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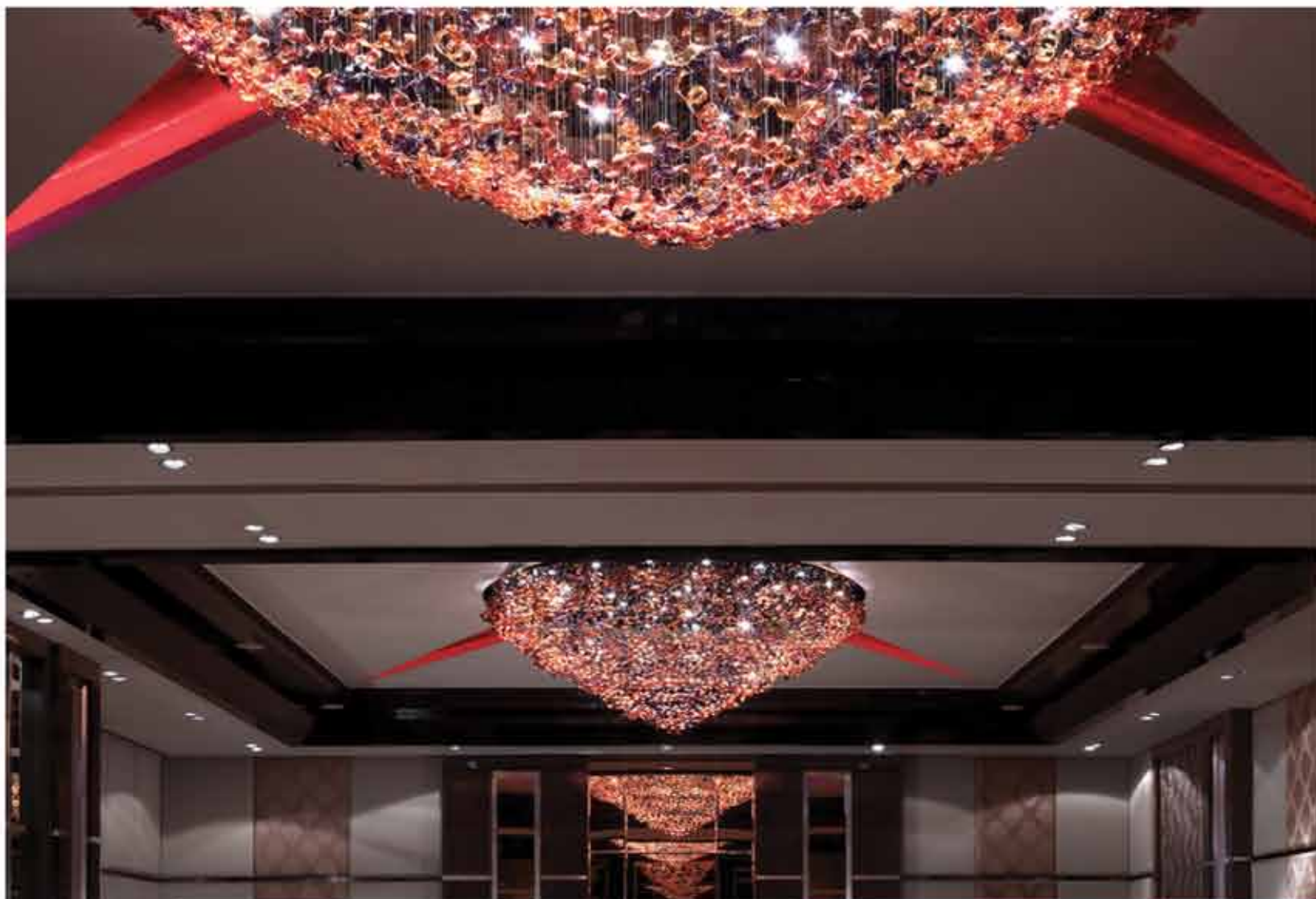


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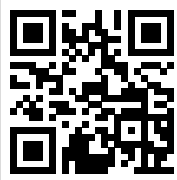
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# ‘There’s room for tourism growth’

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, highlights India’s potential for growth in travel and tourism sector and elaborates on the need for speedier visas, more direct flights, knocking down barriers and make travel easier and cost-effective.



**Suman Billa**  
Additional Secretary, MOT, GoI

**Surbhi Sharma**

**S**uman Billa, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, said India shares a strong bilateral relationship with other countries and travel between India and rest of the world is growing, but still there is scope for growth in the tourism sector. “There is a lot of room for growth and progress. Even though the numbers are good, from the tourism perspective,

India has not really capitalised on the potential we have,” Billa said. He added, “India is today one of the largest inbound markets. Judging by the potential of what we have, we are not doing enough and there is probably for much more headroom for us to capture.”

Commenting on what India can do to boost its tourism, Billa emphasised that the key will be knocking down barriers and making travel

**Judging by the potential of what we have, we are not doing enough and there is probably for much more headroom to capture**

easier. “To increase India’s potential for growth, we really need to see how we need to ramp up on aviation connectivity and ease the visa process to attract more foreign footfall. We also need to work on the cost of reaching India, as the cost is a barrier. There is a lot of work to be done to promote India as a top tourism destination,” he added.

Earlier, reacting to the travel industry’s demand for an active tourism

taskforce, Billa had said that there was a need for multiple taskforces to change the tourism landscape in India. “Taskforce is very important. We can have one taskforce which looks at the picture on a macro side, but we also need to have four or five taskforces which work on sector specific issues. For example, on the infrastructure side, how do we catalyse private investment along with public investment? I think the single important contribu-

tion that tourism sector will do to India is create meaningful jobs at all levels. I think there is a clear case for making four or five taskforces, but we will figure out how to structure them,” he had said.

## Next-gen disrupting travel?

Gen AI is the latest disruptor that is slowly changing the way we do business and the way we travel. **TRAVTALK** explores how young travel entrepreneurs are breaking the mould and driving innovation.



**Abhishek Sonthalia**  
Managing Director, Turtle Down Under

blends the efficiency of tech with the warmth of personal touch. TDU is at the forefront of these changes.

“Driven by its digital fluency and demand for instantaneous solutions, the new generation is reshaping the travel industry. Travellers expect seamless experiences delivered through a tech-driven process. They look for picture-worthy travels that go beyond mainstream destinations. They seek extraordinary, custom-tailored experiences, that don’t empty their wallets. In this tech-driven landscape, businesses must adapt by integrating technology while balancing it with human interaction and personalisation. It is essential to have a hybrid model that

Contd. on page 12 ▶

## ‘Promote women-led initiatives’

Mugdha Sinha, DG, MOT, GoI, emphasises the need for enhanced safety protocols, sustainability practices, and the promotion of women-led initiatives in India’s adventure tourism sector.

**TT Bureau**

**M**ugdha Sinha, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, while addressing a webinar by ATOAI Women’s Collective recently, talked about issues that are particularly relevant for travel agents and tour operators in the adventure tourism sector. There is an urgent need to implement robust safety protocols and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure the safety of both do-



**Mugdha Sinha**  
Director General, MOT, GoI

mestic and international travellers, particularly solo women, she said.

For those curating adventure experiences, Sinha advised to integrate sustainable practices into all aspects of their operations, from the selection of equipment to the engagement with local communities. “We must ensure that principles of sustainability are not just a part of our marketing but are deeply embedded in our practices,” she said.

Sinha suggested travel agents and tour operators to employ more women as trekking guides and in leadership roles.



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# Spiritual tourism grows in India

Spiritual tourism is a key contributor to the travel and tourism industry of the country, which employs more than 80 million people and generates significant revenue. India's spiritual tourism market is estimated to reach \$59 bn by 2028.

## Next-gen revs up travel

The travel industry is getting a serious makeover, thanks to the next generation. These young innovators are shaking things up by fully embracing technology, sustainability, and personalised experiences. Using Artificial Intelligence, Virtual Reality, and mobile apps, they are making travel planning smoother and more exciting than ever. Gone are the days of generic trips—today's travellers want unique, tech-driven journeys that feel tailor-made just for them.

But it's not just about cool gadgets. Sustainability is a big deal for the next-gen. In fact, the idea of luxury itself is changing—it's not just about fancy stays anymore. Now, it's about high-end experiences that also happen to be good for the planet. Social media and digital platforms? They are practically running the show when it comes to influencing travel choices. The next-gen is setting the pace, and they are pushing the industry toward a future that is more responsible, inclusive, and, of course, tech-savvy.

