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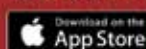


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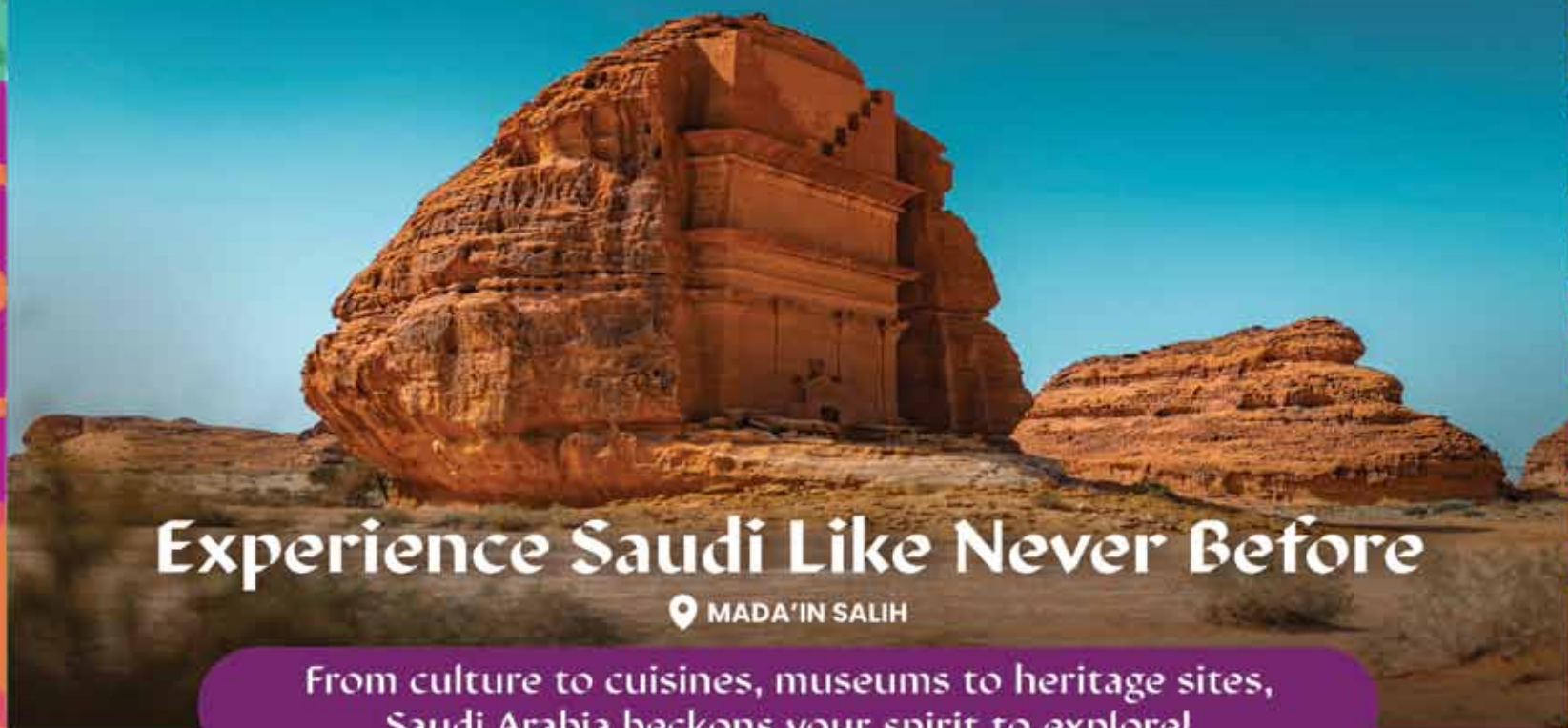


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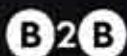
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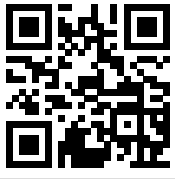
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## Bleisure: Blurring work-life balance?

Bleisure, fusion of business and leisure travel, is reshaping MICE industry, with an increasing number of business travellers seeking to blend work commitments with leisure experiences. Is this evolving trend good for the tourism and hospitality industry or will it affect work-life balance? Industry leaders share insights on the trend with **TRAVTALK**.



**Rajdev Bhattacharya**  
Global Head - Travel and Hospitality & Global Travel Services, Wipro

“Bleisure! Ah, yes, the blending of business and leisure travel—a concept that promises to satisfy both work obligations and wanderlust cravings. But amid our productivity-driven world, can bleisure truly offer a harmonious balance, or is it merely a vacation veiled in burnout potential? While the allure is undeniable, ethical questions linger. Are we blurring the boundaries between work and personal life, perpetuating a culture of constant connectivity? Do companies benefit from employees who are technically ‘on vacation’ yet mentally tethered to their work email?”



**Sanjay Pai**  
VP & Head - Corporate Travel, Aviation, and Facility Management, L&T

“Bleisure still has a long way to make inroads into the corporate travellers. There are many bottlenecks stopping them from combining it, such as leave extension, family visa, policies, and entitlement. At the same time, there are many things that attract them or their family – shopping, game drives, relaxation, spa treatments, adventure, or events happening during their travel period in that country like Wimbledon and Formula One. But good news is that corporates are changing and want the employee to feel it is a great place to work.”

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### New step to ease Italy visa

The Visa Section of the Italian Embassy in Mumbai seems to have taken a step in the right direction. **TRAVTALK** speaks to a few agents in Mumbai and Delhi to find out the ground situation.

TT Bureau

Many a time, agents are forced to suggest a different European destination to a client that wants to holiday in Italy because there are issues with getting visa appointments for Italy. As a result, clients are forced to add-on another destination because they cannot do Italy exclusively. However, there seems to be some good news for Mumbai agents. **Sampat Damani**, Partner, Disha Travel and Head, Diplomatic



**Sampat Damani**  
Partner, Disha Travel and Head, Diplomatic Missions Relations Committee, TAFI

Missions Relations Committee, Travel Agents Federation of India

(TAFI), says, “Italy has opened a new category under ‘If been granted a Schengen visa in the past’. The other Schengen mission should take a cue like granting additional slots to repeat travellers; it will ease their pressure. They can further consider improving on turnaround time, especially when travellers from reputed companies travel for business meetings. They can also consider issuing longer validity visas, even if it means charging a little more for the

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### Kolkata yearns int’l flights

Kolkata is yet to see a direct international flight to Europe. It’s high time the government and aviation stakeholders devise a plan to bring the City of Joy on the international aviation map.

Surbhi Sharma

Kolkata, the northeastern city of India known for its history, cuisine and Durga Puja celebrations, continues to long for better air connectivity. The ‘City of Joy’, recognised by UNESCO for its heritage wealth, is yet to see a direct international flight to Europe from its state-of-the-art Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport.

Highlighting the issue, **Manoj Saraf**, Managing Director, Gainwell



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

Travel & Leisure, said, “Unfortunately due to political reasons, busi-

ness in the capital city of West Bengal has suffered over three decades. Many companies have moved their head offices and operations from Kolkata to other cities. It’s a little late for the present government to do damage control.”

**Bilal Das**, Chairman, Citi Travels, said, “The absence (of direct flight to Europe) can be attributed to several factors, including diminishing industrial growth, political reasons, and a shift in flight slots

Contd. on page 19 ▶

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# STB, SIA honour Indian MICE agents

Singapore Tourism Board, in association with Singapore Airlines, honoured the Indian partners from North and East India contributing impressive numbers to Singapore's MICE segment, at a recent event in New Delhi. Kean Bon, Area Director - India, South Asia & Africa, STB, calls India as one of their top markets for FTAs, especially in the MICE segment.



