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Domestic guests fuelling hotel growth

The domestic traveller has elbowed out inbound tourists when it comes to fuelling business growth in the India's hospitality sector, says Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister, Tourism & Culture. He hails government for transformative infrastructure development in the country.

Lipla Negi

Hailing the contribution of the travel and hospitality industries to India's GDP, **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, said, "The lust for inbound tourists has waned off as the number of domestic travellers has grown exponentially along with their increased spending capacity. This surge in domestic tourism has led

to significant revenue growth for the hospitality sector."

Rise of domestic traveller

Calling the domestic traveller 'growth partner' for hospitality sector, Shekhawat said, "The domestic traveller has elbowed out inbound tourists when it comes to fuelling business growth in the hospitality sector." Emphasising the role of the growing middle class in driving tourism, he noted,

"Our economy is growing, and the development schemes initiated by the honourable PM have helped lift an estimated 27 crore people out of poverty, transitioning into the middle class. This aspirational class is now exploring our diverse cultural and spiritual wealth like never before."

A decade of transformation

Addressing a strong audience of hospitality leaders and profession-

als at the 54th Annual Convention of FHRAI in Goa, he reflected upon the monumental changes that had unfolded over the past decade. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we have witnessed transformative infrastructure development. Through our sustainable policies aimed at attracting global investment, we have become one of the largest travel destinations in the world." He likened India's current growth trajectory to the

'golden era' of the past. "India is once again moving in that direction, and the world is looking at us with excitement and curiosity," he said, envisioning a future where, by 2027, India is expected to be the third-largest economy globally.

Shout out to Indian diaspora

Sharing how he is often asked to look at the growth of Indian Tourism sector as compared its neighbouring countries, which are



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat
Union Minister, Tourism & Culture

receiving more foreign tourists than India, he underlined the staggering statistic coming from domestic destinations like Ayodhya and

Contd. on page 38 ▶

New face of Incredible India

Today India is more than just the Golden Triangle—From the majestic Himalayas to the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, India offers bespoke experiences to travellers. Industry leaders unveil the new side of India.



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

“India offers a wealth of emerging destinations that captivate inbound visitors. The pristine beaches of Gokarna in Karnataka provide a tranquil alternative to Goa. In the North East, Meghalaya's living root bridges and breathtaking waterfalls offer unique eco-tourism experiences. Additionally, Varanasi offers cultural richness coupled with river cruises on the Ganges. Ayodhya has become the spiritual hub of India. For adventure seekers, there is Rann of Kutch. The Diamond Ring of Madhya Pradesh is fast catching up. These destinations highlight India's diverse offerings, blending natural beauty, rich traditions, and unique experiences, appealing to various traveller interests.”

Contd. on page 10 ▶

'India needs bold tourism steps'

With industry leaders calling for strategic changes to elevate the country's inbound travel potential, **Vikram Madhok**, Managing Director, Abercrombie & Kent India, outlines critical areas to unlock the growth.

Janice Alyosius

With a dynamic shift underway in the global tourism landscape, **Vikram Madhok**, Managing Director, Abercrombie & Kent India, shares his vision for India's inbound tourism growth and opportunities in the luxury travel sector. He emphasises that India's tourism sector, especially inbound sector, has untapped potential but needs strategic measures to drive growth. "The government is making commendable efforts with



Vikram Madhok
Managing Director, Abercrombie & Kent India

infrastructure improvements—airports, railroads, connectivity. However, for India to elevate to the

next level, we need cohesive action from both central and state governments," he said. "Today, our outbound tourism is about three times the size of our inbound numbers. We see tourism business worth billions leaving the country. We want more people coming in, perhaps with fewer going out," he added.

Visa reforms and price balance key to unlocking growth

One major focus is enhancing ease of travel for international

Contd. on page 38 ▶

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Inbound beyond the classic triangles

We all know India has more to offer than the Taj Mahal, yet for so many inbound tourists, the journey begins and ends with the Golden Triangle—Delhi, Agra, Jaipur. But here’s the thing—Today’s travellers want something more. They are not just ticking off must-see lists—they are craving genuine, off-the-beaten-path experiences that go way beyond the postcard India.

Imagine Gokarna instead of Goa—a quieter, soulful beach town with laid-back vibes, perfect for those looking to unwind without the crowds. Or how about a stay in an Assam tea estate, where boutique hotels invite visitors to soak in the scenery and experience local silk weaving first-hand? Places like Meghalaya’s living root bridges and the surreal salt flats of Rann of Kutch offer just the kind of ‘wow’ factor that is too often missed in mainstream itineraries.

Then there is wellness tourism, which is booming. Today’s travellers are not interested in just a quick Ayurveda session—they are booking week-long retreats in Rishikesh or Kerala, soaking up ancient traditions in immersive ways. The trend is shifting from doing it all to doing it mindfully, whether it’s a wellness escape or a temple trail through Varanasi.

Thanks to better infrastructure and new hotels popping up in under-visited spots like Tawang and Ladakh, we are primed to reintroduce travellers to a broader, deeper India. India has this incredible opportunity to shift the spotlight from just the classics to places that offer real connection and diversity. It’s time to let go of the ‘hit-and-run’ tourism model and give visitors a chance to really connect with the culture, landscapes, and the people. It is time we shake up the story and introduce travellers to the India that lies beyond the postcards—the one where every experience feels rich, memorable, and entirely unique.

Gen AI: Navigating the future

Generative AI is top priority for the travel sector, but emerging challenges, such as talent shortages, return on investment, and data security, need to be addressed, finds a report by Amadeus experts in the field from across the travel ecosystem.



TT Bureau

Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) remains a central focus for the travel technology sector looking ahead to 2025 – but challenges are emerging as initial optimism begins to dissipate. That is according to a new report released by Amadeus – ‘Navigating the Future: How Generative Artificial Intelligence is transforming the travel industry’ – which surveyed experts in the field from across the travel ecosystem.

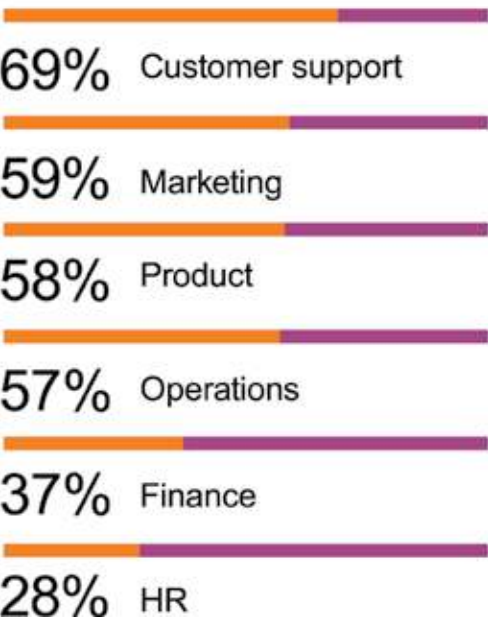
Generative AI is a top priority
Among the 300+ industry leaders questioned, Generative AI was cited as a ‘top priority’ for the coming year by 46 per cent – ahead of any other technology. This figure rose to 61 per cent in Asia Pacific, suggesting the region may be ready to take the lead in this transformative technology. Other technologies cited as a top priority for 2025 included data management (38 per cent), cloud architecture (36

per cent), non-generative AI IT infrastructure (34 per cent), and biometric technology (23 per cent).

Globally, over half of travel technology leaders (51 per cent) argue Generative AI already has a ‘significant presence’ in the travel industry in their country. A further 36 per cent expect this presence to emerge over the next year, while 11 per cent expect the process to take one-to-two years. Just 2 per cent of travel technology leaders think it will take three or more years for Generative AI to have a significant presence on the travel sector where they are. Today, 41 per cent of travel companies say their organisation has the budget and resources in place to implement Generative AI, while 87 per cent are open to working with a third-party vendor to develop Generative AI-powered applications.

Data, talent and cost
While support for the roll-out of Generative AI in the travel technol-

In which areas does your company use, or intend to use, Generative AI?



ogy sector remains undimmed, the report finds a number of challenges are emerging.

When asked what, if anything, was slowing the roll-out of the technology, industry leaders said:

- ❖ Data security - 35 per cent
- ❖ Lack of Generative AI expertise and training - 34 per cent
- ❖ Data quality and inadequate technological infrastructure - 33 per cent
- ❖ ROI concerns, lack of use cases, or difficulty in estimating value - 30 per cent
- ❖ Difficulty in connecting with partners or vendors - 29 per cent

Generative AI specialists are grappling to recruit experts and train existing workforces to bridge a skills gap, while working to secure data and convince senior leaders of the value of Generative AI investments.

Use of Generative AI
While the process of experimentation continues with the deployment of Generative AI, several use cases

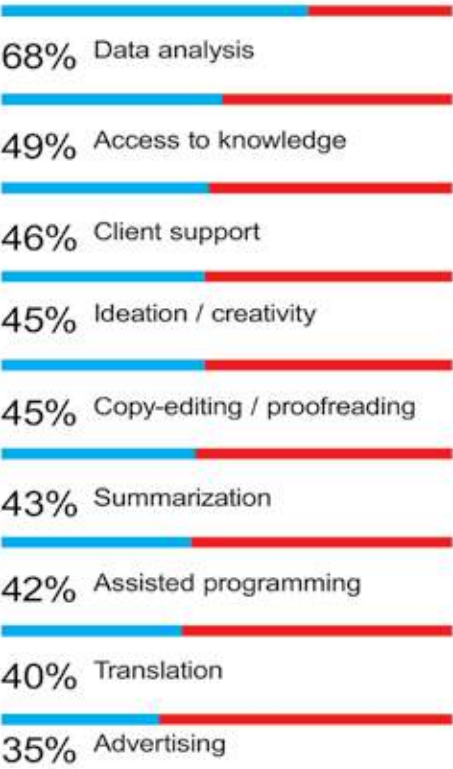
have emerged in the travel technology sector. These are led by digital assistance for travelers during booking (53 per cent) and followed by recommendations for activities or venues (48 per cent), content

Among the 300+ industry leaders questioned, Generative AI was cited as a ‘top priority’ for the coming year by 46 per cent

generation (47 per cent), helping staff to better serve customers (45 per cent), and collecting and condensing post-travel feedback (45 per cent).

Sylvain Roy, Chief Technology Officer, Amadeus, said: “Generative AI is a technology that has the potential to transform every facet of what we do across the travel ecosystem, significantly enhancing the passenger experience.”

Does your company use Generative AI for any of the following internal processes?



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Hospitality key to realise India's \$3 tn tourism vision by 2024

There is a need to create synergy between state governments and the industry to improve tourism sector in India, says Suman Billa, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.



Lipla Negi

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, highlighted the role of hospitality sector in enhancing destination experiences, improving performance on the global tourism index and realising India's vision of \$1.3 billion tourism economy by 2047.

"Our potential is enormous, but our performance is lacking. We have some of the greatest attractions in the world, yet the tourist experience remains poor. How do we ensure these attractions deliver a positive experience? We need to create synergy between state governments and the industry. Results will only come if we optimise our actions among these players," he said.



Suman Billa
Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

Taking a broader view, he noted, "Tourism's contribution to India's GDP currently stands at 5.04 per cent. For a country like India, we should aim for a growth rate of about 10 per cent." He cited examples from countries like Turkey, which contributes 15 per cent, and Thailand, which contributes

around 20 per cent, advocating for a 10 per cent contribution from the Indian tourism sector. "To achieve this growth, we must rely on market forces," he emphasised.

Billa emphasised that supply is significantly lagging behind demand, and that a shift in the capital structure of the hospitality industry is essential. He urged states to enhance the ease of doing business while offering incentives and subsidies to attract entrepreneurs and investment.

"The importance of tourism for any government lies in its ability to create quality jobs," he concluded. He suggested that effective destination management is one way to optimise the tourism potential of a destination without saturating its capacity and appeal.

Rethink outreach strategies to attract global weddings: DG

It is essential to rethink outreach strategies and create a robust framework to attract international wedding clients, feels Mugdha Sinha, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India.



Lipla Negi

Mugdha Sinha, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India, believes that it is essential to rethink outreach strategies and create a robust framework to attract international wedding clients. Speaking at the 54th FHRAI Annual Convention in Goa, she said, "Interestingly, the Indian wedding industry ranks second only to food and grocery, with 54 per cent of people spending an average of ₹10 lakh on a wedding. However, we have not adequately conducted outreach for weddings in India in the international market."

To attract international couples, she advocated for establishing air service agreements for direct flights, expediting visa processes, and exploring potential incentives



Mugdha Sinha
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India

or refunds to enhance the overall visitor experience. She praised the 'Chalo India' initiative for focusing on the diaspora and proposed expanding the outreach of the 'Wed in India' initiative to include honeymoon packages and celebrations of important milestones in India. She urged stakeholders to adopt planet-friendly practices

for wedding celebrations. "The big fat Indian wedding often leads to significant environmental challenges, including traffic congestion and waste management is-

By integrating sustainability into wedding planning, we can mitigate impacts and set example for responsible tourism

sues. By integrating sustainable practices into wedding planning, we can mitigate these impacts," she emphasised.

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- With focus on infrastructure and smaller destinations, India's tourism sector to create 100 mn jobs by 2047: IHCL
- RCS-UDAN's success propelled 1,000-plus aircraft demand in India, highlights PM Modi
- MOT ties up with World Bank for long-term financing of tourism development in Indian states
- India on track to become third-largest economy by 2027; tourism's contribution can be immense: Puneet Chhatwal
- India's hospitality industry to contribute US\$250 bn to the country's GDP by 2030, says Pradeep Shetty
- Goa plans global promotional push worth ₹2 crore to draw tourists from Poland, Georgia and Kazakhstan
- Maharashtra releases ₹72 crore for eco-tourism development, 30 tourist sites to benefit

Asego's million-dollar cover for clients

Has your client ever been stuck in a foreign country, dealing with a sudden medical emergency or a missing bag while they are supposed to be closing a big deal? It's every business traveller's nightmare. Enter Asego—it sets a new benchmark for elite travel with a one-million-dollar cover called 'Signature Plan'.



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Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego

tween continents for meetings or taking a break at a luxury resort, they can rest easy knowing that if something goes wrong, they are covered.

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trip. With Asego's Signature Plan, claims for baggage issues or trip delays are handled without any fuss. No need to justify the loss – it's settled. Plus, with their real-time baggage tracking service called TrackMate, the client will always know where their luggage is, so they can focus on what really matters.

What's even better – there are no medical deductibles, and the



Under the plan, there are no medical deductibles, and the traveller can get express claims whenever they need it

traveller can get express claims assistance whenever they need it. This isn't just a travel insurance; it's a safety net for those who refuse to compromise.

So, next time you are jet-setting across the globe, wouldn't it be nice to have a plan that understands the way you travel?

For those who don't settle for less, Asego's Signature Plan offers a level of security that's hard

to find elsewhere. It's like having a safety net designed specifically for the way your clients travel – one that takes care of the details so they can focus on the journey. Because when they are on the move, especially for business, knowing that they are protected in every possible way isn't just a luxury – it's a necessity. Your clients can travel smart, travel safe, and travel with the confidence that they have got the best protection there is.

Sri Lanka: Perfect for MICE & weddings

Sri Lanka is known for its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. SriLankan Airlines recently hosted a Fam trip for a group of Indian partners to promote the island nation and its premier destinations among Indian travellers. The destination also showcased its potential to host MICE, weddings and corporate events.



SriLankan Airlines, in association with Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts and Walkers Tours, hosted a familiarisation (Fam) trip for its Indian partners to showcase Sri Lanka's natural beauty and capability to host MICE, weddings and corporate events and promote the country as a preferred destination among the Indian travellers. The trip was meticulously designed to give the industry professionals first-hand experience of the premium services and seamless connectivity that the airline offers.

Sri Lanka a perfect gateway
Richard Nuttall, Chief Executive Officer, SriLankan Airlines, put special emphasis on Indians travellers opting Sri Lanka as a leisure destination. "In the last five months, SriLankan Airlines served close to 70,000 Indian passengers with the majority from Chennai. Traditionally, Indians have found Colombo, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Bentota, and



Richard Nuttall
Chief Executive Officer
SriLankan Airlines

Galle as the most preferred destinations. However, Sigiriya, Dambulla, Ella, Trincomalee, Jaffna, and Yala are also emerging as hot favourites among them," he said.

The itinerary was thoughtfully curated to showcase the rich cultural heritage and modern amenities that Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts offers, making it an ideal place to host weddings, corporate meetings and

leisure travellers. Participants explored the leisure and MICE facilities at various properties of Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, such as Cinnamon Grand Colombo, Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo, Cinnamon Bentota Beach, Cinnamon Lodge Habarana, Habarana Village by Cinnamon and Trinco Blu by Cinnamon spread across the country. The travelling group got the chance to visit different places of tourist interests and enjoyed bird watching at Beddagana Wetland Park, an elephant safari at Eco Park, Dambulla Cave Temple, Galle Fort, mangrove boat ride and water sports at Cinnamon Bentota Beach.

