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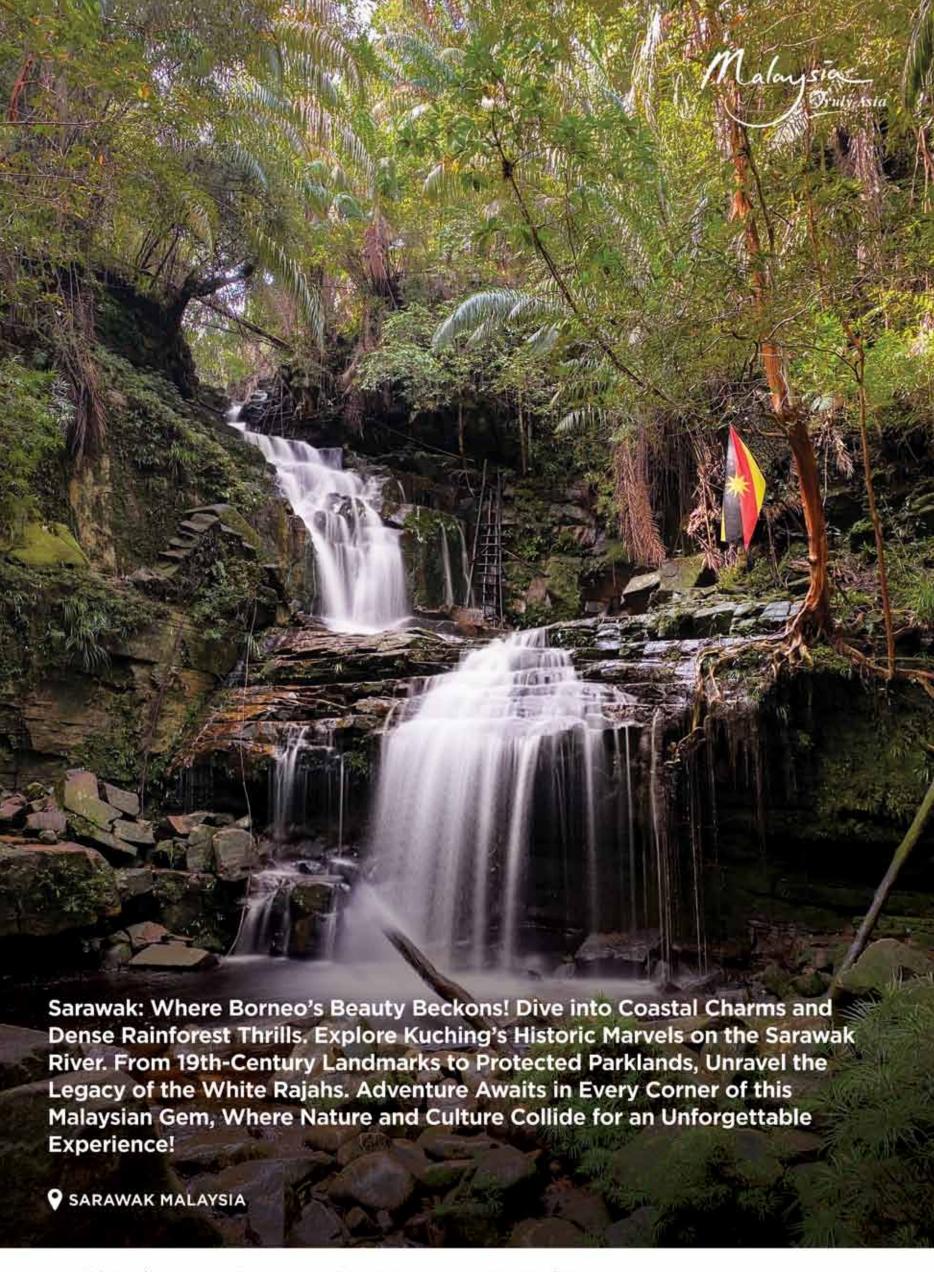


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1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP South Asia's Leading Travel Trade Fortnightly Scan & Share

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5-7 March, 2024

Syncing strategies: India's growth approach

Manisha Saxena, Director General, Tourism, Government of India, emphasizes on the need for a holistic approach to the country's tourism growth, integrating domestic and overseas promotion, infrastructure development, sanitation, skill development, and collaboration with state governments.

Janice Alyosius

he tourism sector in India sees a surge in domestic and inbound tourism, nearing pre-pandemic levels. To further augment the growth, Manisha Saxena, Director General, Tourism, Government of India, stresses on the need for a holistic approach, linking domestic and overseas promotion ef-

forts, investing in infrastructure, sanitation, skill development, and collaboration with state governments for sustainable tourism development.

Highlighting the current state of tourism sector in India, Saxena underlined the remarkable surge in domestic tourism and the recovery in inbound tourism to the pre-pandemic levels. "The tourism sector, particularly in India, is at an inflection point. We are witnessing a significant boom in domestic tourism and have seen a recovery to pre-pandemic levels in terms of inbound tourism. The ministry has been working on its promotion policy, it was undergoing transition a couple of years ago, and now we are leveraging the capabilities of Indian missions abroad," she said.

She reassured stakeholders about the government's commitment to tourism promotion, addressing concerns about budget allocation. "A lot of you have expressed concern about the decrease in the budget for overseas promotion, but I want to assure that it is merely a technical reduction. As you may have noticed, the amount has been increased for domestic

tourism. It's simply a matter of revamping the schemes and using them in tandem for both domestic and overseas promotion. After all, a tourist is a tourist; whether they come from abroad or are Indian tourists, they are invaluable to us. Therefore, the linkage between overseas and domestic promotions, especially in this age of digital media, has become increasingly vital. I be-



Manisha Saxena Director General, Tourism Government of India

lieve it's time for us to take stens to ensure that they work hand in

Contd. on page 20 ▶

Publicise hospitality jobs

Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa, India, puts emphasis on the need to make politicians aware about the employment generation power of the tourism and hospitality sector in India.

TT Bureau

mitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa, India, urged the Indian hospitality and tourism industry to highlight its employmentgenerating potential to politicians and make them aware about the creation of 25 million jobs by 2030, while seeking their help for better infrastructure and status for the sector. "India's tourism sector has been creating lakhs of jobs every year, which has a huge multiplier impact on every direct



Amitabh Kant G20 Sherpa, India

job, but somehow the industry has failed to tell the political class that it is a big creator of jobs in the country," Kant said.

'The tourism sector needs to tell the Centre and state governments that if they pay attention to the sector it will create 25 million jobs by 2030, which is a doable target, while agreeing with their demand for industry status," he added.

He said. "In every speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he emphasizes on the significance and

Contd. on page 20 ▶

'Tap emerging source markets'

India needs to tap into emerging source markets to accelerate its inbound business and focus should be on existing destinations and markets with good infrastructure, feel experts.

market because their economy is coming back in a good fashion.



Vikram Madhok

India is content in itself and it has a huge board of destinations across the country. Besides the extended Golden Triangle, we should explore new destinations which have pristine beauty. India's North-East region is one such area that we need to promote a little bit more through the cohesive effort of the Ministry of Tourism, the state government, the DMCs, and the tour operators internationally. Moreover. there is tremendous potential in Darjeeling and Sikkim as well. When it comes to inbound tourism, there are many markets that we must penetrate like the Latin American

Contd. on page 11 ▶







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'India's aviation surge remarkable'

As the Indian tourism industry charts a course towards expansion, collaboration between stakeholders, guided by organisations like PATA, will be instrumental in realizing its vision of becoming a premier global tourism destination. Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO, PATA, discusses India's aviation surge and outbound tourism's diverse potential.

Janice Alyosius

he global tourism industry has long been recognized as a significant contributor to economic prosperity, and India stands as a prime example of leveraging this sector for growth. According to recent statistics from Future Market Insights, the tourism economy's contribution to India's GDP reached a staggering US\$10.5 trillion in 2022, with forecasts predicting a monumental surge to US\$171 trillion by 2032. Amid these impressive figures, Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), shed light on the dynamic landscape of Asia's aviation sector, particularly India's remarkable growth trajectory during the 3rd edition of PATA India's Tourism Powerhouse in Delhi recently.

Hamid highlighted India's unparalleled aircraft acquisition spree,



Noor Ahmad Hamid CEO Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)

with the country poised to witness the delivery of nearly three new aircraft per week over the next four years. This surge in aviation capacity, coupled with initiatives like Air India's rebranding and network restructuring, underscores India's commitment to enhancing its competitiveness in the regional market. While acknowledging

India's burgeoning aviation sector, Hamid emphasized on the importance of a clearer strategy and refined product offerings to effectively compete with regional counterparts. "It is a crucial role played by airlines. In India, IndiGo and many other airlines serving the destination play a crucial role in not only bringing out people, but more importantly bringing in people to the destination," he said.

