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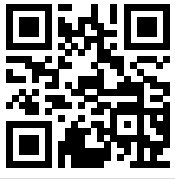
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Credible sustainability dire necessity?

Indian hospitality industry is witnessing a shift towards sustainability, but are hotels looking for sustainability classification? Does that align with the government's goals towards responsible tourism and if this decision is dependent on other factors as well?

Surbhi Sharma

With the UN agencies and global alliances intensifying efforts to fight the climate change battle, economic activities face tough scrutiny for their role in supporting the climate actions. The hotel industry, a key player in the experience economy, carries a significant responsibility to the global efforts towards sustainability. Industry leaders say that hotels are increasingly adopting sustainable initiatives, from energy efficiency to waste

management, aligning with the global standards.

Demand for sustainable classifications

KB Kachru, President, HAI, highlights the growing need for transparency and credibility, particularly as corporate clients and leisure travellers demand verified sustainable practices. Data indicates that 96 per cent of companies now prefer hotels with established sustainability certifications. This shift is especially noticeable in the MICE (Meetings, Incentives,

Data indicates that 96% of companies now prefer hotels with established sustainability certifications. This shift is especially noticeable in the MICE sector

Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector, where businesses are incorporating sustainability into their travel policies.

Emphasising that sustainability is no longer just a marketing tool but a crucial aspect of hotel operations, **Ajay K Bakaya**, Chairman, Sarovar Hotels, said, "As travellers become more environmentally conscious, the demand for eco-friendly stays is rising, making sustainability a competitive differentiator for hotels. This is particularly important for in-

ternational travellers, who now prioritise hotels with strong environmental credentials."

Government's efforts in promoting sustainability

The Indian government is also playing a pivotal role, said Kachru, adding that stricter environmental regulations and initiatives like Prime Minister Narendra Modi's LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) campaign are encouraging businesses to adopt green technologies, renewable energy, and effective waste management practices.

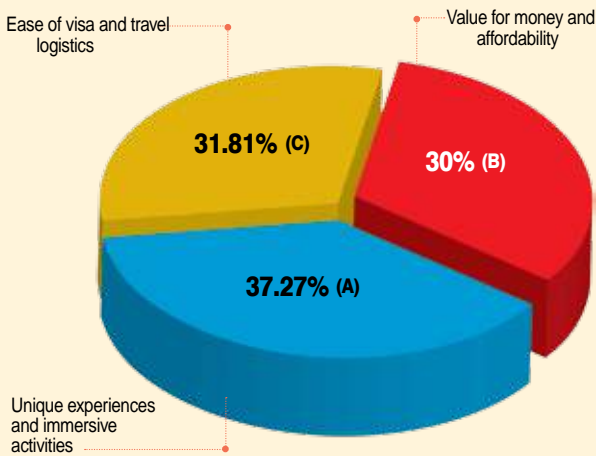


KB Kachru
President
HAI

The hospitality sector is expected to be at the forefront of this shift, with a clear goal of contributing to India's ambition of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070.

Contd. on page 26 ▶

Immersive activities to drive travel in '25



The **TRAVTALK** Poll makes a comeback. We did an extensive survey of Indian travel trade stakeholders via emailers, messages and WhatsApp, which has revealed that unique experiences and immersive activities (37%) will take precedence over ease of visa and travel logistics (32%) in deciding travel choices in 2025. About 30% chose value for money and affordability as the reason. The preference for experiential travel and affordability reflects that travellers are increasingly seeking authentic, immersive experiences, whether through cultural interactions, adventure tourism, or personalised itineraries. At the same time, economic concerns mean that travellers are still prioritising budget-friendly options without compromising on quality.



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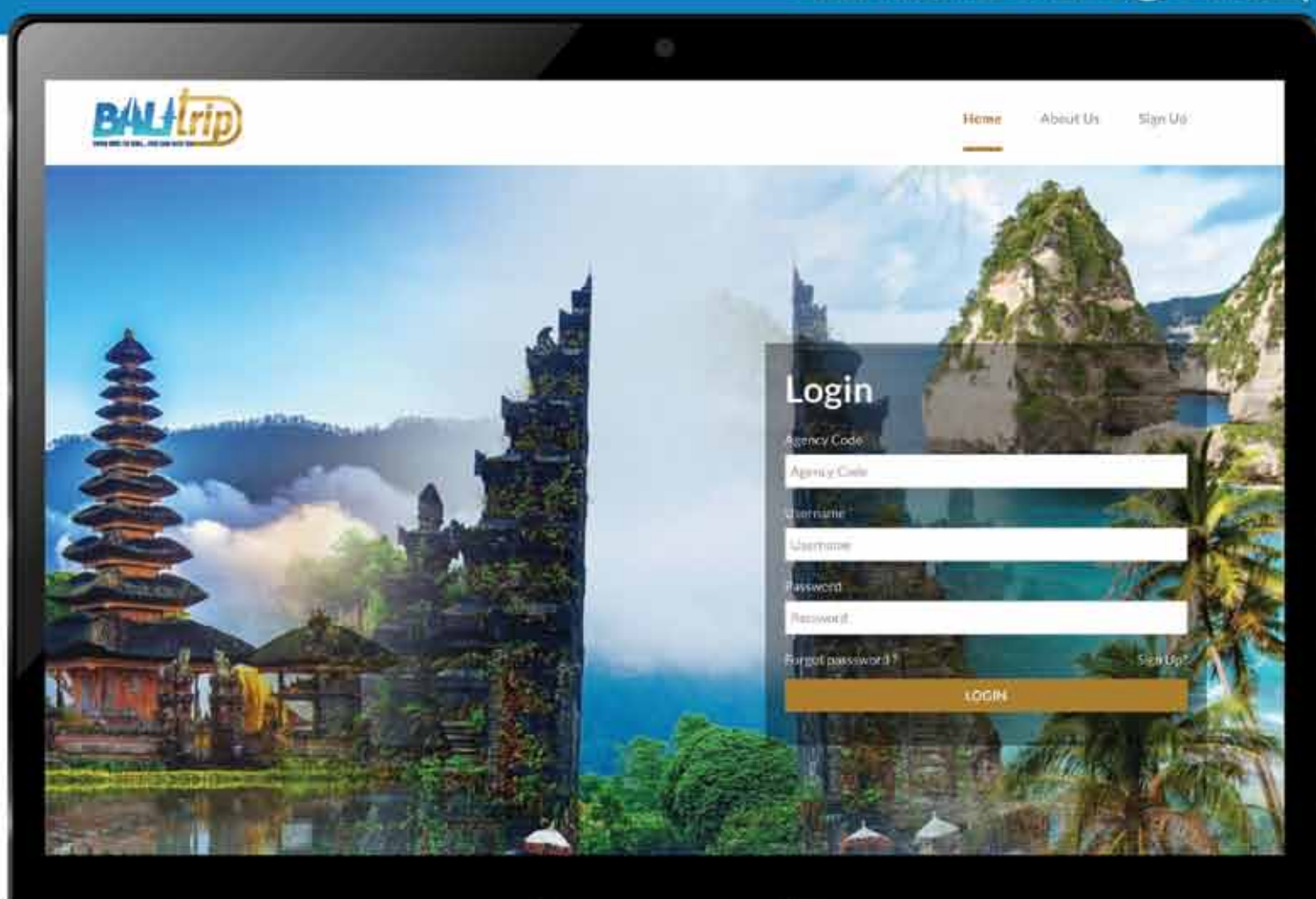
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Only ₹3 cr for overseas promotions?

The Union Budget 2025 paves the way for a strategic shift towards economic growth. However, travel and tourism industry is dismayed over the allocation of mere ₹3 crore for the promotion and marketing of India abroad. Would this amount be sufficient to showcase India's products and attract inbound traffic, they ask.



Nirmala Sitharaman, Finance Minister, Government of India, while presenting the Union Budget 2025-26, unveiled a comprehensive roadmap to transform the tourism sector of India and place the country as a global leader in both leisure and medical tourism. She announced a major push for the tourism sector, focusing on infrastructure, employment, and connectivity.

Among the major announcements, the government proposed ₹1.5 trillion interest-free loans to states for 50 years. The government also proposed to develop 50 destinations sites in partnership with states through a challenge mode. It emphasised Buddhist Circuit destinations and 'Heal in India' initiative to promote medical tourism through private sector partnerships and easier visa norms.



The government also proposed five National Centres of Excellence for Skilling to equip youth with the necessary skills. Modified UDAN scheme will be launched to connect 120 new destinations and cater to four crore passengers over the next 10 years. The government plans to streamline e-visa facilities, along with visa fee waivers for select foreign tourist groups. The government proposed to raise the TCS threshold on remittances under the LRS from ₹700,000 to ₹1 million. Previously, overseas

tour packages incurred a 5 per cent TCS rate up to ₹700,000.

Overseas marketing budget

While the budget estimates for 2025-26 remained almost the same (₹2,541 cr) compared to 2024-25 (₹2,484 cr), the allocation for overseas promotion and publicity, including Market development assistance (MDA), has come down to ₹3.07 crore in this year's budget. The drastic cut in allocation for the overseas promotions has evoked sharp criticism.



Rajiv Mehra
President
IATO

“It is shocking that the budget of ₹33 crore has been reduced to ₹3 cr. In fact, the earlier allocated budget of ₹33 cr was also not enough. While the government is all praise for the tourism sector's contribution to economic growth, it is allocating a peanut budget for promoting the country.”



Pradeep Shetty
Vice President
FHRAI & Spokesperson, HRAWI

“The drastic cut in the overseas tourism promotion budget is a major setback for India's global tourism outreach. This will severely impact India's overseas promotion activities. India risks losing a big share of inbound tourism when other destinations are aggressively marketing themselves.”



K Ranga Reddy
Chairman, IATO Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Chapter

“Budget has dealt a severe blow to the country's global tourism ambitions by allocating mere ₹3 crore for overseas marketing. This paltry sum has sparked concern among industry leaders, who fear India may lose its competitive edge in the global tourism landscape.”

Contd. on page 9 ▶

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Culinary Tourism redefining vacations

Culinary tourism has emerged as a driving force, transforming how vacations are experienced in India. What was once a secondary element of travel itineraries, food is now at the heart of the modern vacation.

Red flag for India's global promo target

The Union Budget's allocation of ₹3 crore for overseas tourism promotion has sparked concern within the industry. While India's domestic tourism is thriving, global outreach is equally crucial to attract high-value international travellers.

Rather than viewing the budget cut as a setback, the industry must come together to explore new ways of positioning India as a premier destination. Collaboration between the private sector and tourism bodies can drive innovative solutions—leveraging technology, strategic partnerships and targeted promotions. The focus should be on strengthening India's appeal beyond just budget allocations. Tourism is a powerful economic engine, and a united effort will ensure that India secures its rightful place on the global map. Now is the time to think bigger, act smarter, and showcase India's immense potential to the world.

Turbulent times over?

Indian aviation is on the verge of a big leap, but let's not kid ourselves—it's still a bumpy ride. From grounded planes due to spare part delays to sky-high fuel costs, challenges keep piling up. While RCS scheme is doing wonders, there are smaller cities still waiting for functional airports and better infrastructure. On the flip side, there is plenty to cheer about. Air India merging with Vistara is a power move, and IndiGo's growing fleet shows no signs of slowing down. Initiatives like UDAN have made flying possible for many first-timers, but slashed funding threatens their future. The sector desperately needs more airports, smoother connectivity, and better use of homegrown talent for manufacturing and maintenance. The potential is massive, but it will take bold reforms, smarter policies, and solid investments to truly take off.



For today's adventurous traveller, culinary experiences are no longer just an add-on; they are essential to shaping the entire travel journey. As culinary tourism in India rises to prominence, it is capturing the attention of both food lovers and the travel industry, signalling a new era in how people explore destinations.

In 2024, a marked shift in travel behaviour saw Indians taking vacations more frequently and for longer durations than ever before. This increase in travel was accompanied by a nearly 25 per cent surge in vacation spending, a significant portion of which was driven by a growing desire for unique and immersive culinary experiences. As travellers seek out food-centric adventures that connect them to local cultures, the demand for food-focused tours continues to rise, setting the stage for culinary tourism to play an even more pivotal role in 2025.

