

MYSTIC EAST

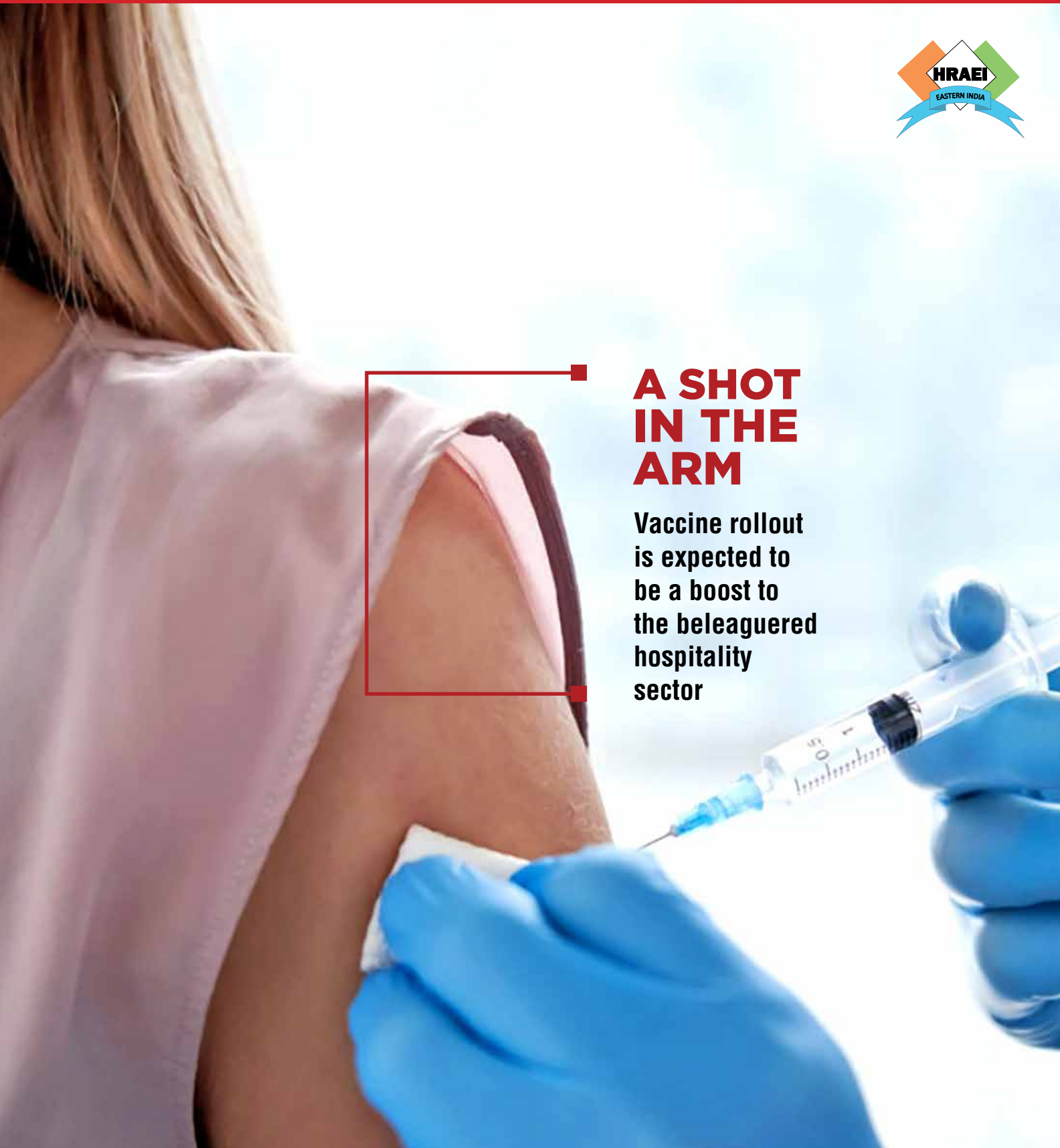
...an unexplored horizon

A Bi-monthly Magazine by HRAEI | Vol 7 | Issue 3 | May - June 2021



A SHOT IN THE ARM

Vaccine rollout
is expected to
be a boost to
the beleaguered
hospitality
sector



ENJOY *Holidays* AT THE LAND OF PALAS

Ayodhya Hilltop • Purulia
www.kushalpalli.in



A M E N I T I E S

OPEN LANDSCAPE | FISHING DECK | MULTI CUISINE RESTAURANT
GYMNASIUM | THE ROCK BAR | SWIMMING POOL
TRAVEL ASSISTANCE | LOCAL SIGHTSEEING | KERALA AYURVEDIC SPA

FOR BOOKING

97351 51515 • 98312 60606
fom.kp@pearltreehotels.com




pearl tree
HOTELS & RESORTS
STAR HOTEL AT PURULIA
81450 01000
www.pearltreehotels.com


Matha
Forest Resort
9903853377 / 9831260606


PEARLTREE
express
HOTELS
Raigachi, Newtown, Kolkata
93302 36877 / 90832 45966



V

Vaccination is the key to boost the hospitality and tourism sector. It is the only comprehensive way to fight the impact of the coronavirus. As the country opens up, many are planning vacations to bite into that slice of wanderlust. And to revive the severely impacted industry, those associated with the travel and hospitality sector feel that boosting vaccination drive is the way forward.

Prioritising immunisation of front-desk professionals, displaying the status of vaccinated staff on a public forum and arranging a job for resort workers in remote areas — industry insiders believe such measures will help regain the confidence of travellers. A slow unlock will bring back domestic travellers, who'll be looking for secluded accommodations and safe ways to travel. Vaccine access will help bring back the economic growth that tourism

“
Vaccination is going to drive the
tourism sector's revival
”

enables. No wonder, at a recent event, Culture and Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel, said, “Vaccination is going to drive the tourism sector's revival and we are working on a uniform policy and setting up protocols for travellers getting vaccinated against Covid-19.”

Global travel and tourism took a massive hit last year and the pandemic shut down borders and suspended most international travel. With vaccination rates picking up, especially in the West, many countries are slowly opening up their economies and borders. Thailand, Turkey, Tunisia and Egypt have ramped up the vaccination drive for tourism industry workers. Phuket is ready to welcome fully vaccinated travellers from July 1. Malaysian and Sri Lankan associations are urging the government to fast-track vaccination for the sector.

Mr Sudesh Poddar
President, HRAEI



66

Promotion of
Border Tourism
will immensely
benefit north east
India

The concept of Border Tourism involves visiting border areas in order to experience diverse cultures, explore rare flora and fauna, acquiring knowledge for trade, or even meeting local communities who live in the border region.

In India, despite political turmoil, Jammu & Kashmir region has been the most exciting destination for border tourism in India. Millions of tourists have visited the area which shares a border with three nations; scores of films have been shot there.

But North Eastern states of India which are equally beautiful—if not more—have not attracted a fraction of tourists compared to Jammu & Kashmir. I am glad that the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry has decided to highlight the potential of tourism in Border Districts of India—with a focus on North Eastern India, especially Arunachal Pradesh. PHDCCI aims to explore the tourism potential in the border districts of India and moreover, to present suggestions towards development of Border Tourism in India. As part of the initiative, the Tourism Committee of the chamber is conducting a series of 18 webinars. This effort will surely promote tourism education among the locals and also develop a rudimentary tourism infrastructure in that area.

MYSTIC EAST

A BI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE BY HRAEI
Vol 7 | Issue 3 | May - June 2021

EDITORIAL BOARD

SUDESH PODDAR
PRESIDENT, HRAEI

DR. SUBORNO BOSE
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

MOHAMMED AZHAR
HONOURARY SECRETARY

VIJAY SHRIKENT
GENERAL MANAGER-TAJ BENGAL & CITY GENERAL
MANAGER, KOLKATA

EDITOR
ATIKRAM GUPTA

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT
SUSMIT BARMAN

CHIEF DESIGNER
SOMU DUTTA

'Mystic East' magazine is printed
and published by Atikram Gupta on behalf of Hotel and
Restaurant Association of Eastern India.

Printed at CDC Printers Private Limited, No.45, Radha Nath
Chowdhury Road, Tangra Industrial Estate-II, Kolkata, West
Bengal 700 015

Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India, 18A/1,
Everest, 18th Floor, 46C,
Chowringhee Road, Kolkata- 700 071;
Telephone- +91 33 2288-1742/43, 40035993.
E-mail: info@hraei.co.in
Website: www.hraei.co.in

THIS ISSUE OF MYSTIC EAST CONTAINS 56 PAGES INCLUDING COVER AND BACK COVER

All information in Mystic East magazine is derived from sources we consider reliable and a sincere effort is made to report accurate information. The publisher regrets that he cannot accept liability for error and omissions contained in this publication that might have crept in inadvertently. Similarly, opinions/views expressed by third parties are not necessarily shared by the magazine. However, we wish to advise our readers that one or more recognised authorities may hold different views than those reported. Material used in this publication is intended for information purpose only. Readers are advised to seek specific advice before acting on information contained in this publication which is provided for general use, and may not be appropriate for the readers' particular circumstances..

No part of the magazine may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the permission of the publication in writing. The same rule applies when there is a copyright or the article is taken from another publication. An exemption is hereby granted for the extract used for the purpose of fair review, provided two copies of the same publication are sent to us for our records. Publications reproducing material either in part or in whole, without permission could face legal action. The publisher assumes no responsibility for returning any material, solicited or unsolicited, nor is he responsible for material lost or damaged.



A 10-year payment plan would have been a more viable option

The government's recent decision to expand the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) seems to be a lifesaver to the beleaguered hospitality sector. By relaxing the eligibility criteria in ECLGS 4.0, more smaller and medium enterprises from the industry can avail loans for longer tenures. This move will help industry players to manage their cash flow better in this difficult time.

In March 2021, the government announced a special ECLGS 3.0 for eligible enterprises in the hospitality and travel sector and recently updated it. The industry welcomes this step, which has provided an additional 20% credit facility under the special ECLGS 3.0 and extended the moratorium period from one year to two. ECLGS 4.0 removed the earlier cap of Rs 500 crore on the debt and allowed assistance to a borrower to 40% or Rs 200 crore, whichever is lower. Banks and financial institutions are very aggressive about extending additional loans to the hospitality sector. In the case of our hotels, we could avail ECLGS 3.0 from the bank.

However, hoteliers are concerned about the moratorium period on interest on funds drawn under this scheme. A 4-year moratorium and a 6-year repayment plan, making it a 10-year payment plan would have been a more viable option for hotels and restaurants.

Mr Mohammed Azhar
Honourary Secretary

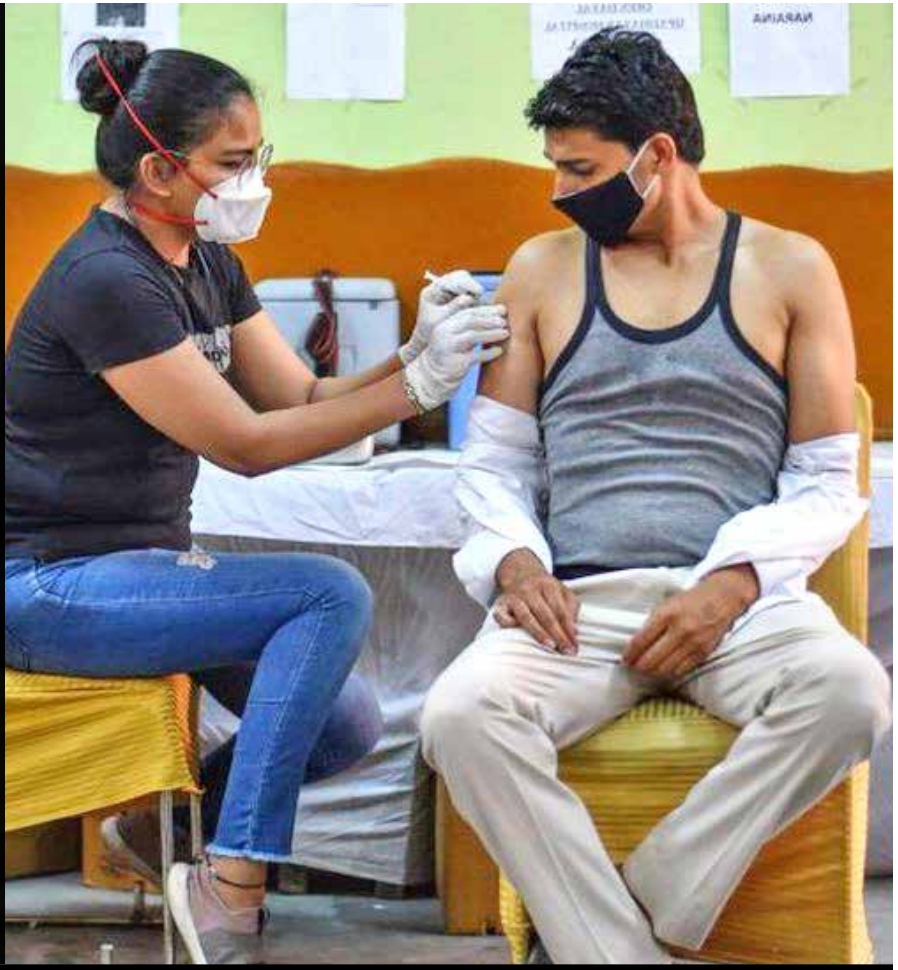
Cover Story

May - June 2021

20

A SHOT IN THE ARM

HRAEI and AMRI Hospitals join hands to vaccinate hospitality employees. Vaccine rollout is expected to be a boost to the beleaguered hospitality sector



14



■ **INTERVIEW:** **MR SAGNIK CHOWDHURY**

Deputy Director General & Regional Director (Eastern India) at the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India discusses the lessons learnt from the pandemic



■ **RED SIGNAL**

25

The Centre does not have a plan to introduce vaccine passports for Indians

28

▪ ECLGS 4.0



How is the relaxed Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme going to save hospitality sector?

