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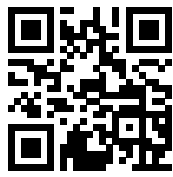
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MOT wraps 2023 with roundtable

Ministry keen on building public private partnerships

Manisha Saxena, Director General, Tourism, Government of India, talks about how public private partnerships (PPP) will be instrumental in developing destinations in the country.



TT Bureau

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (GoI), recently organised a roundtable conference in New Delhi, which aimed to leverage the "immense" potential of India's Tourism Ecosystem. Delegates from various organisations, including NITI

Aayog, UNESCO, UNEP, WTTCII, IUCN, IHMCL, IRCTC, PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry, FHRAI, and international entities like the Intrepid Group. Ministries/Departments from the Central and State Governments, along with representatives from the travel and tourism industry and educational institutes, attended the event.

Underlining the impact of perception on tourism, **V Vidyavathi**, Secretary, Tourism, stressed on managing the perception of tourists. "It's crucial to acknowledge that tourism primarily thrives on perception. Managing perception becomes pivotal. Aligning tourists' expectations with the actual

Contd. on page 10 ►



Manisha Saxena
Director General
Tourism, GoI

Announces iMICE event

MOT's Incredible MICE event, announced at the roundtable conference in New Delhi, aims to elevate India as a MICE destination.



Janice Alyosius

In a move to strengthen India's presence in the global MICE industry, the Ministry of Tourism, organised a roundtable at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi. The event witnessed the convergence of CEOs and senior leaders of industry, who

deliberated on the future of India as a world-class MICE destination. There was palpable excitement for the upcoming Incredible MICE (iMICE) event, which is anticipated to further elevate India's profile as a MICE destination. The roundtable was a direct response to the overwhelming

Contd. on page 7 ►

2023: The year that was

Year 2023 has seen impressive growth for travel industry, thanks to the demand from millennials, high spending power and technology providing the right impetus. **TRAVTALK** takes industry views.



GB Srithar
Regional Director, India, Middle East,
South Asia & Africa, STB

“As Indian travellers made 2023 a big year for exploring the world, Singapore emerged as a top choice. Throughout the year, Indian visitors flew to Singapore from 17 directly connected cities. Till October-end, we had warmly welcomed 887,314 visitors from India, and we will round off the year with more than one million Indians to the City in Nature. This high number can be attributed to factors like the strong socio-cultural ties between the two nations, Singapore's proximity to India, and the appeal of the city's diverse experiences tailored to the preferences of Indian travellers seeking an extraordinary holiday.”

Contd. on page 8 ►

Experts up for India weddings?

Wedding industry shows support to the PM's view on Indian families organising nuptials abroad and appeals to the Union Government to create infrastructure in the country for preventing the trend.



Suhani Sood

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently urged wealthy Indian families going abroad to organise their wedding ceremonies to give up the trend and manage them in India to support the country's economy. Modi also urged people to purchase things made in India. Industry wedding planners, outbound tour operators, and hotel chains extended support to the Prime Minister's view. However, they urged the



Rajeev Jain
Director
Rashi Entertainment

Union government to develop infrastructure in the country, create new destinations and experiences, saying that it will help in the cause. The Union Ministry of Tourism is actively promoting weddings in India through 'I do' campaign.

Industry reaction

Commenting over the issue, **Rajeev Jain**, Director, Rashi Entertainment, said, "We support PM's view on organising weddings in India. It will not only give boost to the

Contd. on page 10 ►



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INFORMATION

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Luxury travel in focus @FITUR 2024

As the travel industry continues to evolve, FITUR stands as a catalyst, steering the course of global tourism towards new horizons. In an interview with **TRAVTALK**, María Valcarce, Managing Director, FITUR, underlines the evolution of Indian market and forecasts luxury travel and sustainability to be the highlight at the event in January 2024.

Janice Alyosius

FITUR will showcase technological trends in tourism booking management systems at 'Travel Technology 2024'. More than 100 global companies will attend the event at IFEMA Madrid from 24-28 January 2024.

The 2023 edition of FITUR witnessed a substantial growth, reflecting a positive trend in global tourism activity. During the event, **María Valcarce**, Managing Director, FITUR, emphasized on business, innovation, sustainability, and collaboration with various segments. Looking ahead to FITUR 2024 from 24-28 Jan, she projected an extensive and innovative edition, anticipating participation from over 9,000 companies, 145 countries, and more than 150,000 industry professionals.

Valcarce highlighted India's robust presence at FITUR 2023,



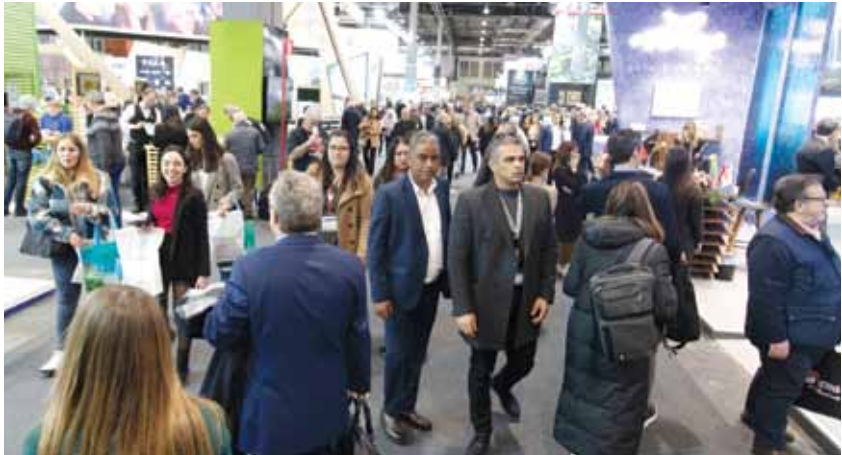
María Valcarce
Managing Director
FITUR

with the Union Ministry of Tourism and multiple government offices and travel agencies showcasing the country's diverse tourism offerings. She underlined the expanded participation of Indian entities, spotlighting regions and significant tour operators. "This 2024, we celebrate that



MOT has grown, complemented by the presence of the offices of Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Telangana

all these exhibitors are back and that, for example, the presence of the Ministry of Tourism has grown, complemented by the presence of the offices of Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. Important tour operators such as Sociedad Geográfica de las Indias, VASCO



Participants at FITUR 2023, organised at IFEMA Madrid, Spain

Travel, Exper Tours, Caper Travel and Shiv Vilas Resorts will also be present," she shared.

Regarding the evolving Indian travel industry, Valcarce observed a transformation fuelled by economic and social factors. Anticipating FITUR 2024, she expects a focus on luxury travel, authentic experiences, sustain-

able tourism, and enhanced technological integration within the industry.

"Tourists are looking for personalized experiences and trips that satisfy their interests and preferences, whether adventure, culture or knowledge of local traditions, for example. India is a destination that offers a variety

of options, and its cultural and heritage richness is immense, as is the beauty of its natural landscapes. It is a dream destination for every traveller and the presentation of the tourism proposals of the different regions of India at FITUR arouses much interest among both professionals and the public visiting the fair at the weekend," she said.





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Another wrap-up

The year started with the Union Ministry of Tourism declaring 2023 as Visit India Year, a campaign that was started to support the momentum expected from India's G20 Presidency in terms of tourism. The country hosted delegates from across the world and showcased various destinations and meeting venues across the country. This included four Tourism Working Group (TWG) meetings followed by a ministerial meeting where the Goa Roadmap for tourism was also released.

Apart from that, the budget and a post-budget seminar promised a number of initiatives, despite TCS being a bone of contention. One such initiative was the Global Tourism Investors Summit. However, the event was postponed and no word has come about it until now. The same goes for the much-hyped National Tourism Board. However, chintan shivir for tourism, regular meetings and events on MICE and industry roundtables are happening to discuss the way forward, while no word is being uttered about overseas promotions, which was delegated to tourism officers sitting in Indian embassies abroad. 'Travel for LIFE' remains the main campaign as of now and we hope it works to create the right buzz about India internationally.

When it comes to international travel, Indians are not shying away from exploring new destinations or getting to know existing destinations in a new way. While visa remained an issue for many destinations, others made it super easy for Indians. The outbound travel potential and spending power of Indians is coveted by all NTOs and everyone wants the share of this pie. This interest is not just limited for leisure travel, but for MICE and weddings segment as well.

