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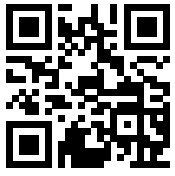
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Free e-visa to foreigners on OCIs' advice

Under its 'Chalo India' campaign, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, will allow 100,000 free e-visas to foreigners on recommendation from OCI cardholders.

Janice Alyosius

India launched its 'Chalo India' campaign at the World Travel Market (WTM) London, held from 5-7 November, to boost inbound tourism with free e-visa incentives. Speaking at WTM, **Mugdha Sinha**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, urged the Indian diaspora around the world to encourage five non-Indian friends to sign up for the

scheme. She said Indians across the world can recommend the programme to their non-Indian friends, with more information available on the 'Chalo India' portal.

Commenting on the initiative, **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, said, "Through 'Chalo India' initiative, foreign nationals with an OCI (Overseas Citizen of India) card can register on the programme's website to receive a unique code. Each OCI cardholder

can then recommend up to five foreign nationals to visit India, who will be eligible for a gratis e-tourist visa. These visas will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis at no charge." He added, "This offer is exclusively for those recommended by an OCI cardholder and is not available to general tourists. Some attendees at WTM expressed concern that the programme's scope should be broader, allowing anyone to apply, regardless of an OCI recommen-



Dignitaries, including Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Culture & Tourism, Government of India (centre), at WTM London

dation. Although the programme will grant 100,000 free visas, some feel it may be restrictive, as it requires applicants to have connections with OCI cardholders. This initiative goes beyond the \$25 visa fee

waiver; it aims to symbolise India's goodwill and respect for international visitors."

The UK remains a crucial market for Indian tourism, ranking as the

third-largest source with 920,000 visitors in 2023. Additionally, the UK has one of the largest Indian diaspora populations, estimated at 1.9 million, a key factor supporting the Chalo India campaign.

Data analytics gains ground

Data analytics is shaping the future of tourism. While AI tools like ChatGPT offer efficiency, human judgement ensures that data-driven insights are applied to enhance experiences. Experts share views:



Suman Billa
Additional Secretary, MOT, GoI

"The significance of research and data in the tourism industry cannot be overstated. It is essential to have accurate and comprehensive data to take informed decisions. While government data provides a solid foundation, it often captures only one facet of the entire landscape. To truly understand the dynamics of the tourism and hospitality sectors, we must triangulate this data with insights from industry bodies, international organisations like the World Tourism Organisation, and other reliable sources. The establishment of the Centre of Excellence is a welcome step in this direction. By pooling together various data sources, we can achieve a more robust understanding of our industry."

Contd. on page 19 ▶

'Increase in hotel inventory must'

Hospitality leaders say keeping in view the demand, there is a need to add more hotels in the country. They stress the need for expanded infrastructure, rate parity, and balanced inventory, especially for weddings.

Janice Alyosius

The Indian tourism and hospitality sector is currently riding a wave of growth, driven by a surge in domestic travel, weddings, and inbound tourism. However, this momentum brings its own set of challenges; managing inventory during peak wedding seasons, sustaining commitments to inbound travellers, and expanding infrastructure to meet future demands. Hospitality leaders share insights on how they are navigating the challenges,



Parveen Chander
Executive VP - Sales and Marketing- IHCL

unveiling a blend of innovative strategies and collaborations and meeting pace with the sustained growth.

Domestic tourism and the government's role

In recent years, government tourism policies have increasingly focused on promoting domestic travel, and this shift is driving much of the sector's current growth. **Ajay Bakaya**, Managing Director, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts, observed that while inbound tourism remains crucial, domestic travel is currently the key market, "Domestic is the flavour," Bakaya said, noting that this area offers substantial growth poten-

Contd. on page 14 ▶

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Elevating Arunachal as adventure hub

The 16th ATOAI Adventure Convention, to be held in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, from 3-8 December this year, is set to elevate the state and Northeast India as a centre for adventure tourism. The convention will unite industry leaders to explore sustainable opportunities and showcase the region's untapped potential for global tourism.



TT Bureau

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) is set to organise its 16th annual Adventure Convention in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, from 3-8 December 2024. The six-day event aims to unite adventure tourism professionals from across India to put spotlight on Arunachal Pradesh as a premier destination for adventure tourism, showcasing the state's untapped potential.

Pema Khandu, Chief Minister, Arunachal Pradesh, expressed his strong belief in the state's promise as a leading adventure tourism hub, stating that the convention could propel economic growth and garner international recognition for the state's remarkable offerings. **PD Sona**, State Tourism Minister, Arunachal Pradesh, stressed the significance of investing in adventure tourism as a driver for



Ajeet Bajaj
President
ATOAI

economic progress that simultaneously conserves the natural and cultural heritage of the region. He believes that promoting sustainable tourism will solidify India's position as a global adventure destination, with Arunachal Pradesh playing a central role.

The convention's agenda includes a comprehensive line-up of ses-

sions, panel discussions, and awards, celebrating industry excellence. Adventure tourism leaders from across India will connect with local operators, fostering partnerships to develop sustainable tourism models for Arunachal Pradesh and beyond. Attendees will have the opportunity to embark on exclusive familiarisation (FAM) trips, allowing them to explore Arunachal's stunning, uncharted landscapes and experience its adventure potential firsthand.

Ahead of the convention, a dedicated adventure guide training programme will take place in Itanagar, led by industry experts to enhance local capacity and professionalism in the adventure tourism sector. Additionally, ATOAI will unveil its roadmap for developing Arunachal Pradesh's adventure tourism, outlining future growth and investment prospects in the region. **Ajeet Bajaj**, President,



ATOAI, emphasised the association's commitment to establishing India as a top destination for responsible adventure tourism, with Arunachal Pradesh at the core of this vision. "We look forward to showcasing Arunachal Pradesh as a model for responsible adventure tourism, setting new standards for environmental stewardship and community-driven development in the region," Bajaj said.

The Adventure Convention will also support the ATOAI's commit-

ment to sustainability, striving to be a net-zero event by minimising its environmental impact and promoting responsible tourism practices. This year, the convention will focus on the importance of Border Tourism, giving delegates the rare chance to visit strategic locations, such as Bumla Pass, a significant border site. Delegates will also tour the renowned National Institute for Mountaineering and Allied Sports (NIMAS) in Dirang, known for its world-class adventure training programmes. These programmes

play a crucial role in equipping local youth and tour operators with essential skills, fostering a new generation of professionals in the adventure tourism industry.

We look forward to showcasing Arunachal Pradesh as a model for responsible adventure tourism, setting new standards

Oken Tayeng, Chair, ATOAI North East, underscored the importance of responsible tourism and highlighted the vast adventure tourism potential in Arunachal Pradesh and the broader Northeast.

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Air India monopoly?

Not long ago, Vistara was launched with much fanfare—a joint venture between Air India and Singapore Airlines, filling the full-service gap left by Jet Airways. But the scene shifted when the government moved to privatise Air India. The buzz around this merger is still going strong, with many wondering about loyalty perks, service levels, and the new livery. One thing's clear though—Air India now stands alone as the only full-service carrier in a sky crowded with low-cost airlines. Does this give them an edge? It could, but the advantage isn't guaranteed.

Is this an advantage? It could be, but IndiGo's upcoming business-class launch may shift the dynamic. IndiGo formed codeshare partnerships with major international carriers. Now the question is: Will Air India establish similar alliances to strengthen its position? or will IndiGo's new business class add fresh competition? The skies are looking turbulent, and the future of Indian aviation just got more interesting.

Data analytics in travel

Data analytics is reshaping tourism by making experiences more personalised and operations smoother, with tools like ChatGPT. But while AI can make things faster and more efficient, the human touch is still crucial for turning raw data into meaningful insights. Data alone doesn't tell the full story—it needs a skilled eye to give it context and depth.

Tourism now draws on a variety of data sources, which creates a richer data ecosystem that benefits everyone. AI tools like chatbots and virtual assistants are making customer service more responsive, but the heart of travel is still about human connection. The industry's future will blend the efficiency of AI with human expertise to create holistic experiences. In short, AI isn't here to replace the magic of travel—it's just helping us share it more effectively.

53% Indians seek wellness trips

From affordable destinations and eco-friendly travel choices to experiential journeys, Indian travellers are embracing a broad array of options. Skyscanner's Travel Trends 2025 report reveals a vibrant picture of evolving Indian travel preferences.



Janice Alyosius

Indian travellers are increasingly drawn to popular international hotspots and lesser-known destinations, blending adventure with affordability, reveals the Skyscanner Travel Trends 2025 report, which highlights emerging patterns and preferences shaping Indian travel choices. The report signals a shift towards value-conscious, immersive, and sustainable travel. More than 60 per cent Indians are keen to explore off-the-beaten-track locations, motivated by a desire to avoid crowded areas and enjoy a more authentic cultural experience, it reports.

Trending destinations

Destinations like Georgia, Uzbekistan, and the Balkans are witnessing a significant rise in popularity, with an estimated 30 per cent year-on-year increase in searches for flights to these regions. Similarly, Southeast Asia remains a favourite, with places like Vietnam and Cambodia appealing to Indian tourists thanks to their affordable yet unique offerings. Vietnam, for instance, saw a 25 per cent increase in interest among Indian travellers in 2024, a trend set to continue into 2025.



Art-Venture & Gami-Vacation

Experiential travel is gaining momentum among Indian tourists, with over 40 per cent expressing interest in art-inspired journeys and gaming-themed getaways, referred to as "Art-Venture" and "Gami-Vacation". This shift is particularly strong among millennials and Gen Z, who prioritise activities that foster creative exploration.

Sustainability takes centre stage

Sustainability is rapidly moving to the forefront for Indian travellers, mirroring a global trend towards responsible tourism. The report indicates that 45 per cent of Indian travellers now consider the environmental impact of their travel

decisions, opting for eco-friendly accommodations and low-carbon travel options. Eco-conscious destinations like Costa Rica and Bhutan resonate particularly well with this demographic.

