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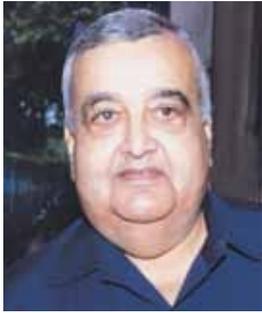


Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East



The lure of India for Middle East

While India hasn't traditionally been a luxury destination for the Middle East travellers, it is coming up as an exotic one with its vibrant culture, ancient traditions, and new bespoke experiences such as private dining and tours. India's transformation into a luxury escape may not be complete just yet, but it has definitely begun this journey.



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

“ India has been experiencing rapid economic growth in recent years, leading to an expanding middle class with a growing appetite for luxury goods services and experiences. Luxury brands in the hospitality industry, be it hotels, ayurvedic resorts, spas, destination weddings, presence of forts and palaces seeped in luxury for a niche segment of customers, have been increasingly targeting consumers, both within the country and abroad. Countries like the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have high levels of disposable income and a strong appetite for luxury products. ”

“ Middle East has been a good source market for India in last two decades. Higher numbers of tourists are travelling from the Middle East and post-COVID the numbers have been picking up again. It's not only petrodollars but the robust transformation with changing times and technology has further made Middle East more attractive source markets. The purchasing power of people from this region has increased and that is why we need stronger marketing efforts. So, the Middle East is definitely a new luxury source market for India. ”



Rajnish Kaistha
Sr. Vice President, IATO

Contd. on page 12 ▶

Suman Billa returns to MOT

Suman Billa has returned to MOT after a gap of 4 years as Additional Secretary replacing Rakesh Verma. He moved on from MOT in 2019 after taking up a role in UNWTO.

TT Bureau

Suman Billa has returned to Ministry of Tourism as Additional Secretary in place of Rakesh Verma, who has been appointed as Additional Secretary, Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation. A 1996 batch IAS officer from the Kerala cadre, Billa was the Joint Secretary, Tourism, from 2014 to 2019, after which he joined the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO)



Suman Billa
Additional Secretary, MOT

as Director, Technical Cooperation and Silk Road. After this, he

was appointed as Principal Secretary, Industries and NORKA, Government of Kerala until the recent move.

Billa is not new to tourism, he had also served as Tourism Secretary for Kerala and was part of some of the most iconic campaigns for the state tourism board. As Joint Secretary, Tourism, he was involved in planning the draft National Tourism Policy as well as conceptualising many campaigns of Incredible India across the world. ▶

Skilling cries for attention

While stakeholders are doing their bit to train and upskill their staff to overcome shortage of quality manpower in the country, more needs to be done to address this core issue, feel industry leaders.



Amitabh Kant
G20 Sherpa, India

Therefore, I believe states should be recognised for their efforts in skilling across all levels of the hospitality sector. ”

“ Skilling is another cornerstone of my vision, reflecting my belief in India's potential to produce world-class talent in the hospitality sector. By 2035, India is projected to provide 30 per cent of the world's skilled manpower. Many of our experts in sectors like hospitality will emerge from India. It's not just about producing manpower; it's about producing the best talent. This century will be India's century, and Indians will engage significantly in outbound tourism. Major hotel chains like Four Seasons, Rosewood, and Ritz Carlton will be led and managed by Indians. ”

Contd. on page 9 ▶

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IATO Convention in Bhopal in August

As preparations for the 39th IATO Convention gather momentum, all eyes are on Bhopal, poised to reclaim its status as a must-visit destination on India's tourism map. With collaborative efforts and strategic initiatives, the convention, to be held from 30 August to 2 September, promises to unlock the immense tourism potential of Madhya Pradesh.



Janice Alyosius

The 39th Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) Convention aims to put spotlight on the cultural and heritage riches of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. Scheduled from 30 August to 2 September 2024, the convention will provide a platform for tourism stakeholders to learn, experience, and collaborate, enabling them to better promote the city to their clients.

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, revealed that the convention's inauguration tentatively takes place on 30 August, followed by sessions on 31 August and 1 September. The programme also includes post tours on 2 September, though specific details are yet to be finalised. "In discussions with the Chief Minister (of Madhya Pradesh), various topics were talked about, including our intention to showcase Madhya Pradesh as a heritage and cultural



IATO delegation, led by Rajiv Mehra, meets Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh

destination. There is abundant wildlife in the region. Additionally, Bhopal city itself is beautiful and offers many unexplored attractions. Furthermore, there is ample potential for rural tourism development. The Chief Minister emphasised on the importance of rural tourism, which we plan to incorporate in the convention. These are our intentions for the convention, and the specifics will be worked out

after our executive committee meeting," shared Mehra.

The connectivity to Bhopal is not a challenge with flights and excellent train services available from various locations. "Bhopal has excellent train connectivity, including services like the Shatabdi Express and Vande Bharat from Delhi. Other regions are well-connected too, with many

long-distance trains passing through Bhopal. Therefore, connectivity should not pose a major problem. Moreover, there is an abundance of accommodation options available, and we hope to secure the required number of rooms," he said.

Speaking on the current inbound tourism recovery status, Mehra highlighted, "Currently, we are far

from our goal, with only 65 to 70 per cent recovery, whereas we had expected it to be 90 per cent. There are various reasons for this, for instance, the connection with Israel via Air India was cancelled. These conflicts should end as soon as possible so that peace

been done for various reasons that the government perceives as valid. However, these reasons are not practical now, and they are not a solution. Therefore, they should consider our suggestions and fol-



I am hopeful that they (govt) will listen to us, and with increased publicity and other efforts, we will be able to attract more business

can be restored, and with peace comes tourism. If things return to normal, I believe we might reach the 90 per cent mark by 31 March 2025, but we still won't be at 100 per cent of our 2020 levels." He added, "Achieving this requires a lot of promotion abroad, which hasn't

low through to see the results. I am hopeful that they will listen to us, and with increased publicity and other efforts, we will be able to attract more business."

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Where and how Indians travelling?

Indian travellers are not just reshaping the domestic tourism but also commanding an increasingly important role in the international travel. An increase in holiday frequency, family-centric journeys and spiritual serenity are the major trends shaping travel.

India's inbound year

Inbound travel to India has been slower to recover. While the country is seeing an increase in inbound travel, the numbers still lag behind 2019 numbers. However, the industry is optimistic of crossing this level in 2024 or early 2025. According to PATA, International Visitor Arrivals (IVAs) to India would fully recover to per-pandemic level in 2024 by 104.2 per cent in medium scenario. The forecast is encouraging and aligns with India's ongoing initiatives. Travel planners are eager to capitalise on this trend by establishing a stronger presence in key inbound markets, including Europe, the UK, and the Middle East. Despite concerns over budget cuts for overseas promotion, the Ministry of Tourism has assured that the 'Incredible India' campaign will be marketed globally, reinforcing India's appeal to international travellers.

Domestic recovery

While inbound is still on a recovery path in India, domestic market is continuing to skyrocket. While driving destinations are preferred by urban populace, tier II & III travellers are not far behind in exploring neighbourhoods at driving distance. Although this trend primarily manifests on weekends, both online and offline agencies report a significant increase in bookings. A recent study by MakeMyTrip indicated that more Indians are taking over three trips a year. In secondary markets, spiritual tourism is driving travel, especially with Ayodhya catching people's fancy since last year. Last-minute bookings remain in vogue across the country, whether it is for domestic or international travel. The demand for hotels and resorts for leisure holidays is at an all-time high. New hotel properties are being announced daily to offer travellers. Overall, the domestic travel boom is fuelled by a combination of accessibility, a renewed interest in local destinations, and the convenience of last-minute planning.

TT Bureau

Among the key trends emerging in travel is that number of people taking more than three trips per year has grown by 25 per cent in 2023 as compared to 2019, according to MakeMyTrip insights gathered from travel searches by their more than 100 million annual active users. The company has put together some of the top behaviours of Indian travellers in the first edition of its India Travel Trends Report. Insights include where, when and how India travels, top trends from millions of journeys – both from a national and a region-wise perspective.

Some key insights from the report are as below –

Where India Travels

- ❖ Number of people taking more than 3 trips per year has grown by 25 per cent in 2023 as compared to 2019.
- ❖ Tier II and tier III cities are embracing spiritual journeys, with searches for destinations with or around religious spots growing 97 per cent in the last two years.
- ❖ Searches for Ayodhya grew by 585 per cent, Ujjain by 359 per cent and Badrinath by 343 per cent in 2023 as compared to 2022.
- ❖ Weekend getaways continue to curry favour with Indian travellers – Searches for Jim Corbett grew by 131 per cent in 2023 as compared to 2022; Ooty and Munnar are other favourites in this context.

Tier II and tier III cities are embracing spiritual journeys, with searches for destinations with religious spots growing 97%



- ❖ 30 per cent all international travel searches from India are for Dubai, Bangkok and Singapore while London, Toronto and New York are the most searched long-haul destinations.
- ❖ Searches for emerging international destinations grew by multi-fold in 2023 – hot favourites are Hong Kong, Almaty, Paro, and Baku Da Nang.

When, with whom and how India travels Family vs Solo –

- ❖ Family travel bookings surged by 64 per cent in 2023 as compared to 2022, followed by solo traveller booking growth at 23 per cent for the same comparative period.
- ❖ Flight booking preferences – 50 per cent of all domestic flyers pick flights between 9am and 6pm irrespective of destination or origin.
- ❖ A significant portion of travel bookings in India are made spontaneously, with 46 per cent of domestic flights booked less than a week before the travel date. In contrast, about half of all international bookings are made at least two weeks in advance.
- ❖ Only one-third of international bookings are made more than

a month before the travel date, suggesting a flexible approach to international travel planning among Indian travellers.

- ❖ Women prefer to pre-book window seats, while men pick aisle seats.
- ❖ Tomato Cucumber Cheese Lettuce Sandwich is the most ordered in-flight meal on domestic flights.

Accommodation booking preferences –

- ❖ 56 per cent of domestic leisure hotel bookings on the platform are made less than a week before the day of travel.
- ❖ 33 per cent of international hotel bookings are made at least 30 days before the date of travel.
- ❖ Alternative accommodations on the platform recorded 24 per cent growth in bookings in 2023
- ❖ For Hostels and Apartments, the preference is for those less than INR 2,500 per night but for Villas, it is higher.
- ❖ Close to 20 per cent of family travellers searched for properties with tariffs over INR 10,000 per night.

Payment Preferences –

UPI is the most preferred payment method for booking travel, making close to 40 per cent of all trans-

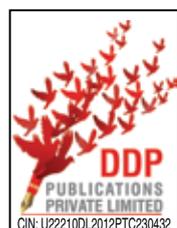
action types, followed by use of credit cards. Credit card is the most used payment mode for high value transactions such as for booking international hotels and flights. This can be attributed to the benefits associated with credit card payments.

Weekend getaways continue to curry favour with Indian travellers – Searches for Jim Corbett grew by 131% in 2023 as compared to 2022

The gift of travel –

Wedding gift cards in the denominations of ₹5,000 and 10,000 are the most gifted.

Rajesh Magow, Co-founder and Group CEO, MakeMyTrip, said, "As India emerges as a formidable force in the tourism sector, these insights can help bridge the demand and supply gaps in the travel and hospitality space. This means crafting policies, identifying destinations, and creating experiences that resonate with the traveller's unique travel preferences and aspirations. Catering to each traveller's behaviour will not only enhance travel experiences but also contribute to the tourism growth."



