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Mahakumbh: UP eyes 40 cr pilgrims from across the world

Uttar Pradesh Tourism is leaving no stone unturned to attract increased footfall for Mahakumbh 2025, for which the state is creating a number of accommodation options, transportation as well as guided tours.

Surbhi Sharma



Jaiveer Singh, Tourism Minister, UP (right) presents a portrait to Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Tourism, Gol (left) at Mahakumbh 2025 Prelude in Delhi

In a curtain raiser to the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, Uttar Pradesh Tourism recently organised 'Mahakumbh 2025 Prelude' in New Delhi to provide a glimpse into the divine essence of Prayagraj, the host city for the world's largest gathering of pilgrims. **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Minister of Tourism, Government of India and **Jaiveer Singh**, Minister of Tourism, Uttar Pradesh, senior officials from the central and state governments, along with dignitaries from various ministries, ambassadors, high commissioners from several countries, including Suriname, Malaysia, Seychelles, Nepal, and Switzerland, attended the event.

Scheduled to be held in Prayagraj from 13 January to 26 February 2025, the primary objective of the Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 is to highlight the largest congregation of faith, culture and rituals in the world. The event is expected to draw over 40 crore devotees from across the globe. Addressing the event, Shekhawat emphasised on India's unique spiritual heritage and

invited global tourists to experience the transformative power of the Maha Kumbh Mela. "We see this monumental event as an opportunity for cultural exchange. We are working diligently to provide all the support for accommodation, transportation, and guided tours around the mela grounds and in its vicinity, making the experience of each traveller as unique as it can get," he said.

Highlighting the event's inclusivity and diverse offerings, Singh said, "We aim to offer something for everyone at Maha Kumbh Mela

2025, whether it's heritage walks, water sports, or helicopter rides." He also made an appeal to the foreign visitors to witness the grandeur of the event, which, he said, will not only showcase India's cultural depth but also set new global benchmarks in religious tourism.

Outlining the infrastructural advancements, **Mukesh Kumar Meshram**, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Uttar Pradesh, said that an ultra-modern tent city near the Parade Ground featuring luxury accommodations, such as villas, Maharaja tents, and deluxe tents,

is under construction. "Additionally, 1,600 Swiss cottages are being set up in Arail, along with 200 cottages in Jhunsi and another 200 at Parade Ground to accommodate the influx of pilgrims. Thrilling activities like

Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 will not only showcase India's cultural depth but also set new global benchmarks in religious tourism

helicopter rides and water sports will further enhance the visitor experience," he added.

Marking the official commencement of the preparations for the grand gathering, the event featured an engaging exhibition, cultural performances, and the screening of films related to Maha Kumbh Mela 2025.

ITTA to discuss generational shift

The 6th ITTA Convention, to be organised in New Delhi from 20-21 December 2024 will bring together all stakeholders to deliberate on the industry challenges and opportunities.

Janice Alyosius



The Indian Tourist Transporters Association (ITTA) is all set to host its 6th convention at The Grand Hotel, New Delhi, from 20-21 December 2024. Under the theme 'Driving Excellence: Upgrading Transport

advance India's tourist and transport sector.



KS Sawhney
Hon. Secretary, ITTA & Chairman of the Convention Committee

KS Sawhney, Hon. Secretary, ITTA and Chairman of the Convention Committee, highlighted the significance of the gathering, saying, "We organise this convention every alternate year to foster a conducive atmosphere among tourist transport operators across India. This year, we are focusing on understanding the generational changes within the industry—a topic that resonates deeply with the evolving landscape of tourist transport."

for a Sustainable and Brighter Tomorrow," the two-day event aims to bring together leaders, stakeholders, and visionaries from the tourism and transport industries. The convention will provide a vital platform to discuss industry challenges, explore opportunities, and forge collaborations to

Reflecting on the sector's evolution, Sawhney described the transformation from the iconic Kali Pili Taxi era to today's sophisticated cab culture. "The term 'taxi' has given way to 'cab', which is perceived as modern and intellectual. This evolution mirrors the need

Contd. on page 10 ▶



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FAITH elects new office-bearers

The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality recently announced its new office-bearers for the 2024–2026 term. With Puneet Chhatwal re-elected as the Chairman, the new leadership is set to steer India's tourism and hospitality industry on the growth trajectory, aligning with the vision of PM Narendra Modi.



Surbhi Sharma

The Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality (FAITH) recently announced its new office-bearers for the 2024–2026 term. The elections for the new leadership team of FAITH, representing 10 associations from India's tourism and hospitality sector, concluded recently in New Delhi.

Puneet Chhatwal, MD and CEO, IHCL, continues as the Chairman. The Vice Chairmen positions are held by **Ajeet Bajaj** of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) and **Ajay Prakash** from the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI). **Rajiv Mehra** of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) and **Kanwarjeet Singh Sawhney** of the Indian Tourist Transporters Association (ITTA) have been appointed as General Secretary and Treasurer, respectively.



(L to R) Rajiv Mehra, Ajeet Bajaj, Puneet Chhatwal, Ajay Prakash and Kanwarjeet Singh Sawhney, the newly elected office-bearers of FAITH

Homa Mistry, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India, acted as the Returning Officer for the elections, ensuring a smooth and transparent process.

Vision for growth

Rajiv Mehra, speaking on behalf of the elected team, emphasised commitment to unified efforts for the advancement of India's tourism

and hospitality sector. "We aim to work cohesively to realise Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision and achieve the ambitious targets he has set for the industry," he said.

FAITH, formed in May 2023, was established as a unified voice for the tourism, travel, and hospitality industries in India. It serves as the

policy federation for 10 national associations, including ADTOI, ATOAI, FHRAI, HAI, IATO, ICPB, IHHA, ITTA, TAAI, and TAFI, with AIRDA as a cause partner.

Advocacy & policy

FAITH has played a pivotal role in shaping tourism policies in India. Its engagement with the central and

state governments has influenced critical initiatives.

Past initiatives

FAITH has successfully organised global buyer-seller meets to boost India's tourism sector. Notable events include GET India 2015, held in partnership with the Ministry of Commerce and India Tourism Mart

editions held from 2018 to 2021, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism. These events have significantly contributed to promoting India as a global tourism destination.



Elections for the new leadership team of FAITH, representing 10 associations from India's tourism and hospitality sector, concluded recently in New Delhi

Looking ahead

Under the newly elected leadership, the association is poised to address emerging challenges and harness opportunities in tourism and hospitality. ↴

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Family trips to rule the roost in '25

Travellers have a strong focus on relaxation, family-oriented trips, and the excitement of discovering new destinations, reveals a survey conducted by digital travel platform Agoda. The survey highlights seven key trends based on travellers' preferences.

And it's a wrap!

As the curtain falls on 2024, it's the perfect moment to take stock of a year that has been both challenging and rewarding for the travel and tourism industry. This year was a testament to the sector's resilience, with domestic tourism serving as the backbone of recovery. While foreign tourist arrivals started slow, the year ended on a positive note, hinting at brighter prospects for international travel in 2025.

Indian travellers embraced experiential holidays like never before, favouring unique and immersive experiences over traditional itineraries. From chasing the Northern Lights in Scandinavia to indulging in wellness retreats, the desire for meaningful travel became a dominant trend. Short, frequent trips and offbeat destinations also gained popularity, while the MICE segment roared back to life with large-scale events and conferences.

On the flip side, challenges persisted. Visa processing bottlenecks, infrastructure limitations, and rising travel costs reminded us that there's still plenty of room for improvement. Yet, the industry's adaptability shone through. Stakeholders doubled down on sustainability, digital innovation, and collaboration, paving the way for future growth.

2024 also saw the rise of niche segments like medical tourism, religious tourism, and even sports and music travel, reflecting a shift towards specialised experiences. Meanwhile, domestic hotspots and international favourites like South-east Asia continued to attract Indian travellers despite fluctuating airfares and hotel prices.

As we wrap up this last issue of 2024, the industry looks ahead with renewed optimism. The upcoming year promises a stronger focus on sustainability, infrastructure development, and policies that will shape the future of Indian tourism.

Here's to celebrating the progress made in 2024 and welcoming 2025 with open arms. Let's make it a year to remember!

TT Bureau

The survey, 2025 Travel Trends, highlights the key factors set to shape the travel landscape in Asia in the coming year. Its findings indicate that travellers are prioritising quality time with loved ones and seeking respite from daily routines. The survey also underscores the growing interest in exploring uncharted territories. Noteworthy is the popularity of theme parks, with one in eight respondents expecting to go on a trip to visit one.



More than a third of travellers (34 per cent) plan to travel with family in 2025

Seven key insights from the survey:

❖ **The more the merrier:**

Traveling with family tops the list
For many travellers, family time equals quality time. More than a third of travellers (34 per cent) plan to travel with family in 2025. Indonesians are the most fervent family travellers of all, with no less than 58 per cent expecting to go on a multi-generational trip with loved ones. Indians follow closely with 30 per cent opting for family trips. This trend is followed by couples

and friends (33 per cent). One in five (20 per cent) gets their travel inspiration from social media. About 28 per cent of Indians consider loyalty programmes and value deals an important factor when planning trips. This trend is reflective of the growing collaboration between banks, credit card firms, and travel platforms to offer better deals in the Indian market seen this year.

❖ **Computer says 'yes': Tech assisting in travel planning**

Technology is playing a pivotal

role in shaping travel plans. A substantial majority of travellers (80 per cent) plan to use travel apps, while about one in eight (12 per cent) are interested in virtual reality tours. Indian travellers appear to be most tech-savvy, with nine out of 10 respondents claiming the use of travel apps when booking a trip.

❖ **In and out of office:**

Travelling on and off the clock

In addition to traditional business trips, which 28 per cent of respondents expect to embark on, the survey also picked up on the emergence of digital nomads, borderless workers who work remotely. One in 25 expects to work remotely in 2025, with a focus on combining work and leisure, as more companies adopt flexible work arrangements. Most prospective digital nomads in the region are from the Philippines, where one in fourteen travellers expect to work while travelling.

