**MICE Tourism in India**

**Success Story, Yet Many Snags**

MICE in India is going places, literally! From the scenic backwaters of Kumarakom to the pink city of Jaipur, the business has clearly gone beyond solely metros to tier II cities like Agra, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Goa and Kochi.

There is a desire to move away from the conventional, so as to bring a new definition to ‘business with pleasure’. However, the question is: are we doing enough to find an important spot on the global MICE map? Here we talk to some key players in the industry and explore the prevailing trends and challenges:

Naveen Rizvi  
Vice President- India & Business Head-TUI

**Hot Trends**

With the continual process of upgrading the MICE facilities in the country, we are now better equipped to bid for international conferences. There are multiple plans on the anvil for more world-class convention centers, airports that contest with the best in the world and efforts to team up with the famous Indian hospitality. Moreover, new hotels are being built in Pune, Bangalore, Delhi, Chennai, etc which are ready to cater to all the needs of the Meetings industry. This has also led to increased rotation of national conferences to cities such as Pune, Kochi, Lavasa and Hyderabad, apart from Delhi, Mumbai or Jaipur, etc.

Corporates have stepped out of domestic boundaries to organise their meetings or annual events overseas. Overseas properties such as Marina Bay Sands, Singapore and Venetian Macau have established a niche positioning for themselves in the world market with huge demand flowing in for Meetings and Incentives. Corporates want to explore regions beyond Asia and Far East to Europe, Australia, New Zealand, USA and many more countries. Destinations less explored such as Tashkent in Uzbekistan, Greece and Prague are also in demand.

**Major Challenges**

The global slowdown in countries such as UK, Germany, France, Belgium, and USA etc is affecting incoming business to India as they are major source markets for international conferences with large numbers of international associations based in these respective countries. It is leading to a decrease in the number of international delegates participating in conferences organised in India. Also, the increasing airfares by major airlines, increasing airport fees, and imposition of high taxes by the government are adversely affecting outbound travel.

Moreover, the depreciating value of the rupee is also a concern.

Rajeev Kohli  
Joint Managing Director  
Creative Travel / Plan it! Meetings & Conferences

Vice President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)

**Karnataka’s Tourism Trade Act**

Myanmar Tourism on an upward curve

IAMAI: 4th Travel & Tourism Summit

Contd on Page 2...
Reykjavík - the capital city of Iceland is an ideal upcoming incentive destination. The land of boiling mud pools, spurting geysers, glaciers and waterfalls is also an adventure playground where groups can choose between skiing, river-rafting, relaxing in thermal pools, hiking, running, riding, swimming in the sea and much more. Also, Dresden in Germany offers its visitors great variety in the form of notable art treasures, architectural sights and a charming landscape on the river Elbe. Within India we have royal historical marvels in Rajasthan such as Castle Mandawa, palaces in the Shekhawati Region, Udaipur apart from other off beat locations such as Sariska for wildlife, Kerala for Ayurveda, Mysore for cultural heritage and places in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh for adventure sports.

**Offbeat MICE Destinations**

**MICE Hubs In India**

Though the political scene of the city is a major influencer for any MICE business; the leisure options available in the city are another influential factor for decision makers. The 400 year old history and the story of the development of the city are depicted in its monuments and various tourism sites developed in and around the city. These monuments are a wonder in themselves but need to be upgraded with infrastructure and facilities suitable to the international traveller. Another very important area that needs to be tackled is the cost of running hotels in the city. The tax structures such as the split taxes or dual taxes have increased the cost of running a hotel in the city.

**Major Challenges**

The challenges facing Hyderabad as a MICE destination are the same as the challenges facing India as a whole. Occurrences such as the recent global recession and the drop in the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) have forced companies to cut down on extra costs, incurred through large size meetings and conferences. The result of this is companies hosting annual events in their respective campuses and not venturing out to look for meeting and conference venues. The impact of the recession and the drop in the National GDP.

In our last issue we incorrectly stated Ozgur Ayturk’s designation as being Culture & Tourism Minister, Turkey (Page 8). He is the Culture & Tourism Counsellor, Turkish Embassy.

In this business sector of India, Hyderabad as a MICE destination is the buzzword; as the city has become a favoured place for all international conventions, meetings and trade shows. Though the growth and development of the city’s infrastructure - to host international conferences and meetings - has been fast paced; there are issues yet to be tackled to make Hyderabad the first choice for every MICE business. In recent times the city has not been politically stable. The city is unpredictable, with political organisations making Hyderabad their ground to put forth their views to their vote banks. This is tampering with the planning and development of the city’s infrastructure - to host international conferences and meetings and facilities suitable to the international traveller.

**HYDERABAD**

Ramesh Jackson General Manager General Manager Marriott & Convention Center, Courtyard By Marriott, Hyderabad

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has also resulted in the increase of travel fares reducing inbound business travel from domestic and international destinations. This, in turn, has resulted in companies rethinking hosting or participating in large conferences in the city.

CHENNAI
M Peer Mohammed, Director Rooms Division, GRT Grand, Chennai

Hot Trends
Recently, there has been an industry trend towards using the term MICE. Other industry educators are recommending the use of “Events Industry” to be an umbrella term for the vast scope of the meeting and events profession. Event management companies are not only restricted to corporate events, they also handle weddings and sporting events which also largely contribute towards MICE.

The drive by the IT, Automotive, Pharmaceuticals and large scale infrastructure sector is fast changing Chennai into a viable business or even MICE destination.

with so much of opportunity available in this segment, the city is fast developing with all facilities which makes it a preferred destination for MICE tourism. As a matter of fact, Chennai housed many major international conferences in the last few years.

Major Challenges
The MICE market in India is still at a nascent stage. There are not yet got into the scale that will allow a location to be described as an ‘established’ MICE market. Chennai is a gateway to switchover to travel to the Southern part of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. It is however, not exclusively looked at as a tourism or leisure destination. Chennai is fast developing with all facilities available in this segment, the city with so much of opportunity every year. It is well connected to various other cities of India and these are the things that work in its favour. The full fledged functioning of the Chandigarh International Airport is going to further boost the MICE growth in the city.

CHANDIGARH
Deepak Manocha General Manager, JW Marriott, Chandigarh
Hot Trends
MICE is an attractive proposition for the hospitality and tourism sector in Chandigarh. MICE tourism has always been considered lucrative by hoteliers considering that the revenue generated by this segment is much more than that of leisure travellers. Chandigarh, as a city, has grown tremendously over the past few years with potential for even more growth. More and more MICE events are happening in the city every year. It is well connected to various other cities of India and these are the things that work in its favour. The full fledged functioning of the Chandigarh International Airport is going to further boost the MICE growth in the city.

Major Challenges
India’s contribution to the MICE pie has been growing considerably in the past few years. However, old bottlenecks, in the form of inadequate infrastructure, support facilities and passive promotions continue to impede don’t mind spending money for an exceptional experience, as it must act as a motivator for their employees to perform better. But at the same time most MICE groups have clearly defined budgets that have to be kept in mind. In the long run, the Indian market is very dynamic and will remain so, thus contradicting past trends and generating business from unexpected market segments.

The need of the hour is that state authorities take a realistic stock of possibilities and needs of specific cities and then plan a time bound strategy to fill the gaps and develop complete MICE infrastructure. Different regions have different requirements, so need to draw up individual action plans and a comprehensive strategy, in close cooperation with the stakeholders in this sector.

Chander Mansharamani, Vice President, ICPB (The Indian Convention Promotion Board)
5 Marketing Strategies

Canada captivates Indians with a growth of 23.47 percent. The India Outbound market stood at 14.9 million in 2010, with visitors to Canada increasing 18.2 percent over 2009 and a per person spend of $868 in 2010, whereas during the period of January to December 2011, Canada welcomed 139,213 Indian visitors, a rise of 9.08 percent over the previous year. Canada has a diverse and unique set of experiences that has helped to lure high yield visitors amid stiff competition.

TND spoke with the Assistant Vice President, Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), in India, Tina Singh, to find out Canada’s marketing secrets...

1 Partnering with travel agents
They continue to play an extremely important role in the decision-making and booking process. Pre-planned annual holidays and independent travel are fast becoming the norm. Travel agents greatly promote Canada. CTC introduced winter holidays through select travel agent partners for the first time, offering a choice of itineraries with varied experiences unique to Canada. A direct consumer campaign began end 2011.

2 Annual shows organised by CTC
CTC organises interactive and educative sessions between buyers and sellers where seminars are held on how to sell Canada better.
1. Focus Canada India: Provides a unique opportunity for networking and relationship building between Canadian travel industry partners and key travel agents from India.
2. Rendezvous Canada: Led by the CTC Rendezvous, it hooks up international buyers with Canadian sellers of tourism products and services. The event is held annually in a different Canadian city.
3. Showcase Asia: Prescheduled business-to-business meetings provide a unique opportunity for networking and relationship building between Canadian travel industry partners and key travel agents from India.

3 Market launch
Since its market launch in 2009, Canada has increased awareness about itself in major Indian cities beyond Mumbai and New Delhi. Bollywood megastar Akshay Kumar, joining Canadian Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, at a travel-trade lunch to accept the Olympic Torch generated considerable media exposure. Since then, the CTC has taken travel-trade partners on familiarisation (FAM) trips, exposing them to Canadian experiences and attractions across Canada.

4 Canada Specialist Programme (CSP)
With more than 90 percent of outbound travel being routed through travel agents, educating them on Canada is of great importance. The CSP Level 2 was launched in July 2010. By the end of 2011 there were 3,125 active agents, of which 640 are certified.

5 Trade shows
In 2010 and 2011 the CTC had a large-scale pavilion presence at the annual Outbound Travel Mart (OTM) in Mumbai and New Delhi. In 2011, the space was shared with travel agents offering specially created products and tours to customers. Agents participating in similar events were supported by the CTC.
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In this Issue: Delhi, Agra, UP, Punjab, Kashmir, Mumbai, Goa, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh

**Fraport AG selling stake in Delhi Airport**

According to a report in The Economic Times, the world's second-largest airport operator, Fraport AG, is weighing the option of selling its 10 percent stake in Delhi airport and has decided to shut its India operations in June, signalling its lack of confidence in the government's ability to push ahead with infrastructure development. "We had some re-assessment... (and realised) that this government doesn't have any spine or drive. So I personally doubt that anything will happen in the lifetime of UPA-II," said MD, Fraport India, Ansgar Siekert.

The ambitious Night Safari wildlife project in Greater Noida, which was mooted in 2005, has now been revived by the Akhilesh Yadav government. The project has been fast-tracked and the government has decided to develop it through the public private partnership mode. The wildlife project has been modelled on the famous Night Safari in Singapore.

Chief Secretary, Uttar Pradesh, Jawed Usmani, would monitor the progress of the project to ensure time-bound execution. The Greater Noida Authority has been entrusted with the task of conducting the bidding process. The nocturnal zoo project has received statutory approvals from the Central Zoo Authority and the Supreme Court.

No commercial construction or housing projects would be allowed in the safari area, which would comprise of natural settings for animals - 40 percent from the Indian sub-continent and 60 percent of animals brought from outside the country.

**Choppers to connect Delhi-Agra**

The Union Ministry of Civil Aviation with the support of Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department is looking forward to connecting Delhi with cities like Agra, Mathura and Vrindavan through chopper services.

With Agra likely to get a brand new international air terminal at Dhanauli, the proposed chopper services are expected to be a hit. Considering that there is already an expressway that connects the national capital to Agra, Mathura and Vrindavan through chopper services.

"Chopper services will benefit those who have less time but more money". "Using the expressway one can visit Agra, Fatehpur Sikri and Vrindavan in a day," he said.

**“Culture and tourism go together”**

According to Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, Omar Abdullah, culture and tourism are related and should be projected in the same way and has said that cultural activities should be showcased to tourists.

"We would want to share our cultural identity, history and art with tourists," Omar said. He also suggested that open air theatres be used to promote cultural activities. As per a PTI report, he backed a 15 day programme to take Kashmiri culture to tourists. Nearly 4.5 lakh tourists have visited Kashmir Valley in the last five months. Additionally, Abdullah has emphasised on the need to develop Kargil, the second most important town in Ladakh, as a tourism and sports destination.

**UP revives night safari project**

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Chief Minister, Uttar Pradesh, Akhilesh Yadav, decided that

Rather than wait for long-discussed airport projects like the Navi Mumbai and Goa international airports to materialise, the Frankfurt Airport developer has decided to focus on other emerging markets such as Brazil, Turkey, Vietnam, China and Portugal.

**Al appoints review committee**

Troubled national carrier Air India (AI) has set up a committee to review its global operations and find out how many pilots are actually required to operate flights. Since the strike began on May 7th, AI has sacked 101 striking pilots and de-recognised the Indian Pilots' Guild (IPG) which has been leading the agitation.

The AI management is contemplating dismissing 300 pilots owing allegiance to IPG. The ongoing strike by the pilots, who fly international routes, has led to the loss of over ₹450 crore so far.

