

IATO Speaks

A tourism industry communication by Indian Association of Tour Operators

**Milestones
in 2019**

**Recommendations for
UNION BUDGET**

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS





Incredible India

आतिथे वेदरत बेहरा

IATO urges all its members and their vendors to fully support Prime Minister Narendra Modi's initiatives:

SWACHH BHARAT ABHIYAN (Clean India Mission)



BAN ON SINGLE-USE PLASTIC

REDUCE
REUSE
RECYCLE



Say **No To**
Single Use
Plastic





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New Year Wishes



E M Najeeb
Sr Vice - President

Warm greetings to all our IATO members! An eventful year has gone by, and we are at the threshold of a New Year which will open up challenges and new opportunities for us. Let us be determined to meet our challenges and grab the opportunities. Tourism, travel and hospitality industry should be resilient enough to move forward towards a brighter future. It is time to unite our hands with new resolve and strengthen our great fraternity. The year 2020 is the beginning year of a new decade. It is a landmark year in our professional journey. Let us be confident, enthusiastic and cheerful. Wishing you all a very happy and bright New Year, 2020.



Rajiv Mehra
Vice - President

Wishing you all a very happy, prosperous and purposeful 2020. India firmly believes in peace and harmony and this will surely translate into a good business for all. Today our country is poised to surge ahead in the area of cruise tourism – a nascent thrust to this area is a welcome step and let us capitalise on this segment, besides leisure and other facets.

Contd. on page 8 ►



Rajesh Mudgill
Hony. Secretary

I wish each of you a harmonious and progressive 2020, and send you my sincerest greetings for the festives of Lohri, Sankranti and Pongal. Looking forward to your active and meaningful participation during this year.

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Honorary Secretary
Rajesh Mudgill

Editorial Board
Neelam Thakur
Atul Rai
Harish Chopra
Manish Poddar
Manoj Matta

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News, Media & PR Committee
Neelam Thakur (*Convener*)

Atul Rai
Harish Chopra
Manish Poddar
Manoj Matta



Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)
310, Padma Tower II, 22, Rajendra Place,
New Delhi - 110 008
Tel : 91-11-25750028, 25754478, 25738803
E-mail: iato@ddpl.com

President's Message



Pronab Sarkar

Dear Friends,

Since the last issue of our newsletter, a lot of significant developments has taken place.

First of all, we have completed our Annual General Meeting on October 30, 2019 at The Lalit Hotel, New Delhi, wherein 82 members actively participated. Rajesh Mudgill, Hony Secretary, read his report wherein the latest updates on IATO activities and achievements were reported. Members also discussed about current issues, future strategies which underline IATO's role as a leading think tank.

Our aggressive follow up with various ministries and with the help of positive initiatives of the Ministry of Tourism, the reduction in e-Visa fee and reduction in GST rates on hotel accommodation has helped the industry with better opportunity to grow numbers. The idea is to fulfil the government's vision of doubling the number of tourists in the next few years and that the benefit of reduction in GST has to be passed on to the final customer, so that the packages for promoting India as tourist destination becomes cheaper than what it is currently.

You are aware, IATO had taken up with Air India to restart its daily flight on Delhi-Varanasi-Khajuraho-Varanasi-Delhi sector and we also had a meeting with Ashwani Lohani, CMD and other officials of Air India on this. You will be pleased to know that Air India in its winter flight schedule from October 28, 2019 to March 28, 2020 has announced operational flights on the above sector.

Budget issues are critical for our business. A meeting was held at Transport Bhawan under the Chairmanship of Rupinder Brar, Additional Director General (Tourism), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, on November 27, 2019. IATO gave its key recommendation details which you will find in this newsletter. Following our meeting with the Ministry of Tourism, we had a meeting with Ministry of Finance, Government of India and emphasised on the following four issues on December 4, 2019:

- Tourism industry to be treated as deemed exporters at par with IT industry under export of services.

- Removal of cascading effect of GST on tourism industry.
- Removal of GST on services provided outside India to foreign tourists, i.e. Nepal, Bhutan, etc.

There will be withdrawal of facility of airport entry passes from January 1, 2020 for the representative of tour operators for entry at the airport. Regarding the airport entry passes we have taken up the issue with the Hon'ble Minister of Civil Aviation and Hon'ble Minister of Tourism and with the concerned responsible officers. We have made a strong written representation to the concerned authorities in person, as it is a question of security and safety of our tourists that our valued members bring into India. We are hopeful to resolve the issue with some amendment in the security measures for the company representatives in line of new security policy in place at all airports of India.

With regards to SEIS delaying clearance of our member's files, the matter was taken up with DGFT concerned officers and discussed at length. We have made suitable representation in consultation with M/s. Ernst & Young.

We have appointed a PR agency for a initial period of six months, that shall endeavor to take our views to the print media and in tweets. We have requested for your valued inputs that can be placed before the agency with respect to stories in national dailies and tweets. This shall strengthen the sinews of brand IATO and bolster its image.

For the benefit of our members who engage in cross promotion of tourism, we had a good set of meetings with officials from Vietnam and Ethiopia and have requested for a Fam for our members who also cater to outbound.

On the November 27 we bid farewell to Suman Billa, Joint Secretary Tourism and Aashima Mehrotra, Director Tourism, Government of India. They both were very helpful, cooperative and gave all the pertinent issues affecting our industry their due recognition. We wish them the very best in their future endeavors.

Soon we will leave one year behind and roll into the next one, I hope this New Year brings you good health and prosperity, and a successful and fulfilling life that you desire and deserve. May 2020 find us with increased energy and greater determination to achieve success in business and move our organisation to greater heights.

Wish you all Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Thanks

Pronab Sarkar
President



Annual General Meeting highlights

Rajesh Mudgill, Hony. Secretary presented the annual report on behalf of IATO during the 37th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the association, which took place on October 30, 2019 at The Lalit Hotel in New Delhi. Here is an update on activities since the last AGM on October 15, 2018.

The year gone by saw many critical recommendations of IATO in diverse facets gain acceptability from Government of India- a record success by any measure. As an apex tourism body of India, IATO is addressed as a strategic association to further contribute effectively to growth trajectory articulated by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

IATO pursued relentlessly the key issues that did not auger well for tourism and its growth path- e-Visa fee, GST, air connectivity, group reservation with the Indian Railways, booking with luxury trains etc. being the main impediments.

