

ASIA'S leading business magazine

# M!CEtalk

A DDP Publication®

Meetings • Incentives • Conferences • Events

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ENVISIONING A NEW FUTURE





**24 PROPERTIES**  
THAILAND | VIETNAM | BALI



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Winter 2022



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# NEWS

## Sarovar Hotels expands its presence in Delhi

Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd. announces the opening of a new hotel in North Delhi. Venezia Sarovar Portico accommodates a pillar-less banquet hall and an atrium spread over a 4,000 sq. ft. area. The hotel also houses a conference hall, where a variety of business and corporate events can be hosted. Venezia Sarovar Portico offers 69 rooms equipped with all the amenities and comforts.



## Europamundo sends its first group of over 40 people to Spain from India, with the support of Spanish Tourism



Europamundo

**‘Wedding tourism to be the focus for Rajasthan’**



**Sumita Saroch**, JD, Tourism, Rajasthan, speaking at Expo 2020 Dubai says that Rajasthan offers multiple picturesque settings and culture. She showcased Rajasthan as a social event destination. "Rajasthan Tourism Policy 2020 focusses on the promotion of wedding tourism in the state," she says while presenting the various offerings facilities for such events.



**Sunil C. Gupta**, Chairman-Northern Region, IATO, has revealed that there

were two corporate charters on the Maharaja Express in

December, which was almost two years after the luxury train operated in March 2020.



**Naveen Kundu**  
Managing Director  
EbixCash Travel Services



If the M!CE industry has to come back, the emphasis has to be on destination marketing, backed by support from the hospitality and aviation industries



## With premium M!CE facilities, BW Vrindavan opens its doors



With 41 opulent rooms and modern M!CE facilities, the Best Western Vrindavan enters the historical district of Mathura, U.P.. The hotel has a premium banquet hall (Stratus), a boardroom (Let's Talk), and open lawns (Lush

Green), making it the ideal location for all events for groups of 700 to 1,000 people. The hotel aims to attract leisure, business, and pilgrim tourists for M!CE, destination weddings, engagements, workshops, satsangs, and other activities. This expansion underlines the brand's commitment to this rapidly rising region.





## A new addition to the WelcomHeritage portfolio

The WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort and Spa, nestled in the Jawai region of Rajasthan, is the newest addition. The property is located in the village of Bera, district Pali, Rajasthan, and is spread across 20 acres of private land. There are a host of amenities inside the property, including a swimming pool, a clubhouse, a gymnasium, a spa, and nature walks, among others.

## Oman Air Holidays signs partnership with CONNECT

With this partnership Oman Air Holidays becomes the exclusive travel partner for all CONNECT events on the 2022 calendar. Oman Air Holidays will offer event delegates, exhibitors, and visitors a variety of exclusive accommodation and tour packages, comprising flight tickets, transfers, excursions, and bespoke itineraries and add-ons. This move paves the way for Oman Air Holidays to extend its package holiday expertise and presence to Oman's growing M!CE tourism ecosystem.



## Banyan Tree Group unveils HOMM Brand

Banyan Tree Group debuts HOMM as the newest concept within the group's global multi-brand ecosystem. HOMM Bliss Southbeach Patong, a 71-room contemporary beachfront property in Phuket, Thailand offering stylish and wallet-friendly accommodations, will serve as the brand's first-ever location. Ideal for business executives, families, and couples alike, guests will find ease in signature facilities, varied dining options, and price-friendly accommodations elevated by the group's purpose-led, sustainable tourism standards.



## ITB Berlin 2022 rescheduled for March 2023

The in-person edition of ITB Berlin 2022 has been postponed due to an increase in Omicron cases throughout the world. ITB Berlin 2023 will now take place on the Berlin Exhibition Grounds and will begin on March 8. ITB Berlin will, however, continue to provide the sector with a wide range of exciting material and new business prospects in 2022.

## The Park Indore eyes M!CE biz

Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited brings its newest hotel, The Park Indore, to the financial capital of Madhya Pradesh. The Park Indore – a modern, exclusive, yet eclectic space – promises a fine blend of experiences that are anything but ordinary, redefining luxury and providing perfect comfort to both business and leisure travellers.



# Long recovery ahead

According to the WTTC and McKinsey report, business travel may return faster in Asia than in many European and American markets, with recovery possibly taking place in phases.

**C**OVID-19 has had a significant impact on the travel and tourism industries, resulting in financial losses of almost US\$ 4.5 trillion and the loss of over 62 million jobs. However, there are signs that the industry has started to recover, with global travel spending on the upswing.

Given the chance that the pandemic might become an endemic, the path to recovery will be long and winding. In such an environment, the travel and tourism industries may be forced to deal with long-term changes in regulations of international travel.

The report, 'Adapting to Endemic COVID-19: The Outlook for Business Travel,' which is based on a collaboration between WTTC and McKinsey & Company, as well as input from key stakeholders, examines at what endemic COVID-19 may entail for business travel. Vaccine rollouts and virus management strategies will impact the sector's revival. The vaccination rollout is still quite unequal, and this difference will impact how soon travel rebounds.

Furthermore, government decisions and efforts to safeguard citizens' health and travel rules will continue to have a substantial and direct impact on travel and tourism. Changes in policy may also have a disproportionate impact on markets that rely on foreign travel. Within these wider trends, the business



## QUICK BYTE The M!CE industry has an influence on both the supply and demand sides of business travel

travel industry has seen substantial changes in the last 18 months, especially in demand, supply, and the overall operating environment that influences business travel.

**Demand:** The recovery of business travel has been slower than that of leisure travel. Furthermore, corporate rules continue to impact business travel demand, and these policies vary by area based on organisational demands and national constraints in both departure and locations.

**Supply:** As the pandemic sped the shift to digital, the industry has seen rapid changes in operations, with businesses adapting their operating models and growing their technology for service operations. With the growing digitalisation of the corporate sector, hybrid events have emerged as a new business paradigm, with technology-enabled

forms increasingly complementing in-person activities. At the same time, the industry is facing a talent risk and a significant labour shortage.

**Operating environment:** Clarity around rules, policies, and regulations is now more important than ever. Certainty and consistency regarding rules and procedures are now key considerations for business and leisure travellers alike. More broadly, the market remains fragmented, with a high share of small and medium-sized businesses. This means the risk of business closures will persist, and smaller enterprises may need long-term support.

In the future, business travel may rebound more quickly in Asia than in many European and American economies, with periods of recovery depending on the leading

business sectors. Based on spending trends over the last year, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and construction were early adopters of a return to business travel. The road to recovery for business travel will almost certainly be rocky. In the meantime, players in the industry can look to the domestic and leisure sectors to help promote development and aid recovery.

Finally, all stakeholders have a role to play in the recovery of the travel and tourism industry, and they can collaborate to help the industry capitalise on opportunities in leisure and domestic markets, increase business travel, and expand to new countries of origin.

M!CE organisations may be able to help by establishing new business models, assuring the safety of existing ones, and implementing hybrid event-hosting techniques. Governments might also help travel businesses and corporate travel providers through financial support.



# SINGAPORE: SETTING THE STANDARD FOR GREEN MICE EVENTS

Known worldwide as a "Garden City", Singapore has always put sustainability at the heart of its development plans. Launched in early 2021, the Singapore Green Plan 2030 sets a vision across various aspects of sustainability: from urban development and renewables adoption to resource conservation and food security. All sectors have taken steps to support these national efforts, and the MICE industry is no exception.



## FACILITATING MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE ON SUSTAINABILITY

Events play an integral role in raising awareness and uncovering solutions to the world's collective climate challenges, and Singapore takes pride in hosting platforms that inspire such necessary dialogue and action.

For example, Temasek's Ecosperity Week gathers leaders from across sectors and geographies to share insights and best practices on sustainable development. Conversations are also being held at the industry level, including at the annual Asia Sustainability Reporting Summit and even at the Singapore FinTech Festival where green financing has become a central area for discussion.

## A PLACE FOR GREEN EVENTS

Besides hosting various sustainability-related events, Singapore also has infrastructure for events to take place with minimal environmental impact. The country's MICE venues have stepped up to the challenge of reducing their carbon footprints and waste.

The Sands Expo and Convention Centre is Singapore's first carbon-neutral MICE venue and is supporting the nation's green energy targets through investments in Renewable Energy Certificates. Resorts World Sentosa is home to one of the country's largest solar panel installations which can produce enough electricity to power 108 four-room flats every year. Fairmont Singapore and Swissôtel The Stamford have an urban aquaponics farm that champions sustainable agriculture practices in the industry.

