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Editor

Priyanka Saxena Ray

Business Consultants

Gunjan Sabikhi
Ruden Dias

Editorial Team

Pallavi Sharma
Shreya Shimpi
Sapna Vaid

Layout Design

Jagraj Chauhan

Marketing

Ashish Sarthak
Deepesh Verma

Published and Printed by

Rai Umraopati Ray on behalf of More
Media Pvt. Ltd. B6, Ground Floor,
Kalkaji, New Delhi-110019.

BOTT Head Office

C-16, LGF, LSC, Block C Market
Paschimi Marg, Vasant Vihar,
New Delhi: 110057

Email: info@bottindia.com

Phone: 011-42750360

RNI/DELENG/2019/1343884

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From The Editor's *Desk*

Dear Readers,



International travel is picking up and how (!). The airlines ticket prices are hitting the roof and yet it is tough to find a seat at the last minute. The visa delays are causing havoc, yet a huge number of visa applications are being submitted every day and even as the outbound traveller continues to huff and puff about the “issues” he is facing while travelling out of country, the outbound travel from India, my friends, is closer than we think to the pre pandemic levels.

The Indian international traveller has evolved drastically in the past two-three years and are presently seeking experiences and not rushed holiday itineraries. Duration of stays in long-haul destinations has lengthened primarily to make the most of high airline fares. Staycations are still doing very well for short-haul destinations as most corporates and organisations continue to work remotely or in a hybrid format. And

relaxed beach vacations at off the grid resorts and hotels continues to rule the charts. Indian travellers have changed, their demands have matured and gone beyond the regular mundane offerings and the experiences they now seek are varied and unique in nature.

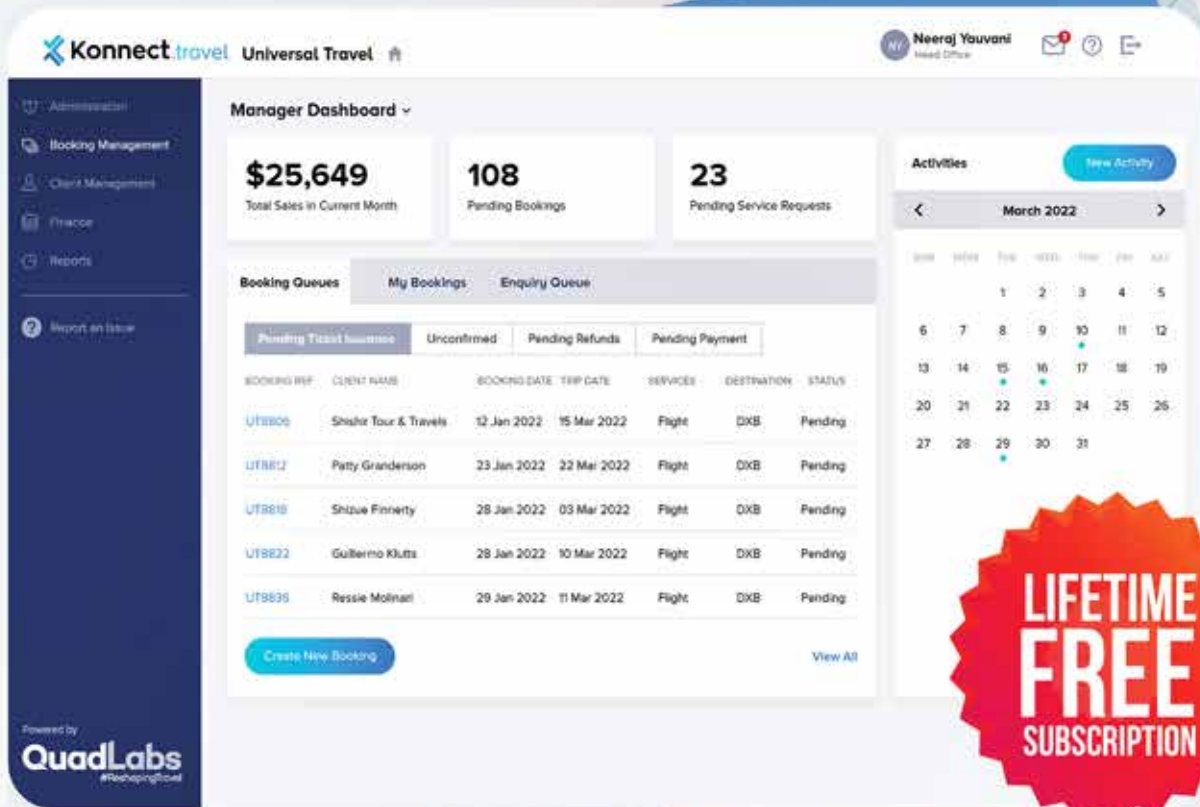
Not just that, the Indian travellers are now adapting sustainable methods of travel and the younger generation is being mindful of their carbon footprint, resource consumption and wastage; thus, leading to generation of more itineraries that are heavy on cultural activities, local experiences and conscious means of transportation. In such a scenario, destination too have had to evolve to match the demands of the conscious traveller and come up with new peg points to attract a conscious tourist who is looking for an experiential stay.

Keeping all these points in mind, BOTT September Issues focusses on the evolution and return of international travel for the India outbound market. To understand it better, we spoke to some leading travel professionals who are marketing destinations in India, country heads and country reps to understand the evolving dynamics of Outbound Travel from India and you will find an exhaustive line-up of thoughts and interviews in the inside pages of our magazine. All this is in addition to our regular columns and updates.

Happy Reading!

Priyanka Saxena Ray
priyanka@bottindia.com

DRIVE GROWTH AND COST SAVINGS WITH THE MOST TRUSTED TRAVEL CRM



The screenshot shows the 'Manager Dashboard' for 'Universal Travel'. It features a sidebar with navigation links: Administration, Booking Management, Client Management, Finance, Reports, and Report on Issue. The main dashboard includes three summary cards: Total Sales in Current Month (\$25,649), Pending Bookings (108), and Pending Service Requests (23). Below these are tabs for Booking Queues (My Bookings, Enquiry Queue) and a table of Pending Ticket Insurance. The table has columns for Booking Ref, Client Name, Booking Date, Trip Date, Services, Destination, and Status. A calendar for March 2022 is also visible on the right.

Booking Ref	Client Name	Booking Date	Trip Date	Services	Destination	Status
UT8806	Shashir Tour & Travels	12 Jan 2022	15 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8812	Patty Granderson	23 Jan 2022	22 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8818	Shizue Finnerty	28 Jan 2022	03 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8822	Guillermo Klutts	28 Jan 2022	10 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8836	Ressie Molinari	29 Jan 2022	11 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending

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ADTOI signs MOU with International Centre for Responsible Tourism

During the International Symposium on Responsible Tourism, organized by Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (Govt. of MP), ADTOI MP Chapter and ICRT India Foundation (Responsible Tourism Partnership) signed a MoU at the Kushabhau Thakre Convention Centre, Bhopal on September 7, 2022. Mr. P.P. Khanna, President, Association of Domestic Tour Operators, India and Dr. Harold Goodwin, Founder Director of ICRT and Managing Director of the Responsible Tourism Partnership signed the MoU during the Symposium. Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla IAS, Principal Secretary, MP Tourism witnessed the signing ceremony along with delegates from ICRT, Officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of MP and Tour Operators from MP along with ADTOI members of MP State Chapter.



IndiGo adds 6 new flights to bolster connectivity between India and Middle East



In its bid to strengthen international connectivity, IndiGo has announced a new daily direct flight from Hyderabad-Riyadh along with additional frequencies on Hyderabad-Doha and Mangalore-Dubai routes. This new route and additional frequencies will enhance connectivity between India and Middle East. Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Chief Strategy and Revenue Officer, IndiGo said, "We are pleased to strengthen our network by introducing new international flights and frequencies. The new connection to Riyadh will enhance business connectivity and easy access to tourist attractions like Al Masmak Fortress, National Museum, Heet Caves, Imam Turki Bin Abdullah Grand Mosque, and Kingdom Centre Tower, among others. In addition, these flights will make travel affordable to the Middle East through direct connections and additional capacity."

Airfares tumble after government lifts fare caps

Domestic airfares have tumbled on many major domestic routes after peaking in recent months, fuelled by high costs. Just a few days after the government did away with fare caps, domestic airlines Akasa Air, IndiGo, Air Asia, GoFirst and Vistara have cut prices. Akasa Air has cut prices across its routes. It is offering Mumbai-Bengaluru flights in the range of Rs 2,000-Rs 2,200, and Mumbai-Ahmedabad is available for just Rs 1,400. As of August, the same seats went for about Rs 3,948 and Rs 5,008, respectively. IndiGo, has matched Akasa Air's rates on both routes, while GoFirst has also cut its fares on these routes significantly.



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Vistara and IndiGo come on board with IDCA for Deaf ICC T20 championship

Vistara and IndiGo have come on board with Indian Deaf Cricket Association (IDCA) as official travel partners for the DICC T20 Champions Trophy to be held from October 1 – 9, 2022 in Sharjah, UAE. As official travel partners, Vistara and IndiGo will fly the players, coaches and support teams of IDCA to Dubai. Both the airlines have come together for a noble cause to encourage and motivate the team to give its best. Speaking about the partnerships, Roma Balwani, CEO Indian Deaf Cricket Association stated, “Vistara and IndiGo, both prestigious private airlines are extending their support to the IDCA is proof that the Indian Deaf Cricket team is gaining recognition in India.”



Prayagraj Airport to soon be made into an international airport



Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh is getting ready for the Mahakumbh in 2025. The city will host Prayagraj Maha Kumbh Mela in 2025, the largest of all religious congregations in India, attended by millions of Hindu pilgrims from all over the world. One of the major changes that the city will soon see is the changing of the domestic airport Prayagraj Airport to an international facility. Yes, very soon the city's only airport will be turned into an international airport. As per the state government reports, Prayagraj Airport has secured 13th position amongst all domestic airports in India.

Assam's Guwahati Airport restarts international flights after 2 years

Guwahati Airport will see international flights resume following a two-year gap this week. Bhutanese carrier Druk Air is resuming its Paro-Guwahati-Singapore fifth freedom flight, which connects the northeastern Indian city with Bhutan. The Indian government has long promoted more international flights from Guwahati Airport, which is nestled close to Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and other destinations. Officials hope to see flights to Yangon, Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Hanoi, and Kathmandu in the coming months and years as well.



Rohit Shorey

MICE Tourism Ambassador for
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-J.B. Singh,

President & CEO, InterGlobe Hotels



"Onam this time comes with promise and hope. In the last two years, humanity had passed through an unprecedented situation that curbed festivals and get-togethers. As the pandemic is receding, the festive spirit and the happiness that get-togethers bring are back in our lives. However, Covid has not completely vanished, and we have to continue our vigil against its return and spread."

-Shri Pinarayi Vijayan,

Chief Minister, Kerala



"I am extremely happy and satisfied with the execution of the TAAI 66th Cruising Convention. Putting together a Convention aboard a Cruise in mere 12 days was a herculean task but we managed to do it. The TAAI team stepped up and industry colleagues came forward to add the "illuminating" element to the whole event. The three days of the cruise were a perfect mix of unique and out of the box sessions along with wonderful experiences on the ship. All 300 plus delegates had a wonderful time and formed memorable experiences while making lifetime memories."

-Jyoti Mayal,

President, TAAI



"We are an Association committed to improving our members' knowledge and expertise and at the same time intend to provide exposure to new and trending outbound destinations from India. Saudi Tourism Authority has always been a religious destination for Indians but now it has emerged as a brilliant tourism destination in the Middle East region. We are happy with our partnership with Saudi Arabia and the success of the event has proved that it was indeed a mutually beneficial partnership."

-Riaz Munshi,

President, OTOAI



"Club Mahindra has been providing great holiday experiences across India to our member families for more than 25 years. This year, we wanted to highlight the softer & emotional aspect of a Caring Family Brand that understands Family & its needs more than the "Mother of the Household". A mother who goes out of the way to balance the different needs of family members while deciding on a holiday destination; makes everything feel like a breeze. Through this campaign, we wish to acknowledge the small things that our #FamilyKiSuperWoman plans for her family and loved ones."

