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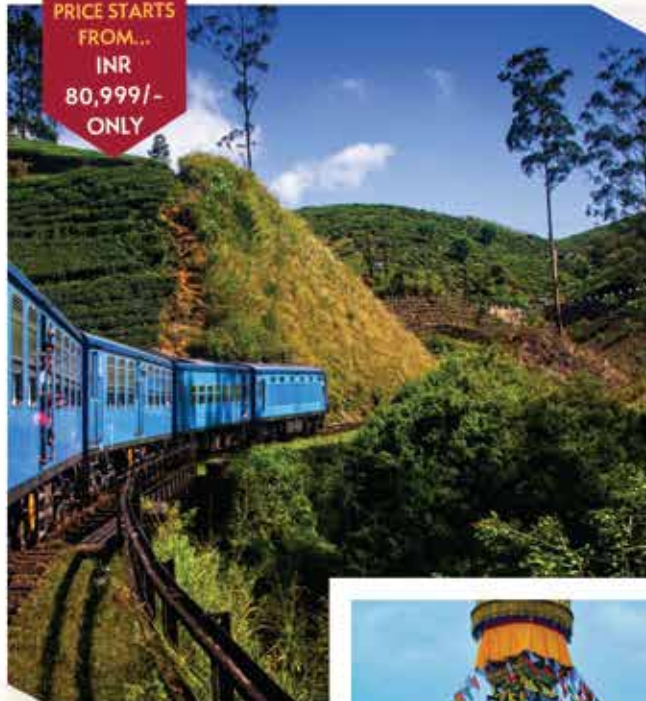
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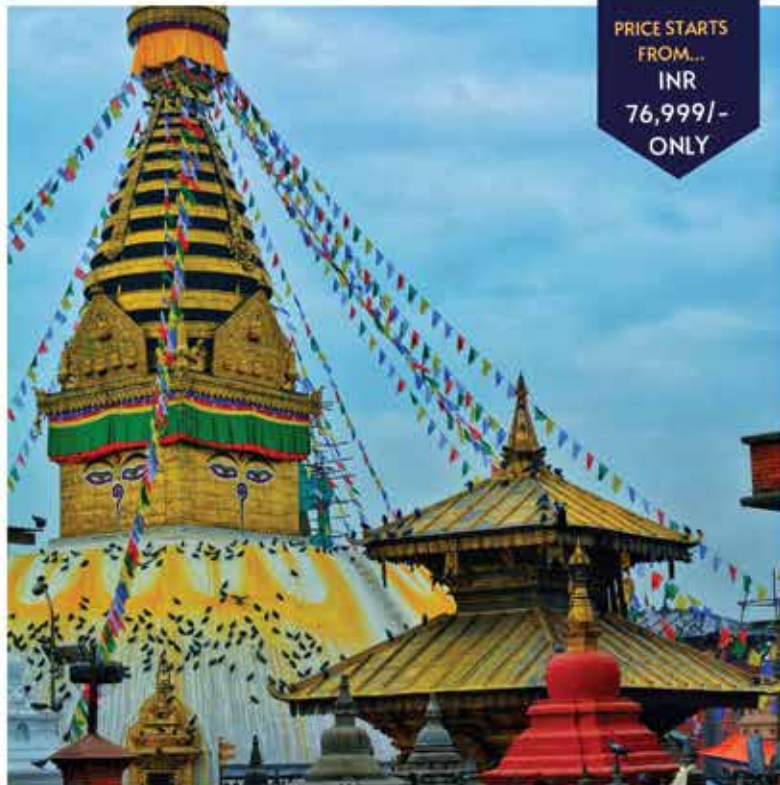


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Editor's Letter

Travel takes a coordinated effort of both; those taking the trip, and/or the resources of a good travel agent. As modern travelers we research as much as we can about the destination before departure. Modern travellers are smart and acknowledging the fact, travel companies are keeping their best foot forward while conceptualising the vacation of our dreams. The recent times have taught us so much, even in this turmoil, there are a lot of companies who have evolved gracefully- which proves the power of resilience.

With active cases taking a continuous dip, India has removed Covid restrictions for inbound travellers, which is not only an immediate sign of relief for the industry but it also brings with it hope; hope that by the time I am writing my next editor's letter, I finally write 'the skies are open now'. Till then, let us all continue seeing the world with profound appreciation. And isn't that what travel is supposed to be about? As you read the February issue, the stories on our thrilling experience with Delhi By Cycle will take you on a journey of what I call 'the original Delhi'. Dining in Turkey, cultures of Torino, adventure of the greatest Indian festival- Holi, or the powerful women of our industry, it is my hope that you enjoy them with the wonderment and appreciate what each writer felt while discovering them.

We are absolutely overwhelmed with the amount of wishes we received in our mailbox throughout the month after the January issue. We sincerely trust that you will have as much pleasure reading this edition of Travel Turtle as we enjoyed compiling this for you, our dear readers. Happy Reading!

Bharti Sharma

Bharti Sharma
Editor

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



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Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives launches Green Globe Sustainability Initiative



Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives recently launched their Green Globe Sustainability Initiative in style. The event was held to affirm the resort's commitment to sustainable tourism. Mr Xu Jing, current Vice Chairman of Global Tourism Economy Research Centre, and Former Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific of UNWTO, inaugurated the event as Chief Guest. Mr Faisal Naseem, Vice President of the Maldives, Dr Abdulla Mausoom, Minister of Tourism, and Dr P Mohamed Ali, Chairman of Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives graced as guests of honour.

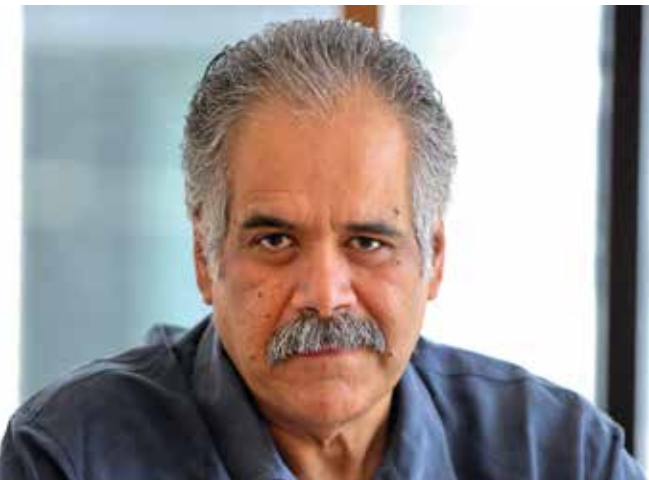
The event took place at The Hawkets, where the Honourable guests planted native trees of the Maldives, connecting with the nature and increasing our ecological footprint. This activity is just a small step of the pledge the resort has undertaken towards long-term sustainability and preserving the ecosystem for future generations.

IndiGo appoints Rahul Bhatia as its Managing Director

The Board of Directors of InterGlobe Aviation Limited (IndiGo), at its meeting today, unanimously approved the appointment of its co-founder and Promoter, Mr Rahul Bhatia, as its Managing Director with immediate effect, subject to the approval of the Members of the Company.

IndiGo Chairman, Mr Meleveetil Damodaran, said "This will further strengthen the airline in the years ahead. He added that Mr. Bhatia would oversee all aspects of the airline, and actively lead the Management team."

Mr Bhatia stated that his agenda would be transformational and would focus on expanding the airline's presence in India and in international markets and building for the long term.



Meliá Hotels recognises as the Most Sustainable Hotel Company in Spain and Europe

Meliá Hotels International has once again been recognised as a leader in sustainability in the hotel industry. Despite the profound impact of the pandemic on the travel industry, Spain's largest hotel company has continued to strengthen its commitment to help combat climate change and preserve the future of travel destinations.

The S&P Global Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA) is the most comprehensive assessment in the world of the performance in sustainability of more than 10,000 companies across all industries. In 2019 and 2020, Meliá ranked first in the global hotel industry, and in 2021 maintains its leadership in Europe and Spain. In particular, the company leads the world in the Governance and Economic dimension, once again achieving the top score among all the companies evaluated in terms of Climate Strategy.



Qatar Tourism announces new superyacht luxury cruises

Qatar Tourism has announced new superyacht luxury cruises in partnership with Emerald Cruises, sailing from Doha launching in January 2023. Emerald Azzurra will offer a seven-night, eight-day itineraries from Doha, with stops at Sir Bani Yas Island, Abu Dhabi; Khasab, Oman; Fujairah, UAE; Zighy Bay, Oman; and Dubai and vice versa. Pre and post cruise tours are available where guests can opt for a three-day package to explore the sites and culture of Qatar. Highlights include the National Museum of Qatar, designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, in the style of a desert rose; or a visit to Souq Waqif, to purchase local souvenirs and spices. Visitors can take a trip into the desert and visit the Inland Sea, before enjoying dune bashing and a camel ride.

The news comes as construction continues on the new Grand Cruise Terminal located in central Doha, near the Museum of Islamic Art and Souq Waqif. The terminal will have the capacity to host two megaships and will offer various attractions, including an aquarium and art gallery.



STB launches Safe Itinerary Guide and 'Experience Singapore!' Compendium for travel planners

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) and five tourism industry associations in Singapore have announced the launch of the Safe Itinerary Guide and 'Experience Singapore!' Compendium, which provides safe travel guidelines and itineraries for the tourism sector as Singapore prepares to welcome more international travellers. These two resources aim to help the industry design and deliver innovative experiences that are in line with new traveller demands, and are the result of private-public partnerships between STB and the National Association of Travel Agents Singapore (NATAS), Association of Singapore Attractions (ASA), Singapore Association of Conventions & Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (SACEOS), Singapore Hotel Association (SHA) and Society of Tourist Guides Singapore (STGS).

Emirates signs new distribution agreement with Amadeus

Emirates has signed a new agreement with Amadeus, extending their partnership to offer the travel trade community more flexibility, choice, and future capabilities. All trade partners on Amadeus are able to access Emirates' content free of surcharge. The new agreement will also see Emirates' NDC (new distribution capability) content integrated into the Amadeus Travel Platform, with NDC content being made available to travel sellers over the course of 2022.

Adnan Kazim, Emirates' Chief Commercial Officer said, "We are pleased to refresh our partnership with Amadeus. This is another step forward in our goal to empower our trade partners in delivering even better customer experiences. In today's environment, and particularly as the industry rebuilds post pandemic, everyone in the travel services chain will benefit from flexible models of engagement, multiple means to access to dynamic rich content, and the ability to offer differentiated products and services."





The Jamaica Pavilion receives over 84,000 visitors in the first three months of Expo 2020 Dubai

The Jamaica Pavilion has welcomed 84,683 visitors in the first three months of World Expo 2020 Dubai. This represents almost 1 per cent of the total 8,958,132 million Expo visitors from October to December 2021. Under the theme Jamaica Makes It Move, the Jamaica Pavilion is proving to be a must-see Pavilion at Expo 2020. It is the scintillating music that welcomes you or the Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee on offer daily by Mokha 1450 or showcasing sports legends like Usain Bolt, that the Jamaica Pavilion is using to exemplify the unique beauty of this island nation.

The average number of visitors per day stands at 930.58, which accounts for 0.945% of the total number of visitors at the Expo. The Jamaica Pavilion received its highest number of visitors in a single day – almost 4000 on the UAE National Day on 02 December 2021.

"Receiving almost 1 per cent of all Expo visitors is proof that Jamaica as a travel and a business destination generates tremendous interest. While the Jamaica Pavilion showcases business opportunities for alliances and investments, for the Middle East and other markets, the uniqueness of the pavilion reflects the culture of Jamaica, which has been a crucial aspect in attracting visitors from across the globe," stated Donovan White, Director of Tourism of Jamaica.

SriLankan Airlines hosted top 50 bloggers and influencers from India

SriLankan Airlines, in an endeavor to support the country's tourism revival efforts whilst fortifying connectivity in its single largest market India, organized a mega FAM tour of top bloggers and social influencers from India who toured Sri Lanka from mid November to mid December.

The FAM tour included 50 top bloggers from India's metros, who traveled across Sri Lanka in two batches on 4 carefully curated itineraries featuring Sri Lanka's rich ecological and cultural vibrancy entwined with the inherent island attributes of authentic village life, wellness and hospitality.

The first batch of the bloggers who arrived in the country, had enjoyable first days in Yala, Kataragama and Kandy, and their stories of travel reached many thousands of their individual followers of aspirant travelers in India. The second batch of bloggers and influencers traveled to Bentota, Sigiriya, Trincomalee and experienced the cultural diversity of the island nation. The official hashtag, #NamastefromSriLanka trended all this and reached the discerning Indian travelers with travel inspiration through these high-profile bloggers.



Australia to reopen borders to international travel from Feb 21

Australia has announced the reopening of its borders to vaccinated tourists and other visa holders for the first time in almost two years.

"If you're double vaccinated, we look forward to welcoming you back," Prime Minister Scott Morrison said. The reopening, on February 21, will be welcome news for many sectors including international education.

Australia has had some of the world's strictest border controls throughout the corona virus pandemic. In March 2020, the government closed the borders. It barred most foreigners from entering the country and put caps on total arrivals to help combat Covid. Some international students and skilled migrants have been permitted to enter the country since last December.

Morrison said those entering Australia when the borders fully reopened would need to provide proof of vaccination. "That's the rule. Everyone is expected to abide by it," he said. Un-vaccinated travellers who have a medical reason for not being jabbed will still need to apply for a travel exemption and, if successful, will be required to quarantine at a hotel.



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Women Travellers

The bona fide trendsetters

While each woman is navigating a different chapter in life, every woman traveller has a common message for women considering solo travel or all-girl group; 'just go for it!'

