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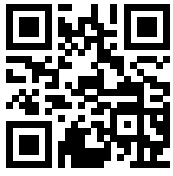
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# India tourism makes green shift

In an era where sustainability takes centre stage in the global travel landscape, India's tourism industry is witnessing a notable transformation. With growing consciousness among Indian travellers towards eco-friendly and responsible travel, there is a surge in demand for sustainable options. Women leaders in the industry share their views with **TRAVTALK**.



**Sheetal Munshaw**  
Director-India, Atout France

“We have observed that Indian traveller has become more aware and conscious of how travel impacts the environment. The segment is still niche and growing but we have noticed an increase in demand for eco-friendly hotels, train travel, discovering destinations/ monuments that are not over populated. There is also a growing interest in regional/ organic cuisine/ wines/ products, reinforcing the belief that Indians are slowly orienting themselves towards more sustainable practices. Another trend that is developing is an increase in immersive cultural experiences.”

“Sustainability has always been at the heart of our tourism initiatives. While we recognize the growing global trend towards sustainable travel practices, it's important to acknowledge that travellers from different regions often have varying priorities and preferences. In recent years, we have observed increased awareness among Indian travellers regarding sustainable destinations. As travellers become more conscious of their ecological footprint and seek authentic experiences that respect local communities and ecosystems, there is a growing demand in sustainable tourism.”



**Elisa Robles**  
Director, Tourism Office of Spain – Mumbai  
Contd. on page 12 ▶

## Ayodhya creates global buzz

The tourism surge in Ayodhya, which has rich historical and cultural significance, is not just driven by religious sentiment but also by curiosity, says Prateek Hira, Chairman, IATO-UP Chapter.



Janice Alyosius

Ayodhya, the holy city situated on the banks of Sarayu river in Uttar Pradesh, is experiencing an unprecedented surge in tourism, fuelled by the hype created surrounding the Ayodhya Temple. Sharing insights into the remarkable influx of visitors and evolving landscape of tourism infrastructure in Ayodhya, **Prateek Hira**, Chairman, IATO UP Chapter, says, “A lot of queries are coming. We have not ever faced



**Prateek Hira**  
Chairman  
IATO UP Chapter

such kind of influx of queries that we are having every day. With approximately 90 per cent of email queries being Ayodhya-centric, the demand for travel to the city is undeniable. Visitors are eager not only to witness the temple but also to explore its surroundings and partake in special darshans.”

The tourism surge isn't limited to domestic visitors. International tourists are also captivated by the Ayodhya's charm. “A lot of

Contd. on page 44 ▶

## PATA India elected to board

PATA India Chapter has been elected to its board and will represent 28 chapters around the world. Also, the 47<sup>th</sup> edition of the PATA Travel Mart 2024 will be held in Bangkok, Thailand between 27-29 August.



TT Bureau

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has elected PATA India Chapter to its board to represent 28 Chapters around the globe, revealed **Runeep Sangha**, Executive Director, PATA India Chapter. He revealed that the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Govt. of India, has also been elected to the PATA board. PATA will officially announce the same after their Annual General Meeting (AGM), which will be held in May 2024 at Macau.



**V Vidyavathi**  
Secretary  
Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

It has been announced that the 47<sup>th</sup> PATA Travel Mart 2024 will be held at the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center (QSNCC) in Bangkok, Thailand from 27-29 August. “Featuring a 1-day conference, a two-day business-to-business travel mart, over 10,000 business appointments, and buyers and sellers from more than 40 destinations across six regions; the event offers attendees a first-hand experience of the industry's resurgence,” said Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO, PATA. ▶

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# Keep investing in members: TAAI

Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, claims it is vital for the association to continuously invest in its members through workshops and educational programmes. In addition, she insists sustainability needs to be more than a buzzword today and awareness about green travel must be extended to all levels of tourism businesses.

Nisha Verma

Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) claims sustainability is a two-way traffic. “Today, sustainability is beyond being a buzzword. It is becoming more feasible because people are getting aware of it, owing to climate change and over-tourism. Today, it needs to be adapted into our lives. We need to make India more sustainable with inclusiveness. People are asking questions even for air travel and are ready to pay sustainability tax,” she said.

### Relationship building

Claiming that the destination marketing is very different today, she said, “Information about destinations should be updated and filter down right to our members, and should not just include CEOs and owners of companies. It is a long-term relationship and should



Jyoti Mayal  
President  
TAAI

be a continuous effort. Such interactions allow members to drive best value and connect to the right stakeholders who have reputes in their own country. At the same time, we want people from other countries to visit India. Hence, we do these MoUs and roadshows that it can be a win-win situation not only for us, but

for the other country too. In fact, wherever TAAI takes its convention or connects with, the business multiplies,” she insisted.

In fact, she added, “We have done roadshow with Sri Lanka and even took our convention to the island nation. Also, roadshows have been done with Almaty, Kazakhstan, and even Turkey in the past. We are in dialogue with more countries for roadshows. Currently, TAAI has MoUs with 28 countries and some states in India, as we are investing in domestic tourism,” informed Mayal.

### G20 facelift

Saying that 2023 saw a surge in business in all respects, she shared that G20 meetings happening in India was a great boon. “Infrastructure got much better with G20 meetings. The last mile connectivity got better and so did our relationships. TAAI has been a

part of all G20 meetings for tourism and I have been a speaker at one of them. All these opportunities have created a huge working institution and relationships for our members,” she informed.



Adding further, she said, “TAAI keeps investing in its members. They should progress and apart from roadshows, we are holding educational programs and Fam trips for them. I’ve been visiting many states and having knowledge sessions with them.”

### Government cooperation

TAAI has been working closely

with the Government. “During G20, we were part of policy-making. I am also the Vice Chairperson of FAITH, and under that we did a lot of policy-making for sustainable tourism, cruise tourism, adventure tourism and film tourism. Also, we believe that the National Tourism Policy should not be delayed any further. We are looking at cooperation with other countries with Ministry of Tourism. We are in continuous dialogue with Ministry of Civil Aviation and MOT for the countries who are looking to start new flights to India.”

### Alliances a priority

TAAI recently organized a six-city roadshow with The Ministry of Culture & Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye and Türkiye Tourism & Promotion Agency.

Speaking about the alliance, Mayal said, “I believe that we collectively need to work towards

upliftment of the industry, educating the industry and see that more avenues and streams open. It is a great opportunity post-CO-

**We need to make India more sustainable with inclusiveness. People are asking questions even for air travel and are ready to pay sustainability tax**

VID to reconnect with Turkey as a destination. With the recent roadshow and meet, our members get more educated and updated on the new ways of working with the country.”

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# Ahoy there! women at helm

The Indian travel and tourism industry was never the one to be deprived of female touch. The women have always been actively involved in all roles—from front office, direct customer interaction, mid-level managers, General Managers running a 400-room hotel, or at the helm of individually owned businesses. The industry has seen these women calling the shots at all levels and providing unmatched service, hospitality and warmth with a smile on their face. As we feature some of the leading women from the industry, we are not talking about empowerment, but making sure that they are celebrated at every chance we get to do that and say 'Ladies always first!'

# It's time for transformational travel

While experiential travel has been in vogue for years now. However, with every destination claiming to offer the same, the term has diluted with time. With sustainability and green tourism being a major pull for travellers, people are looking for more than just experiences. Those looking to make their travel more meaningful, are going for what is called transformational travel. It's not just ticking off places from your bucket list, but breaking out of your comfort zone and stepping into the unknown. As more people have started travelling, there's a clamour for more authentic experiences that have a deep and far-reaching impact on travellers. The seasoned travellers don't want to go for the mundane and need travel to change the status quo. The idea is to get deeply involved with the destination, break into the unknown and learn from people and places they encounter. The focus for the transformational traveller is to discover their true self. How that can be offered by a travel provider is food for thought now.

# Inbound surge to remain till 2026

PATA unveiled PATA Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2024-2026, which states international arrival numbers are expected to overshadow the pre-pandemic level of 2019 and the inbound arrivals will register continuous surge between 2024-2026, indicating robust recovery rates.

TT Bureau

Recently, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) released PATA Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2024-2026 predicting the recovery rate of the travel and tourism industry in Asia Pacific region. As per the forecast report, in 2024, international arrival numbers are expected to overshadow the pre-pandemic level of 2019. The surge will continue in 2025 and 2026, as well, indicating robust recovery rates.

The report reveals that Asia, the America, and Europe will play a major role in the augmentation of International Visitor Arrivals

Asia, the America, and Europe will play a major role in the augmentation of International Visitor Arrivals (IVAs) across the Asia Pacific region

(IVAs) across the Asia Pacific region. The report states, "Under the medium scenario, those three source regions are predicted to account for almost 92 per cent of all IVAs generated into and across Asia Pacific in

Asia Pacific – Forecast top ten source markets 2024, medium scenario

Source Market	IVAs 2024, mns	Relative Share IVAs	Annual Change		Recovery Rate
			Percent	IVAs, mns	
China	109.715	17.7%	52.8%	37.892	85.0%
USA	56.845	9.2%	16.9%	8.237	117.2%
Hong Kong SAR	39.310	6.3%	34.1%	10.000	42.2%
Korea (ROK)	29.992	4.8%	33.2%	7.474	103.6%
Macao, China	29.260	4.7%	6.6%	1.799	104.4%
Canada	27.958	4.5%	5.4%	1.423	102.6%
Chinese Taipei	19.635	3.2%	45.9%	6.181	102.5%
Japan	18.416	3.0%	61.4%	7.007	80.0%
Mexico	17.094	2.8%	11.5%	1.767	89.4%
Singapore	17.037	2.8%	28.1%	3.742	98.2%
Total Top 10	365.262	59.0%	30.6%	85.522	84.2%
Total All	619.185	100.0%	24.5%	121.728	90.7%

Note: Sorted by relative share.

2024, increasing marginally by 2026. Under the mild and severe scenarios, those proportions are predicted to differ only very marginally at this aggregate level."

## Top 10 source markets

Among the top 10 source market, China, the USA and Hong Kong SAR, are predicted to be strongest in delivering increased IVA numbers between 2023 and 2024. This results in the top 10 source markets accounting for 59 per cent of all IVAs into and across Asia Pacific in 2024, with an annual increase of 85.5 million foreign arrivals. By end-2026, while top 10 source markets remain the same, two changes in ranking order are predicted to occur:

The top 10 source markets will collectively account for 62 per cent of all arrivals across Asia Pacific in 2026.

## Asia Pacific IVAs by Destination Region and Key Source Market

Asia: Across 22 destinations of Asia considered for the forecast, the aggregate recovery rates are predicted to strengthen from 2024 to 2026.

The forecast states that in 2024, north-east will receive the highest share of IVAs. In 2026, its relative share distribution will be 58.5 per cent. In case of West Asia, the relative share will be 11.4 per cent, which will be majorly represented by Türkiye.

Intra-Asia travel flows will continue to strengthen IVA numbers across Asia, rising from a 76 per cent share of all arrivals in 2024 to almost 79 per cent by the end of 2026. In 2024, majorly, China is projected to drive the numbers with 23.8 per cent relative

share within the Asia source region sector.

Pacific: The IVAs into and across Pacific are predicted to increase beyond its 2019 level. In this region, Oceania and Polynesia will dominate arrivals, capturing 89 per cent of all foreign arrivals in 2024. While Asia will register a slight growth of 33.5 per cent relative share in 2026 from 32.4

By the end of 2026, India will move ahead of Singapore with 1.9 per cent of IVAs relative share in comparison to 1.7 per cent in 2024

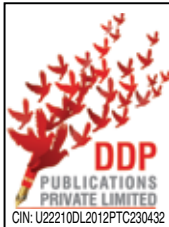
The Pacific – Forecast top ten source markets 2026, medium scenario

Source Market	IVAs 2026, mns	Relative Share IVAs	Annual Change		Recovery Rate
			Percent	IVAs, mns	
USA	9.522	31.4%	-7.4%	-0.766	113.6%
Australia	2.953	9.7%	8.8%	0.239	119.8%
Japan	2.772	9.1%	-0.9%	-0.024	94.1%
New Zealand	2.444	8.0%	4.4%	0.103	125.2%
China	1.835	6.0%	7.6%	0.129	83.6%
Korea (ROK)	1.775	5.8%	3.4%	0.059	109.4%
UK	1.149	3.8%	2.2%	0.024	112.4%
Canada	0.880	2.9%	2.2%	0.019	106.0%
India	0.568	1.9%	6.6%	0.035	120.2%
Singapore	0.531	1.7%	-18.3%	-0.119	96.6%
Total Top 10	24.429	80.5%	-1.2%	-0.301	108.9%
Total All	30.364	100.0%	-1.4%	-0.440	109.3%

Note: Sorted by relative share.

per cent in 2024 as it adds 4.1 million additional IVAs into the Pacific. Half of the top ten source markets in 2024 are forecast to be from Asia, with two from the Americas, and one from Europe.

By the end of 2026, there will be no change in the source market structure with few slight movements as Australia will move ahead of Japan, and India will move ahead of Singapore with 1.9 per cent of IVAs relative share in comparison to 1.7 per cent in 2024.



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# ATM 2024: spotlight on luxury

The Middle East's luxury travel market is evolving rapidly. ATM 2024 will put spotlight on broader scope of luxury travel, where experts will brainstorm over the shifting consumer preferences and industry trends.

TT Bureau

The landscape of luxury travel in the Middle East is experiencing a profound transformation, evolving beyond opulence to integrate elements of heritage, innovation, and sustainability. This shift will take centre stage at the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2024, scheduled to take place from 6 May to 9 May at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC), where global tourism experts will converge to explore the sub-theme of luxury travel.

According to YouGov's Global Travel & Tourism Whitepaper 2023, high-spending travellers are increasingly inclined to pay premiums for experiences that prioritize responsible and eco-friendly tourism practices. This sentiment has echoed in the UAE, where more than three-fifths of residents express willingness to invest in sustainable tourism, indicating a paradigm shift where luxury is no longer solely associated



Danielle Curtis  
Exhibition Director  
Arabian Travel Market

with indulgence but also with ethical considerations.

The participation of renowned brands such as Atlantis The Palm, Mandarin Oriental Dubai, and Jumeirah International at ATM 2024 underscores the region's growing commitment to luxury tourism. This diverse array of exhibitors will offer insights into emerging trends, entrepreneurial ventures, and opportunities for sustainable growth, setting the stage for discussions on the future trajectory of luxury travel.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director, Arabian Travel Market, emphasizes on the significance of incorporating luxury travel as a sub-theme, asserting that it provides a holistic view encompassing extravagant experiences, eco-conscious choices, cultural preservation, and technological innovations. This inclusive approach sets a new standard for the industry where indulgence coexists harmoniously with ethical principles.

The global luxury travel sector, valued at US\$1.28 trillion in 2022, is projected to experience steady

growth, with the Middle East reflecting this upward trend. The region's commitment to luxury tourism is further evidenced by surveys indicating increased vacation spending among residents of the UAE and KSA, highlighting a burgeoning market for upscale travel experiences.

