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'No ease of doing business for tour operators': Sahni

Guldeep Singh Sahni, Founder President, OTOAI and MD, Weldon Tours & Travels, highlights the pressing issues that tour operators face when dealing with foreign exchange transactions. He claims that ease of doing business is still far for outbound tour operators.

Nisha Verma

Claiming that ease of doing business has gone away from outbound tour operators in India, **Guldeep Singh Sahni**, Founder President, OTOAI and MD, Weldon Tours & Travels, said that they are facing an uphill battle with tax regulations that create confusion, hinder business growth and increase compliance burdens.

Operators, not tax collectors

One of the primary challenges faced by outbound travel agents is the way tax regulations are structured, making agents responsible for collecting and managing taxes on behalf of their clients.

"We don't generate any income from such taxes. It is supposed to be paid by the traveller to the government, and he is supposed to file return. We are not supposed to monitor it," he said. Sahni explained, "Now if the government bodies organise committees or sub-committees that engage with various trade associations and agents, they can better understand how bookings are made and how foreign



Guldeep Singh Sahni
Founder President, OTOAI and MD, Weldon Tours & Travels

exchange is handled. Instead of just replying to emails with 'please refer to our rule', they should create a compliance document with clear guidelines."

He revealed that currently, multiple interpretations of the tax rules lead to inconsistency and confusion. "You go to 10 chartered accountants, they will interpret it in a different way," he pointed out. A structured compliance book outlining specific requirements would ease this burden and ensure uniformity in tax procedures.

Forex still a concern

He believes that the lack of clarity in tax rules directly impacts the way foreign exchange is processed, making transactions more cumbersome. In addition, financial institutions and money changers have their own interpretations of the law. "Different interpretations hinder business and prevent agents from engaging in third-country transactions," he reasoned.

Specialisation is future

To navigate these challenges, Sahni suggests that travel agents focus on niche specialisations. "With increasing volumes, expertise will be key. Just as doctors specialise in different fields, travel professionals should become experts in specific destinations or services like visas, adventure tourism, or luxury travel," he said.

Observing a shift in traveller preferences, he mentioned, "People are no longer just booking trips, they want unique experiences like skiing in the Alps or deep-sea diving. We must be prepared to meet these demands with the right information and offerings."

Need for govt intervention

Sahni urges the government to take proactive measures to simplify tax compliance and support the growth of outbound tourism.

"While the government aims to bring more people into the country, they must also facili-

They (the Union Government) should engage with us to see whether we are truly experiencing ease in business or merely being made scapegoats

tate ease of doing business for outbound agents. If they claim to be improving business conditions, they should engage with us to see whether we are truly experiencing ease in business or merely being made scapegoats," he underlined. ☒

AI transforming MICE landscape

Artificial Intelligence is revolutionising the travel and hospitality industry with data-driven insights and predictive capabilities, streamlining processes and enhancing guest experiences.



Rajdev Bhattacharya
Global Head - Travel & Expenses, Wipro

"AI is transforming three key areas in the industry: hyper-personalisation, operational efficiency, and automation. AI-powered chatbots can create detailed travel itineraries, while predictive analytics optimise pricing and inventory management. Airlines and hotels use AI to reduce

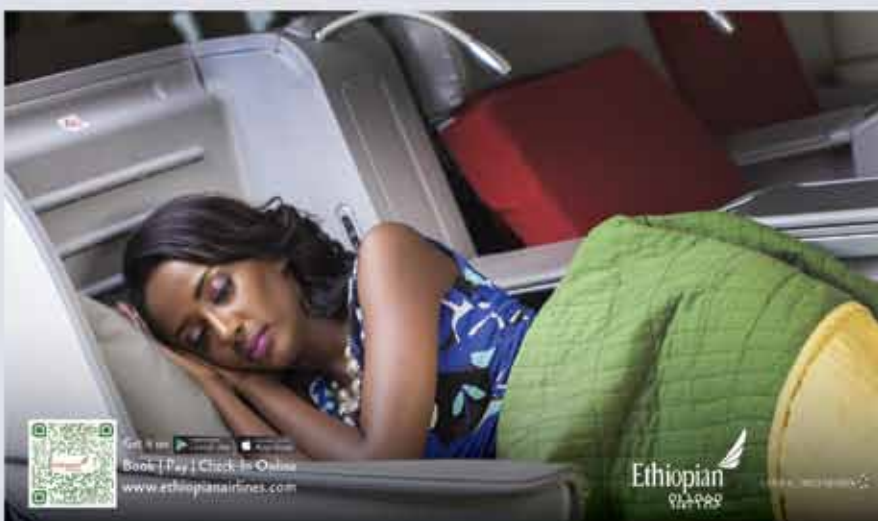
costs and enhance experiences. For instance, facial recognition tech speeds up airport security checks."

"AI is revolutionising the MICE industry, particularly personalised travel and event planning. By analysing data from past events, attendee preferences, and social media, AI curates tailor-made itineraries and schedules that enhance the attendee experience. Event management is streamlined, as AI-powered platforms handle complex tasks like venue booking, logistics, and scheduling."



Nitin Mittal
National Coordinator, NIMA and Co-Founder & CEO, Hotel N Apartment

Contd. on page 14 ▶



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TAAI recognises women in travel

TAAI celebrated International Women's Day with the 'Women of Wonder Awards 2025', felicitating 75 women leaders from travel, hospitality and aviation sectors. Underscoring its commitment to empowering women, the association aims to double its membership, as it approaches its 75th anniversary next year.

Surbhi Sharma

Commemorating the International Women's Day, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) presented the 'Women of Wonder Awards 2025' to 75 women leaders, including industry pioneers, government officials, and entrepreneurs, for their outstanding contribution to the travel, hospitality, and aviation industries.

The association kicked off the awards with an event in New Delhi on 8 March, where it felicitated 30 women leaders, followed by the award functions organised all over the country till 16 March. Among the awardees at the New Delhi function were **Pravati Parida**, Deputy Chief Minister, Odisha; **Mugdha Sinha**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India;



Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, along with his team, honours Mugdha Sinha, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India at WOW Awards

Radha Bhatia, Chairperson, Bird Group; **Jyotsna Suri**, Chairperson & Managing Director, The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group; **Shovana Narayan**, Kathak dancer; **Rohini Bhatia**, Chairperson, InterGlobe Foundation and **Devika Jeet**, Director, DDP Publications. The association also honoured 20 Region & Chapter heads of the association, who were conferred with

the Member Excellence Award for their outstanding leadership. The event underscored the association's commitment to recognising and empowering women leaders, particularly in the travel and tourism industry. The celebration marked a key moment in TAAI's journey, as it prepares to commemorate 75 years of excellence in fostering growth and innovation in India's travel and tourism landscape next year.

Addressing the event, **Sunil Kumar**, President, TAAI, said, "This landmark initiative reflects our commitment to recognising women's leadership and accomplishments. At TAAI, we have chosen the verticals of travel, tourism, and hospitality, blending them with leadership from government and allied authorities, media, and more." Kumar added, "We are committed to raising our current member-

ship with a focus in adding more female members and doubling it from 2,500 members to 4,000 by the time we reach our 75th anniversary." Kumar said, "Through TAAI's chapters and regions, we are able to connect with a lot of industry leaders, even in small towns. We are encouraging our women leaders from small Indian cities to come forward and take up responsibilities at the national level."



Devika Jeet, Director, DDP Publications, receives the award



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Predictive analytics shapes travel

Predictive analytics, powered by Machine Learning (ML), has emerged as a powerful tool in the travel industry to address complexities, offering data-driven insights that help businesses make more informed decisions.

AI versus human touch

Today, AI is not some sci-fi fantasy. It's already shaking up the MICE industry in ways we never imagined. From personalised event planning to automated logistics, AI is taking over the heavy lifting, making things faster, smarter and way more efficient. It crunches data from past events, social media and attendee preferences to build customised itineraries, suggest ideal venues and even predict catering needs. No more guesswork, just precision.

When it comes to networking, AI's got that covered too—matching attendees based on common interests. Of course, let's not forget AI chatbots—always ready to answer those last-minute travel or event queries. However, the truth is—while AI makes events seamless, it can't replace human connections that make MICE truly memorable. The future isn't about choosing between tech and touch, it's about getting the right balance.

Rise of Reset-jetties

Today wellness travel isn't just about fancy spa days or silent retreats. Travellers these days want trips that actually help them live better, longer and stronger. And the numbers back it up—91 per cent of Indians say holidays help them build resilience, while 7 in 10 feel more mindful about their health than ever before. It's not just about hitting the gym or eating clean; it's about 'resetting'. Think gut-health getaways, sober-curious retreats and sleep-focused escapes. A travel psychologist has said "Honouring our biological rhythms and putting human sustainability at the core of travel is actively countering the indulgence we saw post-pandemic." In short, people want to come back from a trip feeling better, not just well-rested. Destinations like Phuket, Manila and the Maldives are catching on, offering everything from Muay Thai and SUP yoga to Hilot massages. Travel is no longer just an escape—it's an investment in a longer, healthier life.

