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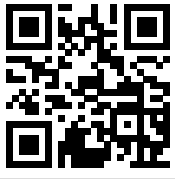
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## Visas: Double-edged sword of travel freedom

With peak travel season upon us, inevitable struggle for visas engulfs the travel trade. Many countries offering e-visas or visa-on-arrival are gaining popularity. This flexibility allows last-minute travellers to book packages on short notice. While agents continue to advise their clients to plan ahead, this necessary evil continues to haunt the Indian traveller.



Jay Kantawala  
Chairman, Western Region, TAFI

“ There has been a significant improvement in visa processing as compared to last year, and we are hoping this will continue as we go into the peak summer season. My clients still ask for a mix of both – destinations that offer e-visa and those that don't. There are certain destinations where you don't have a choice but to apply for a visa much in advance. My clients first opt for their destination of choice and apply for visa for those countries. If there is an issue with the visa or appointment, then they take a call and opt for one that offers e-visa or visa-on-arrival. ”



Jitul Mehta  
National Joint Secretary, TAFI

“ The visa issue has become better now. US has worked hard and opened a whole lot of appointments to clear their backlog. UK has also normalised to a great extent. Coming to Schengen, we are getting appointments within a week or 10-day time. This is true for most Schengen countries except a few. My clients have also started planning in advance and we are getting support from embassy and consulates. So, hopefully this summer should go smoothly. Indians are typically last-minute travellers. But mature travellers do plan in advance. ”

Contd. on page 10 ▶

## Is recce a lost art?

In the age of familiarisation trips, agent reconnaissance seems to be a lost art. Or is it? We speak to key operators who continue to invest in product by exploring new destinations by themselves.

Hazel Jain

Given the premium nature of services that the travel agents and tour operators provide, it is imperative that they, as domain experts, personally assess potential suppliers, understand their capabilities and offerings, and curate exceptional products and experiences for their elite customers.



Reena Sachdev  
Founder, Travel Arena

create great business for not-so-known destinations like Malta, Italy, Peru, Argentina, Portugal, South of France, Spain, Mexico, Cuba, and Egypt. “I have explored them at my own pace, which has given us the first-mover advantage. Considering what we sell is intangible, our overheads are not as high as other businesses and that only makes our responsibility greater. Customers trust our expertise as they cannot touch and feel the product before buying. The least we as

without any official fams for more than 10 years and has managed to

Contd. on page 7 ▶

## This'll be India's century: Kant

Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa, India, unveils a vision for India's economic future at the launch of 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the WTTCII-Hotelivate State Ranking Survey 2024 in New Delhi recently.

Janice Alyosius

Addressing participants at the awards ceremony of the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the WTTCII-Hotelivate State Ranking Survey 2024, **Amitabh Kant**, G20 Sherpa, India, articulated a vision that could potentially reshape India's economic landscape, prioritising tourism as the anchor for growth and job creation. Kant underscored a shift in policy focus that can transform the power of tourism beyond its traditional role as a leisure activity,



Amitabh Kant  
G20 Sherpa, India

especially under Prime Minister Modi's leadership where he will prioritise tourism for both, GDP growth and job creation,” he said.

Kant highlighted tourism's multi-faceted impact on the economy. Tourism emerges not just as a sector but as a potent force for job creation, with the potential to generate 25 million jobs within the next 5 to 6 years, he said. He emphasises on the importance of last-mile connectivity to tourism destina-

Contd. on page 18 ▶



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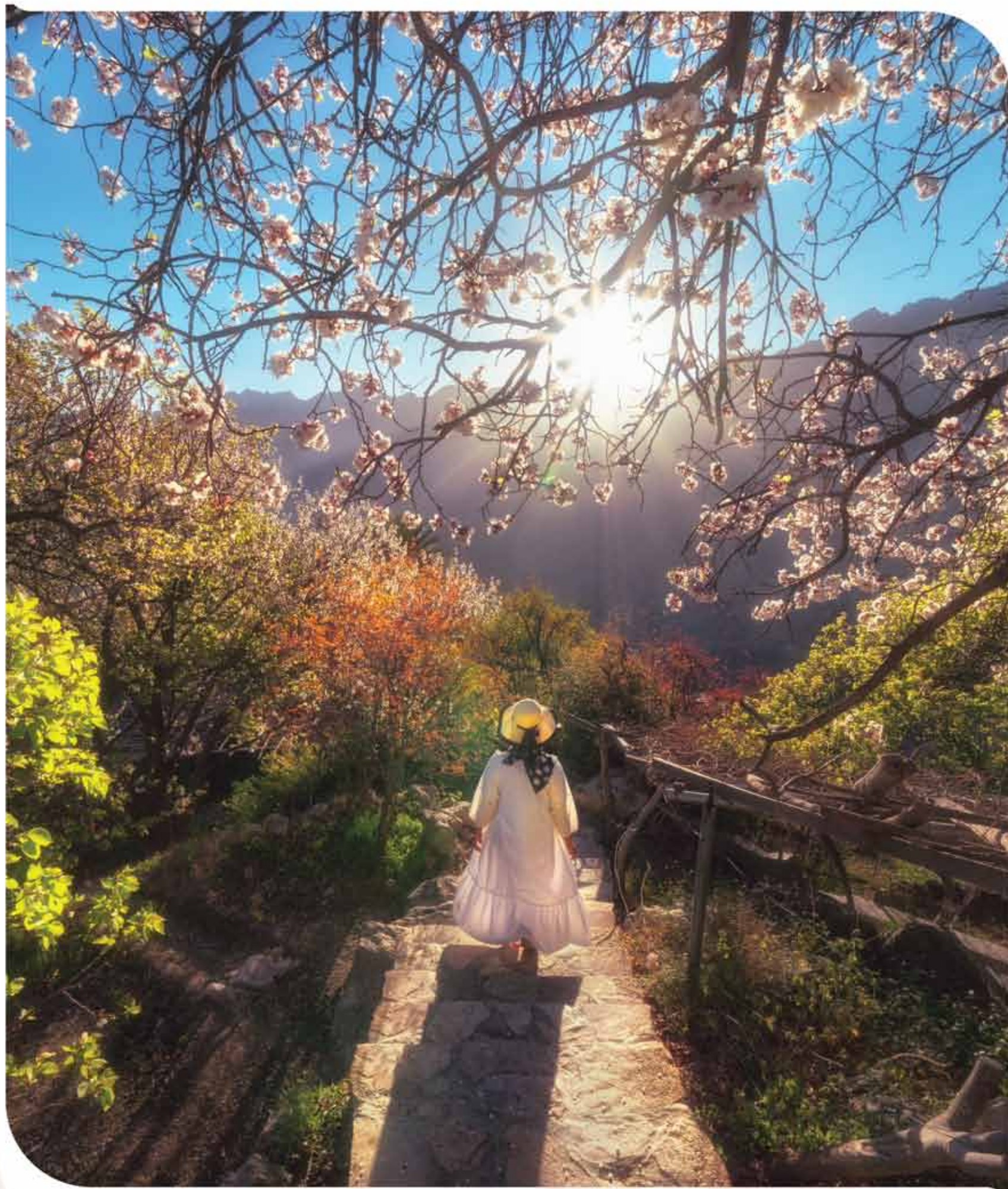
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# McArthurGlen woos Indian trade

Matthias Sinner, Head of Tourism, McArthurGlen Group and Sabina Piacenti, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets, met Indian travel trade partners in Delhi to discuss their promotional plans. With India's travel expenditure estimated to reach US\$410 billion by 2030, the brand plans to penetrate further into the Indian market.



**Matthias Sinner**, Head of Tourism, McArthurGlen Group and **Sabina Piacenti**, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets, met Indian travel trade partners in Delhi to discuss their promotional plans and entice India's outbound market, as they see great demand coming from the country in coming years. Shopping is one of the primary demands of an Indian customer while planning a foreign trip. Highlighting the key trends among Indian shoppers, Piacenti said, "In 2023, we have seen many Indian customers coming from MICE group, GITs, and FITs eager to shop best designer labels in Europe. They spend more than average time to get the best bargain in the stores. Moreover, Indians are particularly attentive to prices and redeem their tax-free shopping. They also love

the entertainment opportunities we feature in our outlet, such as services shopping, playground for kids, and the amenities we offer."

She mentioned that McArthurGlen has ambitious revenue targets for 2024. After two years of presence in the Indian market, the brand aims for a 26 per cent increase in comparison to 2023. To accelerate that and stay relevant when it comes to retail presence in the digital era, the brand collaborates with important stakeholders and gets featured as part of travel partners' itineraries in Europe, many FITs, and GITs itineraries as well. "Currently, we are focusing on the travel trade partnerships. We partnered with some big industry names like Thomas Cook, as well as luxury agencies and MICE operators. We believe that through the travel trade, our proposition is in safe hands," she shared.



**Matthias Sinner**  
Head of Tourism  
McArthurGlen Group



**Sabina Piacenti**  
International Markets Manager  
McArthurGlen Designer Outlets

### Incentives to travel trade

While speaking about incentives for the travel trade, Piacenti, shared, "In collaboration with our marketing team, we recognise benefits and incentives to our travel trade partners. For the customers, we have bespoke opportunities to enjoy value-added benefits, such as an addition of 10 per cent discount on the outlet prices.

and various other important cities. We plan to penetrate further into the market and achieve our goal together with our travel partners in all the other areas of the country."

