

IATO Speaks

A tourism industry communication by Indian Association of Tour Operators

**Synergy is the key:
TOURISM MINISTER**

**Glimpses of the
CONVENTION**

**Quick tips and
UPDATES ON GST**



Cover depicts Dal Lake, Kashmir

CONVENTION IN KOLKATA: A GREAT SUCCESS



Incredible India

अतिथि वेदत भवतः

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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Cover Picture Courtesy: DDP Archives

PM's Thoughts



Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

PM Narendra Modi has stressed the need to focus on festival tourism in India and also urged Indians living abroad to promote traditional festivals. While extending Diwali greetings to the nation, the PM said that our festivals have enormous scope for promoting tourism.

Noting that Diwali is now also celebrated in several countries with the participation of their Governments, Modi said that India presented multiple possibilities for festival tourism as it is a "land of festivals". "We must try to promote our festivals including Holi, Diwali, Onam, Pongal and Bihu; and invite people from other states and countries too to join the festivities," PM Modi said. He said that every state and region in the country have their own festivals and people from foreign nations have a very keen interest in them. "In our country, every region has so many diverse festivals which the Indians living abroad must promote so as to facilitate festival tourism in India."

He said that Indians living abroad have an important role in helping to boost festival tourism in India. PM Modi also urged the people to be compassionate and generous during the festive season to ensure that the less privileged also become part of the celebrations.

"Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh have the potential to be the biggest tourist hub. Remember, there was a time when Kashmir was the favourite destination of Bollywood filmmakers. In the future, I am confident that films, regional and global, will be filmed in J&K," PM Modi said.

Honorary Secretary
Rajesh Mudgill

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Pronab Sarkar

Dear Friends,

We had a very successful 35th annual convention at Kolkata where over 1000 delegates, 15 state governments, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and our host state West Bengal added the fervour and business sense with their participation. The inaugural ceremony, the strong content of the business sessions, learned speakers, motivational talks, India Tourism Mart, social evenings and six-well designed post-convention tours were the much talked about facets of the convention. We were honoured to have Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State for Tourism, Government of India as the Chief Guest at the valedictory session. We are indeed grateful to the Government of West Bengal and the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee for making the convention achieve the results it chalked out. We are thankful to Goutam Deb, Minister-in-Charge, Tourism Department, Government of West Bengal, Atri Bhattacharya, Principal Secretary (Tourism), Government of West Bengal, Meenakshi Sharma, DG Tourism, Government of India, Rupinder Brar, ADG Tourism, Government of India and all the dignitaries from 15 state governments, the members of the press and media and the members of IATO for their support and participating in this grand event

In the past two months, your association had significant achievements to speak about. IATO has been relentlessly 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 our 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 to benefit the stakeholders and usher in more tourists to India

As you know that since the GST was introduced on July 1, 2017, IATO has been aggressively writing to the Government to reduce and rationalise GST on tourism

We are indeed grateful to the Government of West Bengal for making the 35th IATO annual convention achieve the results it had visualised.

and hospitality industry as this was hampering the growth of Indian tourism industry and we were not able to compete with our neighbouring countries due to higher taxation. Hospitality industry also pressed the demand to reduce the highest GST on hotels and our efforts have borne fruit, the GST Council took the decision in favour of tourism and hospitality industry to reduce the rate of GST on hotel accommodation and outdoor catering services. We are sure the move will give a boost to the Indian tourism industry and will bring job opportunities in the sector. We at IATO are ensuring that the benefit of reduction of GST is passed on to the end users who will get the benefit of this announcement as with this substantial relief in GST rate on hotel rooms, the package cost will reduce. This is good news for all inbound, adventure, MICE and domestic tour operators, where India has been losing out to neighbouring countries. Talking about other platforms Ministry of Tourism with IATO organised international roadshows that were attended by members in significant numbers. The upcoming roadshows in China and Colombo are expected to witness active participation by our members.

We put up our sustained efforts at ITM 2019 to make it a successful event. IATO actively participated in selecting foreign buyers and was also part of Fam Tour Committee, Transport Committee and Exhibitors Committee. IATO gave valuable inputs to overcome all the issues that were of major concern for the members last year. We have incorporated all suggestions of our members given last year and tried our best to bring ITM 2019 to the members satisfaction level. We are open to more suggestions from our members for ITM to make it fruitful to our members next year again.

You will be delighted to note that we took few marked initiatives to bring to the knowledge of all government bodies and state governments to highlight the challenges faced by tourism industry which became hurdle for positive growth due to our hard pressed demands and suggestions in positive direction to bring tourism as economic activity and engine for our growth that shall not only augur well as an intellectual output but also offer a marketing tool for our valued members. IATO in consultation with Ernst & Young made a comprehensive vision document titled "Tourism: An Engine for Economic Growth and Employment Generation", which elaborates the problems Indian tourism industry is

facing and the suggestions to overcome such problems. With the help of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and personal attention of our Hon'ble Tourism Minister, Prahlad Singh Patel, this vision document was shared with all state governments and Finance Ministry, Home Ministry and Commerce Ministry to press upon our concern. This helped a lot in recent changes made by the Government on e-Visa and also reducing GST from 28% to 18% & 12%. We are still having our pending demand of GST to remove cascading effect on tour operators' services and make it on added value. Second pending demand is to treat tour operators services at par with exporters as deemed export services and get the same benefits as exporters.

We presented two videos, one on women safety and other a thematic on tourism products for promoting destinations - Incredible India. The same is available on IATO website for your information and use.

I feel proud to let you know that on IATO request, Vistara is going to start operation of its daily flights on

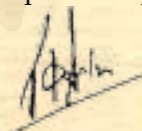
Jenu Devan, MD & Commissioner of Tourism, Govt. of Gujarat announced during his address at the inauguration of the IATO convention that Gujarat will host the 36th IATO annual convention in September 2020.

Delhi - Patna - Delhi and Delhi - Varanasi- Khajuraho- Varanasi -Mumbai sector from November 3, 2019 and Air India will restart its daily flight on Delhi- Varanasi- Khajuraho- Varanasi- Delhi sector from October 29, 2019. On our request and follow ups along with Aurangabad Tourism Guild, you will be pleased to know that after 21 years, Air India is commencing operation of flights on the Mumbai - Aurangabad - Udaipur - Aurangabad - Mumbai sector w.e.f. October 16, 2019, which will operate thrice a week i.e. Wednesday, Friday and Sunday.

IATO members were invited by Uday Singh Kumawat, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Bihar to offer suggestions for increasing tourist inflow to Bihar. You will be happy to note that we gave ten valuable inputs that were much appreciated by the authorities and they assured us to take it further for developing the tourism potential areas in future. In the service to our valued members we took up some major issues with concerned authorities that have been highlighted in your newsletter.

May I request you all to continue sending your feedback to us so that with each issue we come up with nascent features that shall cater to the excellence of brand IATO and in the service to our valued members.

Wishing you the best in all your efforts and a very prosperous Happy Diwali.


Pronab Sarkar
President

Government relaxes e-visa policy for Chinese nationals

The Government has announced significant relaxations in its e-Visa policy for Chinese nationals, the Indian embassy in Beijing has announced. "October 2019 onwards, Chinese nationals can apply for an e-Tourist visa of a 5-year validity with multiple entries. The visa fee for this 5-year multiple entry e-Tourist visa will be USD 80," a statement by the embassy said.

