

IATO

*A Tourism Industry Communication by
Indian Association of Tour Operators*

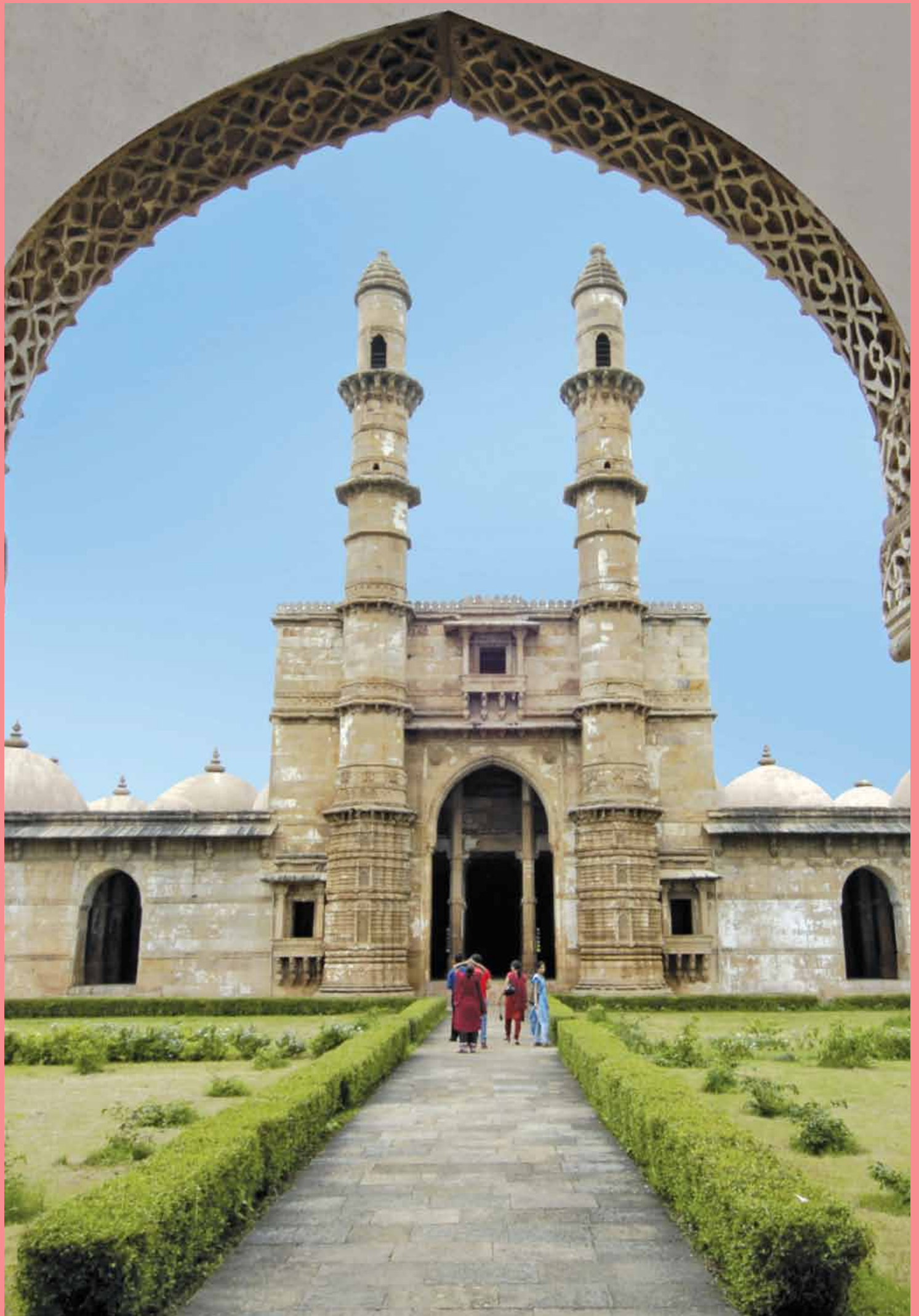
SPEAKS

SPECIAL EDITION

36th IATO ANNUAL CONVENTION GANDHINAGAR



Revival leads the way





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@ddppl.com; admin@iato.in;
iato@airtelmail.in

EC LIAISON
Mr. Harish Mathur

Newsletter Committee
Mr. Rajnish Kaistha
Ms. Devika Jeet
Ms. Elina Satapathy
Mr. Tapas Banerjee
Mr. Abraham George
Mr. Mukesh Manra
Mr. Rahul Chakravarty

COMMITTEE CONVENOR
Mr. Neelam Thakur

IATO Speaks is a publication of Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO). All information is derived from sources, we feel reliable and passed on to the members without any responsibility on our part. IATO assumes no responsibility for returning any unsolicited matters. Jurisdiction is restricted to Delhi.

IATO Speaks is owned by IATO and printed & published on their behalf by DDP Publications Pvt. Ltd. & is printed at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., Delhi



Contents

Inauguration	4-11
Rebuilding The Brand.....	14-17
Panoply of experiences.....	18-19
Working together is important.....	22-24
Joining forces to boost tourism.....	25-28
Going beyond SEIS.....	29-31
All about responsibility.....	34-37
Moving to a digital future.....	38-41
Camaraderie is key.....	44-47
The grand wrap-up.....	48-51



IATO COMES TO GUJARAT FOR THE SECOND TIME

Bhupendrabhai Patel, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat, inaugurated the 36th IATO Annual Convention. The ceremony was attended by senior dignitaries from Union Ministry of Tourism and Gujarat Tourism.



Inauguration ceremony of the 36th IATO annual convention held at The Leela, Gandhinagar

“
Gujarat has a variety of tourism offerings, which are well-known around the world. It is known for its culture and heritage
”

The banquet hall at the Leela Gandhinagar was at full capacity at the inaugural function of the 36th IATO Annual Convention, which was kick-started by **Bhupendrabhai Patel**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat, alongside **G Kamala Vardhana Rao**, Director General Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India; **Hareet Shukla**, Principal Secretary Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat, and **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO. Also present on the occasion were dignitaries from

Government of Gujarat, officials from various state departments from across the country, leaders of the Indian tourism and hospitality fraternity and IATO members who descended from across the country.

In his address, Patel said, “Gujarat has a variety of tourism offerings, which are well-known around the world. It is known for its culture and heritage. Wherever you go, you will see Gujarati families and restaurants and today Gujarati food such as *dhokla*, *thepla*, *gathiya*, *jalebi*, *khichdi-kadhi* have become international dishes.”



Bhupendrabhai Patel, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Gujarat, arrives at the 36th IATO Convention in Gandhinagar

He mentioned, “The convention will see discussions taking place over the theme ‘Brand India - Road to Recovery’.

Owing to the pandemic, the tourism industry has been impacted. Now it is time to go towards recovery. Whether it is tourism, agriculture or business, we must turn this setback of COVID-19 into a comeback. While business must have taken a hit, it is human nature to keep moving. International tourism to Gujarat started owing to the efforts of Hon'ble PM **Narendra Modi** when he was the Chief Minister of Gujarat. He gave a new concept of Festival Tourism in Gujarat to the country and the world at large. Festivals such as International Kite Festival, Navratri Mahotsav, Tarnetar Festival, Saputara Monsoon Festival, Beach Festival, Kankaria Carnival and

Polo Festival today enjoy international presence and popularity.”

“Modi used to say that the 3Ts in Tourism – Tradition, Talent and Trade, are important for tourism growth. We have made a new beginning in terms of border tourism promotion and to encourage heritage tourism, Gujarat has come up with the first of its kind Heritage Tourism Policy 2020 in the country. We hope there is improvement in the current situation, and apart from being an industrial powerhouse, global destination for investments, we take resolution to make Gujarat a global destination on world tourism map, and at the same time, focus towards making it a holistic, environment-friendly and employment generating industry,” he concluded.❖

”

The convention will see discussions taking place over the theme ‘Brand India - Road to Recovery’

”

10% OF TOTAL JOBS HIT IN TOURISM SECTOR

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, shared why the annual convention was a necessary step towards boosting the confidence of IATO members and would help in lighting the 'Road to Recovery' for all. While the industry suffered a lot, it's time for all stakeholders to work in tandem.



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, in his opening address at the inauguration thanked **Hareet Shukla** and **Jenu Devan** for their support in making the convention take place. He informed that around 740 delegates attended the convention.

Thanking the Hon'ble Gujarat Chief Minister, he said. "We support your various initiatives for attracting more inbound tourists to Gujarat," he said. Speaking on the theme, he said, "We have experts from the government and industry to deliberate and give their suggestions on how we can rebuild the tourism business and re-generate employment."

Mehra mentioned that tourism is an engine for economic growth and employment generation for the country. "Tourism is expected to impact more than 10 per cent of India's employment. This means almost five crores jobs, assuming a 75 per cent loss of tourism would imply a proportionate impact of job losses – 3.5 crore – if COVID-19 plays out throughout the year. These would be in the form of layoffs, furloughs, highly reduced working conditions or no work at all depending upon the tourism verticals," the IATO President claimed.

Highlighting the plight of the tour operator community, Mehra said, "All our members are reeling under financial crisis as it has become difficult to manage anymore and survive without any earnings for the past 22 months. Many of our members had to sell their tourist vehicles as they are unable to pay EMIs and shifted their rented office premises to residence beside sending majority of staff on leave without pay and drivers lost their jobs. Skilled tourism employees who migrated from small cities to big cities had to either move back to their native place or leave the tourism industry and look for other jobs. Thus, this is loss of trained manpower for tourism industry."

He claimed that survival was important for them because post COVID-19 they need to start with more vigour and force with more investments on marketing and promotion to regain business from the international market. "I request the Hon'ble Chief Minister and our DG, Tourism and all the state government to come out with a policy, which can help the tourism industry so that we can recreate jobs which have been lost in the tourism industry and contribute in the economic growth of our country," he concluded. ❖

”
Survival was important for them as post COVID-19, they need to start with more vigour and force with more investments on marketing and promotion
”

CONFIDENCE IS CRUCIAL

G Kamala Vardhana Rao, DG, Ministry of Tourism, speaking at the 36th IATO Annual Convention in Gandhinagar, claimed that vaccination will play a significant role in giving confidence to international tourists for visiting India.

