

# TODAY'S traveller

CORPORATE BUSINESS, AVIATION, MICE & LEISURE TRAVEL MAGAZINE

JANUARY- FEBRUARY 2019 | ₹50



**COFFEE TABLE  
BOOK 2018  
AT A GLANCE**

**CANADA:  
THE SPORTS, SPA AND  
WELLNESS HOTSPOT**

**SPOTLIGHT:  
INTERVIEWS WITH  
GAME CHANGERS**

## TIMELESS TAMIL NADU





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The Seminar will be addressed by Film Directors, Producers and Actors, who will present the topic of Film Tourism and the important criteria involved in destination marketing. The speakers will also discuss the approach that destinations should take to seize the opportunities provided by Film Tourism and thus reap the benefits by way of increased revenue and visitor arrival. It will be part of the broader event – MTM+LLTM.

**Time duration: One hour**

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**10 ON A STRATEGIC GROWTH TRAJECTORY**  
In conversation with Shikhar Aggarwal, Joint Managing Director, BLS International

**12 SKILLED STRATEGIST**  
Renu Basu, Senior Vice President - Global Sales, IHCL, elucidates how The IHCL delivers on all accounts - brand promise, event management and technology

**16 CANADA: THE SPORTS, SPA AND WELLNESS HOTSPOT**  
The Sports, Spa and Wellness Summit highlighted Canada's significance as a global tourism hub

**18 CANADA CALLING!**  
Today's Traveller recently organised a Bloggers Expo to share insights on what Canada has to offer when it comes to Luxury and Leisure travel

**20 TIRELESS CRUSADER**  
Meet Taljinder Singh, Area Director - Mumbai Hotels & General Manager, The Taj Mahal Palace, as he shares his valuable insights on what makes the Taj Mahal Palace Mumbai the nucleus of Indian Hospitality culture

**23 COFFEE TABLE BOOK 2018 AT A GLANCE**  
Glimpses from our recently published Coffee Table Book, 2018

**34 AN OASIS OF PEACE**  
Nimba Nature Cure is Gujarat's premier wellness resort known for its unique brand of Naturopathy and Ayurveda

**36 EXCLUSIVITY AT ITS BEST**  
In conversation with BV Bharadwaja, Country Head, The Ascott Limited, India





# TENTS

CORPORATE BUSINESS, AVIATION, MICE & LEISURE TRAVEL MAGAZINE | VOLUME 22 | No.6 | JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2019

42

## A ROYAL ESCAPE

Explore Alila Fort Bishangarh and its range of surprising elements in an insightful conversation with Binny Sebastian, General Manager, Alila Fort Bishangarh

44

## THE ART OF BUSINESS

In conversation with Monica Suri, General Manager, Jaipur Marriott Hotel

48

## DIGIYATRA: PAPERLESS AIR TRAVEL

A passenger facial recognition programme, AAI's DigiYatra platform ensures that your face becomes your boarding pass, making travel easier and simpler than ever before

51

## TRAVEL BUCKETLIST 2019

Make the most of your dream destination in 2019 with a wide range of properties from Fortune & WelcomHeritage Hotels

56

## THE HILTON PROMISE

A tête-à-tête with Aditya Shamsher Malla, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Pune, Chinchwad

58

## TIMELESS TAMIL NADU

On your next trip to Tamil Nadu, visit these iconic colonial marvels from yesteryears and be dumbfounded to discover the slice of history behind their long existence

60

## 24 HOURS IN GOA

This season, discover Goa in its myriad colours as you wind down the old quarters, pristine beaches and cobbled streets amidst winter sunshine and blissful natural settings

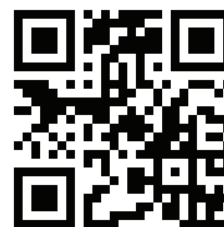
## ADD ONS

NEWS.....4

APPOINTMENTS.....8

WHAT WHEN WHERE.....62

PICK OF THE MONTH.....64



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## THE POSTCARD HOTEL DEBUTS WITH THREE HOTELS IN GOA



Leading hotelier Kapil Chopra recently announced the launch of his latest hospitality venture The Postcard Hotel - a brand of unique, intimate luxury hotels in India and the world. The hotels are aimed at the leisure-seeking audience and will be found in destinations by the sea, the mountains or jungles rich in wildlife. The Postcard Hotel has announced the opening of three luxury hotels spread across unique neighbourhoods in Goa: The Postcard Moira, The Postcard Velha and The Postcard Cuelim.

Speaking on the occasion, Chopra said, "We believe guests want to stay in a place where the hotel does the thinking for them, where they get the simple things right, yet offer fantastic spaces for them to relax, meet like-minded people and experience local culture." The brand is committed to building and operating 50 hotels in the next 5 years. In the next 12 to 18 months, The Postcard Hotel will be present in seven more destinations across India.

## BINGE AT ABU DHABI FOOD FESTIVAL



Abu Dhabi Food Festival (ADFF) recently concluded with more than 70,000 visitors and food lovers coming together across the emirate, strongly contributing to the positioning of Abu Dhabi as a global culinary hub. The 17-day food fest, organised by the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), incorporated an outstanding line-up of food and beverage events, including World of Food, Festember, Big Grill, SIAL Middle East, the ADFF Scavenger Hunt and TimeOut Restaurant Week. Foodies, families and friends attended the festival's various events around Abu Dhabi and were entertained with food trucks, organic markets, themed dining experiences, mall activations and celebrity chef appearances.

Reflecting on another successful edition of ADFF, HE Saif Saeed Ghobash, Undersecretary at DCT Abu Dhabi, said, "This year has seen a packed programme of delectable offerings that, in my view, further cement Abu Dhabi's position as an international hub of culinary inspiration."

## INTERGLOBE HOTELS HOLDS GROUNDBREAKING CEREMONY IN THANE

InterGlobe Hotels held a groundbreaking ceremony (Bhoomi Poojan) on its site in Thane, Mumbai. This marked the commencement of construction of the Ibis hotel, slated to open in 2021. Ibis Thane will house 184 rooms, spread across ~90,000sq.ft. of built-up area, and include meetings and events facilities spanning 3,000 sq.ft. ideal for business events, team-building activities and social gatherings. Amongst the hotel's Food and Beverage offerings, the property will feature the signature Ibis restaurant and bar - Spice It and The Hub.

Speaking on the occasion, JB Singh, President & CEO, InterGlobe Hotels, said, "Ibis Thane will be a perfect destination catering to both leisure and business needs. We are thrilled to enter into one of Mumbai's fast-growing business hubs - Thane. Ibis Thane will be our fifth project in the city. Since our site is located within the Thane CBD, it will cater to hotel demand generated both from Thane CBD and the nearby Industrial Estate."



## WYNDHAM HOTELS & RESORTS TO ADD THREE NEW HOTELS IN HISTORIC AREA OF DUBAI

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts recently increased its footprint in Dubai with three new managed hotels as part of the Deira Waterfront Development by Ithra Dubai, a wholly owned subsidiary of Investment Corporation of Dubai (ICD). The hotels will operate under the Wyndham, Days by Wyndham, and Super 8 by Wyndham brands.

Speaking on the occasion, Ignace Bauwens, Regional Vice President for Middle East, Eurasia and Africa, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, said, "The addition of three of our most iconic global brands to this important area demonstrates Wyndham Hotels & Resorts' commitment to Dubai and the Middle East region as a whole."

He added, "Together with Ithra Dubai, we know we can preserve the heritage of the area whilst still meeting the needs of the modern traveller and contributing to growing the district's commercial opportunity. Offering three very distinct hotel brands ranging from upscale to economy will also ensure the area holds great appeal for visitors to Dubai from many different source markets."





12th Century Airavateswarar Temple built by Rajaraja Chola-II, in Darasuram, is one among the Great Chola Temples, has been identified by UNESCO World heritage site.

## Tamil Nadu Tourism

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## GD GROUP MAKES A BIG FORAY INTO THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR



Bengaluru-based GD Group recently announced its major push into the Hospitality Sector with a plan to open as many as six properties by the end of 2019 under the brand name of Great Destinations Hotels & Resorts. By the end of FY 2019-2020, the GD group is looking at establishing 14 properties under its portfolio. Vividus, along the Race Course Road in Bengaluru, is just 45 minutes away from the international airport and plans to engage with all segments – from business travellers to explorers and from backpackers to business tycoons.

Speaking on the occasion, GD Balaji, CEO and Founder, Great Destinations Hotels & Resorts, said, "The group has major plans of penetrating other market segments and will work towards a planned and fast expansion of the business. I have been very passionate about increasing our foothold in the hospitality sector. The current scenario has seen the growth of GDP, with the tourism sector increasing at a steady rate."

## CLARKS INN DEBUTS IN NEPAL WITH SNEHA CLARKS INN SUITES, NEPALGUNJ



Clarks Inn Group of Hotels recently signed one of Nepal's most iconic property, Hotel Sneha in Nepalgunj, now known as Sneha Clarks Inn Suites. The new addition marks Clarks Inn's second property overall, including one in the capital Kathmandu that is expected to open doors later this year. Combining the old world charm with cutting-edge guest services, Sneha Clarks Inn Suites is a more than 50-years-old property exuding the old world charm with its colonial era architectural designs with the latest amenities and world-class guest services.

Commenting on the latest addition, SN Srivastava, President & Co-founder, Clarks Inn Group of Hotels, said, "We are absolutely ecstatic on our latest addition. This is our operational debut in Nepal and we are doing so with a property that befits this special milestone for us. It's a 60-key property spread over a huge area with lush landscaped green lawns and international feel. The property will cater to guests with impeccable in-room guest amenities and facilities like swimming pool, spa, health club and Casino."

## ECO RENT A CAR PARTNERS WITH EUROPCAR IN GLOBAL FORAY

The French car rental company, Europcar Mobility Group, announced its new strategic partnership with ECO Rent a Car in India. With this partnership, both ECO and Europcar® customers will benefit from a consistent high-quality service worldwide. This new partnership will enable Eco Rent a Car to offer a global quality of service in India with their Self-Drive and Chauffeur-driven products under the aegis of a global brand. For this, Eco will be making various technology and service enhancements to its current product.

Rajesh Loomba, Managing Director, ECOS (India) Mobility & Hospitality Pvt Ltd, said, "We feel proud to be the first Indian car rental company to partner with an international brand, which will embed the Eco Rent a Car brand in over 3700 locations across 130 countries. While the global car rental market is expected to register a CAGR of 17.52% during 2018-2023, this partnership with Europcar will bring global standards to India."



## ORANGE FESTIVAL OF MUSIC AND ADVENTURE (OFAM) 2018

Orange Festival of Music and Adventure (OFAM) 2018 ended on a high note with a grand performance by Iron Maidens, in Dambuk. OFAM, the unique orange-themed Adventure and Music festival held in Arunachal Pradesh, grew even bigger in 2018 with more than 10000+ tourists and 30000+ locals attending the festival. The event was inaugurated by Hon'ble CM of Arunachal Pradesh, Pema Khandu.

The festival was attended by 28 music bands, including international bands like Thundermother from Sweden and others. The scenic Dibung valley was a perfect setting for adventure lovers to get their fill of adrenaline in this year's OFAM. Adventure activities like ziplining, paragliding, parasailing, white water rafting, dirt cycling, speed boating and elephant rides were the popularly enjoyed activities at this festival. With so many adventure activities, hungry crowds were treated to delicious food and fine music on the day and night stages. Food stalls by the locals served up local delicacies like orange pudding, rice wine, variety of local beers, egg with ginger, farm fresh orange juice and all time favourite momos to name a few. This unique one-of-a-kind orange-themed festival also hosted an orange eating competition!!





## ATB APPOINTS BLUE SQUARE CONSULTANTS AS INDIA REPRESENTATIVE



**B**lue Square Consultants has been appointed as the representative for Azerbaijan Tourism Board (ATB) in India. Blue Square Consultants will be responsible to build and develop strong relations with key tourism and hospitality entities and trade partners to grow and strengthen the tourism potential of the destination in the Indian market. Furthermore, Blue Square Consultants will support the representation of Azerbaijan at various tourism exhibitions and fairs to get the trade allied with the destination.

Lubaina Sheerazi, COO, Blue Square Consultants, stated, "We are delighted to represent Azerbaijan and drive it as a preferred leisure destination for Indian travellers. The strategy is to tap into the growing outbound market and change perceptions to showcase the tourism prospects of Azerbaijan. We have the requisite knowledge and an excellent track record in managing various tourism boards and the recent appointment is a reaffirmation of our proficiency in the travel sector."

## TAJ ARAVALI RESORT & SPA DEBUTS IN UDAIPUR



**H**CL's iconic brand Taj has recently opened its second hotel in Udaipur - Taj Aravali Resort & Spa. Nestled at the foothills of the picturesque Aravalli Mountain Range, the resort is spread across 27 acres of lush landscaped gardens. The resort has 92 luxurious rooms, suites and tents with panoramic views of the Aravallis. The design ethos is contemporary with a mix of traditional Rajasthani influences and furnishings inspired by Mewar's world-class equestrian heritage. The hotel is conveniently located an hour away from the airport.

Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, IHCL, said, "With the opening of Taj Aravali Resort & Spa, we are enhancing our offering for the global traveller and reinforcing our commitment to Udaipur - the Venice of the East." Guests have a choice of distinctive culinary options which include an all-day diner - Tiri; a specialty vegetarian restaurant - Javitri; an alfresco grill - Ridgeview; and a bar - Odeypore Lounge. The hotel is an ideal destination for weddings and conferences with expansive indoor and outdoor banqueting spaces. It even boasts a 34-seater movie theatre.

## ATOAI: 14TH ANNUAL CONVENTION IN ARAKU VALLEY, ANDHRA PRADESH

**T**he 14th Annual Convention of ATOAI (Adventure Tour Operators Association of India) is being held in Araku Valley, Andhra Pradesh.

The theme of the convention this year is Adventure Travel: Future Challenges & Opportunities in the digital age. ATOAI visited emerging hotspots in the country to showcase their potential as Adventure Tourism destinations, bringing into focus new as well as established adventure products. This also brings investment opportunities to the adventure travel fraternity and provides networking opportunities with the local stakeholders. The objective is to showcase the potential of Adventure Tourism products the state has to offer.

The convention will offer a mix of activities along with brainstorming sessions, and renewed perspectives on business. The convention will be a one-stop shop which no one can afford to miss. Araku Convention will see a great activity schedule which will have delegates explore and experience paramotoring, hot air ballooning, zorbing, high ropes, zipline, kayaking and ATVs. The convention will offer structured opportunities for the travel trade and tourism boards to network for business development.