**TND VOICES**

Since Srinagar gets fully booked, people are now opting for destinations here in Himachal Pradesh. We are hoping for even greater inflows as the onset of the Amarnath Yatra Pilgrimage will discourage tourists choosing to holiday in Kashmir.

Yogesh Behl, General Manager, Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation

**Troubled Air India (AI)**

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TND, in conversation with Punjab Heritage & Tourism Promotion Board’s Additional C.E.O, Dr. Karamjeet Singh Sra, learns what the state is coming up with next:

Q. What are the new initiatives being taken by the Punjab Heritage and Tourism Promotion Board to attract tourists?
   A. I feel that the state is lagging behind in promoting tourism commercially and for that more marketing and assessment work needs to be done. On that front, we are participating in travel and tourism fairs like TTF and many more, where we can inform people about what Punjab has. We are trying to promote pilgrimage, heritage, farm and eco tourism. Also, according to the kind of tourism we promote, we will be introducing some activities.

Q. The new initiative of farm tourism has created quite a stir. How is it faring in the domestic market?
   A. At the moment, it is at its infancy stage, and at the same time it has grown out of infancy. We are gauging people’s interest and responses in the market and working accordingly. We hope it will do well in the coming years.

Q. Five to seven years ago, there were hardly any promotional activities; is Punjab tourism being aggressive as far as tourism promotion is concerned?
   A. We have started working on our promotional activities. As far as aggressiveness is concerned, I admit we are fairly aggressive. Actually we want to be aggressive and we are working towards being aggressive, so that we can promote our state well.

Q. Which are the new international markets you are targeting? Any markets in particular?
   A. Actually we have not reached the stage wherein we choose any particular market. We have just started. We will target anyone who comes in front of us. At the moment, whatever, wherever we can, we will try to make it a target. Later on we might become choosy.

Q. Is domestic tourism the major chunk of your total tourist arrivals?
   A. Different people have different opinions. But so far we have come to know that we need to work a lot. Very little has been achieved and very little has been done. At the moment we are not doing well, but it doesn’t mean we cannot do well in our near future. A lot can be achieved; we just have to put in some efforts. And we are working hard on it.

Increased tourist flow to Kashmir worries HP

For over 20 years, Himachal Pradesh (HP) has witnessed a boom in the tourism sector as tourists shied away from visiting the turmoil-ridden Kashmir Valley. It seems the tables have turned now as the Kashmir Valley this year is choked with tourists, leading to a decline in the tourist flow to Himachal Pradesh. With the opening up of the Kashmir Valley for tourism again, it is being feared that HP would become second preference for tourists now. HP is, however, receiving the spillover of tourists, as most of the hotels in the Valley are booked for the next few months. Temperature is also a big reason for tourists diverting to Kashmir. In Himachal, tourists face problems like water shortage, traffic chaos beside hot weather conditions. Director, Himachal Pradesh Tourism, Arun Sharma, said that it would be premature to say that HP has lost out to Kashmir this time. “As compared to last year, tourist rush has increased in HP. Actual tourist count can be made only at the end of season and that will clear the picture,” he said.

But I cannot say that we are already saturated with foreign tourists, and now we are only looking towards domestic arrivals. Again, I cannot say that since people from the north are well acquainted with Punjab, we will only focus on tourists from the east or north east. We are yet to reach that stage where we can specifically target someone. So as of now, everyone is welcome.

Q. How does growth have been over the last few years in terms of tourist arrivals?
   A. Different people have different opinions. But so far we have come to know that we need to work a lot. Very little has been achieved and very little has been done. At the moment we are not doing well, but it doesn’t mean we cannot do well in our near future. A lot can be achieved; we just have to put in some efforts. And we are working hard on it.

Five monuments recommended for heritage status

Rajasthan’s Tourism Minister, Bina Kark has confirmed that five monuments from Rajasthan have been recommended to UNESCO for world heritage status. The five monuments are Ranthambore Fort, Gagron Fort, Jhalawar Fort, Chittorgarh Fort, Amber Fort and Kumbhalgarh Fort. The final decision for the approval of these sites will be taken up at the world heritage session, to be held at Saint Petersburg from June 24 to July 7. While Kumbhalgarh Fort has the second-longest continuous wall after the Great Wall of China, Gagron Fort in Jhalawar is the only fort which is surrounded by water on all four sides. Amber Fort, in Jaipur, is known for its distinct architectural style, while Sawai Madhopur Fort, in Rathnambore, is a heritage haven enveloped by forests.

Separatists wooing tourists

Separatists are now championing the cause of tourism in Kashmir, thanks to Hurriyat Chairman, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who is on a journey to promote tourism and boost foreign arrivals in Kashmir. Mirwaiz recently met a Japanese delegation and discussed travel advisories with them. “Visitors should also talk about the worsening situation and dominant political sentiment of the people, in their respective countries,” Mirwaiz told the delegation. The J&K government was quick to welcome it but with riders. “Please tell them: don’t create disturbance. All they have to do is not resort to hartal, strike or dharna. Don’t resort to militant activity and people will automatically lift the travel advisories,” J&K Tourism Minister, Nawang Rizgina Jora, told Daily News & Analysis. Mirwaiz’s gesture has come at a time when tourism is witnessing a major boom in Kashmir. More than five lakh tourists have visited Kashmir so far.

This year Kashmir is likely to host two million tourists, seven lakh more than last year’s 1.3 million.
MTDC planning floating hotels

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) plans to set up 'flotes' (floating hotels) in the harbour areas of coastal cities like Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Ratnagiri and Alibaug, on the public private partnership model.

Long cruises from Mumbai to Cochin and Goa, using cruise vessels with over 200 rooms are also being considered. The MTDC is also in the process of framing a ‘local cruise policy’ to facilitate the introduction of these features into the realm of regional tourism. The approximate cost of a flotel with a seating capacity of 400 persons is about ₹7,200 crore. Also in the offering are long cruises with ships that offer 200-400 rooms.

Goa to host cruise meet

The Chairmen of the five ports - Mumbai, Kochi, Chennai, Mangalore and Mormugao - identified for the promotion of cruise tourism by the Union Tourism Ministry, are set to meet in Goa in July to discuss ways and means to attract cruise ships from across the world and to promote cruise tourism at their respective ports, after creating a dedicated cruise terminal for the big ships. The state government is expecting over one lakh tourists to arrive across the world and to promote cruise tourism at their respective ports, after creating a dedicated cruise terminal for the big ships. The state government is expecting over one lakh tourists to arrive.

Mumbai sees 262 delayed flights

According to data released by the Civil Aviation Ministry, the Mumbai airport witnessed 262 flights that were frequently delayed (delayed on more than 20 percent of the times they were operated in a month) in May 2012. The figure is the third-lowest in the past 14 months. In April last year, the ministry had asked the Mumbai airport operator to publish a list of frequently delayed flights on its website so that passengers had the option to skip airlines with a poor punctuality record. The move was also aimed at disciplining airlines.

“Until a few months ago, the list had several flights that were getting delayed 100 percent of the times they were operated. Now, that number has come down by half,” said a senior Civil Aviation Ministry official. Ministry data shows that flight delays at Mumbai are worse during the monsoon months of June to September.

Rupee depreciation may boost Goa tourism

Since many Indians have cancelled their plans of holidaying abroad due to the fall in the value of the rupee, the tourism sector in Goa is upbeat as Goa is set to witness a rise in the number of tourists visiting the state.

Travel operators claim that inquiries for packages to Goa have increased and June is expected to see a huge influx of tourists. Nilesh Shah, of Raj Travels said, "Tourists who were to travel to foreign destinations will change their plans due to the rising dollar. Hotels have good occupancies and 70-75 percent of the rooms are occupied".

Director, Tourism, Government of Goa, Swapnil Naik, said, “We feel that this time there will be an increase in tourists coming to Goa. We observed a growing trend towards Monsoon Tourism in the state and occupancy had gone up by 60-65 percent during the monsoon season last year. Even now, hotel occupancy is almost 100 percent and this will continue for the next two weeks”. Goa hosted 27 lakh tourists in the recently concluded tourism season.

Gujarat Tourism gets tech-savvy

The Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited (TCGL) will not only provide better infrastructure facilities to tourists coming to the state, but has also decided to woo visitors through internet and mobile services. The department has decided to have a 24x7 call centre, a mobile application and GIS mapping of the tourist destinations of the state to help tourists get information about destinations, facilities and hotels. It will also help visitors in arranging taxi services and facilitate easy online bookings. The TCGL will provide the services through the Gujarat Info Petro Limited.

₹1,200 crore for Gujarat’s coastal tourism

The Planning Commission has approved ₹1,200 crore grant for the Gujarat government’s plan to boost coastal tourism. The state government has chalked out a project which includes developing 10 beaches along Gujarat’s 1,600 km coastline. The nod for the special grant was given at a meeting between Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi in Delhi on June 1st. Though Gujarat has the longest coastline in the country, coastal tourism in the state is underdeveloped due to lack of infrastructure available at its beaches.
Sagar Island to become tourist attraction

Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, has said that the West Bengal government will undertake infrastructural development in Sagar Island with a view to promote tourism. “The Gangasagar Mela is a very important festival and keeping this in view, we will spruce up infrastructural development here to make it an attractive tourist destination,” Banerjee said.

The government is also working on developing a deep sea port in the area. “Work is on full swing, and very soon the island will be on the railway map. We have also donated 10 acres of land here on which tourist centres and other facilities will be developed,” informed the Chief Minister.

“Apart from developing roads and concreting jetties, a university and a medical college will also be set up. We will do everything required to develop the tourism infrastructure of the area” Banerjee stated.

OTDC launches Buddhist circuit tours

On June 2, the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) launched a Buddhist circuit tour package in a bid to promote the state's religious tourism offerings. Visitors to Puri and Bhubaneswar can now opt for the Buddhist circuit tour of Odisha spread across the threehill-tops of Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri and Udayagiri. From Puri, the cost of the entire tour will be Rs 680, while the cost is Rs 620 from Bhubaneswar.

After sight-seeing at Udayagiri and Ratnagiri, tourists will have the option of dining at Toshali Ratnagiri, a property managed by Toshali Resorts International. The hotel will be fully operational within four months and will have 20 rooms, a coffee shop, a swimming pool, a health club, a spa, a library and a conference hall with 60 pax capacity after renovation.

Bihar to develop tourism

The Bihar government will put in place infrastructure at various tourist places in the state to boost its overall economy, Deputy Chief Minister, Government of Bihar, Sushil Kumar Modi, said. The government has plans to build and improve infrastructure, like roads, transportation and hospitality at its popular religious destinations to generate employment for local people and boost the overall economy. Modi has clarified that it is due to the state government’s efforts to improve the law and order situation and tourism infrastructure that there has been a significant increase in the inflow of the tourists, both domestic and foreigners.

The Deputy Chief Minister also said that the state government will also give various incentives to transport operators interested in rolling out luxury buses for tourists on the public-private partnership mode.

Odisha to launch sanctuary tourism

Following the negative publicity, brought on by the abduction of two Italians, the Odisha government has decided to launch as special package of adventure cum pleasure trips to woo tourists. Forest and Environment (F&E) Minister, Debi Prasad Mishra, said that the tourism department, with the help of the F&E Department, is now formulating an eco tourism policy of which Sanctuary Tourism is a part.

As part of the new policy, tourists interested in visiting Bhitarkanika National Park would be able to avail of facilities like natural trails, cottages and toilets, which will be implemented by the Mangrove Forest Division, Rajnagar. Additionally, Rs 1 crore will be invested in the beautification of the Khandadhar Waterfall.

Facilities in Saptasajaya, under the Dhenkanal Forest Division, and Rajhans, under the Chilika Wild Life Division, will be upgraded and floating jetties provided for tourists. Besides officials, the Principal Secretary in the tourism department and Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) will oversee preparedness for the coming tourist season and ensure a hassle-free experience.

Academy of Hospitality Skills launched

A new hospitality finishing school, Academy of Hospitality Skills (AHS), was launched in Kolkata in a bid to address the manpower crunch in the hospitality industry in West Bengal. The first such institution in the city, AHS will provide two courses in the hospitality sector, catering to graduates of any discipline as well as tenth standard pass outs. According to a report by The Economic Times, AHS plans to open 50 more centres in the state. Chairman, Council of Advisors, AHS, Rajiv Gujral, said that AHS will initially focus on West Bengal and then plan to spread out in other states.

In Brief

Gujarat Tourism has entered into a marketing tie-up with Cox & Kings to promote the state in India. Under the tie-up, Cox & Kings will operate tour packages for various destinations and circuits in Gujarat for one year.

The tourism potential of rural Odisha remains untapped as almost all Centre-sponsored projects are making tardy progress. Of the eight rural tourism projects (announced between 2004-07), six are yet to see the light of the day.

Cricketer Virender Sehwag and actor Akshay Kumar are among celebrities being considered by Delhi’s tourism department as its first brand ambassador.

