

TRAVEL

# turtle



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## Singapore

CONCEPTUALISES AND REIMAGINES  
THE PROSPECTS OF 'SAFE' MICE

EMIRATES: MARKET LEADER IN  
INNOVATION AND PIONEERING SPIRIT

MANIPUR: BEEN THERE YET?

CITY TOURISM: UNRAVELLING  
THE URBAN BLING



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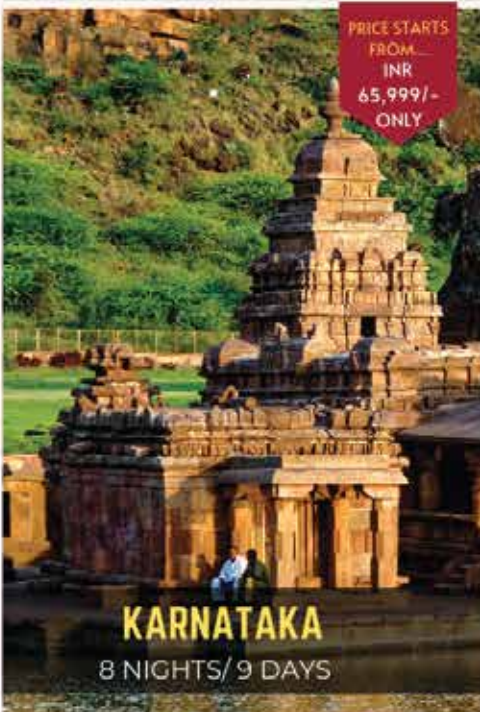
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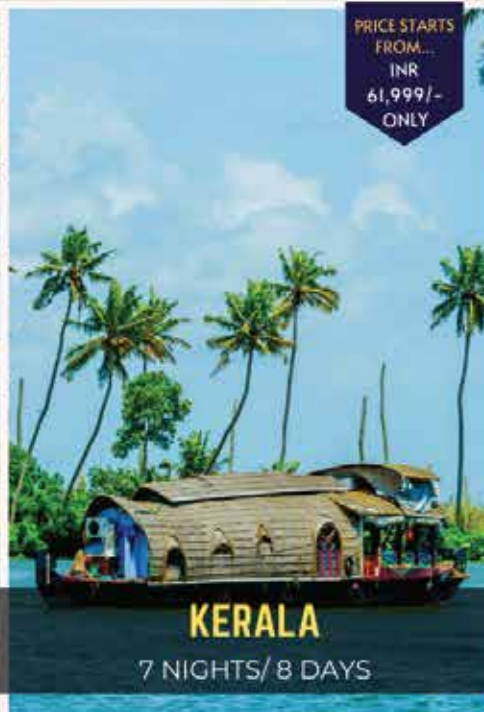
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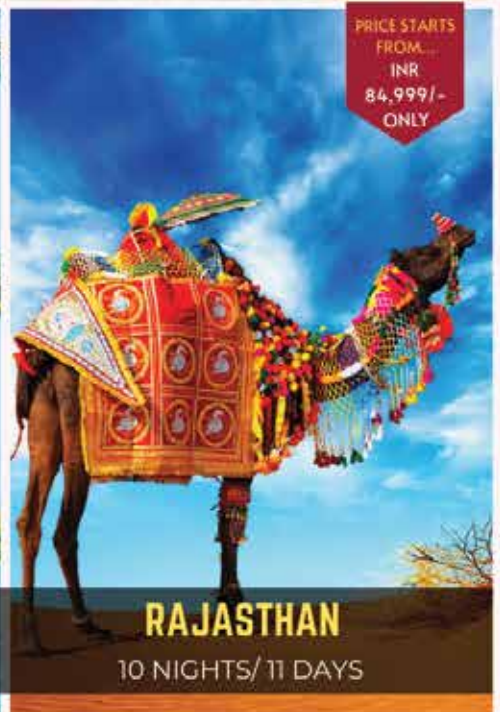
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10 NIGHTS/ 11 DAYS



# Editor's Letter



It's been a month lined with highs and lows for us in terms of experiences, but isn't there all the fun lies, right? The stage is set to experience the wonders of the outside world again, bask in their grandeur and exquisiteness, while reconnecting with the outside world, you will find your travel dosage within these pages.

Our tales in this edition meander along the Douro river and find solace in the coastal town of Porto. Here, we sample excellent vintage Port wine, relax to music, art and creative renaissance while swathed in the warm rays of the Portuguese sun. The cuisines, architecture and harmonious lifestyle seems to have accompanied us on our voyage to the Jewel of India, Manipur.

We are featuring properties such as DoubleTree by Hilton Jaipur, which has exploited the maximum advantage of its location, nature and brilliant aesthetics while sandwiching it with dollops of personalised attention - all leading to inspiring experiences for the guests.

With the perceived future of travel, we all know that travelling is ever more essential now, not only in terms of exploration but in order to get it back on track. What's more encouraging than the IATO Convention which is happening in December? We obviously couldn't hold our horses and with anticipations, we spoke to the hardworking team of IATO in order to know 'What members can expect at the convention?'

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

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Editor: Bharti Sharma



SINGAPORE:

# REIMAGINING SAFE BUSINESS EVENTS

As the world continues to grapple with COVID-19, health and safety remain top priorities for international business events. MICE professionals need to think progressively and reimagine their operations to accommodate different types of engagement.

Singapore, consistently ranked as one of the most innovative countries globally by the likes of Bloomberg and INSEAD, is at the forefront of this evolution. The country's MICE players are unafraid to test new ideas and reinvent event elements, whether physical or digital.



Photo credit: Singapore Tourism Board



Photo credit: Marina Bay Sands

## PUTTING HEALTH AND SAFETY AT THE FOREFRONT

Singapore has demonstrated ingenuity in coming up with prototypes and protocols for a new era of events. Such innovations help maintain the highest standards of event safety without compromising the delegate meeting and networking experience.

For instance, at TravelRevive, 'meeting pods' were outfitted with protective plexiglass shields designed to reduce droplet transmissions. Similarly, geospatial technology was used to power the Safe Event platform, which was trialled at the Geo Connect Asia conference to help enforce health and safety measures.

## EVOLVING THE DIGITAL EVENT EXPERIENCE

To future proof themselves amidst these extraordinary times, Singapore's MICE venues have also strengthened their digital event offerings. Such technologies help to enhance and extend content delivery and engagement.

Marina Bay Sands' hybrid event broadcast studio has been a game-changer, enabling multi-format sessions to come to life on a physical stage fitted with LED walls and hologram capabilities. Meanwhile, the SingapoReimagine MICE Virtual Show used livestreaming to bring leisure tours and masterclasses to overseas audiences. Plus, a virtual 3D tradeshow gave participants a platform to connect remotely with exhibitors.

*The Singapore story is one of reinvention, and the local MICE industry's innovation mindset has enabled it to remain agile. With the country's future-oriented initiatives, event organisers and delegates can have peace of mind when doing business in Singapore.*

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**With bold ideas, Singapore's MICE industry is reshaping the face of business events.**





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**MANIPUR**  
BEEN THERE YET?

**20-24**  
**PORTUGAL**  
HISTORIC BLISS AND  
THE WONDERLANDS  
OF MARITIME EMPIRE

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### ***Vida Hotels & Resorts to open its doors this December***

Vida Beach Resort Marassi Al Bahrain is set to open its doors in December bringing with it a cool new hospitality concept like no other to the Kingdom. Offering a hub for the next generation of entrepreneurial minds to stay, play and connect, the new beach resort takes its inspiration from art, design, entrepreneurship, and fashion.

The sixth Vida property and its second beach resort will offer chic meeting rooms, funky dining outlets and comfortably designed contemporary rooms for the young and on the move, making Vida Bahrain the go-to destination this season. A metropolitan space for those who are tech savvy, enjoy modern art or those who simply want to kick back and relax, whatever your needs Vida Bahrain will take care of them. Situated in the southern island shores of Marassi, with immediate beach access, and in close proximity to the soon to be open Marassi Galleria Shopping Mall, the 157-room and 141-serviced residences resort will be home to your next best escape.



### ***Istanbul spotlights art and culture***

Istanbul's Atatürk Cultural Center reopened its doors to art lovers on October 29, 2021, the 98th anniversary of Turkish Republic Day. Known as Atatürk Kültür Merkezi (or AKM in short) by the locals, the newly-built contemporary structure references its former, iconic design.

The AKM is one of the most important investments of the Beyoğlu Culture Route, established by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism as Türkiye's one of the largest arts and culture project to date. The Centre marks the start of the culture avenue, and its reopening launches the International Beyoğlu Culture Route Festival, also developed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Minister of Culture and Tourism, Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, inaugurated the Istanbul Atatürk Cultural Center in an opening ceremony attended by prominent figures from the business, arts and academic spheres, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations, and local and foreign media outlets.



### ***Fiji to reopen to international travellers in December***

The picturesque paradise of Fiji, known for its incredible scenery and warm, welcoming people commemorated Fiji Day and 51 years of the island nation's independence on the October 10, 2021. On this monumental day, the country's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama has announced that after nearly two years of being closed, its borders will once again be opened to international visitors from December 1, 2021. This official announcement comes off the heels of Fiji reaching its goal to get 80 per cent of its eligible population vaccinated with both doses. While travel restrictions will be lifted in December, travellers from India keen to visit Fiji shores may need to wait a little longer due to the continued travel restrictions in place between the two countries.







**Los Angeles celebrates the return of international travelers**

As the United States reopens its borders to fully vaccinated travelers from overseas, Los Angeles is thrilled to welcome international visitors to start their comeback. The LA visitors know and love is back, continuing to push the envelope of creativity and innovation with new adventures to discover with the full range of the visitor experience from museums and restaurants to theme parks and outdoor live events open for business. A truly global city, LA is home to people from more than 140 countries speaking 224 different identified languages. Prior to the disruption to our industry, international markets

represented a highly important share of business with nearly 1 in 4 visitors to L.A. coming from overseas. In 2019 alone, the destination welcomed over 7.4 million international visitors who injected \$11.6 billion in visitor spending into the local economy. November 8 marks a crucial milestone in the recovery of L.A.'s tourism industry. Los Angeles Tourism forecasts project a growth in international visitor spending from \$3.7 billion in 2021 to \$9.7 billion in 2022. This represents a growth of 262 per cent in international visitor spending.

**IndiGo strengthens domestic network, adds 12 new flights**

In-line with its commitment to enhance domestic connectivity, IndiGo, India's leading airline has added 12 flights on its 6E network in the month of November. IndiGo commences flights between Ahmedabad - Jodhpur from November 01, 2021; Bengaluru - Rajkot, Kolkata - Coimbatore, Delhi - Trivandrum, and Dibrugarh - Dimapur effective November 02, and Ahmedabad-Ranchi, effective from November 10, 2021. Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy and Revenue Officer, IndiGo said, "We are pleased to add 12 new connections to strengthen our

domestic network, cater to the increased demand and improve accessibility between metro and tier 2/3 cities. These routes will enhance connectivity between northern, eastern, north-eastern, western, and southern regions, promoting trade and commerce. We will continue to offer new routes as per the travel demand across various sectors. It is our endeavour to consistently provide our signature on-time, courteous and hassle-free service at affordable fares, across our unparalleled 6E network".



**German National Tourist Board presents the top 100 destinations of foreign guests**

Internationally, Germany continues to be a popular travel destination. Between January and the end of July 2021, more than 14,000 foreign visitors to the online portal [www.germany.travel](http://www.germany.travel) voted for their tourist favourites in Germany. Last year's winner Miniatur Wunderland Hamburg received the most entries for the fourth time in a row. Europa-Park Rust in second place and Neuschwanstein Castle in third place also confirmed their rankings from the previous year. Other attractions that have positioned themselves in the top ten in 2021 are

Phantasialand Brühl, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, the Romantic Road, historic Dresden, Berlin Dresden, Berlin, the Black Forest National Park and the Crime Museum in Rothenburg. Germany's biggest and most popular cities attract plenty of visitors from India. Everyone from business travellers and cultural aficionados to shopaholics and party animals will find exactly what they're looking for. Indian Travellers are sure to be enchanted, whether in a UNESCO world heritage site or a lesser known gem.



## Cygnett Group of Hotels and Resorts debuts in Dehradun

Continuing its aggressive expansion mode, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has announced the launch of Cygnett Inn Paras, Dehradun, a contemporary and budget hotel. Cygnett Inn Paras will cater to both business and leisure travelers looking for state-of-the-art international standard facilities and conveniences at budget prices. Cygnett Inn Paras is strategically located and is near the ISBT Bus Stand and Railway Station and close to Dehradun's Jolly Grant Airport.

"Cygnett Inn Paras is a state-of-the-art modern hotel that has been built with only one thing in mind – guest convenience. We want to give our guests the best of stay and dining experience at a price that appeals to their budget," said Sarbendra Sarkar, Founder and Managing Director, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts.

## Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort appoints Global Destinations as its Marketing Partner in India

Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort has recently appointed Global Destinations as its sales and marketing arm in India, effective immediately. The Republic of Mauritius, located in the south west of the Indian Ocean, attracted nearly 76,000 Indian visitors in 2019. On 1 October, Mauritius reopened its international borders to double-vaccinated international travellers, including those from India. Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort, managed by Hawaii-based Outrigger Hospitality Group, offers guests 181 spacious ocean-facing rooms beside a white sand lagoon in the south of the island, adjacent to the scenic

nature reserve of Bel Ombre. The resort combines local culture with world-class hospitality. It is known for its serene setting, premier amenities, locally inspired entertainment and diverse dining options, including Mauritian Creole flavours.

"We are honoured to welcome back guests from India to Outrigger Mauritius Beach Resort," said the property's General Manager, Mr Cyrille Carmona. "With our new partner Global Destinations, we look forward to showcasing both our beachfront resort and the scenically beautiful south of the island including where Bollywood movies were filmed."