### Operators on shopping trends

During their meeting with the representatives of McArthurGlen Group, tour operators shared the feedback received from Indian clients about the brand and what trends they have noticed among Indian shoppers while travelling abroad. As per them, Serravalle is one of the best McArthurGlen outlets, as it offers a holistic experience. **Ravindra Singh**, Managing Director, Amatra Travel, said that nowadays shopping is one of the major demands among the travellers looking for the perfect itinerary. Some customers look for high-end shopping and some for budget shopping. "If it is an incentive group, they look for budget shopping and value

shopping. If someone wants pre-wedding shopping, then the budget will be on a high scale," he elaborated.

**Sumit Mittal**, Executive Director, Nimbus Holiday, said, "Indians love to shop, and they mostly look

**After two years of presence in the Indian market, the brand aims for a 26 per cent increase (in revenue) in comparison to 2023.**

for discounts. They need at least two days in their itinerary when they only want to shop."



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## Easy visa must for pleasing Indians

It is a no-brainer that Indian travellers are highly sought after by destinations worldwide. Not only do Indians travel extensively, but they also rank among the top spenders. With numerous National Tourism Organisations (NTOs) eager to tap into the Indian tourism market, they are devising new and inventive strategies to appeal to Indian travellers.

As the summer travel season approaches, long queues at visa application centres are anticipated once again, coupled with escalating airfares, making holiday planning quite cumbersome. Presently, destinations offering visa-free entry or streamlined visa processes hold a significant advantage, enabling travellers to plan trips according to their preferences, even at the last minute.

Countries in South Asia remain particularly popular. Thailand and Malaysia already grant visa-free entry to Indians, with Vietnam likely to follow suit, as per industry sources. After implementing visa-free regimes, Bangkok surpassed Dubai as the most searched destination on platforms like Agoda, with searches for Malaysia increasing by 90 per cent. India, touted as a tourism powerhouse, is on the radar of every country. Even long-haul destinations like Australia are offering online visas to Indians, significantly boosting their appeal among Indian travellers.

The facilitation of easy visas has also spurred increased connectivity to these destinations, potentially fostering two-way traffic. Airline executives report mounting additional flights between India and Southeast Asian countries to accommodate growing demand. Enhanced connectivity is expected in the coming months for destinations like Thailand, Malaysia, Dubai-Abu Dhabi, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, as well as Baku and Almaty, all thanks to improved accessibility and simplified visa procedures.

# Sustainable tourism steps by states

The sustainable tourism market size in India, valued at US\$26 mn in 2022, is anticipated to reach US\$152 million by 2032, with a CAGR of 19.3% during the period. Here is a comparative analysis of sustainable tourism initiatives undertaken by state governments.

**A comparative analysis of sustainable tourism initiatives undertaken by state governments under respective tourism policies**

State	Sector focus	Infrastructure development	Other initiatives	Social inclusion & capacity building	Financial mechanisms
Uttar Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsible tourism</li> <li>Youth inclusion</li> </ul>	Incentives for energy audits, water harvesting, green building, and renewable energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint development and marketing of ecological destinations; compliance with environmental law for eco-tourism and waste</li> <li>Capital cost reimbursement for effluent/ sewerage treatment plants.</li> </ul>	Engagement with schools, colleges, and youth for sustainable tourism education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subsidies for audits, conservation practices, treatment plants, and sustainable certifications</li> <li>Energy efficiency incentives: Up to 75 per cent cost coverage for energy audits, capped at ₹50,000 per audit</li> <li>Water conservation and green practices: Support for implementing water-saving and eco-friendly measures</li> <li>Effluent and sewerage treatment: 20 per cent cost coverage for treatment plants, up to ₹20 lakh per plant</li> <li>Green building certification: 50 per cent fee coverage for certifications like IGBC/ GRIHA/ LEED, max ₹10 lakh</li> <li>Sustainable tourism certification: Half of certification fees covered for GSTC, up to ₹5 lakh</li> <li>Ecotourism Society of India certifications: Full fee reimbursement for certifications, max ₹1 lakh for two units annually.</li> </ul>
Madhya Pradesh	Eco-Tourism Pollution Control	Incentives for eco-certification and pollution control investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for eco-tourism development certified by Eco Tourism Society of India</li> <li>Subsidies for pollution control mechanisms</li> </ul>	Encouragement of responsible tourism practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eco tourism certification subsidy: 100 per cent reimbursement for investment in obtaining eco certification (capped at ₹1 lakh)</li> <li>Pollution control investment subsidy: 25 per cent subsidy for setting up pollution control mechanisms. (maximum subsidy of ₹50 lakh, with a minimum investment of ₹10 lakh required.</li> </ul>
Goa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sustainable development</li> <li>Growth of local SMEs</li> </ul>	Infrastructure development with environmental sustainability, sustainable tourist mix, awareness campaigns	Adoption of ecologically sustainable practices in nature-based tourism development	Inclusive growth opportunities for local communities, civil pride campaigns	Policies and programmes aimed at promoting sustainable tourism infrastructure
Jammu & Kashmir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Energy Efficient</li> <li>Infrastructure</li> </ul>		Incentives for improving energy efficiency represent resource-saving measures		<p>Energy Audit Assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Star rating: Maximum assistance of 40 per cent</li> <li>Star rating: Maximum assistance of 50 per cent</li> <li>Star rating: Maximum assistance of 60 per cent</li> <li>Star rating: Maximum assistance of 70 per cent</li> <li>Star rating: Maximum assistance of 75 per cent (capped at ₹5 lakh per unit yearly)</li> </ul>
Kerala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agriculture</li> <li>Transportation</li> <li>Fisheries</li> </ul>	Infrastructure development resilient to climate extremes. Coastal protection measures and monitoring the impact of climate change on agriculture and natural resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special responsibility towards the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity</li> <li>Focus on increasing agricultural productivity and intensification of cultivation for better resource use</li> <li>Encouragement of fruit tree cultivation for efficient land use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Programmes to reduce the debt burden of fish workers and ensure their physical, social and economic security</li> <li>Strategy for cooperatives and collectives of fish workers to move into deep-sea fishing with government facilitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local bank's establishing to support financing of sustainable development projects</li> <li>Potential access to green project finance for the Silver Line Project due to its environmental benefits.</li> </ul>

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# Experience first, sell after

► Contd. from page 3

sellers can do is personally visit and take actual stock of the experience our clients are going to have before expecting them to entrust us with their business, especially in the luxury segment," she says.

When it comes to niche tourism, success is not achieved through mere brochure distribution or social media marketing. Building credibility is paramount. As specialists in golfing vacations, **Arun Iyer**, TAFI (W) Secretary & Founder & MD, My Golf Tours, has invested in premium private golf club memberships, which allows him to interact with golf enthusiasts, understand their preferences, and tailor his offerings. "Destinations like Ras Al Khaimah, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Qatar offer premium sports events, such as the European Tour,



**Arun Iyer**  
TAFI (W) Secretary &  
Founder & MD, My Golf Tours

the creation of exceptional self-drive itineraries," she says.

## On-ground knowledge

**Ashmi Dharia**, Founder and Holiday Curator, Gypsy Soul Holidays, says conducting recce enables her



**Neil Patil**  
Founder, COO & CTO  
Veena World

destinations. "That's how locations like Fujairah in UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman were brought on the map by the industry for Indian weddings. For that matter even in India, cities like Goa, Udaipur and Jaipur have so many new hotels



**Manu Kashyap**  
Director  
Windmill Holidays

Fam trips only show you what the destination wants to sell; the finer nuances can best be explored only if a tour operator explores things on their own. After attending a conference in Osaka, **Subhash Motwani**, Founder Director, Namaste Tourism, extended the trip and did a recce to travel like a local and visited Hiroshima, Miyajima, Kyoto, Tokyo, Mount Fuji and Hakone. "This way, we are better equipped in recommending how to use the public transport, the Shinkansen trains, as well as recommend not just fine dining restaurants but also street food for those who want to experience Japan in an affordable manner," he says.



**Ashmi Dharia**  
Founder and Holiday Curator  
Gypsy Soul Holidays



**Rohit Jadhav**  
Founder & MD  
Moments Forever



**Pritish Shah**  
Founder  
A Travel Duet

F1 circuits, and World Cup football championships," Iyer adds.

In today's digital age, research on travel can be effortlessly conducted online. But the true essence of understanding a destination unfolds when one embarks on a recce trip. **Neil Patil**, Founder, COO & CTO, Veena World, shares, "These, in turn, enrich your product far beyond what surface-level online research can provide. I have done a number of recce trips that have not only been important for product development and enhancement but have also significantly contributed to my podcast and content."

## Enhance your product

Prioritising quality and customer satisfaction is paramount, feels **Manu Kashyap**, Director, Windmill Holidays. "Exploring destinations by ourselves not only sets us apart in the market but also enhances our ability to effectively market, promote, and ultimately sell our products. Investing in these experiences is a valuable strategy for our business, providing competitive advantage by enriching our team's product knowledge. For instance, my initial visit to New Zealand in 2003 inspired

to identify and mitigate potential risks or challenges, such as safety concerns or logistical issues. "It



**Subhash Motwani**  
Founder Director  
Namaste Tourism

gives us a competitive edge in the market. Clients are more inclined to choose operators with comprehensive destination knowledge and expertise," she says.

