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# How to get Gen Z to set sail on cruises?

Cruise lines are realising that the future is the younger generation. Millennials and Gen Z – and even Gen Alpha – are becoming consumer targets for the cruise industry. Will the industry be able to enthuse them enough to start planning a cruise holiday soon?



Hazel Jain

Today's young travellers, especially millennials and Gen Z, are well-informed, aware and value experiences that match their mindset, says **Varun Chadha**, CEO, Tirun Travel Marketing. "We are focused on ensuring they have access to the kind of experiences they are truly seeking — from high-energy adventures and culturally immersive experiences to luxury escapes and expeditions to the world's most remote destinations. Our strategy is digital-first and insight-led, targeting audiences through social media with content that speaks directly to their interests. We stay relevant by listening closely. We track audience behaviour, gather information through our travel partner network, website, and customer feedback through the booking process, and shape offerings



**Varun Chadha**  
CEO  
Tirun Travel Marketing

around what today's travellers actually seek."

A great example of this is Tirun's upcoming Diwali sailing aboard Ovation of the Seas, Royal Caribbean, on 27 October 2025, where it has curated a 'Glo-cal' celebration that features a performance by Hari Sukhmani — whose blend of contemporary and folk music resonates with Gen Z and millennial audiences. This is paired with an Indian street food party and garba night. With the launch of a



**Isha Goyal**  
Executive Director & CEO  
STIC Travel Group

new ship every year, like Star of the Seas and Celebrity Xcel launching later this year, travellers always have something new to look forward to.

## Cruises: Immersive experiences

**Isha Goyal**, Executive Director & CEO, STIC Travel Group, believes that there is a cruise for every kind of traveller. "In India, we have seen a marked shift; younger travellers are no longer viewing cruises as passive holidays, but rather



**Nishith Saxena**  
Founder & Director  
Cruise Professionals

as immersive, high-impact experiences that offer the best of both worlds — adventure and comfort," she says.

STIC has seen a "noticeable rise" in demand for small ship luxury and expedition cruising. "We are spotlighting experiences that resonate with this audience — polar expeditions, island-hopping in Greece, snorkelling in the Seychelles, and other

Contd. on page 12 ▶

# India on cusp of cruise tourism revolution

India's cruise tourism is ready for a change with 'India Cruise Forum', a multi-city B2B initiative, jointly launched by STIC Travel Group and DDP Publications.



Surbhi Sharma

## Cruise demand soars in India

India's cruise tourism is set to sail into a bold new era, and the travel trade is invited onboard. India Cruise Forum, a multi-city B2B initiative, jointly launched by STIC Travel Group and DDP Publications, is gearing up

With cruise holidays witnessing unprecedented interest from Indian travellers, the timing could not be better. Indians are no longer just dreaming of luxury liners and exotic ports, they are actively booking them. Boosted by government



## INDIA CRUISE FORUM

to connect global cruise players with India's most dynamic travel sellers.

Kicking off soon with exclusive B2B networking events in Ahmedabad and Kolkata, the forum will conclude in a flagship event in Mumbai in February 2026.

investments in port-led development and new cruise terminals, India is poised to emerge as a serious global cruise contender.

Despite the opportunity, the trade's readiness remains critical. That is where the initiative steps

Contd. on page 12 ▶

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# Moscow meet ends on high note

More than 200 delegates from India attended the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India's (OTOAI's) 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, organised at the Carlton Hotel in Moscow, Russia. The four-day convention witnessed B2B meetings between the delegates and local partners. It gave the visitors a glimpse into the offerings of Moscow and St Petersburg.



Nisha Verma

Kicking off the convention, **Himanshu Patil**, President, OTOAI, said the event will educate the members about Russia as a destination and will change the perception of the country for tourists. "The business sessions and panel discussion went very well. The delegates also had B2B meetings and exchanged ideas with the local partners. The feedback I have received was positive," he said.

#### The theme

According to him, the best takeaway for the delegates was the theme 'F3: Fast Forward Future



OTOAI team after wrapping up a successful convention in Moscow, Russia

— the intelligent travel'. "The way technology and travel are rapidly changing, the best takeaway is to adapt to these changes. In today's world of social media, what we will showcase from Moscow and St Petersburg, will let people know how this destination is not only beautiful but also how safe it is."

#### Why Moscow?

**Shravan Bhalla**, Vice President, OTOAI and Chairman, Convention, said that the association chose Moscow as the host city for its convention because for the past few months, the association team members were investing their time in a destination which benefitted not just the desti-

nation but also the Indian tour operators.

"During our various meetings with Moscow City Tourism Committee in India, as well as in Moscow on recent visits, we found the city to be one of the world's most fascinating and safe, rich in history, culture and architectural beauty."

#### Huge participation

**Sidharth Khanna**, General Secretary, OTOAI, revealed that this was one of the biggest conventions that OTOAI has organised. "Apart from 200 delegates from India, we had more than 50 DMC suppliers from Russia, primarily from Moscow and St Petersburg." **Monia Kapoor**, Joint

Secretary, OTOAI and Co-Chairman, Convention, added, "We have had an interactive B2B session. Most of the agents



**The way technology and travel are rapidly changing, the best takeaway is to adapt to these changes**

are going back armed with enough information and knowledge." 🐦



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## India's new-age cruise story sets sail

When we talk about cruises, images of Miami beaches or Mediterranean ports often come to mind first. However, did you know that by this year end, India's cruise market is predicted to rake in nearly \$230 million in revenue? That figure is set to soar further over the next few years, with projections indicating an impressive compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8.53 per cent. By 2029, experts estimate revenues could hit close to \$320 million.

So, what is driving these rosy forecasts? For starters, India boasts a rapidly expanding middle-class population eager for exotic vacations beyond traditional resorts. No longer confined to older couples and extended family outings, today's cruise-goers include everyone from adventure-seeking millennials embarking on polar expeditions to Gen Z travellers exploring newfound freedom aboard lavish liners. Throw in some Hollywood-inspired glamour — thanks largely to films showcasing idyllic sea voyages — and suddenly, taking a cruise becomes not just desirable but almost trendy.

However, here is where things get interesting... Despite all its coastal beauty and navigable rivers, India has not quite cracked the code yet as a major cruise destination within its own borders. With only around 1.2 million passengers expected annually by 2029 — a tiny fraction compared to giants like America — there remains enormous untapped potential waiting to be harnessed. To capitalise fully on this opportunity, both private players and policymakers must collaborate effectively. Efforts such as the Cruise Bharat Mission and Maritime India Vision 2030 aim to position India as a top-tier player globally. Developing state-of-the-art terminals along key hubs nationwide would certainly help attract international operators looking for profitable new markets.

Those already invested in selling cruises domestically, have plenty of room too! Technology-driven training programmes targeting travel agents, along with innovative marketing strategies, could prove to be a game changer. We hope that our collective efforts turn these forecasts into success stories soon.

# Airports doubling up as experience centres?

Passenger expectations from airports have changed dramatically over the years. **Gavin Eccles**, Managing Partner, GE Consulting & Advisory, underlines trends that airports must adapt to unlock new opportunities to generate non-aero revenue.

**B**ack in 2019, it was clear that airports were totally focused on airlines as their customer, and efforts were largely towards getting more monies from airline related activities, such as leveraging the runway, gates and faster turnarounds to squeeze money from landing and passenger charges.

However, earnings from airlines do not provide enough revenue to support a successful airport business, and attention must turn to 'non-aviation' activities — where the focus is on making money from the passengers. In

vision of Delhi, and what we can call an aerotropolis project, was first considered for the development of the new Helsinki airport in Finland. The vision of 'Aviaopolis', as it was called in those days, was to bring an airport together with business and communities. With Adani Airports such a vision is also two-fold — how can we blend the vision of being an airport operator as well as city-side projects that use the benefits of an airport's location to embark on shopping, entertainment, hospitality and business-led services, where the customer may not necessarily be a passenger.

With Adani Airports, and in their words, the introduction of the Adani platform and app allows the airport operator to be, "India's go-to platform for unparalleled travel and lifestyle experiences and take the nation's digital journey into the future," allowing the traveller to have a seamless experience throughout the whole airport experience — the benefit being that by knowing something about the traveller, they can enhance the airport experience and provide robust product and service recommendations that contribute back to non-aviation targets.

In essence, every customer interaction, before, during and after their journey through the airport, is an opportunity to drive

revenue. By identifying, optimising and monetising each touchpoint, Adani Airports, and others with the same mindset, can transform passenger engagement into measurable financial gains.

**In reality, the airport is a shopping centre, leisure centre, tourist attraction for travellers and a 'sense of place' for the locals and communities**

### Emerging trends in non-aero revenues

As passenger behaviours and technological innovations evolve, airports must adapt to emerging trends to unlock new opportunities for non-aero revenue.

❖ Subscription models — predictable revenue streams through subscription-based services for parking, lounge access and fast track security. These models appeal to frequent travellers, particularly business passengers, who value consistency and convenience.

❖ Virtual and augmented reality — enhancing retail and entertainment with AR-enabled wayfinding,

virtual fitting rooms and immersive displays. These tools provide personalised, immersive shopping experiences that cater to tech-savvy and leisure passengers seeking novelty.

❖ Hyper-personalisation — leveraging AI and machine learning to deliver tailored offers in real time. By understanding individual preferences through data, airports can provide passengers with bespoke recommendations for retail, dining and other services, increasing satisfaction and spend.

❖ Pop-up concepts — temporary retail and food and beverage installations that attract brands and engage passengers. These dynamic spaces cater to changing passenger demographics and trends, creating excitement and encouraging impulse purchases.

Airports must be positioned to become dynamic, high-performing hubs of innovation and profitability — unlocking non-aero revenue at every touchpoint and optimising the entire customer journey, airports can create resilient and scalable business models that adapt to shifting market demands. Some may say a long-way from just being operational-excellent. Is the airport CEO ready?

**Earnings from airlines do not provide enough revenue to support airport business, and attention must turn to 'non-aviation' activities**

reality, the airport is a shopping centre, leisure centre, tourist attraction for travellers and a 'sense of place' for the locals and community to shop, dine and be entertained. If only that was easy!