Others that saw the efforts of IATO related to skill development workshops, guide fee, recommendations on MDA, the tight schedules of MOT roadshows that needed a breathing space, the result oriented contribution of IATO at the ITM 2019, culminating the acknowledged success of the 35th annual convention at Kolkata and the cherished support of the Government of West Bengal.

IATO's circulars, luncheon and active member meetings were there to keep IATO members abreast with the latest in the area of tourism and aid the business endeavours.

Here is an update on the activities in relation to IATO since its last Annual General Meeting on October 15, 2018:

ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

Marketing offices overseas

IATO requested the Ministry of Tourism that with the closure of some of the India-tourism offices in important source markets like Sydney, Paris, Amsterdam, Milan, Los Angeles, Toronto, Johannesburg etc. There is a dire need to have tourist information centre/tourism cell or the representative offices need to be in operation as early as possible in order to increase the tourist flow to India though marketing.

Development of infrastructure for MICE tourism

MICE tourism is getting very popular across



IATO's circulars, luncheon and active member meetings were organised to keep IATO members abreast with the latest in the area of tourism and aid the business endeavours.



the globe, but India's share is very minimal currently. There is a dire need to develop infrastructure for MICE tourism, as we are losing the MICE business to our neighbouring countries. Not only foreigners, but large Indian companies are opting to have their conferences, conventions in neighbouring countries like Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore or Sri Lanka. All this is due to very limited convention centres across India and other better infrastructure only available in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad or Kolkata. We need to have



convention centres with all supporting infrastructure like hotels, shopping malls and night bazaars etc. in all the states and other important tourist cities to attract foreign MICE operators to market India as a preferred MICE destination.

Improved facilities for foreign tourist at Taj Mahal entry

Tourists (both domestic and foreign) are facing a lot of problems in entering the Taj Mahal after purchasing the entry tickets, which is giving a negative publicity to India abroad. IATO has made a number of suggestions to ASI specially for foreign tourists especially on monkey menace and cleanliness at Taj Mahal.

Other issues raised by IATO include:

- ❖ Problems faced in purchasing entry tickets for Elephanta Caves
- ❖ Revision in guidelines for Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) scheme 2017
- ❖ Leads/queries from Ministry of Tourism website
- ❖ Withdrawal of facility of airport entry passes for representatives of tour operators for entry at the airport.



- ❖ Denial of Kolkata immigration office to acknowledge Darranga checkpoint between Assam and Bhutan.
- ❖ The revision of Guide Policy by ASI
- ❖ Group booking facility with the railways for IATO members.
- ❖ Grievances for booking luxury trains with IRCTC
- ❖ Issues regarding scheduling of India Tourism Roadshow
- ❖ Railway platform entry pass for tour operators

- ❖ IATO videos on women safety and thematic destinations
- ❖ IATO training programmes 2019
- ❖ Recommendations for boosting foreign trade through tourism
- ❖ Suggestions on Air Charter Policy
- ❖ 35th Annual Convention in Kolkata.

IATO's initiatives

- ❖ IATO Vision Document- 'Tourism- An engine for economic growth and employment generation'

MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS

Exemption of tourist vehicles from election duty for the members of IATO and ITTA

During Lok Sabha elections from April 11 to May 19, 2019, keeping in mind the apprehension of IATO members who own tourist





vehicles that they may be asked by the state governments to provide their vehicles for the election duties. IATO wrote a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner of India to exempt tourist vehicles from election duties as they need to provide undisruptive services to their foreign clients.

New website

The IATO website has been revamped and is now being marketed/promoted in various overseas markets with the hope that number of visitors to the website will increase and in turn we can generate some leads for IATO members.

Air connectivity and introduction of new/ additional flights by Air India, Indigo and Vistara

IATO held several discussions and meetings with Air India, Indigo, SpiceJet and Vistara to introduce new or add additional flights on certain sectors which are important for the tourism industry and need better air connectivity.

Handling of MOT Fam tours

IATO was especially given the responsibility to handle all Ministry of Tourism sponsored hospitality guests, tour operators,

media members, TV teams, decision makers from overseas. IATO handled over 50 MOT sponsored Fam tours in a highly professional manner.

Follow up with various ministries

IATO made various representations to Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Finance, GST Council, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Railways and to state governments expressing its concern on various issues. The association was able to resolve some of these issues, while others are still pending and IATO is following up on the same.

Membership

The IATO membership drive continued throughout 2019 and a substantial increase was achieved after the last AGM. Till October 2019, IATO has a total of 1674 members with 352 active and 1322 allied, associate and international members.



Pursuing government on key issues

► *Contd. from page 3*

As you are aware IATO has been for the past 5 months following up with the Minister of Civil Aviation and Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India as the airport entry passes were going to be discontinued after December 31, 2019.

We have been given to understand that Bureau of Civil Aviation Security has extended the validity of Airport Entry Passes (AEPs) expired on December 31, 2019 up to January 31, 2020 and necessary directives have been given to ASG (CISF/Police) deployed at the airport. We are indeed grateful to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, Government of India for the consideration. We shall keep you updated in the matter.

We are pursuing the government on key issues. IATO recommended to remove the cascading effect of GST on tour operators and requested that a deemed value of 10% of gross billing of the tour operator may be considered as the taxable value on deemed basis. We have requested the Ministry of Finance for Export Industry Status to be given to our industry.

You will be happy to note that presently we are actively engaged with the authorities to continue giving SEIS benefits to tour operators for another 5 years to enable them to compete in international markets. We are actively requesting the policy makers on more aggressive marketing proposals to be made for the industry for attracting augmented foreign tourists to India, encouraging skill development programmes to help increase trained manpower for the industry,

IATO shall organise skill training programme under the banner of Skill Council for certifications and Railway Group booking facility for MOT recognised tour operators. We have requested Ministry of Finance to consider issuance of notification for implementation of tax refund for the tourists' scheme provided for, under Section 15 of the IGST Act 2017 – all these are high on our agenda and will greatly benefit our members.

I once again wish you a great season ahead and look forward to your valued inputs in our luncheon meetings and other pertinent platforms.