Not just tour operators, but event planners conducting reccees also stand to gain. **Rohit Jadhav**, Founder & MD, Moments Forever, says this is important to explore newer destinations, which is an ask year on year, as the next generation do not wish to repeat the

coming up, it becomes imperative for planners to visit the new ones to understand the product. I re-



**Saurabh Vyas**  
Managing Partner  
Vyas Travels

cently travelled to Ras Al Khaimah. It is like a second home to me, where I executed almost 13 large weddings," Jadhav adds.

## Team must travel too

**Pritish Shah**, Founder, A Travel Duet, says, "We have team members on the road throughout the year and this has truly allowed us to differentiate our offerings. Clients will equally be more at ease when they know you have experienced the destination, hotel, and restaurants yourself."

**Saurabh Vyas**, Managing Partner, Vyas Travels, says, "It's clear that our customers often know more than us, especially when planning vacations. So, our recce and the quality of products we offer are our best tools in impressing them. I frequently embark on solo trips to



**Varun Godia**  
Manager (Product Development)  
Varun Worldwide Vacations

expand my knowledge of both, new and familiar destinations."

**Varun Godia**, Manager (Product Development), Varun Worldwide Vacations, echoes similar sentiments. "Fam tours are without a doubt useful but can be restricting and limited to what the hosts want us to see. Therefore, in order to get a 360-degree view of a destination or product, sometimes it is necessary to go on your own trip," Godia shares. 🐘

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- Indian airlines gear up to operate 24,275 weekly domestic flights from 31 March, departures rise by 2.3%, says DGCA
- Global Hotel Alliance enters in partnership with Leela, sets 1 million member milestone under GHA Discovery Program
- 67% Indians prefer beach vacation, 58% aim for outdoor adventure: Amex 2024 report
- Visa-free travel increases globally, surge in visa-on-arrival options: UN Tourism Report
- Air India Express to commence direct flights from Kolkata to Kochi and Imphal from April

# 'All inclusive' hospitality in Maldives

Mar Mora, Director of Sales & Contracting - Asia & Indian Ocean, RIU Hotels & Resorts, shares USPs of their two properties in the Maldives, and unique offerings to the Indian market. There has been no impact on their business of the diplomatic row between Maldives and India, she shares.

 Meetu Malhotra

## Can you provide an overview of Hotel Riu Palace & Riu Atoll Maldives and its unique offerings tailored to the Indian market?

RIU Hotels & Resorts began its adventure in the Maldives in 2019 with the opening of two hotels: the Riu Atoll and the Riu Palace Maldivas. These two establishments offer RIU's guests a complete range of options in this destination with a total of 440 rooms, as they are both an ideal choice for families, couples and group of friends. What's more, both establishments offer the renowned "All Inclusive 24h by RIU" service that allows guests to enjoy a wide range of dining and entertainment options without limits.

The 4-star hotel Riu Atoll — a "RIU Classic" hotel with 264 rooms — is located on the island of Maafushi, while the 5-star Riu Palace Maldivas is located on the island of Ked-



**Mar Mora**  
Director of Sales & Contracting - Asia & Indian Ocean, RIU Hotels & Resorts

higandu. The latter has 176 rooms and belongs to the "RIU Palace" line, which is the ideal choice for customers looking for an extra touch of luxury during their holiday.

The two hotels share a reception area and are linked by a walkway, where the exclusive over water rooms can be found. Here, guests can experience the peace and quiet

of this treasured destination while they relax above the heavenly waters of the Maldives. In addition to this, 24 rooms offer a private pool where guests can enjoy an exclusive floating breakfast.

## What are Indian travellers demanding? What is the average length of stay for them? Has it changed recently?

Our Indian customers value having a wide range of meals, including some Indian food options. Regarding the average length of stay, since we started operating our hotels in the Maldives, Indian guests usually stay between three and four nights.

## How are you working with Indian travel agents? How are you incentivising them to bring in more Indian guests to your property?

We work with several travel agents in India through different distribution channels. We believe that the best incentive is our product. The best strategy is to let our partners experi-

ence it by themselves. We do that through Fam trips and other kind of initiatives. We also have our loyalty programme for travel agents: Riu

  
**We work with travel agents in India through different distribution channels. We believe that the best incentive is our product**

Partner Club, which we promote among travel agents. We invite them to join it in order to have full access to all our benefits.

**With the recent issues between Maldives and India, has it impacted your business in terms of**

## bookings from Indian guests?

We have not noticed any impact. On the contrary, we expect to receive more customers from this market because, as of March 1, India and the Maldives are connected by a direct flight.

This new operation gives RIU customers direct access to the Dhaalu Atoll where they will be able to catch the 10 minutes of speedboat ride that will take them to the Riu Palace Maldivas and the Riu Atoll hotels. The great advantage of this new operation is avoiding the connecting flight in Male Airport.

## How do you ensure that the needs and preferences of Indian travellers are effectively communicated and met throughout their stay at Hotel Riu Palace Maldives?

Since we opened our first hotel in the Indian Ocean, in Mauritius back in 2014, we started focusing on new markets for RIU since then, such as India. 

## Tourist count in Sarawak up

A little-known state in Malaysia, Sarawak saw a rise in the number of tourists from India after the TAFI annual convention it hosted in 2022. Sarawak Tourism is now eyeing a bigger chunk of the pie.

 Hazel Jain

More than a year ago, **Sharzede Datu HJ Salleh Askor**, CEO, Sarawak Tourism Board, welcomed about 500 members of the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) to her state for the association's annual convention. Since then, she has seen a rise in visitors from India. She was recently in Mumbai to meet the trade and spoke exclusively to **TRAVELTALK**. She said, "We have seen great results from hosting the TAFI convention in 2022 in Sarawak; the numbers from India have increased. In fact, December 2023 received one of the highest numbers of Indian visitors to Sarawak."



**Sharzede Datu HJ Salleh Askor**  
Chief Executive Officer Sarawak Tourism Board

The growth rate has been good so far, she adds, with 100 per cent increase in numbers in 2023. "We now understand the needs of

the Indian market better, particularly regarding their dietary requirements. We feel, we are ready to welcome Indian visitors. Our figures also show that there is some indication of an increase in the number of nights spent in Sarawak also," she adds.

  
**We now understand the needs of the Indian market better, particularly their dietary needs. We feel we are ready to welcome Indian visitors**

Tourism Malaysia has been promoting its 'Visit Malaysia Year 2026'. Traditionally, India has been one of the top five markets, but it has now dropped to number six. The period between January 2023 and September 2023 see Malaysia welcoming about 14.4 million tourists. 



## Empowering innovation @ATM

The Arabian Travel Market, taking place from 6-9 May at the Dubai World Trade Centre, will put spotlight on aviation, innovation, and sustainability, shaping the industry's future.

 TT Bureau

The 31<sup>st</sup> edition Arabian Travel Market (ATM), scheduled at the Dubai World Trade Centre from 6-9 May this year, will focus on aviation, innovation and sustainability, which are shaping the industry's future. The theme for this year's edition of ATM is 'Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship', championing start-ups and innovators making a significant contribution to the travel and tourism sector. Aligning with this innovation focus, ATM has partnered with Aviation X Lab and the Intelak programme, which have a shared mission to revolutionise the travel industry by providing a platform for start-ups and innovators.

**Danielle Curtis**, Exhibition Director - ME, ATM, said, "ATM 2024 will showcase entrepreneurs in aviation, accommodation, hospitality and attractions, among many others, and explore how innovative sustainable trends will evolve, identifying strategies for growth within key vertical sectors. For the





**Danielle Curtis**  
Exhibition Director - ME Arabian Travel Market

upcoming edition, we have partnered with Aviation X Lab and the Intelak programme to further our focus on entrepreneurship."

Visitors to ATM can expect a comprehensive programme featuring sessions dedicated to exploring key topics, such as technology, innovation, and sustainability within the aviation sector. With insights from industry leaders, attendees will gain valuable perspectives on navigating the evolving aviation landscape. Sustainability emerges as a central

theme in discussions surrounding the future of aviation, with a growing emphasis on reducing the industry's carbon footprint. The International Energy Agency (IEA) reports that the aviation sector accounted for 2 per cent of global energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2022. Sustainable Aviation Fuel

  
**ATM 2024 will showcase entrepreneurs in aviation, accommodation, hospitality and attractions, among many others**

(SAF) emerges as a promising solution, with the potential to significantly reduce emissions. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) estimates that SAF could contribute up to 65 per cent of the emission reductions. 



# 'Paris of Gujarat' hogs limelight

Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant's pre-wedding bash sets tone for Gujarat's Jamnagar to shine on the world stage. The three-day event grabbed eyeballs not only from India but from the world, making Jamnagar a must-visit place in India.

 Surbhi Sharma

The pre-wedding celebrations of Anant Ambani, youngest son of Reliance Chairperson Mukesh Ambani, and Radhika Merchant, daughter of industrialist Viren Merchant, in Gujarat's Jamnagar in March grabbed global attention, with who's who from across the globe present to bless the twosome. To welcome the international guests, the city's airport, which is primarily an Indian Air Force base, was turned temporarily into an international airport for 10 days. "The airport handled 4,500 passengers from 26 February to 3 March. There have been 350 domestic and 86 international flight movements. A huge number of international passengers had arrived for the event," said **DK Singh**, Director, Jamnagar Airport.