### Bringing the vision closer to home

As India embarks on a vision where more airports are going into the hands of private players, commercial activities are taking precedence over core airport services. We saw this with GMR and the development of the Aerocity project at Delhi airport, where the airport operator is predominantly in the real-estate and hospitality business. This

### AEROTROPOLIS PROJECT

The concept of aerotropolis project was first considered for the development of the new Helsinki airport in Finland. The vision of 'Aviaopolis', as it was called in those days, was to bring an airport together with business and communities.



**Gavin Eccles**  
Managing Partner  
GE Consulting & Advisory

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



# 90% consumers rely on brands for unique experiences

Collinson International’s latest report states that nine out of 10 consumers in India rely on brands for unique, transformative experiences and are increasingly turning to loyalty rewards and benefits to access unique, transformative experiences.



Collinson International released its new Asia Pacific research titled ‘2025 Asia Pacific Consumer Happiness Report: How to Generate Lifetime Customer Value in a Transformation Economy’. Surveying over 4,000 respondents across eight markets in Asia Pacific, it explores the role of brands in driving consumer happiness. Findings reveal that brands have an opportunity to become powerful drivers of happiness.

Consumers are drawn to experiences that enrich their lives far beyond basic consumption — experiences that nurture connection, inspire personal growth and help bridge the gap between the world they live in and their aspirations — whether it is travelling to see their favourite band perform live or attending a global sports tournament. This shift is well underway in India, where 92 per cent of consumers rely on brand rewards for unique and exclusive experiences, compared to 81 per cent across APAC. Younger millennials (98 per cent) and Gen Z (93 per cent) respondents in India resonate strongly, and both demonstrate a clear preference



for experiential activities in recent years.

Compared to 66 per cent of APAC respondents, 80 per cent of respondents in India reported being satisfied with the rewards and benefits they receive from brands. Among the respondents in India, Millennials (84 per cent) indicated the highest levels of happiness, followed by Gen Z (77 per cent), Gen X (81 per cent), and Boomers (74 per cent). These insights signal a clear opportunity for brands to become powerful drivers of consumer happiness. By providing access to otherwise unreachable experiences, brands can build deeper emotional bonds, and, in turn,

Consumers are drawn to experiences that help bridge the gap between the world they live in and their aspirations

strengthen brand affinity and lasting loyalty.

**Brand engagement**  
When brands contribute to their happiness, consumers intentionally and positively engage with them. The top actions respondents in India take include trying new products (56 per cent), consistently purchasing from the same brand (54 per cent); as well as engaging with brands on social media (52 per cent).

While brand-driven happiness influences positive consumer behaviour, loyalty manifests differently across generations. Older respondents in India, particularly Gen X (55 per cent) and Boomers (61 per cent), demonstrate higher brand

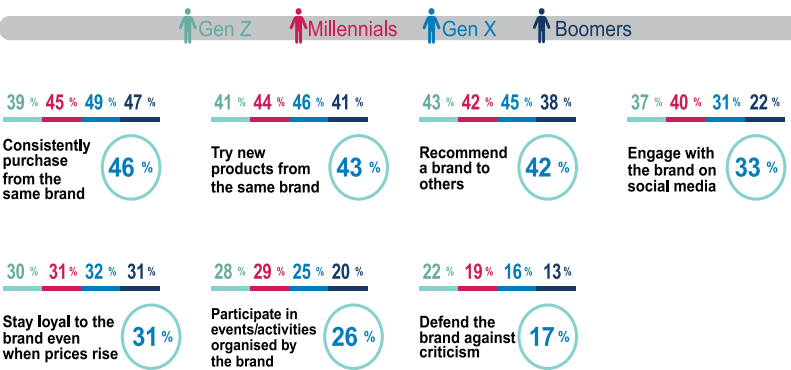
loyalty through consistent purchasing. In contrast, younger generations show loyalty by engaging beyond buying: 54 per cent of Gen Z and 57 per cent of Millennials interact with brands on social media, compared to 53 per cent of Gen X and 30 per cent of Boomers.

### IMPORTANT HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Younger generations in India – Millennials (98%) and Gen Z (93%) – are driving the shift towards experiential brand engagement in the transformation economy
- ❖ 56% of respondents in India prioritise rewards that strengthen ties with family and friends over self-fulfillment
- ❖ Brands can become powerful drivers of customer happiness by providing access to transformative experiences that bridge the gap between the world they live in and their aspirations

## Happiness is a powerful driver of positive brand engagement and loyalty

Brand-led happiness drives tangible brand loyalty and advocacy. When a brand has contributed to happiness, respondents in Asia Pacific participate in the following actions:



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# 'India next big cruise opportunity'

With India becoming central to global cruise strategies, **Ratna Chadha**, Co-Founder & Chairperson, TIRUN Travel Marketing, emphasises its growing outbound demand. Trust, training & tech are key to empowering Indian travel partners, while destinations like the Mediterranean and Galapagos lead cruise itineraries.

Surbhi Sharma

India's booming economy and expanding outbound travel market have positioned it as an undeniable force in global tourism. For the cruise industry, this presents an opportunity that can't be missed. **Ratna Chadha**, Co-Founder & Chairperson, TIRUN Travel Marketing, asserts, "Cruise companies can no longer afford to ignore India. With the country poised to become the world's third-largest economy, India's growing appetite for luxury and experiential travel is driving global cruise brands to rethink their engagement strategies."

**Trade engagements**  
According to her, India



**Ratna Chadha**  
Co-Founder & Chairperson  
TIRUN Travel Marketing

is no longer a peripheral market — it is central to global cruise growth, both for outbound travellers and potential domestic operations. The strategy is clear — leverage precision-targeted technology to reach the right audience and empower travel partners through dedicated tools and support.

This "win-win" approach, she notes, ensures that travel agents remain committed to cruising as a key vacation category.

**Trust, training & tech**  
Trust, training and technology form the foundation of her team's long-standing commercial partnerships with the Indian trade. Over the last 30 years, Chadha has built enduring industry relationships by keeping agents in the loop, ensuring transparency, and offering tailored incentives.

**Regions in demand**  
The trade, she believes, already understands how to extract profitability — particularly with support from the cruise brands' robust sales tools. Mediterranean and Northern



Europe cruises continue to lead the travel demand, followed by niche, high-value itineraries to Antarctica, the Arctic and the Galapagos. Popular passenger segments include affinity groups, FITs, weddings and incentive travellers.

**Why prioritise cruise?**  
For the travel trade, the takeaway is simple — the cruise wave is rising in India. Those who build the right alliances today stand

to gain from an emerging luxury category that is fast becoming a mainstream choice for Indians, she said.



## Cruise-specific protection plans

Cruise travel, once a niche holiday choice, has now transformed into one of the most thriving travel segments. **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego, explains why travel professionals must offer cruise protection with every booking. Protecting cruise clients against the risks of sea travel is not just good practice — it is essential for sustainable, reputation-driven business.

TT Bureau

Cruise travel has officially gone mainstream in India. From short luxury sailing along India's western coastline to international voyages across the Mediterranean, Caribbean, Alaska, or Southeast Asia, cruise itineraries today cater to families, couples, honeymooners and retirees alike.

This surge in cruise demand not just opens new revenue channels for the travel trade community but also presents new responsibilities. In 2025, protecting cruise travellers against the risks of sea travel is not just good practice — it



**Dev Karvat**  
Founder & CEO  
Asego

is essential for sustainable, reputation-driven business.

**A global surge with India at the helm**  
According to the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), over 31.5 million passengers are projected to sail globally in

2025, and India is emerging as a key source market.

**High expectations, higher risk**  
Cruise holidays are logistically complex. Unlike land-



based trips, cruises are time-bound and weather sensitive. Even minor delays, missed connections, or onboard issues can cause major disruptions. For international cruise travellers, a missed departure port or cancelled

excursion could mean losing thousands of rupees in non-refundable expenses. Medical emergencies at sea can be particularly costly, as onboard treatments and air evacuations are charged in foreign currency and are rarely covered by basic insurance.

Additionally, cruise lines often operate under strict contractual conditions that limit refunds or rebooking support. Once the ship sails, recourse can be difficult without dedicated protection in place.

**The Asego solution**  
Recognising these industry realities, Asego has developed cruise-specific travel

protection plans tailored for both international and domestic cruise markets. The product is designed

**Asego, as part of its protection plan, also offers emergency medical evacuation at sea, which is vital in remote or global waters**

to address real-world challenges that cruise travellers face—many of which

are excluded or under-protected in standard travel insurance. For international cruise travellers, Asego offers coverage for trip cancellation or interruption, missed connections, onboard medical emergencies, baggage loss across cruise terminals and connecting flights, cabin confinement due to illness, and missed port excursions. The company also offers emergency medical evacuation at sea, which is vital in remote or international waters. The product is aligned with global cruise norms, ensuring that your clients are protected regardless of which cruise line, region, or itinerary they choose.





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# 'Book cruise early to reap profits'

**Nishith Saxena**, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals, says the Indian market has been an integral part of the growth story of almost all the brands they represent. The company, taking part in B2B meetings to interact with trade partners in person and educate them about its product line, advises them to book groups early to make profits.



Nisha Verma

India remains a priority for cruise brands. Endorsing this view, **Nishith Saxena**, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals, said, "Each cruise brand's global strategy has Indian focus and hence we take pride in calling ourselves the 'Most Diversified Cruise line Representative in India'."



**Nishith Saxena**  
Founder & Director  
Cruise Professionals

## India story

With India being a vast source market, Saxena shared that it is imperative to use technology to support their various initiatives. "Just to provide you an insight, we have recently concluded a webinar for Princess Cruises, which generated great enthusiasm among the travel

fraternity. Next month, we will conduct a webinar for Cunard, where we propose to invite someone from our UK office who possesses tremendous knowledge about the brand." Saxena added, "We have been participating in several B2B meets where we are meeting trade partners in person



and educating them of our product line. Last month it was Lucknow, and this month it was Chandigarh. Several activities are planned in coordination with various tourism boards, which is an exhaustive and fruitful activity for the trade partners."

