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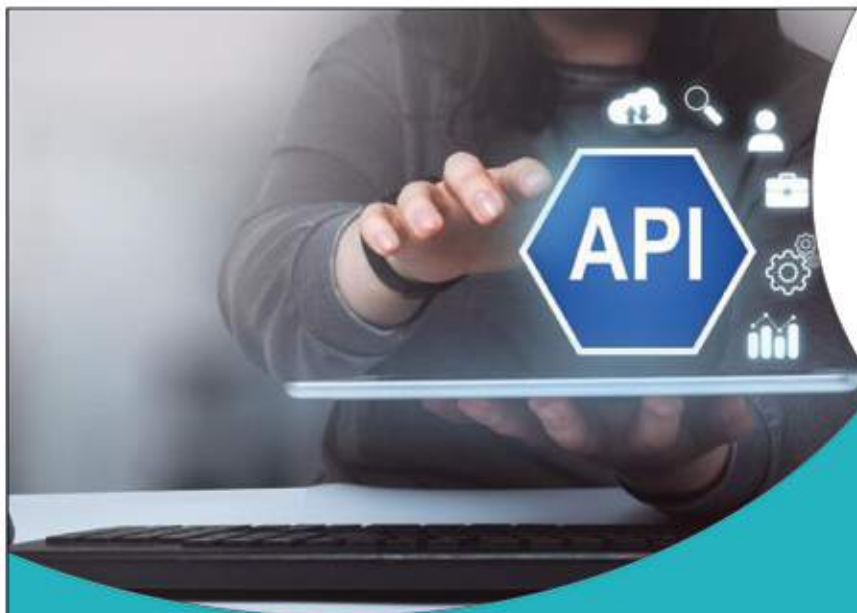
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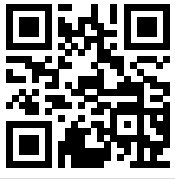
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## Overseas promotion funds slashed

The 7<sup>th</sup> Union Budget mentions about tourism but did not really meet the expectations of tourism and hospitality stakeholders with reduced overseas promotion allocation and no tax relief for the industry.

TT Bureau

The budget allocation for Ministry of Tourism was increased from ₹1,692.1 crore in 2023-2024 to ₹2,479.62 crore in 2024-25. However, the allocation for overseas promotion and publicity, including Market Development Assistance (MDA) was slashed from ₹100 crore to ₹33.02 crore. On the other hand, allocation for domestic promotion and publicity & MDA



Rajiv Mehra  
President, IATO



Madhavan Menon  
Exe. Chairman, Thomas Cook (India)

was increased from ₹95 crore to ₹176.97 crore. The finance minister announced the development of Vishnupad Temple Corridor and Mahabodhi Temple Corridor, be-

sides promoting Rajiv and Nalanda as tourist destinations. Focus will also be on Odisha to be developed as a tourist destination. A major announcement was of simpler tax regime for foreign shipping companies operating domestic cruises in the country, aiming to give a fillip to cruise tourism in India. Apart from that, Sitharaman highlighted the government's Startup Credit Guarantee Schemes.

Contd. on page 10 ▶

## India Travel Awards completes 10 yrs

India Travel Awards, West & South, is all set for its latest edition as it completes 10 years. The prestigious event will witness the industry leaders & visionaries in attendance.

TT Bureau

The India Travel Awards will be held on 13 August 2024, at the Sofitel Mumbai BKC. The awards, completing a decade of promoting and celebrating the existing and budding talent in the tourism and hospitality industry, will be held in Mumbai for the first time since its conception.

These awards were conceived to honour, commemorate and celebrate travel industry stakeholders across the country. Subsequently, they were divided according to regions, with the South India Travel Awards being the first to be introduced. The latest edition will have a new season this year with equally thrilling editions.

The India Travel Awards celebrate industry players from across the country under various categories of travel, tourism and hospitality industry. There are top awards for stalwarts from the industry, which take home the golden trophy 'Maya'. These awards are known to recognise the excellence, hard

work and success - thereby making tourism synonymous with progress, development, and opportunity. This invitation-only event is supported by major as-

sociations, trade bodies, as well as the government. The event is also held before the awards exclusively for the win-



sociations, trade bodies, as well as the government.

The highest honour at India Travel Awards, the Gold Maya, is awarded to those stalwarts who have shaped the industry the way it is today and have created innovative ways and products to take the industry a notch higher. The ceremony is a formal black-tie event with a sit-down dinner. A networking

ners, which helps professionals connect with other regional stalwarts. The awardees are facilitated by our Chief Guest, who is a high-ranking individual from the govt. ↴



## How to fill the skill gap?

A skilled and trained workforce is a prerequisite to run a successful business. TRAVTALK explores the importance of skilled staff and why upskilling and reskilling have become the need of the hour.



Atul Kumar Tiwari  
Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

“At the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, we acknowledge the role of tourism in the 'Viksit Bharat' initiative. Recognising its significance for overall national development, we are committed to fostering both domestic and foreign tourism. To achieve this, collaboration of Ministry of Tourism, NSDC, and NCVET is imperative. We must reimagine our approach, starting with integrating tourism education into the school curriculum and offering industry-aligned degree courses. Our efforts also extend to bridging skill gaps through comprehensive sector-wide studies. Together, we aim to

promote a skilled workforce for the nation's prosperity. ”

Contd. on page 12 ▶



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## Tourism snubbed again in Union Budget

Once again, the tourism sector feels snubbed by the Union Budget 2024. The overall budget for the Ministry of Tourism increased, but slashing the overseas promotion fund is a big blow. Shifting focus to domestic promotion is fine, but it doesn't compensate for the lack of support for international marketing. Attracting foreign tourists is crucial, and this budget misses the mark.

The development of religious corridors in Bihar and Odisha feels like a superficial attempt to placate the sector. Where are the policy changes that expedite hotel development or promote inbound tourism? The omission of GST rationalisation and infrastructure status for the hospitality sector shows a lack of commitment from the government. Reducing GST rates and recognising tourism as a key economic driver could have been game-changers, but those calls have gone unheard.

A simpler tax regime for cruise tourism is a step in the right direction, but it's not enough. Skill-ing and employment generation efforts are appreciated, but without substantial investment in tourism infrastructure and promotional activities, these efforts will fall short. The travel and tourism industry needs more than lip service and token gestures. Until then, the sector will miss out on opportunities, struggling to realise its full potential and drive economic growth.

It's sad the industry has not made a mark on the government. It's a collective failure. We need a total overhaul of the system to take tourism to the helm. The industry is not united; sooner or later, it has to come to terms with reality—unite or perish. Big egos of small businesses and disinterest from big players are collectively crippling the industry.

The travel industry, at least all the agents, know each many lawmakers of our country. It certainly can deliver what it wants. It's time they get their act together.

# Biz travel spending over 2019 mark

Driven by economic stability and pent-up demand, global business travel spending is set to hit a record \$1.48 tn in 2024, surpassing the 2019 peak of \$1.43 tn. Projections suggest spending will exceed \$2 tn by 2028, signalling a strong recovery and growth for the sector.



Janice Alyosius

The global business travel industry is positioned for a strong recovery, as indicated by projections in the latest GBTA Business Travel Index Report. Forecasted to reach \$1.48 trillion by the end of 2024, surpassing the previous high of \$1.43 trillion in 2019, the sector demonstrates significant resilience and momentum post-pandemic. Looking ahead, experts anticipate this upward trajectory to continue, with spending projected to exceed \$2 trillion by 2028.

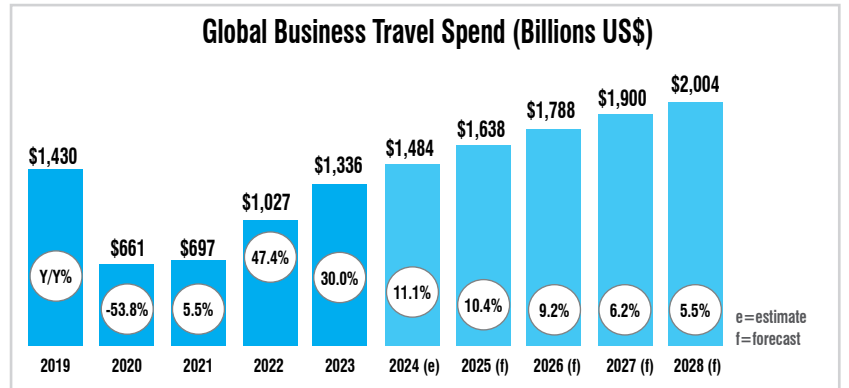
The economic stability has been a crucial factor driving the resurgence of business travel. Combined with pent-up demand from postponed trips during the pandemic, CEOs and CFOs are increasingly endorsing travel for business engagements. This confidence is reflected in the return of many major business travel markets to or near pre-pandemic levels, propelling expenditure growth across various sectors.

According to the 2024 Business Travel Index Outlook by GBTA, global business travel spending is projected to rise by 11.1 per cent in 2024, following substantial year-on-year growth of 30 per cent to 47 per cent in 2022 and 2023. The growth rate is expected to gradually stabilise, leading to an annual compound growth rate of 6.95 per cent from 2025 to 2028.

In 2023, the business travel industry made significant strides, recovering approximately \$675 billion of the \$770 billion lost in 2020, as per GBTA BTI™ analysis. By the end of 2023, it had achieved 93 per cent of its pre-pandemic peak of \$1.43 trillion. The sector saw substantial growth that year, with expenditures increasing by 30 per cent compared to 2022, reaching a total of \$1.3 trillion.

### Key insights from the report

Global business travel spending is projected to rebound to \$1.48 trillion in 2024, returning to pre-pandemic levels. This recovery is supported by stronger-than-



expected economic conditions in 2022 and 2023. However, adjusted for inflation, spending levels are anticipated to trail pre-pandemic peaks in the coming years, suggesting that business travel volumes will also remain below pre-pandemic levels.