## Vantara, a ticket to augment foothall

Spread over an area of 3,000 acres, Reliance Industries and Reliance Foundation unveiled an animal welfare initiative 'Vantara' (Star of the Forest) in Reliance's Jamnagar Refinery Complex in Gujarat. Brainchild of Anant Ambani, the first of its kind effort is a non-profit project that aims to rescue, treat, care, and rehabilitate injured or abandoned animals both in India and overseas. "Vantara is a combination of the age-old ethical value of compassion with the excellence of modern scientific and technological professionalism," said **Anant Ambani**, while



**Bhavik Sheth**  
COO  
Evoke Experiences

talking about the ambitious project. The state of the art zoological park, which will be opened to the public "soon", has the potential to attract both domestic and international visitors, as it offers adventure and wildlife tourism.

## Indian vendors shine at Jamnagar jamboree

Reliance Foundation Chairperson and Anant Ambani's mother Nita Ambani relied on local artisans, designers, and service providers for the arrangements. VIP guests were housed in luxury tents at the Reliance Greens Complex, equipped with lounge areas, living-cum-master bedrooms, dressing rooms, and washrooms. These temporary accommodations hosted VIP guests from various parts of the world. The 900-sq ft luxurious Rajwadi tents were created by Evoke Experiences.

Speaking on the same, **Bhavik Sheth**, COO, Evoke Experiences,



said, "We created about 60-62 luxury accommodations and the size of the tents was 900-sq ft with all the luxurious amenities. We took inspiration from the luxury suites that we created in Rann Utsav, the tent city in Dhordo, Kutch." Sharing more details, he added,

**Vantara is a combination of age-old ethical value of compassion with the excellence of modern scientific and tech professionalism**

"We are known for creating luxury in remote locations where it is very difficult to construct a building or a hotel in a very short period. All the tents were luxurious. The facilities, furniture, and

the bathroom amenities were equivalent as that of 5-star hotels. The overall feedback and the arrangements were appreciated by everyone who stayed there and the management team of Ambani was quite happy with the facilities we created."

Sheth believes that events like these would open new doors for them. "People see an alternative for luxury accommodation at hotels and resorts. We can tap events in remote locations of India where there are not good accommodation facilities," he shared.

**Potential MICE destination** Known as the small 'Paris of Gujarat', Jamnagar has become the epicentre of a monumental event, and is today a potential MICE destination. For the grand celebration, the Ambani family also facilitated the construction of new temples within a sprawling temple complex in Jamnagar, Gujarat. ↴

## Green measures taken by states for tourism

▶ Contd. from page 6

State	Sector focus	Infrastructure development	Other initiatives	Social inclusion & capacity building	Financial mechanisms
Arunachal Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Infrastructure</li> <li>Waste Management</li> </ul>	Developing all-weather roads with minimal environmental impact, co-friendly transportation within and between cities, and maintaining trekking routes	Preserving mutual landscapes, replanting trees during road constructions, and maintaining ecological balance in development projects	Promoting eco-tourism to benefit local communities, awareness programmes, for ecological conservation, and creating employment through eco-friendly services	
Karnataka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Heritage Infrastructure</li> </ul>	Promoting balance in tourism development with the conservation of the environment and local culture		Engaging communities in the development of tourism and promoting sustainable practices	Financial Assistance per Tourism Project (50 per cent of capital cost for undertaking measure) up to ₹1 lakh for water saving, pollution and clean energy projects
Tamil Nadu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Eco-Tourism</li> <li>Sustainable Development</li> </ul>	Promoting sustainable tourism with a focus on attracting high-value tourists rather than large volumes	Rainwater harvesting, renewable energy, waste management, green building certifications like GRIHA and IGBC, and smart solutions for water and wastewater management	Engaging local communities in tourism, enhancing the natural bounty of Tamil Nadu, and creating employment and entrepreneurship opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 25 per cent of capital costs, with a ceiling of ₹25 lakh per project for sustainability initiatives</li> <li>Up to 100 per cent reimbursement for national certification (up to ₹2 lakh) and international certification (up to ₹10 lakh)</li> </ul>

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# E-visa destinations in favour

► Contd. from page 3



**Tejbir Singh Anand**  
Senior VP, ATOAI &  
Vice Chairman, FAITH

“Singapore and Dubai have easy and quick visa process, but they have become more expensive than Europe also. So, my clients prefer to holiday in Europe but the challenge for that is no availability of slots to apply for a visa.

“Visas remain the gateway for anyone’s holiday and also travel agent’s nightmare and delight both. Nevertheless, I think the situation is improving as we have gone ahead. But gone are the days of COVID when we woke up and found that visas were really a big problem. Things are improving. I would say that we deal in Scandinavian sector, and we have seen that countries like Norway and Sweden have really come up very well and the visas are being issued quite aggressively.”



**Erach Kanga**  
Founder and CEO  
Ahura Travels

I don’t understand that the countries want Indian travellers to come there but they don’t make visas easy to get. So, how do you expect people to travel? But countries like Spain and Switzerland have become easy.”



**Hutokshi Marker**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Trail Blazer Tours India

“Visa challenges are very volatile, and they change from one day to the next. Currently, we are having a lot of problems with Italian visas, which was not the case some time back. France is one of the sectors, which is quite easy, but more importantly the tourism board is proactive in helping us out. If you have a genuine case, Atout France India helps us out. But I can’t say that for other tourism boards in Europe. Again, Tourism Australia is also helpful with the visas.”

“Visas continue to pose challenges for summer holiday plans, particularly due to delays in processing times and limited appointment availability. Staying informed about visa requirements and planning ahead can



**Vikram Singh**  
Vice President and Head -  
Outbound, Tibro

help avoid last-minute complications. We advise clients to plan holidays in advance to ensure a smooth travel. UK, Australia, the Middle East, and Asia still have relatively straightforward visa processes at present.”



**Vishal Ashar**  
Founder  
Kafe Holidays

“A few Schengen countries are cooperating and we have managed quite a few appointments till now. Easy destinations are Far East, UAE, and Japan to some extent too. Difficult ones are a few countries in Schengen like Italy, where the date is just not available for months together in a row. Chances of e-visa destinations is 50-50 due to high fares. For instance, a destination like Phuket has only IndiGo as a direct airline and the price is 67K+ which is way high.”

“The purpose of Schengen visa was to make travel easy. However, getting the visa appointment is as challenging as last year. Luckily, for some Schengen countries like Spain, Switzerland, and Neth-



**Dharmesh Advani**  
National General Secretary  
Enterprising Travel Agents Association

erlands, appointments are easily available. Countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand are back on track. Some destinations to get easy visa are Australia, Canada, Switzerland and Netherlands.”



**Saurabh Tuteja**  
Director  
Ujjwal Creation

“Visa requirements can still pose challenges for travellers planning their summer holidays, depending on the destination and the traveller’s nationality. Fortunately, we offer biometric visa services in our office for scheduled

“There is a slight relief now that the situation for visa appointments is improving. With more slots available, there will surely be less wait time for tourists. Though it is very important that consulates should gear up to give visas at a faster pace and bring more revenue opportunities for their country. The easiest destination to get a visa is Switzerland for sure. With early appointments availability, it is definitely all-time favourites. We wish the USA could do something to resolve the visa crisis.”



**Saurabh Vyas**  
Managing Partner  
Vyas Travels

countries. Scandinavian countries generally do not present visa issues, while countries like Italy and Germany may have visa processing challenges. In Far East destinations, such as Singapore and Malaysia, obtaining a visa has not been a problem.”



**Abbas Moiz**  
National General Secretary, TAFI &  
Owner, Shoiz Travels

“The Indian traveller’s quest for visas in summer is only rivalled by a wanderer seeking an oasis in the desert, though the diplomatic missions in India are taking positive steps to ease the process. One of the Schengen country’s initiative to issue appointment slots for repeat visitors, hopefully, will ease the appointment wait times for that country. Holiday travel to Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Cuba is priced attractively and offers direct flights, e-visas, or visa on arrival.”

“While some countries are actively promoting tourism by streamlining their visa processes, others maintain stricter requirements, delaying visa processing. For instance, Thailand has implemented free



**Ashish Malhotra**  
Managing Director  
Vacanza Global Travels

visa-on-arrival policies to encourage tourism. However, destinations like Hong Kong may require online visa registrations for Indian travellers. Countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and the UK historically require extensive documentation.”



**Harmandeep Singh Anand**  
Managing Director  
Jagsons Travels

“With the impending peak season, to avoid last-minute rush for visas and prevent visa shopping, travel agents must guide their clients on when to apply for visas, depending on the country they wish to travel to. Every year during peak season there is a lot of traffic for European destinations and Indian travellers tend to decide their holidays last-minute and expect their visas within a short span of time. However, visa, as such, has never been a problem if one applies in advance.”

“When travellers face restrictions and they want to travel while also seeking ease of travel because when they haven’t planned their travel well in advance, then e-visas and visas-on-arrival really work. Places like Bali,



**Sucheta Nagpal**  
Director & CEO  
Travstarz Global Group

Thailand, and others that offer extended visa-free stays or e-visas are becoming increasingly popular. Additionally, for US passport holders, obtaining visas for destinations like Turkey, Egypt, and Georgia is easy.”

Contd. on page 15 ►

# Vistara's daily direct flight to Bali

Bali witnesses huge arrivals from India, but until now there had been no direct flight between the two destinations. Vistara has commenced a daily direct flight from Delhi to Denpasar in Bali. The destination expects that the flight will further improve their inbound passenger numbers from India.



