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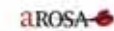


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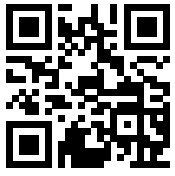
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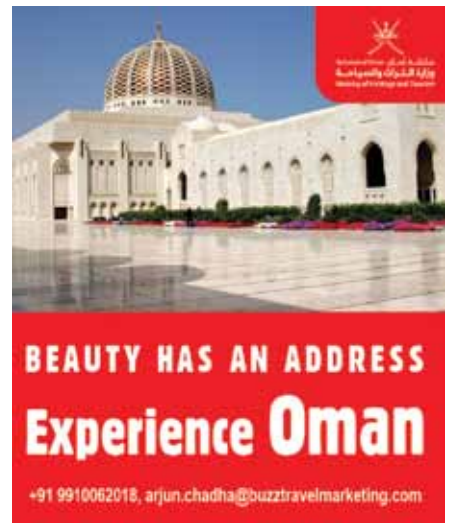
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## Taking tourism to rural areas

Under the Vibrant Villages Programme, the Union Ministry of Tourism recently organised an interactive session in New Delhi for more than 300 Sarpanches and Gram Pradhans from border villages of the country.



Janice Alyosius

More than 300 Sarpanches and Gram Pradhans from border villages of the country participated in a session, organised by the Ministry of Tourism at Ashoka Hotel in New Delhi recently as part of the Vibrant Villages Programme. **V Vidyavathi**, Secretary, Tourism, Government of India (GoI), led the session, which focussed on different aspects of tourism, challenges faced by different villages, and potential solutions for tourism development. The participants discussed various topics, including infrastructure, community engage-

ment, skill development, and environmental conservation.

Emphasising on the Vibrant Villages Programme, said, "The vibrant villages hold immense potential for adventure tourism. The Ministry of Tourism will soon arrange a meeting with the defence authorities to engage the youth from these villages in training them as adventure tourist guides." The secretary said that the expenses associated with the training would be borne by the ministry. Informing about further plans, she said, "We have to celebrate the tourism festivals, and for that, you (participants) do not have to come to Delhi; we will



**V Vidyavathi**  
Secretary  
Tourism, Government of India

reach your villages to celebrate the festival with you. Adventure tourism is an important segment for

tourism ministry, and it has huge potential in vibrant villages."

Elaborating on the objective, **Rakesh Verma**, Additional Secretary, Tourism, GoI, said, "Our primary objective is to understand how they look at the development of their villages, their uniqueness, what tourism attractions do they have. We also shared an overview of what tourism ministry is doing for the development of vibrant villages and how we can work jointly in development of these villages as vibrant villages, leverage their tourism potential, and create opportunities for local youth."

## STIC completes 50-year journey

STIC Travel Group has completed 50 years, led by Subhash Goyal, who shares the ups and downs of the journey so far.



Suhani Sood

With its head office in Delhi, STIC Travel Group's wide network practically covers every corner of India. Backed by some strong and trained manpower across various divisions, the company has sources to offer smooth and seamless travel solutions for a range of businesses.

## From dreams to reality

Going down the memory lane, **Dr Subhash Goyal**, Chairman, STIC Travel & Air Charter Group, says, "We started as a student and youth travel service provider. We had our



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

first contract with Air Ceylon (now SriLankan Airlines); it was when we

Contd on page 7 ▶

## Cruising returns with a bang

There is a surge in cruise tourism from and within India; it has been witnessing a paradigm shift making it a popular choice among travellers. Key industry leaders share their views.



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

"We are bullish on the cruise opportunity and witnessing a strong 60 per cent YoY surge in demand. What is noteworthy is that we are seeing appetite across consumer segments from young India's Gen Z/ millennials, couples, multigenerational families and Corporate MICE. There is an increased preference for luxury experiences and higher categories like ocean-view cabins and suites. Our extensive holidays portfolio offers a diversity of products to suit every consumer preference and price-point, and we look forward to welcoming customers."

"Development of new cruise routes and infrastructure is always a welcome move. Unless we start thinking in this direction, we shall never achieve the dream of developing India as world cruise tourism hub. The usage and profitability of new routes need to fit into long-term plans of cruise companies which invest substantially into building and operating the cruise ships. Any effort without consulting the cruise companies may go in vain. Therefore, it is important to include experienced cruise industry champions at the planning stages."

Contd. on page 16 ▶



**Nishith Saxena**  
Founder & Director  
Cruise Professionals

## 25 new wedding destinations

In a bid to unravel the potential of India's wedding industry, Ministry of Tourism (MOT) has launched a wedding tourism campaign, under which 25 destinations have been shortlisted.



Hazel Jain

**G Kishan Reddy**, Union Minister for Culture, Tourism and DoNER, recently launched the wedding tourism campaign, which seeks to expand India's wedding industry, by luring couples from around the world to celebrate their special day in India.

At the launch of the campaign, Reddy said, "Our 360-degree approach will ensure that every moment, from the first 'hello' to the final 'I do,' is a testament to India's warm embrace and rich heritage."

Under the campaign, MOT has profiled about 25 key destinations across the country, exploring how India fits into their wedding aspirations in more than one way. The campaign boasts of a



**Rajeev Jain**  
Founder & Director  
Rashi Entertainment

collaborative approach, developed in close consultation with industry experts, associations, and seasoned wedding planners.

The campaign highlights a 360-degree approach, which will leverage the power of digital marketing, social media campaigns, strategic partnerships with wed-

ding planners, collaborations with domestic and international influencers, and a host of offline and online activations. The aim is also to redefine India's perception beyond the realm of royal, extravagant weddings. Its thematic focus encompasses wedding themes, such as Beach Wedding, Nature Wedding, Royal Wedding, Himalayan Wedding, and beyond, allowing couples to craft their dream celebration in the embrace of India's charm.

**Rajeev Jain**, Founder & Director, Rashi Entertainment said the trend of weddings is definitely leaning towards more contemporary, classic and traditional styles. "Unfortunately, the trend is also leaning towards destination weddings out of India. The hotel rates that were skyrocketing for the last one-and-a-half years have come

Contd. on page 9 ▶



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# 'STIC pivotal chapter of my life'

► Contd from page 5

entered the GSA and representation business. Apart from that, we were the first travel company to promote Sri Lanka as a leisure destination."

There was no looking back after that. STIC is not just a GSA, but also marketing agents for brands like United Airlines, Air China, Holland America Cruise Line, Windstar Cruises, Enterprise Rent-a-car and many more.

Goyal says, "50 years is a really long period in an individual's life, but very short duration in the history of an organisation. Not even in my wildest dreams, I imagined that I would make travel and tour-

**The biggest USP has been our adaptability, and our commitment to providing relevant solutions to our customers**

ism my profession and by God's grace it has been successful."

Sharing some moments of the company's journey, he says, "It

has become a pivotal chapter of my life. I believe, if you do something with passion and commitment, you enjoy it. My journey has been full of fun, learning, enchantment, and unforgettable experiences. I have got the opportunity to travel extensively and see all the five continents."

## Achievements

Highlighting one of the biggest milestones STIC Family has achieved, he informed that the company has transformed itself from a student travel organisation to India's largest B2B aviation and tourism marketing company, at the same time maintaining the vertical of student and youth travel, which



is the only issuing authority in India for UNESCO endorsed international student ID cards.

Goyal informed that STIC StepUp Xperiences was another vertical launched with a focus on weddings, event and conferences. "We have already conducted two weddings and several events," he adds.

have always been ready to change and adapt our business model to better suit the customers' needs. It is this philosophy and commitment that has helped us survive and grow over the years."

## B2B partnerships

Telling about how B2B partners

are really important, Goyal says, "The secret of our success with B2B partners is that we have never undercut any of the travel agent or tour operators who are dealing with us. We have always believed that collaboration trumps competition, and this is why our B2B partners trust and respect us."

## USP

He says, "The biggest USP has been our adaptability, and our commitment to providing relevant solutions to our customers. The travel industry has changed and evolved a lot in the past five decades. Throughout this period, we

## Experiences & insights

- ❖ During 9/11, most of the airlines operating into India stopped or suspended their operations and it had become difficult for us to maintain the offices and the staff of those airlines.
- ❖ Keep changing along with the industry, which was changing dramatically and that is a reflection of how our country, travellers and their preferences have changed. We can clearly see that change across three aspects – technology, business models and travel styles & preferences.



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## Smooth sailing ahead?

The Indian government's pro-tourism approach is evident with both Indian and international cruise companies either starting sailings in India or planning to begin operations in the subcontinent.

Soon after Italian cruise liner Costa Cruises announced its exclusive India sailings, the Ministry of Tourism, at the G20 Tourism Working Group meeting, released the Draft National Strategy for Cruise Tourism. The vision for this strategy document is to make India the preferred cruising nation for deep sea cruises, coastal cruises, river cruises and yacht cruises, which leverages the natural, historical and cultural advantages of India and the country's travel, tourism and hospitality skills.

