

The year that was 2016

Wonderlust spoke to a number of stakeholders including tour operators, travel agents, Online Travel Agents, association heads and cruise operators to know how the year 2016 turned out to be for the industry and what their expectations from 2017 are. Following are the excerpts based on the interaction.

Ruchi Rani



Anil Parashar

Anil Parashar, President and CEO, InterGlobe Technology Quotient (ITQ)

Travel and tourism is the only industry which is growing at a good rate in spite of the stagnating economy. This major growth driver has significantly come into the forefront due to its rich cultural heritage and ecological variety in India. Not just that, the exquisite mix of technology in the field has made it even more attractive to the people both within and outside the country. Government has also taken various initiatives to explore the potential of this industry to the fullest. E-tourist visa to 150 countries, reviving domestic airports in Tier II and III cities, infrastructural development and many more have ensured that this country is steadily emerging as a major tourism market in the world.

InterGlobe Technology Quotient is a penchant of technological evolution. Our growth spectrum depends primarily on two very important parameters- advanced solutions and world class services. These two key factors drive our ideology to ease travel related workings that help our partners grow and help them create chains of loyal customers.

At ITQ, our expertise lies in identifying the future needs and analyzing scope of developments- thereby introducing smarter solutions that ease workflow and deliver the best possible results.

In addition, we focus on taking up multiple initiatives that can help our society. We have recently launched Skill development initiative for 300 underprivileged children across India



Pronab Sarkar

Kapil Goswamy, Managing Director, Trans India Holidays

Trans India Holidays had a good year, an increase in business from almost all the markets that we work with. Business is up, both in passenger number and rupee terms, which is something that we are happy with. Offcourse business being up is a major highlight, but getting into some newer Western European markets was another positive, and being awarded the National Tourism Award for the third time this year was a key highlight.

In terms of forward bookings, or what we call business on books, 2017 is looking good, and we are looking to further expand into newer markets and products. A noticeable trend, which actually augurs well for us, is the increase in FIT travel to India, and we being a tailor made FIT specialist, are seeing good number of queries for 2017 already.

Pronab Sarkar, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO)

Like previous year, tourism industry continued to face a lot of challenges. Though, with introduction of e-tourist visa in 150 countries, cases of visa issues have reduced. However there are still some lacunas in the e-tourist visa



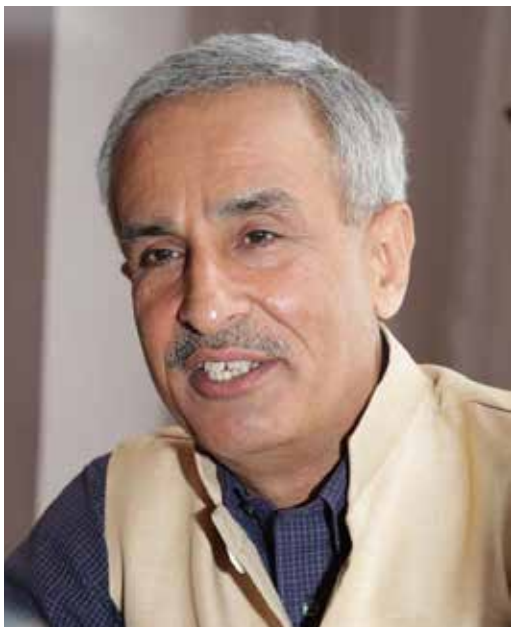
Subhash Goyal

to help them acquire skills required to enter the travel domain. We have also ensured that these students find a firm place to start work after the completion of this course. And with the support from the industry we will continue to drive similar initiatives in the future as well.

policy, which we have taken up with the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Home Affairs. While the road ahead will be fraught with challenges, the world is certainly for taking. And we are ready to grab the opportunity.

IATO played an active role in all the decision making process of the initiatives taken by the Ministry of Tourism to promote tourism to our country and gave its valuable inputs for the following policy making process including for the New Tourism Policy, extension of e-visa facility to 150 countries, setting up of Medical Tourism and wellness board for better coordination of Medical Tourism, Swadesh Darshan Scheme for development of circuits, promotion and development of Cruise Tourism and special efforts to have e-visa facilities for cruise tourists, launching of HRIDAY and PRASAD Projects, 24x7 tourist helpline in 12 foreign languages, single window clearance for investment in tourism projects, especially in the Niche Tourism, Spiritual, Wildlife, Photography, Architecture, Sufi Circuit etc. and organize road shows in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for our members. We also organized the 32nd IATO Convention in Chennai (Tamil Nadu) at ITC Grand Chola from September 18-21, 2016.

As an association we want to keep India as a major tourist destination in overseas markets, explore new markets through road shows, India shows, participation in global travel exhibitions, holding overseas travel bodies annual meetings in India to showcase India to them, hold know India seminars to create a big pool of India experts in tour operator offices



Kapil Goswamy



Kunal Sampat



Nalini Gupta

overseas, boost Cruise tourism, Niche Tourism, Medical Tourism, MICE Tourism in a big way than just promoting traditional Golden Circuits etc.