*Despite its constraints in size and natural resources, Singapore is paving the way for a sustainable future for all. It will continue to blaze trails for a greener tomorrow, and the business events industry is taking up this mantle.*

**Plan your next business event at [VisitSingapore.com/MICE](https://www.visit-singapore.com/mice).**

**Singapore is  
set to become  
a "City of Green  
Possibilities"  
– with the  
MICE industry  
is doing its part.**





# Realising India's M!CE potential

MOT is focussing on five key areas to expand the Indian M!CE sector, says **Rakesh Verma**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, at the Meet in India session for Expo 2020 Dubai.

**Nisha Verma**

Speaking at the Meet in India session for Expo 2020 Dubai, **Rakesh Verma**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), claims that M!CE remains an important segment. Verma claims that the MOT is working with the events industry to position India as a preferred destination for business and social events. "The M!CE industry is an important contributor to the national economy. It contributes to income generation and creates huge employment opportunities in hospitality-related service sectors such as accommodation, food and beverage, convention

services, transportation, tourism and entertainment," he emphasises.

## STRONG INFRA

He highlights that India has excellent convention and hospitality infrastructure, unparalleled cultural and natural attractions, and a rapidly growing economy. "All this provides impetus to India emerging as a hub of business and social events. The convention infrastructure at important cities and major tourist destinations is being upgraded to provide world-class facilities. Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, and



Rakesh Verma

**We need to properly design a marketing strategy focussed on our diaspora**

Goa are some of the leading destinations in the country. We are also focusing on tier-2 and 3 destinations such as Varanasi, Cochin, and Khajuraho, and these may work out to be more competitive and diversified offerings," he says.

## CONNECTIVITY IS CENTRAL

Verma stresses that the government is giving a massive push to connectivity infrastructure with new airports, highways, and railways. "This has enhanced the accessibility of various destinations and their M!CE potential. Consistent improvement in



the business environment, investment climate, and India's emergence as a leader in technology and knowledge-related areas also contributes to India being an attractive destination for the events industry. India is also an attractive market for exhibitions," he says.

### **M!CE AND WEDDING HUB**

"Destination weddings is another important niche area that is growing rapidly," says Verma.

"Many destinations in the country are emerging as wedding destinations, and the industry is getting more organised. MOT is working

He elaborates, "To promote India as a M!CE destination, MOT is further working towards five key areas. First is to strengthen the institutional support for M!CE by setting up a national M!CE board to improve inter-ministerial coordination and set up city-level bureaus. The ministry is encouraging the state governments to set up city-level promotion bureaus at major M!CE destinations in the country. The second is to develop

private sector that is professionally competent. "This is behind India's success and is further driving it to greater heights. In the wake of COVID-19, the industry has taken all the safety measures for organising events. MOT is also forging partnerships with international organisations such as the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) to strengthen and further develop the Indian M!CE sector."

encourage them to come here and organise events on a competitive basis."

### **TARGETING THE DIASPORA**

"The Indian diaspora across the world is a big segment for us to tap," claims Verma. "We need to properly design our marketing strategy focussed on our diaspora and look at their requirements. There are no legal challenges, and even if there are issues, we can sort them out at the destination level or at the state government level. We need to package these attractions in terms of specialised and focussed marketing for the diaspora, which will do the trick," he adds.

## **QUICK BYTE Many destinations in the country are emerging as perfect wedding destinations**



on a strategy to position India as a M!CE destination in the world and a hub of mega conferences and exhibitions. It is working towards creating enabling conditions and institutional frameworks at the central, state, and city levels for the growth of the M!CE industry. The short-term goal of the ministry is to increase India's share in the M!CE business to two per cent from the current share of approximately one per cent," he adds.

an end-to-end ecosystem for M!CE, which requires support from a number of public and private agencies. The third is to enhance the competitiveness of the Indian M!CE industry and the ease of doing business for M!CE events in the country. Fourth is marketing India as a M!CE destination under the Meet in India brand. Fifth is encouraging skill development."

Apart from that, he claims that India has a thriving

### **ASIAN MARKET**

Saying that India has a clear competitive advantage in certain sectors along with cultural affinity, he shares, "For the Asian market, we have the Buddhist circuit as one of the important offerings in India. Hence, the cultural and spiritual offerings in India, along with the domain strength we have in terms of the events industry, make us a good location for short-haul and medium-haul destinations. We can

### **CULTURALLY RICH**

In another session on culture and heritage, Verma highlighted the cultural and religious heritage of India and how it could attract tourists from the world over. "Efforts are being made to create experiences around the heritage sites with interpretation facilities, souvenir shops, eateries, and other conveniences to enhance the overall visitor experience. Several heritage palaces have been converted into heritage and luxury hotels, which have seen great interest from foreign tourists. Tourism is helping us preserve our tangible heritage and intangible assets, like folk arts, dance forms, theatre, etc." Talking about spiritual tourism, Verma concludes, "The presence of numerous sacred destinations of different faiths in the country makes these destinations among the most visited sites globally. India is providing a massive boost to infrastructure. This development has significantly enhanced the accessibility of various destinations of cultural heritage and spiritual importance."

# On the path of a resilient future

**Anuraag Bhatnagar**, COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts, shares how they rode the wave of rapid technology adoption and created opportunities amid the global crisis.

**Nisha Verma**

COVID-19 has not left anyone untouched, observes **Anuraag Bhatnagar**, COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts. "The pandemic has affected the hospitality industry and the travel trade equally," he says. But, he claims, for Leela, it was a time for growth. "We created opportunities out of this adversity and opened three hotels—The Leela Gandhinagar, The Leela Palace Jaipur, and The Leela Bhartiya City in Bengaluru. We used this time by adapting to advanced technologies, hire some of the best talent, set up our systems in the organisation, and bring in some cost synergies," he adds.

Detailing the survival strategies they employed during this period, he shares, "The first step was to survive. So, we made our fixed cost structures as variable as possible. Secondly, we used this time to deploy our people. Also, we were one of the first companies to ensure that a 100 per cent of our employees were vaccinated along with their families. We brought in people-centric strategies, training, and development technology," asserts Bhatnagar.

Taking into account the rapid adoption of advanced technologies all across industries, they also upgraded themselves to offer a high-tech



**QUICK BYTE** Our resort hotels, during the pandemic, have been doing 120 to 140 per cent of the revenue



Anuraag Bhatnagar



**We used this time to bring a lot of technology and hire some of the best talent**



experience without taking the personalisation away. "We rolled out The Leela Palace Butler Services Programme; Ceremonial Rituals as a representation of true Indian luxury; the Pride Pins that we wear; and the 'I am Leela' campaign. We deployed technology to make our HR, accounting, and finance processes more efficient," he shares.

Most importantly, claims Bhatnagar, "We used this time to acquire hotels and expand our portfolio. The Leela Palace Jaipur, which we opened during the pandemic, is now topping

the Jaipur market as the preferred destination for FITs and weddings. The Leela Gandhinagar hosted the renowned IATO Convention. Further, we have a lineup of international and domestic events at this hotel along with Mahatma Mandir."

When asked if they would enter the budget space, Bhatnagar says, "Leela is synonymous with true Indian luxury and that is where we have made a niche. Our customers are now increasingly consuming luxury. Our resort hotels, especially during the pandemic, have been garnering 120 to 140 per cent of the revenue that they were achieving in 2019. We see all this continuing and we are optimistic."





# Luxury's new address

While Odisha has fewer star-rated hotels, Swosti Group's latest offering is set to provide the Indian events industry with a new address.

**T**he Swosti Group's latest offering, Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, the first five-star premium luxury beach resort in Sipasurubuli, Puri, is poised to provide the Indian events sector with a new address. The property features large open-air landscaped lawns and is equipped to host mega conferences and elaborate wedding ceremonies.

Foodies may sample cuisine from several Indian states, as well as Chinese and global cuisines, at the food court. The Sky Lounge bar, which is 150 feet above ground level and overlooks the Bay of Bengal, is the property's centrepiece. If you have some leisure time, go for a swim in the infinity pool. The 125 luxurious rooms, including five premium luxury long suites on the 12th floor, all have

a view of the sea with no obstructions. More similar, cutting-edge amenities may be found throughout the completely air-conditioned property. Each banquet hall will be attached to an open-air lawn.

There is also a gaming zone near the food court area for the young and young-at-heart to ensure that there are enough activities to keep the guests entertained. The resort will also have a state-of-the-art wellness spa and gym, making sure that fitness and wellbeing remain at the forefront of everyone's minds. In addition, the basement has enough parking to accommodate

large-scale weddings as well as conventions.

