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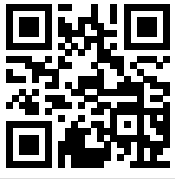
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Change of command at MOT

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, the new Union Minister, Tourism & Culture and Suresh Gopi, Minister of State, Tourism, have taken charge. **TRAVTALK** shares excerpts from exclusive meeting.

Janice Alyosius

After assuming the charge as Union Minister of Tourism & Culture, **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat** was briefed by senior officials of the ministry about the schemes and initiatives. Speaking on the occasion, Shekhawat expressed his gratitude that he has been given the responsibility of globally showcasing India and inviting the world to our country.

"As PM Narendra Modi has emphasised through his various visits and words about our tourism potential, we will work towards enhancing the same, highlighting our various natural and cultural heritage sites from Kashmir to Kanyakumari," said the minister. He added, "Culture Ministry has worked under the leadership of the PM in the last 10 years and a new identity and image of India has been created all over the

world through various levels and various dimensions. I have got the privileged opportunity to take this work forward."

Sharing his views Suresh Gopi said, "I have to take stock of my responsibilities, and the areas which come under my domain, and then plan accordingly. For this, I have to study the ministry and the terrain of the whole country."



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat
Minister of Tourism & Culture, Govt of India



Suresh Gopi
Minister of State for Tourism, Govt of India

'Biz plan for tourism must'

Suman Billa, who has recently returned to the Ministry of Tourism as Additional Secretary, says it is important to onboard states when it comes to planning for tourism growth in the long run.

Nisha Verma

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, said that there is a need to take tourism in the country to the next level. "I think we are poised for great strides because COVID is well behind us, and India has recovered well. Domestic tourism is taking off. There is a lot of outbound also happening and international travel is showing good trend. Looking at it from this context and in a bid to take India to



Suman Billa
Additional Secretary, MOT, GoI

the next level, one of the key things that we need to do is to expand the

hospitality footprint that India has," he shared.

Onboarding states

Billa said, "We need to think of Viksit Bharat 2047 and plan for the next five years in how to create a stronger tourism sector. This means that we will need to get more investments into the tourism space, which also means that essentially the states must be onboarded on to this programme. There are eight or nine states which have a strong

Contd. on page 14 ▶

Weddings returning to India?

High room rates in Indian hotels and growing demand for destination weddings among Indians have sparked a debate over hosting weddings domestically or abroad. Industry experts share views.

"We are working aggressively alongside the government on the latest campaign about doing weddings in India. We already have a document underway on this that we will present to the PM on what is really required in order to achieve the larger goal, as well as ensure that Indians do not travel abroad to get married. Revolutionary fiscal measures will be required to ensure that long-term lending and favourable interest rates are available to this industry. Weddings can be done in India at a much lower cost and with much more ease. Yes, there may be small bottlenecks, but I really don't feel that they are so critical to drive away weddings away from India."



Pradeep Shetty
President, FHRAI

Contd. on page 10 ▶

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New team, new hopes

The election excitement has settled, and the new Tourism Ministers have assumed their roles. With Suman Billa returning as Additional Secretary, the Ministry of Tourism is infused with fresh faces and renewed energy. The industry remains hopeful that the new leadership will introduce positive changes benefiting the travel sector. The ministry is eager to launch new campaigns and initiatives, recognising the extensive work needed at various levels. As the inbound season approaches, it is crucial for Incredible India to enhance its global visibility. Inbound operators are advocating for the appointment of Deputy Director Generals at Indian embassies. Combined with the Prime Minister's efforts to attract global tourists, especially through the Indian diaspora, these measures could significantly boost inbound tourism to India.

Aviation in fast lane

Since the implementation of the 2016 Civil Aviation Policy, India has witnessed a surge in regional connections launched by various domestic airlines under the UDAN scheme. The scheme is in its Version 5.2 and continues to thrive with all low-cost carriers (LCCs) operating on these routes. However, the closures of Kingfisher Airlines and Jet Airways left a void in the full-service segment. Air India attempted to fill this gap, but its efforts were constrained by the ongoing privatisation debate. Currently, with GoFirst out of the picture and SpiceJet facing intermittent financial challenges, IndiGo remains a dominant player in Indian aviation. Air India is also undergoing a significant transformation under the TATA Group, including its merger with Vistara, another premium full-service carrier. Additionally, Akasa Air has emerged as a new player in the LCC sector. As these airlines plan to lease new aircraft and upgrade existing fleets, the luxury aspect of flying is making a comeback, and there is optimism!

India takes lead in aviation

Aviation industry's growth trajectory in India is on the right track, with projections suggesting doubling of the fleet size by FY2030. This accelerated pace of expansion is poised to reshape the aviation landscape, propelled by a rate of growth unmatched in previous decades.



Janice Alyosius

In January 2022, the Indian aviation industry witnessed a historic turning point with the acquisition of Air India by the Tata Group. This landmark event signified not only a strategic shift but also marked the boldest reform since the liberalisation wave of FY2004. Predicted by CAPA Advisory as a critical inflection point, this move has not only stabilised the airline system but also had far-reaching positive impacts, both domestically and internationally.

Kapil Kaul, CEO & Director, CAPA India, shedding light on CAPA's Outlook for Indian Aviation in FY2025 & Beyond, said that the Air India Group, now boasting a fleet of 270 aircraft, exemplifies



Kapil Kaul
CEO & Director
CAPA India

month, IndiGo maintains its position as a key player in the Indian aviation landscape.

India's airline fleet is set to double by FY2030. It took the Indian industry around 90 years from the

Infrastructural revolution

Traditionally, airport infrastructure in India has struggled to keep pace with demand. However, for the first time, airport infrastructure is ahead of demand. With an investment pipeline of US \$11 billion at various stages of implementation, metro airports now have a structural capacity exceeding 600 million passengers per annum.

The National Capital Region (NCR) and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region are witnessing the development of world-class airport infrastructure, with dual airport systems set to handle millions of passengers annually.

Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL) has recently increased its capacity to around 100 million and

Although terminal and runway infrastructures are being developed, greater attention may need to be given to ensuring that there are sufficient parking bays available to support fleet expansion. The productivity of single and dual runway airports needs to be increased to international benchmarks. It is expected that more airports will be privatised and modernised in the next fiscal, with 25 airports earmarked for monetisation. Greenfield airports are also planned in Chennai and Pune.



IndiGo is not behind. With a fleet of 367 aircraft and over 980 on order, IndiGo continues its rapid expansion despite supply chain challenges



the industry's transformative journey. With a record order of 470 aircraft placed last year, accompanied by 370 options, the group's expansion trajectory is nothing short of remarkable. Adding 40 aircraft in the past year alone and expecting delivery of five aircraft monthly in the near future, Air India sets a precedent for growth and ambition, he said.

Meanwhile, IndiGo, India's largest airline, has not lagged behind. With a fleet of 367 aircraft and over 980 on order, IndiGo continues its rapid expansion despite supply chain challenges. Through a combination of lease extensions, securing aircraft on dry/wet lease, and inducting four aircraft per



With a record order of 470 aircraft placed last year, accompanied by 370 options, Air India's expansion trajectory is nothing short of remarkable

time of the first commercial flight to reach a fleet size of 700 aircraft. But the rate of growth is so strong that carriers could add a further 600-700 aircraft in just the next 5-7 years.

is targeting to reach 130-140 million. This will be complemented by the greenfield Noida International Airport, which is likely to open by December 2024, with eventual capacity for 70 million passengers. The Mumbai Metropolitan Region within 12 months from now, will eventually be able to handle around 145 million annual passengers.

Additionally, Adani Airports is significantly expanding capacity at its six non-metro airports ensuring that growth is not limited to major urban centres. Airports Authority of India (AAI) is investing US \$4 billion out of the total US \$11 billion to significantly enhance non-metro capacity.

Irreversible stability

The Indian aviation industry boasts a robust and dynamic airline system, characterised by its size, scale, and strategic intent to become world-class operators. This ambition is exemplified by Air India's significant investment of US \$700 billion in its business plan, reflecting a commitment to excellence and growth.

IndiGo reported record profitability of approximately US \$1 billion in FY2024, with expectations of another exceptional year in FY2025. Despite challenges - such as more than 130 grounded aircraft - the industry has witnessed remarkable growth, with domestic traffic increasing by nearly 13 per cent and international traffic by 22.3 per cent in FY2024.

Additionally, airlines have adopted a rational pricing regime, maintaining it consistently over the last 12-18 months. This strategic approach has resulted in record yields, particularly notable in December 2023.

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Public-private synergy is MoCA's mantra

The Union government is committed to fostering a robust aviation ecosystem in India with a focus on airport expansion and airline development. The number of airports in the country, which has gone up from 74 to 157 in last 10 years, reflects a solid framework and collaborative effort between the government and private sector, says Secretary, MoCA.

Janice Alyosius

The Union government is committed to fostering a robust aviation ecosystem in India with a focus on airport expansion and airline development. Addressing the CAPA India Aviation Summit recently, **Vumlunmang Vualnam**, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA), Government of India. "The new airports, the major airports, and several airports currently under development have demonstrated that the states have now taken upon themselves the responsibility of providing the land. And they have done so. We have major airports under construction even as we speak. So, that is an important building block, and it's now settled."

Highlighting the growth of airports in the country, Vualnam said that the number of airports has doubled in the last 10 years, soaring from

74 to 157. What is notable in this expansion is the underlying framework supporting it, and emphasis on the synergy between the government and the private sector.

Vualnam highlighted the financial mechanism governing airport operations, overseen by the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA). "The finances and the economic regulator that we have, which operates at arm's length from the Ministry of Civil Aviation, provide a robust mechanism that has gained strength. Major airports manage their finances and user fee charges. The entire economic aspect of an airport is overseen by AERA. They have been operating quite transparently and in a consultative manner," he said, adding that, "This creates a solid framework for engagement of stakeholders, and ensures a fair and conducive environment for investment."