- Bharti Sharma

The top 10 safest destinations are: Canada, Finland, New Zealand, Uruguay, Switzerland, Belgium, Iceland, Austria, Chile and Japan.



From traditional times, travelling has been observed as an activity explicitly reserved for men. Be it travel for work or leisure, women have always been perceived as co-travellers or a genreconsidered handicap in taking the lead. In a way, this was not something that women were conventionally supposed to do. Considering the patriarchy in the society, how can we expect travel to be any different from other sectors? But over the last decade, we witnessed a change and evolution in the trend. Also, as I pen this down, I wonder, if anybody has ever felt the need to write something remotely related to 'solo male traveller'? No prizes for guessing, there was never a need to, in this respect. So let's normalise women travelling solo and shed some light on this niche segment gaining unprecedented momentum in recent years.

More than just a liberating experience

Let us begin with the underlying impression procured from experiences of different women travellers seeking an escape from the traditional constraints. Women travellers are often presented as the torchbearers who were able to break free of the constraints of contemporary society and had realised their potential. In a way, it is considered a very gutsy and daring thing to do. Yet, women did travel in all capacities—as wives, sisters, daughters of missionaries, or envoys seeking to prove something to themselves, as individuals in search of the unexpected, or of leisure or instruction, alone or accompanied, for personal or professional reasons.

Journey from an outcast to a pioneer segment

Travel experts are hard-pressed to deliver statistics on the women-only proportion of their industry but say it is becoming increasingly important. As more and more women travel for work within India and also abroad, their preferences remain a strong deciding factor for tourism boards and travel agencies to tailor-make preferred itineraries for women travellers. Along with that, the trend of solo woman travel and group tours for Indian women (many a time with kids) has been showing encouraging numbers and the world is taking note of this. There are few hotels that have some amazing offers for women travellers such as a wine package that includes a bottle of wine, a dinner with wine pairing, massages and guides to nearby wineries.

When considering factors such as culture, safety, scenery, women's rights and adventure for solo female travellers, Japan came out on top. This was followed by France, Spain, USA, Indonesia, Italy, Australia, Canada, Portugal and the Philippines.



Understanding what women want?

Women and men often have starkly different approach towards travel. For example, both women and men may want to hike to the top of the mountain, but men generally intend to reach the peak efficiently contrary to women who don't really care how long it takes, and prefer to meander through villages and markets on the way. Women pay more attention and appreciate more of the local character, the local feel of the destination. Considering the surge of women travellers, taking their preferences into account has directly resulted in innovative travel-friendly ways that bring about inclusive employment opportunities in related areas. This has strengthened sustainable tourism-boosting infrastructure in rural and urban setups. A lot of women travelling will often include vacation itineraries including recommendations on where to get a spa/wellness treatment, shopping tips, a trip to a garden or a cooking class — activities etc.

Safe environs remain a priority

Safety is a major concern for women travelling alone or even all-women groups. There is no denying the fact there are many countries around the globe that are beautiful, exciting and culturally intriguing, but lack in the safety aspect and are not a safe option for unaccompanied women. Ensuring your female travellers feel secure in your hotel is imperative and there are ways to accomplish this. One such safe practice is provision of women only floors which have been popping up in properties such as the Four Seasons Riyadh and the Dukes Hotel in London, allowing female guests to feel relaxed and secure in a female-only environment. Som Hotels have taken a step further in ensuring a safe haven for their female patrons with their launch of the Som Dona hotel in Mallorca; the entire hotel is reserved only for female travellers. This no-men-allowed initiative has proven popular amongst women in helping them to feel safe and at home, no matter where they are. However, you can still remain effective by keeping it simple. Ensuring your hotel is equipped with up-to-date security systems, implementing a 24-hour door attendant and offering after dark airport pick-ups can turn a wary solo traveller into one that feels safe and secure in your capable hands.

Travel companies dedicated to woman-only customers have hugely increased by 230% over the past few years.



27% of travel agents believe that sightseeing and shopping are the most popular activities when women are booking travel.

Need some inspo?

Scottish writer Nan Shepherd, known for her book *The Living Mountain* about her time exploring Scotland's Cairngorm Mountains in the 1940s; Freya Stark, an Anglo-Italian travel writer and explorer who traversed the Middle East and Afghanistan in the 20th Century; and Zora Neale Hurston, the American author and anthropologist who travelled to Haiti in the 1930s to document voodoo rituals and beliefs. The aim is to continue retracing the steps of these intrepid women and documenting the experience.



West Bengal

Quintessence of a delightful heritage experience



Staying at a beautiful place can turn your holiday into a splendid moment of joy. Have you ever imagined staying at a heritage palace or bungalows which earlier was the presidential palace of some king or a zamindar? The mammoth structure, huge ceilings, the traditional antiques, equipped with heritage artefacts adorned with scrumptious food, will surely make you keen and raise your eagerness to spend your break in one of such heritage properties.

- Sudipta Saha



INDIAN SAGA

West Bengal might have been explored by almost each one of us, but the way of exploration might differ. The culture, literature, art, and the delicacies of the state are most talked about points, but have we ever imagined that this vast state was once ruled by several rulers and the Zamindari system was quite prevalent in the state that gave birth to numerous heritage mansions and which later turned into a luxurious place of stay for vacationers. Here are some of the old heritage property that has opened its door for travellers offering the most pleasurable stay making your holiday a memorable experience.

Uniqueness of homestay

The royal history of West Bengal has adorned the state with numerous gorgeous heritage palaces, and mansions which lately have been restored and transformed into a heritage homestay, offering the guest royal hospitality amidst the tranquil landscape. One such homestay is the Itachuna Rajbari also known as Bargee Danga in Hooghly built in the year 1766 by the ancestors of Shri Safallya Narayan Kundu. Itachuna Rajbari is known to offer homely gestures where guests can immerse themselves into unique experiences and get the real authentic Bengali experience (A sense of true Bangaliana). Today, this unique building is open to offer mesmerising experiences, but what motivated to transform it into a homestay, "Many of the old houses in West Bengal are being demolished because the maintenance costs are so high. Very few zamindari houses are being conserved these days, we wanted to try to restore what is left and this was a golden opportunity to save a piece of treasure," adds Sharmistha Bhattacharya, Partner, Itachuna Homestay.

The homestay market in India is witnessing steady growth, and Itachuna is receiving an optimistic response. Adding to the same, Sharmistha Bhattacharya tells, "We think the travellers are



Itachuna Homestay



Sharmistha Bhattacharya

opting for homestays rather than a hotel as there is a homely feeling. As per the current situation, homestays are safer according to hygiene, fewer rooms lead to the absolute meaning of social distancing, independence, and good soul food. We prepare and present traditional Bengali cuisine that is rarely made at home nowadays."

Apart from the royal feel, one can also explore an array of experiences at the property, such as a local guided tour around the

entire property sharing stories and historical dramas of the past, a sandhya Arati is recited every single evening, festivals celebrated here are Holi and Janmashtami, a rural flutist who plays early in the morning- a wakeup call, and in the evenings as well, a walk around the village, range of indoor and outdoor activities, indoor includes a life-size chess board, carom and a table tennis table; outdoor include badminton and fishing.

Unwinding a royal set-up

Every heritage property is unique in itself and has its own story to narrate. The concept of heritage homestay is absolutely a royal affair, the architecture, the ambience and the old heritage charm leaves us spellbound. But have you ever thought about what goes into restoring this piece of architecture? Bari Kothi, in Murshidabad, is a restored heritage property. "I was trying to save my heritage; I was trying to save a legacy I was born into; I was trying to reignite an ecosystem that was frozen for half

a century. Bari Kothi, our ancestral mansion, brought to glory by my great great great grandfather, was locked down for almost half a century like all the palaces in the region. We embarked on a very audacious journey and possibly one of the most unique journeys of restoration in India. The end goal of this exercise was to create a self-sustaining ecosystem that could preserve- conserve- promote the legacy of our family and our community. The Sheherwali's. Being a hotelier was merely a byproduct of this exercise," says Darshan Dudhoria, Co-Owner.



Darshan Dudhoria



INDIAN SAGA

He further mentions that restoring a 300-year-old building wasn't an easy task! Darshan adds, "Given the poor state of affairs in the region, the lack of skilled masons, artisans, plumbers and engineers located near the site posed a problem. And since the family was also keen to preserve the local ecosystem, the project took a lot more time and painstaking effort in acquiring resources. From restoring beams made of teak wood to working on the vintage furniture, the restoration of Bari Kothi involved a lot of attention to detail; enough to last another century or more."

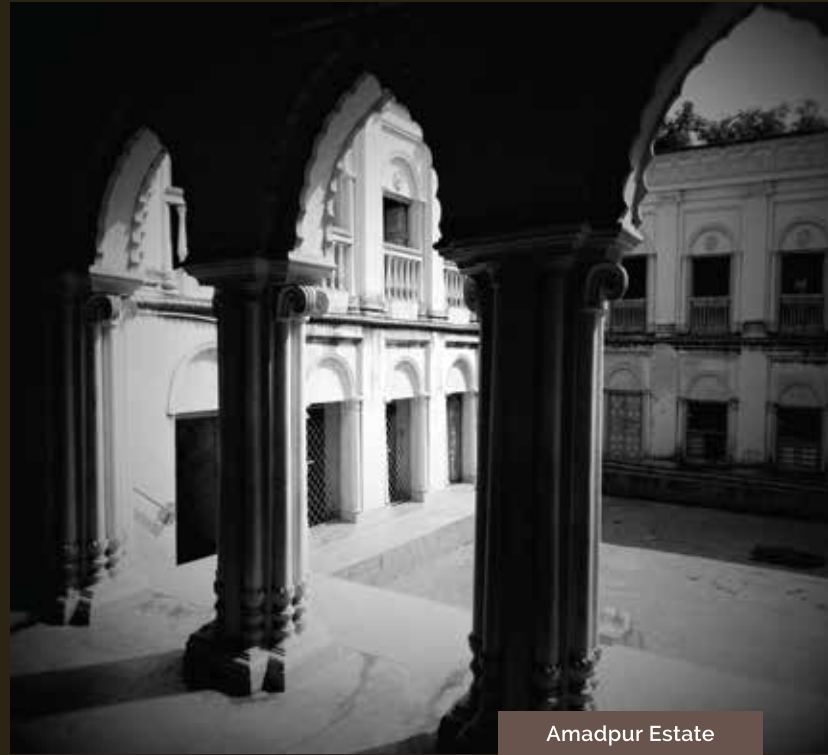
Bari Kothi is not just a place of stay but it is a place infused with experiences and over the years, they have been holding the past very proudly and depicting it to the world in a very royal manner. "We strongly stand by our motto - Bari Kothi does not sell rooms, it creates experiences. Our guest experience is fully infused with culture and heritage. We conduct

morning heritage walks, local country boat experiences, folk dance and music experiences, silk weaving and sericulture experiences, guided tour visit of ASI monuments, traditional local Sheherwali cuisine experience, and community engagement experiences, amongst others," says Darshan Dudhoria.

Adding to it he mentions, "Every element of design within the room and in common areas of Bari Kothi is a reflection of the past and present of Murshidabad. From traditional louvers to Greek and Roman pillars, to British checkered flooring to pure Murshidabad Silk upholstery, to wall carvings inspired from local design to using cutlery made by local craftsmen, to selling products of local produce only. We are most proud about our welcome bouquets which are hand made by our local tribal team members using the fallen leaves and flowers of the Bari Kothi garden."



Bari Kothi



Amadpur Estate

Up-and-coming

The heritage palaces are adorned with spectacular ambience and offer an array of experiences sprinkled with many interesting facts and history about the property. Amadpur Estate is another such unique property located in Burdwan delivering its guests an old-world experience. Sharing on what motivated Shiladitya Chaudhuri to transform the property into a heritage stay, he says, "I wanted to share the experience of my ancestral property with discerning, like-minded people who value heritage themselves and also for the sake of posterity. The young generation must know about our unique culture, traditions and values. Also, I have created a

small local economy surrounding the estate. The people who have been with us for six-seven generations have got a livelihood. Everyone is benefitted, and my property is being used regularly, which earlier was kept under locked and was opened during the major festivals that our family celebrated."

The beauty of these heritage properties is unexplainable, and gradually travellers are keen on exploring them. But, enormous hard work goes into restoring and running these stunning artworks. Speaking on the challenges faced, Shiladitya Chaudhuri shares, "Like everything else in our country, startups come with multiple hiccups. Ours was no exception. Firstly getting locals to understand the concept of city dwellers wanting to visit obscure villages, live amongst them, interact etc was an alien concept as it was always the other way round with villagers visiting cities. Secondly, explaining to local authorities that homestay is not a business in the true sense of the term was tough. Thirdly, close-knit village communities looked upon visitors staying close to them more like an intrusion than anything else and eyed them suspiciously."



Shiladitya Chaudhuri



INDIAN SAGA



Amadpur Estate



Exceptionally heritage

There are several heritage properties in the state of West Bengal which are yet to be discovered and experienced, one such heritage property is Mahisadal Rajbari an ancient palace situated in Medinipur. This heritage property is almost 300 years old and it was one of the top Jamindari Estates of Bengal. "We have three palaces the present one is Phulbag palace built-in 1926 which is comparatively new. We the present generation live there, we have a rich tradition of classical music and also my earlier

generation were shikaris they have travelled all over India in pursuit of hunting. We have preserved the old mementoes and there is a trophy room where the stuffed animals are preserved, a weapons room, a Darbar Hall where musical programs were held and all legends of classical music have come and stayed with us, besides there is a billiards room, a royal dining room. We developed a museum out of these which became very popular among tourists. This motivated us to develop the Heritage Tourism," mentions HP Garg, Owner Mahisadal Rajbari.



