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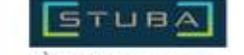
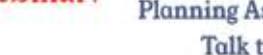
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EDITORIAL

A \$23 billion question

Devika Jeet

The Maha Kumbh Mela, a spectacle unlike any other, is an event that epitomises India's cultural richness and spiritual legacy. As the world's largest human gathering unfolds at Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, it's expected to generate a staggering ₹2 trillion (US\$23 billion) in economic activity. With over 400 million people anticipated to attend, the sheer scale of the event dwarfs global population benchmarks. But this astronomical revenue projection raises a critical question: why isn't the government leveraging similar cultural mega events to amplify tourism and increase India's global visibility?

Uttar Pradesh's investment of ₹70 billion (\$808 million) for the 45-day-long Maha Kumbh is expected to yield ₹2 trillion (\$23 billion), a jaw-dropping amount. In contrast, the entire national tourism budget for Incredible India stands at ₹25,000 million (\$288 million). To put it bluntly, the economic impact of one Maha Kumbh dwarfs the resources allocated for promoting the entire country's tourism sector.

This disparity invites scrutiny. If a single event can generate such monumental economic returns, why isn't India's tourism strategy more aggressive in organising and marketing similar cultural and heritage-centric mega events? More importantly,

how much of the Maha Kumbh's windfall will be earmarked for international promotions to position India as a must-visit destination?

The Maha Kumbh has already demonstrated its potential to attract foreign tourists, with over 1.5 million international visitors expected this year. Initiatives like the tent city offering Ayurveda, Yoga, and Panchakarma are commendable, catering to global audiences keen on India's wellness traditions. Yet, these efforts seem localised and temporary, rather than part of a sustained international marketing push. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) projects ₹100 billion (\$1.15 billion) from tourism services alone during the event—a figure that underscores the sector's untapped potential.

The Kumbh Mela's economic model—where infrastructure, transportation, and hospitality industries collectively thrive—could serve as a blueprint for other regions and states. Events celebrating India's diverse heritage, from the vibrant Rann Utsav in Gujarat to the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland, have demonstrated localised success. Scaling these into globally marketed phenomena could unlock new revenue streams and provide

Contd. on page 8 ▶

Rise of detour destinations

As global travel evolves, there is a growing liking for unique, less crowded destinations. Whether it is leisure or MICE, the emerging trends are reshaping how we explore the world.



Markus Tan
Regional Director, STB, India,
Middle East, South Asia and Africa

“ Indian travellers have evolved, with changing preferences that now lean towards unique and meaningful experiences. Short-haul travel, especially for spontaneous getaways and long weekends, has surged in popularity. As a result, a seamless visa process has become a crucial factor in destination selection. Singapore stands out with its efficient visa process, offering a swift 3–5 day turnaround. ”

“ Travellers are shifting away from traditional hotspots like Paris and Rome, opting for lesser-known destinations that offer unique, authentic experiences. This trend is driven by curiosity and a desire to explore beyond the mainstream. In India, Ahmedabad, India's first UNESCO World Heritage City, is gaining popularity for its rich cultural heritage and historic architecture. ”



Rikant Pittie
CEO and Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip

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'Tourism isn't a zero-sum game for us'

Goa is performing better than the national average and has great resilience and adaptability in the competitive tourism, says Rohan Khaunte, Minister for Tourism, Govt of Goa, while dismissing reports on the decline in the state's tourist footfalls. Goa's overall tourist footfall in 2024 shows a robust 21 per cent growth over last year.

Hazel Jain

Dispelling untruths about tourism in Goa in recent times, **Rohan Khaunte**, Minister for Tourism, Government of Goa, said, "The last week of December 2024 saw 200 daily flights, which is quite a record. The overall tourist footfall in 2024 shows a robust 21 per cent growth over last year, which indicates a positive trend in Goa tourism sector. The total number of tourists visiting Goa has increased by 21 per cent year on year compared to 2023-2024. Our stats show December to December growth has been 54 per cent increase in the number of tourists between December 2023 and December 2024. Foreign tourist arrival into Goa has shown a 3 per cent increase in 2024 while domestic tourism went up by 22 per cent."



Rohan Khaunte
Minister for Tourism
Government of Goa

tor facing an 18 per cent growth rate post-COVID-19, Goa's 3 per cent growth in foreign tourist arrivals signifies the state's resilience and adaptability.

The quarterly growth of the last quarter showed growth of 38 per cent, ending the year strongly. He added, "We are looking at in-

creasing off-season business. We recently organised a day-long conclave with our tourism stakeholders which gave us an insight into some of the issues. We will create an action plan which will be presented to the Goa CM."

The conclave brought together key stakeholders from diverse sectors, including cruise tourism, airport operations, charter flights, beach tourism, transport, and accommodation. Members of the Goa Tourism Board, including Mark Mendes, Ernest Dias, Carlos de Sousa; TTAG President Jack Sukhija, and other industry representatives discussed strategies to enhance Goa's tourism experience and ensure sustainable growth.

Suneel Anchipaka, IAS, Director of Tourism, Goa, said that the arrival data has been compiled from credible sources, including airport arrivals, Konkan Railways, and the

Kadamba Transport Corporation Limited (KTCL) and other transport operators. He added that Dabolim Airport saw a significant surge in

We have also had a lot of brainstorming sessions with charters to understand what the numbers are and how they can be increased

passenger traffic, with a remarkable 27 per cent growth in December 2024 compared to the same month in 2023. He said that the government is focusing on quality over quantity and that the hotel occupancy remained highest this

season, which shows that high-end tourists are preferring Goa.

In 2023, Goa received 8.18 million domestic tourists and 0.45 million international tourists, totalling 8.62 million visitors. Whereas in 2024, provisional figures show that Goa welcomed 9.94 million domestic tourists and around 0.46 million international tourists, bringing the total to 10.4 million visitors.

Issues of overtourism exists

The minister acknowledged challenges such as overtourism, particularly at popular beaches like Baga and Calangute, which have faced overcrowding, waste management issues, and occasional conflicts between locals and tourists. These challenges, along with the impact of budget tourism, require a focused and proactive approach to maintain Goa's infrastructure and reputation. Khaunte added, "We must admit that there has been

some overtourism that put a strain on our infrastructure. We know there is overcrowding in north Goa. But we have started working on this to resolve it. We are also keen that technology is adopted at every stage. We have been having regular meetings with the stakeholders. We have also taken up issues with the Centre for issues like high airfares."

TOURISM ON THE RISE IN GOA

21%
growth over last year in overall tourist footfall in 2024

9,000
number of registered hotels in the state in 2024, a notable increase from 3,000 in 2022 under the Ease of Doing Business initiative





Disparity in event promotions?

Contd. from page 5

a much-needed boost to India's tourism-dependent sectors.

The broader question remains: how do we ensure that the wealth generated by events like the Maha Kumbh trickles down to benefit tourism marketing and infrastructure development? While Uttar Pradesh's Maha Kumbh will contribute significantly to the state's GDP—projected to boost both nominal and real GDP by over 1 per cent—it's imperative to reinvest a portion of this revenue into initiatives that sustain long-term growth. This includes enhancing international marketing campaigns, creating seamless travel experiences, and investing in digital outreach to target global audiences. India's cultural and spiritual wealth is unparalleled, but its global branding often lacks the vigour seen in competing destinations.

Imagine the impact of allocating even 5 per cent of the Maha Kumbh's projected ₹2 trillion (\$23 billion) revenue toward expanding Incredible India's international campaigns. It could redefine India's tourism narrative, enticing millions more to explore its multifaceted charm.

The employment implications are equally significant. Tourism directly and indirectly supports millions of jobs, and its expansion could absorb a significant portion of India's workforce, including women and youth. Investments in skill development, infrastructure upgrades, and policy reforms to ease travel and business operations would multiply these benefits. As the Maha Kumbh unfolds, it's time for policymakers and stakeholders to introspect. Can we replicate its success across other regions and festivals? Can this serve as a wake-up call to align tourism budgets with the sector's immense potential? With India poised to claim a larger share of global tourism, the answers to these questions could shape the future of Incredible India—both as a brand and an economic powerhouse.

Traffic for Kumbh continues to rise

The Maha Kumbh Mela is underway at Prayagraj, UP, from 13 January to 26 February, a once-in-144-year event marked by rare celestial alignments. Skyscanner observes a significant increase in travel interest for the event and shares trends.



TT Bureau

Renowned as one of the world's largest spiritual gatherings, The Maha Kumbh Mela is attracting millions of pilgrims and international visitors to India. Booking volumes have been rising from 12 January continuing through 26 February aligning with key dates of the holy dip rituals, reveals a report released recently by Skyscanner.

Beyond its spiritual and cultural significance, the Maha Kumbh Mela is a major tourism moment for India, with a notable surge in domestic and international travel activity. Apart from the rise in booking volumes, the report highlights some other major trends:

Domestic

❖ 28 January stands out as the peak travel date, indicating higher travel interest due to the Second Shahi Snan (royal bath) on 29 January, which is considered highly auspicious. Other dates with high booking volumes include 14, 15, 25, and 29 January.

