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M!CEtalk[®]

A DDP Publication

Meetings • Incentives • Conferences • Events

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**FESTIVE
boost for
HOSPITALITY**

**Return of
HEFTY
WEDDING
BUDGETS**



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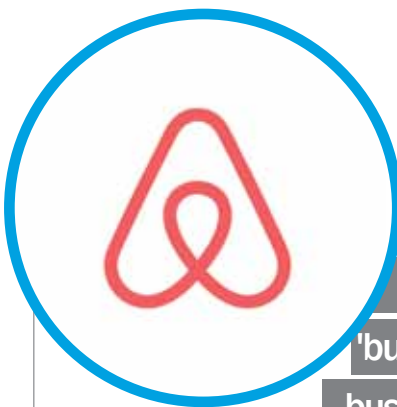
Picture on the cover:

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NEWS

M!CE to be the voice of Sri Lanka

The inaugural Virtual M!CE Expo in Sri Lanka was held from Dec 1 to 3, 2021, and was hosted by the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB) with the Sri Lanka Association of Professional Conference, Exhibition, and Event Organisers (SLAPCEO). Local sellers representing the Sri Lankan M!CE industry displayed their products and services. The expo drew a large number of foreign buyers.



There are 73 per cent of Indian travellers, who are looking at an expanded definition of 'business travel', ranging from business travel to leisure travel while working remotely — Airbnb



Rajeev Menon
President-APAC (excl. Greater China), Marriott Int'l.



India is a priority market for us. We aim to offer more choices in key markets to serve discerning customers.



Marriott in JV with DB Realty, Prestige Group

Marriott International, Inc. has signed an agreement with Prestige Group and DB Realty to open the New Delhi Marriott Marquis and The St. Regis Aerocity. Slated to open in 2025, the agreement is set to add 779 rooms to Marriott International's portfolio.



Sabre forge alliances with Hotel Keihan Chain

Sabre Corporation has formed partnership with the Osaka-based Hotel Keihan Chain to expand the hospitality chain's geographic reach. With this agreement, Hotel Keihan will be linked to hundreds of thousands of travel agents globally via GDS connectivity solutions powered by Sabre Hospitality Solutions' SynXis platform, enabling the group to increase bookings domestically and globally as the industry recovers.



SkyHelix Sentosa to open ahead of schedule



SkyHelix Sentosa will open on December 15, 2021, ahead of schedule. It will be the first carbon-neutral attraction on Sentosa and Singapore's highest open-air panoramic ride. SkyHelix Sentosa is a new addition to Singapore's ever-changing tourism environment. By launching this attraction, Mount Faber Leisure Group aims to contribute to Singapore's vision of becoming a top sustainable urban destination.



Strong recovery for India's M!CE business

Thomas Cook sees an upsurge in M!CE business in India with the delivery of over 200 physical groups. Insurance, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and paint are driving this demand. Key metros such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, and Hyderabad are among the top destinations. Various international M!CE groups have travelled to Dubai, Maldives, France, and Germany.



The return of big, fat weddings

The wedding season is back to normal, with a 57 per cent increase in November 2021 compared to the previous year, as per WeddingWire India. In Q4, the most demand for wedding planners and venues was in Delhi NCR, followed by Mumbai, Bangalore, Lucknow, and Jaipur. The fact that hotels and banquet halls have become the most requested services by users further shows that big, fat weddings are back in demand. Destination weddings are also on the rise, with one out of every 10 guests inquiry, and Jaipur, Udaipur, Mussoorie, and Lonavala are among the top options.

'Reconnect Western Australia' funding package

Premier of Western Australia the Hon. Mark McGowan MLA announced a new tourism recovery package that will see WA's official convention bureau, Business Events Perth, receive US\$ 15 million in funding to attract lucrative business events to WA, thereby supporting the state's business event, hotel, and hospitality industry. Premier McGowan also unveiled the US\$185 million Reconnect WA funding package, a multifaceted package aimed at tourists, skilled workers, international students, and events, and aligned with WA's Safe Transition Plan.



COVID-19 fuels innovations

Hilton published a global trends report that examined how the pandemic affected people. Within the report, Hilton shows how it is evolving along with the changing traveller, covering areas of expertise, such as fitness, spa, F&B, sustainability, design, amenities, and loyalty. The report outlines a slew of eye-opening travel and behavioural patterns that are fuelling innovations both within and outside of hotels. Four consistent themes have emerged that summarise the new, pandemic-changed traveller.

An economic stimulus

The ground-breaking ceremony for Noida International Airport was held at Jewar in the presence of India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath. The airport is strategically important for UP since it will stimulate residential, commercial, and industrial activity in the catchment area and attract more investment.



Rise in leisure travel

On the back of a strong recovery following the second COVID-19 wave, the Indian hospitality industry RevPAR surged by 122.9 per cent in Q3 2021 over Q2 2021.

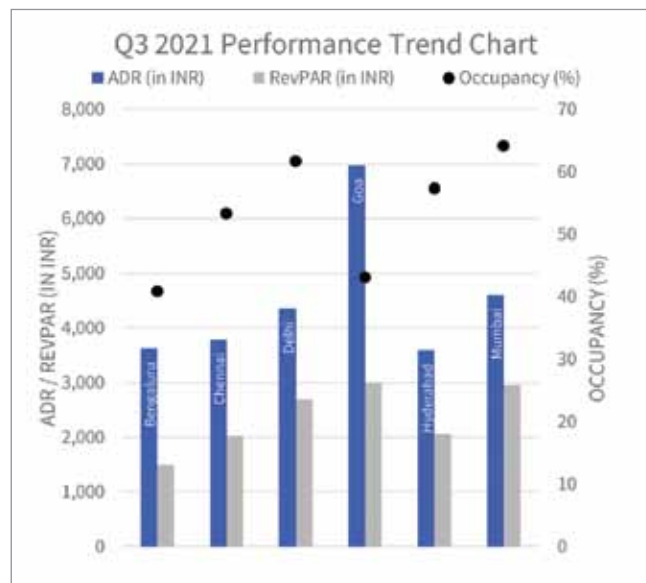
The hospitality industry in India witnessed a growth of 169.4 per cent in revenue per available room (RevPAR) during Q3 2021 as compared to Q3 2020, according to JLL's Hotel Momentum India (HMI) Q3 2021. Furthermore, at a pan-India level, there has been a 122.9 per cent growth in RevPAR in Q3 2021 as compared to Q2 2021, due to a strong recovery in leisure demand.

The year-on-year (y-o-y) growth witnessed in the sector during Q3 2021 is primarily due to the low base effect of Q3 2020. Post the full and partial lockdowns witnessed in many states during April and May of 2021, the sector witnessed a sharp recovery in leisure travel towards the end of Q2 2021. This trend continued into Q3 2021 as an improvement in travellers' confidence was seen with the vaccination drive across the nation.

For the next two quarters (Q4 2021 and Q1 2022), growth in travel is expected to continue as India further ramps up its vaccination rate, resulting in improved sentiment towards domestic travel, especially business travel. IT/ITeS companies have indicated that their travel expenditure will increase in the coming quarters as they foresee employees returning to the office/campus as well as resuming travel for work. However, there is a lag between returning to work and subsequent business-related travel. Leisure



QUICK BYTE Goa continues to lead in RevPAR with a 389.8 per cent rise, owing to the low base of Q3 2020



Source: STR

locations are expected to see a further increase in occupancy and average rates supported mainly by transient leisure and social gatherings.

The total number of signings in Q3 of 2021 stood at 32 hotels comprising 2,624 keys, recording a growth of 13.4 per cent

compared to the same period last year. In line with the overall increase, 15 new signings (47 per cent of total properties signed) are conversions of old hotels. Domestic operators dominated signings over international operators with a ratio of 57:43 in terms of inventory volume. Goa re-emerged as the RevPAR

leader in absolute terms in Q3 2021 with a growth of 389.8 per cent as compared to the low base of Q3 2020.

