

## **Tourism industry stares at \$300-m loss**

The domestic tourism industry is likely to suffer a revenue loss of at least \$300 million with a large number of tourists deciding to cancel their trips due to the coronavirus scare, according to an industry insider. There has been a drop of 67 per cent in inbound tourism since January as compared to the same period last year. On the other hand, there is a dip of 52 per cent in the outbound travel for the same period.

According to the official data of the Ministry of Tourism, the foreign exchange earnings from the tourism sector during 2019 were \$29.96 billion (provisional estimates) with a growth of 4.8 per cent over the same period of the previous year. Room occupancies are coming down and there have been fair amount of cancellations that continue to happen. Of all the segments of the hospitality sector, the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions — popularly known as MICE segment — has been hit the most. “MICE activity, which has already suffered a number of cancellations across the country, will see more cancellations and postponements over the next few months.

The fear of the contagion could keep free independent travellers off the road during the summer months of April-June. Business on the books for the coming months for hotels, particularly those in leisure destinations, will contract sharply. Earlier, the Bureau of Immigration issued an advisory that mentioned all regular (sticker) Visas/e-Visa (including visa on arrival for Japanese and South Korean citizens) granted to nationals of Italy, Iran, South Korea, Japan and issued on or before March 3, and who have not yet entered India, stand suspended with immediate effect.

Such foreign nationals may not enter India from any air, land or seaport ICPs. Those requiring to travel to India due to compelling reasons, may seek fresh visa from the nearest Indian Embassy/Consulate, it added.

“We would also request (the government) to remove the listings of the Online Travel Agents (OTAs) that are not regulated by it. This is because travellers who opt for this cannot be traced, making it a security threat,” said Gurbaxish Singh Kohli, Vice-President, Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India.