❖ Notably, 28 January has recorded a staggering 675 per cent increase in booking volume compared to a typical day. Compared to the same time last year when no event was held in Prayagraj, the volume of bookings has surged by 1,776 per cent, reflecting the grow-



Beyond its spiritual and cultural significance, the Maha Kumbh Mela is a major tourism moment for India, with a notable surge in travel activities

ing enthusiasm to attend this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

❖ Based on data in the week of 20 January, searches for travel in February have spiked across key domestic routes, with the following emerging as sought after routes

in the last 28 days. Interestingly, searches for nearby airports, such as Varanasi, have also witnessed a surge, indicating a growing interest in indirect travel routes.

- ◆ Bengaluru to Varanasi
- ◆ Mumbai to Varanasi
- ◆ Mumbai to Prayagraj

The data also reveals that the following routes witnessed a significant week-on-week (Based on data in the week of 20 January as compared to searches in the week of 13 January). (WoW) growth in searches for travel in February:

- ◆ Hyderabad – Prayagraj: up by 2,815 per cent
- ◆ Pune – Prayagraj: up by 1,345 per cent
- ◆ Prayagraj – Mumbai: up by 870 per cent

International

With significant interest from international travellers planning their visits around the key holy dip dates (13, 14, and 29 January and 3, 12, and 26 February), it is evident that the spiritual event has a global appeal. The top five international cities that have searched for travel to Prayagraj around these dates are:

- ◆ Dubai
- ◆ London
- ◆ Abu Dhabi
- ◆ Singapore
- ◆ Doha

This data underscores how travellers across India and the world are gearing up to immerse themselves in the spiritual grandeur of the Maha Kumbh, making it a pivotal travel moment for 2025.

Domestic air traffic on an ascent



TT Bureau

According to a recent ICRA report, the domestic air passenger traffic for December 2024 was estimated at approximately 153 lakh, higher by around 7.3 per cent in comparison to almost 142.5 lakh in November 2024. It also recorded a YOY growth of approximately 10.8 per cent and remained higher by 17.5 per cent than pre-COVID levels of around 130.2 lakh seen in December 2019. For 9M FY2025 (April 2024 to December 2024),

domestic air passenger traffic was around 1,225.5 lakh with a YOY growth of about 7 per cent and was around 12.7 per cent higher than the pre-COVID level of 1,087.2 lakh in 9M FY2020.

It revealed that in eight months of FY2025, the international passenger traffic for Indian carriers stood at around 218.4 lakh with a YOY growth of about 15.2 per cent and was higher than the pre-COVID level of 152.2 lakh by 43.5 per cent. The report stated that the airlines' capacity deployment in

It is estimated that the domestic aviation industry operated at a Passenger Load Factor (PLF) of 93.5% in December 2024 against 90.7% in December 2023

cent, and by approximately 3.8 per cent over November 2024. It is estimated that the domestic aviation industry operated at a passenger load factor (PLF) of 93.5 per cent in December 2024 against 90.7 per cent in December 2023 and 87.9 per cent in December 2019 (pre-COVID).

From April 2024 to July 2024, the ATF prices were higher by 5.3 per cent on a YOY basis. However, from August 2024 to January 2025, the prices were lower by 16 per cent on a YOY basis.

December 2024 was higher than December 2023 by around 7.5 per

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Streamlined visas boost travel

Visa policies are a crucial factor shaping outbound travel, influencing both leisure and MICE tourism. Simplified processes like e-visa or visa-on-arrival attract travellers, while complex or delayed procedures deter them.



Shравan Bhalla
Director
High Flyer

“Visa policies play an important role, as they regulate the entry of passengers into a country for a specific period and a genuine purpose. Some countries have recognised the importance of implementing traveller-friendly visa policies by introducing visa-free travel, visa-on-arrival, or e-visa facilities, making it highly convenient for travellers. This has helped such countries attract a growing number of visitors and generate more revenue.”

“Visa policies play a pivotal role in shaping arrival figures and can have a direct impact on destination choices. For Indian travellers, prioritising convenience is key, with quick connectivity and flexibility being



Zeenat Gangee
Tourism Promotion Manager -
Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority

essential, particularly for those making last-minute travel plans. Mauritius has always benefited from this advantage, as it has always been a visa-on-arrival destination.”



Manoj Saraf
Managing Director, Gainwell Travel
& Captain, Gainwell Sports

“Visa policies significantly influence international leisure travel, particularly for Indian travellers. As per the latest global rankings, India is currently rated 85th among the world’s most powerful passports. Indian citizens can travel to 59 countries without the need for a visa or with a visa-on-arrival. Countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and the Maldives have seen a surge in Indian tourists, largely due to their visa-free policies.”

“Having a standard visa policy is critical for the growth of the destination and attracting more visitors from India, or from any country for that matter. A reasonable and consistent visa policy is helpful to



Mahendra Vakharia
Managing Director
Pathfinders Holidays

generate good numbers of tourists from India. Ease of obtaining a visa is the first and foremost barrier to be overcome if you want to attract more visitors from India.”



Adil Karim
Director
FlyCreative Online

“The ease of travel is significantly influenced by a country’s visa policies, with destinations offering streamlined processes experiencing a substantial surge in Indian visitors. Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Kenya, for instance, have witnessed remarkable growth in arrivals from India following the introduction of visa-on-arrival option. India is poised to become third-largest aviation market by 2026, driven by its demographic dynamics and other factors.”

“Post COVID, we have seen specific sectors booming. Besides yearly targets, companies are launching schemes every month. These have a short deadline that will not suite the visa framework laid in place by Europe or the USA.



Khushnooma Das
General Manager - Products &
Trade Relations India, FCM Travel

Those need planning in advance. Thus, we now see trips with shorter time frames moving towards Georgia, Vietnam, Japan, or Australia where there are lesser layers.”



Arun Iyer
Founder & MD
My Golf Tours

“Visa policies significantly influence the number of Indian travellers visiting a destination. Post-COVID, countries that swiftly introduced e-visa, like Vietnam saw a surge in Indian tourists and increased flight connectivity. Nations with complex visa processes, such as Italy, are losing out on Indian visitors, US visas still face a backlog, and Canadian visa faces challenges of refusals despite many applicants holding valid US visa.”

“Visa plays a crucial role in travel planning, especially for Indian passport holders. Countries with visa-free or easy visa processes, such as Mauritius, Maldives, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, are top choices for travellers. E-visa for Vietnam and



Gurdeep Singh Gujral
CEO & Director
Gujral Tours & Travels

quick visa approvals for Sri Lanka and Kazakhstan make them hassle-free destinations. These locations allow for last-minute holiday deals.”

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MOT to up capacity for training students in skill-based courses to meet hospitality demand

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FHRAI expects reforms from Budget 2025-26 to transform tourism and hospitality sector

IATO convention in August

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) is geared up for its convention in August and the upcoming elections in April-May. In its bid to strengthen itself on a pan India basis, the association has special focus on increasing its membership, for which it has also reduced fees in many states and Union Territories.

 Nisha Verma

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) recently held their luncheon meeting where a number of important announcements were made. **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, talked about their participation at FITUR, and shared that they are in touch with the Union Minister of Tourism (MOT) for confirming participation at ITB Berlin as well.

Convention approaching
Briefing about their upcoming con-



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO



Sanjay Razdan
Hon. Secretary
IATO

vention he revealed, "IATO Convention is taking place in August 2025, and we will announce the dates very soon. We are trying to finalise the hotels first before an official announcement is made. The convention will be held at the Swosti Premium Beach Resorts in Puri, which has changed a lot with new developments like roads and infrastructure."

Announcements galore

Mehra revealed that the association has conveyed its budget demands via FAITH to the Union Finance Minister, who has acknowledged the same as well. He also shared, "The IATO Annual Day will be held on 9 February. In addition, IATO will have a new president in April-May as we will have our biennial elections this year."

Passing the baton

Mehra also shared that they are preparing for their upcoming elections as well. "We will have a new president in April-May," he shared.


The convention will be held at the Swosti Premium Beach Resorts in Puri, which has changed a lot with new developments

— Rajiv Mehra

IATO on MOT website

Speaking at the luncheon, **Sanjay Razdan**, Hon. Secretary, IATO, highlighted that they have requested MOT to make corrections on its recently revamped Incredible India



website. "We apprised Mugdha Sinha, Director, Tourism, about the discrepancies in the revived website and requested for corrections. We informed her that the IATO package tour link on Incredible India website was for leads and queries generation received by MOT recognised IATO active members. However, it was missing after the website was revamped.

Strengthening membership

In a bid to strengthen IATO on pan India basis with a special focus to increase membership. Razdan said that in many states and Union Territories admission fees was reduced from ₹10,000 to ₹5,000." 

NDC, AI & nature in focus @TAFI

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) recently held its annual convention in the Ninh Binh province of Vietnam. The convention, attended by around 385 delegates, offered its members an opportunity to discover an unexplored region of Vietnam, as well as get insights from experts on pertinent issues affecting the industry.

 Nisha Verma from Vietnam

Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, said that the TAFI Convention 2025 would boost Indian visitation to Ninh Binh, like it has done for other destinations the association has taken conventions to.

"Vietnam has become an extremely popular destination for Indian travellers over the last couple of years. More direct flights are coming in and Indians are now discovering this beautiful country. The challenge is that you need to disperse tourist traffic. Instead of everybody going into Hanoi, Saigon, Da Nang or the Halong Bay, there are many other destinations that this country has to offer," he said.