In the context of India's outbound tourism market, Hamid underscored its burgeoning diversity, encompassing leisure, visiting friends and relatives, and business travel segments. Despite projections indicating a doubling of the Indian outbound market within the next five years, Hamid asserted that India's market size will remain behind China's, positioning it as the third largest globally. However, this underscores the immense potential for further

growth and diversification within India's tourism landscape. The significance of tourism to India's economy extends beyond its domestic market, as it serves as a catalyst for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and domestic infrastructure development. India's rich cultural heritage and geographical

Pacific Asia Travel Association

diversity further bolster its appeal as a premier tourist destination, attracting visitors from across the globe. Moreover, Hamid emphasized on the 2023 Union Budget's provisions for sustainable tourism growth, signalling the government's commitment to fostering a conducive environment for the sector's development.

Despite facing challenges, such as the downturn in inbound tourism in 2021 due to the pandemic, Hamid shared, India's tourism

This surge in aviation capacity of India underscores the country's commitment to enhancing its competitiveness in the regional market

industry is poised for a robust recovery. "Projections indicate a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels by 2024, with subsequent growth surpassing previous benchmarks." he said. Against this backdrop, PATA's role emerges as pivotal in shaping India's tourism narrative on the global stage. The recent election of the Ministry of Tourism of India and the PATA India chapter to the PATA board underscores India's commitment to global tourism leadership. Hamid emphasized on the importance of India's engagement with PATA in harnessing its domestic and outbound tourism potential while contributing to global industry discourse. Highlighting the plans for India market, Hamid said, "India is an important market, whether inbound or outbound. It is getting stronger day by day. There are a lot of touch points that we want to engage with the members in India, particularly in developing a more responsible tourism. We talk about how the PATA chapter and community in India can work towards providing information or data to Indian government to formulate tourism policy." 🖖



MARCH 1st fortnight issue 2024



Tell the India story

India known for its heritage, culture and raw beauty is vouched for by tourists across the world. While India is moving beyond the Golden Triangle and God's Own Country with experiences that are curated for every kind of guest. However, with Foreign Tour Operators (FTOs) still asking for similar products, there needs to be more information going outside the country about new products available here. This can only be achieved through overseas promotions on a big scale. Thus, the questions that arise with the recent cutoff in budget allocation for overseas promotions are not unfounded. We agree that creating infrastructure and destinations for domestic tourists will be ready to cater to international ones, but the India story needs to be told globally, and that can only be done through right international publicity.

Accessiblity vital

In the last one year, we have seen a lot of talks about sustainability under India's G20 Presidency, as well as from the global bodies, NTOs, DMCs, tour operators, and tourists. However, not many are underlining accessibilty during such discussions. People with special abilities sometimes struggle in planning their travels, and hence it's important for destinations to make extra efforts for them. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), 1.3 billion people - about 16 per cent of the global population - experience significant disability. Accessibility for all to tourism facilities, products, and services should be a central part of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. India too released draft Accessibility Guidelines for Tourism in 2022 as a step towards inclusivity in tourism. However, a perception change in making such tourists independent would result in more facilities than just creating a ramp and putting signs in braille. It is only when they can easily participate in leisure tours, cultural events and curated activities.

Hotels to report 7-9% growth in '25

Indian hotel industry expected to report 7-9% revenue growth in FY2025, says a report by Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency (ICRA). It predicts hotel occupancy to be at decadal highs in FY2025, while average room rates moving towards the peak of FY2008.

TT Bureau

he Indian hotel industry is expected to report a 7-9 per cent revenue growth in FY2025, over the 14-16 per cent growth expected in FY2024, predicts international credit rating agency ICRA. Sustenance of domestic leisure travel, demand from Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (M!CE), including weddings and business travel, are likely to drive demand in FY2025. Spiritual tourism and tier II cities are also expected to contribute meaningfully in FY2025. Domestic tourism has been the prime demand driver in FY2024 and is likely to remain so in the near term. Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) are yet to recover to pre-COVID levels and the improvement would depend on the global macroeconomic environment.

ICRA estimates pan-India premium hotel occupancy at decadal highs of 70-72 per cent in FY2024 and FY2025, after recovering to 68-70 per cent in FY2023. Pan-India premium hotel average room rates (ARRs) are expected to go up to ₹7,200-7,400 in FY2024 and rise further to ₹7,800-8,000 in FY2025. The RevPAR is expected to be at an 8-12 per cent discount to the FY2008 peak in FY2024 and subsequently converge towards the FY2008 peak in FY2025. However, the spike in ARR in some hotels and specific pockets has been higher than the average levels, with a few outliers even crossing the FY2008 peak in FY2024.

The demand outlook over the medium term remains healthy, supported by a confluence of factors, including improvement in infrastructure and air connectivity. favourable demographics, and anticipated growth in large-scale M!CE events with the opening of multiple new convention centres in the last few years, among others. The healthy demand amid relatively lower supply would lead to higher ARRs. Several hotels are also undergoing renovation, refurbishment, and upgradation, and these are likely to support the ARRs further going forward.

Larger players would also benefit from revenues/ share of profits generated from hotel expansions through management contracts and operating leases.

Vinutaa S, Vice President and Sector Head – Corporate Ratings, ICRA, said: "Demand is expected to remain strong across markets in FY2025 as consumer senti-

ICRA estimates
pan-India premium
hotel occupancy at
decadal highs of
70-72 % in FY2024
and FY2025, after
recovering to
68-70% in FY2023

ments continue to be healthy and corporate performance is stable. Hotel-specific demand would, however, depend on location, competition, and other property-related dynamics."

She added: "Domestic tourism would be the prime driver, with FTA improvement depending on the global macroeconomic environment. Mumbai and NCR, being gateway cities, are likely to report occupancy north of 75 per cent in FY2024 and FY2025, benefiting from transient passengers, business travellers and

M!CE events. The ARRs would witness a healthy YoY increase in FY2024 and FY2025 across markets. This sharp rise in ARRs of premium hotels also resulted in the spillover of demand to midscale hotels."

Sustenance of a large part of the cost-rationalization measures undertaken during the COVID period, along with operating leverage benefits, has resulted in the sharp expansion in margins compared to pre-COVID levels. The staff-toroom ratio remains 15-20 per cent lower than the pre-COVID levels. Companies have increased their usage of renewable power while pass-through of the cost inflation and strict control on fixed cost increase have also supported margins. Asset-light expansions have been margin-accretive for larger hotel chains. ICRA's sample comprising 12 large hotel companies is expected to report strong operating margins of 31-33 per cent for FY2024 and FY2025, against 33 per cent for FY2023 and 20-22 per cent pre-Covid.

Demand across markets is expected to be strong in FY2025 as consumer sentiment is healthy and corporate business is stable

However, within the sample, it is likely to be a mixed bag, depending to a certain extent on renovations and increase in employee expenses amidst growing demand. De-leveraging of balance sheets has led to lower interest costs and would support net margins. ICRA expects the uptick in earnings and cash flows to support the capital structure going forward. Debt metrics are expected to be better than pre-COVID levels in FY2024 and are likely to improve further in FY2025



Highlights of the report

- Supply, which is expected to grow at a CAGR of 4.5-5 per cent over the medium term, would lag demand, supporting an upcycle
- Margins are expected to remain flattish for FY2024 and FY2025 on YoY basis, aided by healthy revenue growth despite increase in some cost heads, including refurbishment/ maintenance and employee cost
- Healthy business accruals have led to improvement in credit profile in several companies, resulting in upgrades exceeding downgrades in FY2023 and YTD FY2024

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Bringing Indian weddings back

PM Narendra Modi's push for 'Wed in India' has potential to boost economy. But are Indian families willing to do this? Do we have have the infrastructure to deal with the demand?

speaks to three key wedding planners on the issue.



large percentage of Indian couples are planning their weddings in foreign locations, but this is depriving Indian businesses and the exchequer of thousands of crores every year. Is the PM's wedding campaign luring them back? Perhaps, says Rohit Jadhav, Founder & Managing Director, Moments Forever. "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 destination weddings in India. There are limitations of hotel rooms that a single hotel can offer, limitation of event spaces whether it is indoors or outdoors, within any hotel baring a few. Moreover, the infrastructure to some of the destinations, whether its Goa, Jaipur or Udaipur is lacking. Lastly and most important, it is the cost factor. The amount of money spent on weddings in India to the quality and standards offered by the destination are not comparable in my opinion," he says.