All these developments of this year, whether they were positive or not, are building blocks for what happens next year and from what it looks like, it'd be a great year for travel business. We are keeping our fingers crossed.

Indians to make 5bn trips by 2030

Post-pandemic, Indian travellers have grown more discerning and experimental in what they want from a trip and are looking for newer, offbeat destinations and authentic, immersive experiences, often inspired by social media where they get new ideas, finds a study.



Indians are back in action and travelling for work and leisure. Post-pandemic, they have grown more discerning and experimental in what they want from a trip and are looking for newer, offbeat destinations and authentic, immersive experiences, often inspired by social media where they get new ideas and plan their trips, reveals a report 'How India Travels' by Booking.com, prepared in partnership with McKinsey & Company. The report provides invaluable insight into the evolving nature of Indian travellers and the factors that drive this growth.

India leads tourism recovery
Pre COVID-19, Indian travellers spent a total of US \$150 billion on travel marking India as the sixth largest global spender. With a strong economy, a growing middle class and travel-loving youth driving more tourism revenue in India than ever before, it is anticipated that by 2030, total expenditure made by Indian travellers will soar to an impressive US \$410 billion making India the

fourth largest global spender. Due to prolonged travel restrictions, especially in China, Japan and South-East Asia, tourism in Asia remained muted through 2022. India led the way on tourism expenditure recovery in 2022 by reaching 78 per cent of 2019 levels, vis-à-vis 52 per cent for

It is anticipated that by 2030, total expenditure made by Indian travellers will soar to an impressive US \$410 billion making India the fourth largest global spender

Asia. The number of aggregate trips is expected to increase from 2.3 billion in 2019 to a staggering 5 billion in 2030.

How Indians plan to travel
The report reveals an intriguing trait of Indian travellers - with an average window of just 29 days,



Indian travellers showcase remarkable spontaneity in their trip planning, followed by Japan (57 days) and USA (63 days).

Food is priority: While making decisions about the choice of accommodation, Indian travellers take on an unconventional approach. Travellers emphasised culinary convenience, with over 80 per cent of them valuing restaurant and room service options.

There is a surge in demand for alternative accommodation options, such as hostels, campsites, vacation rentals, and chalets.

In 2023, for every night booked at a camp, three nights were booked at villas and 14 nights were booked at guest houses.

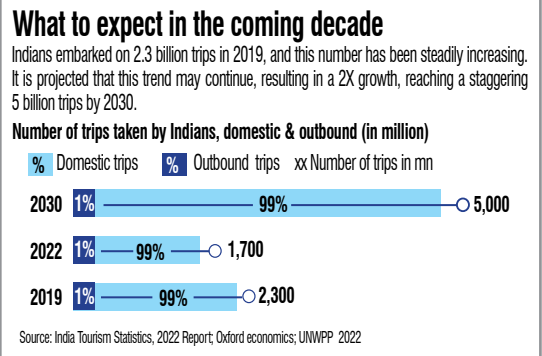
The growth in weekend bookings for alternative accommodation in top leisure and business cities such as Varanasi, Goa, Bangalore, and Delhi are 4 to 5 times higher in 2023 than in 2022.

Where are they travelling
While metropolises have remained top destinations, tier II-III cities like Varanasi, Coimbatore and Kochi are gaining popularity.

A new trend is emerging, where the lesser-known gems are now capturing the wanderlust of travellers seeking a more authentic and one-of-a-kind experience. Cities such as Varanasi, Gurugram and Coimbatore are increasingly showing up in bookings with remarkable growth.

While old favourites like Manali, Shimla and Lonavala remain popular among hilly destinations, offbeat locations like Panchgani, Madikeri and Mount Abu are topping the charts on growth for demand in 2023.

Indians are increasingly looking overseas for their next vacation, with new destinations from Vietnam, Indonesia and Nepal entering the top ranks. Increasing air connectivity is facilitating this.



Tried-and-tested destinations top choice for Indians in 2023

Like in 2022, New Delhi and NCR were the most booked domestic destinations in 2023 on Agoda, an online travel agency catering primarily to consumers in the Asia-Pacific region. For the Indians travelling abroad, Thailand's capital Bangkok leapfrogged Dubai to claim the top spot.

Top domestic destinations		
Rank	2022	2023
1	New Delhi and NCR	New Delhi and NCR
2	Goa	Goa
3	Mumbai	Mumbai
4	Bengaluru	Bengaluru
5	Chennai	Chennai

Top outbound destinations		
Rank	2022	2023
1	Dubai	Bangkok
2	Bangkok	Dubai
3	Bali	Bali
4	Singapore	Singapore
5	Pattaya	Pattaya

(On the basis of Agoda bookings between 1 January – 11 November)

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Industry brainstorms on MICE

► Contd. from page 3

global interest sparked during India's G20 Presidency. The event attempted to capitalize on the successes of the G20 summit, which highlighted India's advanced MICE infrastructure and rich cultural heritage.

V Vidyavathi, Secretary, Tourism, Gol, in her opening remarks, emphasized on three key agendas: Enabling Environment, Policy Regime, and Sustainability. She called upon global agencies and industry leaders to consider their contributions to the tourism ecosystem and how the ministry can enhance the sector, building on the momentum created by India's G20 Presidency.

Rakesh Kumar Verma, Additional Secretary, Tourism, Gol, followed with a comprehensive presentation on the National Strategy for MICE Industry, detailing the vision, mission, goal, and key strategic pillars critical for nurturing and promoting the MICE industry in India.

The roundtable witnessed a collective and insightful contribution from CXOs and senior leaders across the MICE industry, including hotel chains, Professional Conference Organizers (PCOs), and key players in inbound MICE business such as Accor Group, Marriott Hotel Group, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, Jio World Centre, Yasho Bhoomi (Kinexin), Alpcore Network Travel & Conferences Management Company, Radisson Hotel Group South Asia, ICE Incentive Conference & Event Management, and India Exposition Mart.

The diverse feedback emphasized on India's rich cultural and natural diversity as a significant attraction for MICE tourism, while also underlining the untapped potential within the domestic market. Industry representatives recognized India's stature as a knowledge hub, foreseeing its ability to attract a myriad of MICE events across various sectors.

Jyotsna Suri, Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, emphasized on the importance of incentivizing corporations to choose India as a preferred MICE destination. "Most of our weddings and MICE movements are taking place outside India. Particularly for MICE, we now have excellent infrastructure, and I strongly believe that offering a little incentivization to corporates would be immensely beneficial. In the case of weddings in India, it's not just about the ceremony; we require more hotels and improved connectivity to various areas. By promoting the 'I Do' campaign extensively, we



V Vidyavathi and Rakesh Kumar Verma at the roundtable in New Delhi

can start domestically and gradually expand internationally," she said.

Naveen Kundu, Managing Director, Ebixcash, highlighted the necessity for streamlined access to regulatory companies in India. "We handle ap-

lator, addressing the observed trend of sending people abroad. This trend leads to significant losses for the exchequer, particularly concerning the outflow of foreign exchange. Currently, India is experiencing an outflow of \$5.39 billion in foreign

quently, a 'yes' for a convention in 2024 and 2025 here in India might not materialize. Even if it were to happen today, it's likely that I would have already allocated that space to an exhibition or a domestic conference. However, we need to recon-



Jyotsna Suri
Chairperson & Managing Director
The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group



Naveen Kundu
Managing Director
Ebixcash



Puneet Narula
Hospitality Business Head - Convention
& Exhibition Centre, Reliance Industries

Particularly for MICE, we now have excellent infrastructure, and I strongly believe that offering a little incentivization to corporates would be immensely beneficial

proximately 100,000 people in MICE every year. Last year, due to visa unavailability, we conducted 50-55 per cent of these activities in India, and the rest were carried out overseas. This year, 70 per cent of our activities were conducted overseas, with only 30 per cent remaining in India. One critical action that the ministry ought to take is to ensure access to all regulatory companies in India. The ministry should send letters or issue advisories to these companies through the regu-

Last year, due to visa unavailability, we conducted 50-55 per cent (for 55K people) of these (MICE) activities in India, and the rest were carried out overseas

