

***TAFI Kerala Chapter held their members meeting on 19th May at “The Raviz” Kozhikode:**



Kerala Chapter held their members meeting at “The RAVIZ”, Arayidathupalam, Kozhikode, on 19th May 2023. The meeting was presided by the Chapter Chairman Mr. Paulose K. Mathew and conducted by Chapter Secretary Mr. Shaji Mathew as per agenda circulated to members. The floor deliberated the current issues of the trade and expressed individually, various issues they come across. The meeting was well attended and concluded with dinner and entertainment.

***TAFI Kerala Chapter was invited by Oman Tourism for product presentation:**



L-R: Ms. Avneet Kaur, Mr. Paulose, Mr. Mubarak Salim Al Harrasi, Ms. Rani Bechani, Mr. Yousuf Khalaf Al Mujaizi, Mr. Arjun Chadha



Mr. Paulose receiving memento from Mr. Mubarak Salim Al Harrasi. Mr. Arjun Chadha

On invitation from **Mr. Mubarak Salim Al Harrasi**, Head section Of Arab and Asia Market Directorate General of Tourism Promotion of Oman and **Mr. Yousuf Khalaf Al Mujaizi** Assistant Director of Business Development, Kerala Chapter **Chairman Mr. Paulose K Mathew** and National Management Committee Member **Ms. Rani Bechani** participated in the meeting held in **Cochin Marriott Hotel**. **Mr. Arjun Chadha**, Country Manager, Oman Tourism India Office, and **Mr. Avneet Kaur**, Sales Manager, Oman Tourism also participated in the meeting. Latest product update was showcased in the presentation.

***ANALYSIS OF SECTION 194O WITH RESPECT TO TRAVEL AGENTS:**

By H.M. Talha Rahaman, Chartered Accountant, Consultant, TAFI, I.T Matters



Section 194O

This section deals with the TDS provisions of e-commerce operators. Please visit this link to read the section: <https://www.incometaxindia.gov.in/pages/acts/income-tax-act.aspx>

Definition of Terms used in the section:

- (a) "electronic commerce" means the supply of goods or services or both, including digital products, over digital or electronic network;
- (b) "e-commerce operator" means a person who owns, operates or manages digital or electronic facility or platform for electronic commerce;
- (c) "e-commerce participant" means a person "resident" in India selling goods or providing services or both, including digital products, through digital or electronic facility or platform for electronic commerce;
- (d) "services" includes "fees for technical services" and fees for "professional services", as defined in the

Explanation to section 194J.1

According to Section 194O, an e-Commerce operator (Operator) is required to deduct TDS for facilitating any sale of goods or providing services through an e-Commerce participant (Participant). TDS on e-commerce operators under section 194-O is applicable from 1 October 2020.

Applicability of this section for travel agents:

1. This section is not applicable to any travel agent who does not own any digital or electronic network. (In simple words, this section is not applicable to any travel agent who does not own, operate and manage his own website or portal.)
2. So, any travel agent who owns, operates and manages his own website or portal or any platform for eCommerce will become an "Operator" and this section will be applicable to them.

Analysis of "e-Commerce Participants":

1. This section is applicable only to "participants" who are "resident" in India.
2. This means "operators" need not deduct TDS on the payments made to "participants" who are "non-residents".

How much TDS to be deducted?

1. Operators must deduct TDS @ 1% on all payments made to "resident" participants at the time of credit or payment whichever is earlier.
2. No TDS shall be deducted on payments made to non-resident "participants"
3. "Operator" need not deduct TDS if the gross amount during the "previous year" does not exceed Rs. 5 lakhs and if the "participant" has furnished his PAN.
4. If the "participant" does not furnish his PAN, the "operator" must deduct TDS @ 5% on the payments.

What are the payments which attract TDS? (Examples)

1. All payments for the supply of goods and services or both
2. Cost of Tour Packages
3. Cost of Insurance
4. Cost of transportation
5. Cost of Hotel accommodation and Food
6. Service Charges for any facilities
7. Cost of Air Tickets
8. Any other payments for the supply of services.

Disclaimer:

This is the personal view of the writer, and the members are requested to consult their auditors for the proper compliance of this section.

***Prevention is Better than Cure**

By P. Sampath Kumar Consultant TAFI legal & industry affairs.



Do not be naive or succumb to Airline/s temptation of monies offered in the form of incentives and bonuses or a percentage on Deposit if sought to secure access to inventory or ticketing.

As Travel Professionals to protect yourselves legally both from Principal and Consumer, firstly seek and obtain a written and signed “Agreement “ appointing you as Agents, with terms and conditions spelt out upfront from all existing and new Airlines whether FSC or LCC.

Remember if you are already an IATA Accredited Agent by written signed Agreement, it does not mean you automatically are Agents to all its member airlines but only to Airlines who have given their consent by General Concurrence, the current list can be sought from IATA.

Further, do not be under the impression that you automatically are Agents for all Airlines participating in the country’s BSP platform since it accommodates both member airlines and non-member airlines and at times even others connected with aviation as stated in the Agents Handbook.

