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TAAI's annual convention expected to revive tourism sector in Kashmir

The tourism and hospitality sector of Jammu and Kashmir received a major boost as the valley recently hosted the 64th annual convention of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) - a major trade event being held in the state after more than 30 years.



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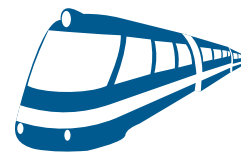
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Dear Reader,

The tourism department of Jammu and Kashmir is looking to revive the tourism and hospitality sector in the state that has been on decline because of negative media coverage. There is anger among locals as well as bureaucrats and politicians who blame that national media is painting the picture of the valley as a place of battle. Though I don't completely agree to this perspective but said so media needs to be balanced in its approach. Positive stories in Kashmir need to be highlighted as well.

Kashmir has been a very popular tourist destination. In the good old

days many European travellers used to visit this heavenly abode. However, years of insurgency has killed the tourism sector here. Even the travel trade seems to have failed the Kashmiris. Why there has been no association convention in Kashmir in the last three decades? Finally, an Indian trade association realized that they need to support their counterparts in the valley.

As part of its endeavours to broadcast the message that the valley remains safe for tourism, the state tourism department hosted the 64th annual convention of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) - a major trade event being held in the state after a gap of 31 years.

This convention witnessed participation from Indian agents and is expected to increase tourist arrivals in the state multifold and dispel the myth that the destination is unsafe for tourists. According to the government's economic survey report, 73 lakh tourists visited the state in 2017, compared to 84 lakh in 2016 and 92 lakh in 2015.

The tourism department is looking to work closely with film production houses to attract more movie shootings in the state. Even the Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti visited several Indian states last year along with industry's stakeholders and held meetings with tour operators, agents and movie stars.

The tourism department is continuing to participate in domestic as well as international tourism marts and roadshows. It is organizing events and festivals like Kargil Marathon, Tosa Maidan Festival and Gurez Festival to attract tourists.

The international tourist arrivals in Kashmir at present are minimal though there is an increase in demand from markets like Middle East, South East Asia and Bangladesh. However, the travel advisories issued by markets like the US and Europe is the main challenge to attract tourist arrivals from these key source inbound markets for India. Our cover story of this month focuses on the TAAI Convention. Rest find inside various news and features that we hope will be of your interest.

Happy Reading!

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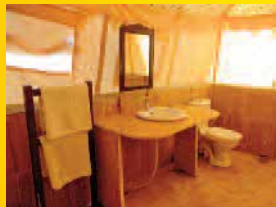
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Immerse yourself in natural hot springs in New Zealand

India's ministry of tourism comes up with integrated marketing plan

India's ministry of tourism has come up with an integrated marketing plan for financial year 2018-2019. As per its integrated marketing plan whatever campaign is being run by the ministry's overseas offices will be in sync with the centralized campaign.

Vijay Arora



Rashmi Verma

The ministry of tourism is expected to shortly complete a process that will see it trimming down its overall number of overseas offices from earlier 14 to eight. The ministry is now adopting a hub and spook model for its overseas operations.

"We are adopting a hub and spook model wherein a hub will overlook at the operation in the region. We will have eight offices in our key and emerging markets. These offices will be supported by our marketing representatives and PR agencies. We in conjunction with Indian missions abroad are in the process of appointing marketing representatives and PR offices," shared Rashmi Verma, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, India.

The National Institution for Transforming India, also called NITI Aayog in its 3-year action agenda for 2017-20 had asked India's ministry of tourism to focus on digital marketing and social media tools for efficient marketing results and conduct cost benefit analysis of its overseas offices. NITI Aayog is the premier policy 'Think Tank' of the Government of India, providing both directional and policy inputs.

The restructuring of overseas offices is also an important part of India's ministry of tourism's upcoming integrated marketing plan for financial year 2018-2019.

"As per our integrated marketing plan whatever campaign is being run by our overseas offices that will be in sync with our centralized campaign. So, whatever activities we will undertake in some of our identified markets, a part of that will be done by overseas office and part from the centralized office here," said Verma.

Some of the countries where overseas offices will remain operational include the US., Germany, UK, Dubai, Russia, China and Singapore. In the past the operations of India's tourism overseas offices have been under question with several posts lying vacant, making it a challenge for the government to manage its overseas offices.

On the other hand the Minister of State (I/C) for Tourism, K.J. Alphons stressed on the need of developing better and safer roads in the country to attract more global tourists. Delivering inaugural address at a two-day conference on 'Safer Road Transpiration to promote National Tourism' here today, he said that "Better and safer roads in the country can help double foreign tourists in India in next three years. About Ten million international tourists visited India during the year 2017. Straightening Infrastructure and improving connectivity will bring more confidence among tourists to come to India".

He opined that apart from improving road infrastructure, we need to be more tourist friendly and hospitality has to be in our DNA as it is in tourist destination like Thailand. The taxi drivers and Auto drivers need to be trained to be tourist friendly and charge fixed rates. They also need to be more regulated. Tourism ministry is planning to impart training to them in league with some corporate companies", he said. The minister also launched a "Tourist Felicitation guide" for information of tourists as well as "code of practice for Taxi operators in India on the occasion.

Over 100 road safety experts, professionals, government organisation's and agencies active in road transport and tourism, transport officers from various states and UN official's are taking part in the two- day conference. The conference is being organised by Institute of Road Traffic Education (IRTE) in Association with Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MORTH) and Union Ministry of

“ Over 100 road safety experts, professionals, government organisation's and agencies active in road transport and tourism, transport officers from various states and UN official's are taking part in the two- day conference. ”

Tourism and culture along with Goodyear's CSR initiative 'Safer Roads-Safer You'.

The number of FTAs in February, 2018 was 10.53 lakh as compared to FTAs of 9.56 lakh in February, 2017 and 8.49 lakh in February, 2016.

The growth rate in foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) in February, 2018 over February, 2017 was 10.1%, compared to 12.7% in February, 2017 over February, 2016.

FTAs during the period January- February 2018 were 21.19 lakh with a growth of 9.2%, as compared to the FTAs of 19.40 lakh with a growth of 14.6% in January- February 2017 over January- February 2016. The percentage share of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during February 2018 among the top 15 source countries was highest from Bangladesh (18.28%) followed by USA (12.40%), UK (11.75%), Canada (4.36%), Russian Federation (4.20%), France (3.24%), Malaysia (3.14%), Germany (3.04%), Sri Lanka (2.89%), Australia (2.65%), China (2.33%), Japan (2.09%), Thailand (1.92%), Afghanistan (1.65%) and Nepal (1.41%) .

The percentage share of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during February 2018 among the top 15 ports was highest at Delhi Airport (30.95%) followed by Mumbai Airport (15.85%), Haridaspur Land Check Post (8.58%), Chennai Airport (6.60%), Goa Airport (5.32%), Bengaluru Airport (4.93%), Kolkata Airport (4.75%), Cochin Airport (2.63%), Gede Rail Land Check Post (2.58%), Hyderabad Airport (2.39%), Ahmedabad Airport (2.05%), Amritsar Airport (1.46%), Sonauli Airport (1.28%), Ghoadanga Land Check Post (1.27%) and Trivandrum Airport (1.23%).

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Air India's new direct flights to Israel

The disinvestment-bound national carrier Air India deployed a 256-seater Boeing 787-800 on the New Delhi-Tel Aviv route that was launched recently.

Wonderlust Bureau

Air India had on March 7 announced a tri-weekly flights to Tel Aviv from March 22, after Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu had announced that Saudi Arabia had allowed India to fly over its territory. It will deploy a 256-seater Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft on the new route, the airline said in a statement.

The new route is being launched at a time of growing ties between India and several Middle Eastern countries, and after Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hinted at a diplomatic realignment in the region earlier this month, said a news report published in The Times of Israel.

The new service was first announced by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi last July, with Netanyahu then suggesting in January the route could pass over Saudi Arabia.

Netanyahu told reporters in Washington earlier this month that Air India had reached an agreement with Saudi Arabia for the route.

The airline's spokesman at the time confirmed the launch schedule for a thrice-a-week service from New Delhi to Tel Aviv but couldn't confirm the exact route. Flying over Saudi Arabia significantly shortens the flight time over the proposed route.

Riyadh has maintained public silence about suggestions the kingdom has covert relations with Israel, but Netanyahu said earlier this month in Washington that Israel and the Arab states have "never been closer."

"Most of the states in our region know – they know very well, believe me – that Israel is not their enemy, but their indispensable ally in confronting our common challenges and seizing our common opportunities," Netanyahu also said at a public event in the US capital.

Modi became the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel last year, and has pushed for investment, technology cooperation and closer defense ties between the two countries. Saudi Arabia and its immediate neighborhood is also strategically important for India as the major source of the country's energy imports.



The wider region also hosts millions of Indian migrant workers who send billions of dollars in remittances each year. Currently, El Al is the only airline offering direct flights from Israel to India, with a Tel Aviv-Mumbai route lasting around 8.5 hours.

In order to avoid Saudi Arabia, which has hitherto prohibited flights to and from Israel over its airspace, the plane must detour over the Red Sea and around the Arabian Peninsula, adding some two hours to the journey.

El Al recently turned to the International Civil Aviation Authority asking for its help in also getting permission to fly to India via Saudi airspace.





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TAAI's annual convention expected to revive tourism sector in Kashmir

The tourism and hospitality sector of Jammu and Kashmir received a major boost as the valley recently hosted the 64th annual convention of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) - a major trade event being held in the state after more than 30 years.

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The tourism sector of the state has been going through a bad phase by the rise in insurgency and corresponding immense negative media coverage. More than 600 delegates participated in the convention and were charmed by the beauty of the valley.

"We expect that post hosting of this convention that witnessed participation from Indian agents pan India will increase tourist arrivals in the state multifold and dispel the myth that the destination is unsafe for tourists. It is also a great opportunity for leading travel agents to get familiar with tourism products of the state," said Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI.

The department of tourism of J&K held series of road shows in Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore and New Delhi in the recent past where the idea to host the TAAI Convention in Kashmir was mooted by the department of tourism.

Jammu and Kashmir Minister for Tourism Tasaduq Hussain Mufti said it was a historic

event in many ways as TAAI is holding a session in Kashmir. "It is great to have TAAI delegates here. In many ways and in some respects it is a historic event. We could not have hoped for a better start of the year", he said. Mufti hoped to build a long-lasting relationship with TAAI to boost tourism in Kashmir.

"I see TAAI's attention to detail in the way they organise things and the observations they have made so far about the state. Some very great ideas have already started flowing in. So I do look forward for a long and enduring partnership with TAAI. Hope that we have good year," he said.

Official figures reveal that around 11.61 lakh tourists and 2.59 lakh Amarnath pilgrims visited Kashmir valley last year. Around 61.88 lakh people visited the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi at Katra in Jammu and 2.63 lakh tourists visited Ladakh during last year. "Once you see this convention concludes successfully, the visibility of Kashmir as a tourism destination

“I see TAAI's attention to detail in the way they organise things and the observations they have made so far about the state. Some very great ideas have already started flowing in. So I do look forward for a long and enduring partnership with TAAI. Hope that we have good year,”

will multiply many times. This would result in more tourists coming to Kashmir. That is our goal, desire and prayer", said Kumar.



The negative impression about Jammu and Kashmir needs to be changed so that tourism regains its old glory in the state, the Tourism Minister said while addressing the media on the sidelines of a golf tournament that marked the beginning of the convention.

The 3 day most historic TAAI Convention, an eagerly awaited event of the Travel & Tourism industry of India, resulted in resounding success. The 64th Convention and Exhibition of TAAI was organized at the most prestigious and mesmerizing city, Srinagar, "the crown jewel" of Kashmir valley situated on the banks

of Jhelum River flanked by the snow-clad mountains from 27th to 29th March, 2018. The convention was ably supported by Ministry of Tourism, Jammu & Kashmir. The event received excellent cooperation and support from the Convention Hotels; Hotel Associations; House Boat Owners Association and other travel and tourism associations of J&K. TAAI J&K Chapter played the role of coordinating committee for the convention and delivered a great event.