India recorded 3,72 lakh foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) during May 2012, as compared to FTAs of 3,55 lakh during May, 2011 and 3,32 lakh in May, 2010.

Air India Ltd will not be ferrying Haj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia from India this year. Part of the carrier’s traditional task will be carried out by SpiceJet Ltd. Saudi Arabian Airlines will fly nearly half of the 125,000 Haj pilgrims chosen by the Haj Committee of India this year.

Clarks Inn Group of Hotels recently opened the Vijay Tej Clarks Inn in Patna, Bihar. Part of a mixed-use development, Vijay Tej Clarks Inn is a mall-hotel and offers 22 guestrooms.

As an exercise undertaken to finalise targets for key infrastructure sectors, an airline hub policy is to be finalised and the Delhi and Chennai airports would be operationalised as hubs in 2013.
Kerala announces new tourism policy

On June 7, Kerala announced, as part of its new tourism policy for 2012-13, that it would introduce fast-track clearances for tourism projects with investments above ₹10 crore.

Among other initiatives, the policy states that Kerala Tourism will devise a scheme for new investors in tour operations, homestays, serviced villas and Ayurveda centres to participate in international and national tourism promotional events for the first three years. The policy also envisages setting up a Kerala Convention Promotion Bureau, with the participation of the tourism industry, to market the region aggressively in the MICE business segment. A task force against trafficking and abuse will also be set up to address substance abuse and child abuse in tourism. The policy also includes an initiative to broad-base Responsible Tourism throughout the state. Moreover, a new system will be introduced whereby 15 percent of the total investment, subject to a maximum ceiling of ₹50 lakh, will be provided for investors classified under Responsible Tourism.

Kochi makes a splash

The executive committee of the Vyttila Mobility Hub Society gave its nod for a boat jetty near the hub to tap the tourism potential of the less-explored water network in the area. Kochi’s backwaters will get a major uplift, as the construction of the jetty would provide a hassle-free ride from Vyttila to Fort Kochi via Champakkara canal, thus utilising water transport infrastructure as a major revenue stream. As per the proposal, a modernised walkway will be constructed on the western side of the Champakkara canal. The walkway will connect the hub with the Kunnara Park.

As the water in the area is comparatively shallow, it can be used for water sports.

Tamil Nadu to invest ₹10,000 cr

As part of its Vision Tamil Nadu 2023 programme, the Tamil Nadu government is aiming at an investment of ₹10,000 crore, by the private and public sectors, for developing tourism in the state. Tourism Minister, Government of Tamil Nadu, S Gokula Indira, said recently that Chief Minister, Government of Tamil Nadu, Jayalalithaa, was aiming at the investment with an objective to develop the industry and generate employment opportunities. Indira pointed out efforts that were on to promote the East Coast Road and some of the Southern districts at a cost of ₹500 crore under an Asian Development Bank funded scheme.

Steps have also been taken to promote heritage, eco, rural and pilgrimage tourism at various places.

New eco tourism centres

The draft project report on the development of the three proposed eco-tourism centres at Kakki, Anathode and Mookhikara, (in the district of Pathanamthitta), at an estimated cost of ₹2 crore, is ready for approval from forest department authorities. The draft would be submitted to the department authorities immediately after a meeting with Vana Samrakshana Samithis and representatives of the people living in the fringe areas of the forest, on June 21st. The facilities planned would be commissioned after ensuring the protection and preservation of wildlife, flora and fauna of the forests. Huts, boating facilities at Kakki, make-shift huts on the tree-tops, information centres at select locations and sale outlets for the forest produce are among the schemes included in the draft.

Karnataka’s Tourism Trade Act

The Karnataka government is planning to come out with a Tourism Trade Act to woo investors and speed up investment processes in the tourism sector. The draft has almost been finalised and the government is planning on circulating it among industry bodies for their feedback. Principal Secretary, Tourism Department, Government of Karnataka, Latha Krishna Rao, said, “We are planning to come out with a new act to bring in transparency. The act would also give information about various eco tourism projects and regulations regarding the setting up of resorts in the state. We will circulate it to various industry bodies within a couple of days.” Rao said the state has signed agreements worth ₹36,000 crore in the tourism sector, which includes the development of theme parks, five-star hotels, resorts and beaches.

The government has already identified three acres of land in Hampi for investors to set up a heritage hotel. The state is also planning to focus more on promoting tourism in Tier II and III cities to set up various facilities for tourists.

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Boost to tourism facilities in Guwahati

To boost inbound visitor numbers, the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) will be developing tourism infrastructure in Guwahati. ATDC plans to introduce two cruise circuits on the Brahmaputra River, a convention center and a golf course and resort in Guwahati. Plans are also on to improve Guwahati’s Dighalipukhuri, a rectangular artificial pond. Managing Director, Assam Tourism Development Corporation, Anurag Singh, said ATDC aims to position Dighalipukhuri as an iconic structure and will maintain it by setting up recreation facilities and lightings at the water body.

Arunachal, Sikkim sign MoU

Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for undertaking joint programmes in the tourism sector. Arunachal Tourism Minister, Pema Khandu, signed the memorandum with his Sikkim counterpart Bhim Dhungel at Gangtok, at the end of May. Khandu pitched for holistic development of the tourism sector, endorsed the issues raised by Khandu and agreed that both Sikkim and Arunachal can work together for mutual benefit. Arunachal can work together for mutual benefit. Arunachal can work together for mutual benefit.

Master plan to enhance Northeast tourism

The ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) has taken up the initiative to have an exclusive masterplan for tourism soon. The North Eastern Council (NEC) has prepared a comprehensive masterplan in association with Tata Consultancy Services. The recommendations in the masterplan will be implemented in the ongoing 12th Five Year Plan period. “We are in touch with the Ministry of Tourism and respective state governments on how to go about exploiting the tourism potential of the northeast. We are also looking at exploring tourism circuits in the region,” said Union DoNER Minister, Paban Singh Ghatowar. The Union Ministry of Tourism’s data showed that the northeast has registered a growth of 6.9 percent in the number of foreign tourists in recent years.

Naga village gets eco tourism boost

With the launch of a nature conservation and eco tourism project at Puliebadze Chahe ki, a rest house on the foothills of the mount Puliebadze, Jotsoma village in the Kohima district of Nagaland received a major boost as a tourist destination. Nagaland Chief Minister, Neiphiu Rio, congratulated the local people for working hard on the project and appreciated the effort they put in to successfully complete the task. Rio said that there were many employment opportunities for the people of the state in preservation and conservation activities and added that remote areas have a lot of potential tourist attractions.

Unanimous call for sustainable tourism

Academicians and intellectuals came together at a seminar on the occasion of World Environment Day, in Shillong. They stressed that tourism in northeast India, one of the top bio-hotspots in the world, should be promoted in an eco-friendly, pro-poor and sustainable manner in order to secure the future of the people and the environment. Noting that the region, with its “magical beauty and bewildering diversity” is a “seventh heaven” for tourists, academicians called for living in within “ecological limits” and creating “satisfying lives for all within the means of nature”. According to researchers, “the region has tremendous rural resources that can contribute much towards sustainable development if utilised properly by the tourism industry”.

In Brief

From June 8, Jet Airways has started operations on a new four times-a-week service on the Mumbai - Kuwait route.

Minister of State for Tourism, Sultan Ahmed, has opposed the appointment of Shankarsinh Vaghela as the head of India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC).

Arun Singh Mewar of Udaipur’s royal family, who runs heritage hotels chain, HRH Group of Hotels, plans to raise Rs 50 crore to expand its capacity in the mid-market segment.

Delhi Tourism, which collaborated with a private operator to kick-start aqua zorbing at the lake at Purana Quila last September, is all set to launch the sport at India Gate. Zorbing at Purana Quila attracts more than 50 visitors on weekdays and the number touches 100 on weekends.

The Assam government has announced that its planned TV channel that will focus on sectors like tourism, education, agriculture and education, would go on air in January 2013.

Air India is inviting bids to lease out five of its Boeing 777 aircraft. The aircraft is used by the national carrier for its long distance non-stop flights, mainly to the US and UK. The leased aircraft will be replaced with the more fuel-efficient Boeing 787 Dreamliners.

The Goa state government will start white water rafting in the Mhadei River inside Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary. Southern River Adventures and Sports Private Limited will be managing the facility in the wildlife sanctuary, which is a part of the Western Ghats.
Indore’s hotel tariffs to rise

Hotel room rates and liquor prices in Indore, Madhya Pradesh will be hiked from July 1, as hotels increase tariffs. Currently, hotels charge 16.18 percent of overall tax. It includes 6.18 percent of luxury tax and 10 percent of service taxes for suite rent per guest. While, the service tax will remain unchanged at 10 percent, the luxury tax will go up to 7.42 percent. These rates will be applicable for suite rent up to ₹1,999 per day. In case the suite rent goes beyond the mark, the tax component is down at 5.42 percent. However, this rate will also go up to 7.42 percent. Thus, the overall tax for such hotels will go up to 17.42 percent. The overall tax on liquor services will rise from the existing 18 percent to 19.35 percent. The government has already jacked up taxes on the hotel industry three times in the past three months.

IHHA advises heritage tourism for Maharashtra

The Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA) has urged the Maharashtra government to consider formulating a heritage tourism policy. They have also suggested that the state provide various incentives for heritage hotels. The IHHA said that the potential for heritage tourism in the state is massive and that heritage hotels in rural areas of the state can attract international and state tourists.

President, IHHA, Maharaja Gajaisingh II of Jodhpur, said, “Heritage properties, from tea estates to old English bungalows, existed in every state and incentives should be given to promote heritage tourism”.

The IHHA has proposed the setting up of a fund that will be made available at a six percent rate of interest for restoration of old properties, discounts in electricity tariffs, and luxury tax exemption for 20 years, among other concessions.

IndiGo to add flights to Dubai

IndiGo will be introducing new flights on the Hyderabad-Dubai, Chennai-Dubai and Kochi-Dubai routes to expand its international operations. The airline will also start its second daily and direct service on the Delhi-Dubai and Delhi-Bangkok routes. These new flights will be operational from August. The airline will also be offering an introductory return fare of ₹1,200 on the new flights. Bookings for the Dubai and Bangkok sectors have opened.

HHI to expand across India

Kolkata-based Hotel Hindusthan International (HHI), which owns and manages five hotels in Bhubaneswar, Varanasi, Pune, Bengaluru and Kolkata, will be undergoing major pan-India expansion in the coming years. Apart from the ongoing hotel projects in Patna (110-room four-star hotel) and a resort in Goa with 30 villas, the company has plans to build hotels in Delhi and Mumbai in the next three years. Simultaneously, HHI will also look at expanding its portfolio by setting up budget hotels in Tier II cities.

The company has identified cities like Raipur, Indore, Jaipur, Bareilly and Guwahati, etc, to set-up its proposed budget hotels. In the future, the group will consider both ownership and franchise/management models.

TCGL to spend ₹300 crore

The Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Ltd (TCGL) will be focussing on providing better infrastructure to tourists.

The Gujarat government has decided to spend around ₹300 crore for developing infrastructure at tourist destinations such as Dwarka, Somnath, Ambaji, Dakor, Saputara, Gir, Kutch and Modhera, which account for almost three-fourth of the total tourist inflow.

“The expenditure has already been approved,” said Principal Secretary, Tourism, Civil Aviation and Pilgrimage, Government of Gujarat, Vipul Mittra.

“We will also come out with policies to attract private investors to set up hotels and resorts at these places,” he added.

In Brief

The Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group has opened the 214-room Radisson Blu Hotel, Nagpur. It is the brand’s first Radisson Blu hotel in Nagpur and 53rd hotel in India. They plan to have 100 operating hotels in India by 2015.

In November and December, Azamara Journey will take 11 and 14-night cruises from Mumbai and Chennai respectively, featuring destinations like Goa, Kochi, Male, Colombo, Galle, Chennai, Port Blair, Rangoon, Phuket and Singapore.

Travel portal TripAdvisor recently inked a partnership with Internet Moguls, a technology solutions company, for hotel consolidation across India. Internet Moguls will consolidate inventory of small hotel chains and independent hotels for TripAdvisor’s Show Prices campaign.

South Africa-based hospitality company Mantis Collection, has entered into a joint venture with ICS Group to develop and operate boutique luxury hotels in the Indian sub-continent and South-East Asia. The joint venture, to be known as Ayana, is planning to have at least 30 properties in its portfolio in the next ten years.

Air India and Jet Airways will cut travel agent commissions to one percent from the existing three percent, starting July 16, as the airlines struggle with high debt and losses. This comes in the wake of the International Air Transport Association decision to defer the implementation of weekly remittance.

