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IATO SPECIAL



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Editor's Letter

T

he inevitability of change has transformed the way we think, plan our holidays, our travels, and our escapes. Though our need for a change of scenery, an opportunity to experience something new - the essence of travel - has not extinguished one bit.

Vacations are precious, and have intensified after the outbreak of the pandemic. Travellers are trying to maximise each and every experience in a carefully crafted manner - keeping 'safe' modes of travel on priority. Travellers also want to experience new places, in the luxury of their own exclusivity, controlled environment without the hassle of transiting. There is virtually no other curated offering in the travel industry like a cruise to satisfy this current requirement.

So, close your eyes, breathe the 'NICE' air, and let the spirit of France move you. As we featured the best of Nice for you in our December Issue, satiating your cravings for French vibes.

This IATO special issue of Travel Turtle has identified the touchpoints, redefining a balanced approach and concentrated efforts in making the magazine as versatile as possible. From cultural treasures of the state to the most diverse tourism products, Gujarat never fails to surprise its visitors. Hence, here we are with the most amazing property The Leela Gandhinagar, which is the latest debutant in the hospitality scenario of the state. It's the season of festivities and the issue has got that covered for you as we take you to Rann of Kutch.

The minute someone talks about Japan, all you can think about is mouth-watering sushi, cherry blossom-filled springs and of course anime series that have filled our childhood with drama and action. Doesn't this beautiful destination have it all?

We sincerely trust that you will have as much pleasure reading this edition of Travel Turtle as we enjoyed compiling this for you, our dear readers. Do share your feedback at Bharti@travelturtle.world.

Happy Reading!

Bharti Sharma

Bharti Sharma
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20-23

JAPAN

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TOGETHER!

42-43

JET WINGS

A LEGACY OF
GRACIOUS
HOSPITALITY

44-45

OYO

POOL OF
OPPORTUNITIES

54-57

RANN OF KUTCH

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WelcomHeritage unveils WelcomHeritage Elysium Resort & Spa, Shimla



WelcomHeritage is delighted to announce the opening of its 36th property in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh - WelcomHeritage Elysium Resort & Spa. This is the 6th property of the brand in Himachal Pradesh. Nestled in the quiet, white blanket of snow and serenity, this resort is surrounded by Fir, Oak, Deodar, and tall Blue Pines, and offers luxury across every touchpoint of the guest experience.

Amidst the picturesque beauty of white enveloped green trees and breath-taking beauty of colonial structures brought out by a modern flair, stands the charm of WelcomHeritage Elysium Resorts & Spa in Shimla. It is an amalgam of old-world charm and contemporary comforts.

The design of the hotel is inspired by the traditional Himalayan architecture with a modern civility around. The crowning glory of the property is the panoramic view of the entire Shimla from its greenhouse-styled rooftop dining area – a mesmerizing treat.

Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives appoints Iris Reps India as India Representative

Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives signed up IRIS Reps India Pvt Ltd as its India representative in a bid to tap India's outbound market and strengthen relationships with trade partners and key stakeholders. Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives is a private island where time and space are redefined. Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives is home to a variety of accommodations to meet the needs of a diversified audience: couples, solo travellers, families, and groups. All 59 beach villas and 36 water villas are inspired by the sprawling nature of the Maldives.

Speaking on this occasion, Alefiya Singh, Managing Director, IRIS Reps India Pvt Ltd, says, Indian market is exponentially growing for Maldives; be it luxury leisure, Niche Destination Weddings or Premium groups along with celebrities and political figures from around the world. Drawing inspiration from its beautiful natural surroundings, Kuda Villingili is one of the much-anticipated luxury retreat in Maldives. Artfully crafted to balance relaxation with adventure, seclusion with togetherness, and local spirit with cultural diversity, the concept is entirely experience-driven. I'm very excited to introduce Kuda Villingili among Indian Travel trade.



Tourism Turkiye conducts FAM trip for Indian Travel Agents

The Turkish Culture and Tourism Office in India recently organized a FAM trip for a group of travel agents from the western India region to Turkiye. The familiarisation trip aimed to create a firsthand experience of the destination Turkiye and highlight its cultural & leisure offerings.

The carefully curated itinerary helped showcase the best of Turkish culture, gastronomy & hospitality to the agents. The first destination for the group was Antalya, where they explored the city and sampled local cuisine. In Antalya the group stayed in some of the best hotels and had a leisure visit to Golf courses in Belek region, Aspendos Antique Theatre and Land of Legends amusement park. The agents also experienced the all-inclusive system of hotels/resorts in which all services such as breakfast, lunch, dinner, local and import drinks, sport activities are covered under a fixed price package. In addition to being an FIT destination, the visit to Antalya also helped agents understand its potential & importance as a MICE and Wedding destination for Indian market.



RARE Community aim for a travel revival and reset at the Discover RARE event in Gurugram

The recently concluded Discover RARE event in Gurugram witnessed 30 boutique conscious luxury hotels and experiences from the RARE Community coming together for two days of interactive sessions with the travel trade. Hosted by RARE India, which is a community of some of the finest conscious luxury boutique hotels, palace stays, wildlife lodges, homestays and retreats in Indian subcontinent, the first-of-its-kind event since the pandemic was targeted towards Destination Management Companies, Travel Influencers as well as Domestic Travel Designers who believe in mindful and curated travel.

Some esteemed hoteliers from the RARE Community who attended the Discover RARE event and interacted with the participants include H.E. Raja Jigmed W. Namgyal of Stok Palace Heritage Hotel in Ladakh, Jairaj Singh from Chanoud Garh in Rajasthan, Behzad J Larry & Rashid from The Lungmar Remote Camp in Ladakh, Yasir Shaw of Nadis Hotel in Srinagar, Vidyun Goel from Haveli Dharampura in Delhi, Sriman Subrahmanian from Svastma in Thanjavur, Rigzin Kalon of Lchang Nang Retreat in Ladakh, Bhupendra Singh Chundawat from Prem Kunj in Udaipur and Luv Shekhawat from Utsav Camp in Sariska. Other hotels that participated in the event are Grand Hotel D'Europe in Pondicherry, Karan Mahal in Srinagar, Dera Amer in Jaipur, BrijRama Palace in Varanasi, Glenburn Tea Estate in Darjeeling, Glenburn Penthouse in Kolkata, Jamtara Wilderness Camp in Pench, Cabo Serai in Goa, Jehan Numa Group of Hotels, The Ultimate Travelling Camp (TUTC), MRS Group and The Claridges.

Fiji welcomes first flight of international visitors in 20 months as borders open

Fiji welcomed their first flight of international visitors as they opened their borders once again. The exciting milestone marked resumption of international tourism in the idyllic nation after almost 20 months of border closures.

On December 1, 2021, Fiji opened to fully vaccinated visitors from travel partner countries, for quarantine-free travel. The first flight, from Sydney, Australia landed at 11:25am Fiji time carrying 300 passengers eager for their first tropical island holiday. The country which is ready to safely welcome visitors back thanks to a successful vaccination roll out, seeing well over 90 per cent of its eligible population vaccinated with both doses, does have some travel requirements in place to ensure visitors can book and travel in confidence that they're keeping themselves and the locals of Fiji safe



COMMUNIQUÉ



One Above conducts a familiarization trip to Maldives

One Above Maldives, known for being trend setters, have added one more feather to their cap. They recently organised two back to back FAM trips for their esteemed partners in the month of November which is considered to be the busiest month in Maldives. The agents enjoyed the hospitality of Grand Park Kodhipparu, Coco Bodu Hithi, Kuramathi and Movenpick.



IRIS Reps comes on board as Indian representative for Amari Galle, Sri Lanka

To endorse its unique offerings to consumers, Amari Galle Sri Lanka has commissioned IRISReps India as their Indian representative.

Puneet Dutta, Area General Manager - ONYX Hospitality Sri Lanka said, "India is one of the biggest source markets for us and we are elated by our partnership with IRIS Reps and are confident about strengthening ties with the Indian trade partners and key stakeholders through the right marketing channels. Through this partnership, our aim is to target primarily the MICE and Leisure segments."

We look forward to continue to expand our footprint and business. Each of our brands offers a unique experience, a secret to share, and a story to tell says, Alefiya Singh, Managing Director, IRIS Reps India Pvt Ltd. She is proud to introduce Amari Galle Sri Lanka under IRIS Reps portfolio.



VisitPortugal has appointed VFS Global as it's India Trade and Marketing Agency

VFS Global has been nominated the new Trade and Marketing Agency for Turismo de Portugal, the official Tourism Board for Portugal, responsible for building destination awareness in the market, attracting more visitor footfall from India, and positioning Portugal as the leading destination for travellers across segments.

In its role, VFS Global will help establish a bigger media outreach for Turismo de Portugal, providing them the latest updates about the destination, and keeping the travel trade up to date on the most recent and relevant information on places, products, and experiences. Additionally, there will be a focus on building corporate and airline partnerships to establish Portugal as a preferred destination in the Indian market.





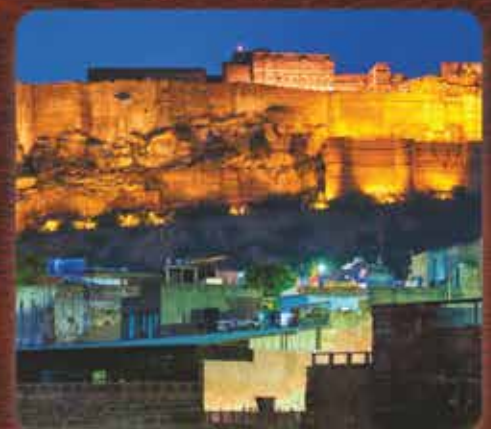
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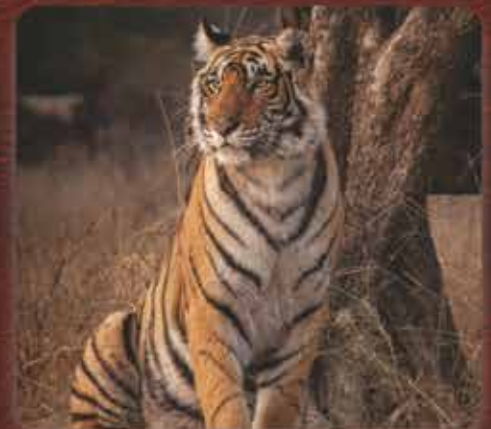
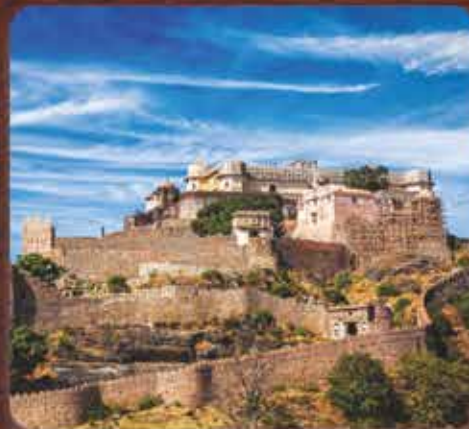
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LIVE WIRE

Polo in ancient India

POLO TOURISM

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL OF INDIA'S HERITAGE SPORT

The royals kept it alive for ages and the army nurtured it; Polo, the hidden heritage that has been enticing the world for decades.

- Bharti Sharma

A historic sport with massive charm and admiration, Polo is not just a sport or a hobby but a national treasure since it was originated in India. India is one of the few countries in the world where this game is still preserved and practiced. The game of Polo has always been synonymous with royalty or later the Indian Army, which has been a custodian of the sport, post-independence. It is not a sport for weak-hearts, and owing to its roots assumed to be a lifestyle that reeks of royalty and tradition. Besides being one of the

most ancient and elusive games in the world, Polo in India can be a deal-breaker for tourism with a little more nourishment and positioning in the tourism circuit.

Tracing the Horse's track

Humans and horses share a timeless bond. Glorious conquerors in history have won kingdoms on horsebacks, and common folks have earned livelihoods through them for centuries. It is therefore impossible to ascertain the timeline of Polo, of which there are different versions but the most

prevalent one places the origin to Central Asia sometime between 600 B.C and 100 A.D. It is believed that the sport was fancied by the Moghul Emperors who called it Chaugan back then but the modern Polo as we know today originated in Manipur when it caught the eye of Lieutenant Joe Sherer who saw exiled Manipuri princes playing the sport in Silchar in the 1850's. The British took such a liking for the sport, that they and the tea planters of Sialchar founded the world's first polo club, the Silchar Kangjei Club in 1859 and the sport of Polo has

never looked back ever since. .

Switching Saddles

Almost 170 years since the modern Polo was introduced by Manipur, the baton for popularising the sport has changed hands over the period. While one hand we have Manipur, where Polo is more than just a sport, it is deep-rooted in their culture and religion, on the other we have West Bengal with its 150 year old Kolkata Polo Club serving as one of the important hubs of the sport for decades. But it is Rajasthan that has undeniably



LIVE WIRE

contributed the most in popularising the sport. Rajasthan has given modern Polo the glamour and royalty it is associated with today. Polo as a sport, as a lifestyle, or as a tradition, are the identified aspects of the sport that can be associated with their respective regions. So as far as Polo and tourism are concerned we already have the perfect ingredients for a hot-selling tourism product, these are the areas that need to be marketed and positioned for the world to witness. Polo enthusiasts that wish to witness the sport in the place of its origin and want to learn about the traditions attached with the game can attend the Sangai Festival in Manipur, an annual affair where the state hosts the Manipur International Polo Tournament, participated by teams from several Polo playing countries. For admirers of the sport with a flavour of grandeur and royalty, the state of Rajasthan offers a buffet of experiences, with Jaipur, Jodhpur, Ajmer and Udaipur, which are home to the finest polo clubs in India hosting Polo matches and tournaments almost round the year. There are several hospitality groups that even have Polo training facilities for their Polo aficionado patrons.