In light of this transformation, the Godrej Food Trends Report 2024, curated by Godrej Vikhroli Cucina and crafted with insights from over 190 food experts including renowned chefs, travel professionals, food bloggers, and nutritionists, has identified the top culinary experiences that shaped Indian vacations in 2024. The report highlights how food has evolved from a peripheral aspect of travel to the very core of vacation planning. With growing interest in food-focused journeys, experts predict that culinary tourism will continue to thrive, as more travellers seek



experiences that immerse them in the local flavours and traditions of their destinations.

Top Travel Trends of 2024:
Street Food and Market Tours: The allure of local and regional flavours dominated travel itineraries, with 94.1 per cent of experts identifying street food and market tours as the biggest attractions of 2024. From vibrant

Rise in travel was accompanied by 25% surge in vacation spending, a big portion driven by the desire for unique and immersive culinary experiences

spice markets to bustling food streets, these tours offered travellers an authentic taste of India's culinary diversity.

Culinary Site Tours: Nearly 92.3 per cent of experts predict that culinary site tours, where travellers learn about the production of their favourite foods, will continue to gain popularity. These tours offered behind-the-scenes insights into food production, from tea estates to artisanal cheese-making hubs.

Home Dining Experiences and Interactions with Local Experts: A significant 87.5 per cent of experts noted the growing trend of travellers booking home dining experiences. These experiences allowed visitors to delve deeper into local food cultures, learn traditional cooking techniques, and enjoy intimate interactions with regional and community experts. Additionally, excursions to source signature regional products emerged as a must-have in itineraries.

we celebrate National Tourism Day, this rise of culinary tourism highlights not only India's rich food heritage but also its capacity to captivate and inspire travellers in entirely new ways and create opportunities for local people and small brands to showcase culinary culture and cuisine."

The growing trend of culinary tourism invites food lovers to discover the nation's vibrant food culture, whether by tasting street food in local markets or learning from community food experts. The fusion of food and travel is not just a fleeting trend; it is a movement that is reshaping the future of vacations, both in India and globally, and promises to redefine how we experience food, culture, and destinations in the years to come.

KEY TRENDS

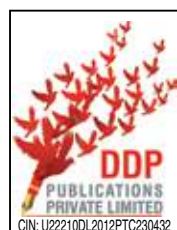
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"Food is no longer just a part of the travel experience, but its very essence," says **Rushina Munshaw Ghildiyal**, Managing Director, A Perfect Bite Consulting and Editor of the annual Godrej Food Trends Report. "Today's travellers are not just seeking destinations but connections—immersive, authentic experiences that allow them to explore the heart of a place through its culinary heritage. Whether it's walking through vibrant spice markets, learning traditional recipes from local experts, or savouring unique regional flavours, food has become the bridge that links people to cultures and stories. As



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'Overseas promo budget peanut'

▶ Contd. from page 7



Gavin Eccles
Managing Partner
GE Consulting & Advisory

“Up to November-end 2023, there were three times as many Indian nationals that left the country than foreign tourist arrivals. Why is this? India does not have a connectivity problem, as 25 million Indians were able to take trips out. If only 6 million international tourists visited the country in first 11 months of 2023, it is clear that new air connections are needed, specially with the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia, as they are four of the five largest inbound tourism markets.”

“From an industry perspective, there was a strong expectation for an enhanced international marketing budget to support India's growing ambitions as a global tourism hub. In the current landscape, where global



Pardeep Siwach
DGM
Mayfair Spring Valley Resort Guwahati

“₹3 crore allocation for overseas tourism promotion raises key questions. With the allocation for Incredible India campaigns abroad cut down drastically, the promotional and marketing activities will take a hit. Over the



Deep Kalra
Chairperson, World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative

tourism is witnessing a robust rebound, India's international visibility is crucial to attracting high-value travellers. This highlights the need for an empowered, strategically driven India Tourism Board to amplify global appeal.”

“The allocation of ₹3 cr to marketing abroad is a positive step to promote inbound tourism. It allows India to market directly to high-value travellers looking for added luxury and immersive experiences. It extends hospitality brands an opportunity to market their offerings worldwide. The Northeast, with its virgin landscapes and vibrant heritage, has the potential to pull in global tourists in large numbers. Increased international footfall means higher occupancy and revenue growth.”



Garish Oberoi
Past President
FHRAI

years, the government has announced to develop domestic tourist centres but nothing has been done so far. There were plans to develop 50 destinations this year too, but there is no initiative to increase tourism sector.”



Dhimant Bakshi
CEO
Imagicaa

“The Union Budget's focus on easing visa processes is a step in the right direction, but the allocation of just ₹3 crore for overseas tourism promotion is highly inadequate to drive real growth in inbound tourism. Tourism is a proven economic multiplier, generating both direct and indirect employment. The sector plays a key role in boosting GST collections and forex inflows. Nations in the Far East have demonstrated how strategic investments in tourism can create large-scale impact.”

“India's ₹3 crore allocation for overseas tourism promotion raises important questions. While domestic tourism is thriving, international visitors bring crucial foreign exchange and economic benefits. Competing des-



Dinesh Yadav
Founder & Managing Director
Fine Acers

“This drastic cut in the overseas marketing, promotion and market development assistance (MDA) budget for Incredible India—from an already mere budget of ₹33 crore to ₹3.07 crore leads to a major setback for India's international tourism ambitions. While domestic tourism has gained momentum, attracting high-value international travellers is in dire need of aggressive branding, astute marketing, and strong representation at global travel fairs.”



Navneet Nagpal
Principal Consultant and Director
Spectra Hospitality Services

tinations like Thailand and Malaysia invest heavily in global marketing. Given India's cultural and natural wealth, an ambitious approach—leveraging digital campaigns, global tie-ups, and promotions—could enhance its appeal.”

Union BUDGET
2025-26

Investment in Tourism for Employment-led Growth in India

- ❖ Top 50 tourism destination sites in the country to be developed in partnership with states through a challenge mode
- ❖ States to be given performance-linked incentives for effective destination managements
- ❖ MUDRA loans for homestays to be provided
- ❖ Special focus on destinations related to the life and times of Lord Buddha
- ❖ Medical Tourism and Heal in India to be promoted in partnership with the private sector.

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Tourism News

- Seven states in India contribute over 70% of national room revenue with Maharashtra solely contributing 20%: Horwath HTL
- India is no longer an emergent market; it is the centre for aviation growth in the next decade: OAG
- HRAWI marks 75 years, set to roll out special initiatives to elevate hospitality sector of India
- Jewar airport set to become Asia's biggest airport, will start operations in April: KR Naidu
- Kerala in talks with Russian authorities to facilitate chartered flight between two destinations
- Cost and quality gets priority over sustainability, 50% travellers give importance to cost: WTTC
- Govt sanctions ₹3,295.76 cr for 40 iconic tourist centre projects under SASCI scheme
- Himachal emerges as most welcoming state: Booking.com

Tech-savvy approach clicks for U & I

U & I Holidays hosted its ninth roadshow in India, highlighting Bali's luxury, wellness, and unique attractions. The event, attended by 23 exhibitors, including hotels and experiences, focused on empowering Indian agents with tech-driven solutions for efficient itinerary creation, competitive rates, and customised packages.

 **Surbhi Sharma**

The recent roadshow by U & I Holidays featured 23 exhibitors from Bali, including 20 hoteliers, Indian restaurants, and Atlas Beach Club. Exhibitors represented a diverse range of offerings, from five-star luxury properties in Ubud to the Trans Studio indoor amusement park. Bali, known as one of the most affordable luxury destinations, is now catering to longer stays, with Indian tourists opting for vacations of eight to nine nights.

Focus on wellness & luxury

Mentioning that they are keen on promoting Bali as a wellness destination, **Shyam Upadhyay**, Director, U & I Holidays, said, "Wellness packages and luxury experiences like spa retreats are now more accessible to Indian travellers. These packages are crafted to fit the budgets of Indians, making Bali an attractive



Shyam Upadhyay
Director
U & I Holidays



Ashish Indulkar
Director
U & I Holidays

destination for both leisure and wellness travel."

Tech-driven solutions

One of the company's stand-out features is their tech-savvy approach to travel planning. Upadhyay claimed that they were currently the only online DMC in India offering Bali packages through a tech platform.

"This platform allows travel agents to create detailed itineraries in just two minutes, complete with day-to-day plans and a comprehensive PDF sheet that includes all tour details," he said. Upadhyay also added that by leveraging technology, the DMC makes the booking process smoother, faster, and more efficient for their travel partners.

Expanding into new markets

While India has long been the primary market for U & I Holidays, the company is now looking to expand into other markets, including Europe, Australia, and the Middle East. Upadhyay revealed that they have participated in major exhibitions like ITB Berlin, ITB Singapore, and ATM Dubai, with plans to enter new territories by 2025.

Building ties with travel trade

Speaking about the company's efforts to engage with travel agents and tour operators across India, **Ashish Indulkar**, Director, U & I Holidays, said, "We are conducting roadshows in key cities, with a strong focus on Delhi, as the capital city provides a high volume of business. The goal of these roadshows is to keep travel agents updated on the latest developments in Bali, while also providing them with tools to offer the best packages to their clients."

Rise of Bali as top destination

Bali has become a sought-after destination, particularly for honeymooners, solo travellers, and corporate groups. Indulkar highlighted the role of social media, particularly Instagram, in making Bali a popular choice among Indian tourists. "Iconic attractions, such as the Bali Swing, have gained significant traction, making Bali an exciting destination for those seeking both adventure and cultural immersion," he said.

TARGETED NUMBERS

25,000
passengers U & I Holidays successfully managed in 2024

2x
passengers the company plan to manage in 2025

'Trade partnerships are vital': VFS

Zubin Karkaria, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, VFS Global, shares how it all started for them and what makes travel trade relationships important for them. He also throws light on how environmentally conscious and technologically driven VFS is, at all levels and even offered to help the industry with the same.

 **Nisha Verma**

No international trip today is possible without a visit to VFS Global, unless, of course, a country offers visa on arrival, but gone are the days when people used to take appointments with different embassies and wait for them to give visas.

Identifying this need, says **Zubin Karkaria**, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, VFS Global, led him to conceptualise the company. "When you identify a need, it is important that it serves not only yourself, but also the people. Hence, when, as a tour operator, we found it difficult to get visa appointments for our clients, we saw an opportunity not only for us to reduce the load on the embassies, but also to make the process more efficient. That is how we decided to start VFS Global in 2001, and our first customer at that time was the United States of America Embassy in Mumbai," he informed.



Zubin Karkaria
Founder & Chief Executive Officer
VFS Global

With 69 countries and growing, VFS Global is adapting to the changing world. Commenting on how technology is changing their business, he said, "When it comes to AI, it is important for all of us to believe that it is coming. It's important to open our minds and be adaptive about it, because it's critical for our businesses. We started 18 months ago on AI. Today, we have 16 data scientists across the world working on AI

products with the governments. In the next two months, we will launch, six AI products for the British High Commission worldwide. We are also working on AI products that not only improve efficiencies, but also help the applicants to ease the process."



When it comes to Artificial Intelligence, it is important for all of us to believe that it is coming. It's important to open our minds and be adaptive about it

Stressing that partnerships within the industry are vital, he highlighted, "The travel trade fraternity is a partner to us. Hence, if there is any help that the trade would require from data scientists within



VFS for their business, we will be happy to collaborate."

Speaking on sustainable and responsible tourism, he said, "The

planet is the only place that we have and we have to protect it. ESG in our context is very serious. Out of 15,000 employees that we have in 150 countries, everyone, including me, has an ESG target in our bonus."

"Hence, 7.5 per cent of our bonus is calculated on achieving the ESG target in our organisation. That is how seriously we take that. I think it's just not a particular exercise that you need to do, but we should really see what we can do in terms of inclusion, diversity, and protecting the environment," he added.