– Rajiv Mehra

Year-end review: Ministry of Tourism

In 2019, MOT reduced the e-Visa fee, GST rates on hotel room, and opened over 120 new peaks for mountaineering. Several steps were taken under Swadesh Darshan & PRASHAD Scheme, and Adopt a Heritage project which were some of the important highlights for the ministry.

- ❖ India's rank in Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) of World Economic Forum has moved from 65th rank in 2013 to 34th rank in 2019.
- ❖ Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) during the period January- November 2019 were 96,69,633 as compared to 93,66,478 in January- November 2018 registering a growth of 3.2%.
- ❖ During January- November 2019, a total of 25,51,211 tourist arrived on e-Tourist visa as compared to 20,61,511 during January-November 2018, registering a growth of 23.8%.
- ❖ Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) during the period January- November 2019 were ₹1,88,364 crore as compared to ₹1,75,407 crore in January- November 2018 registering a growth of 7.4%.
- ❖ Development of thematic circuits is being undertaken under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme. A total number of 77 projects for an amount of ₹6035.70 crore have been sanctioned till date under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme.
- ❖ Integrated development of identified pilgrimage destinations is being undertaken under the 'National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (PRASHAD) Scheme. A total number of 28 projects have been sanctioned till date for an amount of ₹840.02 crore under this scheme.
- ❖ The 'Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan' project is a collaborative effort by the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India, State/ UTs Government for developing tourist amenities at heritage/tourist sites and making them tourist friendly, in a planned and phased manner. Ministry of Tourism has signed 27 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU's) till date under the Adopt a Heritage project.





IATO's milestones in 2019

The year 2019 has been extremely gratifying for IATO as among many, few key recommendations saw a positive nod from the Government of India, and we are indeed grateful to the authorities for taking cognisance of industry needs.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2019

Reduction in e-Visa fee and relaxation in e-Visa rules

IATO has been vigorously writing to the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Home Affairs and even to PMO for last one year to reduce the visa fee, when it was increased last year. With its regular follow up and with the support from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, e-Tourist visa fee has been reduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India and announced the reduction of visa fee from USD 25 to USD 10 during the lean season (April-June).

A short duration of e-Visa for tourists with one-month validity and a visa fee of USD 25 has also been introduced for the peak season (July- March). This is a steep drop from the current e-Visa fee of about USD 80 to USD 100.

A 5-year e-Tourist visa for a fee of \$80 and 1-year visa for a fee of \$40 for Japan, Singapore and Sri Lanka. There will be no visa fee for tourists from 14 pacific island nations belonging to the Forum for India-Pacific Island Cooperation (FIPIC).

GST revised for hotel accommodation

Since the GST was introduced in July 2017, IATO has been aggressively writing to the government to reduce and rationalise GST on tourism and hospitality industry as this was hampering the growth and Indians were not able to compete with the neighbouring countries due to higher taxation. IATO not only approached, the ministers and senior officials in the Ministry of Finance, Commerce and Tourism, it also approached Finance Ministers of all the states who are members of GST Council. Besides IATO also wrote to all the Chambers of Commerce i.e. FICCI, CII, PHDCII and also through FAITH and



WTTCII to raise our concern on every platform in one voice.

At last our efforts have borne fruit with the GST Council in the 37th meeting held on September 20, 2019 at Goa took the decision in favour of tourism and hospitality industry. To reduce the rate of GST on outdoor catering services other than in premises having daily per room tariff of ₹7501 from present 18 per cent with ITC to 5 per cent without ITC. The rate shall be mandatory for all kinds of catering.

EXPECTATIONS IN 2020

Our expectations are always in sync with the needs of our industry and to facilitate the stakeholders. Our major plan area, besides others, encompasses:

Withdrawal of facility of airport entry passes for the representatives of tour operators for entry at the airport

It came to IATO's notice that facility of airport entry passes for the tour operators is being withdrawn from January 1, 2020 and passes will be issued for the interim period till December 31, 2019. IATO has taken up the matter with the Ministry of Tourism, Secretary Civil Aviation and Director General, Bureau of Civil Aviation Security mentioning that airport entry passes are must for the tour operators to receive the foreign guests at the airport and also to ensure their safety and security. If this facility is

withdrawn it will have a negative impact and the efforts being made by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India to increase tourist arrivals will go in vain.

Cascading effect of GST on tour operator service which need correction

Cascading of taxes under GST has been hurting the industry's margin and business to the extent that survival of small players was under threat. IATO recommended to remove the cascading effect of GST on tour operators, IATO requested that a deemed value of 10% of gross billing of the tour operators may be considered as the taxable value on deemed basis. This will allow the service to be taxed at 18 per cent on the added value as mark up or commission.

GST rebate/benefits to be extended to tourism industry is being given to the IT industry under export of services

IATO requested the Ministry of Finance that tour operators be given GST rebate/benefits as a facet of the tourism & hospitality industry as are being given to exporters of goods. The criteria for determining the place of supply of services should be uniform between IT industry and tour operators industry.





far away beyond the endless horizon; there lies a piece of the radiant moon, holy whispers speak to silence here; valleys echo with om mane padme om!

The intercom crackles to life: "Good morning ladies and gentlemen, this is Capt Namgyal from the flight deck. We are cruising at 35,000 feet above mean sea level; temperature outside is 55 deg. centigrade below 0. Our flight route is between longitude 77 - 78 degrees, presently we are flying over the 'Greater Himalayas'....."

On the land below; a mega-spectacle is unfolding....! An astonishing sight to behold for human eyes, a forty-five million years old '**splendour**' entrenched on land, the abode of Gods and genesis of Hindu mythology and myths; the grandest phenomenons on planet Earth. Studded with thousands of snow-clad spires, craggy peaks, lofty summits, mighty massifs and mammoth glaciers; a world enshrouding phantom mysteries, tearing winds, bottomless crevasses, unending slopes and thundering avalanches, where only humans of grit and daring could set their foot, unveils like a snow-white-sea without borders....!

Anointed in eternal glory, the majestic grandeur of **greater-Himalayas** passes by, slowly underneath. Completely awestruck: "*unbelievable!! O my goddd, this is incredible*" a young lady passenger exclaims.....!! marvelling at what she just saw through her window; the others sit dazzled in wonder, recovering from the soulful effects of the visual event!