## SECOND EDITION OF 'MUZIRIS PADDLE' WITNESSES SCORES OF PARTICIPANTS FROM INDIA AND ABROAD

**M**uziris Paddle 2019, the two-day kayaking stand-up paddling (SUP) and sailing expedition, organised by Jellyfish Watersports in partnership with Muziris Heritage Project (Kerala Tourism) successfully concluded with over 100 paddlers from India and abroad participating in the event, including Shilpika Gautam, world record holder of paddling the entire Ganga River, International paddler Jim Bush from Perth and other prominent people. The key aim of the paddling event was to promote the usage of rivers for recreational activities and create a connection to the river with youngsters and tourists.

The event was flagged off from the Kotturpuram Jetty in Kodungalloor district and concluded at Ocean Blue International Marina at Bolgatty Island. The kayakers covered an overall distance of 40km traversing through rivers, backwaters and important Muziris destinations en route. Each day they covered an easy distance of 20km with several strategic breaks for sightseeing.







**ZUBIN SAXENA** has been appointed as new Managing Director and Vice President of Operations, South Asia at Radisson Hotel Group. In his new role, Saxena will provide counsel to the South Asia team. With almost two decades of global hospitality experience, Saxena will be responsible for implementing new brand standards and delivering on operational efficiency and effectiveness to RHG hotels.



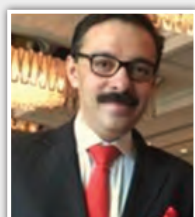
**SEEMA ROY** has been designated as Area Managing Director, South Asia, Middle East & Africa at Preferred Hotels & Resorts. In her new role, Roy will drive retention and development efforts of the brand's growing portfolio in South Asia, Middle East & Africa, supported by the company's regional offices in New Delhi, Dubai and Cape Town. Previously, she has held various positions with Intercontinental, The Oberoi Hotels and Resorts, and The Imperial New Delhi in India.



**MANISH JAIN** has been appointed as Chief Finance Officer at the Sterling Holiday Resorts Limited. In his new role, he will be responsible for Sterling Holidays finance, accounting, tax, insurance, and treasury functions. Jain is a seasoned finance professional with over 26 years of experience in the Hospitality and Manufacturing Sectors. Prior to this, Jain has held the position of Finance Director at Fassco International Pte in Abu Dhabi and as CFO at Roots Corporation (Ginger Hotels).



**GAURAV SINDHWANI** has been appointed as Director, Global Sales & Development, South Asia at Preferred Hotels & Resorts. In his new role, Sindhwani will continue to drive the company's efforts in corporate, MICE, and leisure sales, and also take on additional responsibilities. He brings in more than 20 years of experience working in India's Hospitality Industry. Prior to this, he served as Director of Sales & Marketing for The Imperial New Delhi.



**PANKAJ SAMPAT** has been designated as Area Director – Sri Lanka, Maldives & Malaysia, and Head – Taj Asia Limited (TAL) and Taj Safaris Limited (TSL) at the IHCL. Sampat launched and positioned the new Taj Santacruz, Mumbai, when he was the General Manager of the hotel. Prior to that, he was the General Manager at Vivanta President. Sampat will also additionally

continue to carry out his responsibility as Center of Excellence (COE) lead for Food & Beverage Concepts.



**URBAN DENK** has been appointed as Senior Vice President, Food & Beverage at IHCL. Chef Denk will be instrumental in shaping the Food & Beverage philosophy for IHCL. He is an accomplished culinary expert with over three decades of global experience. He has worked with organisations such as Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group, SAS International Hotels and Hilton International to name a few. Prior to this, he was Director of Culinary Innovations and Development at Steigenberger Hotels and Resorts.



**CS RAMACHANDRAN** has been designated as Vice President, Revenue Account Management for South Asia, Middle East, Africa & Australasia at Preferred Hotels & Resorts. In his new role, Ramachandran will drive strategic success for the brand, and continue to assist member hotels in maximising the effectiveness of their online distribution channels and revenue optimisation. He has more than 20 years of rich expertise in hotel management. Prior to this, he has served as AVP of E-Marketing for The Oberoi Group.



**SARABJEET SINGH** has been appointed as Head of IHCL's new brand, Expressions. He will provide leadership for businesses of The Chambers, Taj Khazana, Jiva and the company's signature restaurants. Singh is a seasoned hotelier and his association with IHCL spans over three decades. In his earlier stint, he was Area Director, Sri Lanka, Maldives & Malaysia and Director on the board of TAL Lanka Hotels PLC & TAL Maldives Resorts Private Limited.



**ANSHUL GOSWAMI** has been designated as Director of Sales & Marketing at Great Destinations Hotels and Resorts Pvt. Ltd, Bengaluru. She has over 14 years of strategic sales and marketing experience in the Hospitality Industry. In her new role, she will be actively involved in managing hotel sales & marketing function, strategic partnerships and alliances. Previously, she has held various positions with Howard Johnson Bengaluru by Wyndham, Mövenpick Hotel & Spa Bangalore, The Lalit Ashok Bangalore, The Leela Palace Bangalore, The Grand New Delhi, The Taj Mahal New Delhi.



**KUNAL DEWAN** has been appointed as the Director of Sales & Marketing (DOSM) at Hyatt Regency Delhi. Dewan possesses a broad knowledge base of the Hospitality Industry and brings more than a decade of experience to the role, where he will be responsible for the daily sale efforts and overall positioning of the hotel. Prior to this, he was the DOSM at The Westin Pune Koregaon Park at Marriott International, where his responsibilities included overseeing financial strategy, anchoring a team of associates and designing content for digital marketing.





**CORPORATE**

# ON A STRATEGIC GROWTH TRAJECTORY

Setting benchmarks and providing differentiated service experiences to customers is what differentiates BLS International from other market players, says, Shikhar Aggarwal, Joint Managing Director, BLS International

## TT BUREAU

**B**LS International is a leader in Consular and Visa process outsourcing and is a preferred partner for Embassies and Governments across the world. It is recognized for being an ethical company in the industry and was recently rated as 'Best under a Billion' by Forbes Asia amongst 24,000 companies.

BLS International emphasizes passion, flexibility and innovation to add value to clients. The Company is ISO 9001:2015 certified for Quality Management Systems, ISO 27001:2013 certified for Information Security Management Systems, ISO 14001 verified for Environmental Management Systems and ILO-OSH 2001 certified for Occupational Safety and Health.

Amongst others, the Company's expertise includes – Visa/ Passport/ Consular Outsourcing Services; Biometric Services; Citizen Services/ E-Governance Services; E-Visa/ Online Visa Management Services

The company is listed on the stock exchanges and is ranked amongst the top companies globally in this industry.

### **Your journey with the group since you took over the reins of the company from your father in 2014.**

The journey has been very satisfying for me. There have been challenges and there have been learnings and the one philosophy that I have imbibed is that business opportunities can be converted only if we are agile, flexible, entrepreneurial in our attitude and committed to providing quality service to our customers. The company is on a growth trajectory and our aim is to create benchmarks in quality.

Our industry is evolving rapidly and there is immense potential and what I am really trying to do is to complement my father to create and grow this industry. We have immense strengths and a very capable team and my focus is on ensuring these strengths are effectively aligned. I am particularly happy



Shikhar Aggarwal

that during these years, amongst many other wins, we have been recognized for our capabilities and awarded the Global Visa contract for Spain as well as the citizen services project by Punjab Government. We have recently entered into a strategic partnership with Sopra Steria to support the United Kingdom Visa & Immigration (UKVI) home office to provide many of the



key deliverables under the contract, as well as a suite of added value services. This contract further strengthens our presence in the European region where we are already working with Spanish, French and Italian Governments and are working with various companies for projects in Portugal, Hungary, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway.

In India we have acquired Starfin, the Banking Business Correspondent of the State Bank of India which is India's largest bank. This will enable us to benefit consumers seamlessly for Financial and Social Inclusion, Digital India and different Government programmes that want to provide a wider access to basic services.

I believe that we are on the right track. BLS International is now listed on both the National Stock Exchange and the Bombay Stock Exchange. What is extremely heartening is also that recently we have been recognized by Forbes Asia as the 'Best under a Billion' company out of 24,000 companies.

**What are the services provided by BLS International to make the experience of travelling easier?**

Convenience and comfort are essential ingredients for every travel experience. We have been leveraging technology to innovate and continuously improve and provide differentiated service experiences and set benchmarks. At the same time, we are also partnering with Governments to provide better and more sustainable business propositions and creating practical solutions to industry needs that have the potential to bridge the roadblocks.

At our visa application centers we provide our customers a portfolio of plain vanilla service as well as differentiated value added services depending on the contract with the relevant authorities. These include, amongst others Mobile Biometric booths, exclusive Premium Lounges, assistance in filling Forms, Delivery of passport at your address as well as facility to submit applications outside the normal business hours. However, this is just the beginning. We are continuously studying the market and identifying consumer needs and will continue to innovate to provide convenient solutions.

**What are the marketing strategies through which you have managed to expand your business? How do you rope in technology to cater to your growing business?**

Our vision is to touch the lives of a billion people globally by creating a differentiated service experience using innovation and technology. Therefore we have focused on understanding the changing consumer and believe that product differentiation in this industry revolves around three critical factors of immediacy, experience and personalized service.

Our marketing strategies take these into account and then leverage technology to transform the user experience. We have leveraged technology in the visa outsourcing industry to streamline the processes, while strengthening the privacy and control on data security.

It is a matter of pride for us that BLS International is the first external service provider for Visa Outsourcing to comply with stringent ENS norms.





# SKILLED STRATEGIST

Renu Basu, Senior Vice President - Global Sales, IHCL, elucidates how The Indian Hotels Company Limited delivers on all accounts – brand promise, event management and technology

KAMAL GILL

One of India's largest hospitality enterprise, The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) has reimagined itself to unlock its potential. It continues to set the benchmark with refreshed brand scape, use of technology and much more.

In conversation with Today's Traveller, Renu Basu, Senior Vice President-Global Sales, IHCL, shares valuable insights into how IHCL leverages its market knowledge to drive business.

## What is the concept of the Taj Wedding Studio and how effective is it in driving business for IHCL?

Unlike in the past, there's a sea change in wedding nuptials in terms of scale, style and grandeur. Unique wedding experiences dictate the millennial's agenda, right from the rites of passage to the ongoing festivities. The Taj Wedding Studio is the ultimate destination to create memorable wedding experiences; showcasing the latest trends in cuisine, innovation in banqueting, destination planning and wedding curation. It offers guests exclusive access to experts in the industry and a variety of services that are designed to address all their wishes for their big day. In doing so, the Taj Wedding Studio addresses the growing need for customization of weddings.



Renu Basu



Wedding as an important business segment from the hospitality perspective and much of it is driven by the brand reputation, respect and competence. IHCL, with over a century of experience and its eclectic and diverse portfolio makes for a great choice for all kinds of weddings. From the idyllic beach resort in Goa, Kerala, Sri Lanka to the iconic grand palaces namely Umaid Bhawan Palace, Jodhpur, Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur, Rambagh and Jai Mahal Palace in Jaipur and the Taj Falaknuma Palace, Hyderabad to the international outposts such as The Pierre, New York, Taj Palace, Dubai and St. James Court, London offer spectacular settings for hosting weddings.

In order to grow our share in the segment we continue to stay engaged with families directly and well as with the wedding planners. I believe that businesses are built on reputation and relationships. Interaction is the key, as is proven by the fact that prominent families of professional CEOs, as well as industrialists have come to us for the wedding in their families.

Under the Taj Wedding Studio IHCL provides the entire value chain when it comes to weddings. An infusion of Western culture brings many trends into focus, namely, wedding shoots, the wedding proposal, the bachelorette party and a Western-style dinner, along with speeches, the toast, et al. An experiential wedding, which is trending, stresses on authentic experiences. Finally, post-wedding stress stipulates the need for a getaway, which Taj handles adeptly as well.

**The IHCL has recently started the Taj B2B Sales Mission programme. What were the key takeaways from this**

**year's sales mission programme and how do you plan to take it forward?**

Sales missions are a critical platform of our strategy to grow our business and enhance engagement. Building on the success of last year, the Travel Industry Sales team hosted the second edition of the IHCL Sales Mission at Taj Lands End, Mumbai, on the 17th of August and at Taj Palace, New Delhi, on the 20th & 21st of August 2018.

The participants included all our key city hotels, palaces and resorts across Rajasthan, Kerala, Goa, and Ginger hotels, to name a few. This was accompanied by a strong presence of hotels from Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, Dubai, Langkawi and London.

We witnessed an overwhelming response with over 1500 of our inbound, outbound and domestic travel trade partners, including online travel agents, event and wedding planners (330+ persons in Mumbai and 1250+ in New Delhi). The enthusiastic response has spurred us to hold future events.

**Currently, how many new hotels and re-launches are there on the list of the IHCL for 2018 - 19?**

The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), saw an aggressive growth momentum adding 15 new hotels across brands with an inventory of 1825 rooms this financial year. The first half of the year also saw the Company winning the bid for the prestigious Taj Mahal, New Delhi and the renewal of the long term agreement for the globally acclaimed Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur. IHCL also strengthened its portfolio in the capital with the winning of the bid for The Connaught. The Company





currently operates 170 hotels globally out of which 25 are in various stages of development.

The Company has signed 15 new hotels, including three Taj hotels, five Vivanta hotels, one SeleQtion and six Ginger hotels in this financial year. This includes a Vivanta at Heathrow in London, a Taj hotel in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, a Taj hotel at the Deira Creek in Dubai and a Vivanta in Kathmandu, Nepal.

### **How does IHCL plan to tap the huge potential of MICE markets in India and abroad?**

MICE is critical for us, as 30 percent of our business comes from it. Our deliverables here are the same as elsewhere – iconicity, reputation and our ability to deliver. We are adding a portal on our website, where our MICE partners can book online directly.

We have a dedicated MICE team that is capable of catering to groups ranging from 10 to 10,000 people. From leadership summits to large incentive groups, our holistic approach captures the best of the weddings and MICE segment. We continue to remain the preferred choice for international and domestic conferences and meetings.

Our conference and banquet services are the product of a rich lineage of hospitality combined with state of the art facilities and latest technology services. Almost all our hotels across the group, have dedicated onsite teams to take care of events, be it corporate or social in nature.

Taj Hotels have historically played the perfect host to Royalty, Heads of State, visiting dignitaries and world leaders.