Innovation emerges as a driving force within the luxury travel segment, with technologies such as virtual reality, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, and big data reshaping the way travellers engage with destinations and services. These advancements enable personalized recommendations, tailored experiences, and anticipatory services.

ATM 2024 will serve as a platform to delve into these trends and developments. With its theme of 'Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship,' the event will facilitate collaboration among policymakers, industry leaders, and travel professionals to shape the future of global travel and tourism.

High-spending travellers are increasingly inclined to pay premiums for experiences that prioritize responsible and eco-friendly tourism practices



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- India ranks high on natural heritage index, budget cut hinders overseas promotion: Arshdeep Anand
- Tourism projects moving on snail's pace, need to monitor data collection, says Parliamentary panel
- Ministry of Commerce, Saudi Arabia, signs agreement with VFS Global for visa services
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- J&K's visitor numbers dip by 50 per cent in Jan, but rush for adventure activities on rise
- 320-acre International Central Park to be built on 120-acre racecourse land in Mumbai

Need to look at tourism as industry

Maharashtra Tourism states that it is now committed to facilitate investments and business partnerships in the state. It recently launched a WhatsApp Chatbot to provide destination-related information as well as a new mobile app to encourage women entrepreneurs.

Hazel Jain

Maharashtra Tourism has announced an ambitious plan to enhance travel opportunities in the state. Recognizing the region's tremendous potential, it aims to leverage its unique cultural, historical, and natural assets to attract domestic and international visitors while promoting business and trade collaborations within the state. **Girish Mahajan**, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, launched an AI-powered WhatsApp chatbot (+91 94038 78864) that provides an interactive way to explore the state's attractions via mobile phone. The chatbot can answer questions about destinations, things to do, accommodation, and more, in both English and Marathi.

While unlocking Maharashtra's tourism potential demands strategic investments in infrastructure,



Girish Mahajan, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra

hospitality, and technology, Mahajan said, "Seamless connectivity, from roadways to air routes, beckons travellers to explore our diverse landscapes. Varied accommodations, from luxury resorts to cosy homestays, cater to all preferences. Embracing digital tools enriches visitor experiences and streamlines services. Yet, sustainability must underpin our efforts, preserving our heritage and supporting local communities. Let's

unite the government, private sector, communities, and citizens to craft a vibrant, sustainable tourism legacy for generations." Commenting on the initiatives, **Jayshree Bhoj**, Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, said, "Our Department of Tourism diligently crafts policies, amplifies promotions and nurtures diverse experiences in collaboration with stakehold-

ers like MTDC and private players championing niche tourism. We envision a sustainable tourism ecosystem fueled by collaborative efforts and robust policies. Join us on this journey as we sculpt Maharashtra's tourism narrative together, with an open invitation for valuable insights to shape our forthcoming comprehensive tourism policy." Mahajan also launched an app for the Aai Policy, which aims to empower women entrepreneurs in tourism. Under this initiative, the Department of Tourism plans to register 10 women-owned and operated businesses in each district, spanning sectors such as homestays, hotels/restaurants, tour and travel agencies, and more. This policy is designed to foster entrepreneurship and economic empowerment among women in Maharashtra's tourism industry. Maharashtra Tourism is committed to facilitating invest-

ments and business partnerships in the state. It will engage with industry leaders, chambers of commerce, and trade associations to foster opportunities across hospitality, travel, F&B, and handicrafts. Through targeted initiatives and promotional campaigns, Maharashtra Tourism aims to attract entrepreneurs and investors to explore the state's vast potential and untapped opportunities.

Through targeted initiatives and promotional campaigns, Maharashtra Tourism aims to attract entrepreneurs and investors

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# Visible shift towards sustainability

► Contd. from page 5



**Dipti Pradhan Thakoor**  
Director, Adventure Holidays  
and ETAA Event Head

“Some travellers prioritize sustainability, driven by a sense of environmental responsibility and a desire to engage in responsible tourism practices. Conversely, a significant portion is more focused on convenience, cost, or other factors. Striking a balance & offering a range of options catering to various preferences will be crucial for travel industry's responsiveness to the evolving landscape.”



**Anshu Tejuja**  
Managing Director  
Ashoka Dream Holidays

“With increasing awareness about environmental issues and the impact of tourism, more travellers are seeking eco-friendly and responsible travel experiences. Today's travellers are not just looking for luxurious accommodations or popular tourist attractions, they are also interested in experiences that contribute positively to local communities and minimize harm to the environment.”



**Aanchal Nagpal**  
Founder  
Roche Holidays

“Indian travellers are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their travel. The average Indian traveller used to look for the most cost-effective option. With the fast changing pace of the world, travellers have been actively opting for options that will reduce their carbon footprint. With a growing awareness of environmental and social impacts, many seek eco-friendly options and products.”



**Shalini Jain**  
Travel Curator  
Click2Travel

“The mature traveller today is conscious of sustainability. This sort of requirement is also largely from the luxury segment. Moreover, we as travel advisors should be more vocal about this and communicate about travelling sustainably to our guests. We must also try and initiate simple measures to promote sustainable travel like advising them on alternative options while they are on their journey.”



**Stephanie Tanpure**  
Vice President Sales  
Sands Resorts Macao


“There is a rising preference for sustainable travel options within Indian travellers, yet the opportunity for growth is definitely something to watch. We see cost as a deterring factor, as eco-friendly and community driven components may come with higher operational expenses. Perceptions are changing though, and a wider choice of sustainable options are entering the market.”



**Arshdeep Anand**  
Director  
Holiday Moods Adventures

“Indian traveller is well aware and in sync with the growing problems of the world, and most of them, when sensitised, do not feel good about leaving a huge carbon footprint due to travels. All suppliers are increasingly coming up with products which are sustainable. There are eco-friendly options for accommodation and modes of transport. Guests are seeking more local and native experiences.”





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# It's more than just a buzzword



**Ayesha Langar**  
Director Sales  
Jaisalmer Marriott Resort & Spa

“Guests are more conscious about their travel needs. In many ways, the choice to stay in a hotel that practices sustainable hospitality bodes well with their moral compass. Branded hotels have moved to bulk bathroom amenity programmes that are wall-mounted to prevent landfill. Water bottling plants and electric vehicle charging stations are a common sight in most of the hotels.”



**Agatha Gomes**  
Director Sales  
Four Seasons Hotel, Mumbai

“Sustainability is more than just a buzzword now. Every consumer today, especially in the luxury segment is conscious of the brands they associate with, and each of their sustainability measures. Hospitality is no different. Our guests are curious about our green initiatives and have responded well to them. Wooden key cards, plastic-free amenities and more have been appreciated by guests.”



**Devidyuti Ghosh**  
Hotel Manager, Mulberry Shades Bengaluru  
Nandi Hills, A Tribute Portfolio Resort

“The Indian traveller appreciates initiatives towards sustainability. A lot of our corporate queries from domestic sector prefer hotels that conduct sustainable events over other hotels. We have adopted several initiatives in this regard – cage-free eggs for food, wooden key cards, in-house water bottling plant, silicon master key wrist bands for usage by hotel associates, to name a few.”



**Ellona Pereira**  
Head  
AVIAREPS India

“With growing consciousness about environmental preservation, Indian travellers are seeking sustainable travel options. This trend is evident both in inbound and outbound destinations. Despite a strong desire for sustainable choices among Indian travellers, limited options remain a challenge, with 83 per cent expressing willingness to switch to more sustainable options.”



**Huzan Fraser Motivala**  
India Representative  
Royal Commission for AIUla

“The Indian traveller has started to look for sustainable travel options. Even if they are not looking, and if that option is presented to them, they are happy to go with it. There are many destinations offering sustainable travel options, and one of them is AIUla in Saudi Arabia. It plans to be carbon-neutral by 2035 and their regeneration project is a showcase for a range of sustainable solutions.”




**Suzanne Pereira**  
Sr. VP - Trade Relations, Corp Comm. & Service Quality, Thomas Cook & SOTC Travel

“The new age Indian traveller is becoming more mindful of the environment. This shift is resulting in an encouraging uptick in interest for eco/ green and sustainable elements across both – air and land. We are doing our part to build momentum. Another important initiative is working with partners towards increasing off-peak/ low season travel to reduce the concerns of over-tourism.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

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# Hurtigruten to entice Indians onboard

Hurtigruten, with an aim to offer mesmerizing and exclusive cruise experience targets India, which is an emerging market for expeditions. To boost the business in India, it carves out strategic plans and marketing campaigns to disseminate information about its packages and future products, and also trains agents for seamless bookings.



India has been one of the fastest-growing markets for Hurtigruten, both for coastal Norway and expeditions businesses. The company aims to serve customers not looking for endless cocktails and entertainment on ships, but majestic hues of nature. Hence, they have launched multiple programmes and executed various strategies to boost business in India. They organised multiple B2B meetings and participated at destination roadshows. Moreover, last year's touring programmes received several queries, which is a testament of Hurtigruten's initiatives in India. Additionally, the polar expedition programme has received a positive response from India.

## Promotional initiatives

With the increase in the popularity of polar expeditions in the last

two years along with Midnight-Sun and Northern Light voyages, Hurtigruten is planning to increase B2B and B2C marketing communication. As Indian guests are seeking off-the-beaten-track experiences, Hurtigruten plans to provide the same through sustainable cruising. It will target not only repeat guests but also first-time customers.

When asked about the initiatives being taken in India to promote Hurtigruten, **Anima Saxena**, Director, Cruise Professionals, replied, "With a legacy of 130 years behind Hurtigruten, there are multiple initiatives which we are taking to ensure the correct brand promotion." The Hurtigruten group has recently created Hurtigruten Expeditions - HX, a new brand that will focus on expeditions with dedicated ships, whereas the Hurtigruten Norway shall continue its traditional



**Anima Saxena**  
Director  
Cruise Professionals

coastal journey. Hurtigruten strategically creates marketing campaigns that align well with the global plan and consumers and travel. The marketing initiative includes trade and consumer print adverts, webinars, social media campaigns, and participation in trade and consumer shows, and plan to introduce rewarding schemes for intermediaries.

## Collaboration with trade

Highlighting Hurtigruten's partnership with travel trade, Saxena, said, "Travel intermediaries contribute almost 90 per cent of our business. We train, engage, and encourage agents to use their packaging capabilities using the specially negotiated rates to form their package. This provides them an edge over net-based options." As per Saxena, The Hurtigruten tour program is one such new product launched by the organisation, which eliminates the intervention of DMC – the agent could build and buy a full package for Scandinavia from Hurtigruten. The company makes sure to provide training and equipment to agents, which increase their knowledge and enhance servicing capabilities. "However, when it comes to guests who plan to oversee their own deal for various components, we encourage them to

reach out to their travel agent for a more comprehensive service,

**We are committed to delivering a cruise ship that surpasses all others in terms of energy efficiency and sustainability in just a few years**

which would not be limited to cruise, but also air ticket, visas and hotels," said Saxena.

## Latest updates

Adding another feather in its cap, Hurtigruten Norway unveiled plans for its first zero-emission ship. Initially, announced in

March 2022, the project 'Sea Zero,' the first-of-its-kind initiative, aims to launch the world's most energy-efficient cruise ship. It presented the findings alongside its consortium of 12 maritime partners and research institute SINTEF, all joined in the pursuit of achieving emission-free marine travel with energy-efficient and carbon-neutral technology solutions. "When we initially announced the 'Sea Zero' project over a year ago, we faced the challenge of not knowing which technologies would be available to us in 2030. After a rigorous feasibility study, we have pinpointed the most promising technologies for our groundbreaking future cruise ships. We are committed to delivering a ship that surpasses all others in terms of energy efficiency and sustainability in just a few years," said **Hedda Felin**, CEO, Hurtigruten Norway.



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# Gen Z covets Tamil Nadu temples

Tamil Nadu's evolving inbound tourism landscape encompasses a spectrum of traveller preferences, spanning from medical and religious tourism to emerging trends like adventure and South Indian-style weddings. There is a growing trend for exploring religious tourism among Gen Z and millennials in the state, says Sriharan Balan, MD, Madura Travel Service.

Janice Alyosius

**Sriharan Balan**, Managing Director, Madura Travel Service, shares insights into the evolving landscape of inbound tourism in Tamil Nadu. While medical tourism holds primary position in the state's inbound business, religious tourism also generates significant interest in leisure section, especially among foreigners, NRIs, and Tamil-origin people.

"Primary tourists into Tamil Nadu are for medical tourism, but concerning leisure travel, the second biggest influx is for religious tourism and temple visits. This encompasses not only foreigners but also a significant number of NRIs and Tamil-origin descendants who arrive for their yearly religious rituals. On the other hand, Europeans prefer to do longer, more relaxed tour of Tamil Nadu by visiting histori-



**Sriharan Balan**  
Managing Director  
Madura Travel Service

cal sites like Madurai, Velankani and Kazhugumalai, along with beachside experiences in Mahabalipuram and Kanyakumari. Asian travellers, including Koreans and Japanese, focus more on religious and astrological destinations such as Chidambaram and Tanjore," he shares. Balan sees a growing trend for exploring religious tourism among

Generation Z and millennials. He elaborates on rising interest in the historic value of temples and the allure of participating in rituals, particularly among tourists from Japan, Korea, and other parts of Asia. Dressing like locals and experiencing these cultural aspects have become popular and "Instagramable" for these younger travellers, he says.

Adventure tourism has also seen a surge in Tamil Nadu. "Post-COVID, we have observed an increase in tourists from Australia who prefer visiting Tamil Nadu for adventure tourism purposes and sea-based activities. Their primary requirements include high-quality hotels, translators, and well-maintained vehicles. While the age group varies depending on the chosen activity, the majority falls within the 40 years and above bracket," he reveals.

Balan highlights the government's recent guidelines, boosting confidence among tourists and operators. The state offers a plethora of adventure activities, including sea-based adventures like scuba diving and surfing in Kovalam.

With over 25 accessible hill stations and the expansive terrain of the Western Ghats, Tamil Nadu offers an ideal trekking experience for enthusiasts

"Biking trips to Kolli Hills and trekking opportunities in the Western Ghats have gained popularity among enthusiasts, primarily in

the age group of 18-40. With over 25 accessible hill stations and the expansive terrain of the Western Ghats, Tamil Nadu offers an ideal trekking experience for enthusiasts," he says.

Talking about inbound weddings, Balan emphasizes on the emergence of South Indian-style weddings. "Weddings have emerged as a significant game changer post-COVID. The way international content exposure expanded through platforms like Netflix and Instagram, Europeans are now enthusiastic about embracing the South Indian way of marriage ceremonies. Puducherry is attracting many French nationals seeking a blend of South Indian traditions with a beach wedding twist. Their preferences include having a priest to officiate the wedding and incorporating elements like elephants and horses (although the use of elephants is presently restricted

by the Tamil Nadu government, yet arrangements have been made in Kerala). Despite limiting the guest list to 50-60 attendees, significantly smaller compared to the typical South Indian wedding, these ceremonies are executed beautifully," he says.

