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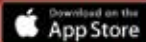


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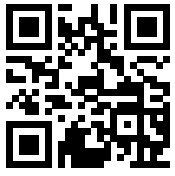
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## MOT keen to rationalise GST

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, says instead of a single tourism taskforce, there needs to be multiple taskforces dealing with sector specific concerns.



Nisha Verma

There is a need for multiple taskforces to change the tourism landscape in India, says **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India, reacting to the industry's demand for an active tourism taskforce.

"Taskforce is very important. We can have one taskforce which looks at the picture on a macro side, but we also need to have four



**Suman Billa**  
Addl. Secretary, Tourism, Govt of India

or five taskforces which work on sector specific issues," he says.

With the Union Budget round the corner, industry has been demanding relief in GST and TCS.

"We are hopeful, as eventually the decision must be taken by the GST Council, which involves the centre, as well as all the states. MOT is keen to rationalise the GST, but I think it is also important that the industry takes it up with equal vigour and they also speak to the states and sensitise the leadership in the states, as well as at the centre, on what needs to be done," he added.

## Pinning hopes on Budget

Union Budget 2024 holds significant expectations for India's travel and tourism sector. As the country aims for a target of US \$1 trillion by 2047, industry experts have high hopes from the budget.



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

exchange for the country. Apart from that, we have GST-related issues concerning the GST Council.

"IATO wants the export status to be given to our industry like the IT industry. We want allocation of funds to the MOT so that they could participate in all major tourism events and start the MDA scheme, as it is much essential. Also, the allocation of funds is required for overseas promotions, consisting of electronic or print advertising, as well as for organising Fam trips for FTOs into India. The government must allocate ₹1,000 crore to the Ministry of Commerce to start a scheme like SEIS, which used to be given to tour operators earning foreign

Contd. on page 20 ►

## It's 'cruise mode' for Indians

Amid growing interest for unique and immersive travel experiences, Indians find cruising as an ultimate experience. As they set sail for a new wave of exploration, cruise vacations are no longer just an option but a sought-after experience for them. With a penchant for exotic locales and premium experiences, the cruise industry is charting new horizons.



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip

"Many Indians are in 'cruise mode' right now. We are seeing more people choose cruises for their vacations, which is evident from the record-breaking 470,000 cruise tourists in 2023-24, with nearly 80 per cent being domestic tourists. There is a growing interest in themed cruises, whether it's wellness, culinary experiences, or family-friendly voyages. Millennials are loving the experiential travel that cruises offer, with their Instagram-worthy moments. Plus, there is a rising trend toward shorter, more frequent cruises."



**Jay Bhatia**  
National VP, TAAI

"Cruise tourism from India is gaining popularity with the Mumbai port cruise terminal getting an upgrade. It is in the infancy but there were almost 70-80 cruise liners that docked at Mumbai port last year, and we are expecting more cruises this year as well. Cruises in the inland waterways from Kolkata and nearby region are also picking up big time. We also sell river cruises to our clients, especially the ones in Europe. That is a huge draw for Indian travelers. The Indian river cruises are almost sold off till next year. The Indian market is booming."

Contd. on page 12 ►

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

TRAVTALK

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VIEWPOINT

## Time for Budget

The industry is pinning its hopes on Union Budget 2024-2025, after a lacklustre interim budget earlier this year. The travel and tourism sector, contributing 5.8 per cent to the country's GDP, has proved time and again how important it is for the economy. With a target of achieving a US \$1 trillion economy by 2047, it's crucial that the upcoming budget offers substantial support to this sector, and the industry is vocal about it.

Firstly, there is a strong call for the industry to receive export status, similar to the IT industry. Such recognition would not only boost morale but also attract much-needed funds for participation in global tourism events and enhanced overseas promotions. MOT must get significant budget allocations to revive schemes like SEIS for tour operators and to tackle GST-related issues that currently hinder growth.

Another critical area is infrastructure. Increased funding for overseas promotion and publicity, which was drastically cut in the previous year, is essential. Moreover, the development of new airports and the expansion of rail, road, and waterways infrastructure are vital to making India a preferred travel destination.

The hospitality sector, burdened by high GST rates, urgently needs relief. Granting infrastructure status to hotels and convention centres, lowering GST rates for hospitality services, and implementing a single-window clearance system for hotel projects can significantly boost domestic and inbound tourism. The government must provide a level playing field among all accommodation providers, which will ensure fair competition and improved service standards. Another key aspect is to invest in skill development and digital marketing initiatives.

Finally, the MICE sector stands to gain from reduced GST rates and streamlined regulatory processes. Joint marketing initiatives to promote India's MICE potential and investment in training for MICE professionals will position India as a premier destination for international events.

# Why hotels must invest in tech?

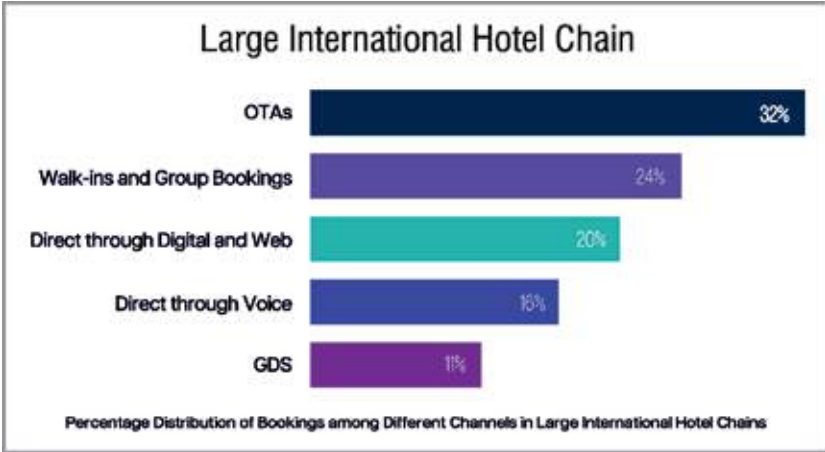
Hotels are inclined towards adoption of technologies to enhance operational efficiency, but their dilemma is where to invest and why? Yogeesh Chandra, Chief Strategy Officer, RateGain, explains the key areas to address the immediate challenges.

Amita Pandey

The hospitality industry is experiencing a transformative wave as technology infiltrates every facet of the business. To remain competitive, industry leaders are investing in state-of-the-art technologies worldwide, aiming to boost operational efficiency and minimise manual labour. This raises the critical question: Where are competitors directing their investments, and why?

To address this, RateGain recently unveiled its 'The State of Distribution for 2024' report prepared after surveying different regions and property types. This comprehensive guide is designed to aid hospitality leaders in strategic decision-making, prioritising technology investments, and organisational restructurings.

Underlining the importance of report for Indian hoteliers, **Yogeesh Chandra**, Chief Strategy Officer, RateGain, said, "It addresses the immediate needs of hoteliers to adapt to technological advancements, consumer behaviour shifts, and broader market dynamics, and facilitates planning for the remainder of 2024 and the budgeting season for 2025. Large chains can focus on integrating solutions with their existing infrastructure to minimise disruption, while mid-size chains can leverage insights on scalability. Independent hotels can identify technologies offering the best return on investment to stay competitive."



Yogeesh Chandra  
Chief Strategy Officer  
RateGain

### Findings

Large hotel chains register 36 per cent of overall bookings from direct channels, and 32 per cent bookings come from Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). By maintaining diverse portfolio of booking channels, big brands witness wide market reach, and it acts as a cushion against occupancy volatility. In mid-size hotels, 40 per cent of the bookings come from OTAs due to limited marketing budget. They do strate-

gic deployment of channel management technologies to optimise their online presence, aiming for rate parity, and maximising revenue across platforms. Independent hotels experience, most of the bookings through direct channels, while 27 per cent of bookings come from digital channels and web drives as they lack loyalty programmes.

### Type of technologies used

Technologies used to capture bookings are the prime focus of hotels across all regions and property sizes. Many hotels have not invested in tools that manage customer data, generate analytics, distribute content, and automate marketing processes yet. Booking engine, CRS, RMS, and Analytics tools have extremely high penetration to manage data efficiently across all properties with an integrated and data-driven operational framework. The report showcased a trend of low investment and prioritisation of marketing automation and content management systems. Mid-sized

hotel chains are still reliant on third-party channels for a majority of their bookings.

### Learnings for Indian Hotels

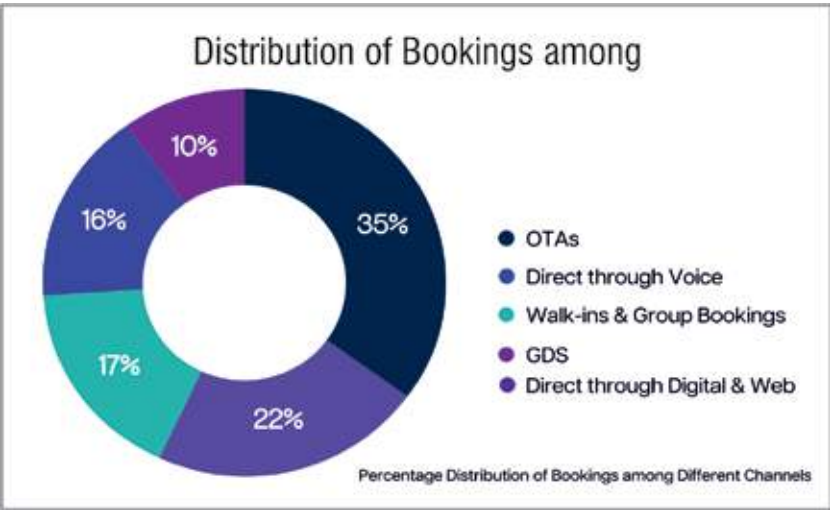
Underlining the learnings for Indian hotels, Chandra said, "While cur-

**Major challenges that hotels in India face when using technology are budget constraints, training, and the adaptability of existing infra**

rent technologies are centered on inventory booking and directing bookings to hotel websites, it is now imperative to leverage AI tools and services to understand traveller's intent and behaviour better. By tracking intent, hotels can sell not just inventory but also ancillary services, and analyse seasonality, city trends, demographics, etc."