Jadhav adds that traditionally, Indians favour international destinations like Middle East and Far



Rohit Jadhav Founder & Managing Director Moments Forever



Birju Gariba Founder ISKRA Events



Nirav Thaleshwar Founder & Director Allegiant Events

The amount of money spent on weddings in India to the quality and standards offered by the destination are not comparable in my opinion

since the appeal by the PM, **Birju Gariba**, Founder, ISKRA Events, has 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

The first challenge is to find sufficient branded hotels that have this inventory and finding enough flight options to reach from different places within India

While the campaign and appeal are a definite positive move, India poses a variety of challenges. An average destination wedding in India is for 250-300 pax and is hosted for about two nights, three days. The first challenge is to find

There is a growing trend of Indians choosing domestic destinations due to a desire for a deep cultural connect and the charm of local traditions

these places. Another major factor is the hotel pricing these days. In the past three years, the pricing per room have almost increased by up to three times of pre-COVID rates. This makes it almost imminent for guests to explore destinations outside India who come at a far more attractive pricing," Gariba adds.

Deep cultural connect

Nirav Thaleshwar, Founder & Director, Allegiant Events, has observed a growing trend of Indian weddings 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 planning within the country contribute to this shift. Undoubtedly, the government's push for weddings in India through the Incredible India campaign has played a role. The emphasis on showcasing India's diverse cultural heritage and picturesque locales has heightened awareness. This makes it an attractive option for couples seeking a memorable wedding experience," he says.



East for weddings due to the ease of travel in terms of connectivity and duration. "I feel that due to political unrest in various destinations, the HNIs and UHNIs who we cater to, are avoiding any social celebrations internationally due to the uncertainty. Secondly, due to government's new reforms of restrictions on international transactions out of the country – 20 per cent fee – on all transactions is exorbitant and enough reason to stay in India!" he shares.

Sense of caution

In his past few meetings and

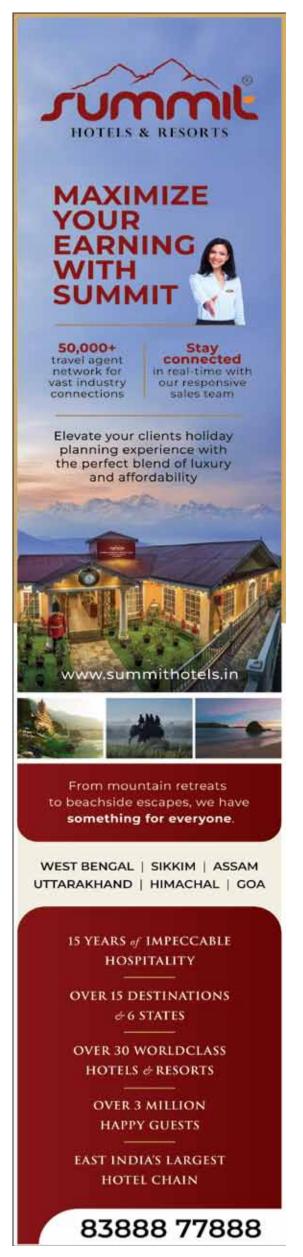
corporate have already cancelled their plans of international destinations. While there is no major panic, there is definitely a sense of caution. With the appeal from the leader of the country and a parallel campaign by the Tourism Ministry, there is definitely a positive movement towards India, and decisions are still pending as far as locking the destination is concerned. The campaign is a good reminder that the families are not compromising by considering hosting the wedding in their own backyard as against going international,"

sufficient branded hotels that have this inventory and finding enough flight options to reach from different places within India and also for international guests reducing flight times, Gariba adds.

"There are very few hotels within the location or few options to fly to

Goa, Jaipur, & Kerala popular destinations

According to IPO India, the average wedding expense in India this year is estimated to be around ₹5 lakh. The most popular wedding destinations in the country include Goa, Jaipur, Kerala and Shimla. The most popular wedding trends include destination, themed weddings, and eco-friendly weddings.



WWW.<mark>travialkindia.</mark>com March 1⁸¹ Fortnight issue 2024 **Trumals 9**

Tourism News

Apart from tier I, TAT will give M!CE incentives in tier II & tier III cities too: Trirattanasongpol

With occupancy demand soaring, Indian hotel industry to generate 7-9 % revenue growth in 2025

India emerges as second largest market after the US for Rail Europe in 2023, says Björn Bender, CEO & Chairman

8,500-12,500 branded keys required to fulfill demand of surging tourist arrivals in Ayodhya

Backed by domestic demand, Indian hospitality industry is set for 11-13% revenue growth in the financial year

Himachal Pradesh registers 6% surge in tourist arrivals in 2023; 62,806 foreigners among 1.6 crore total tourists

Visa application from New Delhi sees 10% year on year growth in 2023, recovers to 82% of 2019 level, says VFS Global

Making Maharashtra sustainable

Girish Mahajan, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, says the government is keen to provide optimal facilities for tourists. He emphasizes on the need for green and sustainable tourism, urging collective efforts to make Maharashtra a sustainable destination.

TT Rureau

he Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Government of Maharashtra, in association with Mumbai Festival 2024, participated in a Tourism Conclave, bringing together distinguished industry leaders, experts, and policymakers to delve into global tourism opportunities and deliberate on sustainable practices within the tourism sector. The conclave featured substantive discussions, presentations, and networking sessions focused on the strategic development of Mumbai's M!CE sector, events, wedding industry, tourism, hotels, and venues.

Girish Mahajan, Tourism Minister of Maharashtra, said, "Launching Mumbai Festival in 2024 marks a significant step towards elevating Maharashtra's tourism sector. With a 720 km coastline, forts, forests, mountains, and beaches,



Girish Mahajan, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, at the first edition of the Mumbai Festival 2024

our state offers everything for a memorable experience. Tourism is pivotal in realising PM Modi's vision of a 5 trillion economy by 2030. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for green and sustainable tourism, urging collective efforts to make Maharashtra the best global destination. Let's prioritise cleanliness, convenience, and quality guiding systems to enhance the appeal of our motherland to international tourists."

Sustainability advocates like **Umit Bhatia**, Director, Sustainability Strategy West Asia, JLL and industry pioneers such as **Prashant Pitti**, Co-founder, Easemytrip, shared insightful perspectives. Discussions were further enhanced by contributions from leaders at renowned organisations, including Hyatt Hotels Corporation, PwC, Thomas Cook, IHCL, SOTC, and Sterling Holidays, reflecting a

commitment to driving sustainable growth in Mumbai's tourism landscape. Jayashree Bhoj, Secretary of Tourism, Govt of Maharashtra, said, "Maharashtra promotes sustainability through collaborations with international entities and innovative initiatives, such as all-women-run resorts, enhancing responsible tourism practices and experiences. The commitment is evident through collaborations, green designs,

and an upcoming policy. Join us in showcasing the diverse beauty of Mumbai and Maharashtra globally."

Dia Mirza, Global Ambassador UN Secretary-General for the UN-SDGs, said, "With the launch of

With a funding of up to US\$ 500,000 investment for the winning startup, the event underscores India's commitment to fostering innovation

the 'Travel for LIFE' program by the Ministry of Tourism on World Tourism Day, India takes a bold step towards sustainable tourism."

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New markets still a strong bet?



Rajiv Mehra President IATO

Indian travel industry needs to promote new destinations in North-East region for inbound arrivals, especially for those who are repeat visitors to India. We should tap into these areas, along with Jammu and Kashmir, which is also coming in with new destinations apart from Gulmarg, Sonamarg, and Pahalgam. New markets like Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan also need to be promoted.

www.travtalkindia.com



Homa Mistry Trail Blazer Tours India

Instead of new destinations, we must promote the existing ones. We must promote destinations with good infrastructure. Trail Blazer focuses on destinations with good infrastructure for promotion instead of tapping into new areas because we don't want a cultural holiday to become an adventurous one. Where inbound arrivals are concerned, there is no need to go in for new markets. ""



EM Najeeb Chairman ATE Group of Companies

India has been continuously evolving as a tourist destination, with new destinations emerging. Some destinations that have been gaining attention among inbound tourists are Leh-Ladakh, J&K, Rann of Kutch, Kaziranga National Park, Puducherry, Spiti Valley, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Majuli Island in Assam, Kumarakom and Munnar in Kerala, Ayodhya and Sunderban.



Executive Director Le Passage to India

India is many countries in one country. It is a continent in itself. There is so much to do, and so much to explore here. Those good old products like the Golden Triangle and Kerala have been on autopilot, they are selling automatically, but it is time for DMCs like us to explore new areas. If all of us will promote these areas collectively, I think our inbound numbers can increase manifolds.



President & Country Head - Holidays. M!CE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)

The concept of spiritual tourism is evolving rapidly and is gaining momentum not only from Gen S but also young India's Gen Z and millennials. We are witnessing an uptick in demand emerging from India's metros and mini metros, in addition to tier II and III cities. To tap into this opportunity, we have expanded our Spiritual Journeys, Darshans portfolio to include unique experiences.