It should also be noted in our country while some established Airlines have recently gone belly up, but, then there are new airlines springing up with similar modus operandi and style of business practices, hence out of caution it’s best that Agents do not become indirect financiers without even a “Certificate of Appointment” to act as Agents.

Finally, at the cost of being repetitive, in light of the spate of airlines going into bankruptcy proceedings filed by both FSCs and LCCs, leaving behind large sums of debts to Agents in the form of refunding cash deposits besides incentive and bonus claims based on productivity, refunds for unused tickets etc. Also dues to others connected with aviation and airport services.

***Know Your Chairman- “Tamil Nadu Chapter”**



Mr. Arul Lazaran



S. N. Gogularamanan



Kannappan Babu



Thomas Raju Verghese



Ibrahim Shia

TAFI Tamil Nādu (TN) Chapter Chairman is Mr. Arul Lazaran. He was elected to this post twice with thumping majority. He is assisted by his Chapter Secretary Mr. S. N. Gogularamanan and his Treasurer Mr. Kannappan Babu. Two of the elected Chapter Committee Members in his team are Mr. Raju Thomas Varghese and Mr. Ibrahim Shah. The Chairman run his business under the name and style “United Travel Services“ and “United Visa Services“ and have a branch at Bengaluru other than one in Chennai. He is an able administrator and managing his business and the Chapter to his best of his efforts in spite his busy shuttling between Chennai and Bengaluru to oversee the business. His agency is recognized by Government of India, Ministry of Tourism and also most of the Consular Offices for his Visa Services approval.

***Finance Ministry issues clarification: No TCS on overseas spending of up to INR 7 Lacs:**



The government on 19th May, announced that no tax will be charged on overseas spending of up to **INR 7 lakh in a year** using **debit or credit** as it looked to douse backlash from its earlier decision of levying **TCS** on all spending. The government had earlier this week brought overseas credit card spending under **Liberalized Remittance Scheme (LRS)**. This meant that any spending using credit cards overseas would attract a 20 per cent tax from July 1. Debit card spending was already part of LRS. However, the move to levy tax collected at source (TCS) attracted criticism with some calling it "tax terrorism". On Friday, 19th May, evening, the government said no TCS will be deducted on the spending of up to INR 7 lakh overseas using any debit or credit card. Concerns have been raised about the applicability of Tax Collection at Source (TCS) to 'small transactions' under the Liberalized Remittance Scheme (LRS) from **July 1, 2023**. "To avoid any procedural ambiguity, it has been decided that any payments by an individual using their international Debit or Credit cards up to INR 7 lakh per financial year **will be excluded from the LRS limits** and hence, will not attract any TCS," the ministry said. Today's clarification by the ministry means that overseas payments exceeding INR 7 lakh a year through international credit and debit cards will be subject to TCS levy at the rate of 20 per cent with effect from July 1. **Currently**, overseas medical treatment and education expenses up to INR 7 lakh a year is exempt from TCS. **A 5 per cent levy** is charged on **expenses exceeding INR 7 lakh**. For those who availed of **education loans**, the rate of **TCS is 0.5 per cent**. "Existing beneficial TCS treatment for education and health payments will also continue," the ministry said. Sandeep Jhunjunwala, Partner, Nangia Andersen LLP, said the exclusion of cases involving payments by an individual using an international debit or credit card up to INR 7 lakh per financial year from LRS-TCS limits, is a welcome move.

***India will become world's largest civil aviation market by 2047: Scindia**



Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia at an event in Delhi said that the government has massive game plans for the civil aviation sector. Addressing the curtain raiser of 'Wings India 2024', organized by FICCI, jointly with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and AAI, said that government will adopt a three-pronged strategy for the growth of Indian civil aviation sector. It is our three-pronged aim which include creating capacity, removing all bottlenecks for the industry and simplify processes and procedures for the industry, Scindia emphasized. The Minister said that the that with rapid urbanization India is growing from a rural economy into an urban economy. "By 2040, nearly 42 per cent of our country will be urbanized and this will lead to greater travel by civil aviation," he added. The Minister further stated that the number of airports in the country will increase from 148 currently to 200 airports in the next 3-4 years. "Today, the 6 metro airports in India have a throughput capacity of 220 million passengers and in next 4 years, this number will increase to 420 million passengers in these 6 airports," he added. Scindia also stated that it is the thrust of the government to focus on providing the last mile connectivity. "Connectivity to the hinterland is mandatory and it should not be optional anymore. The fundamental change that the civil aviation sector has gone through in the last 9 years has been the democratization of civil aviation," he asserted.

