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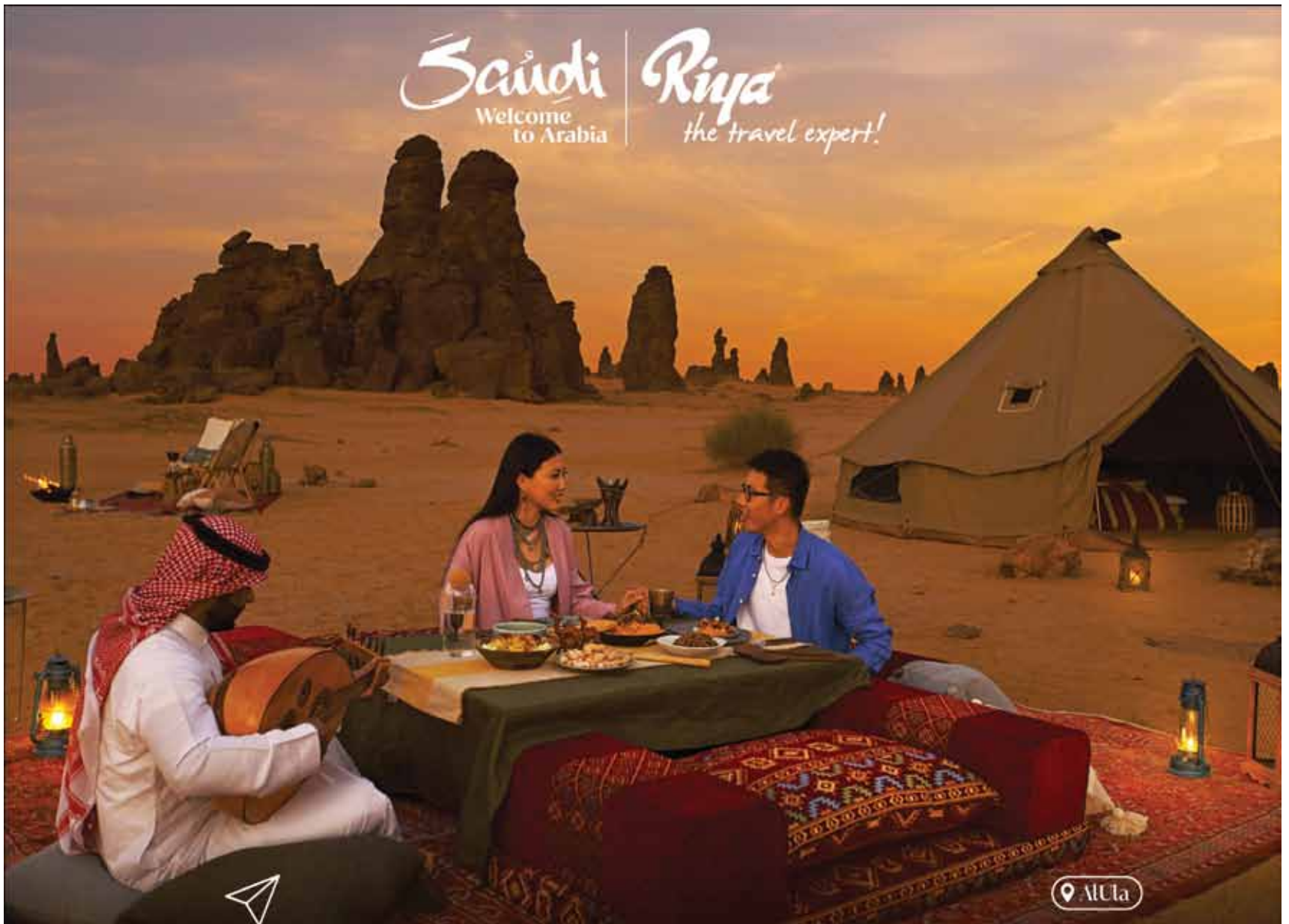


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SGN-DPS	VJ849	07:50:00	SGN-DEL	VJ895	19:00:00

15th Nov 2024

DEL-HAN	VJ972	00:05:00	DPS-HAN	VJ900	13:10:00
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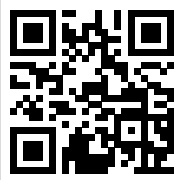
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Saluting the legends of tourism



The India Travel Awards 2024, organised at Sofitel Mumbai BKC on 13 August, was a resounding success, bringing together the crème de la crème of the travel and hospitality industry to pay tribute to exemplary leaders and achievers. Recognising accomplished names in the industry, the awards went to noteworthy honourees.



Madhavan Menon, Executive Chairman, Thomas Cook India, received the Gallery of Legends award. Pradeep Shetty, President, FHRAI & HRAWI & Director, Maharaja Hotels and Restaurants, received the DDP Trailblazer award. Praveen Iyer, Co-Founder & Chief Commercial Officer, Akasa Air, received the DDP Game Changer award, and Neil Patil, Founder & Director, Veena World received the Face of the Future award.

'Adapt to evolving trends'

Industry leaders indicate a dynamic shift towards sustainability, personalised experiences and use of technology. It is time to adapt to the evolving trends to meet guest expectations, they say.



Elie Maalouf
CEO, IHG Hotels & Resorts

“ IHG Hotels & Resorts has launched its Low Carbon Pioneers programme, which brings together energy-efficient hotels that have no fossil fuels combusted on-site and are backed by renewable energy. This group of low operational carbon hotels is the first community of its kind in the industry and will help IHG test, learn and share findings on sustainability measures. This is another innovative way in which we are meeting evolving guest expectations, helping our hotel owners future-proof their businesses and reducing carbon across our estate. This is an important next step in IHG's sustainability journey but it remains one of many we must continue to take. ”

Contd. on page 10 ▶

Mugdha Sinha: New DG, Tourism

Mugdha Sinha, a 1999-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre, has been appointed as the Director General of the Ministry of Tourism, in a reshuffle announced by the Government of India.

TT Bureau

As part from Sinha, the Union Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has announced new assignments for 13 other officers at the Additional Secretary level with the objectives of supporting governance frameworks and improving policy implementation across various sectors.

Sinha succeeds Manisha Saxena, who has been appointed as the Additional Secretary in the De-



Mugdha Sinha
Director General, MOT, GoI

partment of Personnel & Training, Ministry of Personnel, Public

Grievances, and Pensions. Sinha was also the first woman officer to be posted as ADM-1 (Additional District Magistrate) in Jaipur, serving as the second-in-command to the Collector. Sinha brings more than 20 years of experience in governance, policy-making, and international trade negotiations to her new role. Prior to this, she served as Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Culture for two years and was the Secretary of the Art & Culture Department in Jaipur during 2020-21.

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Celebrating travel industry stalwarts

This month is celebration time for **TRAVTALK** India as it completed 10 years of India Travel Awards and that too by making a splash in Mumbai for the first time. With over 15,000 votes cast, this year's awards highlighted those who truly make a difference, from Madhavan Menon at Thomas Cook India, Pradeep Iyer from Akasa Air, Pradeep Shetty of FHRAI to Neil Patil of Veena World. These are not just names; they are the forces driving Indian tourism to new heights. Their dedication and vision have set benchmarks that the entire industry can aspire to. The ceremony was a vibrant celebration of these achievements, but it also served as a wake-up call for the industry to recognise and reward innovation. In a sector as competitive as tourism, it's easy to get lost in the noise. But the India Travel Awards reminded us that true leadership is about more than just accolades—it's about making a lasting impact.

Personalisation on top

In this issue of **TRAVTALK**, we have taken the opinion of head honchos of the travel industry on what trends will guide the future. While the hospitality industry is undergoing a seismic shift, it's no longer just about luxurious stays. It's about meeting the rising demand for sustainability and personalisation. IHG's Low Carbon Pioneers programme is a testament to this, pushing for energy-efficient, fossil-fuel-free hotels. This is not just about being green, it's about staying relevant and future-proofing businesses. Travellers are prioritising experiences over traditional luxury. The industry is evolving rapidly, driven by changing traveller expectations. To keep up, hotels must embrace these trends, integrating technology, sustainability, and personalisation into their core operations. The future of hospitality lies in adaptability and innovation.

Tour operators' revenue to grow @17%

Travel operators are poised for significant revenue growth this fiscal, driven by a surge in demand for domestic and international travel. Enhanced infrastructure, increasing disposable incomes, and strong government support are propelling this expansion.



Janice Alyosius

Travel operators are expected to see their revenues increase by 15-17 per cent this financial year.

"The growth is driven by increased domestic tourism and a greater inclination to travel abroad. Enhancements in infrastructure, higher disposable incomes, evolving travel habits, and the government's efforts to boost domestic tourism are all contributing factors," says a report by CRISIL Ratings

According to the report, the projected revenue increase comes on the heels of a significant 40 per cent surge in revenue last fiscal, which reached approximately ₹14,500 crore, exceeding pre-pandemic levels by about 20 per cent. Travel operators' credit profiles are anticipated to remain strong, supported by healthy balance sheets and stable operating margins of 6.5-7 per cent, consistent with the previous fiscal year. This results in substantial cash flows and continued low reliance on debt. An analysis of four leading travel operators, which together represent around 60 per cent of the sector's revenue, supports these forecasts.

Poonam Upadhyay, Director, CRISIL Ratings, comments, "The



Travel operators' credit profiles are likely to remain strong, supported by healthy balance sheets and stable operating margins of 6.5-7%

trend of 'revenge travel' seen after the pandemic has evolved into 'regularised travel' in recent years with a significant shift towards shorter and frequent vacations, for both domestic and overseas trips. Moreover, growing middle-class aspirations, rising urbanisa-

tions, affordable packages, steadily increasing income levels, and the government's focus on boosting Indian tourism will maintain the

days, such as quick getaways and staycations during long weekends, a rise in spiritual tourism, and improved infrastructure enhancing access to new destinations. In-bound travel, including foreign tourist arrivals, has rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, with significant demand from corporate and MICE sectors boosting domestic travel.

For overseas leisure travel, growth is driven by higher disposable incomes, visa-free entry from 37 countries, simplified visa processes (such as visa-on-arrival and e-visa facilities), and improved travel packages. Indian airlines'

overseas travel packages effective 1 October 2023.

