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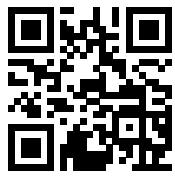
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Indian travellers in demand @ATM

Addressing a session at ATM 2024, Alhasan Aldabbagh, President APAC, Saudi Tourism Authority, said that they have introduced a 96-hour visa for Indians possessing the US, UK or Schengen visa, while Markus Tan, Regional Director, India, South Asia, Middle East & Africa, Singapore Tourism Board, asserted that they keep updating their offerings to attract Indians.

Dr Shehara Rizly

Starting off the session on 'Strategies to entice Indian tourists' at Arabian Travel Market 2024 in Dubai, **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President APAC, Saudi Tourism Authority, shared that India is an important source market for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), as both countries share a range of similarities and there is a convenience of travel. "India is just four

hours away from Saudi Arabia and we can see the growth of the Middle class (in India) is very strong. We have a diverse offering for travellers from India, from mountains to desert lands, to the Red Sea, experiences which include great cuisine and different types of food," he said at the session, which was moderated by **Sanjeet**, CEO, DDP Group.

Aldabbagh said that travellers from the two destinations seek some-



Markus Tan, Alhasan Aldabbagh and Sanjeet at the Arabian Travel Market

what similar expectations. "The burgeoning Middle Class in India brings in a new set of travellers to Saudi Arabia. Hence, the Kingdom is more than happy to welcome Indians to explore its rich culture and history," he said, adding that the diverse offerings in the Kingdom will amaze the Indian travellers.

Addressing the gathering, **Markus Tan**, Regional Director, India, South Asia, Middle East & Africa, Sin-

gapore Tourism, shared that India has been a lucrative market for them over many years in terms of leisure, business and even MICE travellers. "Singapore is a hub in the Asian region and is well known for its infrastructure, diverse offerings to travellers, it is home to world famous theme parks, catering to the requirements from guests across the globe," he said.

Contd. on page 14 ▶

Digital ID future of travel

While digital ID options for air travellers have already been rolled out by several global airlines, the adoption among Indian carriers is still in its early stages. However, steps are being taken in this direction.

Hazel Jain

Convenience and speed are the top priorities for passengers and digital identity (ID) and biometric technology can be the key enablers. Passengers want technology to work harder, so that they spend less time 'being processed', standing in queues. And they are willing to share biometric data for this. But there needs to be more cooperation across the value chain and with governments to make it happen with secure

Sanjay Gupta
CEO, AISATS

technology that is available today. **Sanjay Ghare**, CEO, Vervotech,

says that airlines are now consistently investing in digital ID tools. "The intent to experiment is at an all-time high. Some carriers are exploring facial recognition for boarding, while others are trailing digital ID wallets. There are some interesting examples which can potentially have mass adoption."

Sharing some instances, he says that biometric boarding is being used where in facial recognition and fingerprint scanning are being

Contd. on page 21 ▶

Soft skills key to success

Being a people's person, patience, and effective communication are some of the top skills required to succeed in travel and tourism business, say experienced travel operators in unison.

"The travel industry is all about people, and about fulfilling their dreams and helping them create memories while on a holiday. Therefore, being a 'people's person' is important, as is empathy, which is the ability to put yourself in the shoes of prospective traveller. Familiarity with world geography is a must, as is the ability to incorporate the latest technological developments. But the most important skills are infinite patience and a sense of humour. One skill is important in times of demanding customers or when dealing with visas, and the other is needed when things are going awry and are out of your control."

Ajay Prakash
President, TAFI

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Keep your tech game up

India is considered the hotbed for travel technology innovations, with Artificial Intelligence leading the charge. From chatbots to enhancing customer experience by automating room service and even restaurant delivery, AI has come a long way with trip planning solutions to tailor-made experiences. At the same time, companies are leveraging Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), and Mixed Reality (MR) to elevate immersive experiences for travellers, taking the engagement a notch higher.

Internet of Things (IoT) is gaining traction, providing ample data for personalised services like smart rooms and IoT luggage tags, enhancing passenger experiences. Contactless recognition tech is streamlining airport processes in Bangkok, Singapore, and India, especially post-pandemic, with QR codes and contactless payments facilitating touchless interactions. For strategic marketing, Big Data is doing the needful by analysing travel behaviour and delivering tailor-made choices. From hotel bookings, cab rentals, flight bookings, to ticket purchases, big data and analytics is a huge help. It can even be used for predicting future demand, uncover cyber fraud, and protecting sensitive information of customers. At the same time, Blockchain offers operational transparency and security within the travel industry, and it can be used to safeguard traceable payments, particularly for international travel. It is also used in boosting data storage security and mitigating any information leaks.

India, with its growth and potential to travel, is the perfect playground for all these technologies to be deployed at all levels. Not only would the B2B players gain from it, but it would be highly beneficial to the consumer. The choices are many and it's crucial for travel businesses to capitalise on these tech investments to stay competitive and meet evolving traveller needs.

Middle class driving outbound

Amsterdam, Singapore, London, Frankfurt, and Melbourne are top five trending destinations that Indian travellers are visiting this summer (June-August 2024), as measured by the change in share of flight bookings, stated a report from the Mastercard Economics Institute.



Indian market witnessed a 21 per cent surge in domestic travel as of March 2024, compared to 2019, according to an annual report from the Mastercard Economics Institute (MEI), released recently. The report, titled 'Travel Trends 2024: Breaking Boundaries', provides comprehensive insights into the evolving landscape of the travel industry across 74 markets, including 13 in the Asia Pacific region (APAC). It stated that international travel by Indian experienced a 4 per cent increase during the period.

Drawing on a unique analysis of aggregated and anonymized Mastercard transaction data, the report



ling internationally than ever before. In the first three months of 2024, 97 million passengers travelled

tions that Indian travellers are visiting this summer (June – August 2024), as measured by the change in share of flight bookings.



takes a deep dive into key tourism trends for 2024.

More Indians are travelling than ever before
In 2024, fuelled by a growing middle class and expanded route capacity, more Indians are travel-

ling internationally than ever before. In the first three months of 2024, 97 million passengers travelled

While domestic air passenger traffic surged 21 per cent above 2019 levels, international travel rose by 4 per cent. Notably, Indian travellers are increasingly exploring key markets, with a 53 per cent increase in visits to Japan, a 248 per cent growth to Vietnam, and a 59 per cent rise in visits to the United States, compared to 2019, despite a stronger US dollar. This trend signifies a major shift in Indian travel habits towards widespread exploration and discovery.

According to the report, Amsterdam, followed by Singapore, London, Frankfurt, and Melbourne are the top five trending destina-

"Consumers in the Asia Pacific region have an intense desire and willingness to travel and are becoming increasingly savvy to ensure they get the best value and unforgettable experiences from their trips," said **David Mann**, Chief Economist, Asia Pacific, Mastercard. "For tourism authorities, retailers, the hospitality and F&B sectors, the bottom line is that costs matter. In today's economy, foreign exchange rates and spending power have become vital components in driving a traveller's assessment of value when they are making their plans. This suggests that businesses targeting tourism dollars need to review their current strategies, and shift them, if necessary, to maintain their appeal to travellers."

Travellers continue to prioritise experiences over things
Consumers globally continue to

Indians are exploring key markets, with 53% increase in visits to Japan, 248% to Vietnam, & 59% rise to the US vis-a-vis 2019

prioritise experiences over material goods. This is playing out in the travel sector as spending on experiences, especially nightlife, totals 12 per cent of tourism sales – the highest point in at least five years. Additionally, a burgeoning fine dining scene in India has translated to marginal outperformance of the fine dining category for in-destination tourism dining. As of March 2024, spending on casual dining rose by 49.2 per cent, while fine dining saw a 55.2 per cent increase compared to the previous year.

Highlights of the report

- ❖ The first three months of 2024 have registered 97 million passengers travelling through Indian airports for both international and domestic trips.
- ❖ As of March 2024, domestic travel surged by 21% compared to 2019, while international travel experienced a 4% increase.
- ❖ Indian travellers are increasingly exploring key markets, with a substantial 53% surge in visits to Japan, a 248% leap in visits to Vietnam, and a remarkable 59% rise in visits to the United States, compared to 2019.
- ❖ Amsterdam, Singapore, and London are trending as the top three summer holiday destinations for Indian travellers in 2024.



SanJeet
Editor & Publisher

Editorial
Devika Jeet
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Sushil Kumar
Haseel Jain
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Why GCC clicks for Indian travellers?

Indians are travelling like never before and spending on a plethora of experiences. It has been estimated that Indian travellers will be spending US\$42 billion all over the world in 2024. How GCC can be a possible gainer in this India growth story was explored at a special session at Arabian Travel Market 2024, titled ‘Importance of the Indian market in the GCC’.



Nisha Verma

Indians are the most coveted travellers today, and underlining the same at Arabian Travel Market 2024, SanJeet, CEO, , said that Indian traveller will be spending US\$42 billion all over the world in 2024. “With 96 million Indians having passports, they are ready to travel. The government is developing 80 airports across India, especially in tier I and II cities, which means connectivity will be huge. The only trouble is that Indians buy late, with reports claiming that 70 per cent Indians plan a holiday less than a month before,” he highlighted.

Are Indians coming to GCC?

