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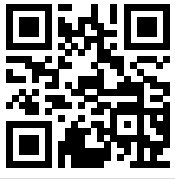
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DDP Group thanks Mumbai travel trade partners

TRAVTALK has entered its 35th year, and what better way to celebrate than with a glittering networking dinner in Mumbai? The city's travel industry elite came together to toast DDP Publications and the journey we have shared.

TT Bureau

From our beginnings as a travel industry publication to diversifying across multiple platforms, we have proudly become the voice of this dynamic community. **TRAVTALK** is on the cusp of an extraordinary milestone—35 years of being the voice of India's travel industry. To kick off the celebrations, we hosted a vibrant networking dinner in Mumbai, a heartfelt gesture to thank the city's travel trade community for their unwavering support. The evening was a dazzling affair, bringing together industry stalwarts and



The who's who of the travel industry made their presence felt at the enthralling evening

long-time friends to reminisce about our shared journey. From our humble beginnings as a single

trust and encouragement of this incredible community.

This Thank You Party was not just a gathering; it was our way of saying— "This is your success tool!" The Mumbai travel industry has been instrumental in shaping our story, and we remain deeply grateful for the faith you have shown in us, even during the toughest times.

As we look back on 34 eventful years, we are reminded of the connections, stories, and milestones that have defined this journey. Approaching our 35th year fills us with pride and purpose—to continue informing, inspiring, and connecting the industry we hold so dear. The evening was not just about reflection; it was about looking ahead. With fresh initiatives and innovations on the horizon, we promise to keep raising the bar. Together, let's embrace a future that celebrates resilience, creativity, and growth. To everyone who has been part of our journey, thank you for making us who we are today. Here's to more milestones, more stories, and a shared commitment to excellence! 🌟



It was a night of camaraderie for the travel trade in Mumbai as they let their hair down at the soiree

e-visa scheme lacks appeal?

Industry stakeholders say that the success of 'Chalo India' campaign lies in sustained efforts by the Government of India and its integration into broader promotional strategies.

Janice Alyosius

The Ministry of Tourism's 'Chalo India' campaign, launched recently at WTM London, aims to rejuvenate India's inbound tourism by offering 100,000 free e-visas to foreign nationals upon recommendation by Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cardholders. While the initiative has drawn varied responses from stakeholders, its true potential hinges on addressing several operational and strategic gaps.

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, said that 'Chalo India' campaign has evoked a mixed response. "If the 100,000 free visa could have been given to all without the recommendation of the OCI card holders the impact would have been far reaching. The campaign has definitely generated a buzz among clients and networks. However, requiring recommendations from OCI cardholders limits its impact, especially in regions like the Middle East and far-east, where fewer OCI cardholders reside. Broader eligibility criteria or alternative validation methods could significantly enhance its inclusivity and appeal," he remarked.



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO

Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO, appreciated the government's gesture but expressed concerns over the campaign's reach. "I am not sure if OCI's will be ready to go through the online process of registration to get the desired code to avail gratis visa for their non-Indian friends or colleagues. However, I think it is a good gesture from Indian government to give importance to Indian diaspora and motivate them to promote India among their non-Indian friends. Although it is too early to say the outcome of this campaign but till now, I have not heard of any unprecedented surge in interest or inquiries to India because of the OCI recommended free visa initiative."

Contd. on page 11 ▶

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Air India only full-service carrier now

Industry leaders are cautiously optimistic about Vistara's merger into Air India, making it the only Full-Service Carrier (FSC) in Indian skies. While this could mean restricted choices, they believe that Air India is unlikely to exploit its position due to highly cost-sensitive consumers and competition from ever-innovating LCCs like IndiGo.



Surbhi Sharma

With Vistara merging into Air India on 12 November, India's aviation landscape has reached a significant inflection point. This leaves India with just one Full-Service Carrier (FSC). This consolidation reflects the challenges of maintaining a competitive, full-service airline amidst a rapidly growing yet fiercely cost-conscious market.

Khushvinder Sarna, Chairman, TAFI NI Chapter and Owner, Federal Travels & Tours, said, "The monopoly by Air India may reduce competition, potentially leading to higher fares and fewer service innovations. For the travel industry, this could mean restricted choices for premium travellers, affecting both domestic and international itineraries." He noted that while a single FSC might stabilise the premium segment, the lack of rivalry



Khushvinder Sarna
Chairman, TAFI NI Chapter and
Owner, Federal Travels & Tours

could hinder growth. Low-cost carriers (LCCs) are already adapting by offering premium services, further blurring the lines between FSCs and LCCs. Sarna anticipates that India's growing market demand could pave the way for another FSC. **Jagdeep Bhagat**, President, TIA and Owner, Vee Bee Tours & Travels, asserted that



Jagdeep Bhagat
President, TIA and Owner
Vee Bee Tours & Travels

Air India, despite being the sole FSC, is unlikely to exploit its position due to highly cost-sensitive consumers and competition from LCCs like IndiGo.

"Competition of the regulated fares on UDAN routes also maintains a check on Air India to charge exorbitant fares. On international routes, it



Manoj Saraf
Chairman & MD
Gainwell Travel & Leisure

may have a little advantage to play on the fares, particularly on long haul non-stop flights," he added.

Manoj Saraf, Chairman & MD, Gainwell Travel & Leisure, noted that distinction between FSCs and LCCs is becoming increasingly blurred. With Air India operating its low-cost subsidiary Air India Ex-



Sanjeev Mehra
President, Skål International India &
Director, Aaryan Leisure & Holidays

press and LCCs introducing premium features, the market dynamics are evolving. "In the last 33 years, Gainwell has witnessed the closure of about six to seven carriers in India, which includes FSCs like Kingfisher and LCCs like Damania and ModiLuft. All have helped in expanding the aviation market and, therefore, if more carriers were

to come in, it would make things competitive," he said.

However, **Sanjeev Mehra**, President, Skål International India and Director, Aaryan Leisure & Holidays, views Air India's monopoly as a double-edged sword. "While it strengthens India's global aviation presence, it reduces competition domestically, affecting consumer choice and pricing," he said. "For travellers, fewer choices may mean compromised flexibility, particularly in premium and international segments. The travel industry could face challenges in maintaining competitive offerings, as dependency on a single carrier grows. However, this monopoly also creates an opportunity for Air India to become a global leader. By prioritising customer satisfaction, modernising its fleet, and collaborating with industry stakeholders, the airline can set new standards for Indian aviation." ↴

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Get 'Chalo India' campaign right

The 'Chalo India' campaign is a commendable effort by the Ministry of Tourism to rejuvenate inbound tourism. However, its impact seems to be falling short due to structural and operational challenges. The scheme's reliance on OCI cardholder recommendations limits its inclusivity and reach. Industry voices suggest that broader eligibility criteria, targeted promotional efforts, and a longer campaign duration are essential to drive meaningful outcomes. Additionally, India's positioning as a tourist destination requires addressing fundamental barriers like high airfare costs, limited hotel availability, and outdated infrastructure. A sustained marketing push—backed by roadshows, digital campaigns, and incentives like free visas for key source markets—could amplify the campaign's appeal.

Warming up to white winters

Indian travellers are embracing the charm of snowy escapes, turning white winters into a growing travel trend. From the classic allure of Switzerland's Alps to the festive Christmas markets in Vienna and Bern, Indian tourists are seeking immersive, magical experiences abroad. Scandinavia, Japan's Hokkaido, and Canada's Whistler offer a mix of adventure and serenity, attracting thrill-seekers and nature lovers alike.

Closer to home, destinations like Gulmarg, Manali, and Sikkim are capturing hearts with their picturesque snowy landscapes. Interestingly, millennials and Gen Z are leading this trend. While snowy retreats are gaining traction, beach escapes like Bali and Dubai still dominate holiday plans. Indian travellers are redefining winter wanderlust, blending tradition with exploration. The cold rush is here, and it's just getting started!

Hotels grow 10.8% YOY in Q3

Hyderabad records the highest RevPAR growth of 23.6% in Q3 2024, as compared to Q3 2023. Other major markets, including Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, have also shown considerable growth in ADR and RevPAR figures.

TT Bureau

The hospitality sector continued to witness Year-on-Year (YoY) growth in performance in Q3 2024 (July - September 2024), primarily driven by a rise in Average Daily Rate (ADR), resulting in a RevPAR growth of 10.8 per cent. In terms of quarterly growth, the sector continued to mark its ascendancy, registering a positive RevPAR growth of 2 per cent Q-o-Q in Q3 2024, compared to Q2 2024. This can be attributed to the typical nature of the third quarter of the year witnessing higher corporate travel as compared to the second quarter, according to JLL's Hotel Momentum India (HMI) Q3 2024.

Apart from a slight decrease in the average daily rate (ADR) of Delhi and Goa, all other major markets (Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai) showed considerable growth in ADR and revenue per available room figures, with Hyderabad leading the list. Although occupancy levels remained relatively stable across the board in Q3 2024 compared to Q3 2023, ADR levels improved, leading to an increase in RevPAR across all major markets.

The upcoming quarter is anticipated to benefit from the continued resurgence of corporate travel, festivals, and other corporate and social Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE). The industry's strong momentum



and sustained domestic demand for business travel, as well as corporate and social MICE events, will drive a busy season.

In Q3 2024, there were 96 branded hotel signings comprising 10,686 rooms. Furthermore, 12 hotels



signed were conversions of other hotels, accounting for 11 per cent of the inventory signed in Q3 2024. Branded hotel openings comprised 30 hotels with 1,988 keys, of which about 80 per cent of the total number of keys were located in tier II and III cities. Hyderabad emerged as the RevPAR growth leader in Q3 2024 registering a growth of 23.6 per cent over Q3 2023, followed by Chennai and Mumbai with YoY growth of 17.7 per cent and 16.8 per cent respectively.

Jaideep Dang, MD, Hotels and Hospitality Group, India, JLL, said, "Backed by strong performance of hotels across India, we continue to see investors moving money in this asset class. There is strong momentum on greenfield developments as well as operating assets across business and leisure markets. Although the summer season has brought down corporate room right demand in Q3 2024, the sector continued to show growth in ADR compared to Q3 2023."