Now officially played by seventy-seven countries and sixteen professionally, the sport of polo has spread the world over, from not-so-humble beginnings.



Vintage Polo team

The Dark Horse

Polo tournaments and festivals in India already attract a number of foreign tourists. Polo tournaments being organised by various clubs, the IPA (Indian Polo Association) is frequented by participants and spectators from across the globe. So, Polo tourism is not a novel concept for India, and the MoT, Gol has even recognised the potential of this segment and its social-economic impact thus drafting guidelines that identify broad areas of support for promotion of Polo as a niche tourism product. Throwing more light on the importance of this segment, Rinaa Shah, the first woman polo player believes that tourism and sports are interrelated and complementary. She adds, "Sports tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in tourism. In my view, more and more tourists are interested in sports activities and sporting events during their trips whether sports are in their travel agenda or not."

The modern Polo is symbolic with luxury, royalty and prestige. Sharing her views on the impact and how can it be better marketed for optimum results, Rinaa Shah feels that Polo as an evolving sport is very niche and always draws a quality audience. "In my personal opinion, it's a sport that needs to be promoted in a big way, and this can be very good for the future of the sport. The polo sector, like other sports, will have a significant economic impact, contributing a lot to the economy and scope for employment generation," she concludes.

The Dramatic Gallop

If there's one thing we know about traveling is that anything that's unique has the potential to attract tourists and when it comes to a sport like Polo, which is both unique and has centuries of history attached to it, there is no way one can control their curiosity and eagerness. Polo in India has more drama to it than a Martin Scorsese flick. The dramatic manner it is believed to have originated back in



The southwestern Asians originally called the game Chaugán.





Rinaa Shah in action

the 1850's, the association of the sport with the Moghuls, the traditional value of the game for the people of Manipur, the glamorisation of Polo and the addition of royal flavour by Rajasthan, the adoption of Polo by the Indian army and keeping the Polo tradition alive post-Independence, are all major landmarks in the game's history till date. All of which, adds to the excitement and drama of Polo, thus rendering it a perfect product for attracting tourists from around the globe.

Lifting the trophy

We have mentioned so many features of the Polo that distinguish the sport as a perfect niche tourism product. But the list doesn't end here, it would not be wrong to suggest that the sport has completed a full circle as we come back to Manipur, the origin of Polo. This time round though, it's the state's women Polo team that is bringing both

glory and adding potential to the tourism angle of the sport. The Manipur women Polo team is coming up strong in the international Polo circuit and are making headlines for all the right reasons. All these factors have made the Ministry of Tourism include promotion of Polo as a niche tourism product. The Incredible India 2.0 campaign also plans to include the women polo players as ambassadors for polo tourism. The segments particularly attracts higher-spending tourists or HNI's. Tourism sector has immense potential in adding to the economic growth and socio-economic development in the country through its multiplier effect. The trend towards travel for the purpose of participating or watching some sports activity is both significant and growing potentially.

Rinaa Shah



Gujarat

AN INVIGORATING EXPERIENCE

Gujarat, the land of Mahatma Gandhi is a historic town known for its vibrant culture, temples and exotic wildlife. The eclectic mix of art and heritage makes Gujarat the most preferred travel destination in India.

- Sudipta Saha



INDIAN SAGA

Gujarat have been attracting travellers from across the globe, the length and breadth of the state is filled with beautiful structures, striking history, and colourful culture, the richness of the state will overwhelm every travellers on their visit.

Glorious Gujarat

Gujarat has UNESCO sites, wildlife sanctuaries with Asiatic lions, Jyotirlinga, Char Dham Temples, museums, the large white desert, Rann of Kutch, Statue of Unity and Gandhian heritage sites. There is no doubt that the state offers myriad of experiences from delightful culture to delicious cuisine, from gorgeous vistas to thrilling wildlife and a rich civilisation that traces its roots to 4000 years back.



Shri Hareet Shukla

Shri Hareet Shukla, Secretary Tourism, Gujarat further shares, "Gujarat offers varied offerings to everyone. Undoubtedly, Gandhinagar and Ahmadabad are major destinations for tourism. The old city of Ahmadabad is itself major attractions and other places such as Rann of Kutch, Kevariya, Bhuj, Somnath Dawarka are some of the attractions, and apart from this we are developing border tourism in Nadabet. As a state tourism department, we intend to develop tourism sites and bring in new offerings for the travellers."

He further adds, "Added to the rich treasure of tourist attractions newer ones which enriches the tourism in Gujarat, one of them is the Statue of Unity, at 597 feet, it's





the world's largest statue. Some of the other attractions surrounding the statue are butterfly garden, cactus garden, handicraft stores and mirror maze which has now turned into a major attractions. Another major attraction is the Sardar Patel Zoological Park, located just 3 kilometers from the Statue of Unity, popularly known as Jungle Safari Park. Created in an open design the park has animals which have been imported from across the world."

Policies unveiling soon

Gujarat is a haven for lovers of history and archaeology. Gujarat is also famous for golfing, Ayurveda based wellness tourism is also gaining a rapid popularity in the state. It has some of India's most accessible wetlands which are hotspots for bird watching and thus one can enjoy bird watching in Gujarat. Thus in order to promote the tourism products and getting

the right stakeholders to invest in the state, the government has been planning on even better tourism policy. Shri Hareet tells, "As a tourism department we are working in developing several tourism policies in the segment of adventure sports, heritage, homestays, cinematic tourism etc. These policies aim at creating tourism opportunities in the state and promote various sectors of the economy."

Diversity on every corner

The land of traditions and legends, Gujarat is lace with rich history and cultural heritages and the best way to explore is through its museums. Every states of Gujarat have a history to narrate and its rich repositories speak about its traditions, ethos and culture. While speaking on what sells the most in Gujarat and what are the major attractions that are in demand, Ashok Dhoot, Managing



Ashok Dhoot

Director, Harsh Travels adds, "Domestic tourism has optimistically picked up this year. 2019 was a glorious year for tourism but this year, we have crossed the numbers achieved in the year 2019. When it comes to Gujarat, we generally create an itinerary for six nights and seven days, which is again a mix match of pilgrimage, wildlife and beaches. The most popular attractions in Gujarat today are Statue of Unity, Rann Utsav, Dwarka and Somnath.

But, while creating an itinerary, the destinations might differ; it totally depends upon the clientele. Over the years, tourism in Gujarat has picked and the tourism department is doing encouraging work towards the development of touristic sites."

He further mentions, "In the last five years, Rann Utsav, Statue of Unity have established itself as major international destination, whereas, Dholavera and Naravet are also coming up as an international destination. Gujarat is blessed to have three wildlife sanctuaries and the little of Rann of Kutch, these are doing fabulously well and have been attracting numerous travellers. Apart from this, soon we will have a heritage triangle in Gujarat ie Vadnagar, Patan and Modhera. The jaw-dropping ancient civilisations, Gujarat has more than 200 Indus Valley Civilisation sites. In short, Gujarat has everything for everyone."



A 5-STAR VACATION IN THE CITY OF JOY

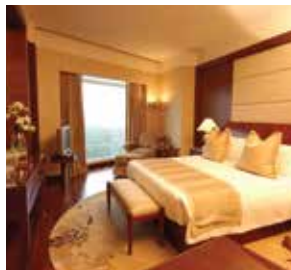


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Waterside Café

The stunning 24X7 café offers a midnight menu as well as a splendid global spread amidst an enchanting view of the waterside and the landscaped gardens.

GUCHHI

Named after the Kashmiri forest morel, this signature restaurant offers a variety of North-Indian and Bengali cuisine, as wide as its theatrical open kitchen display.



The Bakery

The Bakery stands at the entrance of the lobby and welcomes guests with the taste and aroma of freshly baked breads, homemade delicious chocolates, cookies, confectionaries and pastries and more.

JAPAN

**WHERE NATURE, TECHNOLOGY
AND FASHION COME TOGETHER!**

The country of cherry blossoms and Mount Fuji is home to fashion, technology and delicacies that travel around the world.

- Tripti Jain





An island country that extends from the Sea of Okhotsk in the north toward the East China Sea and Taiwan in the south. Japan is as beautiful as it gets, with cold colourful winters to fashion-centric hippy summers. The country open arms to all kinds of new technology and makes a point to leave a mark every year with some new and exciting revelation in the market.

While being connected to deep ancient traditions, Japan is one of the leading markets when it comes to the production of cars and electronics and futuristic advancements. The art of living and believing in yourself is something that the people of Japan ace at. Whether it's an earthquake or any force of nature upon them, the people of Japan rise and swing right up with

powerful minds and wisdom.

Flavours of Japan

The minute someone talks about Japan, all you can think about is mouth-melting sushi, cherry blossom-filled springs and of course anime series that have filled our childhood with drama and action. I would be lying if I said that I don't have a favourite manga character that makes my heart stop. Japanese have brought a great deal of style to the world. Whether it's the leading Y2K fashion or Japanese dramas, the world is gushing with the flavours of Japan and not only with the cuisine.

The capital city Tokyo captures the essence of modernity and technology that Japan needs to offer. Where you can see people

pace up and down the streets with gadgets that will blow your mind and punctuality like a shot of a bullet. Things like the bullet train, ramen and sushi vendors, local markets with some lip-smacking dishes bring the city together and invite travellers and tourists to a joyride.

Famous for iconic monuments like Hachiko and Gundam statues, skyscrapers such as Tokyo Skytree and futuristic tech havens like Odaiba and Akihabara Tokyo is bustling with travellers all year long. One of the most cherished possessions for Japan is Mount Fuji. The beautiful stratovolcano is a treat for the eyes as well as the soul. A popular hiking spot in the climbing season from July to September, the mountain has four trails, the most popular

being the Yoshida trail. Not to forget the trails are drenched in cherry blossoms that keeps the climb a picture right out of an anime series.

Food for thought

A country that has more Michelin stars than France, is home to some of the finest food choices. From top-notch ramen eateries to sushi conveyor belts to robot-run restaurants, Japan has many creative ways of serving your dinner. The most famous Japanese food is sushi, typically eaten with soy sauce and wasabi. Beyond this, Japan is known for a vast range of gastronomic delights: noodle dishes like soba and udon, rice bowls with deep-fried shrimp tempura and pork katsudon,



OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

grilled chicken skewers of yakitori that go well with a cup of sake, and desserts like mochi and teriyaki that are just the right amount of sweet. One can never pass the opportunity to have a piping-hot bowl of Japanese ramen and to slurp the noodles loudly to show appreciation to the chef.

Something that makes all our lives a little better, Japan is known for its tea-loving and drinking culture, especially when it comes to green tea or matcha. Rich in antioxidants, green tea is the most popular type of tea in Japan. During tea ceremonies, powdered green tea is traditionally prepared inside a tea room with tatami floors. A big shoutout to all the

tea to pack their bags and be swept by the amazing variety that the Japanese have to offer.

Shop for good

If you are looking for taking back souvenirs or just grab the right things for a fashionable street excursion, step right into a world of takoyaki and affordable shopping finds in Osaka. Glittering lights and streets filled with people full of energy the city is famous for delicious food markets like Kuromon Market, vibrant shopping arcades like Dotonbori, iconic photo-taking spots like the Glico Running Man and KaniDoraku crab signs, and popular day-trips to Osaka Castle and Universal Studios

Japan. Don't forget to look for Don Quixote branches and 100-yen shops around the city to hoard some amazing gifts to take back home.

Technology that will make your life easier and gadgets that are cooler than anything you will find. Japan is the epitome of inventions and discoveries, with something new brewing in every corner, it's a world of invention and creation. Head to Tokyo's famous Akihabara district — or Electric City, as its nickname goes — for a dizzying array of cameras, video games, computers, home appliances, anime merch, and all kinds of futuristic gadgets under the neon lights. It is a paradise for the new age techies.





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道頓堀

Simplicity lies in the people

Japan is famous for a lot of things but the one that sets the country apart from all the hustle and bustle is the people. Few people can rival the Japanese in terms of showing respect, courtesy, and hospitality to others. Japanese people are famous for their polite behaviour, which includes greeting superiors with a bow or waiting patiently in line. It is like they have a clock edged in their minds to prompt them with every little thing that needs to be done, and most importantly the trait that makes them way superior is punctuality. They value time like no other culture, which is incredibly essential for a living that is disciplined and focused on growing. Japan is the country that does a tremendous job at bringing Nature, technology and fashion together by a single thread and creating a travellers paradise.

What is great about Japan that makes it so worthwhile visiting?