The Convention was inaugurated by Her Excellency, Mehbooba Mufti, Chief Minister, Jammu and Kashmir. She acknowledged TAAI

“ The 3 day most historic TAAI Convention, an eagerly awaited event of the Travel & Tourism industry of India, resulted in resounding success. The 64th Convention and Exhibition of TAAI was organized at the most prestigious and mesmerizing city, Srinagar. ”





for the hand-holding extended as she delivered a touching address to the delegates and compared Kashmir with “Jannat”. Minister for Tourism, J&K, Tassaduq Hussain Mufti who addressed the convention, was present along with six other ministers of J&K. State Minister for Tourism, Priya Seth also addressed the audience.

In the words of TAAI President, Sunil Kumar, it offered to Jammu & Kashmir - Visibility; Connect and Opportunity. The manner in which the event was covered by the Media and the industry partners through digital and social media connect, brought in extensive visibility that Kashmir is a safe place for tourists and such large MICE events can be held here. It offered J&K with a huge connect - with the industry; with the Media and with the world in general. It is now an opportunity before J&K to optimize the TAAI presence in Kashmir where the TAAI convention was held most successfully with over 650 delegates participation from across India and some countries of the world.

Over 45 media leaders travelled with TAAI to Srinagar to cover the event and they were inspired by the hi-quality convention that TAAI presented. The Convention brought to the forefront the most outstanding beauty of Kashmir; its serenity; awesome scenic wonder and the warmth expressed by the local citizens who were absolutely courteous to offer the delegates a life-time experience.

The TAAI Convention at Kashmir had below highlights that added greater value to the Convention.

TAAI committee which arrived on 25th March joined the opening of Tulip Garden at Srinagar and this added great fervor to the convention. On 29th March, 2018; the delegates were offered the visit to this stunning garden which was followed by Lunch in the adjoining and most lush-green botanical gardens.

The TAAI Golf Tournament saw its tee-off on the 27th March 2018 to commemorate the 64th Convention & Exhibition of TAAI. This was held in one of the most unique and stylish golf courses of the world - The Royal Springs Golf Course. Two teams - TAAI Tourism Team and J&K



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Tourism Team participated with over 35 golfers celebrating the game in this most astounding golf course. Tassaduq Hussain Mufti, Minister for Tourism, inaugurated the TAAI Golf Tournament.

An impressive India Travel Trade Expo was held in the most popular SKICC – the Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre, Srinagar boasts of.

There was an overwhelming industry response. The large delegation of TAAI was well received and TAAI's unmatched planning and hospitality made the delegates visit to convention most memorable. The Delegates were offered complimentary accommodation on the 26th and 30th March 2018 to experience the luxury of House Boats on Dal and Nigeen Lakes.

The Delegates were also offered 2 nights pre & post tours to Pahalgam and Gulmarg, the two most popular hill stations located close to Srinagar.

Thanks to IndiGo Airlines; the main partner airline of TAAI for this Convention, delegates who came from all over India were rewarded with one of the best domestic fares ever offered by IndiGo to Srinagar.

The Knowledge sessions organized by TAAI on the Convention Theme 'Incredible Tourism – Integration; Inspiration and Innovation' on the 28th& 29th March at the SKICC Auditorium featured subjects of great relevance. The event witnessed great Gala's packed with some

“Thanks to IndiGo Airlines; the main partner airline of TAAI for this Convention, delegates who came from all over India were rewarded with one of the best domestic fares ever offered by IndiGo to Srinagar.”

superb entertainment at the most profound locations of Srinagar. The Welcome Dinner and Gala of the 27th March was at the iconic and majestic Lalit Grand Palace; the Theme Dinner of 28th was on the SKICC Lawns overlooking the dazzling Dal Lake sheltered by the snowy mountains; and the Farewell Gala was held in SKICC Auditorium followed by entertainment and Dinner at the SKICC Lawns.

This most splendid and fabulous event that was punctuated with uniqueness; wonder and absolute luxury will be ever remembered by those delegates who were gifted with one of the most valuable of tourism experiences; and





by those in J&K who will remain grateful to TAAI for this prodigious gesture and valuable support to J&K and its tourism.

It is predicted that TAAI convention will herald a large number of visitors celebrate their holiday; conferencing and events in this startling and amazing valley of India.

The Minister said tourism has to grow in Kashmir simultaneously with awareness on environment and ecology.

"We have been polluting our rivers and lakes. This trend has to be reversed immediately so that environmental awareness keeps pace with the development of the tourist industry in Kashmir," Mufti said. "It is great to have TAAI delegates here. They organize things very efficiently. I hope we do well with them this year," he said.

The tourism department is also looking to promote the Kashmir valley for movie shoots in its bid to revive the sector. "We plan to work closely with film production houses to attract more movie shootings in the state. We are keen to showcase new tourist destinations here to the world," said Mufti.

"Kashmir boasts of world class golf courses. If international golfing events are organised in the state, it will result in attracting many international golfers," said Rajan Sehgal, President, India Golf Tourism Association (IGTA).

In another attempt to woo tourists to Kashmir, Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti visited several Indian states last year along with industry's stakeholders and held meetings with tour operators, agents and movie stars. The Department of Tourism continues to participate in domestic as well as international tourism fairs and road shows. It is organizing events and festivals like Kargil Marathon, Tosa Maidan Festival and Gurez Festival to attract tourists.

The international tourist arrivals in Kashmir at present are minimal though there is an increase in demand from markets like Middle East, South East Asia and Bangladesh. However, the travel advisories issued by markets like the US and Europe is the main challenge to attract tourist arrivals from these key source inbound markets for India. Indigo airline President Aditya Ghosh suggested the J&K government should consider reducing the aviation taxes





that will infuse a fresh energy in the tourism sector of the state. Ghosh, who heads India's No 1, air carrier, delivered the keynote speech at the TAAI convention in Srinagar. He was later honoured by the TAAI for his leadership capacities. Ghosh's speech was the main take away from the inaugural ceremony as it offered a leader's firsthand experience about where India's aviation sector stands and how it can change fortunes.

"You currently levy 26.5 percent taxes on the aviation fuel, reduce it to one percent and see the change," Ghosh suggested the Chief Minister, who was in the audience along with the Finance Minister Altaf Bukhari. "You will see even aircrafts flying to Srinagar for the sole reason to get refueled." He said if there is no change in a few months, the state government is within its rights to roll the concession back.

Ghosh gave example of Andhra Pradesh to make his point. The state by reducing the tax structure on ATF experienced 200 per cent increase in the tourist footfalls. The Goa airport is a naval base and it is operational 24 x7 for 365 days. "Why cannot Srinagar be the same?" he insisted. Offering a detailed account of how the aviation sector in operates in India, Ghosh said though India's is the third biggest country in the world ranking in numbers of air travellers, it has still the least aircraft penetration. India, he said has only 550 aircrafts and it will take next ten years to reach 1000 aircraft level.

Ghosh said India is one of the lowest in the world ranking as far as air fares are concerned. More and more people are flying and the numbers are going up with every passing day and it is emerging as a huge opportunity for the growth of aviation sector. But the most important thing is improving the infrastructure.

The IndiGo boss said that aviation sector does not need "temples of ego" in the name of airports. "We need airports that would cost Rs 50 to Rs 100 crore with basic amenities so that all the smaller cities are connected.

"We have announced 2018 as 'Visit Kashmir Year' and TAAI Managing Committee would promote Kashmir through its websites, print and publicity material," Kumar said adding the members would package Kashmir beautifully so that the Valley witnesses 'bumper' tourism. After successfully holding its three-day 64th Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) convention, the delegates are now enjoying their stay at Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Srinagar.

The pre- and post-convention tour was organised by the Department of Tourism for the visiting delegates as part of its familiarisation (FAM) programme to expose the travel agents to the real experience of warmth and hospitality of the valley.

To boost tourism, Kashmir needs to raise civic infrastructure and build institutional framework within tourism industry so that the benefits percolate to local economy and help common people, experts and delegates at TAAI convention said.

A number of delegates and experts on tourism, hospitality and aviation spoke about different aspects of tourism revival and hospitality sector on second day of the three-day convention of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI).

While addressing one of the sessions, Kapil Kaul, CEO of Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA) India said, "To boost tourism, there is a need for civic infrastructure development. Besides, institutional framework within the industry is needed so that trickledown effect on local economy is larger." Kaul also highlighted

“ A number of delegates and experts on tourism, hospitality and aviation spoke about different aspects of tourism revival and hospitality sector on second day of the three-day convention of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI). ”

that lack of tourism infrastructure in the valley has resulted in low job creation.

"There needs to be creation of high-wage jobs in this industry so that more youngsters opt for a career in this field," Kaul said.

"Limited number of five-star hotels in Kashmir is a lacuna that needs to be overcome. Kashmir needs more of them. What is the point of asking more airlines to fly to Srinagar when the starred hotel infrastructure is quite weak?" he asked.

On the development of the Srinagar Airport, Kaul said its operating hours need to be increased in order to utilize full economic potential of this airport.

"No doubt it is a secured airport but we can't keep wasting its economic potential. If there is no increase in operating hours, then making a new airport in next few years to meet the demand will become important. Let them run this airport from 6 am to 10 pm at least," Kaul said.

"Frequent skyrocketing of airfares on the Srinagar sector is a natural outcome of demand

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“Travel associations should get together to form a think-tank which can help knowledge creation for the tourism industry. Their role would be to provide inputs to industry players for a way forward. Regional cooperation for Kashmir tourism vis-à-vis other states is important to revive tourism here”

and supply. It is obvious that the earlier you book, the cheaper you get. This exists everywhere and here as well,” he added.

While making a presentation on current trends of the global tour trade industry, Tel Aviv-based Yossi Fatael who is vice-president of Universal Federation of Travel Agents Association (UFTAA) said, “Geo-political crisis exists in several parts of the world at present. Countries with difficult prevailing situations also manage their tourism. I felt a sense of warmth here and this truly is a paradise on earth,”

Anil Khaitan, President of PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry said ensuring tourists of their safety and security is important. “Any tourist needs a total sense of security. Right from arriving at the airport to the way he is

treated by the driver, hotel staff etc matters. The quality and hygiene of food and stay now-a-days must be taken care of,” Khaitan said.

Academician Siddique Wahid, who also has been associated with the tourism industry for several years, said travel associations’ should work in tandem to form a think-tank.

“Travel associations should get together to form a think-tank which can help knowledge creation for the tourism industry. Their role would be to provide inputs to industry players for a way forward. Regional cooperation for Kashmir tourism vis-à-vis other states is important to revive tourism here,” Wahid said.

Sarmad Hafeez, Secretary, Tourism, Jammu & Kashmir said, “TAAI convention will help send positive signal across the globe that J&K is one of the best tourist destinations. This was a historic event which we conceived during winter months and it will help revive tourism in a big way. The local experience which delegates will carry back is our success. Every delegate has been overwhelmed by the tourism products we offer. The local travel agents from J&K also had a great networking session at their home places and they have also benefitted.”

Mahmood A Shah, Director, Tourism, Jammu & Kashmir said TAAI has given Kashmir huge impetus which will revive tourism in a big way. The travel agents were extremely happy over visiting Kashmir. They have promised to promote Kashmir vigorously. We will be expecting good tourist flow this year.”





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Discover the land of Jammu

Nestled against the backdrop of the snow-capped Pir Panjal Mountains, the region of Jammu constitutes the southernmost unit of the state of Jammu & Kashmir.

Wonderlust Bureau



Bahu Fort

It forms part of the transition between the Himalayan range in the north and the dusty plains of Punjab in the south. Between these two extremities lie a series of scrub-covered hills, forested mountain ranges and river valleys, encompassing several microclimatic regions that extend from Kishtawar in the north-east to Akhnoor in the south-west, and the historic town of Poonch in the north-west to the borders of Kangra (H P) in the south-east. The Shivalik hills cut across the area from the east to the west while the rivers Ravi, Tawi and Chenab cut their way through the region.