33

▪ POST-PANDEMIC SKILLSETS



Tips for soon-to-be or recent graduate looking to enter the hospitality job market

37

▪ FUTURE OF MICE



Covid-19 has changed the face of meetings and conventions forever



44

▪ FRONTIER TREK

Border districts of India, especially in the North East, have a tremendous potential to be developed into tourism hotspots

We need to expand tourism horizon: PM



PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has said that the increasing awareness about Indian culture and way of life in the world and the growing inclination of the new generation in India to learn and follow their own culture and traditions will open up new opportunities for spiritual tourism in the country in coming years. The Prime Minister was speaking after inaugurating various projects under the PRASHAD scheme of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in Somnath in Gujarat as well as laying the foundation stone for new temple construction in the complex.

PM Modi said that Tourism, especially Spiritual tourism fills hopes in the minds of people at times of distress and therefore, the Tourism sector has to look at expanding the horizon of travel and tourism to the

new realities ensuring health and safety protocols.

The Prime Minister said that the government through the PRASHAD and Swadesh Darshan Schemes have tried to improve the facilities at various spiritual destinations and improve connectivity between important destinations. Modi spoke about the Ramayan Circuit and Buddhist Circuit.

He said that 15 thematic circuits have been identified for development under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme of the Ministry of Tourism. This will open up tourism opportunities in many remote destinations in the world.

The Prime Minister also spoke about the Iconic Destination development projects of the government. He said that the government has

identified 19 destinations under the scheme and these developments will instill new energy and new direction to Indian tourism.

Enumerating various initiatives taken by the government to support tourism like the e-Visa scheme, visa on arrival scheme, decision to issue 5 lakh free e-visa, to reduce the GST on hotels, the Prime Minister said that these measures have helped improve India's standing on the Tourism competitive Index on a global scale.

Talking about the Somnath promenade project and other infrastructure developments, the Prime Minister said that the 1.5 km long promenade, pilgrim plaza, museum, etc. will enhance the attraction of the destination and thereby promote local economy and employment opportunities.

The 'bio bubble' catapults Kerala Tourism



KERALA was not high on the search list of travellers or recommended destination list of travel trade till a week ago. The reasons were obvious—the surge in Covid 19 positivity figures and then restrictions imposed on visitors by the state. While there is no change in the former, there have been some bold decisions on the part of the government when it comes to the restrictions. Listening to consistent pleas from

the trade and industry in the state, a glimmer of hope has emerged.

Sensing the backlash hard restrictions would evoke from trade and industry when the state was going into the important festival season of Onam, the government relaxed norms allowing access to tourist facilities for fully vaccinated people to enter the state without RT-PCR and people who had taken the first dose of the vaccine, or having a negative

RT-PCR test certificate less than 72 hrs old.

Without wasting time, Kerala Tourism sprang into action by announcing a 'Bio Bubble' tourism model for the state which, with the help of the well-oiled communication machinery of the department, became an instant hit. The campaign not only energised local industry, which had been feeling low due to the over year long lockdown, but also aroused curiosity



in the travellers to learn more.

“The practicability aside, the bio bubble campaign has been a fantastically thought out one which no doubt has instilled some kind of confidence in the trade and industry. There has been a steady rise in enquiries ever since the launch of the campaign,” said a leading tour operator from Kochi.

The model has also become talk of the town as travel associations and industry bodies have started lobbying for similar models in many other states. A delegation of the tourism industry which met the Karnataka CM this week cited how Kerala created a model to improve accessibility despite the presence of a large number of Covid 19 positive cases in the State.

Bio Bubbles are generally used to create a sanitized environment at stadiums and hotels where sportsmen are housed. Therefore, there are people who question the logic of harping on that model for the travel and tourism eco-system where there are so many dots which are difficult to connect and manage.

The advantage Kerala has over other states in the country is that the industry and the tourism department worked together to vaccinate stakeholders realising early on that vaccination was the only way to

reboot tourism, says Anish Kumar PK of The Travel Planners, a leading Tour operator from Thiruvananthapuram. “Although the Covid 19 cases are quite high, unlike other States, everything is streamlined in Kerala. That gives us confidence to reopen the state for tourists now,” he said.

Although current inquiries are largely intra-state associated with Onam, the tourism industry is quite optimistic that inter-state guests would start coming in sooner rather than later. “Last year also, guests from outside the state started coming in from October onwards. We expect the same trend this year as well. We have started getting enquiries from Gujarat and Maharashtra already,” said Seijo Jose, MD, Marvel Travels, adding that the bio bubble was a fantastic marketing campaign.

The District Tourism Promotion Boards were making sure that workers employed at the resorts, houseboats as well as drivers of tourist taxis deployed to transport guests, were all vaccinated, issuing coupons accordingly, confirmed Jobin J Akkarakalam, a house-boat owner from Alappuzha. Akkarakalam had guests from Maharashtra and Gujarat in the last one week.

“We even organised a corporate meeting cruise recently. The re-

sponse has been quite encouraging,” he says. As the number of houseboats operating reduced drastically due to the pandemic, guests were able to enjoy their cruises in a much more comfortable and peaceful manner, he said. “We are hopeful that the government will review the week-end lockdowns after Onam,” Akkarakalam added.

“Our entire staff is vaccinated. That gives a lot of confidence to us as well as the guests coming in,” says Anu Sebastian, Assistant General Manager of Chandy’s Windy Woods, a premium hotel from Munnar.

He confirmed that there had been increasing enquiries from tour operators and travel agents from outside the state since the announcement of the bio-bubble by the Tourism department. So far the hotel was operating with guests from within the State.

“We have been operational throughout. July was pretty good for us,” he said. Unlike other states, people in Kerala were quite aware and followed the health protocols seriously. “Although the number of infected are quite high, everything is managed well in Kerala. There is no panic at all. Those who travelled to the state are going back reassured,” Sebastian said

New timing to push up sales by 40%, hope restaurants



THE extension of closing time for restaurants and bars from 8pm to 10.30pm from Monday will help to revive the food and beverage (F&B) industry in the state that had been struggling to survive with dwindling footfalls and mounting losses. The hotel and restaurant industry employs over 80 lakh people in the state and over 9 lakh in Kolkata.

Leading restaurants and bars are gearing up for a big week since the outbreak of the second wave and hope for a 30-40 percent jump in sales following this extension, which now includes the peak dining hours. For most of them, dinner sales constitute almost 50-60 percent of the total business. The off-shops, too, are optimistic that the new timing will boost their sales.

Hotel and Restaurant Association of Eastern India president Sudesh Poddar pointed out that the restaurants were missing the dinner crowd. "From 7.30pm to 10.30pm is the prime time for dinner and we shall now be on the revival path. So far, we were losing the dinner crowd," he said. According to him, a mere 35 percent of sales is generated by lunch.

Speciality Restaurants chairman Anjan Chatterjee added: "We were losing more than 50 percent of our business because of the restricted timing. For fine-dining restaurants, dinner often contributes 75 percent of our total business."

Park Street restaurants, too, believe the dinner crowd will be back. Mocambo and Peter Cat owner Nitin Kothari expects the next weekend to

be a big one. "At both of our restaurants, customers are enquiring about the change. We hope there will be a 35-40 percent jump in business," he added. Moulin Rouge, Waldorf and Floriana owner Charles Mantosh agreed. "Dinner in Kolkata starts from 8pm, so we were missing the diners," he said.

Chillies owner Rishi Bajoria pointed out that so far restaurants and bars were merely recovering the cost. "The extended timing would help us to earn something," he added. The owner of KK's Fusion and Mio Amore Pradip Rozario was happy that finally he will be able to recover some losses. Aminia director Kabir Azhar and Chowman director Debaditya Chowdhury felt that this will be a big boost to dining.

Flybig launches commercial flight services between Guwahati and Arunachal



WITH private airline Flybig launching its operations on the new route connecting Assam's Guwahati with Arunachal Pradesh's Tezu on Thursday, air connectivity powered by the Regional Connectivity Scheme -- UDAN -- expanded further in the hilly northeastern region, officials said.

According to Airport Authority of India (AAI) officials, Flybig on Thursday started direct flight services from Guwahati's Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport to Tezu

in eastern Arunachal Pradesh's Lohit district.

A water cannon salute was accorded to the first flight at the newly developed Tezu airport, where a new terminal building spread across an area measuring 4,200 sq mt, a runway and a new Air Traffic Control tower are being developed at a cost of INR 140 crore.

India's scheduled commuter airline Flybig operates flights to Indore, Bhopal, Raipur, Kolkata and five airports in northeast India -- Guwahati, Rupsi,

Dibrugarh, Pasighat and Agartala -- along with the newly-added Tezu. It also offers charter services from Delhi to Shillong.

The flagging off function was attended by Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu, the state's Aviation and Tourism Minister Nakap Nalo, and AAI's Regional Executive Director Ravi Kant, among others.

Ravi Kant said that the AAI has always been pivotal in connecting the remote and small places through air transportation, and the expansion

of air connectivity in the northeastern states would boost tourism and trade in the region.

The ATR-72 type aircraft of the FlyBig would operate on the Guwahati-Tezu-Guwahati route every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

A FlyBig statement said that commemorating India's 75th Independence Day, the airline is offering a special fare of INR 75 for Army officers, their immediate family members and senior citizens, honouring their exemplary service to the nation.

"In order to reinforce its network, the airline is adding two new aircraft to its fleet in September and another two in October. The new planes would be stationed at Guwahati and Indore hub," the statement said.

An AAI official said that the RCS-UDAN scheme would offer flight fares lower than the normal rates.

The scheme was launched by the Union Civil Aviation Ministry in October 2016 to stimulate regional air connectivity and make air travel affordable to the common people.

Currently there are 15 airports in the northeast region -- Guwahati, Silchar, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Tezpur, Lilalabari and Rupsi (Assam), Tezu and Pasighat (Arunachal Pradesh), Agartala (Tripura), Imphal (Manipur), Shillong (Meghalaya), Dimapur (Nagaland), Lengpui (Mizoram) and Pakyong (Sikkim).

The AAI at a cost of INR 650 crore is also developing the Hollongi airport near Arunachal capital Itanagar, to boost air connectivity in the mountainous areas



Pandemic has given space for trends like slow tourism



SAGNIK CHOWDHURY is Deputy Director General & Regional Director (Eastern India) at the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. He has been associated with Incredible India, a top global brand for over 16 years, in key leadership positions. Over the years, he has handled leadership portfolios of General Manager, Estate Officer, Director, Regional Director and Deputy Director General in the Public Sector and the Central Government. He is

an ex-officio Member in the Board of Governors of the Central Institutes of Hotel Management, Catering Technology & Applied Nutrition at Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Hajipur and the State Institute of Hotel Management, Bodh Gaya. He is also a Member in the Managing Committee of HRAEI and the Tourism Sub-Committee of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Recently he spoke to Mystic East in

an exclusive interview discussing the future of the hospitality industry in the post-pandemic era. Following are the excerpts:

How bad the hospitality industry has been hit by Covid-19? What is the possible recovery path?

The severity of the blow dealt to the Hospitality industry by the pandemic cannot be over-emphasized. Once complete lockdown was announced



in 2020, travel and tourism trade had come to an abrupt temporary halt.

However, over a period of time, a new normal gradually set in and a realisation started to dawn upon travel-lovers that it is imperative to adapt to the fast-changing tourism eco-system. Thus, with the gradual rollback of the lockdown, we saw that many tourist destinations—especially leisure destinations -- started being thronged by tourists. We saw the

pattern repeat itself after the second wave, post June 2021. In other words, the leisure segment did fairly well, except during the period of total lockdown.

The hotels that were hit the hardest were those that primarily cater to the business and corporate segments—especially the bigger city hotels. With physical travel receding considerably, we saw an unprecedented upsurge of webinars, virtual meetings and online

events. The MICE segment has been severely affected. Recovery path of this segment will be slower. However, I am sanguine that this phase is momentary and with the opening up of inter-state and international travel, and the calibrated increase in the strength of gatherings being allowed as a result of the vaccination drive, this segment will bounce back sooner than we expect.

Recovery will be scattered and not uniform. Some segments will recover faster while for others, it will take some time. Hotels focusing on leisure travel are expected to recuperate sooner than business hotels. Recovery is dictated by several factors, ranging from location to market-segmentation to price-point factor. While these presumptions are largely speculative, the past trends have by-and-large held along these lines. That said, Covid-19 has taught us that it is very difficult to forecast anything with precision.

Do you think budget hotels suffered the most from the pandemic?

We have to bear in mind who stays in these hotels. People who run small businesses, sales executives, mid-level employees and professionals who have to travel outstation frequently. When travel got restricted, these hotels were hard hit as no one could travel. After the lockdown was gradually retracted these people have started travelling again. Hope the situation will improve further in future.

We hear that many hotels are up for sale due to the pandemic. And many mergers and acquisitions are happening in the hospitality industry. What's your opinion on the issue?