Swosti Group, led by J.K. Mohanty, has been effectively marketing the travel and tourism sector of Odisha since 1981, employing over 1,200 people through offices in Delhi, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad, as well as affiliated offices in Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai. The new Swosti Premium Beach Resorts is gearing to employ 375 people directly and around 700 people indirectly, including all vendors.

Locals with expertise in the hospitality industry or who have undertaken

hotel management courses at Swosti Institute of Management & Social Studies will be prioritised.

Apart from Swosti Grand, Swosti Premium, and Swosti Palm Resort in Bhubaneswar and Gopalpur-on-Sea, Swosti Chilika Resort on the banks of Chilika Lake has established itself as a key tourist attraction in the state and has become a popular leisure and M!CE destination in four years.

While Odisha has a shortfall of star-rated hotel rooms in comparison to other states, Swosti Group's latest offering will attract investors to invest in tourist infrastructure. The government of Odisha has taken a number of steps to encourage investment in the tourism sector, which is the world's largest employer.

**QUICK BYTE** Swosti Group has been effectively marketing Odisha's tourism sector since 1981





# Marching ahead

**Sudeep Jain**, MD, South-West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts, sees opportunity in launching global brands at the right time, with the right partners, and in the right locations.

**Nisha Verma**

**S**udeep Jain believes that the year gone by was a mixed bag of business. He claims that after the intensity of the second wave lessened, the situation improved further.

"Starting June 2021, we have seen an encouraging 30 per cent jump in the wedding average per coverage (APC) and a 25 per cent surge in residential weddings. Leisure destination travel demand has also recovered. Our InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort recorded occupancy levels close to Q1 2020 levels in Q3 2021, along with a higher ADR. Our business performance has been quite strong in Q4 2021, with occupancy levels, in some cases, reaching above 2019 levels. Although the rates are still slightly reduced, we have witnessed a substantial surge in overall gross operating profit," he adds.

## GROWTH CONTINUES

Jain shares that given the attractiveness of the tourism and hospitality sectors, they have progressed with their growth plans. "This year,



Sudeep Jain



**We will focus on leveraging technology to enhance our offering to guests**



we opened Holiday Inn Zirakhpur, Chandigarh, and Holiday Inn Goa, Candolim. We also signed Holiday Inn Express & Suites in Jalandhar, and we debuted Holiday Inn Express in Jaipur in October 2020. In addition, we announced the debut of our world-renowned extended stay brand, Staybridge Suites, in India with the signing of Staybridge Suites Bengaluru Thanisandra. Furthermore, we launched our first Six Senses hotel in Rajasthan," he reveals.

## INDIAN MARKET

When asked about the major developments in the industry in 2021, he says, "In the last couple of years, with restrictions on international movement, domestic travel has gained even more traction. Quick weekend getaways, staycations, and intercity vacations have emerged as key trends.

Also, the concept of 'intimate weddings and social events' has played a crucial role in helping the industry move towards a stronger recovery. Food and beverage (F&B) has seen rapid growth since last year."

## PLANS 2022

Jain shares that for this year, they are looking at a stronger recovery. "We expect domestic travel demand to continue to rise in 2022 and a further easing of international movement. We are optimistic about a stronger return of corporate travel. We are also enthusiastic about the emphasis on GOP for the owners as the hotel investment trading volume increases," he reveals.

Jain concludes by saying, "We also plan to continue with our growth momentum across the key Indian markets. Our mainstream portfolio will continue to drive this growth, but we also see opportunity in launching our global brands at the right time, with the right partners, and in the right locations."

**QUICK BYTE** Our business has been quite strong in Q4 2021, with occupancy levels above 2019 levels



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# Envisioning a new future

A confluence of tourism boards, corporates, and leading names from the hospitality industry winds up the 6th edition of M!CE Travel Show 2021 on a high note of hope.

The M!CE Travel Show 2021, now in its 6th edition, welcomed an eclectic mix of the most passionate professionals from the corporate as well as hospitality and travel industries, from December 16 to 17 in New Delhi. Forged along the lines of 'Connect, Converse, Collaborate,' the two-day event saw a strong attendance of 25 suppliers and 45 corporates, forging long-term business associations with the help of pre-arranged business

appointments. While everyone looked forward to being part of a 'physical event' after months of virtual meet and greets, the eagerness to experience 'business as usual' set the tone for the event.

## THINK SMALL, THINK REALISTIC

Over the years, the M!CE Travel Show has garnered a reputation of a 'niche business platform' where professionals across the hospitality industry interact and initiate ideas instinctively. The well-

defined yet spontaneous nature of the show helps the professionals connect, converse, and collaborate for a long-term association with their clients. Talking about the size of the show and the impact it creates **SanJeet**, Director, DDPPL, says, "Small is beautiful. It is more interactive as people can speak more freely and, well, speak their minds. That is when new ideas are born and new discussions take place. This would not be possible if a 1,000 people are present. These things come in smaller core

groups where people find time to speak and listen to each other. We have kept it to a limited number for this very purpose of fruitful interactions and collaborations. The idea is to interact with each other and take things to a higher level. This is more result driven."

Calling it a platform where the entire industry comes together under one roof, **Jyothi Varma**, Consulting COO, Tykhe Cybernetix Pvt. Ltd., says, "The kind of ideas you get at this place make you pin it as a must-



attend. As Indians, we love to meet, talk, and connect. This kind of exchange of ideas happen over dinner or coffee meetings. You find new beginnings here."

While 'small,' 'niche,' and 'interactive' are how the travel show was originally conceived and continued to remain so all these years, the structure perfectly fits the situation that the M!CE industry is facing post-pandemic. Agreeing that 'small' lets us be more realistic, **Raymond Lim**, Area Director, India (New Delhi Office), Singapore Tourism Board, says, "We need to restart the M!CE segment by focussing on smaller groups. Starting only niche programmes is the way forward. A smaller group will allow us to pay more attention to details. Delivering a unique experience for small groups is conceivable in the current situation. It is important that we be more realistic."

### BACK WITH A BANG

From buyers to exhibitors, the participants cheered the impact of physical events. More than business, people have been longing for the 'human touch' which is at the core of any M!CE activity. Whether it is corporates more than willing to reward the star performers, or tourism boards eager to lap up M!CE groups for revenue generation, or hotels patiently waiting to host big corporate groups once again, every part of the M!CE sector wants to bounce back with a bang.

People are what makes the industry tick, and it is the people who want to see the M!CE industry buzzing again. "We all want the pandemic to be behind us and do business as usual. I hope better sense prevails and all the governments



SanJeet



**Closed door events are more interactive as people can speak their mind freely**



across the world lift all restrictions," opines **Naveen Kundu**, MD, EbixCash Travel Services. SanJeet agrees that normalcy is required for business to thrive. "I think the time has come when we face these variants and learn to live with them. Life and travel will continue despite these variants," he says. M!CE thrives on business and corporate travel, which is right now in the 'wait and watch' mode. However, the desire to travel is at an all-time high! "Almost all the corporates except IT have started their travel, and M!CE activity has also started in some areas. I see

Head-Corporate Services, Bharat Financial Inclusion Limited (100% subsidiary of IndusInd Bank Ltd.).

### BEHIND THE PRICE LINES

The panel discussion on November 16 witnessed a thriving debate on how the stakeholders work closely towards standardisation of rates across the industry and focus on value-for-money services. Price lines and negotiations are where the heat of the competition is felt. Moderating the panel discussion, SanJeet addresses the elephant in the room—price—which pretty much circles



### QUICK BYTE Price lines and price negotiations are where the heat of the competition is felt

many companies from the finance sector have started domestic travel. We look forward to a lot of travel and meetings in the coming years. Hence, we are looking for the best deals, services, and experience for our travel for our employees," shares **Santosh Upadhyay**, Sr. VP and National

the pleasure and pain of M!CE business and impacts every stakeholder involved. "Everyone talks about the holistic travel experience. But there is a need to define what kind of travel experience you are looking at, and that kind of definition comes with a price line. Sometimes a M!CE business is grabbed by a five-star hotel by offering a price lower or equivalent to a four-star property. Price negotiation is common practice and is the deciding factor for which destination



to go to, which airline to use, and which hotel to stay at; the price line has a big role to play," opines SanJeet.