MICE potential of Sri Lanka
SriLankan Airlines made special efforts to make the trip comfortable and showcased exotic locations, such as beautiful beaches, landscapes, and historical sites for weddings and corporate events. "Indians are increasingly choosing the island nation for MICE and weddings," Nuttall said. He highlighted



that the national carrier flies to nine Indian cities and can accommodate MICE events from multiple source cities.

Packages to boost tourism
He said, "We provide exclusive airfare packages and specialised services, including airport facilitation and onboard amenities for big MICE and corporate groups. To make their journey hassle-free, we promote online

check-in and have introduced self-check-in kiosks, and a bag drop facility at Bandaranaika International Airport."

Initiatives for travel trade
Responding to the question on how the airline has been engaging with the travel trade for business, he said, "We launched the NDC platform in India, giving agents access to discounted fares, free date changes and incentives on flown

segments. We also run periodic promotions, webinars and Fam tours for agents."

In the last five months, SriLankan Airlines served close to 70,000 Indian passengers with the majority from Chennai

Sustainability efforts
Educating the media about Sri Lanka's sustainable practices, the CEO said, "Presently, we are pursuing electric ground support equipment and collaborating closely with the airport operator to digitalise processes at Bandaranaika International Airport that contribute to inbound tourism."

India offers advanced travel tech

Having access to vast amounts of data on travellers that are flowing through its systems, Amadeus can crunch massive amounts of data and provide insights to travel sellers, says Mani Ganeshan, Senior Vice President, Head of APAC Engineering and Amadeus India.

Hazel Jain

It is technology that is enabling world citizens to be in close touch with each other, whether it is communication or travel. Technology is the fulcrum on which everything is happening today; it is technology that is enabling and facilitating their travel, believes **Mani Ganeshan**, Senior Vice President, Head of APAC Engineering and Amadeus India. He has been with Amadeus for 16 years, since the time the company entered in India.

AI and personalisation
Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an interesting trend and a lot of experts are equating this to the times when the internet boom happened. "AI seems to be different in the sense that technologists like us see the capabilities that it brings to make sure that travel happens in a better fashion.



Our travellers are getting a lot more sophisticated, and a lot more demanding. They are asking, how can you pitch me solutions for my travel needs that are only specific to me. You should know me even without me having to tell you. And that is where technologies like AI come in, where we already have the capability using massive computing and machine learning algorithms, blending with AI techniques to understand the traveller and the profile of the traveller a lot better – their likes and dislikes, their food choices, and their interests," says Ganeshan.

While Machine Learning (ML) techniques were already in existence, with the advent of AI, we see this taking a massive leap. Ganeshan adds, "The other inter-



Mani Ganeshan
Senior Vice President, Head of APAC Engineering and Amadeus India

esting capability that AI is providing is the conversational capability across languages that offers personalised solutions to travellers. We also tap heavily into the travel sellers and travel providers segments. Our travel sellers are saying, okay, our clients are demanding personalised experiences. It is no longer adequate to sell them air or a hotel. We need to see how we

through our systems. So again, using AI techniques and ML, we are able to crunch massive amounts of data and provide enough insights to travel sellers, so that they can serve their clients better. That is how travel sellers are benefiting from these techniques and the Amadeus platform," he explains.

India's advanced tech offerings
He sees this happening in India as well. "India is quite advanced with digital technologies and online travel agencies, quite advanced with using new-age technologies to transform the industry. We have enough examples of Indian OTAs like Paytm and MakeMyTrip who are now adopting solutions that are fundamentally leveraging AI techniques and partnering with us to see how we can develop creative solutions for customers in terms of the business capabilities and the capabilities that airports

happening seamlessly. We need to make sure that the algorithms are learning and getting more and more sophisticated. There is no risk to the airport or the airline as this automation happens. So, that is where we are investing heavily and developing solutions," Ganeshan explains.

Recently, Amadeus acquired 'VisionBox', the leader in border control solutions. "With this, you will see this journey across airports get so seamless that even within minutes you will go from this side to that side with almost

India is quite advanced with digital technologies and online travel agencies, and with using new-age technologies

no human interaction, yet doing that in an absolutely secure and safe way. When we are leveraging techniques like AI, we are very, very clear because of the reach and the impact we have on the industry. We need to do this in a responsible way. While explorations are fine and we allow our engineers to explore such new technologies, it has to follow its due diligence before it reaches production grade. We have, therefore, created an AI review board within the company where all such products and ideas have to be cleared," Ganeshan adds.

Jewar Airport
Amadeus is the primary technology provider for Jewar Airport in Noida, which is a greenfield airport. It is bringing the ecosystem of IT systems so that the passengers get unparalleled experience. This includes solutions like automatic bag drops and seamless check-ins. With the border control systems of VisionBox, it also integrates passenger data with the government systems of immigration, and all these will come in play along with other airport systems to ensure a smooth travel. Amadeus is also doing this with other airports in the world like the Western Sydney Airport.

An Interesting capability that AI is providing is the conversational capability across languages that offers personalised travel solutions


can provide them a holistic solution, which goes across all the segments of travel."

Amadeus also addresses this requirement. "We have that reach into the various segments of travel. We also have vast amounts of data on travellers that are flowing


and travellers are looking for," Ganeshan explains.

AI and biometric technology
Travellers are looking for frictionless experience. For air travellers, this means bypassing many friction points like entry into airports, check-in, baggage drop, border control, to finally reaching the aeroplane seat.


"With at least eight friction points, we see a blend of AI and biometrics coming together and connecting the airlines and the airports, so that we accelerate this trip from the ground transportation to the seat. Biometrics and AI play a big role because you need to have the accuracy when you are relying less on humans and more on technology to make sure that the flow is




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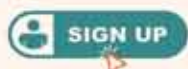
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India: Reimagined & revitalised

► Contd. from page 5



Kush Kapoor
CEO
Roseate Hotels and Resorts

“ WEF has listed Indian cultural heritage having 8th greatest potential. India will soon touch 50 UNESCO sites. Post Covid, inbound tourists are looking for offbeat places like solitude and hiking in the Himalayas, immerse



Sunil Mishra
Hon'y. Treasurer
IATO

“ India is evolving as a dynamic travel destination, offering new experiences for inbound visitors. In terms of new destinations for inbound guests, Kolkata is great especially during Durga Puja. In Odisha,



Nitin Pathak
General Manager, DoubleTree by
Hilton Gurugram Baani City Centre

“ We recently conducted a Fam trip to Ashtamudi, Varkala and Athirapalli which are some new destinations for our partners and I'm sure this will help in selling it in a different way to their clients. India is

“ Destinations like South Goa, Rishikesh, Leh, and the North East present an alluring mix of untouched natural beauty and authentic experiences, whereas the metro and tier II & III cities offer unique heritage and cultural experiences. South Goa, with its serene beaches and tranquil vibes, caters to travellers seeking relaxation and wellness. Delhi, in all its diversity is a famous tourist destination offering a blend of heritage and contemporary offerings. ”



Rajnish Kaistha
Sr. Vice President
IATO

in spiritual experiences, adventure, farm tourism, culinary trails and even dance on Bollywood beats. North East states are now in demand. Even states like Chhattisgarh, MP are also being enquired about. ”

“ Spiritual tours to places like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Rishikesh, and Bodh Gaya are popular, while wellness seekers are drawn to Kerala and Rishikesh. The North East, with improved connectivity, offers varied natural attractions and festival tourism. New river cruises are emerging. Offbeat destinations, paired with popular itineraries, offer diverse options. These regions offer competitive pricing, positioning India as a strong contender in global market. ”



Ashmi Dharia
Founder
Gypsy Soul Holidays

Bhubaneswar there is Ancient Temple Heritage Walk, gaining insights into Odisha's spiritual and architectural legacy. Even in already popular destinations like Kerala there are many unique experiences. ”

“ India is witnessing the emergence of several new destinations that are increasingly appealing to inbound visitors, particularly in the context of MICE tourism. Cities like Udaipur, Ratnagiri, Jabalpur, Surat, and Nasik are undergoing significant development, making them attractive for travellers seeking unique experiences. Udaipur is renowned for its stunning lakes and royal heritage. Ratnagiri, Jabalpur, Surat and Nasik also offer unique experiences. ”



Adil Karim
Director
FlyCreative Online

growing and so is India's domestic tourism market. The destination will grow and the DMCs will also have good returns. MICE has been our forte especially for Kerala offering different activities for corporates. ”



Farida Attarwala
Director
Butterflies Holidays

“ Inbound to India is very seasonal, the places that people shy away for a few months in a year will see maximum inbound in the other half of the year and vice versa, a classic example is Rajasthan where you won't get a



Dipti Pradhan Thakoor
Director-Event Head
ETAA

“ India's inbound tourism has always thrived, with the Golden Triangle of Delhi, Jaipur, and Agra being a major draw for visitors. Beyond these popular destinations, Kerala is amongst favourites for inbound. Cultural



Swayank Maheshwari
Managing Director
Rainbow Vacations

“ India has new products to offer because of better infrastructure and connectivity. Travelling to North East is easier. Vijayapur did not have good hotels earlier, which hampered promotion of Heritage Triangle of Karnataka (Bijapur-Badami-

“ Wellness resorts are gaining popularity, offering holistic treatments at competitive prices. Additionally, clients from the Middle East and Africa are drawn to Kashmir for winter sports. Temple tours in both South and North India remain favourites. Wildlife tours also have a good share. Furthermore, curated culinary and architectural tours are also in demand. Development of Ayodhya is also attracting a lot of inbound. Rann of Kutch and desert festivals is another attraction for NRIs. ”



Manish Kriplani
Chairman, Southern Region,
OTOAI & MD, Baywatch Travels

place during winter. However this has been going on for many years, what we see now is the trend of 'slow life' and wellness where guests come and spend the maximum time in a destination, not wanting to do anything but just rejuvenate. ”

“ Ladakh is preferred for its landscapes and adventure activities like trekking and rafting. Rann Utsav in Gujarat showcases local crafts and music. Ziro Valley in Arunachal Pradesh captivates with its lush greenery, while Spiti Valley invites adventurers. Additional gems include Kashmir, and many more. Each of these destinations highlights India's rich heritage and natural beauty, making them exciting choices for travellers seeking unique experiences. ”



Karan Vakharia
Chief Operating Officer
Pathfinders Holidays

experience at Varanasi and Rishikesh with a dash of spirituality and Yoga is also becoming very popular. Personally, I love recommending Coorg and Kabini in Karnataka for their serene beauty and incredible wildlife safaris. ”

“ The opening of Postcard in Durrung Tea Estate has brought Assam to the forefront. Combining Kaziranga and Durrung shall make an attractive circuit, which includes local craft of eri and muga silk weavers. The boutique chain has focused on developing controlled and regulated tourism as the entire region is sensitive. These circuits can be pushed to mature markets and repeat travellers. It's imperative that focus should be on class of tourism rather than mass. ”



Niraj Vashi
Founder and Director
Nivalink

Hampi). Many good hotels have come up. Port Blair has a direct flight from Malaysia, allowing Andaman to tap regional tourism. We now have guests from Kenya who love Kashmir. NRIs in South Africa are here for spiritual tourism. ”

Contd. on page 36 ►

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Greenwashing isn't sustainability

CB Ramkumar, Vice Chairman, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), sheds light on the critical role of sustainability certification in hospitality. According to his vision for sustainable tourism, clear certification, transparency, and authentic efforts are key to creating a truly sustainable tourism industry.

 Surbhi Sharma

As an advocate of sustainable tourism practices worldwide, **CB Ramkumar**, Vice Chairman, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), highlights the vital difference between greenwashing and genuine sustainable practices, the importance of GSTC accreditation, and how sustainability certification is becoming a key criterion for foreign travellers booking a hotel.

In the early days of sustainability, hotels would implement eco-friendly practices with genuine passion, Ramkumar explains. "They would proudly inform guests about rainwater harvesting, waste management, or using local materials. These actions were authentic, driven by a real desire to conserve resources." However, as sustainability gained attention, many hotels began to engage in greenwashing—superficial gestures like switching



CB Ramkumar
Vice Chairman, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)

to LED bulbs or placing a towel reuse note in the bathroom and calling themselves an eco-resort. "Some hotels even chase awards for sustainability with little real effort. It is laughable," said Ramkumar. But, with today's savvy consumers, this facade quickly falls apart. "Consumers are fed up with false claims. They visit a so-called eco-hotel, only to realise the green claims are far from real-

ity. Bad reviews follow, and trust is lost," he added.

This is where third-party certification plays a crucial role. A verified, GSTC-accredited certification ensures that sustainability claims are real, making it easier for consumers to trust their choices. "Certification is not just a badge; it is a tool for hotels to prove their efforts and stand out in an increasingly eco-conscious market," he emphasised.

Today, sustainability is not just about environment, it is also about

sustainability management, social sustainability and cultural sustainability. The socio-economic issues, the cultural issues, especially in tourism, have become important to ensure that the tourism business continues to be robust, and sustainable. It is a risk mitigation where one reduces all the risks to ensure that there is no interruption in business at all, he noted.

GSTC certification criteria

Achieving GSTC certification is no easy feat. OTAs, such as Booking.com and Agoda, prioritise certified hotels, which results


in better visibility and more bookings. Ramkumar describes the rigorous process hotels must undergo, beginning with certification bodies that must themselves be accredited by the GSTC. "We ensure that certification bodies have the resources, knowledge, and processes in place to certify hotels to GSTC standards," he says.

Importantly, GSTC certification bodies are prohibited from offering consulting or coaching to avoid conflicts of interest. "Certification must remain unbiased and impartial," he asserts. Hotels can trust that a GSTC-accredited certification body will assess them rigorously, offering an assurance of true sustainability.


What travellers want?

Post-pandemic, travellers have developed a newfound appreciation for authentic experiences. "The global shift toward organic living, open-air environments,

and nature is driving demand for sustainable travel options," said Ramkumar.


OTAs, such as Booking.com and Agoda, prioritise certified hotels, which results in better visibility and more bookings

Research from major travel platforms, like Booking.com, confirms that travellers are actively seeking out sustainable accommodations.

"They want to avoid the traps of greenwashing. Authenticity matters, and they are willing to pay more for verified sustainable stays," he added. 



Recognition for sustainable hotels

Santosh Kumar, Country Head, Indian subcontinent & Indonesia, Booking.com, speaking at the launch of 'How India Travels 2024 - The Inbound Edit' report, underlines that they are taking bold steps in sustainable tourism and prioritising third-party certifications allowing eco-conscious travellers' choice of sustainable accommodations.

 Surbhi Sharma

Giving a brief about 'How India Travels 2024 - The Inbound Edit', Santosh Kumar, Country Head, Indian subcontinent & Indonesia at Booking.com, said that India's inbound tourism sector is experiencing unprecedented growth. "This is also reflected in India's 39th rank on the World Economic Forum's 2024 Travel & Tourism Development Index, up from 54th in 2021," he underlined.

Growth in Indian tourism

India's inbound tourism is experiencing rapid growth. The report highlights, in 2023, more than 9 million foreign tourists visited, resulting in a surge in Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) and propelling the country's global rankings. A significant 17.6 per cent rise in FEEs brought in \$15.3 billion in the first half of 2024, emphasising the industry's powerful recovery. The influx of international visitors is



Santosh Kumar
Country Head, Indian subcontinent & Indonesia at Booking.com

catalysing the local economy, potentially generating 58 million jobs by 2033. With tourism projected to contribute approximately \$512 billion to India's GDP by 2028, a substantial increase from 2023, the industry exhibits robust recovery and growth trajectory.

Inbound travel trends

According to the report, 52 per

cent of inbound travellers are selecting India as a standalone destination while 22 per cent intend to combine their visit with other Asian countries. This trend highlights India's growing role as both a primary destination and stopover in regional travel plans. While major cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Jaipur and Chennai remain popular and have consistently ranked as the top five cities in terms of searches, less conventional destinations are gaining traction. Off-the-beaten path destinations like Hampi and Leh rising in popularity, showcasing India's diverse tourism offering. Other emerging destinations like Patnitop, Pahalgam, Madikeri, Vijayawada, and Khajuraho among others have shown a 2X or more year-on-year growth.

New source markets

The US, UK, Germany and UAE have emerged as top inbound source markets for India based on Booking.com search data as com-

pared to 2023. Hong Kong, Australia, Italy and Netherlands were new entrants in the top 10 inbound source markets.

