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Volume XII Issue 3 May-June 2021 28 pages

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Meetings • Locations • Conferences • Events

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NEWS

Swiss-Belhotel to open 7 properties

Swiss-Belhotel International currently has a portfolio of 75 operating hotels in Indonesia and continues its expansion with seven new properties scheduled for 2023. The new properties will add on brand presence of the 3-star Swiss-Belcourt brand, the 4-star Swiss-Belhotel brand & the 4-star Swiss-Belresort brand.



Radisson Individuals makes a debut in India

Radisson Hotel Group has launched Radisson Individuals in India with the opening of Classic Grande Imphal. Overlooking the majestic Baruni Twin Hills and ridges, Classic Grande Imphal features 171 uniquely designed rooms.

IHG debuts Staybridge Suites in India



The Indian Exhibition Industry Association (IEIA) with its strong EC is in a position to assist & guide the Indian exhibition industry through this tumultuous period, says Sonia Prashar, President, IEIA.



The response we receive from Korea Travel Expo (June 22-24), will set the tone for the kind of marketing activities we will do in the rest of 2021

2,500+ ATRs for Expo 2020 Dubai

More than 2,500 online travel agents, tour operators, hotel groups and airlines have signed on as Authorised Ticket Resellers (ATRs) for Expo 2020 Dubai. The ATRs represent more than 100 countries, covering all key markets, which will ensure that visitors of all ages, nationalities and interests can make the most of their visit to Expo 2020 Dubai with value-added travel packages.



IHG announced the debut of its extended-stay brand, Staybridge Suites in India with the signing of Staybridge Suites Bengaluru Thanisandra. The hotel is expected to open in Q1 of 2023. Sudeep Jain, MD, South West Asia, IHG, said, "The thriving corporate sector in Bengaluru and limited hospitality options for long-stay travellers present strong prospects for the success of the new hotel."



Fairmont Ambassador Seoul opens in Yeouido

A new cultural complex, Parc.1, has opened in Seoul's Yeouido district, combining business, shopping & leisure in one stop. The complex welcomes the first Fairmont property to Korea, Fairmont Ambassador Seoul, offering 326 spacious guest rooms, including 16 suites with panoramic views of the Han river. The hotel also offers spaces for business events and meetings.



Accor opens its second Grand Mercure in Bengaluru

Accor announced the opening of its second Grand Mercure, at Gopalan Signature Mall in Bengaluru. This is Accor's sixth hotel in Bengaluru and seventh property in Karnataka. Commenting on the opening, **Puneet Dhawan** – Senior Vice President, Accor India and South Asia, said, "The opening of our second Grand Mercure property at Gopalan Mall, Bengaluru, showcases our confidence in this brand to offer something truly distinctive to cater to the area's need of a business hotel."

Deltin to launch new resort in Goa

Deltin Group is all set to launch a large integrated resort in Goa. The complex will have hotels, a theatre, a water park, a shopping arcade and a convention centre. Spread over 125 acres, this property will be situated close to the airport. Deltin has created a niche premium escapade at each of their properties in Goa and Daman. "Goa and Daman, being the most easily accessible drive-in holiday destinations, have witnessed a steady rise in the influx of the number of tourists post the lockdown," said **Anil Malani**, President of Operations – Deltin.



Sayaji Pune launch lavish banquet space

Sayaji Hotel Pune has launched The Pearl, an all-new premium banquet place for wedding and corporate events. The Pearl can house up to 150-200 guests at a time and almost 320 guests in a theatre-style seating arrangement.

The Fern Brentwood Resort & Spa opens in Mussoorie



The Fern Hotels & Resorts has opened The Fern Brentwood Resort & Spa in the picturesque mountains of Mussoorie in Uttarakhand. This is the second resort the company has opened in the state. The Fern Brentwood Resort & Spa comprises 73 well-appointed rooms and offers multiple dining options and state-of-the-art banqueting facilities.



HK's road to recovery

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) is getting ready to step up promotions and hopes to relaunch mega events in physical formats to prepare for tourism recovery.

Manas Dwivedi

The Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTB) held its annual Tourism Update event online discussing tourism trends and sharing details of the HKTB's latest strategic plans with around 2,700 trade representatives from Hong Kong, mainland and overseas travel agencies, attractions, hotels, airlines, retailers, restaurants, meeting and exhibition operators, cruise lines, and other travel sectors.

During the meeting, **Dane Cheng**, Executive Director, HKTB told the representatives that the tourism board was preparing to step up promotions and would launch a new round of the Hong Kong Neighbourhoods campaign. In addition, the HKTB also hopes to relaunch mega events in physical formats to prepare for tourism recovery. "As well as driving local tourism through the Holiday at Home platform,

the HKTB has maintained Hong Kong's international profile with a succession of promotional campaigns throughout the pandemic. The global economy has started to rebound with Asia predicted to recover sooner and the Mainland expected to outperform other markets in economic growth. Combined with the gradual easing of the pandemic situation in Hong Kong, this makes it a good time for Hong Kong to further raise its profile. As cross-border travel gradually resumes, the HKTB will launch the Open House Hong Kong platform to conduct large-scale promotions in our source markets," Cheng said.