The Taj Mahal Palace & Taj Lands End, Mumbai, Taj Diplomatic Enclave & Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, have hosted numerous events of political and economic significance. Taj City Centre Gurugram and The Gateway Resort, Damdama Lake are some of preferred hotels for residential conferences as well as destination weddings as are our hotels in Goa, Jaipur, Udaipur and Hyderabad.

An optimum mix of all the above will help us take advantage of the huge potential of this segment.





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# CANADA: THE SPORTS, SPA AND WELLNESS HOTSPOT

The Sports, Spa and Wellness Summit highlighted Canada's significance as a global tourism hub

**TT BUREAU**

**T**oday's Traveller recently organised a Summit on Sports, Spa and Wellness, in association with Destination Canada, at Taj Palace, New Delhi. The event focussed on the three themes of Sports, Spa and Wellness Tourism in Canada, and how they have shaped the Tourism Industry in the country. There were two Panel Discussions at the event, first on Sports & Fitness Tourism in Canada, followed by Spa & Wellness Tourism in Canada.

## **SPORTS AND FITNESS SUMMIT**

Fitness Tourism focuses on health holidays and wellness through physical exercise and fun challenges to kick-start your metabolism. The brainstorming session on Sports and Fitness Summit was kick-started by Kamal Gill, Executive Editor & MD,

Gill India Group. In her welcome address, she said that Fitness and Wellness go hand in glove. There are people who look at core fitness and then there are those who look at fitness from a wellness perspective. The concept of sports-related tourism has become important in the last few years due to a number of reasons. First of all is the increased emphasis on fitness and health, due to increased levels of stress. Second is the sporting events category, which has a huge following globally. Fitness tourism focuses on health holidays and wellness refers to attaining perfect alignment of mind, body and soul.

The esteemed Panellists at the Sports and Fitness Summit included Arun Pandya, GM & Country Head, Air Canada; Uday Marwah, Director - Premier Lifestyle Event Management, Uday Tours; Rajan Sehgal, President, Indian Golf Tourism Association; Kapil Berera, CEO World of Astral Travel; Pankaj Nagpal, Managing



Director, Travstarz; and Carl Vaz, CEO & Strategy Director, Destination Canada. The session was moderated by Kamal Gill, Executive Editor & MD, Gill India Group.

According to latest reports, Canada saw a continued rise in the value of Sports Tourism, with a total expenditure of \$6.8 billion, an increase of more than \$33 million over 2016.

In 2017, Canada hosted 41 international events that qualified for funding under the federal government's hosting programme, second only to the USA in terms of the number held in any one country. That was a major factor in the growth of the Sports Tourism Industry in Canada. Major contributors to Sports Tourism are: World Championships and Olympics. The discussion was followed by a Q&A session, where many travel agents and other participants posed their questions to the esteemed Panellists, making for a good knowledge-sharing session for all.

### SPA AND WELLNESS SUMMIT

The Spa and Wellness Panel discussion saw an expansive list of well-informed Panellists from the industry, including Ketaki Kapur Pantle, Co-Founder, Serendipity and Beyond Tours LLP; Birju C Gariba, CEO & Exec Director, Platinum World Group; Sonia Makhija, Vice President (India + South Asia), MasterCard; Mala Barua, Owner, Mystic-Asia; Radhika Khanijo, Managing Director, Welgrow Travels; Ranjit Vig, Managing Director, Caair Travels Private Limited, Gurugram; and Carl Vaz, CEO & Strategy Director, Destination Canada. The discussion focussed on the Spa and Wellness industry globally and how Canada has capitalised on its natural advantages to get a larger share of the global market.

Many panellists were of the opinion that wellness comes naturally to Canada because of the presence of large landmass available, pollution-free environment, lots of areas for meditation, yoga, wellness and also for fitness-related activities. Canada offers many dynamic packages that make it the holy grail of global tourism. Canada also offers many vegan tours for wellness tourists, seeking mental health and physical rejuvenation.

Today's millennials are big spenders and most of them fall in double income groups. They love to celebrate, enjoy and keep themselves pampered by engaging in many wellness-related activities, like spa parties, or exclusive bookings of spa destinations with family and friends. This discussion was fruitful in the sense that it highlighted many reasons behind Canada's growing success as a spa and wellness destination, the new trends in the spa and wellness industry, and the hotspot zones for such activities in Canada. The discussion was followed by a Q&A session, where many travel agents and other participants raised questions to the Panellists, making the session interesting and informative.







# CANADA CALLING!

Today's Traveller recently organised a Bloggers Expo to share insights on what Canada has to offer when it comes to Luxury and Leisure travel

## TT BUREAU

**T**oday's Traveller in association with Destination Canada recently organised a Bloggers Meet at Waterstones Hotel, Mumbai, to highlight various experiences that Canada offers as a Luxury and Leisure destination. Many bloggers from Mumbai, famous in the social media, participated in the event, where they shared their views and ideas in a collective and constructive discussion.

The esteemed Panellists included Etienne Lambert, Consul - Political/Economic and Public Affairs at the Consulate General of Canada, Government of Canada; Annie Dubé, Consul General, Consulate General of Canada, Government of Canada; and Carl Vaz, CEO & Strategy Director, Destination Canada. The Panel was moderated by Kamal Gill, Executive Editor & MD, Gill India Group.

The event kicked off with a welcome speech by Kamal Gill followed by a presentation on Destination Canada by Carl Vaz. Carl Vaz shared his thoughts on why Canada as a destination offers unparalleled experiences compared to any other nation. He addressed the gathering regarding Canada's Signature Experiences, which are exclusive to Canada. A Q&A session was also conducted, where bloggers highlighted many of their personal experiences and posed many interesting questions to the panellists.





Speaking on the occasion, Kamal Gill, Executive Editor & MD, Gill India Group, highlighted how bloggers contributed to a destination's growth and increased its tourism potential. The bloggers showed great enthusiasm during the knowledge-sharing session and shared their positive reviews for the event.

*Bloggers and Panellists can be seen engaged in an interesting discussion, where the focal point was Canada, and why the country is an exclusive destination for Luxury and Leisure travel.*



*Bloggers enjoying a sumptuous lunch at the Waterstones Hotel in Mumbai, over a deep and engaging discussion on Destination Canada.*



# TIRELESS CRUSADER

Taljinder Singh, Area Director – Mumbai Hotels & General Manager, The Taj Mahal Palace, walks us through what it takes for the The Taj Mahal Palace Mumbai, to remain at the forefront of the hospitality world, hosting celebrities and dignitaries the world over, even 115 years after it first opened its doors

KAMAL GILL

What's the first name that comes to your mind, when someone pops the question, "Which is the best luxury hotel in India?" The answer conjures up in your mind in the form of an image... a large brick red Florentine dome, a black-and-yellow facade, and a huge line-up of windows that catches your attention – The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai. Today's Traveller recently caught up with Taljinder Singh, Area Director – Mumbai Hotels & General Manager, The Taj Mahal Palace, who shared his thoughts on the iconic hotel, what the hotel has witnessed and how it has contributed to India's history and shaped its hospitality culture since 1903.

**You have spent 26 years with the Taj Group. How has your personal journey with the Group been?**

My journey with the Taj Group started in 1990, in the Taj Mahal Palace, with no plans to be a hotelier. I managed to clear the Taj Management Training Programme interview – my sole aim being that I did not wish to be a Chartered Accountant. Since my ambition to get through any of the four IIMs was unfulfilled and I could not afford to pay the fees for an International MBA, I decided to take up the training programme, intending to work for 2-3 years before going back to school again. I'd never imagined being in the Hotel Industry long-term, leave alone be at the helm of this iconic institution - The Taj Mahal Palace.

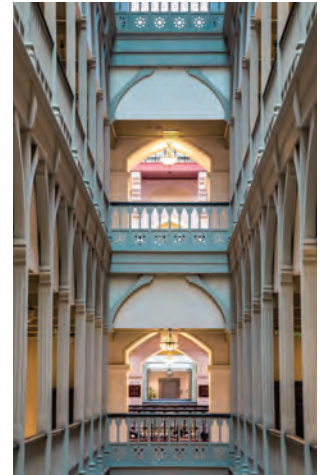
My mentor, Mr. V.S. Mahesh, soon discovered that I planned to go on study leave and tried some gentle persuasion – "Whatever you need to do, we will make you do, but you don't have to leave your job to do that." He understood my innate desire to learn academically and to be continuously involved with education. I stayed on, since I was fortunate to be able to pursue my education via the short-term and medium-term courses, and therefore, am forever indebted to Mr V S Mahesh and to IHCL. Thereafter, within a span of 28 years I moved several times, this being my 11th move. I have not regretted this, as every move has broadened my perspective and been an exciting learning curve. The most gratifying moment came last year, when Rahim Kanani featured me amongst the Top 40 Global Hoteliers of the World in his book – "A Wealth of Insight".

**The Taj Mahal Palace is undoubtedly one of the top hotels in the country with a rich legacy and history. What makes it different from its competitors?**



There are many reasons that make it different. In my Town Hall meetings, I often throw some simple questions to over 500+ associates who are assembled there – How many hotels worldwide, which opened as grand luxury hotels in the forefront, 115 years ago, are still at the forefront? How many of them are still with the original owning company? How many of them are with a company or a group which is ranked amongst the top 20 in global prestige and reputation for integrity and values? How many of these hotels contribute more of their profits to charity? How many of them have a history or have been an active part of a country's freedom movement? How many of them have welcomed royalty and continue to do so? How many hotels have welcomed four generations of British Royalty? How many hotels





have over 300 associates working at any point in time, in the same building, for more than 30 years?

When you narrow the gamut down, we would probably rank as the only hotel in the world to tickbox the above queries. We still have stewards who address some younger industrialists as "baba", since they've been serving them since they were toddlers!! That's what makes this hotel unique. There are amazing surprises everyday – while dining with the Hungarian Consul General, I learnt that Amrita Shergill had lived here and held her first and only art exhibition at the Taj Art Gallery of this hotel in 1936.

Equally surprising was a letter from the Russian Ambassador, informing me that the Consul General wanted to personally handover a plaque representing the opening of the first ever foreign consulate office in India, in the early 1930s, which was housed at the Taj Mahal Palace. Moreover, the Consul General also lived in the hotel, but we have been unable to identify the room in which he stayed. Or the distinguished looking gentleman in his 80's, whom I encountered, who identified himself and his siblings as toddlers in the picture on the historical corridor – the Nawab of Cambay and his parents and grandparents!!





### **What are the areas of challenges when it comes to running and managing a hotel of this kind?**

There are many. One of the key challenges is the fact that the hotel is reputed for having associates who remember guests. But, to keep that level of knowledge intact becomes difficult when retirements take place. Our solution is to actively employ children of our longer serving associates, which keeps the legacy alive as well as the know-how on guests within the system. Consequently, there are several associates who are third generation associates with us!

The second challenge is that the younger workforce doesn't believe in staying for 30-40 years in an organisation. We have to ensure ways to make them to learn and grow within the organisation. As part of the House of Tata's, the value system helps us retain dedicated associates. Today's rapidly changing business environment has led to a demographic shift in customers, whose visits may not be regular. To create a new subset and the need to target new markets, to ensure continued top line growth and enhancing margins in the competitive environment is a huge challenge.

The other challenge is the need to keep a 115-year-old hotel vibrant and in top form, to incorporate avant-garde technology and design. Accordingly, we've switched to technology led processes for check-ins and display signages, banquet functions, entertainment, etc, taking pains to weave in technology subtly, so that it blends well with the cultural and historical style of the hotel. Finally, teaching our new associates, that we have regular guests, who have been coming consistently for decades, who have their designated rooms for whom we would go to any length to ensure their quirks are taken care of. Our team needs to be geared to handle this and be well-acquainted with the regular guests.

### **You have hosted many celebrities of the world. How do you prepare when it comes to hosting these very important guests?**

It's an elaborate preparation, depending on how extravagant the particular country wants it to be, ranging from an elephant welcome to a no-welcome – even that needs planning. The natural instinct of everybody is that a dignitary should be welcomed by the senior most member of the hospitality group. However, some of our prominent business and global leaders

have given specific instructions that they will not be met by anybody on arrival and that they will be incognito as they check-in and out. It's an onerous task to execute, to make sure that you don't cross the line. The only way to do this is through an impeccable communication system that ensures that there's an interface between the top rung, down to the last man in the system. It's imperative to make sure that every chink in the armour is discussed and taken care of, to be resourceful and to know what to do in case something does not go according to plan. It's a typical Japanese way of thinking – that everyone involved at the hotel should know the solution to every problem that could ever take place. For instance, if the only flat work ironer in the Laundry breaks down, how should one handle all the laundry?

### **With the constant pressure of attending to the who's who, how do you unwind after work?**

I don't have a lot of time to myself but I'm sporty, so I hit the gym regularly, running in the morning, and distance running once in a while. I'm game for anything adventurous. I like to indulge in football once in a while, and love unwinding with my six-year-old daughter, the nucleus of my life. We walk together, play football and sometimes go cycling together. Reading is my other passion, and though I read five books at a time, I still have a lot of TBRs in my stack.





# COFFEE TABLE BOOK 2018 AT A GLANCE

PASSION  
—FOR  
EXCELLENCE



# CHARTING NEW BENCHMARKS

Club One Air, India's oldest and largest Business Jet operator, provides an unrivalled experience, with world-class standards of safety, comfort and reliability

## TT BUREAU

Perhaps the ultimate symbol of luxury and status is having a chartered flight take you to the destination of your choice. No endless wait for boarding passes, no sticking to a flight schedule, no boring in-flight services. Thanks to the advent of private jet and chartered air transport companies, today's discerning traveller can give commercial airlines a miss and opt for a personalised flight experience of a chartered air transport company.

While there are many companies jostling for space in the air, very few maintain international standards of safety and security. Combining international service standards with a strict adherence to flight safety norms, Club One Air offers global hi-fliers a choice of a fleet of luxury jet liners meant for CEOs of top global companies, film stars, celebrities and sport personalities. However, as the market opens up, more and more consumers have started opting for private jet and commercial air transport services.

Unlike before, when only industrialists, businessmen at the top of the pyramid and well-heeled celebrities used

private planes, today, middle level businessmen, hospitals, law enforcement agencies and film production houses are taking advantage of private air travel. They realise the value of time to reach the less accessible locations and are opting for business jets instead of waiting for commercial airlines. This is acting as a game changer, since travelling to a small town or a city on short notice is extremely difficult with a scheduled airline. It is here that private charter plane operators come into play.