The last stop on the railway line north is Udhampur, where you can catch onward buses and hire SUVs/MUVs (Tata Sumo / Toyota Innova/ Mahindra Scorpio). However it is better to get down in Jammu and catch a taxi from there as these are more readily available.

Numerous domestic airlines fly to Srinagar and Jammu, and frequent buses and share jeeps provide connections to Ladakh and the plains. Jammu is served by frequent train services. Buses are operated by J&K SRTC to most points around the state. They offer package tour to Gulmarg, Sonmarg, Yusmarg, Ular lake, City tour, etc. There is Tourist information center, where one get the tickets plus info. 4wd jeeps

are quicker, a little more expensive and reach more locations. Private hire jeeps are also available.

Places to see in Jammu

Amar Mahal Palace - Amar Mahal, located in Jammu, is a palace depicting grandeur of an erstwhile era. It was constructed by a French architect for Raja Amar Singh, belonging to the Dogra dynasty. The architecture of this marvelous palace resembles the grand Chateaus of France. The beautiful palace of Amar Mahal is made of red sand stone which is a real visual treat. The scenic background of the place enhances the beauty of this palace manifolds. The stunning sight of River Tawi flowing below and the Shivaliks in the north will surely make your heart skip a beat or two. Dr. Karan Singh donated this palace to the charitable trust of Hari-Tara. At present, this trust is responsible for the maintenance of this palace. In fact, Amar Mahal Palace at present has been transformed into a museum. It also plays host to a well stocked library.

To reach Amar Mahal Palace, you can take auto rickshaws from anywhere in Jammu. These auto rickshaws will bring you to this place at a nominal cost. Minibuses also ply on this route. However, as they can not enter the

palace premises, you will need to walk up to the palace.

Ranbir Canal - A small garden along the Ranbir Canal, which runs through the city outskirts, provides a cool picnic spot during the summer. The canal branches off from the river Chenab at Akhnoor, 32 kms away. Its water remains icy-cold throughout the year and its banks serve as good viewpoints and walkways.

Bahu Fort & Gardens - Situated 5 kms away from the city centre, Bahu Fort stands on a rock face on the left bank of the river Tawi. Perhaps the oldest fort and edifice in the city, it was constructed originally by Raja Bahulochan over 3,000 years ago. The existing fort was more recently improved upon and extended by the Dogra rulers. Inside, there is a temple dedicated to the Hindu goddess Kali. An extensive terraced garden, known as Bagh-e-Bahu, has been developed around the fort.

Patnitop - Patnitop is the most popular tourist spot of Jammu region. Located 112 kms from Jammu this famous hill resort is perched on a beautiful plateau, at an altitude of 2024 metres across which the Jammu-Srinagar Highway passes. It has lush green meadow and pine trees which resembles with Gulmarg. Patnitop offers beautiful picnic spots, peaceful walks



Patnitop

and breathtaking views of the mountains cape of the Chenab basin. In winter, it is covered with a white carpet of snow and its slopes have been successfully experimented for skiing. Skiing courses are conducted at Patnitop in the months of January and February. During winter months there are introductory courses for tourists / beginners at gentle gradient slopes of Patnitop. At Madhatop (5/6 Kms from Patni top on Sanasar Road) excellent possibilities for all kind of skiing exist. Skiing equipments and wooden sledges are available on hire at Patnitop and Sanasar. For beginners Instructors are also available. Accommodation is also available at Patnitop Hotels.

Sanasar - 129 Km from Jammu and only 19 Kms. from patnitop is Sanasar (2079 m), a satellite resort of Patnitop, with a cup-shaped meadow surrounded by gigantic conifers. A place for a quiet holiday, the meadow has now been developed as a golf course. There are several walks in the surrounding hills. The resort itself is ideal for paragliding, which is being promoted by the Tourism Department. Equipment can be hired from the tourist office in Jammu city. May to June and September to October are suitable months for paragliding in Sanasar. Tourists with own vehicle can go on to Sansar from Patnitop and return by the evening. The resort is 19 kms from Patnitop and a road connects the two. Sansar can be reached by bus or taxi from Jammu, via Kud and Patnitop.

Jammu City - Jammu city is the largest city in the Jammu region and the winter capital of Indian administered state of Jammu and Kashmir and situated on the banks of Tawi river. Jammu is also known as the City of Temples owing to the number of historical temples and domes of old mosques located within the city. With its fastest growing urban agglomerations and booming infrastructure the winter capital of state is the second largest city in the state.

Katra - Situated 50 Kms. from jammu this small town serves as the base camp for visting

the famous shrine of Vaishnodevi in the Trikuta hills

KUD - Located 103 Kms. from jammu, this popular resort is situated on the Jammu-Srinagar Highway, at an altitude of 1738 metres.

Batote - Situated 125 Kms. from jammu at an altitude of 1560 metres on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, this resort straddles the forested slopes of the Patnitop mountain range, overlooking the spectacular lie of the Chenab gorge.

Mansar Lake - Mansar Lake located 62 Kms. from Jammu is a beautiful lake fringed by forest-covered hills. Boating facilities are available in the spot. Every year around Baisakhi, a food and crafts festival is organised here by J&K Tourism.

Purmandal - 40 Kms. from Jammu, just off the National highway leading towards Pathankot is the Purmandal Temple Complex built on the banks of the sacred, mostly underground river Decak. Often referred to as 'Chhota Kashi', its main temple is dedicated to 'umapati', while the other temples are associated with Shaivites of the Kashmir Valley. Regular bus service from Jammu.

Shiv Khori - 100 Kms. from Jammu this holy cave, nearly a kilometre long with a 4-feet high naturally formed shivaling, is considered second only to the shrine of Vaishnodevi. A major festival is held here on Shivratri Day.

Dera Baba Banda - It is a major Hindu-Sikh pilgrimage centre situated 75 Kms from Jammu. Baba Banda Bairaagi was Guru Gobind Singh's favourite 'Saint-Soldier', who had the Gurudwara constructed on the banks of river Chenab, where he spent his last days.

Sudh Mahadev - This holy spot near Patnitop is situated at an altitude of 1225 mtrs., about 120 Kms. from Jammu. The shrine is visited by pilgrims on the full moon night of 'Sawan'(July-August) to worship the 'Trishul'(trident) and a mace which is said to belong to Lord Shiva. The Devak stream originates at Sudh Mahadev and disappears among the rocks a few kilometres down stream.

Gauri Kund - Short of Sudh Mahadev is the legendary spring where the Goddess parvati used to bath before commencing Her daily prayers at Sudh Mahadev. This spring came to be named after Her as 'Gauri Kund'.



Vaishno Devi Temple

Vietjet announces route expansion plan with launch of India and Vietnam direct flights

Vietjet has announced its plan to operate direct flights connecting Vietnam and India, while its subsidiary, Thai Vietjet, is to launch a new direct domestic service between Bangkok and Krabi from April 5, 2018. Both plans are designed to become part of Vietjet's long term development program to be a "Consumer Airline" that serves all demands of its customers.

Rachita Sehgal



Officials from Ho Chi Minh City Department of Tourism at SATTE 2018 in New Delhi.

The India route will connect Ho Chi Minh City with New Delhi with four flights a week, serving the growing travel demands of the two peoples and contributing to the region's integration and trade exchange. The announcement was made at the Vietnam - India Business Forum which was witnessed by Vietnam President Tran Dai Quang and senior leaders of Vietnam and India. It also came as a highlight of the 45th anniversary of the establishment of Vietnam - India diplomatic relationship and the 10th anniversary of strategic partnership between Vietnam and India.

India, the country with the world's second largest population, is famous for its diversified culture, religions, cuisine and tourism. Also, the country is well-known for its marvelous nature and grand architectures that are certified as world heritages. Among them are the Valley of Flowers National Park (Uttarakhand), Lotus Temple (New Delhi), Taj Mahal (Uttar Pradesh), Red Fort (New Delhi), etc.

"The lack of direct connectivity has been a big challenge for us. This has meant that a lot of Indians who otherwise would have travelled to Vietnam are opting for other regional

destinations like Thailand. Lack of direct flights also makes the cost of overall tour package costly. We expect 30-40 per cent year-on-year growth once the direct air connectivity is in place," said Pruthi Ranjan, market manager, Victoria Tour.

The carrier is also expected to commence flights to other Indian cities like Mumbai after gauging the success of New Delhi connection. At present the average length of stay of Indian travellers to Vietnam is about 7-8 days.

"There are a lot of requests that we receive from our Indian counterparts but the most inconvenience thing is lack of direct flight. Indian tourists have to travel Singapore or Bangkok for Vietnam so they rather choose other destinations. If we have direct flights we can become competitive to other destinations in the region. Direct flights can add to our marketing efforts in India," said Trinh Nguyen Hung Dzung, chairman, TNK Travel Group.

Last year 13 million overall tourists visited Vietnam, out of which 6.4 million tourists visited Ho Chi Minh City. About 65,000 Indian tourists visited Ho Chi Minh City last year. For

the Thailand route, Thai Vietjet will launch a new direct domestic service between Bangkok (Suvarnabhumi) and Krabi, starting from April 5, 2018. The service will operate with two daily return flights and a flight duration of one hour twenty minutes per leg. Departure times from Bangkok (Suvarnabhumi) are 07:10, 19:25 and departure times from Krabi are 09:05, 21:20. Thai Vietjet will deploy an A320 aircraft with 180 seats for the route, representing the airline's determination to meet passenger demand for popular routes. Krabi is an eternally popular holiday destination, offering great beaches, clean air, beautiful temples, stunning views of both lush mountains and stunning coastlines. It is also a getaway for Bangkok residents to escape the city smog for some clean coastal relaxation. Krabi is also renowned for its world class seafood, beach barbeques and popular nightlife attractions in Krabi Town.

With the new Bangkok (Suvarnabhumi) to Krabi flight addition, the airline will be flying five Thailand domestic routes, including Bangkok (Suvarnabhumi) to Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Phuket, Krabi and a daily direct flight connecting Phuket and Chiang Rai.

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Mandarin Oriental achieves top ratings in the 2018 Forbes Five & Four Star Awards

Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group attained the highest rankings for many of its hotels, restaurants and spas in the 60th annual Forbes Travel Guide Five & Four Star Awards.

Wonderlust Bureau



A record 23 hotels have been recognized, with two new additions in the Five Star category this year: Mandarin Oriental, Marrakech and Mandarin Oriental, Munich. Of particular note, the Group's flagship property Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong, once again achieved six Five Star ratings across all three categories for the hotel, spa and four of its restaurants, the Michelin-starred Pierre, Man Wah, Mandarin Grill + Bar and the Krug Room. This iconic property is the only city hotel in the world to receive this honour.

The Group's second Hong Kong property, The Landmark Mandarin Oriental was again awarded Five Stars across the three categories for its hotel, spa and two Michelin-starred restaurant Amber. Along with Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas and Mandarin Oriental, Macau, this prestigious honour was only accomplished by a handful of hotels worldwide.

Thirteen of the Group's hotels achieved Five Star distinction in both the hotel and spa categories; Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok, Mandarin Oriental, Guangzhou, Mandarin Oriental, Boston, Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong, The Landmark Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong, Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas, Mandarin Oriental, Macau, Mandarin Oriental, Miami, Mandarin Oriental,

New York, Mandarin Oriental, Singapore, Mandarin Oriental Pudong, Shanghai, Mandarin Oriental, Taipei and Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo. In addition, Mandarin Oriental, Barcelona, Mandarin Oriental, Milan and Mandarin Oriental, Paris achieved the Five Star distinction for the hotel and Four Stars for their spa.

Mandarin Oriental, Prague and Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C. achieved Four Star status for both the hotel and spa. Mandarin Oriental, Atlanta, Mandarin Oriental, Geneva, Mandarin Oriental Hyde Park, London, Mandarin Oriental, Prague and Mandarin Oriental, Washington D.C. achieved Four Star hotel status.

