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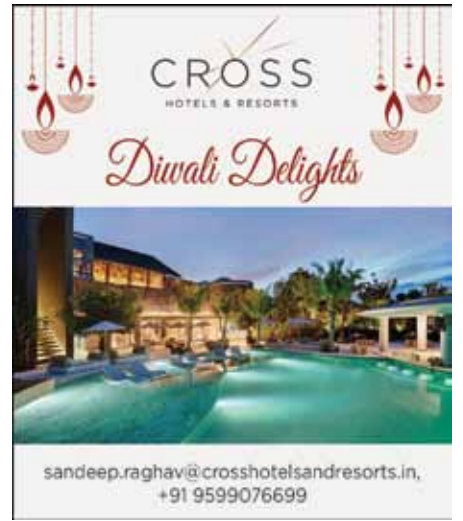
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## India strives for global connect

The Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India, in collaboration with key stakeholders, showcased the rich and vibrant tourism offerings of the country at WTM London 2023.



TT Bureau

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, along with various stakeholders, including tour operators and state tourism departments, made a significant presence at WTM London from 6-8 November 2023. Taking up space of 650 sq.mt., the Incredible India Pavilion at WTM 2023, London show-

cased diverse tourism products and series of transformative experiences for travellers to India under the theme 'Incredible India! Visit India Year 2023'.

The inauguration of the Indian Pavilion was graced by the presence of **V. Vidyavathi**, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, **Vikram Doraiswami**, High Commissioner of India to the UK

and **Rohan Khaunte**, Minister of Tourism, Government of Goa. After the inauguration, the Indian delegation explored the Indian Pavilion and participating state booths. Vidyavathi actively participated in the UNWTO-WTTC Tourism Ministers' Summit focusing on 'Transforming Tourism through Youth and Education' at Elevate Stage. She also interacted with important stakeholders. ➔



Dignitaries at the ribbon cutting ceremony at WTM London

## Looking for new experiences?

Tourists are no more interested in old mundane itineraries and it is critical to amend them depending on the choices and preferences of individuals, suggest industry experts.



**Subhash Goyal**  
Chairman  
STIC Travel Group & Air Charter Group

“ The most popular tours that we are selling are tours where along with sightseeing we are able to provide unique experiences like cycle rickshaw ride in old Delhi, the unique ride in Akshardham Temple, the Sound & Light Show at Red Fort. Similarly, the Aarti in Varanasi, adventure sports like river rafting on the Ganges or water sports in Goa or elephant/ camel rides in Rajasthan, village experience in Punjab or participating in folk dances in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Participating in festivals like Holi, Diwali, Dussehra, Onam, visiting various pandals of Durga Puja are some of the many experiences which foreign tourists coming to India are looking for. ”

Contd. on page 10 ➔

## Global politics at play

Homa Mistry, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India, discusses the impact of geopolitical changes on tourism, with a focus on India. He also highlights emerging trends and challenges faced by tour operators.



Janice Alyosius

The tourism industry is a dynamic sector that is easily impacted by the geopolitical situations and changing customer preferences. **Homa Mistry**, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India, shares the impact of recent geopolitical changes on tourism in specific regions, with focus on India. “India, like many other countries, has experienced the effects of geopolitical situations on its tourism industry. For instance,



**Homa Mistry**  
CEO  
Trail Blazer Tours India

strained relations between India and Canada have resulted in visa problems, which have hindered the flow of tourists between the two countries. Similarly, ongoing issues have led to a decline in the number of Russian tourists visiting India. While these challenges are real, there are positive signs of recovery in other areas, and it is predicted that India will reach at least 80 per cent of the tourism figures from 2020,” he says. Post-COVID, there has

Contd. on page 22 ➔



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# TAFI launches consumer campaign

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has launched a nationwide consumer campaign to create awareness about the benefits of booking through a qualified and authorized travel agent. The campaign, called 'Without a Travel Agent, You're on Your Own', emphasizes on the importance of using an authorised travel professional.

Hazel Jain

Taking a cue from the Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA), the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has recently launched a nationwide consumer campaign to push their cause. **Ajay Prakash**, TAFI National President, said, "We have launched an exciting campaign titled 'Without a Travel Agent, You're on Your Own'. It is aimed at highlighting the pivotal role travel agents play in assisting customers overwhelmed by numerous online options."



Ajay Prakash  
National President  
TAFI

He said that the association had been planning to run the national campaign for educating people about the benefits of dealing with a travel professional. "Australian Federation of Travel Agents (AFTA), which has recently re-branded itself to Australia Travel Industry Association (ATIA), has

now created one big association. They used to have a sticker to identify themselves and stuck it everywhere, including on their car bumpers. The sticker mentioned 'Without a travel agent you are on your own'. And this is a fact. Travellers have discovered



that while booking everything on their own might be great, sometimes they miss out on the fine

**The TAFI campaign is aimed at highlighting the pivotal role travel agents play in assisting customers overwhelmed by numerous online options**

print and get in trouble," Prakash said. "Therefore, it is important that the travelling public is made

aware of the benefits of dealing with a qualified and trusted travel professional," he added. Many consumers think that the services of a travel agents cease once they make a booking but that is a common misconception. When a travel agent is used to book one's travels, if anything goes wrong during the trip, all they have to do is call the travel agent.

Prakash also emphasised on the importance of industry members joining social media platforms such as X to raise awareness about issues that concern the travel and tourism sector.

"Travel agents know the inside scoop. They are professionals who assist with all aspects of travel planning and know exactly what to do when one of their clients are experiencing any type of travelling issues. A good travel agent will truly go the extra mile



for their clients by assisting them with any of their travel needs before, during, and even after their trip is over," Prakash added.

**TAFI calls off convention due to high airfares**  
TAFI has called off its 2023 Convention, which was scheduled to take place onboard Costa Serena from 4-7 November 2023. Prakash said, "We had to call it off on account of the inordinately high airfares from across India into Mumbai."





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TRAVTALK

Published from : India Middle East

VIEWPOINT

Making heads turn

Ministry of Tourism recently participated in full fervour at both ITB Asia as well as WTM London, with senior MOT executives and huge delegations in attendance. Travel for LIFE remained in focus for promotion by the MOT for both events and India was showcased as a sustainable destination and its efforts towards eco-tourism and wildlife tourism were highlighted in both the Asia market as well as the UK market. A lot of attention being given to 'Travel for LiFE' in this season, the country is hoping to revive its inbound numbers back to 2019 and even more. However, apart from a new positive campaign, overseas tourism promotion efforts through embassies need to be boosted as well, and we believe that a combined effort with both public and private stakeholders will create the right impact for a new inbound year.

M!CE-ready for India

India's outbound potential and its worth is no secret for anyone in the world. In fact, Indians' reputation for not just being great travellers, but great spenders is being acknowledged globally. This is being translated into countries, both short-haul and long-haul looking at big numbers from India. Hence, an increased focus on Indian M!CE is being seen. Corporate and incentive groups are leaving no stone unturned in making sure that both new and existing destinations come up with great deals and offerings for them before they make a decision to send a group. NTOs do not just today promote the destination, but also have dedicated wings to promote and attract corporate and business events from India. We recently saw a new destination like Cuba showcasing itself to the Indian travel industry. At the same time, a well-established destination like Australia is making sure that when it comes to M!CE, it is ready to enhance its offerings. It is a great time for Indian M!CE and we look forward to great movements.

Indians willing to spend more

Indians are seeking richer, more fulfilling experiences and are willing to spend more on travel in 2024. Short-haul destinations, food experiences, and sleep health are among important considerations for them, reveals Skyscanner's 'Travel Trends: Redefining value through experience in 2024' report.

Janice Alyosius

Skyscanner, a global site that offers various travel hacks and tools to help travellers find the best deals and destinations based on their preferences and budgets, has released a report, which offers a comprehensive look at the trends and behaviours influencing the travel industry and Indian travellers. The report, titled "Travel Trends: Redefining value through experience in 2024", also combines exclusive flights and hotels data derived from millions of searches, an annual consumer behaviour study, and expert commentary to provide insights into the top travel trends for 2024, along with the 10 most popular trending and best-value destinations.

Commenting on the report, Mohit Joshi, Skyscanner Travel and Destination Expert, said that they conducted the global survey with approximately 18,000 participants, including Indians. "In 2022, we observed a phenomenon known as 'revenge travel', where people eagerly booked holidays. Consequently, we saw a significant surge in travel bookings. What we are observing now is a transition from revenge travel to a more thoughtful approach. This shift is influenced by something known as the 'travel vibe', as Indian consumers have expressed that the ambiance of a destination significantly impacts their travel decisions."

Film and entertainment influence on Indian travellers

According to the report, film and



entertainment have a significant influence on Indian travellers. 94 per cent of Indian travellers are inclined to visit a destination they have seen on the big or small screen.

Additionally, 43 per cent of respondents consider the overall 'vibe' of a destination important when choosing where to go in 2024.

Key travel vibes in India

The report identifies four key travel vibes, and in India set-jetting takes the lead. Set-jetting refers to travellers seeking to immerse themselves in the iconic locations of their favourite shows, embodying the Main Character Energy.