### Major challenges for hotels

Chandra said, "The major challenges that hotels in India face when using cutting-edge technology span several areas, including budget constraints, training, and the adaptability of existing infrastructure. Smaller hotels particularly, struggle with high initial costs and maintenance expenses. To tackle these challenges, investing in technology training is recognised as a key strategy."



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# 'Sustainability vital for corporate travel'

The 10<sup>th</sup> Travel MICE & Corporate Show underscored a pivotal shift in corporate travel dynamics. With companies increasingly prioritising sustainability as a core business strategy, collaborative efforts across industries are crucial. The event highlighted a growing consensus on integrating sustainable practices into corporate travel.



Janice Alyosius

The 10<sup>th</sup> Travel MICE & Corporate Show, organised at the Hyderabad Marriott Convention Centre in Hyderabad from 6-7 July, witnessed around 2,300 B2B meetings involving 33 exhibitors and 72 buyers. One of

## Travel MICE & CORPORATE SHOW

the highlights of the event was the panel discussion on the future of sustainable practices shaping the travel industry, particularly from the corporate point of view.

Sharing his views on the current situation, **Amarnath Lal Das**, Vice President, India Travel, Meeting & Events, Accenture Solutions, said, "Post-pandemic,



(From left to right) Gaurav Shekhar Nagwekar, Head, Travel Logistics & Corporate Service Administration, Reliance Industries; Rajiv Vij, CMD, Carzonrent India; Neha Bose, HM, The Westin Hyderabad Hitec City; Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, and Dr Sanjay Pai, VP, Facilities, Corporate Travel, Hospitality & Director Aviation/ Accountable Manager, L&T

if you observe how do we operate now compared to previously, there has been a significant dynamic shift. This shift is underscored by persistent cost pressures amid rising fares and hotel tariffs. Companies are compelled to manage within unchanged budgets, necessitating strategic cuts without compromising on essential business functions. Cuts inevitably have to be made somewhere."

Emphasising on the growing importance of sustainability, **Dr Sanjay Pai**, Vice President, Facilities, Corporate Travel, Hospitality & Director Aviation/ Accountable Manager, Larsen & Toubro, said, "Sustainability is everyone's business. Currently, all travel managers are recording their verticals of expenses towards carbon footprint to a central model for reporting. Though it's not mandatory yet, in the

next two to three years, it will become obligatory." He added, "Travel is just a small fraction of it, but it contributes significantly from airlines, hotels, facility waste, and more. Sustainability needs to mature comprehensively, not just from top to bottom but also vice versa." While the shift towards sustainable practices in corporate travel is gradual, initiatives like tracking carbon footprints are gaining traction. **Neha Bose**, Hotel Manager,

The Westin Hyderabad Hitec City, said, "Our hotel is LEED Gold certified. So, there are many proactive measures we are taking for our guests. Initially, it was just about reuse and recycle, but we have now moved beyond that and are starting to understand what they are asking for. These efforts, while currently optional, are anticipated to become obligatory in the near future, aligning with global goals of achieving net-zero emissions."

**Rajiv Vij**, Chairman and Managing Director, Carzonrent India, highlighted the role of technology in driving efficiency and sustain-



**While the future of corporate travel presents challenges, it also offers opportunities for innovation and transformation**

ability in ground transportation. "Automation is the only way forward," Vij asserted.

Carzonrent's investment in technology has streamlined operations,

Contd. on page 24 ►

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## TourismNews

India makes remarkable progress in aviation industry, emerges as 3<sup>rd</sup> largest domestic aviation market: OAG Aviation

Tamil Nadu Travel Expo 2024 to be held from 20-22 September, aims to promote state as premier wedding destination

State-wise GST rule puts Indian OTAs at disadvantage, need centralised registration: MakeMyTrip CEO

HRAWI urges Indian government to cut GST by 18% for hotels with room rates above ₹7,500 to boost tourist numbers

Domestic pax count sees 6% YoY growth in June 2024, exceeds pre-COVID levels by 10%: ICRA

Naaveen Kundu pushes for higher budget allocation to strengthen 'Meet in India' amid rising global competition

Adventure sports to boost tourism potential of Kerala, says State Minister

# Still doing ticketing? Here's why

Selling airline tickets is often a strategic decision made by owners to capture business and serve their clients well, rather than with the aim of making money. **TRAVEL** speaks to key agents who have their reasons for going through the risk of selling tickets despite somewhat strained relationships with airlines.



**Ajay Prakash**  
President  
TAFI

“Ticketing is an integral part of our services. Every journey, every tour starts with a ticket. We do all kinds of ticketing, from simple domestic tickets to complex itineraries across the world and we charge a fee for that. The relationship between airlines and agents has all but ended, barring a few large consolidators.”



**Dharmendra Singh**  
Director  
Plaisir Hospitality Services

“We still do ticketing for our clients while selling a package that includes flights, vehicle, and hotels. Moreover, corporate clients just need light tickets, so we must do that. That is also a part of our business. It's not a matter of making revenue; when we sell airline tickets, we get business for hotels and other things.”



**Vishakha Sethi Kotyan**  
Founder  
Vima Holidays

“In the travel business, we never say no. It's just one of the services that we provide - A client will not only book air tickets but will require assistance for additional services like visas, travel insurance, airport transfers and sometimes hotel bookings too. Many clients still trust their agents to guide them to plan their itinerary.”



**Niraj Vashi**  
Founder & Director  
Nivalink

“Ticketing as a stand-alone business would not be profitable for us. However, it is something that generates enough revenue to justify the manpower costs put behind it. We do international, as well as domestic ticketing (LCC and FSC). We also organise flight charters, book pre-purchased tickets through consolidators.”



**Clevio Monteiro**  
Chief Executive Officer  
SunRaj Tours & Travels

“Ticketing remains a core part of our service offering because clients value the convenience of having all their travel arrangements managed in one place. Additionally, our expertise ensures they get the best deals and itineraries tailored to their needs. Ticketing continues to be a steady revenue stream.”

Contd. on page 20 ▶

# Impiana explores India for weddings

Offering a comfortable stay with state-of-the-art facilities and Bali's warm hospitality, Impiana Private Villa Seminyak is the ultimate luxury destination. The property is not only preferred as a private haven for those looking for solitude but also acts as the ultimate destination for intimate weddings and functions, claims Devi Maharani, the General Manager for the property.

TT Bureau

**Devi Maharani**, General Manager, Impiana Private Villa Seminyak, says that the property is best suited for guests looking for a private stay. “We have maximum space and privacy because we are a complete resort with 48 units of villas with a combination of one-bedroom, two-bedroom, and three-bedroom. The three-bedroom villa is perfect for families and has recently become favourite in the Indian market. Each of the villas has a private swimming pool, fully equipped kitchen, separate dining room, as well as the lounge. It's perfect for couples, honeymooners, families, and groups, as well as incentives. The three-bedroom villas can also be connected to form six-bedroom, 9-bedroom and 12-bedroom as well,” she said.

In terms of location, the property is located in the heart of Seminyak area, which is walking distance to Seminyak beach, which has restaurants, spa, sports, as well as



**Devi Maharani**  
General Manager  
Impiana Private Villa Seminyak

nightlife. “At the Impiana Private Villa Seminyak, we offer both local and international culinary delights at the all-day dining restaurant—Oswego Bali Bar & Dining. We have authentic Indian restaurant Firangipaani at the Prana, which offers specialities by our in-house Indian chef, allowing guests to enjoy the food in both interior and al fresco setting. At Prana, we offer both Balinese wellness experience, as well as Ayurvedic experience like Shirodhara. We also have Chill

Reflexology for acupressure treatments,” she said.

## Indian market

For Indians, the central location of Impiana Private Villa Seminyak and the access to varied entertainment options in the area work very well. “The authenticity of the specialty Indian restaurant is one-of-a-kind experience for our Indian guests. We have the option to serve vegetarian, as well as non-vegetarian breakfast, which not many restaurants or hotels could provide. Our villas are huge, and each of them

**Impiana Private Villa Seminyak is perfect for couples, honeymooners, families, and groups, as well as incentives**



is complete with private swimming pool. From couples to families, to group incentives, people can do small meetings, private barbecue inside a villa, spa sessions and group activities like aqua yoga. Hence, we are confident that our property is ideal for Indian market for all segments,” Maharani said.

She underlined that with increasing spending power and outbound travel from India, they can cater to all segments, especially those looking for privacy and stay away from crowds.

## Luxury is experience

Saying that there has been a huge behavioural change in the market, Maharani said, “Nowadays, luxury is about experiences. Hence, we keep in mind that we are unique and special, and guests will share their experience with others. We want to be focused on our market of villas. Also, the guests get to experience Bali as a destination.

## B2B engagements

For engaging with the Indian travel trade, they have a strategic plan, revealed Maharani. “We have ap-

pointed our rep in India, and we would like to get updates from them on the market behaviour for Bali and how to improve the experience for the guests,” she said.

## Wedding market

With combinations of three-to-nine-bedroom villas, Impiana Private Villa Seminyak, can be the perfect wedding destination. Speaking on the same, Maharani said, “This is a special project because we notice a lot of guests are coming to Bali not only for holiday but also for their special events.”



# What attracts young travellers?

Generation Z and Millennials are transforming the travel trends. Industry experts say there is a need to employ a multi-pronged approach to cater to the evolving preferences of the youth, who present an unprecedented business opportunity for the industry.



Sunidhi Malik

Generation Z and Millennials present a promising opportunity for the tourism industry. These young, high-spirited individuals, with higher income at their disposal, are eager to travel domestically, as well as internationally. However, the moot questions are: Is the industry ready to tap this market potential? Does the country have the right products and offerings for the youth?