Asked about offering big incentives to corporates to attract M!CE groups, Lim explains, "We give incentives because we want to influence the decision of a destination. Our targets are groups that are not sure about the destination and activities. In the M!CE industry, there are a lot of players, and it is important to respect all of them. We must not over rely on intermediaries or travel agents because then we do not know who our end consumers or corporates are. Access to corporate is important. When you meet them directly, you are able to present your decision at length as compared to an agent. We need to play a balancing role and put our eggs in different baskets."

## BUDGETS AND BARGAINS

The discussion reached its peak when the hotels and the corporates indulged in a direct exchange on 'budgets and bargains'. While the corporates claimed that budget is never a problem,

hotels highlighted how 'bargaining with corporates turns into a lost battle' for them as food prices and payrolls have gone up in the past few years.

"It is about the mindset. If we keep selling cheap, then it is going to be a challenge. We want people to look beyond 2018 and 2019 and not look at 2020 and 2021 or what has gone wrong. Hotels need to start selling rooms or hotels at an optimum price," says **Pankaj Gupta**, GM, Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar Noida. Defending the corporates by redefining bargain as negotiation, **Gaurav Narula**, Sr. Global Category Manager, Schneider Electric, says, "Negotiation is a war, so come prepared. Be transparent, tell me about your profits and I will give you that."

## FUTURE-READY

The needs of corporate clients have changed, putting safety and hygiene at the top of the list. Narula advises, "Focus on minimum touch points. Invest in technology that helps you achieve it. Maintain what you show



## QUICK BYTE Forged along the lines of 'Connect, Converse, Collaborate', the event witnessed a strong attendance

on the website. Custom experience matters." Calling M!CE events vital for every corporate and the hospitality industry at large, **Greesh Bindra**, VP-Operations, The Suryaa New Delhi, assures, "Hygiene and safety will continue to remain a top priority for all stakeholders."

The pandemic has forced the industry to reimagine M!CE. Kundu opines, "The industry is working on digitisation, reducing touch points, and making experiences seamless. However, it comes with a cost. We have to be fair and

transparent." The players may have different business targets, but the common goal of reviving M!CE brings them all together. As Lim puts it, "With all the travel limitations, the business traveller has become cautious and selective. To attract him, business events should offer a very good value. So it is very important for all the key players in this industry to be very mindful. The push should be to deliver greater value, which is more important, and always ensure that we put the customer first in developing our content or delivering services."



# Future forward

The panellists at the Travel M!CE Show deliberated on a range of aspects pivotal to the resurgence of the sector, such as traveller confidence, hotel pricing points, and technology.



**Raymond Lim**  
Area Director, India (New Delhi Office), Singapore Tourism Board

“ The Travel MICE Show provides us with a platform to reach out to corporates and assist them in understanding our programmes in a better manner. We get to know their concerns in the new environment and, hence, we are able to deliver them rightly. We must continue to be inventive and creative using the current technological advancements. It is always good to start with smaller groups and deliver with great attention to details. At the same time, we must be realistic and cautious.



**Naveen Kundu**  
Managing Director  
EbixCash Travel Services

“ We all want the pandemic to be over so we can return to business as usual. I genuinely hope that all governments throughout the world lift all limitations, allowing people to go about their business as usual. Today, corporate travel procurement professionals are aware of what is going on and may claim the incentives offered by tourism boards. The hospitality industry is moving swiftly to digitise, improve technology, reduce touch points, and provide seamless experiences. It does, however, come at a price. We must act in a fair and transparent manner. As we see a rise in domestic events, there is a need to explore the M!CE potential of domestic venues. It will require a joint effort on the part of suppliers and travel agents to keep costs under control and provide clients with a price that they can understand. They will increase spending after they have accomplished this. Corporate travel, meetings, and domestic conferencing are all on the rise, in my opinion. Domestic locations have a lot to offer to business travellers.

**Greesh Bindra**  
Vice President-Operations, The Suryaa New Delhi

“ It was a pleasure to see so many corporates in the town for the Travel M!CE Show 2021 here. We had a great panel discussion, and above all, M!CE events are vital for every corporation, and I feel in the coming months we will see more MICE events being organised. In the wake of the ongoing pandemic, hygiene and safety will continue to remain a top priority for all stakeholders, including corporates, hotels, and the travel trade community.



**Gaurav Narula**  
Sr. Global Category Manager, Schneider Electric

“ The most pressing challenge we face today is rebuilding 'trust.' Every travel and M!CE partner must re-establish 'trust' with clients and employees. Then, as a sector, we should place a greater emphasis on data, insights, intelligence, analytics, SEO, and artificial reality. In keeping with the 'hybrid' mode, hotels should consider ROI rather than just the cost. Another issue that the industry is facing is the fear of travelling. M!CE should see a 50 per cent rebound in 2022 if we can regain their trust and instill confidence.



**Pankaj Gupta**  
General Manager, Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar Noida

“ We have been witnessing a revival since November 2020. The wedding segment has bounced back significantly. We are expecting good business in January-February and in 2022 at large. The hotels should start selling at their optimum price and should come out of the 'cheap price' mindset pushed by the pandemic. Selling at the right price is the most important thing. We are hoping for a full-fledged M!CE revival in the coming year.



**Santosh Upadhyay**  
Sr. VP and National Head - Corporate Services,  
Bharat Financial Bharat Financial Inclusion Limited

“ It is a fabulous platform where you get to meet so many hotels and travel agents. In the coming two to three years, there are going to be a lot of meetings and travel for corporates, as companies also want their employees motivated. However, travellers are looking for 'new experiences' and price is not a factor here. The hospitality industry should focus on keeping corporates up-to-date on the best deals, new M!CE hotspots, technology, and destination advice.





# High on hopes

The show's exhibitors are hopeful of travel resuming in Q1 2022. They highlighted their extensive offerings to corporates and travel agents to garner thriving trade.



**Rakesh Bhandari**  
Account Director-Global Sales & Marketing, Sun International

“ Even in these trying times, the Travel M!CE Show continues to improve. For us, India is a key sourcing market. We are hopeful about 2022, despite all of the road blocks. What I have recently realised is that decisions will be made really quickly. At a given point in time, people will make a short list of possible destinations. So, even for long-haul locations, where it used to take 3 to 4 months to be finalised, I have seen it happen in a month. This bracket will be narrowed even more, allowing us to plan ahead of time. We must be strategic about the availability and other services we offer. Hence, we may see a lot of activity in Q1.



**Neha Morris**  
Director of Sales  
The Park Hotels

“ If Omicron shows some mercy on us, I am confident that the year 2022 will be the strongest year for the Indian hospitality industry. We will be able to bounce back with plenty of vigour. If all goes well, we will be able to make significant progress in regaining the ground we have lost over the last two years. Following the pandemic, I have noticed that individuals are eager to participate in a variety of household events. Earlier, they were hunting for locations which were mainly abroad from India. They have now looked into locations in India where they may hold M!CE events and conferences. In the last two years, India has made a name for itself domestically.

**Rahul Kanishta**  
Account Director-Regional Liasion Office (New Delhi), Shangri-La Group

“ We expect = business travel to resume in Q1 2022. We are primarily focussing on FIT and M!CE categories. Corporates are interested in visiting overseas destinations. They are now considering new international locations, particularly in Sri Lanka, Dubai, and Muscat. These destinations are expected to gain momentum in Q2 and Q3. With improved flight connections to several of our overseas destinations, especially those in Southeast Asia, we have begun to attract a few bookings from our corporate clients. These destinations will gain traction in the Indian market.



**Amit Sharma**  
Director of Sales, Novotel Goa Dona Sylvia Resort

“ The Travel M!CE Show was a wonderful opportunity. Under one roof, I met a lot of potential visitors. The last two years have been very difficult for our sector. But I am optimistic that everything will soon return to normal. We shall continue to live our lives as we did before the pandemic. I am a representative for two hotels in Delhi. Both are five-star resorts with distinctive features that set them apart from the competition. Our goal is to provide a memorable experience for visitors visiting Goa. In regards to this event, I am optimistic that we will receive a large number of leads for both homes in the next few days.







**Mohit Juneja**  
Account Director-Global Meetings & Events, HYATT Hotels & Resorts

“To be honest, seeing so many people under one roof at the Travel M!CE Show is a treat for my eyes. To meet such decision-makers and influencers here, we want to see a lot more corporates come in by 2022 to help boost M!CE tourism. As an industry, we sincerely want you to come out, explore, and begin your journey. Hyatt has reimagined the meeting experience as a whole. We have valued our collaboration with Hyatt, which we recently introduced. Hybrid meeting modes are available in all of our hotels, with the option to meet one-on-one.