Astro-Adventurers

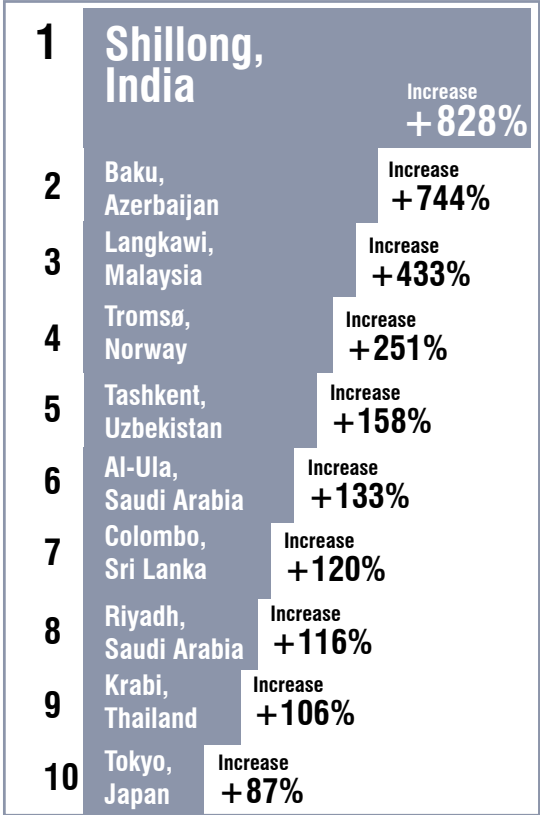
Astro-tourism is emerging as an intriguing trend, with 26 per cent of Indian travellers interested in experiences like stargazing, meteor showers, and solar eclipses. Destinations offering clear skies and astronomical events—such as Ladakh in India and the Atacama Desert in Chile—are capturing the imagination of Indian adventure seekers. With an enthusiasm for space-themed tourism and night-sky destinations, Indian locations like Spiti and Ladakh are expected to see growing interest among domestic tourists seeking celestial experiences.

Best value destinations

Budget travel remains crucial for the Indian market, and the list of best-value destinations suggests options that combine affordability with quality. Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and South America are popular choices for Indian travellers wanting to maximise their budget. Over 55 per cent of Indian travellers cite affordability as a top factor, with



Southeast Asia remains a favourite, with places like Vietnam and Cambodia appealing to Indian tourists thanks to affordable offerings



Wellness travel

Wellness travel is captivating Indian travellers, with 53 per cent planning to prioritise wellness-focused trips that support mental and physical rejuvenation. Dubbed "Reset Jetters", this group seeks destinations that offer relaxation and mindfulness, such as yoga retreats, spa resorts, and wellness escapes in local and international locations. The report projects a 10 per cent growth in wellness tourism among Indian travellers in 2025, with popular destinations including Bali, Kerala, and the Himalayas, providing packages that blend relaxation with cultural enrichment. For travel brands, wellness-focused offerings could become a unique selling point for those seeking to "reset and recharge".

interest in destinations like Vietnam and Cambodia showing double-digit growth.

AI and VR on the rise

The report underscores the transformative role of technology in travel, with Indian travellers showing a growing interest in Virtual Reality (VR) previews and AI-driven personalisation. About 47 per cent of Indian travellers expressed a preference for apps that customise itineraries based on personal preferences. Indian travel brands could benefit from adopting these technologies, such as VR-based destination previews and AI-curated itineraries, to enhance engagement and simplify planning for tech-savvy travellers.



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Sail with Disney from Dec 2025

Unveiling a new chapter in entertainment and travel, Disney Cruise Line announced the launch of its first Asia sailing – Disney Adventure, from Singapore on 15 December 2025, for which bookings will open from 10 December 2024.

Nisha Verma from Singapore

The grand launch of Disney's first cruise, catering specifically to Asian markets, offers an amalgamation of classic Disney storytelling with thrilling new experiences crafted for guests across the continent. Apart from announcing the dates of the sailing and bookings, the immersive theme zones created at the Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre saw the guests at the event enjoying the offerings of Disney Cruise Line first-hand even before the ship touching the shores of Singapore. With environments inspired by Disney, Pixar, and Marvel, the Disney Adventure is designed to offer an array of captivating activities and luxurious spaces tailored for families, couples, and solo travellers alike.

Singapore home port

The choice of Singapore as the ship's port is a strategic move, positioning Disney to meet growing demand in Southeast Asia. Singapore's connectivity, world-class infrastructure, and unique cultural landscape make it an ideal hub, not only for local travellers but also for guests from neighbouring countries like India and Indonesia. "Singapore is a dynamic city. It has one of the best airports in the world, excellent cruise infrastructure, and offers a blend of nature and cosmopolitan charm, making it a perfect base for the Disney Adventure," shared **Sarah Fox**, Vice President and Regional General Manager - Southeast Asia, Disney Cruise Line.

The cruise will run primarily three and four-night voyages featuring only days at sea, a choice that ensures travellers can fully immerse themselves in the Disney Adventure's magic without the interruption of port stops. Each detail on the ship reflects Disney's meticulous attention to guest experience, with the ship boasting



Disney Cruise Line Team at the Grand Reveal event

an extensive lineup of themed areas, innovative attractions, and exclusive dining options that promise to set a new standard for cruising in Asia.

Experiences galore

The company has left no stone unturned in designing Disney Adventure to be an extraordinary vessel for fans of all ages. Among its most anticipated attractions is the Ironcycle Test Run, the longest rollercoaster at sea, bringing Marvel's larger-than-life thrills to life in an adventure zone on the ship's upper decks. This area celebrates some of Marvel's iconic characters, including Iron Man, and promises to add adrenaline-filled excitement to the Disney experience.

In line with Disney Cruise Line's tradition of blending entertainment with innovation, Disney Adventure will feature an all-new Broadway-style production called Remember. The show, exclusive to the ship, is designed to dazzle guests with stunning visuals and storytelling that bring Disney's classic characters and narratives to life on stage.

Sharon Siskie, Senior Vice President and General Manager, Disney Cruise Line, said, "We are committed to delivering exceptional experiences that bring our special brand

of cruising and the best of Disney storytelling to new guests on new shores. When the Disney Adventure sets sail in December 2025, guests throughout Southeast Asia will have the opportunity to experience the magic of their favourite Disney, Pixar, and Marvel stories in their very own backyard."

Big on Indian market

The company recognises the potential of India as a significant market for the launch. India's affinity for Disney characters, coupled with its expanding middle class, positions the country as a promising demographic for luxury travel. When questioned about the anticipated mix of travellers, the Disney Cruise Line team shared that India, along with other Asian countries, is expected to contribute substantially to passenger demographics on the Disney Adventure. With offerings like luxurious staterooms and dining options that cater to diverse tastes, including renowned Asian cuisine, the cruise operator has carefully curated an experience likely to resonate deeply with Indian families and travellers.

For multi-generational families—a growing trend among Indian tourists—the Disney Adventure offers a blend of activities for each age group. Emphasising the ship's fo-

cus on family inclusivity Fox said, "The ship is the destination. From fun and interactive spaces for kids to relaxing venues for adults to unwind and entertaining places for families to enjoy together, guests will find endless adventures from bow to stern."

Disney Adventure is designed to offer captivating activities and luxurious spaces tailored for families, couples, and solo travellers

Thematic zones

The Disney Adventure is divided into seven uniquely themed areas, each providing a distinctive ambiance and experience for guests. The Marvel Landing, for example, will appeal to superhero fans, while Disney Imagination Garden promises a whimsical space filled with iconic Disney characters and surprises around every corner. Other highlights include the San Fransokyo Street and Wayfinder Bay, immersive environments inspired by popular Disney films. For discerning guests, the Concierge Lounge, inspired by Aladdin, will offer an exclusive retreat that blends luxury with an exotic, Middle Eastern ambiance.

Get ready

Bookings for Disney Adventure will open on 10 December 2024, and are expected to draw eager travellers from across Asia. Prices and specific sailing dates will be released soon. This new ship marks an important expansion for Disney Cruise Line.



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Removing baggage worries

TrackMate is designed to protect against loss, damage or delay of baggage during travel. The service includes guaranteed compensation of up to ₹66,000 per bag if it remains untraceable after 96 hours. This assurance removes the financial stress of replacing essentials, says Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego.



The issue of mishandled baggage is a significant concern among travellers. Can you share some insights on the current state of this problem?

Absolutely. Mishandled baggage is indeed a major issue. According to SITA, the global mishandled baggage rate spiked by 74.7 per cent in 2022, reaching 7.06 bags per thousand passengers. This increase is largely due to the resurgence of international travel post-pandemic and the operational challenges faced by airlines and airports. Out of the 28 million mishandled bags each year, 5 per cent are lost, 18 per cent are damaged, and 77 per cent are delayed. These figures highlight the need for an effective baggage tracking solution like our all-new real-time baggage tracking solution - Asego TrackMate.

Those are some big numbers. How exactly does TrackMate address the baggage mishandling?



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego

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most pressing issues for passengers with lost luggage.

Guaranteed compensation is certainly a unique aspect. Could you tell us more about how TrackMate keeps travellers updated on their luggage status?

email notifications for any changes in their baggage status, so they're constantly aware of its location and progress. This kind of proactive communication gives peace of mind, allowing passengers to focus on their journey, knowing their bags are in good hands.

That real-time tracking is bound to ease some worries. What does the purchasing process look like for TrackMate? Is it accessible to all travellers?

TrackMate is indeed accessible to all travellers as a bundled product with our Asego Plus Plan. However, soon we plan to offer it as a stand-alone solution, providing even more flexibility and value to our customers. Travellers can purchase it up until their flight's departure, which means even last-minute planners can now safeguard their baggage throughout their journey with ease.

How does TrackMate fit in with traditional travel insurance?

It is important to note that Asego TrackMate is an add-on service specifically designed to cover delayed or lost baggage. While it provides substantial compensation for mishandled luggage, it doesn't replace traditional travel insurance, which covers a broader range of issues like medical emergencies and cancellations. Instead, TrackMate complements travel insurance, offering an extra layer of protection focused solely on baggage.

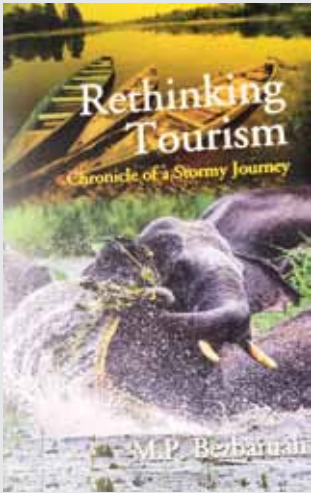
How does TrackMate enhance the offerings for travel agents and other industry partners?

TrackMate empowers travel partners by allowing them to offer a unique, reliable service that addresses one of the biggest travel pain points. It can be a valuable differentiator for the partners with the additional layer of customer care.

Disclaimer: Please review the terms and conditions thoroughly before making your purchase of Asego TrackMate.

Chronicle of a stormy journey

Rethinking Tourism - Chronicle of a Stormy Journey, written by MP Bezbaruah, former Tourism Secretary, Government of India, is a collection of many articles written during a period when tourism and hospitality sector was going through an unprecedented crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is his 5th book on tourism.



