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**40**

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## New Year mantra: Tech & tie-ups

Without adaptability, extinction is a real possibility. The new generation of entrepreneurs and chief executive officers in the travel and hospitality sector believe in agility and innovation; they encourage the industry as a fraternity to think differently and do things differently, so that they just don't survive but thrive in the business.



**Sakshi Mehra**  
Director, Uday Tours & Travels

“2024 should bring in a lot of good business. A lot of things are being added up. Lot of new destinations are coming up as coming into India we talk about. There are a lot of challenges as a lot of our neighboring countries have started up with a free visa policy, though this does not make much of a difference. But for people who are regular travellers, they feel, oh, it's too much of a difference. So working on all that scenarios, things will move up.”

“We have been building up for 2024. We have quite aggressive plans in terms of sales in 2024. MICE and sports remain our biggest areas of focus. We are also procuring rights for some major events coming up next year. And our MICE sales teams are going to work quite aggressively in promoting certain niche of tourism, not just geographically, or just bound to East India or Kolkata in anyway now. We have some of our major clients based in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, where we are eyeing MICE.”



**Maanav Saraf**  
Executive Director, Gainwell Travel  
Contd. on page 10 ►

### Think local, says Pittie

Rikant Pittie, Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip, reflects on the year gone by, plans for the company & the travel startup landscape in India.



Hazel Jain

**What is your prime focus right now?**

With the Indian Angels show, I got the opportunity to pursue my interest in helping startups and aspiring entrepreneurs on a grand scale. Currently, I am allocating my time to help the ventures in all ways possible that I have invested in. As far as the business front is concerned, we are planning to add new travel-related business verticals



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip

inorganically to EaseMyTrip in the coming months with some recent launches being our Corporate Travel Division, Easy-Darshan for Spiritual Travel, our retail stores, premium cards for HNI, and our smart voice recognition tool. Hence, this development is taking up a major chunk of my time nowadays. I am keen on bringing up divisions that are asset-light, tech-based, and synergistic. Having said this, novel

Contd. on page 20 ►



### Visa-free entry for Indians

Embracing a multifaceted strategy, partnerships, and improved connectivity, Malaysia aims to solidify its status as a top-choice destination for Indians.



Janice Alysius

With a notable surge of around 472,000 Indian visitors between January and September 2023, Tourism Malaysia anticipates an even greater influx in 2024. It eyes more than 1 million Indian visitors in 2024, especially with the recent announcement of visa-free entry for Indians until 31 December 2024.



**Akmal Aziz**  
Deputy Director, Tourism Malaysia

**Akmal Aziz**, Deputy Director, Tourism Malaysia, in a recent conversation with **TRAVTALK**, shared insightful perspectives on Malaysia's tourism strategies, specifically focusing on the Indian market and plans for the upcoming year. He highlighted the concentrated efforts to position Malaysia as an ideal wedding and golfing destination. “We are doing it through wedding exhibitions/ events and golf tournaments. Since 2022, we have been organising

Contd. on page 20 ►

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## New Year of new generation

Each New Year brings with it excitement, as well as anticipation. We see stalwarts of the industry talking about the expectations for the coming months and analyzing the trends year after year. However, this time we dedicate the first issue of 2024 to the Under 40 achievers, entrepreneurs, and champions of the industry. In the world where we talk about sustainability, new experiences, curated itineraries, and technology integration at every level, these are the people who are walking the talk.

Today, there are small travel agencies coming out of their cocoons with the next generation not only giving a facelift, but a new direction to their business. There are others who have inherited businesses but are expanding and experimenting with new products. In this issue, we have young CEOs and angel investors talking about their journey, as well as the way forward. In fact, those who have travel startups have their own ideas to share with the industry, and some of them might prove useful.

We have seen the last year unfolding many a new things and trends. A lot of events saw us all getting together and celebrating what we know best—travel. We interacted, networked, indulged in exploring new destinations and tried our hands at new businesses and ideas. The industry cheered for the highfliers and encouraged those who stumbled. It is this camaraderie and cooperation that has always kept us going. This is the reason why 2023 made everyone forget about the dark period of the pandemic, with numbers for most businesses exceeding those seen in 2019. There is a new zeal, enthusiasm and rigour, and we hope that it all culminates into a great year business-wise once again.

Here's toasting to the young and the young at heart— Happy New Year!

# Dubai top destination for Indians

Indian travellers gave top priority to Dubai in 2023 for its modern extravagance and world-class attractions - from artificial islands to mega malls and majestic skyscrapers, reveals a report released recently by global travel marketplace Skyscanner.



Dubai was the most popular international destination for Indians in 2023, followed by Bangkok and Denpasar, reveals a report released recently by global travel marketplace Skyscanner. Indian travellers gave top priority to Dubai for its modern extravagance and world-class attractions - from artificial islands to mega malls and majestic skyscrapers. Bangkok was the second most popular international destination for Indian travellers this year. From savouring street food delights in bustling markets to exploring ornate temples like Wat Pho and indulging in the vibrant nightlife along Khao San Road, the city known for its bustling energy and cultural richness captivated Indian travellers in 2023.

**Cheapest flights, hotels & car hire of 2023**  
This year, more and more Indian travellers opted for alternative,



budget-friendly Indian cities that deliver on culture and cuisine. According to Skyscanner data, Jagdalpur in India was the cheapest flight destination of them all with return flights costing just ₹3,035 on an average in 2023.

After analysing prices across thousands of destinations globally, Nha Trang in Vietnam was found to be the cheapest city for a three-star hotel stay, for those travelling from India. Known for its picturesque coastal beauty and cultural heritage, Nha Trang offers not only affordability but also promises a delightful stay enriched with Vietnam's diverse experiences.

Doha in Qatar was the top city with the cheapest car hire offering, with Indian travellers paying only ₹2,198/ day on an average. Doha is an excellent starting point to embark on a road trip adventure, allowing travellers to traverse Doha's modern marvels, visit iconic cultural sites, and delve into the desert landscapes.

**Mohit Joshi**, Travel Trends and Destination Expert, Skyscanner, said, "As we reflect on the year of travel, it's clear how Indians have embraced global exploration despite tightened budgets. This traveller behaviour correlates with the emerging trends as revealed in our

recent Travel Trends 2024 report, which highlights that the value of experiences and cultural exploration will be key considerations, with price no longer solely ruling decision-making for Indian travellers. We expect this momentum to only grow next year as the 2024 report also highlights that 86 per cent of Indian travellers plan

**Bangkok was the second most popular international destination for Indian travellers this year, followed by Denpasar, as per the Skyscanner report**

to take the same number, if not more, trips abroad in 2024 compared to 2023.

# How will we travel next year?

Using the latest propriety data, industry-leading insight, and expert analysis from across the organisation, Amadeus has identified five developments that aim to create more meaningful travel experiences for the planet, economy, and the traveller.



In 2024, travellers anticipate a seamless journey characterized by comfort, security, and personalized experiences, says Mani Ganeshan, Global Head of Engineering, Travel Distribution and Centre Head, Amadeus Labs. "Underpinning travel providers' ability to meet these expectations, an ever-growing sophisticated level of technology is required," he added.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) is poised to exert a growing influence in travel over the coming years. Whether it's the pursuit of watching our favourite music acts live or adopting innovative tools to follow in the footsteps of digital influencers, travel providers will have



to shape their offerings to cater to these changing tastes. As technology continues to evolve, the travel ecosystem enters a fascinating and progressive phase, promising a swift and positive transformation of the future of travel.

**Music tourism:** After the social isolation of the pandemic, a boom in concerts and festivals has this year tapped into a desire for connection. The trend is expected to accelerate as we look toward 2024.

**Agents of influence:** Social media has become a powerful force during the inspiration phase of a trip, but a new shift is happening.

**As technology continues to evolve, the travel ecosystem enters a fascinating and progressive phase, promising a swift and positive transformation**

Instead of influencers solely being the source of vacation inspiration for their communities, they are now facilitators of direct bookings.

**Electric skyways:** As cities are more congested and air pollution

is more prevalent, a potential solution to fossil-fuel-powered transportation will be the emergence of skyways that allow flying taxis, electric vertical take-off, and landing (eVTOL) aircraft and other kinds of electric aircraft to provide lower emission air travel options.