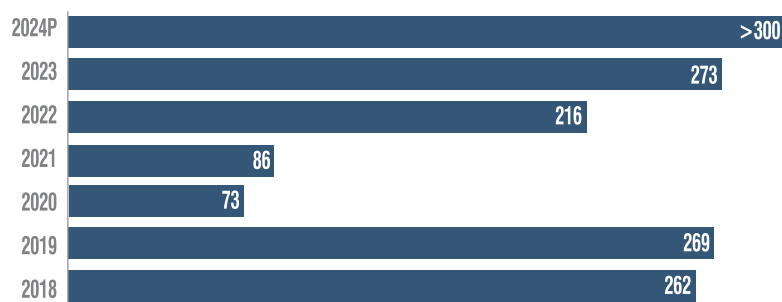
Anil More, Associate Director, CRISIL Ratings, adds, "Strong customer retention, diverse revenue streams, various cost-optimisation measures, and investments in technology/ automation undertaken since the pandemic will keep operating profitability of travel operators healthy at 6.5-7 per cent, in line with last fiscal, despite higher marketing spend. Interest coverage ratio will also continue to be strong at over five times, in line with last fiscal."



Overseas leisure travel growth is driven by higher disposable incomes, visa-free entry from 37 countries, and simplified visa

The sector's liquidity is expected to stay strong due to the negative working capital cycle from significant customer advances and low debt dependence. However, potential risks include changes in visa guidelines, growth in commercial air fleets, fluctuations in airfares, tax structure adjustments, and inflation.

Indian nationals travelling overseas (in lakh)

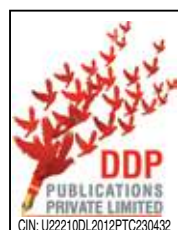


Source: Ministry of Tourism, CRISIL Ratings

strong momentum in the tour and travel sector. This will, in turn, ensure healthy double-digit revenue growth for travel operators this fiscal as well."

In the domestic tourism market, growth is fuelled by micro holi-

increased focus on new destinations in Southeast and Central Asia is further fuelling international trips, setting new records for outbound travel this year. This growth in international travel continues despite the recent increase in the tax collected at source (TCS) on



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Tourism to power India's economic rise

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Culture and Tourism emphasises on the role of tourism industry in the growth of India and positioning the country as the world's third-largest economy by 2027. The Union Minister was addressing the Hotel & Restaurant Association of North India (HRANI) Convention in Greater Noida recently.



TT Bureau

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Culture and Tourism, Government of India, addressing the Hotel & Restaurant Association of North India (HRANI) Convention in Greater Noida recently, highlighted the government's vision to position India as the world's third-largest economy by 2027. "We aspire to make India an advanced, prosperous, powerful, rich and world's principal attraction by the year 2027," he said, adding that his presence at the event signified the government's commitment to provide a conducive environment for the tourism industry to thrive and contribute to India's economic prosperity.

Tourism's role in growth story

Shekhawat underlined tourism as the key driver of the government's ambitious goal, saying that the sector's growth is essentially linked to India's journey towards



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (second from right) at HRANI Convention in Greater Noida

becoming a developed nation. The minister praised the hotel and restaurant industry for its significant contribution to preserving India's rich cultural heritage while catering to the needs of domestic and international tourists.

Government support to industry

Recognising challenges faced by the industry, Shekhawat assured support of the government in addressing them. He also emphasised

on the importance of clear and continuous dialogue between industry stakeholders and policy-makers for sustainable growth of the tourism sector.

Shekhawat identified himself as a part of the Hotel and Restaurant Association (HRA) family and characterised the convention as a familial gathering. "For the past seven and a half decades, the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant

Associations of India (FHRAI) has been the cornerstone of India's tourism industry, actively contributing to its expansion while confronting obstacles faced by the sector and employees involved in it," he said. "Atithi Devo Bhava (translates to guest is equivalent to God) is the motto of the association that works to familiarise tourists with the culture, diversity and values of our country," he added.

Shekhawat said, "India's global image has transformed due to recent advancements in infrastructure and technology, coupled with the nation's growing stature. This has sparked renewed interest among international tourists."

The minister highlighted the rapid expansion of India's middle-class segment and its potential to fuel domestic tourism. "People's habits have shifted from solely spiritual trips to embracing travel as a means to discover, experience, and connect with India's diversity, driving a surge in domestic tourism," he said.

Comparing India's tourism potential to global competitors like Thailand and Dubai, he stressed the need to capitalise on the country's diverse offerings. He emphasised the government's commitment to developing new tourist destinations to decongest popular spots and ease infra-

structure pressures. He asserted that hoteliers will be instrumental in accomplishing this objective.

India's global image has changed due to recent advancements in infra & tech, coupled with the nation's growing stature

With a target of doubling the tourism sector's growth rate, the minister's speech injected optimism into the industry and signalled a proactive approach from the government to unlock India's tourism potential. He pledged to address the complexities of Goods and Services Tax (GST) for the tourism industry.



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- Sports tourism in India witnesses upward trajectory, grows at a CAGR of 17.5%, says Monish Shah, CEO, DreamSetGo
- J&K administration unveils new rules for hospitality sector, sets ₹2 lakh fee for A category 5-star deluxe properties
- IATA raises concerns over GST notices targeting foreign airlines, says move detrimental to India's aviation growth
- Fortune Hotels signs a new property in Rishikesh
- Radisson Hotel Group accelerates expansion in Tamil Nadu, signs 100-room Park Inn by Radisson Chennai ECR
- 42 destinations have been selected in 4 categories for development under Swadesh Darshan 2.0
- 69% event Indian travellers take part in customer engagement & loyalty programmes: Collinson

Infra status our key demand: Kachru

Infrastructure status and industry-related benefits are our main demands from the State and Union governments, says KB Kachru, Chairman, Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group & President, HAI, adding that the association is keen to work closely with the government to address the industry issues.

Surbhi Sharma

Speaking about the key focus areas and initiatives Hotel Association of India (HAI) has taken in the past few months, **KB Kachru**, Chairman, Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) and President, HAI, said, "As far as the hotel association is concerned our key focus is to align ourselves closely with the government whether it's Centre or State governments, and need to address some key components of the requirements of the industry. One among them is hiring talent, retaining it and growing it further, and then we are looking at how we can get more investment in our trade."

According to him, there are more than 100,000 branded rooms in the country which are not sufficient to fulfil the growing demand of customers. "After 50 new destinations have been declared, we have to get more people, more in-



KB Kachru
Chairman, Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, RHG & President, HAI

vestment and better infrastructure for the growth of our sector. We are working with our members to motivate them to invest there, and we have to work with many foreign institutional investors to bring them here," he suggested.

Kachru said HAI is increasing its membership and focusing on the key demands of getting infrastructure status and industry-related benefits. "Eleven states have de-

clared tourism and hospitality as industries, but those industry-related benefits are yet to come. Some states have made some progress in this regard, but the execution needs to be pushed forward," he opined.

There are more than 100,000 branded rooms in the country which are not sufficient to fulfil the growing demand of customers

He said that the growth in hospitality sector has been good, both in terms of room occupancy and average rates. "The majority parts of India witnessed growth to the tune of 8 to 10 per cent in terms of ADRs

except in two or three cities and expect that it will grow better," he said.

Contribution to economy

Highlighting that HAI is not a commercial organisation, and it feels the pain of its members, Kachru said, "We want to deal with all related agencies to facilitate what needs to be done and make business of HAI members more doable and profitable while positioning India better, and looking at the possibility of how we, as an industry, can contribute towards the growth of the country's economy. We cannot comment on numbers, but we are encouraged by the growth we have seen in HAI."

Rise in tier II & III cities

Talking about the association's growth, Kachru emphasised that apart from tier I Indian cities, which have all important hotel brands, including the domestic and international ones, a lot of growth is taking place in tier II and III cities, as development is making

Eleven states (in country) have declared tourism and hospitality as industries, but those industry-related benefits are yet to come

its way there. "People are building hotels, and they want to be associated with an association that will stand by them, help them and assist them in dealing with subjects that they would find difficult to deal with, on their own. For this very purpose, we have our state and regional chapters, which would extend a helping hand to them. Unfortunately, each state has its way of working and there is a lack of centralised functioning. Thus, having state chapters would help address their issues," he said.

TAAI elections before Sept end: Mayal

Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, in an interview with **TRAVALTALK**, revealed that the association's elections for the 2024-2026 term will be held along with the AGM before September end, while the elections for various TAAI chapters are being held across the country. She urged the government to support the association for the growth of tourism in the country.

Surbhi Sharma

Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), said that the association's activities are not just confined to India, and they are "connecting the dots" between different countries and bringing them closer to India for tourism. Commenting on the Union Budget 2024, she said, "The budget was very disappointing for us personally in many ways. Of course, it had its good points of infrastructure and skilling, but as far as tourism and hospitality are concerned, we still need to work on a lot of things and need the last mile connectivity. For that, we certainly need more airports. We need religious tourism to come to the fore and MICE to happen."

She added, "For the growth of tourism sector, we need the taxes to be relaxed, and GST to be reduced to become more economical for inbound travel-



Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India (centre), at Annual General Meeting of the association

lers, as foreign exchange earnings have become necessary for every country. TCS is another point that we are not happy about because the burden of collection of taxes has come on to travel agents. If that happens, only then the number of inbound tourists increases and touches new heights, she added.

Mayal said, "After witnessing the rebound and growth of the tourism sector post-COVID, we

urge the government to support us because we would love to become, what our Prime Minister says, Atmanirbhar, but we need some hands to hold us straight. We want the government to support us in marketing and promoting India globally and help us conduct and organise roadshows while connecting with B2B. TAAI is with PM Modi's vision and wants to work with him, but our only appeal is to make us your partner."

Association activities

Mayal said that annual meeting of regional chapters took place recently. "Now, we look forward to TAAI's elections for the term of 2024-2026, which will be held along with the Annual General Meeting (AGM) before the end of September," she said.