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Upgrading, upskilling new norm

▶ Contd. from page 5



Sheetal Munshaw
Director India
About France

“ We live in very volatile and ever evolving times. To top that, our sector is vulnerable and transforming rapidly. With this as a backdrop, upgrading, upskilling and having the agility and propensity to adapt is now the norm. Keeping not with, but ahead of the times, anticipating trends and strategising in accordance is critical to stay relevant in a continually disruptive landscape. Equipping staff, or as I would call them, our biggest stakeholders, is the most critical element. ”



Aparna Basumalik
Commercial Head, India Subcontinent and UAE, Europamundo

“ There is a crunch for quality manpower across the country. The industry is growing fast, but margins are shrinking leading to companies automating and downsizing. With these pressures many have opted to move out of travel. The new generation has multiple options and a zeal to explore different opportunities, resulting in a lower degree of specialisation. There is no shortcut to educating and training the front line and the core team. At Europamundo this is a year-round process. ”



Mahendra Vakharia
Executive Committee Member,
OTOAI & MD, Pathfinders Holidays

“ Post-COVID, there is definitely a shortage of skilled and trained manpower in the tourism industry. Layoffs during pandemic and inconsistent start of businesses immediately after that is one reason forcing many to become self-employed. We are blessed to have our old team with us, but with the growing business and the need to cater to niche clients, more hands on the table are always welcome. We offer a safe, secure and stress-free environment for employees in our organisation. ”



Rajan Bhatla
Director, Yashvi Tours and Travels
& Treasurer, TAFI - Gujarat Chapter

“ We are indeed experiencing a shortage of skilled manpower within the travel industry, largely due to a scarcity of targeted educational programs and sufficient exposure opportunities. At Yashvi Tours and Travels, we tackle this challenge by actively recruiting individuals who are passionate about travel, regardless of their formal educational background. We believe in nurturing their enthusiasm through hands-on experiences such as client visits and participation in fairs. ”



Dilip Masrani
Favourite Tours & Forex and
Secretary, TAFI Gujarat Chapter

“ We are facing shortage of trained and skilled staff in our routine day to day business. To address this shortage in the travel trade, the industry should invest in education and training programmes. We must collaborate with educational institutions to develop specialised courses and certifications for travel-related professions. We must provide internships and apprenticeships to bridge the gap between education and practical experience. Let us encourage learning and professional development for existing changes. ”



Tejus Jose
Director of Operations
ibis & ibis Styles India

“ The scarcity of qualified personnel is compounded by the challenge of timely availability of talent. We recognise the importance of addressing this issue promptly to ensure the growth of our organisation. Measures to enhance training and streamline recruitment processes are being actively explored to mitigate the challenges. Establishing partnerships between industry players and academic institutions can facilitate knowledge sharing, internships, and job placement opportunities for newcomers. ”



Rajan Kalra
Head of Sales
The Lalit

“ We are experiencing a huge shortage of professional skilled manpower especially for MICE and weddings. This has aggravated post-COVID. People have changed their industry. So, we are trying to train our own people. But there is a kind of vacuum. We are trying to handle it in our own way. We are also trying to train a lot of freshers. We also have Lalit school in Delhi and we get people from there. But it will take some time to fill the gap. There is definitely a demand and supply issue. ”



Smita Jain
Director of MGLuxM & MIHB, SP
Jain School of Global Management

“ This problem has persisted for quite some time, particularly affecting positions such as those in frontline service, management, culinary, and wine stewardship. The shortage stems from several factors, including the industry's perception as offering low-paying, physically demanding jobs, and its high turnover rates. To combat these challenges, there are courses that emphasise on comprehensive knowledge and practical skills, preparing students for diverse roles in hospitality. ”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

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- HRAWI proposes to set up bureau to promote Maharashtra as an enticing destination for MICE events
- No active pipeline of hotel development in Delhi to meet increasing demand of incoming air passengers
- IHG Hotels & Resorts to double presence in India with 100 operating hotels in 5 years
- Palladium Hotel Group debuts in Middle East on Al Marjan Island with more than \$100 million in investment
- IndiGo set to enhance in-flight experience through the process of continuous digitization
- EU introduces 'Cascade' visa system for Indians, offer 2-year, multi-entry Schengen visas

Reshaping travel through innovation

Arabian Travel Market 2024 takes place at Dubai World Trade Centre from 6-9 May, on the theme 'Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship'. More than 200 speakers are expected to address 50 sessions, covering the full spectrum of industry from tourism and hospitality to aviation and MICE.



International policymakers and industry leaders are gathering in the UAE for the 31st edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM), which is poised to explore the transformative impact of entrepreneurship and innovation on the tourism sector.

During the four-day event, over 200 speakers are expected to address more than 50 sessions. Experts from around the world take to the ATM's Global Stage and Future Stage (formerly the Travel

Tech Stage) to address some of the sector's most pressing issues, including the growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the future of aviation, how to stand out in the luxury segment, retail tourism, and sustainable travel.

As the Middle East's leading exhibition for inbound and outbound travel and tourism professionals, ATM 2024 builds on last year's record-breaking 30th edition with its theme: 'Empowering Innovation: Transforming Travel Through Entrepreneurship'. Exhibitors and attendees get the chance to explore



Danielle Curtis
Exhibition Director ME
Arabian Travel Market

new market opportunities, reap the benefits of collaboration and connectivity, and attract investment.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said: "The future of the global travel industry will be shaped by innovators and entrepreneurs, which is why we are so excited to shine a spotlight on the latest insights and technologies at ATM

2024. From startups to established brands, this year's exhibition will showcase fresh thinking on how the sector can enhance customer experiences, drive efficiency and deliver positive economic impacts across the Middle East and beyond."

Exhibitor participation is expected to be 23 per cent higher than last year, making ATM 2024 the largest edition in the event's history. Growth is expected across all

Exhibitor participation is expected to be 23 per cent higher than last year, making ATM 2024 the largest edition in the event's history

show verticals, including regional year on year upticks for the Middle East (19 per cent larger), Europe (32 per cent larger), Asia (20 per cent larger) and Africa (28 per cent larger). The exhibition's sold-out Travel Tech space will be 56 per cent greater on the show floor,



with products from the sector demonstrating 33 per cent growth year on year. Hotel participation, meanwhile, is projected to be 21 per cent higher than last year.

This year's edition will once again enable attendees to move beyond traditional leisure travel by exploring opportunities related to luxury, business, and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE). ATM 2024 will feature an array of discussions on these subjects.



MP invites bids for 33 tourism sites

With tourism driving economic growth through job creation, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board offers robust support and incentives for private investment, aiming for sustainable development and enhanced visitor experiences.



In a recent conversation with **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Department of Tourism and Culture, and Managing Director of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, we gained insights into the state's ambitious plans for tourism development and its impact on the economy. Shukla shed light on upcoming hotel projects, investment incentives, economic contributions, and upcoming events aimed at attracting tourists, both domestic and international.

Upcoming hotel projects
Madhya Pradesh's tourism sector is poised for significant expansion with upcoming hotel projects strategically located near key tourist attractions. Shukla revealed that the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has identified land parcels near prominent destinations such as Ujjain, Dewas, Niwari, Orchha, Raisen, and Bhopal for lease,



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary, Govt. of MP,
Department of Tourism and Culture,
& MD, MP TB

spanning a period of 90 years. "The department has invited bids for 33 land parcels across the state. The aim is to facilitate the growth of tourism by providing modern amenities and accommodations near popular tourist attractions as well as develop new tourist destinations in the state. The initiative is expected to increase to his football in MP and contribute to the overall development of the states," he said.

Incentives for investors

Recognising the pivotal role of private investment in tourism development, Madhya Pradesh offers industry status to the sector, coupled with a range of incentives and benefits for investors and

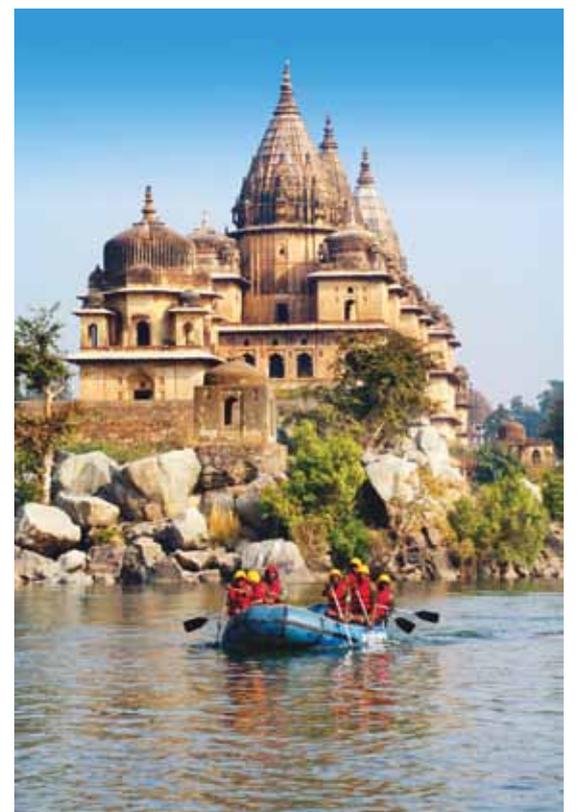
Aim is to facilitate the growth of tourism by providing modern amenities and accommodations near popular tourist attractions

stakeholders. Shukla highlighted, "The board provides lucrative subsidies, local assistance and administrative support for private investors to bolster private investment within the state with the help

of PPP model." MP Tourism Board offers up to 30 per cent subsidy for private investors in the state. The officials of the tourism board personally engage with the private investors to produce the best possible results in order to create the best possible experiences within the state.

Tourism's growth potential

The tourism industry plays a vital role in Madhya Pradesh's economic growth by generating employment opportunities directly and indirectly. Shukla emphasised how tourism encompasses various service providers across multiple industries, thereby not only creating jobs but also raising standards within the service sector. He stated, "The responsible tourism mission is an initiative introduced to leverage the potential of economic growth in the field of Tourism. MP Tourism board provides training and assistance to individuals to develop their skills for 48 types of job roles across eight different sectors."



Upcoming events and festivals

Madhya Pradesh is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, offering a plethora of attractions throughout the year. "MP is one of those rare states where visitors can engage themselves in enchanting tour-

ism activities throughout the year. Madhya Pradesh is a prime summer destination with an array of dams, waterfalls and jungle safaris. The tourism season begins in MP from September when tourists can take part in exciting adventure activities," he said.



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India needs image makeover

▶ Contd. from page 5



Ravi Gosain
Vice President
IATO



Manish Sharma
Managing Director
Akshar Travels



Panos Loupasis
Market Managing Director - TMEA
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts



Chirag Agrawal
Co-Founder
TravClan



Dharmendra Singh
Director
Plaisir Hospitality Services



Prabhakar Kamat
Vice-President
Red Dot Representations

“Middle East has lots of potential for India on luxury segment not only among locals but large community of expats working there. Indian stakeholders need to showcase high-end products to right consumers. Middle East, due to its proximity and good flight connectivity, can be a lucrative luxury source market for India. Apart from culture and heritage, its natural beauty and wellness can be used for promotion.”

“We do see a pick-up in inquiries from the Middle East market. This is especially true for our new package called Election Tourism and we get a lot of people from the Middle East region booking these packages. They are keen on understanding how democracy works and want to see it firsthand. This is a new experience for them. In a sense this is a combination package of election tourism with rural tourism.”

“Over the past few years, India has witnessed a notable expansion in its tourism sector. This growth is attributed to its array of breathtaking attractions and substantial investments in infrastructure, resulting in a significant increase in inbound tourism. Travellers from across the globe, including the Middle East, are flocking to India to immerse themselves in its rich cultural tapestry and explore its myriad attractions.”

“The Middle East stands out as a crucial luxury source market for India. Unlike backpackers from Europe, who often seek budget-friendly experiences, Middle Eastern travellers are more inclined to indulge in opulent offerings. India's transformation into a luxury destination perfectly complements the desires of ME jet-setters – a blend of rich heritage, lavish experiences, and unforgettable adventures.”

“Since the last two to three years, India has been carefully developed as a luxury destination and now travellers from the Middle East are visiting India due to value for money, and good air connectivity to all the major airports. We do see a lot of travellers from the Middle East visit India now; you can say about 30 per cent inbound travellers are from the Middle East. A majority of tourists are from Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the UAE.”

