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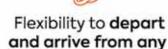
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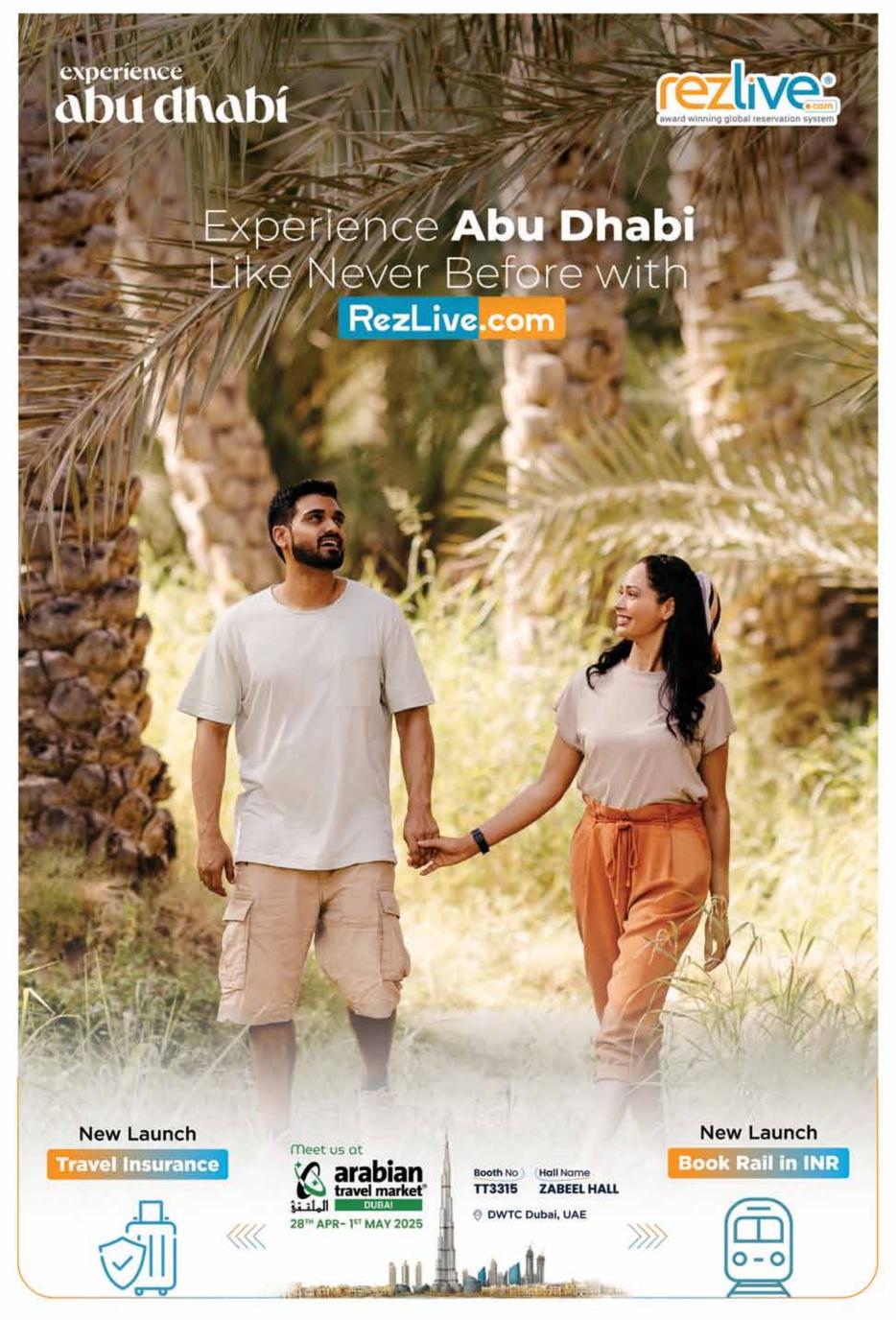
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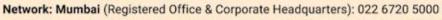
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Indians to splurge on foreign trips

14% Indians plan to spend more on foreign visits, reveals MMGY's inaugural 'Portrait of Indian International Travellers' report. It unveils key insights into the travel behaviours, motivations and preferences of Indians travelling abroad.



assport-carrying adults in India intend to spend an average of \$4,755 (over ₹4 lakh) on leisure trips in the next 12 months, pinpointing a 14 per cent increase in spending over the past year, according to new research by MMGY Travel Intelligence. The research report, named 'Portrait of Indian International Travellers', unveils key insights into the travel behaviours, motivations and preferences of Indian travellers exploring abroad. "India is rapidly emerging as one of the world's most influential outbound travel markets," said Caroline Moultrie, MMGY Global President, EMEA. "This study reveals a confident, experience-driven audience prioritising

safety, sustainability and multi-destination itineraries. Understanding this shift is key to unlocking the next wave of global travel growth," Moultrie added. Based on a survey conducted between December 2024 and January 2025 of more than 3,000 adults with passports residing in India, the report's key findings include:

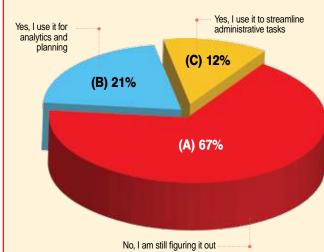
■ Appeal to Younger Generations: Over the past three years, Millennials in India have taken an average of 3.5 international trips, making them the most frequent international travellers among the surveyed generations. Gen Zers, on the other hand, showed the highest growth in planned expenditures, predicting a 14.2 per cent increase in their budgets.



■ Safety and Convenience: The perceived safety of a destination remains a top concern, with 93 per cent of respondents citing it as the most critical factor in travel decisions. Additionally, 83 per cent prioritise destinations that offer vegetarian or halal food options, though many still express an eagerness to "dine local" through food

Contd. on page 42

67% businesses exploring Al adoption



A significant majority of businesses (67%) are still exploring Al adoption, finds a poll survey conducted by

The respondents were offered to choose from three optsions:

- (A) No, I am still figuring it out,
- (B) Yes, I use it for analytics and planning and
- (C) Yes, I use it to streamline administrative tasks.

Over two-thirds of respondents (67%) have not yet implemented AI, indicating a gap in awareness, resources or confidence in AI integration. Among adopters, AI is prioritised for analytics and planning (21%) rather than administrative tasks (12%), suggesting businesses focus on leveraging AI for decision-making over operational efficiency.

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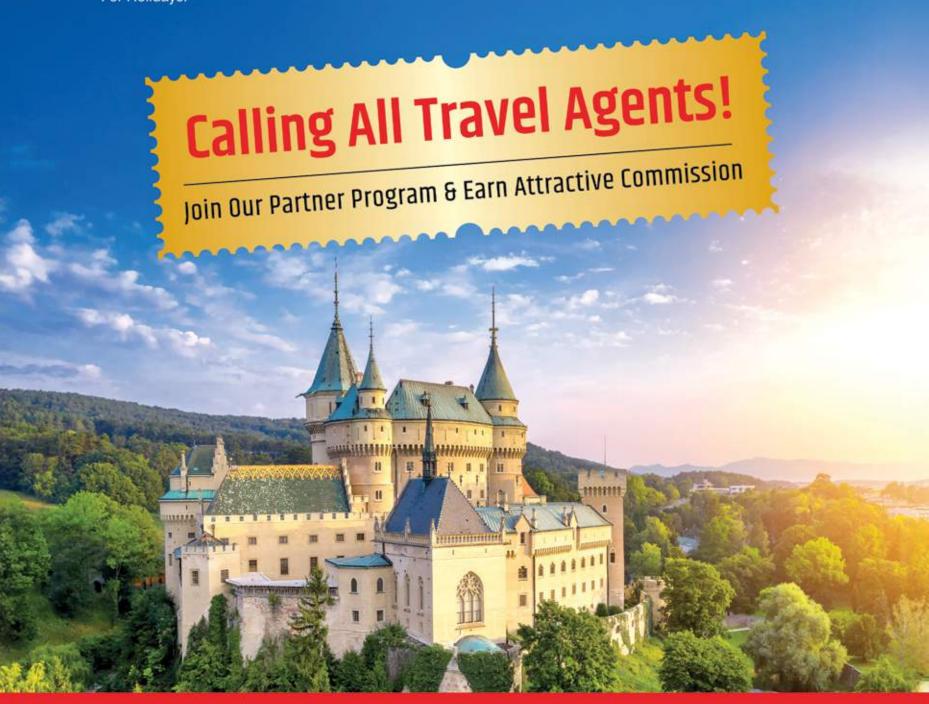
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Cross eyes 40% rise in Indian guests

Cross Hotels & Resorts sets its sights firmly on India with a dedicated 3-city Sales Mission, aimed at expanding its brand presence in the country and engaging the travel trade partners. Creating tailored experiences for Indian travellers, the hotel group is tapping into India's booming outbound travel market through strategic partnerships and product innovation.

Surbhi Sharma

ross Hotels & Resorts, one of the fast-growing hospitality brands in the Asia-Pacific region, successfully concluded its three-city India Sales Mission recently. The sales mission, covering key markets of Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, showcased the diverse portfolio of Cross Hotels & Resorts to the Indian travel trade, strengthening existing relationships and building new connections.

Deepening ties with Indian travel trade

A delegation of Cross Hotels & Resorts, led by **Andrew Hartley**, the Vice



Andrew Hartley Vice President - Commercial Cross Hotels & Resorts

President - Commercial, engaged with top Indian travel agents, tour operators and key industry stakeholders at its roadshows, which featured business meetings and networking sessions. Emphasising that India is

a key market for Cross Hotels & Resorts and contributes a large share to its business, Hartley said, "We are targeting a 40 per cent increase in Indian guests by the end of 2025, through direct engagement and strategic distribution partnerships."

Brand growth & new hotel developments

The group currently operates 28 hotels across Asia, with plans to expand to 100 properties by 2030. At the roadshow, it introduced its recently launched hotels Lumen Bangkok Srinakarin and Away Chiang Mai Thapae Extension. It also promoted its upcoming properties Cross Vibe Bangkok

Srinakarin and Away Bangkok Sukhumvit, which are set to open in May and

We are targeting a 40% rise in Indian guests by the end of 2025, through direct engagement and strategic distribution partnerships

June, respectively. "Our leisure business is doing well, with Bali resorts getting the highest traction.

We are hopeful to attract MICE and wedding business with our new openings," said Hartley. Sharing plans to grow the brand further, he added, "We want to expand our footprints in Thailand and Indonesia. We also have plans to venture into Vietnam and then move to Japan with some new openings."

B2B support & distribution strategy

Recognising the role of travel agents, Cross Hotels provides equal access to all B2B partners, including small agencies. Their dedicated web portal enables easy booking management and tailored offerings, while partnerships

with DMC Discova and influencers help boost brand reach and digital visibility.

5-YR GROWTH HORIZON

28

properties Cross Hotels & Resorts has across Asia

100

properties the group eyes by 2030

6

distinct brands
- Cross, Cross
Vibe, Away, Cross
Collection, Lumen
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Years in Leisure Travel

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35 years and counting OPINION



New normal with Artificial Intelligence?

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) seeps deeper into every layer of travel and hospitality—from backend operations to guest experiences—it brings with it not just efficiency and innovation, but a new breed of risks we are only beginning to understand. Data breaches, phishing scams, fake websites, and eerily convincing chatbot interactions are no longer rare incidents. They are becoming part of the operational reality.