Cruise Professionals has put the online booking tool

on its website, which is open for travel agents.

## Incentives galore

Talking about incentives to trade partners, Saxena said, "Ours is a transparent incentive model where we engage with the agents willing to sign-up for the same. This is productivity based and does not differentiate between agencies."

## Profit building

Saxena has a suggestion for travel agents to earn profit. "Travel agencies must follow a proactive approach, which involves identifying a set of voyages/itineraries, contracting rates with the cruise line in advance and promoting the same voyages in the free-sell period. This way, there is strong probability

of the agent making substantial profits."

## Cunard's 2027 Programme

Cunard has seen an uplift in demand following the launch of its 2027 programme, with a 55 per cent increase in nights booked during the first seven days compared to the same period for the 2026 launch.

## STAR PRINCESS TO LAUNCH IN SEPTEMBER 2025

❖ Princess Cruises is set to launch the Star Princess in September 2025. Cruise Professionals already has groups booked for the maiden voyage and is confident that just like her sister ship Sun Princess, it will garner great reviews too.

## Onboard offerings improve

► Contd. from page 5

itineraries that deliver not just a holiday, but a story. This generation does not see a cruise ship as the destination, but a gateway. A catalyst for reaching places that are otherwise hard to access, for having authentic, nature-led moments, and for creating unique memories," says Goyal. "Like the audience we are trying to engage, the strategy has to be dynamic and constantly evolving. We are trying to stay adaptable across the entire journey. It's not about one big idea — it's about being present and relevant at every touchpoint, whether that is through the way we present itineraries, how we empower our partners, or how we frame the cruise experience itself."

## Cruise lines

Most of the cruise lines that Cruise Professionals represents have enhanced

their onboard offerings to excite Gen Z and millennials. **Nishith Saxena**, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals, says, "Almost all our ships have multi-generational families vacationing where you

**We are focused on ensuring that they (Gen Z and millennials) have access to the kind of experiences they are truly seeking (while cruising)**

have Gen X, millennials and Gen Z all travelling together for family reunions. On the ships, we have age-appropriate programmes and supervised designated areas where the young and older kids are kept en-

gaged with activities. We do understand that if the kids are not happy on the cruise, it would spoil the vacation for the adults too. Therefore, we have a multi-pronged but specific strategy for Gen X, Millennials and Gen Z. For example, Gen Z prefer limited human interaction when it comes to ordering food. So, we have created an app for ordering food. Apart from that, our ships also offer multiple dining options and specialty restaurants."

## TRAVEL PREFERENCES

❖ Millennials and Gen Z more likely to travel solo than other generations

❖ Millennials are drawn to cruising, seeking immersive and experience-driven vacations

## Forum to empower cruise biz

► Contd. from page 5

in; not just as a networking platform, but as a catalyst to equip agents, tour operators and cruise sellers with the tools, insights and relationships they need to succeed.

"India is on the cusp of a cruise tourism revolution," says **SanJeet**, Director, DDP Publications. "This is the moment for the Indian travel trade to step up and lead. The India Cruise Forum is not about passive conversations; it's about real connections, decoding the Indian market for global brands, and giving travel sellers the insights they need to drive serious business."

## Powerful industry participation

The forum promises participation from top international cruise lines looking to expand in the Indian market. For agents, tour



**SanJeet**  
Director  
DDP Publications



**Isha Goyal**  
Executive Director & CEO  
STIC Travel Group

operators, and even new entrants, it is a rare opportunity to interact with decision-makers.

## STIC Travel backs trade empowerment

For STIC Travel Group, a pioneer in cruise representation in India, this effort builds on its legacy. **Isha Goyal**, Executive Director & CEO STIC Travel Group, says, "We are proud to co-create this initiative with DDP. Cruising is one of the fastest-growing segments in Indian outbound travel.

But to truly unlock its potential, the trade needs education, engagement and access. That is what India Cruise Forum promises to deliver across cities."





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# Costa makes a splash in Gulf

Costa Cruises plans to sail in the Gulf this season with a brilliant ship called Costa Toscana, which offers 2–5-night itineraries, including destinations like Qatar and Oman. **Leena Brahme**, Business Head India, Sharaf Travel – the official representatives of Costa Cruises in India, shares details on the cruise line's focus areas.



Hazel Jain

Costa Cruises left a lasting impression on Indian travellers when it departed from local shores two years ago. Now, with the brand expanding its presence through official representatives like the Sharaf Group, its reach continues to grow. Fully Independent Travellers (FITs) are increasingly drawn to its offerings, while corporate clients are taking note of its distinctive destinations.

**Leena Brahme**, Business Head India, Sharaf Travel, says, "As official representatives of Costa Cruises in India, our vision at Sharaf Travel India is to ensure the optics are correctly placed.



**Leena Brahme**  
Business Head India  
Sharaf Travel

Costa Cruises is making a splash in the Gulf this season with a brilliant ship called Costa Toscana."

It offers itineraries between two nights and five nights, which includes destinations like Qatar and Oman. Sailings for two nights begin from Abu Dhabi to Dubai and for five nights



from Dubai to Abu Dhabi. Another jewel in the crown is sailings to northern Europe on Costa Diadema, which offers the experience of pristine cruising at affordable prices with Italian hospitality.

## Focus on Gen Z & corporates

Sharaf Travel is currently promoting Costa's amaz-

ing offering called 'Sea Destinations' — an all-inclusive concept that includes iconic parties of the port that the ship calls at to replicate them on board. "Corporates are also on our radar as Costa's name is well recognised today. FITs are flowing in, and corporates are noticing the uniqueness of destinations like Northern Eu-

rope on Costa Diadema. Blissful cruising into the Norwegian fjords is still ticking the boxes for hosting events, rewards and recognition or an incentive trip," Brahme adds.

Costa also offers Kids Cruise Free on all their sailings with only tax components applicable.

## Europe takes the cake

Brahme is certain that the cruise market will grow as India and Sharaf Travel lay the keel for better working conditions conducive for cruise lines to either homeport or call at Indian shores regularly. "The bridge that we would like to fill is bring in more awareness to the end-consumers."

## CRUISING OFFERS

### ❖ Costa Toscana

Offering 2–5 nights sailing from Dubai and Abu Dhabi, with itineraries that will include countries like Qatar and Oman. These cruises are typically offered during the winter, with week-long itineraries also available from Dubai.

### ❖ Costa Diadema

Sailing to northern Europe from Kiel, Germany and Copenhagen, Denmark, with 7-night cruises.

# 'More at Sea' with NCL

With a focus on innovation and guest experience, Norwegian Cruise Line continues to tap tier II and III cities for its global cruises in addition to the metros. But importantly, **Manoj Singh**, Country Head - India, Norwegian Cruise Line, is aiming to promote longer, port-immersive itineraries typically lasting at least a week, which offer a deeper cultural experience.



Hazel Jain

India's outbound cruise market is thriving, driven by a growing, aspirational middle-class with higher disposable incomes that loves to spend on unique travel experiences, and cruising is among their top five choices. **Manoj Singh**, Country Head - India, Norwegian Cruise Line, says this has been a "remarkable year" for them. "We launched Norwegian Aqua, the first ship in the new Prima Plus Class in April, welcoming our first guests with attractions like the Aqua Slidecoaster and other fun offerings for solo-travellers, families and foodies. Norwegian Aqua



**Manoj Singh**  
Country Head - India  
Norwegian Cruise Line

offers voyages in the Caribbean and will be sailing to Bermuda soon. NCL will continue to prioritise innovation and guest experience in the years to come."

Fly-cruises to destinations like northern Europe,



Alaska and Mediterranean are popular among Indian travellers. "In addition to the metro cities, we also see a huge demand for our international cruises from tier II and III cities. Our port-rich itineraries, coupled with our value-packed 'More at Sea' package, cater to the rising trend of family-orient-

ed and experiential cruise vacations," he adds.

## Shift in preferences

Singh believes that the industry can help change cruise preferences among travellers in India. "Here, shorter cruises are often seen as the default choice for first-time travellers. We want to change that. We

are now aiming to promote longer, port-immersive itineraries of 7–10 days which offer deeper cultural experiences. Mature markets like Singapore are already more familiar with this style of cruising, and we believe that the Indian market too can master the concept of

longer cruise itineraries. Indian travellers are ready for it, all they need is a push in the right direction." Singh notices some sort of shift in behaviour of Indian travellers. He observes that Indian travellers are seeking more meaningful and immersive experiences.

## NEW AT NCL

❖ NCL's latest ship, Norwegian Aqua — a further evolution of its popular Prima Class — is perfect for Indian families, offering interesting experiences like the Aqua Slidecoaster — the fastest slides at sea and the most diverse dining options at sea, including its first Thai restaurant — Sukhothai. It also features 18 bars and lounges, including Metropolitan Bar.