She mentioned that TAAI has been doing a lot in the last five years and is in constant touch with the Ministry of Tourism while engaging with

the stakeholders. "To increase foreign footfall, TAAI is engaging with all the missions outside India and working closely on the 'Incredible India' website for its launch," she said that all this will not just benefit the industry, but also bear fruits for TAAI members.

Talking about the association membership, she said, "We have grown to approximately 2,700 members. Those who had left during the pandemic due to low

business are also joining back." Talking about the expansion in tier II and III cities, she highlighted, "Despite not having a regional chapter in Bihar, we are getting a

TCS is another point that we are not happy about because the burden of collection of taxes has come on to travel agents

lot of requests. Recently, we have been invited by the state to open a chapter there. We have also been invited by the stakeholders and the Government of Odisha to come and open a chapter there, which shows that the government also wants to be a part of us."

Luxury equals unique experiences

The idea about luxury travel has rapidly changed from an emphasis on 'things' to 'experiences'. **TRAVTALK** seeks to explore this evolving concept through the eyes of travel advisors and how their luxury clients want to holiday now.



Hazel Jain

Luxury travel has long been synonymous with opulence, extravagance, and exclusivity. However, the concept of luxury travel is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and the growing desire for unique experiences.

Jay Bhatia, Managing Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays, says, "The definition of luxury is certainly changing for today's travellers. With disposable and double incomes, couple and families want to travel on their holiday in luxury. This is not only seen in travellers from metros but also from those in tier II and III cities. In fact, a lot of senior citizens and retired persons are wanting to travel in luxury and visit unexplored destinations."

He adds that luxury travel is now based on lesser points of destination to cover in a relaxed manner. "Travellers want to spend a few hours sightseeing and the balance in enjoying the facilities of the hotel/ resort and indulge in culinary delights of the location. For most travellers desirous of travelling in luxury, the primary point is business class air travel. Requirement of larger rooms of minimum 60-75 sqmt, butler services, spa facilities in the hotel, multiple multicuisine restaurants in and around their stay, private transfers/ chauffeur drives, sightseeing on private basis, skip the line sightseeing and many more. Almost all destinations in India or overseas where luxury accommodations are available travellers are seeking to visit. Of course, destinations like Vietnam, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are the new destinations where five-star luxury hotels are available at the price of four-star," Bhatia adds.

From materialism to meaning
One category of luxury travellers **Jay Kantawala**, Chairman, Western Region, TAFI and Founder, WYO Travel, caters to requests for comprehensive services where the travellers desire a dedicated person to accompany them throughout their journey, overseeing every detail, such as suites at hotels, private transfers, luxury vehicles, and even charter planes.

"These clients are willing to pay for such service. Another category focuses on luxury vacations where clients seek the finest hotels, private transfers, curated sightseeing tours, restaurant reservations, and opportunities to experience local cuisine and culture," he says.



Jay Bhatia
Managing Director
Tulsidas Khimji Holidays



Definition of luxury is changing. With disposable and double incomes, couple and families want to travel on holiday in luxury



Philip Logan
Chief Operating Officer
Royal Orchid Hotels



Luxury is not just about lavish amenities but also about delivering moments of genuine hospitality

Philip Logan, Chief Operating Officer, Royal Orchid Hotels, says, "Luxury is not just about lavish amenities but also about delivering moments of genuine hospitality. Our commitment to sustainability and community engagement also ensures that our guests enjoy a responsible stay. Our clients seek luxury experiences that blend sophistication with personalised touches. They look for exclusive and immersive experiences, such as private dining with bespoke



Jay Kantawala
Chairman, Western Region
TAFI & Founder, WYO Travel



Travellers desire a dedicated person to accompany them throughout their journey, overseeing every detail, such as suites at hotels



Rajiv K Vij
Chairman & Managing Director
Carzonrent India



Clients appreciate the ease of seamless and personalised travel arrangements, and the comfort of premium vehicles

menus, rejuvenating spa treatments tailored to individual preferences, and curated local excursions that offer a deep dive into the region's culture and heritage. Additionally, they value seamless and intuitive service, where their needs are anticipated and met with utmost care. Our guests also appreciate the luxury of space and tranquillity."

Rajiv K Vij, Chairman & Managing Director, Carzonrent India, shares

that his clients seek luxury experiences that combine sophistication with practicality. "They appreciate the ease of seamless and personalised travel arrangements, the comfort of premium vehicles, and the reliability of professional, verified and well-trained chauffeurs. Whether it is for business travel or personal getaways, they value experiences that allow them to maximise productivity, and enjoy stress-free journeys without compromising on safety. These travellers are gravitating towards destinations like Udaipur for its royal heritage, spa resorts in Rishikesh, Goa and Daman for their upscale beach resorts, and hill stations like Kashmir, Manali, Dehradun and Wayanad for their adventurous yet exclusive experiences," he adds.

Abbas Moiz, National General Secretary, TAFI, believes that luxury travel was earlier defined as traveling by either First or Business Class, meet and greets, staying in suites in iconic



Abbas Moiz
National General Secretary
TAFI



There is now a thin line between luxury and experiential travel. Experiential travel is what we can define as luxury at various levels

hotels, butler, and concierge services. "There is now a thin line between luxury and experiential travel. Experiential travel is now what we can define as luxury in different forms at various levels. Experiential travel in our country started in a small way with the millennials, was nurtured by the Gen Z, and has been the norm for the Gen Alpha. The need to have a fully immersive experience, identify with the destination, and create a bond with the destination."



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Guests valuing green initiatives

▶ Contd. from page 5



Pushendra Bansal
COO
Lords Hotels & Resorts

“What was niche earlier and opted by a few has become a big industry segment. One of the major shifts is in terms of product development, how they are designed and personalised. Segments such as wildlife, wellness,



Raaghav Belavadi
Founder & CEO
Hype Luxury

“Experiential travel is a key trend, with travellers seeking immersive experiences like cultural immersion, adventure travel, and culinary exploration over traditional sightseeing. Social media plays a crucial role in travel inspi-



Pranav Dangi
CEO & Founder
The Hosteller

“We have witnessed a rise in experiential travel, increasing demand for immersive, authentic experiences over traditional luxury. Guests seek meaningful connections with local cultures, nature, and wildlife. There is

“The hospitality industry now emphasises on sustainability and eco-friendly practices, with guests valuing green initiatives. Technology enhances personalised services through data analytics, AI, and smart rooms. Health and wellness amenities focusing on hygiene and well-being are in demand. Travellers seek unique, experience-based stays. Digital tools like mobile check-ins, contactless payments, and virtual tours boost guest satisfaction and efficiency.”



Niraj Vashi
Founder & Director
Nivalink

active holidays, experiential travel and luxury escapes have emerged from being a specialised niches to mainstream travel verticals. This is the main reason behind demands for Northern Lights and African Wildlife.”

“Awareness of premium services in the travel segment has significantly increased. People's choices have improved, with a greater emphasis on quality and experiential businesses. With increased purchasing power, individuals are willing to exceed their budget limits to enhance their experiences and enjoyment. The realisation of accessing better products and services, along with the emphasis on experiential and lifestyle decisions, has transformed the industry.”



Jurgen Bailom
President & CEO
Cordelia Cruises

ration, with 40 per cent of Gen Z and millennials using it for travel ideas. Trends like solo travel and all-women group trips are rising, reflecting a shift towards more personalised and liberating travel experiences.”

“The travel landscape is evolving, with wanderlust-driven souls craving for more than just a place to rest their heads. Today's travellers are seeking unique and authentic experiences to forge lasting memories. Workations are becoming popular, a fusion of productivity and leisure that is redefining how we balance our professional and personal lives, allowing guests to stay for weeks to months at the same place. Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on sustainable and eco-friendly travel.”



Parikshit Rathore
General Manager
Aramness, Gir

a growing interest in personalised travel itineraries and bespoke adventures. Sustainable tourism is another trend gaining momentum. Rising trend in wellness tourism, with guests seeking rejuvenating experiences.”



Akash Garg
CMD, Asia Resorts
Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort

“There is a rise in wellness retreats in India as preferred holiday destinations. More travellers prioritise wellness when booking stays at resorts and hotels, leading these establishments to integrate holistic health experiences into their



Shikhar Kumar
Managing Director
Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts

“A trend that I have been observing in the hospitality landscape of India is the significant shift towards workforce empowerment. The industry's primary challenge has shifted from attracting customers to finding and



Kush Kapoor
CEO
Roseate Hotels & Resorts

“The tourism industry has experienced a paradigm shift post-COVID, with a surge in domestic travel and Indian travellers playing a crucial role. Our business model now caters to international and domestic guests

“The hospitality industry has witnessed a significant shift towards sustainability, transforming it from a mere buzzword to a core operational principle. Eco-conscious travellers now actively seek out hotels that prioritise environmentally friendly practices, driving hotels to adopt sustainable measures that not only enhance their brand reputation, but also yield long-term cost savings. Concurrently, wellness has emerged as a paramount consideration for modern Indian travellers.”



Aviraj Rathi
Director
Namaste Dwaar Resort

services. From yoga and meditation sessions to Ayurvedic treatments and international spa treatments, these retreats provide a range of services aimed at enhancing mental and physical well-being. This shift reflects a broader trend.”

“A notable trend in the hospitality industry is the growing preference among travellers for intimate stays and boutique accommodations. Instead of opting for large hotels, more travellers are seeking unique and personalised experiences. This trend is evident even in famous tourist destinations. This shift in preference has opened new avenues for investors, allowing a diverse range of stakeholders to capitalise on the trend. Boutique stays are becoming popular.”



Bhavik Sheth
COO
Evoke Experiences

retaining staff. To address this, hotel groups have initiated several measures. Many hotels are offering low-cost accommodation, increased wages, and reduced peak-time working hours. Additionally, they are investing in training programmes.”

“At Roseate Hotels & Resorts, several key industry trends are shaping our approach. Staycations are on the rise, driven by the hybrid work model and the increasing number of people working from home. Additionally, guests now have higher expectations due to increased spending power, focusing on unique and memorable experiences. In response, we have enhanced our offerings by catering to the growing interest in diverse and innovative food experiences.”