Additionally, Hyderabad witnessed the highest growth in occupancy level registering a 33.6 per cent increase in Q3 2021 over the same period last year. Bengaluru saw 213.2 per cent growth in RevPAR followed by Hyderabad with a 173.5 per cent hike compared to the same period last year. Demand and supply of operational inventory in six major cities have increased by 159 per cent and 9.5 per cent, respectively, in Q3 2021 as compared to the same period last year.

"The sector has witnessed a sharp recovery in Q3 2021 post the second wave of the pandemic. Holiday destinations are sold out on most weekends with domestic tourists deciding to explore different destinations across the nation. Demand for weddings continue to grow as restrictions on large gatherings are further eased. F&B dining has also witnessed a strong recovery both in major metropolitan cities as well as in tier-II towns, on the back of improved market sentiments and growth in vaccination numbers. In this quarter, we have witnessed a slight up-tick in corporate travel as well, which we believe would be a major step towards a full recovery for the sector," said **Jaideep Dang**, Managing Director, Hotels and Hospitality Group, South Asia, JLL.

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Charting next course of action

STB & MTI will review the needs for M!CE events as Singapore transitions towards a COVID-resilient state, says **G.B. Srithar**, Regional Director (India, Middle East and South Asia), STB.

Hazel Jain

What is the significance of holding the Joint Leadership Summit in Singapore?

The Joint Leadership Summit, which took place from October 5 to 7, convened regional government representatives, major global organisers, and trade association leaders to develop an action plan for the safe reopening of the region's business events in the industry. They discussed the critical need to reopen inter-regional and intra-regional travel routes, as well as the importance of ensuring traveller health and safety as core policy measures. These are the foundations and assurances that business event

organisers require, before committing their resources and assets to the restart of events across the region. Accordingly, the leaders are urging authorities to implement clear policy measures and standard operating protocols all across the region that are calibrated for a COVID-19 environment.

Association of Event Organisers' (AEO), Singapore Association for Convention & Exhibition Organisers' & Suppliers' (SACEOS), Society for Independent Show Organisers' (SISO), Global Association of The Exhibition Industry (UFI), and Singapore Tourism



G.B. Srithar

The pandemic has catalysed technological innovations and concepts

Board (STB) signed an MoU at the Summit. It underlines the parties' commitment to reviving the regional exhibitions industry while also strengthening Singapore's position as a safe and trusted Global Asia hub for business events. The Asia CEO Summit was also launched at the Summit to support the industry's evolution through a COVID-19 operating environment. From 2022 onwards, this event will be held annually in Singapore.

What role does technology play in making safe hybrid events a reality?

In the events industry, the pandemic has catalysed technological innovations

Experimenting with event formats is a new trend, with organisers exploring virtual and hybrid models. Digital guides and contactless registration will become mainstream as technology is integrated into the visitor experience. This is the most fertile period in our industry's history in terms of innovation, and we have seized this opportunity by scaling many new solutions. Recognising digitization is key, the Singapore Tourism Board has launched Tourism Technology Transformation Cube (TCube), which provides a holistic suite of tools to guide tourism businesses in Singapore to build the skills they need to succeed in the digital era.

What kind of push is M!CE segment in Singapore getting from the government?

M!CE and business travel are strategic industries for Singapore, bringing significant economic benefits to the country. Singapore is committed to scaling M!CE events in a safe, trusted, and innovative manner. This approach has been in place since the development of STB's Safe Business Events framework, which is still being refined as Singapore resumes larger-scale events, such as TravelRevive in 2020 and Geo Connect Asia in 2021, where rigorous protocols were trialled.

STB has also worked with the M!CE industry to help them become more COVID-resilient by adopting new business models and technologies. STB has collaborated with event organisers on ways to better extract value from and monetise the data they collect, in addition to encouraging them to host hybrid events. STB also offers a range of assistance schemes to support the

growth of M!CE events. One example is STB's Business Improvement Fund (BIF) that encourages technological innovation and adoption, as well as the redesign of business models and processes to improve productivity and competitiveness. To help the industry develop innovative hybrid business models, the SACEOS, with the support of STB and Enterprise Singapore (ESG), developed the Event Industry Resilience Roadmap (IRR) in October 2020.

What is the purpose of the Safe Business Events Risk Management framework?



In July 2020, STB developed the Safe Business Events (SBEs) framework, taking into consideration the event risk profile and the readiness of event organisers and event venues to mitigate these risks. Under this framework, EOs must achieve key outcomes: Infection control measures for every stage of an event, limits on crowd density, and close contacts between individuals, and preparing for any emergencies. Under the framework, Singapore

Worldchefs' Congress and Expo in 2024 and the 110th Lions Clubs International Convention in 2028. In June 2021, STB partnered with the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) and UFI to launch a white paper titled 'Reimagining Business Events—Through COVID-19 and Beyond'. Launched at the first hybrid Singapore M!CE Forum x IBTM Wired at Marina Bay

QUICK BYTE M!CE and business travel are strategic industries for Singapore, bringing significant economic benefits

has piloted over 140 M!CE events, hosting more than 15,000 participant attendees. In November 2021, Singapore will host two major M!CE events: The Bloomberg New Economy Forum and Industrial Transformation Asia-Pacific. They are part of a series of four pilot events going into 2022.

How is Singapore forging ahead in M!CE recovery?

Singapore has already secured rights to host the

Sands, the white paper is the first such collaboration between a destination and leading associations. STB is constantly engaging our intermediary and corporate stakeholders across our key markets, including India. STB and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) will work with organisers on their event proposals and review the requirements for M!CE events as Singapore transitions towards a COVID-19-resilient state.

A magnificent gala night

IMWF 2021 enabled the establishment of relationships and business, and produced vivid experiences in the minds of its attendees.

The International M!CE and Wedding Forum (IMWF 2021) welcomed the most productive and ambitious M!CE and wedding planning professionals from around the world, as well as its participants in Antalya, Turkey, from November 18 to 22, 2021, with Turkish Airlines as the main partner, hosted by Titanic Mardan Palace in cooperation with Inventum Global.

At the event, which included international meetings, incentive trips, seminars, congresses, events, and destination weddings, all of the key stakeholders, including representatives from world-renowned airlines, hotels, and suppliers, were present. Among those invited were Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, Turkish Republic Minister of Culture and Tourism, and Neşet Koçkar, Chairman of ANEX Tourism Group.

On November 19, 2021, the fifth International M!CE and Wedding Forum commenced with an opening ceremony.

In his opening speech, Neşet



Koçkar, Chairperson, ANEX Tourism Group, says, "We went through hard times; the pandemic was very difficult for our industry. After the pandemic age is over, we will be better than ever. Because people are bored of staying at home for long periods of time, and desire new experiences and visits to new places. We were extremely

fortunate in Turkey during the pandemic because we had a Minister of Culture and Tourism who is one of us and knows the industry as well as we do. I would like to thank our minister again in your presence."

Following that, **Mehmet Nuri Ersoy**, Turkish Republic Minister of

Culture and Tourism, in a speech, says, "Our country is one of the leaders in the international M!CE sector. According to most statistics, Istanbul is one of the top international meeting, congress, and event destinations. We are not focussing on one goal. Our country has the potential to offer much more. We are talking about an important sector."

He adds, "At this point, we can estimate that the global market for destination weddings is worth US\$ 300 billion. A wedding organisation has a daily spending volume of at least US\$ 500 to 600 per person."

"These weddings are considered a type of tourism because they are the most popular and have the most purchasing power. I can confidently state that our

hope that this forum will pave the way for fruitful results, cooperation, and connection," he concludes.

On the main stage, the most creative and assertive names in the industry shared their experiences with all attendees and took everyone on an intellectual journey. IMWF provided its guests from almost 40 nations the opportunity to explore, understand, and remember their trip.

The forum brought together international hotel chains and airline companies, as well as M!CE and wedding planners from key nations, such as the US, India, England, Italy, Lebanon, and Russia, to network and build mutual business.