Vumlunmang Vualnam
Secretary
Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI

Shifting focus to enhancing connectivity, particularly to tier II and III cities, Vualnam outlined the government's strategy to develop underutilised airstrips. "India is a large country, and connectivity to different parts of it is important. The government has been actively focusing on enhancing connectivity to tier II and III cities. We have reviewed the entire list

of 453 airstrips in this country. We considered how to develop them and identified which ones need priority development within a 100-kilometre radius, and which ones would serve larger populations or more industrial development areas," he said.

Vualnam also applauded Indian carriers for their ambitious expansion plans. "From a 25-year perspective, we will be examining connectivity to different parts of our country. The bigger airports would benefit from the smaller airports becoming functional, and small airlines would support the growth of bigger airlines. The entire framework of air connectivity in this country, including whether the regulations for major and smaller airports can be calibrated to the degree of traffic these airports handle, will be considered. We are focusing on expanding connectivity to smaller cities and towns, even con-

sidering heliports and helipads, to ensure that the entire aviation sector is well-connected and poised for growth in the future," he said.

This (financial mechanism) creates a solid framework for engagement of stakeholders, and ensures conducive environment for investment

On the maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) front, efforts are underway to alleviate regulatory hurdles and promote investment. Vualnam expressed confidence in fostering a conducive environment for MRO businesses through

fair taxation policies and supportive measures.

In line with global sustainability goals, Vualnam underscored India's commitment to producing Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), aligning with international standards. "We will work closely with relevant ministries in the Government of India, including the Ministry of Petroleum, and our oil marketing companies to ensure that sustainable aviation fuel production meets the necessary standards and requirements," he said.

Vualnam emphasised on the government's enthusiasm for the aviation sector's potential, epitomised by initiatives like the UDAN. By prioritising citizen-centric accessibility and fostering a conducive ecosystem, India aims to propel its aviation industry to new heights, benefiting stakeholders across the spectrum, he said.

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Tourism News

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India's growing GDP to result in 9% annual growth in travel spending between 2024-30: McKinsey Report

ITTA to organise convention in December 2024, advises to work with tourist transport operators listed by government

Indian airports' FY2025 profit to grow by 35% on strong demand, says Paramprit Singh Bakshi, VP, CAPA India

Government to develop 453 airstrips as brownfield projects, says Secretary of Civil Aviation

PATA Travel Mart 2024 to witness 57% participation from leisure segment buyers

IATA DG warns airlines to stay vigilant about governments 'going rogue' on globally agreed aviation standards

Easy visa & flights must for MICE

Optimistic about India's MICE potential, Naveen Kundu, MD, EbixCash Travel, says that the market is expected to grow at 15.6 per cent, making it the fifth-largest in the world. To handle an outburst of travel and tourism business in India, we need to worry about where the human resources will come from, he adds.

Surbhi Sharma

The Moscow City Tourism Committee recently organised a conference in Delhi for the representatives of Indian MICE industry to introduce them to the tourism strengths of the Russian capital. The conference included panel discussions, thematic sessions and meetings of entrepreneurs coming from the two nations. The event also discussed collaboration opportunities and innovative MICE venues.

Speaking during the event as a key speaker, **Naveen Kundu**, Managing Director, EbixCash Travel, highlighted the emerging trends of MICE in India, based on his sector-wise research on 'Business Tourism in MICE - Knowledge, Innovation & Collaboration'.

Picking up the knowledge part of his study, Kundu gave a brief analysis as to where MICE is



Naveen Kundu
Managing Director
EbixCash Travel

headed from India and said that currently UAE, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Europe and the UK are getting a larger share of the business from India. He added that according to allied market research, the global MICE industry was US \$598 billion in 2022, which is going to be \$2,309 billion in 2032. Globally it's growing at 11 per cent, but in India it is growing at 15.6 per cent. India

had \$5.8 billion of MICE revenue in 2022, which is expected to be \$7.8 billion in 2024 and is expected to be over \$10 billion

There is a huge potential for MICE industry in India to come together, collaborate, innovate and handle the business that is heading our way

by 2030. He added that India will grow at 15.6 per cent, which is the highest growth rate, making the country the fifth-largest MICE market in the world.

India's MICE potential
Naveen Kundu, said, "The size

of the MICE market is about 30 million today, which includes domestic and international pax. Therefore, there is a huge potential for the organised MICE industry in India to come together, collaborate, innovate and then handle the mammoth business that is heading our way."

The focus of the Government of India should be on creating ease of visas, building airline capacity and creating favourable ecosystem for making 'Meet in India' programme successful, he added.

Today, the Indian market seems one of the most promising in terms of increasing both inbound and outbound tourism.

"The vision right now is to ensure that we get to the root of the total size and spending of the industry. India is a market that is on the verge of being one of the largest in the world. Hence, the emerging trend is to create accessibility by providing more flights and bringing in ease of visa that will open gates for more destinations," Kundu said.

Sectors driving growth in India

- ❖ In the past 10 years, the corporate tax collections have increased by 160% and remain at ₹16,63,686 crore.
- ❖ Insurance sector is growing at 4.5%, employing 2.5 million people.
- ❖ Consumer Durable sector is growing at 10% year-on-year with 2 million growth driven by air conditioners and white goods.
- ❖ FMCG sector is growing at a rate of 14.9% due to the access to online and offline retail stores available in India that employ over 3 million people.

Mauritius' 3-city roadshow strengthens bond with India



Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) recently organised a three-city roadshow in India. Led by Arvind Bundhun, Director, MTPA, and featuring a delegation of 21 partners from Mauritius, the roadshow exemplified the robust bond between India and Mauritius and the promising potential for collaborative growth within the tourism sector

Ready for Indian weddings

Mario Bumroongpan, Resort Manager, Cross Chiang Mai Riverside Resort, shares with **TRAVELTALK** USPs of the luxury resort, nestled on the banks of Ping River in Northern Thailand.

TT Bureau

Cross Chiang Mai Riverside Resort's vibrant location, pleasant weather, easy transportation, warm hospitality, culinary delights, and complete privacy makes it a perfect accommodation for guests, says **Mario Bumroongpan**, Resort Manager, Cross Chiang Mai Riverside Resort.

Indians: All-in-one travellers
Talking about the Indian guests, he said, "As far as I know, Indian travellers are the ones who want to witness all-in-one experience in tourism and not just a particular niche. For example, Indian guest would be interested in wellness tourism, culinary tourism, adventure tourism, and ecotourism at the same time."

Though the Indian market is new to them, Bumroongpan said that they are trying to attract Indians by offering them customised packages, which includes a tour of Chiang Mai city, visit to nearby sanctuaries and cruises, participation in festi-



Mario Bumroongpan
Resort Manager
Cross Chiang Mai Riverside Resort

vals with the locals, live music, and sometimes adventures like rafting. "For Cross Hotels, we also have an Indian representative who drives and generates all our business from these clients. Regular interaction with him makes us equipped to welcome Indian market in the best possible way," he says.

About the flight connectivity, he said that as of now, India does not have a direct flight to Chiang Mai city, but there are flights with layover or one stop from cities like Delhi and Mumbai.

Weddings & MICE

Talking about weddings and MICE business, Bumroongpan said, "We have space at our river lawn, which is in between restaurant and river, for personal intimate/private weddings and events. We have had around 100 weddings at our property."

India does not have a direct flight to Chiang Mai, but there are flights with layover or one stop from cities like Delhi & Mumbai

Hopefully, in near future, they might have Indian weddings as well. "I have many ideas for decorations and everything for Indian market, we just need one opportunity to prove ourselves," Bumroongpan concluded.

IndiGo to host IATA AGM in June '25

Pieter Elbers, CEO, IndiGo, portrays a vision for India's aviation sector as one poised for growth and transformation. With strategic investments, collaboration, and a supportive policy environment, India aims to soar to new heights in the global aviation arena, he says.



Janice Alyosius

Pieter Elbers, CEO, IndiGo, recently highlighted the significance of the upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) and World Air Transport Summit of the International Air Transport Association (IATA), which is set to be held in Delhi, India, from June 8-10, 2025 after a gap of 42 years. Describing it as the "largest gathering of aviation leadership in the world every year", Elbers emphasised its importance in bringing stakeholders from manufacturing, aviation and policymakers on one platform.

"It has been 42 years since it was last held in India. Since 1983, it has taken place in various locations worldwide, excluding India. Therefore, we are excited to bring it back," Elbers said. As the host airline, IndiGo sees this as an opportunity to showcase India's evolution and the current state of its aviation industry. "We will closely collaborate with the government and policymakers to address all relevant issues. Our aim is to showcase India's transition from a predominantly domestic market to a global aviation giant," he added.

Wide-body order

Elbers highlighted India's position as a long-haul destination and said, "India is already considered a long-haul destination and market. The only issue was the lack of long-haul aircraft. India didn't have wide-body planes, so it wasn't operating direct flights



Pieter Elbers
CEO
IndiGo

from its shores, but was routing them through different hubs outside the country to reach other destinations worldwide."

To address this, IndiGo has placed a huge order for A350s. "If you consider the number of wide-body aircraft in India today, it's comparable to the fleet sizes in some very small countries. This presents an opportunity for us to enter that market space. Hence, we have decided to move forward and purchase A350s, with deliveries starting in 2027. Our aim is to develop this market and ensure that Indian consumers can fly directly from India to various destinations around the world, rather than having to transfer elsewhere," Elbers said.

Introducing business class

Moreover, IndiGo is introducing a new business product to accommodate the evolving needs of Indian travellers. "We are introducing a new business product because we see India is evol-

ving, and we anticipate millions of first-time flyers joining IndiGo. Additionally, we are witnessing a growing number of travellers seeking a business product. As the market leader in India, IndiGo should be able to accommodate these travellers onboard our flights," Elbers emphasised.