## Religious sites booming

India's spiritual hotspots are gearing up for something big—a wave of new hotels is rolling in, ready to welcome more visitors than ever. With more pilgrims and tourists making their way to these sacred places, the need for quality accommodations is skyrocketing. But this is not just about having a comfy place to crash; it's about creating a richer, more meaningful experience for everyone who visits. The buzz in these cities is all about blending tradition with modern comforts. It's a win-win—travellers get better options, and the local economy gets a boost with new jobs and more visitors.

As more of these developments come to life, religious tourism in India is getting a serious upgrade. These cities are set to become the next big thing in hospitality, offering a unique mix of cultural depth and modern luxury. The future here is looking brighter than ever, with hospitality playing a key role in the transformation.



Janice Alyosius

The spiritual tourism market in India will continue to grow, with the expectations of it reaching approximately US\$ 59 billion by 2028, according to a report by KPMG. The report, 'Sacred Journeys: Unfolding the evolution and growth of pilgrimage and spiritual tourism in India'.

The report explores the dynamic landscape of religious and spiritual tourism in India, highlighting its cultural, economic, and technological evolution. This sector plays a significant role in India's tourism industry, reflecting both historical richness and contemporary growth trends.



of domestic trips. In 2022, 1,433 million domestic tourists visited Indian pilgrimage sites, while the number of foreign visitors was 6.64 million. This represents a significant increase from 677 mil-

Daily visitors reached 6,000 to 7,000 in 2022, up from 4,000.

Key religious spots include Char Dham Yatra, Do Dham Yatra, Vaishno Devi, Venkateswara Temple, Golden Temple, Ajmer Dargah Sharif, and Velankanni Church.

making impromptu travel decisions more feasible.

### Emerging trends

The trend towards digital engagement is growing:

- ❖ Digital searches: In the past two years, searches for religious destinations in tier II and III cities have increased by 97 per cent. Specifically, searches for Ayodhya grew by 585 per cent, Ujjain by 359 per cent, and Badrinath by 343 per cent from 2022 to 2023.

- ❖ Explorer segment: This group seeks spiritual experiences beyond traditional pilgrimages, preferring lesser-known destinations.



**In India, spiritual tourism is expected to be worth around US \$59 by 2028, with over 100 mn people expected to be employed in this sector by 2030**

- ❖ Internet usage: Over 50 per cent of Indians are internet users, with the number expected to grow to 900 million by 2025.

The evolution of religious and spiritual tourism in India reflects a blend of historical reverence and modern advancements. The sector's growth is driven by cultural significance, economic potential, and technological integration.



Religious tourism is deeply rooted in India's cultural heritage. About 20 per cent of the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List are linked to religious or spiritual contexts. Among India's 42 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, 10 are categorised under religious heritage. The country is home to over 450,000 temples, mosques, gurudwaras, and churches managed by religious endowments and trusts.

### Potential of religious and spiritual tourism

Religious tourism is a major component of domestic travel in India, accounting for over 60 per cent

of domestic visitors in 2021 and 1.05 million in 2020.

### Post-Pandemic boom in spiritual travel

Post-pandemic, the demand for spiritual travel has surged:

- ❖ Golden Temple, Punjab: Daily visitors have increased to 100,000, compared to pre-pandemic levels.
- ❖ Vaishno Devi Shrine, J&K: Daily visitors rose to between 32,000 and 40,000 in 2022, up from 10,000 to 15,000 pre-pandemic.
- ❖ Guruvayur Devaswom, Kerala:

### Evolution of religious tourism

The concept of religious tourism is evolving to align with modern travellers' interests, emphasising meaningful, responsible, and transformative experiences. The digital influence is prominent, with travel bloggers and online reviews significantly affecting travel decisions.

- ❖ Digital pilgrimages and virtual reality: Post-pandemic, there has been a rise in virtual pilgrimages, including live streaming and online darshans. Many pilgrims now combine religious visits with wellness retreats and medical treatments.
- ❖ Connectivity and infrastructure: Improved infrastructure and government schemes have enhanced accessibility to pilgrimage sites,

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# IATO Convention pushes MICE in MP

Madhya Pradesh, known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse landscapes, is emerging as a MICE destination. As the state continues to refine and expand its tourism offerings, the IATO Annual Convention serves as a pivotal moment in showcasing the state's potential as a premier MICE destination.



Janice Alyosius

The 39<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention, hosted in the state, marks a significant step in showcasing Madhya Pradesh's potential as a key player in the MICE sector. **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh, underscored the event's importance in enhancing the state's tourism strategy. "Hosting the IATO Convention aligns perfectly with our vision to highlight Madhya Pradesh as a top destination for MICE and travel. This event is more than just a conference; it's a gateway to showcase our infrastructure, rich cultural legacy, adventure tourism, wildlife sanctuaries, and historical sites," Shukla remarked.

The convention, which drew over 1,000 participants, highlighted the state's capabilities to host large-scale events.

The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is actively working on converting heritage sites into luxury accommodations and expanding its hotel network. Over the next five years, more than six new hotels will open, with existing properties in Indore, Sagar, and Kuno-Palpur. "By expanding our hotel infrastructure and enhancing connectivity, we aim to offer a seamless and enriching experience for visitors. Our goal is to make MP a top choice for MICE and tourism, both domestic and international," Shukla added.

The state's modern convention facilities, such as the Maharaja Chhatrasal Convention Centre in Khajuraho and the Brilliant Convention Centre in Indore, offer state-of-the-art amenities that complement MP's stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage. "We are committed to providing a unique blend of business and leisure for delegates," Shukla said.



**Sheo Shekhar Shukla**  
Principal Secretary  
Government of Madhya Pradesh



**Hosting IATO Convention aligns with our vision to highlight Madhya Pradesh as a top MICE destination**



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President  
IATO



**Our convention showcased MP as a prime destination for hosting large-scale events seamlessly**

MPTB is also actively engaging with travel agents and MICE planners to enhance the state's tourism profile. Incentive programmes, training sessions, and workshops are being conducted to better understand and promote MP's potential. Collaborations with travel platforms, such as MakeMyTrip and RedBus, aim to diversify promotional channels and include homestays in the tourism mix.

**Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, praised infrastructure in MP, saying, "Our convention showcased MP as a prime destination for hosting large-scale events seamlessly. The state's hotels, convention centers, and natural heritage sites, all with excellent connectivity, demonstrate its potential and capability to host not only events but also to accommodate visitors effectively."

He added, "The new initiatives integrated into the business sessions

promise to bring a new dimension to the convention, particularly in how the host state presents its strategic vision," Mehra said.

Mehra believes that IATO played a crucial role in collaborating with policymakers to restore tourism to



pre-COVID levels and in attracting MICE events to the state. With its evolving infrastructure, rich heritage, and strategic focus on both traditional and emerging tourism sectors, MP is on its way to become a top choice for international conferences, events, and travellers for both business and leisure. 🌟



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**TourismNews**

Pilgrimage & spiritual tourism on the rise globally, reflects growing interest in faith-based travel: KPMG-PHDCCI Report

Visa applications in India surpass pre-pandemic volumes in H1 2024, says Yummi Talwar, COO, South Asia, VFS Global

Ramp up air connectivity, ease visa process, and work on cost of reaching India to boost FTAs: says Suman Billa

Taxes provide an opportunity to help fund necessary changes in tourism infrastructure: WTTC

Global travel and tourism sector deal activity down by 10.4% YoY during January-July 2024, finds GlobalData

India emerges as global leader in LCCs, with 71% of its seat capacity, overtaking global average of 34%

Finland's Lapland reports 100% growth in overnight stays in 2023, sees 75% rise from Jan-June: Sara Sodhi Juneja

# THSC marks 10 yrs of skill development

Celebrating the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC) in Delhi recently, Rajan Bahadur, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC), reaffirmed the council's dedication to empowering individuals through skill development and contributing to the growth of tourism and hospitality industry in the country.

 **Surbhi Sharma**

Commemorating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC) recently held a grand event in Delhi. The celebration, themed 'A Decade of Excellence, Empowerment, and Employment', highlighted THSC's journey and achievements over the past decade while setting the stage for future initiatives. Eminent personalities graced the occasion, reflecting on the significance of the big milestone.

Delivering the welcome address, **Jyoti Mayal**, Chairperson, THSC, emphasised the council's mission of enhancing skills and creating employment opportunities in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Outlining the accomplishments and growth of THSC over the past 10 years, **Rajan Bahadur**, CEO, THSC, said, "It's been a fantastic journey. We started skilling 50,000 people in the first two years and



**Jyoti Mayal**  
Chairperson, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC)

went up to about four lakh and now aim to cross the figure of five lakh by the end of this year."