## Factors attracting youth

**Pradeep Kumar Rai**, Managing Director, Skyline India Travels, says, "India is becoming a favou-



**Pradeep Kumar Rai**  
Managing Director  
Skyline India Travels



**Devaki Thiagarajan**  
Chairperson  
TAAI Southern Region

Region, says, "The millennials and GenZ travellers are drawn towards India's ancient history, unique culture, and vibrant traditions."

accommodation and transport. The industry needs to provide budget accommodations with quality service and hygiene as

## Travel trends

Talking about the travel trends popular among the youth, Rai says, "Millennials and GenZ travellers prefer sustainable tourism, trekking, wildlife sanctuaries, wellness retreats, and spiritual journeys, transforming travel by seeking meaningful connections and unique adventures." Thiagarajan adds to the list. "Adventure sports, bike drives, nature hiking, bird watching, flora and fauna, all are diverse experiences in a professional way that attract the youth as they seek authentic and local experiences," he says. Singh says, "Millennials and GenZ are tech-savvy, and India's tech solutions and widespread internet connectivity meet their travel needs. India has all the ingredients to cater to Millennials, GenZ, and all inbound tourists, needing only focused initiatives to promote and deliver on promises."

## Where is industry lacking?

**Prateek Hira**, President & CEO, Tornos and Chairman, IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter, says, "India traditionally has not focused on attracting youth travellers, with only a few states targeting this segment individually. While marketing itself, India never pursued demographic segmentation,



**Manmeet Singh**  
Chairman  
IATO Punjab Chapter



**PV Valsaraj**  
Managing Director  
Alhind Group



**Debjit Dutta**  
Chairman  
IATO West Bengal Chapter

rite destination for Millennials and GenZ travellers. The country's rich culture, diverse landscapes, and affordability attract young adven-

## Travel preferences

**Manmeet Singh**, Chairman, IATO Punjab Chapter, says, "We need to analyse the preferences of Millennials and GenZ travellers and align our offerings accordingly. They seek new cultures, far-off locations, and modern experiences. They value authenticity and choose destinations aligning with their interests. Millennials travel more than any other demographic, taking 35 vacation days a year and spending well. Six out of 10 GenZ travellers prefer environment-friendly, sustainable accommodations and connecting with locals." Sharing his views on this, **PV Valsaraj**, Managing Director, Alhind Group, says, "Ladakh, Goa, Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal, Arunachal, Kerala are states where Millennials and GenZ prefer to create experiences, exploring culture and food. They are not interested in luxury. Instead, they prefer to stay along with local people."

**Debjit Dutta**, Chairman, IATO West Bengal Chapter, says, "Young travellers prioritise unique activities and budget-friendly



**Rajesh Ramachandran**  
Manager Tours  
Marvel Tours

per international standards and improve public transportation. Additionally, reducing airfare and organising activities with proper safety protocols is essential to attract young travellers." **Rajesh Ramachandran**, Manager Tours, Marvel Tours, says, "Young tourists, like elders, seek big highlights and off-beat experiences within their time and budget. They also prefer including a happening destination in their itineraries. India is generally okay for tourists but could improve in a few areas like safety and hygiene."



**Prateek Hira**  
Chairman, IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter  
& President & CEO, Tornos

missing out on the potential of GenY and Z."

## Way forward

By focusing on sustainable tourism, promoting authentic cultural experiences, better infrastructure and improving overall visitor management, India can tap into this vibrant market of young travellers. The future of travel is being shaped by these high-spirited generations, and India's ability to adapt and innovate will determine its success in attracting these valuable tourists. 🇮🇳



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# Delhi Airport needs to up its game?

A portion of the roof of Terminal-1 at Indira Gandhi International Airport collapsed following heavy rains in Delhi recently. The incident, happening at a time when the airport is undergoing renovation for the past two years to become one of the biggest international hubs in the world, raises questions about the state of aviation infrastructure in the country.



Subir Ahluwalia

The incident of roof collapse came as a surprise for many because the revamped Terminal 1 (T1) of Delhi Airport was relaunched virtually by the Prime Minister in March this year. In fact, the Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) had planned to commence operations of the expanded Terminal 1 in June itself, apart from enhancing international traffic capacity, as per details shared at the CAPA Aviation Summit recently.

The Union Ministry of Civil Aviation has clarified that the airport building that bore the brunt was an old one and had opened in 2009. Yet, the collapse casts a shadow over the government's ambitious plans.

## Status check

Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) boasts an annual capacity of 100 to 105 million passengers, with international passenger capacity at approximately 22 million. The



airport includes three terminals: T1, T2, and T3.

Videh Kumar Jaipuria, CEO, DIAL, said, "We have around 20 per cent of transit or connecting passengers, whether domestic to international or domestic to domestic, and some segments are experiencing faster growth. Last year, the airport handled close to 20 million international passengers. We have a capacity of 22 million and that is only a headroom of 10 per cent. We need to increase that capacity because we

expect that the growth will be at least 8-10 per cent. We have to be ahead of the curve," he said.

## Need for a Master Plan

DIAL's 10-year master plan, designed in consultation with airlines and stakeholders, aims to accommodate the expected growth in traffic. Large orders by Air India and IndiGo, including wide-body planes, will further cement Delhi Airport's status as India's premier international aviation hub. Given the rapid changes in the aviation industry

over the past five to six years, DIAL has wisely accelerated its master plan, initially slated for 2026. "We are open to options such as dedicated terminals for specific airlines or dedicated terminals for international and domestic connections," Jaipuria said.

Furthermore, DIAL plans to increase international passenger handling capacity by 40 to 50 per cent. By July, the airport is expected to have four fully operational runways, with one side of the fourth runway

being CAT III compliant, which allows flights to land in poor visibility.

## Innovation on cards

The airport's airside capacity, currently accommodating 1,500 slots per day, could potentially increase by 500-600 slots daily. With 84 aircraft movements per hour currently, DIAL foresees the possibility of exceeding 110 movements after runway optimisation. DIAL is also implementing the Airport Operations Centre (APOC) system, designed to collect data and estimate passenger footfall during specific periods, which will help decongest the airport during peak hours. Plans to connect Terminals 1 and 3 with automated people mover (APM) systems are underway, although funding challenges remain. "We have done the commercial evaluation of APM. We expect that some funding will be required. We may approach the government for one-time funding support for APM. The infrastructure is owned by the Airports Authority of India (AAI),

and we are just the operator," Jaipuria mentioned.

## Way forward

The collapse at Delhi Airport's Terminal 1 is a stark reminder of the urgent need for robust, well-maintained infrastructure. As India aims

**The collapse at Delhi Airport's Terminal 1 is a stark reminder of the urgent need for robust, well-maintained infrastructure**

to position itself as a global aviation hub, ensuring the safety and reliability of its airports must be a top priority. The future of India's aviation sector depends on it.

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Costa Cruises has specially designed a range of itineraries for the Indian market, offering options from a 2-night escape to leisurely 5 and 7-night voyages. The 2-night itinerary covers Abu Dhabi with an overnight stay in Dubai, making it convenient to integrate into a UAE land-based package. Alternatively, our 5 and 7-night voyages provide one of the best ways to experience three coun-

tries—UAE, Qatar, and Oman—with the added benefit of a simplified UAE multiple-entry visa. To further streamline the booking process, Lotus Destinations (GSA for Costa Cruises India) has implemented a simplified pricing system with fixed rates valid until 31 August 2024, enabling travel agents to provide clear and competitive quotes to their clients. Take advantage of our current promotions, including companion

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ence onboard is a delightful taste of home. Costa Smeralda additionally offers the chance to dine in 11 restaurants like the Tepanyaki, Sushino, Pummid'Oro Pizzeria, or for an unforgettable gastronomic experience, there is Archipelago, which features menus designed by three world-renowned Michelin chefs.

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**Costa Cruises has designed a range of itineraries for the Indian market, offering options from a 2-night escape to 5 and 7-night voyages**

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# 470K enjoyed cruising in 2023-24

► Contd. from page 5



**Dipti Adhia**  
Director  
Discover the World - India

“We observe a growing interest in unique, immersive travel experiences and a willingness to explore new destinations via cruise. Indian travellers are showing a preference for exotic and culturally rich destinations. Popular cruise routes include the Mediterranean, Alaska, the Bahamas, Caribbean, Mexico, Middle East, Australia and Southeast Asia. However, there is also a rising interest in Nordic countries.”



**Jurgen Bailom**  
President and CEO  
Cordelia Cruises

“There is a noticeable shift towards multigenerational family travel. Travellers are seeking unique experiences, and we have responded by offering itineraries that include less-explored locations, such as the beautiful islands of Lakshadweep and various off-beat ports in Sri Lanka. Additionally, we see a growing willingness among passengers to pay more for premium experiences and peripherals.”



**Karen Mulla**  
Co-Founder, TealFeel, A Conscious  
Luxury Travel Company

“In the past, we would add shorter cruises as part of a larger family holiday but we are now witnessing a cruise being the main holiday itself. Families are keen to travel the world and sometimes the lack of time or the inability to bring a lot of members together means you can only get so many spare days. So, cruising tends to be a family favourite. And for those days at-sea, ships offer lots of activities to keep all age groups happy.”



**Hemendra Singh Jadon**  
Director  
Overseas Travels

“Cruises have evolved from a mere add-on to vacations, to becoming the primary destination for many travellers. This trend spans various segments, including family travel, friends' getaways, MICE, honeymoons, senior travellers, and even weddings. The allure of cruises appeals to those seeking a hassle-free experience where accommodation, transfers, meals, and entertainment are seamlessly integrated.”



**Clevio Monteiro**  
Chief Executive Officer  
SunRaj Tours & Travels

“Indian travellers are increasingly embracing cruise vacations, showing a preference for newer, exotic destinations like Alaska and the Baltic Sea. There is a notable trend towards longer cruises, with 7 to 14-day itineraries gaining popularity over shorter trips. Travellers are also willing to spend more on luxury amenities, premium dining, and exclusive shore excursions. Family and group travel is on the rise.”