Surbhi Sharma

Singapore Tourism Board (STB), in association with Singapore Airlines (SIA), organised a 'MICE Industry Appreciation Night' in New Delhi recently. Several influential personalities, from the MICE trade, particularly from North and East India, attended the event. Best performers from the North and East India, contributing good numbers to tourism in Singapore from MICE perspective were felicitated on the occasion. Talking about the objectives of the event, **Kean Bon**, Area Director - India, South Asia & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board, said, "This is the MICE industry trade appreciation night where we have gathered to celebrate and honour everybody's efforts and contributions to Singapore's MICE business. India is one of our top markets for foreign tourist arrivals and MICE is an important segment. We deeply appreciate the



**Kean Bon**  
Area Director - India, South Asia & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board

support of our MICE partners. This evening is one of our ways to show our support, together with our partners Singapore Airlines. We hope that everyone will enjoy the evening and continue to support Singapore and work closely with us this year."

**Kanneganti Sameer**, Manager - Northern & Eastern India, Singa-



**Kanneganti Sameer**  
Manager - Northern & Eastern India Singapore Airlines

pore Airlines, said that the aim is to show our gratitude to all the MICE partners that we have in the region. He revealed that a lot of developments are happening on Singapore Airline's front and that the airline is hopeful to provide their partners with more opportunities to sell MICE, not only to Singapore but to the rest of the Asia Pacific region.



**Gajesh Girdhar**  
National Coordinator, Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA)

Responding to a question on SIA's plans of getting more MICE business from India, Sameer said, "From India specifically, we constantly try to increase our connectivity to the rest of the greater market. We operate to eight different cities from Singapore Airlines' perspective and plan to add five more cities. So, in total, the Singa-

pore Airlines will operate to 13 cities across India. We offer unparalleled connectivity to different parts of the Indian market helping us to meet the requirements of a lot of our corporate partners."

Shedding light on SIA's plans to expand connectivity and upgrade its product on the India network, Sameer said, "It is something that we constantly review. We are constantly looking how we can expand our network within India. We looked at new cities, new areas where we can tap market potential and at the same time we need to see where we can increase capacity in existing markets. Recently, we launched a second Hyderabad flight."

Praising the MICE travel partners from India for their support, Sameer thanked them. "We are looking forward to working together a lot closer in the coming financial year and we hope to find new op-

portunities, new market segments to tap into," he said.

**Gajesh Girdhar**, National Coordinator, Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA), said, "Singapore is the perfect destination. During the convention, we explored a lot of attractions, a lot of MICE venues, which the members were not aware of. It has almost everything to offer."

## Shining stars

MICE travel supporter award has been given to the following:

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# Ooty top travel choice this summer

Every year summer uncovers intriguing travel patterns about Indian travellers. Booking.com reveals travel insights about the upcoming summer period and how Indians are making plans to travel to domestic as well as international destinations.



## Bleisure benefits

As the work-life boundaries blur, so does the difference between business and personal travel. The concepts of remote work and bleisure have hence gained popularity. Today, it's beyond just bringing your partner to a conference. The portmanteau moniker of bleisure was coined way before the pandemic, but today it's not only being used by those extending their business trip to explore a destination, but also for those who revisit the same destination with family after experiencing it on business travel.

According to a report, worldwide, more than one in three business travellers will add a leisure component to at least one of their business trips this year. Destination marketing organisations (NTOs) have taken cognisance of this trend and revamping their strategies to cater to this hybrid style of travel.

Even MICE agents know their corporate clients and are ensuring that meetings and conferences are not just confined to convention centres and hotels. Even venues for MICE activities have evolved, offering diverse options like museums, historic forts, or exclusive settings in vibrant city streets. Many conferences now include extra days for team building and networking, encouraging corporate travellers to consider future travel opportunities. In fact, combining business and travel is a cost-effective way to travel for corporate and when presented with a good package, they won't let it go.

Ultimately, success lies in understanding the client's bleisure preferences and providing compelling reasons to extend their stay. With careful planning and attention to detail, travel planners can create enriching bleisure experiences for their clients. Of course, that extra touch and personalisation that is unique to you will always count.

Happy booking!

This year, summer promises to be a season of exploration and rejuvenation for travellers who are seizing this opportunity to travel either at home or venturing overseas. According to Booking.com Travel Predictions 2024, 57 per cent of Indians are looking at a long domestic trip and 43 per cent are wanting to take a long international trip (5+ nights) this year.

Mountains remain irresistible for Indians looking at escaping the summer heat with 50 per cent of Indian travellers stating that they would like to take a nature trip this year, followed by a beach trip (48 per cent) and a city trip (37 per cent).

### Domestic delights

Metro cities Bengaluru and Mumbai lead the chart as the most searched destinations this summer. Besides metropolitan cities, hill stations continue to be the top choice for travellers seeking scenic landscapes, adventure activities and a chance to unwind amidst nature. Ooty takes the lead in the most searched leisure destination, followed by Srinagar and Manali. Goa's iconic beaches remain a favourite for beach lovers looking at soaking in some summer sun.

Top 10 most searched domestic leisure destinations (from April 15 to July 15). Ranking as compared to the same time last year.

- ❖ Ooty (-1)
- ❖ Srinagar (+2)
- ❖ Manali (-4)
- ❖ Darjeeling (-1)
- ❖ Goa (0)
- ❖ Kodaikanal (+4)
- ❖ Puri (-2)
- ❖ Rishikesh (-2)
- ❖ Munnar (-1)
- ❖ Mussoorie (+2)

### International escapes

While domestic travel continues to shine, Indians are also exploring short and long-haul destinations within Asia and beyond. Competitive packages, easier booking processes and improved visa access



have made foreign travel more accessible to Indian tourists. This summer, 40 per cent are travelling within the Asia Pacific region, 20 per cent to the Middle East and 40 per cent to London, New York and European countries.

Dubai with its luxurious offerings and futuristic appeal tops the list of most searched international destinations this year. Asia's vibrant culture continues to hold immense charm with cities like Singapore, Bangkok, Tokyo and Bali high on Indians' summer travel wish list.

Top 10 most searched international destinations (from April 15 to July 15). Ranking as compared to the same time last year.

- ❖ Dubai (0)
- ❖ Singapore (0)
- ❖ London (0)
- ❖ Paris (0)
- ❖ Bangkok (0)
- ❖ New York (+5)
- ❖ Tokyo (+5)
- ❖ Bali (-1)
- ❖ Makkah (-3)
- ❖ Amsterdam (0)

### Demographics decoded

From bustling cities that attract solo travellers, leisure destinations that attract family and group travellers to vibrant metropolises and charming hill stations that are a preference for couples, Booking.com shares insights into what different travellers are looking for in their summer holidays.

**Mountains remain irresistible for Indians with 50% of Indian travellers stating that they would like to take a nature trip this year**

❖ **Solo Travellers: City Breaks**  
Top 5 most searched domestic destinations: Mumbai, Bengaluru, New Delhi, Gurgaon and Chennai

Top 5 most searched international destinations: Dubai, London, Paris, Berlin and Toronto

❖ **Families: Nature Escapes**  
Top 5 most searched domestic destinations: Ooty, Srinagar, Manali, Darjeeling and Mumbai

Top 5 most searched international destinations: Singapore, Dubai, London, Paris and Tokyo

❖ **Families: Nature Escapes**  
Top 5 most searched domestic destinations: Manali, Ooty, Goa, Darjeeling and Srinagar

Top 5 most searched international destinations: Dubai, Singapore, London, Makkah and Paris

❖ **Couples: Bustling metros to serene retreats**  
Top 5 most searched domestic

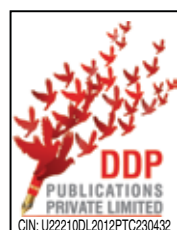
destinations: Bengaluru, Mumbai, Ooty, Srinagar and New Delhi

Top 5 most searched international destinations: Dubai, London, Singapore, Paris and Bangkok

**Santosh Kumar**, Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia at Booking.com said, "Summer has always been a peak travel season, but in recent years witnessing a significant shift in how Indians approach it. While Indians are exploring both domestic and overseas destinations, we are seeing travellers gravitating towards culturally significant or leisure-oriented destinations with

**Dubai with its luxurious offerings and futuristic appeal tops the list of most searched international destinations this year**

a growing desire for immersive experiences. This optimism indicates one thing for sure: the Indian spirit of travel remains undeterred. Booking.com remains committed to making it easier for travellers to plan their summer holidays by providing flights, rental cars, attractions and of course unique places to stay."