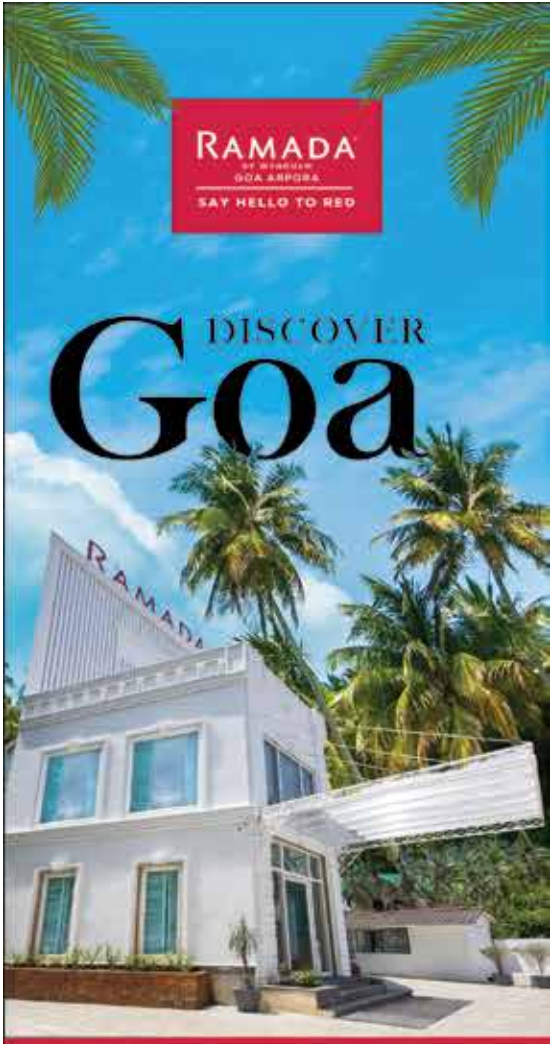
exchange, and tourism alone contributes to 20-30 per cent of this outflow annually."

Puneet Narula, Hospitality Business Head - Convention & Exhibition Centre, Reliance Industries, highlighted the space constraints in India for future conventions. "85-95 per cent of our business in the last year and a half has been exclusively domestic. Someone mentioned that our books might not have enough space, and that holds true. Conse-

In last 1.5 years, 85-95% of our business has been domestic. Someone mentioned that our books might not have enough space, and that holds true

sider our share of the market significantly; this is crucial," Narula said.

Narula also underscored the need for India to leverage its inherent strengths. "We possess a significant opportunity, and India has everyone's attention. However, the convention bureau, like the ICPB or its reinvention, must focus on business development rather than just marketing. They need to take the lead in this aspect," he said.



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Unprecedented demand in 2023

► Contd. from page 3



Daniel D'Souza
President & Country Head - Holidays
SOTC Travel

“This is the era of transformation and FCM is trekking on the same path. The need is not just to innovate but to transform the way we run our businesses across Asia. During the pandemic, we continued to enhance FCM's digital capabilities to improve our client

“Year 2023 witnessed unprecedented travel appetite from customers across segments of multigenerational families, millennials/ young professionals, Gen Z, business and b-leisure travellers, spiritual travellers, honeymooners/ couples, DINKs to explore their favourite destinations – India and international. Indians are now looking at travel as an investment and are ready to spend higher on experiences than pre-pandemic.”



Rakesh Negi
Head of Business Transformation and
Interim Lead, FCM India

experiences. In 2023, we decided to focus on travel management for corporate travel, and globally invested in the FCM meetings & events team.”



Arun Iyer
Secretary, TAFI Western India Chapter &
MD, My Golf Tours

“This year has been a rollercoaster year for us. Business has not been upward compared to 2022 when there was a lot of revenge travel. People have also cut down on their spending this year due to various reasons. Also, the geopolitical issues in various parts of the world

“As we approach the end of 2023, the pace at which the year has unfolded seems almost surreal. December is upon us, and it prompts us to reflect on the remarkable journey we have experienced in the realm of travel and tourism. The restricted visa access to Schengen, the US, and Canada prompted us to explore newer destinations, offering flexible e-visa options or visa on arrival. India's growing economy prompting higher spending.”



Adil Karim
Director, Fly Creative &
Executive Committee Member, OTOAI

have affected the travel business in general. Visas continued to be a challenge for US, Schengen. Our prime focus is on our B2B online portal.”



Jay Kantawala
Chairman, TAFI Western India Chapter &
Founding Partner, WWO Travel

“Year 2023 was very good for our business, we have done extremely well in our hotel division. We have kept a balance of rates. With our business associates i.e. IBT & domestic tour operators, we are the first choice for travellers. We have surpassed all previous figures

“It seems like 2022 brought a surge in travel due to various factors like revenge travel, but 2023 saw a return to more stabilized patterns. Some of the achievements include adaptation to changing circumstances and adapting to the changing dynamics of the travel industry, especially with challenges such as fluctuating travel patterns and visa appointment difficulties. Clients are now planning to secure lower fares.”



Zia Siddiqui
Managing Director
Alliance Hotels & Resorts & ABH Tourism

of business percentage. Once airfare normalizes, India IBT will do much better. 2024-25 is looking very good in terms of business.”



Anuj Bang
Chief Information Officer
Stuba

“2023 was a truly rewarding year for Tourism Australia. India became the first global market to hit pre-COVID levels; arrivals from India for the year-ended September 2023 were 386,000, which were at par with 2019 levels. Total trip spend by Indians for the year ended June 2023

“Year 2023 marked a historic milestone for us with our best year in over 30 years of trading in both sales and profitability and was a testament to our resilience and strategic investments. Our proactive investments during COVID ensured that we emerged stronger than ever. It positioned us favourably for the rebound that exceeded expectations. A bit achievement was 100 per cent adoption of our curated hotels platform, launched last year.”



Nishant Kashikar
Country Manager- India & Gulf
Tourism Australia

was A\$2.2 billion (around ₹12,000 crore). Australia has established itself as a preferred long-haul destination for Indian travellers with its ranking going up.”



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO

“Rail Europe in India has had a fantastic year, and the credit goes to our committed network of GSAs. With over two decades of collaboration, our Indian GSAs form a powerhouse, adeptly utilizing our APIs and showcasing exceptional tech-sav-

“We are at around 40 per cent of our pre-COVID mark and counting. Ministry of Tourism and other policy makers are supporting the cause of tourism and with the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India leading from the front with the G20 Summit and other arsenal, a bright tomorrow awaits us. Some of the tourism niches that will be prevalent in the upcoming years are sustainable tourism, MICE, weddings, and wellness tourism.”



Srijit Nair
General Manager - EMEA & India
Rail Europe

viness. India stands out as a rare market where B2B transactions dominate our business landscape. India has climbed to second position in global turnover, just behind the US.”



Srijana Nepali
Officer, South Asia Unit, Tourism
Marketing & Promotion Department, NTB

“It's impressive to share about the company's journey from its founding in 2022 to its expansion into outbound and events by March 2023. The fact that the business picked up and achieved success indicates growth and potential in the industry. Businesses have focused on enhancing

“Year 2023 for Nepal has been a year of recovery and rebuilding tourism. Our expectation from 2024 is promising. India will always stay as our priority source market and the trend of Indian tourist arrival from 2023 will surge in 2024 for sure. Not only pilgrimage but we will see adventure seekers and nature lovers, including wellness segment. The lifetime experiences offered in Nepal is expected to benefit all kinds of travellers.”



Sachin Sharma
Managing Director
ASCEL Group

safety norms, improving customer communication, and implementing refund policies to address changing customer needs.”

Contd. on page 14 ►

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TourismNews

VFS Global appointed to deliver UK Government visa and passport services in 142 nations

IATA projects civil aviation industry net profits to slightly stabilize in 2024 at US\$25.7 bn

MICE contributes 40% revenue, 8% jobs to tourism, need to focus on developing the sector: Gujarat CM

Bangkok surpasses Dubai in global trips for Indians, Delhi NCR lead domestic travel: Agoda

Event planners exempt from paying 15% VAT on accommodation costs in Mauritius as per new act

Government's endeavour is to have 42 crore people travelling via aeroplane by 2030: Scindia

160 aircraft grounded in India may compromise traffic growth in short term: CAPA

India can contribute \$408 mn in international overnight visitor spend to Queensland by 2032

Need to manage tourists' perception

► Contd. from page 3

experience is vital, which emphasizes the need to focus on building accurate perceptions while ensuring tourist and environment-friendly initiatives," she said.