**Intelligent concierge:** Generative AI is adding tremendous value to the online travel planning experience for consumers, as search and advice become hyper personalized and more intuitive.

**Business luxe-lite:** With ever-more travellers wanting to fly at the front of the plane, there is an opportunity to offer more affordable and accessible "unbundled" business class fares.

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# Digital presence a must

Technology has transformed various aspects of hotel operations, contributing to enhanced guest experiences, streamlined processes, and improved revenue management strategies. Can hotels afford to ignore this platform any more?

 Hazel Jain

We live in a fast-paced world that is not just highly globalised, but also digitalised. It is the age of the internet, easy connectivity, and AI that must be embraced in order to move forward. A strong digital presence through online travel platforms, social media, and user-friendly websites has become crucial.

**Tshering Yanki**, Sales & Marketing Executive, Pemako – a new luxury brand from Bhutan, says that digital presence keeps them vigilant of trends to cater to different consumers. "It allows us to continuously reach out to and engage with our target audience in a cost-effective way," she says. With ease, hotels can nurture customer and business relationships through email marketing, attend to online reviews and feedback that



**Tshering Yanki**  
Sales & Marketing Executive  
Pemako



**Tanu Singh**  
Associate Director Marketing Communications & PR, Signum Hotels & Resorts



**Ayodhya Nath Tiwari**  
Director, Revenue Management  
Novotel Kolkata Hotel & Residences

diverse reviews influence potential guests, and building database."

Training for Revenue Management systems are also crucial. **Ayodhya Nath Tiwari**, Director, Revenue Management, Novotel Kolkata Hotel & Residences, feels

hospitality industry, our digital marketing efforts are crucial for staying competitive and reaching a diverse range of travellers. This includes implementing comprehensive strategies across social media, SEO, email marketing, and online advertising. The impact of digital marketing on Ramee Group of Hotels has been significant and transformative."

Moreover, digital marketing has played a pivotal role in driving direct bookings, reducing dependency on third-party platforms.

Digital marketing has empowered hotels to stay agile in a competitive market. **Ridhima Nagpal**, MarComm Manager, Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore, says,



**Asawari Musale**  
Digital Marketing Head  
Ramee Group of Hotels



**Ridhima Nagpal**  
Marketing & Communication Manager  
Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore

contribute to a positive reputation. This also leverages search and advertising optimisation that ensures the hotel is boosting visibility and is easily accessible.

**Connect to a global audience**  
Digital marketing is also a great way to convey the values of a hotel. **Tanu Singh**, Associate Director, MarCom & PR, Signum Hotels & Resorts, says, "Key factors that help new hotel brands like ours are online marketing strategies, like a user-friendly, mobile-responsive, and SEO-optimised website, partnering with popular OTAs like Booking.com, Expedia, or Airbnb to increase bookings, and social media presence to engage with users, and encouraging guest reviews on sites like TripAdvisor, Google, and Zomato. Posi-

that online platforms have revolutionised how guests book. "In fact, advanced RMS, often powered by AI, enable us to analyse huge data in real time," he says.

There is a need for increased focus on Revenue Management in both hotel management schools and within the industry. "Moreover, the essence lies in embracing Total Hotel Revenue Management and Sustainable Revpar Matrix, which are pivotal," Tiwari adds.

Digital marketing for Ramee Group of Hotels is a multifaceted strategy that encompasses various online channels and platforms. **Asawari Musale**, Digital Marketing Head, Ramee Group of Hotels, says, "In the dynamic



**Sharin Joseph**  
Commercial Director  
Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks

"Implementing online promotions, loyalty programs, and partnerships significantly enhance our brand visibility. It is also crucial to promote online reviews and encourage user-generated content."

**Sharin Joseph**, Commercial Director, Hilton Bangalore Embassy



**Sonal Sahoo**  
Director and Promoter  
Lyfe Hotels

in the industry, feels that travellers today are heavily depend on online platforms to research, compare, and reserve accommodations. "Therefore, a strong digital marketing strategy is imperative for hotels to boost their online presence and secure bookings," she adds.



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- Lodging revenue back to 80 per cent of pre-COVID levels; steady growth projected for 2022-24: Booking.com
- Accor is poised to open 30 new properties in the country in next 3 to 5 years: Puneet Dhawan
- Cross Hotels & Resorts celebrates Away Bali Legian Camakila as the Favourite Hotel 2023 at the Exquisite Awards
- South Indian style weddings attract Europeans in Puducherry, Tamil Nadu market to reach \$10 million by 2025
- Himachal Assembly passes Bill, mandates tourism unit registration within 30 days
- Sports travellers constitute 10-12 per cent of outbound travel, 200 per cent premium segment growth likely in 1 year
- VFS Global renews Visa and Residence Permit services contract for Norway globally, including in India
- Vistara starts non-stop flights between Mumbai and Doha

# Travel Arena gets Czech go-ahead

Out of just a handful of agencies in India to have attained this, Travel Arena is now accredited by the Czech embassy to submit group applications via the fast-track mechanism for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions and social event groups travelling to Czechia.

 Hazel Jain

**L**ittle did **Reena Sachdev**, Founder, Travel Arena, expect to win a prestigious agency accreditation by the Czech embassy when she sent one of the biggest groups from India to Prague in 2022. The destination took note and what followed could prove to be a game changer for Indian travellers as well as Czech Republic.

Sachdev explains, "We did a 40<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for an HNI client and one of the 10 biggest families from India in Prague in 2022. The kind of business that the destination saw at that time gave Czech Republic an idea of the kind of spend that Indian travellers can do in Eastern Europe. Western Europe already knows how important the Indian market is. As a result, Travel Arena received an accreditation from the Czech embassy in September 2023 and is now entitled to submit group applications via the



**Reena Sachdev**  
Founder  
Travel Arena

fast-track mechanism for MICE and social event groups travelling to Czechia."


She adds that only a handful of agents received this. This is a pilot project for a year.

This completely sorts out the Schengen visa issue for business travellers visiting Czech Republic.

She adds, "They realised that the main challenge for Eastern Europe is the visa process. The oft-visited countries in Europe are already aware of this and are doing their bit towards this. But when it comes to Eastern Europe they really needed to buck up. So, it was about time they woke up and smelled the coffee and saw the spending power of Indians. They realised that the first thing they need to eradicate is the delay in visas. So, they developed a programme, starting with MICE, because Eastern Europe is still seen as a MICE and events destination. The embassy decided to have a handful of handpicked agencies like Travel Arena accredited with fast track visa application where we bypass the VFS online date system, which is the regular process." Travel Arena can apply for these visas offline for clients. Slots open every two weeks for Czech Republic.

Her company just sends the details offline and the visa process


is done through that procedure. "I see a lot of interest coming in for all Eastern European countries, including Czech Republic. This initiative is definitely going to be a game changer, especially for MICE clients. This way, they can afford to plan just

 **You don't have to be a group of 50 or 100. You can be as few as two people but it has to be a business or corporate travel or social events**

one month in advance, which is what they usually do. Not just that, there are name changes, so to have this facility encourages us to sell the destination more. Visas can be applied as

less as 20 days in advance. And that is a big promise for any Schengen country."

**Even group of two can apply** You don't have to be a group of 50 or 100, Sachdev explains.

"You can be as few as two people but it has to be a business or corporate travel or social events. And, of course, the point of entry has to be Czech Republic. They also need confirmed hotel vouchers. We whet the client. We are doing the job of ensuring that the client is genuine, and it is our duty to make sure that the visa is given to the right people and that they are duly exiting the country. In that sense, we have a bigger responsibility of making sure we are sending the right people and a good ROI is going to the country for giving us this advantage. A lot of hotels, agents and corporates have reached out to us after this. So, we are seeing a big increase in demand for the destination," she says. 

# Expect AI adoption across functions

TripJack has enhanced its agent offerings with a diverse range, including flights, hotels, holidays, cruises, and rail. The aim is to keep adding new content across key categories and empowering travel partners with global options at competitive B2B rates, says Hussain Patel, Director, TripJack. He shares the company's plans for 2024.

 Hazel Jain

## What are your learnings from 2023?

The thriving landscape of B2B travel in India in 2023 has provided valuable insights and learning opportunities. The growth in travel and demand of B2B travel signifies the preferences of Indian travellers for assisted and curated travel experiences, especially in case of international travel. To stay ahead of the curve, we intend to adapt and leverage the growing enthusiasm for diverse travel experiences by providing multi-product content across flights, hotels, holidays, and cruises.