Highlights

- Hyderabad records the highest RevPAR growth of 23.6% in Q3 2024 as compared to Q3 2023
- In Q3 2024, 30 new hotels comprising 1,988 keys opened, with close to 80% of them located in Tier II and Tier III cities
- Additionally, Q3 2024 witnessed the conversion of 12 hotels, accounting for 11% of the total signed inventory

Cities	Q3 2024		
	Change over same period last year		
	RevPAR Change (%)	OCC Change (pp)	ADR Change (%)
Bengaluru	↑ 15	↑ 2.9	↑ 7.8
Chennai	↑ 17.7	↑ 4.7	↑ 11.5
Delhi	↑ 1.4	↑ 5.4	↓ -3.2
Goa	↑ 1.8	↔ -0.6	↓ -2.2
Hyderabad	↑ 23.6	↔ 0.7	↑ 16.2
Mumbai	↑ 16.8	↔ 0.1	↑ 15.7

Source: STR RevPAR: ↑ Increase ↔ Stable ↓ Decrease



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PATA promotes Phetchaburi

PDMF 2024, held recently in Phetchaburi near Bangkok, highlighted the lesser-known destination in Thailand with MICE potential. The event also demonstrated how sustainable destination management can pave the way for meaningful and impactful tourism.



Amita Pandey

Phetchaburi, a UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, just 3.5-hour drive from Bangkok, has captured attention as a must-visit destination in Thailand, especially after the PATA Destination Marketing Forum 2024 (PDMF 2024) brought to light its potential as a premier venue for international conferences.

PDMF 2024

PDMF 2024 was organised by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) in collaboration with Phetchaburi province, TCEB, Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), and Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) under the theme 'Authentic Prosperous Journeys: Nurturing Culture, Culinary Delights, and Community Wisdom'. More than 370 delegates from 26 destinations across the



(L-R) Siripakorn Cheawsamoot, Peter Semone, Wanpen Mungsri, Chiruit Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya, and Group Captain Athikun Kongmee at PDMF 2024

livelihoods along with sustainable tourism, **Group Captain Athikun Kongmee**, Director General, DASTA, elaborated, "DASTA places importance on the tourism development that generates income for the local, and improves the sustainability of local livelihoods."

Sharing similar views, **Noor Ahmad Hamid**, CEO, PATA, pointed out PDMF's mission to spotlight hid-

den gems like Phetchaburi, blending world-class amenities with untapped global appeal. "PATA India Chapter is also engaging in conversation with the Indian government to unlock MICE potential in tier II and III cities of India, where we could host PDMF in the future," he said.

den gems like Phetchaburi, blending world-class amenities with untapped global appeal. "PATA India Chapter is also engaging in conversation with the Indian government to unlock MICE potential in tier II and III cities of India, where we could host PDMF in the future," he said.

MICE prospects for destination

With its array of 5-star hotels, Phetchaburi stands ready to host world-class MICE events. **Chiruit Isarangkun Na Ayuthaya**, President, TCEB, proudly calls the province a "Gulf of Thailand" gem, blending arts, crafts, na-

ture, and gastronomy. With similar vision in mind, **Peter Semone**, Chair, PATA, underscored the significance of spotlighting tier II and III cities for MICE growth, saying, "PDMF is focusing on secondary and tertiary destinations across Asia and the Pacific, with Thailand leading by example. The goal is to shift tourism from main hubs like Bangkok, Phuket, and Pattaya to foster sustain-

able, community-driven tourism. This approach, also relevant for India, emphasises local culture, cuisine, nature, and authentic lifestyles, aiming to reconnect visitors with grassroots experiences and strengthen ties between hosts and travellers."

Indian weddings in focus

Ravi Ganglani, Resort Manager, AVANI+ Hua Hin Resort, said, "For weddings, we cater to groups starting at 200 guests with packages beginning at Thai baht 3.5 million, covering accommodations, meals, and even high tea and supper. For MICE, we provide enticing incentives like one free room for every 10 booked, one complimentary participant for every 10 attendees, and a 10 per cent commission on room rates for planners."

Paul Pruangkarn, Chief of Staff, PATA, pointed out that while promoting community-based tourism in tier II cities is key, PDMF's core mission lies in showcasing effective destination management strategies and practices, which reduces carbon footprint too.

Hospitality milieu

Phetchaburi boasts world-class hospitality featuring luxurious 5-star stays, such as Dusit Thani Hua Hin, AVANI+ Hua Hin Resort, Long Beach Cha-am Hotel, and The Regent Cha-Am Beach Resort—all set against the stunning backdrop of Cha-am Beach. These hotels promise to serve global cuisine, along with three famous local flavours of Phetchaburi i.e. 'sweet, sour, and salty', which makes the destination more appealing for any MICE group.



Phetchaburi has captured attention as a must-visit destination in Thailand

Asia Pacific and other countries participated in the event. The event aimed to foster closer collaboration between the province, local stakeholders, and major tourism organisations. It aligned with the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)'s aim of promoting tier II, and III cities as MICE destinations.

Highlighting the PDMF's goal, **Wanpen Mungsri**, Deputy Governor, Acting Governor, Phetchaburi Province, said, "PDMF focuses on destinations that possess the potential to showcase the unique cultural heritage, local culinary strengths, and community-driven local wisdom that can create meaningful travel experiences, foster sustainable prosperity, and promote tourism growth while preserving natural resources and traditional cultural assets, which aligns with global tourism trends." Emphasising that PDMF's goal aligns with DASTA's aim of nurturing local

The event aimed to foster closer collaboration between the province, local stakeholders, and major tourism organisations

Places of interest

Not only hospitality, but Phetchaburi has multifarious hidden treasures that any MICE or corporate traveller can explore, and to showcase the same, PDMF organised an immersive technical tour for participants, unravelling its cultural and natural wonders. The journey included visits to royal architectural marvels like Phra Ram Ratchaniwet and Mrigadayavan Palace, reflecting Thai-European elegance, and the scenic Phra Nakhon Khiri Historical Park perched atop mountain peaks.

Participants delved into local life of Ban Rai Krang Community, exploring paddy fields and toddy palm forests, and Tham Rong Community. They savoured traditional sweets at Lung Anake Thai Desserts Factory and gained insights into biodiversity and fisheries at Phetchaburi Aquaculture Demonstration Farm.



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TAFI to limit convention registrations to 400

TAFI has opened member registrations for its upcoming annual convention to be held in Vietnam from 17-20 January 2025. It is offering members a 3-night convention at ₹15,999 per person on twin sharing and has also negotiated great prices with DMCs for some exciting pre and post-convention tours. Early Bird offer closes on December 6.



The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has opened registrations for its upcoming TAFI Convention 2025 that will be held in the Ninh Binh province in Northern Vietnam from 17 to 20 January. The theme of the convention is 'Tourism for Tomorrow: Protecting the Planet'.

Elaborating on the choice of destination and the theme, **Ajay Prakash**, President, TAFI, said, "Indian tourism is booming. While inbound numbers are still below pre-COVID levels, outbound and domestic tourism are breaking all records. But an industry that is totally people-centric and which thrives on the natural beauty and the amazing diversity in the world also has a duty to protect the Planet. Sustainability has gone beyond being a mere catchword, it is the single most important need today for the



Ajay Prakash
President
TAFI

tourism industry and if we are to rethink our business models and think beyond profit, the move has to come from within the industry. As the leading travel association in the country TAFI will take the lead in sensitising our members who, in turn, will guide their clients towards Responsible Tourism practices." He added, "Vietnam is a beautiful country and has become a very popular

destination for Indian travellers. However, the beautiful Ninh Binh province remains relatively unexplored by Indian tourists and, as always, TAFI seeks to introduce our members to newer, lesser-known destinations. It also reinforces our belief that tourism must move beyond the usual popular destinations."



Anil Kalsi, Vice President, TAFI, said, "The Provincial government of Ninh Binh has been extremely supportive, and the Department of Tourism has laid out the red carpet for TAFI delegates."

Speaking about the convention format, **Abbas Moiz**, National General Secretary, said, "TAFI is offering members a three-night convention at an incredible price of ₹15,999 per person on twin sharing. We have also negotiated

great prices with DMCs for some exciting pre and post-convention tours. Our members can contact them directly to take advantage of the special prices. Similarly, members are free to choose between the various airlines offering direct or connecting services to Vietnam and take a stop enroute."

Hitank Shah, National Treasurer, TAFI, clarified that the convention package starts and concludes at Hanoi airport.

"We will have shuttles from Hanoi airport to Ninh Binh from early in the morning on 17 January until midday and again back from Ninh Binh to Hanoi airport on the 20th to facilitate our members arriving and departing on different flights."

Seeraj Sabharwal, Chairman, TAFI Convention Committee, shared various options for ad-

ditional tours that the delegates can take to Da Nang and the Bana Hills, or a cruise in Halong bay, or a visit to the lovely beach at Ho Tram. Participation is re-

TAFI Convention 2025 will be held on 'Tourism for Tomorrow: Protecting the Planet' theme in Ninh Binh province from 17-20 January

stricted to official agency representatives and their spouses, TAFI is restricting numbers and will close registrations at 400 delegates, the Early Bird offer closes on 6 December.

Mayfair to expand in west with 'Elixir'

Mayfair Hotels & Resorts is shifting its focus towards expanding its footprint across India, with a special emphasis on the western region through its Mayfair Elixir brand. Adopting an asset-light model, the group has already established two operational properties in Goa and Alibag, and a third property is in the pipeline.



After having conquered the eastern and north-eastern market in India, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts is now focused on expanding in the western part of India. It opened its second property after Goa in the west – Mayfair Manor Alibag. It is an experiential seven-room villa, spread over three acres of land, nestled in the coastal town of Alibag, just a 20-minute speedboat ride from Mumbai. **Bjorn DeNiese**, Managing Director, Mayfair Elixir, said, "Mayfair Manor Alibag embodies our commitment to exceptional service, elegance, and unforgettable experiences, as we expand our presence through Mayfair Elixir. We are expanding in a big way – we are adding 200-odd keys at Mayfair Guwahati, currently at 160 keys. Soon, we will have a total inventory of 380 rooms in just Guwahati that will probably make it the largest hotel in the region."

Mayfair Elixir follows the asset-light model and Mayfair Hotels



Bjorn DeNiese
Managing Director
Mayfair Elixir

is focussing on expanding under that. DeNiese said, "The number of our owned and operated properties stands at 15 today. Our Chairman is also in the process of building the Mayfair Sanctuary, which is going to be a huge project in Bhubaneswar. With that, I think, we focus more on the asset-light model; it is something that we are looking to expand further, and also develop a few more brands under this model and take the Mayfair brand further out into the market



Randhir Gupta
VP – Commercial & Business
Development, Mayfair Elixir

across the country and across borders as well."

Why Alibag? DeNiese explained, "The western part of India has always been something that we have been keen on pushing for Mayfair. We are known as an eastern India brand but we would like to change that perception. We have been present in Goa for a while now. With Alibag, which is a close option from Mumbai, it is an opportunity for developers, travel

agents and corporates to also discover the brand and experience the Mayfair hospitality. Besides, we are also looking to expand in Shirdi which will be coming up very soon."

