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Khushboo Gujarat Ki

The sand is exactly as white as shown in this picture.

The ocean of white sand stands out stark and pristine in its colourlessness, interrupted only by passing herds of camels.

On moonlit nights, the desert reveals another colour.

Something that can hardly be described in words.

Which colour of Kutch will catch your eye?

Maybe one that I couldn't find!

Amitabh Bachchan

Amitabh Bachchan



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**KUTCH
SALT MARSH**

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Friends,

There are not many moments in my life when I fall short of words (well, considering I am a writer I am glad these moments are only far and few!!). As I write the first 'Editorial' for the inaugural issue of BOTT (Business of Travel Trade) India, I cannot help but reminisce same time last year when we floated one-of-its-kind travel trade digital media platform -- BOTTINDIA.COM. It made significant impact and brought in newer ways of creating, curating and disseminating travel trade news in the industry.

Realising the power of digital media, BOTT India was floated to not just bring the right news in perspective but also explore various angles through which we can highlight all those personalities who have directly or indirectly contributed to the success and rise of this industry. Various "special series" of BOTT India, such as, Fab 40s, Better Half, BOTT Spotlight, GM Series, Mother's Day Special and more not just helped in bringing focus on some of the essential yet somewhere forgotten elements of our industry but also enabled BOTT India to become a known name in the travel trade fraternity. In less than six months of our operations, the website had crossed the 5 million "Hits" mark and we couldn't have asked for more.

Next was an unexpected recognition received at the coveted IATO Annual Convention last year, which happened at Kolkata. Named as the "Best Upcoming Digital Platform", BOTT India was applauded for its astute journalistic standards while covering both news as well as Interviews.

While we were still basking in the success of getting an award in mere 7 months of going live, BOTT India added another feather added to its cap with the launch of a Special Book titled – 'Exploring India through 50 Unique Destinations' with TAAI, which was launched at India Tourism Mart (ITM 2019) in New Delhi. We received a letter of appreciation from none other than the Honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi.

As the year progressed, so did the traffic on the website, crossing 8 million Hits a month, reinforcing our belief with which we had started BOTT India – Good Content is still valued and people, across all segments, appreciate quality writing. Thus, taking our belief a step further, we are delighted to bring you the Printed edition of BOTT India, starting with a 'Recap' Issue of all that we did in the last one year. The popular Interviews, Stories and Special Features (not all of course!) have been compiled together to quickly jog you down the memory lane and also because if you have been interviewed, it feels nice to have it in print, doesn't it?

We at BOTT India promises not only to be different but also better than the others as we will refrain from doing the run of the mill stories. We will continue to do what we have done so far – keep the editorial standards high and do out of the box stories, which will take the writing and reporting in travel trade to an all new high.

Keep your valuable feedback pouring
at priyanka@bottindia.com

Priyanka Saxena Ray



Contents



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Pg
18



Pg
28



Pg
34

Pg 6

Short News

Take a look at the recent
developments in the travel
trade...

Pg 8

BOTT Spotlight

Learn more about the
journey of the veterans
in the travel trade and
get inspired by reading
about their struggles and
achievements...

Pg 16

Expert Opinion

Mr. Rajeev Kohli knows all
the tricks of the "trade" and
writes an unapologetic and

honest open "Letter to the
PM" outlining all that the
government can do for the
tourism industry...

Pg 19

Associations In Action

Take a look at how the
various travel trade
associations are striving for
the progress and upliftment
of the travel industry...

Pg 22

Hospitable Hotels

Hospitality industry sets
its eyes on a sustainable,
plastic free and business
driven 2020 as shared by
some of the leading GMs of
the country...



The ICPB E-Newsletter – MICE Pulse, has been introduced with the sole aim of highlighting the activities being undertaken by the members of not just the Governing Bureau but the complete association as well. **p21**

Pg 26 **GMs Speak**

Hoteliers of repute speak on the sector, their journey, their highs and lows and their road map for the future

Pg 32 **Beyond Boundaries**

Get to know how countries across the globe are trying hard through workshops, seminars, conferences, trainings, Roadshows and more to grab a pie of the growing outbound cake from India

Pg 36

Destination Window

Istanbul is a melting pot of culture, traditions, great food & archaeological marvels

Pg 42 **India For you**

In light with PM's vision 'Pehle Desh, Fir Videsh', take a look at what some of the leading domestic destinations have in store for you...

Pg 48 **Fab 40s**

40s are the new 30s - a stage where Entrepreneurs are at their peak... they are the trendsetters, the visionaries of tomorrow... read more about them...

Pg 52 **Food for soul**

Indulge in authentic 'North Indian' culinary legacy with new menu @ Made in Punjab

Pg 54 **Wellness Window**

Give your skin some relaxation as you indulge in one of the many SPA treatments available

Pg 56 **Fly Global**

SriLankan Airlines to start operations from Ahmedabad and Calicut by year-end



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Rakesh Verma joins Ministry of Tourism as Joint Secretary

Rakesh Verma, 1993-Batch officer of Punjab cadre has joined the Ministry of Tourism as Joint Secretary. Prior to this, he was serving as the Secretary, Technical Education and Industrial Training. Verma has been appointed for a tenure of five years or until further orders, whichever is earlier. He has taken over the post from B Suman, 1996-Batch officer of Kerala cadre.



ADTOI to host its next Convention in Bhopal from April 10 - 12, 2020



P.P. Khanna

Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) is all geared to host its next Convention in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh this year. P P Khanna, President, ADTOI, shared that the focus of the Convention, besides showcasing a new destination to its members, will, like always, be on boosting domestic tourism in the country. ADTOI Convention Chairman 2020, Chetan Gupta declared that the Convention this year will take place from April 10 - 12 at Minto Hall, Bhopal. There will be no Post, but Pre Convention tours this time.

Speaking to BOTT India, Chetan Gupta, Hony. General Secretary, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), said, "We are working on developing circuits this time instead of the normal FAM tour for two days, which we usually do. Exhibition will again be a major part of the convention and we are expecting 25+ exhibitors this time from all across India. We are also working on some new concepts for the exhibition, which when finalised, will be shared."



Chetan Gupta

Puneet Chhatwal elected as the President of Hotel Association of India, for a term of two-year

Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, Indian Hotels Company Ltd has been elected as the President of the Hotel Association of India - the apex body of Indian hotel industry for a term of two-year during its 23rd Annual General Meeting. Succeeding Vikram Oberoi, Managing Director and Chief Executive officer, EIH Ltd, Chhatwal will lead the four member team of Office Bearers comprising the following members elected at the Annual General Meeting - KB. Kachru, Chairman Emeritus and Principal Advisor, South Asia Radisson Hotel Group and Vice President, HAI; J.K. Mohanty, Managing Director, Swosti Premium Limited and Honorary Secretary, HAI; Patu Keswani, Chairman and Managing Director, Lemon Tree Hotels Ltd and Honorary Treasurer, HAI.



OTOAI and Destination Canada organised three-city Training Programme

OTOAI in collaboration with Destination Canada recently held a three-city Destination Canada Product Training Programme. The Training Programme was held in Mumbai on November 21, 2019; in New Delhi on January 22, 2020 and in Ahmedabad on January 23, 2020. The aim of the Training Programme was to brief people about the tourism attractions and experiences that a traveller can enjoy in Canada.

Mr. Carl Vaz, CEO & Strategy Director, Destination Canada, India GSA, gave a detailed presentation on the various aspects of Destination Canada highlighting its touristy sights, best time to travel, what to see and what to expect during particular seasons and connectivity between the regions. "Canada has huge potential and offers unique experiences through all seasons. It has something for everyone. Canada (in size) is the second largest country in the world after Russia where people of all backgrounds, preferences and religious beliefs are welcome. In 2018, around 287,420 Indians went to Canada. India has grown to become the 7th most important market for Inbound to Canada and is ranked as the 5th among the long-haul markets for Canada," said Mr. Carl Vaz.



Taiwan eyes 20% more growth by the end of 2020; tier 2 cities will be the focus

The current global health situation may have put a damper on travel plans, but Taiwan Tourism Board decided to bring Taiwan to India in a cultural evening at the Hyatt Regency in Delhi, that showcased the fun side of this East Asian nation. Among industry-focused workshops, travel presentations and a thrilling mixology showcase, the evening hosted senior members from travel management, hospitality, airlines and related industries.



BLTM 2020 gives the Indian Traveller jump start on their Travel Plans

BLTM Delhi, scheduled from 31st January to 1st February 2020 is India's leading trade show on Business, MICE & Leisure travel hosted within the city-centre of New Delhi. Held in the 5-star Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, it was an exclusive 2-day travel mart. The Guest of Honor was the Minister Commercial of the Sri Lanka High Commission, Ms. Uppekha Samararatunga. Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Maldives and Mauritius also joined the BLTM 2020 bandwagon along with over 100 other prime exhibitors.



K B Kachru: Celebrating an unmatched legacy of work

It wouldn't be wrong to call him the 'Pillar of Indian Hospitality'. Humble, knowledgeable, extremely passionate and a visionary, Mr. K B Kachru, Chairman Emeritus and Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, is a veteran, who has worn many hats in his professional journey. KB is the recipient of many coveted Industry Awards including The Global hotelier and PATWA award at ITB Berlin, WTM London and the HVS lifetime achievement award amongst many others. The one award which he feels most proud of is the Carlson 'Champion of Champion' and Fellowship Award. It was our true honour interviewing him for BOTT Spotlight. Here's more on his journey...



Priyanka Saxena Ray

Having known him for many years, my respect for this veteran grows manifold every time I meet him. The legacy of his work is unmatched in the hospitality industry and it is impossible for anyone to pen his experiences down in a mere article. Born and brought up in Kashmir at a time when the state used to be thronged with tourists without any fear of terror, the young Kachru made a conscious choice of not letting his parents pay donation fee to obtain a medical seat for him and instead opted to sit

for Hotel Management Pusa entrance and clear it. While his mother did not appreciate his choice and stayed upset with him for some time, the Government of Jammu and Kashmir on the other hand, enamoured with the fact that a Kashmiri boy is doing formal education in the field of hospitality, gave him a scholarship for studying at IHM. After enjoying a good stint in the hotel management institute, K.B. became the Students Association President and part of the first-ever batch wherein students were taken as management trainees and not just as stewards, kitchen assistants and receptionists.

"Because my father was a government employee all his life, he pushed me to join ITDC as a management trainee. At the same time the Tawaza Department in the J&K Government was ready to give me job of a Tawaza Officer. However, convinced that ITDC was a better option, I started my professional career in 1971," reminisces the veteran.

Given the fact that he was a committed learner, his training was cut short by six months and he was sent to work as the Assistant Manager at The Ashok Jammu, where he was given a freehand to work and he honed his skills and contributed

greatly to the hotel. K.B. worked there for a year and half and also changed his status to “married” by tying the knot with his lady love.

Soon after, the Government of India and Government of West Germany joined hands to offer higher education and training to select few in specialised fields. “I got selected for the Carl Duisberg Scholarship and also attended the hotel school at Hamburg, which was an enlightening career and learning opportunity for me. I gathered plenty of work experience at various hotels across West Germany. After working in Germany for close to three years, I came back to ITDC and was made the General Manager of the Aurangabad Ashok at the young age of 23,” shares the veteran.

From GM of The Aurangabad Ashok, he moved to the newly opened Ashok Varanasi, which yet again proved to be a great working and satisfying experience for him. At all of 29 years, K B Kachru was made the General Manager of ITDC’s flagship hotel The Ashok New Delhi. The initial few months were challenging but the veteran calls himself lucky to have had a free-hand to manage things his way. K.B. was also actively involved in the opening of Duty Free shops at arrival halls of all the international airports in the country.

“I had been with ITDC for close to two decades now and I realised it was time to look for something new. I had already been approached by international hotel chains who wanted me to help them develop their brands in India. So in the early 90s, Mr. Rajan Jetley (my ex-boss) and I formed a company and we started working with Radisson Hotels Asia. The rest, as they say, is history,” he says, a contented smile on his face, one that has long tales of achievements and experiences to narrate.

The opening of the first Radisson in India was at Mahipalpur, New Delhi. From then to now, Radisson currently operates 95 hotels in India while there are 45 more projects in the pipeline. Till early 2000s, when people were only focussing on metro cities, Radisson went a step ahead and started tapping the tertiary towns and opening hotels spread across tier-II and tier-III cities. As a result, the hospitality chain today has hotels in almost all state-capitals of India, much ahead of its competition.

“The hospitality industry, where it



Mr. K.B. Kachru with his family

stands today, is different from our times, yet with similar set of problems. Going forward, talent acquisition is going to be a continuous challenge – needing skilled people at all levels is a tough requirement to fulfil. We are an industry that is still challenged with antique laws, overcoming which is another obstacle for people operating in this field. The infrastructure of our country is also a topic of concern. Land is too expensive, FSI is limited and basic things are not available at many places even in metro cities, leave alone the smaller towns. The cost of land being too expensive to build hotels on, along with the operating cost of running

a hotel, makes the job all the more tough,” says K B Kachru, with a deep concern for the future of the hospitality industry in India.

In his personal life, he is a family man who loves to spend quality time with his wife Neelam, who is also a hotel management graduate and take family holidays with his sons, Amit and Sameer and their wives Bhavna and Gazal. His mother, who is almost 94 years has lived with them since his father passed away in 1986. He enjoys playing with his grandchildren and proudly talks about his 10 year old grandson playing cricket for the DLCL under 14 Delhi Team.

Vasudha Sondhi: Focussed on promoting small immersive experiences



Priyanka Saxena Ray

She was a born travel aficionado and loved going on holidays with her family when young. After her Graduation, Vasudha decided to get formal education in the field that intrigued her the most – Hotels. She did her Hotel Management degree from Mumbai and started her professional stint with Taj. However, it was at Hyatt where she learned all about the hotels' business – “one of the best hospitality chains in training people,” is what she has to say about the hotel chain. Her professional portfolio kept growing as she went on to handle

There are not many people who are gifted with the sense and clarity of thought of knowing the direction they want their career to take. The ones who are, go on to make a mark for themselves, not just becoming an iconic name but also a force to reckon with. When you meet Vasudha Sondhi, Managing Director, Outbound Marketing, who is a tall woman – both literally and figuratively, you realise just how aptly she belongs to this category.

Looking at her poise and grace, one would think success came easy to her, but when you hear details of her journey from a young mother to a flourishing entrepreneur, which is what she always wanted to be, your respect for the veteran grows manifold – just like mines' did.

Here's our exclusive story on her in BOTT Spotlight.

various profiles in the Indian hospitality industry, loving each with equal vigour and giving them all her complete devotion. But even as she was busy changing hats in the hospitality fraternity, becoming an entrepreneur was something, which was always at the back of her mind.

It was during the time when she was playing an instrumental role as part of the opening team of the Le Meridien Hotels in India, that the opportunity to do “something of her own” cropped up. “In 2001, during one of my travels, I met an ex-colleague who wanted me to partner with him and handle

the sales and marketing of his client. It was a tough decision as I was on the top of my career at that time – being paid extremely well and also working at a certain pinnacle. Sanjay (Vasudha's better half) wanted to step-in and Outbound Marketing was born. However, in a short while we realised that if I don't take the entrepreneurial plunge now, I will never be able to do it. Thus, soon after Outbound Marketing was formed, I too quit work and joined the company full time," she reminisces.

Just like every business goes through a gestation period, theirs did too, where paying salaries and finding good talent were the primary challenges. For the first few years, their portfolio of clients kept going randomly as most clients came with a short-term interest in mind and really had no vision of growth. Sun International was one of their first big clients, who continues to work with them till date. What followed were majorly all hotel clients, who approached them to bring the sales back into their business. It was in 2005 that they got their first destination – Bali Tourism as a client and after handling their road shows etc. for 3 years, the duo opened another company named Om Tourism in 2008, for handling destination clients primarily.

"We do not like to be called a representation company as that is just one of the many services we offer. We put the sales back into the business – make ourselves responsible for the ROIs. Many leading hotel chains work with us, seek our help to bring them out of losses or just escalate their profits or just provide them with sales solutions. Accor worked with us for 6 years and it was a great experience. Early on in our business we had a challenging job from HRH Hotels who needed our expertise in turning their business around – which we did very well to land them in a profitable position. Connect Worldwide, one of the leading US companies that offers marketing solutions to hotels, works with just one company in India and that is us. So we must be doing something right," Vasudha shares graciously.

The client list of both the companies together is not just impressive but also extremely exhaustive. It comprises Corinthia Hotels, The Sun Lux Collection, Connect Worldwide, Onyx Hospitality Group, Melia Hotels International, Louvre Hotels Group, GLH Hotels,



Republic of Indonesia, Mauritius, Grand Resort Bad Ragaz and many many more.

"I have some radical and exciting plans for the future as I am now setting step into curating and selling small retreat immersive experiences. Parvada Bungalows, a hotel resort in Nainital, Uttarakhand, is my first step in this direction. Ramgarh will be added to the bouquet next year," she adds. So from big hotel chains and five-stars, she is now venturing into the niche segment of cosy retreats and keeping her track record and dedication in mind, one can be assured that this too will be a roaring success.

Elegance personified, Vasudha is one of the rare women in the travel trade who has not let her success change her in anyway. She lovingly meets all her old colleagues, has many friends in the industry and is never heard talking foul about competition. She is immensely adored and respected by her office colleagues and media people alike simply because she always takes time to 'respond' and 'listen' – a quality that is fast becoming rare in our circle. A woman of grit and substance, she truly defines what "power-women" are made of and it's a pleasure interacting with her, always.