Furthermore, it has been decided that the prospective tourists can avail single-entry 30-day validity e-Tourist visa at a reduced visa fee of USD 25, while for a 30-day e-Tourist visa during



the months of April to June, the visa fee will be only USD 10. The one-year multiple-entry e-Tourist visa will continue to be offered but at a reduced visa fee of USD 40.

In addition to the above, e-Tourist visa, the existing e-medical visa, e-conference visa, and the one-year

multiple-entry e-business visa will continue to be issued from the online platform of Indian visas.

It is anticipated that this unilateral liberalisation of e-Tourist visa for Chinese nationals will further enhance people-to-people exchanges between the two countries and encourage more Chinese tourists to choose India as a destination for tourism purposes, the statement read.

Notably, India has registered 24.6 per cent growth in e-Tourist visa arrivals during September 2019 in comparison to same period last year.



35th annual convention in Kolkata, a great success

The 35th IATO annual convention from September 12-15, 2019 was successfully completed in Kolkata with commendable attendance. Strong content of the business sessions, learned speakers, social evenings, motivational talk by Chetan Bhagat and the six well designed post-convention tours were the highlights.

Amidst mega fanfare, convention was inaugurated at the Biswa Bangla Convention Centre in Kolkata. A high-level government delegation including **Goutam Deb**, Tourism Minister, West Bengal, **Debashis Sen**, Chairman, HIDCO & Additional Chief Secretary, Government of West Bengal, **Jyoti Prakash Panigrahi**, Minister for Tourism, Odia Language, Literature and Culture and **Atri Bhattacharya**, Principal Secretary Tourism, Government of West Bengal were present during the glittering opening ceremony along with the IATO leadership and many other stalwarts of the travel trade.

The association organised the convention in Kolkata after 17 years with the theme, 'Is Tourism Thriving? Challenges and Opportunities'.

Apart from highlighting the host state, West Bengal, the convention promoted Durga Puja, as part of the theme. The mega yearly event also played host to 16 other states and union territories, who showcased their tourism products and offerings.



The Kolkata convention Chairman and President, IATO **Pronab Sarkar** in his address gave various suggestions to the West Bengal government to boost tourism in the state. "West Bengal is gifted with diverse tourism offerings and Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee has always encouraged tourism and we are happy to note that she has taken very dynamic decisions to promote tourism in the state. This year's convention will help us deliberate on challenges, which we are facing in the industry and explore opportunities on how we can improve the situation. I would like to suggest the West Bengal Government to take certain measures such as introducing a friendly tourism policy with single clearance facility, upgradation of existing state hotels, better air connectivity and facilitating more language guides," he said.

Delivering the welcome address, **Debjit Dutta**, Convention Co-Chairman

& Chairman, IATO West Bengal Chapter said that it is a great pleasure for the 'City of Joy' to host the convention after a very long period of time. "The IATO Convention gave us an opportunity to showcase and position Bengal on the global tourism map and the Eastern South Asia circuit," he said.

The Tourism Minister of West Bengal offered and invited IATO to host the convention every five year in West Bengal and experience the development going on in the state. "Our government is working hard to promote tourism in the state. There is a tremendous potential of creating more jobs with tourism. I am forecasting to develop rural and village tourism in the state. We already have more than 3,000 homestays in the state. We need participation of private players to enhance our efforts." Deb said.

The Odisha Tourism Minister, Panigrahi, suggested to work together with West

Bengal to create an Eastern Tourism Council, where the states can offer travel agents packages to explore Eastern India vividly.

Atri Bhattacharya, Principal Secretary (Tourism), Government of West Bengal said that the convention will serve purpose to form new strategies to promote tourism in the tough phase, which the industry is going through currently.

Rajnish Kaistha, Convention, Co-Chairman and Joint Secretary, gave vote of thanks and he marked the convention a huge success with more than 1000 registrations during the convention, which he said is 20 per cent more than the Convention in Visakhapatnam last year.

The IATO Manual 2019 was released by Minister Deb and other dignitaries present at the inaugural function. Later in the evening, cultural

performances highlighting Bengal's folk and modern tradition in music engaged the delegates to experience the rich history of West Bengal.

The IATO Hall of Fame Award for 2019 was given to **Patanjali Keswani**, CMD, Lemon Tree Hotels.

Near the twilight of the ceremony, **Jenu Devan**, MD, Gujarat Tourism made the announcement that the next IATO convention will be hosted by Gujarat Tourism and will take place in Ahmedabad in September 2020.

The 35th convention was also graced by the presence of **Meenakshi Sharma**, DG Tourism; **Rupinder Brar**, ADG, Tourism; **Anil Oraw**, Regional Director (North) and other key officials from Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

On the lines of the convention theme, "Is Tourism Thriving? - Challenges and

Opportunities", six appealing business sessions explored new opportunities to promote tourism in different horizons.

The sessions during the convention focused on the challenges and opportunities that shall boost the growth of tourism, looked at key niche areas of cruise tourism, digital marketing, connectivity, synergy among eastern states for tourism promotion and marketing. They also

On the lines of the convention theme, "Is Tourism Thriving? Challenges and Opportunities", 6 business sessions explored new opportunities to promote tourism.

charted out unexplored destinations, listened to the new generation of tourism professionals, the ticklish issues of taxation along with presentation by 17 states governments and above all grasped the ideas of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

During the convention, India Tourism Mart was also organised. It was inaugurated. Besides the Ministry of Tourism and the host state, West Bengal, all 15 other states exhibited their products. IATO Run was organised on September 14, where over 100 delegates participated.

The first business session of the convention was focused on the theme of the convention, where all the panellists discussed the current state of tourism in the country and put forward suggestions to the government on what more can be done to improve the current scenario. President Sarkar, the moderator



of the session touched upon various challenges such as heavy taxes, rail, road and rail connectivity, lack of proper policy support from states, global competition from the neighbouring countries and safety and security of the tourists. Meenakshi Sharma, who was also part of the panel said that the private players and the government should work hand in hand to explore new possibilities and strategies. Other panellist of the session included **Sujit Banerjee**, Secretary General, WTTCII; **Dr Jyotsna Suri**, CMD, Lalit Suri Hospitality Group; **Anil Chadha**, Vice President - Operations, ITC Hotels and **EM Najeeb**, Chairman, Air Travel Enterprises.

In the second session, titled, 'Impediments in Traditional Business', moderated by **Homa Mistry**, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours briefed the delegates about prevailing business strategies in the industry and the roadmap for going forward. Panellists including **Hemant Mendirat-**

ta, Senior Vice President, Oberoi Hotels; **Abhinash Manghani**, Area Manager, ITC Hotels; **Gaurav Singh**, Cluster General Manager, Marriot International and **Manish Gupta**, Area Director - Taj Hotels, Palaces and Resorts discussed the need to develop the new markets for India globally and taking forward the new segments such as MICE to boost traffic to India. Whereas, **Sanjay Kumar**, COO, Air Asia called on the need to keep airfares in check and pass on the benefits to customers. **Ankush Nijhawan**, MD, Nijhawan Group of Companies stressed on the need to realise the potential of technology and digital marketing for enhancing the prospects for the business.