HP Garg

Preserve the legacy

The heritage palaces and mansions in the state have been locked down for years, but gradually as the young travellers are thriving to explore and experience something that is undiscovered yet has introduced the concept of heritage homestays. Samrat Chowdhury, Co-Founder and Chief Mentor, BAUL Foundation feels, "Homestays have become an integral part of the life and style of individuals. The covid 19 phase has made each tourist an avid traveller looking for isolated staycations with minimalistic luxury yet basics in place. So, the homestays with minimum room inventory is giving each traveller the value for money and at times extended WFH adaptability. It's true that if each homestay survives and thrives, the local economy gets bolstered and sets the frame for sustainable economic development for the locals. Also, the homely food and non-cosmetic hand holding warmth by the owner or his representative is giving the much-needed rejuvenation to the discerning travellers." These heritage buildings are treasures of our past and portray the history in their manner; it is indeed a perfect stay for any vacationer but more than that it is our pride.



Mahisadal Rajbari



Samrat Chowdhury



When in Turkey, do like the Turks!

A beautiful destination that offers almost everything! Middle Eastern delicacies for your taste buds, scenery that is loved at first sight, and pastures that will make you come back every time.

- Tripti Jain





Let's get to know each other

Turkey's nature is beautiful and perfect, it is a country of diversity that is rich and proud of its Islamic culture. What makes it even more welcoming are the locals that are hospitable, helpful and kind. In addition, the Turkish food is to die for, from Mezze, clay pot (food prepared in a clay pot that is broken open when served), kebab, gözleme (filled flatbread), simit (bagels) to baklava.

Turkey is a versatile country with modern cities, sleepy villages, lovely beaches and beautiful natural landscapes. It's a country with a rich history and delicious food. Turkey is a nice combination of everything. The country that offers some of the most luxurious stays and cuisine that makes your taste buds wander freely. Turkey is a large, vast country. The distances between destinations can be very large. Fortunately, Turkey has a good network of domestic flights. Almost every major city has flights from Istanbul, Ankara or Antalya.

When you think of travel, food, gorgeous architecture and trending culture, the country that immediately attracts attention is Turkey. A transcontinental country, officially known as the Republic of Turkey located in Anatolia in Western Asia, with apportion on the Balkans in Southern Europe. From the bustling cosmopolitan city of Istanbul to the endless valleys and rock sculptures in Cappadocia. The beaches of Antalya, the hot air balloons of Cappadocia and the beautiful mosques of Istanbul, Turkey has become a rave for travellers this season. Amongst all this, Turkey is the 6th most visited destination in the world. Despite the unrest that the country went through within the last few years with Syria, Turkey is not only a safe destination but also one that everyone should experience once in their life.



Destinations that make you go, Wow!

A treat for the travellers, Turkey is brimming with luxurious hotels, historically beautiful Hammams and food vendors at every corner to quench your hunger. The cities in Turkey offer a whole package to the visitors with locals giving them a taste of the rich heritage and culture.

Istanbul is one of the most beautiful city in the country, which is full of mosques, palaces and bazaars. It is a modern metropolis with many inhabitants and more than 3000 years of history. The Bosphorus River divides Istanbul in two, the European part and the Asian part. In the European part, you will find the Blue Mosque, the Hagia Sofia and the Grand Bazaar.

Other attractions include Beyoglu (a popular shopping street), Topkapi Palace and a boat trip on the Bosphorus. One of the most famous and iconic destinations for tourists in Istanbul is commonly referred to as the Blue Mosque. It was built in 1616 and there are over 20,000 handmade ceramic tiles

Another city that attracts tourists is Cappadocia, a city that was a refuge for Christians fleeing Muslims. You can still see this in the many small hidden churches and monasteries that are carved into the rocks. The special shapes

in the rocks are created by erosion. This creates an impressive lunar landscape with valleys, gorges and jagged rock formations. Cappadocia, and more specifically the Göreme Valley, is the perfect environment for hiking, mountain biking or horseback riding. Hiking trails have been mapped out so that you can explore each valley on foot. Another highlight that can't be missed is the early morning Hot air balloon ride over the rocky terrain.

One of the cities that grabs the attention of travellers is the beautiful coastal town of Antalya. The view from the coast is phenomenal, first, you see the sea and behind it the colossal Taurus Mountains. Antalya is also called the Turkish Riviera. The destination is perfect for a relaxing weekend after cruising through the cities in Turkey. The historic centre of Antalya with cosy shops and good restaurants is a delight for travellers.



The right time for a visit

The ideal weather to visit the country is during the spring months—the days are long, and the heat hasn't quite hit yet. Because the temperatures are almost perfect, this is the high season for cities like Istanbul and Cappadocia. Expect fully booked hotels and high prices. However, it is the off-season for the beach resorts. Summer brings plenty of sunshine and hot weather, meaning locals and tourists alike flock to the beaches. Fall is also a wonderful time to visit. The days are shorter, and there is a higher chance of rain come October, but the weather overall is very mild. Winter is cold and rainy, but because of this, there are far fewer travellers.



Food for thought

Turkish food as we know it today developed in the age of the Ottoman Empire as it expanded and came into contact with so many different influences. In modern Turkish food, you will find flavours from the Middle East, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Balkans.

While Turkish food abroad tends to be heavy on meat, the native cuisine is heavily based around eggplant, garlic, lentils, zucchini, pistachios, and cheaters. It is such a diverse blend of flavours. You will need to try at least a few dishes to get a real taste.

You might have tried Turkish delight outside of Turkey, but you rarely get the good stuff abroad. Traditional Turkish delight sweets are made with the aromatic flavours of Bergamot orange, rosewater, mastic, or lemon.



OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

Enlighten yourself!

- Turkey was one of the earliest wine-producing areas and is the fourth-largest producer of grapes in the world.
- The whirling dervishes, where ancient order originates in Konya, whirl as an act of devotion to god.
- Istanbul is the only city in the world that straddles two continents: Europe and Asia.
- The Turks introduced tulips to the Netherlands, as well as cherries and coffee to Europe.
- Design is prized in Turkey, which is reflected in the country's range of exceptional boutique properties.



Turkiye has seen a strong rebound from 2020 as it has witnessed 111.51 per cent increase in tourist arrivals in November 2021 from a year earlier. What kind of growth and opportunities do you see coming from India?

As you have rightly mentioned, we can say that we had a strong rebound in 2021 in the field of tourism. Türkiye emerged as one of the top destinations for FIT and MICE tourists from around the world in 2021, by welcoming over 30 million international visitors. According to the latest data, In Q4 of 2021, Türkiye's tourism revenues shot up by 95 per cent to USD 7.6 billion, which is only 3 per cent below the numbers witnessed during the pre-pandemic period of October-December 2019.

As you may know, 2018 and 2019 were very successful years for Turkish tourism in India. We hosted more than 2.3 lakh, Indian tourists, in 2019 with an increase of 55 per cent in comparison with 2018. Türkiye witnessed over 52 thousand tourists from India, in 2021. In December alone, the country witnessed over 10 thousand visitors from India, which is an indication of the uptick in Türkiye tourism, amongst Indians, once again. I believe that with the resumption of direct flights among our countries the mutual touristic flow resumes again and we can achieve the numbers that we had in 2019.

In what ways Türkiye has outlined strategic plans to rebuild tourists' confidence in the destination and also to ensure the vital recovery of the tourism industry?

Safe Tourism Certification Program has been at the heart of safety protocols of our tourism industry since the mid of 2020. As known, Türkiye is



H.E Firat Sunel

one of the first countries in the world to introduce the Safe Tourism Certificate Program for the tourism industry. This certificate covers a broad range of measures including transportation, accommodation, health condition of employees of the facilities and passengers. Granted by the international certification institutions, this system ensures the safety of the visitors, both domestic and international. Thanks to the Safe Tourism Certificate Program the number of international visitors reached the level of 30 million in 2021.

Could you name the main source markets

for Türkiye? What steps are being taken to diversify Türkiye's source market and also to secure a higher-spending tourist demographic from India?

Türkiye has some classical source markets in terms of tourism. In 2021, Russian Federation, Germany, Ukraine, United Kingdom and Iran were the main source markets for our tourism industry. However, one of the main goals of our tourism policy is the diversification of markets which

contributes to overcoming the seasonality issue in our tourism industry. In this regards, we attach great importance to the countries called as emerging markets for our tourism industry. India is considered as one of the most potential emerging tourism markets for our country. Hence, we will continue to conduct different marketing activities in India in the years to come and will actively promote our country as a family, wedding and MICE destination in India and strive for increasing the numbers of Indian tourists visiting Türkiye.

The worldwide trend is experiential tourism. What other top projects are you currently looking at and what experiential angles do they have for the tourists?

We definitely believe in providing travellers with full-fledged experiential tourism keeping in mind the vast cultural, historical, and ethnic diversity of Türkiye. A culmination of both oriental and European elements, we aim to give an amazing and exclusive experience to the tourists with a number of world-renowned activities in Türkiye such as adventurous hot air balloon ride and horse riding in Cappadocia, rafting and cable car experience in Antalya, cruise in Bosphorus, shopping in Grand Bazaar and Spice Bazaar in Istanbul, and whirling dervish experience in Konya, Cappadocia and in Istanbul

With a diverse landscape and popular local ethnicities, travellers can also experience the rich and delicious food of Türkiye that includes olive oil-based dishes from the Mediterranean Coast, hearty pastries from central Anatolia, subtle spicy flavours from the east and southeast, and the famous Turkish Tea and Turkish Coffee.

Thus, Türkiye is full of vividness, its scenic beauty, historical and heritage value, and provides an enthralling experience to everyone who decides to visit and explore this beautiful country.



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DELHI BY CYCLE

A journey of senses

A surprising cornucopia of a long lost era amalgamated with fascinating tales by the most experienced storytellers, Delhi By Cycle hits the right chords when it comes to keeping visitors thoroughly engrossed. Himanshu Shekhar, Storyteller, Guide & CEO, Delhi By Cycle talks about what goes into the curation of such immersive experiences.

- Bharti Sharma





With countless heritage sights, an overwhelming cocktail of culture and life, Delhi possesses the power of brewing interest in any history, architecture or art buffs. Even after living in Delhi for many years, I've always felt something missing, a feeling buried deep inside that I was never up and close with the city. An exciting cycle tour by Delhi By Cycle somehow made my love and interest for the city grow deeper and got me acquainted with the rich history running through every nook and corner of the city. We opted for the Shah Jahan Tour which happens to be Delhi By Cycle's classic recipe for an exhilarating glimpse into the life and times of the great Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan and the 1500 acre expanse of his capital – Shahjahanabad. While passing through the alleys of Old Delhi, Red Fort, Jama Masjid, the Spice Market and tranquil Civil Lines, the

former British colonial area showcased the sharp contrast to the hectic Old Delhi and the contemporary New Delhi.

Blending the right ingredient of experiences

Delhi By Cycle's tours are more focused on stories, culture, history, and exploring the real side of India and therefore they keep these factors as the core of their tour design. It takes a lot of effort, comprehensive research, recce to prepare the finest bike tour experiences and Himanshu makes it a point that every journey is embedded deep in the heart of the patrons. Talking about its conceptualisation, he tells, "There are different parameters to design a city-based tour and a cycling holiday. For city-based tours apart from stories, and routes, we also need to take care of traffic, best food

places, and create a loop keeping in mind the distance for the tour. For cycling holidays, we also need to take care to include rural routes, nice places to stay, places of interest, and the best balance of ride and cultural factor."

Exploration beyond Delhi

Though they kick-started from Delhi and their Old Delhi tours are some of the most famous ones, a couple of years back Delhi By Cycle also started cycling holidays ranging between 2-10 days around Delhi. "As our tours are more focused on culture and stories, we are about to start a few more in the area of Dehradun-Rishikesh, Jim Corbett National Park and Aravalli region of Sariska National Park. We've worked on Mysore-Goa 10 days cycle tour before the pandemic, hopefully, we will launch that again as well," shares Himanshu.



Himanshu Shekhar



TRAVEL THERAPY



Changing dynamics

Delhi By Cycle primarily catered to inbound tourists coming to India; currently they've served more than 35,000 clients of tours in the last 12 years and less than 5 per cent of the tourists were from the domestic market. But, pandemic made them restructure their entire model, as the products were never designed for the local market. In no time, the team redesigned the route length, worked on the pricing, added some weekend customised trips, which they were not part of their itinerary earlier. Sharing his experience dealing with such adverse situations, Himanshu tells, "Pandemic and back-to-back lockdowns harmed us more than we imagined. With the restriction situation getting a bit better we saw a surge from the domestic market but numbers are still not enough."

The biggest source market for Delhi By Cycle is from the cycle-friendly countries or at least the countries where cycle as mode of transportation is promoted by the government at an institutional level. So, naturally some of their biggest customers are from the Netherlands, France, Belgium, and the UK.

Beginning of many journeys

Delhi By Cycle celebrated its 13th year of existence in Jan 2021 and having served clients from more than 65 countries in this short span they are grateful to the people, partners, tour leaders, co-guides, and travellers from all over the world who have supported them in all the ways possible. Talking about some lessons learnt, Himanshu shares, "Pandemic surely taught us the skills to survive and hopefully with more city tours in the major cities apart from Delhi and some more cycling holidays to be added to the list, we are also looking forward to a major tech upgrade to support the future needs of the tourism space."





HOTELLIGENCE

Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru Maldives: A slice of Swiss excellence with the warmth of Maldivian hospitality

Conceivably one of the most cherished resorts in the Maldives, Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru is renowned for its commitment to guest experience. Jenna- Lanhaolu Gangmei, Sales Manager, Jenna - Lanhaolu Gangmei talks about the exquisite bunch of experiences at this aqua gem.