**Ashmi Dharia**  
Founder and Holiday Curator  
Gypsy Soul Holidays

“The surge in popularity of cruise vacations among Indians can be attributed to various factors. From the ease of visiting multiple destinations without the hassle of constant packing to the plethora of onboard activities and the appeal of all-inclusive luxury, there is something for everyone. Additionally, the affordability of local cruises has made luxury travel more accessible to a wider audience.”

Contd. on page 26 ►

## Navigating the wave of cruise travel

Cruise travel has rapidly evolved, shifting from a niche luxury to a popular choice for diverse travellers. With rising demand and a focus on safety and customised experiences, cruises are now an exciting way to explore the world. Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, shares his insights on emerging trends, essential tips, and the importance of travel protection for a seamless cruise experience.



Hazel Jain

**What new cruise travel trends have you been witnessing in the industry?**

The cruise industry is experiencing a significant surge, primarily due to the pent-up demand for travel post-pandemic. As per our analysis, enthusiasts of all ages are now seeking unique experiences, and modern cruise lines are delivering exotic destinations and diverse onboard activities. Health and safety measures have become a priority, which I think boosts traveller confidence. Additionally, the trend towards customised travel assistance and exclusive cruise protection plans has skyrocketed, offering peace of mind against unforeseen events, both onboard and during excursions.

**Is regular travel insurance sufficient for cruise trips?**

Many travellers mistakenly believe that regular travel insurance is adequate for cruise vacations. However, standard travel protection



**Dev Karvat**  
Founder & CEO  
Asego

products may not often cover incidents that occur on a cruise. For example, if I need to cancel my trip before departure, a cruise-specific protection plan can provide a refund, which the cruise line may not offer. Additionally, in case of medical emergency incidents onboard, passengers confined to their cabins might miss excursions.

**How has the perception towards cruise travel changed in India?**

The perception towards cruise travel in India has undergone a



notable shift in recent times. We have seen an impressive 220 per cent increase in passengers from 2022-2024, indicating a surge in popularity for cruises as a vacation option. Alongside this popularity, there is also a growing awareness of the potential risks involved. Issues like inclement weather, unexpected delays, and medical emergencies have become more apparent. For instance, compensation for lost baggage is often inadequate - in the range of \$400 to \$500, which underscores the importance of having a robust

cruise protection plan. I believe, such a plan is no longer just an option but a crucial safeguard to ensure a smooth and enjoyable cruise experience.

**What common issues should travellers be aware of?**

Cruising, being a unique travel experience, comes with its share of common issues. Several common issues can impact the cruising experience:

❖ Inclement weather conditions can significantly affect cruise itin-

eraries, potentially leading to cancellations or detours.

❖ Mechanical problems, human errors, or maintenance issues can cause unexpected delays and additional costs.

❖ Although medical services are available onboard, the costs for treating injuries or illnesses can be substantial, highlighting the importance of being prepared.

❖ Compensation for lost or damaged baggage on cruises is often

insufficient compared to the actual value of the belongings.

❖ Illnesses or accidents can result in passengers being confined to their cabins, preventing them

**Compensation for lost baggage is inadequate - in range of \$400-\$500, which underscores the importance of having a cruise protection plan**

from enjoying planned activities and excursions.

When it comes to cruise travel, I believe, with the right protection plan, travellers can navigate the high seas with confidence, knowing they are covered against any eventuality. 🌊



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# MICE needs govt support in J&K

Anoop Kanuga, MC Member, TAAI, took part in the Tourism Development Conclave 2024 organised recently by the Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation in Srinagar for promoting tourism in the Union Territory. Sharing details, he emphasises on infra development, accessibility, and cultural promotion besides working with travel agents to develop appealing tour packages.



Surbhi Sharma

The Jammu and Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation (JKTDC) recently organised a conclave in Srinagar with an idea to promote tourism in the Union Territory. People from various walks of life, including government representatives and leaders from the tourism, hospitality and travel industry attended the event. **Anoop Kanuga**, MC Member, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), who also took part in the conclave, said, "The key highlights of the conclave included discussions on infrastructure, development, promotion of local culture, and initiatives to attract more tourists. The aim was to boost tourism in the region by showcasing its cultural heritage, natural beauty and adventure tourism potential. The conclave also emphasised on the need for sustainable tourism practices, which is a welcoming move, and enhancing



**Anoop Kanuga**  
MC Member  
TAAI

the infrastructure. Although the infrastructure has improved a lot in the past few years, there is still scope for improvement. Another important aspect was to promote the local artisans. There is also the need to leverage digital media platforms for wider reach and accessibility," he said.

#### Focus areas

Highlighting the need to attract

more tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, Kanuga stressed that the focus should be on targeted marketing campaigns. "Then the other thing that the government should focus on is infrastructure development, accessibility, cultural promotion and collaborations with travel agents to develop appealing tour packages for all segments and the most important thing is to ensure that tourists have a safe and enjoyable experience," he said.

Kanuga said, "As J&K lacks good connectivity with other cities, we need more flights from tier II and III cities. Tourism to Kashmir is seasonal, therefore, we could look at promoting Kashmir even in the off-season. For growth opportunities, we could look at fully exploiting cultural and adventure tourism, promoting sustainable tourism practices and digital marketing."

He added, "Last year, about 2.1 crore tourists flocked to J&K,



of which 50,000 were foreigners. This year, we have seen 1.5 crore tourist arrivals in the UT. To increase tourists' footfall and enhance their experiences, TAAI can work on having joint tourism sessions, joint marketing campaigns, specialised tours and even partnerships with local stakeholders, including travel and hospitality players. Organising training programmes with JK Tourism, facilitating easier access to permits and travel logistics, and incentivising agents to promote the region

through attractive packages and promotions would be a few things that can be done jointly."

#### Wedding & MICE destination

Kanuga said, "The potential to host weddings in J&K is immense, primarily due to its scenic locations and cultural richness. Taking advantage of it, the government can help support the MICE community by improving infrastructure, strengthening security and offering subsidies to attract event organisers and agents

to host weddings and MICE tourism events in the region." He added, "For the people in travel and trade community, holding travel conventions in the region, joint promotions, frequent training programmes and offering discounts




**Government can help support the MICE community by improving infrastructure, strengthening security and offering subsidies**

on weddings or MICE packages are some of the factors that carry a lot of potential to bring more tourists to J&K thereby bringing more revenue to the UT." 📌

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# Hilton Fiji buoyant on India

Carey Osborne, Cluster General Manager, Hilton Fiji Beach Resort & Spa and DoubleTree Resort by Hilton, Sonaisali Island, shares her views on the India market and explains why the two properties will appeal to the luxury Indian clientele.



Hazel Jain

The beautiful 349-key Hilton Fiji Beach Resort & Spa is spread across 2.5 km of beach on Denarau Island. While the destination is trying to tap the India market, the 18-year old hotel too is aiming for its share of the cake. **Carey Osborne**, Cluster General Manager, Hilton Fiji Beach Resort & Spa and Doubletree Resort by Hil-

expressed interest in our product. The discussion was very educational. We would love to explore this market more. Their clients feel safe and comfortable staying with a known brand," she claimed.

**Great for multi-generational families**  
Travel behaviour has changed

since COVID with more multi-generational travel these days. "In our hotel, we have one-bedroom, two-bedroom, villas, penthouses, 22 villa blocks with their own shared plunge pool, private residences with their own pool. It's great for families, and suits Indians very well. We can offer eight different

rooms in a single block. It gives us a lot of flexibility as against the traditional hotel model," she said.

**Smaller incentive groups**

While Fiji is a leisure destination, Osborne is also hoping to attract small incentive groups, as well as large Indian weddings.



**Carey Osborne**  
Cluster General Manager, Hilton Fiji Beach Resort & Spa and Doubletree Resort by Hilton Hotel Fiji



**We can adapt our menus. There are many possibilities that the India market offers. We must have targeted approach for India**

ton Hotel Fiji, Sonaisali Island, said, "India is still an emerging market for our property, but we see some guests coming from India. There is a comfort factor – because Fiji has a strong connection with India culturally. We have a lot of Indo-Fijian team members and staff. We have an Indian chef, and the owners are also Indo-Fijian." The hotel is aware of the dietary requirements of Indian guests. "Some want Jain food, or vegan food, or vegetarian. We can adapt our menus. There are a lot of possibilities that the India market offers," Osborne added.

Fiji is predominantly an Australia-New Zealand market, with a bit of inbound from the USA and China. "Now, we see a lot more North Americans, and China is stronger. We would also like to start tapping India. I met a few travel agents from India in Fiji, and they









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# Türkiye welcomes OTOAI members

Türkiye has continued to work closely with Indian travel agents, and the recently concluded Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) mega Fam plays a significant role in promoting the destination in India. Organised from 30 June to 6 July, this initiative was dedicated to highlighting the myriad attractions of Türkiye to Indian travel agents.





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# 'Indians love 2-3-night itineraries'

Michael Goh, President & Head of International Sales, Resorts World Cruises, outlines key trends that describe the burgeoning Indian market, ahead of the new Arabian Gulf sailings from the cruise liner. In this exclusive interview with **TRAVTALK**, Goh reveals how they took into consideration the Indian passenger while designing the new itineraries.



Hazel Jain

Speaking at the launch of their new cruise itineraries on Resorts World One, **Michael Goh**, President, & Head of International Sales, Resorts World Cruises (RWC), reveals that India forms one-third of the total cruise business out of Singapore for the cruise company. "Indian passengers love itineraries that are between 2-3 nights. Hence, we have designed shorter itineraries keeping their requirements in mind," he said. The cruise liner celebrates two years of operations this year.