Origins & Growth

- Founded in 2001 to streamline visa processing
- First client: US Embassy in Mumbai
- Operates in 69 countries and expanding

Tech & AI Integration

- AI adoption began 18 months ago
- 16 data scientists developing AI solutions
- Launching six AI products for British High Commission

Sustainability & tie-ups

- ESG targets linked to employee bonuses
- Travel trade seen as key collaborators
- Focus on inclusion, diversity, and environment

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Tourism for employment-led growth

Developing 50 tourist destinations in the country, MUDRA loans for homestays and improving ease of travel and connectivity to tourist destinations are among the key announcements made by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget 2025-26. Industry leaders share their views on the proposals.



Himanshu Patil
President
OTOAI

“Overall, it’s a good middle-class-centric budget, though we were expecting some relief on the TCS front for outbound travel. With the increase in the tax exemption limit from ₹7 lakh to 10 lakh, there is hope for relief in outbound travel. OTOAI is in talks with the finance ministry to address the TCS issue.”



K Syama Raju
President
FHRAI

“The plan to develop top 50 tourism destinations in partnership with state governments is a major initiative. It will not only improve infrastructure but also attract more visitors benefiting local communities. The focus on medical and wellness tourism through the ‘Heal-in-India’ initiative will strengthen India’s position.”



KS Sawhney
Hon. Secretary
ITTA

“Tourism is benefiting from initiatives like the UDAN regional connectivity scheme, which could make flying more affordable for the middle class. The waiver of e-visas for special groups, likely to include Buddhist tourists, is a positive step. India is being recognised as a hub for medical, spiritual, and niche tourism.”



Jyoti Mayal
Chairperson
THSC

“The government sometimes forgets the service providers and travel agents. However, the Budget focuses strongly on infrastructure, including the UDAN scheme, which will add 120 new routes to the existing 619, boosting footfalls. There are plans for more helipads in hill areas and new green and brown airports.”



Deep Kalra
Chairman
WTTCH

“The Union Budget demonstrates the government’s continued focus on elevating India’s tourism ecosystem. The increased allocation of ₹2,541 crore for the Ministry of Tourism, coupled with a significant increase in capital expenditure, underscores the government’s intent to enhance tourism infrastructure.”



Dr Jyotsna Suri
Chairperson & Managing Director
The LaLit Group

“The Budget introduces positive measures for hospitality, travel services, and aviation, including performance-linked incentives for states, streamlined e-visa facilitation, and tax reforms to bolster the aviation sector. These are commendable steps towards enhancing domestic travel and tourism competitiveness.”



Liberatha Kallat
Chairperson & MD
DreamFolks

“The Union Budget 2025 is a game-changer for India’s travel and tourism sector. The UDAN expansion and support for smaller airports will boost regional connectivity, driving demand for premium airport services like ours at DreamFolks. Including hotels in the infrastructure list and developing top destinations will further enhance India’s tourism appeal, creating opportunities for us to expand our network and hospitality partnerships. Access to PM Gati Shakti data will enable us to optimise operations and create a seamless ecosystem.”



Vinay Dube
Founder and CEO
Akasa Air

“The Union Budget 2025 marks a significant step in supporting the sustained growth of India’s aviation sector. We commend the government’s commitment to infrastructure, which will make air travel more accessible, thereby boosting tourism and the economy on the whole. This focus on aviation strengthens India’s position as a global hub, ensuring greater mobility for all and contributing to a well-connected nation. As India’s fastest-growing airline, we applaud the government’s efforts to fuel the sector’s growth.”



Hussain Patel
Director
TripJack

“The Union Budget 2025 reaffirms the government’s strategic vision to position India as a world-class destination, while driving employment-led growth. The initiative to develop 50 top tourist destinations in partnership with states, backed by improved infrastructure and inclusion of hotels in the infrastructure HML framework, will enhance the country’s hospitality ecosystem. The emphasis on skill development, easier access to MUDRA loans for homestays, and enhanced connectivity will help tourism growth.”

Vikas Group acquires Ebix

Ebix Travel Group and Vikas Group marked 50 years of success with a grand celebration at Taj Palace in New Delhi recently. Vikas Group has acquired Ebix Inc, paving the way for ‘Ebix 2.0’ and future growth.

Janice Alyosius

Ebix Travel Group and Vikas Group recently marked a monumental milestone with a spectacular evening at Taj Palace, Delhi. The grand event celebrated 50 years of success and legacy for both organisations and ushered in a new chapter in their journey. **Naveen Kundu**, Managing Director, Ebix Travel Group, revealed that Ebix Inc has been acquired by Vikas Group. “We are thrilled to announce that Ebix Inc is now a part of Vikas Group, marking the beginning of Ebix 2.0,” said Kundu. “This milestone coincides with the 50 glorious years of both Vikas Group and Ebix Inc. Our journey is now aligned with India’s national goals of growth and development. With fintech and digitisation at our core, Ebix 2.0 is committed to driving transformation in line with the government’s vision for a developed nation,” he added.

The acquisition reinforces Vikas Group’s ambition of global expansion



Naveen Kundu
Managing Director
Ebix Travel Group

sion and innovation, ensuring that Ebix remains at the forefront of industry evolution. The timing of this announcement is particularly significant, as it coincides with the golden jubilee celebrations of both Vikas Group and Ebix Inc, making it a truly momentous occasion.

With Ebix 2.0, Kundu envisions a future of resilience and strategic growth. “Our agenda is clear. We aim to move upwards and northwards, leveraging our strong busi-

ness fundamentals to make Ebix a powerhouse in the industry. Vikas Group that now owns Ebix is rooted in India, and this aligns with India’s growth story as a rising global power,” Kundu said.

Looking ahead, Ebix 2.0 is set to redefine industry standards through innovation, customer-centric

Looking ahead, Ebix 2.0 is set to redefine industry standards through innovation, customer-centric solutions, and strategic global positioning

tric solutions, and strategic global positioning. Kundu said, “India is a growing economy, and we must ensure that we align ourselves with this momentum.”

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Women steering solo travel trend

In recent years, a seismic shift has taken place in the travel landscape, driven by a new generation of fearless and independent women. No longer content to wait for others to join them, solo female travellers are now taking the reins, embarking on journeys of self-discovery and empowerment. Experts take on the issue.



Arshdeep Anand
Director
Holiday Moods Adventures

“A quiet yet unstoppable revolution is reshaping the world of travel—women are choosing to go solo, and they are doing it with confidence, style, and purpose. No longer waiting for a travel companion or seeking

“The rise of solo women travel reflects growing independence, confidence, and changing societal norms. Women today seek freedom, self-discovery, and adventure, driven by economic empowerment, digital access, and evolving travel ecosystems that cater to their needs. The industry is responding with women-friendly accommodations, guided experiences, and digital safety tools.”



Jasmine Duggal
Director
Minar Group

validation, they are setting out on journeys of self-discovery, adventure, and personal growth. Once hesitant, women are now embracing the world with an insatiable curiosity.”



Anita Gupta
Director
Yatri Travels

“Solo travel among women is gaining momentum, both in India and abroad. More women are stepping out alone, seeking independence, adventure, and self-discovery. In India, destinations like Rishikesh, Udaipur, and Munnar provide safe and enriching experiences. Internationally, countries like Japan, Portugal, and Iceland are popular for their security and welcoming atmosphere.”

“We do see a rise in solo female travel in recent years, with women of all ages, including those over 60, embracing the experience. These travellers often choose destinations known for safety, culture, and diverse activities,



Ashmi Dharia
Founder and Holiday Curator
Gypsy Soul Holidays

such as Japan, Croatia, Switzerland, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Italy, and within India, places like Ladakh, Kerala, Uttarakhand and Pondicherry.”



Meha Vashi
Director
Nivalink Holidays

“More women from India are welcoming the freedom and empowerment that solo travel offers, seeking destinations that are safe, culturally enriching, and experience driven. Popular destinations for solo female travellers include Japan, Bali, Italy, Vietnam, Cambodia, South Korea, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Scandinavian countries. Within India, it's Ladakh, Rajasthan, Pondicherry, Shillong, and Kerala.”

“Travel choices are evolving rapidly, driven by increasing confidence, improved safety measures, and a growing desire for unique, self-paced experiences. In 2024, we have seen a significant rise in solo woman travellers,



Riya Kakade
Director (Products)
Red Planner

with inquiries at Red Carpet Travels increasing by nearly 18 per cent. Women are travelling solo or for bachelorette trips, seeking diverse experiences.”



Guneet Puri
Founding Partner
Bohemian Adventures LLP

“In recent years, solo female travel has experienced significant growth, driven by increased financial independence and advancements in digital technology. Notably, women now constitute a substantial portion of solo

“The rise of solo travel by women reflects a growing desire for independence, adventure, and personal growth. As a mountaineer and guide, I have witnessed first-hand how solo journeys empower women to step out of their comfort zones, challenge their limits, and gain new perspectives. Whether trekking through remote landscapes or scaling peaks, these experiences offer a unique sense of self-reliance.”



Ellona Pereira
General Manager
AVIAREPS India

travellers, reflecting a growing confidence in exploring the world independently. This surge is further supported by streamlined visa processes and AI-driven travel planning tools.”



Simran
Co-Founder
OneLatitude

“More and more women are stepping out and travelling solo but it's still not as common as it should be. Historically, a lot of the reasons holding women back from travelling alone were family worries, cultural norms or even the lack of financial independence. While a lot of those are now not as much in the forefront, safety still is. While women are travelling, it is to destinations considered safer than others.”

“Solo travel by women is an interesting trend and we see a significant rise in recent years. Social media has played a strong role in this, as women share their experiences and success stories which motivates other women to follow suit.



Tekla Maria
Treasurer, Skål International (Delhi) &
Founder, And The Story Continues

Flexibility in work conditions has also played a role. With numerous resources available on how to stay safe while travelling, women are planning these trips without any apprehension.”



Mariyamma Jose
Managing Director
Athena Travels

“The rise of independent woman travellers is a testament to changing societal attitudes and the empowerment of women. Many women now pursue solo travel, no longer bound by traditional norms requiring companionship. Hotels are adapting, offering women-friendly facilities and exclusive floors for female guests. With the advancement of digital technology, solo female travellers feel safer to travel alone.”

“We have definitely seen a big rise in solo woman travellers, and it's amazing to see how they are choosing destinations that offer the perfect mix of safety, culture, and adventure. Japan is a top favourite—it's incredibly



Neeti Bhatia
Director & Co-Founder
Intrepid Marketing

safe, easy to navigate, and offers deep cultural experiences. Morocco is another great pick, especially for those who love vibrant souks.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

'FIT to Europe gets stronger'

Abdul Salim, Director - Sales and Marketing, Gateways Group of DMCs in Europe, shares insights on the company's plans for 2025, highlighting the growing demand for European travel among Indians.



Abdul Salim
Director - Sales & Marketing
Gateways Group of DMCs in Europe

Gateways of Europe (GoE) is a prominent DMC for Europe. In an exclusive with **TT Bureau**, Abdul Salim, Director - Sales & Marketing, Gateways Group of DMCs in Europe, said, "We serve our guests from all over Asia - Middle East, South-east Asia and India, which is our largest market."

Sharing his views on the India market, Salim said, "It's huge. There are too many FTOs in the outbound segment and the business is not only concentrated in the metros. We target the tier II and III cities too. Indian food is a big criterion for clients but there is a growing demand for local cuisines, as well as travellers are getting adventurous and want to have a more local experience." However, the India market is not without its challenges. Salim said, "Visas have been a challenge, but it has gotten much better these days. The biggest challenge to-

day is about the bookings coming in late. For Europe, the name of the game is booking early and securing the best deals. Secondly, the hotels, transporters and even sightseeing companies these days are heavy on cancellation charges. So, we need to work on these issues."

Predicting the future of travel to Europe, whether groups or FITs will take off, Salim said, "On a larger scale, it will definitely be FITs

as travellers are getting more confident to travel independently with the help of technology. But from the travel fraternity's perspective, it will be groups. Europe is the only destination where there is a significant advantage of over 50 per cent on cost for groups as against the FIT segment." Highlighting some of the new countries that are gaining popularity among Indian travellers, he added, "Scandinavia and Finland during the winters have become very popular these days. The Baltics and Balkans are now getting explored by both leisure and MICE groups."



