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Meetings • Incentives • Conferences • Events

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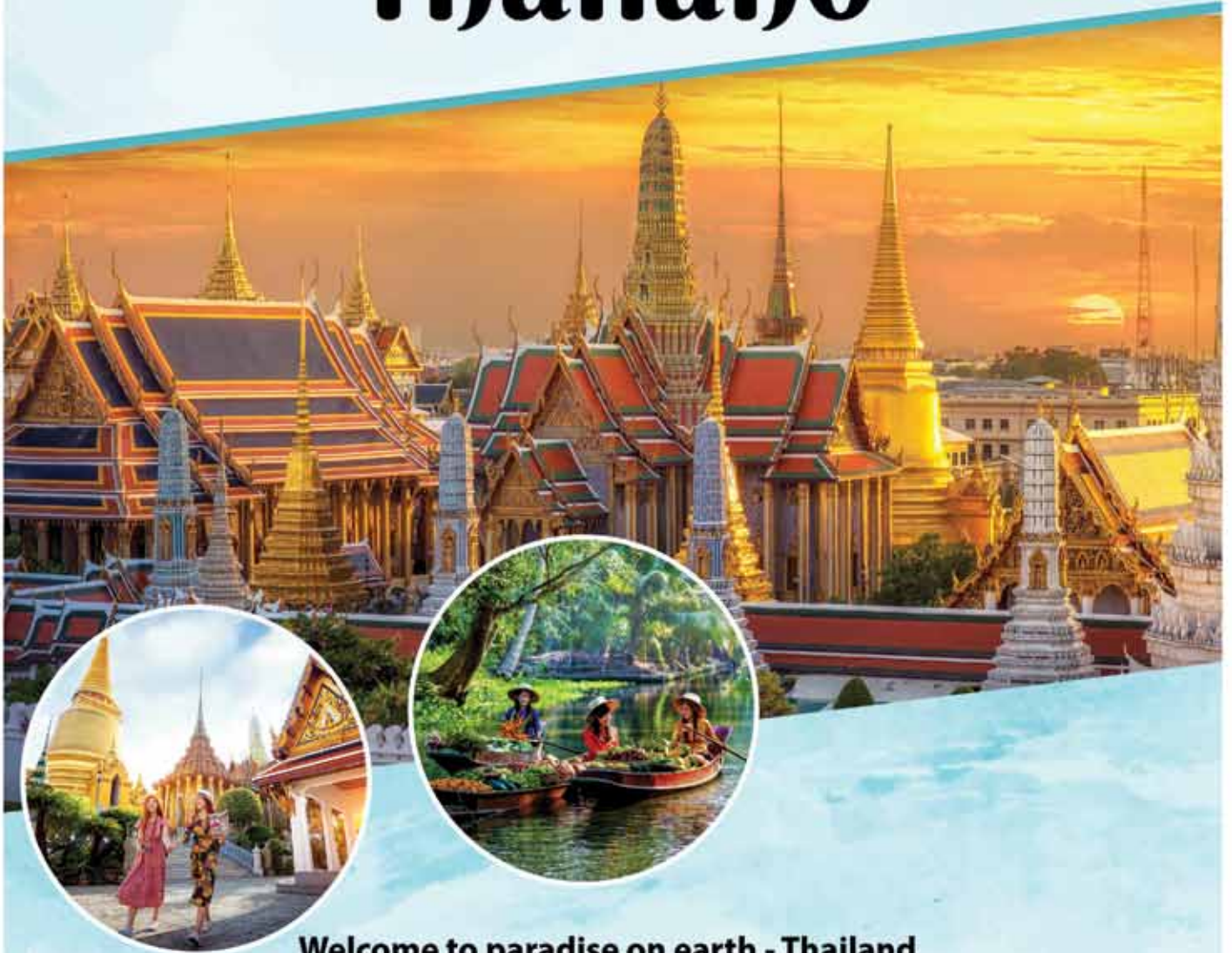
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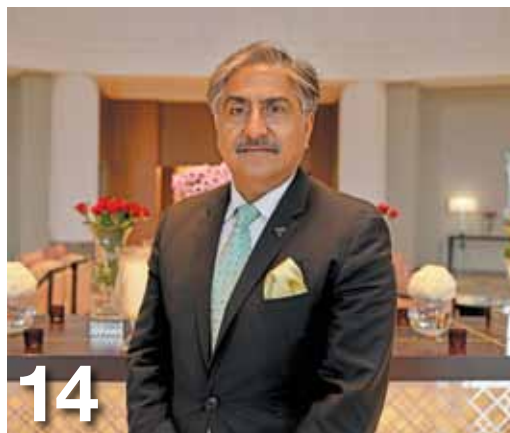
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COVER STORY

India's big shot to prove its M!CE Mettle



TRENDS

2022: Bright year for Indian wedding industry

INTERVIEW

G20: Melange of tech, culture & hospitality



OPINION

M!CE set for buoyant 2023

TRENDS

New age traveler leaping ahead

NEWS

Thomas Cook drives over 200 M!CE groups in 2022

Thomas Cook India has witnessed a strong recovery for its M!CE business in 2022 with over 100 per cent growth vs its pre-COVID levels. The company has delivered over 200 physical groups of between 100–2500 delegates per group, with spending of over ₹3-4 lakh per person for premium groups. In addition to incentive groups and meetings, the company has



managed over 75 international and domestic events; also five weddings and associated events, with a strong pipeline for the upcoming season. Meera Charnalia, Sr. Vice President and Head, M!CE, Thomas Cook India, said, “We have witnessed accelerated business revival of our volume driver M!CE segment by offering unique experiences to corporates.”

IMTEX 2023 ushers futuristic tech



The 20th edition of IMTEX which was held from 19 to 25 January at Bangalore International Exhibition Centre concluded successfully and garnered participation of 991

exhibitors, more than 96,000 visitors, and 23 countries. “Cutting-edge technologies are vital in addressing the need for quality and precision manufacturing in every industry sector,” commented Ravi Raghavan, President, IMTMA.



DBE notched up 232 bids for business events in 2022

Dubai Business Events (DBE), Dubai's official convention bureau has said that it won 232 bids for business events in 2022, almost twice as many as the previous year. The strong performance in 2022 represented

a 95 per cent growth in the number of successful bids from 2021 and a 92 per cent increase in the number of delegates added to the pipeline. Steen Jakobsen, Associate Vice President, DBE, said, “Engaging with meeting planners globally throughout 2022, we consistently heard that they were impressed with the way in which Dubai's business events sector rapidly rebounded in the wake of COVID and appreciative of the platform the city provided them to safely resume their events. This has built on many years of efforts to consistently develop Dubai's offerings, across not only the business events sector but also the knowledge economy—and drive awareness of it among meeting planners and association executives.”

Expo Inn Suites & Convention readies for busy 2023



Expo Inn Suites and Convention, a newly built business hotel is set to host a number of business events in 2023. The 134-room property will be kept busy throughout 2023 with events such as BAUMA CONEXPO INDIA-

the International Trade Fair for Construction Machinery, The India International Garment Fair, World Start-Up Convention 2023 and Elecrama 2023. Sudeep Sarcar, CEO, IEML, said, “In terms of space it is the second largest and in terms of events the third largest. During earlier COVID wave, when everything was closed, IEML stayed focused on going ahead with the plans on expansion. We will continue to stay on track and are fully prepared with all safety precautions.”

Boutique biz hotel Express Inn opens doors



Express Inn has opened doors offering 41 luxurious rooms, restaurant, and bar along with banquet facilities for residential conferences and business meetings. It has two banquets Symphony - Banquet Hall and Harmony - Banquet Lounge which offers splendid decor to organize events and celebrate memorable days in a lavish ambiance. These banquet spaces are a perfect venue to organize a private or professional event such as weddings, parties, engagements, conferences, or any other celebratory event. Waves, multi-cuisine restaurant and bar offers a wide variety of delicacies with zesting beverages and grooving ambiance.

‘Corporate travel saw surge in growth in Q4 2022’

Emburse’s SpendSmart Travel Trends report has revealed that “as the final months of the year 2022 approached, airline officials anticipated a profitable quarter fueled by business travelers”. The report noted that US carriers such as United Airlines and Delta witnessed a rise in the number of business travelers despite winter storms in November and December leading to disrupting of flights.

“The narrative around travel has continued to evolve since the onset of COVID, but one thing seems to be true: business trips are playing an important role in the health of the travel industry,” said Eric Friedrichsen, CEO, Emburse. “The data indicate a resurgence in in-person meetings despite less favourable weather and macroeconomic conditions, suggesting that employers continue to see the value in bringing people together.

However, we did see slight quarter-on-quarter declines in average domestic air ticket prices, as well as average daily lodging spending. This could suggest that travelers are finding a balance between maintaining travel volumes and effective cost control, by opting for lower-cost flights and hotels.”



Cebu sees huge revival of M!CE events in 2023

Cebu city in Philippines is touted to emerge as major M!CE destination in Asia as it will witness a number of M!CE events in 2023. “We see Cebu retaining its stature as a key business and leisure destination. The revival of M!CE activities and in-person events should help propel hotel occupancies and average daily rates in Cebu over the next 12 months,” said Joey Bondoc, Associate Director, Research, Colliers Philippines. Philippines is positioning itself as a desired business events destination in Asia and offering M!CE as top tourism product to the international travelers.

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Surpassing expectations

This year's edition of FITUR 2023 touched global participation levels to new high, almost three times more than 2022, besides registering significant breakthrough in digital sphere.

