

Common protocol is must

Meenakshi Sharma, DG, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), says they will be working towards a common protocol in all states, as well as the new tourism policy with responsible tourism at its core.

Nisha Verma

Meenakshi Sharma believes that the pent up desire of people to travel will lead to the opening of tourism. But, building confidence among them will be a task, for which MOT has taken several initiatives already. While domestic travel continues to be a priority, different SOPs, guidelines and quarantine rules being followed by states is a hurdle for all. Thus arises the need for common protocol across the country. Sharma adds, "It is absolutely required, and MOT would be an advocate for it. We need to start working towards making the state governments agree. If we start now, maybe in 2-3 weeks' time, we can have some consensus, and even ICMR and Ministry of Health could come up with suggestions on the request of MOT and the industry. Persuading state governments requires some reality check on ground as well. I am sure there will be no difficulty on the principle of it; there may



Meenakshi Sharma
Director General
Ministry of Tourism

be some difficulty in implementing it depending on where states stand in the COVID situation."

The DG adds that now is also the time to stress on responsible tourism, including a policy that supports such initiatives and infrastructure projects, and the willingness of the travellers and the industry to be responsible. "We are in the process of making some changes in the new tourism policy, making responsible tourism its foundation. We

can't discuss responsible tourism as a separate entity, but it should be a part of everything we do going forward. There are more elements that will be added as we move forward,

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one of which will be health and hygiene. It's also about the practices of people and the behaviour of the traveller as a responsible tourist. It cannot only be the responsibility of service providers alone. This will now be our priority and we will be working on it," she says.

Agents stay informed

In its latest initiative, Travelport has launched the Travelport COVID-19 Smartpoint Plugin, offering comprehensive information on travel restrictions across the world to travel agents, updated daily.

Nisha Verma

Offering ease of operation to travel agents, Travelport has launched the Travelport COVID-19 Smartpoint Plugin, which offers travel agencies with the latest information on government restrictions, lockdowns and safety measures across the globe, all within the agent workflow. Available free-of-charge to all Travelport customers globally using Travelport Smartpoint 8.2 or above, the plugin can be downloaded directly from Travelport Marketplace.



Sandeep Dwivedi
Chief Operating Officer
InterGlobe Technology Quotient

level information displayed at the click of a button, allowing agents to advise their customers easily and instantly.

cessible up-to-date information, including on government and airline policies, shall unequivocally prove beneficial for our network of agents and serve as a ready aid for gaining momentum in

This free built-in plugin in the GDS is a welcome move from Travelport, one that will result in both an informed traveller and a travel enabler



Agency partners can use the new tool to get detailed information on a range of topics, including lockdown rules, entry requirements and quarantine measures for travellers. One can get country-

Sandeep Dwivedi, Chief Operating Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, says, "With looming uncertainty across the globe, having a substantial amount of certainty through readily ac-

operations and transactions. This free built-in plugin in the GDS is a welcome move from Travelport, one that will result in both an informed traveller and a travel enabler." The information is provided by Safeture, and is updated daily.

Need for a policy overhaul

Arijit Purkayastha, Chapter Chairman for North East, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), feels that not only is there a dire need for a tourism policy overhaul but also a need to bring all stakeholders under the tourism board. He also proposes an inter-country consortium for the growth of tourism.

There is a need for an overhaul of the tourism policy, especially for the Northeast, both from State and Central governments. Assam is the tourist hub for Northeast India. Geographically and culturally, the northeast states have an interdependent relationship. From Guwahati, one could connect other parts of northeast including the neighbouring country Bhutan. Samdrup Jongkhar, the oldest town in East Bhutan, is just 110 kms from Guwahati. Hence, tours can be easily extended to Assam from Bhutan allowing tourists to visit two finest zones. As of now, foreign tourists use the route very often to enter East Bhutan, or exit out of East Bhutan to fly out of Guwahati for their onward destinations.

tourists by stipulating a minimum royalty of US\$250 per day per tourist (excluding nationals of India, Bangladesh and the Maldives) and propose tourism itinerary

The culture and wildlife tours of Assam and Northeast can be combined with nature tours of Bhutan. We propose the carving of an Assam, Bhutan consortium

wherein visitors can visit both the regions with fine connectivity that promise excellent tourist experience. For example, the popular birding tours in West and East Bhutan, currently conducted by Bhutanese tour operators, can be extended to



cover a birding tour in Assam and Northeast which has fine birding habitats. Similarly, the culture and wildlife tours of Assam and Northeast that are phenomenal draws for foreign tourists can be combined with pristine nature tours of Bhutan. It is in this context that we propose the carving of an Assam-Bhutan Consortium (ABC).

Moreover, domestic tourism will automatically revive the northeast region if LTC (Leave Travel Concession)

is extended by the Centre, which is valid at the moment till September 2020. A Central Government official can avail LTC to travel to Northeast, Andamans and Jammu & Kashmir in any airline, unlike other destinations in India where they have to travel by Air India only. Lesser-known destinations in the northeast also need to be promoted with infrastructure sanitation followed by training the locals by the respective state tourism departments.

Registration of all stakeholders Another vital point that is yet to be implemented is the registration of all agents and hotels in Assam under the Assam tourism board. Although tourism activities in Assam have developed in an unplanned manner, travelling to the region through a tour operator has always been important for a smooth journey. It will be more so even for local tourism, post COVID. On May 12, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for "vo-

cal for local" necessitates the urgent registration of all local tour operators whose head offices are in Assam under the Assam Tourism department. This will enable monitoring and maintenance of tourism service standards. Bringing all local tour operators and hoteliers under one umbrella will be the key to making tourism in Assam a success as they will play a major role in benefitting local communities socially and economically.

(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to the same.)



Arijit Purkayastha
Chapter Chairman
North East, ADTOI

Bhutan has, for long, enforced a strict policy aimed at attracting "high value, low volume"