Looking ahead, our strategy involves aligning with the emerging trends in Indian travel. This includes providing travel agents with innovative tools and technology, an extensive array of content, and an intensified focus on

customer satisfaction. In anticipation of the evolving landscape, we are committed to exceeding the expectations of our partners in the vibrant and rapidly expanding Indian travel market.

## What is your main focus right now at Tripjack?

Our main focus is unlocking the vast potential that exists in hotels, cruises, and holidays. Recognizing significant opportunities in these categories, our primary goal is to meet the growing B2B demand. By enhancing our offerings and leveraging technology, we aim to provide comprehensive solutions and services that cater specifically to the evolving needs of businesses in the travel industry.

## What are some of the new products that you are adding for agents?

We have enhanced our agent offerings with our diverse range,



Hussain Patel and Hasan Patel, Directors of TripJack, at the MTF event

including flights, hotels, holidays, cruises, and rail. Our aim is to keep adding new content across our key categories and empowering travel partners with global options at competitive B2B rates. Strong content ensures agents access a wide inventory, ancillary services, fostering convenience and profitability in the

ever-evolving travel industry that is customer-centric and technology driven.

## Have you incorporated any new technology or features to the website?

With a dedicated product and engineering team we are always identifying new products and

features like booking notification and key updates on WhatsApp to travel partners, auto-cancellation and booking of ancillaries for select airlines.

## How do you see the B2B travel trade landscape evolve?


The industry has seen remarkable growth in both leisure and business categories. Consumers today are more demanding and we can see a shift towards more personalized and meaningful travel. The adoption of AI is revolutionizing customer service, offering instant assistance and tailored recommendations. With the AI revolution just beginning, we believe we will soon see the adoption of it across functions to enhance efficiency and customer experience.

## What are your expectations from 2024?

We are optimistic, we have seen new investments being made in the industry that cater to the

growing demand of travellers. From new flights being added to new orders of aircraft to the UDAN scheme, there is excitement and optimistic growth op-

 **The industry has seen remarkable growth in both leisure and business categories. Consumers today are more demanding and we can see a shift towards more**

portunities in flights. From air to hospitality, with the addition of hotel rooms and new properties, to the excitement for experiential journeys like cruise, travel as a whole is poised for significant growth in near future. 

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# Collaboration, innovation key

Contd. from page 3



**Shivani Singh Deo**  
Country Manager – India  
Virgin Atlantic

“We are expecting an action-packed 2024! We intend to go live with several large travel companies, offering relatively lower ticket size loans for flights and hotels. We also plan to launch a couple of large business lines to help increase our penetration across travel agents

“2023 proved transformative for Virgin Atlantic. We achieved a record-breaking milestone in India, flying over 620,000 seats—the highest in our history. As we venture into 2024, our goal is to surpass this feat with 850,000 seats, supported by the launch of our daily direct service from Bengaluru to London starting 1 April 2024. India is our third largest market globally. Our strong performance in this market gives us confidence to grow.”



**Mayank Tewari**  
Co-founder  
SanKash

and end customers. This can't be achieved without an A-team. We intend to hire for senior management positions across functions in 2024.”



**Adil Karim**  
Director  
Fly Creative

“This year has been a rollercoaster year for us. People cut down on their spending this year. So our prime focus now is on our B2B portal. We are adding products onto the platform like buses, hotels, mobile recharge, travel insurance, etc apart from air vertical. We are also looking into ChatGPT and how we could use it to empower our staff. Of course, social media presence is a must in today's times as everything is digital. It helps in giving that visibility.”

“In line with our commitment to innovation, we have been digitally inclined as a company. Our Digital Ecosystem offers a range of cutting-edge platforms, including the 3D Virtual Trade Fair, Virtual Press Conference platform and the AVIAGroup group booking tool. As we reflect



**Ellona Pereira**  
Head  
Aviareps India

on a successful 2023, we eagerly anticipate a promising 2024 filled with opportunities and thriving businesses in this rapidly expanding market.”



**Ramanpreet Singh**  
Vice President - Growth & Strategy  
SKIL Travel

“In 2024, we expect sustained growth driven by our commitment to innovation and exceptional service. Another factor which will play a pivotal role in this success story is our hiring strategy. We expect to hire the best-in-class talent in all verticals and would like to become the most preferred Corporate Travel Management company to work for. Collaboration and innovation are paramount in navigating the current corporate travel landscape.”

“Our vision for 2024 is a thrilling journey beyond traditional boundaries, where every stay weaves an unforgettable narrative, and every service ignites delight. It's a year where we'll not only meet but exceed the expectations of the modern, tech-savvy, and experience-hungry



**Bhavik Sheth**  
COO  
Evoke Experiences

traveller, turning every visit into an extraordinary tale of innovation, luxury, and sustainability. Get ready for a transformative year in hospitality.”



**Nishant Taneja**  
Head of Marketing  
Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort

“As we approach the threshold of 2024, the hospitality industry is poised for dynamic shifts and continued innovation. Reflecting on the trends of 2023, several key aspects are expected to endure and shape the landscape in the upcoming year. One prevailing trend is the

“As 2024 approaches, perched in our hillside hotel, we are poised to blend the art of luxury hospitality with a journey of personal and professional growth. This year is set to be a remarkable chapter, where we not only elevate the standard of wellness and luxury in our hotel but also focus on the individual development of our team. We envision our serene location as a catalyst for innovation, inspiring us to introduce novel wellness experiences.”



**Varun Mehrotra**  
Director, Sales & Marketing, Sheraton  
Grand Whitefield Hotel & Convention Centre

emphasis on personalized experiences. In 2023, we observed a growing demand for tailored services, where guests seek unique experiences.”



**Shyam Upadhyay**  
Director  
U&I Holidays

“Modern-age tourists like to book instantly, and 9pm to 11pm is the time when they prefer making reservations, so we need to quickly adjust ourselves for such changes. Only way to survive is to keep improving our processes so that we can stop leakages; micro-planning is extremely important, and so is simple formula – back to the basics. We are now launching our B2B mobile app so our agent can book while in bed.”

“2024 is going to be the next big year in terms of the entire tourism and hospitality business in India. Whether I talk about outbound, inbound or domestic segment, it is kind of a revival of an inbound segment which is going to happen where



**Barun Gupta**  
General Manager  
Expolnn Suites & Convention

I can see the maximum number of foreign tourists. Indians are travelling abroad and as well as the domestic business has grown bigger”



**Bhawna Sareen**  
Sr Manager – Sales & Operations  
Dook International

“Travel expectations for 2024 is that COVID will never return and travel will boom like anything. All the tour operators and travel agents should have enough business and queries. We, at Dook are also targeting new tourism sectors like earlier we used to do just travel packages, but now we are going into the wedding, corporate industry as well. It is time to focus on weddings in India as per statement by our Prime Minister Narendra Modi.”

“As far as expectations are concerned for 2024, we want that visa processing to countries should be smooth and reliable as well as airfares should be lower. For example: Kazakhstan is giving free visa for 14 days, but what if clients ask for more days, then he/she has to



**Akshay Jain**  
Franchise Owner – Delhi  
EaseMyTrip

go through the hassling process. Secondly, flight rates are next level right now and connectivity is an issue.”

Contd. on page 14 ▶



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# GPS Kolkata aims to tap North East market

Returning to Kolkata after almost a year, Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) witnessed agents from cities like Jharkhand, Bihar and surrounding areas also attending the show. This was followed by another event in Guwahati. Harmandeep Singh Anand, Managing Director, GPS, said that they have a bigger focus on the Northeast, which looks to be an emerging market.



# THE WAIT IS OVER

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# Eco-friendly travel in demand

▶ Contd. from page 10



**Sachin Sharma**  
Managing Director  
ASCEL Group

“Ah, the future is always an exciting and fascinating topic! While I can't predict the future with certainty, I can definitely share some trends from 2023 that may continue to shape the year 2024. Eco-friendly travel has gained momentum in recent years. Travellers are seeking destinations and accommodations that prioritize eco-conscious practices.”