HKTB has also launched the 'Hong Kong Convention Ambassador' programme to help revitalise Hong Kong's M!CE industry. Over 100 distinguished leaders of business and professional bodies in Hong Kong have joined forces with



Dane Cheng

“It is a good time for Hong Kong to further raise its profile



Dr YK Pang

The programme is formulated to bring business events to HK

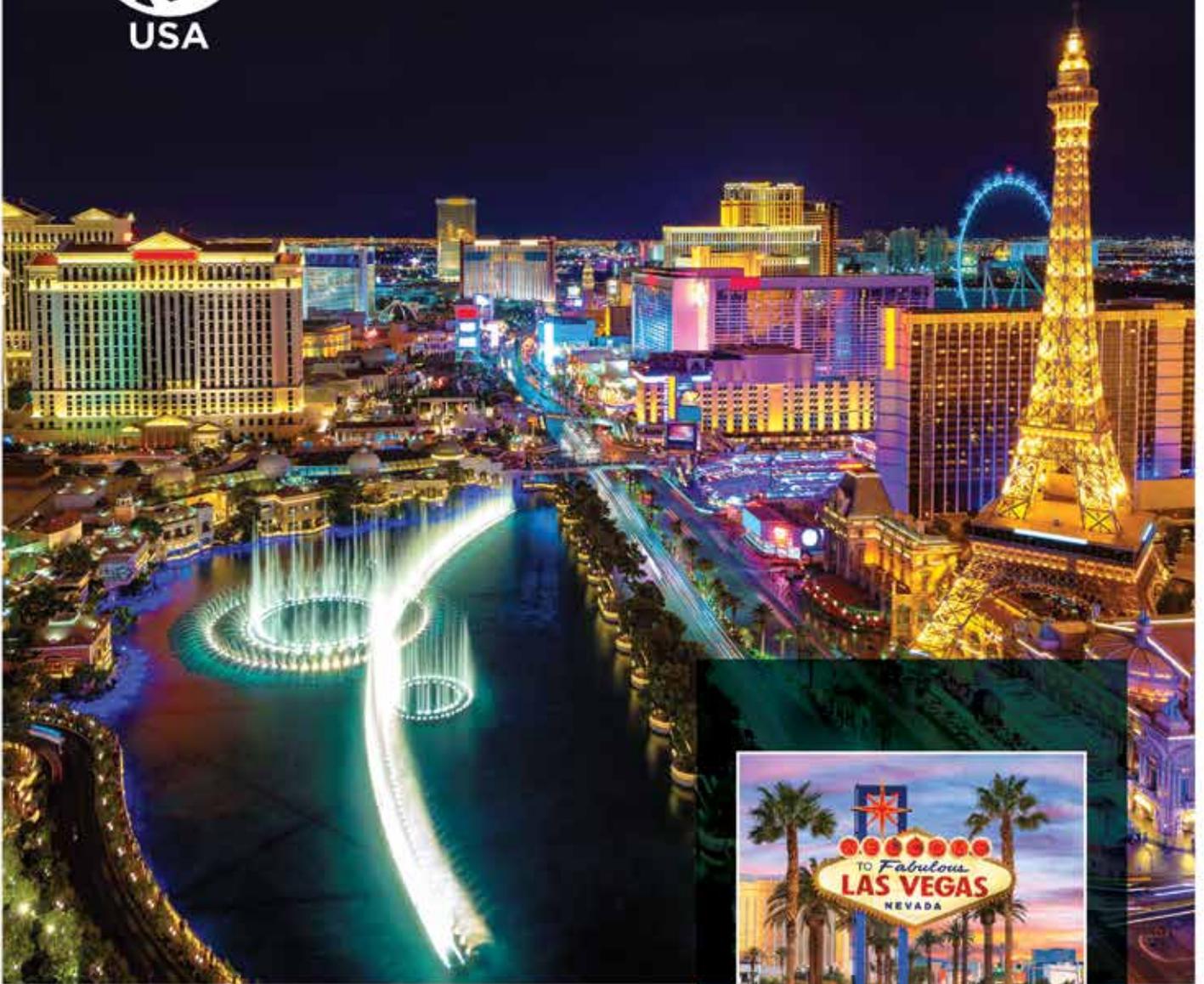


the HKTB as Hong Kong Convention Ambassadors to promote the city as the premier choice for regional and global M!CE events.

"As we chart the road to recovery, we are grateful to have over 100 prominent leaders of the community join us in promoting Hong Kong as the preferred host for global M!CE events," **Dr YK Pang**, Chairman, HKTB said, as he extended a warm welcome to the Ambassadors. "The Hong Kong Convention Ambassador programme is formulated not only to bring business events to the city when travel resumes, it will also promote the advantages of Hong Kong to the global business community and help drive multi-sectoral recovery. The economic multiplier effect of hosting world-class M!CE events is huge. And the HKTB team is here to offer full support to the Ambassadors' efforts," he added.

If the pandemic situation in the city remains under control, the HKTB also hopes to relaunch mega events that Hong Kong people can initially take part in.

QUICK BYTE The economic multiplier effect of hosting M!CE events is huge



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Surviving conventionally

Industry players in India are very optimistic about the year ahead with few markets looking to go back to normalcy at the earliest or by beginning of next year.

Charmaine Fernz

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) had reported back in 2018 a very optimistic viewpoint on the M!CE industry. As per their report, India is a late entrant in the M!CE segment with a small share of the global pie. Of the total 12,563 international meetings in a year, it hosts only 175 or just 1.4% to rank 24th worldwide. Despite its late entry, M!CE tourism in India was pegged at

₹25,000 crore with an eight per cent growth year-on-year, according to the FICCI report titled 'India Inbound Tourism: Unlocking the Opportunity'. The industry was estimated to have a space of 5 lakh sq.mt., which was expected to cross 15 lakh sq.mt. over the next two to three years. Growth figures for global M!CE tourism were pegged at a compound annual growth rate of 7.5% and were expected to reach 1.2 trillion dollars (about ₹70 lakh

M!CE TOURISM

According to the 2018 FICCI report titled 'India Inbound Tourism: Unlocking the Opportunity', M!CE tourism in India was pegged at ₹25,000 crore with an eight per cent growth y-o-y.

Growth figures for global M!CE tourism were pegged at a compound annual growth rate of 7.5% and were expected to reach 1.2 trillion dollars (about ₹70 lakh crore) by 2023. All these figures were scrambled with the onslaught of the pandemic.

crore) by 2023. All these figures were scrambled with the onslaught of the pandemic.