Repeat visits

Nearly 44 per cent of inbound travellers have experienced India and


We recognise accommodations with authorised sustainability certifications by awarding them a badge on our platform

want to visit it again. 40 per cent are eager to explore India for the first time. Travellers aim to explore multiple destinations within India.

The rise of digital traveller: India's inbound tourism has evolved rapidly since 2019. Travellers are now seeking more personalised and flexible experiences with online platforms playing a crucial role. 52 per cent of travellers prefer to book complete travel packages, while 40 per cent opt to book individual components separately.

Challenges & opportunities

Survey responses indicate that limited customisation options (49 per cent), lack of bundled packages that combine flights, accommodation and activities into a seamless travel experience (51 per cent) and information overload (43 per cent) can hinder traveller experiences. Many international travellers also seek personalised itineraries and seamless travel planning but find it difficult to achieve. These challenges open great opportunities for the industry to come together and improve personalisation and expand digital resources.

Tech updates

Sharing technology related updates, Kumar said that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the biggest focused areas at Booking.com and the company has been using AI in its operation for long. However, now it is being used on the consumer side for content moderation as well through features like AI trip planner and AI Chatbot to help them search and discover new destinations better.

Sustainability commitment

To make sustainable travel choices more accessible, the company has focused on incorporating more authorised sustainability certifications into their programme. "Given the size and fragmentation of the travel industry, we are making gradual progress, but there is still much to be done. We are optimistic that in the coming years, we could expand our coverage of genuine sustainability certifications globally," Kumar concluded. 



World Class Travel Company

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Kesari takes its legacy forward

Himanshu Patil, Director, Kesari Tours, shares how they are offering new products and services to clients by paying attention to market trends and customer requirements. With a strong foothold in the market, he believes that their motto of integrity and excellence would lead to a brighter future of the company.

What inspired you to enter this industry, and how has your journey been over the past 40 years?

My father founded this company, and I found myself stepping into the business unexpectedly at a young age. Although academics were never my strongest suit, I developed a deep passion for travel early on. Over the last 40 years, I've had the privilege of visiting more than 120 countries, and it

tastes and preferences. Today's travelers are more informed, tech-savvy, and have a broader array of choices at their fingertips. As a service provider, we continuously monitor these evolving trends through customer feedback and research. By staying engaged with our customers and understanding their needs, we can innovate and adapt our offerings to align with their preferences. Whether it is introducing new types of travel experiences, curating personalised itineraries, or leveraging the latest technology, we are committed to staying ahead of the curve. This proactive approach ensures that we continue to meet and exceed our customers' expectations, even as their preferences evolve.



Himanshu Patil
Director
Kesari Tours

Can you share a memorable experience where your team successfully navigated a challenging situation during a tour?

One particularly memorable incident occurred during the Srinagar floods, when one of our groups, staying in two houseboats on Nagin Lake, found themselves

has been an immensely rewarding journey. My love for travel has grown with every experience, and I have cherished every moment of this incredible adventure.

How do you keep a pulse on changing customer needs?

Over the past 40 years, we've witnessed significant shifts in customer behaviour. In the early days, customers exhibited strong loyalty, but with the rise of digitalisation and external influences, we've seen changes in customer

While customers are still attracted to lower-priced offers, many are aware the lowest price doesn't always guarantee the best experience

stranded due to rapidly rising water levels. With no phone connectivity and limited access to resources, our team on the ground, supported by local suppliers, acted quickly to move the group to a nearby safe location. For two days, our tour leaders coordinated with locals to secure food and shelter. When it became clear there was no immediate way out, they took the initiative to lead the group on an open road towards Leh, from where they were able to fly out safely. It

was a testament to the resilience, quick thinking, and dedication of our team.

We heard you have specific advice on how travellers should keep their passports while abroad. Can you elaborate?

A passport is one of the most important documents when traveling, and it's essential to keep it secure at all times. Personally, I always ensure that I am carrying my passport securely or is stored away safely. When I'm exploring

a city, I prefer to leave my passport in the hotel locker rather than carrying it around. To help travellers keep their passports safe, we've even introduced a specially designed cross-body pouch at our online Kesari Shop. This pouch is worn across the chest and provides a secure way to carry your passport with peace of mind.

What significant changes have you seen in the industry, and how have they affected customer expectations?

Over the years, the industry has seen tremendous growth. With the vast amount of information now available, customers are becoming wiser. While customers are still attracted to lower-priced offers, many are now aware that the lowest price doesn't always guarantee the best experience. Even today, there are numerous customers who recognise the importance of quality service, personalised attention, and the peace of mind that comes from working with a trusted agency. This is why most customers count on professionalism, reliability, and superior travel experience—understanding that these aspects ultimately lead to a more fulfilling and hassle-free journey. In the long run, it's trust and consistency that builds last-

ing relationships, not just the cost of service.

What legacy do you hope to leave in the industry?

The foundation of our legacy is built on the vision my father established and the ethical practices and commitment to quality that my mother instilled in me. I am deeply committed to upholding these values—focusing on trust, unwavering customer care, and

Industry has seen tremendous growth. With the vast amount of information now available, customers are becoming wiser

never compromising on service quality. This is the legacy I hope to leave—one rooted in integrity and excellence. I consistently share this message with the younger generation in our company, reminding them of the principles my father set and the importance of continuing those practices for the future of our agency.



Madhya Pradesh offers 'low-impact' travel

The state is dedicated towards sustainable and responsible tourism, especially with its rich cultural and natural heritage, which sets it apart as a model for many other Indian states. Currently, its tourism board is aiming to create tourism experiences that not only showcase its beauty but also ensure its preservation for future generations.



Janice Alysius

Madhya Pradesh, also known as the Tiger State of India, is home to an incredible diversity of wildlife, including 785 tigers, leopards, vultures, and gharials. Its lush landscapes feature 11 national parks, 7 tiger reserves, and 24 wildlife sanctuaries, making it a paradise for nature lovers. However, with increasing tourism demand, the state has successfully balanced conservation with development.

Wild at heart

"At the core of Madhya Pradesh's tourism strategy is sustainability. We are committed to preserving our natural resources while promoting responsible tourism. Our national parks have clearly defined boundaries that are non-negotiable, ensuring that wildlife habitats are protected. Instead of promoting large-scale tourism, we focus on 'low-impact' activities

like guided nature walks and bird-watching, which provide enriching experiences without disturbing the ecosystem," stated **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Government of MP, Department of Tourism and Culture, and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board.

UNESCO sites

The state also boasts 14 UNESCO World Heritage sites, including Orchha, which is set for nomination by 2027-28. "We place the community at the heart of heritage conservation. By involving local populations and fostering a sense of pride and belonging, we have successfully integrated conservation with urban development," Shukla shared.

He highlighted the role of UNESCO in supporting the state's cultural initiatives, "Gwalior and Orchha have been selected by UNESCO as part of the Historic Urban Land-



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary, Govt of MP, Department of Tourism and Culture, and MD, MPTB

scape Recommendation (HULR), and Gwalior's recognition under the Creative City Network for Music Activity further underscores our efforts. Our partnership with the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 initiative will elevate tourism in cities like Gwalior and Chitrakoot."

Sustainability at core

Sustainability has become a global priority in tourism, and Madhya

Pradesh is no exception. Under the Responsible Tourism Mission, the state has been actively working on eco-friendly projects. "Our homestay initiative is a major success. So far, we have constructed 305 homestays, including 41 rural homestays spread across 16 villages. These provide not only unique experiences for tourists but also livelihood opportunities for local communities," Shukla said.

MP's efforts extend to eco-friendly infrastructure, waste management, and renewable energy projects in tourism facilities. "We are implementing sustainable building practices, promoting vernacular architecture, and fostering local arts and crafts to make communities self-reliant," he added.

Trade-friendly approach

The state's collaboration with the travel trade plays a pivotal role in promoting responsible wildlife and cultural tourism.

"We work closely with travel agents to create eco-friendly tours that minimise environmental impact and offer authentic cultural experiences. Our partnership with IATO members allows

We work with travel agents to create eco-friendly tours that minimise environmental impact and offer authentic cultural experiences

us to offer customised itineraries to both domestic and international tourists, ensuring that our tours respect local traditions and support conservation efforts," Shukla shared.

Travel agents can expect support from MP Tourism in the form of training, certification, marketing assistance, and access to resources. "We aim to build a tourism ecosystem that benefits both the environment and the local communities," Shukla emphasised.

Projects galore

With a growing interest in experiential and eco-friendly travel, the state has been quick to innovate. "Our Responsible Tourism Mission promotes homestays, rural experiences, and eco-friendly accommodation. In collaboration with TOFTigers, we've achieved Footprint certification for wilderness accommodations in places like Kanha, Pench, Panna, and Bandhavgarh," he said.

The state is also home to India's first craft handloom village, Prampur, offering tourists a deep dive into the local craft heritage. 🌿

Why Madurai clicks for events?

Tamil Nadu Travel Expo 2024, held in Madurai recently, emerged from a shared vision of showcasing the region's rich cultural heritage and tourism opportunities. The event not only brought attention to smaller tourism players in the region but also emphasised Madurai's central role as a gateway to Southern Tamil Nadu's diverse experiences.



G Vasudevan
Managing Director
Fortune Pandiyan Hotel

“With TTE, we aimed to promote medical tourism alongside heritage and leisure tourism. The focus was on attracting quality buyers—around 250 to 300 from across India and internationally. We also ensured affordable participation for smaller players in southern Tamil Nadu, making it accessible for them, unlike larger events in Chennai.”



Ranga Reddy
Chairman-Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chapter, IATO & Owner, Garuda Tourism

“TTE 2024 offered local entrepreneurs, artisans, and hoteliers in Madurai a valuable opportunity to showcase their talents to visitors from across India. It highlights the need to shift tourism focus beyond metro cities to smaller regions. Despite Madurai's infrastructural limitations, the city has risen to the challenge, proving that it can host big events.”



Vikram Cotah
CEO
GRT Hotels & Resorts

“Hosting TTE 2024 in Madurai was deliberate to showcase the region's rich heritage, such as its 34,000 temples, spanning centuries. Madurai, with its ancient wellness traditions like Ayurveda and Siddha, is ideal for the wellness theme, a growing trend post-COVID. Tamil Nadu's scenic properties make it a prime destination for weddings.”



B Gopinath
CEO
The Residency Group of Hotels

“TTE 2024 allows buyers and sellers to interact directly, streamlining communication and business deals. It also highlights Madurai's growing infrastructure, including hospitals and IT development, making it attractive for investment. It helps showcase the city's potential as a destination for serious business and not just tourism.”



Murali Krishnan
Executive Director
Sangam Group of Hotels

“At TTE, the synergy between private players, govt., and industry bodies like CII is helping promote the state globally. This expo not only allows buyers to explore Tamil Nadu but also for hoteliers and local businesses to connect with new markets. Madurai, provides the perfect backdrop for showcasing the state's tourism potential.”



Devika R
Senior General Manager-Sales
(Southern Region), CGH Earth

“Madurai, unlike a metro city, retains its cultural essence and charm. The city's location makes it an ideal hub for exploring Tamil Nadu's treasures like Kodaikanal, Chettinad, and Rameshwaram. The response from buyers has been positive, with excitement about the cultural and religious richness of the region.”

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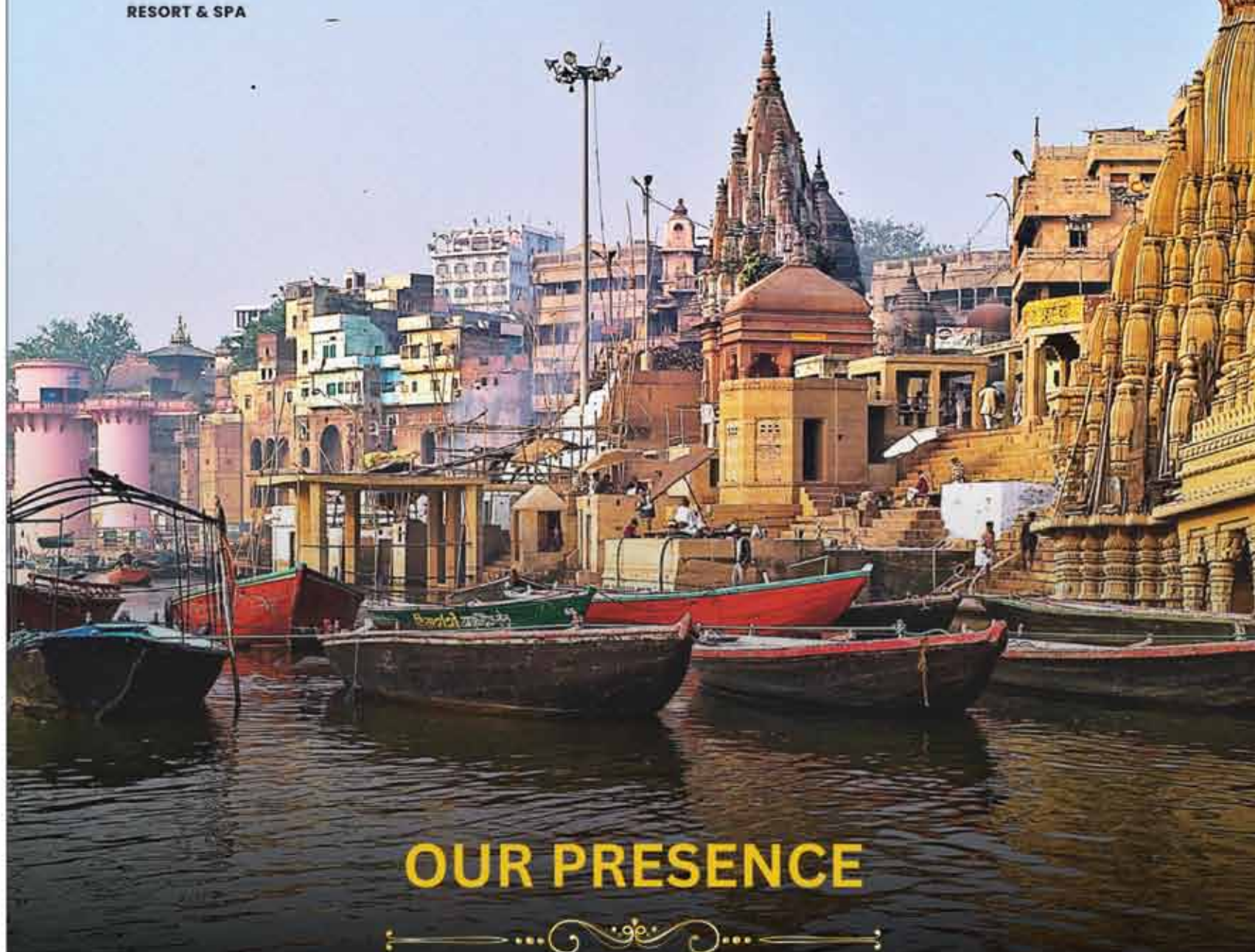
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FHRAI Convention dazzles after 6 years

The 54th FHRAI Annual Convention, organised in Goa from 16 to 18 October, focused on sustainable and wellness tourism. With eminent leaders of the tourism and hospitality trade in attendance, the convention observed constructive and collaborative discussions concerning the future of India's tourism and hospitality industry.



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Focus on lesser-known attractions

The Union government, in collaboration with the Karnataka government, is making relentless efforts to improve the tourism landscape of the state. Mohamed Farouk, Director, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Bengaluru Office, reveals the details of activities being undertaken by the ministry to bring more investment to the state.



Amita Pandey

The Union Ministry of Tourism has taken multiple initiatives under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme to develop tourist spots in and around Karnataka's Mysuru and increase tourist influx. Elaborating on the project, **Mohamed Farouk**, Director, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Bengaluru Office, said that the ministry is focusing on two major sites in Karnataka - Mysuru and Hampi. "Apart from these, we are also working on development of pilgrimage amenities at Sri Chamundeshwari Temple and developing a destination under the Challenge-based development scheme," he said, in a conversation with **TRAVEL** on the sidelines of 'Discover Mysuru' Bloggers Meet 2024, which was organised to promote Mysuru - one of the cities identified by the government for tourism development under Swadesh Darshan 2.0. Farouk



Mohamed Farouk
Director, Ministry of Tourism
Government of India, Bengaluru Office

said that the ministry has also been identifying trekking, heritage, and archaeological spots, along with ideal weekend getaways, and carrying out targeted promotions to attract visitors. The idea is to shine a spotlight on lesser-known attractions in Karnataka, he added.

Why Mysuru?

Asked about the reason behind

choosing Mysuru under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme, Farouk said that the city stands out for its rich heritage, vibrant culture, and distinct cuisine. Farouk described Karnataka as a state with limitless tourism potential. "Karnataka has it all—except snow! Whether you are looking for leisure, adventure, eco-tourism, or wildlife, there is something for every kind of traveller, regardless of age," he reasoned.