**THSC initiatives**

Showcasing the key initiatives and programmes that have significantly contributed to the sector's development, Bahadur said, "Over these years, we have grown to have a presence in every state of India, barring Lakshadweep. We have tie-ups with 1,000 plus



**Rajan Bahadur**  
CEO, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC)

training centres, 100 plus colleges and universities, and as we go forward, we look for opportunities to double our numbers in the next 10-15 years. So far, we have tied up with 21 school boards, which cover over 2,500 schools. We have introduced the RTD (Recruit, Train, Deploy) programme, where we impart training to people for the specific needs of our industry partners, certify them, and then companies employ them."

One of the key highlights of the event was the launch of the 'Empowering 100 Dreams' initiative, which focuses on empowering women by providing them with necessary skills to thrive in the industry. Speaking about this commitment, Rajan underscored the importance of gender inclusivity in the workforce.


**Balancing demand-supply gap**


Emphasising that nothing can be done individually, Rajan said, "We are in complete alignment with the Ministry of Skills Education and Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and the Ministry of Tourism, and working together for narrowing down the demand-supply-skill gap."

**Challenges**

Discussing the industry challenges, he said, "We have done a pan-India study covering 20 states, 5 Union Territories, 10,000 youth, and 500 employers and concluded that our industry has

great potential and holds immense significance in the coming time. The challenges we are struggling with are the entry-level pay scales and the working conditions are not very conducive. As an industry,

  
**Our industry needs far more skilled people to service the guests. For that, we need to collaborate and work together**

we need to address this issue. Our industry needs far more skilled people to service the guests. For that, we need to collaborate, work together, and ensure that India becomes the most preferred destination in the world." 

# Double reward points for MICE planners

With 63 operational hotels, including 23 Ibis and Ibis Styles properties, Accor's growth and brand positioning in India are on a strong trajectory. Pratima Badhwar, Head of Commercial for Accor India and South Asia, discusses the brand's strategic growth, challenges in the competitive Indian market, the focus on sustainability initiatives, and the growing MICE segment.

 **Nisha Verma**

**Pratima Badhwar**, Head of Commercial, Accor India and South Asia, has said that Accor's growth and brand positioning in India are on a strong trajectory.



**Pratima Badhwar**  
Head of Commercial  
Accor India and South Asia

"With 63 operational hotels, including 23 Ibis and Ibis Styles properties, the network is solidified by established brands like Novotel and Ibis, which are well recognised among Indian travellers. This year alone, we are adding significant new properties like the Ibis Styles Mysuru and expanding with other key openings in Goa, Lucknow and Mumbai. Our development team is aggressively working on expanding our footprint, with more hotels and brands expected to enter the market soon. The loyalty programme, Accor Live Limitless (ALL), remains central, driving engagement and positioning our brands strongly among a customer base that exceeds two million members in India," she said.

**Competitive landscape**

The hospitality landscape in India is growing, driven largely by post-COVID travel demand, claimed Badhwar and she believes that this growth presents opportunities for all players. "Accor is working closely with owner groups and partners to provide tailored solutions, from economy to luxury segments. Our diverse portfolio allows us to cater to varied market needs,

and our aggressive expansion plans will keep us competitive. Additionally, our approach includes exploring franchise routes and quick brand conversions to scale rapidly."

**Building brand recognition**

Saying that their growth in India has been organic, which has led to strong brand recognition, Badhwar claimed, "Novotel, Ibis, and even luxury brands like Raffles have established clear identities among travellers. Each brand has a distinct appeal that resonates with specific customer segments. As new properties are added, their visibility and connection with the market continue to strengthen."

**ESG initiatives**

Talking about ESG initiatives at Accor, Badhwar said, "Sustainability is deeply embedded in Accor's operations globally, led by initiatives like eliminating single-use plastics and our commitment to becoming a net zero carbon organisation by 2050.

In India, specific focus areas include reducing food wastage and adopting renewable energy solutions. We have also earned Green Key certifications for several properties underscoring our commitment to ESG goals."

**Capitalising on MICE**

Accor's focus extends beyond domestic MICE, she underlined and said that the brand is also a strong player in outbound MICE catering to global destinations. Through partnerships with organisations like ICCA, ICPB, and EMEA, it continues to enhance its visibility in this segment. The brand also offers value-added benefits like upgraded menus and double reward points for MICE planners, further incentivising event organisers to choose Accor, claimed Badhwar.

"India's growing prominence as a MICE destination, both domestically and internationally, aligns well with our focus. Our extensive portfolio, which includes large convention centres like the

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre and newer additions like the Novotel Jaipur, strengthens our positioning. We are also enhancing our MICE offerings with tailored incentives for

  
**Sustainability is deeply embedded in Accor's operations globally, led by initiatives like eliminating single-use plastics**

planners, alongside our 'The Choice is Yours' programme, which provides value-added benefits and increased reward points," she informed.

**Current challenges**

When asked about major challenges in India for hospital-

ity, including complex licensing processes and long build timelines, she commented, "While challenges exist, they are also opportunities. With government incentives and initiatives like single-window clearances, the landscape is improving. We remain optimistic about the sector's growth potential and continue to work closely with partners to navigate these complexities."

**India on MICE**

Accor has been actively participating in discussions and initiatives led by the Ministry of Tourism and other industry bodies to improve India's standing as a MICE destination.

"While there is progress, greater consolidation and unified efforts could further elevate India as a top choice for international conferences and events. This requires amplified visibility, strategic partnerships, and better infrastructure to accommodate large-scale events," she claimed. 



# Swosti in Puri to pioneer luxury stays & conferences

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts Puri opened its gate with a grand ceremony in the temple town situated across the pristine Blue Flag beach, and will be a game-changer for the tourism in the state, offering great stays and expansive venues for conferences and meetings.



Nisha Verma

Inaugurated by **Dharmendra Pradhan**, Union Education Minister, Government of India, alongside **Pravati Parida**, Deputy Chief Minister and Tourism Minister, Government of Odisha; **Kanak Vardhan Singh Deo**, Deputy Chief Minister, Government of Odisha, and other dignitaries, including **Prithviraj Harichandan**, Minister For Law, Works & Excise, Government of Odisha; **Sambit Patra**, MP, Puri; **Sunil Mohanty**, MLA, Puri; **Upasana Mohapatra**, MLA, Brahmagiri; **Babu Singh**, MLA, Bhubaneswar and **Siddharth Shankar Swain**, Collector & District Magistrate, Puri.

The latest addition to the Swosti portfolio, this property with 125 tastefully designed rooms, is only around an hour's drive from Bhubaneswar airport and railway station. Being the first five-star property in Puri, this property would certainly change the hospitality



Dignitaries at the lamp lighting ceremony, at the inauguration of Swosti Premium Beach Resorts Puri

**Odisha holds huge potential**  
In his address, Pradhan appreciated the effort and vision of Swosti Group to open a 5-star property in Puri and added that the government is in full support of such initiatives. "At the heart of our vision for Odisha is the commitment to socially empowering infrastructure. From modern airports and well-maintained road-

by the robust Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model that promises to lay a strong foundation for growth. As the tourism minister, I am actively addressing the opportunities and challenges that have emerged, setting the stage for transformative advancements in our sector," she claimed.

Congratulating Mohanty on the occasion, Deo said that Odisha should be promoted as a wedding destination. "Nobody is looking at Odisha as a wedding destination. Why can't we develop Puri as a wedding destination where people from other states come to Puri and organise nuptials here. Also, Puri can attract corporates to conduct conferences and conventions, whether national or international. With the international airport in offing, the face of Puri as a tourism destination is set to change. Even golf tourism can be promoted for international tourists. This would also attract foreign exchange."

#### Conference haven

Speaking about the property Mohanty said, "We have a lot of open space, public areas, as well as big space for banquets, meetings, conferences and exhibitions. Each banquet hall has a big lawn in front. For convention facilities, we have gone vertically up in this property. There is one hall with a lawn in front, then a hall and lawn again on the next floor, and another venue on the next floor. The project has been conceived in such a way that we can do three weddings at a time. These conferences have been successfully executed and a lot of weddings are already booked from Septem-

ber up to March next year. In fact, IATO Convention 2025 is planned to be held in Puri at this property," he informed.

