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Dear Readers,

As we gradually foray into the season period of the year, be that for festivals or tourism, we had to begin by celebrating the mounting success that travel and tourism in India have achieved till date. We head to the land of monarchs in London with our ‘WTM Special’ issue, speaking of the commendable success and evolution that India is consistently exhibiting.

Travel and tourism in India are rapidly evolving its offerings and possessions that the government is actively involved in taking tourism in India a notch higher. Travel is a new religion for people around the world as a recent survey revealed that people the world over spend almost 40 per cent of their spare income or savings on exploring new places for leisure. The trend is growing year-on-year irrespective of the changes on the global stage. With this growth come the challenges. Today’s traveller does not want to spread his vacation too thin on too many things. Thanks to the communication revolution, he picks a destination after a lot of research and comes to a destination with a definite bend of mind. The Ministry of Tourism has recognised this very trend and thus introduced ‘niche’ tourism in India. There has been a noticeable change in the tourism footfall ever since the country has begun adding novelty to its age-old tours.

Further, we talk to the industry stalwarts and contributors about their outlook and opinion on how India can gradually surface as a most-preferred destination offering niche experiences across all corners of the nation. In addition to that, we outline some new experiences and destinations that seem to be a promising one for both domestic and international travellers.

This issue brings news and reports about trade, hospitality, aviation and the latest in tourism worldwide. We value your feedback and suggestions so please do write to us on varun@versatilemedia.in.

Happy reading!
Need for Niche
Opening New Doors for Travelling in India

In a bid to attract more tourists to the incredibly beautiful country, the Indian state tourism boards, along with the tour operators are constantly creating new experiences and diversifying concepts. From experiential revolving around food to art, wildlife to adventure, almost everything that is niche in this magnificent country has been taken into consideration by the Ministry of Tourism. While the initial surge in growth has been steady, continuing this thrust will involve a better policy dynamism as well as intensified cooperation between multiple layers of the industry. Decoding the strategies for the next stage of growth, the decision-makers from the state tourism boards and key industry players torture and enunciate the need for niche and new has become the need-of-the-hour to survive and thrive in the competitive tourism market.

In Conversation
28 Alitalia Launches Group Booking Platform for the Indian Travel Trade
Aims to Improve Business-Class Segmentations and Targets

In conversation with Nicola Bonacchi, Vice President-Leisure Sales, Alitalia on the new Group Booking platform and further connectivity.

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Standing at the threshold of tourism in India, jumping a notch up with the quick passage of time, the country today has become the melting pot of traditional landmarks and contemporary experiences. Concurrently, the Government has been actively working towards tapping a plethora of opportunities available in the sector to actualise its true potential. Sujit Banerjee, Former Union Secretary, Tourism and Secretary-General, World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTCII) shares his outlook on the current scenario as to whether the booming inbound tourism that is foraying into India is a matter of celebration or concern.

In conversation with Sandeep Bhasin, Vice President IslandHopper, TravelScapes understands how the company is leveraging the best of benefits under TBO’s huge network of agents and from its foundation built upon inter-personal relationships.

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Making India Economical for All

Yogendra Tripathi, Secretary- Tourism, Government of India speaks at the on-set of the recently-concluded ITM 2019
MoT organises Adventure Trekking Training course in Ladakh

Following the vision of the PM Narendra Modi of development of tourism in Ladakh and under the leadership of Union Minister of State for Tourism & Culture (Independent Charge) Prahlad Singh Patel, the Indian Institute of Skiing & Mountaineering (IISM) Gulmarg, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in association with Indian Institute of Travel & Tourism Management (IITT) an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism has organised an Adventure ‘Tourism Training Courses in Trekking. The first of its kind in the region, this 10 days training course trains local youth in various aspects of mountain trekking and also gives them hands-on experience. Over 30 local youth enrolled in the first batch which started on September 24, 2019.

Approximately 90 local youth were trained in three batches. The training programmes were completed on October 12, 2019. The trekking programme started with a briefing and the participants covered places such as Spithuk, Then, Zinchen, Rumbak, Stok la Base, Stock within 10 days and returned to Leh. This training program is aimed at developing the basic skills of trekking in the youth who can later use these skills for becoming guides or entrepreneurs in future.

APTDC plans extra dome and bamboo tents at Lambasingi

According to a news report, Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) is proposing to construct an additional 30 dome and bamboo tents, as an alternative for the ongoing INR five crore project. The state government is releasing funds in instalments. The tents would be ready by November. Currently, the tourism department has just four tents beside the private players wherein each tent costs INR 1,500 per day on regular days and INR 2,000 per day during weekends. There are plans of charging less tariff for the new tents that will be of comparatively smaller size, as per the officials. The APTDC is making these arrangements for the thousands of travellers that are likely to visit Lambasingi in winter which is the tourist season. In the meantime, the corporation is also planning to begin bus from Vizag to Lambasingi from November 1 and introducing a bus to Lambasingi and Araku.

Centre to launch a programme to boost Kashmir tourism

The Centre is launching the ‘Back to Valley’ programme to give a major boost to tourism in the Kashmir Valley. This will be the first major push by the government to revive tourism in Kashmir after the scrapping of Article 370. As part of the ‘Back to Valley’ program, the Tourism Ministry has asked Federation of Indian Tour and Travel Association to aggressively campaign for reviving Kashmir tourism, sources said. The state tourism department has also chipped in by organising roadshows in state capitals for boosting valley tourism which has seen a sharp decline since repealing of Article 370. The tourism department plans to engage with major tour operators of the country. “We will be doing roadshows from November. Advertisements will be put up in all the airports across the country for promoting Kashmir tourism “said a senior official of the Tourism Department. Tourism in Kashmir has seen a major slump since August 2 with tourist footfalls falling to a trickle. The government issued an advisory on August 2 asking all the tourists and Amarnath pilgrims to leave the valley. Before that advisory, over 8.6 lakh tourists and Amarnath pilgrims had visited Kashmir in 2019. After horticulture, Tourism is the highest money-spinner for Kashmir’s economy and provides livelihood to lakhs of people including hoteliers, houseboat owners, transporters and tour operators.

Goa to emerge as a hub for sports tourism

The government is working towards making Goa a premier hub for sports tourism, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant stated recently. Speaking at an event in the presence of the organisers of Ironman 70.3, a gruelling international sporting event which involves a race spanning across three disciplines, he said, “In the years ahead, we intend to shape Goa as a premier hub for sports tourism. We are hosting the National Games of India in October 2020 and it is not just governments, but other private organisations too which have preferred to host sporting events in the state.” Goa, a soccer-loving state, is already a leading beach tourism destination and attracted nearly eight million tourists last year. The 70.3 Ironman race begins at the Miramar beach in Panaji with a 2.5 mile swim course in the seas off the beach, followed by a three-lap x 30 km bike route passing through the state capital, before the last leg of the race, which is a 21 km three-loop run course. As many as 1,000 participants from 23 countries are expected to participate in the endurance race scheduled for October 20.

Northeast to introduce seaplanes to boost tourism

In an ambitious initiative to boost tourism, the state-run Airport Authority of India (AAI) will introduce water aerodrome or seaplanes in three locations in Assam for the first time, as per an AAI official. “After a countrywide study, it was decided to introduce water aerodrome or seaplanes in three locations in Assam. To boost tourism and connectivity, three riverfronts were selected in Assam to introduce the water-based ferry for the first time in India,” said AAI Regional Executive Director Sanjeev Jindal. He said, “At the end of next year or by early 2021, the water aerodrome or seaplane services would be launched in Brahmaputra river and Umranngs reservoir. The three locations selected for the seaplanes include Guwahati, Umranngs (in Dima Hasao district) and the famous Kaziranga National Park.” Jindal, who recently inspected the under-construction work of INR 300 crore newly designed Agartala airport project, said that not much investment is required to commence the seaplane services in Assam. “Three jetties would be built in three locations at a cost of INR 50 crores. Some other small works have to be done before launching the new ferrying mode,” he added.

UPDATE MoT
Wrong perception of North East needs to be changed: Tourism Minister

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Tourism and Culture, Prahlad Singh Patel, has said the wrong perception of the northeast needs to be changed to attract more tourists.

Inaugurating the third Shirui Lily festival at Ukhrul district in Manipur along with Chief Minister N Biren Singh, Patel said despite being gifted with scenic beauty and rich cultural heritage, due to some wrong perceptions, the region is unable to attract tourists in large numbers. “A collective effort is needed from all the stakeholders to explore ways to attract more tourists to the state,” he said. Patel said he has written to the Union HRD Minister whether it would be possible to make it compulsory for students of the central schools to visit the northeast at least once. “One who has witnessed the region at a tender age would never forget it throughout his/her life,” he said. The four-day festival that began on October 16, aims at spreading awareness about the conservation of the endangered Shirui Lily and to promote Ukhrul as a tourist destination.

Speaking on the occasion, Biren Singh said the law and order situation in the state has improved under the two-and-half years of BJP-led rule. The chief minister said more such fests would be organised as there is an environment of peace in the state. “Earlier, tourists used to fear to visit the hill areas of the state due to the poor law and order. However, that has changed,” he said. Lauding the hospitality of the Tangkhul community, Singh said more than 2,000 homestays have been booked by tourists for the festival. Noting that all disputes can be settled through dialogue, the chief minister said Manipur belongs to its people and asserted that the state government would not allow anything that may hurt the interests or sentiments of any community living in the state.

The chief minister said the state government is urging the Centre to bring about a “topographical need-based budget” to ensure inclusive development of the state. “The Centre has implemented the Hill Areas Development Programme (HADP) for states with hilly topography like Manipur. Tamenglong district in the state is among the 82 districts across the country where the scheme would be implemented in the first phase,” he said. As part of it, Tamenglong would get INR 90 crore for implementation of developmental projects, Singh said. Mentioning that around INR 600 crore would be spent on improving road connectivity in Ukhrul district, the chief minister said around INR 250 crore has been sanctioned for construction of roads between Kamjong and Tengnoupal districts.

He said TRIFED (Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India) under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs has agreed to set up 75 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras in the state. Singh said the Ministry of DoNER has assured that all the hill districts of the state would be covered under it. The chief minister said the state Cabinet has approved the ‘Stand Up Manipur’ scheme as part of which subsidy and soft loans would be provided to people from the SC, ST, OBC categories, women and minorities of the state for setting up businesses and urged them to avail the benefits. Earlier, Patel unveiled the ‘Strength of Unity’ pillar at Shirui village and inaugurated a new building of the Forest Division Office at Ukhrul town.

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OPENING NEW DOORS FOR TRAVELLING IN INDIA

In a bid to attract more tourists to the incredibly beautiful country, the Indian state tourism boards along with the tour operators are constantly creating new experiences and diversifying concepts. From experiential revolving around food to art, wildlife to adventure, almost everything that is niche in this magnificent country has been taken into consideration by the Ministry of Tourism. While the initial surge in growth has been steady, continuing this thrust will involve a better policy dynamism as well as intensified cooperation between multiple layers of the industry that involve both conventional and niche tourism offerings. Decoding the strategies for the next stage of growth, the decision-makers from the state tourism boards and key industry players further explain how the need for niche and new has become need-of-the-hour to survive and thrive in the competitive tourism market.

By Gagneet Kaur & Sayanti Halder

Travel is evolving rapidly all across the world and there is a noticeable shift from mass tourism to the niche. This segment of fresh tourism is fast-becoming a reality in India, further evolving the businesses of the future and many of them are expected to become the key to the growth of India’s future tourism. “The need-of-the-hour for India’s tourism is to create new and unique themes to shape inbound tourism by providing niche experiences and luxury tourism to international tourists”, says a new report. With its diverse topography comprising the Himalayan mountain ranges, deserts, forests, rivers, lakes and backwaters, coastal areas, just to name a few, India has the potential for both soft and hard land, air and water-based adventure activities. The wildlife sanctuaries and national parks spread across the country are a great attraction for wildlife enthusiasts from across the globe.