When asked about preferred destinations in GCC for Indians, UAE takes the cake with Dubai leading the pack, revealed **KD Singh**, Founder & President, TravelBullz. “Around 4.5 million people visit



KD Singh, Founder & President, TravelBullz with SanJeet, CEO, , at Arabian Travel Market 2024

from India to GCC, but a large pack is taken by UAE, where Dubai leads with almost 2.5 million people planning to visit the emirate in 2024. Around 800,000 plan to visit Abu Dhabi and around 600,000 to Oman. Saudi is putting a lot of effort in positioning itself as the leading GCC market for In-

dians to travel, but there is a long way to go,” Singh said.

Putting things in perspective, he shared, “There are over 233,000 seats per week out of India to GCC, which is around a million seats in a month. The occupancy is 70-80 per cent these days. Dubai is

number one destination for Indian travellers. Now, we have more than 100 flights per week to Dubai out of 20 different cities from India. There is no other region that connects to India like this. Having said that, on an average, 25 million people travel every year from India, which will continue to grow

at least double digit for over the next five years.” Singh added, “If you try to find a business or first-class seat out of India, it’s very difficult. The economy is also strong, and hence ever airline is flying an A-380 out of India. Apart from that, the HNLs are taking private charters, not only for themselves, but also for weddings.”

How do Indians travel?

Saying that India is not just a country, but a continent with different language and travel behaviours in different regions, Singh added, “Indian economy is growing at a very massive state and it’s the B and C category towns that are driving growth. When it comes to uber luxury, there are 20,000 families in India valued at upwards of \$30 million net worth. That is growing at almost 18 per cent.”

Targeted destination marketing

He advised that when tourism

boards, hotels, or attractions want to go and look at India market, they need to have a clear strategy as to what is their segment. “We can’t just promote everything and expect uber luxury people to come


When tourism boards, hotels, or attractions want to go and look at India market, they need to have a clear strategy as to what is their segment

to you. Dubai and Abu Dhabi did exceedingly well in customising their promotions to Indian customers. They are not running a
Contd. on page 14 ▶



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- Network of Indian MICE Agents completes 10 years; plans to go global to expand membership
- Kerala Travel Mart 2024 anticipates record-breaking attendance, 592 foreign buyers from 71 countries to participate
- Branded hotel signings surge in Q1 2024 with 9,710 new rooms, tier II and III cities lead growth, finds JLL report
- GCC collaborations ignite India's tourism potential and set foundation for sustainable growth: Gyan Bhushan
- With largest tourism sector in South Asia, India ranks 39th in World Economic Forum Index
- Madhya Pradesh's City Museum in Bhopal will present history through modern technology

Travel trade seeks MOT support

Maharashtra travel trade got an opportunity to meet Dr Sagnik Chowdhury, Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central), Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India. It was the chance for inbound and domestic agents to present their grievances to the MOT before they miss out on more business.



Hazel Jain

Dr Sagnik Chowdhury, Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has been a busy man since joining office on March 1, 2024. He has been tied up the ministry activities primarily concerned with quality and standards, as well as marketing and promotion, including meeting the various travel trade associations. He was recently invited by both TAAI and IATO Maharashtra chapters to meet their members.

Meeting with TAAI members

TAAI had invited the Incredible India team to present to their members about the approval process for travel agencies across the country. His team showcased the process of approval, and the various incentive schemes that are associated with such accreditation. "We

also told them about the Incredible India tourist facilitator certification programme, which I'm sure will go a long way in emboldening and empowering their staff. One of the queries was related to the Marketing Development Assistance (MDA) scheme. We are looking into a little bit of re-aligning the MDA policies soon and rolling it out again," he explains.

Another query was with regard to giving a holistic overview of the Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Certification (IITFC) Programme. "We have now condensed the categories from five to three: Tour Operators (Inbound, Domestic, MICE, and Adventure), Travel Agents, Tourist Transport Operators," Dr Chowdhury said. His team has done webinars on these topics in regional languages, including Hindi, Bengali, and Odiya, apart from English, and can do



Dr Sagnik Chowdhury
Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

in Marathi and Gujarati as well. He has also fixed meetings with other travel and hospitality trade associations as well.

IATO submits issues to MoT

The IATO Maharashtra Chapter recently conducted its chapter meeting with members in Mumbai to discuss certain issues they are facing. This includes guide charges for cruise pas-

sengers and tourist guides. They had invited Dr Chowdhury to introduce him to their mem-

TAAI had invited the Incredible India team to present to their members about the approval process for travel agencies

bers and bring to his notice these challenges. "The Ministry had taken a 705 sq mt space at ITB Berlin. We are receiving so many exciting proposals from various source markets and are looking forward towards a boom in tourism in India," Dr Chowdhury said.

Classification of hotels

Dr Chowdhury has also been busy with the accreditation and classification and approvals of various stakeholders across the board, and across various segments of the tourism industry, which are hotels, travel agents, and tour operators. "We also have been developing destinations and aggressively so under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme where several destinations have been identified, for which we are in the process of identifying PDMCs (Project Development & Management Consultants). Once this process is done, major infrastructure development work will take place. Also, under the PRASAD and the Challenge Based Destination Development (CBDD) schemes of the MOT. These projects aim towards wholistic infrastructure development at destinations identified under the schemes," he shared.

Taj city awaits robust air routes

With the closure of three Agra-bound routes by IndiGo, tour operators are concerned that such decisions would impact the city's image as a destination. Despite being home to one of the seven wonders of the world - the Taj Mahal, which draws huge global attention - the city has always faced inadequate air routes diverting visitors to other tourist hubs, they say.



Amita Pandey

Agra tourism suffered a major setback in April when IndiGo decided to cease operations of three flight routes - from Agra to Jaipur, Bhopal, and Ahmedabad - due to shortage of aircraft. Despite being a part of the Golden Triangle, Agra has been facing inadequate air routes to major cities. With the termination of three of the six IndiGo flights, Agra now has air connections only to Mumbai, Lucknow, and Bengaluru.

It is noteworthy that the Taj Mahal in Agra alone witnessed 5 million domestic visitors and approximately 3.96 lakh foreign visitors during 2023 as per Statista, a German online platform. Therefore, many travel agents are not buying the dubious claim of aircraft shortage after witnessing a full load.

Prateek Hira, Chairman, IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter, said that one of the major reasons behind such disruptions is that Agra Airport (Kheria



Sunil Gupta
Chairman
IATO Northern Region

Airport) does not have a commercial terminal of its own and functions as an Indian Air Force base. "Until commercial terminal will not come into place in Agra, these issues will persist. Airlines initiate these flight routes after conducting a deep study about the route and load in advance. Therefore, it is not feasible to buy the argument that these routes had less load or shortage of aircraft," he reasoned.



Prateek Hira
Chairman
IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter

Impact on Agra tourism

When asked about the impact of the closure of three air routes, Hira said, "As tour operators, we face a lot of problems in case of sudden terminations, as all the plans are done in advance. The last moment changes lead to fare hikes and burden operators and travellers with extra costs. This brings everything to a halt." Another major issue is perception.



Pradeep Rai
Managing Director
Skyline India Travels

"It impacts the image of the city, based on which travellers are reluctant to travel back to the city. It also sends a negative message to the first-time traveller, as it creates distrust among tourists like in the case of Khajuraho. Subsequently, this leads to a decline in first-time foreign tourists as well because Agra is one of the mascots of destinations in India, any trip to India is incomplete without visiting the

Taj Mahal in Agra. Overall, it builds a negative image of the destination," he added.

Expressing similar views, **Sunil Gupta**, Chairman, IATO Northern Region, asserted, "The termination not only disrupts the connectivity, it also shakes the confidence of the operator. It affects the itineraries and other plans. It surely impacts the ease of travel, which eventually affects the footfalls to the city and surrounding regions."

Rahul Wadhwa, President & Founder, Cal India Tours & Travels, also agreed to the fact, saying, "Such sudden termination of flights, forces people to cancel their trips, especially if they want to travel by air only."

Pradeep Rai, Managing Director, Skyline India Travels, affirmed, "Such decisions directly impact employment, hotels and restaurants business. Moreover, it also burdens passengers financially in terms of fares and

accommodation costs, and impacts productivity."

Future ahead

Looking forward, Gupta suggested that better infrastructure will surely help in sustaining new routes, especially to tier II, and III cities. Cities like Agra, Varanasi, and Ayodhya

Taj Mahal in Agra alone witnessed 5 million domestic visitors and approximately 3.96 lakh foreign visitors during the previous year

need better air connectivity, as there is an influx of tourist arrivals in these places, and they act as tourism hubs for Uttar Pradesh, as well as for the country.

Fiji ups the ante in India

Brent Hill, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Fiji, is optimistic that the strong Indian community in Fiji and natural beauty of the destination will attract not just leisure travellers from India but also film production houses to shoot there.



The new government in Fiji, which is just 16 months old, aims to bring back the South Pacific on the world tourism map. The government hopes that Indian travellers can play a big part in this for Fiji, which has 40 per cent contribution of tourism in its GDP.

Speaking on the sidelines of the two-day Fiji Tourism Exchange

Indian tourists visiting Australia or New Zealand can be a great source market for Fiji, which is visa-free for Indian nationals

– Brent Hill



2024 held in Denarau, Fiji, **Brent Hill**, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Tourism Fiji, said, "Indian tourists visiting Australia or New Zealand can be a great source market for Fiji, which is visa-free for Indian nationals, and we plan to tap that. While our top three source markets are Australia, New Zealand, North America and China, we are also looking to India as an emerging market for Fiji." Tourism Fiji is represented in India by Global Destinations.

