

TRAVEL

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ANNIVERSARY
SPECIAL

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A dive into the
turquoise tropical Islands

Thailand

CULTURAL TOURISM: DISCOVERING
THE "REAL" ESSENCE OF DESTINATIONS

SRILANKAN AIRLINES INTENSIFIES
REINFORCEMENT STRATEGIES

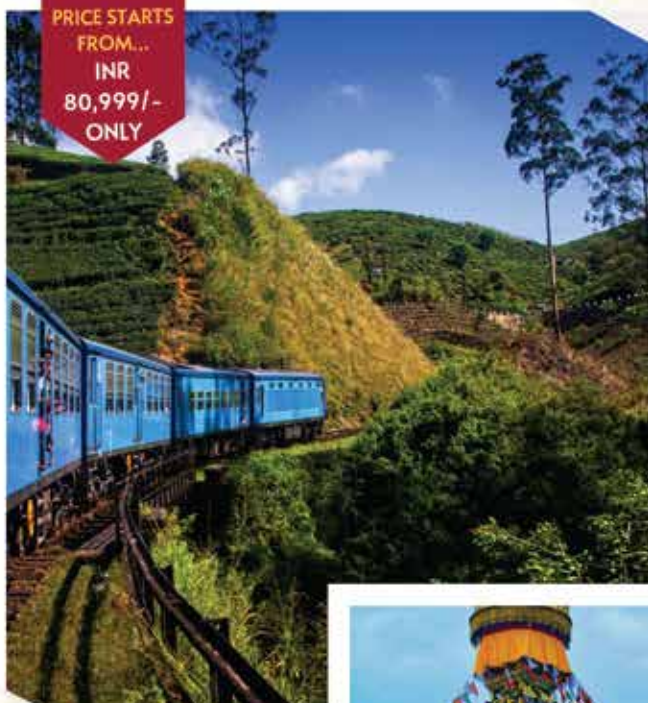
THE DANCE OF TULIPS
IN THE VALLEY OF KASHMIR



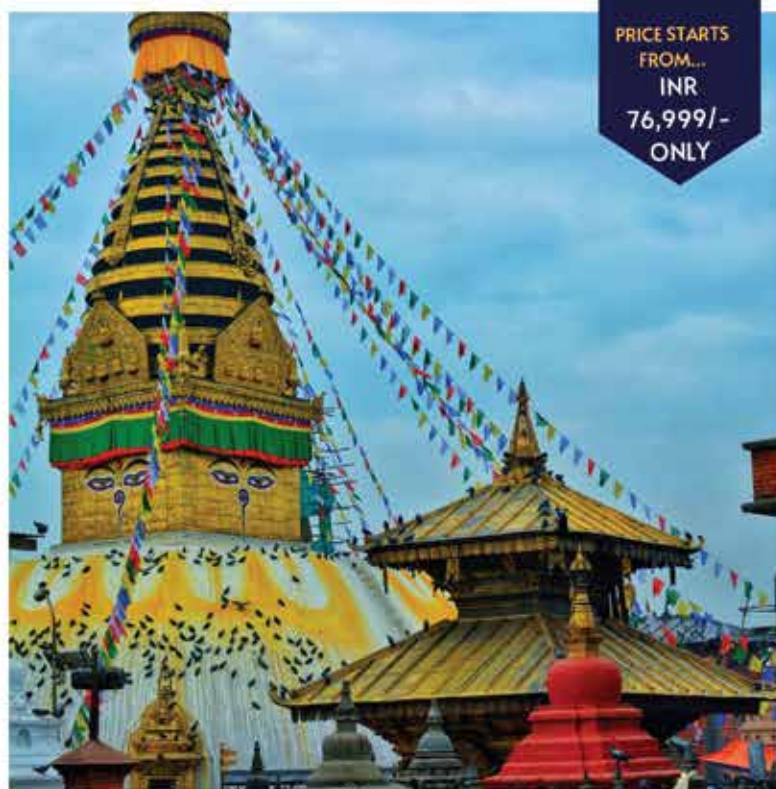
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Editor's Letter

Penning down this note is a concoction of emotions beyond explanation. The euphoria of achieving this milestone, the gratitude for the overwhelming support from our readers and partners, the melancholy of the unfortunate turn of events in the past year and several other sentiments that have gone down in creating the product, we at Travel Turtle take pride in presenting to you today. Yes, your favourite Travel Turtle turns one this issue and this was unachievable without the adoration and support of our readers and our partners. This issue is special in more ways than one. The anniversary issue of the magazine is a time for us to reflect. Our issues in these twelve months have covered the most incredible travel tales while giving voice to the unheard. Anniversaries rightly encourage us to take a glance at the past and indulge in a bit of nostalgia. Concurrently, I'm exuberant for the ride forward as Travel Turtle continues to celebrate beauty in its ever-expanding diversity.

As you flipped through the pages of our different issues, I hope you experienced that feeling of pompousness and curiosity about the tales of accomplishments. The exciting and invigorating facet is that they radiate optimism, confidence and ambition.

Few years back, sipping my Singapore slings at the rooftop of Marina Bay Sands, I connected with a group of travellers out on their quest to explore the world. Germans by origin, their six-month long travel itinerary revolved around exploring Asian countries. The curiosity bug in me ended up enquiring about their plan and reason for their choice of travel. To my surprise, they revealed that they're travelling for 'Culture', to immerse in one. This encounter had hit me hard, and became the inspiration for the cover story of this issue, where we spill the beans about this segment.

The one thing that I love the most about travel is its versatility, and we ensure that this versatility is intact between our pages as well. From the mesmerising luxury lodge in Gir-Aramness to the boutique properties of Teardrop, we guarantee you versatility not just in segments but in the nature of the segments too.

After making through a year that was nothing short of a bumpy ride, I would like to end this letter by thanking the entire team responsible for bringing this issue to life. From external contributors to our advertisers who supported us even when their businesses were suffering, and, of course, our readers. You are the ultimate reason why we put our heart and soul into all we do. This is your magazine, so happy birthday to you, too. Let's go, build and grow together.

Bharti Sharma

Bharti Sharma
Editor

   : [travelturtlemag](https://www.instagram.com/travelturtlemag)





Travel Turtle Team



Publisher: **Harish Chandra Uniyal**

Editor: **Bharti Sharma**

Executive Director: **Sudipta Saha**

Feature Writer: **Tripti Jain**

Contributing Editors:

Saloni Bhatia

Sharmistha Shadukhan

Misbaah Mansuri

Shrinidhi Hande

Marketing: **Tejas Sharma**

Art Director: **Pankti Anjaria**

Legal Consultant: **Aditya Singh**

Photographer: **Abhishek**

Circulation: **Pradeep Kumar**

Accounts: **Dinesh Kumar**



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WELCOME BACK TO SINGAPORE



Travellers from India who are fully vaccinated can now visit Singapore quarantine free on Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) flights.

Singapore Airlines operates daily VTL flights from Chennai, Delhi and Mumbai. From 16TH March 2022, all Singapore Airlines stations in India will operate VTL flights.

For the latest information, please visit <https://safetravel.ica.gov.sg/vtl/requirements-and-process>

Or scan the QR code below



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TO STRENGTHEN
BILATERAL TIES

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THE DANCE OF
TULIPS

IN THE VALLEY
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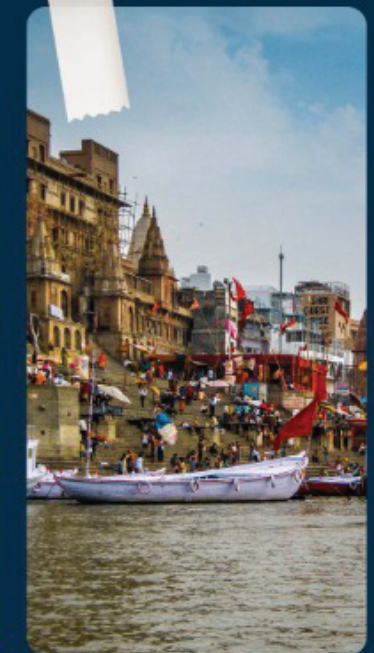
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Fiji is open for happiness for Indian Travellers



India has been included as part of Fiji's 'Travel Partner' country list by Ministry of Commerce, Trade, Tourism & Transport - Fiji, effective March 2, 2022. Thus, Indian Tourists can now travel to Fiji via the currently open transit routes of Singapore and Australia, to enjoy a 'quarantine free' holiday in this picturesque paradise known for its incredible scenery and warm, welcoming people.

Travellers from India to Fiji must be fully vaccinated (Children under 18 can travel with a vaccinated adult), providing a negative PCR test taken within two days prior to departure or a negative RAT test taken within 24hrs prior to departure. Once they arrive on Fiji's shores, travellers can enjoy the best of Fiji knowing that everyone they interact with is adhering to the highest health and safety practices.

"We are delighted to be able to welcome visitors from India once again. India continues to be one of our most prominent emerging markets and we look forward to receiving Indian travellers seeking premium and personalised experiences. In the coming months, we aim to capture a greater share of India's outbound travel market which will help shore up the long-term prospects of both our tourism sectors," said Brent Hill, CEO Tourism Fiji.

Signature Tours by Creative Travel is now 'Away&Co'

Since 1977, the Creative Travel family of brands has been at the forefront of service led experiential travel. Within that philosophy, Signature Tours by Creative Travel has announced an exciting transformation of their luxury outbound brand, to its new avatar, Away&Co.

Supported by a global network of the finest curators of travel experience in every destination, and as a part of one of India's oldest tourism companies, Away&Co will deliver the world in the most unique ways. They intend to take travel beyond most people's imagination.

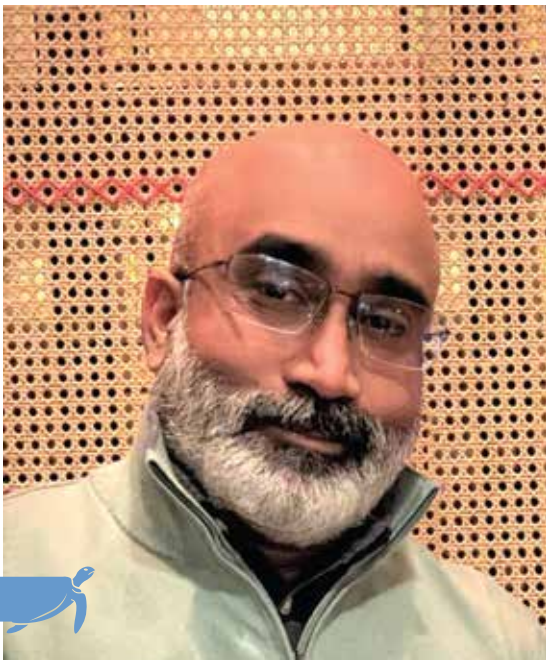
Rohit Kohli, Jt. Managing Director says, "The Indian outbound market has matured exponentially over the years. Indians are more aware than ever before, and want to explore the world, but not as tourists. Our legacy of 45 years is built on creating amazing experiences, and that's what we're doing at Away&Co as well. The world is ready to welcome a new kind of Indian traveller, one who is immersed in the culture and the people, not just the monuments and sights"



Cordelia Cruises launches first ever cruising experience from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka

The largest city on the sea is right here and waiting at our doorsteps. All you have to do is book your tickets and choose to cruise! First time in India ever, Cruising experience from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka- a never seen before the journey, an unforgettable experience and a journey as beautiful as the destination!

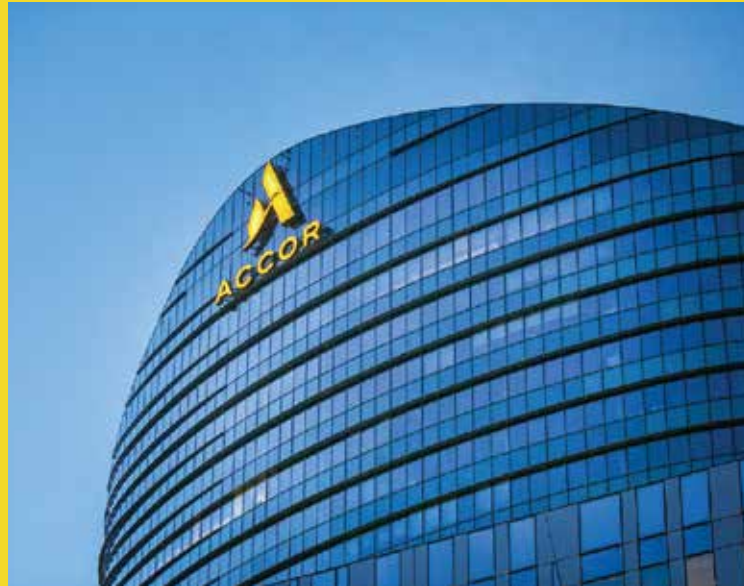
Cordelia Cruises, the only one of its kind holiday destination, makes Her debut in Chennai. It is from here that you could opt for a scintillating holiday by sea to Sri Lanka. The itineraries they offer are versatile with options that are spread over a number of days as well as room categories to meet everybody's needs and requirements. Take your pick from a 2 night, 3 night or 5 nights schedule and then sit back and surrender to the sounds and sights of the sea.



Accor to add nine new hotels in India

Accor, a world-leading augmented hospitality group, has announced plans to densify its portfolio by adding nine new hotels across the mid-scale and economy categories to the existing portfolio of 54 hotels in India. Over the next two years, Accor will add more than 1,300 keys to its Novotel and ibis brands in the country. Over the next 24 months, Accor expects to add six new properties to the network, two of which will debut in leading two-tier markets within India - Novotel Bhubaneswar Janpath Road and Novotel Jodhpur ITI Circle. Accor will also continue to expand its ibis and ibis Styles brand in partnership with InterGlobe Hotels by adding three more hotels in the next two years to the existing portfolio of 20 hotels.

"India is a diverse market with heterogeneous guests, and our endeavour is to cater to our guests in all their varied personas and changing needs," said Mark Willis, CEO India, Middle East, Africa & Turkey. "Our Novotel and ibis brands are much preferred by guests given their value, price and ability to offer a consistent experience, with a seamless service. We will continue to expand our footprint in the upper mid-scale and economy segment in India with the Novotel and ibis brands, and also keep looking for the right partners as we expand our luxury brands after the successful response we received for Raffles Udaipur last year."



WelcomHeritage unveils expansion plans for 2022

One of India's leading hospitality chain, WelcomHeritage is forging ahead with the expansion of its hotel portfolio in some of the most exquisite tourist destinations in the country.

Spearheaded by its CEO, Abinash Manghani, WelcomHeritage is embarking on an exciting expansion journey this year. A legendary brand, WelcomHeritage has played an instrumental role in highlighting the storied rich heritage and cultural ethos of the various destinations where its properties are located.

Despite industry-wide challenges caused by the pandemic, WelcomHeritage's outlook for 2022 looks set to build upon the success of the past year. Withstanding all the challenges, the hospitality chain managed to add highly anticipated new hotels including WelcomHeritage Elysium Resort & Spa, Shimla, WelcomHeritage Badi Kothi, Allahabad and WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa, Bera in its portfolio in 2021. It added 85 keys to its overall inventory in the last year.

YIAPL signs agreement with AAI for provision of Air Navigation Services at Noida International Airport

As part of the development plan for Noida International Airport (NIA), Yamuna International Airport Private Limited (YIAPL) has signed an agreement with Airport Authority of India (AAI) for the provision of Air Navigation Services which includes Communications, Navigation, and Surveillance Systems and Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM). One of the conditions of the concession for NIA, the agreement defines terms and conditions for the provision of CNS/ATM services by AAI at NIA.

As part of the agreement, AAI will plan and procure CNS/ATM equipment, install, and commission the equipment and provide air traffic services for aircraft intended for Noida International Airport. NIA will plan and build all relevant aeronautical facilities according to national and international norms laid down by MOCA, DGCA and ICAO. NIA and AAI will set up a joint coordination committee to monitor the implementation of the agreement.