In 2023, global business travel expenditures totalled \$1.34 trillion,

spending levels. Looking ahead to 2024, China and the USA are expected to maintain their positions as the top two markets for business travel spending.

Across industries, the financial and insurance sectors are poised for the most significant growth (72 per cent) in business travel spending through 2028. Retail trade (41

the importance of coordinated industry action.

A survey of 4,100 business travellers across 28 countries highlighted increased overall business travel, although international travel remains subdued. 64 per cent of respondents reported higher business travel spending compared to 2023, despite some experiencing more restrictive travel policies.

On average, business travellers spend \$834 per trip, with lodging accounting for \$312,



with allocations including, \$501 billion for lodging, \$282 billion for air travel, \$245 billion for food and beverage, \$165 billion for ground transportation, and \$142 billion for other travel expenses.

Regional recovery rates varied in 2023, with Asia Pacific leading at 36 per cent, followed by Western Europe at 33 per cent, and North America at 25 per cent. The USA, Middle East, Africa, and Latin America each achieved or exceeded 100 per cent of their 2019

per cent) and agriculture, forestry, and fishing (32 per cent) sectors are expected to see slower growth during this period.

While the overall outlook remains optimistic, potential longer-term impacts on business travel include factors such as persistent inflation, geopolitical tensions, industry workforce challenges, and environmental concerns. Corporate sustainability efforts are increasingly influencing the sector, underscoring

## Financial and insurance sectors are poised for the most significant growth (72 per cent) in business travel spending through the year 2028

food and beverage \$153, air travel \$176, ground transportation \$103, and miscellaneous expenses \$89. Most travellers (81 per cent) find their business trips very or moderately worthwhile for achieving objectives, with attending seminars/ training and conventions/ conferences being the most common purposes.

With expectations of continued growth and adaptation to evolving economic and environmental factors, the business travel industry is poised for a dynamic future.



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# 1k attendees likely at IATO Convention

The 39<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention, to be organised in Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, promises to showcase the state's diverse cultural and natural heritage. With an emphasis on promoting lesser-known destinations and revitalising inbound tourism, the convention aims to position Madhya Pradesh prominently on the global tourism map.



Janice Alyosius

**S**heo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, MP Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, expressed hope that the upcoming 39<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention, to be organised in Bhopal, will promote inbound tourism. "Madhya Pradesh is a treasure trove of natural beauty, wellness retreats, rich heritage, and historical marvels. We are confident that the IATO convention will provide an excellent platform for global tour operators to witness first-hand the unique offerings of Madhya Pradesh. This will enable them to effectively market our state to discerning travellers worldwide," Shukla said.

Centrally located and known as the heart of incredible India, Madhya Pradesh boasts a robust infrastructure to support tourism. "We have strategically developed a network



Team IATO, along with team MP Tourism, at the interactive meeting for the curatin raiser of 39<sup>th</sup> IATO Convention in Bhopal

of five airports operating on a hub-and-spoke model. Bhopal, our capital, serves as a key hub with extensive flight connections. Indore, in particular, offers the highest number of flights, including international routes to Dubai and Sharjah. Additionally, we are enhancing intra-state connectivity with smaller aircraft and improving our road and rail networks," Shukla explained.

He said this year's IATO Convention is expected to attract more than 1,000 delegates, including



tour operators, hoteliers, and other industry professionals.

Highlighting the state's hospitality sector, Shukla said, "Madhya

Pradesh offers top-tier accommodations around national parks and historical sites. Brands like Taj Safaris have invested significantly, with properties near every national park, including upcoming ventures in Bhopal, Indore, and other key cities. Our goal is to ensure that every visitor experiences unparalleled hospitality amid our natural wonders."

Highlighting Madhya Pradesh's proactive approach to international promotion, Shukla said,

"We are actively promoting Madhya Pradesh on the international fora, and are in touch with more than 25 million stakeholders abroad, who represent source market countries. Additionally, we participate in exhibitions and roadshows."

**Ravi Gosain**, Vice President, IATO and Chairman, 39<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention, expressed similar sentiments. "Bhopal, with its scenic lakes and lush greenery, provides an ideal

backdrop for our convention. Our focus is on unveiling Madhya Pradesh's hidden gems, such as the Udaigiri caves,



**This year's IATO Convention is expected to attract over 1,000 delegates, including tour operators, hoteliers, and other stakeholders**

Bhimbetka rock shelters, and Sanchi stupas. These lesser-known destinations are integral to our theme of 'Resurgent India Inbound', reflecting our collective efforts to revitalise tourism post-COVID," he said. 🐦

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**TourismNews**

₹1,666 crore annual allocation for incentives and operational support in Maharashtra's Tourism Policy underscores the state government's commitment, says HRAWI

Budgetary allocation for Civil Aviation goes down to ₹2,357 crore, Union government grants ₹502 crore for Regional Connectivity Scheme

Madhya Pradesh receives record tourist footfall; 112 million people visit state in 2023, three times of 2022 numbers

India launches e-Visas for Port Blair and five other seaports, expects to be a game changer for yacht and cruise tourism

Goa looking forward to tap new and emerging markets by participating in global trade fairs, says Rohan Khaunte

India's domestic air traffic grows 6% to 13.2 million in June; IndiGo leads with 80.86 lakh passengers: DGCA

# Bangkok all set for PTM 2024

Noor Ahmad Hamid, Chief Executive Officer, Pacific Asia Travel Association, believes that the upcoming 47<sup>th</sup> edition of PATA Travel Mart in Thailand has the potential to unleash the dormant opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region. This year, 57% of the buyers will be from the leisure segment, adding concrete value propositions to the event, he informs.

*Amita Pandey*

**N**oor Ahmad Hamid, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), recently announced at a webinar that the PATA Travel Mart 2024 (PTM 2024) is scheduled to take place from 27-29 August 2024 at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC) in Bangkok, Thailand. This year's event is especially significant, as it marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PATA's presence in Thailand. Hamid also shared exclusive insights about the upcoming event, promising an exciting experience for the participants.

PTM is an international B2B travel trade exhibition that attracts a gathering of more than 1,000 delegates from more than 60 destinations around the world. The event provides unparalleled contracting and networking opportunities. It provides a platform to connect with qualified international buyers,



**Noor Ahmad Hamid**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Pacific Asia Travel Association

sellers, and echelons of the travel industry from the Asia-Pacific region. It is an educational and informative platform for tourism professionals, students, corporates, and hotels to expand their business network and access decision-makers. Moreover, it also assists in consolidating existing business partnerships.

Hamid informed that PTM 2024 expects 57 per cent of buyers

from the leisure segment, 31 per cent from leisure and MICE, and 8 per cent buyers from the MICE segment. This year, the event is going to witness 37 per cent participation from Europe and 12 per cent from Southeast Asia, he said.



One of the exclusive features of PTM 2024 is that it is not being hosted by any destination, which means it would be fully funded by PATA. "Last year, PTM was hosted by the Government of India, but PTM 2024 is not being hosted by the Government of Thailand. It would be fully funded by PATA, which means for every dollar that we spend to host a buyer, we want the return on investment not only to us but more importantly to all the exhibitors," he said, adding that PATA is committed to ensur-

ing that only buyers with concrete business opportunities participate at the event. When asked about the less participation of buyers from the Latin American region, Hamid replied, "Currently, the cost of hosting long-haul flights is challenging but PATA is open to host any buyer until they are adding value proposition to the business."

**PATA Travel Mart 2023**

While highlighting the upside of attending PTM 2024, Hamid illuminated the audience about the success of PTM 2023, which was held at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi in October 2023. "Last year, the exhibition convened 1,106 delegates from 46 countries, including sellers, buyers, media, and young tourism professionals. The event sent ripples across the region with the participation of 92 sellers from 38 countries and 196 buyers from 38 countries," he said, adding that the event witnessed 47 per cent of buyers from the leisure segment, 15 per cent from MICE and

23 per cent exhibitors from the hospitality industry.

**Venue**

QSNCC in Bangkok boasts of 78,500 sqm of event space for all sizes of events and an eco-friendly design. Strategically located, the

**47<sup>th</sup> edition of PATA Travel Mart is especially significant, as it marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PATA's presence in Thailand**

venue is in proximity to a panoply of luxury hotels within five km with over 60 outlets of cafés, street food restaurants, casual dining experiences, and shopping outlets.

# Centara felicitates partners

Centara Hotels & Resorts successfully concluded Rewards & Recognition Night recently in Delhi, drawing over 100 key travel partners at each event. The evenings were highlighted by an awards ceremony recognising top-performing partners with trophies and certificates. The events also marked the launch of Centara Mirage Beach Resort Maldives.





# The agent-airline saga continues

The love-hate relationship between the agent and the airline is never ending. While airlines safeguard their bottom lines, agents feel neglected. Certainly, both parties will have to meet half-way for their mutual benefit. **TRAVELTALK** speaks to key industry players on the issue.



Hazel Jain

The agent-airline relationship is something that all associations have been highlighting and working on for a while. **Ajay Prakash**, President, TAFI, says, "Unfortunately, airlines have cut back on staff, and everything is getting automated. But automation cannot solve everything. The human touch is critical. The agent is critical and, therefore, the relationship between the agent and the airline is important. But today that relationship is virtually non-existent."

He adds that the IATA rules and regulations are also one-sided. "When it comes to making that little extra effort to facilitate the passengers, there is no one to reach out to. There is no remuneration from the airline directly except for volume-based business. But this is not a healthy situation for agents. Now, IATA is also talking about creating a whole new system for payments to be able to reach out to passengers directly," Prakash says.