Hotels are the most capital-inten-

sive sector of the entire tourism and hospitality spectrum. The Loan-repayment period for hotels is usually 7 to 10 years which is way lower compared to several other capital-intensive sectors where the debt-repayment period is as long as 20-25 years. Infrastructure Status has remained largely elusive to the hotel sector. There is very limited scope for internal debt restructuring based on pre-payment/ re-payment/ foreclosure patterns. Long-term loans are scarcely available. Coupled with the fact that the gestation period for a hotel to become profitable is quite high, the pandemic has dealt a severe body blow to nascent projects and recent investors alike. This explains why several hotel projects might be up for sale/ divestment.

What's the situation on the tourism front? Can you see green shoots in the horizon?

Travel is gradually opening up. While international travel, both inbound and outbound, are still not at optimum level, domestic tourism has been robust and served as the mainstay for stakeholders in the industry in recent times.

That said, the pandemic has provided us with an opportunity and space to have a relook at various strategic policies towards augmenting tourism. It has provided the prospect to recalibrate our approach towards ecologically fragile destinations based on their carrying capacity. It has also provided space for alternative trends such as slow tourism.

The pandemic also seems to have helped revive or rediscover tourist spots and explore untapped horizons of the country-especially in eastern India Yes. It has always been our ob-

jective to promote and publicise lesser-known destinations. Of late, the State Governments have been doing a fabulous job in this direction. Odisha's eco-tourism projects have brought to limelight several destinations before and during the pandemic. In addition, before the pandemic, the State had organised a number of National and International sports tournaments giving a fillip to sports tourism in the region. Apart from the sporting events, the state also organises a number of fairs and festivals to promote both tangible and intangible heritage of the state.

On similar lines, Bihar draws thousands of international tourists to their Buddhist circuit. If everything goes well, the Ministry of Tourism has plans for hosting the International Buddhist Conclave in November.

West Bengal has been actively promoting its two UNESCO World Heritage sites—Darjeeling Himalayan Railways (DHR) and Sunderbans—for international as well as domestic markets. Ganga Sagar Mela has been promoted very effectively to the domestic market by the State Government as well as the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. We also promoted many weekend getaways in rural areas of Bengal. Tourists thronged to these villages, enjoyed pristine rural beauty, cultural performances of rural artists and witnessed the finesse of village craftsmen. Little homestays became popular and community tourism developed.

Sikkim and Andamans are two other destinations that have done well in the East. There are many more hidden gems in North Eastern India. The region is indeed an unending horizon of tourism.

Like hotels, restaurants have also been facing acute crises. People have now made a habit of ordering food from home. Also, many Cloud Kitchens have come up to cater to the new market. Will people ever come back to restaurants when the pandemic is over?

Restaurant industry is an extremely dynamic one. Cloud kitchens flourished when movement was restricted and people were forced to order from the confines of their homes. But when people are allowed to go out freely they will certainly visit restaurants. Cloud kitchens have certainly added a new dimension to the industry. Eating out is a phenomenon that has evolved considerably in India in the last two decades. It's not going to go away, rather further evolve in the coming days. However, eating-in is the new in-thing. Either way, it is the end-user who stands to benefit as the choices have increased exponentially.

It's understandably disappointing for those entrepreneurs who had launched their restaurant business during this time. But I am sure, the businesses will soon be back on track.

Food aggregators are also doing good business, sometimes at the cost of restaurateurs

Food aggregators have also been a lifeline for several restaurateurs who have been extremely successful due to the dovetailing of their business with that of the aggregator. From the perspective of policymaking, aggregators and restaurants each have their own space, and they individually need to decide what is in their best interest. However, again, it is the consumer who stands to gain from the increased options on offer. I believe both have their own areas of strength and each should capitalize on their strengths and USPs

TECHNOLOGY

New Trends in Hotel Industry

BY **PALLAB GOSWAMI**

AS we all know, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally transformed the nature of operations in many sectors, primarily in the hospitality industry. To defeat the barriers erected by COVID-19, hotels have started to adapt to new advanced & cutting-edge technologies to attract and pull more guests! With this trend, they strive to boost the hotel guest experience, optimize the check-in and check-out methods, notably propel the workflow, and eventually achieve success!

The VR way

Virtual Reality is the new black! It assists the guests and identifies their hotels and has exceptional features for receiving the most appropriate information about a particular hotel. Highly rated hotels abroad extensively use this feature for displaying all the privileges customers can get from their place. They also assist the customers; to book the rooms instantly!

Blockchain Solutions

Blockchain solutions are the order of the day! Millennials are making enormous investments in blockchain technologies. Cryptocurrency is presumed to shift the e-wallet systems. Many contemporary hotels are planning to incorporate cryptocurrency as

an alternative method for payments. Implementing this will promote your hotels to value themselves as modernized and trendy! And bring in more customers to utilize your services.

Harnessing the power of Social Media

Social Media Platforms rule the World!

It brings everything to the tip of your fingers. Plenty of guests these days don't want to be bothered by the hotel staff anymore. Few hotels have already found a way! Send notifications and messages through these social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, or Instagram messenger. Implementing this feature will help





the hotel employees to be in touch with the guests. Keep the employees informed about the guest preferences and conserve a lot of time during the service.

Smart Recognition Technology

Smart Recognition Technology is one of the newest trends in hotel technology. Several industries have already implemented this to identify their company staff. In the hospitality industry, this technology will be helpful to succeed the grand old key or card system, enabling effortless access for the guests to enter their rooms. This technology aids the hotel staff to

efficiently manage and keep track of the work of all members, their daily attendance, and regularity in arriving for duty.

The World of Automation technology

Automation technology is transforming the hospitality industry. There are numerous methods in which hotels can incorporate the use of automated processes. Some of the hotels are planning to build a human-free experience through multiple Integrated Automated Systems. Customers can check-in using their reference details through mobile applications.

Automation provides the consumers a fresh and unique guest experience.

Cloud Services

Delivering the consumers quality entertainment they require on a snap and online mobile content has led to the inclination of hotels to invest in cloud services. While hotels aspire to be able to offer digital content, they don't necessarily want to invest in IT infrastructure and IT staff, making cloud computing the absolute solution. The initial capital investment is lower than IT infrastructure and servers. Apart from this, it gives hotels the versatility to expand and improve

their IT demands along with tremendous business growth. Investing in upgrades without causing a complete IT system overhaul and removes the administrative burden of managing an IT system in-house. Cloud computing is becoming the norm and we will continue to see hotel groups replacing their legacy IT infrastructure with cloud solutions.

Brilliant Predictive Smart Systems

Staying informed of the guest's major preferences is essential, the predictive system will support customize the guests in various activities such as setting up the alarm, notifying about their breakfast or lunch service, and trace number of significant details of the guests that will support the hotels to enhance the customer retention

Robots in Restaurants

The Post-pandemic era is encouraging hotels to adopt futuristic technologies such as robotics! Robots are used on the frontline to protect hotel guests and employees and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Numerous hotels are planning to employ robots to promote social distancing and decrease the number of hotel staff! Already several hotels have adopted robots for cooking, room services, housekeeping, dispensing facemasks, and hand sanitizers.

Contactless Delivery

A lot of hotels have already started investing in technologies that provide contactless services. Post-Covid, the term "contactless" is the term that holds all the magic. Customers expect anything and everything to be contactless. In this situation, no consumer is ready to meet someone new. Meeting a stranger irrespective of

them wearing masks and other safety precautions will make the customers panic. Right now, all they need is safety. They firmly believe in contactless services right from the check-in, room service, housekeeping, food delivery platform to the check-out. Numerous food delivery applications provide contact-less delivery.

Meanwhile, EaseResto stands out from the rest! It provides the hoteliers individual dedicated mobile applications for their restaurants instead of pooling your restaurant; with several other restaurants. This allows you to ensure special treatment to your loyal customers. With this application, You can respond to customer feedback, update restaurant data, run promotional offers, and add events or special menus of your restaurant using your restaurant's dedicated app!

Technology is advancing at a faster pace than ever before. Plenty of the trends within the industry are resulting in extraordinary improve-

ments and savings for the hospitality industry. Few are changing how hotel developers plan their buildings, infrastructure, management structure, and staffing requirements. Mobile Check-Ins, Contactless payments, Facial Recognition, Smart rooms, Chatbots, Voice search, and Voice control are some of the other vital technologies the hospitality industry has invested in to ensure the hygiene, safety and the luxury of the consumers.

Pallab Goswami is Vice President, EVPL, Head, EaseRoom, EaseMedia and EaseResto. With over 21 years of experience in almost every domain in the Hospitality Industry, Goswami redefined the destiny of numerous clients. He is a pioneer in guiding hotels to achieve Revenue Targets, P&L, Business Operations, Product Management & Commercial Operations. He is the Brainchild of redefining Easeroom and Easeresto to support hoteliers and restaurants to achieve success.







A SHOT IN THE ARM

HRAEI and AMRI Hospitals join hands for vaccination of hospitality employees. Vaccine rollout is expected to be a boost for the beleaguered sector

THE Hotel & Restaurant Association of Eastern India (HRAEI) and AMRI Hospitals have joined hands to take vaccination to all hotel and restaurant employees, keeping in mind the safety and health of both customers and hotel and restaurant workers coming under the ambit of vaccination, the hospitality industry will be able to provide better services.

Mamata Banerjee government has set a target to vaccinate six lakh people from the hospitality sector in phases in order to completely reopen the industry. Initially, it has set a target for inoculating 1.8 lakh people from the sector as soon as possible. This was announced by state tourism minister Indranil Sen while inaugurating the vac-

ination drive for the hospitality sector organized by the Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (HRAEI) in association with health and family welfare department, tourism department and KMC.

Chief minister Banerjee had assured the industry in early June that restaurants and bars would be allowed to open from 5pm to 8pm after their employees are vaccinated. Later the time span was expanded till 10pm. Sen said, "The state government led by Mamata Banerjee is a pioneer to take up the initiative to vaccinate hospitality industry workers. There will be camps across the state for vaccination." The programme was also attended by state tourism secretary Nandini Chakravorty.

Mr Sudesh Poddar, President, Hotel



► **The state government led by Mamata Banerjee is a pioneer to take up the initiative to vaccinate hospitality industry workers. There will be camps across the state for vaccination.**

& Restaurant Association of Eastern India said, “We are extremely glad to spearhead this initiative with AMRI to prioritize health over all aspects of life. We believe this Privilege Health Card will be empowering and reassuring for our members as well our workforce. The coverage of this card is wide and the benefits extend to the families of our members as well. The benefits of this card are expected to reach around 30,000 people and we look forward to its efficient implementation.”

Poddar also said that the camps will be held initially in Kolkata and then districts will come under them. The former president of FHRAI, TS Walia

said that there will be 10 centres in the city. The state government is providing vaccines while the association would provide venue, doctor, support staff, ambulance and other logistics to carry out the drive. According to Walia, Park Hotel will be the venue of such a vaccination camp for a week. Besides, Holiday Inn, Westin, Gateway have offered space for vaccination.

Restaurant owners have welcomed the vaccination move. The owner of Peter Cat and Mocambo, Nitin Kothari said that it has already sent requisitions for vaccines. “Our cooks are here but a lot of staff members are not in the city. We have told them to return,” he said. Pradip Rozario,

owner of KK’s Fusion and Mio Amore, said that it has asked their staff to bring their documents so that he can move forward with the vaccination at the earliest. The director of Aminia Kabir Azhar and director of Chowman, Chapter 2 and Oudh Debaditya Chowdhury also added that it has started the process of inoculating their employees.

Mr Rupak Barua, Group CEO, AMRI Hospitals like HRAEI is part of our initiative to spread quality healthcare to more people. We will offer the best of our services to the members of HRAEI as we have been providing to people living across Eastern India for the last 25 years. We are also vaccinated so

that they can continue to provide quality service to all their customers.”

BOOST TO TOURISM

Vaccination is the key to boost tourism and the hospitality sector, believe all stakeholders in the industry. As the country opens up, many are planning vacations to bite into that slice of wanderlust. And to revive the severely impacted industry, those associated with the travel and hospitality sector feel that boosting vaccination drive is the way forward.

Kerala Tourism Minister PA Mohammed Riyas recently announced making some travel destinations 100% Covid-vaccinated spots by prioritising vaccination for those working in the industry. To “send out a message that Kashmir is safe for tourists”, Jammu & Kashmir Secretary (Tourism) Sarmad Hafeez also fast-tracked inoculation for travel and tourism stakeholders.

Prioritising immunisation of front-

desk professionals, displaying the status of vaccinated staff on a public forum and arranging a job for resort workers in remote areas — industry insiders believe such measures will help regain the confidence of travellers. A slow unlock will bring back domestic travellers, who'll be looking for secluded accommodations and safe ways to travel. Vaccine access will help bring back the economic growth that tourism enables.

At a recent event, Culture and Tourism Minister Prahlad Patel, also mentioned, “Vaccination is going to drive the tourism sector's revival and we are working on a uniform policy and setting up protocols for travellers getting vaccinated against Covid-19.”

As far as budget hotels are concerned, some hotel aggregators have taken the initiative to display the vaccine status of staff and partner hotels on their portal. This will promote the larger cause of vaccination among

our customer base, hotel partners and their staff.

DELIVERY PARTNERS

Food delivery giants have also started vaccinating its delivery partners. They have started facilitating a free and safe vaccination drive for their thousands of frontline staff and employees.

