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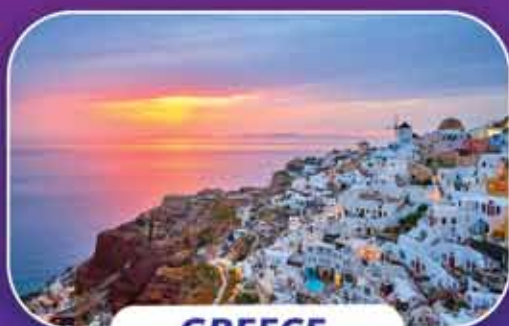
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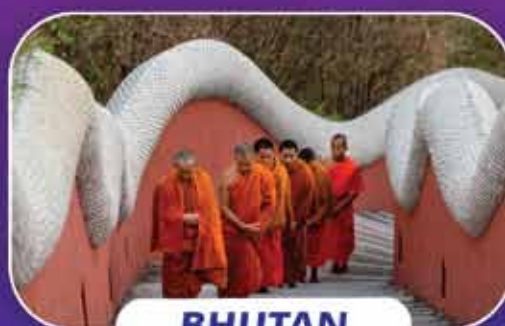
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‘Only 6 GSTC-certified hotels in India’

With only six GSTC-certified hotels in India compared to over 2,000 globally, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is urging Indian hoteliers to embrace certification not just as an ethical move, but a strategic business advantage. Hotels need to start their sustainability journey voluntarily, says **CB Ramkumar**, Vice Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council.



Surbhi Sharma

With an aim to encourage more hotels—especially in India—to adopt and implement sustainable practices, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) recently launched its Certified Hotels Directory, a global listing of hotels that have been certified by GSTC-accredited bodies. The

council hopes that Indian hoteliers will see the commercial advantage of certification, especially as certified hotels gain algorithmic preference on leading Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) like Booking.com and Agoda, thereby increasing visibility and bookings.

CB Ramkumar, Vice Chair, GSTC, says, “Despite India’s growing hos-



CB Ramkumar
Vice Chair
GSTC

pitality industry, only six Indian hotels are currently GSTC certified, compared to over 2,000 globally, most of which are in Turkey and Singapore.”

The disparity, he explains, lies in the lack of strong policy support in India. Countries like Turkey and Singapore have government mandates encouraging certification, whereas in India,



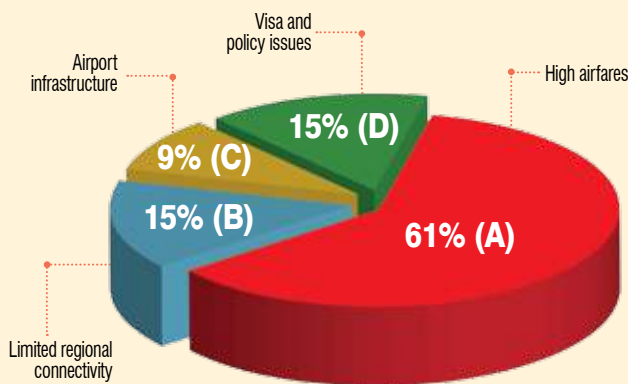
Turkey and Singapore have government mandates encouraging certification, whereas in India, tourism is a state subject

tourism is a state subject. While the Union Ministry of Tourism (MOT) can issue guidelines, implementation depends on individual states.

States to join hands
India’s adoption of sustainable tourism frameworks is still evolving. Encouragingly, some states are stepping up. The MOT has been cautious, partly

Contd. on page 22 ▶

High airfares remain top hurdle



A survey conducted by **TRAVTALK** on challenges being faced by aviation-linked tourism in India highlights high airfares as the primary obstacle hindering aviation-driven tourism in India, with 61% of industry professionals identifying it as the key challenge. Limited regional connectivity and visa policy issues garnered 15% votes. Airport infrastructure was cited as a challenge by 9%.



The respondents were offered to choose from the following options:

- A. High airfares**
- B. Limited regional connectivity**
- C. Airport infrastructure**
- D. Visa and policy issues**

The findings underscore the need for strategic interventions in fare regulation and route expansion to unlock the full potential of aviation-linked tourism across the country.

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‘Cancellations will reduce soon’

Many aviation industry players say there has been a ‘slight increase’ in booking cancellations, but it is only a matter of time before things return to normal. The ticket cancellations were mostly due to concerns over operational reliability and delays, and clients with tight connections or important schedules have been opting for alternative carriers, they say.



Hazel Jain

The aviation industry witnessed widespread cancellations and deferred air travel in June 2025, but travel agents say that might just be temporary, as loyalty for Air India as an airline continues. **Ravi Gosain**, President, IATO, says, “There have been some cancellations from clients, primarily on Europe-bound routes, such as London and Frankfurt. But these were mostly due to concerns over operational reliability and delays. Clients with tight connections or important schedules have opted for alternative carriers. Despite some con-



Ravi Gosain
President
IATO

cerns, we continue to get bookings for Air India.” Dismissing widespread cancellations, he adds, “There has been a slight increase in cancellations, but it’s largely linked to visa processing delays or



Sunil Kumar
President
TAAI

occasional route disruptions, not a general fear of flying. Most travellers are proceeding with their summer travel plans. A small segment of travellers, especially elderly travellers and families are deferring long-haul travel,



Ved Khanna
President
ADTOI

but it isn’t widespread. Popular destinations in Europe, Southeast Asia and the Middle East continue to see strong demand. While Air India is undergoing a transition under the Tata Group, the market is observing whether these



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego

changes improve service consistency. Transparent communication from airlines is now more critical than ever to win traveller confidence.” **Bookings flow in** **Sunil Kumar**, President,

TAAI, differs, based on the feedback he has received. “Cancellations are taking place. The options are offered to travellers as they are not preferring Air India. But this is temporary in my opinion, since the fear has taken over decision making. Surely, the accident that happened ought not to have happened, but the airline is doing its best. We are confident of their extra care that would get invested. It will take some time for this setback to get cleared,” says Kumar.

Strong MICE appeal **Ved Khanna**, President, ADTOI, also echoes similar sentiments. “Concern

Contd. on page 22 ▶



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Reset, Relearn, Reassure

The last three months have seen the travel industry go through an upheaval of sorts. However, we won't say that the Indian travel industry is in a crisis. Rather, it is in recalibration. From cautious flyers to cautious first timers, there is a shift in how people are engaging with travel. What is remarkable is how the industry is responding — not with panic, but with purpose.

First, we would talk of skies. While air travel saw momentary turbulence — from booking cancellations to operational jitters — the overall sentiment remains steady. Travellers are still booking, and most disruptions are either short-term or specific to certain routes. The bigger shift is in traveller expectations. They want reassurance, clarity and confidence. This is exactly what the industry must now offer.

On another front, inbound tourism was briefly shaken by the US travel advisory. But again, here too, perspective matters. The flagged regions don't feature in most itineraries, and seasoned travellers know that. The real challenge lies in perception — not reality. What is needed now is focused messaging, better education of source markets and stronger engagement between government and trade bodies to ensure India's image remains resilient.

Meanwhile, there is something inspiring happening behind the scenes. Companies, colleges and consultants across the sector are doubling down on upskilling. From AI and analytics to wellness, guest handling and sustainability — the commitment to learning is serious and it is industry-wide. That, more than anything else, signals real preparedness for the future.

Finally, we can again talk about Kashmir. Despite headlines and hesitations, associations like IATO, TAAI, and Skål International India are not just talking about revival — they are walking the talk with on-ground initiatives and member visits. The next step? Bringing back large-format events, Fams for foreign buyers and integrating Kashmir more firmly into mainstream itineraries.

Sustainable tourism: A cost-benefit analysis

Every commercial entity does a cost-benefit analysis before venturing into any activity that requires investment. The same logic applies to hoteliers and tour operators when it comes to sustainable tourism. Here is how you can do.

Many operators and hoteliers are not sure what sustainability entails or how to start. Switching to EVs, retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency, or sourcing locally can be expensive. Not all travellers are asking for (or willing to pay for) sustainable options yet, and thus many businesses fear losing revenue. Tour-

best tourism villages in the world. Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission Society is one shining example of sustainable tourism and has taken many initiatives, such as the removal of single-use plastics and encouraging community-based tourism. Sikkim has mandated that all tourist vehicles entering the state must carry large garbage bags. This initiative, designed to reduce waste and enhance cleanliness, requires tour operators, travel agencies, and vehicle drivers to educate tourists on the proper use of these bags for waste collection and disposal. Eco retreats across Odisha are a great example of projects in nature tourism. I recently read that Goa, one of India's tourist hotspots, has mandated that all new tourist vehicles, including bikes on hire, must be EVs. In addition, one-third of new vehicles registered in the state from 2025 onwards will be electric. I am sure there would be many more, but it goes to prove that sustainable tourism requires government support and legislation to be universally implemented. The public sector's role in promoting sustainable tourism is undeniable.

Tourism is made up of countless small players – guides, homestays and transport providers who need support

ism is made up of many small players – guides, homestays, and transport providers who need support to move in the same direction. Without financial or regulatory incentives, it's hard for businesses to justify the transition.