G Kamala Vardhana Rao, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, believes that vaccination would play a major role in taking India towards the road to recovery. "Also, safety protocols must be followed and only then there will be confidence among tourists," he shared.

Claiming that domestic tourism has seen a rise during the pandemic, Rao said, "There is hardly any availability of rooms in hotels, especially at tourist destinations. We have more than 165 notified destinations in this country and more than 80 per cent of the hotels are running on more than 80 per cent occupancy, particularly this season. Despite not having many international tourists, domestic tourism has picked up and 80 per cent of hotels are occupied."

Talking of Omicron variant of COVID-19, Rao claimed, "If you see the cases of Omicron internationally, it is infectious but it is not as fatal as Delta variant, which we have seen earlier. That's the only ray of hope. We are sure that this will not be there for a longer time. By February to March, we could see better times. As per, international surveys and WHO, Omicron is infectious, but the cases of hospitalisation are low and thus the stress on the health

sector is not as much as it was in the last two years. We are using our digital platforms, publicity material and divisions to inform people across the globe. In fact, at more than 20 Indian embassies we have placed our officers. We have requested the embassies to designate one officer there, exclusively to deal with the tourism sector. We are telling internationally about the health protocols we are following now."

While Rao realised the concerns of inbound industry over Omicron scare, he claims that the government's intent at all levels, including at MOT, is to monitor daily number of cases and the vaccination rate. "We are looking at all aspects on a daily basis so as to see a way towards opening the aviation sector. **Jyotiraditya Scindia**, Union Minister of Civil Aviation, has also said that relaxation of international travel purely depends on the Omicron infections," he added.

Stating that the takeaway from the convention should be confidence and courage, he said, "Let us be strong as wonderful days lie ahead. While the inbound season this year is lost, for domestic it's a boon and next year hopefully we will have a roaring recovery in the tourism sector of this country." ♦



G Kamala Vardhana Rao
Director General, Ministry of Tourism.

”
The most important thing is vaccination. Hence, safety protocols must be followed and only then there will be confidence among the tourists
 ”

GOODNESS OF GUJARAT

Hareet Shukla, Principal Secretary Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat, shared that having the IATO Convention in Gandhinagar gave them the opportunity to showcase various tourism offerings in Gujarat.



Hareet Shukla
Principal Secretary Tourism,
Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation &
Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat

Acknowledging that the last two years have been difficult for our sector, **Hareet Shukla**, Principal Secretary Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat, said that there is lot of hope with rapid vaccination, especially in Gujarat. "Hence, we are very well poised for recovery. The suggestions generated at the convention will be useful for Gujarat Tourism and also for the tourism sector of India. Gujarat is open to adopt the best practices."

Giving example of the upcoming Vibrant Gujarat Summit, he mentioned, "When it started, there were hardly any hotel rooms in Ahmedabad, especially in the four or five-star category, at that time, the capacity was just around 400 to 500 rooms. Now, in its 11th edition it has grown up to 4,000 to 5,000 rooms. Even Rann Utsav, which was first time organised in 2006, was a grand show. However, no one could imagine the way it has evolved and come up now, beyond all expectations. We get more than five lakh people visiting Kutch every year for the Rann Utsav and it has changed the picture of rural Kutch entirely. I am sure that the convention would give a great fillip to the Gujarat state and I am sure tour operators will find new

locations in Gujarat to bring a lot of foreign and domestic tourists to this state."

He claimed that Gujarat is a policy driven state. "There are many advantages of this state. It has one of the ideal law and order situation, best possible infrastructure, best connectivity and it is a very welcoming state, whether it's industry or tourism sector. We have the most aggressive tourism policies here. Plus, we have a heritage tourism policy and very soon we will be coming up with a cinematic tourism policy. We also have homestay guidelines and adventure sports related guidelines. We have also been very active in utilising the social media for the promotion of the Gujarat Tourism."

Shukla said that they are developing new destinations, new festivals, new occasions and coming up with new ideas for attracting the tourists to the state. "One such example is Nadabet on the border of India and Pakistan, which is being developed as part of a border tourism product. Gujarat is blessed to have a lot of tourist destinations, and is planning to develop many more and I am sure the post-tours which will be taken by the IATO members, will make them return home with a lot of fond memories to cherish," he added. ❖

”
The convention would give a great fillip to Gujarat and tour operators will find new locations in Gujarat to get lot of foreign and domestic tourists here
”

ACHIEVEMENTS GALORE

Dr. Subhash Goyal, Founder and Chairman, STIC Travel & Air Charter Group, as well as the longest-running IATO President, along with **Mahendrasinh Vaghela**, Managing Director, Vaghela Hospitalitys, and former IATO Gujarat Chapter Chairman, were conferred with the Hall of Fame Award at the IATO convention.



Dr. Subhash Goyal conferred with the Hall of Fame Award

For nearly three decades, **Dr. Subhash Goyal** holds the record for being the longest-standing President of IATO. He has worked tirelessly to support and represent the causes of the entire industry, from tour operators to guides, transporters, the hospitality sector, and the aviation sector.

Upon receiving the award, he thanked the IATO and credited his team and his wife for their undulating support. "I am overwhelmed with gratitude, for the honour that has been conferred upon me. I would

like to thank the office-bearers, the EC, and the members of IATO who decided to confer this honour on me. I would also like to thank my wife, Gursharn Goyal, who stood by me like a rock. I would like to express my gratitude to all the past presidents and EC members, particularly those who are no longer with us," he said in his acceptance speech.

He claimed that without everyone's help and guidance, "We could not have gotten the open skies for global domestic and international air travel, we could not have gotten

”
I am overwhelmed with gratitude, for the honour that has been conferred upon me
”

Hall of Fame



the visa on arrival or a tourist visa implemented." For two years, we could not get the service tax suspended. It has been a happy and interesting journey, and I am grateful to be felicitated. At the same time, getting a Lifetime Achievement Award does not mean that it is retirement time for me. It is not the end of the road for me. I am never going to stop working, and like a soldier, I will fight till my last breath. We will be able to create millions of jobs as a result of this, eradicating poverty and making India the country of dreams."

In his career spanning 53 years, **Mahendrasinh Vaghela**, who is fondly called 'Mike Vaghela' in the trade fraternity and recognised with his trademark hat and his stick, has had an eventful journey, working tirelessly to promote Gujarat as a destination to foreign tourists for more than 30 years.

On his journey, he worked with Air India and was part of establishing the Patson Tours & Travels in India and opening offices in Chicago and Los Angeles, catering to tourists

travelling to India. He has been instrumental in promoting Kutch as an advertisement shooting and filming destination. He is known for his work during the Bhuj and Kutch earthquakes and played a pivotal role in promoting the Rann Utsav.

Receiving the award from Gujarat Chief Minister Hon'ble Bhupendrabhai Patel, Vaghela said, "I would like to thank IATO President **Rajiv Mehra** and the Executive Committee for selecting me as a candidate for this honourable award. I would also like to thank the Chief Minister for coming here and presenting the award to me for my 55-year journey. I am glad to be part of the IATO convention and feel elated to be recognised for my achievements. I would like to thank **Hareet Shukla**, Principal Secretary Tourism, who has been associated with tourism for a long time. I remember in 2008, he was in Bhuj and was helping with tourism for Rann Utsav. I would also like to thank **Nirav Munshi** for his involvement in promoting tourism in Gujarat." ❖

”
He is known for his work during the Bhuj and Kutch earthquakes and played a pivotal role in promoting the Rann Utsav
”

IATO MESSAGE TO GOVT: HELP US IN NEW NORMAL

Rajnish Kaistha, Honorary Secretary, IATO and Officiating Chairman, 36th IATO Annual Convention, claimed that the convention is the best way to put the message forward to the world that India is safe and it is time to visit our beautiful country.

Rajnish Kaistha, Honorary Secretary, IATO and Officiating Chairman of the 36th IATO Annual Convention, shared that the last time IATO annual convention took place in Gujarat, was in 2011 and the then Chief Minister **Narendrabhai Modi** (now the Prime Minister of the country) had graced the occasion. He thanked the Hon'ble Chief Minister for his presence and paid gratitude to **Hareet Shukla**, Principal Secretary Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat and **Jenu Devan**, MD, Gujarat Tourism, for all their efforts towards making the convention take place in the state of Gujarat.

Apprising the gathering about the suffering of the tourism sector, because of the pandemic, Kaistha said, "As per UNWTO, the worldwide tourism economy has lost more than US \$2 trillion, millions of jobs, closing down of many of businesses, and losses are still in the counting. International inbound tourism comprising foreign tourists (the highest foreign exchange earner) and the mainstay of our members is yet to take off. Our balance sheets show zero

revenue. We are heartbroken by the absence of the much-needed financial support towards our industry."

Claiming that the gathering at the convention demonstrates that the industry is ready to fight back and get foreign tourists back to India, he said, "The Government of India needs to take vital steps such as opening the skies with scheduled flights, sixth freedom of air, grant minimum of 60-day visa with multiple entries, and free tourist visas at least till March of 2023."

He said, "It is high time that the central and state governments help us get back to tourism activities under the New Normal, without any delay. The country is now open for tourists and it is safe to travel. We want to send out this message loud and clear through this convention. With more than 1.3 billion vaccines administered all over the country and further counting, we are ready for international tourism to restart. 'Brand India - The Road to Recovery' is the apt theme for this annual convention, being held here in Gujarat. It is a great opportunity to work together with positivity and intent." ❖



Rajnish Kaistha
Honorary Secretary, IATO and Officiating
Chairman, 36th IATO Annual Convention

”
It is high time that central and state governments understand and help us get back to tourism activities under the New Normal, without any delay
”

REUNION TO REMEMBER

The 36th IATO Annual Convention in Gandhinagar saw the members meeting with each other after a gap of more than two years, owing to the pandemic. The air during the three days exuded excitement, rejoicing, empathy and camaraderie within the travel and tourism fraternity.