-Pratik Mazumder,

Chief Marketing Officer, Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India Limited



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New Destinations, pent-up demand & evolved traveller gives boost to *Outbound Travel from India*



Numerous surveys done in the recent past substantiate what the long visa wait and airport lines tell us already – Indians cannot wait to travel out of country and the bouquet of options available keep getting fancier and more attractive with time. Travel has resumed and how (!). While domestic travel across the globe held fort during the Covid times, the easing up of travel norms has witnessed a surge in international travel these past few months. Newer destinations are coming up and despite visa hurdles, the traditional ones continue to rule the travel charts. BOTT spoke to some leading Reps of International Tourism Boards and Countries to get an insight into the latest trends in international travel, recovery time expected and visa norms. Here is what they have to say –

Priyanka Saxena Ray

'The one-size-fits-all approach no longer works with the modern-day traveller'

The enthusiasm and commitment of Indian travellers have changed the landscape of travel in this post-pandemic era. The optimism continues to remain high with Indians traveling globally. As the worst effects of COVID-19 are now ebbed, most indicators point to a speedy global recovery- with a vengeance, people are willing to explore newer destinations and revisit their favourite destinations. I strongly believe that India is positioned to become one of the most lucrative outbound travel markets worldwide, and the recovery of the sector is already anticipated sooner than expected.

Visa delays did create havoc in the market but this did not stop our travellers from exploring newer destinations such as Azerbaijan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Finland and Serbia. Despite visa delays for Europe the top destinations for the summer have been France, Switzerland, Dubai, Thailand, and Singapore.

The one-size-fits-all approach no longer works with the modern-day traveller. Today they look for a more personalized and focused itinerary is what they look for, with better control over it. Sustainability is another trend that is observed, with conscious travel. Travelers are a lot more experimental now with their choices for food, stay and travel.



Priyanka Nijhawan
Director- Representations,
Nijhawan Group



'Travellers today are looking at destinations that offer safety and hygiene'

We have already gone back to pre-pandemic figures for some destinations and definitely for some of the hotels we are representing. As per a survey done by booking.com, the sentiment to travel is the highest in Indians as compared to the rest of Asia Pac. Where we were the number 10th source market, we are Number 1 or top 3 markets driving in the numbers. But for visa issues, we have seen a very good uptick to European destinations as well. Newer destinations along with existing destinations are making it easier for people to travel. Dubai, Indonesia, Vietnam, South Africa, Mauritius are some of the destinations that can be considered for travel.

Currently the upper mid to upper class are travelling internationally as they have the money and will to spend. This in itself is a big segment. The one change I can see is in the planning of travel that hopefully will be here to stay. From a very short lead market, we have started planning with longer lead times. But short to medium planned trips will also continue. Travellers today are looking at destinations that offer safety and hygiene.

Vasudha Sondhi

MD, Outbound Marketing

'There is still some way to go before we reach pre-pandemic tourism levels'

Tourism is certainly on the road to recovery, but there is still some way to go before we reach pre-pandemic tourism levels. In a post-pandemic world, nobody can predict precisely what figures one will achieve and how quickly. Although several surveys suggest that a gradual recovery is expected to continue throughout 2022 and by mid-2023 we will see a full rebound. Nevertheless, India is a mature market and among the fastest-growing markets globally. It won't take long here for the situation to reach the pre-pandemic level again.

The biggest beneficiaries of these visa issues have been destinations that are close to nature. Tourists have now become more environmentally conscious and are choosing less crowded destinations.

More and more Indian travellers to Malaysia are now opting for eco-tourism hotspots in Malaysia such as Taman Negara National Park, Langkawi Island and the states of Sabah and Sarawak. These destinations have everything: high-ranging mountains, white sandy beaches, 200-million-year-old rainforests, flora and fauna and crystal-clear sea waters.

Travellers are now making more careful travel choices and are less willing to compromise on their trips. Health tourism, wellness tourism and spiritual and religious tourism are rising in popularity and are the new travel mantra.

Indian international travellers to Malaysia have shown increased enthusiasm and confidence. Corporate travel in the form of the MICE movement has picked up. We have also witnessed an upturn in the FIT movement. Malaysia is seeing an increase in the number of solo and VFR travellers. The removal of all entry restrictions has triggered a boost in honeymoon, senior citizen and religious group travellers. Besides, we are noticing a phenomenal increment in return visitors. Post-pandemic, a whole new Malaysia is waiting to be discovered.

Muhammad Akmal Hafiz Abdul Aziz MD,
Deputy Director, Tourism Malaysia – North & East India



'Pandemic has led to travellers looking for safe destinations with medical back up'

The newly coined word (revenge travel) is indeed coming out true. The pent-up demand of the Indian travellers is clearly showing and Indians are travelling both domestic and international as if there will be no tomorrow. This is in spite of the fact that the airfares continue to remain high. As regards Thailand is concerned I am happy to say that the figures have been very promising. The next three months are likely to be even higher. However considering that we have had a very long period of practically no travel due to the pandemic I feel it will still take some time before it goes back to pre-pandemic level.

Indians can now travel to over 60 countries without obtaining visa plus there are destinations where visa on arrival is available to Indians. These destinations will definitely attract more Indians rather than countries where now obtaining visa has become a major issue and substantial delays are taking place.

The effect of pandemic has led to travellers looking for safe destinations with medical back up facilities, cleaner, hygienic and less crowded places. People are preferring to travel to short haul destinations with multiple flight options. Staycations and digital nomads are new segments which have emerged. In Thailand tourists are now preferring to stay for longer periods at one destination rather than multiple destinations. People are now focussing more on health and wellness than before.

The emergence of travel segments like Wilderness tourism (Escapers) and Cult-Vacation (Conscious) has also shown that travellers' behaviour and preferences have changed towards spending more time in nature and being increasingly conscious of their impact on natural resources.

Tourism Authority of Thailand has been carrying out various initiatives to promote sustainable and responsible tourism for both domestic and international levels. TAT's new marketing campaign "Amazing Thailand: Amazing New Chapters" has a keen focus on the theme "The Earth We Care" that highlights nature's chance to revitalise itself, due to the fact that the COVID-19 situation has increased ecotourism awareness among the world's travellers and how their travel footprint can impact the environment. Additionally, the Amazing New Chapter on sustainable tourism is in line with the Royal Thai Government's Bio-Circular-Green or BCG economy model and our ongoing promotion of responsible and sustainable tourism. TAT's new marketing activities will emphasise Thailand's strengths in biological diversity and cultural richness under the "Amazing New Chapters" concept.



Pinki Arora,

Marketing Representative North & East India, Bangladesh & Nepal

Tourism Authority of Thailand New Delhi

'Travel in the post-pandemic world has been redefined in many ways'

The world has fully opened up and the global vaccination drive has changed the general mood from anxiety to acceptance. India, like most countries, is currently experiencing a massive surge in outbound travel as a direct result of the pent up demand. Both, leisure travel and the MICE business, are growing at a considerably fast pace and if there is no fourth wave, outbound may certainly be within close reach of meeting and exceeding pre-Covid levels by the end of this financial year.

Visa delays have been playing an important role in determining outbound market growth. As a result visa free access or visa on arrival has become an important factor for travellers. Not only does it take away the hassle of planning, documenting, long queues and wait time during visa appointments but also eliminates the anxiety and inconvenience associated with delays in visa processing or rejections. Since Indians are among the top four nationalities driving global travel demand, the Indian passport has been emerging stronger each year. Indian passport holders can now travel visa-free to 60 countries including Maldives, Jordan, Indonesia, Mauritius and Qatar, with Albania and Botswana being the relatively new additions to the list.

Travel in the post-pandemic world has been redefined in many ways. The last few months have stimulated a desire for 'exploration' and a demand for local and authentic experiences. Travel is now slower and more immersive. Booking periods have reduced because travellers continue to be cautious of isolated outbreaks and borders shutting down, and cancellation terms are being examined with a fine-toothed comb. Children focused itineraries are also gaining popularity as a means for parents to compensate for the isolation kids experienced during the lockdown. Significant growth is being recorded among individual travellers compared to group travel, which has been relatively slow to pick up. Revenge tourism is definitely one of the most prominent trends to emerge post- pandemic.



Yamini Singh

VP - Media - PR, Think Strawberries

'People are showing genuine interest in leisure holidays with family and friends'

In the past year, as an industry, considerable effort has been laid down to curb and shift the effects of the pandemic ebb. With destinations being accessible of late, there has been a boost and it will only further the growth exponentially for outbound travel. Destinations around the world are looking to stay at the top of travel trends more than ever before and have already recognized the potential of the outbound travel section not just from the metro cities of the country but also in tier 2 and tier 3 cities of India. So, it surely seems to have a positive trajectory so far and that instils hope for recovery across the industry.

The way I see it, favoured destinations amongst Indians are making their comeback given this particular scenario. In recent times ever since the easing of rules and regulations regarding covid19, Southeast Asia has gained rapid momentum in the increase of its visitor numbers. Thailand has been one of the leading destinations for holidaymakers since the quarantine was waived off and travel restrictions were lifted. Thailand is also a destination that appeals to all kinds of Indian travellers given its flexibility with budgets, its proximity, and its range of experiences.

It cannot be dismissed that the pandemic gave people a sense of losing time as a result of which there is a huge pent-up demand for international travel this year. People have been showing a genuine interest in leisure holidays with family and friends. More and more people are interested in spending quality time in nature and indulging in wellness-based travel to rejuvenate their minds and souls. Responsible travel where travellers want to form a true connection with the place they are visiting and get a taste of the local culture while leaving a positive impact on the community is also on the rise. There is a surge in travellers that are seeking experiences with personalisation and uniqueness. The tropical paradise islands of Seychelles are making strategic moves to create further awareness for Seychelles as a luxury destination for the Indian Market. Qatar too has an array of luxury offerings as a destination and is actively working towards tapping into the luxury segment of travellers from India through various marketing activities. This previously exclusive market of luxury travel is certainly evolving and growing.

While a lot changed in the travel and tourism industry in the last two years, a lot has begun to change for the better again. We are in an interesting space where there is curiosity and demand for travel like never before and destinations are open to visitors all over again. Recently a lot of destinations are lifting their restrictions and making them accessible once more which is great news for holidaymakers. Hence, I believe we are firmly placing one foot in front of another on our journey of not just reviving the industry but also making it thrive.



Lubaina Sheerazi

CEO & Co-founder, BRANDit

'People are returning to travel with highlighted aspirations of exploring the less explored'

With things going well, we are probably on the verge of a new era of travel. The new COVID-19 variants may impact the travel scenario, however it looks like it is only a matter of time before travellers hit the road and take to the skies again, thanks to rising vaccination rates and manageable caseloads. Travel restrictions have been relaxed in most countries and borders have been reopened for tourism to start in full swing. It appears people are returning to travel with highlighted aspirations of exploring the less explored as the worst effects of the COVID-19 pandemic fade.

In the post-pandemic era, travellers have been facing a hard time with successfully obtaining Visas for various countries, which is not only affecting the travel plans but also leaving an impact on the tourism business. Indians have visa-on-arrival access to 60 countries across the globe. Hence, a number of Indian travellers are now shifting their travel plans to countries which are offering easy e-visas and visa-free arrival options, such as the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Thailand and more.

Today's traveller has become cautious and more responsible due to the volatile travel restrictions. Therefore, they are eager to seek the assistance of travel agents. The uncertainty has created opportunities for companies to offer services that are flexible, as well as support for navigating the travel requirements. Organizing trips through tour operators/travel agents has become increasingly popular among travellers in the post-pandemic era. Various trends are surfacing these days such as the increasing importance of social media influencers and co-branded travel campaigns. Travellers are now looking up to the content creators and travel influencers for planning international trips. They are also showing interest in the co-branded travel campaigns by various OTAs, as the travellers are now able to bag amazing deals via these campaigns. Another interesting shift which we have observed is the interest of travellers from popular hotel chains to boutique hotels & resorts which are offering exclusive experiences to the visitors.

In the wake of the recent pandemic, travellers are increasingly looking for eco-friendly travel options. In order to make their trips more sustainable, consumers are seeking information on carbon emissions and how to offset them. In the midst of the travel industry's recovery, it's an important time to put the environment first and transform it for the better.

Komal Seth

Founder and Director, LinkIn



'There is more disposable income and higher need for quality and frequent travel'

The Indian outbound market has shown its resilience post the opening of borders. Revenge travel is real and the demand is at an all-time high. The willingness and keenness to travel is unprecedented and largely the market is very responsive with tremendous growth potential. For France, we have already seen arrivals since July 2021, when borders had initially opened and since then we have already had a wedding, incentive groups and a web series shooting in the South of France. Keeping this in mind, we estimate that arrival figures will indeed be encouraging and close to pre-pandemic levels.