MT Bureau

The recently concluded FITUR 2023 ended on a high note garnering a total of 222,000 attendees, a growth of 99.6 per cent, almost double that of 2022. In terms of the profile of the participants, 136,000 professionals were registered, representing an increase of 68 per cent and an estimated 86,000 visitors, which is practically three times more than last year's figure.

In terms of participation, the fair brought together 8,500 companies, 131 countries, 755 exhibitors, in eight halls of the exhibition centre, which represented a net exhibition area of 66,900 sq. mtrs., equalling the occupation of 2020.

FITUR also registered a major milestone in the digital sphere, with traffic to the IFEMA MADRID website soaring exponentially on the

first day of the fair alone, reaching a record of 146,000 visits.

Organized by IFEMA MADRID, this edition has had Guatemala as a FITUR Partner Country, which has made an extensive promotional display at the fair under its new Guatemala Asombrosa e Imparable brand. In addition, sustainable development, in its economic, social, and environmental aspects, has been the guiding light of the major proposals from companies and destinations, as well as with the sections and activities of the fair.

This year's event was graced by the King and Queen of Spain. In addition, FITUR 2023 was also visited by the President of Guatemala, Alejandro Eduardo Giammattei, Partner Country of this edition; President of the Spanish Government, Pedro Sánchez;

**FITUR 2023
BROUGHT TOGETHER
8,500 COMPANIES,
131 COUNTRIES,
755 EXHIBITORS, IN
EIGHT HALLS OF THE
EXHIBITION CENTRE**

representatives of the UNWTO; 30 Ministers of Tourism from different countries; the Ministers of Economy and Social Affairs of Guatemala; six Spanish Ministers; 15 Presidents of autonomous communities and Tourism Councillors from 16 communities, and 100 ambassadors and business representatives, and mayors from different towns and cities in our country. A total of 400 authorities attended this year's edition of FITUR.

Regarding the social media expansion, the first two days of FITUR saw a growth in the community of 3,724 followers, and FITUR's profiles on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn now have a total of 288,557 followers. In addition, all the publications produced during these first days have obtained 1,676,316 impressions. FITUR's Twitter profile was the No. 1 trending topic in Spain for the two days the fair was held, with more than 500 mentions per day on this channel.

The Fitur Partner already has a protagonist for the next edition of FITUR, which was announced by the Minister of Tourism of Ecuador, Niels Olsen and the Chairman of the Executive Committee of IFEMA MADRID, José Vicente de los Mozos, who signed the collaboration agreement whereby Ecuador will be Partner Country at the next edition of the international tourism fair, to be held in January 2024.

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Recovery in air traffic continues



IATA 2022 forecast suggests Asia-Pacific airlines witnessed highest rise in Nov 2022 traffic. Trade association of world airlines remains bullish on global aviation industry returning to profitability in 2023.

MT Bureau

IATA has revealed that the total traffic in November 2022 [measured in revenue passenger kilometres (RPKs)] rose 41.3 per cent compared to November 2021. Globally, traffic is now at 75.3 per cent of November 2019 levels. International traffic rose 85.2 per cent versus November 2021. The Asia-Pacific continued to report the strongest year-over-year (YoY) results with all regions showing improvement compared to the last year. November 2022 international RPKs reached 73.7 per cent of November 2019 levels.

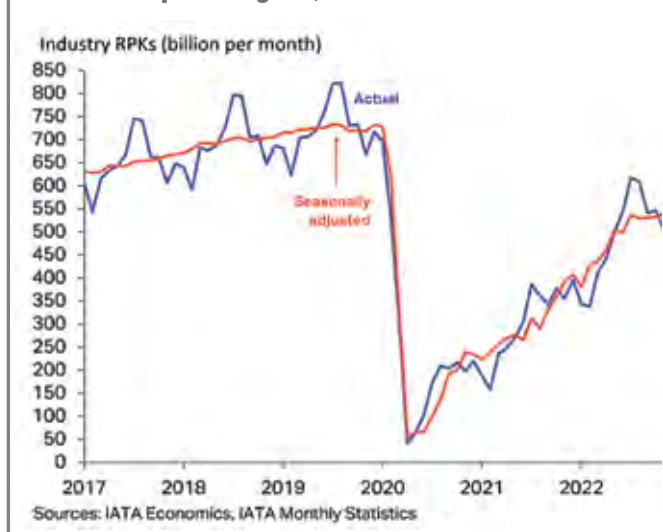
Domestic traffic for November 2022 was up 3.4 per cent compared to November 2021 with

travel restrictions in China continuing to dampen the global result. Total November 2022 domestic traffic was at 77.7 per cent of the November 2019 level. In India, domestic RPKs increased by 11.1 per cent YoY and ASKs by 0.5 per cent. November RPKs were 12.2 per cent short of 2019 results, it was revealed. "Traffic results in November reinforce that consumers are thoroughly enjoying the freedom to travel. Unfortunately, the reactions to China's reopening of international travel in January reminds us that many governments are still playing politics when it comes to COVID and travel. Epidemiologists, the European Centre for

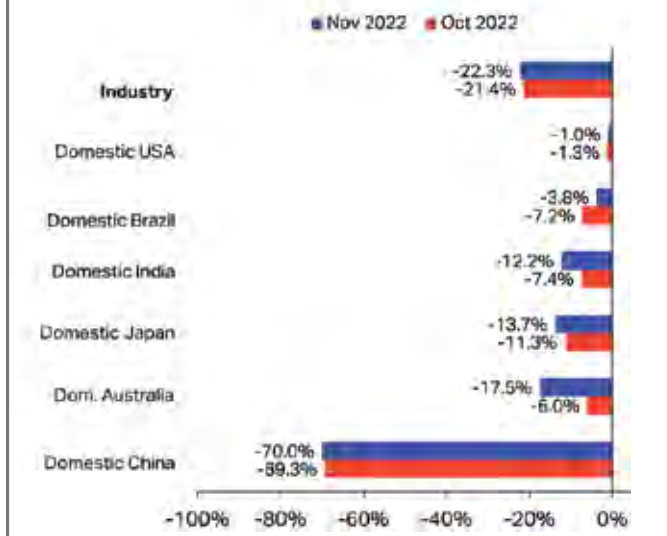
Disease Prevention and Control and others have said that the reintroduction of testing for travelers from China can do little

to contain a virus that is already present around the world. And China's objections to these policy measures are compromised

Global air passengers, RPK billion



Domestic RPK growth (airline region of registration basis), YoY% changes versus 2019



Source: IATA Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

by their own pre-departure testing requirements for people traveling to China.

Governments should focus on using available tools to manage COVID

effectively—including improved therapeutics and vaccinations—rather than repeating policies that have failed time and again over the last three years,” said Willie Walsh, Director General, IATA.

BOOST FOR PREMIUM AND ECONOMY

Recovery trends for international traffic in the Premium and Economy cabin classes remain broadly aligned. Economy class RPKs—which include premium economy (and accounts for 92 per cent of total RPKs)—reached 79.6 per cent of their January 2020 level in July 2022. Premium RPKs—which capture travel in first and business class cabins—fared nearly as well at 74.2 per cent of the January 2020 level. Latest

LATEST IATA FIGURES SHOW A MINOR DIVERGENCE IN THE RECOVERY BETWEEN CABIN CLASSES

IATA figures show a minor divergence in the recovery between cabin classes. Such divergences are frequently observed during high and low activity periods. Travel in Economy tends to lead during the northern hemisphere's summer, and lag during the winter months.



'Corporates keen to spend 30% more on M!CE'

M!CE sector is poised for quantum jump in 2023, owing to unique trends it is creating, says **S D Nandakumar**, President & Country Head, Corporate Tours, SOTC Travel.

Lipla Negi

What are the big M!CE trends you are most excited about in 2023?

Some trends we foresee for M!CE in 2023 are higher spends—corporates are willing to increase their budgets by up to 30 per cent, unique destinations, interactive gamification in events, sports events, health and wellness and also special interest in luxury cruises across Europe, Middle East and South East Asia.

With G20 in the spotlight, what are the biggest challenges that M!CE sector faces?

Since G20 is a year-long event, some of the challenges that the domestic M!CE sector might face due to supply constraints are inventory challenges due to shortage and increased costs, among others. However, the G20 will play a significant role in putting domestic destinations of India on the world map, thus giving our country its due visibility to a global audience.

Has COVID transformed the M!CE industry?

The COVID has changed the traditional perception of M!CE travel. We are witnessing a change in



S D NANDAKUMAR
President & Country Head,
Corporate Tours, SOTC Travel

consumer preferences, and our data indicates that corporates are now choosing to merge the various elements of M!CE in one—this is popularly known as the Meetings Industry. With unspent budgets and strong travel desire, we witnessed a substantial increase in group sizes vs pre-COVID. To enhance sales and productivity, more corporates have been encouraging incentive trips for their key growth contributors this year, i.e., employees, distributors, among others. Our team was quick to seize the opportunity and we have been able to deliver the

TOP M!CE GROUPS IN 2022

- Abu Dhabi: 3,500 passengers
- Dubai: 1,700 passengers
- Mumbai: 1,200 passengers
- Switzerland: 800 passengers
- Singapore + cruise: 700 passengers

INT'L M!CE DESTINATIONS TRENDING

- 2022: UAE (Dubai and Abu Dhabi) led corporate preferences.
- 2023: Witnessing high demand for UK, Spain, Central Europe, Australia, Switzerland, and South East Asia.