- Bharti Sharma



HOTELLIGENCE

The Maldives may be awash with luxury resorts, but not all of them are able to get it right. Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru Maldives has reinvented the notion of island luxury. A globally recognised brand with Swiss roots, Mövenpick Hotels & Resorts is currently part of the French Hospitality Group Accor. With a culinary heritage of 70 years, commitment to sustainability with their Planet 21 Program and family-friendly concept, the Mövenpick brand philosophy always aims at creating unique moments—perfect ingredients for the Indian market.

Quintessential India market

Mövenpick Maldives witnessed 87 per cent increase in the Indian market in 2021 as compared to the previous years in operations. In fact, the property is expecting a very positive trend for 2022 as well. Post pandemic, India has emerged as

one of the top markets for the Maldives with the established travel route between the two countries and improved connectivity from more cities, especially the two hubs of Delhi and Mumbai. “We are delighted to have captured our share of the market. We have received excellent feedback from our Indian guests during their stay. They have also shared good reviews and posts about their stay at the resort across many social media platforms. In addition, we have been fortunate to have welcomed Neha Dhupia and Angad Bedi in 2020 and Abhijeet Duddala, Aakanksha Singh and Rashami Desai during 2021. Their experiences of our hospitality have resonated across different media channels. With the natural isolation of each resort and the precautions taken to ensure the safety of the guest and staff, we believe we will continue welcoming more honeymoon guests as well as family travellers,” tells Jenna.



HOTELLIGENCE



Curating unforgettable moments for guests

Jenna feels that it is crucial to highlight the local culture of the country as well. Thus, the property achieves such synergy by organising a Maldivian Night every week on Friday nights. She shares, "Our buffet restaurant, ONU Marché is decorated with a local touch and our guests enjoy an array of local flavours, fresh seafood such as Maldivian lobsters, tuna and entertainment such as Boduberu (Maldivian drums) performance, showcasing Maldivian people's customs and culture in a truly unique way."

Brand awareness is a constant process

It was challenging for the property to introduce the Mövenpick brand to the Indian market during pre-opening, which was due to the fact that the brand is not present in the country at the moment. However, many Indian business partners and guests who are aware about the brand have recognized them via the famed Mövenpick ice cream, coffee and wine. "In September of 2018 MövenpickHotels and Resorts had been acquired by Accor, a world-leading hospitality group consisting of more than 5,200 properties and 10,000 food and beverage venues throughout 110 countries. Accor is well-known in India and with the addition of MövenpickHotels & Resorts to its diverse portfolio, we have received significant exposure in the market." What do Indians want?

The majority of Indian clients' choice of stay during their tropical vacation is the Overwater Pool Villas. The resort has a total of 72 units of Overwater Pool Villas with 34 units making up the entry category, which is 140 sqm with a private plunge pool, glass floor and overwater hammocks. Talking about the variety of culinary options, Jenna shares, "Apart from the ultimate island holiday, Mövenpick is known for its culinary heritage, we have been able to cater to different specific dietary requirements such as Jain menu, Indian vegetarian food etc. We also offer Indian thali options for Lagoon



Jenna- Lantholu Gangmei

Lunch under our destination dining offerings. And last but not the least, the cherry on the icing is that we offer complimentary chocolate hour from 04.00 pm to 05.00 pm every day in our Mövenpick Café and Wine Lounge for all our in-house guests."

Intelligent and appealing commitment

With the current circumstances the world is undergoing, and the rise of technology has made the internet almost essential across all industries, which is equally valid for the hospitality industry. Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru Maldives is focusing on optimising its online presence in order to reach the potential guests. Talking about the potential India market, Jenna shares, "We will continue with our efforts across India focusing on the honeymoon market which has been growing at the resort. We feel there is enormous potential within the family segment since our resort is well equipped to accommodate families in our Beach Pool Suites and Beach Pool Residences, which are ideal for small and large families with children. Our younger guests can also enjoy activities designed especially for them at Little Birds Club; our Kids Club. Lastly, we will continue to emphasize our brand awareness in the market, and depending on restrictions we will be in India meeting our partners across key cities as well as participating in the upcoming travel fairs OTM, Mumbai and SATTE, Delhi."



It's late, but never too late

It's been almost two years and we don't see any positive approach with concrete steps from the government to boost this sector or provide any kind of reparations to the community.



- Dr Manoj Matta,
Director, Oriental Vacations and Journeys

Since the pandemic hit the world, we, the tour operators, were the first ones to face the repercussions as clients started cancelling bookings. Our payments got stuck with foreign tour operators, hotels, railways, airlines, etc. Our requests for direct financial relief from the govt. has fallen on deaf ears despite the fact that besides individuals, various associations have written to the highest authority of the country severally, our PM, who boasts of tourism on almost every occasion. Besides the so-called ECLG scheme that too is only applicable to those who already had debt on their heads (which is just to get you further debt-ridden), nothing has been done to ensure our survival, let alone revival. Our Finance Minister had proudly asked us to be 'Aatmanirbhar' as if earlier we were being supported by the government. The SEIS benefits have already been stopped and were paid at lower than the committed/announced rate. Our fraternity friends are running post to pillar to get their 10 lac rupee loan sanctioned, as announced by MOT as the only support to approved tour operators.

It's visible that we are at the mercy of our politicians and bureaucrats. Our

'so-called' industry (as we don't enjoy the industry status as yet) which contributes to over 9 per cent of GDP and is the highest generator of employment is not all a priority. They think that 'leisure tourists' are the only cause of virus spread and that too who travel by scheduled flights. Those travelling via Air Bubble Arrangements, Vande Bharat flights or Chartered Flights have somehow developed immunity hence they can't contribute to Covid infections.

Our politicians and policymakers think that election rallies, various melas (fairs), etc. increase immunity against Covid which is why these are not restricted however restaurants are closed even though they follow proper social distancing norms. Republic Day Parade and Beating Retreat can be organised but weddings, meetings can't happen and moreover opening up private offices will super spread Covid as if DDMA has given some kind of immunity to those attending RD Prade and govt. offices.

Aviation ministry had announced resuming of scheduled flights from 15th December which came for a toss and the flights have now been suspended till 28th February, let me ask on what grounds?

Countries such as the US, UK, Europe, etc. have alarming numbers in terms of Covid infections however, they have not restricted the flights and have further liberalised their Covid norms. It seems that few influential people in various ministries have clout with the airlines'officials that's why the scheduled flights are not being made operational. A spokesman from India's LCC had recently said that their airlines had never done charter flights before Covid however now they were doing at least one charter flight a day.



WRECKING BALL

It's high time we learn to live with the virus and start treating this as the normal flu. Many of our hoteliers, guides, tour operators have already lost their lives to suicide and many others have collapsed due to no direct financial support from the government. If the government seriously wants us to survive, revive and thrive then it should immediately consider the following requests:

- Open up skies to pre-covid levels
- Start issuing multiple entry visa (No tourist will plan a visit to India just because we are offering Gratis visa to the first 5 lac tourists till 31st March 2022 so stop doing this eyewash)
- Give one time upfront financial support to Tour Operators (don't trap us by asking us to take loans to pay rent and salary of our staff whom we have employed till now despite zero business for last two years).
- Grant GST holidays for tour operators registered pre-Covid for at least 5 years to ensure that India remains a

competitive destination and the tour operators survive

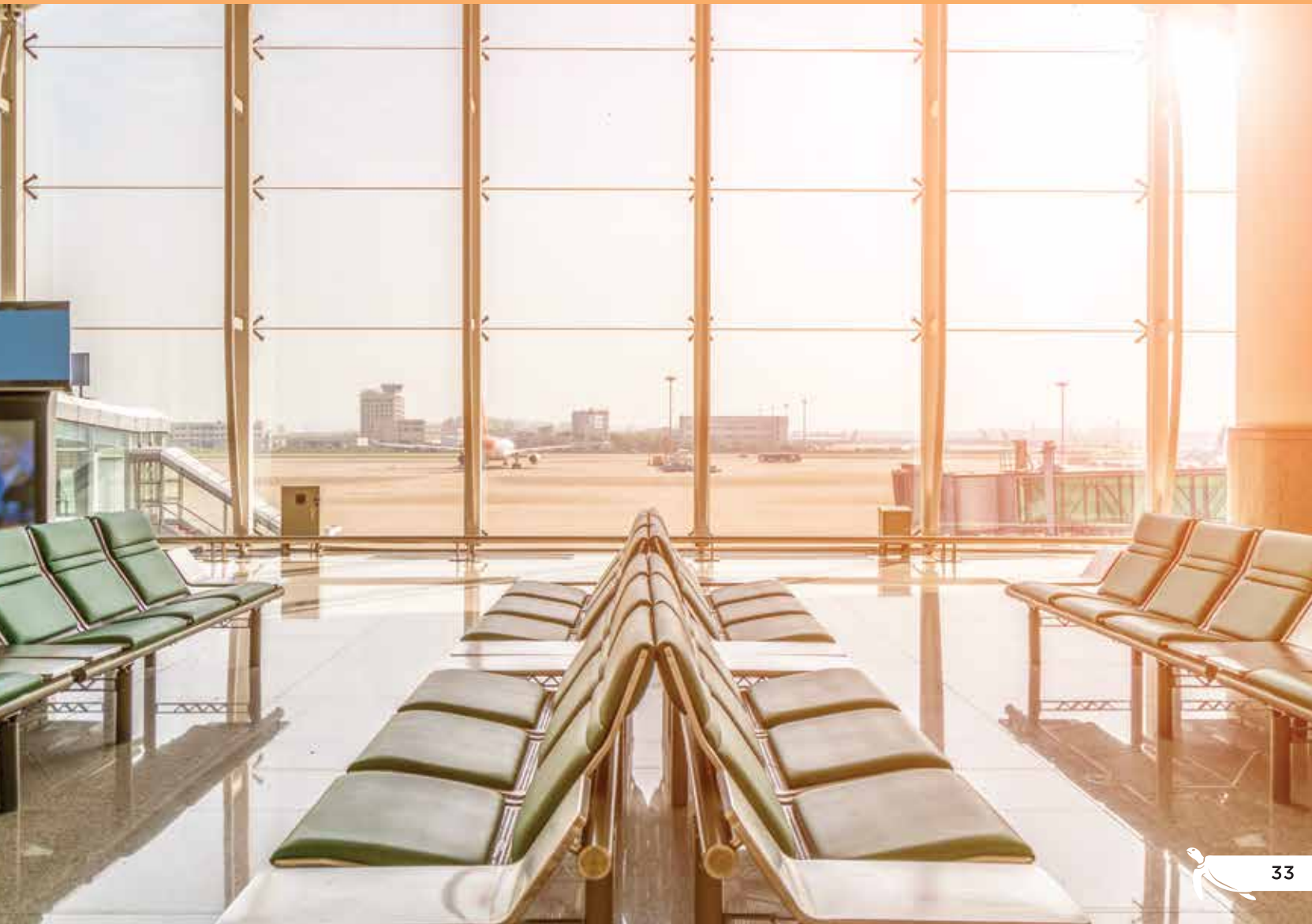
- Announce income tax holiday in the forthcoming budget for tour operators registered pre-Covid so that tour operators could recover some of their losses to sustain themselves
- Offer one-time financial grant equivalent to income tax paid by tour operators in the last three years before Covid struck us
- Offer marketing budgets to tour operators and let them decide which fairs/exhibitions they wish to attend and do let them organise the same (GOI officials from the respective country may join locally).

Creating infrastructure is important be it Kashi corridor or Bodhgaya Circuit however most important is the 'tourist flow'. Where would the tourist come from and even if they come who will serve them? Most of the employees and even entrepreneurs in the tourism industry

have found an alternate source of income and hence may never return to join this industry which is prone to such risks of being worst impacted. Most of the ground handling agents were forced to sell their fleet at throwaway prices because they were unable to pay installments, road tax, insurance etc. due to zero business. Many FTOs have closed their shutters and will never resume. It is important that government should start supporting tour operators wholeheartedly else this infrastructure being created shall get rusted.

Govt. of India needs to come up with a new campaign, 'Immune India' as our infection rate vis-a-vis our population is extremely low as compared with the rest of the world. Govt. should get away with the requirement of mandatory RTPCR tests for fully vaccinated guests.

Any further delay in opening up skies and welcoming the tourists shall be lethal.



HEADS IN BEDS

Rixos Bah Al Bahr

An Exquisite Escapade



From tons of entertainment options to great restaurants and a splendid backdrop, this all inclusive paradise doesn't cease to impress.

- Misbaah Mansuri



HEADS IN BEDS

Spectacular theatrics, gorgeous costumes and an amazing atmospheric backdrop, I was transfixed to say the least. After spending years in the Middle East, this was the first time a hotel had impressed me with its superlative live entertainment options. Two days at Rixos Bab Al Bahr and its allure had already cast a spell on me.

This all-inclusive beach resort is set on a stretch of private beach in the UAE's northernmost emirate and has excellent family facilities, as well as adults-only areas. What's amazing is that everyone is having a good time, thanks to multiple pools, a raft of free activities and friendly service.

First impression

The resort is located on a cluster of man-made islands in Ras Al Khaimah, known as RAK, 10 minutes' drive from Al Hamra Golf Club and

around 45 miles from Dubai airport. First look and I was already loving the gorgeous three pyramid-shaped buildings, with waterways and a souk surrounding a lovely entertainment square. Add to that a trad wind-tower architecture and the beautiful Ottoman-inspired spa, an inviting main pool and beach and you got a winner.