Amita Pandey

Vistara has commenced a daily direct flight from Delhi to Denpasar, Bali. Their aircraft is equipped with state of the art amenities and features, and has a three-class seating arrangement, contemporary interiors, in-seat power/ USB charging ports, a state of the art In-Flight Entertainment (IFE) system, live TV, and onboard Wi-Fi, providing a mesmerizing in-flight experience to passengers, shared **Payal Mehta**, Regional Manager Sales - North India, Vistara, at #LoveBali2024: Talk on Tourism, a promotional event organised by the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in New Delhi recently.

Mehta said, "Currently, we have direct flight only between Delhi and Bali. The total flying time of this flight is eight hours. If demand increases, we might come up with a wide body from Delhi, which will have a seating capacity of 300 seats per departure."



**Bali has introduced regenerative tourism and sustainable gastronomic tourism initiatives that go beyond sustainable tourism**

Moreover, if the load continues, we will introduce a new direct flight route from Mumbai to Bali with right bilateral support."

**Bali, a diverse destination**  
**Ina Hagniningtyas Krisnamurthi**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Indonesia to the Republic of India, addressing the event, underlined, "Every year Bali witnesses huge arrivals from India, but until now there was no direct connectivity between the two destinations. Indians used to travel through Singapore or other routes to reach Bali. Therefore, this direct flight between Delhi and Denpasar is an opportunity to boost the flow of tourists between the two countries." She added, "Last year, without any direct connectivity,

Bali received over 400,000 Indians. Surely, we will expect more tourists and MICE as a result of the direct flight."

She said that launching a direct flight between Delhi and Denpasar was not enough, as stakeholders

have to make sure that the route is sustained. "It needs to have a sufficient daily load throughout the year," she added.

Bali is also developing new strategies to market the destination in India and globally. It has introduced

regenerative tourism and sustainable gastronomic tourism that go beyond sustainable tourism. It is a specific form of strategy generally introduced for destinations that are high in demand like Bali. Indonesia hopes that such activities will safeguard Bali, as it leaves the

destinations in a better condition once the visitors leave. Regenerative tourism in Indonesia includes the involvement of tourists in restoration projects, community empowerment, sustainable agriculture and food practices, and water and energy conservation.



**Payal Mehta**  
Regional Manager Sales - North India, Vistara

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# Special fund attracts MICE to Sydney

Business Events Sydney has launched a new fund for travel agents in India, owing to cost pressures on event planners across the region. Corporate and incentive events with 100-250 persons can apply for the new fund, which is available for a limited time and can be used to cover/ offset an event's on-the-ground expenses in Sydney.

 Nisha Verma

Talking about Sydney Meetings Fund (SMF) **Joo-Rei Mathieson**, Associate Director, Global Corporate & Incentives, said that the applications for the new fund are open for a limited time and can be used to cover/ offset an event's on-the-ground expenses in Sydney.



**Joo-Rei Mathieson**  
Associate Director  
Global Corporate & Incentives

### Specific for small groups

She revealed that the SMF is meant only for smaller (100-250 persons) corporate and incentive events and can be easily accessed through the official website of BESydney. Planners with events larger than 250 delegates can also contact BESydney via this site. **Kristian Nicholls**, Executive General Manager - Client Engagement, BESydney, said, "Since the BESydney SMF opened, we have seen a number of event owners and organisers

register and qualify for financial support for events in 2024. Sydney is the top market in Australia for India, and we look forward to welcoming corporate meetings and incentives from India. From the feedback received following our 2023 India fam to Sydney we know delegates love the natural beauty and wildlife in Sydney, as

well as the adventure, sporting experiences and culinary offerings."

### India market

Mathieson informed that according to the latest Australian Tourism Research data, NSW has become Australia's top destination for visitors from India. "As of September 2023, 31 per cent of Indian travellers choose NSW for their Australia travel. In addition,



boosted Sydney's chances of being a preferred MICE destination. "Tourism Australia offers the best possible assistance to facilitate the visa process for your group. With no biometrics, no personal interviews, up to 5-year visa validity for business travellers, and 100 per cent on-line lodgement, the Australian visa application process is truly best in class and offers a massive advantage over other long-haul destinations."

Sydney has increased in direct flight capacity by four times since 2019 with a total of 12 flights weekly. The number of business events delegates travelling to Sydney from India grew more than 20 per cent from 2019 to 2023." She added, "India was the largest inbound business events market in 2023 for Sydney, surpassing China for the first time."

Sydney, Mathieson said that the ease in business visa has

  
**Since the BESydney SMF opened, we have seen several event owners and organisers register and qualify for financial support for events in 2024**

### Easy visa

Highlighting the various new and already popular destinations in

### To be eligible for the Sydney Meetings Fund

- ❖ Event size is between 100-250 delegates (for event sizes over 250 delegates, please email [jmathieson@besydney.com.au](mailto:jmathieson@besydney.com.au) directly)
- ❖ The event is not yet confirmed to be held in Sydney
- ❖ Event duration is at least 3N/ 4D
- ❖ Event will take place by 31 December 2024
- ❖ Applications must be submitted by 31 May 2024
- ❖ Applications must be submitted minimum 8 weeks prior to the first travel date
- ❖ Fund will be paid to Australia-based suppliers

# TAFI organises B2B show in Mumbai

For the first time ever, TAFI Western India Region, organised a 'Stakeholders Showcase' in Mumbai, which brought together top DMCs, hotels, OTAs, and other industry stakeholders to its members for a unique networking experience. The tabletop meetings were followed by live music and entertainment, cocktails, dinner, and an exciting raffle lucky draw.



# Turtle Down Under promotes NZ

Turtle Down Under has been promoting New Zealand for the last one year. Abhishek Sonthalia, MD, Turtle Down Under, says New Zealand is gaining popularity as a mono destination and the demand is not just for leisure FIT but also groups and MICE travellers. Travellers could plan anything between nine days and two weeks.



Hazel Jain

Having established itself as an expert in Australia, Turtle Down Under has been promoting New Zealand for the last one year. **Abhishek Sonthalia**, Managing Director, Turtle Down Under, says that the destination is now catching up. "We have expanded our expertise to New Zealand and have been selling it for the last one year. While we continue to receive a lot of inquiries for Australia, we have been getting a lot of queries for New Zealand as well. This is not just for leisure FIT but also groups and MICE travellers. We see a lot of enthusiasm among our trade partners to sell these two destinations," he says.

Speaking about their latest offering for New Zealand, Sonthalia adds, "We recently launched a new product – travel to New Zealand for ₹168,000 per per-



**Abhishek Sonthalia**  
Managing Director  
Turtle Down Under

**We see a lot of enthusiasm among our trade partners to sell these two destinations (with leisure FIT & MICE segments)**



**Chander Chhabriya**  
Business Head  
Turtle Down Under

**Australia has really picked up. We are currently promoting our Hero product for Australia that is valid for a limited period only**



son. This covers nine nights and includes all major cities of Auckland, Rotorua, Christchurch and Queenstown. Indian travellers should not miss out on a destination like New Zealand. Mixing it with another destination is not being fair to New Zealand. It is now considered as a mono destination and even up to two weeks stay is not enough."

While Turtle Down Under has many standard itineraries, they also customise it based on client requirements. "We are here to help your clients travel Down Under. We will soon be announcing our roadshow," Sonthalia adds. Speaking about Australia, **Chander Chhabriya**, Business Head, Turtle Down Under, says, "Australia has really picked up for us. We

are currently promoting our Hero product for Australia that is valid for a limited period only. It includes the main sectors like Melbourne, Gold Coast, and Sydney available at ₹178,415. This is 10 per cent commissionable to all our trade partners. We also encourage the trade to sign up for online agent login where travel partners get an Australia quote in five minutes." ↴

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# LA promotes big-ticket events

Los Angeles has been making a lot of noise this year, what with its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hollywood Sign and some big-ticket events it will be hosting in the next couple of years. Seema Kadam, Regional Director, Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board in India, gives **TRAVELTALK** the bigger picture of the destination.

Hazel Jain

The only Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) among all US destinations to have an office in India, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board is seeing great numbers from India despite the visa challenges. **Seema Kadam**, Regional Director, Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board in India, says that India was in the top 10 international source markets in 2023 for Los Angeles. "We received about 130,000 arrivals from India in 2023, and with the soon-to-start non-stop flight services from India to Los Angeles on Air India in the winter schedule of 2024-25, we are expecting this number is go up. So, India is slowly getting there."

Kadam adds that while the city mainly receives FIT and groups, MICE segment is also something that has potential for LA. "We have a lot of repeat travel-



**Seema Kadam**  
Regional Director, Los Angeles  
Tourism & Convention Board in India



**Andrea Blackman**  
International Sales Manager  
Universal Studios Hollywood

lers from India. The messaging is Los Angeles as LA 2.0 because we have a lot of new things lined up. We just celebrated the Hollywood Sign centennial in December 2023 in style with an evening event for the travel trade in Mumbai. We continue to celebrate this milestone as it has managed to generate a lot of buzz around it. Besides, we have big-ticket events lined up. LA will be

the host city for eight matches of the FIFA opening games for Men's Open in 2026, Super Bowl in 2027, and the Olympics in 2028," she shares.

LA is also the entertainment capital with music concerts from big artists, Oscars and, of course, the Grammys. "We have more reasons for people to come and explore the destination. We are also

the host city for IPW 2024, which is a global trade event that sees buyers from across international global markets. There are 27 trade buyers from India attending this show this year," Kadam says.