## ALL – Accor Live Limitless - has All You Need to celebrate the festive season!

Accor, a world-leading augmented hospitality group, has announced 25% off on stays at 55 hotels and resorts across India. Whether you are looking for thrills of wilderness, the excitement of new discoveries or the pleasure of serenity, enjoy ALL YOU NEED with ALL – Accor Live Limitless.

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As the year comes to an end, Accor is ready to welcome its members into its hotels across the Middle East, Africa, India, and Turkey, from November 1, 2021, until April 30, 2022, providing them with all they need. The "All You Need" campaign offers members of ALL up to 25% discount on stays alongside the chance to win 1 Million Reward Points, redeemable in any Accor property around the world, when staying at any of Accor's participating hotels & resort across the Middle East.





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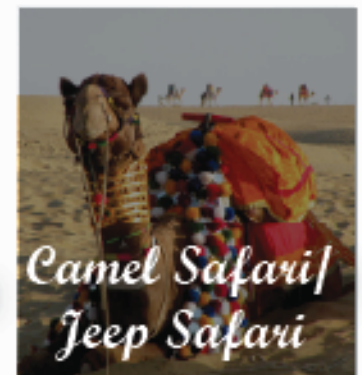


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CITY TOURISM:

# Unravelling the urban bling

City tourism is not an alien phenomenon, it's been there for a while but the segment has witnessed immense growth in the last couple of decades. These increasing trends contribute their major share to the incessant growth of information and communication technologies, which have not only put access to information in the palms of travellers but have also helped in shaping tourist behaviour, moulding their preferences and expectations.

- Bharti Sharma





Since ancient times, cities have acted as magnets for civilisations, housing cultures and commerce and thus attracting visitors from both within the empire and travellers from distant lands. The history associated with cities, the vibrance, the diverse cultural offerings are some of the major factors for the dominance of city or urban tourism in the travel domain. As per UNWTO, city tourism, which is also referred to as urban tourism is considered as 'trips taken by travellers to cities or places of high population density. The duration of these trips is usually short i.e., approximately 1 to 3 days but many cities around the world are creating experiential products in order to increase the duration of stays.

just reassurance on the role of technology and communication in increasing city tourism. Leisure travel provides 78 per cent of total global tourism expenditure, and unsurprisingly contributions to GDP are higher in leisure-driven cities. The eight highest-ranked destinations in terms of travel and tourism's share of GDP are leisure-driven and include Cancún (49.6 per cent), Orlando (18.7 per cent) and Antalya (17.6 per cent). Cancún, Marrakech, Orlando, Las Vegas and Antalya are the top five cities with a greater reliance on travel and tourism than their respective countries.

### He who pays the piper calls the tune

#### The vibe attracts the tribe!

There are several factors contributing to the increasing trend of city tourism but one such contributing factor has its root in the behavioural pattern of travellers. It is estimated that more than half of the world's population lives in cities today, so urbanisation being a thing people living in cities display attraction towards visiting other cities, due to the population density, spirit, amenities, lifestyle, cultural mix of the societal constituents among other reasons, fortifying the trend. City tourism has thus become catalyst of global travel to the extent that traveling to cities has grown faster than total international travel demand in the past decade.

#### More than meets the 'EYE'

The role of technological advancements and communication has a greater role in supporting the trend of city tourism than the obvious. Mobile technology has made travelling to cities and disseminating information, easy for travellers but the increasing popularity of OTT platforms and their content has the viewers pining to travel to destinations their favourite web series are set in. Dubrovnik's reliance on international visitors accounting for 92 per cent of its tourism GDP (as per the data shared by WTTC) is

Infrastructure and development of assets plays a huge role in putting the destination in the map for the potential travellers to choose from. Cities that spend on their infrastructural expansion are better equipped to reap the returns than their counterparts. The proportion of international vs. domestic travel in cities is expected to rise with the rapid growth of emerging markets. Domestic travel accounts for 73 per cent of global travel and tourism expenditure in cities. In fact, cities in China have a heavier reliance on domestic than international demand, with domestic tourism accounting for over 85 per cent of travel and tourism GDP in Shanghai and Beijing.

International transit arrivals worldwide were expected to reach 1.4 million by 2020 and 1.8 billion by 2030. Over the period 2007-2014, the number of city trips worldwide increased by 82 per cent and reached a market share of 22 per cent of all holidays, according to the latest official statistics. Recent developments and behavioural patterns have ensured that cities which were merely serving as entry and exit points to larger destinations are no longer perceived as mere embarkation, or transit points in a journey or just business centres but as full-fledged attractions and destinations in their own right.



### Betting the bottom dollar

We've established the fact that social, economic and technological forces are piloting the substantial flight of city tourism. But let us establish the economic and socio-spatial prospects of city tourism for the region. A study among more than 2,600 residents in Copenhagen, Berlin, Munich, Amsterdam, Barcelona and Lisbon reveals that what residents value most is a positive atmosphere, liveliness and international vibe tourism brings to their city, along with the protection and restoration of historical parts of the city and traditional architecture. City tourism has become a breeding ground for innovation and the element driving economy and development at regional and local levels. It is well-observed that employment creation, facilitator of foreign exchange, promoting investments and contributing to the society has made city tourism a beacon of economic driver at global, national and regional levels.

### Breaking the bank

Tourism has the honour of bridging gaps between race and cultures, but there are interesting spin-offs that come with the role. City tourism is one of the major catalyst for employment generation in the area and those who perform well, display unparalleled results. Abu Dhabi (10.4 per cent), Tehran (6.8 per cent) and Chongqing (6.0 per cent) are leaders among the top ten cities in terms of employment growth across continents. In contrast, the leaders in terms of an absolute number of travel and tourism jobs are Jakarta, Beijing, Mexico City, Shanghai and Bangkok. Look out for Shanghai, Guangzhou, Bangkok and Chongqing in 2027. Shanghai went from being the 8th largest city in terms of travel and tourism GDP in 2007 to become the largest in 2017; a position it is expected to keep until 2027. While Beijing and Paris are forecast to remain the second and third largest destinations, Guangzhou will take fourth place, followed by Bangkok in fifth position.



Dime a dozen

With increasing tourism, comes increasing demands, and urbanisation has added to the expectations of the tourists with the cities and their infrastructural facilities. However, the ever-increasing tourism and related economic activities are responsible for a substantial increase in environment degradation. It has become of paramount importance that tourism and activities arising from tourism are factored in during the urban planning and design stage by the authorities, in order to provide opportunity for sustainable growth of the tourism industry as another source of economic income. Tourism changes and transforms cities and urban spaces and vice versa – these transformations are not always desirable, especially in historic cities such as Rome where incessant influx of tourists in residential areas is adversely affecting the quality of living of local residents. The historic city-centres of such cities display heaviest concentration of tourists, catering to whom is also compromising the heritage and architecture of the ancient city centres. If tourism is recognised as an important force of urban change, this requires long term policy, planning and good governance in which tourism is integrated and the complex realities of tourism with its possible nuisances in the city and the hinterland are taken into account.





# Manipur

## BEEN THERE YET?

Is this a problem of plenty? Almost eight states with nature's abundance beauty, limitless possibility and distinct identity attract only a few thousand real tourists. Leaving apart few all centric traveller; Manipur by and large, even today remain a mysterious destination.

- Anand Singh





## INDIAN SAGA



### The crown jewel of India

Travellers hesitate to step in beyond Darjeeling and Sikkim and get acquainted with Brother Sikkim's adorable Seven Sisters. Refreshing rugged streams, energetic waterfalls synchronising with breeze whirring through pristine lush green meadows and aromatic tea estates engulf in the chanting of monasteries multiphonic singing bowls are enough reasons to tempt one for a truly mesmerising sojourn. If at some point of your voyage you come across the local with precious heart and infectious smile and if your roaming eyes see mani (Jewel) shape hill around you; you are in Manipur. It's said that once this entire area was like famous Loktak Lake but turned to dry land due to the curse of Jungle God and so people decided never to cut trees. In fact, Imphal Fort is still named Kangle Fort (Dry Land). This eternal green shade said Punshilok locally meaning 'Spring of Life' will

not let blink your eyelid. She got all the characters to leave you spellbound.

### Déjà vu

I recon Manipur; city of Imphal is as its capital and as a connecting sutra between mainland India and far off northeast because this very place gives you comfort and confidence to explore rest of Northeast states. Land of head-hunter Naga in its north, Mizoram in the south, Sun rising Ahom dynasty of Assam to its west and international boundary of Myanmar (Burma) is in its east. Women mostly adorn handloom Sari like Bengal, Odisha and Assam. Staple diets recipe usages Rice, a lot of vegetable, herb and local red Chillli and it has a lot of similarity to that of the cuisine of our Purvanchal states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Surrounded by the hegemony of Buddhism of Burma; Saivism Siva and snake of Naga; Ahom, Kamroop of Assam and

Christianity of Mizoram; Manipur cherish Vaishnavism: an incarnation of Vishnu as Rama and Krishna and Hinduism. Among seven sisters states; Manipur with such similarity to the populous culture of India give you a feel-good and home ease which is an evitable ingredient to a successful journey. It's so well connected by flight from New Delhi, Kolkata and Guwahati that wife no more sing 'Mere piya gaye Rangoon, kiya hai wahan se telefoon'.

### The hiding place of Gods

The jewelled land of Manipur has a lot to offer to its visitor. It's been said that Lord Krishna visit Manipur to Marry Princes Rukmini of Manipur. Shree Shree Govindajee temple with gold plated dome, the paved courtyard is a historic centre of the Vaishnaviates with festivity and religious congregation. Shri Bijoy Govindaji temple is the oldest temple of Manipur and

dedicated the Brother Balaram. There is also a big Shri Gopinath temple in Bidhnupur. Raas Leela, a love-inspired dance drama of Radha-Krishna at Vrindavan is now Manipur official classical dance. All across Manipur, we see the divine statues of Lord Jaggarnath, brother Balaram and sister Subhadra carved out of jackfruit tree. Nirtyananda Narshimha temple is associated with Balrama and Chaitnya Maha Prabhu. Nath Sect supreme Guru, Guru Goraknath ji freed his disappeared teacher and Guru Yogi Matashyaendra from Manipur. 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat', this national integration voyage of Lord Krishna from Dwarka in West to Manipur in East can successfully be promoted as Dwarka.

### The melting pot of cultures

From the globally acclaimed Manipuri dance to an ancient form



## INDIAN SAGA

of martial arts 'Thang Ta', Manipur has a lot to offer. Sangai Festival from November 21 to 30 is the best time to see Manipur bloom with its arts and culture, handloom, handicrafts, indigenous sports, cuisine, music and adventure sports. The 'Festival' is named after the state animal, Sangai, the brow-antlered deer found only in Manipur. This festival happens just before the famous Hornbill festival at neighbouring Naga state and gives traveller a unique opportunity to witness two distinct cultures. Manipuri local dishes can be relished at the fairground. Love of art and beauty is inherent in the people and it is difficult to find a Manipuri girl who cannot sing or dance. Ema market or Mother's market, a show of feminine might is the only exclusive women market in a world run by over 300 Emas.

### Travel through history

Located in the heart of Imphal, the sacred place for the Meiteis 'Kangla Fort' is a symbol of Manipur glory and a must-see for history buffs and art lovers. Red hill in the Bishnupur district is the site where the Japanese soldiers joined the Indian National Army and fought against the British. Battle of Imphal (April 4-6, 1944) was fought here and the famous India peace memorial is built here in respect of died Japanese soldier. Imphal War Memorial is the final resting place for 1600 commonwealth service personnel who sacrificed their lives in the battle against Japanese forces during World War II. There is Martyr's Memorial in memory of the Anglo Manipur war of 1891. Last but not the least, a visit to Manipur is incomplete without seeing the INA Memorial and the spot where the Indian independent flag has been hoisted for the very first time by Neta Ji Subhash Chandra Bose.

### Explore the hidden Paradise

It's suggested to come with a professional lens but then those without it will not miss any as the sights behold in you for a lifetime. Land of green meadows such as Dzukou valley is a walker's delight. Yangkhullen village built on a rocky

slope is home of Zeme tribe where the whole village lives like a family. Loktak Lake, a scenic and mystical freshwater lake resemble a miniature island. Keibul Lamjao National Park here is the worlds only floating National Park that exists and is the only floating National Park in the world. It's an unexplored bliss for adventure enthusiasts and solitude seekers, spread over 40 square kms. Manipur is the birthplace of Modern Polo, the world's oldest living polo ground is here. This game is used to play to test King's martial and Cavalry skill. Enjoy a day excursion to the Moreh border in Myanmar, a shopper's paradise and the confluence of varied culture and tradition. One must visit Imphal, local market to buy some handloom sari and tribal shawl, bamboo work and clack pottery made by Chapka women.

Soon there will be a Flight from Mendeley (Myanmar) and Manipur is part of the international highway Singapore to Kabul, Thailand-Bhutan Car rally pass through it. The Institute of Bio-resources and Sustainable Development (IBSD), Manipur Mountaineering and Trekking Association, Loktak Development Authority, Forest Department, Polo Club, Manipur Tourism Association of Tour Operator, Government, NGO, local community all are working out for inclusive growth of the destination. Have you been there yet?



Manipur, an exotic destination enriched with enthralling experiences and striking experiences. Shri W. Ibohal Singh, Director (Tourism), Government of Manipur, shares on the initiatives taken by the tourism board to encourage experiential tourism in the state and how experiential tourism has taken shape over the years.

### 1. How has experiential tourism flourished in Manipur over the years?

Travellers who visit our State prefer to stay and experience many of our popular destinations by actually staying there and by mingling with our locals. Many travellers who have an interest in experiencing our remote natural locations, adventure lovers, and others interested in learning about our culture and traditions, our ancient history etc. visit our State every year. Also, with over 35 tribes and communities, every year is filled with festivals that give travellers an opportunity to actually mingle with different tribes and revel in the celebrations. As such, experiential tourism has always been our strength as a tourist destination.

### 2. In the recent past, how has the tourist arrival in the state been and what numbers did you receive in 2019 as compared to 2018?