The travel industry is intricate and multifaceted, and the process of 'making travel happen' involves multiple interconnected stakeholders. Each stakeholder aims to personalise the travel experience and has a vested interest in ancillary sales. Factors such as fluctuating prices, weather conditions, and socio-political events add more complexity to understanding and forecasting demand. The ability to predict demand accurately is crucial for travel operators, airlines, hotels, and other service providers to optimise pricing, capacity, and resource allocation. Predictive analytics, powered by Machine Learning (ML) models, has emerged as a powerful tool for addressing these complexities, offering data-driven insights that help businesses make more informed decisions.

The rise of compute power and cheaper data storage

With the rapid growth of digital platforms and the availability of large volumes of data, businesses are tasked with analysing this data effectively to forecast demand. This is where predictive analytics comes into play, enabling travel businesses to use historical data and advanced algorithms to make accurate demand predictions and stay competitive.

How predictive analytics helps in demand forecasting

Predictive analytics utilises statistical algorithms and ML techniques to analyse historical data and forecast future trends. By examining past travel patterns, customer behaviour, and external influences, these models



can identify trends and predict demand fluctuations with a high degree of accuracy. For instance, airlines can predict passenger loads, hoteliers can forecast occupancy rates, and travel agencies can assess which destinations will experience high demand during specific periods.

One of the main advantages of predictive analytics is its ability to factor in real-time data, such as changes in consumer sentiment, political events, or unexpected weather disruptions, allowing for more flexible and accurate forecasting models.

ML Models for travel demand forecasting

Several ML algorithms have shown to be particularly useful for travel demand forecasting. Below are a few common models:

- ❖ **Time Series Forecasting Models (ARIMA, SARIMA, Prophet):** Time series models like ARIMA (Auto Regressive Integrated Moving Average) and SARIMA (Seasonal ARIMA) are foundational in forecasting demand based on historical trends. These models are designed to account for temporal patterns, including seasonality and cyclical changes.
- ❖ **Decision Trees and Random Forests:** Decision Trees and Random Forests are useful

in capturing non-linear relationships and interactions between various factors that influence de-

Predictive analytics utilises statistical algorithms and Machine Learning (ML) techniques to analyse historical data and forecast future trends

mand. These models break down the data into binary decisions at each node, enabling the model to predict demand based on factors such as price fluctuations, booking patterns, and market trends.

- ❖ **Neural Networks and Deep Learning:** For more complex forecasting, neural networks can capture intricate patterns and relationships in data that are often difficult for traditional models to detect. Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) and Long Short-Term Memory networks (LSTMs) are types of neural networks particularly suited for time series forecasting, making them ideal for predicting travel demand over time.

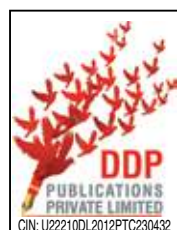
❖ **Support Vector Machines (SVM):** Support Vector Machines are another type of supervised learning algorithm that can classify and predict demand patterns based on features like demographics, pricing strategies, and historical booking data. They are particularly powerful when dealing with high-dimensional datasets and can provide robust forecasts even with limited data.

The application of predictive analytics in travel demand forecasting allows companies in the travel industry to make smarter, data-driven decisions. As the travel industry continues to evolve, the integration of advanced analytics will become increasingly vital in helping businesses navigate its complexities and stay competitive.



Sudhir Kumar
Sr Manager Data Science Engineer
Sabre Bengaluru GCC

(Views expressed are the author's own. The publication may or may not subscribe to them.)



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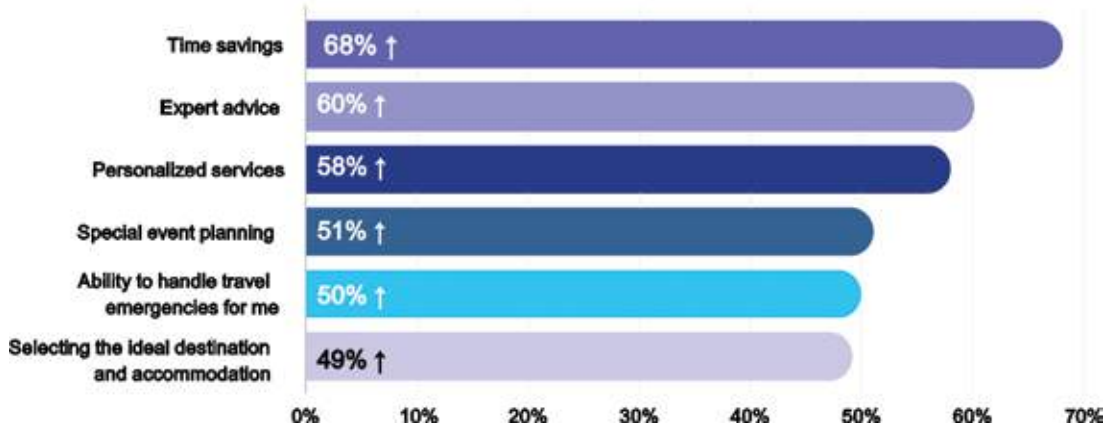
Decoding the travel advisor client

A regional snapshot of the global survey conducted by Expedia Group, in association with Wakefield Research, featuring insights from Indian travellers who booked with a travel agent in the past 18 months.

Note: ↑↓ Arrows indicate when data points are 3 percentage points above or below the global average.

Top reasons to use a travel advisor

Time savings and expert advice stand out for Indian travellers as the main reasons to use advisors.



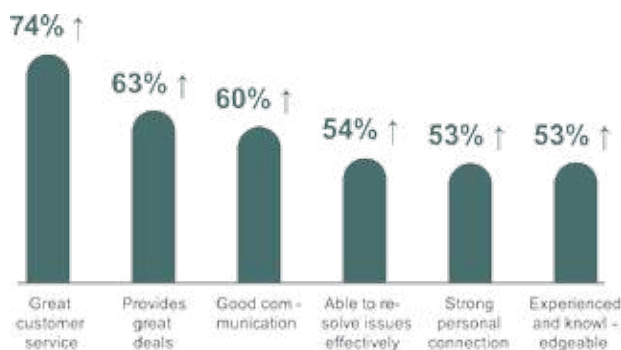
Which travel-related service do you typically use a travel advisor for?

Indian travellers are more likely to use a travel advisor to book the majority of their trip elements than the average traveller globally



Top reasons for staying loyal to one travel advisor

Customer service and providing deals are the main reasons Indian travellers stay with their advisors.



Top takeaways

Indian Travellers expect full service

From booking flights to securing visas, manage every details with care during trip planning so that your clients can enjoy a personalised and stress-free travel experience giving them the confidence to book again.

Expertise in special event planning is important

Appeal to Indian travellers seeking out these services by highlighting your expertise in special event planning on your website and social channels. Encourage clients to write reviews to build trust in your facility.

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- Will approach international consultants to develop **master plan for tourism clusters** in Telangana: TGTDC
- India likely to see next peak in FTAs in 2028-29; **govt investing ₹120 bn in infrastructure** over next 3 years: Mugdha Sinha
- While DigiYatra & web check-in enhance efficiency, **manual check-in system still fully operational**: MoCA
- Telangana unveils **Tourism Policy 2025-2030**, proposes 50% SGST reimbursement for investors in the sector
- 156 hospitality tourism start-ups** operational in Kerala

'Address basic issues first': Pandian

India's tourism sector is booming, yet critical challenges persist. Despite contributing 11% to the GDP, the industry struggles with basic amenities like clean toilets and high inter-state taxes. Pandian Kumaravel, MD, Cholan Tours, says that redressal of the issues can unlock India's full tourism potential.

 **Surbhi Sharma**

India's tourism sector has seen a significant growth over the past two decades, and Cholan Tours, has been at the forefront of this transformation. With 12 offices across the country, which primarily cater to inbound and domestic tourists in South India, the brand stands as one of the strongest travel service providers in India, with a growing fleet of premium vehicles.



Pandian Kumaravel
Managing Director
Cholan Tours

Pandian Kumaravel, Managing Director, Cholan Tours, feels that India faces significant challenges that hinder the full potential of tourism growth. "As spiritual tourism is on the rise and Tamil Nadu is emerging as a leader in the current scenario leaving Kerala behind, the need for improved tourism infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of visitors has become a necessity. As pilgrimage destinations are witnessing unprecedented footfall, with travellers seeking cultural

and religious experiences, one of the most pressing issues is the lack of basic infrastructure, particularly clean public restrooms. This is a major concern for senior citizens and women travellers, making long journeys arduous," says Pandian.