A recent survey of 3,865 LGBT Americans organised by Community Marketing Inc (CMI), a communications and marketing agency based in the US, revealed some startling facts. According to the survey, over 80 per cent said they would visit or have visited India and prefer it over other destinations in South Asia. India is second behind Thailand as a cultural and adventure destination in terms of preference. Despite having diverse destinations and products, India’s tourism industry is not yet able to rise to the level of being called a niche destination. India has to streamline its efforts to attract more niche segments of travel involving young travellers.

With the current stress on culture and heritage, India receives aged travellers who are more inclined towards these two segments. While these core areas continue to drive tourism, there have been efforts to create niche tourism products in the last decade. India’s niche is built around the newness of both experiences and destinations that the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India is looking into polishing further. “Development and promotion of niche products help in attracting tourists with specific:
TravelScapes

Director General (Tourism), Darshan, the Wildlife Circuit has under the scheme of Swadesh boost adventure tourism. Similarly, of Tourism circuits. A set of Scheme for Integrated Development under the Swadesh Darshan the adventure tourism destinations, Governments/UT Administrations Financial Assistance to State Tourism has provided Central niche products is adventure destination. One of the identified and to promote India as a 365 days’ overcome the aspect of ‘seasonality’ tourism products in the country to provide a dedicated institutional framework to take forward the cause of promotion of medical tourism, wellness tourism and Yoga, Ayurveda tourism and any other format of Indian system of medicine covered by Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), the Ministry has constituted a National Medical & Tourism Board which works as an umbrella organisation that promotes this segment of tourism in an organised manner. A task force on cruise tourism has also been formed jointly by the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Shipping with representatives of all major stakeholders. The Ministry of Tourism also provides Central Financial Assistance under relevant schemes to the State Governments / UT Administrations and Central Agencies for various tourism projects including cruise terminals.

Additionally, to promote the destinations and their various offerings, the tourism and hospitality service providers play a pivotal role in packaging and promoting the various attractions including the niche products and presenting them to consumers in different source markets. The Ministry of Tourism, therefore, actively engages and acts as facilitators with all the tourism stakeholders for creating niche experiences and tourism products in the country for garnering more tourists, both domestic as well as from overseas.

However, there is a lack of clarity as to what comes under the ambit of niche and what not, says Rajeev Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel. “Our Indian travel associations are too enmeshed in politics and inflicting to understand the needs of the industry. They are resistant to feedback and indifferent to member’s needs. So, I am today very disillusioned by what our associations are capable of doing. I won’t hold my breath for a miracle to happen,” he further claims. Therefore, the need of the juncture for India tourism is to create new and unique themes to shape inbound tourism by providing niche cognition and luxury tourism to international tourists. What needs to be addressed is the re-definition of niche tourism and not just the enlargement of it. We speak with the top decision makers to get a glimpse into how India is chugging forward towards the next phase of growth by prioritizing the need for niche.

The Ministry of Tourism has identified various niche tourism products in the country to overcome the aspect of ‘seasonality’ and to promote India as a 365 days’ destination. One of the identified niche products is adventure tourism where the Ministry of Tourism has provided Central Financial Assistance to State Governments/UT Administrations for development of tourism infrastructure which also counts in the adventure tourism destinations, under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme for Integrated Development of Tourism circuits. A set of guidelines on safety and quality norms has also been formulated to boost adventure tourism. Similarly, under the scheme of Swadesh Darshan, the Wildlife Circuit has been identified as one of the fifteen thematic circuits for development. In order to provide a dedicated institutional framework to take forward the cause of promotion of medical tourism, wellness tourism and Yoga, Ayurveda tourism and any other format of Indian system of medicine covered by Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), the Ministry has constituted a National Medical & Tourism Board which works as an umbrella organisation that promotes this segment of tourism in an organised manner. A task force on cruise tourism has also been formed jointly by the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Shipping with representatives of all major stakeholders. The Ministry of Tourism also provides Central Financial Assistance under relevant schemes to the State Governments / UT Administrations and Central Agencies for various tourism projects including cruise terminals.

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India has a comparative advantage when it comes to attracting tourists with specific interests

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Moneakshi Sharma, Director General (Tourism), Government of India
Niche tourism has been on the forefront for the past two years. Even in our 2016 tourism policy, niche tourism has been given extraordinary importance. During WTM London 2019, we would be taking forward wildlife and heritage, on a bigger scale. During the tourist season, wildlife will be at its best from November to April. We are going to showcase those areas and destinations, which are not ordinarily available in entire Western Europe. Heritage aspects of Maharashtra are so unique and dissimilar compared to other countries and the much-explored heritage destinations such as Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. We are going to showcase our heritage, which is a composite of valor, a slice of romance, architecture and spirituality, in a package. There are about 10 different locations and circuits that we will be focusing on including Pune, Nashik and there are several hidden jewels, which we will be showcasing and uncovering in London that are lesser-heard about but are equally important, historically and architecturally. The tourist season of ours up till April is a brilliant time to travel to Maharashtra as the weather conditions are so conducive, especially knowing that it is frigid cold in Western Europe and we are enjoying a whole lot of sunshine. We are looking at ME countries, Western Europe, the USA and Canada as a lot of diaspora and second-generation Indians who want to rediscover India and would be happy to come back. And for completely new tourists, I would look at Scandinavian countries. Travellers who have come to India, seen and done it all, would be interested in exploring our spiritual and leisure tours, now. So, we are planning to get back our repeated visitors to explore the state further for leisure, recuperation and wellness. FTAs arriving in the state have grown by over 10 per cent in the last two years. We are curating special packages and deals and are also putting forward our FAM tours for the organised tour operators to come forward and special packages for the high-ranking individuals and corporates.

MP Tourism has prepared different travel circuits and itineraries for every tourism segment

Niche experiences are very much required for attracting more tourists from the overseas market since the tourists’ expectations when visiting a particular place are related to several features of the chosen destination. As a whole, they are crucial aspects of the destinations and have a profound influence on their success.

To attract national and international tourists, Madhya Pradesh Tourism has prepared different travel circuits and itineraries for every tourism segment that the state possesses like wildlife, adventure, heritage, culture, pilgrimage, leisure, music, food, events and many more so that every tourist can get the most as per his interest. We are always in coordination with the tour operators to explain and assist them regarding the new activities, products and new circuits of Madhya Pradesh tourism for both domestic and international tourists. We are also organising roadshows at regular intervals to get connected with the tour operators and travel agents and also to upgrade them, we are providing training to tour operators from different cities to educate them regarding new products and destinations of the state. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB) annually organises Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart to increase domestic and international tourists in the state.

Apart from these, rural and MICE tourism are developing in the state and touching milestones. For decades, Madhya Pradesh tourism is facilitating high standard travel services for travellers visiting central India with an approach to cover all the offerings by the state. We have seen a constant upward growth in numbers when it comes to our foreign tourist arrivals. Around 3.68 lakh foreign tourists visited MP in 2018 which is around 3.6 per cent of the total foreign tourist arrival to India. We are expecting around 15 to20 per cent growth in the foreign tourist footfall by 2020.

Vinita Vaid Singal, IAS, Secretary-Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Government of Maharashtra

Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, IAS, Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board & Secretary Tourism, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal
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Our marketing strategy is to steadily reveal the very secrets of the state

Odisha Tourism adopted the brand identity ‘India’s Best-Kept Secret’ to turn around its assumed disadvantage of anonymity, barring Puri. Our marketing strategy is to steadily reveal the very secrets of the state. To list a few niche tourism products that we market, offer and provide to tourists include ethnic or tribal tourism, heritage walks and Odisha has consistently championed in ecotourism and its flagship initiative of community-managed eco-tourism and camping projects has recently won the award for India’s Best Eco-tourism Initiative. Odisha is home to 62 unique tribal groups that constitute 22 per cent of the state’s population, residing in the Eastern Ghats hill tracts running through South-western and Central Odisha. The state has pioneered in sports tourism by developing world-class sports infrastructure, marketing it as an action-packed experience including sporting events on the field and tourism off it and through investments in skilling and training – not just for playing sports but also for organising sports hospitality. Additionally, it has over 50 unique arts and crafts which are geographically and culturally spaced, allowing tourists to visit the crafts villages and stay with the artisans, observe their art, their lifestyles, try their hand at the art and then take back memorabilia.

Odisha Tourism is also promoting houseboat tourism, water-sports, caravan tourism, heritage hotels and homestays, which would greatly enrich tourists’ bucket lists. We work very closely with our networks of travel agents, industry associations and travel operators in focus markets around the world through their B2B networks. The just-concluded Odisha Travel Bazar (OTB) 2019 saw the state hosting 25 foreign tour operators and over 60 tour operators from within India conduct 2400 pre-scheduled B2B meetings with more than 50 suppliers from Odisha, to forge collaborations in selling unique Odisha Tourism packages to tourists, across India and the world. Through our efforts, we are targeting to receive FTAs of about 500,000 or two per cent of the total tourist arrivals by 2022.

Karnataka Tourism has been developing major tourism destinations in terms of amenities and last-mile connectivity

Tourism is becoming less of destinations and more of experiences. Nowadays, tourists want to experience local culture, involve in activities like art, dance, adventure and more. India having diverse cultures and destinations, offers a wide variety of experiences. And Karnataka, being one of the very vibrant states in India, offers heritage, beaches, wildlife, pilgrimage, unique food and lifestyle. Karnataka Tourism has been developing major tourism destinations like Hampi, Badami, Beluru, Halebeedu, Mysuru, in terms of amenities and last-mile connectivity.

To attract both national and international tourists, Karnataka Tourism has created a brand campaign - ‘Script Your Adventure’. Under the same theme, TVC and print ads have been developed that showcase the major tourism offerings. We are also promoting Karnataka in our focus markets like the UK, France, Germany, Spain and UAE.

In 2018-19, Karnataka Tourism has also conducted eight international roadshows in UK, France and Germany. And it is starting to conduct 16 international roadshows in 2019-20 starting with three roadshows in Spain and Italy during WTM London. This year, Karnataka Tourism has started its first-ever international expo – Karnataka International Travel Expo. KITE was the platform to bring all the tourism fraternity of Karnataka and showcase their offerings to the world. There were more than 100 participants from Karnataka, over 400 hosted buyers from 25 countries and more than 25,000 B2B meetings held during the event.

Talking about the tourist footfall, Karnataka received over five lakh foreign travellers in 2018-19. Since we have started aggressive marketing including the promotions of our niche offerings, we expect to get 20 to 25 per cent more travellers in the coming year.
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There is no doubt to say that India has not been accelerating as it should be for propagating niche destinations. Nowadays, travel has become part of life around the world irrespective of vicissitudes on the global level. Today’s tourists are very eclectic. We are lucky to have lots of niche segments including eco, rural, cruise, sports, adventure and wildlife tourism are a popular ones. But still, there are many more to explore for example cemeteries tourism, geology, ancestral, tribal and even volunteer tourism apart from student travel, transgender travel, photographic tourism and culinary tourism, to name a few.

Niche travel is immeasurable as far as India as a destination is a concerned. In my opinion, these less explore products can be the future for India tourism. India has to focus to attract more niche portiere of travel. To cater to these niche segments, the industry has to equip itself and create an excellent infrastructure to address various issues related to the notion of these segments. India has lots of opportunities for becoming a niche adventure destination as well. If we talk about adventure, I can easily count more than 15 masterly adventure sports activities that we offer at different places across the country.

It is very important that we need to be more innovative to create niche products, time-to-time. However, I differ from the fact that we created mass inbound tourism. There is scope for improving the mass tourism numbers which is easier to get more revenue to our country. We need to do a concentrated effort to promote mass tourism to various destinations in our country. The different states are as good as any European country. Hence, India tourism in association with various state tourism boards and the private partners in their states needs to plan a strategy to promote more effectively. Once the mass tourism begins effectively in various states, we can then come to the special niche products. Promoting and pushing them will be easier. As the number of niche products is less and cannot afford the marketing cost, it has to go hand-in-hand with mass tourism products.