DOMESTIC M!CE DESTINATIONS IN DEMAND

Goa, Jaipur, Hyderabad, Dehradun, Bengaluru, J&K, and Kochi

UP-AND-COMING M!CE HOTSPOTS

Ho Chi Minh, Phú Quốc, Da Nang, Egypt, Qatar, and Hungary.

CORPORATES EYEING FOR

Ease of visas, flight connectivity, event space availability, experience led travel, support from local tourism authorities.

requirements of all our corporate customers and I am delighted to state that for the last two quarters YoY we are upwards of 150 per cent over our pre-COVID numbers.

What have been the learning lessons on the road to recovery?

Corporates have realized the

importance of planning well in advance. In the last quarter, we delivered a mega M!CE group of 800 passengers to Switzerland. The said group was initially scheduled to travel in Q1, however due to visa challenges for most countries in Europe, their travel had to be rescheduled to Q3.



Convention Center



Activities



Shopping



Accommodation

All-set for MICE groups in Qatar

2022 has been an extraordinary year with so many major new hotel and attraction openings. From shopping malls to beach clubs, museums to theme parks, there are now new activities and experiences for every type of traveller, from every nation, and to suit every budget.

With more than one million fans expected to visit in the year end, Visit Qatar has announced new attractions, hotels and resorts that are ready to be launched to provide hospitable experience to **MICE** groups in the coming year.

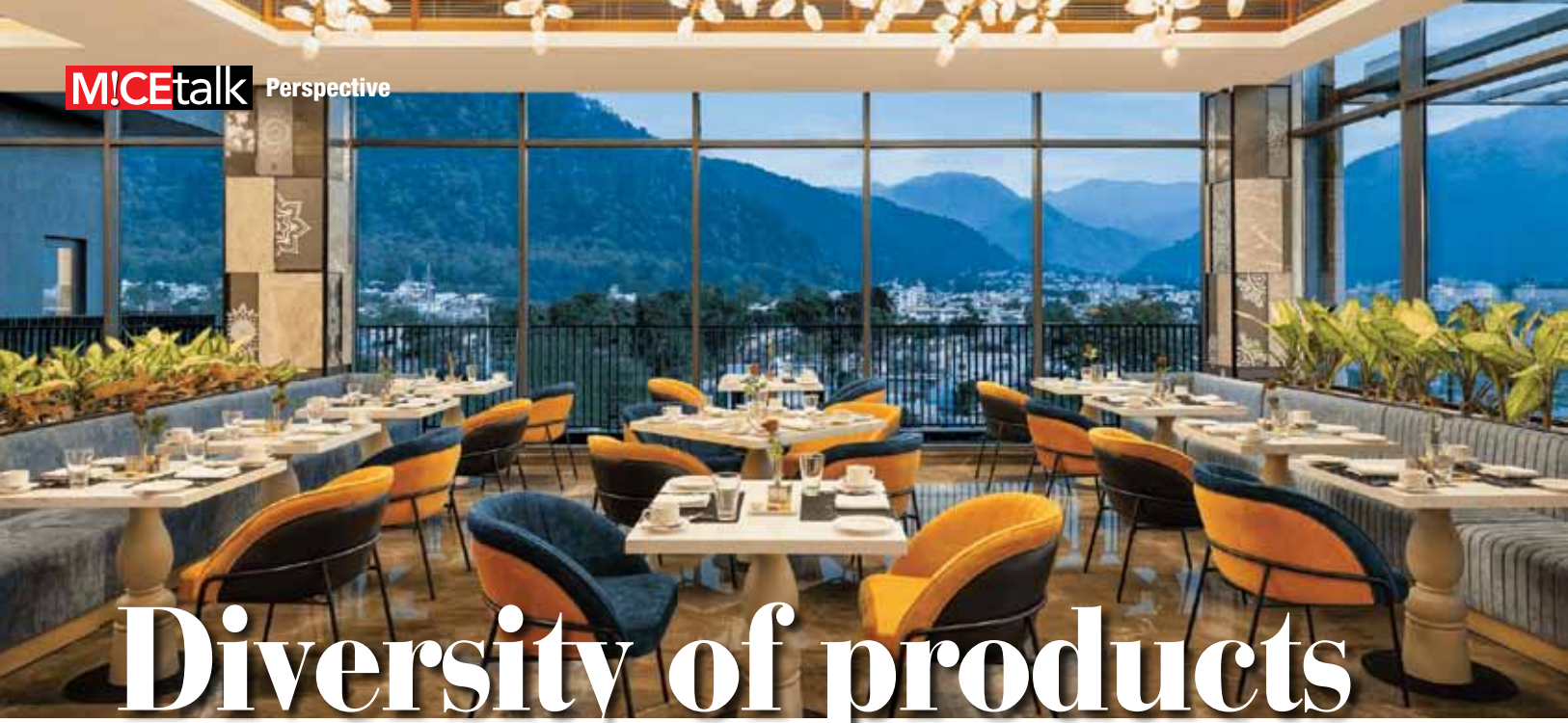


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Diversity of products

Fortune Hotels and Welcomheritage continues its expansion spree in Leisure, Weddings, and M!CE segments post-COVID, while focusing on more balanced approach in 2023.

Nisha Verma

Hotel chains in India are continuously evolving their products offerings post-COVID, especially in the M!CE segment. Fortune Hotels and Welcomheritage is also not behind and has gone through facelift from business brand to leisure and even wedding and M!CE brand today.

Explained Dhananjay Saliankar, Head, Sales & Marketing, India, Fortune Hotels and Welcomheritage, “COVID has taught us to look at things differently. Since then, one has started exploring all other opportunities available in the marketplace such as weddings and social events. We are now looking at how to change our segmentation and our market mix. It is a balanced approach more than depending on few segments,” he said.

Samir MC, MD, Fortune Hotels, shared, “We have opened some interesting hotels at some exciting locations. We have launched a hotel in Katra and opened another hotel in Kufri. As we go into this year, the most interesting thing to see is that travel

has rebounded and it is great to see everybody traveling again.”

EXPANDING OPERATIONS

Saliankar revealed that earlier, Fortune Hotels, as a company used to be a business brand. “However, now our footprint is going to leisure locations more including secondary cities as well as tertiary cities, where we are looking at new business coming in,” he added.

MC claimed, “We will move from what was a very heavily business hotel portfolio a few years back, to a good and equal mix between business and leisure hotels. It offers a great variety of choice to our guests, so they do not need to look elsewhere when they want to book a stay, be it for leisure or for business or for a M!CE event.”

2023 AUGURS WELL

Saliankar stated that 2023 should take tourism industry to the next level. “Corporate travel, M!CE travel, and everything looks much better. We now focus on that and see where we can optimise the situation. Let us hope that things will get much better and we can sustain everything we have done—the occupancy levels, pricing



SAMIR MC
MD,
Fortune Hotels

WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO OPENING SOME VERY INTERESTING HOTELS ACROSS SOME VERY EXCITING LOCATIONS

levels and everything in 2023,” he claimed.

MC added, “We are extremely positive for the New Year because we see the travel upswing continuing over the next couple of



DHANANJAY SALIANKAR
Head, Sales & Marketing, India,
Fortune Hotels and Welcomheritage

LET US HOPE THAT THINGS WILL GET MUCH BETTER AND WE CAN SUSTAIN EVERYTHING WE HAVE DONE

years. It is going to be a very positive few years in terms of travel, primarily because demand is going to continue increasing at a faster pace than supply coming into the market.”



HEAVEN FOR THRILL SEEKERS



Upcoming Mandu Fest and Gandhisagar Floating Festival, Asia's first floating festival in Madhya Pradesh is set to delight travelers with feast of art, craft, music, and adventure.

Madhya Pradesh has emerged as one of the most sought-after tourist locations of the country. The state has reinstated its identity as the hub of adventure tourism and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has made unparalleled efforts to develop the tourism industry. It was a long-term vision of the Tourism Board to establish Madhya Pradesh as a state of adventure and cultural tourism which is now coming into execution. MP Tourism thrives to provide a 360-degree adventure experience for the thrill seekers by facilitating air, water, and land adventure activities.

After three glorious editions of the Mandu Festival, the season four is on course and adventure lovers from India and abroad are participating in it with undying enthusiasm. Meanwhile, a very recent addition, the Gandhisagar Floating Festival is set to commence from February which is Asia's one and only floating festival. During this tourism season, Madhya Pradesh Tourism thrives to

connect all the exclusive festivals of Madhya Pradesh in such a way where tourists can enjoy all these unique experiences one after another. The festivals have been chronologically lined up to quench the thirst of all adventure seekers.

GANDHISAGAR FLOATING FESTIVAL

The Gandhisagar Floating Festival will be a unique glamping experience at the Mandsaur district, Madhya Pradesh, articulating its offerings with the line, 'Gateway to the heart of Incredible India'. The festival will be a four-hour drive from Indore which is very well connected by the road and railways.

The key highlight of Gandhisagar Floating Festival is its five-day festival, which is Asia's first floating festival, replete with live music performances on a floating stage, floating market, boat spa, boat safari, silent forest tour, and much more. The tourists will be facilitated with super luxury tenting facilities until the end of 23 April and the adventure activities will continue until the end of 23 July.

What makes Gandhisagar Floating Festival special is the adventure sports in the middle of the jungle, which includes a plethora of adventure sports and activities that spans across air, water, and land. The air adventure activities would include parasailing, hot air balloon, and paramotoring. The water adventure activities would include kayaking, parasailing, jet ski, speed boating, zorbing, dragon boat, and banana boat ride. The land adventure activities would include Duo Cycling, Cycling, Trekking, Stargazing, Rope Course, Jungle Safari, Night Jungle walk, ATV, Zipline, Paintball, gun shooting, Kidzone, indoor gaming, Bullock Cart ride, Horse riding, Camel ride, and Yoga.