**Anshu Tejuja**  
Managing Director  
Ashoka Dream Holidays

“Our expansion strategy centres on diversifying destination offerings and strengthening partnerships with local businesses. Tie-ups with eco-friendly accommodations and immersive experiences align with evolving customer preferences for unique, sustainable travel. Also, offering different untouched destinations and bespoke experiences than the usual regular stuff.”



**Raunak Jana**  
Founder & CEO  
Greynomad

“We are expecting a full swing of revenue generation in the year 2024. The trend which is going to continue is the need of new itineraries and not just the same old mundane ones. Travellers, especially Indians, are experiential ones who want to try every cuisine, explore every nook and corner of that particular destination, accommodate in homestays or resorts.”



**Ankita Parmar**  
Deputy GM - Marketing  
FCM Travel India

“As we look ahead to 2024, my expectations for the travel industry are brimming with optimism. We expect business travel will continue to grow rapidly as organisations recognise the irreplaceable value of face-to-face interactions and the need for building meaningful connections. The travel landscape is undergoing a digital transformation.”



**Neeraj Gupta**  
Director  
Peekay Holidays

“Business is looking very positive in the coming year more than ever. The young generation has the potential to bring in the modern thoughts and the technology to the business which can benefit swift operations and make things easier to handle. Breaking the barrier of the traditional working format is one way of showing the direction this industry is heading towards.”



**Vinutaa S**  
VP & Sector Head - Corporate Ratings  
ICRA

“Following a sharp recovery in demand post-Covid, the Indian hotel industry witnessed double-digit revenue growth in CY2023. Sustenance of domestic leisure travel, demand from MICE and business travel has supported the growth. The industry also benefitted from additional demand from major events.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

## ‘2023 taught us adaptability’

Karan Vakharia, Director – Business Development, Pathfinders Holidays, says they are looking for collaborations with airlines, hotels, tour operators, and local businesses to expand offerings.



Resilience, collaborations, adaptability for future changes, and crisis preparedness are some of the lessons **Karan Vakharia**, Director – Business Development, Pathfinders Holidays, is taking away from 2023. His focus now is to enhance the overall customer experience. “Staying competitive in a rapidly evolving industry means continuous innovation. We are exploring unique travel experiences, forging strategic hotel and excursion partnerships, and leveraging emerging travel trends to differentiate our offerings. Targeting the right client mix to align with our vision to create a long-lasting relation with our client,” he shares.

As a millennial, he believes in the power of social media. “It is a powerful tool for communication, marketing, and relationship-building in the travel industry. It is helping us to reach a wide audience, showcase our offerings, engage with customers, and stay connected with



**Karan Vakharia**  
Director – Business Development  
Pathfinders Holidays

industry peer. But that isn't enough; we are also introducing new products and services that can attract a different segment of travellers for which we are working on forming preferred partnerships with airlines, hotels, tour operators, or local businesses which can expand service offerings and create unique travel packages. Also, we are focusing our horizon to expand and increase the existing client base in the USA,” he says.

Vakharia believes that technology will continue to play a crucial role in enhancing the travel experience. “Integration of AI, AR/VR will have a big role. Flexibility in bookings and travel plans will likely remain a priority. Travel agencies might continue offering more flexible cancellation policies

**Travel agencies might continue offering more flexible cancellation policies and adaptable itineraries to accommodate unforeseen changes**

and adaptable itineraries to accommodate unforeseen changes. I have seen my parents who co-founded the company always keeping clients at the centre of all decisions, and I continue this practice.”

## ‘Our focus is on India biz’

Cross River Kwai offers a seamless blend of modernity and nature in Thailand. GM Sitapaat Suttisuntrangkura says the property has special provisions to cater to the Indian market.



Cross River Kwai, a 32-room property of Cross Hotels and Resorts, is located beside the beautiful stretch of Kwai Noi River in Kanchanaburi, Thailand, with spectacular mountain ranges in the backdrop. Every room of the property has an uninterrupted panoramic river view, presenting a blend of modernity and nature. The property is an important part of the Cross Hotels and Resorts' diverse portfolio.

**Sitapaat Suttisuntrangkura**, General Manager, Cross River Kwai, said, “We know how each property (of the hotel chain) is different and provides a different experience, having flexible attitude for comprehensive business solutions for real world. We have also built a reputation and have the best professional standards.”

Since the Indian market is new for them, Suttisuntrangkura said their agenda for 2024 is to attract more customers from the country.



**Sitapaat Suttisuntrangkura**  
General Manager  
Cross River Kwai

“As far as 2024 is concerned, we, of course, will expand our properties worldwide, especially in the India market. It is kind of a new market for us, but we have specialists in house who understand the market needs, expectation, culture, and lifestyle,” she said.

Talking about business prospects, she said, “Our focus is on weddings and MICE. Indians have

specific requirements in terms of food, spa and wellness places, excursion sites, and attractions. If they want to go outside, we have special guides to accompany

**It (India market) is kind of a new market for us, but we have specialists in house who understand the market needs, expectation, culture, and lifestyle**

them. They can go out for a safari, zoo and even waterfall,” she said, adding that, “We have special vegetarian menus for Indians and spas as per their demand.”

When asked about the sustainability initiatives taken at the property, Suttisuntrangkura said, “We do everything for success but noting that harms the planet.”

# The second gen of biz leaders

The second-generation business leaders are more confident, better travelled, and have the courage to think differently than their parents. **TRAVTALK** speaks to six young trailblazers who share their personal learnings and how they are implementing them in business. It is important to also work ON the business and not just IN the business, they say.



**Anosh Kanga**  
Partner, Ahura Travels &  
Co-Founder, Exporience

“Over the years, I have realised change is the only constant. Since Ahura Travels has been around for some time, we have a distinct ideology and there is a way we always do things. For a long time, I stuck to them. It is okay doing everyday things in a different way.”



**Muhammad Patel**  
Director  
Atlas Tours and Travels

“As we look ahead in 2024, the world of travel calls us with the excitement of exploring new places, making discoveries, and experiencing different cultures. In our country, many people have a strong wish to travel, but only 40 per cent of Indians travel abroad.”



**Varun Godia**  
Manager-Product Development  
Varun Worldwide Vacations

“I have had the privilege to watch my parents navigate good and tricky times in the industry. As we know, leisure markets are the first to be hit when anything untoward happens in world. What I have learnt is that it is important in such times to adjust to changing situations.”



**Shruti Saboo Seksaria**  
Creative Head  
Guideline Travels Holidays India

“Over time, technology (introduction of online portals, travel apps etc) and innovation in product offerings have disrupted the way we used to know travel as a medium of luxury. Important thing is to move with the changes, implement newer methods and stay relevant.”



**Pratham Saboo**  
Head of MICE  
Guideline Travels Holidays India

“This year has been insightful to understand the changed way that people now travel. People are open to visit more destinations and eager to visit upcoming destinations. A great example of this has been Vietnam. The partnership with EMT has also helped us.”



**Arjun Baljee**  
Strategic Advisor  
Royal Orchid Hotels

“I did not build this firm; it was my father’s vision and grit that has enabled this growth to where we are today. Hence, I respect, understand, support and want to further that vision. Companies are not built by a single person, but by a dedicated team.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

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# Cricket revs up trade for 2024

It was a one-of-a-kind picnic on Sunday for the travel trade fraternity organised by Mumbai Travel Fraternity (MTF) team. With starting point as Mumbai and a surprise destination, each car got clues at various locations on the way as to their next meeting point. Forty cars carried around 150 passengers to a secret location (StayVista in Lonavala) where they engaged in fun and frolic.



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# Win with service, not price

Neil Patil, Founder, CTO & COO, Veena World, pens down his thoughts on many things – his podcasts that have gained immense popularity, the expansion his team is planning in India and internationally, expectations from the New Year and a piece of advice to those who are looking to join this incredible industry.

This has been an incredible year with many learnings. I'll sum them up to three things:

❖ India for the longest time had been a market that had always valued the price over the experience when it came to locking down a holiday plan. However, 2023 was the year where we saw a large shift in consumer behaviour. A large proportion of the audience is valuing the experience more over the price of a holiday.

❖ Europe, despite its visa challenges, continues to be on top of mind for the Indian traveller. This year we saw a six times rise in the number of travellers wanting to travel to Europe in winter months! Before the pandemic, this number was very small.