**We have an agent specialist programme called 'LA Insider', which is currently being updated and will be released shortly**

— Seema Kadam

Making a suggestion for the travel agents, Kadam adds that four nights in an itinerary are great for LA, combining it with Vegas, San Francisco, and San Diego. The NTO has an agent specialist

programme called 'LA Insider', which is being updated and will be released shortly. Visiting India was **Andrea Blackman**, International Sales Manager at Universal Studios Hollywood, which also celebrates the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Studio Tour. She was in India to meet key trade members in Mumbai and Delhi. She says, "We are ready for the India market. We see a lot of potential in this market; India is in the top 10 markets in the Asia Pacific region and with numbers climbing up, it ranges in top 5-6 positions in the region."

The studio tour includes the movie studio and theme park,

including Harry Potter. "It is perfect for multi-generation traveller groups. They need to keep a minimum of one entire day at Universal Studios or split it over two days. Fortunately, we have a 'Buy a day, get a day free' offer. We also have a mobile app that travel agents can use for more information on food, wait times, distance, etc. There is also a shopping outlet called Citadel. Agents can get the 'Hollywood Plus' pass for their clients, which is offered exclusively to the trade and includes many attractions. It can be bought from one of our authorised wholesale agents in India," Blackman shares.

### Upcoming events

- ❖ LA is proud to be hosting the opening Men's National team FIFA match
- ❖ The city is gearing up for the Olympic and Paralympic games in 2028
- ❖ It will host major art events like PST Art
- ❖ The city will see the opening of Destination Crenshaw – a \$100mn outdoor art and culture experience

# Exceptional year for MICE: FCM India

Global corporate TMC, FCM Travel India, hosted its first FCM Corporate Travel Summit in Mumbai recently, powered by the Global Business Travel Association (GBTA) with Hyatt India Hotels, Amadeus, and Singapore Airlines as sponsors. The summit was attended by more than 150 professionals from the travel industry, including key decision-makers.



# Birmingham: A convenient gateway

Tom Screen, Aviation Director at Birmingham Airport, is keen on incentivising travel agents to book their clients via his airport. He discusses the convenience the airport offers to travellers, great air connections, and an average immigration processing time of eight minutes for non-EU nationals among other advantages.



Hazel Jain

With a significant Indian diaspora and proximity to destinations located in the wider Midlands region, Birmingham seems to be a great entry point for Indian travellers. Recognising the potential that lies in the Indian market, Birmingham Airport is keen on attracting more and more passengers travelling to the UK. **Tom Screen**, Aviation Director, Birmingham Airport, says, "We are really interested in the Indian market, particularly with the high VFS traffic in the Midlands regions. Birmingham is an important entry point for them. We have been interacting with the Indian travel agent community about how Birmingham Airport can help them because we are centrally-located airport within the UK with great transport links. We want to look at incentivising travel agents to book more traffic through our airport."



**Tom Screen**  
Aviation Director  
Birmingham Airport

He was part of VisitBritain's 'Destination Britain India 2023' mission that took place in New Delhi in November 2023.

Screen explains that it is the only airport in the UK to have a main line railway station. It is nine minutes from Birmingham central, about one hour from London, a 35-minute drive to Stratford upon Avon, and 45 minutes from

Bicester Village. In terms of air connectivity, this summer will see easyJet fly from Birmingham to Edinburgh and Glasgow three times daily, 12 flights a day to Belfast, and 10 a day to Dublin. "This airport is, therefore, perfect for travellers who want to fly in here and visit some of the local



**We are interested in Indian market, particularly with high VFS traffic in Midlands regions. Birmingham is an important entry point for them**

areas, such as Dudley, Stratford upon Avon, Birmingham, and London for a few days, and then

go on to Scotland and Ireland. It is a very convenient place to start their UK adventure," he adds.

## Air India witnesses 90 per cent load factors

He underlines Amritsar and New Delhi as a catchment area – they are each around 80,000-90,000 passengers a year. From Mumbai, it is around 88,000 passengers per year. A majority of them go

to Heathrow and some fly into Birmingham Airport. "We want to grow this traffic between India and Birmingham Airport. We are keen to work with them to grow their flights into Birmingham. Right now, we have six flights per week on Air India and we are hopeful that they will increase this by one frequency each by September or October 2024 taking them to eight per week," Screen reveals.

He is also in conversation with Air India about looking at Mumbai as well. "But that is more like summer 2025-2026 conversation when they get their A350s. Currently, agents are struggling to get seats on Air India flights with almost 90 per cent load factors. Birmingham Airport also has an incentive scheme for airlines to fly into the airport, tailored to the airline," Screen adds.

## Connecting India to Birmingham Airport

**AIR INDIA** 3 per week Amritsar  
3 per week Delhi

**Emirates** twice daily

**QATAR** daily

**TURKISH AIRLINES** codeshare with IndiGo up to 18 per week from this summer



**KLM** up to 5 times daily

**AIRFRANCE** up to 4 times daily

**Lufthansa** up to 5 times daily

# Early planning solution to visa issues

Contd. from page 10



**Riaz Munshi**  
President, OTOAI &  
MD, N Chirag Travels

“Visas are an important aspect in the traveller's decision, travellers opt for destinations with streamlined visa processes. If they are unable to get a visa, they cannot travel anywhere, and this will restrict their travel options significantly. This trend is driving preference towards visa-friendly destinations, particularly among Indian travellers. Destinations that efficiently issue visas for Indian travellers will see an increase in numbers from India this summer.”



**Shравan Bhalla**  
Director  
Highflyer

“Initially clients preferred Europe, but many clients are now exploring alternative destinations due to visa challenges. A lot of countries have introduced visa-on-arrival facilities or waived the need for a visa if travellers already possess certain visas. So, these destinations are experiencing a surge in popularity. This shift in visa-based travel shows the significance of visa policies in travellers' decision-making processes.”



**Vinay Arora**  
Managing Director  
Flag Travel Services

“Indian travellers prefer destinations that offer e-visa or visa-on-arrival, particularly when planning last-minute trips and holding valid passports. Destinations offering visa-on-arrival facilities make it easier for people to choose them, helping travellers for their last-minute travel decisions. Such destinations emerge as top choices due to seamless entry procedures, enhancing travel experiences for Indian tourists.”



**Gagan Kakkar**  
Senior Vice President  
Akbar Online Booking Co

“Travellers opt for visa-free countries for immediate travel that don't require much planning. Yet, for specific destinations that require visas like the US and Europe, advanced planning is necessary. Last-minute travel to such places isn't viable due to visa requirements, so planning in advance is important. Unlike visa-free options, travel to the regions demand advance planning, including visa applications and documentation.”



**Rajeev Sabharwal**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Gaurav Travels

“Travellers choose destinations that offer hassle-free visas, prefer countries with shorter durations and minimal paperwork. For example, Thailand's visa-free policies have led to a notable increase in travel to such destinations. The future trends towards destinations streamlining visa processes and reducing paperwork. These visa availability preferences reflect a growing desire for seamless travel experiences, where entry procedures are simplified.”



**Arshdeep Anand**  
Director  
Holiday Moods Adventures

“Visas are always a problem. We have been really facing this problem for the past two-three years. Come summer, we are always advising people to go for the visas first and decide later what they want to do. Once you have your visa, it's much easier to decide your plan. Scandinavia, we still have issues with visas, but Norway is really doing well. Finland is also doing well. In about two or three weeks, they are giving out visas.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

# GPS goes to Pune, Chandigarh

Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) was held in Pune and Chandigarh from 14-15 February and 29 February-1 March respectively. A large number of travel agents attended the events. Harmandeep Singh Anand, Managing Director, GPS and Jagsons Travel, said that many destinations and hotels were targeting business from tier II and tier III cities.





# 'Our priority is air service to key cities'

Madhya Pradesh recently launched PM Shri Tourism Air Service and PM Shri Religious Tourism Heli Service for the pilgrims, tourists and locals. The state will be expanding air service to religious and other tourist destinations of the state on priority. After Ujjain and Omkareshwar, air service will also start for Datia, Maihar and Orchha.



TT Bureau

Madhya Pradesh is geographically a large state and equipped with road and rail transport facilities. As a step ahead, the government is now providing air transportation facilities to ensure a comfortable and time-saving journey for travellers. Speaking at the launch of PM Shri Tourism Air Service and PM Shri Religious Tourism Heli Service in Bhopal, **Chief Minister Mohan Yadav** said that the state government will be expanding air service to religious and other tourist destinations of the state on priority. After Ujjain and Omkareshwar, the air service will also start for Datia, Mehar, Orchha, he added.

**Madhya Pradesh will get wings Dharmendra Singh Lodhi**, the Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Culture, Tourism, Religious Trusts & Endowments, said that with the vision and guid-



ance of Chief Minister Mohan Yadav, Madhya Pradesh is getting 'PM Shri Tourism Air Service' and 'PM Shri Religious Tourism Heli Service' as a unique gift. This will undoubtedly provide wings to the state tourism. To make sure the air travel is safe, two twin-engine aircraft are being operated for the

very first time. Tourists, devotees, and common citizens will be able to reach from one city to another in a short time at affordable rates. Not just this, remote areas of the state will be added to the tourism map, which will benefit the localites as new employment opportunities will be generated.

**Air service will be operational in two months Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture Department & Managing Director, MP Tourism Board, said that a contract has been signed with an organisation named Flyola Aviation for the smooth operation of

PM Shri Tourism Air Service. As per this contract, the operator will be responsible for the selection of flight routes, establishment of ticket counters, local staff selection and training, etc. within two months. After this, regular operation of services will begin. Two 8-seater twin-engine aircraft will connect the major airports, including Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior, Bhopal, and Khajuraho, as well as other smaller airports.