Offbeat locations

DeNiese shared that the Mayfair brand has traditionally been coming up in a lot of offbeat locations, apart from capital cities. For example, there is Mayfair Rourkela, which is now home to the Hockey World Cup. The hotel group also has Mayfair Purnea in Bihar, which is again an offbeat destination. "It is in the tier II and tier III cities where we see a lot of opportunity and requirement



for the brand and good hospitality overall. We will also be focusing on the religious circuits; we already have one property in Puri, and Shirdi will be another one that our Chairman has been passionately

following up on. We are also looking at properties in Varanasi and other such locations," he said.

Randhir Gupta, VP – Commercial & Business Development, Mayfair Elixir, said, "This is our first hotel close to Mumbai and our 19th hotel overall. Of these, 15 properties are under legacy brands and four properties that come under Mayfair Elixir – created to expand the brand under management contracts. You will be seeing many Mayfair properties opening in most of the key destinations within the country, as well as outside the country."

Mayfair Manor Alibag boasts of

- ❖ Two lavish villas with 2 and 5 bedrooms
- ❖ Swimming pool and jacuzzi for relaxation
- ❖ Library and games area featuring pool, carrom, and table tennis
- ❖ Lush greenery, trees, and plants creating a unique microclimate
- ❖ Expansive lawns and private areas for leadership meets, private celebrations and get togethers
- ❖ Vibrant colours and aesthetics, signature to the Mayfair brand

'Chalo India' evokes subdued reaction

► Contd. from page 5

Operational challenges

Several leaders have voiced concerns about the campaign's execution. **Rajnish Kaistha**, Sr. Vice President, IATO, points out the lack of a robust marketing push, "It's too early to say about queries on India visit due to free e-visa incentive which should have been without any OCI rider and that could be a game-changer. First, the Government of India needs a big marketing spend in tourist generating markets about Chalo India. No campaign, no results is how I look at it. Government should plan in advance and year-long calendar of promotional activities by participating in foreign trade fairs, India roadshows and share confirmed details with the industry and then



Rajnish Kaistha
Sr Vice President
IATO



Ravi Gosain
Vice President
IATO



Tony Marwah
Executive Committee Member
IATO

visa processes further, investing in infrastructure, and ensuring safety and cleanliness at tourist hubs can significantly improve perceptions, complementing initiatives like 'Chalo India'. Publicity, marketing, and promotion; opening up MOT offices abroad; international roadshows across target countries in consultation with the trade; and Fam trips for foreign tour operators, international media, and bloggers are the imperatives," he said.

On visa policies, Gosain pointed out the potential of free visas as a strategic tool rather than just a financial incentive. "Free visa should be seen as a welcoming step from the Indian government

campaigns. "You do not kickstart a campaign by giving it a name. Today, India is one of the most expensive destinations in South & Southeast Asia. Airfares are sky-high out of Europe and North America. Hotels are not available, thanks to wedding blocks at hotels in most popular tourist destinations in India. India tourism offices overseas are history, and there is a total absence of any print, media, or digital advertising," he said.

Adding to the call for a more robust promotional strategy, Hira noted the lack of sustained publicity. "Somehow, the publicity push for inbound tourism has gone missing for a few years now. Should we want to succeed in increasing the number of arrivals into India

While the initiative has drawn varied responses from stakeholders, its potential hinges on addressing operational and strategic gaps

our members shall plan in advance and budget to participate in such shows for positive results."

Tony Marwah, Executive Committee Member, IATO, raised important questions, saying, "In the absence of comprehensive media coverage, the campaign will remain merely on paper. If you mean that launching a campaign at WTM has translated

encourage them to visit India just to save US\$ 25 on a visa fee? This idea will not work. It seems like someone was in a tearing hurry to announce something on World Tourism Day. This is not an incentive and lacks appeal."

Prateek Hira, Chairman, IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter, sees the campaign as a step in the right direction, provided it is backed by sustained efforts. "The campaign can be a game-changing step to attract inbound tourists to India if it continues for a longer period and is backed by proper publicity about India in foreign shores. The campaign window seems quite limited as it is valid till the end of March 2025. As a norm foreigners plan their long-haul holidays well in advance and this trend takes away the charm of this scheme. Similarly, this scheme is not backed well by advertisement and proper publicity, which may be a

campaigns to promote India along with all other marketing campaigns and traditional marketing of destination India," Hira opined.

The campaign's stipulation for recommendations by OCI cardholders has drawn criticism. **K Ranga Reddy**, Chairman, IATO Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chapter, said, "Many potential travellers feel excluded by the OCI recommendation requirement. It adds unnecessary complexity, particularly for first-time visitors, or those without personal ties to the Indian diaspora. Furthermore, OCI cardholders are concerned about being held accountable for endorsing visitors, which might discourage participation."

Strategic suggestions

To enhance India's appeal as an inbound tourism destination through the campaign, stakeholders outlined various propos-



Prateek Hira
Chairman
IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter



K Ranga Reddy
Chairman, IATO Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Chapter



Mahendra Pratap Singh
Chairman, IATO Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter

robust digital campaigns to attract global travellers. "Extending incentives, such as discounted airline fares, enhanced local experiences, or exclusive cultural packages, could attract more visitors. Strengthening digital campaigns, featuring targeted storytelling about India's diversity and heritage, would amplify interest. Additionally, simplifying

rather than a financial incentive because the double-entry e-tourist visa fee for 30 days is merely US \$25 or UK £25. Secondly, I think to run this campaign for a longer period, total gratis visas should be 500,000 to make it more lucrative. MOT should consider offering free visas to all non-Indians/ non-OCI cardholders for a limited period, restricted to 10 biggest source markets like the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan. This will have a greater impact and position India as a welcoming tourist destination."

Highlighting India's cultural richness, **Mahendra Pratap Singh**, Chairman, IATO Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter, underscored the importance of unique selling points. "To make India more appealing in markets like the UK, we should focus on what makes India unique. While India is known for its busy cities and famous landmarks, we should also highlight its rich heritage. Practices like yoga and meditation can attract wellness tourists, while spiritual tourism, tribal experiences, and the strong cultural bonds of family and community offer a deeper, more authentic experience." Marwah, however, raised concerns about current challenges that could undermine such

and bring in quality tourists with high spending power, we ought to have a multi-pronged strategy. 'Chalo India' is, of course, a great campaign but, in isolation, without a backup of publicity and outreach programmes, it might not fetch the desired results."

Reddy outlined a detailed roadmap to maximise the campaign's potential in key markets like the UK. "India has immense potential to enhance its inbound tourism appeal in key markets like the UK by building on the 'Chalo India' initiative. This can be achieved through further simplifying visa processes, such as offering quicker e-visa approvals and visa-on-arrival options, alongside multi-entry visas for repeat travellers. Tailored travel packages highlighting India's heritage, wellness tourism, and luxury offerings would attract UK visitors, while localised marketing campaigns and celebrity endorsements can strengthen outreach. Improved connectivity through direct flights and regional tourism promotion, along with targeted incentives like discounts on attractions, would increase tourism. Additionally, a focus on eco-friendly tourism, local experiences, safety measures, and hospitality training will position India as a preferred destination for UK travellers," he said.



DDP Group rolls out red carpet

DDP Group hosted a networking party at ITC Grand Central Hotel in Mumbai on 22 November. The event was a token of appreciation for the travel partners' unwavering support. The event brought together a diverse group of industry stakeholders, including tourism boards, airlines, hoteliers, travel agents, tour operators, and DMCs.



for travel partners in Mumbai



Industry leaders honoured in style



at exclusive Mumbai soirée



DDP extends gratitude to partners



in the city that never sleeps



White winters winning Indians

Over the past few years, Indian travellers have increasingly sought out snowy destinations, particularly during the month of December. With about 20 per cent surge in overall winter bookings compared to last December, it's evident that white winters are not just a fleeting trend—they are here to stay.



Sanjeev Mehra
President, SKAL International India & Director, Aaryan Leisure & Holidays

“Recent data shows a 32 per cent increase in Indian travellers opting for white winter destinations during Christmas, compared to just five years ago. What’s clear is that India’s love for themed and immersive



Louis D'Souza
Director, Tamarind Global

“There has been an upswing in the demand for offbeat and new experiences, including a heightened interest in winter getaways in France from India. We are sure that over the years, there will be a growing number



Ankit Chaturvedi
Global Head of Marketing RateGain

“As the Indian vacationists evolve, there is an increasing interest in experiencing the white winter atmosphere of Europe, especially the French Alps, Switzerland, Austria, Finland, Iceland & Norway being favourites.

“Indian travellers are increasingly opting for white winter experiences, drawn by the allure of snowy landscapes. Globally, destinations like France, Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Russia, and Canada are among the top choices. Within India, Kashmir’s Gulmarg, and Srinagar, and Himachal’s Manali, and Sikkim offer beautiful destinations.”



Hari Ganapathy
Co-Founder, Pickyourtrail

travel is on the rise. Switzerland continues to be a popular escape.”

“Over the last couple of years, we have noticed a growing trend among Indians seeking the charm of a white winter. The European Alps remain a timeless favourite, with Switzerland, Austria, Poland and France offering iconic snowy vistas and luxury experiences. Finland and Sweden have also gained traction this year.”



Sheetal Munshaw
Director Atout France – India

of Indians wanting to experience France's unique winter wonderland.”

“According to World on Holiday by RateGain, while Indian travellers have begun showing interest in winter experiences, beach destinations continue to be their top choice for the winter holiday season. For the period from December 20 to January 1, many are booking trips to popular medium-haul beach spots like Dubai and Bali.”



Mit Bhatt
Managing Partner The Grand Vacationist

We are also seeing interest in Montana, Vermont and Aspen in the US.”

Contd. on page 23 ▶

ITA Airways celebrates 2nd anniversary

ITA Airways celebrated the second anniversary of its Delhi operations with a grand event at the Hyatt Regency New Delhi, attended by Fabio Bigotti, Country Manager for India and Japan, and Benedetto Mencaroni Poiani, Vice President. The celebration recognised top-performing travel partners and highlighted the airline's growth and future vision.



Arunachal aims to be adventure hub

Arunachal Pradesh is poised to become a global adventure tourism hub. With a focus on responsible tourism and eco-sensitivity, the state is preparing for significant growth. A revised tourism policy and the upcoming ATOAI convention will showcase its adventure potential while promoting sustainable practices.

Janice Alyosius

Arunachal Pradesh has vast potential to emerge as a global adventure tourism hub and attract an increasing number of domestic and international travellers. The state government is plan-

We are framing the tourism policy; it is going to be a very comprehensive one because it will include a wide range of sectors

—Pasang Dorjee Sona

ning to revise its tourism policy to cash in on this potential. **Pasang Dorjee Sona**, Tourism Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, said, "We are

framing the tourism policy; it is going to be a very comprehensive one because it will include a wide range of sectors. Responsible tourism will be one of the key focuses."