"Challenges arise when requests for a temple wedding are made, as temples usually have restrictions for foreigners performing certain rituals within the temple premises. The buzz surrounding these weddings has only just begun, and we anticipate it to potentially become a market worth a minimum of US\$10 million in Tamil Nadu alone by 2025," he adds.

Balan believes that Tamil Nadu holds immense potential beyond temple tourism. He mentioned upcoming attractions like the Jallikattu stadium, which will elevate the tourism experience.




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# Glamping in vogue at Rann Utsav

Rann Utsav - The Tent City by Evoke Experiences with support from the Gujarat Tourism Department sees great business every year from November to February, during the festival.

TT Bureau

Rann Utsav-The Tent City, by Evoke Experiences with support from the Tourism Department of Gujarat, celebrates the beauty and rich cultural tapestry of the rural areas of Kutch. Set against the backdrop of White Desert in Dhordo village, the four-month-long Rann Utsav provides immersive experience beyond the usual. This year the unique desert festival is open till 27 March. The travel destination is a winter wonderland – a vast white desert formed by the salt residue from the sea's receding backwaters during the summer months.

## Customized itineraries

The Tent City, comprising more than 400 lavish tents equipped with contemporary conveniences, provides unparalleled experiences. Special attractions at the Rann of Kutch include the unique White Desert or salt marsh, wildlife like flamingos and migratory birds, ruins at Dholavira—the Harappan site, Dholavira, camel safaris, sampling the Kutchi cuisine and stargazing in the desert.



The Tent City, comprising more than 400 lavish tents equipped with contemporary conveniences, provides unparalleled experiences

Once settled into The Tent City for an extraordinary glamping adventure, a wealth of activities, an abundance of design, a profusion of culture, and a

cornucopia of music and dance await. The arid Kutch landscape unfolds as a mosaic of captivating experiences in art, crafts, music, and dance.

## Destinations for all ages

There is rarely a destination like the Tent City in the Rann of Kutch, which has so many things to offer whilst catering to visitors of all ages and tastes. The once in a lifetime glamping experience combined with natural wonders cannot be found anywhere else. It justifies the statement, "Kutch Nahi Dekha Toh Kuch Nahi Dekha" roughly translating to "if you have not seen the Kutch, you have not seen anything".

# Affiliate.Travel, a game changer

To continuously innovate and adapt to evolving market trends and technological advancements in the travel and tourism industry, RezLive.com employs several strategies.

TT Bureau

RezLive.com is running Affiliate.Travel specialist program in India for a period of three months to make agents aware on the benefits associated with this unique product. "Affiliate.Travel has emerged as a game-changer in the domain of affiliate marketing for the travel sector wherein it even provides the opportunity for the affiliate to have a sub-affiliate dedicated portal, which they can offer to their B2C clients or corporates," said Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group.

"Affiliate.Travel is a B2B2C payment gateway model, wherein an affiliate earns commission on each reservation done by them or their sub-affiliates. For travel agents engaging with corporate clients, Affiliate.travel by RezLive.com stands as a potent resource for broadening their outreach and fostering revenue expansion. One of the most significant advantages of Affiliate.travel is the level of support and resources pro-



Jaal Shah  
Group Managing Director  
Travel Designer Group

vided to its affiliates," he shared. He claimed that Rezlive.com stands out as a leading B2B online reservation system in the travel industry due to its comprehensive suite of features and offerings designed to meet the needs of travel agents, tour operators, and other travel professionals.

Some key features that make RezLive.com stand out include—extensive Inventory; competitive pricing; and extra benefits like RezVault, RezRewards, Money

Box, user-friendly interface, real-time availability, mmultilingual support, 24/7 customer support, advanced reporting and analytics, and XML integration capabilities. Responding on their plans for

For travel agents engaging with corporate clients, Affiliate.travel stands as a potent resource for broadening their outreach and fostering revenue expansion

2024, he shared, "This year, we are committed to further strengthening our position as a leading B2B online reservation system in the travel industry. We plan to focus on enhancing our platform's capabilities, expanding our global reach, and delivering added value to our travel partners."

# Kerala bets big on heli-tourism

Kerala has unveiled a number of groundbreaking products, including heli-tourism, at Kerala Tourism B2B Partnership meeting, held in Delhi recently. Sky Escapes, the heli-tourism project, will connect top destinations in the state to promote tourism. The initiatives are part of the government's aggressive approach to increase domestic tourist footfall in the state.

Amita Pandey

Kerala, known as God's Own Country, is one of the most coveted destinations due to its unique geography and features like serene backwaters, enthralling beaches, and mystic hill stations with sprawling tea and spice plantations. The state registered 159.69 lakh domestic visitors between January and September in 2023, resulting in an impressive growth of 19.34 per cent.

To further augment the numbers, Kerala Tourism recently unveiled groundbreaking products, including heli-tourism, yard tourism, and wedding destinations during Kerala Tourism B2B Partnership meet, held in Delhi in January 2024. During the event, PB Nooh, Director, Kerala Tourism, also showcased tourism products, innovative tourism circuits, and multiple initiatives taken for infrastructure development.



PB Nooh  
Director  
Kerala Tourism

Sky Escapes, the heli-tourism project unveiled at the event, aims to connect top destinations in the state to promote tourism. "With the launch of Sky Escapes, Kerala has become the first state in the country to do so," Nooh said.

## Wedding Tourism & MICE

Kerala Tourism is also promoting the state as an ideal and diverse wedding destination by leveraging its picturesque des-

tinations and connectivity. "The government is committed to creating a conducive environment for destination weddings, subsequently boosting tourism and local economies," Nooh said. Appreciating how Kerala seamlessly hosted G20 Sherpa meeting at a small village like Kumarakom, he also asserted the state's preparedness to host more such events. Highlighting the accommodation capacity as the strength of Kerala, he mentioned, "Accommodation wise Kerala is at the forefront, but we are identifying the gaps related to other infrastructure development for bigger conferences, and trying to plug in."

## Domestic tourism

He emphasised that post-COVID, Kerala Tourism has crafted an aggressive marketing strategy to bolster the presence of domestic tourists in the state through campaigns like 'Make up for lost time, pack up for



Kerala', which has received PATA Gold Award for innovative promotional initiative. "Kerala's USP is its partnership with other stakeholders of the industry, consistently providing inputs for evolving products," Nooh said.

## Inbound tourism

To put Kerala on the global adventure tourism map, the government is hosting four international adventure sporting events in 2024, as

adventure tourism is expected to grow 20 per cent by 2032 worldwide. Moreover, in the last two

decades, Kerala has been conducting B2B meetings regularly, especially in Europe.

## Adventure sporting events in 2024

- ❖ International Paragliding Festival at Vagamon, Idukki from 14 to 17 March
- ❖ International Surfing Festival at Varkala from 29 to 31 March
- ❖ Mega Mountain Biking event at Priyadarshini tea plantation, Mananthavady, Wayanad, from 26 to 28 April
- ❖ Malabar River Festival at Kodencherry, Kozhikode from 25 to 28 July





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# 'Revamp India's global campaign'

Phil Chung, CEO, Yasho Bhomi (Kinexin), highlights untapped opportunities and challenges India faces in maximizing its appeal on the global stage. He suggests that India needs to exhibit its multifaceted appeal to the world aggressively, including foreign recognition about India as an adventure destination.



Janice Alyosius

Expressing his view on India's potential as an attractive global destination in various fields, **Phil Chung**, Chief Executive Officer, Yasho Bhomi (Kinexin), says that India needs to adopt a more assertive approach in showcasing its allure to the world. "Why don't we have Indian campaigns there? Why don't we see promotion campaigns for India?" Chung says, emphasizing on the need for exhibiting India's multifaceted appeal to the world more aggressively.

Citing the absence of prominent Indian campaigns featuring on billboards at Broadway in Manhattan, New York, he says, "To make India a truly attractive destination, we need to move away from the rigid stance. While India is often described as a corporate and convention destination, the foreign recognition about India is as an adventure destination. We



**Phil Chung**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Yasho Bhomi (Kinexin)

are in much more need of indoor attractions. Following G20 Summit, organised under the India's leadership, we must harness the country's full potential, such as its population, industry opportunities, and competitiveness."

Chung also stresses on the importance of government intervention in encouraging international conventions and exhibitions across diverse sectors. "If the Indian government

mandates every industry to bring in more international conventions and exhibitions, covering top players from all industry sectors, it would be mutually beneficial. All the top-10 agenda events should be encouraged to take place in India and not in other countries. We need to analyse the top-10 events as per each industry and incentivize them," Chung says.

Discussing challenges faced by foreign organisers, Chung underscores the lack of standardized tourism packages aligned with conventions in India. "When I try to introduce India or our venue in New Delhi to foreign organisers, they ask about the tourism packages available in India. They enquire about spouse programmes, half-day or full-day city tourism packages aligned with those conventions. They ask, 'whom should we contact?' There isn't a standardized, easy platform or package, despite the presence of many travel agencies. For instance, we

are in Dwarka, and people might ask about what is there to see in Dwarka and what its competitiveness is. So, we need city-by-city and region-by-region package programmes for all these aspects," he points out.

**Setting up of a deregulation committee for MICE industry would help in simplifying the processes and implementing a single-window system**

Acknowledging India's progress in various spheres, Chung suggests for setting up of a deregulation committee, specifically focusing on the MICE industry. "India is doing well in every aspect, and I



truly believe it will take some time, but maybe if somebody thinks about establishing a deregulation committee from the Central government or Ministry of Tourism, it would be nice. By deregulation, I mean easing regulations in the MICE industry. Establishing a deregulation committee for this industry would help in simplifying

the process of doing business, reducing permits, and implementing a single-window system. Focusing on these regulations might bring about significant changes in this industry because India is already full of many accommodations and tourism spots; all we need to do is make things a little better," he concludes.

## Will India be largest aviation market?

Gavin Eccles, Managing Partner, GE Consulting & Advisory, says the new aircraft orders from Air India and IndiGo are a wake-up call that India is potentially on the crest of a wave on the future of aviation. Is it time for the world to look at India with more clarity, or is the dream of having the largest aviation market space in the world getting closer?

For many years, the aviation world waited for Air India to be privatized, for Jet Airways to return, for India to move from being predominantly seen as a domestic market to an international player. So, we were all looking at India. In the meantime, we saw the birth of another domestic player in Akasa Air, opening of Mopa Airport in Goa, and new projects under construction like the Jewar airport in Uttar Pradesh, and in Navi Mumbai.

In essence, India has made some significant progress in the aviation sector. First, Air India, with its new privatization approach, and the potential for merging Air India, Air India Express and Vistara, bringing a mix of legacy and LCC. The airline has placed an order for around 500 aircraft, which will allow it to open an international outbound strategy and ensure that Indians travels to from East to West, without having to always pass through a Middle East hub.



On the other hand, the low-cost carrier IndiGo, which was predominantly focussing on the domestic market, placed an even bigger order for more than 500 narrow-body airbus A320 family aircraft. What is key with the IndiGo's order is that a significant part is based on the long-haul version of the narrow-body aircraft, the role of A321XLR, and the ability to fly up to 11 hours east and west of the country. In essence, this puts India in the same position as the UAE was some years ago.

However, this also puts focus on the link between Air India and the new

airport infrastructure. Will the airline look to make multiple hubs, or be like Air China (Beijing), or Riyadh Air (Riyadh), and just focus on Delhi or Mumbai? It's a question that needs further analysis. For IndiGo, is it a point-to-point vision, using the new extra flight times to penetrate strongly into Europe and north-east and south-east Asia? And, again, where will it be based. Can IndiGo have multiple hubs across the new airports being built?

### Two-airline situation

India is moving to a two-airline situation. Air India that is covering all

segments but may need to be split across different airports. However, as it is in private hands, the vision may be different. It is not like China where the Government has pushed carriers to dominate parts of the country, and use the airports as hubs across different cities. Can the carrier take a one-city, one-hub approach? And, for IndiGo, the vision of an LCC with a hub strategy has not yet been proven. Emirates and flydubai blend the link between full service and LCC, but we have no real vision thus for an LCC to be connecting 11 hours west to 11 hours east. Can it happen? Is the

airport infrastructure being created with this in mind?

Delhi, Mumbai and Goa serve different market interests?

In ordering the aircraft, is IndiGo really point to point, or do they look at multiple hubs across the country

**Does IndiGo look at multiple hubs across India playing the game of linking cities and countries on a geographical basis?**

playing the game of linking cities and countries on a geographical basis. Again, we see this in the USA, where the big three has secondary hubs for regional impact. How would the bases of A321XLRs in

In conclusion, the new orders from the two biggest carriers are a wake-up call that India is potentially on the crest of a wave on the future of aviation. Is it time for the world to look at India with more reality, and is the dream of having the largest aviation market space in the world getting closer?



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

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



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# Puri's first premium luxury resort

Swosti Group's new venture Swosti Premium Beach Resorts is the first five-star premium luxury beach resort in Puri. Offering a complete coastal experience with beautiful rooms, mega conference facilities, wellness amenities, and diverse dining options, the property will open its doors in Sipasurubuli soon. JK Mohanty, CMD, Swosti Group, shares more.

Hazel Jain

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, scheduled to open early this year, promises to be the perfect destination for MICE and weddings in Puri. The first five-star premium luxury beach resort in Puri aims to position Odisha as a prominent MICE destination. With open-air landscaped lawns, the property is equipped to host mega conferences and elaborate wedding ceremonies.



JK Mohanty  
CMD  
Swosti Group

### MICE offerings

The resort is equipped with modern technologies and state of the art facilities to host mega conferences and elaborate wedding ceremonies. The large banquet hall can host up to 700 pax and three other conference halls can host 150 pax each, and the large open-air landscaped lawns at different heights overlooking the sea and sky create a dreamlike atmosphere for any MICE or wed-

ding event. The resort has already booked two mega medical conferences and four weddings from May 2024 onwards.

Speaking about the new resort, JK Mohanty, CMD, Swosti Group, says, "Puri being the capital of Beach Tourism in Eastern India stands a good chance for getting large number of tourists. Recently, after modernization and beau-

tification of the surroundings of Shree Jagannath Temple, a large number of tourists are visiting Puri every day but there are no five-star hotels in Puri. This will give us an edge in attracting high-end tourists visiting Puri."

He adds that the group is confident of making the Puri project a success because of its in-house travel company m/s Swosti Trav-



els, which is already linked to all domestic and international tour operators. Presently, Swosti Travels is giving business to most of the hotels in Puri and selling its own property would not be a dif-

ficult task. "We are receiving lots of booking inquiries every day. Today, many travellers are seeking unique and high-quality experiences during their vacations," he says.

**A large number of tourists visit Puri every day but there are no five-star hotels in the city. This new resort will give us an edge in attracting high-end tourists**

Some of the proposed upcoming projects of Swosti Group include— one luxury resort in Gopalpur-on-Sea, a jungle retreat at Satkosia and eco-resorts at Satpada and Bhitarkanika, for which land has already been acquired.