There are countless reasons to visit Japan, as the country has something to entice almost every kind of traveller. Whether you're there to explore Japanese history and culture, indulge in diverse Japanese or Indian cuisine, or experience a ride on the lightning-fast Shinkansen trains, a trip to Japanese promises adventure around every corner. Japan truly is a year-round destination. It's not only the technological wonders but also the best places to visit in Japan that have highlighted the island nation on the map. And believe us; exploring each one of them is worth every dime. Each attraction has its own way to entice you, Tokyo- Essence Of Japan, Kyoto- Sacred And Serene, Nara- City Of Culture, Mt. Fuji- A Breath-taking Marvel, Hokkaido- Closer To Nature, Ishigaki- Exotic Destination, Hiroshima- Historically Significant City, Sapporo- Forget The Heat and Humidity, Osaka- A Cultural Delight and it continues. There is so much to see, so much to do and it's such a unique country. Trust me, Japan really should be on your list!

Japan has been developing a lot of experience-based activities for the travellers. Apart from its magnificent culture, what do you want to showcase to the travelers?

Early this year, JNTO introduced them #GoodnessofJapan campaign. It is a unique and first of its kind campaign by JNTO where the focus is not on the tourist spots but on the principles on which Japan stands. We focussed our marketing campaigns on the taglines cleanliness, hygiene,



Yusuke Yamamoto, Executive Director, JNTO

safety, discipline, etc. We built campaign by featuring Yoshinori Tashiro in our official videos (He is familiar face for Indian audience) and received mind-blowing response on our Youtube channel. We are thankful to Indian travellers for their love and support for Japan. It is a glimpse of his journey to some of the popular food joints and attractions such as TOKYO SKYTREE®, Ryosoku-in Temple, A Taste Of India- Ganesha Restaurant, Kyoto, Tower of the Sun Museum, Osaka Castle, Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, KouriOhashi Bridge while strongly giving out the message of safety, cleanliness, and sanitisation. Though Japan is known for its flavoursome delicacies, one can also visit the famous Indian restaurants in Japan, serving the authentic tastes of India. The campaign successfully emphasises on varied vegetarian options which is easily available at close to 2100+ Indian restaurants spread across Japan.

What experiences and activities are planned for the comprehensive growth of the tourism sector?

As mentioned above, the focus would be on lesser-known itineraries. Japan is all

year-round destination and its imperative to educate travellers globally about the same. One can discover and witness amazing events and festivals, visit temples and castles, theme parks or enjoy hot springs. If you love beaches Japan is home to some beautiful beaches. Travellers can also enjoy outdoor activities that Japan has to offer. Whether you're passionate about sports, an art lover, a nature enthusiast, a history buff, a foodie, or just looking to relax on a beach, the possibilities for your Japan journey are endless.

What new initiatives and strategies are in place to boost Japan amongst the travel trade in India?

Currently, we are updating the content of Japan Specialist Program, A travel agent specialised course customised for Indian travel agents and trade partners to enhance knowledge, gain insights on the Japan destination and become an expert for route, group planning and management. We are just on the verge of finishing it and you will see the new Japan Specialist program going live very soon. In addition, we are directly in touch with many

travel agents and hosted over a dozen webinars for Travel agents to increase engagement and share destination updates.

What are the top five inbound tourism markets for JNTO? Do you see the dynamics changing post the pandemic?

- China, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, US are top 5 markets for Japan.
- Traveller from US is about 10 times compare to India.
- Japan-India relationship is close in recent years than ever.

There is an exponential scope for us when we compare it to the total opportunity numbers - Outbound travellers from India.

Yes, we may see change in traveller's behaviour. There will be more queries related to cleanliness, sanitisation, social distancing, safety, hygiene, etc. Business traveller will be more conscious followed by seasonal tourist. Initially, I think we will see upward trend for niche tourism related to wellness, meditation, environmental tours, spiritual tourism, recreational activities, etc

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WRECKING BALL



STARTING INBOUND OR BOILING THE OCEAN?

With global travel strictly on hold and most wish-list destinations reeling under the effects of the pandemic, the tourism industry is still waiting in anticipation of hay days.

- Bharti Sharma

As international air travel remains suspended, inbound tourism will be at a standstill in the coming few months. While inbound and outbound tourism is expected to be slow, owing to the restrictions placed by countries on international travellers, domestic corporate travel may also take a hit depending on the state of businesses in the country. However, domestic leisure travel is said to rebound swiftly and will be a major factor in helping the industry

recover post the pandemic.

LET'S DISCUSS THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

As much as we like singing songs of unity, the trade doesn't see it happening in reality, specifically the relationship with the government. Do we see synergies happening in the future especially when we are dealing with a pandemic? "Synergy means having an open line of communication between the two sides involved.

The government has always limited its interaction with the private sector to a handful of elected association heads," says Rajeev Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel.

Rajeev claims that the government is hesitant to talk to stakeholders who actually have credible business volumes or who hold clout in their domains. He further shares, "The growth of the Indian tourism industry has always been

led by the efforts of the private sector, not by government actions. So if the government was serious about harnessing the strength of the private sector, it would approach it as a partner and not from a point of superiority. Communication that is open, frank and two-way is the key."

Kohli is not alone to possess this feeling about the paucity in synergies, Pandian K, Managing Director, Cholan Tours exclaims, "I



WRECKING BALL

am sorry to say that this synergy will never be possible. I am being very honest. We keep talking about synergising the efforts of both these sectors but this has been possible only in discussion. Practically speaking, both these sectors have a separate purpose for their existence which can never be linked together on a common platform. Like a railway track, these sectors are a set of two parallel rows of entities and synergising isn't possible as it amounts to defeating the very purpose of its existence."



Rajeev Kohli

HERE COMES THE TRUMP CARD

Kohli observes that supporting the private sector financially and structurally in their efforts to sell India globally is a sure-shot way of increasing the market share. The confidence projects as he reiterates, "You have a huge army of foot soldiers willing to do anything for Indian Tourism. Fund them. Encourage them. Use them. I guarantee results."

CALL TRANSFORMATION A REVOLUTION

As far as tourism in India is concerned, every state in India is a trove of treasure, waiting to be identified and celebrated. Every city has a special feature and character that needs to be preserved and promoted. "Transformations such as

restarting, reorganising, and integrating the tourism industry according to the latest standards and rules are required to revive the industry," feels Pandian.

He adds, "We need to appropriately showcase what we have in our country as treasure (could be our culture, tradition, monument etc) to other countrymen. This promotion has been aptly undertaken by the members of IATO in a wonderful way and we will keep showcasing India appropriately on the global platform. Our Government also does its part in preserving the monuments/places that are of tourists' interest."

WHICH STATE IS GOING THE EXTRA MILE?

Rajeev believes that in India, Kerala has always been the frontrunner. He validates, "Not to say they have not had missteps. But overall they are the most cohesive industry in India. Internationally, I admire how Thailand has created platforms for the private and public sector to create wonders."

Every state wants its fair share of the pie when we talk about both domestic and international tourists. However, some states have taken a lead. Rajnish Kaistha, Director, Paradise Holidays says, "Kerala, Rajasthan, MP and now Gujarat has been really pushing the vibrant Gujarat product and has also become a tourism-friendly state. The Statue of Unity in Kevadia and Rann festival have been added to their product portfolio successfully. The first PPP mode of making a luxury Leela hotel on top of Gandhinagar railway station is a fine example of it."



Pandian K.

Pandian also feels Kerala is acing the state game in India. He shares, "I would vote Kerala as first and then Gujarat as second as they both are doing exceptionally well in terms of innovation, tourist-friendly policies, appropriate promotion and thereby attracting tourists."

It is darkest before the dawn. The momentum gained at the domestic circuit has the tourism industry riding with optimism for post covid future prospects. This optimism is reflected when Rajnish says, "Life must move on in sync with the new world order amidst and post covid. The euphoria seems to be coming back with the soft opening of e-visas, scheduled flights and people willing to travel. Domestic tourism has already moved on big time and it has set the stage for international tourists' arrivals. Bookings and enquiries which had dried out have begun to roll in. Businesses across all verticals need to swiftly adapt to changing times and needs, as well as evolve their strategies, to remain relevant to consumers in the post covid era."



Rajnish Kaistha

Spilling some beans on government initiatives, He adds, "Govt has already declared to restart Digital marketing abroad for Incredible India 2.0. Govt has already announced participation in international tourism fairs like Fitur, ITB etc in 2022 and many IATO members have shown interest to participate in these shows. Focused campaign towards the leisure international markets is the need of the hour and IATO has been a regular member of the meetings with MOT for such campaigns."





CRUISING-INDIANS HOLIDAY INTO A NEW DAWN

Cordelia Cruises by Waterways Leisure Tourism is India's only largest premium Cruise liner. True to its name, Cordelia Cruises aspires to promote and drive the Cruises culture in India through experiences that are for families, stylish, luxurious, and most importantly, inherently Indian. It's a Cruise for Indians catering to the way Indians love to Holiday.

Cordelia Cruises is working very closely with the Government of India, shipping authorities, port authority, and travel industry to create a future when travel can safely start again after the current pandemic of Corona passes away, and Indians can cruise and enjoy the proud Indian offering of global standards and quality. With the cases

Given that food is arguably one of the most important aspects of hospitality, Cordelia has partnered with the Apollo Group for its food and drink offerings. With immense variety, the food aboard Cordelia includes a plethora of cuisines and flavours catering to wide ranging palates and tastes. From flavours of India to authentic vegetarian and international cuisines, we also cater to preparations for our dedicated Jain customers. The Empress comprises 796

cabins, 11 decks, food pavilion, a fine dine restaurant, speciality restaurants, bars, lounges, business centres, spa, salon, dive in theatre, casino, marquee theatre, non-stop entertainment, musical performances, 'live' bands, adventure activities and shopping that ensures 24X7 entertainment for everyone on-board!

"Indians were far from familiar with cruising especially locally. The thick of the pandemic was itself a significantly daunting time. I am overjoyed and humbled in equal measure with the response we have received since our launch. Families come in large numbers, weddings and important events are being hosted on board and guests are making memories of a lifetime through the stellar food, entertainment and destination experiences being offered by Cordelia Cruises. Christmas is coming and so is New Year's Eve and guests are truly looking forward to the grand entertainment we have created for them. This response is pushing us to do better and offer so much more. Cordelia Cruises has put India on the global cruising map. This is just the beginning," says Mr. Jurgen Bailom, CEO and President, Waterways Leisure Tourism.



Jurgen Bailom,
President and CEO,
Cordelia Cruises

- About Sailings from September - till date

Cordelia Cruises launched in September 2021. The response we have received is not only encouraging but also overwhelming. The sailings have been to Goa, Cochin, Diu and Lakshadweep.

- Feedback from Guests and Travel partners:

Our Lakshadweep package, in particular, has received a lot of interest. Since our launch, the response we have received from all our customers (B2B and B2C) is not only encouraging but also overwhelming. It is, in fact, twice as much as we anticipated. Domestic travel is being sought after like never before.

- Entertainment on the Empress!

We, at Cordelia Cruises, understand our guests and know that keeping them entertained throughout their stay on-board is of utmost importance. Our entertainment offerings are curated in a way to cater all sorts of age groups on board. Some of the shows we would like to highlight are -

- India through movies - Indian Cine magic
- Magic show - Magicians cut
- Burlesque - Burlesque The Bollywood Way
- Romance in Bollywood - Romance in Bollywood

- The reason for our smooth sailings - Our Team

We are indeed blessed with a truly hardworking, positive and talented set of individuals who form a part of our workforce at Cordelia. The people who represent the company and are the face of it are very integral to the company's growth and success. The consumers perceive us through these faces and we are glad to have people who think of Cordelia as their own. Each and everyone associated with Cordelia has worked towards making the company and the services we provide the best in the industry. In such a short span of time, we managed to make our mark



in the travel industry and hear customers rave about their experiences on-board. So everyone from the back-end team, administration, on-board staff etc are the ones who made our journey to success possible.

- Upcoming sailings

In the coming year, our itinerary includes newer destinations like Sri Lanka and Madras. Currently, Mumbai has been the hub of all Cordelia sailings. However, in the coming year we also plan to make Chennai as a hub court starting monsoon onwards.



Vijay Kesavan,
Sales and Marketing Director,
Cordelia Cruises

- Some testimonials from our B2B customers

"We feel proud of being a Leading Distributor for Cordelia Cruise and for the Guests its a Unique vacation experience for cruising from India which gives everyone the freedom to enjoy the things they would love to do on board, while providing valuable family time together."

Sapneal Rao, Destination Masters LLP

"We are seeing huge demand from the customers for the product. On average we are booking 2 cabins a day from 2-3 cabins a week earlier" - Raveesh Khullar, Yatra.com

"Cordelia has come as a breath of fresh air in the post-pandemic travel industry. What we see and believe that Cordelia Cruises has laid the foundation for the cruise market in India. We have received great feedback and love from those who have recently experienced the cruise. For example — A group of 110 guests on 15th November had a gala time onboard and their reviews couldn't stop raving about their experience. Cordelia is helping Indians to have multi generation travel on a single platform. This new form of travel that is budget friendly, does not even require a passport and without any hassles of multiple travel stops to reach a destination will be the go-to travel plan for Indians and we see this as the new emerging travel trend!"