New B2B portal for Bali

Recognised by the East Bali Tourism Authority for its outstanding promotional efforts, Balitrip Wisata is now concentrating on showcasing this unexplored region of Bali to the Indian market.



Dheeraj Ranjan Kumarr
Founder & Director
Balitrip Wisata

Balitrip Wisata has been repackaging Bali in a new avatar for the Indian market, making sure the destination's popularity does not wane. Speaking on the sidelines of OTM, Dheeraj Ranjan Kumarr, Founder & Director, Balitrip Wisata, said, "Western India is the market where we dominate as a Bali DMC. So, we are meeting a lot of new as well as existing partners here, giving them updates about our offerings." Among the new offerings is its B2B portal. "An exciting thing in 2025 for us is our new B2B portal that we recently launched. It will have more than 250 hotels that our partners can book online with live inventory. Other than that, we are going to add our fixed departure of flights available onto our portal so that agencies can book flights, as well as land component together. This feature makes our portal unique in this market when it comes to the DMC business," Kumarr claimed.

marr added, "Everyone is selling Bali in India but when you get to work with Balitrip Wisata you get innovation, ease of business and absolute transparency."

Features of the portal
The B2B portal is designed to offer seamless, real-time solutions for travel agencies, including:

- ❖ Live Hotel Inventory
- ❖ Land-Only Packages
- ❖ Customisable Packages
- ❖ Fixed Departures with Pre-Purchased Flights

Kumarr said, "I'm also happy to share that we have been recognised by the tourism authority of East Bali for our efforts, and given a task to promote different activities and sights in East Bali, such as Candidasa Beach, Tirta Gangga and Lempuyang Temple." In September, Balitrip Wisata will conduct its five-city roadshow with more than 20 partners from Bali. This includes Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Chennai, and Kolkata. Ku-



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Security combines luxury for ladies

Women are seeking holistic wellness experiences and spa treatments in luxurious settings, private safaris, and more when they are looking to take some 'me time'. With safety being a top concern, luxury travel companies are offering specialised security services for women, including female bodyguards and private drivers.



Monia Kapoor
Director
Travel O Holidays

“The luxury travel trend among women is increasingly focused on how the experience makes them feel rather than simply ticking off destinations from a standard “to-do list”. Women are actively seek-



Meena Bhatia
Vice President & GM
Le Meridien New Delhi

“Indian woman travellers are increasingly seeking bespoke, luxury experiences that prioritise wellness, cultural immersion, and sustainability. Solo travel is gaining popularity, with women opting for high-end



Alpa Jani
Founder
Ace Connect

“The rise of women in travel has shifted the focus to luxury experiences. The growing number of female travellers worldwide is staggering. From wellness retreats to cruises, women are dominating the travel scene. Safaris

“Women are increasingly embracing the luxury travel market, seeking unique experiences that prioritise wellness and personal growth. Luxury travel in the context of women focuses on bespoke services, access to exclusive events, and high-end wellness retreats. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in solo female travel and women travelling with friends.”



Ranjana Sharma
Managing Director
Trav n Tours International

“Travelling is not just about ticking the boxes of the bucket list; it is a deeply enriching experience that allows you to immerse yourself with the local cultures, traditions and lifestyles. It gives us a new perspective on things. Forging new friendships and meeting people in itself is truly self encouraging. The experiences of travel are very individual, each one of us has our own calling, we look at things differently.”



Beate M Kakkar
Managing Director
Indiva Marketing

resorts, spas, and retreats focused on rejuvenation. There is also a growing interest in personalised itineraries, including private cultural tours.”

“Women are redefining luxury travel with a focus on personalisation, exclusivity, and immersive experiences. Solo female travellers and woman-led groups are driving demand for wellness retreats, sustainable luxury stays, and curated cultural experiences. Destinations offering safe, high-end experiences with a strong storytelling element—such as bespoke safaris in Africa—are seeing a surge in popularity.”



Mona Anand
Managing Director
Karnal Tours & Travels

and all-women adventure trips are gaining popularity. Women are also seeking cultural enrichment, driving demand for off-the-beaten-path destinations.”



Erika Rathi
Director
Namaste Dwaar Resort

“Luxury travel for women in India is no longer just about five-star hotels and fancy meals; it is about crafting experiences that are personal and immersive. Over the last few years, we have seen a shift in women opting for transformative journeys,



Sheetal Munshaw
India Director
About France

“Indian women travellers today are not just participants in the travel economy; they are driving it. Their increasing financial independence has given rise to a distinct consumer identity, shaping new trends in luxury travel. According to a



Alefiya Singh
Founder & Director
IRIS Reps

“In recent years, women travellers have embraced immersive, experiential luxury. There is a noticeable shift towards wellness retreats—think yoga, meditation, and holistic therapies in serene, offbeat locations. Bespoke culinary experiences, from farm-to-table

“Today's female traveller seeks more than five-star accommodations—she craves destinations that know and honour her needs. For them, luxury is more than indulgence—it's about ease, personalisation, and emotional well-being. Women are now thinking about themselves by prioritising hassle-free, stress-free escapes so that they, too, can enjoy and unwind. We have seen a sharp rise in women-led travel groups.”



Krinal Thaker
Marketing Head
Evoke Experiences

be it cultural deep dives, creative residencies, or curated adventure escapes. We tailor luxury itineraries that go beyond comfort and exclusivity.”

“There is definitely a lot of evolution in the luxury travel space. Speaking of women in particular, there are a lot of stereotypes and people always bring it down to shopping. But that is a small part of the story. It's also about bonding amongst themselves. It's about women who are real powerhouses on their own, exchanging ideas. They are also pursuing interests and indulging in activities they enjoy, like culinary classes.”



Barnali Sarkar
Executive Director
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

National Family Health Survey, nearly 85 per cent of married women aged 18 to 49 now make independent decisions about their earnings.”

“Luxury is not a place; it's an experience tailored to you. Women travellers today seek more than just opulence—they demand exclusivity, comfort, and, most importantly, safety. IRIS Reps curates some of the finest luxury stays, from Tisya Stays in Goa, offering private pool villas for a serene retreat, to Ninety-Six Mauritius, where premium serviced apartments blend elegance with home-like comfort.”



Anshu Tejuja
Managing Director
For Ashoka Dream Holidays

dining to private cooking sessions, are highly sought after. Women are also opting for sustainable and eco-luxury stays.”

Compiled by TT Bureau



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The digital age has brought about an unprecedented surge in gadget usage. Today, smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other devices are indispensable tools for work, communication, entertainment, and travel. As of January 2025, India remains one of the largest smartphone markets globally, with approximately 700.58 million users, according to recent data from Statista. This figure underscores the growing reliance on gadgets and highlights a significant opportunity for the travel protection service providers to deliver innovative protection solutions.

Interestingly, the term 'Nomophobia', which describes the irrational fear of losing or not having access to one's mobile phone, is becoming increasingly relevant. This dependency on gadgets has transformed them from



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego

mere utilities into essential travel companions. Whether it's capturing memories during an adventure trip, streaming music while relaxing on a beach or staying connected with loved ones while studying or working abroad, gadgets have become integral to our travel experiences. However, carrying valuable gadgets while travelling

also brings an inevitable concern: what if they are lost, stolen, or damaged? Such incidents not only disrupt the travel experience but can also result in unexpected financial strain. For travellers, this worry can overshadow the joy of exploration. This is where Asego Gadget Protection Cover steps in as a game-changer, ensuring that your customers' travels remain stress-free and memorable.

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ensuring that your customers are back online without delay.

❖ **Sports Equipment Protection:** Adventure enthusiasts often carry specialised gear like cameras, GoPros, or drones to document

Whether it's a cracked screen, water damage, or a malfunctioning device, Asego provides coverage for repair or replacement

their experiences. Asego goes beyond gadgets by offering reimbursement for the cost of hiring or purchasing replacement sports



equipment in case of loss or damage during travel.

❖ **24/7 Medical Assistance:** Travelling to unfamiliar destinations can come with unforeseen challenges. Asego provides 24/7 medical assistance, adding an extra layer of security and convenience for your customers.

❖ **Customisable Travel Insurance:** Recognising that every traveller is unique, Asego offers customisable travel insurance plans that cater to individual needs and preferences. From gadget protection to comprehensive coverage, customers can choose what works best for them.

Travel is about exploration, relaxation, and adventure—not worrying about the safety of expensive

gadgets. Asego's Gadget Protection Cover allows your customers to embrace their journeys with confidence, knowing that their valuable devices are in safe hands. Whether it's a lost smartphone or a damaged laptop, Asego ensures that your customers are supported every step of the way. Empower your customers to travel smarter and safer with Asego. Together, let's give their gadgets a new lease of life and redefine travel insurance experience for all travellers.



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The Spiritual Triangle

Uttar Pradesh

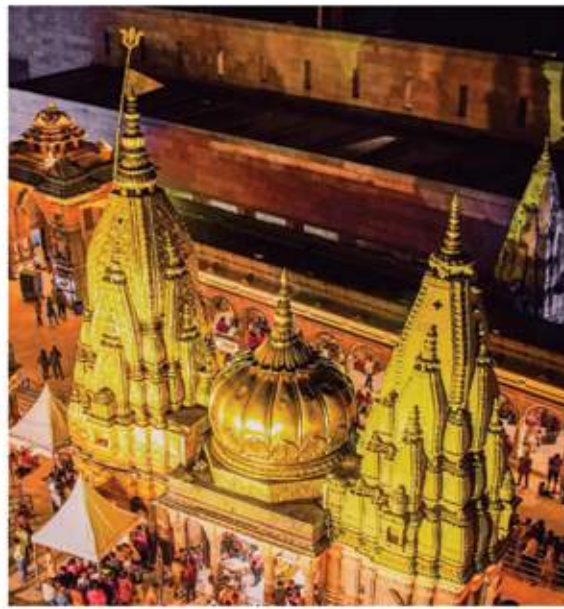
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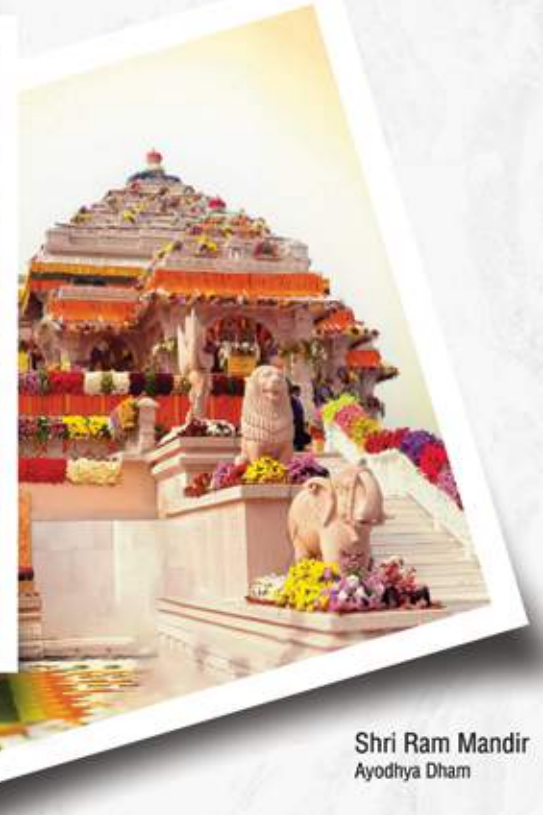
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Prayagraj



Shri Kashi Vishwanath Temple
Varanasi



Shri Ram Mandir
Ayodhya Dham

A Journey Through Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya

Uttar Pradesh stands as a lighthouse of spiritual richness and cultural grandeur, in the heart of northern India. Among its myriad of sacred sites, three cities form an unparalleled spiritual triangle: Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya. These cities are not just geographical locations; they are a witness to India's ancient traditions, faith, and timeless heritage. Together, they weave a narrative that travelled beyond centuries, drawing millions of pilgrims, tourists, and spiritual seekers from across the globe. This sacred triangle showcases the pious spiritual aura of Uttar Pradesh, reflecting its deep-rooted cultural ethos and serving as a vibrant witness to the state's historical significance.