❖ **#Inspiration: Many ways to discover new destinations**

There is nothing quite as exciting as exploring a place for the very first time. About 84 per cent of travellers expect to visit new destinations in 2025. Travel inspiration can come from many sources, including personal interests and hobbies (71 per cent), great value deals (56 per cent), and recommendations from

❖ **Life is a rollercoaster: Theme parks are a reason to travel**

Asia's many theme parks - Disney in Tokyo, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, Lotte World in Seoul, Universal in Osaka and Singapore, Ferrari

The survey findings indicate that travellers are prioritising quality time with loved ones and seeking respite from daily routines

World in Abu Dhabi, to name a few - are a major draw for year-round tourism. Over one in eight travellers (13 per cent) expect to travel specifically to visit a theme park in 2025. The UAE and Singapore are among the most popular destinations for Indians seeking thrilling theme park experiences.



Budget considerations remain a key factor for the travellers

(23 per cent), and solo travellers (19 per cent) in terms of most popular travel groupings across Asian travellers.

❖ **Easy does it: Relaxation is the top travel motivation, by far**

Escaping from the hustle and bustle of daily life is by far the most important reason to travel, according to the survey. About 75 per cent of respondents cited relaxation as their most important travel motiva-

tion. For Indians, this is the leading travel motivation with 80 per cent of the respondents expressing their desire for relaxation when on vacation. Regionally, visiting family and friends follows in second (38 per cent), with cultural exploration in third (35 per cent).

❖ **Travel for less: Journey more, spend smart**

Budget considerations remain a

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₹800 cr to boost adventure tourism in India: MOT

The 16th ATOAI Convention, held in Tawang district of Arunachal Pradesh, unveiled an ambitious roadmap to position India as a global hub for sustainable adventure tourism. The association's strategy aimed to attract global adventurers while preserving local heritage.



Janice Alyosius from Tawang

The 16th ATOAI Convention, held from 3-8 December 2024 in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, showcased how strategic initiatives, robust infrastructure development, and sustainable practices can position India as a global leader in adventure tourism.

During the convention, ATOAI launched the Roadmap & Toolkit for Arunachal Pradesh, presenting the state as a model for sustainable adventure tourism. The initiative aims to enhance Arunachal's identity as the 'Last Shangri-La' by integrating ecological, cultural, and technological advancements. It promises a balanced approach to delivering pristine experiences while preserving local heritage.

Pema Khandu, Chief Minister, Arunachal Pradesh, emphasised the state's strategic push towards high-value, low-volume adventure tourism. He highlighted a key realisation: "High-value, low-volume tourism, such as adventure tourism, is what truly pays back to society. It contributes significantly to the local economy, while leaving a very low footprint."

The Chief Minister further highlighted the Vibrant Village Programme and the partnership with the Indian Army to promote adventure tourism in border areas. Khandu revealed that two major trekking routes are already in plan-



Pema Khandu, CM, Arunachal Pradesh, lights the lamp at the 16th ATOAI Convention in Tawang

ning, with the Trans-Himalayan trekking trail seen as a promising opportunity for global tourists.

Mugdha Sinha, Director General of Tourism, Government of India, shed light on the Ministry of Tourism's strategic initiatives to boost India's adventure tourism sector. Speaking virtually, Sinha emphasised the country's potential to become a global destination for adventure sports. "Adventure sports are a key anchor activity for attracting tourists, and we want people from across the world to experience the diverse adventure offerings India has," she said, highlighting the government's role in creating a framework for growth.

Sinha outlined several key initiatives aimed at developing adventure tourism across the country. "Through initiatives like Swadesh Darshan and the Special Assis-

tance to States for Capital Investment (SASKI) scheme, we have focused our attention on developing the adventure tourism circuit," she said. The ministry is working on both new itineraries and enhancing existing destinations, ensuring that they are 'adventure-ready' through investments in infrastructure that guarantee safety, sustainability, and responsible tourism practices. A major focus is on developing wildlife tourism circuits in the country. "We are spending about ₹200 crore to develop two new wildlife trails," Sinha revealed. The ministry is also working on several new adventure tourism circuits. "There will be a total allocation of over ₹800 crore for these projects," said Sinha.

Ajeet Bajaj, President, ATOAI, outlined a vision for the growth and development of adventure

tourism in India. "Our vision is to have our country ranked among the top 10 destinations for adventure tourism, specifically for responsible adventure tourism, in the next 10 years," he said.

Bajaj, citing the ATOAI's comprehensive safety guidelines and initiatives to train trip leaders in responsible tourism practices, said

Adventure sports are a key anchor activity for attracting tourists, and we want people from across the world to experience the diverse adventure offerings India has

that India is firmly on the path to achieve the vision. "We are investing significantly in training our trip leaders in responsible adventure tourism, while also sensitising them to act as guardians of our natural heritage," he added.

The 17th ATOAI Convention will take place in Madhya Pradesh in 2025. The announcement was made by **Dr Mohan Yadav**, Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh, through a special video message during the closing ceremony in Tawang. 📌

Lakshadweep Tourism case study unveils path to harmony between People, Planet, and Prosperity

As we celebrate World Tourism Day 2024, with its theme of "Tourism and Peace", a compelling new case study titled 'Tides of Change: The Story of Lakshadweep Tourism' is capturing global interest. Released in July 2024 in the renowned Tourism Cases by CABI, UK, this study is authored by Dr Aditi Choudhary and Mahima Gopalkrishna from the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management (IITTM), Noida. "Tides of Change" is a comprehensive examination of Lakshadweep's tour-



ism development, the first of its kind to explore the balance between tourism expansion and the sustainability

of these pristine islands. The study delves into the interplay between policymakers, local communities, cultural preservation, and ecological conservation, offering a model of destination stewardship. This model aligns seamlessly with the 2024 theme, demonstrating how tourism can be a force for peace by fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship.

Lakshadweep, with its delicate ecosystems and vibrant cultural heritage, should be developed as

a prime example of how tourism can support local economies while promoting social harmony and environmental care.

This case study provides a valuable framework for Indian tourism stakeholders, showcasing how responsible tourism practices can lead to sustainable development in vulnerable island environments. It is an essential resource for researchers, policymakers, and tourism professionals. The full case study is available at CABI Digital Library.

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Tourism News

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Air India orders 100 Airbus aircraft, comprising 10 wide-body A350 and 90 narrow-body A320

Global tourism is on mend to pre-pandemic levels; 1.1 billion tourists travelled internationally in Q3 2024

Meetings, incentives and conferences comprise 60% of India's MICE industry, 22% is international: MOT

Indian carriers to become increasingly relevant in future, both in India and globally, account for around 46% of international traffic in India: Travelpoort

Centre sanctions ₹3,295 crore for 40 tourism projects to transform & boost lesser-known sites into iconic spots

Himanshu Patil new OTOAI President

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India has welcomed a new leadership team following its elections on 5 December 2024. Led by Himanshu Patil, the team brings fresh energy and strategic focus to promote outbound tourism growth across India, with strengthened governance and a vision for enhanced regional outreach.



The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) elected a new leadership team in the elections held on 5 December 2024. The new team, set to serve from 2024 to 2026, brings a fresh vision to propel outbound tourism in India to greater heights.

Himanshu Patil, Director, Kesari Tours, was elected as the President, with **Shravan Bhalla** from High Flyer serving as Vice President. **Sidharth Khanna** from Khanna Enterprises (Regd.) was elected as General Secretary, while **Monia Kapoor** from Travel O Holidays was chosen as Joint Secretary. **Gurdeep Singh Gujral** from Gujral Tours and Travels was appointed as the Treasurer.

The election process was managed by **Sanjay Datta**, Managing Director, Airborne Holiday, who



Newly-elected office-bearers of the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI)

served as the Election Officer for the OTOAI elections. Speaking about his vision for the association, Patil, said, "The aim is to change the perception and to grow the association pan-India, especially in the Western region and the Southern side. The way OTOAI is working, we will do well in both these areas."

One of the key concerns that the association is taking up with the Government of India is Good and

Aim is to change the perception and to grow the association pan-India, especially in the Western region and the Southern side

Services Tax (GST). Commenting on this, Patil said, "That remains a key priority, particularly regarding GST. We are engaging with tax authorities and the finance ministry, presenting our case ahead of the upcoming budget. This remains on our agenda, and we are actively pursuing it."

The six-member Executive Committee (EC) for the 2024-2026 term comprises **Riaz Munshi, Adl Abdul Karim, Ankush Nijhawan,**

Rohit Shorey, Vineet Gopal, and Vinayak Laud.

The new leadership team officially began their duties on 6 December 2024. OTOAI has expressed its gratitude to the outgoing leadership for their outstanding contributions, which included organising impactful events, forming strategic partnerships, and signing multiple MoUs that expanded the association's footprint.

From 'Kali Pili Taxi' to cab era

► Contd. from page 5

for our association to adapt and modernise, elevating the image of transporters from traditional perceptions to professional service providers," he added.

The convention is expected to host recognised tourist transport operators approved by the

erations. Luxury car brands like Lexus, Mercedes, and BMW will showcase their latest products and extend exclusive offers to participants, while the Ministry of Tourism's Tourism Mitra programme will spotlight skill enhancement for transporters and drivers to better assist tourists and foster a culture of helpful-

are platforms for members to gain insights, forge collaborations, and drive this transformation."

ITTA, with its 37-year legacy, has been at the forefront of advocating for the industry, addressing critical challenges, and building capacity among its members. From resolving retrospective VAT issues in Delhi to training over 2,000 drivers, the association has been instrumental in shaping the

The convention is expected to host recognised tourist transport operators approved by the Ministry of Tourism from several regions

ness on the road. The agenda will also feature sessions on banking and insurance, offering practical solutions tailored to the industry's needs.

Sawhney also underscored the association's mission, saying, "Today, the term 'transporter' symbolises professionalism and quality service. Our conventions

sector. The ITTA Convention 2024 is not just a meeting of minds; it is a celebration of progress and a commitment to innovation. With a blend of traditional values and modern advancements, this event aims to pave the way for a brighter, more dynamic future for India's tourist transport sector.