As far as France is concerned, visas continue to be delivered in as timely a manner in possible. Clients have at the most postponed their travel plans but we have not had major cancellations. In fact, we have still had a grand wedding and incentive groups depart for France in the peak summer months of May and June, which reinforce the strong positioning of France as a preferred outbound travel destination. In addition, Reunion Island, an overseas territory of France, nestled in the Indian Ocean, has also seen an exponential growth in the number of Indian visitors thanks to their visa on arrival policy.

Some of the key take aways from the recovery travel phase is that there is more disposable income, higher need for quality, travel that is more frequent, better profile of travellers and growth in high spend segments across the board in FIT, weddings and incentives. For France, the traveller is more and more ready for immersive experiences, offbeat experiences and themed holidays such as self-drive, wellness escapades besides others.

They are travelling for short duration but taking multiple trips a year. People are travelling to celebrate landmark events like birthdays, bachelor parties, pre wedding shoot, friends' reunion. People are also more inclined to take a holiday with family. Also, with no travel for the past couple of years, travel to visit friends and relatives to spend good time together is important. During the pandemic everybody has gone through tough times, people are now ready to celebrate and need no reason to travel.



Sheetal Munshaw

Director – India, Atout France

'We have been witnessing great interest from leisure and corporate travellers'

We are definitely seeing a lot of pent up demand for travel. Not only there is a boom in leisure and VFR travel, business and corporate travel is also increasing. There is a surge in demand for travel across various destinations and this trend in all likelihood continue till the next season or maybe next year. India is becoming a top source market for many international destinations. Even though the air fares are high but it doesn't seem to deter the travel plans. Now that everything has opened up people are grabbing every opportunity to travel be it for celebration, weekend getaway, short trips, long trips, visiting friends and relatives, corporate meetings, bleisure etc.

Ireland has been receiving great visitor numbers from India for leisure travel and we expect this trend to continue. Apart from the leisure groups, corporates have visited Ireland this year.

Visa is a very important factor in selecting a destination to travel. Ease of visa amounts to ease of travel. Those destinations that offer Visa on Arrival or visas are available easily are in demand. There are some countries where the wait period is very long and therefore people are hesitant to travel to these destinations.

Australia for example has an online and completely hassle free visa procedure. There are no biometrics required and no physical hand over of passport either. Hence the destination is popular among Indian travellers. For Ireland too, the visa scheme has been simplified. The increase in global travel and demand for unique destinations and experiences validates the fact that travellers are evolving and have become more demanding. Travellers are looking for sustainable resorts, lodges, hotels. Safety and security is always important during travel. Experiential holidays are on the rise. Travellers are more interested in activity based holidays. They want to experience the fun and thrill of doing different things. They are travelling for short duration but taking multiple trips a year. People are travelling to celebrate landmark events like birthdays, bachelor parties, pre wedding shoot, friends' reunion. People are also more inclined to take a holiday with family. Also, with no travel for the past couple of years, travel to visit friends and relatives to spend good time together is important. During the pandemic everybody has gone through tough times, people are now ready to celebrate and need no reason to travel.



Beena Menon & Huzan Fraser Motivala

Partners, Beautiful Planet Destination Marketing

'Indians are now exploring more variety for long-haul destinations'

The demand for international travel has been encouraging in the recent past owing to decline in COVID-19 cases and gradual reopening of country borders, especially for South-East Asian countries and Middle East. However, it will take a substantial amount of time to regain pre-COVID numbers owing to multiple factors such as geo-political situations, surge in airfares and hotel rates and untimely delay in visa issuance. Adding to it, domestic destinations have cemented its way to the Indian travellers' preference during COVID-19 and continues to dominate.

If not by the end of the ongoing year, we can only be hopeful that the following year will witness increase in outbound traffic from India to countries beyond Asia.

Yes, visa delays, especially in Europe have positively led to increased travel in countries that offer the option of online applications with minimum turnaround of 24-72 hours. Countries such as Vietnam, Thailand, UAE and African countries such as Kenya have benefitted from their ease in visa-application process in the past few months and recorded higher traffic from India.

Indians are now exploring more variety for long-haul destinations and deviating from the European and American itineraries for their upcoming vacations.

The Indian international traveller has evolved drastically in the past two-three years are presently seeking experiences and not rushed holiday itineraries. Duration of stays in long-haul destinations has lengthened primarily to make the most of high airline fares. Staycations are still doing very well for short-haul destinations as most corporates and organizations continue to work remotely or in a hybrid format.

Additionally, travellers have initiated adapting sustainable methods of travel and the younger generation is being mindful of their carbon footprint, resource consumption and wastage; thus, leading to generation of more itineraries that are heavy on cultural activities, local experiences and conscious means of transportation.

Neeti Bhatia

Director, Intrepid Marketing & Communications



'We are seeing a trend of travellers now eager to book long-haul destinations'

Almost nine months into 2022, a sense of optimism has returned to the tourism sector, as travel demand finally shows signs of a significant uptick. This has been a great news for all travellers and the industry, especially before the next summer season despite missing on 2 summer periods. The demand for international travel (Germany) is picking up in India and there has been a significant uptick in travel search queries for destinations like Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich. Travel search queries from India for German cities like Baden Baden/ Stuttgart/Munich/Berlin Black forest and the Rhine region have seen a major jump. We are seeing a trend of travellers now eager to book long-haul destinations, fuelled by international borders reopening and relaxation of rules across the globe. Coming off the worst year in tourism history, there's little sense of optimism in the travel industry and expecting a return to pre-pandemic levels by 2023. If past instances serve as indicators, we'll see travel demand soaring once travel restrictions are eased and freedom of mobility returns. If the visa situation was normal or close to normal (maximum two weeks processing time) we would have reached 65% of pre pandemic overnights in 2022.

At the moment travel in India is seeing pre pandemic inquiries, after speaking with the German Embassy visa sections in New Delhi and Mumbai we were told demand is very high for people wanting to visit Germany (Leisure, Business, trade fairs and Incentives). So much so that the process for applying for the visa can take unto one or two months in some cases and even after submitting your documents it will further take two weeks for the visa to be issued. The east has emerged as the most viable option for budget-conscious Indian tourists due to sky-high airfares to the west and visa delays for US, Canada, UK and Schengen nations of Europe. As a result, nations like UAE, Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia and Maldives have become go-to destinations for budget travellers.

More and more people want to explore the local culture and have a positive impact on the community they are visiting. It probably might be the pandemic that has made people more aware of their surroundings. Traveling responsibly is of high importance for the respondents such as taking a 'greencation' or more likely to book travel with a brand that is committed to improving its environmental impact.

Sustainable travel has grown in popularity in recent years as people have tried to mitigate the negative effects of tourism, either by avoiding damaging practices or offsetting them. The travel trends indicate that long-haul travel, neighbouring country tourism, rural and ethnic tourism, wellness and health holidays, cultural tourism, spiritualism, ecotourism, sports and adventure holidays, and coastal tourism and cruises are a few emerging areas of tourist interest.

Lastly, would like to highlight over the remainder of 2022, corporate travel would grow significantly from its now-small base. Team meetings that have been postponed multiple times will finally take place. More conferences will shift back from online to in-person, and those that already have will likely see attendance improve. Even international trips should grow significantly, although some regions will recover faster than others.

Important goal of the GNTB is to strengthen Germany's position as a sustainable travel destination in international competition. With the start of our new global campaign "Embrace German Nature", GNTB, India along with the German National Tourist Board draws the interest of potential vacationers to Germany to the natural landscapes and sustainable vacation experiences in the rural regions. According to IPK International, Germany is currently in second place as a nature travel destination when Europeans travel around the world. We want to further strengthen these positions.



Romit Theophilus

Director, German National Tourist Office, India (GNTB)

TAAI 66th Cruising Convention

concludes successfully amidst informal interactions & knowledge sessions

The recently concluded TAAI 66th Cruising Convention, which took place aboard the Spectrum of the Seas, was a first in many ways. Classy, distinctive, suave and invigorating, the convention has truly heralded the return of tourism (and how!). It had brief two-hour knowledge sessions each day, no formal presentations (barring just a couple) and no official speeches. While it was a refreshing change, especially as many were taking their first break post Covid and were in no mood for long business sessions, there were some who felt that the Convention lacked 'official' element. But then, the **TAAI President Ms. Jyoti Mayal** is a lady who is known for doing things differently and she truly wanted to have a TAAI convention – which is different from all the conventions! This one truly was...



Priyanka Saxena Ray

The very announcement of the 66th TAAI Cruising Convention had stirred many feathers in the tourism industry as no one was expecting to get back on a Cruise so soon in the post pandemic era, especially keeping in mind the horror stories many of us had heard of people staying locked up in cruise ships for days in case one of them was detected positive. But TAAI has always been known as an association that do things differently. Its cabins were booked within 48 hours and on the day of the arrival, an excited bunch of 320 delegates queued up to board the Spectrum of the Seas – the latest ship to set sail in Asian waters. Like me, there were many who were taking the first ever Cruise trip and thanking the association in their hearts for giving this wonderful opportunity. It truly takes guts to host a Cruise Convention, especially post Covid where the paperwork alone is exhausting.

Once onboard the Spectrum of the Seas, the 320 TAAI delegates were in for a treat as the ship has many unique features to offer and TAAI gave ample time to its delegates to experience it all. The association had arranged for an early check-in and lunch followed by a brief welcome address in the evening. The following two

days of the Convention too gave enough time to the delegates to experience the ship offerings and did not hold delegates up in long business sessions. While there were some who definitely felt that the association could have given more time to its business sessions, especially keeping the quality of speakers in mind who were outstanding, a majority of the delegates were happy to be left on their own for exploration.

The TAAI 66th Cruising Convention floated on the theme 'Namaste India' and interestingly explored not the outbound travel possibilities but also developing and boosting relations within India and Asia Pacific. The convention witnessed representatives from Sri Lanka Tourism, Nepal Tourism Board and Kazakh Tourism, who were present to not just show solidarity but also apprise the delegates on the travel scenario to their country.

Day 2 of the Convention started with the entire TAAI MC Committee getting on stage and singing the National Anthem, standing together in unity, sending out a clear message that India and Indians are ready to travel and welcome again. A session on – Oceanside Chat – War Peace & Tourism was chaired by two very dynamic personalities – Ambassador (Retd.) Mr. Anil Wadhwa and



Ambassador (Retd.) Mrs. Deepa Gopalan Wadhwa who talked about their experiences and shared what can be done to boost India's tourism image in international markets.

Up next was a session moderated by Ms. Reema Lokesh comprising an intellectual panel Mr. Rodney D'Cruz, Assistant Director, Passenger and Cargo Services, India, Nepal & Bhutan, IATA; Ms. Ratna Chadha, CEO, TIRUN; Mr. Greesh Bindra, Vice President Operations, The Suryaa and Mr. Vinay Malhotra, Head of Global Sales, IndiGo that talked about technology's intervention in travel and tourism today and discussed whether the same is good or bad along with the way forward.

Post lunch, the ship docked in Penang and delegates were taken to the Angsana Teluk Bahang, a beautiful and ultra-luxury hotel in the Penang Island. Here, while the rain played spoiled sport on the beach sundowner party, the evening was fun with Bollywood music and drinks as everyone was offered a taste of Malaysian hospitality as well. Day 3 of the Convention started with a Press Conference chaired the Nepal Tourism Delegation comprising 15 members who were representing various verticals of Nepal as they briefed the media about what's the latest in the country. This was followed by a session titled 'Partnership Beyond Borders' moderated by Mr. Anoop Kanuga and consisting of Mr. Chalaka Gajabahu, Chairman Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB); Mr. Galimzhan Seilov, Senior Manager



International Kazak Tourism and Mr. Surya Thapaliya, Manager, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB). Up next was a session that talked about the 'Evolved Traveller' and was moderated by Mr. Ashish Gupta, CEO, Faith. The panel comprised Mr. Richard Roberts, Vice President – Strategic Solutions and Partnerships APAC, Travelport; Mr. Amit Shukla, Vice President – B2B and Affiliates, MakeMyTrip; Mr. Rakesh Bansal, CEO, Amadeus India and Mr. B Hariharan, Vice President, ITC Hotels.

