IAAI Newsletter

IAAI News

IAAI – Knowledge Workshops

IAAI is planning to host an **Impact Series** of Knowledge Workshops in various cities in India.

These Workshops are intended to impart as well as refresh knowledge on the many relevant IATA Resolutions that govern the various functions of IATA-Accredited Travel Agencies in India such as Finance, Reservations and Ticketing, to name a few, as also the National and State issues that affect them.

Each of these Workshops will be customized to cater to the training needs of the Travel Agency owners/personnel attending the Workshops. A feedback system has been put in place to get inputs well ahead of the workshop on the topics that are to be covered.

The first such Knowledge Workshop was held at Chennai on 5th July 2014 covering the topic 'Travel Agents Handbook' and was attended by the owners, senior managers and supervisors from over 45 travel agencies.. IAAI National President - Mr. Biji Eapen, Training & Education Committee Chairman - Mr. S. Somaskandan (Shekar) and ADM & BSP Committee Chairman - Mr. G. Girish were the leading instructors.

The next Workshop is scheduled to be conducted in Cochin on August 9th.

New trains announced in Rail Budget

Railway Budget for 2014-15 proposed to introduce 58 trains, which would include five Jansadharan Trains, five Premium Trains, six AC Express Trains, 27 Express Trains, eight Passenger Trains, two Mainline Electric Multiple Unit (MEMU) services and five Diesel Electric Multiple Unit (DEMU) services this year. The Minister also proposed to increase the speed of 11 existing trains.

The Premium Trains include :
- Mumbai Central–New Delhi Premium AC Express
- Shalimar–Chennai Premium AC Express
- Secunderabad--Hazrat Nizamuddin Premium AC Express
- Jaipur–Madurai Premium Express
- Kamakhya–Bengaluru Premium Express

The AC Express Trains proposed in the Budget include :
- Nizamuddin–Pune (Weekly)
- Vijayawada-NewDelhi AP Express (Daily)
- LokmanyaTilak (T)–Lucknow (Weekly)
- Nagpur–Pune (Weekly)
- Nagpur–Amritsar (Weekly)
- Naharlagun–NewDelhi (Weekly)

Delhi to Agra in 99 minutes; Superfast trains from Nov.2014

In a modest step towards fulfilling India's desire to run high speed trains, Railways successfully conducted a trial run of a passenger train at a speed of 160 km per hour between Delhi and Agra, making it the country's fastest train. Rail travellers will be able to reach the Taj city from New Delhi in around 99 minutes once railways starts commercial operations in November. The train completed the 200 km journey in around 99 minutes and hit the highest speed seen on Indian tracks at 160 kmph -- 10 kmph more than the previous record of Shatabdi trains. As of now, the fastest train is the Delhi-Bhopal Shatabdi Express which takes 126 minutes to reach Agra from Delhi, running at a maximum speed of 150 kmph and an average speed of 110 kmph. The successful trial run of the train — labelled "Semi-High Speed" - has raised the hopes of rail travellers who have been denied high speed travel for decades.

Rail Budget 2014 -15 at a Glance....

- ### High-Speed corridor plan for Mumbai—Ahmedabad route unveiled

Plans to transform the the quality & standard of railway travel are riding on an ambitious bid to fast-track Bullet Train Projects, starting off with the 543 km Mumbai—Ahmedabad corridor. To get the projects going, for the first time, the Budget has made a provision of Rs 100 crore for Railway Vikas Nigam Limited to begin work on a High Speed Rail Corridor. Rail Minister spelled out efforts to increase speed of trains on select routes to 160-200 km per hour by upgrading existing tracks. The nine identified corridors include Delhi-Agra, Delhi-Chandigarh, Delhi-Kanpur and Mumbai-Ahmedabad. Other routes for running high speed trains are Nagpur-Bilaspur, Mysore-Bengaluru-Chennai, Mumbai-Goa, Chennai-Hyderabad and Nagpur-Secunderabad.