For them, the safety of their customers is the number one priority for them and their delivery partners who have selflessly and safely delivered hundreds of millions of orders during the pandemic. Some of them are more than covering for the cost – they are ‘incentivising’ their delivery partners to find a slot in their vicinity. They continue to educate delivery partners on the importance of getting vaccinated. The vaccination status of the delivery partners will soon also be visible on their app.

After being vaccinated, people will

Vaccination is the key to boost tourism and the hospitality sector, believe all stakeholders in the industry. As the country opens up, many are planning vacations to bite into that slice of wanderlust



► To revive the severely impacted industry, those associated with the travel and hospitality sector feel that boosting vaccination drive is the way forward



look to travel for a break, believes some stakeholders, who are tying up with local administrations to assist in inoculating frontline staff in various remote districts. While travel to hill stations has been majorly hit this summer, professional trek and tour guides are eager that tourism opens up, but doing so without being immunised may risk to their lives and our families. They have to meet travelers, so they want to get vaccinated, but tourists, too, should only travel once they're vaccinated.

Travel industry employees don't have the luxury to work from home. Often, hotels are closed premises where staff are vulnerable. In parts of Europe, the US and the UK, a major chunk of the population is vaccinated and people are resuming normal life. As soon as vaccination happens, Indians will be able to resume travel again.

Ramping up vaccination rates for Covid-19 will help boost the recovery in the travel and tourism industry, a panel of experts told CNBC. It is the only comprehensive way to fight the impact of the coronavirus. Global travel and tourism took a massive hit last year and many airlines are still struggling to stay afloat. The coronavirus pandemic shut down borders and suspended most international travel. With vaccination rates pick-

ing up, especially in the West, many countries are slowly opening up their economies and borders.

Thailand, Turkey, Tunisia and Egypt have ramped up the vaccination drive for tourism industry workers. Phuket is ready to welcome fully vaccinated travellers from July 1. Malaysian and Sri Lankan associations are urging the government to fast-track vaccination for the sector. Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) chief executive officer Yap Lip Seng said to *The Star* a recovery in the occupancy rate can be expected once the vaccine has been successfully rolled out. Based on the government's projection, Malaysia is expecting 80% of the population to be vaccinated only by the first quarter of 2022, said Yap. "The government also needs to consider priority vaccination for the tourism sector and hotel employees to build and drive confidence for inbound travellers. In addition to that, recovery of international tourism would be highly dependent on the success of vaccination programs worldwide."

Travelers tend to book rooms in hotels where the staff have been inoculated. Where vaccination rates are concerned, some of the more populous countries in Asia have comparatively fallen behind their counterparts in Europe and the United States.

Information collated by scientific online publication, *Our World In Data*, showed that as of June 15, 40% of North Americans have received at least one dose of Covid vaccine and 36% in Europe. In comparison, only 21% received at least one shot in Asia, though the pace of vaccination is picking up in the region.

But he is less upbeat about the possibility of an internationally recognized vaccine passport — a digital app on a smartphone that can access an individual's health data to confirm if they have been vaccinated against Covid-19. Support for digital health passports is split. Critics point to concerns over how secure a person's data will be, as third-party apps will be communicating with databases containing sensitive personal health information.

What the travel industry needs, however, is consistency around regulation. If you have got two vaccines, you don't need to be quarantined. That seems to vary from country to country. Nations should also accept all vaccines that have been approved by the World Health Organization.

Domestic travel is already picking up in countries like China that have brought the pandemic under relatively good control. Cases have remained comparatively low while the vaccination rate climbed.



► The Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, recently issued a clarification and said that the country has no plan to introduce Vaccine Passport for global travel at the moment

VACCINE STATUS

RED SIGNAL

Centre has No plan to introduce Vaccine Passport for global travel. Why is India opposed to the concept?

THE Ministry of External Affairs on Wednesday issued a clarification and said that the country has no plan to introduce Vaccine Passport for global travel at the moment. In a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha, Union Minister V Muraleed-

haran said that while there have been discussions regarding Covid-19 vaccine certificates, no multilateral arrangements have been reached in this regard.

There is no plan to introduce vaccine passports. While there have been

multilateral discussions, including under the framework of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), regarding COVID-19 vaccination certificates, no multilateral arrangements in this regard have been reached so far," the junior minister noted.



► **Developing countries like India, have opposed these vaccine passports on the basis of the core argument that they are discriminatory. These countries, with a large population, have a considerably low rate of vaccination coverage**

The clarification from the Centre comes at a time when several countries are planning to roll out a vaccine passport, a documentary proof that a person has been vaccinated used to fast track visa applications for travel.

What is a vaccine passport?

A vaccine passport is a set of documentation verifying that a person has been vaccinated against an infectious disease, such as COVID-19. In the modern iteration, it is in the form of a digitally available certificate, which can be downloaded online from the government / official portal and can be saved on the mobile phone and other such devices.

Countries may adopt variations in the format. Some versions might also allow people to prove that they have tested negative for the virus, and therefore can more easily travel. Different versions are being worked upon by airlines, industry groups, nonprofits, and technology companies and the end game would be to make it as simplified and accessible as possible. One can expect a platform similar to a mobile app or a digital wallet.

This attempt to digitize vaccination status to facilitate safer and convenient travels can also be seen as a component of the larger strategy to digitize travel and associated pro-

cesses. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) has been working on digital solutions to streamline the travel credentialing process for years. With the onset of the pandemic, the IATA has focused its efforts towards providing vaccination status. The core idea is to make available all the relevant information easily accessible online and downloadable on electronic devices like the mobile, quite like other travel documents, so that a significant amount of time is saved in checking and verification procedures.

In view of the same efforts, IATA has launched a Travel Pass Initiative.

The IATA Travel Pass is a mobile application that will assist travelers to

digitally store and manage their verified certifications related to COVID-19 testing, vaccination proof, digital passport etc. It will manage and verify the traveler's COVID-19 status in line with governments' health and border requirements.

Indian airline carriers Indigo and SpiceJet have on-boarded the Travel Pass initiative to join other global airlines like Singapore Airlines, Qatar Airways, Emirates, Etihad, British Airways, Air France, etc.

Existing vaccine passports across the world

Many countries have introduced vaccine passports, with variations suited to their jurisdictions. Denmark was reportedly the first country to launch its own digital COVID vaccine passport. Hungary has launched an 'immunity passport' that acts as evidence that the traveller had been earlier infected by the coronavirus and thus has antibodies against the diseases. Similarly, most European Union countries also have been using digital vaccine passports to facilitate travel. The US, too, introduced its first vaccine passport called the 'Excelsior Pass' in June, 2021. This passport is mainly a quick response (QR) code that can be scanned to verify an individual's vaccination status.

Many institutions like the World Economic Forum as well as private players like IBM, Microsoft, Oracle, Mvive, etc. too have launched their own versions of digital vaccine passports.

Why is there a need for vaccine status documentation

With the evidently contagious nature of the coronavirus, screening travelers for a COVID negative status has become the need of the hour. Vaccine passports, which are ostensibly a validation of a COVID free status, are

likely going to be seen as essential at a time when the world is trying to transition to a new normal. They also have precedent – with universal vaccination programs targeting the eradication of illnesses like smallpox and polio.

Vaccine passports will aid the travel industry as well as facilitate other linkage industries. It will also unfold opportunities for those who have otherwise been denied work permissions owing to travel ban. More so, it will also provide incentives to people to get vaccinated so as to ensure hassle-free travel.

An internationally standardized vaccine passport can help bring uniformity and ease of administration while facilitating travel. While the vaccine passports need not be digital, such digitization can help bring security and simplification to the entire process. Jamie Smith, senior director of business development at Evernym, who has been working closely with IATA and others to develop the vaccine pass, states – "Imagine a future where a plane lands in an airport and a hundred people have a travel pass, 100 have another health wallet, 50 have bits of paper and another 25 have some kind of government document. What does the airport do? How do they process all those people in a standard, simple way?"

According to the European Union's law enforcement agency, sales of fake negative test results are becoming more widespread among those willing to travel. That is another reason why the industry is trying to develop digital passes that are secure.

Why India is opposed to vaccine passports

The World Health Organization (WHO) as well as many developing countries, including India, have opposed these vaccine passports on the

basis of the core argument that they are discriminatory. Developing countries, with a large population, have a considerably low rate of vaccination coverage and this move will put them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis developed countries. Additionally, those who choose not to get vaccinated despite being offered the vaccine may also lose out on opportunities. There is a danger of stigmatization of individuals who lack certification.

Several other objections that have been raised are as follows:

- Most countries are in the early stages of the vaccine rollout and given concerns about the impact of existing variants – including the Delta Plus variant – on the ability of vaccines to offer protection, it would be premature to introduce the vaccine passport system.
- Such sudden certification requirements may also lead to increased cases of fraud.
- Furthermore, some countries like Hungary are opting for immunity passports, where even if a person has been infected with COVID in the past, it is assumed they have developed antibodies. This can be a dangerous practice. The WHO has warned that such assumptions might prove fatal to the world as it is not a surety that antibodies will remain in an individual's body for long. The fact that people contract COVID-19 more than once is a case in point.
- Finally, there are obvious concerns related to the privacy of the individual. Ideally, health information such as vaccination records is stored nationally and is a matter of confidentiality. These passports could mean that data is shared with outside companies, raising ethical concerns that need to be addressed.

NEW & IMPROVED ECLGS 4.0

How is the relaxed Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme going to save the beleaguered hospitality sector? Here are some answers to Frequently Asked Questions

THE government's recent decision to expand the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) came as a lifesaver to the beleaguered hospitality sector. Many hotels, which are highly leveraged, have been badly battered by the pandemic. By relaxing the eligibility criteria in ECLGS 4.0, more smaller and medium enterprises from the industry can avail loans for longer tenures. The scheme's validity has also been extended from 13th May till 30th September 2021 or till guarantees for an amount of INR 3 trillion are issued. The government added that disbursement under the scheme would be permitted up to 31st December 2021.

In March 2021, the government announced a special ECLGS 3.0 for eligible enterprises in the hospitality and travel sector and recently updated it. How can this restructured scheme help the industry, which has been worst affected by the pandemic?

The industry welcomes this step, which has provided an additional 20% credit facility under the special ECLGS 3.0 and extended the moratorium period from one year to two. ECLGS 4.0 removed the earlier cap of INR 500 crore on the debt and allowed assistance to a borrower to 40% or INR 200 crore, whichever

is lower. This will help more hotel companies to avail the scheme and manage their cash flow better in this difficult time.



How is the eligibility criteria decided for companies who can avail of up to 40% of outstanding credit?

The eligibility criteria are the same as it was in ECLGS 2.0. Additional security or charge will not be extended on the existing security. The government of India is providing guarantees on the scheme.



Will this step encourage banks and financial institutions to extend additional capital to the hospitality sector in current times?

Banks and financial institutions are very aggressive about extending additional loans to the hospitality sector. In the case of our hotels, we could avail ECLGS 3.0 from the bank. The ongoing pandemic devastated the hospitality sector. It had started recovering on the strength of domestic tourism and intimate get-togethers in Q42021. However, the second wave, which was more severe, arrested this

growth. Now, there are predictions about a third wave. This means that travel is unlikely to pick up anytime soon. Even domestic tourism will suffer on account of local lockdowns, night curfews, etc. The sector will, therefore, take long to recover and will probably be the last amongst all industries. Considering this uncertainty, hotels are nervous about the current payback plan and availing of this scheme.



Will a 4-year moratorium and a 6-year repayment plan, making it a 10-years payment plan, be a more viable option for hotels and restaurants?

Hoteliers are concerned about the moratorium period on interest on funds drawn under this scheme. It will really help the hotel industry if the government extends a 4-year moratorium instead of 2-year moratorium and a 6-year repayment plan instead of 4-year repayment plan.



What exactly is the GECL scheme? How is it related to ECLGS?

The Guaranteed Emergency Credit Line (GECL) it is a loan for which 100% guarantee would be provided by



National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company (NCGTC) to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs), and which will be extended in the form of additional working capital term loan facility and non-fund based facility in case of Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) and Financial Institutions (FIs), and additional term loan facility in case of Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs), to eligible MSMEs/ Business Enterprises, individual borrowers in case of the original loan having been for own business and interested Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) borrowers.

Credit under GECL would be up to

20% of the borrower's total outstanding credit (40% in respect of borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector and Civil Aviation sector, subject to a maximum of Rs.200 crore per borrower), excluding off-balance sheet and non-fund based exposures, as on 29th February, 2020, i.e., additional credit shall be maximum up to Rs.100 crore (Rs.200 crore in respect of borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector and Civil Aviation sector). Further, in respect of MSMEs/ Business Enterprises/PMMY borrowers/individuals assisted only under

ECLGS 1.0 and who avail restructuring as per RBI guidelines of May 05, 2021 and are otherwise eligible as per ECLGS and RBI guidelines of May 05, 2021, GECL would include additional assistance upto 10% of the borrower's total outstanding credit as on 29th February 2020.

GECL in respect of borrowers with credit outstanding upto Rs.50 crore is open for all MSMEs/businesses, including MUDRA borrowers. However, GECL in respect of borrowers with credit outstanding above Rs.50 crore and not exceeding Rs.500 crore is restricted only to borrowers in the 26 sectors identified by Kamath Com-



ECLGS 4.0 removed the earlier cap of INR 500 crore on the debt and allowed assistance to a borrower to 40% or INR 200 crore, whichever is lower. This will help more hotel companies to avail the scheme and manage their cash flow better

mittee on Resolution Framework in its report of September 04, 2020 and the Healthcare sector and shall be provided as fund based or non-fund based facility or a mix of two.