In an important session on Cruise and River Tourism, the experts from the industry discussed the need to push forward cruise tourism in the country. Moderated by **Sanjay Basu**, Chairman, Adventure Resorts & Cruises, the session contained presentations from the panel-

lists on their efforts in propelling cruising in and around India.

Session on next day of convention titled, 'Tourism Through the Eyes of Young Professionals', put forward the thoughts of the young blood of the industry and how the young generation is exploring new opportunities with the likes of experiential tourism, culinary tourism, tea tourism, film tourism and adventure tourism. The session was moderated by **Tony Marwah**, Managing Director, India Travel Promotion and the panellist were **Vinayak Koul**, Director, Snowlion Expeditions, **Chirag Shah**, Founder & CEO, Mumbai Film Citytours.com; **Vishal Yadav**, Director, Incredible Destination Management Services; **Madhusmita Khound**, Managing Partner, Avani Travel Services and **Rajeev Goyal**, Managing Director, Solutions Unlimited, who also shared their journey of change and transformation in their business.



The next session of the day was on 'Experiential Tourism', moderated by **Rajesh Mudgill**, Managing Director, Planet India Tours. The session focused on the growing popularity of travelling for experiences and understanding the need of visitors, who are looking for new experiences in India. **Shobha Mohan**, Founder, Rare India; **Husna Tara Prakash**, Owner & Managing Director at Glenburn Tea Estate & Boutique Hotel; **Tejbir Singh Anand**, MD, Holiday Moods and **Pravir Banerjee** were the panellist for the session.

The last session of the day was focused on 'Reinventing East and Creating Circuits Beyond the border'. The panellist in the session representing the neighbouring countries, Bangladesh and Bhutan talked about working together to promote cross border tourism and

develop the Eastern South Asia circuit for tourism. Moderator, **Debjit Dutta**, Director, Impression Tourism Services deliberated on the demand to reinvent the eastern region and create new innovative product for the global market. The panellist included **Supartim Basu**, Director, Help Tourism; **Taufiq Rahman**, Director, Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB); **Sonam Dorji**, Executive Director, Association of Bhutan Tour Operators (ABTO) and **Sabyasachi Dutta**, Director, Asian Confluence Meghalaya.

A special motivation session on how to overcome downturn situation in the present scenario and turn to positivity and successful business was taken by the best-selling author, **Chetan Bhagat**. The session was thoroughly enjoyed by the gathering.

Prahlad Singh Patel, Minister of State for Tourism (I/C), Government of India was the Chief Guest at the valedictory session of the convention.

A study conducted by IATO on the topic "Tourism – An Engine for Economic Growth and Employment Generation" was released by the Minister amidst the presence of other dignitaries.

On the occasion, IATO also released a film on women's safety and security in India, which the association will use in highlighting how safe India is for female tourist in the global market and during its roadshows abroad.

Post-convention, various post tours were organised from September 15 on different sectors and were attended by members in large number.

IATO's efforts bear fruits after major initiatives by Govt

With the continued efforts of IATO, the government decided to relax e-Visa guidelines, reduce GST rates for hotels and many other steps to boost inbound tourism in the country.

IATO has relentlessly advocated **reduction in e-Tourist visa fee and liberalisation of e-Tourist visa**. 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 support from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, e-Tourist visa fee has been reduced by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Government announced changes are applicable to both e-Tourist visa and e-Business visa holders. Now the government has extended the stay to one year with multiple entries.

However, the rules weren't the same earlier. Before the changes, the allowed duration of stay was 60 days for e-Tourist visa and e-Business visa holders with just two entries. With this the government has also made the maximum days allowed per entry to 90 days and 180 days, respectively for e-Tourist visa and e-Business visa holders. Not only this, the government is also increasing the number of ports from 26 to 28, where electronic visa entry is allowed. Port Blair and Bhubaneswar being the new ports. So, now under new e-Visa rules, electronic visa holders from places such as Japan, USA, UK and Canada can stay for 180 days per entry and for this travellers won't require any sort of registration. The move is definitely going to help boost the tourism industry and will attract more and more business travellers to the country.

GST revised for hotels

Since GST was introduced in 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 of the industry and the country was not able to compete with our neighbouring countries due to higher taxation.

IATO not only approached, the ministers and senior officials in the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Tourism, we also approached Finance Ministers of all the States who are members of GST Council. Besides, we also wrote to all the Chambers of Commerce i.e. FICCI, CII, PHDCII and also through FAITH and WTTCCII to raise our concern on every platform in one voice.

At last our efforts have borne fruit as the GST Council in the 37th meeting held on September 20, 2019 in Goa took the decision in favour of tourism and hospitality industry and reduced the GST rates on hotel accommodation across different categories.

The council also reduced the rate of GST on outdoor catering services other than in premises having daily tariff of unit of accommodation of ₹ 7,501 from present 18% with ITC to 5% without ITC. The rate shall be mandatory for all kinds of catering. Catering in premises with daily tariff of unit of accommodation is ₹ 7,501 and above shall remain at 18% with ITC.

The move will surely give a boost to the Indian tourism industry and will bring job opportunities in the sector. The end users will get the benefit of this announcement as with this substantial relief in GST rate on hotel rooms, the package cost will reduce. This is also a good news for inbound MICE, where India has been losing out to neighbouring countries.

Comprehensive vision document

IATO in consultation with Ernest & Young made a comprehensive vision document titled "Tourism - An Engine for Economic Growth and Employment Generation" which briefly elaborate

the problems which Indian tourism industry is facing and the suggestions to overcome such problems. The main objective was to highlight tourism as economic activity and high labour intensive industry at lowest cost to create maximum jobs in the country. The association hopes that all its issues that are mentioned in the document will be addressed by the government. This document has been sent to all our members.

Videos on women safety and thematic destinations

During the first meeting with Minister of State for Tourism, Prahlad Singh Patel, he expressed his concern about the negative publicity about India on safety of women traveller and desired that IATO should make a video on women safety to counter this.

Accordingly, IATO made a video on women safety, which was launched by the Minister during the valedictory session of the convention in Kolkata.

Besides the above, IATO has made one exclusive video on thematic destination for promotional purpose which was also released by the tourism minister during the inaugural function of ITM in Delhi. Both the videos have been uploaded on the IATO website www.iato.in.

Members can use both the videos during their overseas sales and marketing trips, roadshows etc.

Meeting with RTDC authorities

IATO Delegation met the key team of RTDC authorities in Jaipur, which included interactive participation and long brain-storming session followed by the physical inspection at Dahar-Ka-Balaji Railway Station.



It is 6:14 pm, the heart-shaped wooden oar slices through the tranquil waters, sending shapeless ripples into infinity. Overhead, a flock of Brahminy migratory ducks, look for an isolated place on the vast wetland lake, to settle down for the night; their silhouettes barely visible in twilight. Faint melodies of a 1964 hindi song “*yea duniya usi kee, zamana usi kaa, mohabat mein joo ho gaya ho kisi kaa*” (this world belongs to him, this era belongs to him, who surrenders himself to someone, in the name of love) come floating from somewhere far, bringing a smile on boat-man’s face. Pink and yellow water-lilies, appear from nowhere; their small clusters drifting about aimlessly, in the ecstasy of sunset. Near them, a boat full of fresh flowers passes by; leaving behind, a trail of floral scents. Another one carries a newlywed couple, locked-up in passionate embrace of marital liberty and honeymoon romance. Some yards away, a lonesome Kingfisher dives swiftly into water, and flies off with a tiny fish fluttering in its beak.