❖ Japan and Australia have emerged as strong competition for Europe. And with both countries granting multi-entry visas to most travellers, repeat visits to these destinations have become a trend

now. This is slowly chipping into the share of international holiday spend that was otherwise occupied majorly by Europe.

## Audience engagement key

When it comes to the use of technology in travel industry, a major focus has been on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML). I will leave that aside for now to focus on what we are really doing right now. For us at Veena World, having transparent and clear communication with our guests at every step of the journey is critical. To achieve this, we have started many communication initiatives like podcasts: Travel Explore Celebrate Life, 5 Minute Travel Tips, Chalo Bag Bharo Nikal Pado, Travel Katta, Know the Unknown and 'Aapla Maharashtra', which are available on Spotify and Apple podcasts. Such content creation has enabled us to use our social media channels effectively for audience engagement. We have also started focusing a lot on design. Our website now has a



fresh look on a monthly basis. With newer technologies being implemented at the back end, both the technology and marketing teams work hand-in-hand.

## Expanding in India and overseas

When it comes to expansion, we now have a Veena World branch office in Ahmedabad. We recently opened one more office in Pune, which takes the number of Veena World locations in Pune to more

than 20 offices. We now have a presence in Delhi, Kolkata, Bengaluru. With more than 150 offices around India, we want to be closer to the Indian traveller.

At the same time, we have seen our overseas presence grow too, which has enabled us to build our inbound vertical too. We now have an overseas presence in Germany, USA, Canada, Columbia, Australia and the UAE. And you will soon hear

about more office expansions in 2024. We are expecting 2024 to be a year of even greater demand for experiential travel. We also have two Antarctica expeditions taking place in 2024. Year 2024 for us will be a year where we strive to set a new benchmark for how travel services are provided in India.

## Win the market with service

As a second-generation business lead, I do have some personal learnings that I can share with those beginning their journey in this industry. Always enter a meeting with a clean slate. For me, this has really worked because when you enter with a clean slate, you develop the ability to let everyone contribute to the project at hand. And this mantra for us has been incredibly effective, because after all, it is the team that makes the dream work.

When we started doing podcasts, we were pessimistic about sustaining the episodes and the recordings. But two years on, we have done

more than 600 episodes now. So, one of the biggest personal learnings is Impossible is Nothing. If you think it's possible, do it!

If you try to win the market on just a price advantage, there will always be someone in the future who will beat you at it. But if you try to win the market on the service you provide and the experiences that you make your travellers plan and enjoy, you will be a long-term player.



**Neil Patil**  
is the Founder, CTO & COO of Veena World

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

# FITUR: Commitment to sustainability

FITUR 2024, to be organised by IFEMA Madrid from 24-28 January 2024, represents a global stage advocating environmental, social, and corporate responsibility in tourism. Comprising new segments like FITUR 4all and FiturNext Observatory, this edition emphasizes on accessible tourism and region revitalization.



FITUR 2024, the International Tourism Trade Fair, scheduled from 24 to 28 January 2024 at IFEMA Madrid, is poised as a global platform advocating for environmental, social, and corporate governance responsibility within the tourism sector.

This edition introduces the novel FITUR 4all segment, dedicated to accessible tourism, with an emphasis on recognizing the most sustainable stand by assessing its carbon footprint. Additionally, the FiturNext Observatory will acknowledge tourism initiatives contributing to the revitalization of territories. Set against the backdrop of increasing global challenges, FITUR 2024 not only stands as a premier global tourism trade fair but also symbolizes a steadfast commitment toward sustainability and embracing environmental, social, and corporate governance responsibility within the industry. Recognizing the



urgency to address contemporary challenges, the 44<sup>th</sup> edition aims to champion best practices and strategies fostering respectful tourism, furthering the development of a more sustainable economy.

The International Tourism Trade Fair intends to host a multitude of activities, workshops, and conferences, focusing on education, awareness, and knowledge exchange to underscore the significance of sustainable tourism. The objective remains to minimize environmental impact while positively influencing local culture, communities, corporate governance, and promoting equality and inclusion.

All sections within FITUR pivot around sustainability as a core theme. The inaugural FITUR 4all edition, developed in collaboration



with Impulsa Igualdad, signifies a significant addition, aiming to underscore the progression toward accessible and inclusive tourism. In alignment with the pursuit of equality, recognition is also extended to the endeavours of FITUR Woman, spotlighting women's contributions in tourism while advocating for equal opportunities, alongside FITUR LGBT+. Other sections like FITUR Screen, FITUR Sports, and FITUR Lingua aim to

promote destinations, crucial for the even distribution of tourism activity, fundamental in community development and the transition toward more sustainable models. Notably, FITUR Cruises focuses on responsible blue tourism, while FITUR Talent addresses the social and economic dimensions of talent management in tourism.

The exhibitors' responsibility at FITUR is encouraged through

actionable guidelines and recommendations to mitigate the trade fair's environmental impact and amplify its positive aspects. For the second consecutive year, IFEMA Madrid pledges to measure FITUR's carbon footprint, showcasing its unwavering dedication to sustainability and environmental consciousness, striving to reduce detected levels in the forthcoming edition. Sustainable participation at FITUR is underscored by the Sus-

tainable Stand Awards in collaboration with the Responsible Tourism Institute (ITR).

The FiturNext Observatory, now in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition, acknowledges projects for their replicability and

**FITUR 4all segment, dedicated to accessible tourism, puts an emphasis on recognizing the most sustainable stand by assessing its carbon footprint**

positive impact across various domains. This initiative specifically rewards tourism endeavours contributing to the revitalization of regions, aiming to bolster employment and local consumption. 🌱

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# Digital aid key to success of startups

Digital advancements come as a great opportunity for startups to innovate and shape experiences. From new-age travellers to corporate clients, there are several opportunities that are ripe for disruptive solutions, say young startup founders. The landscape is changing dynamically, and it's a great time for the entrepreneurial spirit to thrive.



Hazel Jain

The beginning of 2023 was not easy for startups across the country. While the flow of capital in the startup ecosystem was lower across a few industries like edtech and ecommerce, travel as a sector has displayed remarkable growth and reliance. Clearly, the surge in travel is not just revenge travel; it is now part of the people's lifestyle, as disposable incomes continue to rise.

**Sanjay Ghare**, Founder & MD, Vervotech, which was acquired by Juniper Group this year, says, "We are seeing two big changes after the pandemic. First, people are travelling more than ever, but they are also watching their wallets. Many now prefer tickets with no cancellation fees. Second, technology in travel is changing. For example, blockchain-based startups are getting attention. They use tokens for bookings. If someone

cancels, the system quickly gives a full refund using these tokens, and the booking goes to someone else. It's like a smooth handover. This is a smart way tech is adapting to how people travel now." Juniper is focused on acquiring, managing, and building businesses.

## What kind of ideas work?

Focusing on specific travel segments seems to be the winning strategy, believes Ghare. Unlike broad platforms like MakeMyTrip, which cater to everyone with general offerings, startups that target niche markets are thriving. "For example, companies like PickYourTrail, specialising in luxury travel, are gaining significant success. The key is understanding and meeting the unique needs of specific segments, rather than trying to appeal to everyone with one-size-fits-all products. Now is the time to jump in and boost your travel business. Seize this opportunity with both hands. But, while you are at it,



**Sanjay Ghare**  
Founder & MD  
Vervotech

pay close attention to keeping your costs in check. Choosing the right technology is crucial for that. It's all about making the most of the travel boom while being smart about how you operate," Ghare adds.

## Add value, that is all

Despite long-standing presence and constant evolution of the travel



**Arun Bagaria**  
Co-Founder & CEO  
TravClan

and tourism industries, the answer to what works is fairly simple, says **Arun Bagaria**, Co-Founder & CEO, TravClan. Travellers want 100 per cent on ground support during their travel experiences. If as a business you are able to add value to the experience of the customer, you have a robust and sustainable business model, he says.