RWC's Resorts World One ship will start sailing in the Arabian Gulf from October 18, 2024 until April 2025. During this six-month homeport deployment in Dubai, the ship will offer three different itineraries of 2 and 3-night cruises. Guests will visit Sir Bani Yas Island (Friday to Sunday), Khasab and Muscat in Oman (Sunday to



**Michael Goh**  
President, & Head of International Sales, Resorts World Cruises

Wednesday), and finally Doha in Qatar (Wednesday to Friday).

"We will also tap the Indian visitors who are already living in and travelling to Oman, Abu Dhabi and Dubai. From our experience, we know that Indian passengers love 2-3-night itineraries. That is why we have designed shorter itineraries, so that they can combine shore excursions. We will also serve vegetarian



**Naresh Rawal**  
Vice President – Sales & Marketing, Resorts World Cruises

and Jain food on ships, as well as halal food," Goh says.

## Tapping the young adult

Goh says, "India is a huge cruising market and Indians love cruising. If we look at India market, they are among top three markets for us. Since the pandemic, in fact, we have developed a new segment of travellers – the young adult. The age group between 18-25

years was one of the most difficult groups to tap because they had the perception that cruising is in a confining environment. But we had a lot of younger people who started cruising during the pandemic and posting their experience on social media. That is when younger people started choosing cruise as a travel option."

Explaining how these itineraries have been designed keeping the Indian customer in mind, **Naresh Rawal**, Vice President – Sales & Marketing, RWC, says, "We have put a lot of thought in designing these itineraries – these are short cruises and round trips. Even on a three-night cruise, we have two ports of call in Oman. We have also kept in mind the timings of the ship to depart and arrive, every departure starts at 9 pm so that one can easily connect to a flight. The ship arrives in Dubai by afternoon, which is perfect for the flight back. We have also kept our

Indian customers in mind when it comes to the entertainment onboard. GCC and UAE are possibly the closest to the Indian hearts."

**The RW CruiseBuddy resource centre for the travel partners has been updated with new sailings and they can also earn rewards**

RWC is in touch with the Abu Dhabi Tourism Board, as well as the Sultanate of Oman, to promote these sailings. The RW CruiseBuddy resource centre for the travel partners has been updated with these new sailings and they can also earn rewards as they sell.

Present at the launch event was Colin Kerr, Senior Vice President Entertainment, RWC, who highlighted offerings designed specifically for Indian travellers.

Some of the entertainment experiences onboard include the new Red Carpet (the signature party), along with Twilight Soirée; salsa class; Japanese or Bollywood dance classes, followed by a flash mob in the evening; pyjama party; enchanting Arabian nights party; fun and fitness workshops; and wellness experiences. He also highlighted the availability of a variety of activities for teens and children onboard.

## Good to know

Resort World One features 926 staterooms, 42 suites, six speciality restaurants, three bars and a lounge, and up to six inclusive meals.

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# Saying 'I do' on cruise, now in vogue

The lavish and unforgettable pre-wedding bash of Anant Ambani and Radhika Merchant aboard a cruise ship has given the term 'destination wedding' a new and exciting spin. Here are four reasons why a cruise ship offers the perfect setting for the bride and groom to get hitched and enjoy their special day with friends and family in a different way.



TT Bureau

## A venue for every mood

The big fat Indian wedding would be a miss without the shenanigans and camaraderie associated with multiple functions and customs. Needless to say, each ritual needs a different venue. Aboard a cruise ship one can ditch the limitations of a single location and be assured of a unique experience in different destinations across the world. From the majestic glaciers of Alaska to the blush-hued sands of Bermuda and the dramatic cliffs

of Santorini, the extensive range of cruise ports of call offer an unforgettable backdrop for your clients' wedding festivities. Whether it's a pre-wedding bash; intimate rituals like Mehendi and Haldi leading to the wedding; a glamorous cocktail soiree under the stars; or the larger-than-life post-wedding reception; the possibilities are endless aboard Norwegian Cruise Line's (NCL's) fleet of 19 ships, which sail to over 450 worldwide locations, including the ever-popular destinations of Europe, Hawaii, Alaska or the Caribbean.

## Indulgences of the palate

Indian weddings are known for their delectable spread of dishes worthy of royalty. On a cruise, your clients can curate their favourite dishes

ents enjoy the sizzling delights of Brazilian churrascarias. As the night unfolds, clients can continue their celebration with poolside cocktails, followed by an eclectic mix of global cuisines such as in Indulge Food Hall on NCL's fleet with cuisines from India to Italy to Latin America and more. On the wedding cruise, you can be assured that your clients will be left enchanted and craving for more, long after the final toast.



**NCL's fleet of 19 ships sail to 450+ worldwide locations, including the ever-popular Europe, Hawaii, Alaska or the Caribbean**

for the wedding feast and let their guests indulge in a hearty meal. You can plan elegant cocktail soirees with vibrant French delicacies mingled with the subtle flavours of Japanese sushi or have your cli-

## Non-stop entertainment

What is a wedding gathering bringing two diverse families together, without all the fun and games or the teasing and toasting? Getting hitched on a cruise allows your clients to plan one big non-stop party under the sky and the stars. They can dance the night away with live bands playing their favourite tunes and DJs pumping out hot mixes, or even sit down for a 'listen and watch' of some of the most dazzling world-class production shows, such as Burn the Floor or

Beetlejuice. Cruises offer unique entertainment options from Viva nightclubs or H2Glow deck parties to comedy shows or live game shows. The diverse entertainment options on a cruise ship will make the wedding as unforgettable as your clients' love story.

## Wedding-moon to honeymoon

A cruise allows the couple to wake up at a different destination each day, offering its own unique blend of culture and charm, with differ-

ent sets of friends and family from across the world. Whilst the guests can wander through the ancient streets of Rome, indulge in the culinary delights of Barcelona or dance the night away in the vibrant island of Mykonos, your clients can choose to continue with their honeymoon, romancing with their special one on the ship. From exploring ancient ruins to basking on sun-kissed beaches, every moment is a treasure waiting to be discovered by your clients and their guests.





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# Cunard adapts to Indian taste

Cunard Line, known for its British heritage and transatlantic cruises, is loved by Indian cruisers, says Vivek Jain, MD, Griffon Cruises, which promotes the cruise line in India. Jain highlights some of the popular sailings in India market.



Hazel Jain

Griffon Cruises is currently focusing on promoting Cunard Line, a British cruising company, with iconic ships like Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mary 2, Queen Victoria, and Queen Anne, which was launched in May this year. Talking about the line, **Vivek Jain**, Managing Director, Griffon Cruises, says, "Cunard Line is known for two things - its British heritage and its transatlantic cruises. Indian passengers experience both these aspects when they sail on a Cunard Transatlantic journey—that provides them with a look back in time when cross-continent travel was done primarily by ship."

## Griffon Cruises represents Cunard in India.

Queen Anne offers some amazing sailings like the Transatlantic sailings, which is Southampton to New York, and return, as well as around the world cruises. There are



**Vivek Jain**  
Managing Director  
Griffon Cruises

other sailings in different waters also like the East and the West Mediterranean in Europe, the British Isles, Norway fiords, the Atlantic Coast, and Canary Islands. "So, we cover most of Europe, we also do Japan for the cherry blossom season, as well as Australia in the Australian summer months, Alaska, the Caribbean Islands. So, basically we do all the waters."

## Mediterranean is hot selling

This year, Jain and his team have

started selling a lot of Cunard sailings for both the East and West Mediterranean, and the Fjords. "We also did a few bookings for Japan's cherry blossom sailings, but we were late. So, we will focus on this next year. The British Isles and the Northern Lights are also doing great for the Diwali vacations. In October, we are focusing on our European sailings, starting from 7-day itineraries. We also have shorter sailings of 2-3 nights," he says.

## Aspirational product

For the Indian client, Cunard is an aspirational product, says Jain, because it has a lot of auras around it. "Its old English charm and the luxury attracts Indian travellers. We have so much focus on the Indian market that we serve Indian food on our group movements; on Queen Anne, we have an Indian restaurant as well, so Indian food is not a problem," he shares. He has seen cruising from India increase over the last

few years. "I have been selling cruise for the last 20 years from the time when people did not understand the concept at all. We went one step ahead and did a Bollywood movie called 'Dil Dha-

**Cunard Line is known for two things - its British heritage and its transatlantic cruises. Indian passengers experience both**

dakne Do' on one of our Pullman ships. We have been educating people what cruising is – an experience! On Cunard, we do a lot of English activities. So, we do get mature travellers who want a 14-day itinerary," Jain adds.

# Ticketing remains relevant

Contd. from page 8



**Sanjay Arya**  
Chief Executive Officer  
KFT Corporation

"As a full-service luxury travel agency, we continue to offer airline tickets. Entrusting client's travel arrangements to another agency could disrupt the service. We do suggest clients book directly if they find a better deal elsewhere, which is rare. Our offering extends beyond ticket booking—we handle seat selection, meal preferences, and any other special requests our clients have."



**Burjis Mehta**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Skyworld Tours & Travels

"The benefits of partnering with a corporate TMC include access to a dedicated support team, reduced travel spending, risk management assistance, access to travel technology, enhanced reporting, travel policy creation and integration, and time savings. Airline ticketing is an important aspect of a TMC and we surely provide this service to our corporate clients."

Compiled by TT Bureau

# Reduce GST & give industry status

Contd. from page 5



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President  
TAAI

"We expect increased budget allocation for overseas promotion and publicity that had been drastically reduced to ₹3 crore, down from ₹100 crore last fiscal. This Budget must focus on infrastructure; establishing new airports; rapid expansion in rail, road and waterways; development of religious circuits; MICE; wellness and hidden gems like Lakshadweep, simplifying visa requirements, reduction in ATF costs, more favourable GST rates and industry status."



**Ajay Prakash**  
President  
TAAI

"The travel trade puts forth its wishlist every year before Union Budget and come the day, is invariably disappointed. This budget, we want revision and rationalisation of GST (the highest slab should not exceed 10 per cent and travel agents/tour operators should be eligible to claim setoff), ATF must be brought under GST to make airfares affordable, overseas promotion budget should be increased. A mandatory insurance must be launched to protect travellers against airline failure."