Our efforts will continue and we will impress upon the Government to make necessary amendments in e-Tourist Visa, amendment in guidelines for the Guides, priority to tourism by giving service tax exemption, treating tour operators at par with exporters, rationalization of taxes and to increase language guides all over the country and have more budget allocation for tourism sector.

Subhash Goyal, Chairman, STIC Travel Group

2016 has been a very good year for our company. We have been able to achieve a lot of new things. Firstly, we became the GSA for Malaysian Airlines which is operating daily flights from Indian cities that includes Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mumbai and New Delhi. Air China introduced direct flights from Mumbai to Beijing, four times a week with connections to USA, Canada, Japan and all the major cities of China.

Srilankan Airline has also started operating flights to Kolkata, thrice a week. The above were achievements of my company and as far as I am concerned, I was appointed Member of the Government 'National Tourism Advisory Council' of the Ministry of Tourism.

I think 2017 is going to be a very good year for the Tourism industry because of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Surgical strike' on the Black Money. People now realize that there is no point in hoarding money, instead of that they should spend it on themselves to see India and the world.

Nishant Pitti, CEO & Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip.com

The year 2016 has been a great for my company as introduction of e-visa has helped to increase number of international tourists



Nishant Pitti

coming to this city. If I compare with the last year, EaseMyTrip has also seen an increment of 27% in international trips. As far as domestic tours are concerned, around 200% of the previous year's packages have been booked. We have also seen a remarkable growth in booking of flight tickets.

The biggest highlight in year 2016 was that EaseMyTrip was associated with a Bollywood thriller 'Madaari' as co-producer. We also co-produced film "Freaky Ali" with Sohail Khan. Our company had also taken distribution for movie "Rustom" for New Delhi and UP markets. The company also participated in various entertainment events and became one of the exhibitors at WTM London. We also associated with some other films in the same year.

Kunal Sampat, General Manager - India, MSC Cruises

As expected, we had a good run in 2016 and experienced substantial growth as compared to 2015. Trade partners across the country



Praveen Saxena

have been extremely supportive and Indian travellers are looking forward to cruising as an "All-inclusive Affordable Luxury Experience".

We experienced good growth on both MICE groups and individual passenger front in 2016. Trade partners have been quite innovative in their approach and are trying out-of-box ideas for their Adhoc groups on the cruise. As a cruise ship is enabled with all possible facilities of entertainment and activities, it becomes extremely easy for agents to have an innovative approach. Key highlight for 2016 would be our first wedding group from India on-board in May'16. 2017 looks optimistic so far, however with the recent announcements on demonetization, will have to wait and see how the same impacts the travel fraternity.

Nalini Gupta, Managing Director, Lotus Destination (GSA of Costa Cruise India)

The key highlight for 2016, is that this December, travelers will for the first time ever, be able to embark on a cruise from



Ashwani Sharma

Mumbai to Maldives. Costa neoClassica will be homeporting in Mumbai from December 2016. Costa neoClassica will perform a series of weekly sailings from 16th Dec 2016 - 18th March 2017. This itinerary will be a visa free itinerary and also clients will need to take only one way flight, convenience of embarking and disembarking in Mumbai.

You can cruise from Mumbai to Maldives over 7 nights, or begin the cruise in Maldives and cruise from Male to Mumbai, also 7 nights. The ship will sail along India's South-Western coast, with stops at Cochin and Mangalore on the way to Maldives, and will sail via Colombo and Goa on the way to Mumbai.

Praveen Saxena, Managing Partner, Times Aviation Services

The year 2016 has been challenging for us but at the same time we met our targets both in terms of sales and empanelment of new corporate clients on board. I still see there is a lot of scope to get good corporate from the market the question is to hit the right one, since currently, a travel company can only make profits from a corporate client or direct clientele (B to C).

We at Times Aviation are looking to increase our corporate empanelment through our existing client data base since this gives you the confidence to do the business in long run.

Some of the highlights for us in 2016 included increase in corporate data base, successfully operated conventions in London and Austria of doctors from Pan India and tie-up with Axis Bank to provide full fledged foreign exchange service to our clients.

Our expectations from the New Year include having our own B2C portal, opening of inbound division, looking to tap Poland, Japan and Israel markets, planning to open branch in NCR and increase our corporate clients.



PP Khanna

Ashwani Sharma, CEO, Sheraton Travels and Chairman, TAFI North

This year we focused on Bhutan as a destination. We have been operating in the B2B market as a major DMC of Bhutan in the name of BHR (Bhutan Hotels & Resorts) and have been thankful to agents and friends in industry who have been over supportive otherwise Sheraton Travels is primarily a B2C company with presence in market for last four decades. As you may be aware I have taken up as Chairman-TAFI North India since June which is surely a big responsibility and will try my level



Sharat Dhall

best to take TAFI North to newer heights. We had our first meeting in Nepal attended by 38 members which turned out to be mega event as we had meeting over there with heads of Nepal tourism board, Nepal Airlines and most of head of associations of Nepal tour operators and travel agents. We received amazing hospitality throughout our trip of three nights and four days.