Fiji experienced record tourism growth in 2023 and welcomed

around 929,740 visitors. Now, its target is to achieve one billion visitors over the next four years. "There is intense competition from places like Thailand and Bali. So, we need to deliver exceptional value for money. I believe that the India story can be replicated like the China story, and this is down to air capacity," Hill adds.

Indian arrivals to the South Pacific Island nation in 2023 reached pre-COVID numbers of 2019, underlining the increased appetite for premium and experience-led

'In pursuit of sustainable tourism'

Viliame Gavoka, the Acting Prime Minister and Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation, Fiji, said that their country is in pursuit of sustainable tourism and to bring back the South Pacific to the fore. "Tourism remains a cornerstone of Fiji's economy. But we need to build more rooms; at least 4,000-5,000 more rooms are needed. We are also training our people in tourism," he said. For India, he said, "India is an emerging market for us. Right now, the connection is from Singapore and we want to strengthen that – the India-Singapore sector that will feed the Singapore-Fiji route. Soon Air India will renew its codeshare with Fiji Airways, which is promising. We have a robust team active in the India market. We may be looking at shooting some Indian movies in Fiji." Actress Rakul Preet recently honeymooned in Fiji. Gavoka also shared updates on property developments, including the expansion of existing resorts and the launch of hospitality ventures.



Good to know

- ❖ Total number of hotels in Fiji: 421 accommodation providers
- ❖ New hotels in the pipeline to be completed between 2024-2026: Crowne Plaza Fiji Nadi Bay Resort & Spa, Hilton Garden Inn, Wyndham Garden Wailoaloa Beach, and Radisson Blu Mirage Resort and Damodar City Labasa Hotel in Vanua Levu

travel. The month of December saw the highest number of Indian arrivals in Fiji; increasing by around 300 per cent over December arrivals in 2022. The average length of stay of an Indian tourist to Fiji is 7.6 nights.

At FTE, more than 80 suppliers showcased their products to over 125 buyers from important international markets, including three travel agents from India: Kesari Tours, PickYourTrail, and Thomas Cook India. 🇮🇳

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Is Indian inbound running out of steam?

Is the Indian inbound tourist market slowing down? Experts share a mixed view on this. While some agree to the point of sluggishness in the inbound travel, others say its showed signs of revival in 2023, especially with the 'Visit India Year 2023' initiative aimed at promoting India as a year-round destination, along with the G20 Presidency.

 Inder Raj Ahluwalia

Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) & Chairperson, Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council (THSC), feels the Indian inbound tourist market is not really slowing down. It showed signs of revival in 2023, especially with the 'Visit India Year 2023' initiative aimed at promoting India as a year-round destination, along with the G20 Presidency. "We need extensive marketing to further accelerate growth, place emphasis on aggressive global promotion of 'Incredible India', leverage digital platforms for ease of travel, and highlight India's cultural richness and diverse experiences. Additionally, focus should be on niche tourism areas like adventure, wellness, and sustainable tourism that cater to evolving traveller preferences. Ensuring safety, particularly for women travellers, and enhancing visitors' experience through infrastructure improvements are pivotal steps," she said.

At the Arabian Travel Market 2024, TAAI partnered with the Ministry



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO

of Tourism to celebrate the 'India B2B Networking Evening', which connected inbound Indian agents with GCC countries to partner and synergise. A rethink to further develop inbound tourism in tune with existing industry trends can generate future growth.

Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), feels inbound travel to India has been slow to recover. While the country is seeing an increase in inbound travel, the numbers still lag



Jyoti Mayal
President, TAAI &
Chairperson, THSC

behind 2019 numbers. However, the industry is optimistic of growing substantially and crossing this level in 2024 or early 2025.

"The forecast is encouraging and aligns with India's ongoing initiatives. We need to have a stronger presence in key inbound markets, including Europe, the UK, and the Middle East, coupled with strong marketing and promotion by our nodal Ministry," he said. "Participation in international travel marts is crucial, and should in-



Ravi Gosain
Vice President
IATO

clude not just the major events, but also lesser known ones that have huge potential for India," he added.

Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO, says, "We are at a stage where we need to re-energise ourselves. Inbound tourist traffic to India is at a crucial stage where it needs a stronger push to compete globally with other destinations. We have to become more focused and aggressive. We have a great culture, traditions, historical assets, wonderful



Lajpat Rai
Chairman and Managing Director
Lotus Trans Travels

cuisine and now state-of-the-art world-class infrastructure in place, but in the present, fast-changing environment, all this needs to be known to the world. So, there is a lot to be done at government level to make our product's quality constantly visible on online, offline and social media platforms. PR-building campaigns and regular communication channels are required on a regular basis."

Lajpat Rai, Chairman and Managing Director, Lotus Trans

Travels, feels the first thing the Indian inbound tourist industry has to do is to accurately assess the existing situation. "Where exactly are we? And where are we headed? In my opinion government and the various tourism associations and other related bodies should immediately start additional promotion campaigns in both the existing and upcoming, promising markets. Govern-

 **We need extensive marketing to further accelerate growth, place emphasis on aggressive global promotion of 'Incredible India'**

ment and tourism industry colleagues should bond together more than ever before, and participate in roadshows, tourism fairs, and exhibitions. 🇮🇳

'Election tourism' gets a vote

Introduced in 2012 during the Vidhan Sabha elections, the Election Tourism concept is the brainchild of Manish Sharma, Chairman, Akshar Travels, based in Ahmedabad, and Chairman, Tourism Development Society Gujarat. Today, it has not only become popular with Indians but also international tourists who want to understand the Indian democracy.

 Hazel Jain

Manish Sharma, Chairman, Akshar Travels, based in Ahmedabad, and Chairman, Tourism Development Society Gujarat, is gung-ho about his innovative offering – election tourism. Sharing about its inception, Sharma says, "We introduced this project in 2012 during Vidhan Sabha elections in Gujarat where our CM at the time, Narendra Modi, encouraged this project. At that time, we invited more than 300 tourists from all over the world and India to explore elections in Gujarat. This project was a huge success. After that, in 2014, we introduced this again at the Lok Sabha elections pan India. That was again a huge success and we attracted more than 2,000 tourists from around the world."



Manish Sharma
Chairman, Akshar Travels, based in
Ahmedabad & Chairman, Tourism
Development Society Gujarat

He thought of this concept to showcase the world's biggest democratic nation. "People choose their political leaders by vote. For other countries this is a totally new

concept. And they want to know how the system works up close and how people choose their political leaders," he adds.

His agency organises participation in rallies and in sabhas, as well as one-on-one meetings with the political leaders. Apart from that, he also includes day trips to the leaders' hometown as well as heritage spots in that city into the tour package. "Foreign travellers are very interested in this. We receive a lot of tourists from the US, UK, Japan, France, Germany, Africa, Middle East. This time we also invited South Koreans. This specially appeals to those in whose home country there is no democracy," he adds. Akshar Travels is now busy with the 2024 Parliamentary Elections. Election tourism




is not only a popular attraction for international tourists, but also offers a valuable opportunity for Indian citizens, traveling across the country to attend election speeches, witness their leaders in action, and sometimes even meet them in person which provides a firsthand look at the political landscape. This can help individuals make informed choices when selecting their representatives. Recognising the

growing interest in election-related travel, Akshar Travels offers a variety of tourist packages to make the experience more convenient.

He plans to attract foreign tourists through the Indian embassies and consulates across the world and various international tourism boards, and international trade associations. Packages vary from 4, 5, 6 nights, along with most

prominent places of tourism and election scenarios. Sharma has also created a special package for Varanasi - Modi's constituency –

 **We receive a lot of tourists from the US, UK, Japan, France, Germany, Africa, Middle East. This time we also invited South Koreans**

that includes religious tourism, and showcasing Varanasi to international tourists, who are showing huge interest in it. 🇮🇳

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Shaping the future of global tourism

PATA Annual Summit 2024, organised recently by the Macao Government Tourism Office and SJM Resorts, S.A., in Macao, put the spotlight on global tourism landscape. The summit served as a beacon for international thought leaders, industry pioneers, and senior decision-makers invested in shaping the trajectory of tourism across the Asia Pacific region.



Stargazing in Madhya Pradesh

Madhya Pradesh is promoting Astronomy Tourism. Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture Department, Madhya Pradesh & Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, highlights the new and innovative stargazing activity at five tourist places in the state that are appealing to both domestic and international tourists.



Hazel Jain

Tell us about the stargazing activity that Madhya Pradesh is promoting.

Stargazing project is being implemented in tourist places to promote Astronomy Tourism in Madhya Pradesh. Under this project of tourism board, employment opportunities are being created mainly by providing skill training to the youth in the field of Astronomy Tourism. The state has been experimental in terms of offering vivid travel experiences and this project has been started on the similar lines. The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board paves way for the visitors to embark on a thrilling stargazing adventure at five tourist places Pachmarhi, Mandu, Orchha, Khajuraho and Madhai. The idea came in to offer the visitors a matchless experience of unveiling the universe and enjoying the magic of stargazing at MP's extraordinary destinations.