The articles in the book chronicle the dimensions of the problems as they emerged, the impact on income and employment, the struggle of the industry to stay afloat, the slow process of recovery and the resilience of the industry through the entire period. It is a narration of the experience of an unusual time and the history of global tourism and that of India.

The book also looks at the future challenges and opportunities, of sustainability, impact of fast changing technologies, of the responsibility of tourism and hos-

pitality towards the new doctrine of the "planet, people and prosperity". The book has been described as primer for tomorrow's young leaders around the world.



MP Bezbaruah
Former Tourism Secretary, Govt of India

ATM to focus on connectivity

Arabian Travel Market, to be held at Dubai World Trade Centre from 28 April to 1 May 2025, will underscore the importance of connectivity in shaping the tourism future with the theme 'Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow's Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity'.



Keeping in view the unprecedented growth in the travel and tourism sector globally, Arabian Travel Market 2025 (ATM 2025) is expected to play a pivotal role in shaping the future. Bringing together professionals and industry leaders from the leisure, MICE, luxury and corporate travel sectors, ATM provides a platform for networking, knowledge sharing, and business opportunities, allowing participants to explore the latest trends, innovations, and developments worldwide. Each year, ATM highlights specific aspects of travel.

This year's theme 'Global Travel: Developing Tomorrow's Tourism Through Enhanced Connectivity' will explore how the future of tourism is defined by connectivity across borders, industries and communities.

Commenting on the theme for ATM 2025, Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian



Travel Market, said: "Connectivity extends beyond technology.

Connectivity extends beyond technology. It also involves creating communities that serve as important centres for trade and tourism

It also involves creating communities that serve as important centres for trade and tourism. By working together and embracing innovation and better connectivity, ATM is paving the way for the future of travel. This ensures that tourism in the coming years is more sustainable, inclusive, and closely linked with global economic growth."

In July 2024, the Dubai Media Office (DMO) reported that the city had welcomed a record 9.31 million international overnight visitors in the first half of 2024.

According to the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), this figure represents a 9 per cent increase from the same period in 2023.

On a global level, the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTTC) predicts a record year of travel and tourism, with an economic contribution of US \$11.1 trillion.

According to the WTTTC, this represents 348 million jobs globally, and the sector is predicted to employ 449 million people globally in the next decade.



BATHING DATES:

1. Paush Purnima	- 13 th January, 2025
2. Makar Sankranti (1 st Shahi Snan)	- 14 th January, 2025
3. Mauni Amavasya (2 nd Shahi Snan)	- 29 th January, 2025
4. Basant Panchami (3 rd Shahi Snan)	- 03 rd February, 2025
5. Achala Saptami	- 04 th February, 2025
6. Magh Purnima	- 12 th February, 2025
7. Shri Mahashivratri	- 26 th February, 2025

Experience Spiritual Grandeur in Unmatched Luxury

At the Mahakumbh 2025, tent cities are being set up at the banks of the Sangam and key areas like Parade Ground, Arail, and Jhunsi.

The tent city will offer sheer luxury with three categories of accommodation to choose from.

Villa, Maharaja, and Swiss Cottage-the three types of accommodation will offer unique amenities to suit various preferences of the travellers.

The site at Parade Ground will have 55 tents/Swiss cottages, while the site at Jhunsi will spread over 2.5 acres and accommodate 200 luxury cottages, while a larger tent city at Arail will feature 2000 cottages across 25 acres, with deluxe, super deluxe, and luxury options.



Taiwan eyes 40k Indians in '24

Cindy Chen, Acting Director, Taiwan Tourism Administration, speaks about their target numbers from India this year and their ongoing attempt to have a direct flight between India and Taiwan.

Hazel Jain

Taiwan Tourism took a significant step to cater to the growing interest of Indian travellers by opening a Taiwan Tourism Information Centre (TTIC) in Mumbai earlier this year. The centre serves as a one-stop comprehensive resource hub, providing essential travel information and insights about Taiwan, making it easier for potential outbound travellers from India to plan their trips to the island nation.

Sharing arrival numbers from India, **Cindy Chen**, Acting Director, Taiwan Tourism Administration, based in Singapore, says, "The visitor numbers from India to Taiwan in 2019 were around 40,000. This year, from January to June, we have already received about 19,000 visitors from India. This is about 92 per cent recovery. We mainly get leisure and business travellers to Taiwan, but we believe India has high potential and we have a lot to offer like beautiful hotels,



Cindy Chen
Acting Director
Taiwan Tourism Administration

interesting venues, and great hospitality services. Our aim for this year is to touch 40,000 (visitors)."

Taiwan Tourism also aims to increase the number of days Indians spend in Taiwan. "Our Taiwan Tourism Information Centre also helps us interact with the local travel agents and with the airlines and helps us conduct training sessions to let the travel agents know more about Taiwan's tourism resources.

We will also have workshops in major cities in India and engage with the national and regional travel trade associations," Chen adds. Taiwan Tourism also has a long-standing programme to subsidise travel agents who send their clients to the destination. "We offer incentives for

This year, from January to June, we have already received about 19,000 visitors from India. This is about 92% recovery

both leisure and MICE groups. The minimum size for an incentive group is 30 pax and for leisure its only five pax. To apply for this, they need to send their documents to us," she said.

Ved Khanna new ADTOI President

Team United, led by Ved Khanna, made a clean sweep in the recently held ADTOI election for the 2024-2026 term. The newly elected team will concentrate on advancing India's travel destinations, Khanna said.

Surbhi Sharma

The Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI) successfully concluded its 2024 elections at Hotel Metropolitan & Spa in New Delhi recently, resulting in the appoint-

ment of a new Managing Committee consisting of six office-bearers and eight Managing Committee members. Ved Khanna, Managing Director, Tourwala Enterprises, has been elected as the new President of ADTOI for the 2024-2026 term, succeeding PP Khanna.



Ved Khanna
Managing Director
Tourwala Enterprises

The election process went smooth with all the six office-bearers elected unopposed. Ved Khanna earlier served as ADTOI Treasurer.

After his election as the ADTOI President, **Ved Khanna** said, "After assuming the office, we aim to organise a special drive to encourage our members to go for MOT approvals, make efforts with authorities for simplified GST structure for better trade practices, and open more ADTOI chapters."

The newly elected committee

- President** - Ved Khanna, Tourwala Enterprises, New Delhi
Senior Vice President - Rajat Sawhney, Rave Tours & Travels, New Delhi
Vice President - Ashish Sehgal, Hora Tourism & Consultancy Services, New Delhi
General Secretary - Dalip Gupta, DGS Travel House, New Delhi
Treasurer - Manoj Varshney, Tulsi Travels, New Delhi
Joint Secretary - Neetish Gupta, Sparrow Wing Travels, New Delhi
- EC Members**
Ashok Chanchlani, International Tours & Travels
Atul Singh, Travel Connection
Bashir Ahmad, Peaks Tour and Travels
DR Chouhan, Manka Holidays
Harish Verma, Reisen Tours India
Kuldeep Patel, Indus Vacations
Surinder Singh Jarial, Royal World Travels India
Vinay Ahuja, City Linkers Tours & Travels

Indians make 4% of Jumeirah's clientele

With the commitment to offer authentic Arabian hospitality to its customers, Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel is adapting numerous strategies to further enhance its business in the Indian market and aims to attract more travellers from India's growing tier II and III cities to Dubai in the coming year.

Amita Pandey

Jumeirah, a global luxury hotel company operating 26 world-class hotels and resorts across the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, offers exceptional experiences, irresistible for travellers looking for a majestic stay. From the iconic Jumeirah Burj Al Arab in Dubai and the luxurious Arabian palaces at Madinat Jumeirah, to its contemporary Maldivian island paradise at Olhahali Island, the all-villa luxury resort in Bali, and the art-inspired Jumeirah Capri Palace in Italy, Jumeirah's commitment to unparalleled guest experiences is evident in each property.

In an exclusive conversation with **Kirti Anchan**, General Manager, Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel, shared insights into the property's growth trajectory, its varied offerings, their strategies to woo the Indian market, and explains what luxury means for their customers.



Kirti Anchan
General Manager
Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel

Growth in 2024

Speaking about the continuous business growth, Anchan said, "Jumeirah had an exceptional growth in 2024 versus 2023. If you just talk about Dubai, it had 9 per cent growth in tourism in the first half of the year." He believes this growth will continue for the rest of the quarter and they will complete the year with a better performance than the last year.

New branding

He informed that Jumeirah has completed 25 years since its establishment, but now the new branding idea is to focus on the goal for next 25 years. "It is just not about logo change or the name change. We want to make sure that it matches the international standards, where everybody from different cultures come together and connect," he added. Diving into the brand's uniqueness, he said that delivering authentic Arabian hospitality to its guests is something that makes Jumeirah distinctive.

Importance of Indian market

Reflecting on India's importance as a source market, Anchan mentioned that India is pivotal for their business as 30 per cent population of Dubai consists of the Indian diaspora, leading to concomitant visits of Indian travellers. "In 2024, almost 900,000 Indians have come to Dubai. That is close to 10 per cent of the entire tourist population," he said. The growth of tier

II and III cities within India and increasing flight availability to Dubai from Indian cities, encourages Indian travellers, turning India into a potent market. "Right now, Indian travellers represent around 4 per cent of our business. Thus, for the

In 2024, almost 900,000 Indian travellers have come to Dubai, which is close to 10 per cent of the entire tourist population

last four years, we have repeatedly come to India to strengthen our relationship," Anchan revealed.

Travel patterns from India

Highlighting the usual travel pat-

terns witnessed by the brand from India, Anchan affirmed, "After COVID, the mindset of Indian travellers has changed. Now people want to travel more and they find a reason, whether it is a special occasion, a destination wedding or a corporate event. Dubai can cater to all these segments. I think that will continue to drive the market." He added, "One segment that is growing continuously is leisure. As we know Shah Rukh Khan (Bollywood actor) is the brand ambassador of Dubai, it is one more reason for Indians to explore Dubai and the leisure offered there," he shared.

In terms of corporate clients, he said, Gulf Information Technology

Exhibition (GITEX), held in Dubai, saw major participation from India. "So, whether it is conference or MICE, there is a continuous flow from India into Dubai, and with more flights coming into tier II and III cities, this potentially will just grow more," he added.

Incentives for travel agents

While the new generation of customers mostly uses big Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) for bookings, many travellers are still dependent on travel agents. "Therefore, when it comes to promoting the brand among travel agents, we meet them every year to promote our property and invite them to experience our facilities."