“Indian tourist market share in the international travel market has grown exponentially in the recent past on the back of a strengthening middle class with affluent spending power and more aspirational international destinations opening up for diverse needs, including MICE, weddings, and group tours. Reportedly, India's consolidated travel expense is set to touch US\$410 bn in 2030.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

A luxury touch to Indian hospitality

Saraca Hotels & Resorts, with a collection of intimate luxury boutique hotels and resorts, comprising a heritage hotel in Lucknow, a jungle resort in Jim Corbett, and a resort perched on a 300-year-old Portuguese fort in the northernmost part of Goa, takes part at the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai to make a mark in the international market.



Saraca Hotels & Resorts, where the essence of the “Ashoka Tree”, also known as the sorrow-less tree, permeates every aspect of its properties. It is a collection of intimate luxury boutique hotels and resorts currently operating close to 100 keys across three unique properties: a heritage hotel in Lucknow, a jungle resort in Jim Corbett, and a resort perched on a 300-year-old Portuguese fort in the northernmost part of Goa.

Saraca Hotel Lucknow: Embracing Heritage

Lucknow, being the capital of Uttar Pradesh, has seen a surge of close to 50 per cent of international travellers visiting the city to experience local heritage, culture, food, and important events. The city is conveniently connected by air with important destinations in the Middle East, such as Dubai, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi. In addition to its excellent connectivity with the Middle East, the city is also connected to London, Amsterdam and Prague in Europe.

In the heart of Lucknow, amid its historic lanes and grand architecture, Saraca Hotel Lucknow stands as a testament to heritage and hospitality. Inspired by the Nawabi era, the property with

Saraca Hotel Lucknow guests can plan easy day tours to Ayodhya curated by the hotel while enjoying Lucknow's cultural legacy

41 rooms and suites radiates elegance and charm, inviting guests to immerse themselves in the region's rich cultural heritage. For travellers heading to Ayodhya, the hotel serves as a tranquil stopover. Guests can plan convenient day



Saraca Corbett Resorts & Spa

tours to Ayodhya curated by the hotel while enjoying Lucknow's cultural legacy.

Saraca Resort and Spa Corbett: Embracing Nature

Set amid the tranquil wilderness of Jim Corbett, Uttarakhand Saraca Resort & Spa Corbett, the 45 rooms and suites with spectacular views of the tiger trails in dense Corbett jungle, beckons guests to reconnect with nature's splendour. The resort is conveniently connected by air and road from

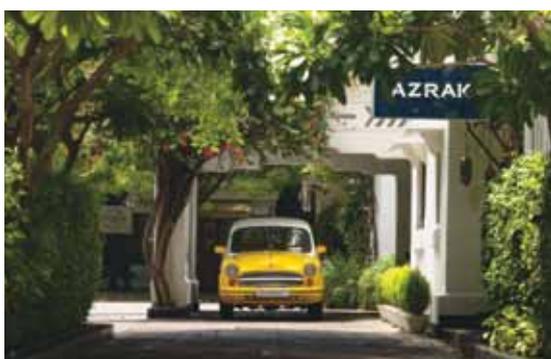
the capital region of Delhi, India. Surrounded by lush greenery and abundant wildlife, the resort offers a haven for both adventure and serenity seekers.

Fort Tiracol Heritage Hotel Goa: Kaleidoscopic view of the Arabian Sea

The 17th-century Portuguese fort was converted into a warm and private resort secluded from the hustle and bustle of the city, peacefully perched on the northernmost tip of Goa. It is the most

famous heritage resort in Goa, a picture post card featuring elegant Portuguese décor in rooms, suites, restaurant, and bar with breathtaking views of the Arabian Sea and Tiracol River.

Amit Razdan, Chief Operating Officer, Saraca Hotels & Resorts, says, “Saraca Hotels and Resorts takes pride in being a luxury, heritage and a sustainable hotel chain. By 2025, we aim to double our properties, expanding our footprint in India and Sri Lanka.”



Saraca Lucknow



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India to be among AIUla's top 3 markets

One of the newest entrants in the India market, The Royal Commission for AIUla is already receiving great feedback from the travel trade and end travellers alike. Will the ancient Arabic oasis city located in Medina Province of Saudi Arabia, manage enough numbers by promoting itself as a sustainable and luxury destination despite its proximity?

Hazel Jain

A new chapter of AIUla's story unfolds as it launches its first-ever global brand campaign titled 'Forever Revitalising'. The campaign offers a fresh perspective on AIUla, showcasing its rich past, vibrant present, and promising future. The Royal Commission for AIUla, represented in India by Beautiful Planet, celebrated this occasion in Mumbai, along with key travel trade partners in the presence of **Ansar Babu**, Global Market Distribution Operations Director, The Royal Commission for AIUla.



Melanie De Souza
Destination Marketing Executive Director
The Royal Commission for AIUla

Also present was **Melanie De Souza**, Destination Marketing Executive Director, The Royal Commission for AIUla. Excited about the potential India has to offer, she says, "We see India as a strategically important market. My expectation is that it will be one of the top three international

source markets for this heritage, cultural and nature-based destination located in the North-West of Saudi Arabia, in the years to come. This is a compelling and brand-new destination in terms of offerings for the India market. I'm really heartened by early signs of bookings already made and the strong anecdotal feedback from both the trade and the customers directly about AIUla. India has

been quick to respond to the destination. However, we are currently limited in terms of room inventory which is at 840 hotel rooms. Asia is 4 per cent of our business but I am expecting between India and China to see Asia and India numbers specifically go up."

Deliberate brand positioning

The brand positioning, she says, is deliberate premised on its brand purpose. "As a destination, we are about sustainability, and our pledge is to curate those transformational journeys that customers from India will truly appreciate. We are not about mass tourism as a sustainable destination and have kept tourist numbers at two million by 2035. We are a boutique destination, and with hotels like Banyan group and Habitas, we are very much positioned as a luxury destination. As the room stock grows and we have more mainstream hotel brands such as Marriott and Hyatt, there will be a

lot more affordable price points," De Souza adds.

AIUla has two new hotels opening this year – Dar Tantora and Chedi. Four Seasons and four Aman properties are expected in the coming years. AIUla will also wel-

As the room stock grows and we have more mainstream hotel brands such as Marriott and Hyatt, there will be a lot more affordable price points

come Azulik AIUla Resort, Sharaan Resort & International Summit Centre – an architectural landmark designed by Jean Nouvel. The

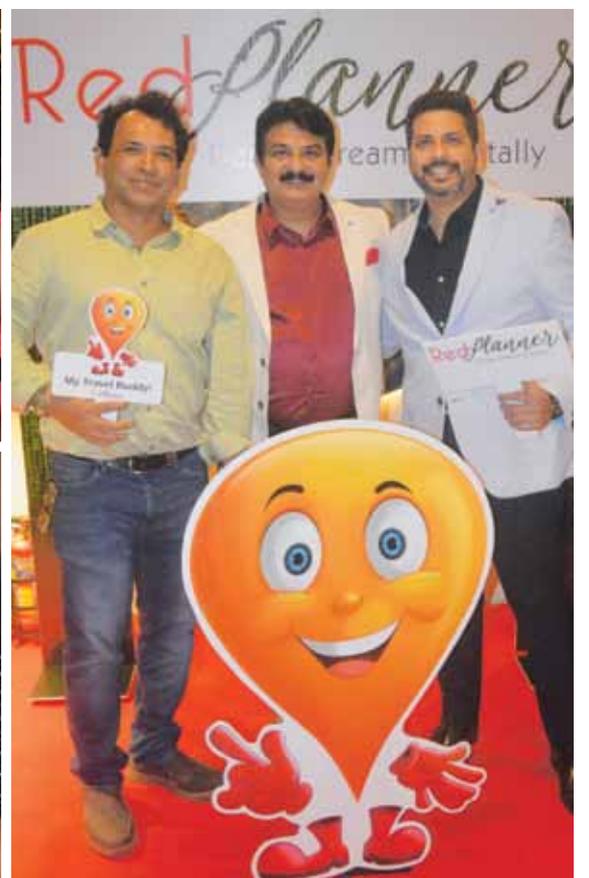


destination will double its room stock by next year, going to 5,500 rooms by 2030, and 8,500 rooms by 2035. Present in India since almost four years ago, it is now developing relationships with key people in the trade and airlines. "Other than hotels, we have lots of other infrastructure coming up

including a 26-km cycling track already built. And with Maraya – our multipurpose entertainment and conference venue – we have a spectacular setting for the world's top artists to perform here. We are also looking at smaller weddings and exclusive MICE movements," De Souza says.

Red Planner launches digital platform

Rajesh Kakade, Founder, Red Planner, launched his new digital platform designed for travel agencies. Being built for over two years, Red Planner is an itinerary builder that also offers real-time costing to agents. The networking event in Mumbai saw presence of key travel partners, along with Riya Kakade, his daughter, who has joined the business.



Meet Neeraj Chopra IN PARIS

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 TT Bureau

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But the experience doesn't stop there. Paris, the city of lights, beckons with its timeless charm and irresistible allure. From the


With DreamSetGo, you will stay in the lap of luxury, whether it's a boutique hotel overlooking the Seine or a 5-star resort in Paris

iconic Eiffel Tower, offering panoramic views of the city, to the majestic Louvre Museum, home to some of the world's most renowned masterpieces, every

corner of Paris tells a story waiting to be discovered.

Picture yourself soaking in the breathtaking sights and sounds of the city, or immersing yourself in the enchanting world of Disneyland Paris, where fairy tales come to life. With DreamSetGo, you have access to an array of Paris-centric activities that promise to enchant and delight every traveller.

Enjoy sports amidst luxury

And let's not forget about the luxurious accommodations that await you at the end of each exhilarating day. With DreamSetGo, you will



Image courtesy: JSV Sports

Meet & Greet Neeraj Chopra in Paris with DreamSetGo

stay in the lap of luxury, whether it's a charming boutique hotel overlooking the Seine or a lav-

ish 5-star resort nestled in the heart of the city. So why wait? Seize the opportunity to experience the Summer Games in Paris like never before with DreamSetGo. Whether you are a sports enthusiast, a culture

connoisseur, or simply seeking a once-in-a-lifetime adventure, DreamSetGo promises to exceed your expectations and create memories that will stay with you forever. Don't just dream it, live it with DreamSetGo.

Goa earmarks green attractions

Goa has earmarked green attractions and activities to attract eco-tourists. It will do this through its 'regenerative tourism' campaign to its less explored hinterlands. The state is now looking for stronger environmental protection and safeguarding its communities as well as visitors through safety mechanisms in place.



Hazel Jain

This round-the-year destination is looking to increase its visitor arrivals by encouraging visitors to participate in green attractions and activities. Up until November 2023, the state received 72 lakh domestic visitors and 4.5 lakh international visitors. Through its new campaign, Goa aims to redefine its tourism landscape by focusing on regenerative tourism through spiritual destinations, and hinterland tourism, and eco-friendly activities.



Suneel Anchipaka
IAS, Director Tourism & Managing Director, GTDC



Vishesh G. Naik
Senior Manager (Hotels & Marketing) GTDC



Through this concept, it is trying to engage the local communities and with their expertise it will offer visitors a local connect and an immersive experience through the local cuisine and culture. This will also create employment for the locals, says **Suneel Anchipaka**, IAS, Director Tourism & Managing Director, GTDC. "The Goa Tourism Minister has appealed to the peo-

ple of Goa to come forward and support this regenerative concept. It is a paradigm shift towards sustainable practices that prioritise the restoration and revitalisation of local ecosystems and communities. With a focus on sustainability and responsible travel practices, we envision a sector that is not just economically prosperous but also environmentally and so-

cially conscious. It encompasses a holistic approach that seeks to regenerate and rejuvenate our ecosystems, communities, and cultural traditions. Our vision is one that harmonises with nature, respects local cultures, and fosters meaningful connections between visitors and our communities. By embracing Regenerative Tourism, we not only enhance the

visitor experience but also ensure the long-term sustainability of our industry," he adds.