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture Department, Madhya Pradesh & MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

Does it have many takers in India? Is it more popular with international tourists?

Stargazing tourism in destinations of Madhya Pradesh is a fresh and promising initiative and the awareness is likely to be higher among domestic tourists than foreigners. Madhya Pradesh has great potential for stargazing tourism due to multiple factors,

including minimal light pollution and the rich astronomical heritage. Many areas, especially outside major cities offer pristine night skies perfect for stargazing. Apart from this, Madhya Pradesh is home to ancient observatories like the one at Ujjain, showcasing

Under this project, employment opportunities are being created mainly by providing skill training to the youth in the field of Astronomy Tourism

ing India's long history with astronomy. Madhya Pradesh offers some of the best stargazing experiences during festivals, including Kuno forest retreat, Chanderi

Festival and Gandhisagar Forest retreat. Here you can find a spot away from the crowds and enjoy the stunning views of star-filled sky. The board has been working into proper promotion and development of infrastructure like stargazing camps and workshops. Madhya Pradesh is an outstanding Astro Tourism and stargazing destination for both domestic and foreign tourists interested in a unique travel experience.

Tell us about the homestay owners you are partnering with and training them.

The stargazing project is not limited to homestays only; rather it is a wide-reaching initiative with a motive to promote night tourism activities in Madhya Pradesh. Under stargazing project, training of 105 days is provided in five phases, which includes 30-day classroom training, 60-day on-job training, three refresher trainings of five days each. Madhya Pradesh



Tourism Board works in holistically developing its destinations as multi-specialty tourist destinations. With the training programme, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board kickstarts an astronomical adventure at the majestic destinations from Ranchha

and Dobha villages near Tala Gate at Bandhavgarh to Chedka and Dhaba at Madhai, as well as Khajuraho. The state welcomes its visitors to experience a cosmic journey where every star has a tale and every constellation has a series.



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Day	Ports	Arrive	Depart
Friday	Abu Dhabi UAE		19:00
Saturday	Doha Qatar	08:00	17:00
Sunday	Bahrain	08:30	17:00
Monday	Dubai UAE	14:00	

* Tendering weather permitting.

2024 Sailing dates: November 15, 22 | December 13, 20, 27

2025 Sailing dates: January 03 | February 21, 28

Desert Days

4-night inclusive cruise onboard Celestyal Journey

Day	Ports	Arrive	Depart
Monday	Dubai UAE		19:00
Tuesday	Dubai UAE		19:00#
Wednesday	Khasab* Oman	08:00	18:00
Thursday	Sir Bani Yas Island* UAE	13:00	20:00
Friday	Abu Dhabi UAE	08:00	

* Tendering weather permitting. #10 Dec 2024 departs Dubai at 22:00.

2024 Sailing dates: November 11, 18 | December 9, 16, 23, 30

2025 Sailing dates: January 06 | February 17, 24 | March 03

Desert Days

7-night inclusive cruise from Doha onboard Celestyal Journey

Day	Ports	Arrive	Depart
Saturday	Doha Qatar		17:00#
Sunday	Bahrain	08:30^	17:00
Monday	Dubai UAE	14:00	
Tuesday	Dubai UAE		19:00
Wednesday	Khasab* Oman	08:00	18:00
Thursday	Sir Bani Yas Island* UAE	13:00	20:00
Friday	Abu Dhabi UAE	08:00	19:00
Saturday	Doha Qatar	08:00	

* Tendering weather permitting. #November 09, 2024 departs 21:00.

^ 10 Nov 2024 & 16 Feb 2025 arrive Bahrain at 11:30.

3/4 night cruises can also start in Dubai or Abu Dhabi.

2024 Sailing dates: November #09, 16 | December 14, 21, 28

2025 Sailing dates: January 04 | February 15, 22 | March 01 | November 15, 22, 29 | December 06, 13, 20, 27



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Focus on tier III & IV cities

The Network of Indian MICE Agents is concentrating on expanding its outreach across India and trying to enrol more members from tier III, and IV cities, according to Gajesh Girdhar, Founder & National Coordinator, NIMA.



Surbhi Sharma

With Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE) industry in India touching new heights every day, **Gajesh Girdhar**, Founder & National Coordinator, Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA), says, “NIMA is concentrating more on expanding its outreach across India and trying to get more members from tier III, and IV cities. We always look for applications filed from these cities, as we believe they are the end users who will give business to consolidators. Hence, they should come



We always look for applications filed from these (tier II & III) cities, as we believe they are the end users who will give business to consolidators



Gajesh Girdhar
 Founder & National Coordinator
 Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA)

forward. To push these cities towards growth and to reach out to more members, we are tapping the far Northeast, the extreme South, and the extreme North of the country.”

Sharing his experience, Girdhar said that corporates are looking for new destinations for their incentive and business conferences and are approaching agents in tier II, III and IV cities. He said the government is positive about creating the required infrastructure to boost tourism, which will benefit

the agents sitting in remote areas to generate business.

Talking about the steps taken by the association recently, Girdhar said, “In the past month, we focused more on the growth of our membership and added 45



Govt is positive about creating the required infrastructure to boost tourism, which will benefit the agents sitting in remote areas

NIMA and the Moscow City Tourism Committee recently met at Leela Palace in New Delhi to discuss some pilot projects. The meeting was fruitful, as it was articulated that the association will launch a few pilot projects in the coming months the details of which are still awaited.

He mentioned that after successfully conducting a training session in OTM, and another one in VLTM, NIMA is convinced to emphasise more on training in the upcoming VLTM. NIMA aims to give education and training to tourism students pursuing their final year.

“We also invite students from different universities to come and attend the seminars, so that they can understand what exactly MICE is,” he said.

Established in 2014, NIMA is the only not-for-profit network dedicated to the benefit of MICE operators in India. The association plans its annual flagship event MICE Forum soon after the Lok Sabha elections results are announced. 🐦

KSA eases entry of Indians with 96-hr visa

► Contd. from page 5

Tan said that Singapore keeps updating its offerings and striving to make the destination more sustainable, whether it is upgradation of Changi Airport or various other features. Singapore attracts more visitors from India and across the world with all its international travel trade exhibitions, he added.

At the session, Aldabbagh highlighted that they have simplified the process to enter the Kingdom. The new visa, especially 96-hour visa, which is a stopover visa, could be obtained by Indians if one has a valid US, UK or Schengen visa, to get access to the Kingdom. It was an interesting session as the audience was able to learn a lot more about Saudi Arabia from visa rules to the weather patterns, cuisine, and different cultures.

According to the latest FINN Partners report on future of travel under the theme ‘Impulse and affluence: Understanding spending trends among India’s young globetrotters’ it was revealed that 42 per cent

of young Indians are making their travel decisions for today instead of dreaming about making their outbound travel options for someday. It is also a known fact that the percentage of outbound travellers from India is not yet at its full strength. A few months ago, Booking.com and



Singapore attracts more visitors from India and across the world with all its international travel trade exhibitions

McKensy stated that only 1 per cent of Indians have been travelling overseas. Dubai took the first leap in attracting Indians with all its grandeur whilst Singapore and Thailand enjoy a great deal of visitors from India due to their proximity. 🐦

2.5 mn people plan to visit Dubai in 2024

► Contd. from page 7

global campaign in India. They are getting Shah Rukh Khan and Ranveer Singh for targeting Indians,” he said, adding that, “You need to be focused as to which market you want and who is your partner. It must be planned in detail. One needs clear policy in India, as between North and South, there is a 2.5-hour flight and one can see difference in language, behaviours, travelling evolutions, travelling needs and what they want to do. One product will not sell in India. There needs to be a regional strategy.”

Travelling abroad cheaper?

Singh claimed that domestic travelling in India is much more expensive than travelling outside India. “India issues a million passports a month, and if you look at the passports to be issued in the next 5 years, imagine the size of the market. All these are first time travellers, and they go to countries where they are closely associated with. The Indian diaspora in GCC is huge, and

hence the first trip is either Dubai or Thailand,” he mentioned.

MICE will be big

Speaking on MICE in India, Singh said, “If the last 4 months are any



You need to be focused as to which market you want and who is your partner. It must be planned in detail. One needs clear policy in India

kind of evidence, we will grow in the MICE segment in India. It is the segment to look at because here the average spend is far higher because it is corporate spend. They are budgeting for this spend based on GDP growth and their own company growth.” 🐦



records 15% more attendees

The Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India, launched its ‘Cool Summers of India’ campaign at ATM 2024. The four-day event set a new record with more than 46,000 attendees.



The 31st edition of Arabian Travel Market in Dubai saw in attendance over 46,000 industry professionals from over 160 countries – including 33,500 visitors. It was a 15 per cent year-on-year increase in attendees compared to the last year’s edition.

The Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India, participated in the event with a delegation of more than 55 participants, including states, tour operators, luxury hotels, wellness resorts, and the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC), tour operators, hotels and airlines. The Incredible India pavilion was inaugurated by **Satish Kumar Sivan**, Consul General of India to Dubai. The focus for India was to showcase itself as a 365-day destination and promote ‘Coolcations’ by highlighting cooler destinations in the country for summer. MOT also

India's focus was to showcase itself as a 365-day destination and promote ‘Coolcations’ by highlighting cooler destinations in the country for summer

launched the ‘Cool Summers of India’ campaign. The campaign seeks to promote India as a holistic destination throughout the year.