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# India's biz travel spend \$33 bn/ yr

▶ Contd. from page 5



**Catherine Logan**  
Regional Senior Vice  
President - EMEA & APAC, GBTA

“ Indian business travellers are more likely to combine leisure with their business trips. They are also more likely to travel for internal meetings. They are more likely to fly first class or business class or stay at a high-end premium hotel. No wonder then that business travel spends coming from India is around US \$33 billion per year. This is set to grow by 12 per cent in 2024. We see a rise in blended travel with 79 per cent of business travellers from India extending their work trips for leisure. ”



**Pranav Kapadia**  
Founder  
Global Destinations

“ In my over 15 years of representing tourism products, bleisure travel has become a game-changer. We, at Global Destinations, leverage our extensive network of DMCs across the globe and luxury resorts like Kavya Resort and Spa, to craft personalised bleisure experiences. Instead of just selling trips, we tell captivating stories that blend business with leisure. Imagine extending your business trip with a customised itinerary. After business meetings in Nepal, unwind at the luxurious Kavya Resort. ”



**Abhishek Gupta**  
CEO & Co-Founder  
Trip Navigator

“ Bleisure travel is carving out a significant niche within the MICE industry, particularly in the 'I' for Incentives. As the post-pandemic world gradually opens up, corporate entities are eager to reward their top performers with more than just a handshake. This pivot towards creating unforgettable experiences for employees and business partners is not just a gesture of appreciation—it's a strategic move to boost morale, foster loyalty, and encourage even higher achievements. ”



**Manpreet Bindra**  
FCM Meetings & Events (M&E)  
Leader, Asia

“ FCM Meetings & Events uses data to forecast demands and trends. There has been an increase in requests for 'bleisure', hence our team has got partnerships and offerings in place, ready to share with our clients during the planning stages of their booking. Our team of specialists is also trained and informed on the latest offerings in key destinations as we work closely with various tourism boards and partners in supply chain. This knowledge allows them to make the best recommendations. ”



**Trishal Rao**  
Chief Sales Officer  
SKIL Travel

“ Business trips have been rising since early 2023 given the increasing need of corporates to host meetings and conferences by bringing like-minded individuals together to help the organisations achieve new heights in revenue and brand reach in the times to come. However, restricting just to business throughout the travel can make travellers feel lethargic and monotonous. At SKIL Travel, we believe in making the most of every trip, for which we trust in mixing business with leisure to help visitors. ”



**Rubin Cherian**  
GM, Novotel Hyderabad  
Convention Centre & HICC

“ At Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre (NHCC) and Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC), we excel in upselling bleisure travel through a comprehensive approach that seamlessly integrates business with leisure. Our strategy involves presenting enticing options to enhance the guest experience beyond their corporate requirements. We offer upgraded accommodations, including luxurious suites, and provide exclusive access to amenities like private lounges and wellness facilities. ”



**Rohit Bajpai**  
General Manager  
Sheraton Grand Palace Indore

“ 'Bleisure' is reshaping the landscape of hospitality. This trend highlights a growing desire among travellers to blend work commitments with leisure pursuits, marking a significant shift in traveller expectations and behaviours. As industry professionals, it's imperative that we adapt to these changes, offering more versatile and enriching experiences to meet the nuanced needs of today's travellers. This evolution pushes the boundaries of traditional hospitality, encouraging hotels globally to reimagine their offerings. ”



**Khushvinder Sarna**  
Chairman, TAFI (NI-Chapter) &  
Owner, The Federal Travels & Tours

“ Bleisure travel is a fascinating blend of business and leisure, offering travellers the opportunity to maximise their time away from home. As travel agents, we play a crucial role in promoting this concept by highlighting the seamless integration of work and play during trips. We curate bespoke bleisure packages that cater to unique needs of travellers. From arranging accommodation to organising excursions and networking, we ensure a seamless transition from work to leisure. ”

Contd. on page 17 ▶



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**TourismNews**

With 79% Indian business travellers extending their work trips for leisure, GBTA sees rise in bleisure travel

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Travel & Tourism's global economic contribution set to reach an all-time high of US\$11.1 trillion in 2024: WTTC

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Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai report over 80% hotel occupancy rates in the month of February

# NDC & AI to change airline retail

Technological advancements have been pivotal in reshaping strategies and enhancing customer experiences in the field of airline retailing. Rajeev Kumar, Founder, CEO & MD, Mystifly, delves into the transformative impact of emerging technologies like NDC and AI on airline retailing.



**H**ow has technology evolved to reshape airline retailing strategies? What are some notable technological advancements?

In recent years, technology has transformed airline retailing strategies, and the advent of advanced data analytics has revolutionised airline retailing. Real-time data analytics tools enable airlines to analyse various factors, such as demand, competitor pricing, and flight status, allowing them to adjust prices to maximise revenue per passenger dynamically. Moreover, behavioural data and purchase history analysis empower airlines to offer personalised recommendations, significantly boosting conversion rates and average order value.

Additionally, embedded finance solutions have streamlined payment and settlement processes in the airline industry. With innovative



**Rajeev Kumar**  
Founder  
CEO and MD, Mystifly

B2B payment and real-time settlement solutions like our 'Airlinepay solution', airlines can unlock new revenue streams and improve operational efficiency, ultimately gaining a competitive edge in the market. The evolution of cloud-based infrastructure platforms has also significantly enhanced agility, reliability, and cost-effectiveness for travel technology providers

and sellers. Modern scalable infrastructure solutions address legacy challenges and expedite speed to market, enabling airlines to adapt quickly to changing market dynamics and consumer preferences.

**Could you discuss the impact of emerging technologies like NDC and AI on airline retailing?**

Airline retailing embarked on a transformational journey around 15 years ago, aimed at modernising the packaging and sale of air travel. This shift was primarily driven by the opportunity for airlines to generate significant "ancillary revenue" by offering additional services beyond traditional ticket sales, such as premium seating, priority boarding, lounge passes, and checked bags. The global ancillary revenue has now surged to an estimated \$62 billion, as reported by IdeaWorks, showcasing the substantial return on investment. Providing crucial technological support, advancements have

been pivotal in the realm of "airline IT and distribution" over the past decade. Progress varied across channels, encompassing innova-

**Global ancillary revenue has now surged to an estimated \$62 billion showcasing the substantial return on investment**

tions, such as airline website and mobile app enhancements, and the adoption of New Distribution Capability (NDC).

**How can personalised retailing contribute to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty? What**

**challenges do airlines face in implementing effective personalised retailing strategies, and how can they overcome them?**

Travellers today, especially the Gen Z, expect all vendors, including airlines, to offer user-friendly, convenient, and personalised shopping experiences similar to those provided by retailers like Amazon. These shoppers want airlines to remember their preferences, understand their likes, and make it fast and easy for them to find what they are looking for. The biggest challenge airlines face in implementing effective personalised retailing strategies is overcoming and bridging the legacy technical and commercial models that have been entrenched for over 50 years, all while ensuring that the world's airline commerce is not disrupted. The path to overcome this challenge is for airlines to strategically embrace new technologies and align with supply chain partners willing to embrace change to improve their bottom line.