Antara Phookan Director, Business Development & Design, Assam Bengal Navigation

In today's world of travel, there are two distinct paths one can take. On one hand, there is the allure of destinations like Dubai, Vegas, Monaco, with their glitzy attractions. On the other, there exists a deeper, more enriching journey one that leads to offbeat destinations. Discerning travellers of Indian origin seek to explore and learn about the beauty in diversity in their country.

Contd. on page12 ▶



New infra to open new doors

Contd. from page 11



Pradeep Shetty President

Mashik's success at attracting tourists during the holiday season highlights its growing prominence as a tourism hotspot. The increased tourist footfall, especially around wineries, signifies a shift in people's preferences towards relaxation and personal time. We believe the reinstatement of WIPS to play the role of a catalyst in propelling the region's development as a tourism destination.



Dharmesh Advani National General Secretary

India is indeed 'Incredible'; it is a year-round destination with diverse tourism options to offer. Different states of India have realised this and are actively promoting the country to their clients through various activities such as B2B roadshows, workshops and even social media. Our states are going all out to showcase their cultural richness, spirituality, and festivals to the global audience.



Neil Patil Founder, COO & CTO Veena World

Temple tours in South India represent a largely untapped area of cultural and spiritual exploration. We are taking efforts to promote these architectural and devotional marvels to a wider audience. Additionally, national parks, are particularly popular among foreign visitors. From the dense forests of Kanha National Park to the tiger reserves of Jim Corbett, these parks offer unforgettable experiences.



Arun lyer Secretary TAFI & Founder and MD, My Golf Tours

The effects of G20 summits on tourism are vet to be fully realized. However, a new policy on tourism promotion needs to be sped up. Moreover. the G20 Summit at the grand Bharat Mandapam, capable of hosting 7,000 delegates, and the colossal Yashobhoomi, accommodating 11,000 delegates, have truly sparked India's emergence as a major convention hub.



Dharmendra Singh *Director Plaisir Hospitality Services*

The entire country is a great destination for inbound tourists, but a special mention of Ram Mandir is needed today. as it is getting popular with inbound tourists. We are getting many inquiries from our NRI clients and foreign clients too. But we should also work on offbeat destinations because nowadays the tourism department is working very hard on promoting offbeat destinations.



Chirag Agrawa Co-Founder TravClan

Within our borders lie hidden gems, patiently awaiting discovery. As discerning travellers yearn for unique choices, certain Indian states whisper tales of untapped potential. Meghalaya, adorned with a picturesque terrain, excellent connectivity, and an unexplored status, stands as a promise yet unveiled. Assam and Madhya Pradesh cradle the untapped potential of wildlife tourism.

Compiled by TT Bureau





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Remarks: Rates are based on DBL/TWN sharing basis. Rates and Offers are subject to change without prior notice & are subject to availability. Tourism Dirham & Room Municipality Fees are not included. Valid till 30th April'2024. *T&C Apply.



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South Africa roadshow hosts 12k meetings

South African Tourism recently concluded its 20th annual India roadshow and hosted over 12,000 meetings across five important cities in the country and generated more than 1,60,000 on-the-spot leads. Starting from Jaipur, the South African Tourism delegation travelled to Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru and finally wrapped up the show in Mumbai.



See more pictures on page 16

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India key focus market for South Africa



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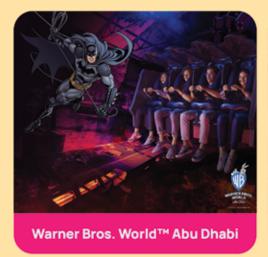
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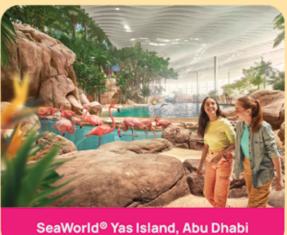
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SIHRA delves into tier II, III cities

The South India Hotels & Restaurant Association of India (SIHRA) held its annual convention in Visakhapatnam with the theme 'India Growth Story' and discussed pertinent issues and challenges being faced by the hospitality industry in South India. The association made sure that the members take away lessons to grow their business from the 2024 convention.



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Manta Aur Connects B'Iuru-Maldives

Manta Air, an aviation company based in Maldives, is set to make a foray into the international arena. Ahmed Maumoon, Deputy CEO, Manta Air, unveils their plans, outlining the three weekly flights connecting Dhaalu and Bengaluru from March 2024.



aving been in operation for five years now Manta Air has established itself as a player in both seaplane and wheel plane services within the Maldives. With a fleet consisting of 18 seaplanes and three ATR aircraft, the company's focus has been on ferrying tourists to resorts from Dhaalu Airport. However, with the tourism landscape evolving in the region Manta Air recognized the demand for short-haul tourist routes and began working towards securing international approvals. "After consideration, we have opted to explore flights to tap into emerging opportunities," said Ahmed Maumoon, Deputy CEO, Manta Air.

After approvals granted by authorities in September, they wasted no time in progressing



with their plans to launch flights from Bengaluru—an important hub, for outbound travel. The first flight, from Bengaluru to the Maldives is set for 1 March 2024 operating on Fridays, Sundays and Tuesdays. The departure times are at 1:30 am from Dhaalu and 6:45 am from Bengaluru ensuring passengers reach the Maldives by 9:30 am.

Maumoon highlighted the benefits of the route emphasizing on the convenience of bypassing transit delays at Male Airport and the top-notch onboard services provided by Manta Air. "Our planes offer interiors and tailored amenities for passenger comfort," he mentioned. "Additionally, we offer meal options catering to preferences, including vegetarian choices," he added.

The choice to start operations from Bengaluru was influenced

At a glance

- NTA AIR Flight between Kempegowda International Airport (BLR) and Dhaalu Airport (DDD) starts 1 March 2024; three flights per week on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday
- Dhaalu Airport conveniently located near multiple resorts
- ATR72-600 aircraft provides 2x2 seating pitch with increased legroom

by its significance as a market for travellers visiting the Maldives. Maumoon referenced data showing that a significant percentage of tourists pass through Bengaluru showcasing the route's potential to offer travel experiences. Looking forward, Maumoon

mentioned, Manta Air plans for growth, such as expanding Dhaalu Airport's runway to handle aircraft, like the A321. This strategic move aims to enhance travel efficiency and opens up destinations beyond Bengaluru, potentially.



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'Focus also on value of travellers'

VisitBritain continues to showcase West Midlands to the Indian travel trade through the latest engagement at Showcase Britain 2024 B2B event, as well as the Britain Ireland Marketplace event held in London, followed by an exciting familiarisation tour. Shuja Bin Mehdi, Senior Manager Industry Engagement – India, VisitBritain, shares details.

Hazel Jair

sing its annual Showcase Britain 2024 B2B event and the Britain Ireland Marketplace, VisitBritain hosted 11 Indian buyers to an educational tour to exciting destinations such as Bicester Village, Stratford-upon-Avon, Coventry, Cotswold, and Birmingham. Each destination offered a glimpse into the rich history, culture, and attractions of Midland Britain. The meetings with the suppliers from Great Britain at the Intercontinental 02 in London were informative and interactive where Indian agents forged lasting relationships.

Sharing details, **Shuja Bin Mehdi**, Senior Manager Industry Engagement – India, VisitBritain, who was part of the Indian delegation, says, "VisitBritain tied up with an industry trade association called ETOA (European Tour Operators Association) and UK Inbound. The idea is

to bring the buyers from overseas markets – over 120 of them – and close to a 180 UK and Irish suppliers under one roof where they conducted one-on-one meetings and discussed packaging Britain and Ireland better."

VisitBritain picked 11 hosted buyers based on the business they delivered over the past few vears. These were mid-sized operators and large-scale companies based in Mumbai, New Delhi and tier II markets such as Jalandhar, Pune, Gurugram, Gorakhpur, and Raipur. "The idea is to help them have conversations with the UK trade beginning with the event in London. Post that we are hosting them on a fam trip to the West Midlands. The aim is to show them the attractions and the destinations within the West Midlands, starting with Stratford Upon Avon, Coventry and Birmingham and showcase Birmingham as the gateway to the West



Shuja Bin Mehdi Senior Manager Industry Engagement – India, VisitBritain

Midlands," Mehdi adds. Air India hosted the tickets for the group.

Evolution of preferences

VisitBritain's main target segment is family, and therefore, it focuses on attractions that are popular with them. "The other segment we also focus on is luxury. This was showcased through some of the hotels that were picked for this Fam. We wanted to showcase that particu-

larly to the mid-size operators. We are continuing with our focus on generating more and more value for visitors and not only go after volume players," he adds.