**Pradeep Shetty**  
President  
FHRAI

"Granting infrastructure status to hotels and convention centres of project cost of ₹10 crore and above is essential for attracting investments and accelerating growth. We urge the abolition of the 18 per cent GST category for hotels with room rates above ₹7500, merging it with the 12 per cent GST category to boost domestic and inbound tourism. A national e-single window clearance system for hotels & restaurants through the HDPB can significantly reduce costs."



**Kanwarjit Singh Sawhney**  
Honorary Secretary  
ITTA

"The allocation of funds to the tourism sector should be on infrastructure development including upgrading road transport, airports and railway networks to improve connectivity. It must be done for marketing and promotion, including enhanced digital marketing initiatives to reach out to wider audience and human resource development/ skill development for unskilled and skilled. These allocations can be adjusted based on specific needs and priorities."



**Naveen Kundu**  
Managing Director  
EbiXcash Travel Group

"Increasing the budget for meetings and events under the 'Meet in India' initiative is not just an investment in event hosting but a strategic move to bolster India's global standing and economic growth. We request the government to consider revising the budget allocation to ensure that 'Meet in India' continues to thrive and contributes to our national goals. Increasing the budget allocated to meetings and events can achieve several important objectives."



**Riaz Munshi**  
President  
OTOAI

"A significant expectation is the reduction of GST rates on outbound tour packages. We are also looking for more rationalised Tax Collected at Source (TCS) policies. The current TCS rates can be burdensome for travellers and travel agencies alike. Moreover, it results in revenue loss for the government, as a sizeable portion of outbound travel business is conducted by overseas companies that do not contribute to the Indian economy."

Contd. on page 24



# Making key policy shifts necessary

After new leadership takes up reins in the Ministry of Tourism, the hospitality sector in India is hopeful that significant strides will be made for promoting India as a top tourist destination. HAI looks forward to collaborating with the government to also promote sustainable growth of Indian tourism.



Surbhi Sharma

In a move that suggests a fresh and aggressive approach to take India's tourism industry forward, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Tourism & Culture, Government of India, recently held a meeting with the leadership of travel trade associations in New Delhi. Important people from the Union Ministry of Tourism, including the Secretary, Director General and Additional Secretary of Tourism were also present at the meeting, which focussed on making India a 365-day destination for inbound tourists.

Elaborating on the points raised in the meeting, **KB Kachru**, President, Hotel Association of India (HAI), Chairman, Emeritus & Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson

sponsible industry, can create jobs for unemployed youth. To employ 50 million people in the hospitality sector, we must work together with the MOT. There is a long queue of hotels to be classified. Unless they are classified and approved by the MOT, they cannot reap the

benefits. Hence, we should look at the possibilities of creating a much better system for classification, so that whatever benefits are sanctioned by the government, investors and developers can get those promptly." He added, "Also, we need to see the ease of doing

business, connectivity, and motivating people to invest and develop destinations. In India, 50 per cent of our GDP comes from tier II and III cities. Thus, we need to work on accommodation and encourage increased development in the hospitality sector."

## Key takeaways

Kachru said, "If we want to promote India internationally and want inbound tourism, then we need to focus more on marketing, campaigning and attending all the key travel trademarks all over the world, particularly in the key markets."



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



**To unleash the potential of Indian hospitality in its contribution to India Vision 2027, making key policy shifts is all the way more necessary**


Hotel Group (RHG), said, "After the government acknowledges that tourism is one of the key pillars for our economy and we contribute a lot in the GDP, we emphasised how can we achieve the targets set by the government and explained how much we can bring in as an industry to overcome the talent shortage by providing employment and contribute more to the GDP."


## Discussion on challenges

In the meeting, Kachru highlighted the need for investment in hospitality sector and reasons to accord infrastructure status to tourism. Whatever is accorded to other industries, should be given to hospitality as well, he said. Kachru said, "To unleash the potential of Indian hospitality in its contribution to India Vision 2027, making key policy shifts is all the way more necessary."

## Recommendations made



Making suggestions to the ministry, Kachru said, "We, as a re-





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# Facilitating corporate connections

The 10<sup>th</sup> Travel MICE & Corporate Show, organised at Hyderabad Marriott Convention Centre, witnessed more than 2,300 meetings involving top corporate buyers from across the country. The event provided an opportunity for industry leaders to connect directly with corporate giants, delving into their travel requirements and fostering crucial business discussions.





# DreamSetGo's 'Winning Run'

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 held in the USA and West Indies saw a remarkable collaboration between DreamSetGo and ICC Travel & Tours, cementing its status as an official travel agent in India for the event. This partnership allowed DreamSetGo to provide unparalleled services to cricket fans, ensuring a memorable experience for over 800 clients.



TT Bureau

## Crossing the 800-mark

DreamSetGo successfully catered to more than 800 cricket enthusiasts, making their World Cup journey seamless and enjoyable. The India-Pakistan match, always a high-stakes encounter, attracted over 600 clients, showcasing

graced by cricket legends Sourav Ganguly and Waqar Younis, who engaged in a unique fireside chat hosted by DreamSetGo's CEO & Founder, Monish Shah. The evening was graced with an opening act by famous musician Rishab Rikhiram Sharma. Overall, the event had a perfect blend of elegance, banter and cricketing

ished experiences was a private meet and greet with cricket icon Brian Lara at his residence. This intimate gathering allowed fans to interact with Lara in a relaxed setting, creating unforgettable memories. Not to forget, DreamSetGo organised an exclusive trophy tour before the finals, the same piece of silverware that was lifted by Team India in Barbados. Additionally, DreamSetGo facilitated meet and greets with cricket stars such as Harbhajan Singh, Ajinkya Rahane, VVS Laxman, Sunil Gavaskar and Ramiz Raja, enriching the overall experience for their clients.

## 'Dream Beyond The Game': A marketing masterstroke

The marketing campaign 'Dream Beyond The Game' featured the vibrant Anusha Dandekar and added a unique dimension to DreamSetGo's offerings. This

**DreamSetGo organised an exclusive trophy tour before the finals, the same piece of silverware that was lifted by Team India**



DreamSetGo's capability to handle large volumes while maintaining top-notch service. Additionally, the gala night saw over 350 attendees, further underlining the event's popularity and the trust placed in DreamSetGo.

insights, offering attendees an exclusive experience that set the tone for the high-octane match to follow. You can also view this entire fireside chat on our YouTube channel: @DreamSetGoOfficial.

## Exclusive experiences with legendary personalities

DreamSetGo's offerings extended beyond matchday hospitality. In the West Indies, a special trophy tour was organised for a renowned brand, adding a touch of grandeur to the event. One of the most cher-

## A night to remember: Gala dinner at 583 Park Avenue

The eve of the India-Pakistan game was marked by an opulent gala night held at 583 Park Avenue, one of New York City's most luxurious venues. The event was



with the best seats at the most significant games, luxurious accommodation in both the USA and the Caribbean, and seamless travel operations. These services ensured that every aspect of their clients' journey was handled with the utmost care and precision, allowing them to focus on enjoying the cricket spectacle.

## A winning partnership

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 was not only a triumph for Team India but also a massive success for DreamSetGo. The collaboration showcased DreamSetGo's ability to deliver exceptional experiences, making the World Cup journey memorable for all their clients. With over 800 satisfied travellers, exclusive events, and a successful marketing campaign, DreamSetGo set a new benchmark in sports travel and hospitality. As the curtains fell on the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024, the resounding success of DreamSetGo's initiatives left a lasting impression on cricket fans worldwide. Looking forward to the next big one the Paris Olympics 2024. ↓

The campaign concluded with hospitality seating at the India-Pakistan match, encapsulating the pinnacle of cricket excitement. To check out this experience, head to our YouTube channel: @DreamSetGoOfficial.

## Unmatched services and hospitality experiences

DreamSetGo's commitment to providing the best services was evident in their meticulous planning and execution. Clients enjoyed matchday hospitality







# Locations driving success for Summit

Summit Hotels & Resorts sets an example of how well-placed properties can meet the growing demand for leisure travel through its newly opened Summit Grand Resort & Spa in Gangtok. Reaching out to untapped destinations boosts economies, creates employment and invites travellers to explore new things, says Sumit Mitraka, CEO, Summit Hotels & Resorts.

Surbhi Sharma

Summit Hotels & Resorts has properties at 18 sought-after destinations in seven states of the country. The hotel chain is constantly enriching its portfolio by expanding to hill stations. Sharing his views on the current hospitality trends, **Sumit Mitraka**, CEO, Summit Hotels & Resorts, said, "We have seen a surge in leisure travel, particularly at our scenic locations. This increase highlights a significant shift in traveller preferences towards destinations that offer peace and natural beauty. A key reason for this surge is our strategic positioning of properties in youthful destinations and off-beat places, attracting a substantial number of first-time domestic travellers to places like Namchi, Shillong, Lansdowne, Kaziranga, Kurseong and Deolo. Our recent launch of Summit Grand Resort & Spa in Gangtok supports this strategy."



**Sumit Mitraka**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Summit Hotels & Resorts

## Reducing carbon footprint

Their MAGIC QR system, to be implemented across the board, drastically reduces paper use by replacing traditional intercoms in guest rooms with a digital solution, marking a major step forward in sustainable hospitality practices. It not only eliminates plastic devices but also boosts operational efficiency and diminishes carbon



footprint. They have also implemented energy-efficient lighting, water conservation measures, and waste management programmes.

## Tier II & III city expansion

Summit Hotels & Resorts has been pioneering strategic expansion into tier II and III cities. "Gone are the days when demand dictated supply. We create supply to generate demand. By positioning our properties in emerging destinations, we

foster traveller interest. Our recent launches in Namchi and Shillong alongside upcoming ventures in Sandakphu highlight this approach. This expansion meets the growing need for unique hospitality experiences and brings Summit's high standards to a broader audience. We believe that expanding and creating supply in untapped new destinations like Sunderbans, Deolo, Kurseong, Lamahatta, Tawang, Mirik, and Dirang will boost local

economies, create employment and invite travellers," said Mitraka.