Manish Dayya, General Manager, Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre (NHCC) and Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) explains, "The entire hospitality industry is adversely affected due to the pandemic. There is a steep decline in M!CE business travel leading to major cancellations and pace lost at both NHCC and HICC not just in 2020 but also until Q3 of 2021 with no clarity on how Q4 would pick up." Sharing a rather unique position, **V Anbu**,

QUICK BYTE India, a late entrant in the M!CE segment, has a small share of the global pie

Director General & CEO, IMTMA and BIEC and President, UFI explains that when the pandemic first hit India in March 2020 and a countrywide lockdown was announced, by then BIEC had completed its exhibition calendar for the year 2019-20 and all subsequent shows were rescheduled to late 2020. However, despite the extended lockdowns the pandemic wasn't eradicated completely due to which exhibitions and events weren't held throughout the financial year 2020-2021. There were some signs of recovery in the first quarter of 2021 but the second wave of the pandemic caught us off-guard resulting in shows getting further postponed."

Convention centres across the country were all fighting the same storm with a little ray of hope but no respite. As **Shahnawaz Shah**, Marketing Manager of Sheri-Kashmir International Convention Centre (SKICC) explains, "When things were getting back to normalcy, we were the first convention centre to open. We welcomed small gatherings of 30 people to begin with which grew gradually to 500 and then even 700 people following all the COVID rules and regulations. Furthermore, SKICC being an exclusive facility in the far north of the country used to be abuzz with M!CE activities with almost four events, big to small per week and at times two to three smaller events in a day. However, things changed to just a few events and very limited participation due to restrictions and apprehensions."

Interestingly, despite all the limitations and hurdles, the M!CE industry is always being considered very resilient. Industry players are very optimistic about



Manish Dayya



There is a steep decline in M!CE business travel leading to major cancellations



V Anbu



The second wave caught us off-guard resulting in shows getting further postponed



the year ahead with few markets looking to go back to normalcy at the earliest or even stretched to the end of this year or by beginning of next year.

THE FOCUS FACTOR

Interestingly, the optimism is based on past



performance wherein there have been sectors which are stronger performers than the others. As Anbu explains, "Shows relating to engineering have always had predominance in the exhibition industry. They attract huge participation from exhibitors and visitors across various industries that focus on technology, innovations and new products."

In contrast, the Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC) is a mixed bag when it comes to segmentation. **Sumit Joshi**, Head – Marketing & Sales shares his view stating that all International Chambers, Export Promotion Councils, associations, trade bodies and respective Ministries and Departments are promoting their industry-specific expertise and schemes to boost the economy through M!CE activities. For Jaipur in particular, there is huge potential and demand to organise M!CE activities in sectors like Gem & Jewellery, Travel & Tourism, Medical & Pharma, Textile & Garment, Cement, Construction & Building

Material among the many others. Taking on a different approach, Dayya feels that the buzz is within the social segment. "We at NHCC & HICC have developed a unique offering mainly under Vivaah at Novotel by leveraging our network across the country. Novotel is providing guests an opportunity to connect with family and friends with the same wedding feast delivered under Dawat by Novotel or be it a gift hamper from the bride and groom delivered across the country under Shagun by Novotel. The wedding guests also have the option to join in the virtual celebrations, while maintaining social distancing norms. Subsequently, we have also started hosting hybrid events for which we are completely equipped from a technological standpoint."

THE NEW NORMAL

Despite being optimistic and looking at the silver lining, the one thing which is a constant for a long time to come are the COVID norms. The new normal in any industry is all about safety, hygiene, sanitisation and social



distancing norms and convention centres are no different. **Humayun Bakshi Javed**, Director of SKICC is of the opinion that guest behaviour has certainly changed. Visitors are weary of entering a premise. All necessary precautions need to be considered such as thermal screening, negative RT-PCR reports and masking up. These factors are mainly for the external divisions, internally we have to make sure we maintain a COVID protocol atmosphere with necessary sanitisation and hygiene. This has become more of a norm. Taking it a notch differently, Dayya shares that in only a few months, the travel and hospitality industry has become nearly unrecognisable compared to the days of early 2020 due to COVID-19's impact. Health and safety are front and centre for customers and that is what will derive business in future.

ADAPTION – THE NEW BUZZWORD
 ‘Change is the only constant’
 – this holds true for the

M!CE industry but with all the precautions set in place industry players would have to go the extra mile now in a post-COVID era to boost numbers. For SKICC, it will revolve around safety and security of the guests. “The safety of delegates will be our primary priority. In keeping with this focus, we will ensure that a healthy atmosphere is maintained in the conference centres by continuing thermal scans on a daily basis, pre- and post-event sanitisation and limit the number of attendees in order to maintain social distancing. The other areas of focus would be the kitchen, cooking of meals and ensuring the staff wear a protective gear,” adds Shah.

Anbu is of the opinion that convention centres would have to keep an extra budget and adopt technology-based solutions to enhance

QUICK BYTE Centres would have to keep an extra budget & adopt tech-based solutions



Shahnawaz Shah

We welcomed gatherings of 30 people to begin with which grew gradually to 500 people

customer experience. Proper planning and investments need to be made to create a safe environment for events in future. Few shows and conventions can now be held in hybrid mode with technology playing a big role. For example, trade shows are building their own apps to enable exhibitors to communicate with visitors in real time through push notifications, contactless technologies for transactions during the show are being explored and artificial intelligence powered matchmaking solutions will help learn about the professional goals and interests of visitors, exhibitors and sponsors.

It is certain that technology will surely play a very big role in the years ahead for M!CE events. However, as Dayya says, convention businesses will have to adapt and change to suit the new environments. There will be a higher focus on smaller domestic events along with increased focus on virtual or hybrid events. Digitisation and flexibility of venues

will be highly important. Subsequently, venues located in safe destinations with flexible spaces and advanced technology are likely to attract large-scale international events.

MOVING TECH FORWARD

The pandemic has brought to the forefront technological advancements and adoptions, which in many cases would have taken years to implement. Convention centres like JECC and SKICC are placing their bets on implementation of new technologies which generate faith in stakeholders. As Joshi says, “We keep ourselves updated with new technologies which support and benefit our industry.”