At the end of the day, agents give a guarantee to passengers and are liable for tickets issued by them on



**Ajay Prakash**  
President  
TAFI



**Jay Bhatia**  
Vice President  
TAAI

**We need to keep having a dialogue with airlines and not let them make rules unilaterally which bypass the agent channel**

**Jay Bhatia**, VP, TAAI, believes that while the relationship is cordial, airlines feel that agents have become too demanding, whereas the agents feel that they must be respected and permitted to do busi-

**The irrational ADMs raised by the airlines along with administrative fees is too huge an amount and is a loss for the agents**

reach the bank in 24 hours and the agents can get an extended time limit from 14 to 28 days depending on the credit card. The airline wants to compete with its own sales channel and are offering huge discounts on their online platforms, along with additional miles. Agents are and shall always be an extended arm of the airlines and their most reliable sales channel, which the airlines must acknowledge," Bhatia adds.

The airlines are not paying commissions and that is a shame, feels Bhatia. "A sales channel partner in no other industry globally not get remunerated by its principal. The agents have started to charge nominal service charges for issuing the tickets. Another major issue is on the payment cycle being weekly. Agents are not able to use their travel agency corporate credit cards while issuing tickets on the GDS, upfront payment on groups, irrespective of IATA credit of seven days should be applicable as per rules. Another major challenge faced by us is the irrational ADMs raised by the airlines along with administrative fees. This amount becomes too huge and is a loss to the agents," he says.

Another issue are the uncertain cancellations. **Rajan Bhatia**, Treasurer, TAFI Gujarat Chapter & Director, Yashvi Tours and Travels, says, "For such situations, there must be some policy so that the travel-

ler should not suffer from these mishaps, which is not their fault. When the travellers are cancelling their ticket, they are charged cancellation fee. Why should not the airline be penalised for cancelling the flight? They should be liable. There needs to be some guidelines for this. Our clients are booking tickets months in advance to get the cost benefit, especially to destinations where not many flights go like Bagdogra. When the airline cancels and the client has to book last-minute, their budget goes for a toss. Our client is not protected. In India, we do not have any policy, but internationally, airlines give another flight option either on their airline or any other airline and adjust the amount by themselves. The airlines take that responsibility."

## Inflated airfares

Meanwhile, **Jigar Dudakia**, Owner, Shakti Travels, is concerned about the practice of selling group air tickets to a few selected travel agents across India which airlines dry sell on a much higher rates than base price. "This practice often results in inflated costs for passengers and a lack of transparency in pricing. We believe, it is crucial for airlines to uphold fair and transparent pricing policies. Unfortunately, the prevalence of dry selling undermines these principles, creating confusion and frustration among passengers who expect clarity in their travel expenses," he explains. He adds, "We are taking a stand against the practice of dry selling by actively choosing not to purchase air tickets from airlines or travel agents that engage in this practice. We believe consumers should have access to upfront and comprehensive pricing information. We urge these airlines to reconsider their approach to pricing and align with industry standards."

## 5 ways to build strong partnerships

- ❖ Understanding each other's needs and challenges
- ❖ Provide value-added services and incentives
- ❖ Communicate regularly and transparently
- ❖ Leverage data and analytics
- ❖ Encourage innovation and collaboration



**Rajan Bhatia**  
Treasurer, TAFI Gujarat Chapter & Director, Yashvi Tours and Travels



**Jigar Dudakia**  
Owner  
Shakti Travels

**When the traveller is cancelling their ticket, they are charged. Why shouldn't the airline be penalised for cancelling flights?**

behalf of the airline. "We need to keep having a constant dialogue with airlines and not let them make rules unilaterally, which bypass the agent channel," he exclaims.

**Dry selling creates confusion and frustration among passengers who expect clarity in their travel expenses**

ness with ease. "TAAI has been persistently following up with airlines to start permitting the agents to use their Travel Agent Corporate Credit Cards whereby monies can

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# Tourism sector left high & dry, again

▶ Contd. from page 5



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President  
IATO

“ There has been a continued neglect of the tourism sector. Once again, the Union Budget has completely ignored us, as it has in the past. There is nothing at all, except for the development of some temples in Bihar and Odisha. There is no provision for inbound or domestic tourism. The only positive aspect is a ₹30 crore increase in the overseas marketing budget, up from ₹3 crore in the interim budget. However, this marks a decrease from ₹100 crore to just ₹33 crore. ”



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President  
TAAI

“ As President of the Travel Agents Association of India & Vice Chairperson of FAITH, the budget for tourism is a huge letdown for us. Out of the 28 states and 8 Union Territories, the FM focuses on the infrastructure development of a couple of states, which is quite disappointing. However, the promotion of a religious corridor in these states is appreciated. The only word of inclusion is the reduction of TDS for all e-commerce firms and a simpler tax regime for foreign shipping firms. ”



**Ajay Prakash**  
President  
TAFI

“ As usual, the tourism industry has been left high and dry this year too. Every year, we put forward what we think are necessary steps if tourism is to realise its full potential. And like every year, it has been ignored. While tourism was mentioned as one of the three important aspects, the only thing, the FM said, the government would do is to develop the temples and corridors at Rajgir and Bodh Gaya, revive the Nalanda university, and there was some concession for domestic cruises. ”



**KB Kachru**  
President  
HAI

“ There is a continued focus on infrastructural development, fiscal prudence and consolidation whereas tourism continues to be accepted as an engine of growth for the economy. The emphasis has been given to spiritual tourism. However, no policy announcement has been done to facilitate the development of hotels and promotion of inbound tourism. The announcement of GST simplification, and comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act provides some hope. ”



**Pradeep Shetty**  
President  
FHRAI

“ There is nothing spectacular in the budget to bring structural changes to address the fundamental challenges it faces in a competitive world order, and to accelerate the growth of the sector to be a \$3 trillion economy by 2047. Some key demands of tourism and hospitality to revitalise the sector, such as GST rationalisation, granting of infrastructure status and bringing ease of doing business and policy reforms have not been considered in the budget once again. ”



**Riaz Munshi**  
President  
OTOAI

“ Once again, there seems to be nothing in the budget for outbound tourism, although we were expecting some reduction in TCS and GST. We had submitted a representation to the tourism ministry, explaining how these taxes are affecting our members' businesses and causing revenue loss for the government. Unfortunately, it appears they either do not understand or do not wish to acknowledge these impacts. They are also experiencing revenue losses. ”



**Madhavan Menon**  
Executive Chairman  
Thomas Cook (India) Limited

“ This year's Union Budget has opened new doors to development, specifically for domestic and inbound tourism. We are optimistic about the significant allocation of ₹11.11 lakh crore towards infrastructure development. When introduced, TCS was considered disadvantageous to salaried, but they can now avail immediate credit of TCS paid on account of their foreign travel. The discontinued SEIS scheme should have been reinstated. ”



**Rajesh Magow**  
Co-Founder & Group CEO  
MakeMyTrip

“ The Union Government's continued emphasis on infrastructure development is commendable. Enhanced road infrastructure will bolster the travel and tourism sector. We also welcome the initiatives to develop iconic spiritual and cultural sites into world-class tourist hotspots. The decision to reduce the TDS rate on e-commerce operators to 0.1 per cent is a welcome move. The provision of credit for TCS under 'Income from Salaries' is logical. ”



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder  
EaseMyTrip

“ The government demonstrates efforts to promote religious tourism and domestic tourism infrastructure. With special focus on Bihar, Nalanda, and Odisha, the government plans to develop the religious sites as world-class religious and tourist destinations. We are optimistic this will enhance the overall experience of religious tourists. Additionally, the government has also shown interest in simplifying taxation in cruise business. ”



**Naveen Kundu**  
Managing Director  
Ebixcash Travel

“ Terrible is the word for the Union Budget 2024, which is appalling when it comes to tourism. It's all talk and no action! The already neglected sector has been simply ignored. Where have initiatives like 'Meet in India' and 'Chalo India' disappeared? Can all that be achieved with a budget of just ₹33 crore? I'm certain even that will remain unspent. This budget is bizarre and deeply disappointing! I am surprised that even after the G20, there has been no effort to learn. ”



**Anil Parashar**  
Executive Director  
ITO

“ Budget marks a transformative moment for India's tourism sector. With an substantial 44.7 per cent increase in funding to ₹2,450 crore, along with enhanced infrastructure, support for aviation, and simplified visa processes, this budget is poised to elevate India's status as a premier travel destination. These measures will not only attract domestic and international travellers but also open up new opportunities for travel providers. The vision is clear to make India a tourism hub. ”



**Pankaj Nagpal**  
Managing Director  
Travstarz Global Group

“ Extremely disappointed with the budget, as it does not address any issues of grave concern to the tourism sector, like the GST, TCS, and industry status. There is no clear focus on promoting India as a tourism hub. Only developing temples and some specified corridors that lack basic infrastructure will not help India realise its true potential. It has been seen that all governments in power have only done lip service when it comes to tourism. ”

Contd. on page 18 ▶

# Manta Air pushes for BLR route

Manta Air re-ignites the appeal of Maldives with exclusive prices and bundled packages of accommodation with air tickets for Indian travel agents. The airline's special travel deals, in convergence with multifarious offerings, aim to increase visitor traffic from India.



Amita Pandey

With the aim to attract 80 per cent of its traffic from India, Manta Air, in partnership with Visit Maldives, recently hosted 'Explore Maldives' roadshow at Shangri-La Bengaluru. The event aimed to rekindle Indian travellers' enthusiasm for the archipelagic nation, as it has set the ambitious target of crossing the two million mark of visitors this year, said **Zihuny Rasheed**, Deputy Managing Director, Maldives Marketing and PR Corporation (MMPRC).

