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*Rajasthan*

Deriving and integrating tourism potential

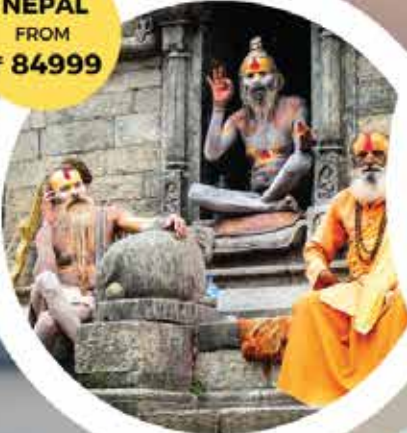


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# W Editor's Letter

With travel in our DNA, the word that kept cycling through our brain all this while was - Incomplete. We all were 'incomplete' human beings as the most important part of our lives was missing. Throughout our evolution we have been travellers, migrating with seasons, just like 'Turtles' on the planet. Whatever journeys we've had, they all were so essential to our souls. We, the travellers became honoured in cultures spanning the globe because there is a universal understanding of the necessity and exposure of travel.

Our event-hopping is back, I am changing suitcases for travel one journey to another, 'what else are we here for? We've covered the lengths of 'luxury travel', one of the most crucial markets for the recovery of economies today. It's the culture of a place, and thereby its people, that attract tourists. To begin with, is there a better example than Rajasthan when we talk about culture? We're discussing the fundamentals of NYC & Co, the exciting history and charms of Monaco. The magnificent travel destinations are all set to captivate the travel connoisseurs, we went on an opulent stay at St. Regis Mumbai. The cuisines, architecture and the calm lifestyle seem to have accompanied us to Sri Lanka.

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

Happy Reading!

**Bharti Sharma**  
Editor

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







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## **TAAI postpones its 66th Convention, which was scheduled in Colombo, Sri Lanka to a future date**



This is to update on the 66th Convention & Exhibition of TAAI, which was scheduled to be held from 19-22 April 2022, in Colombo Sri Lanka, which has been postponed. Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI states that, "We had an overwhelming response to the convention registrations which had crossed the 500 registration mark. Sri Lankan Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB) and Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO), along with Sri Lankan Airlines and, the Hotels in Colombo, were eager to host us for the convention, as was TAAI.

The current economic and political situation in the island nation, whereby there is a shortage of fuel, power, gas, the daily consumer needs along with the political unrest and treason in parts of the country has compelled us to postpone the convention in Colombo. Tourism is always the first to be hit at the outset of any crisis, but we continue to stand strong and committed to our counterparts in Sri Lanka to revive tourism as soon as the opportunity arises by rescheduling the convention, she added.

## **Qantas launches first direct route between Australia and Southern India, set to team up with IndiGo**

Australia's national airline Qantas will fly non-stop from Bengaluru to Sydney and is finalising a codeshare partnership with IndiGo to make travel between India and Australia easier. From 14 September, Qantas will operate four weekly return flights between Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru and Sydney's Kingsford Smith International Airport with its widebody Airbus A330 aircraft. These are the first direct flights between Australia and southern India by any airline, cutting almost three hours off the current fastest trip between Bengaluru and Sydney.

The Bengaluru community has strong connections with Australia for both business travel and people visiting friends and relatives. Famous for its beautiful beaches and iconic landmarks the Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House, Sydney is one of the world's most iconic cities. The new route is being supported by Bengaluru's award-winning Kempegowda International Airport. Qantas will continue to operate up to five flights a week between Melbourne and Delhi, making it the only airline offering direct flights between both northern and southern India and Australia



## **GNTB launches German.Local.Culture. campaign**

The German National Tourist Board (GNTB) is supporting the relaunch of the inspirational campaign German.Local.Culture. Restart in incoming tourism. Petra Hedorfer, Chief Executive Officer says, "After two years of the Corona pandemic and against the backdrop of the terrible war in Ukraine, the tourism industry is facing major challenges. In this situation, it is important to send out a signal for peaceful tourism that brings people together and stands for openness to the world and tolerance. The campaign German.Local.Culture. convey exactly this peaceful coexistence of generations, traditions, and different cultural influences. With the launch of the campaign, we are reflecting authentic, local experiences in urban destinations with the integration of rural areas and their sustainable tourism offers. With countless travel events, the campaign also aims to promote Germany as a destination for longer for culturally interested travelers, families, and active vacationers in the source markets."

German.Local.Culture. will be launched digitally as a cross-media inspiration campaign based on the Social first principle in important source markets for German incoming tourism digitally. The campaign will have a wide reach via programmatic advertising, social advertising, social media channels and influencer measures. Events for in various source markets convey an authentic image of Germany as a travel destination.





## **Visit Utah organises its first b2b Virtual Sales Mission in India**

With the mission of creating awareness about Utah as a potential tourism destination for Indians, AVIAREPS India along with Utah Office of Tourism organized its first exclusive B2B virtual sales mission in India on 8th March 2022. The virtual event was attended by the representatives of Utah partners such as Visit Salt Lake, Kane County Office of Tourism, Bryce Canyon Country, Explore Utah Valley and Utah Office of Tourism among others. Indian trade partners like Thomas Cook, Flamingo, Make my Trip, N. Chirag, Kesari were also a part of it.

Zach Fyne, Global Markets Specialist, Utah Office of Tourism, said, "India has been among the Top 10 markets for the state of Utah in international visitation over the last five years, so we're excited to further increase our efforts and exposure of what our state has to offer to the Indian visitor. We are confident the Indian market will be delighted by the experiences and beauty Utah that has to offer from our Mighty 5 national parks and 44 state parks, to skiing the Greatest Snow on Earth® at our 15 world-class ski resorts, to taking in the night sky at the 24 internationally-recognized dark sky areas and parks, to everything in between that is connected by driving through our 28 scenic byways. We're excited to welcome more people from India to the beehive state!"



## **Tek Travels DMCC acquires 51 per cent stake in BookaBed AG**

Tek Travels DMCC, a wholly owned subsidiary of TBO Tek Limited as announced today that it has acquired 51 per cent shareholding of BookaBed AG. TBO is one of the leading global travel distribution platforms connecting over 100,000 travel buyers across more than 110 countries with millions of travel suppliers, as of October 31, 2021. Investment in BookaBed will enable TBO to scale up its business's services and offerings. BookaBed AG, based in Switzerland, is also a B2B accommodation provider to the Irish and UK travel industries. BookaBed intends to increase its market share in Ireland and the UK by leveraging TBO's global API business, and TBO Academy that trains and educates travel agents and travel trade partners.

Gaurav Bhatnagar, Co-Founder and Joint Managing Director of TBO, commented on the news and said: "We are excited to welcome everyone at BookaBed to the TBO family. BookaBed allows TBO's entry into the Irish market and strengthens our UK presence. Both TBO and BookaBed have a significant opportunity to leverage each other's strengths and further expand our presence in current and future markets. What really makes this truly promising is our shared core values. There are synergies in our business models and vision, but the core values we share are vital when building for the long term. Under Karl's continued leadership, we look forward to strengthening BookaBed's business."

## **SriLankan Airlines' takes on summer with significant frequency increases**

SriLankan Airlines has geared up for a busy Summer 2022 by increasing the number of scheduled flights by 40 per cent to match pre-pandemic levels and meet the growing demand for air travel as the industry continues to recover. The frequency increases will come into effect across SriLankan's network of online destinations with the start of the airline's summer flight schedule. The new schedule will facilitate smoother operations for the airline and offer customers greater flexibility, convenience and connectivity.

One of the most significant changes is in SriLankan's operations to India, which were scaled down considerably at the height of the pandemic. India recently reopened their skies for commercial passenger flights after two years of closure. In celebration of this encouraging development, SriLankan will be nearly doubling the number of weekly flights to India to over 100. Other planned frequency increases to cities in the Indian Subcontinent include the operation of an extra weekly flight each to Gan, Maldives and Lahore, Pakistan.





***IATO expresses its gratitude to the Govt for withdrawing TCS on sale of overseas tour packages for foreign tourists***

IATO expresses its sincere gratitude to the Government of India for restoring for withdrawing Tax Collection of Source (TCS) on sale of overseas tour packages for foreign tourists who book tour through tour operators located in India. According to Mr. Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators, "This decision is a big relief for the entire travel and tourism fraternity as it was not logical to collect tax at source from the Foreign Tour Operators/Foreign Tourists as they are not residents of India. They neither possess any Indian PAN card nor they pay any income tax and hence are not liable to the Indian Income Tax Law. Therefore, there is no scope for them of availing any refund from the Levy of TCS. These persons are subject to taxation in their native country. It was, therefore, necessary that the provisions of TCS should not be made applicable to persons/companies who are Indian resident/located outside India. The Association apprehended that in case TCS is collected from non-resident buyers such as FTOs, individual foreign citizens/tourists, the Indian Tour Operators will lose their business as the non-resident buyers will directly approach the tour operators based in Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives etc. and buy the overseas tour package from those tour operators directly skipping Indian Tour Operators, resulting in loss of business for the Indian Tour Operators and a portion of foreign exchange. The Association strongly recommended that the provisions of TCS should be amended not to be made applicable to sale of overseas tour package to non-resident class of buyers/FTOs for packages outside Indian territory.

***Outrigger to acquire five-star resort in the Maldives***

Outrigger Hospitality Group announced today that it is acquiring the newly renovated five-star Maafushivaru Resort in the Maldives— adding another premier beach property to its expanding global portfolio as early as 1 April, 2022. The luxury resort will be renamed Outrigger Maldives Maafushivaru Resort and is located on a private island in the pristine South Ari Atoll region, a 25-minute seaplane flight from Malé – offering convenient access and breathtaking views for arriving guests. The resort is comprised of a collection of 81 luxury villa styles including beach, pool and duplex accommodations, as well as coveted overwater bungalows and more.

"There are few destinations that evoke higher levels of relaxation, elegance and seclusion than the Maldives. This resort is the perfect addition to our array of global beachfront properties," said Jeff Wagoner, President and CEO of Outrigger Hospitality Group. "With travel on the rise, we look forward to welcoming our global guests to the Maldives and curating unforgettable Outrigger Signature Experiences that allow visitors to appreciate Maldivian culture in an iconic beachfront setting."



***Thailand's Test & Go rules ease from March 1, 2022***

Travellers can arrive in Thailand by air, land, and water with the required prepaid accommodation reduced to 1 night and the COVID-19 tests revised to 1 RT-PCR and 1 self-ATK. The following new rules are now in effect. The following rules are now in effect from 1 April, 2022, and will also apply to travellers who have applied for/obtained the TEST & GO Thailand Pass or Certificate of Entry with scheduled arrivals from this date.

**Points of entry:**

**By air** – Direct international flights to Don Mueang, Suvarnabhumi, Phuket, Krabi, Samui, Chiang Mai, U-Tapao, and Hat Yai (new) international airports, or transit domestically via dedicated flights.

**By land** – Via border checkpoints in Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Songkhla, and Satun (new).

**By water** – Eligible types of vessels include private yachts and ships of Thai government agencies, while Thai crew members on cargo ships will also be allowed to enter Thailand.

**Eligible travellers / countries:**

**For arrivals by air and water:** Fully vaccinated Thai citizens and foreign travellers from all countries/territories.

**For arrivals by land:** Fully vaccinated Thai citizens and foreign travellers from neighbouring countries connecting with the reopened border checkpoints (Nong Khai, Udon Thani, Songkhla, and Satun).

Travellers can check the rules and updates on [www.tatnews.org](http://www.tatnews.org) to stay current on what remains a very fluid and fast-changing situation.







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# Luxury Tourism

## THE TRAVELS OF RILEY

A goldmine for few and alien to many, 'luxury tourism' is one segment that is expected to play a major role in the recovery of tourism. Let's find out what these 'elite travellers' want and what this 'elite industry' has on offer for them?

- Bharti Sharma

As simple as it sounds, 'luxury tourism' as a segment has complex layers of essential elements. In far-flung destinations or most metropolitan cities, it is a product or service that is offered to all but not all can afford it. Differentiated, unique, exclusive and something that does not respond to the demand, it does not satisfy the desires of the masses nor seeks positioning. Likewise, in terms of tourism, the emphasis is on value

rather than price, which is evaluated through consumer experience. The ongoing pandemic negatively impacted the luxury travel market due to stringent lockdown measures and closing of national borders in several countries globally. However, relaxation in lockdowns coupled with massive vaccine rollouts, we are witness to the most ritzy holidays of all times by the affluent circles across the globe.







## Beyond the cliché 'Luxury'

Let me throw a general question, how many times, at how many places, have you even seen brochures, catalogues, and advertisements for luxury packages? No marks for guesses here! Luxury needs specialisation, it needs knowledge and above all the understanding of the basic word 'luxury'. Luxury tourism opens itself to a new playground where the exclusive and unique will symbolize something which is unexplored, unspoiled, inaccessible by many, tucked away from the mass and with the ability to deliver unique experiences. This tourist will look for emotional, experimental and, if possible, non-Google search trips and destinations, moving away from what everyone wants and taking advantage of new trends allowing them to have a distinct space to enjoy it. It is here that the luxury tourist reconceptualises its search and commitment to unique natural destinations, products and services with standards that respond to sustainability (green planes and sustainable hotels, eco-friendly cars, etc.) with the aim of consuming less unnecessary goods and services.

## Influencing economies

Among the many, the recent decades has witnessed an upswing of one particular activity that has excelled in luxury travel; shopping tourism. The government organizations world over are taking measures to develop the travel industry which will facilitate economic development will also support the industry. Government administrations are initiating fresh infrastructure development such as erection of new museums, entertainment venues, parks and shopping centres to attract tourists.





## Identifying elite customers

Customised and private vacations have witnessed a surge in demand as they ensure high comfort and luxury to the elite class. People with extremely high disposable incomes prefer to enjoy vacations customised to their distinctive preferences. The agenda while undertaking a trip for the elite is to experience luxury, to witness exotic destinations first-hand, and relish their authentic culture. Distinguished personalities generally prefer to undertake customised and private vacations to ensure privacy throughout the journey, without interruptions, annoyance or harassment caused by the paparazzi. There is an increasing demand for tailor-made private vacations that warrant more flexibility and freedom. Millennials and generation X are reshaping the foundation of luxury travel industry due to social media influence. If statistics corroborate facts, around 72 per cent of millennials prefer to splurge their money on experiences over material objects and account for over 20 per cent of all international tourists.



## Who can sell and to whom?

Demand facilitates supply, but when the demands are specific and customised they require exclusivity and finesse. The surge in the luxury-oriented sector has observed emergence of tour operators and travel agencies dedicated to serve this sector. This category of individuals are also in demand with several destinations who are looking for necessary means to have their audience, while specialising their services and tourist products, personalising them to the preference of each patron with their origin market as reference. In the past, luxury was all about a fancy hotel. But, luxury today has moved beyond fancy accommodations; luxury now symbolises more privacy, more hygiene, more personal experiences and more of everything exclusive. Travel agents will need to be on their toes while preparing for tailor-made trips as per the client's preferences, an experience which is unique even to the luxury segment. As per the Travel and Tourism Statistic, around 83 per cent people use the internet for luxury travel planning, whereas 40 per cent people prefer travel agencies for the conceptualisation.





A photograph of a Cartier store facade at night. The store has large glass windows and doors, with the Cartier logo prominently displayed above the entrance and on awnings. A red classic car is parked in front of the store. People are visible walking on the sidewalk. The text 'LIVE WIRE' is overlaid in the top right corner of the image.