In this FY, until 31 March, VisitBritain will be delivering a series of six roadshows across six cities in India. The focus will be to interact and meet frontline staff to help them develop itineraries for the UK from scratch using the VisitBritain

У

Focus is not just on numbers, but also value. India has not fully recovered to 2019 levels in terms of number of visitors, as per International Passenger Survey

website. Pune and Ahmedabad are already done, with four more cities to go. "We see an evolution of preferences that Indian visitors to UK demand in the itineraries that are being sold. The value of the packages has also gone up by at least 30-40 per cent as compared to pre-COVID. Not only has the number of stays gone up, but also the money they spend in the UK, experience better quality hotels, people are spending longer time and more on experiential travel rather than just sightseeing," he says.

Indian visitors are also exploring England beyond London. "A lot of

focus is on Manchester as the gateway to north of England and a lot of interest in Scotland as well. We are seeing a good number of visitors to Birmingham and going to Stratford Upon Avon." Mehdi adds.

Popular films and TV shows

The focus is also on developing itineraries around film and TV filming locations popular among the Western audience. So, Europe and North America is the focus for this at the moment. "But going forward VisitBritain will develop more itineraries and share more content with the travel trade which will also focus on Asian markets, including India.

India ranks UK at 4th place in 2023

According to a report, 'How the world views the UK 2023', published by VisitBritain, India ranked the UK one place higher in 2023 at 4^{th} place. Tourism gained one place to 5^{th} and within this dimension historic buildings gained three places to 3^{rd} , vibrant cities moved up one place to 5^{th} and natural beauty gained 10 places to 14^{th} rank.

Swadesh Darshan MOT's priority

Contd. from page 5

Saxena shed light on the government's initiatives, particularly under schemes like Swadesh Darshan, aimed at developing tourism infrastructure across various destinations in India. "Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, numerous new destinations were created. A significant amount of tourism infrastructure was set up under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme. The scope of the scheme has been expanded, with a focus on infrastructure development to ensure the holistic development of entire destinations. During an exercise in the ministry, we realized that there are at least 22 touchpoints for a tourist, from the initial planning stages to posting feedback or memories on social media. This includes not only accommodations like hotels but also aspects such as learning about a destination, transportation to and from there available activities attractions, facilities, guides, basic amenities, local cuisine, street foods, intangible cultural experiences, and safety and security measures. We are now making efforts, in collaboration with state governments and district administrations, to address these points in each destination," she said.

Saxena highlighted the meticulous considerations undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism when developing infrastructure and promoting destinations. One such crucial initiative discussed was

Under Swadesh
Darshan, numerous
new destinations
were created.
Significant amount of
tourism infra was set
up under Swadesh
Darshan 2.0 scheme

the Swachhata Green Leaf Rating System (SGLR) ratings, aimed at ensuring the installation of safe sanitation facilities in hospitality units, especially in environmentally sensitive areas like hills and coastal regions. Saxena cited the successful pilot of this initiative conducted in Pahalgam in January, launched in December and completed within a month. She also announced plans for a similar initiative in the Neel Islands, underscoring the ministry's commitment to expanding this program nationwide. "We are leveraging synergy with district Swachhata teams in this endeavour, aiming to ramp up Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with public sector undertakings (PSUs). We are also earmarking funds for it. I believe this will be a significant initiative over the next year, as we aim to develop at least 100 such destinations. This effort will showcase what can be achieved, even in the smallest hospitality units, in terms of technology adoption for safe sewage management and waste disposal" Saxena said.

Saxena emphasized the collaborative approach taken with state governments to identify areas for conversion into fully managed sanitation zones, whether they be beachfronts, blocks, or villages. The objective is to demonstrate the feasibility of such initiatives on a larger scale. The Director General of Tourism was addressing the 6th Hoteliers' Conclave in New Delhi recently.

India lags in creating tourism jobs

Contd. from page 5

importance of tourism and how tourism can be the biggest driver of growth. Even the budget spoke about tourism."

He added: Everybody in government believes that tourism can be a big driver of growth. If the target is put before the political system that 25 million jobs will be created by the tourism sector, it will have a huge impact on the minds of the political system, and they will do everything possible for tourism." He asserted that pushing the tour-

ism sector as an industry will help at the Centre and state levels.

With the opening of Yashobhoomi and Bharat Mandapam, Kant also urged the industry players to seize the chance in the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) sector, saying that India now boasts of the greatest convention and expo centres in the world. Elaborating on employment opportunities in the sector, Kant noted that in terms of employment, Thailand creates close to 20 million jobs, Malaysia has

about 15 million jobs, whereas India creates 7.8 million jobs from the tourism sector.

Tourism is a \$5 trillion economy globally with India's share in M!CE being less than 2 per cent in the global market, which is over \$ 500 billion. Kant said that this is an area where India has lagged behind and which needs to be increased substantially. He was addressing the 6th Hoteliers' Conclave, organised by the Hotel Association of India (HAI) in New Delhi recently.

Indian delegation at AIME



The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, along with various stakeholders, including prominent convention centres in India, hotel chains, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Limited (IRCTC) and India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), participated at the Asia Pacific Incentives and Meetings Event (AIME), held at Melbourne, Australia, from 19-21 February.

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Utah records 8,700 Indian visitors

Having recently concluded a three-city sales mission, Utah Office of Tourism has revealed a three-year plan for the India market. This includes working extensively with the tour operators on Utah-focused itineraries, as well as creating a multi-state trip to lure in the visitors.

Hazel Jain

ndia is a primary emerging market with substantial growth potential, says Zach Fyne, Global Markets Specialist at Utah Office of Tourism. "India stands out as one of the most stable tourism markets, showcasing remarkable resilience amid global fluctuations. Utah's positioning among the top 10 destinations for Indian visitors reflects the tremendous potential and appeal our state holds. Our aim is to encourage Indian visitors to extend their stays and increase their spending in the state," he adds.

In 2022, Indian visitors boosted Utah's economy by U\$\\$8.7 million, spending an average of U\$\\$2,391.95 per visitor. The state saw a 5 per cent growth in Indian visits compared to 2019, reaching around 8,700 visits. Looking ahead, Utah expects a substantial 42.6 per cent increase in Indian visitation and a remarkable 203.9 per cent



Zach Fyne Global Markets Specialist Utah Office of Tourism

surge in projected visitor spending from 2019 to 2027. Rachel Bremer, Global Markets Director, Utah Office of Tourism, says that the Indian visitor is a high-value one, just below Australia and China. "It is not exponential growth but it is good to see that we have surpassed 2019 growth level. They are in the top 10 spenders in the US. But we see a lot of growth potential and India is an emerging market for Utah," she says.



Rachel Bremer Global Markets Director Utah Office of Tourism

Their three-year plan is to have set departure tours from India with Utah focussed itinerary in partnership with each of India's top five tour operators. "We also want to create a Yellowstone loop or a Grand Canyon multi-state with a minimum three-night stay in Utah with the top five operators in India. At least five Utah itineraries must include non-national park attractions," she adds. For FITs, Utah wants at least 10 agencies to include the state in their website promotions and with a minimum of four-night stay.

The Utah Specialist Academy training programme has received about 700 registrations and 250 completions, which Bremer says is the highest number of registrations and completions Utah has seen for its programme.

What's New in Utah

- 2024 marks a century since the first movies were filmed in Utah. The state will celebrate this milestone with a year-long series of events.
- Utah's Salt Lake City International Airport underwent a ground breaking US\$ 5.1 billion rebuild, making it the first new US hub airport in the 21st century. Boasting 76 new gates, the airport now offers 320 daily departures to over 90 nonstop destinations.

India summit @ATM 2024

With more than 30 per cent of Indian travellers choosing to visit Middle East destinations, this year's Arabian Travel Market (ATM 2024) will be focussing on India's outbound tourism potential. The event will have an India summit in its latest edition.

TT Bureau

The upcoming ATM 2024 from 6-9 May will feature a dedicated India summit titled 'Unlocking the True Potential of Inbound Indian Travellers', which will take place at ATM's Global Stage on 6 May, in conjunction with VIDEC Consultants. The summit will explore the dynamics of India as a key source market for tourism growth, as well as current and future opportunities.

The summit is in line with the boom in Indian outbound market,





which is forecast to be worth \$143.5 billion annually by the end of this decade. According to booking.com and McKinsey, 70 per cent of Indians travelling overseas choose nearby destinations, with one-third choosing destinations in the Middle East. The UAE is the top regional destination, followed by Saudi Arabia. According to the DET, India is Dubai's top source market, with 1.9 million visitors in the first 10 months of 2023. Saudi

Arabia is aiming for 7.5 million visitors by 2030.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director - ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "The boom in outbound travel from India is being driven primarily by the growing middle class. In 2020, only 37 million households had annual income between \$10,000 and up to \$35,000, but due to India's rapid economic growth, by 2030 that number will rise significantly

to 177 million households. More specifically, households earning over \$35,000 per annum will also increase from two million in 2020 to 13 million by 2030, a sixfold increase. And with India's median age being just 28 years, it's little wonder that the UNWTO recognizes India as one of the top three fastest-growing outbound markets in the world. By 2030, India's travel expenditure will be valued at \$410 billion.