The event witnessed the participation of key resort partners from Maldives, such as Universal Resorts, Minor Hotels with NH Collection & AVANI+, Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, Colors of OBLU, and Sun Siyam Resorts, among others. The roadshow was graced by industry leaders of India, including the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) Karnataka Chapter and Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) – Karnataka Chapter, along with the attendance of DMCs, 130+ Indian travel agents and tour operators, as well as MICE travel organisers from India.

## Bengaluru-Dhaalu route

**Ahmed Maumoon**, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Manta Air, said that the airline's current objectives and marketing strategies are to promote the Bengaluru-Dhaalu route,



**Zihuny Rasheed**  
Deputy Managing Director, Maldives Marketing and PR Corporation (MMPRC)

which could catalyse the interest among Indian travellers to seek Maldives as a preferred holiday destination. "As a leading player in the Maldivian market for the last five years, we launched our first international route this year from Bengaluru to Dhaalu in Maldives, which is south of the country. This direct route saves Indian travellers four to six hours compared to Malé Airport. This route offers a more streamlined experience as Dhaalu Airport only has Manta Air landing, which means the airport has to oversee only 64 passengers per landing, contrary to the busy Malé Airport, which is a traditional hub," he said.

Elaborating on the current passenger load, he explained, "The aircraft we are using is ATR 72-600, which has 64 seats. So, our focus is to bolster the present route and would like to market it further through events like this



**Ahmed Maumoon**  
Deputy Chief Executive Officer Manta Air

roadshow. In the last few weeks, we have witnessed about 45 per cent load factor, which we expect to grow to 80 per cent eventually. Recently, we have seen a diverse passenger load, including Indians on vacations, or Maldivians coming to Bengaluru for medical treatment or business needs."

Maumoon shared that Manta Air partners with Indian travel agents and DMCs to offer exclusive packages for Indian travellers. "We provide tailored hotel packages in combination with airfare for Indian customers, including a two-to-three-night stay. This unique value proposition promotes the airline, accommodation, and destination together," he revealed, adding that Manta Air collaborates with a wide range of hotels from the ultra-luxury segment to budget-friendly guest houses located on inhabited islands, where customers can experience the local culture during

their stays, which allows customers to choose from a diverse range of hotels as per their budget.

The crowning touch was when Maumoon informed about the exclusive rates being offered to Indian travel agents. "We are extending return tickets priced at US

**Cities such as Kochi, Coimbatore, or Chennai in southern India are potential expansion targets based on feedback received**

\$350-400 until the end of September. This saves travellers US \$400-500 compared to traditional routes, which require separate tickets from Bengaluru to Malé and then domestic ticket from Malé to the final destination. Additionally, with the promotion of special packages for honeymooners, the airline is witnessing a surge in inquiries from couples looking for wedding celebrations, along with family segment. Moreover, the morning flights on Fridays and Sundays would benefit the visitors looking for weekend gateways to Maldives," he said.

# TravelBullz celebrates industry ties

TravelBullz partnered with Scoot, a low-cost carrier offering flights to South-east Asia, to host exclusive networking dinners for travel agents from Chennai and Coimbatore. This collaboration aimed to strengthen industry partnerships and promote greater co-operation within South India's travel sector.

The events provided a unique opportunity for travel agents to engage directly with representatives from both TravelBullz and Scoot, highlighting the strategic significance of Chennai and Coimbatore as key markets for expanding their regional reach. **Kanwer Deep Singh**, Founder



**Kanwer Deep Singh**  
Founder and President TravelBullz

and President, TravelBullz, shared his enthusiasm for the event. "We are delighted to partner with Scoot in organising this initiative. These events not only

facilitated valuable networking opportunities but also allowed us to showcase TravelBullz's expertise in delivering exceptional travel experiences across South-east Asia," she said.

The evenings included interactive networking sessions, informative presentations, and discussions about upcoming travel trends and exclusive offerings from both companies.

**Brian Torrey**, General Manager, West Asia & India at Scoot, said, "It is indeed a pleasure to co-host the networking events with TravelBullz. We are excited to meet our trade partners who support us throughout and fo-

cus on Scoot's excellent flight connections via Singapore. Scoot currently operates flights to six destinations in Thailand, comprising Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Hat Yai, Krabi and the newly launched flight to Koh Samui, with plans to add more to our flight network in South-east Asia. The latter three destinations are served by Scoot's newest Embraer E190-E2 fleet that entered into service in May."

The strong turnout and engagement from travel trade professionals and representatives from both companies underscored the vital role of Chennai and Coimbatore in South India's travel industry.

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- Junior Officer (Travel)**  
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# Investing in people is key

▶ Contd. from page 5



**Sameer Karnani**  
Managing Committee Member, TAAI,  
& Owner of Arunodaya Travels

“ We live in a volatile and ever evolving times. To top that, our sector is vulnerable and transforming rapidly. With this as backdrop, upgrading, upskilling and having the agility and propensity to adapt is now the norm. Keeping



**Aparna Basumalik**  
Comm. Head, India Subcontinent  
& UAE, Europamundo

“ Post COVID, there is definitely a shortage of skilled and trained manpower in the tourism industry. Layoffs during COVID and inconsistent start of businesses in following years is one reason forcing many to



**Rajan Bhatia**  
Treasurer, TAFI Gujarat Chapter &  
Director, Yashvi Tours and Travels

“ We are facing shortage of trained and skilled staff in our day-to-day business. To address this shortage, the industry should invest in education and training programmes. We must collaborate with educational

“ The industry is facing a drought in skilled manpower. Not just travel agents, even airlines and hotels are facing this. The first preference for jobs is airlines, so travel agencies are left bereft. Not many students are actually enrolling for tourism training. My agency is also not recognised by the MOT. While we have filled the necessary forms, the bottleneck again is staff eligibility. We have started training staff as per MOT standards. Once they are ready, we will go ahead with the registration. ”



**Sheetal Munshaw**  
Director India  
Atout France

not with, but ahead of the times, anticipating trends and strategising in accordance is critical to stay relevant in a continually disruptive landscape. Equipping staff, our biggest stakeholders, is the most critical element. ”

“ There is a crunch for quality manpower across the country. The industry is growing fast but margins are shrinking, leading to companies automating and downsizing. With these pressures many have opted to move out of travel. The new generation has multiple options and a zeal to explore different opportunities, resulting in a lower degree of specialisation. There is no shortcut to educating and training the front line and the core team. At Europamundo this is a year-round process. ”



**Mahendra Vakharia**  
Executive Committee Member –  
OTOAI & MD, Pathfinders Holidays

become self-employed. We are blessed to have our old team with us, but with the growing business, more hands on the table are welcome. We offer a safe and stress-free environment for our staff in the organisation. ”

“ We are indeed experiencing a shortage of skilled manpower within the travel industry, largely due to scarcity of targeted educational programmes and exposure. At Yashvi Tours and Travels, we tackle this challenge by actively recruiting individuals who are passionate about travel, regardless of their formal educational background. We believe in nurturing their enthusiasm through hands-on experiences like participation in travel fairs, which are crucial for developing industry-ready skills. ”



**Dilip Masrani**  
Secretary, TAFI Gujarat Chapter  
& MD, Favourite Tours & Forex

institutions to develop specialised courses and certifications for travel-related professions. We must provide internships and apprenticeships to bridge the gap between education and practical experience. ”



**Tejus Jose**  
Director of Operations  
Ibis & Ibis Styles India

“ We are experiencing a huge shortage of skilled manpower, especially for MICE and weddings. The situation has aggravated post COVID. People have changed their industry. So, we are trying to train our own people. But there is



**Smita Jain**  
Director, MGLuxM & MIHB  
SP Jain School of Global Management

“ To address the issue of manpower shortage, companies can leverage apprenticeship models as a pivotal strategy to address the escalating demand for skilled professionals in the burgeoning tourism industry.



**Kush Kapoor**  
CEO  
Roseate Hotels & Resorts

“ Accor provides equal opportunities and encourages employees to bring their personality, culture, background, and religion to the team. Upskilling opportunities in training and development allow employees to

“ This scarcity of qualified personnel is compounded by the challenge of timely availability of talent, which poses significant hurdles for our operations. We recognise the importance of addressing this issue promptly to ensure the smooth functioning and growth of our organisation. Measures to enhance training programmes and streamline recruitment processes are being actively explored to mitigate these challenges and secure the requisite talent for our needs. ”



**Rajan Kalra**  
Head of Sales  
The LaLIT Hotels

a kind of vacuum. We are trying to handle it in our own way. We are also trying to train a lot of freshers from the schools. We hire people from Lalit school in Delhi. But it will take some time to fill the gap because the growth in this segment has been immense. ”

“ This problem has persisted for quite some time, particularly affecting positions such as those in frontline service, management, culinary, and wine stewardship. The shortage stems from several factors, including the industry's perception as offering low-paying, physically demanding jobs, and its high turnover rates. To combat these challenges, there are courses that emphasise comprehensive industry knowledge and practical skills, preparing students for diverse roles. ”



**Dhriti Prasanna Mahanta**  
Vice President & Business Head,  
TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship models facilitate the bridging of the skill gap and also provide a framework for upskilling and reskilling existing professionals. By blending education with hands-on apprenticeship, businesses can cultivate a talent supply. ”

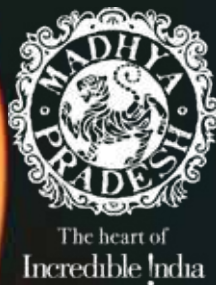
“ At Roseate Hotels and Resorts, we are committed to the continuous growth and development of our team and have adopted several pioneering initiatives, such as Language Training, Educational Advancement, Personality Development, Practical Training, Culinary Exposure, Housekeeping Training, Specialised Training and Online Learning, aimed at ensuring that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide an unparalleled luxury experience. ”



**Anil Chavan**  
General Manager  
Novotel Imagicaa Khopoli

be actors in their professional growth. Seize opportunities to create memorable experiences for our guests and make a positive, sustainable impact. All our employees should enjoy their journey with us. ”

Contd. on page 17 ▶



# India's first intra-state air service in Madhya Pradesh

# PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva

**Unveil enchanting destinations of state**

Madhya Pradesh boasts scenic landscapes, magnificent history, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, spiritual destinations, thrilling adventures, diverse cultures, and archaeological marvels. Each captivating destination whispers its unique story, promising an unforgettable experience. The state's multifaceted beauty has enthralled travellers. In 2023, the state witnessed a phenomenal surge in tourist arrivals – a staggering three times increase compared to 2022! From 34.1 million in 2022, the number

skyrocketed to a remarkable 112.1 million in 2023.