Sheema Vohra: People should see the good in the Industry



She has the most radiant smile in the travel fraternity and can often be seen sporting the traditional Indian attire, despite having spent a major part of her life abroad. A thorough optimist who loves to count her blessings, Sheema Vohra, Managing Director, Sartha Global Marketing LLP, is an inspiration for the women in the travel industry. From her hospitality days to her love for the USA, classical singing, travel, poetry and theatre, Sheema is the perfect example of beauty with brains and we are extremely fortunate to narrate the story of her journey to you under BOTT Spotlight.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

As I sat down to chat with her, warming up before our interview, I couldn't help but marvel the way she carries herself, conducts business and yet remains so warm to not just her visitors but her team too, many of whom have been associated with her for long. Mingling with people comes naturally to her and as she sits comfortably in her big new office with a crazy travel schedule to back her, she gushes about her love to travel, especially to the USA, which is her all-time favourite destination. Sheema Vohra is today doing what she loves, spreading awareness regarding her beloved USA and coaxing people to make a visit. But where did it all start?

Born in Dehradun to "marvellous" parents, Sheema travelled to various

places within India during her growing up years, courtesy her father's transferable job. Majority of her schooling was done at the Maharani Gayatri Devi Public School in Jaipur, which explains the poise and grace that she carries herself with. "I was very happy in the boarding school and loved the numerous activities we were exposed to such as dramatics, sports and more. I always wanted to try my hands at something new and not do the traditional stuff. My parents too let us (my younger sister and myself) bloom the way we wanted to. I decided to go to PUSA and had an amazing time learning about hospitality and making some amazing friends but I wasn't really serious about my professional growth. I started my career with the Maurya Sheraton and then moved on to work for a year at the ITDC in their International Trade Fair

and Conventions Department and while marketing and events gave me a good kick, I remained casual about my career. It was not until I visited the USA in 1984 that my world opened to the ocean of possibilities that lied ahead," she reminisces.

Even though she had done her hospitality education in India, Sheema enrolled herself in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and did Bachelors in Hotel Management. During campus interviews, she was picked by Marriott International where she went on to work for 5 years in the USA. "Those years in the US made me what I am today. However, I was always clear in my mind that I wanted to come back to India and I did and soon joined The Claridges as their Sales and Marketing head," she adds. Sheema went on to work at The Oberoi Group of Hotels in their International

Travel Trade department handling various international markets and was with them for three years. But fate, it seems, had other plans for her. Taking the entrepreneurial jump, Sheema joined hands with Sunil Puri and floated a company called Connexons, which was an inbound company. During the course they met representatives from Mileage Communications – a Singapore based company who wanted to open an office in India and this is how Mileage Communications India office came into existence.

“Every few years I get bitten by this bug, which leads me to explore new profiles, try more challenging avenues and be a part of newer things. So this time when the bug bit me, it took me to the Marriott International, wherein I spent 5 years of my life at their Global Sales Office in India and enjoyed it thoroughly. After gaining an enriching experience, in 2007, I decided to turn an entrepreneur yet again. This was the time when outbound was opening up in India and I got back with Sunil, who during all this time was handling Connexons and Mileage Communications. Given my love for the United States of America, I was clear from the start that I wanted to represent USA in India and keeping this goal in mind, we floated Sartha Marketing in April 2007 and San Francisco was the first client we got, which continues to work with us till date. After San Francisco we got California, followed by many others and today we have more than 15 clients in our kitty under Sartha Global Marketing and couldn’t be happier with our progress,” says Sheema, beamingly, with not an ounce of pride in her demeanour at having achieved such immense success in a short span of time.

Sartha Global Marketing is a full service marketing company offering various services, such as, Tourism Representation, Brand Management and Advertising support, Consumer Promotions, Digital marketing, Influencer Marketing, Events, Public Relations and Market Intelligence and Research. What makes them stand apart from the rest, Sheema believes, is their customised approach to each client and the fact that they are a one-stop shop for all the needs of the client looking to grab a piece of India Outbound. That’s their biggest differentiator. There is no fixed module that is passed on to the cus-



Sheema Vohra and Sunil Puri



Sheema Vohra with her Sister

tomers rather an exclusive deal is curated to position that client strongly in the India market. “Our aim is to stay relevant and sustain customisation. Competition doesn’t bother me. It will always be there. But what we must continuously aim for is quality along with sustained and customised service,” she reiterates.

Sheema Vohra, a die-hard romantic, lives high on life and enjoys all things good! With an absolutely liberating upbringing that her parents gave her, she never felt the need to bind her relations with her loved ones in any strings or names that the society would approve of. She lives life on her terms and absolutely loves doing so. While kitchen has

never been her forte, she loves to spend her free time either practicing singing classical music or listening to ghazals of her favourite poet – Faiz. “I would love to see more and more women enter the travel industry. People should see the good in the industry as it has so much to offer. I have been a part of the travel trade for over two decades now and enjoyed every moment of it. The world is too beautiful and brimming with opportunities – women entrepreneurs should definitely take the plunge! I owe so much to this travel industry and there is a lot of potential still for all of us to grow and co-exist in harmony,” concludes the ever optimistic Sheema with a smile, and well, we couldn’t agree more.

Rajeev Nangia: Driving the Representation bandwagon successfully



Priyanka Saxena Ray

A thorough Delhi boy, elder of the two siblings, Rajeev's love affair with travel started much early in life, thanks to his father's job with Indian Airlines. However, with no intention whatsoever to join the travel fraternity, Rajeev, post his graduation from Delhi University and some 'off the cuff' knowledge in computers, joined Hyatt Regency New Delhi at their front office. He gave that job 5 years of his life before he felt the need to look for another opportunity.

In THE last 15 years that I have been a part of the travel trade industry, I have observed him from afar – a man with perfect demeanour who always has a kind word to say to you. He has never stepped the line, never hopped jobs, never made false promises to undercut the competition and never shown animosity to even those who perhaps did wrong to him and his company. Rajeev Nangia, Chief Operating Officer, TRAC Representations, who has been the pioneer in the representation arena in India, shares his inputs on his journey in the industry in an exclusive with **BOTT Spotlight**

“TRAC was formed in 1992 and since I was keen on trying new avenues, I approached them (Mr. Kavi Ghei) for a job and was made a part of the company in initial stages only. Doing this job was like starting from scratch for me as I had no clue about the work they were about to start doing. Within six months, I started questioning my decision as things were not moving within the organisation. Every company has a gestation period and we were experiencing the same,” reminisces Rajeev. Well, soon enough TRAC started working with some DMCs



Rajeev Nangia
with his wife

for sales in addition to drafting packages and attractions and selling it to the agents. Their first break-through came when they got Thailand as a representation client in early 90s and TRAC immediately stopped selling packages of Thailand as a matter of principle. Working with ethics was an important rule within the organisations – an unsaid code that had to be followed by all.

“We pioneered the whole concept of representation in India. We had no competition at that time, which was good, but we also had no example that we could follow in order to avoid making some mistakes. We thus landed-up learning many things by default,” shares Rajeev, smiling, and the look of pride is clear on his face. Rajeev graciously credits Mr. Kavi Ghei as the guiding force behind TRAC and states that it was indeed his positive and motivational attitude that kept them all afloat and moving forward at all times. I guess when you have worked with a company for close to three decades and collaborated with over 20 governments of the world, you definitely deserve that look of contentment that can be spotted at Rajeev’s face many times during the interview. Having said that, it wouldn’t be wrong to say that Rajeev has no bone of arrogance in his conduct – as I mentioned earlier, humility can indeed be his middle name!

However, the dynamics of the market has changed manifold in the last three decades. From a “no-competition industry” to one being flooded with many, representation has attained an all new meaning and manual in the recent times. Does he find difficult to cope up with this change? “Competition for me is delivering more at less value. I strongly believe that under-

cutting doesn’t help anyone as we are all in this industry to make our bread and butter. When you undercut, the services being offered are surely affected,” he shares, elaborating, “A lot of representation companies are selling half-baked cakes to the clients. Promising but not delivering, which is impacting the image of our country. People need to understand that representation is a gamut of activities and not just road-shows and press conferences. You have to provide your client a 3600 environment for it to blossom completely in a foreign land. Representation is a very creative field and one needs to constantly innovate and work on new ways and means to reaching out to the people.”

As he talks about the representation industry and business, his passion for the same is easily perceptible. It is indeed astonishing how he is not perturbed with the competition growing by leaps and bounds around him, and appear all calm and quaint in his conduct. “Success is not about the number of clients you have but what you are delivering to your client. At TRAC, we deliver 1:10 – meaning, invest one and get value of 10. We believe in taking out extra from the market and give our clients the growth that is more than average value growth. There are not many companies that can promise and deliver this,” he concludes with a soft confident nod.

Sitting with him for a couple of hours and hear him passionately talk about the nitty-gritties of the representation industry was an awe-inspiring experience for me as rarely these days do you come across people who are so knowledgeable and informed about their field and surroundings. Truly, they don’t make men like him anymore.

Now is the time for new *beginnings*...



DEAR MR. PRIME MINISTER:

It is most certainly not an easy job you have. My minute work in associations leading various conflicting opinions tells me that leading this huge diverse nation of strange human beings is most certainly a herculean and thankless job. I may have strong difference of opinion from you but I do wish you success for the sake and love for my country.

I was born into the tourism industry. I grew up seeing my father and his colleagues of the time lay the foundation and grow Indian tourism to bring it to where it is today. I had many career paths in my youth, but I chose to follow his footsteps.

The Dalai Lama once said something which I want to share..."When you think everything is someone else's fault, you will suffer a lot. When you realise that everything springs only from yourself, you will learn both peace and joy.

This is a business where passion for our nation outranks the drive to make money. Those who work in tourism enjoy the adrenalin in seeing our travellers go back with happy stories to share.

Yet, Mr Modi, we are also a very sad and depressed industry. Standing all by ourselves lost. A rudderless boat adrift in the ocean hoping to see land one day.

In all my interactions over the past two decades with various sections of the national government, I have come to the conclusion that the power for tourism to develop India is widely misunderstood, ignored, belittled and outcast. The results of that are apparent in our ever-declining numbers, revenue and employment levels.

The fault lies in many hands – the government, the private sector, the global economy, and so on. No single person, or organisation can be blamed alone for the condition the Indian tourism industry is in today. We are a 'sick' industry and the numbers are there to back this claim.

Mr. Modi, when your government claims that they have done their job by tweaking taxes & visa rules and now the rest lies with the private sector, they oversimplify the challenges we have and the needs of the industry. They depreciate our work. But it is also a fact that the problems we have today have not been created by your government alone. They are decades of systematic apathy and ignorance across all governments that have piled up to create a mountain of challenges.

It is a fact that foreign inbound arrivals from profitable source markets are down and have been so for the past few years. Ask NCAER to do a simple analysis of the arrival numbers and you will see for yourself how grave the situation is.



Our image as a tourism destination in the world is tarnished and will take years to rebuild. Our prices are uncompetitive on the world stage. Taxes, licensing rules, land costs and so much more make running a business in tourism very challenging. Our tourism related foreign exchange receipts are not growing the way they should. Almost all Indian inbound operators are making a negative return on their investments of money and time.

I also very firmly blame our own private sector for doing a horrible job at expressing our view point. My father was one of the founders of our national association IATO. When I go back and look at his notes from 30+ years ago, the conversations we are having today is still the same. We have not grown in our approach or vision. The fact that our tourism associations are political cesspools and that they themselves cannot get along, just portrays a very sad face before your administration. You probably look at us as a bunch of uncoordinated simpletons. And you would not be wrong.

Mr Prime Minister, India is an Incredible country. But we are not an incredible tourism destination. There is a big difference in the two. This is a fact that we in the industry (unfortunately, yet to be given an Industry Status) carry deep in our hearts everyday and a pain that we wish to eradicate.

Our industry is not asking for major investments or infrastructure development. We do not need major budget allocations, nor do we need long-drawn research. All we need are a few sharp, well-crafted policy changes that would go a very long way in making things different. In fact, here are a sim-

ple things that you can do in 30 days and change the face of Indian tourism.

1 Create an empowered crisis management team that interfaces with the tourism industry private sector to help us respond to the external world quickly to issues like pollution, terror, law and order etc. Issues that the world talks about and needs to hear our voice. Unfortunately, your own Ministry of Tourism is gagged from doing any public statements about the country that could help the industry. We have never received a written communique from them that we can share with our customers about any adverse situation in India. So, we look very stupid in front of the world. We are one of the weakest countries in crisis management and in how we respond to situations that affect tourism. The consistent policy of the administration is to keep quiet and hope it goes away.

2 Challenge and ask the Ministry of Tourism to discard all old policies and systems and start afresh. Pretend they are a brand-new ministry and take best practises from all over the world and create something wonderful and dynamic. We have some brilliant men and women who work in the Ministry, who are choked by antiquated and irrelevant policies that don't allow them to work. You have reformed so many areas of governance in this country. Yet our tourism administration is decades behind the world in how we operate. We need a new country brand, new industry support systems, new marketing activities, new overseas outreach, and so much more. We need to think out of the box and think afresh.

Also create a forum for the national government to talk with the real players in the tourism industry. Get first hand input from people who actually have serious business interests. Right now, voices are filtered and suppressed through a handful of association heads. You are not getting the full story from anyone.

3 The Commerce Ministry needs to take more ownership of our affairs. Tourism accounts for almost 10% of the Indian GDP. We contribute a lot to India. Yet we are given step-motherly treatment. I can challenge anyone in the government to show us a part of the Indian economy that has greater potential to create employment at the lowest to the highest skill levels; that has a multiplier effect as far reaching as tourism; or that has the ability to go into the deepest parts of the country to create happiness. No foreign exchange earning industry retains as much forex as we do. No other industry can achieve the goals of skill development like we can. So, it's time the Ministry of Commerce paid a bit more attention to us. Only then will we perhaps get the attention at the central level that we need.

4 Taxes. The saying is true – “Nothing is certain except for death and taxes”. I know most of our conversations with the government resolve only around taxes. This industry has never said no to paying taxes. We do want to bear our fair share of our responsibility. All we want is to be treated fairly. We are probably the only economic segment of the economy that not only pays taxes on taxes, but also is exporting taxes; both of which are not only against all principles of taxation, but also against the whole GST policy. You cannot imagine how much energy and time is spent by our industry on discussing taxes. Time that could be better

spent on our businesses and growing the industry.

5 Let us help you on your mission to make India great. No other part of the Indian economy has so much power to help your missions like Clean India, Skilling, Communal Harmony and so much more. No other part of the Indian economy has so many foot soldiers on the ground like tourism does. We have only one agenda, to make India the most favoured travel destination in the world. We do our jobs because we love our nation. Use us wisely. Use us fairly. Its time to stop having a hierarchical relationship and to start working as true partners.

I wish I had the opportunity to spend 30 minutes with you and share the real picture of our industry. We contribute 10% of the Indian GDP. I think we deserve a lot better. If this piece ever reaches your desk, I hope it adds some value to your thought process.

We Indians don't believe in looking back. As a nation fascinated by astrology, palmistry, numerology, palm leaf reading and what have you, we always look at the future for what it holds and for the opportunities it will bring. If there is something we don't like, there is always a religious ceremony around to fix it. We are a nation of contrasts, of challenges, of organised chaos, of enormous beauty. We are the people who believe in the power of the self and the power of the Almighty. India is an unexplainable phenomenon and Indians can sometimes be odd, but we are the people who believe truly that 2020 will be a better year for us all.

Have a wonderful 2020 Mr Prime Minister form all of us in Indian tourism. Please think of us in your New Year resolutions.



Women power takes centre stage, **Jyoti Mayal** becomes TAAI President

She is still basking in the joy of being elected as the President of one of the biggest travel trade associations of India – TAAI, a position she is truly worthy of. Having won the elections with a sweeping majority, she is one power woman who has got her entire MC come to power without drop of even a single candidate. Though she has been playing an instrumental role in the association for many years now, but sitting at the helm of things, Mrs. Jyoti Mayal has an entire list of resolutions and reforms she wishes to implement. Here's her first ever interview as the President TAAI with BOTT India.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

A lady who never minces words and clearly states her intention every time you hear her speak, Mrs. Jyoti Mayal had announced her candidature for the post of President TAAI much earlier and had her vision and mission in place, even before acquiring the hot seat! Given her legacy of work and active participation across all travel trade related forums, it came as no surprise when Mrs. Mayal was elected as President TAAI with a sweeping majority. Her new team, which is standing with her shoulder to shoulder in her path of success comprises Mr. Jay Bhatia as Vice President, Mr. Bettaiah Lokesh as Hon. Secretary General and Mr. Shreeram Patel as the Hon. Treasurer.

“Like expressed earlier in our manifesto, we have a vision, which will change TAAI. Our aim is to make it into an association that everyone will look up to. We aim to bring change to policies in manner that makes it easy for our members to do business. Technology, in today's day and time can be used to grow not just business but also avenues of income – this is something which we will strongly focus on and help our members to look at non-ticketing revenues also,” shared the enthused President, who is soaked in a whirlwind of congratulatory world at the moment.