### Complete coastal experience

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts is more than just a luxurious getaway. It's a complete coastal experience. Nestled on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, just a 60-minute drive from Bhubaneswar airport and railway station, the Swosti Premium Beach Resorts is a true gem on the Blue Flag Beach, Puri.

One of the standout features of Puri's Swosti Premium Beach Resort is its versatility as a wedding and event destination. The resort boasts of four wedding venues with open-air landscaped lawns at different heights and state of the art facilities, ensuring that the client's special day is set against a backdrop of unparalleled natural beauty.

# IIM Sirmaur hosts industry stalwarts

IIM Sirmaur commemorated National Tourism Day on 25 January 2024 by hosting the Industry Advisory Board, comprising industry leaders from various companies, including IndiGo, American Express GBT, and Cordelia Cruises. Over the course of two days, the IAB members actively engaged with faculty and students, offering invaluable insights and expertise to assist in career development.





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# Explore Central Europe with Finnair

With Finnair celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Anupam Vig, General Manager, India, speaks about the airline's commitment to sustainability, adaptability, and customer experience that puts it in a position for success in the next century. He thanks the partners and customers, and looks forward to continued collaboration in the Indian market.



Hazel Jain

## How has India performed so far and what kind of load factors have you seen in the year 2023?

Our India flights have performed well in 2023 despite the challenges faced by the aviation industry globally. The load factors have been encouraging, reflecting the resilience of air travel demand. We currently run seven weekly flights between Delhi and Helsinki. We are continually evaluating our flight network to adapt to market dynamics. While specific changes or additions are subject to ongoing analysis, Finnair remains committed to optimizing its operations for the benefit of customers.

## Tell us about summer schedule.

Finnair boasts a robust network encompassing key destinations across Europe, North America, and Asia, including Helsinki, New York, Tokyo, and beyond. Finnair



**Anupam Vig**  
General Manager – India  
Finnair

is also the only airline serving Finland's domestic destinations like Lapland, year-round. Our extensive route network caters to both leisure and business travellers. This summer season we are introducing new connection to Wrocław in Poland and offering connections to fascinating destinations, such as European Capitals of Culture Bodø (in Norway) and Tartu (in Estonia).

## What is your strategy for the Indian market in 2024?

Finnair is dedicated to providing Indian travellers with a seamless travel experience. Our commitment goes beyond just convenient flight schedules and comfortable cabin amenities. We strive to create memorable journeys for customers. Our goal is to solidify Finnair's status as the preferred choice for customers travelling between India and Europe, while also exploring opportunities for network expansion.

## How do you see the aviation landscape in India evolve?

India has been part of our story since 2006. We see a lot of potential in the Indian market in the long term and recognize that it is the third fastest-growing air transport market in the world. Our team in India has worked closely with our local partners to promote the network and connectivity we offer via our Helsinki home hub.

We have seen new traffic flows forming over the past year, for example, between India and US destinations. We are also delighted to see so many Indian travellers discovering the wonders that Finland has to offer.

## Any news that will interest the travel agents?

We are introducing a new PrioFlex ticket type for our corporate customers, which will be available

**Finland's flag carrier is introducing a new PrioFlex ticket type for its corporate customers, which will be available for purchase till 27 February**

for purchase as of 27 February. The new ticket type combines the most popular services for business travellers and is available for Economy Class on short-haul flights and Premium Economy and Economy Class on long-haul flights, excluding some routes. PrioFlex tickets are available via Finnair Corporate Portal and travel agents using NDC, exclusively for Finnair corporate customers who hold an agreement with Finnair.

## Any plans to promote the destination along with the tourism board in India?

Our India team has worked closely with our local partners to promote the network and connectivity we offer via our Helsinki home hub and also India as a destination.

## Do you have an app, and how is it performing in India?

Finnair's award-winning mobile app is designed to provide customers with seamless sup-

port throughout their journey, offering peace of mind on the move. This comprehensive app assists travellers at every stage, from pre-flight preparations to landing at their destination. Customers can effortlessly manage their travel documents and stay informed about upcoming trips. Moreover, the app allows users to conveniently book travel extras, perform hassle-free check-ins, access trip details such as boarding passes and gate information, and utilize their Finnair Plus card. We continue to enhance the app's functionality and user experience.

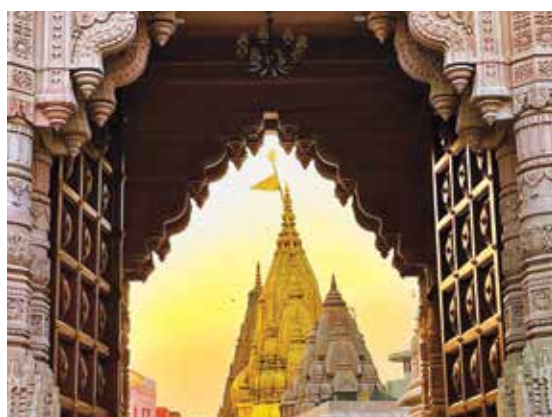
## How do you see the Indian flyer change and evolve?

The Indian flyer is becoming increasingly discerning, with a growing preference for premium travel experiences and personalized services. There is a noticeable shift towards prioritizing comfort and convenience.

# How spiritual tourism supports aviation

According to Future Market Insights (FMI), India's spiritual tourism market size was estimated at US\$1,026m in 2023, accounting for nearly 11 per cent of the global market share, and it is expected to rise in future. The rise in spiritual tourism will augment growth of travel and hospitality industries, says Jaideep Mirchandani, Group Chairman, Sky One.

While presenting the interim budget on 1 February, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman expressed confidence in the growth of spiritual tourism in India. She said that with emerging destinations like Ayodhya, the influx of tourists to such locations would surge, thereby positively impacting various sectors, including infrastructure, hospitality, and aviation. The minister also announced that the government would encourage more states to comprehensively develop iconic tourist centres, brand them effectively, and market them on a global scale. From Varanasi to Bodh Gaya, Ajmer Sharif Dargah and the Golden Temple, spiritual tourism holds a special significance in India, as it is rooted in a rich diversity of religious traditions. Recent reports on the rise in spiritual tourism in India also support Sitharaman's confidence in the sector.



spiritual tourism market was estimated at US\$ 1,025.57 million in 2023, accounting for nearly 11 per cent of the global market share. Projections suggest that this market is now poised for even more growth in 2024. India Inc., particularly the hospitality and travel sectors, including domestic aviation, are poised to become major beneficiaries of this upsurge.

At the recently held Global Investment Summit in Uttar Pradesh,

Ayodhya attracted a huge investment of ₹49,000 crore. SpiceJet has already responded by launching direct flights to Ayodhya from various cities, including Chennai, Bengaluru, and Mumbai. IndiGo is already operating flights to the city from Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Bengaluru. Zoom, the domestic carrier that has re-entered the Indian skies, has also initiated services connecting Delhi to Ayodhya. Moreover, the Ministry of Civil Aviation has announced the

launch of eight new flight routes that will connect Ayodhya with Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Jaipur, Patna, Darbhanga, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. These developments are indicative of the positive impact that the

**From Varanasi to Bodh Gaya, Ajmer Sharif Dargah and the Golden Temple, spiritual tourism traditionally holds a special significance in India**

new spiritual destination is expected to have on India's rapidly growing domestic aviation sector.

The growing trend will also contribute to the development of better

airport infrastructure in the country. According to the Airports Authority of India (AAI), airports serving religious destinations like Shirdi, Gaya, Amritsar, and Varanasi witnessed a significant increase in footfalls in 2023. In line with this growth, we can also expect enhanced amenities at these airports. Airlines can further launch additional services from tier II and tier III cities to these spiritual destinations by partnering with the government's Regional Connectivity Scheme - UDAN.

The increasing interest in pilgrimage destinations will also lead to collaborations between the tourism and hospitality sectors to develop packages based on the customer preferences. The requirements of a spiritual tourist are likely to differ from those of a leisure traveller. Offering dedicated services to cater to pilgrims can attract more group travellers to these destinations.

Meanwhile, another group of individuals may seek spiritual breaks

along with enjoying local experiences and outdoor adventures. This is where a collaborative effort between the travel, tourism, and hospitality sectors becomes significant. India has always been seen as a spiritual destination, but now, with better connectivity, it can not only enrich the economy but also delight tourists from all over the world with the depth and vividness of our multifaceted culture.



**Jaideep Mirchandani**  
Group Chairman  
Sky One

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



# 152 countries part of (Fitur) 2024

FITUR 2024 has wrapped up successfully in Madrid, with record-breaking numbers showcasing the growing global influence of the international tourism fair.



TT Bureau

Feria Internacional del Turismo (FITUR) 2024 organised by IFEMA Madrid, Spain, exceeded all expectations. It surpassed attendance of 250,000 visitors, including, 153,000 professionals and 97,000 general public. The axiomatic success of 44<sup>th</sup> edition of FITUR is evident in its official report, which reveals record-breaking participation with 9,000 companies, 152 countries, 96 official representations, 806 main exhibitors, 9 pavilions, 10 monographic sections for tourist segments. A 13.7 per cent increase in participants was seen as compared to 2023. FITUR is expected to generate around €430 million in revenue for Madrid. The event was inaugurated on 24 January. It saw the sector's dynamism through business transactions, networking opportunities, and dissemination of shifting practices and knowledge.

**The influx of visitors to FITUR this year is expected to generate around €430 million in revenue for Madrid**

To boost its visibility around the globe, IFEMA MADRID has already announced its schedule for FITUR 2025, which will take place from 22-26 January, 2025, with Mexico as country partner.

**India at FITUR 2024**  
The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India participated at FITUR 2024, with a big delegation including private travel stakeholders from India, to escalate inbound tourism to pre-pandemic levels from Spain and other identified source markets in the world, like Latin America.

As per the Indian Government's estimation, 64,756 tourists from Spain arrived in India in 2023, almost touch-

ing pre-pandemic numbers. The Incredible India pavilion at FITUR spanned around 315 sq metres, one of the biggest at FITUR in recent years. It showcased varied tourism products and destinations. India promoted itself as a MICE, wedding and wellness destination in the region. There were 40-plus co-exhibitors along with the presence of state governments including Punjab, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala, MP and Karnataka.



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# India third largest market for Sarova

With Sarova Hotels & Resorts gearing up to celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in April this year, Jimi Kariuki, MD, Sarova Hotels & Resorts, Kenya, delves into the brand's history, its strong ties with India market, and strategies for the future. He also shares his views on the brand's evolution, its focus on diverse markets, and exciting developments.



Arumita Gupta

Nestled in the heart of Kenya, amid its landscapes and vibrant culture, Sarova Hotels & Resorts stands as a testament to exceptional hospitality. With five decades of history, this renowned brand has not only become a household name in Kenya but also established strong connections with the diverse and dynamic market of India.



**Jimi Kariuki**  
Managing Director  
Sarova Hotels and Resorts, Kenya

The India story began 20 years ago when Sarova decided to expand its presence into the market. Little did they know that this would mark the beginning of an amicable relationship. "India has always held importance for us," recalls **Jimi Kariuki**, MD, Sarova Hotels & Resorts, Kenya, adding that the brand's focus has been on leisure. "Throughout these years, the brand expanded its reach by exploring incentives and forging partnerships

with companies like Godrej and Konica. The journey was not without its challenges. However, with unwavering dedication from the team and support from individuals like Heena Munshaw, success became attainable," he adds.

Today, India has emerged as Sarova's largest market after the US and the UK, showcasing remarkable growth. "India is on a progressive trajectory," affirms

Kariuki, expressing his belief in the market's potential. The recent introduction of flights by IndiGo connecting Mumbai and Kenya has brought a dimension to Sarova's engagement with the Indian market.

As Sarova looks ahead to its anniversary in April 2024, the connection with India becomes more significant. Their focus on tier II and tier III cities aligns well with

Throughout these years the brand expanded its reach by exploring incentives and forging partnerships with companies like Godrej and Konica



the evolving dynamics of the travel market. Through partnerships with DMCs, Sarova aims to tap into the potential of these regions.

Educational initiatives play an important role in Sarova's strategy for India. Alongside offering incentives, the brand places importance on organising familiarization

trips and events, viewing them as investments rather than expenses.

**Mita Vohra**, Marketing Director, Sarova Hotels and Resorts, also shares her enthusiasm for the India market. The OTOAI convention came through her dedication to motivate the brand to strengthen its presence in India.

When Sarova reflects on its journey in India, there is a sense of gratitude and optimism. The bond, which has been formed over the years, has emerged stronger. With connectivity and a renewed focus on cities beyond the hubs, Sarova envisions a future where its relationship with India continues to flourish.

# 264 MAX aircraft to fly Indian skies

The 737 MAX is back in headlines, and again for the wrong reasons. The new conversations began after the loss of a door plug section on an Alaska Airlines 737-9 flight on 5 January 2024, which was followed by more potential manufacturing slips. What does the future hold for this aircraft type is still unknown.



Collated by Subir Ahluwalia

The 737 MAX aircraft type today is vital to the growth of many Asia-Pacific airlines and their long-term fleet strategies. What started with fatal crashes in 2018 and 2019, followed by their grounding for a long time, this was the last thing that the MAX programme needed, especially after it had made big leap in improving public perception. However, the current issues are linked to the 737-9 variant only and that too on certain configurations. While investigations are on, there is no news of any regulatory action as of now. In the meantime, Boeing has identified problem in some of its 737 fuselages, which can delay deliveries of 50 aircraft.



MAX jets at the Dubai Air Show, which includes both the MAX 8 and MAX 8-200 variants. Akasa Air currently operates a sole MAX 8-200. SpiceJet, Boeing's largest operator in India, has ordered 155 737 MAX 8s and has 50 additional options. However, owing to grounding in March 2019, only 13 aircraft are delivered so far, leaving 132 outstanding orders. In total, there are 264 MAX aircraft (including options) that could potentially be flying in India. Akasa Air operates an all-MAX fleet with 22 aircraft. Air India Express also

operates the MAX, with 9 aircraft in their fleet. Akasa Air ordered 150 MAX. More relevant is that IndiGo is going to damp lease (i.e. cockpit crew and maintenance remaining with Qatar) five, less than four years old 737 MAX from Qatar Airways for six months to replace huge number of AOG due to P&W engine problem.

**737 Max in Asia-Pacific**  
We should underline that as of now there are very few MAX-9s operated by Asia-Pacific airlines. We can see that the Asia-Pacific

737 MAX fleet has been growing steadily since the previous groundings ended. The only operator of the -9 MAX variant in the Asia-Pacific region is Lion Air, which has three such aircraft in operation, which are not configured with mid-cabin door plug section.

In fact, most airlines in the region are operating the more popular -8 version. According to CAPA, there are 34 companies flying 737 MAXs, including all types of operators. There are 21 operators in

north-east Asia, six in south-east Asia, four in South Asia, and three in the southwest Pacific. There are 211 MAX aircraft in service in the region, owing to aircraft returning to service and new deliveries.