MANDU FESTIVAL

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has announced the fourth edition of Mandu Festival with great elan and pride. This mega festival is witnessing a celebration of the historical heritage blended with the modern vibrancy of the culture of Mandu. The tent city will be available for booking until the end of March 2023.

This Festival will be an eclectic mix of adventure activities, cultural activities, performing arts, workshops, art installations, nature trails and walks, poetry reading, food, architecture, music, and much more. Offering something for everyone, the Mandu Festival will reverberate with an exuberant mix of activities weaving together traditional norms and the old-world charm.



The Festival promises to rewind the beautiful love story that unfurled between Baz Bahadur and Rani Roopmati through storytelling sessions under the magnificent Baobabs trees.



G20: MELANGE OF TECH, CULTURE & HOSPITALITY



With state-of-the-art architecture and immaculately created experiential zones, the MMCEC in Gandhinagar is all geared up to welcome global delegates for G20 Summit, says **Jaideep Anand**, VP & General Manager, The Leela Gandhinagar and Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Center managed by The Leela.

Lipla Negi

How is Mahatma Mandir Convention & Exhibition Centre adapting to new trends and technology to enhance the experience in the exhibitions and events space?

Mahatma Mandir Convention & Exhibition Centre (MMCEC) managed by The Leela is one of India's biggest icons, influenced by the philosophy and life of Mahatma Gandhi. The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts took over the management of the venue in 2019 and have since introduced their signature service standards and elevated the overall experience of the venue.

MMCEC is spanning over 34 acres near Ahmedabad, this expansive venue is perfect for hosting large-scale events, expos, and conventions. Equipped with every modern amenity imaginable, this Centre accommodates over 15,000 people in its air-conditioned halls and 6,000 in its theatre-style hall. Also available are four seminar rooms, three exhibition centres, seven conference halls, and modern meeting and conference rooms. It is a future-ready venue that is designed to accommodate changes and technological upgrades seamlessly. With a special focus on bandwidth requirements and connectivity features, a



JAIDEEP ANAND
VP & General Manager,
The Leela Gandhinagar and
Mahatma Mandir Convention
and Exhibition Center

maximum of one Gbps of streaming-ready infrastructure is available on site.

**THIS YEAR, WE ARE
EXCITED TO SEE
RANGE OF INDUSTRIES
WORKING TOGETHER
TO ORGANIZE LARGE
M!CE EVENTS**

Along with professionals from the sector, the team at The Leela continuously strives to engage with the right profile of events that help the city establish its presence on the global M!CE map. This event space is ideally complimented by



The Leela Gandhinagar that offers 318 luxurious rooms and suites.

What are the top priorities on your agenda for 2023?

At MMCEC, guest excellence and enhancing guest experiences continue to be our top priorities in 2023. We are also experimenting with multiple ways to work towards converting large events to become carbon neutral and have a minimal impact on the ecosystem. This year, we are excited to see a range of industries working together to organize large M!CE events. A lot of them are certain about hosting their events at MMCEC considering the array of advantages the venue and the location have to offer.

We are also excited to see the return of large-scale events where innovative teams are creating new and attractive food and beverage options.



What is the next big M!CE innovation for The Leela?

Our teams are currently working on the same, and we will certainly circle back when we have a formidable IP to showcase and certainly present it. While not in an organized manner, our teams at The Leela's MMCEC are closely working with event planners to adapt to a multi-modular event planning that ensures smooth event execution.

What sustainability initiatives are you putting in your M!CE strategy?

We are rapidly working towards eliminating single-use plastics. We are also encouraging our local vendors and suppliers who are embracing sustainable practices in event production and also in their post-event waste management processes. Our in-house event specialists also recommend environmentally sustainable themes and décor options to our clients. Moreover, at MMCEC, we have tried to think ahead and pre-provided five large LED walls, a proportionate stage, and audio-visual equipment that is state-of-the-art and appropriate for the venue thus reducing a large chunk of the transportation footprint each event carries. Even at the exhibition halls, the entry and exit gates are well designed and large enough to move in and move out set-ups with minimal breakdowns. In this way, we are making our

small contribution towards reducing the negative impact on the ecosystem. Our culinary teams are also introducing an unique dining option of Aujasya by The Leela which is a wellness offering designed as an authentic and holistic wellness journey.

How is the G20 Presidency, an opportunity for India to redefine its M!CE potential?

It is a great opportunity for India as we would once again be able to showcase the large diversity our country has to offer along with the state-of-the-art world-class infrastructures such as at MMCEC to the world and foster the image of our country in the M!CE spaces globally. With seamless handling of such large global events, we would be able to instil the much needed confidence in M!CE organizers about the safety and security of their participants. It is also a golden opportunity to showcase the world the untouched diversity that the nation has to offer in terms of flora and fauna which could be of utmost interest to these international travelers. With the G20 summits spread across the nation, it will also aid in enhancing the image of the nation that was restricted to a few cities such as Delhi, Mumbai, Agra, and Chennai to opening many potential cities across the country with world-class infrastructure and memorable experiences that they offer.

G20 IS GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO SHOWCASE WORLD UNTOUCHED DIVERSITY THAT NATION HAS TO OFFER

How is MMCEC preparing for the G20 Summit?

My team and I are very excited to showcase the true Indian experience with a touch of The Leela service standards at the G20 summit. We have been tirelessly working with various government bodies to immaculately plan every detail for the events we are scheduled to host. Our expert teams are suggesting options for setting up experiential zones, among others. Given that, it is the Year of Millets, our culinary team has planned to creatively incorporate Millets into meals that will satisfy global travelers. As always staying true to The Leela philosophy of *Athiti Devo Bhava*, we plan to showcase the quintessential Indian experience to the global delegates. We have not only planned their stay at the hotel but also are ensuring that every guest carries back with them fond memories of The Leela and Gujarat and is eager to visit us once again.



India's **BIG SHOT** TO PROVE ITS **G20** **M!CE METTLE**

With more than 200 meetings across 55 locations, India is geared up to put best forward to position itself as major M!CE destination during its year-long G20 Presidency.

Nisha Verma

It is a known fact that every country after its G20 Presidency could boost its tourist numbers and India might be part of that list, at least that is what the industry and the industry leaders are accepting. To make sure it happens, India will be showcasing all its tourism assets to delegates, expecting a boost in foreign arrivals after their visit. However, apart from leisure, India is betting big on

getting good M!CE business as it puts its best foot forward in terms of its M!CE facilities.

STAGE SET

G Kishan Reddy, Union Minister of Tourism, Culture and DoNER, claimed that the G20 offers the best opportunity for India to showcase its culture, history, and tourism potential and to position itself as a major tourist destination in the world.



G KISHAN REDDY
Union Minister of Tourism,
Culture and DoNER

G20 OFFERS THE BEST OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA TO SHOWCASE ITS CULTURE, HISTORY, AND TOURISM POTENTIAL

“We will host over 200 meetings across 55 cities from December 2022 to November 2023. These meetings are also proposed to be held in several states of Northeast, including Aizawl. Among the G20 member countries, China, Mexico, India, South Africa, and Indonesia are projected to expand their tourism industry post-COVID. With our Presidency, we definitely can stride ahead of these 4-5 countries to build the rightful place of India’s tourism industry in the global arena,” he claimed.

STATES’ ROLE IN G20 IMPORTANT

Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa, India, stressed on that all states should step up their game for G20. He claimed, “The Prime Minister Narendra Modi has

asked us to do G20 meetings in all the states and Union Territories. Important thing is that every single visitor during G20 who comes to India is not coming for G20. We must send him back as a brand ambassador of India. Every single tourist who comes during G20 must go back mentally rejuvenated as an Indian, he must be spiritually invigorated as an Indian and must go back physically elevated as an Indian. He must become the best brand ambassador of India. That experience is not about hardware, but it is about creating a unique experience around India’s culture, which can only be done by the state governments. They have their unique strengths. Every state should go back to its roots, create a unique state product, which is thoroughly Indian, and that is what every G20 visitor must experience.”

OPPORTUNITY BECKONS

Arvind Singh, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, has said that earlier, countries that took G20 Presidency, used it as an opportunity to project their nation to global community. “The expectations of the Indian hospitality space are rising rapidly, mirroring the growth in the quality of international tourism. The upcoming G20 meet in India will be a key factor in aiding recovery for the Indian hospitality industry. The government has identified 55 unique locations for key G20 meetings on tourism, finance, labour, among others. These sites are chosen for their availability of hotels, convention centres, air, road, and rail connectivity.”

He also shared that sustainability commitment needs to come in mainstream in tourism, especially with G20. “There are four tourism track meetings slated to be held during G20. It is the ideal time that India should take the leadership position in responsible tourism,” he said.

He added that at the time of G20, MOT is going to organize the Global M!CE Conference. Sharing the aim behind the Conference, Singh said, “The agenda will be to position India as an attractive M!CE destination. Today, India has very good M!CE facilities, air connectivity has improved, new convention centres and hotels are coming up. Thus, there are many new destinations where M!CE events can be held. With the conference, India will try to showcase the attractiveness of existing destinations as well as the upcoming ones. I am sure India is in a position to attract M!CE events much more than it did in the past.”