Moments



REBUILDING THE BRAND

The first panel discussion at the 36th IATO Annual Convention took the theme head-on and saw both, the governments and private players sharing their views on how they are preparing for a revival strategy while making sure that 'Brand India' remains inviting to foreigners.



Panel discussion at the 36th IATO Annual Convention

Titled 'Brand India - The Road to Recovery for Revival of Business', the panel discussion had **Pronab Sarkar**, Immediate Past President, IATO as the moderator with panellists – **Hareet Shukla**, Principal Secretary of Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat, **Shilpa Gupta**, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, **Anil Chadha**, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC-Limited-Hotels Division and **Rajeev Kohli**, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel.

The impact

Sarkar set the tone by explaining how the pandemic has impacted the tourism industry and how the industry is looking at growing

its business with a positive note that maximum vaccination has happened worldwide, including India. "It is now possible only with the opening of borders and commencement of international flights." Although COVID-19 variant Omicron has initiated new restrictions, which may continue for some time, awareness is the key to opening again," he said.

Steps forward

Sarkar initiated the conversation with government representatives by asking about the new initiatives the government is taking. Shukla said that it will take another four to five months to reach the normal situation, and Gujarat is better prepared. More than 136 crore people in India have been vaccinated,

”
Although COVID-19 variant Omicron has initiated new restrictions, which may continue for some time, awareness is the key to opening again
”

and in Gujarat, the count is 8.6 crore. We have started many events with all protocols in place; schemes that were put on hold have been revived; even the IATO convention will go a long way in establishing confidence. In January, Vibrant Gujarat will take place, followed by the Defence Expo. This shows that it is probably the last leg of the crisis. We will come out of it soon." He listed the new projects and destinations in Gujarat, including the Statue of Unity, Shivrajpur Beach, and Nadabet.

Taking the conversation forward, **Shilpa Gupta** claimed that both direct and allied services in the tourism sector in MP are fully vaccinated, and keeping in line with tourists' preference to use their own vehicle, Madhya Pradesh's excellent road conditions and connectivity make

Madhya Pradesh is working on all three. She also mentioned that tour operators are their biggest stakeholders, and they are constantly working with associations, transporters, and guides. "We need to make our packages activity-filled and move towards digitalisation by innovating and reinventing ourselves," Gupta added.

Next in line was **Manoj Kumar**, who revealed that Karnataka is a progressive state. The state has come up with its own tourism policy for 2020-26. We were one of the first states to consider tour operators and guides as frontline workers and put them on priority for vaccination. The state gave industry status to four- to five-star classified hotels. Financial support was given to taxi and auto drivers. Relief measures include a 50 per cent



Hareet Shukla
Principal Secretary of Tourism, Devasthanam
Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage,
Government of Gujarat



Shilpa Gupta, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

this possible. Work has been done on the infrastructure with wayside amenities going from 80 to 96. From mass tourism, preferences have changed to less crowded places. Madhya Pradesh tourism is developing new and unexplored destinations, offering lots of activities to meet the need for experiential tourism. Today there are three pillars of tourism – innovation, safety, and sustainability, and

reduction in property tax and the waiver of fixed charges on electricity bills for April to June and 50 per cent of the excise licence fee. "We have a one-time grant of ₹ 5,000 to recover tourist guides. We participated in WTM London and went to Birmingham and Manchester for in-person roadshows in November. We will participate in future events in Dubai and Madrid. We have a Marketing Development

”
Today there are three pillars of tourism – innovation, safety, and sustainability – and Madhya Pradesh is working on all
”

Brainstorming



Brainstorming session at the 36th IATO Annual Convention

Assistance scheme for tour operators and will have KITE second edition in June 2022. With the Karnataka Tourism Society (KTS), we are trying to build the confidence of the industry." In terms of new destinations, they have started heli-tourism and are working on coastal tourism. Also, skill development is a focus for them.

Anil Chadha said, "The New Normal has arrived, and to build the confidence of people, we must be careful. To live in the New Normal, one must learn to live with this. A lot of effort was put in by our staff and associates. We, at ITC Hotels, came up with a campaign called 'WeAssure' under which all touchless services from beginning to end were certified. All new training modules were done for the staff with new standards of hygiene and protocols. We need to wipe out one year from our calendars and imbibe the learning. Hence, do not waste a crisis. Move forward with much more agility, confidence, smarter and sharper."

Giving tour operators' perspective, **Rajeev Kohli**, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel, said, "As tour operators, we have had a lot of time to introspect and talk, but we have wasted time in trying to get things from the government, where tourism is not a priority despite generating 9 to 10 per cent of GDP. Hence, at this forum, we must collectively decide to fend for ourselves. The cancellation of the ITB was a big disappointment. It is important that we come together to build the image, the customer base, and interest in India. All partners have said that people are travelling, Europe is booming, American agencies are doing well, but there is no interest in India. Hence, we need to get our fundamentals right to bring our share back. "

The way forward

When asked about the strategy to promote the state and sector, Shukla said, "It is important to collaborate with the private sector. In fact, Gujarat was the first state to come up with a PPP policy, and now we are

”
At ITC Hotels, we came up with the campaign called 'WeAssure' under which all touchless services from beginning to end were certified
”



Anil Chadha speaking at the Convention

proceeding aggressively to get more private players to manage our properties and come up with new projects. The new policy has unique features in that if somebody comes with a project of more than ₹ 500 crores, the state will not only give land for lease, but also a special customised tailor-made package. Even for aviation, the role of the private sector is important. Together we can create infrastructure and facilities that are truly world-class for tourists. "

Gupta shared that while traditional methods of marketing are being adopted by them, she wants the visitors to be ambassadors of the destination. Also, she said, "The tour operators, as the direct stakeholders, can come up with better ideas to promote tourism, and we are accessible to help through requirements by the government at policy level or for incentives."

Chadha claimed that they are equally bullish about the future. "Indian hospitality is unmatched. Hence, it is 'Brand India', that needs to be focused on, and the Incredible India campaign must

become Incredible 'safe' India, and the hospitality industry will be an equal partner in making sure those experiences are safe and memorable."

Finally, Kohli listed out a few points for the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), which, if done in 30 days or less, will change the lives of the inbound tour operators. Firstly, accept the pain and damage that was incurred on inbound tourism industry. Secondly, we need a crisis management committee. Thirdly, the MOT needs to have more honest conversations with the operators, and not just associations. The fourth point is to do away with all the old systems and policies. They do not work and need to be changed with time. The next point is that we need to retire Incredible India and show a new, happening brand. Then, we need intense and strong PR management. We need new collateral, new videos and new tools that the private sector has at its disposal. Lastly, the MOT needs to recognise its biggest sales force – IATO members. All this is in MOT's authority, and if done in 30 days, "our lives will completely change," he emphasised. ❖

”
It is Brand India that needs to be focused on and the Incredible India campaign must become Incredible 'safe' India
”

PANOPLY OF EXPERIENCES

Gujarat is coming up as a state with a myriad of possibilities for tourists. Right from sites featuring earliest civilisations, to various heritage sites, to seaplane services and heliports being developed, it has something for everyone.



Special session on Gujarat at the 36th IATO Convention in Gandhinagar

A dedicated session on Gujarat was conducted, which was moderated by **Rahul Chakravarty**, COO, IATO, and **Hareet Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage, Govt of Gujarat, spoke about tourism development in Gujarat, alongside **Mahendrasinh (Mike) Vaghela**, MD, Vaghela Hospitalities.

All positive

The session started with Shukla sharing how his department is developing products to boost tourism in the state. “Gujarat has a variety of things for tourists, including heritage history, cuisines, dresses, fair festivals and celebrations. It is also blessed with a very long coastline of 660 km, around which we are coming up with new destinations, ideas, themes and festivals. Gujarat is also very well-connected. We have

19 airports, out of which three are managed by the state government and we are looking for private partnerships to develop projects around those airports. We have two water aerodromes and Gujarat was the first state to start seaplane services. Apart from that, there are 42 ports in the state and huge stretch of motorable road.

“The majority of tourists coming to Gujarat are either under business sector or for spiritual tourism. Hotel occupancies have also gone up and we have more than 4,000 accommodation verified units and over 100 star-category hotels. We are trying to connect those going for Rann Utsav to Dholavira, allowing them to stay and experience the UNESCO World Heritage Site. In future, Master Plan is being developed to make it a world standard site. It is home to one of the blue flag certified beaches

”
Gujarat has a variety of things for tourists, including heritage history, cuisines, dresses, fair festivals, and celebrations
”

- Shivrajpur Beach, which we are developing to be a major tourist attraction," he shared. Shukla also claimed that Gujarat has always been a peaceful state. "We have better law and order situation and very friendly population. There is a continuity in policy and ease of doing business, reforms and policies," he added.

Favourable policies

When asked about the various policies Gujarat is working on, Shukla said, "Besides the regular tourism policy, we also have a Heritage Tourism Policy, Homestay Policy, Adventure Tourism Policy and there is a Cinematic Tourism Policy, which is at the draft stage and will be finalised very soon."

Chakravarty asked Vaghela about cinematic and wedding tourism. "Today in India, 1800-2000 films are made and unlimited advertising happens in TV and digital channels, out of which Gujarat only gets five per cent. Tourism department has this year taken up heavy promotional activities. They have met many producers. I remember when we first got an advertisement shooting in the White Rann of Kutch. Since then, around 96 films were shot in Gujarat and a lot of advertisements. We need to do more and the government is helping us," said Vaghela.

Towards the New Normal

When Chakravarty asked about embracing the New Normal of safety hygiene and security, Vaghela said, "During COVID-19, both tour operators and hoteliers became very active and safety conscious. However, in the last two months, tourists are coming and relaxing. I would request them to not drop the guard, else we'll get into the same loop and suffer."

Nascent projects

On being asked about some of the development projects, Shukla revealed, "The first route on which Gujarat started seaplane services was between Sabarmati and Statue of Unity. There are plans to cover Shetrunji River and Dharoi Dam. Other locations are also being explored. Operating seaplane is a bit challenging. However, we will try to engage with private players and working on a permanent solution to avoid problems we faced in the first attempt."