Ministry of Tourism from several regions, including Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Chennai, Cochin, Hyderabad, Gorakhpur, Agra, and Jaipur. Attendees will engage in enriching discussions on topics like the generational transitions in the industry, where family-run businesses will share insights on adapting to challenges, such as social media and digital op-

Taiwan unveils brand campaign

Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA) has launched a new global brand positioning campaign, and logo, Version 3.0 titled 'Taiwan – Waves of Wonder' to reinforce Taiwan's 'post-pandemic tourism profile'.



Inviting visitors to 'engage now' to experience Taiwan in all its colours and across four-seasons, the new campaign aims to drive demand, accelerate inbound tourism growth, and fully revital-



mountains, oceans, highways and railways, presenting a wave-like design to convey the seasonal highlights of the des-

development of Taiwan's tourism industry. The campaign showcases Taiwan in all its hues, from modern tourism infrastructure and landmarks, great outdoors and activities, pristine nature, architectural and cultural heritage, to exotic cuisines and immersive culinary experiences, vibrant nightlife, shopping, music, entertainment and its vibrant festivals, among others, to position Taiwan as round-the-year destination.

TTA plans to fully broadcast its new brand campaign in all its global destination marketing campaigns and through leading international travel exhibitions that it participates across the various tourism source markets. It will integrate its marketing plans for each market.

The campaign will be unleashed targeting enhanced destination awareness and shape perceptions while positioning Taiwan with messages like 'Taiwan is a high-quality tourism destination' and that 'all four seasons are tourist seasons'.



The new campaign aims to drive demand and revitalise country's tourism sector

ise country's tourism sector. The campaign also aims to drive 10 million international tourist arrivals this year, eyeing a significant growth over last year's 6.48 million tourist arrivals.

The new version of the brand integrates images of Taiwan's

tionation showing that Taiwan is diverse and beautiful, while emphasising its year-round hospitality towards visitors. The logo adopts the orange tones of sunrise and morning light to not only align with the 'warmth and vitality of the previous brand', but also to symbolise the future

Collabs, digital aid ruled in 2024

With 2024 coming to an end, importance players from the India's tourism and hospitality industry share their experiences and learning from the past to chart the future course of action. From fostering collaboration and boosting digital capabilities to enhancing infra and sustainability, the leaders highlight the opportunities and challenges that shaped the industry this year.



Rajiv Mehra
President,
IATO

“First and foremost, there should be peace in the world, which is essential for the tourism industry. If there is peace globally, tourism will grow steadily day by day. My expectations are that, by 31 March 2025, we should achieve the same arrival figures we had in March 2020. Thereafter, we can focus on increasing those numbers further. Hotel rates should stabilise, airfare should stabilise, and government should support tourism.”

“Taking charge as the President of TAAI is a moment of great honour and responsibility. After assuming office, we initiated the launch of a Tax Cell to provide guidance on GST, TCS, and other financial concerns. Build-



Sanjeev Mehra
President
SKAL International India

“We have seen a lot of new resorts, hotels, and new destination cropped up within India, along with a growth in CIS countries, such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Belarus in 2024. Apart from this, we have started an initiative ‘Young SKAL’ to felicitate young chefs in India. Our target is to take the number of members from 1,300 to 1,700-1,800 by the year-end. We are all set to open clubs in Surat, Ahmedabad and Srinagar.”

“First, we noticed an increase in the number of women's groups visiting places all around Malaysia. This is a reflection of a larger worldwide trend where women are increasingly valuing safety, flexibility, and customised



Gajesh Girdhar
National Coordinator
NIMA

“One of our biggest challenges for this year is the lack of availability of MICE professionals who can handle the MICE groups. Addressing the issue, we initiated training programmes at various levels from universities to train tourism students. MICE segment represents a vast and diverse sector of the tourism industry, encompassing inbound, outbound, and domestic tourism. Collaboration among various associations is essential.”

“Experiential holidays continue to dominate tourism trends. Indian visitors coming to France are now keen to discover new regions, immersive experiences and spend more time discovering France. We have also seen



Sunil Kumar
President
TAAI

ing stronger bridges with airlines. We are working on solutions to mitigate challenges, such as financial security concerns and accountability in tax credit reflections.”



Noriah Jaafar
Director
Tourism Malaysia in Mumbai Office

itineraries when seeking experiences through travel. Malaysia is a popular destination for this category because of its varied options, which include wellness retreats.”



Sheetal Munshaw
Director - India
Atout France

a significant increase in the number of incentives taking place in France. The country is gaining popularity as a shopping and luxury destination among Indian travellers.”



Ved Khanna
President
ADTOI

“ADTOI has over 1,000 members pan-India today. However, the percentage of the MOT-approved members is not even 10 per cent. We are constantly representing and protecting the interest of our members who are rendering services in the domestic tourism sector. After assuming the office as President, I formed a committee and heading it with the prime focus to bring the number of MOT-approved tour operators above 200.”

“Expedia Group's Travel Agent Affiliate Program (TAAP) saw dynamic shifts in agent needs and traveller behaviors. As the most used booking platform by travel agents in major markets like the USA, Australia, and Germany, Expedia



Ajeet Bajaj
President
ATOAI

“At the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India, our vision is to position India among the top-10 global destinations for adventure tourism by 2033. We are committed to working closely with all stakeholders to achieve this goal. At the heart of our efforts is a National Board for Adventure Tourism, and we are collaborating with the MOT to promote the growth of responsible adventure tourism across the country.”

“Year 2024 brought significant transformation to India's hospitality sector, characterised by remarkable recovery and robust growth. A notable increase in domestic tourism drove high demand for hotels, resorts, and



Abhishek Sonthalia
Managing Director
Turtle Down Under

“In 2024, Indian travellers showed a growing interest in experiential tourism, looking for deeper engagement through personalised itineraries. This trend was evident in popular destinations like Australia and New Zealand, where Indian tourists increasingly favoured activities that allowed them to go beyond traditional sightseeing. Australia saw a remarkable boost in MICE tourism, with two major events.”

“In 2024, Indian travellers showcased a growing preference for experiential rail travel, seeking unique journeys that go beyond standard itineraries. There was also a marked interest in offbeat destinations, with travellers increasingly



Robin Lawther
Vice President
Expedia TAAP

TAAP's activity serves as a good barometer for the industry as a whole. If one thing is clear, it's that travel is indeed back. We find that there is a rise in solo travel.”



MP Bezbaruah
Secretary General
HAI

alternative accommodations. Foreign tourist arrivals were less than expected but the numbers are picking up. The sector has been reshaped by a few key trends.”



Srijit Nair
General Manager - EMEA & India
Rail Europe

opting for unexplored locations. Key takeaways from 2024 include a rising demand for sustainable travel options and shift towards regional rail routes.”

Contd. on page 17 ▶

Japan expects 2 lakh+ Indians in 2024

Japan expects to cross 2 lakh Indian tourists by 2024-end, says Ryo Bunno, Executive Director, Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO), Delhi Office. The NTO conducted a three-city India roadshow - in New Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai - from 18 to 22 November 2024, to promote Japan as a prime travel destination among Indian trade.



UK takes curated approach for India

VisitBritain is keen to capitalise on the growth trajectory of India's outbound tourism. Gavin Landry, Executive Vice President and International Director, VisitBritain, sheds light on their approach to strengthening ties with Indian travel operators, crafting bespoke itineraries, and fostering partnerships to drive mutual growth.



Nisha Verma

The UK offers a wealth of opportunities for Indian travel operators across segments, including luxury to group travel and MICE. VisitBritain's proactive approach—built on collaboration, innovation, and market-specific campaigns—presents a clear path for mutual growth. Highlighting the same, **Gavin Landry**, Executive Vice President and International Director, VisitBritain, claims that India is a market with unparalleled potential. "The Indian market is pivotal to our international tourism strategy," he shared.



Gavin Landry
Executive Vice President and
International Director, VisitBritain

local operators and travellers," he added.

Market-specific strategies

VisitBritain tailors its approach to each market, focusing on local preferences. "In the US, we highlight heritage and royalty, while in China, it's luxury and guided tours. For India, the emphasis is on Bollywood, cricket, and family travel. Adapting to cultural nuances ensures we resonate with

Emphasising the increasing significance of Indian travellers, he quoted VisitBritain's data, saying that India ranks among the fastest-growing outbound markets, with travellers known for their extended stays and higher-than-average spending. "We see tremendous scope in the Indian market, not



VisitBritain tailors its approach to each market, focusing on local preferences

just for leisure tourism but also for MICE," he said.

Collaborative campaigns

Recognising the role of Indian travel agents and tour operators, VisitBritain is focused on strengthening B2B collaborations. "We aim to work closely with Indian travel trade partners to design bespoke itineraries that align with the expectations of Indian travellers," he explained.

Digital innovations

In a competitive travel market, digital platforms have become indispensable for travel operators. VisitBritain is investing heavily in digital engagement to make its content accessible and relevant for Indian trade professionals. "Our B2B portal offers a suite of resources, including itineraries and insights into traveller behaviour," he shared. The organisation also collaborates with Indian airlines,

OTAs, and DMCs to promote seamless travel experiences. "We want to empower Indian operators with tools and partnerships that drive conversion," he underlined.

Tapping emerging segments

Landry sees immense potential in niche markets within India, such as luxury travel, student groups, and adventure tourism. "Indian millennials and Gen Z are leading the charge, seeking unique experienc-

es such as hiking in the Lake District or enjoying football matches in Manchester," he said.

We (VisitBritain) are collaborating with airlines to enhance flight routes and frequencies between key Indian cities and the UK

Boosting connectivity

Direct air connectivity remains a key factor in boosting tourism numbers. "We are collaborating with airlines to enhance flight routes and frequencies between key Indian cities and the UK," Landry said. Improved visa processes and trade-friendly policies are also part of the conversation. 🇮🇳

River cruising next big thing for Indians

As Indian travellers seek unique experiences, VIVA Cruises, in partnership with Global India Reps, sees an untapped opportunity in river cruising. With tailored itineraries, strategic tie-ups, and a focus on agent education, they promise to open new horizons in cruise tourism while catering to India's growing outbound market.



Surbhi Sharma

As India's outbound tourism market grows exponentially, river cruising—a niche yet unexplored avenue—holds immense potential. In an exclusive interaction with **Rony Broun**, Regional Vice President - Sales & Marketing, VIVA Cruises and **Ashish Saran**, Co-Founder & Business Head, Global India Reps, share insights on how they are navigating this uncharted territory to captivate Indian travellers.