Use cases

UNWTO has named Dhor-do (Gujarat) the site of Rann Utsav as one of the

REWARDING GREEN DEEDS

As a reward for green deeds, visitors to Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, can receive perks like free ice cream, a glass of wine, or discounted museum entry. This initiative is called CopenPay. This is a classic case study of how public policy can effectively incentivise tourist behaviour by encouraging sustainability not through penalties, but through positive reinforcement.

Bringing real change

The two important stakeholders in tourism are the accommodation sector and the tour operators.

Hotels: Hotels can install EV charging stations on the premises. They can charge guests for the ser-

EVs or tie up with transport services that already use them.

Partner only with hotels that have verified sustainability certifications.

Identify restaurants serving authentic local cuisine, and government-authorised artisan shops that offer local handicrafts.

Public policy can incentivise tourist behaviour by encouraging sustainability not through penalties, but through positive reinforcement

vice. Switch to EVs for airport pickups and drops. Guests are already paying for these services, just make them greener.

Promote local cuisine on the menu. Highlight dishes made completely with locally sourced ingredients. If guests choose these dishes, incentivise them with a free drink or an extra dessert. Set up water refilling stations on each floor. If guests bring their bottles and skip the plastic ones, reward them with free items from the mini-bar.

Tour operators: Tour operators can invest in

Today, the focus has shifted to the destination. How can tourism bring lasting economic benefits to local people? This shift is not always easy to grasp and even harder to implement. Measuring success in sustainable tourism can feel vague or complex. But one thing is certain: It's a necessary shift if we want a better world for all beings. The challenge ahead of us is this: How do we make this shift easier to understand, simpler to act on, and more measurable?

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES

❖ Gardens by the Bay, Singapore, features solar-powered 'Supertrees' and climate-controlled conservatories, showcasing sustainable horticultural practices and serving as a model for integrating nature into urban environments.

❖ Bhutan has adopted a unique tourism policy that emphasises high-value, low-impact tourism. Visitors are required to pay a daily Sustainable Development Fee, which supports environmental conservation, and infrastructure development



Kingshuk Biswas
Project Manager with Gujarat Power Corporation Limited

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



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TRAVEL NEWS

Kerala set to leverage its strengths as global **MICE and wedding tourism destination**: Tourism Minister

India moves up 10 spots, makes it to the top 100 list of UN Sustainable Development Goals Index 2025

HAI welcomes Delhi government's move to scrap police licence/ NOCs for hotels

West Bengal leads India with **1,022 certified tourist guides**, empowering local communities

MOT urges industry to promote **dolphin-centric destinations** in tour packages and itineraries

Domestic YoY air pax count may grow by 7-10% in FY2026: ICRA

Cross Hotels aligns offerings for Indians

Cross Hotels & Resorts recorded a 275% YoY growth in room nights from India in 2024. The group has recently opened Lumen Bangkok and is going to open Cross Vibe Bangkok and Away Bangkok Sukhumvit in Bangkok in July to cater to the growing demand from travellers.

 Surbhi Sharma

With Indian outbound travel on a strong upward trajectory due to rising disposable income in the hands of people, countries and hospitality brands across the world are intensifying their efforts to woo Indians. Cross Hotels & Resorts in Thailand is also tailoring experiences to the evolving preferences of Indian travellers.

Chatchaya Glaiprayong, Head of Global Sales, Cross Hotels & Resorts, said, "We are aligning our hotel offerings with the aspirations of tourists seeking not just leisure, but immersive and meaningful getaways. Our goal is to ensure a seam-



Chatchaya Glaiprayong
Head of Global Sales
Cross Hotels & Resorts

less travel experience that highlights the beauty of our properties across destinations. We are developing travel packages that resonate with Indian guests—be it family-friendly adventures, wellness escapes, or romantic getaways—all with a focus on sustainability and authenticity."

Evolving preferences


Traditionally drawn to Thailand's beaches, nightlife and shopping, Indians are now exploring cultural sites and wellness retreats. Cross Hotels & Resorts has responded to this shift by enhancing its offerings, to appeal to those looking for deeper cultural and wellness experiences. "There is a definite shift toward wellness retreats, cultural experiences, and even adventure," she says.

Expanding India ties

Cross Hotels is currently working with a wide network of Indian OTAs, B2B aggregators, DMCs and tour operators, and plans to deepen these collaborations in 2025. Key strategies include exclusive deals and packages, joint

promotions, co-hosted events and system-level integration to streamline bookings. Apart from FIT, the brand's focus is

competitive rates, attractive discounts and commissions to incentivise Indian travel agents and drive conversions.

 **There is a definite shift toward wellness retreats, cultural experiences, and even adventure, which is not just among high-end travellers**

on boosting MICE and destination wedding segments by offering customisable packages,

FOCUSSED STRATEGIES

❖ Ties with OTAs, DMCs and B2B aggregators across India

❖ Expansion plans in 2025 include joint marketing campaigns, exclusive deals and co-hosted events

❖ Attractive commission structures for agents in MICE and wedding segments

'Entire NMIA capacity is booked'

While the opening month of the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) has been pushed again to August 2025, the airport authorities have managed to woo all three major airlines in India. But located more than 40-odd kms away from the city centre, will it be able to woo the passengers? **Captain BVJK Sharma**, Chief Executive Officer, NMIA, assures it will.

 Hazel Jain

Captain BVJK Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA), is in the hot seat as everyone trains their eyes on the new airport, spread over 1,160 acres. Will it be another jewel in Mumbai's crown?

Sharma is already excited about the eyeballs his airport has received from airlines. "I have been interacting with all the three major Indian airlines. The demand is so high that my entire capacity is already booked. IndiGo has committed to 18 departures to more than 15 cities start-



Captain BVJK Sharma
Chief Executive Officer
Navi Mumbai International Airport

ing from day one of NMIA operations. Akasa Air has confirmed 15 departures, Air India and Air India Express both are in touch, but they want to ramp up to 90 domestic departures by March 2026. The exact numbers will be firmed up

soon." Discussions are on with other airlines as well.

The first phase of the airport is expected to open from August-end, though no launch date has been finalised yet. The pre-development work of the next phase of the airport involving a second terminal and an additional runway will begin from October 2026, revealed Sharma, adding that the aim is to model his airport after Changi.

"We have upped our total scale from 60 million passengers, revising it to 90 million passengers. In the launch phase, the airport will have a capacity to handle 20 million passengers

annually. We will start with 8-10 air traffic movements per hour and then ramp up to 30 movements per hour

 **We have upped our total scale to 90 mn pax. In the launch phase, the airport will have capacity to handle 20 mn pax annually**

by next April. The second terminal and the second runway are expected to



be complete by 2029. We will adopt modular way of construction so that it does not impact the flight operations," Sharma adds.

User development fee from passengers

Passengers flying out of the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) will now have to pay a 'User

Development Fee (UDF)' of ₹620 for domestic journeys and ₹1,225 for international journeys. For disembarking passengers, the UDF will be ₹270 and ₹525 for domestic and international flights, respectively. The UDF will be levied on an ad-hoc basis by the Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA). 

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US advisory won't impact business

The recent US travel advisory urging its citizens to 'exercise increased caution' when visiting India has created a buzz in the inbound travel community in India. While some see it as a cause for concern, particularly ahead of the October-March inbound season, most Indian tour operators believe the advisory's practical impact on travel from the US will be negligible.



Janice Alyosius

The USA recently issued a travel advisory urging its citizens to 'exercise increased caution' when travelling to India and marked several Indian states with a 'Do Not Travel' or 'Reconsider Travel' tag. This sparked a debate within the Indian inbound tourism industry. While such advisories are not new, industry leaders argue that the strict nature of the latest advisory could unfairly damage perceptions of safety in India, particularly when the flagged

While such advisories are not new, industry leaders say the strict nature of the advisory could damage perceptions of safety in India

regions rarely feature on tourist itineraries. The industry argues that core travel circuits remain untouched by the advisory, and that seasoned US travellers are unlikely to cancel or alter plans based on a generalised warning. Travel leaders are calling for stronger government-level engagement with US authorities, alongside sharper destination messaging, to



Sanjeev Mehra
Director
Aaryan Leisure & Holidays

dispel ambiguity and safeguard India's image in key long-haul markets.

Core destinations remain unaffected

Despite the renewed advisory, Indian travel trade leaders agree that the impact on leisure travel from the US will be limited. "The advisory may cause initial hesitation, especially for first-time or senior travellers," said **Sanjeev Mehra**, Director, Aaryan Leisure & Holidays. "But seasoned and high-value travellers often make informed decisions beyond blanket advisories. Well-curated itineraries focused on mainstream destinations like Delhi, Agra, Rajasthan, Kerala and Ladakh will remain largely unaffected."

Ravi Gosain, Managing Director, Erco Travels, reinforced this view. "This advisory is basically for places which are not on regular tourist itineraries. Americans mostly travel to southern states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, or to Rajasthan and Delhi.



Ravi Gosain
Managing Director
Erco Travels

So, this advisory will not affect much when it comes to leisure tourists."

Much of the concern among tour operators stems not from the advisory itself, but from the lack of clarity it presents to international travellers unfamiliar with India's vast geography.