Adding further Shah says, “Technology has changed the way the tourism industry functions in future. Today, it is all about e-bookings, video conferencing and virtual meetings. Conference bookings are now done online as virtual tours make it possible by showcasing the infrastructure, allied and ancillary services.”

Huge investments are being made by convention centres focusing on tech integration to create impact and engagement. Dayya asserts that the shift has begun to virtual with emphasis on complete experiences over transactions, and in-venue cloud-based systems rather than terminal-driven access. The focus should remain on being a cost-effective partner while providing solutions that increase attendee engagement.

STRATEGISING AHEAD

With all factors well in place, the M!CE industry is surely looking optimistically for the right time. Industry



Sumit Joshi

For Jaipur in particular, there is huge potential to organise M!CE activities in some sectors

QUICK BYTE The stress is on venue cloud-based systems, not terminal-driven access

partners are charting out strategic plans to ensure a boost in numbers. Anbu is of the opinion that BIEC has an advantage as shows of varying scale and size can be held, sometimes concurrently as well. The venue has been equipped with all the necessary guidelines and processes to conduct any show. Subsequently, there are a good number of shows lined up for 2021-2022, all of which will be held in the new normal adhering to all SOPs.

From a hospitality point of view, Dayya explains, “In the current uncertainty and due to the second wave, socials will remain the key focus along with staycations and transient segment. A lot of focus will be on promotional activities to attract individual travellers and families with a host of recreational activities being introduced to engage our

guests of all ages.” Javed assertively states that once the situation is under control, we will go for an aggressive campaign to attract M!CE organisers, associations and state boards. Kashmir is our USP with its beautiful landscapes, fresh air and adventure activities galore for post-convention attractions.

Concluding on a futuristic point of view, Joshi says, “The pandemic has given us a lot of time to rework our strategies and interact with industry leaders via webinars. Keeping the demand in mind, we are planning to launch our own shows, yes of course with government and industry support.

We are also open to co-organise and support, if respective industry players bring their existing shows to JECC or launch new shows.”

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MEA CONFERENCE



Dubai hosts industry leaders

UFI Middle East and Africa Conference at the Dubai World Trade Centre attracted 150 attendees from 10 countries and highlighted the restart of business events.

MT Bureau

UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry Middle East and Africa Conference 2021 successfully concluded with over 150 participants from across the globe and 30 expert speakers. Held after almost 15 months of digital meetings, UFI MEA Conference was the first onsite in-person event which brought together leading players from the region and beyond to network, exchange ideas and forge new partnerships, with participants travelling from as far as the United States.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General of Dubai Tourism and Dubai World Trade Centre Authority, and Kai



HE Helal Saeed Almarri



The pace of events slowly caught on and has continued since last year



Issam Kazim



Dubai has led the way in restarting business events



Hattendorf, Managing Director and CEO of UFI, delivered welcome addresses.

Leaders from the regional and international exhibition sector gathered in Dubai – thanks to the city’s well-established measures to safeguard the well-being of all visitors and lead the way globally in restarting business events in the wake of the pandemic.

With a mix of speakers from inside and outside the industry, participants enjoyed a world-class programme of content, including economic outlook, case studies, lessons learnt from the pandemic and plans for the future. There were also multiple

QUICK BYTE Leading players got the opportunity to network & forge new partnerships

networking opportunities to catch up with friends and colleagues, meet new people and enjoy the company of colleagues.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri, Director General of Dubai Tourism and Dubai World Trade Centre Authority welcomed everyone, saying, “We are really happy to have you in Dubai, It is great to see the industry that we all love come together after quite an extensive break.”

Commenting on how the UAE managed amid the pandemic, he said, “Between April and July last year the team spent an excessive amount of time to put in place processes and procedures. By May last year we decided to open for domestic tourism and by July we re-opened for events. Although we opened the country for international travellers in July, the events were domestic.”

He added, “The pace of events slowly caught on and has continued since last year, making Dubai one of the first destinations to open for events with great caution.”

Issam Kazim, CEO of Dubai Corporation for Tourism and Commerce Marketing, said, “Driven by the city’s strong, decisive leadership and prudent handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, Dubai has led the way internationally in safely restarting exhibitions, trade shows and other business events, which play a vital role in economic and knowledge development locally.

Just as we’ve worked with local and international stakeholders to ensure the city has been well-placed to resume events, we are

committed to working with the wider industry to share knowledge and learning. Hosting the UFI Middle East and Africa Conference has enabled us to engage with key leaders from the global business events community and provide a platform for its continued rebound.”

Kai Hattendorf, UFI CEO and Managing Director, added, “We are very happy to offer our members and the industry the opportunity to re-connect in person, on site, face-to-face, this week.

You could literally sense the excitement in the conference hall, as colleagues from across the region met each other again, took stock of where we are as markets re-open and discovered future opportunities in the Middle East and beyond. UFI is ready to support the industry across the region in this recovery.”

Trixie LohMirmand, Executive Vice President at the Dubai World Trade Centre, said, “The Dubai World Trade Centre is delighted to finally welcome so many UFI delegates and to connect again face-to-face, celebrate the industry’s achievements and jointly accelerate the global momentum of events re-opening.

On this wonderful occasion, I’m also proud to share the launch of the Sum+ Of Us Women in Events Network, which has received a pledge of support from UFI, whose own Special Interest Group for Female Leadership strives to raise the profile and visibility of female leaders and talents in the exhibition industry. The network will be the region’s first women leadership development initiative, and has been established to



Kai Hattendorf

Colleagues took stock of where we are as markets re-open



Trixie LohMirmand

We are delighted to celebrate the industry's achievements



Naji El Haddad

The event is a manifestation of the industry's resilience



support talented, dedicated women to evolve, grow and create greater impact in the exhibitions and wider events industry.