In fact, the MOT has said that they are aiming to take the cruise tourist numbers in India from 0.4 million currently to 4 million by 2040, claiming that the infrastructure and circuits for the same are being developed. A huge example of that is a \$2 million modern cruise terminal at Chennai Port, spread over an area of 2,880 square metres, which can cater to 3,000 passengers at a time. Also, govt has projected that the number of cruise ships operating in India will increase from 208 in 2023 to 500 in 2030 and to 1,100 by 2047. In addition to that, three new international cruise terminals are expected to be operational by 2024.

With so much going on, the picture of India cruising looks rosy. While the industry is taking these developments optimistically, there are still apprehensions about the number of pax and itineraries that will be developed for the same.

As India gears up to capture its share of global cruise markets, Indians are thronging a range of cruising destinations across the world, which have been offering itineraries, both previously loved and the most coveted ones as well. From Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, to Alaska and Antarctica, cruisers from across the world, as well as from India, are experiencing it all. The governments of these nations have developed state of the art ports and touristic sites at all the port of calls during a cruise trip. While it's a long way for India to attract global cruise passengers, but it can start from home and learn on the way.

# HAI's vision for hospitality

The Hotel Association of India (HAI) has released a vision and roadmap for the future of the Indian hospitality sector, titled 'Vision 2047-Indian Hotel Industry-Challenges & The Road Ahead'. A copy of the report was also presented to V Vidyavathi, Secretary, Tourism, Govt. of India.

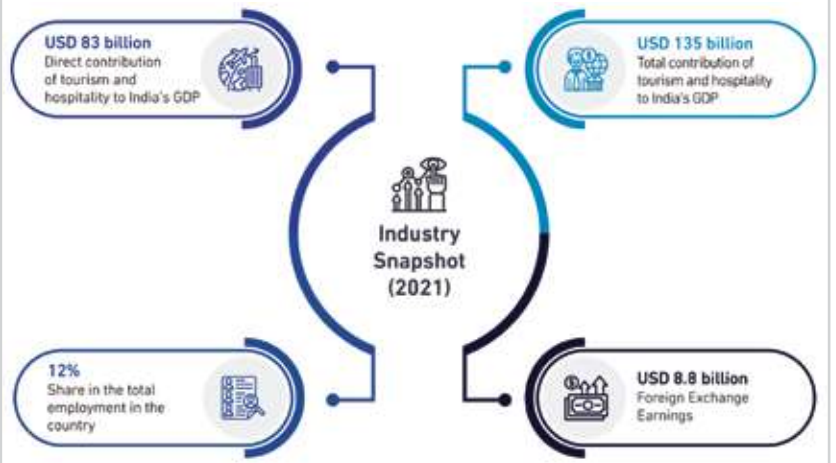
TT Bureau

The HAI report charts out various possible scenarios for the future and what the industry can reasonably achieve by the year India celebrates 100 years of independence.

### The report states:

- ❖ The tourism and hospitality industry is expected to create 53 million jobs by 2029.
- ❖ FDI inflows in the tourism and hospitality industry reached US \$16.4 billion in April-June 2022.
- ❖ By 2028, the industry is expected to earn US \$50.9 billion as visitor exports, compared to US \$28.9 billion in 2018.
- ❖ India ranked 54<sup>th</sup> with a score

### Industry Snapshot (2021)



₹9,926 in 2037, and ₹26,974 in 2047

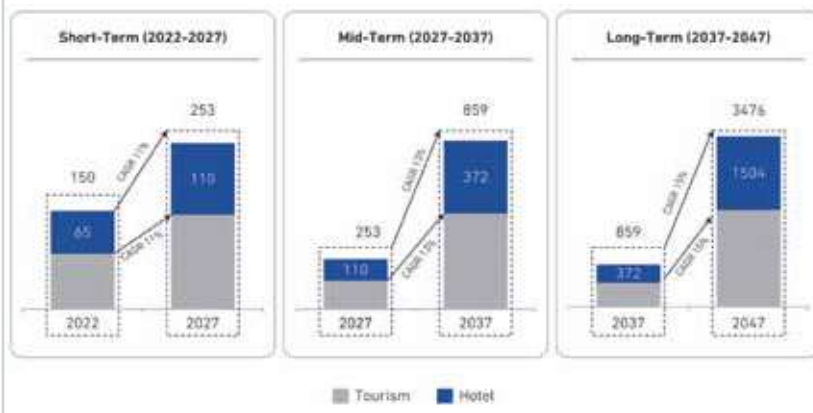
❖ The inflow of domestic tourists is estimated to increase to 1.4 bil-

lions by 2037, and ₹26,974 in 2047

❖ Early implementation of technology and penetration of 5G over the next 5 years

Principal Advisor (South Asia), Radisson Hotel Group, says, "India Vision 2047 is for a US \$3 trillion tourism economy and a million international tourist arrivals. Hospitality sector will play a pivotal role. This report takes

### Total contribution of Indian Hotel Industry to GDP (in US\$ billion)



of 4.1 in the Travel and Tourism Development Index 2021.

### Growth Outlook

Based on expert interviews and input from various stakeholders, HAI has forecast the growth to be at 11 per cent, 13 per cent, and 15 per cent for short, mid, and long term for the overall tourism and hospitality industry and Indian hotel industry.

- ❖ The direct contribution of Hotel Industry to GDP was US \$40 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach US \$68 billion by 2027, and US \$1 trillion by 2047
- ❖ The growth can be attributed to factors such as GDP growth to 4.8 per cent in 2027, 9.5 per cent in 2037, and 19 per cent in 2047, where the income level will increase from ₹2,473 in 2022 to

lion by 2027, 4.8 billion in 2037, and 15 billion in 2047; likely to

**HAI has forecast growth at 11%, 13%, & 15% for short, mid, and long term for overall tourism and hospitality industry and Indian hotel industry**

have 30.5 billion FTA during the mid-term (2027-2037) and likely to attract 1.2 million cruise visitors by 2031

❖ India's sustainable tourism market is likely to generate rev-

❖ National Tourism Policy to be passed in 2023 and oversees initial implementation in short term, while the full impact is witnessed during the long term

❖ Grant of industry status in short term and full implementation in the long term

❖ Infrastructure status grant and inclusion in concurrent list

**Puneet Chhatwal**, President, HAI and Managing Director & CEO, IHCL, said, "Convergence of efforts at different levels and collaboration between the government and private stakeholders will be the key to the successful realisation of the vision of creating jobs and contributing to the national growth story."

**KB Kachru**, Vice President, HAI, and Chairman Emeritus and

**Direct contribution of Hotel Industry to GDP was US \$40 billion in 2022 and is expected to reach US \$68 billion by 2027, and US \$1 trillion by 2047**

a look at the road ahead and the challenges, highlighting the policy interventions required to support the rapid growth of hotels to meet the targets of tourist inflows-both domestic and foreign."

Appreciating HAI's initiative of coming out with a vision 2047 report, **V Vidyavathi**, Secretary, Tourism, Government of India, emphasised the importance of strong partnership and constructive dialogue with the industry. She also outlined the government's vision for integrated destination development and the role HAI can play in it. The document outlines the potential of the Indian hotel industry in the next 25 years. The document discusses the opportunities available to the industry to work in collaboration.



# Philippines woos India again

Bringing its roadshow to India after a hiatus of 4 years, the Department of Tourism, Philippines, plans to start e-visas and direct flights between the two countries. The department hopes that India can be among its top-10 source markets soon.



Hazel Jain

It has been almost four years since the Philippines tapped the India market. But it is back in the country with not just more exciting offerings, but also two game-changing propositions – e-visas and direct flights. Sharing the details **Shahlimar Hofer Tamano**, Undersecretary, DOT, Philippines, says, “A lot has changed since the last time we were here. First of all, we have a new president in Ferdinand Marcos Jr and he is protourism. So, our Department of Tourism Secretary works closely with him and he prioritizes tourism. These are marching orders for not only the tourism department, but also for other agencies like the department of transportation, civil aviation, and maritime travel.”

He added that things are also different now because its current Secretary **Esperanza Christina Codilla Frasco** is focusing on development of routes actively.

“The President has just signed the ASA (Air Services Agreement) between India and the Philippines. They will immediately set up a meeting between both the countries in New Delhi to discuss better air services between the two which will eventually lead to

**The President has just signed the ASA (Air Services Agreement) between India and the Philippines**

direct flights. The main gateways are the Manila International Airport, the Mactan-Cebu International Airport, and possibly the Mindanao airport as well – which is the third major island in Davao city. In a few



Shahlimar Hofer Tamano, Undersecretary, DOT, Philippines, with Nerissa Jean B. Cruz, Market Specialist III, Europe, Africa, ME and India Division, Tourism Promotions Board Philippines

months, we will hear some good news,” he adds.

**Ramon Julian S. De Veyra Jr**, Market Specialist IV (Europe, Africa, Middle East, and India Division), International Promotions Department, Tourism Promotions Board Philippines, was also part of the delegation and it was his first visit to India. He says, “The Mumbai response to the roadshow was overwhelming. The Filipino delegation was very happy with the response. Our MICE department also helps our stakeholders with regards to souvenirs, meet and greet, entertainment, and even reception. This depends on the size and profile of the MICE guests. This is under our enhanced MICE Plus programme.”