Secondly, they are trying to promote a lot of heliports. Shukla elaborated, "First helipad services will start from Ahmedabad. There could be joy ride concepts. In the next step, we'd develop six major heliports. Recently, we approved routes connecting major destinations – Surat-Bhavnagar, Surat-Amreli, Surat-Rajkot. Also, we are trying to start Ahmedabad-Bhuj in first half of January."

There is also a new concept of border tourism, for which the tourism department is developing Nadabet as a destination on the lines of Wagah Border. "We call it Seema Darshan Scheme; aimed to give exposure of the difficulties on the life of people at the border, particularly BSF. There will be lot of activities," he revealed.

USP of Gujarat

When asked about the USP of Gujarat, Shukla shared, "I am sure that the experience which travellers coming to Gujarat get is because of the people of Gujarat, which is our biggest advantage."

Chakravarty aptly concluded the session saying, "Let us work as partners in progress and catapult tourism in Gujarat to a new enviable future." ❖



Hareet Shukla
Principal Secretary, Tourism, Devasthanam
Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage,
Government of Gujarat

”
In the last two months, tourists are coming and relaxing. I would request them to not drop the guard, else we'll get into the same loop
”

Moments





WORKING TOGETHER IS IMPORTANT

The second session, titled 'Hotels in the New Normal', provided an interesting perspective on how hotels navigated the pandemic and how it is now necessary for both hotels and tour operators to collaborate to not only promote India, but also to ensure that everyone gets business.



Session on Hotels in the New Normal held at the 36th Annual IATO Convention

Witty **Homa Mistry**, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours was the moderator of the session, while the panellists included the head honchos of the hospitality industry, including **Nakul Anand**, Executive Director, ITC Hotels and Chairman FAITH; **Puneet Chhatwal**, Managing Director and CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Limited; **Anuraag Bhatnagar**, COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts; and **Ajay Bakaya**, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts.

Kicking off the discussion with how hotels have thrived during COVID-19, Mistry asked the panellists about their crisis management. While Bhatnagar

spoke about taking the crisis as an opportunity, he shared, "We took the 18 months to reset and opened three hotels, including The Leela Gandhinagar. While we added 900 keys, we were able to ensure that we brought in the required technology. We also brought in efficiencies, which were the need of the hour, to ensure we could manage our fixed costs more efficiently."

Chhatwal also shared that in 2018, they announced a strategy called Aspiration 2022, and when the pandemic struck in February-March 2020, they could immediately adapt and go towards a reset in 2020. "This made us realise that fixed costs could also be semi-variable." We

”
We took 18 months to reset and opened three hotels, including The Leela Gandhinagar. We were able to ensure that we get the required technology
”

also realised that there is a need for other businesses to make sure you can bear your expenses and fixed costs. This one year gave us the learning for the next 10 to 20 years," he claimed.

Health and wellness, according to Anand, took centre stage during the pandemic. "Everything started being driven by health and sustainability and wellness came to the forefront. As a business, we had to examine every possible touch point so that, without losing warmth, we could make it as touchless as possible. Apart from adding hotels, we created two brands – Storii and Mementos – catering to boutique properties and experiences. Also, we launched the WeAssure programme wherein we had to bring in safety and clinical cleanliness and instil trust in the consumer," he shared.

On his part, Bakaya said that while they did what others did, they also made a few mistakes. "We had to let go almost 50 percent of our workforce to cut the cost. However, since the last three to four months, when business picked up and we wanted them back, many of them are not available. Another wrong thing we did was to drive down the cost to such an extent that the basic machinery and upkeep suffered. That is the lesson that we have learnt. On the bright side, we converted one of our hotels in Gurgaon into a full-fledged hospital for two months, and we saved a few lives," he said.

Different perspectives

Asking the hotels to look at tour operators in a different way, Mistry said, "Instead of individual tour operators, think of the 400 to 500 IATO members as an alternate

sales force and think of the business you can generate."

Reacting to the same, Chhatwal said, "The first thing is that we have to be united since this sector is very fragmented. Everyone, from tour operators, OTAs, direct businesses, and our own websites, cannot be replaced by each other. We must learn to co-exist and help each other, as we have always done. We need to continue this journey of collaboration and not blame each other or be judgemental. "

Bhatnagar added, "It is important to now analyse how and when we are marketing India. Despite the Incredible India campaign, how and what we are messaging is important. However, the narrative is not often very positive, and hence we need to focus on Ayurveda, wellness, yoga, and everything that started in India. There is a latent opportunity for India to become the wellness capital of the world. We need to actively discover new source markets and to see how to monetise marketing as well as to get more deliberate about digital. "

Bakaya also claimed that technology and the digital were the way forward. "The OTAs beat our loyalty programmes 100 to one. The new generation want instant gratification and want a deal when they are booking, and that too on their smartphones. If IATO can come up with an app, "the hotels will jump at the chance to work together," he claimed.

Taking the intermediate leap

When Mistry put forward the subject of hotels' going direct to customers, Anand claimed, "It has never been our intention to remove the intermediary."



Puneet Chhatwal
Managing Director and CEO
The Indian Hotels Company Limited



Anuraag Bhatnagar
COO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

”
India should be promoted as an all-season destination and we can do that by selling different parts of summer, also hotels can offer special rates
”

Brainstorming



Nakul Anand
Executive Director
ITC Hotels and Chairman FAITH



Ajay Bakaya
Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts

However, prudent business practise in revenue would always expect us to create our own website, and by not doing that, we wouldn't be doing justice to our shareholders. However, my advice for tour operators is to offer value-added services and curate the experience for a tourist, which is not available on the internet.

Marketing India together

Mistry pointed out that instead of marketing India together, all stakeholders are doing it separately. Speaking on the same, Anand said that to market India collectively, there is a need to sit together and see how the segments are changing, based on the data available. We need to use AI and data to collectively take a decision. We can form a taskforce, hire an agency to analyse the data, and based on that, we can prepare a marketing plan. Digitalisation is the only way forward as we need targeted and separate marketing for every location," he added.

Claiming that we need to do what we haven't done before, Bakaya suggested, "We can agree on two to three points that are important to us and collectively go to the government, as we cannot do marketing across the globe without India being part of it."

Year-round destination

Mistry agreed and said that a change is required and since the government has sanctioned crores of rupees for marketing, the industry can at least influence them to channelise it to the right place. "India should be promoted as an all-season destination and we can start doing that by selling different parts of summer wherein hotels can offer special rates and wonderful packages along with tour operators," he said.

Anand agreed that in the Gulf and Dubai, occupancy does not go down in the summer despite having temperatures higher than India. They have created activities and demand, which has been done by their government. The government of India must realise what an important role we play in the GDP of the country. Also, we must look at other segments that are immune to weather, one of which is wellness and medical tourism. Another major segment that is weatherproof is the business segment, which is endangered today. We can effectively target that segment and can get them to India by speaking in one language about how to make India safe," he claimed.

Bhatnagar also said that there is a shift towards wellness from all quarters. "We have seen the pivot happen towards wellness, large spaces and independent villas with plunge pools. The length of the stay has also increased, and consumer mindsets have shifted. Driven by domestic tourism, our resorts are at 120 to 140 per cent of pre-COVID levels, driven by domestic tourism," he said.

Hand in hand

Mistry claimed that tour operators need static rates as they need to quote six months in advance and asked the hotels for a promo code from the IATO. The idea was instantly approved by Chhatwal, who said, "We will work on a promo code for the IATO for our portfolio that gives members access to 230 hotels currently and hopefully to more than 300 hotels in the next few years." We have access through the IATO members to such a large potential base of room nights, and it is a small ask to give a rate. ♦

”

It is important to analyse how and when we market India. Despite the Incredible India campaign, how and what we message is also important

”

JOINING FORCES TO BOOST TOURISM

With tourism dependent on connectivity, it is vital for IATO members to work alongside Railways, Airlines and Cruiselines to make sure that they can not only better sell these products, but also boost businesses at both ends.



Panel discussion on 'Connectivity: New Frontiers'

Titled 'Connectivity: New Frontiers', this session had **Aashish Gupta**, Consulting CEO-FAITH as moderator and the panellists included **Rajiv Jalota**, Chairman, Mumbai Port Trust; **Rajiv Jain**, Additional General Manager (Tourism), Indian Railway Catering & Tourism Corporation (IRCTC); **Sanjay Kumar**, Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo; and **Raj Singh**, Chairman, Antara Luxury River Cruises.

Gupta stated that tourism is completely dependent on transportation and that the goal of the conversation was to determine which IATO member could work best on each vertical of transportation and that they were

looking forward to reviving their business.

Status check

Starting with cruises, Gupta asked about the status of the cruise industry currently, which could be a huge opportunity for India with a 700km coastline.

Jalota shared that Cruise tourism was really growing before COVID-19 and that 2019-20 was the peak year for Cruise tourism in India. "There were 4.67 lakh cruise passengers on 451 cruise calls, which was way beyond the 2.2 lakh passengers predicted in 2019-20 by a study. This included two international Cruise calls as well. While the market is reviving internationally, owing

”
Cruise tourism was really growing before COVID-19 and that 2019-20 was the peak year for Cruise tourism in India.
”

Brainstorming



Sanajay Kumar
Chief Strategy & Revenue Officer, IndiGo.

to COVID-19 concerns, India has not seen much growth. However, one domestic cruise started in Mumbai in September this year, which is going to Goa, Diu, Kochi, Lakshadweep, and the harbours. As of now, 40 cruise calls have happened with 80,000 passengers.

He believes that cruising has a bright future because India formulated the masterplan for cruise tourism, which is divided into three parts: ocean cruising, river cruising, and island and lighthouse tourism. By 2042 to 43, almost a growth of more than 10 to 12 times with 40 lakh cruise passengers is predicted, out of which over 20 lakh will be domestic cruise passengers. Domestic cruises have more potential from an infrastructure point of view. It would need smaller vessels and less infrastructural availability. For both international and domestic cruises, the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways (MoPSW), in collaboration with MOT, has focused on developing six ports as cruise destinations, including Mumbai, Goa, Mangalore, Kochi, Chennai, and Visakhapatnam, " he informed.