The truth is cybersecurity is no longer an IT team's concern alone—it is now a business-critical priority. With web applications being the backbone of modern-day travel platforms, any flaw in coding or lack of process hygiene becomes a direct threat. The pandemic taught us, sometimes the hard way, that laxity in updates and renewals can lead to catastrophic losses. The silver lining? Al can also be the solution—helping detect and respond to cyber threats faster than ever before. But tech alone won't cut it.

Human intervention is still vital. Whether it is setting up standard operating procedures, building digital trust with customers, or navigating legal grey zones AI might stumble into, people are needed to define boundaries and ethics. Without this layer of oversight, even the most advanced AI can backfire—as some high-profile companies have already discovered.

This isn't just a cautionary tale for big brands. Whether you are a cruise line, a hotel chain, or a travel agency, the challenge is the same—How do you embrace the future without compromising your foundation? It starts with recognising cybersecurity not as a checkbox, but as a dynamic process. Regular audits, clear data protection protocols, proactive fraud detection, and perhaps most importantly, collaboration across the industry—these are no longer optional. They are essential for keeping pace in a fast-changing digital landscape. The Al revolution is here, and we must be ready, not reactive.

Blockchain in Travel: Revolutionising B2B payments

The travel industry with its complex ecosystem has faced transaction and payment inefficiencies for decades. Blockchain technology is changing the game by bringing decentralisation, security and transparency to business-to-business interactions.

TT Bureau

ne of the major stumbling blocks in the travel sector has been the lack of transparency between parties regarding financial transactions and contracts. Blockchain assures that all transactions are secure and immutable, reducing the opportunity for fraud and discrepancies. Smart contracts automate the execution of contracts defined in the contract, enhancing transparency and trust to various degrees.



Payment efficiency

cross-border Typically, are seen as payments slow and expensive to process because of the volume of intermediaries that are included in sending payments across borders. However, with the emergence of blockchain technology, peer-to-peer connectivity allows for low processing times and transaction fees. Hence,





cryptocurrencies and stablecoins are capable of enabling speedy and cheap international payments, unlike the traditional banking system.

Reducing fraud

Travel businesses have loopholes in their online booking processes, attracting massive chargebacks and fraudulent transactions. Once transactions on the blockchain have been confirmed, no person can reverse them without the consent of both parties involved. This benefits travel agencies, hotels and airlines by securing their revenue streams and minimising their losses

Data security and customer identity management

The most important thing you need to know about blockchain technology is that it guarantees proof of identity verification in a secure yet decentralised manner. It allows travellers to store their data on a blockchain in such a manner that businesses can check their identity without relying on centralised databases that are susceptible to hacking and data

breaches, thereby making it both the security and fast-tracking check-in and boarding process.

Facilitating loyalty programmes

Many travel companies run loyalty programmes that often face challenges due to the fragmentation of databases and redeemable

With the emergence of blockchain tech, peer-to-peer connectivity allows for low processing times and transaction fees

points. Blockchain, therefore, creates a single loyalty programme ecosystem for travellers, with which they can easily redeem points across the various service provider platforms to boost consumer satisfaction and engagement.

Real-world applications

Many companies and

start-ups in the tourism sector are beginning to see that, with blockchain technology, B2B transactions in their world are going to become exceedingly easier and more performative. From addressing old inefficiencies in B2B transactions and payments, blockchain is said to revolutionise the travel industry with the promise of transparency, cost reduction and security for enterprises, aiming to provide seamless experiences for travellers.

As the world adopts more of this technology, block-chain promises to be one of the greatest pillars in the digital transformation of the tourism industry.



Gopal Kapoor Managing Director Dook Internationals

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

8

Shopping, concerts and sports events drive travel

From shopping for local and handmade goods, making a special trip for a luxury purchase or attending concerts and sporting events, Indians are prioritising unique experiences this year, says 2025 Global Travel Trends Report by American Express.



report says that Indian travellers are shifting gears with both intention and thoughtplanning. Sanjay Khanna, CEO and Country Manager, American Express Banking Corp India, said, "Indians are more informed and discerning than ever before and seek holistic experiences during their travel. At American Express, we understand the preferences of our Card Members and are committed to helping them unlock more value on travel, dining, shopping and entertainment - through each aspect of their journey."

Top insights include: Indian travellers are prioritising unique experiences and purchases.

- 92 per cent Indians look for one-of-a-kind goods to remind them of their trip, so they have a story to share with friends and family.
- ♦ 84 per cent Indians say it is important for them to support local small businesses while visiting a new destination.
- 81 per cent Indians prioritise purchasing highquality local goods (e.g., coffee beans, Persian rugs, Italian leather) on next trip.



- ♦ 50 per cent Indians are planning a global trip in 2025 to purchase a luxury good/ investment piece.
- ♦ 58 per cent Indians are planning to travel to both domestic and international destinations to attend a specific concert or show.
- Indians are willing to go the distance and travel both domestically (36 per cent) and internationally (32 per cent) for a sporting event in 2025. Cricket (63 per cent), football/ soccer (38 per cent) are the top sports Indians are planning to travel for this year!

Indians are savvy spenders and look to maximise value while traveling.

- 79 per cent of Indians are planning to use rewards points for leisure travel (flights, hotels, car rentals) in 2025.
- 84 per cent of Indians surveyed believe combining credit card rewards with other loyalty programmes provides the best value for international trips.
- ♦ 50 per cent Indian travellers are linking their credit cards to dining partner companies in addition to everyday expenses.

Indians are tech friendly and do their research well before planning their travel.

- ♦ When planning a trip, Indians typically use reviews on travel websites (67 per cent), social media (55 per cent) and recommendations from friends / family (51 per cent).
- Finding places that match interests (54 per cent) and their budget (50

Indians are willing to go the distance and travel both domestically (36%) and internationally (32%) for a sporting event

per cent) are most important to Indians when selecting a destination.

- 79 per cent of Indians typically download relevant travel apps before their trip.
- 48 per cent Indian travellers book all aspects of their trips on their smartphone or tablets.





GROUP

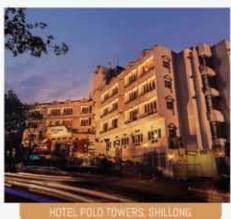
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Tourism foreign exchange inflows hit \$10.1 billion in Q3 **2024-25**, surpassing pre-Covid levels: RBI

With 380+ hotels in its stable, IHCL aims to double its revenue and portfolio by 2030: Puneet Chhatwal

Taj Mahal emerges as highest-earning monument with 98.7 cr revenue in ticket sales during FY24

Global sports tourism expected to expand; India an emerging source market, says Naveen Kundu

Indian carriers' capacity set to outpace demand, leading to lower airfares: MD, Air India Express

Centre okays 2 water tourism projects worth 169.05 cr in Kerala

RezLive adds travel insurance tool

RezLive is expanding its offerings to the Indian travel trade. With the addition of travel insurance and train booking services, plus advanced tools like Al-powered SmartMatch, the company aims to simplify travel planning and unlock revenue streams, making it a more powerful one-stop solution for travel professionals.

Surbhi Sharma

atering to the evolving needs of the travel trade community, RezLive.com, part of the Travel Designer Group, has recently added travel insurance and train booking services to its India portfolio. The additions, along with several tech and product innovations, mark a significant step in the platform's mission to offer a one-stop solution for Indian B2B travel professionals.

Highlighting the rationale behind the expansion, Jaal Shah, Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, said. "The decision to add travel insurance and train booking services to our platform is driven by our



Managing Director Travel Designer Group

commitment to offering a comprehensive solution for our B2B partners."

As post-pandemic travel habits evolve, insurance has become a non-negotiable for safety-conscious travellers. At the same time, train travel, especially in Europe, continues to be a popular and cost-effective option. "With these services, we empower travel agents to provide more complete itineraries that align with their clients' preferences," he explained.

The platform has collaborated with top-tier insurance providers to ensure coverage plans are both competitive and relevant. "We cover a wide range of risks, from medical emergencies to delays and cancellations," Shah noted.

SmartMatch

Among RezLive's headline innovations launched this year is SmartMatch - Seamless Room Mapping Powered by Al. This tool automates the alignment of room categories across hotels, eliminating manual errors and improving accuracy. "This feature streamlines operations for our partners," said Shah.

Decision to add travel insurance and train booking services is driven by our commitment to offering a comprehensive solution

Summer plans

With the summer travel season approaching, RezLive is rolling out special promotions and support initiatives. "Our VIP Desk will provide tailored services, and we are ensuring system readiness to handle peak booking volumes," said Shah.

B2B engagements

The company's strength lies in its close engagement with the travel trade community. "Regular webinars, training sessions, trade shows and personalised support keep the dialogue open. Our partners want advanced technology, competitive pricing and diverse of-ferings," Shah said. On their plans to promote the company at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025, Shah said, "We are focusing on interactive demos and one-on-one consultations while showcasing multiple key developments." 🐈

TIA membership up 2x in a year

TIA is redefining India's tourism industry through unity, innovations and strategic partnerships. With over 400 members across 80 cities, it is focused on the growth of tourism while championing collaborations across industry verticals. As the industry rebounds post-pandemic, the alliance aims to foster holistic, sustainable and inclusive growth for all stakeholders.

Surbhi Sharma

ourism India Alliance (TIA), under the leadership of its President Jagdeep Bhagat, continues to strengthen its position as a pan-India platform uniting travel stakeholders across the country. With a robust membership of more than 400 travel professionals from 80 cities, the alliance has become an important voice in India's tourism landscape, focusing on collaboration, inclusivity and sustainable growth. As India's outbound travel gains momentum postpandemic, optimism within the alliance is high. Bhagat said, "Our members are



Jagdeep Bhagat President

bullish on the upcoming season. We believe this marks the beginning of a new era. Agents are already building packages and consolidating efforts to promote business. The setbacks of the pandemic are finally being offset."

Forging strong airline partnerships

TIA is actively working with airlines to ensure its outbound travel agents receive strategic support and attractive offers. This collaboration ensures that members can serve their clients with competitive pricing and seamless service. "We are in the final stages of a strategic tie-up with a reputed international airline, which will help unlock better opportunities for our members," he said.

Promotion of two-way tourism

Emphasising the importance of a balanced approach, Bhagat said, "We are not limiting ourselves to outbound travel alone and building a two-way channel. Outbound is growing, but we need to

Our members are bullish on the upcoming business season. We believe this marks the beginning of a new era

focus equally on inbound and domestic tourism. The industry is becoming more cosmopolitan, and agents today are involved in multifaceted operations—be it leisure, MICE, or weddings." He pointed out that traditional seqmentation in the industry is outdated. "MICE, weddings, leisure—these are no longer isolated verticals. They all rely on each other. To cater to the needs

Collaborations

- Tie-ups with global airlines in final stages
- 2-way tourism strategy: outbound and inbound

of big MICE or corporate events that can hosts over 20,000 people, India has convention centres Bharat Mandapam YashoBhoomi in Dwarka but lacks rooms in hotels, transport and entertainment to function cohesively. Without synergy, no single vertical can sustain itself," he explained.

Industry synergy

- Call for breaking vertical silos
- Emphasis on inter-dependence of all tourism sectors (hotels transport, venues)

APRIL 2¹¹ FORTNIGHT ISSUE 2025 South Asia's Leading Travel Fortnightly www.travtalkindia.com



Celebrating the Goa Cashew Fest

As Goa gears up for Goa Cashew Fest 2025, scheduled from 25th to 27th April at DB Grounds, Panaji Goa, the spotlight is on this unique celebration that showcases the state's agricultural legacy and culinary innovation. Dr Deviya Rane, Chairperson, Goa Forest Development Corporation, shares the initiatives planned for this year's festival.



hat is the broader vision behind the **Goa Cashew Fest** 2025. and how does it tie into GFDC's mission?