Unique features of the brand

- ❖ Loyalty Programme based on the spend, stay, points
- ❖ Exceptional experiences for top spending clients, such as a video shoot done on the helipad of Burj Al Arab, having afternoon tea at an opera in Madinat Jumeirah

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06 Days	602	424	379	268
08 Days	665	469	419	297

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	ADULT	YOUTH	ADULT	YOUTH
04 Days	539	379	339	240
06 Days	644	454	405	287
08 Days	697	492	439	311

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'Customers first' is Rail Europe's ethos

Valentina Cesani, CCO, Rail Europe, was recently in Mumbai to attend 'Family Day and Reward Recognition Day' programme, which aimed to inspire the team members. Cesani says that actively listening to customers and embedding their feedback into the organisation's philosophy and strategy is the key to success.



Hazel Jain

Talking about the Family Day and Reward Recognition Day programme, **Valentina Cesani**, Chief Customer Officer, Rail Europe, says, "It's a tradition for us. This is the third year that we are doing this; we are celebrating the best talent in our teams here in Mumbai in front of their families, with a bit of fanfare and recognise the talent among us. I'm also here to work with my new head of departments to improve further on our customer support," she says.



Valentina Cesani
Chief Customer Officer
Rail Europe

Tuning into the key word that is her raison d'être – customer support – Cesani adds that it's important to listen to the customer and strategise around them.

"We have a leitmotif, a word that goes around a lot, customer-centricity. But applying it and making it part of your core philosophy and strategy is not easy. We are trying

to make sure that we hear the customer, and we build our roadmap and adjust our existing tools and offers based on what our customers' feedback," she says.

Rail Europe's global customer support hub is strategically located in the Mumbai office, underscoring the company's commitment to prioritising customer needs.

And for Rail Europe, customer support plays a huge role. "What we have done since last year is cut down the size of the entry level supports, not reducing the number but subdividing them in focus groups. So, they have a smaller scope to manage, and they can really become experts in that. For example, Rail Europe supports about 230 different rail operators. Each one of them has their own conditions and characteristics. It's a lot of knowledge for one person to retain. If you cut down the 230 into seven, eight, 10 different groups, you have a chance for your team to become specialists on that topic or rail operator," Cesani explains.

Effectively, Rail Europe now has eight different customer support teams, each one specialising in a specific topic. "At the same time, we changed our anti-fraud team to go full 24x7 to support and get more empowered on the tools that we have and have a mix of AI and

live tools to protect our customers when they purchase through us," she says, underlining an emerging issue across industries.

Customer-centric approach is not just lip service. Rail Europe has also introduced some new trains and routes based on customer demand

Getting groups on trains

Rail Europe has also been encouraging trade partners to bring group tours on their trains. "It cuts down travel time. Traditional coach tours in Europe take longer. For instance, Paris to Lyon, a popular route, can be reached by train in about 2

hours and 15 minutes as against a bus that takes six hours," she says, adding, "Travel in Europe by train. Trains are convenient. Trains are fast. Trains are romantic. Trains are luxurious."

New products

Customer-centric approach is not just lip service. Rail Europe has also introduced some new trains and routes based on customer demand. "We noticed that there was a keen interest in Eastern Europe. So, we worked with our development team, our product team and engineers to connect better and

farther into the Eastern part of Europe. We have introduced quite a few new products this year. RegioJet trains are now available in Eastern Europe, and we added iryo, a new competitor to Renfe and Ouigo Spain, which opens up more possibilities for travellers," Cesani explains.

Rail Europe has also launched new routes with partners like ÖBB and DB, enhancing connections to Denmark, Croatia, and other parts of Eastern Europe—not just the Czech Republic but also Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Trains vs planes

Trains have a lot of benefits over planes. There are fewer luggage restrictions, provide more leg room and space, making it easier to travel with children. A one-hour flight can end up taking almost the whole day with airport wait times and travel from remote airports into the city centre. With trains, you arrive directly in the heart of the city. In France, short-haul flights are banned, so trains have become the go-to option for intercity travel. You arrive right in the city centre.

Hospitality leaders vocal for rate parity

Contd. from page 5

tial. Sarovar is on track to deliver over 50,000 room nights this year, largely fuelled by domestic demand, he revealed. With "a stable government, strong, steady policies, inflation in check", Bakaya expressed optimism that India's tourism environment is primed for significant expansion. However, Bakaya pointed out that the prioritisation of domestic travel may require inbound-focused operators to look towards niche markets like NRIs, medical, and religious tourism.

Rising demand for weddings

The growth of the wedding industry has led to intense demand for hotel space, often creating competition between weddings and inbound groups. "Today, because of weddings, it is difficult to get rooms or accommodation," said **Homa Mistry**, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours. This demand is particularly high in prime locations, such as the Golden Triangle and South India, where limited infrastructure restricts hotel capacity. Mistry pointed to a need for hoteliers to set aside a portion of their inventory exclusively for inbound clients, "There must be a small percentage in your inventory – five or



Homa Mistry
CEO
Trail Blazer Tours

10 per cent – that, come what may, even if there is a buyout, if there is a commitment already made, we will let it pass through for our international clients."

Parveen Chander, Executive Vice President, - Sales and Marketing- IHCL, discussed how IHCL is managing the surge in wedding demand. IHCL has implemented a policy of reserving 15 per cent of inventory out of buyouts, ensuring general availability for inbound clients even during peak wedding seasons. "For the whole financial year, we said that we are going to be careful with buyouts. That 15 per cent will be left off," he noted.



Ajay Bakaya
Managing Director
Sarovar Hotels & Resorts

However, Chander acknowledged that even this allocation can fill up quickly due to the first come first served nature of bookings, adding, "Sometimes that 15 per cent is also not enough because it's on a first come first served basis."

To address these issues, IHCL has invested in expanding its footprint, especially in wedding hotspots like Jaipur and Udaipur, which now have six IHCL properties combined.

Managing rate parity

The challenge of balancing high-demand periods for weddings with commitments to international clients has prompted hotel chains



Anil Chadha
Divisional Chief Executive
ITC Hotels

to implement strict rate parity and allocation policies. Sarovar Hotels, for instance, has made significant progress in this area. Bakaya shared that Sarovar's rate parity on net rates rose from 61 per cent in February 2023 to 84 per cent by August 2024, underscoring their efforts to maintain consistent rates across markets. This level playing field benefits inbound clients, as well as wedding and event guests, building trust and stability for long-term partnerships.

Expanding into new markets

To better manage the rising demand in traditional hotspots, hospitality leaders see a clear opportunity to



Satyen Jain
CEO
Pride Hotels Group

develop new destinations and purpose-built wedding venues. Bakaya advocated for "moving weddings to places like Bhopal and Indore, away from the Rajasthan, Kerala, and Goa scenario." He also highlighted the untapped potential of resort developments within a three-hour drive from major cities. "A resort which caters to weddings, conferences, and MICE events and doesn't interfere with inbound at all," Bakaya envisioned, suggesting that this approach could unlock new growth opportunities in regions with lower development costs.

Anil Chadha, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC Hotels, echoed similar

sentiments. "The wedding segment is on the rise. It's not going to stop," Chadha said. He urged the industry to maintain the value of India's offerings, saying, "Have faith in your own hotels, your own hospitality. This is our time. It will never come back." His appeal is for tour operators and hoteliers alike to avoid over-discounting.

Managing inventory during wedding seasons, sustaining commitments to inbound travellers, and expanding infrastructure are key challenges

Infrastructure expansion

Several leaders also underscored the long-term benefits of infrastructure expansion as a solution to meet growing demand. **Satyen Jain**, CEO, Pride Hotels Group, said that their company has set aside 15 per cent of its inventory to honour commitments to large events.

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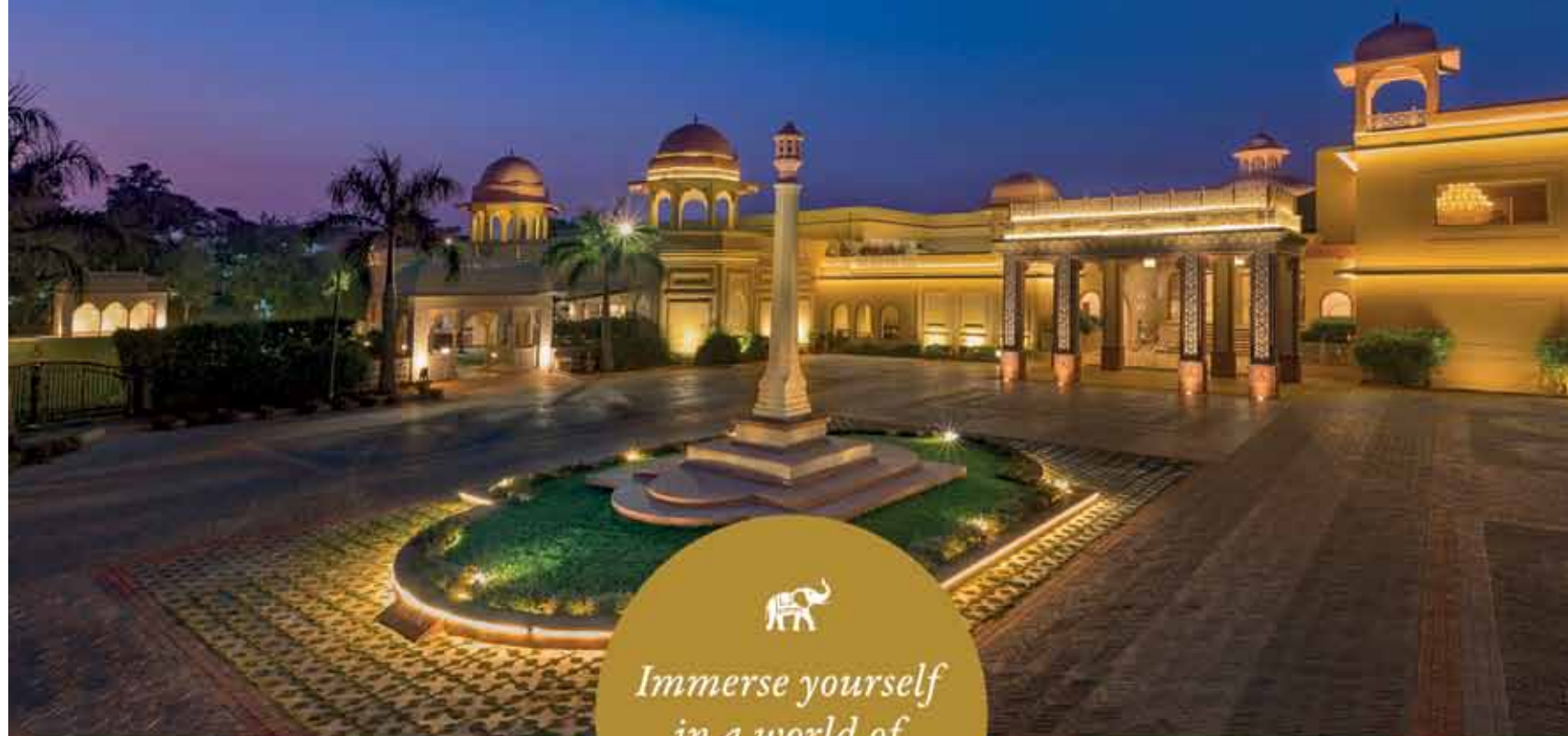
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AI facilitating tourism business

► Contd. from page 5



Sanjeev Mehra
President
Skål International India

“At Skål India, data and research form the backbone of our strategy, helping us lead in the ever-evolving travel industry and serve our members better. Tools like ChatGPT provide dynamic, data-driven insights that transform our planning and decision-making processes. Our members use ChatGPT not only for business insights but also for personal exploration. From analysing market trends to planning optimised itineraries, ChatGPT serves as a valuable support tool.”