### Enhancing connectivity for seamless exploration

Committed to enriching your Madhya Pradesh experience, the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board takes another pioneering step – "PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva", India's first intra-state air service! This groundbreaking initiative marks a milestone in the tourism sector. This initiative will not only benefit tourism but also foster trade, healthcare, education, and cultural exchange.

### Your gateway to an unforgettable Journey

"PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva" reflects the state's commitment to providing a convenient and seamless travel experience. The Vayu seva connects eight cities: Bhopal, Ujjain, Khajuraho, Rewa, Indore, Gwalior, Jabalpur, and Singrauli. Booking your air journey is a breeze as dedicated counters are set up at Indore, Bhopal, and Jabalpur airports. Additionally, you can access schedules, fares, and book tickets online at [www.flyola.in](http://www.flyola.in).

"PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva" is a must-not-miss opportunity to explore more and experience more. Pocket-friendly fares ensure exploring Madhya Pradesh through intra-state flights is an accessible and enjoyable experience.

Embark on a captivating journey through Madhya Pradesh with air service. Rewa beckons you to witness the awe-inspiring waterfalls, explore the majestic Rewa Fort and Govindgarh Palace, and delve into history at the ASI-protected Deur Kothar. Im-

merse in the spiritual aura of Ujjain, famed for the revered Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga Temple and the Mahakal Lok Corridor. Explore historical sites like Ram Ghat, Mangalnath Temple, Jantar Mantar, Harsiddhi Temple, and Sandipani Ashram. Ascend the ramparts of the impregnable Gwalior Fort, a testament to bygone eras. Marvel at the architectural brilliance of Gujari Mahal, Jai Vilas Palace, and the tombs of Tansen and Ghaus Mohammed. Explore the Bateshwar Group of Temples, Padavli, and Mitaoli. Be captivated by the grandeur of the Rajwada, a royal palace. Stroll through the vibrant Lalbagh Place, seek blessings at Bada Ganpati Mandir, shop for treasures at Sarafa Bazaar, and savour delectable treats at Chappan Dukaan in Indore. Witness the architectural marvel of Madan Mahal Fort in Jabalpur and pay homage to the Rani Durgavati Memorial and Museum. Explore the natural wonders of Bhedaghat, a UNESCO tentative list site, and delve into mysticism at the Chaunsath Yogini Temple. Be mesmerized by the world-famous Khajuraho Temples, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and marvel at India's unique artistic heritage. Explore the Adivart Museum, witness the diverse wildlife of Panna National Park, pay re-

spects at the Tomb of Maharaj Chhatrashal, and be awestruck by the cascading Raneh Falls and the Bhimkund natural wonder

### A destination for every traveller

Madhya Pradesh caters to all kinds of travellers. "PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva" simplifies exploring the entire state, allowing you to effortlessly craft your dream itinerary. "PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva,"

**'PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva' initiative will not only benefit tourism but also foster trade, healthcare, education, and cultural exchange**

operated on a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) basis unlocks a world of possibilities for exploring Madhya Pradesh.

So, what are you waiting for? Book your tickets today and embark on an unforgettable adventure in the captivating heart of India!



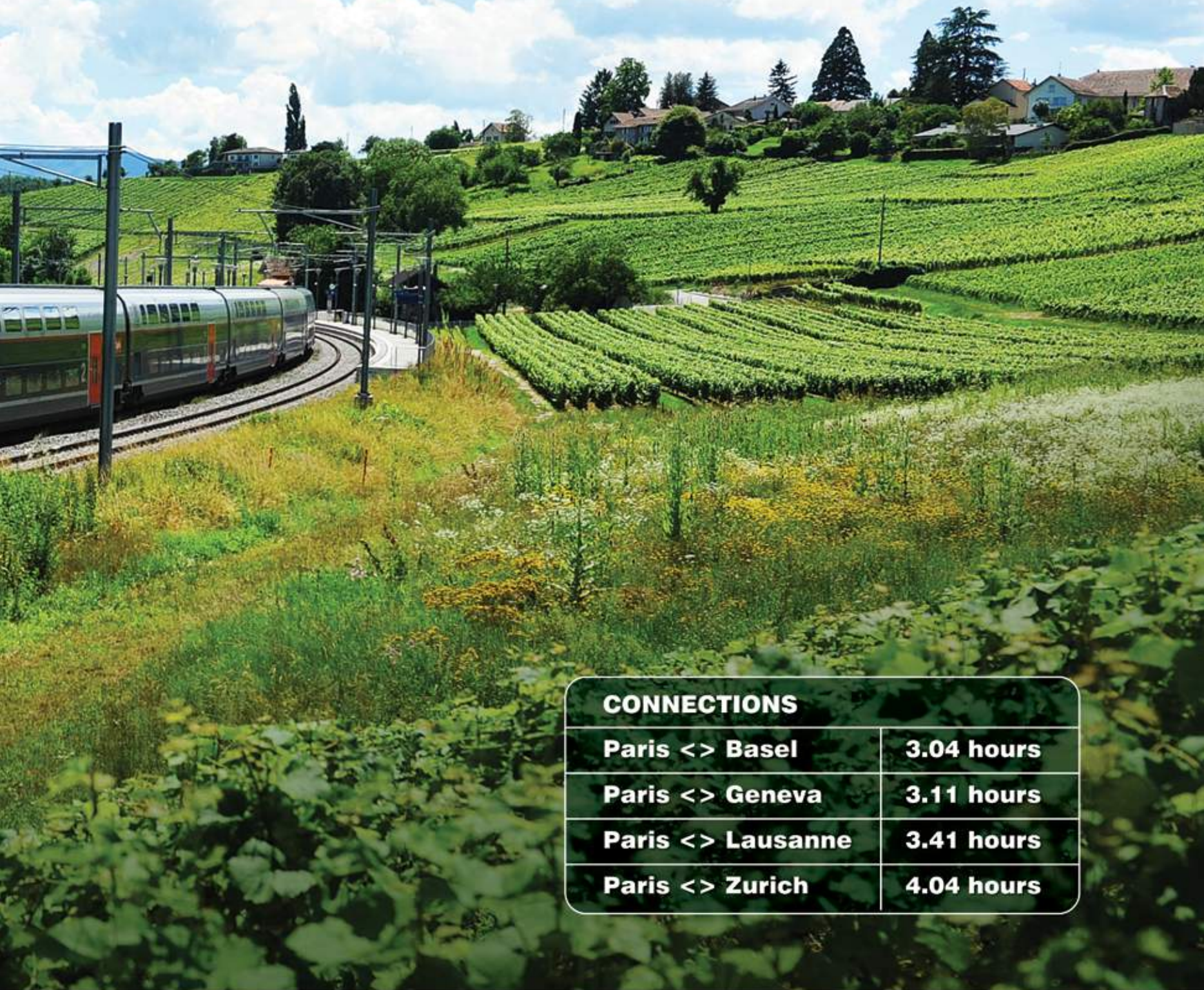


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# 'Trade contributes 60% of our India biz'

In an exclusive interview with **TRAVEL TALK**, Kyp Charalambous, Vice President of Sales, Atlantis Dubai, shares the strategies and initiatives driving the resort's success in the Indian market. Charalambous sheds light on the importance of the Indian market, trade partnerships, and the innovative strategies employed to maintain and enhance their presence.

TT Bureau

Trade partners are key to the business model of Atlantis Dubai. "These partnerships drive success, facilitate growth, and ensure mutual benefits. At Atlantis, we take pride in our strong, in-depth, and long-standing relationships with the partners we work with," says **Kyp Charalambous**, Vice President of Sales, Atlantis Dubai. This commitment to building and maintaining robust trade relationships is a cornerstone of Atlantis' strategy. The opening of Atlantis The Royal marks a significant evolution for the brand, positioning it as an ultra-luxury resort. "We collaborate with high-end travel designers to bring our product to the market. Our approach focuses on quality over quantity, ensuring deeper, more meaningful engagements with our partners," he says.

**Indian trade marketing strategy**  
Maintaining a consistent pres-



**Kyp Charalambous**  
Vice President, Sales  
Atlantis Dubai

ence in the Indian market is paramount for Atlantis Dubai. "Our trade marketing strategy is integral to driving sales from India," says Charalambous. "We focus not only on tier-I cities but also on emerging niche markets," he adds.

Atlantis Dubai has implemented an integrated trade marketing strategy to attract Indian travellers to their resorts.



**The Indian audience: A key pillar**  
Indian guests have been an integral part of Atlantis Dubai's success for over 15 years. "Indian travellers significantly contribute to our rooms and signature suites, world-class culinary offerings, unique marine and water park activities, and large-scale weddings," underlines Charalambous. Approximately 60 per cent of their business from India comes from

the Indian trade sector, including travel agents and tour operators. The remaining 40 per cent is driven by direct group bookings for weddings, highlighting the importance of these segments in their business model.

**Evolving travel patterns**  
Charalambous identifies Mumbai, Delhi NCR, and Ahmedabad as key cities for their business growth.