We are not considered to be the mainstream destination and that is perhaps our biggest challenge. Having said this, our ability to cater to specialist interest segments is truly amazing. Our ability to address any interest is unparalleled. From culinary, art, architecture, dance, music, adventure, wildlife, religion and so many more, we have a product that fits any interest and not a cursory product either. We have the ability to deliver a deep and meaningful experience. So, where we may flounder in attracting mass volumes of tourists, our ability to attract the special interest segments is much stronger. I do indeed consider this to be an important area for us to focus on. We need to, however, be prudent and select a handful of key segments we can service well and in volumes, rather than spread ourselves too thin.

First, the Ministry needs to understand that when it comes to marketing and promotion, one size does not fit all. This has always been a perennial flaw in our promotional efforts. We need to have a fresh strategic plan for every segment we wish to attract. We need to address those consumers differently and even segment different source markets that have potential for us. There is no rocket science needed. In my opinion, I would select six niche areas and then get the industry together that specialise in each and brainstorm on what is needed to attract the right consumers. I would allocate an overall budget for promotion and then sub-allocate that budget across these six areas. I would create core monitoring groups of subject matter experts to give constant input and help guide the efforts of the ministry. At the end of the day, we are all on the same side and the objectives are the same. So let’s harness the power of teamwork and make India tourism a success story.
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Making India economical for all
The next chapter of India Tourism’s growth chugs forward with several initiatives by the government
By Gagneet Kaur

But GST revision for the hotels; streamlining of Inner Line Permit in the North East States of India, visa fee reduction to USD 25 (season) and USD 10 (off-season), opening 137 new peaks to foreigners for adventure tourism and renewed focus on the niche destinations for promoting tourism in a better and brighter light – the Indian government has been bullish on encouraging tourism in the truest sense. At the outset of welcoming the delegates during the inauguration ceremony of India Tourism Mart (ITM) 2019, Yogendra Tripathi, Secretary Tourism, Government of India extolled the benefits of India having several competitive advantages in terms of not just offering the age-old practices like Ayurveda and yoga but also promoting quality tourism.

Detailing further about how promoting India as a favourable destination has become an achievable task, Tripathi shares, “The government of India has been very proactively involved in promoting quality tourism. In the last one and half months, we ensured that our website is completed under the leadership of our current Minister for Tourism and we have been able to convince various bodies within the government to facilitate this further. Going forward, we now have new e-visa rules which also include the reduced visa fee that is expected to considerably bring down the cost of travelling to India and boost arrivals during the lean months, thereby increasing the tourism competitiveness of the country. E-Tourist visa of five-year duration would be permitted in addition to a one-year e-Tourist Visa. This e-Tourist Visa for five years will be with a stay stipulation of a maximum of 90 days’ multiple entries and is non-extendable. e-Conference Visa, in line with e-Conference Visa for Government/P.S.U. conferences would also be granted for private conferences organised by private persons/companies/organisations. A one-month e-Tourist Visa with a double entry is on the cards and would be launched in the near future.”

During ITM 2019, the Ministry officials including the Union Minister for Culture & Tourism (I/C) Prahlad Singh Patel were seen overwhelmed by the decision of the GST Council to reduce the GST on hotels which according to Tripathi has further made India a highly competitive market. “One of the biggest gains for the tourism sector is the recent reduction in the Goods and services tax (GST) rates for hotels which have been brought down from 28 per cent to 18 per cent. This eventually makes India more economical as it will bring down the cost of the travel packages considerably and I am sure that this significant step will make India a complete destination, ensuring that the incoming foreign footfall remains constant,” he asserts.

Over the period of time and in order to promote tourism further, the government has initiated inspections of the different corners of the country, especially of the northeast states. Tripathi during his speech also highlighted that the relaxation of Inner Line Permits to visit the NE is also a crucial step towards promoting this chunk of India which to date was under-tapped despite its humungous potential. Shedding light on the other recent initiatives, Tripathi also shared that the restriction for visit to Andaman has been relaxed. On the infrastructural front, a lot of hotel rooms have been added and many more are on the anvil. “The ministry has been putting in extra efforts and has brought forth imperative alterations in the past three months in order to grow the country’s tourism. I am sure that India, with these initiatives in place, shall move ahead as a global preference very soon,” he concludes on a high note.

The second edition of the annual India Tourism Mart (ITM) was held in New Delhi at The Ashok Hotel from September 23 to 25. Around 300 international buyers from 51 countries and 175 sellers from India participated.

SATTE 2020: Evolving for the furtherance

The show is readying for its biggest showcase under Informa Markets in India. Globally, international tourist arrival was recorded at 1.4 billion and the tourism receipt generated from international tourism reached a staggering USD 1.7 trillion in 2018. South Asia’s contribution to this growth has been robust and growing year-on-year. And SATTE, as the year’s first major international tourism event, has played a critical role in the region’s growth as both, inbound tourism destination and source market for destinations all over the world. However, the role gets a much-stronger fillip amidst some new changes that are at play to unveil a stronger and more powerful SATTE in its 27th edition in January 2020.

The recent integration of the Informa Markets and UBM has caused Informa with a new identity of the company that will bring out its first SATTE, early next year amidst new synergy and direction that is bound to further raise SATTE’s profile as one of the premier international tourism shows. Informa’s presence is spread over nearly 40 countries with more than 300 plus exhibitions and a market cap of around GBP 11 billion.

Yogesh Mudras, Managing Director for Informa Markets in India, said, “The combination of UBM and Informa makes it a larger organisation, with a potential for tremendous reach and therefore I see a lot of synergies happening. This pertains not only to exhibitions but also knowledge sharing, networking, business intelligence, technology and academic publishing, among others. So, what we are trying to bring in is a holistic solution to a customer which will also open lots of new avenues and initiatives for them. And this will be amply evident at SATTE 2020.”

Furthermore, commenting on the change of the venue last year, Mudras acknowledged that it was a bold decision to shift the venue of 25 years necessitated by the renovation that Pragati Maidan is currently undergoing. However, he pointed out that the change of venue not only brought together an event that was haled as truly international but was also much appreciated by the suppliers and exhibitors, alike.
IslandHopper witnesses an accelerated growth post-acquisition

In conversation with Sandeep Bhasin, Vice President IslandHopper, TravelScapes understands how the company is leveraging the best of benefits under TBO’s huge network of agents and its foundation built upon inter-personal relationships

By Gagneet Kaur

Marking its presence prominently in the B2B and B2A space, Travel Boutique Online (TBO), a Gurugram based travel company founded in 2006 has set the wheels in motion for several other companies under its thriving portfolio. The company this year acquired IslandHopper, a leading firm dealing in the island packages of Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles. With this acquisition, TBO has now started to explore various possibilities with other emerging island markets globally. The dynamic pillar of business Bhasin, who joined as the Vice President of this acquisition under the TBO umbrella, spoke with TravelScapes on the sidelines of the recently concluded TBO Preferred Hotels Roadshow.

“With an access to four major cities of Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai through TBO roadshow, we are getting an opportunity to interact with all the agents who are already working with TBO that haven’t been associated with IslandHopper, earlier. We got to meet quality agents who are trading their business on TBO but weren’t choosing IslandHopper for their bookings in island destinations. Moving forward for the season, which is the honeymoon season, we are hopeful to receive more registration of agents in IslandHopper,” he shares.

Since the time acquisition happened on April 1, 2019, IslandHopper, has already grown in multi-fold, with a 120 per cent increase vis-a-vis last year, as specified by Bhasin. Crediting IslandHopper’s success within the last six months to the loyal network of TBO, he says that the company is now settled in to enlarge this effort further for better results. “By meeting the quality agents through the TBO roadshows, our prime focus is only to enhance the relations further for our success story. Moving forward, we are looking at a five to ten times growth in the near future because for us, IslandHopper wasn’t as popular in the southern part of India as it already is in North and West India. That in itself would give us a big boost as the south is a market yet to be explored where TBO already has a steady existence. Being a fully-owned product of IslandHopper, we have the sales support of all the TBO personnel PAN India; not just from tier I and II but also, tier III and IV where IslandHopper could never reach without the utmost support.”

Overall, the pace of growth is steady; having a presence of 1300 to 1400 active agents who were already dealing with IslandHopper, before the acquisition, jumping to a total of over 2000 agents is an accomplishment and as claimed by Bhasin, this number would be consistently increasing, day-by-day and year-on-year. “The idea now is to expedite the growth rather than taking small steps because the trust and support of TBO is already there, the agents have their point of contact with the sales team of TBO.”
Gold Medal expands into India; committed to engaging the travel trade across the country

Gold Medal, one of the largest travel consolidators in the Middle East, has expanded its operations into India. Travel agents in the country can now benefit from the company’s extensive sales, marketing and operational expertise, advanced booking and reporting system and excellent customer service. Gold Medal will initially provide its Indian customers with access to flight bookings, offering over 100 airline partners’ services at competitive rates. The company is planning to launch its full product portfolio, including also a hotel, car hire, insurance services and visas, in the following months in India.

Preetham Kiron, Managing Director for Gold Medal in India said, “We are thrilled to launch our offering in India, a rapidly growing market, where we see excellent business opportunities and strong demand for our quality services. Our broad partnership network and innovative solutions enable travel agents to efficiently manage and grow their business while providing the best possible services to their customers. Our dedicated team will ensure that our Indian partners can make the most out of our offering.” He further adds, “We continue to invest in our operations to further improve our services and expand our footprint in India and beyond.”

Dubai Exhibition Centre’s Expo 2020 location witnesses outpouring global business event bookings

Bookings are witnessing an increased surge from in and across the globe to host exhibitions, conferences and meetings at the state-of-the-art facility Dubai Exhibition Centre (DEC), co-located at Expo 2020. Its opening to concur with the start of Expo 2020 on October 20, 2020, DEC will feature the latest developments in technology, including high-speed 5G connectivity and best-in-class audio-visual facilities. Its co-location within the Expo 2020 site in Dubai South places delegates at the core of the world’s greatest meeting of minds. Over 200 international participants will showcase their trade and investment opportunities and latest breakthroughs for 173 days until Expo closes on April 10, 2021.

Expo 2020 will showcase the best that 192 participating countries have to offer, along with multinational organisations and corporations that will be highlighting their solutions to create a better future for all. Additionally, there will be over 200 F&B outlets as well as the opportunity to experience the best of global art, music, architecture, science, culture and literature at 60 live events, every day. A cornerstone of the Expo 2020 legacy plan, DEC will help the UAE build on its thriving MICE sector. The 45,000 square metres of programmable space, capable of staging immersive event formats and the latest developments in audience participation, can be configured for all types of events, including conferences, exhibitions, summits, banquets, product launches, indoor concerts and weddings. Dr. Shaun Vorster, Vice President, Strategy and Business Integration - Programming at Expo 2020 Dubai said, “Expo 2020 Dubai will be the world’s greatest show of human brilliance and achievement and as a convening power, no event on the planet will offer more exceptional business networking potential as well as tangible opportunities for fostering trade and investment and knowledge transfer.” Dubai Exhibition Centre’s exclusive presentation under the subject ‘Expo 2020: a platform for business events showcasing a presentation on the Dubai Expo 2020 and DBC’ was organised by LeEnticing Global and GACS under the supervision of Praveen Mishra. The event was held at Andaz Delhi, Aerocity, recently.
Ark Travels completes 21-city roadshow in India

Ark Travels Pvt Ltd has completed its 21-city roadshow by October-end 2019. The roadshows, planned and executed in association with Genting Cruise Lines and Dream Cruises, were to educate travel trade about the services, new offers, value add-ons and benefit of cruising. Events were organised in major metro cities of Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai (seven events including Thane and New Mumbai) and Chennai, along with tier-II cities such as Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Lucknow and Mangalore. The company, primarily in the business of selling international cruise vacations to Indian travellers, is also the first to touch base with travel agents by hosting cruise-specific roadshows in cities such as Dehradun, Agra, Pondicherry, Coimbatore and Madurai.