# Cartier

LIVE WIRE

## Regenerative luxury

The future of Luxury tourism can be assessed from this report by Global Market Insights Inc, which suggests the market valuation of luxury tourism will cross \$45 billion by 2027. The market growth can be attributed to the improving economic conditions globally, thus encouraging tourists to spend more on luxury travel. The luxury travel market's most prominent driver is the burgeoning spending power across the globe. As per Investopedia, around 22.8 million people fall under the high net worth income category and contribute over 30 per cent to the global annual spending on travel. Apart from this, shifting preference towards sustainable travelling drives the market growth. As recorded by UNWTO, international tourism arrivals grew by 7 per cent in 2017, which are about 1,322 million arrivals. In 2019, Virtuoso, Ltd registered a 12 per cent growth in total sales, which was over USD 23 billion, up from USD 12.5 billion in 2013.

## More ancient, more opulent

Rich cultural heritage and developed adventure activities are one of the reasons for the boom of luxury travel in the Asia-Pacific region. Among the Asia-Pacific region, China has emerged as the growing market for luxury travel in recent years and is also a top spender in international tourism. The region witnessed an upsurge in business tours, a resultant of strong industrialisation and favourable FDI policies, further boosting the luxury travel market sector. Germany, France, and Spain are at the forefront of the regional luxury travel market due to their rich cultural heritage.



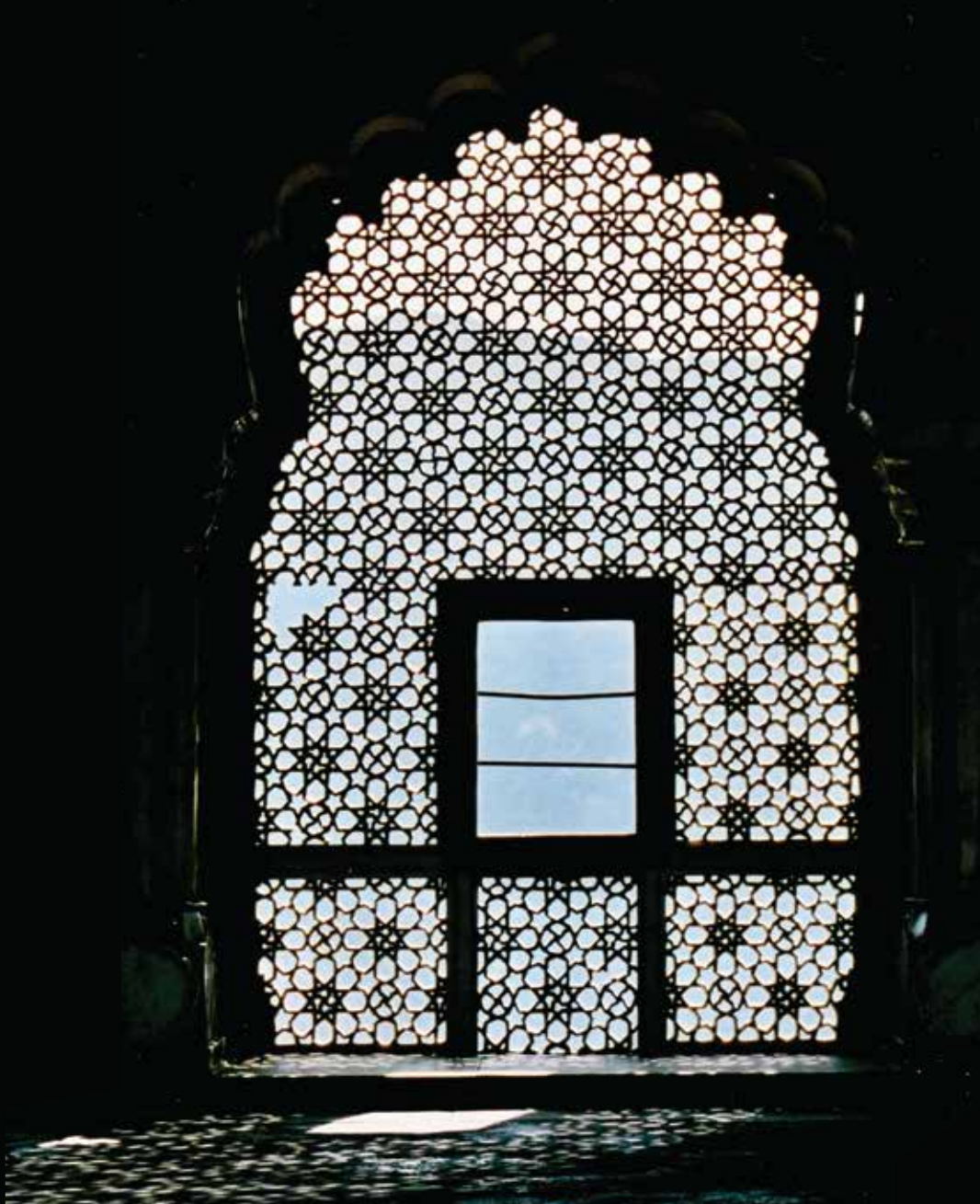


# Rajasthan

## Deriving and integrating tourism potential

Rajasthan has always lived up to the challenge of innovating and enhancing its portfolio of travel options and experiences. Sh. Nishant Jain (IAS), Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan in an exclusive interview with Travel Turtle talks about the revival plans and the state's well-directed initiative to showcase the hospitality, depth and diversity of Rajasthan.

**- Bharti Sharma**





**The tourism sector in Rajasthan now gets the industry status in the state. In what ways will this step reinforce and stabilise the sector in distress? How has the industry status raised hopes of tourism revival in Rajasthan?**

This has been a long pending demand of tourism and hospitality sector across the country, but I believe that Rajasthan is the only and the first state to declare and accord industry status to the tourism sector.

Our honourable CM has announced in the budget itself that it will cost around 700 crores to state i.e., financial implication will be around 700 crore, which means the taxes and levies, will be charged from tourism and hospitality sector on industrial rates, not on commission rates. The grant of industry status for tourism means that power tariffs and

certain taxes would be at par with other industries, as against the current commercial charges. This initiative has been welcomed by the sector with open arms. At the same time, this will help us to invite and attract investments to the state.

**As Rajasthan is trying its best to address the demands and requirements of the travel and hospitality sector, is there any hindrance in fulfilling the them? The tourism sector has been deep distress for a prolonged time, what were their key demands and how do you plan to collaborate with them for the comprehensive growth of the sector?**

Most of the demands that the government received from the travel trade sector were during COVID. During the first and second wave, the government advised and extended some exemptions and



Shri Nishant Jain (IAS)

relief to the tourism industry, including GST reimbursement for a certain period and percentage, the exemption in motor vehicle tax for RATO vehicles, and exemptions for the hospitality sector as well etc. One more important thing is that the Rajasthan government included the tourism sector as the third sector in Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme i.e., RIPS 2019 which will entice investments. As tourism is now the third sector, it also gets the maximum amount of subsidies and exemptions. Another additional benefit is that the tourism sector will come under Mukhyamantri Laghu Udyog Protsahan Yojana where 8 per cent interest subsidies are given to loans up to 25 lacs but for the tourism sector, they give 1 per cent additional interest subsidies i.e., the state offered 9 per cent interest subsidy to the tourism sector for someone who wants to take loan up to 25 million.

**The honourable CM has also announced the Rajasthan Rural Tourism Scheme, under which transfer of property would be exempted from stamp duty. As we have witnessed in the past that there are few states which have tried implementing such useful policies but eventually couldn't retain them because of various reasons. How do you plan to execute the schemes and policy so it's workable in the true sense?**

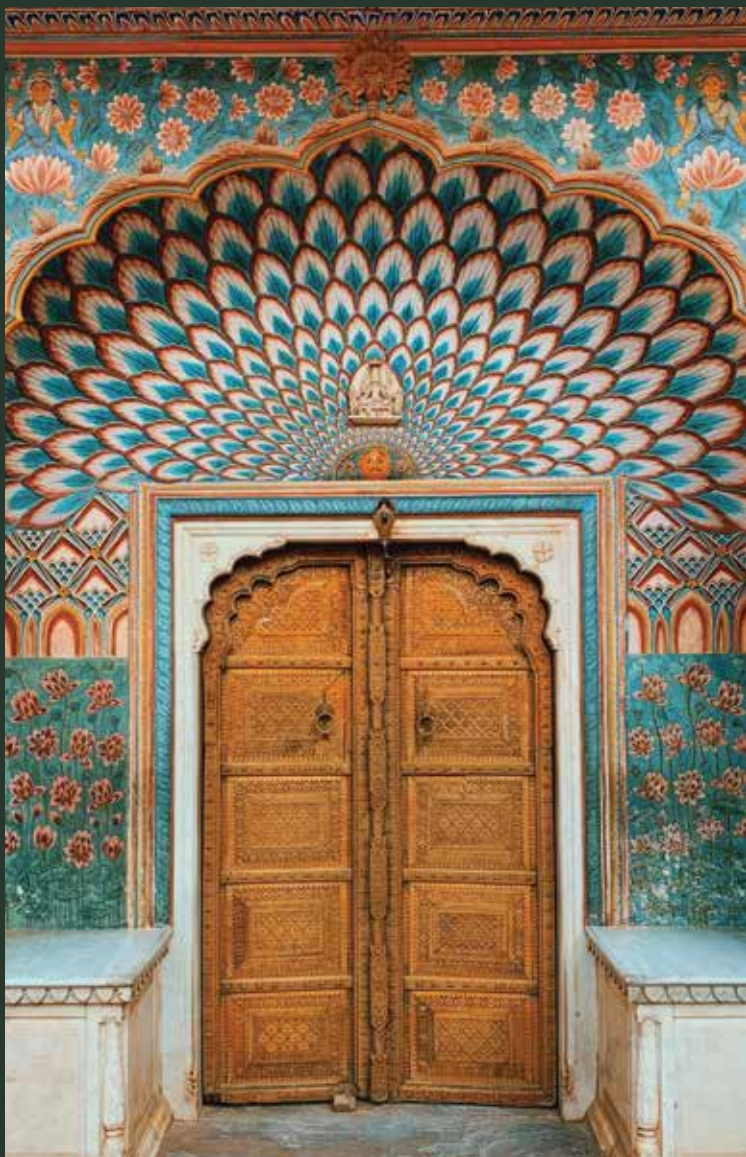
Policy interventions are very

important and they can definitely create a difference. But, the key to making it happen is to popularize/market the schemes and policies and reach out to the potential stakeholders. So, they know that these interventions have been done by the government.

Recently, we have done four policy interventions- the first is Tourism Policy 2020, which is a vision document, second is Guest Houses Scheme in 2021. The state has also revised its Homestays Scheme in October 2021 and Heritage Certificate Guidelines in July 2021. We're excited that the state is about to get Rajasthan Rural Tourism Scheme, Adventure Tourism Promotion Scheme and Film Tourism Promotion Policy which the honourable CM announced during the budget session.

Due to the promotion of tourism in rural areas, local handicrafts, handicrafts, dances and music would get wide publicity, besides giving wide publicity to the rural people. Chances of getting more and more employment opportunities will increase.

A major policy intervention that is in the pipeline is Rajasthan Tourism Unit Policy. It will be revised and launched soon. As per the directions given by Smt. Gayatri Rathore, Principal Secretary Tourism & Chairperson, RTDC, we'll soon have district-level awareness where we will invite travel trade and other stakeholders to make them understand the policy interventions that we have introduced.





### **Since Rajasthan is located at a driveable distance from metro cities such as Delhi NCR, how do you plan to establish it as a Weekend Getaway?**

Tourism has always been the USP of Rajasthan and it provides immense opportunities in terms of employment generation, earning foreign exchange and regional development etc. Rajasthan is the largest state in the country and shares its borders with NCR, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh to the northeast, Madhya Pradesh to the southeast and Gujarat to the southwest, making it a perfect nearby destination for a refreshing- short Weekend trip.

There are multiple getaway options available in Rajasthan with a perfect blend of rich culture, heritage, history and traditions, and thus travellers from these states prefer destinations like Alwar, Bharatpur, Jaipur, Udaipur, Ranthambore, Pushkar- Ajmer, Mt. Abu, Jodhpur, Chittorgarh, Jaisalmer etc as a weekend getaway. Especially, in the current scenario where international tourism is still in the retrieval mode while domestic tourism has quickly picked up, the state is making earnest efforts to establish itself as the most preferred weekend getaway destination and attract increasingly more tourists especially from the nearby states.

Presently, Mt. Abu, Jaipur, Udaipur, Ajmer- Pushkar, Sariska(Alwar), and Ranthambore (Sawai Madhopur) are among the popular Weekend tourism destinations. In the tourism policy 2020, DoT has emphasized developing more weekend tourism destinations and has decided to identify and develop 10-20 such weekend destinations having close proximity to inter-state borders and aggressively market them.

### **Rajasthan is the first choice of our country's best Wedding planners, what new can they expect in Rajasthan and what scheme and policies are planned for this segment?**

Rajasthan is blessed with majestic forts, palaces, lakes and other

architectural legacies which provide a perfect setting for destination weddings. Presently, Jaipur, Udaipur, Pushkar, Jodhpur and Sawai Madhopur are the prominent wedding Destinations in Rajasthan. Tourism Policy 2020 has emphasised wedding tourism and for this; an incentive scheme is also being worked out to promote new tourism destinations such as Jaisalmer, Shekhawati Region and Bikaner. In addition to this, guidelines are being drawn up for identifying heritage properties of Govt. (ie RTDC, PWD Guesthouses, water resources Dept./ PHED Guest houses etc.)

### **While bringing innovative changes to the sector and exploring ways to attract tourists, Hub of Experiential Tourism**

It is a well-known fact that Rajasthan is one of the most preferred tourist destinations in the country which attracts tourists from all over the world for its unique experience of historical forts, palaces, arts and culture- along with its living traditions. The state offers a wide range of unique experiences like culture, heritage, living, food and nature that makes it a potential hub for experiential tourism.

Pristine locations in Sambhar, Pushkar-Ajmer, Rajsamand, Banswara, Udaipur Kumbhalgarh, Jawai and Bikaner are great destinations for experiential/adventure tourism activities. Rajasthan Tourism is also in

the process of formulating an incentive scheme for experiential/ adventure tourism to enhance and improve the offerings for giving the best-ever experiences to tourists.

With the public-private partnership, the government has initiated projects for including water-based activities such as cruise and boating in Chambal and other water bodies, ATVs (All Terrain Vehicles) in sand dunes of Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Barmer, mountaineering and trekking activities in Mount Abu and Jaipur and night viewing of monuments at Jaipur, Udaipur, Jaisalmer, Bharatpur and Chittorgarh.

DoT has been organising fairs and festivals like camel festival, Kite festival, Desert Festival in Jaisalmer, Dussera Festival in Kota, Marwar Festival in Jodhpur and Mewar Festival in Udaipur etc. for the promotion of tourism in the state.