Domestic aviation at an all-time high

Giving an overall view of the aviation industry, Kumar shared that while COVID-19 resulted in a huge impact on aviation, the industry had recovered 70 per cent of pre-COVID-19 levels before the second wave, which saw numbers dip to 10 per cent of pre-COVID, and eventually go back to the almost 2019-20 levels by 2021-end. "Despite the negative news of the Omicron virus, we still continue to operate almost at pre-COVID levels. We have seen changing patterns in the marketplace over the last two

years. With metro traffic being largely dependent on corporates, we have seen growth in new markets, i.e., Tier II and III sectors. In the last three to four months, we have seen markets such as Kanpur, Bareilly, and Gwalior doing well, and we made progress by deploying our capacity there. A lot of domestic growth is visible, despite the postponement of international flights, "he said.

Still, Kumar claimed that India continues to be an underpenetrated market. "We believe that we need more than 2,000 planes in the next 10 years. IATO members can take huge advantage of the network growth coming out of the domestic market. There is a need to look at products around domestic travel, which would meet our business objectives together, "he asserted.

Going beyond railways

IRCTC is coming up with many innovative products and has come a long way by changing its perception as a tourism company instead of a platform to book train tickets. Jain revealed, "The IRCTC has gone into every area of tourism, whether it is cruises, airlines, railways, or land traffic. However, 30 to 35 per cent of our tourism revenue still comes from rail products. On a retail basis, we have some tie-ups and back-up quotes where confirmed tickets are available to those booking a tourist package. Airline traffic has grown, as around 38 to 40 per cent of our traffic comes from domestic air packages. We have tied up with Antara Luxury Cruises as well as other ports in Mumbai.

We are facilitating tourism by all modes of transport instead of just railways. " Despite the fact that he stated that they were open to working with agents and agencies

”
A lot of domestic growth is visible, despite the postponement of international flights
”

to sell packages and partner on a PPP model. We have also entered the budget hotel segment. Apart from the Maharaja Express and the Buddhist Express, we have also launched the Ramayana Circuit for 17 days. "

River cruising

Singh claimed that the potential of river cruising in India is immense, with over 110 rivers being designated as national waterways. "Many of these rivers are navigable, which means river cruise tourism can happen everywhere. The most important thing is that the ships must be made to suit the river's

vessels will be built. This would require facilities and ecosystem development, which would start with capacity building or human resource development. Both MoPSW and MOT are pitching in with adequate funds under Sagarmala. If IATO can give more ideas regarding locations and the kind of investment needed, this sector could pick up. We need to work as partners, as this is the right time," he suggested.

Partnerships galore

Kumar shared that during the pandemic they saw opportunities in many verticals, including domestic charters. "We have seen



Rajiv Jain
Additional General Manager (Tourism), Indian Railway
Catering & Tourism Corporation (IRCTC)



conditions. At Antara, we do domestic cruises to places such as the Sunderbans, colonial towns, and the like. Also, we will be operating cruises in Odisha for the first time as the government there is doing a lot. Hence, there are avenues for tour operators to book new cruises and destinations. We are also looking into combining river cruises with sea cruises. We have nine cruises and we can offer special rates and deals for IATO members," he offered.

Working in tandem

Jalota stated that new and large

people hiring big plains such as Airbus 320 and 321 for groups ranging from 10 to 50 pax. I think it is a new niche market not only in the domestic sector but also for nearby countries like Singapore, the UAE, and Maldives. Another segment for which we have developed connectivity is the religious tourism segment, and IATO members should look at destinations such as Tirupati, Prayagraj (Allahabad), or Banaras, and make packages around them for both foreign and domestic tourists. Also popular are domestic holiday charters, which are a great opportunity as well, like from

”
We will be operating cruises in Odisha for the first time as the government there is doing a lot
”

Brainstorming



Rajiv Jalota
Chairman, Mumbai Port Trust



Delhi or Mumbai to Port Blair. We can think through a strategy to market and sell such packages together. There is huge potential in the Indian domestic tourism market."

Affiliate marketing

Jain claimed that the IRCTC is an old PSU that started with only ₹ 5 crore as capital and today has a net worth of over ₹ 1,400 crore in two decades. "The IATO and its members can also partner with us since we sell our packages not only via direct sales team or online, but we are open to agency-oriented businesses too. Depending on the product, we charge a travel agency commission ranging from two to seven percent. It's a simple process and doesn't take much time. Within a week, an agent can come on board. Right from air package, rail package, or road package, we have provision for agency commission," he said.

Also, he added that they are open to even DMC-kind of business since they are planning around 100 special trains, especially for religious tours or under the Bharat Darshan initiative. "We have introduced affiliate marketing,

which only started around six to eight months ago, but we already have more than 1,500 affiliates on board who are spreading word of mouth and our packages have started to sell," he shared.

Creating awareness

Singh advised that if the IATO members could talk to their overseas partners about river cruising of international standards being available in India, it could create the right buzz about the products they have. "Once that is done, we can help you out with the kind of offerings we have. We will be glad to do a session with the IATO members to educate them on river cruise potential and the places where it is done," he said.

Summing up, Gupta said, "We need to work together and only then can we look at a long-term vision different from online modelling, where customers look for instant gratification." I believe that this is the period of hibernation and that after this, IATO members need to look at reskilling and upgradation to change their strategy, scale, and scope with better partnerships and products." ♦

”
The IRCTC is an old PSU that started with only ₹ 5 crore as capital and today has a net worth of over ₹ 1,400 crore in two decades
”

GOING BEYOND SEIS

SEIS has been the biggest bone of contention throughout the year between tour operators and the government. However, after a lot of persistence, industry got its SEIS dues, although at a much lower rate than expected. A session titled 'SEIS: New Policy under FTP' delved deeper into the issue.



Session discussion on SEIS and the way forward

Discussing SEIS and the way forward, **Pronab Sarkar**, Immediate Past President, IATO, led the session and the panellists included **CA. Sunil H. Talati**, Chairman, Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC), **Raj Muthuraj**, Additional DG, Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), **Dr. Abhay Sinha**, Director General, (SEPC), and **Bipin Sapra**, Partner, Ernst & Young LLP.

Sarkar claimed that they had to wait a year to get an OK from the finance ministry on getting SEIS since they had to run from door-to-door to get it signed by the Finance Ministry. "It would not have been possible without the help of the Commerce Ministry and SEPC."

All about SEIS

Talati shared that SEIS for the fiscal year 2019-20 was delayed owing to the pandemic, the situation, and the thought process of the government. "At the recent SEPC conclave in

Delhi, **Piyush Goyal**, Minister of Commerce and Industry, made it clear that nowadays, businesses and services cannot survive and continue doing business purely on government incentives; they need to stand on their own. Therefore, he is mulling that SEIS should be discontinued and has already announced not to give SEIS for 2020-21 and 2021-22. This is a big jolt for exporters because this incentive is always considered part of the cost or profit. The entire cost is based on the surplus coming from the incentive. Now if that was discontinued, there would be a disincentive and the cost would be higher."

At SEPC, he revealed that they are requesting all stakeholders, particularly the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), to make a representation to the Union Finance Minister for the same. "I would urge the IATO to also make a representation to the Union Ministry of Commerce and to the

”
Nowadays, businesses and services cannot survive and continue doing business purely on government incentives; they need to stand on their own
 ”

Brainstorming



Dr. Abhay Sinha
Director General, (SEPC)

PMO that incentives to service exporters at any cost cannot be discontinued since this incentive would increase exports." The government wants us to reach the target of 10 trillion dollars by 2030. On one hand, they want exports to increase from 55 per cent to 59 per cent of GDP growth, and on the other hand, if they discontinue this, it would not be a welcome suggestion," stressed Talati.

Secondly, he said that SEPC is working hard and is making strong representation to the government with regard to this incentive. He added, "Not only large tour operators, but medium and small tour operators should also become members of SEPC." We have met the Union Commerce

that travel and tourism are integral parts of the 14 service sectors for which we are mandated to promote exports. SEIS has come late and has come with a cap of ₹ 5 crore. Even before the announcement of the notification about the continuity of SEIS, the Ministry of Commerce wanted an alternative scheme for the upcoming foreign trade policy. SEPC conducted a study on the basis of the Remission on Duties and Taxes on Exports Policy (RoDTEP) to incentivise the industry. The study is called "Duty Remittance of Export Services Policy (DRESS), which is still under consideration."

At the same time, he revealed, "There is a suggestion to have



Minister, we have met Niti Aayog, and we have requested DGFT to also make a presentation. I believe that for an increase in exports, good coordination is needed between RBI, the Ministry of Commerce and DGFT. "

Sarkar claimed that tourism in India would not increase without the hand-holding of the government. If the incentives are not given, we cannot compete with the neighbouring countries. We have to add value to our product. Therefore, SEIS needs to continue. "

Looking for alternatives
Sinha shared his presentation focused on the benefits for tour operators beyond SEIS. Later, speaking on the same, he shared

a customised or sector-specific scheme for incentivisation. Now, the question is: Are we only looking at incentivising the exports done, or the entire value chain of the export, which requires hand-holding at various stages to make them competitive and finally export them? This is being debated and we are trying to brainstorm if we can have certain schemes for the exports done to reward the exporters and certain schemes for the entire journey towards making an export possible. There are already a few schemes by the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Tourism. Today, SEPC got a chance to create awareness about those schemes also.

”
For an increase in exports, good coordination is needed between RBI, the Ministry of Commerce and DGFT
”

He added, "We are going to conduct a series of brainstorming sessions on the alternative schemes. Though we have submitted DRESS, we still look forward to having more ideas and trying to incorporate them as a part of the process in the upcoming foreign trade policy."

Multiple taxation should be addressed

Sapra revealed that, mandated by SEPC, Ernst & Young prepared a report, which was submitted by SEPC to the ministry of Commerce, which is called DRESS, aimed at refunding taxes already paid back on services. Whenever the new foreign trade policy is announced (in two to three months), our endeavour is to create a scheme that would replicate SEIS in terms of the benefits. The gist of DRESS is that a tour consists of hotel booking, local transport, sightseeing, and a profit margin. There are certain components of GST already embedded into that, including tax on five-star hotels at 18 per cent. Also, when a tour operator sells a package, he charges 5 per cent. A nominal calculation of that would give a tax structure of 12 to 14 percent, which is getting embedded into the tour operator services that are being exported. Hence, DRESS addresses that the incentive scheme should have a percentage that is linked to the tax cost that is getting embedded into the service, and we have recommended that it be on the basis of that," he explained.