All about partnerships

He insisted that collaboration is key in India's evolving landscape. "There is a lot of collaboration within the trade, and we engage in various activities. We operate through our own channels, work

with the OTAs, and collaborate with different trade partners. The trade landscape is quite diverse, with larger and smaller entities. It's a very dynamic environment. Recently, we have significantly strengthened our organisation and teams dedicated to managing these collaborations," he said.

India: Global aviation hub

The reopening of borders and the overall growth trajectory of Indian aviation further reinforce confidence in investing in MRO facilities and manufacturing. Elbers highlighted the collaboration among airports, airlines, regulators, and the government as crucial in realising India's vision of becoming a global aviation hub.

"There is an overarching vision to develop India into a global aviation hub," said Elbers, emphasising the government's long-term commitment to the sector.

Elbers added, "This vision is expressed by the government and the minister, indicating a long-term commitment rather than a short-term endeavour. Now, this long-term vision is being implemented, and we are in discussions with airports about how it should be realised. We are considering what additional transfer facilities are needed, how to manage large transfer flows effectively, and to handle irregular operations if passengers do not have visas. We are also exploring digitisation opportunities." 🇮🇳

As the host airline, IndiGo sees this (summit) as an opportunity to showcase India's evolution and the current state of its aviation industry

with the OTAs, and collaborate with different trade partners. The trade landscape is quite diverse, with larger and smaller entities. It's a very dynamic environment. Recently, we have significantly strengthened our organisation and teams dedicated to managing these collaborations," he said.

Shedding light on whether IndiGo is in talks with Indian manufac-

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Smooth check-in for travellers



Air India has collaborated with Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) and Delhi International Airport (DIAL) to facilitate check-in for travellers at two metro stations in Delhi

India better for big weddings

▶ Contd. from page 5



Jitul Mehta
National Joint Secretary
TAFI & MD, VP Travels

“ A lot of weddings which were supposed to happen outside India is now converting to India. We see the usual destinations like Rajasthan, Goa and some hilly destinations like Mussoorie are getting a lot of traction.



Meha Vashi
Director
Nivalink

“ The government's emphasis on doing weddings within India through Incredible India's wedding tourism campaign is affecting this movement to a larger extent. But we are still faced with a lot of challenges while planning



Rajan Kalra
Head of Sales
The LaLiT

“ More and more Indian weddings are choosing domestic destinations due to a desire for a deep cultural connect and the charm of local traditions. Additionally, the convenience and cost-effectiveness of

“ After our PM's appeal to do weddings in India, 95 per cent of the big weddings are happening in India. So, it's good to see that everyone is supporting our PM's thought and vision. For big and luxurious weddings Rajasthan is the most popular destination, and cities like Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Jaisalmer are extremely popular, another popular destination is Goa. The 'Wed in India' campaign has helped keep weddings in India and our money is staying in our country.”



Rajesh Poddar
Chairman - Western Region, TAAI
& Director, Rightchoice Travels

We are looking at other, newer destinations for our wedding clients, but there is a dearth of good properties and good infrastructure to support a wedding. So, we are continuously searching for something new.”

“ Current trend is 'Wedding in India and Celebrations Abroad'. Post-COVID, small boutique wedding was in vogue, so international destination was feasible. However, now big weddings are trending again and for that Indian destinations work better. Celebrations are more intimate, involve fewer people and, therefore, international destinations work better. Some of the wedding destinations that are most popular with us are Rajasthan, Goa and Rishikesh.”



Rohit Jadhav
Founder & Managing Director
Moments Forever

destination weddings in India. There is limitation of event spaces whether it's indoors or outdoors. Moreover, the infrastructure to some of the destinations, whether it's Goa, Jaipur or Udaipur, is lacking.”

“ The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group is known for hosting large weddings. Our hotels have prime locations and the properties that are best suited for weddings have panoramic views. Room size is also one of our USPs. The LaLiT Golf & Spa Resort Goa, for instance, is an all-suite hotel with the room size of 605 square feet. It can host large weddings with more than 500-600 pax. Weddings are now more personalised and intimate, but still extravagant.”



Nirav Thaleswar
Founder & Director
Allegiant Events

planning within the country contribute to this shift. The government's push for weddings in India has played a role. The emphasis on showcasing India's culture and heritage has heightened awareness.”



Sandra Polo Canudas
Commercial Director (Asia & ME)
Palladium Hotel Group

“ The wedding segment is also a key area of interest for the group. But not so much for its properties in Spain as much as for the ones in Mexico. We are working with wedding planners for our properties in Mexico, specifically our resort Grand Palladium Costa Mujeres Resort and Spa and TRS Coral Hotel that get a lot of Indian weddings. We have an experienced team here that knows how to handle Indian weddings and it is working well. I highly recommend planners to look at this destination.”

“ Since the PM's appeal, I have seen an increase in the requirements for weddings within the country. The ones who are in the public eye, closer to the politico or from the high ranks of corporate have already cancelled



Valérie Péresse
President
Paris Region

“ With the recent push provided by the PM of India, 'Wed in India' is indeed a game-changer. We have the most diverse locations, good hospitality and international hotel chains that are present in the country and already



Srikant Kanoi
CEO & Partner, Ethereal
Celebration Management

“ Weddings in India shall not only support various sectors involved in the wedding industry but give boost to destinations across India. The philosophy of, 'Atithi devo bhav', which always got NRI weddings to India, is now



Birju Gariba
Founder
ISKRA Events

their plans of international destinations. While there is no major panic, there is definitely a sense of caution. With the appeal from the leader of the country and a parallel campaign by the Tourism Ministry, there is a positive movement towards India.”

“ On my visit to India I discussed with travel agents what Indian tourists want to see and do in Paris and the challenges they faced. The tour operators shared a lot of points with us. For example, Paris did not have enough vegan and vegetarian food options. I reassured them that this will be resolved as veganism is a growing trend in France. We also discussed Indian weddings in Paris. We hope that Paris will be an exception to PM Modi's 'Wed in India' campaign.”



Vikramjeet Sharma
Managing Director
Le Florence Weddings

doing pretty well in terms of weddings. However, there are certain caveats and multiple reasons why someone might prefer going abroad. Easy visa by many nations attracts Indian weddings. Global weddings are perceived as more prestigious.”

“ Weddings in India offer a unique and unmatched experience, characterised by cultural richness, diverse traditions, and vibrant ceremonies. India's diversity and unique selling proposition include the royal palaces and forts of Rajasthan, serene beaches in Goa and Mahabalipuram, the scenic hills of Mussoorie and Kashmir, the dense forests of Ranthambore and Jim Corbett, and the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, all showcasing natural beauty.”



Ruchika Arora
Founder
Plush Weddings

just bound to increase with group of hotels like Taj, Radisson, Marriott launching new properties every month. An initiative now being supported by the government should see India shining on the global stage.”

Contd. on page 17 ▶

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Embassies must hire tourism experts

Tourism industry has been experiencing an upward trajectory globally. However, India's inbound tourism sector is yet to reclaim its glory enjoyed a few years ago. Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, underscores the challenges hindering the country from attaining the much-needed boost, while also highlighting the efforts made by the association over the past month.

Janice Alyosius

Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), who attended the Arabian Travel Market (ATM), held recently in Dubai, highlights the significance of events and developments happening in the tourism sector during May.

"I not only observed the activities at the Indian Pavilion (at ATM) but also met the presidents of various associations. A notable achievement from the event was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maldives Association of Travel Agents & Tour Operators (MATATO). The response there seemed better than at ITB Berlin," he said.

Sharing objective behind the signing of the MoU, Mehra said that the partnership aims to enhance tourism between India and the

Maldives. "MATATO will organise roadshows in India in July, supported by the Indian embassy in the Maldives," Mehra said.

On the domestic front, Mehra announced a significant breakthrough for IATO members. "Our members have finally obtained tickets for the gondola ride in Gulmarg for their foreign clients," he shared.

After his return from Dubai, Mehra emphasised on the importance of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in India's tourism development. He wrote to the Chief Secretary of J&K, suggesting that the Union Territory should have a larger stall. Currently, they have a table stall in the Ministry of Tourism pavilion. "I requested that they take a separate stall like UP, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, and Karnataka. I urged them to consider this for ITB Berlin, WTM, and ATM," he added.



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO

Mehra underscored the need for the Ministry of Tourism to intensify its international promotional efforts. "Our main emphasis today, and until we achieve it, is that the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, should start roadshows abroad and media campaigns (both electronic and print) to promote India. Familiarisation trips for leading tour operators and media

should also resume. We are advocating for this," he asserted.

He also suggested a strategic approach to staffing Indian embassies with tourism experts. "We are requesting that after the new government comes in, it's fine for promotions to be done from the



embassy. However, like officers from the Ministry of Commerce or other such departments who are posted in embassies or high commissions abroad, at least in the 20 key market embassies or high commissions, people at the rank of Deputy Director General

(DDG) should be posted under the overall supervision of the ambassador or high commissioner," Mehra proposed.

Mehra praised the Ministry of Tourism's show at ITB Berlin,

Our main emphasis today, and until we achieve it, is that the government should start roadshows abroad and media campaigns to promote India

saying, "The stalls and arrangements for IATO members were excellent. I even wrote to the Secretary of Tourism, V Vidya-

vati, to express my appreciation." However, he expressed concerns over the space constraints at ATM, Dubai. "The space was inadequate and cramped, making interaction difficult. States like Madhya Pradesh and Goa had larger stalls than the India Pavilion, which is unacceptable. India needs to secure larger spaces to accommodate participants properly," he said.