As per the India Tourism Statistics 2023, the domestic visitor arrivals witnessed by Karnataka in 2022 were 1824.1 lakh and foreign visitor arrivals were 1.285 lakh. In 2022, the number of domestic visitors in Karnataka grew by 124.28 lakh in comparison to 2021 while inbound tourists increased by 77.3 lakh during the same period.

Engaging with travel agents

The Ministry of Tourism has been actively coordinating with tour

Karnataka has it all—except snow! Whether you are looking for leisure, adventure, eco-tourism, or wildlife, there is something for all

operators to boost tourism in the state. "We organise familiarisation tours for potential tour operators from other states," Farouk shared, highlighting that events like the Karnataka International Travel Expo (KITE), tentatively scheduled for February 2025, will bring both domestic and international players to explore the state's offerings.

He also highlighted Karnataka's potential as a MICE destination.

"The state is working on establishing a Karnataka International Travel Bureau, modelled on the Indian Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB) by the Union government. Once established, this will pave the way for large-scale conferences and incentive programmes in the state in the coming years," he said.

Centre-State synergy

On the collaboration between the Centre and the state government, Farouk emphasised that tourism

is primarily driven by the state. "Forming state-specific tourism policies and reforms, such as the one in Kerala, can significantly boost a region's tourism sector," he said. However, he was quick to add that both central and state government, in partnership with private players, are working to improve infrastructure, such as world-class rest areas on highways, enhancing road travel experiences and supporting the rise of caravan tourism.

Important facts about Mysuru

Mysuru is a treasure trove of unique products, many of which proudly hold the Geographical Indication (GI) tag. From the charming Channarayana dolls to the famous Mysore paintings, the artistic and cultural gems are exclusive to the region. Visitors can also explore Payana Vintage Car Museum, Jagan Mohan Art Gallery, Rosewood Inlay Artwork, KSIC Silk factory, and Devaraja Market to witness these marvels up close. No trip is complete without indulging in local delights like the famous Mylari dosa, Mysuru Pak, and other mouthwatering treats.

Cholan promotes unexplored sites

Beyond traditional sightseeing, travellers are now on the quest for serene and immersive experiences. With a steadfast commitment to responsible tourism and community engagement, Cholan Tours aims to deliver unmatched experiences for travellers, says Pandian Kumaravel, Managing Director, Cholan Tours.



Janice Alyosius

There has been a distinct shift in what travellers are seeking post-pandemic, witnessing several key trends in inbound travel to India. "Travellers are now seeking offbeat and less crowded destinations to avoid busy areas and experience serenity," said **Pandian Kumaravel**, Managing Director, Cholan Tours. While domestic tourism has surged, often resulting in crowded popular spots, inbound tourists are increasingly seeking peaceful and immersive experiences that connect them with the local culture and nature.

To capitalise on these new trends, Cholan Tours is actively promoting unexplored destinations that offer tranquillity and authentic experiences. "There is also a growing preference for sustainable and wellness-focused tourism, with travellers showing interest in eco-friendly accommodations, yoga



Pandian Kumaravel
Managing Director
Cholan Tours

retreats, and local community engagement," Kumaravel noted.

New trends

The importance of regional tourism circuits, particularly in South India, has gained traction, especially among non-resident Indians (NRIs) seeking spiritual journeys. "Post-pandemic, temple tourism in South India has seen increased interest, particularly from NRIs

worldwide who seek spiritual journeys combined with sightseeing," Kumaravel said.

These travellers are not only interested in religious aspects but also in the rich historical and cultural significance of the temples. High-end domestic travellers are also exploring these temple circuits, drawn by the unique experiences they offer, such as participation in rituals, traditional festivals, classical dance performances, and authentic South Indian cuisine. Kumaravel highlighted, "The blend of spirituality, history, and local traditions makes these tours appealing to those seeking more than just sightseeing."

Key challenges and solutions

The Indian inbound travel market faces several challenges today. Hotel availability and price hikes pose significant hurdles. "With increased domestic travel, hotels are often overbooked, and room rates have surged. To navigate



this, Cholan Tours has fostered strong relationships with hotels, allowing them to secure bookings and ensure top-notch services even during peak seasons," Kumaravel affirmed.

Besides, evolving traveller preferences towards personalised and experiential travel necessitate a shift in offerings. "We have identified and developed offbeat destinations and crafted immersive

itineraries that align with these preferences," Kumaravel said.

Commitment to sustainability

With sustainability becoming a pivotal factor in travel decisions, Cholan Tours has made significant strides in eco-friendly practices. "Since 2008, we have adopted eco-friendly practices by becoming a paperless, fully digital company. We use solar energy, generating 27 kw of power daily,

and have implemented rainwater harvesting systems since 2014," Kumaravel shared.

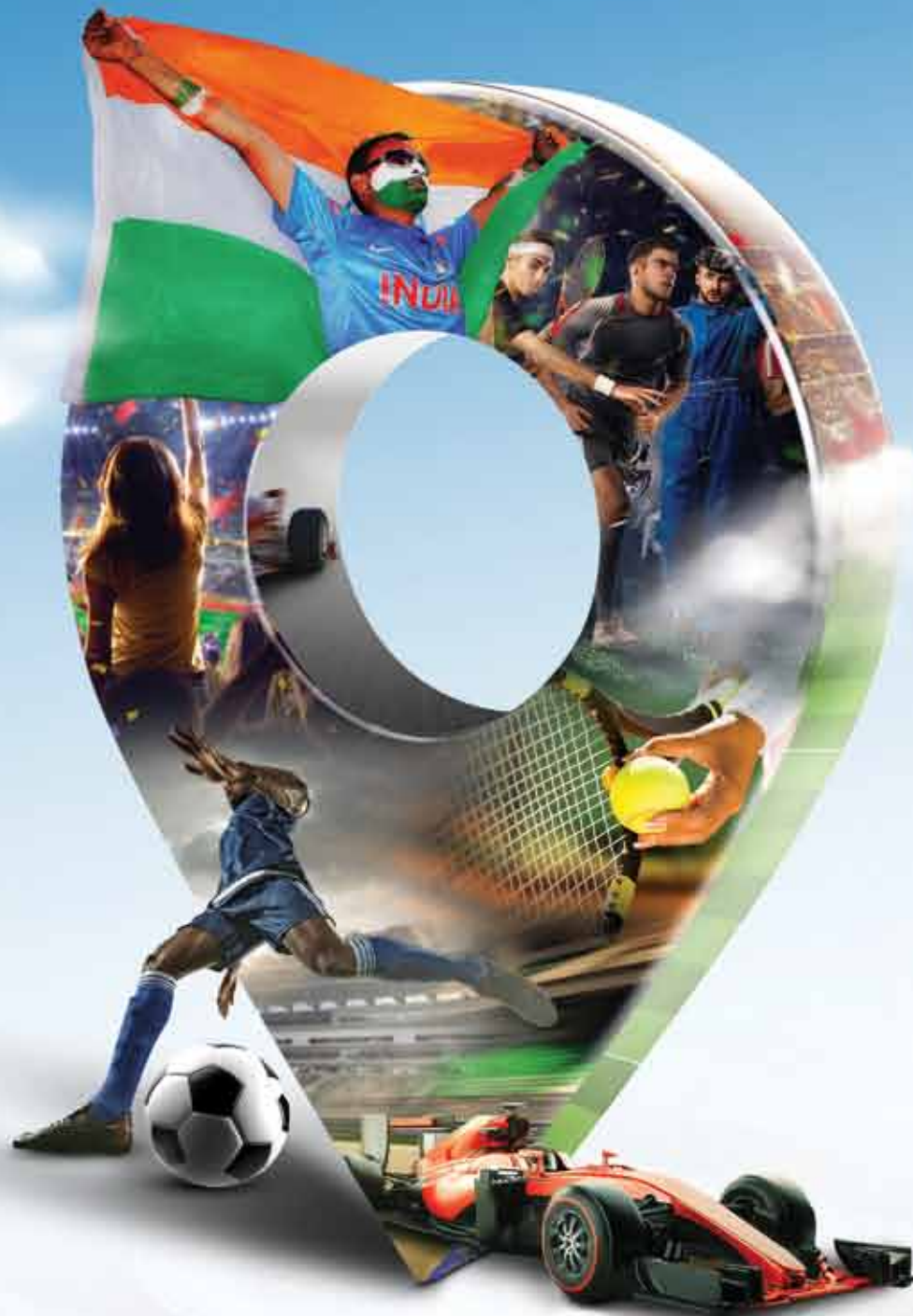
Their commitment to sustainability earned them the "LCC Green Award" from Lufthansa City

Going by the trend, travellers are now seeking offbeat and less crowded destinations to avoid busy areas and experience serenity

Centre in 2019, recognising their initiatives in solar energy. What sets Cholan Tours apart in a competitive market is their commitment to crafting unique, custom-made itineraries.

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SPECIAL RATES FOR B2B PARTNERS

Goa showcases the best of France

Atout France recently organised the 6th edition of its annual B2B showcase Explore France at JW Marriott in Goa. A delegation of 23 stakeholders representing the diversity of France's touristic offering interacted with 50 members of the Indian travel trade over two days. About 1,100 meetings took place during the event.





Cholan Tours Unveils a Bold New *Identity!*

Discover a new era at Cholan Tours with
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The majestic eagle, symbolizing vision and adventure, now graces our brand—just as we continue to soar higher, curating journeys that leave lasting impressions. Join us in this exciting transformation. Let's turn your moments into cherished memories!

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Adding luxury to Goa's charm

Vinay Victor Albuquerque, Director, Alcon Victor Group, highlights the group's beautiful properties at three different locations in Goa – the latest being the Mandrem Beach Resort, a member of Radisson Individuals Retreats. Radisson Resorts Goa creates unforgettable, eco-conscious experiences where luxury meets sustainability.



Hazel Jain

Tell us about the USP of the hotel group and how it is different from other hotel brands?

Radisson Resorts Goa offers a perfect blend of luxury, authenticity, and Goa's vibrant charm. With three unique locations, each resort provides a distinct experience: Radisson Blu Resort in Cavelossim Beach offers beachfront serenity, Radisson Goa Candolim combines upscale comfort with North Goa's lively nightlife, and Mandrem Beach Resort, a member of Radisson Individuals Retreats, delivers an eco-friendly, tranquil escape. Our commitment to sustainability enhances these experiences, with initiatives like eliminating single-use plastics, using solar heating, and recycling waste.

There is a lot of buzz about new destinations in India such as the hinterlands. Tell us how your ho-



Vinay Victor Albuquerque
Director
Alcon Victor Group

tels are encouraging this trend?

Radisson Resorts Goa is embracing the growing demand for off-beat, untouched destinations, with Mandrem Beach Resort, a member of Radisson Individuals Retreats leading the way. Nestled by the serene Mandrem Beach, this hidden gem offers an intimate retreat from Goa's more commercial areas, blending eco-friendly accommodations with modern comforts.

The resort's sustainable design harmonises with nature, while supporting local artisans and businesses, allowing guests to experience authentic Goan culture. With immersive experiences like guided nature walks, beach yoga, surfing and water sports, Mandrem Beach Resort, a member of Radisson Individuals Retreats offers a unique, enriching, and responsible travel experience, showcasing Goa's lesser-known beauty.

Tell us a little about your latest opening in Mandrem?

Mandrem Beach Resort, a member of Radisson Individuals Retreats, nestled near the enchanting Arambol and Ashwem Beaches, known for their Bohemian charm and pristine, silvery sands. Nature lovers will delight in the nearby Morjim Beach, famous for its turtle nesting sites. Beyond the beaches, the resort offers activities such as surfing, kayaking, river cruises, and wellness retreats. It features



an impressive 1,800 square-foot banquet hall and a vast beach lawn that boasts panoramic views of the Arabian Sea. This exquisite setting is perfect for sunset pre-functions, evening sundowners, or even grand weddings. Whether your client seeks adventure, relaxation, or a picturesque venue for their special event, Mandrem Beach Resort promises a holistic stay.

Are you looking at doing any trade engagements?

At Radisson Resorts Goa, we

are dedicated to forging strong connections with the travel trade community. We have scheduled a series of roadshows in key cities across India, specifically targeting markets eager for luxury and beach destinations. These events will provide an opportunity to showcase our resorts' unique attributes and experiences. In addition to the roadshows, we are organising familiarisation trips for travel agents, with a special emphasis on our newly opened Mandrem Beach Resort.

Do you have any new hotels in the pipeline?

We are actively expanding our footprint in Goa, with exciting new properties in the pipeline designed to enhance the guest experience. In response to increasing demand, particularly following the recent in-



Travellers are also demonstrating a heightened preference for sustainable options, a trend that resonates with our offerings

auguration of the Mopa airport, we are also expanding the room capacity at Radisson Goa Candolim to accommodate the visitors. 🌿

Shorter sailings find favour with Indians

Observing a huge uptick in bookings for sailings starting from December 2024, which is ex-Dubai and ex-Abu Dhabi onboard Costa Smeralda, Vasundhara Gupta, Business Development and Marketing Head, Lotus Aero Enterprises (GSA for Costa Cruises), says this could also be attributed to the changing cruising behaviour of Indian travellers.



Hazel Jain

Indian tourists have traditionally been a huge source market for fly-cruise itineraries ex-Singapore. They are now exploring other short-haul cruise destinations like Abu Dhabi. This is evident by the uptick in bookings that Costa Cruises is witnessing for its ex-Dubai and ex-Abu Dhabi sailings starting this December.

Vasundhara Gupta, Business Development and Marketing Head, Lotus Aero Enterprises (GSA for Costa Cruises), says, "We are definitely seeing our sailings ex-Dubai and ex-Abu Dhabi onboard Costa Smeralda get popular. This is one of the largest ships in the world and we have itineraries that are two-nights, five-nights and seven-nights. Even in the seven-night sailing, the ship actually docks in Dubai for two nights. We, in fact, dock in Jumeirah because we own the terminal at the Dubai Harbour cruise terminal."



Vasundhara Gupta
Business Development and Marketing Head,
Lotus Aero Enterprises (GSA for Costa Cruises)

The ship docks at the Dubai Harbour for two nights and then sails on to Oman, Qatar and return to Abu Dhabi, and then go into Dubai as well. "This is starting at a very attractive offer of only Rs 49,444 per person for a seven-night sailing, and I think you can't get better than that. In fact, children below 18 years can share the cabin with two adults and pay only port charges and onboard gratuities," Gupta adds.



Why is this sailing so popular? She explains, "Just like Singapore, Dubai and Abu Dhabi are great repeat destinations for short-haul. In fact, from November until about April, the UAE, Qatar, and Oman sector – generally the entire region – is an amazing place to visit, the weather is really great, they have great port infrastructure. For anyone doing repeat travel to these destinations, cruise is a great way to reinvent it."

Change in cruise pattern

This behaviour is also originating from a change in cruise pattern. "I believe we will see Indians go on world cruises as well in times to come. But right now, some of the most popular itineraries include the Dubai itineraries that we didn't see much of pre-pandemic. Pre-2020, our itineraries were essentially only seven nights. We realised during the pandemic that if we want to build big numbers, we will have to

offer Indian travellers shorter cruise itineraries. This has really worked well," she shares.

She also sees a change in the traveller segment. "We saw a lot of individual travellers going on those seven-night routes. However, from 2022, we introduced the option of three, four-night sailings and we have seen a lot of corporate incentive groups travelling on them. In fact, we have already sold

out these sailings starting from December until March to the corporate traveller. We are also seeing group departures. There are agents



We are seeing our sailings ex-Dubai and ex-Abu Dhabi onboard Costa Smeralda gain popularity with 2-night, 5-night and 7-night itineraries

who are combining our two-night cruises specifically with their land programme in Dubai and Abu Dhabi," Gupta says.

While weddings on cruises have worked for Costa Cruises on both the ship, it is something Gupta is still trying to target for the UAE. 🌿



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GPS empowers trade in Lucknow, Kochi

The Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) was organised in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh) and Kochi (Kerala) to empower the travel fraternity through networking and business engagements. The events generated tremendous response from buyers and exhibitors. GPS is a premier business networking event and a B2B trade show for tier II & III cities in India.



5 years of sporting excellence

DreamSetGo celebrated five years of sporting excellence on 15 October 2024. This marked a milestone for the premier sports travel and experiences platform. From its humble beginnings in 2019 to its status as a global player in 2024, the journey is a testament to the power of vision, hard work, and an unyielding commitment to excellence.

What began in 2019 with a small yet passionate team of six individuals has now grown into a powerhouse of 60+ employees, delivering unmatched sports experiences and hospitality around the globe. Over these five years, DreamSetGo has not only survived challenges but thrived by continually pushing boundaries, innovating, and making its mark on the international stage.