Michael Dominic
CEO
CGH Earth

year-round. The alert independent travellers today seek more than a traditional luxury. At CGH Earth, we have always excelled in creating stays that are meticulously designed to meet the evolving preferences.”

Contd. on page 12 ▶

Kazin hosts dinner for Georgia partner hotels

Kazin DMC, a leading tour operator for Georgia partner hotels, led by its Directors, Vikrant Grover and Tsothe Mirotadze, recently hosted an 'evening of gratitude and celebration'. The exclusive dinner at Keto & Kote, offering an exquisite blend of gourmet cuisine, was a token of appreciation by the DMC for the unwavering support of its partners.



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'Buddhist Circuit' to boost UP tourism

In an attempt to bolster tourism and enhance government revenue, the Uttar Pradesh government is promoting a 'Buddhist Circuit' in the state, propagating the historical, cultural and spiritual ties of Buddhism with UP on the world map and attracting pilgrims from India and abroad, says Jaiveer Singh, Minister of Tourism and Culture, UP.

 Surbhi Sharma

Combining spirituality and the rich heritage of Uttar Pradesh, the state government recently organised 'Bodhi Yatra' Conclave in Delhi to celebrate the spiritual journey of Lord Buddha. The event highlighted Uttar Pradesh's significance as a Buddhist pilgrimage and the tourism potential of the state.

Several important dignitaries, including **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Minister of Tourism, Government of India, attended the conclave. **H.E. Simon Wong**, Ambassador of Singapore; **H.E. Patarat Hongtong**, Ambassador of Thailand; **H.E. Moe Kyaw Aung**, Ambassador of Myanmar and ambassadors from many other countries, such as Bhutan, Japan, Indonesia, Argentina, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam, graced the event with their presence. The event commenced with a presentation showcasing the rich his-



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat (extreme left) and Jaiveer Singh (centre) at the 'Bodhi Yatra' Conclave in Delhi

tory, culture, and heritage of the state's six major Buddhist sites - Sankisa, Sarnath, Shravasti, Kapilvastu, Kaushambi, and Kushinagar. During the event, UP government officials outlined the investment opportunities in the state and its rise as a top domestic destination, aspiring to draw more foreign tourists.

Jaiveer Singh, Minister of Tourism & Culture, UP, said, "UP has immense tourism potential, especially for religious tourism. We are striving to develop a Buddhist circuit while prioritising eco and adventure tourism. We are not only developing the 12 circuits but also providing road, air and water connectivity. We have been work-


ing on heliports by implementing the PPP model." He added, "Apart from the circuits, efforts are being made to develop destinations for tourism that come under the 403 assembly constituencies in UP by providing better facilities and connectivity. Last year, we carried out projects worth crores of rupees in each of these constituencies."


The minister said that the world's largest gathering, Mahakumbh, will be held in Prayagraj in 2025, which is expected to draw a staggering 30 crore participants, further underscoring UP's growing prominence on the tourism map.

Incentives to travel trade

Emphasising on the state's effort to provide incentives to travel and trade, Singh said, "In 2019, the tourism policy of UP was made but due to some loopholes, we promulgated it in December 2022 after the Yogi government came into power. Out of the investment coming to UP, we give a 25 per cent subsidy to trade and travel agents at the general rate. We are also offering a 5 per cent extra to women entrepreneurs or those from the SC/ ST category, making it 30 per cent." He added, "We are still working to provide more incentives and facilities and mend some laws for the beneficiaries. In addition, we have made efforts to clear the roadblocks for agents to get NOCs and licences."

Tourism role in UP economy
Claiming that UP received "very less" share until the Global Investor Summit held in UP in 2023, in


Out of the investment coming to Uttar Pradesh, we (govt) give a 25 per cent subsidy to trade and travel agents at the general rate

which proposals worth ₹169 lakh crore were received by the tourism department alone, Singh said that most of the proposals are being implemented on the ground, which shows that tourism department plays a significant role in the UP's economy. 

'India offers limitless potential'

René de Monchy, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism New Zealand, says that Indians visiting their country, particularly during the off-peak season, could avail the benefit of better rates and superior experiences.

 Hazel Jain

René de Monchy, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism New Zealand, was in India recently leading a delegation of 41 Kiwi tourism operators, including DMCs, hotels airports, and airlines, for its flagship B2B platform - Kiwi Link India. It was for the first time since 2019 that Tourism New Zealand delegation visited India to promote inbound tourism. The visit aimed to connect Indian travel trade with the New Zealand operators, as almost 85 per cent of travellers from India booked through the travel trade, revealed Monchy.



René de Monchy
CEO
Tourism New Zealand

for us, and we will promote our activities, whether it is adventure tourism, mountain biking, wellness, or wine tourism, to India," says Monchy.


The total arrivals of Indians to New Zealand in 2023 was 84,315. Of this, holiday arrivals were 20,100. The total recovery of arrivals was 125.9 per cent while the recovery of holiday arrivals was 70.6 per cent, compared to 2019. To further equip Indian travel agents with destination familiarity, a compre-

hensive frontline product training session was also conducted on the sidelines of Kiwi Link India. "We see strong recovery and our target is to grow tourism by 5 billion NZ dollars over the next five years and we want 70 per cent of that to come in the off-peak. We


We have initiated our new four-year strategy; the focus is really on making New Zealand desirable as a year-round destination


see India as a strong contributor to that. India offers limitless potential as a growth market for us. While our top three markets are Australia, US and China, India certainly offers the biggest opportunity for future growth," he says. 

Travellers charting own course

 Contd. from page 10




Gcobani Mancotywa
Regional GM for Asia, Australasia, & the ME, South African Tourism


"A land of diverse experiences, South Africa has always been known for its stunning landscapes, pristine beaches, verdant forests, and mesmerising wildlife. In a destination boasting of innumerable experiences, we are starting to witness a shift in travellers wanting to chart their own course and stray away from the mainstream locations. Travellers these days look for customised and personalised experiences which they can control and exclusively brag about."



Liam Findlay
CEO
Experience Hub, Yas Island


"Over the recent years, we have witnessed a remarkable surge in Indian visitors showing a growing inclination towards short-haul leisure and entertainment travel. As the country's outbound travel market continues to grow, there has been a notable rise in travellers from tier II and tier III cities, particularly families and younger generations. In response to these evolving trends, we are broadening our reach beyond metro cities to further engage and capitalise on these emerging markets."



Nikhil Sharma
MD & Area Senior Vice President, South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group


"The Indian hospitality sector is evolving rapidly, driven by changing traveller expectations and emerging trends. At Radisson Hotel Group, we are adapting to these shifts to stay ahead in the industry. One of the key trends we are seeing is the growing demand for personalised experiences. The rise of the middle class with increased disposable income has spurred domestic travel and created substantial demand for quality accommodations in Tier II and III cities."

Compiled by TT Bureau

IndiGo turns 18, unveils exciting plans

India's leading airline, IndiGo, celebrated its 18th anniversary in style, organising a huge celebration at Bharat Mandapam in New Delhi recently. Pieter Elbers, Chief Executive Officer, IndiGo, made several big announcements on the occasion, including the airline's expansion plans and revamping of its website with a new UI/ UX design.



Surbhi Sharma

Celebrating the 18 years of IndiGo's incredible journey in India, **Pieter Elbers**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), IndiGo, said that the airline is committed to enhancing customer experience and expanding its footprint in India and internationally. "As India's leading carrier, we are constantly looking at ways of improving our service offering to our millions of customers. With India's soaring economy and the evolving aspirations of the Indian society, it is time for us to redefine air travel again and provide our evolving customers more benefits as they travel the world on us," said Elbers, addressing an audience, including people from the travel community, IndiGo's partners, investors, and the airline's leadership.

Ever since its launch in 2006, IndiGo has revolutionised the air travel



Pieter Elbers
Chief Executive Officer
IndiGo

in India. The airline flies to 88 domestic destinations with over 400 routes, providing connectivity to all large, medium, and smaller cities across India.

Global expansion plans

IndiGo has also embarked on an international journey by serving 33 cities and over 100 international

routes. Elaborating on the expansion plans, Elbers announced that IndiGo will launch flights to seven more international destinations before the end of FY2024. Earlier this month, it announced the launch of flights to Jaffna in Sri Lanka. With the new launches, the airline will cover 40 global destinations.

IndiGo has a domestic market share of nearly 61 per cent and



With India's soaring economy and the evolving aspirations of the Indian society, it is time for us to redefine air travel again



around 975 planes on order. At the end of June, the airline had 382 planes, including 18 aircraft on wet lease. The carrier will be getting A321 XLR planes in 2025 and wide-body A350 aircraft in 2027.

IndiGo Stretch

Launching its newest business product, Elbers said, "A new era of our IndiGo journey has started with our tailor-made business product- 'IndiGo Stretch' on the

busiest, business routes of the country, redefining business travel in India. It is a coupe-style, 2-seat wide bay, crafted to provide customers with a relaxed and comfortable journey." The product opens for booking from 6 August on the Delhi-Mumbai sector, starting from mid-November at an introductory fare of ₹18,018. The product will be operational on most metro-to-metro routes, with all 12 domestic routes expected to be served by the

end of 2025. "The move marks a significant shift for IndiGo which has traditionally operated as a no-frills carrier," he said.

IndiGo BluChip

Elbers also announced the launch of their much-awaited loyalty programme at the event. "IndiGo BluChip is designed to recognise and reward its unwavering loyal customers with BluChips on IndiGo flights," he concluded.

Travel agents' role in era of luxury travel

What does luxury travel involve? It depends on who you ask. When people think of luxury travel, most think of extravagance, pampering, and indulgence. And while that may be true, luxury travel is far more complex than five-star hotels and white-glove service. Robin Lawther, Vice President, Expedia TAAP, explains in detail.

In the years following the pandemic, people were simply grateful to travel again. Now, travellers are raising the bar. Not only is the demand for travel higher than ever before, but so are the budgets. Travel agents are seeing a higher demand for luxury travel experiences, and research shows that it's only expected to increase with time.