Through seminars, speeches by experts in their respective fields, and B2B meetings



QUICK BYTE We can estimate that the global market for destination weddings is worth US\$ 300 billion

'safe tourism' certificate programme plays key role in us becoming one of the leading destinations for tourism, weddings, and similar organisations. The world is experiencing a significant turning point. We have adapted to the changes in our lives. These changes have become the standards of our lives, our jobs, and the guiding principles of our sectors. The numbers and statistics clearly show that we are on the right path. This achievement is still being shared with our national and international stakeholders. I would like to conclude my speech by thanking all of the institutions, organisations, and individuals who have worked tirelessly to bring IMWF to fruition. I sincerely

during the day, as well as a range of themed activities each night, IMWF enabled the establishment of relationships and business, and produced vivid experiences in the minds of its attendees.

The closing ceremony continued with N. Fuat Ersoy, Managing Partner, International M!CE and Wedding Forum, presenting awards to the main partners, Turkish Airlines, Titanic Mardan Palace, Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, and Inventum Global, as well as other key stakeholders. The night concluded with live music, stage shows, and joyful moments shared by all of the attendees.





Eyeing M!CE revival

HRAEI wants to revive the M!CE segment. But, it struggles to get relaxation on property tax and excise license fees despite making several requests to state governments.

Hazel Jain

The Hotel & Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) has elected a new set of regional presidents for the next year. **Sudesh Poddar**, a veteran hotelier with business interests in the hospitality industry in Assam and West Bengal, was re-elected as the association's President at the Managing Committee meeting held after the HRAEI Annual General Meeting in Kolkata.

Speaking about the team's immediate focus areas, the president says, "The foremost aim is to help the revival of the industry after COVID-19. We are trying to extend the number of hours of service for bars and restaurants, keeping in mind the festive season ahead. Guests are coming back to eat out. We have introduced a mass vaccination drive for hospitality workers in the region. In Kolkata, a large number of our workers are now fully vaccinated. We have collaborated with state governments for the drive." Poddar adds, "We are also urging the government to



Sudesh Poddar

We have met several ministries and relevant departments, but we have not been able to resolve these issues

resume international and domestic flights to improve hotel occupancy. We have made requests to accommodate more people in banquets and are making efforts to rejuvenate the M!CE segment."

However, there are certain areas where they have not been able to make any headway. "In spite of several requests to all state governments we have not been able to get any relaxation on property tax and excise license fees. We have sent several letters and delegations to respective departments without any effect. We have also met several ministries and relevant government departments with our requests," Poddar complains.

HRAEI is conducting several meetings with members through multiple online platforms for the past

one year. HRAEI, under the leadership of Poddar, has strived hard towards bringing relief to the industry to the maximum during the devastating epidemic. He made earnest efforts to raise concern over the issues that have been affecting the trade and the industry in the year of crisis with multiple government agencies and individuals.

This apart, he also took the initiative to organise mass vaccination drive for hospitality workers, launch privilege health card with AMRI Hospitals for members of HRAEI and their family members, and facilitated hotels and hospitals to collaborate to meet COVID-19 bed shortage during the second wave of the pandemic. Poddar has been closely associated with HRAEI and FHRAI in different capacities. He has held office as the President of HRAEI for four consecutive years. He is also a member (catering expert) on the Board of Governors of Hotel Management and Catering Technology, Kolkata.

QUICK BYTE Poddar's team is urging the government to resume flights to improve hotel occupancy



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The Emirati hospitality

Abu Dhabi has an array of leisure offerings for Indian preferences, notes **H.E. Ali Hassan Al Shaiba**, ED-Tourism & Marketing, DCT Abu Dhabi.

Nisha Verma



The Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) has announced that the emirate is welcoming fully vaccinated people travelling from all over the world and unvaccinated visitors from Green List countries, without quarantine.

INDIA MARKET

Claiming that India is one of

their top source markets for tourism, **H.E. Ali Hassan Al Shaiba**, Executive Director of Tourism and Marketing, DCT Abu Dhabi, says, "In 2019, Abu Dhabi welcomed 11.35 million visitors and the UAE is home to the highest number of Indians abroad, with 3.42 million Indians—about one quarter of all Indians abroad. Leisure travel in India will gain traction."

QUICK BYTE Abu Dhabi's vaccination drive has improved the confidence 80 per cent of all residents

TAPPING INTO THE INDIA MARKET

Al Shaiba shares that they have shown their commitment to the Indian market via several local training initiatives. "This includes a renewed focus on

our Specialist e-Learning Programme and marketing campaigns. Safety is an important factor for travellers, and Abu Dhabi has implemented careful protocols over the last 18 months," he shares.



H.E. Ali Hassan Al Shaiba



We have organised virtual training sessions for our partners across India



GUIDELINES

- Visitors can register their home nation's vaccination certificate via the ICA App or the website 48 hrs ahead of the travel date.
- SMS confirmation will be sent with a link to the ALHOSN App (to be installed before travel).
- On arrival, visitors will be given a UID number for entering into the App to finish registration.
- Visitors from non-Green List nations will need to get PCR test on days 4 and 8.

TRENDS IN FOCUS

As per the Global COVID-19 Sentiment Survey conducted by DCT Abu Dhabi, sightseeing trips have high appeal among Indian travellers, he says. "Moreover, when choosing a destination, 65 per cent of Indian travellers' decisions depend on low COVID-19 case numbers in the destination of their choice, and 43 per cent of Indian travellers perceive Abu Dhabi as an ideal holiday destination for families. Hence, Indian travellers are more likely to take short-haul flights than mid-long-haul flights, and Abu Dhabi is ready to welcome business and leisure travellers from India," avers Al Shaiba.

AD WITH DUBAI

Usually, travellers combine Abu Dhabi with Dubai, but Al Shaiba claims that Abu Dhabi has diverse offerings in the luxury and affordable luxury segments to help people experience the Emirati hospitality.

LEISURE OFFERINGS

Al Shaiba asserts that Abu Dhabi has a wide array of leisure offerings that cater to Indians' choices, ranging from delectable culinary experiences to unique entertainment and desert activities. "This apart, theme parks, heritage sites, and beaches are some of its permanent attractions. Also, Abu Dhabi enjoys a year-round calendar of activities and events," he highlights.

TAPPING INTO M!CE

Abu Dhabi has witnessed an influx of business travellers flying into the emirate from across the globe, with India ranking amongst the top source markets for tourism. "Our M!CE team is working closely with stakeholders to develop new M!CE-specific itineraries for Indian groups. Over the next few months,

we are also hosting several international events, and we are ready to welcome Indian M!CE groups for these events," suggests Al Shaiba. He adds, "We have an attractive incentive programme, 'Advantage Abu Dhabi' for M!CE groups where, apart from financial support, we also help firms arrange meetings with local government or private institutions to facilitate business and investment opportunities in Abu Dhabi. In 2021, our strategic approach has also been to train and educate trade partners and corporates across India, both virtually and physically. We have held virtual training sessions and webinars for partners across India. We have also adapted to the New Normal by hosting virtual FAM trips for key corporates in India."

TRANSIT TRAVEL

Al Shaiba also points out that Abu Dhabi makes for a great transit destination for Indian travellers on a long-haul trip to the West, with easy and quick accessibility to a variety of diverse tourist spots, giving travellers a quick break to unwind before resuming their trip.

GOING FORWARD

He says that their Emirati hospitality, backed by Abu Dhabi's vaccination drive, has improved confidence, with over 80 per cent of all residents vaccinated, as well as over 95 per cent of all hospitality staff. Abu Dhabi's Go Safe Certification programme aims to ensure the highest standards of health and safety across the hospitality sector. With safety and hygiene paving the new wave of travel, industry reports suggest that Indian travellers are optimistic and looking at short-haul international destinations once travel resumes," says Al Shaiba.



Promoting good tourism practices

The Dominican Republic will be a FITUR partner country for FITUR 2022 by IFEMA MADRID, to be held from Jan 19 to 23, 2022, under the slogan 'Embracing the World'.

