



IAAI Newsletter

December 2015, IInd Fortnight Issue

To

ALL TRAVEL TRADE COLLEAGUES

Happy New Year
2016



FROM

IAAI MANAGEMENT

IAAI News

Termination of BSP Cheque pick up facility

The Indian Travel Trade industry is going to be affected severely from 1st January, 2016, onwards. The new decision to use services of National Automated Clearing House (NACH), the electronic transaction facilities, will ease and enhance financial processing of IATA's Clearance House. It can also be termed as a part of IATA's "StB" (simplifying the Business) process. Technology is good and advanced. Good for them, but bad for the Indian Agents Fraternity.

A look at this automatic process:

On the Remittance day, IATA will initiate the process and the Agent's bank account will be automatically debited as per the BSP payment calendar. The poor Agent is not required to take action to initiate the debit. If there is insufficient fund in the bank at the time of debit, the Agent will be termed to be in "DEFAULT".

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As per the current IATA Bank Settlement Plan (BSP) applicable till 31st December, 2015, the "Remittance Day" is the day on which the Travel Agent is required to submit the payment cheque to IATA. Under the new system, effective 1st January, 2016, the "Remittance Day" is the day on which the Travel Agent's payment is to be credited to the Airline's Bank Account. As a result of this new payment procedure, a Travel Agent stands to lose one precious day from the allowed credit period.

In a country like India, no Agent can run a business without Corporates and cannot flourish without extending credit facilities to them and most of the agents are compelled to do so just for the sake of their survival.

IATA has provided an alternative system. Instead of NACH, Agents can deposit their cheques at the Deutsche Bank head quarters at Mumbai or any of their 16 branches in India. We have 3000 agents spread out in 29 States and 7 Union Territories. Is it practically possible for the Agents located in these 36 different parts of India to avail this facility with the limited 16 branches of the Deutsche Bank?

Remittance through RTGS and other means of transfer involve additional expenses and are time consuming and will not be viable and practical over a long period. Agents in India prefer the traditional method of payment by cheque as it affords them more flexibility with their Bankers at certain times.

Are the Indian Travel Agents geared up and equipped fully for its compliance yet? Already, many Travel Agencies are closed as a result of the various restrictive measures imposed on them by the Airlines like 'Zero' commission, 'Ticketing Authority Process' (TAP) and the 'Weekly Payment System' (WPS). It will now have to be seen how many more will survive through this "simplified" process. Sooner or later, the Industry is going to meet with a tragic end as it appears from 'the writings on the wall'.

The Agency Programme Joint Council- India (APJC-India) is the forum instituted by IATA to decide on these policies. The primary responsibility of APJC-India is to ensure the welfare and smooth running of the Indian aviation industry and of the airline / travel agency partnership. The best practices and procedures should be followed for the betterment of the Industry. It is an admitted fact that the Travel Agent Representatives in APJC-India tend to dance to the tunes of the Airlines and IATA. 'Yes Men' with a vested interest policy.

However, most of the APJC-India policies are not influenced by considerations for the Agents' welfare or aspirations but by the vested interests. Should IATA decide APJC-India Policies?

When IATA insists on NACH, it is essential that the Agents' Representatives in APJC - India should have followed the best practices required for the Indian conditions and demanded IATA to have a cheque collection facility through a Nationalized Indian Bank which has networking all over India instead of the Deutsche Bank that has a very limited number of branches in India.

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The Regulatory Authorities for Civil Aviation in the Government of India should take the necessary steps to ensure that foreign airlines operating to/from/through India deal with only Indian Banks and entities. With India set to become the third largest aviation market by 2020 and the largest by 2030, foreign Banks must not be allowed to poach on the USD 16 billion+ Indian Aviation & Travel Industry business at the cost of the Nationalized Indian Banks.

Looking at it patriotically, why force Indian Travel Agents to deal with a foreign bank?

IATA cannot enforce rules. And, Agents should not be against developmental procedures also. But, implementation of IATA Resolutions and procedures or adaption of new technological systems should be with the approval of the APJC in a country and which MUST be conducive to the Indian market requirements and conditions, subject to the National Law and within the framework of IATA and ICAO.