Speaking with Today's Traveller Coffee Table Book 2018, Club One Air's dynamic CEO, Rajan Mehra, shares, "The demand for charter jets in a country like India will keep on increasing due to its geographical terrain and growing business interest in far-flung rural locations. Club One Air has registered a healthy growth of 18 to 20 per cent in the last two years, with several new categories of clients joining the company." Continuing, Mehra says, "Our growing revenue and business interests have encouraged us to add more jets to our growing fleet of aircraft. In the last three months, we have added two Falcon 2000 aircraft to the fleet."





In the field of aviation business, Mehra is a redoubtable figure. He is a reputed aviation professional with an impressive track record. His experience as the head of several aviation companies makes him the perfect candidate for heading Club One Air. He played a key role in setting up businesses of Qatar Airways, Finnair and Asiana Airlines. Under his able stewardship, the company has seen its profits soar. Says Mehra, "We have been able to maintain a sustainable and substantial growth and a captive clientele, as we guarantee a plane to fly our customers and if for any reason the jet is not available, we provide a replacement aircraft immediately."

Currently, India has around 550 aircraft within the category of 'Business Aviation Fleet,' out of which 150 are business jets, 275 are helicopters and the rest are turbo props. Mehra believes that by 2020 the projected fleet size should reach 800.

However, the perceptive CEO is also keenly aware of the challenges facing the private jet industry in India. Although the commercial side of aviation in India has seen a very healthy growth, the business charter aspect unfortunately lags behind as most of the business charter operators do not get the required attention from the government and policy makers. Also, there is a lack of professionalism in this sector. Several business houses import planes for their personal use and then charter them when not required. What we need are professionally run, stand-alone charter companies.

Mehra claims, however, that with the right policies directed towards the business side of aviation, increased focus on infrastructure development, rationalisation of taxes and easing of regulations, the aviation sector in general and private aviation in particular, will see an exponential growth.

In order to boost business, Club One Air is currently trying to dissociate the 'luxury tag' attached to it. It is not only for the rich and the famous, but for those who want to expand their

"The demand for charter jets in a country like India will keep on increasing due to its geographical terrain and growing business interest in far-flung rural locations. Club One Air has registered a healthy growth of 18 to 20 per cent in the last two years, with several new categories of clients joining the company."

— Rajan Mehra, CEO, Club One Air







business and reach out to many people quickly. Last year, the company traversed the length and breadth of the country by covering almost 250 destinations, including new ones such as Gorakhpur, Ghazipur and Sultanpur in UP, Akola, Kolhapur, Sholapur in Maharashtra, Rourkela in Chhattisgarh, and Jhalawar, Sirohi and Gandhinagar in Rajasthan.

Increasing accessibility provided by the private aviation industry is a boost for the economy as well. Many business organisations are setting up their manufacturing hubs in places that are inaccessible by commercial airlines. Moreover, global corporate organisations are also interested in setting up their plants in India. Further, business leaders have to constantly travel to remote areas to take care of their business interests and new projects. Private jet companies help in making remote places, which are not covered by mainstream commercial airlines, accessible.

Positive changes like incorporating suggestions from industry bodies and the development of aviation infrastructure under the 'Udan' project of the Central Government will also help the business aviation sector in India. Mehra feels that in order to be able to service a country as large as India, it is necessary to be present in all the different regions. That would only be possible if planes are positioned in different locations. An infrastructure boost is therefore crucial. More areas covered by private jet companies will only provide customers with more choices.

Club One Air's current fleet now consists of Bombardier, Falcons and Cessna planes and soon Club One Air will be looking at incorporating larger, long range planes which could fly non-stop to London or Tokyo. The target destinations for Club One Air will continue to be primarily within India, Middle East, Europe, US, China, Far-East and Japan, according to Mehra.



# THE EXECUTIVE TOUCH

Strategic location, avant garde facilities, impeccable service and delectable cuisine make The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi the preferred choice for business travellers

## TT BUREAU

**T**he nature of luxury is intrinsically subjective – this is borne out by the fact that luxury is perceived differently by different people. Luxury is forever evolving and poses a challenge for brands trying to address a global market. However, some brands have overcome this issue by paying close attention to details and making that extra effort to ensure that every experience is inclusive.

The Leela Group of hotels, one of the most iconic and well-managed hospitality brands, is committed to being an innovative leader in the luxury hospitality industry through continually improving service delivery and the quality of its products and facilities. In sync with the brand's mission and concept is The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel Delhi, which is renowned for offering comfortable and well-appointed accommodation, exceptional facilities and some of the finest restaurants and bars. The hotel has built its reputation on service excellence, with the sole mission of delighting and satisfying its guests.

The best business hotels ensure that they are well connected – where travellers can feel at home being away from

home; where guests are stress free and spaces are available where corporates can mingle with like-minded delegates. The hotel emerges a winner on all counts. Its strategic location in East Delhi, smooth connectivity to the city centre and business districts of Ghaziabad and Noida, contemporary architecture and aesthetic interiors make it one of the most sought after luxury properties in the capital.

Going the distance, and beyond, for business travellers, the hotel offers vibrant spaces, showcasing 480 rooms and suites, two receptions, two swimming pools, a-25,000sq.ft.-pillarless ballroom and the largest meeting space, comprising 70,000sq.ft.

A perfect venue for large exhibitions and fairs, The Grand Sapphire, the hotel's pillarless ballroom, can be divided further into five smaller ballrooms and has hosted distinguished luminaries, including His Holiness, the Dalai Lama and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, and events like the Commonwealth Chess Championship, Femina Miss India, the Indian Dental Congress and BES Expo, to name some. Adding to the luminescence is the impressive lighting system and the vibrant blue carpeting and onyx wall lamps. The ballrooms, on the ground floor,





offer three dedicated entrances, including two from either of the towers.

The Emerald Ballroom, with a separate entrance, measures 3,300sq.ft, is adjacent to the Grand Sapphire and can accommodate smaller functions. An expansive pre-function area boasts a sumptuous array of food from a choice of customised menus. For weddings, the hotel's skilled in-house chefs create Indian specialty cuisines on request for various communities. The hotel also has expansive outdoor space and patios to host pre and post wedding ceremonies differently with a choice of themes guests can choose from.

A team of proficient chefs creates international cuisines such as Japanese, Thai, Mexican and Mediterranean to name some. The extensive menu also lists a variety of wedding cakes, while for occasions like Mehendi and Sangeet, a customised cocktail snacks menu is also available. Ever sensitive to guests' sentiments, the hotel has separate vegetarian cooking spaces in the kitchen. The hotel has 3 restaurants, a lounge and a bar. The all-day dining restaurant, Café Knosh, serves multicuisine, the Indian fine dining restaurant is called Dilli 32, Mei Kun is the oriental fine dining and Cherry Bar is the cocktail bar. There is a Cuban themed luxury lounge by the poolside called the 'Club Cuba'.

Contemporary design being the hotel's design fundamental, the facilities are conveniently divided between the two towers. Added facilities include two temperature-controlled outdoor swimming pools, two fitness centres, separate entrance to the towers, two Concierge and two lobbies, thereby greatly enhancing guests' comfort levels. Recreational facilities offered by the hotel include a luxurious spa and a modern salon, Shanaya. The spa specialises in Asian and European therapies, as well as Ayurveda treatments.

Observes Varun Chhibber, General Manager, The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi, "This is one of the largest

convention destinations, equipped with the latest state-of-the-art infrastructure. The hotel is not just host to the largest pillarless ballroom in the country, but also has 22 breakaway rooms over and above the main ballroom, loaded with the latest technology."

# LUXURY BANQUETING

Setting benchmarks in the banqueting domain, The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences excels in the realm of distinctive spaces, impeccable service and delectable cuisine

The basic tenets of a luxury hotel pertain to exceptional levels of proactive service and customer care, with the given that cleanliness, maintenance, hospitality and delivery of services must all adhere to an extremely high standard. But, the best of luxury hotels attempt to differentiate and really provide a difference.

Synonymous with luxury, The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences creates inspired experiences that evoke a distinct sense of space, while delighting the most discerning travellers. Being part of the Leela Group of hotels, it consistently sets new standards for luxury, comfort and innovation. Creating an environment of excellence is part of the company's culture, where the golden rule is treating others as you expect to be treated, and being an exclusive luxury provider for its guests, whether it is through personalised service or avant garde facilities that make life so comfortable.

Strategically located in Gurugram, the poster city of new India, the hotel has a distinctive design, with its masterful blend of marble, granite, glass and steel, all set in contemporary style, combining traditional luxury and unmatched grandeur.

In addition to the 90 Residences, the hotel boasts 322 internationally inspired, luxuriously appointed, spacious and contemporary guest rooms and suites. The hotel's inner spaces, including the residences, restaurants, bars, convention, meeting and public areas, have been designed to the most exacting international standards by world-renowned Interior Designers, Hirsch Bedner and Associates. All rooms and suites address the needs of discriminating travellers in terms of functionality and elegance.







It is this unmatched ambience and sense of belonging that makes the hotel the preferred choice for a dream wedding to come to life. It's the perfect space to house all the day's love and happiness, food and drinks, family and friends, and the bonhomie that goes with a wedding celebration. Both classic and traditional, it is the all-inclusive venue that includes all the vendors, coordination and professional staff it takes to plan the entire scope of a wedding or business event. The hotel boasts a variety of venues, each with its own characteristics, that makes them unique and sets them apart.

The ideal destination for a perfect wedding, launch or event, the hotel's personalised banquet service will customise your event with meticulous detail. The Leela Ambience Gurugram can organise anything from a gathering in a single room to a closed-door CEO meet.

## BEST OF BANQUETING

The Pearl Ballroom with multiple layouts, offers a large meeting space of 9,200sq.ft. and can accommodate over 1200 guests in reception. A Pre-function room of 6,000sq.ft. with natural daylight sports an exclusive entrance. The Royal Room features a pillarless meeting space of 5,200sq.ft, natural daylight, a built-in PA system and multiple layouts. The Maple Room showcases a pillarless venue of 3,500sq.ft, natural daylight, multiple layouts, an in-built PA system, plus a Pre-function area of 1,000sq.ft.

The Board Room Lounge also boasts natural daylight, multiple layouts, adjoining boardrooms, an in-built audio system, and is ideal for Corporate functions, events and social gatherings.

Orbis, an exclusive, one-of-a-kind Banquet-Lounge-Bar concept, is ideal for hosting corporate cocktail evenings, product launches, mid-sized fashion shows, private parties, among other events. Pearl Lounge is perfect for a rendezvous



with your loved one or a small gathering with friends and family. The Conference Rooms are exemplary spaces for executive meetings and can be customised into a Private Dining Room with a set-up of your choice, and include Mahogany, Ebony, Rosewood, Cedar and Mulberry.

Creating great choices for its guests, the hotel's leadership in the banquet and innovation domain makes it your go to destination for a dream wedding or event.





# THE WORLD'S YOUR OYSTER

Years of experience in the travel industry and a team of talented, dedicated professionals have made Club7 Holidays an ace player in the business of curated travel packages

## TT BUREAU

For people who are too busy to plan their own holidays, taking the help of a guided Tour Operator is perhaps the best bet. Hassle-free and economical, holiday and travel packages offer the chance to see the world with the help of curated packages designed either for individuals or for groups.

A travel company rests its laurels on sheer reliability, choice of locations and slick service. Club7 Holidays is one such Indian travel company, which specialises in exclusive customised travel packages, guided group tours, corporate MICE travel and student travel. Incorporated in the year 1988, the company has its head office in Mumbai and sales offices throughout India, and its team of dedicated and talented professionals has a deep understanding of all the major destinations they serve.

Since the company's modest beginnings in Kolkata, in 1988, Club7 Holidays have been sharing their love of travel.

Today, their worldwide travel portfolio features comprehensive group tours, customised land package tours, river and ocean cruises, rail journeys, family and small group tours, domestic holiday packages, group and tailor-made packages for the NRI market, premium trips for high-end travellers, exciting destination based events for corporate travellers, and innovative MICE Solutions.

Group holiday packages include all the major exotic and popular destinations in Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, US, the Middle-East and the Mediterranean. Whether it's taking an exhilarating shopping trip in a Dubai mall, or rolling down the Swiss Alps, holidays are made special by Club7. Guests on tour wake every morning with a new experience and retire content, because Club7 has seamlessly handled all the details. This is best demonstrated in the all-time high return traveller rate of 70 per cent.



An established player in Mumbai and Kolkata, Club7's aim is to expand to 45 cities through its own outlets and e-commerce platforms. Over the years, the company has expanded its portfolio of products and now offers a range of travel-related services. They include, visa application support, holiday packages, corporate travel help, foreign exchange and sightseeing trips.