Following the milestone of FITUR 2021, the Trade Fair dedicates all of its efforts to its mission, to contribute to the recovery of tourism, in its 'Special Tourism Recovery' edition, backed by the entire value chain of the international tourism industry. The representation of the Spanish tourism industry has already been confirmed at its highest level, in terms of autonomous communities and cities, as well as positively in terms of companies, to which must be added the growth of official international participation, which stands at more than 70 per cent compared to the results of FITUR 2020 and represents a 240 per cent increase as compared to the May 2021 edition, two months before the event.

Thus, FITUR 2022, in alignment with elements such as the gradual normalisation of tourism activities and the government's backing in declaring it as an event of exceptional public interest, as well as support from institutions, countries and destinations, hotel chains, travel agencies, and tour operators, technological companies, suppliers, transportation, will once again contribute all of its resources to tourism.

The event continues to focus on the various



QUICK BYTE The event continues to develop its professionalisation and specialisation strategy

segments that drive the tourism market, with its sections FITURTECHY, FITUR KNOW HOW & EXPORT, FITUR M!CE, FITUR HEALTH, FITUR ENTERTAINMENT, FITUR TALENT, FITUR LGBT+, FITUR LINGUA, and FITUR WOMAN, as well as B2B events and programmes that will showcase future key points and challenges, with emphasis on the digital transition and sustainable development. The FITURNEXT Observatory is focussing this year on promoting good tourism practises in terms of accessibility. FITUR will be

held in eight halls: The US in Hall 3; Europe and the ME in Hall 4; APAC and Africa in Hall 6; Spanish official organisations in Halls 5, 7, and 9; and travel technology and companies in Halls 8 and 10.

The Dominican Republic, being the FITUR Partner Country, will have strategic visibility to showcase the country's tourist attractions. The country is the FITUR Partner for the second time. It aims to highlight its mild climate and people's hospitality, its connections with over 1,400 airports from 170 countries, and its proper handling of the pandemic in terms of tourism protocols, vaccination of the local population, and particularly tourism industry workers.



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Return of hefty wedding budgets

While some wedding experts are still experiencing flagging bookings as compared to others, the unanimous opinion is that the next year will be a jackpot for the wedding industry.

Hazel Jain

The great Indian wedding has seen a tumultuous last 24 months. But the upcoming season promises to bring the colour back to a paling industry. While for many weddings are back in full swing, albeit within the country, for others it is still a wait-and-watch situation.

Zubin Saxena, Managing Director and Vice President (Operations), South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, feels that the surge in vaccination rates has given Indians the confidence to host wedding ceremonies in-person, albeit

with a greater focus on health and safety protocols. "Our hotels across Goa, Udaipur, Alibaug and Lonavala and Karjat are seeing an uptick in numbers with newer destinations emerging such as Vizag. For families looking for offbeat experiences and the novelty factor, our newly launched resorts and hotels are being considered as attractive options as they also double up as safe leisure getaways," he says.

To meet this demand, Radisson Hotel Group is offering immersive guest



QUICK BYTE As a result of the pandemic, many families are not sticking to *saya dates*

journeys customised for couples, families, and their guests, with initiatives such as speedboat transfers and champagne welcomes at resorts. Saxena adds, "We have introduced refreshed menus with signature cuisine options from our more than 100 hotels. With the pace of travel and consumer confidence levels both picking up, we are optimistic about this wedding season."

ARE SAYA DATES STILL WINNING?

One of the most ardent advocates of non-saya, or non-auspicious dates for Indian weddings, **Rajeev Jain**, Managing Director, Rashi Entertainment, feels that the Indian wedding industry continues to suffer because of COVID-19. "But we, at Rashi, believe that the Indian wedding industry will witness a significant rise as COVID-19 is more or less over now. International weddings are opening up very fast, and by 2022, we will witness many international weddings across the world. Domestic destinations are already an 'in' thing now. We are getting inquiries, but all are for saya dates only," he says.

Forever the optimist, Jain adds that one will find many new opportunities opening up such as new domestic destinations. He says, "Destinations such as Goa, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Mahabalipuram, Udaipur, Kerala, and Khajuraho are doing roaring business right now. We all should be prepared to cater to an enormous surge of weddings that will take place in 2022, with new domestic destinations at our disposal. We all have huge business opportunities for the coming seasons. The client will spend more on entertainment as

new concepts arise. The expenditure on food and clothes will go up since the number of functions will soar as they are held in Indian destinations."

Meanwhile, **Meera Charnalia**, Senior Vice President & Head (MICE), Thomas Cook India, reveals that her division has executed several weddings and related events this year, with a healthy forward pipeline for the next few months. "The weddings are mostly booked during the saya dates, but due to the pandemic, customers are also open to the idea of planning them on non-saya dates this year. Most of these are destination weddings with themes. Some of the destinations in demand include Jaipur, Udaipur, Hyderabad, Lonavala, Mahabaleshwar, and Alibaug. Goa and Kerala are for hosting sun-downer weddings," she adds.

SMALL, CONVENIENT WEDDINGS

Many families are opting for convenience rather than sticking to saya dates. **Atul Upadhyay**, VP-Operations, Pride Group of Hotels, feels optimistic now that COVID-19 cases are declining and restrictions are being eased. "With the New Normal, the wedding business will certainly take its own time to revive. But currently, the season looks very promising. Many have taken the vaccination, and at this point, small weddings have become the norm, with live streaming and virtual guest attendance alongside. This goes for non-saya dates as well. It is now more about availability, convenience, and combining with holidays rather than just saya dates," he says.

Destinations such as Goa, Dapoli, Gangtok, Udaipur,



Zubin Saxena



We are optimistic about this wedding season



Atul Upadhyay



The wedding business will certainly take its own time to revive



Meera Charnalia



Goa and Kerala are famous for sun-downer weddings



and Mussoorie where Pride Group has its resorts are doing well for pre-wedding shoots, Upadhyay claims.

"City banquets such as Indore, Pune, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, New Delhi, and Kolkata are equally popular. If we talk about destinations, our locations at Bharatpur, Rajkot, Puri, Goa, Mussoorie and Dapoli are quite busy," he says.

NO BUDGET CUTS!

People have money to spend and only those families that can afford to spend on weddings plan for destination weddings, says **Dharmendra Singh**, Director, Plaisir Hospitality Services and Maharashtra Chapter Chairperson, ADTOL. "People are still interested in doing destination weddings in places such as Goa, Jaisalmer, Udaipur, Jodhpur, and Jaipur. Wedding budgets depend from client to client. It starts from ₹25 lakh. That is why you can see every year at least 10 to 12 luxury resorts opening up in India," Singh opines.

Meanwhile, **Jitendra Kejriwal**, Chairperson, Arika Tour & Travels and Chapter Chairperson, IATO-Maharashtra, says the entire wedding industry is almost sold out until February 15, 2022. "This is true even for non-saya dates. The hotel rates for saya dates have skyrocketed. For instance, the Leela Goa is around ₹45,000 to ₹50,000 plus taxes per night." His company is also receiving queries for Indore and Hyderabad. "The clients' budgets are the same as pre-COVID-19 levels; they have not come down and people are okay with spending now." For March 2022, some clients are inquiring about international wedding destinations," Kejriwal adds.

Personalisation is key

Todd Arthur, Vice President, Sabre Travel Solutions Agency Sales, APAC, discusses how technology and innovation can assist in enhancing corporate travel.

Lipla Negi

Sabre Travel Solutions Agency's robust distribution network ensures that airlines and hoteliers are best placed to present their content in front of travel managers, TMCs, agents, and travellers, and that travellers can receive the best tailored offers. Corporate travellers have higher expectations than ever before, and it is vital that our travel partners have the right tools to meet them. Sabre's GetThere travel management solutions offer travel managers and travellers with access to rich content and the ability to differentiate various airline fare offerings. We also announced the launch of NDC content to GetThere, allowing corporate travel managers to access more dynamic content alternatives that airlines are beginning to make available through NDC connections. We have integrated NDC offers alongside EDIFACT content in the familiar GetThere display. Travellers can access more options and NDC content ordered in GetThere can be seamlessly transferred to TMC partners. NDC supports the creation of more travel options tailored to the needs of a company. In this dynamic climate, giving travellers content options and flexibility is essential.