Aviation News

Full-body electronic scan for passengers at US airports



Some passengers at US airports might have to go through full-body electronic scan in wake of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and California. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) which secures American airports said necessary changes have been made in the protocol under which it would be mandatory for some

passengers to go through full body scanner for security reasons. Generally, passengers undergoing screening will have the option to decline AIT (Advanced Imaging Technologies) screening in favor of a pat-down. Some passengers will still be required to undergo AIT screening as warranted by security considerations in order to safeguard transportation security. Security screening at US airports and public transportation systems have been tightened as a precautionary measure in view of the recent terrorist attacks.

Air India introduces on the spot payment for upgrade



Air India has introduced a scheme to upgrade passengers on the basis of spot payment of cash at airports. The scheme is called 'Get Up Front' and is applicable for both domestic and international sectors. The upgrade at airport is subject to availability of seats and on First Come First

Served Basis and also subject to the physical presence of a guest at the check-in counter. The scheme is being publicized through text cards at the airports. The following measures have been taken to make Air India competitive with private airlines: Induction of brand new aircraft on several domestic & international routes to increase passenger appeal; Phasing out & grounding of old fleet; On Time Performance (OTP) is being monitored at the highest level within Air India on daily basis.

Aviation News

Air India launches Ahmedabad—London flights



Air India recently commenced the first ever direct flight from Ahmedabad, the economic and industrial hub of Gujarat to London. With the commencement of this flight, Air India became the first airline to offer direct flight between Ahmedabad and London.

This flight is the fifth frequency as Air India already operates four frequencies to London – three from Delhi and one from Mumbai. The daily flight is likely to hugely benefit the 1.5 million-strong Indian diaspora living in Britain. Catering to the strong demand of more than 6 lakh Indians from the state of Gujarat, the passengers travelling by the direct flight will not have to change aircraft at Mumbai.

Jet Airways to launch daily flights to Amsterdam and Toronto



Jet Airways has announced the launch of daily non-stop services between India and Amsterdam with effect from March 27, 2016.

Jet Airways will operate two daily non-stop flights to Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, one each from Mumbai and New Delhi. Jet Airways will also operate a daily flight from Toronto to Amsterdam. Schedules of all three flights have been planned to allow quick and convenient connections between India and Toronto over Amsterdam. These flights will be available for sale across all booking channels from December 15, 2015. **With the introduction of Amsterdam flights, Jet Airways will discontinue its flight to Brussels from Mumbai as well as Delhi wef 27th March 2016.**

Jet Airways will deploy its modern Airbus A330-300 aircraft with 34 seats in premiere and 259 seats in economy on these routes. With the objective of providing convenient connections for its guests to key destinations across Europe and North America over Amsterdam, Jet Airways has entered into a strategic agreement with KLM Royal Dutch Airlines and Delta Air Lines. Under this agreement and subject to government and regulatory approvals, Jet Airways will code share to 30 European destinations for travel between India and Europe via Amsterdam. Key destinations within the route include Brussels, Berlin, Copenhagen, Munich, Madrid, Geneva and Vienna operated by KLM. Jet Airways will also code share with KLM and Delta on 11 destinations between India and the United States and Canada including New York JFK, Newark, Washington DC, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Vancouver and Montreal.

Aviation News

GoAir introduces additional flights to Goa



GoAir has announced that they have introduced special flights to Goa from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and Kolkata in time for its passengers to bring in Christmas and New Years at the beach destination. The additional flights will be introduced from December 18, 2015 till January 5, 2016.

The new flights and connections are between cities that are currently already being served by the airline on its current network and the flights will be operated using state-of-the-art Airbus A320 aircraft fleet. The additional flights have been introduced keeping in mind GoAir's theme, 'Fly Smart' that is aimed at offering passengers a consistent, quality-assured, and time-efficient service through 'pocket-friendly' fares.

The first special flight from Mumbai to Goa (flight number G81375) departed at 23:00hrs on December 18, 2015 and will be operational till January 4, 2016 (except on December 31, 2015) while the last special flight is the Goa to Mumbai flight (flight number G81376) that will operate on January 5, 2015 (except on January 1, 2016) and will take off from Goa at 1:45hrs.

Air India introduces 'Order to Chef' service



Air India has introduced 'Order to Chef' service for its premium class passengers, on select international flights out of Delhi. In association with its in-flight catering partners TajSats and Sky Gourmet, the 'Order to Chef' service lends a personalised touch to the selection and ordering of menu by First and Business class passengers.