Meanwhile on ground, ignoring the winds on his monastery's door; the mid-aged lama (Buddhist monk) in his maroon robe steps out, and looks up in the skies, towards the approaching airplane. He wonders who amongst them will visit their monastery, to pay reverence to figurine of Padmashambava; the guru of Tantric Buddhism.

Once again, the intercom crackles to life "*all cabin crew return to their stations to prepare for landing*". The airplane begins it's descend; Indus river gets closer in view and landscape changes to stark lunar like shades, tiny patches of green poplars and willow trees start appearing. Some minutes later, Capt Namgyal pulls back gently on his control-column and touches down on the runway of Kushok Bakula Rimpochee Leh airport. Reversing his throttle to break the linear-momentum of speed landing, he presses his feet skilfully on his rudder pedals to keep the airplane rolling on in straight line, till it taxis to halt.

You have just landed at an altitude of 10,684 feet (3256 meters) on the western end of Tibetan Plateau. "**Julay**" (pronounced joo-lay, means hello in Bhoti language); you are in **Ladakh** (or Khapa-Chan). You may now redefine your isolation, or meet your very own fantasy of Shangri-la, or indulge in your rendezvous with divine. Once an independent Buddhist Kingdom, located on the crossroads of trade route between China and Middle East, it is often called 'Little Tibet'. Its 59,145 sq kms of geographical domain (nearly 1½ times, the size of Bhutan) covers parts of 'Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges and the upper Indus river valley'. A territory of amazing encounters, it is comparable to none other.



If you were to sit on **Aladdin's** magic-carpet (legendry flying-carpet fantasy fiction) and were to **wish** for the discovery of Ladakh; this is what the good Djinn would do for you:

He would joyfully **sail** you over the sensational 'trans-Himalayan terrain', over chanting valleys & enchanting landscapes, splendid rivers & emerald lakes, delightful hamlets & dramatic gorges, over fascinating wildlife; elusive Snow leopard, Urials, Chiru (Tibetan antelope), wild Yaks & untamed habitats, over stunning peaks & icy glaciers. And over towering monasteries embedded in mountain slopes & perched on hill-tops, and across grand Buddhas carved into mountainous rock-faces, and over dazzling white gompas clinging to hill slopes, and over Bactrian camels (double-humped camels) wandering in whistling sand dunes.

The Djinn would **sail** you over unimaginable experiences, wonders and sights...!, where women wear turquoise-stoned hats, churn yak milk for butter-tea, and eat 'tsampa' from barley crop, and men enact tantric mask dances in holy courtyards. He would show you winding trekking routes and Dzos (yak-domestic cattle hybrid), high passes and ancient wooden bridges across singing rivers, fluttering flags carrying mantras into winds, and drums and trumpets playing in unknown monasteries, enticing mandalas and tankha paintings, and tsug-den carpet weaving amidst blossoming apricot orchards and more..! Maybe he would also show you glimpses of our frontiers touching China and Pakistan, where our valiant sons-of-India (Faujis) stand alert 24x7, guarding our unique Land and its unmatched diversities.

Waving out to the ground engineers, Capt Namgyal switches off his turbo engines as the passengers begin to move towards the exit door; and into the unfathomable enigma of destination **Ladakh**.

Outside, near the arrival terminal door, an old Ladakhi lady with wrinkles of grace and wisdom on her beautiful innocent face, awaits her Pilot son, who is there only for a very short time, before he takes the airplane back, with his next set of passangers. She holds a rosary of beads in one hand and tibetian prayer-wheel in the other; and is chanting "*om mane padme om.....!*"

Two days later. The young lady passenger (tourist) sends some photos from her phone, on whatsapp to her friends; with a caption "this is ladakh - truly astounding..!". A little boy with sunburnt nose and rosy cheeks, peeps out from behind a tall white gompa, and smiles at her; "*Joolay*" he says shyly, and rushes back to hide behind the Gompa.

The author, Neelam Thakur (Neel) has been a devoted tourism & travel professional for more than 3 decades
thakurquest@airtelmail.in

Author's Note

It is important to bring the younger generation of entrepreneurs into IATO's folds, to encourage and orient them towards united-aspirations for their 'native destinations'. The future lies with them, sooner we realise this; the better!! In case of 'Ladakh', we need to take newer initiatives to get young people engaged into tourism and local hospitality. Youth friendly orientation programmes should be initiated in co-operation with ALTOA, effort can be supported by MOT. The unique UT of Ladakh inherits tourism as a 'primary asset of high value'. It also offers possibilities to re-imagine and develop new-experience-products that fit in with it's winter conditions (Nov-Feb).



Quick tips and updates on GST

The GST council in the 38th meeting announced certain law and procedure changes and rationalised rate-structure in the proposed recommendations.

The GST council in the 38th meeting held on December 18, 2019 proposed recommendations, announcing certain law and procedure changes and rationalised rate-structure. The proposed recommendations will be effective from the date when relevant notification will be issued by CBIC.

Important proposed recommendations are as follows:

- ❖ Input tax credit to the recipient in respect of invoices or debit notes that are not reflected in his FORM GSTR-2A shall be restricted to 10 per cent of the eligible credit available in respect of invoices or debit notes reflected in his FORM GSTR-2A.
- ❖ Due date for annual return in FORM GSTR-9 and reconciliation statement in FORM GSTR-9C for FY 2017-18 to be extended to January 31, 2020.

Following measures would be taken to improve filing of FORM GSTR-1:

- ❖ Waiver of late fee to be given to all taxpayers in respect of all pending FORM GSTR-1 from July 2017 to November 2019, if the same are filed by January 10, 2020.
- ❖ E-way bill for taxpayers who have not filed their FORM GSTR-1 for two tax periods shall be blocked.
- ❖ Due date of filing GST returns for the month of November, 2019 to be extended in respect of a few North Eastern States.

Change in tax rate

- ❖ 28% GST rate on both state run and state authorised lottery with effect from March 1, 2019.
- ❖ With effect from 1st January 2019,

financial infrastructure plots by an entity having 20% or more ownership of central or state government will be exempted with effect from January 1, 2020. Presently, the exemption is available to an entity having 50% or more ownership of central or state government.