Sharing how they closed in on the destination, Prakash revealed, "When we first started looking at Vietnam, we were looking at other cities. However, when we met the Chairman of the People's



Ajay Prakash
President
TAFI

Provincial Committee of Ninh Binh, he insisted on coming to Ninh Binh. When we came for our first recce, we realised that it is a beautiful place with lots of stunning natural beauty and many cultural bonds."

Theme in action

Adding further he shared, "Vietnam is a destination that could use more tourism, but responsible tourism. While it is still in the nascent stage, it is important

that we talk about how we will develop tourism in a destination that is being discovered by Indians. It is the only industry that survives on the natural beauty, diversity and the differences that we have in this world. Thus, it has also got a responsibility towards the


It (tourism) is the only industry that survives on the natural beauty, diversity and the differences that we have in this world

planet, which is the theme of our convention—'Tourism for Tomorrow, Protecting the Planet'."

He added, "In Ninh Binh, where what used to be just marshlands

has been converted into a beautiful pagoda with Tam Chuc, where we had our farewell dinner. The caverns visited by delegates at Trang An in boats were totally neglected in the past. Today it is recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Hence, they have done good work, but it is important to re-emphasise that tourism has to be done in a responsible manner if it is to be sustainable."

Prakash said that the idea behind TAFI bringing its convention to Ninh Binh was to boost its numbers. "TAFI loves to do conventions in unconventional places,



and everywhere that we have taken a convention, the numbers have grown. You will see the same happening in Ninh Binh as well," he claimed.

The takeaway

The convention saw knowledge sessions which delved into topics like NDC, AI and new revenue generation models with speakers ranging from airlines, GDSs, travel aggregators and senior travel industry representatives. "The con-

vention is a catalyst for conversations. The idea of a convention is not merely to go and discover a destination, it is also to network with your peers, because we have 12 chapters spread across the country. This is the opportunity for members to meet, talk, complain, to strategise and devise new solutions. The conversations have been extremely interesting and exciting. However, the convention has opened the doors for further conversations with the suppliers. Also, the B2B gave an opportunity for members to discover new products, new people and build relationships," he concluded.

Hidden Gem

- Ninh Binh chosen for its beauty
- Boosting Indian tourist visits
- Highlighting cultural and natural bonds

Responsible Tourism

- Focus on sustainable tourism practices
- UNESCO site Trang An showcased
- Tourism relies on natural diversity

Industry Takeaways

- Sessions on AI and revenue models
- Networking across TAFI chapters
- B2B fostering new relationships

New logo marks 75 years of TAAI

With TAAI completing 75 years in 2026, the association officially kicked off its year-long celebrations recently in New Delhi with the unveiling of a commemorative logo. The event, attended by prominent figures like Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant, highlighted TAAI's legacy.



Surbhi Sharma

As the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) reaches its milestone of 75 years in 2026, the association kick-started its year-long celebrations, titled "The 75 Years of TAAI", by launching its official logo at an event in New Delhi on 25 January. **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Tourism Minister, Government of India and **Amitabh Kant**, G20 Sherpa, India, along with prominent personalities of travel, trade, aviation and hospitality attended the event. Shekhawat launched the TAAI's new logo.

Addressing the event, **Sunil Kumar**, President, TAAI, said, "We are building up a runway for 2026. We would like to do something purposeful & meaningful and hence this runway to 75th year is very important for our newly elected committee. We would like these two



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Tourism Minister, Government of India, launched TAAI's logo at the event

years to be productive and decided to expand our committees. The theme way forward is to connect, collaborate, and celebrate."

He said, "TAAI is not just an association of ticketing agents, but an association where we have the largest number of tour operators in this country. We intend to focus on the association's role in fostering

collaboration between us and the industry, enhancing our relevance to our membership, and becoming the representative voice, not only for our members but also for passengers and the broader industry."

Shekhawat congratulated TAAI for its achievements and highlighted the tourism scenario in the country. "Tourism in India is growing at

a rapid pace, and with the ongoing Maha Kumbh, we anticipate 45 crore visitors during the 45-day fair. To support this surge, we must upgrade ourselves and our infrastructure, ensuring that we cater to both domestic and international tourists," he said.

Addressing the gathering, Kant said, "Tourism holds a unique place

in India's economy, creating 11 indirect jobs for every direct job. For inclusive growth, no sector matches the potential of tourism. To build a \$30 trillion economy by 2047, India's tourism must grow 22 times,

We would like to do something very purposeful & meaningful and hence this runway to 75th year is very important for our newly elected committee

and that requires skill development and creating unique, state-specific experiences. India's tourism future hinges on partnerships with the private sector, digital marketing cam-

paigns, and skilling our workforce, ensuring we drive not just jobs but unforgettable experiences."

Kant said, "The MICE market is a \$150 billion global opportunity, and with world-class venues like Yashobhumi and Bharat Mandapam, India is now poised to tap into it. Stakeholders must seize this chance to grow." He added that tourism should be treated as an industry, offering long-term funding, and industry electricity rates."



MOT focus on engaging students

Dubbing India's youths as the best ambassadors for promoting the country's tourism domestically and internationally, Dr Sagnik Chowdhury, Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central India), MOT, GoI, explains how the ministry is making a strong attempt to train the youths through skill-based courses for productive engagements.



Hazel Jain

India Tourism has planned several activities targeted around students, working through its Yuva Tourism clubs that have school and college students as members. **Dr Sagnik Chowdhury**, Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central India), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, says, "They (students and youths) are our best ambassadors for promoting India as a tourist destination domestically and internationally. The main idea is to attract students towards our intangible cultural heritage because it is also important apart from built heritage that we focus on. We have planned tie-ups with various organisations and educational institutions where we plan to bring in a lot of students and teachers, hold seminars about tourism and touristic value and careers in tourism." The number of Yuva Tourism club members is north of 30,000.

With a view to making our citizens ambassadors of tourism,



Dr Sagnik Chowdhury
Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central India), MOT, GoI

India Tourism focused on present and potential stakeholders to train them. It selected people who are directly and indirectly related to tourism. The pilot project, named Paryatan Mitra and Paryatan Didi, run in Madhya Pradesh's Orchha intended towards capacity building of local stakeholders directly or indirectly linked to tourism. "At Orchha, we trained more than 1,500 stakeholders, including homestay owners, local guides, facilitators, and students in September 2024.

It was a successful programme and we intend to replicate it across the country," he says.

Gap in skilled-based labour

The Ministry of Tourism runs 21 central institutes of hotel management across the country and there are a number of state hotel management institutes - about 30 - affiliated to the National Council for Hotel Management, an autonomous body under the ministry. These institutes offer management courses as well as skill development courses for the hospitality industry. These courses allow students to take up junior and entry level management positions.

Similarly, the skilled manpower requirement is expected to be plugged by students who undertake diploma courses, craft courses, and certificate courses. "What we are planning in the longer term is to increase our capacity of training students for even these skill-based courses so that the large demand in the hospitality sector

for skilled manpower is met," Dr Chowdhury says.

GI tagging

India Tourism also plans to document GI-tagged products across India. In the western region, they will focus on the states of Guja-

We intend to create a knowledge bank and also generate a lot of public interest because GI-tagged products actually project India's soft power

rat, Maharashtra, Goa, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and the UT of Daman & Diu, Dadra Nagar Haveli. The team will be documenting, photographing and creat-

ing literature on all the GI-tagged products in this region. "We intend to create a knowledge bank and also generate a lot of public interest because GI-tagged products actually project India's soft power. They are an indicator of our heritage, our rich and varied cultural heritage and, therefore, it is important to spread awareness about them," he says.

India Tourism pavilion at Maha Kumbh

Maha Kumbh is an event that occurs once in 144 years. The Ministry of Tourism has, therefore, planned to promote its Dekho Apna Desh campaign, the Chalo India campaign at the event, targeting NRIs and inbound traffic. "We have developed a 5,000 square feet pavilion at the Maha Kumbh, and we have invited influencers and bloggers to the Maha Kumbh. In this pavilion, we intend to facilitate these influencers, VIPs and other visitors, so that the Maha Kumbh experience for them is enriched. We, in collaboration with

Uttar Pradesh government, have also planned a number of walks that are meant to enrich the knowledge about our spiritual and cultural heritage. We also have tied up with airlines, such as Alliance Air starting special flights to Prayagraj for the event. Our public sector undertaking ITDC has developed 80 tents in the tent city at Prayagraj. So, there are lot of activities and regional directors coming from all across the country," he explains.

AT A GLANCE

Over 30,000
Number of Yuva Tourism club members

1,500 stakeholders
Were trained under Paryatan Mitra and Paryatan at Orchha in MP

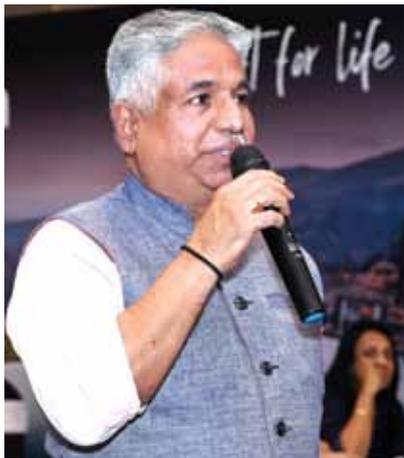
21
Central institutes of hotel management MOT runs in India

Travel MICE & CORPORATE SHOW sees intense panel discussion,

Travel MICE & Corporate Show, held at the Hyatt Regency in Lucknow, hosted 23 exhibitors and 50 buyers from India and other countries. This exclusive, closed-door B2B event recorded over 1,000 meetings over two days. Major highlights were the keynote address and panel discussion, which focused on the latest trends shaping the tourism and hospitality industry.



records more than 1,000 meetings



Unveiling a new side of Vietnam

TAFI Convention 2025, held recently in the Ninh Binh district of Vietnam, gave its members not just a chance to explore its scenic locales, but also offered unique venues for business sessions, wherein they could delve deeper into issues like NDC, AI and new avenues for revenue generation. The three-day event was a remarkable combination of knowledge sharing, networking and sightseeing.