The theme for ATM 2024 was ‘Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship’. Over 2,600 exhibitors gathered at Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC) to explore the drivers behind industry growth and identify future opportunities within the global tourism sector.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: “My colleagues and I are delighted that so many industry professionals from around the world were able to join us in Dubai to explore how innovation and entrepreneurship are shaping a more efficient, profitable and sustainable tourism sector for future generations. We

are thrilled to have set a new show record, underscoring our position as the travel and tourism exhibition of choice as we continue to drive global growth within the industry.”

Experience Abu Dhabi secured the Best Stand Design Award (over

150m²). An independent panel of judges praised the tourism authority’s exhibition space for its flowing design, and innovative use of greenery. Other Best Stand Winners included AlUla, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, and ExploreTECH.



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Oz incentivising Indian corporates

Australia stands ready to captivate and welcome corporates with its distinctive charm and unparalleled offerings. The island nation offers a perfect blend of incentives, accessibility, accommodation, experiences, and streamlined visa processes to attract Indian corporates, says Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager - India and the Middle East, Tourism Australia.

Janice Alysius

The Indian economy, currently the fastest-growing economy globally, is projected to become the third largest in the world within a few years. Consequently, corporates are expected to incentivise their employees, dealers, and stakeholders with international trips as part of their reward programmes. To capitalise on this potential, destinations around the world are targeting Indian corporates by offering them new and attractive offerings.



Nishant Kashikar
Country Manager - India and the Middle East, Tourism Australia

Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager - India and the Middle East, Tourism Australia, sheds light on the burgeoning popularity of Australia as a destination for MICE visits and outlines key reasons driving this surge in corporate interest. He says that Tourism Australia and Business Events Australia are offering a significant incentive for corporates through the Bid Fund Program. "When corporates engage with us during the bidding process and bring groups of nearly 700 or more, contributing over three million dollars to the Australian economy, they are eligible to apply for

Tourism Australia and Business Events Australia are offering a significant incentive for corporates through the Bid Fund Program

the Business Event Bid Fund," he says. He added that the initiative serves as a compelling incentive



for corporates to choose Australia for their events.

He says the accessibility to Australia has significantly improved, facilitating smoother travel for corporate attendees. "In 2019, we had eight flights per week between India and Australia; now, we have almost 28 flights per week, with Qantas and Singapore Airlines returning to almost 100 per cent of their pre-COVID capacity," he adds. Increase in supply of accommodation options and experiences in Australia is also a factor for Indian corporates

to choose Australia. "Recently, over 200 new hotels have opened, providing almost 20,000 new rooms for corporate travellers. So, that is another reason why corporates should consider Australia," he says.

Australia's appeal extends beyond conventional conference halls, offering a plethora of unique experiences and iconic venues. From hosting events at legendary sites like the Melbourne Cricket Ground or the Sydney Opera House to engaging in adventurous activities like climbing the Sydney Harbour

Nowadays, accessibility to Australia has significantly improved, facilitating smoother travel for corporate attendees

Bridge or surfing lessons, Australia promises to be an ideal destination

for corporate gatherings. Moreover, one of the most significant advantages Australia offers is its streamlined visa process. Emphasising on the efficiency and convenience of obtaining an Australian business visa, Kashikar says that the process to obtain the visa is 100 per cent online, with no biometrics or personal interviews required. "This hassle-free approach, coupled with swift turnaround times, eliminates bureaucratic hurdles and ensures a seamless experience for corporate travellers," he adds.

Flight-hotel package for Cyprus



Girisons Airways India, led by Vivek Jain, the Direct Selling Agent of Cyprus Airways, along with Cyprus Airways, has announced a flight-hotel package for Indian travellers, who can now visit Cyprus on their European holidays. This package includes return flight from Rome/ Milan/ Zurich/ Paris/ Brussels to Larnaca (Cyprus) plus 3-night hotel stay on all-inclusive basis

Merlin ties up with Air India



Air India and Merlin Entertainments have entered into a global partnership for Air India's Flying Returns (FR) loyalty programme. Effective 8 May 2024, Flying Returns members have been earning Reward Points on buying tickets to Merlin Entertainments' Madame Tussauds across nine locations around the world

Soft skills underrated in travel biz?

▶ Contd. from page 5



Vikram Singh
Vice President & Head Outbound
Tibro

“To excel in a career in travel and tourism, essential skills include exceptional customer service, effective communication, cultural awareness, sales and marketing acumen, time management, attention to detail, problem-solving abilities, geographical knowledge, proficiency with technology, adaptability to change, interpersonal skills for building relationships, and leadership qualities for managerial roles.”



Mahendra Vakharia
EC Member, OTOAI &
MD, Pathfinders Holidays

“There are lots of skills needed to survive in this competitive industry. But the first one is patience and tonnes of it! One also needs agility in thinking to be able to react and act in emergency situations. One also needs an awareness of the constant changing geopolitical situation of the world. Use of technology, energy to work long hours, and ability to put oneself in the customer's position and offer services accordingly is also important.”



Anshu Tejuja
Managing Director
Ashoka Dream Holidays

“Exceptional communication skills are crucial for interacting with clients and colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Secondly, strong organisational abilities help manage itineraries, bookings, and logistics efficiently. Thirdly, cultural awareness and sensitivity are vital for providing enriching experiences to travellers. Lastly, a passion for travel ensures that you deliver memorable and personalised experiences to the customer.”



Jay Kantawala
Founder, WYO Travel &
Chairman, Western Region, TAFI

“The travel industry has gone through several changes in past 25-30 years, from manual booking systems to complete automation. Information to travellers and travel companies is available at the click of a mouse, some genuine and some not so genuine. Most important skills to be successful in travel and tourism is Adapt to changes, keep a watchful eye on industry trends, don't be afraid to think out of the box.”



Rikant Pittie
Co-Founder
EaseMyTrip

“My suggestion for budding travel entrepreneurs would be to 'think local' as significant value lies in showcasing local experiences, cuisines, arts, and crafts. As the experiential travel trend is catching up globally, there is no place better than Bharat to offer localised experiences, promoting diverse culture and heritage. Next, they should focus on sustainability. Additionally, it's time for startups to embrace technology.”



Neil Patil
Founder, CTO &
COO, Veena World

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

Compiled by Hazel Jain



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Time to streamline medical tourism

Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore has forged strong partnerships with hospitals, doctors and travel agents to attract more medical tourists and make the process seamless. Nischal Ayanna, Director of Sales and Marketing, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore, shares details and the challenges hotels face in this sector.

We have had the privilege of hosting medical tourists from various countries across the globe. Some of the prominent countries from which our medical tourists have originated include the United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Middle Eastern countries, and neighbouring Southeast Asian nations. The duration of stay for medical tourists varies depending on the nature of their medical procedures and recovery periods. On an average, our medical tourists stay with us for a period ranging from two weeks to several months, ensuring their comfort and well-being during their entire treatment journey.

Working with hospitals
We have established strong partnerships with esteemed hospitals like Manipal hospitals, renowned doctors, and trusted travel agents to facilitate seamless experiences for our medical guests. These collaborations allow us to provide comprehensive medical tourism

packages that encompass accommodation, specialised transportation services, and access to world-class healthcare facilities. By working closely with hospitals and

Govt needs to develop clear norms that ensure quality and safety standards are met by healthcare providers, hotels, and travel agents

doctors, we ensure effective communication, exchange of medical records, and coordination of care for our guests. Our partnerships with travel agents further enhance the convenience of medical tourists, as they assist in managing



travel logistics and coordinating appointments, hotel stays, and sightseeing opportunities for the medical tourists and their accompanying family members.

Challenges in attracting more medical tourists
While hotels play a crucial role in catering to medical tourists, there are several challenges that we face in attracting and accommodating this specialised segment:

a) This is an unstructured segment: There is no proper source of booking or channel of reservation. This business

comes in mainly via free-lance agents, referrals and direct inquiries.

b) Establishing trust: Building trust among medical tourists by ensuring transparency, reliability, and consistency in service delivery and quality standards.

c) Managing expectations: Understanding and meeting the expectations of medical tourists, who often have specific requirements and high expectations regarding comfort, safety, and privacy.

Government's role
The government needs to iron out to make this a more consolidated segment. To make medical tourism a more consolidated segment, we believe the government should focus on the following aspects:

a) Standardised regulations: Developing clear guidelines and regulations that ensure quality and safety standards are met by healthcare providers, hotels, and travel agents involved in medical tourism.

b) Infrastructure development: Continuously investing in healthcare infrastructure and facilities to uphold international standards and attract more medical tourists.

c) Streamlined processes: Implementing streamlined processes for medical visa applications, insurance coverage, and cross-border healthcare collaborations to

facilitate the seamless flow of medical tourists.

d) Promotion and marketing: Collaborating with industry stakeholders to actively promote medical tourism through targeted marketing campaigns, participation in international conferences, and engagement with potential medical tourists and travel agents.



Nischal Ayanna
Director, Sales and Marketing
Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore

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

40 Indian agents at Travel Indaba

South African Tourism hosted over 40 travel trade partners from India at Africa's Travel Indaba 2024, organised from 14-16 May at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre. The event served as a platform for tourism professionals from around the world to network and showcase their products & services.