Manisha Saxena, Director General, Tourism, GoI, in her session, titled 'Travel and Tourism Policy and Enabling Conditions' mentioned that the MOT is in a mission mode for private partnerships. "We are keen towards building more partnerships for tourism promotion in India and the upcoming Incredible India portal, which has seen a beta launch finally. It is an example of how we are tying up with all the private partners to welcome people into India," she said.

She asked industry experts for their perspectives on challenges and opportunities arising with private and government partnerships sector in tourism sector. **Sumitro Kar**, Manager Programme & Communications, WTTC India Initiative, answered, saying, "We should focus on a state which has traditionally seen lesser footfalls and do a private public partnership to develop a couple of destinations, create a marketing plan for them,



Manisha Saxena, Director General, Tourism, GoI, along with other dignitaries, at the Union Ministry of Tourism's roundtable conference in New Delhi

make a way to promote it to international and domestic tourists and create unique pilot projects. WTT-CII would be very happy to partner with MOT for this initiative."

Speaking on promoting lesser-known destinations, **Sameer Bajaj**, Head of Corporate Communications, MakeMyTrip, said, "We need to embrace digital. India has 600 million mobile phone users and 80 per cent of all travel searches happen on mobile phones in the country. Hence, when we talk about a country like India, we need to talk scale.

Firstly, there are solutions to everything. There is programmatic marketing, where we can target a specific traveller who is travelling to a specific destination and nudge him to move away from that destination technologically. Discoverability leads to easier decision making for travellers."

Saxena asked about the challenges in collection of data and the ways to overcome the same. **Karan Mahesh**, Account Manager, Central & South Asia, STR, answered the same, saying, "80 per cent of my money comes from 20 per cent

of my destinations. I am not at all discounting the fact that the other 80 per cent of destinations need to be marketed and improved and focused upon. However, if I am able to make a small change in these 20 per cent of destinations, the return on that investment is going to be 80 per cent more as compared to if I would make big changes in other smaller destinations."

Speaking on steps to ensure that these experiences are consistently delivered at every well-known or lesser-known location being projecting on digital portals,

Kamal Kant Pant, Principal, IHM Pusa, said, "Many people in the days to come would like to try their hands at more things and therefore to interest people, the learning cycles in such situations have to be shortened."

Saxena said that with the trend of employing more local communities, how does the background check happen for companies like MMT. Responding to the same, Bajaj shared, "The way marketplace would work is, if a specific entity doesn't deliver the desired experience, then the ratings go down."

Need better infra for fat weddings

► Contd. from page 3

wedding industry in India but also help the local economy."

However, there are some issues with it. People who have money want to explore new exotic locations; they ask for foreign locations due to lack of infrastructure in India. "There is a strong need for infrastructural improvement (in the country). Monuments such as Purana Qila and India Gate, beaches in Goa, heritage sites in various states should be opened for weddings," he suggested.

Sharing similar sentiments, **Barun Gupta**, General Manager, Expolnn Suites & Convention, also emphasized on the need for better infrastructure in the country. "Identify new areas, exotic locations and experiences, which the industry will definitely support," he said.

Win-win situation for all
Will the organisation of weddings in India affect the outbound business? Gupta said, "There will be no effect on the industry, as everyone is getting their own share of benefits. For example, if wed-

dings will happen in India; hotels will be booked, our infrastructure will be used. People who want to go abroad can keep doing so, but no hotel or venue in India will remain empty just because the weddings will move abroad." **Vikramjeet Sharma**, Founder and Managing Director, Le Florence Weddings, also explained how it is a win-win situation for everyone in the industry. "Weddings in India will increase demand for full-fledged, competent wedding planning agencies, which are well equipped to handle weddings.



Guldeep Singh Sahni
Director
Weldon Tours & Travels



Barun Gupta
General Manager
Expolnn Suites & Convention



Vikramjeet Sharma
Founder and Managing Director
Le Florence Weddings

Hence, it's a win-win for the wedding planners," he said.

Employment generation
Pradippta Biswaas, VP, Ananta Hotels & Resorts, said, "The move will greatly benefit the hospitality business, as more hotels will be needed to cater to the local weddings. This will enhance employment and give impetus to hotel revenues, tourist sites, and up wedding planners' game." **Digvijay Singh**, Director of Sales & Marketing, Alila Fort Bishangarh, said that hosting weddings

locally will go a long way in offering employment to our local talent, creating a bigger economy for various sectors, which will eventually lead to better infrastructure.

Weddings abroad, a concern?
However, there were some concerns over the PM's suggestions. **Guldeep Singh Sahni**, Director, Weldon Tours & Travels, said, "While the leader of any country would like to increase tourism in his own country, having concerns about overseas weddings by the PM definitely sends panic signals

to the wedding tourism industry. The panic is that the government will impose policies to curb overseas weddings."

Sharon Immanuel, Business Head, BMP Weddings, said, "We understand the PM's concerns. However, government can bring policies to promote weddings than those that may hamper international relations. Since it is one's right to select where one wishes to celebrate the big event, it should be a matter of choice not compulsion."



Pradippta Biswaas
Vice President
Ananta Hotels & Resorts



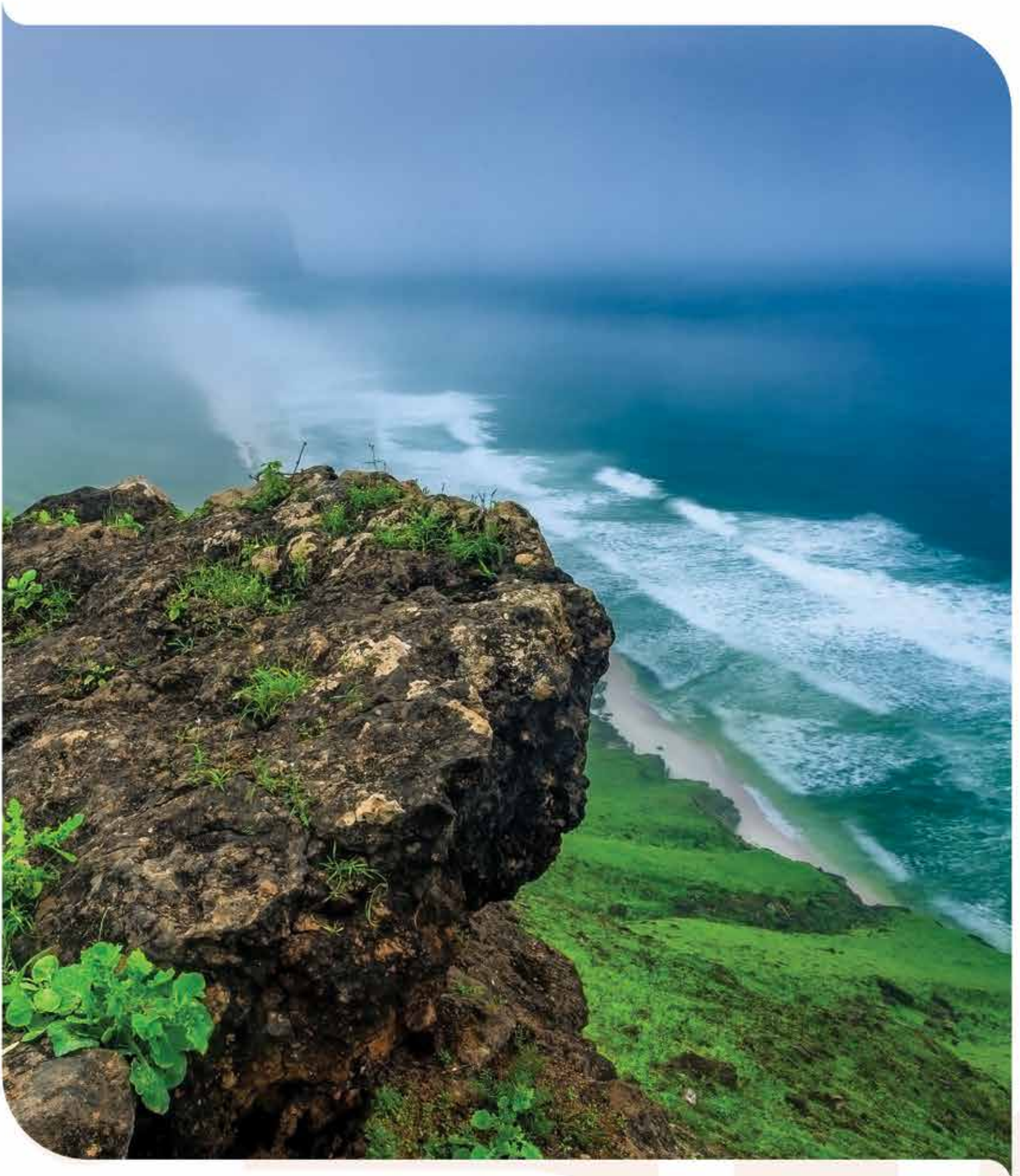
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‘Ease visa to Schengen nations’

As countries around the globe endeavour to make their landscapes and cultures more accessible to Indian travellers, this evolution in visa policies marks a shift in the tourism industry and upholds the collaborative spirit between nations, encouraging a world where exploration goes beyond boundaries.