Travel shifts to lesser-known destinations

▶ Contd. from page 5



Sanjeev Mehra
President
Skål International

“Visas are crucial to the success of any tourist destination. We have seen in the past that positive visa policies have resulted in an uptake in the number of arrivals into a destination. Tourism friendly visa policies also



GB Srithar
Head - Tourism Services
VFS Global

“Off-the-beaten-path destinations, or detour destinations, are gaining popularity. Expedia Group’s list of detour destinations all experienced an increase in searches over the past year, with 63 per cent of consum-



Yash Vakil
Founder
Arago Travels

“We are noticing a distinct shift in traveller preferences. Traditional hotspots like Paris, Venice, and Thailand are seeing competition from lesser-explored yet equally stunning destinations. For instance, travellers are

“Travel trends are evolving, with travellers increasingly moving away from overcrowded hotspots to explore unique, lesser-known destinations. While Europe’s Alps are iconic, the snow-capped peaks of Arunachal Pradesh present a majestic, closer-to-home alternative. Assam’s serene tea gardens rival Tuscany’s charm, while Meghalaya’s living root bridges and waterfalls showcase eco-tourism wonders. Lakshadweep is an alternative to the Maldives.”



Sheetal Munshaw
India Director
Atout France

enhance the positioning of the destination and render it more appealing to diverse segments such as incentives, film shootings, weddings and much more. Visas do play a big role in deciding the choice of destination.”

“Travellers will continue to embrace offbeat destinations offering holistic experiences, wellness, and self-discovery. Instead of jam-packing travel itineraries, they will go slow, take in the flow of destinations. Immersion into local and unique is key. India’s youth opt for trips inspired by social media showcase, fuelling trends like “sleepcations” or “calmcations” which allow for multi-destination trips. They may consider combining Singapore’s urban charm with Indonesian island Bintan’s serene beaches.”



Robin Lawther
Vice President
Expedia TAAP

ers saying they are likely to visit a more obscure destination on their next trip. Whether it’s a detour from Paris to Reims, or a deviation from Milan to Brescia, it is well worth keeping an eye on these rising stars next year.”

“Travellers are increasingly seeking out detour destinations that offer unique experiences without the crowds and environmental impact. They are moving away from cities like Paris, Venice, and Barcelona due to overcrowding, high prices, and a decline in quality of life for locals. There has been a sharp rise in passengers travelling around or across the Arctic Circle in pursuit of that perfect picture of the Northern Lights. Destinations like Bhutan, Iceland, and Finland are gaining popularity.”



Dheeraj Ranjan Kumar
Director
Baltip Wisata

opting for Budapest over Paris for its affordability and charm, Slovenia instead of Venice for its unspoiled beauty, and Bali in place of Thailand for a more serene experience. This trend is driven by the desire for unique experiences.”



Nitin Mittal
CEO
Hotel n Apartment

“International vacations are no longer trips that families take every few years. Some are travelling a couple of times each year. With lots of people arriving in the key cities, local lives are getting affected and



Christian Schoch
Director India
Switzerland Tourism

“As travellers mature, so do their aspirations for discovery. While classic destinations like Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Dubai remain beloved, seasoned explorers often seek experiences that push the boundaries of



Bhavesh Oza
Director
MyTravelBazaar.com

“India’s outbound tourism is experiencing a remarkable surge post-pandemic, driven by a growing aspirational middle class and the influence of social media. With 25 million Indians traveling abroad between January and Octo-

“There is a noticeable shift in the venue preferences for MICE industry. Overcrowded and traditional destinations like big cities are being replaced by lesser-known, unique locations. These alternative destinations offer a more intimate, authentic experience, often with lower costs and a focus on sustainability. For example, boutique venues in smaller cities, nature-centric retreats in rural or coastal areas and emerging destinations in countries like Vietnam, Croatia, and Peru.”



Aparna Basumalik
Commercial Head - India
Subcontinent and UAE, Europamundo

there is understandable resistance. Europamundo saw this coming long ago. We do visit the main cities and cover the must do, before moving next to the lesser-known towns. When travelling from Paris to London we stay overnight in Rouen.”

“Zurich, Interlaken, and Lucerne remain the most popular destinations for Indian travellers. As we see longer stays in Switzerland, other regions are also becoming popular for those seeking unique experiences. In the western part of Switzerland, Geneva and Lausanne are gaining popularity. These regions offer attractions like excellent shopping options in Geneva, the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Chaplin’s World in Vevey, the Golden Pass Railway, and the stunning Lake Geneva.”



Swaytank Maheshwari
Managing Director
Rainbow Vacations

their journey. It’s not about destinations losing their appeal but about the traveller’s evolution towards unique, offbeat adventures. Analysing recent travel trends from our data, we have observed a growing interest in destinations like Abu Dhabi.”

“Tourism is such an enticing activity that people will never forget old destinations but will always look for visiting new ones. Every destination evolves, with some changing every year and others every 5-7 years. For example, Dubai earlier used to offer city tours, desert safaris, and dhow cruises. Over time, it added attractions like the Burj Khalifa and theme parks, followed by the Museum of the Future and many more. Tourists always want to explore something new or alternative.”



Monish Shah
Founder & CEO
DreamSetGo

ber 2024, the momentum is unprecedented. Sports enthusiasts, in particular, are redefining travel trends. While iconic destinations like London remain popular, we see rising interest in offbeat spots like Budapest for F1, and Marseille for rugby.”

Contd. on page 16 ▶

France bets big on new regions

Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France, predicts a significant rise in Indian visitors to France, characterised by extended stays and exploration of off-the-beaten-path destinations. In 2025, the NTO will adopt a highly targeted approach, focusing on niche markets and segmented audiences to cater to diverse interests.

Hazel Jain

Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France, said that they have been receiving "some very encouraging results" for their certified B2B e-learning programme, 'France Connaisseur'. "We have received nearly 1,500 registrations but only 100 certifications. So, we are hoping that more agents will certify this year. To facilitate this, we also introduced a new France Connaisseur e-learning Award under the Ambassador's Travel Awards this year, which is awarded to one travel professional for having successfully completed the programme. We received tonnes of agency applications across India who actually were beyond the distinction mark, as a result of which we actually had to do a lucky draw. So, I would say, 2024 was a big year of learning, simply because it was still in the wake of the post-pandemic," she said.



Sheetal Munshaw
Director
Atout France

Munshaw said that the biggest learning for Atout France is to continue to learn, to understand, to be receptive, to better apprehend what the market really wants. "France continues to stay on top. But we are not at all complacent. The biggest segment for us will continue to be families and individuals. That is how India travels. I think, we will see a lot of oppor-

tunity also in longer stays, discovering more of France, discovering more unexplored parts of France as far as the Indian market is concerned. Then, of course, we have seen in the wake of all the sports events and concerts that people are really traveling towards that as well. Food and wine tourism is going to be a big one for us. I believe we will see a lot more travellers being inspired to travel for culinary tourism," she explained.

Longer stays to discover more Munshaw is certain that there will be a growing influx of Indian visitors to France with longer stays and discoveries of lesser-known regions. "We will continue to showcase France's art de vivre and savoir faire through our activations. We have seen a growing interest in sports tourism. For all of the above, it is important to constantly enhance product knowledge of the destination and keeping the robust competition in mind. We

have also seen a rapid influx of visitors from tier II and tier III cities and we will broaden our network to better connect with these audiences," she shared.

We will continue to showcase France's art de vivre and savoir faire through our activations. We have seen a growing interest in sports tourism

Munshaw believes a lot of itineraries that were sent in as candidates this year are proof to the fact that India is now travelling all over France. "Of course, the gateway city will remain Paris. But Indians

are travelling to Bordeaux, to Burgundy, to Occitanie, to Champagne, to Alsace, to the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, to the smallest ski station. So, it's definitely growing. Moreover, we did a survey in 2024 that indicated a lot of interest and a lot of volition to really showcase remoter parts of France," she said.

Strategy this year

Atout France is going "very, very niche and segmented" this year, Munshaw revealed, adding that, "Our approach is going to be more segmented in 2025. A first in this step will be our participation at the OTM, where France will be showcased as a leisure destination to agents pan India. We will also be participating in EPEX to interact and connect with the wedding and incentive domain that has seen a rapid growth for France and lastly, we will be organising a luxury showcase in 2025 focusing only on France's luxury tourism offer."