Mr Christoph Schnellmann, Chief Executive Officer, Yamuna International Airport Private Limited said, "The CNS/ATM agreement with the Airport Authority of India is another milestone in our journey towards the development of Noida International Airport, whilst ensuring cost efficient aeronautical processes. We are looking to partner with AAI to ensure safe, efficient, and cost-effective ATM services for the airlines operating at NIA. Our vision is to provide customer-focused airport operations in a collaborative environment at NIA."



Singapore opens Vaccinated Travel Lane for all Indian cities

Singapore has announced the extension of the Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL) to all Indian cities, which was earlier applicable only to Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai. With this new development, more travellers from India who are fully vaccinated may now use the VTL for quarantine-free travel to Singapore. The VTL which was launched on November 29, 2021 between both the countries has witnessed success since its commencement. As the pandemic has now shown signs of ebbing, there is new hope and optimism in the travel and tourism industry across the world. Arrangements like the VTL serve to ease travel woes and encourage people to revive their long-pending vacation plans. Travelling to Singapore from India for travellers who are fully vaccinated has become easier, with some pre-requisites before departure, including a valid visa, a Vaccinated Travel Pass (VTP), stay of seven consecutive days in India or a VTL country and a mandatory RT-PCR test/professionally administered ART before boarding the flight. On arrival into Singapore, travellers can enjoy quarantine-free stay, after taking a supervised ART at a Quick Test Centre within 24 hours of arrival and testing negative.

GB Srithar, Regional Director, IMESA (India, Middle East & South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board, said, "The extension of VTL to Singapore from all Indian cities provides the much needed impetus to travel between the countries for all traveller types, whether for leisure, business or cruise. This is part of Singapore's calibrated and progressive approach in re-opening our borders. Over the past year and a half, we had continued engaging the consumers and travel trade through a myriad of content and virtual experiences. We had recently launched a "Reserve in Singapore" consumer engagement activation under our SingapoReimagine campaign and are glad that more travellers from India may now start to plan their trips and reserve their experiences in Singapore. We look forward to sharing Singapore's new, reimagined tourism offerings and experiences with our Indian visitors."

Cenizaro Hotels & Resorts appoints BRANDit to lead The Residence by Cenizaro portfolio in India

Cenizaro Hotels & Resorts, has commissioned BRANDit, a specialist in tourism marketing, as its integrated marketing agency in India following a competitive review process. The partnership will support stakeholders and further enhance the brand's presence in the India market through The Residence by Cenizaro resort collection, with Maldives and Mauritius at the fore. BRANDit will fortify Cenizaro's sales, marketing and PR strategies with a brand-new outlook as part of its mandate.

Commenting on the appointment, Mr. Henry Ngo, Chairman of Cenizaro Hotels & Resorts, said "We are pleased to welcome BRANDit as our new partner in India. As we repurpose our strategy, we look forward to working with the team to increase visibility for The Residence by Cenizaro portfolio and drive operational growth across different target segments of Leisure, MICE and Celebration. India is a priority market for Cenizaro owing to a vast market size and accessibility to many of our resorts, especially Maldives and Mauritius. Outbound travel is seeing a steady upturn and our association will only further bolster our efforts in firming our brand presence in the India market."



Jazeera Airways returns to profitability in record time in 2021 with KD7.1 million

Jazeera Airways returned to profitability for the year 2021, a period which continued to be affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on travel, reporting a net profit of KD7.1 million for the year, up 126.8 per cent from the previous year. The earnings were supported by an increase of 48.2 per cent in the number of passengers flown, which reached 1.0 million, while load factors increased by 3.9 per cent to 66.8 per cent and yield increased by 28.6 per cent to KD73.9.

Operating revenue for 2021 stood at KD80.4 million, up 94.3 per cent, and operating profit increased by 152.2 per cent to KD10.8 million. The airline returned to profitability in record time during the third quarter of the year following a second year impacted by restrictions and limitations in capacity imposed on travel at Kuwait International Airport, and globally, in response to the continued spread of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Jazeera maintained the positive performance in the last quarter (Q4) of the year with a net profit of KD7.0 million, a 164.6 per cent increase from the same quarter of 2020. Operating revenue increased by 285.5 per cent to KD33.1 million while operating profit increased by 204.3 per cent to KD9.3 million. Number of passengers in Q4 increased by 476.6 per cent to 520.2 thousand passengers, while the load factor increased by 35.2 per cent to 74.2 per cent and average utilisation of aircraft increased by 220.4 per cent to 9.2 hours.

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CULTURAL TOURISM

Beyond attending events and festivals,
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the local food and drinks...

- Bharti Sharma

DISCOVERING THE “REAL” ESSENCE OF DESTINATIONS



OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

On one of my trips to Thailand, I merrily remember my visit to the Benjarong village. It was a quaint village engulfed in a collection of small shops selling the famed Benjarong porcelain. While walking past these shops, one can see craftsmen (or women) painting the unfinished vase or plates in some of these establishments. Too excited by the sight I tried my hand at painting a cup and saucer, and BRAVO! I did well. Initially, the activity felt like a general part of the itinerary, but after spending some time with the local craftsmen, learning the basics of their craftsmanship and exchanging conversations with them, my heart was filled with joy and some memories etched in my mind for life. A traveller visiting a particular destination in order to experience

and learn about a particular culture; sounds simple right? On the contrary, it's vast and extremely complex. It's the unintentional part of the whole tourism experience, as cultural immersion (with the local people, their language, customs, cuisine etc) is an inevitable part of a person's holiday. Our travel presents us with endless opportunities to learn about the way other people live, about their society and their traditions. Whether you are attending the Camel Festival in Bikaner, visiting the pyramids in ancient Egypt, taking a tour of the tea plantations in Darjeeling or enjoying the locally brewed kahve on your all-inclusive holiday to Turkey, you will inexorably encounter some form of cultural tourism as part of your holiday experience.





In quest of authenticity

Some people seek to embark on their travels with the sole intention of having a 'cultural' experience, whereas others may experience culture as a by-product of their trip. Culture, in general, has always been a major focus and the notion of authentic experience. There are certain prospects that are intimately intertwined with the segment. Tourists seek an authentic experience associated with cultural products which can be further defined as authentic or inauthentic depending upon whether these are created on purpose or actually performed and practiced by locals as traditional practices.

A deeper understanding

The World Tourism Organisation broadly defines cultural tourism as the movements of persons who satisfy the human need for diversity, tending to raise the cultural level of the individual and giving rise to new knowledge, experience and encounters. The entire concept is backed by a desire to discover, learn about and enjoy the tangible and intangible cultural assets offered in a tourism destination, ranging from heritage, performing arts, handicrafts, rituals and gastronomy, among others. The segment is commonly associated with education in a way, some describing it more narrowly as educational cultural tourism. It also enables local communities to accept their culture as cultural tourism is a major driver for their growth. So, communities go out of their way to celebrate and promote their culture as this is what differentiates them from other communities. As per UNWTO tourism centred on cultural attractions and products - is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry, accounting for an estimated 40 per cent of all tourism worldwide.

India is steeped in history and traditions that are both fascinating and appealing. Many overseas visitors, particularly from the US, the UK, Europe, and Australasia throng here for this reason alone. Apart from offering spiritual awakening, it's a

journey of the senses. A majority of tourists visiting India are coming for the culture; they want to live this culture, explore it while taking home with them, innumerable memories.

Memory, history, and nostalgia

South Africa is packed with a plethora of distinctive sounds and sights. Those looking for an authentic cultural adventure in the Rainbow Nation can visit Eshowe in Zululand. Just a short distance away from Durban, travellers can partake in enchanting Zulu cultural ceremonies including the reed dance with thousands of Zulu maidens and a mass religious gathering of the Shembe. At the Basotho Cultural Village in the Golden Gate National Park, visitors can enjoy traditional dancing and see how the village women weave baskets and grind maize. In South Africa, visitors can also participate in drum circles, opt for a local walking guide, stay and share a meal with a family from an indigenous tribe or learn their art of spear and drum making, beadwork, basketry, pottery and weaving. Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head- MEISEA, South African Tourism explains how tourists can explore the best of the country. She says, "Visitors are invited to stay with locals and live like locals for an immersive cultural experience. The country is alive with carnivals, local markets, indigenous performances, enchanting music and global events all through the year."



Neliswa Nkani

OFFSHORE BINOCULARS



Going back to roots

As more and more cultural tourists sought to explore the cultures of destinations, greater emphasis has been placed on the importance of intercultural dialogue to promote understanding and tolerance. Likewise, in the face of globalization, countries have looked for ways to strengthen local identity, and cultural tourism has also been engaged as a strategy to achieve this goal. Being essentially place-based, cultural tourism is driven by an interest to experience and engage with culture first-hand. In many countries, cultural tourism has been leveraged to drive urban regeneration or city branding strategies. From large-sized metropolises in Asia or the Arab States building cultural landmarks and contemporary architecture to drive tourism expansion, to small and middle-sized urban settlements enhancing their cultural assets to stimulate local development.

and sports activities, cultural sites, events of international importance as well as fascinating cities such as Berlin, Cologne, Dresden, Hamburg, or Munich, attract tourists from all around the globe. While sharing some recent trends Romit Theophilus shares, "We are seeing a strong desire for travel, leisure time and cultural experiences. Our approach is to keep potential travellers up to date, create an emotional connection and provide inspiration. Our message is that the values that have defined Destination Germany in the past – including credibility, responsibility and safety – will continue to do so in the future. Our goal is not just to attract tourists but to secure long-term customer loyalty."



Romit Theophilus

Harnessing framework & potential

Let us take Germany as a case example, which has become increasingly popular as a vacation destination not only for international visitors but also among native Germans. The diverse landscape, the manifold opportunities for leisure



Advancing Cultural policy and Campaigns

In the summer period ahead, GNT0 will launch its German. Local. Culture/Feel Good and Embrace Nature campaign, which will draw attention towards highlighting the customs and culture of lesser-known German towns and cities as well as the incredible choice of high-end hotels, restaurants and individual regions that are certified as socially and environmentally sustainable. Working on similar lines, South

Africa has opened its doors to exemplary culturally immersive experiences which sees a great demand in terms of Indians, "Indian travellers are looking for more culturally nuanced itineraries as it allows them to connect with the pulse of the destination. Almost all tour packages for South Africa have a rich mix of culturally immersive activities. Additionally, cultural adventures form a core pillar of our recently launched More & More campaign. We want Indian travellers to take away incredibly personal, fond memories from their trips to the Rainbow Nation," tells Neliswa.



When Reader is the traveller

Digging out
exclusive places
across the Bengal
for exploring and
enjoying reading

Author:
Angshuman Paul

Picture credit:
Neeldiganta Saha



INDIAN SAGA

Framed in Varanasi, in the film 'The Last Colour', the protagonist is seeking for a tranquil place to feel the book 'Gitanjali' by Tagore; well, that's quite impossible in a temple city like Varanasi but not in Bengal. Be it the capital city of Kolkata or the queen of hills- Darjeeling, how-ever crowded it is, you will surely find a tranquil place within the nook and corner of the city to enjoy reading. Or even if you are a Goethe lover and enjoy reading poetry within the frame of nature, Bengal surely will not dishearten you and in this article,

we exclusively invite the readers & book-lovers for a journey in West Bengal which has magnificent places to sit & read. But before we start, let me tell you, we know you are an explorer and might not be keen to foray into the closed-wall of libraries. So, we shall take you to places, where you are exploring and simultaneously reading. Now, let's start!

Reading & 'City of Joy'

College is known as the country's biggest book market and scrolling through this busiest street, will give

you a feeling of the literary pulse of Kolkata but it's difficult to find a silent corner in this street to read book. So, let's push on to the very recently launched boat-library. Yes, you read it right - West Bengal Transport Corporation at the beginning of this year has unleashed a library in a launch that starts from Millennium Park Jetty. Christened as 'Young Readers' Boat Library' this floating library has good collection of books along with the fresh breeze of the river Hooghly. The weak anthropic principle simply states

that the current Universe is of the form that allows intelligent observers and if you are an intelligent observer then you will not only enjoy reading in the clam milieu of the boat but also will enjoy observing heritage sites like Belur Math across the bank of the mighty river. And if you are hydrophobic but do want to read book in an innovative way, then there are 'Bengali Tram Library' and 'Young Readers' Tram Library' - both situated in a tram, taking you across the city as you keep on enjoying your favorite novel.





Now let's move on from Kolkata to Tagore's terrain – Santiniketan, Excluding the Visva-Bharati University campus, Santiniketan has many places to sit and read book quietly and if you want to explore books and cultural ambience then do visit an old book store-Subarnarekha. With Covid gaining it's momentum, the 2021 principle of travelling is to flocking into lesser known travelling grounds to avoid over-populated areas and lesser known travelling grounds are usually located outside the hustle—bustle of the main city. So keeping aside, Santiniketan or Bolpur, take a ride to Labpur or Kankalitala, you will find lot of lush green fields swathed with bamboo shades and water bodies- halt anywhere around these roads and flip into your favourite book.

With Covid forcing many readers with strong Hashtag bonds (Insta hashtags or FB hobby groups) to form new friendship in virtual world resulted in exploration of virgin places in a very commonly known destinations. Like Digha, which is a famous coastal resort town that is touted to be very commonly known tourist-destination in West Bengal. But even in these highly renowned beaches, you will find untouched shallow sand beaches like Tajpur. "Tajpur beach is empty in the sense it's not overcrowded, the beach looks red because of lot of red cabs and if you go close they will go down their hole," says Neeldiganta Saha, a young photographer and travel-blog writer. In Tajpur, there will be a truce between tranquillity and the reader. It is situated only one eighty-seven kilometres away from Kolkata and is touted to be the most famous weekend getaway for families.

Moving on to North

Graced by the presence of the majestic Kangchenjunga, steeped in the greenery of tea plantations- northern part of West Bengal beckons with its natural beauty but can it bond the reader? Draped over a lofty mountain ridge with a panoramic view of the Himalayas, places like Darjeeling

and Kalimpong will offer you some exclusive corners to enjoy your book but not during the peak season when these places are victim of over-tourism. Then where to go! "Sinjee- a small hamlet in Kalimpong district is just 24 km from Suruk Relli park and with one homestay, this place is silent, serene in the lap of nature and morning was a time to watch Kanchenjunga with some tea and book," answers Srijani Chaudhuri, Sr.Data Analyst at Nielsen and a voracious reader and traveller who co-created a travel blog along with his husband. The book she was reading during her stay in Sinjee was "Words from the hills" by Ruskin Bond and what a book to relate to the magnificent mountains. Ruskin Bond always has a penchant for tea & hills and in an interview with this writer, he revealed that hills always have a charm that captivates him to read. Ruskin Bond did visit the formidable Darjeeling but he didn't visit the lush green areas of Dooars, where he would surely find out a corner to read and write book. Dooars in Alipurduar district, has multiple shades of green in it- be it the dense forest or the cloud capped tea estates or even green plains, no wonder it's the habitat for bisons, one-horned rhinos, leopards, elephants and even the fire-flies. In a crystal clear night of October from a home stay in Raja Bhat Kaua, Chilapata where the Rava community stays, you could hear the poetic Chator bird and under a starry night enjoy reading Vincent Van Gogh (biography/authobiography- both are equally good). Van Gaug preferred watching morning sky and staying in country side-where there are few people to interact and more wide fields, he would have been so happy to stay in the home stays of Dooars. He was a passionate reader as well and the century old Chalsa PWD Bungalow, would surely have enticed the reader in Van Gaug. The tall Magnolia Grandiflora in front of the Bungalow will bind travellers from the trek and halt a bit to bring out the reader in you, who wants to read under the shade of the Grandiflora.