Also on her agenda is something which is perhaps most needed by the industry today – increased women participation. “I hope I will be able to inspire more women to join the travel trade and help them carve a niche for themselves. There is certainly a dearth of women entrepreneurs in our industry and my focus as TAAI President would be to increase women empowerment in our membership. I would also like to have a strong board of advisors consisting of officials from government, airlines and influencers, which will guide the TAAI leadership towards better and higher goals. We will also try and get clarity on GST with the correct favourable policy and educate our members – not just in the metros but in tier-II and tier-III cities as well regarding the same.”



With all this and more on her plate, we can safely say that the functioning of TAAI has indeed landed in capable hands and the travel trade can look forward to some wonderfully successful time ahead for the association.



ICPB aims to bring more Conferences & Conventions into India; launches Newsletter

In the first Interactive Luncheon meeting held by the new Governing Board of ICPB, a string of initiatives, wish-list and plans and policies were disclosed to the members of the association and media in New Delhi recently. Another highlight of the event was the launch of its E-Newsletter – MICE Pulse, which will be taken out bi-monthly to let the industry and its members know more about the activities being undertaken by the association.

Priyanka Saxena Ray and Arushi Bajaj

A new young and dynamic team came to power as ICPB Office Bearers a few months back and the association has been on a roll since. There is plenty that the energetic team wants to put in place with the sole aim of not just boosting MICE movement within and to India but also gain visibility of the association on a national as well as international platform.

Kick starting the first interactive luncheon meeting at the J W Marriott, New Delhi, Girish Kwatra, Honorary Secretary, ICPB talked about how ICPB is striving towards creating more busi-

ness opportunities for the members of the association. “Our aim is to promote India as a MICE destination and we are doing so by promoting different cities in the country. The membership base of ICPB has grown by 35% in 2019 as compared to 2018 and we are positive of boosting this number further. The members of our Governing Board are Pan India, which says a lot about our approach towards boosting MICE Traffic in India. We are extremely grateful to MoT for always showing support and solidarity towards MICE Trade Industry and we hope that going forward, they will continue to help us further. The year 2020 at ICPB is going to be all about Training and Education and we are looking forward to the second ICPB



International Roadshow from May 5 – 8, 2020,” shared Girish.

The newly elected Vice Chairman of the Bureau, Amaresh Tiwari, had an inspiring “wish list”, which he announced during the meet, laying down his expectations and targets in his new role. “MICE or we can say business tourism is the future of travel. We would be working towards a promoting Indian cities for MICE and have a target to bring atleast of 5 Indian cities into the top 100 list of MICE cities in the world by 2023. We would like infrastructure status to be given to our convention centres and hotels to enable long term fund flow to create world class infrastructure. Besides this, creation of a suitable sub-brand for MICE promotion under the Incredible India master brand to make communication streamlined; provision of IGST for DMCs, PCOs on hotels to provide ITC for companies not registered in a particular state; empower Indian missions abroad to promote India MICE stories; etc. are some integral points on my wish-list, which we will all work towards achieving,” elucidated Mr. Tiwari.

He further went on to explain in detail regarding some of the recent initiatives that have been undertaken by the new Governing Board, such as, 10 new committees have been formed under the Bureau, which will be responsible to look into their respective fields of work. These include Membership Development Committee; Research & Publication Committee; Training / Skill Development Programs / Interactive



Meetings Committee; Social Media and e-newsletter Committee; Government Liaison Committee; Hotel, Venue Liaison Committee; Grievance & Ethics Committee; ICPB Ancillary Suppliers Club Committee; Marketing, Communication and Road Show Committee and Advisory Committee.

Another initiative was the launch of the ICPB E-Newsletter – MICE Pulse, which has been introduced with the sole aim of highlighting the activities being undertaken by the members of not just the Governing Bureau but the complete association as well. With an exhaustive content plan, the bi-monthly Newsletter will be circulated far and wide to position ICPB strongly and also increase its visibility in the tourism sector – both nationally and internationally.

Ashish Gupta, Consulting CEO, FAITH, was the Guest Speaker at the event and shared an interesting presentation on India’s contribution and position in the Global MICE market. Talking about the strength of Domestic MICE market he said, “If you are not strong domestically, you will not be powerful globally. You – the MICE stakeholders must have specialists, specialisation and expertise for your clients. If figures are correct, around 42% of the leisure traveller coming to India are “Business Travellers”. Thus the growth and future of MICE in India has immense potential.”

Anuj Wadhwa, Hony. Treasurer, ICPB, giving the Vote of Thanks, expressed gratitude and hope for not just a bright future of MICE in India but also a strong foundation of ICPB, towards which the members are working.

With reduced GST, Hospitality Industry steps into an Environment Conscious Business Driven 2020

Bidding adieu to the teens and entering the new decade with a lot of hope and zeal, hoteliers across India are anticipating an exceptional 2020. Hotel industry in India witnessed a dismal 2019 due to GST and taxation issues but with the New Year settled in, plenty is expected as the hospitality industry is going through major technological changes. In an exclusive chat with BOTT India, Managing Heads of renowned properties share their thoughts on the plans and policies for 2020... Here's a look...

Priyanka Saxena and Arushi Bajaj

Tourism is the backbone of our economy and the millennials swear by it. With the increased travelling amongst millennials and the rapid technological advancement in the sector, hotels across the country have been experiencing good numbers. According to reports, 55 per cent of millennials extend business trips for extra leisure time, giving hotels more revenue. The year 2020 will expect even more travellers who will combine business and leisure travel into one trip – further boosting “bleisure tourism” in India. Sustainability is another major concern that is being seriously taken up by many hotels as they collectively ponder upon fulfilling their environmental responsibilities.

MEENA BHATIA, GENERAL MANAGER AND VICE PRESIDENT, LE MERIDIEN, NEW DELHI

2020 begins with a renewed promise of good times for the industry, the efforts of the industry leadership in getting the much awaited attention of the government towards tourism will show results in the coming year in the form of – reduction of taxes, e-visa and dynamic visa fee structure, opening of new routes



will all bring the rightful gains. 2020 and the decade ahead is time to build and strengthen the tourism industry. Hopefully this year should see tourism getting its status as a mainstream industry.

VIJAY WANCHOO, SR. EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT & GM, THE IMPERIAL NEW DELHI

2020 will bring in more challenges with the leisure travellers becoming increasingly aware and conscious of their needs, while being ready to explore newer destinations with a gamut of offerings. Online Travel market and Digital/ social media domains will retain their popularity while the industry shall continue to bring in



Conscious Travel and earth friendly initiatives, for leisure and business guests alike. The opportunities for established hotels lie in understanding the changing needs of the guest while offering a distinguished product offering and constantly upgrading the services. Our strategy at The Imperial has always rested on providing our guests a unique stay and a personalised service. It is all about creating a home away from home for our loyal guests and we shall continue to do the same in the New Year with sustainable operations, unique product offering and planet friendly initiatives, for an iconic Imperial experience.”

GREESH BINDRA, VICE PRESIDENT - OPERATIONS, THE SURYAA NEW DELHI

After a slow 2019 finally 2020 looks a little more buoyant. The first quarter of the year is rather busy with International MICE events and a huge number of wedding dates. We are all geared up to cater to these heavy demands. E-Visa made inbound tourism easier and the booking window has decreased considerably, from major inbound destinations.



RANJAN BANERJEE, GENERAL MANAGER, CROWNE PLAZA TODAY NEW DELHI OKHLA

As we step into a new decade, we need to create a sustainable ecosystem in the hotel industry. This starts right from zero waste mechanism in kitchen to eco-friendly practices in operations, from locally sourced ingredients in menu planning to innovative concepts such as Farm to Fork. I wish to see India as a leading player in the world in innovations concerning food production, waste management, environment friendly practices, unique experiences and social media footprints. Hospitality is a very demanding industry, hence an engaged and motivated team is the core ingredient for success. It is very important to set up a culture focusing on mental wellbeing, job enrichment and growth opportunities for our colleagues. Training and empowering of local youth and engaging with local communities is a must. Political stability and infrastructural development will be key for the growth of tourism and hospitality sector in the country. Growth in the MICE segment will be a crucial factor for the growth of tourism and hospitality sector in the country. Promoting local cuisines and thus reviving the lost recipes is a very important task. This could also be a great takeaway for the international guests who would get an opportunity to experience the country like a local.



AMIT KUMAR, SR. GM, THE MUSE SAROVAR PORTICO NEW DELHI - KAPASHERA

Hospitality industry welcomes current government's outlook towards expansion of tourism in the country. GST rate reductions have shown positive results precisely for mid-market and luxury hotel segments. GST on F&B reduced from 18 to 5 per cent and has led to growth in banquet revenues and benefits are passed on to the guests at The Muse Sarovar Portico, Kapashera. GST rate cuts on rooms have helped us to increase Revpar and room nights due to growth in demand for domestic travel and expect this to grow further as it reduces total cost payable by the guest. Travel Agents and Online travel agents room nights production has increased marginally due to correction in GST. Though it is quite early to forecast the changes as its peak season for hotels, we are optimistic towards 2020 with a ray of hope to increase overall hotel business as government has shown dedication towards boosting domestic and inbound tourism by spreading the awareness to international partners in hospitality business.



RAJAN MALHOTRA, DIRECTOR OF SALES AND MARKETING, SHANGRI-LA'S - EROS HOTEL, NEW DELHI

The hospitality industry in India is expected to grow exponentially in the coming year. The occupancy levels will see a growth in 2020, however, the ADR shall remain steady. Domestic travel is forecast to increase in the coming year. Emphasis shall be to connect with guests in engaging ways through content marketing on digital and social platforms. Food and Beverage shall be a major focus. Various activities such as conceptual dining pop-ups, wellness menus, and interactive brunches are in the offing at our property.





NARENDRA PRABHU, GM, SIGNATURE CLUB RESORT

Slashing of Goods and Services Tax rates was definitely a

boon for the Hospitality industry which will surely attract more overseas tourists coming to India during 2020. Many brands will shift their focus to secondary and tertiary cities and also towards holiday destinations to absorb mid-scale hospitality segments, budget brands, affordable but yet quality and branded segments where the volume is guaranteed. Digital platforms will continue to play its vital role in influencing the customers to choose a destination or a brand. Presence on social media will become prerogative for any brand to sustain as it defines the online character of a brand and the effectiveness of how well it is communicated to its target clientele will define its success or failure. Increasingly, customers are concerned with environmental issues and want to know if the businesses they deal with are behaving ethically. For this reason, sustainability has been one of the most noticeable hospitality trends of recent times, with a growing number of hospitality businesses promoting their eco-friendliness and this trend will undeniably



continue to dominate during 2020 as well. Trips which combine business travel with leisure activities, and it is increasingly popular, especially among the millennial generation. As an example, a traveller may initially visit a location to attend a business meeting or conference, but then extend their stay to turn it into a "Bleisure."

VINEET VERMA, CEO AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BRIGADE HOSPITALITY SERVICES LIMITED

We expect to see a growing adoption of several innovative "green" initiatives, with specific focus on zero plastic, reduction in Carbon footprint, reduced wastage of food etc. We also see more and more operators turning their attention to adding an 'experiential' touch with flavours of 'local culture and traditions' even in city based business hotels. Digital transformation will continue to grow in 2020. A number of leading operators are working on their own Apps that will allow you to even check-in and gain access to your room and services, without having to go through front office etc. Customer experience and convenience is high on the agenda.



New team takes over OTOAI



A new team has taken over the reigns at the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) wherein Mr. Riaz Munshi, MD, N. Chirag, has been elected as the President for the term 2019 – 2021. “I have been working with OTOAI in one capacity or the other since inception and irrespective of the post, I will continue to contribute to the success of the association and growth of the outbound industry in India,” said the newly-elected President. Mr. Sanjay Datta was the Election Officer of the OTOAI Elections 2019 – 2021.

Mr. Himanshu Patil, MD, Kesari Tours Pvt. Ltd. will continue his stint as Vice-President of the association. Mr. Shravan Bhalla, MD, High Flyer who was earlier in the EC will now serve as the General Secretary, OTOAI followed by Mr. Vineet Gopal who has once again entered the working committee as the Joint Secretary for the term 2019 – 2021. The post of Treasurer has been retained by Mr. Sidharth Khanna, Partner, Khanna Enterprises.

The EC has seen women participation growing strong. While it has retained its previous two members – Ankush Nijhawan, Managing Director of Travel Boutique Online a Unit of Lap travels and Mr. Abdul Karim, Director, Creative Tours & Travels India Pvt. Ltd., Mumbai; Arshdeep Anand, CEO, Hma Spectrum and Monia Kapoor, Proprietor, Travel O Holidays have increased the ratio of women participation in the association. Mr. Gurdeep Gujral, Director, Gujral Tours and Travels Pvt. Ltd. and Mr. Mahendra Vakharia, MD, Pathfinders Holidays Pvt. Ltd. complete the EC count with their participation. The new team took charge effective December 10, 2019.

Antalya, Turkey readies for OTOAI Convention from March 15-18, 2020

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) is holding its 5th Convention in Antalya, Turkey from March 15 – 18, 2020. Realising the importance of Millennials in today's travel scenario, the theme of the Convention this year is “Creating Travel Synergies for New Millennials”. The Convention will focus on finding ways and means of tapping this “millennials” segment and through which, he can increase the business numbers.

“The Convention this year will not have Business Sessions but ‘Knowledge Talks’, which are scheduled in the first half of Day 2 of the Convention on March 16, 2020 while in the second half the Travel Agents will get an opportunity to interact with the Turkish Travel Trade. We are receiving extremely positive response to the convention and are confident that it will be one of the best-ever Conventions for OTOAI,” said Himanshu Patil, Vice Chairman and Convention Chairman 2020, OTOAI. The Convention Hotel selected by Team OTOAI will be Titanic Mardan Palace, which is one of the finest hotels in Antalya.



Himanshu Patil, OTOAI, Convention Chairman 2020

Meena Bhatia: My profile was always challenging enough so I never felt the need to look for another opportunity

There are not many people I know (or even you would know) who can or have stayed loyal to a company for a period spanning over three decades. They don't make men (or women!) like that anymore. So when you do meet such an individual, the respect quotient goes to another altitude completely. Having recently met and interviewed Ms. Meena Bhatia, General Manager and Vice President, Le Meridien, New Delhi, I was yet again assured of the fact that quality deliverance comes with consistency. It is the steady top management at the Le Meridien, New Delhi that has helped it stand through tough storms and excel in its business, year on year.

BOTT is happy to feature Ms. Bhatia's journey in its GM Special Series.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

As I sat down to interview the veteran lady of the hospitality industry, I couldn't help but notice the warmth with which she treated and spoke to her staff members. Perhaps, this warm nature of hers is the secret behind being the favourite of not just many people in the travel trade but also at the property. Youngest of the four sisters, Meena was the naughtiest and most talkative of the lot! A people's person from the start, even as a child, she loved playing outside and making new friends. The regular outings during the Summer Vacations was something she looked forward to immensely. After finishing her English (Hons) from Hindu College Delhi University, Meena, through some friends in the hospitality industry, started developing a keen interest in the field. However, the hospitality industry was not something that her father approved of. But fate had other plans. Her father moved to Kolkata and Meena started doing odd jobs. In 1981 she joined the Oberoi Kolkata at the Front Desk for some time before moving on to another hotel in the city.

"Though I knew I wanted to be in the hotel industry, there was not much seriousness towards the job. In 1983, we came back to Delhi and I did a diploma course in Hotel Management. One day, we were just passing by this beautiful building in central Delhi, which was said to open as Le Meridien and I immediately thought in my mind that one day I am going to work here," she reminisces



with a smile.

Hyatt New Delhi was one of the newest hotels in town and Meena got her first serious job at the front desk at the property. “Hyatt had amazing systems, procedures, which were the best not only at that time but even today too. It was a great learning experience and I learned many things during my tenure. I started at the front desk and moved upwards to become the concierge, managing Regency Club Lounge and finally sales. I did not like the “sales” profile immediately, but the management was confident of the same. Soon I became Assistant Manager – Sales. Because of my nature, I had a wealth of friends in the industry and shared a great relationship with my clients. Unknowingly, I had made a name for myself. Back then, hotel industry was much personalised and guests too treated the hotel staff differently as there were less gadgets to keep them absorbed. Taking feedback was a constructive way of building relations,” the lady recalls.

In 1991, the owner at Le Meridien New Delhi were putting a new team in place to take the hotel to the height it deserved and it was then that Ms. Meena Bhatia was appointed as head of sales. She took up the challenge, put in a lot of hard work, set-up systems and procedures in place. Putting together big events became its USP and soon the hotel received world-wide publicity for cutting the tallest cake ever on its 10th anniversary. An important move made by the team was to renovate the property, which was a herculean task. However, she gives the credit to Mr. Tarun Thakral for carrying out the drill amazing well. Renovations carried out from 2004 – 2010 in a very phased manner and none of the hotel guests left because of construction noise etc., as it was all taken care of. Says a lot about the commitment of the staff.

As Meena Bhatia looks back upon it all, she is a contented soul, happy with all that she has achieved. Married in 1993, she made two things clear to her husband right from the start – that she will be a career woman always and she will take care of her mother. “In 1994, my daughter Ratna was born and my husband and family were extremely supportive during that time. My husband helped me a lot with the baby as I juggled between home and work and I

would take my daughter with me on my travel trips,” Meena adds with a smile.