“Technological advancements are always a boon, particularly tools like ChatGPT. In today's business landscape, data and strategy form the core of success, and the ability of AI to process and analyse data swiftly



Anil Kalsi
Managing Partner
Ambe World Travels

allows for accurate, actionable insights. This technology not only saves time and money but also sharpens our competitive edge. By using AI alongside experience, we can meet and exceed client needs.”



Sunil Menon
Country Manager – India
Tourism Fiji

“Post COVID-19 market research will not only depend on historical data but will also include an in-depth understanding of the individual markets. It becomes more critical today to recognise the manner in which information is delivered and consumed. Quality market research will help to keep our eyes on the larger picture, which would then facilitate us to find new market niches, along with potential new products and services. We are sure to see a transformation.”

“In the short run this doesn't seem to be a threat. Consumers will also get access and that will, to some degree, revolutionise online search. Travel advisors are already accustomed to being approached by



Pritish Shah
Founder
A Travel Duet

clients who have already performed searches to learn about travel options, prices, and more. ChatGPT may take that process to a new level. However, as it evolves, it can eliminate firms not adding real value.”



MP Deepu
Founder
SeniorWorld

“GPTChat, or conversational AI technology, in general, has the potential to significantly impact the travel industry, particularly in the area of customer service and support. By using chatbots and virtual assistants, travel companies can improve their customer service, personalised recommendations, and quick resolution of issues. Additionally, chatbots can help reduce customer service costs and increase efficiency by automating simple and repetitive tasks.”

“At Booking.com, we aim to deliver a world-class travel experience. This means harnessing technology to deliver the best traveller and partner experience while taking the friction out of not only planning, but during and



Santosh Kumar
Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka,
Maldives & Indonesia, Booking.com

post trip as well. Generative AI has the potential to accelerate efforts already long underway at Booking.com, including using machine learning and other technology to enhance experience for travellers.”



Reena Sachdev
Founder
Travel Arena

“ChatGPT is not a threat in the least for quality travel providers. In fact, it's just an added resource that enables travellers to go in-depth with detailed information on the latest offerings. It's nothing but another Google! Travel agents and the trade can use ChatGPT for business. When a new trainee joins the organisation and like all of us, they start at level zero, ChatGPT is a software that enables them to be faster in designing itineraries and understanding specific products in-depth.”

“There is no moving away from any new technology if one wants to be on top of one's business. We must keep ourselves updated to differentiate what is real information and what is fake and use it for our business



Sanjay Ghare
Founder & CEO
Vervotech

“I believe, AI language models like ChatGPT do not directly threaten the existence of value travel agents bring to the table. Still, they certainly eliminate the need for mundane, repetitive tasks travel agents do, such as travel planning and booking travel products. However, travel is an industry where 'end-user experience' could well be make or break for any company selling travel products. That is where human intervention will always be needed and appreciated by travellers.”

“To keep my company agile, we are building a solid on-ground organised network linking traditional (and famously unorganised) tour guides with partner hotels and local experience seekers. We view the AI 'threat'



Vimal Nadar
Senior Director & Head
- Research, Colliers India

“Data collation, accuracy, analysis and interpretation are all vital elements of strategic planning. In fact, data-driven research helps in setting measurable goals, identifying improvement areas, assessing effectiveness of strategies and anticipating potential challenges. Effective use of data also enhances budgeting and resource allocation, contributing to a project's long-term viability. Generative Artificial Intelligence is increasingly aiding research in improving efficiency.”

“Research and data are at the heart of every industry, driving brands to enhance experiences and fine-tune services. At Ayatana, we leverage valuable insights—such as our repeat guests' preferences for ameni-



Arun Iyer
Founder & MD
My Golf Tours

accordingly. Chat GPT is as useful a tool as it is dangerous if not handled well. At times, the information can be fake too. Before it can be put to use, one must learn about it. Like how we know the products we sell.”



Namit Jain
Founder
Strode Experiences

as something that keeps us on our feet and not get lazy. Because our customers can generate their own itineraries online, we have to stay one step ahead and offer them better on-ground, rooted, son-of-the-soil experiences.”



Vishal Vincent Tony
Managing Director
Ayatana Hospitality

ties like spa treatments, dining options, and many more—to continuously elevate their stays with minimum involvement from the guests in sharing their choice of food and other available services post-onboarding.”

Contd. on page 26 ►

Minor Hotels completes 3-city show

Minor Hotels Group recently concluded a three-city India Roadshow - Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and New Delhi. The show had a mix of interesting hotels from various parts of the world under its myriad brands including Anantara, Avani, Elewana, and NH Hotels. The group is gearing up to open its much-awaited Jaipur property later this year.



GPS launches app for travel fraternity

Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) organised a two-day event in Kochi (Kerala) to empower the travel fraternity through knowledge sharing and provide networking opportunity to generate business. More than 500 buyers and 40 exhibitors participated in the event, which also saw the launch of GPS iConnect app.



Surbhi Sharma

Global Panorama Showcase (GPS), spearheaded by its Founder & MD **Harmandeep Singh Anand** and CEO **Raju Akolkar**, once again returned to Kochi recently, bringing together travel industry professionals from across India and beyond. Now in its eighth year, GPS has become a vital platform for networking, knowledge-sharing, and business growth. The two-day event, held at Crowne Plaza Kochi, offered a wealth of opportunities for the attendees, with over 500 buyers, 40 exhibitors taking part. It also saw the launch of a cutting-edge technology, designed to transform how industry professionals connect and operate.

GPS iConnect

A highlight of the event was the introduction of GPS iConnect app, an innovation that Anand sees as a revolutionary tool for the travel



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Founder & MD
Global Panorama Showcase

industry. Available on both iOS and Android, GPS iConnect empowers users to seamlessly connect with industry professionals, not only at GPS but also at global trade events and client meetings. "With over 50,000 users already engaged since the inception of GPS in 2013, the app is the future of networking," he said. The app integrates contact sharing, allowing users to access exhibitors, buyers, and suppliers

at any event worldwide—all in a paperless, digital format.

As the industry shifts towards digitalisation, GPS iConnect eliminates traditional business cards and manual registrations, simplifying how attendees interact and share information. "The app is easy to



With over 50,000 users engaged since the inception of GPS, the app is the future of networking. The app integrates contact sharing

use. It saves time and resources, letting attendees focus on making valuable connections. We are excited to bring this innovation to

Kochi, especially as the industry continues to move in this digital direction," he shared.

Global connections

Explaining the selection process of exhibitors participating at the event, Anand said, "The exhibitor selection process for GPS Kochi is uniquely tailored to the regional market needs, offering products and services that provide growth opportunities for travel businesses. From tourism boards to DMCs (Destination Management Companies) and technology providers, the event showcases a range of suppliers who empower travel professionals to increase revenues and elevate their services." Among this year's participants were South Africa and Spain Tourism, as well as innovative tech products like DoubleTick for WhatsApp communication and ITQ for visa services.

Industry knowledge

This year's GPS event placed a strong emphasis on educa-



Raju Akolkar
CEO
Global Panorama Showcase

tion and industry empowerment. "With the travel industry constantly evolving, GPS aims to help attendees stay informed and adaptable. Through 13 engaging sessions, attendees can explore a wide range of topics, from destination education on South Africa and Spain to the latest in travel technology, including future-oriented solutions like NDC for airlines and TTP for India's Char Dham Yatra," Anand said.

A centrepiece of this year's educational offerings was the Edwin programme, in collaboration with South Africa and Spain Tourism, which enables attendees to experience these destinations first-hand, deepening their understanding and



We want to ensure that our attendees are well-equipped to meet their clients' needs and the app is designed to make that possible

fostering stronger client relationships. Akolkar said, "We want to ensure that our attendees are well-equipped to meet their clients' needs and the app is designed to make that possible."

Infra boost for Bintan Resorts

Located just an hour's ferry ride away from Singapore, Bintan Resorts is gearing up to reclaim its place among the Indian travellers. With significant infrastructure upgrades underway in Singapore, including a new international airport, the destination is highlighting its luxury offerings to tap into the vast potential of the Indian market.



Hazel Jain from Bintan

Bintan Island has been making big efforts to re-familiarise the Indian market with what it has to offer. And everything is working in tandem for this to happen – while Singapore's Changi Airport is easing the transfer of passengers going onward to Bintan Resorts, the Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal in Singapore is currently undergoing a US \$14.9 million upgrade in stages to modernise its facilities and expand its passenger capacity by 20 per cent.

Sharing what Bintan Resorts has to offer, **Abdul Wahab**, its Chief Operating Officer, says, "One of our main focus areas will be to work closely with the travel trade partners for promoting the island to their clients. Sports tourism is one of the things we want to highlight. This means mass sports, such as marathons, triathlons,



Abdul Wahab
Chief Operating Officer
Bintan Resorts

Iron Man, bicycle race, and, of course, golf. We want to offer what Singapore does not. These large sporting events cannot be done in Singapore, but Bintan is perfect for them. You can ride a bicycle for 100 kilometres and not see one traffic light. We also want to develop more hotel inventory. Bintan Resorts has about 2,800 hotel keys right now, including Four



Rakesh Khetrapal
Founder & Executive Director
Pacific Trails

Points by Sheraton Bintan; Lagoi Bay that opened last February; Indigo and Holiday Inn are ready, and Mövenpick will open by end of the year. This will translate to about 1,200 keys. Bintan Resorts' plans to add another 3,000-4,000 keys in the next three to four years."