With restrictions still in place, travel options are limited and for those who are wary of flying or taking the train, there's a solution – hitting the road on one's bicycle! There are many places in and around Chalsa (like the road from Padri Kothi to Duncun's Killot Garden) that are worth cycling and to halt in between under the cool shade of trees to read. The pluses include gorgeous scenery, good memories, a great cardio workout and

enhancement of your intelligence (depending upon the book that you are reading). The fairy-tale land of Metalli, with roads swathed with the slanting Eucalyptus tree, Rocky Island, Suntale Khola, the century old tea-estate- Mission Hill Tea Estate – there are many such places, which are worth exploring on bicycle. With Covid in the zeitgeist, a major bottle-neck is 'over tourism; exclusively in very well-known

places like Darjeeling or Kolkata and with as many as 3000 home stays, Bengal has many virgin places, which are less exposed. And most of these places are not located at the heart of the city, which means they are tranquil enough to entice the reader who wants to go to new places but not without the book. So pick up your favourite book, book a destination and of course don't forget the mask.



OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

A dive into the
turquoise tropical Islands
Thailand

Sipping margaritas around the tropical sunsets and hopping from one island to the other, Thailand is a treasure trove for nature lovers and water babies.

- Tripti Jain



OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

Where the morning starts with chants around Buddhist monasteries and the sunsets with streets flooded with youngsters clinging their high spirits, Thailand is the country of many flavours. The tropical island country that is situated in the southeast part of Asia is the heart of culture, cuisine, adventure and beauty. The water engulfed beaches and small streams around cities lay a beautiful bed of water for the tourists to visit. The capital city of Bangkok opens gates to eminent

traditions of Thai culture with local flavours bustling the town. Often known as 'the land of smiles, the country is home to majestic temples and warm photogenic beaches. The turquoise water islands create a perfect canopy for travellers to wash their worries and breathe in the fresh brisk air.

Thailand opens up a Rolodex of water sports, adventure trails along with cuisine that will make you drool. Anyone looking for a package deal should not think twice and

plan a trip to the land of islands today. Thailand has a lot to offer travellers — no matter your budget or interests. You can backpack on a limited budget or you can live a luxurious travel life in fancy resorts on the beach. Its lush jungles, famous beaches, world-class diving, amazing food, it should come as no surprise that Thailand is a travel enthusiast's first in the world! Apart from being a bachelor pad, the country offers some mind numbing excursions.



Let's dive right in!

The country famous for its full moon parties is easily accessible, you just need to book a flight to any of the main cities and get going. Direct flights cruising over the sublime are a treat to the eyes and the soul. One of the best things that make your journey worthwhile is a visa on arrival. The land of surprise and course gorgeous beach resorts is a paradise for anything and everything. From seaside Hua Hin to outdoor-oriented Chiang Mai to beach-getaways like Krabi and Phuket, destinations that will instantly make you fall in love with the country.

The waters around Phuket Island offer some of the best diving and snorkelling in Thailand, with amazing weather conditions for a quick swim between the fishes. Visibility is good, and the water temperature ranges from 26 to 30 degrees Celsius. Apart from the colourful corals and tropical fish, you can see seahorses, sea turtles, manta rays, and even whale sharks.

The beauty of contrast

Thailand is a country of contrasts. While most people imagine soft white beaches and days in the sun when they think of Thailand, this tropical paradise is also home to cosmopolitan cities, grand palaces and ancient temples, hiking trails that disappear into misty mountains, and some of the best shopping in Southeast Asia. White sand beaches looking over the sunset and hammocks floating between trees relax every fibre of your being while the thumping sound of music and the gushing streets of cities like Bangkok and Phuket are the amalgamations that you wish for.

Thailand is always welcoming, despite receiving hordes of tourists all year-round. Thailand's majestic temples pull you in, and you can't help but be drawn to the history of it all. Thailand's pristine and turquoise waters are magical, warm, and incredibly photogenic which add the perfect touch to a dream holiday. Club hopping is a thing of the past, Thailand is a place for island hopping where you can go for speedboat rides between the twin islands of Koh Yao Yai and Koh Yao Noi, and visit Koh Samui looking over Buddhist temples with architecturally fantastic pagodas.





A blast of flavours

The street vendors at every corner serve delicious Thai including Thai curries, Kaeng Hang Le and not to forget the amazing seafood. Since tourism flooded to Thailand in the 1980's Thai food has become one of the world's leading culinary marvels. It is one of the 5 most popular food types globally, the others being Indian, Chinese, French, and Italian. You are in the home of one of the world's great cooking paradises, so sit back and enjoy. A good place to start your market adventure is at the Sunday Walking Street Market. This is one of Phuket Island's biggest attractions, set in the heart of the historical part of town. Located on Sai Kor Road, the well-designed indoor Banzaan Fresh Market is also a good place to discover exotic fruits, pick up some vegetables or fruits, or try a glass of refreshing coconut water or sugarcane.

Pack your bags this year

The best season to go to Thailand if you're in the mind for some beach hopping would be during the winter months of December and January. There is very little chance of rain and the sun is comfortably warm, especially on the beaches. Being a tropical country, the winters are not harsh but enjoyable in Thailand. Even so, you might want to carry a light jacket or sweater in case it feels slightly chilly. But most people discard them in favour of beachwear as its cool and fresh and humidity-free weather.

However, since December counts as the best time to go to Thailand, beach destinations like Krabi, Phuket and Koh Samui are almost always booked ahead for the Christmas holidays. So, unless you plan, it's going to be difficult to fly into Thailand and find accommodation that is reasonably priced. Thailand welcomes everyone with open arms to celebrate life as we know it while offering some of the most luxurious and breath-taking sights.

I bet you didn't know this

- Thailand was known as Siam until 1939 (and again from 1945 to 1949).
- Siamese cats are native to Thailand.
- Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, much like England.
- Around ninety per cent of Thai people are Buddhist.



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

Thailand has beautiful tropical islands, delicious street food and some of the best beaches in the world. Thailand is known as the Land of Smiles, and that doesn't just refer to the tourists. Fashions and trends come and go, but one thing Thai people always seem to be wearing is a smile – and here, it'll never go out of fashion. The hospitality that Thai people show is one of the main aspects in making Thailand as most loved destination.

Shrines and Temples are as attractive as other activities in Thailand. Known as the Temple of the Dawn, Wat Arun is one of the most important landmarks in Bangkok and looks spectacular when it is lit up against the night sky. In the ancient city of Ayutthaya, you can find Wat Chaiwatthanaram, a magnificent temple complex of the Kingdom of Siam. Pattaya houses an impressive temple, the Sanctuary of Truth. Every inch of its wood structure is covered by fine carvings. Wat Phra That Lampang Luang is one of the most sacred temples in Thailand, home to a strand of Buddha's hair. Thereby fascinated by a lot of travellers.

Talking about food, whether visitors are staying in Thailand for a day or 15 days or even a month, Thai food is so delicious and diverse they will never have to eat the same dish twice. The cuisine changes as per their location do, keeping their food options interesting as they venture from one city to the next. In a nutshell we offer something for all kind of travellers hence I guess we are most adored by Indians and world over.

With pandemic adversely affecting the travel industry, what new initiatives and strategies are in place to boost Thailand amongst the travel trade?

Thailand-India travel air bubble has recently started; we are focusing on getting Indians back to the destination they love. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) is moving forward with its goal to revitalise and transform Thai tourism, with the 'Visit Thailand Year 2022: Amazing New Chapters' campaign, and



Ms. Cholada Siddhivarn
Director Tourism Authority of Thailand Mumbai Office

formulating a 'DASH' model to help revive the tourism sector and the Thai economy overall.

With the Visit Thailand Year 2022: Amazing New Chapters, TAT envisions change towards stronger and sustainable, more responsible, more digital, and more inclusive tourism growth, by leveraging on Thailand's 5F, 4M soft-power foundations, which are Food, Film, Fashion, Festival, Fight, Music, Museum, Master, And Meta. To achieve this, TAT has formulated a 'DASH' model to set the entire organisation towards the single goal of transforming the tourism sector.

D – Domestic travel: The model places emphasis on both tourists and operators in the tourism industry;

A – Accelerate Demand: The model seeks to stimulate qualitative demand, build trust, and a good image by placing focus on tourists' safety, targeting high-income segments, and delivering

impressively different and valuable experiences;

S – Shape Supply: The model looks set to elevate the tourism ecosystem to quality and sustainability based on responsible tourism and digital tourism for all parties to benefit together, and resulting in sustainable income distribution to each sector;

H – Healing Thai Economy: The model focuses on helping to revive the Thai economy through tourism with the country's reopening to ensure a fast recovery and strong

What entry requirements are demanded on incoming tourists?

Fully vaccinated travellers can arrive in Thailand by air, land, and water under the Test&Go and Sandbox program with the required prepaid accommodation reduced to 1 night and the COVID-19 tests revised to 1 RT-PCR and 1 self-ATK. For those who are partial vaccinated or non

vaccinated can entry Thailand under the Happy Quarantine program. The following new rules will be in effect from 1 March, 2022. A Thailand Pass, which can be applied via <https://tp.consular.go.th/>.

Points of entry:

- By air (direct international flight or transit domestically via dedicated flights.)
- By land (at the border checkpoints in NongKhai, UdonThani, and Songkhla.)
- By water (yachts.)

Eligible travellers/countries:

- For arrivals by air and water: Thai citizens and foreign travellers from all countries/territories.
- For arrivals by land: Thai citizens and foreign travellers from neighbouring countries connecting with the reopened border checkpoints (NongKhai, UdonThani, and Songkhla).

Entry registration system:

- For arrivals by air and land: Thailand Pass system.
- For arrivals by water: Certificate of Entry system.

Quarantine requirement:

- For arrivals by air and land: No quarantine, but on Day 1 must wait for the COVID-19 test result within an approved SHA Extra Plus (SHA++) or alternative quarantine facility.
 - For arrivals by water: No quarantine, but on Day 1 must wait for the COVID-19 test result on board the travelling vessel (yacht).
- Accommodation requirement:
- A proof of prepayment for 1 night of accommodation at government-approved hotel/s; such as, SHA Extra Plus (SHA++) on Day 1.

What are the top five inbound tourism markets for TAT? Do you see the dynamics changing now?

Top 5 inbound markets of Thailand in 2019 are:

1. China 10.99 Mil
2. Malaysia 4.16 Mil
3. India 1.99 Mil
4. Korea 1.88 Mil
5. Laos 1.84 Mil

There will be the changes because of each country's policy of traveling inbound and outbound and the connectivity between Thailand and other countries as well as the restrictions to control COVID-19.



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SriLankan Airlines intensifies reinforcement strategies

SriLankan Airlines is a specimen of commitment. The airlines has always fulfilled its duties as a national carrier. With an endeavour to support the nation's economy and infusing tourism into the country, SriLankan Airlines strives to elevate itself with trends in terms of performance, technology and expansion. The airlines' exemplary management during the pandemic has already made headlines. Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Worldwide Sales and Distribution, SriLankan Airlines India unveils some exciting expansion plans and also talks about India, which is one of the top tourism generating markets for Sri Lanka.

- **Bharti Sharma**



1. Aviation is the most impacted industry in the world and in India, and revenues from the aviation industry have seen a tremendous drop with uncertain recovery. What is your viewpoint on the revival of the industry (w.r.t. global market)?

The world was met with an unprecedented and severe blow, but revival may happen faster than we expect thanks to the technological advancements in the past few years. Also, there's a lot of pent-up demand for foreign leisure travel right now from people being unable to travel internationally for the past two years, and this would no doubt be an opportunity for the global travel and tourism industry.

2. SriLankan Airlines reports a company profit of USD 9.25 million and a group profit of USD 10.66 million for December 2021, which is the first profitable month for the airline since the onset of the Pandemic in early 2020. In what ways, the airlines worked on new strategies to deal with this harsh situation?

We relentlessly pursued opportunities that would work for us and help us gain some equilibrium. This included focusing on operating repatriation flights for stranded passengers and expanding our cargo business, which meant introducing new destinations such as Hong Kong, Frankfurt, Seoul and Nairobi based on air cargo market demands. Additionally, SriLankan took measures such as renegotiating lease contracts and trimming overheads to cut down costs, without compromising the safety and comfort of passengers. When border restrictions were being eased, Sri Lanka became one of the first countries to welcome foreign travellers while keeping in line with health and safety protocols. By December 2021, we managed to reach 80 per cent of our pre-COVID-19

schedule while adding six new destinations that we did not fly to prior to the pandemic. Ultimately, it was our ability to adapt and meet the changing needs of the market that made us accomplish our goals in a challenging time.

3. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, the airline operated an extensive network out of 11 Indian cities over 120 flights a week to Colombo, connecting travellers to the resplendent island and beyond. Could you outline the extent of the SriLankan Airlines's expansion plans in terms of new destinations, passenger numbers, additional aircraft and the economic projections?

Yes, India was and remains our main market. Currently, we operate more than 50 flights a week covering nine cities in India within the travel bubble arrangement of the country. We look forward to increasing our frequency of operations once India opens up for commercial flights. As I mentioned earlier, we have introduced new destinations during the pandemic including Seoul, Sydney, Kathmandu, Frankfurt, Paris and Moscow.

SriLankan will continue to deploy flights to destinations that present business opportunities, and Ahmadabad and Calicut are in the pipeline as new destinations and part of our business plan. We are anticipating the Indian travel market, especially leisure travel, to bounce back. A significant number of Indian customers are expected to travel out of India to Sri Lanka and beyond on SriLankan Airlines in the upcoming financial year, that is likely to surpass the numbers we achieved in 2018.

4. SriLankan Airlines offered an amazing deal under 'buy one get one free' to Indian travellers to Sri Lanka. How was the response? Do you plan to come up with unique initiatives like this in the near future as well?

The 'Buy One Get One Free' promotion was a success, and we are thankful to all the Indian customers who expressed their enthusiasm for this offer. Besides, the offer helped recreate awareness about Sri Lanka as a leisure destination and SriLankan Airlines in the prevailing travel recovery period. We definitely have plans to come up with special promotions for the Indian market once the country resumes commercial flight operations.

5. Looking in the future, what do you think the market will develop like in the next few years?

We expect the industry to recover sooner than projected. There will be an increase in passenger travel with countries becoming more flexible and easing up restrictions. The world is certainly getting back to a new normal that is yet to be discovered by travellers who were unable to travel and explore these past two years. My general prediction is that there will eventually be a greater demand for travel, which exceeds the supply in the market.

Travellers are also increasingly focusing on sustainable travel options, and this will be an emerging travel segment for airlines. Customers are also now more concerned about having a safe journey from start to end, and we have taken many measures to ensure that we meet their expectations from introducing stringent health and safety guidelines to transitioning into touchless facilities at the airport and supplementary online facilities. Consumers have now embraced online platforms to purchase all manner of goods and services, unlike previously due to the pandemic. I expect this to be the trend in the aviation industry too, and more travellers are likely to switch to online platforms to fulfill their travel wants and purchase tickets.

TAAI's 66th Convention to strengthen bilateral ties and reinvent the wheel of business

TAAI's 66th Convention in Sri Lanka will act as a perfect stimulus in strengthening the roots of friendship and dispense great business, trade and investment opportunities, due for long now. Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI spills beans on what members can expect from the most awaited TAAI convention.

- Bharti Sharma



ASSOCIATIONS

TAAI's 66th Convention and Indian Congress happening from 19th-22nd April 2022 is the first international event in the industry post-Covid. TAAI has always initiated processes keeping in mind the benefits and growth of the nation holistically. The very confident and dynamic lady at the helm, Jyoti Mayal has made sure that members cash in from this convention in the most diversified way as she staunchly believes that it's time to reboot and invest in our future.