‘Farishta-e-shakoon’ (angel-of-solace), the wooden shikara-boat glides forward with one last stroke of the oar; coming to halt with a soft-thud, touching the deck of cedar wood houseboat ‘Hindustan-kee-shaan’ (pride-of-India). In the distance, Zabarwan mountain tops watch over the landscapes from the horizon, like ageless sentinels guarding a static paradise. Call of ‘maghrib’ (evening prayers), escapes suddenly, from a nearby mosque; gracing the silence of the lake. Putting aside his oar, Abdul, the boat-man, steps onto the deck; lowering his knees to the floor, he begins his devout ritual. Soon, dusk fuses into a starry night, their radiant twinkles completing the fairytale sight. Few kilometres away, the Brahminy



Postcard from paradise

جنت سے پوسٹ کارڈ

ducks wade around on the lake, in thankful solitude.

It is 6:24 am, sun rises gently behind the mountains, brightening up the landscapes with its ornate rays. Flashing sparkles of crisp morning light begin to dance on lake’s surface.

Muezzin’s call of ‘azaan’ (morning prayers) echoes loudly, through stillness of the hour; Life awakens!

Welcome to Kashmir.
It has enticed men of distinguished intellects and abilities; from nomad explorers, emperors and sovereign heads to great poets and sufi saints, granting them solace and blissful refuge.

Ducks take off, heading south-eastwards, after a well-fed night. As day breaks, long wooden boats paddle across hurriedly, carrying an assortment of colourful merchandise; tomatoes, vegetables, fruits, organic perfumes, flowers, seeds, tea, saffron, herbs and spices, selling them with hand-held weighing scales. On the hill, ‘gong’ of bell goes off at 371 BC Shankracharya’s temple of Shiva, sending waves of invisible blessings over the valley. A russet-golden leaf descends from the Chinar tree (maple tree species), zig-zagging its way slowly to ground. On another lake,

a lotus garden floats over placid waters, its pink-white buds reaching out invitingly through leaves dotted with shining droplets of dew; like tiny diamonds in sunlight. Not very far, some skillful men begin to repair a ‘noer’ (hull of a houseboat) re-using old wood. Another craftsman sits nearby, sharpening his chisels, imagining the intricate motifs to carve on ‘ghari’ (upper part) and interiors.

Towards the east; inside a conserved forest, a family of ‘Hanguls’ (Kashmir’s stag deer, endangered species) nibble on caprifloracea shrubs. The parent-male stands still, alertful of intruders; its magnificent antlers poised regally upright in the air. Near him, six white butterflies chase each other in playful gusto; doubtless indications of a pristine habitat, an intact sanctuary thriving at its prime.

Abdul’s wife, Abida Begum, paddles their boat towards the floating vegetable vendors market; humming her favourite Kashmiri song “*mayi chani rawam raat dooh..*” (in your love I have lost my days and nights..) while he sits on edge of the boat, sipping ‘nun chai’ (pink, salty tea) and munching ‘ezhot bread’ from Kandur (traditional local bakery). Content in heart and spirit; ‘Insha-Allah’ (if God wills) he whispers, thinking of the pumpkin and melon seeds they planted on his little ‘rad’ (a floating piece of land). Meanwhile, several kilometres in the west, in a village, on the banks of Sind river, the farmer is admiring his lush paddy fields; rows of peasant women standing over the plantations, the water-fills, mirroring their multicoloured images, in inverted reflections. A motionless ‘scarecrow’ on bamboo sticks stands nearby; its tattered white dress fluttering deceptively in the breeze.

Elsewhere, higher up in the mountains, the Gaddhi (sheppard) grazes his herd of sheep, presenting a picture-post-card frame of striking contrasts; cream-white sheep against the backdrops of radiant green meadow, an iron-collared black Bhutia dog trotting along, in brave earnest; watchful of the leopard. Near them a stream trickles with pure Himalayan spring water, offering a heavenly elixir of health and healing.

One more day in ‘paradise’ has begun! No amount of influences, political or otherwise, can make any difference to its mesmerizing aesthetic coffers nor to its cultural character.

Welcome to Kashmir. It has enticed men of distinguished intellects and abilities; from nomad explorers, emperors and sovereign heads to great poets and

sufi saints, granting them solace and blissful refuge. Its magics have seduced people over aeons. Few words cannot successfully capture, the subtle essence and true appeal of this valley.

Amir Khusro Dehalvi; the scholar and Persian poet, was remarkably right when he used the word ‘firdous’ (paradise), as early as the 13th century, to describe ‘Kashmir’. Inspired by the bewitching beauty of her surroundings, it was here that, Habba Khatoon; the 16th century native poetess, known as the Nightingale of Kashmir, infused her poetries with romantic élan and lyricism. Nothing ever changed; even centuries later, Maestro Zubin Mehta, with his entourage of over a 100 members of Bavarian State Orchestra, invariably choose Kashmir as the venue for their historical concert. “Today, my dream has come true!”

he said; as he lifted his baton, merging Beethoven symphonies with local Folk music of rabab-tumbaknari-sarangi-and-santoor (traditional instruments).

The plentiful fruit orchards and dry-fruits, intricate handicrafts and papier-mâché arts, walnut furniture carvings, carpet weaving, zardozi and embroidery works, the finest woollen shawls and stoles, the irresistible gourmet and wazwan cuisines, the changing shades of chinar trees from dark-green to gold to scarlet-brown, the wealth of fauna and floras, the flawless Kashmiri hospitality, and the invisible air of soulful fulfilment, has cast a spell on ‘one and all’, since the beginning of time.

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

IATO's suggestions to Government for rejuvenating tourism in Jammu & Kashmir

Eight IATO members, headed by **Rajiv Mehra**, Vice President held a meeting on October 17, 2019 at 11:30 hours at Transport Bhawan, New Delhi on rejuvenating and promoting tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.

The following suggestions were submitted:

- ❖ Branding Jammu & Kashmir as iconic nature – tourist friendly destination in the world.
- ❖ Development of infrastructure – Air, Road Connectivity to Jammu, Srinagar (intrastate connectivity by Road).
- ❖ Investment opportunities for 3 to 5 star hotels, Convention Centre,

cultural centres, amusement park, theme parks for promoting J&K as MICE, honeymoon, film, adventure and sports/winter sports destination.

- ❖ To create confidence amongst the intending tourists that it is safe to travel to Jammu & Kashmir.
- ❖ Soft loans for investments on tourism and hospitality projects like hotels, restaurants, amusement parks, theme parks and tourist transport vehicles, house boats, adventure equipment etc.
- ❖ 5 to 10-year tax holidays on tourism investments.

❖ Free flow of tourist vehicles from other states to Jammu & Kashmir.

❖ Aggressive marketing by the Government for promoting Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh Tourism in print and electronic media.

❖ To organize Fam trips for domestic and foreign tour operators/media.

❖ Jammu & Kashmir Tourism should participate in travel marts overseas for effective marketing.

❖ Jammu & Kashmir should be promoted as a year-round destination.