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'We want to cross 1 lakh visitors'

South African Tourism is penetrating deeper into India's tiered cities to address the untapped, cash-rich travellers. Despite no direct air connectivity and no e-visa facility, the tourism board targets 100,000 visitors from India in next financial year. Neliswa Nkani – Hub Head – Middle East, India and Southeast Asia, South African Tourism, reveals more.



he destination has seen a 43 per cent increase in terms of tourist numbers from India, which has prompted South African Tourism to target a smooth 100,000 arrival milestone by next FY Neliswa Nkani - its Hub Head - Middle East, India and Southeast Asia, says, "Right now. India is at number seven in terms of arrivals. This is without a direct airline and without an e-visa facility. If we had these two, I think India would be sitting at the number one position for South Africa. We are very optimistic; India has 960 million passport holders and of this, 440 million are millennials. So there is a lot of potential."

Indians have also increased in value for South Africa. "We used to see Indians staying between seven and 10 days in South Africa. Now they stay back for 14



Neliswa Nkani Hub Head – Middle East India and Southeast Asia

days. So, we see an increase in spend and stay nights in South Africa. Earlier, it was anywhere between ₹22,000 and ₹30,000, which could go up to ₹45,000-₹150,000 for HNIs," Nkani adds.

Tiered markets on radar nowSouth African Tourism recently concluded its 20th annual India roadshow covering five cities of Jaipur, Delhi, Ahmedabad,

Bengaluru, and Mumbai. Travel agents from Pune also attended the Mumbai leg of the show where 42 trade exhibitors from South Africa were present. To this, Nkani adds, "The idea is to expand our geographical reach in the market. The growth and the money is sitting in tier two markets of India. We must chase the travellers in these tiered markets. We are going to possibly repeat these cities later in the year. We

Right now, India is at number seven in terms of arrivals. This is without a direct airline and without an e-visa facility might be going to Chandigarh, Nagpur, Kochi, and Lucknow." M!CE is also a huge segment for the destination. While 45 per cent is leisure, 46 per cent is M!CE. of which 21 per cent is

per cent is leisure, 46 per cent is M!CE, of which 21 per cent is incentives from the India market. "India is the largest contributor in terms of incentive travel to South Africa. The Indian traveller is an adventure junkie. We have learned that they are not coming to South Africa to rest. They want to be fatigued. People are now kayaking, sky diving, paragliding, jet-skiing, shark-cage diving, glamping and even golfing is gaining popularity," she said. Nkani is also excited about the World Cup Cricket that will be held in South Africa in October and November 2027.

India in top 3 focus markets India is currently one of the fastest growing outbound travel markets, outpacing Asia and many countries around the

world. The country is among the top-three focus markets for South African Tourism. South African Tourism is currently running its flagship 'More & More' brand campaign across target cities. The tourism board is also set to host its Corporate Think Tank in the coming months to engage with Indian corporates and address their business and M!CF travel needs. At present. several stop-over flights fly from India to South Africa, including Emirates, Qatar Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways and Air Seychelles.

Inbound tourism from Mumbai for South Africa grew 37 per cent year on year in 2023 and heftily contributed towards leisure and business travel momentum witnessed. Notably, 46 per cent of arrivals from Mumbai gravitated towards exploring the natural attractions of the Rainbow Nation Delhi is currently the second largest market for South African Tourism in India. Interestingly, 36 per cent of Delhiites travelled to the country for business purposes while 72 per cent of travellers from Delhi spent most on shopping when in-destination.

Numbers don't lie

- Pre-pandemic, 95,000 arrivals were from India, and post-pandemic, this went up to 79,992. This is a 43 per cent increase in terms of numbers.
- Conducted across 5 cities in 5 days, the roadshow hosted over 12,000 meetings and generated more than 1,60,000 on the immediate leads for South African suppliers.
- The roadshow collectively hosted more than 1,200 travel trade partners from across 40 Indian cities.

RW CruiseBuddy to support partners

Resorts World Cruises recently launched RW CruiseBuddy, a web portal that offers a marketing resource centre for travel partners to boost marketing efforts and drive customer engagement. Naresh Rawal, Vice President – Sales & Marketing (India), Resorts World Cruises, said that a special reward point system has also been introduced via portal.













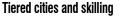
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'Tier II, III growth relies on infra'

Pradeep Shetty, President, FHRAI, says tier-II & III cities of India hold the potential to become big tourist attractions, provided the union and state governments work in tandem with the tourism and hospitality industry. He stresses on infrastructure development, saying that it plays key role in the pursuit of tourism development.

Nisha Verma

alling the recent convention of South India Hotel and Restaurant Association of India (SIHRA) a forum for hoteliers to come together, Pradeep Shetty, President, FHRAI, underlined that the event was held in Visakhanatnam for the first time. "Bringing the conventions to such locations ensures that there is a focus of development of tourism there. It gives an opportunity to players from other parts of South India to come and look at one region. Besides this, the theme was India Growth Story, under which various pertinent issues like talent acquisition and immediate challenges facing the industry were discussed. All this brainstorming will help us in or representation to the governments at the state level as well as the central level " he claimed



Elaborating on the challenges



Pradeep Shetty President FHRAI

faced by the industry in the Southern region, he said, "There has been a lot of growth in the tier II & III cities, which is evident for a couple of years now. In fact, post-pandemic, there has been a phenomenal rise in domestic tourism, and that has helped the industry to bounce back after the pandemic.

"Having said that, it is a critical point. There requires to be a

special focus on development of tourism in these places because many of them have the potential but lack infrastructure. However, there has been a renewed focus of the central government on development in all tier II & III cities. We look at that as an opportunity and hence we are flagging the issue about financial availability or financial credit assistance, as well as how industry should be treated as one of the core infrastructure elements. Within the larger scheme of infrastructure development, hospitality should be a major infrastructure, for which long term lending is a critical part, along with good interest rates. All this is being elusive to this industry. Hence, we want to bring that threshold from ₹100 crore back down to ₹10 crores for tourism project to be planned as an infrastructure project. Resolving these issues would help the idea of developing more tier II cities as tourist destinations " he asserted

Govt collaborations

Reiterating that the central government has increased focus on domestic travel, Shetty shared, "There is a focus on developing more tourist destinations. In the last Parliamentary Committee meeting, we saw that the government was interested in developing greenfield tourism projects, where a particular viable location would



be selected and a complete city would be created akin to Kevadia in Gujarat. Our role is to reach out to both the Union and state governments to see that necessary focus is given to issues that will help in building tourism and better infrastructure. That is our job. We face issues about coordina-

tion between the Union and state governments with tourism, largely being a state subject. However, I see a renewed focus at the central level, and at the state level as well. More state governments are

There has been a lot of growth in tier II & III cities, which is evident for a couple of years now. In fact, post-COVID, there has been a phenomenal rise in domestic tourism

waking up to the fact that there lies a huge potential. In addition, an enabling environment needs to be created and the efforts from our side will continue in bridging this gap—bringing the governments closer and identifying the issues, which will help the industry and the growth of tourism."

FHRAI Initiatives

Encapsulating major issues for FHRAI this year, he informed, "We will focus on various challenges that plagues the industry. One of them being the copyright issue where there are certain irritants about multiple societies claiming money. There is also an issue about our guests being made to pay for the weddings that happen, which are fully exempted. We are presently working with the government and consultation process is underway. We are looking for some resolution in this regard."

Shetty said there are issues with the GST, which need to be looked at. "There are issues with rate and the ₹7,500 slab that has been put, above which you get into the 18 per cent bracket. ⊌

6 lakh+ Indians visit Oman in 2023

In 2023, more than 6 lakh Indian travellers visited Oman, thanks to easy accessibility from all corners of India and streamlined visa procedures. Saada Abdullah Saif Al Harthi, Director, Business Development Department, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, says they were excited to see the overwhelming response from India.



Indian tourist arrivals in the Sultanate of Oman breached the half-million mark in 2023, reaching 610,057 visitors—the highest ever figure. Oman's hospitality has been a significant draw for Indian travellers, complemented by various factors fuelling its increasing popularity in India, including accessibility from all corners of the country, streamlined visa procedures.

and availability of similar cultural influence in Oman.

Commenting over the unprecedented response from India, Saada Abdullah Saif Al Harthi, Director, Business Development Department, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, said: "We are excited to witness the overwhelming response from Indian travellers, thanks to Oman's plethora of attractions, including its rich cultural heri-

tage, stunning landscapes, and warm hospitality. This milestone reflects the collaboration between Oman and our Indian partners. We wish to strengthen the relations between Oman and India, boost Oman's brand visibility and drive interest among premium luxury Indian travellers in the years to come." Oman boasts a diverse array of jaw-dropping tourism attractions contributing to its appeal among Indian travellers. From forts to ancient

We are excited to see the response from Indian travellers, thanks to Oman's plethora of attractions, including its rich cultural heritage, and stunning landscapes



ruins to the stunning natural landscapes encompassing deserts, mountains, and pristine beaches, Oman offers a captivating tapestry of experiences. These attractions are the main reasons for the unprecedented surge of Indian tourist arrivals to Oman.