In recent years, these destinations have surged to the forefront of global tourism, captivating the hearts of international and domestic travelers alike. They offer more than just religious sanctity—each city narrates stories etched in time, reverberating with chants, rituals, and celebrations that have been preserved through generations. From the bustling ghats of Varanasi, where the Ganga mirrors the lights of evening aartis, to the sacred confluence in Prayagraj that hosts the world's largest religious gathering, and the serene grandeur of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama, this triangle is a spiritual journey that encapsulates the very soul of India.

Prayagraj: The Confluence of Faith

Prayagraj is renowned for the Triveni Sangam, the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers. This site is the focal point of the Maha Kumbh Mela, held every twelve years, and is considered the largest religious gathering on earth. The 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela, spanning from January 13 to February 26, happens to be a rare cosmic event, on the verge of which the Maha Kumbh Mela is falling after 144 years; on the completion of 12 Kumbhs. This Mahakumbh is expected to draw more than 40 crore participants, establishing Prayagraj's spiritual significance and the inclination of people towards the Sanatan religion and its principles from all over the world. The city is also home to revered sites like the Bade Hanuman Mandir, Anand Bhavan, and the historic Allahabad Fort. Prayagraj serves as a spiritual confluence where religious traditions, scholarly pursuits, and ancient rituals continue to thrive in a timeless manner.

Varanasi: The Eternal City

Varanasi, also known as Kashi, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. The city is said to be resting on the trident of Lord Shiva and it is believed that it will exist till the end of time, unaffected. Situated along the banks of River Ganga, it is a major center for Hindu devotion, attracting pilgrims who seek spiritual solace and purification, known for the Kashi Vishwanath temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. This city of 'ghats' has eighty six ghats in total, including famous ghats like Dashashwamedh ghat, Manikarnika ghat, Namo ghat and Assi ghat. These ghats are incessantly bustling with activities, ranging from spiritual rituals and religious ceremonies. At dawn, the ghats come alive with devotees performing Surya Namaskar, offering prayers, and taking holy dips in the sacred waters of the Ganga and at dusk the mesmerizing Ganga Aarti captivates every heart. The city's narrow lanes, bustling markets, and ancient temples resonate with timeless traditions, while the aroma of incense, the sound of temple bells, and the sight of saffron-clad sadhus create an aura of divine

mysticism. Varanasi is not just a city; it is an experience that intertwines spirituality, history, and culture, leaving an indelible mark on every soul that visits.

Ayodhya: The Birthplace of Lord Rama

Ayodhya, revered as the birthplace of Lord Rama, holds immense spiritual and historical significance in Hinduism, the city is considered first among the seven Saptpuri's spread across India. This ancient city, situated on the banks of the Saryu River, is a focal point of devotion, especially with the newly built Shree Ram Janmbhoomi temple, attracting pilgrims from across the world. As per the official data available with the department of Tourism, Ayodhya saw over 16.44 crore visitors in 2024. The magnificence of the Shree Ram Janmbhoomi temple has become a major attraction for the pilgrims and as well the travellers from across the world. Ayodhya is mentioned in the Ramayana as the grand capital of the Ikshvaku dynasty. The city's serene ghats, temples, and the vibrant celebrations of festivals like Deepotsav make it a divine destination that symbolizes faith, devotion, and cultural heritage.

Tourism Statistics and Global Interest

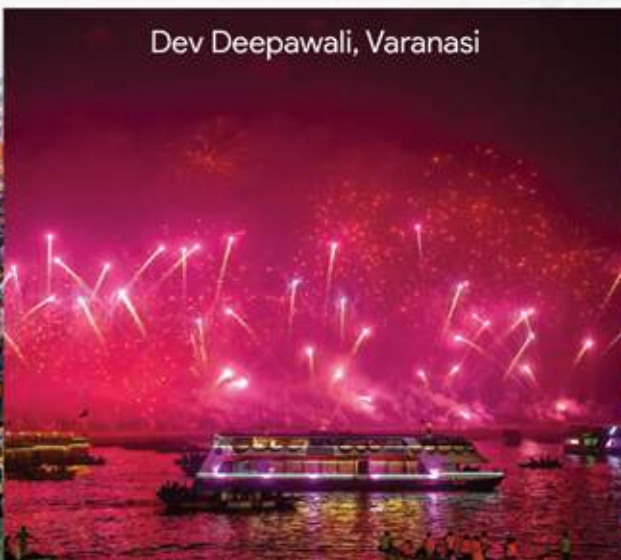
In 2024, Uttar Pradesh recorded a total tourist footfall of 64.90 crore (649 million), marking an increase of over 17 crore (170 million) from the previous year. This surge is attributed to the state's rich cultural and spiritual sites, with Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya at the forefront. These cities not only showcase the spiritual aura and heritage of Uttar Pradesh but also captivate tourists from around the globe, fostering a growing international interest in India's spiritual and cultural offerings. Collectively, the spiritual triangle of Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya encapsulates the essence of Uttar Pradesh's cultural and spiritual heritage, offering visitors an immersive experience that resonates with the timeless traditions of India.



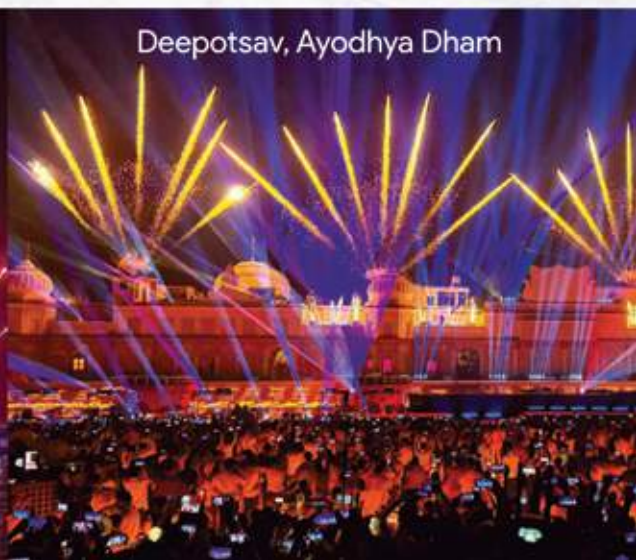
Sangam, Prayagraj



Dev Deepawali, Varanasi



Deepotsav, Ayodhya Dham



'Innovation to give greater flexibility'

With a strong commitment to innovation and seamless service integration, RezLive is strategically evolving to cater to the changing needs of the travel industry. With the launch of new offerings, the company will provide travel agents with greater flexibility and more choices, solidifying its leadership role in the B2B travel space.

Janice Alyosius

RezLive is continuing to innovate within the travel industry with the launch of a suite of new services aimed at enhancing the travel experience for agents and operators. The latest additions, such as Car Rental, Cruise Services, VIP Desk (Concierge Services), and a new Mobile App are designed to streamline booking processes and offer more personalised, flexible options.

Car Rental for simplifying ground transportation

RezLive's new Car Rental service aims to simplify the booking process for travel agents. **Jaal Shah**, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, explains, "RezLive's Car Rental service is designed to offer travel agents and tour operators seamless access to a global network of trusted car rental providers at



Jaal Shah
Group Managing Director
Travel Designer Group

competitive B2B rates." The integration of this service within the broader RezLive platform, which already offers hotels, sightseeing, transfers, and cruises, provides agents with a one-stop solution for their clients' travel needs. "We offer real-time availability, instant confirmation, and flexible cancellation options, ensuring

convenience for agents and their clients," adds Shah. This unified platform approach eliminates the need to juggle multiple systems, simplifying the process and improving operational efficiency.

Offering tailored luxury cruises for customers

RezLive's new Cruise Services mark an exciting expansion into the luxury travel market. "We have started by offering instant online bookings for Resorts World Cruises, and shortly, we will be adding major cruise lines like MSC Cruises, Norwegian Cruise Line, Disney Cruise Line, Cordelia Cruises, and Royal Caribbean," Shah reveals.

Cruises offer a unique blend of luxury, entertainment, and scenic exploration, making them an ideal choice for discerning travellers. With competitive pricing and expert support, travel agents can offer customised itineraries to meet their

clients' specific needs. Shah says, "This expansion into the cruise segment reflects our commitment

Launch of new products highlights RezLive's broader strategy to provide a comprehensive, technology-driven ecosystem for travel partners

to diversifying travel options and supporting our partners in providing distinctive travel experiences."

VIP Desk (Concierge Services) for personalised services
The VIP Desk, RezLive's concierge

service, provides luxury, exclusivity, and personalised assistance to High-Net-Worth Individuals (HNWIs), corporate travellers, VIP guests, and those seeking premium experiences. Shah explains, "Whether it's a private transfer, luxury hotel upgrades, exclusive dining reservations, or floral services, our concierge team ensures that every request is handled with precision and care." This service allows travel agents to offer their clients a level of convenience and exclusivity that sets them apart in the competitive travel market.

App for on-the-go booking

RezLive's new Mobile App is set to transform how travel agents interact with the platform. Shah describes the app as "an important step towards enhancing accessibility and convenience". The initial version offers key features, such as account management, booking checks, and access to confirmed

vouchers. However, future updates will include real-time inventory for hotels, sightseeing, car transfers, cruises, and car rentals, as well as push notifications.

Vision for the future

The launch of these new products underscores RezLive's broader strategy to provide a comprehensive, technology-driven ecosystem for travel partners. Shah says, "The introduction of new products is part of our long-term vision for growth."



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Thailand woos newlyweds from India

Tourism Authority of Thailand New Delhi, in partnership with TravelBullz, launched the Thailand Honeymoon Escapes campaign to showcase Thailand as a premier honeymoon destination. As part of the initiative, TravelBullz offered special incentives for travel agents, providing them with an opportunity to promote Thailand while earning rewards.

Janice Alyosius

Thailand has long been a favourite destination for Indian travellers, and after the launch of the Thailand Honeymoon Escapes campaign by the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) New Delhi in partnership with TravelBullz (TBZ), it is set to become even more enticing for honeymooners. This joint initiative was designed to showcase the diverse offerings of Thailand as the perfect destination for newlyweds.

Why choose Thailand for honeymoon?

- ❖ **Accessibility:** Thailand is well-connected to India, with direct flights available to destinations like Bangkok, Phuket, and Chiang Mai. The ease of travel ensures that couples can start their honeymoon adventure without any hassle.
- ❖ **Affordability:** While Thailand is known for its luxurious offer-

ings, it caters to all budget segments, making it an attractive destination for honeymooners.

- ❖ **Diverse experiences:** Thailand is a country of contrasts. Couples can experience the thrill of adventure with activities like scuba diving in Krabi, island hopping around Phuket, or exploring Chiang Mai's

rich cultural heritage. Alternatively, they can indulge in serenity with spa treatments, wellness retreats, and secluded beaches.

- ❖ **Warm hospitality:** Known for its friendly locals and exceptional service, Thailand offers a welcoming atmosphere that enhances the romantic experience for hon-



KD Singh
Founder and President
TravelBullz



Siriges-a-nong Trirattanasongpol
Director
TAT, New Delhi Office



eymooners. The country's rich culture, paired with genuine hospitality, ensures that couples feel at home while exploring.

Best honeymoon offerings

Thailand offers a variety of experiences designed to create unforgettable honeymoon memories:

- ❖ **Luxurious resorts and villas:** Thailand is home to world-renowned resorts and villas offering private pools, stunning sea views, and ultimate relaxation. Many properties also provide exclusive honeymoon packages tailored to couples, making it an ideal destination for romance.
- ❖ **Tailored honeymoon packages:** TravelBullz launched exclusive

honeymoon promotions, catering to couples seeking a personalised experience. The packages were designed to suit every couple's preferences, from serene beach escapes to adventurous explorations.