As founding sponsor of Sum+ Of Us, the Dubai World Trade Centre is delighted to receive the full endorsement of HE Helal Almarri and the support of UFI, which is at the forefront of driving positive change in the diversity agenda.”

Naji El Haddad, UFI Regional Director for the Middle East and Africa, said, “This conference is a clear manifestation of the industry’s resilience and determination to thrive, despite the current circumstances. The success of the event wouldn’t have been possible without the support of our host, Dubai World Trade Centre, and our destination partner, Dubai Tourism. I would like to offer a special thanks to all of our sponsors, speakers and delegates for their contribution and participation.”

The event is the latest in a series of important shows and conferences taking place in Dubai over recent months, following on from Gitex Technology Week, Gulfood and Arabian Travel Market. In the coming months, Dubai will continue to host major events, including Arab Health and The Hotel Show, as momentum builds towards Expo 2020 Dubai.

This year’s conference was supported by UFI’s Diamond Sponsors – the Thailand Convention & Exhibition Bureau (TCEB), Qatar National Tourism Council (Qatar), Shenzhen World and Freeman. A wide range of sponsors also backed the event.

Transforming the exhibition industry

UFI, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry Middle East and Africa Conference 2021 successfully concluded in Dubai with over 150 participants from across the globe.



Promoting M!CE

Salim Al Shanfari, CEO, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre talks about their plans to make Oman a more lucrative M!CE destination.

Shehara Rizly

How does it feel to attend an in-person event in Dubai?

It is a pleasure to be back in Dubai to attend the UFI MEA Chapter and Congress. It is an amazing feeling and it gives us hope to see the light at the end of the tunnel and to bring the business back to what it was before the pandemic. We look forward to seeing more of such events and networking with our colleagues from the industry to find solutions which can enable us to take the events industry to the next level.

What were the initiatives taken during the past year in terms of the industry?

The last year was a year of reflection, reviewing and assessing how we were performing and how we could help and support the industry. We worked on the structure of our pricing, the structure of our commissions and the way we do business. We also looked at the industry from a level of what risks do they have and what challenges do they go through and how to work as a team to get out of this crisis.

Could you share the collaborative efforts with the government to uplift the industry?

We have worked very closely with the government on different programmes, especially in terms of healthcare, storing medical equipment and supporting the needs of different people. Currently we are working on a mass



Salim Al Shanfari

vaccination programme with the government that would enable us to cover 30% of the populace by end of August. Hopefully before the end of the year the government can cover 80% of the populace, so we work side by side with the government. The government provides experience on the medical side and we provide our

quite a few international conferences including the UFI Congress which will happen in Muscat in November 2022.

We are looking at attracting more international conferences to the country, we would like Oman to be a destination in the Middle East to attract businesses. Oman is still undiscovered



QUICK BYTE We would like Oman to be a destination in the ME to attract businesses

“
We are hoping that by Q4 we will see some movements in terms of events
”

event experience to ensure that we get out of this situation as soon as possible, together as a team.

How do you foresee the future of the events industry in Oman?

We are hoping that by Q4 we will see some movements in terms of events, exhibitions and conferences. Next year we are expected to host

from an events and exhibitions perspective. Oman as a country is beautiful, it has a unique culture & history. We are keen to work closely with the government in terms of the national tourism strategy and achieving the 2040 vision of the country to attract more visitors and investors.

Our focus in the coming year will be mainly on positioning Oman as one of the leading destinations in terms of tourism and attracting investors from around the world.

Business associated to weddings, social events has replaced corporate M!CE, incentives and charters, says **Rohit Chopra**, Regional Director, Sales & Distribution, Accor India & South Asia

Hazel Jain



Revival on the cards

What is your perspective on the M!CE segment opening up?

The M!CE industry almost came to a standstill in 2020 leading to a big dent in the structure, functioning and finances of many businesses. Since the lockdowns have been lifted, we have witnessed a significant shift in the nature of M!CE business. Business associated to weddings, social events and sports has replaced corporate M!CE, incentives and charters, which used to be demand generators in 2019.

To encourage demand, one of the key factors in 2021 will be flexibility on commercial terms & conditions, given that these are unique times. Moreover, as international travel restrictions continue, domestic business will be driving M!CE revenues for the near future. While we did see a drastic increase in demand for M!CE in February 2021, in the last two months we have also witnessed an increase in cancellation or rescheduling because of the escalation in



Rohit Chopra



We have been receiving some queries from corporates for 100-200 pax from Q3 onwards



COVID-19 cases. Business travel and M!CE will be extremely slow, we can expect a revival closer to the festival season, in October, depending on cases and vaccination.

What segment of M!CE do you think is opening first?

While we can expect sporadic demand in segments like weddings and sports, movement in industries such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, automobile, sports, manufacturing, movie production houses and white goods should witness a faster rebound Q3 onwards.

Have your corporate clients already planned for this year?

We are confident that companies would prefer in-person and socially distant meetings and discussions for business

transactions rather than conducting events virtually. Moreover, as international travel restrictions continue, domestic business will be driving M!CE revenues. For India, we have been receiving some queries from corporates for 100-200 pax from Q3 onwards. But they are also keeping a keen watch on the currently developing COVID-19 situation in the country. We have been getting queries for Q4 2021 for safer, long-haul destinations, and can expect similar interest for shorter haul destinations from Q3 2021.

What should hotels focus on right now?

The focus has to be on forging the right partnerships to push M!CE for hotels in India today. We are looking at new ideas and concepts for our hotels such as Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre, Novotel Hyderabad Airport, Pullman New Delhi Aerocity and Sofitel Mumbai BKC. Their expansive space will help us continue to adapt & provide experiences at various levels for all our guests.

QUICK BYTE The focus has to be on forging the right partnerships to push M!CE

NIMA restructured

The Network of Indian MICE Agents has reconstituted its Executive Team, announcing **Jagdeep Bhagat** of Vee Bee Tours, Delhi, as National Coordinator for the second time.