FACELIFT FOR INDIA’S M!CE

Rakesh Verma, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism,

claimed, “There are large number of countries and other participants at these meetings. These destinations will showcase that they have capability to organize these meetings. They have the necessary ecosystem to organize and they will also get notice that these cities have hosted these meetings. That is how the M!CE traffic to these destinations will be improved due to G20 meetings.”

On Global M!CE Conference, Verma said, “M!CE is one segment where India needs to do a lot. There is a lot of potential, but we have not got our market share. This global conference that we are planning with particular focus on G20 countries, will be putting the best foot forward, by telling what all is available in the country, in terms of M!CE infrastructure, M!CE specialties, and M!CE ecosystem. A lot of new things are



AMITABH KANT
G20 Sherpa

EVERY SINGLE TOURIST WHO COMES DURING G20 MUST GO BACK MENTALLY REJUVENATED AS AN INDIAN

happening and the MOT has recently unveiled a strategy for M!CE tourism and a National M!CE Board has been set up. It is an inter-ministerial board to help us coordinate policies, take decisions and help us support the M!CE. It is a very important conference and we look forward to it to position India as a serious M!CE destination.”

GLOBAL HUB OF M!CE

India must be the global hub of M!CE events, said **Naveen Kundu**, MD, EbixCash Travel & Holidays. “There is no doubt that we will be a global hub for M!CE and events one day. Currently, whatever the government is doing is reasonably good. With the kind of infrastructure development there are more conventions happening in India. Thus, there are 3Cs required—we need more convention centers, creativity, and connectivity. Above all, we need the conviction of the government to do that rapidly to



RAKESH VERMA
Additional Secretary,
Ministry of Tourism

**M!CE IS ONE
SEGMENT WHERE
INDIA NEEDS TO DO
A LOT. THERE IS A
LOT OF POTENTIAL**

take us to that objective fast. For that, we all are hopeful that they will do something or the other. However, I always see that the government has been talking a lot, but there is very little visible when it comes to ground. Hence, to make India a global hub of M!CE and events, they have to do a lot of work with the private sector and put things in place and in perspective. G20 Presidency is a major step, and I am glad this has happened. All Indians should be proud and glad that we have the G20 Presidency with India at this stage. These are proud moments, and we should rejoice them, enjoy them, and learn from them,” he added.

SYNCHRONIZING OF GOVT AND INDUSTRY

MP Bezbaruah, Secretary General, HAI, shared that they are expecting to see that the industry and the government are on the same page. “Events are taking place in the remote corners of the country such as Siliguri and Tripura. Northeast and certainly these places will get an exposure, which has not been there earlier. It is also perhaps we hope will help in improving the infrastructure in many of these areas and will encourage the states to create more destinations

along those places where things will happen. I believe that G20 should be seen not as a one-off event for 2023 but as a foundation for a long-term exposure of India and creating infrastructure of international expectations. Thus, G20 is going to be a big landmark for the tourism and hospitality industry of the country,” he said.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

Sharing that the yearlong event is a golden opportunity for the tourism and hospitality industry to shine on the global stage, **Jaish Chacko**, Secretary General, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), has urged the government to intensify promotional initiatives under Incredible India to attract as many foreign tourists as possible during the year and leave an indelible mark of India on the tourism map of the world.

“This is the time that the government should go full throttle to promote tourism under the Incredible India banner. The hospitality industry is raring to showcase its world-class standards and facilities to the world while celebrating the India’s rich and varied heritage and diversity,” he added.



ARVIND SINGH
Secretary,
Ministry of Tourism

**IT IS THE IDEAL
TIME THAT INDIA
SHOULD TAKE
THE LEADERSHIP
POSITION IN
RESPONSIBLE
TOURISM**

In anticipation of G20’s spill over benefits, FHRAI has requested the government to also reactivate the Champion Sector in Services Scheme to give a boost to the M!CE tourism in the country. A total



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of 3,263,219 Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) were recorded till August 2022, which is 47.2 per cent of the 6,914,987 FTAs in the corresponding period in 2019. With the G20 Summit taking place across India through the year, the hospitality industry hopes to bridge the 50 per cent deficit in tourist inflow in a lesser time span.

MORE INTERNATIONAL EVENTS NEEDED

Informing that the hospitality industry is working with the G20 organising committee, **Arun Kumar**, Market Vice President, North India, Nepal and Bhutan, Marriott, shared, "We have over 100 hotels in India, and we want business at the end of the day. The same goes for other operators. For us as a company, G20 is a prestigious event for our country. I think it is very nice



JAISION CHACKO
Secretary General,
FHRAI

FHRAI HAS REQUESTED TO REACTIVATE THE CHAMPION SECTOR IN SERVICES SCHEME TO GIVE A BOOST TO THE M!CE TOURISM

that instead of big cities, we have identified 55 destinations across India to have meetings and everybody will benefit from this. This is the first time that the government has taken so much interest in developing some of these. A lot of research has been done in all aspects. We need more international conferences to come into India and we want to have a very big convention centre in Delhi."

PPP HOLDS KEY

Valmiki Harikishan, MD, Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions, shared that even Telangana has got two G20 events in its kitty. "We are equally excited to support the MOT, because government alone cannot do everything. They need the stakeholders, particularly tourism industry, which will always add value and laurels to it making the G20 events pan India more successful. My expectation is that in every state, public and private partnership should happen to make these G20 events more successful. Value-addition can be given to experiential projects, where tourism only add experience, local authenticity, right from local cuisine tasting,



NAVEEN KUNDU
MD,
EbixCash Travel & Holidays

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT WE WILL BE A GLOBAL HUB FOR M!CE AND EVENTS ONE DAY

or local cities showcasing our monuments. This will offer the much-needed break in between the meetings and tourism can add value to it. The delegates can also rejuvenate with wellness tourism, which is doing very well in India. I am sure tourism is the key to make



ARUN KUMAR
Market Vice President,
North India, Nepal and Bhutan,
Marriott

WE NEED MORE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES IN INDIA AND WE WANT TO HAVE A VERY BIG CONVENTION CENTRE IN DELHI

G20 successful, and I request the government to please involve us. We are ready to work and make India proud with the G20 and we are looking forward for the same," he said.



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No copyright music license for weddings in Rajasthan

Jaipur Police's circular stating that licenses to avoid violating Copyright Act will not be needed by hotels or wedding venues for playing music brings huge relief for Rajasthan's wedding industry.

Nisha Verma

A statement from Jaipur Police has come in response to many local agencies asking for money from the organisers and venues to avoid the infringement of Copyright Act, 1957, claiming that playing songs of any artist/media company would be considered as violation without their consent. Many facilities had to secure a license in advance to avoid this harassment at the time of the event.

The circular clearly states that under Section 52 (1) (ZA) of Copyright Act 1957, "The performance of a literary, dramatic, or musical work or the communication to the public of such work or of sound recording during any bonafide religious ceremony or an official ceremony held by government or local authority shall not amount to copyright infringement. Therefore, no license is required in furtherance of the same."

COPYRIGHT LAW MISINTERPRETED

The news came with a wave of appreciation for Rajasthan Police from across the industry, including



MP BEZBARUAH
Secretary General,
Hotel Association of India

hotels and wedding planners. MP Bezbaruah, Secretary General, Hotel Association of India, said that they welcome the statement by Rajasthan Police. "We have always maintained that playing music at social functions should not come under Copyright infringement, and the way it was interpreted by certain organizations, is not correct. We have always contested this case, and now this circular has come as a relief for all of us," he claimed.

GUEST-FRIENDLY MOVE

Jaion Chacko, Secretary General, FHRAI said,



JAION CHACKO
Secretary General,
FHRAI

"Section 52 (1) (ZA) of the Copyright Act 1957 provides an exemption on payment of royalty or licence fees for any bonafide religious functions including marriage processions and other social festivities associated with a marriage. Yet, some copyright license agencies intimidate hotels and patrons to bully them into paying for licences. FHRAI has been campaigning to create awareness about this law and has been reaching out to law enforcement agencies across the country to make them aware of the illegal activities of such agencies."



RAJEEV JAIN
Founder & MD,
Rashi Entertainment

DEMAND FOR PAN-INDIA LAW

Lauding the move, Rajeev Jain, Founder & MD, Rashi Entertainment, has said that this is a lawful thing that Jaipur Police has done. "Organizations such as PPL and NOVEX were extracting money like anything under this guise. It is a law that the Police has now endorsed. It is a great move by Jaipur Police, as they have done what nobody could do, because they did not have the understanding Under Section 52, it is very clear that these licenses are not required for using music in such events," he added.



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Setting new standards

Sustainability in hospitality industry is going forward with hotels across globe adopting sustainable practices to mitigate climate change, outlines **Inge Huijbrechts**, Global SVP, Sustainability, Security and Corporate Communications, Radisson Hotel Group.

The world has sprung back into action following COVID, with a renewed enthusiasm and determination to make up for the lost time. The travel and tourism industry, as one of the most important industries to lead the rebound wave, has embraced new and emerging trends due to massive shift in consumer needs over the past few years.

INCREASE IN SUSTAINABLE DEMAND

The concept of travel has evolved as the world recognizes the importance of conservation and travelers are now looking for authentic, mindful experiences that benefit the earth. According to Expedia's 2022 survey, 90 per cent of travelers worldwide prefer to see sustainable options when

booking a trip. This tendency was even stronger in APAC, where 95 per cent of travelers expressed interest in sustainable travel options.

MITIGATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The last seven years have been the warmest on record and the number of natural disasters has doubled in the last 30

**TRAVELERS,
ESPECIALLY GEN Z,
WILL AVOID YOUR
BRAND IF YOU DO
NOT PRIORITIZE
ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY**

years, giving rise to increased physical and geopolitical risk. Climate change and global warming rates are only rising.