Safety also paramount

Safety of guests and locals is also emphasised. **Vishesh G. Naik**, Senior Manager (Hotels & Marketing), Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC), says, "If and

when there is an incident, we have put in place a mechanism called the Beach Vigil mobile app which keeps a watch on the activities taking place on the beaches. Earlier, only officials had access to this App, however, now it has been thrown open to the public after a trial. Through this app, stakeholders and the public can report

events which mar the tourism industry." He added that the state has also introduced eco-friendly activities such as bungee jumping in north Goa, Hop-on Hop-off buses, and BLive electric cycle tours. Ekadasha Teertha Yatra, the new Homestay Policy, Caravan Policy, and festivals are also some of the things the state is promoting. ↴

Vibrant networking at TAFI Gujarat meet

The TAFI Gujarat Chapter's bi-monthly meeting and Stakeholders Showcase Meet in Ahmedabad was an immersive experience filled with opportunities for networking, collaboration, and discovery in the dynamic travel industry. In attendance were TAFI national members, including the President, and former Chairman of Gujarat Chapter.



PATA spotlight on women issues

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), along with the Department of Tourism, Philippines, organised the first-ever 'PATA International Conference on Women in Travel' on the pristine island of Bohol in the Philippines recently.



Nisha Verma from Bohol, Philippines

The three-day event, held at the BE Grand Resort in Bohol 20-22 from March, featured engaging panel discussions and insightful presentations. Approximately 200 delegates representing 15 destinations attended the conference, comprising industry luminaries, policymakers, and advocates, who convened to delve into the pivotal role of

empowerment within the tourism workforce, emphasising on the significance of inclusivity and professional advancement for all women involved in travel.

Leading with example

H.E. Christina Garcia Frasco, Secretary, Department of Tourism, Philippines, in her keynote address expressed gratitude to

the attendees for coming to Bohol for the conference and said that sustainability of Philippines tourism hinges on advancing gender equality and upholding women's rights. "The Department of Tourism Philippines has launched initiatives like TourISM WorCS to address women and children-related challenges, alongside the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence Training programme training over 70,000 women for the tourism workforce. Notably, women constitute 56 per cent of the department's workforce, with 62 per cent in official positions. With the development of a comprehensive sex-disaggregated database, evidence-based policies will foster female leadership and gender-sensitive decisions, driving progress in the sector's future. Holding this conference in the Philippines is timely, We recognise the importance of this conference focusing on empowering women, tourism professionals, promoting gender equality, fostering leadership stories, successes, and opportunities," she said.

The DOT, for the first time ever, has appointed Tourism Integrates, Supports, and Minds Women's Rights and Child Safety (TourISM WorCS) Officers across the regions in the country to ensure that the Philippines "remains a woman- and child-safe destination", with the Tourism WorCS manual soon to be rolled out among the Department's various operational units to equip them with the knowledge and tools to effectively combat sexual harassment, trafficking and gender-based violence within the sector, she informed.

A successful step

Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO, PATA, in his address said, "PATA remains committed to organising the PATA International Conference on Women in Travel with other

member destinations in the future to ensure that conversations on women's empowerment can continue and be elevated. As a community, we must unite to discuss tangible strategies aimed at breaking down barriers, challenging stereotypes, and implementing industry-wide changes that pave the pathways for women to excel in the travel industry. It is the Association's wish that this event served as a catalyst for impactful initiatives and collaborative efforts towards a better future for women in all facets of tourism."



It is association's wish that this event served as a catalyst for initiatives towards a better future for women in all facets of tourism

The conference had a strong lineup of international delegates, who shared their insights on varied topics, including 'Breaking Barriers: Women's Empowerment in the Travel Industry', 'Gender Equality and Development', 'Women Behind the Scenes', 'Tourism Start-ups and Entrepreneurship', 'Leading the Way: Inspirational Women in Travel', and 'Sustainable Travel: Women as Agents of Change'.



Noor Ahmad Hamid and H.E. Christina Garcia Frasco at the PATA conference in Bohol

women within the travel and tourism sector. Over the course of the conference, participants delved into the myriad challenges and opportunities encountered by women in the travel industry, celebrating their accomplishments, while also confronting issues of gender bias. The overarching goal was to underscore the urgent necessity for gender equality and

the attendees for coming to Bohol for the conference and said that sustainability of Philippines tourism hinges on advancing gender equality and upholding women's rights. "The Department of Tourism Philippines has launched initiatives like TourISM WorCS to address women and children-related challenges, alongside the Filipino Brand of Service Excel-

State ranking boosts federal competition



TT Bureau

Deep Kalra, chairman, WTTCII, says that ranking of states boosts federal competition in India. He was referring to WTTCII-Hotelivate State Ranking Survey 2024, launched by WTTC India Initiative (WTTCII) early this year. The survey was launched after a gap of five years. The winning states were felicitated at an exclusive event in New Delhi.



Deep Kalra
Chairman, WTTCII

Kalra said, "The basis of this survey is about federal competition and states compete among themselves to improve upon all

the key parameters for tourism. It has a very healthy and salubrious effect on the states. In the survey, we talk about connec-

tivity and green tourism, as we understand that tourism is not just about building but also about sustaining. We are talking about job creation and skilling."

Several senior members from the travel and tourism industry attended the event. Amitabh Kant, G20 Sherpa India, was the Chief Guest at the event. Quoting Kant, Kalra said, "As he (Kant) suggested, we should talk about other aspects like states with cheapest ATF (Aviation Turbine Fuel). He mentioned that while having a budget is good but the spend, and where the spend was, must play a role in ranking. In terms of



The basis of this survey is about federal competition and get states compete among themselves to improve upon

connectivity, last mile connectivity should be considered. We will incorporate all points raised by him going forward."



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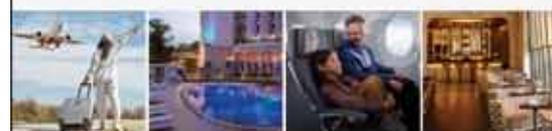
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Jagsons records 4-fold jump in FY24

Demand for travel in smaller, secondary markets in India has grown 10 times since COVID, says Harmandeep Singh Anand, MD, Jagsons Travels. A B2B travel agent, who works with a lot of agents from these markets and has his ear to the ground, is optimistic that they will be a great source for a growing outbound traveller base, he says.



Hazel Jain

Underlining the potential of smaller cities in India, Harmandeep Singh Anand, MD, Jagsons Travels, says that tier II and III cities have been on a growth trajectory since COVID and the travel demand from them is now 10 times more than what it was pre-COVID. "For example, we started promoting UK Doorstep visas as early as 2016, and 8 years down the line, that has grown from about 100 visas per year to almost about 15,000 visas across smaller cities like Akola, Amravati, Jabalpur, Khammam, and Vizag – wherever VFS doesn't have a centre," he says.

The recovery he was expecting by 2025 was fast-tracked and happened by 2023, and most agencies in these smaller cities have seen this growth. Jagsons has also seen a four-fold jump in FY2023-2024 in its sales turnover



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Managing Director
Jagsons Travels

as compared to 2019. One of the reasons is that the number of players in the market have gone down, more people are travelling, plus the overall travel expense has increased by about 40-50 per cent. That also added to its turnover. "Indians in tertiary cities are taking frequent holidays – often twice a year now – and they are travelling not just within India but

also taking international trip. TCS has not impacted business, but it has complicated it," Anand adds.

Agents, guide your clients

With the impending peak season, to avoid last-minute rush for visas and prevent visa shopping, travel agents must guide their clients on when to apply for visas, depending on the country they wish to travel to. Every year during peak season there is a lot of traffic for European destinations and Indian travellers tend to decide their holidays last minute and expect their visas within a short span of time. However, visa as such has never been a problem if one applies in advance.

Most of the embassies have increased their time when you can apply for a visa. For instance, you can apply for a Schengen visa as early as six months in advance! We see a lot of rush starting from March onwards, which leads to a

lot of visa shopping. None of the European destinations had a challenge; they only had a restricted number of visas that would be issued. If you look at Italy, it has made it simpler in terms of repeat visitors to Schengen territory in

Agents must guide their clients in terms of applying for visas to avoid last-minute rush for visas and prevent visa shopping

the last eight years where they have opened additional appointment slots. So, agents must guide their clients in terms of applying for visas. With the impending peak

season, Anand says that to avoid last-minute rush for visas and prevent visa shopping, travel agents must guide their clients on when to apply for visas, depending on the country they wish to travel to. "Every year during peak season there is a lot of traffic for European destinations and Indian travellers tend to decide their holidays very last minute and expect their visas within a short span of time. However, visa as such has never been a problem if one applies in advance. Most of the embassies have increased their time when you can apply for a visa. For instance, you can ap-

ply for a Schengen visa as early as six months in advance! We see a lot of rush starting from March onwards. Next month will be super peak which leads to a lot of visa shopping. None of the European destinations had a challenge; they only had a restricted number of visa that would be issued. If you look at Italy, it has made it simpler in terms of repeat visitors to Schengen territory in the last eight years where they have opened up additional appointment slots. So agents must guide their clients in terms of applying for visas," he shares.

Some important travel trends

- ❖ There has been a fast-track recovery, and most agencies in smaller Indian cities have seen growth in outbound travel.
- ❖ Indians in tertiary cities are taking frequent holidays – often twice a year now – and they are travelling not just within India but also taking international trip.
- ❖ Indian travellers tend to decide their holidays last minute and expect their visas within a short span of time.

Mumbai now connected with Tashkent

Uzbekistan Airways JSC starts two weekly flights on Mumbai-Tashkent route. They celebrated it with trade partners with an exclusive lunch in Mumbai. The airline has been operating regular flights to New Delhi for over 20 years, and currently operating daily flights to Tashkent with onward connections to Europe, USA, Middle East and all of Central Asia.



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The man who future-proofed Minar

Paying rich tribute to Madan Kak, who retired as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Minar Travels recently, Harvinder Singh Duggal, Managing Director, Minar Group, remembers his association with the group for over 13 years and his exceptional service that took the company to greater heights, and pens a heartfelt note in his honour.

In crafting a tribute to Mr Kak's invaluable contributions to Minar over the past 13 years, I am reminded of the very essence that makes our journey at Minar not just a story of business but of passion, commitment, and relentless pursuit of excellence. As I pen these lines, it's not just the milestones we have achieved under Mr Kak's stewardship that come to mind, but the spirit with which each milestone has been carved.

Thirteen years is no small feat; it's a saga! A saga of resilience, foresight, and unparalleled leadership. Mr. Kak joined us at a time when the path was riddled with uncertainties. Yet, with his astute vision and unwavering resolve, he not only steered Minar through these challenges but also ensured that we emerged stronger, and more versatile. His pioneering efforts in nurturing the Indian travel industry, and his relentless pursuit of



The Minar Group team, including Harvinder Singh Duggal, MD, Minar Group and Madan Kak, who recently retired as the COO of Minar Travels

excellence have set the standard for generations to come. Through his leadership, he has not only elevated Minar to unprecedented heights but has also inspired countless individuals in the travel trade sector to dream big and strive for greatness in the realm of tourism and hospitality. What sets Mr. Kak apart is not just his profound understanding of the travel

industry but his innate ability to see beyond the horizon. His strategies were never just about overcoming present challenges but about future-proofing our brand.

This foresight has been instrumental in positioning Minar as a beacon among the top DMCs in India. He has been a mentor, inspiring not by words but by action, principles and

integrity. As Mr. Kak prepares to embark on his next adventure, it's a bittersweet moment for all of us at Minar.

His departure leaves big shoes to fill, but also a legacy of leadership that will continue to inspire us. His contribution to Minar is not just measured by the success we have achieved but by the lives he has

touched, the experiences we have crafted together as a team, and the horizons we have expanded. As he charts his new course, Mr. Kak leaves behind a team that is richer from his guidance, stronger for in leadership, and inspired by his vision. As we look forward to new beginnings, we hold onto the lessons learned, the moments shared, and the unwavering belief in the po-

tential of what lies ahead. Here's to continuing the legacy, to reaching new heights, and to always striving for excellence, inspired by the path paved by him.