IATO looks forward to opening a Chapter in Ladakh

Rajesh Mudgill, Hony. Secretary mentioned that with the landmark initiative of the Government of India, Ladakh region is now also a separate Union Territory. "Following the vision of IATO to bring more tourists into this region which has immense potential, and a greatly contrasting appeal, we shall also look into the possibility of opening up a new Chapter in Ladakh. This will complement our existing Chapter in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

NTAC Meeting with Tourism Minister



President, IATO was invited for the National Tourism Advisory Council Meeting by the Tourism Minister, **Prahlad Singh Patel**. He put forward the issue such as cascading effect of GST, export industry status, airport entry passes, problems at Kolkata airport for tourists coming from Darranga checkpost, halt of Vande Bharat Express train at Tundla, problems with Decean Odyssey train. He also requested the minister that hotels to be advised by the government to reduce rooms rates giving benefits to end users.

Vande Bharat Express halt at Tundla

Sunil Gupta, Chairman, Northern Region, IATO has said that he is impressed by the speed and luxury of the newly introduced Vande Bharat Express. **Ramshankar Katheria**, Chairman, National Commission for Scheduled Castes has written to the Railway Ministry, seeking a stoppage of the train at Tundla junction. On which Katheria said, "Since the train connects the national capital to Prayagraj and Varanasi, passing via Agra which is also a tourist destination, therefore we seek a brief stop at Tundla. The halt will not only facilitate tourists, but will also help businessmen from Agra and Firozabad."



Observations to augment tourist inflow in Bihar

Udai Singh Kumawat, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Bihar held a meeting with the tourism stakeholders at Bihar Bhawan in New Delhi. President, **Pronab Sarkar** and IATO members made the following observations to augment tourist inflow into Bihar:

1. International Buddhist Conclave/ Conference being held outside India should be held at Bodhgaya – the mecca of Buddhism
2. Government of Bihar needs to come with a white paper on its tourism policies where Buddhist Tourism must find a prime place.
3. River Cruise Tourism on the Ganges should find an important place in Bihar Tourism
4. International meditation centre at Bodhgaya where groups can go for a long duration
5. Single Window Clearance is solicited. Chains like The Lalit, Leela and Marriott are keen to invest in Bodhgaya.
6. With regard to the tiger sanctuary at Betiah, IATO can connect Bihar Tourism to the Taj Group of Hotels who specialise in building and operating luxury forest resorts.
7. Domestic Tourism is very important for Bihar and under this segment Commercial/ Business Tourism is

the key. Pharmaceuticals, FMCG and engineering companies come to Patna round the year and organise conferences too. IMA API-CON, ASICON, IRC mega conventions have been earlier organised at Patna. Thus, Bihar is a potent destination for MICE Tourism, especially in the pharma/ medical segment and should capture these conferences as after all Buddhist Tourism is from September to February/March and we need to have a 365-day tourism plan. Delhi and Kolkata are major source markets on this account.

8. Key places in Bihar like Patna needs to have an evening life after 6 pm so that travellers do not rush to take the late evening flights back to their destination. The Choki Dhani concept was mooted
9. Government of Bihar should invite a delegation of tour operators to the state so that they can have an onsite view of the facilities, offer their suggestions to the authorities and meet the Chief Minister of Bihar.
10. Entertainment is a major aspect of tourism and even the government of Gujarat issues event based liquor permit which can be looked into by the Government of Bihar.

IATO at India Travel Mart, Uttarakhand



IATO members were invited for the India Travel Mart Uttarakhand from October 11-13, 2019 by ICM Group in Dehradun, where 12 IATO members participated. IATO was conferred with "Special Award for Promoting Inbound Tourism & Bringing Foreign Exchange to India by its members. The award was received by **Rajesh Mudgill**, Hony. Secretary on behalf of IATO.

Availability of air seats for Prakash Utsav celebrations

Minister for Civil Aviation, **Hardeep Singh Puri** called a meeting to discuss the availability of air seats to/from Amritsar in connection with celebration of 550 Prakash Utsav on the birth anniversary of Shri Guru Nanak Dev. Vice President, **Rajiv Mehra** and Immediate Past President, **Subhash Goyal** were



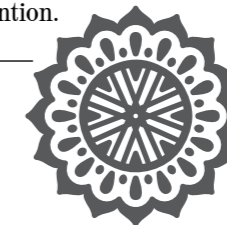
Hardeep Singh Puri

present during the meeting along with representatives of domestic airlines and other stakeholders. Puri informed that the celebrations will commence from the 2nd Week of November 2019 and will continue till end of April 2020. He has requested that this event should be publicised abroad, and effort should be made to get maximum

pilgrimage tourists during this period both domestic and international. The Minister advised those present to check with their foreign operators and advise the IATO office, so that such additional demand may be forwarded to the Ministry of Civil Aviation. He has appointed **Usha Padhee**, Joint Secretary, Ministry of

Civil Aviation as the Nodal Officer for this purpose. IATO thanked Minister Puri for the time and giving a patient hearing about the issue of airport pass and air connectivity to Agra and immediate action taken in the matter. IATO is positive that both the issues will be resolved with his personal intervention.

Appreciate the efforts by Govt. for Kashmir



Rajesh Mudgill, Hony. Secretary, IATO appreciated the move and the efforts of the Government of India in bringing more tourists and investment into Kashmir.



Rajesh Mudgill

He added that the tourism products of Kashmir have not been utilised by the tourists to the desired level, for quite some time. It is imperative to spruce up and refurbish these elements, like the house boats and other facets of the product portfolio of Kashmir. For this to fructify, funding by the government is of utmost importance. Financial support by the government to revamp the tourism products of Kashmir needs to be reviewed urgently, he stressed.

He also mentioned that the recent visit of a delegation of 27 European Union lawmakers to Srinagar

was a welcome step. Although it was successful in conveying positive views, however even one random negative incident can become matter of concern. Security aspect and safety for the tourists needs to be reassured so that later there are no setbacks in the process of marketing Kashmir.

We need to usher in the belief among the travellers that Kashmir as a prime tourist destination is safe and secure. The dedicated efforts by the government and our tourism industry must be supplemented by the support of the people of Kashmir valley. They should totally discourage any kind of forces that are not conducive to promotion of the valley as one of the best tourist destinations of India and acclaimed globally.

IATO members visit ISKON Temple



An over 60-member delegation of IATO members visited ISKON on the September 28, 2019 to know about the various facilities and attraction at ISKCON so that ISKCON Delhi can find a place in the itinerary of foreign tourists visiting India. **Pronab Sarkar**, President IATO spoke on the occasion.

IATO Goa Chapter in action

On the occasion of World Tourism Day, St. Xavier's College, Mapusa, Goa organised a two-day national level inter-collegiate competition on September 30 and October 1, 2019. The theme for this year was "Tourism and Jobs: A superior future for all".

Martin Joseph, Chairman IATO, Goa Chapter was invited to be the Chief Guest and addressed the gathering. IATO Goa Chapter also organised a blood donation camp at Red Cross Society, Panjim on September 27. About 35 donors generously donated their blood.



State Chapter Chairmen working in tandem with the government

State Chapter Chairmen of IATO are working closely with the respective state tourism departments to make sure that policies and infrastructure are in favour of inbound tourists.