The broader vision behind Goa Cashew Fest 2025 -Season 3 is to 'Empower. Enrich. Explore'. This isn't just a celebration of Goa's iconic cashew culture; it's a movement to empower local communities, enrich Goa's agro-based economy, and explore the deeprooted connection between our natural heritage and traditional livelihoods.

As the nodal agency for eco-tourism and sustainable forest-based initiatives, the Goa Forest Development Corporation (GFDC) plays a pivotal role in fostering responsible growth. The Cashew Fest directly aligns with GFDC's mission by promoting value-added products derived from forest resources, encouraging local entrepreneurship, and drawing attention to the ecological and economic significance of cashew cultivation.

Through this fest, we aim to create awareness, generate employment, support self-help



conservation, culture and commerce together.

Cashews are central to Goa's identity – how does the festival blend this iconic fruit with Goa's culture. heritage and cuisine?

Cashews are more than just a crop in Goa — they the festival offers a sensory experience rooted in Goan authenticity. We bring together local artisans, homegrown chefs, folk performers and selfhelp groups who use the cashew in everything from sweets to crafts, infusing it into every layer of the fest.

make it much more than just a festival-it's a celebration of everything Goa stands for. Whether you are a foodie, music lover, fashion enthusiast, or just here for the vibe-there is something for everyone.

How is the local community being involved in organising and participating in the festival?

The Goa Cashew Fest 2025 is truly a community-driven celebration. At its core, it's about giving a platform to the people who keep Goa's cashew legacy alive. From farm to fest, the local community is involved at every step. The cashew apples and ship. The festival empowers Goans from all walks of life to contribute, collaborate and celebrate their identity, traditions and talents on a larger platform.

How do you see this festival contributing to Goa's agritourism and rural economy?

The Goa Cashew Fest plays a key role in boosting Goa's agro-tourism and helping to improve the rural economy and in uplifting livelihood of local community. It provides an opportunity to showcase the rich cultural heritage of Goa, particularly the cashew gallery covers cashew cultivation, after-

connection between tourists and the local communities. And, of course, will improve cashew cultivation in the state of Goa and indirectly help in protecting the identity of the Goan cashew.

This festival is a key component to strengthening the rural economy of Goa.

If you had to describe the Cashew Fest 2025 in three words, what would they be?

If I had to sum up the Cashew Festival 2025 in only three words, the words would be: Explore. Empower. Enrich.



are a symbol of our land, our traditions, and our way of life. The Goa Cashew Fest is designed to be an immersive celebration that blends this iconic fruit with the very soul of Goa's

Will there be any new or unique experiences introduced this year? What can one look forward to at Goa Cashew Fest 2025? This year's Goa Cashew

Fest 2025 is full of surprises—and let's just say, something crunchy and exciting might just be making its debut! You will have to be there to know what it is. Beyond that, we have taken the festival experience to a whole new level. We have curated a vibrant Sundowner Set with mellow coastal vibes, a high-energy Fashion Show that fuses Goan flair with cashew-inspired creativity, and more than 50 food and beverage stalls dishing out irresistible flavours.

Expect live performances by nationally renowned and homegrown Goan artists, exciting games, quirky contests, spot prizes and cultural experiences that niro featured at the festival are proudly sourced from local cashew farmers across Goa. Our Zonal Agriculture Officer plays a key role as the facilitator—connecting these farmers with stakeholders to ensure fair participation and recognition.

Local artists have also come on board to bring the festival to life through stunning décor that reflects Goa's vibrant aesthetic and cultural richness. Our self-help groups, especially women-led ones, are the soul of the festival. They bring a diverse range of products to their stalls-from homemade snacks to goodshandcrafted showcasing the state's local talent, creativity and entrepreneurship.

It's not just about participation—it's about owner-

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care of crop, collection of cashew fruits and nuts, stomping, extraction of juice, feni distillation, roasting of nuts and separation of nut, processed nuts.

In essence, the Goa Cashew Fest serves as a catalyst for rural development, by creating economic opportunities, promoting cultural tourism, and fostering a deeper

invite everyone to Explore the rich world of cashews-from plantation to plate. We Empower our local farmers, artists and self-help groups by giving them a platform to excel in their fields. And we Enrich Goa's cultural and economic fabric through this vibrant celebration of tradition, innovation and community spirit community spirit. 🦫



Akhil Sachdeva at Goa Cashew Fest 2024

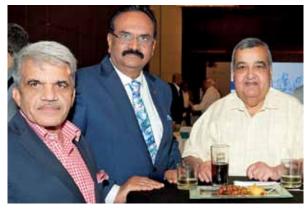
groups, artisans and farmers. At its core, it's about sustainability - celebrating what is uniquely Goan while creating a platform that champions

culture, heritage and cuisine. From traditional feni distillation demonstrations to live cooking counters showcasing innovative cashew-based dishes,



VFS Global visits 6 key Indian cities

Over 750 travel agents attended the VFS Global's pre-season outreach programme across New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh and Kochi. Led by **Yummi Talwar**, Chief Operating Officer – South Asia, VFS Global, the roadshow aimed to strengthen engagement with the Indian travel agents, who are key partners in supporting visa applicants.























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AGENTS 35 years and counting

New tech brings with it cheating risk

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) becomes more integrated into travel and hospitality industries, concerns around data breaches and cyber frauds grow. Ethical looking scams are also a thing and might grow in the coming years. Would we require human intervention to prevent these breaches and setting up new SOPs and compliances?



Artificial Intelligence (AI) breach is a new challenge for us. Cybersecurity evolves with technology new tech brings new threats - and it's quite organic. We shall have to be very good at finding new vulnerabilities and attack vectors and addressing them by taking pre-emptive measures.



Founder & Director

The travel industry has evolved to be dependent on technology employing wide ranging tools that store customer contacts, passports, supplier information and business critical data. In addition. the website content itself is often controlled via a comprehensive data backend platform.



Star Cruises and Dream Cruises

The landscape of cruising is rapidly evolving just like many other industries, affected by the development and reliance of technology, especially on Al. With the growing use of AI, managing operations and systems has become easy, but we must be proactive in setting protective measures.



Corporate – Marketing & Loyalty Head, Royal Orchid Hotels

As AI becomes more integrated into hospitality, concerns around data breaches and cyber fraud are growing. While we have not faced an Aldriven data breach, we are increasingly challenged by scammers creating fake websites, duplicating Google business pages, and deceiving guests.



Sanjay Gurav Deputy GM, Corporation Travel, Facility Management, L&T

Security concerns are growing as Al adoption accelerates. However, we recognise that AI security must evolve alongside Al's rapid advancements with secure internal architecture designing and product selection, technology due diligence, business continuity and disaster recovery planning.



Senior Director - Engineering

With more than half of Indian holiday-makers or their acquaintances having experienced scams, it's essential for everyone to verify sources, use secure payment methods, and be wary of deals that seem 'too good' to safeguard vacations from becoming bad experiences. ""

Compiled by Hazel Jain and Janice Aloysius

Asego celebrates its silver jubilee

Team Asego recently celebrated 25 momentous years in the Indian travel industry, serving the industry as the preferred travel assistance and insurance provider. **Dev Karvat**, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Asego, and the team celebrated the milestone with their important clients and partners recently in Mumbai and thanked them for the continued support.











Gen Z opts for purposeful journeys

Gen Z travellers continue to drive much of the momentum today with their preference for immersive and purposeful journeys. Whether its seasoned adventurers checking off bucket-list countries or first-time explorers seeking convenience and affordability, it's clear that travel is evolving into a true lifestyle priority now.



Karan Vakharia Chief Operating Officer Pathfinders Holidays

Gen Z is changing the way people travel. Instead of traditional luxury, they prefer experiences that feel real, personal and responsible. We have noticed young travellers are choosing trips where they can connect with local people and cultures.



CEO and Co-Founder EaseMyTrip

Active holidays in India are attracting a diverse group of travellers. Millennials and Gen Z are leading this trend since most of them are drawn to immersive experiences that blend excitement with social media-worthy moments for them.



ClickMyCruise

In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in the way Indians approach travel. While Gen Z is recognised as the most adventurous generation, even Millennials are also seeking a blend of relaxation and excitement on their break away. "



Andrew Smith Senior Vice President - Supply

It's hard to understate the importance of Millennials and Gen Z in determining the travel future. It is no surprise that they place a premium on opportunities to capture Insta-worthy content and are constantly looking for new and unforgettable experiences.



Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia, Booking.com

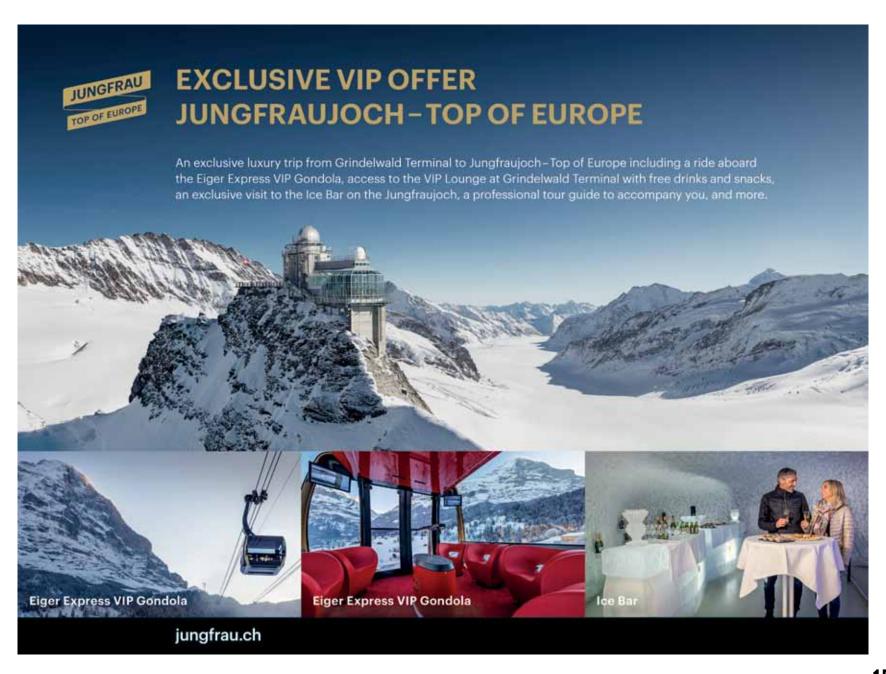
Modern Indian travellers, particularly Gen Z, is leading the way. About 73 per cent of Gen Z travellers are open to Al-powered trip planners, and 71 per cent turn to social media for inspiration. This generation values both comfort and convenience.



Radisson Blu Resort Visakhapatnam

Digital-first Gen Z is reshaping hotel marketing strategies in India. Gone are the days of long-form brochures-today's youth are captivated by 20 to 30-second video snippets, mostly consumed on social media platforms.

Compiled by TT Bureau



www.travtalkindia.com

'Agents are first point of contact'

Yummi Talwar, COO - South Asia, VFS Global, highlights the role of travel agents in India's travel ecosystem, noting that they frequently serve as the first point of contact for travellers seeking visa-related guidance. Recognising their contribution, VFS Global recently conducted a six-city roadshow in India, aimed at deepening engagement with them.



FS Global recently concluded its six-city India roadshow that was attended by more than 750 travel agents across Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh and Kochi. Organised ahead of the peak travel season, the roadshow aimed to strengthen VFS Global's engagement with travel agents - key partners in supporting visa applicants. The initiative was supported by leading travel trade associations such as TAAI and OTOAI.