Sarkar said that there is a cascading effect, due to which we are suffering and need support from the government. "This needs to be looked into, and we must reduce double taxation and remove the cascading effect." Also, as per government policy, the taxes should not be exported and we should get this benefit in our favour," he claimed.

On his part, Muthuraj also agreed that export is an important area for us in services. "In the current period, our exports have been valued at US \$125 billion, which is an increase of about 18 per cent. SEIS is the continuation of a previous scheme with a change in nomenclature. So the government has notified whatever services they thought to have potential from 2014-2015. It was notified the next year as well, and the last notification was in September. All areas of the tourism sector are tackled well, including hotels, restaurants, tour guides, and travel agents. However, now there is an issue of budget, and now for all other cases from earlier periods as well, they are fixing a time limit. There is an amendment to our foreign trade policy. They fixed the time limit up to December 31, 2021 only," he revealed. He urged everyone to submit any claims pending. For any issue, he asked them to take it up with their concerned regional authority of DGFT.

Sarkar added that owing to the time limit, many of the big operators were unable to upload their claims. It was a hurdle and hence during the questions, problems regarding the same were addressed and answered by Muthuraj.

Another point Sarkar raised was that the scrips are being released to people, but they can't sell them because of restrictions from the finance ministry. Hence, brokers are approaching them to buy in advance at a lower price, which is a loss to the actual beneficiary. Therefore, it is important to look into these things since they have not been released for the last three weeks, which is creating a hurdle," he concluded. ♦



CA. Sunil H. Talati
Chairman, Services Export Promotion Council (SEPC)

”
As per government policy, the taxes should not be exported and we should get this benefit in our favour
”

Brainstorming



Brainstorming



ALL ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY

Being responsible in tourism is everybody's prerogative, and the session 'Responsible Tourism' addressed why sustainability is a must to move forward.



Panel discussion on Responsible tourism

”
The responsibility
of bringing
about sustainable
practices in
tourism lies with
the leaders
of the industry
”

A dedicated session on responsible tourism was conducted, moderated by **Anjuna Dhir**, Executive Director, Responsible Tourism Society of India (RTSOI), and the speakers included **SK Srivastava**, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest & Chief Wildlife Warden Office; **Michael Dominic**, CEO, CGH Earth; **Rakesh Mathur**, President, RTSOI; and **Anirudh Chaoji**, Honorary Treasurer, RTSOI.

Responsible tourism every day

Rakesh Mathur started the discussion by claiming that sustainability is not a long-term aim but has to be a perpetual aim as long as the world exists.

"When we think of future generations, we need to think that Mother Earth has to sustain us. Secondly, luxury hotels are large producers of garbage and affluence, and they are high consumers of energy. Thus, the responsibility of bringing about sustainable practices in tourism lies with the leaders of the industry," he said.

He pointed out, "Almost 70 per cent of the industry is in the uncontrolled and unorganised sector. They have no sensitisation. We need to do that both in the organised sector and the unorganised sector. There is a need for us to calculate carrying capacities for every state."

Embracing the locals

Dominic gave a glimpse of how CGH Earth started and how responsibility is part of their DNA. The only way the tourism industry can respond to any environmental crisis through responsible tourism. In 1988, we opened on Bangaram Island in Lakshadweep. We learned that the environment was a primary motive, and all our decisions are based on how we protect the environment. When we were there, one of the terms of the contract was that we had to employ 80 per cent of locals. The big learning was that their service came from the heart. This evolved into our DNA of making CGH Earth and creating our core values. The logistics in Lakshadweep were quite erratic, including irregular flights and ships. We had to depend on the local population for our supplies, which created a symbiotic relationship between the local population and the hotel, resulting in a win-win situation for both. They became major stakeholders, and today, tourism is an important part of their lives.

With this learning, Dominic shared, they came to mainland India. "We started our first property, Spice Village in Kerala, and it was a paradigm shift from traditional hospitality. We realised that it was the experience that made people come back. In short, responsible tourism is about building better places for people to live in and better places to visit. "

When asked if sustainability pays, he said, "Today, CGH is a successful model because sustainable and responsible tourism pays. It gave us the impetus or the visibility because

we are in that space of responsible tourism. Otherwise, I am sure we would have been just another hotel and not noticed. Today, we are internationally known for our responsibility and sustainability."

Move past the tiger

Being everything from a naturalist to a travel service provider and working with the forest department in Tadoba, Chaoji claimed that there was a need to sensitise our travellers. When you send people to Ladakh, tell them what high-altitude sickness is. I request that instead of telling customers to go see a tiger, tour operators should tell them to see the jungle and experience it."

Apart from sensitising, Chaoji said that there is a need to educate the tourists, which is what the Wildlife SOS Organisation and "RTSOI are trying to do now. One needs to tell the tourists what they need to do and what they need not to do. People go to Ladakh and throw chocolate wrappers, which are eaten by marmots, sambar deer, or spotted deer. We need to work on waste management," he said.

He said that there is a need to support a responsible tourism industry that employs local communities. While any other national park must have two to three gates with zones inside, Tadoba has 20 gates and activities, all manned by locals. The gypsies used for safari, are owned by the community. The buffer gates are also manned by them, and they collect the money. We trust them and we do not have forest guards because we believe in the empowerment of locals. "Our guides are trained to give you a jungle experience and not just a tiger sighting," he claimed.



Rakesh Mathur
President, RTSOI.

”
**Responsible
tourism is about
building better
places for people
to live in and
better places
to visit**
”

Brainstorming



Responsibility decoded

Dhir suggested, "We probably need to change what we are saying to our customers, because it is possible to change public discourse." Responsible tourism means it is all our individual responsibility to ensure that our businesses are sustainable. While we make money, it is our individual responsibility to be sustainable economically, environmentally, and socio-culturally. We had to change our name from the Ecotourism Society of India to the Responsible Tourism Society of India because, for 10 years, we struggled with the industry, which told us that ecotourism is only for those coming from jungles and not cities. However, it is for all of us, and hence we changed the name. When we say responsible tourism, we are not negating ecotourism."

Green Gujarat

Srivastava revealed that a majority of ecotourism sites in Gujarat are owned by the forest department. We have problems

with the rules as well as quotes. Also, even if we want to be magnanimous and invite more tourists, people file PIL, and it is difficult to promote it to a large extent. We are doing eco-tourism in a big way. Yes, there is a lot of scope for improvement, and we are working on that. We have an ecotourism policy. There are three levels of bodies, and all of these sites are managed by the locals, who collect fees, provide food, and take care of hospitality. It was envisaged in our policy that there would be a board at state level. We are working on that and also on a Gujarat eco-tourism board," he said.

He added, "Promoting eco-tourism is also for the stakeholders as well – citizens and tour operators. The forest department or the local community cannot market it or bring customers in the same way that tour operators can. Third is the community, because those who live around forests bring the concept of eco-sensitive zone, which results in the stopping

”
Responsible tourism means it is all our individual responsibility to ensure that our businesses are sustainable
”

of industrial activity. Hence, ecotourism brings in jobs as well. "

He shared, "Every person should understand the damage done to the environment and how we can control it so as to give a better future to our kids." In Gujarat, there is a scheme for nature education, wherein we conduct nature education camps. In these camps, we target kids of a certain age who are sensitised in a 24-hour camp. Since these are tented

RTSOI achievements

Claiming that sustainable and responsible tourism is not rocket science, Mathur suggested, "It is changing the way we function." I think we have to think differently, and be more proactive. Let us change our own habits. Therefore, we have been advocating that sustainability and being a responsible citizen should be an interactive subject in every school in India. The government should enforce



accommodations for 50 to 60 people, we are thinking of using these sites as potential ones for group tourism. We are thinking of offering these sites to tour operators on a payment basis. We expect that just the way we bring kids and impart nature and education, tour operators can also bring kids from private schools."

Dhir agreed to accept this offer on behalf of the industry.

laws or behavioural ways or codes of conduct in tourist destinations through traffic wardens or tourist wardens who fine or punish even if someone spits. "

Mathur listed out what they have been doing and requested the industry to join them, claiming that they would get a lot of intangible returns. "We want you to be a part of this journey," he concluded. ❖

”
We expect that just the way we bring kids and impart nature and education, tour operators can also bring kids from private schools
”

MOVING TO A DIGITAL FUTURE

Digitalisation and automation are the way forward, both for the government to plan targeted campaigns and for tour operators to curate personalised itineraries and offer packages through digital tools without having to exceed costs.



Business session on 'Automation and Digital Marketing'

”
Our customers are using online tools to book holidays; unless we upgrade ourselves, it will be impossible to survive in the new business ecosystem
”

COVID-19 has made the world and businesses go online, which has made digital marketing a must in the last year. The session 'Automation and Digital Marketing' was moderated by **Ravi Gosain**, Vice President, IATO and the speakers included **Rakesh Kumar Verma**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; **Hemant Mediratta**, Chief Advisor, The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts.

Seema Gupta, former Professor of Digital Marketing, IIM Ahmedabad and **Syed A. Asim**, Director, DeBox Global.

Starting the conversation, Gosain said that the COVID-19 lockdown has taught us to live in a digital world for our survival. "Our customers are using online tools to book their holidays, and unless we upgrade ourselves, it will be impossible for us to survive in the new business ecosystem," he said.

All about digital marketing

Since tourism, as part of the service industry, is dependent on digital marketing and online publishing content to generate leads, Gupta, when asked how to stand out amidst growing competition online, said, "The good thing about digital

marketing is that it creates a level playing field. To move forward, we should not have any fear of technology. Digital marketing does not require a perfect blueprint. You just need to start the journey, have a digital presence, and your website will act like an online brochure. All one needs is a decent website that is SEO optimised so that people can discover you when they have a need for travel or tourism. The good thing about digital marketing is that it can lead to an entire conversion. It completes the loop – right from creating visibility, generating leads, and converting them through email marketing and continuous lead nurturing.