Munish Dua, TBD





HEADS IN BEDS

TRAIN TO THE LEELA GANDHINAGAR

The first luxury hotel in India to be built on the airspace of a conventional railway station, The Leela Gandhinagar is a 318-room property that combines modernity with subtle inspirations from local Gujarat architecture and culture. Jaideep Anand, Vice President & General Manager, The Leela Gandhinagar talks about the positioning and the uniqueness of the property.

- Bharti Sharma



HEADS IN BEDS



Located merely 30 minutes from the Ahmedabad airport, The Leela Gandhinagar scores in terms of its proximity to important business hubs making it the perfect choice for corporate meetings and conferences. Jaideep Anand is credited with spearheading the pre-opening tasks for various Leela Properties but with The Leela Gandhinagar, it's different and special. He has ensured The Leela Gandhinagar showcases the brand in the most elegant way and the finest extension of 'Leela'.

Opulent memories for our guests

With a myriad of facilities, from a world-class spa, a swimming pool and a state-of-the-art fitness centre, to exceptional dining venues spanning an array of cuisines in idyllic settings, The Leela Gandhinagar promises its guests a stay worth remembering. Jaideep states, "At The Leela Gandhinagar, our team is always delivering an experience that lives up to the brand philosophy- 'Atithi Devo Bhavo', ie Guest is God. Starting from being a destination

for intimate escapes to hosting family social gatherings or large-scale corporate MICE events, we ensure the experience delivered is nothing less than luxury with careful attention to detail at every step. The Leela Gandhinagar team here believes in delivering warm and opulent memories for our guests to cherish for a long time and come back for more."

The folklores of Gujarat

As The Leela Gandhinagar is going to be the first-ever Leela hotel in Gujarat, the brand has worked really hard on delivering the regional flavour, rendering the local feel based on the region's taste, preference, and culture. "Since the day of inception, the Leela Gandhinagar has embraced the enriching culture and untold stories in every nook and corner. Be it the architectural marvel it's known for today, or the opulent interior carefully decorated with different kinds of regional art forms that depict the inspirational untold stories of Gujarat. As a destination popularly known as the 'Silk route'

of the country, the Leela Gandhinagar has embraced the different touchpoints with various forms of fabrics," mentions Jaideep.



Jaideep Anand

Mega venue for Mega-events

The Leela Gandhinagar is hosting the 36th Annual IATO Convention, which is going to be the first mega

event since the outbreak of the Covid19. Being one of the largest MICE destination complexes in the country - The Leela Gandhinagar along with Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre will be offering state-of-the-art conference facilities that will elevate the event's grandeur and magnificence.

Sharing more details on the much-anticipated event, Jaideep tells, "The Leela Gandhinagar is privileged to host the prestigious IATO conference this year. With that being said, the Leela Gandhinagar houses the Grand Ballroom spread over 8545 sq ft with an attached pre-function area of 13,584 sq. ft. Add to that the multiple boardroom meeting spaces of 6612 sq. ft. combined with state-of-the-art technology and the personalised Leela services; perfect ingredients for a grand event like the IATO convention. Furthermore, the Leela Gandhinagar boasts extravagant and extensive outdoor venues with the potential to host up to five thousand people. Overall, the Leela Gandhinagar offers cutting edge, versatile indoor and outdoor



HEADS IN BEDS

meeting spaces that are well equipped to host business and social events of all magnitude."

More mega-events to follow...

The Leela Gandhinagar today is one of the most affluent modern pride of the state of Gujarat. Thus, the thread of events doesn't end with the convention. Sharing details on some major upcoming events, Jyadeep tells, "With one of the biggest convention halls in the country - Mahatma Mandir Convention & Exhibition Centre is soon going to be ready for hosting our honourable Prime Minister's Vibrant Gujarat event, followed by our country's pride Défense Expo in the first quarter next year. The Leela Gandhinagar along with Mahatma Mandir Convention & Exhibition Centre will be pivotal in hosting several large-scale medical conferences and social residential events."

F&B to satisfy the most versatile palate

With a tempting mélange of delectable cuisines, picturesque vistas, and modern contemporary interiors, The Leela Gandhinagar offers an extensive selection of dining venues to please even the most urbane patrons. "The food and beverage at the Leela Gandhinagar offer an extensive selection of dining venues to satisfy even the most sophisticated palate. Though food and beverage are conventionally believed to be a lesser contributor to the hotel's total share of revenue, the Leela Gandhinagar's dining options even in this short stretch of time has been fancied by a lot of non-resident business patrons from the city and beyond. Therefore, the overall f&b contribution we are striving for will be at par with other key revenue contributing departments."

An Artist's galore

The Leela Gandhinagar garners a lot of inspiration from the regional



influence. From the famed Adalaj Stepwells or Vav, to the contemporary Venetian mirrors in the grand lobby, one can experience a juxtaposition of traditional and modern-contemporary beauty, never seen before. Jaideep shares, "The artwork present in the reception is inspired from the Kutch Embroidered fabric created using glass acrylic or mirror. Experience more such compelling art stories such as this, that can only be 'toured' and not told. Every evening our head concierge leads our patrons on this sojourn and culminates it with Moksha Lounge signature afternoon 'Tea Charlie', which again showcases the synergy, this time in cuisine diversity."

Restaurants on platter

The hotel also offers the finest culinary options at various dining alternatives spanning a host of cuisines, served in the most charming environs. Jaideep shares, "Starting with the all-day dining outlet 'Citrus Junction' as the name suggests is inspired from the historical Indian railways. The décor and architecture of the restaurant captures the essence of Indian railways and displays the pivotal role railways played in the lives of Indians over the last century. Whereas, our speciality Indian restaurant- Diya represents a stimulating sense of curiosity created by an interesting play of light on carved contours of the silver metallic ceiling. Finally, the Moksha Lounge offers 'tripti' or 'satiety' for our hunger and thirst. Be it youngsters hoping to catch up with their pals, or a quick chit chat for homemakers in the neighbourhood or an all-day dining area to interact business, Moksha Lounge is an all-day meeting place for guests of all ages from all walks of life."



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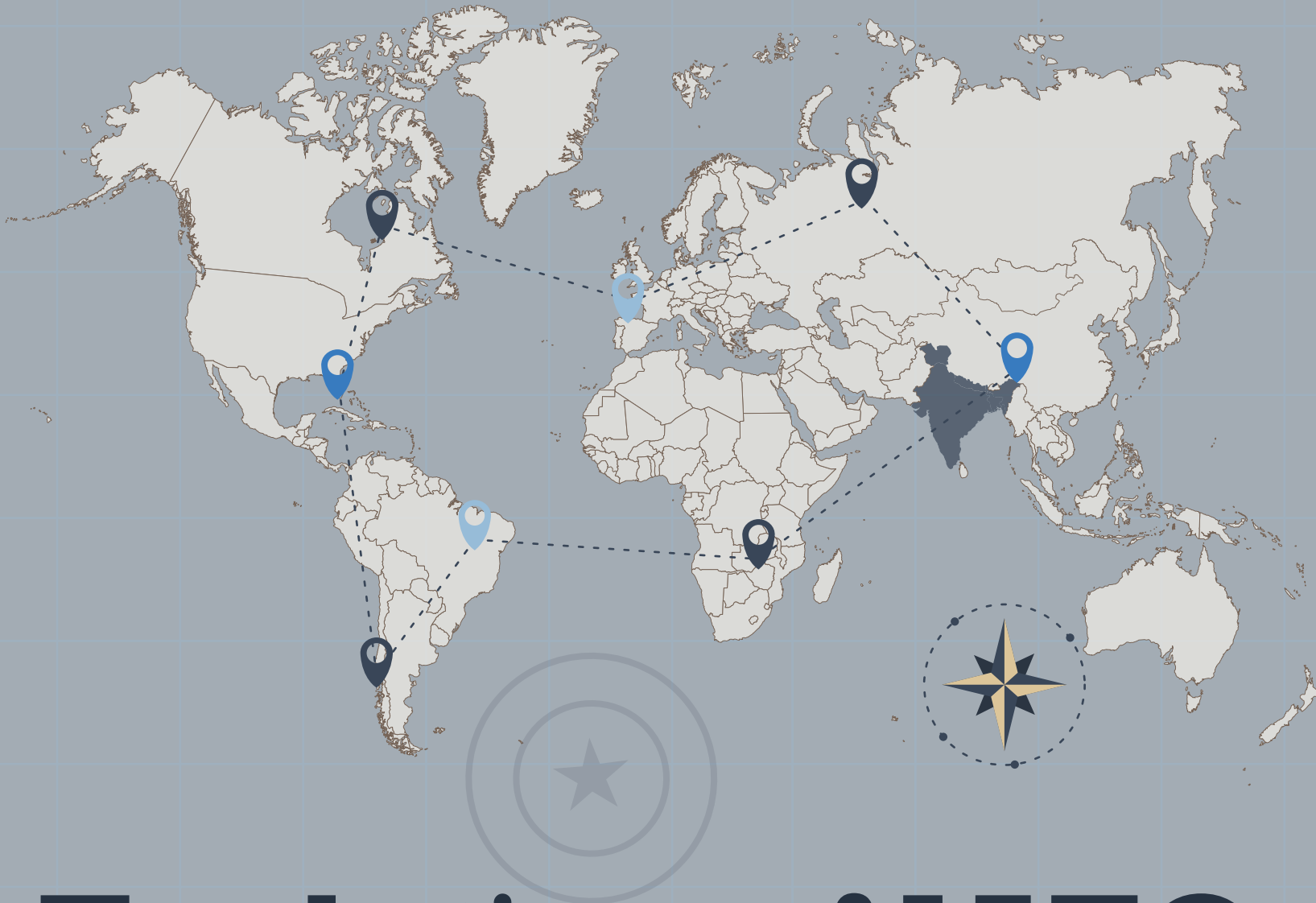
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Evolution of IATO in a decade

The go-to association for inbound tour operators, IATO has spread its wings like never before in these tough times. Over the years, the association has been a beacon of hope for its members, dealing with issues, solving them and maintaining an exhaustive list of loyal members who instill their trust and confidence in them.

- Travel Turtle

IATO has been promoting sustainable growth for the travel and tourism sector, working with governments and international institutions to create jobs and maintain a balance. The office-bearers along with its chapters work closely with the council to expand its presence, voice, and influence in key markets. IATO has remained the driving force behind various activities and policies announced by the government, concerning tourism and tourism stakeholders in the country.

THE POWER OF PR

The association has invested its time and energy in reaching out to larger audiences. The office bearers have consistently worked in this area and it's evident from their regular appearances on our TV screens, in our daily newspaper, various latent portals and of course, our b2b trade publications. With time, the association realised that it was about time to come out of their comfort zone as there was a bigger picture to be dealt with. It

was time to make their voices heard by the decision-makers.

TECHNOLOGY IS KING

The world is moving fast and so is the association, under different leaderships in the past years, the use of technology has been on an upswing. Change is the only constant thing in the world, and IATO is sticking to this concept, putting in every effort to maintain pace with the ever-changing dynamics. Ravi Gosain, who also heads the Social media marketing committee, tells the exciting plan

of action. He tells, "We at IATO have been exploring various opportunities to use technology in upgrading our official work, connecting with members and communicating regular industry updates. Since last year we have created group on WhatsApp for disseminating information which was quite handy for members, likewise we now accept membership applications and fees online. We have definite plans to enhance IATO website with CRM and app for members, it will help them to access all information



they need just at the click of button."

LOBBYING LIKE NEVER BEFORE

The last 18 months have been a nightmare for the travel trade and all its stakeholders. The association, being voices of their members, had the gruesome task of leading from the front. The trade has seen the association going all in to make a difference for the trade, meeting with the Tourism Minister, Finance Minister, PMO, bureaucrats and other stakeholders. The association acts as the link between the Decision Makers and the industry, and presents the complete perspective to both the sides, synergising their common agenda of Tourism facilitation. "IATO has been in regular touch with the MOT and various other ministries for various issues and we are glad that few of our requests and demands were considered positively by the government," reiterates Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO.



MEGA CONVENTIONS

IATO Annual Conventions have always been the most anticipated gathering of travel and hospitality industry stakeholders. Over the years, the conventions have become grander in all aspects and an ultimate source of networking and motivation for the members. "Through IATO Conventions, our foremost aim is to motivate the members to the fullest, educate them about the market scenarios and give them a platform to network with the people. Each and every convention of IATO has its own charm as they are organized in different cities of our incredible India, thus it's an opportunity for the state to showcase the best they have to the most potential operators in the country," Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO.



ACING THE CSR

The association is vigorously receptive to its social responsibility and has always worked on the ground in this respect, contrary to the general trend related with CSR activities. The members keenly contribute in meeting their social obligations during emergencies or calamities. Be it the blood donation camps, carrying out relief work, setting up emergency relief supplies or adopting a village and providing them with the necessary relief and rehabilitation infrastructure. "IATO works on the principles of humanity. The association always comes forward in times of need and support in many ways. The members contribute to it in so many ways wholeheartedly," shares Sunil Mishra,



FOR REGIONAL REACH

IATO as an association is not restricted to only 2 metros both in terms of presence and engagements, as it has a great presence in different parts of the country because of its chapters. A Chapter Chairman who takes their job very seriously makes sure the regional members have access to all the information or can reach out to the authorities easily when required. EM Najeeb, Senior Vice President, IATO shares, "Though the association has a lot of members still it's a very close knit environment, the team is accessible, we want to be available for our members for their requirements. The chapters have proved to be a great medium to that."