Professionally, it’s been an inspiring journey for the veteran lady. From sales head to Resident Manager to now the General Manager and Vice President – it has all been a beautiful ride. There have been periods of boom, of depression caused by spurt in competition, but the property – Le Meridien New Delhi has remained consistent and reliable in its delivery and performance. Eventually, as more Meridiens opened across the country, the awareness and brand loyalty of the customers also increased. However, what also evolved over the period of time are the challenges that the hotels in India face. “The biggest challenge is manpower. Realising this, we started moving to campus recruitment and

recruiting young staff, many of whom have stayed back with us. Those who don’t, we don’t fret over it. It’s okay. We accept the change and take it as a compliment that the staff trained by us in being picked by bigger hotel chains,” she says with her effervescent smile with not a trace of malice to anyone.

Concluding the interview with the quintessential questions of what made her hang-on to her job for 35 years she says, “I didn’t move out because of my sense of commitment to the owners. My profile was always challenging enough so I never felt the need to go out and look for another opportunity that will inspire me professionally or motivate me personally. Innovation was the key word at our hotel and that is something that kept me going always. Still do,” she completes.





Priyanka Saxena Ray

Sitting across the table in Mr. Wanchoo's office, one can feel the energy of the office – his phone buzzing constantly and his team rushing in with requests – things which he handles as calmly as a person would handle his routine business. Well, this is his routine, the rush and frenzy have kept him going all these years isn't it? He smiles in reply and we start talking about his journey – right from the start.

Born and brought up in Delhi, Vijay Wanchoo recalls his house as a "sports hub" where he was well-trained in drawing a badminton-court on ground and could almost do it with his eyes closed. After passing from school – St. Columba's School, Vijay, like any other teenager had a dream of buying the then popular "Bobby Bike" and was keen on doing whatever measly job he could, till he was finally of age of joining the army, which is what he wanted to do. But life had other plans.

"My father took me to meet his friend whose son was doing

VIJAY WANCHOO:

A versatile GM who dons many hats

apprenticeship in ITDC and they asked me to join it as well. When we were sent to The Ashok hotel for our training, I said no to the 'waiter dress' and luckily I was given the captain's uniform to wear, which I soiled completely after clumsily handling a tea/coffee tray that ended up falling on me only," recalls Vijay laughingly.

The initial few months at The Ashok was an interesting time for him as he served many celebs and earned good tips in return. Deciding that it is the hospitality industry only where he will base his future, Vijay Wanchoo did his three year Hotel Management diploma from PUSA New Delhi and enjoyed every bit of it. It was during his training in Shimla IN 1977 that he learnt to play Billiards and is today a pro at the game.

Time moved on as he was appointed as a Kitchen Trainee at The Oberoi New Delhi. Though Vijay was looking for an opening as a Management Trainee but soon started enjoying his stint at the Kitchen. "One day I approached Mr. Biky Oberoi (Mr. P. R. S. Oberoi- Chairman of the Oberoi Group) and said I wanted to be sent abroad to study and sharpen my skills further. "He saw potential in me and I along with a fellow colleague was sent to London's Westminster College to study for a month. I rounded-off my period at The Oberoi after working at The Oberoi Srinagar for 6 months and I enjoyed every bit of my time there," he shares.

He went on to work with The LaLiT, which was then Holiday Inn, as Assistant F&B Manager for 8 years, moving on to become the Food and Beverage Manager before joining The Imperial. In 1994 he won the H&FS award as Best FNB Manager.

He worked at The Imperial for three and half years wherein his biggest responsibility was opening of the Spice Route.

Vijay Wanchoo left The Imperial and joined ITC. He was made the GM Operations of the Fortune Hotels and in the year 2000 he opened The Marriott Saket (now Sheraton). "ITC

He is one of the best-looking General Managers I have ever come across, for how many GMs would you know who can boast about appearing in an AD and even a movie?! Not to forget that he manages one of the most iconic hotels in Delhi. However, none of the achievements have given him any airs as he continues to mingle with his staff, celebrate festivals with his guests and staying motivated, putting his best foot forward at all times. Vijay Wanchoo, Sr. Executive Vice President & General Manager, The Imperial New Delhi is a stalwart and it was a complete honour interviewing him for our BOTT GM Special Series.

sent me to Cornell, ITHACA, USA, in 2006 for a two-week General Managers program, which was a great addition to my portfolio.

“Soon after, I got a job offer from The LaLiT as VP Development and it was during that period when the hotel underwent re-branding. In 2009, I joined back The Imperial and there has been no looking back for me since then,” he says.

The Imperial is a class apart hotel in the capital. The property has been around since a long time and the duration can be guessed by the fact that presently it is the 5th generation of the family managing it! However, the years have only added to the charm and allure of the hotel and Vijay Wanchoo, who after a decade is now the Sr. Executive Vice President and the GM, keeps introducing new ideas and initiatives to keep the guests entertained and come back for more.

“We are constantly upgrading the hotel to improve the amenities being offered. We have opened a big Spa, which is a very good facility and a great attraction for guests. Besides a huge swimming Pool and squash court, our Eliza program for the single lady travellers is a big hit wherein we have few exclusive rooms reserved for single lady travellers which are manned by a camera at their door, a lady butler and more initiatives to ensure



utmost safety.

We have a cricket team, which has won 2 finals in the inter-hotel matches. The mantra for me is innovation. We at The Imperial celebrate all major festi-

vals with our guests and staff, such as Holi, Diwali, Christmas and more. We take our Annual Day celebrations very seriously and plan plenty of activities around it,” shares the GM.

GREESH BINDRA: “Tourism is not a one night stand”

➤ **A ROBUST VOICE**, imposing personality and wit that can have anyone in splits, he is a true hospitality veteran, who even after having crossed the retirement stage, is busy upping the numbers of a luxury hotel. Greesh Bindra, Vice President – Operations, The Suryaa New Delhi, is a man with an extremely interesting past, dotted with anecdotes and instances that will leave you in awe and splits – both. Here’s a look at his journey.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

As I sat down for a chat with him on a nice sunny afternoon, I realised some of the traits in him that makes him an instant hit with his team, customers or whoever he meets. His ability to put you at ease, his openness as he talks about his childhood, family and youth and his endearing nature together makes him a gem of a person, who has a legacy of work behind him.

An Army General’s son, discipline was always a part of his life and indulging in sports his second nature. His father, who even today at the age of 91 plays Golf five days a week, inculcated the “sporty” streak in the young Greesh, which later on helped him plenty in life. In search of a career that was not limited to the armed forces, Greesh Bindra got admission in Delhi University and was one of the few privileged students to enjoy the facility of a single room – all thanks to his contribution towards the college sports teams – Hockey and Swimming (and the DU Water Polo Team).

“During my summer break in the second year of college, I had gone home to dad’s posting station in Jalandhar. Since there was not much to do, I would spend the days leisurely in



the club, until dad thought it was time to indulge me in yet another sport. He took me Golfing with him and I got hooked to it like anything (!),” he recalls with a smile. And it was Golf that opened the doors of the hospitality industry for him.

“One day, in the Final Year of my college, while playing Golf, I met the GM of Taj Mansingh (Mr. Ramesh Johar), who casually suggested that once my graduation got over, I should come and meet him at the hotel. But maybe it was my intuition or my calling, I went to meet him that very morning and by 3 in the afternoon, I was wearing the waiter’s uniform, as an employee of Taj Mansingh, reporting for my shift with not a clue in the world on what was I supposed to do,” Greesh reminisces with a throaty laughter. For a 19 year old boy, who belonged to a respectable and reputed family, Greesh had a tough time explaining his choice of work to his mother while his father, on the other hand, was more forthcoming, his only priority being his son’s happiness.

Soon enough, he moved to ITC and worked at The Maurya for close to three years. He was made the Senior Captain handling the then famous restaurant at the hotel called ‘Bali High’. It was while handling a private catering that he bumped into his uncle who convinced him into partnering and starting the “Whiter Water River Rafting” business in Rishikesh to which he agreed, bidding goodbye to the hospitality industry in 1985.

For close to 10 years Greesh Bindra handled the reigns at Wildlife Adventure Tours and it was here that he learned and sharpened his sales techniques, which eventually helped him crack the job of Director of Sales at the Hyatt Regency New Delhi in 1995. However, the circle of life brought him back to ITC, this time as the sales manager only to be promoted as the Regional Sales Head for North India in mere 8 months – a position that he not only earned by converting many business opportunities but also one that he had worked hard towards.

On December 15, 1999, he joined the IHG Group (then Park Royal) and there has been no looking back for him since then. From Executive Assistant Manager to RM and then finally the GM of Crowne Plaza New Delhi (now The Suryaa) in 2002. “I was given charge of various Crowne Plaza’s during my tenure with



Greesh Bindra with his family

the IHG. From Crowne Plaza Soaltee (in Kathmandu) to Crowne Plaza Gurgaon and finally as part of the pre-opening team of Crowne Plaza Greater Noida. I was made the Area GM for IHG North India Hotels in 2016 moving on to become Regional GM for North India, West India and Bangladesh before retiring in 2019,” he shares with a smile, obviously proud and happy with his tall work in the hospitality as. His stint, however, in the hotel business is far from over.

Now handling the reins at The Suryaa New Delhi, Greesh Bindra is full of energy and plans to get an international tie-up for the property very soon. “The biggest strength of our industry is the relationships. Tourism is not a one night stand. Though the understanding and the way of functioning of people

today is different from our times, yet, what they (the team) must understand is that a happy customer is the best advertising you can do for your hotel. More than hard core training, learning soft skills are very important. The team should stay motivated and happy as only then can they make customers happy. I have, at The Suryaa, introduced many inter-mingling activities, which allows the team members to interact and build a rapport with each other. I want my guys to be smiling,” concludes the dynamic hospitality veteran, whose affection for his team and passion for his profession in not just reflected in the manner of his speech but also in every small gesture that he makes – as simple as ordering a masala chai for you!

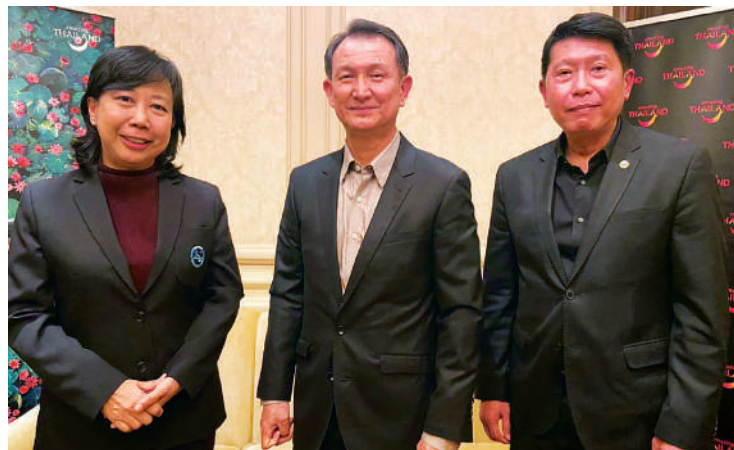
It comes as no surprise that Thailand witnesses a huge number of travellers from India every year. With 2019 being the record breaker year touching almost 2 million tourist footfall, the destination is now eyeing an increase by 10% in 2020 from the India market. In a recently held press conference and networking dinner, Klissada Ratanaparuk, Executive Director - ASEAN South Asia and South Pacific Region, Tourism Authority of Thailand and Isra Stapanaseth, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand briefed the Travel Trade media on the upcoming strategies and campaigns.

Thailand gears for its 2020 innings with new destinations and strategies

Arushi Bajaj

Living up to its tagline – ‘Open to the New Shades’, Thailand, which is much more than a fabulous shopping paradise, is hoping for a spectacular 2020. With the increasing number of flights and expansion through small and medium scale agents, the vision of TAT is to push newer destinations in Thailand in the India market. The strategy is to make people look beyond Bangkok Pattaya, especially those who have already been to the country.

Promoting Thailand as a premium destination for MICE,



Weddings and also Golf, Tourism Authority of Thailand is looking forward to maintaining the momentum through B2B as well as B2C promotion. The destination had hosted almost 400 Indian weddings last year. Sharing his views on the same, Isra Stapanaseth said, “After the introduction of the new routes, we are glad to admit that traffic from West Bengal and Guwahati is showing good flow. We look forward to maintaining the travel quotient and if the airlines find it profitable, they might introduce newer sectors between India and Thailand this year too.”

It would be safe to say that TAT is vigorously working on implementing a 360 degree approach for marketing the destination through website, social media and B2B networking inviting people for a quality experience in Thailand. The government is also trying to lend full support and ensure a safe environment for women travellers, especially solo women travellers. Besides its known factors such as sightseeing, shopping, luxury resorts and spas, the destination, in its endeavour to tap the “millennials”, is positioning “adventure” activities, especially diving, prominently to the segment, inviting them to come and experience the ‘sporty’ side of Thailand.

In India recently to launch its brand new 2020 USA and Canada Premium Escorted Journeys collection including a whole list of exciting and adventurous itineraries of new and unexplored destinations, Anthony Lim, Managing Director - Asia, Insight Vacations along with Rajeev Kohli, CIS, CITP, DMCP, Joint Managing Director, Signature Tours by Creative Travel explained the “differentiator” that makes them stand ahead of their competitors. The duo highlighted how Indian agents can indeed make quick and clean commissions by selling their itineraries, which are unique in every aspect. Here’s more on what they shared.

Insight Vacations introduces new itineraries for 2020, “Insight Choice” & more

Priyanka Saxena Ray

Insight Vacations, over the years, is known for drafting quality itineraries packed with familiarities that one wouldn’t get to experience otherwise. With new destinations, such as Columbia, Israel, South England, Jordan and Egypt added as part of their special itineraries, they are offering a never-before deal this time in the form of ‘Insight Choice’. “This is our differentiator where even while being a part of the group we offer our customers to pick a tour – a sightseeing activity – an excursion of their choice. Even though they are part of a larger group, an individual is free to indulge in an activity of his or her choice. For example if the wife wants to go shopping, the husband is not bound to accompany her and can instead opt for one of the other options available and spend his evening the way he likes – and vice versa. As we like to say – your tour, your choice, your way,” shared Anthony with a smile, the look of satisfaction clearly written on his face.

Supplementing his views, Rajeev added, “This is very unique. No one in Asia offering group tours offers this kind of facility I am sure. So what we are doing here is catering to individual tastes even while they are a part of the larger group. An evening before you can decide the tour you want to do the next day.”

Besides ‘Insight Choice’, another differentiator for the company are the Coaches they offer. “Our Coaches are our strongest USP. All our Coaches are 40 seater, which is actually the 52 seater coach but we have removed the extra seats to make more leg room for our passengers. We have wi-fi in our coaches where people can stretch their legs – no other company is offering this,” shares a proud Anthony.

Another thing which is unique about Insight Tours, besides 100% guest satisfaction is that they are a company that caters to clientele spread across the world. “As Creative we work with partners across the world including Insight and I don’t think there



Rajeev Kohli



Anthony Lim

is any other Tour Operator, anywhere, who has the bandwidth of Insight, selling the same brochure in five different continents. The depth of brochures and the programs they have sets them apart from everybody else. When you are on an Insight Tour, you are not on a bus of only Americans, or only Canadians or only Australians – it’s a Global trip and that is part of the experience. Travel is not just about going and seeing the Eiffel Tower but all about the experience, the company you are in, which makes all the difference. The repeat rate is 52% in India, which is a very high repeat rate for a product that is not targeted at the lower end of the market,” adds Rajeev.

Insight Tours are proud to offer journeys where many come as solo travellers and leave the trip as a couple. Yes! People have fallen in love on the tour and gotten married and then come back to celebrate their honeymoon or anniversary on an Insight Tour again.

In India recently to meet up with the important people of the travel trade and media, a high-profile delegation from San Francisco, laid down the strategy to make India its No.1 tourist source market. Here are some key points from their presentation, importance of India market for them and their strategy to take the numbers higher.

San Francisco hopes for India to become its No.1 source market

Priyanka Saxena Ray

A huge team comprising senior officials from the San Francisco Tourism recently toured the cities of New Delhi and Mumbai to interact with the local travel trade and members from the media. Put together by the team of Sartha Global, who officially handle destination San Francisco in the India market, one can safely say the interactions couldn't have been better planned or organised. The delegation consisted of Joe D'Alessandro, President and CEO, San Francisco Travel Association; Hubertus Funke, Executive Vice President and Chief Tourism Officer, San Francisco Travel Association; Howard Pickett, Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing Officer, San Francisco Travel Association; Percy Stevens, Director, Global Tourism Development, San Francisco Travel Association and Nan Keeton, Deputy Museum Director, External Relations, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

San Francisco, with 16 direct weekly flights from India (keeping the recently added United connection in mind) and as many as 6 five-star hotels opening this year alone, the destination is aptly positioned as the hub to receive maximum traffic from the country. The most walkable city, which is also the great starting point for many road trips, San Francisco has many Indian inspired restaurants and a nightlife that is buzzing with plenty of options.

"India lies in one of the top 10 markets for us. It currently stands at No. 7 in tourism and at No. 3 in terms of spend. Tourism is the number one driver of our economy thus



Sheema Vohra with the visiting delegation from San Francisco

India as a source market is very important for us. In 2019 so far, we have already seen a 5% growth in visitation and +7.7% in "spends". Ours is the only airport in the state of California that offers 16 direct weekly flights from India. There are some major events planned in the city for 2020 and we are looking forward to an increased traffic from the country," shared Joe.