Luxury travel takes many forms

What does luxury travel involve? It depends on who you ask. When people think of luxury travel, most think of extravagance, pampering, and indulgence. And while that may be true, luxury travel is far more complex than five-star hotels and white-glove service. Nowadays, luxury travel embodies a unique, holistic experience tailored to the passions and interests of the traveller. This isn't just hearsay; it's a core principle echoed by our network of expert luxury travel agents. "Clients are looking for unique and personalised experiences," said Tara, owner of



Resfeber Travel, in a recent Expedia survey. "When they travel, they just don't want a hotel. They want something unique and different, and they will pay for these experiences."

For the travellers that want to lounge and relax, a luxury experience is something like a private bungalow perched in the crystal-clear waters of the Caribbean. Every aspect revolves around comfort, ease, and

having everything in one place. For the more adventurous traveller, however, a luxury experience might look like an African safari. In that case, it's all about being immersed in nature and exploring the terrain.

The devil is in the details

Regardless of individual preferences, there are two key aspects that make a travel experience truly luxurious. The first is acute attention to detail. Travellers want to feel

known, and they want their preferences to be understood and reflected in the service they receive. To provide a true five-star experience, every detail, down to the mints placed on the pillow and the fold of the towels, must be considered thoughtfully and carefully.

The second aspect of any luxury travel experience is unparalleled service. The trip could be in the centre of a massive city or a remote

mountaintop. Regardless, luxury travellers expect to have their every whim catered to. Whether it's arranging last-minute reservations at the most in-demand restaurant or organising a helicopter tour of some remote landscape, the hallmark of any luxury experience is the seamless execution of every request.

Anna-Lisa, Owner of Just Pack, told Expedia TAAP that her luxury clients expect "head to toe service, itinerary customisation, and planning all logistics: accommodations, transfers, flights, activities (unique ones like Balian healers or Samurai lessons in Japan) ... even down to restaurant booking."

Planning is everything

Above all else, planning is the most important (and often least talked about) aspect of a luxury travel experience. Meticulous planning is the driving force behind any travel experience. The kind of planning that goes into creating a luxury travel experience takes a lot of time and energy dedicated to meticulous

research, not to mention a wide network of trusted resources and service providers, curated for these luxury travellers.

That is where travel agents come in. Without the assistance and expertise of travel agents, luxury

As options (to create experiences) continue to increase, travel agents will become even more crucial in the process of making that trip a reality

vacations would be almost impossible to plan. And the more exotic or obscure the destination is, the harder it is to plan. In fact, a Phocuswright

Contd. on page 18 ▶

MSC Euribia sets sail from November

Named after the ancient goddess Eurybia who harnessed the winds, weather and constellations to master the seas, MSC Euribia will set sail from November 2024 until March 2025. The cruise ship, empowered with striking new features, will be homeporting in Dubai, but passengers will have a choice to board on Sundays from Doha and Wednesdays from Abu Dhabi.

TT Bureau

UAE, Qatar and Bahrain are the fastest growing cruise destinations in the world with an array of cruise liners sailing in the regions, says **Rashmi Ahuja**, Division Manager, MSC Cruises India. "These countries have always been popular with the India market due to the proximity, budget options of airlines, and ease of visa. Furthermore, we all are aware cruises are an affordable luxury, and has a great appeal with families, honeymooners, MICE, spiritual and wedding groups. Increased surge in cruisers from India and the ever-increasing demand is proof enough for the potential cruise holidays have in India," she adds.

MSC Cruises India plans to cash in on the opportunity the India market offers. Ahuja says that their MSC Euribia will be homeporting in Dubai from November 2024 until March 2025, departing



Rashmi Ahuja
Division Manager
MSC Cruises India

every Saturday, though passengers will have a choice of boarding on Sundays from Doha and Wednesdays from Abu Dhabi too, thereby offering them a variety of airfare options to choose from, depending on their feasibilities. Bookings for the winter season from customers, including a combination of MICE groups, spiritual groups and FITs, have already started, she shares.



MICE and weddings

The concept of MICE and destination weddings is growing at a steady speed in India, as the corporates are interested to explore various locations to host meetings and conferences. "Cruise lines are becoming favourite MICE destinations. Over the last few years, not only has the cruise product been identified as a strong travel option but become popular with corporate groups. Cruise liners are promoting ships as a venue for different

purposes like MICE, wedding, celebrations, and holiday. It has been observed that in addition to the elite families, travel enthusiasts across various sectors in Indian corporates are looking at cruises as MICE destinations for a memorable experience," Ahuja shares.

The reasons behind the growing MICE numbers on a cruise are many. "Handling groups on board a cruise ship is easy vis-a-vis land, as cruise ships offer an all-inclusive destination. Most of

the groups coming for MICE activities combine work and leisure activities on the cruise ship. Everything is available on the ship, from meeting venues and award ceremonies on ship theatre to the leisure activities in the various lounges, pool decks and bars. The ease of having everything at one place enhances not only the attendance in terms of the meetings onboard but gives travellers the flexibility to do whatever they choose to do in the evening," Ahuja says.

Tier markets

Cruise holidays have gained a lot more traction in the tier III cities and smaller towns of India that have remained untapped until recently. "Thanks to our trade partners who have increased their network educating these markets

Cruise holidays have gained a lot more traction in the tier III cities and smaller towns of India that have remained untapped until recently

which have all the potential and urge to travel to international destinations and cruises are an attractive option that are being chosen," she says.

TAFI meets Vietnamese delegation

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) national team met a 12-member delegation from the Ninh Binh province of Vietnam in Mumbai recently. A relatively unknown destination in India, the province has a UNESCO World Heritage site to its credit. The meeting, facilitated by the Consul General of Vietnam in India, aimed to develop tourism activities.



Qantas woos Indians with new offerings

With the passenger traffic between India and Australia increasing by the day, Qantas Airways ensures that it caters to all kinds of travel segments in India. The airline, flying three times a week from Delhi to Melbourne and five times a week from Bengaluru to Sydney, will be increasing flights between December 2024 and March 2025 to fly daily from Bengaluru, adding 12,000 seats.



Nisha Verma

Claiming that the India market is extremely important for them, **Kunal Dewan**, Country Manager India, Qantas Airways, says, "From our perspective, the India-Australia market has it all—large VFR traffic flows, robust corporate demand, incredible destination appeal and growth across all segments."

Status check

Qantas flies three times a week from Delhi to Melbourne and five times a week from Bengaluru to Sydney. Commenting on the services, Dewan said, "Our services from Delhi primarily serve the point-to-point VFR market, while Bengaluru, in South India, is ideally positioned to connect Qantas services to Australia with our codeshare partner IndiGo's domestic network. Owing to strong demand, we will be increasing flights from Bengaluru to Sydney



Kunal Dewan
Country Manager India
Qantas Airways

to daily from December 2024 until March 2025, adding over 12,000 seats between the two cities over the four-month period."

Global expansion

Talking about the growth plans, Dewan highlighted, "2024 is a busy year for Qantas International with a return to 100 per cent of our pre-COVID capacity, increases in Asian and North American flying,

as well as several new markets in the South Pacific. One of our most notable new routes launched this month, with nonstop flights from Perth to Paris, enabled by the Qantas Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner, operates the longest routes in our network. Qantas now operates on four of the world's top 10 longest routes." He added, "Looking ahead, we are planning for the delivery of 36 widebody A350 and 787 aircraft from Airbus and Boeing, which will arrive in the coming years. These aircraft will give Qantas unrivalled range capability and, with the special sub fleet of A350-1000ULRs ordered for Project Sunrise, the ability to fly nonstop from Sydney and Melbourne to London and New York – the next frontier of aviation."

Trade ties

When it comes to engaging with the travel trade in India, Dewan informed, "We work hard to maximise coverage in India with our in-market sales teams constantly

engaged with consolidators, OTAs, leisure/ tour operators, MICE, TMCs and others. We do this in our key online markets of Delhi and Bengaluru, but also in offline cities such as Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and others, customising

India-Australia market has it all—large VFR traffic flows, robust corporate demand, incredible destination appeal & all-round growth

our offerings instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. We are also active in roadshows, travel fairs, virtual travel campaigns and customer visits, often discovering

new market opportunities while travelling around the sub-continent and South Asia."

Codeshare advantage

Qantas has a strong codeshare partnership with IndiGo. "This enables Qantas and IndiGo customers to seamlessly connect on flights between India and Australia. In May this year, we expanded this arrangement to enable customers to connect in Singapore, offering additional city pair connections for travellers between India and Australia. This is particularly helpful for our Indian customers travelling to Perth or Brisbane. Qantas and IndiGo now offer codeshare flights from 21 cities across India."

Group benefits

The airline offers special discounted fares for Indian groups. "All IATA agents have access to these fares through our self-service tool, Qantas Agency Connect. The tool is fully automated to give im-

mediate prices for itineraries that agents need. While our team can, of course, tailor packages as required, the groups tool is highly efficient for agents, giving the benefit of average pricing based on availability," informed Dewan.

Upgrades in line

Qantas has been investing over ₹12 billion to improve customer experience over the past year. "Just last month, we unveiled our winter menu for Qantas International, which includes some fantastic new dishes, particularly in the Business Class cabin," he said.

Fares in focus

Delhi - Melbourne
Economy class: ₹64,000
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Bengaluru - Sydney
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Maldives returns with 360° marketing

Returning to the Indian market with a 360-degree marketing blitz and a wealth of diverse offerings, Maldives aims to welcome 2 million visitors this year. The country is set to boost its MICE and wedding segments by constructing convention centres and enhancing air connectivity, shares Zihuny Rasheed, Deputy Managing Director, Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation.

 Amita Pandey

Maldives is pulling out all the stops to reclaim its tourism business in India. **Zihuny Rasheed**, Deputy Managing Director, Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC), said that they have various plans to attract Indian visitors. "In terms of promotion, MMPRC is doing a lot to rejuvenate tourism in India. We have a 360-degree marketing angle that we look into," he said, adding that MMPRC actively organises Fam trips, invites Indian celebrities or influencers to Maldives and encourages them to share their experience on their platforms. "We are hosting events such as a roadshow in partnership with Maldives' Association for Travel Agents (ATA) in the upcoming months in three major cities - Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai - to engage with various stakeholders across the industry to accelerate this process. Moreover, we are planning to join



Zihuny Rasheed
Deputy Managing Director, Maldives Marketing & Public Relations Corporation

ITB India this year," said Rasheed, adding that the focus would be to ensure that the correct information is passed down to Indian travellers and tour agents, as they are not aware of the multifarious offerings present in the country.