### **As a popular destination in India with both domestic and international tourists, Rajasthan sounds touristy and crowded in all seasons now. So what are the difficulties /challenges for the tourism board to uphold 'Responsible Tourism' in the state? Also, if you can shed some light on the Eco-Tourism Initiatives in the state?**

Rajasthan has been the centre of eco-tourism with sustainable initiatives. It is a land of biodiversity with dense

forests, water bodies and scenic places. With 9 per cent of land under the administrative control of the Forest Department, the state has managed to build and conserve 3 national parks, 3 Tiger reserves, 27 wildlife sanctuaries, 2 Ramsar Sites and 14 Conservational reserves along with numerous niche faunal habitats and desert ecosystem around Aravali hill range.

Rajasthan Government has recently released the Rajasthan Eco-tourism policy- 2021 which aims to generate economic benefits with the conservation of natural resources and attract tourists. With an emphasis on community-based tourism, infrastructural development and public-private partnership, many initiatives have been undertaken recently.

Leopard Safaris in Jhalana and Jawai, Kumbhalgarh in Rajsamand district etc are a few examples which have been developed as per the eco-tourism guidelines.





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The Paradise of  
Luxury Islands

# Maldives

Crystal clear water with breathtaking sunsets and scuba diving amidst the marine life of the Indian Ocean. The island country of dreams for water babies.

- Tripti Jain





## OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

Tropical islands with coral reefs and jaw-dropping views, Maldives is an archipelagic country that is perfect for people looking for pristine beaches, reef-ringed atolls, and beautiful water bungalows. Southwest of Sri Lanka and India, about 750 kilometres from the Asian continent's mainland, Maldives is becoming a destination of pure luxury and glassed floored bungalows to walk over the oceans. The go-to vacay spot for newlyweds and travellers looking for serenity beyond the sublime ocean. A choice of cuisine that offers a variety of seafood that will venture your food palate to the depths of the Indian Ocean and serve you some of the finest delicacies.

A desert island experience like no other, Maldives offers an amalgamation of luxury and beauty. This country is heaven for white-sand beaches. Discover a stunning paradise of over 1000 reef fringed islands, home to the best beaches in the world. Be a small pin on a big map and seize the once in a lifetime opportunity to travel to this remote oasis! Not only is the sand the whitest, but the water is the clearest, the spectacular wildlife, and the palm tree forests beyond magnificent. The natural beauty that is waiting for travellers to be explored and discovered in the wonderful Maldives.

### **Cruising between the fishes!**

The best time to visit the island country is from November to April, with moderate weather during the day and calm twinkling nights. Just a few hours' flights away from almost

every neighbouring country, Maldives is easily accessible and has become a heartthrob of destinations on every traveller's bucket list. You can travel to this white island country without burning a big hole in your pocket. Luxury beyond excellence, Maldives is flooded with resorts and bungalows that provide some of the world's best services including scrumptious food. However, there's good news for those looking for something a little less extravagant. Charming guesthouses are popping up all over the islands, making it a great budget-friendly destination too. With a pocket-friendly getaway on the horizon, some islands offer exclusive stays and night swim between the white sands.

### **Romancing with Islands**

The country with 99% water and only 1% land has almost 1200 islands scattered on vast stretches. Bright blue turquoise water everywhere you see, and little villas connected by walking planks that float over the ocean, Maldives speaks a very different language. A language that is understood only by the one who can truly feel the bliss. The Maldives speaks the language of love, where anyone can fall in love with the islands beyond crimson sunsets and nights that pen to starry nights with wine glasses. Candlelit dinners, romantic barefoot strolls along the beach, and balmy nights of stargazing are everyday events. A simple day at the beaches of Maldives is a treat for the soul. This romantic atmosphere, and the many private islands that house beautiful water villas, make it the ultimate luxury honeymoon getaway.





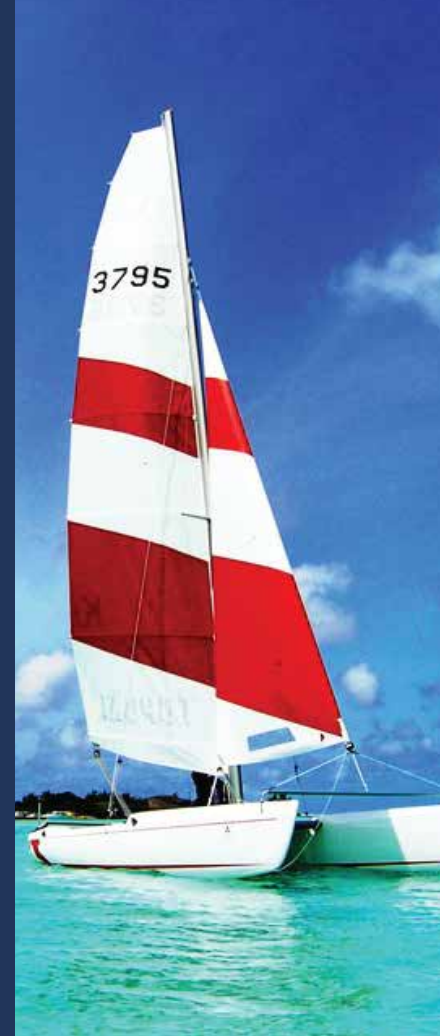
## OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

### For the water babies

The island is a paradise for water activities and an endless playground for sea fanatics who will enjoy a plethora of water activities. Surfing over the Indian Ocean with hands stretched wide open to feel the fresh air, the smell of the ocean adding that wild touch to the sport.

There aren't many places where it's possible to paddle out in the warm shallows and interact with deep-sea wildlife. Even more so, without donning the oxygen tank and wetsuit. By day, experience the spectacular colours of the ocean's wildlife and corals, or swim with dolphins, turtles, and sharks. By night see the ocean sparkle like the stars, as plankton light up the water. The magical sights, and special atmosphere, of the Maldives, will capture hearts and create the tropical memories of a lifetime.

Of course, the Maldives is known for its luxurious, over-the-water bungalows. But, for scuba divers, there's no better way to explore the Maldives than by liveaboard dive safari. The best dive sites in the country are spread out, miles apart on different atolls. If you're based on one Resort Island, you may only see one or two of the best sites. On the other hand, a liveaboard provides a week's worth of epic dives through multiple atolls.



### Munching over the oceans

Since the Maldives is almost 99% sea, fish (mainly tuna) is the most important staple. The cuisine found in the island nation is a mix of Arabic, Indian, Sri Lankan, and East Asian influences. But the tourist resorts scattered throughout the islands offer diverse international menus, so it's entirely possible to eat your way around the world while staying in luxury at one of these resorts. Sample Japanese teppanyaki, fine Italian cuisine, the spicy flavours of India and Thailand, traditional Chinese, fine upscale dining, or just a casual snack. Seafood plays a starring role, regardless of how it's prepared, but those who prefer their food to come from dry land will still have plenty of options.

Coconut is another major part of many dishes in the Maldives and can be served in grated form, as milk, or as coconut oil which is used to deep fry foods. Favourite fish include skipjack tuna, little Tunney, yellowfin tuna, frigate tuna, bigeye scad, wahoo, and mahi-mahi.

The Maldives offers some unique dining experiences as well. Several resorts feature underwater restaurants to truly 'immerse' diners in what the Maldives is all about. Some resorts also attract celebrity chefs or hold cooking classes for that extra special experience.







### Things to remember

- The Maldives is the flattest country in the world.
- The Maldivian flag consists of a green rectangle in the middle with a crescent moon on it, enclosed by a red rectangle.
- During medieval times, the Maldives used shells as currency.
- The Maldives is one of those few places on earth where you can spot the gorgeous whale sharks, the world's biggest fish.
- The island nation does not have Saturday and Sunday as the weekend but instead has Friday and Saturday.



**Maldives' reliance on tourism is a no-brainer, how then has the pandemic impacted a nation such as the Maldives?**

During the lockdowns, we completely shifted our focus to the online medium and have nurtured great results. The campaign 'The sun will shine again' witnessed amazing engagements from the consumers. The numbers give us the motivation to do more in this huge market. MMPRC has been participating in fairs and exhibitions and holding several activities for this market in order to maintain destination momentum and increase it further. India was one of the top source markets for the Maldives in 2021. The Maldives has welcomed over 289,964 tourists to the country by the end of February 2022, with India ranking as the third top source market for this period with 26,094 arrivals, which is a 9 per cent market share. MMPRC has already started with its ambitious plans for increasing the market share from India.

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

MMPRC has been participating in fairs and exhibitions and holding several activities for this market in order to maintain destination momentum and further increase arrivals from this market. This includes virtual and in-person activities such as major marketing campaigns with stakeholders, webinars, roadshows and familiarisation trips. The Destination Online Training is conducted in line with the marketing strategy for the Indian market to strengthen the Maldives brand in this region and create greater appeal to the travellers. It focuses on creating awareness about the activities that can be enjoyed by luxury travellers from India, including those travelling for romantic, honeymoon, family vacations as well as for business purposes, MICE activities and events. The Maldives has relaxed testing requirements for passengers entering the country. Travellers are no longer required to present a negative PCR test result if they have completed the prescribed dose(s) of the COVID-19 vaccine.

**What trends in travel and tourism do you see emerging in the aftermath of the pandemic? What can tourists expect to be different in the Maldives?**

We have taken all the necessary steps and beyond to ensure that the Maldives is a haven of peace, serenity, isolation, and safety. You see, the unique geography of the Maldives ensures that all of our islands are naturally social-distance from each other, thus creating an unparalleled level of safety and comfort. We're the safest haven on the earth. Maldives is a very calm destination. It's for weddings, incentive groups and even MICE. Just imagine a board meeting under the sun or near the beach? Great right?

**What are the top five inbound markets for Maldives? Do you see any changes in the dynamics post the pandemic?**

The top inbound markets at the moment are Russia, UK, India, and Germany. Yes, we do see the dynamics changing as we have witnessed pent up demand from East European countries, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, the Middle East, etc.

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

Maldives has been awarded as the leading tourism destination for two consecutive years. We won that award for a reason. During the pandemic, especially the last two years, people around the globe started knowing what the Maldives is all about before that they had only known it for sun, sand and sea. But, our team promoted different sustainable experiences in Maldives. We found out people don't travel to lie down, they travel for experiences. There are plenty of things to do on local islands such as fishing with the locals, experiencing local cuisine, eating with the locals, etc. At the resorts, you have private over-water villas, floating breakfast, bubble-tent nests, diving, parasailing, underwater restaurants and much more.



Thoyyib Mohamed, CEO and MD, MMPRC





# Madhya Pradesh

## A Teaching and Preaching Trail of Lord Buddha

- The Great Stupas of Sanchi are the first commissioned by Emperor Ashoka.
- If you are in search of inner peace, then explore Sanchi and other places of Buddhists Circuit.



Bhopal. India is known as land of Buddha and the heart of India 'Madhya Pradesh' have roots of Buddhism in it. Sanchi is a Buddhist complex, famous for its Great Stupa on a hilltop at Sanchi Town located nearly 50 kilometres in the northeast of Bhopal is perhaps the earliest archaeological evidence of Madhya Pradesh's Buddhists connection. Designated a world Heritage site by UNESCO in 1989, Sanchi in Raisen district is the most well preserved and famous of those survives, among all the monuments Ashoka (The Grandson of Chandragupt Maurya, who founded the first imperial dynasty of the sub-continent) have Commissioned. But it is not about Sanchi, which is hub of Buddhism in Madhya Pradesh, the other Buddhist settlements in the region like Andher and Murelkhurd in northeast of Sanchi and Sonari and Satdhara in

the Southeast and Southwest of Sanchi, respectively. These are the spiritual homes of the monasteries of Buddhism, religious temples and sacred shrines, where the followers of Buddhism are associated with the teachings of the Lord Buddha himself. Buddhist pilgrimage centres have developed as tourist centres not only for the followers of Buddhism but also for others. Grand Stupas, ancient monasteries, meditation and worship amidst Buddhist chants, are seraphic experience for Buddhist pilgrims.

### ***The rise, fall and renewal of Sanchi***

'Then hear my brothers, all that comes to existence must fade away. Let your striving alone never come to an end!' The rise and fall and renewal of Sanchi encapsulate the truth of these last words of Lord Buddha. One of the notable rulers of world

history, Devanampiya (Beloved of the Gods) King Ashoka, created 84,000 stupas and reallocated the Buddha's ashes in all of the places. In Sanchi, a circumambulatory path was constructed around the Stupa which was surrounded by a stone railing which is also called the Vedika. Parikrama or Pradakshina is an important part of rituals and devotional practices in Buddhism. In addition, a Harmika (a square structure) was also added to the stupa. The Harmika is placed at the top of the Stupa and has a three-tiered Chhatri or Chhatravali that represents the three jewels of Buddhism – Buddha, Dharma (the teachings of Buddha) and Sangha (Buddhism class). There are a number of important Historical Archaeological Monuments in Sanchi that dates back to 2nd and 1st centuries BC. The construction of the Sanchi Stupa is amazingly designed and its glory can be experiment through the Stupas and the elegant carvings on its frontage.

The Buddhist Circuit of Madhya Pradesh Includes

- Sanchi
- Satdhara
- Sonari
- Andher
- Murelkhurd
- Ujjain
- Kasrawad

Attractions in and around Sanchi to Visit

- Mahabodhi Temple
- Buddhist Theme park
- Sound and Light Show
- World Peace Centre
- Fairs and Festivals
- Udaigiri Caves
- Heliodorus Pillar
- Bijamandal
- Archelological Museum, Sanchi & Vidisha
- Neelkantheshwar Temple, Udaypur

### ***When to come***

The best time to visit Sanchi and the nearby Buddhist sites- Sonari, Satdhara, Andher, Murelkhurd- is from October to march. The days will be pleasant and sunny, and during peak winter (December to February) visitors will need woollens or jacket. While Sanchi itself will be beautiful during the rains (July to september), the Buddhist sites around Sanchi might become inaccessible.

### ***November is special***

Every year on the last Sunday of November, the Mahabodhi Society displays the relics of Sariputra and Maudgalyayana at the Vihara. Devotees from the entire world gather here to pay their respects.

### ***How to get there***

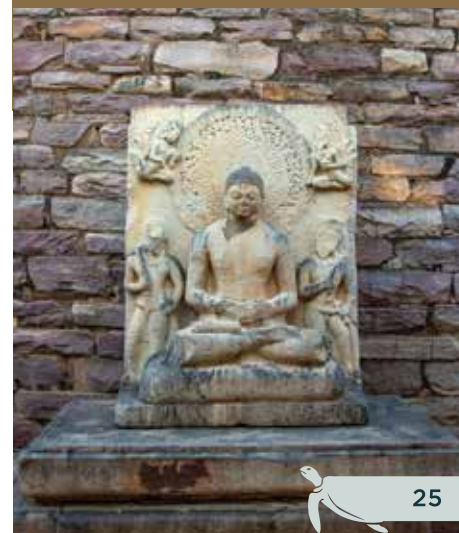
By Air- The nearest airport is Raja Bhoj Airport in Bhopal (46kms via Diwanganj and 78kms via Raisen) that is connected by regular flights to Delhi and Mumbai. Devi Ahilyabai Holkar Airport in Indore is 181kms away.

By Rail- Vidisha (10 kms) has the closest major railway station from Sanchi. Bhopal (46 kms) is the most well connected to Delhi and Mumbai.

By Road- Good motorable roads connect Sanchi with Bhopal, Indore, sagar, Gwalior, Vidisha and Raisen. Buses, both State-run and private, leave from Bhopal at frequent intervals.

### ***Tourists Footfall***

Sanchi is most visited place among tourists. In 2020 total 1,19,807 and in 2021 1,16,824 domestic and international tourists visited Sanchi.