A look at the travel time for high-speed trains in the 9 sectors identified to go full throttle :-

	Distance	Avg speed	Runtime	New Runtime*
Delhi–Kanpur	441km	110kmph	4.45hrs	4hrs
Nagpur–Bilaspur	413km	96kmph	7.10hrs	4.30hrs
Mysore–Chennai	495km	110kmph	7hrs	4.45hrs
Mumbai-Goa	571km	78kmph	10.35hrs	7.30hrs
Chennai–Hyderabad	790km	96kmph	13.50hrs	8.15hrs
Nagpur– Secunderabad	575km	108kmph	8.10hrs	5.30hrs
Delhi–Agra	195km	130kmph	2.06hrs	1.30hrs
Delhi–Chandigarh	244km	105kmph	4.30hrs	2.30hrs
Mumbai–Ahmedabad	493km	110kmph	6.45hrs	4.30hrs

Some of the major announcements in Rail Budget :-

- Railways to construct Foot-over bridges, escalators & lifts at all major stations.

- Railways will provide battery-operated carts for the differently-abled & elderly people tp reach platform comfortably at all major stations.

- Giving a boost to pilgrim tourism, a series of trains across the country to provide affordable transport to important sites of religious & spirituous interest.

(Also See Next Page...)

Pilot project for workstations on trains proposed in Rail Budget 2014-15

In order to enhance rail travel experience for business travellers, the Railway Budget 2014-15 proposes to provide workstations on select trains on a payment basis. Railways will opt for a computer-assisted Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Solution to bring in synergy. For the same purpose, the following initiatives will be taken up:

- Moving towards paperless offices in Indian Railways in five years

- Next-Generation Ticket Reservation System

- Wi-Fi at all A1 and A category stations and in select trains

- Real-time tracking of trains and rolling stock

- Mobile-based wakeup call system for passengers

- Mobile-based destination arrival alert

- Station Navigation Information System

- Extension of dual display fare repeaters at all ticket counters through PPP (Public Private Partnership)

- Digital reservation charts at stations (Bengaluru model)

- Extension of computerized parcel management system

- Extension of logistics support to various e-commerce companies by providing designated pick-up centres at identified stations

- Providing education to children of railway staff at remote locations through Railtel OFC (optical fibre cable) network

SpiceJet to resume flights to Dubai from Mumbai & Madurai from July 21

SpiceJet will resume services on Dubai-Mumbai and Dubai-Madurai routes with effect from July 21, 2014. SpiceJet had launched flights on these two sectors in June 2012 and November 2013, respectively, but had to temporarily suspend the services in May this year due to runway work at Dubai airport, during which time airline was asked to reduce some flights. The runway work is completing as per schedule and SpiceJet is now resuming its flights from Mumbai and Madurai to Dubai. To celebrate the resumption of service, the airline is offering a promotional fare for bookings made till July 10, 2014 for travel between July 21 and July 31, 2014. On Mumbai-Dubai flight, the promotional fare starts at Rs 5,499 all inclusive, whereas for Madurai-Dubai flight it is Rs 5,999/-. With the resumption service to Dubai from Mumbai and Madurai, SpiceJet will provide connectivity to five cities from India to Dubai, including Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Kochi. In addition to Dubai, SpiceJet also operates flights to Muscat and Sharjah in the region.

FLT NO	FROM	TO	DEP	ARR	Days of Operations	Start Date
SG-13	Mumbai	Dubai	0:10	2:15	Daily	21-Jul
SG-14	Dubai	Mumbai	3:15	8:00	Daily	21-Jul
SG-23	Madurai	Dubai	19:45	22:30	Daily	21-Jul
SG-24	Dubai	Madurai	12:30	18:25	Daily	21-Jul
SG-11	Delhi	Dubai	9:10	11:20	Daily	NA
SG-12	Dubai	Delhi	23:30	4:30	Daily	NA
SG-15	Ahmedabad	Dubai	16:45	18:15	Daily	NA
SG-16	Dubai	Ahmedabad	19:25	23:30	Daily	NA
SG-17	Kochi	Dubai	17:20	19:50	Daily	NA
SG-18	Dubai	Kochi	20:55	2:10	Daily	NA

Visa News

- The Government of Japan will issue multiple-entry visas for short-term stay to Indians (ordinary passport holders). The visas will be issued not only at the Japanese diplomatic missions in India, but also at all the Japanese Embassies and Consulate Generals overseas. The issuance of these visas is expected to increase the number of Indian tourists to Japan and improve convenience in business activities, thus further developing bilateral exchanges between Japan and India.