Madhya Pradesh Eco tourism Development Board is set to launch a ‘Jungle Caravan’ scheme from June 23, for excursions to tourist spots in and around Bhopal. Facilities like tour guidance, bird watching, and rappelling will also be made available.
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Kazakhstan to woo Malaysians

Kazakhstan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kairat Sarybay, has said that Kazakhstan will consider easing visa requirements for Malaysians, given the country's aspiration to be a global investment player. However, as our President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is targeting significant developments for Kazakhstan on the investment platform, we will especially be looking at easing the visa regime for the business community as they are potential investors. Sarybay said Malaysia could be a good model for Kazakhstan not only in terms of its economy but also its successfully implemented policies, strategic planning, diversified agendas and multi-ethnic population.

Holy Land witnessing record numbers

A record number of people visited Israel for the period of January – May, 2012, the Tourism Ministry announced. Some 1.4 million visitors and tourists spent time in Israel, “Six percent more than the sameperiod in 2011 and four percent more than 2010”. Tourism Minister, Stas Misezhnikov, said that the ‘consistent increase in incoming tourism and the new record highs prove that the investment in the industry contributes to increased income for the economy and creates tens of thousands of new jobs”. Misezhnikov has promoted continued investment in the industry, saying, “Against the background of the ongoing global economic crisis, the importance of investment in engines for growth becomes sharper and tourism is a central player in maintaining the robust Israeli economy”.

Uzbek tourists eye Turkey

Uzbek tourists, who previously preferred to travel to Asian countries, have this year chosen Turkey as a preferred destination. The streets of capital city Tashkent are decorated with advertisements promoting Turkey, and Uzbek tourism companies have accelerated their work due to a major interest in Turkey from Uzbek tourists. Companies have begun to organise additional flights to the southern province of Antalya, as the previous 14 weekly flights between Turkey and Uzbekistan were not being able to accommodate the increase in tourist flow. Turkey’s Culture and Promotion Adviser in Tashkent, Cihan Varlık, said the number of Uzbek tourists travelling to Turkey was 68,124 in 2010; it increased 25 percent to 85,011 in 2011. He mentioned that 21,970 Uzbekis travelled to Turkey last year during the first four months; that number increased by 25 percent and reached 26,568 this year in the same period.

Countdown to Turkmen Olympic City

Polimeks, a Turkish construction firm in Turkmenistan, has received authorisation from Ashgabat authorities to sign a deal for the second phase of a project to build an Olympic City in the Turkmen capital, which will be ready before 2017 and will cost $1.4 billion. The Olympic City Project is set to be completed before the 2017 Asian Indoor and Martial Art Games. Turkmenistan will be the first country in Central Asia to host the games. The second phase of the project is expected to cost approximately $1.4 billion. The phase includes a closed athletics complex, a 5,000-seat capacity water complex, a 4,000-seat-capacity indoor tennis court and a hotel.

Tajikistan and Pakistan strengthen bond

Tajik Air, the national flag carrier of Tajikistan, is all set to start flight operations between Dushanbe and Islamabad from June, while Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will also fly between Lahore and Dushanbe, the date of which is yet to be finalised, said a Tajikistan official. Meanwhile, after appointing Honorary Consul Generals in Lahore and Peshawar, Tajikistan is also in the process of starting to issue business and tourist visas to Pakistanis from Karachi in the near future. Moreover, tripartite negotiations between Tajikistan, Pakistan and Afghanistan are going on for the transit trade agreement, and construction of a road linking Pakistan with Tajikistan through Afghanistan. Ambassador of Tajikistan to Pakistan, Dr Zubaydullo N Zubaydov, said that Tajikistan is in the state of rebuilding after seven years of civil war; the positive developments have been prompted due to the ringing in of political and economic stability under the leadership of President Rehman.
**Myanmar Tourism on an upward curve**

Tourism, the number of tourist arrivals was more than 800,000 in 2011, up by more than 24,000 or three percent from the 790,000 in 2010. The figures for the first two months of 2012 represented 98,486 arrivals, coming in mainly from North America, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Till February 2012, there were 739 hotels in Myanmar, including 22 with foreign investments, four joint-venture hotels, six government hotels and 707 private-owned ones. Myanmar earned $319 million in 2011 from the hotel and tourism sector, up 26 percent from the $254 million earned in 2010. Tourist arrivals in the country are expected to reach 1.5 million in 2012.

**Malaysian Airlines to double Asia Pacific destinations**

As part of a turnaround plan prompted by five straight quarterly losses, Malaysian Airline System (MAS) intends to practically double its Asia-Pacific destinations within the next three years. Chairman, Malaysia Airline System Bhd, Md Nor Yusof, has confirmed that the carrier may fly to 25 cities in countries including China, Japan and India by 2015, compared with 13 regional destinations now. Flights on some existing routes will also be increased by as much as 50 percent. Nor also hinted that the carrier may make some job cuts - as part of the restructuring - to be announced at the end of June. The new proposal comes after parent companies of Malaysian Air and AirAsia Bhd unwound a share swap agreement.

**China restricts foreigners to Tibet**

After two more Tibetans self-immolated themselves in Lhasa, capital of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), Chinese authorities have alerted travel agencies that foreigners will not be issued permits to visit the region. It is not known for how long the restriction will be enforced, but it is likely to impact tourism with the peak season coming up. Entry to Tibet is frequently restricted for foreigners. In May, Chinese authorities restricted the entry of groups of 5 or more (and everyone had to be of the same nationality and traveling on the same itinerary) into Tibet. Since March 2011, more than 30 cases of self-immolation have been reported from TAR and surrounding areas. Tibet has a target of 10 million tourist arrivals and tourism revenue of 12 billion Yuan. However, with the new restrictions in place, this could be difficult to achieve.

**Inner Mongolia’s desert tourism**

Tour organisers of North China’s Inner Mongolia autonomous region have said that desert tourism has helped the development of the local economy. This statement was backed up by Deputy Manager of the Seven-Star Lake Desert Ecological Tourist Zone, Zheng Haijun. The tourist zone in the Kubuqi Desert, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, features sand resources and lakes. The zone, covering an area of 8.89 square kilometers, is named “seven-star” for its seven lakes in the form of the Big Dipper, that has been recognised as a distinct grouping in many cultures.

**Seoul to host WTC**

The organising committee of the Skal World Congress has announced that they will be holding their World Tourism Congress (WTC) in Korea for the first time. The gathering is scheduled to be held from Oct 2-7, in Seoul. The 73rd World Congress is expected to draw more than 1,500 members of the organisation to Korea and generate economic benefits of 4.5 billion won, including accommodation, travel and shopping expenses. Korea is the fourth nation in Asia to host the event after Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and the Philippines.

**In Brief**

- **Malaysia Airlines’ first Airbus A380 aircraft took to the skies from Kuala Lumpur International Airport on June 8, with 454 passengers onboard.**
- **Turkmen Aviation Association has opened an international tender for the construction of the Türkmenabat airport in the eastern region of the country. The airport is expected to service 500 passengers per hour.**
- **Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), in association with Nokia Thailand, has launched a mobile app for Nokia smartphones that use the Windows Phone operating system. ‘The New Amazing Thailand’ mobile application and a new game ‘Thailand Racing by Smile Land’ were released.**
- **Korean and Japanese visitors have been boosting tourism figures in Hawaii. Japanese arrivals continued to rebound with an increase of 36.2 percent to 86,685 visitors.**
- **Tourism ministry of Indonesia is targeting 10 million tourists in 2014, but a lack of infrastructure and connectivity is hampering growth. The Ministry has divided the tourism destinations into: sports tourism (diving, golf); eco tourism; cruise ship tourism; spa and medical tourism; culture and heritage tourism; culinary and shopping tourism; and MICE tourism.**
- **Association of Thai Travel Agents (ATTA) said Myanmar is now emerging as a serious competitor after opening its doors to investment and political reform. ATTA President, Sisdivachr Cheewaratanaporn, warned that over the next three to five years, Myanmar will pose a serious challenge to Thailand’s travel industry.**
**Sri Lanka**

**Lanka asks Europe to ignore bad media**

Head of Sri Lanka’s Tourism Development Authority, Nalaka Godahewa, is urging European businessmen to ignore negative media reports about Sri Lanka that may lose them investment opportunities. The island is experiencing a boom in tourists and leisure industry-related developments, three-years after government forces ended the decades long conflict with separatists. Many international chains have invested to build hotels and resorts across the island, while the government sets about building infrastructure to support the tourism boom. Godahewa was said while European businessmen pass-up an opportunity to invest in Sri Lanka, Chinese and Indian investors have moved in to fill the void. International hotel chains like Hong Kong-based Shangri-La, the Sheraton and Four Seasons have signed up to develop luxury properties in Sri Lanka. “Ours is a virgin market. Unfortunately the Europeans are holding back,” he said. Western governments have often been critical of Sri Lanka’s human rights record, particularly the way the island handled the final months of its ethnic conflict. Sri Lanka has repeatedly dismissed this criticism, and Godahewa says European investors should also ignore them. In 2010, Sri Lanka had 22,000 hotel beds. By 2015, it plans to add 45,000 rooms.

**Tussle within tourism board**

The tussle within Sri Lanka Tourism has reached a stalemate, after the key issue of promotions, or the lack of it, caused clashes at the top. This led to its Chairman, Dr Nalaka Godahewa, resigning from three of the four institutions headed by him at the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA). Sources said that while some issues pertained to the Indian International Film Awards 2010, other issues included lack of promotions as mandated by the SLTDA, cutting down official travel for tourism events, and recent amalgamation plans of the four institutions under one head through re-establishing the previous Tourism Act.

**In brief**

Dragonair, Cathay Pacific’s regional subsidiary, launched its second route to the Philippines on May 29, when the airline launched a daily connection between its Hong Kong hub and Clark. Flights are operated with the airline’s A320 aircraft.

Qatar is set to issue a new tourism law in June, aimed at giving Qatar Tourism Authority more power to establish infrastructure ahead of the 2022 Football World Cup, scheduled to be held in Doha.

Lebanon’s Tourism Minister has said that the crucial summer tourism season would not be badly damaged by growing domestic unrest and turmoil in neighbouring Syria, and forecast revenues this year of about $7 billion, similar to last year.

The International Council of Tourism Partners announced that the Ministry of Tourism in Yemen has become its third destination member in the Middle East, joining Oman and Palestine. Yemen recently gained a new President and also a new Minister of Tourism.

At 634 meters height, the world’s tallest tower has been completed near Asakusa, in Tokyo. After a 90 second ride inside Japan’s fastest elevator, it takes visitors all the way up to the 350 meter Tokyo Sky Tree Observation Deck, providing a view of Tokyo. Apparently, even Mount Fuji is visible on a clear day.

Malaysia Airlines and Japan Airlines will commence a code share cooperation, effective July 1, covering up to 347 weekly flights of 513 sectors. Sales for this code-share commences on June 12.

**Bhutan reeling under pressure**

According to a report in Reuters, tourists have long eulogised Bhutan’s un-spilt, charms, its peace and its environment, but the country, famed as the “last Shangri-La”, is no idyll. Its economy is struggling and it spends far more on imports than it earns, banks are cracking down on cheap credit after a recent debt-driven spending boom, and youth unemployment has surged to 9.2 percent. The government is trying to cut down on the number of people living below the poverty line to 15 percent of the population from its current 25 percent, according to official figures. Encouraging more tourists would bring in cash, but the government will not abandon its long-standing policy of limiting visitor numbers by accepting only those who pay $250 (R2 131) a day in advance. “Bhutan will never be a mass destination,” said the Head of Marketing at the Tourism Council of Bhutan, Chimmy Pem. “Our target will always be the high-end visitors”.

After paying for accommodation, travel, food and a guide, $65 of that $250 goes to the government.

International perceptions of Indonesia were tainted by terrorism and tsunamis. We need to change these perspectives by pushing more positive news about Indonesia and promoting tourism. We will continue to promote tourism destinations. There are approximately 200 points of tourism in 80 destinations in Indonesia. Indonesia is more than just Bali

Mari Elka Pangestu,
Indonesia Tourism Minister

**Tourism in Nepal scales new heights**

The average length of stay of tourists in Nepal increased to a seven-year high of 13.1 days in 2011. Travel trade analysts have attributed the growth to a decline in strikes, and an increased tourist interest in trekking and mountaineering. According to the Tourism Ministry, visitors coming for trekking and mountaineering in 2011 increased 11.7 percent against a decline of 47.2 percent in 2010. In the past, tour operators offered three-night, four-day packages in Kathmandu. However, a decline in bandhs and strikes since 2010 has encouraged tour operators to offer eight-day tour programs. Apart from leisure activities, the trekking routes of Mt Annapurna, Mt Qomolangma and Langtang are the major contributors to increasing the length of stay of tourists. On average, a trekker spends 12 days on each of these three routes.

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Visa waiver for GCC medical tourism

The government of Thailand has waived visa fees for Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nationals seeking medical facilities. Previously, Thailand issued a waiver on medical tourism fees for a period of 30 days, which has now been extended to 90 days. To qualify for the medical visa exemption, necessary proof of the medical visit is mandatory.