Overall, there are four outdoor pools including an adults-only infinity pool with chilled tunes and bar, along with a host of all-inclusive activities such as beach volleyball, football, basketball, table tennis, tennis, fitness classes and water sports such as parasailing, banana boating and kayaking.

Most of the resort's 650 rooms and suites have ocean views, with one pyramid set aside for grown-ups. Deluxe rooms are understated and classy, with comfy king-size beds and turquoise, taupe and bronze tones and marble-clad bathrooms come with a large rain shower. I was greeted by some scrumptious desserts and a lovely surprise bottle of grape on arrival.



HEADS IN BEDS



The foodie factor

There are eight restaurants and six bars to choose from. Seven Heights, the all-day dining restaurant, that hosts a huge selection of international dishes. Breakfast is an abundant buffet of cereals, yogurts, fruits, breads and pastries, plus eggs cooked to order. From Italian to Asian, there is a dining option for every culinary mood with an array of restaurants to choose from. The Italian fare at L'olivo is top-notch and worth savouring. Apart from that, my big favorite was the Turkish specialty restaurant-Lalezar where melt-in-the-mouth kebabs and fragrant rice dishes as well as breakfast options are just unbelievable! The property's gastronomic strength shines through in every bite.

Spa-rty

The swish and sprawling Avitane Spa is

one of the best I've tried! Post a Turkish hammam and a rejuvenating massage, it feels like my soul is cleansed too. The techniques used by the therapists are quite unique and uplifting, something I observed as they kneaded my muscles into mush.

The couple spa suite is so imperial and the super-efficient and great therapists only add to the fabulousness of the spa.

Verdict

Expect nightly entertainment from the 50-strong animation team, with Strictly-style dance shows, live music, karaoke and quiz games. Trendy pool parties, shows so well put-up that you won't stop smiling alongside the great culinary fare and incredible all-inclusive option make this one a sure-shot hospitality marvel!



How was 2021 for Rixos Bab Al Bahr?

It was a fantastic year. While everyone was not expecting such a strong year we exceeded budgets, we exceeded our performances, we exceeded our targets. In terms of the hospitality industry in the UAE, we have certain unique selling points where in the moment nobody can come close to us: our focus on families and our popular entertainment programs that keep them regaled throughout the stay alongside our all-inclusive proposition. We have entertainment programs, five shows a week and they're truly top notch.

With your background in the culinary arts what plans do you have for the property in this space?

We are constantly working on new offerings and are constantly picking out the special days of the year where we make special culinary experiences for the customers and are targeting and trying to create new F&B offerings through a new restaurant club area where we can provide something more for the adults as well as the mature family segment, so that each target group is catered to. Our Turkish cuisine offering Lalezar is really strong and has quickly become a house favourite. Apart from that, we have everything from Italian to Asian offerings which leave our guests spoilt for choice, when it comes to dining.

If you were a guest what would your ideal 24 hour itinerary consist of in the hotel?

Personally, because of my fast-paced job and long working

hours, I would love to relax, if I get the time. So firstly, I would definitely take the hammam and spend one and a half to two hours in the spa. Then I would look to get a quiet place on the beach, which is the cabana area where we have a little bit of a butler service. I will chill out in the evening and go for an evening cocktail and then try one of the restaurants, a perfect way to recharge!

The Emirates is inundated with five-star hotels, and Ras Al Khaimah has its fair share too. What gives Rixos an edge over the rest, according to you and what will be your focus areas for 2022?

Our advantage to our competitors will always be our focus on the full package for the families and our entertainment options, a great kid's club! As they say, if you have happy kids, you have happy parents. You will have competitors who are trying to put a half hearted concept for families inside but they never go the full way, don't really walk the talk and hence cannot segregate. For instance, you have a five star hotel with let's say 400 or 500 rooms. And then you say okay, I have 80 rooms which are all inclusive, you have 90 rooms which are full board, you have 60 rooms as half board and rest with bed and breakfast. This differentiation for them becomes tricky. For us, it's very easy, everything at my hotel is full-fledged all-inclusive, customers can eat and drink what they want and enjoy till their heart's content. As for the focus areas this year, furthermore beautification of the property and our quest to continue delighting all target groups will be our forever endeavour.

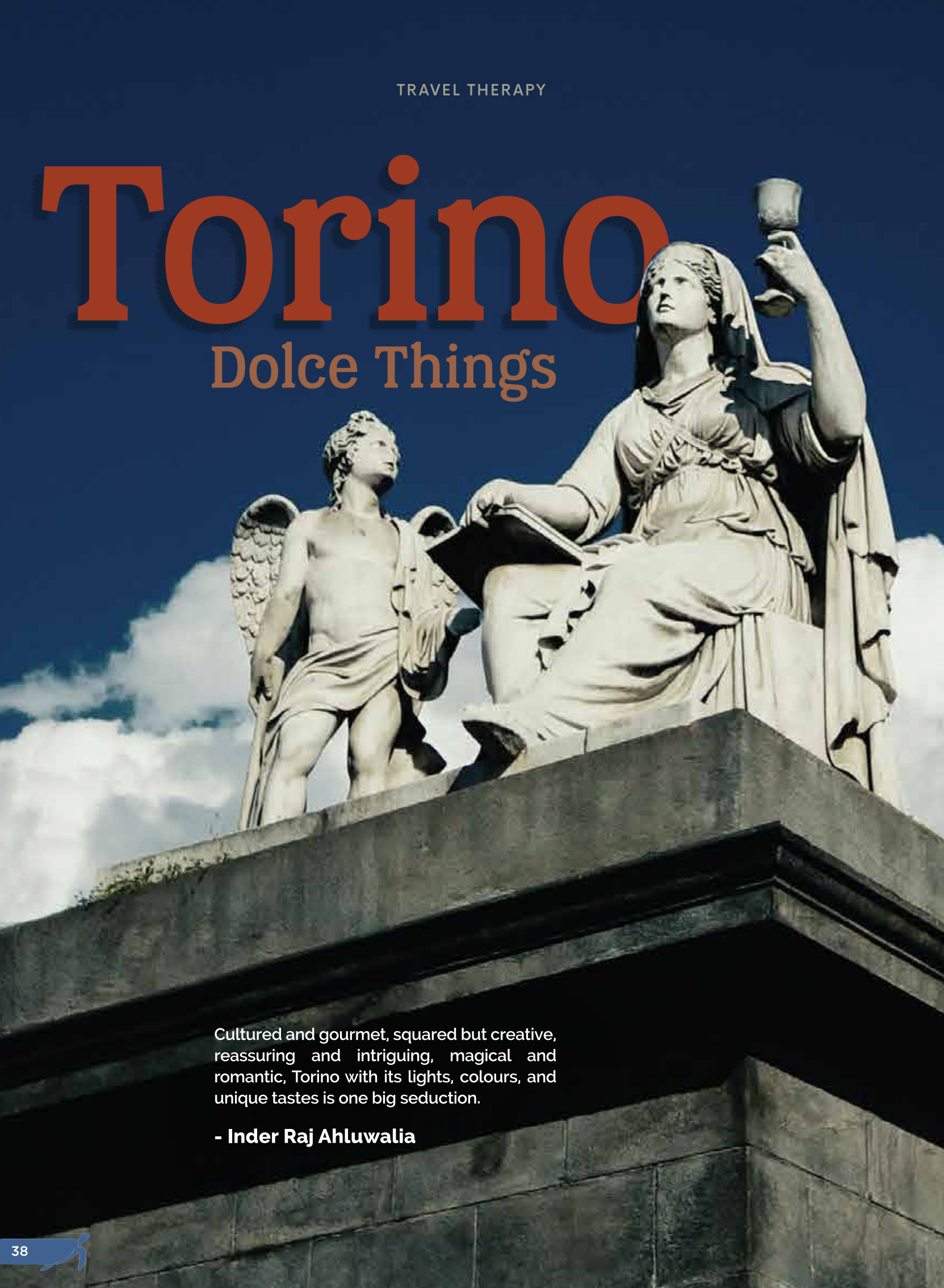


Horst Walther-Jones, General Manager, Rixos Bab Al Bahr



Torino

Dolce Things

A photograph of a classical stone sculpture on a building's facade. On the left, an angel with large, feathered wings stands, looking towards the right. On the right, a woman, likely the Virgin Mary, is seated and holding a book. She is dressed in a long, flowing robe and a head covering. The background is a clear blue sky with some white clouds. The sculpture is set on a dark stone ledge.

Cultured and gourmet, squared but creative, reassuring and intriguing, magical and romantic, Torino with its lights, colours, and unique tastes is one big seduction.

- Inder Raj Ahluwalia



TRAVEL THERAPY

And by the look of things, the world seems to be giving its tacit approval. Because things seem to be in tune and all the wheels are turning.

From a Roman and Medieval culture to a Baroque capital, from the coffee and chocolate culture to global tastes, it's all in place and official. With its streets, buildings and courtyards as beautiful and elegant as stately lounges, and its 18 km of arcades providing an ideal 'umbrella' for all-weather shopping, the city's character can be quite heady.

It's an old tradition that just refuses to die, which makes it a perfect platform to start your city discovery. From the Café Storicis with its robust ambience to trendy

outlets like Gattodolcione, the city wears its 'sweet-tooth' tag with a rakish elegance that's as pleasing as it is startling.

My first look at the city was a bit tepid. The small Sunday Market in the square featured flowers, herbs, jams, cookies, cakes and trinkets. Stalls lined one side, facing the regal-looking Town Hall. It was the Italy of the Fifties.

Torino's had its tryst with destiny. It was the first Italian capital in 1861 and memories and artefacts remain. The Piedmontese baroque style Carignano Palace located in the square bearing its name, and currently the headquarters of the National Museum of the Italian Risorgimento, is a compulsory stopover, as is the hall of the first

Sub-alpine Parliament - a historical relic. Across the square, you find the famous restaurant del Cambio where Camillo Benso, the Count of Cavour, dined in between meetings.

Spanning generations, Torino's architecture, greatly augmented by famous local architects like Filippo Juvarra, Guarino Guarini, and Ascanio Vitozzi is a magnificent collection of royal residences, magnificent church domes and stately mansions that make it a European Baroque capital. Blocks of buildings line arrow-straight streets. And the city's also famed for its Liberty Style, with floral decorations over bay windows embellishing the beautiful 19th and 20th Century mansions.



TRAVEL THERAPY



If you were hankering to indulge your gourmet desires you've hit the jackpot. The Café Storici (historical cafes) excel. Go out for an aperitif (a Turinese invention) or a glass of wine, or some vermouth (invented by Benedetto Carpano in 1786). The place, by the way, is Quadrilatero Romano. Try a Bicerin – a typical Torino coffee, chocolate and cream-based beverage, drunk hot and steaming, mentioned by Alessandro Dumas as being "among the good and pleasant things of the city." And then there's the Marocchino (from Marocch), a coffee cup or hot chocolate.

Agnolotti, bolliti and bonet! Feast royally. Choose a typical 'Trattoria' that offers everything that's brought fame to Turinese and Piemontse cuisine. Or drop in at a renowned eatery like Ristorante Sotto la Mole, with lots of light, lots of chatter, plain walls and a brick ceiling, and delicious Carre d'agnello in crosta di rubata (lamb chops), washed down with Barbera D'Alba (red wine) and then some Pedovena Beer. And then a small brandy. Just go right ahead. It's legal.

If all this isn't enough, Torino is chocolate turf, inventing the famous 'Giandujotti', the symbol of a sweet-toothed city. Numerous pastry shops produce homemade 'tourinot' (nut chocolate mignon shapes that weigh only 2 grams); creams; pralines; alpines; marrons glaces and truffles.

With my penchant for discovery, I found two famed outlets particularly

irresistible. Peyrano Cioccolato, where Signor Antonio Peyrano explained how his chocolates are the products of original mixtures, and Gattodolcione, a huge shop brimful with several top-quality chocolate products and local specialities like truffles, hazelnuts, and bars under the watchful eye of Signor Sergio Arzilli.

All this gastronomy history apart, being the Italian wine capital hasn't harmed Torino's interests either. Rich and full-bodied reds, and sparkling, full-flavoured whites predominate. You can sample the best Piemontese labels, accompanied with 'grissini' (bread sticks) with cheese. With its stunning hall, pillars, domed roof, and spotless linen, Arcadia, (Italian

Restaurant & Sushi Bar), is quite the place to frequent, and I recommend 'Riso con pollo e verdure' (chicken with mixed vegetables and rice) and 'Misto vegetariano' (mixed vegetables), washed down with Pedovena Beer.

All this apart, my yearning for Indian food was also pleasantly fulfilled, thanks to Red Fort. Sporting a Rajasthani and Mughal décor and Indian music, this upscale Indian eatery is the brainchild of the enigmatic, India-conscious Dr. Paolo Powdi. With 130 covers, with different floors featuring different themes, this is where you go for Tandoori Chicken, Raan, Mixed Pakoras, and Indian breads.

Enhanced by famous designers like Pininfarina, Bertone and Giugiaro setting up studios in the city, local shopping is typically thematic and elegant with a distinct Italian taste. The classic shopping area, Via Roma, features outlets of famed brand names. And via Garibaldi, a mile-long pedestrian street, features dozens of upscale boutiques. Via Po and the area around the Mole Antonelliana and the University area are a touch more intellectual with antique bookshops, record shops, and clothes. For more fancy goods, try Belle Epoque in Venaria; Radadan 'n Piassa in Moncalieri; and the Mercantico in Carmagnola. For casual shopping, there's Porta Palazzo and Balon where stallholders have been plying their trade since the middle of the 19th Century.