Manipur has continuously welcomed scores of tourists from various countries and also from other states in India. We received 9,794 Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) and 1,66,032 Domestic Tourist Arrivals (DTAs) in the year 2018-19. In the year 2019-20, Manipur received 12,102 Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) and 1,67,334 Domestic Tourist Arrivals (DTAs).

### 3. What according to you are the factors influencing experiential tourism in the state?

Manipur is a destination tailor-made for tourists who do not visit a place for a day or two. Our state has lots to offer in terms of adventure, culture, rich natural beauty, exotic flora and



Shri W. Ibohal Singh

fauna, ethnic and artistic diversity, etc. and to experience all of these, many travellers have either made repeated visits to the state or stayed at their favourite destinations for days to really experience the best that the destination offer. There are ancient caves, monoliths and megaliths, and pre-historic sites in districts of Senapati, Tamenglong and Ukhrul which could be of interest to tourists. Manipur's rich cultural heritage and ancient past, dating back to several centuries, attracts foreign students interested in learning art and culture. Besides, tourist attractions in our state like Shree Govindajee Temple in Imphal- the most popular pilgrim centre of the Vaishnavite Hindus in Manipur; the Shirui Hills at Ukhrul District the abode of the rare Shirui Lily; the Loktak Lake and the Keibul Lamjao National Park that needs no introduction are destinations that give travellers a never to be found experience at any destination. To sum it up, Manipur is a State bestowed with everything that attracts experiential travellers and the nature of offerings that our State gives to a traveller has always attracted visitors to the State even before the time the term 'Experiential Tourism' was coined.

### 4. As a tourism board, what initiatives are being taken by you to encourage experiential tourism in terms

### of infrastructure, connectivity?

Manipur Tourism has been developing infrastructures through financial support from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India under the Swadesh Darshan II Scheme covering Shree Shree Bijoy Govinda Temple (Imphal West), Shree Shree Govindajee Temple (Imphal East), Shree Kaina Temple (Imphal East), Shree Bungshibudon Temple, Shree Gopinath Temple (Bishnupur).

The project was sanctioned on 25/07/2016 and the total cost of the project is Rs. 53.79 Crore. The project was completed and inaugurated on 21st December 2020 by Shri Nongthombam Biren Singh, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Manipur along with Shri Prahlad Singh Patel, Hon'ble Minister of State for Tourism and Culture (I/C).

It is the first of its kind for the State of Manipur and the completion of this project will help attract more visitors and cater to the needs of travellers wishing to learn about the religious traditions of Manipur.

A mega eco-tourism project at Loktak Lake has been proposed and it will be funded through EAP. The project will include many firsts of its kind facilities in the State and will be undertaken with an estimated cost of Rs. 1,350 crore. We are also focusing on developing rural tourism in the State to attract new traveller segments from across the country. We have been encouraging people to develop homestay facilities in their districts and a guideline for establishing home stay setups was released last year on World Tourism Day.

Manipur is already connected by air with direct and connecting flights from many cities such as Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Northeastern states such as Nagaland and Assam. Railway connectivity to the state has become functional and the entire railway network in the state will be fully functional soon.

Also, we are taking up projects under North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) to enhance road

connectivity in areas such as Khabam Lamkhai and Hannaching in Imphal East.

### 5. Travellers now are keen towards exploring the unexplored, any plans to promote or introduce such hidden gems to the world.

Manipur is a new destination for many domestic and international travellers. Our main area of focus is to attract more travellers to our State through active promotion while leveraging on our strength as a destination bestowed with the best of natural beauty and things that are not to be found anywhere in the world.

We plan to focus on our strengths such as adventure, nature, and our cultural heritage while looking to attract travellers from other parts of India as well as from other countries. Also, the MICE travel segment and wedding tourism are other segments we are going to explore. We plan to develop facilities that support these two segments in the future.

Also, we are taking up several projects to develop tourist attractions such as the Dzuko Valley trek at Senapati District; Heritage Tourism at Yangkhullen Village, Senapati District; Bishnupur District and Cave Tourism Project at Ukhrul District.

### 6. Post COVID, travel trends have transformed, how are you planning to promote Manipur?

We have been lately expanding our target markets towards the eastern and western parts of India in order to attract travellers to the State. Our promotional campaigns were initially concentrated in the northern markets like Delhi and Punjab. We have been slowly taking our campaigns to states such as Gujarat, Maharashtra, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.

The current scenario of the Covid pandemic has halted the travel industry. Post-Covid, we plan to connect with our target markets in the south through our stakeholders while also continuing our promotions in other parts of the country.

OFFSHORE BINOCULARS



Credits: 36\_Exterior do Santuário da Sra do Sameiro, Braga\_Credit Francisco Carvalho

# Portugal

Historic bliss and the wonderlands of Maritime Empire

The country that bleeds red victory, not only on the Football field but also on the map of Europe. Pinnacle to the southern European region, with extraordinary architecture and exquisite travel experience.

- Tripti Jain





Credits: Lagoa Marinha beach MIN-DSC\_0932 (5) Credit AT Alagrv

Long scattered beaches touching the Atlantic, grilled sardines and salt cod any time of the day, and the beautiful European architecture overlooking the Iberian Peninsula. What more can you ask from a place, the country Portugal has it all!

Portugal is becoming the new hub for tourists from all over the world. With a population of over 1.3 crores, it is the land of hills, beaches and mind-numbing architecture. While the world is dealing with travel rules and regulations due to the pandemic, Portugal is making way for travellers to explore the trenches of southern Europe. The Algarve's beaches are the perfect excursion for a romantic evening while sipping wine and caviar. The city of Lisbon known for its exquisite cuisine is a treat and right on top of the bucket list.

### ***Nostalgia around the 1500s architecture***

When in Portugal you can surely not ignore the Magnifique European architecture. The streets packed with colourful houses, and restaurants in every corner with excited football fans, cities of Portugal are a breath of fresh air. Picture perfect towns along the Atlantic are the heart of the country, where you'll often find travellers trotting and capturing the essence of the land.

The historic city of Lisbon and Porto are definitely the go-to places, but not to forget the tiny cobbled villages that are blissful for wine lovers and tasters. When travelling in Portugal the best way to experience the local flavour of the country is to rent a car. What better than a road trip to explore the breezy beaches of

Algarve and mystical castles of Sintra.

### ***Cities that will take your breath away***

Almost every Portugal travellers bucket list includes Lisbon, one of the prettiest cities in Europe with open plazas, bustling streets with beautiful architecture and stunning churches marking the grandeur of the city. Whether it's the famous Tower of Belem or the historic charm of Alfama, you can find beauty in every corner of Lisbon.

If a fairy tale is all you can think of, Sintra is the place for you. Nestled in the pine-covered hills of the Serra de Sintra Mountains west of Lisbon, it is the city of dreams. Known for a collection of castles, the city is pouring with romance and nostalgia from the old novels. The colourful Palácio Nacional

da Pena (Pena Palace) and the more classical Quinta da Regaleira are the most distinct palaces anywhere in Europe, with a wide variety of travellers from all over the world.

The home to sandy beaches and dramatic coastlines, Algarve is home to the clifty Ponda Da Piedade and the old town of Lagos. A three-hour train ride from Lisbon, the city draws a thick summer crowd during the months of July and August.

Planning to take a break from the hustle and bustle of the city, Duoro Valley is the best place to crash. One of the most coveted destinations for wine lovers in Europe, the Duoro Valley is a perfect canopy for enjoying an evening with dozens of wine cellars. Apart from the fascination with wine Duoro has some of the most stunning natural landscapes that scatter around for acres.

### Food for thought

The joys of good food pervade all parts of life in Portugal. Despite the fact that the food is regularly overpowered by its neighbour Spain, Portugal has some of the most lip-smacking and delicious dishes to offer.

Portuguese food is simple but prepared with great taste and impeccable effort involving some of the most basic ingredients available fish, meat, olive oil, tomato and spices. You can hardly differentiate between the spices as they are densely amalgamated with each other to provide the best-tasting dishes.

When in Portugal you have to try the famous Bacalhau, which is a dried codfish. It is a simple recipe but with intense flavours that will leave you wanting more. Another iconic traditional Portuguese dish that is a must-try is Caldo Verde. The national sandwich of Portuguese cuisine is called a Bifanas, which you can easily find in every corner. The Portuguese love their desserts, especially tarts, and anyone who shares the same enthusiasm for sweets. What better than a day full of mouth-melting food and a night with some chilled port wine and dessert!



Credits: I898\_Kitesurfing Algarve\_Credit ©ATA Algarve

### Crème de le crème staycation

Travelling Portugal is a pristine experience with some of the most beautiful and luxurious hotels or boutique hotels. Apart from the grand Hotel experience, Portugal is famous for its countryside stays that allow you to relax and enjoy the natural beauty around you. Windows opening right into wine orchards and paths leading to cliffs make the best staycation for travellers. Some of the Hotels that are a must stay -

- The Lisbon Marriott Hotel
- Crown Plaza Porto
- Hotel Avenida Palace
- Santiago de Alfama
- PortoBay Flores
- Valverde Hotel



Credits: Lisboa Belem Tower\_05\_ac\_Credit Turismo Lisboa



## OFFSHORE BINOCULARS



Credits: 133 - Caminhante passando a Ponte das Tábuas, Rio Neiva, Barcelos - Caminho Santiago - Credit Miguel Da Santa Amatar

### *Crème de le crème staycation*

Visiting Portugal is a treat for the mind and the soul, where you can venture into the sandy beaches and also climb to the creepers of the wine harvests. It is a destination for exploring the taste buds and the mood swings every step of the way. A perfect amalgamation of historic culture and the new age Portugal streets.

### *Facts that travel along*

- Portuguese is the official language of 9 countries.
- Lisbon was almost destroyed by an earthquake, followed by a tsunami 40 minutes later.
- The oldest bookstore in the world is in Lisbon.
- Over half the world's cork comes from Portugal.
- The first Portuguese tarts were supposedly made in the 13th century by monks.



Credits: Comporta Vineyards 2 ©MaurícioAbreu



## OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

### ***What is great about Portugal that makes it so worthwhile visiting?***

The authenticity and kindness in our country will amaze any visitor, a ground basis for Portugal being an award-winning tourism destination, for sure. Portuguese are very passionate about their country, origins, and achievements. Our historical background is astonishing and that path made us a very friendly and inclusive country, our people are natural-born hosts, we are storytellers and we take huge pleasure when we see visitors from other countries enjoying the secrets only locals can tell! Talk to the locals and take their recommendations.

Portugal is 36 times smaller than India, but with seven regions including the islands offering huge contrasts, 850 kms of splendid beaches bathed by the Atlantic Ocean and the best climate in Europe, mild winters, perfect summers with the Atlantic breeze, makes the temperature just perfection. Take a look at our social media gallery @visitportugal and be inspired.

### ***Portugal has been developing a lot of experience based activities for the travellers. What experiences and activities are planned for the comprehensive growth of the tourism sector?***

Portuguese are simple people. We try to develop an approach that is very much focused on the warm hospitality but connected to our origins and our regional contracts, in welcoming every single tourist that comes to visit our country. The country offers beautiful landscapes and architecture, mountains, wine regions, coastal vibes all mixed in with a rich culture, fantastic food and entertainment and easy accessibility, making it the perfect destination. It's more than a sun and sea destination, where the Algarve and Madeira come to mind thanks to the wonderful beaches, clean and

warm waters. It offers diversity and quality of national and international hotels, rural tourism, charming and boutique hotels, wonderful food and wine and further reasons to advise Portugal:

- Walking & Cycling trails – more than 3,500 km of Portuguese Certified Trails, group or independent tours;
- Surfing- first surfing reserve in Europe at Ericeira near Lisbon;
- Nature & Outdoor sports – options such as canyoning, paragliding, rafting, sailing, dolphin and whale watching;
- City Breaks – the historical and the modern cities of Lisbon, Porto, two cities, two rivers, amazing experiences including shopping (23 per cent VAT return)
- Road Trips –Portugal's Route EN2, crossing the country from one end to the other, 750 km of hidden gems.
- Rail Travel Experiences - leisure journeys by train across the country, or historical train stations converted into guesthouses;
- Wine pairs with Portugal - Visit Portugal launched a campaign 'Portuguese Wine pairs with art, discovery, adventure, wellness, and music. 'Wine pairs with Portugal'. We believe that Portugal is the best country to appreciate great wine and good living.

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

The recovery of the tourism sector at a global level is one of the greatest economic challenges of the last decades. Portugal is the country with the highest percentage of the population fully vaccinated anywhere in the world. We achieved this goal of fully vaccinating 85 per cent of the population against COVID-19 in nine months, by the end of September 2021. On our side, Tourism of Portugal reinforces its commitment to the consolidation and

sustainability of companies in the sector, through access to investment, training, markets and knowledge. I'm positive we have the capacity, with the commitment and support of the whole sector, to do even more and better to resume the growth path, effectively contributing to the country's economic recovery. The whole tourism sector in Portugal has the goal of affirming Portugal as a sustainable destination, a country that values the tourist professions and attracts talent, and which is cohesive, innovative, and competitive.