#### Luxury abode

This seaside paradise offers accommodations designed to blend sophistication with comfort. Savour the rich flavours of multi-cuisine dishes and buffets at Beach Hut, the all-day dining, while the Saltwater restaurant caters to seafood enthusiasts. The

**Why can't we develop Puri as a wedding destination where people from other states come and organise nuptials here**



scenario in the holy town popular for Lord Jagannath Temple, which receives thousands of visitors from both within India and outside.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, **JK Mohanty**, CMD, Swosti Group said, "We made this 5-star facility for high-end customers who come to Puri and don't get rooms. It was earlier mentioned at many forums that high end hotels are not there in Puri. To fill that gap, we have made this hotel."

ways to efficient waterways, each element plays a crucial role. These developments are not just infrastructure, they are the catalysts for expanding tourism, creating job opportunities, and fostering a deep sense of pride and self-assurance in our state," he said.

Parida said that with more 5-star hotels entering Odisha, the tourist footfall, as well as the length of stay for visitors to the state will increase. "Exciting tourism initiatives are on the horizon, driven

Sky Bar, on the rooftop offers a luxurious experience with panoramic views. The property also features the luxurious Ekayaa SPA, spanning 1352 sq ft. The highlight of the property is the range of conference facilities, which includes Boita Voyage, accommodating up to 1,000 guests in a pillar less, convertible space. The Panorama and Portrait provide cozy settings of hosting up to 150 guests and the Mahari Courtyard boasts 2,400 sq ft of adaptable space, perfectly blends sophistication and versatility for medium sized events. ✨

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9000

Companies

152

Countries

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# OTOAI asks TGA to simplify Türkiye visa

Leading the 40-member delegation on an educational tour to Türkiye recently, Riaz Munshi, National President, OTOAI, says that the destination has huge potential in the India market, with many unexplored cities yet to be discovered by the Indian traveller. Meanwhile, the association is in discussion with Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) to further ease visa processing.



Hazel Jain

Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency (TGA) in collaboration with the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), recently organised a familiarisation trip over six nights for its members. It was an immersive journey through Türkiye's diverse array of attractions, from ancient ruins to breathtaking natural wonders. In addition to sightseeing excursions, the trip included strategic B2B meetings in Istanbul, bringing together Turkish tourism sector representatives and Indian travel agents to foster meaningful discussions and partnerships.

Riaz Munshi, National President, OTOAI, who was leading this delegation, spoke excitedly about the destination. But why Türkiye? "Well, we had been trying to organise a tour to Türkiye since 2020. We were supposed to host the convention here but couldn't go ahead due to Covid. We have been since then try-

ing to do a Fam tour to Türkiye and that finally came to fruition. Hence, it had been on the agenda for quite some time," he said.

Members from multiple cities were part of this tour, including Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Lucknow, Bengaluru and even Rajkot. The 40 individuals included one representative from Turkish Airlines and two from the tourism board. Munshi added, "Türkiye has huge potential for the Indian market.

**Fam trip was an immersive journey through Türkiye's diverse array of attractions, from ancient ruins to breathtaking natural wonders**



Riaz Munshi  
National President  
OTOAI

Even today, there is a growth of almost 40 per cent over the last five months. Close to four lakh tourists are visiting Türkiye from India." In 2023, Türkiye welcomed 2,74,000 tourists from India. This upward trend has continued into 2024, with the first five months alone seeing an impressive 1,26,066 Indian visitors, marking a 34.55 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2023. Türkiye has

its advantages, Munshi says. Easy visas, direct flights and not too far from India. "During summer, people face issues with getting visas of various countries. When they choose to come to Türkiye, they get visas easily. Within Türkiye also, there are many destinations to explore. Izmir for one is a hugely unexplored town and having visited it this time, we know it is extremely beautiful. So there is lots to explore in Türkiye," he added.

### Visa discussions

OTOAI has been continuing its dialogue about further easing of visas with Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, particularly the sticker visa where the fee is quite high. "We have been requesting them to reduce the fees for sticker visas. It's fine for online visas, but when travellers don't have a valid UK or Schengen visa and they need to get visas in India, it becomes expensive. There is a lot of cost difference between a sticker visa and an online visa. We

will also request if they can issue multiple entry and long-term visas for Indian nationals," he added.

The India market is growing fast and a small increase from India means big numbers, he says, adding, "Not only for Türkiye but India will be in the top five source market for many short-haul destinations soon. In a few years, we will come in the top five source market for sure. The destination is not only great for leisure, but also weddings and MICE, and it already sees a lot of high-end events take place in Bodrum and Antalya."

Offering a piece of advice to his members, Munshi shared, "They must create and focus their own niche. Customers today have access to the internet and are well-informed. So agents need to build relationships with the vendors that are perfect for their clients. And they have to experience the product themselves, keeping in mind their market segment. They must

be an expert in their field, they have to be consultants, and need to be two steps ahead of the client. They must create something attractive, in terms of cost and value, then their clients will pay. Develop

**The destination is not only great for leisure, but also weddings and MICE and it already sees a lot of high-end events**

your network and your knowledge, don't cut and paste. Today, many agents start doing research after a customer calls. Instead, we should be product-ready and merely tailor it to their requirements. They need to be on top of things."

# SriLankan Airlines seeks MICE groups

Indians are increasingly opting for Sri Lanka as a destination for MICE events and weddings, claims Richard Nuttall, CEO, SriLankan Airlines. In an exclusive interview, he highlighted that the airline served close to 70,000 Indian passengers in the last five months with the majority originating from Chennai and are working closely with the travel trade to boost the business further.



Surbhi Sharma

SriLankan Airlines recently hosted a Fam trip for Indians to showcase the beauty and cultural heritage of Sri Lanka and give a taste of the authentic Sri Lankan food, including dishes made with fresh and locally sourced ingredients. The meticulously designed itinerary paid attention to the smallest details.

Richard Nuttall, CEO, SriLankan Airlines, talking about the airline's potential to organise MICE trips and weddings, explained how they are accommodating large family groups coming to organise weddings in Sri Lanka, offering special packages for big MICE and corporate groups, engaging with the travel trade for business, and the steps they are taking for sustainability.

### Destinations for Indians

Highlighting that the airline served close to 70,000 Indian passengers in the last five months with the majority originating from Chennai,



Richard Nuttall  
CEO  
SriLankan Airlines

Richard said that the most preferred Sri Lankan destinations among Indian travellers are Colombo, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Bentota, and Galle, while emerging favourites include Sigiriya, Dambulla, Ella, Trincomalee, Jaffna, and Yala.

### Perfect for MICE & wedding

Emphasising that Indians are increasingly opting for Sri Lanka as a destination for MICE events and weddings, Richard said, "We pro-

mote SriLankan Airlines for both these segments through special airfares and other promotions in collaboration with the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau (SLCB). The country has beautiful beaches, landscapes, and historical sites, offering attractive setting for weddings and corporate events. We have modern hotels, resorts, and conference facilities to accommodate large gatherings."

### MICE & corporate package

Talking about special packages for big groups, Ricard said, "We provide exclusive airfare packages and specialised services, including airport facilitation and onboard amenities for groups, and SriLankan Airlines is recognised as a premier provider of MICE services. We promote online check-in and have introduced self-check-in kiosks, and a bag drop facility for our passengers' convenience at the Bandaranaike International Airport."

### Efforts for travel trade

Responding to the question on how



the airline is engaging with the travel trade for business, Richard said, "We launched the New Distribution

**Most preferred Sri Lankan destinations among Indian travellers are Colombo, Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Bentota, and Galle**

Capability (NDC) platform in India, giving agents access to discounted fares, free date changes and incentives on flown segments. We also run periodic promotions, webinars and FAM tours for agents."

### Sustainability initiatives

Informing about sustainable practices at SriLankan Airlines, he said that they are taking multiple initiatives. "Presently, we are pursuing electric ground services equipment and collaborating closely with the airport operator to digitalise processes at Bandaranaike International Airport that contribute to inbound tourism," he said.

### Goals & expansion plans

Richard said, "This year, we want to increase the current flight frequencies between India and Sri Lanka and lay the foundation to expand our capacity next year with fleet additions."

He added that their current plan aims to gradually increase frequencies to existing destinations in India over the coming months. "We have new cities in our medium-term plans. Our main challenge is to get access to sufficient fleet and engines. With increased capacity, we will expand our flight operations," he said.