Putting a Cruise Convention together in mere 12 days is a herculean task and if anyone could achieve it, it had to be Ms. Mayal, who is truly the wonder woman of our industry. "Yes it was not easy but I also realised that the last two years have been so tough for the industry that as a President, I must do something for them, which will instantly bring a smile on their faces and a Cruise Convention just did that! It definitely had its own set of challenges but then again there is no fun in a success that comes without challenges. I would truly like to thank all my Office Bearers and members of the Managing Committee who helped me put this event together. The



support extended to us by Ratna from TIRUN has been instrumental in putting this convention together and lastly, the delegates who

agreed to follow protocols and guidelines to be a part of this – all of them made these 3 days a success. I always say that my members are my priority and whatever I do, I do keeping their best interests at heart. If this Convention was beneficial to them and their business in any small way, I would consider myself blessed,” she concluded.



Sharjah Tourism Authority holds successful roadshow in Mumbai for travel trade

The Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) hosted its first Road show in Mumbai after the pandemic. **HE Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman of Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA)** spoke to BOTT in an exclusive chat. Here are a few excerpts from the interview.

Shreya Shimpi

How do you see India as a market in terms of tourism?

Since 2014, India has been occupying a large market share in terms of tourism and we see a huge potential there. We have been continuously growing our network and connectivity. There are 1080 flights per week across India. The growth factor is almost 95%. Indian travellers are very specific in terms of their demands when it comes to tourism. They want value for money. Also, families travelling to Sharjah would like their kids to learn as they explore our city. Their aim is not just travel, but edutainment which is a combination of education and entertainment and we are delighted to offer them that. Sharjah is not very commercial and we endeavour to provide our tourists with insights into our culture and traditions through our museums, architecture, cuisine etc.

Are there any travel restrictions at present especially concerning Covid-19?

We have lifted all the travel restrictions. We are dynamic and were one of the few cities to have lifted such restrictions quite early and we aim and attracting more tourists to Sharjah post-pandemic.

What are the new attractions that tourists can visit in Sharjah?

Even during the pandemic, we have invested heavily in the infrastructure. We feel it is critical to showcase our new developments to our travellers. The biggest Safari in the world after Africa has now opened in Sharjah. It aims at keeping the animals in their natural habitat. It is an 8.5 sq. km park and is home to over 120 African species and 50,000 other species which include the black rhino, white rhino etc. It aims at providing information regarding the various flora and fauna thereby providing them, especially kids with an education along with entertainment. Only a certain number of visitors are allowed each day. The safari has also created many job opportunities.

What are the other attractions worth exploring?

Tourists can check out the "Al Suhub Rest House" which is a "cloud lounge" situated 600 metres above sea level. It provides excellent panoramic views of the city. The other places worth visiting are the Al Dhaid Fort, Al Faya Retreat etc. The Al Faya Retreat is a five-star boutique hotel (which was earlier a clinic) with just five rooms, but provides a unique personalised experience. The Discovery Centre showcases a rich history which dates back to nearly 3000 years with proven evidence of human existence. Sharjah has more than fifty per cent of the country's museums and rare treat for history connoisseurs. There are also various artefacts on display in the museums. The museums are not just for viewing artefacts, but they also provide a 360 degree experience since they are well equipped with cafeterias and



eateries. The Sharjah Biennial Art Exhibition is held every year since 1993. Sharjah is suitable for all age groups as a tourist destination. It has been awarded as the 'International Child-Friendly Destination' by the United Nations. It has also been called 'The Capital of Arab Culture' by UNESCO.

Does Sharjah have anything to offer for adventure lovers?

Yes. We have started hiking trails on the East coast and a new bicycle track which is 24 km long in the desert and is one-of-a-kind. It is equipped with all facilities such as restrooms, eateries etc. There is also kayaking across the east and west coast.

Are there any new marketing strategies that have been implemented?

We like to keep up with technological advancements and Sharjah is now on Metaverse with all its experiences. You can also now make bookings on Metaverse. We have added a lot of new attractions for tourists to explore which are quite appealing.

The infrastructure is getting developed at a first pace and we are improving the road connectivity as well. The Sharjah International Airport is now in the stage of expansion. It earlier had a capacity of holding 12 million passengers but by the end of 2024, we aim at increasing the capacity to 20-25 million passengers. It will also have separate terminals for arrivals and departures.

The Research and Innovation Park is one such attraction. The Monorail work is underway and it becoming a zero-emission high-speed public transport. We have also ventured into 3D manufacturing of various equipment and machinery like shipping for example. The aim is the 3D manufacture of such equipment at a low cost and high speed. Such 3D buildings are also part of the development plan and work is underway for the same. Sharjah also has the biggest University in the Middle East. It is the perfect combination of education, innovation and research.

Dubai Tourism strengthens presence in India market with multi-city roadshows

As the Indian outbound travel grows, the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), recently hosted a robust series of four city roadshows in Kolkata, Bengaluru, Kochi and Chennai with the objective of introducing the travel trade fraternity in key Tier II cities to new offerings in Dubai. **Bader Ali Habib, South Asia International Operations Region Head of Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism**, headed the delegation and shared all about the recent developments in Dubai.

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The four-city roadshow offered an excellent networking and engagement opportunity with a wide delegation of Dubai Tourism stakeholders ranging from mid-segment to luxury hotel brands, attractions, DMCs, airlines and cruise liners.

The trade engagement program was attended by over 150 travel trade partners in each city, fostering new networks with the stakeholders and deepened knowledge about the destination. The strong turnout at the roadshows reinstated the heightened interest of the Indian travel trade in all that Dubai has to offer. Be it futuristic innovations, sports, gastronomy, tourism or bleisure (business + leisure) options, since reopening to the global market in July 2020, Dubai has never looked back. Indian visitors including families, honeymooners and MICE travellers have made their way to Dubai in 2020, 2021 and continuing the trend in 2022 to participate in strategic initiatives for growth. Dubai recorded 858,000 Indian tourists in H1 2022, making India the no. 1 source market for the emirate. As compared to H1 2021, Dubai witnessed a 100% growth in visitor arrivals from India. Moreover, this number was close to the number of tourists achieved in the first half of 2019, which saw 996,000 Indian arrivals. The emirate's ability to quickly return to near pre-pandemic tourism levels is even more remarkable given the impact of unprecedented challenges and other macroeconomic factors on the global economy and tourism sector.

Bader Ali Habib, South Asia International Operations Region Head of Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, said, "Looking at the economic growth trajectory of Tier II cities in India and the growing purchasing power among consumers, the accessibility that Dubai enjoys into smaller cities as well as the growing appetite for travel in India, we see an opportunity to further penetrate through a more targeted and personalised approach. Tier II audiences have a different travel pattern and behaviour and we continue to closely study them and tailor our efforts for them."

Habib further added, "As India remains our no. 1 Source Market for



the year, a lot of our efforts in the market are tailored, data-driven and dedicated to the tastes and liking of our audiences. From a B2B perspective, this year we have taken a more aggressive route in terms of B2B engagements, visits and outreach to ensure we can continue building relationship with the trade in smaller cities across all regions of India. We have partnered with leading travel agencies, OTA's and B2B travel platforms. These strategic tie-ups have calendar plug-ins to ensure packages are dynamically pushed throughout the period addressing different audience segments and profiles."

As travel confidence increases, Dubai is anticipating a sustained visitation from India in 2022 and beyond, as more and more travellers discover and re-discover the city and the emirate's diversification of offerings and experiences. With the continued support of Dubai Tourism's stakeholders and partners, Dubai is committed to always offering something new, unique and world-class for the sophisticated global traveller. Early on this year, the emirate witnessed the inauguration of the beautiful building, the Museum of the Future, by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Many other mega projects are in the pipeline as Dubai continues to build on the destination pillars – whether it is culture or gastronomy, entertainment, wellness and relaxation, outdoor adventures or beach activities, family-oriented experiences and shopping in line with the emirate's visionary leadership's goal to make Dubai the most attractive destination and the best city in the world to live in and work.



The GNTB *presents* the 100 most popular tourist attractions in Germany

Between December 2021 and June 2022, around 15,000 international visitors from 30 countries chose their favourite tourist destinations in Germany. The current TOP 100 ranking is now online at www.germany.travel/top100



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Last year's winner, Miniatur Wunderland Hamburg, received the most votes. EuropaPark Rust was also able to defend its second place. Rothenburg ob der Tauber took third place for the first time. Neuschwanstein Castle, Phantasialand Brühl, our capital Berlin, the Black Forest National Park, the Rothenburg ob der Tauber Criminal Museum, Dresden, and the Moselle Valley followed.

Petra Hedorfer, CEO, Board of Directors, GNTB, "For ten years in a row, the TOP 100 ranking presents Germany's tourist destinations and sights. The ranking not only provides a snapshot of international awareness and popularity. The lively participation is also a vote for the appeal of the destination brand, Germany in the international competition."

Since 2012, visitors of www.germany.travel have been able to use a free text field to name the tourist destinations they consider particularly recommendable. From this, the GNTB develops the ranking of the TOP 100.

"History, culture, and natural beauty perhaps best describe the essence of vacationing in Germany. With its many historic cities and quaint small towns, along with an abundance of forests and mountains, Indian visitors are spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing unique places to visit in this beautiful part of Europe," said Romit Theophilus, Director, German National Tourist Office, India (GNTO).

In addition to the overall ranking, the survey results are structured into clusters: UNESCO World Heritage Sites, cities, urban highlights, natural highlights, leisure & animal parks, museums, national parks, regions, castles and palaces.

At a glance: the current rankings in the TOP 100 categories 2022

UNESCO World Heritage Ranking

1	UNESCO- World Heritage Dome of Cologne
2	UNESCO- World Heritage Museum Island Berlin
3	UNESCO- World Heritage Dome of Speyer
4	UNESCO- World Heritage Baden-Baden
5	UNESCO- World Heritage Castle Sanssouci, Potsdam

Cities Ranking

1	Rothenburg ob der Tauber
2	Berlin
3	Dresden
4	Hamburg
5	Munich

Urban Highlights Ranking

1	Miniature Wonderland Hamburg
2	Dome of Cologne
3	Berlin wall
4	Elbphilharmonie Hamburg
5	Dresdner Zwinger

Leisure & Animal Parks Ranking

1	Europa-Park, Rust
2	Phantasialand, Brühl
3	LEGOLAND Deutschland Resort, Günzburg
4	Heide Park Resort, Soltau
5	Erlebnispark Tripsdrill mit Wildparadies, Tripsdrill

Castles & Palaces Ranking

1	Castle Neuschwanstein, Hohenschwangau
2	Castle Eltz
3	Castle Heidelberg
4	Castle Hohenzollern, Bisingen
5	Castle Sanssouci, Potsdam

Visit Iceland and the Embassy of Iceland New Delhi hosts Iceland Tourism Roadshow

With an aim to tap the burgeoning Indian outbound market, Visit Iceland in association with the Embassy of Iceland New Delhi hosted a two-city Road Show, Press Meet and Networking evening in New Delhi and Mumbai in September.

Being held under the aegis of Iceland's new Ambassador to New Delhi **H.E. Mr. Gudni Bragason**, Visit Iceland primarily showcased all that the destination has to offer while addressing the concerns and queries of the travel trade. Representation World assisted Visit Iceland in organising its events in the two cities.

Shreya Shimpi

The Incoming Delegation of Partners for Roadshow this year included Mr. Thorleifur Thor Johnson, Senior Manager, Trade Delegations – Business Iceland; Mr. Ársæll Hardarson, Regional Manager, GSA Asia, Middle East & South America, Icelandair; Mr. Erling Aspelund and Ms. Kristín Björnsdóttir, Owners, Iceland Encounter; Bjarni Hrafn Ingólfsson Managing Director; Terra Nova.

In an exclusive chat with BOTT, Thorleifur Thor Jonsson shares some information on Iceland's plans for the India market.

How do you see India as a market for tourism?

India is one of our biggest markets in Southeast Asia from the tourism point of view. Indian travellers like to spend well on their vacations. Iceland has been receiving a considerable number of tourists from India and they are very important to us. Iceland offers a different experience to them with regards to the climate, terrain, cuisine and a lot of other factors which are worth exploring and provides an interesting contrast. There are acres and acres of land without any people. If you wish to seek solitude and adventure, Iceland is your place to be.

What are the challenges that you have been facing after the pandemic?