He said that India had jumped up to the top 12 international source markets for Philippines and it was on its way to getting into the top 10 when the pandemic happened. “The good news is

that now, with the possibility of better air connectivity, especially direct flights and e-visa for Indian passport holders, we can safely assume that India will again climb the ranks – perhaps in the top seven spots or even better in terms of arrivals into the Philippines. More flights would bring down the fares to a reasonable level,” he says.

Emphasising on more collaboration between the travel trade from both countries, **Maria Paz R. Alberto**, President, Ark Travel Express & Chairman, PATA Philippines Chapter, says, “We have been missing India market for the last four years. The air fares have skyrocketed because of shortage of flights. That is what we will address with the PATA members, the hoteliers and the tour operators. We wish to introduce India as a really good source market for them. We will also guide them, as to how they can promote the Philippines to Indians.”



Maria Paz R. Alberto, President, Ark Travel Express & Chairman, PATA Philippines Chapter, with a partner from the Philippines

## Room rates still high for weddings

► Contd. from page 5

down a little, but they are still quite high and revenge buying from clients is coming to an end; overpriced hotel rooms are not selling any more,” he added.

Lauding the Ministry of Tourism’s new wedding tourism campaign, Jain urges the ministry to give access to the protected heritage monuments. “We appeal to the MoT to start giving heritage monuments for weddings. Why they have not allowed this is beyond my understanding. We want them to allow weddings at India Gate, Purana Qila, and Charminar in

**We want them to allow weddings at India Gate, Purana Qila, and Charminar in Hyderabad. This way, weddings will become more experiential**

Hyderabad. This way, weddings will become more experiential and more sought after,” he said.

According to Jain, the wedding segment has seen about 17 per cent growth, which he believes will grow further. “Our request to everyone is to look for volume business and not look for two-three days of business. Clients will run away after seeing the pricing,” Jain says.

**Not in-sync with the MOT**

This goes against the campaign launched by the MOT to attract more weddings into India. Jain says, “The hotel rates that were skyrocketing for the last one-and-a-half years have come down a little, but it is still quite

high and revenge buying from clients is coming to an end; overpriced hotel rooms are not selling any more.” He appeals to the hotels to bring down their rates to normal if they want to sustain the wedding segment.

**Wedding tourism campaign**

The MOT recently unveiled an ambitious campaign aimed at showcasing India as a premier wedding destination on the global stage. The campaign seeks to expand India’s wedding industry, by enticing couples from around the world to celebrate their special day in India.

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# 20% TCS discouraging: Trade

The high Tax Collection at Source (TCS) that may come into effect soon puts travel agents at a huge competitive disadvantage. Not just that, the FM needs to clarify many issues of practical importance, most of all related to its implementation. **TRAVTALK** speaks to Arjun Akruwala, CA & Lawyer, ASA GST Advisory Services, on the issue.



Hazel Jain

**A**rjun Akruwala, CA & Lawyer, ASA GST Advisory Services, was recently invited by the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) to conduct a knowledge session for its members in Mumbai. Based in Ahmedabad, he specifically caters to the travel and hospitality sectors for GST and TCS related matters.

Akruwala touched upon many sub-topics and answered a whole lot of questions for the audience. He says, "There have been a lot of clarifications from the government on TCS. There was a lot of confusion on what TCS is applicable on. Is it only air tickets, or only hotel booking, or is it applicable only on a tour package booking. So, the government has finally clarified – it would be applicable only if it is a tour package and not if it is an isolated booking of an air ticket or a hotel room." He also took a series of questions from the members. There were questions on whether



**Arjun Akruwala**  
CA & Lawyer  
ASA GST Advisory Services

an NRI can pay for Indian travellers. "It's important to understand that the government's aim with TCS is to track the Indian passport holder who is an Indian PAN card holder and travelling abroad," he adds.

## Confusion prevails

There are still a few issues where more clarity is needed, says Akruwala. For example, what if there is a combination and bundling of

services, which is on the same date of travel such as air tickets booked in the morning and hotel rooms in the evening? Will the government identify this as a tour package or is the transaction is an isolated booking, so that TCS is not applicable?

**We have deployed a payment system that allows users to pay in multiple transactions, which in turn has resulted in one of the highest conversion rates**

Further, clarification on the ₹7 lakh limit is also required vis-à-vis if a customer is booking a package directly out of India, then he has a ₹7 lakh limit. If he is booking through an Indian tour operator, he has a further limit of ₹7 lakh.



**Ajay Prakash**  
President  
TAFI

“There are still far too many unanswered questions. The government needs to speak to all the affected parties—the industry, the banks, the credit card firms, and the enforcement people. Compliances are still complex and the process is not fully in place. We hope to have more clarity.”



**Jitul Mehta**  
Immediate Past Chairman  
Western India, TAFI

“Both in GST and TCS, the laws are not simple. Everyone has their own understanding of the law. Some agents are charging GST and TCS on one percentage, others are charging on another. Some are not charging TCS at all. Deciding the tax slab is government's job, but they need to simplify it.”



**Pradip Lulla**  
Immediate Past President  
TAFI

“The non-clarification is TCS on payments through a credit card. The banks are yet saying that they will have no way to do it. But now when you are using forex cards, you will be charged as per that. So, that needs to be clarified. The government needs to clarify a lot of things.”

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# Menus become maps for travellers

Gastronomical choices play an important role when people plan their travel. A Future Market Insights report says Indian culinary tourism market may reach US \$19,127 million by 2032 at 20.4 per cent CAGR, constituting 6-9 per cent of the global culinary sector. The reason behind this is that visitors across the globe connect with Indian cuisine.



Suhani Sood

**Erik Wolf**, Executive Director & Founder, World Food Travel Association, says that 93 per cent of Indian tourists choose their destination by their cuisine choices. "It is tremendous, how food & beverage can turn away travellers from some worth-a-visit destination. Everybody loves to explore cuisines and I don't see food tourism declining in the near future," he says.

From spicy street food to fine dining, Indian food has something for everyone. Talking about Indian food in specific, Wolf said, "The delicacies are really mouth-watering and I cannot wait to visit India and try them all," he says.

**Huge demand for fusion foods**  
Fusion food is a new and exciting way of combining two dishes and creating it into tasty meals. If you are looking to entice younger segment or millennials, fusion cuisine is the best way to do so. A lot of

Indians love Japanese Sushi, but they won't mind trying other fusion of Sushi, provided the taste is good. It seems that all the fast-food chains and fine dine restaurants are also providing option of food combinations. "There is a huge demand of fusion food, new age food; people want to try and experiment each and every food according to their preferences," says **Pradippta Biiswaas**, VP Operations, Radisson Jaipur City Center.

**Healthy over junk-food trending**  
In the upcoming years, travellers will be eating consciously. They will choose sustainable options. On the other hand, menus will have a plenty of plant based and vegan products. "World is revolving around healthy and nutritious food. They want a burst of flavours and spices mixed together," says Biiswaas.

**Local cuisines in demand**  
Despite hotels doing their best to offer guests a variety and sustain-



**Erik Wolf**  
Executive Director & Founder  
World Food Travel Association



**Pradippta Biiswaas**  
VP Operations  
Radisson Jaipur City Center



**Chander K Baljee**  
Chairman & MD  
Royal Orchid & Regenta Hotels

**It is tremendous, how F&B can turn away travellers from some worth-a-visit destination. Everybody loves to explore cuisines**

**There is a huge demand of fusion food, new age food; people want to try and experiment food according to their preferences**

**India's diverse cuisines entice tourists. Food festivals and tours encourage visitors to explore different places based on food**

able food options, most people go out and eat in local restaurants. Biiswaas holds high prices of buffet, à la carte in hotels and easy accessibility of restaurants responsible factors for people preferring local restaurants.

**Culinary tourism to boost tourism**  
Gastro-tourism is the most effective way of boosting any kind of tourism and hospitality industry. **Chander K Baljee**, Chairman & MD, Royal Orchid & Regenta Hotels, says, "India's diverse cuisines entice tourists seeking authentic flavours and regional cuisines. Food festivals and tours encourage visitors to explore different places based on food." On being asked how will gastro-tourism boost outbound tourism, he says, "A strong food sector instils pride in culinary heritage, encouraging exploration of local flavours abroad."

The experts agreed on one fact and that food tourism is not fading away anytime soon.

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# Enjoy 'The Suite View' experience

Sailing on the big waves of its small ships' cruise experiences, Avalon Waterways invites Indian travel industry to utilize their attractive offers. They have reinvented river cruise ships to redefine the river cruise experience, says Varesh Chopra, Managing Director, Avalon Waterways.



TT Bureau

There is only one point of view on an Avalon Waterways river cruise, which is The Suite View. Their entire fleet in Europe and Southeast Asia comprises only Suite Ships, each featuring their Panorama Suites, having the widest opening windows, open-air balcony and bed facing the ever-changing scenery.

**Varesh Chopra**, Managing Director, Avalon Waterways, says, "Scrupulous Indian travellers know that it is possible to cruise without a crowd, explore new avenues with ease, and sail in a close intimate setting." He invites sailors to board spacious and state of the art Suite Ships. "Travellers will enjoy the company of an expert Cruise Director, appealing crew-to-passenger ratios, and the personal attention, which the cruisers deserve. Lastly, the seamless dock-and-go sightseeing with insider tips and experiences that only be provided by localites," he adds.



