

Knowledge Sessions

Selling India through innovative marketing

DAY two of the GITM opened doors to a discussion on "Marketing and Innovation in Tourism". Neelu Singh, COO, Ezeego1; KD Row, Executive Director, Sales and Marketing India region, Air India; Nikhil Ganju, Country Manager, TripAdvisor India; Arjun Sharma, Managing Director, Le Passage to India and Dilip Puri, Managing Director India and Regional Vice President of South Asia, Starwood Asia Pacific Hotels and Resorts formed the panel for the same with Sheldon Santwan, Editor and COO, Travel Biz Monitor acting as moderator.

Singh started the session with a brief insight into the rapidly increasing numbers of social media and mobile users among Indian travellers. "The current consumption patterns point to increased mobile usage being the future. Hence, marketing plans will now have to be based on this form of media," Singh opined.

Speaking about increasing tourist footfall in Goa from an aviation point of view, Row stated that

Goa needs to analyse and realise what needs to be done and then get stakeholders together to do it. He added that infrastructure should be our priority. Also, connectivity to tier II and III cities in India is critical as domestic tourism is important.

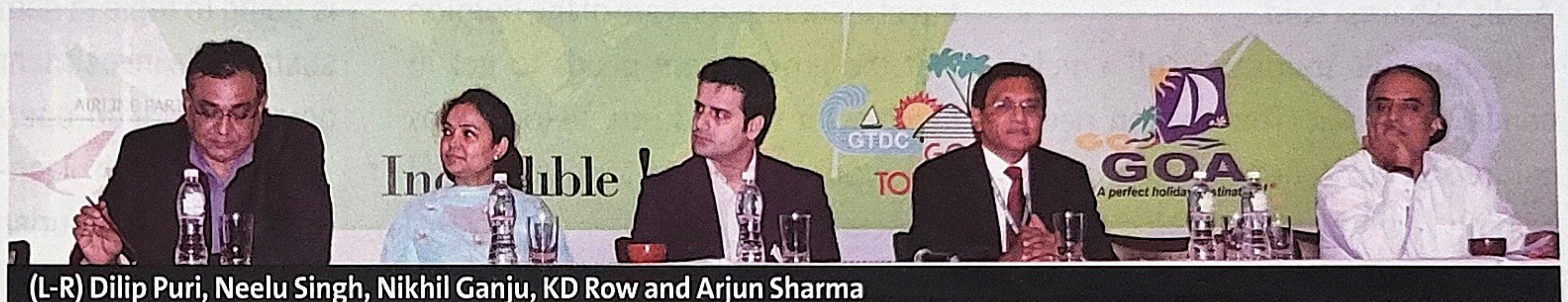
Sharma suggested, "We need to look at the bigger picture. In five years Indian tourist footfall will double and tourism budget will increase to USD 5 billion. The government is not the only body responsible for tourism, the citizens are too. The Incredible India campaign has run its course and we now need versions 2 and 3 to make a bigger impact."

Ganju highlighted the importance of social media which, he said, is fuelled by people's

faith in other traveller's opinions and reviews. He suggested that two out of every three Indian traveller uses online search engines and by 2012 one-third of Indian travels will be booked online. Hence, destination management organisations should start leveraging social media as customers trust each other's opinions, making it the evident way forward.

"Golf tourism can easily bring in tourists; it won't matter if the course is close to or away from the sea. Land needs to be made available and investors will come in automatically. The initiative needs to come locally, from Goa government. We do a lot but we do it sporadically. The industry should come together and develop various tourism facets," added Puri. ■

— By Maansi Sharma



(L-R) Dilip Puri, Neelu Singh, Nikhil Ganju, KD Row and Arjun Sharma

Branding crucial for product positioning

The second knowledge session on the second day of the GITM on 'Branding and Reinventing Tourism' highlighted the importance and need of branding and how it plays a crucial role in positioning a product and the role of trust in brand building. The session was moderated by Sheldon Santwan, Editor & COO, TravelBiz Monitor and the panellists were Hanneli Slabber, Country Head - India, South African Tourism; Özgür Aytürk, Culture & Tourism Counsellor for India, Turkey and Cajetan Vaz, Branding Consultant and Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI and Chief Executive, Nomad Travels.

"Reinventing a destination involves risk," stated Vaz, who also mentioned that a brand is a marriage between two changing people: Brand (Destination) and Consumer (Visitor), and this starts with a change and managing change. A brand with clear vision can best handle change. Vaz also stressed that bringing constant changes in a brand can confuse a consumer.

Slabber concurred, "Change is inevitable. The brand may be true at a given point of time but not tomorrow. Talk to consumers continuously and listen to them. However, this alone is not sufficient; you need to react to what the consumer is saying. Listen, adapt, react and go to tell the people that you have changed. It is not about efficiency but the need

to be over-efficient."

Branding plays a crucial role in the lifecycle of a product. "Once the brand is made, it lives in the heart of the consumers. A brand needs to inspire trust, it is created by experience. You can't rebrand a brand which doesn't exist. Brands are built on trust," Slabber said. Citing the example of her own country, Slabber remarked that South Africa is a tourism driven country. "Understand who you are, what the consumer wants, how you want to interact with

not possible to reinvent the destination all the time and said, "India as a destination has languished for years. Tourism has been viewed as a lightweight subject in India but the fact remains is it is the driving force and generates maximum employment. In addition, tourism does not operate in a vacuum and there are factors like transportation, sanitation, infrastructure which affect tourism." He added, "There are certain unique features of the country, which we need to capitalise on to sell the country effectively. Tourism as an industry needs a specific attitude and passion. The important aspect in branding is to learn the correct way of projecting the product."

Talking about tourism in Turkey, Aytürk said, "In 1980, the Republic of Turkey started treating Tourism as a Special Project. In 1980, the tourist arrivals to Turkey was 1.2 million whereas in 2010 it was 28.6 million, an increase by 26 per cent. Currently, Turkey ranks seventh in tourist arrivals in the world. As far as tourism receipts are concerned,

in 1980 it was USD 0.4 Billion and in 2010 it has increased by 52 per cent to USD 20.2 Billion and ranks ninth in the world." Aytürk said that besides showcasing Turkey as a sea, sun and sand, the tourism board also showcased history, culture, MICE, golf, leisure etc and positioned the product as a harmony of West and East. ■

— By Rashmi Pradhan



(L-R) Ajay Prakash, Hanneli Slabber, Özgür Aytürk, Cajetan Vaz

them, how you want to make them feel when they come to you and how you want to make them feel when they leave you. The biggest mistake tourism boards make is they sell the product to themselves," said Slabber.

Speaking about the tourism scenario in India, Prakash stressed on the importance of not reinventing a country but repositioning it since it is