To expand medical tourism in the country, to the chagrin of the Israelis, who fear that this may translate into less service for the Israelis. The ministries say local hospitals are already overcrowded and understaffed, and there is not enough room in medical wards. However, medical tourism, in which both public and private hospitals take part, reaps nearly NIS 500 million a year for Israel. An estimated 30,000 patients come to Israel every year for treatment with cancer treatments making up 80 percent of the market.

Israel’s medical tourism

Israel’s Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is seeking to expand medical tourism in the country, to the chagrin of the finance and health ministries, who fear that this may translate into less service for the Israelis. The ministries say local hospitals are already overcrowded and understaffed, and there is not enough room in medical wards. However, medical tourism, in which both public and private hospitals take part, reaps nearly NIS 500 million a year for Israel. An estimated 30,000 patients come to Israel every year for treatment with cancer treatments making up 80 percent of the market.

Kempinski and Fairmont foray into Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is set to welcome hotel chains Kempinski and Fairmont. Ready to roll in a couple of years from now, these developments are part of the initiative drive of ‘The Wave’, Oman’s first and most successful Integrated Tourism Community (ITC); official announcements of these projects will be made soon. “Kempinski is likely to open by early 2015 and the first new five-star hotel in Muscat in the last 20 years. Fairmont will follow a few years later. MoUs for these hotels were signed a few years ago”, Vice-President, Sales and Marketing at The Wave, David Stafford, told the Oman Daily Observer.

Frasers eyes Saudi, Oman openings in pipeline

Singapore-based hospitality company, Fraser Suites has said in a statement that it is on target to add three more properties in Oman and Saudi Arabia by next year. The announcement follows the opening of its third Middle East property, Fraser Suites Doha, in Qatar. According to the statement, Fraser Suites Doha was “pivotal” to the group’s expansion in the Middle East, where it has already established presence in Dubai and Bahrain. The properties currently in the pipeline are Fraser Place Suhar, Oman, and Fraser Suites Edafah, Al Riyadh and Fraser Suites Edafah, Al Khobar in Saudi Arabia.

Turkey: Looking East

Turkey is starting to draw a rising number of visitors from the Middle East. The Arab Spring has led to an upswing in tourists from the Middle East choosing “safer” destinations and Turkey is proving to be one of the beneficiaries. Tourist flows from Egypt to Turkey are estimated to have increased by 400 percent in 2011, according to Agence France-Presse.

By 2023, Turkey hopes to be one of the top five global tourist destinations, and boosting its market share in the Middle East forms part of this plan. The Culture & Tourism Ministry is also reaching out to the Gulf states, and is emphasizing upon the shared cultural and religious traditions to attract more visitors from the region.

Jordan woos Malaysian tourists

Malaysia is considered one of Jordan’s more important markets in Asia, with a potential to grow further, said Managing Director, Jordan Tourism Board, Dr Abed Al Razzaq Arabiya. This is despite the fact that Malaysians only totalled 15,977 or 0.234 percent out of the 6.8 million visitors to Jordan last year. Arabiyat said they were introducing a promotional programme called ‘Haj and Umrah +1’ package to attract Malaysians visiting Saudi Arabia for the Haj and Umrah by including Jordan in their itinerary. “Malaysia is an important market for us and this is strengthened by air connectivity between the two countries,” said Jordanian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Nayef Al Fayez.
Vampire tourism on a rise

People on three continents have shown interest in travelling to Bulgaria’s town of Sozopol, where local archeologists claim to have found a vampire skeleton. The skeleton was the one of a buried man with an iron stick in his chest. He was buried over 700 years ago and was stabbed multiple times in the chest and the stomach, as his contemporaries feared that he would rise from the dead as a vampire. National History Museum Director, Bozhidar Dimitrov, told local media. Bulgarian tour operators are saying that the interest has been huge and Germans and Brits have already inquired about “vampire vacations” in Sozopol. There is an expected increase of visits from the US and Russia as well, while long lines are being reported at the excavation site.

Bulgaria hopes for 600,000 Russians

Bulgaria remains one of the top holiday destinations for Russians, and is expecting a 30 percent year on year growth in the number of Russian visitors, in 2012. With the arrival of the summer tourist season, the Bulgarian Consulate in Moscow is already issuing 3,000 visas daily. For the first four months of 2012, Bulgaria has granted 11 percent more visas to Russian tourists compared with the same period of 2011. At the same time, the Bulgarian Consulate is stressing that the actual increase in the number of Russian travellers to Bulgaria is no less than 27 percent, when the Russian holders of the Schengen visas are also counted in. Over 455,000 Russian citizens visited Bulgaria in 2011, which was an increase of more than 20 percent year-on-year.

Slovakia investing in tourism

Slovakian government officials, as well as businesses and tourism authorities, are suggesting several approaches that Slovakia could use to improve its tourism potential and attract more people.

The state government is proposing several initiatives and approaches that the ministry plans to continue implementing various measures in the tourism law that was amended last year, as well as providing more support for cycling tourism, establishing a working group to focus on preparing solutions for “creation of landscape” and restoration of damaged parts of the countryside, cooperating with the Environment Ministry in finishing a new zoning regime for the High Tatras National Park, and preparing a new law on protection of nature.

Favourite destinations for Romanians

The preferred holiday destinations for Romanians in 2011 were Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Turkey, UK, Greece, Germany and France, according to Mediafax newswire. Around 4.5 million Romanians travelled to the first ten countries in the ranking, with Bulgaria becoming a favorite destination. Last year, 1.5 million Romanians went to Bulgaria, and 336,000 stayed just one or two nights. Around 1.1 million Romanians went on holiday in Hungary, most of whom stayed for one to three nights. Many of the Romanians who go skiing to Austria prefer to spend the night in Hungary, while some Romanians also fly out from the Budapest airport.

Around 276,000 Romanian tourists went to Austria last year, 5.5 percent more than in 2010. The UK saw 260,000 holidaying Romanians last year. Fewer went to Greece – 224,000. Germany came next, with 170,000 Romanian visitors. France and Croatia are last in the ranking, with a bit over 100,000 and 63,000 Romanian tourists respectively.

Tourists spend Hryvnia 9 million over three days

Tourists spent around hryvnia (Hr) 9 million in Lviv, Ukraine, over the first days of the Euro 2012 European Football Championship. Acting Head of the Tourism Department of Lviv City Council, Halyna Hrynyk, said, “According to our calculations, foreign tourists have spent around Hr 9 million in Lviv. One tourist spends EUR 110 per day. We expect that the city will earn Hr 30-40 million over the month”. Some 60,000 tourists, including over 15,000 Germans, 6,000 from Portugal, and many guests from Poland and various regions of Ukraine, visited Lviv over first days of the Euro 2012 championship.
Estonia to launch five million euro campaign

Enterprise Estonia is going to spend about five million euros, targeting tourists from Russia, Latvia and Finland. Last year, the tourism promotion campaign focussed on Tallinn that was the European Capital of Culture; this year's objective is to attract foreign tourists to visit sights outside Tallinn. "Nature tourism does not mean that people should be arriving in camouflage suits and in Wellingtons. We want to reduce the importance of Tallinn among foreign tourists and get tourists to, for instance, Lahemaa," says head of Enterprise Estonia's tourism promotion centre, Tarmo Mutso. Mutso says that while all three countries remain important for incoming tourism, they all require different approaches.

Russians are now being offered holidays in luxury historic mansion houses that "make them feel like the Russian Emperor Peter I or Chaikovsky". Since, statistically, an average foreign tourists spends 213 Euros in Estonia, the state should attract 23,400 tourists a year to cover the cost of the five million euro campaign.

Since it is estimated that about 1.8 million foreign tourists visited Estonia last year, this shouldn't be a problem.

Tourism Ireland launches Olympic campaign

Tourism Ireland has launched a €500,000 marketing initiative, encouraging Londoners to visit Ireland during the Olympic Games in July. The 'Escape the Madness' campaign is aimed at making Ireland the ideal destination for Londoners seeking to avoid the difficulty of travelling in the city during the Games. The scheme publicises Ireland as 'the place to get away'. More than 200 large advertisements will be shown at different Tube stations, highlighting Ireland's open spaces and lack of congestion.

Norwegian orders 100 Airbus A320neo

Norwegian, one of the largest low cost carriers in Europe, has firmed up its order for 100 A320neo aircraft with Airbus. This follows a commitment signed in January. The order makes Norwegian a new Airbus customer and one of the biggest A320neo customers. The new aircraft will feature a single class cabin layout, seating approximately 180 passengers. The A320neo will support the carrier's growth and modernisation strategy. "We are very pleased to be an Airbus customer and look forward to a close cooperation. This order gives us an opportunity to secure and invest in the company's future," said Norwegian's CEO, Bjorn Kjos.

Volcano tourism anticipated to erupt

The rest of the tour involves a hike over the lava fields to get to the volcano itself, along with a volcano safari.

Discover the World recently launched a new tour which will take visitors to Iceland inside a volcano for the first time, all the way to the ground floor of the magma chamber. Using a cable car, visitors descend into the magma chamber, spending an hour on the bottom.

Sweden keeps its visitors happy

According to a report presented by the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, 90 percent of the 16.7 million foreign tourists who came to Sweden in 2011 were happy with their stay. The study consisted of over 20,000 interviews at Swedish border stations, conducted when visitors were leaving the country. It showed that the majority of visitors come from neighbouring Norway, Denmark and Finland, which made up 61 percent of the total number of visitors. Ten percent of visitors came from Germany. Out of the 14 million non-business related visits to Sweden, 40 percent stated that their visit was for leisure purposes and 16 percent stated that it was the shopping that drew them to the country.

Finnair finds India convenient

Nordic carrier Finnair sees India as a strategic market not just for inbound tourism into Finland, but to also as a convenient hub for transit to other European nations and North America, said Chief Executive, Finnair, Mika Vehvilainen. However, the carrier, which currently flies to New Delhi, has no immediate plans to look at other Indian cities or re-introduce passenger operations to Mumbai. The airline had suspended operations to Mumbai some years ago. "India offers a lot of potential. It is a growing and important market for us. But the aviation market there faces lot of competition," said Vehvilainen.

Destination Watch

Patras, Greece

One of the first cities in which the Greek Revolution began in 1821 • Neoclassical buildings and mansions dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries • Popular for: the Roman Odeon, the Fortress of Rio, Georgiou I Square and the Spinney of Patras

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Slovenia investors eye Montenegro tourism

Slovenian investors have their eyes on the famous Lipska Cave (Lipska pecina) in Cetinje. The investment group says they are interested in building the tourist value of the cave, and nearby Cetinje, through direct investment and marketing activities. Lipska Cave, one of the largest in all of former Yugoslavia, was once a tourist gem. Accessible only via trails and tour guides, Lipska was developed as a “show cave” back in 1905. There is no confirmation as to which group of investors from Slovenia has been announced but Pytheas Limited commissioned a study for Montenegro investment in July, 2011. That study, ‘Investing in Montenegro, the pearl of the Adriatic’, depicts Montenegro as a logical bridge between Western Europe and the extended Balkan region, and said, “It is Pytheas’ opinion that Montenegro could become the business bridge of Europe across the Adriatic, both a business hub and an economic gateway; an exclusive destination for Europeans and other nationals that seek to invest in a holiday, a retirement home or an investment home”.

Greece – a real bargain

Tourists who still wish to visit Greece this year are in for a treat, as foreign tour operators and Greek hoteliers are lowering prices in a bid to bolster demand. London-based Olympic Holidays, one of the biggest tour operators specialising in selling Greek package holidays, has reduced its rates by 25 percent for the peak season. Online hotel prices in Greece are showing an eight percent decline compared with June 2011, with hotel rates in Athens falling by 22 percent year-on-year. The head of the Hellenic Association of Tourism and Travel Agencies (HATTA), Giorgos Telonis, said that the negative publicity in world media distorts the country’s image as a safe destination while disputing its economic and monetary stability.

Good first quarter for Croatian capital

Croatia’s capital Zagreb had 154,535 tourists with 300,013 overnight stays from January to April this year, a two percent increase on overnight stays from the same period in 2011. According to statistics released by the Zagreb Tourist Board, the most visitors arrived from Germany, followed by Italy, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. In April alone there were 52,809 tourists, which was a one percent rise from April 2011.

Macedonia eyes trade, woos GCC

The Balkan Republic of Macedonia is awaiting a huge flow of travellers and tourists from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states in the coming months, particularly from Qatar, where its only embassy of the region is located. In 2011, 700,000 tourists flocked to the Balkan nation, whose local government is supportive in backing the hospitality sector. Though the country has only a small number of major hotel chains, there are a large number of budget hotels, resorts and tourist accommodations. Considered generally as a relatively cheaper European tourist destination, the tiny country is receiving tourists mainly from within Europe, USA and Far East. “We are focusing more on wooing tourists from the Middle East, in particular from the GCC states, for whom we have so many attractions on offer,” said Advisor to the Macedonian Agency for Promotion and Support of Tourism, Zhivka Cverkoska-Andonoska. He said the interest evinced by Qatar in exploring the possibility for making long-term investments in the industrial and hospitality sectors of Macedonia would go a long way in promoting travel to the country by visitors from this region.