He said that besides being a honeymoon destination, Maldives has a lot of multifaceted tourism offerings, but it did not market it earlier.



"There is ample opportunity in the market to diversify our tourism products, which we are currently doing," he added.

Destination offerings

Rasheed said that from North to South, Maldives has numerous offerings that need to be highlighted and experienced, specially by repeat Indian tourists. "Maldives has 100 dive spots scattered across

the nation. There are adventure sports like surfing, and the country is also hosting tournaments to promote sports events. Even the cuisine available in Maldives is something that Indian tourists can savour. Tourists can also avail the country's wellness tourism, popular for its world-class spas, along with the traditional Maldivian wellness knowledge like Dhivehi beys," he added.

Another unique offering that is booming in Maldives is the budget-friendly accommodations. Moreover, a 30-day free visa entry in Maldives for international tourists is another aspect that makes it an attractive destination.

Focus segments

Malaysia has an ambitious target to welcome more than two million visitors this year. "Currently, the focus

segment of Maldives is going to be honeymooners and families as always. But beyond that, the sports enthusiasts and the youth are the target segment for the country," he revealed. He added that Maldives is


30-day free visa entry in Maldives for international tourists is another aspect that makes it an attractive destination

trying to grow MICE and wedding segment within the next five years. "We are in dialogue with Maldivian government to construct more auditoriums and convention centres, which will enable us to draw more tourists," he revealed. 

TAFI brings Mexico to members

With a consulate in Mumbai, which also issues visas for Indian nationals, Mexico is keen on promoting tourism between the two countries apart from trade and investment focusing on Maharashtra and South India. The air connectivity may still feel like a hurdle, despite easy visas and vegetarian food. Will the Indian market respond favourably?

 Hazel Jain

With a plan to offer something different and uniquely crafted for its members, the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) Western region organised yet another destination event - this time focusing on Mexico. It brought together a holistic picture by including the Consul General of Mexico and a Mexico DMC - Trip to Mexico - in the event.

Adolfo Garcia Estrada, Consul General of Mexico, Consulate of Mexico in Mumbai, showcased Mexico to the members. They recently opened a consulate in Mumbai that also issues visas for Indian nationals.

"We have our embassy in New Delhi for many decades, but Mexico decided to open a Consulate General in Mumbai (Nariman Point) to promote trade, tourism and investment focusing

on Maharashtra and South India," he said.

The turnaround time for visas is not more than 10 working days. However, Indian tourists can enter Mexico with a valid USA, UK, Canada, Schengen, or Japan visa.

"While there is no direct flight between the two countries, we do have convenient connections through major hubs like Europe, USA, Dubai, and Istanbul, making it a convenient direct flight from these gateways to both Mexico city and Cancun," the CG said.

He stressed on the similarities of Indian and Mexican culture. "Vegetarian food is widely available in Mexico. In fact, Mexican food has a huge component of vegetarian dishes. So, Indian clients are well catered for. We receive huge interest from individuals and corporates. We would love to keep our communications with travel agents open," he added.



Adolfo Garcia Estrada
Consul General of Mexico
Consulate of Mexico in Mumbai



Pruthvi Khetani
COO
Global Destinations

Pruthvi Khetani, Chief Operating Officer (COO), Global Destinations, which represents Cancun-based Trip to Mexico DMC in India for the last one year, sponsored the TAFI event.

"Our focus area is FIT, luxury, bespoke travel. Currently, travel between India and Mexico is at a nascent stage. There is a lot of interest in Mexico as a destination and a lot of Indians already have valid visas, so they don't need to apply for visa," Khetani said.

"We have clients visiting Mexico and not travelling to USA at all, so there is a huge scope for Mexico as a standalone destination. We also see a lot of honeymooners and small families booking Mexico. It will surely work since Indians love exploring new destinations," he added.


Jay Kantawala, Chairman, Western Region, TAFI, said, "Most people will view Mexico as an

add-on trip to the USA because its easy to fly from there. Like the CG said, it is mostly the Indian visitors who are going to drop their kids or have friends and family in the US and visit Mexico. It makes for a great trip for 10-15 days. We should see more traction to Mexico from India in the coming years."

The Mexican-themed knowledge sharing and networking event exemplified ongoing commitment of TAFI to value its members.

Following the triumphs of the inaugural 'Tourism Stakeholders Meet' in February and the TAFI-Spanish networking event in April, this event provided another platform for learning and connection. The initiative proved a resounding success, solidifying TAFI's dedication to equipping travel professionals with valuable destination knowledge. 


The turnaround time for visas is not over 10 days. However, Indian tourists can enter Mexico with a valid USA, UK, Canada, Schengen, or Japan visa


There is a lot of interest in Mexico as a destination and a lot of Indians already have valid visas, so they don't need to apply for visa

Integrating luxury dining into travel

Atlantis Dubai, renowned for its opulence and grandeur, offers an unparalleled dining experience that appeals to all age groups. From world-class culinary delights to engaging activities for children, the resort ensures that every guest, regardless of age, finds something to cherish, says Kyp Charalambous, Vice President of Sales, Atlantis Dubai.



TT Bureau

Atlantis Dubai prides itself on its culinary offerings, featuring some of the finest chefs globally. Elaborating on this unique selling proposition, **Kyp Charalambous**, Vice President of Sales, Atlantis Dubai, says, "We have gathered some of the finest chefs in the world to offer guests and visitors a dining experience like no other." The resort is home to an array of restaurants that cater to various dietary preferences and requirements, ensuring an inclusive dining experience for all.



Kyp Charalambous
Vice President, Sales
Atlantis Dubai



requirements, from vegan to sugar-free and dairy-free," says Charalambous. This attention to detail ensures that every guest, irrespective of their dietary restrictions, can indulge in exceptional cuisine.

Family-friendly

Beyond its culinary prowess, Atlantis Dubai is a paradise for families. The resort offers an array of activities and amenities designed

to engage children and create lasting memories. "We are seeing an increasing trend of multi-generational families travelling together," observes Charalambous. The resort caters to this trend by providing a variety of activities suitable for different age groups.

Children can enjoy daily complimentary access to Aquaventure, the world's largest waterpark, and The Lost Chambers Aquari-

um. The Atlantis Explorers' Club offers a range of educational and fun activities, ensuring young guests are entertained throughout their stay. For parents looking for some alone time, professional babysitting services by accredited, first-aid trained childcare experts are available.

Multi-generational travel

Atlantis The Royal is designed to cater to multi-generational travel, offering accommodations that range from interconnected rooms to private penthouses. These options provide ample space and privacy for different generations, ensuring comfort and convenience. Family-friendly amenities such as the Explorers' Club, engaging marine education programmes, and diverse dining experiences make the resort a perfect destination for families.

Atlantis Dubai's comprehensive offerings make it an ideal destination for travel agents and tour

operators targeting diverse clientele. The resort's commitment to culinary excellence, luxury dining experiences, and family-friendly amenities ensures that every

Atlantis Dubai offers an array of activities and amenities designed to engage children and create lasting memories

guest, from young couples to multi-generational families, finds something to cherish. As a leader in the luxury hospitality industry, Atlantis Dubai continues to set new benchmarks for delivering exceptional experiences to all its guests.

Luxury dining

For young couples and families, Atlantis The Royal offers an exquisite blend of luxury and gastronomy. The resort hosts more celebrity chefs under one roof than anywhere else, making it a culinary and entertainment hub. Dining at Atlantis The Royal is not just about the food; it's about the entire experience. The resort's

restaurants use local ingredients extensively, supporting local farmers and ensuring sustainability. Each dish stays true to its origin while incorporating local culinary techniques, providing guests with an authentic yet innovative dining experience.

The focus on dietary needs is another highlight of Atlantis Dubai. "We cater to all types of dietary

Airlines make a new high

India is now the third largest domestic aviation market globally. The country's airline capacity is expected to double from its 2014 level and reach 230 million departing seats by this year end, as per the OAG report.



Surbhi Sharma

India's aviation market is undergoing a major transformation post pandemic and has made remarkable progress. Elaborating on this achievement, **Mayur Patel**, Head of Asia, OAG Aviation, said, "India has positioned itself as the third largest domestic aviation market in the world. The country has witnessed substantial growth in the domestic sector with a steady increase in the travel demand. This achievement showcases the country's expanding middle class and rising disposable income in the hands of people."

Sharing the factors behind the achievement, Mayur said that the Government of India's efforts to liberalise the aviation sector, coupled with the entry of low-cost carriers, have played a crucial role in driving this growth. "The rise of budget airlines has made air travel more affordable and accessible. Furthermore, the implementation of the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) has enhanced the connectivity to remote areas, pro-



Mayur Patel
Head of Asia
OAG Aviation

moting regional tourism and economic development," Patel said, adding that the aviation sector is poised for further growth in the coming years.

As per the OAG report, India's airline capacity is expected to double from its 2014 level and reach 230 million departing seats by this year end. The domestic airline capacity has historically increased more quickly than its international counterpart, with an average annual growth of 8.7 per cent.

The report stated that the growth potential for India's aviation sector in the next 10 years is essentially two-fold; there is considerable opportunity for the domestic market

This achievement (of Indian airlines) showcases the country's expanding middle class and rising disposable income in the hands of people

to continue to expand and provide more equitable services to the world's largest population than it presently does, and for Indian outbound services to flourish. Aviation growth is typically driven by economic growth, with traffic often growing at 1.5-2 times the rate of GDP. The GDP per capita in India has risen from US \$1,500 in 2014 to \$2,731 in 2024.

Tech transforming aviation

With advanced technologies like biometric-enabled management, automated check-ins, and real-time baggage tracking, SITA's smart solutions are transforming the Indian aviation industry.