Tourism was badly affected globally, but the major challenge was that a lot of the staff in the tourism and hospitality sector left their jobs and never came back. Due to this, we have been understaffed. We were surprised by the response we received after the pandemic since such a footfall was unexpected. We opened up very fast post-pandemic and we are now completely open devoid of any travel restrictions. We are glad that people are choosing Iceland for travelling. We look forward to giving them the experience to remember and stories to share.

What are the various attractions which are worth visiting?

The very famous Northern Lights are among the key highlights. They are best seen from the beginning of September to late March. You can go fishing and catch the best fish or have the best organic and locally grown vegetables such as cucumbers and tomatoes, coming straight from the greenhouses and are grown all around the year. The Midnight Sun is also a sight to behold. The cleanest drinking water in the world is available here. Tourists can also visit the spas for relaxation and rejuvenation. Bathing in thermal baths is an Icelandic tradition. We also have some volcanic eruptions and few of our tourists have been lucky to witness fresh eruptions. You also need not worry about Indian food as we have some excellent Indian food restaurants as well.

What is so special about Iceland?

We have a population of only 370,000 people. We have adopted a renewable and sustainable lifestyle. We harness geothermal energy and hydropower. Most of our resources except oil are self-produced;



hence we remain unaffected by any kind of crisis. Hot water is pumped from the ground and we produce all the energy locally. We are an easy and peaceful society having the No.1 World Peace Index and we are also number one as far as gender equality is concerned. The cuisine of Iceland especially the fish is worth trying. The Reykjavik Marathon is famous too. The recreational facilities are affordable as well.

Are there any marketing strategies in place to attract Indian tourists?

At the beginning of 2019, we had started direct flights from India to Iceland but those could not be continued due to some reasons. We hope to start the services soon and we are optimistic since great interest is shown by Indian tour operators. There is a possibility of it happening within the next five years and that will help us increase our network as well. We are at present working only with the B2B market and trying to make connections with tour operators. We do not have a huge budget for marketing but we do advertise across our social media platforms. We believe that our best marketing happens through word-of-mouth from tourists who have visited Iceland.

What would be your message to our readers?

Come and see something different and experience Iceland. There is a lot to explore.

South African Tourism sector bounces back, witnesses 147% growth in arrivals

Minister of Tourism, Lindiwe Sisulu, in a recent press conference informed the media that “the South African tourism sector is poised for a tremendous bounce back and positive growth after the first half of the year (2022) figures show a staggering 147% in arrivals reaching an impressive 2,285,746.” Read on to know more –

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Sisulu was speaking in Johannesburg during a media briefing where she presented the domestic and international tourism performance for January to June 2022. “We are particularly pleased that the arrivals from the Americas increased by 331% and represented 128,991 arrivals,” Sisulu said. According to the Minister, Europe remains South Africa’s key overseas market and despite external shocks such as the war in Ukraine, it still “had the most considerable percentage increase in arrivals of 563.”

However, she maintains that the African land market is our bread and butter, and it also showed impressive growth, dwarfing the Europe and Americas arrivals numbers. She added: “The African air market brought in 1,634,244 arrivals.”

Tourism’s upward trajectory is overwhelming on the domestic front; where between January and June 2022, 15.2 million domestic trips were taken. The Minister described this as “A major win for the tourism sector as this is higher than pre-pandemic levels, indicating that South Africa’s domestic tourism sector has also experienced a revenge travel trend.”

Sisulu said the most heart-warming aspect of the numbers was that the share of holiday trips has increased by 23.8% compared with the same period in 2021, and the average spend has skyrocketed to 28.6.” As a rule of thumb, you must have “A buoyant domestic market because it is a silver bullet that turns locals into storytellers and ambassadors of their country,” the Minister said.

The performance report shows that South Africans spend R 2,850 on their domestic trips. “The biggest driver of domestic travel in the first six months of 2022 was the easing of Covid-19 travel restrictions,” the Minister insisted.

On global airlift, the numbers are also picking up quite nicely. “There is a steady increase in global seat capacity – Air capacity is just 61% of the 2019 levels, with Airlink as the largest airline, which has seen fares up by 7%,” she said.

Most remarkable, she said, “75% of seat capacity in South Africa is on Johannesburg routes. Seat capacity on the routes to Johannesburg grew 71% over 2021 – Qatar is the largest source route.” She said Cape Town



has an impressive 1.2 million seats, with Emirates Airways being the largest route.

“And, Durban – King Shaka International Airport is punching above its weight with a 150% growth from 2021 representing 4% of all seats,” she said. “The Durban routes grew with Emirates seats up over 400% and was the most extensive route in the region,” she added.

“Kruger also had 23,100 seats in 2022 (less than 1% of all seats on international routes). The two airlines active on the route are Lufthansa from Frankfurt and Airlink from Livingstone,” the tourism performance report reveals.

The Minister disclosed that “forward bookings increased by 328% (85,960) in August.” Notably, “Between August to October, there was a 287% (187,667). For August to January 2023, there was a 227% (294,220) increase in bookings,” she added.

“We will continue to intensify targeted communication on our digital platforms to sell South Africa as a destination of choice, inviting the world to come and “Live Again” with us,” she concluded.

TAT hosts **Amazing Wedding Destination** Networking Lunch in New Delhi

In efforts to promote Thailand as a perfect destination for Indian weddings and special occasion celebrations like anniversary, birthdays, reunions etc., Tourism Authority of Thailand, New Delhi recently organised a networking session for Indian wedding planners, Thai hotel representatives and a few luxury agents based in New Delhi. The event took place at ITC Maurya on August 31, 2022.



BOTT DESK

The afternoon started with a welcome note by Mr. Vachirachai Sirisumpan, Director – TAT New Delhi who spoke about, Tourism Authority of Thailand's new marketing campaign "Amazing New Chapter" for A to Z Thailand has it all. This campaign emphasizes that Thailand has everything to suit each traveller's needs and wants, and offers new perspectives as well as new experiences in Thailand. He also highlighted the importance of Indian Weddings & Celebrations for Thailand Tourism and Hospitality Businesses. He further said that TAT is looking forward to welcoming Indian tourists to celebrate the special moments in their life like honeymoons, babymoos, birthdays, bachelor/bachelorette parties and many more such occasions, in Amazing Thailand.

Mr Sirisumpan ended his address by saying, "After a long gap of over two years, we are pleased to inform you that from 1 January 2022 until 31 August 2022 we have welcomed more than 440,000 Indians visiting Thailand and we expect by the end of this year, that we could welcome 850,000 Indian visitors to Thailand. I am sure we can achieve this milestone by the continuous support of our industry partners and friends of Amazing Thailand."

The welcome was followed by product presentations by the Thai hotel partners, that included well known hotel chains in Thailand like Minor hotels, Centara hotels & Resort, Banyan Tree hotels, Avista Group of hotels, The Preferred Hotels & Resorts (Landmark hotel), Kata group & Beyond hotels, Kempinski hotels, Melia hotels and Onyx hospitality group (Amari hotels).



The representatives highlighted the offerings and arrangements by their hotels to welcome and organise Indian weddings and special occasion celebrations in Thailand, from the availability of suitable décor, wedding artists, pundits to a variety of Indian food and of course the warm Thai hospitality.

The event saw a good attendance of about 35 wedding planners and 15 luxury travel agents and was a great initiative to connect the Thai hotels with some of the top wedding planners in North India to promote "Vivaha in Amazing Thailand."

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Brand USA is an organization dedicated to marketing the United States as a premier travel destination. It works in close partnership with the travel industry to maximize the economic and social benefits of travel. Brand USA supports numerous trade activities, including trade shows, sales missions, training initiatives and Fam Trips. Brand USA offers a variety of tools and platforms for the travel trade and media to help them understand and market the product better –



DISCOVERY
PROGRAM
India

Official Website - www.traveltrade.gousa.in

Brand USA India Travel Trade


website (www.traveltrade.gousa.in) is the official resource for USA travel planning. Here you will find itineraries, images, videos, DMC info, themed inspiration and information to help you book more travel to the USA! Travel trade officials get to watch fun and exciting travel videos and find out how to embed them in their own collateral. Also, they can browse robust regional and themed itineraries, beginning in key gateway cities and exploring beyond them to discover both iconic landmarks and hidden gems.




USA Discovery Program



The free e-learning program by Brand USA is called USA Discovery Program and can be accessed at www.usadiscoveryprogram.in. The USA Discovery Program is Brand USA's official online agent training program. Here, travel professionals get to learn about all the six U.S. regions and experiences available in the USA to get inspired to sell USA holidays.



The e-learning platform aims to help you sell the USA like never before. Covering the diverse destinations and experiences available in the USA the site can be used as both a handy online reference for when you're chatting with customers and need to know more, as well as the official training program of Brand USA.



By taking the training you can become a USA Specialist and receive official badges as a recognized qualification of expertise. It's completely free and completely flexible! You can learn in your own time, at your own pace.

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GoUSA TV is a FREE global, multi-channel travel entertainment network, powered by Brand USA where you can watch documentaries, series and movies. It covers all of the USA's must-see places, great outdoors, foodie hot spots, sports experiences and amazing road trips. It is available on Apple TV, Amazon Fire, iOS, Android, and Samsung TV Plus. For more information and interesting videos, you can visit: www.gousa.in/gousa-tv

'India is an important potential source market for Portugal': **Claudia Matias**

India is a huge source market for any destination in the world today and Portugal is no different. The country plans to tap on the growing Indian outbound segment in the upcoming year and have plans to enhance its marketing activities in the region in order to do so. They have plenty of events scheduled for the following months, including the trade webinar and networking events. **Ms. Claudia Matias, India Director – Visit Portugal** shares more in an exclusive chat with BOTT.

BOTT DESK

Just like the rest of the world, Portugal too must have experienced a dip in tourism in 2020 – 2021. What were the coping mechanisms put in place to handle the situation?

With a significant decline in international travel over the last two years, the tourist industry has faced major difficulties. In 2019, we were witnessing a significant rise of Indian tourists, but suddenly, as a result of the pandemic, all operations came to an abrupt halt. Throughout that time, we made sure to keep promoting Portugal to the trade. In order for the trade partners to be ready to start marketing Portugal when tourism does start, it was our intention to use this time to educate the trade partners. To help with all the information one may require about our destination, we have developed our own E-Learning module that has been specially curated for the Indian trade partners. With the help of itinerary builder, the travel agent can also make the itinerary and can save it for future references. We had a lot of virtual destination presentations, and I'm delighted to say that we're receiving a lot of inquiries about travel. All of this helped to raise the awareness of the destination and the fact that we are here in India to assist travel industry professionals.

Currently, has tourism picked up in Portugal? By when do you think you will be able to go back to the 2019 figures?

Guests and overnight stays exceeds 2019 levels in Portugal. The tourist accommodation sector registered 3.0 million guests and 8.6 million overnight stays in July 2022, corresponding to year-on-year rates of change of +85.4% and +90.1%, respectively (+97.6% and +110.7% in June, in the same order). Compared to July 2019, there were increases of 6.3% and 4.8%, respectively. In July, the domestic market contributed with 2.9 million overnight stays (+9.1%) and the external markets amounted to 5.7 million (+205.2%). Compared to July 2019, the domestic market grew by 15.8% and external markets reached the same level as in 2019. In the first seven months of 2022, overnight stays increased by 194.3% (+58.5% in residents and +406.2% in non-residents). Compared to the same period in 2019, overnight stays decreased by 4.4% (-9.4% for non-residents and +7.8% for residents).

How many Indian tourists visit Portugal? Are you happy with this number?

Prior to the pandemic, there was a rise in the number of Indians visiting Portugal, and we anticipated a significant growth. In 2019, India positioned itself as the 29th largest foreign demand market for Portugal, measured both by the overnight stays' indicator (0.3% share) and 28th when evaluated by the guest indicator. (0.4% share). The market was responsible for 72,500 guests and 159,000 overnight stays, registering a growth of 37.0% in guests and an increase of 17.5% in overnight stays compared to the previous year (2018). In terms of tourism receipts, we had a 34.4% increase from India. We do see an interest and fast recovery from the Indian market towards Portugal. Within the first semester of



2022 compared to 2019 when evaluated by guest indicator, despite being too far from the potential of growth we could be having and welcoming Indian tourists, only -32%, whereas in overnight stays – 25,1%. These indicators do show us that Portugal is a destination that is very suitable for the Indian market and connectivity from the Middle East, any Hub or European capital works very well, until we have our direct flight.