Spanish tourism may get lift from EU bank aid

The Secretary General of the UN World Tourism Organisation has said that Spain’s biggest growth engine, its tourism industry, will get a boost from European aid as funds trickle to the sector and boost job creation. The Spanish economy is suffering from chronically high unemployment due partly to the strain of bad debts on its financial sector, which is now in line for up to 100 billion euros via a bailout. Analysts had expressed concern over whether Spanish companies could afford to take on temporary staff for the summer tourism season. Spain’s unemployment rate is the highest in the euro zone at 24.4 percent and around 50 percent among young people. Spanish tourism benefited last year from increased numbers of holiday makers avoiding troubles in northern Africa, but growth this year has lagged.
Ski resorts hit as Swiss tourism suffers

The strong franc and weak euro are hurting the tourism industry in Switzerland this year. The latest forecast for the summer season is a drop of 1.7 percent overall, and 3.4 percent in inbound tourism. The two factors that are saving the situation are strong domestic demand, with the Swiss visiting their own country, and a continuing strong demand from Asia. The Economics Ministry, Seco, notes that while strong demand from Asia’s emerging economies helps, they remain too small a share of overall tourism to make up for significant losses from neighbours - France, Italy and Germany. The winter saw Swiss resorts showing a six percent drop despite wonderful snowfall.

New cannabis rules - a success, claims Mayor

The number of complaints about drugs nuisances almost quadrupled to 699 in Maastricht in May, the first month that tourists have been banned from buying marijuana in the city’s cannabis cafes. There were 101 arrests in the Limburg city on drugs charges, compared with an average of five before the ban was introduced. Despite the soaring number of complaints, Mayor Onno Hoes claims that there has been a sharp drop in the number of foreign tourists attempting to buy drugs and the rise in street dealing is ‘manageable’. Some 70 percent of the city’s coffee shop customers used to come from abroad. The aim of the new law is to stop drugs tourism, but opponents say it will lead to an increase in street dealing.

‘Smart’ tourist sites

In what it described as a world first, the city of Brussels has launched a system that enables tourists or anyone else with a smartphone to scan tags for information at 600 sites in the city. Developed by a Belgian firm, the system called ‘TagTagCity’ enables visitors to scan a code on a tag. These tags appear on the walls and windows of museums, monuments, restaurants and shops. For those without smartphones, small devices can be purchased that enable a user to gather information and download it onto a computer.

‘Suicide tourism’ to stay

Assisted suicide has been legal in Switzerland since 1942, if performed by a non-physician who has no direct interest in the death. Euthanasia, or ‘mercy killing’, is legal only in the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Belgium, and the US state of Oregon. There has been a significant rise in terminally ill foreigners - particularly from Germany, France and Britain - travelling to Switzerland to commit suicide in recent years. In 2010, voters in Zurich overwhelmingly rejected proposed bans on ‘suicide tourism’. France may be the next nation to adopt this policy, with Germany not far behind.

Monaco has ambitious over-night plans

The Monaco Convention Bureau, which boasts around 700 events a year, has set itself an ambitious target of 230,000 overnight stays booked by the end of 2015 and has urged all its partners to work towards the same objective. Sandrine Camia, the Bureau’s recently-appointed Head, believes in synergy with local key players.

France fails to impress

Tourists from the BRIC group of emerging economies - Brazil, Russia, India and China - are underwhelmed by the shopping and hotels in France, an economy ministry study, carried out with the French central bank, said. France is the world’s top tourist destination, but only 50 percent of visitors from the BRIC nations said they were “very satisfied” with their visits - a figure that fell to just 39 percent for Chinese tourists and 43 percent for Indians.

France and Germany are hurting the tourism industry while Belgium is underwhelmed by the Dutch. The Monaco Convention Bureau is working towards ambitious targets while the French Prime Minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, plans to create a Ministry for Tourism after the legislative elections in mid-June.

The quality of Swiss hotels is deteriorating because of a cash crunch and unfavourable exchange rate in the past couple of years. Most of these are small Swiss hotels with little scope for growth. The absence of marketing is making it worse.

Irish heritage sites are worth about 700 million euro as tourist attractions, a study has found. Major historical sites and monuments are worth a total of 1.5 billion euro in total to the economy.

Statistics from VisitBritain show that international travellers made 706,000 overnight stays in Manchester last year as overseas tourism to the area grew 15 percent.

IATA has urged the European Union to postpone its controversial carbon tax scheme, amid warnings it could spark a trade war that would penalise Europe.

Marriott International announced plans to open a second hotel in Bucharest - the 147-room Courtyard by Marriott Bucharest. The hotel will operate under a management agreement with Gica Popescu Hotels SRL and is expected to open in 2014.

In Brief

Armenia and Latvia have signed an agreement to cooperate in the sphere of tourism, particularly for cultural tourism.

The global aviation trade group nearly doubled its forecast of European airlines’ losses this year to $1.1 billion and said the worldwide industry will scrape by with wafer thin profit margins due to high fuel prices.

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South Africa to ink new blueprint for tourism

After recording robust growth in the tourism sector in the last decade, South Africa is now ready to shift gears. The country's national tourism promotional agency, South African Tourism (SAT), has chalked out a 360-degree comprehensive tourism development plan to position the country as a multi-faceted destination. Unveiled at INDABA 2012, which was held in May at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli International Convention Centre in Durban, the plan set a target of 15 million international arrivals by 2020. The plan also focuses on sustainable development of tourism and cooperation in the tourism industry.

Setting the target for 2020, Tourism Minister, South Africa, Marthinus van Schalkwyk said, “Eight years from now, in 2020, within the time frame of our National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS), we want to see 15 million international arrivals, for which we will be spending R2.2 billion in promoting our destination in Africa over the next three years. We will ensure a significant presence on the continent with five offices across Africa within five years. By 2020, we will have implemented an e-visa system that will improve security while also facilitating hassle-free travel.”

Travelport acquires Galileo Southern Africa

Travelport has announced the conclusion of an agreement with South African Airways (SAA) to acquire Galileo Southern Africa. The new, entity will be known as Travelport Southern Africa. A new five-year full content agreement has also been signed and will provide all Travelport-connected travel agents with full access to SAA’s full published fares and inventory. Managing Director for Travelport Africa, Mark Meehan, said, “This is also a long-term investment decision and builds on the recently expanded distributor network we have established across much of Africa with Johannesburg as a key regional hub”.

SAA celebrates round trip anniversary

South African Airways (SAA) is celebrating the first year of its popular round-trip nonstop service between New York and Johannesburg, which launched on May 1, 2011. Johannesburg allows passengers throughout the region to spend nearly a full day on the continent before catching their flight back to the US. The round-trip nonstop service has reduced the overall travel time in each direction by over 90 minutes. “South African Airlines is very pleased that the enhancement of our schedule between New York and Johannesburg has received such an overwhelming response from our customers,” said Executive Vice President, North America for SAA, Todd Neuman. “We’ve seen a 25 percent growth in passengers, both business and leisure travellers,” he added.

ATA’s 37th Annual World Congress

The Africa Travel Association (ATA), the travel industry trade association promoting tourism to Africa, held its 37th Annual Congress in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, from May 18 – 22. More than 500 delegates from government, business and the non-profit sectors gathered at the ATA event.

The theme, ‘Africa Tourism: Partnering for the Future’, focused on how tourism, with growth rates in emerging markets outperforming more established destinations, is one of the most promising industries on the African continent for development. South African Airways served as Presenting Sponsor and Official Congress Carrier and Arik Air served as Official Media Carrier. “Our 37th Congress has been a real success with significant outcomes that will have a positive impact on the tourism industry in Zimbabwe and across Africa,” said ATA Executive Director, Edward Bergman. “Now more than ever, the tourism industry has a greater ability to affect lives and contribute to positive growth and development and ATA is pleased to be at the heart of this process”.

SAA announces new hub

South African Airways (SAA) announced that effective from August 16, 2012, passengers travelling from London to Cape Town will fly via the airline’s hub in Johannesburg – OR Tambo International Airport. SAA currently has two daily services between London Heathrow and Johannesburg, and will be increasing its capacity on these flights by 13 percent through the use of larger aircraft to accommodate passengers on this route. SAA also offers up to 38 flights daily between Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Said Cape Town Tourism CEO, Mariette Du Toit-Helmbold, “This is disappointing news for Cape Town’s tourism industry and we fear it could affect tourism arrivals from the UK and the rest of Europe negatively. Whilst SAA’s growth strategy’s emphasis on expansion of routes into Africa and new markets like South America and Australasia is encouraging, the issue of direct air access to Cape Town is again highlighted. Airlines must make economic sense.”

Destination Watch

Djenné, Mali

- World Heritage Site
- Home to the ruins of Jenné-Jeno which dates back to about 300 BC
- Distinctive adobe architecture
- Popular for: ‘The Great Mosque’ – the largest mud-brick building in the world, the tomb of Tapama Djenepo and the Grand Marche
Friendly Planet Travel’s Safari

According to Friendly Planet Travel, the days of a rich safari adventure costing $5,000 are over. Friendly Planet has introduced an eight-day Kenya Safari Express for $2,199, without cutting corners. The Kenya Safari Express includes round-trip airfare from New York’s JFK airport on Turkish Airlines; accommodations at deluxe hotels and superior safari lodges; game-viewing drives with experienced game spotters with a guaranteed window seat and access to a pop-up roof hatch; a boat safari on Lake Naivasha; comprehensive sightseeing tours in Nairobi by friendly Planet Travel’s Safari Express gives them an opportunity that has never been offered before, and might never be offered again. This lion-sized deal is bound to sell out quickly,” she said.

Harmonised visa fees

Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya have introduced an uniform visa fee structure, with the aim of boosting the region’s revenue and marketing the region as a single destination. “Each of the three countries is now charging $50. However this is not the end of it, since we are still negotiating on other measures aimed at marketing the region as a single destination,” said Tanzania’s Deputy Minister of Natural Resources and Tourism, Lazaro Nyalandu. Chairman of the Association of Uganda Tour Operators, Boniface Byamukama, said that although negotiations for a single visa continue, the common ground being maintained is that the region should be marketed as a single destination.

Showcasing Ghana’s heritage through tours

In celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, Christian pilgrimage tour operator, Journeys Unlimited and faith-based African-American lifestyle magazine, The Positive Community, are partnering to present the Ghana Heritage Tour. Taking place from November 9 through 19, 2012, the nine day tour of Ghana introduces travellers to the country’s culture and Christian history, as well as Ghana’s modern and ancient ways of life. The educational tour includes a visit to Cape Coast Castle, dubbed “the door of no return”, from which untold numbers of African slaves were shipped to the United States, South America and Caribbean.

“The Ghana Heritage Tour is an important trip for all Americans to take. Ghanaian history and American history are inextricably linked,” said Journeys Unlimited President, Nick Mancino.

“The experience can be enriching to American visitors on many levels. In addition to learning about Ghana’s past, travellers will marvel at this country’s splendid culture and natural beauty today.”

SAT to host Module III of ‘Learn South Africa’

South African Tourism (SAT) will be hosting Module III of its training workshop ‘Learn South Africa’ for its travel partners from June 12 through July 28, 2012. The workshop will cover 33 cities and South African Tourism will conduct two sessions (three hours each) of the workshop in each city in order to accommodate a larger number of travel trade professionals.

‘Learn South Africa’ aims to train travel professionals to promote, plan and organise holidays in South Africa, customised to client requirements.

According to Country Head - India, South African Tourism, Hanneli Slabber, ‘Learn South Africa’ will provide in-depth knowledge about the destination and the module will include topics like - why sell South Africa; reasons to visit South Africa; how to check the quality of hotels and operators and visa applications, etc.

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Owing to the lack of non-direct flights, the visitor arrivals have dropped on some of the core markets. We are working even harder to sustain tourism growth, to defend our core markets, and to tap into the potential of new tourism markets

Elsia Grandcourt, Chief Executive, Seychelles Tourism Board

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Canada leaves UN tourism group

Canada has chosen to formally remove itself from the United Nation World Tourism Body (UNWTO) over its latest choice of ambassadors.

With a lineup of ambassadors ranging from Drew Barrymore to David Beckham, it seems that the latest pick has pushed Canada over the edge. President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, was honoured as a “leader for tourism” by the UNWTO, along with his politically sympathetic Zambian President, Michael Sata. Over his 25 year presidential term, Mugabe has been accused of election rigging, controlling the media, worsening poverty and engineering hunger and ethnic cleansing.

Today, Mugabe is banned from traveling throughout the EU and the United States. The Tourism Review reported that The Canadian Foreign Minister, John Baird, said that the UNWTOs praise for Sata and Mugabe for their role in tourism at Victoria Falls was the ‘last straw’ in Canadian participation at the UN body.