***Thai Consul-General lauds Jharkhand's tourism initiatives:**



The **Thai Consul-General** in Kolkata, **Acharapan Yavaprapas**, said Jharkhand has a bright future in the field of tourism, fisheries and forest-based green cultivation. The Consul-General said Thailand has made breakthroughs in the field of agriculture and fisheries in recent years, and since India and her country have strong diplomatic and cultural relations, they could share these technologies in the coming years. Speaking at the launch of the logo and the website of the upcoming **Sona Devi University (SDU)** here on 19th May, Friday, Yavaprapas said the exchange programme of students of the two countries will help in the transfer of these technological breakthroughs in the fields of agriculture and fisheries. She also said SDU can play an important role in the promotion of new ideas aimed at the holistic socioeconomic development of the two countries. **SSP Prabhat Kumar**, who attended the function, said the university, which has come up in Ghatshila, will prove to be a strong platform for the keen students of the rural areas who aim to go for higher studies in professional courses. The UGC-approved varsity will tie up with top universities of neighboring countries like Thailand, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal among others in the field of information technology, pharmacy, agriculture and tourism, said Prabhakar Singh, the founder and director of SDU. The varsity officials said the institute will start its academic session 2023-24 in June and the varsity building will also be inaugurated in the same month.

*[Air India Cuts Frequent Flyer Mileage Targets by Half](#)



Air India has announced a refresh of its 'Flying Returns' (FR) frequent flyer program. Members can fast-track tier upgrades with just 50% of the usual qualifying points for a limited time. The Indian airline's FR program has benefited from several changes to become what Air India deems "the most rewarding airline

loyalty programme" in the country. The big news is that flyers can fast-track tier status upgrades or membership renewals using only 50% of their points for a limited time. FR members will access benefits with 25 Star Alliance airlines, including over 1 lakh (100,000) redemption seats monthly and points earned on Air India and partner airline flights. As Air India strives to make Flying Returns "amongst the most rewarding loyalty programmes globally," the refresh **includes several other perks:**

No blackout dates - unlike most airlines, you won't be locked out of certain dates when redeeming points, even during peak travel periods. **Point validity extension** - extended validity of Flying Returns points and tier status till June 30th, 2023, with a further extension to the end of 2023 if points are earned or redeemed up until June 30th. **Retro claim** - claim points on previous trips with 'Retro Claim' up to one year back on Air India flights and six months with Star Alliance partners. **Customer care** - Air India will launch a premium call center, along with a single point of contact on its website, for FR members. **Family pooling** - connect accounts with family members and combine points into one account for ease of use.

*[IndiGo And Tata Group Airlines Now Control More Than 80% Of Indian Market](#)



The **early 2000s** marked the beginning of a significant churn in Indian aviation. The dominance of a handful of full-service carriers (out of reach for most Indians) was about to be challenged by budget air travel. Airlines, such as **IndiGo, SpiceJet, and Go First** (it was called GoAir back then), burst onto the scene, opening the floodgates for millions of first-time flyers nationwide. Even Jet Airways and Kingfisher Airlines were forced to

launch low-cost brands such as **Kingfisher Red and Jet Konnect**. The overwhelming sense prevailing in that era in India was that of democratization of air travel (to a great extent, if not entirely), where no single airline dominated the market, and airfares were kept competitive for passengers. But the latest data by the Indian regulator, the DGCA, suggests new dominant forces in an ever-evolving sector. Currently, India's domestic aviation is controlled by two forces – **IndiGo** on one side and the **Tata Group** airlines on the other. Together, they have a grasp over an eye-watering **82.4%** of the Indian market. Much has also changed in the last three years following the COVID pandemic. The global health crisis was particularly harsh on SpiceJet and Go First, both of which saw their fleet slashed significantly for various reasons. IndiGo continues to remain at the top of its game due to well-timed and sharp business decisions that have allowed it to flourish. For instance, both IndiGo and Go First have been affected by grounded fleet due to **Pratt & Whitney (P&W)** engine issues. But Go First was severely hit because **a)** it did not increase its fleet strength over the years like IndiGo did, and **b)** its contract with P&W reportedly lacked the muscle power, unlike that of IndiGo's. But there's still hope for a more even division of market share (however long that takes). Akasa Air is still a tiny fish in a large pond, but its growth has been impressive. SpiceJet, for all its financial woes, continues to sustain operations somehow and is even thinking of bringing back grounded aircraft into service with the help of government loans.

*[Bold visions for Indian market with targets to welcome 100 million visitors: S T A.](#)



In line with Saudi's Vision 2030 and to welcome more than 2 million Indian visitors this year, **the Saudi Tourism Authority (STA)** has strengthened its commitments to driving awareness about tourism and hospitality in its region. With an aim to maintain strong visibility in India, Saudi has stayed active and busy in Indian market with a line-up of partnerships, trade engagements, roadshows, and participation in prominent trade events from start of this year. The strategy follows *Saudi Tourism Authority's (STA)* ongoing

efforts to increase awareness about Saudi as a unique, diverse, authentic tourism destination and ultimately, drive visits, as one of the key priority source markets for the country. As part of the delegation visit to India since start of 2023, the tourism authority featured a range of meetings, industry roundtables and networking events including participation at the OTM in Mumbai and SATTE in Delhi. This was followed up with two roadshows in Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Later, the Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) also forged a partnership with world's most popular Twenty20 cricket league, Indian Premier League (IPL) as their official sponsors. Talking about the plans, targets and commitments for the Indian market, **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President –

APAC, Saudi Tourism Authority, informed that Saudi welcomed over 1 million visitors from India in 2022 and aims to double its visitation numbers in 2023. "We are really committed to the Indian market for a simple reason that India will be our number one source market in achieving **our vision in 2030**. So, we have laid out a **very bold vision**, where we are targeting **100 million visitors**. By 2030, our share of visitors from India is going to be over 12 million, which is a significant amount of visitors coming from one market. So, we are greatly committed to the Indian tourism market," revealed Aldabbagh during the interaction.