The top destination that Indians are inspired to visit in 2024 is Manali, India, influenced by the movie Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani. This is followed by Ladakh, India, inspired by the movie 3 Idiots. London, United Kingdom, and Paris, France are also popular destinations for Indian travellers, influenced by

Destinations offering best prices to travellers in 2024

Trending	Destination	% Price drop
1	Nice, France	39%
2	Geneva, Switzerland	28%
3	Tokyo, Japan	27%
4	Manama, Bahrain	24%
5	Baku, Azerbaijan	22%
6	Kuwait City, Kuwait	21%
7	Seoul, South Korea	21%
8	Doha, Qatar	20%
9	Dhaka, Bangladesh	20%
10	Johannesburg, South Africa	20%

shows like The Crown and Emily in Paris, respectively.

The report highlights several other travel trends for 2024: Gig Tripping: One-third of Indian travellers (37 per cent) would fly short-haul to see their favourite artist live, and 79 per cent would consider attending a concert overseas to save money.

Budget Bougie Foodies: 59 per cent of Indian travellers have booked a destination based on a restaurant they want to visit. Osaka, Japan, known as the 'kitchen of Japan', is the top destination for foodies on a budget in 2024.

Destination Zzzz: Indian travellers prioritize sleep health and consider visiting the realm of sleep as one of the top activities for their next holiday. Eighty-five per cent of Indian travellers are more mindful of their sleep health today compared to a few years ago, and 66 per cent have report-

43 per cent of respondents in the research consider the overall 'vibe' of a destination important when choosing where to go in 2024

ed improved sleep quality during their holidays.

Commenting on the findings, Joshi said, "The desire to explore and make the best out of holidays with richer, more fulfilling experiences is evident among Indian travellers, as they (63 per cent) are budgeting to spend more on travel in 2024. The strong demand for travel in India coupled with the focus on cultural exploration next year, are reasons why a travel metasearch can bring value to Indian travellers."

The top trending destinations for Indian travellers		
Trending	Destination	% Search increase
1	Da Nang, Vietnam	1141%
2	Almaty, Kazakhstan	501%
3	Baku, Azerbaijan	438%
4	Osaka, Japan	435%
5	Hanoi, Vietnam	396%
6	Krabi, Thailand	390%
7	Budapest, Hungary	371%
8	Mahe Island, Seychelles	356%
9	Auckland, New Zealand	329%
10	Vienna, Austria	316%

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# ‘India top on US visa priority’

The United States Commercial Service partnered with Discover Destinations to organise a tourism networking event in New Delhi recently. The event brought together important players in the US tourism industry and representatives from the Indian travel trade.

Janice Alyosius

The United States Commercial Service, the trade promotion arm of the US Department of Commerce's In-

ternational Trade Administration, partnered with Discover Destinations, an American Destination Management Company, to host a tourism networking event in New Delhi recently. The event featured prominent destinations and tourism stakeholders from the United States, as well as representatives from the Indian travel trade, underscoring the commitment of both governments to bolster travel and tourism exchanges.



Representatives from leading organisations promoting destinations in the United States

Addressing the participants at event, **Brendan Mullarkey**, US Consul General, said, "India is the top priority for the US for visas. Two years ago, as we were emerging

from the pandemic, the situation was very dire in terms of staffing and meeting the demand for people wanting to travel to the US. These individuals were not just seeking leisure trips to Disney World or New York; they were students, workers, and families who had been separated during the pandemic. Therefore, our headquarters decided to prioritize India over nearly every other country in the world. You can see this reflected in the volume of visa applications we are processing." He added, "The only country in the world with a higher volume is Mexico, which is understandable due to our proximity. However, after Mexico, India has the highest volume of visa processing anywhere in the world. To demonstrate the State Department's commitment to prioritizing India, they have significantly increased our staff strength in India."

Mullarkey noted that despite their best efforts, the waiting period for visa applications from first-time travellers from India still hovers around 500 days. To address this challenge the US State De-

partments, and officers are currently being trained and scheduled to arrive," he revealed.

**Umang Malbari**, President, Discover Destinations, highlighted the

**After Mexico (which has higher volume due to proximity with the US) India has the highest volume of visa processing**

– Brendan Mullarkey

partment has agreed to further increase staffing beyond pre-pandemic levels. "In 2024, we already have two approved and funded

company's commitment to retaining its entire staff even during the peak of the pandemic. Through a presentation, Malbari showcased their expansion efforts, including the recent opening of their first office in Canada, located in Toronto, and plans to open an office in Mexico within the next six months. "The US, Canada, and Mexico sector has shown remarkable recovery for us, with the United States leading the way. Many of you are familiar with our key products, such as MICE, Destination Weddings, sports tourism, and fixed departures. Additionally, we have the 2024 T20 Cricket World Cup," Malbari said.

# Maha'tra plans for inbound influx

In order to help inbound tourists plan their itinerary better and entice them to visit Maharashtra, the Tourism Department of Government of Maharashtra has planned to release set dates of all festivals starting with the Mumbai International Festival, which will be held from 20-28 January 2024.

Hazel Jain

Sharing initiatives that the government has started to attract more international tourists into the state, **Radhika Rastogi**, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture Affairs, Government of Maharashtra, said that the state will plan and release set dates of various cultural festivals that the state will host. "We have had various discussions with tour operators who sell India and they gave us really good feedback as to what Maharashtra Tourism can do to increase the state's tourism potential. One of the biggest takeaways for us, and something which we have already imple-



**Radhika Rastogi**  
Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture Affairs, Government of Maharashtra

mented, is that all the inbound tourists plan their itinerary almost

a year or six months in advance. This means we should have events and festivals also planned – at least a year in advance. They suggested we have fixed dates for all our festivals," she said.

Rastogi said that the new schedule will be implemented from the Mumbai International Festival. "This nine-day festival will celebrate the spirit of Mumbai. The first edition will be held during January 20-28, 2024. We will freeze the dates for all the other festivals. So, international travellers can plan their itinerary in advance and get the best of Maharashtra. This year, we had planned for more than 10 festi-

vals. We had two monsoon festivals this year, one firefly festival, which was the first of its kind held in Bhandardara," she said.

Addressing the travel trade partners, Rastogi said that finally tourism is a multi-stakeholder industry and the state government is only a small player. "It is for all of you to come help us and ensure we grow together. At the end of the day, the government has its shortcomings. Because we are slow to change and slow to respond. So, you are in a better position to help since you are on the move and responding to the requirements of the tourists," she added.

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# Cross signs new property in Bali

Cross Hotels & Resorts has signed a hotel management pact with PT. Grha Swahita (BIP Group), which will see Cross Paasha Bali Seminyak become a part of their portfolio from 1 January 2024 to offer one-of-a-kind experience, says Evan Burns, the Country Manager – Indonesia.

Suhani Sood

Cross Paasha Bali Seminyak will join Cross Hotels & Resorts' exclusive portfolio on 1 January 2024, as part of a hotel management agreement signed recently with PT. Grha Swahita (BIP Group).

Talking about the tie-up, **Evan Burns**, Country Manager – Indonesia, Cross Hotels & Resorts, said, "We are very excited to announce that we have a new property in the heart of Seminyak under our Cross portfolio. It is a 99-key property at a strategic location." The property, located at the heart of Seminyak, promises a one-of-a-kind experience. Guests can bask in beachside bliss by day and immerse themselves in an electrifying nightlife scene after sunset. The hotel has an expansive 110 sq.mt. Penthouse Suite by the ocean, making it a perfect space for families and small groups, or even couples.



**Evan Burns**  
Country Manager – Indonesia  
Cross Hotels & Resorts

### Cross Paasha Seminyak's USPs

The hotel is located in one of the most famous streets of Seminyak, called Eat Street, which is popular among Indians due to access of nightclubs, restaurant chains, and beaches in close proximity. Sharing unique selling points of the property, Burns said, "We have sunset all year around, which

is unique to this property. Out buggy service can drop guests to the beach, and other famous highlights of the area, which is

**We are very excited to announce that we have a new property in the heart of Seminyak under our Cross portfolio. It is a 99-key property at a strategic location**

free of charge for our guests. We have teamed up with KU DE TA to give our guests free access to the beach club."

### Understanding Indian needs

India is an important source market for Cross Hotels & Resorts and they know it very well. "We



have left no stone unturned in order to understand and provide best offerings to Indians. For example, a lot of Indian guests love natural beauty; we are a huge tick mark for that criterion. Also, they look for affordable luxury," Burns shared. It is also important for Indians to get that authentic food, and a lot of spices, as they are habitual to it. "You need to understand that certain tastes and preferences might not connect with food and drinks. We are not only doing cross partnerships but also we have access

to authentic Indian food and a lot of vegetarian options. Our chefs are also trained by Indian chefs," he added.

Burns also highlighted the importance of shopping for Indian tourists. "Shopping is and will always be a major criterion for Indians. We have a shopping centre, which is just two minutes of drive from the hotel," he said. Burns mentioned that Cross Hotels and Resorts has nine properties in Bali, under five different brands in the market.

# The adventure that is India

Can India position itself as a top destination for adventure globally? Yes, provided we also rope in insurance and healthcare sectors to offer adventure insurance and Emergency Response Management, opine tourism experts. Without these crucial aspects needed for responsible adventure, it will be tough to package India as a safe and reliable adventure hub.



**Ajay Prakash**  
President  
TAFI

“ We have more than 70 per cent of the Himalayas in our country but that is only one part of it because adventure tourism has many forms. And I think India is uniquely poised to become one of the true adventure capitals of the world. What we need is stringent safety norms.”



