

# Click Technology. Enter Tourism

In a market such as India, travel agents are witnessing a series of changes due to online travel distribution. With the onset of technology, travel and tourism stakeholders, including the various state tourism bodies, hotels, travel agents, OTAs and travel associations are utilising their best practices to update themselves with the latest and robust technology.



MEGHA PAUL



The government of Uttarakhand decided to keep track of devotees visiting the state for the Char Dham yatra by

issuing biometric cards and registering the mobile numbers of pilgrims to provide timely weather forecast. A total of 25 points were identified, most of them in the Garhwal region, where biometric cards were being made and issued to pilgrims. The pilgrims just swiped their biometric card enroute, which will also help keep a track of their location. With the help of Met Department and the Telecom Department, we also provided weather updates to pilgrims on their mobiles so that they could plan their yatra.

**Umakant Panwar**  
Tourism Secretary  
Uttarakhand



Kerala has become the first tourism board in India to launch pages in a foreign language in social media. Kerala Tourism has created official Facebook pages in French and

German languages. The pages contain details of the destinations in French and in German languages to help tourists from the respective countries in their preparations and to enable them to understand the experience offered by the state. The new initiative is part of the Department's efforts to substantially increase foreign tourist arrivals. Europe is a major market for Kerala in the tourism sector and we are taking all the necessary steps to cater to the different countries and regions in the continent. The official French and German pages of Kerala Tourism on Facebook are interactive and reader-friendly with photographs and descriptions. We also started the Kerala Tourism Facebook page in 2009. Today, it has over 85,000 fans.

**S Haridshore**  
Immediate Ex-Director,  
Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala



As part of strengthening our sales distribution in India, Starwood Hotels & Resorts will try to enlist more retail travel agents into its fold. Starwood Hotels has created a dedicated tool – STARnet – for small and medium travel agents. The traditional agent whose core competence was ticketing wants to now shift to hotel bookings. STARnet will help them to get the best commission rates and print their own vouchers. They can book 1,200 hotels globally by joining this programme. STARnet is catching up with retail agents in a big way. However, the DMCs and the wholesalers will continue to drive the B2B business for the company. The hotel company also rolled out the Starwood Personalised India Travel Programme towards the end of 2013.

The group is currently in the process of enlisting hotels for this programme across the globe.

**Dhananjay Sallankar**  
Regional Director,  
Starwood Sales Organisation-South Asia



Online B2B hotel sales in the initial days were primarily focussed on last-moment reservations, business and corporate travel reservations and for travellers looking for best deals on hotels. In the past couple of years, we have seen advance buying, leisure details and luxury reservations. Destination such as Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles, etc which were booked primarily through offline using conventional channels have seen a major shift towards online buying. The company was overwhelmed with the kind of response we received from the travel trade in the very first year of launching RezLive in India. We wanted travel agents to make their reservations online. Being a 100 per cent dedicated B2B system gave

travel agents the confidence to boost their revenues online.

**Jaal Shah**  
Founder, RezLive.com and Group Managing Director  
Travel Designer Group