Kak has not only elevated Minar to unprecedented heights but has also inspired countless individuals in the travel trade

We wish Mr. Kak a healthy retired life and the love and affection of his family, so that he enjoys the fruits of all the hard work he has put in career spanning over 53 years.

Riding the waves with Palladium

On behalf of The Palladium Hotel Group, Global Destination recently hosted a few key agent partners to an exclusive yacht party in Mumbai. This intimate gathering provided a platform to discuss exciting updates, upcoming developments, and the latest hospitality trends within the Palladium brand with Sandra Polo Canudas (Asia & ME Commercial Director).



'Special packages for Indians'

Year 2023 was amazing and generated good business for the properties of Cross Hotels & Resorts. Khata Sinhaseni, Cluster General Manager, Cross Vibe Bangkok Sukhumvit and Lumen Bangkok Udomsuk Station, shares unique selling points of the properties, agenda for 2024, sustainable practices and plans to attract more Indian guests.



TT Bureau

Year 2023 was amazing and generated good business for the properties of Cross Hotels & Resorts, especially in Thailand. Sharing the success story, **Khata Sinhaseni**, Cluster General Manager, Cross Vibe Bangkok Sukhumvit and Lumen Bangkok Udomsuk Station, said, "We almost reached the same result and business as in 2019, which was considered best year for Thai tourism. So, there is no complaint, and we look forward to continuing in the same direction this year."



Khata Sinhaseni
Cluster General Manager, Cross Vibe Bangkok Sukhumvit and Lumen Bangkok Udomsuk Station

Cross Vibe Bangkok Sukhumvit's location is one of the best advantages tourists can avail. "Transportation is feasible and convenient, as it is located near BTS Skytrain Station, exactly 300-metre distance. It is away from chaos but surrounded by places to do touristic activities like bar/ café

hopping, shopping for souvenirs, markets, and vibrancy of Bangkok at the doorstep," Sinhaseni said.

Similarly, there is an easy access to Suvarnabhumi International Airport from Lumen Bangkok Udomsuk Station. Also, there are free shuttle services for guests to explore locally.

Focus on Indian market

Indian market is fairly new to Cross properties. "However, I can see rooms growing in coming years. Cross is focusing on India. We spend a lot of money to promote our brand. We have representative



There is an easy access for guests to Suvarnabhumi International Airport from Lumen Bangkok Udomsuk Station

offices in India and they are active ones," Sinhaseni said, adding that, "We also have special offerings and packages for them."



On the culinary preferences of Indians, Sinhaseni said, "Most of the Indians enquire about vegetarian Indian meals. So, we have a small corner with just Indian vegetarian options like puris and idlis. I know Indians have specific requirements and they are particular about food."

Sustainability initiatives
Cross Hotels & Resorts as a brand

focuses on making travel and hospitality more sustainable, as it is one of the main missions to protect and restore planet's resources. "We are committed to supporting activities that strengthen conservation of natural resources and protect environment like reducing the usage of paper and going digital, avoid usage of plastics, more and more solar energy," he said.

On the expansion plans, Sinhaseni said they have a new Lumen property coming up soon. "We look forward to welcoming more Indian tourists to all our properties," he said. Apart from India, Cross Vibe Bangkok Sukhumvit and Lumen Bangkok Udomsuk Station have huge tourist influx from Southeast Asian markets like Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and Korea. ↴

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Singapore memories capped in a bottle

Scentopia, a tourist attraction on Sentosa island, helps visitors create their own perfumes using essential oils infused with more than 200 orchids found in Singapore. Prachi Saini Garg, Founder and Managing Director, Scentopia, shares while their product is popular with corporate groups, GITs and leisure travellers from India were also booking sessions with them.

Hazel Jain

Prachi Saini Garg, Founder and Managing Director, Scentopia, wants Indian travellers to understand what Scentopia can offer them when they are visiting Singapore. So, her team trains and updates travel agents about her product who, in

turn, can explain about it to their clients. Garg was in Mumbai recently to meet and engage with a select group of travel agents and MICE planners and conduct a session with them to identify the best fit of perfumes for them. She said that while her product was popular with corporate groups, GITs and leisure travellers, such as mother-

daughter duos from India, were also booking her sessions while visiting Singapore. "All our essential oils are infused with about 200 orchids found in Singapore. When you make your perfume at Scentopia using these oils, you are essentially capturing your memories of Singapore in a bottle and bringing home with you. We see a lot



Prachi Saini Garg
Founder and Managing Director
Scentopia

engagement activities can be as large as a few 1,000 people. We are the largest perfume workshop in the world, we can cater to 1,500 pax in one go, and we can do it a couple of times a day. As far as I know, we are the only company in the world that can operate at that capacity when it comes to perfume workshop. The shortest session can last for 45 minutes, but we have also done some 30-minute ones."

We are the only company in the world that can operate at that capacity (1,500 pax in one go) when it comes to perfume workshop



of FITs and some series. In FITs, we see many groups of women, mother-daughter duos, and even large family groups," she says.

Great fit for corporates

Scentopia does get some incentive groups from India, but Garg hopes to see more corporate customers from the country soon. "Our team building and corporate

Clients can walk in any time for these sessions, and they don't need to be part of a group. "We get travellers from everywhere – lots from South India. Our per-

fumiers can speak Tamil, Hindi, English and Punjabi. We are now considering opening India outlets soon," Garg shares.

Scentopia gets a new look

Scentopia's new look transforms it into a multifaceted learning space. From exploring fragrance rooms to understanding the intricacies of perfume ingredients, visitors can expand their knowledge of the art and science of perfumery. The new features aim to heighten visitor engagement, making the attraction even more appealing to a diverse audience.

Mandrem: New take on Goan luxury

Mandrem Beach Resort, ensconced between a narrow inlet of the Mandrem River on one side and the beach on the other, can be an ideal place for your world-class luxury stay in Goa. Away from the maddening crowds, the resort, cocooned in the lap of a green paradise, provides a glimpse into the Goa's beautiful nature bounty.

TT Bureau

The idyllic drive to Mandrem offers picturesque vistas of authentic Goan life as you move from Panjim, the bustling capital city, to the serene village, where you find a quaint life entrenched in the Goan susegad vibe. Away from the maddening crowds, ensconced between a narrow inlet of the Mandrem River on one side and the beach on the other, the Mandrem Beach Resort, a member of Radisson Individuals Retreats, lays cocooned in the lap of a green paradise.

The stunning 1,800 sq.ft. property, part of the Radisson Individual Retreats, welcomes you to an unparalleled experience of nature's splendour and premium hospitality. The key addition to the Alcon Victor Group, leaders in the hospitality and healthcare sectors, enhances their portfolio of providing world-class luxury experiences.



Elegance meets comfort

Exclusivity and elegance flow through the modern design of Mandrem Beach Resort. Inspired by Goan landscape, earthy hues, a minimalistic foyer with touches of wicker furniture and select décor pieces sets the tropical mood for the entire property. Strategically placed rooms and suites of the 41-key property open out to the stunning beach and the river

views, ideal for larger groups. The rooms are designed to suit the preferences of world travellers. Each luxurious escape offers a slice of home, pampering guests with the finest trappings of modern comforts.

The minimalistic interiors exude understated luxe appeal with pastel shades and select wall artwork that lends sophis-

tication. The rooms feature LED Smart TVs, an electronic safe locker, beverage makers, minibars and hairdryers for convenience. Guests can rest assured of finding a meal after a late night through the 24-hour in-room dining. Enjoy the solace of nature from the attached large balconies overlooking the rivulet or stare at a mesmerising sunset from the beachside rooms.

Sunset cove

Indulge in the chef's special offering of local culinary fare, along with Asian and continental spreads. The wooden interiors with antiquated tile patterns blend the old with the new. The wicker

Strategically placed rooms and suites of the 41-key property open out to the stunning beach and the river views, ideal for larger groups

lamp shades add a sustainable finish to the garden-facing restaurant apt for a relaxing meal. They avoid plastic by setting up a bottling plant on the property.

Corel banquet hall

Apart from the exquisite stays, the property offers the perfect setting for weddings and MICE events. The spacious 1,600 sqft hall comfortably holds large gatherings for leadership seminars, workshops, and intimate functions. The well-equipped hall includes audio-visual equipment and on-site catering for all requirements.

Azule gardens

The spacious lawn areas are made to host sundowners and weddings. The highlight is the resort's cliff-top space for all those enviable picture-perfect images.

A relaxing swim in the pool is a cure for the tired mind. Guests seeking adventure can opt for surfing classes, fishing, kayaking, or join the Drum Circle. The Mandrem Beach Resort offers the perfect recipe for a world-class stay as they combine impeccable service with exquisite gourmet experiences.



The Palladium Hotel Group experience

The Unexpected Al Marjan Island Hotel & Residences

Indian travellers are now exploring Spain other than the regular cities, and Palladium Hotel Group is witnessing this trend with bookings at its hotels in remoter cities. Not just this, the group's Mexico resorts are also seeing an influx of Indian weddings, says Sandra Polo Canudas, its Asia & ME Commercial Director.



Hazel Jain

The high arrival numbers that Spain is seeing from India is reflected in the hotel bookings the Palladium Hotel Group is receiving from the market. "This shows that even though there are new hotels coming up in Spain, the Indian market continues to prefer our brand and our properties," says **Sandra Polo Canudas**, Asia & ME Commercial Director, Palladium Hotel Group. She was in India recently to meet the travel trade in New Delhi and Mumbai, where it hosted a few key agent partners to an exclusive yacht party.

Underlining an interesting trend, she says that not only are they exploring newer parts of Spain, but also spending more time here. "Earlier, they used to visit Ibiza for approx. two nights. In recent times, their minimum stay is three nights, with Spain as a mono-destination. They are also eager to visit different parts of Spain in-



Sandra Polo Canudas
Asia & ME Commercial Director
Palladium Hotel Group

stead of just Barcelona or Madrid and Seville. This is why we take care of our clients staying with us at Ibiza, Marbella, and Tenerife in Canary Islands," Canudas adds.

Hidden gems

Opened in 2022, the TRS Ibiza Hotel is a hidden gem for the Indian clients. "The trade is aware of it. It is an incredible product: it is an adults-only hotel and offers both sides of Ibiza, which is the relaxation side and the happening side!

Clients can upgrade their experience in the hotel using our Signature Level guest option and can access private areas inside the hotel, get private check-in, and access to more than 15 F&B options, which the Indian clientele loves. In addition, they can also attend one of the shows happening in Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel or at the High Club, which is opposite Ushuaia Ibiza Beach Hotel," Canudas explains.

Palladium Hotel Group has nine different brands which includes



Indians used to visit Ibiza for approx. two nights. In recent times, their minimum stay is three nights, with Spain as a mono-destination



TRS Coral Hotel

city hotels and beach hotels. Some are seasonal hotels open from March until October every year. Those are beach hotels and resorts located in Ibiza. However, there are other hotels open all year, such as in Marbella and on the incredible island of Tenerife in Canary Islands, which has the Hard Rock Hotel Tenerife. "It is an incredible adventure for families as well as FITs and MICE. It is something out of the box and we already see MICE groups from India staying at this property. The destination has perfect temperatures, adventure, natural parks, interesting gastronomy with lots of Indian restaurants all year round," she shares.

Weddings in Mexico!

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. Canudas says, "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 a very experienced team here that knows how to handle Indian weddings and it is working very well so far. I highly recommend wedding planners to look at this destination."