In addition, out of 60 Forbes Five Star Spas, 14 are Spas at Mandarin Oriental, more than any other hotel group. The list includes the Spas at Mandarin Oriental located in Boston, Las Vegas, Miami and New York together with London, Bangkok, Guangzhou, both hotels in Hong Kong, Macau, Shanghai, Singapore, Taipei and Tokyo. There were two new additions to the Forbes Four Star Spa category, for Mandarin Oriental hotels in Marrakech and Prague.

In continued recognition of the Group's commitment to dining excellence, Twist by Pierre Gagnaire at Mandarin Oriental, Las Vegas;

Pierre, The Krug Room, Man Wah and Mandarin Grill at Mandarin Oriental, Hong Kong, Amber at The Landmark Mandarin Oriental and Vida Rica at Mandarin Oriental, Macau achieved the Five Star award. Ebony at Mandarin Oriental, Guangzhou, Yong Yi Ting at Mandarin Oriental Pudong, Shanghai and Asiate at Mandarin Oriental, New York were awarded a Four Star mark of excellence.

"The Forbes Five and Four-Star awards are some of the most important in the hotel industry. We are delighted that our commitment to excellence has been recognized with this level of hospitality distinction at so many of our properties" said Christoph Mares, Chief Operating Officer at Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group.

According to Forbes, standards for Forbes Five Star Award certifications are exact, and few properties meet them. To achieve Forbes Travel Guide Four and Five Star status, properties must meet or exceed the bar-setting service standards, which are determined through an unannounced, undercover service evaluation conducted by Forbes Travel Guide's expert inspectors. In 2018, 199 hotels achieved Forbes Five Star Award status, 64 restaurants and 60 spas have achieved the Forbes Five Star Award.

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As the name suggests, SaffronStays Mocha Chalet is the ideal getaway for those who love their caffeine. Set within the verdant coffee estates of Chikmagalur, guests can get their coffee fix in every meal - and pick out coffee beans themselves, too.

Fancy living right next to a National Tiger Reserve? SaffronStays Calamondinn Bungalow, Coorg sits on the border of Nagarhole Tiger Reserve, and is combines safari and scenic under one roof. Larger groups can host get togethers in the bungalow, while couples can opt to hide away in the private cottage.

Nestled in the heart of the hills, SaffronStays Milton Abbott, Ooty is a delight for every sense. Surrounded by lush estates, the 1865-built colonial bungalow is your perfect escape from the sweltering heat of the city. For romantic couples seeking an enriching staycation, SaffronStays Kurinji Estate, Kodaikanal is an idyllic retreat with a 9-acre estate. With impeccable hospitality and lip-smacking Tamilian meals by the trained



caretaker husband-wife duo, this home is where you should be setting your heart to. For those looking to relax and unwind amongst private colonial estates, book your stay at SaffronStays to experience redefined luxury.



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VITS HOTELS launches three properties in Phuket

VITS Luxury Hotels has rolled out three boutique properties in the picturesque island of Phuket, Thailand's most popular tour destination.

Wonderlust Bureau



VITS a leading brand of luxury hotels had recently signed Joint Venture with Exhicon Group in Thailand to accelerate the 'VITS' brand of hotels portfolio in the global hospitality market. The new launches are VITS Alfresco Hotel, VITS New Life Classic and VITS Luxur Boutique Hotel. The hotels are exponentially located near Patong beach, the largest and most famous beach in the island of Phuket.

Announcing the launches, Chandrakant Shetty, Director, VITS-EXHICON (Thailand) Co. Ltd. says, "We are delighted to extend the VITS luxury experience in Thailand with launch of three properties located in the heart of Phuket. Each of the three hotels distinctive in its own right offer unparalleled hospitality experiences and contemporary amenities. Phuket with its serene beaches, historic museums and vibrant nightlife is ranked as favorite from travelers in India and around the world. With the launch of our properties in the region we aim to tap the growing potential of tourist inflow. As part of our future expansion we plan to take over 15 hotels primarily in Thailand and Malaysia within the next two years".

VITS Alfresco is an elegant hotel located just an hour away from the Phuket International Airport. The 33-key hotel is fully air-conditioned and inclusive of an array of room amenities. Set with plush interiors it boasts of several facilities like a rooftop pool to spend leisure time, travel desk, rental bikes to go around the town. The hotel flaunts the beauty of Phuket with their balconies that overlook the sandy beaches of Patong, making it one of the best destinations near Patong Beach.

VITS New Life Classic is one of best hotels in Phuket situated in a pristine location, just 6-minute walk from Patong beach. The hotel is surrounded by some of the best attractions, shopping experiences and entertainment avenues. Guests can choose from 20 rooms, all of which exude an atmosphere of peace and harmony. For the comfort and convenience of guests, the hotel offers bar and easy access to the city's must-see destinations. The serene beauty and tranquility of Phuket are mirrored by the wonderful accommodation in VITS New Life Classic set with lovely interiors and protrude a luxurious feel. The rooms are quaint and spacious with attached balconies, wide range of amenities and impeccable services.

VITS Luxur Boutique Hotel located close to Patong beach offers top notched facilities which are paramount to bring you experiences worth revisiting. The Hotel Offers luggage storage and multi-cuisine restaurant. All rooms are filled with opulent amenities and designed with bright colours which create a charming ambience for the guests. The rooftop swimming pool under the open sky will make your dream leisure experience a reality. Guests can enjoy various activities in the surroundings, including golfing, cycling and fishing.

Amma's Canteen is an in-house restaurant at VITS Alfresco, VITS New Life Classic and VITS Luxur Boutique Hotel. Set with a wonderful ambience in the open the restaurant bring you variety of scrumptious delectable from Thai, Italian, Russian and several other continental cuisines. Set with an elegant decor, hospitable staff, serene environment, and delicious food, the restaurant is without a doubt, one among the top restaurants in Phuket.





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Enjoy summer break at The Golden Tusk Resort, Jim Corbett

The first thing that you notice once you enter The Golden Tusk is the chirping of birds. It seems as if they are singing lullabies.

Wonderlust Bureau



Being a wild life buff, I have explored many places with rich flora and fauna but have never experienced such a beautiful sight. In metro cities where you rarely come across a single bird, such an experience gets etched in your mind forever.

The Golden Tusk is located at the village Dhela, Ramnagar (Nainital), Uttarakhand. The property spread over 7 acres is a meticulously landscaped estate. It is situated 5 kms away from Jhirna & Dhela zone of Jim Corbett National Park on the banks of a monsoon river - Dhela. It celebrates picturesque countryside in the backdrop of forest, which is an abode to rich biodiversity.

The resort is an ideal family getaway, where every member of the family has something to enjoy. There are adventure activities in the resort, so if you are an adventure enthusiast, try your hands at activities like flying fox, rappelling, spider web and burma bridge. The resort has 40 well-appointed rooms in different

categories such as Country View Suite, Forest View Suite, Luxury Tent, Villa, Villa Grande and Tiger Suite. If one wants to experience the wilderness, he can stay in the tents. The tents with the forest backdrop are erected within

the resort boundary and are a bit secluded but very secure. I stayed in Country View Suite which was well laid out and spacious. It had all facilities that would make you feel at home, starting from comfortable bedroom, big





lounge, changing room and en-suite bathroom. The accommodation also provides a sitting area outside the room which makes you enjoy the natural surroundings and serene atmosphere even more.

The property has a multi-cuisine & specialty dining area called The Golden Forest, with a clear view of the village and of a seasonal river bed with the mountains in the backdrop. The restaurant offers a lavish buffet with vegetarian and non-vegetarian options along with ala-carte and live grill options. The service is good and the staff is courteous.

The resort offers a conference hall for official meetings, gymnasium, swimming pool, indoor games, spa, cycling and a bar for those who want to relax and enjoy with family and friends. Apart from offering a host of recreational activities, the property offers Golden Flower Spa where you can leave behind the stress and monotony of your daily life and experience tranquility, harmony and inner peace. With their expert therapist, this is a rejuvenating experience, a must to do in your list.

If you want to enjoy a romantic evening with your partner, then water dining is highly recommended. Guests interested in this one-



of-its-kind experience would have a dining table in the pool and can relish cuisines of their choice. While travelling I always collect souvenirs, The Golden Tusk resort has a wonderful souvenir shop where one can get many eco-friendly products.

Apart from the safari there are number of other things one can explore in the region like a visit to Sitabani Forest, drive upto Patkot, picnic at Tumariya Dam and visit to Kotabag, Garjia Temple and Dhangari Museum.

Sitabani is very famous at the Jim Corbett National Park. Wildlife safari is more preferable, when people don't get permit of Corbett Tiger Reserve, and also when the roads in the forest wash away. During monsoon all Corbett zones are closed but Sitabani zone remains open round the year. The ancient temple of Sitabani holds mythological importance for Hindus. It is believed that this is the place where Sita stayed during her exile and raised her sons Luv and Kush. The Sitabani temple has a white stone statue of Sita, without Rama, holding her sons. One can also see wildlife such as spotted deer, barking deer, wild boar, elephants and leopards along with number of species of birds and reptiles.

Tumariya Dam is about 40 Kms from the resort and it takes 45 minutes to reach there. The trip will prove educational for children as well as for adults, there are numerous migratory birds like greater cormorant, lesser cormorant, mallard, common teals, ruddy shelduck, common shelduck, northern pintail and northern shoveler among others that flock to this place.

Word of advice, summer season is the peak tourist season in Jim Corbett, would recommend the readers to book in advance both the safari and the resort.



Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board creates Land Bank to boost MP tourism

Madhya Pradesh a state that reflects the true cultural heritage of the nation through the amalgamation of various communities, castes and ways of life has always been a major tourist attraction.

Wonderlust Bureau



Surendra Patwa

It is one of the forerunners among the economically rising states of the country and is teeming with vast potential of investment in tourism sector. It is an attractive destination from investment point of view and the government has taken multiple initiatives to make the state an investment friendly destination. Madhya Pradesh as a state has good amount of land parcels and heritage properties for private investments which is been promoted by the state on various platforms in the recent past.

The newly constituted Tourism Board has taken one such step for development of tourism and to attract private investors for effective implementation of Tourism Policy. The Tourism Board has procured above 849.077 hectare land for the Tourism Department at 144 places of 49 districts of the State and created a Land Bank for tourism projects in Madhya Pradesh. Besides this, at 71 points, additional 432 hectare land has been identified. Land procurement is in process and soon it will be transferred to the Tourism Department. Amidst land bank 60 hectare land allotted to 16 private investors which generated a premium of Rs 23.50 crore.

Minister of State for Tourism (Independent Charge) Surendra Patwa informed that the State has been segregated in five tourism

regions and potential of private investment has been identified. In Indore region, Indore, Dhar, Khanwa, Burhanpur, Khargone, Badwani, Alirajpur, Jhabua, Ujjain, Ratlam, Dewas, Agra Malwa, Mandsaur and Neemuch district in 43 areas around 233 hectare land has been transferred to Tourism Department by the Board. Besides this, in these districts additional 17 areas have been identified for procurement and are in process.

In Jabalpur Region, land has been identified in Jabalpur, Katni, Narsinghpur, Chhindwara, Seoni, Mandla, Balaghat, Dindori, Shahdol, Umaria and Anuppur district at 28 areas around 82 hectare land has been transferred, while at 10 points 32 hectare additional land has been identified for land acquisition. Similarly, in Bhopal region at 33 points around 135 hectare land has been transferred in Bhopal, Sihore, Rajgarh, Vidisha, Raisen, Hoshangabad, Betul, Harda districts. In these districts at 16 points,

around 82 hectare additional land has been identified. In Gwalior region for development of tourism around 111 hectare land at 15 points has been transferred while in districts of Gwalior, Guna, Shivpuri, Ashok Nagar, Sheopur, Morena, Bhind and Teekamgarh around 32 additional land at 10 points have been identified by the Board. Similarly, in Rewa area at 25 area around 285 hectare land has been transferred by the Board for tourism development inviting private investment in districts of Rewa, Sidhi, Satna, Singrauli, Sagar, Chhatarpur, Panna and Damoh.