"As a B2B travel provider, our responsibilities extend beyond the travel agents, we ensure our agents' end customer is having a hassle-free and quality experience and thus getting more than what they paid for. We solve for and ensure standardized quality of service by setting upon ground teams and direct partnerships with various hospitality partners. We can control and improve experiences in real time. Another pain point across the industry that we have identified over the years is the need for personalization. The one-size-fits-all approach has never worked in the tourism industry. Offering customizations and simplifying the booking process can dynamically change how one can position themselves in the market. There have been rapid advancements in technology with the advent of AI and progression of LLM models. However, the successful adoption of such technologies and the customers' trust

on AI to plan their trips is yet to be seen," Bagaria adds.

While this opportunity to create seamless booking experiences looks promising, he believes that large moats in travel exist, where

**Clearly, the surge in travel at the moment is not just revenge travel; it is now part of the people's lifestyle, as disposable incomes continue to rise**

businesses can stand out by establishing better on ground control. Travel is an evergreen sector, and we are at an inflection point of demand, Bagaria believes.

## India 3<sup>rd</sup> in startup ecosystem

► Contd. from page 3

innovations, associations, and tech-driven offerings continue to be on my agenda for the future.

## How is the travel startup landscape today in India?

India boasts of having the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world. The tourism industry is growing significantly and startups have a crucial role to play in this development. Tech-driven startups are gradually entering the market as technology has emerged as a critical aspect of the sector, enabling growth and innovation. India has startups enabling seamless planning and booking of travel services or assist travel service providers with technology solutions, along with offering ease of discovering and booking travel-related services such as transportation, accommodation, facility management, tours, ticketing, and activities through online portals. The startup count is growing and is, in fact, garnering investor interest, a trend that was unimaginable a few years ago. Venture capitalists are now keen on driving the expansion plans of travel tech startups in India.

## What are some of the requirements for VC funding today?

Despite the funding crisis and geopolitical situations, travel companies attracted over \$27 billion worth of investments from 2020 to 2022. In fact, 2021 will set a new record of just under \$11 billion. This indicates that

**Tech-driven startups are gradually entering the market as technology has emerged as a critical aspect of the sector, enabling growth and innovation**

investor appetite has surpassed pre-COVID levels. However, this year the startup funding landscape had a lukewarm performance in the first half of the year. Raising funding has become challenging nowadays, but the ventures that are able to do so end up getting significant amounts. As far as the criteria

for VC funding are concerned, I feel investors now prioritize the scalability of businesses, their tech infrastructure, and capability to deal with unforeseen situations. After COVID, I feel such attributes are important for investors to consider before they can commit to supporting ventures in their journey. So, today, the investment landscape has become tougher than before. But at the same time, it continues to remain rewarding.

## Your message to upcoming startups in the travel and hospitality space.

I strongly believe that the future of startups in the travel and tourism industry is highly promising, as there is a lot of untapped potential. My suggestion for budding entrepreneurs would be to 'think local' as significant value lies in showcasing local experiences, cuisines, arts, and crafts. As the experiential travel trend is catching up globally, there's no place better than India to offer localized experiences, promoting diverse cultural heritage and traditions. Next, I feel they should focus on sustainability. Environmental consciousness is the need of the hour.

## 'We aim 1mn Indians in 2024'

► Contd. from page 3

numerous golf events and attending numerous wedding shows. We have seen a few golf tournaments and weddings from India in Malaysia and have had a favourable response from the Indian market. In 2024, our aim is to solidify Malaysia's appeal for weddings and golfing experiences among Indian travellers," he shared.

Aziz emphasized on their collaborative efforts with airlines, travel agencies, and online travel agents (OTAs) to attract more Indian travellers. He said participation in trade fairs, conferences, and organisation of roadshows across various cities will maintain their market presence. They will also leverage the influence of social media and media influencers, alongside hosting familiarization trips. The aim is to showcase new products and lesser-explored destinations within Malaysia. Moreover, the partnership with the International India Film Academy (IIFA) Awards 2024 presents a significant platform to showcase Malaysia within the Bollywood industry. Reflecting on the visa-free initiative's impact, Akmal highlighted the positive response



from the Indian travel industry and said, "Malaysian government began visa-free travel to India on 1 December 2023, and we have seen a positive response from the travel industry. Large and small travel agencies have begun

**Malaysian government is negotiating with the Indian government to enhance the number of slots available under the bilateral aviation agreement**

to focus on Malaysia and advising their clients to plan a trip. According to recent travel portal studies, a majority of travellers are looking towards Malaysia for their forthcoming abroad trip and most hotel rooms in Malaysia are fully booked by Indian travellers.

The visa-free entry into Malaysia is valid until 31 December 2024. The extension will be determined by the Indian market's response."

Aziz also underlined the nation's growing appeal in providing incentives and cultural experiences. "We have been witnessing tremendous growth in term of MICE movement in Malaysia since April 2022 and it's increasing day by day. Malaysia Convention & Exhibition Bureau (MyCEB) is assisting and encouraging corporate groups by giving souvenirs, cultural performances during the gala dinner, monetary benefits, and a special immigration lane for corporate groups upon arrival," he informed. Malaysia seeks to enhance air connectivity between India and Malaysia, and negotiating to increase flight slots under bilateral aviation agreements.

"India is number 1 source market for Malaysia in terms of tourist arrivals except Asean and China. According to the Strategic Planning Division, Tourism Malaysia and Immigration Malaysia, we received 14.4 million tourists between January and September this year," he said.

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# Event Talk 2024

## JANUARY

- ❖ **MTF Cricket Premier League**  
Date: 14 January  
Venue: Mumbai, India
- ❖ **Outbound Travel Roadshow**  
Date: 15-20 January  
Venue: Delhi, India
- ❖ **VisitBritain Roadshow**  
Date: 16 January  
Venue: Pune, India
- ❖ **VisitBritain Roadshow**  
Date: 18 January  
Venue: Ahmedabad, India
- ❖ **SHIRA Convention**  
Date: 19-21 January  
Venue: Bengaluru, India
- ❖ **Tourism Fair**  
Date: 19-21 January  
Venue: Nagpur, India
- ❖ **Travel MICE and Corporate Show**   
Date: 20-21 January  
Venue: Jaipur, India
- ❖ **FITUR 2024**   
Date: 24-28 January  
Venue: Madrid, Spain

## FEBRUARY

- ❖ **GPS**  
Date: 1-2 February  
Venue: Nagpur, India
- ❖ **OTM**  
Date: 8-10 February  
Venue: Mumbai, India
- ❖ **South Africa Roadshow**  
Date: 12 February  
Venue: Jaipur, India
- ❖ **South Africa Roadshow**  
Date: 13 February  
Venue: Delhi, India
- ❖ **South Africa Roadshow**  
Date: 14 February  
Venue: Ahmedabad, India
- ❖ **South Africa Roadshow**  
Date: 15 February  
Venue: Bengaluru, India
- ❖ **South Africa Roadshow**  
Date: 16 February  
Venue: Mumbai, India
- ❖ **AIME**  
Date: 19-21 February  
Venue: Melbourne, Australia
- ❖ **SATTE 2024**  
Date: 22-24 February  
Venue: Greater Noida, India
- ❖ **SITE Global Conference 2024**  
Date: 26-29 February  
Venue: Istanbul, Turkey
- ❖ **GPS**  
Date: 28 February-1 March  
Venue: Chandigarh, India

## MARCH

- ❖ **India International Travel Mart**  
Date: 1-3 March  
Venue: Kolkata, India
- ❖ **ITB Berlin**  
Date: 5-7 March  
Venue: Berlin, Germany
- ❖ **CAPA Airline Leader Summit**  
Date: 7-8 March  
Venue: Granada, Spain
- ❖ **India International Travel Mart**  
Date: 15-17 March  
Venue: Ahmedabad, India

- ❖ **International Tourism and Leisure Fair**  
Date: 22-24 March  
Venue: Wroclaw, Poland
- ❖ **India Travel Mart**  
Date: 29-31 March  
Venue: Lucknow, India

## APRIL

- ❖ **Azerbaijan International Travel & Tourism Fair 2024**  
Date: 3-5 April  
Venue: Baku, Azerbaijan
- ❖ **International Luxury Travel Market Africa 2024**  
Date: 7-9 April  
Venue: Cape Town, South Africa
- ❖ **World Travel Market Africa 2024**  
Date: 10-12 April  
Venue: Cape Town, South Africa
- ❖ **World Travel Market 2024**  
Date: 15-17 April  
Venue: São Paulo, Brazil
- ❖ **Uzbekistan International Tourism Exhibition 2024**  
Date: 16-18 April  
Venue: Tashkent, Uzbekistan
- ❖ **The Shanghai International Medical Tourism Fair 2024**  
Date: 18-20 April  
Venue: Shanghai, China
- ❖ **Gulf Travel Show-MICE**   
Date: 20-21 April  
Venue: UAE
- ❖ **Kazakhstan International Exhibition Tourism & Travel 2024**  
Date: 24-26 April  
Venue: Almaty, Kazakhstan