PENT-UP DEMAND

We strongly believe in global recovery in both the



Todd Arthur

It is vital to have the right technology in place to support changing corporate traveller expectations

business and leisure travel sectors. Our earnings data for Q3 is positive, indicating that the current recovery is being led by all regions globally. We are seeing improved foreign and business booking trends that have higher margin, as opposed to the lower margin leisure bookings that were an early driver of travel recovery in the US. The greatest inhibitors to global travel recovery are the world's ongoing and changing travel restrictions. The latest case-in-point of this was the rise in bookings in and out of the US in response to the September news that inbound travel restrictions will be eased, beginning November 8. Despite the fact that the US still requires foreign visitors to be fully vaccinated and to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test, daily bookings to and from the US have nearly doubled since the announcement.

We remain optimistic about the revival of corporate travel as large portions of the global population are now fully vaccinated. Companies are starting to bring back employees to their offices and plan in-person gatherings. There is a pent-up demand for businesses to resume travel to cultivate relationships. As per the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), global business travel will rise in 2022, with full recovery expected in

2024. A GBTA poll found that more than a third of travel managers felt their company now relies on TMCs more than it did before COVID-19. The improving corporate travel trends we have seen in our bookings data are consistent with most major US airlines' favourable trending outlooks, which have indicated that they foresee near-term inflection points in business demand. Following the impact of the Delta variant on bookings, we began to notice a positive shift in mid-September, with pronounced improvements in both corporate and international bookings. As markets throughout the world continue to re-open and corporate travellers begin to travel, these trends have accelerated.

BLURRING OF BOUNDARIES

Instead of solely virtual events, we are seeing more hybrid and in-person events. Domestic travel led recovery, but we are now seeing international business travel resume as people are seeking the benefits to business that an in-person human connection can bring. There are strong signs that corporate travel managers are increasingly turning to TMCs to obtain the best offers for their team members. Corporations have always had a duty of care to their employees, and this is more crucial now than ever.



Personalisation is the key in all segments of the travel industry. Corporate travellers want the ability to tailor their trip to ensure that they get exactly what they need to feel confident about visiting again and do business effectively. They want to receive the most value for the money on every trip. We are also seeing a blur between the boundaries of business and leisure.

With travel off the table for so long, many corporate travellers are adding extra time to their trip to balance business and leisure needs. Given that many companies are now implementing more flexible working policies, such as Sabre's work-from-anywhere strategy, workers are also opting to work from other locations. It is vital to have the right

QUICK BYTE We strongly believe in a broad, global recovery in both the business and leisure travel sectors

technology in place to support changing corporate traveller expectations, and many of our travel partners are taking the time to ensure they have the right technological toolkit in place to broaden their distribution strategy, and to ensure they are able to place the best content in front of corporate travellers.

DUTY OF CARE

Travel is not as simple as it was before the pandemic. There are more hoops to jump, which is why travel management companies and agents are becoming increasingly important. It is vital, therefore, for airlines and hoteliers to have robust

distribution strategies in place. Sabre continues to renew contracts and secure new agreements with forward-thinking travel partners. Our newest airline retailing product suite, Sabre Retail Intelligence, powered by Sabre, will help airlines in better considering traveller segment and trip intent to deliver tailored travel offers.

It is critical for companies to be able to safeguard their employees. They must fulfill their duty of care. We are seeing an increase in interest in our mobile duty of care solution, SafePoint. SafePoint, when combined with Sabre's travel

management application, TripCase, can monitor a traveller's itinerary, allowing travel managers to view events affecting their travellers, while travellers can check in with their corporation and provide a GPS location, as well as have easy access to their emergency assistance hotline if unexpected problems arise.

AN EXCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIP

Through joint service development and rapid product innovation, we are building the industry's leading travel technology with our exclusive alliance with Google. During the pandemic, we have also taken the opportunity to accelerate our technological transformation in response to COVID-19, and rapidly advance modern retailing and develop a new marketplace for personalised travel. This is expected to increase revenue opportunities for Sabre and partners while improving the experience for leisure as well as corporate travellers.

The way forward

Revenge tourism, festive travel, and business reopening will be crucial in revival of India's tourism industry, explains **Sylvain Laroche**, Director-Operations, ibis & ibis Styles, India.

Lipla Negi



Sylvain Laroche

ibis has risen to 20 hotels in 13 cities, thanks to convivial, cool contemporary, caring, and proactive spirit

The domestic market of India is strong, and it will continue to be a key growth driver in this sector, as local travellers prefer to go on short road trips or stay in the same city. Slow travel is becoming the new normal, allowing guests to enjoy a destination at their leisure while learning about the local culture. We are also witnessing the rise of the environmentally-friendly traveller, who searches for sustainable travel opportunities. Factors,

approach. The road to recovery for the hospitality industry is an extension of this approach, requiring a digitally-enabled front-line workforce capable of anticipating, gauging the pulse of guests, and acting promptly. The way forward is to re-evaluate business strategies in the light of new technology that can help us become more inclusive and sustainable.

To run operations efficiently, the industry will also

unique deal, 'Pay for Stay and Dine for Free,' to attract guests.

SPACE SOLUTIONS

At ibis, we started offering alternate office space solutions to meet the needs of working professionals and companies by providing all amenities of a traditional office setup with the added flexibility of a virtual office. Work@ibis aims to provide businesses of all sizes with cost-effective and useful solutions.



such as revenge tourism, festive travel and business reopening, will be key in the revival of India's tourism industry.

GROWING IBIS BRAND

In India, ibis hotels have been operating since 2008. ibis has risen to 20 hotels in 13 cities, thanks to its convivial, cool contemporary, caring, and proactive spirit. ibis has carved out a niche for itself with over 2,400 hotels globally. COVID-19 had an impact on our businesses. To stay safely connected in 2020, hospitality and technology combined to adopt a dynamic and multi-pronged digital solutions

need to implement lean management practises that help decrease waste and cut any non-emergent expenditures.

ROAD TO RECOVERY

Businesses across verticals need to swiftly adapt to changing time and needs, as well as evolve their strategies, to remain relevant to consumers in the post-COVID era. Accor has launched several offers, campaigns, and strategic partnerships to reaffirm guests' faith. We presented a one-of-a-kind limited-period offer of 'Pay What You Want' with the opening of ibis Mumbai Vikhroli, and we are introducing another

Most of our hotels have forayed into food delivery through 'Good Mood Food at your Doorstep.' Our goal with Spice It, our flagship restaurant, was to meet the demands of visitors while also assuring their safety and convenience. The safety of our guests and team members has always been, and will remain, our priority. The ALLSAFE certification, which Accor has awarded to all 20 ibis hotels in India, including the ibis Mumbai Vikhroli, is a testament to the stringent hygiene measures we have adopted across all touchpoints. We have also implemented contactless experiences at all touchpoints.



'Royally' Luxurious

Luxury is about creating beautiful spaces for your guests and help them reconnect with the royal times, observes **Sangjay Choegyal**, GM, Six Senses Fort Barwara.

Lipla Negi

In the world of hospitality, this is a match made in heaven. Sixth Senses Fort Barwara brings legacy of history and heritage to the lilting tunes of 'padharo mhare des.' To this, the iconic brand adds wellness tourism and passion for sustainability. The result is a sensual experience for travellers, offering them a luxurious stay in the 14th century Barwara Fort.

The resort, inaugurated in October, has become the buzz about town. Rumour has it that two Bollywood actors have selected it to host their wedding. With the right mix of glory and architectural grandeur, it seems like a perfect choice for Indian weddings, but we are looking to redefine sustainability and wellness, says **Sangjay Choegyal**, GM, Six Senses Fort Barwara.