## ATM to delve into travel tech

Arabian Travel Market 2024, to be held from 6-9 May in Dubai, will focus on cutting-edge travel technology. Over 100 leading global companies are expected to take part in the event.



This year's Arabian Travel Market (ATM) has 56 per cent more space and 33 per cent more exhibitors than last year, reflecting an unprecedented demand from companies eager to showcase their innovations to a global audience.

Sponsored by Sabre, the ATM Future Stage, formerly known as the Travel Tech Stage, will host more than 100 expert speakers from travel and tourism industry across the world, plus a diverse selection of cutting-edge innovations de-



signed to improve efficiency and profitability within the sector. Delegates will explore how advanced technology can be leveraged to drive improvements across a range of segments, including payment, professional development, accessibility, and sustainability.

The global travel technology market, valued at US\$9.4 billion in 2022, is projected to reach US\$21 billion by 2032, accord-

ing to Allied Market Research. The ATM Future Stage will host a selection of presentations and sessions designed to highlight opportunities within this space. ATM

**Global travel tech market, valued at US\$9.4 billion in 2022, is projected to reach US\$21 billion by 2032, according to Allied Market Research**

2024 will also feature a 'Best Use of Technology' award at its annual exhibitor awards, for the first time. Exhibitors will be evaluated on how and to what extent they have embraced and deployed technology on their stands. More than 40,000 people attended the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of ATM in May 2023. Building on the success of previous editions, ATM 2024 aims to surpass expectations.



## 'Just give Miami one extra night'

Whether it's a client's visit to the theme parks of Orlando or a cruise sailing, Miami can work well with just one extra night, says Joe Docal, Director, Travel Industry Sales, GMCVB.



India is the only international market to have crossed 2019 arrival numbers to the USA in 2023, shares **Joe Docal**, Director, Travel Industry Sales, Greater Miami Convention Visitor Bureau (GMCVB), quoting a report from the US Commerce Department. He was in Mumbai recently after a gap of one year to meet the travel agents and inform them about what the destination offers. "This is quite impressive, especially given the challenges with visas. But we know it has improved in terms of wait times. From our conversation with the US Consulates, they were using other offices that were not as busy to help with the backlog. So, India is doing quite well," he says.

The plan next year is to return to Mumbai but also visit secondary cities such as Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Chennai to meet the agents there, as he believes in the potential non-metro markets offer. Greater Miami Convention Visitor Bureau is represented in India through Aviareps.



**Joe Docal**  
Director, Travel Industry Sales, Greater Miami Convention Visitor Bureau

He says, "Your visit appreciated a lot more in these cities – and they see your commitment not only to their market but also to them. India for us comes under emerging markets. So, this year I have expanded my visit to India to include sales calls as well."

He is looking to tap FITs and MICE, particularly the luxury traveller. "We also have big-ticket events such as the Formula One Grand Prix that bring in that calibre of visitors to Miami. Moreover, with the new Brightline train, visi-

tors can travel from Orlando to Miami. It basically connects Central Florida to South Florida. We want the trade to know that Miami is not just beach and nightlife, but we have culture, a tremendous culinary scene, and we are the cruise capital of the world. Just give us

**We want the trade to know that Miami is not just beach and nightlife, but we have culture, and we are the cruise capital of the world**

one extra night in your Florida itineraries - whether it is after or before Orlando, or pre or post cruise. We are the only destination in the USA that is bordered by two national parks," Docal requests. Miami, a coastal metropolis in the US state of Florida, is known as the cruise capital of the world.



# Reshaping B2B hotel bookings

Deepak Narula, Founder, GRNconnect.com, provides insights into the company's expansion strategy and emphasises on their focus on transforming the B2B hotel booking landscape.

Janice Alyosius

As GRNconnect.com gears up for its next phase of growth and innovation, **Deepak Narula**, Founder, GRNconnect.com, underscores the company's commitment to revolutionising the B2B hotel booking landscape. With a blend of global expansion, technological advancements, and customer-centric initiatives, the company continues to redefine industry standards and set new benchmarks for excellence. The company recently started its UAE DMC to serve Indian and overseas markets better. "We are not confined by borders; we operate globally. Our footprint extends across continents, with offices in the Middle East and the USA, in addition to our base in Delhi," Narula informed.

Highlighting the company's extensive network, Narula revealed, "We serve over 65 countries and boast a clientele of more than 40,000 travel agents worldwide. Our platform witnesses over 6,000 Asian visi-



**Deepak Narula**  
Founder  
GRNconnect.com

tors regularly, facilitating seamless bookings." Emphasising on the company's commitment to excellence, he said, "We continuously enhance our product offerings, focusing primarily on hotels due to our extensive global presence. Our goal is to ensure efficiency and competitiveness while expanding our destination portfolio to cater to diverse market demands." He added, "We are on the verge of launching a new and improved platform, alongside

implementing SAP integration for enhanced efficiency. Our aim is to provide seamless experiences for travel agents, offering real-time updates and automated processes. Our focus is on digitization and automation to streamline operations

**Our aim is to provide seamless experiences for travel agents, offering real-time updates and automated processes**

and elevate customer satisfaction." Narula said Dubai remains a top choice, particularly for Indian and European travellers. "Hence, we are enhancing our inventory and collaborating directly with hotels to offer competitive deals," he added.

# 3k meetings @GITM 2024

A new narrative of regenerative tourism takes root in Goa, led by an initiative to diversify the state's tourism offerings, tapping into verticals such as wellness, weddings, and adventure.

Arumita Gupta

Goa, long revered for its picturesque coastline and vibrant beach culture, is undergoing a transformation and embracing this evolution is crucial not only for altering perceptions but also for driving sustainable economic growth. Talking about the transformation, **Rohan Khaunte**, Minister for Tourism, Government of Goa, says, "Being a preferred destination, people come to Goa specifically for the coastline. However, we are endeavouring to change this perception. The focus is now on showcasing Goa's myriad offerings to foster a deeper understanding of the state's cultural and natural wealth."

Integral to this paradigm shift is the role of the trade and travel industry. Recognising their importance as facilitators, the state government is actively supporting and organising events like the Goa International Travel Mart (GITM). The event played host to 3,000 meetings with over 500 buyers and 300 sellers.



**Rohan Khaunte**  
Minister for Tourism  
Government of Goa

Discussions focused on how Goa can be a high-yield destination. Khaunte said, "Such platforms provide opportunities to connect with international and domestic buyers, fostering B2B collaborations and expanding market reach."

Tourism in Goa currently contributes approximately 16.43 per cent to the GDP, with employment figures hovering around 35 per cent. The aim is to boost these numbers through sustainable practices and strate-

gic investments. "We are talking about sustainability, green investments, and Goa beyond beaches," shares Khaunte. The emphasis on environmental consciousness aligns with the broader goal of regenerative tourism. By promoting

**The focus is now on showcasing Goa's myriad offerings to foster a deeper understanding of the state's cultural and natural wealth**

diverse attractions and facilitating business growth, stakeholders aim to enhance Goa's appeal while safeguarding its natural resources. The efforts to reshape Goa's tourism underscore a commitment to progress and sustainability.

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# TAAI-ER brings together airline partners

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) - Eastern Region (ER) organised an 'Airline Symposium' at The Park hotel in Kolkata recently. The symposium, aimed at bringing together key stakeholders in the airline industry, served as a platform for insightful discussions, networking opportunities, and exploring new horizons in the ever-evolving aviation landscape.



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## Journey of airlines in Indian sky

The Airline Symposium, organised by the TAAI Eastern Region in Kolkata recently, served as a platform for insightful discussions, and exploring new horizons in the evolving aviation landscape.