2019 – Inception: The Dream Begins

DreamSetGo's journey began in 2019, with a mission to provide sports fans with once-in-a-lifetime experiences that go beyond just watching the game. Founded on 15 October as part of Dream Sports portfolio which consists of Dream11, FanCode, Dream Games Studios, it was born out of a passion to make sports better and a desire to make global sporting experiences accessible to fans in India and beyond. Operating out of the Dream Sports Headquarters in Mumbai, with a team of just six, DreamSetGo laid the foundation for its future endeavours by crafting personalised sports travel packages that combined matchday tickets, hospitality, and exclusive experiences such as meet-and-greets with sports stars.

From football to cricket, DreamSetGo catered to the aspirations of fans by giving them front-row access to their favorite sporting moments. Little did they know, this was only the beginning of an extraordinary journey.



2020 – Resilience in the Face of Adversity

As the world grappled with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, DreamSetGo faced its first major challenge. For a company whose core product was centered on live sporting experiences, Covid was a major setback. Pivoting quickly, DreamSetGo adapted its business model to include virtual celebrity interactions with Sporting Legends. The company launched personalised celebrity video messages from the biggest sporting legends, connecting fans with over 25 renowned athletes, including stars like Sania Mirza, Shreyas Iyer, Mike Hussey, Herschelle Gibbs and many more sporting legends. This allowed DreamSetGo to maintain its engagement with fans despite the global lockdown.

The team's passion remained unchanged, and the company

emerged stronger, setting the stage for future success.

2021 – Steps to Strides: Signing Global Giants

By 2021, DreamSetGo was poised for bigger things. The company closed off major partnerships, first signing with English Premier League champions Manchester City, followed by Chelsea FC, and later securing a landmark deal with Manchester United, one of the world's most iconic football clubs. They also signed with Wimbledon and F1 Experiences, offering exclusive packages. These partnerships cemented DreamSetGo's global status as a key player in the sports travel industry. From official hospitality tickets to legend meet & greets, private stadium tours to watching the first team train, DreamSetGo set the bar high in terms of experiential sporting services.

The company also onboarded Indian cricket legend Sourav Ganguly as its brand ambassador, adding a new layer of credibility and visibility to the brand. With the backing of such powerhouse partnerships and personalities, DreamSetGo continued its upward trajectory, growing its team further. The company's ability to strike deals with global sporting giants reflected its increasing influence and ambition.

2022 – Making a Name: Expanding to Global Events

In 2022, DreamSetGo expanded its footprint by moving into a larger office aka Stadium, within the Dream Sports fraternity radius. This year marked a significant step in the company's journey, as it became an official partner for the T20 World Cup 2022 Australia, a highly-awaited sporting event globally. These partnerships not only amplified DreamSetGo's brand visibility

on the global platform but also showcased its capability to deliver world-class experiences on the biggest stages. This time was also smartly and strategically used to assemble the right team and sign the right partnerships.

The company executed its first ICC event at the T20 World Cup in Australia, an impressive feat that solidified DreamSetGo's ability to manage large-scale international events. By the end of 2022, the team had grown and DreamSetGo was slowly but firmly establishing itself as India's leader in sports travel and hospitality experiences. They successfully executed more than 25+ experiential events with legends like Venkatesh Prasad, Aamir Sohail, Matthew Hayden, Brett Lee, Michael Clarke, Sunil Gavaskar, and more.

2023 – In the Big Leagues

If 2022 was the year of making a name, 2023 was the year DreamSetGo cemented its status as a major player in the industry. The company took the lead in executing the 50-over ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 India in style, delivering mind-blowing numbers in terms of fan engagement and hospitality services. From arranging exclusive hospitality experiences to providing private boxes for the Gujarat Titans during the IPL, DreamSetGo continued to break new ground.

By the end of 2023, the company had not only executed successful events but had also established itself as a go-to brand and a serious Sports MICE player offering meet-and-greets, and bespoke sports travel experiences.

2024 – Moving Up Weight Classes: A Global Force

2024 marks another pivotal year in DreamSetGo's journey. The company executed the T20 World Cup in the USA, a significant milestone that showcased its ability to deliver world-class experiences on a global scale. But the crown jewel of 2024 is DreamSetGo's partnership for the Paris 2024 Olympics, making them India's only and exclusive organisation to officially offer hospitality packages at the Olympic Games.

DreamSetGo is moving up the weight classes, ready to take on even bigger challenges. The company has now worked with over 75 celebrities, arranged countless meet-and-greets, and offered exclusive hospitality experiences that have set a new standard in the sports travel industry.

The Road Ahead: Bigger, Better, Bolder

As DreamSetGo celebrates its fifth anniversary, the company is more driven than ever. With a track record of resilience, innovation, and a passion for delivering unforgettable experiences, DreamSetGo is poised to continue its rapid ascent in the sports hospitality world. In their 5 year tenure they have provided access to over 30 tournaments, provided experiences in

With a passion for delivering unforgettable experiences, DreamSetGo is poised to continue its ascent in the sports tourism world

over 75 cities, executed over 100 sports experiences, serviced over 250 group trips, built a strong DMC network of 200+ vendors globally, serviced over 25,000 clients and catered to over 50 corporates with MICE requirements. From its humble beginnings in 2019 to its status as a global player in 2024, DreamSetGo's journey is a testament to the power of vision, hard work, and an unyielding commitment to excellence.

Here's to the next five years—and beyond!



Madhya Pradesh: An unrivalled wedding destination



Madhya Pradesh is famous for its rich history and culture. The state, adorned with magnificent forts and palatial grandeur, offers an exquisite array of venues for an unforgettable wedding experience. Here, luxury intertwines with history, creating a stunning backdrop for a beautiful love story.

For couples dreaming of a wedding surrounded by stunning landscapes and timeless beauty, the 'Heart of Incredible India,' Madhya Pradesh is the perfect stage for an 'I Do.' With majestic venues, serene settings, and warm hospitality, the state offers an indelible backdrop for a love story. Imagine exchanging vows and tying the knot amid rolling hills, ancient forts, and tranquil lakes—every moment bathed in natural splendour. Here, each celebration is more than just a ceremony; it is a grand experience woven with elegance and charm. Let Madhya Pradesh be the canvas for your wedding, where every detail comes together to create cherished memories that last forever.

Weddings in Madhya Pradesh are infused with a sense of royalty and luxury, with many venues allowing guests to relive the splendour of India's regal past. Lavish decorations, traditional music, and cultural rituals add to the royal experience.



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

Serenity and Natural Beauty

Madhya Pradesh offers tranquil settings with serene rivers, lush greenery, and picturesque landscapes, creating perfect backdrops for romantic and intimate weddings. Scenic spots like the banks of the Narmada in Maheshwar or the hilltop views of Mandu enhance the charm of weddings. Organising a wedding in this area also allows guests to explore the spiritual and cultural air of the surroundings as these towns are renowned for temples and forts that



echoes the historical significance of the area.

Stay Options

Madhya Pradesh presents a variety of exquisite stay options, from opulent heritage hotels to sleek modern resorts, promising comfort and elegance for every wedding guest. In Bhopal, Mandu, Orcha and Khajuraho, boutique

properties and upscale resorts craft exclusive, personalised celebrations. These venues blend regal ambiance with architectural splendour, reflecting the state's rich aesthetic and cultural heritage. Each setting showcases intricate details and timeless beauty, offering more than just a place to stay—it is an experience that immerses guests in the essence of

Madhya Pradesh. Here, the wedding unfolds in a world where history and luxury unite seamlessly.

Heritage Properties & Forts and Palaces

Madhya Pradesh boasts numerous heritage properties such as the Ahilya Fort in Maheshwar, Jehan Numa Palace in Bhopal, and the palatial venues in Mandu and

Chanderi offer unique venues for grand and royal weddings. These historic locations add a touch of legacy and splendour to modern weddings, blending tradition with contemporary celebrations.

Majestic forts and palaces, including the Jahaz Mahal in Mandu and Raja Mahal in Orchha, serve as stunning locations for



weddings, offering a regal ambience steeped in history. These venues create an atmosphere of grandeur and elegance, ideal for couples seeking a royal touch to their ceremonies. These venues provide a spellbinding setting for pre-wedding as well and add India's cultural ethos as backdrops in the photographs.

Top Wedding Destinations

Bhopal: Whether drawn to contemporary sophistication or timeless elegance, every setting reflects a distinct charm, allowing couples to choose the perfect vibe for their special day.

Orcha: Famous for its Mughal and Rajput architecture, the town is ideal for fairy-tale weddings. Every corner of the city exudes a surreal charm, crafting the perfect backdrop for unforgettable wedding photography.

Mareshwar: The riverside Ahilya Fort offers a blend of history and tranquillity for serene wedding celebrations. Guests can also immerse in the village-style nimaadi massage before the special day.

Khajuraho: Amidst sacred temples and stunning landscapes of the city, weddings become a

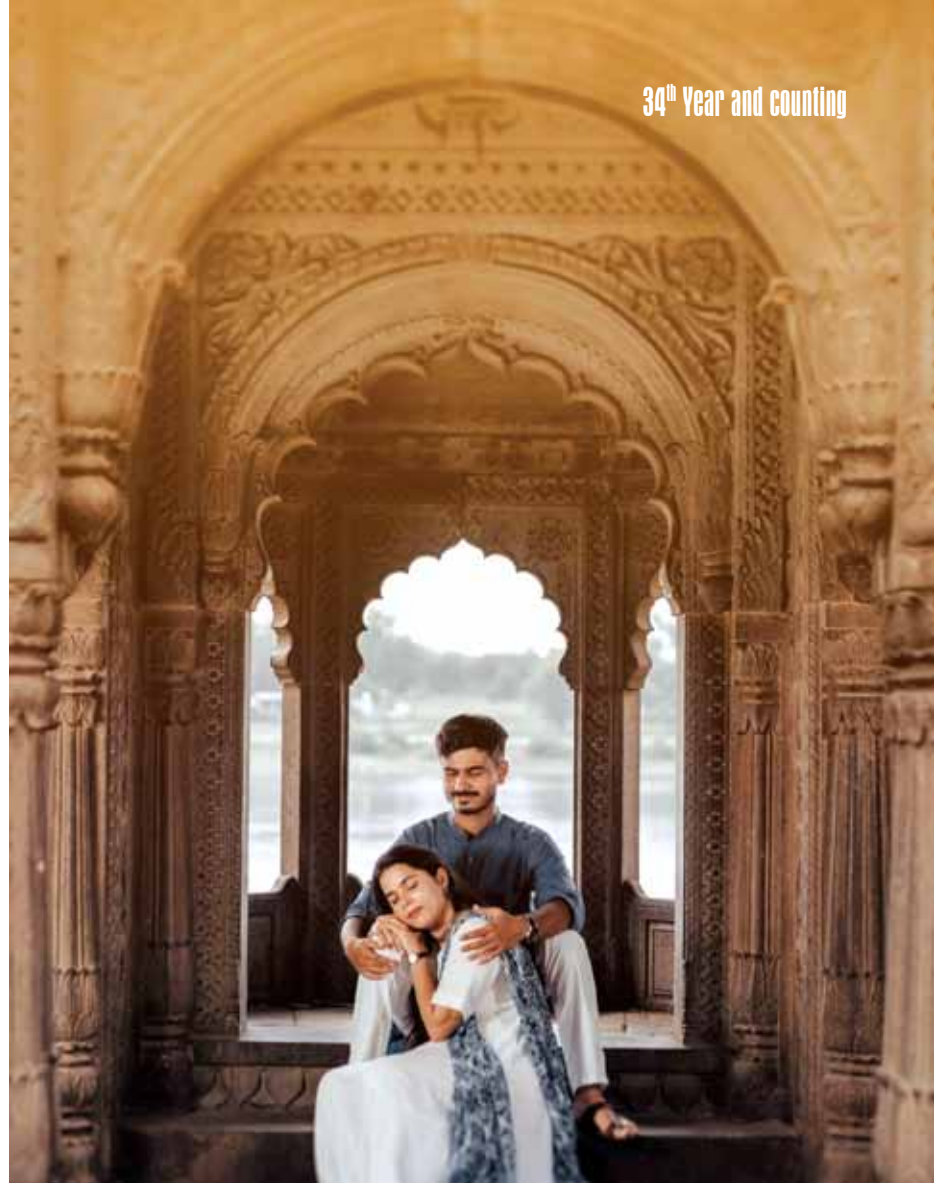
soulful celebration, where spirituality and natural beauty unite to create a truly unique experience. Each moment feels touched by the divine, as vows are exchanged in settings that radiate tranquillity and timeless charm.

Indore: The city offers modern luxury combined with cultural richness for large, sophisticated weddings. The city allows guests to sa-

ceremonies. The city is renowned for its Chanderi sarees so guests can also experience the textile legacy of the location while attending a wedding.

Promotion by Madhya Pradesh Tourism

Madhya Pradesh Tourism is actively promoting the state as one



34th Year and counting

of India's top wedding destinations, highlighting its royal venues, natural beauty, and excellent hospitality services. The state offers exclusive wedding packages, helping couples plan their dream weddings in iconic locations with seamless arrangements.

Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh & Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB), says, "The record-breaking tourist arrivals are a testament to Madhya Pradesh's immense appeal as a diverse and enriching travel destination. Our focus on

developing infrastructure, promoting religious tourism, and showcasing our unique cultural heritage has been key to attracting visitors from across India and the globe."

He adds, "The state is making a conscious effort to enhance religious and historical sites for the ease of wedding planners and organisers. In this relation, it has also developed a strategy to promote it as a majestic destination for weddings. One can avail royal experiences in cost-effective manner."

Enhanced connectivity, infrastructure, and improved amenities make Madhya Pradesh an increasingly

attractive destination for weddings. The state offers a versatile setting that caters to every style of celebration, from intimate gatherings to grand affairs. Eager to extend its renowned hospitality, Madhya Pradesh welcomes not only Indian couples but also lovebirds from around the world. With its blend of cultural richness and modern conveniences, the state is primed to host extraordinary weddings, offering unforgettable experiences in its captivating landscapes. Whether couples are dreaming of a traditional Indian ceremony or a global fusion celebration, Madhya Pradesh is ready to bring their vision to life.

Madhya Pradesh is promoting itself as a majestic destination for weddings. One can avail royal experiences in cost-effective way

your traditional cuisine and flavours of Madhya Pradesh adding a local touch to the entire experience.

Chanderi: A lesser-known gem with ancient forts and peaceful surroundings, Chanderi offer multiple options for intimate wedding

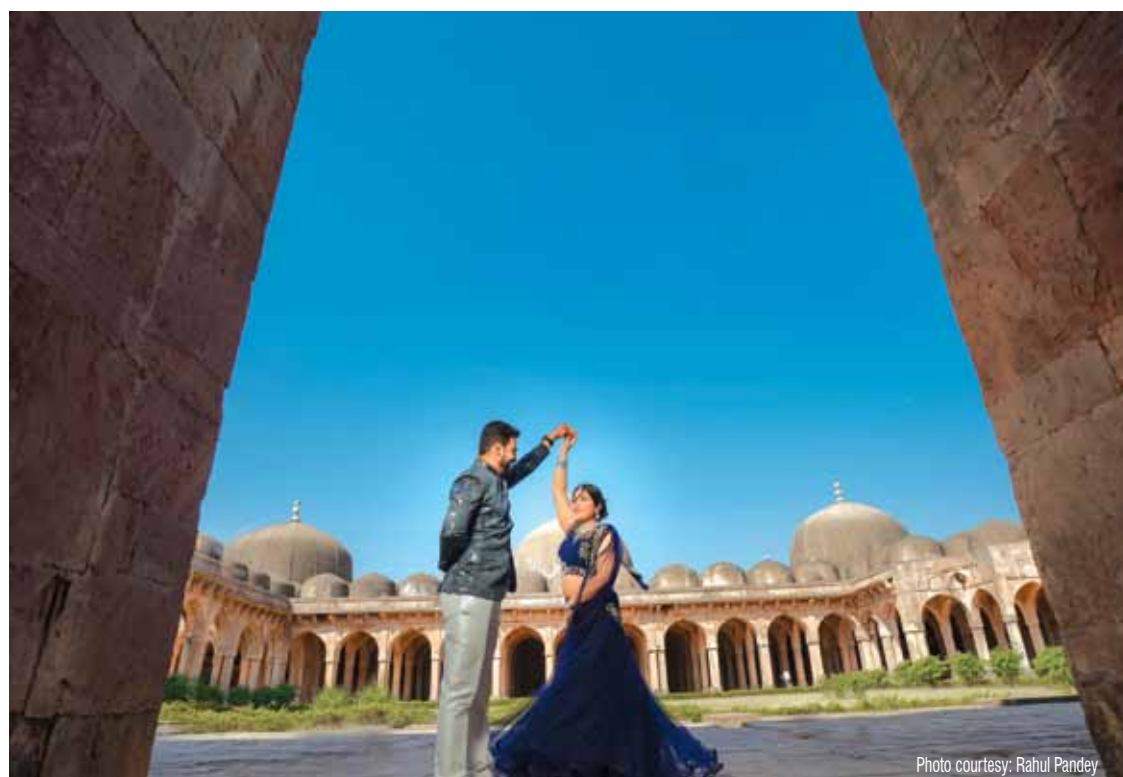


Photo courtesy: Rahul Pandey

Titlis' 6-year revamp plan underway

Mt Titlis' vision to ensure that its clients have an enthralling experience is well on track with new development and upgrades like a redesigned mountain station and the iconic tower. By 2029, Titlis will be home to world-class architecture, including an improved infrastructure for environmental sustainability.