Seema Gupta, Ex-Professor of Digital Marketing, IIM Ahmedabad

She also discussed Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and claimed that social media causes people to generate pleasure hormones. When we see a message being repeated again and again, familiarity will lead to liking, and liking will lead to purchase. "Social media allows you to put your brand in front of people at a low cost, and it will allow you to engage and use influencers," she claimed.

Packaging Brand India

The Ministry of Tourism has taken a lot of digital initiatives to not only build brand India but

also promote it in the right way. Sharing details, Verma said, "We used this opportunity (COVID-19) to rethink and recalibrate ourselves. Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave us the right direction that our portal should be one of the top tourism portals in the world. By looking at how 10 important countries in the world are promoting their destinations, we benchmarked 10 parameters and discovered the gaps. We have a strategy to revamp our digital platform, looking at content services and outreach. Content is the most important piece in our digital marketing. "

He revealed that they now have three partners to support them



Hemant Mediratta
Chief Advisor, The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts

in digital marketing. One is the lead agency, which will give us the branding, the design, and the marketing using all the multiple digital channels that we have. Then there is the technology company, which will provide support at the back-end. The third agency will be a production agency, which will support us in terms of content. We are working with the states and we will partner with industry to have an automated content management system. Thus, anyone and everyone can contribute to the content, which can lead to the marketing of India as a destination, added Verma.

”
Social media allows you to put your brand in front of people at a low cost, and it will allow you to engage and use influencers
”

Brainstorming



Rakesh Kumar Verma
Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism,
Government of India

He shared, "We are trying to put a CRM in place by profiling the visitors, followed by personalisation and targeting. The tools today allow you not just to do mass marketing, but be selective and customisable. We have a powerful platform called the Adobe platform that allows for hyper-personalisation, and the CRM assists us in compiling and ensuring that we are effective and targeted. We are also repurposing our content and using SEO to be at the top of the search results. Our target is to launch our new web portal by May 2022 with this new set of partners and with a new strategy and approach. We hope we will be able to achieve that. "

Another initiative, said Verma, is the digitalisation of tourism as a sector. Unless all interrelated industries – the destination, the attraction, everything gets digitalised, the impact may not be as good as it could be. Hence, the digital tourism mission will look at four aspects. First is to benefit from India's status as a leader in the digital world. Second is tourism domain data, wherein a unified interface will be developed and then the data will be made available to everyone, and they can use it for their own marketing, research, or planning needs. We will use a system on top of it, which is largely driven by the private sector. Whether someone wants to build solutions, portals, or aggregate platforms, the mission will enable all this digitalisation of the tourism sector in a big way. Our timeframe is two to three years, and it would go a long way in strengthening the sector," he added.

Beyond traditional marketing

When asked if traditional marketing is fading away,

Mediratta said, "Whether it is traditional marketing or digital marketing, the fundamentals remain the same." However, it is important to know who your audience is, what their preferences are, what you want to communicate, and what the channel is through which you need to communicate. I agree that digital is at the forefront, especially when you appeal to a younger audience. However, there is still a market for traditional marketing and channels. "

Explaining the difference between traditional and digital marketing tools, he said, "When you use a traditional marketing tool, it is not dynamic; you cannot change it; you cannot be in the flow; and you cannot interact." It is usually one way of communication; there is poor management and a lot of wastage since even those who cannot afford it are also seeing it. In digital, it is the opposite. It is very focused and personalised; you can pinpoint and even measure it. Whatever gets measured these days, you get more bang for your buck. "'

Automation is key

Starting his views on digital marketing, Asim said, "Digital marketing requires a strong strategy. We need a strategy where we brand India as more safe than beautiful, because many countries are treated as one of the safest places just because they have branded their country and talked about that country as a safe country repeatedly. "

Coming to automation, he shared, "We need to look if technology is driving our business or if we are driving the technology. We must ensure that the way we give targets to our sales and operations, we also give targets for IT as well.

”
Unless all interrelated industries – the destination, the attraction, everything gets digitalised, the impact may not be as good as it could be
”



Today, emails can be sent with a pre-decided template, making our people's work easier. The next level is where those sitting in the USA, the UK, or anywhere else could see a property/destination through virtual reality. This way, they would be able to gauge what the tours we can offer are and what experience they can expect. Hence, they will come well prepared to take the full tour. It could be like a trailer for a movie. "

He then elaborated on how they face an issue in terms of convincing people. Once people burn their fingers somewhere and they mistrust technology, they feel that it does not help. Then we have to explain to them that technology definitely helps, but it must be aligned with the business. One must give targets to technology and share problems that need to be solved, he shared.

Asim claimed that COVID-19 has given us the choice to think again and see if we can implement technology in the right way, giving technology a target reduction in operation costs.

Direct benefit

On being asked regarding how this digital mission by the government can benefit tour operators directly, Verma said, "We will create policies and initiatives, one for market development assistance (MDA) and the second for capacity building and digital skills." The third is that a lot of data is being put into a digital asset and it will allow the trade access to all the marketing material, allowing them to use it without investing in creating it. I request the industry to share their content and materials so that we can also utilise them as part of the overall Incredible India. These are some of the ways in which we are going to help the industry with digital marketing and digitalisation.

He further requested that the industry, to keep circulating whatever they pass on to the IATO, to all the members and the larger body of the industry, as this would greatly help them in restructuring the website. ❖



Syed A. Asim
Director, DeBox Global

”
We will create policies and initiatives, one for market development assistance (MDA) and the second for capacity building and digital skills
”

Brainstorming



Brainstorming



CAMARADERIE IS KEY

Working hand in hand is the key to moving forward, and it is necessary to make your presence felt outside India while keeping a united front.



Panel discussion on 'Preparedness under the New Normal'

”
Travel and tourism
have found important
place for themselves
globally. It has to
happen on a regular
basis, and we can't
live without it
”

The session 'Preparedness under the New Normal' had **SanJeet**, Director, DDP Publications, as the moderator and the panellists included **Rupinder Brar**, Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; **Parveen Chander Kumar**, Senior Vice President-S&M, IHCL; and **Harish Mathur**, Executive Committee Member, IATO.

Setting the stage for discussion, SanJeet said that due to COVID-19, a lot has changed in the tourism industry, including business models. "Travel and tourism have found an important place for themselves across the world. It has to happen on a regular basis, and we cannot

live without it. This is where preparedness is needed," he said.

Planning Preparedness

While Brar said that they were taking many steps towards readiness, Kumar said the idea was to get international tourists back. He stated that he was planning on how to instil trust and collaborate with all three partners—government, hotels, and IATO—as well as other sectors of the tourism industry.

Giving the perspective of tour operators, Mathur said that after COVID-19, they went through a tsunami of emotions. "It started with denial of the situation, which led to depression for many.

However, I believe that MOT has done its best in trying to revive us. There was ample opportunity to relook at all our strategies. 'Dekho Apna Desh' was a learning process. We need to regroup, re-strategise, and relook."

Building confidence

Speaking about international travel, Sanjeet asked Brar regarding confidence-building measures being taken up by the ministry. Brar said, "Currently, steps are being taken across the world, but it is time to be more strategic. We know travel is going to restart and we are trying to develop a campaign. We discussed with some stakeholders what kind of messaging India needs to create. The content is ready and it has been previewed by some stakeholders."

She revealed that the messaging was going to be both direct and indirect. "Through discussions, we decided that the campaign should not only be safety-based but also theme-based. Our content will come subtly. We will inform the traveller that Indians have been vaccinated as a clear and loud message. The other message will be that our hotels, cabs, airports, and tour operators are ready to welcome tourists as the country is safe to travel in."

Brar said the campaign was ready and the discussions with the channels were done. "We are only waiting to decide the right day for the launch. Initially, we will go for a soft launch digitally and say that India is ready to welcome you back," she added. The campaign was to be launched on January 1, 2022, but now it has been delayed. She explained. "With the UK, USA, Germany, and France, which are our large source markets,

shutting down, it might not be the right time," she explained.

On the suggestion of the industry, Brar said there is a need to have a large B2B event. "That is where India drives its traffic from, and that communication and connectivity are needed," she claimed.

Get ready hotels

When asked about steps being taken to get the tourists back, Kumar shared that the first step was to create the right infrastructure. "We made sure all the safety protocols were in place, including all the backend work. Right from the vaccination of our employees to the safety protocol and contactless technology, everything was done in the first year. The second step is to communicate with your target audience that you are ready and safe. For this, we have curated some campaigns for the market. First, we came up with a homecoming offer in November; the first people likely to come to India are from the Indian diaspora. Once they start coming in, they will also bring in others. The next step was to make an itinerary-based offer, which will probably be by March."

However, he feels that India has its own niche. "Our team is in touch with all our key operators in international markets. Since the web of tourism, from how it used to operate earlier, has been disrupted, we need to reconnect with people and do it together. We are planning to launch our campaign, and we have had outreach programmes going on for the last six months. We also had bookings from March to April. Unfortunately, we have seen a lot of cancellations in the



Rupinder Brar
Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism,
Government of India;

”
We are planning to launch our campaign, and we have had outreach programmes going on for the last six months
”

last two weeks. However, things are not as bad as they appear. We had private jets coming in and the series started getting booked. There was a lot of positivity in that market," he said.

Prepared to welcome

However, how ready are tour operators to welcome international travellers, and are they also working towards confidence-building? In reply, Mathur said, "We have survived and have been forced to look and relook at our markets.

Those looking at Germany, the US or France earlier are now looking at the Middle East, Japan, Russia, and Ukraine. In fact, all the big, middle, or small tour operators are in the same boat and need to relook at the business from a new starting point. Also, IATO is helping them by generating activity reports in terms of news and filtering relevant news. This is unprecedented. We can only be supported by MOT, airlines and hoteliers," he said.

He claimed that all tour operators were ready and knew what they needed to do. "Since this is the era of competition, everybody has got their trump card up their sleeves. I can guarantee that they have their planned marketing campaign ready."