**Travellers will enjoy the company of an expert Cruise Director, appealing crew-to-passenger ratios, and the personal attention**

Cruising has been a popular mode of travel for a few years now. In contemporary times of 'doing something different', Avalon's River Cruising has come to prove that, when it comes to water bodies, bigger is not always better. All sit down meals, hassle-free excursions, proximity, very high crew to guest ratio, yet still covering cities and beautiful rivers – "That did it for us," says Chopra. "I feel there is simply not going back, as people realised that travelling with Avalon Waterways was a great way to see the world," he adds.

Avalon Waterways has pioneered the river cruise trend, since

its very first set sail, presenting passengers on board their cutting-edge and award-winning Suite Ships with an extraordinary combination of distinctive views, diverse cultures, and timeless traditions. The perfect moment for fervent travellers to board Avalon Waterways and enjoy small ship cruising is right now, with open-air balcony and face changing bed.

Expressing his sincere gratitude toward travel trade, he says, "We cannot thank our agency partners enough for recommending Avalon Waterways and exceptional experience to their clientele."

## Size matters

River cruise vessels are built to slowly ply the world's weaving and meandering rivers to port in storybook settings. Despite having

passenger numbers low, Avalon's onboard crew ratio is high. In fact, on every ship, the average guest-to-crew ratio is 3:1, which means travellers are privy to copious amounts of attention to detail with crew members easily and happily catering to guests needs. On an Avalon cruise, travellers glide along the picturesque vistas and engage in the authentic local ways of life. It is easy to step off-board and

minge with the locals and immerse in their everyday experiences. Beyond their wall-to-wall, floor-to-ceiling windows is a world waiting to be explored - Your Way. Whether you want to enjoy a guided walking tour of one of Europe's great cities, join a cooking class or paddle a canoe, the Avalon Choice® selections of Classic, Discovery and Active excursions offer a wide range of possibilities. ➔



**Varesh Chopra**  
Managing Director  
Avalon Waterways



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## Offer for travel agents

Agents who sell as little as three cabins on Avalon will receive a free cruise for themselves and a special price for their companion. In addition, as a bigger bonanza, agents who sell five cabins will get the cruise completely free for themselves as well as their companion.



In Asia, India has highest hotel occupancy with Mumbai reaching 101 per cent, New Delhi at 97 per cent: FCM

Low-cost carrier FlyArystan announces flights from Delhi to Almaty from September

New orders from two biggest aviation carriers show that India is potentially on crest of a wave: Gavin Eccles

Paytm launches free cancellation for international flight tickets

Skyscanner launches new Hindi product

WTTC anticipates 11.5 per cent growth in global tourism investment in 2023, amounting to \$955 billion

Global MICE market projected to grow at 6.6 per cent CAGR and reach US\$1,563 billion by 2030: FCM

13 mn Indians travelled abroad from Jan-June this year, UAE top destination choice for them

# Seoul: Where K-pop meets tech-pop

Growing popularity of K-pop and K-drama has made Seoul a fascinating destination for Gen Z travellers. This vibrant city also offers a unique blend of future technology, creating a perfect itinerary for young explorers. One can start with the HiKR Ground to know the Korean culture.



Poonam Akolia

Seoul offers an exciting mix of tradition and future technology that makes it an ideal destination for Gen Z travellers. To start off, the HiKR Ground is a must-visit for those interested in Korean culture. As a Korean tourism publicity centre, HiKR Ground provides visitors with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the world of K-pop and indulge in captivating media art. But that is not all. HiKR Ground is also a paradise for social media content creators. With its picturesque settings and eye-catching attractions, this place is a heaven for those seeking to capture Instagram-worthy moments. Whether it's posing against colourful backdrops or snapping shots of captivating performances, visitors will find endless opportunities to create stunning content that will leave their followers in awe.

**Kim Jangho**, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism, Republic of Korea



**Kim Jangho**  
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Culture, Sports & Tourism, Republic of Korea

Republic of Korea, believes that there has never been a better time for millennials to immerse themselves in the vibrant South Korean culture. As the popularity of South Korean music and drama continues to grow worldwide, it offers a unique opportunity to experience the cultural aspect of Seoul, which is popular as the tech city. Going ahead, the Hyundai Motorstudio

Goyang is the ultimate destination for car enthusiasts and travellers alike. As the largest automobile theme park in Korea, this place offers an unparalleled experience that combines fun, excitement, and education. From witnessing the assembly line in action to get-

**Seoul offers a unique blend of modernity and tradition, making it an ideal destination for both Gen Z travellers and families with kids**

ting up close and personal with cutting-edge automotive technology, every moment at Hyundai Motorstudio Goyang is designed to captivate and inspire.



Visting S.K. Telecom Technology Museum, also known as T.um, is most likely to be an amazing experience for the tech-savvy Gen Z. Through the use of cutting-edge technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), hologram, and 5G, T.um takes visitors on a journey that showcases the ways in which technology can revolutionize our lifestyles and connect even rural communities. For the young travellers who have a keen interest in technology, the

experience at T.um can be truly exceptional. The museum provides a platform for visitors to not only observe, but also actively engage with various AR tools.

Seoul offers a unique blend of modernity and tradition, making it an ideal destination for both Gen Z travellers and families with young children. With its vibrant cityscape, stunning architecture, and technological advancements, Seoul has something to offer for everyone.

# 'India inbound from Oz back to normal'

For Intrepid Travel, India is among its top five destinations from Australia. James Thornton, Chief Executive Officer, Intrepid Travel, says that bookings from Down Under to India have started to return to pre-pandemic levels in mid-2022 and the company expects 2023 to be a 'record year' for business.



Janice Alyosius

Emphasising on India's potential in adventure tourism sector, **James Thornton**, CEO, Intrepid Travel, said, "We look at India as Intrepid's top five destinations globally; it has been slightly slower to recover as compared to other destinations around the world due to the borders shutdowns and visa challenges. Despite this, the numbers are very strong from September, as we move into the peak season, we expect it to reach the pre-pandemic levels in India by next year, which will be operating 12,000 customers in the country."

In 2020, the company, once carrying half a million customers annually, faced an overnight shutdown due to the pandemic. However, the company retained half of its workforce and focused on domestic tourism opportunities. "We were able to retain at least half of our workforce around the world and we started to put

our minds more into domestic tourism opportunities. We accelerated our purpose initiatives and thought of expanding to other types of business functions like accommodation," he said.

Gradually consolidating under the Intrepid brand, the company emerged from the pandemic with a strategic vision for the future. Mid-2022 marked a turning point, leading to a remarkable recovery. "Bookings started to return to pre-pandemic state in the mid-2022. Since there has been a huge growth in business, we have been recruiting massively, operations have been running again, year 2023 will be a record year for Intrepid globally," Thornton added.

**Natalie Kidd**, Managing Director, Asia, Intrepid Travel, highlighted that visa was a major challenge they faced. "This year when India opened and we are back to operating under normal circumstances, the country has been slower to



**James Thornton**  
CEO  
Intrepid Travel

**Bookings started to return to pre-pandemic state in the mid-2022. Since there has been a huge growth in business, we have been recruiting massively**



**Natalie Kidd**  
Managing Director  
Asia, Intrepid Travel

**Around mid-last year getting a visa for India was somewhat challenging, people who could not book changed their minds towards other destinations**

recover as compared to other destinations and visas were a part of the reasons. Around mid-last year getting a visa for India was somewhat challenging, and the problem was that people who could not immediately book changed their minds towards other destinations. After a cycle of time, they consider again that where do they want to go, and India will come into that election list. It certainly puts a delay on people to come back, but I don't think this will put this off because India is a fabulous, iconic country. We are back to pre-pandemic levels, but India will take another year. Countries will compete, so if there is a neighbouring country that is easier to get to from various perspectives, it will have a foot up. We really encourage working together and the government assisting us in making India as successful as possible because there is so much richness here for people to experience," Kidd said.

Global expansion remained a central theme for Intrepid's growth

trajectory. Thornton shared that with a remarkable average growth rate of 20 per cent, the 35-year-old company defied industry norms, driven by its strong brand identity and commitment to purpose-driven leadership.

Thornton also stressed on sustainability that lay at the core of Intrepid's ethos. "Intrepid is remarkably the world's leader in travel sustainability, something that is embedded in our DNA since inception in 1989." Amid Intrepid's triumphant resurgence, the focus remained steadfast on 2023. With a significant proportion of their workforce being relatively new, the year is poised to be a testament to the collective effort and resilience that had brought the company back to its thriving state.

Thornton stated, "Our focus is building the future of what Intrepid can become. The travel industry is moving towards experiences and sustainability, positioned to deliver all these things."





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# Cruising undergoing renaissance

► Contd. from page 5

“Cruises are in a big demand right now and it has always been. As an outdoor operator, we have been recommending people that it is a complete package. You don't have to do anything. Everything is organised well, activity is there, you are visiting various cities. So, cruise is becoming popular,



**Guldeep Singh Sahni**  
Managing Director  
Weldon Tours and Travels

and the ones that are more popular for us as outbound tour operators are the European cruises, and Alaska cruises.”