## Airbus to dominate

CAPA revealed that Airbus currently has an edge over Boeing with in-service narrowbody aircraft in the Asia-Pacific region, with Airbus A320neo family leading Boeing's MAX in terms of orders. Airbus accounts for 57.2 per cent of the region's narrowbodies, and Boeing 42.5 per cent. The European manufacturer accounts for 3,298 – or 55.4 per cent – of Asia Pacific narrowbody orders, and Boeing has 1,878 narrowbody orders, for a 31.6 per cent share.

region will grow, which accounts for 44.9 per cent of global orders, significantly ahead of Europe and North America.

**Change in perception is key**  
The major challenge for Boeing and MAX operators could be pub-

Airbus accounts for 3,298 – or 55.4 per cent – of Asia-Pacific narrowbody orders, and Boeing has 1,878 narrowbody orders, for a 31.6 per cent share

lic perception as the manufacturer would not want any negative publicity in the ever-growing Asia-Pacific narrowbody market.



# Over 400 pax turnout @SIHRA Convention

The 2024 South India Hotels & Restaurants Association (SIHRA) convention in Visakhapatnam turned out to be a platform for not only discussing best practices among the hospitality community, but also made sure that the members learn the nuances to excel in terms of technology and sustainability initiatives.

TT Bureau

The annual convention of South India Hotels & Restaurants Association (SIHRA) was held from 19-21 January 2024 at the Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach with theme 'India Growth Story'. This was the first SIHRA convention in Vizag and had in attendance senior government officials, decision makers from hospitality industry and owners from several homegrown hotel chains in South India as well as members of the association. The convention recorded more than 400 delegates in three days full of in-depth discussions on various significant issues pertaining to the industry.

At the inauguration **G. V. L. Narasimha Rao**, Member of Rajya Sabha, addressed the gathering and asserted on the fact that there is a need for development



Delegates at the SIHRA convention at Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach

of tourism in many tier II and III destinations across the region. Citing Ayodhya as a recent example, he said that destinations like Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh can be developed for tourism and hotels and resorts can eventually come up at these locations.

Talking on skill development, he added, "There is a need to take collective representation to create manpower in the hospitality industry. Also, heritage and convention tourism should be developed in other cities apart from metro cities."

**Venkatesan Dhattareyan**, Regional Director, South, West & Central, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, claimed that the convention is a knowledge sharing platform. "With a variety of discussions and a range of speakers at different sessions, the members

get a broader perspective and best practices can be shared with a bigger audience, which are otherwise restricted to individuals. With five states and two UTs, the South India

a big concern for hoteliers in both big and small cities. Thus, capacity building, skilling and training are very important currently."

Speaking about the response of the 2024 convention, **K Syama Raju**, President, SIHRA, said that their idea was to make the convention better than the last one held in Bengaluru in 2023. "Vizag is a beautiful city with a number of beaches and people can invest money in this destination and build hotels, which would help the domestic as well as inbound tourism sector," he commented.

Speaking about SIHRA's activities, he said, "We are promoting a lot of tourism activities and liaising with the government for industry status, which we have achieved in Karnataka. Apart from that we are aggressively setting up laboratories for food safety in all the metro cities."

**The convention recorded more than 400 delegates in three days full of in-depth discussions on various significant issues pertaining to the industry**

region, things are very different and varied at many places. I believe that skill development needs to be addressed in a big way with such a boom in domestic tourism. Hence, having trained manpower remains

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# India shines bright @ **(Fitur)** 2024

The 44<sup>th</sup> edition of FITUR, which was held in Madrid has surpassed all past records in attendance. The India Pavilion was one of the biggest in recent years, and a number of private stakeholders, hotels, and tour operators indulged in B2B meetings and networking. With a focus on MICE and experiential tourism, the India delegation had put its best foot forward.





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# BWH aims to cross 50-hotel mark

BWH Hotels announces the expansion of its aspirational brand World Hotels in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Top leadership of the brand visiting India could be seen as a move to underline the brand's trust in the strength of its Indian partner, Sorrel Hospitality, which will soon start pitching for membership with potential properties in the country.



Lipla Negi

**B**WH Hotels has big plans for 2024. In a move to expand the brand's footprint in the South Asian market, it recently announced the expansion of WorldHotels in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. BWH Hotels acquired WorldHotels in 2019, whose portfolio boasts of 250 strong hand-picked, luxury hotels and resorts over 175 destinations around the world. Sorrel Hospitality, BWH Hotels' master franchise in the region, will start pitching aggressively for membership with potential properties in the country.

Admiring India's growth story in the recent years, **Larry Cuculic**, President and Chief Executive Officer, BWH Hotels, said, "India has now the largest and young population in the world. The beauty and culture of this country complements the ethos of our brand. We



**Larry Cuculic**  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
BWH Hotels

excel in curating unique experiences and India inspires us just like it inspires people to travel and explore this diverse land." Currently, the brand has a global network of approximately 4,300 hotels across diverse chain segments, spanning over 100 countries globally. BWH Hotels' global hospitality network comprises WorldHotels, Best Western® Hotels & Resorts and SureStay Hotels®.



**Atul Jain**  
COO - India, Bangladesh & Sri Lanka  
BWH Hotels

The visit to India by the top leadership of the brand could also be seen as a move to underline the brand's trust in the strength of its Indian partner-master franchise Sorrel Hospitality, led by Atul Jain. "The hotels we visited were spectacular and exceeded our expectations. So, our strategy for India is to exceed guest expectations and establish BWH as the brand of choice. We are eyeing expansion



**Ron Pohl**  
President - International Operations, BWH Hotel Group & President, WorldHotels

in tier II and III cities considering the improving infrastructure in the country," stressed Cuculic.

With 31 operational hotels and 20 more in the pipeline, the brand aims to cross the 50-hotel mark in India. **Atul Jain**, COO - India, Bangladesh & Sri Lanka, BWH Hotels, said, "The region holds immense potential in the luxury hospitality sector and this strategic move is

a testament to our dedication to enhancing the presence of World Hotels in this region."

Citing the travel trends, **Ron Pohl**, President - International Operations, BWH Hotel Group & President, WorldHotels, underscored the rise in demand for luxury escapes, which was further punctuated by the pandemic. "We saw more travel happening in the upscale and luxury segment. At present, under the brand umbrella of WorldHotels we have four sub brands - Luxury, Distinctive, Elite and Crafted," says Pohl.

Currently, the brand has 160 hotels and resorts across the world and 35 more properties are in the pipeline. The brands observed a great opportunity in the boutique section of the upper scale luxury segment when travel increased after the pandemic. It was the right opportunity to expand and add to the offerings. However, the

leadership thought that just putting numbers on the board was not enough. "It's about putting the right hotels in the right community that will create an experiential trav-



**BWH Hotels acquired WorldHotels in 2019, whose portfolio boasts of 250 strong hand-picked, luxury hotels and resorts over 175 destinations around the world**

el that customers are looking for today. So, from boutique to luxury and small to large, WorldHotels will provide that opportunity for guests, who are part of Best Western," says Pohl.

# Utah takes India mission to 3 cities

The Utah Office of Tourism recently concluded a three-city sales mission in India, attracting over 250 travel trade partners in Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Mumbai. The event helped in promoting Utah as a potential tourism destination for Indian travellers. Zach Fyne, Global Markets Specialist and Rachel Bremer, Global Markets Director, at Utah Office of Tourism, addressed the travel trade.





# Classification imperative for hotels

Apart from infrastructure and industry status, 'star classification' is another key factor for the progress of hospitality industry. MP Bezbaruah, Secretary General, HAI, says linking 'industry status' incentives with 'star classification' will help elevate the service standards of hotels, as well as visitors' confidence.



MP Bezbaruah  
Secretary General  
HAI



Lipla Negi

Infrastructure and industry status top the agenda for the Hotel Association of India (HAI) in 2024. Both are essential for energizing the hotel industry.

Another factor that instills confidence in the sector is 'star classification'. "Classification is a time-tested procedure for the hotel industry, as well as the tourism industry. It is an essential step because it is a mark of quality and promises that a set of standards is being followed by a hotel. In fact, when a hotel has this mark from the government, it brings in a lot of confidence at a time when it is needed the most. During COVID, as you know, confidence was the major factor. People showed confidence in the industry and started travelling with full fervour," says MP Bezbaruah, Secretary General, HAI. "Indeed, the road to recovery for the sector wouldn't have been possible without the traveller's confidence," he adds.



**Linking the benefits of industry status, such as subsidized power tariffs will help accelerate the growth of hotels in certain regions like the north-east**

Besides confidence, hotel classification also serves as a trust factor for domestic and international guests when it comes to safety, hygiene, and service quality. Bezbaruah stresses on the need to expedite the process.

"Delegating responsibility to some local authorities and local agencies instead of centrally controlling the whole process can help. We can also think of outsourcing the initial benchmarking to some of the recognized agencies who will do the first screening and then the government agencies can come in and give the final certification. We need to think of out-of-the-box solutions as there has been so much backlog that the matter needs to be very thoroughly

looked into," he opines. Linking the benefits of industry status, such as subsidized power tariffs, lower property tax, and long-term loans, with 'star classification' will help accelerate the growth of hotels in certain regions like the north-east, he

underlines. "If you look at the Government of India's statistics book, you will find only about registered 15 to 16 hotels in the north-east region, as if those are the only hotels around there. There are hundreds and thousands of hotels in the north-

east, but they are not verified as per the standards laid down by the Ministry of Tourism. So, we must encourage them by providing certain benefits that help them in increasing their production, output, and profits," he says.

He further underscores the role of State Tourism Boards in taking the initiative of recognizing the hotel sector with 'industry status', which encourages the sector to generate more revenue and employment in the region.

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# 1,800 meetings at **Travel** MICE & CORPORATE SHOW

Travel MICE & Corporate Show, organised by the DDP Group in Jaipur recently, facilitated an exchange of ideas and laid ground for implementing innovative strategies and solutions in the corporate travel management. During the event, which saw 1,800 meetings, industry titans and corporate leaders discussed key issues, including the adoption on Online Booking Tools (OBTs).





# Luxury—the new mantra for MICE

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center emerges as a beacon of luxury and innovation in Bengaluru. With its state of the art facilities, strategic pricing, and commitment to personalized experiences, the property continues to set new standards in the hospitality industry, catering to a diverse range of guests and events.



Janice Alyosius

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center stands as a distinguished destination in Bengaluru, offering a seamless blend of luxury, technology, and personalized services.

Giving a comprehensive overview of the hotel's offerings and the strategic pricing approach adopted for MICE events and weddings, **Varun Mehrotra**, Director - Sales and Marketing, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center, says, "To effectively address distinct market segments, we have tailor-made our services for convention associations, aligning our offerings with the specific needs of different industries and professional groups. Our commitment to integrate the latest technology,



**Varun Mehrotra**  
Director - Sales and Marketing,  
Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield  
Hotel & Convention Center

combined with strategic marketing initiatives and a focus on fostering networking opportunities, firmly establishes Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center as the premier choice for hosting prestigious events and conferences in the dynamic city of Bengaluru."

With 10 event spaces, further divisible into 16 breakout venues, the hotel can accommodate over 3,000 guests, solidifying its status

**Our commitment to integrate the latest technology firmly establishes Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield as premier choice for hosting prestigious events**

as one of India's largest convention hotels. The convention center, spanning 20,000 sq ft with an unobstructed height of 40 feet, serves as an ideal destination for grand weddings, trade shows,



conferences, and private events. Speaking of the hotel's peak season, Mehrotra says, "We experience peak seasons from October to March and April to September, with corresponding high occupancy rates due to holidays, festivals, and special events. Lean seasons may see a decline in occupancy rates, influenced by factors such as lower demand."

Highlighting the special pricing for MICE, he says, "Post-COVID, the average room rate ranges from ₹18,000 to ₹22,000 per night. For MICE and corporate events, specialized rates consider factors like event scale, duration, and specific services. Long-term or frequent event partnerships offer customized pricing models and packages for added

benefits. We adopt a strategic and tailored pricing approach for banquet facilities. MICE event pricing includes state of the art technology, digital connectivity, and effective presentation tools. Wedding pricing considers decor, catering, venue management, and accommodation arrangements, ensuring transparent and customized packages."

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# Industry debates adoption on OBTs





# Türkiye targets events & weddings

Türkiye Tourism organised a mega six-city India Roadshow in collaboration with TAAI, showcasing its latest products, exclusive destinations, and services to allure Indian visitors, with the aim to welcome over three lakh Indians by the end of 2024. Türkiye's wedding and MICE tourism planners are geared up to host Indian couples and corporates.



Recently, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Türkiye and Türkiye Tourism and Promotion Agency organised a mega six-city India Roadshow in collaboration with the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), to foster business interactions between the Indian travel trade community and Türkiye Tourism officials. The event assembled 29 distinguished suppliers from Türkiye, including tour operators, hoteliers, and Indian restaurants, and unveiled the latest travel trends emerging in both countries. This roadshow spanned six prominent cities of India including New Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Ahmedabad.

The roadshow witnessed an outstanding response from the travel trade fraternity in India, with the



Türkiye Tourism roadshow held in New Delhi saw huge attendance of travel service providers

participation of over 1200 members from India's Tourism Industry, renowned MICE agents and travel brands including Thomas Cook, MakeMyTrip, SOTC, and FCM.

### Experience Turkey

Highlighting the details of the roadshow, **Onur Gözet**, Deputy Director General of Promotion,

Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Türkiye, said, "We are promoting more than eight experiences in Türkiye along with MICE tourism, health tourism, history and cultural tourism, and also many new destinations."

Türkiye is focusing on India as it is one of the top emerging source markets for them. In 2019, Tür-

kiye witnessed 230k Indian arrivals, and in 2022 provisional estimation records 270k Indian footfalls. Türkiye's aim to escalate this number in 2024, with the target of 350k arrivals.

Türkiye Tourism is promoting the destination in India via digital and traditional channels as well in collaboration with tour operators. In 2023, Türkiye hosted more than 7,000 opinion leaders, influencers, and tourism professionals.

Concerning the question how prepared Turkish service providers are for Indian tourists, Gözet replied, "Hoteliers, food and beverage organisations, and travel agencies are all prepared to cater to Indian tourists. Türkiye has some Indian restaurants that serve delectable Indian cuisine, which could be one of the attractive features. In fact, our wedding and MICE organisers are enthusi-

astically ready to host Indian couples and corporates respectively.

Sharing his opinion on Indian government's campaign 'I-Do' to accelerate wedding tourism in India, he said, "At first glance, it seems like it could impact Türkiye's inbound sales, but we should be concerned with the interests of people. Türkiye has great infrastructure, trained tourism professionals, pristine destinations, and hotels with avant-garde facilities, which is best in the Mediterranean area. So, we have our own entrenched and distinctive products that

Indian couples may find exclusively in Türkiye. We are sure that this feature will entice more Indian couples to Turkey in the coming years."

### India-Turkey partnership

Highlighting the agenda of the roadshows in different cities, **Jyoti Mayal**, President, TAAI, said, "We are delighted to tie up with Türkiye once again. The collaborations between the two countries will encourage innovation and increase footfalls, creating stronger opportunities for both tourism and economic growth of India."