Nisha Verma

The Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA), on the occasion of its seventh Foundation Day, reconstituted its Executive Team, and has announced **Jagdeep Bhagat** of Vee Bee Tours, Delhi, as the National Coordinator for the second time and Gajesh Girdhar from Paryatan, Muzaffarnagar, as Chairman Emeritus.

NIMA's new team, besides Jagdeep Bhagat and Gajesh Girdhar, also has SanJeet from DDP Publications as the Mentor for the association, and Vikas Khanduri of Holiday Merchants as the Advisor.

Talking about the new team and its agenda ahead, Bhagat says, "The Vision 2025, which was declared last year, remains the same. The new team is the extension of our agenda we had last year. With this restructuring, we are doing away with our state chapters or state coordinators and now we have constituted regional coordinators.

Their role is to carry on our agenda, develop the states and strengthen the local state tourism bodies, align with the government bodies locally and develop the MICE segment in those states," he informs.

With the new regional coordinators in place, NIMA is targeting at least 12 states on its MoU list by the end of this year, i.e. at least three states per region.

"Currently, we have MoUs with five states, and we will be adding seven more states within this year. This is the immediate task of the regional coordinators — to fix up, coordinate, handhold, plan, strategise and get those MoUs done. We are not in a hurry to implement these things unless or until results are there," he adds.

CLEAR OBJECTIVES

Bhagat says that when the pandemic began last year, it took them time to see how things were developing. He adds, "Whatever interactions we had with our members, our focus was very clear — we wanted them to sustain and stay afloat. This was the basic agenda, which we passed on throughout last year to our members. Whatever business our members could manage was good for everyone — them, the industry and livelihoods of so many who depended on all our members.

The idea was that the pandemic gave us a different perspective of how the state will perform post-pandemic. We had to



Jagdeep Bhagat



NIMA is targeting at least 12 states on its MoU list by the end of this year



NIMA FACT FILE

- Regional coordinators will carry on NIMA's agenda, develop the states & strengthen the local state tourism bodies, align with the govt bodies locally and develop the MICE segment in those states.

align ourselves with it and collaborate. This is what we had been saying — that things have changed, and one may not be able to go solo in all his ventures or what they were doing pre-COVID."

RECOVERY 2023

Bhagat anticipates things will brighten up only after early May 2023. "We don't see much happening in 2022 either. A profitable model will come only in 2023, if at all. The vision with which we have reconstituted our team is that we don't want to push any product because everything is uncertain.

Even destinations, whether domestic or international, nobody's sure how things will turn up. Hence, we don't want our members to keep on planning for those things, where products and destinations are not aware of how things will turn up.

However, we want them to maintain that connect and hence, we are connecting them with relevant platforms to keep themselves updated. It is not the time to plan, but to keep yourself updated on what's happening and where.

Hence, whatever business comes and whenever things open up, they should try to grab whatever best they can and take help of our industry colleagues, network members and remain afloat. They need to remain afloat to reap the profits whenever we bounce back."



QUICK BYTE A profitable model will come only in 2023, if at all



Delivering safe events

Hilton Chennai's approach has been to offer flexible event solutions in an optimum pricing band, thus encouraging clients to feel confident to restart events, says its GM Ruban Das.

Hazel Jain

Do you see corporates booking for this year?

At Hilton Chennai we are approaching 2021 as the year of road to recovery. While we are far away from a fully active M!CE segment till Q4 2021, we are definitely seeing an upswing when it comes to month on month actualisation in this segment which contributes to over 30% of our total revenues.

What about the weddings & social events segment?

Weddings and social events had started to take place early this year, though in a modified service design to suit the new normal, where less has become more. Our team of wedding specialists bring a strong understanding of social and religious wedding traditions. So we have been able to marry our EventReady with CleanStay solutions with customer aspirations effectively while accommodating evolving health related government advisories. Thus, wedding and socials events have



Ruban Das

continued to stay active as a segment followed by hybrid events and small-sized corporate day meetings.

How are you dealing with your corporate clients?

We have been in touch with our regular corporate client roster comprising of companies in manufacturing, SMEs, pharma, technology, BFIS and real estate segment to ascertain requirements and plans. Our approach has been to offer flexible event solutions in an optimum pricing band thus encouraging our clients to feel confident to restart physical and hybrid events, even in small scale to begin with, and to help them with business continuity.

How have you prepared your hotel for the future?

At Hilton, we quickly learnt that the M!CE segment

had been permanently impacted by the pandemic; and, hence we launched the 'Hilton EventReady with CleanStay' programme in July 2020, to address the evolving needs of this segment. The programme delivers event experiences that are clean, flexible, safe and socially responsible. EventReady with CleanStay' programme also provides curated solutions for every step of event planning. The process ensures that guests are able to get personalised experiences. This is supported by a detailed playbook & event checklist.

Another hallmark is the EventReady's extension, 'Hilton EventReady Hybrid Solutions'. The new suite of offerings continue to evolve and adapt intelligently to new meeting needs of customers; thus, directing event planners to Hilton's Hybrid ready hotels while also providing them with planning resources -- including an expanded Hilton EventReady Playbook and flexible customer offers.

EventReady with CleanStay' delivers event experiences that are flexible, safe and socially responsible



QUICK BYTE The M!CE segment contributes to over 30% of our total revenues

Adaptability is key

Sarovar Hotels' Regional Heads talk about the response they are getting in terms of business travellers and how they will look at M!CE to drive occupancy in hotels.

Neha Rawat



Sanjeev Shekhar
Regional Director – West



Though our resort property is doing great in India as international travel is restricted to Maldives and Dubai, our rates in the corporate sector are not going to rise as foreigners not coming in. We would be able to reach 70-80 per cent occupancy in the summers but the rates will really suffer. Also, there are restrictions on the number of people allowed at events, so M!CE travel will not be coming in a hurry, corporates have started moving a little bit, however PSUs will take off faster than the others. Also, WFH for the corporates will continue.