A dedicated 'Order to Chef' cell has been set up in Delhi and an Air India team reaches out to these passengers before the flight, to seek their meal preference from the existing menus. The desired choice of meal, is then ordered in advance, for the premium class passengers. Feedback to the newly introduced service has been positive, with passengers expressing their delight at the gesture.

Currently available for passengers of the daily Delhi-Chicago and Delhi-New York flights and three daily Delhi-London flights, Air India plans to extend the 'Order to Chef' service to other international flights shortly.

Aviation News

Star Alliance to work with LCCs and Hybrid airlines under 'Connecting Partner Model'



Star Alliance is set to expand its network reach with the launch of its Connecting Partner Model. Under this new concept, routes operated by low-cost' and 'hybrid' airlines will be able to connect to the Alliance network. This will allow customers of Star Alliance member carriers to select from an even wider choice of destinations and flights. South African low-cost airline, Mango, has been selected as the first airline with which Star Alliance will be implementing the new concept.

Connecting Partners will be carefully assessed for their fit into the existing Star Alliance network. While these selected airlines need to comply and adhere to the high operating standard required by the Alliance, they will not become a member of the Alliance itself. Customers travelling on an itinerary which includes a transfer between a Star Alliance member airline and a Connecting Partner will be offered Alliance benefits such as passenger and baggage through check-in. Moreover, Star Alliance Gold Card holders will enjoy a tailored set of privileges in line with the different product offerings of the individual Connecting Partner.

Connecting Partners will enter into bilateral commercial agreements with selected Star Alliance member airlines, which may include additional Frequent Flyer Programme based privileges.

Seat auction by Govt to protect Indian carriers



India's government plans to change the way it allocates capacity to foreign airlines from a state-negotiated method to an auction process to protect domestic carriers from overseas competition. Foreign carriers that have already exhausted their seat capacity will need to buy additional capacity through an auction. Currently, the number of seats an overseas airline can fly to India is governed by bilateral agreements between two countries. An auction, instead of handing over the seats without charge through the inter-government agreement, could add to the costs and may lead to higher fares. The price gap to a domestic airline can then be exploited by Indian carriers such as Jet Airways Ltd and IndiGo. Limited by smaller fleets and losses through much of the past decade, India's domestic carriers have mostly not been able to fully utilise their capacity in a bilateral agreement while bigger overseas carriers almost always exhaust them and then demand additional capacity. The seat auction policy will be enforced only on routes that are within a radius of 5,000 kilometers (3,000 miles) from India. Most bilateral aviation agreements hand over similar capacity to both countries. When one side exhausts the quota, the two sides need to renegotiate the bilateral to increase the total for both parties, instead of one country alone getting more seats. Money earned by auctioning the seats will go into subsidising rural flights in India.

Hospitality News

North East debut by Taj Group



Taj Hotels Resorts & Palaces announced its latest addition with the opening of Vivanta by Taj – Guwahati, Assam. Vivanta by Taj—Guwahati, Assam features 150 beautifully appointed guestrooms styled with elegant sophistication. The hotel's distinctive architecture and design has been done by Singapore based eco.id. Tranquil

and calming, minimalist contemporary with splashes of local colours, the hotel is spread over five acres of shaded courtyard gardens, verdant lawns and plants that are reminders of the forest trees and tea gardens of Assam. The design style is inspired by the unique architectural traditions of Assam.

The main pavilion building is inspired by the famed Kamakhya temple in Guwahati while the motifs used for the main hotel building are a modern expression of Assam's strong tradition of woven crafts. The hotel's signature oriental restaurant Umami, serves Japanese and Chinese cuisine centred on the Umami principle.

All-day dining at Seven is an ode to the seven sister states of the North East, offering inventive takes on the simple and rooted culinary traditions of the area as well as familiar global cuisine including Indian, Mediterranean and pan-Asian. No culinary experience in Assam would be complete without tea – the mainstay of Assam's culture. The Tea Lounge at Vivanta by Taj—Guwahati, Assam promises the finest exploratory tea experience for its guests. The bar, Octave pays tribute to the rich musical heritage of the region with a showcase stage for promising local musicians. Vivanta by Taj—Guwahati, Assam is the new address for the brightest and best social and business events in the city. Offering one of the largest banqueting spaces in North East India with over 25,000 sq. ft. of flexible conference and meeting space, including a pillar-less ballroom of over 6,000 sq. ft., it is the ideal venue for select meetings, conferences and private events.