**Sandeep Shaw**  
Director of Sales, Nest Jaipur Luxury Hotels and Resorts

“This is the first time we have engaged with so many corporate executives after a year and a half. Being here and meeting all of these individuals was a great experience. We are not sure what will happen with this third variant. We are a relatively new firm, having launched in February 2021. We have 107 keys on a 9-acre property. Our hotel is ready to host weddings and M!CE events, and we have even rolled out packages. FITs and group movements are on our to-do list. In the last four months, we have done a lot of large incentives. We have organised cricket matches as well as team-building activities.



**Raymond Lim**  
Area Director, India (New Delhi Office), Singapore Tourism Board

“We have gone from virtual to hybrid events. To progress further in the M!CE business, we must be realistic, and to continue our operations, we must be inventive in our use of technology. Events we organise may need to be smaller in scale, so that we are able to pay greater attention to details and deliver a unique experience and launch specialty programmes. Travel agencies are becoming increasingly vital as locations and national tourism organisations like mine expand. It is imperative that all major stakeholders keep working together.

**Pankaj Gupta**  
General Manager, Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar Noida

“As we witnessed a resurgence in November and December 2021, we anticipate a fantastic 2022 for our business in terms of rooms, catering, banquets, restaurants, and everything else. The wedding segment, which is returning, is quite essential to us. M!CE is unquestionably significant for us as we are located near one of the auditoriums that receives a lot of business and has a high ADR. The hotel business could be a challenge if we continue to sell cheaply. We want to return to the ADR that we did in 2018-19 in 2022, and that is what everyone expects.



**Greesh Bindra**  
Vice President-Operations  
The Suryaa New Delhi

“Safety and hygiene will be the main trends in the coming year. And this is something that every businessperson and guest should consider. In our hotel, I have appointed a COVID-19 manager as the go-to person moving forward. Apart from visitors, it is also critical to guarantee that our colleagues, as well as our personnel, are well informed of all of the responsibilities, regulations, and measures that are necessary for an efficient COVID-19 normal. For the time being, we will be looking at large-scale wedding events. We have the experience of organising five to six weddings in a day when there was a cap of 50 to 100 people at gatherings. As we enter the New Year, we have already secured several major M!CE and conference reservations for the future. I strongly believe that we must earn our clients' confidence in terms of ensuring safety and hygiene. I am certain that the current scenario will improve. There have been no major M!CE events in the last few years. As a result, people are eagerly awaiting it. Even if corporations are hosting various types of virtual events, a true M!CE event must be held in the near future. Airlines pose the greatest barrier. If international airlines begin operations, I believe it will significantly boost the quality of our business.



# 2022: A mixed bag

While some buyers are confident that 2022 will be a better year for the travel industry, others are concerned about the numerous uncertainties that continue to plague the trade.



**Santosh Upadhyay**  
Sr. Vice President & National Head-Corporate Services, Bharat Financial Inclusion Limited (100% subsidiary of IndusInd Bank Ltd.)

“Interacting with corporates and informing them of the finest offers, deals, and platforms are crucial areas where the travel sector or hotels can concentrate their efforts, especially with the new technology that is on the horizon. In the following years, R&R programmes will be implemented. There will be a great deal of travel and meetings in the coming years. We are looking for the best prices, services, and travel experiences for our employees. When it comes to the financial industry, I notice a lot of banks and financial firms embarking on domestic travel.



**Vikul Goyal**  
Head of Sales & Marketing  
Vivanta Spirits

“My overall impression of the show was positive. This direct engagement with tourism boards and hotels has been missing for a long time. We have a lot of M!CE and business travel coming in. It is tough to make any predictions about how travel will be in 2022, because what we projected previously has not materialised. In 2022, certain travel restrictions should be lifted, allowing for more freedom. Some air bubbles are opening up. Double inoculation and booster doses will result in a safer travel environment. After this pandemic, I believe that safety and hygiene are critical for any business travel or anything related to business travel, dealers, and distributors.

**Amol Prasadi**  
General Manager, Kaya Limited

“During the pandemic, a lot of things changed. It is now more about choosing a destination. We have doctors on our team. People are becoming increasingly concerned about hygiene. As a result, we are concentrating more on hygiene, destinations, and airlines with high ratings. It instills trust in travellers. We are looking for new hotel chains to meet with, basically, sellers' new ideas and how we may use them for our forthcoming events. The worst has passed. The hotel and tourism industries have resurfaced with a fervor. But foreign travel will take some time. People are more concerned about the guidelines issued by various countries' governments.



**Shailesh Saxena**  
Cluster Head, Wipro Limited

“The hotel business has a lot of room to innovate and become more adaptable. Give guests greater confidence, and make it more cost-effective and feasible for them to travel not just within the hotel, but also in and out of the hotel. The sector must consider alternatives to what it has been doing prior to COVID-19. I feel there is a lot of awareness, and I am hoping that things will go well for all of us in the next year. It is possible that Singapore will be a prominent M!CE destination in 2022. Apart from the regular beach spots in the country, the Maldives is another place I see gaining traction this year.





**Major Aditie Mohan**  
VP & Head Corporate Services, Fidelity National Financial

2022 will be a year of future-ready businesses. For our organisation, 2022 appears to be a very exciting year, and we welcome it with open arms. We have spent a lot of time talking about technology. So, I am curious as to how the industry integrates destinations, travel, and leisure with technology. That is what we are looking at right now. When it comes to changes in leads and post-COVID-19 expectations, I prefer to put myself in the shoes of the other person. It would be extremely self-serving to begin thinking just from the perspective of an organisation.

**Kirti Kant Bhardwaj**  
Circle Head - Administration (Haryana), Reliance Retail Limited

I am new to the Travel M!CE Show. I saw several agents and vendors gathered under one roof. The show is a terrific platform for us as buyers since we learnt about all that is required for a M!CE-related trip. I hope that the pandemic will end soon, allowing people to reclaim their lives. So that we may leave our house, go to our offices, and, of course, resume our travel. During these trying times, we expect service providers to offer safe and secure travel for our employees. Thus, safety is a major concern. To prevent any issues, hotels should adhere to all protocols.



**Vinayak Gupta**  
Deputy Manager-Administration, Nucleus Software Exports Limited

After an almost 1.5-year hiatus, vendors are promising that prices will be excellent. The prospective market for the hospitality industry should have something substantial to offer to corporates and other buyers. We anticipate that travel will soon bounce back with a bang. M!CE activities in corporates and hotels will be fully operational by 2022 as complete double inoculation is achieved and confidence in travellers is instilled by hospitality players in terms of safety and hygiene. We currently have two to three M!CE events planned for the year 2022. Let's cross our fingers and hope for the best.

**Jigar Joshi**  
Director, Samsara Capital

I have been coming to this event for a long time, and I must say that the concept is outstanding. The fact that vendors are approaching us and checking for our specifications is the best thing about the show. The industry has had a challenging time in the last two years. As a result, we have high expectations for 2022. At the very least, we anticipate the commencement of corporate travel. People will resume their usual working habits. When it comes to my company, we have dropped the budget column from our expenses.



**Meena Rawat**  
Deputy Manager-Spare Parts/After Sales, Tenova Technologies Pvt. Ltd.

The way 2022 unfolds will be entirely dependent on the extent of spread and emergence of any new variants in the coming time. The COVID-19 variants are constantly evolving, making it impossible for us to anticipate anything. As a corporation, we are unable to plan or concentrate on any strategy. Thus, we plan to proceed according to the flow. Companies have their own policies, particularly when it comes to travel. All I want is for this pandemic to end so we can breathe without masks.



**Gaurav Narula**  
Sr. Global Category Manager, Schneider Electric

We want travel to increase. We want the travel sector to provide people with more freedom. Trust has emerged as one of the major concerns, on account of the ongoing pandemic. Every hotel, every segment, and every M!CE partner must understand how to establish trust with their consumers. India is known for its hospitality, and we should place a greater emphasis on intelligence, data, insights, and artificial reality. We provide a lot of hospitality, but we never provide an experience for our customers. We must first determine who the travellers are. Second, occasionally we notice something remarkable on a hotel's website, but when we get there, it turns out to be the exact opposite. Third, the price; if a person stays in a hotel and is charged ₹5,000, the price is quite high when that person orders something from in-room dining or the restaurant, especially when a corporate traveller is not necessarily affluent. The most pressing issue at the moment is that everyone is terrified of travelling. In terms of corporate travel, many are hesitant to venture out because they lack confidence. In 2022, I believe there will be a 50 per cent resurgence. M!CE is a whole different game. People would prefer a hybrid M!CE event to a completely physical event.