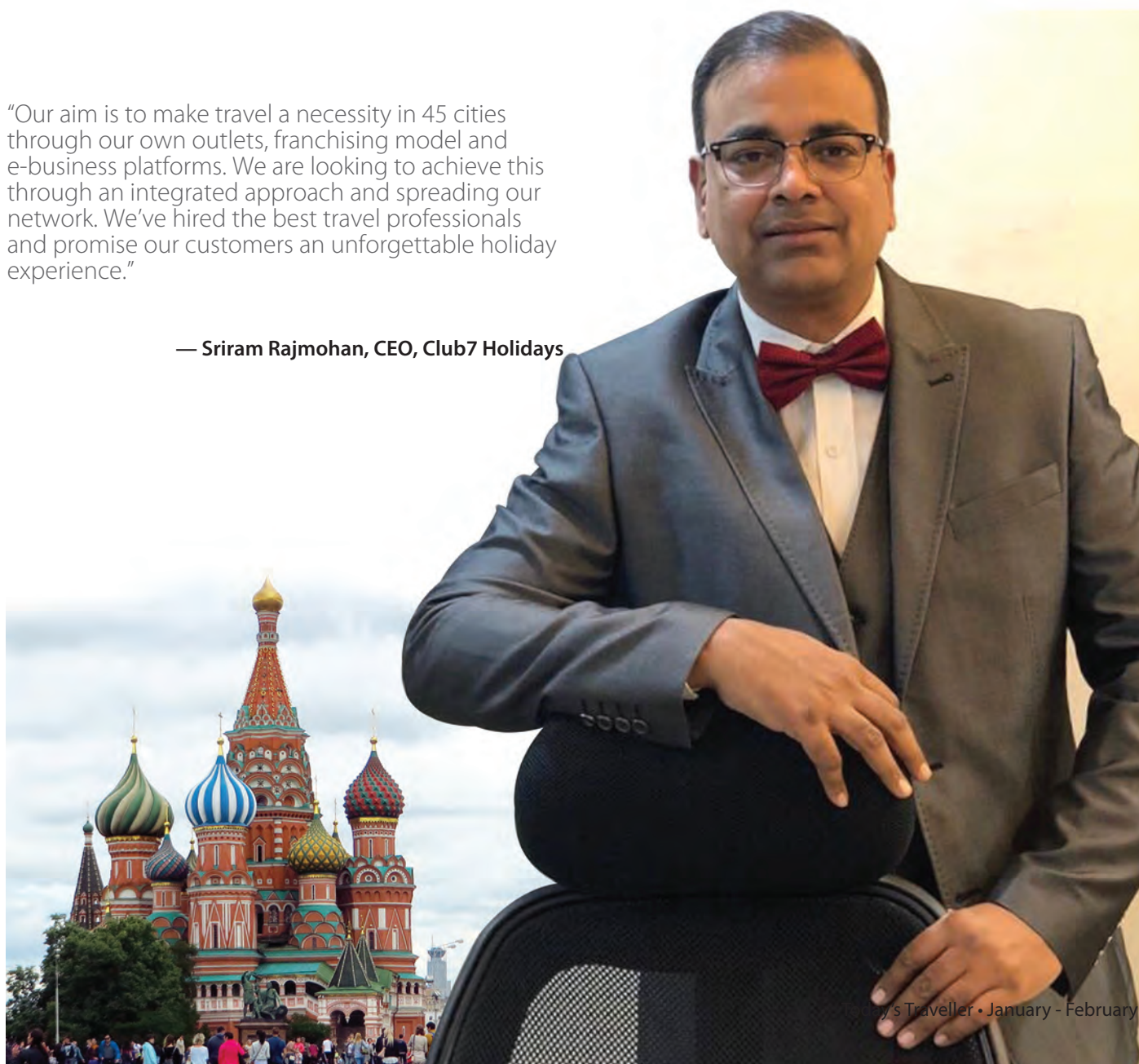
Club7 is also a one-stop shop for the MICE needs of all corporate organisations. Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions form the cornerstone of a successful enterprise. If you are looking for corporate travel packages and a venue to hold your next AGM, or just end-of-the-year party for the sales and marketing, look no further than Club7 Holidays. Within the past 28 years Club7 has successfully conducted MICE trips for corporations, big and large. Everything from planning to booking, to accompanying guests to the rooms and organising conferences are handled by the super professional team of Club7 Holidays. Special requests for customising food, organising theme-based events, booking exotic hotels and choosing out-of-the-box destinations are handled by the expert team of Club7.

Apart from corporate travel, the company has also earned a reputation for personal travel itineraries. Personalised trips, honeymoons, family holidays, all-inclusive packages, road trips, cruises and beach vacations are also handled by the company. Begin your married life with a visit to a romantic beach destination, or venture out on a fun-filled family trip to a popular tourist destination with Club7 Holidays. Their impressive list of travel destinations include urban metropolises of Europe, the untrammelled beaches of Southeast Asia, the deserts of the Middle-East and Africa and the popular locations of US, among others.

Part of its success is due to the tremendous diligence of its team of experts. Leading the Club7 workforce is the maverick expert, Sriram Rajmohan, CEO, Club7 Holidays. A professional Chartered Accountant and management graduate with almost 19 years of experience in finance, business development, strategy and planning, and operations, Rajmohan states, "Our aim is to make travel a necessity in 45 cities through our own outlets, franchising model and e-business platforms. We are looking to achieve this through an integrated approach and spreading our network. We've hired the best travel

"Our aim is to make travel a necessity in 45 cities through our own outlets, franchising model and e-business platforms. We are looking to achieve this through an integrated approach and spreading our network. We've hired the best travel professionals and promise our customers an unforgettable holiday experience."

— Sriram Rajmohan, CEO, Club7 Holidays





professionals and promise our customers an unforgettable holiday experience."

Rajmohan's strong execution skills and result-oriented approach, coupled with his ability to motivate and inspire large cross-functional and multinational teams, hold immense promise for the company's future. He is supported by his army of able functionaries, like Pradeep Mukherjee, COO MICE, Shekhar Sinha Roy, COO, and Anil Rai, COO Domestic & Inbound Tours. Under their aegis is a team of young, dynamic and talented executives, who have in-depth knowledge about their respective fields of work.

Club7 Holidays has invested in a workforce, which is a team of trusted industry leaders, who draw on their extensive knowledge and expertise to ensure their travel partners and guests experience the best the world has to offer today and in the future.

As far as Club7 Holidays' future is concerned, Rajmohan informs that business will grow in the sectors of leisure and pilgrimage for both individual travellers and those in a group. According to the CEO, both NRI and domestic markets look promising.

Rajmohan is also keenly aware of the importance of expanding the company's digital footprints. He maintains, "We have noticed that travellers, instead of visiting the traditional brick and mortar shops, now prefer to book a tour right on the Internet. This 24 x 7 convenience cannot be understated. We are therefore making large investments in enhancing our online presence by launching our fully functional online portal – this will give us instant access to a large number of potential customers who can browse, shortlist, compare and instantly book everything from a flight ticket to a hotel, a complete holiday or just a sightseeing trip, or a transfer worldwide from the comfort of their homes," concludes Rajmohan.






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# AN OASIS OF PEACE

Gujarat's premier health retreat is slowly changing the landscape for wellness resorts, with its unique brand of Naturopathy and Ayurveda

TT BUREAU

**A**n hour's drive from Ahmedabad, spread over almost 30 acres, sits the wellness retreat, Nimba Nature Cure Village. Generously verdant with trees and natural foliage, Nimba welcomes guests to an exceedingly pure natural environment, resplendent with water bodies and lush green gardens. An expansive Nakshatra Garden has recently been completed, while work on a new medical block is currently underway. On a normal day, one can see guests mingling with each other, talking in hushed tones as they complete their exercise quotas for the day or walk back from their scheduled meals. A large white Buddha statue, located in the middle of a fountain, welcomes everyone as they make their way onto the grounds of the resort.

With 45 luxuriously appointed rooms, Nimba has always catered to a more boutique clientele who are looking for a tailor-made treatment and set of therapies, instead of a generic wellness regimen that is often found in the wellness resort facilities of South India. Founded a few years ago by a Gujarati

industrialist, BH Bokadia, Nimba has since then grown under the custodianship of his son Jayant Bokadia.

Today, the retreat's medical centre is headed by Dr Shyam Nidugala, who over the past two decades has worked in the field of Naturopathy not only in India but in wellness centres abroad as well. He spearheads a team of doctors who, under his guidance, treat patients for a variety of ailments and modern-day medical conditions.

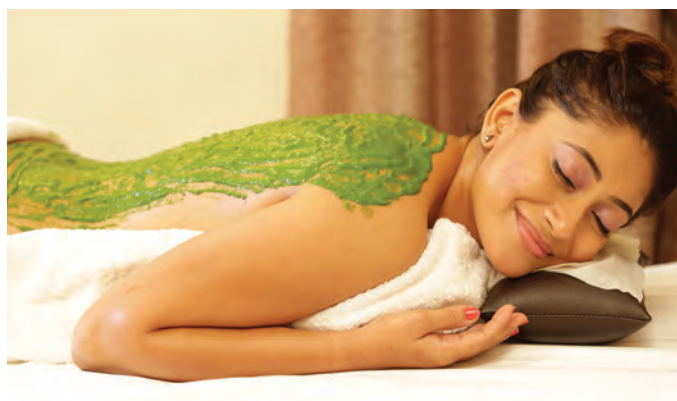
Though most popular for its weight-loss regimen, Nimba is much, much more than that. The Nimba Nature Cure Village has become very popular with guests across the country, treating clients for diabetes, blood pressure, stress and anxiety, post-operation healing and even addiction-related issues, among several others. A loyal following from Bollywood insiders, including Actor Vivek Oberoi and Directors Rajkumar Santoshi and Anurag Kashyap, has also garnered much attention for Nimba from other film industry veterans and clients based out of Mumbai.



At its core, Nimba's belief system is based on balancing modern science, traditional practices and ancient wisdom, with professional guidance to bring about an internal and external balance in guests. It offers an overall physical, psychological and spiritual health overhaul, with the help of the power of nature, believing that our body is capable of healing itself by maintaining the effective balance of the mind, body and soul. Our modern lifestyles cause a deviation from the normal, leading to health complications and general disorders in the body's systems. Bringing us back from that deviation in the most unobtrusive way is what Nimba offers.

Preaching healthcare for all, Nimba offers packages starting from as low as Rs 6000 per day per person, thus making it a very desirable wellness retreat for a wide spectrum of people from across the country.

More recently, Nimba handed over the management of the resort to Trance Hotels, a hospitality firm started by Taj Hotels' veteran, Veer Vijay Singh. Under his organisation's guidance, Nimba has seen a structural reconfiguration and refurbishment in its facilities in order to cater to a host of discerning wellness clients from across the globe. The move signals further strengthening of the resort's goal to take new initiatives towards achieving world-class hospitality and guest satisfaction scores.







# EXCLUSIVITY AT ITS BEST

Emphasising on the current growth prospects, BV Bharadwaja, Country Head, The Ascott Limited, India, says, the company aims to increase its portfolio in the growing markets of South Asia, including India

## TT BUREAU

**T**he Ascott Limited (Ascott) is a Singapore-based company that has grown to be one of the leading international lodging owner-operators. Ascott, a wholly owned subsidiary of CapitaLand Limited, pioneered Asia Pacific's first international class serviced residence with the opening of The Ascott Singapore in 1984. The company's brands include Ascott, Citadines, Somerset, Quest, The Crest Collection, lyf, HARRIS, FOX HARRIS, YELLO, POPI, Préférence and HARRIS Vertu.

### Throw some light on the USPs of The Ascott Limited

Ascott has more than 95,000 units, both operational and under development, in over 640 properties located in key cities of the Americas, Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. Its portfolio spans more than 160 cities across over 30 countries. Today, the

company boasts over 30 years of industry track record and award-winning brands that enjoy worldwide recognition.

With centrally located properties in some of the world's most bustling cities and neighbourhoods, Ascott residences provide top-tier comfort and convenience for intrepid travellers pursuing work-related or leisure commitments.

### Tell us about the development plans of The Ascott Limited

Our global target for Ascott is to increase our portfolio to 160,000 units by 2023.

Ascott understands that in addition to organic growth, mergers and acquisitions are the best way to accelerate and expand our global portfolio. In 2014, Ascott inked a deal to acquire a 20% stake in Australia's Quest Serviced Apartments (Quest). By 2017, Ascott had increased its stakes in Quest to 80% for a whopping



BV Bharadwaja



sum of A\$180 million. Following which, Ascott also acquired 80% stakes in US-based Synergy Global Housing, to expand the serviced residence portfolio in the US. Earlier this year, Ascott dove into the fast-growing business hotel segment by investing about US\$26 million for a 70% stake in Green Oak Hotel Management – the Indonesia-based holding company for TAUZIA Hotel Management (TAUZIA). This marked Ascott's first major move into the hotel segment beyond its core serviced residence business and the existing business in apartments for corporate lease.

We are also looking to expand beyond serviced residences, where we can leverage Ascott's over 30 years of experience in managing properties globally. TAUZIA has six, fastest growing mid-tier business hotel brands that will enable us to capture the ballooning segment of short-stay travellers in Asia. We are on the lookout for developer partners who will help us bring TAUZIA's brands to other international markets like India, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. We see potential to add another 20,000 keys over the next five years across Southeast Asia, under the various TAUZIA brands. This will increase our hotel portfolio to over 41,000 keys, constituting about 25% of our 160,000-unit target by 2023.

#### **Are there plans for any strategic tie-ups in India?**

In India, Ascott has recently secured a contract to manage two Citadines-branded serviced residences in Goa. The management agreement consolidates Ascott's foray into a new city in India, Goa, and increases its India portfolio to over 1500 units across nine properties in six cities. We also have our flagship Ascott

brand, the 160-unit Ascott Ireo City Gurgaon is slated to launch in Q3 2019. This property is being developed by IREO and will be managed by Ascott. We are currently pursuing strategic tie-ups in India to grow and benefit mutually.

#### **What are the differences between developing a serviced residence versus developing a hotel property? Do you think more real estate developers will venture into Serviced Apartment segment in coming years because of its advantages in terms of faster ROI?**

Although the cost of developing a serviced residence is slightly higher than a hotel property, the benefits to the developer and operator are much more. The long-stay nature of serviced residences makes it not just a stable yielding business proposition but also accounts for lower operational costs and higher efficiencies, resulting in higher profitability margins and faster ROI for the developer. A serviced residence endures much lesser wear and tear, hence, the cost of refurbishment is reduced. These factors make serviced residences a more viable option. India will surely witness a clear and conscious move on developer's part to launch international class serviced residences in all its major cities.

#### **How do you maintain work-life balance?**

Maintaining a comfortable work-life balance is vital to being productive at both the workplace and home front. I believe in the mantra, "Work hard, play hard."





# CORPORATE JET-SETTER

**Capt. Rajesh Sharma**  
**Managing Director**  
**IFM and Asset Services**  
**Cushman & Wakefield**  
**Gurugram**

**TT BUREAU**

**Q: Most memorable trip to any destination?**

It was a family vacation trip to Singapore that included a cruise to Malaysia and back from Singapore. My extended family and a few of my friends joined us on the cruise. It was a very laid-back and relaxed holiday.

**Q: You dream of going to?**

Being a wildlife enthusiast, I dream of going to Serengeti National Park and hopefully see the annual migration at close quarters.

**Q: Favourite airline and why?**

Emirates. It not only offers great service and convenient timings, but more importantly Dubai, as the airline's centre, offers excellent connections to other destinations.

**Q: Best hotel experience and why?**

My stay at the Serena Beach Resort and Spa at Mombasa stands out for me. The hotel offers an excellent location with beachfront and excellent views of the Indian Ocean. The spa and the other facilities at the hotel ensure you have a relaxing stay, and when it comes to cuisine you are indeed spoilt for choice. Lastly, the



location of the hotel is right next door to the best of Mombasa nightlife on offer.

**Q: A place you plan to visit again?**

I would like to visit Maasai Mara again. The experience is unparalleled for a wildlife enthusiast. The last trip was with friends and colleagues, but I now plan to go there for a family holiday.

**Q: A family vacation that stands out?**

The family vacation that stands out for me was a month-long holiday we took in 2016. On that trip, we spent the first ten days in Europe and packed in London, Paris and Amsterdam, and then spent three weeks in North America catching the sights in Canada and the US.