Attributing Ark Travel’s success to a well-rounded marketing strategy, Kishan Biyani, Managing Director of Ark Travel’s commented, “Our aim to reach every nook and corner of India to educate travel partners about the benefit of cruising.

ATM to unlock full tourism potential of India and other foreign markets

Arabian Travel Market 2020 (ATM) has launched a new series of buyer forums and networking events focused on India, Saudi Arabia, China and Russia’s growing outbound potential, as GCC travel and tourism companies and destinations look to attract a larger share from these major source markets.

Following the successful launch of the ‘Arabia China Tourism Forum’ at ATM 2019, these new forums and networking events have been designed to explore the untapped opportunities that India, Saudi Arabia, China and Russia’s expanding tourism markets present while advising travel, tourism and hospitality professionals, on how to attract and cater to these key markets. As part of the networking sessions, ATM will be inviting 150 hosted buyers from India, China, Russia and the Middle East as well as partnering with CBN Travel & MICE once again to bring an additional 84 new buyers from China.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market (ATM), which takes place at Dubai World Trade Centre from April 19 to 22, 2020 said, “Identifying the key players in the top source markets, along with current and emerging industry trends are two of the most valuable insights ATM has to offer. Therefore, the 2020 edition will continue to follow that successful model with a packed agenda, including new forums and networking opportunities as well as an engaging seminar programme.”

Looking at the UAE alone, according to research from Colliers International, in partnership with ATM, the number of Indian visitors travelling to the UAE is expected to increase at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of seven per cent to 3.01 million by 2023, while arrivals from Saudi Arabia will witness an increase of two per cent to 1.76 million during the same period.
One of the leading destination management companies, with a sole aim to revolutionise and redefine the wholesale business in the travel trade, TBZ (TravelBullz) recently celebrated its 9th anniversary of operations with a gala affair in Thailand. All the employees of Team TBZ from all of respective Hong Kong, Thailand and India offices travelled for a five-day celebration in Pattaya and Bangkok, respectively.

The celebration was concluded with a gala award night in Bangkok on August 16, 2019, organised at Hotel Centara Grand at Central World Bangkok Hotel for TBZ’s industry partners. A guest list having over 300 names, including several stalwarts from the tourism and hospitality industry, was present at the evening of festivity. Alongside the gathering was a cocktail dinner that included the launch of TBZ’s brand new booking engine. Key guests of the evening included Chattan Kunjara Na Ayudhya, Deputy Governor for International Marketing Asia and South Pacific, Litti Kewkacha, Executive Vice President of Safari World Public Company Limited and Prachoom Tantiprasertsuk, Vice President Sales at Dusit International in Bangkok. The five-day grand merriment was of unlimited fun and frolics for TravelBullz’s employees.
and also allowed experiencing the destination Thailand, first hand.

At the award ceremony, several industry partners were acknowledged with TBZ’s recognition that included Centara Hotels & Resorts, Thailand for ‘Best Supporting Hotel Chain’; Bella Villa Hotel Group, Pattaya for ‘Best Supporting Hotel Chain’; The Venetian Macao - Sands Resorts Macao as ‘Most Popular Luxury Hotel’; Hong Kong Disneyland Resort, Hong Kong for ‘Most Popular Theme Park Hotel’; ‘Most Promising Five Star Hotel in Pattaya’ was rewarded to Grande Centre Point while ‘Most Popular Five Star Hotel in Bangkok’ was given to Amari Watergate. Avani Atrium received ‘Most Popular City Hotel in Bangkok’; ‘Most Popular City Hotel in Hong Kong’ to Harbour Plaza North Point Hotel; Amari Phuket for ‘Most Popular Beach Hotel’; ‘Most Popular Hotel – Groups & Series’ went to Rembrandt Hotel & Suites Bangkok and ‘Most Popular Budget Hotel’ to Golden Sea Pattaya including Safari World & Marine Park, Bangkok for ‘Most Popular City Attraction’ and Nong Nooch Tropical Garden, Pattaya for ‘Most Popular M.I.C.E Venue’.
The third edition of ‘The RARE Showcase’ to be held on April 2020

RARE India, a collection of some of the finest palace stays, boutique hotels, wildlife lodges, homestays and retreats of the Indian sub-continent, will be hosting the third edition of The RARE Showcase at The Imperial in New Delhi on April 17 and 18, 2020. Ever since its launch in 2004, RARE India has been promoting concept hotels that operate on a few basic tenets such as conservation, repurposing heritage and creating livelihoods for the local community, all in the ambit of luxury and comfort. The RARE Community currently marked its presence in India, Nepal and Bhutan, 15 states in India alone and a community of 64 hotels and experiences as brands. In sync with the Community’s commitment towards Conscious Luxury, the central theme of The RARE Showcase 2020 will be ‘Conscious Luxury is Future Ready!’

Shoba Mohan, Founder, RARE India said, “RARE India has evolved along the principles of its protagonists, whom we call our Hero Partners, some still struggling with uncertain return on investments and uneven average room rates, yet unswerving in their commitment to ‘Conscious Luxury’ that straddles commerce and conservation, community and innovation. The RARE Showcase 2020 is a celebration of this spirit; of creating shared value through partnerships around the globe and in the true tradition of explorers to go where no one has tread before – to provoke thought, create trends and be future-ready!” She added, “The event will also allow us to present our Hero Brands to the international market and show how they are committed to the seven principles that we endorse.”

Travel Tours expands its southern presence with a new store in Mangaluru

Travel Tours, the leisure travel brand of FCM Travel Solutions - the Indian subsidiary of Flight Centre Travel Group Australia, has launched its first-ever store in Mangaluru to increase their presence in the southern markets. This store will be Travel Tours’ 40th such store in India and sixth in Karnataka. The store was inaugurated by the chief guest M Ravalnath Prabhu. With the opening of this latest store the national reach for Travel Tours’ extends to a total of 40 stores across Mumbai, Delhi, Chandigarh, Jalandhar, Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Pune, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi, Anand and Mangaluru via a combination of owned branches and newly opened franchise outlets.

Speaking about the store launch, Anand Menon, Brand Leader, Travel Tours said, “Focusing on high potential markets such as Mangaluru has proven to be a growth driver for Travel Tours. Mangaluru has a unique advantage of being a tier II city with massive tourism potential, especially with its very own international airport. A primary aspect of tourism in the city is the outflow movement of travellers to the Gulf region but more recently the coastal city has tried to push tourism in different ways like cruise tourism. Keeping these developments in mind, having Karnataka’s first Travel Tours store outside Bengaluru be launched in Mangaluru, is strategically aligned with Travel Tour’s vision for its southern market.”

Visit Brussels organises Tourism Mission in Mumbai & Delhi

Visit Brussels recently organised a Brussels Tourism Mission in India and interacted with over 200 trade partners from the travel fraternity. The two-city event covered Mumbai on October 9 and Delhi on October 11, 2019, respectively. The mission was led by Pieter Callebaut, Business Development Leisure of visit.brussels and Ellona Pereira, Account Director, visit.brussels – India with a clear mandate of ensuring that the travel trade should experience the rich hospitality that not just this European capital has to offer but Belgium as a whole. The week-long visit to Mumbai and New Delhi were jam-packed with meetings with leading travel agents in both cities, training program for front line travel staff selling Brussels as a destination.

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Arjuna's Penance the largest bas relief measuring 27mx 9m is the pride of Mamallapuram. This huge whale back shaped rock contains figures of gods, demigods, men, beasts and birds in fact, can be said to represent the creation itself. Behind and nearby Arjuna’s Penace, the rock-cut cave tradition represented by more than thirteen caves was first initiated here by Mahendravarma. They are known for their simplicity in plan and decoration.
Having a rising scale of its business generating from the India market, with around 95 per cent of its business coming from the Indian travel trade, the Italian national carrier Alitalia now aims to bring two important online products, namely ‘Alitalia Connect’ and ‘Group Connect’, to India to strengthen its trade engagement in the India market. The strategic plan for Alitalia’s 2019-2020 financial year is stated to be based on the basic pillars of focusing on high-potential and long haul destinations and more focus to attract a higher number of business travellers.

Alongside, Bonacchi mentions that the segmentation strategy for 2020 would be to increase leisure values and volumes from all the markets. “We aim to have around 90 per cent yield in the corporate segment along with high-yield leisure in 2020,” says Bonacchi.

Alitalia recently launched its B2B community platform ‘Alitalia Connect’ in October to offer a personalised relationship between Alitalia and its B2B partners including travel agencies and companies. Now, the Italian carrier is set to launch ‘Group Connect’, a web platform under the umbrella of ‘Alitalia Connect’ in India on November 13, 2019. ‘Group Connect’ is aimed to connect tour operators across the globe for group bookings with ease and clarity. Launched in markets such as Switzerland, Germany and Italy in early October, these inter-connected web-based platforms are aimed at creating a network of travel agents worldwide and deliver a speedy flow of information about the airline to the agent community, as revealed by Bonacchi.

“Group Connect is a web-platform within Alitalia Connect, which help agents manage and speed-up quotations for group bookings in a standalone fashion. Group Connect will enable agents to request an offer, book a group and have the quotation and contract in real-time. Following the mid-November, India would be able to book without any waiting list and also create connections with the global network,” he adds and continues saying, “Alitalia Connect is a platform designed to guarantee a personalised relationship with B2B customers and create privileged access to dedicated services and content. Alitalia wants to create an open community of travel agents through sign-ups and create a network of travel agents worldwide.”

Talking about the business strategy, Bonacchi said that the airline intends to increase revenue by targeting high-value segments like corporate and hi-end leisure travellers. “Segmentation is one of our key strategies going forward,” he said so that the airline creates two distinguished offers for business and leisure travellers. He further informs that Alitalia’s growth in North America continues as the airlines aim for direct flight services between Rome and San Fransisco, three times a week, shortly.

Commenting on the Rome – Delhi route, Bonacchi said that the product has been received well by the market and there has been 31 per cent growth in passenger numbers 26 per cent growth in revenues in the first nine months of this year. While the airline carries 60 per cent India to Italy traffic, 40 per cent is onward traffic is to Europe and the US. While the overall load factor is 87 per cent, Bonacchi said that the effort is to grow the business passenger loads (77 per cent currently) at par with the economy loads of 90 per cent.
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OneAbove Destination Management Company, in association with Centara Hotels and Resorts, organised a majestic gathering of the travel trade to celebrate the auspicious festival of Diwali therefore, bringing the partners closer. The celebrations took place in St. Regis Mumbai on October 23, 2019. Present at the event were the dynamic leaders of OneAbove, BA Rahim, Vishal Somaiya and Irshad Dadan along with Moumita Mukherjee Paul, Head Marketing and Sales-India of Centara Hotels & Resorts and the crème-de-la-crème of the travel fraternity. The celebration was simply an initiation of the glorious week ahead bringing joy and success for the days to come.
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The Postcard Hotel aims to declare a record profit by March 2020

By Team TS

Completing its 10 months of successful operations and fronting the market with a redefined version of luxury hospitality, Kapil Chopra, Founder and CEO of The Postcard Hotel reveals that the company now aims to declare a record-profit by the end of March 31, 2020, which is also the closing of the company’s first financial year. “Goa is one of the best destinations to open a hotel in and we opened our hotel in a very profitable and well-visited destination, to begin with. With the current target of having 50 hotels in five years, our structured plan is to come up with six hotels in year number one, eight in year two, 10 in the third year, 12 in the fourth and 15 hotels in year number five. With five hotels in the first 10 months, I believe that we are bang on the target, as of now,” he further adds.

Additionally, with over INR 1,000 cr of assets under management, today, and projects underway across South Asia, The Postcard Hotel is looking at owning or managing over USD 1 billion (INR 7,000 crores) of assets in the five years.