**Kinal Pandya**  
CEO  
Orsang Group of Camps & Resorts

“ We conduct eco and adventure tourism in Gujarat. We are running our own eco adventure campsite near the Statue of Unity and we are also country's longest zipline – 2.5kms across the Orsang river. We are looking to connect with travel agents who can promote our products.”



**Dipti Pradhan Thakoor**  
Director, Adventure Holidays and ETAA  
Event Head

“ We promote offbeat India. This includes Leh, Spiti Valley, Assma in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Tripura. Most travellers are now looking for new destinations. Some like to revisit destinations like Kerala but may not like to visit the same circuit.”



**Nishant Patel**  
Director of Tourism, IETO & Managing  
Partner, Kinihara Group

“ Extreme tourism or adventure tourism implies participating in activities that carry a degree of injury/life risk or are taking place at high-risk locations. This trend is picking up, and India is also taking the lead in numbers and coming up with innovative adventures.”



**Subhash Motwani**  
Founder Director  
Namaste Tourism

“ While we already offer a lot of adventure activities internationally, we want to explore what adventure activities can we offer within India that we can include in our portfolio. Within India, we are taking 30-odd runners for the Ladakh marathon, one of the highest altitude marathons.”



**Milind Bhide**  
Chapter Chairman  
West & Central Region, ATOAI

“ We need to promote best practices in adventure tourism business and encourage tour operators to sell adventure. It's a world of networking and we are in a niche business. But the world of media and social media has given a huge boost to adventure.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain



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# Offbeat destinations in demand

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

“Our customers are planning longer trips and showing interest in exploring offbeat destinations. Outdoor activities like hiking, snorkeling and biking trips to destinations as varied as Kashmir, Himachal, Leh Ladakh, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Andaman and South India have become popular. Trends indicate increasing preference for unique accommodations like forts and palaces.”



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

“We have been offering experience-based journeys to our customers for over a decade where we understand the interest and requirements of our clients and then plan a trip accordingly. Rajasthan is one of the most popular Indian destinations and we have recently seen increase in the demand in Vietnam and Japan. Connectivity to Vietnam has improved with direct flights.”



**Neliswa Nkani**  
Hub Head – MEISEA  
South African Tourism

“We are proud to say that contemporary travelers are more conscious of where they spend their money, what kind of accommodation they choose, where they dine, and how they travel locally. We have enhanced efforts to make our itineraries, properties and transport facilities more sustainable. We are also actively showcasing our sustainable product offerings.”



**Mahendra Vakharia**  
EC Member/ Immediate Past President,  
OTOAI & MD, Pathfinders Holiday

“Experiences ranging from adventure such as high-altitude peak hikes, expedition cruise, skydiving, scuba, bungee jumping and off-road touring, wellness and nature-based experiences are a top draw with my clients. Nationally Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, and Himachal are few of the states that are promoting experiences like festivals, homestays, heritage, and culture.”



**Daniel D'Souza**  
President & Country Head, Holidays  
SOTC Travel

“Customers want to open their minds to unique experiences that inspire and enrich them. This mainly comprises unusual destinations away from the mainstream, offbeat and rugged holidays and in-depth exploration of domestic locales. Millennial and young professionals are keen to explore offbeat experiences and outdoor and adventure activities.”



**Ravi Gosain**  
Founder & Managing Director  
Erco Travels

“Destinations with the real experience where you can show them real India, the local culture, food, cuisine will be more prominent and sought after for the foreign tourists. Experience travel is a big budget these days. So, most of the tourists when they come to India, it's not just a normal holiday for them. They want to experience lifestyle, food, culture, everything.”

Contd. on page 12 ►

## BLS op. revenue at ₹407 cr

BLS continues to witness growth in profits driven by improved business mix. Its operational revenue is at ₹407.7 cr in Q2FY24, with highest ever EBITDA in the company's history.

TT Bureau

BLS International Services, a trusted global tech-enabled services partner for governments and citizens, announced its unaudited consolidated financial results for the quarter and six-month period ended 30 September 2023. Among several others, the company processes visa applications for Spain, Italy, Portugal, Germany, Thailand, Hungary, Morocco, India, Vietnam, Malaysia and Slovakia.

**Shikhar Aggarwal**, Joint Managing Director, BLS International Services, said, “We have continued our growth momentum into the second quarter of this fiscal. The company's performance has been in line with the expectations. Despite revenue growth of 14.3 per cent year on year in the quarter, our EBITDA and PAT witnessed robust growth of 52.7 per cent and 60.8 per cent year on year, respectively. Favourable business mix resulted in the expansion of EBITDA margins, which sustained above the 20 per cent mark this quarter.”



**Shikhar Aggarwal**  
Joint Managing Director  
BLS International Services

Aggarwal added, “As key markets are opening up, we expect an increase in the number of visa applications. During the quarter, we

signed up with the Government of Slovakia to offer outsourced visa services. Slovakia is becoming a hot spot for tourists. In addition, we rolled out visa outsourcing centres for Hungary and Italy in various countries. On the digital services front, we tied up with Kotak Mahindra Bank to offer banking correspondence services. Overall, we aim to continue focusing on spreading our reach far and wide with prudent emphasis on organic as well as inorganic growth while striving to maintain our internal rate of return threshold.”

For the quarter ended 30 September 2023, the company's consolidated revenue rose 14.3 per cent YoY to ₹407.7 crore, while operating EBITDA witnessed a growth of 52.7 per cent to ₹86.7 crore.

### Growth drivers

- ❖ Opening up of key geographies for travel & tourism
- ❖ Winning new contracts as well as tenders which are in the pipeline
- ❖ Increasing demand for value-added services
- ❖ Potential Inorganic opportunities in both Visa & Consular and Digital Services segments

## Collaborate to go green

Collaboration with brands that have a shared philosophy of sustainability helps hotels work for sustainable future, says Shruti Shibulal, CEO & Director, Tamara Leisure Experiences.

Hazel Jain

A huge advocate of green hotels, **Shruti Shibulal**, CEO & Director, Tamara Leisure Experiences, shares her perspective on how hotels can be sustainable. “Especially in the post-pandemic world, we have witnessed a significant shift in traveller preferences, one that has made sustainability a decision-driving criteria rather than a bonus or value add, as it used to be. People actively seek out immersive experiences with nature, mind and body wellness, clean food, and offerings that are authentic in terms of aligning with local cuisine, customs, and culture,” she says.

This consumer-driven demand has made sustainable travel a more profitable venture in recent years. It has allowed hoteliers to both expand and experiment with region-specific sustainability across several geographies. Shibulal says that collaborating with brands and initiatives that have a



**Shruti Shibulal**  
CEO & Director  
Tamara Leisure Experiences

shared philosophy of wellness, sustainability and respect for nature helps. “Such collaborations help us elevate our hospitality offerings and create an eco-system of shared learning around sustainability,” she says.

### How much to invest?

Sharing her perspective about the kind of budget hotels should

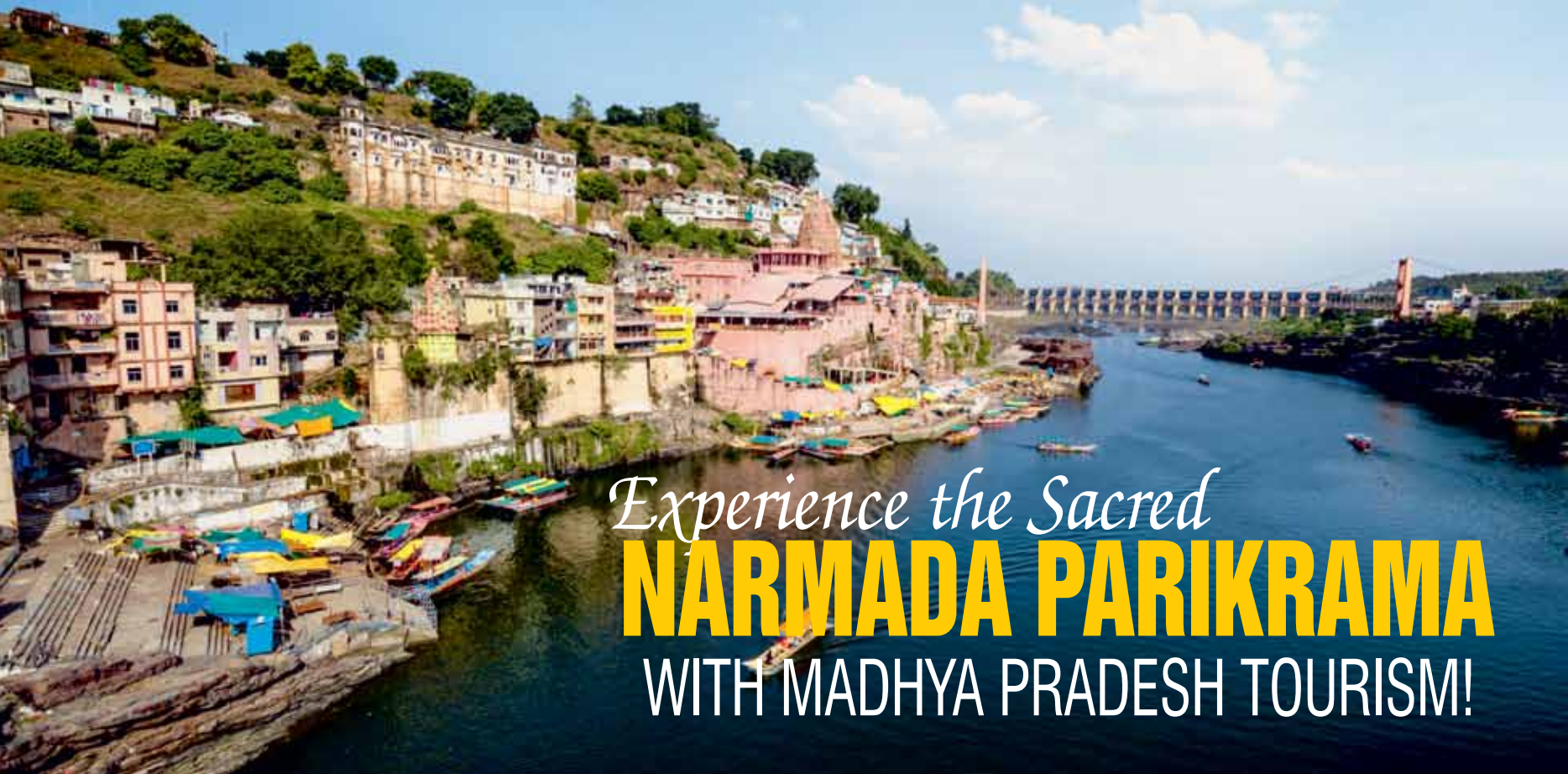
allocate towards being sustainable, Shibulal says, “Strategically, we approach sustainability by embedding it in all our policies and practices. For determining investment, we consider financial