AMBASSADOR'S TRAVEL AWARDS

Visa Category –
Veena World

Destination Showcase Awards

Gold – Best Showcase of France as an Incentive Destination - Thomas Cook (India)

Diamond – Best Showcase of France as an Indulgent Destination - N.Chirag

Platinum – Best Showcase of France as an Experiential Destination - Harmony Tours

France Connaisseur E-learning Award – Noopur Shukla, Holidays & More

Unique destinations in vogue

Contd. from page 15

Indian travellers are increasingly opting for unique and less-explored destinations. While popular destinations like Thailand, Bali, and Europe remain attractive, there is a noticeable shift



Jia-En Poon
Senior Manager
Sales, Scoot

Travellers are transitioning from traditional and popular tourist hotspots to unexplored, less crowded, and culturally rich alternatives. They are increasingly seeking destinations that offer unique experiences and allow them to

(Fitur) reaffirms its stature

The 45th edition of FITUR in Madrid focused on driving tourism growth through sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity, while offering a platform for discussions on balancing tourism expansion with responsibility.

TT Bureau

The 45th edition of the International Tourism Fair (FITUR), organised by IFEMA MADRID, solidified its position as the largest travel show globally, both in terms of visitors and exhibitors. With nearly 255,000 attendees, including 155,000 professionals over its first three days, the event showcased the robust recovery of the tourism sector. FITUR 2025 is already anticipated with high expectations, promising continued growth for the industry.



with Spain and Madrid following this trend. Tourist spending figures have risen to €126 billion nationally and €16 billion in the Madrid region. Moreover, these figures from FITUR anticipate that by 2025, traveller numbers and tourism spending will continue to grow, driven by strong demand. FITUR 2025's nine exhibition halls hosted over 9,500 companies across 884 stands, representing 156 countries, including 101 with official delegations.

IFEMA MADRID has announced that FITUR 2026 will take place from 21 to 25 January, with Mexico as the Partner Country.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM FITUR 2025

255,000
attendees, with 155,000 professionals in total

9,500
companies from 156 countries hosted

€445 million
economic impact generated on Madrid

94 million
visitors to Spain, 16 million to Madrid



Hishamuddin Bin Mustafa
Director
Tourism Malaysia - Chennai

Southeast Asia has long been a favoured region for Indians due to its connectivity and this trend continued in 2024. This past summer, Southeast Asian destinations that were the top choice for Indians included Singapore, Bali, and Bangkok. We have also observed travel demand from India to Koh Samui, Krabi, Penang and Malacca. In terms of traveller profiles out of India, we observe mainly leisure travellers, workers, and VFR traffic. India is a country with tremendous growth potential.



Myong Kil Yun
Regional Director - India & SAARC Countries, KTO

connect more deeply with local culture and traditions. This shift reflects the evolving preferences of Indian tourists, who are now prioritising meaningful and immersive travel experiences.

Compiled by TT Bureau

toward places that offer immersive and off-the-beaten-path experiences. Malaysia is emerging as a strong contender, with destinations like Langkawi becoming a favourite for its pristine beaches, and luxury resorts.



Abu Dhabi

A bucket list destination

VISA

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, is a destination offering a rich blend of modern attractions and cultural heritage. From the artistic wonders of Saadiyat Island to the exhilarating adventures of Yas Island, the destination has everything for a traveller, making it an ideal choice for diverse experiences that meet unique preferences.

 Janice Alyosius

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is a vibrant destination that seamlessly blends modernity with tradition, offering something for every type of traveller. Whether it's cultural exploration, thrilling adventures, or peaceful retreats, the emirate has it all. Abu Dhabi's diverse offerings across Saadiyat Island, Yas Island, and Al Ain make it a top destination.

Saadiyat Island: A cultural and heritage hub

Saadiyat Island is a must-visit for travellers interested in delving deep into Abu Dhabi's rich history and cultural heritage. The island is home to some of the most prestigious museums in the world, offering a rare opportunity to experience the UAE's commitment to art, culture, and heritage.

The Louvre Abu Dhabi is one of the highlights, a breathtaking architectural marvel that houses masterpieces from around the globe, spanning centuries of art history. The museum's collection ranges from ancient civilisations to modern art, offering guests an immersive cultural journey. For those interested in contemporary art, The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, still under

development, promises to be another world-class museum that will further solidify Saadiyat Island as a cultural landmark. Beyond the museums, Saadiyat Island also showcases Manarat Al Saadiyat, a space dedicated to exhibitions, performances, and educational programmes, where visitors can engage with local and international artists. The island is also home to stunning beaches, including Saadiyat Beach, which provides a tranquil retreat, perfect for those who enjoy the finer aspects of nature while being surrounded by an artistic atmosphere.

Saadiyat Island represents an unparalleled opportunity to offer clients a culturally enriching experience, blending art, history, and natural beauty into one unforgettable destination.

 **Saadiyat Island is a must-visit for travellers interested in delving deep into Abu Dhabi's rich history and cultural heritage.**

Yas Island: The heart of fun and adventure

For those seeking fun, excitement, and world-class entertainment, Yas Island is the place to be. Known for its high-energy attractions, the island is a dream destination for families, thrill-seekers, and sports enthusiasts.

One of the most notable attractions is Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, home to the world's fastest roller coaster, the Formula Rossa, where adrenaline junkies can race through the track at speeds reaching 240 km/h. Additionally, Yas Waterworld provides the perfect escape for those looking to cool off with over



40 rides, slides, and attractions for all ages.

For motorsport fans, Yas Marina Circuit is a must-see. Hosting the Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, the circuit offers a chance for visitors to watch world-class racing in an iconic desert setting. Warner Bros. World Abu Dhabi brings beloved characters to life with thrilling rides and interactive experiences for the whole family.

Yas Island is also home to top-notch hotels, shopping, and

dining options. Whether visitors are staying at luxury resorts like Yas Viceroy Hotel or exploring the vibrant shopping and dining scene, Yas Island promises a perfect mix of excitement and leisure. Travel agents can easily position Yas Island as a must-visit destination for clients seeking action-packed adventures and unforgettable memories.

Al Ain: An oasis of Nature

For those looking to experience the tranquil side of Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, popular as the 'Garden City', is an oasis in the desert that offers a perfect escape from the bustling city life. Situated at the foot of the majestic Jebel Hafeet mountain, Al Ain is rich in history, nature, and outdoor adventures.

The Al Ain Zoo is one of the oldest in the UAE and is home to endangered species, offering a unique wildlife experience. Meanwhile, Al Ain Oasis provides a refreshing natural retreat, with its ancient falaj irrigation system and lush palm groves creating a serene environment for visitors to relax and unwind. The city is also famous for its archaeological sites like Hili Archaeological Park, where visitors can discover ancient tombs and artefacts dating back thousands of years.

For adventure lovers, the Jebel Hafeet Mountain Road is a thrilling drive offering panoramic views of the surrounding desert. Whether clients are looking for a peaceful getaway or an adventure in the mountains, Al Ain offers a variety of experiences that cater to the taste of every type of travellers. 



Oman eyes wedding tourism market

In a bid to tap into the lucrative wedding market, Oman rolled out the red carpet for international wedding planners, showcasing its stunning landscapes, rich culture, and world-class infrastructure at an event in Mumbai recently. Khalid Mohammed Al Azri, Director of Tourism Trends Department, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman, highlighted incentives for the wedding planners at the event.



Jordan aims 2x visitors in a year

With non-stop flights on the horizon, the Middle East nation has plans to double its visitor numbers to 160,000 within the next 12-18 months. Through 'Explore Jordan' initiative, Royal Jordanian Airlines is joining forces with tour operators to promote the country as a vibrant new destination for Indian travellers.



Hazel Jain

Royal Jordanian Airlines recently announced two new routes from Amman to India. "The launch of our new non-stop routes connecting Amman with Mumbai and New Delhi marks a significant milestone in our strategy to promote Jordan as a tourism destination for the Indian market while positioning Royal Jordanian as a boutique airline," said **Karim Makhoul**, Chief Commercial Officer, Royal Jordanian Airlines, who was recently in India to announce four weekly flights to each destination from Amman.

As part of its expansion plan, Royal Jordanian will introduce 19 brand-new A320neo and Boeing 787 aircraft in 2025-26. The new routes to Mumbai and New Delhi will be served by the A320neos, featuring dual-class configurations (Economy and Business), advanced in-flight entertainment, and WiFi services.



In line with the 'Explore Jordan' programme, the launch highlights Royal Jordanian's commitment to showcasing Jordan as a unique tourist destination for Indian travellers

Makhoul added, "We plan to increase it to daily flights next year. We are a travel agent-friendly airline. We are on all GDSs and pay commissions. Together with our partner STIC Travels, we are happy to bring tour operators flexible IT fares because our main mission is not just ticketing or connecting traffic, but to promote Jordan as a destination and

tourist packages into Jordan via 'Explore Jordan'."

Explore Jordan

There is a new website under rj.com which is meant to showcase the variety of experiences Jordan has. "Jordan doesn't have the awareness it deserves. Jordan for me, as a non-Jordanian, is the most authentic, truly Arabian country with

a wide variety of activities. So, we developed 'Explore Jordan' with RJ to explain the nine pillars of experiences Jordan offers," he added.

The nine pillars include Culinary Tourism, which is vegetarian friendly, Adventure that includes the Jordan Trail, Art and Lifestyle with 20 art galleries in Amman alone, great nightlife, beautiful weather in the summer with cool evenings and hot days. Another pillar is Contemporary Heritage with modern muse-

ums, and Holy Travel for Christians and Muslims. Five out of the top 10 Vatican sites are in Jordan.