With a focus on responsible tourism and eco-sensitivity, the state government is committed to balancing development with the preservation of its pristine environment. "As I always say, we don't want travellers who spend Rs 10 but leave behind a burden of 20. We need to ensure that we are eco-sensitive and care about our environment," he said. With eco-sensitive growth as the foundation of the policy, the state government is serious about how it grows tourism while encouraging people to explore its natural heritage, while also ensuring the protection of its fragile ecology. "That is the biggest concern as we frame the policy. The policy is not yet finalised, but we hope to have it in place by the end of next month," the minister said.



Pasang Dorjee Sona, Tourism Minister, Arunachal Pradesh; Ranphoa Ngowa, Secretary Tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh; Arun Srivastava, Joint Director General, Ministry of Tourism; Ajeet Bajaj, President, ATOAI; Oken Tayeng, MLA and Convention Chairperson; along with other dignitaries

Adventure takes centre stage

Arunachal Pradesh is preparing to host the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) convention in Tawang from 3-8 December, highlighting its adventure tourism potential on a national platform.

Ajeet Bajaj, President, ATOAI, said, "Arunachal is India's last Shangri-La, with unmatched natural heritage and adventure opportunities. The convention will focus on show-

casing the state's offerings, from mountain biking, rafting, and kayaking to India's longest zip line in Mechukha. This is an incredible opportunity to highlight Arunachal's potential while setting benchmarks for responsible tourism."

The convention is designed not only to promote adventure activities but also to ensure sustainable practices. "Our event will be net-zero, with steps to calculate and mitigate the carbon footprint," said

Bajaj, adding that, "We hope to inspire similar initiatives across India, aligning adventure tourism with eco-conscious travel trends."

Sustainable tourism practices

As the state attracts more attention, its leaders are focused on avoiding the pitfalls of over-tourism seen in other destinations. **Oken Tayeng**, MLA, Convention Chairperson, and Chapter Chairman of the North Eastern Region, ATOAI, emphasised the need

for sustainable development. "Arunachal is a relatively new destination, where not much has happened yet in terms of tourism. However, it holds immense potential. As one of the largest states in the country, it boasts 80 per cent forest cover, great peaks—two of which are about 23,000 feet high—and vast adventure territory. This convention is particularly significant because it is the first dedicated adventure tourism event happening here."

Hahnair celebrates 25 years

Hahnair stands at the forefront of revolutionising airline distribution, offering global solutions tailored to meet regional needs. From its innovative H1X1 platform to its growing presence in the Indian market, the company blends cutting-edge technology, customer-centric services, and strategic tie-ups to connect airlines and travellers worldwide.

Surbhi Sharma

Hahnair, a scheduled and executive charter airline of Germany, has transformed the landscape of airline distribution, empowering airlines and travel professionals worldwide. From integrating regional carriers into global markets to pioneering cutting-edge solutions tailored for diverse regions like India, the company combines technology, service excellence, and strategic partnerships to redefine how the world travels. It recently celebrated its 25-year milestone in the industry at Le Méridien hotel in New Delhi. Over 80 travel agency partners attended the event, along with **Kimberley Long**, Vice President - Agency Distribution, Hahnair and **Bharat Kapoor**, Regional Vice President, Hahnair.

India being one of the top five global markets for Hahnair, the celebration highlighted the contributions of Indian partners in its journey

and underscored the company's commitment to supporting their growth. "India remains one of our key markets globally, and we are incredibly grateful for the continued support, trust and collaboration from our agency partners here. Together, we are achieving great things, and I am confident that our partnership will only grow stronger in the years ahead," Long said.

Recalling the company's journey, she said that Hahnair began with a humble route from Düsseldorf to Luxembourg. Since 1999, the company has been offering distribution services to other airlines, and during the last 25 years, the company has established itself as the market leader. "Today, we collaborate with over 350 airlines, reaching 190 markets worldwide and empowering more than 100,000 travel agencies to book flights through our HR169 ticketing code," Long shared. She said, "One of Hahnair's notable achievements is the develop-



Kimberley Long
Vice President - Agency Distribution
Hahnair

ment of the H1X1 platform. This platform brings smaller, often regional airlines, into the Global Distribution System (GDS), providing them with the tools and reach they need to operate globally. For airlines with limited fleets, Hahnair's H1X1 solution offers them the infrastructure, technical support, and access to global markets without the heavy operational overhead. This



Bharat Kapoor
Regional Vice President
Hahnair

approach underscores the company's emphasis on empowering airlines to choose their distribution markets strategically."

Impact of technology

With technology at its core, Hahnair has become a leader in innovation within the airline distribution space. "As the aviation industry advances towards New Distribution Capability (NDC) standards,

our commitment to enhancing customer service remains central. Our round-the-clock service desks in Montevideo, the Philippines, Germany, and India ensure seamless support for clients worldwide. This combination of cutting-edge technology and human-centric support reflects company's dedication to a smooth, client-friendly experience," she highlighted.

India, a strategic partner

Highlighting how India market is different from the rest, Long said, "The company views India as an innovation hub, recognising the country's dynamic, youthful workforce and its willingness to embrace new ideas."

Plans for next 25 years

Hahnair promises expansion and innovation, with a strong focus on India and emerging technologies. The company envisions a world where technology further personalises travel and creates new efficiencies in airline distribution.

Success in India market

Kapoor expressed gratitude to the Indian market. "With access to more than 350 partner airlines whose flights can be issued on the Hahnair HR-169 ticket, Indian travel

Hahnair highlighted the contribution of Indian partners in its journey and underscored the company's commitment to support their growth

agencies have been instrumental in our success. The praise we receive from Indian travel professionals for our complementary Securix® insolvency protection is a testament to our shared values of trust and reliability," he said.

IHCL mantra: Stay net cash positive

IHCL's 'Accelerate 2030' strategy will be to expand its brandscape with new brands and new segments, build on its legacy of globally acclaimed service excellence, focus on doubling growth in consolidated revenue to ₹15,000 crore and doubling its portfolio with over 700 hotels – all while staying net cash positive.

Hazel Jain

Announcing IHCL's comprehensive strategy for 2030, **Puneet Chhatwal**, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, IHCL, revealed that the group will expand its brandscape, double its consolidated revenue with a 20 per cent return on capital employed, and grow its portfolio to over 700 hotels. It will also double its consolidated revenue to ₹15,000 crore, scaling new and re-imagined businesses to over 25 per cent share of revenue.



Puneet Chhatwal
Managing Director
and Chief Executive Officer, IHCL

After the COVID-19 pandemic, IHCL recovered from the losses to make ₹1,450 crore profit, with 10 consecutive quarters of record-breaking results. What was a ₹4,000-crore topline consolidated revenue company turned to ₹7,000, crore, with doubling of EBITDA. "We went from a ₹3,000-crore debt to

being net cash. We are actually debt-free with the exception of a small debt in our London property," said Chhatwal.

He added that the group tried to unleash the potential of Indian Hotels Company with Taj being the backbone, continues to be the backbone and will continue to be the most important brand,

both within Indian Hotels, as well as the most important brand within the Tata Group. "We have grown our portfolio from 155 to 350 hotels, from operational hotels of 142 in February 2018 to 232 today," he said.

The future IHCL spies

Speaking about the hospitality sector at large, Chhatwal said, "There are long-term structural tailwinds that have started pushing the sector. If you look at the Quarter 2 results of most of the consumer-based companies, it's only the hospitality sector that has really shown strong topline growth. This means the sector is beginning to change. It's not just Indian Hotels. And that is evident because of the size of the economy and GDP growth, which is also leading to strong demand growth. We are yet to witness the increase in foreign tourist arrivals. All this is going to create a strong demand base while the



supply remains constrained. It's not easy to build hotels; it is very complex in nature."

He explained: "If you look at the number of branded room supply in other G20 countries versus India, we have a very, very long way to go. If supply remains at six to eight per cent and demand is almost double digit, then the fundamentals of the business will be very strong in terms of the topline growth, and the bottom line growth and infrastructure improvement."

A differentiated strategy

IHCL puts the money where its mouth is. Chhatwal said, "For any flagship location, for any brand enhancing project, we will use our own capital. It's the right thing to do, especially if you can hedge your portfolio to majority of your business in asset light model, but at the same create value by driving operating leverage in good times when demand continues to outpace supply."

International growth

He said, "We will only grow with

the Taj brand in international gateway locations with the exception of anything which is within two to three hours of flying distance from India." He added, "Other brands may be relevant; I

Taj is the backbone and will continue to be the most important brand, both within Indian Hotels, as well as the most important brand within the Tata Group

will not take Ginger to Europe or Switzerland. This is not a part of our strategy. But we will take a Taj to Europe. In fact, we are opening a Taj in Frankfurt in less than 10 months from now. ↘

Nok Air's 2nd Mumbai flight launched

With Nok Air's second flight connecting Bangkok to India from Mumbai, Thailand hopes to cross the two million mark by this year end. Represented in India by Dex Group, the airline brings high-quality product to the Indian market, offering great connections to destinations from Bangkok so that Indian visitors can explore more facets of Thailand.

Hazel Jain

It has been almost two years since Nok Air started operating Hyderabad flights from Bangkok. They also added Mumbai flights to cater to the heavy traffic. Visiting India for the launch was **Ranon Viputsiri**, Chief Commercial Officer, Nok Air. "Mumbai is a strategic market for us and another milestone for Nok Air. Hopefully, in 2025, we can add New Delhi to our routes as well," he said.

Nok Air's Boeing 737-800 aircraft with 189 seats will fly from Mumbai to Bangkok's Don Mueang International Airport eight times a week. There are over 13,000 seats from Mumbai to Bangkok per month to meet the demand. The flights also offer the option of vegetarian meals that need to be pre-booked. Viputsiri said, "Our flight time is very good. It arrives in Bangkok at 7.45 am to ensure passengers get a full day in Bangkok. It is also good for transit pas-



(L to R) Varun Mohindra, VP-Sales, Dex Group, with Donnawit Poolsawat, Consul General, Thailand in Mumbai, Ranon Viputsiri, CCO, Nok Air, and Auttapon Thaweessuntorn, Deputy Director, TAT-Mumbai office

sengers who can get great connections to other popular places like Chiang Mai, Phuket, and Krabi, as well as other secondary cities like Surat Thani, on Nok Air." The airline has a total of 14 aircraft in its fleet.