Clicked by: A Muralidharan





BEYOND BOUNDARIES

IATO, though being an association of inbound agents in the country, has well-crafted international acceptance and linkages too. It has close connections and constant interaction with other tourism associations in the US, Nepal and Indonesia, where USTOA, NATO and ASITA respectively are its member bodies; and is increasing its international networking with professional bodies for better facilitation to the International traveler visiting not only India but the entire region

SKILL DEVELOPEMENT

IATO has been constantly working to train and educate its members for the future and has organised plenty of programs for the members. Zia Siddiqui, Executive Committee Member, IATO shares, "The training and courses emphasis on various prospects so the members can ace in this competitive market. Pre-covid, we organised some classes on digital marketing, 10 different webinars were organised and the whole idea was to make our members aware of the new and useful concepts such as social media marketing, search engine optimisation, email marketing, blogging, etc."



The 'Nice' Story

The very name tastes of holidays. And why not? History backs it. Tourists love it. And the stories roll on and on.

- Inder Raj Ahluwalia



TRAVEL THERAPY

Legend has it that the capital of the Cote D'Azur emerged from the mists of time, with the Greeks being the first settlers to appreciate the varied charms of the region and establishing a trading centre known as the 'Nikaia'. They were followed by the Romans, who built 'Cemenelum', a rival to Nikaia. Though buffeted by a turbulent history, the town grew in harmony with its beautiful surroundings and became the rendezvous of celebrities from around the country and also from England, Italy, Russia, Spain, and Belgium, all of who descended here to savour its 'sweet way of life.'

This is how the stories were born.

Your first impression of Nice may or may not be overpowering, but there's a distinct gentle and elegant touch to all things here, big and small.

Morning time, and the sunshine is a golden blessing, lighting up

the snowy Alpine peaks at one end of the town and the deep blue Mediterranean at the other. The passing day sees the light change colours, until, finally, evening descends on the famous town and its famous lights come on.

I literally 'went to town' on the town, and thereby hangs a tale!

Nice was made for tourists. And they haven't exactly let the city down. Year after year, the floodgates open and visitors from the world over flock here in faithful homage to the aura of romance that has held sway for generations. I felt a certain buzz not commonly experienced elsewhere. For tourists, it is almost mandatory to do the celebrated stroll along the Promenade des Anglais, the most famous sea-face boulevard in the world. I followed the norm and started off from here.

Interspersed by blocks of

shrubbery, and flanked on either side by the sea and buildings strong on architectural finesse, the promenade in high season boasts more glamour and glitter than all of Hollywood. My leisurely walk took me past hotel after hotel gleaming in the sunlight, their white facades and golden balconies now part of local legend and folklore, symbols of a city forever basking in glory.

Amidst all the shining stars, the highlight is the Negresco, among the most famous of all the French Riviera's exalted hotels, shining like a glittering palace in the heart of the bright lights and festivities of the promenade. Courtesy my appointment with the general manager, I spent an hour in the hotel's haloed confines.

An institution by itself, the Negresco is a classified historical monument of world fame, and a hotel that conjures

up the style and luxury of the Belle Epoque, and of an elegant savoir-vivre that reflects the best of French courtesy. It is here that the stars of the world meet over leisurely cups of coffee, or endless glasses of vintage wine. Enter its lobby and you're engulfed in elegance. Dine at its restaurants, and you've tasted the very best of culinary France.

Came midday and I got a glimpse of another facet of local offerings. A more subdued but enormously charming world unfolds in the Old Town, which has its own rhythm and atmosphere. Here the pace slows down and one is whisked back fifty years. You can spend days soaking up the myriad charms of the Cours Saleya which refuses to change with the times, hanging on to its Greek character with a vengeance. Flower, fruit and vegetable markets proliferate, imbuing the air with a strong, sweet





fragrance. Time means nothing here as one walks the narrow streets, buys souvenirs, samples food, and guzzles wine at little taverns whose tables spill out onto the pavements. The plethora of elegance and entertainment is as varied as it is exciting. Dozens of celebrated restaurants line the Promenade des Anglais, some taking bookings days in advance. Further inland, little bistros and cafes offer the special ambience of coastal France. The packed festive calendar reaches its pinnacle with 'The Carnival'. This is the undisputed highlight, a

cultural extravaganza sporting its legendary colour, fun, pageantry, myriad floats, and its inimitable flower battle. But there's plenty else going on throughout the year and one can see most of it without fuss or planning. If the days are for leisurely strolls and café and boutique-hopping, the nights are dedicated to refined pursuits like high-stake gaming, opera, theatre, musicals, and elegant dining. Comes evening, and Nice glitters. This is when the casinos animate with life, the Rolls and Buggatis glide into the dusk, champagne corks hit the ceiling, and trays of smoked salmon line

elegant table corners. To imbibe the mood you can drop in at the elegant boutiques, coffee-shops and cafes. Or just hang out. The mood follows you to the famed Opera, which is a veritable treat for those with an eye for classy opulence. Year-round, there's plenty to do. You can dance with the stars, be still and listen to the night breeze cleaving the palms, or take in a soul music session. There are nightclubs with a fairy-tale setting, roulette and baccarat at the casino, and horses to be backed at night at

the Hippodrome. And there is all that wonderful wine to be savoured with visitors from the world over. And then there's the Mediterranean air to be breathed and walking to be done along the winding little streets of the Old Town and along the Promenade des Anglais. And in the evening, with the winds gusting and the waves raising high surf, you will stumble onto what has become another famous symbol of the city. Empty chairs...

Fact File

- The best access is via Paris. Air France operates direct flights to the French capital and also on to Nice. The airport is virtually in the heart of town, just minutes by taxi from the main hotels.
- Accommodation comes in wide variety, stretching from deluxe hotels down to more modest establishments.
- Local shopping options are unlimited, but be prepared to dig deep into your pockets. Dozens of trendy boutiques stock the best designer labels in fabrics, clothes, accessories, cosmetics, and perfumes.
- Nice is a convenient jump-off point for several other places of interest in the French Riviera, like Cannes, Menton, Monte Carlo, and Grasse, to name a few.



About the author

Inder Raj Ahluwalia is a world-renowned international travel journalist & author. His professional profile features awards from several European and Asian countries, among others.



JETWING HOTELS

A LEGACY OF GRACIOUS HOSPITALITY

How does it feel when a brand becomes synonymous with the destination? Well, Jetwing Hotels has the best understanding of this emotion. Whether you're seeking leisure, MICE, romantic getaways, or just craving for a beach vacation, if you've zeroed in on Sri Lanka as your destination, then Jetwing Hotels is the answer for all your hosting requirements. Hashan Cooray, Manager- Marketing & Business Strategies, Jetwing Hotels elaborates on how all their properties are unique from one another and yet have the classic Sri Lankan hospitality in common.

- Bharti Sharma

Jetwing offers two distinct brands within its portfolio - Jetwing Hotels is the larger arm of the company, featuring the brand's iconic resorts, boutique hotels, and villas while Hotel J is a select-service hotel brand that is located in key tourist areas in Sri Lanka, offering comfortable rooms and amenities at a very affordable price. With the two brands catering to different demographics, Jetwing Hotels and Hotel J both welcome Indian travellers - while Jetwings Hotels is preferred by families and larger groups for their space, service, and comfort; Hotel J clicks with independent travellers and backpackers for offering them everything that they need for a memorable vacation in Sri Lanka in their budget.



HOTELLIGENCE

When the neighbour calls

As Sri Lanka's closest neighbour, Jetwing Hotels has a strong and long-standing relationship with India and has welcomed Indian travellers to the emerald isle for decades. This depth of this relationship took the centre stage during the travel restrictions brought about by Covid-19 where Indian travelers were instrumental in reviving and supporting the travel and tourism industry of the island. Hashan Cooray elaborates, "While India was a valuable market for us prior to the pandemic as well, since the reopening of borders between the two countries in early September, we have seen a growing influx of travellers from India and a much larger market share. The customer response from the Indian travellers at Jetwing Hotels has also been very positive and we look forward to welcoming more guests from India to our residence of authentic Sri Lankan hospitality."

MICE on your mind?

Packed with mesmerising panoramas and authentic hospitality, Jetwing Hotels' resorts offer world-class event hosting facilities at stunning destinations across the island, which are well-equipped to cater to large business meetings, weddings, and other conference or banquet events. Throwing light on MICE facilities at different

properties, Hashan Cooray shares, "Our collection of properties on the golden coast of Negombo such as Jetwing Blue, Jetwing Beach, and Jetwing Sea, are favourites among Indian travellers for MICE events for the destination's stunning views and the hotels' service and facilities as well as their proximity to the airport. The panoramic setting of Jetwing Lagoon makes it the most desired choice in Negombo for weddings while Jetwing Lighthouse is at the top of the list for MICE events in Galle. Our hotels in Colombo (Jetwing Colombo Seven), Dambulla (Jetwing Lake), Panadura (JieJie Beach by Jetwing) and Jaffna (North Gate by Jetwing) all offer facilities for MICE events. Jetwing's smaller boutique hotels are also armed with adequate provisions for conducting smaller events to provide an intimate, personalised setting for your business or personal needs."

In comparison with the South and South-east Asian counterparts, Jetwing enjoys an elevated level of brand recognition and awareness among the Indian travelers. Travel agents, DMCs, and sales representatives have constantly positioned Sri Lanka and Jetwing within the Indian travel market and as a result, guests from India are well aware of the brand's unique offerings leading to customer satisfaction.

Relations that date back centuries!

It is often believed that the older the relationship, the stronger are the ties. This belief becomes a practical statement when the case study of the two neighbours is put to test, which share more than just national boundaries. On relationship and sharing culture, Hashan Cooray explains, "India and Sri Lanka have a shared history that can be traced back more than a millennium to the times of kings and queens. This connection has led to strong regional travel ties that exist to this day and the sharing of culture and taste across the Palk Strait. For travelers from India, Sri Lanka is sure to feel familiar and welcoming while also being distinct in its offerings to make the experience unique and unforgettable." Also touching upon the changing landscapes in close proximity he says, "One of the important features of Sri Lanka is its compact size, where you can spend the mornings relaxing on warm tropical beaches, enjoying heavenly seafood and to set your evenings serene head to the mist-laden mountains of central Sri Lanka for a cup of evening tea by a fireplace overlooking scenic tea estates."

In search of newer avenues

Navigating successfully through the troubled tides forced upon by the pandemic, Jetwing Hotels

looks at the future with optimism for tourism to return to normalcy and a hope that people can once again travel and experience destinations around the world freely. With optimism as a virtue, the brand is also foraging into fresh verticals, Hashan Cooray says, "As a company, we have ensured that all our associates are trained and ready to offer the best of authentic Sri Lankan hospitality to our guests. We have also diversified our business and have recently acquired management of one of Colombo's premier restaurants and bars which will operate as stand-alone dining outlets. We believe that the light at the end of the tunnel, which once was faint, is now much brighter and closer and tourism will enjoy its best years ahead."



Hashan Cooray



POOL OF OPPORTUNITIES IN TECHNOLOGY FOR THE YOUNG AND NEW LEADERS:

ROHIT KAPOOR, OYO

At OYO, the focus for the future is on strengthening the tech stack to increase revenues while making operations hassle-free for their patrons. In conversation with Travel Turtle, Rohit Kapoor, CEO - India & South-East Asia, OYO shares how they ensure a seamless user experience.

- Bharti Sharma



tourism and hospitality scenario and why?

My bet would be on the industry being as tech and product-first as possible. New technologies may take the centre stage and Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning along with other technologies could continue to shape the post-COVID world. I also believe that for the young and new leaders, there's an opportunity to introduce tech-based solutions for your customers. There's increasing adaptability towards technology. It is being seen as an enabler.

3. How did you engage with your consumers during the pandemic?

Last year, we launched several initiatives for customers, such as 'Contactless Check-in' which essentially lets you check into an OYO hotel from anywhere eliminating the physical touchpoints. Our initiative, 'Sanitised Before Your Eyes (SBYE)' provides on-demand sanitization for customers at certain storefronts. We also launched 'Yo! Help', a 24*7 real-time chat assistant for guests with a valid booking across its hotels and homes globally. During March 31, 2021, over 72 per cent of all responses to consumers were automated via this tool itself. In addition to this, we undertook various initiatives in the first wave, for example as part of 'OYO CARE' we partnered with various state Ministries and local authorities we partnered with various state ministries and local authorities to offer storefronts to be used as quarantine and self-isolation facilities at affordable prices. We partnered with government and private hospitals to provide quarantine centres and accommodation for healthcare professionals and essential workers. We worked closely with several diplomatic missions in India to arrange accommodation for stranded tourists from various countries across different cities in India during the nationwide lockdown from March to May

2020. During Fiscal 2021, we provided thousands of booked nights to hospital staff and asymptomatic patients, accommodation to returning expatriate Indians during their mandatory quarantines and last-mile accommodation support to corporate customers during various lockdowns in India.

4. The industry has evolved more in the past 18 months than it did in the past decade. OTAs have taken the industry by storm. What do you have to say about the dynamics changing so rapidly?

Customer interactions with businesses, including the ones in the short-stay accommodation market, are increasingly becoming digital as the growing preference for convenience and seamless experience takes customers online. COVID-19 has further propelled digital adoption with an increased preference for convenience and safety.