"Another challenge is the high tax burden on inter-state travel. Taxa-

tion policies across different states create logistical and financial hurdles, limiting the seamless movement of tourists. These barriers need urgent policy interventions to make travel more accessible and affordable," he stresses.

Need for govt intervention
Emphasising that tourism contributes significantly to India's GDP, accounting for 11 per cent currently and projected to reach 14 per cent by 2027, Pandian says, "Despite its economic significance, the government has yet to grant tourism industry status. Compared to other industries receiving considerable government backing despite contributing far less to GDP, tourism sector remains overlooked."

He said a simple, yet impactful intervention would be improving basic infrastructure—clean public restrooms, designated parking areas, and safer public spaces. "If these fundamental needs are met,

the tourism industry would require little to no marketing, as satisfied travellers would become natural ambassadors for Indian tourism," he underlines.

Call for action
India's tourism potential is immense, but realising it requires collaborative efforts between private stakeholders and the government. The industry does not seek handouts—just recognition and essential infrastructural support. "If India is to truly harness its tourism potential, policymakers must take

immediate steps to address the existing gaps. By improving facilities, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and recognising tourism as a key industry, we can position India as a world-class destination for travellers across the globe," he feels.

With an ever-increasing number of tourists exploring India, Cholan Tours is investing in modern, high-quality transport solutions. Recently, it added two brand-new Volvo buses to its fleet and are in the process of acquiring 10 more buses and 50 Toyota Crystas.

Challenges	Remedies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lack of improved tourism infrastructure ■ Scarcity of basic amenities like clean public restrooms & designated parking areas ■ High tax burden on inter-state travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improve basic infrastructure ■ Provide basic amenities like clean public restrooms, designated parking areas ■ Make travel more accessible and affordable with easy taxation policies

What industry learnt from Kumbh?

The Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj drew applause from all around the world for its successful organisation. However, it was not without its share of challenges. **TRAVELTALK** interacted with on-field experts to know the challenges faced during the event and sought potential solutions for smooth organisation of future events of such mega scale.

 **Somya Deep**

Regarded as the world's largest spiritual gathering, the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj showcased India's rich cultural heritage. The event reported 66 crore pilgrims in 45 days, showcasing India's ability to host large-scale events. Commenting on this, **Sunil C Gupta**, Chairman, IATO Northern Region and Director, Travel Bureau, said while it was a successful event in many ways, there were also some significant challenges that needed to be addressed. "To ensure the success of future editions, it is essential that authorities address challenges and work towards creating more efficient systems in areas of traffic management, waste management, and parking," Gupta observed.

Major challenges
Commenting on the traffic management, Gupta said, "The massive influx of vehicles led to severe traffic jams, causing many

guests to miss their flights. The situation was exacerbated by the fact that vehicles were unable to move, forcing guests to walk for miles with children and senior citizens in tow. Parking was also a major issue, with many guests struggling to find parking spaces. This led to further congestion on the roads and added to the overall chaos." Raising the waste management issue, he highlighted, "The volume of waste generated

by the crowd was a significant challenge, and it was evident that more effective waste management systems were needed to be put in place."

Prateek Hira, Chairman, IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter and Founder President & CEO, Tornos, noted, "With the kind of footfall from Maha Kumbh the challenges were very few as compared to the positives. One was reaching the mela

site. Reaching the mela site was tedious for most. Moreover, airfares going up near Maha Kumbh was a dampener for people who did not book earlier."

Pradeep Kumar Rai, Hon. Secretary, TAAI, Uttar Pradesh & Uttarakhnad Chapter and MD, Skyline India Travels, pointed out, "Accommodation was in high demand, making it tricky for travellers to find a place

to stay. Additionally, high airline ticket prices hiked travel costs. Stations and trains were overcrowded, making travel difficult."

Suggested measures
Suggesting potential solutions for future events of mega size, Gupta said, "Implementing intelligent traffic management systems can reduce congestion. Providing alternative transportation options, such as shuttle services and public transportation, can also be useful. Further, increasing the number of parking spaces and designating specific areas for parking can help ease parking at such mega events," he said, adding that "better recycling and composting" of the waste was recommended. Hira recommended separate lanes for the movement of vehicles and pilgrims. "For movement, ferry from parking to mela site could be another effective way to ease traffic congestion," he added. Rai advised early hotel bookings for future spiritual events.

Largely a successful event
Hira said, "Overall, the event was well managed and a win-win for private players and government. It was a great exercise for India to project its soft power to the world and make spiritual tourism a mainstay tourism." He said, "The best part was upholding the standards of social tourism since the mela saw all kinds of tourists, ranging from luxury high paying travellers to pilgrims from nearby villages. Social tourism came into light during Maha Kumbh and Prayagraj became a destination for all strata of society."



Indians chasing adventure now

Gone are the days when Indian vacations were solely about iconic landmarks and leisurely retreats. Fuelled by a hunger for immersive, offbeat experiences and amplified by social media's allure of picture-perfect adventures, Indian explorers—especially millennials and Gen Z—are diving into scuba sessions in Thailand, trekking Bali's volcanic trails, and cycling through Vietnam's countryside.



Himanshu Patil
President, OTOAI & Director, Kesari Tours

“The pandemic played a key role, fuelling a desire for physically engaging experiences like trekking, cycling and scuba diving. Luxury resorts have also adapted to this trend, curating active experiences like sa-



Gcobani Mancotywa
Regional General Manager for Asia, Australia, and Middle East, South African Tourism

“I expected this trend and started my own cycling group tours in international locations in 2016. This shift can be attributed to factors like hectic work schedules, greater awareness of one's health and fitness



Mit Bhatt
Managing Partner The Grand Vacationist

“More clients are moving beyond conventional sightseeing and leisure trips to embrace experiences that combine adventure and outdoor activities. This shift is driven by a growing demand for unique, immersive experi-

“The era of Indian travellers ticking off iconic landmarks from a checklist is fading fast. Today's explorers are trading temple tours for treks in Peru, swapping beach lounging for diving in the Maldives, and exchanging bus rides for cycling escapades through Tuscany's vineyards. This shift, seen first-hand by industry insiders, stems from a blend of rising disposable incomes, tech-driven access to affordable flights, and smoother visa.”



Rikant Pittie
CEO and Co-Founder EaseMyTrip

faris and nature trails that cater to families and solo travellers. With India's adventure tourism market projected to grow at 18.3 per cent CAGR from 2024 to 2030, active holidays are set to rise.”

“The pandemic reshaped travel priorities, with people now seeking meaningful, health-focused experiences. South Africa, with its diverse offerings—ranging from thrilling safaris to hiking trails and water sports—has become a preferred destination for Indian travellers looking to stay fit. This shift is evident among young professionals who value wellness and adventure. Activities like wildlife safaris and shark cage diving are popular.”



Sunil Uttam
Director Kass Travels

goals, a desire for unique and need for memorable experiences. Post-COVID, people, especially millennials and Gen Z, have started spending a good part of their income on them.”

“Over the past five years, millennials have emerged as a dominant force, steadily claiming a larger share of the vacation market. This generation is redefining leisure by prioritising active holidays that blend fitness, wellness, and adventure with traditional travel. The post-pandemic era has accelerated this shift, with a surge in travellers aged 25-45 years seeking vacations infused with dynamic activities like cycling.”



Hussain Patel
Director TripJack

ences. Social media plays a crucial role in inspiring travellers, with influencers and adventure enthusiasts sharing stunning visuals and stories of their active trips, making such experiences aspirational.”



Kulin Shah
Managing Director Kulin Kumar Holidays

“Traditionally, individuals and families would embark on one or two vacations annually. But current trends indicate that many are now opting for three or more trips each year, blending both domestic and interna-



Subhash Motwani
Director Namaste Tourism

“Adventure holidays in India is experiencing a significant surge in demand, driven by the country's diverse landscapes that are perfect for high-adrenaline activities. Paragliding, skydiving, bungee jumping, whitewater rafting and hot



Rajeev Kale
President & Country Head - Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)

“In the post-pandemic era, travellers are opting for immersive and personalised activities that resonate with their passions and interests. We have seen demands for experiences like attend-

“From adventures in New Zealand to relaxing beaches in Bali and ski trips in Japan and Europe, the interest in immersive travel has grown. Factors such as heightened health consciousness post-pandemic, exposure to global travel trends via social media, and the desire for unique, Instagram-worthy experiences are driving this shift. Internationally Switzerland and Japan and domestically Rishikesh and Meghalaya are gaining traction for adventures.”



Rahim Aslam
Founder & Consultant OA Globe DMC

tional destinations. We are responding to this by launching fixed departures to destinations like Mauritius, Seychelles, and Jordan. These curated packages combine experiences with adventure.”

