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Indian travellers seek alternative destinations

After the recent India-Pakistan conflict and subsequent dip in travel to Turkey and Azerbaijan, Indians are shifting their summer travel plans and opting for destinations that offer cultural depth, affordability and political neutrality.



Surbhi Sharma

In the wake of recent India-Pakistan conflict and subsequent shift in sentiments, Indian travellers are changing their travel plans away from Turkey and Azerbaijan and seeking alternative leisure destinations that are culturally rich, visa-friendly and aligned with pro-India sentiment this summer. With more than 50-100 per cent cancellations



Isha Goyal
Executive Director & CEO
STIC Travel Group

reported by some travel companies for Turkey and Azerbaijan, industry players are swiftly redirecting demand to alternative countries.

New star on the block

Isha Goyal, Executive Director & CEO, STIC Travel Group, said that response from the Indian travel industry after the India-Pakistan conflict has been swift and unified. "We have seen a strong and swift movement of traffic away from Azerbaijan and Turkey. More than 30



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

per cent of this demand is now heading to Jordan alone," she said.

With its compact size, rich heritage and stable political climate, the country is fast becoming the go-to destination for Indian travellers this summer. Jordan's liberal environment, excellent infrastructure and wide-ranging attractions are proving attractive to families, couples and solo travellers. Indian agents are seeing enhanced commissions, flexible packages and support from both airlines

and tourism boards eager to fill the gap, she noted. This shift is not just consumer-driven. "Tourism boards and airlines from alternative destinations are actively collaborating with Indian agents. There are real-time repositioning efforts—flexible travel packages, co-branded marketing and enhanced commissions are all in play. From cruise operators to DMCs, partners are seizing this redirected demand with renewed focus. With Jordan leading the charge, agents are diversifying offerings, presenting offbeat options with an edge of safety and support," said Goyal.

Rise of visa-friendly alternatives

Pankaj Nagpal, Managing Director, Travstarz Global Group, confirms a 50 per cent cancellation rate for Turkey and Azerbaijan, including premium leisure groups. But there is no vacuum. "We offer

Contd. on page 15 ►

Can India's tourism associations weather every storm?

As crises threaten travel plans, India's tourism associations are stepping up like never before. Their swift actions and united voice are proving critical in shielding the industry's players.



Surbhi Sharma

In an industry as dynamic and sensitive as tourism, sudden disrup-

teller confidence and maintain business continuity. Their strategic interventions, policy advocacy and grassroots engage-



Ravi Gosain
President
IATO



Sanjeev Mehra
President
Skai International India

tions—from geopolitical conflicts to natural disasters—can send ripples of uncertainty across the globe. Amid these challenges, India's leading tourism associations have emerged as guardians of the sector, working tirelessly to protect interests of their members, restore

ment are vital to sustaining momentum when the stakes are high.

Protecting members on the frontlines

When political tension or crises strike, quick and coordinated responses are essential. Indian

Contd. on page 14 ►

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Philippines' visa-free entry

The Department of Foreign Affairs Philippines has announced that Indians travelling to the country can apply for 14-day visa-free entry by fulfilling the prescribed eligibility criteria.

TT Bureau

The Department of Foreign Affairs Philippines (Kagawaran Ng Ugnayang Panlabas) has announced that Indian visitors can apply for 14-day short-term visa-free entry to the Philippines. According to the document released by the department, Indian citizens can enjoy a visa-free stay in the Philippines for up to 14 days, exclusively for tourism purposes.

This type of admission will not be extended by the Bureau of Immigration. This type of admission will be non-convertible to other Philippine visa categories. The visa-free entry may

be availed in any Philippine port of entry (major international airports and secondary international hubs, as well as in sea-ports by passengers on



board cruise ships/ vessels). Transit passengers holding visas to a destination beyond the Philippines shall be required to apply for or hold Philippine transit visas. They must not have any derogatory record with

the Bureau of Immigration. Indian nationals availing of the said visa-free privilege will need to present the following documents at ports of entry.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

- ❖ Passport for at least 6-month validity
- ❖ Proof of confirmed accommodation
- ❖ Evidence of sufficient funds to cover expenses during the stay
- ❖ Return or onward ticket to the next country of destination

FAITH conclave in August

The FAITH will host its National Tourism Conclave in Delhi on 12-13 August. The conclave will serve as a critical milestone in defining the next phase of India's tourism growth.

Surbhi Sharma

The Federation of Associations in Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) has rescheduled its National Tourism Conclave 2025 keeping in view the geopolitical situation, which has impacted the international and domestic travel sentiments. Earlier slated to be held in June, the event will now take place on 12-13 August at Taj Palace in New Delhi, said **Bobby KS Sawhney**, Treasurer, FAITH. The theme of the conclave is 'Tourism 2030 – India on Mission Mode'.