Talking about the event, Yummi Talwar, Chief Operating Officer - South Asia, VFS Global, said, "The response to our road-



Chief Operating Officer

shows across cities has been truly heartening, and the positive feedback from the travel trade means a great deal to us."

Talwar added, "Travel agents are an essential part of India's travel ecosystem, often being the first point of contact for

visa-related guidance. It's important for us to remain connected with them, understand their concerns, and do all we can within our remit to support them and the travellers. These roadshows reflect our continued commitment to working closely with the trade community.'

During the roadshows, VFS Global introduced a dedicated referral programme for travel agents, designed to encourage closer collaboration and improve the overall visa application experience for its customers. Agents were also encouraged to advise customers to apply early for visas to avoid peak season delays. VFS Global reminded attendees that most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days in advance, with Schengen countries

VFS Global reiterated at the roadshow that all appointments are free of charge and can only be booked via the official website

accepting applications as early as six months prior to travel. A strong focus was placed on protecting travellers from fraudulent entities. VFS Global reiterated that all appointments are free of charge and can only be booked via the official website.

Training sessions

The sessions also put spotlight on the Visa At Your Doorstep (VAYD) service, an increasingly popular optional offering available on behalf of 19 client governments in India, comprising Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia, Switzerland and the UK. The service enables travellers to complete their visa application process from the comfort of their home, office or location of their choice. Agents were also briefed on Prime Time. FIT travellers who are hard pressed for time can book appointments outside of working hours using the service. For the UK, new temporary service locations has been started

KEY INFO

One can apply for a Schengen visa 6 months before the travel date and for a UK visa 3 months before

VFS Global has opened new UK Visa Application Centres

Vietnam Airlines adds 2 routes

Vietnam Airlines will introduce two new non-stop routes from Hanoi to Bengaluru and Hyderabad from May 1, operated by its two-class Airbus A321 aircraft. This was announced recently at an evening in Mumbai, attended by **Abhishek Goyal**, Executive Director & CEO, Aeroprime Group and **Pham Thi Nguyet**, Director - Marketing & Sales, Vietnam Airlines.













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THINGS TO DO IN THE OMAN

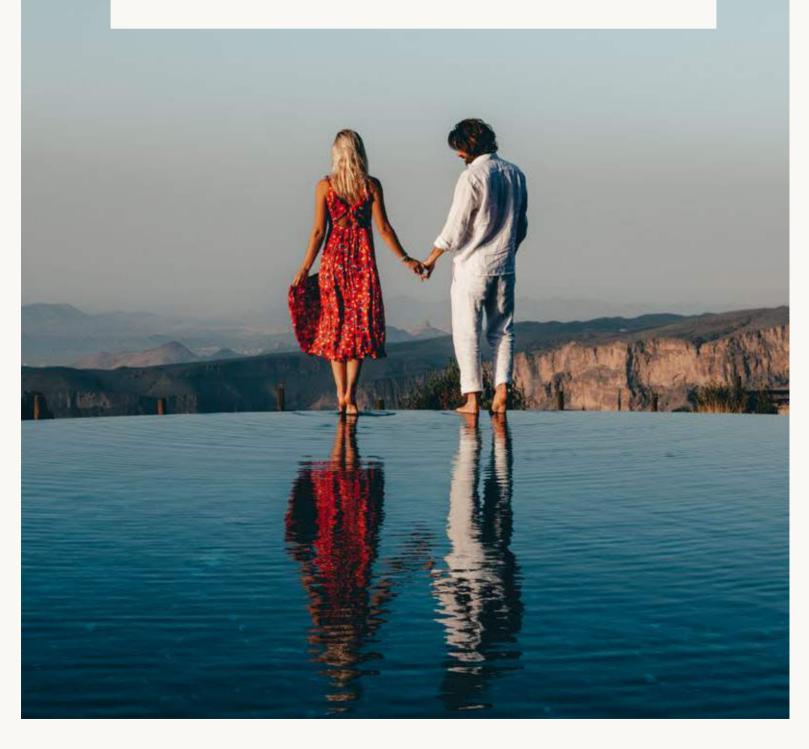
More than a destination, it's an experience.

TRAVEL TIPS & ADVICES

Make travels much easier for you

Experience OMAN

Experience Arabia's hidden beauty





Nestled on Arabian Peninsula, the Sultanate beckons travellers with its breathtaking landscapes, rich history, and warm hospitality with the essence of Arabian charm.

If you are looking for destinations that can satisfy your wanderlust, then Oman is the one stop solution that you must visit once in your lifetime.

Blessed with dramatic mountain ranges, fabulous seascapes, spectacular desert vistas and fertile terrains, Oman, 'the Land of Frankincense' is rapidly becoming a prime destination for travellers seeking a welcoming and safe place to enjoy with a plethora of options to explore. Being a land of sheer elegance with serene beauty, the country has mesmerising treasures to offer. With a fabulous climate year-round, Oman is the place for adventure, relaxation, rejuvenation and discovery.

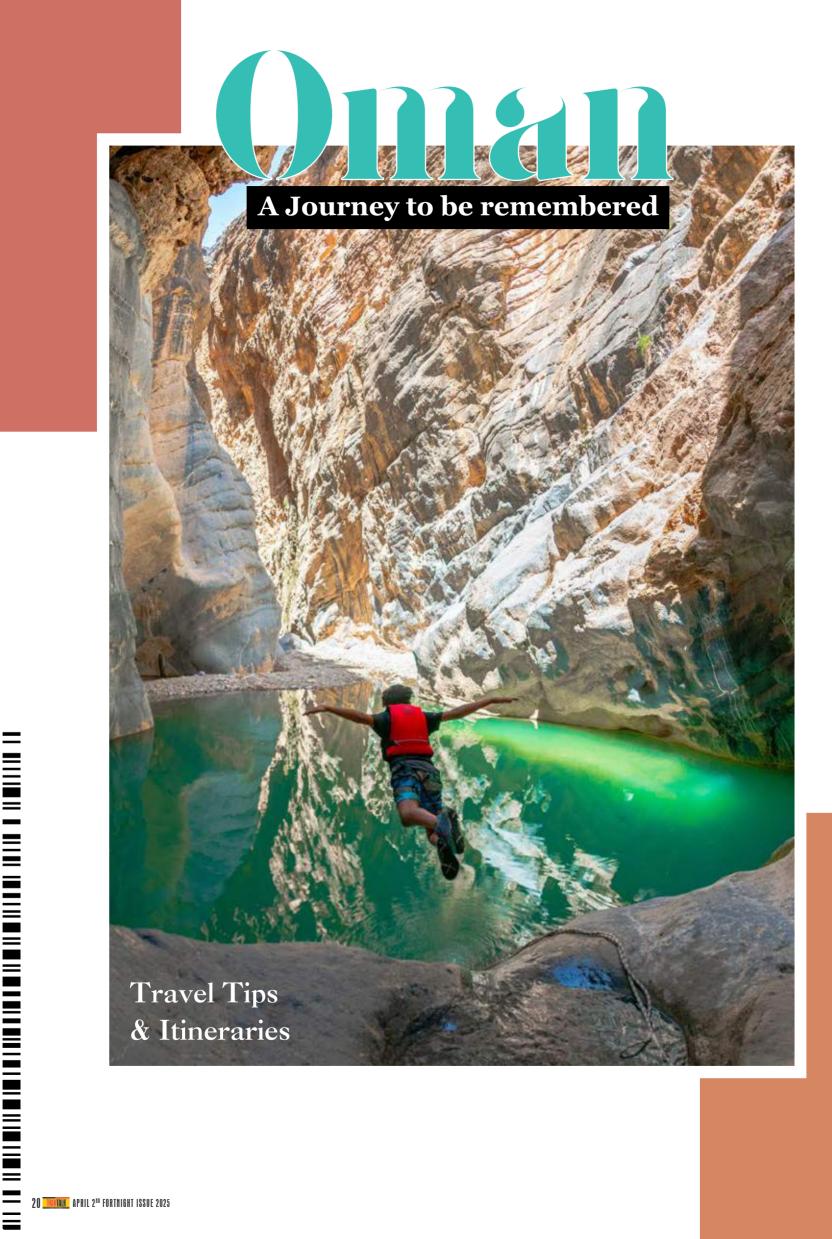
From luxury hotels to desert camps; from dhow cruise to luxury yachts; from distinctive architectural richness to extraordinary wild – life, Oman's diverse landscape has everything for every traveller regardless of their age, taste and budget. Be it camping and hiking along glorious wadis, watching magnificent turtles hatch, swimming in crystal clear waters, wildlife reserves, fascinating UNESCO World Heritage sites, mountain safaris, state-of-the-art museums, art galleries and the opera too—you name it and Oman has it!

Additionally, one can explore hundreds of historic forts and castles, soak up into style at a shopping mall or simply relax and unwind on one of Oman's many pristine beaches. The travellers have multifarous options to choose from along with majestic locations for film production and weddings.

Located in the south of the Arabian Gulf, every corner of Oman has some geological story to narrate, from the highest mountain, Jebel Shams, to the mega-dunes of the Empty Quarter (Rub Al Khali) and the Rock Garden at Duqm. Oman features various UNESCO World Heritage sites like Bahla fort, Bat, al-Khutm and al-Ayn and the ancient city of Qalhat revealing its ancestral ingenuity.

Let us dive into the spectacular itineraries that travellers can enjoy while unlocking immersive experiences and activities that the Sultanate of Oman has to offer.







Visa requirements for Indians

India stands as a key contributor to Oman's foreign tourist influx, driven by strong diplomatic ties, deep cultural connections, and more. As for Indian travellers, Oman's visa regulations currently state:

- India is part of 103 countries and regions that are exempted from entry visas to Oman for stays up to 14 days with confirmed hotel booking, health insurance, and a return ticket for Indians carrying a valid US, Schengen, Canada, Australia, Japan or UK visas.
- Even if Indian Passport holders do not hold any of the above visas, the Oman Visa can be applied through the Royal Oman Police website or any of the authorised DMCs. The process is easy with a nominal fee.

Diverse Experiences Safaris, wadis and more

Beyond spectacular views, Oman offers unique and immersive experiences. Here are few special interests and activities that travellers can explore and create lifetime memories.

• Mountain Safari

Rising 2,087m, Jebel Harim is Musandam's ultimate adventure for adventure lovers eager to experience the best of mountain safari. Its steep, winding ascent demands a four-wheel drive or a seasoned hiker's grit.

Conquer it, and you will be rewarded with breathtaking panoramas—rugged peaks, deep valleys, and the unexpected green oasis of Sayh Plateau.

Dhow Tours

The best, and most relaxing, way to see Musandam's fjords, mountains and islands is by sea. Take a traditional dhow excursion along the fjords to the remote islands; the scenery will take your breath away and the passage of time is sure to appear to slow down.

Yacht Trip

One of the nicest ways to experience Musandam is at night from the deck of a yacht. With very little light in the fjords, you will be able to see billions of stars in mostly clear skies and perhaps spot and wish upon a shooting star.

• Frankincense Experience

No trip to Oman would be complete without a close look at a frankincense tree and the resin it produces. One of the best places to learn about this precious substance is Wadi Modaam where asha'bi frankincense is produced.

• Film Locations & Wedding destinations

With its stunning landscapes and diverse terrain, Oman provides a breathtaking canvas for any cinematic vision and for weddings. From the peaks of Jabal Shams to the depths of Snake Canyon, the Sultanate offers a wealth of locations to suit every film genre. For couples, Oman's majestic landscape offers a breath of fresh air.

From the majestic Al Hajar Mountains to the mystical Wahiba Sands and the pristine shores of the Arabian Sea, Oman offers enchanting vistas for couples ready to say 'I do.'