# Adopting a ‘do or die’ approach

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the travel and hospitality industries. After a series of setbacks, the industry is seeking for a ray of optimism amid the ongoing crisis.

**Charmaine Fernz**

**T**he year 2022 began with a burdened outlook, but being human, we live in hope. The hope is for things to get better and revive. The tourism and hospitality industries are no different. Industry personnel are pinning their hopes for a better year ahead. As a recent Deloitte report on the ‘Impact of COVID-19 on the Hospitality Industry’ explained, the impact is huge, and not yet predictable, on both revenue and supply chains. Decisions being taken to shut down hotels, restaurants, theme parks, and cinemas, not to

mention the entire disruptive effect of the travel ecosystem, all have a significant impact on worldwide tourism. Despite all the negativity, the industry is ready to bounce back once normalcy returns.

## LOOKING BACK

As **Vinod Kannan**, COO, Vistara, explains, "2021 started on the note of a gradual revival in traffic. However, the second wave had huge implications for operations and business." Despite the blow, H2 2021 showed recovery. "We saw demand for domestic air travel steadily grow. The factors were streamlined



**QUICK BYTE** While the industry did see some traction in 2021, it was not sufficient to fill the gaps



travel restrictions and vaccination drives. The surge can also be attributed to the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) segment or people travelling for leisure. Corporate travel also saw an uptick," he says. Kannan adds that recovery was also seen in international travel.

From a tourism destination perspective, **G.B. Srithar**, Regional Director, India, Middle East & South Asia, International Group (IMESA), Singapore Tourism Board says, "2021 saw the launch of the India-Singapore Vaccinated Travel Lane (VTL), which made it possible for fully vaccinated travellers to travel to Singapore from India on the VTL flights. Almost 2,000 agents from India attended two trade update webinars for VTL jointly organised by the STB, Singapore Airlines, and Changi Airport Group. This underscored the strong interest within the Indian travel trade community in promoting Singapore as a top-of-mind destination for Indian tourists." Srithar further explains that 2021 also saw a series of innovative marketing initiatives. The activities included an artistic collaboration between Indian Gond artist Bhajju Shyam and Singaporean artist Sam Lo in January 2021, under the curatorial direction of St+art India Foundation, to create one of the tallest murals in Little India in Singapore. This was followed by the Voot Kids and Green Gold Animation collaboration, the 28th edition of the Singapore Food Festival with FoodHall, and the Instagram reel campaign with the Khoye Se song. "On the B2B front, we organised a virtual roadshow and a FAM trip, which set the benchmark for an engaging virtual initiative with immersive interaction. We also reached out to

M!CE corporate decision-makers from various sectors through a virtual lunch session," adds Srithar.

Several initiatives were also seen in the M!CE industry. As **Meera Charnalia**, Senior VP and Head, M!CE, Thomas Cook (India) Ltd., explains, "We have witnessed a strong recovery in the M!CE sector with a clear increase in demand for business groups, sporting events, and weddings in 2021 as compared to 2020. Our corporate engagements towards driving M!CE demand also resulted in the delivery of physical groups of between 20 and 200 delegates per group in the year 2021."

**Nikhil Sharma**, Regional Director-Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, says, "Since May 2021, the occupancy of our business and mixed-demand properties have doubled, with business hotels reaching slightly lower occupancy than leisure. Even our leisure hotels across Eurasia achieved a 58 per cent uptick in occupancy in February and July 2021. We also recorded 10-30 per cent growth in ADR over the last 10 weeks and achieved more than 100 RGI during Diwali."

### THE HOPE FOR BETTER

As **Arif Patel**, Regional Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Hyatt India explains, "In a post-pandemic world, we have evolved to hybrid meetings. Together by Hyatt hybrid event packages provide small- to large-scale meetings across multiple Hyatt hotels in India, Asia Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East." He goes on to explain that, with a specialised skill set and expertise, the group can facilitate gatherings ideal for up to 15 attendees per location, along with a scale for significantly larger



**Vinod Kannan**  
COO  
Vistara

**Digitalisation will continue in the future and transform the way we travel**



**G.B. Srithar**  
Regional Director, India, MESA,  
International Group, STB

**We remain confident in the prospects of Singapore's tourism sector**



**Neerja Bhatia**  
VP-Indian Subcontinent  
Etihad Airways

**We hope for the industry to reach pre-COVID-19 levels**

groups. "Those who attend the hybrid meetings can also opt in to be streamed in a video conference where they can contribute effectively with ease," he adds.

"We remain optimistic about Singapore's tourism sector's long-term prospects, both for leisure and M!CE as well as business travel," Srithar says. "Before COVID-19, STB India was successful in luring the Indian Family with Children sector, and this will be one of our priorities. We believe that sailing from Singapore will once again be popular among Indian leisure travellers. When the time comes, we will review our Cruise Development Fund support plan to see if we can assist cruise agents in resuming their marketing efforts by providing a pre-and post-cruise experience package," he adds. On the M!CE front, the STB has reviewed a slew of our M!CE support schemes to help corporates and M!CE travel agents develop a higher-value M&I itinerary in Singapore and make a quicker destination selection decision. "Many inquiries have been received from India about the possibility of meeting and incentive group movements as early as the first quarter of 2022," Srithar says.

Every airline, like a destination, is seeking the right chance to grow its numbers, and Etihad is no exception. As **Neerja Bhatia**, VP-Indian Subcontinent, Etihad Airways, argues, "Sustainability initiatives will be key. Our Green Loyalty Programme exemplifies this. We plan to enforce more programmes in 2022 to stimulate the adoption of a sustainable way of travelling."

Kannan takes a different approach, stating that our clients are everywhere and have access to content on

a range of platforms. The level of digital content consumption is the major change in a post-pandemic world. As we adjust to this trend, the platforms we use will become increasingly dependent on their relevance and our target audience. "Regional news outlets, community communication, engaging with influencers, cross-promotion, and partnering with like-minded firms are just a few of the new methods that have acquired traction. Adopting a customer-first strategy and tailoring marketing and communication efforts to better cater to it is also vital," he adds.

## THE RESURGENCE

The tourism and hospitality sectors, which have been severely affected by the pandemic, remain



## QUICK BYTE Strategies of the past would have to be reconsidered in a post-pandemic world



optimistic. As per reports, Indian visitors are likely to be among the most sought-after travellers who have shown a desire to travel and an intent to travel in the coming six to 12 months, according to Srithar. "Among the key concerns in destination selection will be safety, security, and hygiene," he adds. Srithar says that tourists will be more interested in sustainable travel

options, and environmental sustainability will be top-of-mind.

"By rewarding staff, distributors, and business partners, incentives will play a key role in the corporate business relationship process for M!CE. Travel as an incentive will be sought after, but the types of trips and places available may be limited, especially for medium-haul destinations.

However, we expect a surge in foreign travel in the next two years," he adds.

On a positive note, Bhatia says that the sector should be able to return to pre-COVID-19 levels with the required regulations and protocols in place, especially in terms of maintaining safety and hygiene standards. With increased business around the globe, the M!CE sector appears

to be in overdrive, and technological advancements have only boosted the growth potential.

## TREND SETTERS

The future is all about trends that will or may change the direction of the industry, with a ray of hope lurking in every vertical. Experiential M!CE, luxury stays, and longer-duration stays, as per Charnalia, will all continue to be popular this year. "Hybrid events, as well as the wedding segment, will continue to rise through 2022," she says.

Charnalia gives a city-wise demand stating that top domestic destinations include key metros such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, and Hyderabad, followed by top conference favourites such as Goa and Jaipur. Leisure favourites such as Udaipur, Puri, and Mahabalipuram will remain popular, while on the international front, destinations such as Dubai, Maldives, France, and Germany have hosted M!CE events with group sizes ranging from 20 to 200 people. She adds, "There is also a growing



need for private events and increasing spending."

The pandemic, as per Kannan, has accelerated digitalisation across the travel ecosystem. "This trend will continue in the future, with new technologies transforming the way we travel," he says. Kannan also observes a notable travel trend: A growing demand for nonstop, direct connectivity, especially on long-haul routes. "This is due to a number of factors, including minimising the risk of infection while in transit, the evolving complications of foreign travel, and quarantine rules, among others. There has also been a shift in client booking patterns," he adds.

Based on technological advancements, various safety measures will shape how many parts of social and corporate activities can be conducted at the same time, says Srithar. To future-proof our sector and prepare for the new normal, we will need to rely on innovation and technology. "Digital transformation has given the tourism sector a significant boost and changed tourist expectations. People are increasingly turning to digital tools to have a better experience. The rise of slow, immersive travel options follows," he adds. Srithar cites a MakeMyTrip study, according to which more people will opt for travel that balance their itinerary with a relaxed pace, allowing them to explore more while avoiding the stress of running around trying to check off all the boxes.