Hazel Jain

The pioneering spirit of Mt Titlis will be both tangible and visible over the coming years. An overhaul on a huge scale is already underway and the entire project is supposed to last six years. The first two years of this project have passed by, and everything is on schedule in spite of adverse weather conditions over long periods.

As planned, the Titlis Connect cable car will be ready by December

2024, reveals **Rayomand Choksi**, Regional Sales Director, Mt Titlis, who represents Titlis Engelberg in India, the Middle East, Japan and Australia. "However, it shall not be put in operation as the tunnel to connect this new cable car to the Titlis Tower opens in the next phase in December 2026. The Titlis Tower will host some of our new restaurants, including a new fine-dine restaurant and an exciting viewing gallery. As soon as the restaurants in the new Titlis Tower open, we shall secure and make safe the Rotair cable car entry and exit points

and then dismantle the existing cable car station," he shares.

A new cable car station with ultra-modern facilities will then be built around the existing Rotair entry and exit points. The Gen Next station will be the most modern cable car station so far built in the Alps. The entire project has been designed by the famous architectural firm of Herzog and de Meuron. "We do not expect any inconvenience for our visiting guests. In fact, the first two years have gone by smoothly with hardly any guest even noticing that construction is in full swing. Most of the work in the season is undertaken at night-time and only the non-invasive and silent construction is being done during the day. All our facilities are fully operational and will continue to be so. Hence the travel agents and tour operators will be able to sell Mt Titlis as they have always been doing, without a hitch and all services guaranteed," Choksi ensures the trade.



Rayomand Choksi
Regional Sales Director
Mt Titlis

The evolving Indian traveller

Sharing his perspective on how the Indian traveller visiting Switzerland has changed, Choksi says, "We do find a gentle swing in numbers from the traditional group business to the individual traveller especially after the pandemic. Whilst the group business is still playing catch-up, the FIT figures have far outstripped the 2019 pre-covid numbers. We also find the average age of the Indian traveller to

be much lower and hence they are spending more time in enjoying the various activities like the zip-line in summer and the snow bikes in winter. Also, Indian food, for the new generation is not a prerequisite and, in fact, they are quite experimental with the local cuisine."

This he attributes to his travel trade partners. He says, "Thanks to our well-informed travel agents and tour operators who continue to propagate the Mt Titlis excursion, India has now become the number one overseas source market. Mt Titlis continues to reinvent itself to ensure it remains on the top of the mind of all visitors to Switzerland. All our unique selling points of the Rotair, the Ice-Flyer, the Titlis Cliff Walk and the Glacier

All our facilities are fully operational and will continue to be so and the trade will be able to sell Mt Titlis as they have always been doing

cave makes it a one-of-a-kind experience. The various activities in the snow in winter coupled with some extra activities in summer, along with sumptuous Indian food, makes it the most comprehensive mountain excursion."



Developments at a glance

2025: Opening of Titlis Connect

2026: Upgrade of the Titlis Tower

2029 (final phase): New Titlis Peak Station

80 global buyers @Australia Next

Business Events Australia's signature incentive showcase, Australia Next 2024 brought together over 80 international buyers and 96 Australian industry sellers in Cairns/ Gimuy, Tropical North Queensland. Australia Next 2025 will take place from 1-3 December 2025 in Melbourne/ Narm, the organisers announced.



Lipla Negi from Australia

Continuing its successful run for third consecutive year, Business Events Australia's signature incentive showcase, Australia Next 2025 will take place from 1-3 December 2025 in Melbourne/ Narm. "Our signature incentive showcase has not been held in Melbourne in more than a decade, so it will be great to once again take international business events buyers to Victoria," said **Robin Mack**, Tourism Australia's Executive General Manager of Commercial & Business Events Australia. The programme will be delivered in partnership with the Melbourne Convention Bureau.

This year, the business event successfully brought together more than 80 international buyers, 96 Australian industry sellers, and 15 media professionals in Cairns/ Gimuy, Tropical North Queensland. In partnership with



Participants at the Business Events Australia's signature incentive showcase, Australia Next 2024

Business Events Cairns & Great Barrier Reef, this two-day event provided delegates with an immersive experience showcasing the region's exceptional business events expertise, unique offsite opportunities, and breathtaking World Heritage landscapes.

An early comeback

Traditionally, the signature incentive showcase has been organised ev-

ery two years. But after having the showcase on pause for four years, the team felt that it was important to give buyers more opportunities to explore and experience latest incentive offerings around the country. "We are already seeing international business events return to Australia, with the latest numbers from Tourism Research Australia showing they contributed \$4.6 billion to our visitor economy

in the 12 months to March 2024," shared **Phillipa Harrison**, Managing Director, Tourism Australia. She further stressed that the leads generated by Tourism Australia play a critical role in the recovery of business events industry.

Last year, the incentive showcase in Adelaide/ Tarntanya generated 212 business leads across the country to date, worth \$192 mil-

lion. "While that Total Trip Spend is above the levels we experienced in 2019, the number of visitors arriving in Australia for an international business event is at about 75 per cent of what we have seen in the past and we hope hosting Australia Next in Cairns in 2024 will help to drive the industry's recovery and future growth," she asserted.

MICE opportunities galore

From the Great Barrier Reef to lush tropical rainforests, incentive planners from 10 key global markets had the opportunity to explore first-hand the unique tourism experiences and world-class venues in Cairns. The two-day event was launched at the newly redeveloped Cairns Convention Centre, which garnered acclaim for its strategic location. After a recent multi-million-dollar expansion, it has added an array of world-class amenities, including an incredible new 410-seater plenary, new exhibition space, ballroom for up to

500 guests, and an outdoor terrace overlooking the Trinity Inlet. With a total of 45,000 sq mt of event

The incentive showcase is highly popular among global buyers for its thoughtfully curated experience of the destination

space, it offers a 2,330-tiered-seat auditorium and 5,000-seat arena. Just a 10-minute drive from Cairns Airport, the venue is conveniently within walking distance of hotels, restaurants, and the marina.

The incentive showcase is highly popular among global buyers for its thoughtfully curated experience of the destination.

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GMR AERO ENTERPRISE



Hyderabad - An Emerging Global Hub

HYD Airport is rapidly emerging as a key hub, handling a record 25 million passengers in FY24 and ranking as India's 4th busiest airport. Its single, integrated terminal boasts a 40 million-passenger capacity and seamlessly connects travelers to over 90 destinations.

GMR Hyderabad Air Cargo Terminal at Hyderabad International Airport is India's 1st Integrated Cargo Terminal with International, Pharma Zone and for Domestic cargo services which plays a crucial role in the progress and development of the aviation sector. Boasting India's largest in-house MRO facility, HYD ensures top-notch aircraft maintenance. With a runway handling 51 peak-hour movements, 44 aerobridges, and over 100 parking stands, efficiency is key. Passenger focus shines with city-side check-in, Digi-yatra, self-baggage drop, and over 175 F&B and retail facilities. Aero Plaza, nestled within the sprawling expanse of Hyderabad International Airport, promises an exhilarating experience that combines gastronomic delights, live entertainment, and adrenaline-pumping activities. The future looks bright, with educational institutions like the GMR School of Aviation and Aviation Academy aiming to cultivate skilled workforce for the airport eco system and a dedicated logistics hub further bolstering the ecosystem.

Hyderabad Passengers by Region - 2023



Hyderabad Takes Off : A Booming Tech Hub & Aviation Powerhouse

Colliers Research ranks Hyderabad as Asia's 3rd fastest-growing city, with a remarkable 7.8% annual surge. Telangana boasts the title of India's fastest growing economy. With a per capita income of Rs. 3.1 Lakh (1.9x the national average) and a GSDP valued at US \$160 Billion in 2023, Telangana attracts wealth; it houses the country's second highest number of ultra high net worth individuals (Knight Frank 2022). This robust economic ecosystem fuels aviation growth.



Hyderabad's strength lies in its diverse industry base. Major MNCs, its status as India's vaccine capital, and a flourishing IT hub with giants like Google, Microsoft, and Amazon all contribute significantly. T-Hub, the world's largest innovation hub and start up eco system enabler is driving force behind the transformational change in the city's start-up eco system. Additionally, leading aviation players like Safran and P&W, Tata Boeing Aerospace Ltd, Brahmos Aerospace and Collins Aerospace, to name a few, solidify Hyderabad's potential as a major aviation hub.

Trust, the biggest moat in travel

Still among the biggest competitive advantage over a company's competitors, trust is what sets it apart in the travel industry even today. Deepak Meena, Chief Executive Officer and Co-founder, Flyzy, shares insights into why the B2B channel needs more standardisation and quality checks to be able to build more trust.



Hazel Jain

What are some of the key challenges in the B2B space?

There are two key challenges in the B2B space. The first is Layers. It won't be wrong to claim that most of the B2B suppliers are just sources from other suppliers. They are selling at a premium to make a profit. This chain of reselling makes the services expensive and also hampers the on-ground services and communication because of multiple layers of sources. The second is Trust. If you want to source inventory in today's market, it is tough to find the right suppliers because everyone claims to be authentic. However, there is no standardisation. There are no quality checks, which ruins the overall trust metrics in the industry.

Why is building trust and transparency in travel important and how can tech help resolve this?



Deepak Meena
CEO and Co-founder
Flyzy

Travel is a high-ticket services business. So naturally, people want the best experience in exchange for paying a hefty amount. Once the experience of your customer is hampered in any way, there is no redemption. That is the main reason to build trust and work towards fulfilling the promises. It's weird to say that trust is still the biggest moat in the travel industry.

When it comes to transparency, during our research we found that over 87 per cent of people had no idea what they were paying in taxes and fees. This brings us to the second most important point, i.e. transparency. Transparency is important regarding taxation, finances, and sources with the partners and retailers, so that they can provide the best offers to their customers.

How does your product help resolve these for the B2B agent?

Flyzy has simplified these key problem statements for the agents, i.e. transparency on the taxation of their purchases and best last-mile facilities at competitive pricing, which makes us the go-to platform for agents. We offer SAAS solutions that enhance operational efficiency by simplifying the booking process. Flyzy as a platform ensures complete visibility into financial transactions, making it easy for travel agents and corpo-

rate travellers to track travel-related taxes and expenses from a single dashboard. This helps clients save up to 20 per cent on their business travel and also streamlines the process of filing GST and TCS—a

Secondary cities do not have access to advanced tools, and they are looking to optimise operations with technology-based solutions

unique selling point that no other travel-tech company in India offers at this scale.

With Flyzy, agents and corporate travellers can easily search, com-

pare, and book flights and hotels at special corporate rates. We provide 24/7 customer support and have the best in industry response time with an average response time of 2-10 minutes.

Are secondary cities showing demand for this product?

Yes, secondary cities are showing more interest in our product than the metros because of the

lack of exposure to the ways they can optimise their business. They do not have access to these advanced tools, and they are looking to optimise operations with tech-based solutions that can streamline things for them. Tier II cities hold much promise for expansion. We are currently operating in 15 states primarily, but we are looking to expand in tier II cities in 10 more states.

Making travel easier

Flyzy recently partnered with PhonePe to provide Flyzy-powered airport cabs where PhonePe customers are able to book airport cabs without any hassle. With just a few taps on PhonePe app's travel section, they are able to book Flyzy airports cabs. Already live in 6 metros, Flyzy-powered airport cabs will soon be available at 20 more airports providing airport travel solutions across India. Meena says, "Our mission is to streamline the travel experience. Airport travel has become cumbersome and legacy companies often fall short of addressing the pain points of the travellers. By integrating Flyzy airport cabs services with PhonePe app we aim to make airport travel smoother and accessible for millions of users."

Red Planner launches digital platform

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



Hazel Jain

Rajesh Kakade, CEO, Red Planner, has always believed 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.

The response that he has received for Red Planner portal since its launch has been overwhelming. He says, "Travel agents especially from the tiered cities are actually finding it as a game changer for their bookings and are benefiting from the same. In terms of new developments, we have tied up various tourism boards and are running contests. In terms of new features, we have incorporated AI as well and added standalone services along with complete holiday



Rajesh Kakade, CEO, Red Planner (right)

packages along with cost in under three minutes. It is also multilingual now. Upcoming features include downloadable e-flyers with the option to customise."

The market feedback for Red Planner is excellent and it is garnering momentum through word of mouth, he adds. "In the last three months, we have registered more than 1,600 agents on Red

Planner. Out of this, more than 73 per cent agents are actively working on Red Planner. It's the age of digital transformation so the sales are rapidly increasing with online exposure and also helping streamlining operations and enhancing customer engagement. It's not only about becoming more efficient but also being able to position ourselves on a global scale," Kakade says.

The primary focus for Kakade right now is on five major destinations, which are USA, Canada, Europe, Scandinavia and Australia. "We have uploaded more than 200 readymade itineraries with instant real-time costing. However, besides the run-of-the-mill itineraries, we are also focusing on new locations, destinations, upcoming cities and newer attractions," he says. This includes places such

as Seattle, Northern Alaska, Atlanta, Nashville, and New England in USA. In Europe it is East and South of France, Switzerland storytelling itineraries, couple-friendly or romantic itineraries for Flanders, beautiful beaches with historic itineraries for Rome and surroundings. In Australia, they are promoting Adelaide, The Ghan Train, and Darwin.

Kakade adds that the team is in the process of adding couple of other interesting countries which will be live by first week of January.

The evolving Indian outbound

India's outbound tourism has seen a significant surge in the market (the FIT packages growth is around 23-27 per cent) and is projected to do even more so soon. Kakade adds, "There is a surge for experiential itineraries, and besides the Instagramable locations, the travellers are looking for a relaxed, luxurious holidays and out-of-the-box itineraries."

Secondary market issues

Catering to secondary cities of India as well, Kakade is witness to the challenges they face. "In a tier III or tier IV city, sometimes

It's the age of digital transformation so the sales are rapidly increasing with online exposure and also helping streamlining operations

even in tier II cities, the agent does face a challenge in finding the right DMC to get the right kind of itinerary and cost. Often, it's time consuming for them. Through Red Planner, we are empowering these agents," Kakade adds.

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OUR ACCREDITATIONS



SCAN NOW

India's sports tourism scores big

In the rapidly evolving sports tourism landscape, Sports Konnect has consistently stood out for its diverse and inclusive approach. Shashank Shekhar Mishra, Founder & CEO, Sports Konnect, attributes their success to a simple yet powerful USP - catering to all types of customers through a wide range of sports tourism products.



Hazel Jain

Sports Konnect is a leading sports tourism and marketing company recognised for its award-winning services. It specialises in providing exclusive access to premier global sporting events, paired with comprehensive travel packages. Its expertise covers a broad spectrum of sports, including World Cups, major club leagues, iconic events like Wimbledon, motorsports, multi-sport competitions, and more. The team at Sports Konnect curates unforgettable experiences for fans worldwide, offering everything from budget-friendly tours to ultra-luxurious hospitality packages. Additionally, it operates a dynamic talent management and sponsorship division, further enhancing its diverse offerings.

Sharing some details of the B2B focus, **Shashank Shekhar Mishra**, Founder CEO, Sports

Konnect, highlights the kind of offerings they have for travel agents. "With the growing demand for sports tourism in India, we are actively seeking partnerships with B2B agents nationwide. As this is a highly specialised sector, we are committed to training our partner agents, equipping them with the knowledge and tools to effectively promote and sell these unique packages to their clients. B2B agents benefit from increased sales volumes and profitability, thanks to the high-value, exclusive nature of our offerings. Additionally, with most high-demand events selling out quickly, our guaranteed inventory ensures agents can fulfil customer requests, even at the last minute," he says.

Mishra sees a huge uptick in travel for sporting events from India. "Yes, there has been a noticeable uptick in travel for sporting events from India in recent years. Several factors contribute to this trend:



Shashank Shekhar Mishra
Founder & CEO
Sports Konnect

Rising interest in global sports, increasing disposable income, enhanced and improved accessibility today, influence of social media and globalisation, combined with tailor-made sports tourism packages that are now easily available. These factors together are fuelling the growing trend of Indian travellers seeking out sporting events across the globe," he explains.