Sri Lanka: An island destination full of opportunities

The convention in Sri Lanka is significant in more ways than one; not only will it strengthen the bilateral ties but will also provide travel agents with the much required opportunity to expand their businesses, explore new avenues and reconnect with stakeholders. Talking about why TAAI selected the destination as the host, Jyoti tells, "Sri Lanka is one of the favourite and closest picturesque tourist destinations for Indian travellers. A lot of new opportunities with fiscal benefits and sustainable business is what we all look forward to. I would take this opportunity to very loudly state that members need to grab the opportunity to travel, explore and restructure their business. Sri Lanka is full of opportunities and truly beyond value for money to be offered to travellers. We also need to connect with them to get more footfall to our country, which has a plethora of destinations and experiences to offer."

An experiential meet after two years

The convention will be a mega-event lined with knowledge sessions for members to imbibe and benefit from. It will serve as a perfect platform with B2B opportunities for the members to establish mutually rewarding new relationships. That's not all, the opportunities and knowledge will be paired with fun-filled entertainment evenings for the

members to relax and recoup. It will truly be an experiential meet for all, after two years of the gruesome lockdown. Such a long pause has generated both curiosity and excitement amongst the members and the industry, and TAAI is leaving no stone unturned in ensuring this is the most successful convention. Sharing a few highlights of the convention, she shares, "The focus of the convention will surely be on reviving tourism with special attention to some elements which have gained momentum post covid such as wellness and wedding tourism; two key segments to focus upon post-pandemic, as both the sectors are in demand. Recent trends and numbers suggest that post pandemic, people are more interested in destination weddings, and it is the right time for both countries to encash this opportunity to the best possible. Apart from these, film, water, wildlife, adventure, culture, religion, cuisine, history and religious tourism are also segments to invest in."

Strengthening bilateral tourism ties between India and Sri Lanka

Jyoti feels there is a need to create a stronger connection and environment to support each

other. She further shares, "India and Sri Lanka have had good relations with each other, be it proximity, cultural similarity, history and various other fronts. But sadly, the two countries have not utilised their strengths to the fullest in developing tourism. Many opportunities have been lost. We need to invest in regional tourism with our border countries and cultivate a strong interdependency to develop trade too. Sri Lanka is extending domestic tourism and we need to build on aspects of regional passport with ease of visa, tax-free holidays and not lose this opportunity as we all once again are restarting our businesses."

Tourism bringing peace

As the President of the premier travel tourism and hospitality association of India, Jyoti believes that signing more and more bilateral agreements with countries and organising events like this convention would work towards strengthening the bonds between countries, hence providing a smooth passage for expanding business by giving direct access to the market of different countries. "Post-covid things have taken a drastic turn. Things that were not even considered before have come to be accepted as a new normal

now. Flexibility and a positive approach are the key. Tourism brings peace to people, connections with stronger bonding and not to forget experiences to drive the economy and create jobs. It always has a multi-faceted effect on both sides," asserts Jyoti.

Bleisure is the new the buzzword

Post-covid, people have become more travel-oriented than ever before. Being homebound, a sense of fear and insecurity accompanied by stress has opened up a new perspective of life. People now want to shake these emotions away and start living a normal life once again. They want to use every opportunity to travel, connect with friends and family and make up for lost time. Jyoti feels all aspects of leisure travel will top the list and it could be wellness, adventure, rural or others. "Gone are the days when people used to wait for weekends and vacations to plan a trip. With more and more companies adopting work from home as a way of life, especially in the corporate world, trips can be planned throughout the year. Bleisure will be the buzzword. The country needs to invest in ease of travel with sustainability to restructure tourism," adds Jyoti.





DEL TIN

READY TO TAKE THE NEXT LEAP OF GROWTH

Being an early mover along with a robust business and efficient management set-up, 'Deltin' is well poised for sustaining its leadership position in the market. Anil Malani, CEO, Deltin Group in conversation with Travel Turtle talks about his vision and the changing dynamics of the gaming and hospitality industry in India.

- Bharti Sharma



Tell us about the growth of the casino business in India. Has India made any progress in terms of licensing and market growth?

India has immense albeit untapped potential as far as the casino business is concerned. Market research firms from across the spectrum confirm that India's live gaming industry promises to be a cash cow for the government provided a fine balance is struck between the regulatory structure on one end and free and fair operations on the other. Over the last two decades, India has witnessed the emergence of a savvy professional salaried class that works hard and parties harder. It is this demographic that wants to throw up its feet and partake of the thrills that are on offer. One must keep in mind here that tourism and the casino industry go hand-in-hand. Travellers are looking to have a gala lifestyle experience and play a few rounds. It is the bigger picture, the holistic package that clinches the deal. Take the casino industry away from the tourist scene, and the business will lose its sheen. Take casinos out of the tourist circuits and tax revenues will take a hit. The need is to co-relate one with the other so that both of them become catalysts for mutual growth.

What is the range of casino markets in India? Do you feel there is a demand-supply disparity? If yes, how?

A large section of India's working population is experiencing an unprecedented earning and consumption level growth, the likes of which haven't been seen in the last three-four generations. It is this category that makes me cautiously optimistic about the possibility of a deeper penetration within Indian markets. As far as the demand-supply skew is concerned, one doesn't have to look far. There are underground gambling dens operating across the country that, either wittingly or unwittingly, stoke, not just illegal activities but also rob the government of legitimate revenue. The scale of illegal

gambling is prodigious but incalculable considering its very nature. The illegal gambling industry must be considered a proxy for the deficit that a kosher, regularised casino sector can fulfil. Sure, it is a long way to go from where we are to where the casino industry can be but the growth prospects are truly exciting, and indeed, achievable.

I am quite cautiously optimistic that one will be able to see a remarkable upsurge in the penetration of the casino business in India. Barring Goa and Sikkim, licences for actual casinos haven't been granted liberally. However, this is not to say that the status quo will continue as is. There have been quite a few signals recently that many state governments are warming up to the idea of legalised gambling and are looking to positively explore possibilities rather than outrightly shut the door on it.

In recent years, Deltin opened its casinos in Kathmandu-Nepal and Gangtok-Sikkim. How has the response been?

The response has been very good; both the hill stations observe substantial tourist footfalls. The covid-19 pandemic, in last couple of years, have played a bit of spoilsport for the entire industry but things are again looking up.

What lies ahead for Deltin? Which domestic and international destinations are you looking at for expansion?

At present, the only states in India where live gaming (casinos) is allowed are Goa and Sikkim (proposed in Daman, subject to regulatory approvals). In each of these gaming destinations, Deltin has already established a dominating presence.

Deltin will further continue strengthening its business and take it to the next level with an Integrated resort Project in Goa spread across 100-acres of land. This will be one-of-its kind integrated resort having facilities like 5-Star Hotels, Casino Gaming, Waterpark, Entertainment Area,

Retail Area, Convention Centre, Cinemas, Banquets, etc. by providing a holistic, immersive experience at par with international tourist destinations. We are also replacing one of our offshore floating casinos in Goa with new state-of-the-art one. Once completed, these two projects will add immense value not only to the company but also to the local community in terms of developing tourism, employment and infrastructure.

Apart from the same, we are majorly focusing on the domestic market for now which is our strength because we understand the market well. We are awaiting our casino license in Daman. Beyond this, we would not like to comment at the moment.

India is at the cusp of a major transformation and hospitality sectors are emblematic of this journey. How do you see the hospitality sector evolving?

The hospitality sector has learnt some very valuable lessons during the pandemic and we have been applying them in our operations. Players in the organised sector are delivering deeply customized packages that deliver more bangs for the buck. The hospitality sector, on the whole, has also become far more sensitive and receptive to the feedback emanating from the ground and revisions in packages- be it on price points or total experience- are made faster than ever before.

The future for the hospitality sector is going to be an intensely cut-throat playing field but then, here, just as it is in other sectors as well, the wheat and the chaff will be separated, and those companies whose fundamentals are in place will be able to ride out the storm. As far as the customer is concerned, any company that sits on its laurels for too long will lose in the long run. The nouveau traveller wants a reinvigorating experience that helps him hit the drawing board with renewed energy or wants to get away from it all for a few days. Packages



Anil Malani
CEO, Deltin Group

have to be tailored just right to deliver on that front.

What is your vision for the gaming sector in India?

As far as live gaming (casinos) is concerned, the idea is to take our units to strong tourist pockets across the nation. The Indian or the foreign traveller shouldn't have to opt for just Goa, Sikkim or Daman to have a taste of the casino experience. He should be able to have access to it at smaller, less popular sites as well. While our performance in Goa as far as the gaming sector is concerned has been remarkably robust, we are hungry for more. Obviously, our packages are geared keeping in mind that the games are only one piece of the larger jigsaw. Other aspects like food, beverages, entertainment, hospitality and a premium experience at economical rates also play a substantial role. A few years down the line, as we make greater inroads into the sector, we see ourselves sustaining our position as the market leader in the gaming industry adding momentum to it year after year. On the other side, we will also be playing a pivotal role in job creation and employment. The gaming and hospitality industry is intensely human-resource centric, and we understand and embrace our role as facilitators of local development.

HOTELLIGENCE



Aramness

Iridescent vistas of Gir & intimate luxury

Aramness is an immersive experience entrenched in local culture, designed with authenticity and oozing luxury. Located within the area skirting the National Park, this luxury lodge sits within a rarely undeveloped natural paradise in a protected teak forest. Jimmy Patel, Founder & Owner, Aramness unfolds to us how they plan to deliver an exceptionally crafted, luxury experience.

- Bharti Sharma

HOTELLIGENCE

Aramness is a luxury boutique Safari lodge, packed with exemplary service, situated in the only forest in the world that is home to the Asiatic lions. The brand appeal speaks for itself, right from aesthetics, design, sustainability, conservation to promoting local cuisine, culture, and people. Sasan Gir National Park is home to the last remaining Asiatic lions in the world coexisting with the semi-nomadic Maldhari tribe.

For Jimmy, wildlife safaris are the ultimate holiday destinations. He has always been intrigued and interested in conservation, sustainability as well as luxury safari lodges and how they function, which lays the foundation of his vision - Aramness. While reminiscing old times, Jimmy shares, "As a child, I visited Sasan Gir often and believed that there was an opportunity to raise awareness for the Asiatic Lions and the plethora of birdlife, flora, and fauna. It was an organic and gradual process, starting with the vision to build a luxury safari lodge at par with the best lodges from around the world."

Aramness is the culmination of collaborative design between the Architects, Fox Browne Creative and Nicholas Plewman. There were many key elements and parameters that were taken into consideration while setting up this luxury lodge. Shedding light on such elements, Jimmy tells, "To bring my vision alive, both the firms brilliantly collaborated. The three of us were in sync to create a design that reflects the local

culture, architecture, and designs. Conservation is the key element along with staying true to local culture and heritage. From the kind of materials such as the Clay roof tiles (Naliya in local language), Stone bricks such as Sandstone (Tola stone in local language) to using the Jaali inspired from dried teak leaf to build to the layout of the Kothis and the style of service all reflect the local region and way of living."

Jimmy passionately emphasises on the significance of regional flavours; the region's taste, preference and most importantly, its culture. The lodge houses 15 standalone single bedroom kothis and three standalone double bedroom kothis with a shared dining space that overlooks waterways and beyond the dense forest. Each kothi boasts of a private pool inspired by the Indian step wells. The thoughtfully curated experiences will be delivered by butlers assigned to each kothi. He further asserts, "When we speak about conservation and sustainability, it is only natural to lean on the regional factor. From the design and architecture elements to the food cooked and way of service – it must all reflect the local region."

The luxurious lodge offers many well-executed activities including but not restricted to game drives into the park to get a glimpse of the Asiatic lions accompanied by an Aramness naturalist, jungle walks

in the teak forest, home-visiting a Maldhari family and more. Aramness is in the process to further elevate the overall experience, as they will soon introduce Fly Safari. Sharing details on this unique initiative, Jimmy explicits, "Fly Safari is a charter flight program to bring our guests easily to our lodge in a private chartered helicopter or jet. We are in the process of fine-tuning the program and will be introducing it shortly."

India is at the cusp of a major transformation and hospitality sectors are emblematic of this journey. Jimmy perceives the hospitality sector is turning towards local factors as a substantial number of guests become appreciative of sustainable efforts taken by the sector and are even applauding for such steps. He adds, "Eco-friendly and conservation steps are being taken as well. With the global pandemic, tourism within India has increased. Those who generally only travelled abroad are now looking for luxury options and adventures within borders that are at par with international luxury destinations."

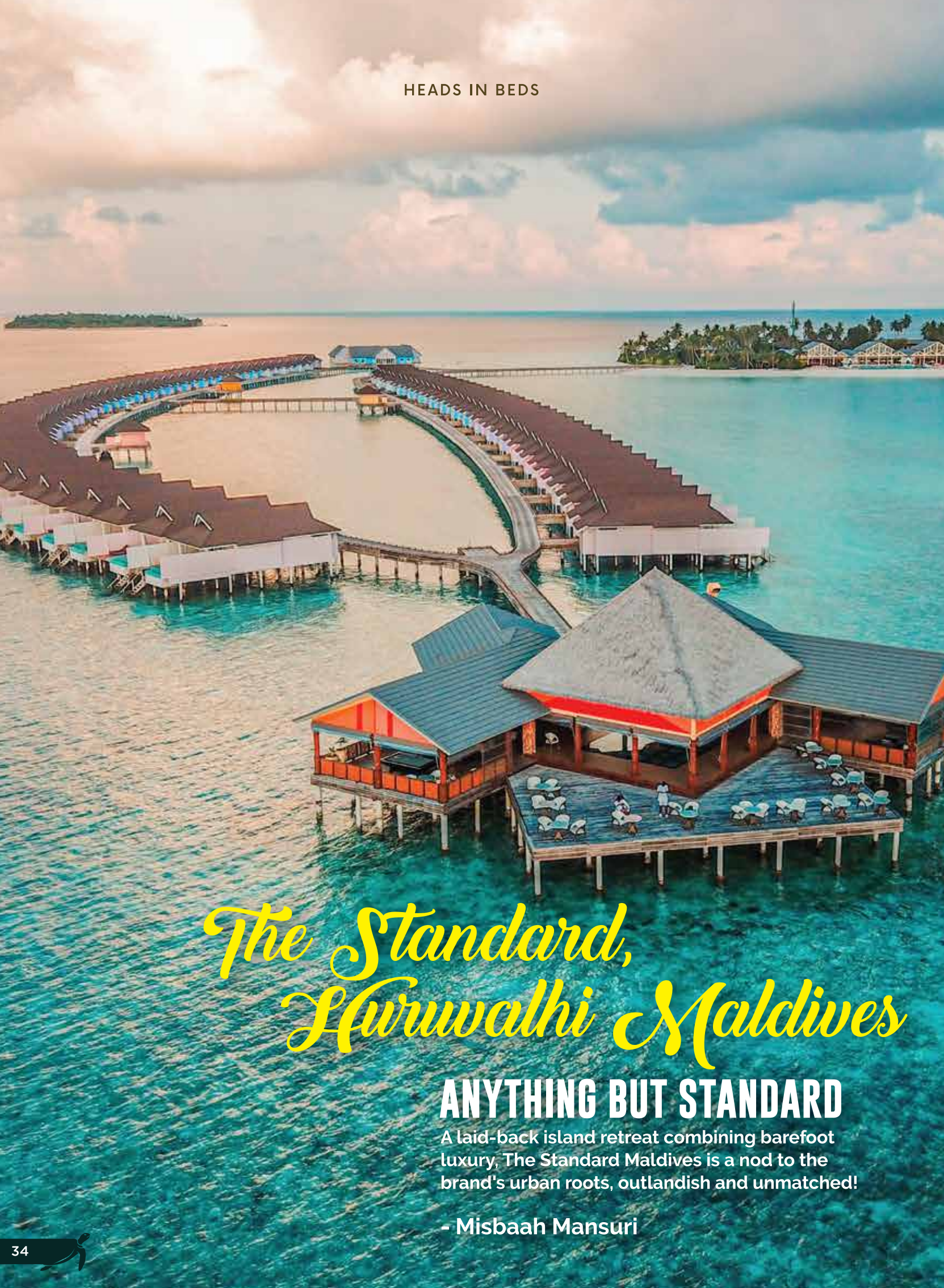
"As we are located in the middle of the forests, we are in a bio-bubble. Our teams are regularly tested, and we also ask our guests to arrive with negative RTPCR test results or double vaccination certificates. All our lodge staff members wear masks during service. We also practice regular sanitation protocols."