Citing the issues, he made a call for action from senior officials. "We hope that the senior economic advisor, Bhushan Kumar, along with Arun Srivastava, will report these issues to the Ministry of Tourism, and appropriate actions will be taken post-elections," he said. He also emphasised on the importance of tourism for generating employment in the country and increasing foreign exchange reserves. IATO will organise its convention from August 30 to September 2 in Bhopal.

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Regional chapters fuelling membership

Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) chapters are working towards helping its members reach a common goal – their empowerment, says Ajay Prakash, the National President of the association. Sharing updates about the long-pending TAFI Annual Convention, Prakash says that they are in talks with three destinations for the same, but nothing has been finalised yet.



Hazel Jain

Chapters of the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) have been quite active in the past two months. After conducting two back-to-back roadshows – in Mumbai and Ahmedabad – for its members, TAFI continues to maintain its pace. Recently, Pune chapter of the association also conducted its meeting and welcomed 35 new members. **Ajay Prakash**, National President, TAFI, says, "I think that is phenomenal and speaks volumes about the chapter office-bearers and the work they are doing. In fact, we see an increase in membership across the board. This is also because all our chapters are actively providing value to the membership."

TAFI's Tamil Nadu Chapter recently organised a meeting combining it with a familiarisa-



Ajay Prakash
National President
TAFI

tion trip to Sri Lanka. Apart from this, TAFI has redone its Joint Bank Guarantee (JBG) to help its members. "We have also added a few more members to our JBG scheme after vetting it with our financial consultant and JBG team. The new JBG will come into effect from 1 July 2024. We are currently in the middle of completing all docu-

mentation and making it tighter, thereby making it easier for our members to conduct business," Prakash reveals.

All TAFI chapters are also conducting regular bi-monthly meetings. "This ensures that people are involved, they are aware, and they contribute by sharing new ideas. We have a Tourism Promotion Committee that has been talking



to members and asking them to make a presentation on new and unusual destinations," he says.

Sharing an update about its long-pending annual convention, Prakash says that they are in talks with three destinations for the same, but nothing has been finalised yet.

Time for Eastern Europe

Prakash also highlighted that Eastern Europe has started getting popular among Indian travellers. "People have been visiting Western European countries for

The bottleneck of visas is frustrating and if they use this extra money to reduce the turnabout time, we won't have any complaints

a long time and there is a certain amount of fatigue that has set in. Meanwhile, Eastern Europe has remained relatively unexplored, not that they have not been trav-



elling there. Awareness about this part of Europe has picked up a lot in the last decade. More direct flights, easier visas have helped, and some of our members have taken more interest in Eastern Europe," he adds.

The Schengen visa fee will go up a bit from June 2024. Prakash says that people do not mind paying more for the Schengen visa, provided they get the visa

on time. "The bottleneck of visas is frustrating and if they use this extra money to reduce the turnabout time, we will not have any complaint. But if you charge more money and still make people wait for six months, you are shooting yourself in the foot. But it's not an increase that will push people to other countries. It's not about the cost alone, it's also about the speed and ease of visas," he shares. 🐦

Travel frenzy for Southeast Asia

Atendra Singh Yadav, Assistant Vice President, TravelTriangle, delves into travel preferences evolving in recent years. The renowned travel expert sheds light on the reasons behind the rising popularity of Southeast Asian countries, especially Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, which have become the top picks for Indian travellers.



TT Bureau

What are your views on recent significant shifts, such as Vietnam and Japan emerging as top tourist destinations, followed by the USA?

One thing I would like to mention is the increasing popularity of South Korea. Thanks to the rise in Korean shows on Netflix, there has been a surge in the travel industry. Destinations such as Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, and other CIS countries are becoming increasingly popular among new-age travellers. This is primarily due to the rapid growth of the Indian economy, which has opened up new travel opportunities. These destinations offer something different from the typical tourist spots, which is what modern travellers are seeking. This shift in travel trends is significant.

Why are Indian travellers visiting destinations outside India, such as Vietnam, instead of exploring within the country?

From my perspective, both domestic and international travel are experiencing an upswing. The construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has sparked a surge in religious tourism within India. On the other hand, outbound travel is also rising, with travellers increasingly opting for one international trip per year. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly curtailed travel, leading to a pent-up desire among Indian travellers to explore new destinations.

Religious tourism is growing due to the infrastructure and the attraction of Indian travellers. What trends are emerging? Does the country's demographic influence the decision-making process while planning a trip?

India is developing its travel infrastructure, focusing on countries like Kazakhstan and Southeast Asia. Over the past decade, Indian travel agencies have been working hard to promote these destinations and create appealing travel packages. With increasing



Atendra Singh Yadav, Assistant Vice President, TravelTriangle

disposable income, people across the country are now considering which destinations best match their desired holiday type. For ex-

ample, when planning a family vacation, individuals seek a country that offers a comprehensive experience, making Japan and South

Asian countries the preferred choices. The supply of travel options is already in place, and now, with increased spending power, people are making decisions based on their individual preferences. It's undeniable that religious tourism is also on the rise due to improved infrastructure, drawing in Indian travellers.

With the increasing interest of Indian travellers in planning yearly trips abroad, how can we expect the international travel market to change and adapt to the future trend of more Indians travelling internationally?

The growing interest of Indian travellers in planning annual trips abroad is influencing the international travel market. We can anticipate various changes and adjustments in the future to accommodate this trend. One can expect to see more personalised travel packages and itineraries designed to attract Indian travellers. This may involve a broader range of food options, language

support, and experiences that align with Indian cultural preferences. TravelTriangle has been closely monitoring the shift to-

Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has sparked a surge in religious tourism within India. On the other hand, outbound travel is also rising

wards offering customised travel packages for all types of travellers. The future trend of more Indians travelling internationally will likely result in a more diverse and India-friendly international travel market, providing more choices and improved experiences for Indian travellers. 🐦

Exclusivity makes Fiji click

It's not yet a mainstream destination, but that is exactly its appeal. Fiji sees fewer crowds at tourist spots and activities, which in itself is a kind of luxury we all yearn for. **TRAVEL TALK** speaks to buyers about their perception about Fiji from their recent visits, as well as sellers from Fiji who share their views on the potential India market offers them.



Samir Kachwala
Associate Vice President, Leisure Travel (Outbound), Thomas Cook India

“As of now, Fiji is largely promoting hotels and resorts. We have not really sold Fiji in India as the cost is slightly high. They see the overall cost of the trip and they usually back out to look for other more cost-effective options. There are a few challenges that we must cross for Fiji to become more popular in India.”



Raveesh Khullar
Senior Category Manager Pickyourtrail

“We sold Fiji back in 2020 and pre-COVID, and the count of pax was close to 60 in a year. The main challenge with selling Fiji is that the flight connection from India to Fiji with transit at Singapore and Hong Kong as of now is way too long. Flights from Thailand and Malaysia need to come back considering the high airfares.”



Roshani Sane
Senior Travel Consultant Kesar Tours

“I think of Fiji as the natural beauty, distinctive culture, and adventure activities. People of Fiji are warmest, friendliest, full of energy and most welcoming; this is what will work the most for our India market. We don't have clients that enquire about Fiji. We haven't sold any Fiji files yet, but yes, we look forward to.”



Pranav Kapadia
Founder Director Global Destinations

“We are now getting very active where promoting Fiji is concerned. This is for two reasons; one is, of course, because we have had the best December ever in terms of arrivals from India. Later in the year, we plan to do an India focused tourism exchange in Fiji and that is when we will take a bigger delegation from India.”



Damend Gounder
Managing Director Tour Managers

“We first started tapping India (market) in 2007 for Fiji, looking at the potential that the market had for this part of the world. I used to see young couples in Fiji – affluent travellers looking to do activities in exotic destinations. That is when we discussed with Tourism Fiji to explore this market. The rise has been gradual.”



Allison Haworth West
Executive Chair, Captain Cook Cruises Fiji Islands

“We do get a lot of Indian guests, particularly for our dinner cruises, say sails to Tivua Private Island and then increasingly on our expedition cruises. The expedition cruise going to the remote locations of Fiji. The Indian market is starting to learn about the expedition as it was recently launched.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain in Fiji

‘Onboarding states is vital’

Contd. from page 5

tourism policy, incentives and subsidies. There are many which don't. The first thing to do is to get them onboarded and get tourism at centre stage as an opportunity for them to improve their revenues.”

Skilling is vital

Secondly, he added, “Skilling will be vital for us because the realisation of Viksit Bharat will entirely depend upon the way we can utilise the demographic dividend and especially with manufacturing going the fourth industrial revolution way, jobs are shrinking. Thus, labour intensive sectors like tourism will have to play a vital role. Hence, we need to expand the footprint of tourism and create jobs that are commensurate with the development that we see. Hence, the next five years are going to be vital for us to get back on track with international promotion and publicity.”

Business plan strategy

Billa claimed that the strategy must be planned differently. “Broadly, we need to look at having a business plan sort of a strategy—where are we now? Where should we be in 2047? and What is the target that we set for our-

selves over the next five years in terms of investment, job creation, promotion & publicity?”

He also said that we need to map the way the aviation sector is growing. “Some airlines have placed order for almost a thousand planes in the country. That is a good contextual point for tourism to start. There is a lot of infrastructure and several unconnected places where

We need to think of Viksit Bharat 2047 and plan for the next five years in how to create a stronger tourism sector

we have airports today. There are Vande Bharat trains which make travel convenient. We need to map all of this and look at aligning this.”

Promotional budget

When asked about the low budget allocation for overseas tourism

promotion, Billa said that is part of the strategy too. “We will reboot that. When we figure out a new strategy, this will be an important part of it,” he promised. Speaking about other projects like Nidhi 2.0, he added, “All the things that the MOT is doing, we are looking at how effective they have been. What are the things that are working well? What are the things that require improvement? If there is a case for simplification, consolidation or if there are new things that we need to do? That exercise is still going on and once we have a strategy session with the new ministers, we will be clear about what we need to do,” he explained.