While the destination is making every effort to offer the best it can



Ratna Wahyuni
General Manager
Natra Bintan Tribute Portfolio Resort

offer to tourists, the sellers are also going all out to tap the full potential of the Indian market. As the preferred DMC for Bintan Resorts, **Rakesh Khetrapal**, Founder & Executive Director, Pacific Trails, explains what his team is focusing on right now to connect with the Indian travel trade. "Right now, the India market perceives Bintan Resort as a premium, up-market

product because there is a ferry involved from Singapore or because of the hotels here. Having said that, it is still cost-effective destination. Pre-COVID, we used to receive a reasonably good number from India considering that this island only entertained about 2.3 million visitors in 2019. We want to double the 2019 numbers in the next two years. This destination has a huge potential when it comes to the Indian market. We are in talks with Kesari Tours, Veena World, MakeMyTrip, Thomas Cook India, and SOTC. What travellers can't do in Singapore they can do here – it's a great complementary destination to Singapore. I am promoting Bintan aggressively for two-three-night stay. I also have an active inquiry for a group of 500 pax from Ahmedabad for a MICE group," he reveals.

The hotels in Bintan Resorts are also ready to welcome Indian clientele. **Ratna Wahyuni**, Gen-

eral Manager, Natra Bintan, Tribute Portfolio Resort, says that almost 80 per cent of the Indian guests that stay at her hotel come via Singapore.



Tanah Merah Ferry Terminal in Singapore is undergoing a US \$14.9 million upgrade in stages to modernise its facilities

"India swings between number two and three for us when it comes to the international market. Singapore leads, followed by our domestic market, Indonesia, and then India tied with South Korea," explains Wahyuni.

Swosti Puri targets high-end tourists

Under the leadership of JK Mohanty, CMD, Swosti Group, the brand is not just building hotels, it is transforming the tourism landscape of Odisha. With the inauguration of Swosti Puri, the city's first 5-star hotel, the brand's focus on high-end hospitality and sustainable tourism presents a much-needed boost.



Nisha Verma

The hospitality journey of **JK Mohanty**, CMD, Swosti Group, began at Delhi University, where his initial plans for civil service gave way to a passion for hospitality. "I noticed the quality of hotels in Delhi and thought, why not bring that to Bhubaneswar?" he recalls. With a modest loan of ₹1 lakh from his mother, he opened the Swasti Grand in 1984. This marked the inception of a journey that would see the Swosti Group flourish into a leader in Odisha's hospitality sector.

Now, the recent opening of Swosti Premium Beach Resort, Puri in 2024 marks a significant milestone in Odisha's hospitality sector. "Most tour operators were saying Puri lacked high-end accommodations. With the new property, we have addressed that gap," he says. The hotel offers world-class amenities, expansive



JK Mohanty
CMD
Swosti Group

banquet spaces, and the capacity to host multiple large events simultaneously. "This hotel has already hosted two major medical conferences with more than 700 attendees, and we have several weddings and conferences booked through the next year," adds Mohanty. With the upcoming IATO convention scheduled to be held at Swosti Puri in 2025, the hotel is poised to become a



hub for both leisure and business tourism, offering much-needed facilities for high-end travellers.

Filling the gap

Swosti Puri is not just a luxury hotel; it represents a strategic move to fill a void in Odisha's tourism offerings, Mohanty emphasises. High-end tourists, who often skipped Puri in favour of Goa and other established

destinations, now have a compelling reason to visit. "Puri was lacking in good, premium accommodations. Now, with Swosti Puri, we can attract high-end tourists who have been going to Goa and other oversaturated destinations. We are creating an alternative that has everything—a beautiful coastline, rich culture, and now, top-tier hospitality," he explains.

Infrastructure and promotion

Mohanty underscores the importance of robust government support. "The biggest challenge for tourism in Odisha is infrastructure. We need better connectivity, roads, and world-class tourist attractions to keep people in the state for longer," he asserts.

Eco-friendly expansion

Looking beyond luxury, Swosti

Group's future is deeply tied to eco-tourism, claims Mohanty. His plans include new resorts in Satpada, Bhitarkanika, and Satkosia—exotic forest destinations

Biggest challenge for tourism in Odisha is infrastructure—it needs better connectivity, roads, and world-class tourist attractions

that could position Odisha as a top eco-tourism destination. "These areas are rich in wildlife and natural beauty, but they lack quality accommodations. We are planning eco-friendly resorts," he says.

Nok Air celebrates Mumbai launch

Thailand-based low-cost carrier Nok Air has started its daily non-stop flights between Bangkok (DMK) and Mumbai (BOM) from 28 October 2024. It will use Boeing 737-800 aircraft, accommodating 189 passengers. It recently celebrated this launch with agent partners in Mumbai, highlighting its various products and discussing future plans.



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LONDON

A 50-member delegation of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, comprising representatives from State Governments and airlines, inbound tour operators and hoteliers, took part at the World Travel Market (WTM) London 2024, held from 5–7 November. India's cultural diversity and tourism products were showcased at the event.



'Travesla to redefine GSA services'

Salil Nath, Founder and CEO, Travesla, brings his extensive experience with Etihad Airways to the forefront by setting up the GSA enterprise with an aim to redefine the industry standards. He explains how his time at Etihad shaped his vision for Travesla and how the new venture is positioned to deliver true value to the aviation industry.

Janice Alysius

Salil Nath, Founder and CEO, Travesla, who served Etihad Airways for 12 years managing the Indian subcontinent region, says that his extensive experience with the airline laid the foundation for a new approach in the GSA landscape. "While buying GSA services sitting on other side of the table, I noticed that the value being added was often minimal. Legacy issues, a lack of fresh talent, and a dearth of aviation professionals meant that GSAs were missing the mark," he says, reflecting on his tenure at Etihad.

The industry, Nath observed, is accessible due to low capital barriers, but the challenge lies in genuinely adding value. "It's about the true intent to make a difference, which is where my decision to launch Travesla began," he explains. With Travesla, Nath is focused on offering a comprehensive approach to



Salil Nath
Founder and CEO
Travesla

airline representation that extends beyond traditional sales. "True representation doesn't mean just pushing sales numbers. It's about becoming an extension of the airline itself within specific markets," he emphasises.

According to Nath, premium revenue streams, such as corporate travel, business and first-class

bookings, student travel, and high-quality leisure, are key drivers for airlines. "The price-sensitive bookings tend to come naturally, but it's the premium revenue that requires focused expertise, and that is what we are committed to delivering at Travesla," he explains.

Travesla aims to differentiate itself by building a 360-degree ecosystem to support airline clients. "We have an in-house marketing and PR team that amplifies our clients' brands across the country, and this is included within our core service offering," Nath says. Travesla also specialises in corporate travel, leveraging strong relationships with top corporate clients in the region. "If an airline has a GSA handling trade but lacks corporate expertise, we can take on that segment to bring high-value business into the fold," he emphasises.

Beyond sales, Nath believes in the importance of regulatory or



"aeropolitical" expertise. "Aviation is a highly regulated sector, and obtaining the right permissions and licences is critical for efficient and scalable operations. We bring significant experience in this area, which is indispensable to our clients," he says.

Nath's long-term vision for Travesla goes beyond providing traditional GSA services; he aims to elevate the GSA's role in the market. "Today, a GSA is often seen as a lower-tier option if an airline doesn't

operate directly in a market. We want to change that perception and set a benchmark where airlines view GSAs as equally effective as having their own direct set-ups," he says. "Our goal is for GSAs to be as trusted as an in-house team, bringing real presence and market insight," he adds.

While Travesla is firmly grounded in the aviation sector, Nath is also keen to expand into non-air industries. "We see significant opportunities in supporting non-air

clients—helping them establish partnerships with airlines and secure beneficial deals for niche markets," he reveals. Travesla's diverse client base has rapidly expanded to include sectors like

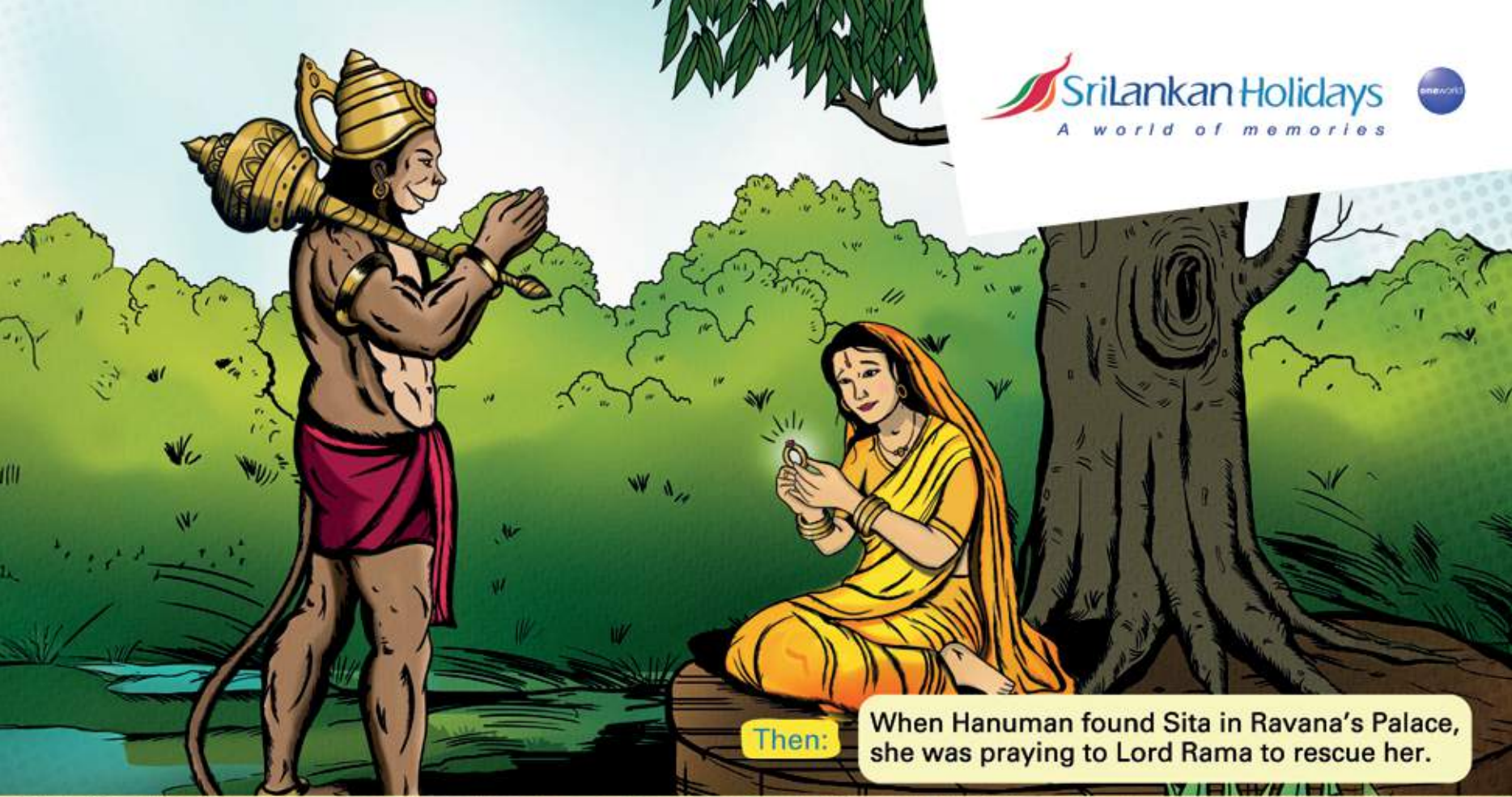
The price-sensitive bookings tend to come naturally, but it's the premium revenue that requires focused expertise in business

fintech and telecom. "These are industries that need representation to scale, and we are in a position to support them on the trade and corporate sides," he underlines.