Makhoul said, "Through 'Explore Jordan' we want to promote Jordan together with the two operators as the new destination for Indian tourists. In good years, like in 2023, we used to receive 80,000 Indian tourists, which I think is not much. So, our aim is to double this number within the next 12 to 18 months with non-stop flights and increase connectivity further. We will adjust our capacity to the Indian tourism behaviour. This means, if we get more numbers from India, we are ready to increase our capacity." For Indians, Jordan has in principle visa-on-arrival facility. One can apply for it online. However, if tourists buy a package from Explore Jordan, then the visa is free.

Amman, the hub of Royal Jordanian Airlines, will serve as a gateway for Indian travellers to Europe, North America, and the Middle East.

Isha Goyal, Chief Executive Officer, STIC Travel Group, said, "We are excited to announce the much-awaited Royal Jordanian non-stop services, connecting India and Amman. Travel agents across the country can now book through the GDS. So, please plan ahead. Jordan is a fantastic leisure destination."



For Indians, Jordan has in principle visa-on-arrival facility. One can apply for it online. However, if tourists buy a package from 'Explore Jordan', then the visa is free

FLIGHT SCHEDULE OF THE AIRLINE

4 weekly flights the Mumbai route will operate starting on 17 April 2025

4 weekly flights the New Delhi route will operate starting on 17 September 2025

₹19,999

for a one-way ticket from Mumbai and New Delhi, while ₹33,333 for a return ticket

Cygnett signs property in Goa

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has signed up Anamore Select Resort & Wellness in Goa. Nestled amid greenery, the property redefines upscale hospitality with 150 villa rooms, with a focus on wellness and sustainability.



Surbhi Sharma

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, one of India's fastest-growing hospitality chains, has made waves in the industry by announcing its latest venture: the signing of Anamore Select Resort & Wellness at Mopa, Goa, in partnership with Yugen Infra, a prominent name in real estate.

Sarbendra Sarkar, Founder & Managing Director, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, said, "Anamore Select Resort & Wellness is a significant step forward in Cygnett's ambitious diversification strategy. With 150 meticulously designed villa rooms, this high-end resort targets the discerning traveller seeking a harmonious balance of indulgence and rejuvenation. Our vision for Anamore is bold and forward-looking. We aim to redefine the future of luxury travel in India. Having successfully established multiple hotels in the mid-segment annually, we are confident of replicating this success in the upscale market."



Sarbendra Sarkar
Founder & Managing Director
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

Destination like no other

Nestled amid the Western Ghats and set within Goa's largest golf course township, Anamore Select Resort & Wellness boasts a prime location, just 15 minutes from Mopa Airport and accessible via the Goa-Mumbai Highway.

Amenities redefine comfort

Designed to cater to both leisure and corporate guests, the resort offers an array of premium amenities.

Highlights include an all-day dining restaurant and a sophisticated bar, a sprawling 10,000 sq ft lawn and a 6,000 sq ft banquet hall, perfect for grand celebrations and corporate events, recreational facilities, such as a swimming pool, health club, kids' play area, a clubhouse and a dedicated wellness wing, Bluum Mudra by Ayurveda, offering holistic well-being services.

FROM MID-SCALE TO UPSCALE

5

properties are in pipeline in Karjat, Murud, Khalapur in Maharashtra, Srinagar in Uttarakhand, and Pushkar in Rajasthan

15

new properties it plans to add within the next year

8,000-9,000 keys the group plans over next five years

BOM-HAN route gets wide-body

Vietnam Airlines strengthens its commitment to the Indian market by upgrading aircraft on the Mumbai-Hanoi route, enhancing capacity and comfort with the most modern A350 and B787 aircraft.



TT Bureau

Vietnam Airlines, the flag carrier of Vietnam, has announced the upgrade of its aircraft on the Mumbai to Hanoi route. Starting 1 May 2025, the flights will operate four times a week using the state-of-the-art Boeing 787 and Airbus A350 aircraft. Both models are renowned for their advanced technology, spacious design, and superior comfort. This upgrade reflects Vietnam Airlines' commitment to increasing capacity from Mumbai, strengthening air connectivity between India and Vietnam.



Nguyen Trung Hieu
Country Manager India
Vietnam Airlines

Nguyen Trung Hieu, Country Manager India, Vietnam Airlines, said: "Following the successful launch of daily A350 flights in Delhi last year, and the overwhelming response from the market, we are thrilled to increase our operations from Mumbai. Upgrading to wide-body operations with our Boeing 787 and Airbus A350 aircraft reflects our unwavering commitment to offering Indian travelers unparalleled comfort and

convenience. We look forward to welcoming passengers onboard and providing them with an exceptional journey characterized by renowned Vietnamese hospitality."

Abhishek Goyal, CEO & Executive Director, Aeroprime Group (India GSA for Vietnam Airlines), said: "Upgrading to the world-class Boeing 787 and Airbus A350 aircraft demonstrates Vietnam Airlines' commitment to enhancing cus-

tomers experience. We are proud to support Vietnam Airlines in their journey as Mumbai represents a vital market for expanding travel between India and Vietnam." Vietnam has emerged as one of the most sought-after destinations for Indian travellers in recent years. According to Google Trends, it was the "Most Searched Destination for Indians in 2023." The introduction of wide-body flights from Mumbai is perfectly timed to meet the growing demand.

FLIGHT UPGRADATION

14 flights

weekly Vietnam Airlines currently operates from Delhi and Mumbai to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

A350 & B787

aircraft airline announces to rope in from 1 May 2025 on the Mumbai-Hanoi route

MTF Premier League fosters camaraderie

The MTF Premier League Season III concluded on a high note on a cool Sunday evening in Mumbai. Muffazzal Hafiji owned Excel Titans emerged as champions this season, delivering a phenomenal performance under the leadership of Captain Satbir Singh Narula. It was an exceptional event organised by the MTF's core team – Pradeep Saboo, Sameer Karnani and Rajat Bagaria.



Sarovar eyes 150 hotels by year-end: Ajay Bakaya

Sarovar Hotels has seen a remarkable growth in recent years, with 2024 seeing the launch of 27 new properties. Top leadership of the group shares insights into the brand's vision and strategies to maintain its lead in the mid-market segment.

Surbhi Sharma

Sarovar Hotels, one of India's leading hotel chains with 135 hotels in 85 destinations across India, Nepal and Africa, has undergone a remarkable growth over the years. As it looks to the future, the brand is well-positioned to continue its growth in the domestic and international markets, while staying true to its core values of offering affordable, high-quality accommodation with a strong emphasis on local culture and sustainability.

Vision & growth

Elaborating on the success, **Ajay K Bakaya**, Chairman, Sarovar Hotels, said that 2024 was a record year, with 27 new hotels opened and 43 new properties signed. "This growth has exceeded our expectations," he said. With a strong government policy and increased infrastructure spending, Bakaya foresees a steady growth trajectory over the next four years, positioning the brand as a leader in the mid-market segment. By 2025, Sarovar Hotels is expected to surpass 150 properties, with over 10,000 rooms across 90 destinations.



Ajay K Bakaya
Chairman
Sarovar Hotels



Jatin Khanna
CEO
Sarovar Hotels

Growth has exceeded our expectations. By 2025, Sarovar Hotels is expected to surpass 150 properties, with over 10,000 rooms across 90 destinations

ties, more landmark hotels under every single brand. We are currently in the process of renovating our hotel in Chandigarh under a

Our vision is aligned with our principal partner's vision; every time an owner or a guest thinks about engaging with the industry, we should be among top choices

what we have been doing and what has been working for us and at the same time keep on upgrading our guest experiences and technology

hesitant to venture. This strategic move has given Sarovar Hotels a significant head start in these regions. The mid-market segment, especially tier II, III, and IV cities, remains a key area of growth for the brand. As these cities experience rapid development, Sarovar is well-positioned to cater to the rising demand for high-quality, affordable accommodation.

Expansion plans

Sarovar Hotels continues to focus on balanced growth across city and leisure hotels, with a 70:30 ratio. Domestically, the brand has a strong presence in major cities like Goa, Bangalore, Delhi NCR, and Mumbai, with plans to expand in cities like Lucknow, where the number of hotels will increase from three to six or seven in the coming years. Internationally, the brand is expanding its footprint in Africa from existing three to five hotels, with properties in Hargeisa (Somaliland) and Kampala (Uganda) set to open by 2025. The brand also has a strong presence in Nepal, where it plans to increase its portfolio to four hotels by 2025 end. Although Sarovar is yet to establish presence in the Middle East, Bakaya remains optimistic about future opportunities in the region.

Growth & occupancy

Bakaya is pleased with Sarovar Hotels' performance in 2024, which saw a growth rate of over 9%, surpassing the initial forecast. The addition of new properties further boosted the brand's overall growth to around 13 per cent year-on-year. Looking ahead, he expects this growth momentum to continue in 2025 and beyond.