Jimmy Patel



HEADS IN BEDS



The Standard, Suruwalhi Maldives

ANYTHING BUT STANDARD

A laid-back island retreat combining barefoot luxury, The Standard Maldives is a nod to the brand's urban roots, outlandish and unmatched!

- Misbaah Mansuri



HEADS IN BEDS



Having tried several properties from The Standard Hotels, when I heard about the debut of the brand in the Maldives, it sparked my curiosity to say the least! So I decided to test the much raved-about, all-new property. Does it match The Standard benchmark? Read on to find out...

FIRST IMPRESSION

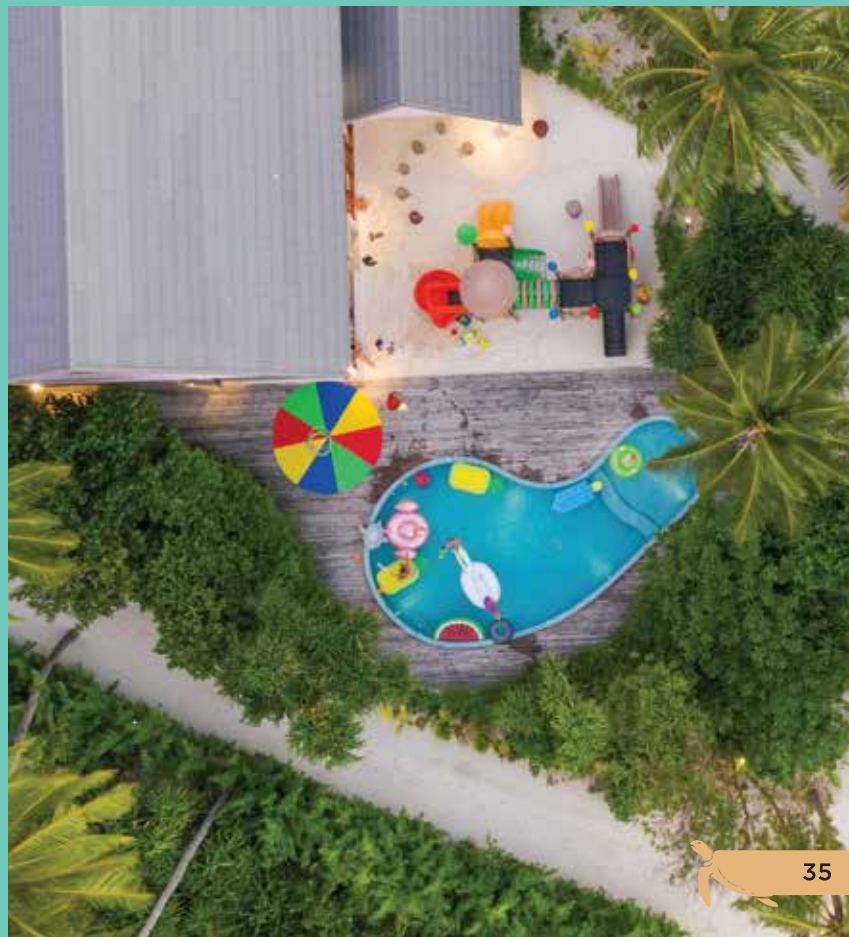
A 40-minute seaplane flight from the international airport, The Standard occupies its own island in Raa Atoll, north of Malé. We were greeted by an island entirely fringed by deep drifts of sand and overlooking a turquoise lagoon. The ravishing setting is further enhanced by proximity to off-island activities such as castaway daytrips, snorkelling with manta rays or visiting a local community.

The gorgeous beach villas come with a pale wood and off-white colour scheme livened up with hot-pink accents and textural

touches that mimic the patterns of sunlight on the sea. Details, details, it's all about the details here. We love the activity wall hung with snorkelling equipment adds a playful element and the hard-to-miss disco ball above the oversized bathtub. The best part is of course that all the villas – Beach and Overwater – also have private terraces and plunge pools.

THE VIBE

We love the departure from the sleepier, more honeymoon vibe one might expect in the Maldives, this is a livelier affair whose public spaces encourage socialising. Afternoons are about DJs pumping up the volume at the beach-club-style poolside hub, while evenings end beneath the disco ball on overwater Beru Bar's glass dance floor. As for the aesthetics, the buildings go big on fully retractable windows and walls to keep guests continually connected to the scenery outside.



HEADS IN BEDS



THE FOOD FACTOR

The property adds stellar touches like setting up a date night with the waves crashing beneath your feet where time stops by urging you to cherish every bit of it to a floating breakfast as you admire the signature Maldivian blues. Apart from that, breakfast is also served buffet-style in Kula. Think curries, noodles and Maldivian dishes alongside more typical fry-ups and pastries. Pizza, pasta, salads and more curries feature here at other times. Elsewhere, BBQ Shack offers meats and seafood grilled beachside over coconut charcoal. We highly recommend the Gaduguda for its elevated Maldivian cuisine (curries, grilled fish, coconut rice) cooked to perfection.



HEADS IN BEDS



SUN, SEA AND SPLENDOUR

In terms of activities here, you'll be spoiled for choice! From an immersive underwater turtle expedition where you can spot turtles to manta diving, there's lots to do here. Particularly special is The Standard Spa where spa therapists are encouraged to go off-protocol to administer tailored treatments (such as the jetlag-busting Rock-a-Bye, which combines rhythmic massage, hot stones, stretch and hemp-derived CBD oil). Beyond the overwater spa (complete with communal hammam), facilities include a water sports centre and floating 'aquapark' assault course, plus twice-weekly 'moonlight cinema' screenings in the poolside lounge.

From the incredible location, swish villas to the scrumptious fare and hard-to-match spa and other offerings, The Standard wins you over with its quirks, casting its magic on you before you even know it!





Dead Sea

SUN, SALT & FIESTA

At first glance, it does look dead.

At first glance! But then there's hazy movement and gradually, things seem to come alive.

- Inder Raj Ahluwalia



TRAVEL THERAPY

By any account, this isn't your normal 'run of the mill' type of destination. 400 metres below sea level, this is the lowest point on earth, and appears far removed from the everyday world as we know it. But make no mistake. It is part of our everyday world. Just ask the thousands of tourists who annually descend here to enjoy the myriad charms of this unique site.

The simple fact is that the Dead Sea region is a special place. Graceful gazelles graze close to the saltiest water on earth, and fresh water springs and nature reserves are at hand, as is the mineral-rich Dead Sea water.

Along with the health-enhancing properties that have made the region world famous, adventure

opportunities abound, with excellent options for exploration, touring, hiking, and plain relaxation. Mineral-rich mud is carried from deep within the earth by springs, fresh-water springs, run-off from watersheds, and the Jordan River, and along with the year-round sunshine, cause an evaporation effect and create the salts and minerals. From the Dead Sea coast, from the Jordan River at its northern point, to Sodom at the southernmost tip, there's a variety of spas ranging from the 'popular style' to the luxurious, all exploiting the extraordinarily rich mineral wealth of the region.

Also known as the Salt Sea, the Dead Sea came to be so named because virtually nothing lives in it owing to its 30 per cent concentration of salts and minerals, which also

accounts for the phenomenal buoyancy of the water, which precludes swimming but keeps everything and everyone afloat.

Natural spectacles apart, the region mirrors the glories of the past and documents grand moments of history. It was where the Jordan River flows into the Dead Sea that Jesus underwent baptism. Today, the devout come here in large numbers to immerse themselves in the holy waters. A quick bus or car ride brings you to several important sites in the area. There is Qumran, where the Essenes, closely associated with Jesus, lived their strict religious and disciplined lives, leaving behind the enormously valuable heritage known as the Dead Sea Scrolls.



TRAVEL THERAPY

Hailing distance away from the water body is the brooding but magnificent Masada palace and fortress, built by King Herod on a high plateau that towers over the Dead Sea. It was here that the Jewish zealots made their famous last stand against the Romans. Here, in Israel's most thoroughly excavated archeological site, reached by cable car or by a steep snake-trail climb, one can see the architectural prowess exhibited so long ago.

Culture apart, outings into the region provide excitement and adventure, with trained guides leading safaris and challenging desert tours that include rappelling among the crags and cliffs.

Lushness and greenery are also at hand. When David sought refuge from King Saul, he found comfort in Ein Gedi where fresh water springs feed a lush oasis. Today, one can visit magnificent nature reserves at Nahal David and Nahal Arunt, created to protect the ancient sites. Here, in the midst of nature, casual walkers can follow the streams and plunge in hidden waterfalls, while serious hikers have soaring cliffs to climb and archaeological sites to admire.

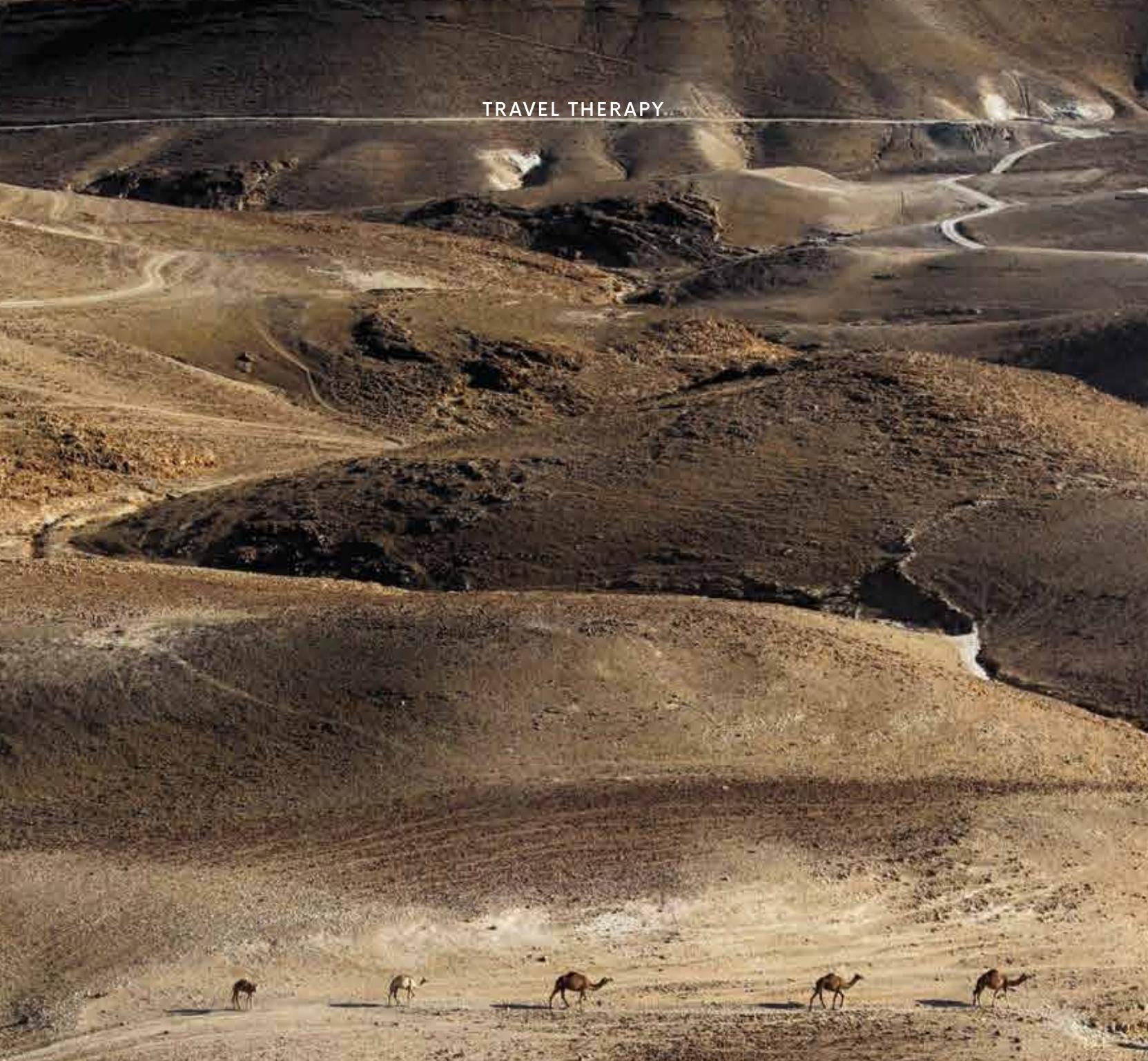
The world converges here to reap the benefits of the soil, skillfully exploited by health and nature-care centres and spas. Because of its relative isolation from urban centres, the region's hotels cater to every need of guests, with the saunas being their specialty. All the big hotels have spa pools filled with piped-in Dead Sea water, and offer mineral-rich mud pack treatments, and underwater and normal massages.

The treatment at these famous spas concentrates on the application of the minerals and programmed exposure to the sun. Floating in the sea itself is also beneficial as weightlessness relieves pressure on joints.

The Dead Sea continues to captivate one's imagination as it has done for over two thousand years. In many ways, it is a region like no other. Beautiful, peaceful, almost ghostly! And always worth visiting for so many reasons. Arguably one of Israel's prettiest areas, it is immensely popular with the Israelis themselves as the unending hordes of tourists shows.

Every day and every night, it comes 'alive'.





FACT FILE

- The Dead Sea is about three hours driving from Tel Aviv, Israel's aerial gateway.
- While it is a year-round tourist destination, the best time to visit is from September through March.
- The region offers several hotels and guest houses.
- The Spas are a major attraction. Most large hotels have their own spas. One can enroll in long, detailed health courses under professional guidance. The major spas offer several different types of massages, mud wraps, an assortment of water treatments, sulphur pool treatments, inhalations, beauty centres for men and women, health bars and heated indoor Dead Sea water pools.

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.





TEARDROP HOTELS: THE PERFECT BLEND OF EVERYTHING LUXURY

The finest collection of petite, stylish, service-driven hotels that prides itself for contemporising centuries-old heritage establishments and vintage tea bungalows with mesmerising views scattered across distinct regions of the island nation...

- Bharti Sharma



Henry Fitch

Teardrop Hotels are dotted across seven distinct locations in Sri Lanka with each stay having its unique feature, history and story to be narrated. Known for the fusion of centuries-old heritage buildings with vintage tea bungalows and estates, the properties are defined by their distinct climate and ambience in different boroughs throughout the island. Since India is a diverse market that has varied choices ranging from gardens to lakes, mountain ranges to the ocean, Teardrop caters to all genres of preference. Henry Fitch, CEO, Teardrop Hotels talks about the hand-picked extravagance that the brand has to offer.

Endowing guests with characteristic and customised experiences

Teardrop's properties are a collection of tastefully renovated, historic properties sewed together by three founding principles; genuine Sri Lankan hospitality; fabulous Sri Lankan and Asian fusion cuisine prepared with locally sourced fresh ingredients; and experiences that put guests face to face with the warm and colourful sights and sounds of Sri Lanka, the teardrop island. "Every hotel provides guests with a characteristic experience, customised as per their preferences. With limited inventory, we believe in creating an ambience of a private abode with luxurious comforts. For visitors with an assorted palate like Indians, we have something for everyone. Each hotel is a destination within a destination."

Reinforcing position in Indian market

Indians are evolving rapidly in their needs when it comes to planning a holiday. They are on a constant lookout for hassle-free vacation options to spend quality time exploring the destination. Staying at exotic locations, unique experiences, exciting activities are all part of a modern Indian traveller's bucket list. Henry believes Sri Lanka has always been a top holiday destination for Indians, making it a rewarding market to tap into. He further tells, "Ever

since lifting the travel ban, we have witnessed an uptick in footfalls across our properties. We see tremendous potential in the Indian market and continue to strengthen our positioning through robust trade engagement by showcasing the most premium holiday experience Teardrop Hotels has to offer."