“Compared to five years ago there are more Indians today opting for active holiday experiences. I remember about five years ago, we had only 20 clients signing up for the Berlin marathon, and today this number has doubled. There is this interest where a lot of people from the running community want to take part in the world's major marathons. Besides, a new trend has caught on, which is 'run-cation' where people go for a holiday post the marathon.”



SD Nandakumar
President & Country Head - Holidays and Corporate Tours, SOTC Travel

air ballooning are gaining popularity, especially in popular destinations, such as Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttarakhand, Puducherry, Rajasthan (Jaipur and Pushkar), and the Rann of Kutch.”

“Adventure tourism in India has seen a marked surge in demand, driven by the growing interest from Young India's, Millennials and Gen Z. Popular destinations, such as Spiti Valley, Dharamshala, Solang Valley, Bedni Bugyal, Doon Valley and Auli are witnessing an uptick in bookings for adventure activities, such as paragliding and skydiving. These regions offer a unique blend of scenic landscapes and adrenaline-pumping experiences.”



Shashank Shekhar Mishra
Founder & CEO Sports Konnect

cyclathons, walking trails, guaranteed reservations in Michelin star restaurants, long distance hikes and similar. Most adventure seekers are in the age group of 20-30 years.”

Compiled by Hazel Jain

Handpicked luxe experiences in Britain

In keeping with its new campaign 'Starring Great Britain', VisitBritain recently showcased luxury experiences for the ultimate British journey across London, England, Wales and Scotland, focusing on luxury and culture in 2025. Shuja Bin Mehdi, Senior Manager Industry Engagement – India, VisitBritain, shares details.

TT Bureau

The UK is and has always been synonymous with luxury, with premium offerings. With the aim of sharing a guide for the travel trade, VisitBritain recently showcased its 'Starring Great Britain Premium Collection' – an amalgamation of top luxury experiences throughout the UK, including London, England, Wales, and Scotland.

Shuja Bin Mehdi, Senior Manager Industry Engagement – India, VisitBritain, shares insights into the newly launched Starring Great Britain Premium Collection, a meticulously curated guide showcasing the UK's most exceptional luxury experiences. Spanning iconic destinations like London, England, Wales, and Scotland, this collection highlights the pinnacle of opulent travel offerings. "The UK is renowned for its luxury experiences, and through our newly launched Premium Collection guide, we are



Shuja Bin Mehdi
Senior Manager Industry Engagement – India, VisitBritain

bridging the gap between the travel trade and the end customer," explains Mehdi. Designed to fill this gap, the guide has already been launched in key markets—the GCC countries, India, and China—offering a gateway to Britain's most coveted experiences.

A cinematic journey

The Starring Great Britain campaign,

launched in January 2025, opens with a blockbuster-inspired film that positions Britain itself as the star. "The film takes viewers on a cinematic journey across Britain offering a front-row seat to its iconic destinations. By harnessing the growing trend of using films and TV shows to inspire travel, it encourages more visitors to choose Britain, to explore more," says Mehdi. From London's glittering skyline to Scotland's rugged Highlands, the campaign encapsulates the essence of luxury travel, which Mehdi notes "can mean different things to different people." Whether it's unwinding in historic five-star hotels or indulging in Michelin-starred dining, the guide weaves together bespoke experiences tailored to discerning travellers.

London's iconic luxury stays

Highlighting accommodations that blend heritage with modernity, Mehdi emphasises London's thriving hospitality scene. "Whether you prefer modern luxury at Raffles at The



OWO and Broadwick Soho or the timeless charm of The Goring and Brown's Hotel, London offers premium experiences for every traveller.

Retail therapy

London is a premier destination for

shopping, says Mehdi, pointing to exclusive retail experiences across the UK. Heritage destinations like Harrods, established in 1834, and Bond Street's luxury boutiques cater to refined tastes, while Westfield London—a sprawling hub

with over 350 shops—being one of Europe's largest shopping destinations. For curated indulgences, Covent Garden pairs high-end retail with world-class theatre. Beyond London, Selfridges' outlets in Bir-

The Starring Great Britain campaign, launched in January 2025, opens with a blockbuster-inspired film that positions Britain itself as the star

mingham and Manchester, along with McArthurGlen's designer outlets, ensure luxury seekers find "exceptional service and access to globally renowned brands during their visit to Britain."

A Night to Remember!



Travel agents in Mumbai witnessed an unforgettable evening where BTFI Travel and SABDMC Türkiye marked six incredible years of partnership. From honouring top-performing partners to cherishing heartfelt moments, the night was all about gratitude, connections and future possibilities.

2 new resorts open in Fiji

Brent Hill, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Fiji, shares updates on Fiji, the new Loloma Hour sustainability programme and meaningful travel experiences that will take centre stage in 2025.

Hazel Jain

Fiji has been steadily engaging with the Indian market. How significant is India for Tourism Fiji's growth strategy?

Absolutely, India is a priority. We are serious about bringing more Indian tourists to Fiji and have been active here for years through our partners at Global Destinations. While we have seen 10 per cent year-on-year growth, we want to accelerate this significantly. To do that, we are doubling down on investments—educating trade partners, amplifying what makes Fiji unique, and showcasing why it's worth the journey.

What travel trends are you observing among Indian tourists?

Fiji is renowned as a family-friendly destination, and Indian travellers love our resorts and island-hopping experiences. But we are also seeing demand for luxury—think honeymooners, wellness seekers, and high-end stays.

How is Fiji working with travel agents to boost visibility?

Trade engagement is key. We are



Brent Hill
CEO
Tourism Fiji

redefine luxury. Plus, iconic island properties like Vomo Island and Kokomo Private Island are rolling out new villas and renovations.

Sustainability is a global focus. How is Fiji innovating here?

This year, we are launching Loloma Hour—Loloma means "love" in Fijian. Think of it as a "happy hour for the planet", where guests join activities like coral planting, mangrove restoration, or Fijian language lessons. It's about connecting travellers to our culture and environment.

expanding famil trips and have the Matai Specialist Programme—Matai means 'expert' in Fijian—to train agents as Fiji ambassadors.

Any exciting new developments in Fiji's hospitality sector?

Two major launches stand out - the Crowne Plaza Resort Fiji opened in February 2025 and boasts 324 rooms with stunning common areas, including a beach club and lagoon-style pool. Then there is the Westin Fiji on Denarau Island—a 276-room, high-end resort that will

EXCITING NEW DEVELOPMENTS

324-room

Crowne Plaza Resort Fiji opened in February 2025

276-room

Westin Fiji - a 276-room, high-end resort on Denarau Island will redefine luxury

Vomo Island & Kokomo Private Island are rolling out new villas and renovations

Spain's focus on lesser-known regions

Since stepping into her role as Director of Spain's Tourism Office in India in September 2024, Elena Orland has championed a dynamic strategy to deepen Spain's connection with India. Elena's focus is now on diversifying India's travel palette and promoting lesser-known regions like Extremadura and Navarra.



Hazel Jain

Elena Orland, Director, Tourism Office of Spain in India, has been busy since taking over the office in September 2024. This year, the NTO is planning multiple familiarisation trips for agents to Spain, the major one being a six-day MICE trip to Madrid and Seville. "The plan is to also promote lesser-known regions of Spain, such as Extremadura, Castilla y León, Castile La Mancha, Aragon, and Navarra. So, we will be having multiple famils and bring these regions closer to the Indian travellers. We also want the trade to discover off-the-beaten track itineraries in regions like Andalusia, Catalonia and Valencia," says Orland.

She adds that one of the best ways to discover the destinations is to look for accommodation on Paradores – a public network of luxury hotels located in beautiful locations. There are currently almost a



Elena Orland
Director
Tourism Office of Spain in India

100 paradores located throughout Spain. They usually have an average of 65 rooms, thus ensuring personal, quality customer service. More than half of them are located in historical monuments and buildings; and many others offer accommodation in national parks and outstanding natural spaces.

In addition, their restaurants serve a harmonious blend of traditional

dishes alongside the latest culinary trends. All of this shows the commitment of paradores to sustainability and translates into a management model where the protection of historical and cultural heritage, care for the environment and the promotion of the local economy always prevail. In April 2025, the NTO will host a webinar on Paradores, as well as sustainable tourism products in Spain for trade.



The number of solo women travellers to Spain is also growing, and Indian women are not an exception to this. "Solo travelling for women is more than a regular holiday. It's about building confidence, about discovering new skills and about living on your own terms. Spain is a safe, friendly and warm country for solo travellers, and mainly for women. There are many experiences that women can enjoy like wine tasting courses, hiking, spiritual journeys, and of course shopping," she adds.