Rony Broun
Regional Vice President - Sales &
Marketing, VIVA Cruises

Tapping into Indian market

Explaining their strategies of promoting VIVA Cruises in India and attracting Indian travellers, Broun said, "This is our first major step into the Indian market. Our initial objective is to feel the pulse of the market and gauge interest in river cruising. We are confident that the curiosity is there. Our current approach involves collaborating with travel agents who will promote our product. Simultaneously, we are learning from these agents to

understand the specific preferences and needs of Indian travellers. This exploratory phase is crucial for creating a tailored experience."

Collaborating with travel agents

Shedding light on how they are engaging with the travel trade partners in India to boost their business, Broun said, "We are offering a competitive starting

commission of 12 per cent, with the potential for additional incentives based on performance. This is an attractive proposition to motivate agents to explore the river cruise segment."

Our initial objective is to feel the pulse of the market and gauge interest in river cruising. We are confident that the curiosity is there

On the other hand, Saran emphasised, "Our strategy includes multiple touchpoints. Beyond commission incentives, we welcome agents to experience our cruises first-hand at subsidised rates. Joint



Ashish Saran
Co-Founder & Business Head
Global India Reps

marketing collaborations, such as co-branded promotions via websites or brochures, are also on the table. We are focused on creating a robust partnership ecosystem that benefits both parties."

Understanding preferences

While sea cruises are already popular among Indians, river cruising is relatively untapped. "River cruises

offer a unique experience. Indians love exploring multiple cities, and river cruises provide the perfect blend of convenience and adventure, eliminating the hassle of constant packing and unpacking," he said.

Our strategy includes multiple touchpoints. Beyond commission incentives, we welcome agents to experience our cruises first-hand

According to him, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Antwerp, and Brussels are particularly promising destinations, alongside Paris with its Seine River cruises and the Danube covering Vienna and Budapest.

Offerings & expansion plans

Unveiling their plans for fleet expansion, new itineraries and seasonal packages, Broun said, "We offer specialised Christmas market cruises in Germany and Austria, along with New Year itineraries. These packages can be further customised with agents to suit the Indian market's preferences. Expansion and innovative offerings will depend on the market's response, but we are optimistic about introducing more exciting options."

Role of education

Education is paramount. The agent must be educated because outbound travel towards the Europe has always been a B2B domain. "Unlike single-destination trips, European river cruises often span multiple cities and regions, such as the Rhine Valley, Rhone, and Danube," said Saran, adding that agents must learn the nuances of river cruises to pitch the product in a better way. 🇮🇳

Exploring France beyond Paris

The repeat Indian visitor to France is charting newer territories, aiming for a more immersive experience in the country. They are now keen on indulging in winter activities, exploring the countryside, staying longer and opting to add a more local flavour. **TRAVELTALK** speaks to six key agents in six cities of India to find out more.



Karan Vakharia
Chief Operating Officer
Pathfinders Holidays (Ahmedabad)

“We have recently started France as a part of the itinerary but not as a whole of the itinerary. Now that we have made direct contacts it will make it easier for us to get clarity about the product and sell

“There are a few regions in France which are new for us, that we have not promoted to our clients. We predominantly keep selling Paris and the French Riviera, but there are other regions that have come up that we want to sell. For instance, skiing we have always tried to focus on Courchevel. But we met Val Thorens ski resort in India recently.”



Shweta Machhar
Co-Founder
Visteria (Aurangabad)

France as a mono destination. Right now, my clients are staying only for four to six nights in France.”



Swaytank Maheshwari
Managing Director
Rainbow Vacations (Jaipur)

“For the Jaipur market, I believe new cities like Marseille and Lyon will work. These days, clients have so much exposure and information about destinations and if we do not suggest these kinds of unique experiences, we will not be able to keep up with them. There is a huge demand for solo France itineraries for seven to nine nights.”

“Val Thorens is a new destination for us and it's an interesting alternative to destinations in Switzerland with more family-based activities here. Many of the French sellers have been visiting us in Bengaluru,



Supriya Kandhari
Managing Director
Chrysalis Holidays (Bengaluru)

so we know them. But it is always good to know what is new, as we can keep itineraries updated.”



Raveesh Khullar
Senior Category Manager
Pickyourtrail (New Delhi)

“I felt Sodexo was an interesting seller for France. Sodexo Live! Has been selected by the French Tennis Federation as its exclusive marketing partners for Roland-Garros hospitality programmes from 2023 to 2026. This is great because we get a lot of requirements from clients for sporting events around the world.”

“We do sell a lot of France in Goa, mainly because Lourdes is one of the key religious destinations that we sell besides Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fátima in Portugal. We also add leisure activities



Sanjeev Mendes
Aury Mendes
Representations (Goa)

in the itinerary, including Nice, the south of France, or the Cote D'Azur.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

Spotlight on trade partnerships

Namaste Dwaar is a rural wellness resort nestled close to Delhi. Its rural vibe is enhanced by the fact that its team constantly works towards enhancing the village experience at its property and keeps updating the travel trade about it. Erika Rathi, Director, Namaste Dwaar Resort shares details with **TRAVELTALK**.



Namaste Dwaar is a rural wellness resort nestled close to Delhi, offering a harmonious escape where guests can reconnect with nature and well-being. “We blend ancient Ayurvedic principles, the knowledge of mudras, and modern wellness to create immersive, personalised experiences. Our unique position as a countryside retreat is amplified by our lush herbal garden and vast farmlands that supply fresh, healing ingredients used in our wellness treatments. With an emphasis on authentic, connected experiences, we offer a peaceful alternative to conventional urban wellness centres,” says **Erika Rathi**, Director, Namaste Dwaar Resort.

The unique experience
Saying that the resort stands out for its authentic rural experience,



Erika Rathi
Director
Namaste Dwaar Resort

where guests immerse themselves in natural beauty and simplicity, Rathi adds, “Our offerings range from farm-to-table meals and sustainable practices to a variety of wellness and retreat options, including women's retreats, senior citizen programmes, and exclusive 'Getting Back to Roots' experience. We emphasise meaningful connections, making Namaste

Dwaar ideal for intimate, family-oriented weddings and events, alongside leisure travel.”

For small celebrations

Namaste Dwaar is increasingly popular for small, intimate celebrations and weddings. “Our wedding venues—including Buddha Lawn, Char Bagh, Gher Villa, and Poolside—are designed to foster closeness and authenticity, creating cherished memories for families looking for meaningful celebrations. We are also building 16 new rooms with a central pavilion, specifically for families desirous of a shared experience,” she shares.

Wellness tourism growth

Since the pandemic, wellness tourism has gained traction, with a noticeable demand for city detox retreats, mindful getaways, and immersive wellness experiences, claims Rathi. “Guests are now more inclined towards sustainable,



health-oriented, and rejuvenating stays, and we are constantly expanding our wellness offerings to meet these needs, including digital detox initiatives and holistic wellness consultations,” she adds.

Sustainable approach

Rathi claims that sustainability is a core focus at Namaste Dwaar. “As a rural resort, we aim to reduce our environmental impact through eco-friendly practices, conservation of water and energy, and supporting local communities. Our herbal garden

not only supports wellness treatments but reduces the need for external sourcing. Additionally, we use reusable resources and avoid single-use plastics as part of our ongoing commitment to sustainable tourism,” she adds.

Growing appeal

She further adds, “While Namaste Dwaar primarily focuses on domestic tourism, we also have a growing international appeal, especially among travellers seeking genuine wellness experiences in India.”

Trade engagement

When it comes to maintaining relationships with the travel trade for business, Rathi says, “We actively engage with the travel

“Since the pandemic, wellness tourism has gained traction, with a noticeable demand for city detox retreats, mindful getaways, and immersive wellness experiences

trade by partnering with agents, hosting familiarisation trips, and collaborating on digital platforms.” They have plans to expand, but first, they are focusing on creating a complete village experience.

Melbourne taps India's MICE potential

Melbourne has emerged as a prominent hub for MICE tourism, with India taking centre stage in its strategy. Brendan McClements, CEO, Visit Victoria, shares insights into Melbourne's growing engagement with Indian market, highlighting the city's robust offerings, unique venues, and strategies tailored to Indian preferences.



TT Bureau

With its strategic focus, unique offerings, and strong engagement with Indian travel and MICE agents, Melbourne is set to become a favourite destination for Indian corporates and event planners. "The Indian market has been fantastic," said **Brendan McClements**, Chief Executive Officer, Visit Victoria, attributing the growth to improved direct connectivity between India and Melbourne, with flights from Delhi and Mumbai. "India may well become the biggest MICE market for Australia in the world in the next couple of years," he added. Melbourne's MICE sector is projected to contribute \$45 billion by 2025, with India expected to play a pivotal role.

Why Melbourne?

Melbourne's unique blend of offerings makes it an attractive

destination for Indian corporates and event organisers. "From the iconic Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) to the National Gallery of Victoria, everything is centrally located, making it a very walkable city for delegates," he shared.

He also highlighted Melbourne's culinary appeal, which resonates with Indian travellers. "The MCG and leading hotels in Melbourne have staff trained to meet Indian dietary requirements, and many venues even allow organisers to bring their own chefs. Melbourne and Victoria are the food bowl of Australia, offering farm-to-plate experiences that are world-class," explained McClements.

Additionally, Melbourne's adventure offerings add to its allure. "You can take a hot air balloon ride over the city or even skydive and land on the foreshore. For Indian delegates



Brendan McClements
CEO
Visit Victoria

seeking adventure, Melbourne has it all," said McClements.

Focused engagement with Indian MICE agents

Melbourne Convention Bureau (MCB), a subsidiary of Visit Victoria, is spearheading efforts to deepen ties with Indian MICE agents. "The MCB is a one-stop

shop—a plug-and-play solution for organisers. They can connect you to over 80 venues and 8,200 members to create a seamless experience," shared McClements.

The bureau has also appointed a representative agency in India to ensure consistent engagement. "We are pounding the pavement, knocking on doors, and building relationships," he said. "Trade missions and familiarisation trips are regular features of MCB's strategy, offering Indian agents a first-hand experience of Melbourne's potential," he added.