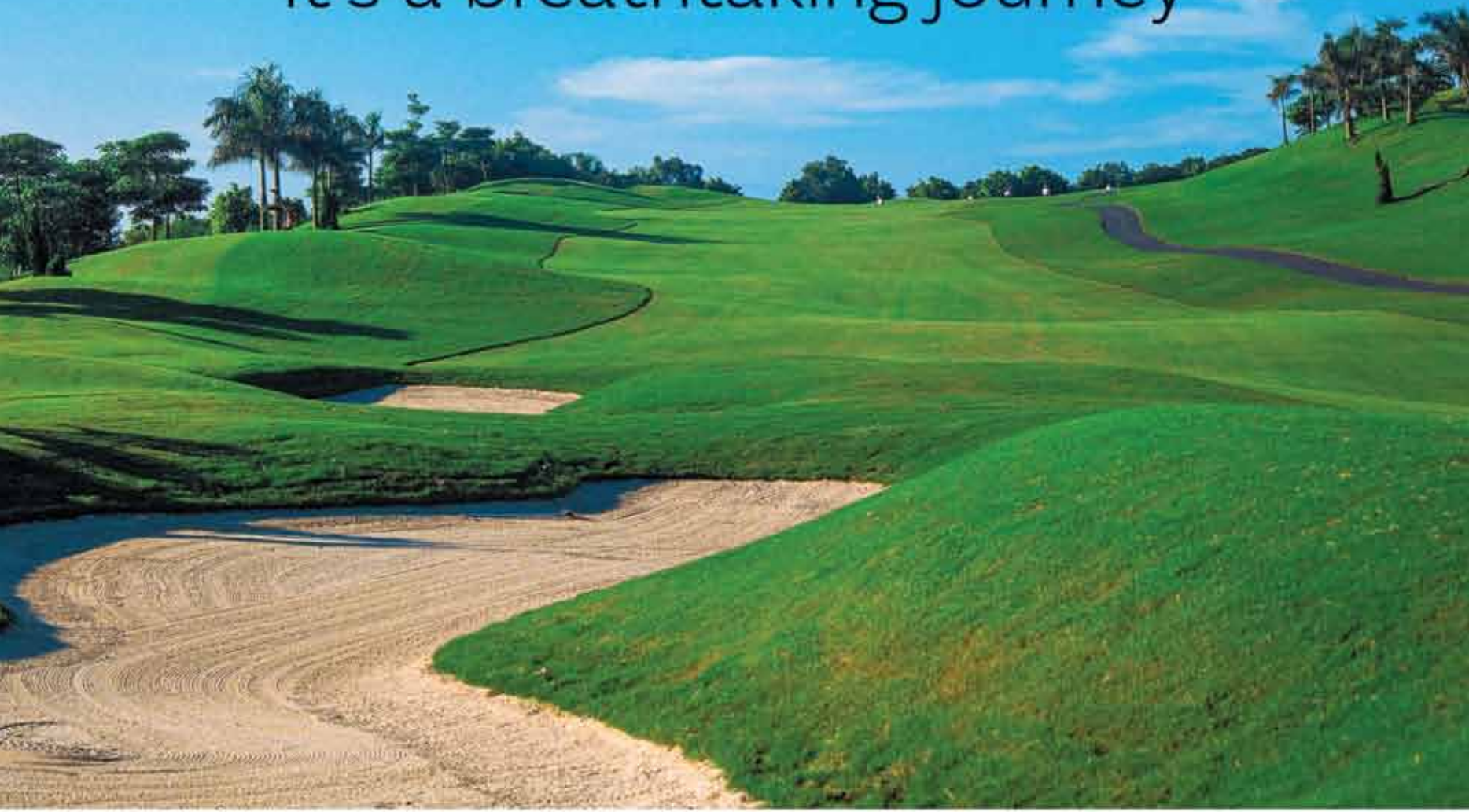
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# Luxury-themed voyages in vogue

India's cruise market is riding a wave of growth with travellers opting for luxury experiences, multi-country itineraries, and themed voyages. From the Mediterranean's charm to Antarctica's thrill, demand is diversifying. Yet, as Indian agents gear up to tap this potential, deep product expertise and digital savviness are becoming critical.



**Manoj Singh**  
Country Head-India  
Norwegian Cruise Line

“Indians are seeking experiential and meaningful holidays to the world's most beautiful destinations, such as Europe, Alaska and the Caribbean. Currently, 7–8-day itineraries to the Mediterranean, Northern Europe and Alaska are among best-sellers.”



**Manoj Saraf**  
Managing Director  
Gainwell Travel

“Cruise holidays have rebounded strongly, registering 20 per cent annual growth over the past two years. However, cruise sales training among Indian travel agents remains limited. India still lags in B2B training on the global cruise map.”



**Dhrupe Shah**  
Founder & Managing Director  
Travelsukham

“We have observed strong growth potential, particularly in the Alaska and Mediterranean sectors. There has also been a rise in interest for expedition cruises, especially to destinations like Antarctica. Indian agents can tap into this opportunity.”



**Pankaj Nagpal**  
Managing Director  
Travstarz Global Group

“We have seen substantial interest in cruise vacations, but the major difference has been a preference to cruising in Europe and the Mediterranean. The itineraries too have increased from the typical two-night cruise to 4–5 nights or multi-country cruises.”



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder  
EaseMyTrip

“India has always been a big fat wedding market. People are willing to shell out money to have their dream wedding. We have the popular wedding-on-cruise trend. It will be a trendsetter in the industry in the times to come, and it will be a key market for us to serve.”



**Dheeraj Ranjan Kumar**  
Founder & Director  
Balitrip Wisata

“In Bali, we operate Sunset Dinner Cruises, one of the preferred excursions for Indians. Beyond that, Balitrip Wisata has introduced a new yachting experience, offering luxury sailing from one island to another, including routes from Bali to Komodo Island.”

Contd. on page 20 ▶

## Europe cruises still top selling

**Vivek Jain**, MD, Griffon Cruises, says that Europe continues to be their best-selling itineraries for cruise – whether it is the Mediterranean, the Canary Islands, the British Isles or the Adriatic cruises. While this probably may not change much in the coming years, his aim is to introduce Indian clientele to lesser-known isles in Europe.



Hazel Jain

**Vivek Jain**, Managing Director, Griffon Cruises, is bullish on the Indian cruise market, with strong demand for global sailings, particularly in Europe.

Griffon Cruises is currently selling voyages from Cunard, the iconic British cruise line, which operates four flagship ships worldwide. They offer Mediterranean, Northern Europe, British Isles, and Atlantic sailings, including the Canary Islands. “We have also seen strong interest in Japan this year, where Cunard deployed a ship for the first time. However,



**Vivek Jain**  
Managing Director  
Griffon Cruises

a few Indian travellers also opt for Japan as part of the world cruise,” Jain said.

Alongside Cunard, Griffon is also promoting Miray Cruises in the Greek Islands — a destination Jain has been selling for 15–20 years. “Miray's 3

and 4-night itineraries are picking up well, especially from April to October,” he noted. “Indian travellers fly into Greece from India or Europe to explore these islands.”

**Upcoming B2B portal** Griffon is launching a B2B online portal for travel agents to streamline bookings. The portal is currently in beta testing. “We aim to go live by Diwali, starting with Cunard and adding three more cruise lines within six months,” Jain revealed. The platform will feature special India-market rates, APIs for OTAs, and user-friendly filters for voyage selection. “We

want to simplify the process — agents should be able to finalise a booking

— **We want to simplify the (online booking) process — agents should be able to finalise a booking for clients in five to six clicks**

in five to six clicks. The challenge is integrating with cruise lines, but we are working on it.”

Understanding Indian travellers' preferences, Griffon ensures customised onboard experiences, including Indian menus. To motivate travel partners, the company offers commissions, overrides, net rates and Performance-linked Bonuses (PLBs). “Many agents are new to cruise sales, so we provide full support — answering queries, assisting with client calls, everything except negotiating prices,” Jain explained. “This is a high-touch product; clients need guidance, especially for premium lines like Cunard.”

**Travellers' behaviour** Europe remains the top-selling cruise destination,

particularly the Mediterranean, thanks to its well-known ports. Jain emphasises the need to promote lesser-known gems like the Adriatic Sea. “Agents must first understand these regions to educate clients,” he said.

Indian travellers have come a long way in the past seven years. “Earlier, cruises were seen as expensive and only for seniors. Now, families, young adults and middle-aged travellers are opting for cruises, realising they can be more affordable than land holidays,” Jain observed. That said, most still prefer shorter sailings (4–7 days) over extended voyages. ▶



# Puducherry eyes 30 lakh tourists by '30

Puducherry recently welcomed Cordelia Cruise on its shore. Sharing his vision for the UT's development, **K Lakshminarayanan**, Minister of Tourism, Government of Puducherry, said the government is all set to welcome over 30 lakh tourists by 2030, and to achieve the target, it is ramping up tourism infrastructure, enhancing connectivity and taking up reforms.

 Amita Pandey

With its timeless French elegance, Puducherry continues to cast its spell on travellers. Known as the 'Window to French Culture,' the Union Territory is the perfect blend of French architecture and South Indian heritage, offering a compelling setting for not only domestic tourists but also for European visitors.

To further capitalise on its coastal tourism, Puducherry is welcoming Cordelia Cruises twice a month starting July, adding a new dimension to its marine offerings. This new tourism offering, announced

recently, will further strengthen the connectivity between Visakhapatnam, Puducherry and Chennai.

**K Lakshminarayanan**, Minister of Tourism, Government of Puducherry, speaking exclusively to **TRAVEL** on the occasion, talked about the recent initiatives and endeavours that aim to position the UT as a year-round travel and MICE destination. "From wellness retreats to architectural gems, the UT caters to every kind of traveller — be it the culturally curious, the spiritually inclined, or the luxury seeker. For those chasing a destination steeped in history and diversity, Puducherry is not just a



**K Lakshminarayanan**  
Minister of Tourism  
Government of Puducherry

getaway — it is a dream come true," he said.

The UT is focused on transforming its tourism landscape with multiple initiatives. "Puducherry is eyeing an ambitious target of 30 lakh tourists annually by 2030. Currently,

the UT witnesses about 19 lakh domestic and 1 lakh international tourist arrivals annually," he said.

On the infrastructure front, "The UT has utilised ₹124 crore under the first phase of Swadesh Darshan scheme and an additional ₹80 crore under Swadesh Darshan 2.0 for various tourism development projects, including better public amenities." A further 100 acres of land has been earmarked for a Special Tourism Zone under the public-private partnership (PPP) model.

**Week-long destination**  
The minister also noted a shift in tourist behaviour. "Puducherry is no longer



just a weekend escape. With rising interest from leisure and MICE travellers, it is increasingly becoming a week-long tourist destination as visitors choose to extend their stay," he said.

**Connectivity**  
The UT currently offers direct flights from Puducherry Airport to Bengaluru

and Hyderabad, both of which serve as gateways to international destinations. "Currently, the UT is in dialogue with the Centre regarding upgradation and extension of the airport's runway, which will open opportunities for long-haul flights and will connect the UT to international destinations directly," added Lakshminarayanan. 🇮🇳



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# Serious biz & real connections

From high-impact meetings to heartfelt connections, TMIndia's annual gathering in Delhi brought together 200 curated travel professionals for two days of focused networking and collaboration. Curated by Nidhi and Gaurav Hasija, TMIndia 5.0 featured structured one-on-one meetings, knowledge sharing and relationship building.