But is this only for cricket? Mishra reveals, "Over the past few years, we have witnessed an incredible surge in demand for motorsports, football, and tennis. Despite the higher costs associated with these events, travellers are increasingly opting for them. A prime example is Formula 1, which offers tremendous value to fans, providing access to global concerts, thrilling on-track action, and an immersive festival atmosphere—all packed into an exciting three-day experience."

Traveller segments

Mishra underlines the target segment that the team focuses on:

Passionate Sports Fans: Individuals who are deeply interested in specific sports or teams and seek the excitement of live, in-person experiences at major sporting events.

Affluent Travellers: High-net-worth individuals who are willing

to invest in premium sports packages, VIP experiences, and exclusive hospitality services at prestigious events like Wimbledon, the Super Bowl, or Formula 1.

With most high-demand events selling out quickly, our guaranteed inventory ensures agents can fulfil customer requests, even at last minute

Corporate Clients: Another segment is companies looking for unique hospitality and entertainment options for client engagement, networking, and team-building through corporate packages at major sporting events.

Experience Seekers: Next are travellers who seek unique and immersive experiences and enjoy combining their love for sports with travel and exploration.

Special Interest Groups and Enthusiasts: Niche groups dedicated to a particular sport, such as motorsports, rugby, cricket, or soccer, who seek specialised travel experiences to events related to their passion.

These segments, Mishra adds, vary based on the nature of the event, location, and the type of experience offered whether it is budget or luxury.

"Our key USP has always been offering a wide range of sports tourism products, catering to all types of customers, not just high-value deals. Many of our clients start as first-time travellers and gradually move on to more premium experiences," Mishra concludes.

Swosti Puri elevates Odisha's stature

Swosti Group announces the opening of Swosti Premium Beach Resorts in Puri, a landmark addition to Odisha's luxury hospitality sector. This grand opening marks a significant step in establishing Odisha as a premier destination for MICE, blending the state's rich cultural heritage with world-class amenities.



TT Bureau

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts was inaugurated by Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Education, Government of India, in the presence of other prominent dignitaries on 25 August 2024. The property promises to elevate Puri's status as a top destination for both leisure and business travellers.

Next-Gen resort experiences

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts Puri is the latest addition to Swosti

Group's portfolio of luxury properties, now open for bookings. Situated in the sacred city of Sri Jagannath Dham, this resort is designed to offer an unparalleled luxury experience, combining the spiritual and cultural richness of Puri with modern comforts and conveniences. The resort is now open for bookings, inviting guests to experience the perfect blend of Odisha's cultural richness and world-class luxury.

Versatile banquet facilities

The resort is strategically designed

to serve as a premier MICE destination, featuring state-of-the-art facilities that cater to large-scale conferences, corporate events, and elaborate wedding ceremonies. With open-air landscaped lawns and a convention hall spanning

The resort is now open for bookings, inviting guests to experience the perfect blend of Odisha's cultural richness and world-class luxury

6,000 square feet, the resort offers versatile spaces to accommodate diverse events and gatherings.

Architecture and amenities

The design and architecture of



Swosti Premium Beach Resorts are deeply rooted in Odisha's rich cultural heritage. The interiors draw inspiration from the elegant swipes and shapes of Odissi and Mahari dance forms, beautifully reflected in the resort's chandeliers. The ceilings, inspired by the ancient Boita boats of Kalinga, feature graceful curved designs that evoke the region's maritime legacy. Even the staff uniforms are crafted with a nod to Odisha's

traditional weaving culture, incorporating the intricate patterns of Sambalpuri and Ikat fabrics. This seamless blend of cultural inspiration and modern luxury creates an ambiance that is both sophisticated and authentic.

Elegant accommodations

Guests can choose from 125 elegantly designed luxury rooms, including suites that boast sophisticated decor, state-of-the-art

technology, and stunning views of Puri's Golden Beach.

Culinary excellence and wellness

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts offers an exceptional culinary experience, with menus curated by expert chefs. Guests can indulge in a wide range of multi-cuisine dishes and buffets at the Beach Hut, a restaurant that offers breathtaking panoramic views of the ocean.



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交通部觀光署
Tourism Administration, MOTC



India shines at Skål World Congress 2024

Four Indians have been appointed at key positions at Skål International. The announcements were made at the 83rd Skål World Congress 2024 held from 16-21 October at Izmir, Turkey.

Skål International India has announced that four distinguished members from the country have taken significant positions at Skål International. These announcements were made at the 83rd Skål World Congress 2024 at Izmir, Turkey. This marks a significant milestone for Skål India.



NSN Mohan
Chief Executive Officer
Kennedy Holidays, Hyderabad

has been named Deputy Auditor of Skål International, taking on a crucial role in overseeing financial transparency and accountability within the organisation.



Valmiki Hari Kishan
Founder & Managing Partner, Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions

The first notable appointment is of **NSN Mohan**, CEO, Kennedy Holidays, Hyderabad, who was nominated and elected as Deputy Vice President of Skål International. The news comes as a testament to his leadership and dedication to fostering camaraderie within the travel and tourism commu-



Vani Subhas
Owner, Hansa Holidays from Skål International - Hyderabad

nity, and this appointment is expected to strengthen Skål's global initiatives and further enhance cooperation among international chapters. This is the first time in the 90-year history of Skål International that an Asian and Indian has been elected to this prestigious position.

Valmiki Hari Kishan, Founder & Managing Partner, Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions, Hyderabad,



P Saravanan Palanivelu
Owner, Viking Tours & Travel, Chennai from SKAL International India - Chennai

P Saravanan Palanivelu, Owner, Viking Tours & Travel, Chennai from SKAL International India - Chennai and **Vani Subhas**, Owner, Hansa Holidays from Skål International - Hyderabad have been honoured as Membre D'Honneur.



Sanjeev Mehra
President
Skål International India

Sanjeev Mehra, President, Skål International India, said, "We are extremely proud of Mr NSN Mohan, Mr Valmiki Kishan, Mr P Saravanan, and Ms Vani Subhas."

Hotel industry buoyant: Bakaya

Ajay K Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels, has clear-cut ideas about the future of the hotel segment. The seasoned campaigner says that the current Indian hotel environment is strongly domestic travel-oriented but moving ahead, there is a need for caution.



Inder Raj Ahluwalia

Ajay K Bakaya, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels, foresees an uptrend in overall business. "Current Indian hotel environment is strongly domestic travel-oriented," he says. However, wants industry to be cautious in its approach. "While Indian travellers have kept business buoyant for the past 2 years, over-dependence on this sector could be a mistake because Indian travellers are now travelling overseas in large numbers. As such, hotels must work to regain the compliment of inbound travelers. This is crucial," he suggests.

On the whole, Bakaya foresees definite, healthy growth in the Indian hotel sector. He feels several positive factors will contribute to this. "The Indian infrastructure has never been better. The country now boasts the finest airports anywhere in the



Ajay K Bakaya
Managing Director
Sarovar Hotels

world. Better and longer highways are coming up on a regular basis. The national rail network is the next up-gradation subject. A stable government and inflation in control, makes India the flavour of the world," he says, predicting a healthy 8 per cent plus annual growth year on year over the next 5 years.

Sarovar's greatest strength is the fact that it has a pan-India presence and coverage, with presence in 80 destinations across the country. Their strongest segment is the mid-market 3 and 4-Star affordable hotels category. They cover and have meaningful presence in business, pilgrim, and leisure destinations alike.

Sarovar has a presence in Ayodhya also, where it operates Park Inn. It is the only branded hotel in the city. In addition, they expect to open Sarovar Premiere, Ayodhya in 2025. Bakaya feels the Indian hotel segment is undergoing constant evolution, and hotel trends and guest demands are also constantly changing. "Today's guests are aware of things and expect instant rewards. The main success factor is to provide them what they want, namely, special experiences, instagammable presentations, and imagi-

native hotel products, especially in the food and drinks department," he opines.

The key to hotels' success lies in their ability to provide key facilities.

While Indian travellers have kept business buoyant for the past 2 years, over-dependence on this sector could be a mistake

The main ones being the ability to provide a safe environment, personal recognition and good food. That is exactly their objective.

Product value central to demand

Iris Reps believes that being different is not just about pricing; it's about the value it brings to the table. Alefiya Singh, Founder & Director, Iris Reps, underscores how her company expertly manages a diverse range of tourism products for its customers.



Hazel Jain

Iris Reps is an ISO-certified company based in Mumbai with a sales office in Delhi. It has been operating in the Indian market for over a decade, managing a diverse portfolio of international and local hospitality products. **Alefiya Singh**, Founder & Director, Iris Reps, says, "Our mission is to spread awareness and introduce unique products to the Indian market, be it hotels, attractions, destinations, or DMC partners. We believe that being different is not just about pricing; it's about the value we bring to the table. From handling a stand-alone resort to managing groups of local and international chains, cruises, and attractions, we aim to showcase unique offerings. We specialise in PR and marketing activities, including themed events, roadshows, branding, media meets, Fam trips, and celebrity campaigns."

India market evolving

Indian travellers are evolving rapidly—they are becoming more adventurous, informed, and discerning. Today, they seek immersive, authentic experiences, whether it's trying local cuisines, exploring



Alefiya Singh
Founder & Director
Iris Reps

off-the-beaten-path destinations, or prioritising quality over quantity in their travel plans. Singh shares that thanks to technology, such as GPT and various travel platforms, clients are well-researched before making decisions.

Singh says, "At Iris Reps, we understand these changing needs. We have partnered with unique brands such as NOOE Maldives, Makanudu Maldives, Paradise Cruise (Vietnam), Tisya Stays (luxury villas in Goa and Uttarakhand), and Sea Cliff Zanzibar to offer something extraordinary to Indian travellers. We are not just



Focus is on creating a real connection between agents and the products they represent, ensuring that every brand gets visibility and market penetration

cater to international brands; we also help domestic brands establish themselves firmly in this growing market."

Trade engagements

Iris Reps actively conducts webinars and participates in key trade fairs like Melange and ITB India, as well partner with important travel trade associations both national and regional such as UTEN, TAAP, and TAFI. "These events give agents firsthand exposure to the products and help them integrate these offerings into their itineraries," she adds.

The company's focus is on creating a real connection between agents and the products they represent, ensuring that every brand gets the visibility and market penetration it deserves.

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Raising the bar for B2B engagement

The inaugural edition of Mélange 2024, held in Mumbai, set a new standard for B2B exhibitions in the travel trade industry. By curating a niche platform exclusively for trade professionals and suppliers, the two-day event facilitated meaningful connections and high-quality meetings, proving that sometimes, less is truly more.



Hazel Jain

Organised by a core team of three members from the Mumbai trade, Mélange 2024 was a masterclass in B2B excellence where business met immense opportunities. **Pradeep Saboo**, Chairman and Managing Partner, Guideline Travels and Co-Founder of MTF Events, gets to the crux of it. "Our aim was to clear every small and big pain points any exhibitor faces during big shows. This means building the stalls, having the same booth design for every category. But most importantly, we wanted to ensure a completely filtered crowd that actually comes only for business. At Mélange 2024, we have made sure that only the right kind of buyer is allowed to enter. So, either you are an exhibitor or you are a buyer, there is no one else in between," he explains, adding that, "When we do B2B business, we don't want people who come to sell their things there. So, every



Pradeep Saboo, Rajat Bagaria and Sameer Karnani

buyer that enters the show has to be a genuine buyer and the seller has to have a diversity in products that a travel agent actually needs."

Sameer Karnani, Owner of Arundaya Travels & Co-Founder of MTF Events, underlines the exhibitor profile and says, "We have tried to cover everything in this show – tourism boards like VisitBritain

and Tourism New Zealand, airlines, DMCs, international suppliers – so, it's a good mix. We have domestic, as well as international exhibitors with a lot of first-timers, who have come in, like India Tourism, VisitBritain, Sabre and even Virgin Atlantic. We have got agents from South America, Morocco, Bali, and Sri Lanka. In terms of buyers, we do have a hosted programme for them.

We have got buyers down from Pune, Nasik, Aurangabad, Gujarat, Chennai, Bengaluru, Coimbatore, Delhi and Punjab as well."

Karnani emphasises that they were conscious of not accepting any B2B player as buyers. "They had to be purely B2C. Hoteliers were not allowed as buyers. We received about 2,500 registered buyers,

along with a few invitees. In total, we had about 3,000 plus buyers. The vetting process for buyer registration was stringent. We had a team of 10 people scrutinising their credentials!" he adds.

Rajat Bagaria, Managing Director, Shrishti Tours & Travels, and Co-Founder of MTF Events, says, "We are not looking at numbers; we are looking at quality buyers. We don't want the floor to be flooded with people. Moreover, the design of the show and the design of the booth was different. The idea was to standardise the designing. So, the expense on the designing and

the build-up of the booths was eradicated for exhibitors. Everybody gets the same kind of design if booked in the same category. The uniqueness of the show is that all the stalls are being fabricated, produced and provided by us to our exhibitors. So, there is a uniformity, there is no super spends that my exhibitors have to do."

"We are confident that Melange will set new benchmarks in the industry. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all participants and look forward to welcoming everyone to what promises to be an exceptional event," said Bagaria.

Mélange 2025

MTF Events' Mélange 2025 will take place on 20–21 September 2025 at NESCO in Mumbai. They are offering special pre-registration rates for those who register before 30 September 2024. Current exhibitors may also be eligible for an early bird offer of 50 per cent rebate on all quoted prices if they register on or before 14 October 2024. Meanwhile, the team is preparing for the MTF Premier League 3, which will be held on 12 January 2025.

A new era for India begins

Contd. from page 10



Shikhar Kumar
Managing Director
Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts

"India offers exciting new destinations and experiences perfect for inbound visitors, blending adventure, history, nature, and culture. Kumbhalgarh in Rajasthan, offers a glimpse into India's medieval, past, while nearby Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary offers jeep safaris, trekking, and spotting wildlife. Gokarna, a serene beach town in Karnataka, offers a spiritual and peaceful alternative to Goa, with its secluded beaches."



Nitin Mittal
CEO
Hotel n Apartment

"India should reposition its popular tourism states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Goa, Gujarat and Kerala as luxury tourist destinations with enhanced connectivity and premium hotels to offer. It is time to shake off the image of backpackers' paradise and putting your money where your mouth is. Religious tourism is already making waves with Gaya in Bihar and Ayodhya developing as a great attraction for the devotees across the globe."



Valmiki Hari Kishan
Founder & Managing Partner,
Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions

"Owing to Govt. initiatives and supportive sustainable practices, inbound is bouncing back. Events like G20 Summit showcased parts of India to the people in such a way which in return attracted inbound travellers. Destination wedding segment is attracting foreigners to destinations like Rajasthan. Similarly, new additions in UNESCO heritage sites is drawing inbound visitors. To increase the footfall more, we need to develop good hotels and roads."



Thomas Pappachan
Director
ETI Global Holidays

"The inbound tourism industry experiences significant seasonal fluctuations, with certain popular destinations thriving during specific periods. Notably, Rishikesh has emerged as a top destination, particularly for wellness and holistic pursuits. Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh are also witnessing a surge in demand. The Golden Triangle remains a timeless favourite among tourists, especially during the peak season of November and December."



Khushvinder Sarna
Owner
The Federal Travels & Tours

"Emerging destinations like Meghalaya, with its lush landscapes and living root bridges, is perfect for nature enthusiasts. Places like Rann of Kutch, with its white salt desert and Rann Utsav makes it an ideal spot for those interested in unique landscapes and cultural immersion. Experiences such as luxury wellness retreats in Kerala, featuring Ayurvedic treatments and eco-conscious resorts, resonate with travellers seeking holistic rejuvenation."



Sanjeev Mehra
President
SKAL International India

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Compiled by TT Bureau



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

EVENT TALK

Published from: India Middle East

NOVEMBER 2024

Date	Event	Time
1-3	International Tourism & Travel Show 2024	11:00 am
1-4	Taipei International Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am
5-7	WTM London	9:30 am
6-8	Korea MICE Expo 2024	9:00 am
7	Abu Dhabi Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
7-10	The Luxury Travel Fair 2024	10:00 am
8	Morocco Tourism Webinar	11:30 am
8-10	Holiday Expo-Visakhapatnam	9:00 am
8-10	India Travel Mart Bhopal	9:00 am
11	Arabian Cargo Awards	10:00 am
12	Arabian Travel Awards	10:00 am
12	Conztruct 2024	4:00 pm
12-14	PATA Destination Marketing Forum	10:00 am
13-16	Global Sustainable Tourism Conference 2024	8:00 am
18	JNTO Roadshow-Delhi	10:30 am
18	Belgium Travel Expo 2024	9:00 am
19	Czech Travel Market 2024	9:00 am
19	Universal Tourism Exhibition 2024	9:00 am
20	JNTO Roadshow-Bangalore	10:30 am
20-22	VisitBritain Roadshow-Bangalore	10:00 am
21-22	Digital Travel Summit 2024	8:00 am
22	JNTO Roadshow-Mumbai	10:30 am

Spotlight on regenerative tourism

The global travel industry is increasingly recognising its role in promoting sustainable practices. World Travel Market London is set to shine a spotlight on regenerative tourism during its upcoming 'Sustainability Summit' on 6 November 2024.