- ❖ **Spa and wellness retreats:** For couples looking to unwind, Thailand's wellness retreats offer rejuvenating spa treatments, yoga, and meditation, making it the perfect destination for couples seeking tranquility.
- ❖ **Adventure and activities:** Thailand is a haven for adventure lovers, offering everything from jungle safaris in Chiang Mai to water sports in Phuket. There is no shortage of exhilarating activities to enjoy.
- ❖ **Gastronomic delights:** Couples can indulge in Thailand's world-

famous cuisine, from street food to gourmet dining experiences, offering an authentic taste.

POPULAR DESTINATIONS

- ❖ **Bangkok:** Bustling city with cultural landmarks, shopping, and nightlife.
- ❖ **Pattaya:** Coastal city known for its beaches and entertainment.
- ❖ **Phuket and Krabi:** Stunning islands with beaches, clear waters, and luxury resorts.
- ❖ **Samui:** Serene tropical island for a peaceful retreat.
- ❖ **Chiang Mai:** City rich in culture and history, perfect for adventure amidst nature.
- ❖ **Hua Hin:** Quiet coastal town offering relaxation and family-friendly activities.

A prelude to TAAI's 75th year

After Delhi, TAAI kicked off its diamond jubilee celebrations in Mumbai as well with the unveiling of its logo for its members. Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, described the milestone as a significant moment not just for the association but for the entire tourism sector in India. He highlighted the association's commitment to its members through the 'Member First Programme' and outlined its upcoming initiatives.



Watch cricket like never before

DreamSetGo is proud to offer exclusive travel experiences for cricket enthusiasts worldwide as one of the select authorised travel agents for the tournament. With its bespoke travel solutions, fans can indulge in a once-in-a-lifetime adventure that combines official match tickets and luxurious stays, tailored to their unique passion for the sport.



DreamSetGo, India's premier sports experiences and travel brand, has been appointed as an Official Travel Agent for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, bringing cricket fans closer to the action with personalised, high-end travel and hospitality experiences.

As one of the select authorised travel agents for the tournament, DreamSetGo will provide seamless, customised travel solutions for cricket enthusiasts worldwide. These premium packages will feature official match tickets, luxury accommodations, VIP hospitality, exclusive fan interactions and meet-and-greet sessions with cricketing icons, ensuring a once-in-a-lifetime sporting adventure tailored to each fan's passion.

Daniel D'Souza, Co-founder, DreamSetGo, said, "At DreamSetGo, we believe sports travel should go beyond just attending matches. It should be a gateway to immersive, unforgettable experiences."



Daniel D'Souza
Co-founder
DreamSetGo

D'Souza added, "As an Official Travel Agent for the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, we are elevating fan engagement through bespoke offerings that provide top-tier hospitality and exclusive access beyond the stadium. Whether it's soaking in the electrifying atmosphere of a marquee match or getting up close with cricketing legends, we are committed to curating extraordinary journeys for fans. With personalisation at its core, DreamSetGo's offerings blend sport, luxury, and exclusivity, ensuring fans do not just watch history unfold, but become part of it."

As an Official Travel Agent, DreamSetGo will provide exclusive travel packages designed to offer fans a seamless and unforgettable experience. Our offerings include:

- ❖ **Match Tickets:** Secure official tickets to witness the world's best cricketing nations battle for glory.
- ❖ **Accommodation:** Stay at premium hotels handpicked for comfort and convenience.

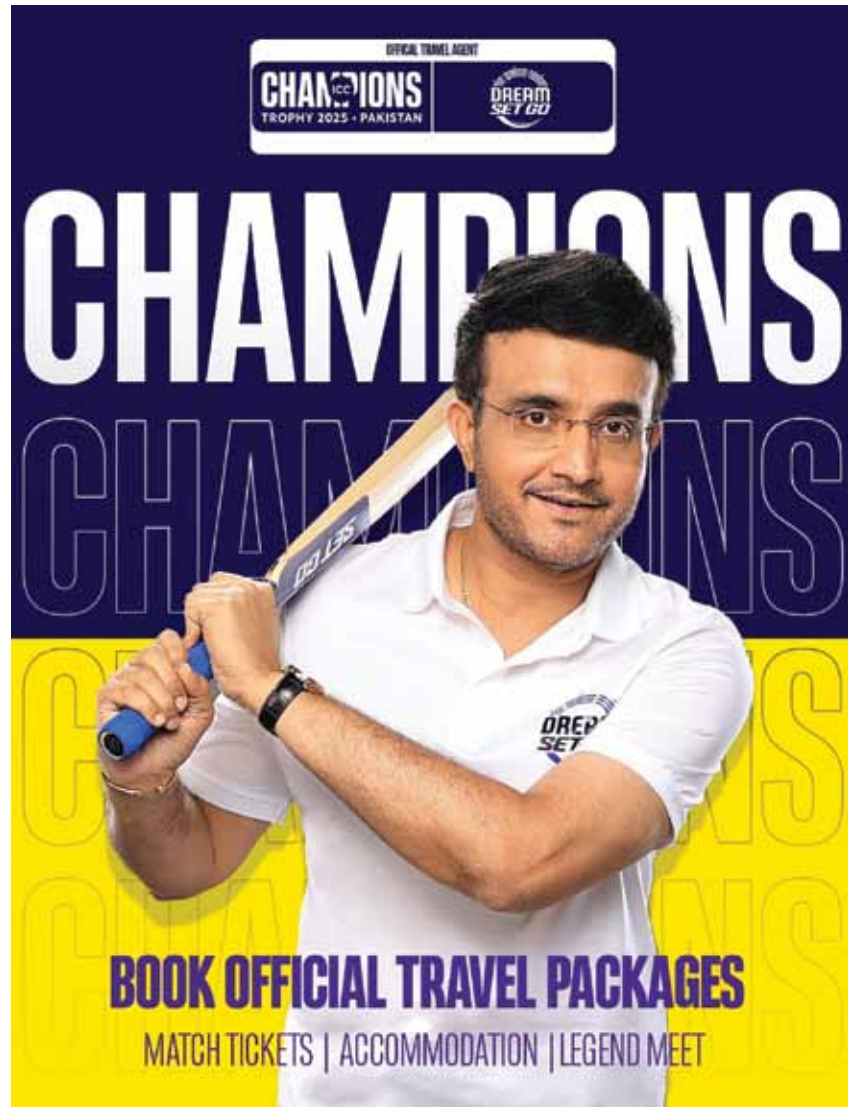
❖ **Meet & Greet Experiences:** Get up close with cricketing legends and experience exclusive interactions.

Whether you are a die-hard supporter or a corporate group looking for hospitality experiences, DreamSetGo ensures a hassle-free and luxurious journey to the ICC Champions Trophy 2025.

The ICC Champions Trophy 2025 will bring together the world's top eight teams competing for the prestigious title. Among the biggest draws of the tournament is the highly anticipated India versus Pakistan clash on 23 February. A rivalry steeped in history, this

As an Official Travel Agent, DreamSetGo will provide exclusive travel packages designed to offer fans a seamless and unforgettable experience

showdown is expected to be the most in-demand fixture of the tournament, attracting millions of fans worldwide. Along with this, all fixtures that feature the Indian team will be played at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium. Team India's recent performance during the England tour of India



has raised the expectations of Indian fans for the Champions Trophy 2025.

With demand expected to soar, cricket fans looking to experience the ICC Champions Trophy 2025 in unparalleled style

can explore DreamSetGo's exclusive travel packages. For enquiries and bookings, visit www.dreamsetgo.com.



Call for sustainability classification

► Contd. from page 5

According to him, hotels must adopt a cohesive, standardised approach to sustainability, supported by clear frameworks and government policies. This not only enhances competitiveness but also strengthens the industry's contribution to India's broader sustainability goals.

Highlighting that Indian government's role in promoting sustainability is crucial, Bakaya said through initiatives like the Swachh Bharat Mission and the National Action Plan on Climate Change, the government is encouraging eco-friendly practices in hospitality. "However, the implementation of these policies remains a work in progress, with further collaborations needed between the public and private sectors to accelerate the adoption of sustainability practices," he said.

Philip Halanen, Head of Sourcing & Sustainability, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, said, "The Indian government, through initiatives like the Sustainable Tourism Criteria of India (STCI) and the introduc-

tion of green hotel certifications, plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainability in hospitality. These frameworks provide a roadmap for hotels to adopt eco-friendly practices and contribute to the nation's broader environmental goals."

Push for net zero

Kachru said certifications, such as STCI, Green Key, Green Globe, EarthCheck, and Green Building certifications like LEED, EDGE, and IGBC are becoming critical tools for hotels to meet the demand for sustainability.

HAI, under Kachru's leadership, became the first industry body in India to endorse the World Travel & Tourism Council's (WTTC) Hotel Sustainability Basics, a foundational certification that sets 12 essential criteria for hotels embarking on their sustainability journey.

Bakaya said that hotels in India are implementing a range of sustainability measures to meet the demand. Energy efficiency, water management, and plastic-free operations are becoming standard practices across the industry.



Ajay K Bakaya
Chairman
Sarovar Hotels

Hotels are also emphasising the importance of waste reduction, sourcing local materials, and engaging guests in eco-friendly initiatives, such as linen reuse programmes and vegetarian dining options.

Halanen said several Wyndham properties in India have already achieved advanced sustainability certifications. For instance, Ramada by Wyndham Lucknow Hotel and Convention Centre and Ramada Plaza by Wyndham Chennai have earned Level 5 certifications, indicating their lead-



Philip Halanen
Head of Sourcing & Sustainability
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts

ership in sustainable practices. These certifications reflect Wyndham's commitment to reducing its environmental impact, with the company setting ambitious goals such as a 15 per cent reduction in carbon emissions and a significant reduction in water usage.

He also highlights that Wyndham's efforts extend beyond environmental sustainability to broader social responsibility. The company's ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) initiatives are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focus-

ing on diversity, human rights, and community support.

Classifying hotels based on guest engagement

Kachru said, "Online travel agencies (OTAs) and request-for-proposal (RFP) frameworks are gradually incorporating sustainability criteria into their hotel rating systems. In India, the STCI certification recognises hotels for their sustainable practices, and similar certifications are being adopted globally. The Global Business Travel Association (GBTA), for instance, developed a sustainability framework for the travel industry in 2024, helping companies reduce their carbon footprint and optimise resource use."

Bakaya underlines that certifications like LEED India and GRIHA are gaining traction, with many hospitality chains working to meet global sustainability benchmarks. However, beyond certifications, the industry is also seeing a shift in guest engagement. Hotels are increasingly incorporating sustainability into the guest experience, offering eco-friendly amenities

and encouraging environmentally conscious behaviour during stays.

While there is no mandatory classification system specifically for guest engagement in sustainability, hotels like Sarovar are leading the way by offering programmes that align with guests' values. These initiatives not only enhance guest satisfaction but also contribute to the industry's overall sustainability efforts.

In terms of guest engagement, Halanen said that Wyndham Hotels and Resorts has developed tools like the Green Toolbox, which tracks energy and water consumption, waste diversion, and emissions.



Disney Cruise aims at Indian MICE

After a big reveal in Singapore and launching bookings for Disney Adventure, Disney Cruise Line is witnessing a huge demand from India and the team is leaving no stone unturned to tap the leisure as well as the MICE segment from the market. Before sailing starts, the team is aggressively promoting and engaging with Indian travel trade.

Nisha Verma

The bookings for the much-coveted Disney Adventure cruise by Disney Cruise Line opened in December 2024 and has been witnessing a huge uptick from the Indian market. Speaking on the same, **Sarah Fox**, Vice President and Regional General Manager, Southeast Asia, Disney Cruise Line (DCL), said, "Since bookings for the Disney Adventure opened on 10 December 2024, we have seen tremendous demand across all sail dates, including our maiden voyage on 15 December 2025, from international guests, particularly those from India."

India market

Claiming that the Indian market is incredibly important to them, Fox added, "The Disney Adventure is set to be a game-changer, offering exciting and nuanced experiences. Designed specifically for the region, this new ship will provide a magical escape for Indian families.