The Postcard Hotel is on track to open 50 hotels in five years in experiential destinations across the world. The investment will be an intelligent mix of buying off the asset, taking a long term lease on the asset or managing it as a management company. On an operational level, the hotels in Goa have been profitable since inception in December 2018, due to a strong focus on consumer preferences and highly personalised service. The hotel bears three fundamental strategies of long-term lease, management contract and whole buyouts, respectively to enlarge the brand’s network.

Furthermore, the latest entrant in the Indian luxury hotel space, the company, under the supervision of Chopra, now forays into the overseas. After a successful start of three hotels in Goa, the brand’s first international venture will be the stunning mountain setting of Bhutan and the historic town of Galle in Sri Lanka. The Postcard Hotel is all set to receive guests in Sri Lanka and Bhutan, this November with its two new properties namely The Postcard Dewa in Thimpu and The Postcard Galle, respectively. “We aim to establish 10 more hotels in Goa and three more in Bhutan,” informs Chopra. Globally, no luxury brand has expanded this fast with international openings in its first year of operations.

“We handpick our locations and our hotels, so that guests have an authentic experience. Sri Lanka is the perfect location to explore the cultural landscape of the charming town of Galle, steeped in history dating back hundreds of years. While Bhutan, with its rich culture and breath-taking landscapes has long been on the bucket list of most exclusive and luxury travellers. Guests will now be able to enjoy the best of luxury Indian hospitality that perfectly complements the unique splendour of these destinations,” says Chopra.

Anantara announces its Malaysian debut

Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas is entering the Malaysian luxury hospitality sector with the debut of the Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas property, scheduled to open on December 1, 2019. Desaru Coast, Malaysia’s rising-star luxury resort destination is located at the country’s south-eastern tip in Johor Bahru and spans over 16 square kilometres along a pristine 17-kilometre beachfront facing the South China Sea. It is near Iskandar Malaysia and is easily accessible via a 45-minute drive from Malaysia’s Senai International Airport (JHB) and a two-hour drive from Singapore. Additionally, visitors from Singapore can travel to Desaru Coast by ferry, followed by a short drive.

The newly-build Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas is located on the golden Malaysian shores of the new high-end resort development and offers a range of luxury accommodation nestled in lush tropical gardens. The resort has 123 keys comprising 90 deluxe guest rooms in low-rise buildings that overlook the gardens, lagoon and ocean; thirteen stand-alone, luxury one- and two-bedroom pool villas and 20 expansive three- and four-bedroom residences that offer guests utmost privacy with an infinity pool, full kitchen and chef and butler service.

Attractions in the area include The Els Club Desaru Coast that comprises two beautifully manicured golf courses that feature 43 holes in total; Ocean Course, a 27-hole golf course designed by the four-time major champion, Ernie Els; and Valley Course, an 18-hole golf course designed in collaboration with another major champion, Vijay Singh. Anantara Desaru Coast Resort & Villas, Anantara Hotels, Resorts & Spas’ first venture into Malaysia, is a joint venture between the Banglok-based international hotel group and its Malaysian partner, themed attractions Resorts & Hotels Sdn. Bhd. (TAR&H), a subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad.

Sarovar Hotels opens Sarovar Portico, Surajkund

Sarovar Hotels and Resorts expands its presence in Delhi NCR with the opening of Sarovar Portico in Surajkund, Faridabad. This will be Sarovar’s third hotel in Haryana after Gurugram and Faridabad, respectively. Sarovar Portico, a mid-scale hotel located in Surajkund-Faridabad, is an ideal destination for business travellers and tourist. The hotel has 60 well-appointed spacious rooms including suites with all contemporary amenities. State-of-the-art conference rooms and banqueting facilities for up to 600 guests, effortlessly meet any business or social needs.

Anil Madhok, Executive Chairman, Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd. says, “We are delighted to expand our business and boundaries further in Delhi NCR. This is our third hotel in the state of Haryana. With our focus on providing quality accommodation and services, priced attractively, the hotel will ensure a pleasant stay for all our guests travelling to this region.”
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India’s Top MICE tour operators visit Phuket in association with IndiGo Airlines and TravelBullz

Nine leading outbound MICE tour operators and travel agents from India, recently visited Banyan Tree Phuket and Angsana Laguna Phuket, as part of a familiarisation (FAM) trip organised by the two niche hotels in association with airline partner IndiGo and on-ground partner TravelBullz. Offering crafted experiences for leisure and MICE, Banyan Tree Phuket and Angsana Laguna Phuket aim to create an in-depth understanding about the properties, their service and cultural insights that are outlined to cater to these segments of the India market.

Banyan Tree Phuket Area Director of Sales & Marketing, Shannon Creadio and Angsana Laguna Phuket Area General Manager, Michael Zitek welcomed and accompanied the tour operators during the familiarisation. The MICE agents were given a product presentation and detailed information on the offerings and benefits of booking with Banyan Tree Phuket and Angsana Laguna Phuket at special rates for the India market.

Commenting on this initiative, Creadio said, “We are seeing a huge opportunity in the Indian MICE sector especially with weddings and special occasions. Our experiences are uniquely designed keeping in mind the requirements the organisers and their guests. Our all Pool Villa Resort and brand values are one-of-a-kind and promise an exclusive experience, catering to the needs of those who book with us.” Zitek added, “We are thrilled to welcome some of the leading MICE operators from India and look forward to working very closely with them to cater to the ever-growing market of corporates, weddings and event in India, especially now with the launch of our new venue ‘ACES’.”

Ankush Nijhawan, Managing Director of Nijhawan Group said, “Our key focus is to bring milestone events, special events, weddings, corporate and MICE groups to experience service and hospitality is truly exceptional and we are excited to welcome some of the leading travel operators during the familiarisation. The MICE agents were given a product presentation and detailed information on the offerings and benefits of booking with Banyan Tree Phuket and Angsana Laguna Phuket at special rates for the India market.”

The Ritz-Carlton debuts in Pune

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, L.L.C recently announced the opening of The Ritz-Carlton, Pune, the second hotel in India from the iconic luxury hotel brand. Situated in the heart of Pune’s captivating downtown and across from the prestigious Poona Club Golf Course, the hotel is ideally located for travellers seeking to take in the sights and unique experiences of this dynamic metropolis.

“We are extremely pleased to debut The Ritz-Carlton Pune in this city. This will be our second ‘Ritz-Carlton’ branded hotel opening in India after Bengaluru,” informed Neeraj Govil, Senior Vice President, South Asia at Marriott International. “The ‘Ritz-Carlton’ experience of service and hospitality is truly exceptional and we are excited to bring this to Pune. This hotel promises to epitomise luxury for affluent travellers and international tourists seeking enriching experiences and this opening reflects our continued commitment to providing a true ‘luxury’ offering to guests with discerning and evolved tastes,” he added. Also commenting on this launch, Atul Chordia, Chairman, Panchshil Realty said, “The Ritz-Carlton will be the most iconic hotel offering in Pune. It makes us very proud to bring this legendary brand in this city. With the launch of this hotel, we have globally positioned Pune. As one of India’s premium real-estate developer, The Ritz-Carlton is synonymous with quality and perfection. All the brands we have associated with providing guests with an exemplary level of service and product delivery.”

Lords Hotels and Resorts opens new hotel in Moti Khavdi Jamnagar

Lords Hotels and Resorts have added another hotel to its portfolio with the launch of Lords Inn at Motikhavdi-Jamnagar. Lords Inn is a smart and efficient business hotel with 58 contemporary rooms and suites. The hotel offers the finest of accommodation with a mix of deluxe rooms, executive rooms, suites and other facilities such as multi-cuisine vegetarian restaurant, banquet hall, lawns and SPA along with café, board room, gym and swimming pool.

This hotel was inaugurated on October 11, 2019 by lighting of lamp done by Dhanrajbhai Nathwani, Group Senior Vice President, Reliance Industries Limited and joining him as Chief Guest was R.C FalduSaheb, Cabinet Minister of Gujarat; Dharmendrasinh J Jadeja (Hakubha), State Minister of Gujarat; Poonamben, Minister of Parliament, Jamnagar; Mulubhai Bera, Chairman of Board, Gujarat; Baghjavibhai Patel, MLA Jamnagar Rural; Chandreshbhai Patel, President of Jamnagar-BJP; Anil Vishwambharan, Head CRG Vadinar-Nayara Energy Limited; Pradeep Gupta, Director of Powerica Limited and many more dignitaries.

Promoters of Lords Inn-Jamnagar Dilip Singh Chudasama, Sunil Bhai Lodaya and Bhagirath Singh Jadeja stated, “The hotel is located in a green natural environment and the prime industrial area nearby Reliance Industry on the main Dwarka Highway. We aim to capture business tourist and leisure traveller visiting nearby places such as Marine National Park, Maa Asha Pura temple, Lakhota Fort to mention a few and other guests travelling to Dwarkadish.”
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Airbnb becomes the official partner for HornBill Festival

Building on Airbnb’s commitment to harness the potential of the tourism sector in India’s North-East region, Airbnb recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department of Tourism, Government of Nagaland in the capital. The signing event was held in the presence of Neiphiu RyokPremier, New Town

According to reports, Lemon Tree Hotels recently launched its upper mid-scale brand, Lemon Tree Premier, New Town in Kolkata. This new-age contemporary hotel is the company’s second in the state of West Bengal after Siliguri. Lemon Tree Premier offers 142 plush and well-appointed rooms and suites with contemporary interiors and artwork. Room categories include deluxe room, executive room, studio suite and presidential suite. Also, a specially designed suite is available for differently-abled guests.

Commenting on the launch of this elegant property, Patanjali Keswani, Chairman and Managing Director said, “We are happy to enter Kolkata with our upper mid-scale brand Lemon Tree Premier. Kolkata is a gateway city to the East and an important destination for both business and leisure travellers. The hotel is strategically located near the business and IT hub of New Town, SEZs, Rajarhat, Salt Lake, DLF IT Park, Unitech Commercial Complex and Ecospace. This hotel, like Mumbai and Pune, showcases a new design style that blends nostalgia with chic interiors and modern amenities.”

The Fern Residency opens in Aurangabad, Maharashtra

The Fern Hotels & Resorts recently announced the opening of The Fern Residency in Aurangabad, Maharashtra. The Fern Residency, Aurangabad is a 120-room business hotel offering modern-day accommodations, swimming pool and state-of-art banquet halls. A finely-designed multi-cuisine restaurant and a bar are the dining and unwinding options for the guests. The hotel offers three categories of room viz. Winter Green, Fern Club and Hazel Suite.

Suhail Kannampilly, CEO of Fern Hotels and Resorts said, “People visiting Aurangabad, which is steeped in history will be delighted by the hospitality extended to them. The Fern brand is extremely popular in the state and this property will go a long way in further expanding the popularity.”

St. Regis Hotels debuts on Venice’s esteemed Grand Canal

St. Regis Hotels & Resorts announced the debut of The St. Regis Venice, located steps away from Piazza San Marco and boasting the largest waterfrontage in Venice. The opening follows a two-year, full-scale renovation, restoring the grandeur of the former Grand Hotel Britannia, which opened in 1895 – the same year as the inaugural Venice Biennale. The hotel offers 169 guestrooms and suites, many of which boast private terraces or Juliet balconies for sweeping views of Venice’s iconic landmarks. Situated across the Grand Canal from Punta Della Dogana, the hotel marries its celebrated heritage with the St. Regis brand’s modern design and service of the brand’s modern design and service.