Arun Iyer
Secretary Western India - TAFI & MD, My Golf Tours

“Indians per se have been identified globally as a high spending group and are being sought by many countries. Tourism boards are conducting roadshows to educate agents and tour operators. Suddenly, we saw a great surge in tourist movements to Vietnam and Japan as Europe was unable to process visas as per demand.”



Anshu Tejuja
Managing Director Ashoka Dream Holidays

“I believe that countries like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa have greatly eased their visa processes for Indian passport holders. It is also all electronic and online; so, it becomes easier for my clients. However, destinations like the USA and Schengen countries need to ease their visa processes.”



Jay Kantawala
Chairman, TAFI Western India Chapter & Founding Partner, WYO Travel

“Several countries have taken steps to ease visa processes for Indian travellers in recent years. Countries like Thailand, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have implemented measures such as visa-on-arrival or e-visa facilities. Thailand has implemented measures like visa-on-arrival and e-visas to attract more Indian tourists.”



Manoj Kumar Tiwari
General Manager Regency Holidays Qatar

“Qatar, known for its opulence and cultural richness, has emerged as an attractive destination for Indian travellers in recent years. It has taken significant measures to facilitate Indian travellers. The visa-free entry to Indian nationals is a testament to Qatar’s commitment to strengthening ties between the two nations.”



Niluh Werdiani
Managing Director Tria Uma Wisata Tours & Travel

“Bali has long been a sought-after destination for travellers worldwide and now increasingly a vacation spot for Indians. However, visa procedures were once seen as a hurdle for Indian tourists. But Bali has transitioned from a cumbersome visa-on-arrival process to a user-friendly e-visa system for Indian travellers.”



Prabhakar Kamath
Assistant Vice President Red Dot Representation

“We manage the issuance of Vietnam visas through an automated system in partnership with Visa’s services in Vietnam. The emphasis on Vietnam’s acknowledgement of the Indian market’s potential and streamlining of visa procedures reflect a concerted effort to promote tourism.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

Queensland connects with Indian trade

Tourism & Events Queensland, along with Department of Tourism, Innovation & Sport, Tourism Australia, and Trade & Investment Queensland, jointly hosted a grand evening in Mumbai for key aviation and trade partners from India, which is its fifth-largest international tourism market. The mission began in Mumbai and continued on to New Delhi.



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McArthurGlen cheers Indian trade

Wrapping up a successful year in the Indian market, McArthurGlen Group honours key tour operators who managed to send a good number of clients, particularly leisure and MICE groups, to their outlets across Europe and Canada. These outlets work well for big groups as the shopping proposition helps in selling packages.



Hazel Jain

Sabina Piacenti, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets, was in India recently to celebrate a successful year in the India market with some of its top performing partners at McArthurGlen Tourism Awards hosted in Mumbai. The company honoured some of its key partners such as Thomas Cook India, SOTC, Ebix, Thrillophilia and Akbar Holidays, for sending an impressive number of visitors to McArthurGlen's 25 designer outlet malls across Europe and Canada. These tour operators introduced shopping opportunities for their clients at McArthurGlen outlets in their European itineraries. Acknowledging their support, Piacenti says, "The travel trade performed well for us this year, which saw the return of tourism after the pandemic. We saw huge numbers at our outlets but India



Sabina Piacenti
International Markets Manager
McArthurGlen Designer Outlets

stands out among the returning markets with tax-free sales figures that doubled our best year 2019. We are here to say our heartfelt thank you to our amazing partners for supporting us."

McArthurGlen saw many different segments from India – from

FITs to leisure groups, and a lot of MICE groups. "This was actually new for us and it was an amazing surprise to cater to such big groups and incentives. Our outlets work well for big

We saw huge numbers at our outlets but India stands out among the returning markets with tax-free sales figures that doubled our best year 2019

groups because the shopping proposition helps in selling their packages. To include a shopping stop at one of our centres means to give your clients the oppor-

MCARTHURGLEN
DESIGNER OUTLETS



(L-R): Sabina Piacenti, Ben Shinde, Deputy General Manager - Products and Contracting SOTC & Harish Chhetri, Head Sales India, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets

tunity to get amazing bargains and with good quality shopping. This is why our travel trade were so happy to include our outlets in their itineraries," she adds.

Moreover, certain times of the year are amazing for shopping at McArthurGlen Designer Outlets. The big sales are in January and February, followed by summer

The company honoured some of its key partners, including Thomas Cook India and SOTC, for sending an impressive number of visitors

sale in July and August, and November that has nearly 10 days of Black Friday discounts that go up to 50 per cent. "So, we have different kinds of discounts all year round. The new year is also looking brilliant for us. We are happy to receive even more guests from India. We believe that air connections have increased, and we will surely see more Indian clients at our European centres," Piacenti says.

'Tis the year of recovery

► Contd. from page 8



Elisa Robles Fraga
Director
Tourism Office of Spain - Mumbai

"In 2023, the Spanish tourism office in India witnessed a resurgence in Indian outbound travel to Spain, with arrivals reaching 193,595 by late November, surpassing 2022 figure of 144,659 after the pandemic-induced decline. This signals a renewed interest among Indians. An emblematic event was a roadshow organised for the travel trade."



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

"Year 2023 has been a very good year for us, with all our DMC offices back to full operations now. Some of our DMC locations have seen phenomenal demand, which includes Egypt, Turkey, Vietnam and Bali, besides Thailand, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Singapore. The year also saw Travstarz getting back as Joint Promotion Partner for Abu Dhabi & Qatar."



Sejo Jose
Managing Director
Marvel Tours

"2023 has been a great year for Marvel Tours. The support we got from all our partners was great. The maximum business we got was FIT and small families, which was unique about this year, as normally we get more of groups. The cruise business really grew a lot and one of the highlights was handling three cruise liners in one day by transporting over 4,500 tourists."



Rajeev Kale
President & Country Head - Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)

"Year 2023 witnessed a resurgence of travel, and this is reiterated in our strong business delivery across leisure and MICE segments. This year also witnessed a dramatic change in consumer behaviours with Indian consumers moving rapidly from a traditional saver to spender, and this has created a significant momentum to travel demand."



Sheetal Munshaw
India Director
Atout France

"This year has been a good year for France with many learnings. On a global level, we have learnt that we must work in close association with our stakeholders to move ahead together. As a company, for the very first time, we reversed our annual meetings with our members from a showcase of a pre-defined action plan to taking the time to engage with them."



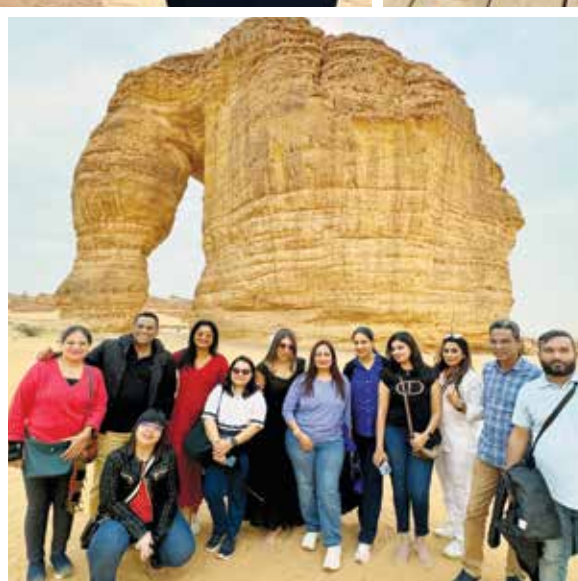
Saurabh Tuteja
Chairman
ETAA North India Chapter

"For ETAA, 2023 was amazing. Domestic tourism was selling like hotcake and will continue. Room rates of hotels have gone up by 50 per cent. The upcoming year looks even more promising and growth oriented. Indian market is a market that cannot be ignored by any country. COVID has taught us to go for staycations, work from hotels to break the monotony."