Procedural change for departmental officers

- ❖ A standard operating procedure for tax officers would be issued in respect of action to be taken in cases of non-filing of FORM GSTR-3B returns.
- ❖ Grievance Redressal Committees (GRC) will be constituted at zonal/state level with both CGST and SGST officers, including representatives of trade and industry and other GST stakeholders to address grievances of specific/general nature of taxpayers at the zonal/ state level.
- ❖ To check the menace of fake invoices, suitable action to be taken for blocking of fraudulently availed input tax credit in certain situations.

Due date for annual return in FORM GSTR-9 and reconciliation statement in FORM GSTR-9C for FY 2017-18 to be extended to January 31, 2020.

GST rate on woven and non-woven bags and sacks of polyethylene or polypropylene strips or the like, whether or not laminated, of a kind used for packing of goods falling under HS code 3923/6305 will be 18%.

- ❖ Upfront amount payable for long term lease of industrial/

The Union Budget 2020-2021 will be presented on February 1, 2020





IATO bids farewell to Suman Billa

To facilitate and acknowledge the contribution of **Suman Billa** as Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and **Aashima Mehrotra**, Director, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, IATO organised a farewell for both the officials, where the EC members wished them luck for their new position and all future endeavours.





Special extra baggage rates for the IATO members by IndiGo



The special baggage rates for foreign tourists booked by IATO members have been revised. Given below are the revised rates which are applicable with immediate effect (December 12, 2019).

Baggage	Revised Rate effective December 12, 2019
08 kg	INR 1200
15 kg	INR 2000
30 kg	INR 4000

We request all IATO members to send their request for special extra baggage on email id agency.support@goindigo.in and do not copy mails to senior officials of IndiGo or make any telephone calls. In case you find any problem or want to call, you can speak with **Rajesh Kapoor**, Senior Manager-Sales Support, IndiGo on +91-124-4352500 and +91 9811172898 or call customer care.

Visa on arrival to nationals of the Republic of UAE

UAE nationals will have access to a 60-day visa on arrival, with double entry for business, tourism, conference and medical purposes. According to Bureau of Immigration, the visa on arrival facility, however, will only be available to those Emiratis who have earlier obtained an e-Visa or paper visa to visit India.



Air India restarts Delhi-Varanasi-Khajuraho-Varanasi-Delhi flight

IATO had taken up with Air India to re-start its daily flight on Delhi-Varanasi-Khajuraho-Varanasi-Delhi sector and also had a meeting with **Ashwani Lohani**, CMD, Air India and other officials of the airline in June 2019 in his office, to which Lohani agreed to the request. Since then, Air India in its Winter Flight Schedule from October 28, 2019 to March 28, 2020, has announced operational

flights on the above sector as per following schedule:-

- ❖ From October 28, 2019 to November 10, 2019 – five days in a week (1,2,3,4,6)
- ❖ From November 11, 2019 to March 28, 2020 – seven days in a week

Flight No.	From	Departure	To	Arrival
AI406	Delhi	1015	Varanasi	1135
AI406	Varanasi	1210	Khajuraho	1320
AI405	Khajuraho	1355	Varanasi	1440
AI405	Varanasi	1650	Delhi	1830

Ladakh tourism budget increases from ₹ 55 lakh to ₹ 200 crore

The Union Territory of Ladakh has increased its tourism budget to ₹200 crore this year from ₹55 lakh earlier when it was only a district in the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir state, revealed **RK Mathur**, Lieutenant Governor, Ladakh, while speaking at the special 'Ladakh Night' organised by the Administration of UT of Ladakh Tourism Department and All Ladakh Travel Association stakeholders. He also revealed that the newly allocated

budget would be used to create new tourism products and infrastructure in the UT.

The event saw the stakeholders presenting the tourism products of Ladakh to the travel and tour operators in Delhi. Some of the dignitaries present at the event were Rigzin Samphel, Commercial Secretary, Tourism, Ladakh and Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, Member of Parliament, Ladakh.

NCRPB prepares for Regional Plan-2041



IATO President addressed the workshop on Tourism & Heritage, organised by NCRPB for preparation of Regional Plan-2041 for NCR on January 6.

IATO Interactive Luncheon Meeting now rescheduled on January 17 at Le Meridien. Earlier, it was scheduled to take place on January 8.



Congress of Association of Finnish Travel Agents to be held in India

A meeting held on November 13, 2019 under the chairpersonship of Director General (Tourism), Government of India to discuss regarding holding an annual congress of Association of Finnish Travel Agents in India in April 2021. **Ravi Gosain**, Hony. Treasurer represented IATO in the meeting. MOT, GOI had invited IATO and asked if this is important for tour operators. On behalf of IATO, Gosain had mentioned that around 25000 Finnish travellers visit India as per the data, there is also a direct



Ravi Gosain
Hony. Treasurer, IATO

Finnair flight and thus it is an important market for tour operators. It was also suggested that IATO needs to know the profile of the travel agents who would visit India, whether they are inbound, outbound, MICE and also what they are expecting from IATO. Based on that, MOT, GOI will prepare a questionnaire and send to the Finnish Travel Agents Association. DG tourism suggested that IATO should take the lead and organise the event in India.

Validity of airport entry passes extended till January 31, 2020

The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security has extended the validity of Airport Entry Passes (AEPs) for tour operators till January 31, 2020 and necessary directives have been given to ASG (CISF/Police) deployed at the airport. According to an earlier directive, the passes were discontinued after December 31, 2019. IATO has been for about 5 months following up with the Minister of Civil Aviation and Joint Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation Government of India as the airport entry passes were going to be discontinued and it would have caused trouble to tour operators in handling their foreign clients. Now that the guidelines/procedure for the airport entry passes is being revised by the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), IATO has requested the ministry to continue issuing of airport entry passes to the tour operators under the revised guidelines for which necessary information as required by the MoCA has been given, which includes training of staff, number of passes to be given to the tour operators and the list of MOT recognised tour operators (submitted by the Ministry of Tourism).

A Vietnamese delegation led by Pham Tri Dung, First Secretary – Economic Section, Vietnam visited IATO office on November 20, 2019 and discussed bilateral tourism and travel ties. IATO also met Ethiopian minister on November 28 where the concept of a Fam trip to explore the opportunities for cross exchange in tourism was mooted.