“The St. Regis Venice unites the captivating spirit of the city with the timeless sophistication and service of the brand, re-interpreting Venice’s rich history through a modern lens.”
EVENTS STAND OUT

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T he Tourism Office of Spain in Mumbai, India, has appointed a new Director, Elisa Robles-Fraga. She has commenced her position as the Tourism Counsellor and Director of Tourism Office of Spain in Mumbai. Throughout her professional experience, Elisa Robles-Fraga has been mainly working at the Spanish General Administration both at national and international levels, including European Union-related matters. In a previous position as Director General of the Centro para el Desarrollo Tecnologico Industrial – Center for Industrial Technological Development (CDTI), the Spanish Innovation Agency of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, Government of Spain, she has had the opportunity to bilaterally work with India for several of her projects during her tenure at CDTI. Her roles and responsibilities will remain the same as the previous directors of the said office.

Australia’s cruise industry paves way for mass expansion

T ravelling by sea throughout Australia is becoming a popular past time for the domestic travellers. As a result, cruise operators are increasingly joining forces to offer ‘bite-sized’ breaks along the coast for the domestic travellers, says GlobalData. Its latest report, ‘Tourism Source Market Insight – Australia’, reveals that although land dominates as a form of transport significantly, the total domestic trips by sea are set to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.36 per cent from 3.9 million in 2018 to 5.1 million by 2023, holding the highest growth rate among all other transport means.

S eychelles Tourism Board successfully conducted a three-city roadshow in Chennai, Ahmedabad and Delhi on September 16, 18 and 20, 2019 respectively, to strengthen its outreach among the travel trade fraternity in India. To retain the growth momentum of Indian arrivals into Seychelles, the tourism board along with destination management companies, hotels on main as well as private islands and Air Seychelles connected with around 223 prominent travel and tour companies of India. This interactive roadshow platform with prefixed meetings allowed trade partners and travel agents to network and learn more about the diverse product offerings and experiences that Seychelles has to offer.

Sherin Francis, STB Chief Executive stated, “The annual roadshow in India is a marketing event that is extremely substantial for the destination. It gives us immense pleasure to see our Indian partners always eager to keep updated with Seychelles. This roadshow was well-attended and received a remarkable response from all three cities. India represents a substantial and vast market for Seychelles and these planned events help us to understand the current market dynamics and connect with the existing as well as potential Indian tour operators.” Lubaina Sheerazi, STB representative in India further added, “We are extremely pleased to have received positive and encouraging feedback from stakeholders about the format and quality of meetings conducted at the roadshow. Delhi and Ahmedabad have been among the top three markets for Seychelles and we wanted to revisit these cities to ensure quality engagement with all trade partners there.”

Hotels that participated this year were Berjaya Hotels and Resorts, Club Med Seychelles, Cerf Island Resort, Enchanted Island Resort, Air Seychelles connected with around 223 prominent travel and tour companies of India. As a form of transport significantly, the total domestic trips by sea are set to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.36 per cent from 3.9 million in 2018 to 5.1 million by 2023, holding the highest growth rate among all other transport means.

VFS Global has commenced Belarus visa services for the residents of India through centres in five cities namely Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Kolkata. This is the first time the Belarus Ministry of Foreign Affairs has outsourced their visa services. The centres accept applications for tourist, business, and private visit visas, across all these locations. Before this, customers in India had to visit the Embassy of the Republic of Belarus in New Delhi to apply for their visas to Belarus. Customers applying through VFS Global can access a range of optional services for a seamless visa application experience.

H.E. Andrei Rzheussky, Ambassador of the Republic of Belarus to India said, “Starting cooperation with VFS Global on visa issues in India is an important step of Belarus in tourism development strategy in South Asia region. A new approach of Belarus in this cooperation is reflecting the gradual tendency of travels facilitation between India and Belarus, which is crucial for developing fruitful bilateral relations between our friendly countries.”

Vinay Malhotra, Regional Group CDO – South Asia, Middle East and China, VFS Global added, “It is always exciting to commence our visa services for a new country and bring our travellers the best application experience we can offer. Footfall to Belarus has been growing in recent years and we are looking forward to serving customers for Belarus in India.” Belarus has recorded a steady increase in the number of Indians travelling to the destination in recent years, with an average of 1,200 applications being submitted annually.
ENJOY NATURE AT ITS BEST ON A BOATHOUSE

Experience the refined art of sailing with the luxury houseboats in Udupi, Karnataka amid the striking creation of nature. Panchajanya Cruise features the tranquil view of backwaters of Swarna River in Kodi-Bengre village, with seashore on one side and the Swarna River on the other surrounded by tiny islands. Gangothri Holiday Cruise offers panoramic views of backwaters of Panchagangavali River meandering through Kudapur. In a cruise, the guests can get up-close with the rustic lifestyle of backwater villages of Karnataka. A floating holiday on the backwaters with Thirumala Cruises makes for a delightful experience. In scuba diving, a mode of underwater diving, divers use a self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (scuba) that aids in breathing underwater. It’s usually a half-day activity, which encompasses receiving a brief introduction on the scuba equipment, signs for communication underwater and a quick run-through of the skills, then taking a boat ride to the island for diving in the sea where you will be accompanied by an instructor and returning to the dive centre. For an enthralling scuba diving experience travellers can consider West Coast Adventures that offers Discover Dives, Fun Dives, Inland (Pool) Diving, PADI and SSI certified courses, under the supervision of professional instructors.

STAY AT THE SERENE NATURE RETREATS

Offering pleasing views and engaging activities, at nature camps around Udupi that are shrouded in a vast green cover visitors can witness a wide range of birds. Amidst the tranquil and lush green environs of the Mookambika Wildlife Sanctuary, the Anejhari Butterfly Camp encapsulates the travellers offering an experience of a lifetime. While on the butterfly Trail, visitors can gaze at butterflies of diverse hues including Tamil Lacewing, Plain Puffin, Malabar Tree Nymph, Paris Peacock, Grey Count, Red Helen and Blue Oak Leaf. Anejhari Butterfly Camp is located near Kollur, which is about 80 km from Udupi. Seeking a break from the chaos of the daily grind, Seethanadi Nature Camp, is located 40 km from Udupi, in Hebr is certainly a getaway offering peace in the midst of the wilderness. Surrounded by greenery, it transports the guests to a natural wonderland. Besides going for nature walks admiring the views, Seethanadi Nature Camp also organises a plethora of activities for their guests. This Camp is situated in the heart of Someshwara Wildlife Sanctuary.
GUJARAT
CASTING A SPELL OF RESPLENDENCE

A blissful blend of heritage, handicrafts, culture and cuisine, Gujarat is delightfully dynamic. With world’s largest white desert, India’s longest coastline, celebrated temples, the only habitat of Indian Wild Ass, country’s first Marine Wildlife Sanctuary and Marine National Park, ancient Buddhist caves and Harappan citadels are few of the reasons for Gujarat to be on every traveller’s bucket list.
Picking out one of the historical treasures from the box of wonders called Ahmedabad, Sabarmati Ashram is an engrossing attraction that stands as a testimony to the strenuous efforts of the ‘Father of the Nation’ Mahatma Gandhi. Situated on the banks of Sabarmati River, the Sabarmati Ashram is just not a place to travel back in time for a peek into the life of Mahatma Gandhi but it’s a destination for some much-needed inspiration as well. Spanning over an area of 36 acres, the ashram accommodates different wings which are named after people who were really close to Mahatma Gandhi including Magan Niwas, Vinobha Kutir, Hriday Kunj and Upasana Mandir. Tourists from around the world visit Sabarmati Ashram to take back some leanings of ‘Bapu’. There is this special kind of warmth in the air of Sabarmati Ashram that as soon as you step in the premises, it gives you a feeling of finally coming back to your roots, your home.

AHMEDABAD
Ahmedabad is bustling with stories that can be read through the vibrant pages of the mosques exuding opulence, temples seeped in divinity, monuments wrapped in patriotism besides archaeological landmarks, exceptional museums, lush gardens, and many more tourist attractions. Ahmedabad is beyond Sabarmati Ashram and Kankaria Lake as this city rich in heritage, culture and cuisine offers so much more to experience to the travellers. Possessing a vast legacy of Hindu and Muslim rulers, it’s a historic city with an extraordinary past. If you wish to delve deep into the history of Ahmedabad, you will get an opportunity to do just that at Sanskar Kendra, a cultural centre and museum located near Sardar Bridge.

Some of the not-to-be-missed places to visit in Ahmedabad on your next trip include Bhadra Fort, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel National Museum, ISKCON Temple, Calico Textile Museum, Rani Sipri’s Mosque, Jama Masjid, Parimal Gardens, Auto World Museum, Hutheesing Jain Temple, Vastrapur Lake, Gujarati Science City, Sarkhej Roza, Dada Hari Vav, Swaminarayan Temple, Jhulta Minara and Lothal. If you are on a family holiday, then it’s a good idea to explore amusement parks such as Maniar’s Wonderland, Adventure Park Vastrapur, Amrapali Funland and Splash The Fun World.
GOLF COURSES
The golf courses add to the glory of Gujarat, the state possesses verdant golf estate options and a variety of terrains. Gujarat has everything to sweep the golf enthusiasts off their feet with golfing options ranging from a royal palace to a backdrop to an adventurous fairway through rugged landscape. This state offers the best of modern amenities set against a rich cultural heritage to become a world-class golf destination to reckon with. With top-notch facilities, signature golf courses, luxurious golf clubs, plush resorts and even swanky residential complexes set around golf courses, any golf lovers can vouch that one of the best ways to explore Gujarat is through its golf tourism. The 18-hole championship golf course at Kensville Golf and Country Club is a well-maintained and an outstanding golf course, which those who enjoy swinging the club can experience. Besides the many operational golf courses, the Aalloa Hills Resort, Cambay Spa & Golf Resort, Gandhinagar, Gulmohar Greens Golf & Country Club Ltd., Kaluhaar Blues & Greens Golf Club, The Gaekwad Baroda Golf Club and The Belvedere Golf and Country Club are undoubtedly Gujarat’s best golf courses.

LITTLE RANN OF KUTCH
A salt marsh which is part of Rann of Kutch, sheltering the Indian Wild Ass since 1972, is the Little Rann of Kutch. Here, the tourists can indulge in the cross-desert safari in open vehicles. Harsh deserts are among the places that only fewest people have experienced and Little Rann of Kutch gives the wanderers a unique chance to witness an almost solitary landscape amid the company of Indian wild asses. Gazing at the seemingly unending landscape you will appreciate the Indian Wild Ass (Khur or Indian Onager in Gujarati) roaming amid nothingness. The Wild Ass Sanctuary of the Little Rann of Kutch, covering nearly 5000 square kilometers of the Little Rann, is the only place on earth where the endangered Indian Wild Ass still lives. Kiang, a subspecies of wild ass, lives in the high arid plateaus of Tibet. Indian Wild Ass or Gudkhur are capable of reaching high speeds when galloping across the Rann, the wild ass is usually seen in small herds. The elegant blackbuck (Indian antelope), nilgai or blue bull (India’s largest antelope) and the graceful chinkara (Indian gazelle) are other mammals can be seen in the Little Rann of Kutch. The main carnivores of this area are the endangered Indian wolf, desert fox, Indian fox, jackals, desert and jungle cats and hyenas.
STATUE OF UNITY

Statue of Unity symbolises the rich culture and values, all-encompassing history and incredible heritage of India. It is no secret that the world’s biggest statue can be clearly seen from space. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel taught us to rethink our civilisation and re-imagine the history. This colossal statue takes the stature of this finally coming back to your roots, your home, visionary leader to another level making Statue of Unity truly extraordinary. Strategically located at Kevadiya Colony near the Sardar Sarovar Dam, around 200 kilometers away from Ahmedabad, the 182-meter figurine adds to the charm of Gujarat. Travellers can visit the museum for an insight into the life of the freedom fighter, observation deck for a bird’s eye view and a shopping plaza to return home with souvenirs. The aesthetically pleasing statue’s skeleton is made of concrete and steel while the exteriors have bronze cladding. Vallabhbhai Patel is not merely an inspiration for the citizens but had an enigmatic persona, he was a far-sighted man with ideologies of patriotism, unity, inclusive growth and good governance that are still relevant and very much needed even in today’s time. Besides visiting the mighty statue, tourists can indulge in some guilt-free shopping at the neighbouring local shops and the markets.
With a coastline stretching for almost 1,600 km along the mighty Arabian Sea, the state of Gujarat has numerous beaches to its credit. Some of the beaches, such as those in Somnath or Dwarka, are highly popular; pilgrims head to the beach after visiting the temples in here. However, there are a few beaches which are equally beautiful but not part of the conventional tourist circuit. Also, since most beaches in Gujarat are not stand-alone attractions, the ambience is rather traditional. The months of November to February are the best time to explore the serene beaches in Gujarat.