**Such collaborations (to go green) elevate offerings and customer experiences and create an eco-system of shared learning around sustainability**

viability at that particular moment in time, long-term impact, and the alignment of specific initiatives to our brand values.”

She says that typically, sustainable infrastructure will deliver returns on investment between one to five years. ►





# Experience the Sacred NARMADA PARIKRAMA WITH MADHYA PRADESH TOURISM!

A unique opportunity to embark on a transformative spiritual journey along the sacred Narmada River

In the tapestry of Hindu mythology, the Narmada River weaves a sacred narrative that transcends time. Born from the sweat of Lord Shiva's celestial dance (The Tandav), this mystical river embodies purity and spirituality.

Often personified as the goddess Narmada, the water of the river is believed to cleanse the soul and wash away sins. As you embark on your journey along the banks of this revered river, you'll discover a profound connection between nature and spirituality, an experience



that has beckoned pilgrims for generations. Welcome to the enchanting realm of the Narmada, where legends come to life: Welcome to Madhya Pradesh!

Are you ready to embark on a spiritual journey like no other? Madhya Pradesh Tourism invites you to join our exclusive 13-Night/ 14-Day



Narmada Parikrama Tour Package, where you can traverse the holy banks of the Narmada River as it flows through the heart of Madhya Pradesh. Get ready for a soul-enriching adventure that will leave you with memories to cherish for a lifetime.

## Destinations that Awaken the Soul

Our meticulously crafted Narmada Parikrama Tour will take you on a captivating voyage with two flexible itineraries, including the following enchanting destinations.

## Itinerary 1 (Jabalpur to Jabalpur)

Jabalpur – Amarkantak – Mandla – Kareli – Hoshangabad – Omkareshwar – Badwani – Rajpipla – Kathpor – Mithi Talai – Barodra – Jhabua – Maheshwar – Ujjain – Salkanpur – Budni – Jabalpur – Amarkantak

## Itinerary 2 (Indore to Indore and Bhopal to Bhopal)

Indore/ Bhopal – Ujjain – Omkareshwar – Badwani – Rajpipla – Kathpor – Mithi Talai – Jhabua – Mandu – Maheshwar – Salkanpur – Jabalpur

– Amarkantak – Mandla – Kareli – Hoshangabad – Omkareshwar – Indore/ Bhopal

## Activities to Elevate Your Journey

Throughout the Narmada Parikrama Tour, Madhya Pradesh Tourism will facilitate a range of activities to enhance your experience:

**Narmada Aarti:** Witness the mesmerizing Narmada Aarti, a spiritual ritual that will leave you enchanted.

**Boat Rides:** Enjoy peaceful boat rides along the Narmada River, allowing you to connect with nature and spirituality.

**Sightseeing:** Explore all the major pilgrimages of Madhya Pradesh and immerse yourself in their sacredness.

**Worship at Omkareshwar Temple:** Seek blessings at the Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga Temple, a pilgrimage site.



**Holy Dip:** Take a dip in the purifying waters of the Narmada River and cleanse your soul.

**Maheshwar Delight:** Enjoy a sight-seeing tour of Maheshwar, where history and spirituality blend seamlessly. Interact with Rehwa society of weavers and buy authentic Maheshwari silk sarees.

**Madhya Pradesh Tourism invites you to join our exclusive 13-Night/ 14-Day Narmada Parikrama Tour Package, where you can traverse the banks of Narmada**

**Jabalpur City Tour:** Discover the charm of Jabalpur and witness the stunning Kapildhara waterfalls.

**Day Trip to Amarkantak:** Visit the birthplace of the Narmada River and experience its spiritual significance.

**Bhasma Aarti (Optional):** Participate in the sacred Bhasma Aarti at the Mahakaleshwar Temple, a profound spiritual experience and

a must do for any spiritual devotee visiting the place.

## Tailored for All Age and Income Groups

Our Narmada Parikrama Tour is designed to cater to individuals of all age groups and income levels. Whether you're a seasoned traveller or embarking on your first spiritual journey, we ensure that this experience is accessible to all.

## Comfortable Travel

Travel in style and comfort with our well-equipped Semi Luxury AC and NAC buses and sports utility vehicles (Toyota Innova Crysta) that will take you comfortably from one destination to another, ensuring a hassle-free and enjoyable journey.

Don't miss this unique opportunity to embark on a transformative spiritual journey along the sacred Narmada River. Join us on the Narmada Parikrama Tour and let the divinity of Madhya Pradesh's holy sites rejuvenate your soul. Reserve your spot today and prepare for an unforgettable adventure with MP Tourism!

## For booking contact:

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Toll Free - 1800-233-7777





# Experiential travel trending

► Contd. from page 10



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
Sr. VP, ATQAI & Founder & Managing  
Director Holiday Moods Adventure

“Adventure tourism has always been experiential by its own DNA and offerings. Earlier, it was just about hotel booking, transport booking, and exploring already famous destinations or monuments. But today's traveller is not convinced with that. Today's traveller wants good experiences, quality time, amazing local delicacy, and explore the unexplored.”



**Noriah Jaafar**  
Director  
Tourism Malaysia

“We believe that Indian travellers are ready to see and experience new and offbeat destinations. They now like to immerse themselves in destinations and the unique experiences they have to offer. Malaysia offers caving activities such as at Gunung Mulu National Park in Sarawak. Visitors can also experience the longest water slide at Escape Theme Park in Penang.”



**Ritu Sharma**  
Deputy Director  
Switzerland Tourism

“In Lucerne, we urge tourists to explore the city via public transport, on foot, or on bike. There are also multiple hikes or multi-day trekking options or customizable tours in and around the city that take you into the nature's lap. Lucerne also offers Swisstainable-certified eco-friendly establishments across the Lake Lucerne region to suit every taste and budget.”



**Raman Tuli**  
Country Head – Travel Trade  
Travsie

“Experiential travel is one of the latest trends in the travel and tourism industry. Increasing in popularity, this type of tourism is often viewed as 'good', frequently facilitating niche tourism or sustainable tourism endeavours. We have observed that youth aged below 35 years have more liking to experiences and above 35 years look towards sightseeing based holidays.”



**Meha Vashi**  
Director  
Nivalink Holidays

“Clients, especially those who are well travelled, are increasingly opting for experiences whether in India and International destinations. These are centred on craft, culture, cuisine, adventure and heritage. So guests may opt for visiting a craft centre, do a heritage walk, enjoy a local meal, opt for a hike, and look to spend more time with locals or enjoy a sundowner.”



**Punit Bhasin**  
Senior Vice Chairman  
ETAA

“It is very important for the agents to focus on experiential tourism, spiritual, wellness tourism that brings out certain unique experiences. The same old mundane itineraries would not work out anymore. Providing something interesting to the end customer is the key to sustain themselves. In terms of inbound, Rajasthan and Kerala have always been a hit with tourists.”

Contd. on page 22 ►

## Using technology-driven solutions

While travel demand is soaring to unprecedented heights, mobile apps and technology-driven solutions are playing a pivotal role in revolutionizing the industry. Voice Recognition, Bluetooth, Sensors, Virtual Reality, and the IoTs are being harnessed to empower travel agents with increased control and convenience in facilitating travel experiences.

The travel landscape is undergoing a remarkable shift, with FNV Research forecasting a staggering surge in the global online travel market to reach approximately US \$1835.7 billion by 2028. This projection is underpinned by a compelling CAGR of roughly 14.9 per cent between 2022 and 2028. This trend is equally noticeable in the Indian online travel market, where Mordor Intelligence predicts growth from US \$15.60 billion in 2023 to US \$25.69 billion by 2028, showcasing a CAGR of 10.49 per cent during the forecast period. These numbers indicate the profound impact of mobile apps and technology transforming, not only on a global scale, but also in India.

The power of these technologies lies in their ability to offer personalized and convenient services at travellers' fingertips. Mobile apps enable swift booking of tickets, hotels, cabs, tours, and more with a few taps. Beyond transactions, they provide navigation, social media



integration, reviews, discounts, and alerts. These apps allow travellers to get instant support and communicate with travel agents and service providers in real-time, which is a crucial requirement for any traveller.