Way forward

In recent months, Melbourne has hosted several large-scale Indian MICE groups, including Herbalife and a leading Indian bank, with delegations exceeding 1,500 participants. "We are seeing increasing interest from Indian corporations rewarding their

staff and building relationships. The momentum is undeniable," shared McClements.

Melbourne's collaboration with Tourism Australia enhances its visibility in India. "The largest trade show in the southern

With 26.7 million Indians expected to travel this year—equivalent to the population of Australia—the potential is immense

hemisphere, AIME (Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event), is based in Melbourne. It's a

fantastic opportunity to showcase what we offer," he highlighted.

Commitment to excellence

McClements said that financial incentives are also available for Indian organisers considering Melbourne. "We provide additional support on a case-by-case basis to make Melbourne an attractive choice," he shared, emphasising that Melbourne's value proposition lies not in competing on price but in offering a distinctive and enriching experience. On an optimistic note, he said, "Melbourne offers everything Indian delegates and organisers could wish for—a vibrant city, seamless logistics, and unforgettable experiences. With 26.7 million Indians expected to travel this year—equivalent to the population of Australia—the potential is immense. For Melbourne, this is just the beginning."

Australia courts India's growing market

Phillipa Harrison, MD, Tourism Australia, and a delegation of 15 Australian tourism CEOs were in India recently to strengthen industry ties. They met with trade partners, including Air India, IndiGo, MakeMyTrip, DreamSetGo, TripJack, and Thomas Cook, in New Delhi and Mumbai to enhance tourism ties as Indian visitor numbers continue to rise.



VisitBritain engages with 'MEA trade'

The 2024 edition of VisitBritain's flagship event, Destination Britain MEA trade mission, was held recently in Bengaluru, and saw in attendance around 37 suppliers from the UK and over 70 buyers from India, GCC nations, Japan and South Korea. The three-day event saw more than 1500 B2B meetings, networking evenings and seminars.



Religious, medical tourism grow

▶ Contd. from page 11



Bjorn DeNiese
Managing Director
Mayfair Elixir

“The past year has seen a lot of consolidations in the market in terms of brand, and expansion as well. So, I believe, a lot of acquisitions in the hospitality industry have happened, a lot of mergers have taken place. Therefore, stabilisation and growth in the market is what, I feel, is going to be taking the industry forward going ahead. In the hospitality sector, I see that the newer generation is keen on taking risks.”



Rajeev Kale
President & Country Head - Leisure
Travel & MICE, Thomas Cook

“One of the most exciting trends we have witnessed in 2024 is the surge in experiential travel. Travellers are increasingly seeking unique, once-in-a-lifetime experiences, such as witnessing the Northern Lights in Scandinavian countries or exploring autumn in destinations like Japan and South Korea. Winter holidays are also gaining momentum, with destinations offering activities like skiing, and snowboarding.”



KS Sawhney
General Secretary
ITTA

“We have seen a substantial rise in both religious and medical tourism in India this year, significantly boosting the tourism sector. Religious tourism is drawing visitors to the country's spiritual hubs, while medical tourism has surged with travellers from Africa, the Middle East, and other regions seeking high-quality healthcare services. Renowned hospitals like Medanta, Fortis, Max, and Moolchand are consistently filled with international patients.”



Yummi Talwar
Chief Operating Officer - South Asia
VFS Global

“The travel industry has witnessed significant trends in the past year. Long-haul destinations have gained immense popularity, with travellers increasingly opting for newer destinations with flying times between 5-7 hours. Additionally, student travel has emerged as a vital segment, contributing to a surge in VFR traffic. The MICE segment has also regained momentum, positioning these sectors as key drivers of growth in 2025.”



Anuj Rathi
Chief Business and Growth Officer
Cleartrip

“As we approach the year-end, we are seeing a shift in travel trends. While favourites like Udaipur, Jaipur, Varanasi, Manali, Amritsar, Ooty, Munnar, Mussoorie, and Pondicherry continue to attract travellers, we're seeing Port Blair making its mark as a fresh favourite in the domestic travel scene. On the international front, Manila and Tbilisi are catching travellers' fancy. The desire to experience new cultures, cuisines and remains undeterred.”



Arjun Baljee
President
ROHL

“Two prominent trends stood out in 2024 Indian travellers showed a strong inclination toward experiences that immerse them in local culture, heritage, and natural beauty. The demand for eco-friendly and sustainable travel options has grown significantly, reflecting a conscious effort by travellers to reduce their carbon footprint. With the rise of flexible working models, there has been a notable rise in short trips.”

▶ Contd. on page 22

Minor scouts for more locations in India

Minor Hotels is not only making a dent in the hospitality segment in India but has also opened its very own hotel – Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur – with many more in the pipeline. As the leadership team based in India scouts for locations in the country, here are the growth plans for the brand in the Indian market.



Hazel Jain

Minor Hotels is set to intensify its presence in the dynamic Indian hospitality market. The global hotel operator with more than 550 properties in 56 countries recently concluded a three-city India roadshow in Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad. The roadshow saw representatives from 26 Minor properties from the Middle East, Europe, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius meet India's travel agencies, luxury wedding planners and MICE companies. This was the third edition since 2019.

With the first property under 'Anantara' brand opening in Jaipur recently, Minor Hotels is targeting 50 new openings in India over the next decade. **Richard Beh**, VP Commercial – Asia, Minor Hotels, said, “India is a huge market for us for inbound, within India, and outbound. We are seeing a lot of potential growth from India for



Richard Beh
VP Commercial – Asia
Minor Hotels

our hotels in South-East Asian markets, including Thailand and Maldives. India is one of our fastest-growing markets; it is the third largest economy in Asia; and we are seeing a lot of middle-class Indians that have disposable income. We are also seeing a lot more interest in destinations where we have our brands in. We are setting up an office in India in New Delhi soon. We wanted to have



Vijay Krishnan Vazhvelil
Vice President – Indian Operations
Minor Hotels Group

our presence directly here, so that we are able to serve our partners and suppliers, and have the pulse of the market. Our focus will be on further development and Anantara in Jaipur is one of them. We also see huge potential in other gateway cities like Mumbai.”

Vijay Krishnan Vazhvelil, Vice President – Indian Operations, Minor Hotels Group, said, “We



Chirodeep Chakraborty
Regional Director – Sales
Minor Hotels

have all the brands here right from Anantara to Avani, Avani Plus to NH Collection and NH Hotels. Minor Hotels is making a mark in India with Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur, which has 150 keys and beautiful banqueting spaces for weddings and celebrations. We have a lawn of approximately 5,000 square metres, beautifully laid out and we have a ballroom of 8,000 square metres, a small room, which is

around 3,500 square feet and a couple of other party halls in and around that hotel.”

Introducing their new concept called “Namaskar Minor”, **Chirodeep Chakraborty**, Regional Director – Sales, Minor Hotels, said, “Namaskar Minor is a new programme that we are introducing this year. It is a standardisation promise to our B2B and B2C customers, whether they are travelling for weddings, FIT, individual stays, or as a group. Everything that an Indian traveller need is covered under Namaskar Minor. This includes regular things like a bottle of water, but also connecting rooms for families, vegetarian food and Indian food. So, it is standardising all of that into a channelised way to tell our hotels the basic criteria of an Indian guest.”

He shared that the group has seen a lot of bookings for their hotels in Europe, Australia, and

the USA from Indian guests. “Cities like Amsterdam have been doing extremely well for the Indian market with Thailand being a favourite since weddings are big in Thailand. And Anantara, being a

The global hotel operator with more than 550 properties in 56 countries recently concluded a 3-city India roadshow in Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad

Thai brand, is well known among Indian guests for weddings. But what has happened in the last two years is that the luxury set has also increased. As a result of this, we are seeing more luxury guests,” Chakraborty added.

South Africa Tourism meets Indian trade

South Africa's Minister of Tourism, Patricia de Lille, and South African Tourism CEO, Nombulelo Guliwe, were recently in India to commemorate the partnership between the two nations under the theme '30 Years of Diplomatic Relations, 30 Years of Democracy, and South Africa's Assumption of the G20 Presidency in 2025' in Delhi and Mumbai.



The right insurance for cruising

Cruising has become an increasingly popular vacation choice, shifting from a luxury experience to a mainstream travel option. Dev Karvat, Founder and CEO, Asego, shares insights into the need for tailored travel protection, and how agents can ensure that their clients have a smooth experience every time they embark on a cruise trip.



TT Bureau

The cruise industry has been flourishing, with a significant rise in the number of passengers, especially in the post-pandemic world. In India alone, cruise passengers have increased by over 200 per cent from 2022 to 2024. This boom is not just for a specific age group, as more travellers across age groups are exploring cruises nowadays. Today's cruise lines offer a wide array of destinations, onboard activities, and even special-themed cruises to cater to every type of traveller.

Additionally, cruise-specific coverage is crucial in the case of medical emergencies. Passengers confined to their cabins due to illness or injury may miss out on scheduled excursions, leading to disappointment and lost opportunities. An exclusive cruise trip protection ensures that such



Dev Karvat
Founder and CEO
Asego

disruptions are handled with financial support and other forms of assistance.

Why standard travel insurance may not be enough for cruise trips While regular travel insurance is helpful, it often does not cover the specific situations that can arise on a cruise. **Dev Karvat,**

Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Asego, explains, "Many travellers mistakenly believe that regular travel insurance is sufficient for cruise vacations. However, it often does not cover incidents that occur on a cruise." For example, if a passenger must cancel their trip before departure, a cruise-specific protection plan can offer a refund — something that may not be available through standard insurance.

Medical emergencies on a cruise are another example, where specialised coverage can ensure that passengers receive the necessary assistance, including financial support in case of disruptions to their planned activities.

Cruise travel in India: A growing trend India's burgeoning cruise scene has seen a remarkable surge in recent years. As more and more

Indians discover the allure of cruising, they are also becoming aware of the potential pitfalls of seafaring adventures. From unexpected weather delays to unforeseen

Many travellers believe that regular travel insurance is sufficient for cruise vacations. However, it often does not cover incidents that occur on a cruise

medical emergencies, these challenges can quickly dampen the vacation spirit. A comprehensive travel protection plan can be a lifesaver, ensuring a worry-free and unforgettable cruise experience.