"The 'Do Not Travel' and 'Reconsider Travel' labels can be confusing for foreign tourists, especially when large parts of India are unfairly clubbed together," said **Prateek Hira**, President & CEO, Tornos & River Rhapsody. "No Indian tour operator includes Naxal-affected areas in itineraries. Mentioning them only creates unnecessary doubts and damages our country's image."

Hira also criticised the inclusion of all Northeastern states and Bihar under caution. "It is highly disrespectful and unwarranted. The advisory appears to have been drafted without understanding the ground



Rajnish Kaistha
Director
Paradise Holidays India

realities. We anticipate a decline in bookings."

Rajnish Kaistha, Director, Paradise Holidays India, warns that perception is key, and the cascading effects of such advisories can be more damaging



Prateek Hira
President & CEO
Tornos & River Rhapsody

than anticipated. "Yes, there is already a decline in bookings, both from USA and Europe and now it has further dipped due to Israel-Iran war and air space being closed over the Middle East. An advisory of this kind makes it seem like the entire country is unsafe to the average American who looks at India as a whole in the absence of product knowledge."

Travel sentiment remains positive

In contrast to the alarming interpretations, many operators are reporting stable interest from US travellers. "At Kennedy Holidays, we curate experiences for discerning global guests, and we continue to receive consistent bookings from

the US," said **NSN Mohan**, CEO, Kennedy Holidays. "Tour operators and US travellers distinguish between advisory language and actual safety. The areas flagged have never been part of premium travel circuits."

In 2024, India welcomed 9.66 million foreign tourists, crossing pre-COVID benchmarks. "Of these, 1.6 million were from the US, making it India's largest long-haul inbound market. The trajectory continues to rise in early 2025, with 1.87 million foreign tourists arriving in the first two months alone, nearly 20 per cent of these from the US," Mohan added.

parency and on-ground expertise. "We are sharing real-time updates, working with trusted local partners and offering round-the-clock support," said Mehra. "With careful planning and destination knowledge, the advisory can be navigated without compromising the richness of the journey."

Mohan outlined a structured approach. "We lead with verified information from India's Ministry of Tourism, use certified guides and wellness-approved venues and offer concierge-style guest experiences. Traveller confidence remains high."

Marketing of destinations needed

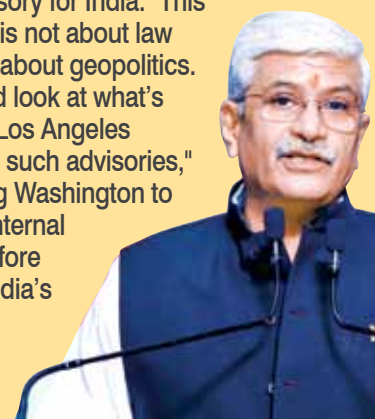
While the industry is confident about navigating the current advisory, there has been a growing consensus that the Indian government needs to be more proactive. "It is imperative that the Government of India address this issue through diplomatic channels," urged Hira. "Invite US Embassy officials to see the ground reality, organise roadshows and conduct familiarisation trips for American travel agents and media. Now is the time to protect and promote India's global tourism image."

How operators are responding

Tour operators are actively working to reassure nervous travellers with trans-

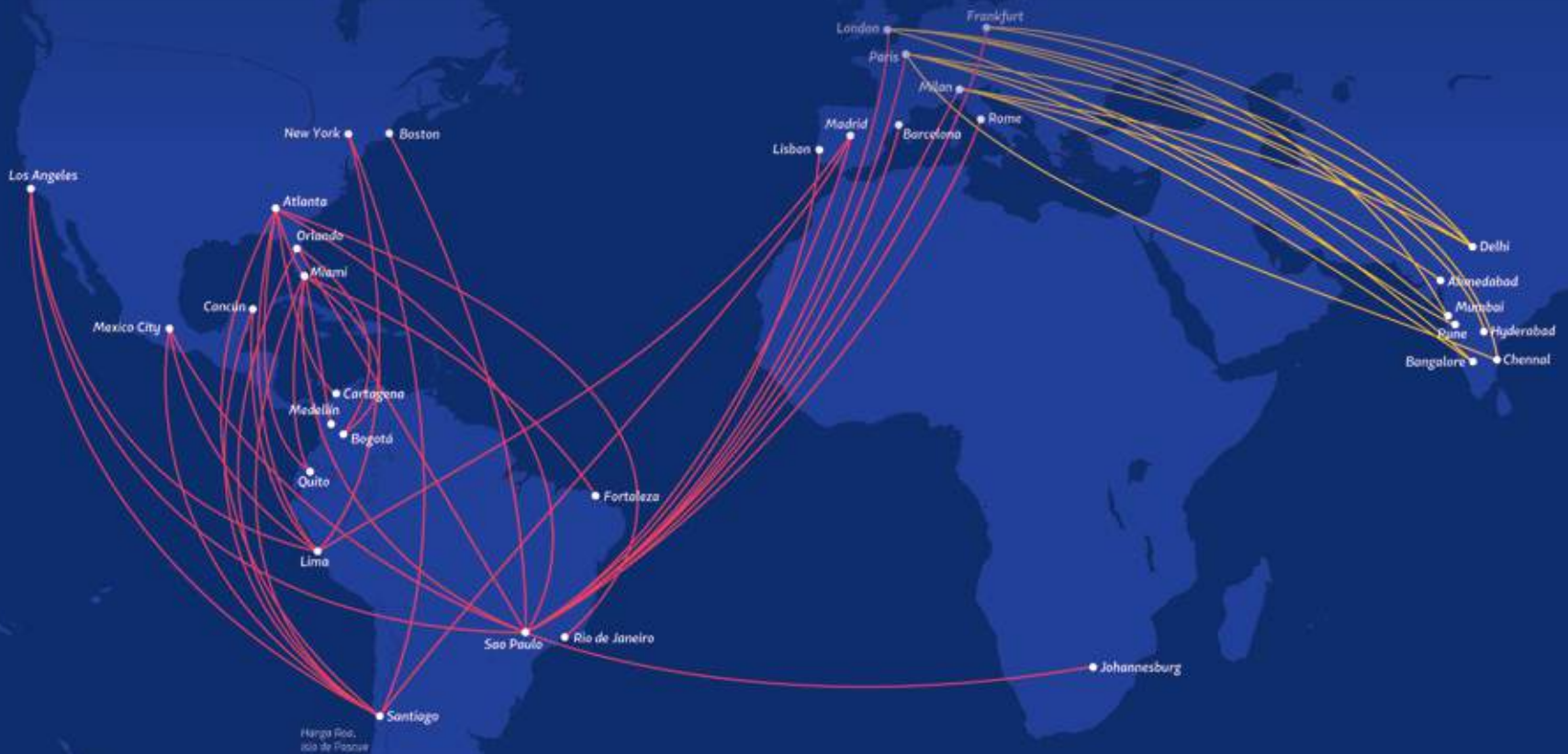
MINISTER SPEAKS

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Tourism Minister, criticised the recent US travel advisory for India. "This (US advisory) is not about law and order. It's about geopolitics. The US should look at what's happening in Los Angeles before issuing such advisories," he said, urging Washington to reflect on its internal challenges before questioning India's safety and democratic credentials.



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Agencies go for AI, skilling staff

With rapid advancements in technology, evolving traveller expectations and increasing focus on sustainability, continuous upskilling has become a non-negotiable priority across the travel and hospitality industry. Professionals are now engaging in destination-specific training, performance marketing, AI tools, and data analytics to enhance guest personalisation and operational efficiency. Structured learning through micro-modules, hands-on experience and executive programmes is helping teams stay agile. Emphasis is also being placed on soft skills, emotional intelligence and leadership development to manage both guest experience and internal growth. Training in areas like digital marketing, crisis handling, sustainable practices and compliance is seen as essential. Institutions are aligning curriculums with global trends, though some voices also call for more engaging and regionally relevant government-led modules. Across the board, the focus is clear that learning is no longer optional; it is the foundation for delivering meaningful, future-ready service.



Chirag Goyal
Founder & Managing Partner
Holiday Tribe

“Continuous learning and skill enhancement are vital to staying ahead in the ever-evolving travel-tech landscape. We follow a robust upskilling strategy that includes formal training, hands-on experience, and consistent & relevant exposure to learning opportunities. We place important focus on destination training.”



Varun Modi
Director
Euphoria world travels

“At Euphoria World Travels, we believe that continuous learning is the cornerstone of excellence. Our team regularly undergoes upskilling in areas like luxury travel management, crisis handling, and digital tools. We are also encouraging staff to take part in MOT-certified training programmes on sustainable tourism.”



Neil Patil
Founder
COO & CTO, Veena World

“We see continuous upskilling as essential to staying ahead, especially with the rise of AI and ML in travel. Personally, I'm focusing on performance marketing strategy, AI-driven customer segmentation, and tools to aid data mining and marketing automation. For the team, we are encouraging certifications.”