A new highlight about the meet was the presentation on San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, which receives a million visitors every year. "We are not just a regular museum but a hub of innova-

tion and inspiration. It is interesting to note that around 48% of our visitors are under the age of 35 and the average stay time at the Museum is 90 mins. With 3 dining options inside, I can assure this museum has lots to keep you engaged," added Nan. Concluding the event, Sheema Vohra, Managing Director, Sartha Global Marketing LLP, shared, "San Francisco is one of the safest cities in America. Since people are on their feet all the time, one rarely do come across a scary patch. San Francisco is also a great destination for MICE as there are numerous convention venues and options available."

Adding another client to its kitty, Representation World will now be responsible for promoting Republic of Tunisia in the India market. Addressing the travel trade media and select travel agents from the industry, H.E. Mr. Nejmeddine Lakhal, Ambassador, Republic of Tunisia to India, highlighted the touristy aspects of the destination with the major highlight being that Indians indeed do not need a visa of any sorts for visiting Tunisia. Here's more on the destination in a BOTT exclusive.

Embassy of **Tunisia** partners with Representation World for promotions in India market

Priyanka Saxena Ray

The fact that Tunisia has been a visa-free destination for Indians since 2017 and yet receives only 3000 – 3500 Indian visitors a year is proof that the awareness levels regarding the place in low in the country – a statistic that is about to change in the near future as Representation World, takes over the marketing and promotion of the destination in India. Sharing his thoughts on the event, the Ambassador said, “For Indians, all they need is a valid passport, hotel bookings and confirmed return ticket to clear immigration at Tunisia. The destination receives close to 7.5 million tourists every year and we want to increase the percentage of Indians in this figure. From food, to five-star hotels, historic and UNESCO sites, buzzing nightlife, exotic spas, medical and cosmetic treatment centres, Tunisia offers it all. The city of Carthage, the National Bardo Museum, SidiBou Said – a cliff-top village, the various souks, El Djem Amphitheatre and Star Wars locations – a tourist will truly be spoilt for choice in Tunisia. One needs a minimum of 5 days to do justice to the sightseeing in the destination.”

Promoting the destination for filming of Bollywood movies and a probable destination wedding option is also on the cards for Tunisia. Well, with so much going on in view of marketing and positioning the destination in India, we are sure many of you would be booking a holiday to the destination in the coming months.



Istanbul: The melting pot of cultures, tradition, great food and archaeological marvels



› **A destination that has been on my bucket list for long, Istanbul is even more breath-taking in reality than what the pictures prepare you for. The modern sites alongside old-world charm and monolithic structures adds a mystic touch to the place, which is tough to put down in words. The food, shopping and people all together make the experience worthwhile. Here's what all fascinated me in Istanbul.**

Priyanka Saxena Ray

As soon as we stepped into the newly-constructed Istanbul Airport what struck me the most was the massiveness of the structure. It's huge and yet extremely well-managed. Enroute to our hotel – Hilton Istanbul Bosphorus, which is one of the oldest and classy hotels in the city, the country side that the destination had to offer was quite intriguing and left us asking many questions to our learned Guide.

According to data published not so long ago in one of the reputed journals, around 5.42 million tourists visited the Turkish city of Istanbul between January and May of this year, which is 11 per cent more compared to the same period in 2018. Moreover, the overall num-

ber of foreign tourists who visited Turkey has grown by 11.3 per cent compared to last year, totalling 12.8 million visitors over the five-month period. The total number of travellers coming to Turkey increased by 11.5 per cent.

Though we were pressed for time and had to see much in a shorter span, we still managed to catch the pulse of Istanbul through some of its “must” experiences that we indulged in –

Click an overview pic from Galata Tower

The Galata Street, which wasn't so popular until sometime back, has now become one of the most bustling points in Istanbul. Dotted with shops selling lights and bulbs, the Galata Square plays host to many delicious savouries that offer global cuisines. After

enjoying a good meal, gear up to climb atop Galata Tower to get a mesmerising view of the city below. Though there is a lift that will take you on most of your trip up, there are a couple of flight of stairs that one will have to go up in order to reach the top. Once at the top, the 360 degree narrow observatory offers some amazing view of the city below and clicking a selfie here is a must. The tower has been modified over the centuries, at one time being used as an observation tower to spot fires. Today, its upper reaches include a café, restaurant and a night club,

Enjoy an Ice cream at Galata Square

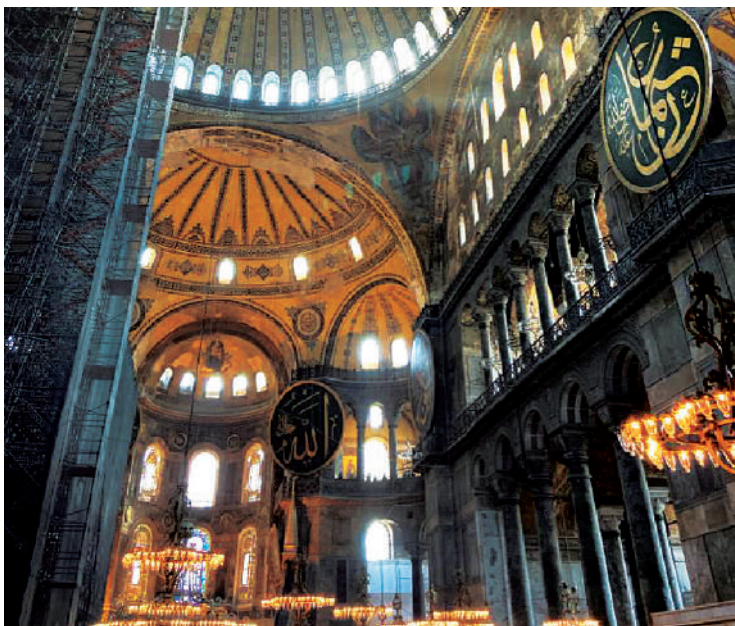
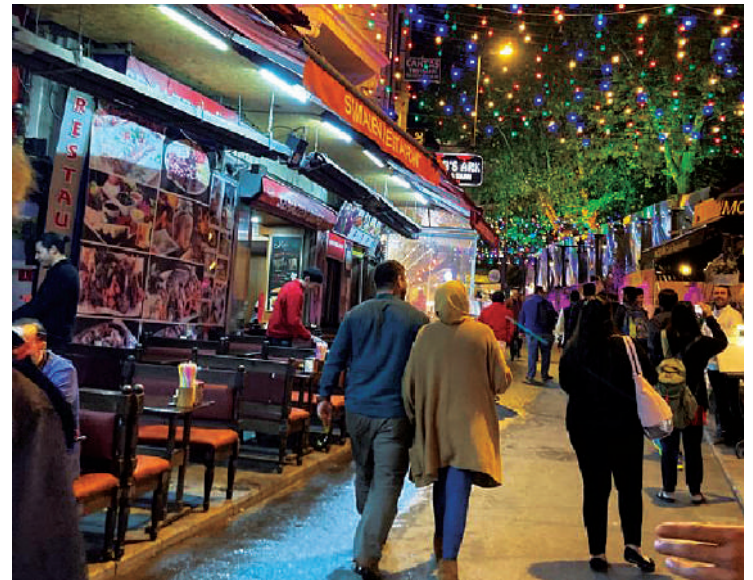
The Turkish ice-cream is famous world-over and is a must try at the Galata Square. After all that walk, you definitely deserve it!

Experience the traditional Hamaam

Turkish Baths or Hamaams are much more than what you would have imagined or what the movies might have prepared you for. If a Spa or a massage relaxes you then you must definitely experience a traditional 'Turkish Bath'. The actual set up of a circular room with large domed ceilings works as a steam room of its own. The centre of the Hamaam always has a marble block where you and others will lay on, with only a towel around your waist, allowing the steam in the rooms to soften your skin. Once ready, the lady workers at the Hamaam, who have been assigned to give you a bath, will first use a scrubber to remove all the dead skin from your body and wash you with plenty of soothing hot water. The steam, the scrubbing and the water truly offers a refreshing experience to those who come to indulge in a traditional Turkish Bath.

Visit Hagia Sophia

The construction of Hagia Sophia started out as a Greek Eastern Orthodox basilica that was home to the Patriarch of Constantinople when it was built in



537. For almost six decades in the 12th century, the monument was treated as a Roman Catholic Church. It then went on to become a mosque in 1453, remaining that way until 1931, the year when it was closed. However, owing to its architectural beauty and historic significance, the Hagia Sophia reopened as a museum in 1935.

At one time, it was the largest cathedral in the world that inspired construction of many other mosques, including the Blue Mosque, as it was such a great example of Byzantine architecture. It is most famous for its mosaics depicting various religious scenes and continues to draw visitors in large numbers who come to marvel at the marvel.

Say a prayer at the Blue Mosque

A landmark in Istanbul is the famous Blue Mosque, which was built in the early 17th century and even today remains an active house of worship. Though most parts of the Mosque are undergoing some restoration work, numerous visitors throng the place to not just say a prayer but also marvel its architectural

splendour. All visitors to the Mosque must remove their shoes and women must cover their hair. The marvel that houses more than 20,000 ceramic tiles in various tulip designs and 200 stained glass windows, all with intricate designs, is a sight to behold. The mosque was built by Sultan Ahmet and was named Blue Mosque because of the blue tiles on the dome and the upper levels of the interior.

Shop at the Grand Bazaar

No travel trip is complete without shopping for local souvenirs. When in Istanbul, shopping for knick-knacks at the Grand Bazaar is a must. The bazaar dates back to 1461 and is today home to two mosques, four fountains, two hamaams or steam baths, and the Cevahir Bedesten, where the rarest and most valuable items have been found traditionally. The place receives more than a quarter-million visitors a day who come looking for traditional and authentic Turkish jewellery, carpets that may or may not fly, spices, antiques and hand-painted ceramics, delicate lamps and more.



Dubai gears to welcome the world for Expo 2020 with newer attractions

There is less than a year to go until Expo 2020 Dubai opens its gates to the world for what promises to be a life changing show. Keeping the same in mind, there is a lot that is happening in Dubai in terms of growth and development and adding new touristy attractions to the destination. Mr. Issam Kazim, Chief Executive Officer – Dubai Corporation Tourism and Commerce Marketing was recently in the capital to brief the Indian travel trade and media in the progress made so far.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

From being the 7th most internationally visited destination in 2012 to becoming the 4th most internationally visited destination in 2018, destination Dubai has indeed climbed the ladder of popularity on a fast pace. Last year, we closed the year at 15.92 million visitors, which was a record number for us. “We have seen an overall 3% growth in the first half of this year and while we would like the numbers to be higher, we realise that these are tough times globally. However, our strategy is mapped out. There are four key areas we have to focus on – first being to increase the number of visitors, second is ensuring that they are spending a longer duration of time in Dubai, third is to explore the city wider and further, beyond the landmarks they are familiar with and lastly to focus on repeat visitation also. To achieve this, we obviously cannot function in isolation. Dubai’s success has been built on public – private relationship and thus we did a series meetings with the private and other government sectors and thrust is on to look beyond the 6-7 traditional markets for us while obviously focussing on these sectors also,” elucidated Issam.

There are lots of projects in the pipeline keeping the Expo 2020 in mind and also beyond. Dubai is a hub for some of the greatest hotels and there are newer properties coming up every now and then. The ones that will open soon includes The Andaz from Hyatt, a new completely different structure of The Atlantis is also coming up in the same vicinity as an extension and many other Boutique Hotels, where the visitors will have a completely new experience. From one of its most popular annual event – The Dubai Shopping Festival to its landmarks such as the Burj Khalifa, The Atlantis, The Palms etc., the destination has so much more to offer to the discerning traveller. “We are happy with the outcome of the Shahrukh Khan Campaign as I feel one must always stay in touch with their target market as India is a very important market for us. Around 25% of our visitors are repeat customers out of which 12% is from India, which is a good number. So even though there has been a slight dip in the tourist traffic from India, we will not slow down on our promotions,” he adds with



a determined smile. One of their recent initiatives has been to float the Dubai College of Tourism where programs have been curated to make people ambassadors of Dubai – it has been an extremely successful initiatives and offers a plethora of programs to choose from.

A detailed interview talking about the EXPO 2020 and all that it has in store will follow shortly. Meanwhile, start your planning to attend what promises to be a life-changing experience.

Mauritius eyes more numbers from India in 2020, especially MICE and Honeymooners

Pristine beaches, golfers' paradise, honeymooners' hub, ideal for weddings and world-famous for luxury tourism – Mauritius, has a lot to offer. Augmenting the historical India-Mauritius ties, the cultural and religious connect that have grown strong between the two over a period of time, Mr. Arvind Bundhun, Director, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, shares his vision, strategy and expectations for the year 2020.

Arushi Bajaj

Concluding SATTE with a record breaking footfall at its booth, Mauritius Tourism Board, in a separate press conference, expressed its wishes to accentuate its presence in India. Since, the accessibility is like never before with a frequency of 10 flights a week, Mauritius wishes to attain a considerable footfall from India in the year 2020.

Elucidating his point of view further, Mr. Arvind said, "The year 2019 was a very challenging year due to the lack of accessibility and emerging markets have gone down drastically. While connectivity was a major issue, yet response from the India market was quite good. However, MICE was hit majorly."

Commenting on increasing the footfall in Mauritius he said, "We have been trying hard to increase the numbers to Mauritius. In our endeavour to up the figures, we have also come up with the idea to give incentives to any travel agent bringing a minimum of 100 tourists to Mauritius," adding, "Activities for the India market are earmarked in terms of promotion for 2020. We also intend to further promote Mauritius as a popular honeymoon destination. Around 80,000 tourists came from India last year, which is an encouraging number but we want more! Be it gastronomy, hospitality, weddings or golf – Mauritius has a lot to offer to a discerning traveller."

Concluding his presentation he declared that Mauritius is synonymous to mini United Nations and that they are extremely hopeful for 2020. He feels that leisure segment is quite a big chunk of travel and Indian traveller is an adventurous traveller and they can savour the destination like no one. Mauritius is a completely "safe" destination for solo women travellers and the country would like to more numbers in this segment.

"Mauritius is a high end destination and we strive for excellence in the long run. We have some amazing three star and luxury hotels. We are completely palatable and expect a certain quality of tourism. We are definitely not looking at mass but classy tourism as millennials look for authenticity and we have ample of it," he concludes.





Visit California's inaugural India Sales Mission saw great participation and response

Visit California recently hosted its first Sales Mission in Delhi and Mumbai amidst great response and enormous participation. The huge delegation was led by Visit California President & CEO Caroline Beteta and included California Destination CEOs and senior travel executives from the state's leading destinations, tourist attractions and hotels.

Arushi Bajaj

The Indian market is critically important to California tourism. In 2018, 353,000 Indian travellers visited California, spending \$1.1 billion in the state, with an average stay of 23.5 days. Current projections show an annual 5 to 6% increase in visitation forecast for the foreseeable future. It is estimated that by 2023, Indian visitors will contribute over \$1.5 billion to the state's tourism economy.

Sharing her thoughts and vision for the India market, Caroline Beteta said, "Visit California has identified India as its top opportunity market for visitation growth. The delegates on this Sales Mission are eager to meet with their Indian counterparts, to create

and grow relationships that make it easier for Indian visitors to come to California. We are tapping into various segments including millennial travellers, self-drive enthusiasts, and luxury lovers, taking advantage of this excellent opportunity to reinforce California's position as a premier destination for Indian travellers."

The delegation met up with the travel agents, tour operators, media and wedding planners on the multi-city mission.

Commenting on the occasion, Cynthia Schmitt, Director, International Sales and Marketing, Citadel Outlets said, "We did very well in the year 2019, especially as the Indian visitors' footfall increased substantially. Considering that the India market is a relationship building market, we have been successful in not just maintaining relationships but also eventually increasing business."

Adding to the sentiments, Jodi Cumming, Senior Director, Tourism Development PIER 39 said, "The major challenge was the exchange rate as there was a worldwide economic slowdown. To top it up, rains and bad weather affected our market drastically. People today are still concerned and sceptical regarding the Visas, which also acts as a deterrent for them. However, despite all this, we are eyeing a good 2020 with an increase of 4-5 per cent from the India market."

The Sales Mission ran in conjunction with a fact-finding mission in Delhi, hosted by California's Bay Area Council. Both missions were joined by California Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis, adding additional diplomatic impact to each delegation's presence. In Delhi, Beteta was joined by the Executive Director of the California Film Commission, Colleen Bell. Beteta and Bell met the Film Producers Guild of India to unveil the "California Incentive Collection," a set of offerings and incentives from California destinations and the California Film Commission.

Odisha Tourism aims to increase domestic footfalls and promote Eco-Tourism

Odisha, today, is not just referred as one of the ‘char-dham’ destinations but more so for all the developments that it has made over the years - all thanks to its stable government! You name a tourism product and Odisha has it. In an exclusive chat with BOTT India, Rina Mohapatra, Jt. Resident Commissioner, Government of Odisha, who was attending the recently concluded SATTE, gave some interesting insights on the 2020 perspectives, plans and aspirations.

Arushi Bajaj

Striking a conversation with BOTT, Rina Mohapatra, said, “The year 2019 was an amazing year for the tourism department and the outcomes are visible considering whatever we are doing, people are liking it so far.” Odisha, as we all know, is blessed with a 485km long coastline and the weather is moderate throughout the year. Thus, making optimum use of the same, the Odisha Tourism is developing the coastline into an attractive tourist hub.