As additional 24 hectare land in 71 points have been identified. Through land bank private investors under land transfer policy under Tourism Project 94 hectare land in 19 land plots for Hotel, Resorts and other establishments' tenders have been invited. In this noted groups like Mahendra Holiday, Orange County, State Express, JahanumaPalce Hotel, Gen-X Hotel, Sristi Ventures have been included.





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Strong passenger demand resumes: record load factor in February

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced global passenger traffic results for February showing a rebound in traffic growth following the slower demand experienced in January, which was owing to temporary factors including the later timing of the Lunar New Year in 2018.

Wonderlust Bureau

Total revenue passenger kilometers (RPKs) for the month rose 7.6%, compared to February 2017, up from 4.6% year-over-year growth in January. Monthly capacity (available seat kilometers or ASKs) increased by 6.3%, and load factor rose 0.9 percentage point to 80.4%, surpassing the previous record for the month of 79.5%, which was set in February 2017.

“As expected, we saw a return to stronger demand growth in February, after the temporary slowdown in January. This is being supported by the robust economic backdrop and solid business confidence. However, increases in fuel prices--and labor costs in some countries--likely will temper the amount of traffic stimulation from lower airfares this year,” said Alexandre de Juniac, IATA’s Director General and CEO.

- Middle East carriers recorded a 3.4% demand increase in February compared to a year ago. Capacity rose 3.9% and load factor slipped 0.3 percentage point to 74.1%. Carriers in the region faced significant headwinds over the past year including the temporary ban on large portable electronic devices as well as the proposed travel bans to the US from some countries in the region.

- North American airlines’ traffic climbed 7.2% in February, supported by the relatively vigorous US economic backdrop, while the weaker dollar appears to be offsetting some of the negative impacts on inbound travel. Capacity rose 4.6% and load factor was up 1.9 percentage points to 78.0%.

- Latin American airlines posted the fastest year-on-year growth for a second consecutive month as February traffic jumped 9.8% compared to February 2017, up from 8.1% growth in January. Demand continues to recover from the impacts of the severe 2017 hurricane season. Capacity increased by 8.9%, and load factor rose 0.6 percentage point to 81.5%.

- African airlines experienced a 6.3% rise in traffic for the month compared to the year-ago period. The growth occurred amid an improving regional economic backdrop. Business confidence in Nigeria has risen sharply over the past 15 months while a reduction in political uncertainty in South Africa has contributed to an improvement in business confidence there for the first time in more than a year. Capacity rose 3.3%, and load factor climbed 1.9 percentage points to 67.8%.

Air passenger market detail - February 2018

	World share ¹	February 2018 (% year-on-year)			
		RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) ²	PLF (level) ³
TOTAL MARKET	100.0%	7.6%	6.3%	0.9%	80.4%
Africa	2.2%	2.1%	0.2%	1.3%	68.8%
Asia Pacific	33.7%	10.1%	9.3%	0.6%	82.1%
Europe	26.5%	7.0%	4.9%	1.6%	81.6%
Latin America	5.2%	7.2%	6.1%	0.9%	81.4%
Middle East	9.5%	3.7%	3.9%	-0.2%	74.0%
North America	23.0%	6.5%	5.0%	1.1%	80.6%

International Passenger Markets

	World share ¹	February 2018 (% year-on-year)			
		RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) ²	PLF (level) ³
International	63.8%	7.2%	5.9%	1.0%	79.3%
Africa	1.9%	6.3%	3.3%	1.9%	67.8%
Asia Pacific	18.5%	9.1%	8.4%	0.6%	80.5%
Europe	23.7%	6.8%	5.0%	1.4%	82.2%
Latin America	2.8%	9.8%	8.9%	0.6%	81.5%
Middle East	9.1%	3.4%	3.9%	-0.3%	74.1%
North America	7.8%	7.2%	4.6%	1.9%	78.0%

February international passenger demand rose 7.2% compared to February 2017, which was up from the 4.2% increase recorded in January. Led by airlines in Latin America, all regions recorded better year-on-year growth compared to January’s results. Total capacity climbed 5.9%, and load factor rose 1.0 percentage point to 79.3%.

- European carriers saw February demand increase by 6.8% compared to a year ago, a modest acceleration compared to a 6.0% increase in January. Passenger volumes are trending upwards at a double-digit annualized rate alongside supportive economic conditions in the region. Capacity rose 5.0% and load factor increased 1.4 percentage points to 82.2%, highest among regions.

- Asia-Pacific airlines’ February traffic rose 9.1% compared to the year-ago period. Demand is being supported by healthy regional economic growth and expansion in the number of routes on offer. Capacity increased 8.4% and load factor climbed 0.6 percentage point to 80.5%.

Domestic Passenger Markets

	World share ¹	February 2018 (% year-on-year)			
		RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt) ²	PLF (level) ³
Domestic	36.2%	8.2%	7.0%	0.9%	82.3%
Dom. Australia ⁴	0.9%	3.9%	0.5%	2.6%	77.3%
Domestic Brazil ⁴	1.2%	4.5%	3.4%	0.8%	80.1%
Dom. China P.R. ⁴	9.1%	11.8%	13.1%	-0.9%	85.3%
Domestic India ⁴	1.4%	22.9%	17.7%	3.9%	90.7%
Domestic Japan ⁴	1.1%	5.8%	2.1%	2.5%	71.8%
Dom. Russian Fed. ⁴	1.4%	6.6%	1.3%	3.8%	77.9%
Domestic US ⁴	14.5%	6.2%	5.2%	0.7%	81.9%

Domestic travel demand rose 8.2% in February compared to February 2017, up from 4.9% year-over-year growth in January, with all markets reporting increases, led by India and China. Domestic capacity climbed 7.0%, and load factor increased 0.9 percentage point to 82.3%.

- India’s domestic traffic rose 22.9%, the 42nd consecutive month of double-digit year-on-year demand growth, and load factor exceeded 90% for the first time on record. Passenger demand continues to be stimulated by network growth that translates into time savings for air travelers.

- Australian domestic traffic rose 3.9% compared to the year-ago period, which was a 17-month high.



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Kuwait to drive a new era in global geopolitics & growth with Northern Gulf Gateway project

The Boeing Company to open permanent office in Kuwait and hope to add Kuwait as one of its Flight Training Centres.

Wonderlust Bureau



The first session of the Kuwait Investment Forum 2018 (KIF 2018), on 'Investing for the Future Kuwait' presented a bold statement in global geopolitics from Kuwait - driving the closer cooperation with the region - through the ambitious Northern Gulf Gateway, an integrated flagship project for realising the Kuwait National Vision 2035 that will open doors for investment opportunities for US, European, Chinese and Asian investors.

H.E. Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah, First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Kuwait; Dr. Merza Hasan - Executive Director & Dean of the Board of Executive Directors, World Bank Group; Mr. Omar Kutayba Alghanim - CEO, Alghanim Industries & Chairman, Gulf Bank Kuwait; Mr. Timothy Keating - Executive Vice President of Government Operations, The Boeing Company, USA; and Ms. Noura Al-Qabandi - Director of International Affairs and Research Department, CITRA, Kuwait, addressed the session.

The panelists underlined the importance of fostering regional and global liberalisation, trade integration and cultural integration, and the leading role of the private sector in development, financing and investment, as well as the need to introduce legislation and supportive systems for sustainable development. At the session, The Boeing Company announced that it will open its permanent office in Kuwait, which will scale up the number of high-quality job opportunities

for Kuwaiti nationals. More details of the Northern Gulf Gateway that opens tremendous opportunities for investment and its impact on the economy were also announced.

- US\$150 to 200 billion in FDI for developing 20% of the project
- Northern Gulf Gateway to add US\$220 billion to the GDP
- Development to create 300,000 to 400,000 knowledge-based jobs for world's youth
- To attract 3 to 5 million visitors annually, opening new investment opportunities for the tourism, hospitality and leisure sectors
- Board of Trustees of the Harbour City in Northern Gulf Gateway to discuss with Chinese companies on May 1

H.E. Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said: "To change things have prevailed and to regain our growth, we have chosen the Northern Gulf Gateway development, not only as an economic catalyst but also to build a new geopolitical era. We can use the geographic advantage of our northern region, which lies closest to two of the world's oldest civilizations to help build new relations with our neighbours. Connecting to the Belt Road Initiative, the development will have a world-class airport, industries, a knowledge zone, leisure zone and educational zone. With Northern Gulf Gateway, Kuwait will be a catalyst in bringing together other countries in the region and across the world."

Mr. Omar Kutayba Alghanim said: "Our growth story has only begun; we are an open transparent market place, we are the oldest democracy in the region, we have a healthy balance sheet and geographic location. There is no better time than now to be part of the Kuwait story, underlined by the practical changes we see around. International corporations are opening office, and with our administrative and regulatory changes, we are open to global business. Since the inception of our SME Fund, more than US\$7 billion were set aside for them; such support doesn't happen in any other country."

Mr. Timothy Keating said: "The Middle East alone would need 63,000 pilots by 2035 as well as 69,000 technicians in addition to training to be offered for 100,000 crew. Such training partnerships are what we are looking at in Kuwait, so the young people here do not have to leave the country to be trained. We hope to add Kuwait to the list of our training centres as you have the right talent base and infrastructure here. We have about 50 employees now but watch the numbers grow."

Ms. Noura Al-Qabandi said: "Kuwait has led world relations, benefited humanity and assisted developing countries financially. We see the next big opportunity in the Northern region as an investment haven with God-given resources, land and a central location. It is a place where civilizations met, traded and connected, and it is our future."

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Immerse yourself in natural hot springs in New Zealand

New Zealand's beautiful beaches and waterways are a major attraction and, turning up the temperature from just plain cool to steamy, some of the best soaking spots boast heated water – and, even better, no-one has to pay the electricity bill because nature provides the power.

Wonderlust Bureau



Hot Water Beach, Coromandel

At Hot Water Beach on the Coromandel Peninsula in the North Island of New Zealand visitors can create their own natural jacuzzi in the wet sand during low tide. PC - Destination Coromandel Two hours either side of low tide, Hot Water Beach (aka Te Puia) fills up with visitors eager to dig their own spa pools in the sand. On the Coromandel Peninsula between Tairua and Whitianga, this thermal sandpit is a star attraction, with temperatures ranging from tepid to scalding. Either dig with your hands or hire a spade and, while it's perfectly fun to soak here in summer, on a cold winter's day it's hard to beat. At night, when the moon is out and the stars are twinkling, it's utterly heavenly. But do be warned, the open sea can be rugged so less experienced swimmers must take extra special care.

Travel Tips

Hot Water beach is 2.5 hours' drive from Auckland – make sure you don't forget your swimming costume and towel. When you've had enough of those thermal charms, choose from one of the cafés, but note that many close

during the winter. Nearby Hahei has eateries, a brewery, bicycle hire and kayak tours. The area is also home to Cathedral Cove – a spectacular natural archway and marine reserve that is popular with snorkellers. Explore on your own or take advantage of various tour companies offering excursions.

Te Rata Bay, Lake Tarawera

On the southern shore of Rotorua's Lake Tarawera, Te Rata Bay (also referred to as Hot Water Beach) is understandably popular. Fringed with pohutukawa trees and alive with native birds, as well as wild wallabies, the thermal vents on this beach help keep campers' coffee hot while they roast their daily catch in sandpits.

Travel Tips

Accessible by boat or via a fabulous five-hour bush walk (the 15km Tarawera Trail), you'll need to plan ahead to visit the beach. If you plan to stay overnight at the campground (or glamp it) you must book, and stock up on supplies as there are no shops. Happily, water taxis are easy to arrange through Totally Tarawera, with

plenty of options for enjoying this area either overnight or as part of a day-trip.