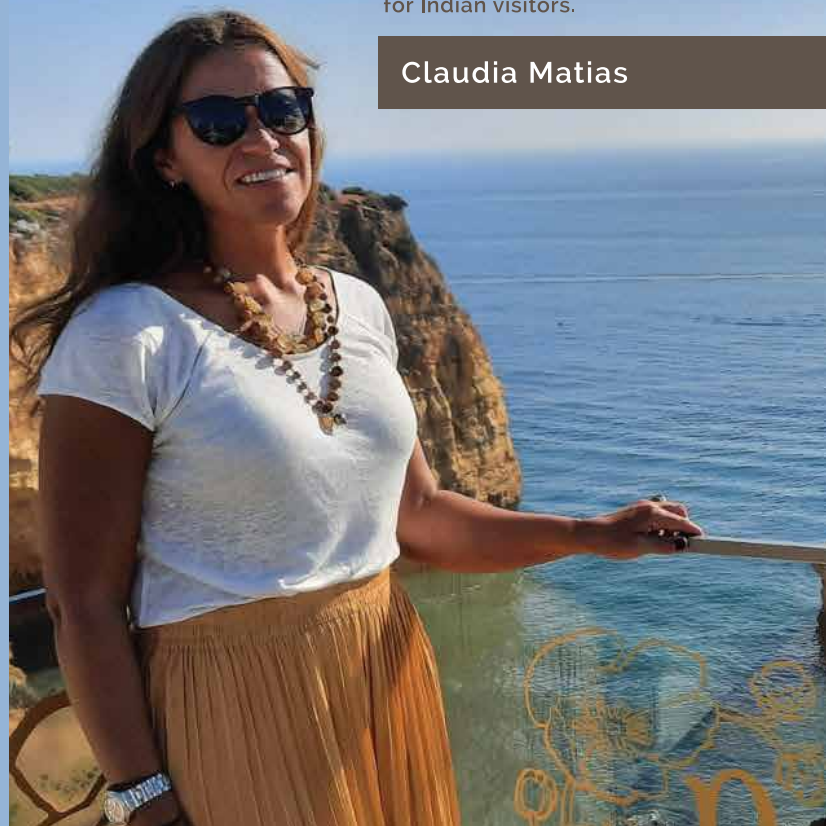
### ***What entry requirements are demanded on incoming tourists?***

Portuguese government has been taking all necessary public health measures to protect the entire population as well as our visitors. Essential and non essential travel is allowed from countries of the European Union, Schengen Associated countries and other countries like Australia, Brazil, Canada, United States of America, United Kingdom, and other countries.

### ***What are the top five inbound tourism markets for Portugal and where does India stand? Do you see the dynamics changing post the pandemic?***

We are a country that attracts many markets from Asia to North America. But our top 5 markets in 2019 were the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Germany and Brazil. With restrictions which were in place in 2020/21 other markets such as Belgium and the Netherlands emerged. We are diversifying our international markets, and we hope to see more tourists coming from India. We opened an office here in India early 2020 covering the entire market. So, this is a very strong commitment with two major objectives. First one is to increase awareness about Portugal as a tourist destination and the second one, of course, is to increase partnerships with different tour operators and travel agencies to increase their knowledge and expertise on Portugal and to create the best conditions for these potential partners to bring more business here from India. Portugal is indeed an aspiring destination for Indian visitors.'

Claudia Matias





# AFFORDABLE EUROPE TOURS



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TRAVEL THERAPY

AYUTTHAYA: BYGONE GLORY

*Soft, light, flighty..!*

- INDER RAJ AHLUWALIA



*Images: Tourism Authority of Thailand India*



It was the kind of feeling that caresses you like a feather-touch, and remains with you like a constant companion.

The day's first sun rays welcomed me as I boarded the 'Oriental Queen', an ultra-luxury river cruiser operated by the Oriental Hotel, to sail down the Chao Phraya, (River of Kings). 80 km down-river from Bangkok, Ayutthaya laid waiting.

The city was waking up for the day as we sailed down the busy river, the skyline and scenery changing by the minute. The huge riverfront structures that are modern Bangkok's commercial symbols, gave way to green fields and shacks, and the occasional pagoda visible in the distance. While the river was muddy to the point of being uninviting, the scenery on both sides was refreshing and the on-board service superb.

Before you could say 'Jim Robison' we'd docked at a little jetty that had more foreign tourists than wooden planks, and alighted in the heart of Thailand's Northern Plains in mellow sunshine.

Ayutthaya is a city that has come back from the past. Brick by brick, it's been carefully restored to its original splendour that mirrors the legacy and glory of ancient empires.

History hangs everywhere like a shroud. Capital of Thailand from 1350, and a power centre for over 400 years till its ravage and destruction by Burmese invaders in 1767, Ayutthaya today is a prime destination and priceless Thai and Buddhist relic.

Ayutthaya's heydays in the 17th Century saw it become the most fabulous city in the Orient, a centre of pomp and glory, a place of fabulous temples built by its people in honour of their Gods, and impressive palaces for their royalty. The buildings were constructed on a grand scale, set amidst landscaped gardens and

given definite shapes, all of which testify to a well-developed architectural flair.

Adhering to the city's historic value, no fresh construction is allowed. The skilful restoration work has ensured that nothing's been changed, nothing's been removed. Everything is intact in terms of physical proportions. The ruins have been carefully restored. Most still show their rough, rugged beauty through elegant shapes and distinct contours. The former glory of those bygone days is back.

The city's first aspect that impressed me is the rare sense of space that's soothing both to the mind and body. Enhancing the effect of the overall vastness is the comparative lack of vehicular traffic and refreshing silence.

My city walking tour was as educative as it was interesting. The entire area's replete with attractions. The architectural relics include shells of palaces that lie in the middle of large courtyards, and precariously leaning pagodas partly submerged beneath vegetation. There are countless, diverse smaller structures, and a superb and priceless collection of Buddha images, some neatly lined up in a row as though part of some grand ceremony. In keeping with their religious and heritage value, the Buddha images deserve respect, which sets certain behavioral norms. It's considered disrespectful to point one's feet towards them or ascend to higher levels than where they're placed. And smoking is prohibited. One must never forget that, tourism notwithstanding, this is a very sacred, religious and historical place.

Among the most important sites are the interesting ruins of the former Royal Palace, which was a complex of several buildings - something like a 'city within a city'. Worth seeing is the Chao Sam Phraya National Museum that's stocked with old handicrafts and Thai art treasures that span several centuries of craftsmanship. Amidst these treasures, nestles a large

Buddha image called the Phra Mongkhon Bophit, a relic of infinite value.

A fairytale scene of architectural wonders awaits you at Bang Pa-In Summer Palace, which played a significant role in former royal days. The palace features a unique collection of ornate ceilings, pillars, and bright arches, tastefully merged to form this beautiful and majestic structure.

As is the case in most of Thailand, your local shopping experience can be as varied and exciting as you want it to be. While the main buildings of note are all old and historic, there's nothing old or historic about the dozens and dozens of shopping outlets that do roaring business in souvenir sales, with voracious bargaining very much a part of the deal. The famous local souvenir is fish mobiles, but equally popular and fast-selling are other items that include silks, weaves, artificial flowers, basketry, gilded human figurines, dolls, and the choicest woodcarving. Adjacent to Bang Pa-In is the Bang Sai Royal Folk Arts and Crafts Centre, where craftsmen from Thailand's four main regions converge and produce quality handicrafts.

No matter what your mindset, the word 'special' would feature in your description of Ayutthaya. Not by any means Thailand's main tourist centre, the city's popularity is continuously soaring, and with good reason. You get to peep into the country's past, get a chance to admire superb old architecture, and learn about old age-old rituals that still hold sway.

Instead of loud contemporary music, there are religious chants of monks. And in place of bright lights, here there is the glow of little candles and lamps lit in reverence to local Gods and deities.

Soulful, peaceful, beautiful! A visit is always worth the trouble.



## FACT FILE

- AYUTTHAYA IS MAINLY A DAYTIME DESTINATION FROM BANGKOK, BEING ABOUT THREE HOURS UP RIVER FROM THE THAI CAPITAL, AND ACCESSIBLE BY FERRY (3 HOURS) AND ROAD (2 HOURS).
- WHILE THE TOWN'S A YEAR-ROUND DESTINATION, CLIMATE-WISE, THE BEST TIME TO VISIT IS FROM OCTOBER THROUGH MARCH.
- SOME MONUMENTS REQUIRE VISITORS TO FOLLOW CERTAIN NORMS, LIKE REMOVING ONE'S SHOES ETC. IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENSURE THAT ONE DOES NOT SHOW DISRESPECT TO BUDDHA IMAGES.
- THE LOCAL TOURIST OFFICE FURNISHES RELEVANT DETAILS AND ALSO PROVIDES GENERAL TOURIST INFORMATION.

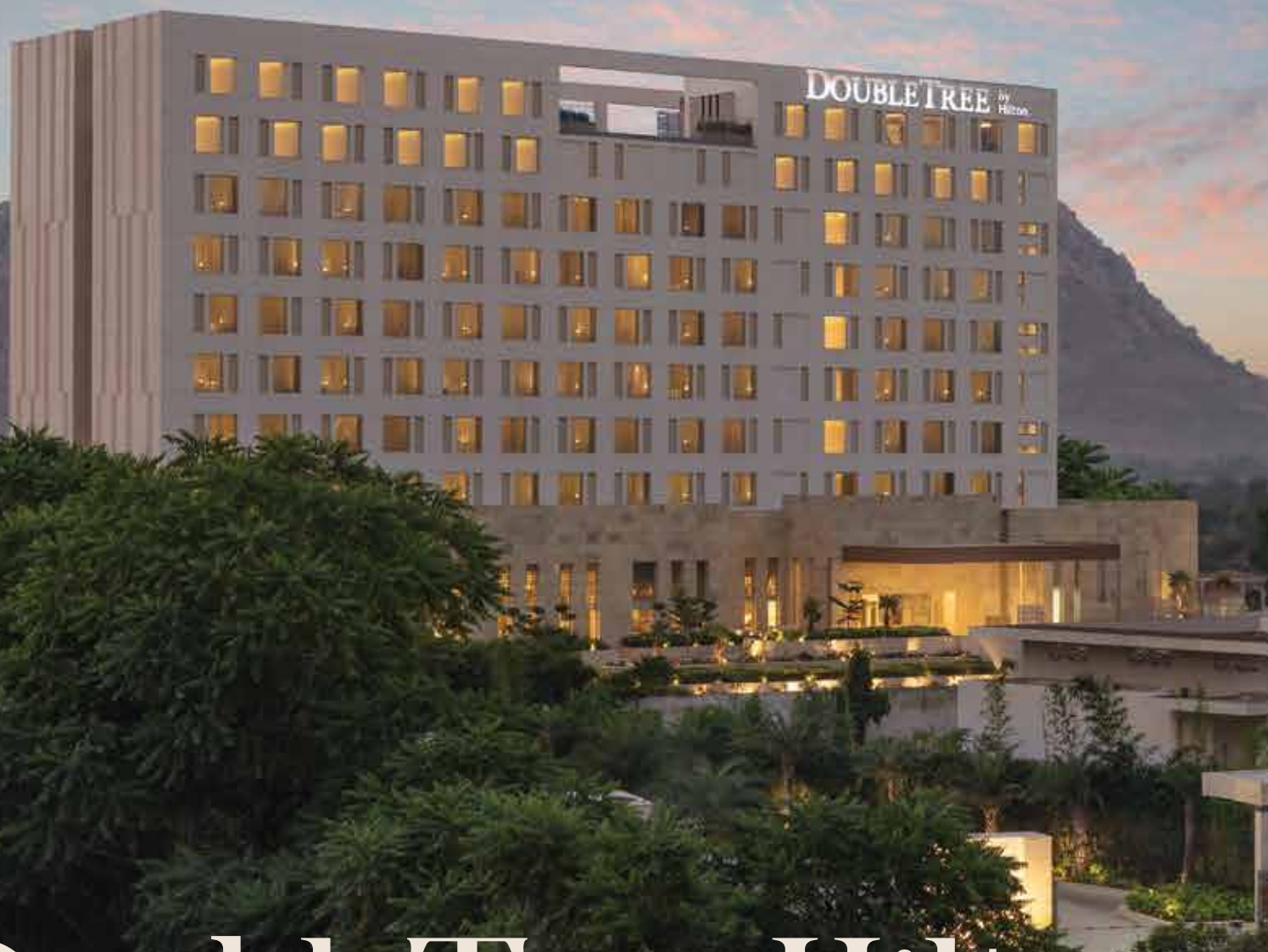


### About the author

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



HEADS IN BEDS



# DoubleTree Hilton Jaipur Amer

MULTIPLE OFFERINGS, A STAND-ALONE EXPERIENCE

As the industry gains momentum with more weekend getaways, destination weddings and conferences in the pipeline, DoubleTree Hilton Jaipur Amer stands out as Hilton's newest offering in the Pink City.

- Saloni Bhatia



## HEADS IN BEDS

The changing tourism landscape has led hotels to go beyond conventional expectations and effortlessly blend local experiences with comfortable stays. Overlooking the Aravalli range, the fairly new DoubleTree Hilton Jaipur Amer effectively tunes in the city's classic experiences with specially curated ones in the house. Just 30 minutes away from all the main attractions in Pink City, the 151 room key property is conveniently located right before entering Jaipur on the National Highway 8.

The very first DoubleTree property in Rajasthan, the hotel strengthens Hilton's presence in a competitive region with two offerings in Jaipur. Away from the main city's commotion, the hotel offers splendid views of the Aravalli making it ideal for weekend getaways and rooftop wedding functions. Owned by Govardhan Estate Private Limited and managed by Hilton, it includes Guest

rooms, Suites, Deluxe and Accessible Rooms apart from the restaurants and banqueting facility.

Making sure the guests experience the local culture even at the hotel, special folk dances entertain the evening diners. A special kid's playroom has been created near the lobby so young ones are engaged in various activities and often the management customizes evenings with magic shows and kathputli dance based on family guests preferences. The fitness centre, pool and dining- Aravalli Bar & Grill have been meticulously planned on the top floors ensuring guests fully cherish the scenic surroundings. Naturally blessed with splendid views of sunrise and sunset, one doesn't have to even step outside the hotel to witness the same.

The hotel's all-day dining restaurant The Amber Kitchen serves an expanse of local, North Indian as well as international dishes. Chef Suraj Chauhan's team ensures

the guests get a real taste of local cuisine with Rajasthani delicacies waiting to surprise your palette. From Dal Bati Churma, Jodhpur Pulao, Murgh ka Sweta, Laal Maas, Gobind Gutta Curry there are many classics on the menu that define this Indian state. At the same time, Chef Robin Srivastava's experience as a pastry chef brings out some unique cake recipes that elevate the buffet's offerings. From olive to spinach, there are many interesting combinations of cakes that one can find at the breakfast table.