# Balitrip Wisata offers new itineraries

Balitrip Wisata, an Indian DMC to Bali offering complete travel solutions, starting from cultural, and recreational to corporate, conferences and incentive groups, has introduced new itineraries. This year, the DMC will conduct a four-city roadshow in the first week of September, starting in Ahmedabad, followed by Pune, Indore, and concluding in Delhi, to further boost the numbers.



Surbhi Sharma

Indian at heart and Balinese at spirit, the Indian DMC to Bali, Balitrip Wisata customises itineraries as per the guest's requirements.

To understand the requirements and expectations of Indian guests, the DMC has strategically made an execution team of local Balinese staff.

Giving insights about how the company works, **Dheeraj Ranjan Kumar**, Director, Balitrip Wisata, said, "We are establishing a system that serves as a bridge between travel agencies in India and the hospitality industry in Bali. This exemplifies the essence of a destination management company, which we proudly are. Our ecosystem is dependable, sustainable, and innovative and our primary objective is to satisfy our partners with top-notch services. We provide the most innovative

approach to selling Bali packages within the DMC sector and are the sole provider offering Bali packages that include flight tickets. While others in the market are beginning to adopt this strategy, we remain the leader in this segment."

## Partnerships in Bali

Talking about its partnerships with airlines, hotels, and local service providers in Bali, Kumar highlighted that they have established a well-managed and process-oriented ecosystem that collaborates effectively with airline partners in India and said, "Our primary partnerships are with Viet Jet, Singapore Airlines and Malaysian Airlines. Presently, we are the source company in Bali, directly contracting hotels without intermediaries which significantly reduces costs and enhances the efficiency of our packages. Additionally, we maintain our transportation system, with a fleet owned by Balitrip, and we engage directly with local



**Dheeraj Ranjan Kumar**  
Director  
Balitrip Wisata

vendors for services such as water sports activities."

## Roadshows in September

Explaining how Balitrip markets its packages to travel agents and tour operators, Kumar said, "We employ a dynamic marketing strategy that encompasses various channels. Our Bali packages are promoted through direct market-

ing, where our sales representatives regularly visit travel agencies in different states and cities to present our services. Additionally, we have a strong digital marketing presence, utilising email and WhatsApp marketing to engage our agency partners. Exhibitions also play a crucial role in our marketing efforts. Furthermore, we are one of a few DMCs that organise annual roadshows in India. During these events, we invite hospitality partners from Bali to showcase their offerings to Indian travel agencies and this year, we will conduct a four-city roadshow in the first week of September, starting in Ahmedabad, followed by Pune, Indore, and then in Delhi."

## Bali gains momentum

According to Kumar, the popularity of Bali, particularly Ubud and East Bali, as a tourist destination for Indian travellers has significantly increased in recent years, especially regarding its rainforests. A growing

interest in trips to places, such as Nusa Penida, Gili Island, and Nusa Lembongan, has been witnessed. Additionally, there is a rising de-

**We are establishing a system that serves as a bridge between travel agencies in India and the hospitality industry in Bali**

mand for various destinations within Bali. The luxury segment is also expanding, making Bali an ideal tourist destination for diverse groups, including honeymooners, families, leisure travellers, special occasion visitors, women, and senior citizens.

## Our USP

Stressing that innovation is the key to success, Kumar said, "Balitrip is committed to regularly enhancing its offerings and aims to introduce new attractions and itineraries that align with market demand. Our flight-inclusive packages, which enable travel agencies to promote Bali as an affordable destination are a key differentiator for us and we take pride in being pioneers in this area."


## New offerings


Announcing the launch of its new travel packages for East Bali which will feature destinations such as Candidasa Beach, Kumar said, "We are expanding our itineraries to include a wider variety of island experiences and are all set to introduce several honeymoon-focused packages, anticipating a rise in demand for romantic getaways as the wedding season approaches. This strategy aims to capitalise on current market trends."


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# Conscious travel now a priority

▶ Contd. from page 5



**Vishal Bhatia**  
Country Manager  
VisitBritain India

“The next generation is increasingly leveraging AI, virtual reality, and mobile apps to enhance travel experiences, from personalised trip planning to immersive virtual tours. Sustainability is also a key focus, with



**EM Najeeb**  
Chairman  
ATE Group of Companies

“Technology, sustainability, and customised experiences are being incorporated into every facet of travel by the younger generation, who is leading the charge to transform the travel and tourism sector. Their



**Ellona Pereira**  
General Manager - India  
Aviareps

“The ‘next-gen’ technology is poised to bring innovation and transformation to the travel industry in several key areas first being offering customised experiences to clients. Next-gen technologies can analyse

“The next generation prefers personalised, sustainable, tech-driven travel rooted around well-being and experiences – reflecting a broader shift in travel trends. As per VisitBritain research data, social media and travel websites via search engines are one of the top three motivators for Indian travellers to the UK, highlighting the importance of technology and current trends in making future travel decisions. We aim to support tourism businesses that are focused on sustain.”



**Pranav Kapadia**  
Founder  
Global Destinations

eco-conscious travel and carbon-offset programs gaining popularity. This generation's emphasis on ethical and experiential travel is set to redefine the industry, making it more responsible and inclusive.”

“The next-gen is revolutionising the travel industry in India by embracing technology, sustainability, and personalised experiences. Digitalisation is making travel planning and booking more accessible and convenient through online bookings, mobile apps, and social media. Younger generation is driving demand for sustainable tourism, prioritising eco-friendly and responsible travel. Personalised travel is also on rise with a focus on cultural immersion”



**Noriah Jaafar**  
Director  
Tourism Malaysia-Mumbai

emphasis on digital engagement from using social media to influence travel decisions to leveraging AI-driven platforms for seamless bookings – is transforming how destinations like Malaysia are marketed.”

“The next generation is transforming our travel industry by embracing technology, prioritising sustainability, and curating personalised experiences. Young entrepreneurs are creating AI-driven platforms with personalised itineraries and virtual reality tours allowing travellers to explore destinations prior to booking. They champion sustainable tourism through eco-friendly stays, zero-waste travel, and practices that preserve culture and nature.”



**Dharmesh Advani**  
Director, Bombay Travels &  
National Director, ETAA

vast amounts of data to understand traveller preferences and behaviours. This allows for highly personalised suggestions for destinations, activities and accommodations, tailored to individual tastes.”



**Mahendra Pratap Singh**  
MD, MP Tours & Chairman, Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter, IATO

“The next generation is revolutionising the tourism industry, stepping beyond the role of consumers to become influential entrepreneurs who are driving significant growth. They are launching startups that prioritise sustain-



**Sriram Gopalswamy**  
Vice President, Site Reliability Engineering & MD, Sabre Bengaluru

“AI-driven digital assistants are revolutionising how trips are planned, offering tailored itineraries, recommendations, and seamless resolutions to disruptions. These technologies enable companies to bet-



**Mit Bhatt**  
Managing Partner  
The Grand Vacationist

“We have integrated eco-friendly practices and smart technology into our offerings, which is a key element that modern-day young travellers look for. Today's guests prioritise sustainable luxury for

“The next generation is driving change in the tourism industry through sustainability, technology, and personalisation. They prioritise eco-friendly travel, leading to innovations like green hotels and carbon-offsetting platforms. Tech-driven experiences such as AI-powered itineraries, augmented reality tours, and remote work-friendly destinations are reshaping how people travel. Social media & influencers are making travel more experiential, promoting lesser-known destinations.”



**Dipti Adhia**  
Director  
Discover the World - Global

ability, cutting-edge technology and unique personalised experiences, fundamentally reshaping the way we travel. From AI-powered travel apps to virtual reality tours, these young entrepreneurs are making travel more personalised.”

“Our Bengaluru capability centre exemplifies how the younger generation at Sabre is driving transformation in the travel industry with fresh perspectives, new ideas, and a new take on what the future of travel should look like. Through our Hyperjump internship program, we attract top talent at the very start of their careers. At the end of the six-month program, our interns present ideas to improve their teams' solutions or services, to our leaders.”



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder  
EaseMyTrip

ter segment customers and optimise workforce efficiency, ensuring more personalisation. Even fintech innovations are capacitating cross-border payments, allowing travel businesses to focus more on growth and improving workflows.”

“In the aspirational travel economy, innovation and creative offerings will be the key to success in serving the millennial travellers going forward. Looking at the trends, the young minds with their fresh perspectives on travel are continuously coming up with new experiences and ways, harnessing emerging technologies, to fulfil the traveller's aspirations and dreams thereby generating phenomenal business opportunities.”