Addressing hospitality issues

Talking about how inventory shortage is a pressing issue for hospitality industry, Billa shared, “Rooms are a problem because domestic demand is expanding, which is probably also elbowing out the international demand because there are more people closer who are willing to pay the top dollar and stay there. I think the investments in India need to pick up purely to address the demand there is and the only way to make this happen is by getting the states involved.”

Roadblocks in MOT registration

While Incredible India continues campaigning for its MOT registration among the trade, agents are facing difficulties in getting things in order to be eligible for the same.

Hazel Jain

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) had recently invited the Incredible India team, led by **Dr Sagnik Chowdhury**, Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central), Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India, to create awareness among their members about the benefits of being an agency approved by the MOT and how one can avail its Marketing Development Assistance (MDA). Dr Chowdhury's team showcased the process of approval, and the various incentive schemes that are associated with such accreditation. This is under the 'Recognition of Travel Agents/ Tour Operators/ Tourist Transport Operator/ Adventure Tour Operator/ Domestic Tour Operator' scheme.

Sameer Karnani, Managing Committee Member, TAAI & Owner of Arunodaya Travels, says that there are not many TAAI members registered by India Tourism.



Dr Sagnik Chowdhury
Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central), MOT, GoI



Sameer Karnani
Managing Committee Member TAAI & Owner of Arunodaya Travels

“This is not giving us the right kind of platform when we are talking to the ministry. Hence, we thought more and more members should register themselves with the MOT. The issue with this is the criterion for staff where IATA-approved staff is not recognised. It needs to be tourism trained staff only, and this is very hard to find,” he says. Karnani goes on to highlight a bigger problem faced by the industry today. “The industry is facing a drought in skilled manpower. Not

just travel agents, even airlines and hotels are facing this. Not many students are actually enrolling for tourism training,” he explains.

His agency is also not recognised by the MOT. While he has filled the necessary forms, the bottleneck again is staff eligibility. “The type of staff we have are not eligible by MOT. So, we have started training them. Once they are ready, we will go ahead with the registration,” Karnani adds.

Bengaluru: Next jewel of India?

Who would have thought that Karnataka's largest city will become one of India's star attractions. It has quietly developed hotel and airport infrastructure for not just MICE but also leisure, with great connections to domestic and international destinations. **TRAVELTALK** looks at why Bengaluru has become an attractive proposition the world cannot ignore.



Hazel Jain

Presenting the state budget for 2022-23, Basavaraj Bommai, then Chief Minister of Karnataka, had said that his government will upgrade Bengaluru into a MICE hub of the country by leveraging the advantages the city enjoys as a business capital, IT capital, as well as its world-class infrastructure in technology and air connectivity. Add to this, its beautiful Terminal 2 at Kempegowda International Airport, and we have a great market for not just MICE but leisure travel as well!

Thomas Cook and SOTC recently operated an inaugural charter to Bhutan from Bengaluru at full capacity, indicating that there is a strong appetite from Karnataka for unique destinations like Bhutan. The companies see South India as a vital market, contributing over 50 per cent to Bhutan's business. **Rajeev Kale**, President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India), says, "This has given us the confidence to operate two additional charters in May. We had handpicked Bengaluru airport as the gateway for this initiative based on three clear opportunities: Karnataka is our top source market, high demand for unique destinations-experiences, and absence of direct connectivity for Bhutan from South India. What is noteworthy is that all our flights are currently at a 100 per cent booking position."

Hotels springing up

An analysis of the latest Skyscanner Travel Insight data shows that since the start of 2024, searches for domestic travel in India are up 19 per cent year-on-year (yoy). What's more – the top domestic destinations for Indian travellers in 2024 shows that Bengaluru is

at number two position, only after Delhi. Thanks to all the investment coming into this market, we will see about 10 premium hotels inaugurated in 2024 in Bengaluru. While a Hyatt is coming up at Hebbal, a Hilton is coming up at Whitefield. An IBC hotel is also coming up, along with a Taj hotel at the airport. JW Marriott is planning a new hotel near Devanahalli.

The demand for convention centres in Bengaluru has also seen a significant rise in recent years. Previously, conventions were primarily held in Mumbai and New Delhi, with Hyderabad being the main destination in the South. However, Bengaluru has emerged as a prominent location for such events. Initially, the BIEC was the main venue for exhibitions. However, with the establishment of numerous hotels in the city, the landscape has changed.



Manoj Chacko
MD and CEO
FLY91

Balaji M, CEO, Clarks Exotica Convention Resort & Spa, says, "Bengaluru's reputation as a prime destination for events and MICE activities stems from various factors. Firstly, its status as a major IT hub and the presence of numerous multinational corporations drives demand from corporates.



Rajeev Kale
President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)

Additionally, the city's excellent connectivity via air, rail and road network makes it a convenient choice for hosting events. Moreover, Bengaluru's vibrant tech and startup ecosystem contributes significantly to the demand."

Varun Mehrotra, Director, Sales & Marketing, Sheraton Grand



Cam Wallace
CEO
Qantas International

Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Center, says, "The kind of demand that is required for convention centres in Bengaluru hinges on mastering Optimised Space Management. Conducting a comprehensive exploration of the nuances of space allocation, group ceilings, and optimal venue



Markus Tan
Regional Director, India, Middle East, South Asia & Africa (IMESA), STB

utilisation is crucial. Hotels in Bengaluru have adapted to catering to these distinct market segments by offering specialised and tailored services. Convention attendees benefit from state-of-the-art facilities and expert event planning services. The city boasts of a vibrant amalgamation of traditional and contemporary cultural experiences, from historic landmarks to eclectic dining and entertainment options. This diversity makes it an ideal destination for those seeking a well-rounded travel experience."

Good air connectivity

The Bengaluru airport embodies India's soaring aspirations. Its self-drop bag service significantly enhances airport operations, im-



Satyaki Raghunath
Chief Operating Officer at Bangalore International Airport

to Bengaluru. There are many individuals who are employed with tech companies and other corporates who hail from different towns and cities, and they would like to travel back home, or to a leisure destination or to attend religious ceremonies. We are seeing a mix of travellers who are visiting Bengaluru for leisure, business, meetings and VFR. We have stepped in to add last-mile-connectivity and make tier II and tier III cities like Sindhudurg, Jalgaon and Agatti more accessible."

between the two cities over the four-month period. **Cam Wallace**, CEO, Qantas International, says, "Demand for travel between India and Australia continues to be incredibly strong, so we are pleased to be responding with extra flights to Sydney. These additional flights are timed to carry more travellers to Australia in summer, while also helping more families and friends reconnect over the holiday period."

Making travel easier is, of course, the new T2. **Satyaki Raghunath**, Chief Operating Officer at Bangalore International Airport, says, "As we reflect on the past financial year, it's been a landmark period with the highest passenger figures ever recorded in our airport's history. We have also seen an increase in the number of airlines. We are poised to solidify our position as the premier gateway to South and Central India."

Great outbound market

Speaking about the Bengaluru market, **Markus Tan**, Regional Director, India, Middle East, South Asia &



Varun Mehrotra
Director, S&M, Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center



Balaji M
CEO, Clarks Exotica Convention Resort & Spa

Demand for convention centres in Bengaluru has seen a significant rise. Previously, conventions were mainly held in Mumbai & Delhi

Qantas, the national carrier of Australia, has also announced additional flights from Bengaluru to Sydney to cater to strong demand over the holiday season. Between mid-December 2024 and late March 2025, the airline will increase flights from five per week to daily, adding over 12,000 seats

Africa (IMESA), Singapore Tourism Board, says, "With 25 direct weekly flights to Singapore, Bengaluru serves as an important source market for us. The continuous revitalisation of Singapore's tourism offerings and experiences resonates effectively with the preferences of the local consumer base."

proves passenger experience and contributes to a smoother travel process. Additionally, the new terminal at Bengaluru airport will cater to the increasing demand and accommodate flights, enabling domestic as well as international airlines to expand its network to additional cities.

Manoj Chacko, MD and CEO, FLY91, an airline enhancing regional connectivity, says, "Our idea is to provide Indian travellers from smaller towns, for example, Sindhudurg, seamless travel

New developments at airport

- ❖ Prepare for a transformation near Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru as Bengaluru Airport City Limited (BACL) unveils investment plans for a two million square feet Business Park and 775-key hotel, along with a concert arena in Airport City with capacity to host 10,000 attendees.
- ❖ The Combo Hotel will feature the Vivanta brand with 450 keys, along with the Ginger brand providing 325 keys. It is anticipated to be completed by the end of 2026. The hospitality landscape within the Airport City has also witnessed expansion, with the 370-key Taj Bangalore hotel.



45% discount on Egyptair bookings

Egyptair celebrated its 92nd anniversary with Indian travel trade partners in New Delhi recently. The airline, planning to increase frequencies between New Delhi and Cairo, announces a 45% discount on bookings from Delhi to Egypt. Growth in all sectors, especially wedding tourism sector, will drive the air traffic between two countries, says Amr Ali, Country Manager, Egyptair.

 Amita Pandey

Egyptair, the national flag carrier of Egypt, celebrated its 92nd anniversary with Indian travel trade partners in New Delhi recently. The airline highlighted the role of the trade partners in achieving the milestone and the loyalty of its customers. It announced many initiatives and special fares, including a 45 per cent discount on bookings from Delhi to Egypt until June 30, 2024.

Focus on strengthening network in India

Highlighting Egyptair's plans to strengthen its network in India, Amr Ali, Country Manager, Egyptair, said, "India is one of the most important markets for Egyptair. We have been operating here for many years, from Mumbai. We started our operations to Delhi last August, with four flights every week. We are hop-



Amr Ali
Country Manager
Egyptair



Praful Khosla
Executive Vice President
Bird Group

ing to increase our frequencies soon to reach daily flights, i.e., seven flights per week between Cairo and New Delhi." He added, "At present, we are working to strengthen our operations in Mumbai and Delhi, striving for a stable level of service. Our immediate goal is to maximise the use of all available frequencies. Since the operations between any two

countries hinge on the increase in traffic and the agreed number of flights, we will continuously monitor the Indian market and its traffic trends. Naturally, when the right opportunity arises, we will not hesitate to expand to other Indian cities."