As guidelines ease and states open up their borders, the property has witnessed a rise in Wedding as well as MICE queries. With a total of 1200 sq m of event space, the ballroom is well attached with a lawn and open-air reception area. While the roof-top restaurant can be used for day ceremonies, the banquet space is apt for main functions up to 300 guests. A dedicated planning team also assists in catering, meeting

equipment and venue decoration. As a MICE facility, the hotel offers 6 meeting rooms and Hilton's, 'Create an Attendee Website' service which adds more functionality to an event. The custom website for all events at Hilton hotels gives the attendees the flexibility to reserve their own rooms on their own time at the group's special rate.

"The hotel's proximity to all the main centres of the city as well as location surrounding the Aravallis has made it an ideal getaway among leisure travellers these past months. Many are visiting during weekdays benefitting from the ongoing work from home concept," stated Sujeet Singh, Assistant Director, Food and Beverage.

A quick ride to the inner city takes you to hotspots like City Palace, Hawa Mahal. The major Forts like Amer and Jaigarh are within 20 km of the area. Planning day excursions to the city matched with quiet evenings at the hotel will fit in every traveller's itinerary.



## HEADS IN BEDS



*A renowned name in the Jaipur hotel industry, Neeraj Maharashi, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton, Jaipur Amer speaks to Travel Turtle on the property's growing popularity*

***What makes DoubleTree by Hilton, Jaipur Amer stand out in a competitive market like Jaipur.***

As soon the COVID restrictions eased, there was a huge demand among travellers looking for small getaways from cities like Delhi NCR. The properties location and offerings lured in many people looking for short stays. The hotel's location in terms of easy accessibility along with views matched with the services has played an important role in attracting tourists. The hotel is well-equipped to cater

curated in-house experiences for guests to enjoy and relax as well as visit world-famous monuments, sights and places in and around the city since the hotel is conveniently located.

***Which nearby areas are bringing in the maximum number of tourists and how long is their stay***

Our major traffic is from Delhi NCR region as well as main Jaipur city as many are now looking for weekend getaways. With flights not fully functional, many are visiting us through drive-in via Delhi. A convenient 5-6 hour drive from Delhi and 45-minute drive from the main city Jaipur makes it ideal for weekend getaways. The average length stays for these guests is two nights and three days.



**Neeraj Maharashi**





## HEADS IN BEDS

### ***How has been the response from the wedding and MICE segment***

We already had some weddings planned for the season and are already receiving more queries by the day. As the MICE segment opens up, we have started witnessing a rise in conference queries as well. The hotel's location and facilities are apt for such functions. Our rooftop Aravalli Bar and Grill restaurant with its stunning views is ideal for wedding ceremonies. We look forward to hosting more this coming season.

### ***How is the hotel coping with the impact of COVID? Any special protocols being followed for the visitor's safety?***

Post the second lockdown, there has been a steady growth in occupancy and event queries which showcases how the industry is finally opening up. We are receiving guests not just from Delhi but Jaipur as well which highlights people's desire to travel. We hope the trend will continue as the industry opens up further. We have been following all cleanliness and safety protocols as the Hilton brand and also continuously communicate about our efforts to our guests. There are signs in all main areas and rooms emphasizing on the regulations to be followed. Furthermore, we have ushered in dining and event areas to ensure people wear masks as per guidelines.

### ***How do you plan to promote the property as India opens doors for international tourists?***

We shall begin our promotions in late December or starting next year to tap on the next year's season. Hilton properties across Delhi, Agra and Jaipur will also enable us to promote the Golden Triangle to foreign tourists.






CONNECTING DOTS

# Singapore

conceptualises and reimagines the prospects of 'safe' MICE

STB continues to progressively resume larger scale events with rigorous protocols and innovative solutions in place for the end-to-end visitor journey, depending on the current evolving situation. GB Srithar, Regional Director (India, Middle East and South Asia), Singapore Tourism Board talks about how STB has have seized the 'fertile period' by piloting and scaling many new solutions for the MICE industry.

- Bharti Sharma



## 1. What makes Singapore attractive for international conferences and exhibitions?

MICE and business travel is a strategic industry for Singapore and brings about significant benefits to our overall economy. We are confident in the long-term prospects of MICE, because the fundamentals that make Singapore

a key MICE hub and an attractive location for leisure and MICE experiences remain unchanged. These include our air connectivity, highly skilled workforce, and the fact that many global MNCs are headquartered here. Our partners are also confident that Singapore can sustainably host safe, trusted and innovative MICE events on a larger scale. Singapore is recognized widely as a

melting pot of quality attractions, a plethora of F&B offerings and corporate experiences that make it an ideal choice for business travel and events.

Covid-19 has certainly pushed the fast-forward button and accelerated digital transformation and adoption across the world. The resumption of MICE events in Singapore has been done in a careful and calibrated manner, with

limits on the size and capacity of events to ensure safety of on-site participants and allow for wider interactions through virtual platforms. To do so, STB has established the Safe Business Events framework and several other initiatives to guide the industry on how to implement Safe Management Measures to meet a set of health and safety outcomes. Public spaces are being re-designed



## CONNECTING DOTS

to provide safe distancing, contact-less solutions and hygiene practices for delegates and employees safety assurance. Virtual spaces are being transformed to replace physical meetings. Digitisation, the flexibility of venue spaces as well as health and safety protocols have been event planners' key priorities following the resumption of the industry.

### 2. Please throw some light on the Safe Business Events framework which STB developed in July 2020?

In July 2020, STB developed the Safe Business Events (SBE) framework, taking into consideration the event risk profile and the readiness of Event Organisers and Event Venues in mitigating these risks. Under STB's SBE framework, EOs must achieve five key outcomes:

- Infection control measures for every stage of an event attendee's journey (pre- to post-event)
- Limits on crowd density
- Limits on close contacts between individuals
- Ensuring a safe and clean environment
- Preparing for emergencies relating to COVID-19

The framework was created in consultation with the industry and is aligned with international best practices. It arises from reflections and lessons learned during the pandemic when businesses in Singapore's MICE sector conceptualised and reimaged what a safe event could look like.

Under the SBE framework, Singapore has piloted over 140 MICE events, hosting more than 15,000 participant attendees. Riding on the successful pilots of large-scale events such as TravelRevive (November 2020) and Geo Connect Asia (March 2021), STB continues to progressively resume larger scale events with rigorous protocols and innovative solutions in place for the end-to-end visitor journey. In November 2021, we will host two major MICE events - the Bloomberg New Economy Forum and Industrial Transformation Asia-Pacific.

### 3. Singapore is taking a Trace, Test and Vaccinate national strategy to live with Covid-19, what other initiatives are taken by STB to ensure the safe resumption of MICE in Singapore?

STB is committed to support the industry through this challenging journey. Several initiatives have been undertaken such as partnering with the Agency for Science, Technology and Research (A\*STAR) to conduct simulation studies by measuring airflow, fomite, and air transmission. This ensured our approach to running safe business events is academically sound and scientifically proven, and to give delegates with peace of mind. This enabled us to custom-design Safe Meeting Pods and exhibition booths to enable delegates to interact for a prolonged period. The pandemic has catalysed



GB Srithar

technological innovations and concepts in our events industry. Experimentation with event formats is an up-and-coming trend, with organisers trailing events in virtual or hybrid models. The integration of technology

into the visitor experience, such as digital guides and contactless registration, will also become mainstream. In terms of innovation, this is the most fertile period in our industry's history, and we have seized this by piloting and scaling many new solutions.





Recognising that digitalisation is key, STB has launched TCube (Tourism Technology Transformation Cube), which provides a holistic suite of tools to guide tourism businesses in Singapore to build capabilities to succeed in the digital age. These tools help tourism businesses learn more about themselves, test their concepts or ideas, and build solutions that last and meet customers' needs. The Singapore Association for Conventions and Exhibitions Organisers and Suppliers (SACEOS) became the first MICE industry association worldwide to launch a set of technical references for the exhibition industry and partnered with local institutions to develop formal avenues to training and upskilling.

To provide further guidance for MICE businesses, STB and Enterprise Singapore (ESG) have collaborated with the Singapore Association of Convention and Exhibition Organisers and Suppliers (SACEOS) to formulate an Industry Resilience Roadmap (IRR) – a public-private partnership focused on three strategic objectives: Establishing best-in-class standards for new event safety measures, creating agile business models with a focus on digital capabilities, and developing pathways for professional development in the post-COVID-19 world. The IRR will serve as the 'roadmap' to guide Singapore's Event Organisers as they plan for the safe resumption of other b2b events in Singapore and sustainable recovery.

#### 4. Which MICE activities are more likely to be held in Singapore?

Singapore's high population vaccination rate has laid a strong foundation for us to resume large-scale MICE activities with international participants in a risk-calibrated and phased manner. We are therefore taking the opportunity to further fine-tune our safety measures and protocols, as well as testbed new innovations, with the events in our pipeline. The Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) and STB will continue to work with event organisers on their event proposals and review the requirements for MICE events, as Singapore transitions towards a COVID-resilient state.

To pave the way for the safe and calibrated resumption of larger MICE events in 2022, four pilot events (Joint Leadership Summit of AEO, SACEOS, SISO, UFI Singapore, 5-7 October 2021; Gamescom Asia, 14-17 October 2021; Bloomberg New Economy Forum, 16-19 November 2021 and Industrial Transformation Asia Pacific (ITAP), 22-24 November 2021) had been identified to trial new protocols and innovations to put us on a strong footing for recovery.

These tradeshows are crucial trials to pave the way for the safe and progressive re-opening of Singapore's wider economic activities, and for Singapore to continue delivering on its promise to deliver safe, trusted and innovative business events.

At the Joint Leadership Summit, ASEAN leaders and Global

Exhibitions Leaders met face-to-face to affirm and chart a reopening roadmap for the region's business event industry. The Summit also witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) by AEO, SACEOS, SISO, UFI and Singapore Tourism Board. The MOU showcases the commitment to revitalise the regional exhibitions industry and strengthens Singapore's long-standing position as a safe and trusted Global Asia hub for business events.

#### 5. What's your take on the development and promotional strategy of the Singapore MICE industry?

The reopening of the MICE industry will proceed in a phased manner, with the evolving COVID-19 situation taken into account. STB's key priority is to ensure that business events can provide a safe and fruitful experience for event organisers and delegates while minimising the risks of transmission. STB will continue to support event organisers as they decide on their next steps and ensure that the necessary Safe Management Measures (SMMs) are implemented.

We will continue to further refine the framework with industry feedback and learnings from the pilot events, as well as strengthen our protocols and test bed new ideas towards reimagining the future of MICE.

In India, we continue engaging with corporate, MICE intermediaries and the travel fraternity to sustain awareness of Singapore as a MICE destination. Based on feedback and interactions with the various MICE players, we are heartened and confident that when borders between Singapore and India re-open, Indian BTMICE travellers will be keen to visit the city. The fundamentals that make Singapore a key MICE hub and attractive location for business and leisure events remain unchanged, and our industry is resilient. This puts us in a good position to emerge stronger from COVID-19. STB will work closely with our industry partners in India to rebuild and recover together.



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# Emirates:

Market leader in innovation  
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combined with  
global sustainability

Emirates currently operates to more than 120 destinations via their home and hub; Dubai, and continues to sustainably expand its global network. Mohammad Sarhan, VP-India & Nepal Emirates talks about the airline's innovative view of connectivity, destinations, and offerings.

- Bharti Sharma



## AEROPHILE

The effects of the COVID-19 were unprecedented and the aviation industry in particular, was hit the hardest. However, Emirates' agile model of operations enabled them to adapt swiftly to the needs of the changing business environment. With global rollout of vaccination programmes now well underway, and easy in travel restrictions worldwide – Emirates thrives to expand its comprehensive network. The fundamental approach of the airline has been the same since day one - concentrating on operations, connecting cities, continents, and people with the best possible service.

"We are confident that the aviation industry will continue to recover and travel demand will eventually bounce back to pre-pandemic level. Customers

choose to fly safer and better with Emirates due to our world-class products, health and safety measures, industry-first multi-risk travel insurance, and generous re-booking policies," comments Sarhan.

Dubai Expo has pent up the air travel demand to Dubai and it is expected that there is a possibility of increasing flights under the air bubble for the Expo. Since the safe reopening to international tourists last year, Dubai remains one of the most popular stopovers and holiday destinations. It was one of the world's first cities to obtain a Safe Travels stamp from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) – which endorses Dubai's comprehensive and effective measures to ensure

health and safety of travellers. Sarhan adds, "The city has something for everyone. This year, especially, visitors will have an unforgettable experience as the city is hosting Expo 2020 and as the UAE celebrates its Golden Jubilee."

Sharing insight on the ongoing and new expected routes, he shares, "For now, we operate flights to nine destinations in India and look forward to continue working closely with our partners to fly customers safely to/from Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Cochin, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Kolkata, and Mumbai."

Looking ahead, Emirates will continue to lead the industry with innovative offerings, world-class products, and exceptional services. Working diligently towards winning

the customers' patronage ensures that the airline stays nimble enough to capture the changing market sentiment, shift their sales and marketing strategy when necessary while also introducing new products that sets them apart. "We currently offer passenger services to 120 destinations – restoring around 90 per cent of our pre-pandemic network. We recently announced added services across our network, deployed our iconic A380 on more routes, launched a new route service to Miami, US, and introduced the highly anticipated Premium Economy cabin – which has taken the Emirates signature A380 experience to another level. We remain committed to offering unmatched travel experiences and to serving our customers safer and better on Emirates."

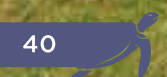


# TREE OF LIFE RESORTS & HOTELS

Escape in the countryside

With a collection of luxury getaway experiences providing an escape from the daily hustle-bustle of life, Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels (ToL) is an ultimate destination to rejuvenate your senses. Akhil Anand, Director, Tree of Life Resorts & Hotels talks about the concept behind the chain and some exciting expansion plans.

- Bharti Sharma





For any experienced traveler, a stay at Tree of Life is another chapter in a lifetime of travel and exploration but ToL intends to make it a memorable one. Whether you're looking for a scenic getaway in the hills or a soothing escape deep in the trenches of greenery, their properties are set in a wide variety of locations offering an array of exciting experiences.