What are your reasons behind picking Rajasthan for your India debut?
Rajasthan boasts of so many



Sangjay Choegyal

We aim to showcase to the domestic market how best to implement sustainability and wellness

great existing properties, and most of all, a fascinating and beguiling history. Fort Barwara encompasses and seamlessly weaves all these traits into the restored 14th century fort and palaces we call Six Senses Fort Barwara. Guests can also have a dekko of the wild: Ranthambore National Park.

Is India ready to be a sought-after wellness destination keeping in mind the neighbours, such as Maldives, Seychelles and Singapore?

The definition of luxury has evolved a lot in recent years. I believe luxury is about creating beautiful spaces for your guests and help them reconnect with the royal times. This is what we have strived to do at Six Senses Fort Barwara, and I believe, we are more than ready to be positioned in this light.

Indians often prefer foreign destinations for luxury vacations. Would they be equally excited for a domestic destination?

The restrictions we have experienced on travel abroad has made us appreciate the beauty of a resort or a hotel closer to home to spend a long and memorable weekend. With Six Senses Fort Barwara being our first property in India, we have crafted a package for our guests — daily unique Six Senses experiences. We aim to showcase to the domestic market how best to implement sustainability and wellness.

What is the famed 'Six Senses experience'?

The fort along with the two palaces were restored to their glory highlighting the beauty of the over 700-year-old structures. The experience at Six Senses is not all about sheer opulence, but about creating spaces and opportunities for our guests to reconnect with themselves and others.

QUICK BYTE The resort, which was inaugurated in October, has become the buzz about town





Stress on creativity

Luxembourg's participation in Expo 2020 Dubai is a unique opportunity to introduce emiratis to the Luxembourg leisure and business tourism sectors.

Shehara Rizly

H.R.H the Hereditary Grand Duke of Luxembourg led a tourism promotion mission to Dubai, where H.E. Lex Delles, Minister of Tourism and Minister of the Middle Classes, participated in 'Luxembourg Tourism Days' and the closing ceremony of the 'Made in Luxembourg' week at Expo 2020 Dubai. H.R.H. the Hereditary Grand Duke and H.E. Lex Delles were accompanied to Dubai by a delegation comprised various tourism actors and the national tourism promotion agency, Luxembourg for Tourism, and the Luxembourg Convention Bureau, the Grand Duchy's official representative for the promotion of events.

Luxembourg's presence in Expo 2020 Dubai is a unique opportunity to promote Luxembourg companies' tourism assets and know-how. The Directorate General for Tourism held 'Luxembourg Tourism Days' from November 8 to 10 within the Luxembourg Pavilion, which featured the



H.E. Lex Delles

The mission's itinerary includes visits to foreign pavilions on the Expo 2020 site

setting of a village of stands with various exhibitors from the tourism sector to highlight their diversity and creativity. There was also the installation of the 'Luxembourg Sky Swing' that takes visitors to the pavilion on a virtual journey through Luxembourg. H.R.H. the Hereditary Grand Duke and H.E. Lex Delles, launched a workshop titled 'Inspiring travel and meeting experiences in Luxembourg'. This seminar presented an opportunity to introduce the Emiratis to

the Luxembourg leisure and business tourism sectors.

H.R.H. the Hereditary Grand Duke and H.E. Lex Delles closed the 'Made in Luxembourg' week, which was held in the pavilion from November 1 to 6. It highlighted the variety and quality of work produced by Luxembourg's small and medium-sized businesses. The mission's itinerary includes visits to several foreign pavilions on the Expo site, including the pavilion of the host country, the UAE. H.E. Lex Delles also visited the Dubai Exhibition Centre. H.R.H. the Hereditary Grand Duke and H.E. Lex Delles also met with Dr. Ahmad Belhouli Al Falasi, UAE Secretary of State for Entrepreneurship and SMEs. H.E. Lex Delles further met with key players in the UAE tourism and middle-class sectors. He also had the opportunity to meet with H.E. Helal Saeed Al Marri, Director General of Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism, and Abdulbaset Al Janahi, CEO of Dubai SME.

QUICK BYTE 'Made in Luxembourg' week highlighted the variety of work produced by Luxembourg's businesses

Open to the vaxxed

Tourism Malaysia is inviting more visitors and has devised a campaign called #WeMissYou ahead of the reopening of its international borders.

Hazel Jain

As the world slowly opens up for domestic and cross-border travel, Malaysia is looking at gradually opening up to allow domestic movement and, eventually, international visitors.

Manoharan Periasamy, Senior Director, Tourism Malaysia's International Promotion Division for Asia & Africa, says of the country's current priorities, "Malaysia has successfully completed the vaccination of more than 90 per cent of its adult population against COVID-19, and as a result, domestic tourism has fully



Manoharan Periasamy

Tourism Malaysia is set to welcome tourists while pushing the campaign

reopened effective October 11, 2021. Meanwhile, Tourism Malaysia is ready to welcome more tourists while simultaneously pushing the #WeMissYou campaign ahead of the reopening of our international borders, which is expected once we achieve 90 per cent complete nationwide inoculation."

Tourism Malaysia recently participated for the third time in the third edition of the Gulf Travel Show, held from October 12 to 14, 2021. Malaysia had its own virtual pavilion with 13 booths, including Tourism Malaysia Dubai, Tourism Malaysia Jeddah, Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), Malaysia

Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC), three DMCs/ tour operator partners, one product partner, and five hotels and resorts from the island of Langkawi. Manoharan adds, "Gulf Travel Show 2021 is a platform that allows industry players to share the development and implementation of safety for domestic and international travellers in preparation for reopening the borders, especially for the Middle East market."

"On September 16, 2021, the government announced the reopening of Langkawi as the pilot project for Malaysia's domestic travel bubble, aiming at reviving the nation's tourist industry," says **Nasaruddin Bin Abdul Muttalib**, Chief Executive Officer, LADA.

Langkawi has become the first Malaysian holiday resort to welcome fully vaccinated domestic travellers. Visitors are also subject to standard operating procedures (SOP) compliance and must pass COVID-19 screening tests before entering Langkawi.

QUICK BYTE Tourism Malaysia recently participated for the third time in the third edition of GTS 2021



On the brighter side

In the pandemic-driven volatile environment, the million-dollar question is how the industry leaders will respond to the dip in bookings and competitive pricing.



Mainak Ray

Mainak Ray

Associate Director-Sales, The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat

IMPROVISATION IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

We can all agree on one thing: COVID-19 has had the greatest impact on the hotel business. On the bright side, the pandemic has been a great learning experience for the hospitality industry. We have learned to innovate and improvise to weather the COVID-19 storm.

The hospitality sector is characterised by its rising room supply and tight margins. Dynamism is the name of the game, and I believe this was my key takeaway. This industry is heavily reliant on ambiguous demand. On the field, forecasting demand uncertainty is difficult. The only way for hotels to mitigate current uncertainty in demand is to secure a base occupancy and then be dynamic with pricing based on the current demand. While focussing on certain segments, such as airlines or seafarers crew, relocation movement is of

paramount importance in maintaining a healthy occupancy, and boosting the average daily rate (ADR).

Additionally, the strong competition necessitates that hotel revenue managers continuously adapt methods to remain relevant. We must be aware of our surroundings to monitor any developments and react ahead of the competition to mitigate the impact of the uncertainty around us. To stay ahead of the competition, it is more important than ever to hire the right people.

Above all, we as leaders must keep a positive attitude for the sake of our teams and the industry as a whole, and this will all be behind us soon. The health and safety of consumers venturing out to travel or dine has been the primary issue since COVID-19. A high degree of cleanliness is a new luxury, and it will become the price that guests will be willing to

pay to stay in hotels. The latest trends in home deliveries, carried out by hotels to ensure that patrons do not miss out on their celebrations, which we perform at reasonable pricing, with value add-ons and combination meals, was an important step taken during the pandemic.

At The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat, we offer a variety of services to ensure that our guests have a luxurious experience while adhering to all COVID-19 safety protocols.