SAROVAR ON EXPANSION PATH

27

new hotels opened by Sarovar Group in 2024 and 43 new properties signed

150

properties the group eyes across 90 destinations by 2025 year-end

2

more properties the group plans to add in Africa; one in Hargeisa and another in Kampala set to open



While Sarovar Hotels is often associated with the mid-market segment, Bakaya emphasises that the brand also has premium properties, though it remains committed to its core mid-market audience. "We have no aspirations of grandeur. We serve a particular segment, and we do it well," he said.

Sarovar currently maintains a balance of 80 per cent mid-market hotels and 20 per cent premium properties. Sharing more updates, Bakaya said, "We are looking for stronger, larger and better proper-

three-year plan, which starts from this year and carries on to 2027. Meanwhile, we are building a 156-key Sarovar Portico in Chennai that will launch in the first half of this year. We are creating benchmarks, but we remain true to the mid-market cause and the mid-market customer."

Sharing his vision for Sarovar Hotels' role in shaping the future of the Indian hospitality industry, **Jatin Khanna**, CEO, Sarovar Hotels, said, "We want to keep on growing and to be consistent in

part. Our vision is aligned with our principal partner's vision that every time an owner or a guest or an employee thinks about engaging with the industry, we should be one of their top choices."

Sarovar's USP

In an increasingly competitive hospitality landscape, Sarovar Hotels has maintained its edge by staying true to its roots. Bakaya attributes much of the brand's success to its early entry into tier II and III markets, where many multinational chains were



Land based-Guidelines for All-Terrain Vehicles (ATV) Tours

ATVs, also called quad bikes, are safe when used correctly but can cause serious injuries if misused. Operating ATVs requires specific training as their functioning differs from cars and motorcycles.

Guides

Guides must have accreditation from international institutes or complete in-house training, covering:

- ❖ ATV basics, protective gear, and pre-ride inspections
- ❖ Riding techniques: Starting, braking, turning, and traversing obstacles
- ❖ Safe driving practices, U-turns, and trail riding
- ❖ Risk awareness and emergency manoeuvres (e.g., quick stops)
- ❖ Guides must be familiar with ATV operating manuals and assessed for their knowledge.

Customer training

Participants must undergo a basic training session, covering:

- ❖ Proper mounting, control operation, and dismounting
- ❖ Smooth braking techniques and safe turning by weight shifting
- ❖ Paying attention to guide instructions is mandatory

Equipment

ATVs: Use well-maintained models from reputable manufacturers and adhere to manual-recommended maintenance.

Protective Gear

- ❖ Helmets: Must be approved, well-fitted, and securely fastened
- ❖ Face shields/ goggles: For protection in dense foliage
- ❖ Gloves: For hand comfort and protection, preferably off-road style with knuckle padding
- ❖ Footwear: Ankle-length boots with low heels for better grip
- ❖ Clothing: Long-sleeved tops and trousers to prevent scratches
- ❖ Carry a first-aid kit and tool kit during tours.

Inspections and maintenance

Inspect ATVs before every ride using the T-CLOC checklist:

- ❖ Tyres, wheels, controls, lights, oil, and chassis.
- ❖ Conduct regular maintenance as per the manufacturer's manual.

SOPs and rules

Develop SOPs approved by state tourism departments, focusing on:

- ❖ Wearing helmets and protective gear
- ❖ Keeping hands on handlebars and feet on footrests
- ❖ Avoiding paved surfaces and public roads unless permitted
- ❖ Prohibiting alcohol, drugs, and carrying passengers on single-seater

Children's safety

- ❖ Under-18 riders require parental consent and adult supervision.
- ❖ Children must use ATVs suitable for their age, following manufacturer's age recommendations.

Risk mitigation

- ❖ Conduct risk assessments of trails before use.
- ❖ Prepare and regularly train staff on an Emergency Action Plan.

Emergency and rescue procedures

- ❖ Ensure availability of first-aid kits and easy access to emergency services.
- ❖ Prepare a detailed emergency procedure, including evacuation plans and emergency contacts.

Medical concerns

- ❖ Advise participants to carry personal medications and inform the ride leader of any medical conditions.
- ❖ Guides must have a plan for accidents and carry a first-aid kit.

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



FEBRUARY 2025

Date	Event	Time
4	Oman Tourism Workshop-Mumbai	10:00 am
6	Oman Tourism Workshop-Ahmedabad	10:00 am
6-8	Dhaka Travel Mart 2025	10:00 am
9-11	Gujarat Travel Fair 2025	10:00 am
10-12	Asia Pacific Incentives And Meetings Events (AIME)	10:00 am
10-12	Saudi Travel Market 2025	2:00 pm
11-12	GPS-Nagpur	10:00 am
14-16	India International Travel Mart-Kolkata	11:00 am
14-17	Taipei Travel Expo	9:00 am
18	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
19-21	South Asia's Travel & Tourism Exchange (SATTE)	9:00 am
20-23	Hong Kong Holiday & Travel Expo	9:00 am
21-23	Indo Himalayan Expo	9:00 am
22-23	Los Angeles Travel & Adventure Show	9:30 am
24	Singapore Tourism Roadshow-Mumbai	10:30 am
24-25	Utah Travel Expo 2025	2:00 pm
24-25	Holiday Expo-Visakhapatnam	9:00 am
26	Singapore Tourism Roadshow-Chandigarh	10:30 am
27-28	GPS-Visakhapatnam	10:00 am
28	Singapore Tourism Roadshow-Bengaluru	10:30 am

Tisya Stays strengthens portfolio

Tisya Stays, a renowned luxury villa rental brand, ushers in a new era of luxury villas. It is elevating the standard of exclusive vacation experiences with its expanded portfolio of opulent villas and apartments in Goa and Uttarakhand.



TT Bureau

Tisya Stays has long been a hallmark of luxury and privacy in the world of villa rentals, and with the recent expansion of its portfolio, it is further solidifying its reputation as a premium provider of exclusive vacation experiences. With 18 luxurious villas and 35 apartments in Goa and three stunning villas nestled in



PROPERTIES ON OFFER

18
luxurious villas and 35 apartments Tisya Stays offers in Goa

3
stunning villas the brand offers in the peaceful hills of Uttarakhand

7,000
properties globally where guests can redeem points

the peaceful hills of Uttarakhand, Tisya Stays offers an unparalleled combination of comfort, space, and privacy.

The company is thrilled to announce the launch of new villas that cater to various group sizes and preferences. These new additions—Casa Solace, Casa Mera-ki, and Casa 2565, all 3-bedroom properties, and the larger Vilasa villa with five bedrooms—are designed to provide guests with

an extraordinary vacation experience. Each villa boasts its own private pool, contemporary amenities, and exceptional interiors, ensuring that every stay is nothing short of memorable.

In addition to these stunning new properties, Tisya Stays also offers luxurious villas in the serene surroundings of Uttarakhand. The Mukteshwar, Sitla, and Satoli villas provide a perfect escape for those looking to unwind amid the

tranquility of the hills. One of the key differentiators of Tisya Stays is its unwavering focus on delivering a personalised experience. Each villa comes equipped with modern amenities like private pools and generators for power backup (for villas), ensuring that guests enjoy a seamless, uninterrupted stay. Tisya Stays is also accredited with Marriott Bonvoy, which means guests enjoy exclusive privileges, including earning points at over 7,000 properties globally.

OBITUARY



Saravanan Palanivelu
(14 Feb 1960 – 20 Jan 2024)

The travel industry mourns the loss of Saravanan Palanivelu, a visionary leader whose contribution to travel and tourism and dedication to organisations like TAAI and Skål International have left an indelible mark.

In 1986, he founded Viking Tours & Travel in Chennai, an IATA-accredited agency that became a trusted name in outbound travel. His leadership extended to TAAI, where he served as Southern Regional Chairman (2010-12) and on the National Managing Committee (2017-19). Palanivelu's legacy in Skål International is unparalleled. His contribution will continue to inspire generations in the travel industry.

UTEN organises 2nd B2B meeting

Satyaprakash Gupta and Winifred Dsouza, Co-Founders of UTEN, organised the 2nd edition of their tabletop networking event in Mumbai recently. International and domestic travel suppliers, including Shroff Travels from Philippines and MP Tours from Madhya Pradesh, took part in the B2B event.



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MOVEMENTS

CHALET HOTELS

Mumbai

Chalet Hotels has appointed **GAURAV SINGH** as the Chief Operating Officer (COO), effective 15 January 2025. In his new role, Singh will be focusing on asset management, driving operational excellence, ensuring efficiency to strengthen the business and design scalable processes for Chalet Hotels. With a robust portfolio and an ambitious pipeline of additional rooms, Gaurav's leadership backed with 26 years of experience in hospitality will play a crucial role in steering Chalet's exciting journey. Singh said, "I am excited to join Chalet Hotels at such a transformative phase in its journey."



HILTON GURUGRAM BAANI CITY CENTRE

New Delhi

Hilton Gurugram Bani City Centre has appointed **HARKARAN SINGH SETHI** as the General Manager. With over 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Sethi brings extensive expertise in operations management, food and beverage innovation, and strategic leadership. His diverse skill set positions him well to guide Hilton Gurugram Bani City Centre toward continued success and growth. Sethi has held leadership roles with renowned hospitality brands, including as General Manager and Associate Director of Operations, South Asia at the Radisson Hotel Group, where he supported and managed strategic operations.