- The French Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Development announced that Indians will be issued Visas within 48 hours from January 1, 2015. An announcement of the launch of 'Chalo Paris' application (app) for the Indian market in September 2014 was also made during the meeting. The official and free app for smart phones and tablets is aimed at enhancing the experience of travellers.

Private charters may be allowed to convert to scheduled airlines

To promote air travel in hitherto unconnected destinations, the government is considering allowing Non-Scheduled Air Operators (NSOPs) and air-charter firms to convert to scheduled operators to fly on routes not touched by existing airlines. A major relief being considered is that the NSOPs, which are granted scheduled operators' permit, would not attract customs duty for importing aircraft. They would be allowed to have code-share agreements with existing scheduled airlines or with other such NSOPs.

The proposal to allow NSOPs to be converted into scheduled commuter or shuttle services has been recently moved by the aviation regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to encourage air connectivity in and out of Tier-II and Tier-III cities.

While scheduled airlines operate flights as per schedules drawn up for several months or even years and are committed to flying during these periods on these routes, an NSOP or a charter operates irregularly and may be planned a short time before a flight. The NSOPs have also to be assured of a full load of passengers. There are currently about 130 NSOPs which are registered with the DGCA. The proposal, now being vetted by the government, comes in the wake of some state governments, like Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal, initiating moves to provide intra-state air connectivity by giving various sops to private aviation firms.

Singapore Airlines offers free passes to tourist attractions in Singapore for booking A380s ex-Mumbai & Delhi

Singapore Airlines (SIA) is offering passengers flying on its Airbus A380, from Mumbai and Delhi to Singapore, free passes to two tourist attractions in the country, along with two days of rides on the SIA Hop-on bus. The offer is valid for travel up to September 30, 2014 and translates into savings of over SGD 100. The attractions on offer for travellers to choose from are Gardens by the Bay, including OCBC Skyway; Singapore Flyer, including during peak hours; Singapore Zoo; River Safari; Cable Car Ride (2 Ways); Jurong Bird Park; Singapore River Cruise; Singapore Duck Tour; Sentosa Island Admission and Sentosa Express, including two attractions from among Images of Singapore/Merlion tower/Fort Siloso/Wings of Time/Butterfly Park and Insect Kingdom/Tiger Sky Tower/Gogreen Segway Fun Ride/Gogreen Bi-Pedal Bicycle/1 Luge and 1 Skyride; and Bayview Tandoor @ Singapore Flyer. For bookings made before September 30, customers can avail of special Economy Class, return fares to Singapore on the A380, starting from Rs 28,700/-.

3000 cr.investment for Rail & Road Infrastructure in North East in Union Budget 2014—15

In order to improve connectivity among the North-Eastern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur, popularly termed as the 'Seven Sisters', Union Finance Minister, has proposed an investment of Rs 3,000 crore for development of national highways and state roads in the region. While announcing the Union Budget 2014-15, Finance Minister also proposed a sum of Rs 1,000 crore over and above the amount announced in the Interim Budget to expedite the development of rail connectivity in the region. These provisions have been set for the North-East region since it has suffered from under development and a sense of isolation due to lack of proper connectivity.