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FOR TRAVELERS 2025







Your Romantic Escape

Cultural Tips

Dos and Don'ts for Visitors

Oman is known for its rich cultural heritage, warm hospitality, and stunning landscapes. Understanding local customs and traditions can enhance your experience and ensure a respectful visit. Here are some important dos and don'ts, along with the best times to visit for different activities

Dos:

- · Dress Modestly: Oman is a conservative country, so it's important to dress modestly, especially in rural areas and when visiting mosques. For women, long skirts or trousers and long-sleeved tops are recommended. Men should also wear long trousers and avoid shorts in public settings.
- Respect Local Customs: Be mindful of local traditions and customs. Greet people with a smile and a handshake, but remember that physical contact between genders may not be appropriate in all situations. Wait for a local to extend their hand before initiating a
- Try Local Cuisine: Embrace the opportunity to taste traditional Omani dishes. Local hospitality often involves sharing food, so be open to trying new flavors and dishes like shuwa, majboos, and Omani halwa.
- Learn Basic Arabic Phrases: While English is widely spoken, learning a few basic Arabic phrases can go a long way in connecting with locals. Simple greetings such as "Salam" (hello) and "Shukran" (thank you) are appreciated.

Don'ts:

- Avoid Public Displays of Affection: In Oman, public displays of affection, such as kissing or hugging, are considered inappropriate. Keep your interactions respectful and reserved.
- Don't Photograph People Without Permission: Always ask for permission before taking photos of individuals, particularly women and children. Many locals appreciate your respect for their privacy.
- Refrain from Discussing Sensitive Topics: Avoid discussing sensitive topics such as politics, religion, or personal wealth. Omani culture values modesty and respect, so stick to neutral topics in conversations.
- Don't Consume Alcohol Publicly: While alcohol is available in licensed hotels and restaurants, consuming it in public places is frowned upon. Always drink responsibly and be aware of your surroundings.



Magical OMAN

Experience Arabia's hidden beauty



Best Times to Visit for Different Activities

1. Winter (October to April):

This is the most popular time to visit Oman due to the mild and pleasant temperatures, ideal for outdoor activities. Visitors can enjoy hiking in the Hajar Mountains, exploring the wadis, and visiting cultural sites. It's also the perfect time for beach activities and water sports along the coast.

2. Spring (March to May):

Spring offers blooming wildflowers, especially in the Dhofar region. It's a great time for road trips to see the natural beauty of Oman, as well as cultural festivals celebrating Omani heritage. This season also marks the beginning of the khareef (monsoon) season in Salalah, transforming the landscape into a lush paradise.

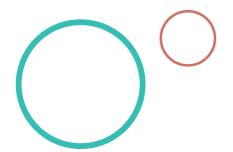
3. Summer (June to September):

Oman can be quite hot during the summer months, with temperatures soaring above 40°C (104°F) in many areas. However, this is a great time to visit the cooler highlands of Jebel Akhdar or enjoy the refreshing coastal breezes in Muscat and Salalah. Indoor activities, such as visiting museums and traditional markets, are also recommended during this time

4. Monsoon Season (June to September in Salalah):

This period transforms the southern region of Dhofar into a green oasis, making it a unique experience for travelers. Visitors can enjoy waterfalls, lush landscapes, and cooler temperatures. Festivals celebrating the khareef season offer a glimpse into local culture and traditions.









Cultural Sights

Jebel Akhdar is rich in cultural sights that reflect the history and traditions of Oman:

- Al Ayjah Castle: This historical castle offers insight into Oman's architectural heritage. Its unique design and strategic location make it an important landmark in the region. Visitors can explore the grounds and learn about its history.
- **Traditional Villages:** The area is home to several traditional Omani villages, where visitors can witness the lifestyle and customs of the local people. The beautifully preserved architecture and terraced farming methods provide a glimpse into the region's agricultural heritage.
- Rosewater Distilleries: Jebel Akhdar is famous for its rose cultivation, particularly in April and May when the roses bloom.
 Visitors can tour local distilleries to see how rosewater is produced and even purchase some as a fragrant souvenir.

Unique Stays

For travelers seeking unique experiences, consider these distinctive accommodations:

- **Desert Camps:** Experience the magic of the desert by staying in a luxury desert camp, such as Al Maha Desert Resort or Desert Nights Camp. These camps offer comfortable tents, gourmet dining, and activities like camel trekking and stargazing.
- **Mountain Resorts:** Stay in a mountain resort like Alila Jabal Akhdar, which offers stunning views and an opportunity to explore the surrounding landscapes. Many resorts provide guided hikes and cultural experiences.
- **Traditional Guesthouses:** For a more authentic experience, consider staying in traditional Omani guesthouses. These accommodations often reflect local architecture and hospitality, providing a unique insight into Omani culture.
- Salalah Rotana Resort: Located near the beach, this resort provides family-friendly rooms, a kids' club, and a range of water sports activities. The on-site restaurants cater to various tastes and dietary needs.

Packing Tips

Packing smart is essential for a comfortable trip to Oman. Here are some tips to ensure you're well-prepared:

- Clothing: Oman's climate can vary significantly. Lightweight, breathable clothing is essential for the daytime, while evenings in the mountains or desert can be cooler. Modest attire is encouraged, especially when visiting religious sites.
- Swimwear: If you plan to visit the beaches or wadis, don't forget your swimwear. However, be mindful of local customs and dress modestly when not at the beach.
- **Comfortable Footwear:** Bring comfortable walking shoes or sandals, especially if you plan to hike or explore wadis. Sturdy shoes are recommended for desert activities.
- Sun Protection: Pack sunscreen, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses to protect yourself from the sun, especially during outdoor excursions.
- Hydration and Snacks: Carry a reusable water bottle to stay hydrated, and bring some snacks for long journeys or hikes, as food options may be limited in remote areas.
- Travel Essentials: Don't forget your travel adapters for charging electronic devices, a basic first-aid kit, and any necessary medications.











4-Night Itinerary









Day 1

Arrival & Muscat city tour

- Arrive at Muscat International Airport and head to hotel.
- Visit Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.
- Explore Muttrah Souq & Corniche.
- Stop for a photo at Qasr Al Alam Palace & forts.
- Dinner at a local restaurant and stay overnight.

Day 2

Scenic drive to Jebel Akhdar

- Drive to Jebel Akhdar from Muscat.
- Visit Birkat Al Mouz.
- Explore Jebel Akhdar's terraced farms.
- Visit Diana's Point, offering panoramic views.
- Relax in a mountain resort.
- Stay overnight in 4-star mountain resort in Jebel Akhdar.

Day 3

Wahiba Sands desert adventure

- Drive to Wahiba Sands for a night in a desert camp.
- Enjoy dune bashing, camel riding, and a sunset view.
- Traditional Omani dinner and stargazing.
- Stary overnight at Desert Camp.

Day 4

Wadi Bani Khalid & return to Muscat

- Visit Wadi Bani Khalid, a stunning oasis with natural pools.
- Swim and relax before returning to Muscat.

Day 5

Departure

• Free time in the morning & airport transfer



5-Night Itinerary





Day 1

Arrival & Muscat City Tour

- Arrive at Muscat International Airport and head to hotel.
- · Visit Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.
- Explore Muttrah Souq & Corniche.
- Stop for a photo at Qasr Al Alam Palace & forts.
- Dinner at local restaurant and stay overnig

Day 2

Scenic drive to Jebel Akhdar

- Drive to Jebel Akhdar from Muscat.
- Visit Birkat Al Mouz & falaj irrigation.
- Explore Jebel Akhdar.
- Visit Diana's Point.
- Relax in a mountain resort.
- Stay overnight in 4-star mountain resort in Jebel Akhdar.

Day 3

Wahiba Sands desert adventure

- Drive to Wahiba Sands for a night in a desert camp.
- Enjoy dune bashing, camel riding, and a sunset view.
- Traditional Omani dinner and stargazing.
- Stay overnight at desert camp.

Day 4

Wadi Bani Khalid & Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve

- Morning drive to Wadi Bani Khalid.
- Swim in natural pools.
- Continue to Ras Al Jinz.
- Evening turtle-watching tour.
- Overnight in Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve or Sur, staying near the beach.

Day 5

Coastal Drive Back to Muscat

- Visit Sur, a historic fishing town known for dhow shipyard.
- Stop at Wadi Shab.
- Visit Bimmah Sinkhole, a water-filled crater.
- Scenic coastal drive back to Muscat.
- Stay overnight in Muscat

Day 6

Departure

- Free morning for last-minute shopping.
- Transfer to Muscat International Airport for departure.



8-Night Itinerary





Day 1

Arrival & Muscat city tour

- Arrive at Muscat International Airport and transfer to hotel.
- Visit Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque.
- Explore Muttrah Souq & Corniche.
- Stop for a photo at Qasr Al Alam Palace & forts.
- Dinner at a local restaurant and overnight in Muscat

Day 2

Scenic drive to Jebel Akhdar – The Green Mountain

- Drive to Jebel Akhdar from Muscat.
- Visit Birkat Al Mouz.
- Explore Jebel Akhdar.
- Visit Diana's Point.
- Relax in a mountain resort.
- Overnight stay in 4-star mountain resort in Jebel Akhdar.

Day 3

Nizwa Oman's cultural capital

- Drive to Nizwa, a cultural center.
- Visit Nizwa Fort.
- Explore Nizwa Souq, known for Omani crafts.
- Shop or enjoy local Omani snacks.
- Visit Jabreen Castle.
- Stay overnight in Nizwa or Jebel Akhdar.

Day 4

Wahiba Sands desert adventure

- Drive to Wahiba Sands for a night in a desert camp.
- Enjoy dune bashing, camel riding, and a sunset view.
- Traditional Omani dinner and stargazing.
- Overnight at Desert Camp.

Day 5

Wadi Bani Khalid & Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve

- Morning drive to Wadi Bani Khalid.
- Swim in natural pools.
- Continue to Ras Al Jinz.
- Evening turtle-watching tour, observing endangered green turtles.
- Overnight stay in Ras Al Jinz Turtle Reserve.

Day 6

Flight to Salalah

- Drive to Muscat or Sur Airport for a flight to Salalah.
- Arrival in Salalah.
- Explore Al Baleed Archaeological Park & Frankincense Museum.
- Visit Sultan Qaboos Mosque Salalah.
- Walk along Al Haffa Souq.
- Relax on white sandy beaches.

Day 7

Natural Beauty of Salaiah

- Visit Wadi Darbat, stop at Tawi Atair Sinkhole and then visit Mughsail Beach & Blowholes.
- Explore Frankincense Trees in Wadi Dawkah.
- Return to Salalah.