**Q: Your best holiday with friends?**

The trip to Kenya where we spent a week in Kenya covering Nairobi, Mombasa and the Mara. It included a couple of days at Mombasa right by the Indian Ocean with excellent views, nightlife and water sports activities on offer and then a few days at the Mara which included six safaris in three days.

**Q: Great food you enjoyed and where?**

Carnivore restaurant in Nairobi, for the exotic cuisine it offers and a completely different dining experience. The sheer range and a variety of meats on offer is mindboggling with roasted foodstuffs brought to the table and carved and served right there. It is an experience worth repeating.

**Q: What to watch out for while travelling?**

It always helps to do a bit of reading before heading to a new destination and lastly there is no substitute to common sense when travelling in a new city.

**Q: As a travel buyer, what's your philosophy?**

When it comes to travel, I always believe convenience and comfort take priority over saving a few dollars here and there. Lastly, I do believe in not just going by attractive photographs and pictures but reading up on reviews left by past guests.





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# CORPORATE JET-SETTER

**Rahul Lal, MRICS**  
**National Head – Infra, Facilities, Real  
 Estate & Security**  
**Dalmia Bharat Group**  
**New Delhi**

**TT BUREAU**

**Q: Most memorable trip to any destination?**

Singapore, hands down! Been there a couple of times now and can vouch for all that the country has to offer.

**Q: You dream of going to?**

Next in my bucket list is Europe.

**Q: Favourite airline and why?**

Singapore Airlines, for both, the comfort and their customer-centric approach.

**Q: Best hotel experience and why?**

Oasia Hotel Downtown, Singapore. The hotel offers unparalleled comfort, delectable cuisine and on top of that, lot of greenery in its premises.

**Q: A place you plan to visit again?**

In the immediate future, Goa!



**Q: A family vacation that stands out?**

Can't just say one, any time spent with the family needs to be cherished.

**Q: Your best holiday with friends?**

In recent months, my best holiday with friends was in Goa.

**Q: Great food you enjoyed and where?**

I enjoyed the seafood platter in Goa.

**Q: What to watch out for while travelling?**

Before heading out for a new destination, do check out how well-connected is the public transport system in that place is.

**Q: As a travel buyer, what's your philosophy?**

Planning at the right time gives a plethora of options to choose from.







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# A ROYAL ESCAPE

Alila Fort Bishangarh is a bouquet of surprises, ranging from its hallmark architectural design, personalised services to the rich Rajasthani hospitality, all with a touch of royalty, says Binny Sebastian, General Manager, Alila Fort Bishangarh

## TT BUREAU

Standing true to its name, Alila Fort Bishangarh is a place steeped in royal history stretching back to 230 years. Carefully restored and renovated over a period of seven years, Alila Fort Bishangarh features stark and refined elements carefully interwoven to make you feel utterly amazed. Today's Traveller recently caught up with Binny Sebastian, General Manager, Alila Fort Bishangarh, who spoke on what makes Alila a surprise element in the Indian Hospitality space.

### What makes Alila Fort Bishangarh "Surprisingly different" from other luxury hotels and resorts?

Alila means "Surprise" in Sanskrit, which suitably describes the refreshing character of the properties and impressions of guests when they stay with us. The hallmark of Alila is the combination of innovative design and luxury in unique locations, an unprecedented level of private space, personalized hospitality, and bespoke learning journeys.

Akin to the royals, Alila Fort Bishangarh, the 230-year-old warrior fort, offers guests to experience a personal connection with the heritage. Perched magnificently upon a granite hill, Alila Fort Bishangarh appears seamlessly sculpted from the surrounding rustic terrain, overlooking 360-degree views of the impressive Rajasthani landscape.

Our efficient leisure concierges at the Fort prepares tailored experiences which include highland trekking through Aravalli Hills, meeting local artisans, learning Rajasthani culinary with Chef, guided access to hidden temples, relishing authentic dishes in the village and many more.



**Recently, the hotel has been featured in TIME magazine among the "World's greatest places in 2018." What helped Alila Fort Bishangarh earn global recognition in such a short time?**

At Alila Fort Bishangarh, we always try to stay true to ourselves, to our brand identity and values. To us, a hotel is much more than just a place to sleep. It should reflect a sense of place, and allow the guest access into the destination, its people and culture with engaging and meaningful activities. While at the same



time, providing innovative, operational standards to support and drive sustainable tourism.

The gradual setup and subsequent operations of Alila Fort Bishangarh as a distinctly, authentic warrior fort in the country have also led to the evolution and enhancement of the village – Bishangarh, fulfilling our brand philosophy of integrating commerce, community and conservation in our business model. All of this is supported by our friendly team who knows the difference between just a hotel and what it takes to be one of the greatest places.

**You have 20 years of rich global experience in the Hospitality Industry, how has the Alila experience been for you?**

Brand Alila is still relatively young compared to other industry players and within a short span we have come a long way and appeared as a strong brand in the hospitality industry. Honestly, I had no clue what I was getting into when I took this job. Over the course of one year, Alila Fort Bishangarh has bagged multiple awards and recognition across various categories from national and international entities of repute. I have spent many years in the Caribbean and travelled the best locations, but what I find interesting about Alila Fort Bishangarh are the experiences we offer besides the history and the location itself. We like to engage our guests in curated activities which have a rural touch.

**What is your style of management and how do you keep team motivation at a high?**

I personally think that every leader should adopt a “Participative” style of leadership approach as it does not only strengthens your relationship within your team but also helps you to attain your

objective effectively. Nowadays, it is essential to give time to the team, listen to their suggestions as they are the one who service the guest. I also practice knowledge-sharing sessions with the team. What is the point of having years of experience when you can’t share it with the team? Sharing knowledge helps in many ways, most importantly it empowers the team and secondly team knows what you expect.

**How do you unwind in your free time?**

I love the vivid offerings that I’ve witnessed across the globe but the sense of relaxation and serenity you feel in India is resplendent. When you wake up in the morning and find the serene Aravallis across 360 degrees with a backdrop of the incredible heritage, the sense of positivity you receive is unquestionable. Whenever I get free time, I like to take a walk in our beautiful organic garden, hitting the Gym, going for a round on bicycle in the village, spending time with my family and going to places which are quiet and peaceful.





# THE ART OF BUSINESS

In conversation with Monica Suri, General Manager, Jaipur Marriott Hotel

## TT BUREAU

Ingrained with the cultural legacy of the Pink City and complemented by inviting spaces, Jaipur Marriott Hotel stands for refined elegance and a contemporary look. Conveniently located near the international airport, the hotel offers guests with spacious guestrooms adorned with traditional features, and replete with modern amenities. The hotel offers internal and external spaces ideal for meetings, conventions or theme weddings. Explore the city's finest culinary culture at the hotel's award-winning restaurants – Okra, Saffron, Jaipur Baking Company and Lounge 18. So, come and visit Jaipur Marriott Hotel for some truly elevated experiences.

### According to you, what defines the USPs of your hotel?

At Jaipur Marriott Hotel, our guests can experience a winning combination of traditional luxury and modern convenience, where we welcome them with refined elegance, contemporary amenities, and a prime location near Jaipur International Airport.

Jaipur Marriott Hotel is also the largest hotel in Rajasthan with the highest number of rooms in its inventory. We also offer two unique ballrooms and 40,000sq.ft. of banqueting space. We cater to a huge clientele from varied segments like weddings, corporates, local social gatherings, airline crews, FIT corporates and leisure travellers. Our rooms and suites are designed keeping the comfort of travellers in mind, and feature luxury beddings, marble bathrooms, and high-speed Internet access. Additional amenities throughout the hotel include a fitness centre, an outdoor pool as well as a splash pool for kids. Finally,

our unparalleled location in Jaipur makes it easier to enjoy major attractions in the city, including the famous City Palace.

### What are the challenges that you face in the marketplace?

Being the largest hotel, in terms of room inventory, it is difficult to compare Jaipur Marriott Hotel with any other hotel, as our hotel is a great mix of group and transient business unlike most of the hotels that are either group or transient driven, which makes their business a bit easier. In our case, the business mix is almost in the ratio of 50-50. Our team has to be equally focussed on all the segments, and to mention a few would be special corporates, wholesale series, MICE and weddings. As a leader, my role is challenging as the dependency on the group business is huge and most of it is driven out of Delhi and Mumbai markets.

### What does the hotel offer with regard to meetings and events?

Our hotel offers diverse meeting spaces to meet the needs of all kinds of huge conventions and meeting requirements catering from 10 to 1000 people. We also have Marriott tools, Meetings

Imagined and Meetings service applications, that help us to facilitate a brilliant guest experience. Meetings Imagined is a programme through which we identify, in a structured manner, the purpose of every meeting and the exact objective that a guest is looking for from a particular get-together. We then suggest many options to achieve that objective by offering theme breaks, team-building options and much more, all of which have proven to be really beneficial and counts as huge success among corporates. On the other hand, Meeting service application is a platform that connects the guest with hotel's events team, banquet operation team, housekeeping team, front office team and the



Monica Suri





culinary team to coordinate during the event in order to make it successful. The guest gets an opportunity to put in any request pertaining to the deliverables or highlight service gaps so that it is addressed by the right team on time. This avoids unnecessary delays and negative feedbacks, post or during their event, which helps both us and our esteemed guests.

#### **How do you maintain Work Life balance?**

I believe there is no such thing as 'Work Life Balance.' Both work and life are intertwined and integrated into one another and one is definitely impacted by the other. Work is one of the many important pillars of life. The reality I found is that balance is stationary, and real growth and transformation usually happen on shaky grounds. So, if you want to get moving, overcome obstacles, and chase your passions, sometimes it's necessary to disrupt the balance.

Personally, for me practicing mindfulness is quintessential as I believe in managing my own self first and then taking on other things. Yoga and meditation are an integral part of my life and provide me with the ultimate tool for enhancing my capabilities and functioning at the highest peak.





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**AVIATION**



## SPICEJET INTRODUCES NEW FLIGHT CONNECTING DELHI TO PRAYAGRAJ



SpiceJet recently announced special daily flights to be operated during the Maha Kumbh Mela between Prayagraj (Allahabad) and Delhi. The flights on the Delhi-Prayagraj sector are scheduled to operate from January 6, 2019 to March 30, 2019. The airline will operate daily flights between Delhi- Prayagraj. The airline will deploy its Boeing 737 – 700 aircraft on the Delhi-Prayagraj-Delhi route.

Shilpa Bhatia, Chief Sales & Revenue Officer, SpiceJet, said, “We are delighted to introduce a new flight on the Delhi-Prayagraj route. The city stands testimonial to India’s glorious history and rich cultural heritage besides being a key pilgrim destination.”

## TOURISM MALAYSIA LAUNCHES “FANTASTIC DEALS”



The ‘Malaysia Fantastic Deals’ package was recently launched to promote more value-for-money holiday packages to Malaysia for Indian travellers. The campaign was officiated by Tuan Syed Yahya Syed Othman, Director of Package Development Division, Tourism Malaysia, and Manoj Mehta, Country manager, Malindo Air. The initiative sees Tourism Malaysia in partnership with Malindo Air and several popular hotels and a restaurant in Malaysia to offer a total of five packages catered specifically to the Indian market. The packages can be purchased through select Indian travel agents based in Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai and Kolkata. Bookings are open only from December 15, 2018 to January 15, 2019 for travel to Malaysia between February 1, 2019 and July 31, 2019.

Tuan Syed Yahya Othman, Director of Package Development Division, Tourism Malaysia, said, “We are proud of this partnership with some of the key names in Malaysia’s Tourism Industry, and believe that Indian tourists will enjoy better value and have a memorable experience of Malaysia. These packages bring together the best of Malaysia’s islands and beaches, city, gastronomy and family-friendly experiences, and will provide a broader experience of Malaysia.”

Chandran Rama Muthy, CEO of Malindo Air, said, “We are honoured to be a part of this initiative with Tourism Malaysia in India, to promote our premium airline service from nine cities in India to Malaysia. In year 2019, we are targeting a 12% increment of passenger’s load from India compared to last year. We believe this partnership will contribute in achieving our goal and boost the number of visitors to Malaysia.”

## JET AIRWAYS ANNOUNCES CODESHARE WITH FLYNAS

Jet Airways and ‘flynas’ have entered into an extensive codeshare partnership to enhance connectivity between India and Saudi Arabia. As per the agreement, Jet Airways will place its marketing code ‘9W’ on flynas flights between the gateway cities of Dammam, Jeddah and Riyadh, thus providing its guests travelling from India the ability to travel into Saudi Arabia via one point and depart from another. Jet Airways will also be placing its code via Dammam, Jeddah and Riyadh to the Saudi Arabian cities of Medina, which is the holiest city in Islam, as well as the port city of Giza, the agriculturally rich city of Gassim, the unofficial summer capital city of Taif and the popular tourist destination Abha, thus extending Jet Airways reach into Saudi Arabia.

In turn, flynas will be able to offer its guests access into India by placing its marketing code ‘XY’ on Jet Airways’ international flights connecting Jeddah to Mumbai, Riyadh to Mumbai and Delhi as well as Dammam to Mumbai and Delhi. In addition to these international routes, flynas will also place its marketing code on certain destinations on the Jet Airways domestic network.