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India puts strong front at ATM 2024

Arabian Travel Market 2024, Dubai, saw in attendance more than 46,000 industry professionals from over 160 countries, registering a 15% YoY increase in attendees compared to the previous edition. The event, showcasing interesting products and services from travel, tourism, hotel and technology sectors, also saw signing of important business deals.



Airlines prioritise privacy with Digi ID

► Contd. from page 5

piloted for a smoother and faster boarding experience. This could eliminate the need for physical boarding passes in the future.

Other examples include predictive maintenance where airlines are using sensors and data analytics to monitor aircraft health and predict potential maintenance issues. This proactive approach can prevent delays and ensure safer flights.

Then, of course, there is robotic baggage handling at airports that are increasingly deploying robotic systems to automate baggage handling, which can improve efficiency and reduce the risk of lost luggage. "Widespread adoption may still be a bit far, but we will witness these technologies at work sooner than later," Ghare adds.

Amr Ali, Country Manager, Egyptair Airlines, also agrees that the aviation industry as a whole is experiencing new trends and procedures every day to enhance the travelling experience of customers. "Now, technology is playing a central role in industry. One can make all sorts of reservations and payments while sitting at home. Even airports have self-kiosks, which provide 'self-yourself service' to the travellers adding convenience in the boarding process, and in handling luggage. After pandemic, we aim to minimise human intervention in the whole procedure. Also, we try to use the most modern aircraft like Airbus A320neo with the latest facilities. Moreover, we provide inflight Wi-Fi services to our customers, which is extremely important for business travellers. Overall, the industry has been developing at an equal pace, along with the technological developments," he adds.

Privacy must be respected

Since airlines operate globally, airlines must comply with various privacy laws and regulations across



Sanjay Ghare
CEO
Vervotech

Intent to experiment is at an all-time high. Some carriers are exploring facial recognition for boarding, while others are trailing digital ID wallets

jurisdictions. IATA's One ID standards put privacy as the highest priority and set out the following principles to protect privacy:

- ❖ Passengers own and control their data. They provide informed consent to share their digital identity data that is required to travel.
- ❖ Airlines and airports should request only the minimum data required
- ❖ Passengers can opt in to share in advance digital identity information and/or have a biometric-enabled end-to-end digital experience
- ❖ Passengers must have the ability to opt out at any stage of any One ID biometric processing and can choose manual processing



François Blanc
MD
Traveler ID, Nexwave, Amadeus

It provides the means to automate travellers' identification and document verification, at any travel checkpoint

An exciting era for air travel

Speaking about how SITA leads the world in passenger self-service solutions at the airport, **David Lavorel**, CEO, SITA, says, "By combining our solutions and expertise we will take the passenger journey, and the operations around it, to a dimension of efficiency never seen before. Airports and airlines will get the most innovative passenger handling solutions available. Passengers all over the world can look forward to a new horizon in smooth, seamless, and contactless travel. We are on a powerful transformation path. This acquisition fits perfectly with our growth strategy. We wanted to take a bold step towards transforming the future of travel, and we have done it."

Meanwhile, International Air Transport Association (IATA) also sees an appetite for Digital IDs. Accord-



Suresh Khadakhbavi
CEO
DigiYatra Foundation

DigiYatra has revolutionised the air travel experience in India. It has seen impressive adoption and expansion over the last year



Amr Ali
Country Manager
Egyptair Airlines

Now, technology is playing a central role in industry. One can make all sorts of reservations and payments while sitting at home

ing to a survey it had conducted in 2023, travellers prioritise speed and convenience and are increasingly embracing biometrics and off-airport processes to deliver it.

IATA also successfully tested the first fully integrated digital identity travel experience, from shopping for flights to arrival, on a journey from London Heathrow (LHR) to Rome Fiumicino (FCO) with British Airways.

Nick Careen, Senior Vice President for Operations, Safety and Security, IATA, says, "Passengers have made it clear: They want to spend less time booking and move through the airport faster. And they are increasingly willing to use biometric data to complete more pre-departure tasks off airport to achieve this. Convenience and speed are the top priority for passengers and we think digital ID and biometric technology can be the key enablers."

India's DigiYatra a success

Indian airlines that have partnered with DigiYatra for enabling digital ID travel experience include Air India, SpiceJet, IndiGo, and Vistara. **Sanjay Gupta**, CEO, AISATS, says, "While full-scale adoption is still some time away, various Indian airlines along with aviation authorities, seem keen on implementing digital ID systems to enhance security, reduce hassles, and provide a modern, seamless experience for air travellers. This is despite challenges such as developing a standardised system, addressing

another 14 airports next month. Our focus is now expanding to international travel, starting with prototype testing on E-passport based enrollment, expected next month."

Agnostic technology

Internationally, Travel Ready by Traveler ID is an ambitious plan of Amadeus to simplify flying experience. It allows travel companies to automate and digitize passport verification processes at check-in. **François Blanc**, MD, Traveler ID, Nexwave, Amadeus, explains, "Amadeus Travel Ready currently verifies digitised documents such as passports, visas, and other documents before travellers reach the airport. It provides the means to automate travellers' identification and document verification, at any checkpoint. Air Europa announced using the solution to verify passports for its international travellers. In the coming months, Amadeus will provide the possibility to implement additional functionalities, facilitating the biometric ID processes at the airport via travel companies' mobile apps."



David Lavorel
CEO
SITA

Passengers all over the world can look forward to a new horizon in smooth, seamless, and contactless travel

privacy concerns, and creating the required infrastructure across all passenger touchpoints at airports."

To this, **Suresh Khadakhbavi**, CEO of DigiYatra Foundation, adds, "Digi Yatra has revolutionised the air travel experience in India. It has seen impressive adoption and expansion over the last year, with more than 20 million users. Currently rolled out in 14 airports, DigiYatra is set to be introduced in



Nick Careen
Senior Vice President for Operations
Safety and Security, IATA

Convenience and speed are the top priority for passengers and we think digital ID and biometric technology can be the key enablers

Amadeus is agnostic in the roll-out of this technology, which will work whatever local airport biometric provides. For example, it has deployed technology with a partner at Narita Airport where passengers can check-in at one of several biometric kiosks where their facial image is captured and verified against their passport. Once this is done, passengers do not need to show any physical documents from bag drop till security and boarding.



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

EVENT TALK

Published from : India Middle East

JUNE 2024

Date	Event	Time
2-4	Global Travel Marketplace West 2024	9:00 am
4-6	Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2024	9:00 am
5-7	CAPA India Aviation Summit 2024	9:00 am
10-13	Annual International Conference on Tourism 2024	9:00 am
12-13	Aviation India Summit & Exhibition 2024	9:00 am
13	Mauritius Tourism Webinar	11:30 am
13-14	Sustainable Tourism Africa Summit 2024	9:00 am
13-16	Hong Kong International Travel Expo 2024	10:00 am
14-16	Beijing International Tourism Expo 2024	9:00 am
25-27	Africa Travel and Investment Summit 2024	9:00 am
27-29	Gujarat Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am

JULY 2024

1-4	ILTM Asia Pacific 2024	9:00 am
6-7	10 th Travel MICE & Corporate Show	10:00 am
11-14	Travel and Leisure Expo 2024	9:00 am
12-14	Travel & Tourism Fair-Kolkata 2024	2:00 pm
17-19	Gujarat Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am
26-28	IITM - India International Travel Mart Bangalore 2024	11:00 am

Goa's gastronomy haven

Sunset Cove of Mandrem Beach Resort, a distinguished member of Radisson Individuals Retreats, nestled near the enchanting Arambol and Ashwem Beaches, is known for its exceptional cuisine and stunning views among culinary connoisseurs.



Amidst Goa's serene coastline lies Sunset Cove at Mandrem Beach Resort, which promises an unparalleled dining experience for food lovers. This exquisite venue, situated between the beachfront and riverfront, invites food enthusiasts to embark on a unique gastronomic journey, where opulence, creativity, and coastal charm blend seamlessly to create an indelible experience for guests.

Breakfast delights

Sunset Cove is more than just a restaurant; it is an experience. Start your day with a delectable breakfast served until noon. Enjoy a tempting array of fresh fruits, pastries, juices, and gourmet treats designed to excite your palate and nourish your body. Savour your morning coffee or freshly squeezed juice as you bask in the sun, accompanied by multi-cuisine dishes and local delicacies, such as Ross omelette and Feijoado.

Seafood extravaganza

As a coastal sanctuary, Sunset



Cove offers an exquisite selection of seafood dishes, including succulent Goan prawn curry, grilled lobster with garlic butter, crispy calamari, and flavourful fish tikka. These thoughtfully curated dishes celebrate the ocean's bounty with a symphony of flavours.