# Creating value-driven communities


TMIIndia is rewriting the rules of B2B travel networking. Founded by Nidhi Hasija and Gaurav Hasija in 2019 to help the travel fraternity with no profit motive, the platform today champions curated gatherings, meaningful conversations and lasting partnerships with a focus on quality over numbers and building a close-knit community that thrives on genuine collaboration.

 Janice Alyosius

TMIIndia, founded by **Nidhi Hasija** and **Gaurav Hasija** of ALifetimeTrip India in 2019, is transforming the way B2B travel events function — focusing on quality connections, meaningful collaborations and authentic networking. Their community-first approach is reshaping how serious buyers and sellers engage in the Indian travel trade.

They wrapped up the latest edition of TMIIndia recently in Delhi with 200 curated participants. They have a reason to restrict the number of participants. “We cap attendance intention-

ally. After 150 registrations, we start filtering. We don’t go beyond 200. It’s about

  
**Even if you spend two hours with one person, you truly understand them and can build a real business relationship**

– Nidhi Hasija

quality, not quantity. One strong connection is often more valuable than 50 superficial ones,” says Nidhi.



**Nidhi Hasija**  
Founder  
TMIIndia


According to her, each annual event is carefully designed to maximise value. From a grand opening to an exclusive one-on-one conclave, every minute is structured to encourage focused dialogue. “We don’t do typical round-



**Gaurav Hasija**  
Founder  
TMIIndia

tables. We believe in sitting down one-on-one. Even if you spend two hours with one person, you truly understand them and can build a real business relationship.” What makes TMIIndia stand out is its no-free-pass


policy. “Everyone pays to be here. This ensures only serious sellers

  
**We are always thinking about how to add more value — because that is the only reason people will keep coming back**

– Gaurav Hasija

and buyers attend. That shows in the kind of interactions that take place,” says Gaurav.

The goal is not just to get leads or exchange business cards, but purpose-driven conversations. “We ask people to come prepared with five problem areas they are facing. Many leave with actionable solutions,” Nidhi adds.

Looking ahead, TMIIndia 6.0 is already in planning mode, though the destination is still under wraps. “Whatever mistakes we made this year, we will fix them and come back stronger,” says Gaurav. “We are always thinking about how to add more value—because that is the only reason people will keep coming back.” 



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# Expedia TAAP offers 25% discount

Expedia TAAP has launched its 2025 Summer Sale, offering travel agents exclusive discounts of at least 25 per cent on thousands of global properties. The initiative, designed in view of the surge in last-minute travel demand, aims to support agents with competitive deals, instant bookings and enhanced tools during a crucial travel window.



Janice Alyosius

In a strategic move to empower travel agents, Expedia Travel Agent Affiliate Programme (TAAP) has rolled out its 2025 Summer Sale for travel till 31 October 2025. The sale, valid for bookings made until 21 July 2025, includes exclusive discounts of at least 25 per cent to Expedia TAAP partners on thousands of hotels across top global destinations.

Explaining the rationale behind the initiative, **Robin Lawther**, VP, Expedia TAAP, said, "The main goal of the 2025 Summer Sale is to give travel agents a competitive edge during one of the busiest travel seasons. By offering 25 per cent



**Robin Lawther**  
Vice President  
Expedia TAAP

discount on thousands of properties worldwide, Expedia TAAP aims to help agents drive more bookings and better support clients planning summer and early autumn getaways."

He added that the sale was not just about discounts, but also about empower-

ing agents with the tools to succeed. "It also reinforced our commitment to agents by giving them access to exclusive deals not available to direct consumers — helping them build trust and retain value in a competitive market. With more travellers interested in short-haul, last-minute trips this year, the timing of the sale is strategic to match that trend and boost agent-led sales."

According to Lawther, response to the initiative has been encouraging. "Since the launch in June, we have seen strong engagement across multiple markets. Agents appreciate the ease of booking, instant confirmations and competitive pricing — especially when

dealing with last-minute client requests."

While the full data is still being compiled, early

**It also reinforced our commitment to agents by giving them access to exclusive deals not available to direct consumers**

trends point to a spike in both hotel searches and transactions, particularly

for leisure hotspots. "The sale has also sparked renewed interest in TAAP's tools and resources, reinforcing the value we offer to agents during this important travel period," Lawther affirmed.

Lawther maintained an optimistic stance on global developments. "At this stage, we have not seen any significant impact on bookings or traveller confidence related to the Summer Sale. While we are mindful that broader global factors can influence travel behaviour, demand for domestic and international trips remains steady — particularly for leisure travel during the summer months." However, Expedia TAAP remains

alert to the developments. "We are closely monitoring the landscape to ensure agents have the latest information and flexible options, helping them respond effectively to client needs as things evolve," Lawther said.

## STRONG INVENTORY

**3000,000**

properties around the globe in Expedia TAAP's inventory

**500**

airlines can also be booked through them

**170,000**

tours and activities available during the sale

## '300 weekly flights from NMIA'

Akasa Air will operate 300 weekly flights from the Navi Mumbai International Airport, which is scheduled to open in September 2025, says Belson Coutinho, Co-Founder & COO, Akasa Air.



Hazel Jain

Akasa Air is set to expand its fleet to 30, with its 29th aircraft recently flying into India. The airline is also set to make the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA) its key hub.

**Belson Coutinho**, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer, Akasa Air, says, "We will be operating about 300 weekly flights from the Navi Mumbai International Airport. We are ready to fly — we are only waiting for a firm date from the airport. We are looking forward to making the new airport a home base."

According to Coutinho, Akasa Air will commence operations from NMIA with



**Belson Coutinho**  
Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer, Akasa Air

more than 100 weekly domestic departures initially, scaling up to 300 domestic and 50 international departures weekly in the winter schedule.

The airline's network team is constantly looking at new routes. "Currently, we fly to five international destinations. It's natural for us to start adding more fre-

quencies and opening up more destinations. But at this point, we can't reveal details," he says.

As part of its broader strategy, the airline is also set to ramp up to 10 parking bases by the end of FY2027.

## NMIA TAKE-OFF

Flights from Navi Mumbai are set to launch on 17 September, coinciding with PM Narendra Modi's birthday. CIDCO and government officials are also working to start flights on Independence Day.

## Cruise biz on rise for 2 yrs

Contd. from page 16



**Jaal Shah**  
Founder, RezLive.com & Managing Director, Travel Designer Group

"Cruise bookings from India have grown significantly, especially in premium and long-haul segments. At RezLive.com, we have seen a strong demand for family-friendly lines like Resorts World Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line, and we are expanding our online offerings. To keep up, agents need deep product knowledge, which we support through training and webinars."



**Guldeep Singh Sahni**  
Managing Director  
Weldon Tours & Travels

"In the last two years cruise bookings and supply have increased extraordinarily. A seasoned traveller prefers a short or long cruise, while on holiday. Cruise takes care of every aspect of a vacation. Indian travel agents do not have to wait for an inquiry to find a supplier but train themselves for options available. This is where the role of cruise lines and tourism boards comes in."



**Amit Thadani**  
Director  
Nik N Ami Travels

"We see Indian clients choosing cruises differently than before. For instance, short cruises of 3-5 nights are popular now and people are looking to experience shorter cruises. They usually ask for balcony rooms, good Indian food, and better hospitality. We see more multi-generational families booking cruises, including kids and grandparents. For Europe also, people prefer short 6-8 days of cruises."





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# Pilgrim towns in focus for ROHL

With a plan to triple its portfolio by following an asset-light model, Royal Orchid Hotels will look for management contracts, franchise agreements and select lease opportunities. **TRAVELTALK** speaks to **Arjun Baljee**, President, Royal Orchid Hotels, about where this expansion will take place. Will religious destinations also be in focus for the hotel company?

 Hazel Jain

Royal Orchid Hotels has planned an aggressive expansion — to reach over 300 hotels and 20,000 rooms in the next five years. How will it do this? Through an asset-light model, reveals **Arjun Baljee**, President, Royal Orchid Hotels. “We have an ambitious road-map for growth. The plan is to triple our portfolio by following an asset-light model — mainly through management contracts, franchise agreements and select lease opportunities. This gives us the flexibility to expand faster without compromising on quality. Our strength lies in under-



Arjun Baljee  
President  
Royal Orchid

standing regional markets, and we are leveraging that insight to scale up quickly and efficiently across the country.”  
  
The hotel company will look at a balanced mix — metros, high-potential tier



II and III cities, as well as strong leisure and religious destinations. Baljee adds, “You will see us expanding in places like Tirupati, Assam, Pushkar, Chittorgarh, Jamshedpur, Lucknow, Mussoorie, Bhopal, Dapoli, Rajkot, Solapur, Gir and Nepal. All our brands will play a role.”

**Regenta Z for Gen Z**  
Regenta Z is something Baljee is excited about. “It’s fresh, vibrant, and designed for the new-age traveller. Regenta Z brings together style, tech, art and social connection in a fun and affordable format for Gen Z and millennials,” Baljee explains.