Strategy ahead

SanJeet claimed that there are travellers beyond NRIs who would want to come and visit India, and to attract those tourists, there must be strategies in place ranging from focusing on certain pockets for promotion, a particular media, a B2B show, or even a roadshow.

Brar said, "The initial thought is social media. However, a dialogue between all three segments – the government, hotels, and tour operators – is crucial. Hence, roadshows also need to happen. Thus, we have started planning some of the roadshows, and we hope that in the first quarter, a good roadshow will be coming up."

When it comes to business, she said, "We will need to work with the tour operators more closely to create roadshows and go back to all the travel marts in an aggressive manner."

Synergy is needed

SanJeet said that when the government is taking so many initiatives and spending money, then the private sector and tour operators can join hands as well in promoting the country with a call to action and contacts mentioned in every communication, whether direct or indirect.

Although IHCL is working with the MOT, Sharing details, Kumar said, "All the partners, including the airlines, can work together and unleash the potential." In fact, we used 'Dekho Apna Desh' as a campaign and generated huge traction, which also led to conversion. When tourism starts, there will be two or three key things that attract international tourists – firstly, value-driven tourism; second, key themes such as nature, history, experiential, yoga and health; and third, it will be the youngsters who are willing to travel everywhere without fear."

Brar agreed and said that they are working with private players and are putting a lot

”
All the big, middle, or small tour operators are in the same boat and need to relook at the business from a new starting point
”



Brainstorming session on 'Preparedness under the New Normal'

of private content on the site. "We are also working with the heritage association. We would be happy to work with the trade because there must be a synergy. I am nothing without trade, and tourism is all about it. I would encourage everyone to come and work with us," she claimed.

When asked about what the tour operators are looking at, Mathur said, "We are already holding hands with the government. Also, we are re-strategising ourselves and looking at new ideas, new markets, new developments, and new themes."

Brar added, "We must use this opportunity to come out of our comfort zones and stop selling and reselling the same few things, since we have invested a lot in large infrastructure. Many other destinations have opened up in terms of air travel and highways among others."

Kumar, for his part, said that since people have become increasingly technology-savvy, everyone can work together and create an infrastructure where the call to action gets generated on our websites. "The Ministry of Tourism website can help to host all the experiences and, towards the end, give a list of hotels, travel and tour operators and the airlines from which people can have the

option to choose. It will be a game changer," he said.

A collaborative future

Kumar, on working together with the tour operators and on asking about a single rate for tour operators and OTAs, said, "Taking forward the conversation where IATO wanted a special code from IHCL, I am happy to announce that we have made that and by next week you will get the concept for it." This shows that this is a long-term relationship that needs to be nurtured. "Regarding cancellation policies and other things, the way we have been doing work in the past will be changed. We will have to look at different policies for groups and individuals."

Mathur said that with everyone working together, the future looks bright. Kumar added, "We should continue working together and keep reinventing ourselves. We must look at what the customer is saying. It is also imperative to use the technology for our businesses," he said.

Brar concluded by saying that the future is bright and lies in three things: the product, the process, and promotion. "Hence, join hands and make sure that the Incredible India is more incredible," she said. ❖

”
Taking forward the conversation where IATO wanted a special code from IHCL, I am happy to announce that we have made that
”

THE GRAND WRAP-UP

The valedictory session of the convention saw in attendance senior members from the Ministry of Tourism as well as Gujarat Tourism, apart from the who's who of hospitality and trade.



Concluding Valedictory session

”
We will compile all of the suggestions from the convention's deliberations and share them with appropriate bodies in order to move them forward
”

The 36th IATO Annual Convention closed by recording around 740 attendees in three days. **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, welcomed the delegates and thanked everyone for their attendance. He stated that they will compile all of the suggestions from the convention's deliberations and share them with the appropriate bodies in order to move them forward. We appreciate the support given by MOT for taking up the issue with the Home Ministry on the opening of e-Visa and the five lakh free tourist visas. As requested to the ministry, free visa validity should be extended

till March 31, 2023. Also, we have requested that the visa be valid for multiple entries so that tourists who wish to visit neighbouring countries along with India can travel easily. We now request that international flight operations, which were announced to be resumed on December 15, 2021 but have been further extended till January 31, 2022, be reconsidered and normal flight operations should be resumed so that there are sufficient flights and airfare costs are brought down. We will send our recommendations to the MOT and Gujarat Tourism soon. "

In summing up, **Rajnish Kaistha**,



Honorary Secretary, IATO and Officiating Chairman, highlighted a few points that needed immediate attention. "The IATO will consolidate and send a detailed note to the Ministry of Tourism, Gujarat Tourism and other concerned ministries as to how we can market brand India and create a 'Road to Recovery' for inbound tourism. We need to make a strategy for overseas marketing by making our India Tourism offices more active and also through electronic, social and print media to send a message to the world that it is safe to travel to India and we are whole-heartedly ready to receive them," he said.

He added, "Till the time inbound tourism re-starts, the centre and state governments should plan to financially support the inbound tour operators." In our last meeting with **Rakesh Kumar Verma**, Additional Secretary, MOT, we requested him to consider a 50 per cent subsidy to IATO members for participation in FITUR 2022, as well as in other overseas travel marts such as ITB Berlin, WTM London, and Top Resa, among others. In the new Foreign Trade Policy 2021-26,

the interests of tour operators and other tourism industry stakeholders are important, and I request our ministry to support us in the above. We have requested the Ministry of Finance to withdraw the levy of TCS on foreign tourists as they are not liable to pay income tax and do not have a PAN card. This is under the favourable consideration of the Ministry of Finance. "

Rakesh Verma said that at MOT, they are looking at the post-pandemic scenario. "Many thoughts have been deliberated during the convention, and they will give us some policy initiatives. As we consider how to develop tourism, I believe it is an opportunity to reconsider many fundamental issues that we are attempting to address in our policy – a little ambitious, but I think that is what is required."

Sharing details about the missions of the draft tourism policy, Verma shared, "The first thing we are setting up in the policy is the Green Tourism Mission, which focuses on sustainability and responsibility, which is also one of the lessons from the pandemic." The idea is

”
We have requested Finance Ministry to withdraw the TCS on foreign tourists as they are not liable to pay income tax and don't have PAN card
”



to set that agenda at the national level. There are a lot of successes in the states, and that can give our tourism sector a new look. Hon'able Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** has committed to COP 26. We have got some targets to fulfil, and unless the tourism sector, being a big sector, takes leadership in sustainability and responsible tourism, we will not be able to achieve them.

The second mission is digital tourism, which can open up new opportunities for the tourism sector. "It can enhance the competitiveness of the tourism sector and make us all more productive. The third mission is skilling in the tourism and hospitality sectors. We talk about a 12 per cent contribution in employment to the tourism sector, but at the apex level, we need to have a strategy for skill development within the sector for the two sectors. Hence, even while the ministry of skill is doing something, MOT has to

spearhead this mission in a bid to strengthen the contribution of the tourism sector to our economy and employment. Destination management is another aspect where we are lacking. If you look at our practises in the country, we do not have a well-institutionalised structure. Hence, destination management is another priority we are looking at. We are thinking of strengthening our institutional framework and laying down something for the country. And the fifth mission is to support the MSMEs in tourism and hospitality and address the challenges being faced by small and medium groups. We need to provide support, nurture, and mentor them. Hence, these are the five broad missions as part of the new policy. We will be sending the draft policy to IATO also and seek feedback and take it forward," he elucidated.

Hareet Shukla, Secretary Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation & Pilgrimage,

”
We are sure the planning being done by the ministry for overseas promotion will kick-start once the situation permits
”

Marketing Innovation Competition Awards

- ❖ Best Digital Marketing by Tour Operator - **Razdan Holidays**
- ❖ Best Brochure by Tour Operator - **Skyway International Travels**
- ❖ Best Digital Marketing by Hotel - **The Leela Gandhinagar**
- ❖ Best Brochure by Hotel - **ITC Hotels**
- ❖ Best Poster by State Government - **Karnataka Tourism**
- ❖ Best Brochure by State Government - **Uttar Pradesh Tourism**
- ❖ Best Digital Marketing by State Government - **Madhya Pradesh Tourism**
- ❖ Best booth - **Gujarat Tourism**



Randhir Singh Vaghela
Co-Chairman of the 36th IATO
Convention and Chapter Chair of Gujarat

Government of Gujarat, shared that having the IATO Convention in Gujarat was a fulfilling journey. He told IATO members, "We are waiting for all the suggestions that will come from the stakeholders." I think you are the most important stakeholders for us, and your suggestions matter a lot. We will do whatever is possible to implement in the state of Gujarat. Having the IATO Convention in Gujarat will not only benefit the state in particular, but the tourism sector in general."

Randhir Singh Vaghela, Co-Chairman of the 36th IATO Convention and Chapter Chair of Gujarat, gave the vote of thanks. "Our thanks to **Rakesh Kumar Verma** and we are sure the planning being done by the ministry for overseas promotion will kick-start once the situation permits and we will re-start our business. I would also like to thank **Rupinder Brar**. The insights given by you during the session and

presentation enlightened us about the ministry's plan for the Road to Recovery."

He also thanked **Hareet Shukla**, **Jenu Devan**, and **Nirav Munshi** for their help in planning and executing the convention successfully at The Leela, Gandhinagar, Gujarat. "We had 11 more states that supported us." I would like to thank The Leela Gandhinagar, the venue of our convention, for the hospitality that has been extended to us by providing the venue, accommodation, and the lavish food," he said, and also thanked the Fortune Inn Haveli and the Grand Mercure for providing accommodation for the delegates. "Thanks to all the speakers for joining us and sharing their knowledge with the members. This will help our members to motivate them during this difficult times when tourism needs encouragement," he concluded. ❖

”
The planning being done by the ministry for overseas promotion will kick-start once the situation permits and we will re-start our business
 ”

Moments

EXPLORING BEST OF GUJARAT

The post tours of the 36th IATO Annual Convention saw members discover the various new and old destinations in the state of Gujarat. From new scenic sites to popular religious locations, members bonded while exploring the highlights in the state of Gujarat.



Moments



Moments