Artists and art thrive in the streets and under the arcades, and some 40 museums satisfy the passions. In the magnificently restored Rivoli Castle is the Museum of Contemporary Art, Italy's foremost. Second in importance only to Cairo's, the Egyptian Museum contains over 30,000 pieces that narrate 5,000 years of history through art, religion and daily life in the time of the pharaohs. Located in the same building, the Sabauda Gallery houses the work of Piedmontese artists, Tuscan and Venetian masterpieces, and Flemish and Dutch paintings. The GAM includes temporary shows and also permanent collections, with works of Picasso, Chagall, and Modigliani.



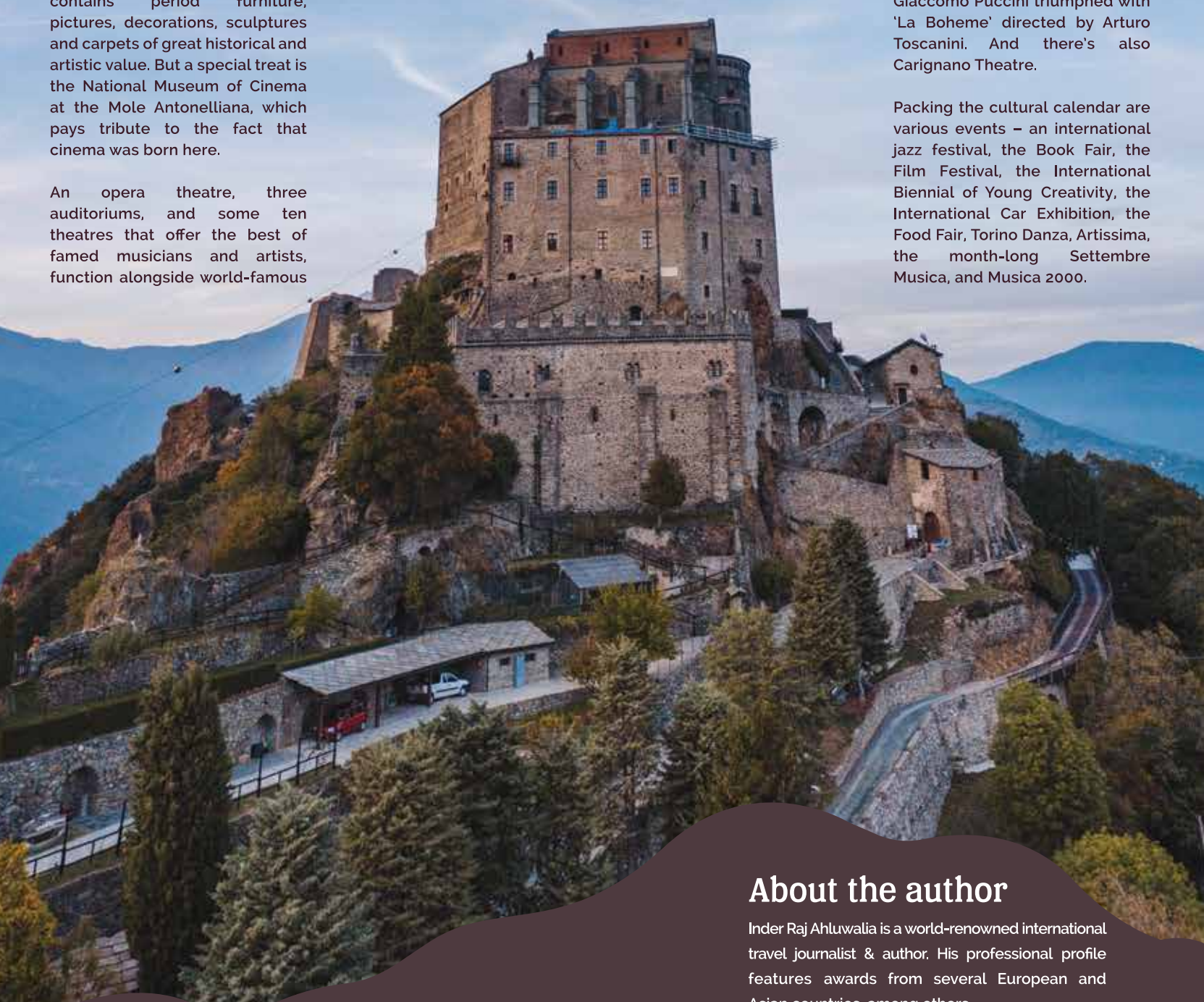
TRAVEL THERAPY

This is Italy, and there is a National Automobile Museum. The Museum of Decorative Art contains period furniture, pictures, decorations, sculptures and carpets of great historical and artistic value. But a special treat is the National Museum of Cinema at the Mole Antonelliana, which pays tribute to the fact that cinema was born here.

An opera theatre, three auditoriums, and some ten theatres that offer the best of famed musicians and artists, function alongside world-famous

concert halls like the modern Auditorium of Lingotto and the Regio Theatre wherein 1896 Giacomo Puccini triumphed with 'La Boheme' directed by Arturo Toscanini. And there's also Carignano Theatre.

Packing the cultural calendar are various events – an international jazz festival, the Book Fair, the Film Festival, the International Biennial of Young Creativity, the International Car Exhibition, the Food Fair, Torino Danza, Artissima, the month-long Settembre Musica, and Musica 2000.



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.



The Facts

- Torino is connected with several European air hubs.
- Accommodation is wide-ranging and diverse.
- The city is a jump-off point for exploring Piemonte Region, an odyssey of fine wining and dining and close look at prime local products that just happen to be chocolates, cheeses and wines.





Moksha Luxury Stays

Consortium of jewels

Moksha Luxury Stays is a brand that is unique, full of character and at the same time comes with a flavour of the local community in their properties. Sejo Jose, Founder, Moksha Luxury Stays talks about this distinct luxury brand...

- Bharti Sharma

The pandemic was a baffling time for almost every industry, but the tourism industry took the hardest blow. The lockdowns and scare of the pandemic kept people away from travelling. However, with things gradually opening up people wanted to go out on holidays but at the same time they were jittery about being infected with the virus while visiting the property during their stay. Sejo used to get a lot of enquiries for exclusive accommodation but with all the luxuries of a five-star hotel. Simultaneously, there were inventories of extremely luxurious service villas that were looking for customers, which prompted him to launch 'Moksha Luxury Stays'.

Sejo, who's always been extremely particular about the minutest details when it comes to dealing with customers, has developed Moksha with a lot of enthusiasm. He shares, "We at Perfect Hands Solutions (technology company which provides back-end software to hotels) realised the disconnect between the customers and suppliers. Keeping this in mind, we started a brand called 'Moksha Luxury Stays'. This brand caters to the customers seeking exclusive luxury stays in the most exotic locations with a great experience. The other inducement to enrol with Moksha is the personalised feature of a chef, trained in multiple cuisines

so guests can satisfy their gastronomic desires during their stay in the villas. A pool always adds to the luxury quotient of the property, when paired with local activities makes for the perfect holiday one would look forward to."

Customers are the guest of the host village and not just the villa

What are the key attributes that set boutique hotels apart from regular properties? Well, if guest preferences are to be accounted for, the intimacy, independent spirit and personalised services offered by boutique hotels are distinctive features liked by travellers and Moksha Luxury Stays

is all about exclusivity and service with a personal touch. Sejo emphasises on such personalised experiences as he tells, "Our teams are primarily from the same locality the properties are situated in, and as such the local flavour can be observed in the hospitality and also effective in showcasing the destination better. We aim at making our customers the guests of that village and not just the villa. The team will keep the guest informed about the festivals or celebrations such as marriage, ensuring each and every guest feels at home. And while we make them feel at home, we pamper them with different cuisines and the guests also have an option of



curating their own cuisine. We ensure the presentation of food, rooms, and common area is as per their requirement. These, I believe, are the reasons why we have many repeat guests."

Experiences that can't be bought

Though Sejoie considers luxury as an important element for any accommodation he believes that making a guest feel at home makes the biggest difference. Elucidating his thoughts, he further shares, "In most cases, we introduce our guests to different dance forms and indulge them in various activities, but imagine the excitement when a friend invites the guests to be part of the village or the guests getting their faces painted and actually be a part of the kathakali community while planning to watch the Kathakali dance. Imagine, tagging along the neighbour fisherman as they go fishing into the backwaters and bringing back the catch of the day. These local and cultural feels are experiences that are priceless and one will never forget during their stay at any of the Moksha property."

Where every property is all soul

The brand 'Moksha Luxury Stays' will have the standard maintained in terms of cuisines, luxury, and service across properties. In other words, if a guest visits any of the Moksha properties they will know what to expect. Sejoie adds, "Any big hotel brand you choose is for the reason

that one is 100 per cent sure about what to expect in terms of luxury, cuisine and service. Presently, we have a good inflow of domestic tourists at our properties and there are more referral customers as it's like a lifestyle now. The moment the international market opens, we expect a big jump in the business. We have already started getting bookings from the top inbound tour operators of India booking our properties for their guests."

Spreading wings

Presently, Moksha Stays has its properties only in Kerala. In the first stage of expansion, they plan to expand to the rest of India and then move to a few neighbouring countries. Sharing some exciting expansion plans, Sejoie tells, "We want the world to know we are not just another vacation rental but a brand which provides private exclusive stays without compromising on luxury and are responsible to the society. Like we always say, we would like to be responsible to our destination as well as to our travellers."



Sejoie Jose



TRAVELBULLZ FORAYS INTO THE DOMESTIC MARKET WITH DESTINATION INDIA

TravelBullz now brings speed, instant confirmations and transparency to the whole booking experience for domestic B2B partners. Shalini Nair, Founding Member & Director- Global Operations & Product Development, TravelBullz talks about the brand's newly launched portfolio, 'Destination India.'

- Team Turtle



Change is the only constant thing in the world, and only the ones susceptible to change can keep things rolling. Adapting to changing trends and responding with appropriate strategising is the key to sustaining and succeeding in the current scenario. Being one of the most innovative travel companies in India, TravelBullz realised that there is a vacuum in the domestic stage and thus a need for a national level player is of paramount importance, a DMC for India covering all regions of the country and selling India as a destination to fellow domestic agents as well as agents across the world. Conceptualising the idea further, TravelBullz added 'Destination India' in its product portfolio for the b2b travel fraternity.

Exploring India like never before

Giving a glance at this exciting portfolio, Shalini asserts, "Imagine having an experience of booking a Kerala or a Kashmir package dynamically selecting your own choice of hotel, your own choice of vehicle and your own choice of activities at your pace of nights in each city and making the booking with a confirmation instantly. It's magical!"

With an exponential reach to over 14,000+ agents in India and 64 different nationalities as global distribution, TravelBullz possesses the distribution and reach to grow India domestic and inbound business. Taking this into consideration, they have now started working on five destinations in the first phase and plan to expand to a few more. These five destinations are Kerala, Rajasthan, Himachal, Jammu & Kashmir and North East.

Sharing details on the same, Shalini adds, "India domestic and inbound business has been traditionally offline, with regional companies (some of them doing quite well) specialising in some parts of India distributing their products to a limited number of agents in specific markets."

What's in the kitty?

TravelBullz has launched its first package with WelcomHeritage Elysium, Shimla which includes a one-way helicopter ride, something never been tried in the past in the Indian domestic market. Sharing details on the package, she tells, "The launch package with WelcomHeritage Elysium, Shimla was a first of its kind package in the Indian domestic market. Who could have thought one can fly to Shimla for a Holiday? WelcomeHeritage Elysium Hotel is a brand new hotel in Shimla and TravelBullz wanted to create a unique product that complements the luxury holiday experience the resort has to offer."

World-class user experience

Offline is still the most preferable mode of booking experiences by agents currently, which is both time-consuming and opaque. With the help of technology, TravelBullz brings all available options under one roof, thus acting as a one-stop shop for Domestic/Inbound travellers in India with the most competitive prices for all hotels, tours, transfers and package option. Shalini further tells, "Our agent partners will be able to book multi-city, multi-state packages with

one click and instant confirmation without having to call various hotel/vendors. Currently, the domestic product is very fragmented at a regional level and the focus is to make all hotels, transfers, tours and multi-city packages available at the most competitive prices under one login for the b2b agents. The Dynamic Packaging Module will play a big role in how the b2b fraternity makes bookings for the domestic product and is expected to be a game-changer."

Connecting suppliers to buyers seamlessly

TravelBullz is not leaving anything to chance and definitely not sticking to one end of the rope. Apart from the destinations, TravelBullz has also signed up with hotel chains wherewith products such as WelcomHeritage, ITC, Oberoi and other chain hotels they would focus on serving city hotels and transportation demands for SME and MSME travel within India and at the same time work with chain hotels to market leisure properties. "TravelBullz marketplace allows all regional, local operators in India to showcase their products on www.travelbullz.com and reach out to agents worldwide at zero cost. It's one of the key projects which would connect suppliers to buyers seamlessly and at no cost. With new products and destinations getting onto the package module, the agents and travel partners will be able to book a multi-city and multi-state itinerary with one click with instant confirmation and vouchers online," concludes Shalini ■



AVIAREPS India

Augmenting results with a generative approach

Being a global company with representation in over 45 countries, the future certainly holds bright for AVIAREPS India, as they bring to the forefront global experience coupled with strong local expertise. Ellona Pereira, Head, AVIAREPS India shares how they produce, develop and implement, strategic and effective plans for their illustrious portfolio of clients.