HOLIDAY INN AMRITSAR RANJIT AVENUE

Amritsar

Holiday Inn Amritsar Ranjit Avenue has appointed **RAVI DHANKHAR** as the General Manager. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Dhankhar has a proven track record of leadership across prestigious hotel brands, such as The Leela Palace, Taj Hotels, Sarovar Hotels, Lemon Tree Hotels, Narendra Bhawan Bikaner, Pride Group of Hotels and Ramada Jaipur. His diverse background positions him to further elevate the hotel's reputation and service standards. In his new role, he will oversee all aspects of hotel operations, focusing on enhancing guest satisfaction, and improving operational efficiency.



MAAN VILAS BY STONE WOOD UDAIPUR

Udaipur

Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts has appointed **AMISH MATHUR** as the General Manager of Maan Vilas By Stone Wood Udaipur. A seasoned hospitality professional with 27 years of vast experience, Mathur has honed his expertise across a diverse range of roles, including working with QSR chains, international hotel brands and independent properties. His 360-degree understanding of the hospitality business is complemented by his expertise in pre-opening projects and managing properties in remote locations. He is a 1994-97 batch hotel management graduate of the Mangalore University.



LORDS INN, KANKIDHAM

Kankidham

Lords Inn, Kankidham has appointed **ANIRBAN BANERJEE** as the General Manager. A seasoned hotelier with over 23 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Banerjee has a proven track record of leading operations and driving revenue growth for prestigious hotels across India. In his new role, Banerjee will focus on operational excellence, enhancing service quality, and promoting sustainable practices at the hotel. Commenting on the appointment, Sudhir Jena, Corporate Vice President, Lords Inn, Kankidham, said, "We are delighted to welcome Anirban Banerjee to the Lords family."



SOFITEL BAHRAIN ZALLAQ THALASSA SEA & SPA

Bahrain

Sofitel Bahrain Zallaq Thalassa Sea & Spa appoints **VIVEK BRAGANZA** as the Director of Operations in charge of Sales & Marketing. With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Braganza will be in charge of all hotel operations at Sofitel Bahrain Zallaq Thalassa Sea & Spa. He will be responsible for managing accommodations, F&B, spa services, and recreational activities. Before joining Sofitel, Braganza held a crucial position at Shangri-La Group, where he oversaw Global Sales Offices in both India and the Middle East. His leadership spanned major cities, including Mumbai and Delhi.



DOUBLETREE BY HILTON GOA-PANAJI

Goa-Panaji

DoubleTree by Hilton Goa-Panaji appoints **BLISSE COLACO** as the Marketing & Communications Manager. The appointment marks a significant step in the hotel's strategy to bolster its leadership team and drive impactful communication initiatives. As part of her new role, Colaco will develop and execute marketing strategies and budgeting to strengthen brand perception and position in the market. Apart from this, she will also work closely with teams to develop narratives that will amplify customer acquisition and sales. She brings a wealth of experience, having spent over five years at the Goa Marriott Resort and Spa-Marriott International.



NHCC & HICC

Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre & Hyderabad International Convention Centre (NHCC & HICC) has appointed **GOVIND DHANU NAIK** as the Director of Security. With over 14 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Naik specialises in managing security teams and implementing comprehensive security strategies for large properties. His expertise lies in addressing potential security risks and enforcing proactive measures to ensure the safety of employees and guests alike. He has a proven track record in leading cross-functional teams and collaborating with senior management to analyse market trends.



HILTON BANGALORE EMBASSY GOLFLINKS

Bangalore

Hilton Bangalore Embassy GolfLinks appoints **SIDDHANT ARORA** as the Food and Beverage Manager. In his new role, Arora brings over nine years of experience in the hospitality industry, focusing on operations management, strategic partnerships, and revenue enhancement. At Hilton Bangalore Embassy GolfLinks, he will oversee a dynamic operation in the various Food and Beverage Outlets. He has held pivotal positions at prestigious hospitality brands. Throughout his career, he has excelled in managing large-scale operations, leading pre-opening teams, and executing innovative marketing initiatives for restaurants.



AUXILIA NETWORKS

Bengaluru

Auxilia Networks has appointed **REJI THOMAS MATHEW** as Head of Business Development – South India. He has been in the travel industry for almost three decades, working in India and Middle East markets and gained rich experience of working with a number of high-profile travel agencies and tourism boards, such as Cox & Kings, Dnata and VisitBritain. He has built an extensive network of trade, hospitality, media and airline contacts in India and abroad. Mathew has extensive experience in trade and consumer sales & marketing, campaign coordination, running trade and media families.



PULLMAN AND NOVOTEL NEW DELHI AEROCITY

New Delhi

Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity appoints **UDAY BHATNAGAR** as the Director of Revenue Management. With an expansive career in hospitality revenue optimisation and a proven track record of success across various regions, Bhatnagar brings a wealth of knowledge and leadership to the team. He joins the Pullman and Novotel family from his previous role as Director of Revenue Management at Novotel Goa Resort & Spa, Novotel Goa Candolim & Novotel Goa Panjim. His expertise in strategic pricing, yield management, and demand forecasting has been instrumental in maximising revenue and profit.



Hilton Bangalore Embassy GolfLinks appoints **MALEENI ROY BARMAN** as the Human Resources Manager. She brings over seven years of experience in strategic HR management, talent acquisition, and organisational development. Barman's dynamic leadership and innovative HR practices will play a key role in fostering a strong workplace culture and driving employee engagement. She has held roles at many organisations, including JW Marriott Kolkata and Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway. She holds a Master's degree in HM from the Institute of Hotel Management, Bangalore.



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'Agent is our customer': Dev Karvat

Asego has completed 25 years in the industry, providing one of the strongest ancillary products to the travel trade. Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, shares what makes them click and how they are crafting new products according to the market demand.

Nisha Verma

Asego as an ancillary product is not just looking at its own profits, but creating avenues for its travel partners to also earn money, shares **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego, with **HT** on the sidelines of the recent TAFI Convention in Vietnam.

In fact, at one of the sessions at the event, agents openly applauded Asego for the same. Speaking on how he achieves that, Karvat said, "Globally, travel insurance is among the top three ancillary revenue generators for travel agents, airlines, OTAs and DMCs. In India, we are gradually moving towards the direction where travel insurance will be the largest revenue generator for a travel agent. To do that, as a travel insurance



provider we believe that you need to offer relevant products to your customers. The moment you have a relevant product offered to the customer, he is going to offer it further. Post-COVID, the customer is willing to spend money, but he wants the right product. He wants right protection and service. If that is provided, he is willing to give you a share in his wallet."

What clicks

Responding to the praise coming Asego's way, Karvat said, "The most important thing is to stay focused and specialised. We are celebrating 25 years of our company, and we have not changed course in between. We have not got tempted to start selling five different things. We have stayed true to what we enjoy doing. We have stayed true to what we have been committed to the travel agencies. We believe that the agent is our customer. We may be issuing policies to a lot of Bollywood personalities, or to government organisations, or to large corporations, but because we do 100 per cent of our business with the travel trade, they are our customers. In fact, our teams, totalling about 450 people across the country, have been working with most of the travel agent partners that we have worked with over so many years. Hence, we have a longstanding relationship."

He added, "In a service industry, it is nice to



Dev Karvat with agents at the TAFI Convention in Ninh Binh, Vietnam

get compliments from the travel trade because it's not easy to be in a service industry and continue to do the same thing for about 25 years. Thus, we are very happy and lucky to have a great team that keeps supporting all the travel agents across the country."

How agents earn money?

Looking at India's insurance market, he said, "In India, only about 20-30 per cent people buy travel insurance when they go overseas,

agencies. As Asego Travel Insurance, we stay committed to creating relevant products, which will help them in converting those 40-50 per cent of the customers who are not buying today, and, in turn, will generate additional revenues for the travel agency."

Unique products

Observing that people are taking longer flights, Asego introduced lounge access for its customers. Asego will soon be launching a new product called Chatmate. "Along with other products they buy, Chatmate will help the customer to get a lifetime global eSIM number, which they can use and top up as they go. The cost is very low compared to what they would pay to any domestic telecom provider," he revealed.

The most important thing is to stay focused and specialised. We are celebrating 25 years of our company, and we have not changed course in between

which was in single digit in 2000. We have come a long way today. We have worked closely with travel agents in educating them about the product. However, going forward, when we benchmark with any of the global peers, they are at about 85-90 per cent. Hence, we have a long way to go, and that gap of around 30-90 per cent can generate huge revenues for the travel



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO, Asego

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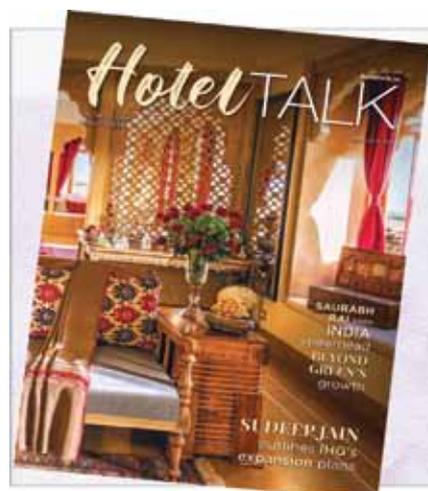
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SENSING BUSINESS

- 20-30%** people now buy travel insurance when they go overseas, which was in single digit in 2000
- 85-90%** travel insurance buy global peers
- 40-50%** customers can be converted with right products



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