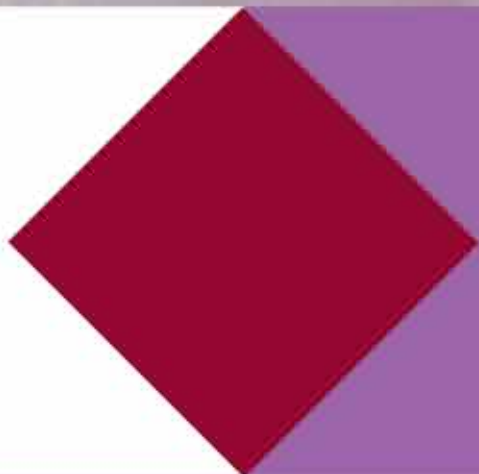
Property Name	No. of Keys	City	Status
Regenta Resort Beach House	155	Goa	Open
Regenta Resort Baywatch			Open
Regenta Resprt Vindhyachal Statue of Unity	46	Gujarat	Open
Regenta Resort Waterfront Dapoli	100	Maharashtra	Open
Regenta Bharti Resort Pune	70	Maharashtra	Open
ICONIQA	300	Mumbai	Open
Regenta Bhuj	59	Bhuj	In pipeline
Regenta Resort Tropical Village	7 (cottages)	Mysore	In pipeline
Regenta Central	50	Solapur	In pipeline

# Skål Int’l head meets Indian members

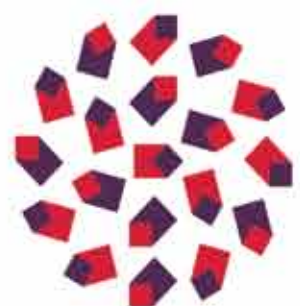
To reaffirm India’s rising prominence in the global Skål movement, **Denise Scrafton**, President, Skål International, recently made a visit to India and went to three of its top 10 clubs globally — Delhi, Chennai and Kolkata. Her presence inspired renewed energy and deeper alignment across the clubs, with a focus on future leadership, sustainability, youth engagement and international cooperation.







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# Value addition trumps discounts

Hotels across India are adopting sharper, smarter strategies and moving beyond plain discounts to offer thoughtfully curated packages during the shoulder season. From spa add-ons to influencer tie-ups, hoteliers are boosting occupancy and revenue by focusing on value-driven experiences that attract both leisure and business travellers.



Janice Alyosius

With shoulder seasons traditionally seeing a dip in demand, hotels across India are adopting sharper, smarter strategies to maintain occupancy. Instead of resorting to outright discounts, leading hoteliers are offering curated packages that deliver perceived value without hurting profitability and creating strong opportunities for travel agents to upsell and diversify offerings to their clients.

## Strategic offers over plain discounts

**Anukam Tiwary**, General Manager, Le Meridien Amritsar, said, "In the shoulder season, we focus on



**Anukam Tiwary**  
General Manager  
Le Meridien Amritsar

value-rich packages that include breakfast, airport or Golden Temple transfers, spa discounts and flexible check-in or check-out. For MICE and group bookings, added benefits like upgraded breaks or dining credits help us enhance appeal while maintaining the margins." Their



**Rajat Sethi**  
General Manager  
Fairmont Jaipur

online offers are often tied to flash sales, while offline strategies centre on long-term relationship building with corporates and travel partners.

**Rajat Sethi**, General Manager, Fairmont Jaipur, expresses similar sentiments. "Instead of heavy



**Barun Gupta**  
General Manager  
Expolnn Suites & Convention

discounts, we focus on added value like wellness rituals and signature experiences. This elevates the guest journey and encourages longer stays and higher on-property spending. Fairmont's 'Endless Summer Memories' and 'Meetings Made Majestic' packages are



**Ritu Gupta**  
Director of Revenue  
Sofitel Mumbai BKC

examples of how hotels can balance value with distinction.

## Offline vs online approaches

**Barun Gupta**, General Manager, Expolnn Suites & Convention, explained, "Our online offers include smart discounts

and promo codes, while offline promotions are more relationship-led and tailored for corporate or group bookings." Offers like 'Stay More, Save More' and 'MICE & Expo Combos' are designed to boost mid-week occupancy and capture event-related demand.

For Sofitel Mumbai BKC, consistency is key. "We maintain a unified omnichannel strategy, offering the same promotions online and offline to uphold brand integrity," said **Ritu Gupta**, Director of Revenue, Sofitel Mumbai BKC. "We don't differentiate between platforms. For us, guest trust is built on transparency."

*Contd. on page 30 ►*

# 'Guest feedback best stamp of approval'

The hospitality sector in India is witnessing a strong growth, but to thrive globally, the focus must shift towards experience curation, embedded sustainability, tech integration and strategic marketing, says **Dilip Puri**, Founder & CEO, Indian School of Hospitality. It's time to repush 'Incredible India 2.0' campaign—backed by robust government support, Puri adds.



Surbhi Sharma

India's hospitality market is evolving and so does the definition of luxury hospitality. It's no longer only about grand hotel rooms or fine dining, but also about creating meaningful and story-worthy experiences. **Dilip Puri**, Founder & CEO, Indian School of Hospitality, explains, "Today's luxury travellers seek experiences that stay with them—something they can talk about and remember."

Luxury, he adds, is now about emotional recall, unique storytelling and personal connection, not just service or opulence.



**Dilip Puri**  
Founder & CEO  
Indian School of Hospitality

This shift requires hospitality brands to focus on immersive offerings, local narratives and authentic cultural engagements.

**Luxury requirements** Sustainability is no longer an optional add-on

for hotels. "Even a traveller paying \$1,000 a night now asks what are you doing about sustainability?" Puri emphasises. He believes sustainability and technology must be integrated into a luxury hotel's DNA. "From energy-saving smart sensors in rooms to waste reduction systems and sustainable sourcing, customers are now driving the green agenda."

## Certifications

Touching upon sustainability certifications, Puri questions their relevance in the digital-first era. He believes that travellers today no longer rely on official hotel classifications, such as five-star ratings

or certifications, but on online reviews, personal experiences and transparency. "Most leading hotel

**Today's luxury travellers seek experiences that stay with them — something they can talk about and remember**

chains already practice sustainability better than certification norms de-

mand. They don't need to tick boxes for validation," he says, adding that the best stamp of approval is guest feedback, not bureaucratic checklists.

## India market

As the hospitality sector in India witnesses a strong domestic growth, do we need to push for inbound growth? Puri says, "With India's booming domestic market and high-paying Indian travellers, many hotels already generate strong revenues without foreign footfall."

However, he insists that India must re-market itself internationally to reflect improved connectivity,

infrastructure and guest experiences. To achieve this, he suggests that tourism budgets should be enhanced. "Foreign tourists no longer face the issues they did 15 years ago. It's time to repush the revamped 'Incredible India 2.0' campaign—backed by robust government support," he concludes.





# The Wait Ends



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# J&K banks on infra growth & promo

In an exclusive interview with **TRAVTALK**, **Yasha Mudgal**, Commissioner cum Secretary, Tourism, Jammu & Kashmir, shares how they are collaborating with travel trade partners as their 'brand ambassadors' to send positive message about the destination across the country. Apart from that, the tourism department will be focussing on infrastructural growth and confidence-building measures.



Nisha Verma

After the April terrorist attack in Pahalgam, the biggest task of Jammu & Kashmir government was to re-assure tourists of safety and security in the Union Territory. Speaking about the government's tourism revival strategy, **Yasha Mudgal**, Commissioner cum Secretary, Tourism, Jammu & Kashmir, claimed that they have a roadmap in place for confidence-building and infrastructure development.

## Organic revival

Mudgal claimed that the administration made a conscious decision to allow the situation to stabilise naturally before



**Yasha Mudgal**  
Commissioner cum Secretary, Tourism,  
Jammu & Kashmir

launching a tourism push. "We consciously allowed things to settle on their own for some time after the incident and its aftermath. There was a big lull, but slowly numbers have started picking up. Travellers are once again heading not only to Srinagar and Gulmarg, but also to

Pahalgam," she said, adding that, "J&K will see a busy winter rush."

## Perceptions and outreach

Mudgal, however, admitted that perception remains a major factor that needs attention. "When it comes to Jammu & Kashmir, everybody knows that there is a need to tread cautiously in some aspects," she said. She was quick to highlight the tourism boom witnessed recently. "Last year we broke all records with 2.35 crore visits in the UT, which was unprecedented," she added.

To reinforce confidence, the UT's top authorities have been holding seminars, visiting destinations

and directly engaging with travellers and trade partners. "We are having constant interaction with the

beautiful place and a must-visit destination," she said.

## Infrastructure & investment

At the same time, the government is committing significant resources to strengthen infrastructure at both popular and emerging destinations. "The government is already investing thousands of crores in terms of road connectivity, power, solid waste management and water," she noted. She thanked private stakeholders, saying, "We are offering incentives to the private sector to come and be our partners."

## More roadshows

The Tourism Department of J&K is planning a comprehensive calendar of

roadshows to send positive message about the destination across India. "We are still planning the strategy and details of the roadshows. Associations will be given platform to engage their target groups and a final roadshow plan will be approved by the minister," she informed.

## CONFIDENCE-BUILDING

- ❖ Organic revival strategy
- ❖ High-level engagement
- ❖ Direct trade interactions
- ❖ Planned roadshows across India

# Air Cambodia's curated fares for agents

Aeroprime Group's appointment as Air Cambodia's GSA marks a strategic leap in India-Southeast Asia aviation. With growing demand for cultural travel, the company is strengthening trade engagement, consumer outreach and connectivity. Backed by strong response to the Phnom Penh-Delhi route, it plans further expansion, targeting leisure and heritage segments.



Surbhi Sharma

India's outbound travel landscape is rapidly evolving, with Southeast Asia emerging as a hotspot for culturally immersive and affordable experiences. Within this context, Aeroprime Group's recent move to take on the Passenger GSA role for Air Cambodia reflects a timely and strategic expansion. From the lens of industry development, this partnership marks more than a commercial partnership—it signifies an important step in strengthening India-Cambodia connectivity and shaping travel demand for newer and off-beat destinations.



**Abhishek Goyal**  
CEO & Executive Director  
Aeroprime Group

**Abhishek Goyal**, CEO & Executive Director, Aeroprime Group, views the partnership as a natural extension of the company's long-term growth strategy. It previously served as Air Cambodia's Cargo GSA, which provided valuable operational in-

sights and laid the groundwork for expanding into passenger services. "This expanded mandate aligns perfectly with our vision to represent high-potential international carriers, opens new travel corridors, and offers integrated solutions that support bilateral tourism and trade," he shares.