The largest and furthest-flung island in the Hauraki Gulf, Great Barrier/Aotea is 90km from Auckland. A rugged rock that's completely off grid, it tends to attract a capable sort of citizen. Renowned for unspoiled beaches, impressive wildlife and rich history, it's also home to a





picturesque thermal pool. Kaitoke Hot Springs is an easy, pram-friendly 45-minute walk from Whangaparapara Road. But be sure to take any provisions you need with you, as aside from two long-drop lavatories, this beautiful spot is completely non-commercial.

Travel Tips

Isolated Great Barrier/Aotea Island is popular with visitors who enjoy fishing, surfing, hiking and anything to do with nature. Recently awarded International Dark Sky Sanctuary status, be sure to look heavenward after dark when the stars astonish. Accessible by a 30-minute flight or a five-hour ferry ride, there's plenty of accommodation and a reasonable selection of eateries (although you're wise to take some food). Be sure to allow a good few days to get to grips with all the island has to offer.

Kawhia Ocean Beach, Waikato

Less crowded than Coromandel's Hot Water Beach, hot springs can be found at Kawhia's Ocean Beach for two hours either side of low tide. Steeped in history, Kawhia is where the Tainui waka (one of the original canoes carrying the first Polynesians) came to rest after its epic trans-Pacific voyage, and today is a sleepy little spot, far from the madding crowds and all the better for it. If you're not sure where to dig to gain access to the steaming seams, a friendly local will show you the way. But be warned, because this is a black sand beach, it can really heat up in summer, so don't forget your shoes.

Travel Tips

Kawhia is a peaceful King Country town 200km from Auckland. It offers accommodation (including a campground), a museum, a couple of cafés, a general store and a fish and chips

shop. Popular with history buffs, fossil fans and fisher people, it's heavenly all year round. And do experience the cooler charms of nearby Waitomo Caves if time allows.

Welcome Flat Hot Pools

And don't forget the South Island, because 20km south of Fox Glacier you'll find Welcome Flat Hot Pools, near a conveniently positioned DOC (Department of Conservation) hut. Surrounded by snowy peaks and forest, there are several temperature options with even the fussiest bathers catered for - provided they don't mind mud. The pools are accessed via the Copland Track, which is 18km one way (it takes about seven hours to complete), so ensure you book ahead for one of the 31 beds in the DOC hut. Of course you'll need to take your food, sleeping bag and swimming suit as well. It's open year round, so pack for the conditions and keep an eye on weather reports.

Travel Tips

Welcome Flat is found in South Westland in the South Island, four hours' drive from Queenstown or six hours' from Christchurch. The Fox Glacier region is bursting with tourist highlights, from kayak tours to scenic flights. The Hobnail Café and Souvenir Shop is a great spot to refuel, Gillespies Beach is grand if you're into geology, rainforest and seals, and always look out for the kea, New Zealand's cheeky parrot.

Old meets new look in New Zealand's second largest city

Take a journey on Christchurch's tram network to witness the city's changing landscape as sparkling new buildings pop up alongside heritage architecture.

Christchurch's iconic trams trundle along the inner-city streets each day to the tune of knowledgeable conductors. A journey in one of these beautifully-restored heritage trams will transport you back in time and through the city's changing cityscape. Services ground to a halt after the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010 and 2011 and locals were excited to see the trams up and running again two years later. A full circuit is about 45 minutes and takes in a significant amount of the city.

Consider the past, present and future

Officially stop number two on the tram tour, Cathedral Square is a great spot to disembark and reflect on Christchurch's past, present and future. Challenge your friends to a game on the giant chess board or, on Friday nights, choose from a variety of delicious food trucks. While the damaged Christchurch Cathedral is a reminder of the earthquakes, the exciting news is that it is to be restored.



Visakhapatnam: How Andhra Pradesh's business hub is becoming a travel and leisure destination

In the bifurcated Andhra Pradesh, this coastal city discovered its new identity and is now emerging not merely as the business and technology hub but also as a travel and leisure destination.

Wonderlust Bureau

As per a report published in IANS though in the very first year of the truncated state, cyclone Hudhud battered the city, known popularly as Vizag, it bounced back with new vigour. The rebuilt infrastructure gave a new look to the city, adjudged the third-cleanest in India last year.

Though already recognised as a key hub for being the headquarters of the Eastern Naval Command, the presence of a port, a steel plant and other industries, the city in the past did not get its due and was never branded properly. This was because, as people of the port city say, the focus of successive governments in undivided Andhra Pradesh was Hyderabad.

After the breaking up of Andhra Pradesh to carve out Telangana state with Hyderabad as its capital in 2014, Vizag found new importance. The state government launched an initiative to develop it as the country's Fintech hub and a centre of new-age technologies. It has hosted partnership summits here for the last three years, witnessing signing of MoUs for massive investments in the state.

The government also started working on plans to develop Vizag as a travel destination. The yachting festival held on March 28-31 brought into focus the bustling city's huge tourism potential.

The four-day festival organised by Andhra Pradesh Tourism in association with E-Factor Adventure Tourism Pvt. Ltd, saw a fleet of plush yachts descending on the Vizag shores, for the discerning enthusiasts who love engaging with lifestyle, water and adventure.

Organised with a vision to establish and put Vizag on the marine tourism map, the festival, said to be first of its kind in India, saw yachts cruising on the azure waters of the Bay of Bengal, providing sailing enthusiasts a breathtaking view of popular beaches like RK Beach, Rishikonda, Thotlakonda and Yerada. The on-board audiences were treated with activities like swimming, snorkelling, rescue demo by the Indian Navy and adrenaline-pumping displays of fly-boarding.

In the evenings when the yachts were parked at Vizag port, the audiences were entertained with musical performances.

It was the first attempt to introduce lifestyle tourism in Vizag, a key destination on the



nearly 1,000-km-long coastline of the state. The organisers sold limited tickets, priced at a steep Rs 14,500 per person per day.

"Water holiday or yachting is a richie rich, big boy's holiday. Typically, one hour of yachting costs Rs 1 lakh in India," Kaushik Mukherji, principal advisor to Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister on rebranding the state with a focus on tourism, told IANS.

He believed yachting can contribute significantly to the state's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). "Though only one percent of society can afford yachting, it has a huge margin," he explained, claiming that on India's east coast, Vizag is the only place which can offer this kind of holiday.

Mukherji was confident that two years down the line there will be people who will come to Vizag for water holidays. "Why do I need to go to Bali when I can do it in Vizag? The reasoning is being created."

The yachting festival was one of the marketing techniques to brand Vizag. "Andhra Pradesh has no better tourism card than Vizag. It was never marketed earlier. Vizag was always consumed by the word of mouth. There was no draw towards it. I am changing the perceived value," Mukherji said.

Explaining why Vizag is important, Mukherji pointed out that its beach mountains were not found anywhere else. Every brick at Thotlakonda beach is 2,500 years old. He believed a Buddhism circuit can be created here and marketed in countries like Sri Lanka, Taiwan, China and Japan, which always look for Buddhism products.

"Ten miles from where we are sitting (Vizag port) is the (Pakistani) Gazi submarine which can be one of the finest diving sites of the world. I can give the best dive into the submarine which was sunk during the 1971 war."

Mukherji believed different products for different segments of the market could help tap the state's immense tourism potential. He set the ball rolling a year ago with Vizag Music Festival followed by the balloon festival in Araku valley, a picturesque location about 100 km from Vizag.

"We have to be clear about who our target audience is. It's the promise which I am selling. People buy promises, not destinations," he added.

Tourism currently contributes seven per cent of the state's GDP, but Mukherji believes powerful tourism brands can increase this to 24-25 per cent.



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Brijrama Palace: Where spirituality meets royalty

My recent visit to Varanasi exposed me to a city which truly is as old as the human civilization. The 84 beautiful and vibrant ghats (riverfronts) of Varanasi unravel many stories of human existence.

Ramya Mishra



Sadhus, salvation seekers and holidayers, Varanasi transcend expectations of all. My recent sojourn to this ancient city opened up my heart and soul to a world that is mystique but still so simple. It was a hot and humid morning of March when I left to Varanasi from New Delhi on an IndiGo flight. A short flight of little more than one hour meant I reached the Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport before I could finish my nap.

Varanasi's Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport has witnessed strong growth in passenger numbers, from 1 million in 2014-2015 to 1.9 million passengers in 2017-2018. Definitely, it is one of the better airports located in non-metro Indian cities. As I was staying at the Brijrama Palace, a hugely popular luxury hotel in Varanasi, I was greeted by a representative of the hotel, part of the Brijrama Palace's guest helpdesk located in

the premises of the airport. On my way to the hotel, I could see that the city is reaping benefits of being the electoral constituency of the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. The driver of my car, Dharam Raj, shared that the prices of real estate have escalated drastically in Varanasi leaving behind cities like New Delhi. Over the days, I realized that Mr. Dharam Raj is blessed with the gift of storytelling. In one of our chit-chats, he told me that there is a Mukti Bhavan in Varanasi where only people on their death-bed are allowed to stay. The priests at this last abode perform rituals and rites that are believed to help the dying depart from the earth in peace and attain salvation. However, there is a catch, if the person does not die within two weeks of his stay, he or she needs to leave Mukti Bhavan and has to give the room to someone in the waiting.

The story made me pensive; however, exciting times were waiting for me once I reached Rajghat, where Brijrama Palace's bajra (a classical handcrafted wooden boat) was waiting for me. As soon I boarded the boat my young host recounted the legend of Varanasi over a glass of chilled 'thandai' (sweetened milk prepared with almonds and infused with flavors and textures of saffron, rose, melon



The Brijrama Palace, Varanasi



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seeds etc.). The Ganges flowing along the ghats offered magnificent views one can only enjoy while on a boat cruise over the river. A number of ghats walked past us as we maneuvered to the Brijrama Palace.

Ghats are manmade embankments of stone, centuries old and built to face east towards the rising Sun. Originally built as access to the river for pilgrims seeking a holy dip to perform sacred rites and religious ceremonies, some sections of the ghats are dedicated for cremation rites. Built post 1700 AD, the patrons of the ghats were of Maratha lineage from the noble houses of the Scindias, Holkars, Bhonsles and Peshwas.

Manikarnika ghat is one of the ghats that have a significant religious importance. Many people believe that, one can attain salvation if cremated at the Manikarnika ghat.

A deviation from the common Hindu tradition, the dead bodies are cremated here not only in the day time but in the late evening as well! One can find a lot of tourists on boats silently watching the cremation process. While the holy water in the river Ganges remain a still spectator, the flames rising from the funeral pyre carries many souls to eternity. A deep melancholy shrouds one who stops at the ghat for a while.

After a 20 minutes long boat ride, I reached the Darbhanga Ghat, where the hotel is located. In the 18th century, the Royal House of Nagpur greatly influenced by Maratha architecture built the Brijrama Palace on Darbhanga ghat. Considered as one of the oldest buildings on the ghats, it was originally designed to serve as a fort. This fort was acquired by the Maharaja Saheb of Darbhanga in the early 20th century, who converted and christened this fort as the famous "Darbhanga Mahal". The Maharaja incorporated elements of Greek architecture and the first lift in South Asia, which I took to reach the 'baithak' of the hotel. The baithak is a traditional sitting area of the hotel, where the guests are offered a customary Indian welcome. The ancient sandstone pillars boast of beautiful artwork from the time of Marathas. Glistening Chandeliers and lamps adorn the ceilings and walls and old world furnishings accentuate the ambiance.



The Brijrama Palace may not compare to the grandeur of some of the lavish yesteryears palaces in Rajasthan that have now been converted to hotels but its location overlooking the majestic river Ganges and intricate architecture sets it apart from the rest. The first impression of Brijrama Palace comes across as a quaint and guest friendly property. The staff of the hotel is one of the most hospitable one that I have come across during my stay in various hotels across the globe.