**Soufiane El Allam**  
Complex Commercial Director, Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection at Al Habtoor Group

which we've driven out single-use plastics, partnered with EV luxury fleet operators, and retrofitted our guestrooms with state-of-the-art technology to reduce energy consumption significantly.”

Contd. on page 16 ▶

# More capacity & choice for Indians

An indication of how important The Asian market is to Air New Zealand is reflected in the increase in its seat capacity from November this year to March 2025. The airline will add an extra 20,000 seats on its routes between Singapore and Auckland with 11,000 of those being in its Premium Economy and Business Premier cabins.



Hazel Jain

The latest arrivals data shows that there were 182,000 passengers travelling between India and New Zealand last year. About 87,000 of those passengers were Indian travellers, says **Imogen Thornton**, Head of South & Southeast Asia, Air New Zealand. "Together with our joint venture partner Singapore Airlines, we carried half of those travellers from India via Singapore. It's a key part of our South and South East Asia network. An indication of how important this region is for us is reflected in the increase in the additional capacity that we're adding to the route from November this year through to March 2025. We will be adding an additional 20,000 seats between Singapore and Auckland, 11,000 which are in our Premium Economy and Business Premier cabins," she said.

## Plans for India

Partnerships are key to the airline's



**Imogen Thornton**  
Head of South & Southeast Asia  
Air New Zealand

success and are part of Air New Zealand's ongoing strategy in the Indian market. Thornton said, "Our partnership with Singapore Airlines allows Indian travellers to connect from its eight ports across India through into Singapore, where together with SIA we offer 4-5 daily flights out of Singapore into Auckland or Christchurch. Once in New Zealand, travellers can connect to Air New Zealand's 20



domestic destinations." The airline also works closely with Tourism New Zealand to continue educating the trade and customers about the destination. "Over 70 per cent of our bookings come through our trade partners and we appreciate their support," she adds. Speaking about opportunities in the Indian market, Thornton says that more capacity on Air New Zealand services means more options for Indian customers to book premium seats on their journey to New Zealand.

"Another opportunity that we see is to educate Indian travellers on the choices they have when they fly in Economy cabin with us. We offer multiple options from Economy Stretch to our very popular Economy Skycouch, a full row of economy seats that folds out into a lie-flat bed," she informed.

## Indian aviation scenario

After attending the CAPA Conference in Delhi recently, Thornton was impressed with the ambition

by the growth of the Indian aviation sector. "It was impressive to see how airlines, airports and other industry bodies are collaborating. The future is bright for Indian aviation industry. Strong partnerships are key to success in this industry, in particular strong relations with trade partners. We recently hosted 23 trade partners from India in New Zealand at the annual TRENZ conference. Many of them also attended post or pre-conference Farns," she commented. Soon, we will see

a refresh of the Air New Zealand cabin product. "Later this year, the first of our current 787s will be updated with our new interior product, then next year, we're expecting our first new Dreamliner to arrive from



**Over 70% of our bookings come through our trade partners and we want to thank them for their ongoing support**

Boeing," Thornton revealed. "70 per cent of our bookings out of India are made by our travel agency partners, so our trade relationships are incredibly important to us. We want to thank them for their ongoing support," she concluded.

# MTF's session for next-gen to join tourism

Spark – New Horizon is an innovative platform, and a brainchild of Pradeep Saboo, Sameer Karnani, and Rajat Bagaria, designed to inspire and motivate the next generation to join the tourism industry. The session, organised at Jai Hind College in Mumbai, saw attendance from not only the industry but also from college students, eager to learn more about tourism.





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# Adopting tech for customised solutions

As travel continues to evolve in response to the shifting global dynamics, Viacation sets ambitious goals and takes initiatives to redefine the travel experience. Jatinder Paul Singh, Co-Founder & Global CEO, Viacation, shares his vision for the company's trajectory over the next few years and how they are developing innovative solutions.

Janice Alyosius

Viacation adopts a customer-centric approach, aligning with the industry trends. "Our main objectives for the next 1-3 years focus on expanding our presence in both domestic and international travel markets, enhancing customer experiences through personalised and tech-driven solutions, and promoting sustainable travel," said **Jatinder Paul Singh**, Co-Founder & Global CEO, Viacation. "We aim to establish Viacation as the premier platform for curated travel packages, catering to a diverse range of travellers from adventure seekers to those in search of luxury and relaxation," he added.

Singh emphasises the importance of data-driven insights for navigating the complexities of the current market. "We plan to invest in data analytics to better understand our customers' preferences and emerging travel trends. This will enable us to offer more tailored



**Jatinder Paul Singh**  
Co-Founder & Global CEO  
Viacation

and unique experiences through strategic partnerships with local vendors and luxury resorts," he said. Singh also highlights Viacation's commitment to sustainability. "Incorporating eco-friendly practices into our travel packages is essential as conscious travel continues to rise," he shared.

Viacation is poised to introduce several initiatives aimed at enhancing



ing travel experiences. "We are particularly excited about offering personalised recommendations based on travellers' preferences and histories. This will make trip planning more seamless and tailored," Singh shared. The company is also focusing on immersive travel experiences. "By partnering with local communities and unique destinations, we aim to provide off-the-beaten-path

travel packages that go beyond traditional sightseeing," Singh said. "This commitment to authenticity extends to sustainable travel options, with plans to collaborate with green hotels and support conservation efforts," he added. Singh underscored the importance of a customer-centric philosophy in driving success. "Our approach is deeply rooted in valuing both our team members and our customers

equally. To deliver exceptional experiences, we must first empower our talent through cutting-edge technology and a thriving work environment," he explained.

This philosophy not only enhances service delivery but also fosters a mechanism where both employees and customers benefit, leading to sustained success for the company.

Post-pandemic, Singh envisions a transformative shift in the Indian travel landscape. "We are witnessing a move towards more

**We plan to invest in data analytics to better understand our customers' preferences and emerging travel trends**

mindful, experience-driven travel with a focus on safety, wellness, and sustainability. Domestic tourism is thriving as travellers explore India's hidden gems," he said. Viacation aims to play a pivotal role in this transformation by offering curated, safe, and personalised experiences.

## Next-gen is more eco-conscious

Contd. from page 12



**Aman Shah**  
CEO  
Wild Whisper

"Next-gen travellers are bringing in a notable change in the luxury safari industry by upholding sustainability. We witness this shift through a growing demand for eco-conscious travel and authentic cultural engagements. Young travellers are not just seeking opulent accommodations but are increasingly valuing how their journey impacts the environment and local communities. This shift is leading us to innovate by offering eco-friendly luxury options."



**Aditya Sharma**  
Business Development Director,  
Regency Holidays Qatar

"The new generation of luxury travel is being redefined by blending high-end experiences with sustainable practices in Qatar. Their modern approach is exemplified by offerings like Ramlah Qatar, where cutting-edge amenities harmoniously merge with Arabic traditions. This shift towards sustainability reflects a lifestyle change resonating with today's eco-conscious travellers. Their vision goes beyond traditional luxury, but focusing on creating immersive experiences."



**Louis D'Souza**  
Director  
Tamarind Global

"At Tamarind Global, the next generation is leading a revolutionary shift towards sustainability with a focus on destination weddings and events. The new-age generation's vision is about creating immersive experiences. By leveraging technology like virtual participation, the next-gen brings inclusivity to celebrations. Marrying tradition with modern-day innovation, the next generation redefines luxury to be more conscious, sustainable, and socially impactful."



**Trishal Rao**  
Chief Sales Officer  
SKIL Travel

"The next generation has inspired us at SKIL to bring a sea change in our traditional approach to operations by paving the way towards more sustainable and responsible tourism. Their vision for the future has led us to invest significantly in eco-friendly technologies, like introducing an electric vehicle (EV) fleet through our cab aggregator service. We also joined hands with BluSmart cabs to introduce greener transport solutions."



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

"There is a shift in the industry functioning post-pandemic. We have seen the next-gen to become smarter and contributing largely to OTAs. They are heavily invested in emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and the IoT. Thus, it is becoming difficult for us to hold the attention of next-generation. Growing up with the internet, social media, and mobile technology, this generation has different expectations and behaviours as consumers."



**Khushvinder Sarna**  
Owner  
The Federal Travels & Tours

"The next generation is significantly transforming the travel industry in three key areas: technology, sustainability, and the demand for authentic experiences. They ARE incredibly tech-savvy and use mobile apps, social media, and AI-powered platforms to plan and book their trips. They expect personalised, real-time information and seamless digital experiences. This has forced the travel industry to innovateto meet these demands."