In the dynamic world of aviation, staying updated with the latest trends, technologies, and strategies is crucial for success. Recognising this need, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) Eastern Region recently organised an Airline Symposium aimed at bringing together key stakeholders in the airline industry. This symposium served as a platform for insightful discussions, networking opportunities, and exploring new horizons in the ever-evolving aviation landscape. The Airline Symposium, hosted by The Park hotel Kolkata, witnessed the participation of airline representatives, travel agents, industry experts, government officials, media and aviation enthusiasts. The agenda for the symposium was meticulously crafted to cover a wide array of topics pertinent to the airline industry, ranging from market trends and passenger experience to sustainability initiatives and technological innovations.

Airport Authority of India (AAI) was represented by **C Pattabhi**,



**Manav Soni**  
Chairman  
TAAI - Eastern Region

the Airport Director, who gave a detailed presentation about Kolkata Airport.

During the symposium, improving passenger experience emerged as a focal point of discussion, with experts highlighting the importance of personalised services, seamless connectivity, and innovative amenities.

During the key aviation event, airlines shared their strategies for enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty in an increasingly competitive market.

The symposium served as a catalyst for collaboration, innovation, and growth within the aviation industry. By bringing together diverse stakeholders and fostering meaningful discussions, it contributed to the collective effort of shaping a more resilient, sustainable, and passenger-centric aviation sector in the Eastern Region.

**Experts highlighted the importance of personalised services, seamless connectivity, and innovative amenities for air passengers**

As participants departed with new insights and valuable connections forged during the TAAI's Airline Symposium, they were poised to navigate the evolving landscape of air travel with confidence and adaptability.



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# PATA celebrates Women in Travel

The inaugural edition of PATA International Conference on Women in Travel, organised by the Philippines' Department of Tourism at the BE Grand Resort in Bohol from 20-22 March this year, brought together around 200 delegates, including industry leaders and policymakers, who discussed the challenges faced by women and celebrated their achievements.





# Indian cuisine: Untapped treasure trove

About 8 per cent of travellers say gastronomy is a key element in defining the brand and image of a destination. It is considered that the weight of gastronomy in tourism revenue can be as high as 30 per cent. India, with its diverse cuisines, can build strategies around its cuisine culture and promote tourism in the country.



Inder Raj Ahluwalia

When Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, said, 'Food is the first love', he knew what he was talking about. Today, not only is the cuisine industry among the biggest globally, it forms the hub of tourism and plays a pivotal role in enhancing visitors' travel experiences.

**MP Bezbaruah**, Permanent Representative (Hon.), UNWTO & Secretary General, HAI, feels one unmistakable trend of the new millennium is tourists' search for unique experiences as the motivation for travel. It is estimated that about 30 per cent of global travellers seek experiences based on local identity and culture. UNWTO studies show that destinations' cuisine determines the quality of the holiday experience. One such survey has also shown that for 88 per cent of respondents, gastronomy is a strategic element in defining the



**MP Bezbaruah**  
Permanent Representative (Hon.),  
UNWTO & Secretary General, HAI

brand and image of their destination. It is considered that the weight of gastronomy in tourism revenue in destinations can be as high as 30 per cent. India, with its tremendous variety in cuisine, can build cuisine innovatively in marketing and promotion, keeping quality and authenticity as important factors.

**Jyoti Mayal**, President, TAAI, and Vice Chairperson, FAITH, feels that



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI, &  
Vice Chairperson, FAITH

cuisine is an important aspect of Indian inbound tourism, as it reflects the diversity and richness of the country's culture, history, and geography. India offers a variety of regional and local dishes, each with its own unique flavour, ingredients, and preparation methods. Tourists can enjoy the authentic taste of India by exploring different cuisines, such as North Indian, South Indian, Mughlai, Bengali,

Gujarati, Rajasthani, and Goan. Cuisine also showcases to tourists, Indian traditions, customs, and community lifestyles, as well as the health benefits of spices and herbs. By highlighting India's culinary tourism potential, the

sine in Indian inbound tourism is enormous, and goes beyond just satisfying hunger. "It serves as a gateway to the country's culture, traditions, and way of life. Emphasises the importance of food and

retary General FHRAI, feels when one talks about cuisine's role in tourism, the sky is the limit. The potential is enormous. The key is that Indian cuisine is diverse and plentiful, and changes at every



**A great asset is India's great regional diversity reflected in individual cuisines, each of which has its own distinct flavour**



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President  
IATO

country can attract more visitors and enhance their overall experience. **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, feels the importance of cui-

cuisine in Indian inbound tourism, and its key role in attracting travellers and enhancing their overall experience. **Jaion Chacko**, Sec-

300 kilometres. This startling fact makes the country truly unique with an estimated 1,000 regional experience. **Jaion Chacko**, Sec-

*Contd. on page 17* ▶

# Italy adds new category to ease visa

▶ *Contd. from page 5*

same." However, his advice to clients is to plan early and be honest with their intent to travel. The situation in Delhi tells a different story. **Anil Kalsi**, Vice President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), says, "Slot availability for tourists in Italy is limited. One seldom sees any availability for tourist visa applications



**Anil Kalsi**  
Vice President  
TAFI

**One seldom sees any availability for tourist visa applications in Delhi, but business visa for Italy is available**

in Delhi, but business visa for Italy is available. Italy visa application in Mumbai is better placed, as they offer priority visa appointment to persons who have travelled to Europe in the last two years."

But not all agents in Mumbai are aware of this new facility. **Anshu Tejuja**, Managing Director, Ashoka Dream Holidays, says she is not aware of such a thing. "Italy visas from Mumbai are very difficult. You do not get appointments for three months, and even after that the slots available are minimal. As of now, the next available slots are showing May 2024. I request them to open up the system to add more appointments and ease the system," she says disappointedly.

## Tactical approach

To tackle the visa appointment issue, a few Delhi operators are



**Anshu Tejuja**  
Managing Director  
Ashoka Dream Holidays

using a tactical approach, but in vain. **Guldeep Singh Sahni**, Managing Director, Weldon Tours & Travels, says, "We have seen that they are infrequent; there are days when the calendar doesn't even open. When it opens, there are just a day or two, or three, that open, and then within a few minutes it gets blocked. If you want to give a choice to your customer, by the time you get back, the system gets blocked. I don't know what kind of system they have. You look at the dates once or twice, the system gets blocked. And one has to wait for two or three days to reopen with the same login ID.



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

Or you keep on changing the login ID. It's a weird system. When you get the appointment, either there is too much delay, or the refusal rate is higher. And the refusal rate still, I would say, in cases which are very, very good, frequent fliers and all, is still okay. But new cases definitely are at risk. I see appointments in Mumbai also have not opened up."

Mumbai-based **Arun Iyer**, Founder & MD, My Golf Tours and Secretary of TAFI (WI), agrees and says, "There is a problem. While there are improvements – about 40 per cent better than last season – we have been forewarning

clients since Christmas 2023 to start planning their destination and obtain appointments for visas in advance. This has helped customers. Those planning in March for a vacation in May to Europe have to postpone to June as per

**Manish Vohra**, Founder & CEO, MEITICKETWORLD, is also reaping the benefits of the new option that Italy has opened up.

He says, "This has been a boon for us as we are now able to rec-



**Arun Iyer**  
Founder & MD, My Golf Tours and  
Secretary of TAFI (WI)

appointment availability. Easy destinations are the UK, France, Switzerland and Germany who have improved in their turnaround time. However, Italy is offering visa appointments early if the passengers have visited Schengen countries in the past. If not, the appointment dates are not early."