Surbhi Sharma

SITA Aero, providing IT and telecommunication services to the air transport industry globally, recently held a roundtable in New Delhi to shed light on its ongoing collaborations with airlines and airports across India. On this occasion, the company also announced opening of a new command centre in Gurugram to expand its portfolio in India.

Responding to the question on Digi Yatra, **David Lavorel**, CEO, SITA Aero, said, "With the introduction of Digi Yatra in June 2017 by the Civil Aviation Ministry of India, it has become a model for the world when it comes to using technology to facilitate hassle-free travel. It uses facial recognition technology to confirm passengers' identities at various checkpoints, including security, boarding gates, and check-in, giving passengers a paperless and seamless experience."

In a groundbreaking collaboration, the company implemented the SITA Smart Path solution at



David Lavorel
CEO
SITA Aero

Bangalore International Airport Limited (BIAL) this month, which is aligned fully with the Digi Yatra programme. The partnership sets a new standard for seamless, biometric-enabled travel experience in India.

In this pioneering collaboration, BIAL is utilising SITA's cutting-edge products and solutions, including SITA Smart Path, Passenger Flow Management (PFM) solution, and Face Pods. These technologies enable biometric-

enabled passenger processing at all touchpoints across the airport, ensuring a seamless and contact-free travel experience. Additionally, the implementation ensures compliance with the Digi Yatra initiative for the newly inaugurated Terminal 2 at BIAL, enhancing the

With the introduction of Digi Yatra in June 2017 by the Civil Aviation Ministry of India, it has become a model for the world

airport's commitment to innovation and passenger convenience. In another partnership between with SITA and Noida International Airport (NIA), latter will be utilising SITA's Airport Management System (AMS).

# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP (SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY) EVENT TALK Published from: India Middle East		
AUGUST 2024		
Date	Event	Time
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
23-25	Holiday Expo-Vadodara	9:00 am
26	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Chennai	10:00 am
27-29	PATA Travel Mart	9:00 am
28	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Bangalore	10:00 am
29-31	Business + Leisure Travel and MICE 2024	11:00 am
30-2 Sept	39 th IATO Annual Convention	10:00 am
SEPTEMBER 2024		
1-3	India Travel Mart Amritsar	9:00 am
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
8-11	Australia Next	10:00 am
10	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
11-13	ITB India	10:00 am
16-18	FHRAI Convention	10:00 am

WTM unveils advisory team

The newly announced Conference Advisory Team for WTM London 2024, to be held from 5-7 November at ExCeL London, will curate the 'world's most influential travel and tourism event'. Global experts have been invited to shape the conference programme.



World Travel Market London has unveiled its 2024 Conference Advisory Team, chosen from nearly 50 submissions following a 'Call for Advisors'. This expert panel will collaborate with the World Travel Market team to shape the event's conference programme, which will have six content streams, each focusing on future trends and industry opportunities. The advisory panel includes:

- ❖ **Uwern Jong**, Experientialist-in-Chief, OutThere, will be supporting the Diversity, Equity, Accessibility & Inclusion content track
- ❖ **Mark Frary**, Author, Writer and Consultant, will be advising on the Geo-Economics content stream
- ❖ **Matthew Gardiner**, Director, Travel Massive & Senior Vice President, FINN Partners, and Tina Charisma, Director and Founder of the Charisma



Campaign, will be working to shape the Marketing content programme

- ❖ **Tina O'Dwyer**, Founder & CEO, The Tourism Space, will be advising on the Sustainability content track

- ❖ **Timothy O'Neil-Dunne**, President, T2Impact, will help mould the Technology programme

Juliette Losardo, Exhibition Director, WTM, commented, "The World Travel Market's Conference

Programme is unparalleled in offering top-quality education and inspiration, ensuring attendees gain valuable insights and practical knowledge for the year ahead." She added, "To keep WTM at the

The conference programme will offer top-quality education and inspiration, ensuring attendees gain valuable insights

forefront of industry evolution, it's essential to refresh our content and include diverse perspectives. The advisory teams have been crucial in our conference development, and their input is deeply appreciated. Our 2024 Advisory Team embodies our commitment to inclusivity, featuring emerging talent and diverse voices.

Udaipur, Dubai top 'most searched' destination list

Whether it's a cultural immersion, a serene escape or a vibrant nightlife, Indian travellers are seeking a mix of experiences while exploring both domestic and international destinations.

Busting metros continue to be popular choices with Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi topping the list, as travellers look at going back home to enjoy the long weekend or combine work and leisure. For those seeking a change of scenery, leisure destinations within drivable distance like Lonavala, Ooty, Mahabaleshwar are on top of mind for travellers. Cultural and spiritual hotspots like Udaipur, Jaipur, Varanasi and Puri are also witnessing a surge in searches during this time, according to Booking.com. Internationally, while Dubai with its luxury offerings tops the list of the most popular international destinations, the allure of Southeast Asia is also captivating Indians with destinations like Singapore, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Bali and Phuket on the travel bucket list.

▶ Contd. from page 13

survey of travel agents revealed that a majority (55 per cent) of their clients are affluent travellers seeking personalised service and expertise, typically those with a six-figure income. The survey also found that travel agents seem to have the most success when they have a particular niche or area of focus, making luxury travel an emerging specialisation.

The role of travel agents

Travel agents not only have time to plan these vacations, as it's their full-time job, they also have the expertise and connections to ensure premium quality throughout the vacation. Most clients seem to agree, as 85 per cent of luxury travellers view travel agents as the best way to book personalised, luxury travel experiences.

Luxury travel often goes beyond what a quick Google search can uncover. Exclusive tours, private dining experiences or hidden gem accommodations might not have a flashy online presence, but a seasoned travel agent will know how to find them. Their connections

Paradigm shift in luxury travel



Travel agents not only have time to plan vacations, as it's their full-time job, but they have the expertise to ensure quality throughout the vacation

with these high-end destinations grant travellers personalised entry to experiences beyond the reach of a typical traveller.

Potentially one of the most important aspects of a travel agent's role is their unmatched level of support throughout the entire traveller's journey. Their ability to nimbly navigate schedule changes and last-minute adjustments to plans are what most travellers value, considering this can be extremely difficult to do for a traveller operating alone. The relationships that travel agents build with their networks are a huge contributor to the seamless travel experience and support their customers can benefit from.

These trusted networks are the cornerstone of a travel agent's value proposition. Expedia TAAP's

programme provides luxury travel agents with a wide selection of 4 and 5-star properties to choose from and over 600,000 luxury room types, including suites and villas, in addition to exclusive rates for travel agents. Expedia TAAP covers all major luxury providers, making it a one-stop shop for travel agents to make all their bookings on one platform. Expedia TAAP's expansive network and range of luxury partners have made it the platform of choice for many luxury travel agents.

Looking ahead

Luxury travel has exploded with possibilities, which gives us hope

that the demand will continue to rise. There are endless options now when it comes to creating a custom travel experience. As options continue to increase, travel agents will become even more crucial in the process of making that trip a reality. Their resources and knowledge base are truly the magic behind the curtain of these luxury experiences. As demand grows, it's essential to support travel agents with access to premiere networks and advanced tools to make their job as seamless as their customers' vacation experiences.



Robin Lawther
Vice President
Expedia TAAP

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

Webinar on Zurich

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- **Best of Switzerland Tours**, a leading sightseeing tour operator from the German-speaking part of Switzerland

Date	Day	Webinar	Time	Registration QR code
22nd Aug 2024	Thursday	A return to Zurich	3.00 PM IST	

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MOVEMENTS

CROSS HOTELS & RESORTS

Bangkok

Cross Hotels & Resorts has appointed **ANDREW HARTLEY** as the VP – Commercial, effective from 8 July 2024. He will report to Harry Thaliwal, the CEO. Hartley possesses a wealth of experience in Sales & Marketing and Commercial Operations, spanning over 20 years within the luxury hotel industry in Thailand, Singapore, Australia, China, Vietnam, the UK and Oman. Prior to this, he served as the Assistant Vice President – Strategic Sales & Marketing for Raffles Hotels & Resorts in Cambodia. Hartley holds a Bachelor's degree in Leisure Management (Tourism & Recreation) and a BTEC National Diploma in Business & Finance.



ACCOR

India

Accor has appointed **MOHAMMAD ALI** as the Director of Global Sales – India. Ali embarked on his career with Accor in 2010 as Director of Sales – MICE. His outstanding performance and dedication led to his swift rise through the ranks. He was promoted to Area Director of Global Sales – North India in 2017, following the establishment of Accor's Global Sales Office. In 2019, he took on the role of Area Director of Global Sales – West India, based in Mumbai, where he provided strategic leadership and direction to drive revenue growth in the region. Before joining Accor, Ali worked with renowned hospitality brands.



AIR FRANCE-KLM

New Delhi

Air France-KLM has appointed **STEFAN GUMUSELI** as the General Manager for the India-Middle East establishment, effective 1 August 2024. He will be based at the regional office in Dubai, UAE. Gumuseli will oversee the passenger business for India and the Middle East, which includes a range of diverse and multicultural countries, such as India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Egypt, as well as additional offline countries. He will be responsible for further strengthening the overall presence of Air France-KLM in the region. Gumuseli started his career with KLM Royal Dutch Airlines in 2001 and has vast experience.



THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS

Mumbai

The Fern Hotels & Resorts has appointed **AMIT KUMAR SHARMA** as the Cluster General Manager- Maharashtra. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality sector both in India and overseas, Sharma brings a wealth of expertise, with a proven track record of successful performance across hotel operations. He joined The Fern family in 2016 and has since demonstrated exceptional leadership skills and a deep understanding of the hospitality industry. In his new role, Kumar will be overseeing the overall management and strategic direction of 15 properties across the region.



TOURISM AUSTRALIA

Singapore

Tourism Australia has appointed **EDWARD KWEK** as Senior Business Events Manager for South and South-East Asia. He reports to Edea Lu, Regional Business Events Director for Asia. Taking up the role in Singapore, Kwek will support the implementation of business events distribution strategies and partnerships in South and South-East Asia's MICE segment, as well as engage with key customers and stakeholders through joint event activities in the region. Kwek was most recently Trade Manager Business Events for Tourism New Zealand, where he oversaw the development business for South-East Asia.