The Brijrama Palace offers a number of rooms and suites for the discerning travelers. One can opt from Maharaja Suites, Varuna Burj Room, Vasundhara, Dhanurdhara and Nadidhara. Each suite and room has its own unique specialty and guest amenities.

In the afternoon, the hotel arranged for a priest who took me on a tour to the famed Kashi Vishwanath Temple, one of the most important Hindu temples dedicated to Lord Shiva. The accompanying priest ensured that we had a hassle free darshan (view) of the deity.

In the evening amidst the enchanting sounds of temple bells, and the chirping of birds, I enjoyed the beautiful view of the setting sun and the quiet pristine Ganges, at the outdoor extension of Bhaithak while sipping a cup of tea.

Before retiring for the day, I headed to Darbhanga to experience a selection of international vegetarian delicacies at Brijrama's fine dining outlet. One can enjoy a quiet meal, personalized to one's taste sitting amidst the beauty of restored ceilings and walls rich with a bouquet of frescos and artwork.

Varanasi has over 300 temples dedicated to various Hindu deities. I was able to visit few of them next day including Mrityunjaya Mahadev Temple. This temple of Lord Shiva is situated in Maidagin in Varanasi. The temple is believed to ward off untimely death from its devotees. The temple complex has a well whose water is said to be a mixture of several underground streams and good for eliminating several diseases. It is also called Apa Mrityu Hareshwar. According to another popular belief, Dhanvantri the father of Ayurveda poured all his medicines in this well, so its water is sacred and eliminates several diseases. I had a full glass of water which I felt was sweet.

In the evening I headed to the Dashashwamedh Ghat where Ganga Aarti, a ritual offering to the Ganges is performed every evening to intense chanting and beating of cymbals. The hotel offers a complimentary boat ride to its guests interested to participate in this ritual.

One of the many fascinating part of staying at Brijrama Palace is that the hotel offers evening soirées of live classical music that resonates along the Atrium. For a truly spiritual experience, participate in the daily sunrise yoga at the Udyaan, the terrace. You may also cosily soak in the winter sun with a view of Ganges.

Soon, before I realized my two-day-long stay in Varanasi's Brijrama Palace was about to end. On my way back to the airport, I told Dharam Raj if I would have stayed more than two days in Varanasi; there was no going back for me.

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Air Freight Up 6.8% in February but Protectionist Risks Remain

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) released demand growth results for global air freight markets for February 2018 showing a 6.8% increase in demand measured in freight tonne kilometers (FTKs) compared to the same period last year. Adjusting for the potential Lunar New Year distortions by combining growth in January 2018 and February 2018, demand increased by 7.7%. This was the strongest start to a year since 2015.

Freight capacity, measured in available freight tonne kilometers (AFTKs), grew by 5.6% year-on-year in February 2018. Demand growth outstripped capacity growth for the 19th month in a row, which is positive for airline yields and the industry's financial performance.

The continued growth in air cargo demand is consistent with ongoing robust global trade flows. There are, however, signs that the best of the upturn for air freight has passed. Demand drivers for air cargo are moving away from the highly supportive levels seen last year. In recent months the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing and export orders has softened in a number of key exporting nations including Germany, China and the US. And the seasonally-adjusted demand for air cargo which rose at a double-digit annualized rate for much of 2017 is now trending at 3%.

Jet Airways signs a new order for additional Boeing 737 MAX aircraft

Jet Airways has signed a new order for 75 additional Boeing 737 MAX aircraft taking the total order to 150 aircraft. The Boeing 737 aircraft type is the backbone of Jet Airways' fleet. The 150 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft will serve the Airline not only to replace its existing fleet but also to equip it with modern and environmentally progressive airplanes thereby fueling the airline's expansion strategy to support its network and growth aspirations in the world's fastest growing aviation market.

Vinay Dube, Chief Executive Officer, Jet Airways, said, "Our new order for the additional 75 Boeing 737 MAX aircraft will allow us to deliver a differentiated and world class customer experience to our guests. This additional order reemphasizes our trust and confidence in Boeing and also reaffirms our commitment to operate extremely modern, reliable and fuel efficient aircraft as part of our fleet. Jet Airways' partnership with Boeing goes back 25 years ever since the airline was conceived and took to the skies. This order underscores Jet Airways' commitment to the growth and sustainability of the Indian aviation market".

"We are honored that Jet Airways has again placed its trust in Boeing with its order for 75 more Boeing 737 MAXs", said Dinesh Keskar, Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific & India Sales, Boeing Commercial Airplanes. "These additional Boeing 737 MAX airplanes will help Jet Airways continue to be an industry leader by combining a superior passenger experience with reliable and efficient operations".

MakeMyTrip & Flipkart announce strategic partnership

MakeMyTrip Limited and Flipkart have announced a strategic partnership in the travel services segment. MakeMyTrip's multiple brands, including MakeMyTrip, Goibibo and redBus, will leverage the large customer base of Flipkart platform to drive online bookings in travel services. The new partnership will start with a roll-out of domestic flight bookings in the next few weeks, followed by Hotels, Bus and Holidays bookings.

Commenting on the partnership, Deep Kalra, Founder & Group CEO, MakeMyTrip Ltd. said, "Flipkart is one of the most exciting companies of our times and we are delighted to partner with them to catalyse the massive online travel opportunity in India. This partnership will help us reach out to an even wider consumer base and further open up the online travel market in a significant way"

Kalyan Krishnamurthy, CEO, Flipkart said, "Flipkart and MakeMyTrip have played a defining role in shaping the consumer internet ecosystem in India and bringing millions of people online. This strategic partnership helps us make travel booking a seamless experience for customers, even those in the farthest regions, while also furthering our goal of being a one-stop destination for all digital transactions

Region's first food truck in a 5 star hotel parks itself in Chandigarh

Adding an all-new dimension to the region's food and beverage (F&B) landscape, the region's first food truck in a 5 Star hotel has parked itself at North India's premier hospitality destination, JW Marriott Chandigarh.

Celebrating the varied gastronomical preferences of the city's populace, the newly launched Food Truck at JW Marriott Chandigarh serves an exquisite menu that offers a delightful mix of Indian, Oriental, Western and Italian comfort food. Launched in an alfresco set-up, the Food Truck is an inventive open-air destination for Tricity residents who, despite having a lifestyle comparable with their contemporaries in major metros, still retain the understated style and relaxed disposition that comes naturally to them.

Radisson Hotel Group aims for 200 hotels in South Asia by 2022

The newly rebranded Radisson Hotel Group announced its expansion plans at Hotel Investment Conference South Asia (HICSA) 2018. The company aims to expand its portfolio to more than 200 hotels in operation and under development by 2022 in South Asia, where it is already a dominant international player.

The group has already signed Radisson Blu Resort Visakhapatnam, Radisson Panipat City Centre and Country Inn & Suites by Radisson Agra in the first quarter of 2018. Radisson Gwalior opened last month and the group is on track to open another eight more hotels in India this year.

"We excitedly continue the momentum on our growth and signings in 2018. With a robust performance, ahead of industry average and continued investment in technology and revenue driving platforms, we are optimistic of meeting our five-year goals. I am delighted that India is leading the way in Asia Pacific with a total of seven global brand offerings which will further strengthen our business in the region," said Raj Rana, Chief Executive Officer, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group.

Anchored on growth and improvement plans for three main levers vis-à-vis business performance, people and owner relationships, Radisson Hotel Group has developed robust plans for each area whereby the operating structure has been realigned and investments are being made into strategic areas of marketing, revenue generation and procurement to drive desired outcomes. The group is focused on enhancing profitability, ensuring brand standard compliance and uplifting guest experience while aiming to open landmark hotels in strategic locations and growing its mid-scale brand footprint. It saw healthy occupancy and average rates ahead of industry performance in 2017 and has continued the momentum in the first quarter of 2018.

Yatra.com launches 'YUVA', a universal virtual assistant

Yatra.com, one of India's leading online travel portals, has taken an innovative approach to delivering a personalized experience and launched - 'YUVA' which stands for Yatra Universal Virtual Assistant. The unique and first-of-its-kind "Hybrid approach" allows the user to use both voice and text to communicate with YUVA and complete the booking on the go. YUVA is available on desktop, Android, IOS, Google Assistant and Facebook Messenger.

Supporting various Indian accents, YUVA enables intuitive customer interaction in a relatively human-like way, answering questions related to flight bookings and providing expertise in real time. No longer do customers need to search through content on the company's website, instead they can now interact directly with YUVA and uncover the information they need in an instant.

The users can search and book flights, apply multiple filters, rearrange options with different sort orders and modify bookings. The user can provide the complete information in a single sentence or talk to YUVA and provide the relevant information in a form of a communication. For example, 'Show me refundable non-stop flights from Delhi to Mumbai for next Sunday morning on Indigo' or 'Me and my wife want to go Delhi from Mumbai in business class on Christmas.'

IndiGo to launch Tiruchirappalli its 51st destination

Reinforcing its commitment to connect tier-II, tier-III cities on its ever growing 6E network; India's largest and fastest growing budget carrier, IndiGo will soon add "Tiruchirappalli" as its 51st destination. Starting June 01, 2018, IndiGo with its seventh ATR, will start operating four direct flights from Chennai to Tiruchirappalli. IndiGo would be the first airline to launch four departures on its inaugural day at Tiruchirappalli. IndiGo will also be the only airline to provide same day return facility to its customers on Chennai - Tiruchirappalli - Chennai sector.

The new flights are designed to cater to business and leisure travellers who are constantly on the lookout for new and affordable flying options. The introduction of these flights will further strengthen airline's ATR operations, and will provide enhanced connectivity between Chennai and Tiruchirappalli with all-inclusive fares starting from INR 2499. Customers who wish to plan their travel can book tickets on www.goindigo.in with immediate effect.

Air Arabia receives ATN's Corporate Editor Choice Award

Air Arabia, the Middle East and North Africa's first and largest low-cost carrier (LCC), has received the 'Corporate Editor Choice Award' at the 2018 Air Transport Awards organized by Air Transport News held this year in Dubai, UAE. The accolade is a demonstration of Air Arabia's continued commitment to passenger satisfaction and development within the industry.

Air Arabia picked up the prestigious award at the Air Transport Awards which remains to be the only international prizes that award all the main categories of the air transport industry. The jury for the judging process comprised of prominent leaders from the field of aviation, government and air transport bodies. Nominations submitted were evaluated by jury members with the final winner per category being adjudged on overall consensus. Air Arabia, currently operates flights to 147 routes across the globe from five hubs located in the Middle East

and North Africa, and continues its mission to create an ever-expanding network of diverse destinations, allowing for high-quality and cost-effective travel.

Ginger Hotels expands its footprint in Goa with Ginger Hotel, Dona Paula

Ginger Hotels, the fastest growing brand in the budget lodging segment in India has announced the opening of their second hotel in Goa with the launch of Ginger Goa, Dona Paula. The move is in line with Indian Hotels Company Limited's (IHCL) focus on increasing its footprint across segments to meet the consumer demand at various price points.

Perched on a hillock overlooking the Arabian Sea, Ginger Goa, Dona Paula enjoys a prime location and is situated between the Dona Paula beach and the Vanguinim beach. The hotel is within a forty-minute drive from the International Airport and is near Panjim city center as well as the Karmali railway station (Old Goa).

The hotel houses 24 beautifully designed spacious rooms with a choice of a private terrace or a balcony. With a committed and caring team, this spotlessly clean hotel features a multi-cuisine restaurant, fitness center, swimming pool, efficient meeting facilities and seamless complimentary Wi-Fi. Ginger Hotels are a smart choice for today's value conscious and discerning travelers, given the wide array of facilities the hotel offers.

The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace supported the worldwide Earth Hour Movement

To shed light on climate action in support of Earth Hour 2018, The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace went dark for one hour on March 24th 2018. The hotel united with millions by turning off its lights at 8:30 p.m. local time to illuminate a powerful message about environmental awareness and action. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) created this annual global environmental awareness event to emphasize the threat of climate change.