Chef Eabin Mathew
Principal, BGS Institute
of Hotel Management

“At BGS Institute of Hotel Management, we acknowledge the fast-paced evolution of the hospitality industry driven by technology, shifting guest expectations, and global sustainability trends. To stay aligned with these changes, we update our Hospitality Management curriculum annually after review.”



Dr Sagnik Chowdhury
Director (A&F), National Council for Hotel
Management & Catering Technology

“At NCHMCT, we update our curriculum regularly in consultation with industry and academia leaders to ensure it reflects current trends and global hospitality standards. For working professionals, we offer advanced courses like MSc (Hospitality Administration) covering several relevant topics.”



Pradeep Shetty
Vice President
FHRAI & past President, HRAWI

“HRAWI in collaboration with the FHRAI Institute of Hospitality Management (FHRAI-IHM) is committed to building future-ready talent. Through a range of workshops, master-classes and executive development programmes, we focus on operations, sustainability and digital transformation.”



Abhishek Goyal
CEO & Executive Director
Aeroprimo Group

“Upskilling is a core part of our growth strategy. We foster a culture of continuous learning through regular internal sessions on customer service, operational excellence and aviation trends, ensuring our teams stay ahead of industry standards. We actively encourage our staff to pursue various relevant certificate courses.”



Gauri Chavan
Director
Grape County Eco Resort & Spa

“We regularly invest time in learning about the latest marketing trends, sustainability in hospitality, guest experience innovation and data-driven decision-making. For the staff, we have created a learning environment where micro-learning, external workshops, and hands-on training are encouraged and scheduled.”



Jay Bhatia
Managing Director
Tulsidas Khinji Holidays

“I personally keep myself updated through global forums, destination workshops, and tourism board training focused on overseas destinations through digital transformation. Our staff undergo regular training in customer experience, GDS training with digital tools, and attend tourism board workshops and roadshows.”



Ashish Vohra
Founder & CEO
Onora Hospitality

“At juSta Hotels & Resorts, we believe upskilling is key to staying ahead. Our philosophy centres on developing both — the self and the team. We run leadership development programmes for senior team members, while frontline staff undergo training in guest handling and complaint resolution. We have aligned learning framework with MOT.”



Neeraj Kumar Ailawadi
Director
Travel Mudra

“To stay competitive and relevant in the ever-evolving travel and tourism industry, we focus on continuous learning and skill development, both individually and as a team. We are upskilling ourselves and our staff through destination training and webinars, technology and tools training and organising workshops.”



Neeti Sharma
Director, Intrepid Marketing
and Communications

“I regularly attend webinars, global travel trade conferences, and tourism board presentations to stay tuned in to evolving traveller sentiments. I'm currently mapping out a few professional development areas that I believe will strengthen our work across tourism representation, hotel marketing and B2B sales. These include short courses.”

Skål steps in to boost J&K tourism

The launch of Skål International India’s J&K chapter reflects a timely intervention to reconnect the region’s tourism players with national and international markets. Amid policy uncertainty, infrastructure challenges and post-crisis recovery, the move highlights how industry-led partnerships can play a crucial role in rebuilding Kashmir’s travel economy.

 Janice Alyosius

In a significant step towards reintegrating Jammu & Kashmir’s travel community into global tourism circuits, Skål International India has officially launched its local chapter in the region. While symbolic, the move reflects a deeper strategy to help local stakeholders recover from years of disruptions and slowdown in tourism activities.

Elaborating on the development, **Sanjeev Mehra**, President, Skål International India, said, “Our goal is to ensure at least one Skål chapter in every Indian state and Union Territory. J&K was a key part of this vision.”



Skål International India members at the launch of its local chapter in Jammu & Kashmir

By bringing local hoteliers, houseboat owners, transport providers and tour operators under the Skål umbrella, the chapter will strengthen business collaborations through Skål’s core philosophy – doing business among friends. “If I have a client travelling to Kashmir, I will coordinate with Skål members

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS KEY

❖ Skål plans to invite key industry players, including airlines, hotel chains and tourism boards to join hands in promoting Kashmir as a safe, welcoming destination. Sanjeev Mehra, President, Skål International India, said, “Reviving Kashmir’s tourism is a collective responsibility. Everyone in the hospitality industry needs to help this region reclaim its place on the global travel map.”

there for hotels, houseboats and transport. This not only guarantees quality and trust but helps our partners in J&K earn their fair share,” Mehra said.

Abdul Wahid Malik, President, Skål International J&K, said, “There are many new business opportunities within Skål .

The network of 500–600 members ensures that our agents are always connected.” However, Malik acknowledged the current challenges. “After the recent incident, tourism dropped by nearly 100 per cent in the first two weeks. It’s slowly returning with around 10 per cent business back. 📈

Expands presence with J&K club

Skål International inaugurated its Jammu & Kashmir club in Srinagar, marking its 19th chapter in India. The ceremony brought together Skål board members and local tourism stakeholders, reinforcing the spirit of collaboration. With a shared vision to promote the region’s culture and natural beauty, the new club signals fresh momentum for J&K’s tourism growth.



TAAI leads with rally for Valley

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) organised a ‘Rally for the Valley’ campaign to express solidarity with travel fraternity in Jammu & Kashmir and revive the region’s tourism. With tourism being a critical pillar of the state’s economy, the campaign not only aimed to bring back travellers but also restore confidence and pride among local stakeholders.

Janice Alyosius

Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister, Jammu & Kashmir, addressing TAAI’s ‘Rally for the Valley’ campaign in the Union Territory, extended his heartfelt thanks to the association. “They say you truly know who your friends are when times are bad. For the tourism fraternity in Jammu & Kashmir, to have TAAI come here under these circumstances, is a reflection of its commitment to the state. Thank you for being here and giving us this boost,” Abdullah said.

The Chief Minister acknowledged the challenges that had followed the terror attack in Pahal-



TAAI honours J&K CM Omar Abdullah for his outstanding leadership in Union Territory's recovery

gam and spoke of how they affected the local tourism economy. “We are almost starting from scratch. We had over 50 flights a day before April. Today, there are barely 15. A hotel that once charged ₹75,000 per night is now offering full-board stays for ₹20,000 with vacant rooms,” he highlighted.

Citing that tourism revival in J&K requires unified action, **Sunil Kumar**, President, TAAI, announced several initiatives as part of the campaign:

Family & Friends Campaign: A grassroots effort powered by TAAI’s 20 regional chapters to encourage personal and commu-

nity travel to the region.

Neighbourhood Media Meets: Planned across the country to generate positive stories on J&K.

Convention Spotlight: TAAI’s upcoming convention will feature a dedicated focus session on Kashmir, aimed at drawing global

attention to the region’s tourism potential.

Sameer Baktoo, President, TAAI J&K Chapter, said the campaign is already showing results. “TAAI was the first association in the country to start an initiative for the revival of tourism in Kashmir under the banner of Rally for the Valley. It has proven to be a game changer.”

Baktoo highlighted how local and regional efforts are amplifying the campaign. “We have had 20 regional TAAI chapters hold conferences in their respective states and union territories, sharing their experiences from the rally and giving a strong

shout-out to tourists and travel agents to promote Kashmir,” he said.

Looking ahead, roadshows are being planned across cities in the country to widen the campaign’s reach.

CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ **175+** delegates participated from across India
- ❖ Delegates visited key sites like Dal Lake, Gulmarg and Sonmarg.
- ❖ **20+** Regions & Chapters activated by TAAI to promote J&K

Extends support to J&K tourism

TAAI united over 175 members in Srinagar from 10–12 June 2025 to launch the bold ‘Rally for The Valley’ campaign, calling for nationwide support to revive tourism in J&K. With the presence of **Omar Abdullah**, CM, J&K, scenic visits and heartfelt solidarity, the event showcased the industry’s commitment to rebuilding travel confidence across the Valley.



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IATO triggers tourism revival in J&K

As part of its tourism revival initiative called 'Rubaroo with Jammu & Kashmir', the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) recently took a delegation of 22 members from different cities to the Valley. The delegation explored various tourism sites, facilities and properties in Pahalgam and Srinagar.



Nisha Verma

As part of 'Rubaroo with Jammu & Kashmir', several stakeholders in the Union Territory came forward to host the IATO delegation and showcase their varied offerings. The aim was to re-establish the destination as safe and secure for tourists, after the terror incident in Pahalgam. To strengthen their commitment and assure the delegation of the situation, **Omar Abdullah**, Chief Minister & Tourism Minister, Jammu & Kashmir, also met with the delegation and discussed plans to revive tourism in the valley.

Solidarity steps

Ravi Gosain, President, IATO, said that the aim



Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister & Tourism Minister, Jammu & Kashmir, addresses the IATO event in Srinagar

behind organising this fact-finding trip to Jammu & Kashmir was to showcase that Kashmir is safe to travel and to show solidarity to local stakeholders. "We were glad that things were quiet in Pahalgam and Srinagar. We wanted to show our support to the industry, and I urge people to come here as we need to back the local industry."

Way forward

When asked what the next

step in this endeavour will be, especially after the members return from the destination, Gosain revealed, "The purpose of visiting Kashmir with the tour operators was to create the buzz that Kashmir is safe. Many of them promoted the destination on their social media and shared first-hand experience with their clients and followers. Only when the tour operators are confident about the desti-

nation, can they instil that confidence in travellers. Many of our members have a few groups on hold, which are scheduled to travel in August or September. This visit would give them assurance to pursue their clients to not cancel trips."