**Manish Vohra**  
Founder & CEO  
MEITICKETWORLD

ommend Italy as a destination to repeat Schengen guests since appointments in this category are easily available as of now." Perhaps, it is time for European countries to remember that the Schengen visa was created, so that it would get easier for tourists to visit their destinations. ▶



# Cross Hotels impresses Indian trade

With a focus on attracting the emerging Indian outbound market, Cross Hotels & Resorts conducted its India Sales Mission 2024 by organising roadshows in four cities across India from 11-15 March. A seven-member delegation of the group showcased products under the Cross Hotels & Resorts portfolio and engaged in B2B meetings with Indian agents.





# Unlock the potential of cross-selling

Amid evolving consumer preferences and digitalisation, it has become imperative for travel service providers to adopt strategies that not only attract customers but also drive revenue growth. Cross-selling, which involves offering complementary products or services to travellers, comes as one such strategy gaining popularity these days.

In the competitive travel landscape, maximising profits and enhancing customer satisfaction are paramount goals for any entrepreneur. With evolving consumer preferences and increasing digitalisation, it has become imperative for travel service providers to adopt innovative strategies that not only attract customers but also drive revenue growth. One such strategy that has gained significant traction in recent time is cross-selling, which involves offering complementary products or services to customers during their journey. From ancillary services like travel insurance and airport transfers to upselling hotel rooms or rental cars, cross-selling presents a lucrative opportunity for travel businesses to increase their bottom line while providing added value to their customers.

According to studies conducted by Travelport in conjunction with Toluna Corporate Insights, an impressive 45 per cent of respondents express a preference for booking their entire trip through a single website, one that offers a comprehensive



selection of airlines, hotels, car hire companies, and additional extras. Surprisingly, the same statistics reveal that a mere 13 per cent of respondents would opt for the cheapest option if it meant sacrificing their freedom of choice.

## But what holds the key to driving this change?

Cross-selling stands as the pivotal player in catering to custom-

ers' needs across every stage of their journey. But how can travel businesses unlock the full potential of cross-selling? The answer lies in leveraging retail software solutions. These advanced technologies empower travel providers to seamlessly integrate cross-selling opportunities throughout the entire customer journey. Using modern retailing technology, travel providers can find extra services that

match each customer's preferences and travel plans, such as seat selection, baggage fees, travel insurance, airport transfers, and lounge access. These ancillary services add value to the travel booking process, allowing agents to offer comprehensive solutions to their clients while enhancing the overall travel experience.

Cross-selling presents numerous benefits that travel businesses can harness to enhance their operations and drive revenue growth. Here are some key advantages:

**Modern travellers crave convenience - a seamless experience where they can browse and book all aspects of their trip in one place**

❖ **Increased Revenue:** By offering additional products or services during the booking process, travel businesses can significantly increase their revenue streams.

❖ **Enhanced Customer Satisfaction:** Cross-selling enables travel businesses to anticipate and meet the diverse needs of their customers.

❖ **Improved Customer Retention:** By offering a comprehensive range of products and services, travel businesses can strengthen their relationships with customers and encourage repeat bookings.

❖ **Streamlined Booking Process:** Retail software solutions facilitate seamless cross-selling opportunities by integrating additional products or services directly into the booking process.

❖ **Competitive Advantage:** In today's competitive travel market, offering a diverse range of products and services can set businesses apart from their competitors. Cross-selling allows

travel businesses to differentiate themselves by providing comprehensive solutions.

Ultimately, the key to driving this change lies in the hands of travel businesses themselves. By leveraging retail software for cross-selling success, travel providers can revolutionise travel retailing, providing unparalleled convenience and choice to modern travellers while securing their position as leaders.



**Sanjay Kumar**  
President and CEO  
InterGlobe Technology Quotient

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

## 'Bleisure' reshaping hospitality

▶ Contd. from page 9



**Dinesh Kumar**  
Secretary, TAFI (NI-Chapter) &  
Director, Inter Airways

“Upselling bleisure travel in a single trip needs an understanding of your target customer's preferences. To effectively upsell bleisure travel, we curate packages specifically designed for bleisure travellers that include a mix of business-oriented services (like meeting rooms and high-speed internet), along with leisure amenities and activities. Offer flexible booking options that allow travellers to easily modify or cancel their plans.”



**Mehul Sharma**  
Founder & CEO, Signum hotels &  
Resorts

“We are always looking for ways to stay ahead of the curve. One trend that has been gaining momentum in recent years is 'bleisure' travel. It has become increasingly popular among business travellers, with more than 60 per cent of them adding leisure components to their business trips. This trend offers a unique opportunity for the hotel industry. It is essential to cater to the needs of bleisure travellers by offering amenities.”



**Jagdeep Bhagat**  
President  
Tourism India Alliance (TIA)

“After the pandemic, there has been a paradigm shift in the minds of the travellers for maintaining a healthy and stress-free balance in their personal and work lives. For our agencies, bleisure travel offers a great opportunity to capitalize on and increase their revenue. Special themed evenings, experiential activities, learning and engaging activities for the kids while the parents are working - all help in upselling.”



**Anil Kalsi**  
Vice President, TAFI & Managing  
Partner, Ambe World Travel

“Upselling bleisure is based on the flexibility of the visa regime, ability to change tickets and destination delight. Normally, we propose a pre or post bleisure trip for the delegates. Indian infrastructure is growing at a tremendous pace and cities will soon have matching convention and hotel rooms. As of now, there is a challenge of finding accommodation in mid-size upcoming.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

## 'Cuisine concepts can create great tourism attractions'

▶ Contd. from page 15

and local cuisines that reflect the great depth and diversity of India's geography, history and culture. “Together, our hospitality and cuisine concepts can create great, world-class tourism attractions

needs to focus more on this key issue. A growing number of international tourists are now delving deeper into local cultural experiences and local food. **Rohit Arora**, Vice President, North & Goa Operations & Head of Leisure Sales,



**Ravi Gosain**  
Vice President  
IATO

and advantages that are unique only to India,” Chacko adds.

**Ravi Gosain**, Vice President, IATO, considers cuisine to be an integral part of any culture, and India, being blessed with one of the world's most varied and rich cuisines,



**Rohit Arora**  
VP, North & Goa Operations &  
Head of Leisure Sales, ASPHL

Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited (ASPHL), feels cuisine's role in inbound Indian tourism is limitless. Not only does it provide a great economic source, but also serves as a gateway for tourists to immerse themselves in local culture, traditions, and flavours. ↴



# ITB Berlin witnesses 100k attendees

ITB Berlin 2024 was held at the Berlin Exhibition Grounds from 5-7 March and recorded about 100,000 attendees. More than 5,500 exhibitors from 170 countries displayed their products at 27 exhibition halls set up at the world's leading travel trade show, where AI and its potential uses was a much-discussed topic.





# Malaysia bullish on India biz

India's share in Malaysia's MICE business is 48%, says Mohammad Isa Abdul Halim, Director, Meeting and Support Incentives, Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau, underscoring the importance of India market for them.

Janice Alyosius

**M**ohammad Isa Abdul Halim, Director, Meeting and Support Incentives, Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB), sheds light on the remarkable growth trajectory of Malaysia's business events industry. He underlines the strategic importance of India in Malaysia's ongoing efforts to expand its footprint in the global MICE sector.

"The number of business events, or MICE, in Malaysia has been consistently increasing each year. The Indian market is a significant focus for us, as it contributes approximately 48 per cent of our delegates for conferences, exhibitions, corporate meetings, and incentives," he shares.

In a bid to further bolster ties with the Indian market, MyCEB actively participated in the Tourism Malaysia's sales mission across key Indian cities, including Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, and New Delhi. These engagements underscore Malaysia's commitment to



**Mohammad Isa Abdul Halim**  
Director, Meeting and Support Incentives, (MyCEB)

fostering robust partnerships and tapping into the immense potential offered by India's burgeoning MICE segment.