During the day, The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace took a big step forward in preserving energy with a meaningful tree planting initiative. Guests of the hotel also participated in bringing attention to the importance of conserving Mother Nature.

25 year old restaurant "Banjara" from Bangalore comes to serve Mumbai

Enjoy the delicacies of Karnataka in Mumbai as the 25-year-old restaurant of Bangalore, "Banjara", opens its door in Andheri East in Mumbai. A property of Goldfinch Hotel from MRG Group, the Multi-cuisine restaurant offers a delicious spread of Indian, Chinese and Mediterranean fare.

Derived from the Tulu dialect widely spoken in South Karnataka, "Banjara" literally means 'a satiated stomach'. True to its name the upscale fine dining restaurant offers an array of traditionally cooked Indian dishes with particular emphasis on flavor along with a selection of beverages, making it one of the finest haunts for the food connoisseurs. One of its first kind culinary, the scrumptious menu comprises of specialties like Matka Biryani, Crab Malvani Masala, Chicken Pesto Salads, Irish Money Boxteys to name a few. Elegant décor with soft lightning and relaxing ambience coupled with warm hospitality of Goldfinch, brings the classic fine dining experience back to life.

SriLankan Airlines scores a hat-trick at Golden City Gate Awards 2018

SriLankan Airlines, the national carrier of Sri Lanka and a member of the one world alliance, reaffirming the global appeal and innovativeness of its marketing communication endeavors yet again, won three awards at Golden City Gate Awards 2018 at ITB Berlin, the world's largest tourism trade fair. The 18th edition of the awards saw a jury of 40 members judging 157 submissions sent by over 30 countries.

SriLankan Airlines was awarded the 'First Star' in the campaign category for its Melbourne launch campaign "Two Cities, One Spirit." It also bagged the 'Second Star' in the same category for its brand campaign in China themed "The Spirit of China, the Story of Sri Lanka." The third, another 'Second Star', was bestowed upon SriLankan for its video "The Largest Carrier to India" in the TV Cinema Spot category. This is the second consecutive time the Airline was commended at the Golden City Gate podium, having been the recipient of the 'first star' for its destination video "Epic Journey of Sri Lanka on SriLankan Airlines" in the MICE Promotions category, last year.

Upon receiving the awards, SriLankan Airlines General Manager Marketing, Saminda Perera said, "We at SriLankan Airlines are honored to receive three prestigious awards at this year's Golden City Gate Awards. This is the second consecutive time that we have been commended at this podium and this proves the universal appeal of our marketing communications endeavors. These awards will certainly inspire us further to explore new avenues in creative conceptualization and creation of unique content to take Sri Lanka to the world."

Indian Culinary Forum discusses the future of the food industry in India

Nothing brings people together like a good food. But if you needed some food for your thoughts on how to tackle the Indian food & beverages industry in the years to come, ICF Knowledge Summit 2018 was your place to be. The summit was organized by Indian Culinary Forum in association with TagTaste as their Knowledge partner on 29th Mar 2018 at Pullman Hotel, Aerocity, Delhi.

Hundreds of business leaders, farmers, chefs, nutritionists, consultants, marketers, MNCs and entrepreneurs from across India came together to listen to various industry stalwarts and veterans about their experiences and insights on the industry and various trends. The summit acted as a networking and knowledge exchange for all the members.

Chef Davinder Kumar started the day by giving welcome remarks. Thereafter, Mr. Jaspal Singh Sabharwal, co-founder & CEO of TagTaste discussed the modern-day networks and their impact in our lives. He also highlighted how anybody can use these networks for their benefits. This was followed by panel discussions on various topics.

Etihad Airways begins trial of VR technology

Etihad Airways has started trialing SkyLights Aero Virtual Reality (VR) entertainment technology at its flagship First Class Lounge and Spa and Business Class Premium Lounge, at Abu Dhabi International Airport's Terminal 3. The aim of the month-long trial is to gather customer feedback to determine the airline's future lounge entertainment offering at Abu Dhabi's state-of-the-art Midfield Terminal. SkyLights is a leading provider of entertainment solutions, working closely with leading airline industry partners to leverage the

latest cinematic VR technology to transform their inflight and ground experience. The company has offices in San Francisco, Paris and Toulouse.

Linda Celestino, Etihad Airways Vice President Guest Experience and Delivery, said: "As with the Etihad inflight experience, we are constantly investigating ways to enhance our service and hospitality offering on the ground through innovative technology and customisation. By conducting trials such as this, we already understand that modern travellers expect more information and seek increasingly connected and immersive experiences which engage and entertain them on every level. Gone are the days when a premium lounge experience just meant comfortable design, luxurious amenities and fine dining."

In one of the sessions dedicated to farmers, Dr. GS Khalon, the pioneer in Citrus Horticulture in India and an advisor at Department of Horticulture, Punjab enlightened the audience about the aspects of citrus fruits, evaluation of new varieties and standardization of cultural practices for the control of nutrient deficiencies and fruit quality improvement.

First edition of Très RARE organized in New Delhi

The maiden edition of Très RARE - a showcase of the finest boutique hotels, lodges, hideaways, camps and retreats in India, Nepal, and Bhutan was held recently at The Roseate Resort, New Delhi. The 2-day event that has been envisaged and instituted by RARE India aimed to engage with the bespoke tour operators and media from India and overseas, alongside an eclectic mix of world travelers. Not restricting itself to just meetings and networking sessions, the event hosted speakers on hospitality and related topics to add value to the concept of experiential travel in the sub-continent.

With the participation of select 100 Indian Destination Management Companies and 30 Foreign Operators from UK, US, France, Germany, and Italy, this event focused on intensive one-on-one engagement, knowledge building, and innovations. Close interactions with the hotel owners and hosts, followed by eleven hosted familiarization trips across India, the event promised to be one of the most intensive and engaging travel shows in the sub-continent. Some of the hotels which participated at Très Rare were RAAS Jodhpur in Rajasthan, Bhainsrorgarh Fort, Rajasthan, Hotel Druk, Bhutan, Pepper Trail, Kerala, Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge, Nepal, Deccan Odyssey and many more.

Cox & Kings Ltd sells second tranche of 3% in subsidiary

Cox & Kings Ltd. (C&K), the leading holidays and education travel group having operations in 22 countries, today announced that its 100% subsidiary Prometheon Enterprises Ltd (PEL) has sold additional stake of 3% in Prometheon Holdings (UK) Limited (PHUK) to an investee company of SSG Capital Management.

In the first tranche, announced on 22nd March 2018, PEL had sold 11.58% stake to SSG Capital Management. PEL along with C&K India earlier held 65.58% of PHUK, which houses the Education and Hybrid hotels businesses. Pursuant to the stake sale in two tranches, Cox & Kings Group will hold 51% of PHUK through PEL & C&K India while SSG Capital will hold 49%. In November 2017, SSG Capital had first invested in PHUK when it bought The Rohatyn Group's (TRG) entire stake of 34.42%. PGL and NST are leaders in the experiential learning space in the UK and have taken the product to Australia. The business is attracting strong volumes in inbound student traffic from Europe and China.



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DoubleTree by Hilton Pune-Chinchwad appoints Director of Revenue

DoubleTree by Hilton Pune-Chinchwad has appointed Himanshu Kumar as the new Director of Revenue. Himanshu has an experience of 17 years primarily in the hospitality sector, including an in-depth exposure to room management, revenue management, room reservation and front office. Himanshu is highly competitive and is responsible for bringing new creative ideas, strategies and implementing them successfully. During his career, Himanshu has worked with various international brands including Crowne Plaza - Bahrain, Fraser Suites- Dubai, Oakwood Asia Pacific, Intercontinental Hotel Group and Marriott International. In his current role at DoubleTree by Hilton Pune, Himanshu would be responsible for consolidating the hotel's RevPar positioning and driving innovative strategies.



Renaissance Hotel Lucknow appoints Director of Operations

Renaissance hotel Lucknow has appointed Namit Vijh as Director of Rooms for the hotel. Namit will be responsible for the overall functioning of the hotel will spearhead various functions like front office, housekeeping, reservations, food and beverage, alliances, marketing and guest service.

Prior to joining Renaissance Lucknow Hotel, Namit was working with Courtyard by Marriott, Gurugram, as Director of Rooms. After completing his Hotel Management Course from Dr. Ambedkar Institute of Hotel Management, Catering & Nutrition Chandigarh in 2005, Namit started his career with Taj Hotel, Chandigarh, as Taj Hospitality Trainee in Front Office. Later he served in responsible positions and gathered extensive experience working with renowned hotels such as The Oberoi, The Imperial, The Hyatt Regency, The Leela Palace, New Delhi, JW Marriott, Juhu, Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai and Courtyard by Marriott Gurugram amongst others.



Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport appoints Corporate Master Chef

Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport has appointed Chef Dheeraj Mathur as a Corporate Master Chef - Indian. In his new role, he will be responsible for handling the most awarded Indian specialty restaurant The Great Kabab Factory (TGKF) at Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport, as well as assist in product development and pre-opening activities for UHPL, the hospitality company that franchises, markets and operates the TGKF brand. Having worked with reputed hotels for over 17 years, Chef Dheeraj comes with an enriching experience of delivering great taste, exclusive offerings, strategic F & B planning and operational excellence. Chef Mathur did a three years diploma in Hotel Management from Govt. Institute of Hotel Management Almora, Uttaranchal and also completed his graduation from Delhi University.



Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bengaluru appoints Revenue Manager

The newly opened Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bengaluru Racecourse has appointed Amritpal Singh as the Revenue Manager. Having worked with renowned brands like The Lalit Ashok, Hyatt and Ginger Hotel, Amritpal comes with an extensive experience of over 10 years in industry. He has been part of many successful pre-openings in the span of 10 years in his career.

In his new role at Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bengaluru Racecourse, he will be responsible for overall revenue management of the property with key focus on generating maximum revenues. He will be actively involved in short and long-term planning and preparation of the marketing strategies, hotel policies, procedures, relevant legislations and the annual budget. Prior to joining Holiday Inn Express & Suites Bengaluru Racecourse, he worked as the revenue manager at The Lalit Ashok Bengaluru.



DoubleTree by Hilton Pune Chinchwad appoints Director of Rooms

Sagar Gaonkar is a well healed professional with over 11 years of experience in Hotel Operations. Having worked with established names such as Leela, JW Marriott, Starwood, Wyndham and Hilton. Sagar has an expertise and proficiency in handling guest relations, implementing systems and managing a gamut of key operational divisions. As the Zonal. Incharge at Double Tree by Hilton, Pune, Sagar will be responsible for monitoring activities of all associates in coordination with HOD's ensuring that they adhere to the standards of excellence, plan and initiate the best practices to achieve targets and goals in order to maintain the brand leadership, implement best practices and drive quality check, by leading the team as a change champion and ensure to the adherence of all the brand standards. Sagar's well rounded experience at various levels will bring the right amount of experience and expertise to the profile.



Sarovar Hotels & Resorts appoints GM for Hyderabad property

Sarovar Hotels & Resorts has appointed Ankush Sharma as General Manager of Aditya Park Hyderabad, a Sarovar Portico hotel. He brings with him a diverse experience and expertise of over 16 years in the sphere of hotel operations, sales and marketing, project management and revenue management.

In his last international assignment, Ankush spearheaded the pre-opening of Ramee Rose in Bahrain which had been acclaimed for customer standards and procedural benchmarks. Prior to this, he has also been the General Manager of Clarion Collection at Delhi and Savoy Suites in Delhi NCR. In the past, he had also been associated with Taj Group and Intercontinental Hotels Group. Ankush is a Hotel Management graduate from AMC Bangalore followed by an MBA degree from Amity University specializing in Marketing Management. He is adept in managing diverse manpower owing to his rich exposure. In his current assignment, he is responsible for project management in terms of renovation and refurbishment of the hotel as well as restructuring sales and marketing for maximizing yield.

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