Hotels can mitigate the uncertainty in demand by securing a base occupancy

QUICK BYTE Relocation movement is crucial in maintaining a healthy occupancy, and boosting ADR





Rishi Mattu

General Manager, ITC Rajputana, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Jaipur

A CRUCIAL PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY

With corporates and conferences being minimalistic, the segment that is actually using hotels is predominantly leisure, which includes travellers who want to go on motorable adventures. There are people who travel to see friends and family, and then there are groups of families or friends who travel together.

We have also observed the booking window, which is the time prior to the arrival date during which the booking is made, shrinking to a week or less, whereas in the past this was usually about 10 to 15 days because corporate or conference travellers would tend to make confirmed bookings much in advance so that they could plan their itinerary out.

The trend's uncertainty is primarily due to travel waivers, impromptu, or revenge travel. Hotels frequently layer their

businesses in such a way that it is divided into corporates, travel agencies, family travellers, leisure travellers, and conferences, among others.

In the current pandemic scenario, uncertainty has arisen primarily as a result of travel restrictions that vary from state to state, and there has been little or nearly no corporate movement, though we are now seeing some increasing trends

in this segment. Whereas leisure travel is also prone to cancellations, there have been instances where we have seen a dramatic decline in bookings for a variety of reasons.

Since corporates and the M!CE segment are also attempting to reestablish routine and regain their vacation window, plans are being made and modified, and we are witnessing peaks and valleys in our occupancy charts at times.



Rishi Mattu

There has been little or no corporate movement organising conferences



QUICK BYTE The uncertainty in the trend is primarily due to travel waivers, impromptu, or revenge travel



Festive boost for HOSPITALITY

The industry is expected to see exponential occupancy from festive bookings by the fourth quarter of 2021 and the first quarter of the next year.

Ananya Kukreja

The COVID-19 crisis has had its upsides in spotlighting domestic tourism.

Ease of domestic travel enraptures the pent-up travellers' desire, creating opportunities for the hospitality sector. The continued demand for mini

vacations or staycations is a big contributing factor to festive weekends becoming busier this year. The festive period in India has always been important. November and December are popular months of weddings and given the trend of comfort outings,

resident city hotels will experience a considerable boost in banquet bookings.

During COVID-19, fewer occasions were indulged in or celebrated.

QUICK BYTE The socio-economic conditions after COVID-19 have altered the travellers' mindset

The winter of this year is seeing revenge celebration, and people are willing to dole out more.

CAUTIOUS BENEFIT

Guests are opting for air inclusive stays of seven to 10 days. Upon re-opening after the second wave, Thomas Cook saw a surge in July versus June 2021 and have been growing at over 100 per cent monthly. An appetite for celebrations is being witnessed from millennials, groups of friends, corporate M!CE, and wedding segment, says **Indiver Rastogi**, President and Group Head of Global Business Travel, Thomas Cook (India) and SOTC. Hygiene and safety is the primordial concern and this has resulted in a strong demand for premium hospitality brands. Festive and bank holidays are creating an additional opportunity with travellers extending their stays. Also, high in demand are experiences such as biking, hiking, camping, jungle safaris and picnic lunches, and the industry is rising to the occasion to offer such value additions.

The festive season has generated a positive consumer sentiment and Thomas Cook have seen a surge of over 5x compared to Diwali 2020 with properties moving into high occupancy for Christmas and New Year. Mahindra Holidays have seen a great uptick in the demand for leisure travel this festive season. Travellers are choosing trusted brands as their vacation partners, says **Miguel Munoz**, Chief Resorts Officer, Mahindra Holidays and Resorts India Limited. The Club Mahindra 'SafeStay' programme provides hygiene and safety protocols. Club Mahindra resorts have obtained the highest level

of certification in safety and hygiene standards from 'Bureau Veritas'. They also launched 'Travel with Confidence' initiative. Club Mahindra also craft unique experiences around the interests of guests.

At IHCL, there is traction on the 'Dekho Apna Desh' festive offer that gives guests an assortment of exclusive experiences. Ambassador, New Delhi, and The Connaught are witnessing significant buoyancy for the festive weekends and shorter booking windows. After the journey of transformation and re-opening of Machan, the hotel introduced bespoke Machan memorabilia as gifting options and special hampers for children. The Chambers was re-launched this year and has a range of gifting solutions in designer baskets and boxes. Emperor Lounge features gourmet selection of handcrafted savouries and artisanal bakes along with a collection of tea and coffee.

The Art of Gifting at Taj Mahal, New Delhi, offers limited edition lux merchandise and gourmet delights. Taj Mahal observed a steady increase in the guests visiting their restaurants for festive dining. With Tajness – A Commitment Restrengthened – the assurance of IHCL's augmented safety protocols, they are privileged to be a part of the guests' festive celebrations, states **Satyajeet Krishnan**, Area Director New Delhi and General Manager, Taj Mahal New Delhi. The demand for exclusive events and memorable destinations are growing. To cater to such demands, Taj Mahal Lucknow ensured customised services and packages under COVID protocols, mentions **Vinod**



Indiver Rastogi

Travel desire has created a significant opportunity for the sector



Miguel Munoz

People are opting for destinations at drivable distances



Satyajeet Krishnan

The trend has been positive and buoyant this festive season

Pandey, General Manager, Taj Mahal Lucknow.

UPTICK WEDDINGS

Hospitality organisations are observing a strong uptick in weddings and related events. Corporate travel is showing signs of life, and Thomas Cook expects to be at 65 per cent of pre-pandemic levels by the end of the year, working with partner hotels to see a growth in business travel and bleisure.

The Taj Mahal, New Delhi, is a preferred venue for social gatherings and intimate weddings, curated by their culinary, service, and sales teams. Weddings in city hotels are on the rise for the upcoming season. It is easier for city residents to host events in their hometown.

Travel to international places is still limited, however domestic leisure destinations are expanding with individual travel; this makes city hotels the prudent choice.

WAY FORWARD

The hospitality industry will enjoy exponential occupancy from festive bookings by Q4 2021 and Q1 2022. The sector is seeing a surge in demand from city residents and nearby areas. Diwali bookings soared significantly. Top venues are sold out for Christmas and New Year's, owing to the changing mindset and long weekend surrounding the holidays. The firms that go above and beyond to ensure the safety of their guests must be credited for building this trust. While many people celebrated in their home comfort even before COVID-19 struck, many others continued to celebrate as flamboyantly as they could even during the peak of the pandemic.

Travel risks in 2022

Riskline has identified 10 major trends and potential challenges for travellers and travel managers with a duty of care to watch for in the New Year.



Natural disasters, elections, and social unrest will be among the major threats and disruptions to travellers in 2022. Riskline has identified 10 key trends and issues to watch for in 2022.

#1 EXTREME WEATHER: Climate change is likely to exacerbate extreme weather conditions in the future, putting emergency preparedness and infrastructure to the test. Meeting the disruptions caused by extreme weather will require a more ambitious climate change plan, adaptive infrastructure, and better emergency services.

#2 FUTURE OF THE PANDEMIC: Education, work, and other aspects of public life will continue in a hybrid mode. More supply chain disruptions and worker shortages are inevitable, and the hospitality and travel industries will be hit hard by the ongoing uncertainty.

QUICK BYTE Travellers need trusted sources to keep them up to date on a wide range major risks

#3 STRUGGLE TO VACCINATE THE WORLD: Protests against the vaccination, and vaccine supply and distribution issues in least developed countries are expected to persist into 2022.

#4 CRITICAL ELECTIONS: Political polarisation in the US will persist. Post-COVID-19 recovery has been hindered by lingering economic malaise and scepticism about the vaccine. Elections for the presidency in France in 2022 is no longer certain.

#5 THE NEXT EPIDEMIC: In several Western democracies, right-wing populism has given birth to a vocal politics of defiance against health measures. Despite global public-private cooperation

to develop vaccines, international cooperation has suffered. China's refusal to probe the virus's origins has dented its reputation.