Tithal Beach situated on the coastline of Valsad is famous for its black sand and is split by the Damanganaga River. Also, Nargol Beach is a very rare and an unexplored beauty spot that is one of the few undiscovered ones in the tourist program. Ahmedpur in Mandvi is one of Gujarat’s lesser-known gems and the finest pieces of coastline. This is one of the best beaches in the region of Saurashtra, which has a seven-kilometre long coastline. Last mention-worthy beach is Balachari, 26 km from the city, that showcases the marvels of nature at its best. There is Bedi Port in Jamnagar spectacular at coastal locations. The significant pint to note is that between Kutch and Jamnagar, there are 42 small beaches, which instinctively intensify the beauty of Gujarat’s coastline.
GASTRONOMICAL DELIGHTS

Gujarati cuisine is one of the oldest culinary treasures of India and is primarily vegetarian. Regardless of a famous Hindi movie where Gujarati food’s names are said to be associated with the names of missiles, it is surely all delightful and lip-smacking. Many of us associate Gujarat only with dhokla, khakra or the drool-worthy Gujarati Thali. But there is more to Gujarati food than that. The entire state North Gujarat, Kacch, Kathiyawad and Surti Gujarat are four major regions of Gujarat and each of these bring their uniqueness to Gujarati cuisine. The state is also predominantly vegetarian, so most of the delicacies belong from that category. Gujarat uniquely combines the sweet and savoury tastes into the same dish. An ideal thali will include preparations made from pulses or whole beans (called kathor in Gujarati) such as mung or black eyed beans, a snack item (farsaan) such as dhokla, pathra, samosa, khand and nuts and a sweet (mishthaan) such as mohanthal, jalebi, doodh pak and more, with chaach (buttermilk) and pickles, as condiments on the side.

SHOPPING SPREE

With myriad of shopping spots in Gujarat, the tourists are spoilt with options. There is an array of items to shop including cloth playthings, curios, cradle fabric, appliqued patchworks, embroidered garments, lacquer furnishings, gagra cholis, handhinis, patola silk sarees, embroidered footwear and the list is endless. Law Garden is an evening market and unlike other regular markets that are illuminated with tube lights, this one blooms with some additional help from oil lamps. It is a bustling shopping place and what sets it apart from others in this category is the focus on selling traditional handicrafts made by artisans such as weavers and quilters from Gujarat. There is a wide range of stalls and street shops where traditional garments, wall hangings, ornaments, handicraft items, and other items can be purchased. If you love fashion, then at the Law Garden market you can explore the rich ethnic fashion sensibilities of the Gujarati community. The street food too is quite tempting here. Lal Darwaza is one of the most famous shopping areas of Ahmedabad and is actually a magnificent arched gate. The gate has balconies inside its structure and is marvelous in its design and architecture. The place is a huge market selling electronics, ethnic dresses of Gujarat, kids wear and more. Maneck Chowk, a city square, is among the most famous areas of Ahmedabad. A bustling vegetable market in the morning, jewellery market in the afternoon and a foodie destination in the night, Maneck Chowk is indeed a gem.
Taiwan Tourism Bureau (TTB) marks its anniversary celebrations in Mumbai, where the Smart Asia Expo & Summit will also be taking place. TTB recently celebrated its first anniversary in India and the Taiwan Roadshow in Mumbai on October 16, 2019.

To mark the milestone, a diverse program was lined up for the grand celebrations, which was held at the St. Regis Mumbai. Guests were graced with a speech by Dr Trust H.J Lin, TTB Director of India, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore and the Middle East who provided a look back at TTB’s activities in India for 2018 along with catching the premiere of a celebrity video as well as presentations by key airline and hospitality partners of Taiwan Tourism. Moreover, there was an award ceremony together with a quiz and prizes.

Also, taking place in October is the Smart Asia Expo & Summit 2019. Smart city solutions and smart technology applications was the focus of the event, which ran from October 17 to 19, 2019. And for the first time, the expo and summit, organised by the Taiwan External Trade Development Council (TAITRA), in association with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI), will be held in Mumbai at the Bombay Exhibition Centre (BEC).

Industry leaders in the smart city domain were present, while the expo showcased solutions from some of the brightest players in Taiwan as well as address areas such as urban city planning, IoT solutions, smart energy, smart transportation, smart water management, environmental sustainability and future smart cities development in India.

The summit gathered notable speakers including R. T. Tsai, Vice President, Delta Electronics, Taiwan; SK Chang, Professor and Director, Advanced Public Transport Research Center and Naresh Pradhan, Project Officer-Transport, Asian Development Bank. The expo comprised exhibitors from Delta Electronics, Ahamani EV Technology and Acer Being Communication of the Acer Group.

Smart Asia 2019 will also feature ‘Taiwan Excellence’ and ‘COMPUTEX’ pavilions, exhibiting Taiwan’s diversified award-winning and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-incorporated smart solutions for their Indian counterparts.

James Huang, Chairman of the TAITRA, “After a successful stint in Bangalore in 2018, where we witnessed over 70 per cent of players adopting our technology with a potential impact on approximately 150,000 end consumers, the need for smart city solutions became evident.

Moreover, with significant uptake from the city planning segments in India such as real estate, infrastructure and transportation, we look forward to offering our AI-driven urban city solutions that will significantly boost productivity.”
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**Linkin Reps and Dolores Travel Services introduces Sochi to India market**

Ural Airlines would be directly connecting New Delhi and Sochi from February onwards and aims to boost tourism, informs Komal Seth, Director, Linkin Reps. Pvt. Ltd at the interactive destination presentation and networking event of Sochi Tourism that was attended by some of the leading names of the travel trade fraternity. The event was held at La Roca in Aerocity, New Delhi on October 16. Linkin Reps. Pvt. Ltd recently bagged the PR marketing and Media representation mandate for Sochi Tourism in India. Amit Mathur, Director, Serenity Global Holidays (India rep of Sochi Tourism) and Lokesh Bardia of Dolores Travel Services were present. Mathur gave a presentation highlighting the diverse offerings of Sochi from both leisure and MICE perspective and that it has the potential to be an entertainment destination like Thailand. Besides networking, the intent behind the event was also to allow the travel trade fraternity to mingle with the representatives of Sochi Tourism and enhance their knowledge and understanding of the destination. It also helped them to clear their doubts regarding the destination, air connectivity and visa process. The interactive destination presentation primarily focused on the various aspects of the destination and urged the travel trade industry to increase the influx of tourists from India to Sochi. Seth said, “Currently we are working towards highlighting Sochi as a preferred travel destination for Indian travellers and also create awareness about its offerings in the India market. The event was a step further in this direction. We have also planned FAM trips for the travel trade and media in our endeavour for them to first-hand experience the destination.”

**Training Program by Experience Hub drives increased product and destination expertise in India**

Experience Hub, the trade and promotion arm of Yas Island Abu Dhabi, has announced the latest ‘Yas Expert’ winner from India. The recently launched online destination training program has generated increased awareness around the entertainment and leisure hub nestled in the UAE capital and resulted in a rise of in-market destination specialists, with more than 2,100 registered travel agents to date. Experience Hub continues to show its commitment to global partners by leveraging its valuable trade programs. The added incentive program for Yas Experts includes entries into regular raffle draws. Most recently, Sneha Chandra, Senior Executive, Mumbai Operations, from key partner Ottila International, won an all-inclusive four day trip to Yas Island to explore all that the destination has to offer. Ottila International currently has more than 20 Yas Expert certified agents. Excited about her win, Chandra said, “At Ottila International, we are witnessing an overall increase in our customer base’s interest in visiting Yas Island as a preferred holiday destination throughout the year. With this insight in mind, we are encouraging our associates to become certified Yas Experts so that they can provide the right information and guidance about the destination to travellers planning their next holiday to Abu Dhabi. As a Yas Expert myself, I look forward to visiting Yas Island and ultimately developing packages that will give our travellers the best holiday experience in UAE’s prestigious capital.”

**Tourism Australia unveils its latest India focused tourism campaign**

Australia, host nation of the ICC T20 World Cups, has unveiled its latest India focused tourism campaign. In the run up to the next major global event in cricket, Tourism Australia’s call to ‘Experience the game and beyond’ is targeted at Indian cricket fans, offering them a combined experience of world-class cricket and an unparalleled holiday experience. Tourism Australia will also be focusing on promoting women’s cricket in India as a part of its endeavour to make the ICC Women’s T20 World Cup the most attended women’s sporting event ever. The core idea of the campaign is to draw synergies between cricket and signature Australian experiences that define the legendary ‘Australian way of life’, which includes food and drink, nature and wildlife and aquatic and coastal experiences. The entire campaign will run across three stages, Awareness, Consideration and Booking that is eventually intended to drive visitation to Australia during 2020 and beyond. Brent Anderson, Regional General Manager, South and South East Asia, Tourism Australia said, “We have been witnessing impressive growth in terms of visitors and spend from India, the upcoming T20 World Cup provides us with a massive opportunity to take this to the next level. We look forward to welcoming our guests from India for an unforgettable cricket experience at our iconic stadiums and also giving them a flavour of our truly distinct way of life. As part of our plan to make this one of the largest sporting spectacles in the world, a range of offerings and packages are being introduced for travellers from India.”
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Standing at the threshold of increasing tourism in India, jumping a notch up with the quick passage of time, the country, today, has become the melting pot of traditional landmarks and contemporary experiences. Concurrently, the Government has been actively working towards tapping a plethora of opportunities available in the sector to actualise its true potential. **Sujit Banerjee, Former Union Secretary-Tourism and Secretary-General, World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTCII)** shares his outlook on the current scenario as to whether the booming inbound tourism that is foraying into India is a matter of celebration or concern

“DEFINITELY THE BEST TIME TO EXPERIENCE INCREDIBLE INDIA 2.0!!!”

It is indeed time for celebrations, as India opens its door to offer warm hospitality and emotional connect to the citizens of all nations. The Government of India has recently announced one of the most liberalised and one of the most competitive e-Tourist Visa on Arrival (E-TVoA) regimes in South Asia along with a slew of other measures including robust connectivity between destinations, infrastructure to match world-class standards and a cost-competitive stay. Our rank in the World Economic Forum, Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Rankings has improved and will continue to improve in the future. Every state in India has its unique tourism products and selling points. Governments, both at the Centre and State, are leveraging on it for effective results. Along with the traditional destinations, India has myriad, pristine, unexplored destinations that beacon both new and repeated travellers.

Overtourism is a cause of concern worldwide but India has enough products and destinations to sustainably cater and host both international and domestic segments of visitors. Growing with tourists are employment and job opportunities. This is a healthy trend as WTTC India Economic Impact Report 2019 stated that travel and tourism contributed 9.2 per cent to India’s GDP, worth USD 247.3 billion when all direct, indirect and induced effects are taken into consideration and are responsible for 8.1 per cent of all India’s employment or 42.7 million jobs.

An amazing reason why India is such a great destination to travel to, are its citizens and communities. Indians love to celebrate, we love to be boisterous and we are as diverse and contradictory as they come! India is not only a cultural extravaganza but also a destination of culinary adventure. It is a cauldron where spiritual connections, modern values and traditional philosophies melt. And we are generous; Indians champion the cause of service to the fellow human beings in every which way we can. India, unquestionably, is the world’s greatest host. Our traditions, way back 2000 years ago, coined the motto ‘Athithi Devo Bhava’ or ‘Guest is God’. Yes, it would be booming inbound in India and the best time to experience Incredible India 2.0!!