With PM Shri Religious Tourism Heli Service the access of devotees to the spiritual places of Madhya Pradesh will become easy. Devotees, especially the elderly and disabled, will be able to easily reach the two Jyotirlingas of the state, Ujjain and Omkareshwar, and other religious places. Under this service, there will be one twin-engine helicopter and two single-engine helicopters. One twin-engine helicopter will operate from Bhopal and one

single-engine helicopter each in Indore and Ujjain. Online bookings could be possible through the Madhya Pradesh Tourism portal, MakeMyTrip, and Agoda.

**A contract has been signed with an organisation named Flyola Aviation for the smooth operation of PM Shri Tourism Air Service**

An Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has also been signed between the tourism board and Flyola Aviation for the operation of PM Shri Tourism Air Service on the Jhabua, Khargone and Mandla airstrips.

## Banyan Tree is now Banyan Group

Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts recently hosted an exclusive event for a few wedding planners and travel agents in Mumbai. It was to celebrate its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, as well as to announce its new branding – it is now called Banyan Group. The morning session included a tabletop meet-up with the trade to highlight its various brands to the India market.



# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY		
EVENT TALK		
Published from: India Middle East		
APRIL 2024		
Date	Event	Time
2	Rail Europe Webinar	3:00 pm
3-4	GITM Goa 2024	10:00 am
3-4	HICSA-Bengaluru	10:30 am
3-4	International Mediterranean Tourism Market	9:00 am
4	New Zealand Webinar	10:00 am
5	Switzerland Webinar	3:00 pm
5-6	International Tourism Fair Tirana	10:00 am
7-9	International Luxury Travel Market Africa	9:00 am
7-10	Global Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange 2024	9:00 am
10-12	World Travel Market Africa	10:00 am
10-12	African Tourism Investment Summit	9:00 am
12-13	International Tourism Fair Kosova 2024	10:00 am
15-17	World Travel Market 2024- Brazil	9:00 am
16	Tour Fox Webinar	3:00 pm
18	Irish Travel Trade Show - Dublin	9:00 am
24-26	Kazakhstan International Exhibition Tourism & Travel 2024	10:00 am
MAY 2024		
5-7	The Great Indian Travel Bazaar 2024	9:00 am
9-12	Seoul International Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am
14-16	IMEX Frankfurt 2024	10:00 am
16-18	Guangzhou International Travel Fair 2024	9:00 am
27-29	Riyadh Travel Fair 2024	3.30 pm

# Indian skies looking up

After setbacks over the past decade, Indian aviation landscape is witnessing a revival with the emergence of new low-cost carriers gearing up to operate domestically and regionally, injecting fresh vigour into the industry.

 Subir Ahluwalia

The Indian aviation sector is experiencing a period of significant transformation, marked by the emergence of new players, the perseverance of struggling incumbents, and the revival efforts of defunct airlines.

### Optimism in India

**Campbell Wilson**, Chief Executive Officer, Air India, recently expressed confidence in India's aviation industry, highlighting its rapid expansion potential to support additional international hubs beyond Mumbai and Delhi. Wilson emphasised on India's unique market dynamics, particularly the robust east-west and Asia-Africa/Australia-Europe air traffic flows.

### IndiGo stake sale

Reports suggest that promoter Rakesh Cangwal and associated entities are considering selling a 3.3 per cent stake in Inter-Globe Aviation. The proposed floor price for the sale stands at ₹2,925 per share, representing a 6 per cent discount to the current



Under the UDAN scheme, flights from Guwahati to Cooch Behar will soon take off, connecting various airports across the region. Narain chairs the airline, while Singh serves as CEO and MD.

 **SpiceJet recently finalised lease agreements for 10 aircraft. Resolving disputes with multiple entities, the airline secured significant savings**

market value. Global investment banks JPMorgan Chase and Morgan Stanley are facilitating the transaction.

### Fly91 takes flight

Recently authorised to commence operations, Goa-based startup airline Fly91's entry raises expectations amid a backdrop of numerous private airlines ceasing operations in the past decades. Overcoming challenges, including the aftermath of Jet Airways' collapse, founder Manoj Chacko secured investors to materialise his aviation venture.

### Jet Airways update


The National Company Law Ap-

pellate Tribunal (NCLAT) has instructed the monitoring committee of Jet Airways to finalise the transfer of ownership to Jalkan Kalrock Consortium (JKC) within 90 days. Additionally, JKC is mandated to obtain an air operator's certificate within the same timeframe. Notably, the NCLAT authorised the utilization of ₹150 crore from the Performance Bank Guarantee towards the initial ₹350 crore payment.

### Jettwings ventures forth

Jettwings Airways, conceptualised by Sanjive Narain and Sanjay Aditya Singh, is poised to commence flight operations to three destinations in West Bengal.

### SpiceJet gets summer ready

SpiceJet recently finalised lease agreements for 10 aircraft. Resolving disputes with multiple entities, the airline secured significant savings. To fuel expansion initiatives, SpiceJet aims to raise ₹2,250 crore through share and warrant sales. 

## Erco turns 25, unveils logo

Erco Travels celebrated its Silver Jubilee at Hotel Le Meridien, New Delhi, recently, unveiling a new logo, which serves as a symbol of their continued growth and innovation.

 TT Bureau

Erco Travels commemorated its Silver Jubilee recently at Hotel Le Meridien, New Delhi recently. The event proved to be a significant moment for the company, highlighted by the unveiling of their new company logo, symbolising their journey of growth, resilience, and commitment to tourism industry.



**Ravi Gosain**  
Managing Director  
Erco Travels

The new logo, a fusion of the Conch Shell or Shankh and Mandala art, embodies Erco Travels' core values of new beginning, prosperity, harmony, and unity. This innovative design encapsulates the essence of the company's evolution from its modest beginning to becoming a beacon of excellence in the travel industry.


**Ravi Gosain**, Managing Director, Erco Travels, expressed his heartfelt gratitude on this significant milestone, saying, "As we celebrate our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we reflect on the remarkable journey that has

brought us to this momentous occasion. Our new logo represents not just our growth but also our unwavering commitment to showcasing the beauty of India to travellers around the world, while embracing sustainable practices. We take great pride in being at the forefront of the Indian inbound travel industry. Our focus on providing personalised experiences, coupled with our extensive network of partners and commitment to sustainable tourism, sets us apart as lead-



ers in the industry." Over the past 25 years, Erco Travels has continually evolved to meet the changing needs and preferences of travellers. Their dedication to delivering ex-

 **Our new logo represents not just our growth but also our unwavering commitment to showcasing the beauty of India to travellers**

ceptional service and memorable experiences has earned them numerous recognitions and strengthened their position. 

## 'Focus on last-mile connectivity'

 Contd. from page 3

tions, recognising it as an anchor for enhancing visitor experiences and driving footfall. "The Government of India has already invested significantly in this area, evident in initiatives such as the construction of 80,000 kilometres of roads, expressways, and highways over the past decade, benefitting every state in India," he said.

Underscoring the need for concerted efforts to bridge existing infrastructure gaps, he said that states must shoulder the responsibility of ensuring seamless connectivity to key tourist sites. "The primary responsibility of the state should be to ensure last-mile connectivity to tourism destinations. Since there are around 15 tourist destinations in a state, the provision of last-mile connectivity becomes paramount. Many states lack adequate last-mile road connectivity to these heritage sites or destinations, which, in my view, is of utmost importance," he asserted.

Kant also underlined the role of cleanliness in shaping tourists' perceptions and experiences. "I

believe, there is a need to encourage the states further in terms of cleanliness. The focus should be redirected towards the top 20 sites within each state. The emphasis should be on examining the cleanliness index of these 20-25 specific locations. The focus should be on assessing the cleanliness of key destinations within each state, numbering

 **Gol has already invested significantly in this area, evident in initiatives such as the construction of 80,000 kilometres of roads, expressways, and highways**

around 10 to 15. States should be ranked based on the cleanliness of these tourism destinations alone. In my opinion, significant importance should be given to cleanliness, as it is the state's responsibility and is crucial for

tourism. States should be incentivised accordingly," he said.

Kant also called for treating tourism as an industry. "Currently, only nine states in India recognise tourism as an industry. This means charging electricity rates at industrial rates rather than commercial rates. Therefore, states that treat tourism as an industry, offering benefits such as electricity at lower rates and land allocation at industrial rates, should be rated higher. However, despite the designation, only four or five states have begun providing these benefits. It's important to note that many states have yet to implement such measures. Hence, states that provide these benefits should be rewarded, while those lagging in recognising tourism as an industry should face penalties. By incentivising states to support tourism as an industry, we can promote its real benefits effectively," he emphasised.

Additionally, Kant also highlighted the untapped potential of the MICE industry in the country, advocating for strategic investments in convention infrastructure to capitalise on the segment. 

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- **Geneva**, a vibrant cosmopolitan city, as well as the home of watchmaking.

Date	Day	Webinar	Time	Registration QR code
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\*T&C: Attend all webinars to be eligible.

# MOVEMENTS

## RADISSON HOTEL GROUP

New Delhi

Radisson Hotel Group has appointed **NIKHIL SHARMA** as the Managing Director and Area Senior Vice President (ASVP) for South Asia, effective 1 April 2024. In his new role, Sharma will lead Radisson Hotel Group's operations in the dynamic South Asia region, which boasts of over 165 hotels in operation and development. He will play a key role in strengthening the group's leadership in the Indian market, nurturing relationships with valued partners, driving revenue growth, and ensuring operational excellence. He will also lead the group's vision of being an employer of choice for dynamic talent in the ecosystem.