**Rashmi Ahuja**  
Divisional Manager India  
MSC Cruises

“Cruising as holiday option has been popular, and now has gained momentum with introduction of domestic routes. Singapore and Middle Eastern (Ex-Dubai) cruises are accessible destinations, which make it popular among Indians. MSC Cruises has exciting winter sailings from Dubai with two beautiful ships: MSC Virtuosa and MSC Opera. Longer duration cruises and choice of cabins, which have at least balcony and suites, are in high demand.”

“International cruising has made a triumphant return, and is flourishing in Asia Pacific, Middle Eastern and European waters. While cruising in the USA and Canada maintains strong demand, visa complexities have led passengers to explore alternative destinations. Presently, Asian and Middle East itineraries are favoured



**Dipti Adhia**  
Director  
Discover the World-India

due to their visa flexibility. The recent trend highlights the popularity of cruises among MICE groups and events like weddings.”



**Vasundhara Gupta**  
Business Development and Marketing Head,  
Lotus Aero Enterprises (GSA for Costa Cruises)

“I believe, we will soon see Indians go on world cruises as well. Right now, some of the most popular itineraries include the Dubai itineraries, which we didn't see much before the pandemic. This may be because a lot of Indians already visit Dubai and Abu Dhabi. We realised during the pandemic that if we want to build big numbers, we would have to offer the Indian travellers shorter cruise itineraries, which has really worked well. The tertiary cities are doing well.”

“The Andaman islands and Puducherry are also popular destinations for cruising and are being demanded by lots of cruise lines. Cruise lines are willing to homeport off India's eastern coast. With various bold initiatives taken by the central government, India is ready for cruising. India is working on enhancing



**Rajiv Jalota**  
Chairman  
Mumbai Port Trust

the current cruise tourism ecosystem to facilitate the anticipated growth. Our ministry has formed a high-level panel.”



**Jurgen Bailom**  
President and CEO  
Waterways Leisure and Cordelia Cruises

“If there is a cruise company tailored to different countries and regions, Indians deserve their own cruise company. We pride ourselves on doing everything the 'Indian way', providing a home away from home experience. Next year, we plan to expand to Middle East and in the long term, when we have three ships, we would deploy them at different ports and explore new ports such as Kolkata, Port Blair, Diu, New Mangalore, Porbandar, and Vizag.”

“No doubt that India is getting new routes domestically and internationally. However, one thing which will restrict cruise tourism industry to grow is negative attitude of Customs & Immigration department. For example, I visited Portugal and Spain, where I observed that cruise just had single digital identity



**Manoj Saraf**  
Managing Director  
Gainwell Travel & Leisure

“Cruising in India as well as abroad is back with a bang. Cordelia Cruises sailing from India has done very well over the last two years, even though per passenger sailing price is very high. Costa Cruises will also have their ship in India till the year-end. Among international departures, Singapore remains the most popular part with Royal Caribbean and Genting Dream both doing brisk business on their Malaysia and Phuket short sailings.”

“India is not able to provide favourable environment, which is a major challenge hampering the rise of domestic cruise tourism. Till the time we don't provide a favourable atmosphere to the cruise liners, no matter how many terminals are introduced or how many cruise liners come to India, they will not



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
Managing Director  
Holiday Moods Adventures

“Cruising is something that India does not have, which is the reason for the great demand. Both domestic and the international cruise products are doing very well. The Mumbai to Lakshadweep itinerary seems to be popular. However, the sailing to Maldives is the topper, but not available. On the international front, the short-haul destinations like Singapore, Thailand and UAE do very well, but a new trend of enjoying the polar regions can be witnessed.”

“We have definitely seen a revival in cruising among Indian travellers post the pandemic, especially as more people now want meaningful holidays where they can bond with their families and friends. A cruise ship offers all this and more. The Indian cruise traveller has moved



**Daniel D'souza**  
President & Country Head - Holidays  
SOTC Travel

“Cruise holidays offer Indians a perfect all-inclusive holiday - onboard a luxurious floating hotel. Our extensive portfolio of Cruise Holidays offers a wide range of cruise experiences, from entertainment and exciting activities, diverse cuisines, wellness-spa, shopping, to exploring new and exotic locales. We are witnessing strong growth emerging from regional India's tier II-III markets; this is in addition to metros and mini-metros.”



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

card for everything. Till we do not have that kind of attitude, no matter how many cruises come to India, they will not sustain.”



**Naveen Kundu**  
Managing Director  
EbixCash Travel Group

be able to retain their position in India. Together stakeholders should create infrastructure for smooth sailing of cruise liners.”



**Manoj Singh**  
Country Head India  
Norwegian Cruise Line

away from single-island vacations towards more diverse, multi-destination experiences. There is a growing demand.”

Compiled by TT Bureau



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# Adventure tourism is inclusive

Six proponents of adventure tourism in India speak about why they are encouraging not just their clients but also fellow tour operators to start promoting adventure packages in the country. They dispel the myth that adventure activities are limited to a certain gender or individuals with physical fitness.



**Ajeet Bajaj**  
President, Adventure Tour Operators  
Association of India

“Almost 80 per cent of the market today is soft adventure travel and we want to network with travel agents and tour operators in Mumbai and other cities to discuss responsible adventure tourism, best practices, as well as how to select and start working with good adventure tour operators across the country.”



**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 do need is perhaps more stringent safety guidelines for tourists.”



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
Vice President  
ATOAI

“Maharashtra is one of the most mature markets in India for adventure tourism. It's not just about money; it's also about the attitude and aspirations. It's time for the travel associations and travel agents to collaborate and join hands to promote adventure tourism and encourage clients to look at soft adventure.”



**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 today and we are in a niche business. But the world of social media has given a huge boost to adventure. I see a great opportunity for the travel trade who don't sell adventure yet.”



**Arshdeep Anand**  
Chairperson  
ATOAI Women's Collective

“Adventure can be incorporated into MICE travel, and in school group tours. Women travellers can also take up adventure. MTDC has shown keen interest in organising programmes in the state for adventure tourism. Adventure travel can be inclusive, and not restricted to a particular gender or level of fitness.”



**Subhash Motwani**  
Founder  
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. The Gen Z and the millennials are looking at new adventures when they are travelling within India and we would like to cater to them.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

## Sentosa thanks Mumbai trade

Chin Sak Hin, Assistant Chief Executive, Sentosa Development Corporation (SDC), was in Mumbai recently to strengthen SDC's longstanding relationships with Indian trade partners and to appreciate their support. Currently, India is a top source market for Sentosa and accounts for nearly a third of overseas visitors to Sentosa Island for the first half of 2023.







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# TripJack expands in North India

TripJack, one of the top B2B online travel platforms, plans to concentrate on North India markets for business. Going with the plans, the company inaugurated a new office in Delhi recently.

**Suhani Sood**

TripJack achieved an important milestone by opening its third office in Delhi recently. With this strategically positioned office, the company plans to concentrate on important North India markets and increase adoption of

**Hasan Patel**, Director, TripJack, said, "It has been quite some time now that we have thrived in this market, and we have observed the market potential, presenting opportunities for immense growth. Our office is designed to look beyond today and cater to the needs of the future. We aim to provide our

ter COVID-19, people were saying that the industry will return to normal state by 2025, but due to the technological intervention, huge demand is coming in and we have big targets. We have seen an exponential growth in airline industry, as well as hospitality industry."



(L-R): Ashu Gupta, Hasan Patel, Hussain Patel at the inauguration of TripJack's office in New Delhi

smooth, logical, and reliable travel site. Speaking at the inaugural event, **Hussain Patel**, Director & Co-founder, TripJack, said, "The inauguration of our Delhi office is a result of culmination of our vision and commitment to the travel agents. The new office will play a pivotal role for TripJack in the North."

team with a vibrant, conducive, and healthier environment."

Sharing future plans, **Ashu Gupta**, CTO, TripJack, said, "As a company, we really want to invest more into technology, which will increase transactions and overall business. We have seen this industry growing rapidly. Af-

Emphasising on the importance of creativity in business, Patel said that creativity proliferates amid healthy surroundings. "It is important to provide people with the right environment to bring forth their creativity. As we surge forward with investments, we will definitely invite more people to our clan of TripJack," he added.

# Kerala revamps district portals

State Tourism Minister recently launched the revamped websites of all the 14 District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPCs) in Kerala, offering quick access to information on tourism attractions.

**TT Bureau**

**P A Mohamed Riyas**, Tourism Minister, Kerala, has launched the new DTPC website packed with information and images. He said that with the advent of social media, it is vital to draw on cutting-edge technologies while developing and updating online platforms providing tourism information.

The updated DTPC websites are stacked with a lot of information on diverse attractions awaiting the visitors across Kerala. These websites are designed in a highly attractive manner, enabling tourists to effortlessly navigate through them, for choosing the places they want to visit and make use of facilities available in each location, said the minister.