Work continues

Abdullah, in his interaction with the delegation, also shared the same sentiment, saying, "We

are determined to work with trade partners to ensure that we put our best foot forward and project

IATO delegation visit's aim was to re-establish the destination as safe and secure for tourists, in the wake of the terror incident in Pahalgam

the best face of Kashmir as a tourist destination. We will be organising roadshows as part of our promotional efforts."

Yasha Mudgal, Commissioner cum Secretary, Tourism Jammu & Kashmir and **Raja Yaqoob Farooq**, Director, Tourism, Jammu & Kashmir were also present and assured full support from J&K Tourism Department. On the sidelines of 'Rubaroo with Jammu & Kashmir', the IATO delegation also held a meeting with the J&K Chapter.



Creating waves of confidence

A 22-member IATO delegation recently visited Kashmir under the 'Rubaroo with Jammu & Kashmir' initiative, which aimed to revive tourism and reinforce confidence in the Valley. With focused interactions, site visits, and support from the government, the visit marked a new chapter in trade engagement and collaboration with local stakeholders.





trade strategy takes off

Ethiopian Airlines has expanded its operations, including new flights to Hyderabad, and is actively pursuing collaborations to enhance its network and services. The airline is exploring new technologies and innovative solutions. **Bethelhem Dibaba**, Regional Director – India Subcontinent, Ethiopian Airlines speaks exclusively to **TRAVTALK** and shares details.



Hazel Jain

India is a significant market for Ethiopian, says **Bethelhem Dibaba**, the new Regional Director – India Subcontinent, Ethiopian Airlines. “Our presence in India has only been growing. Based on demand, we have been adding new flights, and effective 16 June 2025, Hyderabad has also joined our passenger service as our fifth gateway city in India. Travellers can now choose between Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad when visiting India. We have also finalised all preparations to start passenger flights to Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Porto and Hanoi besides Hyderabad in India.”



Bethelhem Dibaba
Regional Director - India Subcontinent, Ethiopian Airlines

A robust distribution network is crucial for airlines, especially in a diverse market like India. “It ensures efficient reach to customers and facilitates revenue generation. Ethiopian Airlines has strategically developed its distribution network by focusing on partnerships,

digital channels, and expanding its reach through codeshare agreements, among other initiatives,” Dibaba says.

Ethiopian currently owns 163 aircraft and has an additional over 100 aircraft on order.

Ethiopian Airlines has had various developments in recent months. “We have signed an agreement with Archer Aviation to deploy Midnight aircraft under the ‘Launch Edition’ programme, with plans to build an air taxi network in the region over time. Enhancing our charter service, we acquired a Boeing 737-800 aircraft dedicated exclusively to VIP and smaller group



The Ethiopian Airlines team at the launch of its new thrice-weekly passenger service connecting Addis Ababa and Hyderabad

charter flights. We have also signed various partnership agreements with industry leaders in technology to equip our, currently on order, Boeing 777X aircraft, the first of its kind in Africa with the latest technology products,” Dibaba adds.

Vision for India market

Ethiopian Airlines aims to

be among the top 20 global airlines by 2035 and sees India as a strategic market for growth. “We plan to increase frequency and expand our network in India, targeting both business and leisure travellers. To tap into emerging trends, we are focusing on digital platforms, personalised services, and partnerships with Indian travel agencies.”

NEW ADDITION

Ethiopian Airlines’ new passenger service to Hyderabad is three times a week, making it the fifth destination it operates in India. It is providing over 50 weekly passenger and cargo flights to five Indian cities.

❖ ET 682 Addis Ababa (ADD) to Hyderabad (HYD) – Mon, Wed, Sat

❖ ET 683 Hyderabad (HYD) to Addis Ababa (ADD) – Tue, Thu, Sat

Indian market fuels Bali villa demand

With Indian travellers increasingly seeking private luxury experiences in Bali, Impiana Private Villas Seminyak is positioning itself as the go-to retreat. Offering culturally-tailored services, exclusive packages and strategic partnerships in India, the resort aims to grow its share in the honeymoon, wedding and group travel segment.



Janice Alyosius

Impiana Private Villas Seminyak is emerging as a favourite among Indian travellers looking for privacy, luxury and convenience in Bali. “Our spacious private pool villas combine luxury amenities with personalised service in the heart of Seminyak,” says **Tiara Ong**, Senior Sales Manager, Impiana Villas Seminyak. “Indian guests love the ease of accessing beach clubs and restaurants while enjoying their own tranquil villa space.”

The property has seen increasing demand from Indian wedding and honeymoon segments. “We have



Tiara Ong
Senior Sales Manager
Impiana Villas Seminyak

curated romantic flower set-ups, couple spa experiences and offer intimate event spaces ideal for pre-wedding photoshoots or small ceremonies,” Ong explains, highlighting how the property caters to cultural preferences with care.



Impiana regularly introduces exclusive offers to support Indian travel agents, ranging from honeymoon packages with value-added inclusions to villa buy-outs for weddings. “Our products are designed exclusively for the Indian market, making it easier for agents to sell Seminyak as a premium villa destination,” says Ong.

Recognising the Indian market’s growing potential, Impiana is expanding its partnerships across

Indian metros and tier II cities. “We are investing in on-ground representation,

Our products are designed exclusively for the Indian market, making it easier for agents to sell Seminyak as a premium villa destination

sales calls and participating in Indian travel fairs to strengthen our visibility,” Ong adds.



Cultural familiarity also plays a key role in business. “We offer Indian vegetarian, vegan and Swaminarayan cuisine. Our team at Frangipani includes Indian staff to ensure communication is smooth and service feels

like home,” she said. With its unique blend of luxury, location and cultural sensitivity, Impiana Private Villas Seminyak is well-positioned to become a preferred choice for Indian travellers in Bali. 🌺

Cozmo expects surge in wellness

While the Indian travel industry goes through a transformation, Cozmo Travel has a clear vision — to be a catalyst in shaping India’s new-age travel landscape by delivering meaningful and scalable travel solutions. **Santosh Kanchan**, Country Head – India, Cozmo Travel, talks about how he keeps his company relevant and agile in this competitive and aggressive market.

 Hazel Jain

The Indian travel market is on the brink of a transformative leap — fuelled by accelerated digitisation, shifting consumer aspirations, and an expanding appetite for immersive, purpose-driven journeys. Over the next two years, **Santosh Kanchan**, Country Head – India, Cozmo Travel, anticipates strong growth in outbound travel from tier II and tier III cities, increased traction for curated group departures, and a marked surge in religious, wellness and experiential tourism.

“We are future-ready. Our strategy is anchored in innovation, agility and relevance. We are investing in



Santosh Kanchan
Country Head – India
Cozmo Travel

advanced digital platforms to enhance customer and partner engagement, forging high-value global alliances, and launching specialised verticals like MICE. We are also strengthening our international footprint by establishing multiple offices across our existing global

network — not only to promote those destinations as DMCs in India, but also to drive inbound tourism into India from these markets. This dual strategy is designed to create a cross-border travel ecosystem,” Kanchan reveals.

The company continues to align with tourism boards to spotlight emerging destinations. “Our vision is clear — to be a catalyst in shaping India’s new-age travel landscape by delivering seamless, meaningful, and scalable travel solutions,” he adds.

Role of agencies is transforming
He does not believe that the role of travel agencies is diminishing. “It is trans-

forming. In an age of online noise, travel professionals are becoming trusted curators. The future lies in spe-



The role of travel agencies is transforming. In an age of online noise, travel professionals are becoming trusted curators

cialisation, personalisation and integration. Agencies that can combine deep product knowledge, strong

supplier relationships and tech-enabled service delivery will thrive. At Cozmo, we view ourselves not just as tour operators, but as travel architects — offering end-to-end travel solutions with a human touch. The emphasis is shifting from just selling packages to crafting seamless journeys,” Kanchan says.

Relevance in today’s dynamic market is earned through adaptability, innovation and customer-centricity. Companies must continuously evolve with changing market behaviour. “At Cozmo Travel, we stay ahead by building specialised teams for niche segments, launching digital-first online platforms integrated with

latest AI technology, and leveraging data to drive personalised engagement. Additionally, we are expanding our domestic and international network to enhance reach and operational excellence. Our goal is not just to stay relevant — but to lead the way.”

CHANGING ROLE

- ❖ Travel professionals are becoming trusted curators
- ❖ Future lies in specialisation, personalisation and integration

An evening with Belluna Lanka

Intrepid Marketing, on behalf of Belluna Lanka Hotels & Resorts, hosted a dinner for key travel trade recently in Mumbai. Reyhan Morris, Managing Director, Belluna Lanka, specially flew down from Sri Lanka to meet the agents and talk about their stunning properties and expansion plans in Sri Lanka. He visited Mumbai and Bengaluru on this visit and plans to visit other key cities later this year.



Thailand promotes its North region among Indians

TTM Plus 2025 highlighted Thailand's cities from the Northern region like Chiang Mai. Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) maintains that the region embodies elements that resonate with preferences of Indian visitors for soulful travelling.