Challenges while cruising

Although cruising offers a unique travel experience, there are some common challenges to consider:

- ❖ Weather disruptions, which may alter cruise itineraries.
- ❖ Unexpected delays due to mechanical issues or other reasons.
- ❖ Medical expenses, as healthcare on cruises can be costly.
- ❖ Limited compensation for lost baggage, which may not fully cover the value of personal items.
- ❖ Illness or injury preventing passengers from enjoying the cruise.

How can travel protection (insurance) improve the cruise experience?

The right travel protection can alleviate the stress caused by these potential issues, ensuring that

travellers can enjoy their cruise with peace of mind.

For those considering a cruise vacation, it is highly recommended to opt for a cruise-specific protection plan that includes coverage for medical emergencies, trip cancellations, cabin confinement-related losses, lost baggage, and more.

The future of cruise travel

Looking forward, the cruise industry is set to keep growing, with more personalised and adventurous options for travellers.

As cruise lines continue to offer unique itineraries, Asego caters to these unique itineraries and has created more flexible protection options. With the growth of this industry, investing in the right travel protection will be essential in ensuring that your cruise experience is nothing short of unforgettable. ✈

Meaningful tourism: PATA's aim in 2025

As a pivotal force in global tourism, PATA stands ready to shift the narrative from 'sustainability' to 'meaningful tourism'. With innovation, sustainability, and context-driven solutions, the organisation aims to drive travel growth in Asia Pacific in 2025 and will continue to focus on revenue growth for the benefit of its members.



Amita Pandey

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) is gearing up for 2025 with a forward-looking vision. Speaking at the PATA Destination Marketing Forum 2025, **Peter Semone**, Chair, PATA, unveiled the organisation's plan to shift the tourism narrative from 'sustainability' to 'meaningful tourism'. Explaining the vision, Semone emphasised the need to redefine tourism's impact by asking questions, such as "How can tourism be meaningful to communities—economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally?" He highlighted the importance of broadening tourism's benefits beyond investors and major players to truly enrich local communities.

Another pivotal goal for PATA would be to address outdated tourism success metrics, such as visitor numbers and length of stay. Semone proposed innovative systems, like entry



Peter Semone
Chair
PATA

fees, that could be reinvested directly into communities. "It is time to build from the ground up—starting with communities and working towards agencies and governments," he suggested.

PATA's strategy for 2025 also emphasises the importance of creating conscious travellers who care about their destinations. Semone called for a shift from destination marketing to destination



Noor Ahmad Hamid
CEO
PATA

management, encouraging governments to focus more on managing resources and infrastructure than solely driving demand. "This is an opportunity to rethink priorities—less about attracting visitors, more about ensuring a sustainable, well-managed supply side," he said.

Echoing a progressive outlook, **Noor Ahmad Hamid**, CEO, PATA, outlined plans to elevate the



Paul Pruangkarn
PATA
Chief of Staff

organisation by expanding events and increasing revenue to benefit members. "This growth will help raise awareness about critical issues in the tourism sector, like over-tourism," Hamid explained.

He revealed that PATA Annual Summit 2025 is set to take place in Istanbul, Turkey and PATA Travel Mart 2025 will return to Bangkok, Thailand. For the next PATA Destination Marketing Forum



(PDMF), Chiang Rai, Thailand, is being considered as a fresh venue. Beyond events, PATA will focus on capacity-building initiatives across member countries to drive industry-wide improvement.

Paul Pruangkarn, PATA, Chief of Staff, emphasised the importance of focusing on sustainability and digitalisation in 2025, describing them as enduring priorities. "These are not fleeting trends—they will remain relevant and essential next year," he said. He believes that key areas of attention will include climate change, the rise of AI, robotics, and virtual experiences.

Challenges

When asked about the challenges that tourism industry is facing globally, Semone said that the impact of geopolitics on tourism is

in his priority list and needs to be discussed by the leaders worldwide. "From the Ukraine conflict to tensions in the Middle East, peace remains crucial for the industry's

PATA's strategy for 2025 also emphasises the importance of creating conscious travellers who care about their destinations

success. Leadership decisions worldwide and safety concerns also play significant roles, driving a push toward strengthening intra-regional travel within Asia Pacific," he said. In addition, Semone expressed concern over social media's influence, warning of its potential to harm destinations. ✈

Vietnam: The 'S-shaped' country

Vietnam, the 'S-shaped' country in the Southeast Asia, known for its rich history, stunning natural beauty, vibrant culture and beaches, has just 4-5 hour flight journey from India. Also known for its ancient dynasties, French colonial period, and multiple wars, the destination finds place in the bucket list of many Indian outbound travellers.

Vietnam Airlines recently hosted a group of travellers to a promotional trip to Vietnam. The airline, covering all major routes, offered Business Class flying experience for the travellers with top-notch services and amenities. The group was taken to Hạ Long Bay, Hanoi, Da Lat & Ho Chi Minh, four key destinations in the country.

Ha Long Bay

One of the most famous sites in northeastern Vietnam is the UNESCO-listed Ha Long Bay. The name "Halong" translates

capital located in northern part of the country, is a cultural and historical hub with over 1,000 years of history. This charming city blends traditional Vietnamese architecture, French colonial influences, and modern developments.

The most vibrant and colourful attraction is Hanoi Train Street, a narrow train bypass in Hanoi that sees a twice-daily train pass close to buildings on either side of the tracks. The alley is so narrow that local residents have to remove their personal belongings, including bicycles and children,



- ❖ Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum: Pay respect to Vietnam's founding father.
- ❖ Temple of Literature: Dedicated to Confucius and Vietnam's educational heritage.
- ❖ Hoan Kiem Lake: Scenic lake with Ngoc Son Temple and the iconic Tortoise Tower.
- ❖ Hanoi Opera House: Stunning example of French colonial architecture.
- ❖ Imperial Citadel of Thang Long: Ancient fortress and UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- ❖ Vietnam Museum of Ethnology: Explore Vietnam's diverse ethnic groups.
- ❖ Hanoi Hilton (Hoa Lo Prison): Former prison turned museum.

Da Lat, Vietnam - the 'City of Eternal Spring'

A picturesque city known for its cool climate and misty landscapes - rolling hills, valleys, and lakes surrounded by pine forests - Da Lat is famous for its flower farms, growing a wide variety of roses, carnations, and orchids. Many historic buildings, villas, and hotels showcase French influence.

Must-see attractions:

- ❖ Xuan Huong Lake: Scenic lake with walking paths and boat rides
- ❖ Crazy House: Unconventional hotel with surreal architecture
- ❖ Bao Dai Summer Palace: Former royal residence with stunning views



- ❖ Da Lat Market: Local marketplace for fresh produce, handicrafts, and souvenirs
- ❖ Datanla Alpine Coaster: Ride

the longest alpine coaster in Southeast Asia

Da Lat is an ideal destination for adventure seekers, nature lovers, couples, and those seeking a relaxing getaway from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Ho Chin Minh

Founded in 1698 as Gia Dinh, renamed Saigon in 1839, Capital of South Vietnam during Vietnam War, was renamed Ho Chi Minh City in 1976 after reunification.

Top Attractions

- ❖ War Remnants Museum: Learn about Vietnam's history.
- ❖ Cu Chi Tunnels: Explore underground tunnels.

- ❖ Notre Dame Cathedral: Iconic cathedral.
- ❖ Central Post Office: Historic landmark.
- ❖ Reunification Palace: Presidential palace.
- ❖ Ben Thanh Market: Vibrant marketplace.
- ❖ Museum of Vietnamese History: Explore Vietnam's past.
- ❖ Temple of Jade Emperor: Oldest Taoist temple.
- ❖ An Phu Market: Local marketplace.
- ❖ Bitexco Financial Tower: Panoramic views.

Ho Chi Minh City is a bustling metropolis with a rich history, cultural attractions, food and entertainment, and activities.

to "descending dragon". Ha Long Bay includes over 1,969 islands and islets, most of which are made of limestone, rising dramatically out of the emerald green waters of the Gulf of Tonkin. Legend has it that the islands were created by a dragon sent by the gods to protect the Vietnamese people from invaders.

Thiên Cung Grotto, a massive cave with stunning stalactites and stalagmites and Cát Bà Island, the largest island in the bay with beautiful beaches and lush forests, are certainly not to be missed. One can explore these islands and caves through simple boat tour or go kayaking or swimming in the crystal-clear waters. Whether you are interested in history, nature, or adventure, Ha Long Bay has something for everyone.

before the train passes. Locals often sit on the tracks, drinking tea and playing checkers. The street has become a popular tourist stop in Hanoi. While Hanoi Train Street itself is not difficult to find, it does take some preparation to watch the train pass through this narrow passage. Finding the right place on time is, therefore, a must.

A few must-see attractions are:

Historical and Cultural Attractions:



Hanoi
Hanoi, Vietnam's vibrant

Some interesting facts about Vietnam

- ❖ Vietnam is the second largest coffee producer in the world after Brazil.
- ❖ Around 16 per cent of the world's flora and fauna species can be found in Vietnam, in the Greater Mekong region. The Mekong river is the longest in Southeast Asia, 7th longest in Asia and the 12th longest in the world.
- ❖ Motorbikes are everywhere in Vietnam. More than eight in 10 people own a motorbike in Vietnam.
- ❖ Vietnam has the world's largest cave, Son Doong.

MyTravelBazaar.com

A new online portal for agents

MyTravelBazaar.com is an online portal launched by brothers Bhavesh and Suprabh Oza, second-generation entrepreneurs who have taken the time to understand the pain points of the B2B players in India and used tech to resolve many challenges.

Hazel Jain

In a sea of online travel agencies that we see in India today, one stands out powered by the legacy that it carries. MyTravelBazaar.com (or MTB) is a new online tool – a brainchild of brothers Bhavesh and Suprabh Oza. It has been designed keeping in mind the ever-evolving needs of travel agents all over India and its cutting-edge technology offers seamless bookings for all travel-related products like air tickets, IRCTC train tickets, hotels, activities, and transfers.