Adventurous activities, such as desert safaris, scuba diving, and trekking in the picturesque mountain ranges of Oman, provide an opportunity for exploration and discovery. The colourful festivals

and events held throughout the year offer detailed insights into the sultanate's vibrant traditions and heritage, thereby enticing the Indian travellers to delve deeper into its wonders.

The sultanate's appeal to Indian travellers lies in its rich historical ties, diverse natural landscapes, commitment to sustainable tourism, and renowned hospitality. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, is making strenuous efforts to

increase Indian tourist arrivals to Oman by showcasing its many attractions.

Oman's architectural marvels resonating through Nizwa and Bahla forts, offer a rare glimpse into the country's fascinating and glorious past. Oman's rugged terrain—from vast desert sands of Wahiba to the rugged peaks of Al Hajar Mountains and pristine coastline—provide a captivating backdrop for exploration.



www.<mark>Iravialkindia.</mark>com march 1⁵¹ Forthight issue 2024 **25**

MARCH 2024

Date	Event	Time
29-1 Mar	10:00 an	
1-3	India International Travel Mart-Kolkata	11:00 an
1-3	India Travel Mart-Goa	9:00 am
1-4	Taipei Travel Expo	9:00 am
5-7	ITB Berlin	9:00 am
7	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3.00 pm
11	Cross Hotel India Mission-Delhi	9:00 am
13	Cross Hotel India Mission-Mumbai	9:00 am
13	VisitBritain Training Workshop-Bangalore	9:00 am
14	Cross Hotel India Mission-Ahmedabad	9:00 am
15	Cross Hotel India Mission-Kolkata	9:00 am
15	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3.00 pm
15	VisitBritain Training Workshop-Kolkata	9:00 am
15-17	Travel & Tourism Fair-Chennai	10:00 an
15-17	India International Travel Mart Ahmedabad	9:00 am
15-17	India Travel Mart Bhopal	9:00 am
19	VisitBritain Training Workshop-Chennai	9:00 am
20-21	British Tourism and Travel Show	10:00 ar
22-23	Holiday Expo-Varanasi	9:00 am
22-24	MATTA Fair 2024	10:00 an
29-31	India Travel Mart	9:00 am

'Rural experiences our forte'

Bhavik Sheth, CEO, Evoke Experiences, talks about Rann Utsav Tent City at Dhordo village, a 400-tent accommodation which can cater up to 1,100 guests on a daily basis and even offer triple occupancies during weddings and festivals.

TT Bureau

voke Experiences manages and curates a temporary project, known as Rann Utsav Tent City, which is dismantled and rebuilt every year for a few months. It is a 400-tent accommodation which can cater up to 1,100 guests on a daily basis and even offer triple occupancies during weddings and festivals.

Talking about the project, Bhavik Sheth, CEO, Evoke Experiences said, "The tent city is a unique festival in itself. The main USP of the festival is, in spite of temporary setup that we create every vear, it provides each and every essential of the hospitality, each and every essence of the experiential tourism to all the guests who come to the festival. With the help of local artisans, handicraft people, and with the help of natives in the region, we create the venue and try to give the flavour of Kutch."

Sharing about the inspiration behind the project, he said, "When



Bhavik Sheth Evoke Experiences

the Rann Utsav was launched in 2009, we were the officially appointed contractors who were setting up the infrastructure facility on behalf of government. We thought that it is right time that we know how to curate the festival, we know the kind of technicalities about it. So, we just need to work on one thing, that is the hospitality and the wholesome experience."

Expansion plans

Sheth said, "We are opening tent city in Dholavira and Kuno as

well. We work with various state governments. Right now, we are working with Gujarat Tourism and MP Tourism. The first concept and the pioneer project obviously is the tent city."

Evoke Experiences are choosy about selecting sites and locations. "There are multiple parameters we consider before opening in a location, like how closely that place is connected to nature, what is the connectivity, what is target market for us? Erecting and dismantling something every year involves a huge cost for us. However, as compared to a normal business or a commercial hotel, the profits are lesser," he said

Customized itineraries

Curating the customized itinerary is important. "But before curating it, we make sure that our team members have experienced it. So, it is not about just drafting an itinerary on the word document and just to mention that sunrisesunset or pickup drop. Unless and until you experience those

things by your own self, you will not be able to sell it and you will not be able to know what kind of difficulties the guest is going to face, at which location, or at which point of operational part,"

"We try to stick to the basics. Rather than making it more com-

The main USP of the festival is, in spite of temporary setup that we create every **year**, it provides each and every essential of the hospitality

mercial, we want to preserve its nature and excitement; that is the main reason it is running only for four months. For us, from the first day till the last, it is a peak day," he added. 🦫

Merlin woos Indians with Ramdev statue

Merlin Entertainment recently unveiled yoga guru Baba Ramdev's wax statue in Delhi, to be placed at Madame Tussauds New York museum. They are planning to add more Indian figures to augment Indian footfalls at the museum, and are in dialogue with key travel trade partners for the promotion of Madame Tussauds New York, in India.

Amita Pandev

erlin Entertainments unveiled the wax statue of yoga guru Baba Ramdev in Delhi recently. The wax figure will be showcased at Madame Tussauds New York. This addition is expected to attract more Indian diaspora at the world's greatest wax museum in New York.

Merlin, as a location-based global entertainment leader. currently operates more than 140 global attractions, 23 hotels, and six holiday villages in 24 countries spanning four continents. India is one of their major source markets. "Baba Ramdev is the perfect figure to represent India in New York," said Tiago Mogadouro, Head of Marketing, Madame Tussauds New York, during the unveiling of Baba Ramdev's wax statue.



Head of Marketing Madame Tussauds New York

Baba Ramdev is a world-renowned yoga guru, who has played a significant role in mass awakening about yoga and connected over two billion people in the world. As per Merlin, Baba Ramdev's statue will be pivotal in reaching the Indian market. "To be more inclusive, we are planning to add more figures to Madame Tussauds New York from diverse

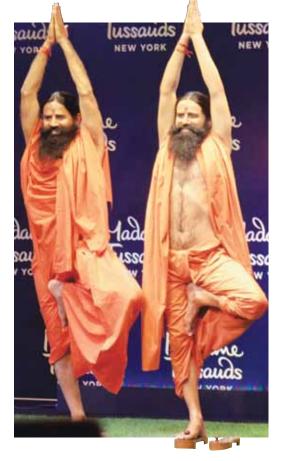
walks of life and the addition of Baba Ramdev's wax statue is the testament of the same. This initiative will draw visitors from India and the whole world to New York and will add diversity to our audience as well," Mogadouro added.

He said, "We are engaging in interactions with our Indian trade partners so that Madame Tussauds could be more visible to the

The wax figure, to be showcased at Madame **Tussauds New York, is** expected to attract more **Indian diaspora**

wider audience or Indian tourists visiting New York. We expect that our meetings with trade partners and tourism experts in India will result in Indians adding Madame Tussauds to their itinerary whenever they are travelling anywhere."

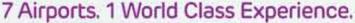
Merlin is expecting that, being the host city of T20 World Cup 2024, New York will welcome a huge number of Indian cricket fans and diaspora to the city. This could be a grand opportunity for Merlin to attract Indian visitors to Madame Tussauds. Therefore, to boost business, they have strategically planned to reveal Sachin Tendulkar's wax statue at Madame Tussauds New York in 2024. Concerning the other marketing strategies, which Merlin is executing to boost international footfall. Mogadouro responded, "Every year we are adding 10 wax statues to Madame Tussauds' collections, which is a huge number."



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MOVEMENTS

New Delhi

SANJAY KUMAR JAIN, an Indian Railway Traffic Services (IRTS) Officer of 1990 batch, has taken over the charge as Chairman & Man-

aging Director of Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd (IRCTC). A qualified Chartered Accountant (CA), Jain's career is a blend of leadership roles in policy making, commercial ventures and developmental ventures of the Government of India and PSUs. He brings with him more than 30 years of experience in handling important portfolios in Ministry of Railways, PSUs and Department of Public Enterprises, Ministry of Finance, Government of India.

VFS GLOBAL

GB SRITHAR joins VFS Global as Head of Tourism Services, effective 1 February 2024. He joins from Singapore Tourism Board (STB), where

he spent more than 27 years in a career that spanned multiple functions, including Human Resources, Organizational Development, and International Marketing. He also served as the Area Director for South India & Sri Lanka and was instrumental in leading the International Marketing and Brand Campaigns

teams at STB's headquarters. He has done Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Science (Honours) from the National University of Singapore.