In the fast-growing on-demand use case category, OYO is well-positioned to cater to the rising on-demand bookings, along with the usual leisure/business demand, due to its large footprint, wide choice of accommodation types available to cater to customers across various paying capacities, D2C channel to provide ease of booking and a promise to offer a standardised experience. This has powered OYO's share of same-day bookings to be 4x+ of organised hotel chains on an average in India, in the pre-COVID period.

5. It's been said that countries that are able to vaccinate their population will be racing ahead of their counterparts. There is enough scientific evidence to prove that fully vaccinated people carry lesser health risks compared to non-vaccinated people.

In what ways and period will our vaccination drives be bringing tourism back on track?

Most countries have made progress in vaccinating people against COVID-19 over the last 6 months. Developed countries such as certain European countries and the United States have been ahead of the curve in terms of vaccination coverage, and are planning to provide booster doses to older and vulnerable populations in autumn of 2021. Developing countries such as India and Indonesia plan to complete vaccinations for the entire population by the end of 2021. As of September 20, 2021, 808.6 million vaccination doses have been administered in India. Hotels and homes across the world have adopted safety practices for activities relating to reception, concierge, technical and maintenance services, cleaning and housekeeping and common areas such as restaurants and gyms, amongst others. Besides these basic practices, businesses have been deploying technology to facilitate online and contactless interactions and transactions across various touchpoints.

1. How do you see the hospitality industry being redefined in this post-COVID world? To what extent, do you feel there's a need for the digital transition and tech-savvy tourism to revive sectors and businesses?

The timing of complete recovery in the hospitality sector is highly uncertain as the pandemic is still not subsided with the new omicron variant. The industry has gone under transformation. At OYO, we've always been a tech-focused organization. We utilized the COVID downtime to improve existing – and introduce new - technologies and products for our stakeholders - our patrons & customers. We work with over thousands of hotels and homeowners globally while utilizing our technology and revenue growth capabilities to ease operations and build successful businesses for them. OYO offers SMBs and entrepreneurs an identity, a brand, and a technology stack to compete in this new environment and create an overall transformative business lift. Our tech improvements have made OYO's consumer app the 3rd most downloaded travel app (apps that enable hotel/flight bookings and do not include maps, cabs, railways and other local services) globally in 2020 (as per Sensor Tower).

2. What is that one thing you would place your bet upon, that could transform the country's

BIZ

TRAVELBULLZ

THE FRONTRUNNERS OF INNOVATIVE TRAVEL

Run by experienced travel industry professionals, TravelBullz is noted for regional expertise, innovation, competitive, and highly personalised travel services. Kanwer Deep Singh, Founder & President, TravelBullz shared about the steps they have taken to prepare for the future.

- Bharti Sharma



Travelling post the pandemic is not going to be the same but it doesn't have to be all chaos and hassles especially with TravelBullz to your rescue. In order to ensure smooth travelling once international borders are open again, especially with the new set of rules, guidelines and requirements, TravelBullz provides adequate assistance to its partners at every step of their travel journey. The travel trade has always been a priority for them, thus they make sure to bestow the sector with the most personalised services right from discovery, bookings to authentic local experiences. Even when the world was locked up inside their homes, Kanwer Deep invested his time in brainstorming sessions with the team to come up with the most innovative ideas to educate the travel trade sector.

Destinations selling like hot cakes

Customisation is a trend that is visible across industries from fashion to tech, so how can travel be an exception. Leisure Travel, which is a cardinal aspect of our life, has started gaining momentum and how. Talking about the destinations and segments witnessing great numbers, Kanwer Deep shares, "The current trend continues to be Maldives, followed by UAE. Recently, we have started to get a

lot of queries for Thailand and other Asian countries as they are opening up. However, in the long haul, Western Europe is still the most favoured destination but sadly the recent spike in covid cases have dampened the spirits of their seekers. Maldives has flourished as a destination because of its structure, Thailand has a Test and Go facility and now Singapore has announced VTL flights."

He adds, "The destination is not really the only criteria for leisure travellers. It also depends on the ease of travel which includes covid rules and guidelines, the number of RT-PCR tests, time and the cost involved in getting it done. Overall, safety still remains a concern for decision-makers while choosing their pick."

Wellness- the game changer

During the pandemic, one of the trends that is fast becoming a lifestyle for many is wellness. While there has been an upsurge in the demand for wellness travel, Kanwer Deep tells, "Wellness travellers are extremely specific with their requirements. They are always looking for specialised wellness resorts with established credentials. For wellness, we are recommending and focusing on Thailand which has great product offerings. We are working with wellness resorts to bring in great

experiences for our agent partners to share with their customers."

The trendsetter

TravelBullz was the first company since the onset of the pandemic to reinstate physical events in Delhi and Chandigarh - 'Let's Talk' bringing an end to an era of remaining indoor and attending virtual meetings only. Kanwer Deep mentions, "This encouraged a lot of other stakeholders in the industry to come forward and start engaging with people. This disseminated a strong signal to the travel fraternity that now is the beginning of the normalisation of travel. Over 100 guests/travel trade professionals attended the event respectively."

Educating the trade

It's time to invest in innovation and enhance customer experience. Talking about how TravelBullz engaged with the trade during the tough times, he adds, "At TravelBullz, we have always maintained the industry leadership in keeping our travel partners engaged. In the early pandemic days, we did educational webinars however we did innovate to move away from one-way monologues to the active participation of agents and bookers in order to bring engagement and excitement to the webinars."

TravelBullz in association with the Tourism Authority of Thailand recently organised the Indian Travel League. The fun-filled quiz program aimed at engaging the travel agent community in India focused on Phuket, Krabi, Phang Nga, Khao Lak, Koh Yao Yai and Noi. The goal was to garner interest, awareness and educate sellers about the destinations and hotel and attraction partners. Kanwer Deep tells, "ITL - Indian Travel League (based on the IPL concept) has set up the standard of engagement to a completely new level where engagement with the trade was over a period of 6 weeks and over 600+ agents registered, 120+ agents played ITL virtual quiz matches for over 4 weeks and over 30 agents won great prizes."

Trends and forecast

With revival of tourism being the prominent question of the moment, Kanwer Deep is optimistic that the business will revitalize by next year. "We are all waiting for the current hectic activities to convert into business soon. Also, I wish all our trade partners can go back to pre-pandemic levels as soon as possible. TravelBullz is looking at business revival from first quarter 2022 and big pent up demand bouncing back in the second quarter," he concludes.





Shiv Vilas Jaipur

EVOKE THE SPIRIT AND ROYALTY

Rajasthan has no dearth of history and heritage, and when it comes to the renowned Rajasthani hospitality swamped with the intricacies of history and heritage, Shiv Vilas Jaipur emerges as one of the finest examples. It offers a variety of curated trails and experiences which has captivated travellers with its jaw-dropping ornate interiors and authentic hospitality. Mr. Prathi Raj Sharma, Director, Shiv Vilas Resorts elucidates on the ingredients that make the uniqueness of the luxurious property.

- Harish Chandra



Shiv Vilas Jaipur celebrates the joys of local decor in a typical Indian art-deco environment with gold and silver furniture, retro lighting and mosaics with colourful effigies. Every nook and corner is designed in a way that blends authenticity and comfort. The patrons are guaranteed royal treatment with all their wishes made true, be it a guide to discover the national treasures or unwinding in the spa.

Magical royalty befitting the regal city

A royal experience is partial unless royal accommodation is accompanied by equally imperial dining arrangements. Prathi Raj shares, "At Shiv Vilas Jaipur, we have a total room inventory of 125 Rooms which includes 84 elegant rooms, seven elite rooms, 6 Junior Suites, 24 Suites and 4 signature suites. As far as F&B outlets are concerned, we have a 24*7 Coffee Shop, Shahi restaurant, Sheesh Mahal (Indian Fine Dining), Crystal Bar and SABOR the Night Lounge. Guests can choose from an array of Eastern and Western-influenced treatments to restore the vital energies of their body, or select from our range of beauty treatments that impart nourishment and radiance at the Divine Spa."

Selling an experience

The property is not just an accommodation; it's a place narrating the many stories of the majestic Jaipur ensuring the guests are able to feel the age-old glory of the city. The regional factor has been given a lot of importance here. "Rajasthan is fondly known as the 'Cultural Capital of India'. It is one of the most alluring tourist destinations in the world, thus the 'Land of Maharajas' is one such place that showcases the most exuberant colours and cultures. From the costumes to people's food habits, religious celebrations to social gatherings, Rajasthan has still

adhered to its diverse traditions and rich cultures. Therefore, it is very important for us to contain all these elements and showcase it to our guests. Hence, we always say at Shiv Vilas, we sell a worthwhile experience to our guests," narrates Prathi Raj.

He adds, "For me, it is all about selling an experience to all our guests. The brand image has to be maintained at the highest level. It is not our guests' responsibility to remember us. But it is our moral duty to ensure that we don't give a chance to our guests to forget us."

Venues matching the grandeur of Jaipur

The hospitality industry has evolved beyond rooms and dining. MICE has completely changed the revenue dynamics of hotels, though weddings have always been business for properties in India, but the exemplary rise of corporate events, musical concerts and the ever-growing magnitude of Indian weddings, have kept the hospitality industry on their toes. Commenting on the MICE segment of the property, Prathi Raj says, "Since the Pandemic scare is still on, even domestic travellers are limited. But slowly the domestic travellers are increasing day by day. We too expect foreign tourists soon once the guidelines are removed. Though the flow of domestic travellers was minimal, we had a fair share of the business. At Shiv Vilas, we had a lot of high-end conferences, corporate award nights. Here at Shiv Vilas Resorts we only do exclusive and exquisite events. We do not entertain multiple events to ensure the corporate companies experience the grandeur and privacy for their event."

Attention to details score the winning goal

Prathi Raj believes that every facet of hospitality is important in business, if they are to uplift a guest's overall experience. Thus,

the property emphasises upon the entire package including but not restricted to f&b, customer service, facilities and luxury. "All the departments are very important to enhance the business. In this industry, the Chef and his team along with the F&B service team have to be creative and innovative in order to deliver the top-notch services to compete with the world-class hospitality standards," he concludes.



Prathi Raj Sharma



THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL WITH THINK STRAWBERRIES

With a tactical approach and long-term perspective, Think Strawberries (TS) has sailed efficiently through the pandemic while working on the sidelines drafting a strategic course of action for their clients. Munnumnn Marwah, COO-India & UAE, Think Strawberries elaborates on the factors that kept them going even in the darkest times for travel and tourism in recent history and the elements that sets them apart when it comes to travel representation.

- Bharti Sharma



One of Think Strawberries' key clients, Maldives has been the top destination for Indian travellers with India emerging as the top source market for the island nation for consecutive years 2020 and 2021. Throughout the pandemic, TS has remained consistent in terms of quality and were even successful in adding new accounts into their kitty including Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) and Ain Dubai. As more and more countries are increasingly eyeing India and GCC as lucrative markets, they're consistently striving to remain a frontline enabler in this pursuit. Munnmunn, with over 25 years of varied travel industry experience has successfully developed partnerships and maximised revenues for some of the world's leading tourism products and destinations.

Personalisation is the key

India, being a major outbound market, is home to tourism offices of almost all major countries directly as well as through representations. As each client has specific needs, goals, and budget, Think Strawberries devise and execute tailor-made strategies which are specifically designed to deliver targeted results. Munnmunn shares, "At Think Strawberries, we are backed by over a decade of experience in the travel representation industry. Strong knowledge of the market, coupled with our brand pillars, including solid SOPs, detailed personalisation, values, and people has continued to ensure that our clients are seen and stand out. All these factors have played a part in positioning Think Strawberries as a leader that is

defining the frontiers of Travel Representation."

The whole nine yards approach

When Think Strawberries was conceived back in 2010, the idea was to address the gaps in tourism representation with the world witnessing a global travel boom. Munnmunn feels that the key to expanding internationally is to ensure that your brand 'thinks global and acts local'. She adds, "Partnering with a local in-market expert as an extension to one's tourism promotion efforts is key to capturing any market successfully. The local representative is armed with the expertise, market insights and the right kind of network. Over the years, we have successfully promoted some of the world's leading global travel products in the markets of India and the Middle East."

Navigating through the challenging period

While many tourism representation companies were rendered toothless by the pandemic, Think Strawberries has been able to smoothly map its way through the tough times and remained resilient to the potholes along the way. Sharing her experience, Munnmunn mentions, "This is a result of the faith and trust our partners have put in us and because of our agility and flexibility to adapt to the ever-evolving industry landscape, much before the onset of the pandemic. Being steadfast in our long-term vision and not deviating from it, regardless of the nature of the challenge, has helped us successfully sail through the period. I have to give

it to our devoted team and loyal clients for their trust and support. They have been our true beacon of light."

Always been digital-first

Team TS utilised the covid downtime to train and re-equip the tourism sector and educate the trade about the expansive products and destinations they represent. "The landscape and expectations of the stakeholders are changing faster than ever, and we believe it's extremely crucial to innovate and keep pace. During the pandemic, when the teams were isolated, we reinvented the wheel and sharpened the tools. Now, we are leaner, technologically strong and poised to meet all the expectations presented in the post-pandemic era," asserts Munnmunn.