[*Scindia urges airlines to help set up international civil aviation hub in India](#)



Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Wednesday, 24th May, urged domestic airlines to help set up an international civil aviation hub in India. "Take risk, face volatility, India's flag has to fly high in international airspace," the minister said. The civil aviation ministry has been pitching for having more wide-body planes with domestic carriers so that they can operate more direct flights to international destinations. The minister asked airlines to help in creating an international civil aviation hub in India. Speaking at industry body's Annual Session 2023, Scindia said the festival and winter seasons are expected to witness higher domestic air traffic demand and highlighted those efforts are underway to ramp up overall capacity. After the coronavirus pandemic, the country's civil aviation sector has witnessed a V-shaped recovery and the CAGR for the domestic air traffic stood at 10.6 per cent in the last eight to nine years, he said. According to him, the traffic was around 6 crore in 2013-14 and rose to 14.4 crore in eight to nine years. CAGR refers to **Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)**.

[*Uttarakhand tourism introduces river rafting on Bhagirathi in Harsil](#)



Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) has officially announced the opening of whitewater rafting on the Bhagirathi River in Harsil valley, located near Uttarkashi in Uttarakhand. Harsil Valley, located approximately 30 kilometers from Uttarkashi, has long been renowned for its significance in the Char Dham Yatra pilgrimage and its stunning trekking routes along the banks of the Bhagirathi River. Under the Vibrant Village scheme, which focuses on uplifting rural areas, UTDB has identified three river rafting destinations, one of which is the stretch between Jangla

and Jhala bridges on the Bhagirathi River. This initiative aims to attract both pilgrims and adventure seekers, providing them with the unique experience of river rafting on the Bhagirathi River. Additionally, the development of this tourism activity is expected to generate new employment opportunities for the local youth. To facilitate the implementation of river rafting in Harsil Valley, UTDB has granted approval to two rafting companies, which have already commenced their operations. The rafting season will run until June 30, 2023. Commenting on the launch, Satpal Maharaj, Minister of Tourism, Irrigation, Culture, and PWD of the Government of Uttarakhand, said the introduction of river rafting in Harsil Valley would not only enhance tourism but also contribute to the local economy. Furthermore, UTDB has advised that to enhance safety during the trips, it is required that either two rafts always travel together or one raft and one safety kayak accompany each trip. Recently, UTDB also announced Jadung as the next tourism destination in Uttarakhand. This old border village, situated near Harsil, is expected to attract visitors due to its proximity and the growing tourism activities in the region. The opening of rafting on the Bhagirathi River in Harsil Valley signifies a remarkable step forward for Uttarakhand's tourism industry.

[*BLS International bags visa outsourcing contract with Spain for another term:](#)



BLS International has been awarded the global contract for visa application outsourcing by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union, and Cooperation (MAEUEC) of Spain for the second time in a row. The contract covers Europe, the Americas, Latin America, the CIS, Africa, the Middle East, and APAC, amongst other regions. BLS International has been working with the Spanish government since 2016 and currently operates 122 visa application centers (VACs) in 40 countries. According to the information shared by BLS, for the first time, Spain has also

outsourced the category of national visas which will lead to a further increase in volumes and opening of offices in new geographies. As a part of the contract, BLS will also be offering various value-added services (VAS) like SMS, courier services, mobile biometrics, premium lounge, etc. Currently, BLS International handles approximately 2 million Spanish visa applications annually. The number is expected to increase further. BLS has already deployed its new technology software for appointment booking and processing applications, which is the best in class in the industry and leads to more convenience for the applicants. With this development, BLS International finds itself amidst some major global wins in 2023, with an influx of newer missions in newer landscapes like accepting electronic visa on arrival (EVOA) applications from 17 countries worldwide for Thailand, Poland in Manila and Cebu, Thailand in South Africa, and Germany in the USA, amongst significant others, BLS stated in their official release.

***New Visa Rules To Ban International MBA & Master's Students From Bringing Dependents:**



From January 2024, international students on taught master's programs including business master's and MBA degrees will no longer be allowed to bring family members as dependents to the **UK**. The **UK government** announced the move as a temporary measure while it organizes a more permanent solution. Only students who are on research postgraduate degrees such as a PhD will be exempt from the new UK dependent visa rules.

Previous indications that the government would allow dependents of students at certain top universities to enter the country under a merit-based approach appear to have been scrapped. There have been no changes to the current graduate visa system which allows degree graduates to stay and work in the UK after finishing their programs. The new rules, announced by home secretary **Suella Braverman**, also stipulate that international student will be unable to switch from a study visa to a work visa before finishing their degree. This comes after reports of a growing trend of students switching visas on arrival into the UK. In a ministerial statement announcing the new rules, Braverman wrote, "The International Education Strategy plays an important part in supporting the economy through the economic contribution students can bring to the UK, but this should not be at the expense of our commitment to the public to lower overall migration and ensure that migration to the UK is highly skilled and therefore provides the most benefit." International students in the UK contributed more than \$50 billion between 2021 and 2022, according by Kaplan International Pathways, Universities UK International, and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI).