He shared that the loadfactor for Hyderabad is around 77 per cent. "The Nok Air brand is already well known in the Indian market as we have been flying from Hyderabad to Don Mueang with four flights

per week. We work with all the key partners and try to tap all segments from leisure to corporate, as well as students and sports segments. We will soon have in-flight entertainment," he revealed.

GSA representation in India

Viputsiri said Thailand has been a preferred destination for Indians for years. "However, we see that the traffic has shifted more towards FIT and smaller family groups. Earlier, Indians

would travel in bigger groups. For MICE groups, we can customise packages in terms of extra luggage or any other convenience. What makes our airline different is that we provide the best affordable fares, and we also give importance to the product and service. While we don't have any code-share partner yet, we are exploring this avenue," he added. It will soon go on the GDS apart from being available on OTAs and travel agents.

Commenting on newer destinations that Indians are now exploring, **Auttapon Thaweessuntorn**, Deputy Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand – Mumbai office, said, "Indian visitors are now travelling to newer destinations in Thailand. While they do visit Bangkok, they also visit nearby cities. We also see many Indian weddings." Sharing an update on Indian numbers, **Donnawit Poolsawat**, Consul General, Thailand in Mumbai, said, "The visa-free scheme aims

to facilitate travel from India to Thailand. Hence, the visa application to my office has reduced significantly. Since launch of this scheme, the number of Indian arrivals has increased. For the

Nok Air's Boeing 737-800 aircraft with 189 seats will fly from Mumbai to Don Mueang International Airport in Bangkok 8 times a week

first six months this year, we recorded around 1.6 million Indian visitors, and I hope by the end of this year, we can cross 2 million milestone. I am confident that the visa-free scheme will be extended indefinitely." ↘

McArthurGlen honours key partners

McArthurGlen Designer Outlets, a global leader in luxury outlet shopping, acknowledged its top trade partners in India for their contribution at the McArthurGlen Tourism Awards held in Mumbai recently. Presenting the annual Achievement Awards was Sabina Piacenti, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets.



TAAI plans tax cell to guide on GST

Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) embarks on a transformative journey under its new leadership. With a member-first agenda, focus on technology, and plans to celebrate 75 years of legacy in 2025, the association aims to empower its members, tackle industry challenges, and ensure sustainable growth.

 Surbhi Sharma

Sunil Kumar, newly-elected President of Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) and Co-founder & Commercial Head, AirRetailer, outlines a vision to redefine the association's role in the travel ecosystem. "With the travel and tourism industry contributing over 6 per cent to India's GDP, the significance of this sector cannot be overstated. However, challenges persist. In a dynamic industry like ours, change is constant. From evolving technology to shifting market dynamics, members face ongoing challenges. TAAI's role is to be a steadfast partner, offering support, fostering collaboration, and ensuring our members are equipped to adapt and thrive," Kumar said.

Key focus areas

He said that TAAI's key focus areas include sustainability and

growth to ensure long-term resilience in operations, education and training to keep members updated with industry trends and technologies and collaboration, and strengthening ties between members and key stakeholders, including government bodies and airlines. "Our overarching goal is to enhance TAAI's relevance and support systems for members, ensuring they can address challenges effectively and seize new opportunities," he added.

Three-point agenda for 2024-26

Speaking about his three-points agenda, Kumar said, "Our motto is 'Member First Approach'. We aim to address member expectations and challenges comprehensively. Members invest their time and resources in TAAI, and it is our duty to provide value, relevance, and tangible benefits in return. This includes tailored support systems, forums for addressing member



Sunil Kumar
President
TAAI

concerns and enhanced member engagement to ensure their voices are heard."

He added, "Secondly, we believe that technology is the game-changer for the travel industry. However, adopting it can be expensive and daunting. TAAI is committed to exploring affordable,

technology-driven solutions to help members enhance their online presence and operational efficiency. By making technology accessible, we aim to future-proof our members' businesses and lastly, as TAAI approaches its 75th anniversary in 2026, we are planning a year-long celebration to honour our legacy and achievements in early



2025, one year ahead to ensure the initiative grows with relevance and get transitions into a significant industry event. This milestone is not just a celebration of the association's journey but a reflection of the growth and evolution of India's travel industry. Our focus will be on

showcasing our history, fostering partnerships, and preparing for a future of continued excellence."

First steps towards change


Kumar said, "Since assuming office, we have hit the ground running and launched immediate initiatives, such as strategic workshops; within the first month, we organised a two-day workshop in Hyderabad with 65 regional and chapter leaders. Together, we brainstormed strategies for the 2024-26 term, member support systems; we initiated the launch of a tax cell to provide guidance on GST, TCS, and other financial concerns, airline relations; building stronger bridges with airlines has been a priority.

Addressing challenges

The travel and tourism industry faces hurdles in one or the other form, said Kumar, adding that from airline insolvencies to technologi-

cal disparities, the road ahead is demanding. Therefore, to address those challenges the key initiatives


We are working on solutions to mitigate challenges, such as addressing financial security concerns & ensuring accountability in tax credit reflections

that we need include risk management, reviving insurance as a reliable form of financial security, establishing specialised committees for tourism, technology, taxation, and member development to identify and resolve challenges proactively, he noted. 

GST made easy for travel partners

GST has transformed the business landscape for travel agents in India, adding layers of complexity, but also creating opportunities for those who approach it strategically. Manish Gadia, CA and Partner at GMJ & Co, shares tips on how the GST affects travel agents, the need for reforms, and strategies to improve business.

 Surbhi Sharma

In an era of complex taxation and financial regulations, Goods and Services Tax (GST) has become an influential factor in the travel and tourism sector of India, bringing unique challenges that directly impact travel agents and service providers. Talking about the GST's impact on travel agents, **Manish Gadia**, Chartered Accountant and Partner at GMJ & Co, says, GST is a transaction-based tax, which makes it crucial for businesses to fully understand their transactions to ensure compliance. For travel agents, whose business often involves multiple transactions, this is especially challenging. "GST is enormous in its impact. Without a detailed understanding of each transaction, travel agents risk calculating their tax obligations incorrectly," he cautions.

The nature of GST requires travel agents to carefully assess how each sale or service affects their tax responsibility. "Misinterpre-



Manish Gadia
Chartered Accountant &
Partner at GMJ & Co

tation of GST rules can lead to overpayment or underpayment of taxes, with potentially severe financial consequences. To avoid these pitfalls, I always advise that whosoever is paying GST should go to a consultant, understand the intricacies of different transactions they are entering into and then decide on tax payments," he says.

Need for reforms in industry

While GST is here to stay, Gadia

believes that reforms are possible and necessary to ease its burden on the travel industry. He points out a significant issue in the industry - lack of unity among travel industry associations. "Government has shown a consistent willingness to adapt and provide relief to businesses, but they need to unite and come up with a clear list of reforms they want from the government," he says, adding that, "Currently, different associations within the travel sector are not aligned on the reforms they are asking for."

Three-point agenda for ease of doing business

When it comes to ease of doing business, Gadia highlights three fundamental principles that can help travel agents not only navigate GST but also enhance business efficiency and customer trust.

❖ **Embrace Tax Compliance:** Gadia stresses that attempting to avoid tax is counterproductive. "First and foremost, every businessperson has to understand that



you can't escape paying tax," he says. "Being compliant not only avoids legal issues but also contributes to long-term stability and customer trust," he adds.

❖ **Leverage GST Benefits:** GST offers advantages, especially the input tax credit, which can significantly benefit both businesses and their clients. "With input tax credit, if you are operating properly, you can improve your own revenue while providing cost-effective options to your clients," he says. "By correctly applying input tax credits, travel agents can reduce costs as-


sociated with GST, improving their margins and customer satisfaction," he adds.

❖ **Operate Transparently:** Transparency is not just good ethics—it is also good business. Incorporating it in business operations is critical for long-term success, according to Gadia. He emphasises that building a transparent business fosters trust and avoids potential conflicts. "Customers will eventually discover how you are operating. So, it is always advisable to be transparent from the start," he asserts. "By openly dis-

closing costs, tax obligations, and service fees, businesses can build lasting relationships with clients who appreciate honesty," he adds.


Misinterpretation of GST rules can lead to overpayment or underpayment of taxes, with potentially severe financial consequences

Approach to GST compliance

Gadia sees opportunities for the travel industry to adjust and grow. He stresses the importance of industry collaboration and shared goals to make significant headway. "For travel agents to thrive under GST, a unified approach towards reform and adaptation is essential," he concludes. 

Minor opens 150-key Anantara Jaipur

Expanding its footprint in India, Minor Hotels has opened its first property under Anantara brand in Jaipur. The group plans to establish 50 hotels across the country in next 10 years. Diana Marin Acosta, Senior VP, Head of Luxury & Global Sales, Minor Hotels and Rohit Chopra, Area Commercial Director, Minor Hotels (India), share details.



Surbhi Sharma

Minor Hotels, which owns, manages and operates a diverse portfolio of more than 540 hotels, resorts and branded residences across 56 countries, recently concluded its three-city India roadshow - in Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Delhi - with an aim to engage with the travel trade industry. The event saw participation of representatives from 26 Minor Hotels properties in the Middle East, Europe, Thailand, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Mauritius.

Speaking about the roadshow, **Diana Marin Acosta**, Senior Vice President, Head of Luxury & Global Sales, Minor Hotels said, "We are thrilled to be back in India, a market we cherish and are eager to invest in. With dedicated sales teams in both Mumbai and Delhi, we are committed to deepening



Diana Marin Acosta
Senior Vice President, Head of Luxury & Global Sales, Minor Hotels

our engagement here. Each year, we take a moment to express our gratitude to our Indian partners, whose support and collaboration drive our growth." Acosta added, "For Minor Hotels, India is an essential component of our global strategy. With over 550 properties in 56 countries, we recognise India as a crucial market for many

of our international destinations. Our plans for expansion in India are ambitious, starting with the opening of our inaugural hotel in Jaipur. But this is only the beginning—we aim to establish at least 50 properties across India in the coming years."

For us, sustainability extends beyond eco-friendly initiatives like eliminating plastic and using natural materials; it means supporting local communities

Sustainability

Responding to the growing demand for luxury and eco-friendly accom-

modations in India, she specified that Minor Hotels is dedicated to authenticity and sustainability in every location, and India is no exception. "For us, sustainability extends beyond eco-friendly initiatives like eliminating plastic and using natural materials; it means supporting local communities through initiatives that make a lasting impact. This is a commitment we uphold across our portfolio, from luxury brands like Anantara to upper-scale options like Avani," she said.

India vital for global strategy

The Indian market holds strategic importance for Minor Hotels. "As we expand, we are committed to cultivating relationships with partners across diverse segments, from luxury travel agencies and destination weddings to MICE and corporate travel," she said.