Amita Pandey

Thailand Travel Mart (TTM) Plus knocked on the doors of Indian travellers again from 4-6 June 2025 in Chiang Mai, introducing unexplored Thailand to Indian travellers — this time with a focus on the serene north. This year's edition of TTM showcased a fresh wave of tourism products and a strategic shift in Thailand's outreach framework toward its third largest source market — India.

In an exclusive session focused on the Indian segment, TAT officials acknowledged the key challenge that Northern Thailand remains off the radar for most Indian tourists.

Traditionally, Indian travellers have gravitated toward Southern Thai



Thapanee Kiatphaibool
Governor
TAT, Thailand

New products

TTM Plus 2025 brought together 406 international buyers, 450 sellers and 30 exhibitors from lesser-known Thai destinations — all under one roof with the projection to generate Thai baht 4.2 billion in tourism revenue. The product update showcased a renewed focus on culture, wellness and sustainability, with a distinct promotion of Lanna heritage.



Sirigesanong Trirattanasongpol
Director
TAT, New Delhi Office

from Bangkok to Chiang Mai with stopovers across five provinces.

Indian footfall in Thailand

Shedding light on the surge in Indian arrivals to Thailand, **Sirigesanong Trirattanasongpol**, Director, TAT, New Delhi Office, said that the momentum picked up after the visa-free initiative rolled out on 10 November 2023 and extended the visa-free stay from 30 to 60 days.

"While we did see a significant uptick in traveller numbers, the real game-changer was the expansion of the air service agreement," she said.

Incentive structure for MICE

Underlining the current incentive structure being offered by Thailand to Indian travel agents for weddings and MICE, **Trirattanasongpol**, said, "We have a scheme of sharing cost with our partners. For example, the incentive group coming to Thailand from a metro city, we offer ₹350 per pax, but the group size must be over 100. For weddings, the group size starts from 150, and we subsidise about ₹800 per head with the visit class ticket. For the incentive group coming from a tier II city, we subsidise ₹550 per pax for a group of

over 25 pax. However, we monitor and evaluate the rates every year."

Recovering from the past

Recalling Thailand's post-COVID roadmap to tourism recovery, **Patsee Permvongsene**, Executive Director, ASEAN, South Asia and South Pacific Region, TAT, said, "In 2021, our strategy began with the Phuket Sandbox



— a carefully controlled model designed to prove we could reopen safely."

Within just two years of reopening, Thailand welcomed over 2.12 million Indian tourists, marking an 8 per cent growth over the pre-pandemic figures.

Reinforcing how Thailand truly offers something for every kind of traveller, **Pinki Arora**, Marketing Representative, North & East India, Bangladesh, Bhutan & Nepal, TAT, said, "From adrenaline-pumping adventures like skydiving to intricate local embroideries, family-friendly activities to world-class fine dining, scenic golf courses and vibrant theme parks, here the experiences are available for each age group."



Kiteboarding



Checklist for Travel Agents

Kiteboarding is a water sport that blends surfing, paragliding and wakeboarding. But it demands expert supervision, suitable conditions and proper client fitness. Here are the key points every B2B agent should know:

Instructor qualifications: Instructors must be certified by recognised bodies, with at least three years' experience and valid CPR, lifeguard and powerboat licences.

Student eligibility: Clients must be strong swimmers, medically fit and sign a declaration disclosing any health conditions.

Equipment standards: Operators must provide well-maintained kites, boards, harnesses, helmets, life jackets and trainer kits suited to wind and skill levels.

Safety briefings: Clients must be briefed on equipment, site hazards, fitness needs, emergency procedures and must sign a liability waiver.

Rescue readiness: A safety boat with trained crew must always be on standby during sessions, especially in open waters.

Operating conditions: Avoid sessions during poor weather or after dark.

Medical preparedness: First aid kits and evacuation plans must be in place.

Documentation: Operators must keep updated records of instructor credentials, Standard Operating Procedures, emergency contacts and participant health declarations.

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



Patsee Permvongsene
Executive Director, ASEAN, South Asia
and South Pacific Region, TAT



Pinki Arora
Marketing Representative, North & East
India, Bangladesh, Bhutan & Nepal, TAT

cities for honeymoons, family holidays, weddings and MICE events due to convenient direct flights. TAT now aims to redirect that love northward with the tranquil hills, temples for spiritual fulfilment, Michelin-starred cuisine for foodies and luxurious 5-star retreats that cities like Chiang Mai have to offer. To turn this vision into reality, TAT is in talks with IndiGo airlines to explore the launch of direct flights from India to Chiang Mai.

According to **Thapanee Kiatphaibool**, Governor, TAT, Thailand sees wellness and medical travel as key attractions for Indians. In Northern Thailand, destinations like Fah Lanna Spa and ZiRa Spa are blending tradition with tranquillity through yoga, folk dance and Lanna-inspired therapies. A major announcement was the Blue Jasmine Rail Journey, launching this November — a nine-day luxury train experience

'It's time to market Philippines'

Delhi-Manila direct flight and visa-free entry for Indians are right moves to give a fillip to the Philippines' tourism. While these moves open new possibilities, Indian travel trade warns that without aggressive promotion, broader connectivity and deeper engagement with Indian agents, the country risks losing momentum to more established Southeast Asian destinations.



Janice Alyosius

India's first-ever direct air connection to the Philippines, starting 1 October 2025, is a much-needed and exciting development. Air India's five-times-a-week Delhi-Manila service, combined with the newly introduced visa-free entry for Indian tourists for up to 14 days, seems like the right formula to unlock the country's potential for Indian travellers. But while the step is promising, it may not be enough unless supported by robust on-ground marketing, infrastructure and stronger outreach by the Philippines Tourism Board.

Riaz Munshi, Managing Director, N. Chirag Travels,



Riaz Munshi
Managing Director
N. Chirag Travels

welcomed the new developments but stressed the need for a more strategic push. "The launch of Air India's direct flights between Delhi and Manila, along with the visa-free entry for Indian travellers, is a game-changer for the Philippines. It's a destination that perfectly



Guldeep Singh Sahni
Managing Director
Weldon Tours & Travels

fits the preferences of Indian travellers, but lack of visibility and direct connectivity have held it back. While these initiatives will definitely boost numbers, the Philippines must now focus on aggressive marketing and strengthening its presence in the Indian market. If the



Adil Karim
Joint Managing Director
FlyCreative Online

airfares are competitive, I see the Philippines emerging as a serious contender to established destinations like Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore."

According to **Guldeep Singh Sahni**, Managing Director, Weldon Tours & Travels, the lack of direct

connectivity had long kept the Philippines off the radar for Indian agents and travellers alike. "There were people interested in going to the Philippines, but without direct flights and with post-COVID uncertainties, it was not a popular choice." However, Sahni observed that interest has been picking up in the past year. "Now, with visa-free access and direct connectivity, those seeking hassle-free travel without layovers will find this attractive," he said, especially families and last-minute vacationers.

He believes the Philippines won't necessarily take away traffic from Thailand or Malaysia, but will attract seasoned travellers look-

ing for fresh experiences. "It's a different kind of holiday – beautiful beaches, unique landscapes. It may be slightly more expensive than other Southeast Asian countries, but for those exploring mid-haul destinations like Mauritius or Europe, it's still competitive."

Adil Karim, Joint Managing Director, FlyCreative Online, said the Philippines still has significant catching up to do. "Let's be honest – Thailand, Vietnam and Malaysia have had decades of consistent engagement with Indian travellers. They've invested in understanding the Indian mindset, worked closely with agents and maintained a constant promotional presence." 🇮🇳

Capitalising on bespoke experiences

Take Me 2 The World, a DMC blending luxury with local flavour, transforms New Zealand into a playground for travellers. Founded by Natarajan and Uma Subramanian in 2013, the company thrives on customisation and connection. In an interview with **TRAVTALK**, Subramanian talks about how personalisation is not just a strategy – it is the secret behind their multi-million-dollar global success.



Amita Pandey

A New Zealand-based Destination Management Company (DMC), Take Me 2 The World offers premium luxury itineraries, crafting bespoke adventure activities for elite travellers in the country. Founded by Natarajan Subramanian and his wife Uma in 2013, the DMC captivates clients from India to North America, building a multi-million-dollar brand on quality, exclusivity and tailored experiences, besides promoting sports tourism.

At the heart of Take Me 2 The World's success is its commitment to personal-



Natarajan Subramanian
Founder
Take Me 2 The World

sation, says Subramanian. According to him, every itinerary is meticulously crafted to meet the specific needs of each client. "For us, every itinerary is unique. We try to understand why our clients are coming to New Zealand

and what are their ticking points. For example, if someone is an adventurous person, we create an itinerary that gives them unique adventure activities. So, every itinerary is based on what unique experience a client is seeking."

Focus on luxury

For Take Me 2 The World, luxury is not just about staying in high-end accommodations or spending a lot of money but offering something exclusive. This approach has allowed them to create truly bespoke experiences that exceed their clients' expectations. "It could be a \$50 experience but if it is something very close to their heart, that is

pure luxury in our philosophy," asserts Subramanian.