### Integrating the travel agents

Travel agents are harnessing a range of cutting-edge technologies to significantly enhance their control and convenience in facilitating travel experiences. This is especially evident among OTAs, who are constantly customizing travel experiences for various travellers

simultaneously. For instance, voice recognition enables travel agents to interact with systems naturally, resulting in streamlined tasks and reduced effort. Technologies such as Bluetooth, Beacons and Sensors, enable personalized travel offers and real-time updates based on location.

We have observed that many travel sellers are keen to explore retailing concepts, which are new and innovative through the adoption of technology and social media. This approach has allowed them to serve their customers in a more effi-

cient manner by helping people find their dream travel experience. One standout development is our creation of voice-activated technology, enabling customers to effortlessly search and book travel.

Given the rise of remote work, sustainable travel, and wellness-focused journeys, travel providers should diversify their offerings

### Amadeus helps travel agents

Amadeus provides self-service APIs designed for developers within the travel industry. For travel agents, we offer robust search and booking tools that facilitate agent management and automate back-office

tasks. Our comprehensive travel agency software equips agents to cater to an informed customer base, unlock new market opportunities, safeguard competitive positioning, and optimize revenue streams.

### Strategies to gain client trust

To gain a comprehensive understanding of evolving traveller expectations and tailor services, the travel industry should adopt several strategic approaches. First, a critical factor is the anticipation of diverse traveller needs. To address this, we introduced the Traveler Tribes 2033 report, a comprehensive study aimed at providing nuanced insights into the future of travel. This research delves into the potential transformational forces that will shape travel in the coming years, along with emerging traveller traits, behaviours, and preferences.

The study has identified four distinct 'Traveler Tribes' that are likely to emerge in the next 10 years. Not as homogenous fixed groups, but

signposts to how we, as travellers, may think and act.

Adapting to shifting travel behaviours is equally vital. Given the rise of remote work, sustainable travel, leisure trips, and wellness-focused journeys, travel providers should diversify their offerings. By embracing emerging technologies, the industry can craft impactful and pertinent travel experiences for the times ahead.



**Sreejith AR**  
Senior Director of Engineering, Amadeus

(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)



# Gujarat to host ATOAI convention

ATOAI, in collaboration with the Gujarat government, has set the stage for its 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, which is scheduled to take place at the iconic Statue of Unity from 16-19 December 2023.



Janice Alysius

The 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), in partnership with the Government of Gujarat, is set to unfold at the magnificent Statue of Unity in Gu-

jarat from 16-19 December 2023. The four-day convention will bring together stakeholders from all over India to discuss and celebrate the growth and potential of responsible adventure tourism.

of unity and resilience. Gujarat, with its diverse natural heritage and vibrant traditions, offers a plethora of adventure and exploration opportunities. We believe that hosting the convention at this prestigious location will provide a unique and enriching experience for all attendees,

fostering a spirit of camaraderie and collaboration within the adventure tourism community."

Vaibhav Kala, Vice President & Convention Chair, envisioned the convention as a melting pot for travel conglomerates, government dignitaries, media, and visionary leaders, all converging to shape the future of adventure tourism in India. "Our ambition is to bridge the gap between grassroots operators from India's hinterlands and global adventure tourism stalwarts, fortifying our collective strength," he said.



jarat from 16-19 December 2023. The four-day convention will bring together stakeholders from all over India to discuss and celebrate the growth and potential of responsible adventure tourism.

Ajeet Bajaj, President, ATOAI, highlighted the pre-pandemic global surge in adventure tourism, emphasizing its \$683 billion valuation and a remarkable 21 per cent Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) since 2012. Bajaj sees India's diverse natural heritage positioning it as a global leader in the sector, potentially doubling inbound tourist figures in the next five years through adventure tourism alone. The convention's



**The convention will bring together stakeholders from all over India to discuss and celebrate the growth and potential of responsible adventure tourism**

theme, "Indian Adventure Travel: Exploring New Frontiers", reflects the commitment to sustainable growth and responsible tourism practices.

Hareet Shukla (IAS), Secretary Tourism, Government of Gujarat said, "We are thrilled to extend a warm and heartfelt invitation to the esteemed members of the ATOAI to grace the iconic Statue of Unity in Gujarat for their annual convention. This monumental statue, standing as a tribute to the great Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, is not just a testament to our rich history and cultural heritage, but also a symbol



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# Tourism education takes centre

Tourism education takes spotlight at WTM London as global leaders discuss its significance. The Indian Pavilion's formal inauguration at the event featured V.Vidyavathi, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and H.E. Vikram Doraiswami, High Commissioner of India to the UK, in the presence of Rohan Khaunte, Minister of Tourism, Government of Goa.





# stage @WTM London 2023





# India #2 in turnover for Swiss

Fausto Zaina, Head of Market Management, Swiss Travel System, was in India recently to meet important travel partners. He revealed that not only does India rank number two for them in terms of turnover, but it is also the number one market for its Swiss Travel System Excellence training programme.



Hazel Jain

Switzerland popularity among India travellers goes back decades and the destination is only gaining popularity. Only now, Indians are evolving into better travellers. This reflects in the rising popularity of the Swiss Travel Pass. **Fausto Zaina**, Head of Markets, Swiss Travel System, was in India recently meeting key trade partners in Mumbai and New Delhi. He shared some interesting insights with TravTalk. He said, "We have seen a continuous rise in bookings on Swiss Travel System from the India market. We recorded an increase of more than 10 per cent in terms of turnover from January to August 2023 as compared to the same period in 2019. We are already above 2019 levels which is amazing! The overall turnover out of the Indian market before the pandemic – this is overall for Swiss



**Fausto Zaina**  
Head of Markets  
Swiss Travel System

Travel System products and our core product the Swiss Travel Pass – was 19 million Swiss Francs. We expect this to end up 21 million – going above 20 million for the first time."

He added that India is now the number two market worldwide

in terms of Swiss Travel System turnover, and only behind the USA. "US is the strongest market for us right now and there is a pretty big gap between USA and India. But this can change dramatically from one year to the other. So, I expect the gap to close up in the coming years," Zaina said.

## India an important market

India has always been an important market for Swiss Travel System. "We have invested a lot in the past in India. The base of this popularity in the India market comes from strong continuing work before the pandemic from our side. We have relied on the travel trade for many years, and we invest in the local travel trade and local promotion in India since many years. This is paying off well for us now. Even during the pandemic, we never left the India market and were always in touch with our trade

partners here. And we were right there after the pandemic in 2021 with training and marketing," Zaina said.

## Expanding travel segments

The Swiss travel Pass historically targets more FITs. However,

**US is the strongest market for us and there is a pretty big gap between USA and India. But this can change dramatically from one year to the other**

Zaina added, "But nowadays we see smaller groups of about 20-40-odd pax that could also travel with the Swiss Travel Pass by



train. They are looking for a more sustainable travel option and want a different way of travelling – the Swiss way of travel – where they can interact with the local people. This will be travelling by train bus and boat in Switzerland. So, we will now push to smaller groups to travel by train because we have luggage transport solutions in term of same day, door-to-door service. So, groups don't need to carry their luggage around if they don't have a coach waiting for them."

Zaina is also excited about the Swiss Travel System Excellence Program – an award-winning programme and the only e-learning programme in the world that covers the entire public transport system of a single country. He said, "It is very popular in India; the number one market by agent registration and completing the training programme is actually India! We relied on India travel trade in the past and we continue to rely for your support."

# Focus on tier II, III cities: Lords

Lords Hotels & Resorts is one of the fastest growing mid-segment chains in India & Nepal. Aiming for global expansion, the group wants to spread its services to Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Muscat, Dubai, Africa, and US. Shiladitya Mukherjee, Associate Vice President, Gujarat Region, Lords Hotels & Resorts, shares Lords' agenda for 2024.



Suhani Sood

Lords Hotels & Resorts is one of the fastest growing mid-segment hotel chains in India and Nepal. The hotel chain constantly strives for excellence, and perfect convergence of traditional values and modern hospitality. The group started in the Western Zone of India and now has around 22 hotels in Gujarat itself.

The hotel chain has already signed a couple of hotels in the North and East, and focusing on expanding the Eastern and Northeastern fronts. It is also planning to open hotels in international locations like Africa, Dubai, and United States.

Sharing future strategy of the hotel chain, **Shiladitya Mukherjee**, Associate Vice President – Gujarat Region, Lords Hotels & Resorts, said, "We are increasing our visibility in tier II and tier



**Shiladitya Mukherjee**  
Associate Vice President  
Gujarat Region, Lords Hotels & Resorts

III cities, and the metro cities as well. We have it in Bengaluru. We are exploring Kolkata and other places. We are increasing our hotel count pan-India. We are also going for brand digitalization."

## Collabs must for competitive edge

The hospitality sector has competition, it is necessary to monitor it continuously, and

adapt accordingly. Mukherjee said that they analyze the customer preferences and adapt to their services accordingly. They

**We are increasing our visibility in tier II and tier III cities, and the metro cities as well. We have it in Bengaluru. We are exploring Kolkata and other places**

are also trying to participate in various industry association conferences in travel and trade fairs, international and domestic as well.