Sharing his views, Patel says, "The industry needs to consider a new, emerging audience. This is coupled with safety, security, and cleanliness, which are critical for many planners and

travellers. Thus, preparing for hybrid events is an important measure. Our guests are our priority, so we try to remain promoters of a people-first culture to understand their requirements by making the technological set-up convenient for the planner and broadcasting the live event to expand the meeting." Bhatia shares a similar technological mindset, saying that sustainability will take centre-stage in 2022 as it is not a trend but a matter of relevance. "At Etihad, we are constantly researching new technologies such as data science, analytics, and digital transformation that will be adopted quickly on a global scale to improve overall performance," she adds.

Betting on the technology wave, Sharma says that every year, rapid advances in technology and changes in customer demands introduce new trends in the industry. As the sector continues to innovate on health and sustainability practices, a greater emphasis on innovation and sustainability is anticipated. Travellers' health will continue to be a top priority. Increased technology integration will follow, ensuring contactless services as well as personalised experiences.

## THE TECH REVOLUTION

According to Sharma, technology has already played a pivotal role in the sector with COVID-19 accelerating the rate of digital adoption. "We have rolled out a few advanced technologies at Wyndham, including the Wyndham mobile app, which offers low and in-stay capabilities. The Oracle Hospitality OPERA Cloud Property Management platform, which is mobile-enabled, helps hotels boost



**Meera Charnalia**  
Sr. VP & Head, M!CE  
Thomas Cook (India) Ltd.



**M!CE is recovering with a high demand for business groups**



**Arif Patel**  
Regional VP, S&M  
Hyatt India



**In a post-COVID world, we have evolved to hybrid meetings**



guest personalisation, cut costs, and improve operational efficiencies. We estimate roughly 20 per cent of our full-service portfolio to migrate in the next one year, with the rest in the next few years," says Sharma.

Kannan makes the point that Vistara has adopted many seamless and hassle-free experiences for customers travelling within India, including trial runs of a biometric face recognition entrance and boarding system. "Our IT infrastructure is entirely cloud-based. We have also created Big Data solutions to get a full picture of our clients and their requirements," he adds. Srithar discusses the new aspects of VR and AI in tourism, claiming that recreating experiences with VR can give brands an edge. In the travel and tourism industry, Big Data and the IoT are also used. "This implies that brands now have access to a huge amount of data, which can be used to monitor, track, and analyse behaviour patterns to help in planning," he explains

Sharma concludes by stating that a new industrial revolution is underway. As AI has advanced, service robots have become more widespread in the industry. Their key interactive and communicative capabilities set them apart from conventional self-service machines, resulting in the most exceptional human-technology interactions. He goes on to say that, however, a team member's personalised touch cannot be replaced by integrating technology. In fact, by using technology to accomplish tedious chores, team members can spend more time connecting with visitors and providing excellent customer service.

# India's cruise potential is bright

With almost 10 to 12 times the growth projected in cruise tourism, **Rajiv Jalota**, Chairperson, Mumbai Port Trust claims that new and big vessels will come along.

**Nisha Verma**

**R**ajiv Jalota shares that domestic cruising in India will be on the rise and how the country is building the right infrastructure for this sector to grow. Cruise tourism was growing before COVID-19 and 2019-20 was the peak year in India.

However, he believes that cruising has a bright future because India formulated the masterplan for cruise tourism, which is divided into three parts: Ocean cruising, river cruising, and island and lighthouse tourism. "By 2042-43, almost a growth of more than 10 to 12 times with 40 lakh cruise passengers is predicted, of which international passengers

would be in the range of 6 to 7 lakh, and over 20 lakh will be domestic cruise passengers. Hence, now our focus needs to be on the domestic cruise, as from an infrastructure point of view, it has more potential. It would need smaller vessels and less infrastructural availability. For both international and domestic cruises, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW), in collaboration with MOT, has focussed on developing six ports as cruise destinations, including Mumbai, Goa, Mangalore, Kochi, Chennai, and Visakhapatnam. All ministries are working together to put good SOPs in place and make cruise



Rajiv Jalota

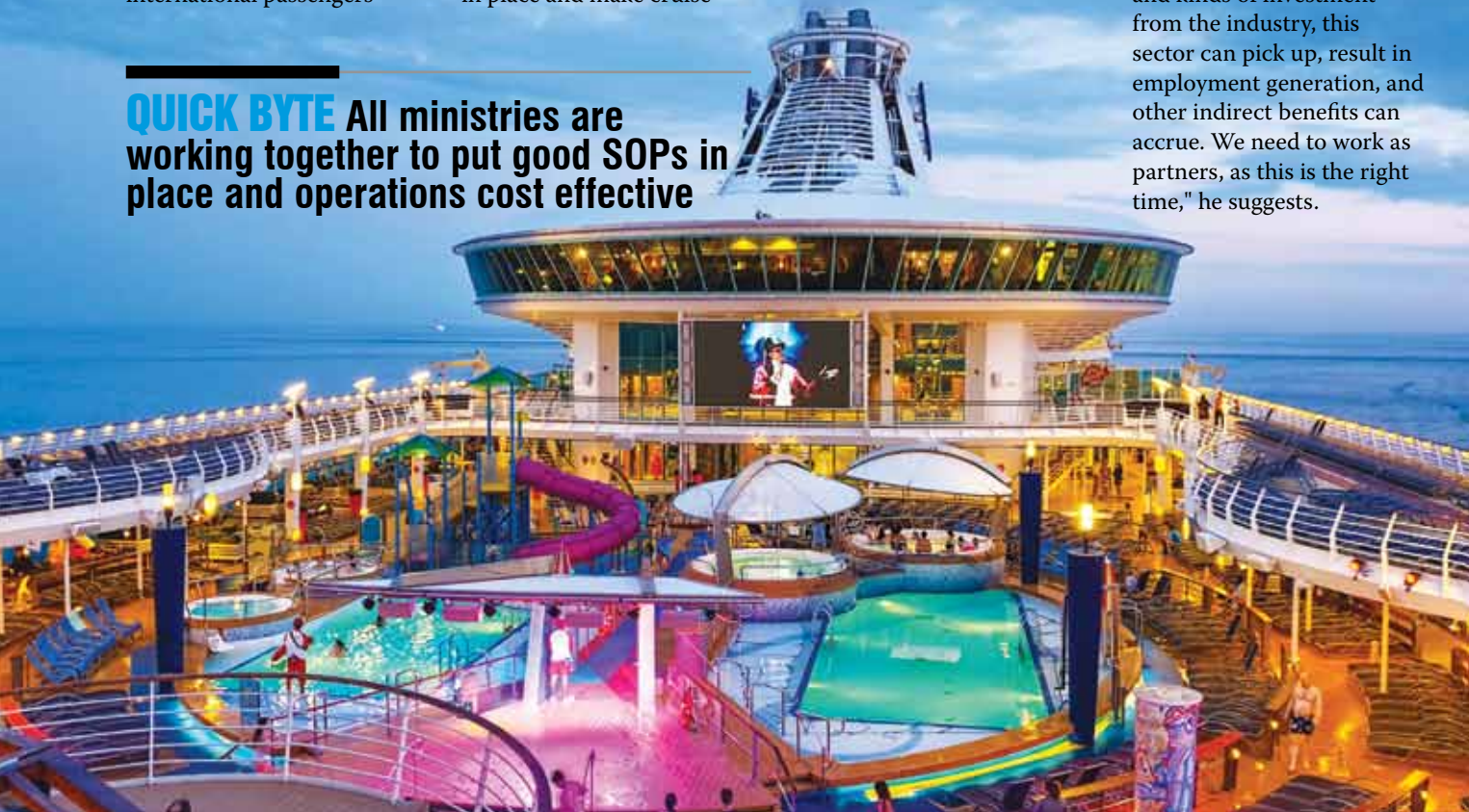
**There were 4.67 lakh cruise passengers on 451 cruise calls, which was way beyond the 2.2 lakh passengers**

operations more efficient," he says.

## WORKING IN TANDEM

With almost 10 to 12 times the growth projected in cruise in the coming years, Jalota claims that new and big vessels will come along. "This would require facilities and ecosystem development. It is the right time to tap this market as many cruise vessels are in the doldrums and looking for latent markets like India where there is paying capacity and some minimum level of infrastructure of a certain standard. Both MoPSW and MOT are pitching in with adequate funds under Sagarmala. With more ideas regarding locations and kinds of investment from the industry, this sector can pick up, result in employment generation, and other indirect benefits can accrue. We need to work as partners, as this is the right time," he suggests.