### Connectivity check

- ❖ Both IndiGo and Turkish Airlines operate 14 daily flights including flights from Delhi and Mumbai.
- ❖ Istanbul takes up 54% of the travel pie, Antalya 11% and Cappadocia contributes 9% of top destinations for Indian travellers.

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# Did Cuba click with trade?

The Indian travel trade experienced Cuba with MGM Muthu Hotels & Resorts, and explored its varied offerings. The destination, despite wooing the travel trade with its amazing location, beautiful views and its vibrant capital city Havana, had quite a few challenges like lack of domestic air connectivity, vegetarian food and overall hospitality. These teething issues, owing to the political and economic situation, if sorted out, can attract Indian travellers in huge numbers.



**Mahesh Shirodkar**  
Managing Director  
Tamarind Global

“It is a long-haul destination and hence one needs to combine a US trip with Havana. It cannot be a standalone destination yet. Old Havana town is amazing and has a lot of character. There are other places with beach resorts and at the border, where distances become a challenge. MGM Muthu Group have a mixed product bag. It's great value for money. For the luxe quotient, you need to compromise a little. They have opportunity to promote MICE for India”

“MGM Muthu Group has done a fabulous job in showcasing the destination and we love Cuba completely. Havana has been a total highlight and a must do for everybody. The rest of the parts of Cuba have also been fantastic, but there have been issues about how to reach there. Overall, it's been a fantastic



**Ajay Chhabria**  
Partner  
Intime Travels By Design

experience and the beaches are fabulous. Havana is the place to be and it has a great vibe, culture and restaurants.”



**Anita Patni**  
Associate Vice President-Holiday  
Thomas Cook

“The destination has some excellent cities like Havana, Varadero and Vinalis. Some of the challenges were that some places had a long driving time and were a little bit difficult to fit into the itinerary. It's an excellent initiative because Cuba is a destination that is still unexplored and this opportunity for travel agents to come here and see the destination gives them a perspective to create an itinerary or build a product for Indian market.”

“MGM Muthu Group have amazing properties in various locations like Havana, Cayo Guillermo and Holguin. The destination is an eye opener. The beaches, the city life, night life in Havana was amazing. While the destination has many things to offer, it does have a language barrier. Food is a challenge



**Urjit Thaker**  
Founder & CEO  
World Wide Travels

as Indians prefer vegetarian food. The produce here is limited and agents need to educate their clients about the barriers.”



**Kamaya Sangodkar**  
Founder & MD, The Pravasi  
Business & Experiential Travel

“Cuba is more like an epiphany and I would highly recommend it to Indian travellers, specifically the discerning travellers, because there are a lot of opportunities. There is so much to experience here—the people, culture, kindness and warmth. The destination is for travellers who want something completely unexplored. There will be challenges, but we as travel advisors will prepare them for that. However, they need training in hospitality.”

“Cuba is a great destination and boasts some of the top world beaches. For Indian clients, Havana would be the best destination, with its bars, good restaurants, good Italian food with vegetarian options. I would recommend all Indians coming to US to combine their itinerary with 4-5 days in Cuba and



**Hiral Somani**  
Owner  
Holiday Exotica

visit Havana before going back. I am grateful for MGM Muthu Group for inviting us to experience this beautiful and unique country.”



**Vinayakk Laud**  
Partner  
Vinaayak Holidays

“Cuba is a destination which everyone will love because the location is amazing. The activities are very good including sky diving, parasailing, and vintage car ride. The cuisine is amazing and it is a hub for cigar and rum. There are a lot of places offering cigar making experience or rum making experiences. Indian food is a big challenge in Cuba for those coming from India, since a lot of ingredients needed to make Indian food are not available.”

“I think Cuba is for an evolved client. It's a very interesting destination, but it's not for everybody. You should know your client before you sell Cuba. It has a lot to offer and has fantastic history and culture. Everyday, we were discovering new facets. Apart from the beaches of Cuba, it's more about little



**Deepali Ghanekar**  
Owner  
Good Earth Holidays

places where there is a lot of culture, which is quintessentially Cuba. People going to USA can combine a trip to Havana.”



**Aparna Thakurdas**  
Chief Operating Officer  
UNIGLOBE Odyssey Travel

“I will sell Cuba more as a cultural destination with Havana and Trinidad. If someone has time, they can do Santiago de Cuba and for those who want the beach, then Varadero can be included. While people in Cuba are hospitable, nice and warm, there are chinks in the armour as to how hotels are run and that could be ironed out. The roads are fantastic. It was a great initiative by MGM Muthu Group. It needs to be pre-organised through a tour operator.”

“Havana is a lively place and vintage car drive is a must. Havana and Varadero are places that can entice the clients, who are not particular about Indian food, which is a challenge. However, hotels like MGM Muthu having people from India making Indian food. Italian food in Havana is great.



**Shankar J**  
Asst. General Manager  
Trail Blazer Tours

It's a haven for vegetarians and sea food lovers. MGM Muthu Group has 12 resorts in Cuba, which is an eye-opener.”



**Sanjeev Mehra**  
Founder & Director  
Aaryan Leisure & Holidays

“We had a wonderful time in Cuba and have already started with a few itineraries. For Indians, it is a little far, but it's a fantastic destination with beaches, history, culture, and gastronomy. They need better flight connectivity within Cuba because places are far to drive. While the destination has challenges, as a travel agent we must solve them. Hotels by MGM Muthu Group are great, but those being taken over, need refurbishment.”

“My experience in Cuba was amazing. It was full of opportunities and it has opened my perspective. For films, it has got a lot of positive points and we have to iron out all the small little nitty gritty issues and logistics issues. If everything is done, it is an amazing location. The place has limitations in terms of



**Natarajan Ramji**  
Founder & Director  
Travel Masters India

connectivity. We are trying to solve these issues with the MGM Muthu Hotels management.”

Compiled by Nisha Verma



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# VisitBritain highlights West Midlands

Using its annual Showcase Britain 2024 B2B event, VisitBritain hosted 11 Indian buyers to an educational tour to many destinations in Midland Britain, such as Bicester Village, Stratford-upon-Avon, Coventry, Cotswold, and Birmingham. Indian agents also met suppliers from Great Britain at the Intercontinental O2 in London, where they interacted with each other and forged lasting relationships.





# Dook launches all-in-one portal

Gopal Kapoor, Director, Dook International, gave insights about the shifting trends of travel agents and the changing demands of Indian travellers. He also highlighted the initiatives executed by Dook International to boost business, and the plan to expand portfolio.



**Gopal Kapoor**  
Director  
Dook International



TT Bueau

To accelerate its business in 2024, Dook International, with its modern and cutting-edge technologies, has re-launched a B2B portal where travel agents can book departures, hotels, flights, meals etc. The company aims to provide an integrated platform that can act as a one-stop shop for travellers from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In addition to that, Dook has recently added Belarus to its portfolio to entice Indians who want to travel visa-free. Dook has plans to expand further and add more destinations to meet the demands of more tourists.

## MICE is big

In relation to the MICE business, **Gopal Kapoor**, Director, Dook International, mentioned, "We have helped travel agents operate more than a thousand incentive groups till now and itineraries greatly vary from client to client except for duration



**We have witnessed a new trend recently that Indians want to travel with groups comprising of travellers of different nationalities**

which is typically three to four nights." As travel agents look for a varied range of itineraries, Dook International has observed a change in the trend, especially in the segment of MICE groups travelling with families. Such clients demand destinations that have exclusive attractions for kids. To cater to this segment, Dook generally proposes Baku, Almaty and Turkey as they have multiple offerings, which could be fun for kids.

## Indian leisure travellers

Dook International has observed a shift in the demand of leisure travellers. Nowadays, leisure travellers are asking for longer and more inclusive itineraries with local experiences. They demand to visit places, which can offer local

cuisines, and experience local culture along with the opportunity to interact with local or native people. Kapoor underscored, "We have witnessed a new trend recently that Indians want to travel with groups comprising of travellers of different nationalities. To cater

to this requirement of travellers, we have launched group tours which can be joined by travellers of any country."

## Emerging Destinations

When asked about the emerging popular destinations among

Indian travellers as per Dook International data, Kapoor replied, "CIS destinations including Tashkent, Almaty, Baku, Tbilisi, and Yerevan are gaining popularity among Indian travellers owing to short flying duration and ease in the visa process." For them, post-

COVID there are more enquiries for longer itineraries which were unlikely earlier. These changes in customer's demand showcases that the Indian travel industry is back on track after the pandemic with a few tweaks in the way people used to travel.

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# Book with Atlantis, earn rewards

As the ultra-luxury Atlantis The Royal completes one year of operations, it receives tremendous response from the India market. In an interview with **TRAVELTALK**, Neil Shah, Account Director, International Leisure Sales, Atlantis Dubai, shares how the India market is performing, targets for 2024 and the cities that are in focus to reach targeted numbers.

 Hazel Jain

During his recent visit to India, **Neil Shah**, Account Director - International Leisure Sales, Atlantis, Dubai, travelled to New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh and Mumbai. Sharing his views on the India market in Mumbai, Shah said, "Ahmedabad has been performing really well for us, along with the North of India. We are yet to visit the southern cities, but we already see great bookings from Chennai and Hyderabad."



**Neil Shah**  
Account Director, International Leisure Sales, Atlantis, Dubai

Recognizing Chandigarh as a pivotal market, Atlantis Dubai, recently hosted the city's trade partners for a comprehensive update on Atlantis, The Royal, which completed a year. Shah added, "Wrapping up its first year in February 2024, Atlantis The Royal will continue to focus on India as a key source market. India has a rising affluent class with increased income and spending. This luxury

market is growing beyond the metros and has witnessed substantial growth from pockets of wealth like Chandigarh, Ludhiana and the surrounding regions in Punjab. This demographic seeks products and experiences that cater to their refined taste and worldly exposure, and we see Atlantis The Royal with its many luxurious offerings as a perfect fit. Despite being a young addition to

the map, Atlantis The Royal has already garnered significant interest since our last visit."

While the Atlantis brand is familiar to the India market, Atlantis The Royal is slightly different from Atlantis The Palm. "We exceeded our targets that we had for 2023 for Atlantis The Royal from India, which is in the top 10 list. We saw a lot of couples and honeymooners seeking privacy and personalised services. As a result, we now have increased our target by 30 per cent for 2024. This says a lot about how well the India market is performing and the potential it has for Atlantis The Royal. Our focus on India will be more aggressive going forward. But at the same time, we will be selective in our approach because the clientele for Atlantis The Royal is different," Shah explained.

Apart from couples, he also wants to continue tapping families, as



the property has a kids club and is connected to the water park, the access for which is included in the stay. MICE is also on the radar for private events, celebrations, birthdays, and private family events. "We also see business coming from the YPO segment, along with weddings. We have stunning venues for weddings, and we have already seen about 10-12 since the time of opening. Our focus is on the luxury consumer,"

Shah said, adding that the market has been shifting towards luxury.

"I see a lot of interest for high-end properties from Indian guests. They are now mature travellers and are aware of what they want and what to expect," he further added.

## Rewards programme

For the agents, there is the Global Rewards programme, for which they need to register. This will soon be extended to the Royal as well. "We have also introduced some lovely offers for the agents. They will be rewarded an amount on every booking depending on what they sell," Shah said.

## About the hotel

Atlantis Dubai consists of two resorts, Atlantis The Palm, which opened in 2008 and Atlantis The Royal, which opened in February 2023. Atlantis The Palm was refurbished in 2018. Today, it has brand new rooms and has also expanded its waterpark, which makes it the world's largest waterpark. Atlantis Dubai now has an inventory of 1,544 keys at The Palm and 795 at The Royal. The 43-storey ultra-luxury resort offers a collection of 795 rooms, including 693 standard rooms, 96 suites, and 6 penthouses.

# U&I brings Bali closer to India

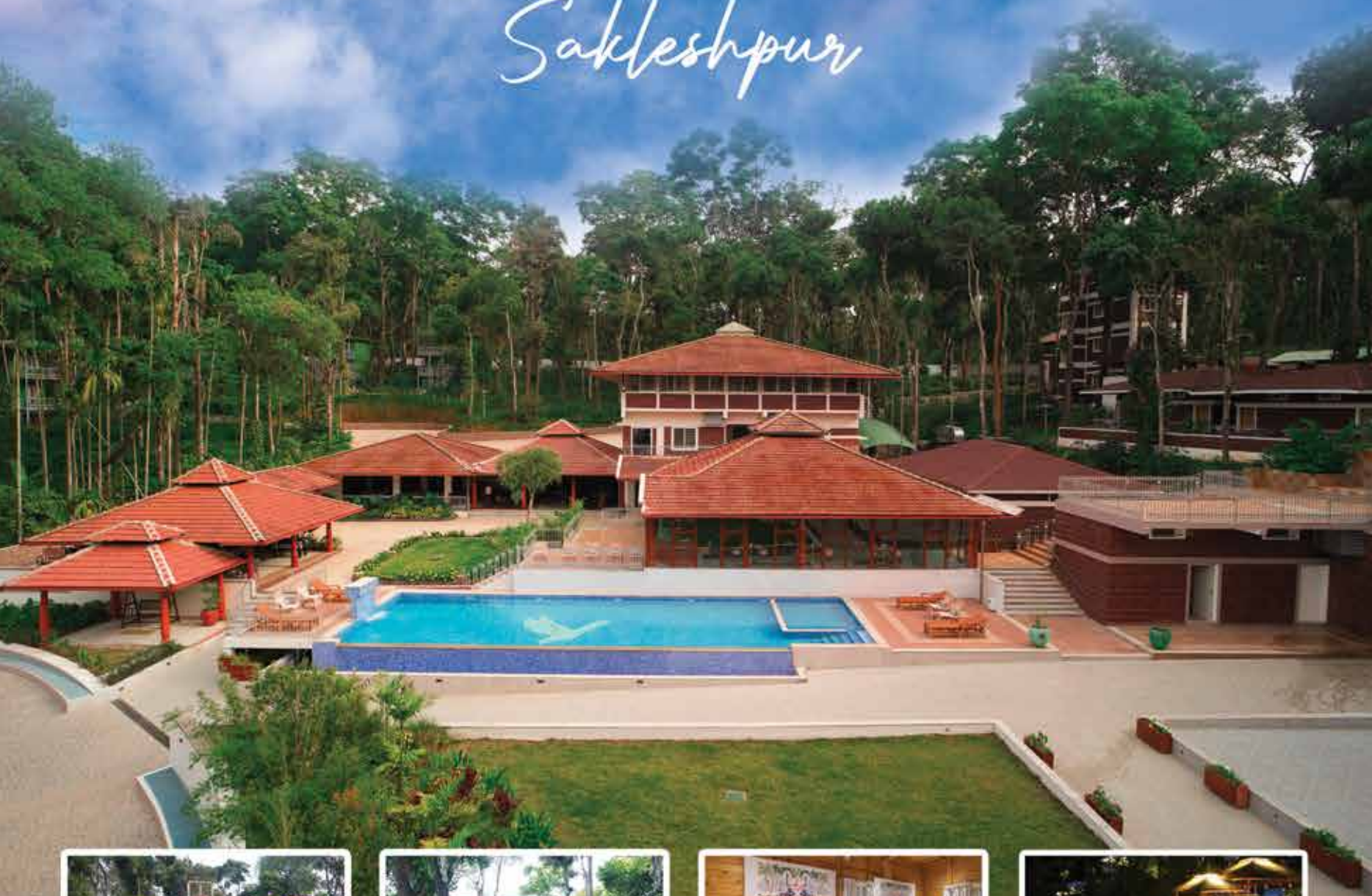
Continuing with its efforts to make Bali an even more popular destination in India, U&I Holidays organised its annual roadshow in the country again this year in four cities, including New Delhi and Mumbai, recently. With the possibility of direct flights starting between India and Indonesia soon, Bali seems closer than ever before for Indian travellers.