BP oil spill cleared; tourists back

The US Gulf Coast is a hot destination two years after the massive British Petroleum (BP) oil spill made the region a tourist dead zone. The petroleum giant has pumped more than $150 million into promotions to help the region recover.

New Orleans, where more than four million barrels of oil gushed into the Gulf of Mexico, has seen a frenzy of tourism efforts. A chunk of the $15 million BP initially sent to Louisiana in 2010 funded emergency advertising to quell misperceptions that New Orleans was laden with oil.

Since then, BP has sent more than $150 million to Florida, Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi to aid tourism, and will shell out close to $30 million more by the end of 2013. Another $82 million was committed for seafood marketing and testing, BP spokesman Craig Savage said.

It is not clear whether states most affected by the oil spill still lag behind others as tourism improves nationally.

“I Love NY!”

New York is dusting off its 40-year-old “I Love NY” icon in a $2 million tourism push aimed at vacationers in the state, in neighboring states and in Canada. Governor, Andrew Cuomo, announced the TV campaign in early June, that marked the return of the “I Love NY” logo with a heart in place of the word ‘love’. The summer tourism commercials will run in upstate markets as well as in Cleveland, Philadelphia, Toronto, Montreal and Connecticut and print ads will be carried on all NYC taxis.

Hotel rates near pre-recession levels

Hotel rates for business travellers in North America surged 9.3 percent in April, coming within three percentage points of the peak pre-recession rates in fall 2008, according to Pegasus Solutions. For leisure travellers, rates increased 7.3 percent in April but remained below pre-recession peaks by double-digit percentage points, the company said. STR Global, which tracks supply and demand in the hotel industry, reported that the overall average hotel rate in the US, at the end of April was $105.71—a five percent increase compared with the same period in 2011.

The Pegasus report predicts that rate increases will continue in the months ahead.

Record-breaking year expected in SFO

Tourism in San Francisco generates more than $8 billion a year and the projections for 2012 are looking even better. During a typical summer, seven million to eight million people visit the city. This year, with the Golden Gate Bridge’s 75th anniversary, the US Open and the America’s Cup World Series, the summer is anything but typical. The San Francisco Travel Association says hotel occupancy numbers won’t be in for a couple months, but they’re expected to skyrocket mid-June onwards. Tournament officials expect 220,000 visitors at the US Open. Last year, tournament attendees spent $21 million on food and nearly $7 million on recreation, including golf.

Heritage tourism helping Nebraska’s economy

A report commissioned by the Nebraska State Historical Society and Nebraska Department of Economic Development shows that heritage tourism has an outsized economic impact on the state. It contributes $196 million annually to the state’s economy and supports more than 3,000 jobs. Nebraska has three million visitors a year to heritage tourism sites, with 38.5 percent of those visitors coming from out of state. Heritage tourism visitors generate $6.4 million in state and local tax revenues.
Travel to Cuba easier

Despite lying just 90 miles south of Florida in the Caribbean Sea, Cuba has been mostly off-limits to American travellers since being put under an economic embargo 50 years ago. That began to change last year when President Barack Obama’s administration resumed issuing “people-to-people” licenses intended to promote more contact between Americans and Cubans and make it easier for ordinary US citizens to visit the island, as long as they go with a licensed operator. Cuba is a hot destination for Americans who are unsure how long the people-to-people licenses will remain available.

Pluna Airline CEO warns of ‘collapse’

Brazil’s slowing growth and Argentina’s trade and currency restrictions are dragging down the profits of some of the region’s airlines. In Uruguay, the national airline, Pluna, is resisting a $30 million government bailout offer, saying that unless politicians provide more protection from unfair competition, “everything we built will collapse”. That warning came in a letter that CEO of Pluna, Matias Campiani, sent to Pluna employees. Campiani, who asked his workers to stay optimistic, work hard and “don’t forget to smile for our passengers,” blamed Uruguay’s neighbors, competitors and politicians for his company’s difficulties.

Gay tourism boom in Buenos Aires

Over the past years, Buenos Aires has prevailed as Latin America’s greatest gay travel capital and lesbians and gays comprise as much as 15 to 20 percent of visitors. The city endeavours to ensure that gay tourism is formally recognised with its huge collection of gay bars, restaurants and tango halls. There are also gay-run restaurants, gay-only B&Bs, a near-gay-only beach, and hotels that publicise as “gay-friendly”.

BRAZIL

Brazil to finance Ghana airport

The Brazilian government has approved a request from Ghana to finance the Tamale International Airport project. Upgrading the Tamale Airport is estimated to cost $73.2 million. If discussions are finalised, a Brazilian company, Queiroz Galvao, will handle the construction, which is to be financed by Brazil’s national EXIM bank BNDES.

Green passport initiative

The Government of Brazil and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) launched the Green Passport initiative in Rio de Janeiro in the beginning of June. The Green Passport campaign is aimed at bringing about behavioural changes in travellers’ attitude towards the environment. The ‘passport’ is actually a physical passport-style document packed with advice and tips on how to make a holiday more sustainable. Ecuador, Costa Rica, France’s overseas territories and South Africa have already taken this initiative and about 100,000 Green Passports were distributed to visitors during the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. The Green Passport initiative was launched in Rio keeping in mind future events like the 2014 FIFA Football World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games.

US, among others, wooing Brazil

Just a few short years ago a hot topic of conversation among well-heeled Brazilians was their rough treatment at US consulates. Now US president Barack Obama has thrown out a big welcome mat, promising to slash the amount of time it takes Brazilians to get tourist visas. Brazilian citizens are on the move like never before. Last year more Brazilians visited the US than French and spent more there than the Germans. Obama is not the only one looking to get a slice of this action. Governments are scrambling to get their destinations into Brazilian travel brochures. At the Travel Week in São Paulo, hundreds of foreign destinations paid €7,500 to sell their wares to Brazilian tour operators. Notably absent from the event was any Irish presence. Tourism Ireland, the body responsible for promoting Irish tourism abroad, says it is a question of money. Its resources have been cut back at a time when it is trying to recover the two million visitors lost as a result of the global downturn. Tourism Ireland decided it was much more likely to recover these losses from its four main markets – the UK, US, Germany and France.

In Brief

Low-cost airline VivaColombia entered Colombia’s growing commercial airline sector with deals as low as $29 each way. The airline is the second local airline to dub itself “low-cost”. The carrier begins with three Airbus A-320s, each able to seat 180 passengers. It will fly five domestic routes.

The Chilean Foreign Investment Committee, under the Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, has announced foreign investment projects in the infrastructure sector worth up to $14 billion. These projects include the tender of the Arturo Merino Benítez International Airport, work on five hospitals, and the building of The Transandino Central Railway (Aconcagua Bioceanic Corridor).

President of Uruguay, José Mujica appointed Armenian descent, Deputy Minister of Tourism, Lilian Keshishyan, as the new Minister of Tourism and Sport.

Visit California has launched a premium edition of its Fun Spots promotion to celebrate the enhancements opening this summer at some of the Golden State’s attractions. Save on admission at California theme parks, zoos, aquariums, museums as well as boat and train rides through downloading discount coupons at www.visitcalifornia.com.

Tourists spent US$1.3 billion in Costa Rica, 15 percent more than 2011. San Jose, Costa Rica, ranks sixth in disbursement of money for tourists. The first place is Mexico, the second Buenos Aires, the third Sao Paulo, the fourth Lima, and the fifth Bogota.
200 percent increase in yacht arrivals in St Kitts

In the first three months of 2012, figures from the St Christopher Air and Sea Ports Authority (SCASPA) reported that 267 yachts dropped anchor in St Kitts; a triple-digit increase in yacht arrivals and a double-digit increase in passengers aboard yachts compared to the same period last year.

Minister of Tourism and International Transport, Senator Richard Skerritt, recently said that the yachting landscape in St Kitts and Nevis will change dramatically over the next few years. Establishment of the private jet terminal, together with the ongoing construction of world-class marina facilities at Christophe Harbour, and a further expansion of the Port Zante Marina, coupled with the modernisation of yacht entry and clearance administration are in the pipeline.

Air service between Nevis to Montserrat

Airlift from Nevis will be bolstered with daily flights to and from Antigua with Fly Montserrat Airlines. The scheduled start of flights between Nevis and Montserrat by Fly Montserrat has been welcomed by the Montserrat Tourism Board (MTB). The inaugural flight took place on June 4. Director of Fly Montserrat, Captain Nigel Harris, during the ceremony held at the Nevis Airport ahead of the inaugural flight, said that the 20 minute flight would give visitors ample time to explore and enjoy what Montserrat has to offer.

New iPhone travel app in Barbados

A daily travel blog, Uncommon Caribbean, has launched a new Uncommon Barbados app for iPhones. This app aims to help travellers maximise their Barbados travel experiences. An Internet connection is not required to access Uncommon Barbados content, which means that travellers can use it without racking up international roaming charges. Uncommon Barbados content encompasses a tightly curated collection of activities, hotel options, suggested restaurants, drinks, and more.

2012 policy includes storm guarantee

With the launch of its 2012 travel interruption policy, Starwood Hotels and Resorts has reassured Caribbean group and leisure travellers the guarantee of a full refund or a complimentary guestroom upgrade on their next visit, within one calendar year, in the event of a storm. In addition, in-house guests will not be penalised for an early departure in the event of a storm, and any unused portion of a deposit will be refunded. Area Director, Sales and Marketing, Caribbean Starwood Hotels and Resorts, Jim Curtis, commented that experts are predicting a slower season than in the past years.

Visa requirement for Anguillians put on hold

The measure that would have required persons in possession of Anguillian passports to obtain visas to enter French Saint Martin has been put on hold by French authorities. A seven-strong delegation, including Governor, Alistair Harrison; Chief Minister, Hubert Hughes and Minister of Home Affairs, Walcott Richardson, travelled to Marigot to hold discussions with officials of the French Prefecture. The delegation was assured by the French authorities that the matter would be raised at a higher level in Paris.

The government of Anguilla said it was pleased with the decision and is ready to continue discussions to bring this issue to a satisfactory conclusion.

Vogeler praises Cuba

General Director for the Americas of the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), Carlos Vogeler, said Cuba now is in the third position as the Caribbean country that receives more tourists per year, trailing the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. He also said that Cuba was improving its tourist industry, which shows in the increasing number of arrivals each year.
Jamaica confident about merger

We are extremely happy to announce the start-up of our service from Gatwick to Piarco International Airport. We are strategically well positioned to become the preferred airline for all customers flying between London and the Caribbean with seamless connections to South America.

Robert Corbie
Caribbean Airlines Chief Executive Officer

St Kitts-Nevis adopts GSTC new criteria for destinations

By taking over Air Jamaica, CAL immediately doubled its passengers and became the dominant airline in the region. “There has been a cutting of some of the routes that Air Jamaica used to fly, but I have been told that these decisions are due to economic reasons. In any case, we are not against this because we want Caribbean Airlines to succeed,” he reiterated.

Minister of Tourism and Entertainment, Jamaica, Dr Wykeham McNeill, has said he is confident the Air Jamaica and Caribbean Airlines Ltd (CAL) merger will be a success. McNeill is hopeful that it will lead to the growth of CAL.

He said, “CAL took over Air Jamaica after a lot of discussions and we were happy that the Air Jamaica brand was retained. By taking over Air Jamaica, CAL immediately doubled its passengers and became the dominant airline in the region”. “There has been a cutting of some of the routes that Air Jamaica used to fly, but I have been told that these decisions are due to economic reasons. In any case, we are not against this because we want Caribbean Airlines to succeed,” he reiterated.

Belize ranks among world’s best destinations

Belize ranks among the world’s best destinations in 2012, according to the readers of Travel and Leisure magazine. The editors of the Travel and Leisure magazine have just released to the Belize Tourism Board that this August, Belize will be featured in Travel and Leisure magazine, the official website TravelandLeisure.com, and in the iPad edition of the publication. Minister of Tourism and Culture, Manuel Heredia Jr, said, “It is always an honour to see and know that our beautiful Belize continues to be recognised worldwide for all it has to offer”.

Green Globe certifies Rosalie Bay Resort

Green Globe has announced certification of The Rosalie Bay Resort on Dominica, for its impact on the environment by using renewable energy and implementing eco friendly practices.

It has become the only Green Globe certified property on the island. Rosalie Bay Resort, which is the first wind turbine on Dominica and one of the largest in the Leeward Islands, actively contributes to protecting endangered sea turtles on the island by providing a protected nesting ground.

Owner of the Resort, Beverly Deikel, said, “We are excited to be Green Globe certified and to bring this distinction to Dominica. Seeing our dream become a reality is very fulfilling, and receiving international recognition for our environmental and community achievements makes us very proud”.

Saint Lucia embraces travel agent community

The Saint Lucia Tourist Board has wrapped up a ‘Grand Fam’ involving scores of US based travel partners to ensure that arrivals to the island grow from year to year. The US is the island’s largest source market, accounting for 40 percent of arrivals. From May 31 to June 4, seventy travel agents had the opportunity to visit the island’s resorts to get a firsthand experience of what Saint Lucia has to offer. Tourism Director, Louis Lewis, said, “We endeavour to do all that is possible to nurture and sustain this symbiotic relationship with travel agents. With increasing competition, it is critical that we remember to show our appreciation and to do all we can to ensure we remain in the forefront of these travel influencers minds”.