“Konark which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site used to be a day tourism destination. We have events such as Konark Dance Festival and International Sand Art Festival happening in December. Now we have come up with a glamping retreat at Marine Drive Konark named as Marine Drive Eco Retreat. This has converted Konark into a beach side destination hav-



ing luxury tents, beach shacks, water sports, adventure sports, conferences facilities with mouth watering cuisines without disturbing the ecosystem.”

Adding further she said, “Odisha Tourism, in a joint venture with the Forest Department, aims to promote eco-tourism by organising camps in the natural areas such as forests, beaches and hills. Another advantage of this initiative is that it involves the local people of the area who not only get employment through the same but also feel involved and important. Going forward, we are also in talks with the Houseboat agencies and those involved in Cruise Tourism to come forward and invest in Odisha.”

Besides Konark, Odisha receives perhaps the maximum footfall in the holy city of Puri, which while being famous for religious tourism is also equally popular for its clean and



pristine beaches. Talking about developing tourism in Puri, she said, “The Shamuka Beach project aims to have a beach city over 1500 sq km having hotels, conventions, golf course and other beach side activities. This we are hoping will attract a lot of traffic and simultaneously ease overcrowding in Puri.” She also mentioned, “Royal Palaces have been converted to luxury hotels and this will further boost the level of investment in the destination.”

Ensuring that people across India and even those outside get to know about various activities and initiatives being taken up in Odisha, the state is investing heavily in its marketing and promotion. “We have participated in Metro Train wrapping in Mumbai and we are in talks for similar proposal in Delhi as well. In London also we did the bus wrap during the Hockey world cup. In addition to this, various airports and lounges across numerous states are already packed with branding Odisha as an attractive touristy destination,” she added.

She insisted that Odisha is perhaps one of the safest destinations for women travellers across the region. The people as well as touristy sights are well-equipped and monitored at most times so there is no fear of a mishap. The Government of Odisha has been careful and alert regarding the safety of its tourist and it is something that has always remained of paramount importance.

“Another noteworthy feature has been the MO BEACH CAMPAIGN, which is one of the largest beach cleaning activities along the Puri beach that was held by the volunteers from different walks of life. It was a huge success and drew positive comments and views for the destination,” she added.



Commenting on the plans for the year 2020, she illuminated, “Currently we are focusing on increasing the visibility of the niche products available in Odisha as that is a big differentiator for us. While the domestic traffic to the state is heartening, as of now, only one per cent of foreign travellers are visiting Odisha, which is set to change given the increasing international sports activities that are being planned and implemented across the city.”

Concluding the chat on a positive note, she said, “By the year 2020, Odisha would witness 2.5cr footfall, which is a great number. We also have an award winning end-to-end website wherein hoteliers and tour operators can host and promote their product for free.”

“I invite you to come and explore Odisha – India’s best kept secret” – Rina Mohapatra, Jt. Resident Commissioner, Government of Odisha.

New tourism offerings and revamped policies boost tourism in Rajasthan

The majestic royalty that the region of Rajasthan is brimming with is not hidden from anyone – its palaces, forts, havelis and extremely warm hospitality makes it an ideal tourism destination. However, the destination is also blessed to be run by officials who believe in continuously adding to its splendid offerings in form of destination, hotel or experience. Mr. Sanjay Pande, Additional Director (Development), Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan, spoke exclusively to BOTT about the “latest offerings” by Rajasthan Tourism.

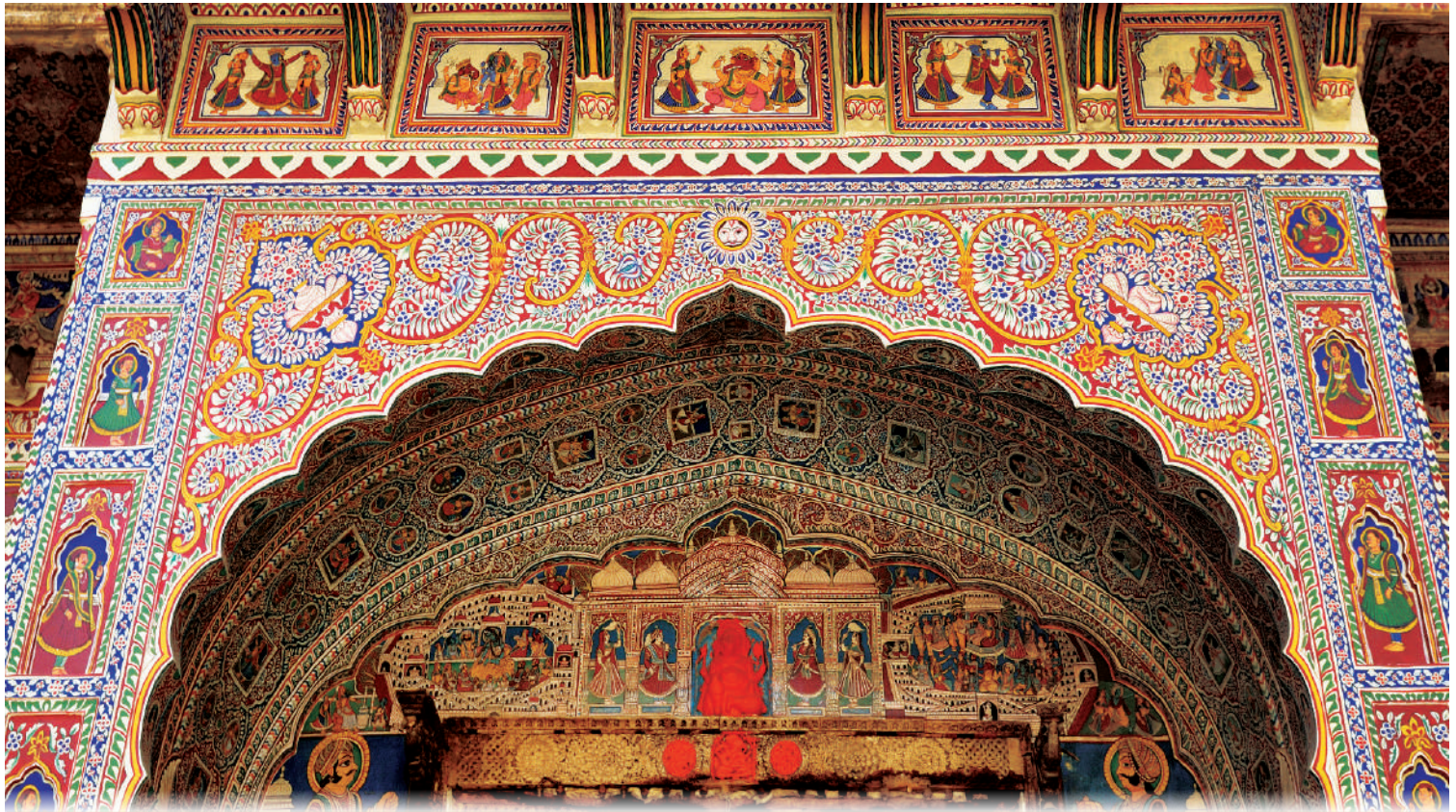
Arushi Bajaj

Rajasthan is blessed with rich culture and heritage and 78 per cent of India's heritage hotels. As a tourist destination, the state never disappoints anyone, a testimony of which is the fact that it witnessed over 5 crore tourist arrivals in the year 2018. Sharing these figures with us, Sanjay Pande, said, “I am glad to share that UNESCO and Rajasthan government have joined hands to promote music, art and various forms of craft along with other intangible cultural heritage of the state to spur socio-economic growth of several artist communities with a view to move people towards rural tourism, which is a very strong springboard for us, for tourism expansion in terms of handicrafts and culture.”

Elaborating further he said, “In addition to the development of rural tourism, another latest offering by Rajasthan is the Sambar Salt Lake area, which was a development project done under Ministry of Tourism's SWADESH infrastructure and is now complete – awaiting exploration. Located just 50 km from Jaipur, it is the only Salt Lake in the country. A lot of new and unusual experiential activities have been developed which can be undertaken around Sambar as it's an unexplored weekend destination. All facilities have been put in place there.” Delightful visuals and a small video of this new and amazing offering by Rajasthan Tourism was also shared with the delegates present at the IATO convention in Kolkata.

The region of Barmer in Rajasthan, which is also called as mini Dubai in terms of oil production, will soon play host to one of the biggest and most advanced refineries in the country, construction of which has already started. “This is a lesser known destination. We are also looking at promoting petro-tourism so that people come and see how the oil is





ENJOY A HERITAGE HOLIDAY @ SAMBHAR RESORT

Sambhar Salt Lake in Rajasthan is 80 km from Jaipur and 65 km from Ajmer, and envelopes the beautiful and historical Sambhar Lake Town. This inland lake receives water from five rivers, namely Samaod, Khari, Mantha, Khandela, Medtha, and Roopangarh. The latest attraction to the region is the Sambhar Heritage Resort comprising Swiss Tents that offer both authentic as well as luxury stay experience in this unique region, which is home to India's largest inland salt lake.

The Sambhar Lake is known for the production of brine/salt and also houses one of the largest salt manufacturing units in the country. Apart from this unit, tourists also flock the Sambhar lake to get a glimpse of the famed 'Shakambhari Devi' temple and for bird-watching. Flamingoes, pelicans and the waterfowls are commonly sighted at the Sambhar Lake.

Another newly added attraction is the The Sambhar Heritage Resort, which brings to you a carefully crafted luxury experi-



ence right in the middle of nature's marvel, the Sambhar Salt Lake. It gives you 3 equally remarkable stay options to choose from, the Swiss Tents, Heritage Suites or the Kothis, each furnished with the best of modern amenities. The Heritage suites include two distinct fine dining experiences – The Mughal Tara, which is a vegetarian's paradise using all organic ingredients while the other is Wine And Cheese Lounge serving gourmet cuisine overlooking the scenic Salt Lake.

extracted and then when refinery comes in place they can see how it is taken to the refinery and finally, processed into a final product," he said.

Illuminating on the hospitality sector in Rajasthan, he said, "The job of the government is to look at the basic groundwork, which is taken care of by the department of tourism, i.e. the capital expenditure for putting up of infrastructure and then for management of these properties, we bring in the private partners."

He further went on to share that besides this, the government has also launched a scheme under which those parties who

are coming up with new tourism hotels and projects in the state need not seek prior approval for the initial three years of construction. "Now, for hoteliers, there is no requirement for any permission and approval for the first three years of their project. The older procedure of first taking approval first and then starting construction has been completely abandoned. However, care must be taken that to avoid the after construction hassle, the investor must work within the stipulated guidelines. This indeed will act as a major boost for tourism industry," he concludes.

Madhya Pradesh is looking for Integrated Development of Tourism in the State

There is no denying that the state of Madhya Pradesh is the heart of India, which receives huge number of domestic as well as inbound tourists. However, besides its natural bounty, what is also noteworthy in the region are the judicious activities carried out by the officers at the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, who leave no stone unturned in their efforts to increase the tourist flow. Yuvraj Padole, Deputy Director – Events and Marketing, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, falls in the same category of hard-working officials, who is extremely passionate about tourism in the state. Here is his exclusive interview with BOTT India.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

As the tourist flow continues to increase into the region of Madhya Pradesh, thanks to its cultural, historical and wildlife attractions, the tourism department is busy strengthening the infrastructure of the state. “Trends today are changing very fast and people who are now coming to MP are young. We have thus introduced the ‘Active Holiday Concept’ – staying active while holidaying, which is something the youngsters today completely identify with. With the aim to enjoy the space around you, MPTB has arranged for some activities to be indulged in during one’s stay at a resort, which people of all age groups can indulge in,” he shared.

Up next, the state tourism board aimed at filling up the rooms during the rainy season and thus they developed Panchmarhi as an ideal monsoon getaway. Since the road connectivity to the region is very good and Panchmarhi is a beautiful destination, pulling crowd to the destination wasn’t very difficult. “Enroute Panchmarhi, we have introduced ‘Way Side Amenities’ along the road such as toilets, refreshment areas and more. Around 250 WSAs are ready and getting good response from the visitors. Plus, we have also developed homestays in the region for people who wish to get a feel of the true MP lifestyle,” he shared.

The state tourism board is also laying extra focus on boosting Agri and Rural Tourism in the area. They have briefed up villagers also to not be afraid of tourists as sometimes they become wary while witnessing foreigners in large numbers. These inbound tourists are extremely fascinated with the village culture – especially when they see women cooking on fire. “We have tried to link tourism to employment as we feel that is one way of holding people back in their hometown and not have been running into the city in search of employment. When tourism is growing in a certain area, it provides job opportunity to a lot of its local



resident. Unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled – all categories of people get employed, thanks to the growth of tourism. We even teach them basic English so that they can communicate with the foreign tourists. All this is done through the ‘Hunar se Rozgar’ scheme,” elaborates Yuvraj, the passion and pride clearly reflecting in his voice as he humbly



Madhya Pradesh Tourism announces the 'Namaste Orchha' festival

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is all set to host a new cultural festival at Orchha, which was recently recognised as the 'Best Heritage City' at National Tourism Awards, 2019. In a bid to promote the state and draw tourist's attention to the city of Orchha in particular, the state tourism board will be launching its new initiative titled 'Namaste Orchha' on March 6, 2020. The three-day festival will include showcasing of state and Orchha's cultural landscape through a range of activities like art, music and dance performances, guided history tours, photography tours and much more.

Besides, over the course of the three days, the festival will also see an inaugural cultural performance at the 16th century Orchha Fort, an immersive visual spectacle of the 'MahaAarti' on the banks of river Betwa, and a 'farm-to-fork' experience showcasing products of organic farming. The festival will also feature a food

and crafts bazaar that will have local cuisine and traditional handicrafts of the region on offer. Among performing artistes at the event will be Indie music band Indian Ocean and famous Hindustani classical vocalist Shubha Mudgal. The festival will come to a close on March 8, 2020.

Talking about their new initiative, Faiz Ahmed Kidwai, secretary tourism, MP government, said, "Madhya Pradesh is among the most exciting tourist destinations in the country and has immense potential to grow inbound tourism. We are creating new opportunities and initiatives to promote the state and its rich cultural, natural and architectural heritage and its traditions and history. This festival will find a place in the lives of the local populace of Orchha, sharing their home and heart with visitors."

shares achievements of the tourism board.

There is much that the MP Tourism Board is doing in the field of imparting education. They are doing it all through the 5 IHMs wherein they offer 6 months – 1 year training certificate and have also linked it to employment. They have

invested in 4 Food Craft Institutes, which imparts culinary skills at an extremely nominal fee. "We are moving slowly and steadily addressing issues of manpower while skilling the people of our state and ensuring they get employment in the burgeoning tourism industry," he concluded.

➤ How many people do you know, who while being in their late 40s unabashedly say that it is just now they have started working and that there is so much more that remains to be achieved?! **Rajat Sawhney, Director at RAVE Tours and Travels**, is not just a power-house of knowledge and energy but also someone who believes that there is immense potential in the travel sector, waiting to be explored. Here's an exclusive feature on him in our **BOTT Fabulous 40s!**



Rajat Sawhney: “We are a peoples’ industry”

Priyanka Saxena Ray

I have known him for many years now and every time I meet him, my respect for him as a person, not just as a professional, increases manifold. He knows his subject, talks sense, acts like a perfect gentleman, never bad-mouths his competition and is always ready to lend you a helping hand – should you need one. Even though he is at the fag-end of his 40s, with over 25 years of work experience, when you propel him to talk about his achievements and journey, he humbly brushes it aside saying that what he has achieved is just the tip of the iceberg while the entire mountain awaits his exploration!

A Delhi boy born in a business family, Rajat laughs at remembering his entry into the travel industry “by chance”. “In the summer of 1991, my friend and I drove down to Manali, in our zest to explore new destinations. We were staying at the ‘Log huts’ in Manali, which was owned by Himachal Tourism and used to play host to political leaders. While exploring that area we came across a beautiful new hotel in the vicinity, which was 90% complete in construction but not operational. The owner shared his financial woe and showed interest in giving the property on lease to whoever would pay the remaining amount needed for construction. I somehow arranged for the money (Rs 4.5 Lakh) and sealed the deal. We opened that property in summer of 1992 and were sold out from day one! We had to refuse and send back people. From April 15 – July 30 we enjoyed tremendous occupancy and when I went back to Delhi, I had money to return and surplus. We had made profits in just one quarter,” he reminisces. This was the start



Rajat Sawhney with his wife and son

of a travel venture full of milestones.

From one hotel, Rajat went on to get lease of another property in Manali. His friend, who was also his partner in all these ventures, had a small restaurant in Delhi, thus making “catering” task up in the hills easy for them. They would take their chefs and equipment and their F&B also flourished along with rooms. Early 90s, when Kashmir was a terror zone and not tourism friendly, the pull of the hills pushed people towards two popular destinations – Manali and Shimla. “I had a friend in Shimla whom we collaborated with and so our portfolio of offerings increased. Every agent of Mumbai and Gujarat knew us. We took up an office space in CP and named our company RAVE Tours in 1993,” he shares.

After his father passed away, Rajat also had to look into the family business and managing hotels became tough. So he gave it up and concentrated on his business at hand – promoting domestic tourism. This was the time when just a handful of people were offering such a service and Rajat’s experience and expertise helped him craft memorable holidays for his clients. “Happy with our services, our clients started demanding international holiday packages from us and we started venturing into outbound with South-East Asia packages. However, I realized that there was a lot of demand for Europe and since it was impossible to sell all experiential holidays (we possibly couldn’t visit them all!), we collaborated with service providers in those markets and sought their help in drafting holidays and packages for us. This is where the role of travel shows and events play a major role – in increasing our inter-face with the service providers we would be working in, in future,” he explains.