Ajoy Balkrishna
Regional Director – North



Currently under the North region umbrella, we have around 47 operational hotels, and out of 50, about 8-9 are in North. Our growth in the North has been the fastest and the highest, we have mostly been focused on business destinations but in the last couple of years we have started opening in our leisure segment. COVID has made us change our strategies and adaptability is the key word now. In addition to the business segment, we have started focusing on weddings, leisure, workcations and staycations. 2021 is going to be a great fight back year and we will be back to normal.



Swarup Datta
Regional Director – South



There are certain directives given by the local governments for the gatherings, that depends upon the case load of the area. Small conferences and meetings still do happen, however the WFH and Zoom call meetings scenario has curtailed travel which hits us in a big way. However, to increase footfalls we are looking at various cost-effective options. We are also working on providing safe spaces for people to visit. Our hotels are highly dependent on international travel and once it opens up we will look at the M!CE segment to drive occupancy in hotels.



Connecting with the global market

We have already reached out to some of the corporates to gauge their readiness to travel, says Jyothi Varma, the new VP for the India market at DigiTravel Consulting.

Manas Dwivedi

To support a resurgent business travel industry, DigiTravel Consulting (DTC) has announced an expanded global presence by adding consultants in India / Asia, US and Canada. **Jyothi Varma** has been named as the Vice President for the India market. Sharing her first reaction on her appointment, Varma says, “I have almost three decades of experience in the travel and hospitality industry. I believe my connections and experience in the industry will help expand our reach in my new role as Vice President for the India market. For me personally, the new role helps in connecting with the global market and will add value addition to my knowledge curve while learning something new and also enrich networking with international players.”

US-based DigiTravel Consulting provides next-generation consulting services to the business travel industry powering the omnichannel experience. Sharing her immediate plans and goals with the new responsibility, Varma says that they have already reached out to some of the corporates to gauge their readiness to travel and handle the new norms of travelling. “Travel is never going to be the same now. The way things are,



Jyothi Varma

“There will be emphasis on vaccination, wellness, health & the kind of food being served”

we want to understand if corporates are ready to travel or not. How are they going to plan their travel keeping in mind safety, hygiene, sanitisation. The goal is to identify what is the status of corporates resuming travel and what is the update in the market. We have slowly reached out to few clients and we have told them what all we are doing. The work is already in progress,” she says.

Talking about the future of business travel in India in the new normal era, Varma says that a lot of things will change in the way corporates and business travel is managed in India. “Till now, it was the price war which was the defining factor in the market. But going further, it will not be the only deciding factor, the

value of the product will be much more important. The value of the product is how much emphasis is given to hygiene, what are the things being done to take care of the clients, how resources for a company, which are the most valuable assets for a firm do not face any issue during their travel. So there will be a lot of emphasis on vaccination, wellness, health and the kind of food being served during the trip. There is going to be a huge difference in the way corporates & business travellers will travel. For corporates, if you are giving them services according to their needs, they won’t mind paying extra,” she explains.

Predicting the timeline for the full recovery of the M!CE industry in India, Varma says that she personally is looking forward to consistent movement starting from the first quarter of the next financial year. “I wouldn’t be able to predict how and when. We have just peaked the second wave and we are looking at the third wave of COVID infections. Although, we have become smarter since the first wave, we have learnt a lot of things and realised the same things will not work in the second wave. So, if you ask me when the business travel is going to resume, there is no clear deadline,” she concludes.



QUICK BYTE The goal is to identify what is the status of corporates resuming travel

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Priority vaccination

Türkiye has begun the full-fledged vaccination of its tourism employees. The drive will cover employees of airlines, airports, accommodation facilities and travel agencies.

MT Bureau

Türkiye has begun the full-fledged vaccination of its tourism employees in coordination with The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Health and Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA). The vaccination drive initiated by Turkey will cover employees of airlines, airports, accommodation facilities, travel agencies as well as professional guides. Vaccination of the entire tourism staff

Türkiye is continuing to invest in the 'Safe Tourism Certification Program'

will be completed before the beginning of the 2021 summer season. Within the scope of 'Safe Tourism Certification Program', this vaccination drive aims to welcome international



travellers for the upcoming summer season and to ensure the health & safety of tourism employees and its residents. Since the launch of 'Safe Tourism Certification Program' in June 2020, Türkiye has been following stringent health and safety guidelines and taking all necessary steps to ensure it continues to be safe. As part of the continuing efforts in the

fight against COVID-19 and to further enhance its position as one of the world's safest destinations, Türkiye is continuing to invest in the 'Safe Tourism Certification Program'. Up to now, more than 8,000 facilities have been certified. As the country is expecting a V-shaped recovery in touristic travels, the tourism workforce has been prioritised for vaccination.

Redefining experiences

M!CE has been a strong segment for our hotel, says **Rahul Joshi**, General Manager, Taj Hotel & Convention Centre Agra

Neha Rawat

What is your post-COVID strategy for M!CE?

M!CE has been a strong segment for our hotel – we hope to see more recovery and confidence on this front. We have redefined our wedding experiences by remodelling and re-engineering our banqueting processes. For instance, we now have individual pre-plated portions of dishes to avoid sharing of food between guests; we have redesigned seating arrangements keeping physical distancing in mind; we have mandated the use of PPE by associates and guests; health declaration forms are a must, etc.



Rahul Joshi

We now have individual pre-plated portions of dishes



Besides, basics like thermal screening, resting of guestrooms between usage, hygiene kits at vantage points, and stipulated guidelines for wedding vendors have already been implemented.

Guests have a selection of offers to choose from

depending on their specific needs. Our hotel offers upgrades, special discounts on F&B, extended stay benefits etc. to name a few. We have the advantage of offering our guests to choose from seven different room types and multiple banquet spaces to suit their requirements.

M!CE post- COVID

We can expect a big focus on small domestic events, says **Saurabh Tuteja**, Director – Brand3Sixty & General Secretary – Enterprising Travel Agents Association (North India).