No ceiling on loans outstanding has been prescribed for GECL in respect of eligible borrowers in Hospitality, Travel & Tourism, Leisure & Sporting and Civil Aviation sectors, subject to a cap of Rs.200 crore per borrower.

What is the objective of the Scheme?

The Scheme is a specific response to the unprecedented situation arising out of COVID-19. It seeks to provide much needed relief to the MSMEs/businesses by incentivizing MLIs to provide additional credit of up to Rs. 3 lakh crore at low cost, thereby enabling MSMEs/businesses to meet

their operational liabilities and restart their businesses.

What is the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme?

The Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme provides 100% guarantee coverage by NCGTC to MLIs on GECL of up to Rs. 3 lakh crore to eligible MSMEs. MSMEs for the purpose of this Scheme will include MSMEs/ Business Enterprises which are constituted as Proprietorships, Partnerships, Registered Companies, Trusts and Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs), interested borrowers under PMMY, and also loans to individuals for business purposes.

What is the duration of the Scheme?

The Scheme would be applicable to all

loans sanctioned under GECL during the period from May 23, 2020 to September 30, 2021, or till guarantees for an amount of Rs. 3 lakh crore are issued by NCGTC, whichever is earlier.

What would be the guarantee coverage under the Scheme?

The entire funding provided under GECL shall be provided with a 100% credit guarantee coverage by NCGTC under the Scheme.

What will be the eligibility criteria for MSMEs to avail the benefit of the Scheme?

The eligibility criteria under the Scheme are as under:

- All MSME borrower accounts with combined outstanding loans across all MLIs of up to Rs.50 crore in any sector and any amount in respect of

borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector and Civil Aviation sector and classified as regular, SMA-0 or SMA-1 as on 29.2.2020.

- All MSME borrower accounts in the 26 sectors identified by the Kamath Committee on Resolution Framework in its report of September 04, 2020 and the Healthcare sector having combined outstanding loans across all MLIs above Rs. 50 crore and not exceeding Rs.500 crore and classified as regular, SMA-0 or SMA-1 as on 29.2.2020.

- Hospitals/Nursing Homes/Clinics/ Medical Colleges/ units engaged in manufacturing of liquid oxygen, oxygen cylinders etc. having credit facility with any lending institution (non-necessarily MLI) and classified as regular, SMA-0, SMA-1 or SMA-2 as on 31.03.2021.

- Borrowers who have availed facility under ECLGS 1.0 and are seeking restructuring as per RBI guidelines of May 05, 2021.

- The Scheme is valid only for existing customers on the books of the MLI.

- The MSME borrower must be GST registered in all cases where such registration is mandatory. This condition will not apply to MSMEs that are not required to obtain GST registration.

- Loans provided to individuals for their own business purposes will be covered under the Scheme.

What would be the procedure followed in case a borrower has loan accounts with multiple lenders?

- In case a borrower has existing limits with multiple lenders, GECL may be availed either through one lender or each of the current lenders in proportion depending upon the agreement between the borrower and the MLI.
- In case the borrower wishes to take

from any specific lender an amount more than the proportional 20% (40% in respect of borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector and Civil Aviation sector, subject to a maximum of Rs.200 crore per borrower) of the outstanding credit that the borrower has with that particular lender, a No Objection Certificate (NOC) would be required from such lenders whose share of loan under ECLGS is being proposed to be taken from the specific lender. However, it would be necessary for the specific lender to agree to provide loan under ECLGS on behalf of such lenders.

- No NOC will, however, be required if the GECL availed from a particular lender is limited to the proportional 20% (40% in respect of borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector and Civil Aviation sector, subject to a maximum of Rs.200 crore per borrower) of the outstanding credit that the borrower has with that lender

I run a business enterprise and have a GST registration. However, I am not registered as an MSME nor do I have Udyog Aadhar. My Bank also does not classify me as an MSME borrower. Am I eligible under the scheme?

You are eligible if

(i) you have total credit outstanding of Rs. 50 Crore or less as on 29th Feb 2020 ; or (ii) belong to the 26 sectors identified by the Kamath Committee on Resolution Framework in its report dated September 04, 2020 or the Healthcare sector and the total credit outstanding is above Rs.50 Crore and not exceeding Rs.500 crore as on 29th Feb 2020; or

(iii) you have total credit outstanding of any amount with an eligible MLI as

on 29th Feb 2020 and belong to the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector or Aviation sector;

(iv) you are a hospital/nursing home/ clinic/medical college /unit engaged in manufacturing of liquid oxygen, oxygen cylinders etc. having credit outstanding with a lending institution and need assistance upto Rs.2 crore for setting up a on-site oxygen generation plant;

(v) you have a GST registration or were not required to obtain such GST registration Udyog Aadhar or recognition as MSME is not required under this Scheme; and

(vi) you meet other eligibility criteria prescribed under the scheme.

My Bank/ NBFC has offered me a pre approved loan of 15% only though the scheme mentions 20%. Can the Bank/ NBFC do so?

Under ECLGS, Banks/ NBFCs/HFCs are to offer loans up to 20% (40% in respect of borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector and Civil Aviation sector, subject to a maximum of Rs.200 crore per borrower). Actual loan extended can therefore be less than 20% (or less than 40% in respect of borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector and Leisure & Sporting sector). This is generally on mutually agreed terms between the borrower and the lender based on factors relevant to the business operations.

What is ECLGS 1.0, ECLGS 2.0 , ECLGS 3.0 & ECLGS 4.0?

ECLGS-1.0 refers to the scheme for providing 100% Guarantee coverage by NCGTC to its Member Lending Institutions against extension of eligible credit to its existing borrowers

whose total credit outstanding (fund based) across all lending institutions and days past due as on February 29, 2020 was upto Rs.50 crore and upto 60 days respectively.

ECLGS-2.0 refers to the scheme for providing 100% Guarantee coverage by NCGTC to its Member Lending Institutions against extension of eligible credit to its existing borrowers in the 26 stressed sectors identified by the Kamath Committee on Resolution Framework and the Healthcare sector whose total credit outstanding (fund based) across all lending institutions and days past due as on February 29, 2020 was above Rs.50 crore and not exceeding Rs.500 crore and upto 60 days respectively.

ECLGS 3.0 refers to the scheme for providing 100% guarantee coverage by NCGTC to its Member Lending Institutions against extension of eligible credit to its existing borrowers in the Hospitality, Travel & Tourism, Leisure & Sporting and Civil Aviation sectors whose days past due as on February 29, 2020 was upto 60 days, subject to cap of Rs.200 crore per borrower

ECLGS 4.0 refers to the scheme for providing 100% guarantee coverage by NCGTC to its Member Lending Institutions against extension of eligible credit to hospitals/nursing homes/clinics/medical colleges/units engaged in manufacturing.

I am an eligible borrower with total credit outstanding across all lending institutions above Rs.50 crore as on February 29, 2020. Am I eligible for assistance under the scheme of ECLGS?

You are eligible for assistance under ECLGS 2.0 provided you fall in the 26 stressed sectors identified by the Kamath Committee on Resolution

Framework or the Healthcare sector, your total outstanding fund-based facility across all lending institutions and DPD as on February 29, 2020 was upto Rs.500 crore and upto 60 days respectively and you meet the other eligibility criteria prescribed under the scheme.

You are eligible for assistance under ECLGS 3.0 provided you belong to the Hospitality sector, Tourism & Travel sector, Leisure & Sporting sector or Civil Aviation sector and have credit facilities with an MLI with DPD of upto 60 days as on February 29, 2020.

I am an eligible borrower in the 27 identified industry sectors for assistance under ECLGS 2.0. How much fund based and / or non-fund based facility am I eligible for under the scheme?

As per the scheme guidelines, you are eligible for total assistance upto 20% (40% in case of Hospitality, Travel & Tourism, Leisure & Sporting and Civil Aviation sectors) of your credit outstanding across all lending institutions as on February 29, 2020. This assistance could be in the form of a fund based facility, non-fund based facility or a mix of the two. Credit decisions of how much would be fund based and/or how much would be non-fund based would rest with the MLI.

What is ECLGS 3.0?

ECLGS 3.0 refers to the scheme for providing 100% guarantee coverage by NCGTC to its Member Lending Institutions against extension of eligible credit to its existing borrowers in the Hospitality sector, Travel & Tourism sector, Leisure & Sporting sector and Civil Aviation sector, whose total days past due as on

29.02.2020 was upto 60 days , irrespective of the amount outstanding.

What activities are covered under ECLGS 3.0 ?

Eligible activities are businesses in the Hospitality sector (all kinds of hotels, restaurants, canteens, caterers, marriage halls etc.), Travel & Tourism sector (including tour operators, tour assistance activities, adventure tourism etc.), Leisure & Sporting sector (Entertainment or recreational activities including amusement parks, theatres etc.) and Civil Aviation (including scheduled and non-scheduled airlines, chartered flight operators, air ambulances and airports).

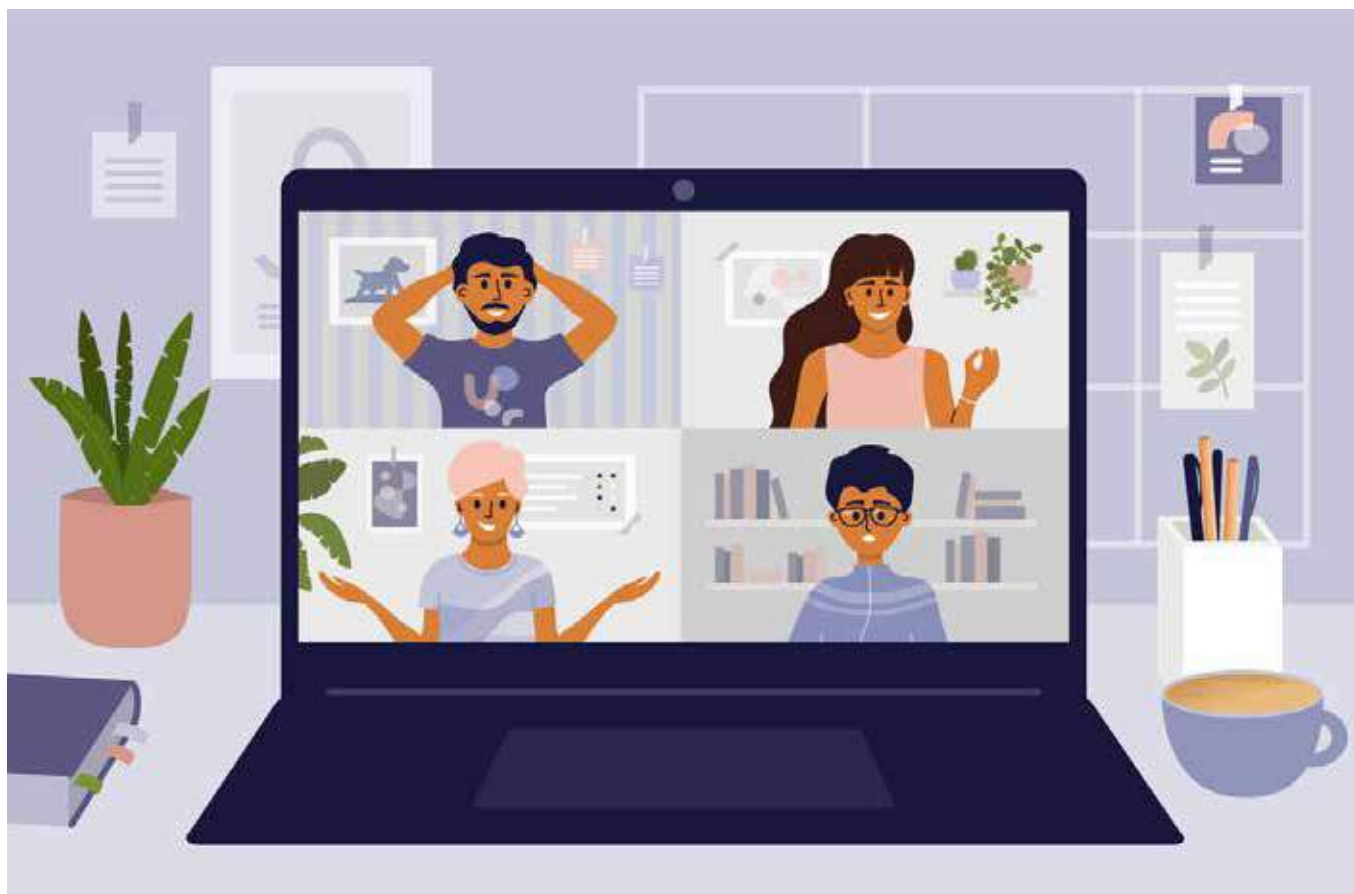
I am an individual borrower engaged in the business of Hospitality (hotel/restaurants, canteens etc.)/Travel/Tourism/Leisure/Sporting/Civil Aviation sectors banking with an eligible MLI. Am I eligible for assistance under ECLGS 3.0 ?

Under ECLGS 1.0, individuals are allowed coverage if they are either (i) MUDRA borrowers or have taken assistance for (ii) commercial purpose vehicles, (iii) commercial / construction equipment, (iv) diagnostic equipment or (v) have taken loan against property for their own business.