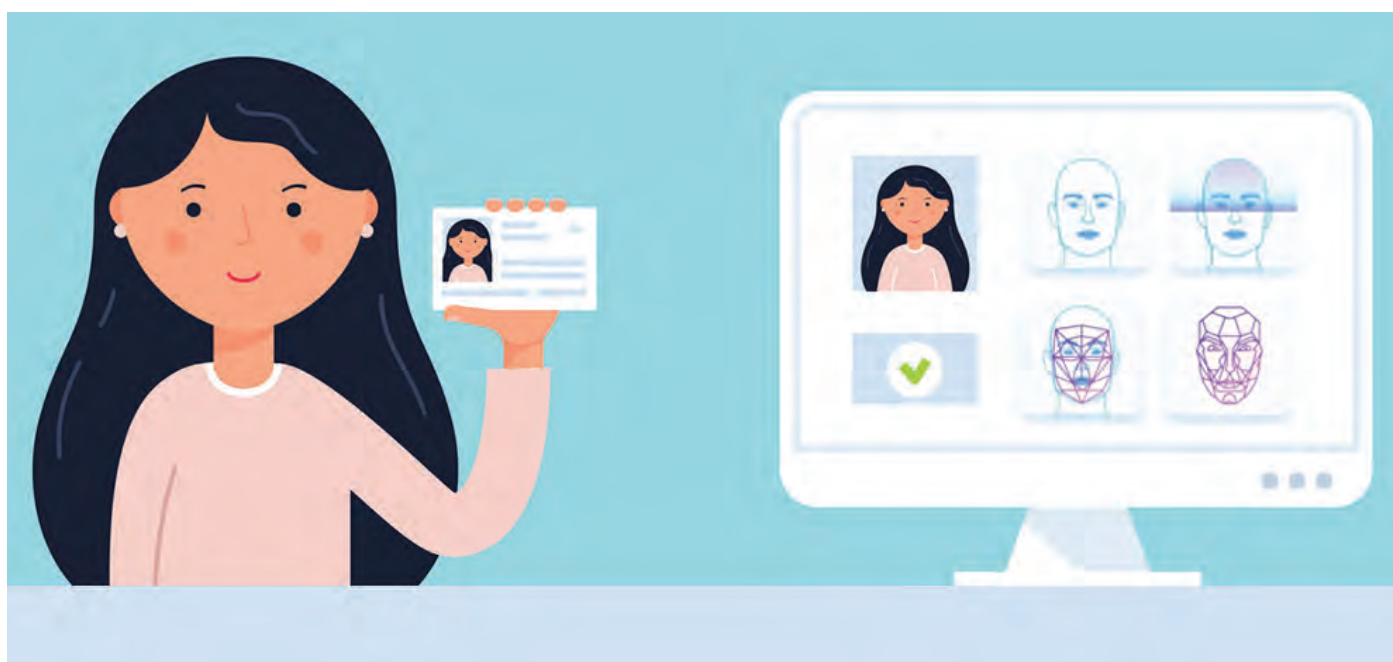
## NOW FLY FROM DUBAI TO NAPLES AND BUDAPEST WITH FLYDUBAI

Dubai-based airline flydubai recently announced the start of flights to Budapest in Hungary and Naples in Italy. flydubai will operate up to five flights a week to Naples from June 4, 2019, becoming the first UAE carrier to offer direct flights. Daily flights to Budapest will start on June 27, 2019, and will be in addition to the current service offered by Emirates. Emirates will codeshare on both routes, and this further illustrates the strength of the partnership, which aims to provide more options for travel to passengers. Both routes will operate from Terminal 3 at Dubai International (DXB).

Commenting on the launch, Ghaith Al Ghaith, CEO of flydubai, said, “We are delighted to be launching flights to Budapest and Naples. These destinations provide our passengers with more choice on our network while reaffirming our commitment to the vision set by us to create free flows of tourism and strengthen direct airlinks with the UAE.”







# DigiYatra: Paperless Air Travel

A passenger facial recognition programme, AAI's DigiYatra platform ensures that your face becomes your boarding pass, making travel easier and simpler than ever before

## TT BUREAU

In the past four years, air travel sector in India has witnessed tremendous growth in its numbers. The growth numbers in this sector are the result of new and upcoming destinations on the Indian Aviation map, the developments under the UDAN scheme, and the expansion and innovation taken to create additional infrastructure to cater to increasing passenger numbers. With the help of avant-garde technology and new-age infrastructure, better facilities and a much more secured environment are available to meet the ever-growing expectations of passengers. To meet all these expectations, it is first important to chalk out all the problems and then design a solution with the help of technology. It is important that all the aviation stakeholders involved in providing the solution work in tandem to reap the benefits of these technological advances.

Recently, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) rolled out the concept of 'DigiYatra' – an innovative facial recognition programme that will provide seamless travel experience and improved security features. MoCA proposed DigiYatra (DY) for enhanced travel experience and formed a technical working committee to issue guidelines and standards in order to implement this initiative in a glitch-free manner.

## REVOLUTIONARY IDEA

The long-awaited DigiYatra Central Platform, built on

international standards, will be operational from the end of February 2019 at Bengaluru International Airport and Hyderabad International Airport. This pilot implementation will further pave way for other AAI airports, including Kolkata, Varanasi, Pune and Vijayawada by April 2019.

With this new DigiYatra implementation, passengers will witness a powerful, pan-India platform that will give airports the possibility of providing innovative and consent-based targeted services to passengers in future. Any intermediary service provider will be able to utilise this platform to cater to the travel of passenger in future. This paperless, seamless initiative is sure to elevate the travel experience of air passengers, who will now have many travel-related options available to them.

The inbuilt cutting-edge Identity Management and Face Recognition technologies will help in simplifying the passenger processes at various checkpoints at the airport, right from the terminal entry gate, check-in/bag drop, security check, to boarding gates.

Now passengers will no longer require to show their tickets/boarding passes and their ID cards at many of those checkpoints at the airport, since the ticket/boarding pass will come integrated with the ID card document. This will drastically reduce the long queues and waiting time, and will lead to faster processing time and simpler processes.



## ADVANTAGES OF DIGIYATRA

DigiYatra will provide many advantages not only to the passengers but also to all the aviation stakeholders – airlines, airport operators, security and immigration agencies, cab operators, retail establishment and others – involved in providing a pioneering, digital flying experience. The seamless exchange of data and information, resulting from this initiative, will help in delivering much improved and innovative services to passengers. The travel information will also help airport operators in better resource planning. With the availability of real-time data of passengers within the terminal, airline operators will know the exact location of passengers, which will help avoid delays and congestion of flights. This new initiative will also position Indian Aviation as one of the most pioneering air networks in the world. Errors in boarding passes will also not occur with the help of this technology.

A successfully registered passenger on the DigiYatra platform can directly go to the entry point E-Gate of the airport and scan the boarding pass/QR code/barcode of the ticket. A camera will then capture the image of a person's face and compare it with the DY Photo ID. On successful verification of all the travel details and facial recognition, the E-Gate will open. This recognition process is also valid for all subsequent checkpoints at the airport, which will eliminate the need to show documents or ID.

## FLY NONSTOP BETWEEN NEW DELHI AND SAN FRANCISCO WITH UNITED AIRLINES



United Airlines recently announced a new daily nonstop seasonal service between Indira Gandhi International Airport and its hub at San Francisco International Airport. United's new route to San Francisco will be the airline's third daily nonstop service from India in addition to the existing daily, year-round services from Mumbai and New Delhi to New York/Newark.

Speaking on the occasion, Harvinder Singh, United's Country Manager India, said, "This new flight strengthens our international route network and provides our customers from India with even greater travel choice, with connections from San Francisco to other destinations across the US and Canada." He added, "Connecting the Indian capital to the US West Coast opens up new opportunities for both business and leisure travellers."

## KEY FEATURES OF THIS INITIATIVE

- » Centralised registration system for passengers ensures they would get a unique DY ID on booking the tickets
- » Use any Identity proof to create a DY ID by sharing personal details like e-mail, mobile number, etc.
- » The airline would then share the passenger data and the unique ID with the airport from where the passenger will be flying out
- » Optional linking of Aadhaar to airline ticket will ensure a faster airport entry and automated, paperless check-ins
- » It will be a biometrics-based system for passenger entry and other related requirements at the airport
- » It will be voluntary on part of passengers whether to opt for facial recognition biometric or not
- » Passengers will receive real-time notifications about delays or congestion of flights
- » Baggage notification alert to passengers, when their luggage reaches the baggage claim belt



## TURKISH AIRLINES AND INDIGO ANNOUNCE A CODESHARE AGREEMENT

A member of Star Alliance, Istanbul-based Turkish Airlines, and India's largest domestic carrier, IndiGo, recently announced a codeshare and mutual cooperation agreement. The signed codeshare and mutual cooperation agreement between the two carriers will enable both carriers to provide more flexibility of choice to their respective customers to fly on sectors between India, Istanbul and beyond.

This is the first codeshare agreement for IndiGo as part of its international expansion strategy. Through this cooperation, Turkish Airlines will be offering new destinations in India as Marketing Carrier on IndiGo-operated flights, while IndiGo customers will be able to reach many European destinations through Turkish Airlines' extensive network. This reciprocal arrangement will allow TK and 6E to provide seamless connections to their customers, besides enabling them to use through check-in and many other facilities.







TODAY'S  
traveller

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AIRLINE  
LATIN  
AMERICA

ITALIA

EXPLORER



# TRAVEL BUCKETLIST 2019

It is 2019, and with the winter giving way to spring and summer, it is probably the time of the year to pack your bags and head for newer experiences. Explore the mountains, beaches or deserts of India, and indulge in a host of adrenaline-pumping activities. No matter what's on your travel wish-list, there's a Fortune & WelcomHeritage hotel to take care of all your needs.



## MOUNTAINS

From the quaint charm of McLeod Ganj to the cool climes of Mussoorie, there is a Fortune & WelcomHeritage Hotel in all your favourite destinations. Some of the best mountain retreats include those in McLeod Ganj, Solan, Kasauli, Srinagar, Mussoorie and Ooty.



## BEACHES

Fall in love with the oceans once again with Fortune & WelcomHeritage Hotel's exclusive properties across Goa in Candolim, Miramar and Panjim.



## DESERTS

Explore the desert and the history-rich palaces of Kota and Jaipur with Fortune & WelcomHeritage Hotels. You'll be spoilt for choices when it comes to choosing your destination.





# TRAVEL FRIENDLY MOUNTAINS

Explore the picturesque mountain ranges and get your adrenaline fix by indulging in some of these coolest mountain activities, including Mountain Trekking, River Trekking, Cable Car Rides, Camping, Skywalk, Zipline, Zip Swings, Rock Climbing and Rappelling, Caving, Mountain Biking, Paragliding, Rafting, Toy Train Rides, Tea Gardens, Horse riding, Angling and Hang Gliding. Fortune & WelcomHeritage Hotels offers some of their best properties at these pristine mountain getaways, so that you can enjoy your holidays with the best of hospitality, personalised services and sumptuous Indian and international cuisines.



## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Summer time from April to June is the best time to visit the mountains when the skies are clear and bright.



## WHAT TO DO

Mountain trekking, river trekking, Cable Car rides, Camping, Skywalk, Zipline, Zip Swings, Rock Climbing and Rappelling, Caving, Mountain Biking, Paragliding, Rafting, Toy Train Rides, Tea Gardens, Horse riding, Angling and Hang Gliding.



## TRAVELLER'S TIP

Make sure you pack plenty of woollens and apply sunscreen to protect yourself from the harsh rays of the sun.



### FORTUNE PARK MOKSHA, MCLEOD GANJ



### FORTUNE SELECT FOREST HILL, SOLAN



### WELCOMHERITAGE GLENVIEW RESORT, KASauli



### FORTUNE RESORT HEEVAN, SRINAGAR



### WELCOMHERITAGE KASMANDA PALACE, MUSSOORIE



### FORTUNE RESORT SULLIVAN COURT, OOTY





# SUN KISSED BEACHES

Whenever we think of beaches, Goa strikes our mind almost effortlessly. The peak season to visit is from November to March, when the weather is perfect and streets are filled with holidaymakers. Beach activities include Parasailing, Jetskiing, Windsurfing, Dinghy Sailing, Scuba Diving, Waterskiing, Angling, Water Scooter and Swimming. Do not forget to rejuvenate yourself at Fortune & WelcomHeritage Hotels known for their world-class hospitality and especially curated services.



## BEST TIME TO VISIT

Winter time, from October to February is the time you should head out to the beaches. Book early to avoid rush.



## WHAT TO DO

Parasailing, Jet skiing, Windsurfing, Dinghy Sailing, Scuba Diving, Waterskiing, Angling, Water Scooter and Swimming, just to name a few of the fun activities.



## TRAVELLER'S TIP

Make sure to visit the Basilica of Bom Jesus, Fort Aguada, Fontainhas & Sao Tome. Walk down the Old Quarters and cobbled streets sampling local craftsmanship and cuisine.

### FORTUNE ACRON REGINA, CANDOLIM, GOA



### FORTUNE MIRAMAR, GOA



### ACRON WATERFRONT RESORT, BAGA, GOA



### WELCOMHERITAGE PANJIM, GOA





# SHIMMERING SAND DUNES

Spending quality time amidst the golden sands of deserts is something that can be enjoyed during winters, when the air is crisp, the days are comfortable and the nights are chilly - all-in-all, making for a perfect sojourn. Enjoy all desert-related activities with all the comforts by your side, and with a touch of royalty and Rajasthani hospitality at the fabulous properties by Fortune & WelcomHeritage Hotels.



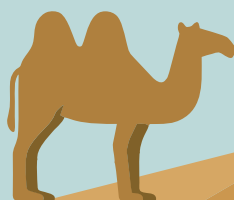
## BEST TIME TO VISIT

November to February is the best time to visit Rajasthan. Avoid summers for they are scorching. Monsoon season should also be avoided.



## WHAT TO DO

Desert activities include Parasailing over Thar Desert, Hot Air Ballooning, Camel Riding, Dune Bashing, Camel Safari, Desert Safari, Jeep Safari, Camping in Thar, and Sightseeing.



## TRAVELLER'S TIP

Rajasthan is well-known for its handicraft and handloom items. Pick up a few items to support the local artisans

### FORTUNE SELECT METROPOLITAN, JAIPUR



### WELCOMHERITAGE BALSAMAND LAKE PALACE, JODHPUR



### WELCOMHERITAGE UMED BHAWAN PALACE, KOTA



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# WHY? TO GET A STEP AHEAD OF DISEASE.

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# THE HILTON PROMISE

In conversation with Aditya Shamsheer Malla, General Manager, DoubleTree by Hilton Pune, Chinchwad

## TT BUREAU

Located in the quiet, but modern and upbeat city of Pune, DoubleTree by Hilton Pune - Chinchwad tops the list when it comes to selecting a premier business hotel that not only suits your requirements but is also easily accessible. This modern and stylish hotel is situated near the main IT hub of the city – Hinjawadi, and makes for an ideal choice when it comes to hosting a successful business or MICE trip, or a fun-filled family get-together. You can also easily explore the nearby tourist spots like the charming hill station of Lonavala, located at about 42km from the hotel, and the architecturally rich Karla and Bhaja Caves. It is also one of the best hotels for bleisure travel and staycations, which are currently gaining grounds in the industry.

### Throw some light on the USPs of DoubleTree by Hilton Pune - Chinchwad.

Commissioned in 2012, the hotel is well-established as a premium business hotel in the automobile hub of Chinchwad, on the Old Mumbai Pune Highway. The hotel boasts fine food and beverage options, ranging from a multi-cuisine, all-day dining restaurant with a la carte and buffet, an award-winning specialty Japanese restaurant with a teppanyaki grill, a rooftop Indian specialty restaurant serving signature cocktails and carefully curated a la carte menu, and a deli and patisserie serving creative pastries and fine coffees. The hotel's rooftop swimming pool and spa add to the leisure and relaxation activities for guests while they stay over for business or a break. The unique experience of staying at this hotel starts from the check-in with our signature warm DoubleTree cookie. The team at the hotel will surprise you with their warmth and attention to detail, delivered consistently throughout your stay.