- Dubai has laid out plans for a real-estate project known as Mall of the World in the emirate, which will include an eight-million-sq-ft mall, a climate-controlled street network, a theme park covered during the scorching summer months, and 100 hotels and serviced apartments. The Mall will be the world's largest. Plans for the Dubai project include a cultural and theatre district drawing inspiration from New York's Broadway, a shopping thoroughfare based on London's Oxford Street and a "wellness district" meant to attract medical tourists. The complex will be built near the Mall of the Emirates, which has an indoor ski slope, and a short drive from Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest tower, and the adjacent Dubai Mall.

- Etihad Airways has taken a 49 per cent stake in Alitalia following months of negotiations. It is believed to be the biggest investment for the Middle Eastern carrier so far.

- As a facilitation measure for incoming passengers, Minister for Finance, Government of India, in the Union Budget 2014-15, has proposed an increase in duty free baggage allowance from Rs 35,000 to Rs 45, 000. The duty free baggage allowance under the baggage rules was last revised in 2012. Till now, anyone above 12 years visiting a foreign country was allowed to bring goods worth up to Rs 35,000 without paying any duty.

- Understanding the need to develop and augment air connectivity, Minister for Finance, Government of India, proposed development of new airports in Tier-I & II cities, while announcing the Budget 2014-15. Scheme for development of new airports in Tier-I and -II will be launched for implementation through Airports Authority of India or PPPs. Faster clearance of import and export cargo reduces transaction costs and improves business competitiveness. To help achieve these objectives, measures are being initiated to extend the existing 24x7 customs clearance facility to 13 more airports in respect of all export goods and to 14 more sea ports in respect of specified import and export goods.

Canada officially launches CAN+ Visa Programme for Indians

Canada has launched the CAN+ Visa Programme for Indian passport holders, which will enable those who have travelled to either Canada or USA in the last ten years to get a Canada Visa within five days of submitting the application. The Programme would make Canada more accessible for Indian travellers, specially Business Travellers, Leisure Travellers and Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFRs). Those who have travelled to the US or Canada in the last ten years would be eligible to apply under the CAN+ Programme by presenting a documental proof of their earlier travel, and get their application processed within five working days. Currently, it takes ten days for processing a normal Canadian Visa.

Govt to develop tourist spots along River Ganga

Government of India, has revealed its plans to develop tourist spots along the banks of River Ganga starting from Gangotri to Ganga Sagar. All possibilities of converting the River into a tourism hot spot will be explored by the government. These include introduction of shikharas (houseboats) and cruise ships starting from Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh to Hooghly in West Bengal. While cleaning the River, the government would explore possibilities of opening Ganga for navigation of small ships. The government has submitted a Rs 400-crore project to the World Bank for assistance to conduct dredging for increasing the depth as well as the width of the River to 45 metres. This would also entail construction of barrages along the River at every 100 km.

Enhanced Security Checks on US bound flights

With enhanced security checks on electronic devices, passengers on US-bound flights will have to leave them behind if the devices are charged using flat batteries. US Homeland Security Secretary confirmed that enhanced security checks would be implemented immediately at some airports abroad as experts believe terrorists have devised how to turn phones into explosive devices that can avoid detection. Passengers using airports that offer direct flights to the US may be forced to switch on their mobile phones and other electronic devices to prove to security officials that they do not contain explosives. Powerless devices will not be permitted onboard the aircraft. The traveller may also undergo additional screening.

Finance Minister sets aside Rs 500 cr for development of 5 tourist circuits

Minister for Finance, Government of India, has proposed development of five tourism circuits (theme circuits) and set aside Rs 500 crore for the purpose. The Minister, while announcing the Budget 2014-15 today, also proposed an allocation of Rs 100 crore for improving facilities at the pilgrim destinations. As part of augmenting the national heritage, has proposed to develop destinations like Mathura, Amritsar, Gaya, Kanchipuram and Ajmer under the National Heritage Augmentation plan at a cost of Rs 200 crore. There will be also an allocation Rs 100 crore for development of archaeological sites at Sarnath, Gaya and Varanasi on the Buddhist circuit.