Under ECLGS 2.0, individuals are not eligible.

Under ECLGS 3.0, such of the individuals who have taken loan against property for their own business which falls within one of the specified sectors under ECLGS 3.0 (i.e. Hospitality/Travel/Tourism/Leisure/Sporting/Civil Aviation) would be eligible, provided all other conditions are met.

Updated as on May 30, 2021



► Over the course of the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has sent the world economy into turmoil as workforces in large part found themselves confined to their homes

EDUCATION

POST-PANDEMIC SKILLSETS

Fresh hospitality graduates entering the job market in the Covid era must have some special employment skills

ARE you a soon-to-be or recent graduate looking to enter the job market? Are you concerned about how you can gain work experience? Are you wondering how to improve your employment skills? Taking your first steps on the career ladder can be a daunting

prospect, never mind when trying to do so amidst an ongoing global health crisis which is interrupting, transforming and redefining 'business as usual' and the workplace.

Over the course of the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has sent the world economy into turmoil,

forcing industries across the globe to come to a stand-still or reinvent themselves in record time as both small and large businesses fought for survival and workforces in large part found themselves confined to their homes. National lockdowns, a persistent decline in working hours



► **While some specialized students may not be affected yet, other graduates planning to enter fields like hospitality, retail, food and technology may have to overcome unexpected obstacles**

and business closures have contributed to the loss of the equivalent of an unprecedented 255 million jobs, according to the International Labour Organization. Global unemployment increased by 33 million in 2020, with the unemployment rate rising by 1.1 percentage points to 6.5 per cent while 81 million workers quit the ranks of the labour market altogether, and millions of enterprises were forced to close or sharply curtail their activities.

Countless employers have been forced to cancel and postpone work experiences and internships leaving many graduates questioning their future. According to a Prospects survey, in 2020, 26% of final year students

lost out on an internship because of the pandemic. In a recent Indeed survey of over 1000 students graduating in 2021, 54% said they feel less confident in finding work after they graduate because of the coronavirus' impact on the labour market, while 33% said they feel they will struggle to get into the industry they're graduating in.

Uncertainty about job opportunities and disruption to regular routines can make an already stressful job search feel even more challenging. While some specialized students may not be affected yet, other graduates planning to enter fields like hospitality, retail, food and technology may have to overcome unexpected obsta-

cles. But, while it may feel all doom and gloom, there is a silver lining to every crisis – including this one.

Rethink where and how you want to work in the future

The World Economic Forum projects that by 2022, at least 54% of all employees will need reskilling and upskilling to respond to changing work requirements. In other words, the technical skills required for most sectors quickly become outdated owing to rapid changes in technology and the spread of automation. Young people need the skills to rapidly learn, adapt, practice resiliency and take advantage of entrepreneurial mindsets, to respond to this reality with the

ingenuity to earn an income.

While you can be forgiven for feeling an initial sense of despair at these unprecedented obstacles, these hurdles should instead be seen as steppingstones to invaluable life lessons and skills required for the future of work. A future in which flexible work schemes are going 'viral'. In a survey by Capability Jane Recruitment in the UK, 81% of UK employees feel that flexible working makes a job more attractive to them; 79% believe flexible working would make them more productive; 92% of millennials identify flexibility as a top priority when job hunting; 35% of UK employees would prefer flexible working rather than a pay rise; 80% of women want flexibility in their next role; 52% of men want flexibility in their next role.

From internships to part-time work, job-shares, remote and virtual work, freelance, contracting or full-time work, employment nowadays can take on many more different forms broadening your prospects. The current climate is then a prime environment to be creative, innovative and entrepreneurial in order to respond to this reality with ingenuity. As hospitality graduates, you are equipped with the mindset and skills to help (re)imagine, (re)design, and (re)build what employment looks like moving forward.

1. Entrepreneurial mindset: spot opportunities for business growth

In today's climate, companies are going to need creative and disruptive thinkers in order to reimagine business models, processes, service offerings, and client engagements with a digital-first approach. Digital natives with entrepreneurial experience or a flare for transforming challenges into opportunities and developing a business are going to have an edge

above others as entrepreneurialism becomes key to companies' growth strategy. With more and more organizations recruiting on potential, and not solely on past experience, the time is ripe to get involved with, or even better, launch your own innovative start-up. The rise of the gig economy, the desire for ultimate flexible working and the Uber-isation of everything has ushered in a tidal wave of entrepreneurs.

Many talent acquisition professionals may look at a CV and see stints of entrepreneurial efforts and place them on the 'no' pile because they weren't working in a comparable role in a similar working environment.

More and more organisations are opening up to the practice of 'recruiting for potential', which focuses on assessing potential employees on their tested ability and perceived potential, rather than on past experience alone.

2. Online networking: leverage technology to stay visible in a virtual world

Employers today are going to be looking for individuals who can thrive in a virtual environment. Remote networking and creating a professional presence on social media are proving critical as professionals shift online and social distancing limits opportunities for real-life encounters. Ensure you are active on business networking sites like LinkedIn, have up-to-date employer-friendly social media profiles, join professional interest and industry groups online and interact with similar professionals to expand your network and grow your profile. Your next employment opportunity or mentor may just be a connection away.

3. Continuous learning: acquire and hone new employment skills

Improve your employability by

improving your skills. Online certifications, skill-specific courses or professional development training such as those offered by Ecole Hoteliere, Lausanne (such as, Culinary & Restaurant Management Certificate) are nowadays available in a range of subjects to complete in your own time, online, alongside employment and without the constraints of enrolling in a new degree. Furthering your education by completing short courses or online certificates are a helpful way to sharpen your existing skills or explore something new and prepare you for this rapidly evolving work environment. As employers increasingly look out for continuous, agile learners, it's also an effective way of demonstrating your initiative, drive, and organizational skills.

4. Multi-language fluency: learn a foreign language

In an international and digitalized business world, there is a significant interest in hiring multilingual employees who can bridge the gaps in understanding and communication between different countries and cultures. Being fluent in multiple languages will make you more competitive in the job market, and particularly for globally-minded organizations. A study of U.S. employers found that among companies that are dependent on foreign language reports, one third reported that their staff was not meeting their foreign language needs. In addition, one quarter admitted that they were unable to pursue a business prospect because their staff could not meet the translation needs required. For U.S. companies, employees with skills in Chinese, Spanish and French are in the highest demand.

If you are lacking incentive, note that a study found that speaking a second language can add 10-15% to



Hospitality skills are transferable to many sectors

The hospitality mindset, the various specializations and practical skills acquired during hospitality management studies and work placements make you a well-rounded prospective employee attractive to any employer. With the increased usage of technology in the future, companies will have to differentiate themselves from the competition through the human factor. As hospitality graduates stemming from a sector all about people, human interaction and experiences, you can prove yourself to be a highly valuable and appealing candidate to industries outside of the hospitality sector such as retail, luxury brands, banking, human resources or marketing. Excellence in the future will be defined by the level and quality of the human interactions and experiences, as technology will be a given. So, keep an open mind, see everything as an opportunity, and remember, when one door closes, another opens.

► **While everyone possesses an innate level of emotional intelligence, consider whether you need to take steps to improve your EQ (emotional quotient)**

your salary. So, parlez-vous français? Sprechen Sie Deutsch? ¿Hablas español? If not, what are you waiting for? There are plenty of online resources and apps that are just a click away to help you learn a new language or take your second (or third) language to the next level.

5. Outside interests: pick up a (creative) hobby

Pursuing a hobby not only has many personal benefits – such as improved physical and mental health or creativity – but a growing amount of research and anecdotal evidence suggest that hobbies can supercharge our ability to learn and grow, making us better professionals. Having interests beyond work and home life broadens your identity and shows you have passion and drive, making you more interesting and unique to prospective employers. Aside from helping you gain new perspectives, a hobby also introduces you to new people and therefore widens your network of contacts – and who knows the connec-

tions you can make or the doors that could open via a shared interest...

6. Emotional intelligence: strengthen your social skills and self-awareness

In the current job market, the deciding factor for employers often comes down to a contest between candidates' hard vs. soft skills, with the latter seen as more important. A key gauge of soft skills is emotional intelligence which is thought to be the 'secret ingredient' for career success with facilitated personal interaction with colleagues, leadership or clients. While everyone possesses an innate level of emotional intelligence, consider whether you need to take steps to improve your EQ (emotional quotient). For example, widen your horizons by engaging with people from a variety of backgrounds, get involved in social projects or volunteer. These experiences will teach you greater awareness both of yourself and others as well as develop relationship-building and communica-

tion skills – useful across all industries and job types.

7. “VUCA” leadership: demonstrate effective leadership fit for the future

Volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) characterize the current environment we are in, creating unprecedented challenges and demands for leadership. A certain skill set is required to confront these conditions – from the ability to react quickly to change, demonstrating flexibility and agility in merging planned activities with adapted ones or changing course entirely, to a winning attitude, resilience and the foresight to deal with the expected and unexpected alike. In other terms, to demonstrate VUCA leadership. Consider investing in some executive coaching to ensure you have all the skills and competencies to take your personal and professional development to the next level and be a leader fit for the future.

Courtesy: EHL [Ecole Hôtelière Lausanne] Insights

MEETINGS

FUTURE OF MICE

Covid-19 has changed the face of meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions forever

But the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) changed the MICE landscape. Since travel and MICE are inextricably linked, it is apparent that “tourism can contribute to the spread of disease”

THE Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE) industry is considered the fastest growing tourism sector. MICE generates foreign exchange, increases trade and investments, provides employment, boosts local economies, and promotes destinations. The major key to its success is the strong collaboration with the travel, hospitality, and leisure sectors that provide products and services for the industry. Therefore, any disruption along its value chain may lead to significant losses for its stakeholders: organizers, participants, suppliers, sponsors, and host destinations. Although the industry is resilient, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) may be the definitive crisis that will reset any previous gains from a formerly robust tourism industry. Let's begin with a discussion on the impact of COVID-19 on MICE. Then we shall seek to present the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) as the alternative platform used during the pandemic. Finally, will make an attempt to identify areas for further research to proactively prepare for the MICE post COVID-19.

Global crisis

MICE industry is specifically designed for individuals and organizations whose main travel objectives are

networking, lead generation, volume sales, sourcing, and knowledge transfer. In contrast, leisure travel focuses on recreational activities such as shopping, visits to friends and relatives, vacations, and other non-business purposes. In 2019, the Global Travel Business Association (GBTA) forecasted that the overall business travel spending would reach US\$1.7 trillion by 2022 (Skift, 2019). However, this prediction was based on the historical performance of the industry which excluded any possibility of a reversal due to a global pandemic. But the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) changed the MICE landscape. Since travel and MICE are inextricably linked, it is apparent that “tourism can contribute to the spread of disease” (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020a, p. 15). When compared to previous crises, the effect of this pandemic is unprecedented with no clear end in sight. Reports reveal that the most “recent global crises between the years 2001 to 2015 such as the September 11 terrorist attack and the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) ... cannot compare to the unpredictability of COVID-19” (Gössling, Scott, & Hall, 2020b p 3). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the impact of COVID-19 is five times that of the 2009 global economic crisis (WTTC, 2020a).



► **Virtual and hybrid MICE events have strong advantages. The platform enables event managers to reach more audiences through social media**

Amidst the need for the MICE industry to pivot, this research has two interrelated objectives. First, this paper seeks to present the impact of COVID-19 on meetings, incentive travel, conventions, and trade exhibitions. Since the industry operates in a high-touch environment, this paper also discusses how the industry stakeholders used information and communications technologies (ICT) to continue producing business events. Finally, the paper will seek to recommend areas of further research to help pivot MICE through the use of ICT and other event technologies in a post COVID-19 environment.

Review of the scenario

The review of literature was limited to constructs that are common to the meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions sectors. Research articles discussing the “novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and tourism” were also reviewed. To achieve this, published literature were identified using an online search of webinars conducted by experts and documents from tourism researchers and those published by organizations such as the WTTC, UNWTO, and UFI-Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, among others. Key terminologies started with “MICE tourism” and similar phrases

(business tourism, trade exhibitions, conferences, and incentive travel) in conjunction with terms such as “event management,” “co-creation,” and “information and communications technologies for tourism.”

Analysis

On December 31, 2019, an outbreak of pneumonia of unknown cause was detected in Wuhan, China. A month later, the World Health Organization (WHO) issued a global health emergency due to a reported similar case in Thailand. But by mid-February, China declared that it had 80,000 cases despite the lockdown (Euro-

pean Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2020). Around the same period, WHO named the disease coronavirus (COVID-19) and declared that it can be transmitted through “droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes” (WHO, 2020). On March 2020, 146 countries reported cases of COVID-19 that prompted WHO to declare it as a pandemic. By April 2020, travel restrictions and non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPI) such as social distancing, closure of educational institutions, and quarantines were imposed (Gössling, Scott & Hall, 2020c, p. 2).