- **Bharti Sharma**



Committed to achieving tangible results and long-term commercial value for the clients, AVIAREPS is always listening, learning and evolving. The Lord Commander at AVIAREPS, Ellona has a hands-on approach and ushers passion and drive to all client activity. Talking about the parameters while designing campaigns and driving solutions for the brands in India market, she shares, "It is true that India has been perceived as a lucrative outbound market but in the same breadth this market is complex, diverse and requires a focused approach. Therefore, we try our level best to tailor our marketing strategies and tourism offering to local preferences. With regards to ensuring that our clients get that much-needed exposure in the market, we undertake a host of year-round activities such as organising destination workshops for our trade partners, media partners and prospective travellers, conducting product training as well as participation in leading domestic travel trade shows."

Eyes and ears of the clients in the India market

AVIAREPS manages to engage with all relevant stakeholders by ensuring open channels of communications related to regular travel updates as well as travel guidelines for the countries, which they represent apart from conducting regular webinars and events for the b2b market. Ellona continues to be cautiously optimistic for a super quick recovery, as the outbound travel scenario remains plagued with global travel restrictions. She says,

"As a representation company, we are closely monitoring the situation as far as the economic growth is concerned, since this will be the key driver of outbound tourism. At the moment, the projected economic growth of the country is encouraging; this will give a positive boost to the middle class resulting in increased wealth and disposable incomes. Another core group that will contribute to the industry's growth story and which we should capitalise upon is India's dynamic young population, who have an irresistible inclination towards travelling abroad. On similar lines, we also keep our clients regularly updated on the situation in India with clear market insights.

A top of mind brand recall

It is a well-known fact that tourism is vital for the success of many economies around the world as the sector is a key generator of foreign exchange. Moreover, there are many governments that rely solely on tourism for a majority percentage of revenue. And, while different countries may have different reasons for opening up tourism promotion offices, Ellona does believe that the core reason is to create a top of mind brand recall when presenting the 'country' as a preferred tourism destination. "The representation offices managed with local expertise not only strengthens the relationships with the key trade and media partners directly involved in the outbound tourist market and thereby contribute to better development of the tourist supply and in creating new tourist products of the destination," feels Ellona.

Early adopters of new ideas

Using its in-house developed virtual platform, AVIAREPS organised a one of a kind 3D virtual exhibition and networking event for their clients during the lockdown. This sanctioned their reach to exponentially larger audiences thereby proving to be a powerful tool for them to promote their destination clients. Ellona believes that in the coming months many tourism boards will be developing their very own technology platform that gives information on local tourism business offerings, apart from online training modules related to travel trade certification.

Sharing the experience on how the past two years have affected the industry and their segment, she asserts, "The last two years have been super challenging for us. However, in midst of this temporary paralysis, it was amazing to witness sudden acceptance and acceleration in the digital transformation process of the local travel and trade. This development gave us a clear indication that we needed to organise a virtual initiative that would allow us to create a strong relationship between the visitor and the destination."

What future holds?

Ellona prefers to stay optimistic about the future and believes that the vaccination drive is the key to recouping the tourism industry. She adds, "I believe that by Q3 of this year, we should witness a positive phase for the travel sector and India will once again become a preferred source market. In spite of the uncertainties ushered in by the pandemic, on a positive note, just last year we secured a five-year tourism representation contract for the Utah Office of Tourism."





Exemplary hospitality with Trully India

Trully India is known to manage several luxurious properties located in serene locations. With a world-class range of services, blissful stays, adventurous camping and dream weddings, it has an expanse of offerings. Naresh Arora, Founder & CEO, Trully India Hotels & Resorts, over the year has been committed to delivering an exceptional experience to the guests.

- Sudipta Saha

Trully India is established as a reputed hotel management brand that continues to deliver top-notch hospitality infused with mesmerising experiences to guests. The Covid-era has been a challenging situation for almost everyone, but post covid, travel seems to pick up, sharing on the same, Naresh Arora says, "The market is picking up gradually, and now people have started to make travel plans again, and this year we will be seeing a lot of student groups, corporate groups and a lot of destination weddings."

The year 2022 has come as a year of opportunities and hope. The market sounds optimistic, and Trully India is determined to unknot the new ways for growth. "The expectations are

high for the year 2022, and we are expecting some good business and just hoping not to be affected by more variants of the virus. We are also expecting the inbound market to open soon, and with the international tourist arrivals, we could grow between 30 and 78 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021. While that sounds like a significant improvement, it would still be more than 50 per cent below pre-pandemic levels," shares Naresh Arora.

We need to understand that several destinations survive only on tourism, and domestic tourism has been a game-changer in the post-pandemic era. A phenomenon growth in domestic tourism has been witnessed, speaking on the same line, Naresh Arora says,

"The domestic business has been phenomenal, we have seen more domestic travellers than ever from 2020 people have started to realise the real beauty within India, and they intend to explore India like never before. We witnessed a higher demand in the region of Kumbhalgarh and Jaisalmer."

Another segment that picked up was the wedding market and an upsurge in destination weddings was noticed as well. Trully India hotels and resorts are located in beautiful locations and offer luxurious accommodations, services and facilities making it an apt for destination weddings. "The wedding market has been delightful as we have some of the best properties in terms of large

inventories, beautiful locations, multiple venues and popular destinations, and also we can cater to multiple crowds from people planning mid-scale weddings to a big fat wedding," adds Naresh Arora. Some of the popular properties for destination weddings are The Jai Bagh, Jaipur, The Amargarh, Udaipur, The Udai Bagh, Udaipur, The Desert Palace, Jaisalmer, The Kumbha Bagh, Kumbhalgarh, The Kumbha residency, Kumbhalgarh.

Providing services in the hospitality industry for a long time, Trully India is planning to cover the Rajasthan region in the coming months and will be coming up with properties in Pushkar and Jawai, and is also planning to focus more on destination weddings.





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REPORT



NEW PLACES AND FACES:

81 PER CENT
OF
INDIAN TRAVELLERS
WANT TO MEET
NEW PEOPLE
ON A VACATION



I love you



XOXO

The year 2022 will be the year to make the most of unpredictability, as the world continues to tide through the uncertainties of the pandemic. With the season of love upon us, Booking.com's Travel Predictions 2022 research revealed that 2022 will be the time for Indian travellers to branch out and make some new connections.

Swipe right on new faces and places

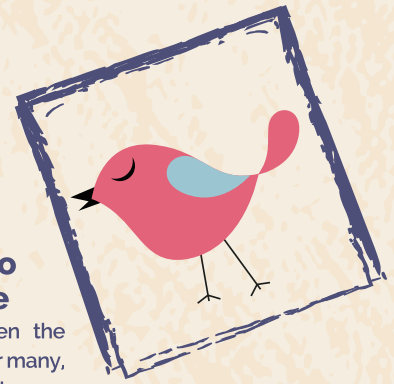
Tired of swiping through the same faces for the past year and a half, people will also be making use of their favourite dating apps while on vacay in 2022 with travel providing an exciting opportunity to find love. Booking.com's research predicts a resurgence of holiday romances, with 77 per cent of Indian travellers hoping for one on their next trip. In fact, the research also reveals that 74 per cent of Indian travellers would want to stay somewhere close to plenty of nightlife options so that they can meet new people. While a vacation can act as a starting point for holiday romance, it doesn't have to stop when parting ways at the end of the trip thanks to video calls becoming part of our everyday lives. This implies that we expect to see more than a few of these holiday romances turn into the real deal.

Travel as a means to expand social circle

Meeting new people is often the starting point of romances. For many, the pandemic meant spending an extended and intense period with our closest friends and loved ones, giving limited facetime with new people. In 2022, we expect to see travellers using their vacations as an opportunity to expand their usual social circles, with 81 per cent of Indian travellers wanting to meet new people while away. Furthermore, 77 per cent of Indian travellers look forward to socializing while on vacation in order to expand their social circles.

As Valentine's Day draws closer, Booking.com data** shows that Indian travellers are travelling to leisure destinations like Goa, Jaipur, Manali and Udaipur besides metros from 11th to 14th February 2022 to celebrate. Hotels emerged as the most booked accommodation type during this time followed by resorts and guest houses.

Ritu Mehrotra, Regional Manager, South Asia at Booking.com said, "The pandemic has forced us to rearrange our priorities in life and realize that freedom has never been more precious than it is now. In 2022, we will not only see travellers reconnecting with friends and family but also actively seeking out new relationships, as shared in our Travel Predictions 2022 research. As travellers set out to explore new relationships and meet new people while away, Booking.com will be there to make it easier for them to reclaim their travel mojo and enjoy all of the unforgettable experiences travel has to offer."



Celebrating unity with colours the festival of Holi!

Smokes of colours, cheeks shining with rainbow colours, the festival of Holi is the perfect kick start to an amazing lit year.

- Tripi Jain





Splashing rainbow colours over each other's faces, and celebrating with hugs and laughs. An Indian Festival celebrated in March is the start of festivities for the year. The festival of colours is one of the most awaited festivals in the country and is celebrated by Hindus all over the country. The festival takes you back to your childhood and is enjoyed by everyone. Hugely celebrated across North India, the traditional festivities start one day prior when you can smell delicious savouries being cooked at home. Marking the win of good over evil, this festival has a pretty interesting mythological story.

The Legend goes!

The colourful festival of Holi spans over two days and marks the beginning of spring. On the first day, known as the day of 'HolikaDahan', fire is lit marking the victory of truth over evil. The second day is 'Phag' when the actual Holi is celebrated with vibrant colours and water. The festival bridges the gap between people of different communities and age groups and people hug each other while smearing each other's faces with colours.

The stories about Holi as told in every Indian household by ancestors'

talk about Hiranyakashyap, who was a mighty demon who beat the gods and became the master of the universe. He had a son named Prahalad. Prahalad was hated by his father as Prahalad was a devotee of Lord Vishnu, one of the most worshipped gods among Hindus. It is said that Prahalad was confronted many times by his father for worshipping Vishnu. The king decided to kill Prahalad. So he further decided to ask his soldiers to throw Prahalad off a cliff and get him crushed by elephants. There were many more such antics that were used by Hiranyakashyap. Unfortunately, all his attempts to kill Prahalad went in vain. After many failed attempts, Hiranyakashyap thought of a master plan and called his sister Holika. Holika was blessed by gods in a way that she was immune to fire, that she wouldn't get burned. Hiranyakashyap asked her to kill his child. Holika initially hesitated to kill Prahalad but agreed when forced. One day Holika held Prahalad in her lap and sat in the middle of the fire. But to everybody's amazement, a miracle happened and Prahalad was saved. This marked as the win of good over evil and from then was celebrated with colours and happiness.





Let the celebration begin

Although Holi is a Hindu festival, not many religious practices are attached to the festival. To celebrate the victory of good over evil, bonfires are lit on the first day of the festival and a dummy of Holika is burnt. The festival is welcomed by everyone in great spirits which involves a lot of singing and dancing. People also make sweets and greet each other with hugs after the Holika is burnt. They smear colour on each other's faces wishing them a prosperous and healthy year. Holi is celebrated with much joy in North India and the Holi of Mathura is extremely famous. It starts a week before the actual festival and attracts enthusiastic travellers from far off places.

The morning of Holi is awaited by much anticipation especially by kids. They prepare to be the first ones to attack their family and friends with water balloons and coloured water guns. It is a tradition to wish the elders of the family a traditional Tika and take their blessing for the coming year. The morning of Holi in almost every Indian house kicks off with food music and colours. You will find the youngsters face and hair drenched in colours cruising around on their bikes and open jeeps zooming around cities. In the noon when everyone is done with colours, comes the time of food that has been specially prepared. People on this day usually have sweets and many even drink bhang.

Diversified but unified Holi

The best part about this festival is the unity. Holi brings everyone together, it is said to be the festival that makes bonds. Another interesting thing about the festival is that it is celebrated differently in all parts of India.

• Holi with Flowers in Mathura

The best place to visit during Holi is in Mathura, the birthplace of Lord Krishna and Vrindavan where he spent this childhood. These cities are a road trip away from Delhi. There is an old custom carried on for generations that celebrates Holi with flowers. The streets of Mathura are lathered with flower petals on this day.

• Lathmaar Holi of Barsana

In Barsana and Nandgaon, one can witness the famous Lath Maar Holi, where the women greet the men by playfully hurling sticks (lath). The significance of this dates back to Radha and Krishna, where Krishna use to visit Radha and her friends in Barsana and play Holi with them.

• Buttermilk Holi in Maharashtra

In the south, especially Maharashtra the people have a unique way of celebrating the festival by breaking Matkis or a bowl of buttermilk by hanging it high in the air. They have different teams and make human pyramids and compete against each other. Holi is the festival that not only pump up the excitement amongst kids but also brings the child out in adults.



Hunger games

An Indian festival is only complete when every house is bustling with sweets and food. It is a common tradition to make sweet ghujiyas, and drink bhang. A lot of people are hungover by the fun and frolic of the day and make their way to their beds for a sound sleep after scrubbing themselves for hours. Not to forget the famous savouries that are specially cooked days before the festivities. You can spot the people days after Holi with pink and blue stained faces which makes it pretty evident that they had a blast during the festival. The festival that brings everyone together marks the start of summers for the Indians.





La Place Sarovar Portico- Lucknow, Achingly authentic and infinitely charming

A brilliant location and pampering service that gives you a taste of true Lucknowi 'mehmaan nawazi' is what makes La Place Sarovar Portico an ideal choice for travellers. Rahul Sharma, General Manager, La Place Sarovar Portico- Lucknow talks about the plans for the year ahead.

- Team TT

Tell us about the hotel in terms of rooms, f&b outlets and the other elite offerings?

Little away from Hazartganj, the hotel is located right in the heart of the city. The 50 well-appointed rooms are equipped to cater to every need of business and leisure travellers. The hotel offers a range of business and leisure facilities and innovative food and beverage concepts make the hotel versatile. The hotel offers 2 banquet halls and 2 boardrooms which effortlessly cater to any event big or small, corporate or personal.