# Air Seychelles anticipates to carry over 300,000 passengers in 2022.



As tourism is vital for Seychelles and its flag carrier- Air Seychelles, they're leaving nothing to chance by offering 'the' tropical treasure clubbed with the best of aviation. Charles Johnson, Chief Commercial Officer, Air Seychelles Ltd tells...

- Bharti Sharma







Charles Johnson

Seychelles, a thousand miles from anywhere, an archipelago of islands, the epitome of luxury and tranquillity, is a destination with thousands of picture-postcard memories and home to the airline Air Seychelles. Just like any other airline, it's been tough for the national carrier, Air Seychelles, with limited traffic flow consistently impacting its operations. But all the hurdles have dwindled when exposed to the optimistic team at Air Seychelles, which is oozing with confidence that it will 'fly'.

### Keeping with the creole spirit of the airline

Charles feels that the industry has rebounded extremely fast, seemingly overnight. As he shares, "With no new variants on the horizon, the pent up demand is currently at record levels. However, we are being rivalled by extremely high oil prices, which are impacting revenue optimisation."

### Never say never

Air Seychelles plans to add flights

to their schedule starting May 2022 making it a bi-weekly flight and facilitating itineraries offering 4 days and 7 days as stay options. "We've added 8 extra flights in May and June to cope with the expected demand. We will then go back to the weekly service over the summer and evaluate the growth after that. Our aim is to return to 3-4 flights per week by the end of 2022."

Air Seychelles serves four markets such as Tel Aviv, Johannesburg, Mauritius and Mumbai under its network. "On top of this, we operate an extensive charter business. Asia remains off of our radar for the moment, but never say never," asserts Charles.

### Bigger potential to expand the reach

With the return of flights to India, Air Seychelles will soon be flying to all of its pre-pandemic destinations on a regular basis. Sharing insights on its code-share strategy, Charles comments, "We code-share with a number of airlines on our domestic routes, with four more coming in

the near future. For India specifically, our previous partner Air India will be finalising their technical integration with our system shortly, so we look forward to having the AI back on our flights soon. With the Tata Group's investment in Vistara, there is certainly potential for us to advance our reach."

### Evaluating ways to remain competitive

The modern fleet at Air Seychelles gives them big efficiency gains on the regional network. The A320NEO aircraft offers lower operating costs, produces less emissions and provide a better customer experience. "In 2022 we anticipate carrying over 300,000 passengers. Our fleet comprises 2 x A320NEO aircraft and 5 x twin-otters for domestic flying. We don't have any aircraft growth plans for 2022, but we are constantly evaluating ways to remain competitive in the market and ways to fully utilise our fleet. Though we have no plans to add any new destinations in India on a commercial basis, for

charters we will continue to serve other markets when the demand arises," explains Charles.

### Recovery expected by year-end

Air Seychelles is undertaking various initiatives to help the environment and the messaging. Though they may be small, they add up to the global message that the industry is taking environmental responsibility seriously, front and centre. Talking about the way forward, Charles tells, "We anticipate by the end of this year a full return to pre-pandemic flight levels. That of course is barring any new covid related variants and hopefully matched with stabilization in oil prices. The pent-up demand bubble should last 12-18 months, after which a more gradual increase in pax traffic should return. With some relaxation on the covid restrictions, which will happen on a route by route basis, we will drop our mask mandate between countries once it's fully allowed between both city pairs."







# NYC & Company

## Creating a distinct voice in the India market

In 2019, New York City welcomed 358,000 Indian visitors. The forecast for 2022 is 185,000 Indian visitors to travel to NYC. Makiko Matsuda Healy, Managing Director, Tourism Market Development, NYC & Company tells what new destinations and experiences are waiting for Indians at NYC.

- Bharti Sharma

***How significant is India market for New York City. What kind of growth have you witnessed in the last few years and how do you plan to market the destination in a huge market like India?***

India has remained in New York City's top 10 international source markets in 2021, mainly based on the VFR segment, visiting friends and relatives. Prior to the pandemic, the Indian market generated immense growth across all business segments. The strong potential for long-haul travel based on a solid economy, disposable income and aspirations of a growing middle class only accelerate the positive development.

To market the destination in India, NYC & Company hosted a first virtual sales mission for travel trade partners in February this year with a detailed webinar update on various new developments in the City and multiple face-to-face meetings to review business opportunities. We also work closely with multiple airline partners to run joint promotional initiatives. We expect more airlines to further expand US-bound long-haul routes in the near future.

***USA is extremely versatile and a lot of states from the USA are already very active in the India market. How do you plan to compete with other US destinations such***

***as Washington, LA etc?***

We continue to see positive indicators of rebound from the pandemic. At NYC & Company, we are focused on accelerating recovery in India by inviting travelers to return to their favourite US city and ensuring a deeper, richer experience of the five boroughs when they arrive.

We encourage first-time visitors to choose New York City as their next must-visit destination whether in a group or as an individual traveller. As the number one point of entry into the United States, NYC's airports JFK International Airport, Newark Liberty International Airport and LaGuardia Airport are undergoing complete transformations and are ready to

welcome visitors from around the globe. We recently announced a new 'Get Local NYC' campaign. The new initiative kicked off with a new Brooklyn travel guide, inviting visitors to Brooklyn like a New Yorker. These neighborhood exploration campaigns encourage visitors to experience both the City's traditional tourism corridors as well as those across the City that may be lesser known, helping to better distribute the economic benefits of tourism. And with longer stays in one city – NYC is perfect since we have multiple non-stop flights as well as so many one stop options, and offer such a wide variety of experiences without traveling to another place.





**Describe how the pandemic has impacted NYC. By when do you expect the country to return to its 2019 numbers?**

As with other destinations around the world, the pandemic has affected almost every factor of New York City's tourism and hospitality industry, and we saw a visitation drop by two thirds in 2020. We are projecting a 70 percent increase in tourists this year from last year to 56.4 million visitors, including 8 million international visitors; triple the number of foreign travelers we welcomed last year. We expect to reach record 2019 record levels once again, by 2024.

**Why is collaboration across the travel industry imperative to navigate the post-virus landscape? What kind of marketing activities will NYC now conduct in India?**

Collaboration with multiple airlines, tour operators and travel agents will help us amplify the reach of the campaign by promoting attractive packages to visit New York City. Our engagement with the travel trade will also prioritise travellers with immediate intent to travel and encourages staying longer and spending more time across the five boroughs.

**What trends in travel and tourism do you see emerging in the aftermath of the pandemic? What can tourists expect to be different in NYC?**

With easing outbound restrictions placed on international travel, the outlook for long-haul travel is strong and early indicators for our key summer holiday travel season are very positive. Transient business and leisure bookings are driving the tourism recovery. The long-term group market, especially MICE businesses are taking time committing to large, in-person events as the organisers, exhibitors and attendees adjust to a diversity of restrictions and regulations, and global economic conditions.

Typically, business travel accounts for 20 percent of the trips made to the City annually. In 2022, the turnaround is already visible as meetings and conventions have come back online and business

travel is returning. Tourists can expect a new experience in NYC with more than 9,000 new hotel rooms coming online this year.

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

India is a very important market for us and to create a distinct voice in the market, with efforts including our virtual sales mission in February.

Besides this, we continue to provide critical press and media outreach, marketing and promotion coordination, as well as trainings and sales efforts to online travel companies, tour operators, travel agents in India. With our monthly travel trade and meeting planner newsletters, we continue to provide useful information related to Covid-19 updates and educational resources to empower the trade to promote visitation to NYC in a safe and responsible way. In December last

year, we also launched The Asian Experience in NYC, a resource on NYCCGO.com celebrating the City's diverse and vibrant Asian community including India.

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

The international outlook is very positive with most markets seeing significant increases in 2022 due to the lifting of travel restrictions. Now, with American borders fully re-opened to visitors for the first spring since 2019, we expect to see a return to our more typical market mix, with top markets including Canada and Western Europe.

With strong arrival numbers, solid pent-up demand and close ties, economically as well as emotionally, with a very flourishing NRI and student community, we greatly look forward to welcoming Indian visitors back this year and beyond.



Makiko Matsuda Healy



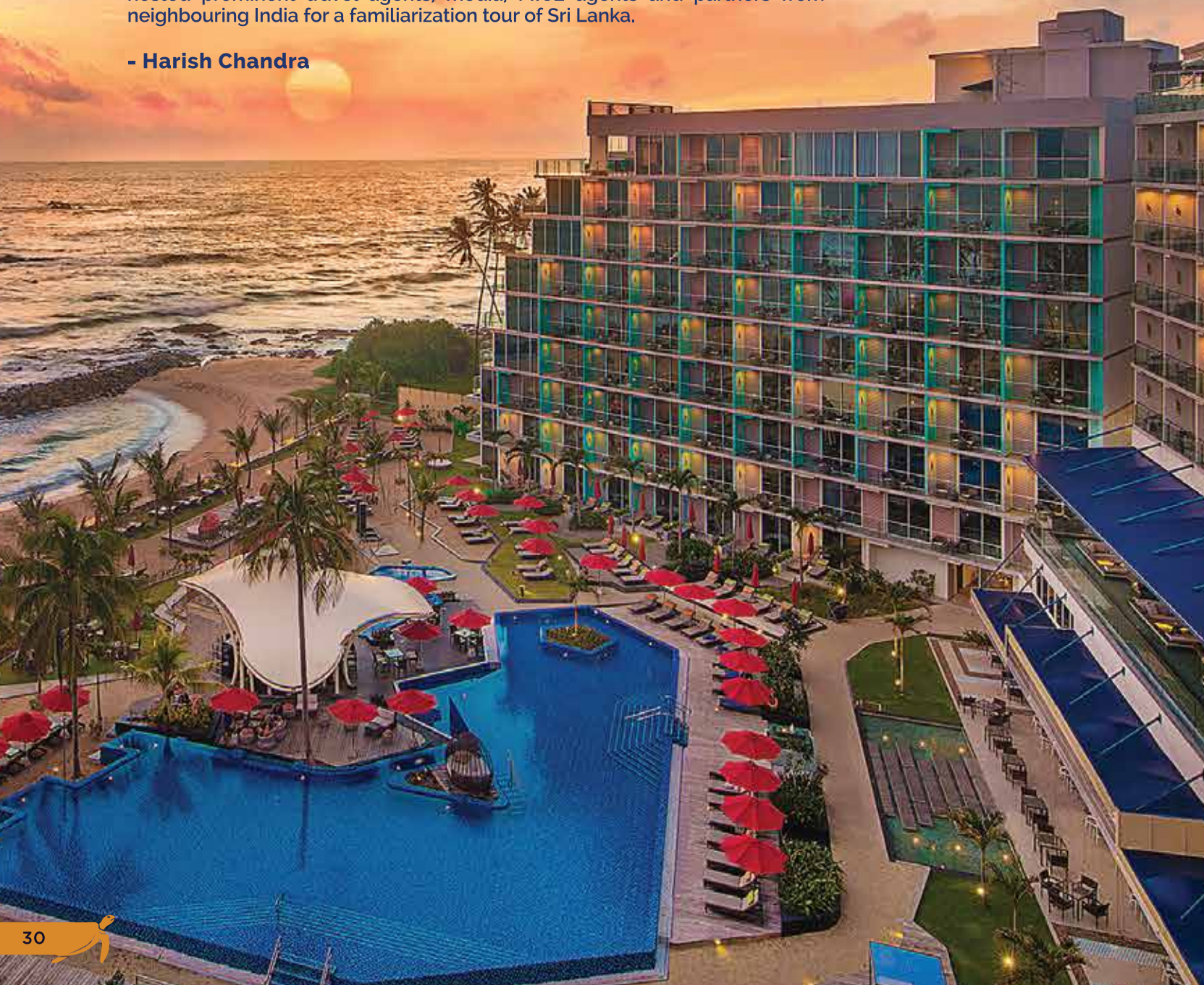


# Sri Lanka

An emerald waiting to be discovered

ONYX Hospitality Sri Lanka in association with Iris Reps and One Above hosted prominent travel agents, media, MICE agents and partners from neighbouring India for a familiarization tour of Sri Lanka.

- Harish Chandra







Vacations have always brought about an emotion of joy, thrill and a buzz unparalleled to none for almost all of us. And if the pandemic situation lined with lockdowns, we've been witnesses to in the past two years are factored in, the feeling just multiplies by folds. Now imagine my enthusiasm, all set for an International vacation after a gap of more than two years and that too a vacation in the 'pearl of the Indian Ocean; Sri Lanka'. My emotions were running through the roof as I was at entering the terminal, all packed and set for my first international trip since the onset of the pandemic. The opportunity was an exclusive 5-night familiarisation trip in Sri Lanka hosted by ONYX Hospitality Sri Lanka in association with IRIS Reps and One Above.

As I boarded the Sri Lankan Airlines flight to Colombo, I was greeted with the warm hospitality and the world-class service of the airline, which seemed so familiar and welcoming even though I was travelling with the airline after a considerably long gap. I was comfortably set in my window seat and in no time was engulfed in the thoughts of the pristine beaches, panoramic views of the Indian ocean, coastline and drives lined with beautiful coconut trees of the

pear-shaped gem of the Indian subcontinent and of course, how can a thought of Sri Lanka be complete without the oh so delectable Sri Lankan cuisine. The thoughts were only pleasantly disrupted by the hospitable staff of the airline serving sumptuous food making the journey even more comfortable and reassuring the classic hospitality of both Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan airlines.

The landing at the Colombo airport ushered me into bliss and in no time, we were through the immigration and on the transport arranged by our gracious hosts. The next stop, Cinnamon Hotel, Colombo our abode for the first day of the trip. Colombo, a city of contrasts as it popularly goes by, never disappoints you. The national and commercial capital of Sri Lanka, Colombo is an assorted blend of modernity and heritage. No matter what your vacation preferences are, the city has all that one can wish for, heritage, culture, bustling street markets, a wide range of f&b options for all your gastronomic cravings and breathtaking panorama among many more. Well, Colombo treated us really well and the exhausting but fun-filled day came to an end and we retired for the night in the comfort and opulence of the Cinnamon Colombo.





## JOURNEYS



The morning sun was different today, it was the Lankan sunshine waking me up from slumber paired with the excitement for the itinerary of the day ahead. The agenda for the day was Kandy, the second destination of the trip and our stay for the next two days. We boarded our transport and took off on the picturesque drive to Kandy bidding farewell to Colombo for now and putting the beautiful Cinnamon in the rearview. The drive to Kandy was a rather smooth one, with beautiful landscapes and signature coconut trees accompanying us throughout the journey. For the travel heads making this journey and wish to explore the attractions on the way, don't forget to add Mount Lavinia Beach, Gangaramaya Temple and Dutch Hospital Shopping Precinct among others in your list, which are small detours but are worth the visit. On reaching Kandy, we headed straight to check-in at the OZO Hotel, where we would be staying for our 2-night schedule of Kandy. Your first thought at the mention of Sri Lanka, anyone? White-sand beaches? Surfboarding? What if I say misty hills and dense forests, yes you heard that right! Let me take you on a trip to Kandy, fondly called the 'City of Kings' it is the island's well-preserved mountain emerald. Set in the midst of misty mountains

and dense forest, with a majestic lake at the backdrop, the breathtaking Kandy also happens to be the cultural and historical capital of Sri Lanka. The OZO, Kandy gracefully incorporates the beauty and aesthetics of the city, nestled comfortably amidst the misty hills and tropical tea plantations, paired with the pleasant views of Kandy lake, Ozo is the perfect property to absorb the beauty of the hill city. A blend of all things good, OZO Kandy is a sophisticated, chic and stylish hotel, with all the amenities required for a memorable stay. With the plethora of attractions at Kandy, paired with the amenities and hospitality of OZO Kandy, the two-day itinerary passed by like a flash, leaving each of us wanting for more as we bid adieu to the charming Kandy.