Additionally, businesses from Chandigarh, Ludhiana, Jaipur, and Pune have developed well, showcasing a broadening reach across the country. The pandemic has influenced travel patterns. "Indian travellers have taken greater control over their holiday decisions. They now have a better understanding of Dubai as a destination and are confident in independently booking trips," he observes. Post-pandemic, the length of stays has increased, with a noticeable trend of multi-generational families travelling together, emphasising family togetherness and creating lifetime memories, he shares.

**Culinary excellence**  
Atlantis The Royal prides itself on its diverse culinary offerings. "We have gathered some of the finest chefs in the world to offer a dining experience like no other," says Charalambous. Local ingredients play a significant role, in supporting local industries and ensuring sustainability. "We cater to all dietary needs,

from vegan to sugar-free and dairy-free options," he adds.

**Future trends**  
Looking ahead, Charalambous foresees a blend of personalised experiences, sustainable practices,

**Atlantis Dubai has implemented an integrated trade marketing strategy to attract Indian travellers to their resorts**

and technological innovation shaping the future of luxury hospitality. "We remain focused on creating exceptional experiences for guests and maintaining our position as a global leader," he concludes.

## One Above DMC promotes Georgia

One Above DMC hosted an evening to promote Georgia among its travel partners in Mumbai. During the event, Ana Kirkitadze, CEO, One Above Georgia, showcased the destination, sharing practical details like air connectivity from India and visa process. Also present at the event was Georgia Bus and the team to interact with more than 200 travel partners.





# Tamil Nadu Travel Expo in Madurai

About 250 participants are expected at Tamil Nadu Travel Expo 2024, scheduled in Madurai from 20-22 September this year. The event will showcase hospitality, wellness, and wedding offerings.



TT Bureau

Tamil Nadu Travel Expo 2024 will be organised at the Grand Madurai by GRT Hotels in Madurai from September 20 to 22.

The travel exhibition promises to shine a spotlight on Tamil Nadu's vibrant tourism sector, emphasising on its rich heritage, burgeoning wellness retreats, and rising profile as an ideal destination for weddings.

About 250 people from domestic and international markets are expected to take part in the expo, which aims to bolster Tamil Nadu's reputation as a top-tier tourist destination.

With a strategic focus on showcasing the state's cultural treasures and hospitality offerings, the event will provide valuable networking opportunities and foster collaborations within the travel industry.

In collaboration with the South India Hotels and Restaurants Association (SIHRA), Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), and Travel Club Madurai, the Tamil Nadu Travel Expo 2024 represents a concerted effort to elevate the region's tourism landscape.



Through engaging presentations, panel discussions, and interactive sessions, attendees will explore the diverse facets of Tamil Nadu's tourism potential, spanning from historical landmarks to wellness retreats and bespoke wedding venues.

Industry leaders, travel professionals, and stakeholders will converge to delve into Tamil Nadu's multifaceted offerings. The expo's

theme for the year, blending heritage, wellness, and wedding, invites exploration beyond heritage, showcasing Tamil Nadu's excellence in hospitality, wellness retreats, and wedding destinations. As Tamil Nadu continues to attract travellers in search of authentic

**The event will provide valuable networking opportunities and foster collaborations within the travel industry**

cultural experiences and luxurious wedding settings, the expo stands as a premier platform for industry insiders to connect, collaborate, and set the course for future tourism endeavours.

# Skilled staff gives an edge

Contd. from page 12



**Sumit Mitraka**  
CEO  
Summit Hotels and Resorts



**Sarbendra Sarkar**  
Founder & Managing Director  
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts



**Bhavik Sheth**  
COO  
Evoke Experiences

“We prioritise employee development through a multi-faceted upskilling programme. We offer regular training sessions and cross-training across departments, facilitated by a dedicated trainer focused on enhancing employee skills. Senior managers attend advanced courses at prestigious institutes and lead knowledge-sharing sessions upon their return. This comprehensive approach ensures our staff gains diverse skills and continuous improvement opportunities.”

“The hotel industry today is struggling with a shortage of skilled manpower. Recognising the importance of nurturing and upskilling our team members, we have established our L&D vertical supported by a digital learning platform. This platform curates a culture of continuous learning and development for all levels of employees. In response to the evolving needs of the hospitality industry, we have launched CLDP, which covers a broad spectrum of skills.”

“At Evoke Experiences, we emphasise on internal mobility to provide career advancement opportunities within the organisation. This strategy helps retain top talent and ensures that employees continue to develop new skills and take on more significant responsibilities. We recruit interns from top hotel management institutes across India, focusing on the comprehensive development of their skills while ensuring that they receive practical exposure.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

# Owner-operator stake in biz 50-50

V Prabhu Kishore, Chairman, Varun Group, delves deeper into the owner-operator paradigm of hotels in a management contract, and says that it's important for international brands to understand Indian hospitality sensibilities and tweak their ways accordingly. Among other factors, location is the most important thing for the success of a hotel, he says.



Nisha Verma

During the last few years, tier II and III cities of India have seen a huge surge in the development of hospitality units, especially owing to the surge in domestic travel post-COVID. V Prabhu Kishore, Chairman, Varun Group (Owner, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach), shares that there has been a lot of enthusiasm for hospitality in such markets. “Around 12 per cent of Indian jobs are created directly or indirectly by hospitality. It contributes beyond 5 per cent to the GDP.”

## Owner's view

When developing a hotel, there are many things that an owner needs to consider, but Kishore believes that minimalism is key when it comes to such investments. “As the legendary Late Mr Oberoi (Mohan Singh Oberoi, Founder of Oberoi Hotels & Resorts) said, location is the most important thing for the hotel. Gone are the days that you have flab in construction with

chandeliers and opulent things. It's important to make a good and practical product. A business traveller stays only for a night or two, as he is travelling most of the time. The same goes for a leisure guest. It's important to make practical, easy to maintain properties and choose your location. Use materials which are extremely easy to maintain over long periods,” he advised.

He further suggested, “Even in the management of the hotel, try to be as frugal as possible so that the monthly Gross Operating Profit (GOP) would be better, instead of wasting money on unnecessary flamboyant things.”

## Industry to remain buoyant

However, he agrees that the hospitality industry will continue its growth. “When people travel to a different city, they would like to stay in a hotel. Apart from regular business travel or leisure travel, there is temple tourism, pilgrimage tourism, health tourism, social



**Prabhu Kishore**  
Chairman  
Varun Group

tourism and wedding tourism. So, the spectrum has increased. The hotel occupancy is on account of different types of customers. Hence, based on the location, one can build a nice property and enjoy a good ARR and good RevPAR,” he said.

“RevPAR should be the scale on which the owner should measure the performance of his hotel. GOP is another important aspect. It

doesn't matter if you do ₹100 crore business and the GOP is 20-25 per cent. It is a capital-intensive industry, and one must be careful. We should not go for face or glamour. We must prefer business and profit. In fact, even flamboyance should translate into convenience for the guests,” he added.

## Owner-operator dynamics

Speaking on the relationship between brand operator and the owner, he said, “It's a 50-50 relationship. The owner invests a lot of money, his blood and sweat into the property. He pays a lot of interest, and the properties are getting delayed in implementation. There is overrun, which leads to a lot of pain for individual owners to make a 100-200 rooms hotel, unlike big hospitality corporates. Therefore, it's important that the brand owner and the hotel owner treat each other on equal footing, respect each other and the relationship. There will always be some hiccups or hurdles between them. However, those can be ironed out by discus-

sion, communication with mutual respect. Hence, no one-upmanship should come into play between the two players.”

## Choosing the right operator

According to Kishore, building a property and choosing the right

**Indian owners are passionate about their property. It's not easy for them to give their property to another operator after spending Rs 100-300 crore**

person to operate it is equally important. Citing an example from his personal experience, he said, “We had lots of discussions with Accor in 2008-09. They had their point

of view and I had mine. However, we ironed out and signed with Accor. Thereafter, the relationship has been extremely smooth, cordial and mutually respecting.”

Highlighting another important point, he said that operators coming from Europe, Americas, or Hong Kong and Singapore in the East bring with them their own learnings. Those learnings in terms of product might not be best suited for Indian conditions and tradition. “Therefore, the operator should also tweak and make things acceptable for the Indian conditions, owners and guests,” he advised.

Kishore said that the adoption to Indian ways must continue even after the hotel is operational. “Even after the product is made, the operator needs to adopt to Indian requirements, whether it's F&B or other operations. Indian owners are passionate about their property. It's not easy for them to give their property to another operator after spending ₹100-300 crore,” he said.

# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY		
EVENT TALK		
Published from: India Middle East		
AUGUST 2024		
Date	Event	Time
2-4	India International Travel Mart Chennai	10:00 am
2-4	India Travel Mart-Jaipur	9:00 am
2-4	Tourism Fair - Kolkata 2024	11:00 am
5-7	Indian Travel Expo-Bengaluru	10:30 am
7-9	Travel & Tourism Fair-Ahmedabad	9:00 am
8	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
12	India Cargo Awards	8:00 pm
13	Indian Travel Awards	8:00 pm
16-18	Tourism Fair - Raipur 2024	1:00 pm
16-19	Taiwan International Tourism Expo (TITE) 2024	9:00 am
20	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Delhi	10:00 am
22	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Mumbai	10:00 am
22	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
26	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Chennai	10:00 am
28	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Bangalore	10:00 am
27-29	PATA Travel Mart	9:00 am
29-31	Business + Leisure Travel and MICE 2024	11:00 am
SEPTEMBER 2024		
3	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
4	Spain Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
5-6	Travel and Tourism Fair Hyderabad 2024	9:00 am

# Weddings remain key for Della

Arika Holidays, in partnership with Della Resorts, recently hosted more than 200 agents from Mumbai for a day visit at Della Resorts. The trip's aim was to showcase the leisure potential of the resort, as well as highlight its offering - DATA Resort by Della Adventure.