One of the pivotal factors expected to catalyse the influx of Indian delegates into Malaysia is the introduction of visa-free travel for Indian nationals. "India has been a vital market for Malaysia, and we anticipate a 15 to 20 per cent increase in Indian delegates visiting Malaysia, especially with the introduction of visa-free travel for Indians," Halim said.

He revealed that Malaysia has secured an impressive line-up of 351 events, scheduled from 2023 to 2030, signifying the country's unwavering commitment to positioning itself as a preferred MICE destination on the global stage. "India remains a cornerstone of Malaysia's MICE strategy, with 229,000 international delegates hailing from India,

**India has been a vital market for Malaysia, and we anticipate a 15 to 20% per cent increase in Indian delegates visiting Malaysia**

constituting nearly half of the total delegate count. To capitalise on this momentum and further incentivise engagement from the Indian market, MyCEB has rolled out a pioneering initiative under the 'Meet in Malaysia'

campaign dubbed 'MyTripleE'. This incentive package, encompassing Excel, Elevate, and Enliven components, caters to both large-scale and small-group corporate meetings and incentives, offering a compelling value proposition until 31 December 2024," he informed.

The MyTripleE is a support programme under MyCEB's Meet in Malaysia campaign to attract regional and international business events to Malaysia while boosting domestic business events market in line with the MyCEB Business Events Strategic Marketing Plan 2021-2030.

Looking ahead, Halim expressed optimism regarding the prospects of Malaysia's business events industry, fuelled by the anticipated surge in Indian delegates.

"With the continued growth in Indian participation, Malaysia is poised to enhance its offerings and solidify its status as a premier MICE destination, setting the stage for sustained success in the years to come," he concluded.

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Date	Event	Time
15-17	World Travel Market 2024- Brazil	9:00 am
15	Oman Tourism Sales Mission- Delhi	10:00 am
16	Tour Fox Webinar	3:00 pm
16	Abu Dhabi Itinerary Training Workshop- Lucknow	10:00 am
18	Irish Travel Trade Show - Dublin	9:00 am
19	Oman Tourism Sales Mission- Ahmedabad	10:00 am
22	Oman Tourism Sales Mission- Lucknow	10:00 am
23	Teleport Webinar	3:00 pm
24-26	Kazakhstan International Exhibition Tourism & Travel 2024	10:00 am
26	Abu Dhabi Itinerary Training Workshop- Jaipur	10:00 am
30	Rail Europe Webinar	3:00 pm
MAY 2024		
3	Abu Dhabi Itinerary Training Workshop- Pune	10:00 am
5-7	The Great Indian Travel Bazaar 2024	9:00 am
6-9	Arabian Travel Market Dubai 2024- Dubai	10:00 am
8-10	TRENZ New Zealand	9:00 am
14-15	GBTA APAC Conference 2024	9:00 am
14-16	Africa's Travel Indaba 2024	10:00 am
14-16	IMEX Frankfurt 2024	10:00 am
15-17	PATA Annual Summit 2024- Macao	8:30 am

## In Memoriam



**Krishan Mahajan**

**Krishan Mahajan**, Managing Director, Ambassador Holiday, passed away on 2 April 2024 at the age of 78. Paying tribute to Mahajan, Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, said, "He was a gentleman and thorough professional. He will be remembered for his contributions to the industry for years to come." Mahajan, affectionately known as 'Lion' among his friends, was at the company's helm for over four decades – his motto was to serve clients and provide the experience they look out for and of going beyond that expectation. Exploring new destination and products was his domain but his interests also included literature and history, making him one of the best guides in India.

# Kolkata-London flight in the offing

► Contd. from page 5

to other cities with higher growth rates. European carriers have lost interest in Kolkata, leading to a lack of connectivity despite its strategic geographical location, which could serve as a vital hub for routes between Eastern India, SAARC countries, ASEAN countries, Australasia, and Europe. Additionally, major bilateral landing rights have been consumed by other metro cities, exacerbating the situation."

## Kolkata versus metro cities

Shedding light on why Kolkata has fewer international flights in comparison to other Indian metro cities, **Anita Gupta**, Director, Yatri Travels, said, "To my knowledge, factors such as economic viability concerns, infrastructure limitations, competitive landscape, regulatory restrictions, airline strategies and governing policies are the reasons behind fewer international flights from Kolkata. We must understand and adapt to these constraints while exploring opportunities for business growth and sustenance."

Manoj Saraf said, "Trade associations like TAAI (Travel Agents

Association of India) and TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India), along with the state government, are trying to get direct flights into Europe and the UK. There is some hope that Air India may start Kolkata-London nonstop flights sometime later this year." Gupta said, "We can address the market demand through partnering with airlines for better routes, organising charter flights for flexibility, promoting alternative routes via major hubs, offering comprehensive travel packages, investing in technology for easy booking, conducting market research for tailored services, providing customer education and support by meeting traveller needs efficiently and effectively."

Das said, "Indian airlines have not devised any comprehensive plans yet to address the issue. However, initiatives such as establishing Kolkata as a connectivity hub for Southeast Asia and maintaining connections with European cities could potentially resolve this issue. The willingness and determination of stakeholders, includ-



**Anita Gupta**  
Director  
Yatri Travels

**As a travel agency owner, advocating for improved connectivity could encourage airlines to reconsider their strategies for Kolkata**

ing airlines and government authorities, are crucial in developing effective solutions."



**Bilolaksha Das**  
Chairman  
Citi Travels

**The absence (of direct flight to Europe) can be attributed to several factors, including diminishing industrial growth & political reasons**

**Direct Kolkata-Australia flights**  
Talking about the plans to revive or start direct flights from Kolkata

to Australia, Das said, "Despite the interest from travel agents and the potential demand from passengers, there have been no announcements regarding the initiation or revival of direct flights from Kolkata to Australia. However, airlines like IndiGo, as the sole carrier, continue to expand their operations, which may lead to future developments in this regard."

Gupta said, "In the industry, we are considering the feasibility of starting or reinstating direct flights from Kolkata to Australia. We shall conduct market research, explore airline partnerships, engage stakeholders, gather customer feedback, ensure regulatory compliance, and promote the potential economic and tourism benefits."

## High airfares add to woes

With the airlines providing direct or indirect flights from Kolkata to other Indian cities charging higher airfares, Das said, "Currently, airfares are at their peak due to unequal competition among Indian airlines. The uneven market landscape has led to inflated airfares, impacting travellers' expenses."



# MOVEMENTS

## TREEHOUSE HOTELS & RESORT

New Delhi

TreeHouse Hotels & Resorts has appointed **AJAY MEHTANI** as Partner. In this newly created role, Mehtani will leverage his extensive experience across hospitality, investment, strategy, growth, technology and brand development to fuel TreeHouse Hotels' continued growth and expansion in India & South Asia. Mehtani brings with him more than 30 years of experience in Hospitality, FMCG, ITES, and Private Equity. Prior to this, he served as President of Asset Management & Executive Search South Asia at HVS Anarock. He has held leadership positions with renowned companies.



## CROWNE PLAZA

New Delhi

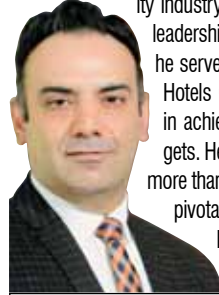
Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar promotes **PANKAJ GUPTA** to the position of Area General Manager within IHG Hotels & Resorts - South West Asia. In his new role, he will be responsible for eight operating and two pre-opening hotels. With over two decades of hospitality experience, Gupta has consistently exemplified leadership and operational excellence. Previously, as the General Manager of Crowne Plaza Mayur Vihar, he spearheaded revenue growth, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction initiatives. His exceptional leadership has garnered widespread recognition.