Contd. on page 17 ►

AIUla: A tapestry of luxury and legacy

The Royal Commission for AIUla India office orchestrated a captivating and bespoke journey expressly designed for Indian travel agents. The journey propelled the idea of AIUla as more than just a destination—as a symbol of a quick, yet profound, luxury getaway. The fusion of history, culture, and opulence converged to create an unforgettable experience for the visitors.



OTOAI showcases Kenya at convention

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) concluded its 5th annual convention at Sarova Stanley, Nairobi, Kenya, from 24-27 November. Members and delegates at the convention not only engaged in B2B sessions but also experienced the wildlife, natural beauty and hospitality of the country during the pre and post-Fam tours organised by the association.



Airlines, hotels win big this year

► Contd. from page 14



Vinay Malhotra
Head of Global Sales
IndiGo

“In 2023, we witnessed India's aviation sector surging at an impressive 8 per cent, solidifying its global standing. The industry's rapid expansion, coupled with the dynamic landscape of diverse destinations, showcases India's dominance in the aviation sector. The world looks towards India as a transformative force. As we navigate through this exhilarating journey, the collective vision is clear — to position India as a significant market.”

“This year saw an increase in occupancy due to additional supply, and a surge in rates driven by high demand. Despite the entry of new hotels, occupancy levels have remained robust; we continued to successfully identify its niche within the business landscape.”



Deepak Kumar
General Manager
Hilton Mumbai International Airport

For us, the segment mix continues to be influenced by domestic corporate clients, with retail and online channels driving the ADR.”



Harmandeep Singh Anand
MD, Global Panorama Showcase
& Jagsons Travels

“It was an excellent year for GPS. We have identified right quality of buyers and exhibitors for our events. At Jagsons Travels, in 2023 we have doubly surpassed the figures we achieved in 2019. Hence, I think it has been a completely upward trajectory and we foresee that moving forward, 2024 would be much better than 2023. There is shortage of trained qualified staff in the industry, but technology is playing a great role in getting business.”

“After COVID, we saw a very high increase in tourists in FY2022-23, but in FY2023-24 we see a little decline in tourist footfall in the region. Hopefully from next year, we will be able to catch up with the numbers. Currently, the domestic tourist footfall has more



Debajit Borah
President, Tour Operators Association of
Assam & Director, Brahmaputra Cruises

than doubled. It is, in fact, 500 per cent more, if you compare it to numbers just after the pandemic. We are looking forward with hope.”



Irshad Dadan
Director & Group CEO
One Above Global

“2019 was the peak year in tourism business, but in 2023 we have seen the size of business crossing all levels. Although COVID had broken our backbones completely, but 2023 has recovered the business. People who have sustained through the pandemic have recovered the losses, all thanks to the right attitude towards tourism and putting in huge effort to grow this market back. We have crossed 2019 figures.”

“We have had a great year in terms of the Indian market, and we have a strong standing. Every time we enter a new year, we try and deepen that standing and this year has been a testimony to the same. There has been a huge focus on driving performance for the hotels.”



Pratima Badhwar
Head of Commercial India
& South Asia, Accor

We have had a record-breaking performance, and it is going to be our best year ever. We have deepened our inroads into the Indian market.”



Dhananjay Saliankar
Head of Sales & Marketing
Fortune Hotels and WelcomHeritage

“This was one of the best years for our business. We have signed new properties, and we are opening around 12 hotels next year as well. We will cross the 50-hotel mark this year with a new opening in December itself. The plan is to open at least 10 hotels every year and we will continue to do that because the market is quite buoyant currently. From the sales point of view, I think it has been an excellent year.”

“2023 was a good year. We look forward to the New Year, but only concern is domestic airfares, as something needs to be done for the same. It is a very important thing, as people prefer packages that we provide as tour operators. However, when they try to book air tickets,



Arijit Purkayastha
Chapter Chairman for North East, ADTOI and
Founder & Director, Koyeli Tours and Travels

they find it expensive than going abroad. As an association, we have some targets. We are going ahead with other states and have more members.”



Alex McEwan
Senior Manager - APAC
Virgin Atlantic

“Year 2023 was another record year for Virgin Atlantic in India, as we flew over 620,000 seats, our highest ever. India is our third largest market globally. We also expanded our partnership with IndiGo this year, which now covers 35 destinations beyond Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, providing comprehensive coverage of this key market. We are grateful to our partners selling Virgin Atlantic and provide support to our customers.”

“Destination weddings and corporate MICE is growing at a rapid pace. Dehradun is an upcoming destination, and at the recent Investment Summit held in Dehradun, the PM also stressed upon 'Wed In India' and encouraged people to promote Uttarakhand. Our wedding



Ajit Singh Gandhi
General Manager
Hyatt Centric Dehradun

specialist shall work closely with the family to deliver the ceremony the family wants, personalized to their need, culture and style.”



Gregg Wafelbakker
General Manager - Asia
Tourism New Zealand

“2023 marked 20 years of Tourism New Zealand's presence in the India market. To celebrate this milestone, we held a special event to thank our trusted Indian partners and pay tribute to the role they played in New Zealand's growth story. We also held frontline training workshops in Mumbai and Delhi where a 20-member delegation consisting of a diverse mix of businesses from New Zealand participated in our first in-market event since 2020.”

“The past year has been an exciting one for CGH Earth. It has been a year filled with profound experiences, transformative learning opportunities, and noteworthy takeaways. One key learning from 2023 has been the importance of adaptability and resilience. After years of COVID-



Michael Dominic
MD and CEO
CGH Earth

induced sufferings, new expectations and new markets are emerging. This success can be attributed to the company's ability.”

Contd. on page 18 ►

1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

EVENT TALK

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DECEMBER 2023

Date	Event	Time
15-17	Tourism Fair Siliguri 2023	1:00 pm
16-19	ATOAI 15 th Annual Convention	10:00 am
18-21	International MICE & Wedding Forum 2023	9:00 am
23-25	India Travel Mart-Chandigarh 2023	9:00 am

JANUARY 2024

5-7	Holiday Expo-Coimbatore 2024	9:00 am
11-12	Accessible Travel and Tourism International Summit 2024	9:00 am
12-14	Tourism Fair Durgapur 2024	1:00 pm
15-20	Outbound Travel Roadshow Delhi 2024	11:00 am
16	VisitBritain Roadshow-Mumbai	10:00 am
18	VisitBritain Roadshow-Ahmedabad	10:00 am
19-21	India International Travel Mart Cochin 2024	11:00 am
19-21	Tourism Fair Nagpur 2024	9:00 am
20-21	Travel MICE and Corporate Show	10:00 am
24-28	FITUR 2024	10:00 am
25-28	Thai International Travel Fair 2024	9:00 am

For more information, contact us at: talk@ddppl.com

Aiming mid-segment growth in NE

With 44 hotels already in its kitty, Lords Hotels & Resorts is set for expansion. COO Pushpendra Bansal says they are aiming 100 properties by 2026. 2023 has been a remarkable year for Lords, but sourcing experienced staff remained a daunting task for the industry, he adds.

Janice Alyosius

With 44 operational hotels in its portfolio, Lords Hotels & Resorts stands poised for a promising future. **Pushpendra Bansal**, COO, Lords Hotels & Resorts, shared valuable insights into the current state of the company and its future. "2023 was a significant year for us, marking a remarkable upsurge of 100 per cent in business compared to the turbulent times during COVID-19," Bansal said.

The occupancy rates, averaging between 70 per cent and 80 per cent, showcased the resilience of leisure destinations, with even city hotels showing exceptional performance. The occupancy figures were achieved despite challenges on weekends.

Acknowledging the ongoing challenge of manpower shortage, Bansal said that sourcing experienced staff remains a daunting task despite the pres-



Pushpendra Bansal
COO
Lords Hotels & Resorts

ence of a sizeable number of hotel management institutes in Surat. "To address this recruitment challenge, we are intensifying our training programmes. We are exploring recruitment from Northeastern and Northern India, where there is an abundance of talent. We are also investing in more trainers. Although, retention remains an issue as trained staff tend to seek other job opportunities, we

anticipate this trend to persist, necessitating more hiring than initially planned. Thus, we need to be prepared to face these challenges head-on," he said.