Hazel Jain

Experiential weddings are in, says **Pearl Sanga**, Group Director, Della Group. Recently, she hosted a group of about 220 travel agents to showcase their various venues, as well as DATA Resort by Della Adventure – which offers military-themed luxury glamping. It has luxury tents with a rustic, military themed exteriors located in Lonavala.

Speaking about weddings, Sanga says, "Weddings have always been our forte. We have multiple venues – both indoors and outdoors. The segment has picked up well for us now, especially with the 'Wed in India' campaign and we are doing 35-40 weddings per year. We see experiential weddings take place now rather than standard weddings where the bride and groom want to use different venues for different functions. The millennials and Gen Zs are the ones taking decisions, they are aware of new things that are possible and so expect a lot. The bride and groom



**Pearl Sanga**  
Group Director  
Della Group



**Udeshe Kejriwal**  
Managing Director  
Arika Holidays

**Weddings have always been our forte. The segment has picked up well for us, especially with the 'Wed in India' campaign**

are very much involved with the venue and the décor, as they want more personalised service." Della

**We are still an offline agent as you need a face to sell luxury products. Our clients don't buy luxury products online yet**

plans to increase their B2B engagements and plan to organise more Fams for the travel agents.

**Udeshe Kejriwal**, Managing Director, Arika Holidays, who led the delegation, highlighted some wedding trends as well. "We see big weddings coming to India now with destinations like Jaipur, Lonavala, Dehradun, Bengaluru and Kochi picking up. While during COVID, the demand was for under-50 room weddings, now it has gone up to 50-room and above. People are now looking to do weddings in India, wherever there are big hotels. So, Dehradun is a new destination because of Hyatt Regency Dehradun Resort & Spa, Bengaluru has now become a wedding destination with JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa, Grand Hyatt Kochi has picked up due to their huge inventory, and Fairmont Mumbai is also in demand," he explains.

Arika plans to do another round of Fams of the same size soon. This is mostly for the counter staff who sell to clients. Kejriwal adds, "We are still an offline agent because you need a face to sell luxury products. Our clients don't buy luxury products online yet."

# Spiritual tourism govt priority in Budget

Contd. from page 10



**Gajesh Girdhar**  
Founder & National Coordinator  
NIMA

"NIMA welcomes some of the initiatives proposed in the Budget, such as the government's continuous focus on the development of domestic and inbound tourism sectors, encouragement to the Indian cruise tourism industry by offering a simpler tax regime for foreign shipping companies looking to operate and lease the vessels in Indian waters. This is a move not only for domestic tourists but also to attract foreign tourists."



**Pushendra Bansal**  
COO  
Lords Hotels & Resorts

"The hospitality sector was optimistic about the Budget aligning with the Union Government's vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, focusing on economic development, environmental sustainability, social advancement, and effective governance. Unfortunately, our important demands, such as granting infrastructure status to the hospitality sector and increase in funds for marketing and overseas promotions, were left unaddressed."



**Shrikant Goenka**  
Chairman  
IAAPI

"The Finance Minister announced that the Union Government is working on many development projects to make India the international tourism hub. This will give a boost to the tourism sector. The budget provides for good investments for development of Rajgir, Nalanda, Vishnupad, Mahabodhi temple and various sculptural marvels of India. These will make wonderful corridors to attract huge investments."



**Davinder Juj**  
General Manager  
Eros Hotel New Delhi

"We welcome the provisions presented in Union Budget 2024 by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, particularly the initiative to transform several iconic locations into world-class tourist destinations. This strategic move aims to attract businesses, support entrepreneurship, and create jobs for local communities. We also praise the government's dedication to position India as a top global travel destination."



**Alope Bajpai**  
Chairman, MD & Group CEO  
ixigo

"The government's policy initiatives to enhance spiritual tourism is a welcome move. We saw a 40-50 per cent increase in demand for spiritual tourism last year, for destinations like Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Tirupati. The government's PRASAD Scheme has led to a remarkable transformation in Varanasi's tourism sector, attracting 100 million visitors to Kashi Vishwanath Dham after the corridor project completion."



**Kush Kapoor**  
CEO  
Roseate Hotels & Resorts

"Though the Budget did not provide direct tax rebates for the hospitality, it offers significant indirect benefits. The new centrally sponsored scheme for skilling 20 lakh youth over the next five years is a vital step. Revision of the Model Skill Loan scheme and the introduction of a new internship programme, funded through CSR, will assist in attracting skilled manpower. The government's upskilling initiatives are commendable."

Compiled by TT Bureau

# Why is outbound > inbound in India?

There were three times as many Indian nationals that left the country than foreign tourist arrivals from January to November in 2023. Is the lack of international connectivity into India from key tourism source markets the reason for lower inbound numbers? Gavin Eccles, Managing Partner, GE Consulting & Advisory, delves deeper into the issue.

According to the figures provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT), for the period up to end-November 2023, there were three times as many Indian nationals that left the country than foreign tourist arrivals. Why is there such low interest in discovering the country's delights?

During January to November 2023, there were around 8 million international arrivals to the country. However, the numbers were down 16 per cent compared to the same period (Jan to Nov) in 2019. In essence, Indian tourism has not been able to recover to pre-COVID levels. Is it the connectivity issue or the challenges of not having the correct promotion what is affecting the numbers? Or is the tourism infrastructure not aligned with the needs of the travellers? For sure, the emergence of new winter sun destinations, particularly Mumbai and Zanzibar, has made



the offer of Goa not as attractive for Northern Europeans. And the frustrations of always having to connect through the Middle East may be putting off the more independent traveller. What makes the situation worse was that of the 8 million international tourist arrivals, 25 per cent were actually Indian diaspora coming to India. So, in reality, India only

had 6 million 'true' foreign tourist arrivals during 2023.

Meanwhile, the number of Indian nationals leaving the country (for holiday, work, who knows), was nearly 25 million - 1 per cent increase on the pre-COVID numbers. So, it is fair to say that outbound has been able to build back, but foreign tourists com-

ing into the country has not seen such success.

Can an incentive programme that looks at drawing airlines into the country, and, with that, the ability to bring-in more international arrivals be a working proposition? It is clear that Saudia Arabia, with its 'Saudi Vision 2030', has looked spe-

cifically at the importance of a connectivity scheme.

In conclusion, India does not have a connectivity problem, as 25 million Indians were able to take trips out. The reality is that the traffic

**It is time to better align the vision of Incredible India with a strong air connectivity programme that works these markets well**

is very much aligned with a vision for airlines to work with such travellers who are with work or friends and family commitments across the GCC countries of the Middle East. But, if only 6 million true international tourists visited

the country in the first 11 months of 2023, it is clear that new air connections are needed, especially with the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia as they are four of the five largest inbound to India tourism markets. From which cities, and, with which carriers? It is time to better align the vision of Incredible India with a strong air connectivity programme that works these markets well. It is time for India to reverse the 'out versus in' perspective.



**Gavin Eccles**  
Managing Partner  
GE Consulting & Advisory

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

## 'Human touch & tech must coexist'

Emerging from the challenges of the pandemic, dnata Travel Group has rapidly accelerated its growth, leveraging diversified source markets and innovative technologies. In an insightful discussion on 'Journeys in Technology', John Bevan, CEO, dnata Travel Group, shares his perspective on the evolving travel landscape, the role of AI, and the balance between technology and human interaction.



John Bevan, Chief Executive Officer, dnata Travel Group, sharing his views on the hype around Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential to replace customary travel agents, says. "I don't think AI will remove the need for travel agents. It amuses me when people say AI can plan a three-day itinerary. Essentially, it scrapes the internet for existing information and presents it to customers. But a good salesperson on the phone or in your shop will do a better job. The human element is irreplaceable."

Recalling a historical analogy, Bevan, adds, "When the internet appeared, a chairman at a conference told travel agents to invest in a carpet for their shop rather than the internet. Similarly, AI has its uses, but it will not replace the value of human creativity and personal touch."

### Practical uses of AI

Internally, dnata Travel Group is harnessing AI for practical applications, especially in handling increasing costs and complexities.

"We have seen significant cost increases and offshoring becoming more expensive. Therefore, we have started using AI and robotics to improve back-end processes. For instance, we have developed a vault using AI to read and process manual hotel contracts, achieving a 25-30 per cent time gain. We anticipate up to 70-80 per cent improvement as the system matures," he says.

Bevan highlights other AI applications, such as automating schedule changes for airlines, which improves efficiency and customer communication. "We had success in the UK where a robot handles schedule changes, alerting clients within minutes. This saves time



**John Bevan**  
CEO  
dnata Travel Group

and resources, ensuring timely customer notifications," he shares.

### Further enhancing customer experience

On the front end, AI assists agents in providing better service. "If an agent is planning a trip to Singapore, AI can suggest local events and attractions based on real-time data, enriching the customer ex-

perience. However, AI will not take over the conversation; it enhances it," he says.

### Balancing technology and human interaction

Bevan stresses on the importance of adapting to customer preferences. "Whether it's WhatsApp, email, chat, or face-to-face, we aim to communicate through the customer's preferred channel. For example, we have successfully used WhatsApp for concierge services, providing immediate assistance upon a client's arrival in Dubai," he says.

### Value of physical presence

Despite technological advancements, physical presence remains significant in certain regions. "In the Emirates, 50 per cent of our transactions are offline. Human interaction is crucial, especially in corporate travel. People prefer meeting in-person

rather than over Zoom," he says, sharing his experience.

### Social media influence

Social media plays a pivotal role in dnata's marketing strategy. "Social media is hugely popular

**I don't think AI will remove the need for travel agents. It amuses me when people say AI can plan a three-day itinerary**

here, especially among the Emirati community. Influencers can significantly impact travel trends, as seen when prominent figures

showcase their trips on platforms like Instagram," he opines.