New properties

Palladium Hotel Group is strengthening its international presence with its arrival in the Middle East. The project announced will be carried out in conjunction with Al Marjan and Almal Real Estate Development, an award-winning ultra-luxury developer based in the region. The ambitious project, which attracts more than \$100 million in investment, will consist of 442 hotel rooms and residential units. It represents the first international opening for the iconic Ibiza-born brand, which is now to be known as

Ushuaia Unexpected Hotels & Residences, integrating the concept of branded residences with the existing hotel proposition. The hotel and residential facil-



The group's new project in the Middle East will be carried out in conjunction with Al Marjan and Almal Real Estate Development

ity will be located on Al Marjan Island in Ras Al Khaimah, and will comprise a sophisticated beach club, restaurant and infinity pool, all situated adjacent to the Wynn Resort Island and overlooking the picturesque Arabian Gulf. ↴



TRS Ibiza

'We are witnessing hospitality 2.0'

Vikram Cotah, CEO, GRT Hotels & Resorts, shares the journey of the brand, as it completes 25 years. 'We have been the pioneers in the domestic home-grown brands catering to tier II & III markets, which is today being sought after by international brands in equal measure,' says Cotah, adding that this is the beginning of a new chapter in hospitality.



Nisha Verma

GRT Hotels & Resorts is going international with their first property in Maldives, as they celebrate 25th year of inception of their first hotel this year, says **Vikram Cotah**, Chief Executive Officer, GRT Hotels & Resorts. "We are proud that we are part of the growth story of India. We started in 1998 with our flagship hotel in Chennai. It was the dream child of our Chairman, and the hotel was the first to have a 100 ft atrium and indoor pool in 1998. It was a big hit in those days because our philosophy was that we should give 5-star facilities at 3-star prices and that went well with the Indian population. From then, the story began and then we acquired the Radisson hotel, which was the second Radisson hotel in the country and that too in Chennai. We kept it as a Radisson and co-branded as GRT and now we have renovated and



Vikram Cotah
Chief Executive Officer
GRT Hotels & Resorts

re-launched it post-COVID and it is getting fabulous reviews. We then bought the Temple Bay hotel from ITDC. It is a 45-acre property in Mahabalipuram now named as Radisson Blu Temple Bay Beach Resort. Since then, our growth story has started," shares Cotah.

Growth story

With more than 20 hotels in their

kitty, GRT owns 80 per cent of their hotels. "We are asset owners, and we are only starting to manage hotels for others. We know that the asset light model will also grow, so that our expansion is also there. As of now, we are concentrated in the south, but we want to be a national brand. We have got our first property in the Maldives and have entered international waters. We are looking at Sri Lanka now. The next 10 years will be India story and we want to be part of it," he claims.

Informing that their focus is to expand fast during 2024-26, he said, "We see that the demand drivers are immense. While the entire world economy is slowing down, Indian numbers are unbelievable. The growth taking place today is the pay-off for the hard work done in the past many years. India is being positioned as a destination for the world, which is going to take us a long way. The government is

also pushing for tourism, and that is making a major difference. There are a lot of smart city programmes and push for tier II cities. There is huge interest in places like Ayodhya and Lakshadweep today."

Growth in tier II & tier III cities

Talking about new hotels, he shared, "In 2024, we are going to open three hotels in the first quarter and all these are in tier II and III cities. The first one is in Madurai with 125 rooms, and the second is a 100-room boutique hotel in the centre of Vijayawada. We will also have our second hotel in Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh."

Optimising hotel rates

One of the major trends post-COVID is the hotel rates skyrocketing across India. In response to the same, he shared, "This is a sensitive topic. I keep saying to my fellow hoteliers that we should not burst the bubble. The demand is

high and supply is less. Hotels always go through a cycle every five years, which goes at a peak and then comes down. I think we are at a peak now, and because there is

We see that the demand drivers are immense. While the entire world economy is slowing down, Indian numbers are unbelievable

no new supply, the demand is high and the entire economy is buoyant. Hence, the existing hotels are charging more. We must be sensitive to this because last November-

December we saw some of the guests moving away from Goa and other traditional destinations in India to places like Thailand, Vietnam and Bali, which have become our competition. Even Sri Lanka is much cheaper. These countries are also giving visa-free entry to Indians, which makes it easy to visit. We need to take cognisance of these factors. I am not asking to reduce rates, but I think we need to be sensitive to what we charge."

Competing with global brands

Cotah agreed that international brands coming in is an obvious threat as they see a huge demand in India. "They know what is the potential of not only the nine metros, but also tier II and III cities. In fact, at a recent hotel investment conference the CEO of Marriott came to India for the first time and was excited to bring their Moxy brand, which is their lifestyle brand, to India," he underlined.



Indulging in Sunset Delights at Madrem Beach Resort, a member of Radisson Individuals Retreats. Experience handcrafted cocktails, tantalizing tapas, and evening adventures like kayaking against the backdrop of vibrant sunsets or observing local fishermen in their traditional pursuits.



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Wed in India, The LaLit way

Known for hosting large, elegant weddings, The LaLit not only has city hotels for business travellers, but also a host of beautiful resorts located at strategic spots that are perfect for weddings. Rajan Kalra, Head of Sales, The LaLit, speaks about their USP and the transparency the group offers to travel agents while working with their clients.



Hazel Jain

The LaLit Group has a portfolio of 12 beautiful properties across India in cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Srinagar, Bekal, Jaipur, Udaipur, Goa and Khajuraho. Strategically located, they are great for MICE and the wedding segments. The LaLit Mumbai is right next to the international airport which makes it perfect for MICE and business travellers. Meanwhile, The LaLit New Delhi is in the heart of the city in Connaught Place. The one in Bengaluru is next to Vidhana Soudha, and in Kolkata it is next to Eden Garden.

Underlining the group ethos, **Rajan Kalra**, Head of Sales, The LaLit, says that these are prime locations and that has always been one of the group's strong points. "Our properties that are



Rajan Kalra
Head of Sales
The LaLit

best suited for weddings have panoramic views like The LaLit Golf & Spa Resort Goa is next to Raj Baga Beach, The LaLit Grand Palace Srinagar is located right next to Dal Lake and has one of the largest gardens in Srinagar. The LaLit Laxmi Vilas Palace Udaipur is overlooking the Fateh Sagar Lake. 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, which is a starting category. It can host large weddings with more than 500-600 pax. It also has nine villas. So, all LaLit properties are built grand," he says.

One of the group's key offerings is also wellness, and all its properties have spas that offer a holistic experience.

Weddings in India

The LaLit Group is known for hosting large weddings. Kalra says, "There is a huge change in trend today. Weddings are now more personalised and intimate, but still extravagant. For us, this segment has grown by 7-8 per cent annually. We also see a rise in pre-wedding functions such as engagement ceremony. Couples now want themed weddings like Bollywood theme.

We also see a change of attitude among couples and families. While traditional weddings are still taking place, the entire story of love and commitment is changing. We are

While traditional weddings are still taking place, the story is changing. We are now also getting wedding inquiries for non-saya dates as well

getting wedding inquiries for non-saya dates as well. We are packed this year, even though there are not too many saya dates in June this year. And this will change in the



coming years." He adds that couples are also asking for sustainable weddings and he sees a shift towards this in the last two years with more eco-friendly events. "Hotels are also adjusting to this, but we, in general, are following sustainable SOPs," he further adds. All LaLit hotels also have in-house wedding decorators.

Unexplored Khajuraho

Speaking about new and unexplored properties, Kalra says that

the group does have something coming up in Ahmedabad in a year or so. But more details on that later. Meanwhile, for the travel agent partners, he says the group offers complete transparency. "We are one of the few chains that are strong in rate parity and encourage agents to book with us. They will get complete transparency with us. I would suggest them to look at Khajuraho which has not been explored much," he adds. 



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Elisa Robles Fraga, Director, Tourism Office of Spain & Tourism Counsellor, Embassy of Spain India, is proud to share that India is the number one international market in terms of registrations for its Spain Specialist Program. The NTO has also planned fam trips for the travel trade to known, as well as newer destinations, to help them promote the destination better.



Hazel Jain

The Tourism Office of Spain has always encouraged direct engagement with the travel trade. It was recently part of an interactive session organised by TAFI WI and sponsored by Global Destinations, where **Elisa Robles Fraga**, Director, Tourism Office of Spain (Tourism Counsellor - Embassy of Spain India), presented the myriad tools available for the travel trade.

She says, "Even though travel agents know about Spain, we have been highlighting the different tools that agents can use to improve their knowledge of Spain so that they can sell it better. We have for them our website as well as our specialist programme."

Created along with local and regional tourism boards, the Spain Specialist programme is online and freely available for the

travel trade. It has four courses and many modules, and upon its completion, agents can earn a certificate and also stand a chance to win a sponsored trip to Spain.

Robles adds, "I am proud to say that India ranks number one among all the countries where travel trade has access to this programme with 964 registrations. Number two is Argentina and a very far third is USA." The NTO will be participating in the upcoming MICE Travel Show organised by Buzz Travel Marketing in July this year.

Surpassed pre-pandemic inbound numbers

Robles reveals, "We are the second-most visited country in the world. We have been second again last year in 2023 with 85.2 million international visitors. The Indian outbound market has indeed shown its positive intent



Elisa Robles Fraga
Director, Tourism Office of Spain (Tourism Counsellor - Embassy of Spain India)

in the past year, especially with respect to Spain. We are in fact very pleased to say that we have passed our pre-pandemic numbers in 2023, with the figures reaching almost 250,000. We therefore have an extremely positive outlook for 2024."

Spain will be promoting new products this year in India mar-

ket. It will continue promoting some of the already popular products – art and culture, luxury, gastronomy, among others. At the same time, it is also promoting some of the lesser-known aspects of Spain such as the Green Spain region as well as encouraging travellers to explore Spain during the non-peak seasons in an effort towards a more sustainable tourism development.

"We have multiple familiarization trips in pipeline – to destinations that are already popular in the Indian market such as Andalucía as well as some of the hidden gems in the regions like Galicia in the North of Spain," Robles adds.

Visas made easy for travellers and quick

Spain is the first Schengen country in terms of processing visas and efficiency of the process, Robles claims. "Spain Tourism is always grateful for the assis-

tance provided by our Consulate and Embassy with respect to visas. Among other things, the processing time has greatly improved and applicants in Mumbai receive visa within 48 hours after

We have been highlighting the different tools that agents can use to improve their knowledge of Spain so that they can sell it better

submission. Visa processing has indeed increased by 30 per cent compared to 2022," she adds.

Addressing TAFI members in Mumbai, **Fernando Heredia**

Noguer, Consul General of Spain in Mumbai, said, "I am overwhelmed by the love and interest Indian nationals have for Spain. I am always happy to share information with the travel agents and understand their needs and challenges so we can try and accommodate their requests as much as our resources allow us to." Noguer added, "We have increased our visa processing capacity by 30 per cent in 2023 compared to 2022 and increased 40 per cent compared to the average of the four years before the pandemic. In 2023, we managed to issue almost 52,000 visas versus 40,000 visa applications in 2022. We have the authorisation to open a new consulate general in Bengaluru." He also shared that travel agents can write at cog.mumbai.vis@maec.es in case of any issue with families or group visas and assured that every genuine email will be responded to. ↴

Dusit Hotels eyes India's MICE biz

Dusit Hotels & Resorts kicks off its India Showcase 2024 with a three-city roadshow in Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai, aimed at presenting its offerings to the Indian travel trade. Nine hotels participated in the roadshow, focusing on attracting more Indians, especially from the MICE and wedding segments.



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Empowering agencies in tier II cities

The newly launched digital platform – Red Planner – is designed not only to educate the smaller agencies in secondary markets about destinations but also build an itinerary within minutes, thereby empowering them and offering them opportunities that weren't easily available to them. Rajesh Kakade, Founder, Red Planner, shares more.

 Hazel Jain

The potential of tier cities in India – in terms of disposal income and the hunger for travel – can no longer be ignored. The only thing posing a hurdle to agencies in these cities is lack of information and good network of suppliers. **Rajesh Kakade**, Founder, Red Planner, understood this issue. To tackle this, he has launched a digital platform designed for small-scale travel agencies. Being built for over two years, Red Planner is an itinerary builder that also offers real-time costing to agents. He launched this during a networking evening event in Mumbai that saw presence from key travel partners and NTOs, along with Riya Kakade, his daughter, who has joined the business.