As global warming accelerates, tipping points in the climate system are inevitable. As a result, failing to act to limit global warming and mitigate the effects of climate change can have catastrophic repercussions.

Mitigation means going beyond just preparing for the impact of climate change to also being part of a permanent solution. However, people not familiar with sustainability, often ask: what is the cost of sustainability? Asking for the cost of sustainability is the wrong approach—the cost of inaction is what we will be dealing with at large if this continues.

CONTINUOUS ACTIONS FORGING INNOVATIONS

While the tourism industry was inclined towards sustainability even before COVID, efforts have only intensified in recent times. Sustainability has allowed businesses the chance and freedom to bring in innovations and disruptions.

For hotel owners and investors, unsustainable assets are also a huge risk of depreciation in value as increasing numbers of investors are realizing that properties compliant with their ESG targets add value to their credibility and extend the lifecycle of their assets.

Even consumers and employees consider sustainability to be an important characteristic when associating with a

brand. Travelers, especially Gen Z, will avoid your brand if you do not prioritize environmental sustainability. This is true for nearly all global markets, but even more prominent in India.

Employees also only want to work for companies with a purpose. In the current labor market, companies that are not engaged in environmental and social sustainability will find it even harder to attract and retain talent.

TOWARDS NET ZERO ATTAINMENT

At Radisson Hotel Group, we are committed to being net zero by 2050 and have published validated science-based targets. We have also defined a renewable energy strategy for 25 key markets. Now in times of rising utility costs, any action on efficient resource use has an even better return on investment.

For businesses, the move to net zero requires action on several focus areas:

- An increased use of renewable energy produced onsite or offsite or purchased from providers.
- Green buildings having benchmarks such as LEED, BREEAM, EDGE, or similar guidelines.
- Operational efficiency, achieved by smart habits in hotel operations.

Additionally, communication with guests requires clarity, consistency, and continuous progress which is why the World Travel & Tourism Council, together with Radisson Hotel Group,

70 hotel companies, HAI, and several destinations launched Hotel Sustainability Basics (HSB) a solid, clear, industry standard for hotel sustainability. HSB contains 12 criteria focused on efficient resource use, planet, and people with progress built into the framework.

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL MAKING HEADWAY

Sustainable actions require an evaluation and deliberate planning. While approaches can vary, the duty falls squarely on all stakeholders' shoulders. Sustainable travel is more than a 21st-century phrase, with consumers seeking actual actions from businesses that illustrate their commitment. With shifting demand patterns, we must work together to provide positive, measurable initiatives toward



INGE HUIJBRECHTS
Global SVP, Sustainability, Security
& Corporate Communications,
Radisson Hotel Group

EVEN CONSUMERS AND EMPLOYEES CONSIDER SUSTAINABILITY TO BE AN IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC WHEN ASSOCIATING WITH BRAND

net zero, biodiversity conservation, and an equitable world. The more we as an industry push for responsible travel, the clearer the case for sustainability becomes, and the greater the impact we create. The maximum positive impact on sustainability can only be achieved if we tackle challenges collectively and the tourism industry is well-poised to take the lead in initiating this cycle.





M!CE set for buoyant 2023

G20 events together with robust infra growth will push M!CE tourism in India to newer heights in 2023, opines **Nandivardhan Jain**, CEO, NOESIS Capital Advisors.

After a difficult 2020 and 2021, the year 2022 showed positive signs for the hotel industry. Continued demand for domestic leisure destinations, rise in demand among the top 20 business cities in the second half of 2022 and strong demand for social and wedding events in Tier II,

III, and IV cities were the real gamechangers of the Indian hospitality industry in 2022. This demand will continue to rise in 2023 as well due to strong infrastructure development work across India starting from airports, roads, and railways, which will add fresh demand. The G20 summit in India encompassing 200 events

across 50 cities in the next 12 months is further icing on the cake for the hospitality industry. These events will generate 100,000 direct room nights and 200,000 indirect room nights requirement in 2023. In addition to this, these 50 cities have an opportunity to showcase themselves on a global platform.

DOMESTIC LEISURE TRAVELERS FUELLED UP THE LEISURE MARKET WITH HIGH DEMAND DUE TO UNCERTAINTY IN 2020 AND 2021



Goa's second airport development is a classic example of infrastructure development correlated with the growth of the hotel, hospitality, and travel industry. The existing Dabolim Airport, being a naval airport, has limited slots for civilian flights, due to which Goa's air connectivity growth was disrupted for the last few years. With the newly built Mopa Airport, air connectivity with new domestic and international destinations will improve substantially this year. One new inbound flight introduction to Mopa Airport will generate additional demand for 70,000 room nights annually.

In FY 23-24, hotels in Goa will witness a rise in average daily rate and occupancy by 10 to 12 per cent due to enhanced air connectivity.

One more such example of hospitality investment correlated with infrastructure development is the commencement of construction work for the Mumbai- Ahmedabad bullet train corridor. A few months back when bullet train development work commenced in Gujarat, it immediately gathered the attention of domestic and foreign investors for hotel acquisitions around bullet train station terminals in cities such as Surat, Vadodara, and Ahmedabad.

Domestic leisure travelers fuelled up the leisure market with high demand due to uncertainty and restrictions in 2020 and 2021. In 2022 also, leisure travelers preferred to plan travel closer to the date and domestic travel was preferred to avoid uncertainty. In the domestic experiential leisure market, offbeat locations, home/villa stay,

farm stay, staycation, and coastal destinations are the ones, which reported high demand. This market was largely driven by the young domestic travelers.

Based on the data of 150 villa owners across India, collected by the NOESIS research team, the reasons for strong demand for villas/ homestays at rural and offbeat destinations were value for money, privacy, among others. The average return on investment (ROI), these villa owners are making, is within the bracket of 6 per cent to 10 per cent on the Capex incurred by them on today's valuation. In a few cases, ROI is as high as 14 per cent as well. Due to limited regulatory approvals and low Capex requirements in comparison to traditional resort/hotel developments we foresee strong supply adding up. Land cost is quite low in offbeat locations, which makes these projects quite profitable for the investor.

We foresee in 2023 all the hospitality and lodging formats at the macro level



NANDIVARDHAN JAIN
CEO, NOESIS Capital Advisors

**G20 EVENTS
WILL GENERATE
100,000 DIRECT
ROOM NIGHTS AND
200,000 INDIRECT
ROOM NIGHTS
REQUIREMENT
IN 2023**

will break all their records of ADRs, occupancy, revenues, profitability, new project announcement, and fundraising. It is time to be prepared for the golden year.



Big leap for sports tourism



With the hosting of Hockey World Cup for the second consecutive time, Odisha's M!CE tourism got massive boost with foreign tourists flocking to witness grand festival of Hockey.

MT Bureau

Over the past few years, Odisha, under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, has undertaken several sports initiatives to transform itself into a preferred global sports destination. From hosting marquee events to developing world-class infrastructure to strengthening sports grassroots programs, Odisha has been at the forefront of supporting all forms of sports. It is also the hub of High Performance Centres. The state has contributed massively to the development of sports is a prime example of sports tourism.

Hockey is deeply connected to Odisha's rich culture. It has produced champions such as Dilip Tirkey, Pramod Tirkey,

Lazarus Barla, Jyoti Sunita Kullu, Sunita Lakra, Amit Rohidas, Deep Grace Ekka, Namita Toppo, among others. CM Patnaik himself was the goalkeeper for his school team, hence he has a deep emotional connect with the sport. Hockey is integral to the state and attracts audience in thousands.

Odisha has been one of the pivotal reasons behind Indian Hockey's success in the recent years. The Odisha government became an official partner of Hockey India in 2018, and since then Indian Hockey teams have significantly improved. Over the years, Odisha has hosted various marquee tournaments such as Odisha Hockey Men's World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018, FIH Men's Series Finals 2019, Olympic Hockey

FIH MEN'S HOCKEY WORLD CUP 2023 HAS RECEIVED OVERWHELMING RESPONSE FROM HOCKEY FOLLOWERS WORLDWIDE

Qualifiers 2019, FIH Odisha Hockey Men's Junior World Cup Bhubaneswar 2021, FIH Hockey Pro League 2020, 2021-22 and 2022-23.

The FIH Odisha Men's Hockey World Cup Bhubaneswar 2018 was hosted with grandeur at

the state-of-the-art Kalinga Hockey Stadium, which was refurbished with two new galleries, increasing the capacity to 15,000 seats. It received an overwhelming response from Hockey followers worldwide. It attracted massive tourists from India as well as around the world. The state received around 2.22 million domestic tourists and an average 15,000 foreign tourists during the 2018 World Cup phase.

This 15th edition of the World Cup has been held in the Sundergarh district, where a brand-new Birsamunda Hockey Stadium has been built. The premises of the stadium has athletes' accommodation, Hockey Practice Centre, Gym, Swimming Pool, and provision for fan-park and various other event-related activities.



Gala show

Marvel Stadium, Melbourne will play host to the AIME Welcome Event on 13 February 2023. The Stadium is set to enthrall the guests with joyful food and entertainment evening.

MT Bureau

The Asia Pacific Incentives and Meeting Event (AIME) is returning to the Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre (MCEC) from 13–15 February 2023. AIME 2023 will be celebrating the show's extraordinary 30-year legacy with new features, events, and programming. Adding more glamour and sparkle to this grand celebration, Marvel Stadium will now play host to the AIME Welcome Event on 13 February 2023 with a ground-breaking evening of food and entertainment. Produced by Peter Jones Special Events, the evening has been designed to bring the business events industry together in celebration of AIME's 30-year milestone.