Abu Dhabi Cruise Terminal now open at Port Zayed

Abu Dhabi opened its first purpose-built cruise terminal at Port Zayed. MSC Cruises and Celebrity Cruises will start homeporting ships from the current season. Travellers wanting to undertake the cruise will now be able to avail of multiple-entry cruise visa.

Hospitality News

Taj opens 6th hotel in Bengaluru



Taj Hotels Resorts and Palaces opened Taj Bangalore, the latest addition to the group's luxury portfolio and the sixth Taj group hotel in the Garden City. Conveniently located minutes from Kempegowda International Airport, Bengaluru, Taj Bangalore will offer guests a world of sophisticated luxury. The hotel has 154 spacious rooms and 12 luxury suites and a presidential suite.

For diners, Taj Bangalore offers a menu for every palate and a food-on-the-go concept to suit those on a schedule. The 24-hour all-day dining, Café 77 East, has light-filled indoor and alfresco spaces ideal for the Bangalore weather. Authentic Indian food is on offer at the Indian restaurant, Tamarind, where guests can choose from dishes straight from the Royal kitchens including Rajasthani laal maas, Punjabi rara gosht or Awadhi lagan ka murgh. For those in search of an Eastern flavor the Asian restaurant, Soi & Sake, offers Chinese and Japanese fare. Sit around the live Teppan grill or Sushi bar to see a culinary masterpiece created in front of your eyes. For private or group tastings, the tasting room is the perfect venue for sampling local and international wines.

Start-Up is an informal networking destination ideal for entrepreneurs and professionals to brainstorm over a single malt or a cocktail. For wellness freaks, the hotel houses, Taj Group's own signature, Jiva Spa. Taj Bangalore has over 25,000 sq.ft. of banqueting space, comprising an array of private multifunctional indoor spaces from elegant ballrooms to intimate boardrooms to suit all requirements. The events spaces lead onto landscaped gardens; the seamless merging of the indoor and outdoor is reminiscent of Bengaluru's own cityscape.

The Gateway Hotel Gir Forest now open



The Gateway Hotel Gir Forest, located at the edge of the world-renowned Gir Forest is now open for guests. The hotel, set in an idyllic environment is perfect for a relaxing holiday. The Gateway Hotel

Gir Forest, is the nature lover's getaway. With its rich surroundings of dry deciduous and tropical thorn forests, the hotel faces the Hiran River to offer a picturesque and setting, away from the bustle of the city. Home to the Asiatic lion, the Sasan Gir Forest is one of the only two natural habitats of this subspecies around the world. The latest census recorded the lion count in Gir at 411. The leopard, jungle cat, rusty spotted cat, cheetal, sambhar, four-horned antelope, wild boar and hare are also easy to spot here, along with over 200 species of avifauna. Also integral to the experience will be the jungle safaris the hotel will provide in an open Gypsy. For those who prefer a cultural expedition instead, the hotel is also close to various temples such as the Somnath, Banej and Kankai Temple, and historical destinations such as Junagadh, Gondal and Rajkot.

Hospitality News

Leela expands with 3rd hotel in Delhi NCR



The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts announced a new addition to the group's luxury portfolio with the reflagging of Ambience Group's five-star deluxe hotel in East Delhi. Renamed "The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi," the 480-room property offers one of the largest conference and event space in India. With the newest addition, The Leela group now operates three unique properties in the Delhi-NCR totalling over 1150 rooms, further enhancing its brand appeal and market penetration. The Leela now offers guests three hotels with distinct identities in the Delhi-NCR region to choose from - The Leela Palace New Delhi; The Leela Ambience Gurgaon Hotels and Residences and The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi.

Second Le Méridien Hotel in Bhutan Opens



Le Méridien has opened its second property in Bhutan, the Le Méridien Paro, Riverfront. Situated on the edge of the Paro River, the hotel offer panoramic views of the Eastern Himalayas. Its 59 guest-rooms and suites come are contemporary in their design with classic Bhutanese touches, complemented by facilities such as a swimming pool, a fitness center, and its signature Explore Spa.

Railway News

Executive Lounges at 49 Railway Stations



Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has been entrusted with the task of setting up Executive Lounges at 49 locations. These Executive Lounges will provide value added services at a charge, offering facilities such as Wifi Internet, buffet services, wash and change facility, concierge services for pre-departure and post-arrival assistant to passengers. These facilities are similar to the facilities provided at the airports.