## Affordable luxury

Talking about room rates, he said, "We believe that delivering high-end experiences at reasonable prices is key to fostering long-term relationships with our customers and partners."

## Expansion plans

Talking of plans, Mitraka shared,

"We are expanding with POSHTEL, an elevated posh hostel experience at 8,500 ft in Meghma. We are launching METTA, India's first mid-

**Gone are the days when demand dictated supply. We create supply to generate demand by positioning hotels in emerging destinations**

scale wellness brand, with its first property placed in Lansdowne. We have also introduced the SUMMIT CLUB, our exclusive vacation ownership programme. These ventures reflect our commitment to innovation and meeting the diverse needs of our guests."

## Funds for MICE & skilling must

Contd. from page 20



**Jagdeep Bhagat**  
National President  
TIA

"Industry status for tourism is long-due and should be attributed. Regulation and registration of agency operations must be streamlined. Outbound packaged tours should be exempted from TCS and GST refunds for inbound tourists be allowed. We are not against overseas promotions and support the urgent need for intensive marketing in overseas markets. We demand the need to rationalise the way it is spent. Sanctioning the marketing budget only to a few selected and preferred associations should be done away with."



**Gajesh Girdhar**  
Founder & National Coordinator  
NIMA

"We expect reduced GST rates and exemptions on event-related services or the govt can refund some percentage of GST amount to MICE companies for promoting India; refund of GST on shopping for international tourists; subsidies for MICE infrastructure development and financial support for modernising MICE facilities. Also, NIMA can support Govt to commercialise historical tourist places for doing better events during non-tourist hours. We request joint marketing initiatives to promote India's MICE potential."



**K Syama Raju**  
President  
SIHRA

"We urge the govt to consider a uniform GST rate of 5 per cent for all segments within the hospitality sector, including restaurants and small hotels. Govt support is required to get the entire industry and infrastructure status in tapping state employment potential. The govt must allocate more funds for skill development programs and work closely with the private sector to create job opportunities. Simplifying regulatory processes and reducing bureaucratic hurdles will significantly benefit our industry."

Compiled by TT Bureau

## Green travel programmes crucial

Contd. from page 7

reduced paper usage, and introduced electric vehicles (EVs) into their fleet, marking a significant step towards reducing carbon emissions.

"We have implemented a programme where we track the number of kilometres that corporate clients cover in EVs. We calculate the carbon savings



a significant part of the industry going forward."

**Asego tries to settle smaller, non-medical claims, such as lost baggage, or passport issues, without original documents**

from these journeys and include this information in every invoice, showing how much CO<sub>2</sub> emissions they have saved. Additionally, we provide them with a monthly certificate that they can use internally, indicating the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions saved from using non-electric vehicles that month. This aspect will be

**Gaurav Shekhar Nagwekar**, Head, Travel Logistics & Corporate Service Administration, Reliance Industries, acknowledged the evolving priorities in corporate travel. "In the past, even corporates were specific in terms of cost. Cost was the basic criterion when they used to look at any travel programme. Today, things have changed. Safety and security have taken the forefront, followed by sustainability. So, leadership is talking about it. They are trying to drive it. It's a long way, but I'm sure we shall get there in a few years."

**Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego, illustrated how innovation can foster sustainability in the insurance sector. "I believe that creating awareness is the first step towards sustainability. In the past, our travel insurance policies used to be lengthy documents

of terms and conditions. However, with our new self-booking online tools, we issue close to 1.5 million completely paperless policies annually. We actively discourage customers from printing policies due to environmental concerns," he said. "Regarding claims, we have partnered with multiple insurers. For smaller, non-medical claims, such as lost baggage, passport issues, or delayed baggage delivery, we aim to settle these without requiring original documents. We have developed an app where customers can upload their documents, allowing us to credit claims directly to their accounts. These small initiatives are crucial in promoting sustainability," he added.

By embracing sustainability, leveraging technology, and prioritising employee welfare, businesses can navigate the complexities of the post-pandemic era while contributing to a more sustainable future.





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18-20	Global Travel Marketplace 2024	10:00 am
19-21	Tourism Fair Nagpur 2024	1:00 pm
25	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
25-26	MICE India & Luxury Travel Congress 2024- Jaipur	9:00 am
26-28	IITM - India International Travel Mart Bangalore 2024	11:00 am
29-31	Asian Travel Expo 2024	11:00 am
31	Israel Tourism Webinar	12:00 pm
AUGUST 2024		
2-4	India International Travel Mart Chennai	10:00 am
2-4	India Travel Mart-Jaipur	9:00 am
2-4	Tourism Fair - Kolkata 2024	11:00 am
5-7	Indian Travel Expo-Bengaluru	10:30 am
7-9	Travel & Tourism Fair-Ahmedabad	9:00 am
8	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
16-18	Tourism Fair - Raipur 2024	1:00 pm
20	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Delhi	10:00 am
22	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Mumbai	10:00 am
22	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
26	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Chennai	10:00 am
28	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Bangalore	10:00 am

# Are you accounting correctly?

Muffazzal Hafiji, Director & CEO, Excel Software Consultancy, highlights the benefits of getting an automated accounting system that accurately calculates GST and TDS/ TCS, thereby helping even smaller agents save time and money.



Hazel Jain

Calculating TCS or GST and clarifying tax input credit is not everybody's forte. For good reason, agents are more careful than ever when it comes to billing and accounting perfectly to avoid any future backlash. One of the ways to ease this process is through a good travel accounting software.

Muffazzal Hafiji, Director & CEO, Excel Software Consultancy, who is in the industry for more than 34 years, has clients not just in India but in the Middle East, Africa, Thailand, USA, and even Australia. "We are also getting new clients from destinations like Sri Lanka now. This year travel has been good, which, in turn, has spurred the trade into making investments in technology with the aim of reducing costs," Hafiji said.

Last year, he launched xLSmart-Books.Com – a browser-based software that can be used on any device or system. "We have added a lot of innovative features to it us-



Muffazzal Hafiji  
Director & CEO  
Excel Software Consultancy

ing my 37 years of programming experience. This product speaks for itself. We have something called a reduction in the menu system. Hence, users do not have to get into individual menus. For instance, if they want a customer report, just one option will internally give them 20 different variations of the customer's outstanding. Most importantly, the travel agent is at peace of mind when using our products," he explained.

The most popular product, however, is their xLWebPro,

which was launched in 2009 and is being used by many big agencies. Gradually, they will be migrated to the latest product since it has better features. "While taxation points differ from one country to another, we programme it in such a way, so as to match with the country's VAT requirements. For India, we have programmed for TCS and have taken care to ensure that at least through our systems it monitors the utilisation for the year and accordingly suggests whether it should be charged at 5 per cent or at 20 per cent. The agent is always free to override this option," he adds.

Client requirements have also changed after COVID, Hafiji adds. "They (clients) are becoming more aware that they need a computerised accounting system; most of them still do manual accounting. But they have realised that more than half their time is spent on accounts, which can be used to do business development. But things are changing, they are informing

themselves of what is available in the market, and they are inching towards computerisation. We have seen even smaller agencies opting for our product now. It is much more important for them

**Our system monitors utilisation for the year and suggests whether TCS should be charged at 5% or at 20%**

because they should not be investing in a full-fledged accountant, spending ₹20,000 a month. This will not help them because their volumes are not that high. In using a software, they can do invoicing on the computer, which they are currently doing manually," he says.

# Multi-generation cruises on rise

Contd. from page 12



Mario Stubbs  
Managing Director  
Sail Lanka

“Short-haul luxury cruises are favoured by Indian travellers, especially for tropical destinations like Sri Lanka. While cruising is gaining traction among Indians, there remains a niche market preferring international long-haul cruises. We offer bespoke luxury cruises for short-haul market, given the high interest from Indian travellers in luxury cruising and the serene ocean views.”



Sanjay Kapoor  
Director  
STIC Group

“Cruise industry has rebounded significantly post-COVID. Travellers are seeking more unique and longer cruises beyond the typical 7-night Alaska, Europe, and short-haul Singapore itineraries. Guests are opting for extended voyages like 11-day cruises to Iceland & Greenland, 14-day Norwegian Fjord adventures, 14-day Japan Explorers, and 22-day South America & Antarctica journeys.”



Arun Iyer  
Managing Director  
Super Holidays

“We are getting a lot of inquiries for Alaskan luxury cruises, especially from travellers who already have a US or Canada visas. It is in demand for multi-generational holidays. We also see demand coming from senior segment for river cruises in Europe. We recently launched our promos for the same. Senior travellers are curious about river cruises, and they prefer it because it is an all-inclusive product.”



Anil Kalsi  
Vice President, TAFI & Managing Partner, Ambe World Travel

“The seven-night sailings are more popular among vacationers. New destinations like Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand have been the flavour of this season apart from most Mediterranean, North Europe, Greek Isles, Bahamas and Alaska cruises. In India, cruise tourism has hit a new high with footfall touching 4.7 lakh in 2023-24, higher than the pre-pandemic period.”



Khushvinder Sarna  
Chairman, TAFI (NI-Chapter) & Owner, The Federal Travels & Tours

“Traditional favourites such as Singapore, Dubai, and the Mediterranean continue to attract Indian travellers with their luxurious offerings. However, we're seeing a growing interest in closer-to-home destinations like Lakshadweep and the Andaman Islands, known for their pristine waters and exotic marine life. The demographic of Indian cruisers is shifting with a decrease in the average age.”



Pankaj Nagpal  
Managing Director  
Travstarz Global Group

“There has been a preference for cruising in Europe and the Mediterranean, which is becoming the favourite hotspot, especially for the well-travelled travellers. The itineraries too have increased from the typical two-night cruise to 4-5 nights multi-country cruises. This shift is not only prominent among the younger travellers but is also influencing the older generations.”