Travel restrictions, border controls, and involuntary quarantine resulted in the collapse of MICE tourism because the industry relies on a strong collaboration among stakeholders across the supply chain. Zhang et al. (2009) emphasized the role of both the public and private sectors in the design, production, staging, and managing of MICE events. These include tour and transport operators, caterers, and destination management companies, among other vendors, the majority of whom are small and medium-scale enterprises. Adding to the complexity of the fragmented nature of MICE is the challenge to seamlessly produce and manage events with minimal disruptions along the value chain. Unfortunately, COVID-19 NPI resulted in greatly reduced profits and revenues, temporary (or permanent) closure of businesses, and bankruptcies for some tourism-related enterprises. Statistics from WTTC forecasted as much as 197.5 million jobs and USD 5,543 billion in gross domestic product (GDP) may be lost due to COVID-19 (WTTC, 2020b).

To mitigate the impact of COVID-19, exhibitors and organizers

either cancelled or postponed trade shows. The Center for Exhibition Industry Research (CEIR) reported that 72.6% of events scheduled for the first quarter of 2020 were cancelled resulting in a 15.1% decline in industry performance as compared with the previous year (CEIR, 2020). In another report, the UFI-Global Association of the Exhibition Industry projected losses amounting to USD144.9 billion, as of the second quarter of 2020. In terms of its impact on global economies, full-time equivalent (FTE) job losses related to the exhibitions industry amount to USD 31.6 billion, USD 31.1 billion and USD23.6 billion, for North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region, respectively (UFI, 2020, p 1.). However, all these data need to be interpreted with caution because the pandemic continues to be a moving target.

Meeting and convention organizers, who were unable to guarantee the safety of participants, decided either to cancel, postpone or relocate their events. According to the Center for International Meetings Research and Training (CIMERT), 74 countries, located mostly in Europe and Asia Pacific, have either cancelled, re-scheduled or changed the venues of their meetings. Aside from the health and safety risks, travel restrictions and quarantine requirements compounded the challenges of conducting face-to-face meetings (CIMERT, 2020). There were some meetings that adapted the virtual or hybrid format as the alternative to live events (Congrex Team, 2020a). Virtual events totally rely on online technologies, while hybrid events combine both live and online platforms. The shift to these formats entail the right combination of technologies, staging and production skills, strong support from sponsors, and participant interest.

Moreover, event managers must also be able to provide an immersive and engaging experience using technologies that will try to replicate human interactions.

On the other hand, tourism agencies explored the use of online platforms to feature virtual attractions. For example, the Ministry of Culture of India featured digital classes on Indian traditional art forms such as Kathak, Kutiyattam, theatre and puppetry; while Japanese artists showcased online Kabuki performances (Matcha, 2020; Panache, 2020). Ballet and orchestra performances as well as three-dimensional (3D) tours of natural and man-made attractions were broadcast through social media. Using a format that is accessible, these online tours offered a glimpse of the cultural heritage of a destination. However, some authors argue against staging these activities which contradict the essence of authentic experiences that may result in the commodification of the culture (Cornet, 1975; Greenwood, 1977; Maccannell, 1973). However, these can be evaluated from this perspective: that the virtual platform can help promote and preserve intangible cultural heritage such as oral traditions, social practices, festivals, rituals, performing arts, and traditional craftsmanship (Cohen, 1972; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019).

The previous discussions attempted to present the importance of using information and communications technologies (ICT) in response to the challenges posed by COVID-19. According to Buhalis (2003), ICT refers to: the hardware, software, human resources, and capacity to develop, program, and maintain equipment and applications...to facilitate the operational and strategic manage-



► **Technology-driven MICE events can enable co-creation of the event experience that, in turn, may lead to more value for participants, sponsors, and suppliers**

ment of organizations by enabling them to manage their information, functions and processes as well as to communicate interactively with their stakeholders for achieving their mission and objectives” (p. 5). Fuchs et al (2010) asserted that the further growth of tourism is inextricably linked to its ability to use ICT. The use of ICT and other event solutions empower MICE managers to focus on critical activities, while repeatable, redundant processes are undertaken using online tools. In addition, technology-driven MICE events can enable co-creation of the event experience that, in turn, may

lead to more value for participants, sponsors, and suppliers. But prohibitive costs, lack of skills, technophobia, and security issues are cited as the most common barriers to ICT (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Kotze, Anderson, & Summerfield, 2016). However, the onslaught of COVID-19 shifted this paradigm. Webinars, teleconferences, and virtual exhibits have become the norm in 2020.

Hybrid events

Virtual and hybrid MICE events have strong advantages. First, the platform enables event managers to reach more audiences through social

media. These also empower participants to access events using mobile applications on their gadgets. According to Hootsuite & We Are Social (2020), there has been a “significant increase in digital activity, especially in countries that have the strictest COVID-19 lockdowns.” Their research shows that, as of April 2020, there are 3.81 billion active social media users and 5.16 unique mobile users (para. 8). Although the rise in internet use can be attributed to available time due to the flexible work schedules and lockdowns, 15% of respondents stated that “they expect to continue spending more time using social

media after the outbreak is over” (para. 18).

Second, mobile applications allow participants to use any type of gadget and operating system to gain access to an event. It is also a sustainable alternative to venue-driven events. For organizers, these online initiatives reduce the costs of venue rental, catering, transportation, material supplies, and lodging, among other expenses (Hind, (2020a). Delegates, sponsors, and exhibitors have the opportunity to participate in the events at the comfort of their homes, with possible access to archived presentations at their most convenient schedules.

Technologies for online MICE events also “provide real-time feedback that can be used for continuous improvement” (Congrex Team, 2020b). Organizers gain access to post-event statistics on demographics, levels of satisfaction, topic preferences, and participant interest, among other critical data. These data facilitate adjustments that need to be made to further increase engagement. Furthermore, the shift from face-to-face events to online platforms caused relatively minor disruptions in schedules and venue preparation.

But despite the ubiquitous internet, virtual and hybrid business events may not fully replace the experience of face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, online events must provide an immersive experience for participants similar to well-produced television shows (Hind, 2020b). These take into serious consideration the limited attention span and varying levels of interest of the virtual audience. Therefore, to maximize engagement, event managers must bring in a team of professional staging, production, and entertainment suppliers whose fees may reverse any potential savings to be gained from hosting

But despite the ubiquitous internet, virtual and hybrid business events may not fully replace the experience of face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, online events must provide an immersive experience for participants similar to well-produced television shows

online conferences, incentives, and virtual exhibits. But Nuehofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin (2013) argued for the use of technologies “to create enhanced tourism experiences...intensify engagement, experience co-creation, and deliver a high value proposition to the tourist in the online world” (p. 549). Moreover, the authors recommend the full use of ICT as a way to differentiate experiences in a crowded tourism landscape.

The tourism industry, albeit one of the early adopters of ICT, needs to revisit the features and benefits of different event technologies. The

respite brought about by the pandemic may be an opportune time to proactively conceptualize innovative business events that use ICT across the value chain. Technologies may be used to collaborate among stakeholders; digitize processes for registration and payment; integrate artificial intelligence, robotics, and virtual reality for production; incorporate metrics using beacons, heatmaps, and online surveys; enable co-creation of immersive experiences; communicate through social media; and share critical data analytics for marketing and strategic planning; among other objectives. Thus, use of ICT may be used as a tool for better engagement, enhanced tourist satisfaction; and improved revenues and profits (Kavoura & Katsoni, 2013; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). In addition, a rigorous research agenda focusing on the multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary nature of tourism studies should be pursued to keep the MICE industry relevant (Tsiotsou & Ratten (2010). Aligned with this, a review of new business models, changes in participant behavior, the use of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, data analytics, as well as insights into engagement and co-creation are among key themes for further research.

Covid Code

Hind (2020b,) coined the term ‘COVID Code’ to refer to guidelines issued by tourism organizations that are designed to mitigate the rise of the pandemic. He recommended an assessment of these procedures anchored on two scenarios, “New Normal” and the “Future Normal.” According to Hind (2020b), the former refers to “events hosted during the period where there is still no vaccine, while



► **The respite brought about by the pandemic may be an opportune time to proactively conceptualize innovative business events that use ICT across the value chain**

the latter are events after the vaccine is available.” The distinction can guide stakeholders in selecting policies that may contribute to the “normalization” of the event industry. In a related presentation, Konar (2020) discussed the “New Normal” and the “New Future” where he outlined five strategies to pivot: “resolve, resilience, return, re-imagination and reform.” Similarly, industry leaders from the World Travel and Tourism Council highlighted the need to encourage travel confidence through consistent policies across countries, development of new business models, targeted tourist marketing, and the support for domestic tourism, ahead of regional and

international travel (Chapman, 2020; Guevara, 2020; Smith, 2020).

There is also a strong indication that a unified MICE leadership will push for business events in destinations declared COVID-free and are therefore capable of managing safety, health and risks for participants and organizers. This initiative echoes the general sentiment of MICE stakeholders that there is a need to jumpstart before the end of 2020.

The messages are clear: The tourism industry is resilient. The MICE and special events sector will rebound. This paper argues for further research on themes that cut across the MICE industry. These topics include, but are

not limited to big data, smart tourism, authenticity, participant journey, new roles in MICE, staging and production, new business models, and impact analysis. Refer to these topics and questions that may stimulate research interest (table II) possible research in preparation for a new era of MICE tourism. This seeks to initiate a broader research agenda with more rigor through the development of new conceptual frameworks, innovative formats, and replicable business models that may help stakeholders navigate MICE post COVID-19.

ICT for MICE

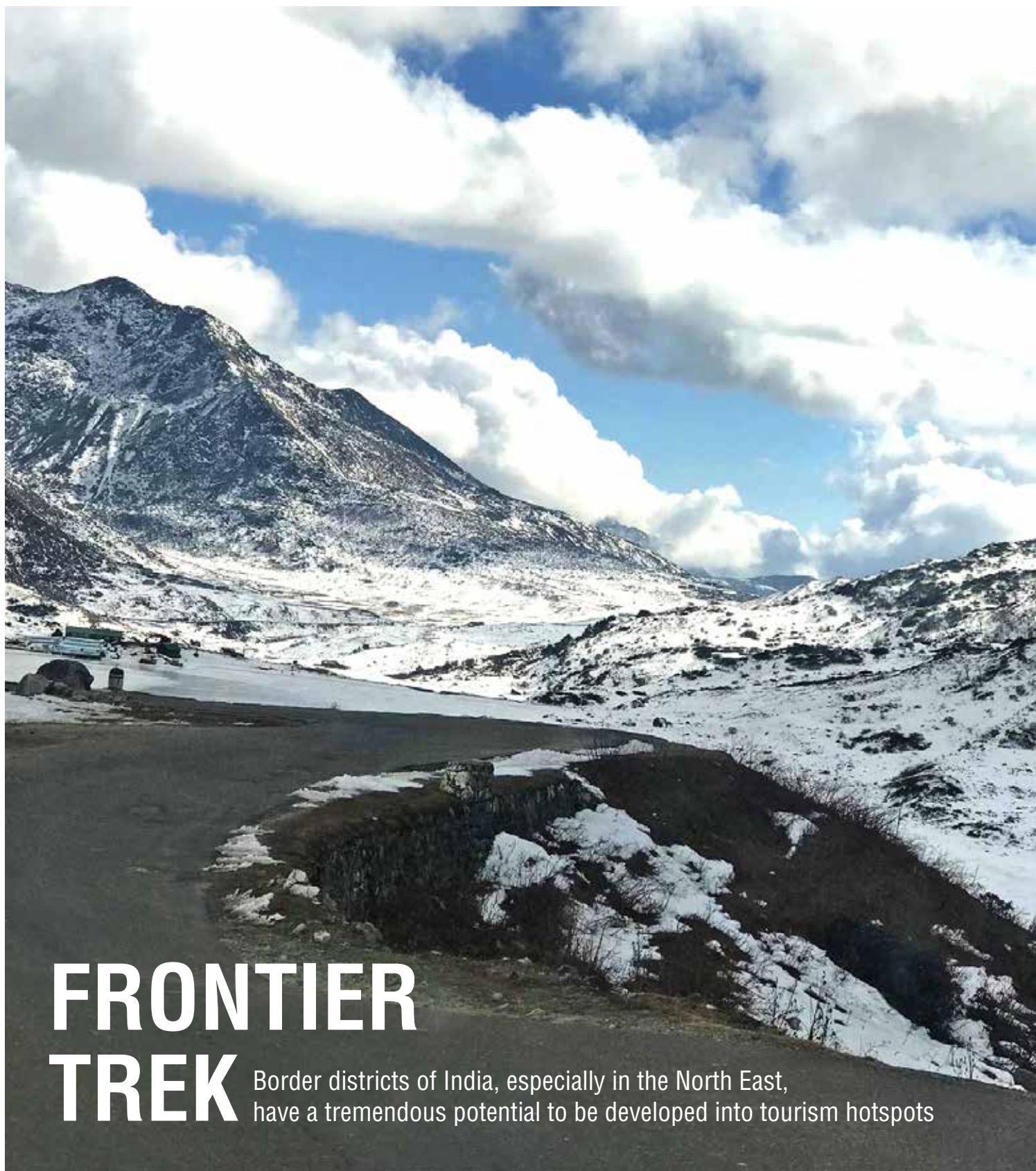
Despite the disruption brought

about by COVID-19, this paper argues that stakeholders can gain from the use of ICT when the technology is matched with objectives of sustainability, engagement, and collaboration. The scope of this paper was limited by the available literature on the internet. It also specifically focused on the use of ICT for MICE as a sector, not as individual events. But its exploratory nature offers insights into the use of ICT, not just as a stop-gap solution, but a continuing process towards enhancing value for all MICE stakeholders. To remain relevant in the dynamic, interconnected, fragmented MICE environment, stakeholders must revisit the guidelines issued in response to the pandemic. The “COVID Code” can be used as the basis for re-designing strategies for the new future of MICE tourism and special event management. This may refer to an optimal combination of face-to-face and virtual techniques for competitive advantage that may result in improved revenues and profits. Research using the frameworks of the liberal arts, education, business and the social sciences may assist in the development of a more robust industry. This paper also presents areas of possible research in preparation for a new era of MICE tourism. This seeks to initiate a broader research agenda with more rigor through the development of new conceptual frameworks, innovative formats, and replicable business models that may help stakeholders navigate MICE post COVID-19.