Celebrating Sri Lanka's diversity

The brand's luxury hotels are defined by each destination and encourage guests to explore, experience and shape their own Sri Lankan story. "Sri Lanka is our passion. Our collection of small, stylish, service-driven boutique hotels champion the island's rich history, dazzling diversity and warmth, open-hearted people, while our fusion menus celebrate the country's abundant variety of fresh local produce. Additionally, we assist our guests with our specialized service 'Teardrop Journeys', where we create tailor-made, bespoke itineraries around the island nation, linking our hotels and must-visit attractions," expresses Henry. Understanding guest's emotion With optimism as a virtue, Teardrop Hotels look at the future with optimism for tourism to return to normalcy and hope that people can once again travel and experience destinations around the world freely. "After the unprecedented pause, we positively look forward to

2022 as a year of revival. While it will take a while to achieve the pre-pandemic visitor numbers, we certainly expect substantial footfall in due course. Currently, the benchmark is to provide our guests with impeccable service, unforgettable experiences and to design a Sri Lankan getaway unlike any other.

The ever-gracious neighbours

Teardrop Hotels are always committed to ensuring their distinction as good neighbours, employers and hoteliers. Talking about the safety and hygiene protocols undertaken at the premises, Henry shares, "In view of the current scenario, safety and health of our guests are of paramount importance. All our guests are asked to have their body temperature checked, fill in a health declaration form along with their check-in registration, while also maintaining social distance. We also ensure that any signs of related affliction are reported to the hotel management. Furthermore, we have sanitiser dispensers placed all through the properties, a thorough deep-cleaning process for common and public areas, and protocols for staff, vendors and third-party chauffeur-guide too."

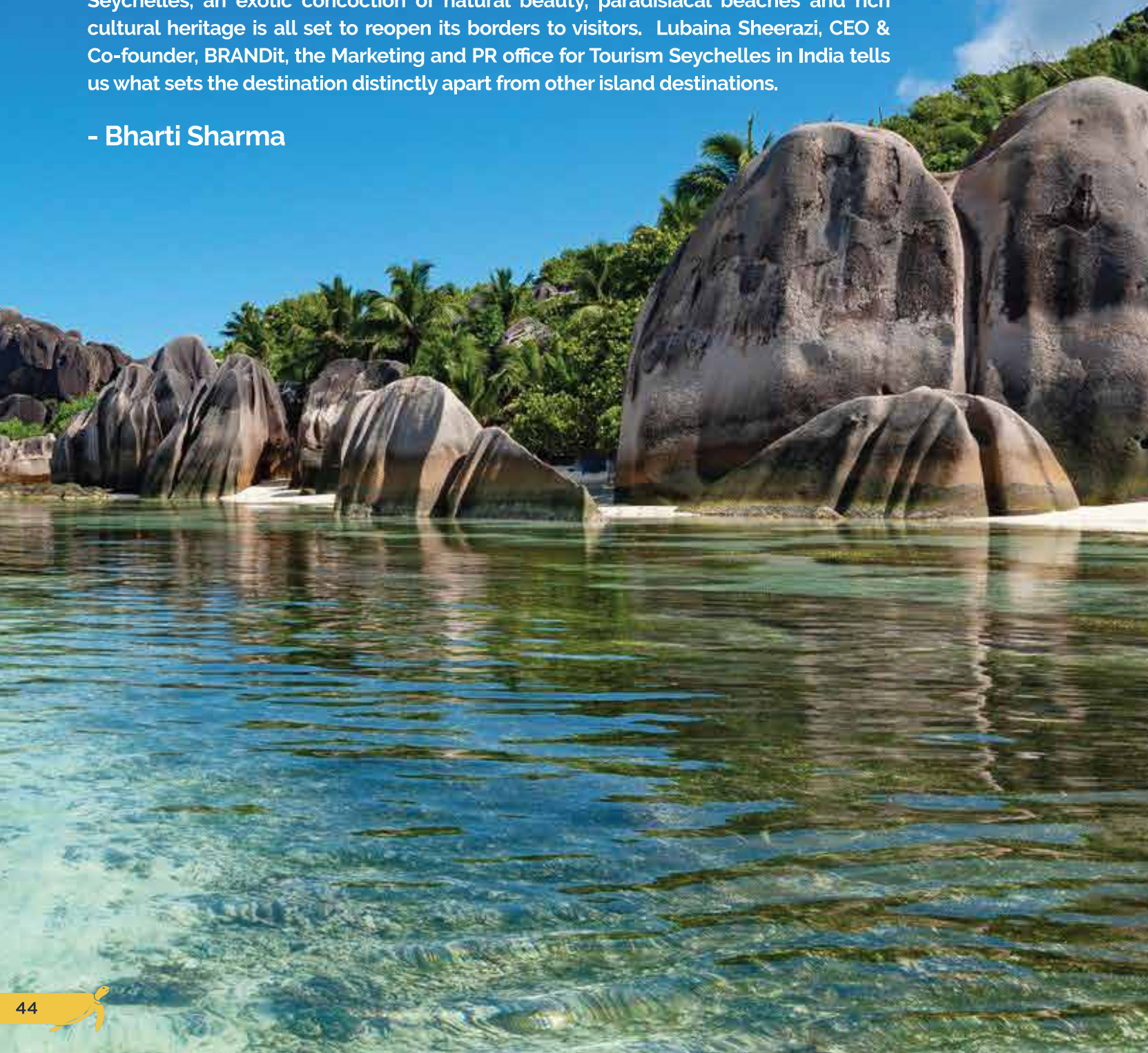


Seychelles

Slice of tropical perfection

Seychelles, an exotic concoction of natural beauty, paradisiacal beaches and rich cultural heritage is all set to reopen its borders to visitors. Lubaina Sheerazi, CEO & Co-founder, BRANDit, the Marketing and PR office for Tourism Seychelles in India tells us what sets the destination distinctly apart from other island destinations.

- Bharti Sharma





Lubaina Sheerazi

Seychelles has always witnessed supported interest from India as a preferred beach destination and is looking forward to hosting a significant number of Indian holidaymakers soon. Seychelles received 14,996 visitors from India in 2019 and while the expected recovery is slow, the country hopes to reach and even surpass that figure in good time.

Rising like a phoenix

The pivotal role of tourism in the Seychelles economy is a no brainer; calling it the backbone of the Seychelles economy would not be exaggerating. In such a scenario, when the pandemic made the travel industry collapse globally, the ramifications were seismic and unsustainable. "The pandemic did have an adverse effect

on tourism, with little to limited visitors for over a year. It did take a toll on the private sector and stakeholders as they were faced with numerous challenges. However, the last quarter of 2021 and the onset of 2022 saw visitors from Europe, Russia and the Middle East markets," elucidates Lubaina.

Penetrating into the diverse Indian market

Collaborations, both in the B2B and B2C space allows for higher returns. It aligns synergies towards a common objective while amplifying the channels of communication with the end consumer. Seychelles has significant plans to entice the Indian market, which can be deduced as Lubaina shares, "Tourism Seychelles will actively pursue collaborations and joint promotions in both the travel trade and consumer segment in 2022. We aim to significantly increase our reach and visibility in the Indian market in the next couple of years."

Slow travel and longer itineraries

Visitors can now expect additional customisation on their trips to Seychelles with escalated emphasis on experiential tours. With 'The Creole Rendezvous' as their theme, Seychelles will put a lot of emphasis on green tourists as it is one of nature's last

sanctuaries in the world. Shedding light on some trends in the travel and tourism sector emerging in the aftermath of the pandemic, Lubaina expects slow travel, longer itineraries, more intimate stay choices, focus towards relaxation and rejuvenation and lesser inclination towards crowded group tours. She adds, "We are happy to see the new trends in favour of Seychelles, as the country offers some exquisite experiences that will appeal to all kinds of travellers; from honeymooners, small families, intimate celebrations or even group tours with all protocols and safety requirements in mind."

New excursions awaiting

Seychelles aims to promote 'island-hopping' in a big way. The destination allows for an immersive experience across multiple islands in a single holiday, each diverse and unique in its offerings. Elucidating upon such experiences and excursions, Lubaina tells, "We will also focus on promoting smaller establishments for visitors to experience the local hospitality of the country. 'Semi-submarine' in Mahé and crystal water kayaking in the gorgeous 'Anse Source D'Argent' beach in La Digue has already caught the visitors' eye but more day trips to uninhabited islands which are bird sanctuaries or giant Aldabra tortoise nature reserves will also be a highlight."

Comprehensive strategies in place

The honeymoon segment has always been an essential fragment of the Indian market. Sharing on how the tourism board plans to capitalise on the segment, Lubaina asserts, "We now wish to extend our scope to tap into the intimate celebration segment and invite consumers to host small, intimate socials such as pre-wedding get-togethers, reunions, jubilee celebrations in Seychelles. The pristine beaches of the archipelago offer a fantastic backdrop for memorable events with friends and family."

Country with lion's share

Currently, the top five inbound tourism markets for Seychelles are France, Russia, Germany, the UK and Northern Ireland. Seychelles certainly expects a change as early as the third quarter subject to any situational changes. "We also envisage India's contribution to visitor arrivals with Air Seychelles adding flights to their schedule starting May 2022 making it a bi-weekly flight and allowing for itineraries offering 4 days and 7 days as stay options," concludes Lubaina.



BIZ

RAYNA TOURS

Born to deliver more than expected

Rayna Tours is a pronounced name in the travel and trade industry, their staggering growth is a story in itself. Incepted in 2006, today Rayna is acknowledged as the preeminent destination management company, Manoj Tulsani, CEO, Rayna Group, shares more with Travel Turtle.

- Sudipta Saha



THE STORY OF SUCCESS

Success is not an easy achievement and being successful demands enormous courage to transform your ideas into reality. In 1999, Manoj Tulsani decided to resign from his job, he was working as the Marketing Head at Time Machine Group of Companies for the last seven years, with an idea in his mind and willpower to achieve something, and he was determined to set up his start-up. This led to the opening of Rayna Tours (as a travel boutique) in Dubai's Flora Grand Hotel in 2006. He further adds, "My friend and former colleague, Kamlesh Ramchandani, joined me in this endeavour. All we had back then was our strong passion for travel and entrepreneurship and of course, the strong determination and will to turn this venture into a success. Within two years of its inception, we opened 15 more outlets and, our start-up evolved into a full-fledged Destination Management Company by 2009. Rayna Tours is now one of the industry-leading service providers for all-inclusive travel in both b2c and b2b sectors".

He further states, "Starting a business, especially without any prior experience or business background, can be a tough experience. And Rayna Tours' sail to the top has never been smooth or easy. There were many challenges, obstacles and failures throughout. But, we have always kept our eyes open as

we continue to pick up a lesson from every setback. So when you set out to start your venture, the most important thing is to keep this spirit alive; believe in yourself, pay attention to genuine reviews (particularly negative ones) and fund your limitation by getting the right team on board. All these can help you to take your startup to new heights."

UNIQUELY DIFFERENT

Since its inception, Rayna has established itself as the best and preferred DMC and its seamless services make it quite different from the others. "Our b2b venture, Raynab2b, is one of the few portals that offer a comprehensive suite of services and solutions to empower small travel businesses, tour operators, travel agents etc. With a smorgasbord of features including API web services, white label solutions, and user-friendly booking engines, it allows businesses to unlock new or better opportunities which help them to boost sales beyond their expectations and grow their start-up seamlessly. The majority of our services offer the best price guarantee and are backed by smooth, secured online transactions plus live chat support available on the clock basis," says Manoj Tulsani.

GLOBAL EXPANSION

With a strong determination and dedication Manoj Tulsani not just initiated his dream project but his vision was to spread the wings globally and

today they have established their presence in close to 10 countries across the world and aims to open more in new markets and destinations. Sharing the plans, Manoj Tulsani mentions, "As the industry rebounds and the market is on its path to steady recovery, the company plans to launch more travel-tech solutions for travel partners and worldwide holiday packages from the UAE in B2C that allow our guests to travel safely and without any worry in this unprecedented time. We are continuously enhancing our product and service portfolio to guarantee our guests a travel experience that satisfies both their budget requirements and other unique travel demands."

OPTIMISTIC 2022

After the pandemic, 2022 is the year of hope and positivity, sharing on the expectations from 2022, Manoj Tulsani says, "More than two years into the outburst of the pandemic, we have witnessed some significant changes in the travel trend. As the world slowly opened after the initial waves of COVID-19 in 2020, people limited their journeys to staycations. In 2021, this interest was shifted to domestic travel. 2022 seems to be more promising for the travel industry as more people now look forward to long-haul travel and strike off their much-beloved travel wishlist, thanks to the widespread and increased vaccination drive plus quarantine-free travel allowed by most holiday destinations".



Global Destinations on the crest of representation business

Being the pioneers of representation in India, Global Destinations focuses on providing the finest services, maintain efficacy and improvise to adapt to the ever-changing market dynamics and needs. Pranav Kapadia, Founder & Director talks about the comprehensive plans and extensive engagements that go into yielding the best results for their clients.

- Bharti Sharma



Global Destination is highly experienced and very energetic tourism solution provider which offers top quality service to its ever-growing customer base. With a clear understanding of the vast market, Pranav and his team aim to provide their partners a complete 360 degrees plan which includes not only sales but the right marketing and PR to complement it.

Dynamic Approach

Pranav aims to focus the energies on regular engagement activities with the trade through our sales call programs, product updates, educational training keeping them abreast with latest information and protocols. He further adds, "In addition to this we are looking to organise trade and media fam trips to build confidence and exposure for our products. We are planning our own roadshow and look to participate in multiple trade Shows such as OTM, SATTE etc this year. Being very active on our social media channels we aim to further build brand visibility and expand our reach. With our strong team of dedicated and knowledgeable account managers, thorough understanding of the India outbound market, and a pan India presence we aim to facilitate both the company and our partners to further develop and establish business growth within India and beyond to the international tourism arena."

Third eye of clients

A representative office enhances the capability to connect with travel agencies and tour operators as they act as an extension arm of the partner company. Pranav believes it is market presence and a personal touch, that human factor that allows you to create a bond beyond the professional, establishing a solid and lasting business relationship. He

shares, "The need is now more than ever to have presence of trust-worthy tourism representation companies to inform trade buyers about post-pandemic measures to rebuild confidence and re-energise travel. Also, it provides International partner companies to showcase an array of new and refreshed tourism offerings as well as understand market requirements to curate better tourism products and services, specially keeping the health and safety of the traveller in mind."

New paradigms in travel

With various nations competing hard to maximize on this massive vengeance in travel outburst in this post pandemic era, their tourism promotion offices present in different countries are striving hard with various promotional weapons, and agent support to attain a good market share of tourist to their country. "The advance health and safety protocols in travel and vaccination drive across the world, coupled with the positive sentiment for outbound travel and boost in traveller confidence is creating new paradigms for the way people will travel and explore the world. These massive changes are having a tremendous impact on travel and tourism across the globe."

Evolution is imperative

When all of this started, none of us could have envisaged the scale and prolonged events about to unfold. It was certainly hope and positivity which has led us and shown us light through these exceptionally inexpedient times. "In the past two years we have seen and experienced unimaginable happenings. The tourism Industry is always the first to

be affected as we have seen in the past with outbreaks such as SARS, Ebola, terrorism etc. However, we haven't seen anything like this before, where global travel was entirely disrupted for nearly two whole years. The last two years taught us to have a more resourceful set-up, work more efficiently and evolve continuously," asserts Pranav.