Prateek Hira
Chairman, Uttar Pradesh & Uttarakhand Chapter

The two states of UP and Uttarakhand have governments that understand tourism and all its benefits. IATO has been advising and opines regularly in all policy related matters, advising governments for the betterment of tourism. Luckily, we have had very able and proactive officers who value expert advice and inputs from IATO. The two governments need to plan tourism to address the dwindling numbers of arrivals at least in terms of foreign tourists, at least from traditional markets. IATO is pressing on the issue of strategic planning and inclusive strategy to be adopted in its consultation by state governments. Marketing budgets of the states are too low and each state of India should be present in all mega international trade fairs.



Gagan Sarangi
Chairman, Odisha Chapter

IATO State Chapter has always been recognised as the voice of tour operators in Odisha. The tourism infrastructure of the state has improved. The overall road condition in Odisha is much better compared to many other states. The forest department has also taken initiative to promote eco-tourism by way of developing eco camps/ lodges/ accommodation in various parts of Odisha. However, we need to do something to increase the number of good hotels in Odisha. We have suggested the tourism department to develop our beaches, lakes, tourism sites and provide roadside amenities for the tourists. We have to do something for our members who are specialising in outbound tourism. Odisha is going to be the hub for outbound tourism to the South-east and European countries.



Vasuki K. Sundaram
Chairperson, Maharashtra Chapter

There is a continued synergy between IATO and the Tourism Secretary Vinita Singhal. I would also like to make a special mention of Neela Lad, Regional Director, India Tourism, who has been actively involved in every aspect of promoting tourism from training to meeting with the stakeholders. She has consented to get all stakeholders together to address concerns of the sector. We as IATO have requested our respected fellow associations to join and strengthen the platform. We are working on the flights to Aurangabad and have some key stakeholders working relentlessly with the airports and airlines to ensure that some flights should be operational soon to and from Aurangabad. Training is one area of focus for inbound and parking areas and toilets have been an on-going challenge too. All these have been put across to them. Maharashtra is a state of unlimited opportunities and we just need to go beyond the existing limitations.



Pandian K
Chairman, IATO Andaman & Nicobar & Tamil Nadu and Puducherry Chapter

Tamil Nadu is gifted with all riches, wealth and resources in abundance. However, certain factors like lack of toilets and other public amenities along highways, parking lots in any area is one of the biggest bottleneck to attracting international tourists. Toilets does exist but they have zero maintenance. Authorities can even fix a tariff for using toilets but what is needed is hygienic, standardised restrooms to matches the international clients' expectation. Being the State Chapter Chairman, I have represented and escalated all these points and submitted many letters to the state government, highlighting all the points and requesting their attention. I do have a long-term vision of bringing IATO convention again into South India in 2021 to Madurai city,



Randhir Singh Vaghela
Chairman, Gujarat Chapter

We undertook many initiatives this year. IATO Gujarat made its presence felt at all tourism programmes and initiatives undertaken by the MOT and the state tourism board. We were able to increase IATO presence further with new members from B and C class towns. We held events inviting Rajkot agents to address problems, including the connectivity issue between Rajkot and Mumbai. Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited has been supportive of IATO Gujarat. Over the last year we have seen them host foreign tour operators, Delhi tour operators and promoting Gujarat across various platforms with the aim of promoting Gujarat and increase inbound footfalls. We have regular talks with Gujarat Tourism on different levels and shared our vision with him.



Deepak Gupta
Chairman, Sikkim and North Bengal Chapter

It is high time that the tourism fraternity and the authorities should have some kind of control mechanism as far as rate, quality and tourism practices are concerned. I feel, there should be equal distribution across the industry. Many of us are capable of creating the infrastructure but we are not able to think towards super structure. It is something government has to think. Things are in place, but we are still missing out on basics. This can be the need of a policy into the trade, a stringent process for those who are practising into the trade, a big financial system for those, who are playing in the system and government looking into the super structures. Without synergy, tourism cannot exist. As far as synergy is concerned, we as a chapter have tried bringing in quality operators in our area and certain parts of India together. So, that at least, we can deliver committed services to our clients.



Sejo Jose
Chairman, Kerala Chapter

There are various points that the Kerala Government needs to address on an urgent basis. One of them is to remove the mandatory hotel classification that one needs to have just to open a bar. Hotels can open a bar only if they are classified under three-star or above categories since stand-alone bars are not allowed in the state. As a result, there are many hotels with three to five-star classifications but do not offer star service. They get a license just to run a bar. Starred classifications are misused and confuse tourists who book hotels online. The Government should remove this mandatory classification for bars and make it a separate license.



Manmeet Singh
Chairman, Punjab Chapter

With our new dynamic tourism minister— Charanjit Singh Channi. He has his vision of the growth for the tourism industry of Punjab. As Chapter Chairman for IATO, the association at large is constantly in touch with him and sharing and learning together to improvise the tourism scenario for state. Visa fee reduction by the Govt is a welcome move. The Govt and MOT should take IATO and other recognised association's selected members from all states of India on hosted industrial tours to meet various travel counter parts of world, enabling them to interact and showcase their state product offerings. This one step, along with the other major works like improvisation in terms of infrastructure development, reduction in tax component will help in increasing the foreign tourist arrivals.



Martin Joseph Thypodath
Chairman, Goa Chapter

GTDC is very supportive when it comes to promoting tourism in Goa by undertaking various activities like participating in different trade fairs within India and abroad. For this, they also allow us tour operators to participate along with them free of cost. For tourists, they started women-driven taxis and became the first state in the country to do so. They also started the hop-on hop-off sightseeing buses in Goa for the first time in India. Goa Tourism also organised various festivals. However, there is a need for more infrastructural development in Goa such as a new airport, better roads, good convention centre, metro line, public toilets, good local transportation and more toilets. We at IATO have put forward these requirements and they are already working on it. We also have regular meetings with them in this regard.



Sushil Kumar Singh
Chairman- Bihar and Jharkhand Chapter

I have spoken to the Tourism Director of Bihar and he is ready to work closely with IATO. I have also convinced the tourism department to participate in IATO Convention. I am also going to organise tourism awareness programmes in Patna very soon under IATO. I am glad that the Government has taken steps to reduce the visa fee. This step would attract tourists to visit our country. In my opinion, to promote Buddhist Tourism in Bihar, the Government should offer free visa for Buddhist tourists, because Buddhist sector has not got its due in terms of promotion till date.

Quick tips and updates on GST



We have summarised some quick pointers, which every taxable person under GST has to perform while filing the tax return.

Input Tax Credit

The company should reconcile GST Credit as per books and the ITC as per Form GSTR-3B for the period 2018-19. In case any credit which is being missed to be availed, then avail such missed credits.

In case of debit note which are being issued post March 2019, pertaining to the period 2018-19, then GST credit involved in such credit notes shall be from the original supplies. Hence, we should target to claim the ITC in respect of Debit notes up to original invoice eligibility.

The company should reconcile GST credit availed in Form GSTR-3B with transactions reported in Form GSTR-2A. Identify those transactions wherein the company is of the view that are not reported in GSTR-3B but coming in GSTR-2A. Although the same is time taking activity, however for the companies which have adopted the technological tool for the reconciliation, they should identify those cases wherein 100% mismatch is being reflected. In such cases, in respect of the expenses wherein the company has expensed off entire credit, then re avail the credit along with adjustment in the books of accounts as prior period income.

The person should target to re-compute credit eligibility as per rule 42 and 43 of the rules (Exempted and Taxable), as applicable. They should target to re-compute the reversal of the common input tax credit and avail those credit wherein excess reversal has been done.