Day 8

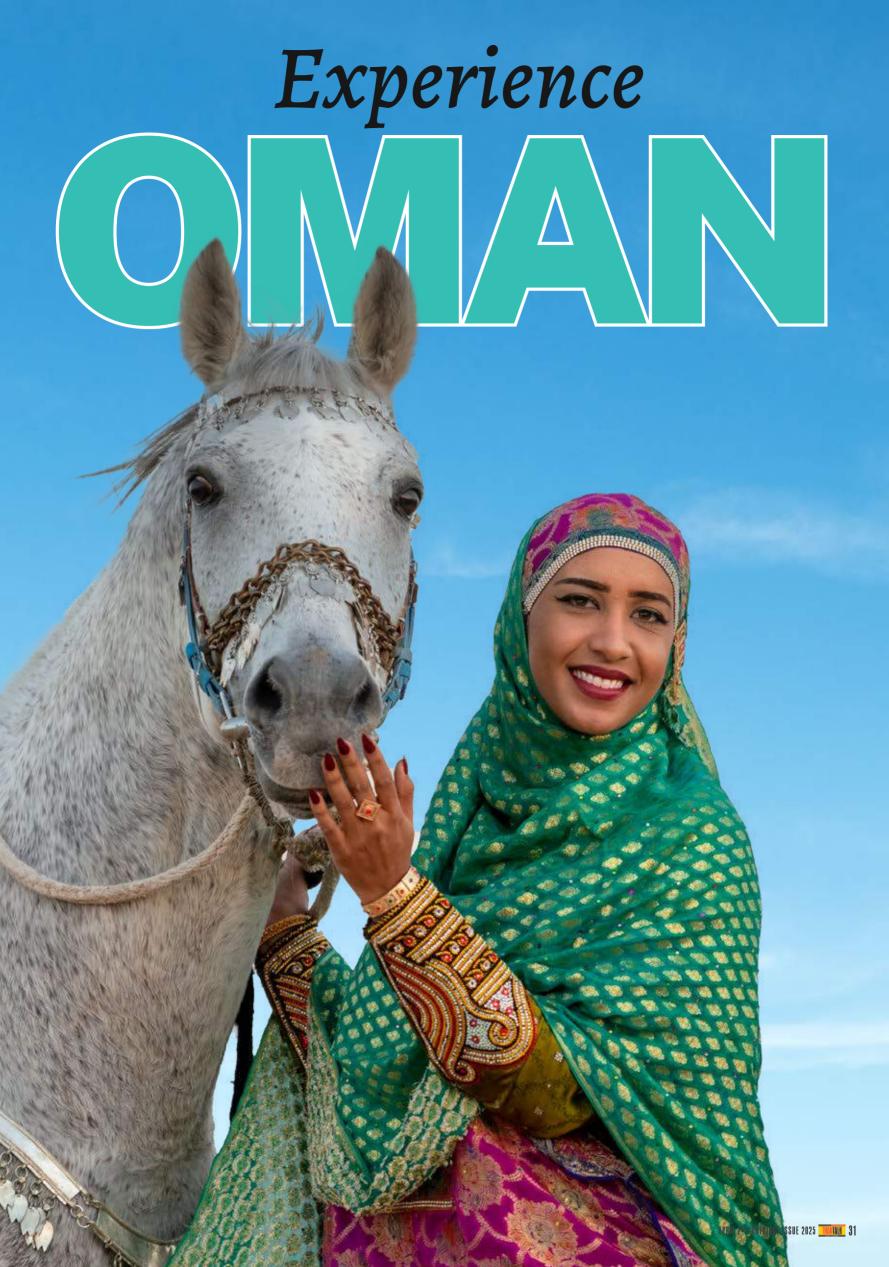
Hidden Gems of Dhofar

- \bullet Visit The Lost City of Ubar and then explore Mirbat Castle & Old Town.
- Enjoy a boat tour spotting dolphins.
- Overnight stay in Salalah.

Day 9

Departure

- Flight from Salalah to Muscat for departure.
- Option to extend the stay in Muscat for relaxation.







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THINGS TO DO IN THE OMAN

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TRAVEL TIPS & ADVICES

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India set to impress world @ arabian travel market DUBAI

With 41 per cent year-on-year increase in participation, India is expected to make waves at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025. As outbound travel surges towards a projected US\$ 55 billion by 2034, this year's event highlights key Indian tourism players, market trends and opportunities for travel agents to tap into the country's evolving travel landscape.



ndia's outbound tourism market is on a rapid growth trajectory, projected to reach US\$ 55 billion by 2034. This surge is driven by rising disposable incomes, evolving traveller preferences and enhanced global connectivity. At Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025, taking place from 28 April to 1 May at the Dubai World Trade Centre, India's presence has expanded by 41 per cent year-on-year, underscoring the country's growing influence in global travel.

India's tourism boom According to Future Market



Insights, India's outbound tourism sector is set to expand at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 11.4 per cent over the next decade. This growth is fuelled by an increasing

demand for international travel, especially among millennial and Gen Z travellers seeking new and immersive experiences. Dubai remains one of the top destinations for Indian

travellers, with 3.14 million overnight visitors from South Asia recorded in 2024. India played a significant role in the city's overall 18.72 million international visitors, reflecting

a 9 per cent increase from the previous year.

India at ATM 2025

India's participation at ATM 2025 is bigger than ever, featuring key exhibitors, such as the Ministry of Tourism, Air India, Air India Express and prominent tourism boards from Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The larger showcase highlights India's diverse offerings across luxury, wellness, culture and adventure travel.

Danielle Curtis. Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "India's larger showcase at ATM not only highlights the country's rich and diverse travel offerings but also serves as a crucial platform for

-y-India's outbound tourism sector is set to expand at 11.4% CAGR over the next decade. This growth is fuelled by an increase in travel demand

global travel exchange, enabling the international travel industry to tap into this lucrative market."

Viacation - Taking the D2C road!

Since the inception, Viacation Tourism Pvt Ltd (VTPL) have had a single core agenda, being customer centric. Taking this philosophy further, Viacation is expanding its wings in the D2C market. While we are already present in Gurugram with a dedicated Sales, Products, Ticketing and Marketing Team with a head count of 150, we are expanding to twice this number by the end of Q3-25'. From Vietnam to Char-Dham and Europe to Ladakh, covering everything for the discerning traveller. Groups, Fit's and Corporate Travel, it's all in the bouquet. With repeat travellers and customers becoming Patrons, we are all about putting customer first.





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Radisson redefines luxury in Srinagar

With luxury travellers and corporate groups turning their gaze towards Kashmir, Radisson Collection Hotel & Spa, Riverfront Srinagar is leading the renaissance. From destination weddings to high-end MICE events, the first property of Radisson Collection blends global standards with local charm to create unforgettable experiences year-round.

Kashmir emerging as a sought-after luxury destination, the Radisson Collection Hotel & Spa, Riverfront Srinagar is positioning itself as the epicentre for premium MICE events and destination weddings. As the first Radisson Collection property in India and the largest inventory hotel in Jammu & Kashmir, the hotel is setting new benchmarks in the region.

Capturing the MICE and wedding market Basharat Rashid, Cluster

Director - Sales & Marketing, Radisson Collection Hotel & Spa, Riverfront Srinagar, said, "The focus is to bring more MICE



Cluster Director – Sales & Market-ing, Radisson Collection Hotel &

events and weddings to Kashmir and promote the destination in this segment during both peak and off seasons. High-end corporates and High Net-worth Individuals (HNIs) are already connecting with us for large-scale events where over 150 rooms are

needed, and we offer all facilities under one roof." This aligns with the Radisson Collection's broader vision of putting Kashmir on the map for large-format corporate gatherings and luxury celebrations.

Luxury experience for travellers

As Kashmir gains traction among high-spending leisure travellers, the hotel is going beyond the traditional to deliver a truly international experience. "With rooms, conference facilities, unique cuisine, spa therapies and immersive local experiences of international standards, we cater to guests seeking excellence and pure luxury,' Rashid noted. "Additionally, Radisson Rewards membership benefits further enhance the appeal for both domestic and international travellers," he added.

As Kashmir gains traction among highspending leisure travellers, the hotel is going to deliver a truly international experience

Strong booking trends driving 2025

Radisson Collection Srinagar has seen a noticeable uptick in MICE



and wedding bookings, prompting a strategic shift in sales and marketing for the coming year. "The MICE and wedding segment has seen immense growth for us over the past year. Our large inventory has made it feasible for big events to be executed in Kashmir," said Rashid. "While leisure is already well established,

the Radisson Collection brand's luxury standards are attracting guests from across India and international markets," he added.

Kashmiri heritage

With 212 keys and multiple event spaces, the hotel is much more than just a luxury property. It is deeply rooted in the cultural heritage of the region. 🦫

Experience 45 hyper-local urban tours

No Footprints reimagines travel through hyper-local storytelling, bringing community-based stories to life which are as appealing to inbound tourists as they are to Indians. Harshvardhan Tanwar, Co-Founder, No Footprints, shares how travel is not about places anymore—it's about perspectives, and they are here to change how travellers see India.



n an era where urban life often distances people from the communities around them, Harshvardhan Tanwar, along with Eesha Singh, launched No Footprints in 2014—a boutique travel experience company designed to reignite that fading connection.

Operating across Mumbai, Delhi and Jaipur, they curate 45 hyper-local tours and experiences that transcend conventional sightseeing. Their mission? To weave heritage, community and storytelling into journeys that leave lasting impressions. No Footprints offers 45 signature experi-



Harshvardhan Tanwar Co-Founder

ences, including flagship tours like 'Mumbai by Dawn', which captures the city's quiet magic at sunrise, and the 'Refugee Food Tour', spotlighting displaced communities through their cuisine.



Co-Founder

"But our vision goes deeper. For instance, 'Five Senses' is not just about ticking off landmarks. We blend cultural, historical and community narratives to create a well-rounded perspective of a city," says Harshvardhan Tanwar. Co-Founder, No Footprints.

Similarly, the 'Queer Day Out' tour explores India's LGBTQIA+ history and its modern pop culture evolution, while Delhi's 'Basti Sisterhood' amplifies the voices of women in Basti Nizamuddin. In Jaipur, 'Starlet Spirits' pairs heritage liquor tastings with tales of Rajasthan's royal legacy, he adds.

Blurring lines between travellers and locals

No Footprints' tours cater to everyone-from firsttime visitors to seasoned explorers and even locals. Tanwar adds, "The idea of 'backyard tourism' is booming. People crave intimacy with their own cities now. Whether it's food

_ **y**___ Earlier, travellers focused on tangible luxuries. Today, they invest in experiences. Social media has fuelled this shift in trend

tours, beverage trails, or community immersions, No Footprints prioritises storytelling to create intersections between past and present.'

Travel trends are evolving rapidly, Tanwar says. "Earlier, travellers focused on tangible luxuries—luxe hotels, gourmet meals. Today, they invest in experiences. Social media has fuelled this shift, turning cultural credibility into a currency. People want memories, not just souvenirs. They are seeking connections—to places, histories, and people," he explains.