Citing the reasons, **Puneet Chhatwal**, Chairman, FAITH, said, "The decision to postpone the con-



Puneet Chhatwal
Chairman
FAITH



Ajeet Bajaj
Vice Chairman
FAITH

clave has been taken after a thorough review of the evolving geopolitical landscape. This adjustment allows us to ensure greater participation from global stakeholders and uphold the spirit of collaboration."

Ajeet Bajaj, Vice Chairman, FAITH, said, "The

recommendations emerging from the discussions will be formally presented to policymakers, guiding strategic decisions to shape and evolve the policy framework to realise India's tourism potential while strengthening India's position as a leading global tourism destination."

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Time to steady the ship

In a world where one natural calamity, geopolitical spark or conflict can scatter months of travel plans, it's heartening to see India's tourism industry stand up—not just for damage control, but for long-term resilience.

Today, our travel associations are doing more than ticking boxes. They are lobbying hard when foreign advisories threaten inbound sentiment, urging national carriers and hotels to be flexible, and working hand-in-hand with government stakeholders to ensure disruptions don't derail decades of effort.

Whether it's Kashmir or Kerala, when crises hit, these bodies are mobilising fast—advocating, informing and guiding the industry through murky waters. They have become more than watchdogs. Now, they are the architects of industry stability.

Meanwhile, on the outbound front, the recalibration has been swift. Turkey and Azerbaijan saw a steep dip, but Indian travellers have not gone into hiding. Instead, they are pivoting to Jordan, Georgia, Egypt and other destinations that strike the right balance—visa-friendly, culturally appealing and politically neutral. Indian tour operators are not only quick to adapt—they are shaping new markets, negotiating better deals and creating fresh demand in regions that welcome it.

Still, reactive agility is not enough. The way forward demands proactive intelligence. We need an industry-wide crisis dashboard—real-time updates, advisories, sentiment tracking and coordination between domestic and outbound operators. Perception management should be at the centre, not an afterthought.

The message is clear for the industry—unity, not panic, is our best defence. At the same time, agility, not inertia, is our biggest strength.

The more we collaborate, communicate and co-create, the less vulnerable we become to global shocks—and the more future-ready our tourism truly is.

Manual travel approvals are dead weight?

Many travel organisations are still wrestling with outdated manual travel approval processes. Are manual travel approvals dead weight? The future of smart, efficient business travel management lies in pre-trip AI risk assessment.



TT Bureau

Let's cut through the noise and be honest—business demands agility and efficiency. Yet, far too many organisations are still wrestling with outdated manual travel approval processes. These are not just administrative steps; they are significant bottlenecks, actively hindering productivity and frustrating the very employees we rely on to drive the business forward. Sounds familiar? It's time to call it what it is: manual

AI risk assessment has the potential to eliminate layers of workflow traditionally dedicated to manual approvals

travel approvals are dead weight. The future of smart, efficient business travel management lies in pre-trip AI risk assessment.

Think about it. Approval delays consistently rank as a top headache for business travellers. But these delays are not just annoying; they



can directly translate into lost opportunities, stalled projects and a dip in morale. Why are we still relying on a manual, human-led gatekeeping process for every single trip request when powerful technology is readily available to do it better, faster and more accurately? I think, this is where the transformative power of AI comes in.

As I think deeper into this topic, more convinced I become. Instead of a cumbersome multi-step manual review, AI tools can instantly evaluate a travel request against a multitude of critical factors simultaneously. This means verifying compliance with cost policies and budgets, assessing vendor risk based on real-time data, analysing geopolitical threats and security concerns for the destination, and even factoring in traveller-specific insights like recent travel history

or potential burnout levels. The real-world results should speak volumes. The implications for the travel industry and beyond are profound. After all, embracing AI risk assessment has the potential to effectively eliminate entire layers of workflow traditionally dedi-

Let's use tech to enable and empower our employees. Isn't this an essential evolution for any business striving to remain competitive

cated to manual approvals. It forces us to redefine how travel budgets and compliance are managed, moving away from a rigid, often

slow, control-based model towards one centred on confidence-based governance. By letting AI quickly identify and flag the small percentage of genuinely high-risk trips, organisations can confidently grant pre-approval for the vast majority of standard travel, freeing up valuable time for travel managers and finance teams to focus on strategic initiatives and managing exceptions.

Looking ahead, one key idea resonates: "AI doesn't ask for permission—it calculates risk and moves forward." Let's use technology to enable and empower our employees. Isn't this an essential evolution for any business striving to remain competitive, agile and efficient in today's global landscape? It's time to shed the dead weight of manual processes and let the intelligence of AI lead the way.