The brainchild of industry veteran Himmat Anand, Tree of Life pioneered a whole new segment in the hotel industry with 13 critically acclaimed properties, all of which are an aesthetic treat to the eyes. In 2009, Himmat was joined by his son Akhil Anand who quickly realised the need for a branded chain of such boutique experiences in India.

### EUPHORIC STATE OF MIND

Every property of ToL is away from the noise and crowd of cities and yet conveniently close. Guests can curate a lifetime of memories through personal experience as ToL enables journeys of adventure and indulgence. "All of our properties are boutique in nature between 6 and 20 keys. They are all situated away from the crowded city centres and close to nature. They would all offer you a sense of privacy and space. We are currently present in 13 destinations in India and growing," shares Akhil.

### REFLECTING THE ESSENCE OF THE LOCALE

Each ToL property is created in a manner that ensures travellers engaging with the place, people and stories that make their experience like none other. Emphasising the relevance of connecting with the communities and indulging in the experiences, Akhil tells, "It is becoming



Akhil Anand

increasingly important for a hotel and its guest experience to reflect the essence of the location it is situated in. This starts with the basics of welcome drinks and food and then goes on further to offering certain rural experiences allowing your guest to get under the skin of the region they are visiting you in. Travellers are now bored of the cookie-cutter approach. They are looking for something unique and a differentiated experience which adds long-term value. This is the client profile that we cater to."

### PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO DEAL WITH THE PANDEMIC

About 12 years ago, ToL had started off primarily as an inbound focused brand. A few years in they realised that the domestic market is too important to ignore, making them go for a few changes that would align them with the requirements of the domestic market and also tweaking their communication to suit this segment well. Sharing further, Akhil asserts, "We quickly moved from an 80:20 Inbound: Domestic ratio to 50:50 ratio without compromising on our ADRs. After the pandemic, as has been the case for everyone, inbound has been near zero and we once again took the time of the lockdown to redefine our product and communication very quickly.

ToL reopened most of our properties shortly after the nationwide lockdown opened and have beaten last year's figures month-on-month in terms of ADR as well as occupancy. We seem to be at the right place and at the right time. Across the group, our average occupancy since April 21 has been roughly 58 per cent with an ADR of about 7400 room only. Our flagship in Jaipur is the front-runner in this mix with an ADR of over 21000 and occupancy of about 72 per cent."

### ON THE PATH TO RECOVERY

The pandemic has forced the hospitality industry to inculcate

## HOTELLIGENCE

certain safety measures to instill confidence among the travelers. ToL, in this respect has chosen utmost care while ensuring the highest possible safety and hygiene standards across the group. "More importantly, I feel how a brand communicates during these times is of utmost importance. It must generate the confidence in a guest to book with you. Discounting or slashing prices

at a time like this may not be the answer. As a group we have recently opened new experiences in Dared in Gujarat and Udaipurwati and our second property in Jaipur in Rajasthan. The second property in Jaipur would complement our flagship resort well as it comes at a more affordable price point. This is a 10 room old Haveli in Amer on the outskirts of Jaipur city," concludes Akhil.



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# De Box

Reshaping the industry through technology

Technology has profoundly impacted the industry movement and insightfully changed the dynamics of doing business. Technological developments in the field of tourism are delivering sustainable results and have enabled travel companies to conduct business strategies through a robust platform. Syed A Asim, Director, De Box Global, shares his insights on the burgeoning technology and how De Box intends to offer impactful results through its system.

- Sudipta Saha





**Syed A Asim**

### 1. What is the significance of technology in the travel and tourism industry?

One of the Harvard University reports says that it is widely accepted that technology is the key driver of economic growth. It is also quite evident that technology will play an important role in the growth of the travel and tourism industry as well. But here is the catch. Not just technology but the right selection of technology will become a catalyst in growth, else it may become a deterrent.

Selecting the right technology partner from the sea of providers is one of the major challenges for entrepreneurs. There is risk in both, following the crowd or giving chance to new. But if they ask the right questions to themselves, it will make their life easier. A few questions are as follows:

i) Industry-specific – Is a generic system modified for the travel industry or its grounds up developed for your industry?

ii) Not industry participant promoted – Are the promoters of a technology company from the same industry as yours?

iii) User-friendly – How well system has adopted your Industry processes rather than making you adopt theirs?

iv) Innovative and evolving – Is the technology company constantly working to take the product to the next level?

v) Strong after-sales service – How do existing customers rate the after-sales support of any technology company?

**2. There is a lot of talk about what the future is going to look like, and the overriding changes this pandemic is going to bring about across sectors, but particularly in the travel industry ranging from digital health passports to contactless travel, the entire process seems to be technology-driven. What changes do you**

### foresee in the travel industry?

It's the Law of Nature that if anything is suppressed, it bounces back to come to its equilibrium. Travel and tourism was the most and longest hit Industry across the World. As the things are getting back to normal, experts say that this Industry will soon see a big boom. Pandemic has pushed people to use technology and we can see that impact in our homes and all around. Homemakers, kids, and elders who were ignorant about technology are now fully savvy. Post pandemic businesses must also adopt technology to reduce their cost and create a better experience for their customers.

Travel Industry will become much more technology-oriented and any business that will not go with this transformation will face challenges.

### 3. What is the impact of new emerging technologies on the tourism sector and how is it going to transform the industry?

New emerging technologies will transform the tourism sector, but they have become more like organic veggies where some of the technology companies misuse the jargon like AI (Artificial Intelligence), VR (Virtual Reality), Big Data, IoT (Internet of Things), and many others very frequently, without using them in their products. At the moment Industry needs smart but simple solutions so that adoption becomes easy. At the same time a very clear roadmap to use all advanced technologies as users and consumers both becomes savvy and more comfortable.

### 4. What makes De Box unique in the travel market and what are the technology services available by De Box for the tourism industry?

De Box is unique in many ways, firstly it has systems developed grounds up for each segment of the travel industry namely Inbound, Outbound, MICE, Domestic, etc. as every business has a very different process flow and practices and therefore requires different features and functionalities. Secondly, it has developed its products to adopt the workflows and formats of the travel segment rather than making them adopt their system. Thirdly, it has product roadmaps for the next few years to ensure a constant evolution of its products.



### 5. Can you please emphasise on why one should start a business with De Box?

De Box believes in a partnership approach and helps its customers focus on their business without worrying about their IT infrastructure. This helps its customers to have cutting-edge technology and bandwidth to concentrate on their business opportunities.

### 6. In what ways De Box stands out to be different from the existing travel technology providers?

De Box stands out in terms of its techno-functional experts who understand the customers' problem and provide the best possible solution in the shortest possible time. The passion of the team to support customers 24 x 7 gives confidence to its customers to go all out and do business.

### 7. Any other information you would like to share with us

De Box has built a customer-centric culture across the organization based on its five core values:

D - Develop an environment of trust in the organization.

e - Ethical practices followed by everyone.

B - Best quality product and services delivered.

o - Ownership demonstrated by each employee like an entrepreneur.

x - Xceed customer expectations every time.





## Hyatt focuses on authenticity, basics, and passion-driven hospitality

Dietmar Kielnhöfer, Area Vice President - Hyatt West India Hotels & General Manager - Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel and Residences in an exclusive interview with Travel Turtle shares his viewpoints on the resurgence of the tourism industry in the country.

### - Sudipta Saha

#### Domestic travel scenario

Looking at our booking pace I am cautiously optimistic. I don't have the proverbial crystal ball but I dare to say the worst is behind us. The domestic market shows strong upward trends for the last three months already. I am not too concerned about the domestic market, it has shown incredible resilience over the past couple of months. In order to move the needle north, we need the international market to return and for that, we need to see a healthy return of international air carriers. Occupancy levels have reached almost pre-Covid levels but room rates remain extremely depressed, and that remains a concern. The area of managing cash flow is over, we need to shift gear and focus on driving higher margins again and for that, we need to see better rates. We have also noticed a significant uptick in

corporate travel and group business. Our resorts are doing exceedingly well and business in Delhi and Mumbai shows encouraging signs as well - even tier II city such as Lucknow, Raipur, Hampi and Ahmedabad show healthy trends. Consumer sentiments have definitely shifted; there is more exuberance and confidence, we just need to maintain the momentum.

#### What's trending?

The area of staycations and take-away food is drawing to an end. We experience strong pickup trends from the corporate sector and group segment. Business is definitely returning and the overall consumer sentiment shows a strong upward trend. Restaurant business is booming, in particular on weekends. China House (at Grand Hyatt Mumbai) is sold out every weekend and in two weeks we open Soma. For the past three months, we have

exceeded our forecasts with better than expected revenues from all segments.

#### Hygiene and Safety protocols

Irrespective of what the future holds, customers will not tolerate a compromise in hygiene and sanitation. Covid was the great reset for the hospitality industry, it wiped the slate clean and we all had to start from the beginning again. At Hyatt, the safety and security of all stakeholders is imperative, this is an area that is non-negotiable. If there is one thing Covid has taught us, it is the importance of complying with the latest legislation and WHO recommendations of hygiene and sanitation; I refer to it as the New Norm. At the Grand Hyatt in Mumbai for instance, we have our own food laboratory and passionate Hygiene Managers who do nothing to ensure we are fully compliant with the latest statutory requirements.

#### Experiential Hyatt

It is no secret that our hotels in tier II cities are doing well, in particular Hampi, Lucknow, Raipur and Ahmedabad. The Andaz in Delhi shows a huge increase in popularity, driven largely by a superb product, a great location and a very unique food concept in AnnaMaya. What works for us is a combination of location, branding and an unyielding focus on food quality coupled with high levels of personalised service. There is no magic; we just focus on authenticity, getting the basics right, top-quality produce and passionate people who love what they are doing.

#### Destination properties vs city-centric hotels

Resort properties in Goa (the all-time Indian favourite) and resorts in Rajasthan doing extremely well at the moment but I think it is just a question of time before the pendulum swings back in favour of city Hotels. There is so much pent up demand out there that sooner or later city hotels start filling up again as demand gradually outstrips supply. After all, business is conducted in cities and Mumbai is the commercial capital of India.



BIZ

# StreetGooser: An effective tool for hospitality business

StreetGooser, cloud-based technology is designed to offer a complete distribution solution for all budget hotels. John Varghese N, Founder, and Chief Executive Officer, StreetGooser shares more information on how they envision reaching out to accommodation providers globally.

- Sudipta Saha






**John Varghese N**

StreetGooser has established itself as the most reliable and innovative cloud-based technology for all budget hotels. Making hotel booking a convenient and superlative experience for travellers, the power of the software relies on the array of services it intends to offer. This simple tool is superbly designed for homestays, vacation rentals, and small hotels, offering them ample solutions such as managing reservations, in-stay experience, back-office reporting. StreetGooser through its online distribution solutions aims to increase the hotel's online revenue.

### Revolutionise your hospitality business

StreetGooser, basically a cloud-based technology company for any accommodation partner focuses to proffer a simple and most advanced technology integrated with their property. Being primarily into b2b business and now focusing

to enter the b2c market as well. "StreetGooser focuses on those markets where there are varied accommodation providers who don't have proper technical support. The technology can be best suitable for small and mid-sized properties. While we choose a market, we consider both b2b and b2c opportunities and that's how we decide on the geographical locations where we can enter. We provide products and solutions that can help property owners not only to manage it in an advanced way but also will help them to improve their revenue. StreetGooser envisioned tweaking the mode of operations of small and mid-sized properties across the globe," states John.

### Latest advancement

A new entrant in the market, StreetGooser is slowly and steadily spreading its wings. Well, StreetGooser, while completing its successful two years of journey,

came up with two new important announcements. Adding to it, John Verghese says, "StreetGooser is entering the second Continent-Europe through Georgia. With this entry, StreetGooser will mark its presence in four countries within two years. During this tough time, as far as we are concerned, it's a great achievement. Our next best move is that we are launching our b2c App-'Stayanser-World of Accommodations'. So it's time for us to call for a grand celebration."

### A user-friendly tool

StreetGooser is a one-stop-shop for all the technical requirements that a property needs. "This technology and solutions we provide are tailor-made that is simple and the user-friendliness makes it unique. We work from the point of view of a property owner. This has helped me and my team learn what the hotelier requires and we have developed our product accordingly. StreetGooser,

the UI we use makes it a user-friendly app. This is one of the USPs of StreetGooser as it is developed by the hoteliers for the hoteliers," mentions John.

### Reaching out to the masses

StreetGooser is committed to bringing the best technology which will enhance the business and equip it with the leading tools as per the accommodation types. At the moment, they are not only expanding their verticals but are also collaborating with partners and are offering them the powerful software built to serve their needs. Speaking on the marketing plans, John Verghese shares, "We have a well-experienced team working remotely and on the grounds are experts in reaching out to the right market. We also have reseller programs as well through which we also operate. Moving forward, we have planned on various marketing activities which will be implemented soon."



## What to expect at 36th IATO Annual Convention?

IATO, being the nucleus of the inbound travel has been a go-to association for tour operators for decades now. As IATO announces its 36th IATO Annual Convention with conviction and a sense of responsibility, we spoke to the core team of IATO to know what members can expect from the illustrious convention this year...

- Bharti Sharma

The resilient travel industry had its share of gloom in the past 18 months. But associations such as IATO have acted as an anchor in these constant high tides. With the announcement of its 36th IATO Annual Convention which will be held in Gandhinagar Gujarat, the association yet again brews speculations and anticipations as it is going to be the first tourism mega event in India since the world was ambushed by the Covid 19.

### ***A mega venue for the mega event***

The venue hosting the humungous convention between December 16 to 19, 2021, The Leela Gandhinagar is the first luxury hotel in India to be built on the airspace of a conventiona railway

station, 22 metres above the ground. The 318-room property combines modernity with subtle inspirations from local Gujarat architecture and culture and sits proudly atop the railway tracks. IATO has always bestowed its members with the best in class hospitality and this special venue endorses their intention.