## MAY

- ❖ **The Great Indian Travel Bazaar 2024**  
Date: 5-7 May  
Venue: Jaipur, India
- ❖ **Arabian Travel Market Dubai 2024**  
Date: 6-9 May  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **ILTM Arabia 2024**  
Date: 6-9 May  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **ILTM Latin America 2024**  
Date: 7-10 May  
Venue: São Paulo, Brazil
- ❖ **TRENZ 2024**  
Date: 8-10 May  
Venue: Wellington, New Zealand
- ❖ **Seoul International Travel Fair 2024**  
Date: 9-12 May  
Venue: Seoul, South Korea
- ❖ **IMEX Frankfurt 2024**  
Date: 14-16 May  
Venue: Frankfurt, Germany
- ❖ **ITB China 2024**  
Date: 27-29 May  
Venue: Shanghai, China

## JUNE

- ❖ **Travel Wedding Show**   
Date: 1-2 June  
Venue: India
- ❖ **The Leisure Show Dubai 2024**  
Date: 4-6 June  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **Malaysia International Dive Expo 2024**  
Date: 7-9 June  
Venue: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- ❖ **Bali & Beyond Travel Fair 2024**  
Date: 12-14 June  
Venue: Bali, Indonesia
- ❖ **Hong Kong International Travel Expo 2024**  
Date: 13-16 June  
Venue: Hong Kong

## JULY

- ❖ **ILTM Asia Pacific 2024**  
Date: 1-4 July  
Venue: Singapore
- ❖ **Arabian Travel Awards**   
Date: 2-3 July  
Venue: Riyadh, KSA
- ❖ **International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality 2024**  
Date: 5-6 July  
Venue: Singapore
- ❖ **Travel and Leisure Expo 2024**  
Date: 11-14 July  
Venue: Iloilo, Philippines
- ❖ **Global Travel Marketplace 2024**  
Date: 18-20 July  
Venue: USA
- ❖ **Travel MICE and Corporate Show**   
Date: 20-21 July  
Venue: India
- ❖ **Global Business Travel Association Annual Convention 2024**  
Date: 22-24 July  
Venue: Atlanta, Georgia

## AUGUST

- ❖ **International Conference on Leisure and Tourism 2024**  
Date: 9-10 August  
Venue: Colombo, Sri Lanka
- ❖ **Taiwan International Travel Fair 2024**  
Date: 16-19 August  
Venue: Taiwan
- ❖ **India Cargo Awards**   
Date: 28 August  
Venue: West and South India
- ❖ **India Travel Awards**   
Date: 29 August  
Venue: West and South India
- ❖ **Korea International Tourism Show 2024**  
Date: 31 August-2 September  
Venue: Han Goyang-si, North Korea

## SEPTEMBER

- ❖ **International Travel Expo**  
Date: 5-7 September  
Venue: Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam
- ❖ **Gulf Travel Show-Weddings**   
Date: 7-8 September  
Venue: KSA, UAE
- ❖ **Australia Next**  
Date: 8-11 September  
Venue: Cairns, Australia
- ❖ **Pure Life Experiences**  
Date: 9-12 September  
Venue: Marrakech
- ❖ **ITB India**  
Date: 11-13 September  
Venue: Mumbai, India
- ❖ **World Tourism Event 2024**  
Date: 12-14 September  
Venue: Genoa, Italy
- ❖ **IFTM Top Resa**   
Date: 17-19 September  
Venue: Paris, France
- ❖ **Asian Tourism Fair**  
Date: 19-21 September  
Venue: Dhaka, Bangladesh
- ❖ **ILTM North America**  
Date: 23-26 September  
Venue: Nassau, Bahamas
- ❖ **Corporate Travel World Asia Pacific**  
Date: 24-26 September  
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand

- ❖ **Incentive Travel & Conventions Meetings Asia**  
Date: 24-26 September  
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand
- ❖ **International Meetings Industry and Business Travel Conference**  
Date: 24-26 September  
Venue: Moscow, Russia
- ❖ **Kerala Travel Mart**  
Date: 26-29 September  
Venue: Kochi, Kerala
- ❖ **Tourism Summit 2024**  
Date: 27-29 September  
Venue: Jaipur, India

## OCTOBER

- ❖ **Kazakhstan International Tourism Exhibition**  
Date: 2-4 October  
Venue: Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan
- ❖ **MATTA Fair 2024**  
Date: 4-6 October  
Venue: Kuantan, Malaysia
- ❖ **Adventure Travel World Summit 2024**  
Date: 7-10 October  
Venue: Panama City, Panama
- ❖ **IMEX America**  
Date: 8-10 October  
Venue: Las Vegas, USA
- ❖ **Global Luxury Travel Expo**  
Date: 11-13 October  
Venue: Bangkok, Thailand
- ❖ **China Outbound Travel & Tourism Market**  
Date: 16-18 October  
Venue: Beijing, China
- ❖ **Arabian Cargo Awards**   
Date: 21 October  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **Arabian Travel Awards**   
Date: 22 October  
Venue: Dubai, UAE
- ❖ **ITB Asia**  
Date: 23-25 October  
Venue: Singapore
- ❖ **International Golf Travel Market**  
Date: 28-31 October  
Venue: Lisbon, Portugal

## NOVEMBER

- ❖ **CAPA Airline Leader Summit and Sustainability Awards**  
Date: 5-6 November  
Venue: Hong Kong
- ❖ **World Travel Market London**  
Date: 5-7 November  
Venue: London, UK
- ❖ **IBTM World**  
Date: 19-21 November  
Venue: Barcelona, Spain
- ❖ **International Travel & Tourism Fair**  
Date: 21-23 November  
Venue: Warsaw, Poland
- ❖ **24<sup>th</sup> WTTTC Global Summit**  
Date: To be announced  
Venue: Perth, Western Australia
- ❖ **Qatar Travel Mart**  
Date: 25-27 November  
Venue: Doha, Qatar

## DECEMBER

- ❖ **ILTM**  
Date: 2-5 December  
Venue: Cannes, France
- ❖ **India Cargo Awards**   
Date: 10 December  
Venue: North and East India
- ❖ **India Travel Awards**   
Date: 11 December  
Venue: North and East India

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JANUARY  
TO  
MARCH  
2024



**HYDERABAD**  
23-24 Jan 2024  
Marigold Hotel



**NAGPUR**  
1-2 Feb 2024  
Hotel Centre Point



**PUNE**  
14-15 Feb 2024  
Sheraton Grand Hotel



**CHANDIGARH**  
29 Feb - 1 Mar 2024  
The LaLit Chandigarh

JULY  
TO  
DECEMBER  
2024



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# MOVEMENTS

## SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD

Mumbai



Singapore Tourism Board appoints **MARKUS TAN** as the Regional Director for India, Middle East, South Asia, and Africa (IMESA), effective January 1, 2024. Based in Mumbai, Tan will spearhead STB's initiatives in promoting Leisure and Business Travel & Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (BTMICE) in the IMESA region. His responsibilities will include overseeing travel promotions, public relations, and marketing to enhance Singapore's position as a premier travel and business destination.

## AMRITARA HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi



**AKASH BHATIA** has been elevated as Vice President - Amritara Hotels & Resorts. Bhatia has been working with the group as Group General Manager for more than two years. He comes with an experience of more than 18 years. He has worked with Ramee Group of Hotels, Kingdom of Bahrain and Lemon Tree Hotels, India. In his new role, he will play a vital role in steering Amritara Hotels & Resorts towards further growth and expansion.

## ITC GARDENIA

Bengaluru



An alumna of Welcomgroup Management Institute (WMI), **AMANDEEP KAUR** is now the General Manager at ITC Gardenia, Bengaluru. Earlier, the GM at Welcomhotel by ITC Hotels, Richmond Road, Bengaluru, Kaur was responsible for the overall operations of the property leading the team to achieve desired results. She started her career at ITC Grand Central, Mumbai as a member of the pre-opening team. She played a pivotal role in the opening of ITC Grand Chola, Chennai.

## COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT

Gorakhpur

Courtyard by Marriott Gorakhpur has appointed **PRASAD RAO** as the General Manager. With over 15 years of innovative leadership in the hospitality industry, Rao brings extensive experience to his new role. He will spearhead operations, manage budgets, foster seamless communication and coordination among his team of associates and ensure compliance with evolving regulations. He has played a pivotal role in the pre-opening of several hotel ventures.



## RAMADA ENCORE BY WYNDHAM

Amritsar

The Ramada Encore By Wyndham at Airport Road, Amritsar, has appointed **VIJAY SINGH** as the Hotel Manager. In his new role, Singh will be responsible for overseeing the hotel's overall operations, team building & management, employee trainings, impeccable standards of guest services, high standards of cleanliness, on-line reputation management, planning effective sales & marketing in accordance with the business goals, ensuring that the hotel's business runs successfully.



## RAMADA BY WYNDHAM, YELAHANKA

Bengaluru

Ramada By Wyndham, Yelahanka, has appointed **DINESH KESEVALU** as the Resort Manager. In his new role, Kesevalu will be responsible for overseeing daily operations, ensuring guest satisfaction, managing staff, implementing policies, maximizing profitability, budgeting and marketing strategies. A talented and experienced hospitality professional, he will play a key role in ensuring that the Ramada By Wyndham, Yelahanka, continues to provide guests with the same high-quality service.



## SKIL TRAVEL

Mumbai



SKIL Travel has promoted **TRISHAL RAO** as the Chief Sales Officer. Currently working as the Director, Rao plays a leadership role and exudes strong business strategies that have helped the company to flourish in the travel trade market. A seasoned executive known for driving businesses to success, he possesses sharp analytical acumen that he has developed over the years through his diverse exposure in the hospitality sector. He has been a part of hospitality brands of repute.

## NOVOTEL HYDERABAD AIRPORT

Hyderabad



Novotel Hyderabad Airport, located at GMR Aerocity, Hyderabad, appoints **RAHUL CHOUDHARY** as the Director of Revenue. With over 12 years of expertise in yield management and comprehensive revenue strategies, he brings invaluable insights and leadership to drive the hotel's financial success and revenue management. He has been associated with brands like ITC, Accor, and The Park, where he has demonstrated his ability to drive revenue growth, enhance profitability, and elevate brand positioning.

## SOFITEL

Mumbai BKC



Sofitel Mumbai BKC has appointed **NIMESH PANDAV** as their new Front Office Manager. Pandav brings with him more than 13 years of Front Office experience, both in India and abroad, overseeing multiple tasks and managing employees effectively. A graduate from Mumbai University, he completed a Diploma in Pharmacy from PES College of Pharmacy in Bangalore, before moving to the United Kingdom for a Diploma in Hospitality & Catering from Ealing and West London College.

## ESPIRE HOSPITALITY GROUP

New Delhi

Espire Hospitality Group (ZANA – Luxury Escapes and Country Inn Hotels & Resorts) has appointed **MOHD AAMIR** as the Head, Revenue and E-distribution. In his new role, Aamir will play a pivotal role in developing and implementing strategic initiatives to optimize revenue generation and enhance the group's e-distribution channels. He brings over 15 years of extensive experience in the travel and hospitality sector, having worked with renowned brands such as MakeMyTrip, Agoda, Bloom Hotel Group and Lebua Hotels and Resorts.



## HILTON BANGALORE EMBASSY GOLFLINKS

Bangalore

Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golfinks has appointed **SOURAV CHOWDHURY** as the Food & Beverage Manager. He has more than 15 years of experience in managing teams. Prior to this, he served as the Food & Beverage Manager at Kochi Marriott Hotel. Sourav's academic foundation includes a Bachelor's degree in Hotel Management and Tourism from NIMS Kolkata, and his career has been enriched by collaborations with esteemed hotel groups such as Hyatt, Marriott, and Accor.



## NOVOTEL GOA RESORT & SPA AND NOVOTEL GOA CANDOLIM

Goa

**WASEEM KARBELKAR** has been appointed as the Director of Sales & Marketing by Novotel Goa Resort & Spa and Novotel Goa Candolim. He will be responsible for leading the sales and marketing initiatives for both the properties, aiming to elevate their positioning in the market. Karbelkar earlier served as Director, Sales & Marketing at Novotel Imagicaa and established the property as a key destination for MICE business.



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# 2023 best year in 30 years

Anuj Bang, Chief Information Officer, Stuba, is determined to enhance the user experience on the website. He speaks exclusively to **TRAVALTALK** about what the online accommodation wholesaler will bring to the travel trade in 2024.

 Hazel Jain

Year 2023 marked a historic milestone for Stuba, a premier online accommodation wholesaler catering exclusively to travel agents and tour operators. It was the best year for the platform in over 30 years of trading in both sales and profitability – a testament of its resilience, strategic investments and commitment to its partners. **Anuj Bang**, Chief Information Officer, Stuba, is ecstatic.

He says, “Our proactive investments during COVID ensured that we emerged stronger than ever, both in structural readiness and technological advance-

ments, which positioned us favourably for the rebound that exceeded expectations.”

A huge achievement was the 100 per cent adoption of its platform for curated hotels, launched to the trade last year. This platform became a driving force behind Stuba’s substantial growth, offering travel agents a powerful tool to enhance their effectiveness.

“Throughout the year, we have continued to evolve the platform, introducing new curations such as trade deals, VIP perks, boutique hotels, and pre and post-cruise accommodations. Our commitment to product strategy was further solidified with the appointment of Malcolm Lindop as Sourcing Director based in the UK. In a short time, his contributions have proved invaluable in contracting the right products, ensuring Stuba remains at the forefront of delivering excellence to our travel agent partners. The expansion of our global sales team, including a strengthened presence in India, reflected our commitment to listening to and serving the evolving needs of our travel agent partners,”

Bang adds.

## Focus areas for 2024

As we head into 2024, Bang’s expectations and focus areas are grounded in the momentum gained from the successes of 2023. “On the back of our strategic investments and early



wins, we are confident that we are on course for another exceptional year of sustained growth and profitability. In 2024, we remain dedicated to enhancing the user experience on our website, driven

**A huge achievement was the 100 per cent adoption of our platform for curated hotels, launched to the trade last year. This platform became our driving force**

by continuous feedback from our valued travel agent partners. Our commitment to delivering features and tools that cater to the needs of travel agents underscores our unwavering support for their success,” he shares.

Behind the scenes, substantial investments are being made to comprehensively upgrade Stuba’s infrastructure, including advanced cloud capabilities, the implementation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) across various business functions, and the upgrading of its Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and finance systems. “These efforts are geared towards elevating our service standards, enhancing speed, and ensuring efficiency in our interactions with both travel agents and hotel partners. We have already set the service bar very high to deliver excellent service, and we intend to continue to challenge ourselves

and raise the bar even higher,” the young CIO says.

## Collaborations

Stuba has recently formed a strategic alliance with Vervotech, a renowned B2B accommodation data management brand, to enhance its offerings and deliver immaculate accommodation content to its customers. Through this partnership with Vervotech, Stuba’s goal is to leverage Vervotech’s AI-driven hotel mapping technology to offer its customers a property list with the latest content, removing all possibilities of duplicate hotel content and bad property mappings. This move also nullifies any possible challenges for Stuba related to passing outdated hotel partner data to its customers, which effectively enhances the quality of its accommodation offerings.

Stuba’s platform uses clever tech to curate hotels by lifestyle categories, including luxe, beach, family, as well as predictive analytics to show trending hotels and exclusive trade deals, enabling travel agents to fine-tune their accommodation searches to precisely match their client’s needs.

Sharing why he loves his work, Bang says, “There is a lot to love as I have been involved with the organisation since 2007. Both travel and technology are such interesting domains close to my heart. I get to work with such great minds and souls from within the organisation and the broader industry that it helps me develop as an individual every day. It is immensely satisfying when you realise that so many people, including our own staff and individuals directly and indirectly connected to Stuba, are positively impacted by the business of which you are a part of.”



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