Compiled by TT Bureau



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# MOVEMENTS

## TOURISM MALAYSIA

New Delhi

Tourism Malaysia has appointed **AHMAD JOHANIF MOHD ALI** as the Director of Tourism Malaysia's office in New Delhi. He brings with him over 34 years of experience in tourism promotion and international relations. His career within Tourism Malaysia is marked by outstanding achievements and dedication to promoting Malaysia as an exceptional tourist destination. He has significant skills in public speaking, event management, marketing, and sales. He holds an MBA in Tourism Management from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) and an Associate's Degree in Tourism Administration from UiTM.



## HRAWI

Mumbai

The Hotel And Restaurant Association (Western India) – HRAWI – has appointed **TRUPTI PAWAR** as the new Secretary General. She has 22 years of experience in international trade and business development. In her new role, she will be liaising and facilitating the various processes for efficient management of the Association and its affairs. Prior to this, she served as the Director at the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC). She holds a Bachelor's degree in Commerce from University of Mumbai, an MBA in HR from IGNOU and PG Diploma in International Business Operations (PGDIBO) from IGNOU.



## ITC WINDSOR

Bengaluru

ITC Hotels appoints **SABRINA DEY** as the General Manager of the iconic ITC Windsor - a Luxury Collection Hotel. With a career spanning almost two decades, Dey will helm a diverse portfolio of responsibilities, at the first LEED Zero Carbon certified hotel, driving environmentally conscious guest experiences. Dey began her career with Oberoi Hotels, graduating from OCLD in 2008. In 2018, she transitioned to a general management role as Director of Operations at JW Marriott Kolkata and later the Hotel Manager at JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort and Spa.



## IHCL

Panaji

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) has appointed **SHEETAL SINGH** as the General Manager of Taj Exotica Resort & Spa, Goa. Singh joined IHCL in 2008 as Deputy Housekeeper at The Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai. Her first general management position was at Ambassador, New Delhi – IHCL SeleQtions, followed by her role as General Manager at the Ginger Mumbai Airport. Singh is a hotel management graduate from the Institute of NIHMCT, and has a Post Graduate Diploma from Welcome Group Management Institute.



## 7 APPLE HOTELS

Mumbai

**AMAN SHAIKH** has been appointed as the Corporate Deputy General Manager - Operations at 7 Apple Hotels. Shaikh brings a wealth of experience and proven track record in hotel management and operations, making him a valuable addition to the 7 Apple Hotels executive team. With a career spanning over two decades, he has demonstrated exceptional leadership and operational expertise. He is an MBA with a Diploma in Hotel Management & Catering Technology. In his new role, he will be responsible for ensuring brand consistency across all operational facets.



## HYATT CENTRIC HEBBAL BENGALURU

Bengaluru

Hyatt Centric Hebbal Bengaluru appoints **MANUJ SAWHNEY** as the General Manager. He has over 15 years of experience in various leadership roles across India. His hospitality career began at The Oberoi Group, where he worked in various departments, starting as a Front Office Assistant and progressing to Restaurant Manager. He then moved to The Leela Kempinski as Banquet Manager and rose to Assistant Director of F&B. Following that, he took on Director, F&B roles at Crowne Plaza Delhi and JW Marriott Kolkata. Recently, he served as Director of Operations at Hyatt Regency Pune.



**MEGHA BHATIA** has been appointed as the General Manager of Taj Fort Aguada Resort & Spa, Goa. Bhatia began her journey with IHCL as a Management Trainee in 2014, quickly advancing to strategic positions as Restaurant Manager at the Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi and Corporate Director - The Chambers, where she played a crucial role in the brand's expansion. An MBA in Global Hospitality Management from Les Roches Switzerland, Bhatia possesses a global perspective and an in-depth understanding of the hospitality industry.



## SHANGRI LA EROS

New Delhi

Shangri La Eros New Delhi has appointed **PARUL JAIN** as the Director of Finance. A Chartered Accountant with an MBA degree from Xavier Institute of Management Bhubaneswar, Jain has nearly two decades of diverse industry experience. Her career includes pivotal roles at prestigious organisations, such as The Lodhi, New Delhi, The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, and Barista Coffee. In her new role, she will oversee all aspects of financial operations, including budget management, financial reporting, and risk mitigation. She is committed to optimising resource allocation, and ensuring regulatory compliances.



## RAMADA GORAKHPUR GORAKHNATH

MANDIR ROAD

Gorakhpur

**APARUP BISWAS** has been appointed as the General Manager of Ramada Gorakhpur Gorakhnath Mandir Road at Saket Nagar. In his new role, Biswas will be responsible for overseeing the daily operations of the hotel, including managing staff, overseeing finances, ensuring guest satisfaction and maintaining overall functionality of the property. Biswas, a native of Krishnanagar, West Bengal, has Master of Science degree in Hotel Management from Annamalai University, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in 2008.



## EROS HOTEL

New Delhi

**PREETI RAHEJA** has been appointed as the Assistant Front Office Manager at Eros Hotel New Delhi, Nehru Place. A BSc in Hotel Management, Raheja has a decade of experience in the industry. She has worked with prominent hospitality brands, such as Hyatt Regency, Lemon Tree Hotel, Radisson Hotel, Jaypee Hotel, and Heritage Village Resort and Spa. Her most recent role was as Front Office Manager at Karma Lakelands. Raheja's expertise in guest relations and operational management aligns with Eros Hotel's ethos. Her passion for wellness & dedication to service make her a valuable addition to the team.



## COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT SHILLONG

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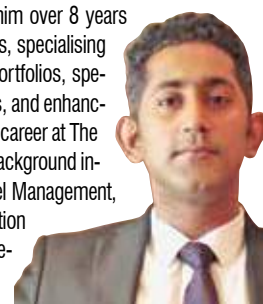
Courtyard by Marriott Shillong appoints **NIPU KALITA** as the Associate Director of Sales. With an illustrious career spanning over a decade in the hospitality industry, Kalita brings a wealth of experience and expertise to his new role. He will be responsible for overseeing and leading a dynamic team to achieve sales and revenue goals for the property. Prior to this, he served as the Head of Sales and Marketing at Vivanta Meghalaya Shillong. He has also worked with Vivanta Guwahati, The Park Hyderabad, Marriott Hyderabad and Taj Hotels Hyderabad among others.



## BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

The Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield has appointed **NIKHIL G JACOB** as the Food and Beverage Manager. Jacob joined the hotel a few months ago and brings with him over 8 years of experience in leading luxury brands, specialising in process development, beverage portfolios, specialty restaurants, fine dining services, and enhancing guest experiences. He started his career at The St. Regis, Mumbai. His educational background includes a Bachelor of Science in Hotel Management, Catering Technology & Applied Nutrition from the Institute of Hotel Management, Kolkata.



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# Malaysia eyes 1 mn Indians by 2026

Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali, Director, Tourism Malaysia's office in New Delhi, in an exclusive interview with **TRAVTALK**, outlines Malaysia's efforts to diversify its appeal and enhance connectivity, targeting 1.02 million Indian arrivals by 2026.



Janice Alyosius

Malaysia is trying to attract more Indian tourists and establish itself as a premier holiday destination, says **Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali**, Director, Tourism Malaysia's office in New Delhi. "Our vision is to get more Indian tourists visiting Malaysia. MICE is one of the things that we have concentrated on in recent years. We have great venues to host Indian weddings and hence we are also targeting the wedding segment from India," he said.

Furthermore, he explained Malaysia's new tourism initiative targeting the adventure enthusiasts, particularly divers. "We would like to introduce diving for all Indian tourists," he revealed. He elaborated on Malaysia's allure for divers, citing Sipadan Island as a divers'



paradise and emphasised on the country's role as a favoured destination for PADI courses.

Discussing incentives for promoting Malaysia, Mohd Ali disclosed various packages designed to entice Indian travel agents and companies, ranging from cultural performances during dinners to complimentary sightseeing tours for larger groups.

He highlighted Malaysia's appeal as a filming destination, noting significant incentives provided through its film industry bodies. "We give back up to 35 per cent of what companies spend in Malaysia for filming," he shared.

Revealing Malaysia's ambitious goal of welcoming 1.02 million Indian tourists by 2026, he said, "Based on the first quarter arrivals from India, we are confident of surpassing this target." He attributed this confidence to eased visa regulations

and increased flight connectivity between India and Malaysia. "The government is looking to

**We have great venues to host Indian weddings and that is why we are also targeting the wedding segment from India**

extend the visa free entry for Indians to get more tourists because we are celebrating our 'Visit Malaysia 2026'."

Emphasising on Malaysia's unique cultural diversity, he informed, "Only in Malaysia can you experience such a vibrant mix of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures." He noted that this cultural amalgamation extends to the cuisine, which offers a distinct flavor profile appreciated by Indians.

Mohd Ali highlighted collaborations with airlines like Malaysian

Airlines, AirAsia, and Batik Air to enhance accessibility from India to Malaysia. He underlined the opening of new flight routes to tier II cities in India. "We have about 1.8 million seat capacity from India to Malaysia. We are confident to get at least 1.1 million tourists from India because the accessibility is increasing. Batik Air is planning to fly Chandigarh in September," he said.

Inviting Indian travellers to explore beyond Kuala Lumpur, he said, "In recent years, there has been a deliberate effort to encourage Indian travellers to explore other Malaysian gems such as Langkawi, Desaru Coast and Sabah. This strategic shift aims to diversify tourist experiences beyond the capital city."

Mohd Ali also highlighted Malaysia's proactive strategies to enhance its appeal to Indian tourists. "We are currently intensifying our efforts with collaborative roadshows involving airlines. In addition, we are gearing up for a dedicated wedding roadshow where Malaysian suppliers, including hoteliers and wedding planners, will interact with their counterparts in India."

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