Our hosts were saving the best for the last it seems and this was evident as we drove into the Amari Galle, a concrete marvel placed ideally at the shore of the ocean in the southern coastal town of Amari. Let me give you a glimpse of Galle before I get consumed by descriptions of the stunning Amari Galle. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Galle is nothing less than a jewel. A coastal city in southern Sri Lanka, the port city is blessed with

a majestic coastline and striking Dutch-colonial architecture one cannot afford to miss. There are a plethora of attractions for one to choose from, based on one's preferences for a memorable trip. Whether you're a lover of history or culture arouses your senses, the lofty Galle Fort and the Galle lighthouse might just take your breath away with their sheer rawness and architecture. If the mention of shopping makes you weak in the knees, Galle is here to your rescue with bustling shopping avenues flooded with art, antiques, clothing and whatnot! So, whatever mood you're in, Galle will not disappoint you.

Now, in my opinion, an immersive experience of this southern beauty is incomplete unless paired with an exquisite stay and that's when the Amari Galle steps in. The Amari Galle is a destination in itself. The stunning property rests strikingly on the beach, with a private beach area for its patrons. The moment we entered the lobby of the hotel, we were greeted by the blue waters of the Indian Ocean, the beautiful shoreline right in front of us. We noticed, this is the property's USP, no matter where you are, you're never away from the views of the ocean. The balconies of each one of the 172 rooms, open

up to panoramic views of the ocean. Another striking feature of the Hotel was the aqua coloured theme running consistently through the rooms, balconies and subtle décor of the property, leaving a coastal vibe for as far as your sight can behold.

The humongous property is equipped with four different dining outlets, for the different moods and culinary choices of the guests. The Ahara Gourmet Gallery is the market-style restaurant of the property serving vibrant flavours of Asian and International cuisines. My pick, go for the local Sri Lankan cuisine, prepared by very talented Chefs; they're an absolute treat to your taste buds. Also, the Amari Galle know us Indians and have gone a notch up in catering to their neighbours by availing them with specialist Indian Chef spicing up the ladles with the best of spices for all your Indian cuisine craving. How about some classic cocktails and a soothing ambience with a view of the ocean? That would be my favourite and if your interests align with me, head straight for their BOMMU rooftop bar looking out over the beach and the ocean or the dense forest, choose your pick. Note, that the views from the rooftop are breathtaking.





## JOURNEYS



Then there is the Shoreline beach club, which is the perfect setting for lazy afternoons, basking in the sun by the pool or the bitch and sipping those delicious cocktails, isn't that a perfect recipe for relaxing noon? I was so overwhelmed with all the offerings of the property that I almost forgot about an event that was erstwhile, the most anticipated activity of the trip for me; The G.A.S.H.E.S Cup! If you're a cricket enthusiast like me, you'd already know what I'm talking about. The highlight of this familiarization trip and the love for cricket among the Indians and Sri Lankans, ONYX Hospitality portfolio hosted us to a friendly game of cricket. I usually don't boast much, but here I would love to mention that the man of the match in the friendly G.A.S.H.E.S Cup was awarded to Mr Harish; yes, that's me! The astonishing fact about the cricket match was it was played within the property premises itself. Exactly, this is how grand the property is. Amari Galle is undoubtedly the best venue for hosting any MICE event and is comfortably equipped to entertain any request the clients conducting MICE would have. From what I have experienced, for anyone with a beach wedding in mind, your search ends here. The Amari Galle has some of the finest arrangements that can go into the making of a memorable wedding event. My personal favourite would be 'peras' by the beach. The perfect sunset, the blue of the ocean as the natural backdrop while the ceremonies take place, a cocktail set up in the open under the glimmering stars, paired with the exquisite Amari Hospitality; ingredients of a heavenly wedding.

My last evening at Amari Galle, which happened to be a networking night with amazing food and great company left me in awe of that moment and the amazing five days I had spent in the Island nation. With breathtaking panoramas, exquisite hospitality, warm and friendly people, and a memorable stay, I was taking back more than just memories! I was taking back a part of Sri Lanka with me, a part that would stay with me forever!

“

“SriLankan Airlines partnered with One-Above and Amari Hotels, to educate and build confidence among top tour operators in order to encourage Indian leisure travellers to visit Sri Lanka. SriLankan Airlines had invited a few of the top-performing series operators to be a part of this FAM. New segments like Galle were introduced in the itinerary, as opposed to the traditional itinerary which was limited to Kandy and Colombo to increase the visibility of Sri Lanka's southern coast. Improving MICE movement to Sri Lanka was one of the other goals, as most of the other destinations had not yet opened up to Indian travellers. Few prominent wedding planners were invited, as destination weddings generate greater revenue.”

**Ruwan Wijekoon,**  
*Manager- Western India,*  
*SriLankan Airlines Ltd”*

“I went out of the country after a long halt of the pandemic. Sri Lanka is an excellent destination and due to the Ramayana circuit, it has a different meaning to our hearts. People are attracted to Colombo due to hotel infrastructure, food, casino, shopping and of course seashores. Kandy is a beautiful hill station and one must explore it by walking around. Home of the temple of the Tooth Relic is also a world heritage site that is beautifully maintained. OZO hotel had a fantastic view that made our stay comfortable. The weather was just perfect. The biggest attraction of the tour was Galle the beautiful seaside place with very nice resorts. Amari Galle is one of the best places for wedding, conferences or MICE. Overall it was an amazing short break by One above, Srilankan Airline and local partners.”

**Zelam Chaubal,**  
*Director, Kesari Tours*

”





HEADS IN BEDS

## A Sumptuous Splendour

# The St. Regis Mumbai

With great views, a good variety of dining options, fabulous pool and gracious staff, The St Regis Mumbai continues to reign over the hearts of guests, consistently shining through times.

- Misbaah Mansuri



As a Mumbai girl who has grown up trying reams of hotels in the sunshine city, I'm quite fussy when it comes to zeroing on a property to unwind and really melt away the mundane stresses. However if there is one property that has continued to pass this test with flying colours, it has to be The St Regis Mumbai.

### First impression

As a keen shopper who likes malls, I love that the hotel is just a sliding door away from the gleaming multi-storey Palladium, with its plethora of international luxury stores. Tucked between the trendy coastal Bandra neighborhood and historic Fort district, the hotel is a towering luxury hotel perfectly situated to explore all that this bustling Indian metropolis has to offer.

The property is in close proximity to some of the city's favorite art galleries, bookstores, coffee shops, restaurants and boutiques. The 395 rooms are sumptuously carpeted, complemented by marble bathrooms with separate soaking tubs. Floor-to-ceiling bay windows afford views of the bustling city and expansive racecourse. With its palatial living room, ornate master bathroom fitted with an oversized tub and sea views, The Metropolitan suite makes a grand impression. I also love how the statuesque hotel hosts art in the form of installations and paintings at every level and is incredibly opulent in its choice of wide, sweeping staircases and elegant furnishings.

### The foodie factor

A paradise for foodies, I was spoiled for choice during my stay here. I loved noshing on the eclectic Afternoon Tea at the all-day Drawing Room lounge-bar is where the traditional St Regis 'tea ritual' takes place every afternoon and the Diya ceremony (culminating in 'sabering' the top off a bubbly bottle) on Wednesdays and Fridays. The fluffy scones and sinful desserts are not to be missed. Perennially

popular Seven Kitchens is the all-day dining room that showcases food from every continent with an army of chefs replenishing buffet after buffet – their breakfast spread is excellent, with an exhaustive array of Western and Indian options.

Luna Nudo is one of Mumbai's most-frequented nighttime destinations for those who enjoy dancing and lively crowds paired with delectable drinks and soul-stirring sounds. Bollywood fans will surely spot a recognizable face on most nights. The St. Regis Mumbai has a charming little library that's home to a small selection of books, complete with tall, regal armchairs to curl up in. Don't miss the signature St. Regis double chocolate-chip cookies.

I also devoured a dining experience at Sahib Room & Kipling which brings colonial era-inspired North Indian fare and aristocratic interiors. The cameo-portrait-laden wall is particularly Instagram-worthy. From the tantalising slow-roasted kali mirch (black-pepper-infused curry) chicken and gosht ki gilawat to the tender lamb cooked with 25 Lucknowi spices, the food here is definitely stuff of culinary paradise.

The new kid on the block in terms of restaurant offerings-Sette Mara, a Middle-Eastern Lounge, Bar & Kitchen serves a mean hummus platter, succulent kebabs and a scrumptious baklava, I heartily recommend.





## HEADS IN BEDS



### Sun, spa and splendour

The St. Regis Mumbai's rooftop pool is not to be missed. Lined with palm trees and shaded loungers, the mosaic-tiled swimming hole boasts sweeping views over the city's skyscraper dotted skyline. You'll find everything you need to squeeze in a workout at the 24-hour gym, including plenty of cardio machines and weight-training equipment. The softly lit, palatial Iridium Spa is an ideal setting for some pampering. Opt for a massage using a fragrant oil blend of immortelle (curry plant) and roses to rejuvenate after a busy day exploring Mumbai. As I surrendered to my nimble-fingered therapists who kneaded my muscles into mush with the rejuvenating massage, I was definitely in spa heaven!

### Verdict

I love how luxuriously the interiors overall are appointed with chandeliers above lounge tables, a tinkling piano and sweeping staircase that exudes an atmosphere of opulence and grandeur. In fact, all the public spaces shout 'no expense spared' – a perfect match for those who like ostentatious luxury, and a rather nice change from the neutral palette that tends to dominate the contemporary incarnation of good taste. The regal rooms which are tonally warmed by gold, bronze and regal red accents, thick carpet, textured walls, silky sheets, romantic mood lighting and marble bathrooms with a large tub and rainfall shower are another brownie-point here. Plus that ultimate luxury: an on-tap butler. With swoon-worthy culinary options, opulent rooms, interiors and plush facilities that are real cocoons of indulgences, The St Regis Mumbai continues to carve a gem-strewn path for itself. No wonder, very few compare to this Grande Dame!





## HEADS IN BEDS

### How was 2021 for The St. Regis Mumbai?

2021 was an exciting year as it made us look at the different opportunities that were out there. Opportunities that we had not thought of before. Opportunities on how we were going to be more entrepreneurial around areas like home delivery with Marriott Bonvoy on Wheels or different ways to sell our rooms to different guest groups. We also learnt to create bio-bubbles for sports teams and top fashion events. Financially, it was a very tough year, there's no doubt about it, but we are glad to say that the end of the first quarter of 2022 has really started to turn the corner and we're seeing a significant growth.

### Can you tell us about The St. Regis Mumbai's big plans and focus areas of 2022?

The year 2022 is around the continuing growth of our food and

beverage offering. We will be launching a Nikkei cuisine lounge and bar - Koishii, followed very quickly by Koi Bar which is a Peruvian Pisco bar. We are also going to introduce something completely new and different to the city - 38 Manhattan, a banqueting space. When I say space, it's going to be an area where you can have a nice fire-side chat during the day and even a party in the evening for over 300 people. I am extremely excited about 38 Manhattan as it is going to be designed to look like a penthouse sitting room in Manhattan, New York. We also have our recently renovated Zenith, as well as a beautiful and spacious new pre-function space called Astoria with the Long Gallery in addition to our Astor Ballroom. We see the return of travelers and we need to focus on making sure we are targeting them with personalized amenities, facilities and experiences. We have already started to see a huge increase in the number of international guests coming back to

the hotel, a market we haven't really seen in the last two years, so our teams are already for them and ensuring that our services are aligned to needs.

### In a city that is inundated with hotels, what gives The St. Regis Mumbai an edge over the rest?

Primarily, it is our Food and Beverage offerings; we took the opportunity during the pandemic of enhancing our venues. There are not many hotels in the city that have so many new, refurbished, exciting restaurant concepts under one roof. We launched Sette Mara, our Middle Eastern lounge, bar and kitchen midyear 2021 and Seven Kitchens was refurbished and launched with its new avatar. By the Mekong was refurbished and re-launched with a new chef - Chef Raymond, and his coming on board has really enhanced the menu. We are now looking forward to our exciting new

entrant, Koishii and Koi Bar which will be opening very soon. Koishii will celebrate and showcase Nikkei cuisine. I must also make a special mention of our wonderful Indian specialty venue - The Sahib Room and Kipling Bar which is a favourite among our guest and The Drawing Room & The St. Regis Bar.

Next is, our location! We are located right beside Phoenix mall, Lower Parel, Mumbai's and probably India's best Luxury Mall. We are very close to some of the busiest business hubs, and some of the leisure hubs of the city. And then, it's just the feeling of being at The St. Regis Mumbai and the whole grandeur of the hotel. The amazing St. Regis rituals that are key components of our hotel. The famed St. Regis Butler Service Program, Afternoon Tea Ritual, Bloody Mary Ritual and the Evening Ritual with the much looked forward to, Champagne Sabering. So, we have varied elements that make our hotel incredibly special.

Nicholas Dumbell, General Manager, The St. Regis Mumbai





TRAVEL THERAPY

# MONACO



# MONTAGE

- Inder Raj Ahluwalia





## TRAVEL THERAPY

The drive from Menton was ordinary enough. Till we rounded a bend on the motorway and alighted at the 'viewing point', that is.

There was nothing ordinary about the panorama that lay ahead and below us. Straddling the coast, its reflections bright in the blue waters of the Mediterranean, was an urban maze that was part concrete and glass, part high-rise monstrosities, and part avant-garde. Cameras whirled and clicked in tandem with our rising excitement.

The principality of Monaco may be one of Europe's smallest states (1.95 sq km), but it is, nevertheless, a full-fledged United Nations member. This independence, recognised since the 16th Century, was won, then protected thanks to the Grimaldi Dynasty which has ruled the rock for over 700 years. Throughout history, this exceptional refuge formed by the sheer Rock of Monaco, with its natural port, has been coveted by primitive peoples and Oriental navigators.

The Ligurians (including the tribe of the Monoikos who were probably the origin of the name Monaco) were the first to settle here, before being overpowered by the Romans who settled in Provence in 122 BC. With the fall of the Empire in the 5th Century, Monaco became a trade route for barbarians, until the Counts of Provence drove out the Saracens in 975, ushering in a new era for the country.

The principality's long and colourful history saw it change hands amidst great upheaval. Today, progress is visible through the length and breadth of Monaco that thrives and flourishes as an ultramodern state.

The world meets here for myriad reasons. Tucked away in France's south-eastern corner, the state is sheltered by the slopes of the French Alps, and benefits from a mild, temperate climate. A four-km stretch of the Mediterranean coast doesn't amount to much area, but the scenery is spectacular – blue as far as the eye can see –

where the sea and sky meet. Over 300 days of annual sunshine have created a unique luminosity.