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# GPS woos 'City of Nizams'

The latest edition of Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) kicked off 2024 in the city of Nizams—Hyderabad, which saw in attendance senior travel agents and tour operators from the city as well as the Southern region. The attendees indulged in effective B2B interactions with a range of exhibitors with a varied list of tourism offerings over two days.





# Dubai

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# Direct sales key to promote outbound

For Netherlands-based DMC Saffron World B.V., India remains an important market. The company believes that regular engagement with clients through their expansive sales team, participation at travel shows, and strong digital presence, they can achieve remarkable numbers and boost the business.



TT Bureau

Established in late 2018, Saffron World B.V. is a Netherlands-based Destination Management Company (DMC) specializing in handling FIT, Leisure Groups, and MICE to Europe. **Ravi Gosain**, Managing Director, Saffron World B.V., shared that they successfully conducted business from India and various other regions until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which severely impacted the tourism sector.

"However, we have since reorganized and restructured our back office and sales teams in India to cater to B2B clients effectively. Strategically located in the Netherlands, we benefit from excellent connectivity to all parts of Europe. All our products and services are meticulously crafted to meet the specific requirements of Indian travellers. With

sales teams based in Delhi and Mumbai, we provide dedicated support to travel agents and tour operators for their clients' European travel needs. What sets us apart from many European DMCs is our fully-staffed sales team, enabling us to promptly address client inquiries and ensure excellent customer service."

The Saffron team actively engages in direct sales calls, participates in various travel trade fairs, and conducts roadshows in major cities, as well as tier II & III cities, and APAC. He added, "This helps us to expand our network and foster relationships with both existing and prospective clients. Following our participation in SATTE 2023, we have received an overwhelmingly positive response from B2B agents, demonstrating our potential for continued success despite challenges such as de-



**Ravi Gosain**  
Managing Director  
Saffron World B.V.

lays in obtaining Schengen visas and high flight costs."

Talking about their strategy, Gosain shared, "Over the past year, we have diligently worked to establish partnerships with suppliers across Europe, contracting with numerous hotels and transport companies to curate the best value packages for our customers. Our primary focus



**Kumar Utkarsh**  
General Manager-Sales  
Saffron World B.V.

lies in tailor made packages, which though time-consuming, offer significant business opportunities. We have set ambitious targets to capture a sizable share of this segment and are actively implementing strategies to achieve our objectives."

**Kumar Utkarsh**, General Manager-Sales, Saffron World B.V., claimed that India holds signifi-

cant importance as an outbound market for us, and we are delighted to witness the evolving demands of travellers, extending beyond conventional tourism offerings and destinations. "Understanding the specific requirements of tour operators and travel agents, who represent actual travellers, is paramount. Without comprehensive destination knowledge and experience, creating marketable products becomes a challenge. Therefore, our management dedicates maximum time to researching accommodations, local tours, experiences, culinary options, transportation, and more, ensuring that we offer the best available options to maintain quality and provide optimal value for every rupee spent by travellers through Saffron World," he said.

Sharing their plans, he added, "We have strategically planned

our marketing activities in India by enhancing our sales team in key source markets and participating in various city roadshows and trade fairs

**Our primary focus lies in tailor made packages, which though time-consuming, offer significant business opportunities**

such as SATTE and OTM. Our online presence and activities are also evolving in tandem with market demands and growth, ensuring that we remain agile and responsive to future requirements."

## Ayodhya's tourism infra on rise

► Contd. from page 5

visitors are coming from outside," Hira says.

The IATO UP Chapter Chairman gives credit to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the unprecedented love for the holy city. Calling them the "big-

sponsible travel practices amid the growing crowds.

Hira highlights, "Despite infrastructure limitations, Ayodhya is witnessing the development of new hotels and accommodations, such as Park Inn by Radisson and Taj Hotel, to accommodate the rising number of visitors." He

benefit surrounding destinations. "The tourism boom in Ayodhya also benefits neighbouring cities like Lucknow, which serve as gateways to the sacred destination. The convenient two-hour travel distance between Lucknow and Ayodhya further amplifies tourism potential in the region."

The temple has been attracting a lot of visitors, not only for spiritual tourism but also for those who want to come and experience the hype that

**The tourism boom in Ayodhya also benefits neighbouring cities like Lucknow, which serve as gateways to the sacred destination**

has been created. "Spiritual tourism is playing a significant role, not solely driven by religion or spirituality, but by curiosity. Despite the numerous challenges faced, there's a curiosity to witness what has been created," Hira concludes.

also underscores the increase in Ayodhya's connectivity with other destinations. "Currently, there are eight SpiceJet flights operating from various locations, along with services from IndiGo and Air India. Additionally, airlines are increasing both flight and seat capacity to accommodate the growing demand, not only in terms of connections but also by adding more flights," he informs. The rush for Ayodhya is likely to



gest brand ambassadors," Hira says their visits to the temple created a buzz and enhanced Ayodhya's appeal.

However, the surge in tourism poses challenges for local infrastructure and residents in Ayodhya. "It has become overly crowded. The locals are finding it challenging to manage their daily lives," he pointed out, emphasizing on the need for re-

## U&I to explore new markets

Shyam Upadhyay, Director, U&I Holidays, says they are expecting to double their growth in 2024 by expanding to newer markets - the United Kingdom, Australia and the Middle East.

Hazel Jain

**Shyam Upadhyay**, Director, U&I Holidays, is right now focussing on processes at the company. He says, "The only way to survive is to keep improving our processes so that we can stop leakages. Micro planning is also extremely important. We are also focusing on having a simple formula - back to the basics."

They are also incorporating new technology. "We have created an extranet; so, we are now going live with room inventory. Considering the booking pattern we have observed, which is 9pm to 11pm, we are also launching our B2B mobile application so that our agent partners can make bookings while in bed. We are creating an ecosystem where we can empower our retail travel agents to face the competition and get the maximum business," Upadhyay adds.

Speaking about competition, he says that they have always loved to compete with themselves and others to help them stay on their



**Shyam Upadhyay**  
Director  
U&I Holidays

toes. "We worked hard for 11 years to create a brand name for Bali in the India market. Today, wherever we are standing is only because of the Island of Gods - Bali, and we would like to maintain the same for next 10 years. So, no diversions for us. But we will expand in different markets with one product. We are getting into newer markets as our product and system is now ready to serve a bigger clientele. We have identified three markets - UK, Australia and Middle East - and we are going to appoint a

sales team in these market by mid-2024. We are making structural changes right now. We will move our head office to Bali from 2024. We are expecting to double our growth," Upadhyay adds.

**Modern tourists are likely to make reservations instantly during 9pm-11pm window; so, we need to quickly adjust ourselves for this change**

U&I Holidays recently concluded the eighth edition of its Bali Roadshow covering six major cities of India. "Without adaptability, extinction is a real possibility. Modern tourists are likely to make reservations instantly during 9pm-11pm window. Thus, we need to quickly adjust ourselves for this change," he adds.



# We open the world to indian travelers

## PACTO Indonesia: Record-Breaking Indian Outbound Travel to Bali



On the eve of much-anticipated SATTE (South Asia's Leading Travel Show) in New Delhi, February 22-24, 2024 Umberto Cadamuro as the Chief Operating Officer of PACTO DMC spoke to TRAVTALK to share his thoughts and insights on the Indian market traveling to Bali and the rest of Indonesia.

Founded in 1967, PACTO has been recognized as a "pioneer" in Indonesian tourism. Demonstrating its "pioneer" status, PACTO was among the first Indonesian travel companies to recognize the potential of India's outbound travel market. In 2006, the Indonesian DMC formed a close-working representative relationship with the owners of Absolute Hospitality Services, Randhir Narayan and Anuradha Singh to tap into the growing interest of Indian travelers to travel to Bali.

### Bali, Indonesia



**Umberto Cadamuro**  
Chief Operating Officer  
PACTO DMC

The Indian market has returned to Bali and shows signs of remaining a dominant force for years ahead. Demonstrating solid-growth-pattern, in 2023, 393,903 Indian tourists landed in Bali. Due to the sudden growth of Indian tourists, now they represent the second-largest source market for Bali, following Australians, at the pole position" says Mr. Umberto.

Indonesia has reopened doors to the world. Indian Citizens are on the list of 96 countries granted VOA. Quarantine and vaccination were no longer required. To boost Indian numbers, Indonesia is expanding travel promotion to the Indian market and ready to welcome direct flights from India to Bali.

Mr. Umberto added, PACTO's proud, years long track record and growing experience ensures his team offers excellent value across the entire range of accommodations available in Bali and now also exploring Lembongan and Penida Islands. Island visits by Indians now far beyond traditional cultural sites visits. Indian tourists to Bali, all ages, also now come for bespoke shopping experiences, adventure sports opportunities, spa and wellness.



## Unveiling the wonders of Hellas with CEL Tours SA

CEL Tours SA is a leading tour operator in Greece with experience of more than 35 years. They specialize in Asian market and have handled most important corporates of India.

Founded by Ms Mary Soulis who is an inspiration, the company services individuals travelers, curates honeymooners experience and provides the best qualified services.

Cel Tours is a reputed and established name in the MICE segment having handled special interest groups of all size with ease and competence. The company has planned and executed events for large groups on themes such as Bollywood Nights etc.



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Strategically located on the main street of Legian and a mere stroll to the famous Kuta and Legian beaches, exciting nightlife, numerous restaurants and the famed shopping district of Seminyak. 15 minutes walk from Beachwalk shopping centre, Mercure Bali Legian is the perfect choice for the explorer.



### Randhir Narayan, Founder, announces new contracts with hotels & DMCs

- **Bali Hotels:** The Bale Nusa Dua, IZE Seminyak, The Santai Umalas, Nusa Dua Beach Hotel & Spa.
- **DMC Services:** Premium Incoming, Spain & GlobeEnjoy, Sri Lanka - A full service DMC for tour groups & events.



## Explore Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia with Sen Travel

Sen Travel is the Destination Management Company, services tour operators and travel agents worldwide, specializing in tailor-made travel itineraries for both individual and group of travelers seeking the authentic experiences in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia.

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Discover the pinnacle of luxury at Peppers Seminyak, where 52 exquisite villas offer an unparalleled retreat in the vibrant heart of Seminyak. Centrally located, our villas provide easy access to well-known restaurants and popular nightclubs, ensuring you're in the midst of Bali's lively scene.

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# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

EVENT TALK

Published from : India Middle East

FEBRUARY 2024

Date	Event	Time
15	VisitBritain Training Workshop-Chandigarh	6:30 pm
15	South Africa Roadshow-Bengaluru	9:30 am
16	South Africa Roadshow-Mumbai	9:30 am
16-18	Travel & Tourism Fair-Bengaluru	10:00 am
19	Morocco Tourism Webinar	11:30 am
19-21	AIME-Melbourne	7:30 am
21	PATA India's Tourism Powerhouse	2.15 pm
22-24	SATTE	10:00 am
26-29	SITE Global Conference 2024	12:00 pm
29-01 Mar	GPS-Chandigarh	10:00 am

MARCH 2024

1-3	India International Travel Mart Kolkata	11:00 am
1-3	India Travel Mart-Goa (ITM)	9:00 am
5-7	ITB Berlin	9:00 am
12-14	Gujarat Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am
12-14	Asia Golf Tourism Convention	9:00 am
14-17	World Tourism Fair	10:00 am
15-17	Travel & Tourism Fair-Chennai	10:00 am
15-17	India International Travel Mart Ahmedabad	9:00 am
15-17	India Travel Mart Bhopal	9:00 am

# travelbullz promotes Thai luxury

TravelBullz, in partnership with the Tourism Authority of Thailand, has launched Luxury Escapes, a campaign aiming to redefine Thailand as a luxury destination, with focus on unique experiences, wellness, and world-class shopping.



TravelBullz, in partnership with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT), has launched an exclusive campaign aimed at positioning Thailand as the quintessential luxury destination for Indian travellers.

**A new epoch in luxury travel**  
This joint initiative is a testament to their commitment to catering to the sophisticated needs of high net worth clients from India. Focusing on unique experiences, wellness, and world-class shopping, the campaign is designed to showcase Thailand's diverse and opulent offerings that resonate with the luxury market.

**Curating experiences**  
Understanding the evolving preferences of Indian travellers, the campaign will highlight bespoke experiences ranging from serene wellness retreats and exclusive culinary journeys to luxury shopping extravaganzas. Thailand's rich cultural tapestry positions it uniquely to offer an unparalleled



Siriges-A-Nong Trirattanasongpol  
Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, New Delhi

**This tie-up aligns with the vision of Tourism Authority of Thailand and TravelBullz to position Thailand as the ultimate destination for luxury experiences**

travel experience. The campaign brings together the Thailand Lux-



Kanwer Deep Singh  
Founder & President TravelBullz India

**The campaign shows TravelBullz's commitment to enhancing Thailand's positioning as a destination with vast choices of luxury experiences**

ury Supply Chain and stakeholders to showcase their products



and offer exclusive deals for the B2B travel agent fraternity in India.

Commenting over the partnership, **Siriges-A-Nong Trirattanasongpol**, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand, New Delhi, said, "Elevating Thailand's position in the luxury market, this collaboration aligns with the vision of the Tourism Authority of Thailand and TravelBullz to position Thailand as the ultimate destination for luxury escapes."

**Kanwer Deep Singh**, Founder & President, TravelBullz, said, "The Luxury Escapes project is more than just a showcase-it manifests TravelBullz's commitment to enhancing Thailand's positioning as a destination with vast choices of luxury experiences with close collaboration with the Tourism Authority of Thailand and Industry partners."

# Baba Ramdev now at Tussauds

Merlin Entertainment has unveiled the wax statue of Baba Ramdev for Madame Tussauds New York in the presence of travel trade partners and senior members of the industry in New Delhi. The Yoga guru himself did the honours to reveal the life-like statue for the crowd and even interacted and got pictures clicked with the attendees.