It is believed that COVID is here to stay for long and the entire world has to learn how to live with it. Even when the regulatories allow the venues & destinations to hold physical events, the recovery of the industry will largely depend on consumers & the stakeholders as and when they gain confidence that destinations and venues are safe to visit.

One positive thing today is that surveys suggest that people are keen to travel for M!CE as soon as possible. In the post-COVID world, it's for sure that M!CE events will definitely be very different from the past. If we compare exhibitions with conferences, social distancing is easier to handle in exhibitions in comparison to conferences. So there might be a possibility that we may see more exhibitions than conferences.

We can also expect a big focus on small domestic events with demands of hygiene & social distancing.

For sure we can expect some virtual & hybrid events. But, the shelf-life of virtual events is not too long. I am sure, we all get a link in our WhatsApp or mail account about some virtual event or conference or knowledge session happening every day. People are losing interest in virtual events and are not too keen on attending them. Most of them attending are doing so because of the social peer pressure. Yes, surely there will be some hybrid events as well. We won't be surprised if we are invited to an event only if we are vaccinated. Others may attend the same event digitally within the comfort of their living rooms.

Another interesting trend in events we expect soon will be multiple location events happening in different cities of the world, connected online to form one global forum. This will give an opportunity to the participants to be part of the event in person without taking long flights. So, they

can travel by road and attend the forum, avoiding risks of large gatherings.

We can definitely expect a revolution in digitisation. Venues need to upgrade to different levels of technology infrastructure. They need to have tailor-made solutions for virtual integration. Convention centres or venues which will upgrade to a level that they have all kinds of integrations possible, will be the winners. Conventions are just not about presentations, it's also about making new friends from the industry, networking & creating partnerships. It is also a very big stress buster, wherein we get a chance to break our official monotonous routines and live few days of a stress-free life. There can be no substitute to conventions and M!CE events and let's hope we have a safer world to start living the pre-COVID M!CE life again.

(The article has been written by Saurabh Tuteja, Director – Brand3Sixty & General Secretary – Enterprising Travel Agents Association (North India). The views expressed are the author's personal views)



Saurabh Tuteja



There will be multiple location events connected online to form a global forum



QUICK BYTE Surveys suggest that people are keen to travel for M!CE as soon as possible

Movements



Akbar Al Baker
Chairman, oneworld global
airline alliance, Qatar

The Governing Board of the oneworld global airline alliance has appointed Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive, His Excellency Akbar Al Baker to serve as its Chairman. Al Baker will oversee the alliance's governance, chair oneworld's Governing Board meetings & work closely with oneworld CEO Rob Gurney & the management team. Having led Qatar Airways since 1997, Al Baker is the longest-serving CEO of a oneworld member airline.



Rajeev Jalnapurkar
Chairman
IAAPI, Hyderabad

Rajeev Jalnapurkar has been appointed as the Chairman of Indian Association of Amusement Parks and Industries (IAAPI) from April 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022. Jalnapurkar has over 20 years of experience in the theme park, attraction, entertainment and leisure industry. He is the Board Management member for the development of theme parks, M!CE, weddings & celebrations at Ramoji Film City. He was the Vice Chairman of International Relations Committee of IAAPI and is actively associated with Education Sub-committee, Asia.



Michelle McKinney Frymire
Chief Executive Officer
CWT

CWT, the Business-to-Business-for-Employees (B2B4E) travel management platform, has appointed Michelle McKinney Frymire as CEO with effect from May 1, 2021. Frymire joined CWT in 2019 and has over 20 years of travel industry experience. Her leadership has spanned a broad range of functions with notable leadership roles as the CFO at Starwood Vacation Ownership and Delta Technology (a division of Delta Airlines).



Souvagya Mohapatra
Managing Director
Atmosphere Group

Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts has announced the appointment of Souvagya Mohapatra as the Managing Director for India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. This announcement signals significant growth plans, with a strong focus on the Indian subcontinent. Mohapatra has over 28 years of experience. He will be responsible for the overall business strategy & setting up new Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts in emerging destinations in South Asia.



Vineet Mishra
Complex GM, Pullman &
Novotel New Delhi Aerocity

Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity announced the appointment of Vineet Mishra as the Complex General Manager. He will be spearheading the management of the 670-room property, a unique combination hotel of two brands, Pullman and Novotel. Mishra brings on board an illustrious career spanning over 22 years. In his new role, Mishra will take on a cluster leadership role for Pullman & Novotel New Delhi Aerocity.



Mohit Gurnani
GM, Taj Jumeirah
Lakes Towers, Dubai

Taj Jumeirah Lakes Towers has appointed Mohit Gurnani as General Manager. In his new role, Gurnani will be responsible for overseeing the full management and operations of the hotel in Dubai as it continues to deliver exceptional guest experiences. A seasoned hotelier, Gurnani has been with The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) for over 15 years, having led a distinguished professional path with several senior management roles in India and the Middle East.



Vikas Sharma
General Manager
Radisson Blu Resort
Dharamshala

Vikas Sharma has been appointed as General Manager at the upcoming Radisson Blu Resort Dharamshala. With a career spanning over three decades in hospitality, Sharma has contributed to well-known hotel brands such as Taj Hotels and Resorts, IHG, Starwood, Hilton and Hard Rock Hotels. His core competence lies in successfully launching new properties and managing hotel operations. Sharma has had extensive experience in F&B, Sales and Revenue Management.



Rajitha Rajapakse
Business Development
Manager
Enlite, Dubai

Rajitha Rajapakse has joined Enlite – a B2B wholesaler as their Business Development Manager. He has 20 years of experience in the travel industry. Starting his career in 2001 in Sri Lanka with Walkers Tours, he moved to the UAE in 2011, working for Arabian Adventures. In 2016, he was heading Sales & Marketing for Explore the Wonders until this new stint at Enlite. He is confident that his journey with Enlite will give an opportunity to redefine wholesale travel products to all retail agents.

WORKING

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