Vegetarian indulgence

Vegetarians will find a delightful array of options, including paneer tikka masala with naan bread and a fresh Mediterranean salad with seasonal vegetables and tangy feta cheese. Innovative plant-based dishes elevate vegetarian cuisine, ensuring every diner finds

As a coastal sanctuary, Sunset Cove offers an exquisite selection of seafood dishes, including succulent Goan prawn curry and grilled lobster

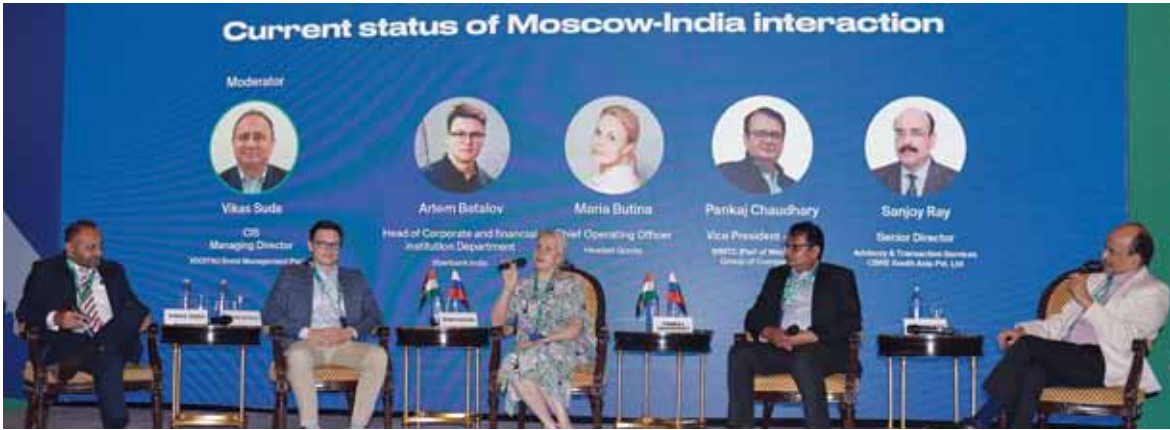
something to savour and cherish. Whether you are a discerning food enthusiast or a traveller seeking to

indulge in the finer pleasures of life, Sunset Cove invites you to embark on a culinary adventure that promises to tantalise your senses and leave a lasting impression. Come, bask in the glory of a Goan sunset, and let Sunset Cove whisk you away on a gastronomic voyage like no other.

The resort offers a plethora of activities such as surfing, kayaking, river cruises, and wellness retreats, ensuring a holistic and enriching stay. The resort also boasts a 1,800 sqft banquet hall and a vast beach lawn with panoramic views of the Arabian Sea.

Moscow woos Indian MICE business

The Moscow City Tourism Committee organised the Shaping MICE Future Conference in Delhi recently to showcase the tourism strength of Moscow. The event brought together more than 100 MICE industry representatives from India, corporate customers, representatives of the travel industry in Moscow, Aeroflot and the Indian branches of Sberbank.





Come & explore Madhya Pradesh

A land where indigenous culture is a living masterpiece!



The Heart of Incredible India will take you on an enthralling journey to unveil the soul of India's indigenous heritage. Home to the largest concentration of indigenous communities in the country, Madhya Pradesh has 24 distinct tribes, each with their own vibrant language, traditional customs and local social structures.

The skilled artisans breathe life into age-old crafts, their nimble fingers weaving tales into textiles, shaping wood into exquisite sculptures, and adorning themselves with fine jewellery. Each piece they create is a testament to their rich history, passed down through generations.

Madhya Pradesh resonates with ancient traditions, where tribes

like the Bhil, Gond, Baiga and Bhariya have thrived for centuries. Pack your bags for an indigenous trail to converse with the Bhil, India's largest tribe, known for their colourful Pithora paintings that narrates stories on walls.

Navigate the indigenous belt while crisscrossing through Mandla, Chhindwara, Balaghat, Shahdol, Dindori, Hoshangabad, Jabalpur,

Betul, Damoh, Sagar, and parts of northern Madhya Pradesh where the Gond tribe dwells. These mountain dwellers are known for creating decorative fabrics with intricate geometric patterns and animal motifs with natural dyes and weaving techniques passed down through generations. Explore the Baiga tribe that resides primarily in the southern region of the state, particularly at Dindori,

Madhya Pradesh resonates with ancient traditions, where tribes like the Bhil, Gond, Baiga and Bhariya have thrived for centuries

Mandla, Jabalpur, Shahdol, revered for their knowledge of the forest and their deep respect for nature's bounty.

Unravel the secrets of the Sahariya tribe in Madhya Pradesh that resides primarily in the north-western districts of Shivpuri, Guna, Gwalior, Morena, Bhind and Sheopur. Learn the herbal remedies from the Sahariya tribes and drown yourself in "Khambaswang", a dance drama of the Korku tribe from Chhindwara, Narmadapuram and Harda dis-

tricts. Inhale the ancestral art of Agaria tribe – transforming black sand and clay into iron using ancient bellows. This tribe particularly resides in Dindori, Balaghat, Mandla, and Sidhi.

Nestled in the mountains of Madhya Pradesh, Jhabua echoes with stories through their ancestral dolls. Crafted by the Bhil and Bhilala tribes, these dolls, known as "Adivasi Gudiya Hastashilp", are more than just playthings. Each stitch and bead carries the weight of tradition, empowering the artisans and keeping their heritage alive. Adorned with intricate cultural hues, these dolls have reflections of a land embellished with artistic flavours. Unveil the synergy of the Korku tribes with nature as they design pieces with brass, beads, and shells.

Walk around to acclimatise with their lives, homes, cultures, religion and marriage traditions. Savour the rhythmic beats of drums and intricate patterns of

indigenous art. Madhya Pradesh awaits – come discover a land that resonates with myriad hues of culture and traditions.



MOVEMENTS

MINOR HOTELS

India

Minor Hotels appoints **PUNEET DHAWAN** as Head of Asia. He will be responsible for the performance of all properties of Minor Hotels in Asia, working in close collaboration with the senior leadership team. Dhawan, a seasoned professional with a 30-year hospitality career spanning Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, brings a wealth of experience to his new role. His most recent role as Senior Vice President of Operations—India & South Asia at Accor saw him lead the group's business development, owner management, hotel operations, and commercial team, driving Accor's growth in the region.



HYATT REGENCY

Chandigarh

Hyatt Regency Chandigarh has appointed **AMIT BHATIA** as the Director of Operations. Bhatia brings over 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry to this key leadership role. A graduate of GGS IP University Delhi with a Bachelor's degree in Hotel Management, Bhatia's started his hospitality journey with Trident Hotel Gurugram in June 2008. Driven by passion and a commitment to excellence, he transitioned to Goa Marriott Resort & SPA in October 2011. During his career, he has worked with many brands, such as JW Marriott Bengaluru, JW Marriott Mussoorie, JW Marriott Jaipur and Leela Palace Udaipur.



ROYAL ORCHID HOTELS

Gurugram

Royal Orchid Hotels promotes **SANDEEP KUMAR RAJPUT** to the position of Vice President – Sales. He will oversee the North, East, Central India, and Nepal regions. Rajput, who has been an integral part of the ROHL family since 2019, has played a pivotal role in spearheading the growth and development of the company's vast territory. Under his adept leadership, Royal Orchid & Regenta hotels have added 30+ hotels in recent years. Rajput's strategic initiatives have not only driven business growth but also solidified the group's standing as a prominent player in the hospitality industry.



SPREE HOSPITALITY

New Delhi

Spree Hospitality, a subsidiary of EaseMyTrip, elevates **SAGAR KHURANA** from the position of Executive Vice President to the role of Chief Operating Officer. Khurana's promotion underscores his invaluable contribution to the company's success and growth trajectory. During his over 10 years of career, he has demonstrated exceptional leadership, overseeing business activities, sales, and operations with a strategic and result-driven approach. His comprehensive understanding of the industry has positioned him as a valuable leader in the hospitality and food industry.



CROWNE PLAZA NEW DELHI MAYUR VIHAR AND HOLIDAY INN KATRA

New Delhi

SOMALI BAJPAI has been appointed as the Cluster Marketing Manager for Crowne Plaza New Delhi Mayur Vihar and Holiday Inn Katra, bringing a strategic, dynamic, and creative approach to enhance the brand presence and market penetration for both the hotels. With a robust background at leading PR agencies, she brings a profound understanding of media dynamics and consumer behaviour.



HYATT CENTRIC BALLYGUNGE KOLKATA

Kolkata

GLEN DSOUZA has joined Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata as the General Manager. With more than 18 years of experience in the hospitality and service industry, Dsouza brings a wealth of expertise in business administration, budgeting, revenue forecasting, and adept relationship management. He completed his Hospitality Management studies with the American Hotel and Lodging Association and started his hospitality journey with Marriott International. He has worked with Fairfield by Marriott Goa Anjuna, Marriott Resort & Spa Goa and Courtyard by Marriott, Ahmedabad.



RAMADA BY WYNDHAM GANDHIDHAM SHINAY

Gandhidham

Ramada by Wyndham Gandhidham Shinay appoints **JITENDRA SINGH DADYAL** as the General Manager. In his new role, Dadyal will be responsible for overseeing the hotel's staff and operations, sales, marketing, budget and P&L. "Jitendra is a talented and experienced hospitality professional and will play a key role in ensuring that the Ramada by Wyndham Gandhidham Shinay continues providing guests with the same high-quality service and exceptional value that it has become known for in the Gandhidham community," said Navin Hadia, owner of Ramada by Wyndham Gandhidham Shinay (A Unit of BDH Hotel and Resort).