Neelu Singh

PP Khanna, Director, Diplomatic Travels & President, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI)

We are more than three decade old company handling corporates and embassies business. We are mainly in luxury segment. The year 2016 was a challenging one due to crunch in the economy and induction of lot of Online Travel Agents (OTAs). Corporate clients look for services and cost not so much so we are less affected but this poses a challenge to tour operators in general.

The entry of OTAs in the trade has impacted the business of conventional travel agents and tour operators. My company was no exception to this menace. We are highlighting this intrusion in each and every travel trade forums and trying to find a viable solution through negotiations with hoteliers who deal with OTAs on account of bulk business OTAs give to hoteliers thereby giving special rates and discounts. Online business is here to stay but for survival every travel agents had to find alternative ways to increase their business. Hopefully with our concerted efforts with hoteliers there can be some viable solution to the problem in the coming year.

Neelu Singh, CEO & Director, Ezeego1

In 2016, we witnessed a significant growth in consumer demand. Air bookings and group holiday packages dominated Ezeego1's online travel market. In domestic market, our packages to emerging destinations like Ladakh and Andaman were sold out and we had to purchase additional inventory to cater to this increased demand. Likewise, our outbound market saw a 2x growth in passenger count to short haul destinations like Thailand, Dubai, Singapore. Overall, factors like high disposable income, awareness of new and emerging destinations and a more dynamic lifestyle has increased the propensity of consumers to



Karan Anand



Sanjay Bhardwaj



OP Mendiratta

travel extensively. This was further fuelled by regular flash sales offered by Airlines making air travel cheaper. Apart from summer holiday packages, we also saw a tremendous pick up in hotel bookings and packages for long weekends across cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Bangalore and Ahmedabad

Sharat Dhall, COO, Yatra.com

2016 has been a very good year for us with excellent overall growth in the business driven by an over 20% year on year growth in the domestic air passenger market. We also forayed into new lines of businesses like Homestays, Activities and Inter-city and point-to-point Cabs in order to continue to provide a one stop shop travel solution to all our customers.

One of the key highlights of 2016 was the announcement of our reverse merger with NASDAQ listed Terrapin 3 Acquisition Corporation (TRTL). In addition, we also launched the following key features during the course of the year:

Yatra Mini App: A new multilingual app (available in 9 languages), relevant to users looking for a light weight travel booking app which works even on slow internet networks.

Introduction of Cab platform: We launched a cab platform where a user can book outstation and hourly cabs directly from Yatra's platform.

Karan Anand, Head Relationships, Cox & Kings

The year 2016 was a significant year for Cox & Kings in terms of the overall business growth and we grew more than the industry average. There is a significant growth in demand for travel from tier II and tier III cities. Discerning customers ask for itineraries with distinctive/specific elements. To cater to this segment, we have successfully launched several innovative products in the year 2016 to our already extensive offerings. Diving holiday packages to Maldives, trek to Everest Base camp, 100%

Veg Kitchen Tours in the Indian market for vegetarian travellers and much more.

Sanjay Bhardwaj, Managing Director, Anuga Holidays

Our company Europa 'D' Tours has recorded a decent growth in the current year. Big evidence was the fact that we had initially planned one or two departures each month and due to high demand and constant support from our



Mahesh Iyer

partners we operated a group every week, in fact, six to seven departures were operated in the month of May, June and July. We got a wonderful response from entire Asian region, however; Indian Market was distinguished as the top contributor to our company's revenue.

There were few remarkable achievements in the current year. We have facilitated tour for more than 1,500 passengers. We worked with limited partners and operated tours from our UK office till September, however; our company launched its Delhi Office in October and made

the announcement in BITB 2016. Ever since the launch of Delhi office, we have received an overwhelming response from North India Market as we have facilitated both GIT and FIT tours for their client apart from our November fixed departure.

OP Mendiratta, Managing Director, Global Hotel Representations

The year 2016 was good for most but bad for some as the recession of Europe is not over as yet, however Medical Tourism and Buddhist circuits are doing well and major metro cities are doing well thanks to domestic movements, Corporate business and MICE. The occupancy and Rev Par has gone up of hotels we are representing.

The e-visa was a welcome step and arrival of foreign tourists have gone up from SAARC countries and USA and cost of product has always been a challenge. Also the supply has surpassed the demand. In my opinion 2017 will bring a boom to the tourism industry of India if GST is introduced.

Mahesh Iyer, Chief Operating Officer, Thomas Cook India Limited, Thomas Cook (India) Ltd.

The year 2016 was an eventful year for us. Despite the challenging backdrop of geo-political headwinds with global acts of terror (including France, Brussels, Thailand, unrest in Kashmir), the coup in Turkey, Brexit and introduction of Schengen visa biometrics have created a dampner to consumer sentiment and hence their outlook to travel. Our strategy was hence a carefully calibrated plan to inspire demand and this we did with a slew of new unique product launches and campaigns as also our focus on new emerging segments and geographies. In our travel business our value driver was our 'Simply Series'- a simple air inclusive basic package that was easy to book and fly (both international & domestic).