

# Tourism Marketing Alliance (TMA): Making an impact in India's Eastern Region

Four industry professional companies namely MSC Cruises, RezLive, BookonBlueStar.com, Pearl Tourism and Leisure Group have come together to form the Tourism Marketing Alliance (TMA) to connect with and educate the travel agents and tour operators in India's growth cities on the possibilities in the outbound tourism space. A **ETW** report

The writing is clear on the wall. The travel industry especially in the outbound business space is going through a metamorphosis and the demand to travel abroad is growing rapidly especially from India's Tier II and III cities. Tourism Marketing Alliance (TMA) is the result of this market scenario, wherein four industry professional companies namely MSC Cruises, RezLive, BookonBlueStar.com, Pearl Tourism and Leisure Group have come together with the aim to spread steady and strong footprints in new markets in India, as they feel it's prudent to educate those looking for authentic and quality partners in the space who are ready for business. All they need is someone approaching them with an aim to work as partners in this business.

TMA's Eastern roadshow touching three cities namely Patna, Kolkata and Bhubaneswar recently concluded with an encouraging response for travel agents, which also reflects the temperament of the market and its interest in the outbound tourism business. The Patna city roadshow witnessed a robust delegate count,

with 91 travel agents attending the event. This clearly reflects the interest that the region has, to activate bookings for international travel. Jayesh Ashar, managing director, Pearl Tourism & Leisure Group showcased a portfolio of products across countries from Africa to Australia, Europe and Bali. RezLive.com's spokesperson Zaheer Jeddy, national sales head, gave the attendees a serious showcase of empowering new agents to work as partners. MSC Cruises led by Kunal Sampat, GM- India, received an enthusiastic response from the attendees, which shows that outbound cruise tourism has promise. BlueStar was represented by Bhavesh N Oza, vice president - international markets, who spoke about the importance of rail and airline bookings and how they can empower the agents in these pockets to do better business.

## MSC Cruises

MSC Cruises is the world's largest privately-owned cruise line and brand market leader in Europe, South America and South Africa. "Our ships sail year-round in the Mediterranean and the Caribbean, and



our seasonal itineraries include Northern Europe, the Atlantic Ocean, South America, southern Africa, China, the Dubai, Abu Dhabi and India. The MSC Cruises experience embodies the elegant side of the Mediterranean to create unique and unforgettable emotions for guests, through discovery of the world's cultures, beauties and tastes,"

said Sampat. MSC Cruises translates its passion for the sea into a commitment to excellence in hospitality, professionalism, dedication and mastery of every single detail to ensure the complete happiness and satisfaction of each and every guest. According to Sampat, India is a key and an emerging market for MSC Cruises. "Our focus is very clear,

to educate and empower our trade partners to establish our footprints throughout the country. In our endeavour to do the same, we have been arranging regular training sessions for trade partners, getting engaged in partnerships with world's leading airlines and hotels providing benefits to MSC Cruises passengers. We are also in

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process of launching a rewarding e-learning programme for our trade partners, to strengthen our ties with them," he said. Speaking about TMA and its focus and potential, Sampat felt that while it is a fact that majority of the business comes from metro cities like Mumbai and Delhi, even Tier II and III cities of India have potential. Guests originating from these cities also have global aspirations and look forward to able and professional travel partners to guide them making the correct choice in their travel plans. "TMA not only gives us an opportunity to connect with travel agents in Tier II and III cities, but also ensures optimum focus and coverage. We interacted with approximately 200+ travel agents during this roadshow and as expected, there was a lot of interest shown for our India sailings along with our regular Mediterranean, Caribbean and North Europe sailings. We look forward to be creating more opportunities for our trade partners to ensure they are able to earn more revenue for themselves," concluded Sampat.

### Blue Star Air Travel Services

Blue Star Air Travel Services, a 31-year old award winning brand, is well established in the B2B travel trade surviving business challenges. Today it has also evolved as an online travel company serving more than 25,000 travel agents across India. Speaking on the brand Oza says, "Today its online portal [bookonbluestar.com](http://bookonbluestar.com) is known as one of the fastest growing platforms providing products across the travel spectrum. We differentiate ourselves as an 'Online company with a face'." The company is focused on connecting with India's growth cities, and was present along with its regional team to connect and understand the market and the potential better. Listing its product USP and benefits to the trade, Oza articulated that there are a number of online companies across India which provide similar services but what really defines Blue Star's USP amongst many points are

1) An Innovative Mobile App 2) An army of subject matter experts to solve the most complex issues related to travel and 3) Our 24x7 reliable services. He further shared the benefits that the company provides to its partners namely, 1) No poaching of our travel agents clients 2) Different markup facilities which helps our agents to increase their profits 3) A stable and reliable platform which delivers travel agent friendly services 4) All travel products on one platform. The company is known for its strength and service in the rail and air bookings space. Sharing information on this specialisation within the group Oza said, "Today a passenger who wishes to travel abroad can be from any Tier II or III city definitely require to travel using both the modes of transportation i.e rail and air, hence the biggest advantage a travel agent gets is the fact that with one single sign and one transaction account will help him book both the rail and air tickets for the same passenger in one login session hassle free, add to it the benefits of healthy commissions and reliable services. The Tier II and III cities have been highly neglected and I firmly believe this is the most potential source. Hence to ensure we win their hearts with our products, we also educate them in their preferred language. The idea is to give them a family/friendly feeling were they can feel free to interact with us, hence to start with we do our presentation and tutorials in Hindi."