Third meeting of the National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC)



Third meeting of the National Tourism Advisory Council (NTAC) held on October 4, 2019 at VIP Lounge, Paryatan Parv, Rajpath Lawns, New Delhi. The meeting was attended by members of NTAC and senior officers of the Ministry of Tourism. During the meeting, **Pranab Sarkar**, President, IATO suggested that the Ministry should focus on

development of skills in the form of Paryatak Sahyog. Licence may be given to new airlines to make up for the loss of air seats due to Jet Airways grounding, which in turn will help reduce airfare and positive news may be publicised and any negative news propagated in different countries/agencies regarding Article 370 may be properly countered.

IATO writes to Finance Minister

IATO has written Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister, Government of India and Chairman, GST Council, on the following issues:

- Practice followed by IRCTC treating tour operators as their pure agents is incorrect under GST Law.
- Request IRCTC to raise 5 per cent GST invoice for tour operators as principal service providers and enable them to avail ITC under GST Law.

Special Hosted Buyer Programme at OTM for IATO members

Outbound Travel Market (OTM) is being held in Mumbai from February 3-5, 2020 at the Mumbai Exhibition Centre. To facilitate IATO members to visit OTM 2020, it has launched a Special Hosted Buyer Programme for the IATO members on a first-come-first-served basis.

Members who are interested can apply for the Hosted Buyer Programme with special privileges such as 100 per cent refund of the registration fee for qualified members, networking meals, hotel accommodation and reimbursement of return air tickets. A circular to this effect has been sent on December 13, 2019.

Any issues you want to talk about ?

Write to us at

iato@ddppl.com

and make us your mouthpiece. We will make sure that you are heard.

EVENTS CALENDAR

• FITUR	January 22-26	Madrid
• OTM	February 3-5	Mumbai
• ITB	March 4-8	Berlin
• MITT	March 17-19	Moscow
• COTTM	April 1-3	Beijing
• ITB INDIA	April 15-17	Mumbai
• GITB	April 19-21	Jaipur
• ATM	April 19-22	Dubai

IATO Activities

Participation and quick updates

Throughout 2019, IATO and its members engaged in multiple activities and participated in various roadshows, trade events, travel marts and other gatherings. Here are the quick updates to various invitations, participation and activities.

- ❖ Spain - FITUR, Madrid, January 22-26, 2020 around 23 IATO members to participate.
- ❖ IATO members invited to attend Destination East, an international tourism buyer seller meets organised by CII in Kolkata on January 13-14, 2020.
- ❖ Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan invited IATO members to attend and promote the Camel Festival from January 11-13, 2019 in Bikaner, Rajasthan. 50 complimentary rooms for IATO members offered for two nights on CPAI basis.
- ❖ Request received from India Tourism, London regarding participation in travel fairs UK, Ireland and Benelux countries during January/February 2020 and participation of stakeholders as co-exhibitors. Circular were sent to members. Interested members can send names directly to India Tourism, London.
- ❖ Rajiv Mehra, Vice President, IATO along with Capt. Swadesh Kumar, President, ATOAI and Amaresh Tiwari, Vice Chairman, ICPB called on Suman Sharma, Additional Director General of Foreign Trade, Government of India regarding SEIS on December 17. The matter was discussed at length and suitable action is being taken by IATO for submitting the document which she requires.
- ❖ IATO members invited by PHDCCI for the 3rd PHD Golf Tourism Conclave and Tournament in Jaipur from December 12-13.
- ❖ IATO conducted a Digital Marketing programme in Ahmedabad on December 6-7, 2019.
- ❖ IATO members invited to attend PATA Tourism Powerhouse on December 6 by the PATA India Chapter.
- ❖ IATO members invited to attend NICE reception programme on December 5, 2019 by PATA Nepal Chapter.
- ❖ Information received to attend Know India Seminar on December 1 from India Tourism, Dubai.
- ❖ Invitation received for all IATO members to attend Ek Bharat Shreshtra Bharat on November 28 in New Delhi from India Tourism, Delhi.
- ❖ Sambandh PR appointed as IATO's PR agency on 28th November.
- ❖ IATO members invited to attend Matasya Utsava in Alwar from November 23-26, 2019.
- ❖ 8th International Travel Mart in Imphal, Manipur from November 23-25, 2019 by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. IATO members participated and handled FTOs in Delhi and Manipur.
- ❖ Fam trip to Paraguay from November 13-19, 2019. 4 IATO members participated.
- ❖ Ministry of Tourism, Government of India organised roadshows in China from November 12-14, 2019 in which 23 IATO members participated.
- ❖ IATO members participated in the Northeast festival organised at IGNSA, Janpath, New Delhi from November 8-10, 2019.
- ❖ IATO members were invited to participate in Run For Unity on 31st Oct, 2019 in Dwarka and Ghaziabad.
- ❖ IATO Goa Chapter Meet held on October 24, 2019 in Goa. Ravi Gosain, Honorary Treasurer, IATO along with other EC members addressed the meeting and took stock of the condition specially after facing setback by the charter operations of Thomas Cook.



Educational Tour

Children visit Ambassador Sky Chef

In a bid to educate and motivate the youth, IATO organised an educational tour for the children of its members on December 28, 2019 to Ambassador Sky Chef, New Delhi to make them aware about the hospitality facilities used in the industry. A total of 32 children between the age group of 12 to 18 years participated. Organised by the Committee for Cultural, Social Events, Sports/Recreation activities comprising, **Sunil Mishra, Sanjay Razdan, Sanath Kai Suri, Atul Mahajan, Saransh Gupta,** and **Manish Saini**, the team was led by **P. Vijaysarathy**, EC, Liaison.



New Membership

Approved w.e.f. October 10, 2019

ACTIVE

Rajasthan's Invitation Travels Pvt. Ltd.

UG-36, Crown plaza, Vaishali Nagar
Jaipur-302021
Tel: 0141-4032162
Email: spain@indiasinvitation.com
Web: www.indiasinvitation.com
Abhishek Shekhawat, Director
Mobile: 9829247544

Active (Change of Status)

Seven Sisters Holidays
Mahatma Gandhi Avenue, 2nd Floor
Above Punjab National Bank
Imphal- 795001
Tel: 0385- 2443977, 2443979
Email: 7sistersholidays@gmail.com
Web: www.sevensistersholidays.com
H. Radhakrishna Sharma, Partner
hrksharma@gmail.com
(M) 9706123401

Incredible Indian Moments Pvt. Ltd.