Contd. on page 18



# Oman meets trade in Delhi, Mumbai

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman commenced its India Roadshow from Delhi, followed by Mumbai. The delegation led by His Excellency Azzan Al Busaidi, Undersecretary of Tourism, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, engaged with the travel trade in both the cities.



EVENT TALK		
SEPTEMBER 2024		
Date	Event	Time
3	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
4	Spain Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
5-6	Travel and Tourism Fair Hyderabad 2024	9:00 am
8-11	Australia Next	10:00 am
9	Abu Dhabi Roadshow-Delhi	10:00 am
10	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
11	Abu Dhabi Roadshow-Bangalore	10:00 am
11-13	ITB India	10:00 am
13	Abu Dhabi Roadshow-Mumbai	10:00 am
13-15	Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart	10:00 am
17-19	IFTM Top Resa 2024	9:30 am
19-20	GPS-Kolkata	10:00 am
20-22	Tamil Nadu Travel Expo 2024	10:00 am
25-26	GPS-Lucknow	10:00 am
26	Abu Dhabi Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
26-29	Kerala Travel Mart	10:00 am
OCTOBER 2024		
8	Israel Tourism Webinar	12:00 pm
15-16	GPS-Kochi	10:00 am
16-18	FHRAI Convention	10:00 am
23-25	ITB Asia	10:00 am

# RDTM to showcase 'WICE'

The Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM), to be held in Jaipur from 13-15 September this year, aims to showcase Rajasthan's capabilities in hosting Weddings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events (WICE) as its theme for the latest edition.

 **Surbhi Sharma**

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM) will be held at the BM Birla Convention Centre in Jaipur from 13 to 15 September this year. The Federation of Hospitality and Tourism of Rajasthan (FHTR) will host the event in collaboration with the Department of Tourism, Rajasthan. Themed 'Weddings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events (WICE)', the event aims to showcase Rajasthan's capabilities in hosting weddings, incentives, conferences, and events and promises to be a significant gathering for stakeholders in the domestic travel and tourism industry.

The FHTR delegation, led by its President **Kuldeep Singh Chandela**, met **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Minister of Culture and Tourism, Government of India, and **Diya Kumari**, Deputy Chief Minister, Rajasthan, to invite them for the RDTM's inaugural function on 13 September. During the three-day event, more than 200 stalls will showcase about 600 properties.



FHTR delegation meets Diya Kumari, Deputy CM, Rajasthan, to invite her for RDTM inauguration

Approximately 1,300 buyers and 7,000 visitors are expected to attend the event. Chandela said that during the meeting with the Union minister and the Deputy Chief Minister, discussions were held on key issues, such as GST, visa-on-arrival for European tourists, direct international flights from Europe to Jaipur, and the management of historical monuments. The FHTR delegation included Senior Vice President **Surendra Singh Shahpura** and Secretary General **CA Virendra Singh**, besides **Tarun Bansal**, President, HRAR; **Mohan Singh Mertia**, Secretary, RATO and **Ranvijay Singh**, Secretary, HRAR.

 **Over 200 stalls will showcase 600 properties. About 1,300 buyers and 7,000 visitors are expected to attend the event**

RDTM 2024 is a joint venture initiative by key industry bodies, including the Hotels and Restaurants Association of Rajasthan (HRAR), Indian Heritage Hotels Association

(IHA), Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO), Jodhana Hotels and Restaurants Association (JARA), and the Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI). It offers a prime platform for tour operators, hoteliers, wedding planners, and event managers to explore and showcase Rajasthan's unique offerings. Attendees will benefit from extensive networking opportunities with national buyers, hospitality brands, and tourism professionals, as it will provide a platform for networking, exploring new opportunities, and discussing the latest trends in tourism.

The event will provide stakeholders with a platform to showcase products across various tourism sectors, including heritage, adventure, wildlife, pilgrimage, weddings, eco-tourism, and village tourism. The event will also feature B2B meetings, promoting business opportunities and networking, aiming to establish Rajasthan as a premier wedding destination and boost tourism in the state. 

## OBITUARY



**Bhupesh Kumar**

**Bhupesh Kumar**, a visionary leader in sales, marketing communications, and PR, passed away, leaving a legacy of excellence across the tourism and hospitality industry. His career spanned prominent roles with organisations like Lavasa Corporation, German National Tourist Office, and Malaysia Tourism Board. Known for his outstanding collaborative skills, Kumar seamlessly integrated tourism with large-scale projects. As an SME assessor and leadership consultant, he made significant contributions to both government and private sectors. Kumar's expertise and dedication will be deeply missed by colleagues and the industry he served with passion.

# Youngsters reshaping Indian hospitality

 *Contd. from page 16*

“The next generation is poised to bring significant changes to India's travel and tourism industry, where technology would continue to play a key role with online booking engines and travel websites, along with mobile apps being



**Nitin Mittal**  
CEO  
Hotel n Apartment

the preferred mode for research and booking. Responsible tourism is the growing theme for environmentally conscious youngsters.”



**Sarbendra Sarkar**  
Founder & MD  
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

“To attract next generation, it is essential to rebrand hospitality as a vibrant lifestyle sector. A greater emphasis on work-life balance, a positive work atmosphere, fast-track career growth, and competitive compensation packages can make a significant difference.

The next generation is at the forefront of our efforts to incorporate technology into various operational functions and putting high value on sustainability.”

“The next generation is reshaping India's hospitality industry through a significant digital transformation. With an increasing number of tech-savvy consumers, particularly belonging to Gen Z, the demand for seamless, technology-driven experiences is becoming para-



**Shikhar Kumar**  
Managing Director  
Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts

mount. Hotels are adopting advanced technologies such as contactless check-ins, AI-driven personalisation, and cloud-based management.”



**Gaurav Mudgal**  
Director of Commercial  
Aamaghati Resort

“The younger generation in India is driving a shift towards sustainability and experiential travel within the hospitality industry. This demographic values eco-friendly practices and is increasingly willing to pay a premium for sustainable offerings. Younger consumers often prioritise experiences over products, and they seek brands that align with their values. Additionally, there is a growing preference for immersive travel.”

“We prioritise offering job opportunities to the educated and talented young local population. With most of our team falling into the next-gen category, we have seen many advantages. These young professionals excel in using digital platforms



**Aviraj Rathi**  
Director  
Namaste Dwaar Resort

and social media to enhance our brand presence. They can adapt to the demanding and fast-paced hospitality industry.”

*Compiled by TT Bureau*

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<b>DOMESTIC CRUISE PARTNER</b> CROCIAS	<b>WHATSAPP COMMERCE PARTNER</b> DoubleTick QuickSell	<b>LUXURY PARTNER</b> JASTANS	<b>MARKETING PARTNER</b> EntReps	<b>EDWIN PARTNER</b> Ethiopian Ethiopian Ethiopian	<b>GDS PARTNER</b> TRAVELPORT	<b>VISA INFO PARTNER</b> Visa	<b>INDONESIA DMC PARTNER</b> TRAVEL MANIA	<b>GPS INITIATIVES</b> EduX CONNECT	

# MOVEMENTS

## ATLANTIS

Dubai

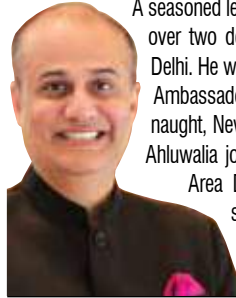
Atlantis Resorts has appointed **RUTUJA PATIL** as the new Account Director, Leisure Sales (India). Patil brings with her a wealth of experience in the hospitality sales industry, making her a valuable addition to the Atlantis team. Prior to this, she served as the Sales Manager for Leisure Sales (UK & Scandinavia) at Atlantis Dubai. With over a decade of global expertise, Rutuja is known for her impactful commercial strategies and outstanding leadership. Kyp Charalambous, VP, Sales, Atlantis Dubai stated, "Rutuja has been an incredible part of our team since 2022, serving as a Sales Manager – Leisure."



## TAJ MAHAL

New Delhi

Taj Mahal, New Delhi has appointed **ANMOL AHLUWALIA** as the Area Director – Operations and General Manager, Taj Mahal, New Delhi. A seasoned leader in luxury hospitality, Ahluwalia brings over two decades of experience to Taj Mahal, New Delhi. He will also be responsible for the operations of Ambassador, New Delhi - IHCL SeleQtions, The Connaught, New Delhi - IHCL SeleQtions, and Soulineaire. Ahluwalia joins the team from his recent position as Area Director - Operations in Goa, where he spearheaded a diverse portfolio of IHCL's Hotels under its various brands, including Taj Holiday Village Resort & Spa.