This year, the NTO is planning multiple familiarisation trips for agents to Spain, the major one being a six-day MICE trip to Madrid and Seville

India-Spain Dual Year

Last October, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Spanish President Pedro Sánchez declared 2026 as India-Spain Dual Year in order to strengthen bilateral relationship between the two countries in three main areas – Tourism, Culture and Artificial Intelligence (AI). The NTO will, therefore, plan a major roadshow and conduct other activities through the year. "Spain is one of the most visited countries in the world. In 2024, we had almost 100 mil-

lion visitors in total with more than 226,000 visitors only from India. As compared to 2023, we are pretty much on track in terms of the number of arrivals. However, beyond the number of tourists, I would like to highlight that the per person tourism spending is about 2,600 euros by travellers from India, which is much higher than the overall average tourism spending per person in Spain. This data shows how Indian traveller recognises Spain for the value it offers," Orland elaborates.

IN NUMBERS

100 million
visitors Spain received
in 2024

226,000
visitors were only from India

2,600 euros
per person tourism
spending by travellers
from India

Kiwi-India connection gets a push

Tourism New Zealand, at a gala evening hosted recently in Mumbai to welcome René de Monchy, Chief Executive, Tourism New Zealand, announced a series of initiatives to remove barriers to tourism from India. Acknowledging the support received from travel agents in India, de Monchy hinted at a potential direct flight route between India and New Zealand.



AI promoting personalised travel

▶ Contd. from page 5



Sanjay Pai
Head – Travel & Facilities and
Director Aviation, Larsen & Toubro

“ AI is set to transform the travel industry through autonomous operations, predictive services, and hyper-personalised experiences. Fully autonomous or remotely controlled operations could reduce reliance on human intervention. AI-powered systems can optimise travel itineraries with the lowest logical fares and minimal connectivity, all while adhering to country-specific safety norms. Predictive analytics will help anticipate flight delays, reducing downtime and associated costs. ”

“ AI is dramatically reshaping the travel and tourism industry, offering both improved customer experiences and operational efficiency. AI algorithms analyse user behaviour to provide personalised destination



Jyoti Mayal
Chairperson
THSC

suggestions, travel itineraries, and promotions that enhance engagement and satisfaction. AI-powered chatbots streamline communication, offering instant responses for bookings and local recommendations, making the process smoother. ”



Pradeep Shetty
Spokesperson
HRAWI (Western India)

“ AI is rapidly transforming India's travel and hospitality sectors. AI-driven technologies enhance guest experiences, streamline operations, and optimise pricing. From chatbots offering instant assistance to dynamic pricing models adjusting rates in real-time, it is making travel seamless. Personalisation has also significantly improved, with AI analysing guest preferences to offer tailored experiences. It is helping hotels predict demand trends, manage inventory, and boost profitability. ”

“ AI is reshaping India's travel industry, enhancing accessibility, security and immersive experiences. As the country embraces digital transformation, Madhya Pradesh is leading the way by integrating AI-driven innovations into



Bidisha Mukherjee
Additional Managing Director
Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

its tourism landscape, proving that technology and tradition can co-exist seamlessly. One of the most groundbreaking advancements is Virtual Reality tourism, allowing travellers to explore heritage sites remotely. ”



Gourav Deb
Chief of Operations
Niraamaya Wellness Retreats

“ The future of hospitality is rapidly evolving, driven by changing guest expectations and technological advances. Key trends include a preference for unique, experience-driven stays over standardised services, the rise of AI-powered personalisation, wellness as a core lifestyle choice, and increased guest autonomy in curating their travel experiences. Sustainability is also becoming key factor, with travellers seeking destinations that align with responsible tourism. ”

“ AI, though in its nascent stages in India, is key to staying relevant in a fast-evolving market. AI-powered platforms, virtual assistants, and chatbots, enhanced by Natural Language Processing (NLP), will elevate customer



Louis D'Souza
Managing Partner
Tamarind Global

service by offering instant responses. As Machine Learning improves, human intervention for complex queries will decrease. Personalisation will be revolutionised, as it leverages real-time data and past behaviours. ”



Pranav Kapadia
Founder & Director
Global Destinations

“ AI is reshaping India's travel industry by offering numerous opportunities and some challenges. On the positive side, AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants provide instant customer support, while Machine Learning enables highly personalised recommendations. Dynamic pricing models allow travel companies to offer competitive fares, while predictive analytics optimise operations. Over-reliance on automation can reduce human interaction, which is important for memorable experiences. ”

“ AI is poised to revolutionise India's travel and tourism industry, enhancing efficiency, personalisation, and overall customer experience. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants will streamline the booking process, offering



Jay Bhatia
Director
Tulsidas Khimji Holidays

real-time recommendations and multilingual support. Dynamic pricing algorithms will help optimise rates for airlines and hotels based on demand, while AI-driven personalised itineraries will cater to individual traveller preferences. ”



Sucheta Naggal
Director & CEO
Travstarz Global Group

“ Artificial Intelligence is transforming the landscape of travel and tourism, especially destination weddings, in several ways. Whether it is the AI tools facilitating the entire planning process like managing checklists and schedules, or providing real-time data to take informed decisions about venues, caterers and vendors, AI is playing a pivotal role in managing tasks efficiently. It also helps personalisation by providing recommendations for accommodations and activities. ”

“ AI is revolutionising the travel landscape by making processes more efficient, personalised, and secure. In travel discovery, chat-based AI tools allow customers to easily plan itineraries. AI-enabled customer



Suyash Gupta
COO
Travel Bureau

support systems, integrated with platforms like WhatsApp and Gmail, streamline communication and improve response time. AI-powered booking platforms offer tailored recommendations, dynamic pricing, and 24/7 support. ”



Lokesh Bhattaiah
Vice President
TAAI

“ AI is present in almost every step of the travel and tourism industry. AI excels at processing data and automating tasks, while humans provide creativity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence, leading to more efficient and innovative solutions. AI travel agent systems are the way people book and manage their travel. It helps in handling a wide range of tasks that were traditionally managed by humans. AI provides instant support, answering queries and resolving issues round the clock. ”

“ AI is reshaping India's travel sector by improving operational efficiency and enhancing customer experiences. Machine Learning and analytical models enable firms to anticipate travellers' preferences, optimise pricing, and provide



Trishal Rao
Chief Sales Officer
SKIL Travel

highly tailored travel itineraries. AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants have reduced wait times and increased service efficiency. Automation in logistics and itinerary management simplifies complex business and group travel. ”

Compiled by TT Bureau

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Empowering tier II, III city agents

The Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) set a new benchmark with its resounding success at GPS Vishakhapatnam, offering valuable opportunities for education and networking to tier II and III travel agents. Harmandeep Singh Anand, MD, GPS, says, "Some of the different exhibitors here include the ones that offer the Chardham Yatra, which is huge during the upcoming season."



Gear up to cash in on the concept of connected trips

Seamless, all-in-one travel experiences are the future and connected trips are leading the way. Experts from TravClan, Amadeus and ITQ discuss how agents can capitalise on this trend, the challenges involved and the role of technology in execution.

 Janice Alyosius

The concept of connected trips is gaining momentum, offering a seamless travel experience by integrating flights, trains, road transport, hotels, at-

views, **Mohammad Mujtaba**, COO, Amadeus IT, explained, "Any GDS today is looking beyond just selling air segments. We are focusing on creating a super PNR or an order ID that clubs multiple travel components together."

are developing corporate solutions that bundle hotels, flights, ground transport, and even visas into a single platform. Additionally, we are integrating expense management to make corporate travel more efficient," he said.

Mujtaba highlighted automation as a key value driver. "Travel consultants spend hours manually building on itineraries. If connected trips can reduce this time, customers will pay a premium. However, as GDS companies, we remain B2B



Chirag Agrawal, Mohammad Mujtaba and Anoop Tewari at the panel discussion

tractions, and more. While the idea holds immense potential, travel agents face several challenges in execution. A recent panel discussion with experts from TravClan, Amadeus, and ITQ explored how travel agents can leverage this evolving trend to enhance services and revenue.

Why connected trips matter for travel agents


Travel agents today are expected to offer more than just individual bookings. Sharing his opinion, **Chirag Agrawal**, Co-Founder, TravClan, said, "Traveller behaviour is evolving rapidly. Market feedback shows that personalised experiences are now a major demand. The experience economy is shaping how travel is booked and consumed."

Connected trips are not just about personalisation but about simplifying complex itineraries. "Instead of selling separate travel components, agents can offer a seamless journey, combining flights, hotels and transfers into one curated package. This enhances customer satisfaction while opening new revenue streams," he suggested.

How GDS platforms are powering connected trips

For travel agents, integrating trips requires access to reliable data and technology. Expressing his

Amadeus is enabling travel agents and OTAs to build connected trips by providing extensive data integration. "Companies like MakeMyTrip in India and Hoppers in Germany use our data to forecast and create virtual interlining, which combines low-cost and full-service carriers," claimed Mujtaba

 **Connected trips presents a major opportunity for travel agents to offer more value-added services and increase their revenue**

Anoop Tewari, CCO, ITQ Technologies, highlighted Travelport's approach. "Our global survey found that 56 per cent of travellers believe travel has become more complex over the last decade and 75 per cent expressed the need for a single platform addressing all their travel needs. We are focused on multi-source content that is optimised and authenticated to make bookings seamless for agents."