ANANTARA JAIPUR HOTEL

Global hospitality group Minor Hotels appoints $\ensuremath{\textbf{ROHIT PANDEY}}$ as General Manager of Anantara Jaipur Hotel, a newly-built hotel set to be

launched later this year as the luxury brand's debut in India. Pandey joins from The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru, where he served as the five-star property's Hotel Manager. His career spans more than two decades, working for brands such as Marriott International, Centara Hotels & Resorts, Dusit Thani Hotels & Resorts, One & Only Resorts, Aman Resorts, Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, Taj Hotels and Minor Hotels' Anantara

Hotels, Resorts & Spas.

ASCOT HOSPITALITY

New Delhi

Ascot Hospitality welcomes **NEERAJ BALANI** as Chief Operating Officer. A visionary leader in the hospitality landscape, he is known for

his expertise in launching and managing luxury hotels and resorts across esteemed hospitality brands such as The Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, Grand Hvatt. Intercontinental Hotel Group, Radisson Hotel Group and ITC Hotels. Balani will take on the responsibility of overseeing the entire group properties under the Savoy Suites, Savoy Greens, Tullahmore, and Ludlow House. He is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the vision and ensuring operational excellence.

FAIRMONT

Jaipur

Fairmont Jaipur promotes **SUKHPREET SINGH BATH** to the position of Director of Operations. Singh previously served as the Director

of Rooms and demonstrated exceptional leadership, vision, and a commitment to ensuring a personalized and memorable stay for guests during his tenure. He joined Fairmont Jaipur in 2019 as the Front Office Manager. Over the years, he ascended to the role of Rooms Division Manager, where he made significant contributions to the property's operations, showcasing his dedication and proficiency. He has substantial knowledge and experience in the luxury segment.

CONRAD

Bengaluru

Conrad Bengaluru has appointed RUBEN NAIR as Marketing Manager. With diverse experience across key marketing functions, Nair has

been associated with some of the leading names in the industry, such as Zoo Media, Schbang Digital Solutions, Ogilvy and Mather and Grey Group India. In his new role, Nair will spearhead strategic marketing initiatives, brand development, sales and customer engagement strategies to further strengthen the property as a premier destination for luxury hospitality. He will be involved in strategy development as well as promotion and implementation of digital campaigns.

SKIL TRAVEL

Mumhai

SKIL Travel has appointed JAY BAJAJ as Assistant Director - International M!CE & Events. He played a crucial role in contributing to the

travel sector with his exceptional skills while leading the M!CE department for several brands, including Club7Holidays and Royal Goan Beach Club. With hands-on experience in handling groups ranging from 20 to 750 participants, Bajaj has a keen understanding of the dynamics involved in creating impactful events. His approach exceeds transactional relationships, focusing on building collaborative partnerships with corporate clients.

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON

Goa - Panaji

DoubleTree by Hilton, Goa - Panaji has appointed ABHINAV KUMAR SINGH as Director of Finance. His impressive journey includes roles such as Associate Director of Finance at Lodhi New Delhi, Financial Controller at Hilton Garden Inn Saket New Delhi, and Finance Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Siliguri. With a proven track record of financial leadership, he brings a strategic mindset and a deep understanding of hotel finance. His expertise will play a pivotal role in elevating the financial management of the establishment and contribute to

its continued success.

DOUBLETREE BY HILTON GURUGRAM BAANI SQUARE

New Delhi

DoubleTree by Hilton Gurugram Baani Square appoints EKTA MAHAJAN as the Training Manager. Mahajan is known to be a dynamic hospitality professional. In her new role, she will be responsible for planning and executing efficient training procedures, identifying and monitoring training needs, cultivating talent, inspiring teams, and enhancing operational efficiency. She began her professional journey in 2014 as a Management Trainee with IHCL.

SANTOSHI RAWAT has been promoted as the Rooms Division Manager at DoubleTree by Hilton Gurugram Baani Square. Rawat has been associated with the property since 2023. She has 12 years of experience working with reputed brands like Hilton, Marriott and Hyatt. In her new role, she will be responsible for enriching guest comfort and satisfaction, demonstrating diligent attention to guest feedback, training and development, quality assurance, budgeting, performance development and ensuring operational excellence within the team. She hails from Uttarakhand.

BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield has appointed ANJALI NAIK as the Director of Sales and Marketing. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, she is poised to strengthen the leadership team, bringing a significant impact to the property's market share and revenue growth. She embarked on her hospitality career in 2002 as a Business Development Executive at K Raheja Resorts & Hospitality Services in Mumbai.

DoubleTree by Hilton, Goa - Panaji has appointed SARANG SHANBHAG as Front Office Manager. He comes with a decade of service industry expertise in both select service and luxury hotel segments. Having served as the Front Office Manager at Fairfield by Marriott

Goa Anjuna, he has excelled in overseeing front office operations and ensuring optimal rooms profitability through cost control. He is set to leverage his wealth of experience in his new role, promising to uphold the brand's standards of excellence. DoubleTree by Hilton has more than 660 hotels across 54 countries in the world.



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85 hotels in pipeline for IHCL

Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, IHCL, Chairperson, FAITH & President, HAI, offers insights into the fusion of art and science driving IHCL's market expansion. He emphasizes on the strategic blend, highlighting the group's growth trajectory.

Janice Alyosius

balance of art and science defines The Indian Hotels Company Limited's (IHCL's) approach to market expansion, "Development is both an art and a science. Pure science alone isn't sufficient, and nure art alone isn't either It's a combination of various factors, such as the type of contractswhether it's a management contract, a lease contract, an investment, a partnership, or a ioint venture, among others." says Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), Chairperson, Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism &



Hospitality (FAITH) & President, Hotel Association of India (HAI), providing a glimpse into the meticulous planning and strategic anticipation, which is driving the company's growth trajectory.

Discussing the factors determining where to expand and how to grow sustainably, he said, "That's where the science comes in. Deciding where to expand is also a science. However, the art lies in knowing the right time to accelerate and when to decelerate."

Under Chhatwal's lead-

ership, IHCL has

emerged as a trailblazer in growth. Commenting on success, he said, "The combination of both science and art has led us become industry henchmark in growth over the last three to four years, with the highest number signings and openings. And I don't foresee that changing in the years to come."

With an ambitious pipeline comprising 85 hotels, IHCL is poised to maintain its momentum, aiming to open a minimum of two hotels per month. "There may be new conversion opportunities or new construc-

Based on my interactions, I believe that weddings, especially in hotels, are relocating to venues outside due to the high banquet room rates

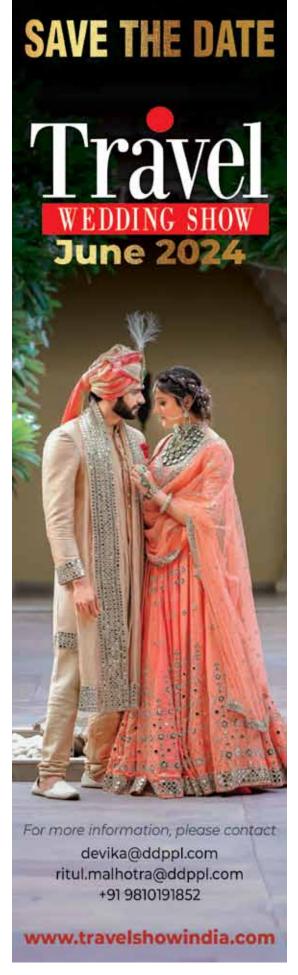
tion projects that we are not yet aware of. Hence, we anticipate being in a favourable position to continue opening a minimum of two hotels per month," said Chhatwal

Furthermore, Chhatwal also provides insights into IHCL's expansion plans in Lakshadweep, highlighting the complexity of building on an island. "We are in the final stages of planning, which will soon be submitted for approval. However, construction will take three to four years, or possibly

even five, given the complexity of building on an island rather than just a hotel on a regular site," he revealed.

About the high room rates, which have led to many weddings being held abroad. Chhatwal acknowledged the shifting dynamics in the hospitality landscape. "People have accepted the current average room rates. Nevertheless, based on discussions with numerous individuals, I still believe that weddings, especially in hotels, are relocating to venues outside due to the high banquet room rates. However, these figures don't align with what is announced when publicly listed companies declare their results. Each company reports doubledigit growth in the top line, which wouldn't be possible if people were indeed moving out. On the contrary, as foreign travel gradually returns to pre-COVID levels, we expect these numbers to rise even further," he said.

Looking ahead, IHCL anticipates a resurgence in demand as international travel gradually rebounds to the pre-pandemic levels. This optimism underscores IHCL's unwavering commitment to innovation and adaptability in navigating evolving market dynamics.





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