## THE LEELA AMBIENCE GURUGRAM HOTEL & RESIDENCES

Gurugram

The Leela Ambience Gurugram Hotel & Residences welcomes **SHRIDHAR NAIR** in the role of Senior Vice President and General Manager. In his new position, Nair will be based in Gurugram, directly leading The Leela Ambience Gurugram while also overseeing The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, The Leela Mumbai, The Leela Gandhinagar, Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre Complex, and The Imperial Club by The Leela. He has impressive educational background.



## GRAND MERCURE MYSORE

Mysore

Grand Mercure Mysore welcomes **RADHIKA TATA** as the new General Manager. A seasoned hospitality professional with over a decade of experience at Accor Hotels, Tata brings a wealth of knowledge to her new role. Prior to this, Radhika steadily progressed through leadership roles at multiple Accor properties across India, including Novotel Convention Centre, Novotel Imagicaa, ibis Navi Mumbai, ibis Bengaluru Hosur Road, and most recently, as General Manager of ibis Hyderabad Hitec City. A proven leader with a keen business acumen, Tata has consistently excelled in driving sales.



## THE LEELA AMBIENCE CONVENTION HOTEL

Delhi

The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel Delhi has appointed **ABHISSEK BASU** as the new Hotel Manager. With an impressive tenure of over 23 years in the hospitality industry, Basu brings with him a wealth of experience in hotel management, operations planning, and food and beverage excellence. Commenting on his appointment, Basu said, "I am thrilled to be a part of the incredible team at The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi - a 5-Star Luxury Business Hotel - and eager to contribute to its continued success while delivering memorable experiences to our guests."



## ESNA HOLIDAYS

Sri Lanka & Maldives

**JYOTI MONGA** has joined Esna Holidays as the new representative for Sri Lanka and Maldives. With over 20 years of experience in the travel industry, Monga brings a wealth of knowledge, particularly in promoting Sri Lanka to Indian travel agents. Esna Holidays, as a leading Destination Management Company, is dedicated to delivering exceptional travel experiences. Travel O Quence, where Jyoti has been a key figure, is highly regarded for its outstanding sales and marketing representation services, enabling travel brands to excel in a competitive landscape. Her insights and experience will add value to the brand.



## HYATT CENTRIC BALLYGUNGE KOLKATA

Kolkata

Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata appoints **SAURAV BASAK** as the Director of Sales. With over 13 years of experience in handling head-quartered accounts, managing room sales, catering, and MICE events across India and South Asia, Basak brings a wealth of expertise and a proven track record of success to the team. In his new role, Saurav will be responsible for managing the sales budget and monitoring expenses to ensure alignment with financial targets. His primary duties encompass overseeing the sales budget, monitoring expenses, and ensuring alignment with financial targets. He will maintain sales volume and selling price.



## FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Bengaluru has appointed **KAZIM MEHDI** as the Director of Food & Beverage. Mehdi brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to this prestigious role with over 18 years of experience in the luxury hospitality. He has worked with some renowned properties across the Middle East, India, and East Africa. His appointment underscores the brand's dedication to providing exceptional guest experiences and upholding its reputation for excellence. Known for his confidence and resourcefulness, Mehdi has demonstrated a strong business acumen and ability to lead and inspire teams.



## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON GOA-PANAJI

Goa

DoubleTree by Hilton Goa-Panaji has appointed **ROSELYN MARIAN** as the Director of Sales. This strategic appointment underscores DoubleTree by Hilton Goa-Panaji's commitment to strengthening its business development leadership. Marian has more than 13 years of experience working across several sectors. Based in Mumbai, she will lead the hotel's business development operations aligning with the properties overarching business and sales strategy, particularly focusing on the MICE segment. Her extensive background equips her to lead the team with a focus on creating a target-driven environment.



## NOVOTEL HYDERABAD CONVENTION CENTRE & HICC

Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre & Hyderabad International Convention Centre have appointed **JOHN PAUL** as the new Director of Engineering. With an impressive background in engineering and hospitality management, Paul will oversee the hotel's engineering department, driving innovations and maintaining the highest standards of facility excellence. He brings over two decades of extensive experience in the hospitality engineering sector.



## GRAND HYATT MUMBAI HOTEL AND RESIDENCES

Mumbai

Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel and Residences has promoted **OBAID KHATRI** to the position of Director of Events. Previously, he served as the Senior Events Manager. Khatri brings over 15 years of experience in the hospitality and food industry and has been an invaluable member of the events and banquets team at Grand Hyatt Mumbai for the past two and a half years. He joined Grand Hyatt Mumbai in February 2022 as Senior Events Manager. During his tenure, he played a key role in overseeing and coordinating successful events, managing sales, and ensuring exceptional guest experiences.



## THE MACHAN RESORTS

Lonavala

The Machan Resorts has appointed **GIRISH MENON** as the Head of Development. Girish holds a degree in Hospitality and Tourism Management from Edexcel, United Kingdom, and brings over 15 years of specialised experience in asset management, business development, guest relations, marketing and operations to this role. Prior to this, Girish served as Associate Director of Business Development at Sayaji Hotels. His career also includes a significant tenure as Business Development Manager at Lords Hotels and Resorts, besides key roles at renowned organisations.





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# Oman hosts four-city India roadshow

As Oman continues to strengthen its position as a top-tier global destination, the ongoing partnership with Indian travel agents and strategic initiatives undertaken by the sultanate are poised to attract more visitors from India.

 Janice Alyosius

The Sultanate of Oman recently organised its four-city India roadshow to showcase the country's allure as a premier destination for Indian travellers seeking luxury, culture, and adventure. The roadshow, covering New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, and Bengaluru, highlighted Oman's growing appeal for the Indian tourism market.

Emphasising on the significance of Indian market for Oman's tourism sector, **His Excellency Azzan Al Busaidi**, Undersecretary of Tourism for the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, said, "India ranks as Oman's second-largest source market."

The statistics underscore this importance: Indian visitor numbers to Oman surged past 625,000 in 2023, reflecting a remarkable growth of over 70 per cent from the previous




vious year. This upward trend shows no signs of slowing, with a 15 per cent increase in arrivals recorded in the first five months of 2024 alone.

H.E. Al Busaidi attributed this growth to a combination of factors, including the success of the recent roadshows and the invaluable support from Indian travel agents. "The numbers we are seeing right now show a significant increase in inbound tourists from India to Oman. I believe, this is due to many factors, but foremost among them are the roadshows and other activities that Oman Tourism is conducting here in India," he noted.

He expressed optimism about continued growth, saying, "I believe, in the next phase, the numbers are expected to grow even further."

In 2023, Oman welcomed 4 million inbound tourists, with over 600,000 coming from India—a significant rise from 350,000 the previous year. H.E. Al Busaidi anticipates even higher numbers for this year, with 265,000 Indian travellers already recorded in the first

five months. "If this pace continues, I am confident we will surpass last year's numbers. To further increase this figure, which is our objective, we need to conduct more roadshows, campaigns, and raise market aware-


  
**I am confident we will surpass last year's numbers, for which, we need to conduct roadshows, campaigns, and raise market awareness**

ness. We also require support not only from our market-based representatives here in India but also from Indian travel agents, who play a key role in achieving these goals," he said.

Oman is also taking strides in creating an attractive investment environment. Seeking Indian investments in the tourism sector, H.E. Al Busaidi said, "We welcome Indian investments in the tourism sector in various forms. Several incentives will be pro-

vided, including long-term land leases at minimal charges, tax incentives, and other financial and non-financial benefits to encourage more investments from India in Oman's tourism sector. I believe, these investments will not only increase the number of tourists from Oman to India but also vice versa."

The potential for expanded connectivity between Oman and India is also on the horizon. H.E. Al Busaidi highlighted that some airlines are already flying to 10 destinations in India and performing well, with Indian airlines also serving various Omani cities. He expressed readiness to facilitate the expansion of flight services, saying, "If increasing the number of tourists requires additional flights, we will coordinate with the relevant departments to make it happen."

The Indian market is particularly vital for MICE and wedding tourism in Oman. Acknowledging the importance of the segments, H.E. Al Busaidi said, "India is considered one of our key markets for tourism, and we look forward to increasing the number of tourists from India to Oman across different segments, including MICE." 



His Excellency Azzan Al Busaidi  
Undersecretary of Tourism for the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman

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