In an increasingly competitive Southeast Asian aviation market, visibility and differentiation are key. He says, "Our strategy is two-fold: a strong B2B backbone complemented by sharp consumer outreach. While targeted social media campaigns and collaborations with tourism boards will drive

awareness among travellers, the company is also investing heavily in the

**While targeted social media campaigns will drive awareness among travellers, the company is also investing heavily in the trade ecosystem**

trade ecosystem—rolling out training modules, incentives and familiarisation trips for Indian agents.

These efforts will ensure Air Cambodia is top-of-mind when Indian consumers seek culturally immersive, value-for-money international getaways."

The timing couldn't be better. The newly launched Phnom Penh-Delhi route has already generated healthy load factors and positive traveller feedback. According to Goyal, the convenience of direct connectivity and Cambodia's rich heritage—exemplified by landmarks like Angkor Wat—are resonating strongly with Indian travellers. Encouraged by the initial traction, the company is evaluating additional frequencies and expanding

services to other Indian cities. Notably, Air Cambodia also offers seamless access to destinations like Siem Reap, Guangzhou and Da Nang, creating regional travel opportunities beyond the capital.

## EMPOWERING THE TRADE

Aeroprime is enhancing the travel agent experience with

- ❖ Prompt resolution
- ❖ Tailored fare deals
- ❖ Market education support to boost cruise and heritage tourism in Cambodia





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## 'Largest' delegation at Skål Asia Congress

Skål International India marked a defining moment at the Skål Asia Congress 2025 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, by fielding its largest-ever delegation to an Asian area event.

TT Bureau

The National Committee Meeting (NCM) of Skål International India was held on the sidelines of Skål Asia Congress 2025, at Shangri-La Hotel in Colombo on 26 June 2025. The meeting drew presidents, secretaries, board members and national committee representatives from India, united in their vision to strengthen the Skål movement in India and beyond.



**Sanjeev Mehra**  
President  
Skål International India

congress reinforced India's growing influence within the global Skål fraternity. Our dynamic presence in Colombo is a result of hard work, vision and the coming together of like-minded professionals dedicated to transforming tourism through collaboration, ethics and friendship."



**NSN Mohan**  
Director-Region 10 (India) and  
Director-Finance, Skål International

"This is more than a milestone—it is a movement in motion," said **Sanjeev Mehra**, President, Skål International India. "With a record presence at Skål Asia Congress, India has not just shown up—we have shown the way forward. The National Committee Meeting in Colombo echoed our unity, discipline and determination to lead Skål globally, with professionalism, purpose and pride."

**NSN Mohan**, Director Region 10 (India) and Director Finance, Skål International, said, "This

**NCM was marked by constructive dialogue, praise of club achievements and the celebration of initiatives**

### Skål India Congress 2025 in Mumbai

The focus now shifts to Skål India Congress 2025 in Mumbai this September, with preparations already underway. "Let's build on this momentum," Mehra emphasised. "We aim to launch our remaining clubs swiftly."

# B2B travel-technology comes to the rescue

The travel industry is undergoing a transformation — shaped by rising demand for personalisation, sustainability and tech-driven experiences. To stay ahead, operators must embrace innovation and stay aligned with the needs of today's travellers.

Hazel Jain

The future of travel lies in smart, seamless and scalable tech solutions. Those who adapt will not only remain relevant but thrive in this dynamic, experience-led landscape. A modern travel management company wants to enable travel agents, DMCs, tour operators and hospitality providers with digital tools that simplify workflow and unlock new revenue channels.



**Sandeep Khetarpal**  
Founder  
ZoTrav



**Sanjay Ghare**  
CEO  
Vervotech

companies need real-time inventory from flights, hotels, activities and ancillary providers — wrapped in content that resonates with diverse customer segments. This is because the expectations of travel and hospitality businesses — especially travel agents — have changed dramatically in recent years, says **Chirag Agarwal**, Co-founder, TravClan.

**Personalisation is at the heart of today's traveller demands. No two travellers are the same — so why should their travel packages be?**

From B2B tours marketplace connecting customisable packages with travel resellers, to digital eSIM platforms — travel management companies are reshaping how travel business functions.

**Sandeep Khetarpal**, Founder, ZoTrav, says, "The evolving consumer is driven by a desire for personalised, sustainable and immersive experiences, and it is redefining the role of travel companies, presenting both new challenges and opportunities. In this digital-first world, the way we plan and experience travel has completely changed. If we, as tour operators and travel professionals, do not evolve with these expectations, we risk becoming outdated."

At the heart of it, travellers want more than service — they want understanding. And that is where the real opportunity lies. The slant toward personalisation is at the heart of today's traveller demands. No two travellers are the same — so why should their travel packages be?

**Changing demands**  
Hyper-automation has been at the core of rising demand for B2B technology, says **Sanjay Ghare**, CEO, Vervotech. "The ability to automate complex processes has increasingly been in demand, not only for the sake of efficiency but also for cost-effectiveness. Companies now expect automation at every level — from complex backend processes to customer-facing workflows."

Ghare, however, adds that there is also a broader behavioral shift. "They (the companies) do not just want a service provider, they want a partner who understands their business deeply, can grow with them, and help them future-proof their operations. The industry has matured, and with it, the expectations have too."

### Complicated tasks need fluidity

As a Software With A Service (SWAS) company, Vervotech brings together the best of both worlds;

enterprise-grade platforms and localised content with execution capabilities. **Karthik Venkataraman**, CPRO, Vernost, believes that the combination enables them to solve complex challenges for their clients that include a leading



**Karthik Venkataraman**  
CPRO  
Vernost



**Chirag Agarwal**  
Co-founder  
TravClan

Indian airline, a global TMC headquartered in Bahrain, a prominent Indian leisure travel company, and one of the largest B2B travel players in Africa. "The blending of corporate and leisure travel is transforming how companies plan and deliver travel. Today's traveller may book a corporate trip that merges into a personal holiday. This fluidity requires platforms that can handle hybrid itineraries, traveller profiles and flexible fulfillment models," he says.

Equally important is access to scalable, global content. It's not enough to just have the tech —

and reliability. Agents and their travellers no longer want to wait hours for quotations or supplier confirmations. They expect real-time pricing, faster responses and tech that allows them to close bookings fast," he says.





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EVENT TALK		
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AUGUST 2025		
Date	Event	Time
2-3	Travel MICE and Corporate Show	10:00 am
5-8	Global Sustainable Tourism Conference 2025	9:00 am
12-13	FAITH Conclave 2025	10:00 am
18-21	Focus Oman-India Residential Roadshow 2025	10:00 am
21	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
22-25	IATO Annual Convention	10:00 am
22-25	Taiwan International Travel Expo 2025	9:00 am
26-28	PATA Travel Mart 2025	10:00 am
27-28	Travel Trade Maldives 2025	10:00 am
SEPTEMBER 2025		
2	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
2-4	ITB India 2025	10:00 am
8	India Cargo Awards	8:00 pm
9	India Travel Awards	8:00 pm
10	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
11-12	GPS - Pune	10:00 am

# Hotels add value to aid occupancy

► Contd. from page 24

## Data-led promotions with strong ROI

Hotels are increasingly adopting data-driven strategies to evaluate the impact of their off-season campaigns. “We track metrics like occupancy, ADR, RevPAR and conversion rates. Guest feedback and ancillary spend also help measure cross-selling success,” said Tiwary.

Barun Gupta highlighted the importance of agility in campaign execution. “If a campaign underperforms, we tweak it mid-way. We define KPIs before launch and also measure the lift in F&B or spa spendings linked to promo guests.”

At Sofitel, performance insights from Accor’s regional campaigns help determine market timing and investments. “A 5–10 per cent year-on-year growth during shoulder periods is considered a strong return



on investment, enabling us to drive incremental revenue without margin erosion,” said Ritu Gupta.

Rajat Sethi from Fairmont Jaipur added that they track total guest spending across wellness, dining and events. “It’s not just about room nights, it’s about overall engagement.”

## Experience over discounts

There is a consensus on evolving guest expectations. “Guests today look

for more than just lower rates. Thoughtful inclusions resonate more,” said Tiwary. “A package that includes a spa or F&B perk feels more luxurious than a flat discount. Guests respond better to a package like ‘Room + Breakfast + Spa Discount’ than to a flat 15 per cent off,” Barun Gupta added.

Sethi observed that curated experiences like the ‘Five Senses Arrival’ and cultural evenings like ‘Shaam-e-Khaas’ have higher emotional value for guests.

Agreeing with Sethi’s view, Ritu Gupta said, “Our ‘Luxe Weekend Offer’ with local transfers and early check-in has outperformed standard discounted deals.”



NEW OPENINGS	
Flights	Hotels
<b>Route:</b> Mumbai to Adampur (direct) <b>Frequency:</b> Daily <b>Airline:</b> IndiGo	<b>Hotel:</b> Sarovar Portico Gwalior <b>Rooms:</b> 100 keys <b>Brand:</b> Sarovar Portico
<b>Route:</b> Hindon to Goa (direct) <b>Frequency:</b> Daily except Saturdays <b>Airline:</b> IndiGo	<b>Hotel:</b> Ramada by Wyndham Bareilly <b>Rooms:</b> 80 keys <b>Brand:</b> Ramada by Wyndham
<b>Route:</b> Mumbai to Manchester <b>Frequency:</b> Three weekly flights <b>Airline:</b> IndiGo	<b>Hotel:</b> Le Méridien Ahmedabad <b>Rooms:</b> 164 keys <b>Brand:</b> Le Méridien
<b>Route:</b> Mumbai to Amsterdam <b>Frequency:</b> Three weekly flights <b>Airline:</b> IndiGo	<b>Hotel:</b> Regenta Central Shivani, Solapur <b>Rooms:</b> 65 keys <b>Brand:</b> Royal Orchid Hotels
<b>Route:</b> Mumbai to Phuket (direct) <b>Frequency:</b> Four weekly flights <b>Airline:</b> Vietjet Thailand	<b>Hotel:</b> Taj Damdama Lake Resort & Spa, Gurugram <b>Keys:</b> 143 <b>Brand:</b> Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL)

# TAAI Western Chapter rallies for J&K

The TAAI Western Region held its meeting recently in Mumbai, led by its Chairman, **Rajesh Poddar**. The main topic of discussion was to promote tourism in Jammu & Kashmir. Two members – Sameer Karnani and Vivek Gupta – shared their experiences at the event.