"Notable collaborations are a must for gaining a competitive edge, and we have recently



signed up with one of the best channel managers with one of their premium products, which will give us an edge ahead of our competition," he said.

## Tailor-made packages for clients

The hotel chain is in close participation with the travel and trade associations. "We are

here to create. We are creating different partnerships, packages, and tailor-made packages with the travel agencies to give our customers the best services," Mukherjee shared.

## Post-COVID revenge travel

After the setback triggered by the pandemic, travel and

tourism recovered at rapid pace in the following years. Mukherjee said, "Last year, it was a revenge tourism for all of us. We have seen it. People were travelling wherever they wished to go; domestic tourism boomed a lot. We all benefited from it. The airline sector, the hospitality sector, and everyone."



# MTF Cricket Premier League returns

The MTF Cricket Premier League is back for a second season bringing with it some new players from the trade. The player auction was held at NSCI Worli in Mumbai on 29 October and the matches will be organised from 14 January 2024. The organisers believe that the event is not just a cricketing extravaganza but a celebration of sportsmanship & excellence in the travel industry.





# Now, fly Mumbai to Baku direct

Azerbaijan Airlines brings Mumbai closer to the destination with a direct, three-times-a-week flight from the city into Baku, and beyond to London and other European cities. It is a full services airline operating on 757 with a total seat capacity of 180, which includes 22 business class and 158 economy class seats.



Hazel Jain

After starting direct flights from Baku into Delhi, Azerbaijan Airlines is now flying directly into Mumbai, announces **Vishal Sharma**, Managing Director, Zeal Global Services

"We now have a total of six departures from India into Baku with this launch starting from 29 October 2023. The frequency is three times a week taking off every Monday, Wednesday and Saturday from Mumbai. It is

a full services airline operating on 757 with a total seat capacity of 180. This includes 22 business class and 158 economy class seats."

With this new direct route, passengers from Mumbai and surrounding regions can now enjoy the convenience of a four-hour non-stop flight to Baku. The Delhi route was launched in April 2023 with three flights a week.

Sharma says that the load factor from Delhi is touching almost

90 per cent today. "We have different traveller segments on our flights from senior citizens, families, solo women travel-



**We also fly beyond Baku to Georgia (Tbilisi), and major cities in Europe like Milan, Berlin, Vienna, London, and other CIS countries**

lers, to HNIs. Vegetarian food is easily available in Baku and it's a wonderful destination for everyone. We also fly beyond Baku to Georgia (Tbilisi), and many major cities in Europe like Milan, Berlin, Vienna, London, and to other CIS countries," Sharma adds.



Key travel agents meet the Azerbaijan Airlines team at the launch event in Mumbai

Azerbaijan Airlines is also offering a limited time offer to travellers from Mumbai. The Companion Free offer includes a second seat for free and is valid until 13 November 2023. Zeal Global is primarily a cargo GSSA company and is now diversifying into the passenger side with Azerbaijan Airlines.

To reaffirm India's potential as a key source market, the Azerbaijan Tourism Board recently concluded a successful three-city destination

seminar for travel trade partners in New Delhi, Bangalore, and Mumbai. It should be noted that during January-September 2023, the number

of visitors from India to Azerbaijan was 77,379 people, a 115 per cent increase compared to the same period last year.

## Azerbaijan destination partner of WTTC

Azerbaijan has been selected as the official destination partner of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC). It was decided in a meeting between **Fuad Nagiyev**, chairman of the State Tourism Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan, and **Julia Simpson**, President and CEO of WTTC. They also discussed the prospects of promoting the country as a new tourist destination. Being a partner country, Azerbaijan is also a member of the 'Sustainable Basics' programme of the WTTC, which includes 12 main activities for hotels.



Azerbaijan Airlines team showcases the product to the travel trade

# TAFI members learn about ChatGPT

The TAFI Western India Chapter organised a session titled 'Unlocking the Future with ChatGPT' to provide members with valuable insights into the potential of artificial intelligence in tourism. The session was conducted by AI marketing pioneer Neeraj Shah, who showcased live examples of how ChatGPT technology has the potential to be a game-changer in the business.







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# Cozmo eyes tier II, III markets

In order to grow its network of business-to-business travel agents, Cozmo Travel has been eying the potential that tier II and III cities offer in India. The company has now diversified its focus to include holiday packages, as well as corporate travel, and invites these agents to be part of the Cozmo family.

 Hazel Jain

**S**antosh Kanchan, Country Head – India, Cozmo Travel, is excited about its renewed focus on holiday packages and corporate travel. Explaining the reason behind this, he says, “We are looking at changing our entire product segmentation. No business can rely on just one business and the pandemic has taught us that. So, we want to expand our focus from just visas to corporate travel, global visas, and holiday packages. We have a global visa portal for travel agents. We also have an online tool called TravTrolley, which allows corporate clients to issue tickets on their own.”

## Exceptional service to agents

Highlighting the renewed focus on holiday packages, Kanchan adds, “We are focusing on packages where we have our own offices. These includes Dubai,



**Santosh Kanchan**  
Country Head – India  
Cozmo Travel

Egypt, Oman, Jordan, Armenia, and Georgia. All our offices are headed by a country manager, who is from that country, which gives Cozmo an advantage when it comes to promoting that destination to B2B agents. Therefore, we don’t call ourselves a DMC. There will be cross-promotion

and we will promote India holiday packages in these other destinations where we have offices.” Explaining why this will give Cozmo an advantage, he adds, “We will not work with third-party vendors, but with our own people and our own team at these destinations. This will assure our travel agents the guarantee of great service for their clients.”

The company has a presence in more than 30 cities in 11 countries, including India.

## Agent network in tier cities

Cozmo Travel is also looking to grow its travel agent network, especially in tier II and tier III cities. “Agents in these cities need a quality brand they can trust on, and agents already know of us. Service and trust are our most important traits. My request to all our agents is – don’t focus too much on the cost. Look at the



Staff at Cozmo Travel's new office in Mumbai

service and quality. It’s a huge market, and everyone will get their share. Compete with good service, not cost,” he explains. Another important focus for Cozmo Travel is the bottom line. “Our focus now is very clear – the bottom line. Pre-COVID, our focus was on top line but the pandemic showed us that the top line can vanish. That is when we realized that the bottom line – the

revenue – is the most important aspect in business. If we are making revenue in any segment, we will keep it. If we are not, we will not think twice before exiting it,” Kanchan states.

Cozmo Travel recently further invested in the India market by opening a new office in Mumbai. Deepa Rajesh, Director– Sales & BD, Cozmo Travel, based in the

UAE, says, “We have also strategically consolidated our operations and finance from the new office in Mumbai. The India market is not easy; it’s a very competitive market. But competition keeps us going. We are trying to be part of COP28 UAE, which is taking place from 30 November to 13 December. Like every big player we are trying to get a small piece of pie in the segment.”

# Ajman shows readiness for India

Ajman Department of Tourism Development (ADTD) recently completed a three-city networking evening series in India aimed at promoting travel and tourism opportunities in Ajman. The events took place in Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai. H.E. Mahmood Khaleel Alhashmi, Director General, ADTD, attended all the three events.





# Thai-inspired stay with Nepali taste

Nestled in the lap of the Himalayas, Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort Dhulikhel is a captivating property that combines Thai-inspired hospitality with local culture. Opening its doors to customers in July 2023, the resort has tasted success and plans to expand its event facilities to cater to the wedding and MICE segments.

Janice Alyosius

Situated close to Namobuddha Monastery in the Himalayas, Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort Dhulikhel combines Dusit's unique brand of Thai-inspired gracious hospitality with local culture and traditions. Translated from Thai, Dusit Thani means "Town in Heaven" and, true to its name, the resort, managed by Dusit International, is a testament to the captivating charm of its surroundings, where nature and heritage unite to create an unforgettable experience.



**Kris Panya**  
General Manager, Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort Dhulikhel, Nepal

Sharing insights about the demography of visitors at the resort, **Kris Panya**, General Manager, Dusit Thani Himalayan Resort Dhulikhel, Nepal, says, "Indians represent a significant proportion of our guests. They predominantly originate from the following market segments, i.e., leisure travellers seeking a serene getaway, honeymooners looking

for a romantic escape, wellness and spa enthusiasts, adventure and nature enthusiasts who want to explore the beautiful trails and Himalayan region."

While the resort caters to the luxury segment, Panya unveils plans to explore other segments also. "While our primary focus

is on the luxury segment, we do have plans to explore other segments such as weddings and MICE. We offer state of the art conference facilities and beautiful event venues, making us an ideal destination for weddings

**While our primary focus is on the luxury segment, we do have plans to explore other segments such as weddings and MICE. We offer state of the art meeting facilities**

and corporate events," he says. "Our Lumpini Ballroom offers an exceptional setting, featuring a spacious 226 sq.mt. interior, an adjoining 65 sq.mt. terrace, and a 100 sq.mt. pre-function area,



suitable for versatile events. The outdoor lawn provides a picturesque setting for events, with the breathtaking mountains as a backdrop - perfect for destination weddings," he adds.

One of the highlights of the resort is its diverse range of dining offerings, featuring authentic Indian cuisine and flavours. "We have expert chefs who specialise in

various regional Indian cuisines, and we source high-quality ingredients to ensure an authentic dining experience. Our menus feature popular Indian dishes, and we also cater to specific dietary preferences and requirements," Panya informs.