### What does the hotel offer in terms of meetings and events?

Food Studio is a uniquely designed meeting space, breaking away from the usual straight lines and templated presentation. As the name suggests, meetings held at Food Studio are more effective and memorable due to the creative presentation, which is a welcoming change. An open terrace adjoining the French windows in Food Studio gives an opportunity for participants to step out in fresh air and sunshine to rejuvenate and improve concentration. Food Studio along with Vihara, the other meeting venue, together offers meeting spaces for up to 300 people in seating and 500 in reception style.

### How do you maintain work life balance?

Work-life balance is integral to a long, successful career. As I was reading recently, fitness, family and career must go hand in hand to create the right cocktail for success. Every day, I dedicate the morning hours to fitness, which keeps me mentally and physically agile. I also dedicate 'me time' for reading and feel refreshed after going through the



Mr. Aditya Shamsheer Malla



editorials of leading dailies and also my favourite magazines. Reading at least two different genres of books simultaneously helps me to relax and enjoy the books and avoid boredom. My daughter and son claim whatever time I have left after I return from office. In fact, often they join me in my reading and morning exercise rituals. Weekends are for family outings or a game of golf. I can't say it's perfect, but this seems to be working well for me at the moment.







# TIMELESS TAMIL NADU

On your next trip to Tamil Nadu, visit these iconic colonial marvels from yesteryears and be dumbfounded to discover the slice of history behind their long existence

**ABHISHEK PATHAK**

**T**amil Nadu is adorned with many architectural wonders of great importance, built in a range of architectural designs from Gothic, Neo-Classical, Victorian, Neo-Gothic, to Swiss-styled chalets. Make sure you add them to your bucket-list, as you head out to explore the architecturally rich state of Tamil Nadu this season.

## **FERNHILLS ROYALE PALACE, OOTY**

Located in over 50 acres of lush green estate sits the Fernhills Royale Palace, the erstwhile summer residence of the Mysore Maharaja built in 1844 by Capt. F Cotton. The palace resembles a Swiss Chalet, with carved wooden bargeboards and ornamental cast iron giving it that peculiar look. The palace grounds appear characteristic to Swiss Alps region, with large manicured gardens, dense woods and terraced tea gardens. Situated in the Nilgiri Hills of Ooty, the palace is undeniably charming and popular among holidaymakers, honeymooners, and film units.

The palace nowadays serves as a heritage hotel offering 19 suites that bask in sky lit corridor, overlooking stylised lawns fringed by large, sprawling plantations of cardamom and tea, and eucalyptus forests, from the glass-encased verandas. The palace is decked with Victorian era furniture and colonial furnishings that still exude the same charm that it once did, like those big

chandeliers radiating golden light, teakwood panelling, bay windows, dressing rooms, a magnificent ballroom with a highly valued ornamental paper mache ceiling and other attractive interiors with a blend of gothic, regency and neo-classical renaissance architecture.

## **SANTHOME BASILICA, CHENNAI**

Constructed in the Neo-Gothic style, the Santhome Basilica, in Chennai, traces its history back to the days when church architecture was primarily inspired from old Victorian cathedrals. Both exteriors and interiors bear elaborate details, like pointed windows with decorative tracery, geometrical design and pinnacles, ornate stained glass windows to let in ample light within the dark interiors of the church, and the ornamental confession box.

The colossal nave of the church is covered in coffee brown ceiling with elegant chandeliers, which is an iconic feature of Gothic architecture. The stained glass windows depict the lives of St Thomas and other apostles of Jesus Christ. The tall and slender towers impart a sense of height to the entire structure. Clearly, the white, spotless structure is indeed imposing and brings a sense of reverence to the eyes of the beholder.



### HIGGINBOTHAMS BOOKSHOP, CHENNAI

Established in 1844, the Higginbothams Bookshop is the face of Mount Road in Chennai. It is the oldest surviving bookstore in India and has seen a long list of who's who from around the world visiting its premises during its long and chequered history. It seems like a lot of thinking was done before the bookshop was built, like a high ceiling with sloping roof was built for proper air circulation to protect the books from dampness and mustiness, while the windows were kept to minimum to prevent dust from the then unmetalled Mount Road.

The Italian marble chequered flooring, in black and white, lends the bookshop a proper feel and warmth. The majestic wooden staircase leading to the second floor adds the old world charm. There's also an antique grandfather clock at the foot of the staircase, possibly kept for visitors to remind them of the times gone by. The bookstore still features old style high ceiling fans and lamps, all remnants from its glorious past. The 175-year-old bookstore ably embodies the passion for books as its founder, Abel Joshua Higginbotham.



### RIPON BUILDING

A perfect example of Neo Classical architecture, Ripon Building was built in 1913 and houses the Chennai Municipal Corporation. The beautiful, three-storey building, with Westminster Quarter chiming clock as its main attraction, is built in a smooth blend of Gothic, Corinthian and Ionic architecture. The chiming clock used to ring in every quarter of an hour, just like the Big Ben in London. The insides of building feature a wealth of woodwork, stained glass, and parquet ceiling.

Designed by Government Architect GST Harris and completed by JR Coats, the building is built around two courtyards spanning three floors separated by a grand staircase. The rectangular facade of the building is a series of composite columns and pilasters that support the arches on the ground and first floors and rectangular openings on the top-most floor. The capitals in the columns are elaborately decorated with bunches of grapes, vines, and other forms of prosperity.





# 24 HOURS IN GOA

This season, discover Goa in its myriad colours as you wind down the old quarters, pristine beaches and cobbled streets amidst winter sunshine and blissful natural settings

TT BUREAU

## BASILICA OF BOM JESUS

A very popular church, it contains the tomb and the mortal remains of St Francis Xavier and is located in Old Goa. The basilica was completed by the year 1605 and is a prominent place of worship for Christians all across the world. It is the only church in Old Goa which is not plastered on the outside. The right time to visit the church is during the Feast of St Francis Xavier, which is held each year on December 3.



## FORT AGUADA



The historical fort, where “Dil Chahta Hai” was shot, stands overlooking the mouth of River Mandovi. It is located in a magnificent place offering beautiful views for tourists. Built in 1612, it was the first watering point for Portuguese ships that were coming in. The word ‘agua’ in Portuguese means water. Today, visitors can get to the hilltop fort by taking 4 km winding road that heads east from Sinquerim Beach and loops up around the headland.





## FONTAINHAS & SAO TOME

They are the more vibrant districts of Panjim, in terms of Portuguese culture, located between the hill side of Altinho and the Ourem Creek banks and have beautiful narrow streets for wanderers to explore. Fontainhas, which is the larger of the two districts, hosts beautiful pastel-shaded houses that go on till the Altinho's hill. São Tomé is a tiny area which is located north of Fontainhas.



## DUDHSAGAR FALLS



Away from the beaches and parties, Goa also has some very impressive waterfalls on the eastern border with Karnataka. In fact, Dudhsagar Falls are second highest in India which is best experienced after rains. The four-tiered waterfall is located in the Bhagwan Mahavir Sanctuary and Mollem National Park in the Western Ghats. Monsoons are the best time to visit.



**WHAT: SINGAPORE ART WEEK**  
**WHEN: JANUARY 19-27, 2019**  
**WHERE: SINGAPORE**

A celebration of creativity, beauty and bold new ways of perceiving art, Singapore Art Week 2019 returns with a packed schedule, aptly themed Art Takes Over, with activities and events spread across city's galleries, museums and surprising spaces, even backstreets and alleys. This seventh edition will showcase works from some of the most dynamic artists from Singapore and around the world, through a plethora of art-themed events ranging from exhibitions and walking tours to art fairs and symposiums. The event will give aficionados a rare chance to view the private collections of some of the city's most discerning collectors. Art lovers interested in the inner workings of the art world can attend discussions, dialogues and symposiums featuring noteworthy speakers and panellists.



**WHAT: JAIPUR LITERATURE FESTIVAL**  
**WHEN: JANUARY 24-28, 2019**  
**WHERE: DIGGI PALACE, JAIPUR**

One of the most sought-after festivals for literature in India and Asia, the Jaipur Literature Festival is attended by authors, poets and a whole lot of other dignitaries, where seminars and debates take place regularly. Lovers of literature shouldn't miss this fantastic opportunity to meet with renowned national and international authors and listen to them speak – and all for free! The Jaipur Literature Festival is an annual event that's considered to be one of the most important literature events in Asia.

**WHAT: CARNIVALE**  
**WHEN: 16 FEBRUARY-5 MARCH, 2019**  
**WHERE: VENICE, ITALY**

Venice bursts into life during the dreary wintery month of February when the city jumps back to the 18th century in celebration of Carnevale. Dress up in the full array of ballgowns, fanciful masks and lots of face paint for a weekend filled of debauchery, masquerades and lots of cicchetti. Carnival in Venice is a one-of-a-kind celebration suspended between past and present with a traditional local allure featuring many event-within-the-event.



**WHAT: SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL**  
**WHEN: 24 JANUARY-3 FEBRUARY, 2019**  
**WHERE: PARK CITY, UTAH**

The Sundance Film Festival takes place annually in Park City, Utah. With over 46,660 attendees in 2016, it is the largest independent film festival in the United States. The festival showcases new works from American and international independent filmmakers. The festival comprises competitive sections for American and international dramatic and documentary films, both feature films and short films, and a group of out-of-competition sections, including NEXT, New Frontier, Spotlight, Midnight, Premieres, and Documentary Premieres.



**WHAT: RIO CARNIVAL**  
**WHEN: MARCH 2-9, 2019**  
**WHERE: RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL**

The Carnival in Rio de Janeiro is a festival held before Lent every year and considered as the biggest carnival in the world, with two million people per day on the streets. The typical Rio carnival parade is filled with revellers, floats, and adornments from numerous samba schools which are located in Rio. Dressed in beautiful costumes, these amazing dancers parade through the Sambadrome; official balls and parties are held at Copacabana Palace. And the streets come alive with the mini festivals instigated by locals where formality and structure are left far behind as music and dancing become the order of the day.

**WHAT: MARDI GRAS**  
**WHEN: MARCH 5, 2019**  
**WHERE: NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA, USA**

Mardi Gras is synonymous with hedonism and debauchery, and with a motto of 'Let the good times roll', it's no surprise that this is probably the wildest party in the United States. It may be a surprise to some, however, Mardi Gras is the official final celebration before the period of Lent, the Catholic period of introspection and sacrifice. But whatever your religion – everyone is welcome! So grab your purple, green and gold (the festival's official colours representing justice, faith and power) and take to the streets for one of the biggest parties of your life.





# PICK OF THE MONTH

The latest collection of books, games, audio CDs and DVDs are here to keep you entertained for the month

## MUSIC - UGLY BEAUTY

Ugly Beauty is the fourteenth studio album by Taiwanese singer Jolin Tsai. It was released on December 26, 2018, by Sony Music Taiwan. Ugly Beauty opens with the song "Necessarily Evil". Produced by Taiwanese record producers Razor Chiang and Starr Chen, the song incorporates hardcore hip hop with trap and gothic rock styles, it also accompanies "devil's voices", shouting sounds, and synths. Tsai uses a deeper vocal register to intone the lyrics to express sense of conflict between repression and emancipation, and the song's lyrics carry a message of being fearless of

the evil in inner world. The lead single from the album, "Ugly Beauty", has trap, hip hop, and drum & bass influences. The song was written with Golden Melody Award winner for Best Lyrics, Taiwanese singer-songwriter Greeny Wu, British songwriter Rhys Fletcher, Taiwanese songwriter Stan Dubb, British songwriter Richard Craker, and Starr Chen.



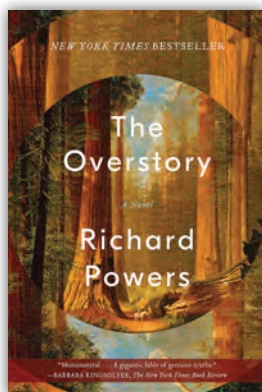
Genre: Pop

## BOOK - THE OVERSTORY

In his twelfth novel, National Book Award winner Richard Powers delivers a sweeping, impassioned novel of activism and resistance that is also a stunning evocation of – and paean to – the natural world. From the roots to the crown and back to the seeds, *The Overstory* unfolds in concentric rings of interlocking fables that range from antebellum New York to the late twentieth-century Timber Wars of the Pacific Northwest and beyond, exploring the essential conflict on this planet: the one taking place between humans and nonhumans. There is a

world alongside ours – vast, slow, interconnected, resourceful, magnificently inventive, and almost invisible to us. This is the story of a handful of people who learn how to see that world and who are drawn up into its unfolding catastrophe. *The Overstory* is a book for all readers who despair of humanity's self-imposed separation from the rest of creation and who hope for the transformative, regenerating possibility of a homecoming. If the trees of this earth could speak, what would they tell us? "Listen. There's something you need to hear."

Genre (s): Literary Fiction



## MOVIE - THE BOOKSHOP

A small town in 1959 England does not seem like the most progressive place in the world. But this doesn't matter to a woman named Florence Green. She's always been a bit of a rebel, so starting a bookshop seems like the most logical next step. But it's not long before it becomes clear that certain townspeople do not want her to succeed. A fan of Nabokov and Bradbury, she exposes people to controversial works of art that they wouldn't have seen otherwise. But at one point, she's forced to ask herself if the pressure makes her venture impossible.

Genre: Drama



## GAME - ONIMUSHA: WARLORDS

Onimusha: Warlords is the game that officially kicked off the Onimusha series, spawning many sequels to the fantasy action game. Now, the PS2/PC game is returning in remastered form, and will release on PS4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, and PC. The action game, first released in 2001, follows samurai Samanosuke Akechi and ninja Kaede as they fight to rescue Princess Yuki. Set in feudal Japan, the two must save Yuki from mysterious demons that have invaded her castle while uncovering the fiends' plot. Players wield katanas and other weapons as Samanosuke and Kaede battle their way to the castle. The game is receiving a high-definition graphics overhaul of its characters, environments, and cinematics, and Capcom is adding widescreen support that allows for quick changing between widescreen and classic display modes. The studio is also adding support for analog sticks to boost movement accuracy during combat. Onimusha: Warlords HD will release on all systems on January 15, 2019.

Genre (s): Action-adventure game, Hack and slash





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