Bhavesh Oza, Director, MyTravelBazaar.com, says “We also wish to get the global inventory available to our agents with just a click. We want to offer our agent partners a white-label solution so that they can remain competitive in the global market. During my interaction with travel agents, I saw couple of challenges like high tech cost, high manpower



Bhavesh Oza
Director
MyTravelBazaar.com

cost and at the same time maintaining relationship with their customers. What we realised was that no travel portal in this country is offering all these solutions on one single platform.” So, they decided to fill this gap themselves by conceptualising and developing a platform which covers all these things. MyTravelBazaar.com offers a viable solution so that agents are competing with global giants, he



Suprabh Oza
Director
MyTravelBazaar.com

says, adding, “At the same time, it offers multiple fare types so that they have content richness which brings down their manpower cost. This way, our travel agents are not only relevant in the market, but they are also very profitable.”

Moreover, the air ticketing content has also evolved and keeping this in mind, MTB offers GDS, LCC, NDC, SOTO, and series fare at just

a click of a button. “We ensure that the content richness is available to the travel agent, when they are talking to their passengers. The second important bit is the technology. We have about 100-plus features on the portal, including the family fare option. MTB ensures agents can get all information,” Oza adds.

Technological edge

Speaking about the technology behind this platform, **Suprabh Oza**, Director, MyTravelBazaar.com says, “We have integrated around 40+ APIs in this. These consist of airline APIs wherein we have connected with the GDS, with LCC, with NDC products, as well as SOTO. In hotel also, we have connected more than 20+ APIs, which is helping us to provide content from around the globe. Around 1 million plus hotels can be on our portal. At the same time, we have connected with multiple payment gateways and ICICI bank virtual account networks also.”

Rail Europe rewards partners

After a gap of almost 4 years, Rail Europe, together with Lufthansa Group, Swiss tourism boards, and high-speed rail operators, organised a Fam tour to Switzerland and Paris in France to acknowledge support from its key partners.



More clubs in the offing across India

With 1,300 members as of today, Skål International India now wants to take this to 1,600 members by the year end. It also wants to start three new clubs, taking the total to 20 clubs in India soon.

Hazel Jain

It has been almost five months the new board of Skål International India has taken over from the old team, and has brought about a few changes that will be implemented in the club. **Sanjeev Mehra**, President, Skål International India, from Kolkata, shares details of the new vision. “First of all, we want to expand and further develop our membership. As of now, we have 17 clubs with 1,300 members. Going forward, we want to take this to 1,600 members by the end of this year. We will also start new clubs taking the total to 20 clubs in India soon,” he says.



Sanjeev Mehra
President,
Skål International India

tion. Skål India now wants to be perceived as a pure business networking platform. We have just collaborated with key travel trade fairs in India that will host international members from Skål International as buyers,” he says, adding that, “The idea is to start with India and partner with different trade fairs in different countries.”

New team's vision for 2025

Mehra shares that in order to help its members the national club plans to have knowledge sessions with its international counterparts. In terms of the new team's vision for 2025, Mehra says, “We want to encourage business and synergetic co-operation among colleagues.”



Krishna Gopal
Vice President
Skål International India

Mehra also shares his plans for 2025. “We will look at five more clubs and 2,500 new members next year. Our focus is on the entire country, especially on eastern India, including Guwahati, Siliguri, Patna, and Ranchi. We are also starting a new club in Srinagar and Surat; they have already been registered. Ahmedabad is also coming up. Then, we have a few more pockets in South India where we are coming up with more clubs. We are also looking Amritsar as another point in Punjab. The idea is to have a minimum of one club in each state,” he reveals.

The president is also looking to change the image of Skål International India. “For some reason we have not been promoted as a business-oriented associa-

Young Skål

Skål is not only for industry professionals but also for the young. Sharing his view on this, **Krishna Gopal**, VP, Skål International India from Pune, says that Skål India has a dynamic Young Skål Club with Rajagopal Iyer as its Director based out of Trivandrum.

Key Events

Skål Asia Congress

Colombo, Sri Lanka
26th-29th June, 2025

Skål India Congress

Mumbai, India
12th-14th September, 2025

Skål World Congress

Cusco, Peru
25th-30th September, 2025

# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY EVENT TALK Published from: India Middle East		
DECEMBER 2024		
Date	Event	Time
17-19	Bengal Travel Mart 2024	10:00 am
18	CII Annual Tourism Summit 2024	9:00 am
20-21	ITTA 6 th Annual 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		
8-13	Outbound Travel Roadshow Delhi 2025	11:00 am
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
17-19	Matka Travel Fair 2025	10:00 am
17-20	TAFI Annual Convention	10:00 am
22-26	FITUR	10:00 am
24-25	Utah Travel Expo 2025	10:00 am
24-26	India International Travel Exhibition Nagpur 2025	11:00 am
30 Jan -1 Feb	OTM Mumbai	10:00 am

'Speed up green practices'

A recent report presented at Arabian Travel Market highlights significant challenges in achieving the UN's tourism-related sustainability goals, with only 15 per cent on track for 2030. The findings stress the need for increased investment in sustainable development.



TT Bureau

An exclusive whitepaper produced for Arabian Travel Market (ATM) by the Digital Tourism Think Tank (DTTT) has revealed that the tourism sector is significantly lagging behind in meeting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report highlights that only 15 per cent of tourism-related SDGs are on track to be achieved by 2030, underlining the need for more concerted action across the sector.

The findings are based on United Nations research which predicts alarming increases in resource consumption due to tourism. By 2050, tourism is expected to cause a 154 per cent rise in energy consumption, a 152 per cent rise in water use, and a staggering 251 per cent increase in solid waste production. The sector is also predicted to contribute a 131 per cent increase in greenhouse gas emissions. These



Nicholas Hall
Founder and CEO
DTTT



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME
ATM

figures make it clear that there is a critical need for higher investments in sustainable practices to mitigate these impacts. Further research by Visa and Oxford Economics has revealed that consumers are struggling with a lack of transparency and insufficient information about sustainable travel options. This gap in knowledge presents a challenge for both the tourism industry and its

customers as they look to make more eco-conscious decisions.

Nicholas Hall, Founder and CEO, DTTT, commented, "The discussions surrounding sustainability in tourism at the ATM Innovation Wall highlighted the multifaceted challenges we face. Achieving sustainability requires a holistic, multi-pronged approach—whether it's

managing plastic waste, encouraging responsible travel behaviours, or ensuring tourism benefits local communities. Importantly, sustainable tourism cannot be achieved with a one-size-fits-all approach. By collaborating across sectors and perspectives, we can develop more effective solutions."

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, ATM, said, "ATM provides a vital platform for the tourism industry to advance its sustainability goals. By fostering collaboration, ATM encourages the development of region-specific sustainability frameworks that integrate environmental, social, and economic dimensions. We advocate for community-driven tourism strategies that preserve cultural heritage, empower local populations, and enhance destination resilience." The strategic partners for ATM 2025 include Dubai's DET, Emirates, IHG Hotels & Resorts, and Al Rais Travel.

IN MEMORIAM



VK Thanabalan

VK Thanabalan (70), the visionary Chairman of Madura Travel Service, popularly known as VKT Balan, passed away on 11 November 2024, leaving behind a legacy in the tourism industry. Born in Tiruchendur, Balan moved to Chennai in 1981, facing numerous challenges. Starting from humble beginnings, including living on railway station platforms, Balan's determination led him to establish Madura Travel Service. His contributions earned him the Kalaimamani Award in 1997.

Sanjeev Ticku, Co-Founder & COO, Indie Trails, passed away on 28 November 2024. With over three decades of experience in the travel and tourism industry, Ticku was a visionary leader known for his deep-rooted passion for connecting people with authentic travel experiences. His journey from Vice President at Yatra Online to General Manager roles at Kuoni and Sita India exemplified his dedication to promoting inbound tourism and fostering cross-cultural connections.



Sanjeev Ticku

Meenu Nageshwaran, wife of PN Nageshwaran and founder of Incent Tours, passed away on 23 November 2024. Incent Tours was founded by the couple in 1982 as a privately owned company. The company handles Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. The company also has a leisure and business travel division to look after individual travel needs in India and beyond. We, at DDP Publications, mourn the loss of a prominent figure in the industry.



Meenu Nageshwaran

Emphasis on safe destinations

Contd. from page 17



Alok K Singh
Co-founder and CEO
Travonint

“Indian travellers showcased a growing preference for solo and experiential travel, seeking unique and immersive activities that go beyond traditional sightseeing. Solo travel saw a significant rise particularly among millennials and Gen Z, driven by a desire for self-discovery, independence, and flexible itineraries. Short weekend getaways became popular among young professionals looking for quick and accessible escapes, catering to busy lifestyles. Travellers are also exploring offbeat destinations in India.”



Pranav Kapadia
Founder and Director
Global Destinations

“In 2024, Indian travellers embraced emerging trends that reflect their evolving preferences for diverse experiences and unique destinations. Event-based travel emerged as a dominant force, as travelers integrated their passions with exploration. Music festivals, sporting events, and cultural extravaganzas became catalysts for travel, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in local cultures and create lasting memories. Concurrently, mindful travel gained significant traction.”



Beate M Kakkar
Managing Director
Indiva Marketing

“The arts have been an important catalyst for travelling, attending exhibitions, music events, embracing immersive art experiences across disciplines of art: archaeology, decorative arts, jewellery, manuscripts, miniatures and Tanjore paintings, textiles, numismatics and more in key art centres across the world like New York, Washington DC, across Europe, including lesser-known art centres like Frankfurt. And, of course, sports tourism is also booming these days.”