The resort offers a range of experiences both within and beyond its premises. Guests can embark on

serene hikes to visit the revered Namo Buddha Monastery, known for its spiritual significance. The picturesque local villages and countryside can be explored through scenic trails, including destinations like Balthali, Panauti, and Dhulikhel. For those interested in history, the historical treasures of Bhaktapur Durbar Square, located just 20 km away from the resort, await exploration.

## Blending luxury with Nature

Nestled within a 20-acre expanse adjacent to a 2,000-acre reserved forest, Grape County Eco-Resort is a harmonious blend of luxury and nature. Tejas Chavan, Director, Grape County Eco-Resort and Viveda Wellness, shares insights into their sustainability commitment, highlighting the resort's water conservation efforts benefiting the environment and wildlife.

Janice Alyosius

Grape County Eco-Resort, nestled on a 20-acre landscape adjacent to a 2,000-acre reserved forest land, isn't just for relaxing; it's also a great example of how luxury and nature can go together peacefully. Established in December 2016, Grape County's guiding philosophy is "Co-Exist with Nature", and this mantra permeates every aspect of its operation.

**Tejas Chavan**, Director, Grape County Eco-Resort and Viveda Wellness, says that sustainability is deeply rooted in the resort's core values. "The core of our functioning is centred around 'Nature'. We believe that Nature always takes care of us, so we need to take care of it. Our commitment to everything nature-friendly can be seen in our ambition to always lookout for innovative and sustainable options. We take pride in our employees



**Tejas Chavan**  
Director, Grape County Eco-Resort and Viveda Wellness

and all the members of our team in their enthusiasm towards sustainability," he says.

The resort has been awarded for its innovative sustainability efforts over the years. Notable accolades include the 5-star rating by The Energy Research Institution, Delhi (TERI), the Best Renewable Energy Utilization award, the "Va-

nashree Award" for planting over 35,000 trees, and the "Vasundhara Award 2019".

In line with its sustainability goals, Grape County has implemented several water conservation initiatives. "We have intro-

**Key aspect of Grape County's water reservation efforts is the creation of three man-made lakes on their property, boasting storage of 21 cr litres of water**

duced water-efficient plumbing fixtures, including dual-flush water closets, low-flow aerator faucets, low-flow showerheads, and



sensor urinals to minimize water wastage. These fixtures have significantly reduced water consumption," Chavan highlights.

However, the most remarkable aspect of Grape County's water reservation efforts is the creation of three man-made lakes on their property, boasting a total storage capacity of approximately 21 crore litres of water. "In addi-

tion to the three man-made lakes on our property, we have built several ponds and wells on the property for rainwater harvesting. This collected water is used for irrigating our plants. Furthermore, the percolated water has raised the groundwater level in the region, enhancing soil quality and supporting the thriving flora and fauna. The lakes have also attracted numerous migrating

birds, and various fish species are flourishing in the ecosystem," he tells.

Grape County's lakes alone have saved a staggering amount of water, with Lake 3 leading the way by conserving 5.5 crore litres. The positive impact of Grape County's water conservation efforts extends beyond the resort's boundaries.



<div> <div># 1 IN CIRCULATION &amp; READERSHIP</div> <div>SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY</div> </div>		
<div> <div>EVENT TALK</div> <div>Published from : <span>India</span> <span>Middle East</span></div> </div>		
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NOVEMBER 2023		
Date	Event	Time
16-17	UNWTO International Conference on Accessible Tourism 2023	10:00 am
16-19	Peru Travel Mart 2023	10:00 am
19-21	VisitBritain Roadshow- Delhi	10:00 am
21	Czech Travel Market 2023	9:00 am
20-22	Qatar Travel Mart 2023	9:00 am
21-23	International Tourism Mart (ITM)- Shillong	10:00 am
22-23	GPS-Kolkata	10:00 am
23-25	India Travel Mart 2023	9:00 am
24	Rajasthan MSME Conclave	9:00 am
24-27	OTOAI Convention	10:00 am
24-26	India International Travel Mart Pune 2023	11:00 am
30-2 Dec	International Fair of Tourism 2023	9:00 am
DECEMBER 2023		
1-3	IITM Hyderabad 2023	11:00 am
5-6	GPS-Guwahati	10:00 am
8-10	India Travel Mart 2023-Lucknow	9:00 am
16-19	ATOAI 15 <sup>th</sup> Annual Convention	10:00 am
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# LATAM woos Indian flyers

LATAM Airlines is deeply involved in the India market and is making strong efforts to engage with the travel trade here to promote the airline and South America, which is an upcoming destination for Indian travellers.



Hazel Jain

**E**duardo Patta, Sales Manager Asia, LATAM Airlines Group, was in India recently to meet the travel trade and showcase the airline and its network in South America. InterGlobe Air Transport, GSA for LATAM Airlines Group in India, organised a B2B workshop in New Delhi and Mumbai. Patta said, "In the near future, we plan to replicate this in other cities, as well as in tier cities in India, as it is important to reach the agents from these cities as well. I can see a lot of potential there."

**Mariana Tagwerker**, Sales Executive-Asia, LATAM Airlines Group, was also present at the events.

## Interline partners key

The primary objective of these workshops was to showcase LATAM's wide-ranging product offerings, the extensive route network, and the unparalleled connectivity from India to South America. One of the key aspects emphasized during the



The LATAM Airlines team, led by Eduardo Patta, meets key travel agencies in Mumbai and showcases its product and offerings

workshops was LATAM Airlines' strategic use of interline partners. This approach allows passengers to easily reach LATAM's gateways in Europe and the USA, connecting them to various destinations across Latin America.

Patta added, "We are very active in the India market despite being an offline product. We have an extensive offering, and we fly to more than 144 destinations. From India, we fly with our interline partners to London, Frankfurt, and Paris and onwards on LATAM Airlines

to connect to all South America via Sao Paulo. From 2 December 2023, we are launching direct flights from London to Lima."

## Corporate and leisure traffic

The airline sees a lot of corporate and leisure traffic from India. "Leisure is a segment that is growing, and people are showing interest in visiting south America; we see honeymooners and the young travellers. We are also hoping to announce a new codeshare from India to one of our gateways in Europe that will

be very useful for our guests from India, especially Delhi and Mumbai. We are just waiting for the approvals for this to come in," Patta revealed.

The Embassy of Peru played a pivotal role in the success of the two-city workshops, actively participating in the event and promoting Peru as a popular destination for Indian travellers. Furthermore, they highlighted the seamless connectivity LATAM Airlines Group offers to travellers planning to visit South America from India. 🇵🇪

## India sought-after destination

Contd. from page 12



**Kartik Gaggar**  
CEO, Founder  
Slo Mo Experiences

“India is becoming a highly sought after experiential destination. Just looking at the Instagram content - the Himalayan region has been covered (post pandemic) with a remarkable increase of newer destinations and unexplored places. This includes Ladakh, Uttarakhand and Himachal. Wildlife tourism has also picked up. It's like the soulful connect with nature and luxury.”



**Karen Fitzgerald**  
General Manager, Experiences  
Tourism Australia

“Tourism Australia's Signature Experiences packages and promotes Australia's tourism experiences within a variety of niche areas and special interest categories. It is a programme for the trade, and we have an experiences portal that the trade can get on and find all the 700 experiences by theme. The beauty of Signature Experiences for the luxury travel advisor is that it's a great place to start.”



**Hussain Patel**  
Director  
Tripjack

“The pandemic has led to a shift in the way people travel. Nowadays, many travellers are looking to explore and have real and one-of-a-kind experiences. The pandemic has given people the opportunity to reassess their priorities and focus on things that truly matter to them. There is a greater appreciation for local cultures and communities as well when people travel.”

## Global publicity key to inbound

Contd. from page 3

been a noticeable shift in tourist preferences. Mistry highlighted some of the key trends that are emerging in the tourism sector. "While traditional itineraries still hold appeal, there is a growing demand for wellness experiences in India. Tourists are eager to explore the country's rich offerings in terms of holistic wellness practices, yoga retreats, and Ayurvedic treatments. Additionally, there has been a trend towards smaller group sizes, indicating a preference for more intimate and personalized travel experiences," he says.

Mistry says that inbound travel trends in India have witnessed a reduction in the size of tourist groups and an increase in demand for FITs. "Experiential travel is gaining popularity, with a particular focus on wellness, agricultural experiences, and pre-wedding photoshoots, especially among tourists from countries like Japan. However, uncertainties surrounding visa issues with Canada remain a challenge, and efforts are being made to restore normalcy in travel between the two countries," he shares.

Mistry also stressed on one of the major challenges faced by tour operators, which is the lack of global advertising. "This limits their reach and hampers the promotion of tourism offerings. Steps are being taken to address this concern and explore opportunities for global advertising in the future. The tourism industry

**Experiential travel is gaining popularity, with a particular focus on wellness, agricultural experiences, and pre-wedding photoshoots**

try has evolved significantly since the pre-pandemic era, with specialization becoming more prominent, as tour operators strive to cater to specific niches and meet the diverse preferences of modern travellers," he says. The other

point that Mistry emphasizes on is the synergy between tour operators and hoteliers. "Recognizing the significant role of the hotel industry, constituting about 65-70 per cent of the package cost, efforts have been made to foster a productive partnership between tour operators and hoteliers. This involves understanding the rapidly changing dynamics of the hotel industry, including technological advancements and investments. The goal is to strike a balance that meets the needs of both parties and ensures a mutually beneficial partnership," he shares.