Courtesy: Mice tourism during Covid-19 and Future: Maria Arlene T. Disimulacion Department of Tourism, Associate Professor, Far Eastern University, Manila, 1015, Philippines; <https://ejournal.medan.uph.edu>



► **ICT may be used as a tool for better engagement, enhanced tourist satisfaction and improved revenues and profits**



FRONTIER TREK

Border districts of India, especially in the North East, have a tremendous potential to be developed into tourism hotspots



► **The rugged beauty of Nathula Pass attracts a large number of tourists every year and is considered as one of the most crucial passes on the crossroads of the India-China border**

THE concept of Border Tourism involves visiting border areas in order to experience diverse cultures, explore rare flora and fauna, acquiring knowledge for trade, or even meeting local communities who live in the border region.

In India, despite political turmoil, Jammu & Kashmir region has been the most exciting destination for border tourism in India. Millions of tourists have visited the area which shares a border with three nations; scores of films have been shot there.

But North Eastern states of India which are equally beautiful—if not

more—have not attracted a fraction of tourists compared to Jammu & Kashmir. I am glad that PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry has decided to highlight the potential of tourism in Border Districts of India—with a focus on North Eastern India, especially Arunachal Pradesh.

BORDER TOURISM IN INDIA

India is the largest country in South Asia with varied topography. 18 Indian States and Union Territories share their border with 7 neighbouring Countries. The border destinations of India are rich in tourism potential

which are famous for their many historical monuments, mountain peaks, scenic beauty, wildlife, local cultures etc.

However, in spite of having sound tourism potential, these areas are also economically backward; the living standard of local inhabitants is low and employment opportunities are few which means that tourism is not developed systematically in these destinations.

I heard that PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) aims to explore the tourism potential in the border districts of India and more-



BORDER TOURISM HOTSPOTS

SOME TOURIST HOTSPOTS ARE ALREADY DRAWING TOURISTS IN SEVERAL STATES OF NORTH EAST. HERE ARE THE TOP FIVE:

► **The Tripura Government, in a bid to promote tourism in the region, is in the process of developing the India-Bangladesh Akhaura border on the lines of Punjab's famed Attari-Wagah border. The border spot will be used for regular drills similar to that of the Indo-Pak border**

over, to present suggestions towards development of Border Tourism in India. As part of the initiative, the Tourism Committee of PHDCCI will be conducting a series of 18 webinars on BORDER TOURISM: 'Highlighting the Potential of Tourism in Border Districts of India' from June 2021 onwards.

One district per State (majorly aspirational district) has been identified and the webinar will highlight the need to promote tourism education among the locals and also to develop a rudimentary tourism infrastructure in that area.

POTENTIAL OF NORTH EAST INDIA & ARUNACHAL

North East India comprises eight states. All the states share international borders with some countries. For its impeccable beauty we call the region 'unexplored horizon'. Among all the states, Arunachal Pradesh is perhaps the most beautiful as well as the most 'unexplored'.

Arunachal Pradesh literally means 'the land of dawn-lit mountains'. This almost virgin land beckons visitors with its verdant valleys, pristine water bodies, rich heritage and ancient monuments. This untouched state in

the far East of India attracts visitors not just with its natural beauty, but also promises to take the traveller on a spiritual journey.

The state has among the highest diversity of mammals and birds in India. Its forests account for one-third of habitat area within the Himalayan biodiversity hot-spot.

FOCUS: ANJAW, ARUNACHAL PRADESH

PHDCCI has chosen Anjaw, the eastern most district in India, as their focus on Border Tourism. This district, on the banks of the spectacular Lohit



► Main gate of the famous Tawang Monastery in Arunachal Pradesh. Also known in Tibetan as Gaden Namgyal Lhatse, which translates to "the divine paradise of complete victory"

river, happens to be the second least populous district in India. The district is rich in wildlife. Rare mammals such as Mishmi takin, Red goral, Gongshan muntjac, Leaf muntjac occur while among birds there is the rare Sclater's Monal. A pine, *Pinus merkusii*, is found only in this district in the entire northeastern India. A flying squirrel, new to science, also has its range in this district. It has been named as Mishmi Hills Giant Flying Squirrel, *Petaurista mishmiensis*.

Apart from Anjaw, PHDCCI also wants to include Mechuka and Anini, two other areas known for their breath-taking

beauty in the border region.

CHALLENGES

The idea is novel but there are several challenges for developing these areas into tourism hotspots.

First, there are gaps in accessibility, transport and economic infrastructure that are required by tourists. The region is not connected to either road or air connectivity.

Second, there is an acute shortage in expertise, existing networks and experience in collaborating on tourism between stakeholders in border areas.

Third, there is not enough expertise and knowledge that are required to supply quality products and services in tourism in border areas.

As a representative of the hospitality industry I wish these challenges are dealt with by both the central and state governments. Although Arunachal Pradesh has recently taken some steps to popularise some of the circuits, there's a long way to go to draw more tourists in the region.

The central government's UDAAN scheme has helped develop many new airports in the country, but few have been developed in the state.



► **COLOURS OF PEACE:** The emerald colour of the Dawki river is the major attraction of the place and hence Dawki tourism has flourished in the past few years

Road networks also need to be intensified to help tourists move around the landscape.

On behalf of the hospitality industry I wish the government comes forward to develop hotels and resorts in the PPP mode with our members. Better infrastructure will surely attract our industry and give a huge boost to the #DekhoApnaDesh sentiment in our citizens who are dying to binge on revenge travel and explore new horizons in their country.

1. SIKKIM: NATHULA

The rugged beauty of Nathula Pass attracts a large number of tourists every year and is considered as one

of the most crucial passes on the crossroads of the India-China border. Located on the Old Silk Route, Nathula Pass which connects Sikkim to China was sealed for almost four decades after the People's Republic of China repressed a Tibetan rebellion in 1959. It was after India's former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's China visit in 2003 that the route was resumed. The Nathula Pass ever since it's reopening (in 2006) serves as an official Border Personnel Meeting. Now it plays a very significant role in the Sino-Indian trade. The Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage distance is also shortened by the Nathula Pass.

2. MEGHALAYA: DAWKI

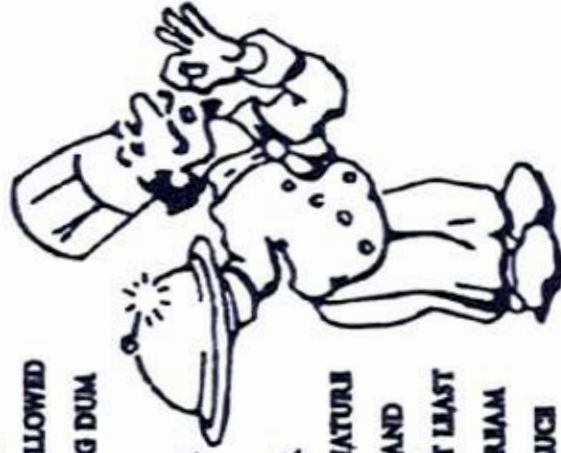
Situated on the India- Bangladesh Border this is a small town in the lap of the Jaintia Hills. A place of immense natural beauty in Meghalaya, this is known mainly as a coal exporter to Bangladesh and also places of India. The main attraction here apart from the extreme natural beauty and peace is the Dawki Bridge. It is a suspension bridge over the Umngot River and also serves as a place from where all tourists can enjoy some spectacular panoramic views of Sylhet, Bangladesh. The emerald colour of the Dawki river is the major attraction of the place and hence Dawki tourism has flourished in the past few years.

JOIN US AT PETER CAT FOR A MEAL PREPARED IN THE TRUE HONOURED TRADITION OF INDIA. BEGIN WITH A FISH MAKHMALI AND A TANDOORI BROCCOLI FOLLOWED BY THE MOUTH WATERING DUM KI RAAN. A PORTION OF VEGETABLE MALAI KOFTA OR IF YOU PREFER OUR CHICKEN RISHMI BUTTER MASALA. THEN OUR SIGNATURE ORIGINAL CHELO KEBAB AND LAST BUT CERTAINLY NOT LEAST A MERINGUE WITH ICE CREAM AND HOT CHOCOLATE SAUCE TO MAKE YOUR LUNCH AND DINNER COMPLETE EVERY COURSE A SPECIAL TREAT. EVERYDAY AT PETER CAT.



18A, PARK STREET, KOLKATA-700016, INDIA
+91-33-22298841, +91-33-22172942
INFO@HERITAGEDINING.IN

IN CALCUTTA THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE MEAN BY A WELL-BALANCED MEAL



JOIN US AT MOCAMBO FOR A MEAL PREPARED IN THE TRUE HONOURED TRADITION OF EUROPE. BEGIN WITH A DEVILLED CRAB, GARLIC HERB PRAWNS, FOLLOWED BY A CHICKEN PAPRIKA, CHICKEN TIRAZZINI AND ASPARAGUS CREAM, ELSE A VEGETABLE ALA KIVY OR IF YOU PREFER OUR BECKTY MEUNIER, LOBSTER THERMIDOR, AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST A BAKED ALASKA TO MAKE YOUR LUNCH AND DINNER COMPLETE EVERY COURSE A SPECIAL TREAT. EVERYDAY AT MOCAMBO.

Mocambo's

25B, PARK STREET, KOLKATA-700016, INDIA
+91-33-22290095, +91-33-22654300
INFO@HERITAGEDINING.IN



► **BADARPUR FORT:** A Mughal era fort on the banks of the river Barak in Assam's Karimganj district is close to Indo-Bangladesh border. The town, before independence, was a part of present day Sylhet district in Bangladesh and a major railway and commercial hub during British rule

3. ARUNACHAL PRADESH: TAWANG

Nestled in the Himalayas, Tawang is a charming little hill station in Arunachal Pradesh and is considered to be one of the most visited tourist destinations of Northeast India. The small town is just 33kms away from Bum La Pass, where the McMahon Line separates India and China. With a rich culture and history, Tawang houses India's largest monastery and is a revered destination among Buddhists. The serenity of this town is soothing, while in winters, the snow-covered land provides skiing opportunities.

4. TRIPURA: AKHAURA

The Tripura Government, in a bid to promote tourism in the region, is in

the process of developing the India-Bangladesh Akhaura border on the lines of Punjab's famed Attari-Wagah border. The border spot will be used for regular drills similar to that of the Indo-Pak border. Reportedly, a budget of INR 90 crore has been allotted to build up facilities like stadiums, where people from this side of the border can gather and witness the half-an-hour programme. As per the sources, India will also be investing INR 250 crore in building a 15 km railway track connecting the capital of Tripura, Agartala with Akhaura. Of the 15 km rail track, 5 km of the track will be on the Indian territory while the remaining will fall in Bangladesh. Now around 100 people visit here every day. Most of them are locals and State guests unlike the Wagah side in Amritsar where the

event is a major tourist attraction and tourism destination.

5. SUTARKANDI: ASSAM

Famous for having an International trade centre, Sutarkandi is the International border of India and Bangladesh. Through this space, export of fruits, silicon and coal is done. The place is situated in the district of Karimganj, Assam. The place has a huge scope of tourism and the government of Assam is working on the same. It is located 14km away from Karimganj and contains a principal custom check post for the trade flow. Two national highways run through Sutarkandi that is National Highway 151 (old) and National Highway 7 (new) which is 45 km from the border of Sylhet town of Bangladesh.

Expand Your Foot Print

ADVERTISE IN MYSTIC EAST

HRAEI's bimonthly journal

Colour AD Size	Rate Per Issue	Rate for 1 Year
Back Cover	25000	120000
Inside Front Cover	20000	96000
Inside Back Cover	20000	96000
Inside Full Page	15000	72000
Inside Half Page	7500	36000

Reach out to an ever-expanding network of decision makers, owners and managers of hotels and restaurants in 12 states and a union territory. As our circulation crosses 2000 let your network grow across the East and beyond.

The size specification of the advertisement is 7.06-inch (width)x 9.86 inch(height).

The ad material conforming to the size specified above is needed to be sent on CD or email with dpi (resolution) of at least 300.

To advertise call

Atikram Gupta: +91 8585015172

Hotel & Restaurant Association of Eastern India

18A/1, Everest House, 18th Floor, 46C Chowringhee Road, Kolkata 700071

M: +91 85850-15172 | T: +91 (33) 2288-1742/43, 40035993

E: info@hraei.co.in | W: www.hraei.co.in



VISION

- ✌️ Make the Eastern Region comprising 12 States and a Union Territory a flourishing destination for domestic and foreign tourists by projecting their captivating tourism assets.
- ✌️ Promoting best industry practices and setting benchmarks for industry constituents.

MISSION

- ✌️ A common voice for hotels, restaurants and associates for unhindered progress of the hospitality industry in the country's Eastern Region.
- ✌️ Create value for members by ensuring government policies remain supportive of tourism and the industry.