S-207, Time Square, Vidhyadhar Nagar
Jaipur-302 039
Tel : 0141-2339668, 2337137
Email : info@indianmoments.com
Web: www.indianmoments.com
Pankaj Sharma, Director
ceo@indianmoments.com
(M) 9414064040

Terra World Travel (India) Pvt. Ltd.

First Floor Shop No.2, CSC Market |
C-8 Vasant Kunj, New Delhi- 110070
Tel: 011-26125550-51-52, Fax: 011-26125552
Email: ops@terraworldtravel.com
Web : www.terraworldtravel.com
Mrs. Nandini Lohia, Managing Director
(M) 9811173769

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Web: www.allindiapackages.com
Mr. S. Mohyadeen Abdul Kader, Director
(M) 9840461767

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221, The Galleria, Mayur Vihar, Phase-1
Extension, New Delhi- 110091
Tel: 011-41053444
Email: info@alpha2omega.co
Geeta Sirpaul, GM-Operations
(M) 9811210844

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New Delhi-110063
Tel: 011-41001163
Email: crystalindiaholidays@gmail.com
Web: www.crystalindiaholidays.com
Mr. Amit Narang, Proprietor
(M) 9311016363

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Harony Hospital, Rajkot-360001
Tel: 0281-2483469-70
Email : info@deepaktravels.co.in
Web: www.deepaktravels.co.in
Deepak K. Rathod, CEO
(M) 9824208487

Exotic Escapes India Pvt. Ltd.

10-C, DCM Building, 16, Barakhamba Road
New Delhi-110001
Tel: 011-40455831, 47055931
Email: sameer.mahajan@exoticescapes.in
Sameer Mahajan, Director
(M) 9810502802

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Bank Building, Ramanbaug Chowk,
Pune- 411030
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Web: www.goholidays.in
Ashwini Makarand Angal, Proprietor
(M) 8805021658

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Email: raj@globalodyesey.com
Web: www.globalodyesey.com
Raj Gupta, Director
(M) 9811461819

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Opp Jama Masjid, Vijay Baugh Road,
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Tel: 03192-235577
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Santosh Kumar, Director
(M) 9679545107

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Tel: 011-41084298
Email: akshay.sharma@hospitalitytycoonz.in
Web: www.hospitalitytycoonz.in
Akshay Sharma, Director
(M) 9654377738

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Souvik Banerjee, Director

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Divya Lahad, Director

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Email: care@priyatravels.in
Web: www.priyatravels.in
Abhisek Singh, Proprietor
(M) 9831569934/9432269934

Satge 3

83/52, Sri Kalyan Square, 3rd Floor, Pantheon
Road, Egmore, Chennai-600008
Tel: 011-42147719
Email: stage3chennai@yahoo.com
stage3operationsoffice@gmail.com
Web: www.stage3eventz.com
Sunttosh NM, Proprietor
(M) 9840055657

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Saraswathipuram
Mysore - 570009
Tel: 0821-4244490
Email: sbitravels@gmail.com
Web: www.sbitravels.co.in
Shantkumar Biradar, Managing Director



Shiv Vilas Resorts Pvt. Ltd.

NH.No.-08 Jaipur Highway, Kukas, Jaipur
Tel: 0141-2531100
Email: info@shiv-vilas.in
Web: www.shiv-vilas.in
Prathvi Raj Sharma, Director
(M) 9829063098

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Block-J, Community Centre, Rajouri Garden
New Delhi-110027
Tel: (M) 9311987447
Email: info@silentleopard.com
Web: www.silentleopard.com
Vaishali Shaw, Director
(M) 9311987447

Travbuddies Tours and Travels Pvt. Ltd.

003 SLV Homes, 8th Cross, 10th Main
Maruthinagar, Malleshpalya
Bangalore-560075
Tel: (M) 974222252, 9611929000
Email: info@travbuddiesindia.com
Web: www.travbuddiesindia.com
Tapas Panda, Director

Travel Fair India Pvt. Ltd.

262, Ground Floor, Opp. Satnam Farm House,
Lane No.4, Saidulajab Near Saket Metro
Station, New Delhi-110030
Tel: 011-20860916
Email: info@travelfairindia.com
Web: www.travelfairindia.com
Rohit Singh, Director
(M) 9811222320

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7A1, 7th Floor, Mainaak Towers, Beside
Aayakar, Bhawan, Christian Basti, G.S Road,
Guwahati - 781005
Tel: 0361-2340101
Email: Nileshjain@travelorr.com
Web: www.travelorr.com
Nilesh Jain, Director
(M) 9833407234

Wildlife Explorer India Pvt. Ltd.

GL-13, 208, Second Floor, Hari Nagar Jail Road
New Delhi-110058
Tel: 011-45541946
Email: balvinder@wildlifeexplorerindia.com
Web: www.wildlifeexplorerindia.com
Balvinder Singh, Director
9818147830

Yoho Travels Pvt. Ltd.

1st Floor, Bhogal Complex, Veer Savarkar
Block, Shakarpur, Near Nirman Vihar,
Delhi-110092
Tel: 011- 40307777
Email: sales@yohotravels.com
Web: www.yohotravels.com
Mr. Sandeep Kumar, Director
9899198889

New Membership

Approved w.e.f. November 14, 2019

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Affordable Tours N Travels

Office No.8, First Floor, Sarnath Complex,
Opp. Board Office, M.P. Naga
Bhopal-462016
Tel :0755-4929222 (M) 9827239502
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Web: www.affordabletoursntravels.com
Rajendra Bajaj, Proprietor
(M) 9827239502

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(M) 9609796097
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Web: www.airtrips.in
Rahul Kumar Rustagi, Partner
rahul@airtrips.in
(M) 9609596096

Coterie Tours Pvt. Ltd.

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Pocket-7, Sector-12 Dwarka
New Delhi-110078
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Email: ranjan@coterietours.com
Web: www.coterietours.com
Ranjan Kumar Jain, Director
(M) 9899262242

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humantripindia.bookings@gmail.com
Web: www.humantripindia.in
Philippe Malet, Partner
(M) 9840472440

Imperial Voyages Pvt. Ltd.