What are the various initiatives / marketing strategies being adapted by you to increase this number?

India is a big source market for us, and in the upcoming year, we plan to enhance our marketing activities here. We have a ton of events scheduled for the following months, including the trade webinar and networking events. We are also organizing the agenda for our FAM tour and are excited to host the trade agents and media from India. Additionally, we have already participated in notable occasions like MILT and ITB India. Our goal remains to provide destination knowledge to trade partners and to raise destination awareness within the industry, as Portugal is still a niche or new destination to many. Portugal Expert E-Learning course is available, providing trade partners with a certification and tourism expertise about the destination. I will continue to travel within India (recently been to Mumbai and Bangalore) and meet our partners and respective teams in their offices. Portugal is already one of the most approached destinations by international travellers, with 7 regions within easy reach Madeira, Azores, Alentejo, Algarve, Lisbon region Porto and the North. We are a country of contrasts with such heritage, diversity and inclusiveness, warm hospitality, and mild weather. We invite Indian travellers to discover Portugal.

Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul offers ultimate luxury in hospitality

Çırağan Palace Kempinski in Istanbul, Turkey is undoubtedly one of the finest palace hotels, not just in the country but across the world. It offers a resort ambience in the city and reflects the ultimate luxury of an Ottoman Palace with a total of 310 rooms, including 279 rooms and 20 suites in the hotel section and 11 suites in the palace section. **Mr. Ralph Radtke, General Manager, Ciragan Palace Kempinski** shares more information not just about the palace hotel but also the challenges they faced during the pandemic in an exclusive chat with BOTT.



Priyanka Saxena Ray

The only Ottoman Imperial Palace and Hotel on the Bosphorus that once hosted Sultans, Çırağan Palace has a heritage that dates back to the 17th century. The building had different formations including a waterside summer villa and a marble palace. The Hotel and Palace opened in 1991 as an accommodation and event venue managed by Kempinski, Europe's oldest luxury hotel group; celebrating its 125th year anniversary.

Mr. Ralph Radtke has been the General Manager of the iconic Ciragan Palace Kempinski Istanbul since 2011 and takes pride in the journey he has led and continues till date with the landmark property. Çırağan Palace Kempinski is regarded as the ideal venue to host city's high profile meetings and congresses, weddings and social events where one can create memories to remember for a lifetime experience.

Extremely lively and witty, Mr. Radtke's passion for the property is well-reflected in the manner he talks about it. A man of many talents, he prides in keeping a check on all aspects of the property and often personally spends time meeting with the guests and taking their feedback on the stay. A hotel that has catered to many celebrities, royalties and popular stars, the Ciragan Palace Kempinski is also popular for hosting lavish weddings and social events. Infact, the hotels has also hosted few Indian weddings and this is a market they are keen on tapping on. Just recently famous Bollywood star – Sara Ali Khan had stayed at the hotel and was completely awed by it.

Just like any other hotel, the pandemic was hard on Ciragan Palace Kempinski too but the hotel did not sack any of its staff and rather stood in solidarity with the entire team. As round after round of vaccinations take place and world opens up for travel, Mr. Radtke is confident of the good times returning soon, with safety being the top priority. "As a leading property, we continue to focus on safe, proactive, and efficient solutions at Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul. Our priority remains to provide a healthy and safe environment for all our guests and employees. With this in mind, we strictly follow the rules and regulations. As Çırağan Palace, we immediately developed our services, places and facilities in this



direction and quickly adapted to the process. With such large gardens and open-air alternatives in the Bosphorus line, we are naturally preferred by guests who are looking to holiday amidst open spaces."

Çırağan Palace has also created various special accommodation and experience packages for the new order, considering the comfort and convenience of its guests. Attractive accommodation packages are rolled out especially for the ones who want to be able to relieve stress and breathe a little away from the chaos of the city. Guests can have their breakfast at their private balconies against the backdrop of the Bosphorus as well as à la carte service on the terrace of the Gazebo Lounge if they prefer.

"In addition to this, we have focused on a new project, which we have termed the 'Çırağan Palace Shop', to be able to create a different service line for our local guests. The 'Çırağan Palace Shop' is offering our guests special pastries and delicacies that they can enjoy from the comfort of their homes. As a summary of the work, in this process, with the social distancing order having entered our lives and at a time when a comfortable experience away from the crowd is desired, we offer plenty of alternatives for our guests to create their own special areas," he adds.

OTOAI members meet held in Mumbai in association with Saudi Tourism Authority

OTOAI (Outbound Tour Operators Association of India) had organised a 'Members Meet' on August 20, 2022 at Sofitel, BKC, Mumbai in association with the Saudi Tourism Authority. Attended by close to 200 members, the event proved to be an excellent platform not only for OTOAI members to know about 'The Kingdom of Saudi' as a upcoming destination for leisure travel but also a quality networking of travel trade.



Shreya Shimpi

The event was well supported by Saudi Tourism Authority India team and they presented the destination with all new dimensions about The Kingdom and educated the travel fraternity on various aspects of Saudis culture, adventure, heritage, cuisine and much more. Saudi has immense potential to attract tourist in the coming years and it has some mega projects coming up like Red Sea and Amaala in 2023.

The destination presentation was followed by interesting Q&A followed by an interactive quiz. It was a great networking evening, attended by some senior members of Mumbai travel fraternity. OTOAI President Riaz Munshi addressed the gathering urging members to come together for the welfare of the tourism industry. He mentioned the removal of the requirement of pan card for foreign remittance. Efforts have also been made with the embassy for the Gratis Visa which was applied for, by the tourists before the pandemic, but could not be used due to the travel restrictions. He also spoke about the agreement with LVG, a learning and networking platform for tourism, which will be free for all OTOAI members. It provides information regarding various tourist destinations.

Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI said, "We are an Association committed to improving our members' knowledge and expertise and at the same time intend to provide exposure to new and trending outbound destinations from India. Saudi Tourism Authority has always been a religious destination for Indians but now it has emerged as a brilliant tourism destination in the Middle East region. We are happy with our partnership with Saudi Arabia and the success of the event has proved that it was indeed a mutually beneficial partnership."

Saudi Tourism Authority Official spoke about the vision of Saudi Arabia Tourism for 2030. She presented a virtual journey of Saudi Arabia showing the various UNESCO Heritage sites such as Hima, Al Hasa Oasis, famous tourist destinations, varied landscapes, and upcoming projects. Tourism in Saudi Arabia at present accounts for 5.3% of the GDP. They aim to increase it to 15% by 2030.

Various points were highlighted regarding the E-Visa which is currently provided to 51 nationalities. Though E-Visa is not granted to Indian travellers at present, an announcement is expected to be made soon. However, if an Indian tourist has a US, UK, or Schengen Visa, and it has been used at least once in the previous year, then he is eligible for a Visa on Arrival. As per a new regulation, an Abaya or a hijab is no longer mandatory for women travellers in the Kingdom. Saudia, the national carrier of Saudi Arabia has good connectivity and connects seven Indian states to its capital, Riyadh. With 9 International Airports and over 13 key tourism destinations to explore, it is becoming one of the most sought-after tourist destinations. It also makes for a great stopover for tourists traveling to Europe. Another good news is that the city of Medina is open to tourists including non-Muslims. Entry to the mosque, however, is restricted.

Saudi Arabia is a great destination that can be explored throughout the year, but the best time would be from September end to the end of March. Six Flags, a renowned adventure park is soon to set foot in Qiddiya. It will be the first Six Flags Park outside the United States. Jeddah is another city worth exploring and is known for its multiculturalism. One exciting news for travellers who love cruises is that the MCS Cruise will set sail from the 23rd of November 2022 to 12 April 2023 across the Red Sea. You can explore the timeless beauty of Jeddah, Egypt, and Jordan through this seven-night cruise which will truly be an experience to remember.

ATOAI felicitates Mr. Ajeet Bajaj and his daughter for completing "Seven Summits"

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India recently organised its Members Meet at The Delhi Gymkhana Club to felicitate Mr. Ajeet Bajaj and his daughter Ms. Deeya Bajaj for climbing the "Seven Summits".

Mr. Ajeet Bajaj and Ms. Deeya Bajaj are the first Indian & the first Asian parent-child duo to complete "Seven Summits". The duo summited Mount Denali (North America) on June 5th this year marking the last summit of their "Seven Summits".

The Seven Summits include - 1) Mt. Everest in Asia, 2) Mt. Aconcagua in South America, 3) Mt. Denali in North America, Mt. Kilimanjaro

in Africa, Mt. Elbrus in Europe, Mt. Vinson in Antarctica, and Mt. Kosciuszko in Australia (Mt. Kosciuszko is considered an exceptional mountaineering challenge, first achieved in 1985 by Richard Bass, an American mountaineer).

A fun-filled evening over Cocktails & Dinner was organised by ATOAI and was attended by its members, travel trade media and senior members of the travel trade from various associations like OTOAI, FAITH, IATO and ICPB.

The event started with a visual presentation by Mr. Ajeet Bajaj followed by networking amongst the members.



Radisson Jaipur City Centre is the ideal hub for business & leisure stays



BOTT DESK

Your business or leisure stays can now be enjoyed best the Radisson Jaipur City Centre, which is one of the best hotels in Jaipur. The hotel features wonderfully adorned rooms, perfectly located restaurants, and well-equipped spa and fitness centre to treat guests regally. The hotel is installed with world's best amenities and offers luxurious facilities to the guests to give them an astonishing experience and make them comfortable in this luxurious abode. There is a rooftop pool in the hotel, where guests can bask in the sun and enjoy drinks that are served along with lip-smacking snacks.

The hotel has beautifully designed 135 upscale rooms and suites. There are Standard Category 70 Rooms, Superior Category 38 Rooms, Business Class Category 15 Rooms, Jr Suites 7 and Suites 5. All accommodation options are well-equipped with 24-hour room service, a minibar, international direct dialling, LED TV, bathtub and cubicle, coffee/tea maker, satellite channels and free Wi-Fi. Radisson Jaipur City Centre is a part of the fabled Golden Triangle and has an amazingly new ambiance. The hotel features new renovated rooms and majestic suites ranging in size 315 to 630 Square Feet along with, grand ballroom, energizing gym & Spa, multiple dining outlets, and state-of-the-art meeting facilities.





DINING OPTIONS:

Guests staying at the Radisson Jaipur City Centre can indulge in a wide variety of international and local flavours at the all-day dining or speciality restaurants. Guests can also enjoy our 24 Hours room service and complimentary buffet breakfast each morning.

BANQUETS & CONFERENCE FACILITIES:

With more than 8914 square feet area in excellent meeting rooms desirably located and exquisitely appointed, the hotel is an ideal choice for events, meetings exhibitions, weddings and more. Radisson Jaipur City Centre offers an exclusive level of flawless service. Whether you are planning a social event for several hundred special guests or a small meeting with a handful of select colleagues, you can indulge in bespoke service and unparalleled environments.



Treat yourself to a memorable holiday amidst luxury @ **Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi**

An unforgettable holiday experience in the tropical paradise of the Maldives, surrounded by thriving vegetation and pristine waters, the 'surf island', Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi is an escape for the soul. With a range of accommodation options, from garden villas to beach to over-water villas, the island has an adventurous spirit of its own and calls out to those with a penchant for exploration and discovery.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

They say that what makes a holiday special is the company and the place, but if you ask me, what makes a holiday special, especially one that is limited to a resort, is the staff – the people who take care of you through your stay and that's exactly what made our stay at the Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi truly unique.

Adaaran, a home grown Sri Lankan brand, is well known in the hospitality circles and Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi truly lives up to its expectations and delivers so much more. Located in a peaceful seclusion in the North Malé Atoll, the resort is well known for its waves, making it the ideal holiday for surfers and adrenaline junkies. The mature island featuring beautiful greenery along with the inescapable sun, sea and sand is also ideal for families seeking respite. Surfing at Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi is one of the best surf holiday resorts in the Maldives with a perfect left breaking down one side of the island and six other world class waves just a short boat ride away.

Located at a mere distance of 19 km from Malé International Airport (MLE), the resort is easily accessible via speedboat and it normally takes anything between 20 – 30 minutes to reach there. Once at the resort, the magnanimity of the resort just takes you by surprise. Spread over a vast area of 80+ acres, there are various accommodation options to choose from and a mix and match of them allows you to experience everything that the resort offers!