The noteworthy, India

India is one of the key source markets for several global destinations, airlines and hotels, and many new partners are considering Indian travellers very seriously. Talking about the significance of India market and how TS works with this huge market, Munnmunn shares, "The latest study has projected that India will reach levels of 29 million outbound trips by 2025. With a growing economy, young population and rising middle class, India is touted to become one of the most lucrative outbound tourism markets in the world. Hence, it will be important for tourism brands to work with specialist representation companies who have a strong foundation, are financially stable and, most importantly, equipped with the right resources to successfully position them in the India market."

CONNECTING DOTS



CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES

Travel Turtle in conversation with H.E. Dr. Roger Gopaul, High Commissioner, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago finds out the importance of Ayodhya for him and his people and what kept him etched to his roots all these years.

- Bharti Sharma



CONNECTING DOTS

In 1845, H.E. Dr. Roger's great grandparents left Basti, a humble town in Uttar Pradesh, a stone throw from Ayodhya. When they left India for Trinidad & Tobago, they had with them the one thing that would define their roots and keep them in touch with their land; the Ramayana. Trinidad and Tobago are no alien to Hindu mythology and culture, in fact surprisingly it is home to the tallest hanuman statue in the western hemisphere (85 feet tall), which validates their devotion and importance of Hindu mythology in their culture. Present in Ayodhya, to attend the 'Deepotsav', his happiness knew no bounds. Sharing the experience of his journey to Ayodhya to attend the grand Deepotsav. The elated H.E. Dr. Roger says, "The words cannot begin to describe the feeling of knowing that the Ram Janmbhoomi would one day stand this tall and proud for the world to see. It is the celebration of one of the greatest king, husband and son that the world has ever known-Sri Ram!"

Marvel of the world

Ramayana and Ayodhya, are not just touchpoints for conversation for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, their impact on the lives

and culture of the country runs deep. Talking about the significance and influence of Ramayana and Ayodhya on his people back home, he shares, "Ramayana became the text of hope, guidance and encouragement for our ancestors when they came here. Ayodhya, has always been the epicentre for all Indian Hindu diaspora to look upon more than any other place on the planet. It is more than just a tourist attraction or sightseeing. It is grander than just looking at the architectural marvel of Ram Janmabhoomi, it is actually a sensory experience. Ayodhya would represent the major point of destination for all those who want to switch for a deeper and more beautiful meaning of life."

Connecting people

The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has organised a series of online events in India which speaks volumes on the various aspects of the connection between the two countries. Talking about the response of these seminars, HE states, "The response has been phenomenal. We had multiple universities from India, Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago

participating in the series. A lot of Indians from America also participated. At one point in time we had as many as 24 countries participating in the conference. We, the people of Trinidad & Tobago believe that every creed and race are equals and strive that everyone finds an equal place. This Diwali, we had five countries getting together for the first time in the diplomatic history in India to celebrate Diwali, it became the biggest Diwali event held by the collaboration of Embassies, ever. These countries were Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago. The minister of state for Ministry of External Affairs was the Chief Guest for the event."

Epitome of harmony

India and Trinidad and Tobago share a connection that is beyond diplomacy and is ingrained in the DNA of both the populations. Elaborating on the relations between the two countries, HE shares, "If we look at our diplomatic relationships, Trinidad & Tobago and India continue to grow from strength to strength, throughout the years. The relationship could not be sweeter and stronger. Culturally, we continue to exchange our traditions, whether it

is our own indigenous music such as Soca and Calypso or arts and culture. We have in the past collaborations with Bollywood film producers as well and as we speak there is another Bollywood project being produced but it is actually about Trinidad & Tobago. We are both strong democracies; we hold ideals and virtues that govern both the governments and people. I'm very proud to represent Trinidad & Tobago in this land of Bharat and to see where both nations continue to build and strive."

Blessed with nature and hospitality

Trinidad and Tobago is a gem of the Caribbean's, it not only the epicentre of economic and financial activities of the Caribbean but is equally blessed with natural marvels and people full of warmth and hospitality. Explaining the beauty and superiority of his country, the excited HE shares, "From our coconut trees to our beaches, our rainforests to our mountains, our rivers to our waterfalls, Trinidad & Tobago is a paradise on earth. Our carnival is one of the greatest shows on Earth. It is also known as the manufacturing capital and the financial capital of the Caribbean. Economically, we are very strong and sturdy in terms of our government and our democracy we tend to hold very strong and stable government and we're very democratic. So, as much as we enjoy our 'roti' we enjoy our 'dasheen' and our 'Yam', as much as we enjoy Indian music and Hindi songs, we enjoy our 'Soca'. On the category of tourists forming the majority of Indian arrivals in Trinidad and Tobago, HE adds, "Business, trade and investment, we find that particular segment of tourism mainly from India to Trinidad & Tobago."

Trinidad & Tobago is well connected through direct flights from London, New York, Amsterdam, etc. Communicating the ease of traveling to Trinidad and Tobago, "It is very easy to connect and we don't need to sail on a ship from Calcutta anymore, thankfully," laughingly says H.E. Dr. Roger.





LA LA LAND

AN EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME

Rann Utsav

Ethnicity blended with a stream of modernity, RannUtsav celebrates Gujarat and the traditions that have been passed on for generations. The tent city that brings all kinds of activities together under one roof.



LA LA LAND

An annual affair that engulfs the Rann of Kutchh in all glory and amusement. The RannUtsav is organised by the Gujarat Tourism every year between the months of November and February. The effort by the Gujarat Tourism is commendable, as the Utsav brings back the Rann back to life and attracts travellers from all across the world. The Utsav has gained momentum from the past few years by creating a little interesting story that revolves around the rebirth of the Rann of Kutchh after the 2021 Gujarat Earthquakes.

What to expect?

This year the RannUtsav is organised from 1st November 2021 to 20th February 2022, with a slogan that says 'BanayeapniRannkiKahaniya.' Authentic Gujarati cuisine that will make your taste buds

sparkle with joy accompanied by cultural burst of flavours and activities that can be checked off the bucket list.

This year's RannUtsav is all you can ask for with colourful vibrant handicrafts from all over Gujarat and a glimpse of the Gujarati culture wrapped with modern sports and adventures. Spread across the Rann of Kutchh, the Utsav opens doors to a tent city that is nothing like your camping trips but a luxurious experience like nothing you have experienced before. Customary welcome by garlands and tilak will give you a flavour of the shenanigans that are in store. Organised in the massive tent city of Dhordo surrounded by white dessert, the RannUtsav has array of things starting from authentic cuisine, handicrafts, mesmerising views and flea markets that will make your trip worthwhile.

Mini Gujarat with a twist

The RannUtsav this year is a splendid series of activities and merriment of the Gujarati flavours, with luxurious tents and different restaurants for every meal, the travellers are in for a treat. You can also try your hands on pottery and weaving amongst many other things. Apart from the basic cultural vibe, Gujarat tourism has made sure to indulge you in an eventful experience that includes fun activities such as rock climbing, paragliding, zip lining, along with a series of tracks for adventure lovers. Take a hot air balloon ride and we dare you to recover from it. The experience of overlooking

the vibrant hues of the salt sand from the top is so enchanting that you will develop a compulsion to talk and think about it. This year, have the most exhilarating winter in Gujarat at RannUtsav 2021-22.

The Utsav brings an amalgamation of adventure sports and indoor sports as well. If you are looking for a family vacay and are trying to figure out which way to go, RannUtsav is the best place to be. There is something for every age, with pool tables in every corner and kids arcade at every stop. Morning tea at your tent and an evening stroll beside the beach. What more can you ask from a place that has a shining sunrise and breath-taking sunset.



Experiencing moments

The major reason for anyone visiting Kutch is to explore its two natural landscapes - Great Rann of Kutch for the White Desert (that you find at Kutch RannUtsav) and Little Rann of Kutch for the barren crack-land & salt-mashing.

RannUtsav has your bags covered. The options will make you go crazy. Exotic handcrafted Gujarati articles, leather articles, splendid silverware, intricate Kutchi embroidery, and beautifully crafted ornaments – either let them feast upon your wallet or allow your eyes to have a feast full time.

The RannUtsav is not only about travelling and experiencing Gujarat, it is about making and experiencing moments and creating memories. An experience that marvels at the rustic charms, indulging in the local cuisines and street food, unveiling the secrets of dark night skies, gazing into the infinities. It is called the experience of a lifetime for a reason. Getting up to the melodious tunes of folklore and singers binging along as you walk through the white desert to witness the stories behind the marshy land. Clicking selfies with the camel or a ride on it, whichever way the Utsav will make you fall in love with the ruins.



Pocket friendly or not

Ranging from high to low and the number of days for which you plan to visit, there are different packages that are available. The tents have one of a kind names and are well equipped with all the luxurious as well as basic amenities. Darbari and Rajwadi are the deluxe luxury experience tents that are almost good as any 5 star hotel room. Apart from the two jewels you will find premium, swiss deluxe tents that are available for the ones that are planning to stay for one or two nights.

The tent city created near the Dhordo Village is one perfect management of a temporary human settlement. The AC and non-AC tents are equipped with all possible amenities that one can think and ask for. Room heaters, round the clock supply of warm water in the middle of a desert, shopping complex for all your needs, exhibition center, adventure one and two humongous dining halls – no requirement is left unanswered here.

The experience at RannUtsav including the tent will cost you not more than ten grand, which is a small price to pay for a fun filled vacation with your loved ones.



WHY TECHNOLOGY HAS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN TOURISM?

Tourism is usually considered a crowded market where many companies use technology to provide lowest price and discounted price. Now is the time to use technology to solve major problems in tourism sector.

- Vipul Jain, Founder & CEO, Gabbit Systems



Tourism industry is one of the major contributors of the economy. During 2019-20, tourism in India not only contributed 6.8 per cent to GDP, but also employed 8 per cent of workforce (as per WTTC). Let find out where can we implement the technology for a seamless user-friendly experience?

Over-Tourism

During last two years, tourism sector has seen two opposite behaviors –from 'zero-tourism' to 'over-tourism'. While the former is an exception due to Covid-19, the later can be seen frequently every year during holidays and weekends. This phenomenon of over-tourism is there across the world and is a cause of concern by many countries. Over Tourism results into chaotic conditions, long-queues, parking unavailability, resource-shortage, road rages and clashes etc leading to bad tourism experience.

Over tourism is generally an outcome of multiple underlying issues such as

- Lack of information about alternative places which are equally good but lesser-crowded- It is not only tourists that don't have this information, but most of the

travel agents as well don't have it. This results into most of tourists travel only to well-known destinations while others await tourists. Also this information is too big to be managed and run manually.

- No real-time crowd information about destinations- Tourists come to know about over-crowding only when they reach the place. By that time, it is too late for them turn to a different destination.

- Not enough 'Things to do' at lesser-known places- Travel plans for such places need to have enough activities to keep tourists engaged, otherwise very few tourists opt for them. This requires a technology that can help to choose places as per choice, make travel plans by combining other activities at or nearby, provide real-time information about crowd and queue situations at various destinations.

Safe Tourism

So far, tourist's safety usually means an app which can call some pre-fed number during distress. Contrary to this belief, tourist's safety is an important but complex issue to manage because-

- Tourists are new to the place, without acquaintance with it and local culture. During

distress time, it is extremely difficult for them to save themselves. Any app with some pre-fed numbers can provide little help as the called people may actually be miles away.

- While local administration is responsible to provide help, it has no information about tourist counts and their location.

- Tourist's location and count keeps changing, which makes it difficult to manage the things.

Things get more complex, in case of pandemic – where tourist's contact chain needs to be identified - natural disaster, law and order situation etc. Rescue efforts needs coordination with multiple departments, identify tourists, provide timely help, especially when the scale is not known (eg Kedarnath tragedy 2013)

There is a need for the technology solution which can coordinate with multiple stakeholders to monitor the situation, takes proactive measures before things breaks-down. Also help tourists in quickest way during distress.

Inclusive Tourism - Involvement of Locals

Tourism at a destination is mostly limited to selected attraction points, activities. But tourism of a place is incomplete

without understanding its local art and culture, history, produce, believes and stories, specialties and expertise etc. There is a big demand for such experiential tours. Lot of such information is available only with locals, local entrepreneurs, SMEs.

There is a need for a technology solution that can bring such local experiences into mainstream tourism. A system where tourists can see all experiences at one place, choose-n-book experiences as per their choice and availability. This will not only bring-out the real tourism, but also contribute to local economy of the place.

The Disconnect

There is no communication channel and information flow between stakeholders (tourists, tourism industry, government) resulting each of them work in silos. For example:

- Tourist in Delhi leaving for Shimla to know the current snow conditions.

- A Government department like to provide detour information on a tourist route to tour operators, cab drivers, tourists.

It requires a technical system where stakeholders can communicate with other based on location.



Vipul Jain



SriLankan Airlines committed to serve India as the airline continues to consolidate operations to pre-COVID-19 levels

SriLankan Airlines recently organized a media meet and assured to Indian travellers that the Airline is committed to increase the flights to destinations that were temporarily halted due to the pandemic, restore operations to pre-COVID-19 levels, and offer Indian travelers a wide range of connections to Sri Lanka.

meet the changing needs of the industry as the pandemic raged on and played a key role in bridging countries and facilitating the movement of people and critical supplies, including between India and Sri Lanka," stated Richard Nuttall, Chief Commercial Officer of SriLankan Airlines.