Manoj Singh
Country Head - India
Norwegian Cruise Line

“This year, we have seen Indian travellers show a strong inclination toward immersive and meaningful travel. They are keen to explore the world with their loved ones, choosing cruises to destinations like Europe, Alaska, the Bahamas, and the Caribbean. These voyages have become the preferred holiday choice for Indian guests. Additionally, conscious travel is gaining popularity. Eco-conscious travellers are opting for small-group tours.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

Mamaka by Ovolo
welcomes
its newest culinary
rockstar, Chef
Anuj Kumar Ray in
BALI



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Indian Cuisine



 Mamaka by Ovolo Hotel, Kuta Beach Bali

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MOVEMENTS

DREAMSETGO

Mumbai

DreamSetGo India's premium sports experiences and travel platform, has appointed **DANIEL DSOUZA** as the new Co-Founder. He will join the leadership team to drive DreamSetGo's next phase of growth and solidify its position as a leader in this rapidly expanding category. Dsouza has played a pivotal role in shaping the leisure and holiday business at SOTC Travel, part of the Thomas Cook Group and formerly Kuoni Travel. His deep expertise in the travel and tourism sector, combined with an acute understanding of evolving consumer preferences, will play a pivotal role in enhancing DreamSetGo's premium sports travel offerings.



GRAND HYATT GURGAON

Gurgaon

ARSHEESH TODYWALA has been appointed by Grand Hyatt Gurgaon as the Cluster Director of Marketing. In his new role, Todywala will oversee the marketing and communication strategies for Grand Hyatt Gurgaon, Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar, and Hyatt Regency Dehradun. He aims to refine and articulate each hotel's unique value proposition, ensuring that the brand remains at the forefront of luxury hospitality in India. By leveraging his extensive experience in brand partnerships, he aims to execute innovative initiatives that elevate brand visibility and transform guest experiences.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON AGRA

Agra

RAJANI NAIR DEB has been appointed as the General manager of DoubleTree by Hilton Agra. With over 22 years of hospitality experience, Deb recently served as Commercial Director at Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park, where she played a pivotal role in driving exceptional growth in hotel performance metrics. Prior to joining Hilton, she served as Pre-Opening Director of Sales & Marketing at The Leela Gandhinagar and The Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre.



JW MARRIOTT HOTEL BENGALURU

Bangalore

SRIKANT KODALI has been appointed by JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With over 13 years of diverse experience in the hospitality industry, Kodali brings extensive expertise across sales, marketing, and event operations. In the new role, he will be responsible to lead the sales and marketing team to achieve the hotel's revenue goals, while further enhancing the brand's presence and reputation. In his most recent role as the Director of Sales & Marketing, he successfully implemented strategies that maximised hotel revenues and enhanced market positioning.



NOVOTEL PUNE

Pune

Novotel Pune appoints **HARKIRAT SINGH** as the Director of Revenue. An accomplished professional with over a decade of experience in revenue management, sales, and business development, Singh brings a proven track record in driving growth, optimising revenue, and enhancing business strategies. In his new role, he will oversee revenue strategies, optimise pricing, and develop innovative business solutions to enhance Novotel Pune's market position. Prior to this, he served as the Cluster Revenue Manager for Ibis and Ibis Styles India. His diverse career spans key roles at renowned organisations.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON BENGALURU WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

SHYAM KUMAR has been appointed as the General manager of DoubleTree by Hilton Bengaluru Whitefield. He brings with him over two decades of experience in managing luxury and upscale hotels. In his last role as General Manager at DoubleTree by Hilton Agra, he spearheaded the hotel's growth, performance and expansion, making it the preferred destination for upscale weddings and leisure travellers. Kumar started his Hilton journey with Conrad Bengaluru as the Director of Operations.



RAFFLES UDAIPUR

Udaipur

Raffles Udaipur has appointed **PUJA SINGH** as the Director of Marketing & Communications. With over 16 years of experience in the marketing industry, Singh brings extensive expertise to her role. She has worked with prestigious hotel chains, including Hyatt Hotels in India and IHG's Six Senses in Vietnam. In her prior positions, she led marketing strategies and evaluated marketing effectiveness at IHG's Six Senses Ninh Van Bay, as well as oversaw brand development at Ana Mandara Hospitality. Her diverse experience encompasses driving brand awareness, developing targeted campaigns, and enhancing the overall guest experience.



NOVOTEL GOA PANJIM

Panaji

Novotel Goa Panjim has appointed **VINAYAK M PRABHAVALKAR** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With over 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry, including significant expertise in Goa, Prabhavalkar is set to bring valuable insights and leadership to this role. His career began in 2006. Since then, he has worked with leading hospitality brands. He has demonstrated excellence in driving revenue, leading sales teams, and optimising customer satisfaction. In his new role, he will focus on enhancing Novotel Goa Panjim's visibility, fostering long-term client relationships.



NAMASTE DWAAR RESORT

Mansurpur (UP)

Namaste Dwaar Resort has appointed **JITENDER JAKHAR** as the Operations Manager. With a strong background in hospitality management and a proven track record in hotel operations, Jakhar brings a wealth of experience and a dedicated approach to enhancing guest experiences at Namaste Dwaar Resort. His career in the hospitality industry spans more than a decade. In his last stint, he served as Operations Manager at Hotel Mughal Suites in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE. In his new role, he will oversee all resort operations, ensuring seamless and efficient management of labour, productivity and quality control.



CLARKS EXOTICA CONVENTION RESORT & SPA

Bangalore

Clarks Exotica Convention Resort & Spa has appointed **MUNMUN BHATTACHARYA** as the Associate Director of Human Resources. With over 13 years of experience in HR management, Bhattacharya is set to play a pivotal role in strengthening the resort's talent development initiatives, employee engagement programmes, and organisational policies. She has had an illustrious career in human resources, holding senior positions at leading hospitality brands, such as The Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata, Ibis Kolkata Rajarhat, and Ibis Kochi City Centre.



THE FERN BRENTWOOD, MUSSOORIE

Mussoorie

The Fern Brentwood Mussoorie has appointed **GOURAB BISWAS** as the Head of Human Resources. With extensive expertise in people management and employee engagement, Biswas will lead efforts to strengthen the resort's team and enhance guest experiences. He brings over a decade of experience in human resources, specialising in employee development and fostering inclusive work environments. His background across various sectors of the hospitality industry aligns with The Fern's values of nurturing talent, promoting sustainability, and building a supportive workplace culture.



HYATT PLACE AURANGABAD AIRPORT

Aurangabad

Hyatt Place Aurangabad Airport appoints **GANAPATI PANDURANG PATIL** as the Director of Sales. With over 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Patil brings a wealth of expertise in sales, marketing, and client relationship management. In his current role, he is responsible for overseeing key projects and ensuring their successful execution. He collaborates with cross-functional teams to drive innovation and streamline processes within the organisation. Prior to this, he served as Director of Sales at Ibis Hyderabad, HITEC City. He has also held leadership positions at several prestigious hotels.



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'We're here to listen to the trade'

Amid invigorating discussions around strengthening the bilateral co-operation between South Africa and India, Patricia de Lille, Minister of Tourism, South Africa, interacted with the travel agents in Mumbai and New Delhi to discuss core issues.

 Hazel Jain

Patricia de Lille, Minister of Tourism, South Africa, accompanied by **Nombulelo Guliwe**, CEO, South African Tourism, was in India with an important agenda – to further increase the number of Indian visitors into her country. Elaborating on the purpose of their visit to India, de Lille said, "The purpose of our mission is to engage with Indian tour operators and trade associations, business leaders, and government officials so that we can work closer together and foster collaboration between the two countries. Indian travellers bring immense vibrancy to our tourism ecosystem."

The trusted tour operator

In a significant move to strengthen tourism ties with India, South Africa has come up with a gazetted

Trusted
Tour Operator
System



Patricia de Lille
Minister of Tourism, South Africa



South Africa is gearing up to host the ICC T20 Cricket World Cup in 2027

(TTOS) scheme which will take effect from 20 January 2025. Aimed specifically at the Indian and Chinese markets, it will allow for bulk visa processing for group travellers. A total of 23 Indian tour operators have been selected for this in the first phase. "We know that one of the obstacles that has prevented many Indians visitors to come to South Africa is the visa regulations. We have finally resolved that. From now on, people who are travelling in groups will be able to go to any of the selected tour operators, whether a group of 5 or 10 or 200, who will facilitate their visa application. This will simplify group visa applications. We are working on a turnaround time of two to three days," the minister said.

At the moment, the South African team is busy finalising the process and the names that will be announced by this year end. "We are also here to listen to the travel trade, hear their concerns, and where we can improve. We are here to ask for their advice, especially for the MICE segment," she added.

5-year visas through ETA

The minister shared another exciting development. "We now have Electronic Travel

Authorisation (ETA) enabling individuals to apply directly for their visas, and we are phasing out the e-visa applications because we had experienced several problems with that. With ETA, companies from India with businesses in South Africa can get five-year visas with multiple


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entries. This will also reduce the burden on our embassy officials. Visitors now only need three criteria to fulfil: travel dates, purpose, and duration. We have cut out the re-

Good to know

There has been a 25 per cent year-on-year growth in Indian travellers aged 41-50, alongside a 10 per cent increase in family travel to South Africa. Among Indian visitors to the Rainbow Nation in 2024, Mumbai contributes the largest share at 64.3 per cent, followed by Delhi. Leisure travel constitutes 38.8 per cent of overall Indian arrivals, with 18.3 per cent motivated by VFR. The MICE segment remains a key focus area.

quest for death certificate, divorce certificate, and bank statements. So, we have really transformed the visa system now," she explained.

South Africa is gearing up to host the ICC T20 Cricket World Cup in 2027, leveraging the tournament to attract cricket enthusiasts and capitalise on the rising demand for experience-driven travel.

The minister also emphasised on discussions with top Indian airlines regarding a potential code-sharing partnership aimed at strengthening ties between India and South Africa. "We met officials from Air India. Currently, there is a shortage of airplanes across the world, and they are waiting on some deliveries. IndiGo is also positive; they are looking at a codeshare agreement with South African Airways. With this, South African Airways will be able to take Indian travellers from Mauritius, or from Kenya into South Africa," she said.

Currently, Indian tourists represent 3.9 per cent of the total arrivals to South Africa. The goal is to increase the number to 10 per cent by next year. The minister was hopeful that the easing of visa application process will push the numbers. Year 2023 saw an impressive 43 per cent increase in travellers from India compared to the previous year. With this momentum, South Africa is targeting 100,000 Indian tourists by the end of FY 2024-25. South Africa witnessed a significant influx of tourists from India. 

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