Lords' focus remains on the mid-segment hotels. "My focus primarily revolves around the mid-segment, as we lack large five-star properties suitable for weddings or major events. While our smaller properties—

Retention remains an issue as trained staff tend to seek other job opportunities, we anticipate this trend to persist, necessitating more hiring than initially planned

around six to eight—already boast of significant bookings, my emphasis remains on the

mid-segment, targeting city hotels in tier II and tier IV cities. We are strengthening our presence in Rajasthan and the Northeast, focusing on the mid-segment, which may cater to backpackers or bike riders," he shared.

Highlighting their expansion plans, Bansal shared, "Unfortunately, we don't cater to international tourists, but our properties in Nepal—three currently operational and a fourth under construction in Kathmandu, featuring 60 rooms and potentially a limited casino—stand testament to our international expansion. We have recently opened a motel in Atlanta, USA, with 46 rooms. We are exploring further expansions in international cities and countries, including an offer from Bhutan."

He added, "Currently, we have a total of 54 signed and contracted properties, with an anticipated increase to over 65 by 2024. My aim is to reach 100 properties in the next three years, both domestically and internationally."

Travel appetite at par with 2019

Contd. from page 17



Mayank Tewari
Co-founder
SanKash

“Year 2023 has been phenomenal for us. At SanKash, we launched several products that helped us grow rapidly. As a team, we were able to integrate technologically across several of our large travel agents, leading to a steep rise in consumer demand. We also launched industry first business lines like zero per cent merchant financing.”



Manoj Kumar Matta
Director
Oriental Vacations and Journeys

“Nepal and Bhutan have witnessed tremendous growth post-pandemic, especially beginning this year. Several initiatives and conferences were done in Nepal for MICE agents, and we handled more than pre-COVID inbound guests in Nepal on behalf of our sub agents. We saw Indians travelling to Bhutan via Phuentsholing.”



Anshu Tejuja
Managing Director
Ashoka Dream Holidays

“In 2023, we learned the paramount importance of agility and adaptability. The travel landscape evolved rapidly, emphasizing the need for flexible strategies and robust crisis management. Customer safety and seamless experiences emerged as non-negotiable priorities. Our primary focus is enhancing the digital customer experience.”



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & MD
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

“In 2023, India's hotel industry witnessed a notable rebound in business travel, especially in domestic commercial sectors, driven by the growth of manufacturing and allied industries. This trend was further augmented by the hosting of various sporting events. Significant revenue gains were also observed from the resurgence of corporate MICE.”



Neil Patil
Founder & Director
Veena World

“Year 2023 has been an incredible year with many learnings for sure! Of all the learnings, I guess, I will sum it up to three things. We saw a large shift in consumer behaviour. A large proportion of the audience is valuing the experience more over the price of a holiday. Europe, despite visa challenges, continues to find favour with Indians.”



Bhavik Sheth
COO
Evoke Experiences

“In 2023, the Indian hotel industry witnessed a significant rebound, with hotel occupancy and average room rates nearing pre-pandemic levels. This rise was driven by a surge in demand from the wedding season, compounded by a recent slowdown in hotel development, which led to a supply-demand imbalance.”

Compiled by Suhani Sood

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Amadeus has appointed **SANDEEP DWIVEDI** as Managing Director – Travel Sellers, India and Subcontinent, where he will oversee Amadeus' commercial activities for travel sellers across the region. Dwivedi takes over responsibilities for India and subcontinent from Ramona Bohwongprasert, SVP, Southeast Asia, Inside Sales & Startups, Travel Sellers, Asia Pacific, Amadeus, who will continue to look after Southeast Asia with an expanded role of Inside Sales & Startups across the entire Asia Pacific region. Bringing decades of travel industry knowledge to Amadeus, Dwivedi has extensive experience most recently as COO for InterGlobe Technology Quotient.



SHERATON GRAND PUNE

Pune

Sheraton Grand Pune has appointed **ZUBIN D SUTARIA** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. He will be responsible for overseeing and strategizing the sales and marketing initiatives. With a distinguished career spanning over 12 years, Sutaria brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the role. In his recent position as Director of Sales & Marketing at Hilton Garden Inn, Pune Hinjewadi, he played a pivotal role in leading the sales team to build enduring, value-based customer relationships. Prior to that, he held key roles with industry giants such as Cushman & Wakefield, Hyatt Hotels Corporation, and Marriott International.



JAISALMER MARRIOTT RESORT & SPA

Jaisalmer

Jaisalmer Marriott Resort & Spa appoints **SHIV BOSE** as the General Manager. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Bose brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role. His journey in the hospitality sector started in 2002. He has worked in leading roles with Le Meridien Nagpur; Courtyard by Marriott Hebbal, Bengaluru; Sheraton Grand Chennai Resort and Spa & Double Tree by Hilton Panjim, Goa. In his new role, Shiv will be responsible for managing the daily operations of the resort, ensuring the highest levels of guest satisfaction and creating memorable experiences for all guests.



FCM

Delhi NCR

FCM has appointed **SUNNY SODHI** as the Managing Director of India. Sodhi has spent more than 26 years in the travel and hospitality industry. He is a seasoned professional with experience establishing businesses and delivering accelerated growth. Previously at OYO, Sodhi was the COO for Luxury and Upscale Business and the Head of Sales for India and Southeast Asia. Before OYO, he was the COO for Yatra for Business (Corporate Travel), a vertical he was instrumental in establishing from the ground up. He was also the Head of Industry Relations for Yatra.com. Sodhi has had successful stints at HRG and CWT India.



PILIBHIT HOUSE - IHCL

Haridwar

Pilibhit House - IHCL SeleQtions has appointed **VIKAS NAGAR** as the Hotel Manager. An influential hotelier with an experience of more than 18 years in luxury hospitality, Nagar is known for his strategic vision, skilled leadership and ability to handle operations of different scales. In the new role, he will be spearheading Pilibhit House's hotel operations, and play a pivotal role in planning and executing strategies. With in-depth knowledge and work experience in culinary operations, he will ensure the highest standards of food and beverage service are being implemented with exciting changes already in line.



THE WESTIN KOLKATA RAJARHAT

Kolkata

JOYDEEP DAS has been appointed to the position of Director of Sales & Marketing at The Westin Kolkata Rajarhat. He will be responsible for nurturing new sales and marketing strategies in order to boost rooms and events sales at the hotel. His primary duties encompass making pricing decisions for both transient and group bookings, creating budgets and forecasts, devising strategies, organising special events to boost sales of rooms and food & beverage, and establishing the hotel as the preferred choice for weddings. During his 14 years of career, he has worked with top hospitality brands, including ITC Hotels.



INTERCONTINENTAL CHENNAI MAHABALIPURAM RESORT

Chennai

GOUSE SHAIK takes up as the Director of Human Resources at InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort. With an illustrious career in the hospitality industry, Shaik is well-prepared to lead HR Operations at the resort. His strategic vision aligns with the brand's commitment to providing a world-class work atmosphere and cultivating a culture of excellence. In his new role, Shaik will concentrate on enhancing the employee experience. His responsibilities encompass talent acquisition and development, employee relations, and implementation of innovative HR strategies.



NOVOTEL VISAKHAPATNAM VARUN BEACH & THE BHEEMILI RESORT

Visakhapatnam

Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach and The Bheemili Resort has appointed **MANALI KHATAVKAR** as the Marketing and Communications Manager. With a strategic vision to amplify the hotels' presence and foster business growth, Khatavkar's seasoned expertise in marketing, digital strategies, PR, and brand management aligns seamlessly with the hotels' objectives. She assumes responsibility for spearheading marketing strategies for both hotels. Her role extends to overseeing media communications among other things.



MAYFAIR TEA RESORT

Siliguri

SUNIL KUMAR PANDA has been appointed as Resort Manager of Mayfair Tea Resort, Siliguri. He has more than 18 years of hospitality experience, having managed premier 5-star luxury hotels and resorts in India and overseas, including Papua New Guinea in the South Pacific region. His career highlights include international exposure, distinguished leadership, expertise in marketing and talent development, and a knack for customizing the guest experience. He has consistently driven large teams to achieve operational excellence and maintained a focus on corporate social responsibility. During his versatile career, he has held various roles, from F&B Manager to GM.