Talking about the venue, Silke Calder, Event Director, AIME shared, "AIME, MCB, PJSE, and Marvel Stadium have worked tirelessly to create a 30th-anniversary extravaganza and we are delighted to make the eagerly



SILKE CALDER
Event Director, AIME

**AIME, MCB,
PJSE, AND
MARVEL STADIUM
HAVE WORKED
TIRELESSLY TO
CREATE A 30TH-
ANNIVERSARY
EXTRAVAGANZA**

awaited venue announcement ahead of time. The business and events industry should take a moment for themselves

to appreciate the hard work it has taken to get us to where we are today."

State-of-the-art pearl theming celebrating 30 years will be mirrored in a directional menu curated by Victorian producers, Delaware North, featuring delights such as Akoya Pearl oysters, Gippsland beef empanadas, and crispy pork belly baos. Scott Fitzgerald, Head, Marvel Stadium Commercial, is thrilled to welcome the business and events industry to Melbourne and showcase Marvel Stadium's first-class hospitality. "As the flagship trade show for the business and events industry, and a key contributor to the health of our business tourism economy, AIME is one of the most important events of the year. Marvel Stadium and our facilities connect business and customers together and the soon-to-be-completed \$250 million redevelopment, will amplify our ability to bring to life global events such as AIME, and help deliver the

best industry event for the Asia Pacific region."

Julia Swanson, Chief Executive Officer, said, "As owners of AIME, we are delighted to be co-hosting the 2023 Welcome Event and to celebrate close to a third of a century of bringing the business events industry together, building connections and sharing knowledge at AIME, right here in Australia's events capital, Melbourne. AIME is now the foremost business events trade show in the Asia-Pacific region. This is a significant testament to the longevity and legacy of the show and its importance to the global business events industry."

This year, the AIME show floor includes new features such as The Accor Hosted Buyers Lounge, a new Tech area, and a Wellness Café where visitors can enjoy some pampering. A special anniversary lanyard featuring First Nations' artwork will be adding the touches of Australia for the participants and visitors.



‘Enormous surge in visa demand post-COVID’

Restarting operations for VFS Global post-COVID was not easy as the company had to deal with visa floodgates in India to cater to the increased demand.

Hazel Jain

When COVID hit, VFS Global was caught off-guard as the outbound travel ceased completely. It did not have COVID insurance and it had to quickly adapt to the situation. **Prabuddha Sen**, COO, South Asia, VFS Global, said, “We looked at how to control costs, to generate revenue from whichever stream was open at that time. As we crossed over COVID tide, the restart for India was quite a challenge. Suddenly, in March 2021 when the floodgates were opened, the demand that we saw in India was higher than what any of us or our client governments anticipated. While VFS Global could ramp up quickly to cater to this sudden demand, we did face challenges in terms of training and development.”

But the bigger problem, he added, was that the demand far outweighed the supply. “We only take care of the administrative task. The diplomatic community had left India during COVID. So, there was a dearth of personnel handling the visa applications. What we also saw was unfortunately visa shopping.



PRABUDDHA SEN
COO, South Asia, VFS Global

Travelers were running around trying to figure how and where they could get an appointment easily. Someone who was meant to travel to country A was applying for country B for visa. Documentation was towards one country, which was not really justified. So, people with good travel history were also not getting visas because of poor quality of documentation. These were some of the challenges that we faced,” he said.

DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY READY NOW

The good news is that the diplomatic community is now strongly geared up, Sen explained. “Due to the current geopolitical situation, out of the three large markets, only

one is thriving and people are turning towards India to ramp up their tourist and workforce numbers into 2023. Trust me, when I say this—the diplomatic community present in India have their eyes and ears on the ground. They were fully aware of what was going on and the complexities of the situation that erupted after the restart in March. We engaged with them deeply and continuously. They have been very accommodating in terms of attending to specific requirements,” he affirmed.

VFS Global call centres got 100 calls multiplied by four times during the peak. But there is a scientific limit to how much you can ramp up. “Despite the chaos that prevailed, we were easily handling between 22,000 to 25,000 applications per day across India. The seasonality of travel shifted—people who could not manage to travel during June-July have traveled even leading up to September-December and this is bound to continue into 2023 as well,” Sen added.

“The number of client governments and diplomatic missions have put down statements of intending to open

**WE WERE EASILY
HANDLING
BETWEEN 22,000
TO 25,000
APPLICATIONS PER
DAY ACROSS INDIA**

the floodgates as far as India is concerned. So, the serious capping issues that we saw last year with the appointments to a great extent should be resolved. That should take care of a lot of demand that will emanate from India. Number two is we do see the seriousness because economically the impact that the geopolitical situation of the West has caused is also being a hindrance, for many a government to utilize the economic flow from wherever it is possible is very high on their minds. They all are also adding staff to cater to this increased demand,” Sen revealed.

VFS Global on its behalf is also increasing its footprint and reaching out to Tier II and III cities with Visa at Your Doorstep product.



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New age traveler leaping ahead

New breed of travelers longing for exemplary experiences post-COVID are pushing companies to create extensive range of experiential products to cater to their needs and preferences.

Hazel Jain

The guest journey has changed post-COVID and the industry needs to work hard to meet the needs of the new breed of travelers. With a shift in travel trends from when to how, brands will have to adapt to the needs, preferences, and expectations of this new breed of traveler, and find ways to reach and excite them to go on trips.

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head, MEISEA, South African Tourism, said COVID taught a great deal, including the demand for sustainable tourism. "It also allowed us the space to bring in disruptions, innovations, adapt sustainable alternatives in the industry, while also using technology to bring about responsible, tangible business solutions and substitutions. We are

proud to say that travelers are more conscious of where they spend their money, what kind of accommodation they choose, where they dine, and how they travel locally. We have enhanced efforts to make our itineraries, properties, and transport facilities more sustainable. We are also actively showcasing our sustainable product offerings and ecotourism experiences such as cycling tours, nature safaris, conservation projects, and rural experiences," she added.

Having understood the Indian traveler well over the past few years, Nkani further added, "Travelers are also looking to chase their passions! They are traveling for food, long self-drives, marathons, swimming and cycling tournaments, theatre, culture,

and music festivals and more. There is a sense of purpose, ownership, and fulfilment among the travelers."

Airlines are not too far behind. **Sakari Romu**, General Manager (India), Finnair, said his airlines wants to introduce its Indian customers to the experiences that Finland has to offer. "Many of our customers have already visited Rovaniemi in Lapland, met Santa Claus, and the lucky ones have even seen the Northern Lights. Also, the Helsinki region is familiar to many of our business travelers and those interested in design and architecture. However, our Lake district and the Finnish Archipelago are still unique and unexplored territories to many Indians. In addition to these destinations, we would absolutely recommend a tour in the

Baltics or in the Nordics. The distances between the Baltic or Nordic capitals are actually very short. From Helsinki you can fly to Tallin in Estonia in 30 minutes or to Stockholm in Sweden in 45 minutes. If it is a unique experience, you are after, flying to Helsinki for two days, followed by a tour of Sweden and Norway would be our recommendation of experiencing the Nordic nature and culture," he shared.

IndiGo has introduced a host of technological initiatives such as RFID tech and electronic documentation to cater to the tech savvy traveler.

The traditional ideas of traveling are being adjusted all the time, according to Virgin Atlantic. In an email statement, the airlines shared, "The internet is a big part of this, with travelers able to

curate their own travel unique experiences by reading blogs and viewing content through social media. There is so much information available which gives people more confidence to travel on their own and then to meet people at their destination. One of the main customer segments which we focus on at Virgin is the experience embracers, those who are looking for a premium travel experience which enhances their quality of life. This year, we launched direct flights from London to Austin, Texas, and are seeing strong demand from India, with travelers loving the city's food, arts, and music culture."

LONGER TRIPS IMPLY MORE SPLURGE

Customers of Thomas Cook (India) are planning longer trips and showing interest in



RAJEEV KALE
President & Country Head, Holidays,
MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)

HAVING UNSPENT TRAVEL BUDGETS, TRAVELERS HAVE BEEN DISPLAYING STRONG APPETITE FOR LUXURY TRAVEL



DANIEL D'SOUZA
President & Country Head,
Holidays, SOTC Travel

CUSTOMERS ARE SEEKING DRIVE-CATIONS AND STAYCATIONS TO NEARBY OFFBEAT DRIVABLE DESTINATIONS



HUSSAIN PATEL
Director,
Tripjack

NOWADAYS, MANY TRAVELERS ARE LOOKING TO EXPLORE AND HAVE REAL AND ONE-OF-A-KIND EXPERIENCES

WHAT IS TRENDING

- A research by Google on APAC's four biggest travel markets—Australia, India, Indonesia, and Japan—reveals there is 3X increase in intent to travel internationally among travelers.
- 61 per cent of the travelers indicated a preference for international travel to future leisure vacations.
- Majority intend to travel for longer periods; plan to visit one or two nations per trip.
- Google also saw a 17 per cent increase in the average booking time.

exploring offbeat destinations, said **Rajeev Kale**, President & Country Head, Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India). "Outdoor activities such as hiking, snorkeling and biking trips to destinations as varied as Kashmir, Himachal, Leh-Ladakh, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Andaman and South India have become popular across families, friends, and millennials. Our demand trends indicate increasing preference for eclectic stays and unique accommodations such as heritage bungalows, havelis/

palaces, forts, in the heart of a desert or bamboo grove, tree houses or tea estates/coffee plantations. Having unspent travel budgets, travelers have been displaying strong appetite for luxury travel—for that once in a lifetime experience," he said.