## IHCL

Goa

The Indian Hotels Company appoints **RANJIT PHILLIPOSE** as Senior Vice President – Operations, Goa. A celebrated visionary for his outstanding achievements in opening new hotels and rebranding initiatives across the world, Phillipose brings a wealth of experience in exceptional hospitality leadership spanning three decades with IHCL. An award-winning hotelier with extensive global experience in hotel management, strategic leadership and brand development, Phillipose embarked on his professional journey in 1993 with IHCL at Taj Coromandel, Chennai.



## SHERATON GRAND PUNE BUND GARDEN HOTEL

Pune

Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel appoints **SAGAR KULKARNI** as the Director of Food & Beverage. Kulkarni's extensive career has seen him thrive in various prestigious establishments, showcasing his commitment to excellence and innovative leadership. In his previous role at Hilton Mumbai International Airport, he demonstrated exceptional proficiency in overseeing Food & Beverage operations, excelling in forecasting, budgeting, ownership handling, and successful relaunches of key outlets. He has also worked with Sofitel Mumbai and Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore.



## CONRAD MALDIVES RANGALI ISLAND

India

Conrad Maldives Rangali Island has appointed **THOMAS HOEBORN** as the General Manager. A hospitality veteran with close to 40 years in the industry, Hoeborn's new role will see him further drive Conrad Maldives Rangali Island's ongoing commitment to luxury and innovative guest experiences. He recently served as Area General Manager in Central China. Before his stint in Central China, Hoeborn was Area General Manager of Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan for Hilton's multi-branded hotels in the region and General Manager of the internationally acclaimed Conrad Hong Kong.



## TAJ EXOTICA RESORT & SPA, THE PALM

Dubai

Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, The Palm, Dubai, appoints **NAYAN SETH** as its new General Manager. With over three decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Seth brings a wealth of expertise and leadership to his new role. Beginning his career with IHCL at Taj Mahal, New Delhi, he has steadily climbed the ranks, showcasing remarkable dedication and talent. His journey includes pivotal roles at esteemed properties, such as the Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai, and Taj Lake Palace, Udaipur, India. In his most recent assignment, he served as General Manager of the Taj Palace, New Delhi.



## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON AGRA

Agra

DoubleTree by Hilton Agra has appointed **VAIBHAV MATHUR** as the Commercial Manager. Mathur brings along a wealth of expertise in the Sales and Marketing domain. In his new stint, he will be entrusted with the responsibility of crafting a robust commercial strategy that encompasses all segments and channels to drive total revenue, enhance profitability, and bolster market share penetration. With over a decade of experience, Mathur has worked with many prominent brands, such as Marriott International, IHG, The Lalit hotels, ITC Hotels. He will be focusing on developing and implementing sales strategies.



## CONRAD

Bengaluru

Conrad Bengaluru appoints **INNU LAMA** as the Learning and Development Manager. With more than 12 years of experience, she is poised to elevate training standards at the property. In her new role, she will lead the development of innovative training initiatives and craft comprehensive training modules, onboarding and orientation process for new hires, managing service quality, training needs and talent development. With pivotal roles at renowned establishments, Lama has consistently demonstrated an unwavering dedication to excellence in front office operations and training management.



## FORTUNE HOTELS

Gurgaon

Fortune Hotels has appointed **AJINKYA SALUNKHE** as the General Manager of Fortune Select Global, Gurgaon. Bringing nearly two decades of invaluable industry expertise and demonstrated leadership prowess to his new role, Salunkhe is poised to steer Fortune Select Global toward new heights of excellence. He will oversee all facets of operations, ensuring seamless execution, exceptional guest service, and effective team management. His rich blend of experience and proven track record positions him as an invaluable asset to the Fortune Hotels family.



## SKIL

Mumbai

SKIL has appointed **DEEPAK BOHRA** as Chief Financial Officer (CFO). Bringing over 15 years of overall experience, he is a distinguished Chartered Accountant (CA) and Company Secretary (CS) with a remarkable track record in finance, accounts, and strategic financial management. Bohra's career journey has navigated diverse sectors, including NGOs, startups, corporates, and CA firms, highlighting his ability to adapt to and excel in varied financial landscapes. His expertise spreads to business analysis, management, and adept liaison skills.



## EROS HOTEL

New Delhi

Eros Hotel New Delhi has appointed **SAMVEDNA SUMAN** as the Marketing & Communication Manager at Eros Hotel New Delhi Nehru Place. With over 14 years of experience in digital and brand marketing, Suman will design and implement innovative marketing campaigns and digital strategies and take care of the external communications for the luxury business hotel. Having worked with various advertisement agencies across different business verticals, including the hospitality industry, Suman has a deep understanding of market trends, consumer behaviour, and strategic branding initiatives.



## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

Goa Panaji

DoubleTree by Hilton Goa Panaji has appointed **SURJEET SINGH RAWAT** as the Food and Beverage Manager. He will play a crucial role in overseeing and managing all aspects of the hotel's food and beverage operations, meeting high-quality standards, offering excellence in enhancing guest dining experiences. He will also be responsible for staff training and development to strengthen daily on-ground momentum, inventory and financial planning and management. Serving in the hospitality industry for the past 8 years, Surjeet has been associated with various hospitality brands across India.



## BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield appoints **AVISHEK SINGHA** as the Executive Pastry Chef. Singha, who has 13 years of experience, embarked on his culinary odyssey in 2011 as an Operational Trainee at Oberoi Hotels and Resorts. His journey led him to a breakthrough role as Chef De Partie in 2014, marking the initiation of his venture as an independent pastry chef. Throughout his professional trajectory, Singha refined his craft, leaving an indelible mark at distinguished establishments like Conrad Bangalore & Pune and Hyatt Regency Kolkata. In 2019, Avishek's affiliation with Marriott began at JW Marriott, Pune.



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# Luxury at affordable prices

Paul Wilson, Executive VP, Cross Hotels & Resorts, underscores the brand's focus on the Indian market. With India emerging as a significant outbound travel market, the hotel brand aims to establish a strong presence.

 Janice Alyosius

With the hospitality industry undergoing a profound transformation globally, understanding the needs and nuances of diverse markets has become paramount. Paul Wilson, Executive Vice President, Cross Hotels & Resorts, shows enthusiasm for the Indian market. Wilson emphasises on the evolving demands of contemporary travellers, saying, "People want a little bit more attention to detail. They want the arrival experience to be a little bit more personal. They want breakfasts to be a lot more personal."

He underscores Cross Hotels' response to these evolving preferences and elaborates on the distinctive experiences curated by the group. "You get bubbles with breakfast," he says. Furthermore, he emphasises on the brand's




commitment to infusing vibrancy and intimacy into the hotel experience, citing examples like the DJ breakfasts offered at Cross Vibe properties. To meet the demands of the evolved guests, Cross Hotels works towards enhancing guest experiences through personalised touches and innovative amenities, thereby enriching the overall stay for guests.

The Indian clientele constitutes a significant portion of Cross Hotels' guest demographics, reflecting the brand's commitment to catering to the unique preferences of this burgeoning market. With India emerging as the world's largest outbound travel market, Cross Hotels recognises the strategic imperative of establishing a strong foothold in this dynamic landscape. Wilson underscores the brand's proactive

approach, aiming to understand and resonate with Indian travellers better than any competitor,

thereby aligning the brand's growth trajectory with the exponential rise of India's travel market.


Wilson also highlights the significant presence of Indian guests, constituting approximately 25-30 per cent of their clientele. Rec-

  
**People (here guests) want a little bit more attention to detail. They want the arrival experience to be a little bit more personal**

ognising India as the largest outbound market globally with its vast population, Wilson emphasises on the strategic importance of catering to this demographic. "India is the biggest outbound market in the world. It's the biggest population in the world. So, we want to be first in the market, understand the market better than anyone else," Wilson asserts. Wilson further emphasises that from his understanding India's growth trajectory

shows no signs of slowing down, paralleling the expansion of Cross Hotels & Resorts.

While Cross Hotels' expansion plans predominantly focus on Southeast Asia, India remains a priority on its radar. "At the moment, our growth trajectory is massive. We are just currently trying to handle what we have got. But India is 100 per cent on our radar," he says. The brand's primary focus remains predominantly on Southeast Asia, with hotels in Vietnam and upcoming openings in Japan. Australia represents another potential market for future expansion.

Speaking of the hotel's market positioning, he emphasises on their commitment to offering luxury experiences at affordable prices, saying, "We are luxury, but affordable luxury." Acknowledging the spending capacity of Indian guests, he underscores the importance of pricing strategies. With a diverse portfolio of properties, the hotel chain caters to various segments rather than focusing on one specific market. "We have a lot of hotels, so we don't have one specific segment. What we do quite well in is the honeymoon market," he says. 



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FROM SEWARD  
**NORWEGIAN JEWEL**  
MAY – SEP 2024

**7-DAY ALASKA:**  
DAWES GLACIER, JUNEAU & KETCHIKAN  
ROUND-TRIP SEATTLE  
**NORWEGIAN BLISS**  
MAY – SEP 2024 & APR – SEP 2025

**9-DAY ALASKA:**  
KETCHIKAN, SKAGWAY & JUNEAU  
ROUND-TRIP SEATTLE  
**NORWEGIAN JOY**  
21 MAY 2025



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