Ali also emphasised on the current traffic flow Egyptair is ex-

periencing from India and the destinations it covers. "Most of the traffic from India on Egyptair is heading to Europe, North America, and a few destinations in Africa. Our goal is to boost traffic between Cairo and New Delhi, and broadly between India and Egypt. We offer fantastic domestic destinations like Sharm El-Sheikh as well. Given that Egypt and India are two of the world's oldest civilisations with rich cultural ties, we are keen to enhance cultural tourism, adventure tourism, safaris, and beach tourism in both countries. Wedding tourism is also on our radar. Promoting these various forms of tourism in Egypt will positively impact air traffic to our country," he asserted.

When asked about the promotional activities, Ali replied, "From time to time, we organise events to meet our travel partners. We host them


As Egypt and India share rich cultural ties, we are keen to enhance cultural tourism, adventure tourism, safaris, and beach tourism in both countries

in our office, and we visit their offices to discuss the areas of cooperation between Egyptair and these companies. We chart strategies to build relations with all stakeholders in the market as an airline and provide exclusive benefits to the travel agents to boost sales."

Bird Group, the GSA for Egyptair in India, sees tremendous business opportunities for Egyptair

in India "Traffic from leisure and MICE segments is in demand between India and Egypt," revealed Praful Khosla, Executive Vice President, Bird Group. Optimistic towards the India market, Khosla said that with the increasing demand to many unexplored destinations, Egyptair and other airlines will initiate more air routes and flights from India.

Offers and discounts

- ❖ Routes from DEL to EGYPT & beyond (6th freedom)
- ❖ Business Class discount 25%
- ❖ Booking class for business class Z
- ❖ Economic Class discount 40%
- ❖ Booking class for economy class T, W, S, E, L
- ❖ Sales period with immediate effect till June 30, 2024
- ❖ Travel till June 30, 2024
- ❖ Tour code IN39PROM

Della Resorts hosts Mumbai agents

Arika Holidays, in partnership with Della Resorts, recently hosted about 218 agents from Mumbai for a day visit at Della Resorts. Led by Udesh Kejriwal, MD, Arika Holidays, the trip's aim was to showcase the leisure potential of the resort, as well as highlight their offering - DATA Resort by Della Adventure – which offers military-themed luxury glamping.



Indian weddings' allure undeniable

▶ Contd. from page 10



Rajeev Jain
Director
Rashmi Entertainment

“Weddings are made in heaven, and we bring that celestial magic to earth. Whether you dream of a celebration in the vibrant landscapes of India or at a breath-taking international destination, we make your vision a reality. Every location around the world offers its unique charm and challenges, but our goal is to ensure that your joy and satisfaction come first. We are here to turn your desires into unforgettable memories.”



Nitin Kumar
Manager Operations
WBI Weddings

“Choosing to have a wedding in India or abroad, gives many different aspects. From mid-size to the big fat wedding is an important factor deciding the location, while the family is looking for venue, starting with the venue finalisation, Decor, DJ, artist managements and theme weddings play an important part nowadays and impacts on choosing a destination. Those with high-end budget look beyond India.”



Shrawan Yadav
Managing Director
Shubh Muhurat Luxury Weddings

“The allure of a grand Indian wedding is undeniable. It's a vibrant celebration of love, culture, and family. However, finding the perfect venue that balances grandeur with affordability can be a challenge. The beauty of a domestic wedding lies in the familiarity and depth of traditions. Imagine saying "I do" under a majestic Indian fort, on a serene beach in Goa, or amid the lush greenery of Kerala. These experiences are unmatched.”



Deep Agrawal
Founder & CEO
Royal Wedding Planners, Jaipur

“Weddings in India are a fantastic option due to their rich cultural tapestry, diverse venues, and culinary delights. Indian weddings offer a unique blend of vibrant traditions, colourful attire, and intricate rituals that create a memorable and immersive experience. The country's stunning venues, from royal palaces in Rajasthan to serene beaches in Goa, provide breathtaking backdrops for any celebration.”



Louis D'Souza
Director
Tamarind Global

“The demand has certainly increased in the recent past. November to February is traditionally the peak wedding season. Demographically, India is currently concentrated with millennials. Moreover, a strengthening upper middle class with better disposable income has spiked the wedding market. Bookings are from across the country and HNIs from across the country, mainly key metros like Mumbai, and NCR region.”



E M Najeeb
Chairman, ATE Group of
Companies & Founder Director, KIMS

“Choosing whether to have a wedding in India or abroad depends on various factors including budget, personal preferences, cultural considerations, and logistical elements. Indian weddings can be lavish and expensive, but they can also be done on a budget whereas destination weddings tend to be more costly due to travel and accommodation expenses.”

Compiled by Janice Alysius

RWC showcases GCC offerings

Resorts World Cruises recently organised an event in Mumbai exclusively for the travel trade, where Michael Goh, the President, & Head of International Sales and Naresh Rawal, the Vice President – Sales & Marketing (India), highlighted the new cruise itineraries, including the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, and the amenities available to guests.



Influencing the future of tourism

The future of tourism in the Eastern Region will depend on how effectively stakeholders collaborate to address challenges, while balancing economic growth with environmental and social considerations. Eastern regions may need to tweak their offerings to cater to diverse traveller segments, says Manav Soni, Chairman, Eastern India, TAAI.

The future of tourism in any specific region involves considering various factors such as economic trends, geopolitical stability, technological advancements, environmental changes, and evolving consumer preferences. For the Eastern Region, which could encompass diverse areas depending on the context (e.g., Eastern Europe, East Asia, or the Eastern United States), several trends and developments may influence the future of tourism:

Infrastructure Development: Investment in infrastructure, including transportation networks (roads, railways and airports), accommodation facilities, and tourist attractions, can significantly boost tourism in the Eastern region. Governments and private investors may focus on enhancing accessibility to remote areas and developing sustainable tourism infrastructure.



Cultural and Heritage Tourism: Eastern regions often boast rich cultural heritage and historical sites. Preserving and promoting these assets can attract tourists interested in heritage tourism. Initiatives such as cultural festivals, heritage conservation projects, and guided tours can contribute to this niche segment's growth.

Nature and Adventure Tourism: Many Eastern regions feature diverse landscapes, including

mountains, forests, rivers, and coastlines. Outdoor activities such as hiking, wildlife safaris, skiing, and water sports can appeal to adventure seekers and nature enthusiasts. Sustainable ecotourism practices will likely become increasingly important to preserve natural environments.

Culinary Tourism: Eastern cuisine is renowned for its diversity and flavours. Culinary tourism, centred on local food and beverage experiences,

can attract gastronomy enthusiasts. Initiatives such as food tours, cooking classes, and farm-to-table experiences may gain popularity.

Sustainable ecotourism practices will likely become increasingly important to preserve natural environments

Digital Transformation: Technology will continue to play a crucial role in shaping the tourism industry. Advancements in digital platforms, mobile applications, virtual reality, and augmented reality can

enhance the visitor experience, offering personalised recommendations, interactive guides, and immersive storytelling.

Health and Wellness Tourism: With a growing emphasis on health and wellness, Eastern regions may see an increase in wellness tourism. Spa resorts, yoga retreats, wellness centres, and medical tourism facilities could cater to travellers seeking relaxation, rejuvenation, and alternative healthcare services.

Sustainable and Responsible Tourism: Eastern regions may prioritise eco-friendly accommodations, carbon-neutral transportation options, and community-based initiatives to minimise negative impacts and maximise benefits for local communities.

Geopolitical Dynamics: Political stability, security concerns, visa

regulations, and international relations can influence tourism flows.

Changing Demographics and Consumer Preferences: Eastern regions may need to tweak their offerings to cater to diverse traveller segments, including millennial, Gen Z, solo travellers, families, and senior citizens.



Manav Soni
Chairman, Eastern India - TAAI & Member D' Honneur, Skål International Kolkata

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

| # 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY | | |
|---|---|----------|
| EVENT TALK | | |
| Published from: India • Middle East | | |
| JUNE 2024 | | |
| Date | Event | Time |
| 14-16 | Beijing International Tourism Expo 2024 | 9:00 am |
| 25-27 | Africa Travel and Investment Summit 2024 | 9:00 am |
| 25-27 | International Wellness Tourism Expo 2024 | 10:00 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 |
| 8 | Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Chennai | 10:00 am |
| 9 | Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Hyderabad | 10:00 am |
| 11 | Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Kolkata | 10:00 am |
| 11-14 | Travel and Leisure Expo 2024 | 9:00 am |
| 12 | Singapore Tourism Roadshow- Ahmedabad | 10:00 am |
| 12-14 | Travel & Tourism Fair-Kolkata 2024 | 2:00 pm |
| 17-19 | Gujarat Travel Fair 2024 | 10:00 am |
| 18-20 | Global Travel Marketplace 2024 | 10:00 am |
| 25-26 | MICE India & Luxury Travel Congress 2024 | 9:00 am |
| 26-28 | IITM - India International Travel Mart Bangalore 2024 | 11:00 am |
| 29-31 | Asian Travel Expo 2024 | 11:00 am |

WTM sets stage for 2024

'Call for Papers' by World Travel Market London 2024 invites global innovators to shape the future of travel. Diverse voices converge on key themes at the event, fostering progress and inclusivity for a sustainable industry.