He adds, "It was essential to keep ourselves abreast with all the continuous developments as the situation was continuously evolving and be prepared and provide for tourism products in accordance. It was our ability to stimulate optimism, retain courage and continue self-development that gave us a new dimension of hope to sustain through. Whilst tourism has faced the hardest hit since the outbreak of the pandemic, there is now a lot of confidence that tourism will return with a vengeance and we will recover very quickly and put the pandemic behind us."

Technology is an investment

Leveraging technology poses a major opportunity for improvement within the business. We take technology to be an investment in our business, and in order to deliver maximum ROI technology must evolve as the business. Technological advancements are the imperative to our day-to-day operations and we as well as our international stakeholders have utilised the time during the pandemic to make changes both internally and externally to upgrade processes and our business overall. Internally we have developed a new CRM system which will help us identify our shortcomings and improve our service levels with our trade partners. Some of international stakeholders on the other hand have embraced technology by introducing paperless travel documents, online

booking system enhancement which will ensure that we deliver impeccable services to both our trade partners and their clients.

Flipping the script

The surge in travel seen in the last few months are clear indicators that travel will continue to rebound in 2022. With new trends having evolved during the pandemic— particularly increased flexibility with the acceleration of a remote work culture and fluid travel policies, these have altered the way travellers plan their holidays. Pranav believes adaptability to these trends as well as the new normal in travel with having to follow necessary protocols will be keys in moving forward. As he further tells, "We already have a lot up our sleeve as we prepare to embrace the future with charged energies and positive enthusiasm. Having announced our membership to GTRA (Global Travel Representation Alliance) in December we are in the process to bring new exciting global tourism products to an Indian audience."

Being appointed the India representative for Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort, Global Destinations has an exciting first QR 2022 ahead and likely to announce 2-3 new additions to their portfolio. Sharing some details, Pranav tells, "We have evolved through the years with expansion of our partner portfolio to what it is today and growing further. Being highly experienced and running successfully for more than a decade we have positioned ourselves as one of the best suited marketing, representation and consultancy platforms for tourism partners to manage & grow their operation and network in India. With our current focus and strategy, we aim to be forerunners in tourism representation in India."





THE UNSTOPPABLE HOSPITALITY MAVEN

Innovating and staying at the top of the hospitality game comes easily to Rahul Bajaj, Director-Le Sutra Hospitality. As the conceptualiser of the gorgeous Le Sutra hotels where every room was designed to reflect ancient Gunas, artistic reflection of the Rajas, Tamas and Satvik qualities of man, Bajaj today has brought the hotel brand to new heights by offering a stay that tries to match cerebral ideas with bespoke hospitality.

- Misbaah Mansuri



In a sector or that's always looking to the west for inspiration, Le Sutra stands out as a hospitality brand that looks inwards. Now donning another hat as hotelier as well as f&b maven and chocolatier with rather aplomb, there has been no stopping Bajaj, who is scaling up his all-new brainchild, The Blue Gourmet to great heights. From charting a gem-strewn path for the iconic Out Of The Blue restaurant by constant menu and other innovations to now launching an artisanal bean-to-bar brand, we chat with the hospitality wiz on his fondest travel memories, trends in the hospitality space and masterfully bringing his Willy Wonka & The Chocolate Factory dreams to life that is poised to disrupt the space.

Edited excerpts below:

At a time when we are inundated with hotels, what gives Le Sutra hotels an edge over the rest?

Le Sutra is a boutique art hotel concept, working on the Indian form of art. The Bombay hotel is based on 3 gunnas- Rajas, tamas and sattva. In Vishakhapatnam, the hotel is the first Indian craft hotel that works on the Andhra form of old school craft of handmade toys.

The Le Sutra Great Escapes, the first mini/Dinky hotel of Le Sutra is in Lonavala called Geometrica. The second one is going to be launched too. Each of them has budget-friendly yet upmarket restaurants. Bombay has Olive Bar and Kitchen, Out of the Blue, and Deli by the Blue attached to it. Lonavala has The Anglo-Indian Cafe. Vishakhapatnam has another hotel and three other restaurants attached to it. That is how we're unique and we're amalgamating our Indian culture into the experiential that we have to offer.

You seem like someone who loves travelling. What does travel really mean to you?

Travel for me is a form of expression, freedom and finding yourself. The way your mind exposure happens is beautiful. You don't know how an idea will emerge and what will happen when you travel.

What are your fondest travel memories and favourite travel destinations?

My favourite destinations for travelling are the garden route of South Africa, going for all the different chocolate and cheese tasting at Amsterdam. I also love Himachal and Garhwal, which are very beautiful.

Your far-flung escapes as you mentioned were the inspiration behind The Blue Gourmet, tell us about that discovery?

I tried real chocolate in Amsterdam, and through a gift that a friend got me and a couple of other times and I realized that cacao is a fruit and no two fruits taste the same. Then why does the 'so called' chocolate taste the same? That's when I thought that I should travel the whole of south India, talk to a lot of people and understand it. We had a 4 year plan to get into chocolate but because of the lockdown, we expedited the plan and started making our own bean to bar couverture chocolate. Pure chocolate has 4 taste notes to 20-24 taste notes. By taste notes I mean different flavor profiles.

What according to you is the biggest USP of both The Blue Gourmet and Out Of The Blue that still remains classics?

Out of the Blue started sizzlers and fondue that are our classics and are evergreen. The Blue Gourmet we make amazing ice creams, bean to bar chocolates and chocolate products. So the craft, the hardwork and the different techniques used are our USP. Our Bonbons, barks and ice creams are our classics. Also our ice creams that are alcoholic and vegan are unique.

Tell us about the big trends you foresee in the hospitality and F&B space?

With every trend we keep going back to basics. Eg. Bell Bottoms had come back into fashion. Same way, organic, sustainable grains like ragi, jowar, haldi have come back as turmeric latte. Similarly everyone is moving to a healthy, sustainable and lighter diet. So, even the restaurant food that used to be heavy, full of butter and ghee has become lighter and more adaptable to our palates and stomach. And that is the way forward, again.

Your food and travel bucket list for 2022?

I would love to go back to Amsterdam and backpack to South America and explore all the smaller places to figure out the different trends that are in the non-commercial space. Because that gives a lot of ideas and makes you understand new cultures and trends.

Out Of The Blue Musings

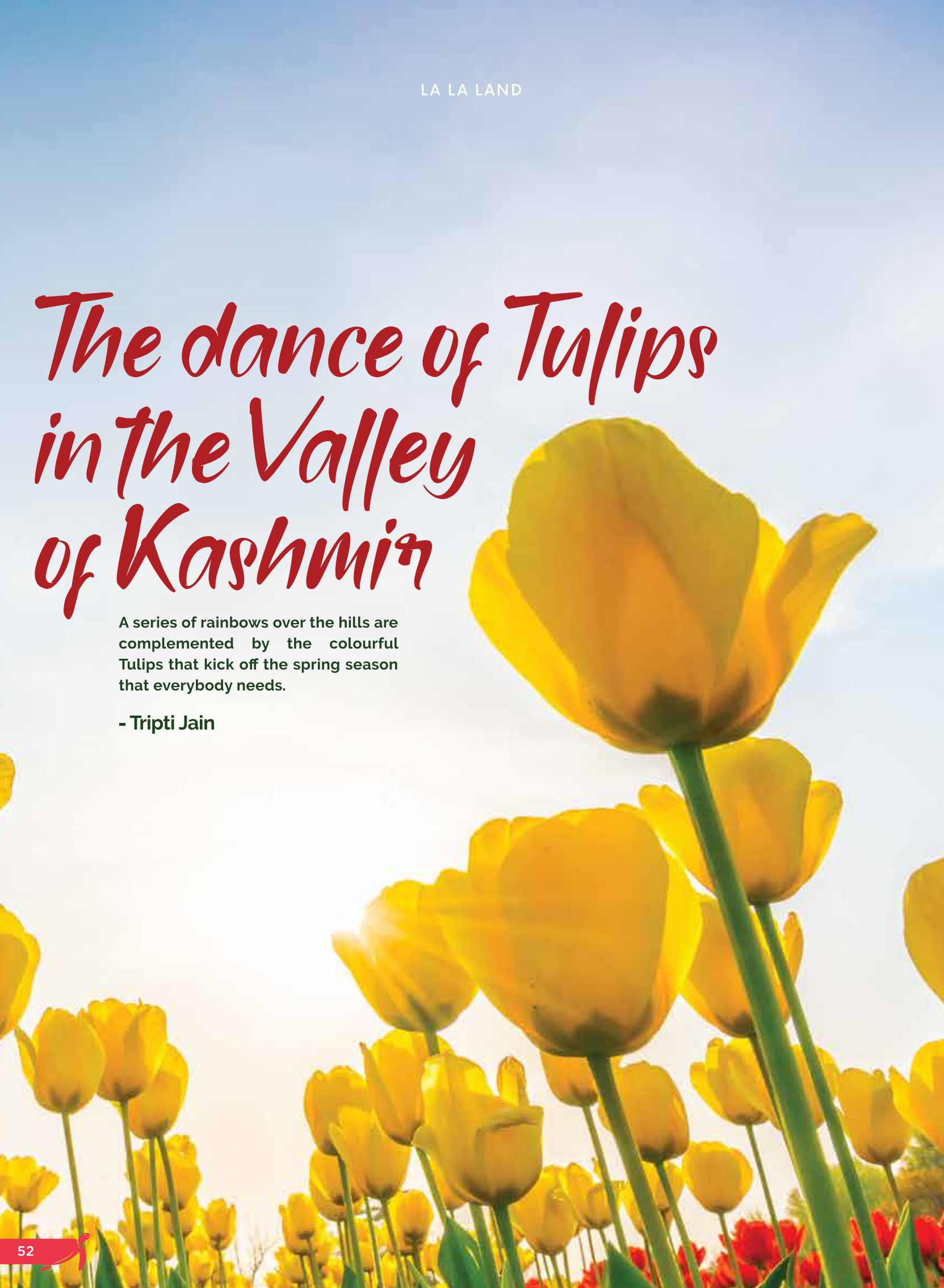
We put to test the new menu by the restaurant and love how it encapsulates the flavours from around the world and brings them to your plate right here in Mumbai! The keto and vegan additions are everything to rave about: We heartily recommend the ravishing Mushroom Risotto, the soul-nourishing Cheese Fondue and tantalizing Grilled Chicken stuffed with creamy porcini mushroom sauce. Overall, the food is healthy yet bursting with flavours, totally acing the healthy eating, taking the gastronomic experiences a notch higher!



The dance of Tulips in the Valley of Kashmir

A series of rainbows over the hills are complemented by the colourful Tulips that kick off the spring season that everybody needs.

- Tripti Jain



Mesmerizing vibrant tulips laid beautifully across the foothills of Kashmir, Asia's largest Tulip Garden is a vision for sore eyes. The Indira Gandhi Memorial Tulip Garden is spread across 30 hectares of land in the foothills of the Zabarwan Mountains looking over the Dal Lake. A yearly parade of flowers at the onset of the spring season is the highlight of Kashmir Valley apart from all the beautiful things Kashmir has to offer. Around the beginning of April, the Valley of Kashmir hosts an annual exhibit of Tulips which are flown from Holland to celebrate the spring season.

Kashmir valley is known for its amazing natural beauty and it has many meadows and valleys to mesmerize anyone. Blessed by God with tremendous potential for tourism in Kashmir valley and Srinagar city, in particular, is one the best tourist destinations in India.

Colourful parade!

Started by the tourism board of Kashmir, The Tulip Festival began in the year 2007, when the travellers were obsessing over the beauty of Kashmir. The mini Switzerland of India offers some of the most spectacular views and snow clasped mountain peaks along with little cute huts for the perfect stay. Houseboats and snowfall, Kashmiri Shikaras and early morning Kahwas, Kashmir is a land of scenic marvels and snow-coated roads. Blooming with more than 1.5 million tulips of about 48 varieties. The Tulip garden in Srinagar also hosts many other species of flowers like ranunculus, hyacinths and daffodils and a very rare tree called the Tulip Tree which also blooms at the same time.

While Kashmir's beauty will leave you baffled already, a walk amidst these parallel rows of bright coloured flowers will make a mark on your mind for a lifetime. With a very minimal charge, the entry to the Tulip Festival is for all the travellers as well as the locals. You will always find something new around the city that will keep you engaged and apart from everything touristy, it is the perfect getaway.



Reach in a blink of an eye

The garden was built to promote floriculture and tourism is located at a distance of 8Kms from Lal Chowk (The Main City Centre) of Srinagar, 18 kilometres from Srinagar International Airport and 17 kilometres from Srinagar Railway Station. The nearest bus stop is on the Boulevard road near Cheshma Shahi crossing at a walking distance of about 900mts from the Tulip Garden. The garden is easily accessible from the nearby hotels and resorts around the city which adds to

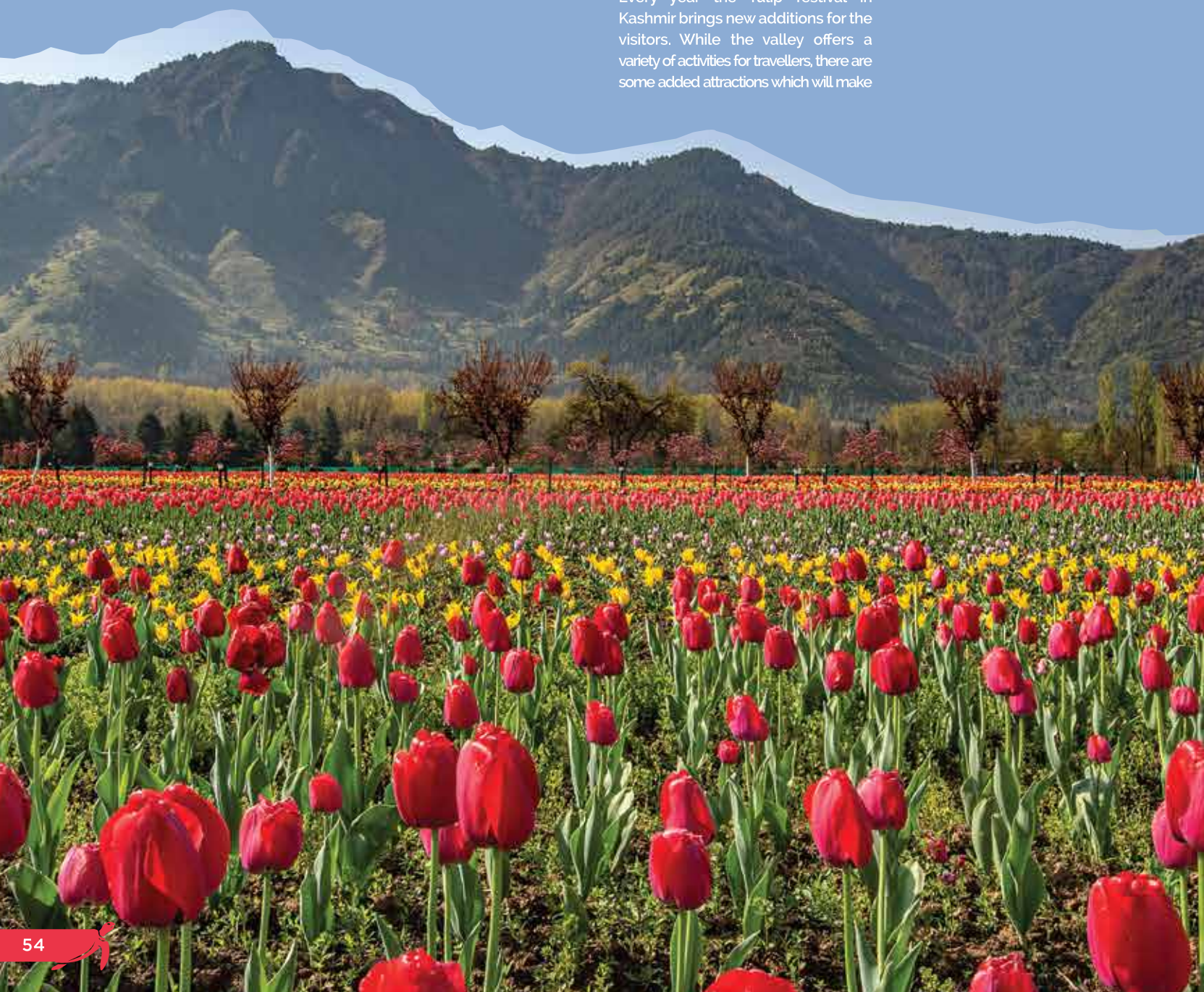
the list of positives.