### Future predictions

Looking ahead, Bevan envisions continued importance of human interaction in travel planning.

"Complex trips, such as first-time visits to Asia or South America, will still require human expertise. The travel industry needs to move away from pigeonholing customers and adapt to their evolving needs. Seamless booking and management systems are essential for the future," he says.

In a nutshell, while Artificial Intelligence and technology are transforming the travel industry, the irreplaceable value of human touch and expertise remains central. dnata Travel Group is poised to navigate this evolving landscape, balancing innovation with personalised service.

# MOVEMENTS

## HYATT REGENCY DELHI

New Delhi

Hyatt Regency Delhi has appointed **DANIEL DOLATRE** as the General Manager. With over 30 years of extensive experience, Dolatre will be at the helm of the hotel's operations, overseeing both strategic and tactical growth initiatives. He will focus on elevating guest experiences and setting new benchmarks for hospitality standards. He brings a wealth of expertise from his diverse management roles across the globe. Prior to this, he served as General Manager at various hotels in South America and Europe. His hospitality journey began with a background in human resources. He later transitioned into food and beverage, his true passion.



## THE RITZ-CARLTON

Bangalore

**REUBEN KATARIA** has been appointed as the General Manager of The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore. Renowned for his extensive experience and unwavering passion for luxury hospitality, Kataria is poised to lead the property with a focus on exceptional guest experiences and service excellence. His journey through the luxury hospitality landscape has been marked by his unwavering commitment to excellence and an innate understanding of the guest experience. He has worked with esteemed organisations such as The Oberoi, JW Marriott and Four Seasons.



## GRAND MERCURE BENGALURU GOPALAN MALL

Bengaluru

**RAM SHETTY** joins Grand Mercure Gopalan Mall as the General Manager. Shetty brings with him over 19 years of extensive experience in the hospitality industry, demonstrating exceptional leadership skills, a comprehensive understanding of the business and an innovative mindset. In his new role, he will oversee the complete operations and management of the hotel ensuring the highest levels of guest engagement, and profitability. In his previous role, he managed Sheraton Hyderabad, a 272-key property, as the Hotel Manager by spearheading initiatives that led to significant growth across various metrics.



## NOVOTEL GOA RESORT & SPA AND NOVOTEL GOA CANDOLIM

Goa

**AMIT BARANWAL** has been appointed as the Director of Finance for Novotel Goa Resort & Spa and Novotel Goa Candolim. He has more than 12 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Baranwal's priorities will be to ensure financial stability, optimise profitability, and enhance operational efficiency with specific tailored initiatives to elevate the hotel's overall performance. He will also play a pivotal role in the implementation of financial forecasting, technology integration, and sustainability initiatives.



## HILTON BANGALORE EMBASSY GOLFLINKS

Bengaluru

Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks has promoted **RAVINDER CHAHAL** to the position of Director of Sales. Since his joining in June 2022 as Assistant Director of Sales, Chahal has showcased exceptional leadership and strategic vision. With over a decade of experience in the hospitality and pharmaceutical industries, Chahal is a proven sales and marketing leader, known for his problem-solving skills and effective collaboration within cross-functional teams, driving revenue and profit growth. In his previous role, he led a high-performing sales team, developed and aligned sales goals with broader business objectives.



## THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS

Mumbai

The Fern Hotels & Resorts has appointed three new Operations Managers across its properties. With a 17-year tenure in hospitality encompassing hotel operations, **SUDHANSHU GOPE** has been entrusted with the role of Operations Manager at The Fern Bambora Fort, Udaipur. His responsibilities include overseeing hotel operations, managing budgets, and maximising guest satisfaction. Gope's prior experience includes serving as Front Office Manager at The Fern Lonavala and UK 27 The Fern Belagavi, where he demonstrated exceptional leadership and operational expertise.



## SAROVAR HOTELS

Gurugram

**CDR. SIDDHARTHA GARGORI** has been appointed as the Corporate Director, Engineering, at the Corporate office of Sarovar Hotels. Gargori served the Indian Navy for over 21 years. His distinguished career includes eight years of active sea service on various Indian Naval warships. He is a graduate of the Naval College of Engineering, INS Shivaji, Lonavala, holding a BTech degree in EEE, a PG Diploma in Management from Jammalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai and an Executive Diploma in Business Management from the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi.



## COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT MAHABALESHWAR

Mahabaleshwar

Courtyard by Marriott Mahabaleshwar has appointed **GAURAV PALEJA** as the Director of Sales. Joining the team from W Goa, Paleja brings with him a wealth of experience in positioning resort as a leading luxury destination. His extensive experience in the luxury resort market, combined with his proven track record of success, makes him the perfect fit for the property. His nearly two-decade-long career includes stints with esteemed hotel brands, such as Hilton Shilim (Pre-Opening), The Lalit Suri Hospitality, Sahara Star (Pre-Opening), and Aamby Valley.



Among other appointment by the Fern Hotels & Resorts, **JITENDRA SINGH HADA** takes over as Operations Manager of The Fern Sattva Resort, Little Rann of Kutch. Hada has more than 14 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Demonstrating a strong background in front office operations, reservations and revenue management, and rooms division, Hada's responsibilities will include overseeing hotel operations, managing budgets and ensuring guest satisfaction. His background features key positions at groups like The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group and HRH Groups of Hotels.



**SURANJIT SENGUPTA** has been appointed as the Corporate Director, Food & Beverage at the Corporate office of Sarovar Hotels. With 18 years of experience, including a decade at Marriott International in key positions such as Hotel Manager at Fairfield by Marriott Jodhpur and Director of Food & Beverage at the JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity, Sengupta brings a wealth of expertise to his new role. He has also made significant contributions to Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golf Links and Taj Krishna Hyderabad in Banqueting operations. His efforts have earned him great recognition.



## SOFITEL MUMBAI BKC

Mumbai

Sofitel Mumbai BKC has promoted **SIDNEY DCUNHA**, Director of Culinary, to the position of Director of Food & Beverage and Culinary. Sidney, who joined Sofitel Mumbai BKC in 2022, has since then been instrumental in further developing the hotel's robust culinary offerings. Through a series of unique food festivals, he has played an instrumental role in carving a niche for the property on Mumbai's innovative restaurant scene. He has also played a crucial role in the hotel's adoption of Winnow, a food waste management solutions company which develops AI tools to help chefs run more profitable, sustainable kitchens.



**BHAVESH RATHOD** has been appointed as the Operations Manager at The Fern Residency, Jamnagar. With over nine years of experience, Rathod brings with him a knowledge and passion for delivering exceptional guest experiences. In previous roles as Front Office Manager at establishments like Lords Hotels & Resorts and Hotel Fortune Palace, he has consistently focused on growth through innovation and collaboration. In his new role, he will focus on enhancing operational efficiency, improving guest satisfaction, and fostering a positive work environment for his team.





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# Abu Dhabi eyes 285k Indians in '24

After unveiling their tourism strategy for 2030, Abdulla Yousuf Mohammad, Director of International Operations, Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, says they plan to surpass the target of 285,000 Indian hotel guests by the year-end.

 Janice Alyosius

**A**bdulla Yousuf Mohammad, Director of International Operations, Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi, recently unveiled their tourism strategy for 2030, with an aim to position Abu Dhabi as one of the fastest-growing tourism destinations globally. Talking about the tourism strategy, Mohammad said, "It is structured around four main pillars. The main one being city activation and offering, the second being infrastructure development and mobility, the third being marketing and promotion, and the last being visa and regulation. Throughout the strategy, we have defined more than 26 initiatives that define what we want to achieve in order to reach our goals."

An integral part of the strategy is the diversification of source mar-



kets, which will be expanded to 26 source markets from 11 at present, ensuring a broader base of hotel guests and greater resilience against market fluctuations. "This approach aims to maintain Abu Dhabi's appeal across various demographics and economic landscapes," Mohammad said.

Central to the strategy is enhancing Abu Dhabi's city offering and activation. Mohammad explained, "When we look at city offering and activation, we are focused on ensuring that the event calendar in Abu Dhabi is filled with events throughout the year, offering experiences for hotel guests regardless of when they choose to visit."

Abu Dhabi recently inaugurated Terminal A at Zayed International Airport, a critical step in enhancing connectivity. Talking about the connectivity issue, Mohammad said, "When we look at visa and regulation, we are focused on making Abu Dhabi an investor-friendly destination and simplifying visa processes to attract more visitors." Abu Dhabi's strategy includes detailed plans

said, "We are working closely with all international airlines to position Abu Dhabi as a key destination in their network development." Additionally, they are collaborating with hotels in Abu Dhabi. "We are working with hoteliers to ensure a consistent standard of product and services within our hospitality sector," Mohammad added.

  
**We are working closely with all international airlines to position Abu Dhabi as a key destination in their network development**

for each market, tailored to demographics and travel preferences. He also emphasised on the importance of personalised marketing and effective communication channels to engage target audiences effectively.

Speaking of collaboration with the Indian travel trade, Mohammad said, "The Indian travel trade is crucial to us. Through our office in India, we work closely with key players in the market, including OTAs, tour operators, wholesalers, travel agents, associations, and groups."

Elaborating on their commitment to supporting travel professionals in promoting Abu Dhabi effectively, he said, "We ensure they have everything they need to communicate what's new and happening in Abu Dhabi." He also highlighted their e-learning programme, which is designed to equip agents with comprehensive knowledge about Abu Dhabi. Abu Dhabi conducts regular roadshows in key markets to enhance partnerships with airlines and bolster tourism growth. Recently, they organised a roadshow in tier II cities of India, and this September, they are gearing up for tier I cities with over 40 stakeholders.



**Abdulla Yousuf Mohammad**  
 Director of International Operations  
 DCT – Abu Dhabi

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