With 45 specialised tours already thriving, they focus on further growth. "We are ready to bring No Footprints to more cities,' he says. 🦫

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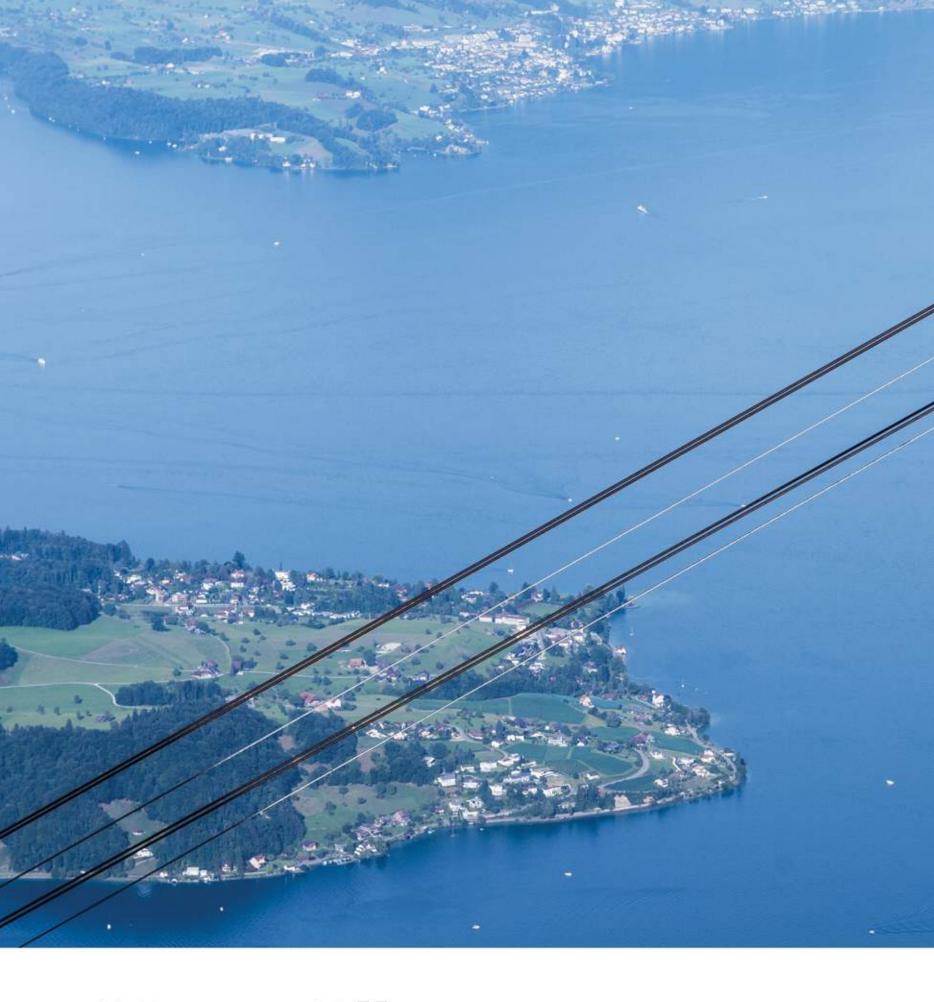




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'Right time to tap MICE potential'

India is experiencing an unprecedented growth phase, fuelled by rapid infrastructure development and a booming MICE industry. With global businesses eyeing India for corporate events and large-scale conferences, hospitality brands like Sarovar Hotels are expanding aggressively. Ajay Bakaya, Chairman, Sarovar Hotels, shares insights.



ndia is witnessing an unprecedented growth phase, outpacing many other global economies. The Union Budget's continued emphasis on infrastructure significantly boosting domestic tourism and thus helping hospitality brands like Sarovar to expand their reach.

India's readiness for MICE events

Ajay Bakaya, Chairman, Sarovar Hotels thinks there a need for long-term planning to cash in on the opportunities in MICE sector. "With a world-class infrastructure in place, India is primed to host global MICE events. However, a successful MICE



Ajay Bakaya Sarovar Hotels

strategy requires longterm planning and proactive marketing. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has already initiated efforts to bring the Olympic Games to India in 2036, demonstrating the importance of early and strategic promotion. Similarly, securing large-scale MICE events

demands that marketing efforts begin years in advance," Bakaya opined.

Strategic expansion in emerging locations

Sarovar Hotels is at an exciting juncture in its journey, with 140 operational hotels and another 80 in the pipeline across 80 destinations. The brand has achieved remarkable expansion, opening 24 new hotels in 2024. "We continue to identify and invest in high-potential locations. Recent openings include Ajmer and Sindhudurg. Often compared to Goa in its early days, Sindhudurg boasts pristine beaches and minimal commercial impact, making it a hidden paradise for travellers," Bakaya explained. Looking ahead, Sarovar has targeted 16 new hotels in 2025.

-¥-

India is primed to host global MICE events. However, a successful **MICE strategy** needs long-term planning and marketing

MICE strategy

Sarovar has several properties equipped for large conferences, particularly in cities like Hyderabad,

Bangalore, Punjab, and Kerala. "However, instead of operating as individual players, the brand actively collaborates with other hotels and event organisers to attract and host large-scale MICE events," the chairman said.

Wedding market

While corporate MICE events are growing in India, weddings remain hospitality sector, informs the chairman. "Big-budget destination

revenue generator in the

country's largest

weddings continue to fuel demand, followed by international and domestic conferences. We, at Sarovar, are well-positioned to capitalise on this trend, offering premium venues," he added.

Hotel count

- 4 140 operational hotels and another 80 in the pipeline across 80 destinations
- Opened 24 new hotels in 2024

New openings

- Royal Tulip Kathmandu set to open in 3 months
 - Hargeisa, Somaliland is scheduled for launch in May

Saraca adds to experiential travel

Indian hospitality industry is witnessing an unprecedented shift with independent luxury boutique brands gaining prominence. Saraca Hotels & Resorts, a rapidly growing player redefining experiential travel, heritage tourism and the MICE segment with its properties in Lucknow, Jim Corbett and Goa, is expanding its reach with new projects.

Surbhi Sharma

rising star in the independent luxury boutique hospitality space, Saraca Hotels & Resorts is rapidly expanding its presence across India and beyond. With established properties in Lucknow, Jim Corbett and Goa, the brand is set to redefine experiential travel with upcoming projects in Sri Lanka and a new Jim Corbett resort, marking a strategic push into highdemand destinations.

Expansion into key markets

Talking about the brand scaling new heights in India and abroad, Amit Razdan,



Amit Razdan Chief Operating Officer Saraca Hotels & Resorts

COO, Saraca Hotels & Resorts, says, "We are bringing the biggest property in Jim Corbett, featuring 180 keys, a 10,000 sqft banqueting space, and a host of immersive experiences. This expansion aims to elevate Jim Corbett's hospitality landscape, attracting a new profile of travellers seeking premium, naturedriven getaways.'

He adds, "Our growth extends beyond hotels to culinary ventures, with our signature specialty restaurant, Azraq, making its way from Lucknow to Delhi NCR. Set to debut in Malcha Marg and the Qutub Minar area, Azraq—meaning "blue" Persian—celebrates the rich culinary traditions of Awadh, ensuring strong brand recall among Delhi's discerning diners.'

Simultaneously, Mirissa in Sri Lanka, a surfer's paradise, is set to host

The hospitality landscape is evolving rapidly, and we are ready to meet the growing demand with strategic expansions

Saraca's latest international property, catering to adventure seekers and luxury travellers alike.

Reviving heritage: New biz strategy

Saraca is partnering with

www.travtalkindia.com

royal families to restore and convert historic palaces and forts into luxury heritage hotels under its management. With two out of three operational properties being heritage hotels, the brand is wellpositioned to lead this transformation in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Weddings & MICE: **Driving growth**

The brand has capitalised experiential emerged as a key revenue generator for us," he says. Moreover, corporate travel is also evolving. "MICE is no longer just about boardroom meetings. Corporates now demand immersive experiences, bespoke F&B and curated activities, and our properties cater perfectly to these needs," he adds.





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GPS makes debut in Bengaluru

Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) recently made its debut in Bengaluru to empower the travel fraternity through knowledge sharing, engagement and exchange via business networking. The two-day event saw 35 exhibitors and 275 buyers from Raichur, Mysore, Mangalore, Anantapur and Mandya, says **Harmandeep Singh Anand**, MD, Jagsons Travels.

























HOTELS 35 years and counting

MICE hub in 'Green Mountain' of Oman

Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa has been redefining luxury for Indian travellers capitalising on its cooler climate and wellness-driven spa for families, couples and celebrations. Backed by strategic expansion in terms of three new meeting spaces, including a ballroom, the hotel is now positioning itself as a MICE destination in the Arabian Peninsula.

Hazel Jain from Oman

otel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa is perched 2,000 metres up on Jebel Akhdar Mountain range, known as the 'Green Mountain of Oman', with incredible canyon views. Its 173 rooms, suites and chalets offer modern luxury while maintaining the authenticity of the place. But the real magic happens in our experiences - whether it's a guided hike through ancient villages, stargazing under pristine skies, or dining at its Vue Rooftop & Lounge, which at the highest rooftop venue in the Middle Fast.

The hotel has welcomed a growing number of Indian



Anoop JosephDirector of Sales & Marketing, Hotel
Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa

guests since its opening. It's a diverse mix – multigenerational families, couples, and even corporate groups. **Anoop Joseph**, Director of Sales & Marketing, Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa, says, "What's consistent across these segments is their appreciation for



James Reeves General Manager, Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa

authentic experiences. Our Indian guests tend to be curious explorers who want to connect with local culture while enjoying luxury comforts. Many are drawn to our cooler mountain climate, especially during summer months when temperatures remain pleasant at our elevation."

India market

Joseph believes that the potential from India is tremendous. "We are seeing a growing segment of Indian travellers seeking experiential luxury – meaningful experiences in unique destinations rather than just traditional luxury

We are already enhancing the resort offering and have started work on three new meeting spaces with natural daylight

holidays. With excellent air connectivity between India and Oman, we are an accessible luxury destination that still feels like a discovery. The increasing interest in wellness travel from the Indian market makes our spa particularly appealing. We also see great potential in celebration trave," he says.

James Reeves, General Manager, Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar Resort & Spa, says, "What makes us different is our deep connection to this place. When I first arrived here three years ago, I spent time with the villagers, listening to their stories. Those experiences shaped everything about this property."

USP OF THE PROPERTY

2,000 metres
up on Jebel
Akhdar Mountain
range Hotel
Indigo Jabal
Akhdar Resort &
Spa is situated

173
rooms, suites
and chalets offer
modern luxury

Unique
experiences
include guided
hike through
ancient villages,
stargazing under
pristine skies
and dining at Vue
Rooftop & Lounge

Industry bonds over festive fervour

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), in partnership with Ark Travels and support from Bonding Beyond Collaborations, brought the travel industry together for Holi celebrations. DJ Chetas set the stage on fire with electrifying beats, while cocktails and gourmet delights kept the spirits high, as the industry leaders united for a day of fun and networking.

















Security paramount for 93% Indian travellers

Contd. from page 5

trucks and other in-destination offerings.

- Social Media's Influence: A staggering 90 per cent of travellers report being influenced by social media when selecting international destinations, with Instagram and You-Tube being the most influential platforms.
- Sustainability Matters: Among those surveyed, 74 per cent of travellers are aware of sustainable practices, and 62 per cent are willing to pay a premium for eco-friendly experiences.
- Top Destinations: The USA and Europe are the most popular destinations overall, with 83 per cent of Indian travellers expressing strong interest in visiting these regions in the next 12 months. Asia is a close third at 80 per cent.

Simon Moriarty, VP - Syndicated Research, MMGY Travel Intelligence, said the report equips travel

90% travellers are influenced by social media when selecting global destinations; Instagram & YouTube being top platforms

marketers with tangible insights at a critical time for the industry. "Our research shows that Indian international travellers are increasingly seeking seamless, personalised travel experiences that combine comfort, convenience and authenticity," he said. 🦫

Skål India Congress to be held in Mumbai

The event will bring together Skålleagues from the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors from across India and beyond.

TT Bureau

kål India Congress 2025 will be organised in Mumbai from 12-14 September, Skål India announced recently. The event will bring together key leaders and professionals from the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors from across India and beyond.

Hosted by Skål International Mumbai South, Skål India Congress 2025 promises high-value networking, engaging sessions, and access to attendee data for strategic post-event follow-ups.

Hosted by Skål International Mumbai South, Skål India Congress 2025 promises high-value networking sessions

Sanjeev Mehra, National President, Skål International India, said, "We are excited to bring together Skålleagues to celebrate camaraderie and drive sustainable growth in the tourism industry."

Mukesh Batra, President, Skål Mumbai South, the host club, said, "We look forward to welcoming Skålleagues from every corner of the country and seek wholehearted co-



Sanjeev Mehra SKÅL International India

operation to make this event a grand success.'