For the very first time, World Travel Market is focussing on regenerative tourism as a core element of its 'Sustainability Summit,' taking place at Excel London on 6 November 2024. Guided by the show's sustainability advisor **Tina O'Dwyer**, an expert in sustainable tourism, the summit will explore on the theme of using travel for societal benefits, aligning with the show's broader theme, 'TravelPower.'

As the moderator, O'Dwyer will open the summit, discussing how travel can support resilient communities, robust economies, and thriving ecosystems while examining the factors driving regenerative tourism. Renowned thought leader **Anna Pollock** will kickstart the event with a keynote on 'Uncovering the Regenerative Tourism Paradigm,' which will incorporate insights from successful case studies and actionable strategies. This will be followed by an engaging session on transformative tourism campaigns by **Elke Dens**, Founder of



global sustainable tourism organisation the Travel Foundation and Place Generation.

Next, **Orla Carroll**, Director of Product Development, Fáilte Ireland, will present a session on 'Policy to Practice: Ireland's Real-Life Experience with Regenerative Tourism Placemaking,' which will delve into how to apply regenerative tourism principles to promote economic growth with environmental and social restoration.

Debbie Clarke, Director of Regenerative Development, Centre for Good Travel and host of the

Good Awaits Podcast in New Zealand, will share how to translate principles of regeneration into real-world experiences and itineraries, with insights from Asta

A dynamic platform to exchange ideas and forge innovative solutions that will shape and drive regenerative tourism

Sigurjonsdottir, CEO, Iceland Tourism Cluster. **Rob Holmes**, Founder and Chief Strategist, GLP Films,

and **Anne Kawalerski**, Global Chief Marketing Officer, Bloomberg Media Group, will discuss effective communication of sustainable initiatives, showcasing successful models. The summit will conclude with a discussion led by O'Dwyer on 'The Future of Regenerative Tourism.' **Juliette Losardo**, Exhibition Director, World Travel Market London, commented, "The Sustainability Track offers a dynamic platform for all attendees to come together, exchange ideas, and forge innovative solutions that will both contribute to and shape the drive to regenerative tourism. The whole programme invites both exhibitors and the media to boldly rethink how we approach sustainability, re-imagine its purpose, and foster prosperity for all."

OBITUARY



Nileshe Mukhi

Nileshe Mukhi (59), a member of Skai International Kolkata, passed away in an accident in Bali on 16 October 2024. He is survived by wife, Kavita and two sons, Yash and Gaurav.

Nileshe's profound contributions to the travel industry spanned over 35 years, with significant roles at Orient Express and ITC Travel House before founding Silicon Travels nearly two decades ago. His career was marked by his expertise in corporate handling and luxury travel packages, earning him deep respect and admiration across the industry.

We, at **TRAVEL TALK**, pray for him and extend our heartfelt condolences to the family.

'Need to manage hotel rates'

► Contd. from page 5

visitors. Madhok highlights the need to streamline visa processes to enhance India's appeal as a travel destination. "Countries that attract large numbers of Indian tourists often offer visa-on-arrival or even waive visa requirements entirely," he explained. "For India, introducing visa-on-arrival options for key source markets could be a game-changer. It would greatly improve ease of travel and make India a more accessible and attractive option for international visitors," he remarked. Madhok believes that simplifying entry requirements is a crucial step toward boosting inbound tourism and positioning India competitively on the global stage. "This would address ease of doing business, something we need to prioritise," he suggested.

He also stresses the importance of managing hotel rates to avoid pricing out potential visitors. "We can't keep increasing rates without consequence. If costs continue to rise unchecked, we risk deterring tourists who would otherwise choose India," Madhok said. He warned that continually hiking prices could deter tourists.

"This is something we need to be careful about if we want to sustain and grow inbound tourism," he added. Striking a balance between offering premium experiences and maintaining affordability is essential, especially in luxury travel. "To keep luxury tourism thriving, we must ensure that high prices don't overshadow the unique value India offers to travellers," he opined.

Luxury travel demand growing

At Abercrombie & Kent, Madhok has witnessed a growing demand for high-quality, immersive travel experiences. "In the luxury, first-class space, travellers are increasingly spending more time at destinations. They want experiences that allow them to relax and engage deeply with local culture, sights, and activities. They are not just skimming the surface—they're digging deeper," he shared. He is confident in the enduring strength of the luxury segment. "Luxury is here to stay, and I see good growth ahead. Our tours cover India's vast expanse, including states like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh. We are dedicated to promoting these destinations," he said.

Global market trends

On the source markets driving growth in luxury travel, Madhok highlighted several strong economies. "We are seeing an increased number of travellers from the United States, Europe—particularly Germany, Switzerland—and a resurgence in the UK. The Asia-Pacific region is also

To keep luxury tourism thriving, we must ensure that high prices don't overshadow the unique value India offers to travellers

responding positively, with strong numbers from Australia, Japan, and Hong Kong."

Reflecting on the future of tourism in the country, Madhok advises for adopting a proactive approach for the positive outcome.

Infra boost for tourism industry

► Contd. from page 5

Ujjain, which had seen an astounding footfall of 100 million domestic tourists in just one year, putting domestic tourism much ahead of the curve. He outlined various government initiatives, including 'Dekho Apna Desh' and 'Chalo India', that have spotlighted India on global traveller's map. "Keeping the Indian diaspora in mind, our Prime Minister Narendra Modi has requested Indians living all across the globe to inspire at least four non-Indian travellers to visit the country," he said.

Role of govt policies

He said that after making the move of free one lakh visas, the Ministry of Tourism is also exploring the revival of top key source markets for India in association of the Ministry of External Affairs. "Last year, the government offered interest-free long-term loan to states for development of tourism. ₹1 lakh crore loan was distributed and we are committed to extend it this year also. He further announced, "Under the decongestion and

new product development initiative, several big-ticket projects worth ₹8,000 crore have been submitted by states. In Jammu & Kashmir, three new tourist desti-

Under the new product development initiative, several big-ticket projects worth ₹8,000 crore have been submitted by states

nations are being developed. "A budget of ₹5,600 crore has been sanctioned to develop these new destinations," he said.

Demand for industry status

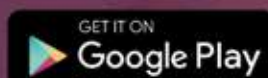
Acknowledging that tourism is primarily a state subject, he urged states to adopt best practices to support the hospitality sector.

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MOVEMENTS

MINOR HOTELS

New Delhi

Global hospitality group's Minor Hotels has appointed **ROHIT CHOPRA** as Area Commercial Director, India. In his new role, Chopra will spearhead commercial activities across the group in India with emphasis on driving revenue growth, building long-lasting client relationships, and enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty. Chopra is a seasoned leader in the hospitality industry with a career spanning over 26 years, including roles at Marriott, Hyatt, and Accor. Chopra holds a Bachelor's degree in Commerce from DAV College Amritsar and a Master's degree in Tourism Management from the Institute of Management Studies (IMS) Ghaziabad.



MAYFAIR HOTELS & RESORTS

Raipur

Mayfair Elixir has appointed **RANDHIR GUPTA** as Vice President - Commercial and Business Development, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts. With over 23 years of experience in the hotels and airlines, Gupta brings a wealth of expertise in sales, marketing, and business strategy. Before joining Mayfair, Gupta was associated with Accor India & South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group and Sahara Airlines, overseeing sales operations across key markets. With his deep industry knowledge and proven leadership, Gupta is expected to contribute significantly to Mayfair Hotels' commercial growth and development initiatives.



FAIRMONT JAIPUR

Jaipur

Fairmont Jaipur has appointed **GAGAN KATYAL** as the Director of Sales. With over two decades of experience in sales and marketing, Katyal brings a wealth of knowledge and a proven track record in driving strategic growth and elevating brand presence in the luxury hospitality sector. Prior to this, he has held several leadership roles in prestigious brands, including Ananta Hotels & Resorts, ITC Rajputana Jaipur, and Marriott International. In his new role, he will oversee the sales department, driving both inbound and outbound sales strategies to further strengthen the hotel's position as a leading luxury destination.



TOURISM AUSTRALIA

South & South East Asia

Tourism Australia has appointed **JENNIFER DOIG** to the role of Regional General Manager South and South East Asia. Doig, who brings a wealth of marketing experience in the Asia region to the role, was most recently working for Dubai Tourism as Director of Global Campaigns. She will report to Andrew Hogg, Executive General Manager, Eastern Markets & Aviation, Tourism Australia, and operate from the Singapore-based office. Her responsibilities include driving trade and consumer marketing activity with the teams in key markets, including India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore.



THE LALIT ASHOK BENGALURU

Bengaluru

The Lalit Ashok Bengaluru appoints **PAVAN KUMAR MANIKONDA** as the General Manager. He has an exceptional track record and a wealth of experience in hotel operations spanning over 18 years. Manikonda is well-regarded as an industry veteran with a strong business acumen. In his new role, Manikonda will be responsible for overseeing and enhancing the operational excellence of The Lalit Ashok Bengaluru. His proven leadership skills, strategic vision, and extensive knowledge in various aspects of hospitality management will play a pivotal role in driving the hotel's growth, and optimising performance.



LYFE HOTELS

Bhubaneswar

Lyfe Hotels Bhubaneswar appoints **VAISHAKH SURENDRAN** as the General Manager. With more than 24 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Surendran brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role. Renowned for his extensive experience in hotel and resort operations, particularly in front office management, and his leadership qualities, Surendran has consistently delivered top-tier results throughout his career. Prior to this, he served as General Manager at Ramada Chennai Potheri, where he played a pivotal role in the property's rebranding from SRM to Ramada.



THE LEELA AMBIENCE GURUGRAM

HOTEL & RESIDENCES

Gurugram

The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences has appointed **MAYANK UPPAL** as the Director of Revenue. A seasoned expert with an impressive track record in revenue optimisation and market leadership, Uppal's appointment is poised to strengthen the hotel's position as a pioneer in the luxury hospitality sector. His deep expertise in business development, project management, and market intelligence makes him the perfect addition to the leadership team. His appointment aligns with the hotel's vision.



GRAND HYATT GURGAON

Gurgaon

GAURAV CHANDNA, a hospitality professional with over 20 years of experience in leading hotel chains, has been appointed as the Director of Operations at Grand Hyatt Gurgaon. His impressive track record in luxury hospitality and his expertise in streamlining operations are set to elevate the guest experience and solidify Grand Hyatt Gurgaon's position as a premier destination in the region. Having refined skills across various departments at Hyatt Regency Delhi, Chandna's journey reflects a commitment to excellence and continuous growth. In his new position, he will lead operational efficiency and foster team development.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MUMBAI

Mumbai

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai has appointed **AARUNI DWIVEDI** as the Hotel Manager. With an illustrious career spanning 17 years in luxury hospitality, Dwivedi brings a wealth of global experience and expertise to his new role. He will oversee the hotel operations, reinforcing the brand's commitment to delivering the highest standards of luxury and service. A seasoned leader in operations, Dwivedi has worked at top-rated Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts across the APAC, EMEA, and Americas regions. His experience will be instrumental in elevating the guest experiences at the Mumbai property.



CLARKS COLLECTION

Jaipur

Clarks Collection appoints **RAJESH RANJAN** as Area General Manager Rajasthan to manage all its contract properties. In his new role, he will also seek out new properties for signing, and developing fruitful strategic alliances. Ranjan has more than 16 years of experience spread across various hotel groups, such as Taj, Piccadilly, Tulip Inn, St Laurn, Berggruen (Keys Hotel), and Lords. Prior to this, he worked as General Manager with Clarks Resort, Birgunj, Nepal. He has grown in the hospitality sector from scratch and specialises in handling luxury to mid-segment to luxury properties.



THE CLARKS HOTELS & RESORTS

Noida

The Clarks Hotels & Resorts has appointed **RYAN ROCQUE** as the Director of Marketing and Communications. With more than 14 years of leadership experience in the hospitality and luxury sectors, Rocque brings extensive expertise in marketing strategy, brand positioning, and corporate communications, making him a valuable addition to the team. His career highlights include leading marketing efforts at prestigious brands, such as JW Marriott and Four Seasons Hotels. In his new role, Rocque will focus on enhancing brand identity to position it at the forefront of the hospitality industry.



TRIPJACK

Mumbai

TripJack, India's leading B2B travel-tech platform, has appointed **VARUN MAHAJAN** as the Head of Business for its Flights portfolio. In his new role, Mahajan will work closely with founders Hussain Patel and Hasan Patel to drive TripJack's vision forward and accelerate the company's growth trajectory. He will lead TripJack's largest division with a focus on building new lines of business, driving process transformation, and enhancing capability development. His leadership will be instrumental in shaping the future of TripJack's flights portfolio. Mahajan brings with him over 15 years of rich experience across diverse sectors.



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27% YOY rise in hotel guests

Abu Dhabi's international hotel guest numbers have increased by over 27% year-on-year, reveals Abdulla Yousuf Mohammad, Director, International Operations, DCT – Abu Dhabi, at the inaugural APAC Travel Marketplace, held recently in Al Ain.

Janice Alyosius

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, has been actively promoting itself through roadshows, webinars, workshops, and various initiatives across India and other key markets. In a groundbreaking move, the Department of Culture and Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT – Abu Dhabi) hosted the inaugural APAC Travel Marketplace in Al Ain, bringing together more than 200 travel agents from the Asia-Pacific region alongside 60 stakeholders based in Abu Dhabi.

The event aligns with Abu Dhabi's Tourism Strategy 2030, which aims to position the emirate as a premier global tourism destination through innovative partnerships, distinctive offerings, and a strong focus on sustainability. Through the marketplace, DCT – Abu Dhabi



bi seeks to strengthen its network across the APAC region, foster long-term collaborations, and highlight Abu Dhabi as a destination for growth and opportunity in the travel industry.

Abdulla Yousuf Mohammad, Director, International Operations, DCT – Abu Dhabi, explained the strategy behind this initiative, saying, "There is nothing better than bringing the world to Abu Dhabi. Some stakeholders expressed challenges in participating in DCT's extensive calendar of activities, so we thought, why not hit multiple birds with one stone by hosting an event in Abu Dhabi, specifically for the APAC region!"

Al Ain for APAC Marketplace

Choosing Al Ain as the venue for the APAC Marketplace was a strategic decision, rooted in the city's cultural and historical significance. Abdulla explained,

"Al Ain is not just a city—it's the cradle of Emirati heritage, offering a truly authentic experience of the UAE's rich culture. Hosting the marketplace here allows us to showcase a side of the country that many inter-

national visitors, especially from APAC markets, may not be familiar with."

Growth in strategic markets

Abu Dhabi's tourism performance has been remarkable. "Year on year, our international hotel guest numbers have increased by more than 27 per cent. When we look at the markets that are leading this

When we look at the markets that are leading this growth, India and China represent over 25 per cent of that in total. This is aligned with our 2030 strategy

growth, India and China represent over 25 per cent of that in total. This is very much aligned with our 2030 strategy," he shared.

In addition to the established markets like India and China, DCT Abu Dhabi is focusing on new opportunities. "We have a clear strategy to start opening new markets, such as Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. With the support of our stakeholders, we

are confident that we can start penetrating these markets and gaining market share," he said.

Shift in consumer demands

Abdulla highlighted the rapidly evolving traveller needs in the tourism sector. "Travellers today demand more value for their money, and only through strategic partnerships between us as a destination and our partners can we meet these needs," he said. "If there is one word that represents Abu Dhabi, it's authenticity. Based on our consumer surveys, visitors see Abu Dhabi as a place where they can connect with authentic experiences and culture. Whether it's in Al Ain or Abu Dhabi, we offer something that stands apart from the rest of the world," he claimed.

Abu Dhabi's 2030 strategy

Abdulla spoke at length about the 2030 strategy. "The strategy focuses on four key pillars: city offerings, promotion and marketing, infrastructure, and accessibility." The aim is not only to double the number of international hotel guests but also to double tourism's contribution to the GDP, growing from AED 49 billion to AED 98 billion by 2030. Also, one of the significant milestones is the opening of Zayed International Airport Terminal A, which Abdulla referred to as "a new gateway for over 45 million passengers".

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