Accommodation Options

Its Accommodation Options includes 20 Garden Villas, 18 Lohis Villas, 46 Beach Villas, 45 Deluxe Beach Villas, 10 Sunset Beach



Villas, 5 Family Beach Villas, 8 Sunset Family Beach Villas, 20 Sunrise Ocean Villas and 20 Sunset Ocean Villas.

Dining Options

The main restaurant at the resort is the Banyan Restaurant that dishes out delicious Buffet meals with International cuisine. Within it there is the Indian Pavilion that serves authentic North and South Indian cuisine. For the surfers, who want to remain undisturbed, there is the Lohis Wave that serves International buffet for breakfast and lunch during surf season only for surfers (March-November) and special oven-baked pizza all through the day. The Beach Grill is another dining option that serves amazing snack menu. The one with the best view is the Sunset Restaurant that offers International cuisine, with continental, Indian, Chinese and Arabic favourites

exclusively for ocean villa guests. Dining can be enjoyed through prior reservations for non-ocean villa guests also. Besides this – the Hiyala Bar and the Tiki Bar are ideal for enjoying the Signature Cocktails and shisha

Resort Activities

- Table tennis
- Volleyball
- Tennis
- Badminton
- Beach volleyball
- Football
- Pool table
- Animation activities

Water Sports that can be enjoyed

- Diving
- Surfing (seasonal)
- Scuba diving
- Fly boarding
- Water skiing
- Kite surfing
- Jet skiing
- Parasailing
- Morning snorkelling excursion (with equipment)
- Snorkelling throughout the day (with equipment)
- Canoeing
- Windsurfing (License is required)
- Catamaran sailing (License is required)
- Stand up peddle board

Excursions

- Sunset cruise
- Dolphin cruise
- Sunset fishing with 'kakka' (cooking)
- Sunrise fishing
- Big game fishing
- Jigging and casting fishing
- Submarine dive
- Male' tour
- Full Day Island hopping with BBQ
- Local island exploration
- Banana garden tour
- Day visit to Birds' Island with BBQ lunch



Rejuvenate your senses @ Spa

The Spa at Adaaan Select Hudhuran Fushi presents traditional therapeutic methods to naturally purify both body and mind with a holistic spa experience. Spa services ranges from traditional aromatherapy massages to result-driven Elemis face and body treatments, using dynamic with medical grade formulas that offer scientific solutions to every skin, body and lifestyle concern.

Destination Weddings and Vow Renewal

Hear the harmonious tunes of the breeze, the ocean and the rustling palms as you walk hand in hand to celebrate your eternal love. The celebration experts at the resort will ensure your dream day is made a reality with a touch of the Maldivian traditions. With the mesmerizing blues creating the perfect backdrop, your happily ever after is sure to be a day to treasure and relive.

'Cruise travellers must opt for a protection plan': **Dev Karvat**

Travellers should consider a cruise protection plan that covers their losses against trip delays, missed cruise departures and other unforeseen emergencies says **Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, ASEGO**. Read on to know more travel and insurance tips from the travel expert.

BOTT DESK

What new trends in cruise travel have you been witnessing in your industry?

The surge in cruise trips could be attributed to the pent-up demand for travel owing to the travel restrictions over the past two years. Travel enthusiasts, irrespective of their age, are now seeking unexplored experiences and today's cruise lines provide exotic choices in terms of destination and experiences. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on health and safety precautions on-board have encouraged the travellers to pack their bags and explore the cruise travel. Additionally, cruise operators have also been promoting customised packages including travel assistance services with special cruise covers which has instilled a great deal of confidence amongst travellers. We have also been witnessing a huge spike in the number of people opting for exclusive cruise protection plans that safeguards them against exigencies not only on the cruise, but also while they are out on excursions and tours.

Is regular travel insurance sufficient for cruise trips?

Sailing through the open seas amidst serene landscapes and luxurious provisions is an amazing experience. But what if an unforeseen emergency or mishap arises? That's when a cruise protection cover



comes into the picture. There is a general misconception amongst cruise enthusiasts that a regular travel insurance should be sufficient to keep them secured while enjoying the high seas. However, travel insurance does not cover passengers while on a cruise. For instance, if a mishap strikes before you even begin the journey, you may have to cancel your trip. The cruise line won't reimburse you, but a dedicated cruise trip protection can. Further, if a passenger is affected with COVID-19 or any other medical emergencies on board, they will be confined to their cabins and eventually miss their excursion. Cruises protection plans such as Asego's exclusive cruise cover does not only safeguard travellers from such losses but also covers emergency evacuation and subsequent medical care expenses in case of serious injuries.

What are the various aspects a cruise traveller should consider before choosing an insurance?

We have been in the travel protection space for more than 22 years now, and as per my experience every travellers embarks on a trip with a different set of preferences and needs. Hence, they should always opt for a protection plan that can be customised as per their respective travel needs. While holidaying abroad, every second counts and even the slightest delays may cost a bomb. Though weather is one of the most crucial aspects, cruise trips are always prone to glitches such as mechanical issues, human error or improper maintenance that may cause unexpected delays and detours. Hence, travellers should consider a cruise protection plan that covers their losses against trip delays, missed cruise departures and other unforeseen emergencies. Also, since we are now living in an age of uncertainties, travellers should ensure that the cruise protection plan they opt for covers them against losses due to cabin confinement and new-age travel risks such as loss of baggage and gadgets.

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*Fairy Tale
Weddings*



Picture by Ptaufiqphotography

The perfect 'Hill Stations in India' for intimate *Destination Weddings*

Getting hitched in the Mountains is a magical experience, where blessings are bestowed from nature's remarkable wonders such as snow peaked mountains, lush green trees, gently flowing rivers and alluring landscapes. The beauty of Indian hill stations is surreal and unmatched. Hill station weddings continue to be popular with couples who have a limited gathering and are looking for a perfect blend of serenity with sensational vibes. The weddings are no less grand, just smaller and cosy... So here's a list of 7 Hill Stations in India and the wedding venues it has that are perfect for intimate destination weddings...

Intimate Weddings have become popular among modern couples due to several reasons and one of them is Covid19 pandemic. Small weddings can be happening too in these spectacular mountains following all the safety protocols and precautions. A big shout out for all nature lover couples, "The mountains are calling you and you must go!" Check out these Hill station Hotels in India to add a magical and memorable vibe to any wedding hosted there -

Sapna Vaid

SHIMLA

Due to its temperate summer climate and refreshing mountain air, Shimla was adopted as the summer capital of British India in 1863. Nowadays, Shimla is a popular destination for weddings, trekking and heritage walks.

Wildflower Hall - Wildflower Hall is a 5 star hotel in Shimla that exudes the ambience of a grand stately home; with a welcoming lounge and opulent accommodation. Wildflower Hall provides a unique opportunity to lose yourself in the romance of nature. Indoor and al fresco dining areas with mountain views, personalized spa experiences in wooded locations and private dining, perfect for intimate weddings.

The Oberoi Cecil - For couples who would like to witness Shimla through a colonial lens, a wedding at The Oberoi Cecil will give them just that. This heritage hotel that was extremely popular during the days of the Raj, is perfect for intimate celebrations. With its teakwood interiors and opulent chandeliers, the property extends a distinctive old-school ambience and offers wonderful views of the high peaks and lush valleys that it overlooks.

Taj Theog Resort & Spa - Another absolutely mesmerizing lodge-style luxury resort with commanding views of the surrounding valleys and



the peaks beyond. The rooms and suites are beautifully understated, a tribute, perhaps, to the utilitarian values of mountain life — simple modernist furniture, richly figured wood, and accents in classic red are the extent of the ornamentation.

MUSSOORIE

Mussoorie is known as the “Queen of Hills” and it’s the top most choice for every couple who wants to have a destination wedding in the hills. The landscapes of Mussoorie makes for an ideal backdrop for an inspiring wedding.

JW Marriott Walnut Grove Resort & Spa – JW Marriott Walnut Grove Resort & Spa, Mussoorie has a lush green lawn which is ideal for an open-air evening reception. The Grand Orchid Ballroom is ideal for an indoor wedding and reception ceremony that can include up to 350 guests. Trout House Grill & Bar is the terrace which can be used as a dining area. One need not worry about guests who come a long way to attend pre-wedding and wedding functions as the venue offers a comfortable stay for the outstation guests.

Jaypee Residency Manor - Jaypee Residency Manor, Mussoorie, is a lovely venue to host, pre-wedding functions, weddings and reception ceremonies. It is on the hill-top surrounded by the mighty Himalayas and is spread over 9 acres of green landscape. It is located on the Jharipani Road which makes it easily accessible for all to reach there. The elegant decor of the venue gives a special touch to your big day. Jaypee Residency Manor has a sprawling lawn that is amidst lush greenery which will refresh your senses. The venue has an inviting ambience which makes everyone feel welcomed.

ITC Welcomhotel The Savoy - Located in Mussoorie, ITC Welcomhotel The Savoy is one of the most sought-after banqueting facilities in the city. It was set up with a view to giving an elegant and superior banqueting space to cater to the varied requirements of their clients for their grand functions. The flourishing lawns are filled with a gentle breeze and blue sky making it a perfect atmosphere to host all kinds of nuptial celebrations in the friendliest manner.

Swirled in the midst of time, ITC Welcomhotel The Savoy is an elegant and historic hotel and promises to give its guests an unparalleled experience. Their team of experts will provide a hassle-free nuptial experience that one can cherish forever.



KASAULI

Kasauli is a perfect place for a destination wedding of 50 to 500 guests with perfect weather, lovely mountain setting and a plethora of hotels and resorts in all budget categories. Snow-clad mountains, dense forests and a pleasant climate make Kasauli a major draw among tourists. Kasauli provides many hotels and resorts with large room capacity, big banquet halls for wedding functions and lawns and open terraces to perform the functions in the open with a wonderful mountain and valley views in the backdrop.

The Fern Surya Resort - Fern Surya Kasauli hills is located on the Kalka Shimla Highway around 16 km from Kasauli town. It is at the heart of the hills where Pine Forest grows in harmony with many other broad leaves. It is an ideal choice of destination for the leisure traveler,



corporate traveler, and also an ideal place for a destination wedding. The hotel has a total of 47 rooms along with wide open areas in form of terrace and small interspersed lawns which serve as great sitout areas. Fern Surya Kasauli also boasts of an indoor swimming pool, restaurant, a bar with indoor recreation and a banquet hall.

Ramada Kasauli – Ramada Kasauli makes a great venue for a destination wedding. It offers an elevated stay in Kasauli Hilltop hotel with an outdoor pool, inviting spa, and breathtaking valley views, soothing spa treatments, and an outdoor pool create a beautiful escape in this resort at Kasauli. It has an impressive venue that can hold up to 80 guests for traditional intimate weddings or elegant receptions.

DEHRADUN

Fascinating history and intriguing mythology meet at the crossroads of this beautiful hill-station, one of the most popular in the country. Just 240 km from Delhi, nestled in the rolling Doon Valley and at the foothills of the Himalayas, Dehradun is surrounded by high mountains and lush Sal forests. Known for its pleasant year-round weather and scenic surroundings, the city is a gateway to several popular hill-stations.

Four Points By Sheraton - Four Points by Sheraton is a five-star hotel in Dehradun. This wedding venue is among the most prominent hotels in Dehradun city. It's undoubtedly the ultimate choice when it comes to hosting weddings and functions, which are adversaries to the occasion of the nuptial ceremony. Four Points by Sheraton will be an excellent



choice for all those options, from pre-wedding functions such as engagement to post-wedding celebrations like receptions.

Hotel JSR INN - Hotel JSR INN is a hotel situated in the city of Dehradun. With abundant indoor space accessible, this is an appropriate setting for pre-wedding, wedding, and additionally post-wedding functions. They can offer their banquets as an occasion space that has an ability to accommodate a crowd of up to 600. Hotel JSR INN can even give accommodation to all the guests making it a perfect spot to host residential wedding functions. A portion of the services that they offer is a bridal room, in-house catering, in-house decor and also service staff which is continually present. All these facilities can be changed as per the needs and requirements of the wedding.

DARJEELING

Darjeeling conjures visions of snow peaks, serenity of vibrant green hills steeped in splendor, a land of breathtaking beauty crowned by the majestic Himalayas. Darjeeling is one of the most magnificent hill resorts in the world. This heavenly retreat is bathed in hues of every shade.