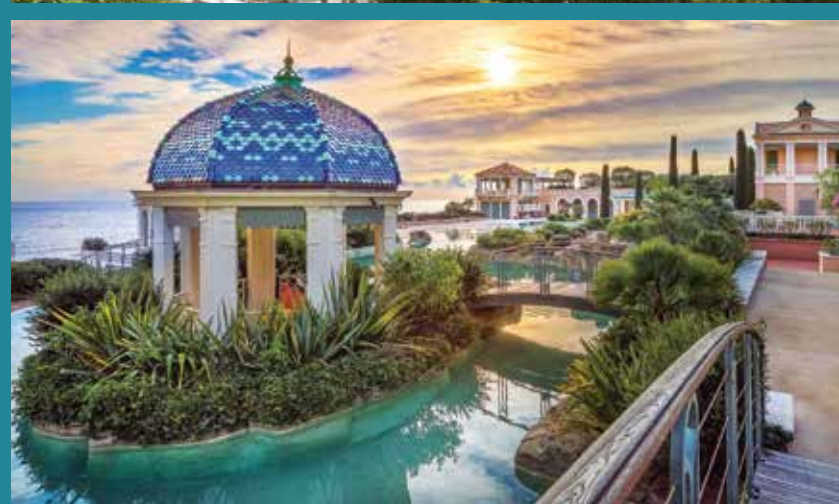
At the heart of one of the Mediterranean's most beautiful bays, the sea itself forms the focus for many sporting activities like sailing, water-skiing, jet-skis, and parascending. There's tennis in the unique setting of the Country Club, or golf on the eighteen-hole course 810 metres above sparkling blue water. Top sporting events include major international competitions in yachting, show-jumping, athletics, the renowned Monte Carlo Open Tennis Championships and the incomparable Monaco Formula 1 Automobile Grand Prix.

The Thermes Marins, overlooking the Port of Monaco recharges one's batteries before one goes shopping in the malls and luxury designer boutiques. At night, the casinos, gala dinners and stunning nightclubs all come alive.

The arts are honoured with a passion, with a constant whirl of prestigious events. Concerts by the Monte-Carlo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Monte-Carlo World Music Awards, the Monte-Carlo Ballet Company, International Showjumping, the International Flower-Arranging Contest, the 'Reveries sur les Jardins' Exhibition, the International Circus Festival, the Rose Ball and the Monegasque Red Cross Gala, all contribute.

When elegance joins forces with upscale entertaining, a ball or gala dinner, the 'Salle des Etoiles' with its roof open to the night sky, becomes almost spellbinding!

The curiosity of visitors is rewarded with the picturesque remnants of a heroic past, stretching back over seven centuries, a testament to the tenacity of the Grimaldi dynasty. Dominating the Old Town with its medieval streets, is the Prince's Palace, which along with the imposing sight of the daily changing of guard, is the most beautiful symbol of Monaco's past.





## TRAVEL THERAPY



The list of attractions also includes the Oceanographic Museum and Aquarium, the Exotic Garden with its extraordinary plants, the National Museum, the Naval Museum, the Monte Carlo Story Museum, the Exhibition of HSH the Prince's Private Collection of Classic Cars, and the Monte Carlo Casino with its sumptuous gaming rooms.

The past and present can be discovered on foot, through an ancient engraved stone door lintel, a statue, a colourful painting or mosaic frieze decorating a building façade. Follow the Sculpture Trail adjoining the Fontvieille Park and the Princess Grace Rose Garden, or enjoy the serenity of the Japanese Garden, or take in the tropical foliage in the Little Africa Gardens, or linger in the brightly coloured stalls in the herb market.

Overlooking the port of Monaco, the Thermes Marins Spa is a treat in itself.. In charming surroundings with direct access to Hotel de Paris and the Hotel Hermitage, this temple of well-being nestles in the pure luxury of pink marble, pale wood and clear glass.

The beautiful thalassotherapy and health centre combines luxurious facilities and high tech to offer sophisticated equipment for body and mind treatments. Numerous courses are available: Well-being and beauty, Azur Tonic, Stress Control, Slimming, Cellulite Elimination, and Pro-Form.

From Diaghilev to King Edward V11, Caruso, the Belle Otero, Challapine, Winston Churchill...The list goes on and on. They all came here to try their hand and flirt with lady luck, and left their impressions for posterity.

The nights are made for gambling, or 'gaming' to use a more respectable term. This is casino, gala dinners and stunning nightclubs time. All roads lead to the world-famous Monte-Carlo Casino, that glitters with splendour.

Europe's first, one of the world's oldest, and definitely most glamorous, the Casino dates back to 1863. It's building is among the most representative of the 'Belle Epoque' architecture which began during the reign of Emperor Napoleon 111.

While the casino's exterior is stunning, its interiors are an escape into a world of art. Moving through the establishment is a voyage in time and in the 'Belle Epoque'. Setting the tone are exquisite murals, period furniture, and priceless painting. There is 'Le Cabaret', the 'Touzet' Saloons (craps, blackjack), the 'Salle des Ameriques' (Slot Machines, Slot Machine 'Colossus'), the 'Salle Blanche' (slot machines), the 'Salon de L'Europe' (European Roulette, English Roulette), the 'Salle Renaissance', the 'Salle Medecin' (European Roulette, English Roulette), the 'Club Anglais' (Black Jack, English Roulette, Punto Banco), the Monte-Carlo Casino Atrium (Slot Machines), and the restaurants and bar 'Les Prives' and 'Train Bleu'.

The dining experience can be delightful, classy or moderate, depending on your budget. Michelin starred chefs, masters of haute cuisine, offer dishes inspired by the surrounding region and infused with a multitude of flavours. A hundred and forty restaurants ensure variety of cuisine and pricing. Michelin starred chefs, masters of haute cuisine, offer dishes inspired by the surrounding region and infused with a multitude of flavours.

One can enjoy a grand meal in the exquisite décor of the celebrated 'Louis XV' (2 Michelin Stars) at the Hotel de Paris, 'la Coupole' ((One Michelin Star) in the Hotel Mirabeau, and the 'Grill' (One Michelin Star) at the Hotel de Paris. Les Ambassadeurs in the Metropole Palace, and Le Vistamar of the Hotel Hermitage, are other good options. For fish specialties, try 'Le Vistamar'(One Michelin Star) at the Hermitage.



## TRAVEL THERAPY

Reminiscent of the splendours of a bygone age, with their multi-coloured frescoes and marble colonnades, or symbolising avant-garde town planning, the luxury hotels are legendary. Some twenty hotels fuss over guests. Some four and four star deluxe properties are located in Belle Epoque splendour around the Casino Square. Others straddle the coast, right on the shore or perched on headlands, with views of the sea, Hotel de Paris, Hotel Hermitage, The Metropole Palace, the Hotel Mirabeau, and the Monte-Carlo Beach Hotel are flagships.

For conferences and meetings, Monte Carlo's facilities are simply superb. The 'Grimaldi Forum' is at the forefront of a new generation of convention centres.

Don't wait too long to savour this slice of holiday luxury.



### The Facts

The nearest airport is at Nice that's connected with several French and European cities.

All trains, including the TGV, stop at the Monaco - Monte-Carlo station. There are connections to several cities like Paris, Milan, Genoa and Basle.

The European motorway network links Monaco with France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, Austria and the U.K.

Short Getaways: Monaco's a good starting point to tour the French hinterland and the Italian Riviera. Take the Cliff Road and you quickly reach the village of Eze. Roquebrune is another village worth seeing. By road, Menton and Nice are half an hour's drive, and Cannes takes an hour.



### 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.







Exploring the land of Mountains

# Nepal

Snow laden mountain peaks with camp bases for trekkers, bustling cities with cuisine that melts in your mouth and twinkling casino nights, Nepal is the upcoming tourist spot for adventure lovers.

- Tripti Jain





## JOURNEYS

A country that is so close to home and offers everything that I need for my first International vacation post-pandemic. The moment I came across the opportunity to travel to Nepal, I didn't give it a single thought and started sifting through luggage bags. Fortunate enough to live just a few hours from the International border between Nepal and India, this was a little treat in my lap. This trip organised by the Nepal Tourism Board was my first ever familiarisation trip, so not only were my trekking shoes new, but the whole experience for me was brand new.

A mountain baby at heart, I always wanted to witness the beautiful range of mountains that Nepal has to offer. Another cherry on the cake was the trip being a road trip. What started with a bumpy ride ended in a trip that I will always keep reminiscing about for the rest of my life.

The very first day of our trip was a 4-hour journey to the Border of Nepal, Nepalgunj from Lucknow, where we were greeted by the officials of the Nepal Tourism Board with loud drum music and Khadas (A customary Nepalese Scarf). Soon after we were allocated our respective hotels. After a long drive, all you need is a comfy bed to bring back the energy for the next day. kalpatru Lords Inn, Nepalgunj was a perfect host for the next two days. It felt like I shut my eyes for just two minutes when the morning sun shined and we were into day two. The day started with the most pleasant encounter, with a visit to the famous Bageshwori Temple in Nepalgunj. Post which we headed to the Siddharth Hotel, Nepalgunj where the main event was supposed to take place. The Western Travel Mart Nepal inaugurated with a symbolic flaming ritual was the commencement of long term relations between the two countries. As Dr Dhananjay Regmi, The CEO of the Nepal Tourism Board said in his speech, "This is the first step towards building a travel companionship between the closest country to us in terms of culture, heritage and people. It is the perfect opportunity to witness Unexplored Nepal."

The Mart kicked off with authentic and traditional performances by

talented Nepalese dancers. It seemed like everyone in Nepal had a knack to perform. During the Mart, I got the opportunity to make the acquaintance of Mr Achyut Guragain, the president of Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents (NATTA), who described Nepal as a potential tourist destination for all the neighbouring countries.

The day of incites and information about the plethora of things Nepal has to offer culminated in a grand gala dinner at the same hotel. The performances by the little Nepalese kids kept the amazement alive and the DJ played a mix of Bollywood and Nepalese songs. The shenanigans of the night weren't really over when we decided to hop into our hotel's casino, which is the biggest casino in Nepalgunj.





## JOURNEYS



Day three started with everyone trying to scrape themselves off the bed and getting ready to checkout and head to Chisapani to witness the famous one pillar bridge, over the Karnali River and engage in rafting amongst other water activities. As soon as we started inching close to Chisapani, we could see the scenery changing. The plains were now long gone and we were surrounded by beautiful hills. Excited about the rafting we almost trekked two to three kilometres down the hill to reach the Karnali River where the blue rafts were waiting for us. The water never seemed so beautiful and the waves washing us toward the Karnali Bridge were a sight of pure bliss.

After a bumpy ride between the jungles leading to the Bardiya National Park, we finally were greeted with the jungle feels. Small cottages with mosquito nets over the bed and a buzzing sound of silence through the night. The Paradise Resort at the Bardiya National Park was a delight. Woken up by the

chirping birds and fresh flowers singing across the resort, it was an early morning for the safari ride into the Bardiya National Park, a densely packed forest stretched across 968km. Although we weren't able to spot any tigers, the safari ride was a treat of its own. I have never seen such a dense forest in my life and with species that are being fostered and preserved for years.

A three-hour-long safari ride later it was time to bid goodbye to the beautiful Bardiya National Park and Chisapani and head back to Nepalgunj where the closing ceremony for the Western Travel Mart Nepal was waiting for us. The night was still young when we decided to hit the casino one last time and this time I won.

The next morning, it was time to journey back home with a heavy heart and a promise to visit again. On my trip to Nepal, I experienced a lot of highs and lows but the best part about the destination was the potential it has to offer and the hospitality which exceeded my expectations.



Dr Dhananjay Regmi, CEO of NTB

### **How do you plan to market tourism post the pandemic?**

Before the pandemic, the main focus of our tourism was on the European, American and Australian markets but during the pandemic, we decided to conduct a number of surveys and research that gave us data that the neighbouring markets, especially India, have a lot of potential and will be perfect if explored. So, we decided to shift our focus to India and neighbouring countries which gives us the opportunity to engage in affordable and convenient tourism. Also, another important aspect of the Indian market is the accessibility to airports. Nepal is a

few hour's drive from Northern India and what more do tourists need that checks all the boxes. The future of Nepal tourism is the Indian Market.

### **In what ways Covid affected Nepal Tourism?**

We have basically segregated the impact of Covid amongst 3 categories of people that have suffered. Firstly, the people had invested a lot before the pandemic, which was supposed to be an important year for Nepal tourism as it was the Nepal visit year. Secondly, the people who had invested in the rental properties and thirdly, the people who worked for the first and second ones. However, the

government was able to cater to the first category of people but the ones who suffered majorly were the second and third category people as the government was unable to do much for them. Which resulted in a major shift of manpower from the tourism sector to the agriculture sector.

### **What campaigns or methods were initiated to address the plight of the locals post-pandemic?**

The situation created by the pandemic gave us the opportunity to introduce Nepal Darshan, where we firstly gave a familiarisation trip to the locals of both western and eastern Nepal where we initiated the blending of both cultures and educated the people on the importance of tourism sector for the country and what magnanimous things Nepal has to offer. We initially started off by inviting journalists and reporters to visit the different parts of the country with the motto of 'Pehle Desh fir Videsh.'

### **How do you plan to promote Nepal to India?**

Firstly our target is to educate the travel agents from India about what all Nepal has to offer, post which they can create and market tourism packages accordingly. We need to assure them that Nepal is a safe market and thirdly, we need to address that by promoting Nepal they can earn money.

### **What are the Top 5 inbound markets?**

Firstly, for the old people wanting to discover religious sights, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, also places related to Mahabharat, Ramayan and Ved Buddha. Secondly, for the youngsters, ample opportunities to discover the mountains through trekking and camping. Mainly the adventure junky youngsters that are looking for a trip that fulfills fun as well as the adventure junky inside them. Also, for families with a vacation that is equipped with visits to all kinds of cities that offer abundant activities for everyone.





# The 'Walkers' of Sri Lanka

They're not only the market leaders in Sri Lanka but also a brand that Indian b2b travel players resonate with. Prabath Harshakumar, Head of Business Development, Asia, Walkers Tours is not new to the Indian market. Let's find out the brand's extensive expansion plans in the region.

- Bharti Sharma

Being a 53 year old premier Destination Management Company in Sri Lanka, Walkers Tours caters to all major source markets globally from Western and Eastern Europe, Northern America, Middle East, Far East, North, South, East Asia and Australia. Not just that, the brand also encompasses a spectrum of segments ranging from leisure, MICE, luxury, wellness, adventure to special interest segments.

## Expanding presence in India

Sri Lanka is geographically next door to India and that creates a lot of opportunities for WTL in the country. As India is a massive outbound market and it's the number one source market for Sri Lanka with the highest number of arrivals by any single country, Prabath has high hopes from the country, which can be derived as he mentions, "India will be one of the key strategic growth markets for Walkers Tours in terms of numbers. We have seen marginal growth over the years but we cannot be satisfied. So, our strategy would be to expand our presence in the market through vibrant representation for North, West, and South to begin with. We will continue to participate in all major travel fairs in India and focus on travel roadshows in second and third-tier cities. Also, we will actively promote and support Fam tours for identified growing segments of the market."