With more than 25 years of work experience, Rajat strongly feels that what he has done and experienced so far is just the tip of the iceberg. In times to come, India is going to see phenomenal growth in the outbound sector. Destination Weddings and Events – a zone that Rajat has just stepped into three years back, holds exceptional potential and is going to be a big focus area for them. He is not in this for numbers. “I do quality business with good margins. My competition in travel is not with fellow agents. It is with the B2C portals – with extreme discounts they offer. The market in India will take some time to understand that the services offered by an agent are far more valuable than saving few thousands on online booking,” he adds.

In another portfolio, Rajat is an active member of two leading associations – ADTOI and OTOAI and has held several significant posts in the former association, interacting with the domestic tour operators and helping them solve their woes. The last Convention of ADTOI in Vizag, which was handled by Rajat as the Convention Chairman was one of the best ever conventions hosted by the association, which will be remembered for its panel discussions, ambiance, venue, f&b offerings and record profit!

As I thank him for his interview, he graciously thanks me back stressing upon the point that the travel trade industry is a “peoples’ industry” that functions on “human touch”. All these road shows, events, industry meet-ups are mere networking forums that help people stay connected. Well, I couldn’t agree with him more and since he has figured this secret out, guess his success in this arena is guaranteed for sure.

> It would be safe to call him the “hero” of the travel trade not just for his looks and polite demeanour but also the manner in which he has turned around ADTOI and won a National Tourism Award for his Company. A young achiever, who strongly believes in keeping the work-life balance and prides in doing things “differently”, Chetan Gupta, Director - Sales and Marketing, RG Destinations Pvt. Ltd.; Hony. General Secretary, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) is indeed a ‘Young Turk’ featured exclusively
> in **BOTT Fab 40s.**



Chetan Gupta : “I like doing things differently”

Priyanka Saxena Ray

There are not men in their 40s who can claim to be living in the same house that they were born in – Chetan can, which is perhaps why he comes so well-equipped with a strong sense of family values. Eldest of the three brothers, Chetan, who initially had no plans to enter the travel industry, is one of the few Oracle Verified Professional (OCP), the country has since it's a rare course that he did but did not pursue a career in.

“I was always sure that I wanted to be an entrepreneur – the question was doing what. After trying my hand at a couple of odd jobs I joined Hotel Connaught as Sales Manager as I used to find the hotel industry very glamorous. After working there for 4 years, I got my PR and moved to Australia to work for Mirvac Group of Hotels (Now Accor) wherein I was in-charge of Sales & Marketing for 14 hotels in NSW. I worked in Australia for three and half years before coming back to India and starting my own company in 2006,” he reminisces with a smile.

Floated in his daughter's name, Chetan started operations at R.G. Destinations from a single table space, selling domestic holidays. What he has today is a company with a turnover of about 8 crore, a double digit staff and more than 12,000 clients whom he has served over the years. His ‘better half’ actively handles the operations with him at the work place. R.G. Destinations currently has offices in Australia, Canada and soon in Singapore with staff on the company pay roll. From a humble beginning to winning the National Tourism Award in 2018 and handling a corporate client base of 32 companies as clients, Chetan has covered a magnitude of distance, which he believes is just the tip of the iceberg as there is lots more to achieve.

“There is no dearth of business – it's all out there. People are still travelling, infact more than before and it is this growth that we have to tap. Online book-



Chetan Gupta with his wife & daughters

ing platform is mostly used to booking tickets or standalone hotels. But for Tour packages and MICE, people might check the rate online before but they would prefer to deal with an agent only. Thus I believe there is no dearth of business options, if one is open to give value for money and not be greedy for commission,” shares the dynamic business person who has achieved so much in such little time.

His journey in the trade association industry started in 2008-09 when he became a member of ADTOI – Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India. However, he came in the lime-light after becoming an EC member for

2011-13 term and then General Secretary in 2016 – till date. “A lot of work has been done at ADTOI. We have 14 committees now for handling different portfolios with different heads for each committee. We have 11 chapters now and plans are afoot to add more. On the whole the image of ADTOI has changed much and even the Ministry of Tourism has started recognising the work we do. The focus of the PM also is now on promoting domestic tourism and we are trying our best in not just improving the image of the association through our work but also that of our country to as to encourage more and more people to travel within India,” he concludes.

Savour the culinary legacy @ Made in Punjab



Fondly called as ‘the Prince of Indian cuisine’, Zorawar Kalra’s Made in Punjab is the definite king of North Indian food in the capital. Known for showcasing authentic techniques and flavours, it candidly brings out the palate of Indian culinary legacy. Fancying a display of the true flavours of this ancient, farm-rich land, unified under the rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Made in Punjab crafts a true culinary legacy. Imbibing some lost & forgotten recipes from homes and dhabas of Punjab, it strikes a fine balance between earthy-rustic and chic-modern. Made in Punjab endeavours to offer a renewed culinary experience through its menu, taking the legacy forward as #PunjabiNext.

Offering a perfect combination of favourites and finds from the Pind, the menu collects dishes from the Dining tables of Punjab, Recipes of Punjabi mothers and Highway Dhaba specialities, maintaining native, traditional flavours of each dish on offer, while seamlessly amalgamating the spirit of festivity of its people. The idea being of reconnecting with our roots, reminiscent of the rustic-earthy experience coupled with a quirky take on traditional classics, for the guests to enjoy a first-hand affair in true Punjabi style & giving a peek into this celebratory culture.

A work of culinary perfection, “Made in Punjab” owes its roots to the legendary Late Jiggs Kalra, also known as the Czar of the Indian cuisine. The cuisine

served at Made in Punjab comprises of dishes from the Princely State, developed after in-depth research and study of the region’s culinary past, focusing on the provinces surrounding the Five Rivers. With celebration in its veins and fun in its brains, Made in Punjab presents a New Menu to elevate the Punjab dining experience. The new menu is a manifestation of the rich, celebratory culture of Punjab and never-ending Punjab spirit of fun whether it is the cuisine, language or the terroir. Inspired from the travels, the kitchen have uncovered hidden and untold recipes from the pinds, towns, dhabas and cantonments in the region and perfected them with our own innovations.

New Menu offerings

Indulge in a quintessential party of dishes rooted in Indian flavours and spices. Start the meal with warm and comforting Shorba’s such as Mushroom Shorba and Tomato Dhaniye ka Shorba. Enjoy a flavourful Chaat Chatkara collection of authentic Palak Patta Chat, Samosa Golmaal and roasted Chicken Tikka Chat served with lentil sprouts and smoky tomato salsa.

To conclude, Made in Punjab a fine dining restaurant in DLF Cyber Hub that fills in all the boxes for the best food, drinks and ambience. The elegant decor and comfortable seating make it a popular destination for groups large and small.



Brigade Hospitality Celebrates National Girl Child Day

Brigade Hospitality, one of the leading hospitality groups in the country celebrated National Girl Child Day at Signature Club Resort in Devanahalli today. National Girl Child Day is celebrated across the country on January 24 and Brigade Hospitality in association with World Vision India organised an event that saw around 30 young girl children from different schools take part.

The children shared their experiences and engaged in a hearty conversation with a group of successful women, some of them teachers, CAs, entrepreneurs who in turn threw light on the challenges they faced during their journey from childhood to their professional careers that met with great applause from the young girls.

The event was organised to bring about a change in the mindset where girl children were made aware of the surroundings, understand what is right from wrong, know how to prioritise oneself to become informed individuals. The discussion also emphasised on factors such as the importance of education, hygiene and cleanliness, safety and a



secure future for an enriching career among them.

For women are often judged on the basis of gender, religion or class, one should start believing in themselves from a young age in order to learn and overcome challenges the society throws at them. Be proud to be a girl, celebrate and embrace many things that come with it such as motherhood and set examples that will pave way for generations to come are some of the learnings imparted to them.

Speaking on the sidelines of the event, Mr Vineet Verma, CEO & Executive Director, Brigade Hospitality Services Limited said, "At Brigade Hospitality, we give girl child education and safety the utmost importance. In the past, along with World Vision India, we have curated initiatives to address various issues surrounding the girl child to seek and provide appropriate solutions. National Girl Child Day is an apt occasion to engage in a dialogue that enables one and all to realise the need to have an inclusive community that works toward the betterment of the girl child in all aspects of life."

ITDC salutes the Young Bravehearts at Purana Qila

Honoring the bravehearts, who were declared the winners at the Republic Day ITDC organized an exclusive screening of the sound and light show, showcasing the 1000 years journey of the capital city 'Ishq-e-Dilli' at the Purana Qila, New Delhi.

Present at the screening, Dr. Ravi Pandit, Vice President, Engineering, ITDC said, "It is an honor to communicate, converge and connect with the youth of India, whose hearts are filled with courage at such a tender age. These young Indians have showcased humanity, empathy by valuing others life and fighting to protect them; they are our real heroes."

The children were scheduled to receive the National Bravery Award for their outstanding act of courage by the Hon'ble President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind on 26th January, Republic Day.

22 children, including 10 girls and 12 boys were selected for the Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) National Bravery Awards, 2019. One award has been given post-humously.



Pamper your skin at Chi, The Spa at Shangri La New Delhi



It's winter time and this chill in the air definitely calls for a pampering session – both for your skin and mental state. So this weekend give yourself a break from the monotony and indulge in spa therapies from Chi, The Spa at Shangri-La New Delhi that will leave you relaxed and refreshed take a look...

Chi is the universal life force that governs well-being and personal vitality. For people to maintain a state of complete wellness, it is believed that 'Chi' must flow freely within the body. Take your pick from a wide range of treatments to find your Chi and restore balance and harmony of your body. Spread over 20,000 square feet, Chi, The Spa boasts of 5 spacious treatment rooms, including a special couple's suite. Spa products used are organic, natural and include internationally renowned brands such as Zents and Omorovicza.

Taste of India Retreat 120 minutes | INR 11000

Experience Ayurveda with this authentic Indian retreat. After a foot soak, begin with a full-body exfoliation to remove dead skin and start the de-stressing process. Relax your muscles with long massage strokes using rich Ayurvedic oils before concluding with a Shirodhara experience to complete your well-being.

Includes: Foot Ritual, 30 mins Coconut Body Scrub, 60 mins Abhyanga Massage and 30 mins Shirodhara Treatment

Chi Indulgence 120 minutes | INR 9000

Chi is the universal life force that governs well-being. To maintain a state of wellness it is believed that 'Chi'



must flow freely within the body. Open up your blocked energy with a full body scrub, followed by our Signature Asian Blend massage which incorporates techniques to open up all energy pathways. Includes: Foot Ritual, 30 mins Organic Body Scrub, 90 mins Chi Signature Asian Blend Massage.



Gift the 'Lovable Collection' from neoVeda by Craft House

It's that season of the year when love is in the air and you want the best of everything for your beloved. So, pick the best for your sweetheart from the enchanting Valentine's collection from neoVeda. Gift the nourishment and pamper Him or Her with these products that are not only made with natural, fresh and pure ingredients and essential oils, but are also designed to balance three Bio Energies known as Vatta, Pitta and Kapha in Ayurveda. And they are without parabens, and harmful chemicals like sulphate, silicone, mineral oil, Trethanolamine and Phenoxyethanol, also are PETA Certified.

Face Glow Apricot & Chamomile Pack - Our Hot Seller is a ready to use hydrating pack/mask with Apricot and Chamomile, which is a powerful moisture retainer. It softens fine lines and wrinkles and improves elasticity of the skin making it firm. The mild fragrance helps to relax your mind

Price: INR 700

Hand Care Kit - Get sorted with your dry hands and feel the moisture with our favourite Hand Care Kit consisting of 3 products Shea Butter, Jojoba & Cinnamon Cream (4 packs), Skin Young (Almond and Coconut Soap) and Skin Soft (Silky Rose Soap). The Collection not only replenishes lost moisture but also forms a protective layer that prevents further damage. Whereas Almond coconut soap is exceptionally gentle on skin and also helps in reducing eczema, pimples and blackheads. neoVeda Silky Rose Soap

gives soft and smooth texture to the skin and also reduces spots and discoloration. The kit is highly recommended for dry hands as it has natural moisturizing factor and helps to rejuvenate your skin.

Price: INR 2100

Essential Oils - Gift warmth and love to your special ones with our special "Evergreen Valentine Collection" consisting of five exotic Essential oils like Pigmentation Reduce, Acne Reduce, Wrinkle Reduce, Radiance Kumkumadi and Glow Essential Oils inspired by powerful ingredients like Kumkumadi, sandalwood, lavender; bergamot and many more. These magical ingredients are highly placed for its efficiency and formulation. The unique blend of oils and herbs in this kit is formulated to help skin look young and healthy. The kit contains natural ingredients, which relieves blemishes, acne, acne scars, wrinkles, dark circles and make skin lighten and brighten.

Price: INR 3650

Available at - **Craft House, The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa** Bangla Sahib Road, New Delhi
Delhi Bazaar Craft House

International Departure, Terminal 3 (T3)
Indira Gandhi International Airport
Delhi. E-store: www.crafthouseindia.com



Vistara starts daily flight to Kathmandu, Nepal from February 11, 2020

Vistara has added Kathmandu, Nepal, as the fifth international destination to its fast-growing network. The airline will operate daily flights to Kathmandu starting February 11, 2020, the bookings for which open today, progressively on all channels including Vistara's website www.airvistara.com, Vistara's iOS and Android mobile apps and through travel agents.

Leslie Thng, Chief Executive Officer, Vistara, said, "We are happy to launch flights to Kathmandu, the gateway to a

country with significant trade and cultural ties with India. The timing could not have been any better, as Nepal recently kick-started its global tourism campaign, 'Visit Nepal Year 2020' and prepares to welcome 2 million tourists this year. These factors make Kathmandu a promising addition to Vistara's growing network. As India's only five-star carrier, we look forward to contributing to Nepal's tourism growth meaningfully and providing business and leisure travellers alike the finest way to fly between the two countries."

SIA will introduce a fifth weekly flight to Kolkata starting March 29, 2020

Singapore Airlines (SIA) will introduce a fifth weekly flight to Kolkata, India, from March 29, 2020. On the same day, the Airline's regional wing SilkAir will cease services to the city. Currently, SIA operates four weekly flights and SilkAir operates three weekly flights to Kolkata. SIA's Kolkata services will continue to be operated by the Airbus A350-900 medium-haul aircraft, which is equipped with the Airline's latest regional cabin products for Business Class and Economy Class.

Singapore Airlines Senior Vice-President (Marketing Planning) Tan Kai Ping said that the Airline's A350-900 medium-haul aircraft has been warmly received by customers since its introduction to the Singapore-Kolkata route in June 2019. "We are pleased to



increase our services to Kolkata with this new generation aircraft by adding

a weekly frequency from March 2020," he said.

Sri Lankan Airlines to start flights from Ahmedabad & Calicut

Meeting at the recently concluded SATTE in New Delhi, V. Ravindran, Regional Manager, SriLankan Airlines, talked about the future plans of the airline, especially with regards to the India market and what are their expectations from 2020. Here is a BOTT Exclusive on all that the airline has in store for the customers in times ahead.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

SriLankan Airlines, the official airline of the beautiful island country of Sri Lanka offers some of the best connections from India to not just the destination but also beyond into various parts of the world. The airline currently operates out of 11 cities in India (to Colombo) which include four flights a day from Chennai; a double daily flight from Mumbai and Bengaluru, and one flight daily each from Madurai, Tiruchi, Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram.

The airline has also recently increased its double daily frequency between Colombo and New Delhi to three times a day now. It has four flights a week from Coimbatore and Chennai and six flights a week from Hyderabad. From Kolkata it has three flights a week to Colombo.



“By the end of 2020, we are looking at starting operations from Ahmedabad and Calicut as going forward we are going to lay more focus on Tier-II and Tier-III cities. Supplementing this, we are also planning to increase frequency from our existing markets of Kolkata, Hyderabad and Coimbatore,” shared V. Ravindran.

Ravi heads the overall marketing and administration functions of the airline operation in India and Bangladesh. Working in conjunction with the global team in Sri Lanka, he has been instrumental in strengthening the position of SriLankan Airlines in the region of China and has successfully executed the growth plan in that Region covering Beijing, Shanghai & Guangzhou. Armed with 19 years of experience in the aviation industry, Ravi started his career with SriLankan Airlines

as a trainee in year 2000 followed by a wide variety of divisions and multiple management functions in marketing, sales and operations, within the organisation. He was also the Country Manager to Oman and China, Sales Manager to Cochin.

“After the tragedy that had stuck our country last year, we are glad to note that India was quick to bounce back. India market is one of the most important markets for us and we are constantly looking for ways and means to strengthen this relationship further. Going forward we are going to majorly focus on internet promotion and digital social media marketing. Last year we had 11-11, which was a one day promotion with special offers and benefits and it garnered good response. In the future also we will do event specific promotion,” he shared.