Beyond flights, ITQ is expanding into multi-modal solutions. "We

Real challenge is who takes responsibility?

While connected trips offer convenience, execution remains a challenge. When disruptions occur, such as flight delays affecting ground transport or hotel check-in, responsibility becomes a key issue. Mujtaba clarified Amadeus' role. "As a GDS, our responsibility is to provide actionable data, tools, APIs, and platforms for travel sellers. We offer real-time updates on delays and gate changes, but the responsibility of ensuring a smooth experience lies with travel sellers," he said.

Tewari pointed out that service quality depends on strong contracting. "Unlike airlines, which are standardised, hotels and ground transport are fragmented. Ensuring guaranteed service delivery is a major challenge. Until we address this, connected trips will remain difficult to execute smoothly," he emphasised.

Revenue vs Experience: The right approach for agents

Investing in connected trips must be financially viable for agents. Sharing ITQ's approach Tewari said, "While we support our customers in forming connected trips, it does come with costs. Our revenue model includes subscription-based services and revenue-sharing agreements with tech providers."

providers and invest in startups to drive innovation without shifting to a B2C model," he said.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR AGENTS

- ❖ **Leverage GDS tools** – GDS platforms like Amadeus and ITQ are creating APIs and data solutions to help agents integrate connected trips seamlessly.
- ❖ **Prioritise contracting** – Ensuring strong agreements with hotels and ground transport providers is key to delivering a reliable connected trip experience.
- ❖ **Use AI and automation** – Investing in AI-based tools can help agents automate itinerary planning, reducing booking time and improving efficiency.
- ❖ **Monetise connected trips** – Subscription-based services, revenue-sharing and premium upselling can help agents generate additional income.
- ❖ **Stay ahead of industry trends** – Airlines and OTAs are moving towards bundled travel solutions. Agents should explore how to integrate similar services to stay competitive.



Checklist for travel agents

Booking bungee jumping for clients

Bungee jumping is a high-risk activity and travel agents must ensure clients book with certified operators following strict safety standards. The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) has issued guidelines to help mitigate risks. Here's what to check before booking:

Certified operators: Ensure the operator follows global safety standards (AS/NZS 5848:2000) and is registered with local authorities.

Equipment & inspections: All gear, especially bungee cords must be from reputable suppliers, regularly inspected and properly maintained. Always ask when the equipment was last inspected.

Emergency preparedness: Check if the operator has rescue plans, trained medical staff, hospital tie-ups and insurance coverage. Confirm with which local hospitals they have emergency arrangements.

Age & weight limits: Confirm that clients meet the standard requirements (12–45 years, 40–110 kg).

Medical restrictions: Ensure clients with heart issues, high BP, back problems, epilepsy, pregnancy or recent surgeries are not allowed to jump.

Safety briefing & waivers: Clients must receive a full safety briefing from the jump master and sign a disclaimer before jumping.

Weather conditions: Ensure jumps are not conducted during extreme weather conditions like heavy rain, strong winds or thunderstorm

Trained staff: Jump masters must be experienced, first aid & CPR certified and capable of handling emergencies.

Sustainability & compliance: The operator should follow environmental best practices and have the necessary government approvals.

For detailed safety guidelines, refer to ATOAI's Indian Adventure Tourism Guidelines (2018, Version 2). Always verify before booking to ensure a safe experience for clients.

Source: ATOAI's Indian Adventure Tourism Guidelines, 2018 Version:2

Frangipani: A taste of India in Bali

Frangipani, nestled within the luxurious Impiana Villas Seminyak in Bali, has emerged as a top dining destination for Indian travellers. Known for its authentic Indian flavours and elegant ambience, the restaurant seamlessly blends tradition with innovation, making it a favourite among leisure and MICE groups alike.

Janice Alyosius

Indian travellers visiting Bali are always on the lookout for authentic dining experiences that remind them of home. Frangipani, located in the luxurious Impiana Villas Seminyak, has carved a niche for itself by offering an exquisite blend of Indian flavours with a thoughtfully curated ambience.

An authentic Indian culinary experience

Sharing his views on what makes Frangipani a top choice for Indian travellers and MICE groups, **Dheeraj Ranjan Kumar**, Founder & Director, Balitrip Wisata, said, "Frangipani offers a unique blend of authentic Indian flavours and a thoughtfully curated ambience that transports diners to a world of Indian culinary indulgence. The restaurant's commitment to authenticity, using Indian-sourced ingredients and recreating traditional recipes, ensures that every



Dheeraj Ranjan Kumar
Founder & Director
Balitrip Wisata



Devesh Katyani
Managing Director
Holidays Bookers DMC



Kunal Sachdeva
Co-Founder & Director
Ishull DMC



Anurag Pant
Managing Director
Trip Mantra Bali DMC

dish tells a story of India's rich culinary heritage."

Echoing similar sentiments, **Devesh Katyani**, Managing Director, Holidays Bookers DMC, describes Frangipani as "a true gem, offering a perfect blend of authentic Indian flavours and warm hospitality". "The restaurant has consistently impressed our clients with its elegant ambience, meticulous at-

tention to detail and a diverse menu catering to both traditional and modern Indian tastes. Availability of vegetarian and vegan options has been a major draw," Katyani said.

Perfect fit for MICE groups

Frangipani's concept resonates deeply with Indian travellers and incentive groups. Kumar elaborates, "The restaurant's ability to cater to diverse palates, paired

with its scenic location and serene vibe creates a perfect balance of tradition and luxury. It's a destination where guests can celebrate, bond and enjoy a true taste of India's culinary diversity."

Kunal Sachdeva, Co-Founder & Director, Ishull DMC, appreciates Frangipani's spacious setting. "It has a spacious area for both indoor and outdoor dining, making it

an ideal venue for MICE events," Sachdeva said.

Anurag Pant, MD, Trip Mantra Bali DMC, highlights the overall experience. "Frangipaani at Prana Restaurant in Impiana Villas Seminyak offers an unforgettable dining experience, with its exquisite blend of flavours and serene ambience. A perfect setting for both relaxation and indulgence," he recalled.

Enhancing the experience

To further enhance its appeal to Indian travellers and MICE groups, industry leaders suggest a few key improvements. Kumar recommends introducing "customisable group dining experiences, including live cooking stations featuring regional Indian specialties."

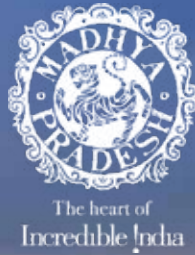
Sachdeva said that adding variety to the dessert menu and incorporating live entertainment could enhance the dining experience.



Indiva Marketing celebrates 20 yrs

Indiva Marketing, founded by Beate HK Mauder Kakkar, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary with a grand celebration in Mumbai. The event marked a significant milestone in Indiva Marketing's journey, highlighting two decades of excellence in representing some of the world's most prestigious brands, such as Washington DC, New York City, Frankfurt, Happy Valley, Atlantis and La Mamounia.





Madhya Pradesh

A trail of timeless & undiscovered heritage treasures

Wherever you wander in Madhya Pradesh, history breathes beneath your feet and all around you, waiting to be discovered. This land isn't just rich—it's overflowing with treasures. After all, the only diamond-producing state in India is bound to have gems beyond just the sparkling kind.

Imagine a place where, in less than 100 kilometres of travel, you find yourself on a trail of archaeological wonders and ancient marvels—each site revealing a different chapter of time. Madhya Pradesh is an open-air museum, where relics of the past stand untouched by time: majestic forts, intricate temples, prehistoric rock art, and awe-inspiring monuments scattered like jewels across the landscape.

The world already knows Madhya Pradesh for its UNESCO-recognised wonders—the sensuous sculptures of Khajuraho, the serenity of Sanchi, the prehistoric artistry of Bhimbetka. But beyond these, 15 more hidden treasures are now rising to claim their place in history, quietly drawing in travellers who crave the undiscovered.

Known for its clean, green, and safe destinations, Madhya Pradesh is also recognised as a women-friendly travel destination, ensuring a comfortable and secure experience for solo and group travellers alike. The state wears its ethos—"Atithi Devo Bhava" with pride.

Here, you are not just a visitor; you are a part of a story thousands of years in the making. Pause the noise of the world. Listen. Let history reveal itself to you.

Step Into The Stories of the Past

Picture a grand city, well-connected to the rest of the country, its majestic fortress standing like a pearl under the golden sun. Every stone holds a story, every alley echoes with the footsteps of kings, poets, and travellers from centuries past. This city is also the keeper of the first-ever written mathematical Zero. Gwalior invites you to walk through its regal corridors.