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DOMESTIC CRUISE PARTNER <b>INDIA</b>	WHATSAPP COMMERCE PARTNER <b>DoubleTick QuickSell</b>	LUXURY PARTNER <b>J JASTANS</b>	MARKETING PARTNER <b>EntRep</b>	EDWIN PARTNER <b>EDWIN</b>	GPS INITIATIVES <b>ECOCONNECT</b>	<b>EduX</b>	<b>CONNECT</b>	<b>CONNECT</b>	<b>CONNECT</b>



# MOVEMENTS

## IBIS HOTELS INDIA

New Delhi

**TEJUS JOSE** has been appointed as the Director of Operations for ibis and ibis Styles India. Jose will be overseeing operations for 21 hotels located across 14 cities in India. Prior to this, he served as the General Manager at Hilton Bangalore Embassy GolfLinks. He has an impressive career in the hospitality sector spanning over 23 years and brings a wealth of experience to the role. His expertise includes hotel management, sales and marketing, with notable contributions at premier hospitality companies and international brands. He is an alumnus of the IIM, Calcutta.



## NOVOTEL

Pune

Novotel Pune appoints **CHETAN SURWADE** as the Associate Director of Sales. His responsibilities will include managing MICE and Sales Centre for the hotel. He has vast experience in the sector. Prior to this, he served as Senior Sales Manager at Crowne Plaza Pune City Centre, where he was later promoted to the position of Associate Director of Sales in February 2023. He has held also key positions at Ramada Plaza Pune Hinjewadi, Radisson Blu Pune Hinjewadi, DoubleTree by Hilton Pune - Chinchwad, Radisson Blu Resort & Spa - Alibaug and Sayaji Hotel Pune.



## SHERATON GRAND BANGALORE HOTEL

Bengaluru

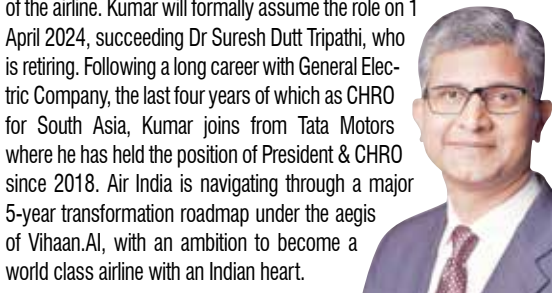
Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway has appointed **SUSHMA KHICHAR** as the General Manager. With over 18 years of experience in the service industry, Khichar brings a wealth of expertise and leadership to her role. She has been a key contributor to driving revenues, enhancing guest service, and optimizing overall support functions throughout her career. Beginning journey with Marriott International in 2006, Khichar has served Courtyard and Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Outer Ring Road as Cluster General Manager. She holds a Diploma in travel & tourism.



## AIR INDIA

Gurugram

Air India has appointed **RAVINDRA KUMAR GP** as the Chief Human Resources Officer. He will report to Campbell Wilson, CEO & MD of the airline. Kumar will formally assume the role on 1 April 2024, succeeding Dr Suresh Dutt Tripathi, who is retiring. Following a long career with General Electric Company, the last four years of which as CHRO for South Asia, Kumar joins from Tata Motors where he has held the position of President & CHRO since 2018. Air India is navigating through a major 5-year transformation roadmap under the aegis of Vihaan.AI, with an ambition to become a world class airline with an Indian heart.



## SHERATON GRAND BENGALURU

### WHITEFIELD HOTEL & CONVENTION CENTER

Bengaluru

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center appoints **ENA ROY** as the new Director of Operations. With over 21 years of experience in leading hospitality brands like ITC Hotels and the Hyatt, Roy is a seasoned professional known for her expertise in managing hotel rooms operations. Starting her career with The Oberoi Amarvilas, she has been instrumental in the pre-opening and operational management of prestigious luxury brands.



## THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS

Mumbai

**PIYUSH BHASIN** has been appointed as the General Manager of The Fern Residency, Ajmer. With a distinguished career spanning over two decades in the hospitality industry, Bhasin is known for his impactful contributions to revenue performance, growth, and service excellence in esteemed organisations. His wealth of knowledge and commitment to strategic leadership position him as a valuable asset, poised to elevate standards and contribute significantly to the continued success of the organisation.



## RONIL GOA

Goa

**PRATITI RAJPAL** has been appointed as the General Manager for Ronil Goa – a JdV by Hyatt Hotel. She brings along 15 years of diverse experience across ITC, Marriott and Hyatt in India, with almost 12 enriching years with the Hyatt family. Her journey with the brand started with Hyatt Regency Chennai as a Marketing Communications Manager, followed by a cluster marketing role at Park Hyatt Goa Resort and Spa and Grand Hyatt Mumbai. Later, she moved to Delhi NCR as Director of Marketing for Andaz Delhi and Grand Hyatt Gurgaon. She launched the JdV by Hyatt Goa in 2023.



## HILTON AND HILTON GARDEN INN BENGALURU

### EMBASSY MANYATA BUSINESS PARK

Bengaluru

**AKSHAY VARMA** has been appointed as the Director of Sales for Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park. Varma is a distinguished professional with more than 15 years in the hospitality industry. In his new role, he will play a crucial role in steering the sales strategy, achieving revenue targets, and overseeing all aspects of the sales and marketing department.



The Fern Hotels & Resorts appoints **VIKAS CHAUDHARY** as the General Manager of The Fern, Alwar-Sariska (Rajasthan). He has more than 10 years of experience in the hospitality industry. A certified Lean Six Sigma Green Belt and Post Graduate Diploma holder in Sales & Marketing, Chaudhary's customer-centric approach and robust expertise in guest management make him an ideal fit for the position. He is known for his forward-thinking approach, passion for exploring wildlife, and commitment to charitable causes.



## FCM TRAVEL INDIA

Mumbai

FCM Travel India appoints **SHAILENDRA PANDEY** as its new Chief Technology Officer. He brings 17 years of experience in the technology sector. A seasoned software engineer, Pandey is set to synchronise the company's corporate technology product strategy with its business objectives, ensuring a seamless and value-driven experience for both customers and users. His role will be pivotal in aligning with the India leadership team and integrating with the broader technological strategies across Asia. Key to his mandate is the development and implementation of an automation roadmap that promises to elevate productivity.



**SHARADA BANDODKAR** has been appointed as the Human Resources Manager for Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park. With around 10 years of experience in HR Management, Bandodkar brings extensive expertise in manpower budgeting, recruitment, HR policy formulation, performance management, and employee engagement. Having successfully managed the human resources department in various organisations, her wealth of experience will significantly contribute to the success of the properties' human resources initiatives.



**RAJEEV SINGH** has been appointed as the General Manager of The Fern Seaside Luxurious Tent Resort, Diu. An MBA in Marketing, Singh has more than two decades of experience. Known for exceptional operational performance, Singh's leadership has been instrumental in driving revenue growth and elevating guest satisfaction at various esteemed establishments. His key skills encompass revenue management, team leadership, guest satisfaction, financial management, relationship management, and digital initiatives.



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A photograph of a family of four on the deck of a Princess cruise ship. A man is carrying a young girl and a young boy, while a woman stands next to them. They are all smiling and appear to be enjoying their time on the ship. The background shows the ship's structure and a clear sky.

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# Britain through films, TV shows

VisitBritain is keen to promote its destinations through popular films and TV shows, says its CEO Patricia Yates. The tourism board will release a campaign titled 'Starring Great Britain' sometime this year.



Hazel Jain

**P**atricia Yates, Chief Executive Officer, VisitBritain, said that they will use popular films and TV shows shot across Britain to promote the destination among travellers. "It (films and TV shows) is a great industry to align with. The new campaign titled 'Starring Great Britain' will be released around early summer globally, including India. We will work through the destinations that we want to promote through this in each market. It will be a global campaign, but we will tailor it by market depending on what films and TV shows work there and what destination they showcase. For instance, West Midlands is the

background for Peaky Blinders and the success of this show has led to travel to Birmingham," she revealed.

Emphasizing on the importance of film and TV shows, Yates said, "Set-jetting is a booming trend - more than half of the travellers Expedia recently surveyed said films and TV were inspiring their travel plans. By shining the spotlight on film and TV inspired experiences you can only have in Britain, we are encouraging visitors to come now and discover more, putting themselves in the picture. Films and TV drives urgency to visit. Castle Howard in North Yorkshire reported that visitors aged 18-24 years to its website increased by 3,400 per cent after Bridgerton was released."

## Engaging the trade

Trade engagement will be important, and Yates touches upon that. "We need to also persuade the operators to put more such products into the itinerary and sell it. We need to be committed to this. The north-east will continue to be a focus - it's a destination that doesn't attract too many international visitors. It has a heritage site and is also where Harry Potter Quidditch games were filmed. We are scoping the new campaign right now and will kick it off as soon as we



can," Yates added. Showcase Britain 2024, the international trade event organised recently by VisitBritain at Old Royal Naval College in London's Greenwich, welcomed 120 travel buyers from 18 countries, including 11 from India, who met destination sellers coming from England, Scotland and Wales. The buy-

2019 from India to the UK was about £753 million, which went up to £776 million in 2023. This year, we are forecasting India to be a £924 million market, which would be approximately a billion-pound market. This year, we are forecasting 695,000 visitors from India, which is back to pre-COVID levels. India has recovered and there is real excitement about the market. We also see an increase in spend per visitor - people are spending 30-40 per cent more than they were pre-COVID. And that is not just India market."

Of this, the average spend per visit by an Indian traveller is up from £848 to £1,480. The length of stay has also increased. Visitors from India stayed an average of 23 days in 2023 based on the latest data, up from an average of 18 days in 2019.

"India is a growing market and we already have strong links with VFR. We now want to increase the high-end traveller and business travellers coming to the UK as well. We also see a jump in wanting experiences and we need to tap into that," she added.

Destination Britain for the MENA region will be held in Goa this year in November and dates will be released soon.

**By shining the spotlight on film and TV inspired experiences you can only have in Britain, we are encouraging visitors to come now and discover more**

ers were also taken to Coventry, Stratford-upon-Avon, and Birmingham for educational visits. Air India was the airline partner for Indian delegation. Following the event, Yates has invited suggestions from the travel trade in India on the new campaign, which would likely be showcased at the next big event - Destination Britain, to be held this year in Goa in November.

## India stats looking great

Yates said, "Pre-COVID spend in

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Chief Executive Officer, VisitBritain

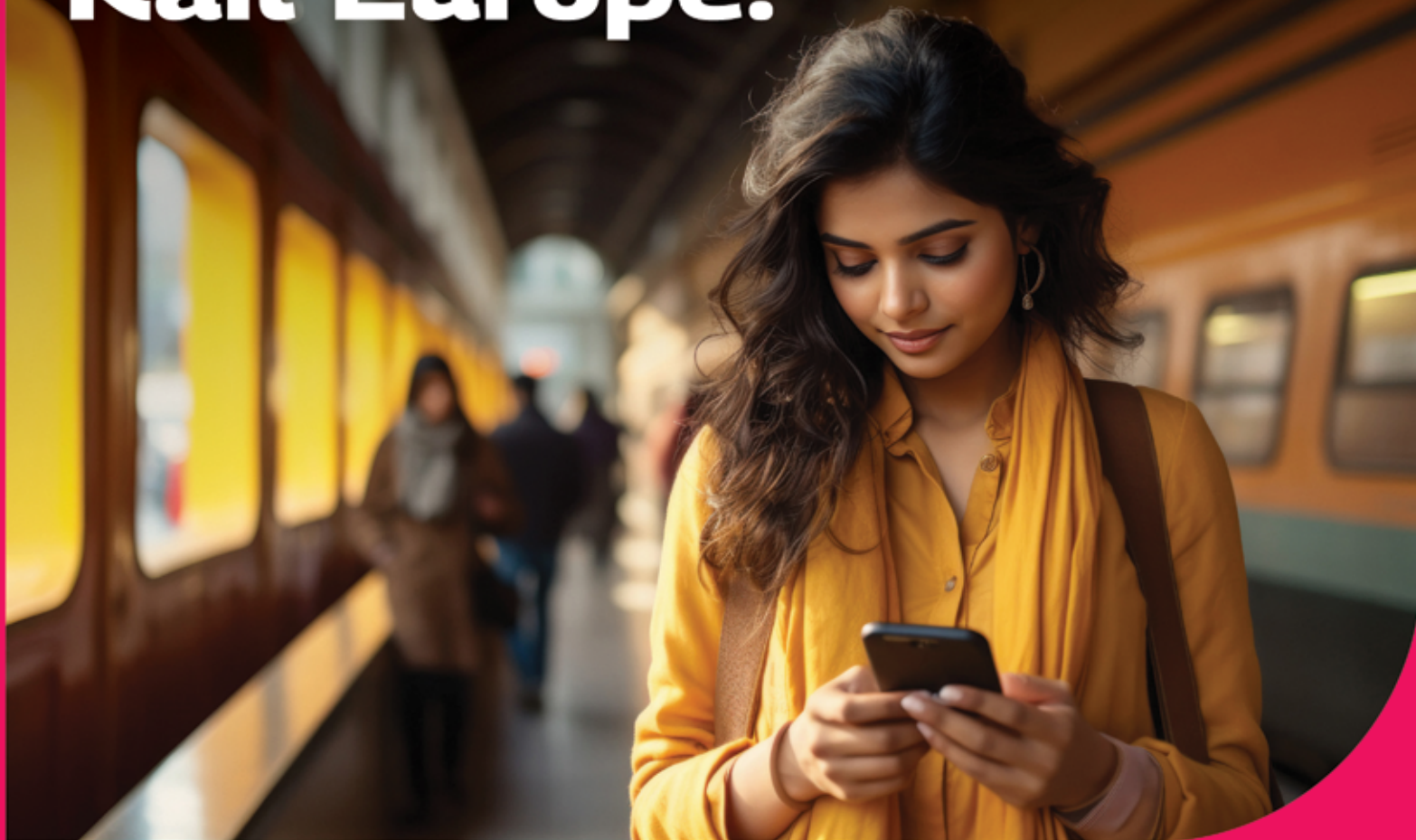
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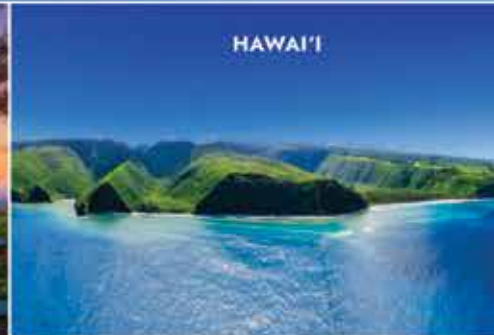
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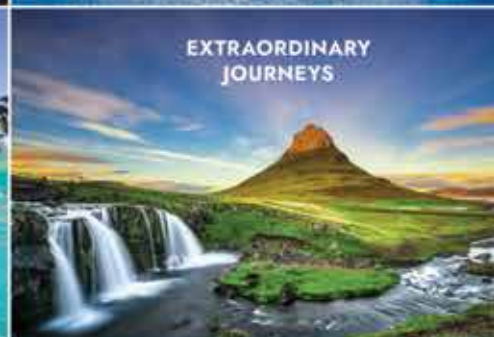
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