Heritage Village showcases add-ons

Heritage Village Resort and Spa, Manesar, recently hosted an exclusive evening for senior members of the travel industry to celebrate partnerships and showcase the resort's latest renovations. The event, hosted by Arjun Sharma, Chairman, Select Group, offered immersive experiences, flaunting the blend of modern luxury and Rajasthani architecture.





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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
18	JNTO Roadshow-Delhi	10:30 am
18-19	Belgium Travel Expo 2024	11:00 am
19	Malaysia Tourism Webinar	12:00 pm
19	Czech Travel Market 2024	9:00 am
19	Universal Tourism Exhibition 2024	9:00 am
19	Business Events Expo 2024- New Zealand	9:00 am
19	Ibtm World 2024-Spain	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
22-24	India Travel Mart 2024-Jammu	9:00 am
22-24	Tourism Fair Varanasi 2024-Varanasi	1:00 pm
22-24	Global Conference on Hospitality and Tourism Management 2024	1:00 pm
25-27	Qatar Travel Mart	10:00 am
25-27	Indian Travel Expo 2024- Bengaluru	11:00 am
27	Oman Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
29-1 Dec	India International Travel Mart Pune 2024	11:00 am

Sarova eyes MICE, wedding biz

Sarova Hotels & Resorts is poised to expand its presence in the Indian market, shifting focus beyond leisure travel to tap into the growing demand for MICE and destination weddings. The group has made significant investments in cutting-edge technology.

Hazel Jain

Mita Vohra, Board Director, Sarova Hotels & Resorts, met travel partners at the group's recent roadshow in Mumbai and expressed gratitude for their support. "We want to thank the city that brought us to India, and now we can see a lot of other cities excited about Kenya and Africa in general. It's been super exciting to grow our business here. We have taken our focus on India to another level, and we have grown substantively every year," she said.



Mita Vohra
Board Director
Sarova Hotels & Resorts

Sarova Hotels participated in the OTOAI convention that took place in Kenya a few years ago, which had an incredible domino effect in popularising their properties in India. "Our higher category rooms such as our club tents have gotten very busy. We are really seeing an escalation in volume, in people knowing that now they have to pre-book their hotel before visiting Kenya, and not just 10 days in advance; it has become a very popular destination among Indi-

ans. We are also seeing guests visit two or three times in a year, repeating their stays with us," Vohra revealed.

She said that Kenyans are intrinsically warm and hospitable, and they now understand the needs of the Indian market. While leisure is big from India, Vohra wants to expand into the MICE and the wedding space from India.

Making inroads into MICE
Among other hotels, the group

has the Sarova Mara Game Camp, the Sarova Lion Hill Game Lodge, the Sarova Shaba Game Lodge in the north, Sarova Whitesands Beach Resort & Spa Mombasa, and Sarova Maiyan in Nanyuki Town, which largely cater to the leisure segment. "We also have properties that are great for MICE in Nairobi City, we have the Sarova Stanley Nairobi heritage property, which is the oldest hotel in Kenya. The Queen stayed there, and several celebrities from India have stayed there. We are now looking to extend into MICE. That segment is very important for us because we have a large property and huge inventory with five swimming pools, beautiful spa, white sand beaches, and beautiful beach bay experiences," Vohra added.

Perfect for Indian weddings
Sarova Hotels & Resorts, which has Aviareps as its sales and PR representative in India, also wants to focus on destination weddings from India. "Kenya is so beautiful, and we have strong banqueting facilities. So, we are really looking to grow that market. We have invest-

ed in technology, where we can showcase the event planners exactly what the décor will look like. It just takes things to a whole other level of how you present to the client. We are starting to do a lot of content about the wedding set-ups that we can offer, and the gala dinners so that people can see our offerings," Vohra explained.

We have invested in technology, where we can showcase the event planners exactly what the décor will look like. It just takes things to a whole other level

New at Sarova
This year the group has added Sarovar Maiyan in Mount Kenya – a beautiful property that offers a lot of experiences, including horse riding and mountain climbing.

(Fitur) celebrates 45 years

FITUR 2025 promises to be a significant event for the tourism industry, facilitating collaboration, innovation, and the sharing of expertise that will shape the industry future. Robust participation is expected for the event.

TT Bureau

FITUR 2025, celebrating its 45th anniversary, will take place from 22 to 26 January at IFEMA MADRID, bringing together the global tourism market. With Mexico as Partner Country, it promises a dynamic platform for business and knowledge exchange.

As the premier international tourism event, FITUR 2025 is poised to continue its legacy of growth and innovation. Organised by IFEMA MADRID, this year's edition will build on a positive global tourism recovery, with international tourist numbers projected to rise by 20 per cent compared to 2023. The fair will host representatives from the full spectrum of the tourism industry, including destinations, accommodations, transport, agencies, technology firms, and institutions, offering valuable insights and trends. With Mexico as Partner Country, FITUR 2025 aims to generate new



Maria Valcarce
Director
FITUR

business and enhance the exchange of knowledge. The event will focus on networking, visibility, direct sales, and professional training, providing a vital platform for companies and destinations to elevate their presence globally.

The fair's ten specialised sections will cover crucial aspects of the tourism industry, such as accessibility, cruising, sports tour-

ism, diversity, technology, and sustainability. Maria Valcarce, Director, FITUR, stressed, "After a 2024 where the trade fair broke records in all its parameters, we hope that at this new edition,

We'll continue to consolidate our global influence thanks to the support of public and private sectors and that of all others in the value chain

which is so special because it is the 45th anniversary, we will continue to consolidate our global influence thanks to the support of the public and private sector and that of all the players in the value chain."

Data analytics key to planning

Contd. from page 19



Sanjay Arya
CEO
KFT Corporation

"I don't view ChatGPT as a threat to agents in the luxury sector. This is because our clients will seek tailor-made itineraries, and they admire the exclusivity we offer, which is a by-product of our decades of experience and expertise. Since every AI-generated content platform, including ChatGPT, delivers on prompts, it is important to decipher what part of the job is fit for an AI to handle and what requires human intervention."

"For me and our team, data analytics and research play a crucial role in planning our sales, marketing, and operational strategies. I believe, having a solid understanding of our current data and making accurate projections is



Dheeraj Ranjan Kumar
Director
Balitrip Wisata

essential for shaping our future strategies. The data we already have can reveal trends in various areas like sales figures, helping us in planning growth strategies."



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

"In today's age, data has become an integral part of our living and plays vital role for any business to strategies and succeed. Data is pivotal to understand the consumer behaviour and expectations and accordingly helps businesses to create appropriate products and services. Chat GPT and Artificial Intelligence, if used in progressive manner, is the ultimate tool to help us achieve better results."

Compiled by TT Bureau

Mahakumbh 2025: Where Spirituality Meets Tradition and Adventure



UTTAR PRADESH TOURISM



Since ancient times, saints across India have engaged in deep spiritual practices, or sadhana, striving to connect with the divine and praying for world peace. The tradition of collective prayer and unity runs deep in Indian heritage and continues today through vibrant festivals and spiritual gatherings. Of these, the Mahakumbh stands out as the pinnacle, a sacred event occurring every 12 years that is among the world's largest spiritual gatherings.

Millions of pilgrims from around the world gather at Prayagraj, the sacred confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers, known as the Triveni Sangam. This revered gathering is steeped in the symbolism of ancient Indian texts, which recount the cosmic battle between gods and demons for the elixir of immortality. Bathing in the waters of this confluence during Mahakumbh is believed to purify the soul, bringing devotees closer to salvation and liberation.

Mahakumbh is hosted in rotation between Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik, and Prayagraj every 12 years, creating a powerful blend of spirituality and cultural diversity. This monumental event serves as a unique bridge to inner transformation and offers visitors a deep look into India's living traditions, making it a pilgrimage unlike any other.

In January 2025, Prayagraj will once again welcome the Mahakumbh, with extensive preparations already underway. The Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC) is establishing a "tent city" at key areas like Arail Ghat, Parade Ground, and Jhunsi, offering around 2,000 tents in categories from basic to luxurious, and ensuring that pilgrims can enjoy both comfort and spiritual retreat. Moreover, special accommodations are being made for the Akhadas representing different monastic orders; these spiritual organizations bring an added dimension to the Mahakumbh's sacred atmosphere.

One of the key rituals of Mahakumbh is the series of seven important snans, or ritual baths, each with its own deep significance. The first snan is scheduled for January 13th, known as Paus Purnima, a full-moon bath associated with the pursuit of moksha (liberation from rebirth). On January 14, the Makar Sankranti snan—the first Shahi snan, or royal bath—will occur, where spiritual leaders symbolically lead devotees in taking the holy dip to mark the sun's northward shift. Other major snans include Mauni Amavasya (January 29), Basant Panchami (February 3), Magh Purnima (February 12), and the grand finale on Mahashivratri (February 26), each representing unique blessings and significance on the journey to spiritual awakening.

In addition to these ritual baths, Mahakumbh offers visitors a rich cultural experience. A wide array of indigenous and local cuisines will be available, giving visitors the chance to savor the authentic flavours of the region. Complementing this is a series of yoga sessions, offering pilgrims a rejuvenating opportunity to align their physical, mental, and spiritual selves. Yoga, renowned as an integral part of Indian culture, will play a significant role in providing inner peace to all who attend the Mahakumbh.