## Back with a bang

As the business gets into the revival mode, he retains an optimistic outlook. Prabath feels that collaborations across this huge market are indeed imperative as post-pandemic most of the DMCs have perished over the past two years. He mentions, "Tour operators too



Prabath Harshakumar

have not been able to survive. We're coming back into the market strongly with the message; we are back in business and are ready to serve you better than ever before." Exquisite traveller experiences Indians are evolving rapidly in their needs when it comes to planning a holiday. They are on a constant lookout for hassle-free

vacation options to spend quality time exploring the destination. At Walkers Tours, they offer first-hand experiences to their customers and aim to curate memorable experiences for travellers. A diligent hardworking team and rigorous customer support have made Walkers Tours one of the reputed names in Sri Lanka's

travel industry. He further shares, "We always strive to stay ahead of our competition-by embracing state of the art technology, constant training of our staff and chauffeur guides to offer an exquisite traveller experience to all the clients travelling with us on the ground."

## Hallmark of trust

Walkers Tours plans to assist tour operators and agents facilitating them in offering the highest quality and value products and services in the destination they serve. "We have a separate team looking after the product development side of our business and coming up regularly with novel products from different parts of the country. Also, our customer service team works tirelessly to ensure the highest quality is maintained on the ground with hotels, transport, guides etc. Hence, we strive always to offer the highest quality and best value products to our partners."

## Opting sustainability

Once you've landed in Sri Lanka, team Walkers will make sure you have the most fantastic trip to their home country. They offer a 360-degree travel solution to any arriving passenger on the ground in Sri Lanka. "We offer a 24 x7 airport operation and transport service and also provide, accommodation at all established and approved hotels in Sri Lanka. WTL is an ISO 9000 & 14000 company. We provide a comprehensive public liability insurance cover for all passengers travelling with us in Sri Lanka. All our vehicles are carbon neutral and passengers travelling with us contribute to the environment. We also hold 'Tourcert certification' for doing responsible Tourism in Sri Lanka," concludes Prabath.







# **Iris Reps: Giving the right hand holding to its partner**

The team Iris consists of professionals who excel in their respective trade and have the right skill to extract results. The Founder of Iris Reps, Alefiya Singh's distinction in travel is driven by admiration, hard work and scads of passion.

**- Bharti Sharma**





Operating in the service industry, companies succeed or fail based not only on what they do for their clients but how they plan and execute their vision. Iris Reps has always envisaged their clients' requirements and that's how they are able to get overwhelming results for their clients in a huge market like India. The crisis has proven that the leader's mindset is one of the pillars on which the success of the company is based. Alefiya has been in the industry for over two decades and has delivered excellence with every new project. She eats, sleeps and breathes travel and thus she has a strong influence from the travel sector that harmonizes with her persona. Iris Reps is representing a diversified clientele such as Coco Collection Maldives- a luxury resort in the Maldives, Makunudu Island Maldives, Kuda Villingili Resort Maldives, Amari Galle Sri Lanka, Tour Managers Fiji, Millennium Tours Azerbaijan and Marine Dynamics Shark Tours and attractions for South Africa, which is also the latest account added to their kitty.

### **Opportunity for priority**

"When expectations are met or exceeded, everyone smiles". As simple as it sounds, it's not always easy to get the desired results, especially with the daunting last two years when people had lost hope. But on the contrary, throughout this time, Alefiya and her team have worked tirelessly with their various stakeholders and have made a mark for themselves. Through a series of webinars, educational sessions and extensive social media engagement, Team Iris has literally extended a hand of support to the industry in distress by constantly feeding them the right dose of information on new trends and destinations.

### **Invested in trade relationships**

Alefiya feels communicating and setting realistic expectations is essential in getting positive end results, encouraging the clients to return again. Preparing your clients for what to expect is of utmost importance. As each client has specific needs, goals, and budget, Iris Reps devises and executes tailor-made strategies which are specifically designed to deliver targeted results. She further adds, "The relevance and presence of the representation company are so important as they advise the brand/client as per the correct market situation. Depending on the situation, we come up with the right sales and marketing strategy that will work for the brand to yield the best possible results. A right hand holding partner is always needed to make a product work. We invested in trade relationships in India, steering them through the new travel landscape."

### **From Concept to Conceptualisation**

Innovation is not just technological advancement or big picture thinking, it's any time your customer experiences more value from you. Thus, Alefiya was honing her leadership throughout. "The landscape and expectations of the stakeholders are changing faster than ever, and we believe it's extremely crucial to innovate and keep pace. With the entire market shut down, Maldives served as the only saving product for the entire travel industry. It has actually helped me understand the destination more closely, we have done small groups for birthday celebrations, MICE groups, and pre-wedding celebrations here, whereas erstwhile the destination was primarily considered for leisure alone. During the pandemic, when the teams were isolated, we

reinvented the wheel and sharpened the tools," she tells.

### **Rare yet imaginative acumen**

The pandemic didn't quash peoples' desire to travel. It has reshaped their preferences for travel. Alefiya believes a lot has changed for the better and they need to have that partnership with clients. She says, "India has peddled to become one of the most lucrative outbound tourism markets in the world. Hence, it will be important for tourism brands to work with specialist companies who have a deeper understanding of the market, even deeper connections with the trade and most importantly, are equipped with the right assets to effectively position them in the Indian market."

### **Trodding on the Merry Way**

IRIS Reps has prospered against all odds in the last few quarters. Therefore the year 2022 is poised for a strong recovery for them, as international air bubbles get lifted, flight frequencies increase and capacity increases. Alefiya adds, "The company is geared up for its next phase of growth across its business verticals. The 2022 year has given us a tremendous opportunity to make new connections, reinstate the contract with existing partners, and announce a series of senior appointments to ramp up its strength. We are expecting more hotels, attractions and tourism boards to come on board. Iris Reps is happy to associate themselves with Marine dynamics, which is an attraction in South Africa. Travellers can experience whale watching, shark diving, etc which is a must-do whilst in South Africa. They have the capacity to accommodate groups, fit and can cater for breakfast/ lunch facilities."





## Centara Hotels & Resorts reflect on a stellar growth

Infusing its authentic values into every touchpoint of the guest's journey, every Centara property aspires to create a sense of belonging. Thailand's most admirable hospitality brand has managed to score high consideration from the Indian market as well. Moumita Mukherjee Paul, Director of Sales – India, Centara Hotels & Resorts tells what entices the Indian market when it comes to such a diversified hospitality group.

- Bharti Sharma





Centara Hotels & Resorts is constantly striving to develop its bandwidth of services and evaluating new ways to personalise and customise guest experience. The brand is well placed to fulfil the requirements of every category of an Indian traveller, including families, couples, the MICE industry and those seeking destination weddings and honeymoons. Indian guests have always been of great importance to Centara as one of their special source markets across the global portfolio. The huge numbers received by every Centara property is a reflection of the immense efforts invested in this market by Moumita and her team. A step further in ensuring their exemplary offerings, Centara is aligned with guests' unique needs, whether it's for leisure, dining, or family experiences or the crafting of unique, personalised stays.

### ***Connects to the core poignant drivers***

With paramount focus on elevating its services to accommodate Indian travellers facilitating a feel at home vibe, more choices for accommodation, dining and entertainment that is at par with the trending preferences of the Indian traveller are being made available. The portfolio of Centara is crafted in a manner that encompasses all budgets or segments including niche and wide. "Centara has a variety in terms of 4-5 stars and now with the opening of Centara Reserve, our luxury segment has gone to new heights. I can proudly say that Centara is in the top five list for all our contracted partners in the destinations we are based. Even the properties are acknowledged widely both by the consumers and the agents," shares Moumita.

### ***Innovation is born of deep insights***

Centara's current portfolio includes hotels and resorts at a

number of favoured locations and thus it's difficult to pick any one destination or brand that is most preferred by Indians. Sharing a few insights, Moumita tells, "When we talk about the Indian market, it is difficult to pick one brand or property, as there are multiple properties that are currently hot selling in the Indian market. If you talk about the Maldives, Centara Ras Fushi is extremely popular with more than 10 per cent of the market share, Centara Grand Mirage in Pattaya has been India's favourite for more than five years now, Centara Grand in Krabi sells way more than our four-star. For us, it's the experience that the customer loves more with us. Each and every property has its unique USP and features which makes it in demand in the India market."

### ***Going 'the' extra mile***

In order to strengthen the brand's ties with the Indian travel-trade fraternity, Centara is gearing up with a newly enhanced focus. Giving details of some exciting plans, Moumita tells, "We are very aggressive with our rates this year, especially in Thailand, Dubai and Sri Lanka. When we re-launched the Maldives, we started with 'The Great India Flash Sale' where we registered 6000+ room nights in the first month; periodic flash sale, value adds and our kid's policy will be our highlight this year."

### ***Deep-rooted collaborating culture***

Centara's visibility on various platforms will certainly help in increasing brand awareness and gaining more consumers. While focusing on expanding and enriching travel experiences with authenticity, Centara has been on an upswing mode as elated Moumita shares, "I am very hopeful this year. If we take it as endemic then this year will be the 'show time' for sure. Centara has not stopped the expansion even when the pandemic was at its height. We opened a property in Vietnam,

our brand new luxury property Centara Reserve is open now, Centara Mirage in Dubai has recently opened, and we are opening our first property in Japan all in a span of one year. Big expansion is underway in Laos and Myanmar as well."



Moumita Mukherjee Paul





# Cora Cora Maldives

Indulge in luxury with unfettered freedom

Cora Cora Maldives is a heavenly multi-layered confection; a perfectly balanced coastal beauty, wrapped in castor-sugar white beaches, surrounded by iridescent turquoise waters reflecting the sand and coral reefs, it rests in the majestic outer layer of the deep blue Indian Ocean. Karishma Kazi, Founder, Black Turtle (India Representative of Cora Cora Maldives) talks about the elite offering of this latest entrant.

- **Bharti Sharma**





The six-month-old property is the recent edition of Maldives's jewel collection. Right before the launch, the brand started expanding its ambit in the Indian market and has been receiving an overwhelming response already. A celebration of lifestyle and liberation, Cora Cora Maldives is driving hospitality trends that are setting the benchmark in its own style. Its contemporary trends create a space that sits in perfect harmony with the natural environment inspiring the guests. The inspirational backdrop, intuitive service, infinite connections and a distinctive mix of once-in-a-lifetime experiences makes it an extraordinary destination for couples, families, and groups searching for paradise. Located in Raa Atoll, Cora Cora Maldives is just 45 minutes by seaplane from Velana International Airport or 30 minutes by domestic flight, followed by a 20-minute speedboat journey.

***Proliferating the aesthetic balancing***

While the allure of mesmerising destinations and postcard induced fantasies inspire us to travel, it is quite often that we check into a hotel, soak in its aura but then find ourselves seeking some thrilling activities to venture into. If you nodded in acceptance, then Cora Cora Maldives is the answer ready to come to your rescue covering all you seek during your stay at the property. "Cora Cora Maldives is positioned as a premium all-inclusive resort with an Ethos- 'It's Freedom Time'. From the name to the concept and inclusion, we have found that based on the feedback in the market we stand out from our competition. Most importantly, the colourfulness, contemporary feel and sense of easiness truly create that second home for guests. Accommodation size ranges from the generously appointed Beach Villas at 68 sqm to the two-bedroom Lagoon Pool Villa with slide inject an element of fun into the traditional over-water villas which the Maldives is famed for," tells Karishma.

***Trump card for India market***

There is absolutely no debate that the property is blessed with stunning natural beauty, but there are many more reasons to justify Cora Cora's position as one of the handpicked resorts in the Maldives. Sharing some insights on the potential India market, Karishma shares, "Since the opening of Cora Cora Maldives, we have had a fair market share in the premium segment from India. This is due to our winning formula i.e. the pricing strategy and meal inclusion plan. India will remain in the top five arrivals for 2022 and 2023. I believe hence, we noticed there is also retention of guests in certain resorts, where guests are travelling twice to the Maldives due to its accessibility and affordability than any previous years."

***The authentic 'native' feel***

An immense amount of thought has gone into making this place feel wonderfully lively and yet intensely private. She tells, "Cora Cora Maldives differs itself from others, we are providing our guests with an array of experiences in terms of culinary. Culturally speaking, we have a licensed Museum on the property which provides guests with an insight into the civilisation and history of Maldives. Also, we have a mix of guest nationalities from the UK, Germany, USA, Russian, Switzerland, South Korea, GCC and this does appeal to the Indian guests as well. As a premium, an all-inclusive resort that only opened in Oct 2021, India is in our top 10 Nationality. We will continue to invest in marketing and maintaining our presence in the market."

***Zen with luxury***

It is an established fact that the dining experience has the capability to lift or dampen the spirits of any patron. Cora Cora has taken this notion pretty seriously and has left nothing to chance. A stay at Cora Cora treats the guests with a

culinary journey, including a wide range of international restaurants and premium beverages, coupled with in-villa services and amenities, activities, excursions and much more! Talking about how it is working the best for Cora Cora to entice the travellers, Karishma tells, "After six months of opening, based on the feedback from our guests in India, we found that they loved the comfort of the villas. They felt liberated during their stay t and felt that the resort provides a natural relaxing ambience."



Karishma Kazi





LA LA LAND

*Let the  
feast begin at*  
**The Bali  
Art  
Festival**

Celebrating the essence of the Balinese community with fun, frolic and fiesta, Indonesia's most famous province Bali features a yearly charade that unites the people with cuisine, parades and exhibitions.

- Tripti Jain



Showcasing the rich heritage enveloped with vibrant colours, Indonesia has always attracted travel junkies. Bali being one of the busiest provinces in terms of tourist attraction is without a doubt one of the crown jewels. Sporting the fiesta on a greater level, Bali organizes an annual festival to turn up heads and join in on the shenanigans. A month-long festival with over the top costumes depicting the Balinese culture and people from all over Indonesia sipping a flavour of every tradition. Known as Pesta Kesenian Bali or PKB, the annual jamboree is a mix of people showcasing the culture in the most authentic way possible. This year the festival kicks off on the 11th of June, and with month-long merriment will close on the 9th of July. It is the longest and largest cultural arts festival in Indonesia, even in the world. Bali Art Festival will be implemented in the form of Offline and Online Hybrids, as an effort to protect the classical arts and the Sebunan tradition (locality-based) in each Regency or City. The materials of Bali Art Festival include Peed Aya (Parade), Rekasada (Pergelaran), Utsawa (Parade), Wimbakara (Competition), Kandarupa (Exhibition), Widyatula (Sarasehan), Kriyaloka (Workshop) and Art Awards.

### *The grand entrance!*

Traditionally the festival is hoisted with a grand parade, which is followed by performances and all kinds of activities to indulge your creative side. A time in Bali when the streets are flooded with tourists from all across the world to experience the fun and frolic of the festival. Founded in the year 1979, to foster the Balinese culture, the Bali Arts Festival started under the governorship of Ida Bagus Mantra. The first-ever festival lasted for two months showcasing some of the almost extinct Balinese cultures and took the first step to preserve the cultural and classical art of the people. A festival that allows people to explore the culture in the most unique way. Over the course of

time as the people developed the festival also became grand, and today it is one of the most awaited times of the year.

### *The fun begins here*

During one whole month, the best of this idyllic tropical island's dance, music, and artistic expressions are displayed to the public. Bali showcases its best cultural presentations, presented and revived by villagers across the island. Daily performances of traditional and modern dance and music alongside countless related cultural and commercial activities during which literally the whole of Bali swarms into the city to present offerings of dance, music, excitement, colour and stunning beauty. The cherry on the cake is the little kids, dressed in lively costumes with traditional makeup, dancing their hearts out along the streets.