One (common demand) is unique adventure activities and the other is dining experiences, combined with wine-tasting experiences

He adds that he has observed two common demands that are close to his Indian luxury clients.

"One is unique adventure activities and the other is unique dining experiences, combined with wine-tasting experiences."

Power of Sports Tourism

A closer look at the clientele curated by Subramanian reveals that he is harnessing the universal power of sports to elevate tourism to newer heights.

From hosting legendary voices from sports like Harsha Bhogle to joining hands with former New Zealand cricketer Jacob Oram, Subramanian believes in the game-changing impact of sports on global travel trends. "Collaboration with

Jacob Oram led to the creation of Kiwi Caps, a brand that brings young New Zealand cricketers to India for a life-changing experience. The programme includes training sessions, cultural experiences and a visit to an IPL game," says Subramanian.

CHANGE IN AVERAGE STAY

❖ **10 days**
Average stay of luxury travellers in New Zealand

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The visitors are extending their stays now

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3-4	International Conference on Tourism and Hospitality 2025	9:00 am
4	Cross Hotels & Resorts Webinar	3:00 pm
4-6	Tourism Fair Durgapur	1:00 pm
4-6	India Travel Mart - Shimla	9:00 am
10-12	TTF - Kolkata	10:00 am
11-12	GPS - Ahmedabad	10:00 am
11-12	Global Travel Marketplace	10:00 am
11-13	Travel & Tourism Fair - Kolkata	2:00 pm
16-18	IITM - Chennai	10:00 am
17	Rail Europe Webinar	3:00 pm
18-21	Korea International Tourism Show 2025	9:00 am
19-20	TTF - Patna	10:00 am
19-20	Travel & Tourism Fair - Patna	9:00 am
21-23	GBT A Convention 2025	10:00 am
24	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
30-31	GPS - Chandigarh	10:00 am

Insurance premium becomes costlier

around Air India has led to travellers making selective cancellations, especially on long-haul routes, such as Delhi–San Francisco and Mumbai–London. That said, these are isolated cases and not indicative of a mass shift away from the airline.”

Shift in travel insurance trends
Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, says he observes a distinct shift in how travellers approach travel protection in the aftermath of the recent Air India incident and amid growing global uncertainties.

“There is a clear move toward opting for higher sum insured options. Previously, many travellers settled for coverage between US\$50,000 and 75,000. However, we are now seeing a strong preference

for higher-value protection, with many choosing plans starting at US\$500,000 and even going up to US\$1 million.”

Many travellers settled for US\$50k to 75k coverage earlier. Now, we are seeing a strong preference for higher-value protection

Karvat says that for high medical-cost destinations like the USA, Europe, or parts of Asia, travellers are increasingly selecting premium plans, such as Asego Signature & Plus plans.

NEW OPENINGS

Flights

Route: Kochi to Bahrain (direct)
Frequency: Starts 15 June; daily service
Airline: IndiGo

Route: Hyderabad to Bahrain (direct)
Frequency: Starts 15 June; 4 flights a week
Airline: IndiGo

Route: Chennai to Muscat (direct)
Frequency: Starts 16 June; 3 flights a week
Airline: IndiGo

Route: Addis Ababa to Hyderabad (direct)
Frequency: Starts 16 June; 3 flights a week
Airline: Ethiopian Airlines

Route: Amman to Mumbai (direct)
Frequency: Starts 19 June; 4 flights a week
Airline: Royal Jordanian

Hotels

Hotel: The Fern, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh
Rooms: 75 rooms
Hotel: The Fern Nerul, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra

Rooms: 154 rooms
Hotel: The Fern Residency, Vadodara, Gujarat
Rooms: 83 rooms
Hotel: The Fern Residency, Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh

Rooms: 100 rooms
Brand: The Fern Hotels & Resorts

Hotel: Aryaville by Atmosphere, Jaipur, Rajasthan
Rooms: 244 rooms
Brand: Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts

Hotel: Sterling Varvasa, Lansdowne, Uttarakhand
Rooms: 33 colonial-style cottages
Brand: Sterling Holidays

OBITUARY



Priyanath Behera
(12 July 1978 – 26 June 2025)

Priyanath Behera, Vice President & CFO, Swosti Group, passed away on 26 June 2025. A seasoned professional with over 21 years of experience in the hospitality sector, Behera joined Swosti Premium, Bhubaneswar in 2011 as Executive Housekeeper and rose to President-cum-CFO of Swosti Group of Hotels Travels and Education in March 2025. Our heartfelt condolences to his family and colleagues.

Green certification to reap results

because tourism is a state subject. However, progress is visible in states like Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, which have included certification subsidies in their tourism policies, offering to cover up to 50 per cent of certification costs. States like Meghalaya and Madhya Pradesh are also showing interest, and GSTC is actively conducting training and awareness programmes with local tourism boards and officials. The council has offered to work with these states to operationalise their policies, provide training and explain the commercial and ecological benefits of certification.

Ramkumar stresses that hotels need to start their sustainability journey voluntarily before future mandates from India or feeder markets like Europe make certification

a requirement. He also urges hoteliers to look at sustainability as a risk mitigation strategy and a business imperative, not a CSR exercise.

Four pillars of sustainability
One major barrier for the certification is misconception—many hotels equate sustainability with environmentalism alone, or assume it requires heavy capital expenditure. GSTC defines sustainability across four pillars: Sustainability management, socio-economic sustainability, cultural sustainability and environmental sustainability. The first step is often as simple as measuring electricity, water and waste usage—not installing solar panels.

Another barrier is perception; some hoteliers see sustainability as “nice-to-have” rather than some-

thing that is core to business. Ramkumar argues this mindset is flawed. Sustainability reduces op-

As awareness on greenwashing grows, savvy travellers are increasingly demanding authentic, sustainable experiences

erational costs, improves staff retention, enhances customer loyalty and boosts brand reputation.

Importantly, GSTC does not differentiate between business hotels, home-stays, or FIT-oriented properties. “All hotels should be sustainable,

irrespective of size, location, or segment,” he asserts. Given that hotel guests typically consume 7–9 times more water than local residents, the impact of the sector is immense—and so is its responsibility.

Certification & credibility: Fighting greenwashing
In a marketplace flooded with unverified “green” claims, GSTC certification offers third-party validation, setting verified properties apart from competitors. Ramkumar stresses that certification is more than a label—it is a stamp of credibility backed by independent audits.

As awareness on greenwashing grows, savvy travellers are increasingly demanding authentic, sustainable experiences and questioning vague sustainability claims.

Carbon footprint: A hidden crisis in Indian tourism
Ramkumar believes a major reason for delayed action is the underrated environmental impact of tourism. Unlike industries like coal and steel, tourism’s carbon emissions have largely “flown under the radar”. However, with each hotel potentially emitting hundreds of tonnes of carbon annually, governments need to acknowledge tourism as a major carbon contributor.

What next?
India’s hospitality sector must act now, voluntarily embracing sustainability to stay ahead of international standards, consumer expectations and upcoming regulations. As more states and operators get on the board, GSTC hopes to witness a significant increase in certified Indian hotels.

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MOVEMENTS

LORDS HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi

Lords Hotels & Resorts has appointed **PRASAD BAL** as the Associate Vice President – Revenue and Distribution. With over a decade of experience in revenue strategy, distribution management, market analysis and dynamic pricing models, Bal brings valuable expertise to the Lords Hotels team. In his new role, he will be responsible for optimising distribution channels and maximising revenue through proactive selling strategies and targeted action plans.



MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

Bengaluru

SHREYA SHARMA has been appointed as Multi Property Director of Marketing for Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel and Convention Centre, Marriott Executive Apartments UB City and The Artiste Kochi, a Tribute Portfolio Hotel. With an illustrious career spanning over a decade in various industries, including hospitality, real estate and consumer tech, Sharma has consistently demonstrated her ability to lead teams in devising tailored communication strategies.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BENGALURU

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru appoints **NIDHI BERRY** as the Commercial Director. With over two decades of distinguished experience across India's premier hospitality brands, Berry brings a nuanced understanding of the country's travel landscape, coupled with a strategic commercial acumen and an empathetic, people-centric leadership style. Her appointment marks a significant step forward in the luxury major's journey, perfectly mirroring the brand's ethos of intuitive luxury.



NOVOTEL PUNE

Pune

Novotel Pune has appointed **MANALI KHATAVKAR** as the Marketing and Communication Manager. With over 12 years of rich and diverse experience across the hospitality, healthcare and event sectors, Khatavkar steps into her new role with a reputation for strategic thinking, digital innovation and impactful brand storytelling. In her new role, she will lead the hotel's integrated marketing & communication initiatives and oversee brand positioning among other things.



JW MARRIOTT HOTEL BENGALURU

Bengaluru

JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru appoints **KANISH KAUL** as the Food & Beverage Manager. With over a decade of rich and diverse experience across leading hospitality brands, Kaul brings with him a dynamic approach to elevating food and beverage operations, guest experiences and service innovation. A passionate and motivated leader, Kaul began his career in hospitality in 2012 and steadily rose through the ranks, most recently serving as the Assistant Director of Events at The Ritz-Carlton, Pune.