Sarah Fox
Vice President and Regional General Manager,
Southeast Asia, Disney Cruise Line (DCL)

Singapore's strategic location, combined with its world-class air connectivity and port infrastructure, makes it a thriving cruise hub in Asia. Homeporting in Singapore allows us to focus on source markets that are key contributors to Singapore's tourism sector. These regions are natural priority areas for us due to their strong travel demand and well-established flight connections, ensuring easy access for travellers."

Underling India market's potential, she said, "India's emerging outbound travel market and growing interest in cruises provide Disney Cruise Line with a significant opportunity to introduce our offerings to a wider audience. India's travel landscape has evolved significantly, with increasing demand for premium, family-friendly experiences, particularly in tier I cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Chennai. These urban hubs are home to a thriving audience, seeking unique and immersive vacations."

Trade engagements

When it comes to collaborating with the travel trade, Fox informed, "Disney Cruise Line has been working closely with a range of regional and local travel operators, including on-line travel agents and traditional travel agents across Asia, to meet guests' booking preferences. We also have dedicated teams in India and Indonesia to ensure trade promotions are strong and effec-

tive. This includes opportunities for MICE-related group bookings, and we welcome inquiries related to corporate charters and events. We plan to offer customised onboard packages tailored to business and corporate groups,

Disney Cruise Line has been working with a range of regional and local travel operators, including OTAs and traditional travel agents across Asia

as well as guests interested in wedding-related plans, with more details to be shared later."

Getting ready

The Disney Adventure is being meticulously crafted to delight its



audiences, she revealed. "Indian guests can look forward to magical and nuanced experiences featuring their favourite Disney characters. With a growing number of Indian travellers seeking luxury escapes and unforgettable family experiences, the Disney Adventure is poised to be the ultimate vacation at sea. Disney Cruise Line is experiencing a period of turbocharged growth, and our new ships, including the Disney Adventure, offer greater flexibility to bring the magic of Disney

cruise vacations to new global destinations," claimed Fox.





Unveil the Mystical Charm of

Orchha

The Majestic Chronicles of Royal Legacy in Madhya Pradesh

Tucked away from the hustle and bustle of crowded cities, Orchha invites you to step into a world of timeless charm and tranquility. Exhibiting the culture and legends of the Bundela dynasty, this hidden gem seamlessly blends historical grandeur with serene landscapes. Whether you seek a picturesque wedding destination, a cinematic backdrop, or a peaceful retreat, Orchha has it all.

Weddings in Orchha: A Royal Affair

Orchha's understated luxury makes it an idyllic destination for weddings. Orchha is where elegance meets affordability creating a lavish wedding experience. The royal palaces of Orchha blend rich legacy with modern luxury. Popular venues include Jahangir Palace, Orchha Palace, Amar Mahal and

more. The town's historic temples add a spiritual dimension, creating memorable backdrops for rituals.

A Cinematic Paradise for Filmmakers

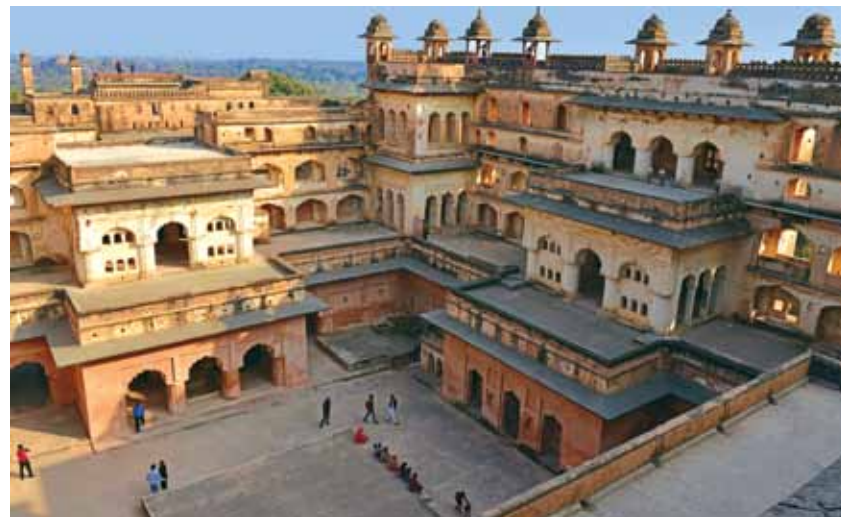
Lights, Camera, Orchha! Orchha's historic charm and mystical vibe have made it a sought-after location for filmmakers. From *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3* to Hollywood movie 'The Lovers', Orchha's stunning architecture and serene landscapes have been featured in numerous blockbusters. The magnificent palaces, forts, temples, and cenotaphs offer a mix of Rajput and Mughal styles, ideal for period films. The Betwa River and surrounding forests provide romantic and adventurous settings. Madhya Pradesh Tourism also actively promotes the region with incentives and logistical assistance.

Adventure and Nature

For thrill-seekers and nature lovers, Orchha is a paradise. Rafting, boating, and peaceful walks along Kanchana Ghat await you. Explore the countryside on a cycling expedition or delve into the region's wilderness, home to peacocks, deer, and migratory birds. Trek through serene landscapes, enjoy invigorating nature walks, or picnic amid lush greenery.

Orchha Heritage: A Journey through Time

The Orchha Fort Complex is an enchanting escape steeped in architectural heritage featuring, Raja Mahal Known for its beautiful murals depicting mythological themes and Bundeli life. The Jahangir Mahal is a stunning blend of Mughal and Bundela architecture, built to honour Emperor Jahangir's



visit in 1605. Sheesh Mahal, which was once a royal residence, is now a luxurious heritage hotel. The 14 iconic Cenotaphs on the Betwa River that stand as silent sentinels to history are now home to a colony of critically endangered vultures.

Spiritual Destination: For Devotees

Orchha is a spiritual hub for devotees, with its ancient temples and peaceful riverside setting. The Ram Raja Temple is the only temple in India to worship Lord Ram as a king and not just as a deity. Other spiritual attractions include Lakshmi Narayan Temple and Chaturbhuj Temple, each echoing stories of devotion and faith.

Folklore and Legends:

Orchha's folklore weaves a vivid tapestry of valour, devotion and royal heritage, deeply rooted in the legendary tales of Lord Ram and Raja Madhukar Shah. These stories come alive in the town's vibrant folk performances, offering a glimpse into Bundeli heritage. Also, immerse yourself in the mesmerizing Light and Sound Show at Orchha Fort, where the enchanting blend of storytelling and illumination unveils the grandeur of Orchha's rich history and royal legacy.

Homestays: Experience Bundeli Culture

Opt for a homestay to immerse yourself in Bundeli traditions,

cuisine, and hospitality. Popular options include Ramabai Homestay, Sheeta Greens Homestay, Madhav Hill View Home-Stay, and many others. Book early, especially during peak tourist seasons (October to February).

Orchha's UNESCO Aspiration

In a significant milestone for India's cultural heritage, the MP Tourism Board has successfully submitted a dossier nominating Orchha as a historic group of monuments for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List. This recommendation for the year 2027-28 recognises Orchha's unparalleled legacy of architectural and cultural brilliance.



Rediscover history, luxury, and nature — all in Orchha.

(Fitur) sees historic participation

FITUR 2025 concluded with an impressive 255,000 attendees, reaffirming its status as a leading tourism event globally. With India among 156 participating countries, the event showcased industry growth, innovation, and sustainability. Over 9,500 companies across 884 stands fostered key business opportunities at the event, generating €445 million for Madrid's economy.





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Experience Mauritius!

Skål International has partnered with Air Mauritius to enable its members personally experience the airline's services, as well as discover the beauty of Mauritius, accompanied by their families.



Skål International Bombay – 144 recently partnered with Air Mauritius for an exclusive event in Mumbai. Citing the reason behind the partnership, **Burjis Mehta**, President, Skål Club of Bombay 144 and CEO, Skyworld Tourism Travels, said, "This idea of partnering with Air Mauritius germinated about three months ago when **Gagan Sharma**, Country Manager, Air Mauritius, attended our event. From that day, we have been constantly in touch with them and planned this event after he got a go-ahead from the airline head office in Mauritius."



Gagan Sharma
Country Manager - India
Air Mauritius

Ziyaad Parthasee, Ag. Chief Commercial Officer, Air Mauritius, made two key announcements for Skål members at the event.

Sharing the announcements, Mehta said, "We will be having an educational familiarisation trip to Mauritius in partnership with Air Mauritius. And secondly, they want travel agents who are members of our club to tie up with them for special fares and I'm sure that on an all-India basis, we should be tying up with Air Mauritius and giving benefits of special fares to our members. Air Mauritius has announced a special fare for agents and their families to experience the product. Our members will definitely be interested in this, but I can assure you that we are not stopping at this. We continue to work together for our mutual benefit."



Burjis Mehta
President, Skål Club of Bombay 144 & CEO, Skyworld Tourism Travels

Gagan Sharma, Country Manager - India, Air Mauritius, was also present at the event. He said, "We are very happy to be here and partner with Skål International Bombay – 144. This platform offers huge opportunities for us and its great to disseminate information about Air Mauritius and Mauritius as a destination." India is the only country where the airline operates direct non-stop flights to three cities - Mumbai, Delhi and Chennai.

"Mumbai is about four to five flights seasonally and then we can add any additional frequency during peak periods. For Delhi, we have the two base flights, and we keep on adding additional frequency subject to requirement. Chennai, we are operating a single flight. Travel agents are integral part of our growth in India. We have incentives in place for the high performers, as we continuously offer short incentives, as well as promotional offers. At this point of time, we have amazing fares available across India for Mauritius and beyond. We also have a travel agent fare where we allow their family members to accompany them to visit Mauritius. We only charge about ₹25,000 to a travel agent and many of them have already visited the destination and experienced our product," Sharma said. Mehta added, "We want to encourage our members to experience the product. Since Mauritius is a leisure destination, we believe that more and more travel agents need to come and experience with their family. This fare is valid till 31 March 2025."

Taiwan sees 20% growth from India

India is No. 1 South Asian market for Taiwan in terms of visitor arrival numbers as well as spend, says Paul Shih, Director, TTA Singapore Office.



Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA), the national tourism agency of Taiwan, reveals that Indian market has registered a strong 19.46 per cent growth in visitor arrivals in the first 10 months of 2024. Taiwan registered a total of 31,766 visitors from India during the January – October 2024 period, a robust near 20 percent growth over 26,591 visitors from India registered during the same period in 2023.

Paul Shih, Director, TTA Singapore Office, said: "India is our number one South Asian market for both, in terms of visitor arrival numbers as well as spend. Our focused marketing initiatives, targeted trade engagements through road shows, travel exhibitions, as well as trade and media familiarisation trips, consumer engagements through social media influencers' trips backed by digital initiatives and activations, have held us in good stead in 2024 and we look forward to execute these plans for

2025 with even greater finesse and results."

International arrivals to Taiwan soared to 6,206,267 between January and October 2024, an impressive 24.55 per cent growth over the corresponding period in 2023 when arrivals had reached 4,983,081 in-

Our focused marketing initiatives, targeted trade engagements through road shows and travel exhibitions have held us in good stead in 2024

ternational visitors. With two more months to add to inbound arrival number of last year, total year-end Indian arrival number is expected to be over 38,000 visitors.

Empowering agents with tech

Bhasin Travels Online is revolutionising the travel industry with its cutting-edge B2B travel management platform. By harnessing the power of technology, the company is transforming the way travel agents operate to stay ahead in the competitive market.



Bhasin Travels Online is an innovative B2B travel management company, which provides customised travel solutions through technology and top-class services, delivering utmost value for its associate partners. The B2B travel portal is transforming travel with its cutting-edge technology, along with API and white label integration. Elaborating on the portal's role, **Manpreet Singh**, Director, Bhasin Travels Online, says, "Our



Manpreet Singh
Director
Bhasin Travels Online

mission is to empower the travel agent with next-gen technology. API integration with certification gets them 24x7 assistance of our dedicated support team and a guaranteed opportunity to maximise their earnings. Our technologically powered portal allows them to have and combine multiple APIs for flights, hotels and transportation to deliver real-time inventory. They can offer their customers a huge array of options,

broadening their service-range to have a certain competitive advantage. In our white label offering, we help them to become a travel entrepreneur by building their own

API integration with certification gets them (agents) 24x7 help from our team and a guaranteed opportunity to maximise their earnings

customised travel product or solution and setting up their own brand to unlock automated travel business benefits."