Speaking about the new offering, Kakade says that the idea initially was just to build something that



Rajesh Kakade, Founder, Red Planner, at an event

would help the trade design itineraries. This was more for tier II, III, and IV city agencies who struggled to understand the destination and design itineraries. "We started with that idea, and along the way realised that along with itineraries people are going to ask about the costing too. So we started building the costing into this platform. Today, Red Planner is an itinerary builder that also of-

fers real-time costing to agents," he explains.

This is actually not a selling platform, but more of a treasure trove of information. "Of course, selling will be there but this will also educate the travel agents on various destinations that are slightly difficult to understand but are doing well in the India market. These include the Scandinavian countries,

Canada, US, Europe and Australia. To begin with, these are the five major destinations which we are promoting through this platform," Kakade adds.

Once the booking is made, the mother company – Red Carpet Travel – will handle the entire logistics on the backend. Red Carpet Travel is a DMC and has offices in USA, Canada, Scandinavia,

Europe, and Australia. So, while Red Planner will help agents design itineraries, Red Carpet Travel will take care of the after-sales.

Technology to the rescue

Kakade believes that travel, like everything else, must evolve. "Technology started to take over everything since covid and using it, the new digital platform will help agents sell on the spot without waiting for the DMCs to reply or waiting for rates or itineraries. We have also started working on an AI-based platform," he says. His team has already started promoting it in tiered cities. "We have already started connecting with our valued tier II and III agents and started educating them about this new platform and how it can help them. The response has been amazing, they are really liking it. An agent in Satara in Maharashtra who is currently selling only Far East was thrilled to use the system and wanted to log in and start

learning about new destinations. We are empowering the small-scale agents in tertiary cities with this platform, so they can quickly understand newer destination and

 **This is dedicated to my travel agent partners both old and new. This can help them not only build itineraries in 2-3 minutes but also customise it**

sell tours," Kakade adds. He has 12 developers in a team of 32 working on this. "This is dedicated to my travel agent partners. This can help them not only build itineraries in 2-3 minutes but also customise it for clients," he adds. 

A new chapter of AIUla's story unfolds

The Royal Commission for AIUla, represented in India by Beautiful Planet, along with key trade partners, recently celebrated a milestone in AIUla's legacy – the launch of its 2024 global brand campaign titled 'Forever Revitalising' in Mumbai. The campaign offers a fresh perspective on AIUla, showcasing its rich past, vibrant present, and promising future.



Banyan Group eyes tier II, III cities

Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts, now rebranded Banyan Group, has been witnessing a lot of interest coming for its hotels in India, especially in tier II and III cities like Raipur. While honeymooners and families are top visitors to the group's properties, weddings and MICE events offer huge potential in terms of numbers.



Hazel Jain

Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts recently announced its re-branding to Banyan Group on its 30th anniversary. To celebrate this occasion in India, the hotel group hosted an exclusive evening event for a few wedding planners and travel agents in Mumbai. Leading the delegation was **Benjawan Meksakul**, Regional Director, Sales & Marketing (Thailand, Laos, Maldives & Indonesia), Banyan Group, who also visited Delhi and Bengaluru to meet select luxury agents. Representatives of hotels in Thailand and Indonesia were also present.

Meksakul says, "India has always been one of the top five markets for us. While our brand Banyan Tree has always been a favourite with Indian visitors, Angsana Laguna Phuket hotel is also popular here, not just for FITs but also for MICE and weddings. And now,



Banyan Group team, including Benjawan Meksakul, Regional Director, S&M (Thailand, Laos, Maldives & Indonesia) (4th from R) and Tekla Maira, Regional Director, S&M – India (5th from R)

with good air connectivity between India and Bali, we feel our hotels in other destinations will also work here, such as Indonesia, where we have three hotels in Bintan and one in Bali." With a change in its corporate identity from Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts to Banyan Group, it has gone from a single luxury brand of Banyan Tree to doubling

its portfolio from five to 10 brands that can cater to the diverse needs of Indian customers. Banyan Group has lifestyle hotel brands ranging from mid-scale, upper mid-scale to luxury. "The other brand that could interest the Indian market is Cassia – its brand ethos really matches with the personality of Indian travellers," Meksakul adds.

Commenting on the traveller segment that book the most with them, she says, "We get a mix right now depending on the destination. For instance, Bangkok gets a lot of couples, honeymooners and families. Wedding is one of the key target segments for us, especially since Banyan Group has a lot of resorts. Our hotels are keen to take

big groups so buy-outs are possible. We also know about Indian and vegetarian food, as we have Indian chefs at many of our hotels. Angsana Laguna Phuket is perfect for an Indian wedding."

Speaking about the potential of Indian cities, **Tekla Maira**, Regional Director, Sales & Marketing – India,

says that she sees tier II and III cities of India growing by leaps and bounds today. "Raipur has shown a lot of interest in our hotels and Bengaluru luxury agents are also engaged with us. MICE is always big, particularly incentives.



Banyan Group celebrated the rebranding and hosted an exclusive evening event for a few wedding planners and travel agents in Mumbai

They are looking for new experiences. So, the hotels are creating them. We believe our brand Cassia will work well," she adds.





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EVENT TALK		
Published from: India Middle East		
MAY 2024		
Date	Event	Time
3	Abu Dhabi Itinerary Training Workshop- Pune	10:00 am
6-9	Arabian Travel Market 2024- Dubai	10:00 am
8-10	TRENZ New Zealand	9:00 am
9-12	Seoul International Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am
9-12	Travel and Leisure Expo 2024	11:00 am
14-15	GBTA APAC Conference 2024	9:00 am
14-16	Africa's Travel Indaba 2024	10:00 am
14-16	IMEX Frankfurt 2024	10:00 am
14-16	Myanmar Tourism Mart 2024	9:00 am
15-17	PATA Annual Summit 2024- Macao	8:30 am
16-18	Guangzhou International Travel Fair 2024	9:00 am
16-18	MICE Nepal Expo 2024	10:00 am
16-19	Thailand Dive Expo 2024	11:00 am
27-29	Riyadh Travel Fair 2024	3.30 pm
27-29	ITB China 2024	9:00 am
JUNE 2024		
4-6	Global Sustainable Tourism Summit	9:00 am
5-7	CAPA India Aviation Summit 2024	10:00 am
7-9	Malaysia International Dive Expo	10:00 am
12-13	Aviation India Summit & Exhibition	9:00 am

Lords' location in Doon its USP

Newly-opened Lords Eco Inn Dehradun's proximity to major tourist attractions and business districts makes it an ideal choice for travellers seeking convenience and comfort during their visit to the capital of Uttarakhand.



TT Bureau

Lords Hotels & Resorts has added another gem to its collection with the inauguration of Lords Eco Inn Dehradun. Boasting over 60 hotels across India and Nepal, Lords continues its legacy of providing exemplary hospitality with the launch of latest property in the capital of Uttarakhand.

The newly opened hotel with captivating interior designs offers a total of 29 refined rooms and suites. Guests can indulge in a luxurious stay while enjoying enticing amenities, including a rooftop sky lounge and bar, perfect for unwinding after a day of exploration or business meetings. Moreover, the hotel prides itself on its two opulent banquet halls designed to cater to conferences and weddings, adding versatility to its offerings.

Located just 5 km from the Dehradun Railway Station and conveniently accessible via the national highway, Lords Eco Inn Dehradun enjoys a prime spot in the city centre. Its proximity to major tourist



attractions and business districts makes it an ideal choice for travellers seeking both convenience and comfort during their stay.

Mandeep Dang, Owner & Director, Hotel Doon Castle, expressed

his excitement over partnering with Lords Group to launch the hotel. "We are thrilled to partner with Lords Group in launching a hotel that we are truly passionate about. Dehradun is emerging as Uttarakhand's most vibrant city, well-known for its

scenic grandeur and beautiful surroundings. We have created a property with guest-focused efficiency that offers a top-notch experience to our visitors from India and overseas," he said.

We have created a property with guest-focused efficiency that offers a top-notch experience to our visitors from India and overseas

Vikas Suri, Vice President, Lords Hotels & Resorts, highlighted the significance of entering Uttarakhand. "We are delighted to debut our presence in Uttarakhand with this first hotel in Dehradun. The hotel will provide quality accommodation and services at the best rates. It is an ideal destination for both business and leisure travellers," he said.

KSA eyes 7.5 mn Indians by 2030

As Saudi Arabia continues its journey towards becoming a global tourism hub, it remains committed to fostering cultural exchange, economic growth, and mutual understanding with countries like India. The Kingdom, through its strategic initiatives, is poised to realise its vision of welcoming millions of visitors and unlocking the full potential of its tourism sector.



Janice Alyosius

In 2016, Saudi Arabia unveiled its vision for the future, built upon three pillars: a vibrant society, an ambitious nation, and a thriving economy. Shedding light on how tourism and travel serve as integral components of the vision, Alhasan Aldabbagh, President, APAC Markets, Saudi Tourism Authority, said that tourism is not merely an industry in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia but a catalyst that drives growth across various sectors. "Tourism is what opens doors, bridges cultures, and allows people to connect. Through that connection, we build partnerships in business, art, communities, technology, science, and literature. It's really the catalyst for other industries to flourish."

On the rising number of Indian visitors in 2023, Aldabbagh said, "Last year alone, we welcomed over 1.5



Alhasan Aldabbagh
President, APAC Markets
Saudi Tourism Authority

million Indian travellers, marking a 156 per cent growth compared to 2019. This significant growth is something we aim to sustain, continuing the momentum towards our vision of reaching 7.5 million visitors from India to Saudi Arabia (by 2030). This makes India our top source market and Saudi Arabia the number one destination for Indian travellers."

To further strengthen ties and facilitate travel between the two nations, Saudi Arabia has implemented several initiatives, one of them being enhancing air connectivity. "We have been collaborating with various Indian carriers such

Last year alone, we welcomed over 1.5 million Indian travellers, marking a 156 per cent growth compared to 2019

as Air India, SpiceJet, Vistara, IndiGo, as well as Saudi national carriers like Saudi Airlines and



Flynas. Together, we are adding new routes and increasing flight frequencies to connect different cities in India to Saudi Arabia," he said.

Additionally, efforts have been made to simplify the visa process, making it more convenient for Indians to visit Saudi Arabia for leisure, business, or pilgrimage. "We have established 10 Tashir VFS offices across India where individuals can apply for leisure,