233, Pocket- E, Mayur Vihar, Phase-II
Delhi- 110091
(M) 8800333500
Email: info@imperialvoyages.com
Web: www.imperialvoyages.com
Avadesh Narayan Mishra, Director
avadesh.n.mishra@gmail.com
(M) 9810097505
Amit Mishra, Director
amit@imperialvoyages.com
(M) 981007503

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Email:info@passoinindia.com
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(M) 9711821991

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Web: www.thetattva.com
Nitin Budhaulia, Partner
(M) 9810712498

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S.G. Highway, Ahmedabad-380051
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Fax: 02877-281099
Email: sales@1000island.in, veerendra.
parashar@1000island.in
Web: www.1000island.in
Veerendra Parashar,
Director of Sales & Marketing
(M) 722693001



Luncheon meet at The Suryaa

In its monthly luncheon meeting organised at The Suryaa - Delhi, IATO invited its taxation consultant, **SC Kamra** to give a presentation on changes made by the government on Reverse Charge Mechanism (RCM). The EC also welcomed the new CMD of ITDC, **G Kamala Vardhana Rao**.





IATO's budget recommendations

A meeting was held at Transport Bhawan under the Chairmanship of **Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General (Tourism), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India on November 27, 2019, where major recommendations were made by IATO.

Treat inbound tourism as export of services

The parameters/definition of 'export of services' may be relaxed in the case of tour operators and the services of tour operators earning foreign exchange for the country may be accorded with the status of 'export of services' paving the way for non-payment of IGST on billing to the foreign tourists /foreign tour operators.

For this purpose, the criteria of 'place of supply' of services based on its performance as specified in section 13(3)(b) of IGST Act may also be excepted / made inapplicable for tour operators operating in the country. The 'place of supply' of services of tour operators should be linked with the location of the recipient (foreign

tourist/ foreign tour operator) which is applicable for IT Industry.

Cascading effect of GST

The backbone of GST system is based on the principle that there is no double taxation/multiple taxation, whereas tourism is suffering from cascading effect of GST on various input services viz. hotel, transport, professionals, office rent, maintenance of office and office equipment etc.

On one hand, the government has fixed 5% GST for tour operators, on the other hand, input tax credit on input services has been withdrawn except services of counterpart tour operators in the same line of business. The ill effects of denial of ITC and cascading effect of taxes needs to be addressed by the Finance Ministry and the concerned policy makers so that requisite framework is put in place that the tourism industry is looking for.

IGST exemption

Very often foreign tourists visiting India include their tour to Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and other neighbouring countries. In such tours, IGST is payable on the entire package cost including services provided in the neighbouring country. It is necessary that the cost of services provided outside India should not suffer GST even if package includes India tour. At present, IGST is exempted only when services are provided to a foreign tourist for organising his tour wholly outside India. There is a need to relax this parameter so that in a composite tour, portion of the tour organised outside India should also be exempted from IGST.

A pre-budget consultation on issues of direct and indirect taxes for Union Budget 2020-21 took place on December 4, 2019 at the North Block, where IATO also pushed forward its recommendations.



IITF goes digital from Jan 1, 2020

The first module of Incredible India Tourist Facilitator (IITF) certification commenced from January 1, 2020 shares **Meenakshi Sharma**, Director General – Tourism, Government of India.

The Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Certification (IITFC) programme aims to create an online platform to provide training and certification to new age tourist facilitators available anytime, anywhere, any device and self-paced. Enabling Indian citizens to develop and enhance the skills associated with tourism, this is a digital initiative where one can incorporate knowledge about facilitating tourists across the country.

The tourism sector is highly dependent on skill development, claims Meenakshi Sharma. “We all know that tourism is one sector that provides employment to many people, right from the top of the line to the lowest level, and across all sectors including hospitality, travel operators, and guides.

Hence, in order to meet the demand of the industry and fill the gap, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has launched the ‘Incredible India Tourist Facilitator’ (IITF) certification, which would create and give them the required skills. If anybody wants to know about an experience or a destination, they can do this through an online learning management system. It can be done full-time or part-time, in the remotest parts of the country.



Meenakshi Sharma, Director General, MOT

information and offering a wholesome experience to tourists coming to India,” she reveals.

The certification programme comprises of basic and advance self-paced courses designed in a manner that the users can learn at their own time, space, path and pace. The certification programme comprises of basic, advance, refresher and lingual self-paced courses. Being a centralised, PAN-India e-learning module, the course delves on skill development.

“It is already online and the payment gateways opened on December 20. The first module starts from January 1, 2020. We already have this programme in English and Hindi, and we are working with state governments to provide this programme in other regional languages as well. The best part is that this course can be done at any level,” she explains.

MOT will promote the programme on social media and offline channels, and will also organise workshops at the state level. Going forward, MOT will develop an e-marketplace, which will be accessible by individual travellers as well.

The programme aspires to reach out to a far-flung audience encompassing a diversity of candidates ranging from an enthusiastic student who has recently qualified for higher secondary to an ambitious homemaker willing to grasp tourist facilitation skills from the comfort of their home.

MOT will promote the programme on social media and offline channels and will also organise workshops at the state level. Going forward, MOT will develop an e-marketplace as well.

This is something that can bridge the gap, in at least providing tourist

Who can enrol for the certification?

While the strategic partner for IITF is Wipro, IITTM Noida is the knowledge partner and the course has also been designed by them. MOT has already received 7,500 queries for the course, and they are targeting around 20,000 registrations in the first month of commencement of the programme.

The course fee is ₹2,000, which is exempted for SC/ST/OBC and

residents of J&K and Ladakh. The minimum qualification for taking up the programme is 10+2. However, for applicants above the age of 40, a 10th class certificate is also valid. MOT has also set up a dedicated helpline for applicants. There is a refresher programme for regional-level guides; they don't have to do the beginners programme and automatically qualify for the learners' course.

Registration, user manual and more details about the programme is available on IITFC's portal, www.iitf.gov.in



'Indian Association of Tour Operators'
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the numbers keep growing every month; welcomes you to
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iato@airtelmail.in | Tel 011 2586 1331

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Incredible India

IATO's widespread presence
across the country with its state chapters