What's your outlook on the year ahead? Can you please shed some light on the growth/ marketing strategy for this year?

For the Year 2022, we expect things to remain subdued for the month of Jan-March 2022. However, on a positive note, we expect a decent recovery from April onwards and expect it to be better than pre-pandemic levels.

With more people getting vaccinated every passing day, we expect things to normalize by April and expect good business for the rooms and food & beverages.

How important in your opinion is the regional factor, giving a local feel based on the region's taste, preference and culture?

Yes, it's a very important aspect of the hospitality business. We need to have a local flavour as guests travelling from different parts of the country would like to have local flavours. At La Place Sarovar Portico, Lucknow we have put in Chiken Fabric on the Head Boards and Jali Wark near the window which is typical of Lucknow and gives a room very local Lucknow feel.

How has the domestic market fared for La Place Sarovar Portico, Lucknow both in terms of business prospects and customer response?

For us, about 95 Percent of business is driven by domestic travellers. Lucknow is a fast emerging city for IT

and ITES Services, TCS, HCL already has their presence in the city and many more companies are coming in the defence manufacturing, retail, solar power generation and so on. The city has also emerged as a popular destination for film, OTT platforms and sports destinations. From this year, we have an IPL team featuring in IPL & if everything goes well we shall have the IPL matches being held along with many sports events are being organised, such as International Level Badminton Tournament, Hockey India Leaguer, Kabaddi League and with new ATAL stadium IPL and international T 20 matches are being held in the City. We expect Lucknow to grow in all aspects be it business, sporting evenings, film shooting or people visiting religious towns around Lucknow. Lucknow as a city has a rich history and Offer -CCC ie Cuisine, Culture and Crafts.

According to you, how important is f&b for the growth of a hotel?

F&B is very important for the growth

of the hotel as both the room and f&b business goes hand in hand. f&b also drives your room business. We plan food and beverage promotions every month for our guests. At present, we have Sizzlers Food Promotion going on. Hotels banqueting will be core for growth of the business, as far as restaurant hotels will get stiff competition from Stand Alone restaurants from Local as well as established restaurant chains.

Anything interesting/developments to mention about the property from your perspective?

We are the first hotel in Lucknow to Install Photo Voltaic Power Plant. This would certainly help us to save energy costs thereby reducing the carbon footprints. We are also reducing our usage of Plastic in the Hotel. This further will help us to reduce our waste in the hotel. In Terms of Food and Beverage, we are contemplating redoing our Terrace Grill Restaurant in the coming months.



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IATO expresses its deep disappointment over being overlooked in the budget

IATO expresses deep sense of despair on the FM completely ignoring in her budget speech the plight of the tourism sector and not announcing any sop for the sector when it has borne the maximum brunt of pandemic.

An extension of the loan under ECLGS has been announced, but it is of no use for the inbound tour operators as they are not able to pay EMIs of the loan they have already taken. Besides banks are not providing fresh loans to the tour operators until they clear their previous loans. Further the loans are not being given to tour operators who have taken loans under ECLGS 1 and 3.

According to Rajiv Mehra, President IATO, "We had requested one time grant based on our 2019-20 turnover, reduction in GST, restoration and enhancement of SEIS benefit, reducing taxes on International airfares and overall reduction of taxes on Hospitality sector. Most disappointingly none of these found mention in the budget presented".

Mehra adds, "There has been huge employment loss besides financial loss in our sector. Just few years ago we were earning huge foreign exchange for the government and in this hour of despair we expected some handholding by the government. We sincerely believe the government would consider some substantial relief in the supplementary demands."

Air India finally back home after 7 decades is a historic moment for Indian aviation: TAAI President

The Tata Group on January 26, 2022, regained ownership of Air India, 69 years after the airline was nationalised. The handover has come as a culmination of the government's attempt to transfer the ownership of the loss making airline to a private owner. The airline never made profit since its merger with Indian Airlines in 2007-08 and reported a loss of INR 7,017 crore in FY21.

Speaking on the ownership by the Tata Group, Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI extended her heartiest wishes to the group and said that the acquisition gives Tatas 100 per cent

ownership in Air India, its low cost subsidiary Air India Express and 50 per cent stake in ground handling firm AISATS. "It was more of an emotional connection so to speak, the group was keen on Air India for a long time if we go by the reports. The financial sweetener allowed them to take over the airlines with the right kind of debt," Mayal said.

"With Air India and Air India Express, the TATA Group now has four airlines and around 23 per cent market share, becoming the second largest operator in the domestic sector behind IndiGo. It is the largest player on international routes and the only Indian carrier on long haul routes like Europe and USA," she added.

FAITH pitches for commercial flights operations in full strength

FAITH has called for allowing operations of commercial flights in full strength to and fro from India to enable tourist arrival in the country and help the sector recover from the impact of the pandemic. The Indian inbound and outbound travel industry has been shut for the past 23 months, Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality

(FAITH) said in a statement.

In the pre-COVID year of 2019-20, the Indian travel industry had received almost 10.9 million foreign tourists and almost USD 30 billion in revenue and was engaged in travel planning for almost 26.9 million outbound travellers from India, it added.

"Both of those two lines of businesses have been completely closed, rendering huge distress, unemployment and financial burden on employees and enterprises of the Indian travel industry in the absence of that work," FAITH said.

A lot of countries have now opened or have announced opening up their borders to fully vaccinated travellers with the impact of Omicron subsiding, it added.

The industry body said it has asked Ministry of Tourism to take up with Ministry of Health for the same and announce the opening up of borders and "resumption of full commercial flights with zero quarantine to fully vaccinated travellers across all Indian ports".



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APPOINTMENTS



IRIS Reps

Sandeep Raghav has been appointed as Business Development Director at IRIS Reps. Bringing over 20 years of experience in the industry and an expert in business development for leisure packages, corporate travel management, outbound leisure tour and M.I.C.E. He has successfully strategized, co-created and executed business for brands like Marriott International, Conrad Maldives, Frasers Hospitality, Accor Group, Jumeirah Hotels. His role in IRIS Reps will be to acquire new accounts and also handle and sustain the existing portfolios for IRIS Reps.

The Westin Goa

A seasoned and accomplished professional, Devika James joins The Westin Goa with 15 years of adept experience in the hospitality industry. Known to be a person who is constantly striving towards delivering excellent quality and enriching customer service, Devika in her new role will focus on developing and implementing sales and marketing strategies for the hotel. Devika James, joins the hotel from Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa and has a proven track record in planning and implementing effective business development strategies, forming revenue enhancement tactics along with managing staff and developing skills. In addition to enforcing these responsibilities, Devika will continue delivering profits to the stake holders.



Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport

Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport has announced the elevation of Anuj Sooin as Director of Operations. Reporting to the General Manager, Anuj Sooin will be responsible for overseeing the performance and strategic direction of operational departments. A proven industry leader in hotel food and beverage operations for more than 15 years. Anuj joined the RHG family as the Director of Food & beverages in 2018. Anuj has created memorable dining experiences for travellers and locals while boosting operating efficiencies of its food-and-beverage options in Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport.

IRIS Reps

Harish Acharya has been appointed as Executive Director at IRIS Reps. With over two decades of experience in Travel and Hotel Industry, his expertise lies in Marketing and Sales, multi-tasking, Product handling, Public relations with a vast network in industry. In the past he has managed Sales and Business development with leading organisations such as Accor group, Venetian, Marina Bay Sands, Jetair, VFS, Le Meridien and Cox and Kings. With us his prime focus and responsibility will be for developing, executing and sustaining IRIS Reps product strategy and ensuring the real value for the brand.

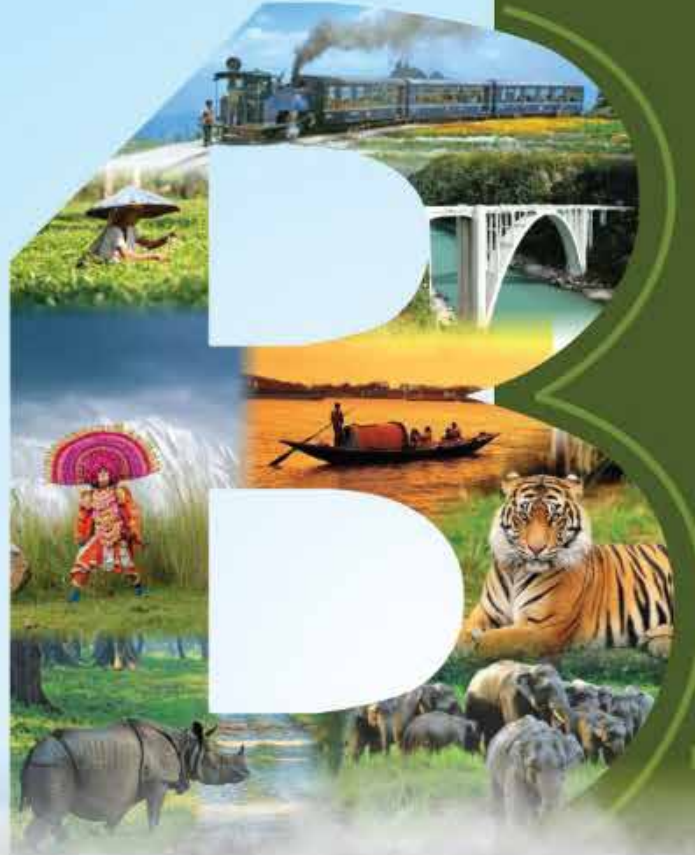


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What Kitty Did?

- Trisha Bora

Just as soulfully a group of women connect in club bathroom after two pitchers of Long Island is how you would connect with Ketaki Roy aka Kitty in this book.

- **Sharmistha Sadhukhan**

A struggling young adult figuring out boss's whims, career, men along with broke account and flute full of wine is a classic case of adulthood that struck us like a thunder in dessert... unexpectedly and with no choice but to endure it.

Kitty takes you out for long drunk nights at Cafe Terra, then to a night-escapade with a fifty-something Ronny Verma that end with a walk of shame on a windy winter morning.

Trisha Bora's a tongue-in-cheek eye-roll of a novel about upper-class New Delhi is seen through the eyes of Kitty, who is an English literature graduate turned journalist and floundering from one drunken night to the office to the next drunken night. She works at a fashion magazine

called Poise squirming at the stories she must write ('10 ways to lose belly fat'). Kitty is extremely grateful for the paycheque that buys her bottles of vinegar-like wine every month.

It almost feels surreal on how similar all our lives are that when you stumble upon a book like this you question the sensibility of the entire women community in terms of the crippling love life and hay-wired career choices. Kitty isn't your usual clumsy, glasses-wearing, sports-loving cliched introvert heroine. Her faults and scrapes are painfully real and relatable.

Kitty is in Delhi, living away from her social butterfly Mother Mala. Her family, in her words, is "completely and totally bonkers." Her mother is enjoying a second lease of life after a brief stint at the hospital which involves everything from French men to hash brownies. Her father is a timid professor who doesn't get out much. Kitty has a close-knit group of friends, all of

whom are dysfunctional in their own way.

Sliding in and out of her life is an ex-boyfriend (well! We all got one such kind) who cheated on her, nicknamed Scum. There is a six-foot, serious man called Kabir – we will have to wait and see what becomes of him. With this colourful cluster of characters, Bora explores Delhi from the eyes of Delhiwallah's and Delhites.

As new students, Kitty and her friends explore old Delhi through food, old havelis, Ghalib's memories and Karim's famous mutton curry.

Her friends Reza, Naz and Adi are just the perfect combos of chaos sans any calm in her story. All these ingredients cook up this story where you visit lanes of Lajpat Nagar to reach Kitty's office which by the way she is always late to and let's say just as every other boss in the world are, her boss Kamini is no different when she taunts her publicly... Everyday without fail!

Kitty's mundane life however suddenly finds an explosive curveball when she is assigned a big story at work – write a profile of the recently deceased actress Roxanne Merchant. Kitty sets up meetings in Delhi's Amrita Shergill Marg and Meherchand Market as she interviews the rich and the powerful in Roxanne's life. And before she knows, kitty is sneaking into Roxanne's

Bungalow, walking through lanes of Delhi investigating and unravelling the murder mystery of Roxanne initiated by one of her friends. While all this is on, Kitty explores different cafes and enjoys French dinners and romantic picnics with Kabir at Humayun Tomb.

There is a particularly hilarious takedown by Kitty of a Delhi restaurant called Indie Accent that serves 'Burrata papdi chaat with a tamarind champagne brew' and "tandoori duck with wasabi malai'.

The narrative smoothly entails multiple high points like kitty getting fired from her job, managing unruly curls (I mean this really is a herculean task.. no kidding!) and drunk texts to Scum because of complete lapse of judgement.

Amidst this chaos, Kitty does find her calm in Kabir. Trisha's writing is simple and yet captivating, to keep you hooked to the book. She takes you for a smooth ride from Khan Market to Sheikh Sarai to Maharani Bagh and Lodhi Road.

Delhi is like a complete Punjabi family, it has its own quirks of mystery and history to it, but nevertheless, it is still home to us and our dreams, and this book just reminds us the same.

Bonus:

Kabir is a six feet cheesecake with Nutella topping, with all that non-cliche hero things going in and around him.

Established over almost 22 years ago, the company has emerged to be a leading Inbound Travel Management company reaching out to the discerning travelers from continents across the globe. Personalized service, luxurious accommodation at attractive prices and informed guidance are the company's forte. With a humble beginning in the first few years of its operations, the clientele has grown impressively to over 8000 international guest base annually, today. The **extensive experience of the travel business of its director** adds to the quality, style and exclusivity of all services which the company offers.

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