***Go First airline says 'no definite timeline' for resumption of operations, informs DGCA:**



Go First airlines have informed Directorate General of Civil Aviation (**DGCA**) that they do not have a '**definite timeline**' yet on the resumption of operations. Go First stopped flying on 3 May. Meanwhile, Go First airlines have informed Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) that they do not have a 'definite timeline' yet on the resumption of operations. Board of Go First on Tuesday 23 May, filed caveats before the Supreme Court against four aircraft lessors of the crisis-hit

airline. Four caveats have been filed by **Varun Berry, the Chairman** of the suspended board of Go First through his counsel advocate **Pranjal Kishore**, as per the information available on the website of the Supreme Court of India. The lessors are - SMBC Aviation Capital Ltd, GY Aviation, SFV Aircraft Holdings and Engine Leasing Finance BV (ELFC) - owning around 22 aero planes. The caveat has been filed against the order passed by the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal on Monday, which upheld the order passed by the Delhi bench of the NCLT on **10 May**. The **National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT)** on 22 May, upheld insolvency resolution proceedings against crisis-hit airline Go First, derailing aircraft lessors' efforts to take back their planes from the struggling Wadia group firm. Disposing of their pleas through a 40-page-long common order, the NCLAT said lessors are at "liberty to file" appropriate application before NCLT under Section 65 of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC) with "appropriate pleadings and material" regarding their claims. "The appellants, as well as IRP, are at liberty to make appropriate Application before the Adjudicating Authority (NCLT) for declaration with regard to the applicability of the moratorium on the aircraft with regard to which Leases in favor of the Corporate Applicant (Go First) were terminated prior to admission of Section 10 Application, which Application needs to be considered and decided by the Adjudicating Authority in accordance with the law," it had said. So far this month, several lessors have approached aviation regulator DGCA for deregistration and repossession of Go First's 45 planes.

***VFS Global security personnel nab group with forged documents to apply for Schengen Visa**



Two alert security personnel at the VFS Global visa application center (VAC) in Delhi nabbed a group of seven applicants carrying a forged document to apply for Schengen visas. VFS Global is the world's largest outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions. The incident took place at the Delhi VAC on 24 May 2023. The visa appointment letters produced by the applicants while entering the facility raised suspicion in the mind of the security personnel and on crosschecking with the applicants manifesto the documents were found to be forged. Subsequent investigations revealed that the forged letters were created by misusing the VFS Global logo and allegedly procured from two Delhi-based agents - Sharma Travels and Shiv Shanker in exchange of Rs 30,000 to Rs 55,000. In line with VFS Global's zero-tolerance policy against visa frauds, a police complaint was filed against at the IGI Airport Metro police station in Delhi. "This incident reiterates the need to be wary of grey operators selling fake appointments and take informed decisions. VFS Global has been consistently leveraging all its customer touchpoints to caution visa applicants about this menace. Appointments are free and available online on a first-come-first-serve basis. Given the unprecedented pent-up demand for outbound travel from India, it is advisable to apply for visas as early as possible to avoid falling prey to such grey operator," said Prabuddha Sen, Chief Operating Officer - South Asia, VFS Global. He added that the company would continue to be vigilant against third-party fraudulent entities.

***Lufthansa Agrees to Acquire 41% Stake in ITA Airways**



Deutsche Lufthansa AG reached an agreement with the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance (Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze, MEF) to acquire a minority stake in the Italian national carrier ITA Airways (Italia Trasporto Aereo S.P.A.). Lufthansa will obtain a 41% stake in ITA for EUR 325 million through a capital increase. The capital contribution thus directly benefits the company. As part of the agreement, the MEF has also committed to a capital increase of EUR 250 million into ITA Airways. In addition, the

MEF and Lufthansa agreed on options to enable a potential acquisition of the remaining shares by Lufthansa at a later date. The purchase price for the remaining shares will be based on the business development of ITA Airways. The contractual finalization of the agreement is expected to be completed shortly. The acquisition of the minority stake is subject to approval by the relevant authorities. Upon closing of this transaction, ITA Airways and Lufthansa Group are expected to immediately start their cooperation at a commercial and operational level. As a network airline, ITA will closely cooperate with Lufthansa Group to benefit from group synergies. ITA Airways will become the fifth network carrier in Lufthansa Group's multi-brand and multi-hub system. Italy represents the most important market outside the Group's home base countries and the United States. Italy is the third-largest economy in Europe in terms of gross domestic product, with a strong export-oriented economy. This is one among many reasons why business travel to and from Italy is important. For private travelers, the Mediterranean country is one of the most popular leisure destinations in the world.