TALKing People

RUBINA SHARMA, EAM Room & Business Development, Eros Hotel, New Delhi, says, "De-stressing for me is a multi-faceted approach that revolves around activities that bring balance and rejuvenation in my life. Engaging in regular workouts, especially running, or hitting the gym. Dancing is another powerful outlet for stress relief. Last but not the least, spending quality time with my family is my ultimate stressbuster. My favourite holiday destination in India is Gulmarg, where the beauty of snow-clad mountains captivates the soul. Internationally, Switzerland steals my heart with its charm."



SANDRA POLO CANUDAS, Commercial Director (Asia & ME), Palladium Hotel Group, de-stress by practising a sport. "I have always played sports since I was a child and the pandemic has given me the opportunity to have a regular schedule. Get some fresh air running meanwhile observing sun going up or down next to the Mediterranean sea is just an incredible boost of energy. Moreover, during the lockdown, I have learned to cook a bit better!" she says. Canudas loves India and says, "During all these years of travelling to India on business, I had the opportunity to visit Jaipur."



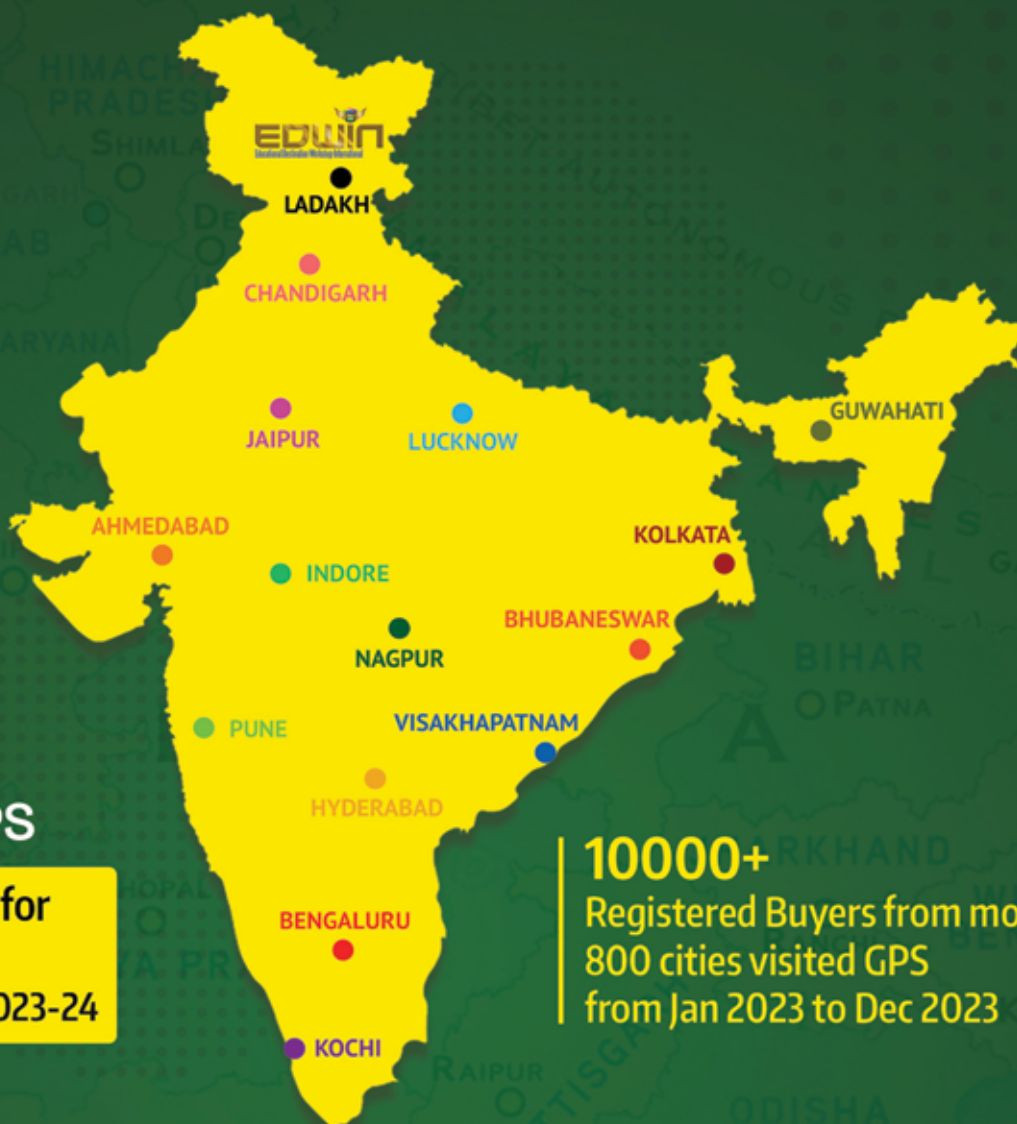
DEBADITYA CHAUDHURY, MD, Chowman, enjoys his visits to Varanasi. "I love its powerful spiritual significance; it is the ultimate pilgrimage spot. There is a sense of peace and calmness in the atmosphere. The environment pleases you to bring out the stress within you. And internationally, it's London. This place holds rich history and culture with its immense iconic sites, magnificent architecture, and amazing food. The museum and galleries amuse me each time I visit. I would definitely count this as my favourite destination. My next holiday will be to Vietnam! Honestly this place inspires me thoroughly," he says.





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Oz eyes Indian M!CE-pie

Robin Mack, Executive General Manager – Commercial & Business Events Australia, Tourism Australia, says the Indian market has largely recovered and is already ahead in terms of spend as compared to 2019 figures.



Nisha Verma

Adelaide buzzed with energy as it hosted Dreamtime 2023, Business Events Australia's signature incentive showcase, which was held after a gap of four years. MICE operators and event planners from India attended the event alongside the delegations from Greater China, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, North America and United Kingdom, to reconnect with Australian industry sellers.

In an exclusive interaction with **Red Bird**, Robin Mack speaks on how the industry has changed since the pandemic and what makes India special. Mack reveals that since the last Dreamtime, held at Perth in December 2019,

there has been a lot of infrastructure development across the country. "Around 200 new hotels have opened across the country during that time, with 20,000 beds being put into the system, which is a good thing. A lot has changed in the last few years as there have been a lot of new developments, and many new things for incentive groups to experience around the country," he says.

India a priority

Claiming that India remains a priority for Australia, Mack explains, "India's connection to major events, particularly the cricket events, is full of passion and enthusiasm. Thus, the travel and incentive group travel around that is different than some of the other groups. In addition, we get huge VFR traffic from India as well and we are seeing great potential and demand from incentive sector too. The connectivity has a role to play in this, which is driven by that demand and appeal for Australia.

"In April-June 2023 quarter v/s April-June 2019, Indian visitors for business events went 73 per cent back in terms of numbers and it's growing. It's faster than some of the markets. The spend is 91 per cent back. Tourism Australia also



appreciates incentive business travel because they spend more than a leisure traveller. However, leisure is already 100 per cent back to pre-pandemic numbers," he informs.

Meeting India demand

Commenting on how Australia is well-equipped to cater to Indian travellers, he shares, "We are blessed as a destination, as we have fantastic DMCs that personalise and meet the objectives

of an incentive planner. We have a dedicated team that supports incentives and assist in visa process, trying to expedite and make it as painless as possible."

Incentives for groups

To attract more Indian groups, Business Events Australia also offers incentives. "We have a Bid Fund Program, which is our venture to support partners in Australia to convert the business and win event bids. It has been going on since 2018. We are accepting applications till 2029. We work with the bureaus and the centres in helping them convert that business and supporting them in their bid process," he shares.

Trade engagements

Business Events Australia also has a great website for resources, including planning tools, tips, destination insights and fact sheets. "We launched a campaign in March 2022 called, 'There's Nothing Like Australia For Business Events' and it was the first time, in a long time, that we have done a dedicated creative for any film, new assets, which focused on incentives," he said.

Dreamtime will now be called Australia Next and will return in September 2024 for an additional event hosted in Cairns, Queensland. The incentive showcase will return to every two years after 2025.

Acknowledging that Indian incentive planners prefer major cities in Australia like Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide, he says that they are also looking beyond and visiting regional ar-

In Apr-Jun 2023 quarter v/s Apr-Jun 2019, Indian visitors for business events went 73 per cent back in terms of numbers. The spend is 91 per cent back



Robin Mack
Executive General Manager – Commercial & Business Events Australia, Tourism Australia

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