Rajdev Bhattacharya
Global Head (Travel & Hospitality)
and Process Owner, Wipro

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

Spain-India declare 2026 as 'Dual Year'

India and Spain are strengthening tourism ties with 2026 marked as the 'Dual Year' to celebrate culture, tourism and advancements in AI. Alongside growing collaboration at FITUR, both nations aim to have direct air connectivity to major cities and island destinations, while promoting lesser-known Spanish regions among Indian travellers.

Janice Alysius

The Indian travel trade has much to look forward to, with Spain and India set to observe 2026 as the 'Dual Year' to celebrate culture, tourism and advancements in Artificial Intelligence in 2026. S Jaishankar, Minister, External Affairs of India, during his official visit to Spain, announced that 2026 will be marked as a 'Dual Year' between India and Spain.

At the heart of this momentum is FITUR, Spain's global tourism trade fair, which continues to draw strong participation from Indian stakeholders.



H.E. Juan Antonio March Pujol
Ambassador of Spain to India

Speaking at a networking event recently in New Delhi, **H.E. Juan Antonio March Pujol**, Ambassador of Spain to India, emphasised on deeper strategic collaboration. "The idea is to take the tourism connection to a new dimension. Spain is the second-largest tourism market and received 94 million international tourists in 2024. With India's tourism sector also on the rise, our aim is to establish stronger connectivity between India and Spain, with direct flights to



Jose Sánchez Rodríguez
Commercial Manager, Trade Fair Business Director, IFEMA MADRID

Madrid, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, and the Canary Islands," he said.



Elena Orland
Tourism Counsellor - Embassy of Spain & Director - Spain Tourism Board

Jose Sánchez Rodríguez, Commercial Manager, Trade Fair Business Director, IFEMA MADRID, highlighted that India's footprint at

FITUR has grown significantly over the years. "India has long played a significant and prominent role at FITUR. Indian tourism participation represented 30 per cent of the exhibition area in the Asia-Pacific zone last year. And in 2018, India was chosen as FITUR's partner country," Rodríguez said.

Elena Orland, Tourism Counsellor - Embassy of Spain & Director - Spain Tourism Board, said, "Tourism is a sector with great potential to enhance bilateral ties. Last year, we welcomed over 230,000 Indians to Spain, and their average expenditure is among the highest."

INDIA-SPAIN TIE-UP

❖ Dual Year 2026 to celebrate culture, tourism & advancements in AI

❖ Aim to build a new partnerships between Indian hotel industry and tour operators

❖ FITUR 2026 to debut the Knowledge Hub on AI & travel technology innovation

Not embracing NDC not an option

Initially perceived as a threat to GDS, NDC has been integrated by travel technology providers to deliver complex retailing solutions. However, adoption hesitancy among agents and OTAs still persists. As modern retailing shifts from traditional ticketing to dynamic order management, it demands tripartite collaboration between airlines, GDSs and agents.

Hazel Jain

When NDC was born, dynamic pricing was not even a part of the conversation. It was all about ancillaries and bundling. Today, dynamic pricing is not just here—it's a strategic priority for nearly every airline. But NDC is now powering the next wave; real-time dynamic pricing across every channel, including corporate travel.

Anil Parashar, Chief Executive Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient, says, "NDC is a great combination of the new technologies and the new offering that the travel agent can use. It's an evolving subject and it could take until 2030 for



Anil Parashar
Chief Executive Officer, InterGlobe Technology Quotient

all airlines to migrate to it. Currently on Travelport, there are about 20 airlines available in India and I think that is a good number to start with. Airlines themselves are in different stages of maturity – some have moved forward, some are in nascent stages, while others have not even started."



Ritam Saha
Passenger & Cargo Services for India, Nepal and Bhutan, IATA

In terms of agents, some have gone faster than the others. But the content is increasing and with the national carrier now onboarding NDC, Parashar thinks the adoption will be faster even among travel agents.

Ritam Saha, Assistant Director - Passenger & Cargo Services for India,



Suprabh Oza
Director, MyTravelBazaar.com

Nepal and Bhutan, IATA, shares their aspiration for NDC. "We sincerely want at least 30 per cent of the total airline sales to be coming from the NDC channel. The good part is that we already see one of the airlines bypassing that number, and there are others who are marching steadily towards that goal," says Saha.

Underlining some issues travel agents face in adopting NDC, **Suprabh Oza**, Director, MyTravelBazaar.com, says that since this is a new technology being adopted by the GDS companies, it is not at par with what they have been

using, especially the EDI-FACT part of it.

"Airlines are also pushing for it since they want something that allows them to curate their content easily and share it with us on our SUDOS. So, it is an effort that needs to come not only from GDS companies, but also from the travel agents," he adds.