#6 NEW FOCUS FOR EXTREMISM: The UN estimates that there are roughly 10,000 foreign terrorist fighters in Afghanistan. IS-K and other groups are expanding their recruitment efforts into Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and China. Many Central Asian governments' efforts to build ties with the Taliban are unlikely to provide security guarantees. Both Hindu and Islamist extremism pose risks to India.

#7 WATER SCARCITY AND FAMINE: There is a 72 per cent chance that 2022 will be hotter than prior years, causing droughts in the ME and North Africa.

This will have an impact on agriculture, resulting in food shortages in several nations.

#8 AFRICA—CONFLICTS AND COUPS: Several African conflicts took on new dimensions in 2021 and are expected to continue indefinitely through 2022.

#9 COVID-DRIVEN CRIME WAVES: Crime will continue to rise in developing countries, after a spike since COVID-19. Crime has increased in various African countries as well as across the Americas.

#10 PANDEMIC AND THE AFRICA-EUROPE MIGRANT ROUTE: Aid budget cuts and untenable living conditions in the African continent have driven thousands of people to pursue migration routes from North Africa into Europe. As the tide of anti-refugee sentiment in Europe rises, public health measures to limit migrant arrivals will be upheld.



A renewed approach

The reputation of the property has helped us achieve decent business recovery after first lockdown was lifted, says **Shobhit Sawhney**, GM, Park Hyatt Hyderabad.

Nisha Verma

Park Hyatt Hyderabad has registered month-on-month (m-o-m) increase in the quantum of domestic travel, confirming signs of recovery, shares Shobhit Sawhney, General Manager, Park Hyatt Hyderabad. During lockdown when international connectivity was restricted, domestic travel became the key factor in driving the business of the hotel.

Post-lockdown, the business faced a strong rebound mainly through staycations, weddings, film shoots and certain corporate sector activity. "With Park Hyatt Hyderabad being a coveted wedding destination offering exclusive designed spaces, our events segment saw a surge in bookings. On top of that, our specialty restaurants acted as catalyst to get footfall back in our F&B spaces," Sawhney elaborates.

STEPS FOR RECOVERY

Offering safety and clean environment has always been the hotel's top priority. "We focussed more on a holistic sense of wellbeing from pre-arrival to checkout and beyond. The hotel is reimagining experiences with contactless technology,

hygiene and wellbeing manager on the floor to instil confidence among the guests," he says. "We also provide our guests the support that they need to organise such events safely, seamlessly and creatively through 'Together by Hyatt' with hybrid meetings, safety and wellbeing, F&B creativity, being the areas of focus," he shares.

That apart, Sawhney adds, "Through an exclusive collaboration with headspace, the guests, members, and colleagues accessed mindfulness exercises, guided meditations and sleep content via the World of Hyatt App either in-room TVs or on the road. Exceptional F&B experiences at our award-winning restaurants supported the recovery process."

BACK TO BUSINESS

Claiming that the guests had faith and comfort in the Park Hyatt Hyderabad's services, he observes, "We have witnessed an inflow of business since mid-June

2021, be it corporate visits, conferences, leisure travel, weddings, and film shootings. This surge in demand will help us get the desired results that are nothing like pre-pandemic times. However, we witnessed a positive trend." Park Hyatt Hyderabad also provided guests with the 'Work from Hotel' concept, which gained popularity.

THE WAY FORWARD

Sawhney believes vaccination drives are making the citizens confident. "The news of commencement of offices in the IT sector will accelerate travel for business. Relaxation in the international inbound travel and opening of borders with countries, such as the UK, Canada, the USA, the Middle East and others is a news of optimism," he comments.

Sawhney says that a focussed campaign towards the leisure domestic market of India has seen an increase during the ongoing pandemic. It will also help in inbound tourism of Telangana.



Shobhit Sawhney

We focussed more on a holistic sense of wellbeing from pre-arrival to checkout and beyond

QUICK BYTE Offering safety and clean environment has been the hotel's priority

Movements



Mohamed Khater
Regional General Manager and
Managing Partner
Flash Horizon

Mohamed Khater will oversee all UAE business in his new role with plans to expand operations to Oman, Bahrain, and the KSA. He has worked with the Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority for more than seven years. Mohamed has honed his skills in destination promotion and marketing, negotiating, budgeting, and leisure sales during his years working with government administrations and international organisations to promote tourism in the Middle East.



Sandeep Basu
Corporate GM-Pre-opening
& Ops, Cygnett Hotels
& Resorts

Sandeep Basu has been appointed as Cygnett Hotels & Resorts Private Limited's new Corporate General Manager – Preopening & Operations. He brings with him an impressive track record of over two decades in the hospitality industry. He will be vital in achieving Cygnett's aggressive growth targets. His first job in his new position will be to launch Cygnett Park BL in Jaipur. His expertise is in hotel pre-opening, which he has gained through decades of experience in a variety of roles and locations.



Jayachandran C.R.
Area Director-Operations
Niraamaya Wellness Retreats

Jayachandran has been promoted from GM to Area Director-Operations at Niraamaya Wellness Retreats. In his new role, he will be in charge of the operations for all of the retreats and private residences in Kerala. He has 20 years of management experience with luxury hotels in India and abroad, handling the operations of pre-opening, opening, and functional hotels. He has worked with brands such as Taj, ITC, Leela, Raviz and MGM Grand Australia.



Kiron Nair
Director-Operations
Zone by THE Park Hotels

Kiron Nair will be responsible for driving operational efficiencies throughout the Zone by The Park Hotels in his new role. He will focus on positioning the brand as a market leader. Nair has been in the hospitality industry for almost two decades. He has previously worked with top hotel brands throughout the country, demonstrating his extensive hotel industry knowledge and exposure in the rooms division and hotel operations. Nair has been in the hospitality business for more than two decades now.



Deepak Kumar
GM, Hilton Mumbai
International Airport

Deepak Kumar brings with him 20 years of experience and extensive operational knowledge from a variety of brands. His last position was as GM of Holiday Inn Cochin. He has been a top achiever, driving change and growth with new strategies to expand revenue streams and manage expenses, cultivate talent in his teams, and enhance relationships with owners. He has undergone Six Sigma Certification and Strategic Management Certification at IIMA.



Kshitij Jawa
General Manager
Radisson RED

Kshitij Jawa has been appointed as the General Manager by the Radisson Hotel Group for their yet-to-be-launched Radisson RED in India. Jawa will be responsible for introducing the unconventional RED brand in the country. He will lead a dynamic team of more than 300 employees at the Radisson RED Chandigarh Mohali. Jawa inherits the ability to improve brand standards, develop a bespoke guest experience. This apart, he is a passionate person to the core with a strong business expertise.



Venkat Bhuvaneshwar
Director-Sales & Marketing
The Westin Chennai Velachery

Venkat Bhuvaneshwar began his career in Food & Beverage operations with the Park hotel group. Later, he moved to Chennai as part of the pre-opening team. In 2006, he moved to Hyderabad to join Accor Group's pre-opening team. In 2008, he transferred to Catering & Event Sales at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre. This allowed him to obtain experience in a variety of conferences, conventions, and multi-faceted events. His contribution to The Westin Chennai Velachery's success led to his promotion to Director of Sales and Marketing.



Hemant Mediratta
Chief Advisor-Int'l Leisure
Business, Leela Palaces,
Hotels & Resorts

Hemant Mediratta has been named Chief Advisor for Leela Palaces, Hotels, and Resorts' International Leisure business. He departed The Oberoi Group after a 16-year career and is now the Co-Founder of a sales and marketing organisation, catering to global ultra-luxury and luxury brands. He will drive the international leisure strategy and mentor and guide The Leela's travel trade team and international sales offices to strengthen the brand's positioning.



Aishvarya Guhagarkar

Director MICE, Switzerland Convention
& Incentive Bureau

“Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau (SCIB) is a specialised division of Switzerland Tourism, which is the National Tourism Organisation of the country.

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