SOFITEL MUMBAI BKC

Mumbai

Sofitel Mumbai BKC welcomes **JASVIR BELWAL** as the new Director of Operations for the property. Belwal comes from The Ritz-Carlton Bengaluru, where he was working as the Director of Rooms for last two years. In his new role, he will be responsible for maximising room sales and revenue through appropriate yield management, upselling, and inventory management initiatives; planning and implementing effective training programmes for all Front Office employees; maximising employee productivity through multi-skilling, multi-tasking, and flexible scheduling to meet the financial goals; and preparing the business plan for the Rooms Division.



STONE WOOD HOTELS & RESORTS

Goa

Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts has appointed **ABHIJIT DEY** as the Vice President. With more than 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Dey brings a wealth of knowledge in hotel operations, product development, brand management, and sales empowerment. His impressive career includes pivotal roles with prominent companies, such as K Raheja Group of Hotels, Taj Group of Hotels, and VITS-Kamat Group of Hotels, spanning regions, including India, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia.



NOVOTEL PUNE

Pune

Novotel Pune has appointed **ANANT LEEKHA** as the General Manager. Leekha brings over 20 years of experience, characterised by a strong track record of achievements. In his new role, he will oversee the overall operations and management of Novotel Pune Nagar Road, focusing on enhancing guest engagement and profitability while further establishing the hotel's reputation. Prior to this, he held significant roles within Accor, most recently as Cluster GM overseeing ibis Mumbai Vikhroli, ibis Navi Mumbai, and ibis Thane. This appointment marks his return to Pune, where he served as GM in 2016.



KOCHI MARRIOTT HOTEL

Kochi (Kerala)

Kochi Marriott Hotel appoints **SACHIN MALHOTRA** as the General Manager. With an illustrious career spanning over 24 years in the hospitality industry, Malhotra brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record in all aspects of hotel operations and relationship management. His extensive background includes leadership roles at both resort properties and city business hotels. He is known for his strong expertise in food and beverages, events planning, revenue management and asset upkeep. Prior to this, he served as the General Manager at Fairfield by Marriott Lucknow since 2021.



Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts has appointed **ANUSH NIRESHWALIA** as the General Manager - Sales & Marketing. Nireshwalia brings over 19 years of experience in sales and marketing leadership roles with international and renowned brands, including Jehan Numa and Evoke Experiences. Known for building high-performing teams and driving strategic growth initiatives, Nireshwalia is passionate about delivering exceptional results through collaboration, creativity, and customer-centric approach. His expertise will play a key role in enhancing the brand's market presence.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT AGRA

Agra

Courtyard by Marriott Agra has appointed **PRATEEK WADHWA** as the Director of Sales. With over 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Wadhwa brings extensive knowledge and expertise to the role. Prior to this, he was working with Fairfield by Marriott Jodhpur, where he spearheaded the sales team, driving exceptional results. His career has also included roles with Hyatt Hotels, Taj (IHCL), the Asian Development Bank, Chime Tours (East-bound Group), and The Lalit Hotels. In his new role, Wadhwa will be responsible for overseeing and leading a dynamic team to achieve revenue goals for the property.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BENGALURU

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru announces the appointment of **DEEPIKA JONNALA** as the Front Office Manager. With a decade of experience in the hospitality industry, Jonnala brings a wealth of knowledge and a flair for excellence that perfectly aligns with the Four Seasons' values. Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru is a luxury business hotel in the heart of Bengaluru. Channeling the innovative and cosmopolitan spirit of Bengaluru, the property puts you in the middle of the city, offering easy access to the Central Business District, international tech parks and exhibition centres.





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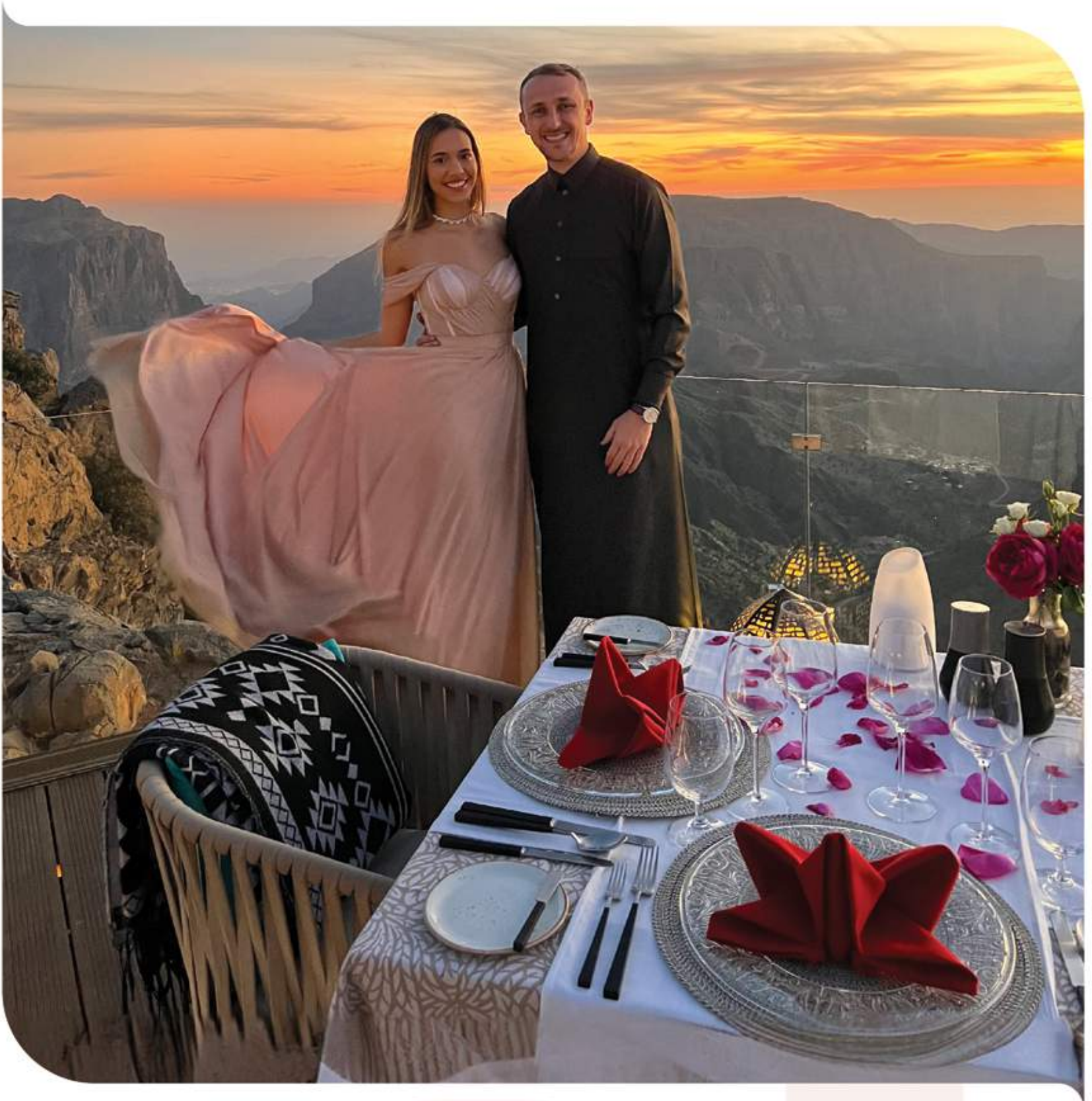
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Indian arrivals to Türkiye up 34.5%

Wedding tourism in Türkiye has seen significant growth, with destinations like Istanbul, Bodrum and Cappadocia gaining popularity for luxury weddings, says Ismail Bütün, GM, Turkish Tourism Promotion & Development Agency (TGA).



Hazel Jain

What are the visitor numbers in Türkiye from India since COVID-19?

Since the pandemic, Türkiye has witnessed a remarkable recovery in its tourism sector, particularly from the Indian market. In 2022, Türkiye hosted 51.4 million international visitors, solidifying its position as the fourth most popular destination for tourists worldwide. Among these visitors, the number of Indian tourists has shown significant growth.

In 2023, Türkiye welcomed 274,000 Indians, reflecting the country's ongoing appeal and strategic efforts to attract visitors from India. This upward trend has continued into 2024, with the first five months alone seeing an im-



pressive 126,066 Indian visitors, marking a 34.55 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2023. India is one of the most significant and promising source markets for Türkiye. With approximately 90 million passport holders, India represents a pivotal growth market for Türkiye.

What about the wedding segment from India?

Overall, Türkiye's tourism market is substantial and continuously growing. The wedding tourism segment, in particular, has seen significant growth, with destinations like Istanbul, Bodrum, and Cappadocia gaining popularity for luxury weddings. With substantial investments in tourism infrastructure and efforts to promote the country as an ideal wedding destination, Türkiye is attracting more couples from around the globe.

Depending on the location, it can be romantic, adventurous, or cool. And yes, offbeat locations in Türkiye are also gaining popularity for Indian weddings. The response from weddings and family group

events has been overwhelmingly positive. The wedding segment has significantly contributed to the tourism growth, especially in destinations like Istanbul, Bodrum, and Cappadocia. The luxurious venues and diverse landscapes

accommodations, and related services. We are taking several initiatives to attract couples to destination weddings.

Tell us about the recent educational trip you organised for OTOAI members to Türkiye.

The idea behind organising the OTOAI Fam tour was to showcase the diverse attractions of Türkiye to Indian travel agents. This initiative involved 40 OTOAI members from across India, representing various regions and tourism interests. The collaboration between the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA-Turkish Tourism Board) and the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) underscored a mutual commitment to fostering tourism partnerships and facilitating meaningful exchanges within the travel industry. Through this endeavour, we strengthened the ties between India and Türkiye.

In 2023, Türkiye welcomed 274,000 Indians, reflecting the country's ongoing appeal and strategic efforts to attract visitors from India

of Türkiye align well with the grandeur of Indian weddings, enhancing cultural exchange and boosting local economies through increased spending on venues,

'All in Türkiye' for travel agents

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