**QUICK BYTE** All ministries are working together to put good SOPs in place and operations cost effective





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# Emerging victorious

**Deepak Verma**, Director-Sales & Marketing, The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace, explains how 'Shaadi by Marriott' showcased the brand's prowess in curating bespoke weddings.

**Nisha Verma**

Sharing details of various activities planned for the flagship 'Shaadi by Marriott' event, **Deepak Verma**, shares, "The euphoria of activities that were comprised during the overall wedding expo exhibited wedding offerings, showcasing Shaadi By Marriott and how it caters to curating bespoke wedding experiences for our guests. There were wedding masterclasses scheduled that allowed guests to learn from the experts in the wedding industry. An evening wedding soiree was also curated." Verma claims that the overall response of the attendees throughout the day was exceptional.

A number of wedding planners and event organisers were part of the event. "Magnanimous Matrimonies at Westin Hyderabad Mindspace saw a mélange of wedding experience zones set up to showcase the wedding essentials. For event



Deepak Verma

**With tier-2 cities picking up the pace, there are ample growth opportunities in Hyderabad**

management we had Rachnoustav Events, Theme It Up, Mighty Events & Weddings by Sunny Khandelwal, and P3 Weddings that had intricately designed wedding set ups. For gifting and packaging options, Friends Cards and Sneha Wrapzz Gifting elevated the wedding experience.

"We had wedding planners from across the country. The entire menu curation for the events throughout the day was catered by the internal culinary team at Westin Hyderabad. Themed breaks and lavish meal curations by our culinary magicians allowed for interactions and discussions, across the delegates," he shares.

The Wedding soiree was curated to enchant the

elite guests and delegates of Marriott International, claims Verma. "A grand fashion showcase by the internationally acclaimed designer and couturier Gaurav Gupta was the highlight of the evening," he informs.

## OPPORTUNITIES

"With the national, local, and regional coverage, we have already started to collate a list of possible wedding leads for the upcoming months. It is true that the pandemic has created abundant uncertainty across the globe, however, the business as well as the market has been picking up gradually. With the safety standards in place, we have been able to garner surety and loyalty from our guests. There has been a spike in weddings being held in Telangana. While weddings have taken a more intimate turn, there is further increase on the offerings that we are presenting them with," Verma concludes.

**QUICK BYTE** The day observed a blend of traditional and contemporary wedding elements



# Partnership is key

Industry players must approach recovery strategies with foresight and a balance of insights obtained before and after COVID-19, says **Alan Pryor, GM, KLCC**.

**F**aced with nationwide lockdowns, a ban on business meetings and events, newer COVID-19 variants, event postponements and cancellations, and the declaration of a state of emergency throughout Malaysia, 2021 was no better than 2020. The Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre was presented with an opportunity to give back to its community when parts of the country were hit by flash floods. 2021 was the toughest year, and only one strategy was needed to drive business continuity. Collaboration.

**No compromise on safety SOP compliance:** The Kuala



Alan Pryor

**We also created a digital twin for our physical venue that allowed planners to visit and experience the centre remotely**

spaces were empty. For our event partners, their equipment and technical know-how lay dormant. We married them both, transforming the exhibition halls and meeting rooms into virtual and hybrid studios with production-grade audio, visual, and broadcasting equipment that came together with technical experts to guide and counsel customers.

**What is next?** "The centre looks forward to another

is looking to enhance its sustainability and corporate social responsibility programmes. This will come in handy for international planners. A deep focus will also be placed on the further development of the centre's offsite catering services as a standalone product and enriching delegates' journey through food.

It is an extremely competitive market, with a pressing need for the supply chain to stay above the

**QUICK BYTE** Clients find it beneficial to have everything they need for a digital pivot, all under one roof



Lumpur Convention Centre engaged with industry bodies and leaders to push for a comprehensive Safe Business Events programme to provide confidence to the stakeholders. It was to encourage venues to undergo an accreditation process for the verification of SOP compliance.

**Technology and innovation:** The pandemic accelerated the rate of virtualisation adoption. In less than a year, the smart meetings industry has become saturated with virtual products and solutions. **Alan Pryor, GM, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre**, says, "At the centre,

event-packed year, with 40 per cent of its target for 2022 already secured. We are especially excited to host the first hybrid World Congress of Nephrology 2022, at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre from February 25 to 27," concludes Pryor. The Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

curve, to perform something others cannot and to reach somewhere others have not.

Industry players must approach recovery strategies with informed foresight, an open and creative mind, and a balance of what we knew before COVID-19 and what we learned after.

# Movements



**Swarup Datta**

Regional Director-North  
Sarovar Hotels Pvt. Ltd.

Datta is an industry adept professional with over 30 years of experience in the hospitality sector. He has been part of Sarovar Hotels for eight years. In his last role, he was the Regional Director-South. He holds strong hotel operations and management skills. He is a certified hotel administrator by the American Hotel and Lodging Educational Institute. A graduate from the Oberoi School of Hotel Management, Swarup is also an alumnus of IHM, Mumbai. Sarovar Hotels is part of the Paris-headquartered Groupe Du Louvre, with 2,500 hotels in 52 countries.



**Devika James**

Director-S&M  
Sheraton Grand Chennai  
Resort & Spa

In her new role, Devika will focus on developing and implementing sales and marketing strategies for the hotel. She joins the hotel from Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort & Spa, where she has a proven track record in planning and implementing effective business development strategies and forming revenue enhancement tactics, along with managing staff and developing skills. In addition to enforcing these responsibilities, she will continue to deliver profits to the stakeholders.



**Victor Chen**

GM, Courtyard by Marriott  
Mumbai International Airport

Chen comes with strong operations experience. He began his career with Hyatt Hotels in the Corporate Leadership Programme after graduating from hotel school in Kolkata. He joined Marriott International in 2016 as Resident Manager at JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu, where he was responsible for effectively developing the brand strategy and upgrading the guest experience. He was elevated to General Manager at the Le Meridien Calangute Goa as a result of this.



**Devendra Sharma**

GM, Swosti Premium,  
Bhubaneswar

Sharma is a seasoned hotelier with robust operational experience, having spent 17 years in the industry. He began his career with the Taj Hotels in the Corporate Leadership Programme. He joined Marriott International in 2007 as the Food and Beverage (F&B) Manager at Le Meridien Jaipur. Sharma's focus on genuine care, a clean, well-maintained hotel, and empowering colleagues has improved the visitor experience, resulting in increased brand preference and several hotel accolades.



**Rayan Aranha**

GM, Novotel ibis Chennai OMR  
& Novotel Chennai SIPCOT

Aranha has over two decades of hospitality experience in sales, marketing, distribution, and operations. He is currently in his 10th year at Accor, where he started as the Director of S&M at Grand Mercure, Bangalore, moving to operations as Executive Assistant Manager. He has also worked with Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity before heading operations at ibis Mumbai Airport. His last assignment was with Grand Mercure Bangalore.



**Sandeep Udupa**

Assistant Director of HR  
JW Marriott Bengaluru

Udupa has effectively strategised, co-created, and implemented business transformation via people processes to boost business and maintain organisational effectiveness, bringing over 14 years of expertise in the sector. He began his career in 2012 at the Goa Marriott Resort and Spa, eventually moving into HR at the Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield. He has worked for brands such as Fairfield by Marriott Rajajinagar Bengaluru and Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel in various managerial capacities.



**Sohrab Khan**

Sr. RM, Sheraton Grand Pune &  
Le Méridien Mahabaleshwar

Khan has a diverse skill set, including building successful company strategies, distribution optimisation, and revenue forecasting. He has worked for Marriott International, Radisson Blu, and Ascott Limited, among others. His new role will entail developing and implementing the brand's revenue management plan. He will be responsible for the formulation and execution of a proper rate plan, maintaining a positive growth trajectory.



**Sushil Amlani**

Head-Business Development  
Espire Hospitality

i Amlani is an industry veteran with over two decades of experience in business development, hotel operations, and sales. He has worked with leading hospitality brands such as Accor, Sayaji Hotels, Sterling Holidays, and Best Western Peninsula. In his role at Espire Hospitality, he will be supporting the growth objective of the company and achieving the goal of 20 resorts in the next two years. Espire Hospitality owns and operates Six Senses Fort Barwara, as well as Country Inn Hotels & Resorts.



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