### Rezlive.com

Rezlive.com was established to help travel agents develop a sustainable business model. India's phenomenal growth in outbound tourism offers an exceptional opportunity for travel agents to diversify from inbound and ticketing business to outbound tourism. From 1991 to 2016, the number of Indian nationals' outbound departure has grown at a CAGR of over 10 per cent to nearly 2.2 crore. From 2016 to 2017, India's international tourism spending increased 9 per cent and reached



US\$ 18 billion and ranked 17th in the world. The growth is expected to continue in the coming years and provides an excellent opportunity for traditional travel agents to diversify into outbound leisure and business travel and develop a sustainable business model. The growing opportunities also brings its share of challenges. A recent report by Google and BCG finds that an average customer spends nearly 49 minutes to research about a travel destination before making reservations. Travellers also have many options in B2C sites to make flight and hotel reservations. They are well informed and are much more independent than they used to be. Travel agents need to be on top of their game with extensive knowledge of product, destinations, visa regulations, flight routes and best hotel recommendations to win customers. Rezlive.com and other partners in TMA can give travel agents straight-forward solutions and an edge in this competitive scenario.

Travel Designer Group, started in 1999 as an outbound operator for short haul destinations, launched its online hotel reservation system in 2007. Today, Rezlive.com is one of the top global brands in online hotel reservations that connects travel agents to over 250,000 hotels, 45,000 sightseeing attractions and private transfers in over 900 cities. The wide range of products gives travel agents accessibility to make reservations in any part of the world. Rezlive's product team



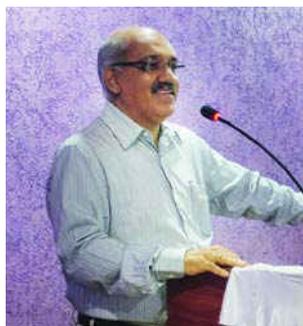
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actively looks for travel trends and emerging destinations across the globe and ensure that new hotel properties and sight-seeing attractions are added to its portfolio. Rezlive.com's robust reservation engine allows to reserve up to eight rooms with eight travellers in each room. Combined with sightseeing and transfers, travel partners can even plan and execute mini group reservations. The product offers unbeatable options for same day reservations and on peak days such as New Year's eve. "We want to build our product based on wide coverage and seamless execution. We have invested heavily on a back-end support system that re-confirms every reservation that we make, directly with the hotel," said Jedly. "Our travel partners can be sure that their reservations will be executed with perfection," he further added.

Apart from integrating with all major hotel wholesalers, Rezlive.com also has its own strong contracting team that has over 15000 direct contracts across Asia and Middle-East. Rezlive.com is also dynamically connected with many major hotel chains and it ensures that travel partners get the best rates and make them competitive in the crowded market. As the Indian growth story continues, Rezlive.com is geared up to support this growth and facilitate travel agents to make a shift from traditional businesses to the much more profitable outbound travel business.

### Pearl Travels

Pearl Travels (pearltravels.com) is a vertical of Pearl Tourism & Leisure Group (www.ptlg.biz) founded in 1992 in the UK. It aims to be a global wholesaler offering off-beat itineraries for worldwide destinations through an easy to use reservation process. Over the years it has built its confidence amidst its clientele and serves as a wholesaler of land arrangements, package holidays and MICE globally. Speaking on the product and its offerings, Ashar said, "Our clientele, ranging from retail travel agents, tour operators and re-



gional wholesalers, is spread across 35 countries. As a FIT and MICE specialist we are able to offer tailor-made and fixed itinerary modules to suit every budget and requirement. With the advent of the internet, we have successfully managed to harness the strengths of technology and human interface to create an exact balance of both resources in a manner to offer the best user friendly working environment for clients, suppliers and team members." The company's mission is to provide the global travel trade, (buyers and sellers) a transparent, reliable and trust worthy business exchange platform. "We aim to provide a professional, progressive, dynamic, friendly and open minded employment environment and opportunities for our team members, to operate with a view to offer a prompt, reliable and professional service to our clients," stated Ashar. Pearl Travels specialises in four major destinations, namely Europe, Africa, Bali and Australia with direct contracts with relevant suppliers after complete quality checks. The company also offers innovative itineraries which are backed by some sound ground work." Although traditionally

the Tier I metro cities of India have been the largest source markets for us, we are experiencing a large surge in business from Tier II and III markets lately. We strongly believe that business growth will multiply with a strong support from these markets as they have been asking for new destinations and experiences. TMA is providing us a huge platform to target and source business from these emerging markets," said Ashar. The company also has three other verticals namely, Heritage India Tour (inbound vertical serving USA, Europe and African source markets), Adventure Bike Tours which offers high end experiential biking tours with a huge amount of soft adventures and unique experiences and Konzept Africa which offers sales, marketing and reservation outsourcing solutions to African vendors looking to target the Indian outbound market.

The attendees across all three cities were unanimous in their opinion that they were glad to exchange knowledge on both destination and products with team TMA. They are hoping to have on going interactions with them to upgrade their product knowledge.