### ***Brand India- The Road to recovery***

The well-thought out theme 'Brand India- The Road to recovery' as the name suggests, will emphasise on the industry's road to recovery. The befitting business sessions on diverse strategic topics will address the SWOT to recuperation. This will be the first convention under the leadership of Rajiv Mehra, President,

IATO who observes that the convention is a renewed opportunity to start business and converge on networking at the opportune time as borders are opening up. Members will also be exposed to policy discussions by the state governments thereby enabling them to chalk out their region-specific strategies.

He adds, "The focus will be on addressing the key issues that plague the industry at present so that the members discuss the same with the policy makers present and discuss among themselves to come to doable solutions. Besides the main theme, the business sessions attempt to dwell on an in-depth analysis of the plan of action to recovery, connectivity, marketing, policy framework relating to SEIS and

other pertinent issues, sustainable tourism and other facets. Onsite visits at the tourist destinations of Gujarat will add to the productivity and promotion."



**Rajiv Mehra**



**Instilling confidence amongst members**

IATO annual convention will set the stage for rebuilding confidence amongst the tourism industry delegates. EM Najeeb, Senior Vice President, IATO states, "We expect about 900 delegates to attend the convention. Besides, we have also invited all the state governments and they will be asked to tell the industry the state of affairs in their respective state with regard to tourists arriving there.



**EM Najeeb**

Also, delegates will get a chance to meet after a gap of two years to interact and network. Whatever fears we have in mind we will put forward to the senior government officials from the Centre and the state government and will clear our doubts and whatever are impediments in our way, we shall request to resolve."

**Meaningful & power-packed networking**

"Our annual convention is undoubtedly the flagship event of the Tourism industry in India," shares Ravi Gosain, Vice President – IATO. He further adds, "In 2020, we were not able to organise the convention due to the pandemic so as a managing committee of IATO this year we're shouldering a substantial responsibility of conducting a fruitful convention for the industry to open up. Hence we have carefully crafted the theme of the convention 'Brand India-Road to

recovery' in order to give our participants a proposition to adapt to the appropriate change for taking their business forward. We are bringing some of the most renowned and experienced speakers for our knowledge sessions which will help members in enhancing their skills."



**Ravi Gosain**

**Revival begins**

Restrospecting the past 19 months and how an unprecedented pandemic brought the world down on its knees, IATO Convention is a call for recovery. Rajnish Kaistha, Hony. Secretary asserts, "With dark shadows behind us, we now need to adjust to the new normal. With the soft opening of e-tourist visas, there is definite optimism in the air. The message we want to forward is that from now onward it's the road to recovery and revival of business. The Indian government has issued a list of 96 countries in 'category A' where govt has entered into an agreement for mutual recognition vaccination certificates for fully vaccinated travellers. IATO has been on its toes for the opening of the e-tourist visas and further, the second step is to initiate multiple entry e-tourist visas and restoration of scheduled flights. This will enhance seamless air travel and flights at affordable prices for the tourists." "Members can look forward to effective physical meetings, addressed by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of Gujarat and other state governments on the products,

marketing and promotion, connectivity, infrastructure and policy announcements. Besides the above, the theme of the convention is apt considering the present situation and the need for revival," shares Mishra.



**Rajnish Kaistha**

**IATO goes Green**

The IATO run for responsible tourism, an event synonymous with the convention and already a huge hit amongst the members will be organised on day two of the convention. "We at IATO are working towards reducing carbon footprints for a better tomorrow. Along with that, we intend to make our members aware of the surroundings as well as the environment. This convention will bring a hope and a better tomorrow for our members," tells Kaistha.

**The best of Gujarat**

One of the most exciting facets of the convention is the host destination and its attractions, and this year the delegates are looking forward to reimagining Vibrant Gujarat after 10 years. Gujarat saw its last IATO convention in 2011 and things have certainly changed for good since then. Sunil Mishra, Hony. Treasurer - IATO shares, "Members can market any destination only if they are familiar. There are going to be 6 post-convention tours, which will give members the opportunity to explore the real Gujarat. The members will have the opportunity to discuss the same over networking Luncheons

and Dinners. On-site visits of key destinations of Gujarat would catalyse the marketing angle."



**Sunil Mishra**



**Value for time and money**

With a series of sessions and activities planned for the members, IATO is leaving absolutely nothing to chance in their bid to transforming the convention into a revival kit. Ravi shares, "We want every participant to make use of each penny they spend on attending our event and for this, we are committed to providing them with powerful networking opportunity, value sessions on government plans, incentives, automation and digital marketing, responsible tourism to name few. Apart from this, we will have a motivational speaker, relaxed evenings over music and our popular IATO run. Personally, I wish all stakeholders in tourism and hospitality trade to attend the convention and rebuild businesses, relationships and fill the gap which was created by unusual long and tiring lockdowns."



**Sanjay Razdan**

**We're all set for inbound tourism**

Domestic tourism is the base of the pyramid the foundation of the sector is built upon and has helped hotels and airlines to stay afloat even in the darkest phase for the travel industry. Rajnish mentions, "We're ready for foreign tourists now and have lined up very interesting and relevant sessions so our members get to deal better with changing yet challenging times."

Sanjay Razdan, Hony. Joint Secretary – IATO asserts, "As IATO Convention will also be the largest congregation of tourism professionals from all over India after Covid-19 pandemic hit

us in March 2020, we all have experiences to share. Members are waiting to hear from the experts about the way forward as tourist visas are restarting from November 15, 2021."

**Taking no chance with safety and hygiene**

Ensuring that every guest-stay is not only the most memorable but also the safest, the hotel has implemented enhanced safety and hygiene protocols under

'Suraksha by The Leela' - a comprehensive safety program in partnership with Bureau Veritas. The Leela Gandhinagar also has a 100 per cent vaccinated workforce reassuring guests of complete safety in their care. Sanjay adds, "Firstly, the focus would be to follow all SOP's and Covid protocols as we're showcasing to the world that India is ready. I am sure this convention will be a mega-hit."





# EXPERIENCE THE WILDERNESS OF RANTHAMBORE WITH JUNA MAHAL



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# Ayodhya immerses in the euphoria of 'Deepotsav 2021'

Uttar Pradesh Tourism had recently organised a Familiarisation Tour to Lucknow and Ayodhya from November 1-4, 2021 to showcase the grand celebrations of Deepotsav in Ayodhya. The tour covered the visits to prominent pilgrimage sites in Ayodhya such as Kanak Bhawan, Dashrath Mahal, Saryu River, Hanuman Gadi, etc. The fam tour was attended by 40 delegates from the Indian Association of Tour Operators - IATO and media.



**Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO**

Ayodhya surprised me, being a first time visitor. I was delighted to see the development, cleanliness, cultural heritage, colourful bylane markets and above all the feeling of spirituality that could be felt. I am sure once the iconic Ram Temple and quality accommodations comes up, it will surely get tourists from all quarters. Ayodhya will not only establish itself as a religious destination but will be a most sought place to find spirituality, culture and heritage. Model of Ramrajya must be restored and it's looks possible under the leadership of Shri Yogi Adityanath. Hon'ble Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh.



**Prateek Hira (President & CEO - Tornos and Director - River Rhapsody)**

Ayodhya is coming up as India's newest tourist destination. After having been neglected for long it has garnered huge attention from the government that is going all out to create the most conducive infrastructure, and also by the tourism industry to bring it on the tourism map of both domestic and inbound tourists. Ayodhya has all the potential of being one of the most sought-after tourist destinations due to its proximity and connectivity to major destinations in Uttar Pradesh such as Lucknow, Prayagraj and Varanasi. Having been closely associated with Ayodhya since 2015, I have been seeing it grow exponentially and striking the right cords of tourism.





**Sanjay Razdan, Hony. Joint Secretary - IATO**

The recent visit to Ayodhya and Deep Utsav was like a dream come true and surely a blessing to visit the Ram Janam Bhoomi Temple. 'Deep Utsav' on November 3, in one word was absolutely mesmerizing where 9.41 lac earthen lamps were lit on the ghats of Saryu River, a new Guinness World record which ended with a grand laser show depicting glimpses of the life of Lord Rama culminating in a grand display of fireworks. In my opinion Ayodhya will be a leading destination for tourists both from India and abroad and will be an essential part of most inbound itineraries in future. Though many new projects are already on, at present, the tourist infrastructure is weak but we have been assured by the local administration that they are planning many good hotels and other tourist facilities in the near future.



**Manoj Kumar Matta**

Undoubtedly, Ayodhya shall soon be the hot selling destination across the country. I was blessed to be there and happy to witness the world record in making. Whosoever wishes to visit Ayodhya, do let me know so as to plan the perfect holiday for lifetime. The light and sound show, fireworks and laser show was mind blowing; never saw such work anywhere across the globe!



**Sejoe Jose, Regional Chairman – South, IATO**

When I got the invitation from UP government through IATO to visit Ayodhya for Deepotsav, I was not sure what I should expect. The images I had in mind were a village which is not very clean and organised. But the trip to Lucknow and then to Ayodhya was an eye opener and really makes me feel that Ayodhya is one of the must see destination India, keeping in mind the history and religious sentiments of India.

What really struck me was the organisation capacity of the team who managed the event. There were more than 200 thousand people and the place was very clean and crowd management was very well managed. The event started right on time and the flow of event was like a clock. I am of the opinion that Ayodhya will truly become the must see destination of India.



# 70 per cent people are willing to spend on travel during Nov-Dec

The world of travel and tourism has a new order in place, post-pandemic. With the spotlight now on consumers and their fast-evolving cares, it is important to understand what makes them tick, where their inhibitions lie and what their expectations are anticipated to be. Consumer-centricity is the only way forward, the industry agrees.

With the aim of providing a birds-eye view of consumer behaviour, InterMiles, a leading loyalty and rewards programme, has published results of their third travel survey in the 'Consumer Sentiment Index Report (Travel) 3.0'. Based on responses received from 2,276 InterMilers across India during mid-October 2021, the report showcases insights and changing consumption patterns of the evolved Indian traveller.

## Key Insights from the InterMiles Consumer Sentiment Index (Travel) 3.0:



## Bucketed as an essential expenditure, travel commands greater attention from consumer wallets

Given its role in re-energizing and re-motivating a population fatigued by the pandemic, by promoting mental health and wellness, travel is no longer grouped under non-essential expenditures. Additionally, with millennials choosing to invest in experiences rather than assets, it comes as no surprise that over 70 per cent of the members surveyed are willing to spend over INR 10,000 (per person) on a trip.

15 per cent members are willing to loosen purse strings even further and spend over INR 50,000 (per person) solely on travel.





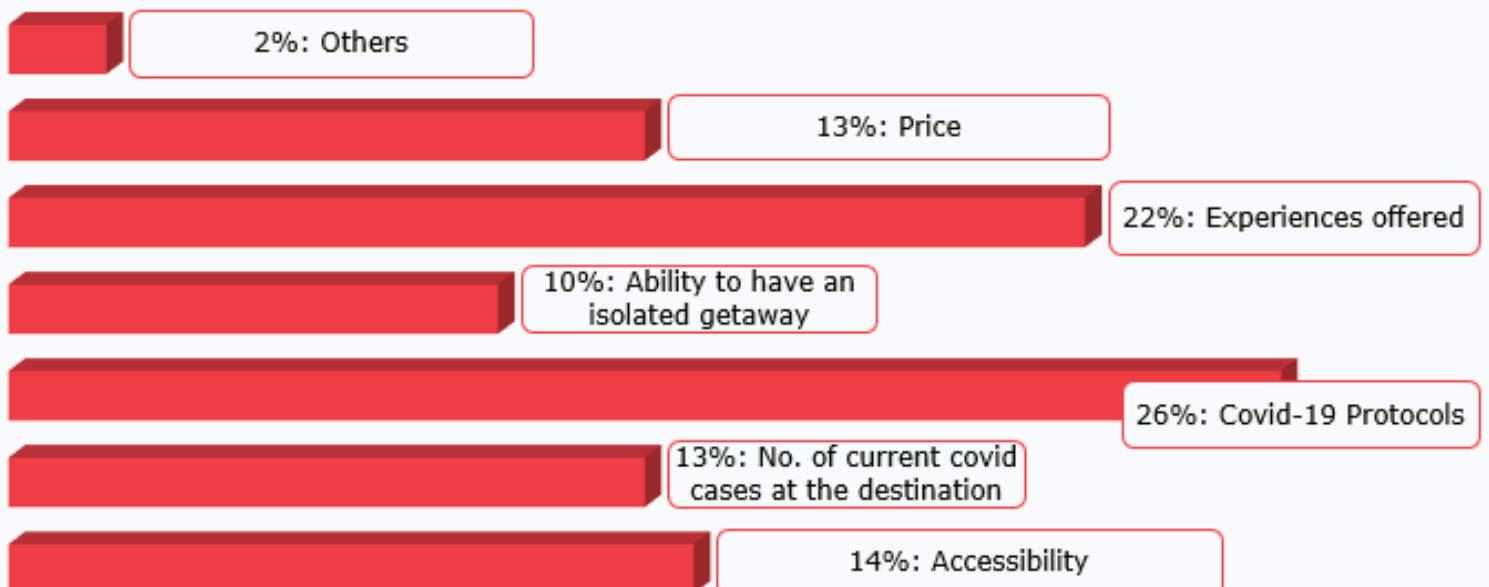
## Flights continue to be the preferred mode of transportation



Around 55 per cent respondents planning to travel in Nov-Dec 2021, said they would opt for flights to get to their destination. This is in continuity to a similar trend observed during the InterMiles Consumer Sentiment Index (Travel) 2.0 released in March 2021 – where majority travellers stated that they felt more comfortable travelling by flights, as opposed to any other mode of transport. Self-drives – which emerged as a popular travel trend last year – continues to be popular with 20 per cent respondents choosing to either travel by rented or personal vehicles.