NOVOTEL MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mumbai

Novotel Mumbai International Airport appoints **RACHITA SOOD** as the General Manager. Sood is an accomplished hospitality veteran with over 20 years of experience, dealing in rooms, guest experience, spa operations, revenues and controls, implementation and maintenance of operational systems and procedures. In her new role, she will spearhead overall development of hotel operations vertical and oversee planning and implementation of strategies, along with guest relations. Her promotion underscores her dedication and capability to navigate diverse challenges within the hospitality industry.



CLARKS EXOTICA CONVENTION RESORT AND SPA

Bengaluru

Clarks Exotica Convention Resort and Spa promotes **NILISHA GHULIANI** to the position of Vice President. The promotion is a testament to her exceptional contributions to the resort's success and her dedication to enhancing the guest experience and organisational culture. Ghuliani has 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry. She has been an integral part of the Clarks team for the past 13 years. Before joining Clarks, she gained valuable experience at prestigious establishments such as Taj, Pride Hotels, Zuri, Royal Orchid, and Anandas in the Himalayas.



TOURISM NEW ZEALAND

India

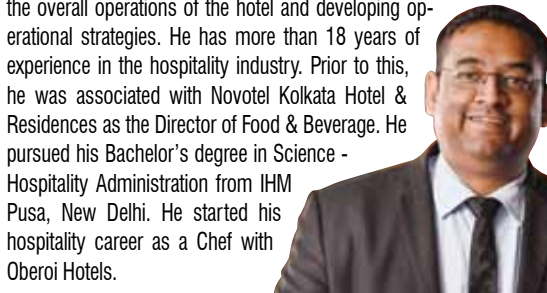
Tourism New Zealand has appointed **RATUL GHOSH** as the Trade Marketing Manager for India. With over a decade of diverse experience spanning e-commerce, debt syndication, trade & investment, and tourism, Ghosh brings in a wealth of expertise in customer-facing roles, such as Sales, Marketing, and Strategy. His professional journey includes notable contributions to fostering international relationships and promoting tourism initiatives. During his tenure with the Government of Western Australia, he played a pivotal role in maintaining Sister-State relationships with Andhra Pradesh.



NOVOTEL MUMBAI JUHU BEACH

Mumbai

Novotel Mumbai Juhu Beach has appointed **NEELABH SAHAY** as the Director of Operations. In his new role, Sahay will be overseeing the overall operations of the hotel and developing operational strategies. He has more than 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Prior to this, he was associated with Novotel Kolkata Hotel & Residences as the Director of Food & Beverage. He pursued his Bachelor's degree in Science - Hospitality Administration from IHM Pusa, New Delhi. He started his hospitality career as a Chef with Oberoi Hotels.



THE WESTIN GURGAON NEW DELHI AND THE WESTIN SOHNA RESORT AND SPA

New Delhi

PRERNA DAGA has been promoted to the position of Multi Property Director of Marketing and Communications for The Westin Gurgaon New Delhi and The Westin Sohna Resort and Spa. She has over 19-year experience in hospitality, marketing communications, and public relations. Having joined Marriott International in a leadership capacity, and being a part of the Westin family for 5 years, she has consistently demonstrated her commitment to excellence.



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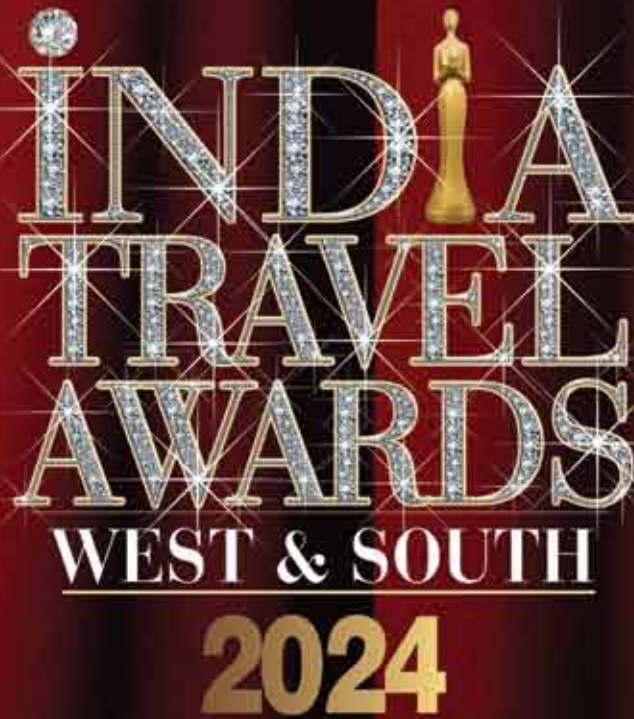
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Aiming high:100k Indians in '24

South Africa's tourism industry is rebounding with significant support from India. In 2023, 79,774 Indian tourists visited the rainbow nation, nearing pre-COVID levels. Their goal is to attract 100,000 Indian tourists in 2024.

Janice Alyosius

South Africa's tourism industry is in the midst of a robust recovery, and much of its success can be attributed to international partnerships, particularly with India. In 2023, South African Tourism witnessed 79,774 Indians visiting the country, which was almost 82 per cent of the pre-COVID numbers of 95,000. They are now aiming to attract 1 lakh Indian visitors in 2024. A strategic plan for this was highlighted by key speakers at Africa's Travel Indaba 2024 held recently. The trade show, held at the Inkosi Albert Luthuli Convention Centre (ICC), Durban, brought together key delegates from around the world, ready to do business with Africa. It emphasised on the pivotal role of Indian travellers and the concerted efforts being made to enhance their experience.

Expressing gratitude towards India at the event, **Patricia de Lille**, Minister of Tourism, South Africa, said, "I want to use this opportunity to thank India for their support. It has assisted us, allowing us to say that we have at least equalled or slightly exceeded our 2019 figures. This milestone is significant, considering the setbacks faced during the COVID-19 pandemic."



Patricia de Lille
Minister of Tourism
South Africa



Fish Mahlalela
Deputy Minister of Tourism
South Africa



Neliswa Nkani
Hub Head - Middle East, India &
South-East Asia, South African Tourism

de Lille further highlighted the importance of understanding the preferences of Indian tourists to curate better tourism packages.

Addressing logistical challenges, particularly concerning visa policies and air connectivity, de Lille acknowledged the complexities involved. "As you know, visas are not under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Tourism but the Minister of Home Affairs. However, we have escalated the visa waiver for up to 90 days for both China and India to the President. The President, Cyril Ramaphosa has directed the three ministers—the Minister of Tourism, the Minister of Home Affairs, and the Minis-

ter of State Security—to come together and provide a joint report," she said.

The air travel situation, particularly the Johannesburg to Mumbai route, remains a concern. "With India, we have engaged with South African Airways, but they have not fully recovered since COVID-19. After the pandemic, they went into business rescue, and a private partner took a 51 per cent share, allowing some routes to return, but not all. The Johannesburg to Mumbai route has not yet resumed," de Lille explained, adding that efforts are on to streamline air access, including discussions with Air India.

Fish Mahlalela, Deputy Minister of Tourism, South Africa, provided a broader perspective on the recovery and future targets of South African Tourism. "We made a decision before COVID, but unfortunately we were then hit by the pandemic. In 2019, we decided that we wanted to achieve 21 million arrivals by 2030. However, in 2020, we were struck by COVID-19, which set us back by 10 to 15 years," said Mahlalela, adding that despite the setbacks, there is optimism, with industry

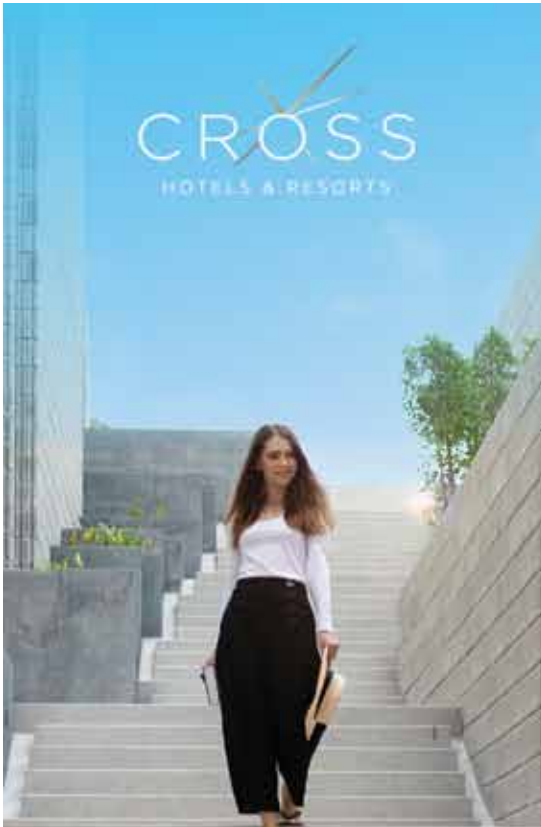
recovery at 96 per cent. He underlined the economic significance of tourism in tackling unemployment. "Tourism is a critical and important sector of our economy because it is the biggest employer. We have challenges with

Africa's Travel Indaba 2024 highlighted role of Indians and the concerted efforts being made to enhance their experience


unemployment in the country, and tourism is a key solution to this problem," he said.

Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head - Middle East, India & South-East Asia, South African Tourism, provided insights into the business travel segment. "We have engaged with over 500 corporations in India. I do not sell to them; I engage with them. My ROI (Return On Investment) is 30 per cent," she said.





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