Sterling Darjeeling - Sterling Darjeeling, located at the highest point in Darjeeling, offers a spectacular view of the Kanchenjunga range. Here one can organize and execute different kinds of events and celebrations. Their hotel staff is well-equipped to host wedding celebrations as well, and a beautiful stay for both leisure and business travelers. Sterling Darjeeling has the capacity to accommodate 30 to 100 people at its venue in its banquet hall and offer a great wedding experience. It can be an ideal venue for a variety of occasions ranging from pre-wedding,



wedding, as well as post-wedding functions. From intimate weddings to grand celebrations, they would ensure that each event is well planned and executed to perfection.

Mayfair Darjeeling - Mayfair makes for the perfect wedding destination in Darjeeling hills offering excellent banqueting space. It is conveniently located inside the city to make sure that it is accessible to people attending the wedding. This place is an ideal choice for hosting special functions with friends & family. It has a banquet hall that can easily accommodate a guest list of 60-300 people for different types of events and functions. It offers specially curated menus to fit any occasion, proficient service staff, luxury guest services and exclusive space for special functions, catering and decor assistance as well.

OOTY

The charm and beauty of this hill station in Nilgiri hills calls for the name it got, The Queen of Hill Stations. It is called a nature lover's paradise too, due to its greens, wonderful blue Mountains, rippling clear lakes, alpine woods and lively climate like that of English summers.

Savoy – IHCL SeleQtions - A location that brings together the best of hills and heritage. The 200-year-old property borrows its endearing charm from the heyday of the British and seamlessly blends Victorian aesthetic with modern amenities. The hotel's 40 rooms and suites have distinctive personalities, and their event spaces are designed to add to



the elegance of any soiree. While their largest venue can accommodate up to 850 people at a time, the smallest seating capacity is for 80 guests which makes it an ideal for both grand and intimate weddings alike

Fortune Resort Sullivan Court - Set on the gentle slopes of Ooty, amidst lush green lawns and a colorful patterned garden, Fortune Resort Sullivan Court is a modern-day tribute to John Sullivan, who founded the scenic town in 1821. The comprehensive banquet facilities at the hotel meet all requirements for destination weddings and functions for up to 2000 guests. As one of the best hotels in Ooty, Fortune Resort Sullivan Court offers a choice of 67 beautiful rooms, comprising 51 Standard Rooms, 12 Fortune Club Rooms, and 4 Suites. The rooms at this Ooty hotel provide a stunning view of the slopes.

NAINITAL

Commonly known as the 'Lake District', Nainital is nestled high up in the Kumaon Himalayas at an altitude of around 2,000 m above sea level. This beautiful town is surrounded by seven hills, popularly known as 'Sapta-Shring' – Ayarpata, Deopata, Handi-Bandi, Naina, Alma, Lariya-Kanta and Sher-Ka-Danda. The majestic mountains and the sparkling waters of the lake add an immense lot to the beauty of the town.

Rosefinch Sarovar Portico – Rosefinch Sarovar Portico is located inside the city which makes it available to host all your moments and commemorations in a beautiful manner with just the loved ones. Rosefinch Sarovar Portico has a beautiful and spacious banquet hall to



accommodate a crowd of up to 50 to 70 people at once. It has a gorgeous space and a splendid lawn makes a perfect place for an intimate traditional wedding. One can have a lot of pleasure and entertainment as they will plan each function in a detailed manner. Guests can gorge on delicious multi-cuisine dishes at our in-house restaurant. A 1200 sq. ft. banquet hall with modern facilities is perfect for business events and social celebrations.

Kaara Hotels & Resorts – Kaara Hotels & Resorts is a wedding venue based out of Ramnagar, Jim Corbett - one of India's top 50 tourist destinations & top 10 wedding destinations. The property is built over an area of 4 Acres with enough green patch to give you and your guests a great experience to unwind from the city hassle and to relax in the lap of nature. Kaara Hotels & Resorts offers both indoor and outdoor venues to host pre-wedding, wedding and post-wedding functions. Their venue can host up to 50 to 2000 guests at a time without any hassle.

LVG Learning: Educating the travel trade and equipping them to do better business

LVG Learning and Networking, headquartered in London, comprises some of the most reputed European travel industry veterans and e-learning expert Bige Cetinoglu. They were one of the first and only corporate learning systems in the tourism sector, who, along with their software partner in Turkey, took up the task of enhancing the travel knowledge of the people in tourism business. Although destination learning courses are not new and several companies are offering these in the market, LVG prides in offering a completely different, innovative and unique curation, using state-of-the-art software to develop our clients' programs and modules. **Seda Caylak, CEO, LVG Group** shares more –



BOTT DESK

Can you share the core ideology behind LVG Learning? Why did you choose the Indian market for this?

LVG is a new model solution designed from the experience gained in order to provide for the most basic needs of tourism people in the new world.

With this knowledge and cutting-edge technology, we tell DMOs that if they want to promote their destinations, they need to find new solutions. We say to tourism companies that if they want to grow, they should invest in their employees.

Since tourism is an intertwined structure where many branches intersect at different points, the solution to encompass the whole must be integral. LVG's starting point is to provide an integrated solution to the current challenges in each and every corner of tourism.

The founders of LVG have more than 15 years of commercial work in the Indian market. Thanks to a strong reputation and network, it was always the best strategy for us to start in a very dynamic and strong market like India.

How was the response to the program in India? Can you share the details of the companies/associations you have worked with so far?

India is a country that uses technology well and is open to innovations,



so we got great feedback from the first day. We became the learning partner of TAAI in the first year and now our agreements with two distinguished associations are in the signing phase. In addition, as having a sister company (DMC) in Europe, we are very much in the industry and support all our business partners with destination and skill courses free of charge.

How many Agents / Operators have been trained under LVG so far? What is your destination number?

Although we are a fairly new platform, we currently have over 4000 agency members and will soon increase our membership to over 10,000. These numbers may seem small for India, but the most important difference of LVG is that we recruit our members carefully, because after the pandemic, there are huge changes and uncertainties and everyone needs reliable partners more than ever. We provide a "Log in by invitation only" trust to secure quality over quantity.

What strategy are you adopting to reach Tier II and Tier III cities in India?

Our cooperation with tourism associations and face-to-face meetings with tour operators, and travel agencies will continue in pan India. Our most important difference is that we deliver a 3-sided marketplace and turn Learning into Selling. We are not just an education platform, we use education as a tool to grow and LVG is the first and only platform in this concept.

Is there any other information you would like to share with us?

There is serious confusion in the tourism economy right now. For tourism people, time is always very valuable, so I advise all innovative companies to pay attention to education and technology. The world is no longer the old world. The future belongs to those who invest not only for themselves but also for society, the sector and its employees. We learnt with the pandemic that we are all connected to each other by invisible bonds, so the success and sustainability of the tourism sector will be our success. Do not be afraid to share. Thank you.

YOUR STORY STARTS HERE

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Business of Travel Trade

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ASTRO SPEAK

Tarot Card Reading is the art and science which helps understand the present status and the future course. It helps to apply course correction, if required. Tarot card can be used for shaping Career, Health, Finance, Business, Relationship, marriage, match-making etc. **Ms. Richa Srivastava, a renowned Tarot Card reader** conducts exclusive Tarot reading under her banner – Tathaastu. Here are her predictions for the New Year 2022.



Know what your stars say about Sept-Oct 2022



ARIES (March 21 – April 20)

Your hard work will pay dividends. If looking for job change or own venture, this is the time. Your investment decision will be good. You may offer support to needy. Take care of yourself and spend quality time with family.



Taurus (April 21 – May 21)

Take out time for yourself and pamper yourself. This is a good time to switch a job if you are looking to change your present one. Choose your next job intelligently. Strengthening of relationship with loved ones is on cards.



Gemini (May 22 – June 21)

Be optimistic in this phase. Take a break and do your research, as you have to work hard to make things happen. Mind and heart are at conflict. Learn to control the emotions. This is the right time for marital alliance.



Cancer (June 22 – July 22)

You will enjoy good health and vitality. New job/promotion/project is expected. Travel overseas for business expansion is expected. Be cautious with your decisions and spend quality time with family.



Leo (July 23 – August 21)

Recovery from illness, if any, will be quick. Travelling is on cards. You will be rewarded for your hard work. Financially rewarding time. A major change is coming your way for the good. Enjoy your time with family. Meeting with life partner is expected.



Virgo (August 22 – September 23)

A professionally satisfying time. Good time to invest. Taking stress will adversely affect your health. Support from senior or colleagues will come your way. Challenging, busy and hectic schedules. Keep calm and hold back yourself in your relationship.



Libra (September 24 – October 23)

Follow a healthy routine. Include Yoga & walk in your regime. Travel for work is expected. New venture is imminent but be cautious and avoid risky investments. Think positively and identify the right opportunity for yourself. Appreciate and give time to your partner.



Capricorn (December 23 – January 20)

Search the job will be successful. Career success is possible by putting thoughts into action. Recovery from illness is expected. Do a research work before doing any kind of investment. Spend time with family.



Scorpio (October 24 – November 22)

Please take care of your lifestyle. Focus and success/promotion is assured. You may start a new business. Make a determined and sincere effort in your work. Collaboration will help you achieve your goal. Relationship with partner will strengthen further.



Sagittarius (November 23 – December 22)

Positive change will happen in your health profile. New job/promotion/new business is expected. Time to invest, but after a research. Celebration time and spending quality time with family is expected.



Aquarius (January 21 – February 19)

Don't be lethargic. Have a positive outlook in life. Take lessons from your past mistake and learn to take a stand. Success is closer than you think. Communication is the key. Spend time with your partner.



Pisces (February 20 – March 20)

Avoid stress and take care of your health. Be positive. Your talent and ambition will make you stand high in status and career. This is the time for new ideas, beginnings and proposals. Make smart investments. Good news expected from legal matters. Singles may meet their future partners.



TravelBullz *announces* ESOPs for employees on its 12th Foundation Day



K.D. Singh



Shalini Nair

BOTT DESK

These 14 employees, who have been chosen for ESOPs have been handpicked based on their long-term association, contribution and commitment to the company's growth and vision. The recognition has been through the rank and file, ranging from front-line executives to HOD's.

This is a first-of-its-kind initiative in the travel and tourism industry, where ESOPs are being issued and wealth is shared with employees by a self-funded Private Limited company.

According to the scheme, employees of TravelBullz will be able to vest their ESOPs after a period of 2 years. The grant of ESOP shall generate wealth for the ESOP holders in line with the company's valuation in 2 years.

Sharing his thoughts on the occasion, K. D. Singh, Founder & President of TravelBullz said, "We owe our growth in the last 12 years to 'OUR PEOPLE' and their dedication. We wish to reward their complete ownership, their unflinching support through the pandemic and their outstanding performance. I wish that in the coming years' everyone working with TravelBullz should have ESOPs so that they could align their growth to the company's growth."

Shalini Nair, Founding Member, of TravelBullz, further added, "Our employees are our most valuable asset, and their devotion and hard work have allowed us to expand significantly in the last year. This ESOPs is

our method of expressing our gratitude in a very humble way to our employees and, as a result, making them stakeholders in our success."

TravelBullz was founded in August 2010 with a sole aim to revolutionise and redefine the Wholesale Business in Travel Trade. The company considers its people to be its strength and like the founders of the company, they come with rich experience in online and offline destination management companies spanning through successful careers in best brands in the travel industry.

TravelBullz offers state of the art modern and interactive technology, with over 150,000 hotels in more than 100 countries worldwide. With over 1,53,000 guests who have travelled on its network in 2019, they have operated over 800 groups including FIT Series last year across its offices and a turnover of over 26 Million USD in the 9th year of operations.

The TravelBullz wholesale booking engine has latest technology platform and its user-friendly interface conveniently connects to over 15,000 travel & tour companies worldwide seamlessly to search for the best prices with availability for instant confirmation of Hotels, Apartments, Transfers and Tours.

In March 2020, the company launched its long-awaited Dynamic Packaging Module that builds all travel components with opaque hotel rates. With its dedicated team across all its offices committed to Customer First Approach, there is no doubt that the company is set to revolutionize the B2B travel business. TravelBullz has also won numerous coveted awards over the years which are a testament of its commitment towards its customers as well as employees.

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- ▶ Domestic roadside assistance
- ▶ Family protection & more...

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- ▶ Trip cancellation protection
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24x7 helpline: +91 22 6787 2037 | customercare@asego.in | claims@asego.in