## RADISSON BLU

Guwahati

**ANKUR MEHROTRA** has been appointed as the General Manager of Radisson Blu Guwahati. With two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Mehrotra brings an unparalleled wealth of leadership and expertise to the new role. Prior to this, he served as Senior Manager, Operations, Radisson Hotels Group, South Asia, and assisted the hotels in achieving the overall "Centre of Excellence" targets. He has been with the Radisson Hotel Group for more than 10 years in multiple roles. He has also held pivotal roles at esteemed hotel chains, such as InterContinental Hotels Group, The Claridges, Jaypee Hotels and Resorts.



## OMAN AIR

Mumbai

**ATUL BHATARA** takes over as Manager Corporate and TMC – India for Oman Air effective 18 March 2024. He comes with a wealth of experience in the airline industry. Prior to this, he was with Air Mauritius for more than five years. He oversees the overall operations, sales, and business performance of the company in India and South Asian subcontinent, where he is responsible for generating revenue, designing and executing go-to-market plans for new flight launches, identifying strategic and future air connections, and improving customer and employee satisfaction.



## FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT

Kolkata

Fairfield by Marriott promotes **MANOJ JANGID** to the position of General Manager. The promotion follows his successful tenure as Hotel Manager, spanning over two and a half years. He spearheaded successful positioning of the hotel convention centre, establishing it as Kolkata's premier banqueting facility for both, social and corporate events. His adept management of costs has further solidified his impact on the hotel's operations. He has 21 years of experience in the hospitality industry. An alumnus of IBA, his journey commenced at Taj President Mumbai before his tenure at Grand Hyatt Mumbai.



## CROWNE PLAZA

Greater Noida

Crowne Plaza Greater Noida appoints **ANKUR RAJ** as the Director of Finance. He will be responsible for optimising revenue generation activities while supporting the leadership teams with various business activities. With over 12 years of experience, he will contribute towards budget planning and forecasting for short-and long-term periods. Having worked with key brands, Raj brings an in-depth knowledge of revenue management. He has a proven track record in creating internal and external opportunities to expand and optimise revenue-producing activities.



## PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi

Preferred Hotels & Resorts appoints **MAYANK TUTEJA** as the Director of Sales – South Asia. He will be based at the company's New Delhi office. In the new role, Tuteja is expected to strengthen the brand's corporate, leisure, and MICE sales efforts across South Asia, both within the region and outbound, supporting the brand's global portfolio. He has more than 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry and honed his expertise in sales and marketing in both regional and global roles. Prior to this, he held positions at both The Leading Hotels of the World and Hyatt.



## DUDIGITAL GLOBAL

New Delhi

DUDigital Global has appointed **MANOJ DHARMANI** as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). He will be responsible for managing all aspects of the company's operations, including business development, product innovation, and client relations. With over 28 years of impressive track record in aviation and telecom sectors, Dharmani has held prominent leadership positions at leading organisations, including Air Asia, GoAir, and Vodafone. His last role was as Commercial Head at Air Asia. In the new role, he will spearhead the company's strategic vision and drive ongoing expansion in the global market.



Crowne Plaza Greater Noida has appointed **ANKITA PALIT** as the Crowne Meetings Director. She is a sales expert with more than 11 years of experience in the hospitality sector. Having worked with brands like The Taj, Hyatt, The Lalit, she has invaluable experience in the MICE sector. She will be responsible for revenue generation, creating new business opportunities through MICE, weddings and outdoor catering vertical. She will be working with the sales team and other departments, ensuring a smooth functioning of the overall department.



**SHAKUN KHANDELWAL** has been appointed by Preferred Hotels & Resorts as the Senior Sales Manager – South Asia. In the new role, Khandelwal is expected to strengthen the brand's continued corporate, leisure, and MICE sales efforts across South Asia, both within the region and outbound, supporting the brand's global portfolio. Khandelwal brings a rich experience of 15 years in sales and marketing roles across corporate and MICE, and has worked with various luxury hotel groups and hospitality giants in India, including The Leela Palaces Hotels & Resorts, and ITC Hotels.



## FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru appoints **BINAY KUMAR SINGH** as the Director of Sales. With over 18 years of experience in the hospitality sector, Singh brings with him a wealth of knowledge and a passion that personifies the commitment to service excellence and unparalleled guest experiences that define Four Seasons standards. In his previous role at Taj Yeshwantpur, Singh spearheaded initiatives that led to a 126 per cent year-on-year revenue growth, surpassing targets and setting new standards for the hotel. Prior to joining Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru, Singh served as the Director of Sales at Taj Bekal Resort and Spa.



## MRS GROUP OF HOTELS

Jaipur

The MRS Group of Hotels, which owns and operates a distinct collection of boutique hotels across Rajasthan and Uttarakhand, appoints **SAMEER MEHRA** as Chief Commercial Officer. This significant move underscores the group's dedication to accelerating its growth and solidifying its presence in the hospitality industry. With a distinguished career at leading hospitality brands such as The Oberoi Group, Hilton Worldwide, Marriott International, and most recently, Standard International in Thailand, Mehra is set to lead the group's strategic growth and commercial operations.



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# India numbers rising for Fiji

Robert Thompson, Executive Director of Regions, Tourism Fiji, says they want to put more focus on the India market, as Indians become one of the top subscribers of their Matai Specialist programme, aiming to boost tourist football.

 Hazel Jain

Represented in India by Global Destinations, Tourism Fiji brings into sharper focus arrival numbers from India. This long-haul visa-free destination has appeared in the Indian travellers' wishlist not just as a standalone destination, but also as a great stop before their Australia and/ or New Zealand holiday.

Robert Thompson, Executive Director of Regions, Tourism Fiji, who was in India recently, says, "Right now, India ranks among top 8-9 in terms of international source market for us. India for us has been an emerging market for quite some time. We now want to give it more focus. Our strategy is to be able to give India the resource and the attention that it deserves, hence pulling it under me directly." He recently took



over the India market from K a t h y K o y a - m a i - b o l e . Speaking about the Indian traveller, he says that since Fiji has always received a slightly more adventurous Indian traveller, they are known to do everything.

Globally, Fiji ended

2023 slightly ahead of 2019 numbers. "From India, pre-COVID we had just over 6,000, and post-COVID we are approximately 6,200. So, we are seeing really good numbers. Overall, we are looking at a 4-5 per cent increase in arrival numbers this year. We are being conservative, when in actual fact December 2023 v/s December 2019 from India was 300 per cent up and we are hoping that this trend will continue," Thompson adds.

providers get a high proportion of Indian clients who want to do excursions and indulge in cultural experiences," he adds.

 **India ranks among top 8-9 in terms of international source market for us. India for us has been an emerging market for quite some time**

### Specialist programme

India has surpassed many of Fiji's other larger source markets for registrations, Thompson says, in reference to their Matai Specialist programme. Matai means smart in Fijian. Launched two years ago, the NTO has added incentives within the programme that now has three levels: Bronze, Silver and Gold.

"We have seen wonderful subscription from India. This means that there is a real thirst for knowl-

edge for Fiji, which is fantastic! Once they are in the programme and registering all the bookings they are doing, it progresses them through the levels that have various incentives built into them. Once they finish Gold, we list them on our website," he reveals.

### Sustainability initiatives

Post-COVID, Tourism Fiji has zoomed in on sustainability, and has hired a sustainability officer, who has been extremely busy. Thompson says, "We wanted to be clear that we were not greenwashing, so there are initiatives that are meaningful for the environmental and cultural preservation of Fiji. Our first step was to join the GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council). We are working with them to look at how we can set up the criteria and practices for our industry. Some of the initiatives include planting and re-planting projects for corals. Coral plantation is using corals that can withstand slightly warmer temperatures and planting into warmer waters. This is something that tourists can also get involved in. They can also adopt a coral and leave with a certificate while leaving the coral in the lagoon." 



Robert Thompson  
Executive Director of Regions  
Tourism Fiji

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