Another beautiful cultural component of Mahakumbh will be the bhajan sandhyas, or evening devotional music performances, where the uplifting sounds of traditional music fill the air with tranquility. For those seeking adventure, Mahakumbh 2025 will have something special to offer: helicopter joy rides will give visitors an exhilarating aerial view of the grand Kumbh Mela grounds and the holy Sangam, providing a unique perspective on the enormity of this sacred congregation and the captivating landscape of Prayagraj.

Adventure lovers can also engage in water sports along the banks of the rivers. The area surrounding Prayagraj boasts a number of revered temples, including the famous Hanuman Temple and Mankameswar Temple, each adding to the city's spiritual depth. These sacred sites allow visitors to explore Prayagraj's rich cultural history and enhance their journey with moments of deep spiritual connection.

Together, these cultural and recreational elements transform the Mahakumbh from a traditional pilgrimage into a multifaceted celebration of India's cultural heritage. With activities and experiences for every type of visitor, Mahakumbh 2025 promises to be an enriching event that resonates with both domestic and international travellers, all converging on Prayagraj for a glimpse of India's unique spiritual heartbeat.



MOVEMENTS

TAMARIND GLOBAL

Mumbai

Tamarind Global has appointed **ALISHA SHIRODKAR** as the Vice President - Strategy. In her second innings with the company, Shirodkar will play a vital role at the helm to drive the company's growth strategy, enhancing business prospects, and making marketing increasingly immersive across all channels. She is a seasoned professional with diverse experience from her previous roles within the hospitality and travel industry. In her new role, she will focus on harnessing Tamarind Global's legacy, credibility, and vast industry expertise that the brand brings to achieve purposeful growth across the business verticals.



Tamarind Global, India's leading comprehensive travel solutions provider and DMC, has onboarded **SIDDHARTH KADRI** as the General Manager - Marketing. Equipped with a rich experience in marketing leadership for over a decade, Kadri has held the helm position in notable workplaces across industries - travel, digital media, and pharmaceuticals. In the new role, Siddharth will lead the diverse marketing initiatives to strengthen Tamarind Global's presence in travel and hospitality services domestically and internationally with products focused on bespoke leisure travel, MICE, corporate travel and weddings.



HILTON GOA RESORT, CANDOLIM

Goa

KSHITIJ JAWA has been named as the General Manager of Hilton Goa Resort, Candolim. A seasoned leader with two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Jawa's expertise spans across pre-opening projects, hotel operations, marketing, food and beverage, team management, and financial management. His leadership will be crucial in achieving the hotel's ambitious growth goals over the next few years focused around elevating hotel positioning, enhancing the guest experience, and fostering a culture of excellence. Jawa will lead the team across all aspects of the hotel operations, administration, and guest services.



LE MÉRIDIEN MAHABALESHWAR RESORT & SPA

Mahabaleshwar

Le Méridien Mahabaleshwar Resort & Spa appoints **FIROZ SARWAR** as the Associate Director of Sales. As an institute topper and a scholarship holder in MBA (Marketing) and BE (IT), Sarwar comes with a brilliant academic track record, along with a well-rounded professional experience of over 17 years in luxury hospitality sales and business development with some of the most prestigious brands in the industry. As a sales leader, he has been associated with renowned luxury hospitality brands, including Sofitel and The Leela. In his new role, he will oversee the strategic direction of the sales department.



THE LODHI

New Delhi

The Lodhi, New Delhi has appointed **SHEENA TANDON** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With a distinguished career spanning over 19 years in the hospitality industry, Tandon brings a wealth of expertise in hotel operations, sales, and client relationship management. In her new role, she will oversee the strategic sales, marketing, and business operations, and lead all aspects of the Sales & Marketing department. Her core responsibilities will include driving revenue growth, enhancing guest and employee satisfaction, and monitoring the financial performance of the department. Her career has seen her excel in various roles.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON GOA-PANAJI

Goa-Panaji

DoubleTree by Hilton Goa-Panaji appoints **NIKITA DUGADE** as Assistant Director of Sales. In her new role, Dugade will be spearheading on-ground operations, enhancing stakeholder relationships and overseeing sales operations in Goa. She brings with her a rich background from her tenure at Westin Goa, Westin Powai, JW Marriott Juhu, and Vivanta by Taj Goa among others. She has been recognised with several prestigious awards throughout her career, including 'Manager of the Year' at Westin Goa and for organising and executing the 'Shaadi by Marriott' campaign at JW Marriott, Juhu.



CONRAD BENGALURU

Bengaluru

Conrad Bengaluru has appointed **DHRUV HEMRAJANI** as the Rooms Division Manager. In this new role, Hemrajani will oversee Front office, Housekeeping and Spa functions at the hotel. With over 11 years of experience, Hemrajani brings a wealth of expertise in hospitality operations and business management. His background includes tenures at prestigious properties, such as Hilton & Hilton Garden Inn Embassy Manyata Business Park Bengaluru, and The Westin Sohna Resort & Spa. In his recent assignment, Hemrajani was Dual-Front Office Manager with Hilton & Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata.



CONRAD PUNE

Pune

Conrad Pune promotes **NAVEEN RAAJ** to the position of Rooms Division Manager. With more than 11 years of experience within the Hilton group, Raaj has showcased remarkable leadership and a passion for hospitality. His journey with Hilton began in 2013, during which he held significant roles at several prominent Hilton properties, including Hilton Chennai and DoubleTree Suites by Hilton Bangalore. His international exposure and commitment to excellence have been pivotal in enhancing guest experiences and operational efficiency at each property. In his new role, he will oversee both the Front Office and Housekeeping departments.



HYATT CENTRIC BANGALORE

Bangalore

Hyatt Centric Bangalore appoints **RAMESH MR** as the Human Resources Manager. In his new role, Ramesh will oversee various HR functions, including talent acquisition, performance management, employee engagement, and compensation and benefits. With a wealth of experience in the hospitality industry, he brings a strategic mindset and a passion for talent development. His professional journey has been marked by a consistent focus on human resources, with notable roles at hospitality companies like Hyatt Regency Trivandrum, Radisson, Marriott, Leela and Sarovar Hotel & Resorts.



BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield appoints **YVONNE RODRIGUES** as the Assistant Manager Hygiene. With three years of expertise in sanitation protocols, health standards, and hygiene regulations within hospitality environments, Rodrigues brings a fresh perspective and essential leadership qualities onboard. She started her career in 2021 with Radisson Blue Resort Cavelossim Goa. In her new role, Rodrigues will be overseeing hygiene operations across all departments, ensuring compliance with safety regulations, fostering a clean and safe environment, and driving staff development through targeted training programmes.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT MUMBAI

INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mumbai

Courtyard by Marriott Mumbai International Airport has appointed **SONAL RAM** as the Marketing and Communications Manager. With over seven years of experience in the hospitality industry, Ram brings a wealth of expertise in marketing, communications, and event management. In her last job, she worked with Lemon Tree Hotels. In her new role, she will be responsible for developing and executing innovative marketing strategies to elevate the hotel's brand visibility, drive footfall, and increase revenue.



HYATT CENTRIC BALLYGUNGE KOLKATA

Kolkata

ANWESHA BHATTACHARYA has been appointed by Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata as the Marketing Communications Manager. With over five years of experience in Marketing and Public Relations, Bhattacharya brings a wealth of knowledge and a proven track record in brand building and strategic communication. Her expertise spans a range of industries, making her an asset in driving the hotel's marketing and PR initiatives. She will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of the hotel's marketing, branding, and communications strategy and positioning Hyatt Centric Ballygunge as a preferred destination in Kolkata.



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McArthurGlen gets new platform

Sabina Piacenti, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets, was in India recently to thank the travel partners and also launch its McArthurGlen Hub – an online platform that will provide new revenue opportunities to the trade.

Harshal Ashar

Woven into the vibrant tapestry of the fashion industry, McArthurGlen has become a haven for the style-conscious shopper. With a rich heritage dating back to 1993, when it was founded by Kaempfer Partners, McArthurGlen has transformed the designer outlet shopping experience. The opening of Europe's first outlet, Cheshire Oaks, in the UK, marked the beginning of an extensive network that now spans 24 designer outlets across eight countries.

Sabina Piacenti, International Markets Manager, McArthurGlen Designer Outlets, was in Mumbai recently for its annual awards it presents to the top-performing travel partners. "Our annual Achievement Awards aims to thank our main travel partners

who have supported us throughout the year. We will discuss and develop



our strategy for 2025 with them which will continue to focus on leisure and MICE groups. However, for next year, we also want to look at attracting high-end customers from India and will, therefore, tap some of the key luxury travel agencies that offer bespoke programmes," she reveals.

She also had an interesting announcement for the trade – the launch of the McArthurGlen Hub – a technologically driven platform that will allow partners to book shuttle bus tickets to reach its centres, as well as add packages for shopping at net rates. "In this way, we aim to promote not only our centres but also to provide revenue opportunities to our travel partners. I believe, this will be a game-changer in our strategy," Piacenti says.

India performs remarkably
India scored well with another year of tremendous growth, she says, so much so that McArthurGlen is now forecasting an incremental growth of 15 per cent in tax-free spend. "Volumes are rising not only for the high-end customers but for groups of leisure and MICE as well. Among all our centres, I

would say Serravalle near Milan remains one of the favourites of the India market, but we see some surge in popularity for other centres like Designer Outlet Parndorf, located near Vienna, Venice, and even Rome, which has

We have been in the Indian market for the last three years, want to stay here and keep on investing because we recognise its huge potential

become extremely popular. Our newly-added centre Paris-Giverny in the west-north of Paris is also growing with patronage from the Indian customers and I think they are really appreciating this new centre. I believe, we witnessed an increase of the average ticket value this year and this is mostly from the high-end customers. I also must add that the lowering of the tax-free sale threshold in Italy brought great attention from

the Indian customers for the premium and mainstream brands," Piacenti adds.

Retail events a huge attraction
McArthurGlen has always been popular for its retail events. It will now have its amazing Black Friday event with incredible discounts up to 70 per cent across its brands. "This will be followed by the beautiful installation of Christmas with amazing Christmas trees with the lovely Christmas atmosphere. In December and January, there will be winter sales that nobody should skip. We have been in the Indian market for the last three years, want to stay here and keep on investing because we recognise its huge potential," she adds. For this, McArthurGlen has a strategy that will continue to focus mainly on the travel trade, along with digital marketing. She adds, "Our team on the ground will start addressing the trade for planning the itineraries for 2025."

McArthurGlen conducted several Fam tours this year with partners from India, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, and Turkey to its centres in Milan, Rome, Venice, Vienna, Salzburg, Paris, Malaga and Roermond.

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