June Mukherjee, the newly appointed Director - PR & Communications, Skål International India, said, "I invite travel media to be part of this landmark industry event and help create meaningful impact."

Skål International India also promises to bring developments, renewed growth and some pleasant surprises - all aimed at uplifting the travel and tourism fraternity. Watch this space to get surprised and feel proud to be a true Skålleague!

It is worth noting that Skål International is the world's largest travel and tourism organisation made up of industry leaders who believe in doing business among friends. With a legacy of fostering global connections and goodwill, Skål promotes sustainable and ethical tourism practices across continents. Skål International India is proudly aligned with this vision and is currently driven by a focused mission to reach a milestone of 2,500 active members by 2026. 🦫

Manchester eyes MICE business from India

Daniel Gidney, CEO, Lancashire Cricket, recently spearheaded a trade mission in Bengaluru at a show to put a spotlight on Emirates Old Trafford as a dynamic MICE venue in Manchester.



7 Hazel Jain

Manchester as a business

and leisure destination,

providing a dynamic in-

vestment landscape with

a focus on sports, culture

At the event, Daniel

Gidney, CEO, Lancashire

Cricket, informed the In-

dian travel trade about the

and technology.

Bhagwan Ramnani, Managing Director, Vensimal World Travel Agents, passed away on 4 April 2025. He was 74 years old and is survived by his wife Seema Ramnani and two sons. Ramnani was an active member of TAAI Eastern Region and had served as Hon. Treasurer (1995-1996 & 1996-1997), Hon. Secretary (1997-1998 & 1998-1999) and Chairman (2001-2002) of TAAI Eastern Region. TAAI offered its "heartfelt condolences" to the family. We, at _____, also offer our deepest condolences to the family.



Lancashire Cricket

venues available at Emirates Old Trafford in Manchester and the opportunities for them to deliver business events, with an on-site hotel at an iconic historic cricket ground. "Bengaluru has strong

tech connections to Manchester, and we know what an incredible cricket-loving population it has. The market also has an engaged audience in the MICE sector and we are looking forward to deepening our ties with the travel trade here," Gidney said.

Engaging the trade

With two global brands within their sponsorship portfolio of Emirates and Hilton, Gidney is working on curating unique inbound travel and accommodation offerings with commercial partners STH Travel (part of Sodexo Live!) and Destination Sport to increase reach in these markets. 🦫

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MOVEMENTS

RAS AL KHAIMAH TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

After 12-year stint with VisitBritain, VISHAL BHATIA joins

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority as the India Market Director. He is excited about India market's potential, and will contribute to RAKTDA's vision of showing off the beauty and experiences that Ras Al Khaimah has to offer. MICE and weddings will be a key segment for the tourism board. Bhatia serves as a distinguished ambassador, championing RAK as a premier destination.

ACCOR

India

Accor has appointed VINEET MISHRA as Vice President—Operations, India & South Asia. With over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry,

Mishra will oversee Accor's operational strategies across its diverse portfolio reinforcing the brand's presence in the region. He will resume an elevated leadership role, overseeing overall operations and driving business performance. His professional journey includes senior roles at renowned hospitality brands, such as The Oberoi Hotels and Marriott International.

THE LEELA HYDERABAD

Hvderabad

The Leela appoints RAJESH GOPALAKRISHNAN as the General Manager of The Leela Hyderabad. With over 30year experience in the hospitality industry, he

> brings a wealth of expertise to the new role. His experience spans managing operations, business development, guest experience and sustainability initiatives in both established and emerging markets. His previous roles include General Manager at Radisson Hotel Group, Novotel Visakhapatnam and Grand

Mercure Vadodara.

SKÅL INTERNATIONAL INDIA

Skål International India appoints JUNE MUKHERJEE as the Director - PR and Communication. With an extensive

background in public relations, corporate communication, and brand strategy within the travel and hospitality industry, Mukherjee brings a wealth of experience and expertise to the role. In her new position, she will be responsible for enhancing Skål International India's brand presence, strengthening stakeholder engagement and driving communication initiatives.

UDAIPUR MARRIOTT HOTEL

Udaipur

Udaipur Marriott Hotel, the first hotel set to open in Udaipur under the flagship Marriott Hotels brand, has appointed

VAIBHAV SAĞAR as the General Manager. With nearly two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Sagar brings a wealth of expertise in operations, strategic planning and team leadership. He began his career with Hyatt Hotels, before making a successful transition into banking. His return to hospitality saw him take on leadership roles with globally acclaimed hotel chains

PULLMAN CHENNAI ANNA SALAI

Chennai

Pullman Chennai Anna Salai has appointed **VINODH RAMAMURTHY** as the General Manager, effective April 2025. With more than two decades of experi-

ence in the hospitality industry, Ramamurthy brings a wealth of operational and commercial expertise and leadership to his new role. His hospitality journey began 26 years ago, during which he has held pivotal positions in renowned establishments across India. In his new role, he will focus on enhancing guest experiences and driving strategic growth.

VISIT UTAH

Mumbai

The Utah Office of Tourism appoints **TERA ATWOOD** as the Global Markets Specialist, marking a significant step in

strengthening Utah's presence in key international markets, with a focus on India. With international travel from India on the rise, Atwood's role will focus on increasing Utah's visibility among Indian travellers, strengthening travel trade relationships and developing targeted campaigns to position Utah as a must-visit US destination. She will also manage key markets across the APAC region.

CHOMU PALACE JAIPUR

MUKESH PAREWA has been appointed as the General Manager of Chomu Palace Jaipur. With over 19 years of ex-

perience in the hospitality industry, Parewa brings a wealth of knowledge and leadership to the new role. A seasoned hotelier, he has been associated with renowned international hospitality brands, including Hilton, Radisson and IHG. His strategic vision and commitment to excellence have consistently driven exceptional guest experiences and operational success.

TAMARIND GLOBAL DUBAI

MADHURI SINGH joins Tamarind Global Dubai as Manager - Client Servicing. With over 11 years of diverse ex-

perience in sales and business development through the hospitality sector, Singh will help bolster client relationships and elevate the outreach of Tamarind Global's services in the region. In her new role, she will be overlooking client engagement across MICE, weddings and luxury travel sectors handled by Tamarind Global to ensure the execution of seamless premium services.

THE PARK

New Delhi

The Park New Delhi has appointed **SUKHJYOTI SINGH PAUL** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With over two

decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Paul brings a wealth of expertise in sales strategy, revenue management and market expansion. Prior to this, he held leadership roles at The Westin Gurgaon & The Westin Sohna Resort and JW Marriott New Delhi Aerocity. His extensive background in corporate, leisure, MICE and digital sales will be instrumental in driving The Park's commercial growth.

CLARKS COLLECTION

Gurgaon

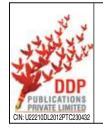
Clarks Collectionhas appoints NILESH SHUKLA as Associate Director of HR - Corporate. With over a decade of experience in the hospitality industry, Shukla has worked with renowned hotel groups, such as Taj, Carlson Rezidor Group, Marriott Hotels and The Palms Beach Hotel & Spa. Kuwait. Bringing a wealth of expertise in recruitment, training & development, payroll management and human resource operations, he will play a pivotal

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MUMBAI

Mumbai

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai appoints MAYURDEEPSINH RATHOD as the Director of Revenue. Bringing over a de-

cade of expertise in revenue management, strategic pricing and market analysis, Rathod will play a key role in optimising revenue strategies and reinforcing the hotel's leadership in Mumbai's luxury hospitality landscape. In his new role, Rathod will oversee revenue optimisation, pricing strategies, market analysis and distribution channels, ensuring that Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai remains at the forefront.



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'Taking travel trade along is important'

Since its inception 25 years ago, Asego has been driven by the mission of not only delivering unparalleled travel assistance and insurance solutions but also ensuring mutual growth of partners in ancillary business, says **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego.

Hazel Jain

sego recently celebrated 25 years. Tell us how travel agents figure in your plans going ahead?

In these 25 years, we have created a strong ecosystem along with our trade partners. When we started, it used to take two days for somebody to get a policy, which now happens in seconds. It used to take months for travellers to claim, which now hap-



pens in days. Moreover, there was no product differentiation, but today we have more than 300 products. We have a solution for every kind of traveller.

As we move forward, our objective is to ensure that insur-



generators. This is the situation worldwide and India should be no different. And as market leaders, we take this responsibility to make sure that we will generate maximum revenue for the travel agency.

A lot has changed post-COVID. We see a huge mindset change in customers, and they are now asking for insurance

How has Asego onboarded technology into the system for agents?

We have just introduced a new tech platform called Dolphin which allows us to customise the product for our trade partners depending on who the customer is and where he is travelling. The system will show the right product to him. We have tie-ups with multiple service providers across the world, and the system is so well integrated that it picks up the right partner, depending on which country are you travelling to, and gives you the right solution. Dolphin

is going to be a big part of our lives and our travel partners' lives.

How has travel insurance evolved over the years?

A lot has changed post-COVID. We witnessing a huge mindset change in customers, and they are now asking for insurance. Not only that, now they also want to know what they are being covered

for and how much will they be able to claim, how will they be able to claim it. etc. They want to know everything before they travel. That is a big shift.

One of the big shifts we are seeing today is that people are buying travel insurance even while travelling to short-haul destinations. It is because, I think, travellers now realise that the medical cost outside India can really add up. I see a big rise in most countries making travel insurance mandatory. So, I think in the next few years, we will see a huge conversion happening towards travel insurance among people travelling outbound.

How do you plan to train the agents about your new products?

We are starting a Smart-Edge programme across the country, where we will be going out to train the travel agents and their counter staff on our products, how they should actually sell it, and how they can upsell new products. This will help in conversions, which is close to 25 per cent and should go up to about 50 per cent in the next couple of years. There are still people who feel that they don't need travel insurance, because there is still a lack of awareness on the issue.

ASEGO PRODUCTS

WaitMate gives users access to over 1,600 airport lounges

TrackMate allows a customer

to track their baggage within minutes

Would trade tariffs disrupt global travel?

Amid rising geopolitical tensions and economic barriers, **Julia Simpson**, President & CEO, WTTC, remains optimistic on the travel and tourism sector. While long-term impacts remain unclear, short-term forecasts remain stable, she affirms.

Janice Alyosius

s global trade wars and tariff tensions make news, concerns are rising over their potential impact on travel and tourism. Addressing the issue at a press conference, Julia Simpson, President and CEO, World



Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), offered a grounded perspective.

Acknowledging the uncertainty surrounding current economic developments, Simpson highlighted that WTTC, in collaboration with Oxford Economics, has attempted to factor in these global risks when producing their forecasts in WTTC's 2025 Economic



Impact Research.Despite the turbulence, Simpson urged caution against overreacting in the short term. "We are right in the middle of some very un-

We are right in the middle of some very uncertain times. But I don't think

it would be

right to radically

change our

forecast for 2025

certain times. But I don't think it would be right to radically change our forecast for this year,"



meaning current itineraries and package commitments are unlikely to be disrupted. This stability gives agents a window of opportunity to maintain momentum and push sales for Q2 and Q3.

Looking ahead, she acknowledged that the economic landscape remains fluid. "None of us know what is going to happen. One day the markets bounce back, the next they dip again. It's a wait-and-see situation," Simpson added. She expressed hope that progress on trade agreements, particularly involving the US, could help calm the waters. "If we start seeing some trade deals being completed between countries, I think things will settle down," she said.

EFFECT ON AGENTS

While macroeconomic indicators can be daunting, Simpson's approach offers reassurance for the trade.

Short-term bookings remain solid: With most 2025 travel already booked, agents can focus on fulfilling current demand without immediate disruptions.

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