Speaking of innovations or enhancements the company is planning to introduce on its platform,

Singh adds, "Bhasin Travels Online plans to launch more non-air services on portal and establish ourselves as technology partners creating B2C, B2B or corporate tool for travel agents. We are coming up with AI tools for customer support."

Sharing his plans for 2025, Singh says, "The future is innovative technology that facilitates end-user satisfaction. This year is going to witness Bhasin Travels Online coming up with the same through technology services."



# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY		
EVENT TALK		
Published from: India Middle East		
FEBRUARY 2025		
Date	Event	Time
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
25	Oman Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
26	Singapore Tourism Roadshow-Chandigarh	10:30 am
27-28	GPS-Visakhapatnam	10:00 am
28	Singapore Tourism Roadshow-Bengaluru	10:30 am
28	Turtle Down Under Webinar	3:00 pm
28-2 Mar	India Travel Mart-Chandigarh	9:00 am
28-2 Mar	India International Travel Exhibition	4:00 pm
28-2 Mar	Holiday Expo-Varanasi	9:00 am
MARCH 2025		
3-6	SITE Global Conference	9:00 am
4	Israel Tourism Webinar	12:00
4-6	ITB Berlin	9:00 am

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GPS 2026

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MOVEMENTS

INTERGLOBE HOTELS

Gurugram

InterGlobe Hotels has appointed **VINAY GUPTA** as the Vice President - Development & Asset Management. With over 25 years of global hospitality expertise, Gupta will play a key role in leading investment strategies and maximising the value of the company's hotel portfolio. He will oversee capital deployment and drive financial performance by focusing on strategic investments and operational improvements to maximise long-term value for InterGlobe Hotels. Gupta is a recognised industry veteran with a proven track record of success in diverse markets, including India, the UK, the UAE, and Australia.



TRIPFACTORY & NEXUS DMC (ORN GROUP)

Bengaluru

TripFactory & Nexus DMC appoints **YOGESH MEHTA** as the Chief Commercial Officer. With a career spanning over 21 years in the travel and e-commerce industries, Mehta brings a wealth of expertise in strategic growth, business transformation, and innovation-driven solutions. In his new role, he will spearhead commercial strategy, revenue growth, strategic partnerships, and business optimisation across the company's diverse travel verticals, including flights, hotels, and experiences. His focus will be on scaling operations, enhancing customer experiences, and leveraging technology to establish the company as a global leader in the travel ecosystem.



MERCURE

India

Mercure has appointed **VIJAY NANMARAN S** as the General Manager of Mercure Kathmandu Sukedhara Heights. With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Nanmaran brings extensive experience in operational excellence, revenue growth, and guest satisfaction. His career spans key leadership roles in esteemed hotel chains, including The Soaltee Kathmandu, InterContinental Hotels Group, Starwood, and ITC properties across South Asia and the Middle East. In his new role, he will oversee all aspects of Mercure Kathmandu Sukedhara Heights, ensuring seamless operations.



PARALLEL HOTELS UDAIPUR

Udaipur

Parallel Hotels Udaipur has appointed **KUNAL SABHARWAL** as the Cluster Director of Sales & Marketing. In his new role, Sabharwal will oversee Parallel Hotels Udaipur (Member of Radisson Individuals), Manuscript Jhilwara Haveli and Rajdarshan - A Lake View Hotel in Udaipur. Sabharwal brings about 23 years of hospitality experience, having worked with renowned brands, such as ITC Maurya, Radisson Hotel Group (RHG), IHG Hotels & Resorts, Jaypee Hotels, Hilton and Crowne Plaza. Starting his career in Food and Beverage (F&B) production, Sabharwal is a seasoned Sales & Marketing professional, poised to drive growth for Parallel Hotels Udaipur.



THE RITZ-CARLTON, BANGALORE

Bengaluru

The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore has appointed **JYOTSNA KANWAR** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. With over 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Kanwar brings a wealth of expertise in sales, marketing, and customer relations, coupled with a passion for driving business growth and enhancing guest experiences. She began her hospitality career in 1999 and has since worked with prominent brands, such as ITC, Taj and The Leela Palace. She has successfully led sales teams, exceeded revenue targets, and developed key client relationships throughout her career.



ibis INDIA

New Delhi

ibis India has appointed **VIVEK AGARWAL** as the Director of Finance. With over two decades of financial expertise in the hospitality industry, Agarwal is poised to drive operational excellence and set new standards in financial efficiency for ibis and ibis Styles India. His illustrious career includes leadership roles at top international and Indian hospitality companies. With Agarwal's proven expertise and leadership, ibis India is confident in charting a path of financial innovation and robust growth. His vision will not only refine the brand's financial operations but also contribute to its mission of delivering world-class hospitality experiences.



RENAISSANCE BENGALURU RACE COURSE HOTEL

Bengaluru

Renaissance Bengaluru Race Course Hotel appoints **SUMAN GULIA** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. With an impressive 17-year track record in the hospitality industry, Gulia brings a deep understanding of sales dynamics and strategic marketing to her new role. Having honed her expertise with prestigious hospitality brands, she has contributed to diverse roles across multiple cities in India over the past decade. Prior to this, she served as the Cluster Director of Sales at Taj Holiday Village and Taj Fort Aguada Resort & Spa in Goa, where she played a pivotal role in driving revenue and market expansion.



SHERATON GRAND BENGALURU WHITEFIELD HOTEL & CONVENTION CENTRE

Bengaluru

Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Centre has elevated **SWAPNIL NANDURKAR** to the position of Director of Sales. With over 14 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Nandurkar has been an integral member of the hotel's leadership team, having served as the Associate Director of Sales. His career includes roles at prominent global brands, such as Taj Hotels Palaces Resorts Safaris, Mumbai & Hyderabad, and JW Marriott Pune. Nandurkar will oversee all aspects of the hotel's sales strategy.



NOVOTEL HYDERABAD AIRPORT

Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Airport appoints **KARTIKEYAN R** as the Director of Operations. Bringing a wealth of experience from both India and international markets, Karthikeyan is set to enhance the hotel's operational efficiency and guest experience, further strengthening its position as a premier hospitality destination in Hyderabad. In his new role, he will oversee the hotel's day-to-day operations, ensuring seamless coordination across departments to enhance efficiency and service quality. His strategic vision and expertise in hotel management will be instrumental in elevating Novotel Hyderabad Airport as a preferred destination.



MRG GROUP

Gurgaon

MRG Group has appointed **SANDHYA NAIR** as the Deputy General Manager Marketing & Communications. She has more than 15 years of experience in leading marketing and communications for some of the most prestigious brands. Throughout her career, Nair has excelled in various roles beyond the hospitality industry, bringing a wealth of diverse experience to her new position. In her last assignment as Corporate Head - Marketing and Communications at Inventree Hotels & Resorts, she demonstrated her ability to drive marketing strategies that delivered exceptional results.



ITC WINDSOR

Bengaluru

ITC Windsor has appointed **RITESH ARORA** as the Food & Beverage (F&B) Manager. With over 13 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Arora brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role. His journey in the hospitality industry began in 2011 as a Food & Beverage Associate at ITC Rajputana, Jaipur. He spent nine years at The Leela Palace, Bengaluru, honing his skills across various roles, with his last position being Assistant Food & Beverage Manager before joining ITC Windsor. In his new role, he will be responsible for elevating the dining experiences at ITC Windsor, overseeing all food and beverage operations.



NOVOTEL IMAGICAA

Khopoli (Maharashtra)

Novotel Imagicaa has appointed **TEJAL HUNDAL** as the Front Office Manager. With a rich background in the hospitality industry and a proven track record of excellence, Hundal brings a wealth of experience and a passion for guest relations to her new role. She began her journey in the hospitality sector as part of the Management Training Program in the Front Office at Novotel Ahmedabad. Her extensive experience within Accor's ecosystem highlights her ability to adapt and thrive in dynamic environments, making her a valuable asset to Novotel Imagicaa.



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Malaysia eyes 1.5 mn Indians

In the countdown to Visit Malaysia Year 2026, Tourism Malaysia is leaving no stone unturned to ensure that its presence is felt in India. Nuwal Fadhillah Ku Azmi, Director, International Promotion (Asia & Africa), Tourism Malaysia, shares plans with **HotelTalk**.



Hazel Jain

India has been a key market for Malaysia for over 20 years, and with the upcoming Visit Malaysia Year 2026, the NTO is targeting 1.5 million Indian travellers. Sharing the strategy for this, **Nuwal Fadhillah Ku Azmi**, Director, International Promotion (Asia & Africa), Tourism Malaysia, says, "With 'Visit Malaysia Year 2026' we want to encourage more tourists to come to Malaysia. India is already one of our top-10 international markets with 1.1 million tourists in 2023. But now we also want to focus on special interest groups apart from the FITs, such as wedding, MICE and incentive groups. So for 2026, we are looking at achieving 1.2 million to 1.5 million tourists. That is why we are really looking at marketing and promoting Malaysia aggressively in India."



Nuwal Fadhillah Ku Azmi
Director, International Promotion (Asia & Africa), Tourism Malaysia

Malaysian strategy for India

Sharing details on the strategy for India, **Datuk Manoharan Periasamy**, Director General, Tourism Malaysia, says, "We have more than 68 suppliers participating with us at OTM and our sales mission. We are also having an interaction with wedding planners and a corporate networking session along with Thomas Cook India. These efforts are to enhance our presence in India in line with Visit Malaysia Year 2026. We also want to attract the high-end segment from India."



Datuk Manoharan Periasamy
Director General
Tourism Malaysia

He adds, "We are talking directly with the tour operators here in In-

dia and working with the airlines, along with famils for agents. Our focus is to offer a more experiential holiday to Indian visitors through edu-tourism, homestay programmes, and community-based tourism." Tourism Malaysia recently collaborated with Marriott International for its Malaysia Food and Cultural Festival at JW Café, JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar. Apart from this, Malaysia Sports Tourism Association signed an MoU with Tourism India Alliance to boost sports tourism in India.

In 2024, Malaysia welcomed a record one million tourists from India, with southern India contributing more than 50 per cent of Indian visitors. The strong connectivity between southern India and Malaysia is underscored by 151 weekly flights and a total seat capacity of 26,686 seats per week. The recent introduction of new flights by IndiGo to Penang and Langkawi from Chennai and Bengaluru further enhances travel options.

Currently, Malaysia has a visa-free policy for Indian tourists and there are more than 245 flights connecting India to Malaysia. "The latest one to be added is IndiGo flying into Penang and Langkawi, besides Kuala Lumpur. So, we are hoping to attract more Indian tourists to not just Kuala Lumpur, but also to other parts of Malaysia. Apart from participating in OTM, we are conducting our sales mission to Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Kochi. We also have two special seminars focusing

on wedding planners and one for incentive groups. Weddings is a growing market for us, and we believe we can develop the segment even more. What we are

Apart from Free Independent Travellers, Tourism Malaysia will also aggressively tap corporates, incentives and the wedding segment

doing right now is getting our industry players, such as our hotels and the suppliers, to be ready to receive Indian tourists," she adds. Tourism Malaysia embarked on its largest-ever Sales Mission to India, taking place from 3-7 February 2025. The mission visited key cities of Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Kochi, with a delegation of 60-plus sellers from Malaysia.

In a focused endeavour to inspire its top corporates, Thomas Cook (India) partnered with Tourism Malaysia to host a high-impact MICE event in Mumbai. The engagement witnessed strong participation of over 30 CXOs and senior executives from leading multinational corporations and Indian corporate houses across sectors that included BFSI, pharma, and electronics. The format of the event allowed for a productive blend of business and networking, packed with presentations, discussions and one-on-one sessions that allowed participants to explore Malaysia's MICE offerings.

TARGETED NUMBERS

1.1 million
Indian tourists Malaysia received in 2023

1.2-1.5 million
tourists Tourism Malaysia aiming from India in 2025-26



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