"In an age when the fast-paced growth of IT has a great influence on people, identifying its possibilities is vital to the growth of Kerala's Tourism sector. So, updating and upgrading technological platforms like websites using most modern



P A Mohamed Riyas  
Tourism Minister  
Kerala

technology is vital for promotion of tourism in the state," he added.

Kerala Tourism has revamped its websites after 20 years, showcasing the distinct features of each of the 14 districts to the world. Riyas added, "This also reflects the efforts of the State Tourism Department to adapt itself to the global transformations. DTPCs form an important branch of the Tourism Department. The

revamped websites will enable each district's tourism activities to be coordinated in a better way. Apart from providing details regarding each district's tourist locales, the website also makes navigation easier for the tourists."

**In an age when the fast-paced growth of IT has a great influence on people, identifying its possibilities is vital to the growth of Kerala Tourism**

The minister has also urged the secretaries of 14 DTPCs to add more details on websites regarding events and places of cultural and historical significance, besides highlighting the Keralites' hospitality and communal harmony to attract more visitors.

# Expressing gratitude, Merlin's way

Merlin Entertainments recently hosted more than 40 trade partners at an exclusive event in Mumbai to express gratitude and acknowledge their efforts in driving sales numbers. Leading the event were Shannon Bailey, Trade Sales Director, Asia Pacific region, Merlin Entertainments Group, and Gaurav Seth, Head of India Trade Sales, Outbound, Merlin Entertainments Group.







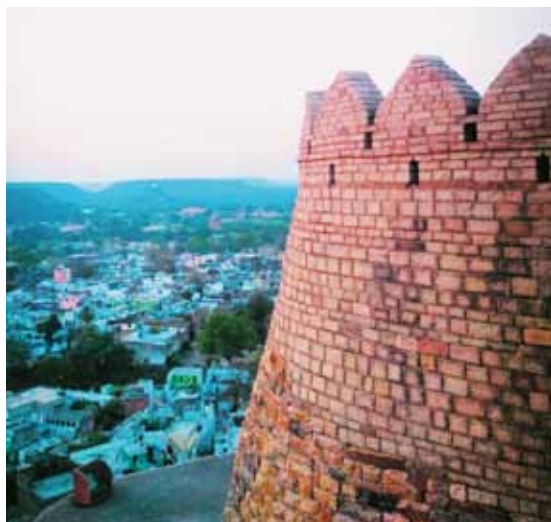
# Chanderi Festival

*A confluence of art, culture, and fun*

## Chanderi Festival

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board will organise the first edition of Chanderi Festival this September at the Katti Ghati to showcase its rich heritage and exquisite handloom traditions. The festival aims to showcase the beauty and craftsmanship of Chanderi's handwoven textiles, known for their intricate designs and timeless elegance. Going beyond the realm of textiles, the festival will also offer an array of exciting activities, combining adventure and recreation. Attendees can indulge in thrilling land and air adventure activities at the tent city and experience the Maha Aarti at the Laxman Sagar Ghat, immersing themselves in the picturesque heritage sites that surround Chanderi.

Cultural workshops and musical gigs will also be organised to promote the local cultures of the state. The visitors will be taken on a gastronomic ride where they can savour the Bundelkhandi and



Bhagelkhandi cuisines. A local excursion tour will also be conducted to the textile and craft tourism village Prampur, 4 kms away from Chanderi. For those looking for relaxation and rejuvenation, there will be wellness and yoga sessions to harmonize the mind, body, and soul. Additionally, cricket and volleyball tournament is also set to be organised at the Mela ground.

Families can enjoy a dedicated kids zone, ensuring that the festival is a memorable experience for all age groups. Additionally, indoor sports activities will be organised for the guests. Activities like DJ nights and lights & sound shows, hot air balloon glow show, vintage car rallies and photography workshops will also be conducted for the entertainment of the guests.



The heart of  
Incredible India

The festival will span over five days, commencing after the monsoon season, when the natural beauty of Chanderi is at its peak. A luxurious Tent City will be set up for the guests to explore and immerse themselves in the cultural extravaganza of the Chanderi Festival.

## About Chanderi

The time-warped mofussil town of Chanderi played a tragic role as the location of a Jauhar—mass self-immolation. Around 1,500 women and children made the choice to embrace death rather than being taken captive by Babur's armies in 1527. The tale of their sacrifice is commemorated on the grounds

## When culture meets craft



Travellers who are looking for an authentic experience of India's diverse culture can head to Chanderi, a historical town nestled in the heart of Incredible India in the Ashoknagar district of Madhya Pradesh. With its rich historical significance and picturesque charm, Chanderi invites you on a journey back in time. The town's traditional festivities, multi-hued culture, and unique weaving techniques are its major attractions. Nature enthusiasts can explore the serene surroundings, including nearby lakes and lush hills, creating a perfect blend of cultural and natural tourism.

Going beyond the realm of textiles, the festival will also offer an array of exciting activities, combining adventure and recreation

In recent years, Chanderi has also gained prominence in the film industry, serving as a breath-taking backdrop for several cinematic creations. Its scenic landscapes and heritage structures have attracted filmmakers to capture its timeless beauty on the silver screen, enhancing the town's charm. Stree, Stree 2 (Ongoing), Sui Dhaga, Rangbaaz, Akkad Bakkad Rafu Chakkar are some of the films that have resonance in this town.

Come and inhale the tranquillity of this historic town and drown yourself in its tapestry of culture and heritage.

## Connectivity

**By Air** – Gwalior Airport (250 Kms)

**By Rail** – Lalitpur Railway Station, Uttar Pradesh (37 Kms)

**By Road** – Bhopal (213 Kms), Gwalior (250 Kms) Jhansi (130 Kms)

of Chanderi Fort, where the heart-wrenching event unfolded.

Explore the timeless beauty of the Chanderi Fort, where the echoes of a poignant past resonate through the Jauhar Smarak. The town mirrors a unique blend of traditional and contemporary customs, with a diverse population that includes various indigenous tribes. Get ready to be enchanted by the weaving traditions and the grace of Chanderi sarees.





# GPS back with a bang to Ahmedabad

More than 40 exhibitors met over 600 pre-registered buyers during the recent two-day Global Panorama Showcase in Ahmedabad, where the journey to connect tier II cities across India begins. Apart from B2B meetings, it also saw interesting sessions on cybersecurity, charters, TCS, GST and partners presenting various revenue and ancillary opportunities.





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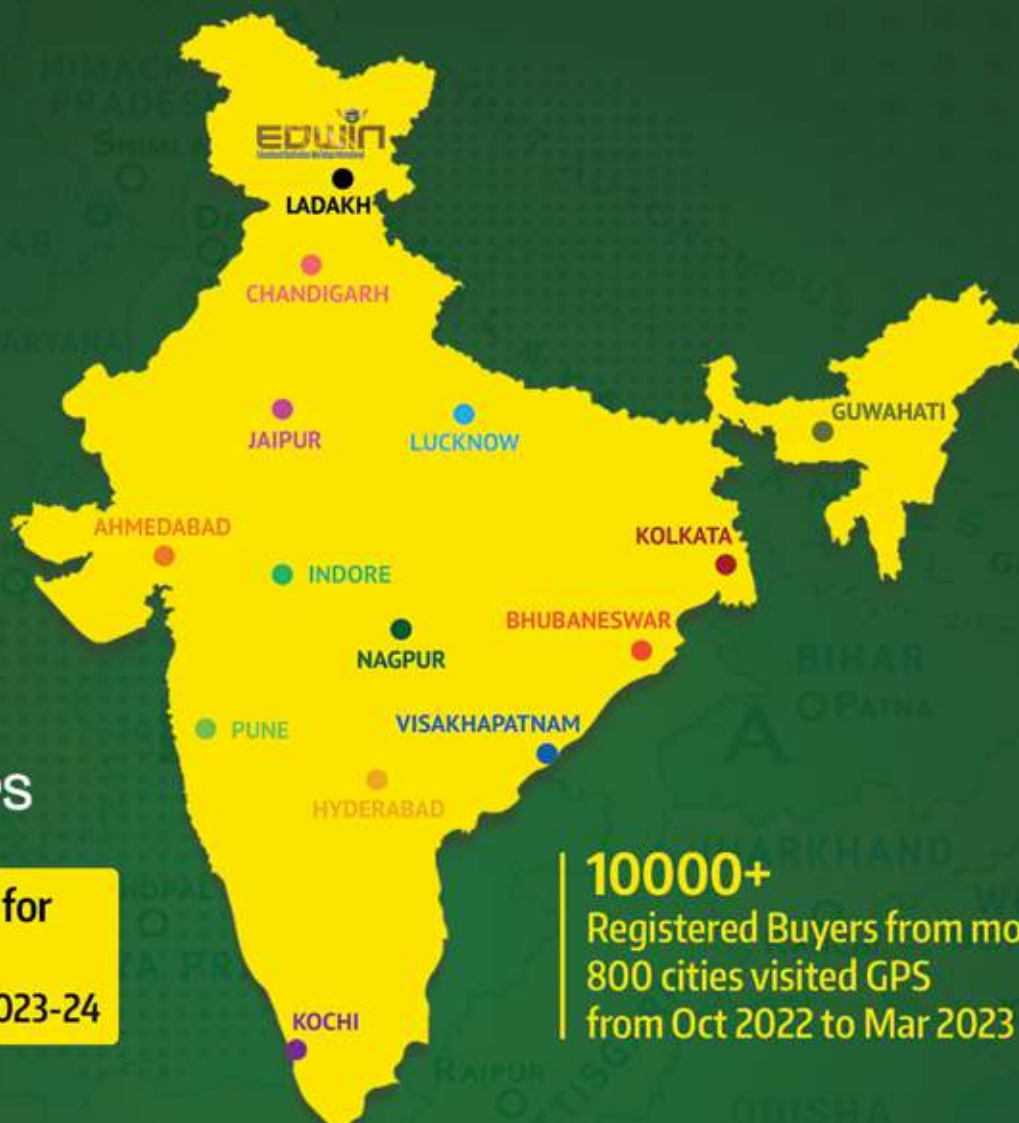
# EaseMyTrip celebrates stake in 3 firms

Having acquired majority stakes in three travel companies in India – Guideline Travels Holidays (Mumbai), TripShope Travel Technologies (J&K), and Dook Travels (New Delhi) – EaseMyTrip celebrated with the travel trade fraternity in Mumbai with a fun party that saw participation from airlines, cruise companies, travel agents, NTOs, DMCs, and hotels.