The world knows Madhya Pradesh for its wonders—the sensuous sculptures of Khajuraho, the serenity of Sanchi, & the prehistoric Bhimbetka artistry

A little further, the whispers of a bygone era draw you into a city standing tall since the 6th century BC. Here, breathtaking monuments and delicate palaces hold secrets of royal romances, moonlit serenades, and timeless muses that inspired poets and dreamers



Bir Singh Dev Palace, Datia

alike. It is here that the vision of the Taj Mahal was born. Welcome to the enchanting Mandu.

Unearth Hidden Mysteries

Wander into a town where wonders lie beneath the surface—splendid ancient stepwells carved deep into the earth. With their mesmerising symmetry and labyrinthine stairways, they transport you to a world filled with awe and mystery. Legend has it, these stepwells will never run dry as long as the oceans have water. Dare to test it? Chanderi awaits.

For a refreshing escape, take a boat ride through towering white marble cliffs that glow under the sun, as waterfalls crash down in a roaring symphony. The cool mist on your face, the rhythmic sound of oars slicing through the Narmada

River—it's a moment of pure, exhilarating freedom. Jabalpur offers a dreamlike retreat.

Or perhaps, you seek something even more enigmatic. Imagine stepping into a hidden world where stone craftsmanship and nature's mystique come together. Over 51 monolithic caves, sculpted and carved into a rugged hill, stand in breathtaking precision, a silent testimony to the artistic and spiritual mastery of the 5th-7th century CE. Wander through grand doorways, towering stone columns, and intricate sculptural symbols that radiate peace, tranquility, and wonder. Dhamnar is your gateway to an era long past.

Taste the Essence of Tradition

No journey is complete without

indulging in the unique flavours of Madhya Pradesh! Stop in a town where even the simplest dishes are transformed into culinary masterpieces. The streets are alive with the aroma of thick, creamy mawa jalebis, a sweet treat that lingers on your taste buds. Even a humble plate of dal and chawal is reimagined with yellow peppers and served with mahua chutney—a wild, tangy, floral dip made from forest blossoms. Burhanpur offers a feast with unique flavours.

The Legacy of Kings and Queens

Step into a town that has seen charismatic queens, chivalrous kings, and powerful kingdoms and rule for nearly four centuries. The echoes of sword clashes and courtly whispers still seem to lin-

ger in the air. Mandla with its understated yet distinct palaces offers an intriguing view of Madhya Pradesh regal valour and heritage.

A Story That Never Ends

And yet, we have only just begun. We have not even spoken of the rest of the archaeological and heritage wonders—hypnotic places, legendary tales, and hidden marvels, that are now on the tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites, waiting for another story to be told some other time.

The cool mist on your face, the rhythmic sound of oars slicing through the Narmada River—it is a moment of pure, exhilarating freedom

Madhya Pradesh is a state where every road leads to discovery, every corner hides a mystery, and every moment is a step into something extraordinary. So, until next time—keep your curiosity alive, your bags ready, and your heart open for more discoveries. See more, so you can remember. And remember more than one can possibly see. See you soon!

Travel **brings together more than 70** WEDDING SHOW

The Travel Wedding Show at Anantara Jewel Bagh Jaipur Hotel was one-of-a-kind event, bringing together over 70 top wedding planners under one roof. With over 2,000 meetings in two days, it set new benchmarks for collaboration, venue partnerships and bespoke experiences, reinforcing Jaipur's position as India's premier destination wedding hub.



wedding planners under one roof



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

EVENT TALK

Published from: India Middle East

APRIL 2025

Date	Event	Time
1-2	Rendez-vous en France 2025	9:00 am
6-8	International Luxury Travel Market Africa 2025	9:00 am
7	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Hyderabad	10:00 am
8	PATA Webinar with Director Events	2:30 pm
8	LA Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
8	Deluxe Travel Market 2025- Georgia	9:00 am
9	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Chandigarh	10:00 am
9-11	World Travel Market Africa 2025	10:00 am
10-11	International Tourism Fair Kosova 2025	10:00 am
11	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Pune	10:00 am
11	PATA India's 19th Update and Outlook Meeting with DG Tourism	4:00 pm
14-16	World Travel Market 2025- Brazil	9:00 am
15	Hospitality & Tourism Summit Chicago 2025	11:00 am
16	PATA Jewels of India webinar with UP Tourism	TBA
21-23	PATA Annual Summit	10:00 am
24	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
26-28	PATA Travel Mart	10:00 am

Sopa Lodges expands in India

Sopa Lodges' growth strategy includes expansion and strengthening of its market presence in India with the help of its India representative – Global Destinations. Rosemary Muthoni, Director of Sales, Sopa Lodges, speaks exclusively with **TRAVEL TALK**.

Hazel Jain

Sopa Lodges, a leading mid-range hotel chain in East Africa, is intensifying its efforts to strengthen its market presence in India. With the support of its India representative, Global Destinations, the lodge chain aims to collaborate with Indian travel trade partners to enhance its reach and cater to the growing demand from Indian travellers. This strategic move comes as the company witnesses a significant surge in Indian tourists, particularly post-pandemic.



Rosemary Muthoni
Director of Sales
Sopa Lodges

Rosemary Muthoni, Director of Sales at Sopa Lodges, highlighted the growing interest of Indian travellers in Kenya and Sopa Lodges. "We've seen over the years, especially post-COVID, the growth of outbound Indian travellers into Kenya and specifically into Sopa Lodges," she said.

To tap into the burgeoning India market, Sopa Lodges has been working closely with local Destination Management Companies

(DMCs) in Kenya and travel agencies in India. "We thought it was very important for us to come here ourselves for brand visibility, to understand the needs of the Indian traveller, and to ensure we are meeting their expectations," Muthoni added.

The Indian traveller

The company is keen to delve deeper into the preferences of Indian travellers, from pricing to specific needs based on their city

of origin. "What is the most important thing for them, especially from a price perspective? What are the different needs from which cities or the different travellers? What is the difference between our luxury travellers, budget travellers, and the different types of travel, be it families or groups?" Muthoni explained.

Food, in particular, has emerged as a critical factor for Indian travellers. "The first thing they ask is, 'How is your food? Tell us about your food?' We are happy to report that we have an Indian chef because we have got a lot of Indian incentive groups and multi-generational families," Muthoni said,

adding, "This focus on culinary preferences has been a key driver in attracting Indian guests."

Families and incentive groups

Indian travellers to Sopa Lodges are multi-generational families or incentive groups, with a few FITs. The lodge chain has also seen a rise in Indian weddings and honeymoons at their properties.

Revenue growth

The Indian market has contributed significantly to revenue growth of Sopa Lodges. "In 2023-24, we grew our revenue by 25 per cent, with close to 10 per cent coming from the Indian market," she said.

PROPERTIES WITH NO. OF KEYS

Name of the property	Number of Keys
Amboveli Sopa Lodge	84 rooms
Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort	82 rooms
Lake Nakuru Sopa Lodge	60 rooms
Masai Mara Sopa Lodge	101 rooms
Samburu Sopa Lodge	60 rooms
Tarangire Sopa Lodge	75 rooms

OBITUARY



HH Arvind Singh Mewar
(1944-2025)

HH Arvind Singh Mewar, Chairman, HRH Group of Hotels and the 76th Custodian of the House of Mewar, passed away in Udaipur on 16 March 2025 at the age of 81 after a prolonged illness. Born on 13 December 1944 in Udaipur, Rajasthan, he was the younger son of Bhagwat Singh Mewar and Sushila Kumari. A graduate of Mayo College, Ajmer, he pursued hotel management in the UK and USA, gaining international experience before establishing HRH Group as a professionally managed hospitality company.

Mewar is survived by his wife, Princess Vijayaraj of Kutch, and their three children: Bhargavi Kumari, Padmaja Kumari, and Lakshyaraj Singh Mewar.

AI SL 2025 unites travel agents

Air India successfully hosted its first-ever pan-India cricket tournament, the Air India Super League 2025, bringing together over 500 participants from 48 leading travel partners spanning Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai. The event fostered camaraderie between Air India and its valued travel partners.



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MOVEMENTS

ITDC

New Delhi

RAJESH RANA has been appointed as the Director (Commercial & Marketing) of India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC), a public sector enterprise under the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. He took charge of the office in his new role on March 17, and will serve as a member of the Board of Directors. With a career spanning over 26 years in the hospitality industry, Rana brings expertise in catering, tourism, marketing, and business operations. He began his career as a Management Trainee with the Jaypee Group of Hotels before moving to THDC India, a PSU. In 2005, he joined IRCTC.



RATEGAIN

Noida

RateGain Travel Technologies appoints **ANURAG JAIN** as Executive Vice President-APMEA. In the strategic role, Jain will lead RateGain's efforts to accelerate growth, strengthen partnerships, and expand its footprint across the APMEA region. He brings over two decades of leadership experience in business transformation, revenue growth, and market expansion across global organisations, including Expedia, Amazon and Johnson & Johnson. Most recently, he led South Asia, Indonesia, and China for Expedia, helping thousands of hotel partners scale their businesses and expand B2B channels.



THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

New Delhi

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts appoints **PREETI MAKHIJA** as the General Manager of The Leela Palace New Delhi. A seasoned leader with extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Makhija has been an integral part of The Leela group since 2011, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to excellence and operational expertise. Her journey with The Leela Palace New Delhi began during the pre-opening phase when she joined as a Duty Manager. Upon stepping into the role of Hotel Manager in 2024, she took charge of the hotel's overall operations and long-term vision.



RENAISSANCE AHMEDABAD HOTEL AND FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad

Renaissance Ahmedabad Hotel has appointed **ROHIT BAJPAI** as the Cluster General Manager. He will be spearheading both Renaissance and Fairfield by Marriott Ahmedabad properties. With over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Bajpai is an industry veteran known for his strong expertise and exceptional leadership skills.



HILTON GURUGRAM BAANI CITY CENTRE

Gurugram

Hilton Gurugram Bani City Centre appoints **ABISHEK CHANDRAN** as the Cluster Director of Marketing & Communications. With over 14 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Chandran has a proven track record of successfully driving marketing and communication strategies, boosting brand visibility, and executing impactful campaigns. In his new role, he will spearhead marketing and communication strategies across the cluster, working closely with the cluster commercial director, general managers, and Hilton brand's teams. He will be responsible for developing innovative campaigns and advancing brand growth.



SAHARA STAR

Mumbai

Sahara Star has announced key leadership appointments to enhance guest experiences, optimise operations and drive innovation. Bringing over 22 years of diverse experience spanning hospitality, ITES, retail and FMCG, **SANTOSH SINGH** has been promoted to the position of Hotel Manager. Previously serving as Head of Procurement for Sahara Star & Aamby Valley City, Singh played a pivotal role in streamlining operations, optimising costs and driving efficiency. A results-driven leader, Singh has successfully led new business ventures, standardised operations, and driven profitability across his career.



IHCL

Goa

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) has appointed **ANMOL PANCHOLY** as Hotel Manager - Taj Cidade de Goa Heritage. Pancholy began his journey with IHCL as a Management Trainee. In his most recent position as Director of Operations at The Leela Hyderabad, he developed his expertise in operations and general management. With his experience across multiple properties, Pancholy brings a unique blend of strategic vision and collaborative leadership. In his new role, he is poised to bring fresh perspectives, energy, and a commitment to excellence, further strengthening the hotel's legacy.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT GURUGRAM DOWNTOWN

Gurugram

Courtyard by Marriott Gurugram Downtown has appointed **NIKHIL BHANOT** as the Hotel Manager. With an illustrious career spanning over two decades in the hospitality industry, Bhanot brings a wealth of experience in hotel operations, guest experience management, and strategic leadership in tier 1 markets. In his new role, he will oversee hotel operations, ensuring excellence in guest experiences and reinforcing Marriott's brand positioning in the dynamic Gurugram market.



VIKRAM PRAKASH BHARDWAJ joins Sahara Star as the Head of Revenue, Strategy & Growth. Bhardwaj has nearly two decades of expertise in revenue management, digital transformation and AI-driven business intelligence. His strategic approach has played a crucial role in driving profitability across multiple hospitality verticals, including rooms, banquets, Food & Beverage, memberships and MICE. Bhardwaj has also been instrumental in launching A-Star Academy—India's only hotel school, spearheading project and process automation to enhance guest loyalty programmes.



SKYVIEW BY EMPYREAN

Mumbai

Skyview by Empyrean has appointed **VINOD SANGRA** as the Hotel Manager. At the 22-acre property, Sangra will focus on curating exceptional guest experiences, optimising operational efficiency and driving revenue growth while maintaining brand standards and profitability. He brings a wealth of knowledge and extensive hospitality experience spanning 23 years to his new role. He started his first professional stint with InterContinental New Delhi (now The Lalit) and has held key leadership roles at The Orchid Group, ITC Hotels, Four Points by Sheraton, and Ramada. As VP at TDI Infratech, he played a key role in strengthening the F&B business.



SHERATON GRAND PALACE INDORE

Indore

Sheraton Grand Palace Indore promotes **SEEMA TAJ** to the position of Director of Sales and Marketing. In her new role, she will lead strategic efforts to enhance brand presence in the market, drive business expansion, and foster key partnerships. Her leadership and vision will be instrumental in positioning the property as a premier choice for both business and leisure travellers. With a career spanning 23 years in the hospitality industry, she has consistently showcased strong leadership and market expertise. Over the years, she has held key leadership roles with renowned hospitality brands.



GRAND HYATT MUMBAI

Mumbai

Grand Hyatt Mumbai has appointed **VIKAS YADAV** as the Area Director of Digital Marketing. With over 18 years of experience in the hospitality, travel, e-commerce, media, and B2B sectors, Yadav comes with a rich background in digital marketing, marketing analytics, and technology. He began his career as a developer focusing on marketing analytics and digital marketing tools before transitioning into digital marketing. Over the years, he has worked with leading brands, such as IndiaMart, Vconnect Global and Amar Ujala. He holds a BSc degree in Computer Science & Physics and a Master of Computer Applications.



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Captivating agents with lucrative incentives

Malaysia Airlines is expanding its India footprint with better connectivity and new trade-friendly solutions. Dersenish Aresandiran, Chief Commercial Officer of Airlines, Malaysia Aviation Group, talks about fresh opportunities for its partners.

 Janice Alyosius

In a world where air travel is more than just moving from one place to another, airlines are rewriting the rules of connectivity, experience and engagement. Malaysia Airlines is not just expanding its network in India, it is crafting a more seamless, immersive and rewarding journey for travellers. With new routes, strategic alliances and passenger-first innovations, the airline is reinforcing its commitment to one of its fastest-growing markets.

Strengthening India-Southeast Asia connectivity

Sharing how the moves are shaping the future of Malaysia Airlines in India, **Dersenish Aresandiran**, Chief Commercial Officer of Airlines, Malaysia



Dersenish Aresandiran
Chief Commercial Officer of Airlines, Malaysia Aviation Group

Aviation Group, says that the decision to launch a direct flight between Kolkata and Kuala Lumpur aligns with the airline's broader strategy of strengthening its presence in India, one of its fastest-growing markets globally. "Kolkata emerged as a natural addition to our network as air travel demand surges across India. We anticipate surpassing our FY24 targets in FY25, with a projected 1.3 million passengers from India, representing a 14 per cent year-on-year growth. Our Indian routes have recorded an 88 per cent load factor in metro cities and 86 per cent in tier II cities, and Kolkata is expected to play a crucial role in driving this growth," he says.

Additionally, Malaysia Airlines' expanded codeshare partnership with IndiGo enhances connectivity, offering seamless travel options beyond direct routes.

What can agents do: Leverage the expanded network to offer travellers greater flexibility, connecting them from metro and tier II cities to Kuala Lumpur and beyond.

Sports tie-ups for brand engagement

Malaysia Airlines' collaboration with Manchester United has strengthened brand visibility in India. "By tapping into the deep emotional connection Indian fans have with Manchester United, we have positioned ourselves as a lifestyle brand. Our exclusive influencer experience at the MATTA Fair in September generated significant engagement, amplifying



brand visibility across key Indian markets," shares Aresandiran.

Additionally, the airline's partnership with ICICI Bank offers special discounts for Manchester United ICICI cardholders, enhancing customer loyalty.

We anticipate surpassing our FY24 targets in FY25, with a projected 1.3 mn passengers from India, representing a 14% year-on-year growth

What can agents do: Promote exclusive Manchester United travel experiences to football fans, integrating sports and travel offering.

Expanding reach through codeshare partnerships

The codeshare agreement with IndiGo has extended Malaysia Airlines' access to key domestic destinations in India, complementing its direct routes to major cities.

"This tie-up expands Malaysia Airlines' access to seven key domestic destinations in India, complementing our direct routes to 10 major cities," Aresandiran notes.

What can agents do: Utilise the codeshare partnership to offer enhanced travel itineraries, ensuring smooth connections across India and Malaysia.

Tailored solutions for agents
Malaysia Airlines is empowering agents through travel solutions:

- ❖ **MHGroup:** Special fares & flexible conditions for group bookings.
- ❖ **MHCruise:** Seamless travel options for cruise passengers.
- ❖ **MHUpgrade:** An upgrade bidding system for Business Class.
- ❖ **MHplus NDC:** Dynamic pricing and personalised fare bundles. "We are committed to equipping agents with advanced tools, allowing them to curate seamless travel experiences," says Aresandiran.

What can agents do: Leverage the trade-friendly solutions to customise offerings and provide added value to customers.

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