Sharing his views, **Rohit Chopra**, Area Commercial Director, Mi-



Rohit Chopra
Area Commercial Director
Minor Hotels (India)

nor Hotels (India), said, "We are excited as this is the third and the last leg of our roadshows in India. This time, we have 26 international properties, including Anantara, Avani, Avani Plus, NH, NH Collection, Oaks, and Tivoli, that are participating, along with a few representatives who are representing Europe."

First Anantara in Jaipur

Expressing happiness over the responses that Minor Hotels got from Indian travel agents and partners from the roadshows, Chopra said, "The feedback from the Indian

The feedback from the Indian travellers, as well as support from the market, has been tremendous because we are very well spread in Europe

travellers, as well as support from the market, has been tremendous. People like Anantara for their leisure and weddings."

Cold rush: Snow destinations top choice

► Contd. from page 18



Hari Kishan Valmiki
Founder & Managing Partner
Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions

"A new trend is emerging among Indians who traditionally avoided colder destinations, especially in winter. Today, more people are drawn to winter wonderlands, both in India and abroad. Popular domestic choices include Shimla, Kashmir, Nainital, Auli, Rishikesh, Mussoorie, Leh Ladakh, Darjeeling, Tawang, Gangtok, Spiti, and Patnitop. Internationally, many are exploring destinations like Kazakhstan, Armenia, the Nordic region and Swiss Alps."

"Countries like Switzerland, Austria, and France remain top choices for snow enthusiasts from India, while Scandinavia and Japan are gaining popularity for their unique winter landscapes. People would love visiting the



Sumit Mitruka
CEO
Summit Hotels and Resorts

"Indian travellers are increasingly choosing white winters. In Eastern and North India, destinations like Sandakphu, Kalimpong, and Kurseong are becoming popular for their serene snowy landscapes. Gulmarg and Auli also attract adventure enthusiasts. At Summit Hotels, we cater to this demand by offering comfortable stays in picturesque winter locations. Indian travellers are exploring Christmas markets beyond traditional hubs."

"Switzerland is definitely seeing an increased interest from Indian guests for winter holidays to experience the snow-covered mountains in destinations like Engelberg Titlis or Grindelwald with the Jungfrau Ski Resort. The



Rikant Pittie
Co-Founder
EaseMyTrip

"Indian travellers are showing a growing enthusiasm for winter sports, particularly skiing, marking a significant shift in vacation preferences. While traditional European destinations like Chamonix and Zermatt continue to attract skiers, there is a notable rise in interest in domestic skiing locations, with Gulmarg's world-class facilities and Auli's panoramic slopes leading the trend. The market is diversifying beyond skiing."

"White winters are becoming a preferred choice for many Indian travellers, driven by a mix of curiosity and the allure of winter sports. This trend is opening up new possibilities for travel companies to create unique winter experiences



Khushvinder Sarna
Owner
The Federal Travels & Tours

Christmas markets. Traditional favourites like Germany and Austria are still popular, but travellers are exploring markets in cities like Prague, Tallinn, and Krakow."



Christian Schoch
Director India
Switzerland Tourism

vibrant Christmas markets are very high in interest, from the romantic stalls of Zurich and the flying Santa at Montreux to the charming new Winterlaken market in Interlaken."



Manish Saini
Co-Founder
Levax Holidays

that cater to this demand. They have a growing list of favourite destinations that combine scenic snowy landscapes with winter activities and cultural experiences."

Contd. on page 26 ►

Focus on sustainability @ (Fitur)

FITUR 2025 will be organised by IFEMA MADRID from 22-26 January, highlighting sustainability and responsible tourism. The fair aims to inspire tourism professionals to adopt sustainable practices.

TT Bureau

With a firm commitment to boost business and knowledge exchange, IFEMA MADRID will organise FITUR 2025 from 22-26 January 2025. In its 45th edition, the international tourism trade fair aligns

direct global economic impact of about US \$3.4 trillion in the first seven months of 2024, according to UN Tourism statistics. FITUR closed its last edition with more than 250,000 attendees and the participation of 9,000 companies representing 152 countries. FITUR 2025 brings together the

This is precisely the aim of two of its major projects. On the one hand, the FITURNEXT Observatory, FITUR has a platform dedicated to promoting best practices, which has been working all year over the past six editions to identify and analyse initiatives implemented globally by destinations, companies, and organisations around an industry challenge. On this occasion, the 2025 Challenge focused on how tourism can contribute to sustainable food management and, after the analysis of nearly 300 proposals, the winners are Sustainable Gastronomic Routes of Extremadura (Spain), Hurtigruten Cruises (Norway), and Too Good To Go (Denmark).

On the other hand, FITUR 4all, the space that for the second consecutive year brings all people with accessibility needs closer to tourist destinations and services in order to promote inclusive tourism. This project will be producing the first Guide to Best Practices in Accessibility in 2025.



Tourism has reached 790 mn international tourists, generating a direct global economic impact of about US \$3.4 trillion in the first seven months of 2024

itself with the global challenge facing the industry and reinforces its commitment to the promotion of responsible tourism, inviting its professionals to strengthen their pride of belonging.

Tourism has reached 790 million international tourists, generating a

global tourism market, placing sustainability at the centre of its programme with the aim of contributing to solid economic growth and showcasing respectful practices with a positive impact that can be replicated to continue improving the quality of tourism activity.

TripJack's rewards program a hit

Travel agents are embracing TripJack's rewards programme as the perfect tool to leverage the seasonal momentum. Double Dhamaka offer by the company is proving to be the ultimate year-end catalyst for them.

Hazel Jain

With Christmas and New Year approaching, TripJack has hit the sweet spot with its Double Dhamaka offer. This rewards-packed programme is becoming the ultimate tool for agents to maximise their earnings during the peak travel period leading up to New Year 2025. The offer, effective from 1 September to 31 December 2024, is tailor-made for the high-demand season. With additional rewards of up to 1.25 per cent on hotel bookings and up to 0.6 per cent on flights, agents have the opportunity to earn substantial rewards. Unlimited rewards beyond the highest target slab ensure even greater rewards, as bookings for flights, hotels, cruises, and holiday packages soar. Travel or check-ins must be completed by 15 January 2025 to claim these rewards.

Vishal Lagad, Vice President, Sales & Strategy, TripJack, said that in a crowd-



Vishal Lagad
Vice President, Sales & Strategy
TripJack



Abdul Thingna
Vice President, Hotels & Holidays
TripJack

ed marketplace, TripJack distinguishes itself through a customer-first approach. "Our key differentiator, Check-In Guarantee Program, with a 99.6 per cent success rate, ensures peace of mind for agents. For the rare booking mishap, TripJack provides swift resolutions, including alternative accommodations or compensation—all within an hour and Best Rate Guarantee, for select top-performing hotels, assures unbeatable prices for

agents. If better rate is found on a competitor's platform, TripJack offers double the difference after verifying the claim," he explained.

Abdul Thingna, Vice President, Hotels & Holidays, TripJack, said, "Our hotel inventory has expanded significantly, reflecting a 30 per cent growth over the previous year. The platform boasts over 2 million hotels globally, with a focus on high-demand destinations and 4 and 5-star accommodations."

WAI, MoCA give wings to aspirations

Women in Aviation India (WAI), in association with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, hosted 'Giving Wings to Dreams 2024' awards at Roseate in New Delhi recently to celebrate 37 women shaping India's aviation landscape. Women from key aviation authorities, such as BCAS, DGCA, CISF, and Pawan Hans, were also recognised for their service excellence.



Indians going for repeat visits to France

Atout France India concluded the 6th edition of 'Explore France' in Goa recently. Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France India, said that Indians are not only making repeat visits to France, but also staying longer there, indulging in more local activities, and showing a preference for staying at local boutique hotels and apartments.



Hazel Jain

Atout France, the tourism development agency of France, concluded the 6th edition of its annual B2B showcase, Explore France, in Goa recently. A delegation of 23 key stakeholders representing the diversity of France's touristic offerings interacted with 50 members of the Indian travel trade fraternity over two days of pre-scheduled meetings. Agents at the workshop were from Mumbai, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Bengaluru, Aurangabad, and Chennai.

It not only included table-top meetings, but also a presentation for the French delegation on the Indian travel landscape and the ever-evolving profile of the Indian traveller by Neil Patil, COO, Veena World. There was an introduction also by NPCI Payments International and Lyra on the importance and integration of UPI as a seamless mode of digital payments and its

advancement in France. An interactive visa session was organised in association with the Consulate General of France in Mumbai and VFS Global to discuss visa procedures and address commonly asked queries by Sami Bouakaze, Consul and Deputy Head of Mission. Bouakaze revealed that the approval rate of visa applications from the Mumbai Consulate is 85-90 per cent.

The evolving Indian traveller
Sharing an update on how the India market is performing, **Sheetal Munshaw**, Director, Atout France India, said, "India is a growing source market for France and has been on a consistent upsurge for the last decade or more. Platforms such as these are critical to ensure that we do not lose momentum. It is mutually benefitting, as it allows us to introduce key stakeholders on both sides, facilitate dialogue, showcase the diversity of France and enable both sides on product



Sheetal Munshaw
Director
Atout France India

knowledge on the one hand and market trends and potential on the other. The showcase of the UPI also demonstrated the dynamism of the Indo-French relationship. There have been many takeaways on both sides, and we are confident that the Indian influx of tourists to France will continue to be on the upswing." Indian arrivals in 2019 was 700,000, and in 2023

it was almost 550,000, which means a 70-80 per cent recovery since pre-COVID.

Currently, UPI is available only at certain attractions in France, including the Eiffel Tower, but they are looking to expand their footprint. Moreover, a lot of exhibitors at the workshop were from and around Paris. "That has been our mantra for the last several years. It's all about how to go beyond Paris and the Eiffel Tower. Our endeavour has always been to do Eiffel Tower differently and Paris differently. Even for Indian visitors who revisit Paris, they spend four to five nights, and they want to feel like locals, they want to stay in local hotels and indulge in local experiences like wine tourism, tourism around food, outdoor activities like cycling, spending time in nature, and attend concerts. They are engaging in activities now rather than just sightseeing," Munshaw shared.

Even within Paris, they are doing things differently. "They are booking food tours, they are looking at fashion, using the personal shopper experience; there is a lot of differently done experiences even in Paris for those who keep coming

they were before, because of which they are going to different places. So, we hope they will use the trains a lot," she explained.