The seven terraced gardens have some beautifully picked out flowers that create parallel rows with water channels for perfect picture moments. The garden has many sections and each section is designed by gardeners to make it unique. Every section hosts different varieties of Tulips like strong gold, margaritas, candela, kung fu, early harvest, le de France, etc. Strolling in Asia's largest tulip garden is a therapy for the mind and the soul.

There's more in store

Every year the Tulip festival in Kashmir brings new additions for the visitors. While the valley offers a variety of activities for travellers, there are some added attractions which will make

your visit worth it. Apart from the garden being well equipped with flowers, it also offers free Wi-Fi, washrooms (separately for disabled people) and drinking points. These tulips in Kashmir are imported from Holland and planted at this magnificent garden in Siraj Bagh. This festival reflects the culture and beauty of the place. The Tulip Garden in Kashmir is designed in such a way that in a first glimpse, one can see parallel rows of bright coloured tulips lined up. This garden is carved out of seven terraces which creates a gently sloped ground that gives a view of the entire garden from any direction.



The land of snow and food

The garden hosts stalls offering souvenirs, handicraft items and Kashmiri clothes that are up for grabs. People can splurge on some beautiful Knick knacks to take back home while hogging on yummy Kashmiri delicacies. A unique display of diverse culture, lip-smacking cuisines, beautiful handicrafts and handloom products to make your day in Tulip

festival more blissful. Apart from the garden of dreams, travellers can visit the Pari Mahal which is the most amazing Chashm-E-Shahi Garden, this historic monument was a Buddhist Monastery once upon a time. The Dal Lake is said to be paradise on Earth with Shikara rides and perfect picture moments. The Shalimar Bagh is another embellished garden that the Mughal emperor Jahangir built, which is a great example of Mughal craftsmanship. Another highlight is the Shankaracharya's Temple, soaking in the beauty of the snowy

Pir Panjal Range, this old-aged temple is situated at a height of 1100 ft.

Long romantic walks between the blooming tulips are all you can dream of and when in Kashmir the time stops to appreciate the beauty of the land. An entry into this garden offers a wide window to paradise. The eye gets riveted to the numerous parallel running rows of more than a million, a variety of multi-coloured tulips. The only thing to do now is to book your holiday for this spring season and fly to paradise.

OTM Mumbai, the first major International Travel Tradeshow to promote tourism post-pandemic

OTM Mumbai is being held at the Bombay Exhibition Centre from March 14th to 16th, 2022. Organised after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the show will witness 600+ exhibitors from over 20 countries, 29 Indian States, and 7 Union Territories. It will be the first international travel trade show since the pandemic.

"Tourism and Hospitality businesses form about a tenth of national incomes and workforces globally. It was hugely affected in the last two years, crushing down a huge number of units due to lockdowns and restrictions. The worst seems to be over and we see a good sign of recovery. We are delighted to host OTM Mumbai, the first international travel trade show post-pandemic", says Sanjiv Agarwal, Chairman & CEO, Fairfest Media Ltd.

The 3-day event will bring together all destinations that are open including International Tourism Boards, National, and State Tourism Boards, Hotels & Resorts, Airlines, Destination Management Companies, MICE, Wedding Planners and Film Producers under one roof. The dignitaries at the inaugural session will include Tourism Ministers, High Commissioners, Consul Generals, Secretaries, and Heads of various Tourism Boards.

Maldives Tourism is coming back to Mumbai after just a few months, reconfirming their commitment to the Indian market, and will be the Partner Country of the show. Azerbaijan

Tourism Board and Nepal Tourism Board too are participating as Partner Countries of OTM 2022. Qatar Tourism, Korea Tourism Organization, Singapore Tourism Board and the Department of Tourism of Philippines are the Feature Countries of the event, bringing together their travel suppliers, airlines and hospitality partners to network with the Indian travel trade.

Visit Brussels, Visit Utah and Seychelles will also be showcased at the event. International DMCs, Hotels, Tour Operators will represent Greece, Dubai, France, Madagascar, Russia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, among others.

OTM 2022 will host State Tourism Boards in a big way for the revival of travel within India, including official participation from Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand. Other destinations like Andaman & Nicobar, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Jharkhand, Manipur, Punjab, Sikkim, West Bengal, Delhi, Haryana, Puducherry and Telangana will be represented through their private stakeholders.

The event is supported by 'Incredible India' and the Ministry of Tourism, who have a pavilion, along with private stakeholders, showcasing multiple initiatives like Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, Dekho Apna Desh etc.



OTM Forum, a knowledge-sharing platform, will bring together India and Asia's most influential travel leaders on one stage. Panel discussions, master classes, and workshops are conducted by top-level Executives from industry leaders and C-suite executives from over 100 top brands including Amadeus, Booking.com, Paypal, Twitter, Hilton, BCD and many more.

The broad theme of the OTM is 'Restart, Rebuild and Rejuvenate Travel & Tourism Economy'. There will be panel discussions on interesting topics such as Adapting and innovating to meet post-pandemic customer travel preferences; the Importance of India-Outbound in post pandemic market recovery;

Post-covid Luxury; top trends that will define hospitality; The Future of the MICE industry; The rise of Women-focused tours: safety, employment and opportunities; Travel Blogging under the new normal... and many more.

"With a potential of 29 million outbound trips by 2025, the Indian market is specially lucrative in the post-pandemic phase when many traditional markets like China may still be out of bounds due to restrictions owing to the 'Zero-Covid' strategy. With the end of the pandemic already visible in India, there is a significant revival in the domestic market while international travel is likely to rebound in the later part of 2022", according to the organisers of OTM.



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J&K Govt. and OYO launch home-stays to encourage startup entrepreneurship under Project 'Crown of Incredible India'

With an aim to uplift the lives of local communities and to turn the youths of the State into startup entrepreneurs, OYO has partnered with the Government of Jammu & Kashmir to launch a state-wide initiative - 'Crown of Incredible India'. OYO is a leading, new age travel-tech platform enabling the global hospitality system. Under this collaborative approach, OYO will also partner with the government's 'Mission Youth' programme to open home stays across 75 villages to promote entrepreneurship and create self-employment opportunities.

The Mission Youth initiative of the J&K Government provides a platform to local youth under multiple schemes. It offers financial assistance, last-mile infrastructure and accessibility to promote sustainable livelihood. This initiative includes supporting the provision of Livelihood Generation, Skill Development, Education, Counseling & Rehabilitation, Sports and Recreation etc. In its efforts to promote rural tourism, 'Tourist village network' includes 75 villages that have been identified on the parameters of scenic beauty, landscape, cultural diversity & heritage and OYO will provide its tech platform to onboard home stays and boost the local economy. J&K Govt under Mission Youth will support 500 youth for establishing home stay and Rs. 50,000 financial assistance per home stay will be provided for refurbishment. The venture will help in building a tourist infrastructure of world standards in rural J&K.

The 'Crown of Incredible India' project was inaugurated by Shri Manoj Sinha, Honourable Lieutenant Governor of Jammu & Kashmir and aims to help operationalise upto 200 home stays in Udhampur, Srinagar, Jammu, Anantnag, Doda and other underpenetrated districts in the next year. The company will expand its network across 75 villages under 'Mission Youth'. OYO will assist in the training of existing and potential homeowners on responsible hosting, hospitality standards, hygiene and basic amenities. OYO will provide a constant stream of guests to these home stays by listing and promoting them on OYO's customer app, which is the world's third-highest downloaded travel app. In addition, the homestays will also be listed on OYO's website and multiple Online Travel Agent (OTA) platform. The homestays owners will also be able to use OYO's technology to run the operations and customer service through the company's simple to use home-owner facing Co-OYO app. This partnership is a part of OYO's ongoing efforts to boost tourism across India and empower underserved communities in the process.

France adds India to its Green List

Since 3rd March 2022, as per the latest country classification announced by France, India has been moved to the green list of countries. The authorities further added that all public health measures would continue to apply to travellers, and each visitor needs to provide proof of vaccination. A person is considered vaccinated if seven days have passed since their second dose of vaccines recognized by the European Union, namely Pfizer, Moderna, and AstraZeneca (Covishield). For those not vaccinated by these, seven days post an additional booster dose from an approved vaccine is required for access to the country. Students heading back to universities from green-list countries also do not have to present any compelling reasons to head back. In addition to this, a vaccine pass that lays out rules that differ from the ones needed to enter the country might be needed for recreational activities in France.

Travellers need to present proof of vaccination or a negative RT-PCR test no longer than 72 hours from the time of departure or an antigen test taken 48 hours before departure. A recovery certificate is also valid. The rules do not apply to children under the age of 12 or residents of cross-border areas who are on work-related trips or those heading to the region on an emergency basis, the release added.

Proof of full immunisation can be provided, inter alia, by an EU digital COVID certificate or by a COVID certificate issued in one of the 33 countries and territories that have joined the EU digital COVID certificate system under EU equivalence decisions: Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Cape Verde, El Salvador, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Israel, Iceland, Lebanon, Liechtenstein, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Northern Macedonia, Norway, Panama, San Marino, Serbia, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Togo, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Uruguay and the Vatican City.



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APPOINTMENTS



Jet Airways

Jet Airways appointed Sanjiv Kapoor as Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The announcement was made by Jalan Kalrock Consortium. Kapoor, who is currently President of Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, will join the airline company from April 4. He was previously with full-service carrier Vistara, and budget airline SpiceJet.

Speaking on his accepting this new role, Kapoor said, "I am looking forward to getting back to aviation, an industry I am passionate about, with Jet Airways, one of the warmest, classiest and most loved brands to have graced Indian aviation. Even though Jet Airways has been out of operation for three years, it still has a large fan base of loyal customers who miss it every day and can't wait for it to take to the skies again," Kapoor said.

Accor

Accor announces the appointment of Pratima Badhwar as the Head of Commercial India & South Asia, effective February 14, 2022. With an extensive background in Sales and Distribution in the hospitality industry, Pratima will lead the India and South Asia Commercial Team to achieve business targets for all Accor brands and hotels in the region while ensuring the execution of global strategies.

Bringing over 19 years of expertise in the Sales discipline, Pratima has a remarkable history of working in the field with major hospitality brands. Throughout her career, Pratima has been a key contributor to various hotel leadership teams as a collaborator, effective communicator, and a result-oriented individual driving business growth through exemplary organizational capabilities. Her forte is creating and managing high-performing teams that offer intangible products to translate her ideas into results.



Pushpam Lords Resort- Karjat

Gaurav Basnet has been appointed as the General Manager of Pushpam Lords Resort- Karjat. Basnet is an accomplished Hospitality professional with 17+ years of experience; he is 40 years young and has Post Graduate degree in Business Management from XLRI. He had spent his initial days at ITC Windsor Sheraton and Towers, Bengaluru as Restaurant Manager, Marriott Hotels and Resorts, New Delhi as Asst. F&B Manager, Starwood Hotels & Resorts (West Bengal) as Operations Manager.

He then moved to Golkonda Hotel & Resorts Pvt Ltd, Hyderabad as Operations Manager, Nanu Hotels & Resorts, Goa as Operations Manager & then at Mint Hotels & Resorts as Regional Manager.

Renest Tirupati

Nageshwara Rao is newly appointed as the General Manager at Renest Tirupati. Nageshwara Rao will be responsible for developing procedures, planning and implementing effective control measures, designing and implementing training programs, identifying and resolving problems-reversing negative trends, controlling costs and maximizing profits. He is a competent professional with experience of 25 years in the hospitality industry having worked with the top of the line hotels of the Taj Group in India and Yemen, Le Royal Meridian at Chennai, and more.



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The Most Welcoming Cities in India for 2022



For those looking for something truly special to inspire their future travels, Booking.com has unveiled the Most Welcoming Cities in India for 2022. From off-the-radar beach breaks and nature escapades to scenic backwaters and wellness getaways, this year's 10 destinations have all been selected for consistently providing outstanding hospitality, as evidenced by verified reviews from real Booking.com travellers.

Most Welcoming Cities in India for 2022:

1. Palolem, Goa
2. Agonda, Goa
3. Mararikulam, Kerala
4. Thekkady, Kerala
5. Varkala, Kerala
6. Coonoor, Tamil Nadu
7. Jaisalmer, Rajasthan
8. Munnar, Kerala
9. Hampi, Karnataka
10. Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh

Palolem, Goa

A popular beach with white sand and calm waters in the bay of South Goa, Palolem has been recognised as the #1 Most Welcoming City in India in 2022, as per traveller reviews on Booking.com. You can experience the whole of Palolem beach by walking as it is a stretch of white sand that extends up to a mile. While in Palolem, travellers can find a plethora of activities to indulge in, be it on the beach or in the water! From watching the sunset as you kayak in the water and making photographic memories to taking a long walk with your loved ones and stopping by the shacks to try traditional Goan food, Palolem is a place worth visiting and going back to.

Agonda, Goa

Agonda, ranking second on the list of the most welcoming cities, is a great place to escape from the hustle-bustle of the usual Goan

life, especially if you are a fan of quiet beaches. This destination is a quaint village with a number of palm and coconut trees along tranquil waters. It is also among the main 3 nesting grounds for Olive Ridley turtles, so you have the chance to watch them from a close distance as they swim ashore and go back to the sea. Once in Agonda, you are in for some quiet mornings and lazy afternoons as you take a dip in the sea followed by relishing delicious fresh seafood. The beach has aesthetically pleasing cafes and restaurants which make for a perfect wine and dine with your friends and family. So if you have got two days free in your schedule, Agonda awaits you!

Mararikulam, Kerala

Popularly known for Marari beach, Mararikulam is Kerala's most beautiful destination, with crystal clear blue water and fine white sand. The life of Mararikulam is known to be associated with the culture of Coastal Malabar and the warmth of the beautiful sea, which makes it really exciting for travellers. Once you have arrived in Mararikulam, you are in for a peaceful break as you watch stunning sunsets every day and enjoy locally cooked food. Not so far away from Alleppey, you can also find lesser known beaches in Mararikulam. Thumpoly beach is one such beach inhabited by the serene and natural environment scattered by many birds. A laid back, slow vacation is looking forward to you in this small and sleepy fisherman's village.

Thekkady, Kerala

Home to India's most enchanting natural wildlife sanctuaries, Thekkady is a hill station situated in the Idukki districts of Kerala at an altitude of 700-900 meters above sea level. Surrounded by scenic western ghats, rich plantations and dense forests, this hilltown is perfect for travellers who are wildlife enthusiasts. You can watch wildlife at a close range while boating on an artificial lake at one of the world's most natural wildlife reserves - the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. Along with experiencing the wildlife, you can visit Kumily to shop for locally grown traditional spices or take a quick trip to Murikkady to explore cardamom, coffee and pepper plantations.

Varkala, Kerala

Known to be the only town in Kerala where cliffs are found adjacent to the Arabian Sea, Varkala is a travellers paradise. Palm-covered red cliffs and golden beaches have made it a popular setting for self-care and self-love. The city boasts of yoga studios, ashrams and teacher training schools as well impromptu classes that are often hosted on the beach. Along with the serene cleansing beach, the town of Varkala also houses forts, pilgrimage sites, springs, natural fisheries and more. So if Varkala is soon to be on your bucket list, get ready for complete rejuvenation.



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Mr. Rajesh Menon
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