***Destination experiences take center stage at this year's TTM+:**



This year's Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) will run with the theme, **Visit Thailand Year 2023**: Detailing the theme's influence on TTM+ (**Thailand Travel Mart Plus**) programming, TAT governor **Yuthasak Supasorn** said a number of interesting businesses from across the country would be brought together on site to inspire unique travel experiences. These include Araksa Tea Garden, an organic tea garden in Chiang Mai; the Ruk-Khon, a group of shadow puppet-making artists in Nakhon Si Thammarat; the Luk Wa Group, a group of young volunteers promoting the unique handicrafts of Phetchaburi; and the Chao Phraya Abhaibhubejhr Hospital, a centre of alternative medicine and herbal medicine treatment. TTM+ delegates will also be able to sample seasonal fruits from the Eastern region and freshly brewed organic coffee that will be paired by Thai desserts. The event will be packed with informative presentations, including Thailand destination updates; TTM Talk, where the Future of Thai Tourism comes into focus; and GMS Media Briefing, where Greater Mekong Subregion countries will provide updates on their tourism situation and trends. New to TTM+ is the Amazing **Thailand Culinary City**, a trade and consumer event that spotlights gastronomy tourism through 30 Thai entrepreneurs. **"The Visit Thailand Year 2023: Amazing New Chapters** invites friends from around the world to our wonderful country and to write their own impressive chapters, which they can then share with their friends and family. Focusing on experience-based tourism, we wish to deliver fresh travel experiences and aim to create a meaningful travel experience for travellers, as well as the local communities and the environment," Yuthasak told. With TTM+ set to kick off on **May 31**, Yuthasak said interest levels have been high. Buyer numbers this year are up 34 per cent over 2022, while seller numbers are up 64 per cent.

TTM+ delegates will also be able to sample seasonal fruits from the Eastern region and freshly brewed organic coffee that will be paired by Thai desserts. The event will be packed with informative presentations, including Thailand destination updates; TTM Talk, where the Future of Thai Tourism comes into focus; and GMS Media Briefing, where Greater Mekong Subregion countries will provide updates on their tourism situation and trends. New to TTM+ is the Amazing **Thailand Culinary City**, a trade and consumer event that spotlights gastronomy tourism through 30 Thai entrepreneurs. **"The Visit Thailand Year 2023: Amazing New Chapters** invites friends from around the world to our wonderful country and to write their own impressive chapters, which they can then share with their friends and family. Focusing on experience-based tourism, we wish to deliver fresh travel experiences and aim to create a meaningful travel experience for travellers, as well as the local communities and the environment," Yuthasak told. With TTM+ set to kick off on **May 31**, Yuthasak said interest levels have been high. Buyer numbers this year are up 34 per cent over 2022, while seller numbers are up 64 per cent.

***Vietjet revitalises fleet for flight network expansion**



Vietjet has added four new aircraft to its fleet in May, marking the airline's upcoming intercontinental flight network expansion. The new aircraft includes three A321neos and one A330, which feature fuel savings, emission reduction and environmental protection to help modernize VietJet's fleet, enhance operational efficiency as well as reduce operating costs. Vietjet plans to expand its fleet of 87 aircraft, including nine Airbus A330 wide-body aircraft, in 2023. In addition, the airline aims to operate 139,513 flights with 25.7 million passengers onboard, with its targeted consolidated revenue for 2023 at over 50,178 billion dong (US\$2.14 billion) while after-tax profit is set at 1,000 billion dong. Growing in fleet size will also support the flight network expansion plan. The airline has recently announced a series of new services from Vietnam to Japan's Hiroshima and India's Kochi, as well as restoring flight operations to Phuket, Hong Kong, Daegu among others.

Growing in fleet size will also support the flight network expansion plan. The airline has recently announced a series of new services from Vietnam to Japan's Hiroshima and India's Kochi, as well as restoring flight operations to Phuket, Hong Kong, Daegu among others.

***Chennai start-up ePlane Co., receives key DGCA approval for electric aircraft development:**



Chennai-based deep tech start-up, **The ePlane Company**, aiming to build flying electric taxis, became the first Indian electric aircraft company to obtain a key approval from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on **May 23**. This approval marks a significant milestone for the company's aim to achieve commercialization by **2025**. The ePlane Company received Design Organisation Approval for its **ePlane e200** aircraft from the DGCA, which is a crucial, initial step in the aircraft certification process. After this, the start-up will be working towards obtaining type certification for the aircraft. The ePlane e200 is a two-seater aircraft specifically designed for urban spaces. It boasts a travel range of 200 km and can make multiple stops on a single charge, resulting in significant time savings for consumers, as stated in a release by the start-up. An eVTOL aircraft utilizes electric power for vertical take-off, hovering, and landing. **In May**, the company conducted a successful test of its prototype aircraft, the ePlane e50. Incubated at IIT Madras and founded in **2019** by **Satyanaryanan Chakravarthy**, who is also a professor at the institute, the start-up is currently seeking Series A funding. In 2022, it secured \$5 million in seed funding.