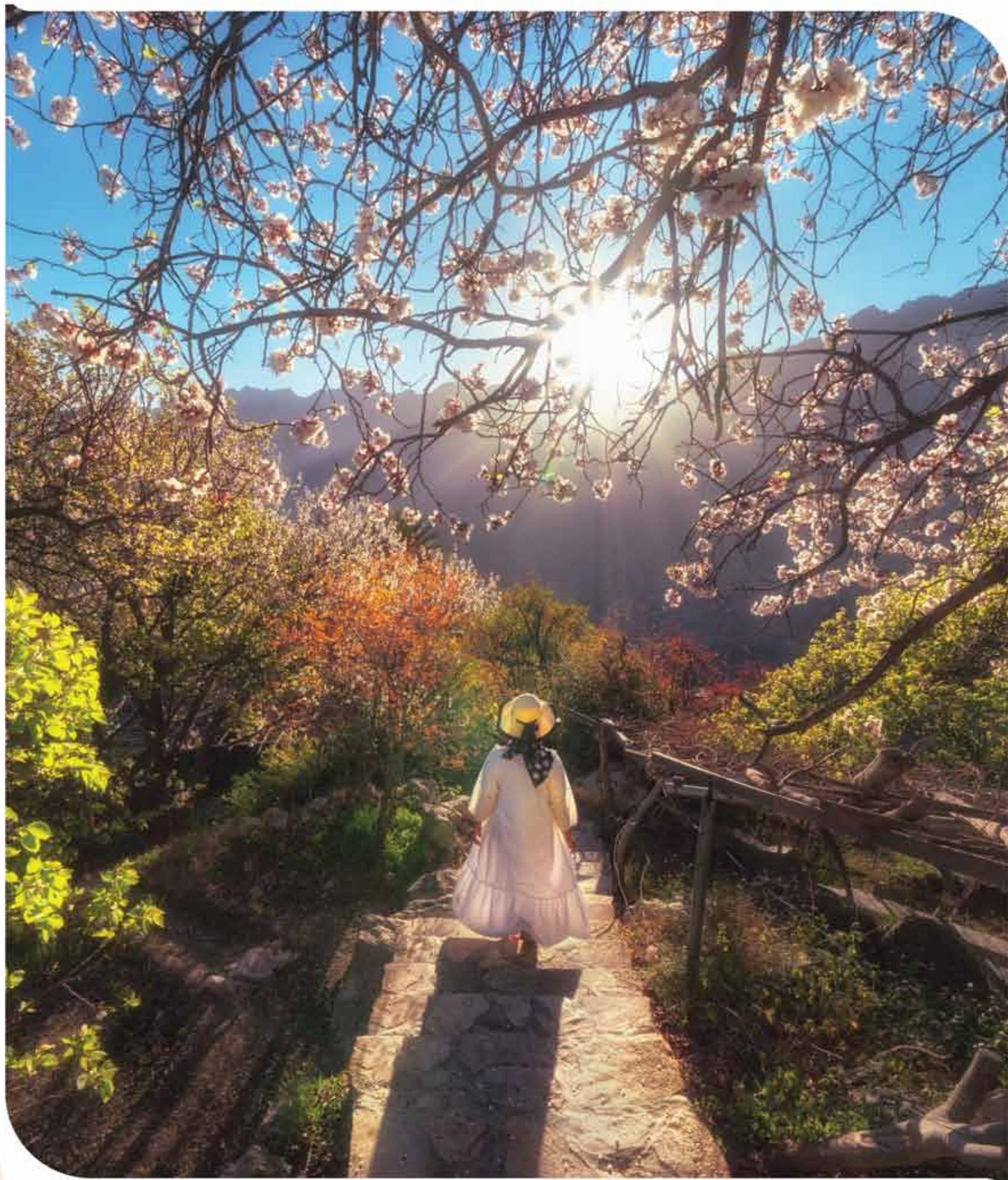
business, family, friends, or Umrah visas. Also, we recently introduced the stopover programme for travellers flying through Saudi Arabia with Saudi Airlines or Flynas, which provides for a 96-hour free stopover visa. Additionally, you can now apply for your visa online through Tashir and VFS offices and have the biometrics collected at your doorstep," said Aldabbagh. He added, "We have also launched a programme enabling individuals holding UK, US, or

Schengen visas in India to apply for an e-visa or visa-on-arrival."

Saudi Arabia's dynamic landscape offers something for every traveller, from cultural experiences to adventure and entertainment. "We host numerous events throughout the year, including major sports tournaments and music concerts. The Boulevard in Riyadh, for instance, hosts the world's largest lifestyle festival," he said.

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MOVEMENTS

MINAR GROUP

New Delhi

Minar Group has appointed **DEEPAK KUMARR BHATNAGAR** as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) - Tours division. A respected figure in the tourism industry, Bhatnagar joined Minar in July 2023 and has swiftly risen to the pivotal leadership role. Having earned his postgraduate degree in Tourism from the University of Delhi, he has more than 36 years of experience in the sector. His career includes stints with esteemed organisations such as SITA and Le Passage to India. Bhatnagar is celebrated for his exceptional skill in creating unique travel experiences and has been an influential executive member of the ITOA.



NOVOTEL GOA CANDOLIM

GOA

Novotel Goa Candolim appoints **DIBENDU KUMAR KHAN** as the Director of Operations. Khan is an accomplished hospitality professional with a career spanning over 20 years and a rich background in team management, food and beverage operations, customer service and curating bespoke guest experiences. In his new role, he will oversee the day-to-day operations of Novotel Goa Candolim, ensuring seamless execution of services and maintaining the hotel's commitment towards providing exceptional guest experiences.



ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES

India

BEZAWIT TASSEW has taken over as Regional Director India Sub Continent of Ethiopian Airlines from 1 April 2024 and will be stationed in Mumbai. Tasew joined Ethiopian in 2002 and served the airline in various positions in Marketing & Sales, Manager Customer Relations and Area Manager Rwanda, the position she was currently holding. She holds a degree in Bachelor of Arts Marketing Management. Her rich, varied and long-standing experience will help elevate operations of the airline in the Indian Sub Continent. Ethiopian Airlines has witnessed rapid growth.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT BENGALURU OUTER RING ROAD

Bengaluru

SUVEER SODHI has been appointed as the Cluster General Manager by Courtyard by Marriott Bengaluru Outer Ring Road & Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Outer Ring Road. He has over 17-year experience in the hospitality sector. His last role was as the General Manager of Alila Diwa Goa and the Diwa Club. His career is punctuated with several accolades, including being named the F&B Professional of the Year by Vir Sanghvi in 2016 and his inclusion in Hospitality's 30 Most Popular GMs in India for 2023.



FINNAIR

New Delhi

Finnair, the national airline of Finland, has appointed **ANUPAM VIG** as the General Manager for India. Vig is a dynamic professional with over two decades of experience in the airline industry. His expertise lies in developing and implementing innovative sales strategies that drive growth and expand market presence. Throughout his career, he has demonstrated a deep understanding of industry dynamics and consumer behaviour, consistently delivering results by identifying business opportunities. His leadership will help further Finnair's goals.



CINNAMON HOTELS & RESORTS

Delhi

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, a leading hospitality name in the Sri Lankan hospitality industry, appoints **PALAK SHAH** as the Vice President of Sales. Shah brings with him 24 years of hospitality experience, especially in India and Southwest Asia. In his new role, he will lead the hotel's strategic sales initiatives, particularly focusing on accelerating growth in key source markets and India. He will also oversee the Global Sales Office initiatives and efforts set up in these markets. As the former Regional Director Sales – Southwest Asia at Intercontinental Hotels Group (IHG) – Global Sales Office in Mumbai,



NOVOTEL GOA PANJIM

Goa

SURAJIT CHATTERJEE has been appointed as the General Manager of Novotel Goa Panjim, which is set to open its doors for guests later this year. Chatterjee has played a key role in pre-openings of numerous hotels. His professional journey has seen him traverse the length and breadth of the country, working with esteemed brands, such as Accor, Marriott International, and IHG. In his new role, he will spearhead the dynamic leadership team, aligning with Accor's core values to position the hotel as a premier destination in India's coveted holiday landscape.



RADISSON BLU INDORE

Indore

Radisson Blu Indore has appointed **IMRAN ALI** as the Associate Director of Sales. Ali is a seasoned professional in the world of hospitality sales. During his decade-long career he has worked with prestigious brands, such as Le Meridien, Radisson Blu, Novotel, and Marriott Suites. He has a Post Graduate Diploma in Management (Marketing). His career began with the renowned Mahindra Group in 2011. Since then, he has navigated diverse roles within the hospitality sector, leveraging his strategic acumen and customer-centric approach to drive business growth.



ALOFT BENGALURU OUTER RING ROAD

Bengaluru

Aloft Bengaluru Outer Ring Road has promoted **HARAMOHAN BORA** as the Director of Food and Beverage. With a career spanning over 16 years in the hospitality industry, Bora brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the position. He honed his operational skills and leadership abilities through his tenure at renowned establishments like Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Road. In his previous roles, he has showcased his strategic vision and operational acumen while playing a pivotal role in driving revenue growth and enhancing guest satisfaction.



JW MARRIOTT HOTEL BENGALURU

Bengaluru

JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru has appointed **SHIVY BHAT** as the Director of Sales. With an illustrious career spanning over a decade in the hospitality industry, Bhat brings a wealth of experience and expertise to his new role. In his new role, he will be responsible for overseeing and leading a dynamic team to achieve revenue goals for the property. Prior to this, he worked at JW Marriott Aerocity, New Delhi, where he led the sales team. He holds a B.Sc. degree in Hospitality and Hotel Administration from Dr Ambedkar Institute of Hotel Management Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition, Chandigarh.



BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield has appointed **SHANTANU BUDHALAKOTI** as the Front Office Manager. With a distinguished career spanning over 13 years in the hospitality industry, Budhalakoti brings a wealth of experience, expertise, and a proven track record of excellence to the organisation. He started his career in hospitality in 2011 as a trainee duty manager at Hyatt Regency, Delhi. Throughout his career he has demonstrated outstanding leadership qualities.



EROS HOTEL

New Delhi

Eros Hotel New Delhi appoints **AVINASH KAUR** as the Director of Conference & Events. She has 15-year experience in the hospitality sector. In her new role, she will play a pivotal role in driving the strategic direction of sales initiatives, fostering long-term partnerships with corporate clients and event planners, and delivering tailored solutions to ensure exceptional guest experiences. With her keen business acumen and dedication to excellence, she is poised to maximise revenue opportunities and elevate Eros Hotel's reputation as a premier hotel for events and conferences.






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Pack your bags for Paris 2024

With France leaving no stone unturned to make the 2024 Summer Olympics in July-August a success, Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France India, explains why it's the best time for Indian travellers to explore their country in all its glory.



All eyes will be on France this year, courtesy Olympic Games 2024. How Atout France plans to make the most out of this big event to push the destination?

The games are about to witness many firsts as they make their way to the French Capital. To begin with, for the first time ever the Opening Ceremony will be held in the city centre and at the very heart of the city, along its main artery, the river Seine, allowing for more visitors to partake in the celebration, and that too at no admission fee, is certainly a major first.

Majority of the sports will feature hospitality experiences, tickets are sold on a single, centralised platform and its hand-picked dis-



tributors making it easier for fans all around the world to purchase tickets securely and fairly. Visitors will also have access to venues by bike and cycling paths with 3,000 additional velibs being made available, giving them a chance to truly explore the city and its environs like a Parisian and do so responsibly.

Using 95 per cent of its existing or temporary venues, the Paris Games seek to be efficient and environment-friendly. Many events will be held in existing well-known stadiums whose facilities are perfectly suited to an event of this magnitude: the Roland-Garros Stadium, Parc des Princes, Accor Arena, Stade de France, Golf National as well as the Vélodrome National. In terms of gastronomy, Paris will be catering to athletes, volunteers, spectators and all the players linked to the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. More than 13 million meals will be dished out, making it one of the world's largest catering events.

What all strategic activities have you planned for your travel partners/ agents to attract more tourists?

Our regular scope of activities include our annual B2B Workshop Explore France – our flagship event, media and agent familiarisation trips to France, participation of Indian agents at several thematic workshops in France, B2B and B2C campaigns among others. In the recent past,

Using 95% of existing or make-shift venues, Paris Games (scheduled in July-August) seek to be efficient and environment-friendly

we also launched a multi-market e-learning programme France Connaisseur, which received an enthusiastic response from the Indian travel trade. On the logistical front, visa facilitation has always been a key element and our network with the embassy and consular services is seamless and aligned to better facilitate travel to France.

Could you please share the number of Indian tourists that visited the country last year and how much jump you are expecting in that number in 2024?

India has witnessed a robust recovery post pandemic. With 549,770 visitors in 2023 (source Oxford Economics), it was 78.5 per cent recovery versus 700,000 visitors in 2019. We are hopeful to attain our pre-pandemic figures by the end of 2024 or 2025.

From India, which segment of travellers you are targeting? Do you get queries for large MICE groups and is it easier to cater to them in terms of food, experience, and ease of travel?

We see an evolution in the traveller profile from India, notably post-Covid, and we see this across segments. The Indian traveller is far more inclined to seek new experiences. Families remain a mainstay, but we also see an increase in small groups, women only travellers, edutours with school groups, youth travelling around events and concerts et al. We definitely see an interest in sports tourism. Couples have always loved France and associated it with its romanticism, but we also see more and more gastronomes and oenophiles exploring France.



Sheetal Munshaw
Director
Atout France India

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