SriLankan Airlines' Chairman, Ashok Pathirage said "India is our biggest market, and we are dedicated to re-establish operations to full scale where the Indian market is concerned. We continued to operate both passenger and cargo flights to and from India even during periods of lockdown and despite many global travel restrictions. .

Accordingly, Cargo operations emerged as a key activity in the Airline's business model, and SriLankan plans to introduce more dedicated Cargo flights to its operation.

"It is an ideal time to create awareness about SriLankan Airlines' operations in the Indian market and build confidence among travelers to book with the Airline as lockdowns are being lifted and global travel restrictions are eased, added Mr. Pathirage.

SriLankan Airlines' Head of Worldwide Sales and Distribution, Dimuthu Tennakoon, said that the Airline is now forging ahead with plans and investments to reestablish its presence in the Indian market.

"The inflow of tourists from India to Sri Lanka has increased considerably in the last few months, with Sri Lanka being one of the first few countries to open borders and welcome fully vaccinated Indian travelers including those who have taken Covaxin. India continues to be one of Sri Lanka's most significant source markets for international travelers," he said.

Recently, the Airline flew down a group of Indian media personnel for a familiarization (FAM) tour of Sri Lanka, so that they could be updated on the current environment in the country for Indian tourists in terms of facilities to ensure a COVID-Safe holiday. He added, "Likewise, we conducted several media FAM tours including a recently concluded major FAM tour for fifty top brand influencers from India who go to experience the diverse culture and heritage of Sri Lanka, which in turn they would promote to their audiences in India. Additionally, there is a pan-India brand campaign in progress at the moment."

"The Airline was able to adapt to



TAT organises Loy Krathong festival celebration in New Delhi

Keeping the festive spirits alive and in following the tradition, Tourism Authority of Thailand (New Delhi) along with Royal Thai Embassy and Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport Hotel, celebrated the Thai festival of lights – ‘Loy Krathong’ on November 19, 2021 at Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport Hotel.

It was a beautiful and picturesque evening as several floating candles, flowers and krathongs decorated the venue showcasing Thai festivals & traditions.

Guests including diplomats, corporates, media and members of the travel fraternity were invited to celebrate the magical festival of lights where candle- lit krathongs twinkled on the water creating unforgettable experiences.

The evening was inaugurated with a welcome speech by Mr. Thirapath Mongkolnavin, Minister & Deputy Chief of Mission, Royal Thai Embassy who thanked the guests for joining the event and celebrating the Thai festival of lights. This was followed by a welcome remark from Mr Nitin Kapur Director Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport Hotel.

The event was highlighted by cultural dance performances depicting the strong cultural and religious links between India & Thailand. Other performances included a traditional Loy Krathong dance and a dance from the four different regions of Thailand.

This was followed by the beautiful Loy Krathong procession that was led by Nang Noppamas who invited the guests to release the candle and incense lit krathongs into the water thereby paying respect to the water goddess.

Guests at the event learnt the art of traditional Krathong making and decoration which they floated into the water. The event included demonstrations of a popular Thai noodle dish - Pad Thai which was greatly enjoyed by the guests. Office of Thai Commercial Affairs also showcased Thai products which are being imported into India and used in Thai cuisine.

Mr Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Director Tourism Authority of Thailand, New Delhi said “We are very grateful to be able to celebrate the Loy Krathong festival in New Delhi and pay respect to our Thai festivities as well as highlight the strong cultural bond between India and Thailand. I hope this event has given the guests a glimpse of Thai traditions, art & culture and a taste of delicious and authentic Thai food by Soy Neung Roi restaurant at the Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport Hotel. We would like to thank all our guests who joined us and of course our hotel partner Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport Hotel for their continuous support in making this a memorable celebration. Now that Thailand is open for fully vaccinated travellers from India, we look forward to welcoming travellers to experience Amazing Thailand which is now “Even more Amazing.”



APPOINTMENTS



Sarovar Hotels

Sarovar Hotels has announced the appointment of Harpreet Singh Babbar as their new Regional Sales Manager for West. He will spearhead the sales development and implementation of business strategies for West Zone which is a key source market for the brand.

A focused and analytical hospitality professional, Harpreet brings with him over two decades of rich and varied experience in Sales and Revenue growth for the brand. Before joining Sarovar Hotel, he was associated with brands such as Raheja Hotels, Carlson Hotels, Accor, Berggruen Hotels & Lemon Tree Hotel, where he made a remarkable contribution.

Radisson RED Chandigarh Mohali

Harmohan joins Radisson RED Chandigarh Mohali from The Lalit Chandigarh where he made an impact through the years across streamlining operations and optimizing revenue opportunities. With an Indian Institute of Hotel Management, Bhopal degree, his career graph also includes successful stints with key national hospitality brands such as The Oberoi Group, The Claridges and Park Plaza

"I am proud and excited to be a part of the first Radisson RED team in India and to have the opportunity to market a brand with no true competition. I will strive to contribute to the successful growth of the hotel and hope to elevate its positioning as one of the most coveted landmarks for bold and edgy hospitality experience", said Harmohan Singh, Director of Sales, Radisson RED Chandigarh Mohali.



Le Meridien Goa, Calangute

Babita Kanwar has been appointed as the General Manager for Le Meridien Goa, Calangute- A unit of Models Leisure Venture. Babita brings with her a unique combination of hotel sales and operations and has recently celebrated the 20-year completion milestone with Marriott International. Having started her career in F&B Operations in Taj and Oberoi hotels in India, Babita subsequently moved into the sales function where her notable achievements include the successful ramp up of the Renaissance Mumbai Convention Centre Hotel and Lakeside Chalet- MEA after the inventory of the hotel was increased by 300 keys. She went on to lead the Market Sales set up for the Marriott Hotels in Mumbai and eventually moved to Shanghai as Director of Sales and Marketing where she was instrumental in the success of the flag ship Marriott City Centre Hotel.

Amritara Hotels and Resorts

Amritara Hotels and Resorts recently announced the appointment of Akash Bhatia as the Group General Manager. Akash's prior experience includes Ramee Group of Hotels-Bahrain and Lemon Tree Hotels at various locations- Gujrat Region, Vadodara, Bangalore, East Delhi and Corporate Office Delhi

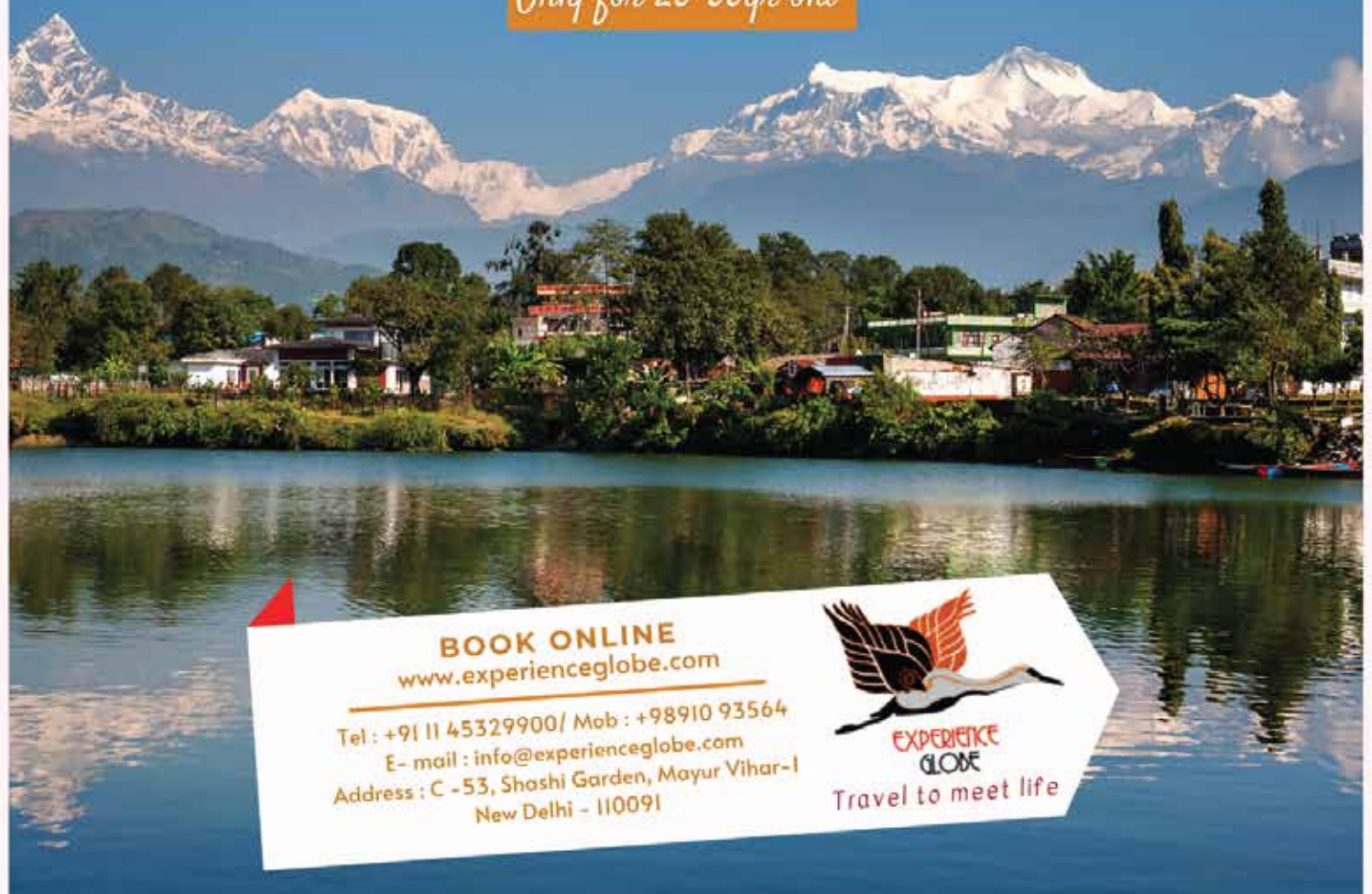
We are very happy to welcome Akash Bhatia to the Amritara family. Amritara has always attracted brilliant leaders who have demonstrated their leadership skills, expertise and have led their team members towards enabling them to make a difference in today's time.



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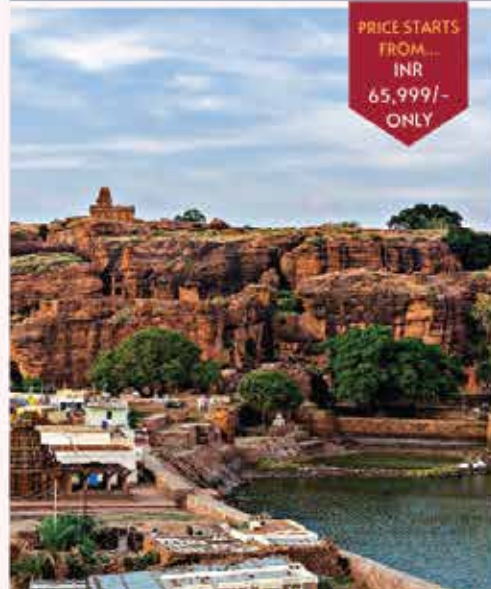
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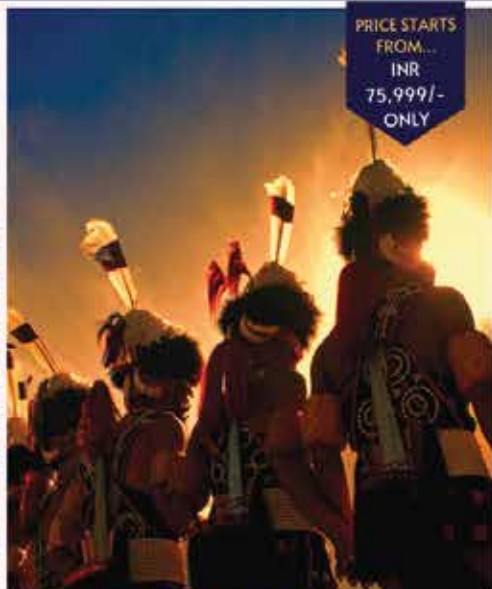
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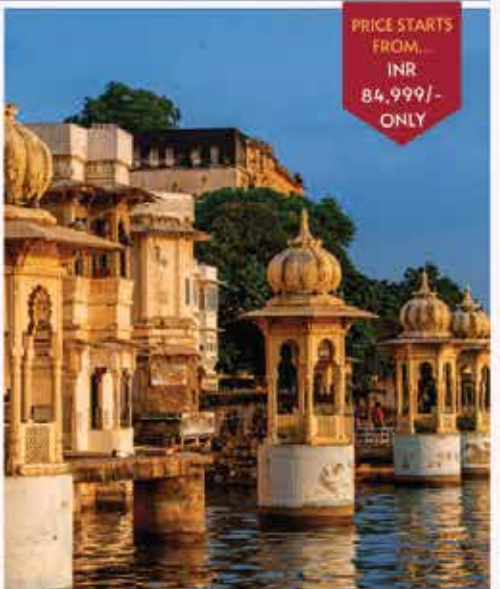
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