New Government's "Visa on Arrival" policy

As announced by the Finance Minister in the recent budget, the "Visa on Arrival (VoA)" facility will be restricted to passengers landing at *9 airports* namely Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kochi, Thiruvanantapuram & Goa only. Currently it will be available to nationals of *11 countries* only namely New Zealand, Singapore, Japan, Finland, Luxemburg, Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia & Myanmar. Nationals of these countries can apply for Visa online & after their details are scrutinized by the Immigration Dept, they are issued an Electronic Travel Authorization (ETA), on the basis of which they can travel to India. Their passports are stamped with the Visas on landing in India. This policy will be extended to more countries in a phased manner.

The above policy tries to strike a balance between demands of the Tourism Ministry & that of the Home Ministry. The Tourism Ministry wants the e-visa facility for nationals of all countries & at all International Airports in the country with the thinking that it will bring in more tourists & much needed foreign exchange to the country. The objection from the Home Ministry is on grounds of national security. At all the Indian Embassies & High Commissions abroad, a biometric identification is being insisted upon at the time of granting Visas. There is no such system at the airports in the country which need to be equipped with this technology.

African style Safari experience at Bandhavgarh

The Samode Safari Lodge at Bandhavgarh,has adopted several measures to bring a slice of the African Safari experience to India. The Lodge has become a member of the Relais & Chateaux International marketing alliance, only the sixth in India on that exclusive list. Located at the edge of now unused gate of the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh, the lodge combines the best of both worlds—the reserve is home to the densest tiger sightings in the country, & the hospitality group, which was the first to introduce luxury boutique hotels in India, has spared little by the way of contemporary comforts—couched in local asthetics—to make its guests comfortable.

The Safari experience is at the centre of the resort stay. The price of a stay at the Samode Safari Lodge includes safari rides—morning & afternoon—in the national park. Bandhavgarh is home to many wildlife species including the barking deer, cheetal, nilgai, wild dog, wolf & hundreds of species of birds.

Modern Chalets

Sustainability is also at the key to every aspect of the resort. The lodge has a specious central block & just 12 'cottages' - well given their size & level of amenities—perhaps a word such as chalet or mansion would be better suited.

The Identical Chalets come with separate living & bedrooms. Each has an entrance porch & veranda at the back overlooking a dense forest. The chalets are well stocked with every modern amenity including a huge bath & a separate outdoor shower, a huge walk-in wardrobe, wonderful art & little touches of detail in design & comfort wherever you turn—it can just as well be a retreat to recover from the vicissitudes of urban life. The entrance to the property itself is unobtrusive, & leads to a spectacular 'living room'. It has used wood, mud, local metalcraft, period furniture, vast arrays of Gond Art, & there are lots of books & artwork dotted all over the walls. Books are a significant part of the offering, & there is a separate well stocked study on the ground floor.

Meals are another magical experience & are mainly outdoors at a terrace adjoining the central block. The food again sticks to locavore principles. It helps that the lodge grows a significant amount of its own greens, & also sources from the adjoining village. Dinners along with Wildlife films & with naturalists at attendance always lead to an enlightening, engrossing experience as guests imbibe more about the reserve & wildlife protection at the same time.

While the India Safari market is still largely sustained by international tourists, there is a growth in domestic visitors as well. A whole new generation of young Indians is growing up with a greater appreciation for the need to preserve the nation's vast wildlife treasures with the tiger at its apex.

Source : Business India

Lighter Moments

A police officer in a small town stopped a motorist who was speeding down the Main Street. "But officer," the man began, "I can explain."

"Just be quiet," snapped the officer. "I'm going to let you cool your heels in jail until the chief gets back."

"But, officer, I just wanted to say,"

"And I said to keep quiet! You're going to jail!"

A few hours later the officer looked in on his prisoner and said, "Lucky for you that the chief is at his daughter's wedding. He'll be in a good mood when he gets back."

"Don't count on it," answered the fellow in the cell. "I'm the groom."

Thought for the Fortnight

Bring your desires down to your present affordable means.

Increase then only when your increased means permit.

— Aristotle

IAAI Director Board

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