### *Larger than Life*

The island bustles with people travelling from far off lands just to witness the magnanimity of The Bali Arts Festival. Many towns are decorated with traditional bamboo and coconut decorations to celebrate this festival and many outdoor stages and pavilions are erected so that the vast array of talent can be viewed all over Bali Island. On these stages, you will be treated to dances, puppetry and musical performances.

Among notable highlights, the dance dramas (Sendratari) cannot be missed. Other important high points like Bali's Modern Theatre, Photography Workshops, Culinary festivals, and musical performances are what bring everything together. A wide choice of competitions to participate in which include documentary movies competitions, handicrafts, literary writing, painting, photography competitions, - the whole gamut. Parades and dramatic

and opulent processions are also shown including the Gong Kebyar, the TopengPanca, Nglawang, DramatariArja, WayangKulitParwa, JogedBumbung, and more.

### *Grab a bite*

Travelling all the way to Bali and experiencing authentic Balinese food is a treat for the taste buds. The festival flaunts many cuisines from around Indonesia, but one must definitely try the authentic style of cooking when visiting. Food stalls catering to all your needs will not only surprise your eyes but will give your trip a happy ending. Apart from the authentic Balinese meals, you will also spot cuisines from all across the world with their own little home. The festival sticks to the basic idea of bringing cultures together and promoting the traditional ways of living, breathing and learning.

### *Creative Angle*

Since a lot of artists gather at the Bali Art Festival venue to share their work and ideas, it becomes imperative for the organizers to create a place for everyone. The spirit of the participants is very friendly and open, and it is a very enjoyable experience whether you are taking part in them or watching them.

Exquisite displays of traditional music and gamelan recitals occur on outdoor stages at the Bali Art Centre. The centre boasts multiple stages, and each stage is reserved for a specific type of performance. Screenings of films designed to document and tell the story of Bali culture and history take place in auditoriums set specifically for this purpose. These auditoriums serve as an introductory platform for international tourists before they delve further into viewing various performances and arts.







### *Drenched with cultural fuels*

Even though artists, in general, seek an audience for their performances, the art form itself can never die in essence. Artists at the Bali Art Festival are aware of that and hence the overall mood during the festival is that of celebrating and sharing culture and ideas. Such a confluence of like-minded perspectives is always an enthralling experience for the ones taking part in it either by performing or by visiting. Not only will you be able to find and understand everything that Bali is about at the Bali Art Festival, but the general spirit of the place and the population will also be resonating with the nature of the festival, painting your trip perfectly and completely to serve that purpose as best as it can.



# BTM 2022

## SETS A BENCHMARK WITH ELEVATED NETWORKING



The 6th edition of Bengal Travel Mart (BTM) took a plunge this year as it witnessed an enormous response from the travel fraternity, the thrust to promote north Bengal and its colossal tourism potential has encouraged EHTTOA to organise the show in a grandeur manner.

- Sudipta Saha



With every passing year, BTM has established itself as a brand that not only showcases the encouraging tourism potential of North Bengal but also offers an exclusive first-hand experience of the place to its delegates. BTM has turned out to be a potential platform that offers an opportunity for every stature of travel professionals to exhibit and enhance their business. This year, BTM has set a benchmark for itself, being organised from March 5-7, 2022 at Mayfair Tea Resort, Siliguri, the show was more grand and impressive. Approximately around 80 exhibitors and around 530 travel trade stakeholders graced the event and made it a huge success. BTM has always acted as a connecting thread between North Bengal, the seven sisters and the neighbouring countries Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh; the show has not encouraged the stakeholders from the eastern Himalayas to participate has also created an opportunity for the neighbouring countries to participate, showcase and explore the business opportunities.





## EVENT AFFAIR



The sole purpose of BTM was to establish Siliguri as a platform for the inbound and domestic market for the Eastern Himalayas and encourage tourism in the region. Sandipan Ghosh, General Secretary, EHTTOA said, "Our sole purpose of organising BTM is to push tourism in the region and to offer an opportunity to stakeholders to showcase their offerings under one roof to the travel and trade fraternity. Our aim is not only to promote the Eastern Himalayas but also to promote the seven sisters and the neighbouring countries. Every year, we are trying to expand the show and create more opportunities for the stakeholders of the region."

From the inaugural ceremony to the technical session, every bit of the event was brilliantly set up. The buyer and seller meeting during the event were meticulously organised to increase the business prospects. BTM 2022 was dedicated to Late Kalyan Deb, then Senior Vice President and the entire show was dedicated to him. Well, putting together a grand show altogether is not as easy without a hardworking and dedicated team, the team EHTTOA (Eastern Himalaya Travel and Tour Operators Association) and the convener for the year Vivek Subba, Anil Kansobanik and Hemant Agarwal.





# Busy travel season ahead, as witnessed at OTM Mumbai



Delivering a strong message of rapid post-pandemic recovery, OTM Mumbai successfully culminated its three-day grand reopening on a thrilling note. The marquee event consciously focused on rebuilding the travel and tourism economy in the post-Covid scenario. Resurfacing after a two-year forced sabbatical, the iconic three-day travel trade event rose to the occasion by hosting 800+ exhibitors from over 20+ countries, 29+ Indian States, and 7 Union Territories. Bombay Exhibition Centre once again played host to the leading travel trade show in Asia Pacific with much-anticipated fanfare and gaiety. With the grand success of the 2022 edition, both in terms of participation and footfalls, OTM continues to reinforce its stance as the leading travel trade show in India and the Asia-Pacific. The event successfully brought together all destinations open for business including International Tourism Boards, National, and State Tourism Boards, Hotels & Resorts, Airlines, Destination Management Companies, MICE, Wedding Planners and Bloggers under one roof.

More than 25,000 trade visitors from all over India and abroad attended

the three-day B2B exhibition.

Sanjiv Agarwal, Chairman & CEO, said in his opening address of the awards ceremony: "This edition has had a special significance as a booster of confidence in travel trade. The worst seems to be behind us and it is time to get back to business. As travel and tourism contribute about a tenth of the economic activities, it is imperative that the industry is put back on rails after such a devastation in the last two years."

"With major travel markets like China having zero-Covid rules, travelling to and from there has become almost impossible at this point of time. Unfortunately, the European market too is beyond reach due to the current political upheaval. Travelling to the USA also comes with mandates like quarantining. Thus, India right now is in a unique position to fill these gaps. Indians, in turn, have also started taking keen interest in destinations closer to home, like Maldives, in order to have a relaxed time at a place where they are welcomed with open arms," he added.

The eminent dignitaries who graced the awards ceremony were Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, Hon'ble Tourism Minister, Maldives, Dr M Mathiventhan, Minister for Tourism, Government of Tamil Nadu and Dr B Chandra Mohan, IAS, Principal Secretary, Tamil Nadu Tourism.

Talking about India-Maldives relationship and the importance of OTM, Dr. Abdulla Mausoom, Tourism Minister, Maldives said, "India-Maldives relationship is very strong. When the world was closed, we were able to have a dedicated travel bubble between Maldives and India that really helped Maldives tourism. Hence, we are going to be present at all the travel platforms in a very strong manner. Of course, in the year that was the toughest for the travel industry, nearly a quarter of the tourists in Maldives were from India. So, I wish to thank the Indian travel trade for being a part of Maldives tourism... In this regard, OTM is indeed a very important platform. I wish OTM becomes stronger and continues to be a platform for us to do business."

Maldives Tourism was present with a large delegation led by the Tourism Minister, extending its full support to OTM as a Partner Country. Azerbaijan Tourism Board and Nepal Tourism Board were also exhibiting as Partner Countries. Qatar Tourism, Korea Tourism Organization, Singapore Tourism Board and the Department of Tourism of Philippines were showcased as Feature Countries at the event. Their travel suppliers, airlines and hospitality partners got the opportunity to network with selected Indian travel trade. Visit

Brussels, Visit Utah, Seychelles, Fiji and Monaco were also showcased at the event along with International DMCs, Hotels, Tour Operators representing Greece, Dubai, France, Madagascar, Russia, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, United Kingdom, among others.

OTM saw a major participation from State Tourism Boards in numbers and size for the revival of travel within India, including from Delhi, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Ladakh, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand. Maharashtra was the Host State of the event. Other destinations like Andaman & Nicobar, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Goa, Jharkhand, Manipur, Punjab, Sikkim, Telangana, Haryana, Puducherry, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal were represented through their private stakeholders.

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

The next edition of OTM will take place on 13-15 September, 2022 at the brand new Jio World Convention Centre, BKC, Mumbai.



## *Palladium Hotel Group: A Rendezvous of Travel & Tapas!*

Palladium Hotel Group the internationally renowned Spanish hotel chain represented by Global Destinations in India recently hosted exclusive cocktail dinners for their top 50 priority travel and trade partners and media in the cities of Mumbai and Delhi.

The evenings were graced by The Consul General of Spain Mr. Fernando Heredia Noguera along with The Director of the Tourism Office of Spain in India Ms Elisa Robles in Mumbai, while Delhi saw the presence of The Deputy Head of Mission, the Embassy of Spain Ms. Montserrat Momán Pampillo and Incharge of Consular Section, Embassy of Spain Ms. Helana Escorial Lopez in attendance. The St. Regis, Mumbai and Shangri La, New Delhi worked as perfect venues for the event evenings.



## *Emaar Hospitality Group conducts a two-city roadshow in India*



Emaar Hospitality Group recently organized a two-city roadshow in India on 15 and 16 March 2022, in Delhi and Mumbai. The roadshow was held to strengthen relationships with the leading travel agents and tour operators to boost Indian travellers. India, being one of the biggest outbound markets

in the world, the biggest for Dubai, and amongst the top 10 for Bahrain and Turkey, this roadshow brings immense value to the group's success.

The event was attended by Indian travel industry's top contributing trade partners, associations and media affiliates. The evening was graced by the presence of Mr. Mark

Kirby, Head of Emaar Hospitality Group who feels deeply connected to the Indian Market for its positive energy and contributions to the hospitality industry. The group's presence in India is not new, they are represented through the Nijhawan Group for over a decade and have experienced an impressive growth in the Indian market.

On the occasion, Priyanka Nijhawan, Director, Nijhawan Group said, "We are thrilled and excited for the year 2022 as travel and tourism is fully revived. We conducted Emaar Hospitality Group's roadshow in India after 4 years and we were very keen to know more about the portfolio. We thank all our partners for their continuous support."





## TAT/TG Amazing New Chapters Mega FAM Trip' organised in Chiang Mai and Phuket

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) recently organised the 'TAT/TG Amazing New Chapters Mega FAM Trip' in which 60-70 travel agents, media, and key opinion leaders (KOLs) from around Asia and the South Pacific were introduced to new tourism products and services on offer in Chiang Mai and Phuket. The trip took place from 21 March to 3 April, 2022, with participants from Mongolia experiencing the fam trips programme in Phuket from 21-29 March. Meanwhile, participants from ASEAN-Cambodia, Lao PDR., Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines and Vietnam; East Asia – Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan; South Asia – Maldives, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan, and the South Pacific – Australia were on the programme in Bangkok and Chiang Mai from 28 March to 3 April.

Mr Tanes Petsuwan, TAT Deputy Governor for International Marketing-Asia and South Pacific said, "This fam trip corresponds with the 'Visit Thailand Year 2022: Amazing New Chapters' tourism campaign, which aims to show Thailand's readiness to welcome back tourists. At the same time, with Thailand reinstating the TEST & GO entry scheme again since 1 February, TAT is taking this valuable opportunity to proactively stimulate key markets in Asia and the South Pacific and boost tourism to the kingdom."

The 'TAT/TG Amazing New Chapters Mega FAM Trip' project was aimed in particular at the digital nomad, responsible tourism, and health and wellness market segments from Asia and the South Pacific.





*Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru Maldives hosts networking dinner in Mumbai*

Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru Maldives along with One Above Destination Management Services recently hosted an exclusive dinner on the last day of OTM for more than 100 travel trade partners in Mumbai to foster conversations. The resort presentation was presented by Fawaz Ibrahim, Director of Sales and Marketing. The evening was filled with joy, laughter and great food. The response was extremely encouraging, and it was heart-warming to witness the spirit of camaraderie and friendship among the trade partners.

Raising a toast to 2022, Jenna Gangmei, Sales Manager, Mövenpick Resort Kuredhivaru Maldives said, "India has been one of the biggest source markets for us in Asia and we appreciate all the support we received from our trade partners. For upcoming months, we are expecting a great business by offering 3 nights packages with dolphin cruise and floating breakfast, it can only be possible if our trade partners continue to support us." Rahim Aslam, Director, One Above Global DMC added, "We help in providing our trade partners with more hotel options especially in the luxury segment in Maldives. We will be continuing our efforts to host such educational and interactive events in coming future for different markets."





## APPOINTMENTS



### **IndiGo**

InterGlobe Aviation (IndiGo) appoints Mahesh Malik as its new Chief Commercial Officer - CarGo. Mahesh will start on May 15, 2022. Over the last several years, the Cargo industry in India has been witnessing exponential growth and IndiGo has been in the forefront of serving this industry via air connectivity across the country and neighboring nations. In addition to belly CarGo that IndiGo traditionally carries, since the pandemic, we made configuration changes to some of our aircraft to carry in-cabin CarGo. Over the next few months, IndiGo is planning to induct freighters into its fleet. To support this growth and to bring in enhanced focus on CarGo operations, IndiGo today announced the appointment of Mahesh Mallik as Chief Commercial Officer - CarGo.

### **Accor**

Accor has recently appointed Aniruddh Kumar as Vice President- Development, India & South Asia. Aniruddh brings over 23 years of diverse experience to the role, due to his previous posts in Investment, Merger and Acquisition, Joint Ventures, Strategy and Business Planning, Commercial and Contractual Dispute Resolution, Development, Corporate Finance, Accounts and Taxation. In his new role, Aniruddh will spearhead Accor's expansion strategy in the region in order to consolidate its current brand footprint, as well as focusing on expanding current and new brands.

Congratulating Aniruddh Kumar on his appointment, Puneet Dhawan, Senior VP Operations, India and South Asia said "With an extensive experience across major hospitality brands and a deep understanding of various domains, Aniruddh will contribute tremendously to bolstering Accor's position in the region. We are confident he will uphold the Accor legacy and commitment to its guests and owners, for the best of experiences and lead the group to new horizons."



### **Udaan Hotels and Air IQ, Siliguri**

Neeraj Kumar Ailawadi has joined Udaan group of companies as India Head Sales & Marketing. Bringing 30 years of experience in the Travel and Hotel Industry, he has vast network in B2B market and public relations. He will lead the team to achieve business targets for both Udaan hotels and Air IQ. Throughout his carrier he has successfully strategised, executed and contributed to various travel companies. He is now responsible for branding, marketing and sales of Udaan Group of hotel – Chain of hotels in North East and AirIQ.in – a fixed departure and pre purchase air tickets company.

### **Hyatt Regency, Dehradun**

Harkaran brings with him 15 years of varied experience across Marriott & Hyatt hotels in India. He began his journey with the Hyatt family 12 years back and has worked across Hyatt Pune in 2010 to Hyatt Hyderabad Gachibowli, Hyatt Regency Kolkata and was General Manager at Hyatt Raipur, before taking on his latest role at Hyatt Regency Dehradun. Passionate about delivering above-and-beyond moments for guests and colleagues, Harkaran is strategically aligned, financially disciplined and result-oriented with a repertoire of exceeding expectations of all stakeholders. In his role as the General Manager, he is leading the multi-cultural team of this stunning 263 keys hotel across all disciplines.







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