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1-3	Tourism Fair Mumbai 2023	11:00 am
9-10	G20 Summit- New Delhi	10:00 am
9-10	Travel and Tourism Fair - Hyderabad 2023	9:00 am
9-11	TAFI Western India Chapter Meeting	10:00 am
9-11	India Travel Mart Amritsar 2023	9:00 am
9-11	Bengal Travel Mart 2023	10:00 am
11-14	Adventure Travel World Summit 2023	9:00 am
11-14	Switzerland Travel Mart 2023	9:00 am
12	South Africa Workshop	12:00 pm
12-13	GPS- Jaipur	10:00 am
12-14	International Trade Fair for Travel & Tourism 2023	10:00 am
12-14	ITB china 2023	9:00 am
12-16	India International Travel Mart New Delhi	9:00 am
21	ATOAI Seminar & Roadshow - Northern Region	9:00 am
27	World Tourism Day	9:00 am
28	Switzerland Webinar	3:00 pm
29-2 Oct	38 <sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention	10:00 am
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# Raviz showcases Kerala's beauty

With a focus on both luxury and holistic experiences, Raviz Hotels & Resorts plans to develop wellness destinations in Kerala. The group organised a promotional event recently to cash in on the tourism potential of God's Own Country.



Janice Alyosius

The tourism potential of Kerala, known as God's Own Country, took centre stage at 'Showcase Kerala', a promotional event organised by Raviz Hotels & Resorts at The Leela Ambience Gurugram recently. Dr B Ravi Pillai, Chairman, RP Group, unveiled the event, which was a part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the renowned destinations Kovalam and The Leela Raviz Kovalam. The event saw the participation of esteemed dignitaries from the realms of travel trade, tourism, culture, and eminent social influencers, making it a splendid convergence.

Giving insights about the brand and their plans, **Asish Nair**, India Vice President, RP Group, said, "In the hospitality sector, we have four luxury hotels in Kerala, and we have entered in a management agreement with Leela Group to manage our hotels. We own the 'Raviz' brand, which is the fastest growing brand in Kerala. We also have inter-



**Asish Nair**  
India Vice President  
RP Group

national presence through managing and owning hotels in the Middle East, especially in Dubai."

Sharing more about the brand, Nair said, "Raviz is derived from the vision depicted by our chairman Dr B Ravi Pillai. His major focus is the Middle East. He hails from a small village in Kollam, which is called Chavara. So, it was always there in his mind to start something international in that small village, right at the banks

of lake Ashtamudi. The first thing which is done was that he created a beautiful hotel, a destination hotel like Raviz Ashtamudi, which is now managed by Leela. The Leela Kovalam was bought by him in 2011 and similarly the property in Malabar, the Raviz Kadavu and Calicut. These are the four properties that define the Raviz Hotel & Resorts in Kerala among all 5-star luxury hotels."

He asserted that hotel maintenance is a humongous task. "We have to maintain the property, the resources and everything else, and at the same time have to maintain the luxury. So, first 10 years of our journey were focused on setting up the process and policies in place where we remain as a leader in all the regions and destinations we operate. From Kovalam to Malabar region, our properties are ranked the best, so that is the first thing we did. Next, we also plan to move into developing wellness destinations, we have also bought a beautiful palace right next to Raviz Ashtamudi, called Padmavilas Palace, and we

are slowly trying to curate that area into a wellness destination," Nair said.

Speaking of the marketing strategies, Nair said, "We are fortunate to receive substantial support from the Kerala government,



**The travel trade and hotel industry in Kerala function as a closely-knit community, focused on collaboration rather than competition**

which has developed a comprehensive marketing plan to enhance promotion efforts. The travel trade and hotel industry in Kerala function as a closely-knit community, focused on collaboration rather than competition."

# Medical tourism to grow @21% in '23

Medical Value Tourism (MVT) is steadily growing year on year and is expected to grow at the rate of 21 per cent in 2023, as per a report. It plays a crucial role in a country's economic growth. In India, the central government, along with the industry, is actively working towards promoting the sector in the country.

India is revered as the land of ancient knowledge and wellness. From introducing the world to yoga and spirituality to now providing Medical Value Tourism (MVT), the globe has often looked towards the country as an answer to healing. The government, along with the industry, is actively working towards promoting MVT in India.

Besides, the rising price of treatments in Western countries and the war between Ukraine and Russia have made India a haven for patients seeking affordable medical treatment. The sector is steadily growing year on year and is expected to grow 21 per cent in 2023, as per a report.

The recent 'One Earth One Health – Advantage Healthcare India – 2023' program hosted by the Indian Government during G20 Summit in New Delhi was also an initiative to position India as a hub for medical tourism. The event witnessed 500 participants from



more than 70 countries and it was a great opportunity for the medical industry stakeholders, experts and professionals to network and explore opportunities.

India is at an advantage to cater to the global medical needs because of affordability, first and foremost. One of the primary reasons for India's popularity as a medical tourism destination is cost-effective healthcare, as compared to many developed countries. This not only includes the actual treatment, but also the pre and post-treatment rehabilitation. Patients from around

the world can access quality treatment at a fraction of the price, 'quality' being the key term here. While the treatments are affordable, they are at par with international standards. India is home to numerous state of the art hospitals and some of the world's most respected medical fraternity. The healthcare institutions in India are equipped with modern technology and the medical fraternity, including the support staff, is highly skilled.

In terms of accessibility and language also, India enjoys a unique position. There is a significant

English-speaking population in the country, which makes it easier for overseas patients. Thus, as an industry, MVT plays a crucial role in the country's economic growth.



**Rising treatment costs in Western countries and the Russia-Ukraine war have made India a haven for patients seeking affordable medical treatment**

Recognising the same, the Indian government has been proactively promoting medical tourism and has implemented policies to facilitate the process, such as simplified visa procedures for medical travellers. Provisions like the Ayush Visa by the gov-

ernment will help overseas patients access MVT in India. This includes Ayurveda, Unani, naturopathy, homoeopathy, medicine, and wellness.

Initiatives like 'Heal in India' are perfect for branding the message. The collaboration between the Union Health Ministry, Tourism Ministry, Ayush Ministry, Civil Aviation Ministry, hospitals and other stakeholders has helped in building a roadmap to connect overseas patients with healthcare facilities in India. This is further boosting medical tourism, infrastructure development and R&D in the country.

The Marketing Development Assistance Scheme or MDA by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, is also a good initiative. The scheme provides financial support to approved tourism service providers. Services Exports Promotion Council, with financial support from the Ministry of Commerce, organises a global event named 'India Heals' every year

for the global market. NABH has established a robust framework for the accreditation of hospitals to promote MVT.

This unprecedented growth in MVT is expected to scale from \$6 billion currently to \$13 billion by 2025. This will positively affect not just the healthcare sector, but also associated sectors such as tourism, industrialization, hospitality, and infrastructure development.



**Rajeev Taneja**  
Founder, Global Care

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



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# MOVEMENTS

## SHERATON GRAND PUNE

Pune

Marriott Hotels India has appointed **SUPREET ROY** as General Manager at Sheraton Grand Pune. With an illustrious career spanning over two decades, Roy brings in an unparalleled level of expertise and a proven track record of achievements. He has worked with some of the most renowned hospitality brands such as Hyatt, Radisson, Imperial Hotel, and the Accor group of Hotels. In his new role, he will steer Sheraton Grand Pune towards unprecedented success. His dynamic leadership will set new benchmarks in the luxury hospitality industry.



## SIX SENSES FORT BARWARA

Fort Barwara (Sawai Madhopur)

**RAJAT GERA** has been appointed as the new Commercial Director of Six Senses Fort Barwara, the magnificent luxury resort near Ranthambore in Rajasthan. He will spearhead the fort's commercial objectives while highlighting the unique essence of the resort, showcasing the transformative experiences and sustainable practices that are synonymous with the Six Senses brand. With an illustrious career in the sales and marketing department, Gera has demonstrated exceptional leadership, creativity, and a deep understanding of the industry, making him the ideal choice for the pivotal role. In his previous assignment, Gera played a key role in driving growth of the property.