Outward supplies

You should reconcile the turnover as per Form GSTR-3B and Form GSTR-1 to rectify any differences between the two. If possible, it is suggested to include the reconciliation with the books apart from

Notification

- ❖ Due dates for GSTR-3B, GSTR-1 for October 2019 - March 2020 has been shifted for company having turnover less than ₹ 1.5 crore.
- ❖ Applicability of reverse charge mechanism on certain transactions.
- ❖ Exemption of services under notification No. 12/2017- Central Tax (Rate).
- ❖ CBIC seeks to notify the grant of alcoholic liquor license neither a supply of goods nor a supply of service as per Section 7(2) of CGST Act, 2017.
- ❖ Gujarat HC: Directs release of vehicle and goods while allowing continuation of proceedings initiated.
- ❖ Rajasthan HC: Litigation tracker-ultra-vires of provisions denying ITC w.r.t. property construction challenged before Rajasthan HC.
- ❖ Kerala HC: Allows refund of IGST on zero-rated export despite grant of drawback.
- ❖ Karnataka HC: Directs nodal officer to expedite process for rectification in TRAN-1 filing.

Case Laws-

- ❖ Madras HC allows credit transition of Education Cess, Secondary/ Higher Education Cess & KKC into GST.
- ❖ MP HC: Dismisses writ, upholds order cancelling registration for alleged bill/invoice issuance of absent supply of goods.

GSTR-1 V/s GSTR-3B. However, since the GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B differences can be apparently seen from the GSTN window of the taxable person, so such differences will enable the taxable person to do the adjustment without further time efforts.

Reverse Charge

You should review the expenses (importantly the foreign currency payments) to ensure that payment of tax under RCM is done and eligible ITC is claimed. Unlike under the service tax period, wherein the credit under reverse charge shall be due after the payment of the taxes. However, under GST regime, in case of any reverse charge liability wherein the liability to pay the reverse charge due during the period 2018-19, shall be paid up to September 2019; return and cor-

responding credit of the same shall also be availed up to September 2019 return under GSTR-3B.

Credit Notes

Reconcile the credit notes issued as per books and the credit notes disclosed in returns (BOTH GSTR-1 and GSTR-3B) to check if any disclosures are missed in the returns with respect to GST credit notes.

Review of the contract terms or agreed clauses in respect of supplies made during FY 2018-19 and annual customer ledger reconciliation to identify any agreed downward revision in prices or discounts, that require issue of a GST credit note and disclose the same.

Source and credits: GST Expertise

EVENTS CALENDAR

Upcoming Incredible India Roadshows

November 11, 2019
Colombo, Sri Lanka

November 12, 2019
Chengdu, China

November 13, 2019
Chongqing, China

November 13, 2019
Joint Working Group Meeting in Male, Maldives

November 14, 2019
Kunming, China

November 14, 2019
Male, Maldives

PARTICIPATION

- ❖ 12 IATO members attended India Travel Mart (ITM) Uttarakhand from October 11-13, 2019.
- ❖ 5 IATO members attended the Goa International Travel mart (GITM) from October 23-25 in Goa.
- ❖ At FITUR 2020, 32 IATO members have enlisted for participation and more entries are to yet to come.

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.

New Membership

approved with effect from August 14, 2019

ALLIED

Abhisarika Holidays

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Favourite Tours and Forex Pvt. Ltd.

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Honey Buzzard Travel LLP

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KKS Holiday

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La Hospin Hotels and Resorts Pvt. Ltd.

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Fax: 0883- 2488899
Email: accounts@hospin.com

Natural Holidays

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Rising Gujarat Tours

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Action in place to resolve industry issues

Inkeeping with its mission to resolve industry-related issues, here is a list of the initiatives that IATO has taken up to remove the hurdles that are posing a challenge to grow inbound tourism in India:

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

It is being learnt that the 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 took up the matter with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, 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.

Denial of Kolkata immigration office to acknowledge Darranga checkpoint between Assam and Bhutan

The North East India Tour Operators Association informed that Bhutan Government will 'freeze visas for tourists exiting via Samdrup Jongkhar', as an interim measure for the exit route from Bhutan connecting Assam. The reason given by Bhutan Government is the problems faced by foreign tourists during immigration at the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport, Kolkata as the immigration office at Kolkata have denied to acknowledge Darranga, Assam entry stamp in the passports, which has created a lot of inconvenience for tourists. The matter was taken up with Secretary, Home Affairs, Joint Secretary (Foreigners), Ministry of Home Affairs, Commissioner Bureau of Immigration, Ministry of Home Affairs and Secretary (Tourism), Government of India. We had mentioned that it is an important point of entry as it boosts tourism in North-east India. Foreign tourists visit Northeast

India after or before visiting Bhutan via this route and it creates an important international tourism circuit. We requested that Darranga checkpoint be recognised as a valid check post for entry/exit so that Bhutan Government can lift its order of freezing visas of international tourists exiting via Samdrup Jongkar.

In this regard a circular with the list of authorised immigration check post was also sent to the members as a precautionary measure and to avoid any problem for the groups.

Group booking facility with railways for IATO members

Indian tour operators involved in inbound tour business are unable to do booking through IRCTC's online platform for groups of more than 6 pax and onwards since the existing IRCTC software allows booking for 1 to 6 persons only. Whereas the average size of a foreign tourist group is of 30-40 persons. So, in one go for groups, tour operator cannot book train tickets for the whole group and they need to do booking multiple times. In such cases they get some tickets confirmed and some waitlisted or sold-out. Even if tickets are confirmed, foreign tourists who are travelling in a group get split in different coaches/compartments, which the foreign tourists don't like and often make complaints because of language constraints and security reasons. IATO made the following suggestions to solve the issue: -

- IATO members should be allowed to book rail tickets for their foreign groups in the similar way as they do for domestic air booking vide with group name, id numbers, passport details and nationality of the passengers is mandatorily mentioned.
- Facility of 360 days advance booking for foreign clients, should be avail-

able for the IATO members who are recognised by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India as foreign tourists do not make rail booking directly, and rather they depend on the Indian tour operators to take care of the entire tour package including Rail Tickets.

- For group bookings for foreign tourist, terms and conditions, advance booking period etc, should be at par with your booking pattern for International booking centres abroad.

Grievance for booking of luxury trains billing with IRCTC

The members of the association are currently facing issues with IRCTC in respect to their invoicing of booking of tour package for Maharajas' Express luxury train for the current season 2018-19. The members of our association are recognised by the Ministry of Tourism as tour operators. Under the GST regime, they are paying 5% GST (without availing ITC facility) as tour operators. From the current season 2018-19, IRCTC has abruptly changed its invoicing pattern and has started treating the tour operator / Sales Affiliate as "pure agent" of the end customer / tourist by referring to GST provisions with taking concurrence from tour operators / sales affiliates before changing the billing process. We requested that IRCTC should not treat our members as pure agent of foreign tourist(s) and tax invoice should be raised by IRCTC to sales affiliate/tour operator in INR with 5% GST. Since the tour operator is permitted to avail ITC in respect of GST charged by another tour operator in the same line of business, the sales affiliate registered as tour operator will take ITC in respect of CGST / SGST / IGST charged by IRCTC.

