

## **In a first, online travel aggregators to be accredited, classified by govt**

Online travel aggregators like Air B&B, Makemytrip, Yatra and Oyo will now need to be recognised by the Tourism Ministry in order to operate. For the first time, the ministry has prepared a set of guidelines by which it will approve and classify online travel aggregators (OTAs) ensuring reliability of their services. The scheme for approval/re-approval of OTAs will be rolled out online by the end of this month and all applications and fee payment will have to be made on it. The scheme will set standards towards accreditation and add value to the dependability and reliability to the aggregators in the online space operating in the organised tourism sector. The recognition as an approved OTA will be granted by the ministry for five years, based on the inspection report and recommendations of a committee comprising representatives of The Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) and The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), and approval of the chairman of The Hotel & Restaurant Approval & Classification Committee (HRACC). Such a scheme for accreditation was necessary as letting the market operate unhindered could lead to unscrupulous players to vitiate it through unethical trade practices. In order to engage with the OTAs constructively, it is imperative that a system is put in place with qualitative benchmarks to accredit them. The paramount concern would be the assurance of quality of service delivery for the customer by the OTA.

The guidelines for approval/re-approval of OTAs will ensure that there are adequate safeguards against deficiency of service, alternate arrangements, if needed, and punitive deterrence. The ministry has also stated that homestays and bread and breakfast establishments too need to apply online for accreditation, approval and reapproval.