## CONCEPT HOSPITALITY

Bangalore

**DEBANGSHU BHATTACHARYYA** has joined The Fern Hotels & Resorts as Associate Director Sales at their Regional Sales Office in Bangalore. His extensive 16 years of experience and expertise will drive core sales and maximise revenue, establish valuable relationships, promote brand strategies and contribute to the brand's fair market share in the South India region. He has worked with renowned organisations such as The Chancery Hotels, Sarovar Hotels and Resorts, and IHG Hotels. His proven track record of success positions him perfectly to assist the sales team in delivering exceptional results.



## KOOLWAL KOTHI ZINC JOURNEY BY THE FERN

Nawalgarh, Rajasthan

**JITENDRA RAGHUWANSHI** takes over as General Manager of Koolwal Kothi Zinc Journey by The Fern, Nawalgarh, Rajasthan. He possesses a wealth of experience in the hospitality sector. He has worked with renowned names such as Taj Group, Sayaji Group, Hotel Best Western, Lemon Tree Hotels, Country Club and Purnam Sweets LLC Dubai, before joining Concept Hospitality. The Fern Hotels & Resorts, a renowned environmentally conscious hotel chain and one of India's fastest-growing brands, is delighted to commemorate a remarkable milestone.



## THE FERN RESIDENCY SUBHASH BRIDGE

Ahmedabad

**AKSHAY PURI** takes over as General Manager of The Fern Residency Subhash Bridge, Ahmedabad. Puri brings a wealth of expertise to his new role. Committed to elevating guest satisfaction with strategic initiatives and a focus on brand development, his aim is to drive overall growth for the hotel. Leading a passionate team, his vision is to create an unmatched experience for every guest. His leadership is driven by a commitment to excellence and a genuine desire to create lasting memories for every guest. Prior to this assignment, Puri was General Manager at The Fern Residency, Mundra.



Palghar (Maharashtra)

**MANOJ MATHEW** takes over as General Manager of The Fern Shelter Resort, Palghar (Maharashtra). Mathew brings with him more than two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, having worked with Oberoi Hotels, Hotel Marine Plaza, InterContinental Marine Drive and The Shalimar Hotel. He believes innovation is the key to staying relevant and chasing a vision while constantly learning is the way forward. The coming together of Concept Hospitality and Shelter Resorts in Palghar district is a positive step in this direction. With good support from all resources, he sets high standards for the property.



## SUMI YASHSHREE HOTELS

Darjeeling

Sumi Yashshree Hotels has appointed **SHIKHA KHANNA** as the new Global Head of PR, Sales & Marketing. With an extensive background in the industry, Khanna is poised to lead the company's strategic efforts and elevate its brand presence on a global scale. Bringing a wealth of experience to her role, Khanna will oversee PR campaigns, spearhead innovative sales strategies, and drive impactful marketing initiatives. Her vision and leadership are expected to reinforce the brand's position as a leader in the hospitality sector. Khanna's dedication and strategic thinking are set to reshape the company's growth trajectory.



## SAYAJI MORBI

Morbi

Sayaji Hotels has appointed **SHIVENDRA SINGH** as the General Manager of Sayaji Morbi in Gujarat. In his new role, he will be accountable for budgeting and financial management. Singh has worked in the hospitality industry for more than 20 years, covering hotel administration and operations, planning, and implementing business strategies. Prior to joining Sayaji Hotels, he was associated with Radisson Group of Hotels. He graduated from the Institute of Hotel Management, Meerut. Commenting on his appointment, Singh stated, "It is an absolute honour to lead the iconic property of Sayaji Hotels Group featuring 97 guest rooms."



Mumbai

**POONAM GAWAS** has been promoted as Associate Director - Online Revenue at The Fern Hotels & Resorts. In her new role, she will spearhead the Online Revenue function from the company's corporate office in Mumbai, leveraging her extensive experience and expertise to drive core online sales and maximising revenues, establish valuable relationships, promote brand strategies and contribute to brand marketing initiatives. Having served as Online Revenue Manager since 2018, she has demonstrated exceptional dedication and outstanding performance in driving business growth and achieving the group hotels' online budgets.



## TALKing People

**BRUNO COURBET**, Director of Indonesia, India, Thailand & New Markets, Club Med, enjoys playing golf, and other outdoor activities like snorkelling. "My favourite holiday destination in India is Rajasthan. It is home to Jaipur aka The Pink City, beautiful architectures and culture. I also love Varanasi. I was amazed to see a mix of modern and ancient with it being one of the oldest living cities in the world and the pilgrimage spot for Hindus. Goa is a close second; it is a great mix of relaxing, beautiful beaches and intriguing cultural heritage in old Goa. My next holiday will be to Seychelles!" he says.



When it comes to choosing a favourite holiday destination, **RITU GUPTA**, Director of Revenue, Sofitel Mumbai BKC, prefers Kerala. "It holds a special place in my heart. Internationally, Paris has always been a top choice for me. As I plan my next holiday, Europe beckons with its irresistible allure, and two destinations that have captured my attention are Turkey and Greece. The rich historical heritage, tantalizing culinary delights that each country within the EU offers, play a key role in shaping my decision. Exploring Europe as a whole is always an exciting prospect," she says.



**AYUSH CHANDEL**, Director of Rooms, Sayaji Hotel, Raipur, believes communication is a key ingredient in the process of de-stressing. "Sharing my thoughts and feelings with friends, family members, co-workers or colleagues whom I trust the most provides a sense of relief and support to me. It also offers me fresh perspectives," he says, adding, "I love to travel, and Goa is one of my favourite holiday destinations in India because of alluring shacks, unique restaurants, abundant greenery and marvellous beaches. To escape and sit calmly on the beach is my idea of paradise. My next holiday destination will be to The Island of Gods - Bali."







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# Radisson bullish on India biz

Zubin Saxena, Managing Director and Senior Area VP, Radisson Hotel Group, envisions India's hospitality industry as a vibrant sunrise, which will continue for the next 25 years due to domestic demand and infrastructural growth.



Janice Alyosius

India is witnessing a sunrise when it comes to hospitality and the country will continue to shine on this front for the next 25 years, says **Zubin Saxena**, Managing Director and Senior Area VP, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group. "The Indian hospitality industry is a rich domestically driven market, with the amount of infrastructural development happening in the country in the form of new highways and airports; it is creating an impact on how domestic tourism is moving," he said. "India is poised to become world's third largest economy in the next 5-7 years and that will position India enviably in the world as one of the largest tourism and hospitality markets. I think the fundamentals look strong and we are quite bullish about the future of India as a hospitality destination," he added.

Highlighting Radisson's plans to solidify its presence further, Saxena shared, "We currently have a portfolio of 170 hotels operating and under development, and we plan to develop the portfolio further in the next 3-5 years. We are opening 10-12 hotels every year, which is a part of our active strategy to target tier II, III, IV, and V cities within the Indian market. The strategic move is to tap the potential these cities have to offer and that is where we see the Indian domestic story really shining.

Radisson is positioning itself to penetrate and thrive in these untapped markets."

Over sustainability issue, Saxena said that it is not just a buzzword at Radisson, but a core principle that shapes every facet of operation. "Radisson is leading the sustainability efforts on a global level, there are many global sustainability initiatives going on, we call it sustainability basics and they start from everyday operational practices, such as rooms preparation and recycling of towels to larger-scale endeavours like



**Indian hospitality industry is a rich domestically driven market, with the amount of infra development happening in the country**

installing electric chargers across all our hotels," he said.

He said that Radisson's commitment to sustainability extends from guest rooms to operations and both on the road and at their properties. "We are investing deeply in terms of energy efficiency, right from temperature



controlling, the air conditioning in our hotel rooms to producing power by using solar panels and so on and so forth. So, sustainability is a way of life for us, and we are deeply engaged in initiating sustainability measure and ensure our hotels are really at the forefront of this cause," he added.

The Indian hospitality business is expanding but guests are anxious about the rising hotel costs and want to know when will the costs stabilise. He said the dynamics of hotel room pricing is a complex interplay between supply and demand. "I think, we are at a point where demand for hotel rooms is very strong, and the supply for hotel rooms is somewhat

stable, that is what is pushing the average rates up. Also, our industry has started focusing on price value proposition for our customers, and that is coming by the way of giving better services and after almost 2-3 years of down period due to COVID-19. I think, average rates are bound to grow and remain this way for the next 12-18 months." ↴



**Zubin Saxena**  
Managing Director and Senior Area VP, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group

#### Group plans rapid expansion

- ❖ India is poised to become world's third largest economy in the next 5-7 years
- ❖ Radisson Hotels currently have a portfolio of 170 hotels operating and under development
- ❖ Radisson Hotels opening 10-12 hotels every year
- ❖ Their active strategy is to target tier II, III, IV, and V cities within the Indian market
- ❖ Average room rates are bound to grow and remain this way for the next 12-18 months
- ❖ Radisson Hotel opening their best hotel in Srinagar in next 3-4 months



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