Sujit Banerjee has served the Government of India in various capacities in his distinguished career as an officer of the Indian Administrative Service. In his career, he has served as Secretary, Central Vigilance Commission, Secretary and Chairperson of National Authority, Chemical Weapons Convention. He retired as Union Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Tourism. He headed a committee constituted by the Ministry of Environment and Forests to formulate guidelines for forest and wildlife eco-tourism in the country. He has served as Member on the Ethics Committee of Standing Conference of Public Enterprises, as Chairman, Advisory Committee on World Heritage Matters, Ministry of Culture, as a part-time, non-official Director on the Board of SAIL and as Chairman, Committee for National Heritage Sites under the aegis of Ministry of Culture.
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SriLankan Airlines wins accolades at SATA 2019

SriLankan Airlines was adjudged the ‘Leading International Airline’ in South Asia for the third consecutive year at the South Asian Travel Awards 2019 (SATA) and also bagged the ‘Leading Airline Passenger Class – Business’ award for the third year running from among airlines in the region. Vipula Gunatilleka, Group Chief Executive Officer of SriLankan Airlines said, “We are delighted to once again be recognized as the airline of choice in the South Asian region. SriLankan has positioned its services to provide rapid connectivity throughout the Indian Ocean region, serving destinations throughout South Asia, the Far East, Australia and the Middle East.” The fourth annual SATA Awards ceremony was held this year on September 20 at Amari Galle and featured airlines from India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and the Maldives.

Air India becomes first airline to use TaxiBot on A320 aircraft

Air India becomes the world’s first airline to commercially use TaxiBot on an Airbus A320 aircraft with passengers on-board at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, on October 15. Air India’s Chairman and Managing Director Ashwani Lohani flagged off flight AI665, which was carried to the runway using TaxiBot at Terminal 3 of the Delhi airport to Mumbai. By end-2019, five TaxiBots will be operational in India. With TaxiBot it is possible to tow an aircraft from the parking bay to the runway with its engines switched off. TaxiBot is a robot-used aircraft tractor for taxiing an aircraft from parking bay to runway and vice versa. It is a pilot-controlled semi-robotic aircraft tractor and it has been used on an Airbus A320, leaving the country proud. This tractor was developed by Israel Aerospace Industries, in partnership with a French company. It is another milestone for the airline as it a huge step towards a cleaner environment. TaxiBot has been successfully used on Air India flight carrying passengers from Delhi to Mumbai to the runway for take-off. The benefits of TaxiBot are that it saves 85 per cent of the fuel the plane would normally use at that time. In addition, the TaxiBot is also expected to help cut down on CO2 emissions, up to 800 kilograms are emitted for every 15 minutes. The most important thing is, it can also help reduce noise pollution by as much as 60 per cent. In early 2019, Air India became the third domestic carrier to complete TaxiBot trials (on Boeing 737-800). The other two were SpiceJet and Jet Airways. Now, a total of 40 TaxiBots will be deployed at airports across the country.

GoAir launches non-stop flights to Singapore from Bengaluru and Kolkata

GoAir launches its non-stop flights to Singapore from Bengaluru and Kolkata. GoAir is operating flights connecting Bengaluru and Singapore with a frequency of four days in a week and effective from October 19, 2019. GoAir will operate flights connecting Kolkata and Singapore with a frequency of three days in a week. Besides the new international destination, GoAir also announced daily flights to Aizawl, which is its 237th domestic destination. Jeh Wadia, Managing Director, GoAir said, “The introduction of flights to and from Singapore is a turning point in the history of GoAir. Singapore carries the distinction of being an important leisure destination as well as an established business hub. It is in this regard that GoAir will work closely with the Singapore Tourism Board and all suchilikeminded organizations that can further the cause of tourism in India as well as Singapore. On the other hand, our flight to Aizawl is in sync with the Government’s vision for the seven sisters of Northeast aptly described as ‘transformation by transportation’. GoAir flights will certainly improve connectivity to one of the most underserved but scenic destinations in North-East India.”

AirAsia India announces new routes

AirAsia India is on an expansion spree, the low-cost carrier has begun flight services to Goa and Chennai from Mumbai on October 27. Besides, the airline has also increased the frequency between Mumbai-New Delhi to four times daily. “We recently set up Mumbai as our fourth hub and have now increased frequency to Delhi from the city to four times daily. We have also introduced direct flights to Goa and Chennai from Mumbai,” said Sanjay Kumar, Chief Operating Officer, AirAsia India. Mumbai is a crucial market for the airline considering the growing passenger traffic and with the addition of these routes, it is looking forward to building a strong link between Mumbai and the other parts of the country. The airline had recently announced flights from Agartala to Guwahati, Imphal, Kolkata and New Delhi, that started from October 20. AirAsia India also started a daily flight on Delhi-Jaipur route from October 20.

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Domestic air passenger traffic rises by 1.18 per cent in September

Indicating further slowdown in the aviation sector, the domestic air passenger traffic this September increased by just 1.18 per cent compared to the same month last year, according to data released by the DGCA. In August this year, the domestic passenger growth was 3.87 per cent compared to the same month last year. The domestic air traffic last month consisted of 11.79 million passengers compared to 11.35 million passengers in the same month last year, a jump of 1.18 per cent, as per data. Regarding September data, a senior official of Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said, “The numbers are disappointing. They have pulled down our projection (for 2018-19) to four to six per cent. The good news is that we have managed to withstand the sad exit of Jet Airways and maintained a positive growth despite three months of negative or almost flat growth.” The passenger load factor of four major airlines—Air India, GoAir, AirAsia and Vistara—declined in September as compared to August last year, as per the DGCA data. The passenger load factor measures the seat capacity utilisation of the airline. “The loss in the fleet on account of Jet Airways has largely been recovered and we expect an all time high fleet of more than 686 aircraft in the air in a month’s time from now. With some more aircrafts joining our fleet by December 31, we expect a return to double digit growth in the early part of next year,” the official added.

IndiGo maintained its lead position with 48.2 per cent share of the domestic passenger market in September, the data showed. SpiceJet’s market share decreased from 15.3 per cent in August to 14.7 per cent in September, giving it the number two spot, as per the data. The market share of Air India, GoAir, AirAsia and Vistara was 13 per cent, 11.5 per cent, 6.3 per cent and 5.8 per cent, respectively, last month.

Flight from Chennai lands at Jaffna

As Sirisena inaugurates Lanka's third international airport

An Alliance Air flight from Chennai landed at the Jaffna International Airport on October 17 as Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena inaugurated the country’s third international airport, upgraded with India’s assistance, in the Tamil-dominated Northern Province. The inaugural flight from Chennai was the first to land at the new international airport in Jaffna. The ATR 72-600 aircraft was accorded water salute as it landed at the Jaffna airport, about 400-km from capital Colombo. The Jaffna International Airport was earlier known as Palaly airport which was used as a military air base and for domestic flights. President Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe formally unveiled a plaque commemorating the inauguration of the airport. Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Taranjit Singh Sandhu was also present. The occasion also marked the maiden overseas trip of Alliance Air making its first overseas trip with a delegation from India led by Air India CMD Ashwani Lohani, Alliance Air CEO C S Subbiah and a group of Indian journalists on board. Alliance Air, the wholly owned subsidiary of Air India, would soon commence its maiden overseas flight to Jaffna, aimed at boosting the ties between India and Sri Lanka.

Speaking on the occasion, Sandhu said that with the inauguration of the Jaffna airport the bilateral relations between India and Sri Lanka have now truly touched the sky. Sandhu said that the inaugural flight was yet another example of India’s commitment to continue with people-oriented development projects in Sri Lanka. “We are planning to commence operations very soon. It will be thrice a week. Later, we will increase to seven flights a week,” said Lohani.

IndiGo connects Delhi and Riyadh

Taking a step ahead towards strengthening its presence in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, IndiGo commenced operations to Riyadh from October 12. The airline inaugurated the first direct flight on Delhi-Riyadh route, making Riyadh IndiGo’s second destination in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, after the launch of Jeddah earlier this year. William Boulter, Chief Commercial Officer, IndiGo said, “This is an exciting time for us as we step in the capital of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh being the commercial and political centre, holds immense potential for trade between the two countries and attracts heavy tourism for its local market place, museums, and heritage sites that signify KSA’s history. These routes will not only enhance mobility, but also be a significant step towards promoting trade, tourism and social cohesion between the two nations.” Boulter added, “IndiGo will continue to expand its network in middle-east to meet the requirements of both business and leisure travellers. It is our constant endeavour to provide flexibility of choice to our customers as IndiGo continues to offer them on-time, affordable, courteous and hassle-free flying experience always.”

Hindon civil airport operates first commercial flight

The first commercial flight from the Hindon civil airport, which is adjacent to the IAF’s Hindon airbase, began operations from October 11 when a nine-seater plane will take off for Uttarakhand’s Pithoragarh district. According to sources, flight operations will start for Shimla from the Hindon civil airport in November. A private aircraft with nine passengers on board took off from Pithoragarh’s Naini-Saini airport at 11.30 am. The one-hour flight will depart daily from Pithoragarh, Heritage Aviation Manager MS Dhami said. The one coming from Hindon will take off every day at 1 pm and arrive at Naini-Saini airport at 2 pm, Dhami said. It is being seen as a boost to air connectivity between the border district and the NCR.
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TO:

Jaipur Marriott Hotel has appointed Rahul Maini as its General Manager. With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry across properties in India and abroad, Maini is a result-oriented individual who has consistently delivered results that has contributed to the overall success of the hotel. He has also helped oversee and mentor pre-opening for hotels. He was the opening GM of Renaissance Lucknow Hotel.

TO:

Concept Hospitality Pvt Ltd has appointed Grimek Khizakhe as its Chief People Officer. Khizakhe has been associated with Human Resource Development for the last 26 years and has worked with some of the most reputed hospitality brands. He has been associated in the past with brands such as the Taj Group, The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf - UAE, Carlson Rezidor and the Intercontinental Hotel Group.

TO:

Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd. announces the appointment of Ajoy Balkrishna as its Regional Director - North. An industry adept professional, Balkrishna brings with him over 30 years of experience in the hospitality industry. In this role, he will be responsible for overseeing the planning and implementation of all Sarovar hotel in North India. Balkrishna has been part of Sarovar Hotels from last 11 years.

TO:

The Westin Hyderabad appoints Parag Sawhney as its General Manager. With over 17 years of hospitality experience, Sawhney’s primary aim is to enhance the overall commercial performance of the hotel by growing the market share substantially and positioning the property as a market leader in its competition set.

TO:

The Leela Mumbai appoints Anand Athavale as its Director of Sales and Marketing. With over 14 years of experience, Athavale brings with him a wealth of expertise in the sales and marketing domain. His core responsibilities will include implementing the hotel’s sales and marketing strategy, maximising hotel’s revenues, setting annual budgets, forecasting, analysing revenue reports and strategy.

TO:

Crowne Plaza New Delhi Rohini has appointed Siddharth Mann as its Director of Sales. Mann holds a rich experience of more than a decade in the hospitality industry. He began his career in operations with Oberoi Hotels and further moved to Sales with IHG. Mann brings with him a strong understanding of diverse segments and has worked for various prominent hotel brands including Marriott and Hilton.

TO:

Four Points by Sheraton Hotel & Serviced Apartments, Pune appoints Anup Mathur as Director of Sales. Mathur brings with him experience in SEM. His passion for the hospitality industry has seen him rapidly rise through several positions. Mathur has worked with Sofitel, Novotel, Ibis and more. His last assignment was with Keys Hotels as Director of sales – Pune region.

TO:

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center has appointed Tania Thomas as Marketing Communications Manager. With 10 years of experience, Thomas excels in brand management, marketing and corporate communications. She will be responsible for developing annual marketing communications plans, monitoring trends within the industry and more.
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