Trade partners' contribution
A lot of it comes from the industry itself. Munshaw said, "Our travel partners are a lot more exposed to France now than before. We are going to have some larger tour operators launch solo France itineraries for groups, which is new, adding new destinations. They are also going to change in terms of seasonality and launch packages for autumn and winter, which is something they have never done before. The same thing is happening with MICE. We are seeing a demand for newer destinations apart from Paris. They are also looking at places like Nice, Cannes, Toulouse, and Lyon. In terms of the FIT traveller, the mix is the most eclectic because you have as many different things that they do based on as many tourists as they are." ↴

Our travel partners are a lot more exposed to France now. We will have some larger tour operators launch solo itineraries for groups to France

back. We also have Rail Europe as an important partner to showcase what France has to offer in terms of trains. Indians are spending a longer time in France now than

Skål's new vision: Expansion & growth

Skål Club of Bombay (144) recently held a post-Diwali get-together for Skåleagues in Mumbai. The event was graced by Sanjeev Mehra, President, Skål India, who flew from Kolkata to give members an update on the new team's focus areas. Alongside him were Krishna Gopal, VP, Skål India and Burjis Mehta, President, Skål Club of Bombay (144).



IN MEMORIAM

Elegy for a travel agent

— For Anup Nair



Scatter my ashes by the Taj Mahal, where the marble glows, quiet, unbreakable, even in the midday heat. Let me become part of something that waits and stays.

Take a handful of me to the Gateway of India where the sea is restless, a lung filling, emptying, filling again. Where the salt air lingers, lifting and carrying, as if it knows how we all need to be a little lighter, a little freer in the wind.

At Amer Fort, find me in the sunburnt walls, The silence and patience, of the desert. I'd like to be small and steady there, to learn how sandstone holds its ground.

And then the Elephanta Caves, deep in the shadows of carved gods, that are only gods because they remember how to stand in darkness how to turn from stone into light, forever shifting, forever constant.

In Old Delhi, slip me into the market air, among the smells and colours and the heat, Stop for a moment by Jama Masjid, so you can lose yourself in the hum of it all, a city of voices holding its breath — every hope and prayer, floating up past the minarets, going somewhere I'll never know.

Let me drift to the surface of Nigeen Lake, like lilies pressing up, pushing against still water, trying to meet the mountains that lean in close Just a part of me, resting where the world is small and the sky is wide.

Finally, to the Arabian Sea, let me drift out— where every wave is both departure and return, and begin again, like everything we are— every lost thing, set free, coming home.

and when the dawn comes, I'll be there — quiet, not gone, exactly—just everywhere I wanted to be.

— By Neel Chaudhuri

Indians embrace winter adventures

▶ Contd. from page 23



Shравan Bhalla
Director
Highflyer

“ Since last year, we have seen travellers opting for destinations to enjoy snow activities like skiing, snow mobile experience, stay in a glass igloo or the Ice Hotel, Northern Lights experience, reindeer safari, as well as visiting Santa Claus town. A few of the winter destinations we have seen are Rovaniemi, Almaty, Germany, Norway, France, and Switzerland. A few have made bookings for Germany and France to enjoy Christmas in Christmas towns. ”

“ We have noticed a rising trend among Indian travellers, particularly from southern regions, choosing snow-covered destinations. This is especially evident among honeymooners and young adventure enthusiasts.



Narendra Bharti
Founder and CEO
The Holidays Club

Activities like the Chadar Trek in Leh are drawing participants from across India. With the growing interest, destinations like Himachal and Uttarakhand have great potential. ”

Compiled by TT Bureau

# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY		
EVENT TALK		
Published from: India Middle East		
DECEMBER 2024		
Date	Event	Time
2-5	International Luxury Travel Market 2024-France	9:00 am
3	South African Tourism Minister's meet-Delhi	11:00 am
3-8	16 th ATOAI Annual Convention	10:00 am
5	South African Tourism Minister's meet-Mumbai	11:00 am
5-7	International Tourism Trade Fair and Congress 2024-Turkey	9:00 am
6-8	India International Travel Mart Hyderabad 2024	11:00 am
6-8	India Travel Mart 2024-Lucknow	9:00 am
10	STB Webinar	3:00 am
12-13	Holiday Expo-Visakhapatnam 2024	9:00 am
17-19	Bengal Travel Mart 2024	10:00 am
18	CII Annual Tourism Summit 2024	9:00 am
20-21	6 th ITTA Convention	10:00 am
20-22	India International Travel Exhibition-Madurai 2024	4:00 pm
20-22	Tourism Fair Siliguri 2024	1:00 pm
JANUARY 2025		
11-12	Travel MICE and Corporate Show	10:00 am
16-19	Thai International Travel Fair 2025	9:00 am
16-19	Holiday Fair Vienna 2025	9:00 am
17-19	India International Travel Mart Cochin 2025	11:00 am

WAI cheers next-gen leaders

WAI, in partnership with the MoCA, felicitated 37 women achievers from across diverse aviation fields at its 'Giving Wings to Dreams 2024' programme in New Delhi recently. The event highlighted the contribution of the woman leaders.



Surbhi Sharma

Women in Aviation India (WAI), a non-profit organisation dedicated to advancing women in aviation and aerospace, in collaboration with the Ministry of Civil Aviation, hosted the third edition of its iconic awards, Giving Wings to Dreams 2024, at Roseate in New Delhi recently. The event honoured 37 women achievers whose contributions have significantly shaped India's aviation sector. The awards celebrated excellence across diverse aviation fields, including airside operations, terminal management, engineering, security, and flight operations. Women from key aviation organisations, such as BCAS, DGCA, CISF, and Pawan Hans, were also recognised for their service excellence.

Empowering women

The ceremony, attended by **Vumlunmang Vualnam**, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation,



Vumlunmang Vualnam
Secretary
Ministry of Civil Aviation

and IAS officials **Usha Padhee** and **Vipin Kumar**, highlighted India's burgeoning aviation infrastructure. Vualnam noted the exponential growth of the sector, with airports doubling from 74 to 157 in a decade, passenger numbers soaring to 22 crore annually, and aircraft fleets expected to grow to 1,400 within five years. "There is immense opportunity for women in the aviation sector to



Radha Bhatia
President, WAI &
Chairperson, Bird Group

become a vital part of this growth story," said Vualnam. He emphasised the government's commitment to integrating women into the drone industry and other emerging aviation fields, stressing that their participation is crucial for sustained industry momentum.

Inspiring future generations

Radha Bhatia, President, WAI and Chairperson, Bird Group, underlined

the significance of equanimous growth across all aviation verticals. "India has the largest number of women pilots globally, but we aim for balanced representation across the industry," she said.

Through initiatives like the Girls in Aviation Day programmes, WAI is reaching out to young girls in remote regions, introducing them to the world of aviation.

Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu, Minister of Civil Aviation, praised the WAI's efforts and encouraged young girls to explore the vast opportunities in aviation.

Next gen of aviation leaders

In addition to honouring industry stalwarts, Giving Wings to Dreams 2024 recognised 35 schoolgirls as 'Young Aviation Ambassadors'. These students received sponsorships for aviation and travel industry courses, further strengthening the pipeline of future leaders in the sector. 🐦



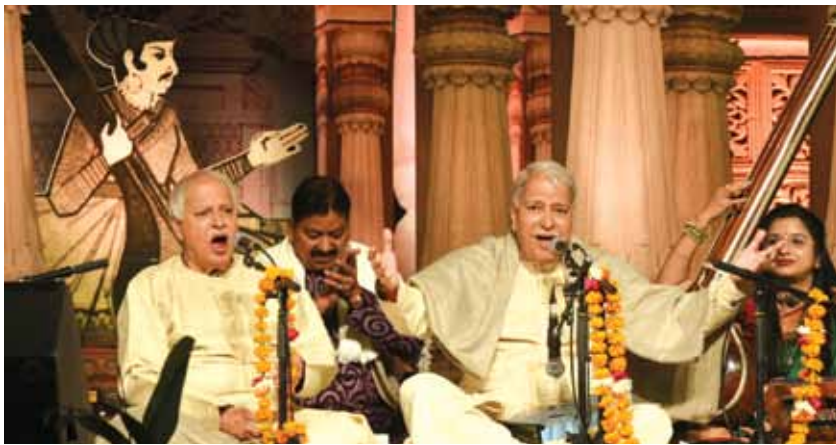
The heart of Incredible India

100th Tansen Samaroh in Madhya Pradesh



A Century of Music, a Lifetime of Inspiration

Heat of Incredible India, Madhya Pradesh is a kaleidoscope of rich cultural experiences, traditions, and history. The state has been a crossroads for civilizations for centuries and has woven a vibrant tapestry of customs, languages, and artistic expressions. Its annual cultural extravaganzas offer a captivating glimpse into this mesmerising mosaic. Madhya Pradesh's grand festivals are not merely celebrations; they are immersive experiences that let visitors dive deeper into the state.



100th Tansen Music Festival from 15-19 December

Madhya Pradesh beckons you to celebrate the life, legacy, and contributions of the legendary musician Tansen at the Tansen Music Festival. Renowned for its rich cultural heritage, Madhya Pradesh has made substantial contributions to Hindustani classical music. Gwalior, a UNESCO-designated Creative City of Music, is the annual venue for t h e

prestigious Tansen Festival. This musical extravaganza showcases the rich heritage of Indian classical music, attracting music enthusiasts, scholars, and artists from around the world. The festival's roots can be traced back to the early decades of the 20th century.

Over time these events grew in scale and scope and got institutionalised becoming a



regular feature on the cultural calendar of Madhya Pradesh. In recent years, the Tansen Music Festival has gained international recognition, attracti n g

participants and audiences from various countries.

As the Tansen Music Festival continues to evolve, Madhya Pradesh Culture Department and Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board are set to leave a mark. The state is lining up a pre-launch event in New Delhi, series of musical and thematic

exhibitions, week-long film festival on Tansen at Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal. Efforts of collaborating with the ICCR, Indian embassies abroad, and foreign embassies in India to organise international performances featuring artists from different countries is a landmark initiative to gain global recognition in the centennial year.

51st Khajuraho Dance Festival from 20-26 February 2025

The land of UNESCO World Heritage Site and renowned architectural pil-

with their rhythmic footwork and melodious ghunghrus. For adventure enthusiasts, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board offers a plethora of exciting activities.