***3rd G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting in Srinagar concludes successfully:**



Addressing the Press Briefing in New Delhi today on two key deliverables of the **3rd G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting**, **Shri Arvind Singh**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism said that all G20 members would submit their suggestions in writing by 26th May, 2023 which will form part of the final draft of the roadmap prepared in consultation with **UNWTO** that will be presented at the 4th Tourism Working Group Meeting to be held in Goa in June followed by the tourism declaration at the Ministerial Meet. The Secretary, talking about the 3rd Tourism Working Group Meeting, said that many successful side events were organized during the meeting which witnessed high quality discussions from national and international delegates and experts. The delegates were also shown local arts and handicrafts, and also had an interaction with the artisans. The delegates were also taken for sightseeing in Srinagar where they saw the old Mughal Gardens, the Pari Mahal, and the newly renovated Polo View Market under Smart city Mission. Cultural nights were also held for the delegates in collaboration with the state government, added the Secretary. A side event on **'Film Tourism for Economic Growth and Cultural Preservation'** was organized on **22nd May 2023**, focusing on strategies to promote film tourism. The event was addressed by **Shri. Amitabh Kant**, G20 Sherpa, Government of India. He emphasized that potential of Jammu and Kashmir to grow as tourism destination that will encourage employment generation in the UT. In his opening remarks, **Union Minister for Culture, Tourism and DoNER, Shri G.K Reddy** highlighted the significant progress made by Tourism Working Group in the last two meetings and informed that five priorities of the Tourism Working Group have been fully endorsed by G20 member countries, invited countries, and international organizations. The union minister for Science and Technology during his address informed the gathering of the huge tourism potential of Jammu & Kashmir and the variety of landscape, art, culture, handicrafts etc. He also highlighted the unique infrastructure created for enhancing the tourism in the UT. The Minister for Science and Technology also reiterate the five priorities of the Tourism Working Group and expressed that Goa roadmap will act as a guiding document the sector and its stakeholders. The day concluded with cultural evening and dinner for all the delegates and invitees at **Vivanta by Taj**, with a view of Dal Lake in Srinagar. The delegates also experienced the 'Shikara' ride – a traditional gondola-type light rowing boat, at the pristine 'Dal' lake and enjoyed viewing sunset. Delegates also had the opportunity to experience the local attractions like Nishad garden, Polo Market, Pari Mahal. After the session the delegates participated in local DIY activities.

***SWISS offers more services for upcoming winter season:**



Other destinations flying from Zurich include Berlin (52 weekly flights), Barcelona (28 weekly flights), Amsterdam (28 weekly flights) and Athens (19 weekly flights). The Czech capital of Prague and the Romanian capital of Bucharest will also have their SWISS services substantially expanded with an additional seven and five weekly flights respectively. SWISS flights will be operated once again between Zurich and Vienna

with three flights a day to the Austrian capital. The route will also be operated by sister Lufthansa Group carrier Austrian Airlines with multiple daily flights to London, Lisbon, Porto and Athens. Portugal's capital Lisbon will also receive 14 weekly flights from Zurich, and 11 times a week for Porto. The service to Hamburg introduced this summer will continue with four weekly frequencies, and SWISS will further offer services to Geneva from the UK and Scandinavia. The winter timetable period will run from October 29, 2023 to 30 March 30, 2024.

***Princess Cruises welcomes the Star Princess:**



Princess Cruises has revealed the name of its second Sphere Class cruise ship – Star Princess, which will debut on August 4, 2025 with her inaugural Mediterranean sailing. Star Princess joins Sun Princess as the largest ships ever built for Princess Cruises. The new ship will carry 4,300 guests, and feature intimate settings with a number of new spaces such as transformational entertainment venue The Dome; an array of F&B concepts; an expanded casino; a two-story spa; and entertainment headlined by Cirque Éloize. Guests will

have a variety of staterooms and suites choices, including the new Reserve and Signature Collections. Star Princess will be the second in the Princess fleet to be powered by LNG fuel technology and built with the most advanced sustainable innovations available. Star Princess cruises go on sale from June 1, 2023.

***Indonesia strengthens tourism ties with Malaysia and Thailand:**



Indonesia **President Joko Widodo** (Jokowi) has launched the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) Visit **Years 2023-2025** to strengthen tourism cooperation among the three countries. Witnessed by the dignitaries of the IMT-GT member countries, the launch of the campaign took place during the ASEAN Summit in Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara on May 11. The campaign is expected to increase connectivity and growth in the tourism sector for the three countries. In his speech, Jokowi shared that the IMT-GT area managed to reach a value

of US\$618 billion during the global pandemic in 2021. He said: "Going forward, the IMT-GT area must be able to further encourage the acceleration of inclusive and sustainable economic growth to face the various challenges ahead." **Sandiaga Uno**, Indonesia **minister of tourism** and creative economy, added: "(The campaign) is expected to involve 10 provinces in Sumatra, as well as Southern Thailand and Malaysia. One of the main issues is to downstream the industries, including the tourism industry, as well as strengthening connectivity with a target to increase tourist arrivals." The campaign aims to attract 60 million tourists and achieve foreign exchange earnings of US\$75 billion within the period, according to Sandiaga. In Indonesia, the campaign will start with Bangka Belitung and South Sumatra, followed by the rest of the provinces in Sumatra. Commenting on the campaign, **Pauline Suharno**, president of the Association of Travel Agents in Indonesia (**ASTINDO**) told TTA Asia: "For IMT-GT collaboration to work, there should be commitment from each country to actually take part. So, it's not just a pledge, paperwork or FGD output, but concrete steps (need to be taken) to make it happen." As part of the campaign, the minister said the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (MoTCE) would hold a world entrepreneur summit event in Padang, West Sumatra. In order for the campaign to be a success, Pauline opined that member countries should create a co-brand, as well as set short- and long-term joint promotions and budgets. She elaborated that agent "are used to selling to the three countries", which includes travelling from Indonesia and transiting in Singapore, before heading to Malaysia and Thailand.