HYATT REGENCY DEHRADUN RESORT AND SPA

Dehradun

Hyatt Regency Dehradun Resort and Spa has appointed **RAJINIKANTH RAMADASS** as Director of Sales & Marketing, bringing nearly 15 years of luxury hospitality expertise to the property. Having shaped an impressive journey through prestigious hospitality brands and delivering standout performance at Park Hyatt Chennai and Grand Hyatt Goa, Ramadass brings strategic insight and market intelligence to his new role. He aims to redefine the resort's approach to luxury celebrations and corporate events.



SAYAJI HOTELS

Mumbai

Sayaji Hotels has elevated **SUMERA DHANANI** to the role of Corporate Head – Business Development. In her new role, Dhanani's mandate includes identifying new business opportunities, strengthening the brand's footprint across emerging markets and cultivating high-impact partnerships that align with Sayaji's ethos of heartfelt, personalised hospitality. Dhanani is uniquely positioned to unlock new value streams and steer Sayaji into its next transformative phase of growth and innovation.



LULU GROUP INDIA

India

LuLu Group India has appointed **RAHUL RAJ** as the Head of Hospitality, marking a significant milestone in the group's journey to redefine luxury and lifestyle experiences across the Indian hospitality sector. Raj is no stranger to the LuLu Group, having successfully led Hyatt Regency Trivandrum since its inception. With a distinguished career spanning over 20 years, he brings with him a wealth of experience from some of the world's most respected hospitality brands.



SHANGRI-LA BENGALURU

Bengaluru

Shangri-La Bengaluru has appointed **MEENA REWARI** as the Director of Sales and Marketing. With over two decades of experience across leading hospitality brands, Rewari brings a wealth of expertise in sales strategy, diplomatic engagement and market expansion to her new role. She has led transformative sales and marketing initiatives at various luxury properties, such as JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar, Park Hyatt Chennai and Hyatt Regency Delhi.



RAMEE GROUP OF HOTELS

Mumbai

Ramee Group of Hotels has appointed **AKHIL GAD** as the Digital Marketing Manager, reinforcing the brand's commitment to strategic growth and innovation in the digital space. With over 10 years of experience in the hospitality and marketing sectors, Gad brings a deep understanding of brand storytelling, customer engagement and digital strategy. His expertise will be instrumental in shaping Ramee Group's online and offline presence to further enhance brand visibility.



LORDS HOTELS & RESORTS

Mumbai

Lords Hotels & Resorts appoints **RAHUL KHARAT** as Corporate Human Resource Manager. With a bright career spanning over 27 years, his core strength lies in talent acquisition, employee engagement, policy formulation and administration. In his new role, Kharat will spearhead the group's talent strategy, focusing on enhancing employee satisfaction, streamlining recruitment processes and fostering a culture of continuous development.




HYATT CENTRIC BALLYGUNGE KOLKATA

Kolkata

Hyatt Centric Ballygunge Kolkata appoints **BARNENDU DAS** as Human Resource Manager, recognising his expertise in hospitality human resources and his commitment to fostering a vibrant, people-first culture. With a career spanning over 13 years, Das brings a rich background in human resources, learning & development and talent management across leading hospitality and corporate brands. He is an alumnus of Edinburgh Napier University (UK) and Symbiosis Institute of Business Management.



 <p>DDP PUBLICATIONS PRIVATE LIMITED CIN: U22210DL2012PTC230432</p>	<p>Sanjeet Editor & Publisher</p> <p>Editorial Team: Devika Jeet Nisha Verma Sushil Kumar Hazel Jain Janice Alysius</p> <p>Design Team: Sudhir Mudgal Nityanand Misra</p> <p>Production: Anil Kharbanda, General Manager Ramesh Gupta, Manager</p>	<p>Advertising Team (Delhi)</p> <p>Nikhil Jeet Arumita Gupta Jaspreet Kaur</p> <p>Advertising Team (Mumbai)</p> <p>Sachita Saran Harshad Ashar Samantha Pereira</p> <p>Advertisement Designers</p> <p>Nitin Kumar Aditya Pratap Singh Anil Khater Ghertti</p> <p>Circulation: Ashok Rana</p>	<p>DDP is a publication of DDP Publications Private Limited. All information in DDP is derived from sources, which we consider reliable and a sincere effort is made to report accurate information. It is passed on to our readers without any responsibility on our part. The publisher regret that he cannot accept liability for errors and omissions contained in this publication, however caused. Similarly, opinions/views expressed by third parties in abstract and/or in interviews are not necessarily shared by DDP. However, we wish to advise our readers that one or more recognised authorities may hold different views than those reported. Material used in this publication is intended for information purpose only. Readers are advised to seek specific advice before acting on information contained in this publication which is provided for general use, and may not be appropriate for the readers' particular circumstances. Contents of this publication are copyright. No part of DDP or any part of the contents thereof may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted in any form without the permission of the publication in writing. The same rule applies when there is a copyright or the article is taken from another publication. An exemption is hereby granted for the extracts used for the purpose of fair review, provided two copies of the same publication are sent to us for our records. Publications reproducing material either in part or in whole, without permission could face legal action. The publisher assumes no responsibility for returning any material solicited or unsolicited nor is he responsible for material lost or damaged.</p>	<p>This publication is not meant to be an endorsement of any specific product or services offered. The publisher reserves the right to refuse, withdraw, amend or otherwise deal with all advertisements without explanation.</p> <p>All advertisements must comply with the Indian and International Advertisements Code. The publisher will not be liable for any damage or loss caused by delayed publication, error or failure of an advertisement to appear.</p>	<p>DDP is printed, published and edited by Sanjeet on behalf of DDP Publications Pvt. Ltd., printed at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., C-52, DDA Sheds Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi-110020 and published at 72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110 001 Ph.: +91-9818767141, +91-9650399920</p> <p>MUMBAI: 504, Marine Chambers, 43, New Marine Lines, Opp. SNDT College, Mumbai - 400 020, India, Ph.: +91-22-22070129; 22070130</p> <p>MIDDLE EAST: Durga Das Publications Middle East (FZE) Z1-02, PO Box: 9348, Saf Zone, Sharjah, UAE Ph.: +971-6-5528954, Fax: +971-6-5528956</p>
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Digi Yatra for foreign tourists, a reality soon?

Digi Yatra Foundation is working on a pilot scheme for the creation of electronic passport-based credentials. The foundation is also working on rolling out Digi Yatra at 17 more airports across India, as well as using the app for border-crossing.



Hazel Jain

From being one extra step for passengers between booking and boarding to being a means for smart travel, Digi Yatra app has become India's pride. The facility is being extended to more and more airports, including all the new airports like the Navi Mumbai International Airport and Jewar Airport. Sharing details on the Digi Yatra app progress, **Suresh Khadakbhavi**, CEO, Digi Yatra Foundation, said, "We are currently at 24 airports and will add four more airports in the next month and another 13 airports in the next three to six months. That will take the total to 40 airports across India, which will also cover tier I and tier II city airports."

Meanwhile, more exciting news is brewing. Khadakbhavi's team is already working on a pilot scheme for the creation of elec-



Digi Yatra Foundation team attends the Inter Passenger Terminal Show (IPTS) 2025 held in Mumbai

tronic passport-based credentials. "It's under User Acceptance Testing (UAT),

stakeholders, like the immigration authorities, and ensure that it is acceptable to all stakeholders. Once the electronic passport-based enrolment starts, the first step would be to make it available for international passengers flying domestic routes," he says.

Indian passport holders cannot use it since it does not allow passport scan. Khadakbhavi says, "Our efforts, including the 'd-KYC' campaign initiative, helped us drive growth in

We are currently at 24 airports and will add four more airports in the next month and another 13 airports in the next three to six months

which is the final phase of software testing where real users test the software. After that, there are certain contractual obligations and documents to be signed. We should then be able to have a process where anyone with an electronic passport (e-passport) can enrol into Digi Yatra."

Digi Yatra also aims to conduct an international pilot project, enabling foreign passengers with e-passports to experience its seamless ecosystem. "Border crossing is a sensitive topic. Therefore, we first need to align with various

AI in aviation

Khadakbhavi believes that AI has huge potential in aviation, especially in terms of increasing efficiency, enhancing passenger experience and reducing operating costs. "With all the information that is possible with all the predictive tools that can be done using AI, I do believe airports will become much more efficient – not only in terms of landside operations and terminal operations, but also airside operations. We are just at the beginning of this journey; there is a lot to be done."

As of today, users need their Aadhaar card to use Digi Yatra app. So, non-

Our partnership with IATA for the IATA One-ID and Digi Yatra for enabling Digi Yatra for international flow will drive further growth in 2025

2024. Our partnership with IATA for the IATA One-ID and Digi Yatra for enablement of Digi Yatra for international flow will drive further growth in 2025."

In time, the platform intends to support all 22 official Indian languages.

ON THE ROLL

Digi Yatra has crossed 14 million users and has facilitated over 58 million journeys. The biometric-based passenger entry system has 30,000 new users signing up daily and adoption as high as 60 per cent at some airports.

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