Immerse in a Musical Odyssey in the Heart of India

This year's Tansen Music Festival promises an unparalleled experience, honouring the legacy of the maestro. Join us as we celebrate music, scholarship, and cultural exchange. In addition to these prominent festivals, Madhya Pradesh hosts many other cultural events that highlight the state's rich legacy. Festivals such as

Madhya Pradesh beckons you to celebrate the life, legacy, and contributions of the legendary musician Tansen at the Tansen Music Festival

grimage, Khajuraho resonates with the grace of classical dance. The Khajuraho Dance Festival will mark its 51st edition in February 2025, continuing its tradition of showcasing classical dance forms against the backdrop of the iconic temples of Khajuraho. Renowned classical dancers from across India converge here to enthrall audiences

Lokrang, Artichol, Ustad Allauddin Khan Sangeet Samaroh, Akhil Bhartiya Kalidas Samaroh, Pranati, Raag Amir, and Ghungru showcase the diverse cultural heritage of Incredible India. Whether you are a dance enthusiast, a music lover, or simply seeking an authentic cultural experience, Madhya Pradesh has something to offer everyone.



MOVEMENTS

THE KHYBER HIMALAYAN RESORT & SPA, GULMARG



The Khyber Himalayan Resort & Spa, Gulmarg, appoints **ABDEALI ZOOMKAWALA** as the Director of Operations. During his more than two decades of career in the hospitality industry, Zoomkawala has worked with renowned brands, such as The Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai and most recently with IFBE Ice Factory Ballard Estate. He has extensive experience in hotel management, pre-opening operations, and strategic leadership roles and a proven track record of achieving operational excellence.

HYATT PLACE AURANGABAD AIRPORT

Aurangabad



Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport has appointed **JOSHUA D'MELLO** as Assistant General Manager. In the pivotal role, D'mello will lead the hotel's operational efforts, offering exceptional guest experience while ensuring that the property meets the high standards associated with the Hyatt brand. He brings more than 24 years of diverse experience in the hospitality industry, having held various managerial positions at renowned hotels. His expertise in guest relations, team leadership and strategic operations has consistently contributed to the success of the properties he has managed.

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON PUNE-CHINCHWAD

Pune



DoubleTree by Hilton Pune-Chinchwad has appointed **KHIZER KHAN** as the Hotel Manager. With more than 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Khan brings a wealth of knowledge and a dynamic leadership approach to the role. He has worked with some of the esteemed brands in the industry, including Marriott in London Kensington, Hilton at London Heathrow Airport, and Hampton by Hilton in London Waterloo. In his new role, Khan will oversee all aspects of operations at DoubleTree by Hilton Pune-Chinchwad, with a focus on enhancing guest experiences, improving operational efficiency, and strengthening the hotel's reputation.

IBIS HOTELS

Bengaluru

NAJMA VARGHESE joins as the Multi Hotel Director of Sales for ibis Bengaluru Hebbal, ibis Bengaluru City Center, and ibis Bengaluru Hosur Road. With over 15 years of experience in sales management and business development, Varghese is celebrated for building lasting client relationships and expanding market reach. Expressing enthusiasm over her appointment, she said, "I am thrilled to join the ibis family and embrace this new opportunity. My goal is to support ibis Hotels' vision by fostering dynamic client partnerships and driving impactful business growth."



IRIS REPS

Mumbai

IRIS Reps has appointed **SUNIL NAIR** as the Sales & Marketing Head for South India. With more than 30 years of leadership in aviation and leisure travel industry, Nair has been an important player at industry giants like Jet Airways, Gulf Air, Revel Tours, and Kanoo Travels, where he pioneered innovative strategies that transformed customer experiences and boosted revenue growth. As IRIS Reps expands its footprint in the South Indian market, Nair's vision and leadership will drive greater success, offering new opportunities and partnerships for travel agents across the region.



MINOR HOTELS

India

Leading global hospitality group Minor Hotels has named industry veteran **OMAR ROMERO** as its Chief Development and Luxury Officer, a newly-created position, as the group continues its rapid global expansion. In his new role, Romero will drive the global development strategy of Minor Hotels, identifying new business opportunities, overseeing the planning and execution of projects, and managing relationships with key stakeholders. He will also play a pivotal part in shaping and supporting the curation of Minor Hotels' luxury brands, ensuring the delivery of exceptional experiences.



Mumbai

DIVYA BHAGAT takes on the role of Multi Hotel Director of Sales for ibis Mubai Vikhroli, ibis Navi Mumbai, and ibis Thane, bringing a unique blend of strategic insights and industry experience from her work with prestigious brands like The Oberoi Group and Pullman Gurgaon. Bhagat, who has previously led Accor's National Sales office in Mumbai, is keen to reinforce the brand's footprint in this highly competitive market. Reacting over her appointment, Bhagat said, "I look forward to building upon the strong foundation here by bringing fresh sales strategies that foster client relationships and drive growth."



IBIS STYLES MYSURU

Mysuru

ibis Styles Mysuru welcomes **GANESH RAM IYER** as its new Hotel Manager. With an impressive 21-year career in the hospitality industry, Iyer brings extensive expertise in enhancing operational efficiency, elevating guest satisfaction, and driving financial performance across luxury and midscale hotel segments. Prior to this, he served as Director of Operations at Novotel Chennai SIPCOT. His career also includes pivotal roles at prominent brands, such as Radisson, Holiday Inn, and Hyatt. Ganeshram, known for his energetic leadership, is skilled at crafting and implementing effective operational strategies.



NOVOTEL PUNE

Pune

Novotel Pune has appointed **SATISH VISHWAKARMA** as the Chief Engineer. With over 17 years of experience in engineering management within the hospitality sector, Vishwakarma brings a wealth of knowledge in energy management, manpower optimisation, project management, and sustainable building practices to the hotel. Prior to this, he held important positions at renowned establishments, including Jio World Centre, Taj Vivanta Hotel, Four Points by Sheraton, and JW Marriott Sahar Mumbai. His expertise spans across various facets of hotel engineering, including energy management and preventive maintenance.



Hyderabad

RAJESH DUDI joins as the Director of Sales for ibis Hyderabad, Hitec City, with an impressive 18-year career in hospitality sales and operations at renowned properties, including The Westin Hyderabad and Radisson Blu Banjara Hills. He is known for his ability to create strategic growth initiatives. Commenting on his appointment, Rajesh said, "I am excited to collaborate with our team to deliver exceptional guest experiences and grow the ibis brand in Hyderabad." His focus will be on strengthening ibis Hyderabad's competitive edge and fostering meaningful client partnerships.



FERNS N PETALS

New Delhi

Ferns N Petals (FNP), a leading name in the floral, gifting, and event management industries, has appointed **ABHISHEK SAKLANI** as the Head of Human Resources for its wedding, hospitality, and healthcare verticals. In the new role, Saklani will oversee HR initiatives for the company's varied segments: the wedding vertical, which includes FNP Weddings & Venues the newly launched FNP Fleur, and Shaadi Central; the hospitality vertical, featuring Udman Hotels & Resorts and premium catering service U Kitchen; and FNP's healthcare division, FNP Care, as well as the women-centric platform Women Listed.



THE LODHI

New Delhi

The Lodhi, New Delhi, has appointed **SHABAD AHUJA** as the Director of Food and Beverages. With over 15 years of experience in the hospitality sector, Ahuja is poised to elevate the culinary offerings and guest experiences at the hotel. In his new role, he will oversee all F&B operations, leading a talented team to deliver exceptional dining experiences while optimising financial performance and fostering innovative strategies to enhance guest satisfaction. He joins The Lodhi from Annamaya Holdings, where he served as GM at MA-HE Coastal Indian in the UK. Prior to this, he held key positions at JW Marriott Hotels in Bengaluru and New Delhi.



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'Aim to make India £1 bn market'

VisitBritain is doubling its efforts to attract more Indian visitors, capitalising on the country's booming economy, strong airline connectivity, and increasing interest in both cultural and rural experiences, reveals Patricia Yates, CEO, VisitBritain.

 Nisha Verma

India has long been a key market for Britain, but the current growth trajectory is impressive. "We have seen really strong growth from India—around 18 per cent up this year," Yates shared. This marks an exciting milestone, as the Indian market now contributes approximately £840 million to the UK economy, with projections for this to rise to £1 billion soon. "We are seeing fantastic demand from India, especially with the increasing number of direct flights connecting Indian cities to regional airports across Britain," Yates explained.

Starring Great Britain

In January 2025, VisitBritain will launch a major marketing campaign aimed at showcasing the UK's cultural richness through the popular films and TV shows.

"Our Starring Great Britain campaign is all about bringing the magic of British



Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, England

films and TV to life. Whether you are walking the streets of Bath like in Bridgerton or visiting locations from Peaky Blinders in Birmingham, we want visitors to feel like they are part of these cinematic landscapes," she said.

The campaign taps into a new, modern sensibility, appealing to the growing interest among Indian tourists in experiential travel. "People don't just want to look at landmarks—they want to be part of the experience. Whether it's visiting film sets or walking through picturesque British towns, we offer more than just sightseeing," Yates added.

Rise of regional Britain

A key aspect of VisitBritain's strategy is to move Indian tourists beyond the traditional London-centric itinerary. "We know that many Indian visitors are now seeking quieter, more authentic experiences," Yates said. For these travellers, the rolling countryside of Scotland, the charming lakes of Cumbria, or the historic beauty of Wales are drawing growing attention. For instance, VisitBritain has worked to promote the West Midlands, particularly Birmingham, which gained global attention following the Commonwealth Games. "The West Midlands has been a huge success, es-

pecially with Indian travellers. It's not only a vibrant city but also a gateway to the countryside, including Shakespeare's Stratford-upon-Avon. We are seeing more Indian travellers exploring these areas, enjoying both the heritage and the modern culture," Yates highlighted.


VisitBritain is working closely with Indian travel agents, offering them opportunities to visit the UK and explore new destinations

Moreover, there is a growing interest in cities like Manchester and Newcastle, which have yet to fully tap into the Indian market. In 2025, VisitBritain will bring Indian travel buyers to explore these newer destinations, helping them craft fresh itineraries that appeal to Indian tourists.

Trade engagement


One of the key aspects of VisitBritain's strategy is its focus on strengthening relationship with

Indian travel trade professionals. "The travel trade is hugely important for us in India, particularly when it comes to attracting high-end travellers," Yates noted. VisitBritain is working closely with Indian travel agents, offering them opportunities to visit the UK and explore new destinations, enabling them to better sell regional Britain to their clients.

A billion-pound market

Looking ahead, the future of the Indian market looks bright. As mentioned, VisitBritain aims to make India a billion-pound market within a few years. "With the booming Indian economy, strong airline connectivity, and the continued appeal of British culture, we believe we are on the right track. We are not just selling a destination; we are offering an experience," Yates said confidently.

In addition to these efforts, VisitBritain is also addressing practical concerns like visa processing. Yates highlighted that the UK's smooth visa processing system, particularly in India, has been a major factor in improving traveller confidence.

"The visas are being processed quickly, within the 15-day window, which is crucial for the trade," she explained. 



Patricia Yates
CEO, VisitBritain



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