TT Bureau

World Travel Market London 2024 has officially opened its 'Call for Papers', inviting innovators and experts from around the world to shape the future of travel. The WTM London Conference Programme is traditionally one of the event's highlights, as evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive feedback each year from attendees and sponsors alike. Apart from that, high-profile speakers at the WTM conference stages host a wide cross-section of voices covering mainstream as well as specialist topics.



Juliette Losardo
Exhibition Director
World Travel Market

This approach aligns with WTM's commitment to providing a platform for all, contributing to the immediate advancement of the industry, while providing inspiring ideas for the years ahead.

As usual, WTM 2024 will be organising the conference programme around themes and is particularly interested in: Marketing; Geo-Economics; Diversity, Eq-

uity and Inclusion (DEI); Sustainability; Technology; and Consumer and Industry Trends.

Last year's event included WTM's first ever Diversity and Inclusion Summit. Organisers are hoping to build on the success of the launch event with a similarly high-profile summit this year.

Juliette Losardo, Exhibition Director, World Travel Market, said, "The conference programme is the heartbeat of WTM, and we



strive to ensure that the content on stage resonates with our audience,

We strive to ensure the content on stage resonates with our audience, reflecting issues of interest and current trends

reflecting issues of interest and current trends, while also having an eye on the future."

She added, "We are interested in proposals from emerging and established destinations, startups and blue-chips, industry veterans and newcomers. Innovative submissions, stories with bold goals and quantifiable achievements, out-of-the-box thinking, thought leadership, case studies and more."

Losardo said, "Presenting a mix of voices across themed stages is part of our ongoing effort to keep the content fresh and guarantee that conference attendees come away educated and entertained."

Minds On Marketing

Minds On Marketing (MOM) is a Sales, Marketing and PR company founded by two young and enthusiastic, yet, veterans of the hospitality industry.

Mr Ashish Rohra and **Ms Sashi Sherpa** have spent about 15 years working and promoting some of the well-known DMCs and international hotels in India, before they launched their dream project, MOM.

Their strength lies in the fact that they have a hands-on experience of "walking the market", which made them truly understand the nuances of the industry, and its competitive and



unstructured character. MOM's vision is to provide services to DMCs and hotels which are serious and want to work with India market to grow their business and brand.

MOM has been appointed by three reputed DMCs – Jasmine

Travel Group (Vietnam & Cambodia), Sunset Vacay (Thailand) and Travel Life Events (Spain & Portugal) as their India sales office, and who all have seen a remarkable shift in their brand establishment and revenue generation. MOM also plans to launch a couple of more destinations shortly.

Co-Founders can be reached on ashish@mindsonmarketing.in and sashi@mindsonmarketing.in



Mr Ashish Rohra
Founder
Minds On Marketing



Ms Sashi Sherpa
Co-Founder
Minds On Marketing

Jasmine Travel Group A DMC for Vietnam & Cambodia



Ms Katherine Nguyen
Founder
Jasmine Travel Group



Founded in early 2020 by **Ms Katherine Nguyen**, who has almost 20-year experience in the travel industry, Jasmine Travel Group (JTG) has earned the trust of numerous worldwide business partners, especially from India when it comes to Indochina travel destinations (Vietnam, Cambodia & Laos). Among many other travel companies, what makes JTG stand out is their working philosophy, never focus on what the others do but what they can do best. The company has successfully organized a large number of leisure and MICE groups.

Given the fact that more airlines fly between India and Vietnam, JTG plans to invest heavier than ever into the Indian market, joining their hands to bring Vietnam closer to the Indians than ever. There is no doubt that their ambition for success in the Indian market is visible, they really have a reason for that.

Sunset Vacay A DMC for Thailand



Ms Rattika Khaniyomdee
Founder
Sunset Vacay



Sunset Vacay, spearheaded by **Ms Rattika Khaniyomdee**, wants to carve out a niche with its experiential, luxury, and offbeat services in India. Ms. Khaniyomdee's vision stems from a profound belief in the untapped potential of this segment within the Indian market. Right from the hotels to coaches/ vehicles and restaurants, she believes in handpicking the best.

Having handled numerous leisure groups, NRI and Indian weddings during her career of more than 15 years, she's seen by the local hotels and suppliers as a DMC to be reckoned with respect.

Sunset Vacay will be an answer to the Indian agents who have been longing to work with DMC that can offer their guest with world-class services at competitive pricing, and products that are not run-of-the-mill.

Travel Life Events A DMC for Spain & Portugal



Mr Shakti Attri
Founder
Travel Life DMC



Travel Life Destination Management Company is a B2B service provider, handling Spain and Portugal as a destination. The company is headquartered in Madrid for over a decade and is co-founded by two Indian gentlemen, **Mr Parveen Kumar** and **Mr Shakti Attri**.

Their operation and reservation team operates from Madrid office, where majority of the team handling, FITs, leisure and MICE are Indians. This also makes it easier for them to understand the complexities of the market, and are in-built to be flexible and price sensitive.

The DMC is also proud to own two Indian restaurants in Madrid: Curry Masala & Arpit, as well as the catering company. This boosts their confidence of providing the most competitive rates for any large groups, be it MICE, leisure, or even special interest groups like – Educational group, Jain groups that need kitchen access for their chef.

(Advertorial)

MOVEMENTS

ANANTA HOTELS AND RESORTS

Udaipur

GAGAN KATYAL has been promoted to the position of Commercial Head, Ananta Hotels and Resorts. He was currently working as the VP Sales and Strategy. Katyal is an accomplished hospitality professional who has made a mark in the industry with over a decade of experience. He has worked with some of the leading hotel chains and has held various positions throughout his career. Starting his career as a Sales Manager at Hyatt Regency, he gained valuable experience in the industry before moving on to Marriott International, where he worked as the Director of Travel Trade Sales for India.



THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS & RESORTS

India

The Leela Palaces, Hotels, and Resorts has appointed **SHWETA JAIN** as Chief Marketing and Sales Officer. A seasoned professional and dynamic brand visionary, Jain brings with her a wealth of experience, having spearheaded South Asia's luxury lifestyle evolution across various industries, including Spirits, Consumer Packaged Goods, Wellness, Media, and Communications. In her last role as Chief Business Development Officer at Diageo India, she crafted transformative strategies that drove long-term double-digit growth. A seasoned commercial and marketing leader.



SHANGRI-LA EROS

New Delhi

NIKHIL BHASKARAN joins the leadership team of Shangri-La Eros New Delhi as Food & Beverage Manager. With a Bachelor's degree in Arts and International Hospitality Management affiliated with Queen Margaret University and the ITM Institute of Hotel Management, he has also earned the Bachelor of Science in Catering Technology and Hospitality Management certification. In his new role, he will provide strategic leadership to the F&B operations, focusing on maximising revenue, introducing innovative concepts, and enhancing the overall dining experience for guests.



SAROVAR HOTELS

Gurugram

Sarovar Hotels has promoted **RAJESH RANJAN** to the position of Senior Vice President – Development. The appointment has been made with a view to strengthen the top management. Ranjan has more than 30 years of experience in the industry. In his new role, he will take charge of all business and project development activities, including global franchisee and management contracting. Additionally, he will lead the design and development think tank, drive strategic alliances, spearhead business growth initiatives, and oversee the planning and launch of all new hotels.



MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

India

BHUPINDER SINGH has been appointed as Director of Airport Operations – India for Marriott International. Singh brings over 17 years of experience in the hospitality industry. With a proven record of success in strategic management, he will lead the airport operations for Marriott's portfolio of hotels across India. Since joining Marriott International in February 2013, Singh has consistently demonstrated a dedication to exceed guest expectations and optimising operational efficiency. Bhupinder is an alumnus of JP Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology, Meerut.



Shangri-La Eros New Delhi has promoted **RAJEEV NEOLIA** to the position of Director of Sales from Director of Business Development. Neolia will work to reinforce the brand and its core ethos. He will also enhance the development and implementation of innovative sales strategies aimed at expanding the hotel's market share while driving revenue growth and ensuring an ultimate guest experience. An alumnus of Kanpur University, Neolia has played a key role in the success of multiple properties, including The Lalit - New Delhi, The Grand - New Delhi, and The Jaypee Palace - Agra.



CHILLARU SPA & RESORT

Oachghat, Solan

SONIT SONI joins as the Director of Chillaru Spa & Resort, Oachghat, Solan. Soni is a proactive leader and planner with experience in strategic planning, market plan execution, account management, pre-sales efforts, competitor and market analysis, staffing, and management. He has expertise in formulating strategies for business development and client servicing, with complete profit responsibility. An effective communicator with a flexible attitude, he has significant experience in liaising with clients. He is an enterprising leader with strong analytical, problem-solving and organisational abilities.



CONRAD

Pune

Conrad Pune has appointed **ABHINANDAN GOPTU** as the Director of Conferences & Events. Goptu has more than 16 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Born and raised in Kolkata, his career began with Four Seasons Sydney as an F&B Executive. Since then, he has held various positions in sales and marketing, including roles at ITC Sonar – A Luxury Collection Hotel and ITC Hotels Kolkata. Recently, he served as Head of MICE at ITC Royal Bengal & ITC Sonar. His field of expertise spans across corporate sales, sporting events (IPL, ISL, World Cups), MICE events, and weddings.



RADISSON BLU BENGALURU OUTER RING ROAD

Bengaluru

Sarovar Hotels appoints **ANUKAM TIWARY** as the General Manager for Radisson Blu Bengaluru Outer Ring Road. Tiwary has more than two decades of experience in the hospitality industry. Prior to this, he served as the General Manager of Marriott International's Courtyard Raipur and as the Hotel Manager of Fairfield Amritsar. An alumnus of NIIMC Bhubaneswar, he started his hospitality journey with Le Meridien New Delhi and continued his growth with IHG, Radisson Hotel Group and Marriott International.