Another tour operator echoes similar thoughts. **Daniel D'Souza**, President & Country Head, Holidays, SOTC Travel, said his customers want to open their minds to unique experiences that inspire and enrich them. "This mainly comprises

unusual destinations away from the mainstream, offbeat and rugged holidays, and in-depth exploration of domestic locales. Millennials and young professionals are keen to explore offbeat experiences and outdoor and adventure activities, hence we see them book itineraries that involve a host of activities right from trekking, paragliding, skiing, white river rafting, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, sea karting and biking trips. Customers are also seeking drive-cations and staycations to nearby offbeat drivable destinations to get away from the city," he added.

ENTICING NEW AGE TRAVELER

It is true that COVID has led to a shift in the way people travel, said **Hussain Patel**, Director, Tripjack. "Nowadays, many travelers are looking to explore and have real and one-of-a-kind

experiences. COVID has given people the opportunity to reassess their priorities and focus on things that truly matter to them. There is a greater appreciation for local cultures and communities by the travelers. Apart from our strong offerings in flights and hotels, we have curated holiday packages for international destinations such as Bali, Vietnam, Turkey, Baku, Sri Lanka, and the domestic destinations such as Himachal, Andaman, Kashmir, and Kerala. We look forward to adding more unique holiday experiences. Cruise experiences is another category we are excited about," he said.

Iris Reps India is currently promoting a new age hotel for the new age traveler. "The 25 hours Hotels One Central in Dubai is adventurous, cheeky, innovative, unique, a little crazy and locally connected," said **Alefiya Singh**, Director, Iris Reps India.

2022: Bright year for Indian wedding industry

Demand for destination and resort weddings witnessed some traction, while international destination weddings also gained momentum in 2022, reveals WeddingWire India's yearly report.

MT Bureau

WeddingWire India's yearly report has revealed some interesting weddings trends that the year 2022 witnessed. The report disclosed that Delhi hosted the greatest number of weddings surpassing Mumbai. It also showed that 20 per cent couples chose Sunday for their weddings followed by 19.7 per cent couples choosing Friday for the weddings.

Talking about 2022 trends and insights, Anam Zubair, Head, Marketing, WeddingWire India, said, "2022 was the year the wedding industry had been waiting for, especially as the last two years were uncertain and slightly limiting for the industry due to COVID. This year, we witnessed how the priority list changed for couples and their families. More than the guest list, it was the curated experience that they were spending most time and efforts on. However, it was interesting to note that this

barely made a difference in the earmarked budget. We are excited to see what 2023 holds for the wedding industry considering Gen-Z is entering the wedding cycle."

HIGHEST IN-DEMAND CATEGORIES

The report revealed that venue vendors were the most in-demand with 29 per cent of bookings being made for the category, followed by wedding photographers and make-up artists at 11 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively. In terms of venues, banquet halls with 56 per cent demand emerged as a winner with no close competitors. Interestingly, the demand for resort and destination weddings increased.

DESTINATIONS IN VOGUE

According to the report, as the COVID restrictions lifted up, international destination weddings with a limited guest list

REPORT DISCLOSED THAT DELHI HOSTED GREATEST NUMBER OF WEDDINGS SURPASSING MUMBAI

and curated experiences became fashionable again. The top three overseas locations with maximum traction in 2022 were Singapore, Abu Dhabi, and New York. On the other hand, in terms of destinations in India, Udaipur and Goa led the bandwagon, followed by Jaipur.

Interestingly, Delhi after a year again topped the list of the top three cities that hosted the maximum number of weddings. It was followed by Bengaluru and Mumbai for the 2nd time in a

row. On the other hand, Tripura, Sikkim, and Imphal recorded the least number of weddings. The report also revealed—Lucknow, Jaipur, and Gurgaon are the top three Tier II cities in terms of weddings.

The report revealed that December (21.5 per cent) witnessed the maximum number of weddings followed by Feb (15.49 per cent). In fact, 2 December 2022 (Friday), was the most popular date for weddings last year. Weekend weddings were another trend that still ranked high on the popularity chart. It also showed that the average wedding expenditure in 2022 increased by 14.66 per cent to 28 lakhs, up from 21 lakhs in 2021.

It also divulged that the guest-size curation was a mixed bag with some couples and families wanting to keep it intimate with less than 100 guests (60.21 per cent), while others hosted a much larger crowd of more than 300 guests (13 per cent).



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MELBOURNE

Talk of town

Fortune Hotels recently organized a networking event to celebrate its success in respect of expansion of its leisure business, especially in Tier II & III cities.



Concord hosts awe-inspiring evening

Cocktail and dinner bash was recently organized by Concord Exotic Voyages to honor its clients, referrals and partners at The Connaught, New Delhi.



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MOVEMENTS



Anjali Yadav
Assistant Manager,
Marketing & Communication
The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat

Anjali Yadav started her career as a Public Relations intern, working in different verticals such as education, legal advisory, and technology. She will be responsible for developing and implementing the overall marketing and PR strategies, supervising, and elevating digital platforms and creating a sound network for The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat as Assistant Manager, Marketing & Communication. Yadav graduated from Amity University with a Bachelor of Journalism and Mass Communication. She then went on to pursue a Postgraduate Diploma in Corporate Communication and Event Management.



Biswajit Chakraborty
Cluster General Manager
The Leela Kovalam

Biswajit Chakraborty has over 35 years of experience across Indian hotel brands such as The Oberoi Hotels, Taj Hotels, and Accor Hotel Group. Having held leadership roles in various capacities, including Hotel Operations, Sales and Marketing and Pre-Openings, he brings with him a wealth of experience. Prior to joining The Leela Kovalam and The Leela Ashtamudi as Cluster General Manager, Chakraborty was with Hotelivate as Managing Director, South India. Chakraborty holds a master's degree in commerce from Bangalore University and a Diploma in Hospitality General Management from Cornell University.



Kkeyur Sangani
Crowne Meeting Director
Crowne Plaza Greater Noida

Kkeyur Sangani, a seasoned professional with extensive experience has been appointed as the Crowne Meeting Director at Crowne Plaza Greater Noida. He is a result-oriented and passionate professional with a wealth of experience in enhancing sales, marketing, and revenue streams. He has a deep understanding of the market and has worked with renowned brands, his professional portfolio, includes JW Marriott, Jin Jiang International Hotel, InterContinental Hotels Group, PVR Cinemas, among others. His last assignment was as a General Manager of Operations at PVR Limited, Mumbai.



Namit Vijh
Cluster General Manager
Radisson Hotels Group

With a degree in Hospitality Management from IHM Chandigarh, Namit Vijh has an experience of more than 15 years with hotel brands such as The Oberoi Group, The Imperial, Hyatt Hotels, The Leela Palace Hotels Resorts and Marriott International. As Cluster General Manager, Rajasthan and Agra, Radisson Hotels Group, he will be responsible for a bigger portfolio comprising of Radisson Blu Jaipur, Radisson Jodhpur, Radisson Nathdwara, Radisson Udaipur, Radisson Agra, and Country Inn & Suites by Radisson Kota in addition to Radisson Gurugram Udyog Vihar.



Nitin Gohri
Director, Sales
The Westin Goa

As Director, Sales, The Westin Goa, Nitin Gohri will be leading and managing strategic sales, developing MICE strategies, and expanding the wedding portfolio for The Westin Goa. Nitin began his career with the Regional Sales Team in Delhi before moving to the Taj Palace in New Delhi, where he worked on several convention segments. Nitin's last assignment was with Taj Lands' End, Mumbai as the Director, Catering Sales, where he played an instrumental role in transforming the hotel's positioning and delivering remarkable commercial excellence for the property.



Rohit Chhokar
Director, Sales & Marketing
The Westin Rishikesh
Resort & Spa

Rohit Chhokar has held key positions across hospitality brands, including Marriott International, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, JHM Interstate Hotels & Resorts, and Wyndham Hotels & Resorts. As Director, Sales & Marketing, The Westin Rishikesh Resort & Spa, Chhokar will be instrumental in implementing strategies to enhance the brand reputation by driving innovative campaigns. He will spearhead business plans to deliver profitability and continue the successful growth trajectory for the hotel brand. Rohit has an analytical and passionate approach to marketing, sales, and revenue management.



Shanmugavel Thangavel
Learning & Development Manager
Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park

Shanmugavel Thangavel brings with him an industry experience of 14 years across brands such as Starwood hotels, The Leela Hotels, ITC Hotels, Marriott Hotels & Resorts, Hilton Hotels and Resorts. As Learning and Development Manager, Crowne Plaza Chennai Adyar Park, he will be responsible for the recruitment of the team, managing payroll, ensuring ethical business practices, statutory compliances, associate well-being, learning and development and team engagement. Thangavel is an expert in connecting employee engagement and setting the foundation for great people and work culture.



Farhan Hamidani
Director, Sales & Marketing
The Westin Goa

A seasoned manager, Farhan Hamidani has 13 plus years of experience in the hospitality industry and has worked with hotel chains such as Hyatt and Accor. He joins The Westin Goa as Director, Sales and Marketing. Hamidani will be leading a country wide sales team and strategically directing the marketing roadmap for The Westin Goa. In addition, he would also be responsible for collaborating with key stakeholders and business partners to define the competitive strategy in line with the hotel's charted intent.



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