*Two more ferry services launched in Kanyakumari



A 45-minute to one-hour ride into the sea could be the next item in the itinerary while visiting Kanyakumari as Tamil Nadu state minister for public works department **Mr. E V Velu** launched two ferry services -- **Thiruvalluvar** and **Thamirabarani** -- from the Poompuhar Shipping Corporation's jetty on Wednesday, 24 May. These will be additional boat services to the existing ferry service from the jetty to Vivekananda Rock and Thiruvalluvar statue. The boats would leave the jetty and sail via Chinnamuttom to the Vattakottai area in the sea from where the Vattakottai Fort on the

land could be spotted. The 18th century fort was constructed by Travancore kings and was remodified as a naval defense fort by Dutch captain Eustachius De Lennoy who was at the service of the kingdom. It would be a round-about trip to the Vattakottai area and back to the jetty. The boat ride would be for a distance of 6.5 nautical miles and subject to the weather conditions, according to officials. The two boats were procured by the tourism department for the cost of INR 8.24 crore and were handed over to Poompuhar Shipping Corporation. With these two boats, the number of boats at the jetty increases to five with three boats catering to the jetty and Vivekananda Rock and Thiruvalluvar statue. While the Thamirabarani boat is fully airconditioned with 75 seats, Thiruvalluvar has an airconditioned cabin with 19 seats and 138 non-airconditioned regular seats. The corporation will be charging INR 450 for airconditioned seats and INR 350 for regular seats. Based on the weather conditions, each boat will make four to five trips in a day, according to shipping corporation officials. **Mr. Velu** and State Dairy Minister **Mr. Mano Thangaraj** launched the works of expanding the Vivekananda Rock jetty for 100 meters at a cost of INR 10 crore. The ministers also launched the works for **laying a glass bridge between Thiruvalluvar Statue and Vivekananda Rock** for a cost of INR 37 crore.

*Air India Group carriers to operate special Haj flights from 4 Indian cities



Air India Group owned by TATA Group - **Air India** and **Air India Express** will be flying around 19,000 Haj pilgrims from four destinations in India to Jeddah and Medina in Saudi Arabia. The first Air India flight of this year's Haj operations, **AI5451**, took off from **Jaipur International Airport** on **May 22**. During the first phase of the operations, Air India will be operating 46 flights from Jaipur and Chennai to Medina and Jeddah, respectively, from **May 21 to June 22, 2023**. During the **second phase**, Air India will be bringing back the pilgrims from Jeddah and Medina to **Jaipur and Chennai operating 43 flights** from **July 3 to August 2, 2023**.

The number of pilgrims scheduled to fly with Air India from Jaipur is 5,871 on 27 flights while 4,447 pilgrims will be flown by it from Chennai on 19 flights. Overall, a total of **10,318** passengers will be flown by Air India to Saudi Arabia with its Boeing 787 and Airbus 321neo aircraft. On the other hand, Air India Express will be deploying its B737-800 aircraft to operate flights from **Kozhikode and Kannur** from **June 4 to 22, 2023**. It will operate **44 flights from Kozhikode to Jeddah** - carrying 6,363 passengers and **13 flights between Kannur and Jeddah** carrying 1,873 passengers during the first phase. A total of 8236 passengers will be flown by Air India Express operating 57 flights during the first phase. In the second phase, from July 13 to August 2, 2023, Air India Express will fly back the pilgrims from Medina to Kozhikode and Kannur. Commenting on the joint operations, **Campbell Wilson, CEO and MD**, Air India said, "Air India is happy to resume the annual special flights for the sacred Haj pilgrimage from the cities of Chennai and Jaipur while Air India Express will operate from Kozhikode and Kannur. Our collective effort with Air India Express is to provide unparalleled comfort and convenience to the passengers on this pilgrimage. We look forward to serving the pilgrims through our dedicated flights. We have taken special efforts to boost our on-ground teams at the relevant airports to ensure special care for all our valued guests on these flights." **Aloke Singh, MD, Air India Express & AirAsia** India, added, "We are happy to operate Hajj special flights from Kozhikode and Kannur, for the benefit of pilgrims from Kerala, **in addition** to our scheduled flights to the **Kingdom of Saudi Arabia** from **Mumbai, Mangaluru, Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Kozhikode and Kannur**. With this special initiative, Air India Express and Air India are going the extra mile to ensure a seamless travel experience, enabling our passengers to embark on their spiritual quest with peace of mind and undivided focus."