India airfares forecast to increase by 5% in 2020; hotel rates expected to rise by 6.8%



After posting sharp rises in 2019, prices in the global travel industry are likely to slow in 2020, with flights rising a modest 1.2%, hotels rising only 1.3%, and rental car rates up 1% (in USD terms), according to the sixth annual Global Travel Forecast, published today by CWT and GBTA. While the global economy is doing well overall – and expected to grow a solid 3.6% in 2020 – a raft of uncertainties are set to put a damper on pricing.

“The risks and ambiguity have increased over the past few months – not least the threat of escalating trade wars, the impact of Brexit, possible oil supply shocks, and the growing likelihood of recession,” said Kurt Ekert, CWT’s President and CEO. “This forecast will help travel buyers make the right decisions in an increasingly challenging environment.”

India’s strong economic growth is fueling a greater demand for business travel and driving up prices. Airfares are forecast to increase 5% (in local currency terms; 0% in USD terms), while hotel rates and ground transport prices are expected to climb 6.8% (1.8% in USD terms) and 4.5% (-0.5% in USD terms), respectively.

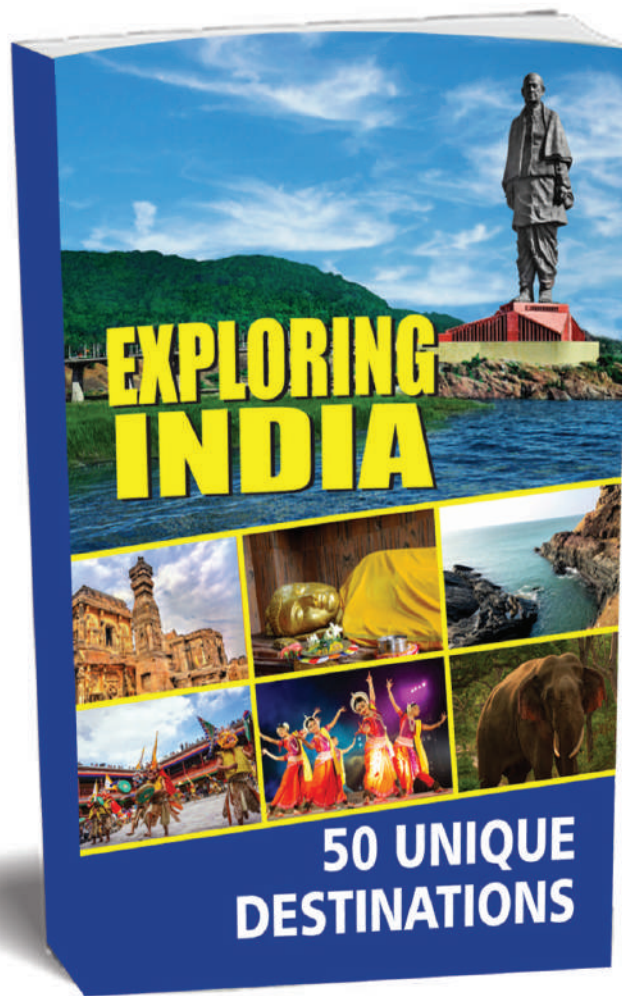
“Earlier this year we saw a spike in airfares after Jet Airways ceased its operations in April, so we’re already at a high base in 2019,” said Vishal Sinha, CEO, India, CWT.

“With other airlines adding capacity to fill the vacuum, fares have begun to normalize and we expect that to continue next year. However, if the rupee weakens against the dollar, Indian carriers could be faced with bigger fuel bills and we might see that being passed on to travelers.”

“Hotel rates are also expected to rise, as the demand for rooms outpaces supply, especially in secondary cities like Chandigarh, Jaipur and Ahmedabad. At the same time, the commercialization of mid-tier properties by players like Oyo are also pushing prices upwards.”

Released today by the Global Business Travel Association, the voice of the global business travel industry, and CWT, the B2B4E travel management platform, the 2020 Global Travel Forecast uses data generated by CWT Solutions Group, to give an early look at the trends and developments that will shape the business travel industry in the year ahead.

“Technological advancements and an increasingly volatile economic and political landscape across the globe have changed the way today’s travel buyers need to do their jobs,” said Scott Solombrino, GBTA COO and Executive Director. “This annual forecast provides insights into the key drivers forcing these shifting priorities and gives a road map for travel buyers looking to plan their 2020 travel programs.”



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Discover the unseen and untouched in Uttarakhand...

AULI

For many people, the state of Uttarakhand is synonymous with the names Haridwar and Rishikesh. Those with more religious bent will add Badrinath and Kedarnath also to it – but the beauty and lure of Uttarakhand goes far beyond these few well-known places. Auli, is one such gem, hidden away from the eyes of a short-sighted explorer and awaiting the discovery of the discerning traveller, such as you.

Apple orchards, oak trees, pine trees not just provide plenty of fresh air in Auli but also makes up for its scenic beauty. Located at a height of 2800 metres above the sea levels, the quaint hill station of Auli is home to the mountain ranges of Nanda Devi, Mana Parvat and Kamat Kamet in addition to the few other religious destinations scattered around the region. The place is said to have been blessed with the visit of Shankracharya himself.

But religion is just one of its alluring aspect. The other is adventure with skiing topping the list. If you too feel the urge of trying your feet and hands at the ice on the slopes, you need not to go Alps for it but come down to Auli, stay in one of the many ski resorts and glide through its snow-capped peaks and slopes. For the more competitive ones, there is

>“Earth and sky, woods and fields, lakes and rivers, the mountain and the sea, are excellent schoolmasters, and teach some of us more than what we could learn from books.”

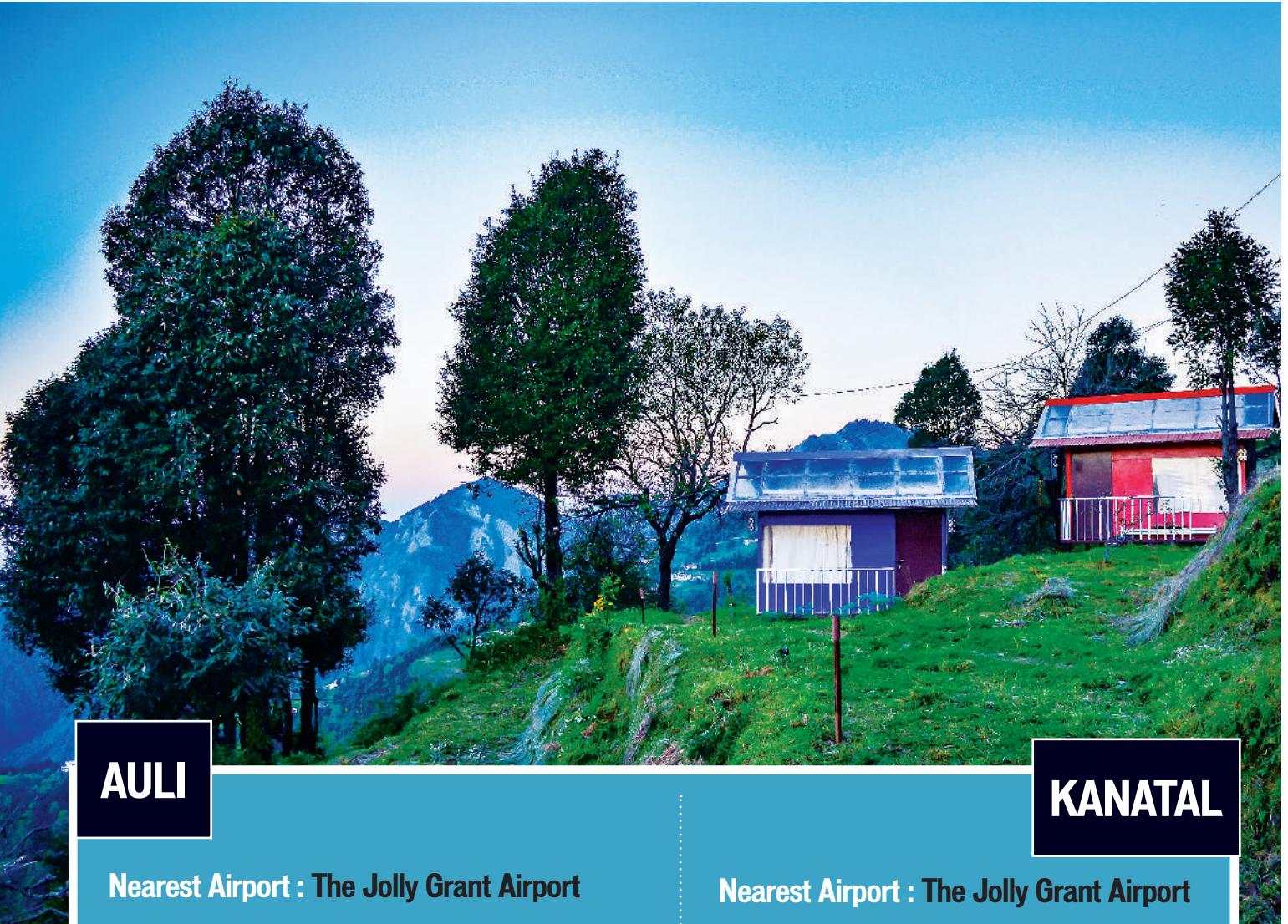
> - **John Lubbock**

also an Auli National Skiing Championship, which has just recently started.

KANATAL

The perfect weekend getaway

Located at a high altitude in the suburban area of Mussoorie on the main Chamba – Mussoorie road, Kanatal is yet another serene and picturesque hilly town that offers solace and peace from the maddening rush of the city. With picture perfect sceneries and plenty of greens, this quaint town has much to



AULI

Nearest Airport : The Jolly Grant Airport

Nearest Railway Station : Dehradun Railway Station,

Best time of visit : Throughout the year

Ideal For : Family vacation, couple vacation, trips with friends

Website: [https : //uttarakhandtourism.gov.in](https://uttarakhandtourism.gov.in)

KANATAL

Nearest Airport : The Jolly Grant Airport

Nearest Railway Station : Dehradun Railway Station, Rishikesh Railway Station

Best time of visit : April - September

Ideal For : Weekend getaway with friends and family

offer in terms of recreation and adventure to the discerning traveller visiting the region.

Popular served as a weekend getaway for the local populous, Kanatal is a picture perfect hub that boasts of heavenly scenery, luxuriant vegetation, and bountiful adventure activities. If you are looking for a holiday with solemn peace but wouldn't really mind a bit of fun as well, take a trip to Kanatal – away from the urban hassles. Besides stunning natural beauty, there are a

number of interesting things to do in Kanatal.

The destination also offers plenty of adventure opportunities and is also chosen as a favourite spot for campers. You can also take a walk through the Kodia Jungle, which is a dense forest area located at a distance of around one kilometre away from Kanatal. You can spot a few wild animals by taking a ride through the jungle in a jeep, and you can also see Tehri Dam and many natural springs that are quite prevalent in the region.

The Year (2019) that was...

India's rank in Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of World Economic Forum has moved from 65th rank in 2013 to 34th rank in 2019.

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) during the period January – November 2019 were 96,69,633 as compared to 93,66,478 in January – November 2018, registering a growth of 3.2 per cent.

Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) during the period| January – November 2019 were ₹1,88,364 Crore as compared to were ₹1,88,364 Crore as compared to were ₹1,88,364 Crore as compared to ₹1,75,407 Crore in January – November 2018, registering a growth of 7.4 per cent.

During January – November 2019, a total of 25,51,211 tourists arrived on e-Tourist Visa as compared to 20,61,511 during January – November, 2018, registering a growth of 23.8 per cent.

Initiatives undertaken by MOT

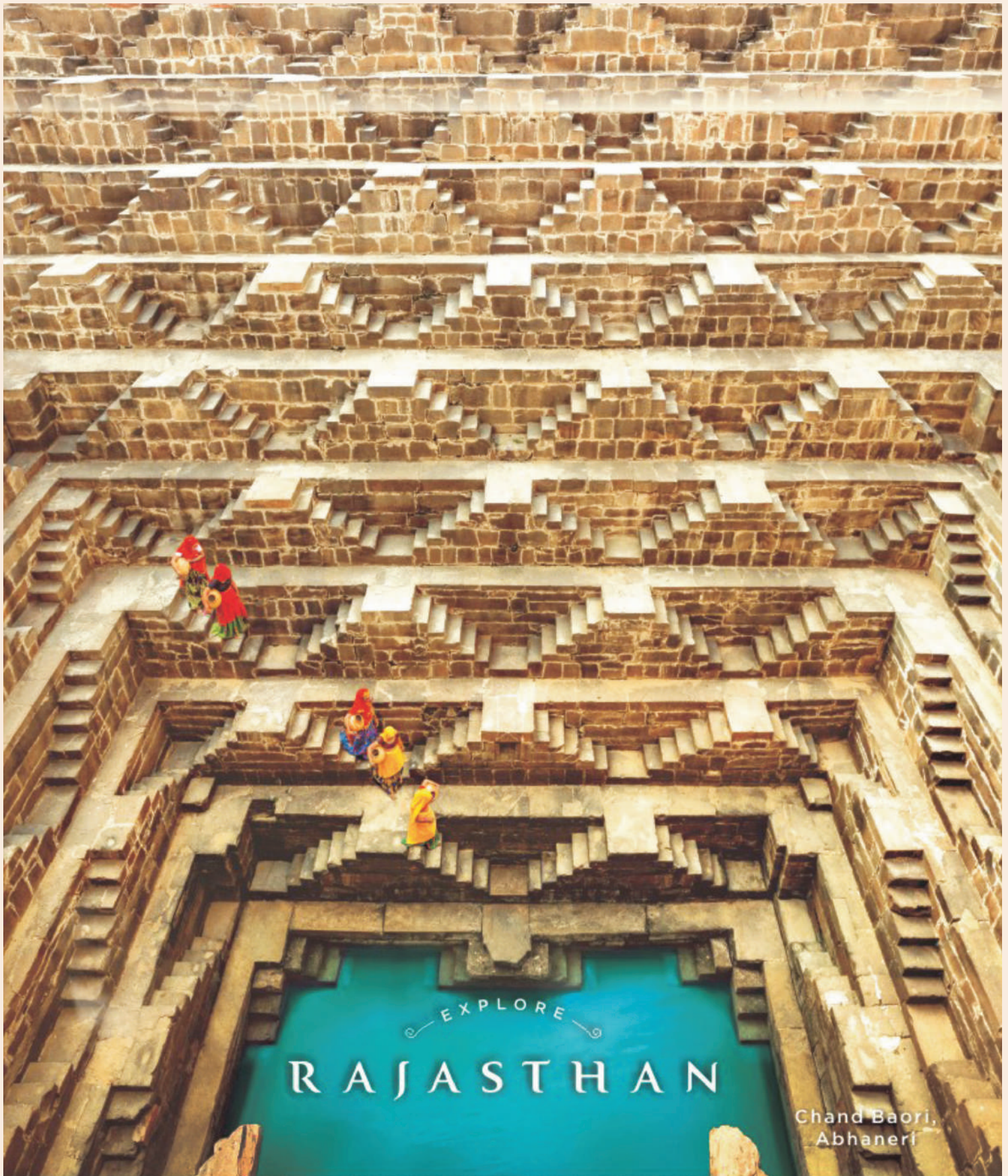
Development of thematic circuits is being undertaken under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme. A total number of 77 projects for an amount of ₹6035.70 Crore have been sanctioned till date under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.

Integrated development of identified pilgrimage destinations is being undertaken under the 'National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (PRASHAD) Scheme. A total number of 28 projects have been sanctioned till date for an amount of ₹840.02Crore under this Scheme.

The Government opened more than 120 mountain peaks for mountaineering and trekking. The opening of the peaks is a move towards promoting adventure tourism in the country.

The Government reduced the GST on hotel rooms with tariffs of 1,001 to 7,500/night to 12%; and those above 7,501 to 18% in an endeavour to increase India's competitiveness as a tourism destination vis-à-vis other competing markets in the region.

The Ministry of Tourism has revamped the Incredible India website. The Hindi version of the Incredible India website was launched in the Tourism Minister's Conference.



www.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in, www.rtdc.tourism.rajasthan.gov.in

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Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan



RAJASTHAN

The Incredible State of India !



Ministry of Tourism
Government of India



NATIONAL
SALT SATYAGRAHA
MEMORIAL

DISCOVER THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY THAT INSPIRED A NATION.

The National Salt Satyagraha Memorial (NSSM) at Dandi, Gujarat, recreates the spirit of the 1930 Dandi March led by Mahatma Gandhi and 80 of his fellow Satyagrahis. NSSM is a Net Zero Energy project reflecting the ethos of self-sufficiency, with a unique blend of technology, innovation, art and architecture.

Come, learn of the great struggle and inspirational history of the Mahatma.

Incredible India

DANDI MEMORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

Welcome Centre
It has a Library, a book shop, an auditorium, and an activity space.

The Gandhi Statue
A 5m high bronze statue of the Mahatma, by the renowned sculptor Sadashiv Sathe.

Crystal Tower
Pyramid of light formed by a 40m steel A-Frame with glass crystal.

Salt Making Centre
Salt making centre for visitors with 14 electric pans.

Solar Trees
41 solar trees with a capacity of 180KVA for self-sufficiency.

Artificial Lake
14,000 sq.m artificial lake created with a pathway around.

Narrative Murals
Various events from the salt march depicted through 24 narrative murals.



The Salt Marchers: 81 life-size silicon bronze sculptures of salt marchers by 48 sculptors from 9 countries.

STARK Delhi 9148

www.incredibleindia.org
www.dandimemorial.in