Halt of Vande Bharat Express at Tundla junction for pilgrimage tourism

We have requested the Railways Minister that "Vande Bharat Express" from Delhi - Varanasi - Delhi, which halts at Kanpur and Prayagraj should be given two minutes halt at Tundla Railway Station as this train will be very useful for domestic as well as foreign tourists who would like to travel from Mathura to Varanasi and Prayagraj and they can board the train from Tundla Junction and the timing is also very suitable for day journey. We have also taken up this matter with PMO, Tourism Minister, Prahlad Singh Patel and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh.

Introduction of Vande Bharat Express on important tourist sectors

We also requested that Vande Bharat trains be introduced in more tourist sectors covering cities like: • Jaisalmer-Jodhpur-Jaipur-Agra and return • Mumbai - Aurangabad - Nagpur and return • Howrah- Patna - Varanasi and return • New Delhi - Chandigarh - Jammu and return • Chennai - Trichy - Madurai - Kanyakumari - Trivandrum and back • Khajuraho - Varanasi and back

Bookings on Deccan Odyssey

With the scenario of Cox & Kings, our members enquired from Cox & King on the status of bookings of their clients, but there was no reply from Cox & Kings about the departure of the train and booking made by our member.

The matter was taken up with Principal Secretary Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, Managing Director Maharashtra Tourism requesting them to honour the bookings made by our members for which advance payment have been made and tickets issued. We requested that Deccan Odyssey Luxury train departures should not be cancelled and should operate as per scheduled and bookings accepted so that image of Indian tourism is not tarnished.

Landing time issue with TUI Airways

TUI Airways is a UK charter flight that operates to Goa from November to April. There are three flights to Goa in a week. This year the preventative maintenance of Goa Airport is scheduled on Saturdays from 0730 to 1230 IST. However, these timings disrupt the TUI Airways operations on Saturdays. TUI airways

operated on Saturday at 1130-1300 IST last season.

The airline has very clearly mentioned that due to operational reasons and crew rest they cannot operate at the timings offered by AAI, Goa and Delhi. The aircraft operating to Goa on Saturday comes into the UK from far east, hence cannot arrive early morning. It cannot operate 1800 hrs onwards in the evening as the same crew operate the flight on Sunday which is at 0815-1000 IST. They have stated that they would be forced to cancel the flight if not permitted to operate as requested.

IATO desired urgent intervention as the first flight is scheduled to depart on November 1, 2019 which is on Friday from Manchester. It would arrive into Goa on Saturday November 2, 2019.

IATO has requested the authorities to kindly look into the matter and revise the naval NOTAM to 0630-1130 hours IST. This will allow the TUI Airways aircraft to operate at 1130-1300 IST. Or else TUI Airways should be permitted to operate at 1230-1400 LT. Charters have restrictions. Only limited time windows are open to charters.

IATO's suggestions on Air Charter Policy

The present policy has somehow not facilitated this objective as the present policy is in some cases restrictive instead of being facilitator regarding the easing of restrictions of barring travel of tourist arriving on chartered flights, it is proposed this clause should be altogether removed and tourists arriving on charter flights should be allowed to travel on schedule flights on the undertaking by tourist and Indian DMC. In order to boost tourism, following are the subsidies/incentives offered by Turkey and Sri Lanka to tour charter operators:

Turkey

Subsidy given by Turkish Government to tour operators for bringing tourist on charter flights.

Sri Lanka

- 10 USD per person incentive given by Government of Sri Lanka to

FTOs through Local DMC.

- 10% discount on airport taxes for each tourist arriving on charter flights.
- 10% discount of fuel price to charter flights.
- 15% discount on landing, parking and navigation charges for charter flights.

Following are our suggestions for giving incentives to charter operators:

discount on landing charges to charter operators, operating series of flights to Goa.

- 25% discount to charter operators operating one weekly flight from October to March.
- 35% discount to charter operators operating twice weekly flight from October to March.
- 50% discount to charter operators operating thrice weekly flight from October to March.

- 75% discount landing charges waiver to charter operators operating daily flight from October to March.

Slot allocation

• ITP charters brings the much needed foreign currency to the country and to facilitate these flights, priority in slot allocation to international charter flights needs to be given over domestic flights between 0500 hrs to 1130 hrs, since this is the most preferred time to operate international charters to Goa.

• Due to airport infrastructure limitations and congestion at terminal and ramp, charter flights are not able to depart as per their schedule and have to incur additional parking fee due to poor airport infrastructure. Hence it is proposed that AAI should allow 3 hours free parking to charter flights at Goa specially wide body aircrafts.

Synergy is the key: PS Patel

Sharing his views about the tourism industry during the convention in Kolkata, **Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State for Tourism (I/C), Government of India, analysed the current scenario and suggested possible measures to improve the situation.

Tour operators and travel agents are an integral part of our industry and we cannot take any step without their support. From the day, I have taken charge of the ministry, we have been working tirelessly to explore new areas of promoting tourism.



Prahlad Singh Patel

I have been receiving several suggestions and recommendations from IATO on promoting tourism and we have duly reviewed and considered them. Now, we also need the support of private players for thinking and deliberating on how we can work together and move ahead.

All the stakeholders of the industry should come forward and work hand in hand with the ministry. I am delighted that India's ranking has improved positively on the Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report in last five years. We will target to feature in top 10 of the list in the next five years.

I have received several recommendations and suggestions from the travel trade, and I assure my full support in the matters which are necessary for the development of the industry. We will put forward the important suggestions to the Centre with full confidence. There is a need for states, tourism ministry and stakeholders to work together in synergy.

We will put forward the important suggestions to the government with full confidence. There is a need for states, tourism ministry and stakeholders to work together in synergy.

I feel, we need to prioritise things we need to do. We need to take more care of basic facilities and necessary amenities for tourists and sanitation, without which we cannot overcome challenges the industry is facing. We

need good support from the travel industry to enhance our support and efforts. More than anything, I feel that thinking and perception about India must change.

India has a deep-rooted culture and we should use that to highlight new and lesser known destinations in the country among foreign tourists.

We have also received suggestions that ITM should take place in different cities, we will try and deliberate on this. The nation is going to celebrate the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi this year, so the Ministry has developed and introduced the Gandhi Gramin Circuit; for which, IATO has curated several itineraries around the country. The theme of this year's Paryatan Parv was also based on the same.

To prosper tourism further in the country, we also need to realise the global competition from our neighbouring countries and work to tackle it. The states should not compete with each other, they all should come together and become a force to reckon. We should also focus on getting the Chinese tourists to India. They are one of the largest global travellers and if we even get 10 per cent of the total share, I think we can achieve our targets in one year.

Air connectivity with Khajuraho

On IATO's request, Vistara is going to start operation of its daily flights on sector Delhi - Patna - Delhi and Delhi - Varanasi- Khajuraho-Varanasi -Mumbai. The association also had celebrations with Air India to restart its daily flight on Delhi-Varanasi-Khajuraho- Varanasi- Delhi sector. The team had a meeting with

Ashwani Lohani, CMD, Air India and other officials of Air India in June 2019 and Lohani agreed to the request.

Air India in its winter flight schedule October 28, 2019 to March 28, 2020, has announced operation of flights on the above sector, five days in a week



(Mon, Tues, Wed, Thurs, Fri, Sat) from October 28- November 10, 2019. From November 11, 2019-March 28, 2020, the flight will fly all seven days a week.

rendezvous with divine...!
Vadalkh

Incredible India



Incredible India

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