## Safety considerations and pandemic protocols remain #1 when planning travel

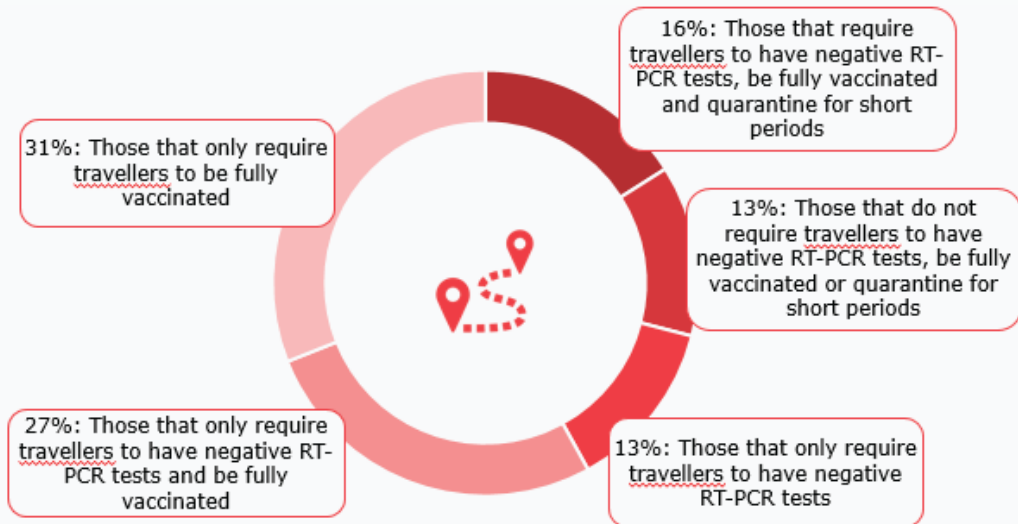
The traveller consideration list has evolved significantly during the pandemic – pushing health and safety to be primary factors when it comes to choosing a destination as well as accommodation properties. During the course of the survey, close to 50 per cent respondents cited different aspects of safety as the most important factor while choosing a destination. Major deciding factors included Covid-19 protocols (26 per cent), the number of current Covid-19 cases at the destination (13 per cent) and the ability to have an isolated getaway (10 per cent). It is interesting to note that respondents are more skewed towards gauging the safety ranking of a destination, by taking health protocols into consideration as opposed to the number of infections.



## Vaccinate, test and mask-up please!

Post-pandemic, travellers do not believe that less is more, with them actively seeking out destinations that have strategic safety and hygiene measures in place. Vaccinations are working like a charm when it comes to boosting traveller confidence. This is evident as close to one 1 in 3 travellers state that they are comfortable travelling to destinations that allow only fully vaccinated travellers.

Another 27 per cent respondents say that they would have most confidence in destinations that mandate negative RT-PCR tests, in addition to complete vaccinations. Furthermore, 16 per cent state that in addition to the above stated criteria, they will be most comfortable with destinations that have short quarantine periods.



## What masking protocols are consumers most likely to follow during travel?

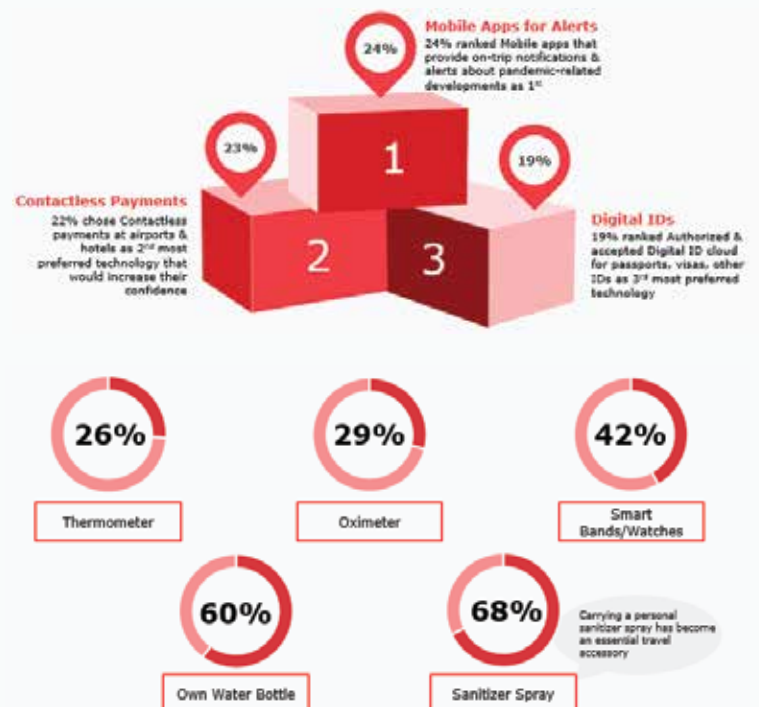


Respondents seem to be divided on the correct masking protocol, during travel. However, a majority (32 per cent) lean towards wearing single masks. These are closely followed by those who prefer to don a single mask + face shield (28 per cent), double masks (23 per cent) and double masks + face shields (17 per cent).

## Increased dependency on technology in travel

With the onset of the pandemic, technology was predictably slated to play a huge role in reducing person-to-person contact. The InterMiles survey reaffirms its part in restoring consumer confidence, as a whopping 42 per cent respondents say that contactless technologies boost confidence while travelling – these include contactless payments (22 per cent) and digital IDs (19 per cent). Having a constant eye on travel developments via mobile applications also helps increase confidence in 24 per cent travellers.

Along with dedicating attention to the latest travel news, travellers have also evolved to keep constantly keep a tab on physical health and again, technology comes to the rescue! 42 per cent survey respondents said that they were likely to pack a smart band or watch that can track their fitness when travelling. Rather than tag around individual oximeters (29 per cent) and thermometers (26 per cent), majority travellers prefer smart bands and watches which are usually capable of monitoring both, temperature and SpO2 levels. In addition to technology that monitors health, travellers also exercise adequate precaution – they state personal sanitizers (68 per cent) and personal water bottles (60 per cent) have now become absolutely essential travel accessories.



## Yorker Holidays Services organises Diwali party for its trade partners



Yorker Holidays Services organised a cocktail and dinner get together for its trade partners on October 29, 2021. The event was supported by Norwegian Cruise and Maldivian Airlines along with other partners such as Dubai Parks and Resorts, Ain Dubai, Ski Dubai and Lemon Tree Hotels. "It's been almost two years, we have been seeing many virtual events being organized, now that travel is gradually starting, we thought of organising a small get together for our travel trade partners. It's high time to physically meet and greet and on the occasion of Diwali we thought of inviting our partners and celebrate the occasion," said Vinnet Srivastava, Director, Yorker Holidays Services.





## ALUla welcomes guests on world first 'Museum in the Sky' flight by SAUDIA

The world's first 'Museum in the Sky' is a joint collaboration between ALUla and SAUDIA Airlines, to highlight the significance of ALUla as a living museum, with only a small fraction of archaeological sites identified currently being investigated.

The flight took off from Riyadh to ALUla on the 4th of November 2021. Onboard the flying museum, a replica collection of artefacts discovered in ALUla during excavations by archaeologists

revealed some of the mysteries of ALUla's ancient civilizations. SAUDIA also used the opportunity to launch their new In-Flight Entertainment System (IFE), Discover Saudi Arabia, on which passengers were encouraged to watch the Discovery Channel documentary movie – Architects of Ancient Arabia – a 2021 release full-length documentary movie produced by PowderHouse revealing that some of human civilization's first building blocks were set in place in ALUla.

## South African Tourism unveils dynamic tourism recovery strategy for India

Inspired by border openings and increased confidence in travel, South African Tourism held their maiden virtual roadshow in India to capitalize on the strong consumer and corporate traveller demand in the country. The 'Virtually Yours South Africa' roadshow is expected to boost tourism economies in both nations, especially as the South African national tourism board focuses on bullishly driving strategic recovery measures in India.

According to the Tourism Sector Recovery Plan put together by the tourism board earlier this year, key focus areas remain re-igniting demand, protecting & rejuvenating supply and

strengthening capacity. The recently concluded roadshow in India is the first of many efforts to reignite international travel demand, in order to meet a global target of 2.6 million visitors in FY21-22.

99 South African suppliers were part of the trade delegation who exhibited their products and services in India from 20th to 22nd October 2021. They reiterated the tourism board's emphasis on diversifying geographies and expanding product range for the India market. Of the 99 suppliers, over 41 were exhibiting in India for the first time and 12 were women-owned enterprises.

## ETAA signs LOI with IATA to promote the TIDS Seller Identification Program to its members

ETAA National board has signed a LOI with IATA to promote the TIDS Seller Identification Program to its 800++ members on a Pan India basis. It is a significant achievement in the travel and tourism industry. A letter of recommendation from ETAA can be used in place of a letter from Airlines, GDS or other major industry suppliers. TIDS stands for Travel Industry Designator Services. The agency identification program that allows for the bookings of travel Sellers and intermediaries to be recognized by

industry suppliers from airlines, hotel and resort chains, cruise lines, car rental companies, theme parks, and rail companies.

As the digital transformation of the industry ramps up, industry-wide standard identification of sales intermediaries has become critical. To facilitate this, IATA TIDS is now FREE of charge. As part of this digital transformation, IATA has launched a new self-managed information platform to allow you to easily maintain your agency profile and details online.

ETAA also organised a webinar with Mr. Luc Debono, Senior Manager of Product Development - Identity Services from IATA to assist members with the procedure for TIDS on boarding. The webinar received a great response and members have started applying for TIDS with Letter of Recommendation from ETAA.



## TAT New Delhi hosts #Thailand Reopening Webinar for Indian Travel Trade



& South Pacific), who threw light on TAT's new marketing campaign – Amazing Thailand, Now Even More Amazing. Next information on updated guidelines on entering Thailand protocol for travelers from India as well as documents and process for obtaining Thailand pass and visa, was given by First Secretary of Royal Thai Embassy. Tourism representatives from Phuket, Pattaya, Koh Samui and Chiang Mai also participated as speakers in the webinar providing information on tourism update for each of the destinations to the Indian travel trade.

TAT New Delhi recently hosted #Thailand Reopening Webinar for Indian travel trade to update the Indian travel agents, media and wedding planners, about the gradual re-opening of Thailand for tourism from India. Tourism Authority of Thailand New Delhi organized "Amazing Thailand Reopening" Webinar on October 21,

2021. Around 440 participants attended the webinar live on Zoom while the total reach of the webinar was over 5000 viewers across digital platforms including TAT social media pages and WhatsApp. The session started with a welcome remark by H.E Ms Pattarat Hongtong, Ambassador of Thailand to India who spoke about the

importance of tourism in Thailand as well as the strong and cherished ties between the people of India and Thailand. She also highlighted that year 2022 will mark the 75th anniversary of Indo – Thai diplomatic relations. This was followed by a short note from Mr Tanes Petsuwan, Deputy Governor for International Marketing (Asia

This webinar was a great initiative to reach out to the Indian travel trade and update them about tourism situation in Thailand as well as to highlight steps taken by the Thai government and tourism authorities to ensure health & safety of all tourists looking to visit Amazing Thailand.

## EWD celebrating 9th anniversary with tourism industry veterans

EWD recently celebrates their ninth anniversary with tourism industry veterans at Ayu Hotel on October 29, 2021 in Delhi. EWD paid tribute to the stalwarts of the tourism fraternity for their impeccable contribution in the tourism industry. Himmat Anand, Founder, Tree of Life Resorts and Hotels was the guest of honour. Malkit Singh Virdi and Jaishree Rawat Virdi, Founders, EWD thanked the friends for joining them on such their special day.



## APPOINTMENTS



### OMPL Group

OMPL Group announces an additional responsibility for Renu Kundaliya, a senior Marketing Executive with the OMPL group. In addition to her current responsibility Renu will handle the sales for Naad Wellness as Assistant Director Sales. Renu is based out of Delhi and brings a wealth of experience of over 20 years in the Tourism industry. She has worked with various Overseas Tourism Boards and travel agencies over the course of her career.

### Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts Private Limited has announced the promotion and appointment of Sandeep Basu as their Corporate General Manager- Pre Opening & Operations. He will play a key role in meeting the Cygnett's aggressive growth goals. His first assignment in his new role will be the opening and launch of Cygnett Park BL, Jaipur. Sandeep brings with him an incredible track record of over two decades of experience in the hospitality sector, having essayed roles in various renowned companies like Park Hotels, ITC Hotels, Hyatt and Sheraton.

An articulate and passionate hotel professional with a strong business acumen, his expertise lies in pre-opening of hotels which he garnered along his decades long experience across various roles, locations and hotel segments.



### Holiday Inn Kolkata Airport

Bhawna is a hospitality professional with an experience of 19+ yrs. across brands such as Taj Hotel, Hyatt, Imperial, InterContinental Hotels Group & Marriott International. She started her career in 2001 and grew to the role of Executive Housekeeper in 2007 at the first managed IHG hotel i.e., Crowne Plaza Today Gurgaon. She spent 10 fulfilling years with IHG growing into the role of General Manager at Holiday Inn and Suites Bengaluru. She was given the opportunity to work at conversion hotel; positioning the hotel to deliver profits within first year of Operations. She learnt various facets of leadership while being at IHG – maintaining assets, owner relations, switching gears from expense department to generating revenues. She moved to Courtyard by Marriott Gurugram in 2017 as a General Manager.

### Hilton Mumbai International Airport

Hilton Mumbai International Airport has appointed Deepak Kumar as General Manager. He has over 20 years of experience and extensive operational knowledge across multiple hotels and brands. His last assignment was as General Manager, Holiday Inn Cochin, where under his guidance the hotel has performed exceedingly well across all parameters including guest experiences, commercial performance and operational performance.

Prior to working at the Holiday Inn Cochin, Kumar worked with Holiday Inn Mumbai International Airport and Holiday Inn New Delhi International Airport, completing nearly a decade with IHG. As a hotel and marketing management graduate, he has also undergone Six Sigma Certification and Strategic Management Certification at IIMA.



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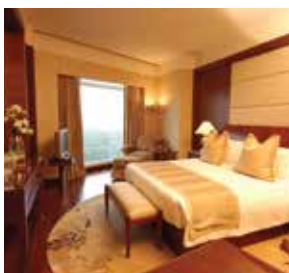


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### GUCHHI

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