Speaking of Trailblazers new product offerings, Mistry revealed, "We are focusing on continuously developing new products and itineraries to cater to the evolving demands of tourists. In recent years, unique offerings such as singing tours, Beatles-themed experiences, and wellness packages have been introduced and well-received by clients. Additionally, South America is being aggressively promoted, leading to significant growth in the Spanish market." 🇪🇸





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# MOVEMENTS

## WORLD TRAVEL & TOURISM COUNCIL

London

World Travel & Tourism Council announces **GREG O'HARA** as its incoming Chair. O'Hara, who will take over the position later this month, has been a member of WTTC's Executive Committee since 2019, and Vice Chair since 2021. He will follow current Chairman, Arnold Donald, former President & CEO of Carnival Corporation, who has been in the position since the spring of 2021. Prior to forming Certares, one of the largest investment platforms dedicated to Travel & Tourism, O'Hara served as Chief Investment Officer of JPMorgan Chase's Special Investments Group. He is the Chairman of American Express Global Business Travel.



## EXPO INN SUITES AND CONVENTION

Greater Noida

Expo Inn Suites and Convention has appointed **BARUN GUPTA** as the new General Manager. With a career that has spanned international brands like Accor, Marriott, IHG, and Hyatt, Gupta brings a wealth of experience, expertise, and passion for excellence to the new role. Known for his exceptional skills in marketing, operations, and public relations, he has consistently demonstrated an unmatched ability to turn around and elevate hospitality businesses. Whether it's strategic marketing, product and service enhancements, he has a track record of transforming businesses into progressive ventures.



## SAROVAR HOTELS & RESORTS

Gurugram

Sarovar Hotels & Resorts appoints **CHANDRAYI BASUTHAKUR** as the new Director – National Sales. Basuthakur is a seasoned professional with a career spanning over two decades in the hospitality industry. She has worked with prestigious hospitality brands such as The Oberoi, Taj Hotels, Hyatt, The Claridges, Shangri-La, and Intercontinental. In her new role, Basuthakur will assume direct oversight of all Sarovar Regional Sales Offices (RSOs). Additionally, she will actively collaborate with unit sales teams across Sarovar's diverse portfolio to provide expert guidance on offline sales strategies. She will also play a key role in working closely with various teams.



## ASCOTT INTERNATIONAL

New Delhi

Capitaland Investment Limited's (CLI's) wholly-owned lodging business unit, The Ascott Limited (Ascott) has appointed **ARPIT PANT** as Director – Business Development for the Indian Subcontinent. Arpit brings with him over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry. He has worked with some leading companies, including Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts and Preferred Hotels & Resorts. In the new role, Pant will spearhead Ascott India's strategic initiatives to expand presence in the dynamic Indian hospitality sector and enhance its portfolio of varied offerings.



## THE LEELA AMBIENCE GURUGRAM HOTEL & RESIDENCES

Gurugram

The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences appoints **SANDEEP SINHA** as Hotel Manager. Sinha has more than two decades of experience in the luxury hotel industry, having overseen some of the prestigious hotels. During his career, he has worked with well-established hospitality brands, including Taj Hotels, Marriott International, and Hyatt Hotels. His most recent assignment was with Trident Bandra Kurla. He hails from Jharkhand and is an alumnus of The Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development.



## ITC HOTELS

Mumbai

**SAMIT KAZI** has been appointed as the Area Head of Sales for the West division of ITC Hotels India. In his new role, Kazi will be responsible to drive hotels' sales across assigned geographical region for ITC Hotels, Welcom and Storii brand. Based out of Mumbai region, he will leverage his experience of over two decades to collaborate with the hotels' sales and ITC Hotels Head Quarter team with an objective of driving revenue across hotel portfolio for the West region. Kazi started his career with Marriott's flagship hotel Renaissance Mumbai Hotel and Convention Centre back in 2003. He has a wide-ranging sales experience.



## JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU PRESTIGE GOLFSHIRE RESORT & SPA

Bengaluru

JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa and Mulberry Shades Bengaluru Nandi Hills A Tribute Portfolio Resort appoint **SHANTLA JAIN** as the Director of Marketing and Communications. During her over two decades of experience, Jain has worked for renowned international hotel chains such as Hyatt, Accor, Hilton, and IHCL. In her new role, she is poised to spearhead the development and implementation of comprehensive marketing campaigns, forge strategic brand affiliations, and assume responsibility for media initiatives.



## NHCC AND HICC

Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre (NHCC) and Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) has elevated **SUBBIAH MURALI KUMAR** as the Rooms Division Manager for the property. Working in the hospitality industry for more than two decades, Kumar brings with him a wealth of experience and expertise. In his new role, he will be overseeing the daily operations of the rooms division. His primary responsibilities will include ensuring the highest standards of guest comfort, overseeing housekeeping, maintaining services, and leading a team of professionals. He will also focus on optimizing room occupancy rates.



## MARRIOTT HOTEL

Indore

Indore Marriott Hotel has appointed **NILESH JAIN** as the Director of Operations. He has more than 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry. In his new role, he will be responsible for overseeing and optimizing the day-to-day functions of the hotel. His role entails ensuring the highest standards of guest satisfaction, managing operational efficiency, and fostering a culture of excellence in hospitality services. Jain's career in the hospitality field began at Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur, where he initially worked as an Assistant. Over the course of his journey, he has worked with several hospitality brands.



## TALKING PEOPLE

India has such a variety of ambiances and landscape that it's difficult to choose from, says **BARBARA BREHERET**, Representative to India, Regional Tourism Board of Auvergne Rhone Alpes. "Let's say Punjab for my roots, Kerala for the amazing food and a soothing landscape. But I still have so much to discover. As a repeated traveller, I would say some of my favourite destinations include Basque country (South-West of France) on the Atlantic coast for their traditions and Corsica for their incomparable link with the sea. But I love Italy for its heritage and architecture."



There are two things that help **RITU CHAWLA MATHUR**, Managing Partner, Prognosis Global Consulting, during stressful times. "One is creating art. I enjoy painting and when I'm having a rough day, my art helps me take my mind off the stressors in life. I feel as adults we don't often think of practicing art or drawing to relieve stress, but it can do wonders; and number two is 'retail therapy'! There's nothing like some 'me-time' and window shopping at the mall. Some coffee and shopping can feel like a treat and can be the much-needed indulgence," she adds.



**SURAJ NARAYAN**, Director of Sales – Delhi RSO – The Fern Hotels & Resorts, says, "I find solace in a few different activities to de-stress. Regular exercise such as yoga and running, helps clear my mind. Additionally, I enjoy reading, meditating, and spending quality time with friends and family. It's all about finding a healthy balance to recharge and stay focused. My favorite holiday destination in India has to be the serene and picturesque Kerala. The backwaters, lush greenery, and cultural richness make it a truly rejuvenating experience. Internationally, I have a soft spot for the enchanting city of Kyoto located in Japan."





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GPS INITIATIVES



# 'We prioritize sustainability'

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts is among the key international brands that prioritize sustainability. Anuraag Bhatnagar, CEO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, shares the sustainability initiatives taken by the group.

 Sara Haque & Suhani Sood

Sustainability is a buzzword in the hotel industry nowadays. Hotels around the world are taking initiatives like smart showers, solar power installations, and waste diversion to promote sustainable future. The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts is among the key international brands that prioritize sustainability.

**Anuraag Bhatnagar**, Chief Executive Officer, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, says, "We are committed to eliminating all single-use plastic across our portfolio. We prioritize waste management and have implemented zero waste initiatives. Many of our properties have their



own organic kitchen gardens and herbarium on premises, to grow and use organic fresh produce. Our social responsibility strategy is aligned with the Brookfield ESG guiding principles and is centred on four pillars."

## Sustainable practices taken by the group

Bhatnagar says that they follow sustainability diligently across all their properties. Highlighting certain green initiatives undertaken on their properties, he says, "We have launched a pool by the ladder initiative, where all flowers across all the properties are upcycled and converted into incense sticks. It becomes a part of gifting and amenities programmes. Also, we are working towards being completely plastic-free. We are a part of the global plastic removal part of the

United Nations initiatives. We have systems and processes in place. Green hospitality is sort of an upscale initiative."

They have installed garbage segregation plants and trained staff for the waste segregation. "The ultimate aim is not just to go net zero by certain duration of time,


 **We are committed to eliminating all single-use plastic across our portfolio. We prioritize waste management and have implemented zero waste projects**

but it is to ensure we have appropriate infrastructure to reach that milestone. We also heavily focus on upcycling and recycling. All our hotels are being strictly monitored for the green moves," he adds.

Talking about the sustainability scenario in India, Bhatnagar says,

"I think India is evolving itself and is on the fast track as far as embracing green sustainability is concerned."

Do all this add to their ratings? Bhatnagar says the importance of ratings cannot be exaggerated enough. "Though ratings are important, but we do not practice sustainability just for ratings and recognitions, but this is what all tourists believe in nowadays. People want to enjoy themselves to the fullest but also be conscious and mindful of sustainability and green practices," he opines.

The hotel aims to create luxurious experiences for guests, while consciously believing that it is of utmost importance to act responsibly and respectfully towards the environment. "We do this through building management systems, focus on improving indoor air quality and our commitment towards global net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. We are working towards creating renewable energy solutions across our properties. We use LED lighting in all properties and conserve water through the use of low flow equipment," he says. 


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