INVENTREE HOTELS & RESORTS

Bangalore

Inventree Hotels & Resorts Bangalore appoints **SANDHYA NAIR** as Corporate Head - Marketing & Communications. Nair is a passionate Marketing & Communications professional with 15 years of rich experience with some of the finest brands. Apart from hotels, she explored challenging roles at ISKCON and Akshayapatra as Regional Head, Communications and Senior Consultant, PR at PRHUB Integrated Marketing. She has strong communication skills, media planning, budget management, corporate communication, brand building and people management. She has excellent rapport with print, electronic and online media.



WELCOMHERITAGE CHEETAHGARH RESORT AND SPA

Bera (Pali)

WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort and Spa has appointed **SURESH KUMAR** as the General Manager. With a wealth of experience in the hospitality industry and having spent the past 4 years with ITC Hotels, Kumar has a proven track record of delivering exceptional guest experiences. Bringing a unique perspective and leadership style to the popular luxury boutique property located in Bera, Rajasthan, he will be instrumental in overseeing the resort's daily operations and elevating guest experiences.



INDORE MARRIOTT HOTEL

Indore

Indore Marriott Hotel has appointed **JAHEER ABBAS** as Assistant Director Human Resources. Abbas comes with 15-year experience in the hospitality industry. In his last role as an HR strategist at Accor's Grand Mercure Mysore, he led diverse teams and spearheaded initiatives that not only strengthened the hotel's reputation for employee welfare and HR excellence but also fostered an inclusive culture conducive to personal and professional growth. His dedication to nurturing talent extends beyond mere encouragement. He takes proactive steps to identify and cultivate potential in others.



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Adieu to brand Vistara by year-end

'Change' has been the keyword in the Air India story for the last two years, and the way things are moving forward, it is likely that we see a different face of the airline, as well as Indian aviation at large, shares Campbell Wilson, CEO & MD, Air India.

 Nisha Verma

Campbell Wilson, CEO & MD, Air India, said that it is a good time for aviation, and it will continue for some time longer, particularly given the supply chain constraints on deliveries of new aircraft.

"From an Air India perspective, it is about two years since we were privatised, 18 months since we started our transformation. The first phase of that, throughout early part of 2023, was simply about stabilisation because we were an under-invested business. We had a lot of skeletons in the closet. We had to keep the business afloat and stable. Then, the next year was about building the competencies, capabilities, platform systems to enable rapid growth," Wilson said,



addressing the CEO session at CAPA India Aviation Summit in New Delhi.

Fleet induction

"In the last six months, we have seen that growth come to fruition. It was mentioned that 40 aircraft were inducted over the last year. However, considering aircraft that were rehabilitated from being long grounded for want of spare parts, we have added about 70 aircraft in the last 18 months, which is the size of Vistara. We continue to take in aircraft at the rate of about one every six days. We have for the last six months, and we will for the next six months.

That is consuming a lot of our time and bandwidth," he claimed.

The merger

Talking about the much-anticipated merger, Wilson informed, "We are also in the process of integrating Air Asia India with Air India Express, as well as Air India full service with Vistara. Both these should be completed towards the

bookings. However, we hope to complete the process at the end of this calendar year," he said.

The transformation

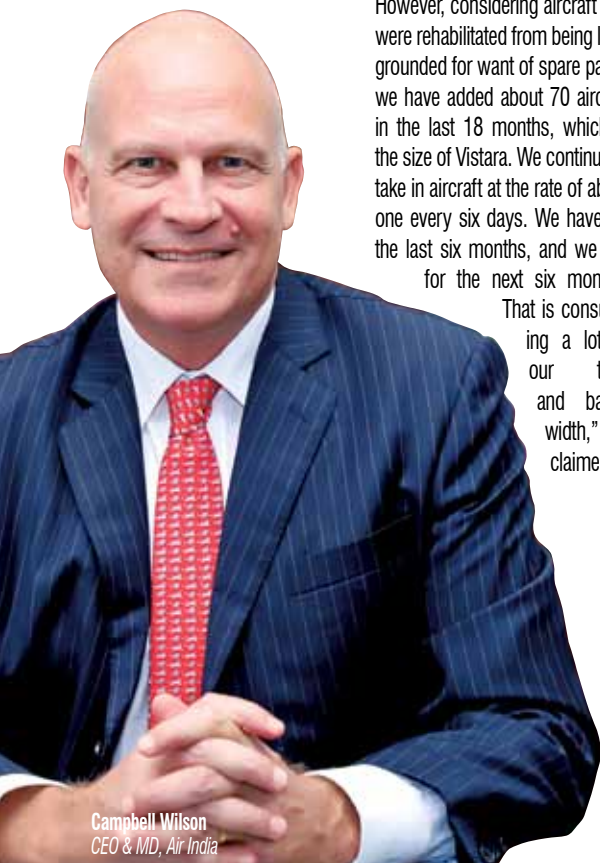
When it comes to transformation, Wilson said that there was a lot to fix in the old Air India. Cut to the status today, Wilson informed, "We have had about 9,000 people join the company, which includes 5,000 new cabin crew and more than 1,000 new pilots. We have completely replaced the IT platform. More than 85 new IT systems have been deployed."

Product, network expansion

Wilson informed that in addition to the six A350s, "Air India has also leased 11 B777s and we have got 70 firm orders for more A350s, B787s and B777s. With new amenities, new catering, new brand, new uniforms, the training that we are giving the 5,000 new crew that we have onboarded, it takes a while to bring these things together. However, being up there with the best of the world airlines is a key priority and ambition for the future," he shared. The entire standardisation is going to be until the middle of 2026. "You will see key markets like New York, San Francisco, London, Frankfurt, Singapore, and Dubai being exclusively served," he said.


We have had about 9,000 people join the company, which includes 5,000 new cabin crew and more than 1,000 new pilots

end of this calendar year. Hence, this year is very much about growth and integration." He added, "With respect to the merger of Air India and Vistara, we have the competition clearance. We are awaiting the publication of the legal clearance from the National Commercial Law Tribunal any day now. On top of that, we are working with the DGCA on the process of transferring aircraft from one operating certificate to another, transferring crew, systems and



Campbell Wilson
CEO & MD, Air India

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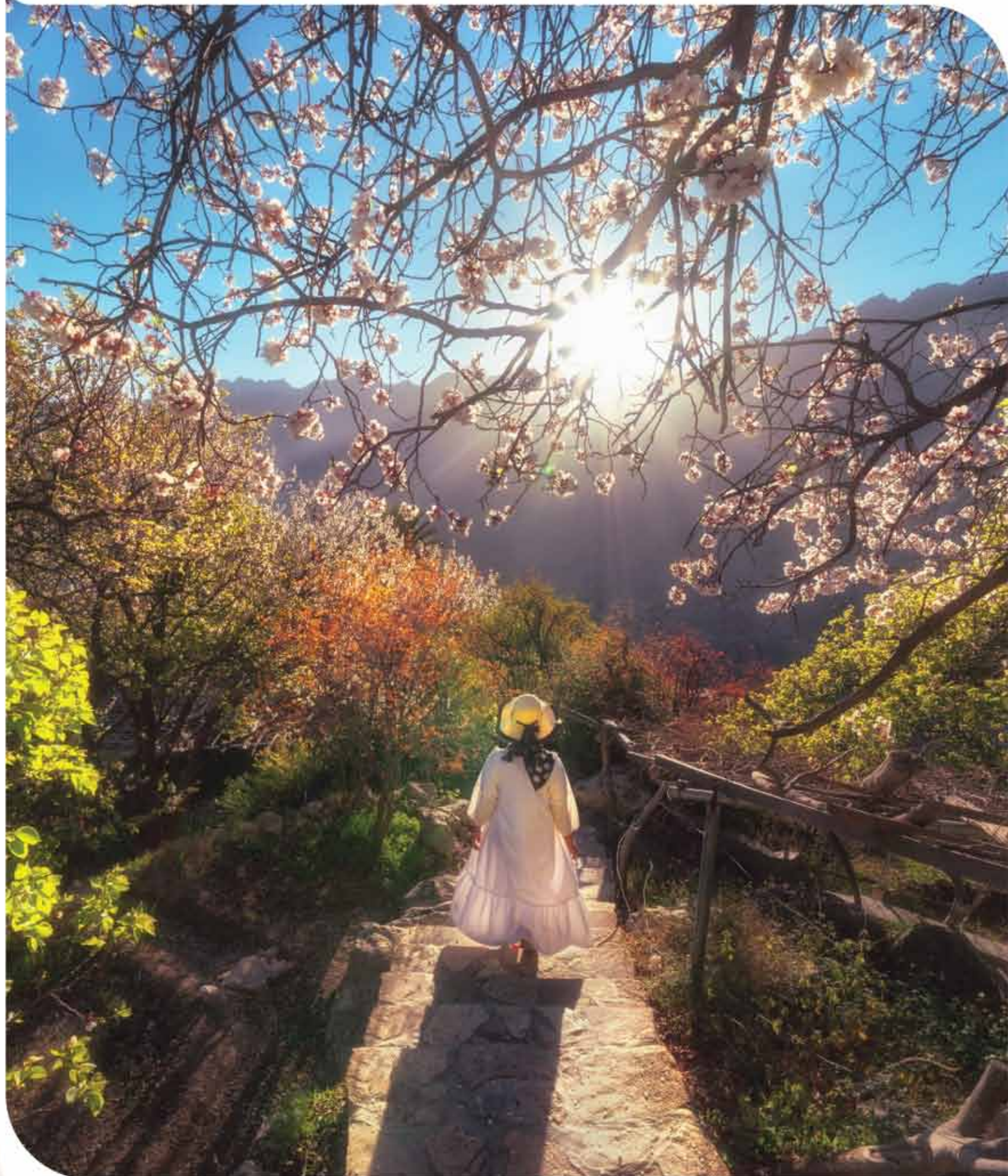
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