The locations which have been proposed are New Delhi, Delhi, Nizamuddin, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Amritsar, Jammu, Agra Cantt., Bhopal, Nagpur, Vijayawada, Chennai Central, Bengaluru City, Trivandrum Central, Madurai, Kozhikode, Ernakulam Jn., Madgaon, Mumbai Central, Lokmanya Tilak Terminus, Bandra Terminus, Vadodara, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Ajmer, Kathgodam, Bhubaneshwar, Lucknow, Lucknow Jn., Varanasi Cantt., Kalka, Hyderabad, Secunderabad, Pune, Bilaspur, Ranchi, Raipur, Dhanbad, Tatanagar, Guwahati, Visakhapatnam, Puri, Sealdah, Howrah, New Jalpaiguri, Patna, Gorakhpur, Allahabad, and Kanpur. Executive Lounge at New Delhi Railway station has started operation. IRCTC is in the process of setting up Executive Lounges at other locations.

IRCTC to operate Maharajas Express for New Year travellers



Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd (IRCTC) will operate its premier luxury train, the Maharajas' Express, as a special and memorable trip for New Year travellers planning to celebrate festivities in style at pink city Rajasthan – Jaipur and the historic city of Taj-Agra along with safari at Ranthambhore. The itinerary "Gems of India" trip has been scheduled for December 30 and will take the travellers on a 3-night/4-day itinerary of Delhi-Agra-Ranthambore-Jaipur-Delhi. For booking of tickets, the Maharajas' Express website has been enabled to accept online payments. Guests can now book tickets directly on its official website, <http://www.the-maharajas.com>.

In addition, the Maharajas' Express has launched a unique offer for people planning to sparkle their New Year celebrations. Pay for one adult only on twin sharing cabin while the second adult availing the same cabin will be on complimentary, if booked directly on Maharajas' Express official website.

Visa News

Schengen states launch Visa Information System in India



The Schengen states have launched the Visa Information System (VIS) in India along with the neighbouring countries as part of the worldwide introduction of the VIS, which since October 2011 has been functioning in 17 out of 23 world regions.

All Schengen consulates worldwide will be connected to the VIS by end of 2015. VIS, a system for the exchange of data on short-stay visas (maximum 90 days in 180 days) between the Schengen states, was introduced to protect applicants against identity theft, to prevent document fraud and 'visa shopping'. Since November 2, Indian citizens applying for a Schengen Visa have to come in person to provide biometric data.

The biometric data will be taken from the previous visa application included in the VIS for subsequent applications within the next five years. However, children under the age of 12; persons for whom the collection of fingerprints is physically impossible; and sovereigns and other senior members of a royal family, heads of state and members of the national governments travelling for official purposes will be exempt from fingerprinting.

PHOTO FEATURE

International Kite Festival, Gujarat



In the state of Gujarat that kite flying has been accorded special status with its world-renowned International Kite Festival, which coincides with the Uttarayan festivities, drawing visitors & participants from all over the world. Gujarat's Kite Festival 2016 will run from January 8th to 14th, 2016 across Gujarat. Uttarayan heralds a period of joyous thanksgiving to the Gods & emotional gatherings with family & friends, but now it's also synonymous with kite flying at another thrill-giving level altogether. Over the years the montage of Uttarayan festivities has lent wing to the combative spirit of the International Kite Festival with participants getting more & more ambitious with the range, design, colours, materials & technical efficacy of each kite that soars over the heads of the thrilling crowds into the cloudless heavens..

Open Space

Lighter Moments

A mathematician, an accountant and an economist apply for the same job.

The interviewer calls in the mathematician and asks "What do two plus two equal?" The mathematician replies "Four." The interviewer asks "Four, exactly?" The mathematician looks at the interviewer incredulously and says "Yes, four, exactly."

Then the interviewer calls in the accountant and asks the same question "What do two plus two equal?" The accountant says "On average, four - give or take ten percent, but on average, four."

Then the interviewer calls in the economist and poses the same question "What do two plus two equal?" The economist gets up, locks the door, closes the shade, sits down next to the interviewer and says, "What do you want it to equal"?

Thought for the Fortnight

The pessimist complains about the wind, the optimist expects it to change, the realist adjusts the sails.

— William Arthur Ward

IAAI Director Board

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