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# MOVEMENTS

## LUFTHANSA GROUP

India

Lufthansa Group has appointed **KEVIN MARKETTE** as Senior Director – Regional Sales South Asia. Based in New Delhi, Markette will oversee all commercial activities across the South Asia region, including the strategically important Indian market. A seasoned aviation executive, Markette brings over 20 years of leadership experience within Lufthansa Group, having successfully managed commercial, customer and operational teams across Africa, the Middle East and the Americas.



## FARIYAS HOTELS

Mumbai

Fariyas Hotels appoints **SHREENATH SHASTRY** as the Chief Executive Officer. Shastry brings with him over three decades of global leadership experience spanning hospitality management, strategic planning, real estate and integrated facility management services. Prior to rejoining Fariyas Hotels, Shastry served in various leadership capacities at Wipro over an 11-year tenure. He played a pivotal role in global hospitality management, digital transformation and real estate optimisation.



## HYATT PLACE GURGAON

Gurgaon

Hyatt Place Gurgaon appoints **NEHA KAPOOR** as the General Manager. Kapoor has more than 21 years of experience in the hospitality industry. Her strategic insight and people-centric ideals will drive the hotel's ongoing expansion. Kapoor began her career with the Grand Hyatt Mumbai's pre-opening team and has subsequently held significant Sales & Marketing positions with top hospitality brands, including JW Marriott Mumbai, Sofitel Mumbai BKC and Shangri-La Mumbai.



## ECKO HOTELS AND RESORTS

New Delhi

**AMRIT MUKHOPADHYAY** has been appointed Area General Manager by ECKO Hotels & Resorts. He has more than 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry and possesses a wealth of knowledge in budgeting, sales and marketing, revenue management, hotel operations and guest services. He has worked with esteemed hospitality brands, including The Fern, Royal Orchid and Clarks Inn. He has managed branding, hiring and training for several hotel pre-openings.



## WYNDHAM GARDEN JIM CORBETT CHHOI

Ramnagar

Wyndham Garden Jim Corbett Chhoi names **VIKKAS SHARMA** as the General Manager. In his new role, Sharma will be responsible for overall hotel operations, increasing revenue potential, enhancing guest experiences and creating positive work environment for team members. Corbett being a tiger reserve, Sharma would be required to promote Wyndham Garden in all tourism markets. Previously, he served as General Manager for Lemon Tree Premier Jim Corbett.



## MAYFAIR SPRING VALLEY RESORT

Guwahati

Mayfair Spring Valley Resort, Guwahati, has appointed **NIPU KALITA** as Assistant General Manager – Sales. Backed by over 13 years of experience with leading hotel chains like Marriott, Taj, Vivanta and The Park Hotels, Kalita's appointment marks a fresh push toward market expansion and guest outreach in Northeast India. Kalita steps into his new role after serving as Associate Director – Sales & Marketing at Courtyard by Marriott Shillong.



## HILTON GARDEN INN MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Mumbai

**AMAN DHOUNDIYAL** has been appointed as the General Manager of Hilton Garden Inn Mumbai International Airport. The property, owned by Fariyas Hotels & Resorts, is being operated in tie-up with the Hilton brand. With nearly 20 years of experience across marquee brands, such as Marriott and The Oberoi, he brings a blend of operational acumen, strategic foresight and people-first leadership to his new role.



## LINKIN REPS

New Delhi

Linkin Reps appoints **VINEET SARNA** as the Head of Business Development. Bringing with him a wealth of experience in B2B sales and strategic partnerships within the travel industry, Sarna is set to lead the growth journey for three of Linkin Reps' premier partners: Royal Gulf (Dubai), Tour Blue (Sri Lanka) and SriLankan Holidays, the holiday programme of SriLankan Airlines. He is a leader known for his sharp business acumen, market foresight and results-driven approach.



## LE MÉRIDIEN MAHABALESHWAR RESORT & SPA

Mahabaleshwar

Le Méridien Mahabaleshwar Resort & Spa has appointed **SHIVANSH DIXIT** as the Assistant Marketing and Communication Manager. With a strong foundation in digital marketing and brand communication, Dixit brings a fresh perspective and strategic vision to the resort's marketing initiatives. In his new role, Dixit will be responsible for supporting the planning and execution of the resort's marketing and communication strategies, including media relations and digital marketing.



## GRAND HYATT GURGAON

Gurgaon

Grand Hyatt Gurgaon has appointed **DIA RAJDEV** as the Director of Events. Rajdev brings over 15 years of hospitality experience across leading luxury brands, including The Ritz-Carlton, Four Seasons, St Regis and Westin. Recently, she served as Director of Catering at The Westin Mumbai Garden City, leading strategic initiatives for revenue optimisation, guest satisfaction and event innovation. Her career spans multiple geographies and responsibilities.



## MAHINDRA HOLIDAYS & RESORTS

Mumbai

The Mahindra Group has appointed **ASHA KHARGA** as the Chief Customer Officer of Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India. Kharga had been serving as the Chief Customer Officer of Mahindra Group. She brings over 28 years of rich experience in transforming customer-centric brands into premium offerings across multiple industries. She has been recognised for her strategic acumen, creative excellence and ability to harness consumer insights.




## CROWNE PLAZA KOCHI

Kochi

Crowne Plaza Kochi appoints **VIJENDER P MOHAN** as the Front Office Manager. Mohan brings with him more than 18 years of experience in Front Office operations, having worked with leading hospitality brands, such as Radisson Hotels, Ramada, ITC and Marriott. A graduate of Kerala University with a Diploma in Hotel Management, Mohan has built a strong career through his passion for delivering outstanding results, with a consistent focus on guest satisfaction and team leadership.



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# MMT leans into curated trips to spiritual towns

**Jasmeet Singh**, Chief Commercial Officer – Holidays & Experiences, MakeMyTrip, talking to **TRAVTALK**, outlines how the brand is blending innovation & personalisation, while underlining the importance of offline agents in curating culturally-rich experiences.



Nisha Verma

Travel preferences are evolving fast, feels **Jasmeet Singh**, Chief Commercial Officer – Holidays & Experiences, MakeMyTrip. “Today’s travellers seek flexibility, personalisation and assurance in a seamless manner across every stage of their holiday journey. That is where technology and innovation serve as our biggest enablers.”

## Experience evolution

Highlighting the changing demographic of holidays and experiences, Singh adds, “We have built a robust, automation-led platform that connects Indian travellers to instantly bookable, high-quality experiences across global destinations, with transparent last-mile details and culturally relevant content. Complementing this is our dynamic, do-it-yourself holiday engine that empowers users to customise every element of their trip in real time. It highlights the cost-effective

dates, adapts to traveller behaviour and offers smart nudges to support better decision-making.” He adds, “Over the next two years, we foresee deepening of our destination portfolio, both within India and overseas, by expanding direct partnerships to deliver even more localised, experience-rich holidays. The goal is to lead the transformation of holiday planning from a static transaction to a smart, personalised journey.”

## Big on tech

Singh believes that delivering personalisation at scale is one of the most transformative opportunities in holiday planning. “Our goal is to offer choices that are more relevant, timely and easy to act upon. That is precisely where our data-driven, modular platform architecture is pivotal. We have built deep funnel-level personalisation that adapts to traveller cohorts — families, couples, groups or theme-based seekers like spiritual travellers. It also accounts for region of origin, advance booking behaviour and preferred travel style. Customised landing pages, dynamic filters and assistive search suggestions ensure that discovery is tailored from the first click.”

Elaborating further, he says, “We have also adopted an API-first approach to integrate with global platforms, such as Viator, Euro Rail and GlobalTix, bringing a vast array of curated, instantly bookable experiences into our platform. Tools like the Visa Protection Plan and Visa Calculator empower outbound travel-



lers to make confident decisions despite global uncertainties. Meanwhile, our AI-powered chatbot acts as a real-time digital concierge and supports users across the journey, clarifying package details and resolving queries instantly, whether for a domestic escape or an international tour.”

## Beyond the usual

Agreeing that experiential travel has come of age, Singh says travellers are actively seeking places that offer cultural depth, spiritu-

**The goal is to lead the transformation of holiday planning from a static transaction to a smart, personalised journey**

al meaning or unique local character. “This rise in demand presents a powerful opportunity to spotlight India’s lesser-explored towns and cities through curated, experience-led formats. To serve this intent, we have introduced multiple differentiated offerings like ‘Live Like a Local’ — a series of day-long experiences crafted around food, art, folklore and heritage across leisure destinations.”

MakeMyTrip’s offline network includes over 180 franchise stores across 100+ cities, supported by a team of more than 1,500 holiday experts

## Delving into B2B

Singh claims that offline

travel agents continue to play a vital role in helping travellers — especially from smaller cities — navigate the complexities of holiday planning. “These are often high-involvement, trust-driven decisions, where agents serve as a valuable source of advice, reassurance and end-to-end support. While digital solutions are transforming many aspects of travel, the offline ecosystem remains relevant. Our myPartner platform has strengthened this network by providing agents with access to real-time inventory, pricing and curated holiday products.”

## The road ahead

Talking about their plans, Singh reveals, “We are pursuing growth across all fronts, domestic, outbound and new service formats. In the domestic market, an increasing number of travellers are planning holidays around a distinct theme, be it spiritual escapes, romantic getaways, or honeymoon stays in unique, offbeat locations.”

MakeMyTrip’s outbound business spans over 60 countries and continues to evolve. “Short-haul travel leads, especially with itineraries built around culinary discovery, hidden gems and Indian-friendly formats. Long-haul travel, too, is gaining traction,” Singh concludes.

## ‘PILGRIMAGE’ CATEGORY

MakeMyTrip has created a ‘Pilgrimage’ category, under which the company offers curated circuits across iconic spiritual towns, such as Char Dham, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Rameshwaram and Tirupati

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