Voices

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TND

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Robert Corbie
Caribbean Airlines Chief Executive Officer
Growth in traffic prompts Hertz NZ to expand

To help accommodate Queenstown Airports’ strong growth in passenger traffic and subsequent new opportunities for car rental in the region, Hertz New Zealand has opened a new service centre based at the airport. Hertz New Zealand Country Manager, Mark Righton, said, “This new facility will enable us to be even more efficient in meeting the needs of the growing number of leisure and business customers. We have timed the opening to coincide with the start of the 2012 ski season, the peak period every year for tourism in the Queenstown region”.

All Hertz operations and administration across the Wakatipu Basin will be controlled from the new site. CEO of Queenstown Airport, Scott Paterson, welcomed the expansion by Hertz, which coincides with a 29 percent increase in flights to the airport this winter, compared with last year.

First homestays open on Mitiaro Island

Initiated by Tenu Okotai of Cook Islands Tours and the Mitiaro community with the full support of Cook Islands Tourism, one of the Cook Islands’ most remote sister islands, Mitiaroas, opened the first of its homestay accommodation options. Hosted by local Mitiaro families, the island now features three homestay kikau huts. A forty-five minute flight from the capital Rarotonga, the new homestay development is the only accommodation option on the island. Seven more huts and a two-bedroom family unit of the full Mitiaro Homestay Project are expected to open within the next three years.

‘India 2020 Strategic Plan’

The Australia Tourism Exchange (ATE) saw ‘Tourism Australia unveil a new strategy aimed at tapping into the future tourism potential of India, developed by Tourism Australia in consultation with industry and government stakeholders. With the ‘India 2020 Strategic Plan’, Australia is seeking to secure a greater share of the 50 million Indians expected to travel overseas by 2020.

Unveiled by Minister for Tourism, Government of Australia, Martin Ferguson, the plan identifies the main opportunities and sets out the approach required to build Australia’s appeal and to win future market share. The major cities of Delhi and Mumbai and middle class travellers within them will be Tourism Australia’s primary consumer marketing and distribution targets. India is currently Australia’s tenth most valuable inbound tourism market, with 48,000 visitors spending AUD 867 million in 2011.

Small tourism operators to receive web advantage

A workshop is being held in the Solomon Islands to help medium and smaller sized accommodation operators get up to speed with their online presence so that operators can create websites for visitors to book online. The Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau says 12 accommodation operators are in the process of getting websites up and running. The sites will then also be channelled in with other travel websites like expedia and wotif. Marketing Manager at the Bureau, Freda Unusi, says, compared to other South Pacific countries, accommodation operators in the Solomon Islands have virtually no online presence and are missing out on business as a result. “Just looking at our other countries in the region, like Fiji or Vanuatu they are all up there; we’re sort of lagging behind. And one of the things we think is affecting this is our very little presence online.” Unusi says the websites should be up and running in three months time.

In Brief

The latest phase of Tourism Australia’s global marketing campaign, “There’s nothing like Australia”, has been launched. Tourism Australia will spend approximately A$810 million over the next three years rolling out the evolving campaign in its key international markets and in Australia.

Auckland International Airport, which is targeting Asian arrivals to stoke growth over the next decade, starting July, will cut the average international passenger fee and lift domestic charges as a part of their new pricing schedule.

The Solomon Islands Tourism Year 2012 has been launched. The theme is “Tourism Development in Harmony with Nature and Culture”. The government has also put in place a five year tourism action plan - from 2011-15.

Cook Islands has seen an increase in visitor figures for April 2012 with huge number of Asian tourists coming to the island. The number of Asians coming to Rarotonga in April is up by 40 percent compared to the same month last year.
Australian ski season opens early

Early snowfall means the official ski season in Australia has opened a week early. Perisher Ski Resort in New South Wales’ Snowy Mountains is set to open a week ahead of the official ski season, following heavy snowfall, low temperatures and continuing snow. 30 cm of snow was recorded in the area. Perisher Chief Executive, Peter Brulisauer, said proceeds from the weekend will be donated to local charities. Other Australian ski fields are also gearing up for a great start to the ski season.

Virgin Lounge opens at Gold Coast Airport

Virgin Australia has opened its 680sqm passenger lounge at the southern end of the Gold Coast airport’s domestic terminal. The two-level lounge features an entry level reception area and offers facilities like a buffet put together by celebrity Luke Mangan, for business travellers. Virgin Australia General Manager, Alison Chalmer, said the expansion represented a significant investment by the company.

Gold Coast Airport Chief Operating Officer, Paul Donovan, said the new lounge was a strong boost for tourism in the region and a sign of Virgin’s confidence in the market. Passenger numbers have only just started to turn around for the Gold Coast Airport after a tough year hit by natural disasters in Queensland, Japan and New Zealand and a high Australian dollar.
Events

In this issue: Thailand Travel Mart, IAMAI Travel & Tourism Summit, World Travel Awards, Flower Carpet 2012

Thailand Travel Mart Plus 2012

Over 473 buyers from 60 countries met 381 sellers at Thailand’s largest travel and tourism B2B exhibition, Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) 2012 at the IMPACT Exhibition Center in Bangkok. The theme was ‘Customise your experience in Thailand’ to encourage tour operators to offer their customers, both group travellers and free independent travellers, the opportunity to enjoy itineraries that are tailored to their specific interests when visiting Thailand.

“This year, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has refocussed our strategies to attract a greater number of niche-market visitors seeking holidays and experiences more in tune with their personal preferences and lifestyles. Four of the key niche markets that offer considerable potential are golf, weddings & honeymoons, eco tourism and health & wellness. The weddings and honeymoons category alone offers tremendous opportunities for Thai tourism operators – at present, India, Korea, Japan, France, USA and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are rapidly-growing source markets for those who want to get married or celebrate their union in Thailand,” said Governor, TAT, Suraphon Svetasreni.

TAT’s support in intra-regional travel was reinforced with the participation of several NTOs from the Greater Mekong Subregion including Bhutan, China’s Yunnan and Guangxi provinces, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam at TTM+ 2012.

To achieve effective results, TAT is going to initiate the ‘DISCO Blueprint’ for the organisation to follow.

‘DISCO Blueprint’

D is for Digital Marketing
I is Image Building
S is Sustainable
C is Crystallisation & Crisis Management
O is Organisation Management

Istanbul Shopping Festival off to a good start

The third edition of the Istanbul Shopping Festival 2012 commenced on June 8th and is scheduled to run till June 29th. The 21-day festival will offer discounted items, extended hours and a range of events in venues around the city.

Traditional tourist destinations such as the Grand Bazaar and Egyptian Spice Market will host concerts, street festivals and fashion shows, emulating the Dubai Shopping Festival.

The organisers hope that the festival will grow in size to attract over 1.5 million tourists to Istanbul annually over the next four years, helping the government hit its target of 10 million tourists a year by 2015.

Flower Carpet 2012

From August 15 - 19, Brussels will honour Africa at its Flower Carpet 2012. The flower tapestry of showcases patterns recalling designs from the tribes of Ethiopia, Congo, Nigeria, Botswana, and Cameroun. It will be held in the Grand-Place, which will be adorned with thousands of ‘flamingo flowers’ from South America.

Kenya to host WTA

The World Travel Awards 2012 will take place in Nairobi on September 26, with important decision-makers in the region’s travel and tourism sector scheduled to attend. The awards recognise excellence in travel and tourism, and aim to encourage world class competition that promotes innovation, thereby ensuring that travellers around the world receive exceptional value. Kenya is honored to host WTA Africa and the Indian Ocean gala for the first time this year. The event will be co-hosted alongside the Africa Hotel Investment Forum (AHIF), a two-day conference (September 25-26) that will showcase the hospitality investment potential of Africa’s fastest-growing nations.

Tourism festival in J&K

Bhaderwah, in Jammu & Kashmir, is prepared to kick off a four-day tourism-cum-cultural festival from June 24 to attract domestic and foreign tourists. Various government departments and private stakeholders are expected to set up stalls at the venue to provide first hand information regarding government schemes and various products to the public. Sports such as paragliding, river crossing, rappelling and tree climbing will be conducted by the Jawahar Institute of Mountaineering.
IAMAI: 4th Travel & Tourism Summit

IAMAI organised its 4th Travel & Tourism Summit on June 8th at Hotel Shangri-La, New Delhi. The conference was a successful conglomeration of gurus of the travel and tourism industry. The day long sessions addressed various issues and challenges being faced by sectors like aviation, technology, hotels, destination marketing, OTAs and Non-OTAs, amongst others.

**Plenary Sessions**

The Summit comprised of five Plenary Sessions:

- Technology as the business enhancer
- Hotel Booking – choosing the right online partner
- Showing the world to Indians (Outbound)
- Developing India as a Destination (Inbound and Domestic)
- Airlines & OTAs: Building Sustainable Partnership

The esteemed panelists of every session gave insightful and informative analyses on the current travel scenario. They highlighted ground realities and the need to comprehend the opportunities in the Indian tourism industry. Theopen hours for Q&A made the sessions more meaningful and lively.

Managing Director, Travelocity India & Chairman, Digital Commerce Committee, IAMAI, Himanshu Singh, pointed out, “The total travel market is around $800 billion and the online share is growing rapidly. Payment and logistics still pose a challenge and the success parameter for business is about cracking these problems. These problems that we are facing today have to be countered by all players of the industry together, and this will help the market grow exponentially”. As per IAMAI ‘Internet Economy Watch’ data, e-ticketing continues to grow with irctc.com recording 5.56 million bookings in April 2012 as compared to 2.26 million bookings in April 2011. Airlines recorded 1.92 million bookings in April 2012, as compared to 1.01 million bookings in April 2011. The data for online travel is based on absolute numbers captured from irctc.com recording 5.56 million bookings in April 2012 as compared to 2.26 million bookings in April 2011, as compared to 1.01 million bookings in April 2011.

**Speakers at the Summit**

As per the recent report released by Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) while e-ticketing continues to grow with irctc.com recording 5.56 million bookings in April 2012 as compared to 2.26 million bookings in April 2011, airlines recorded 1.92 million bookings in April 2011, as compared to 1.01 million bookings in April 2011.

In April 2012, as compared to 1.01 million bookings in April 2011. The data for online travel is based on absolute numbers captured from irctc.com recording 5.56 million bookings in April 2012. The Vice President, Marketing-Fox International, Debarpita Banerjee, said, “In order to make fruitful experiments, it is very important to keep your ears to ground level and keep it relevant. It is very important today, to keep innovating so that we can enable a traveller enjoy a lot while travelling and make it the most memorable journey”.

Globally the travel & tourism market is pegged at about US$ 800 billion but the online market share has not reached its optimal point. With internet users in India at around 121 million, the focus is now to create a solution for travellers to plan travel online. ‘An innovative marketing strategy coupled with value additions will sway travellers to book hotels and tickets online’, said Regional Director, Revenue Management, India, Bangladesh and Nepal, Starwood Hotels & Resorts, Devdutta Banerjee. He added, “Online is the platform for growth. Integration of logistics and services is necessary to fuel further growth”.

‘Ancillary Revenue’ has a great potential, pointed out GM, Revenue Management & Pricing, Air India, Alok Singh. He also focussed on how important it is to make convergence possible between Distributions, CRM & Research. The Summit also addressed issues related to technology and payments as a business enhancer. With many technology outlets available, it is important to use them in a strategic manner and explore new ways of marketing, packaging, quality of services and robust payment system in the travel industry. Speaking about the same, CEO, Quadlabs, Gaurav Chiripal, said, “The customer is king. And with technology, if we include social connect, it can really help our business grow. Global strategy in every aspect is very important to focus”.

**A Great Networking Platform**

Chairman – STIC Travel Group, Subash Goyal: “It is a highly useful platform where you get to meet all the industry related people at the same time. Besides networking, such summits give one an opportunity to learn, share views and clear doubts during the Question hour sessions. The topics chosen for day long sessions are very relevant. We need to address these issues and find solutions to various challenges we are facing. The organisers need to be applauded for having taken efforts to choose good speakers”.

Vice President, Sarovar Hotels, Sajid Mahmood: “Such summits provide an excellent opportunity to exchange views and share practices in industries. A good learning opportunity at all levels”.

President & Chief Operating Officer, Cleartrip, Samyukth Sridharan: “Today, the discerning customer looks for a good booking experience, comprehensive offering and competitive pricing. I feel collectively the goal of both, the airline and the OTA, should be to marry these benefits. We should offer a platform to customers that boasts of a seamless booking interface, numerous payment options, and the convenience of products and services. These should be delivered efficiently and without unnecessary costs flowing through the process. Needless to say, choice, unquestionably favors the consumer”.

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