NDC is now powering the next wave; real-time dynamic pricing across every channel, including corporate travel



TRAVEL NEWS

IHCL to invest ₹2,500 cr in Northeast over 3 years, take hotel count to 30 hotels by 2030, says CEO

PM urges States to develop one global-standard tourist destination each to attract global visitors

IATO inks MoU with Nepal Association of Tour & Travel Agents

ADTOI to introduce vendor marketplace app, expand with new chapter in Bihar

World Travel & Tourism Council announces Manfredi Lefebvre as its Incoming Chair

Cruise holidays emerge as viable travel option eliminating complexities of multiple visas: Thomas Cook CEO

TAAI pushes to revive J&K tourism

In a move to revive travel and tourism in Jammu & Kashmir post the recent unrest, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has launched 'Let's Visit J&K' campaign. Designed as 'a community-tourism-industry connect' initiative, the campaign aims to restore confidence among tourists visiting the region.

 Surbhi Sharma

In a bold move, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) has launched a campaign to revive travel and tourism in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), where the tourist footfall took a nosedive after the recent attack and subsequent tension between India and Pakistan. The campaign, 'Let's Visit J&K', aims to restore the confidence of tourists in the region, support local livelihoods, and revitalise tourism activity in the Union Territory.

Rebuilding a premier destination

Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, expressed disappointment over the current tourism dip in J&K and



Sunil Kumar
President
TAAI

recalled the association's past efforts, including the landmark 2018 convention in Kashmir, which elevated the region's tourism profile. "We invested years into establishing the UT as a premier destination. The recent developments have unfortunately undone some of that progress," Kumar noted.

Call for responsible outbound strategies

On the outbound travel front, Kumar highlighted that Indian outbound travel must be aligned with


We invested years into establishing the UT as a premier destination. Recent developments have undone some of that

those countries which are favourable to the call of government. He has asked the FAITH to con-

vene a round table of all industry associations to define an apt policy that aligns with that of the government. He called for an industry-wide round table involving all major travel associations to reassess travel relationships.

Future ahead

While destinations, such as Australia, Europe, Bali, Singapore, Japan and Korea continue to attract Indian travellers, Kumar reiterated the importance of promoting safe and politically aligned destinations. "Travel must continue—but with thought and strategy," he noted.

Meanwhile, to mark its 75th years in the industry, TAAI is planning to host its upcoming convention in Q3

or Q4 this year, underscoring its legacy and ongoing commitment to shaping Indian tourism.

CAMPAIGN INITIATIVES

- ❖ Active promotion of J&K via aggressive social media outreach
- ❖ Collaboration with J&K government
- ❖ Partnership with hospitality sector & local tourism operators
- ❖ Engagement with airlines
- ❖ Leveraging TAAI's local network

VFS workshop for TAAI Hyderabad

VFS Global recently organised a workshop to provide Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) members in Hyderabad a platform to share and resolve their queries related to the challenges they face while assisting clients with visa applications. The workshop focused on operational best practices, process timelines, document requirements & traveller preparedness.

 TT Bureau

In a significant step towards enhancing the visa application experience for Indian travellers, VFS Global and the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) jointly hosted a Visa Insights Workshop, titled 'Consultant-to-Officer Dialogues' in Hyderabad, Telangana, on 17 May 2025.

The interactive session was attended by 40 travel agents from the Telangana and Andhra Pradesh chapters of TAAI and staff from the VFS Global Visa Application Centre. The workshop facilitated dialogue between travel consultants



Participants at the Visa Insights Workshop in Hyderabad pose for a group photograph

and VFS Global, promoting transparency and mutual understanding in the visa facilitation process.

The event featured discussions on the end-to-end process of visa applications handled by VFS

Global, focusing on operational best practices, process timelines, document requirements and traveller preparedness.

Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, said, "This joint knowledge-sharing work-

shop by TAAI and VFS Global, is among the firsts of its kind. This is a commendable initiative that strengthens the bridge between visa consultants from travel companies and VFS Global frontline employees. Such collab-

orative efforts not only enhance operational efficiency but also empower our industry professionals with deeper insights needed to deliver exceptional service to travellers, especially in an evolving travel environment."

Sharad Gowani, Regional Head, VFS Global, said, "Engaging with travel agents through forums not only enables us to understand their perspectives better but also improves service delivery. At VFS Global, we are committed to creating a seamless and informed visa application journey for travellers. We believe that partnerships with key industry stake-

holders like TAAI are not just important, but integral to achieving that goal. We sincerely thank TAAI for their enthusiastic participation and providing us with a platform that benefits the entire travel community."

FACT FILE

- ❖ VFS Global has been spearheading travel agent outreach across the country. It recently concluded a six-city roadshow supported by the travel fraternity

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Travel honchos share big India plans

In conversation with the head honchos of travel conglomerates **TRAVELTALK** learns that the travel trade is leaning into technology, personalisation and new demand drivers. AI tools and curated content are being strengthened to support agents more efficiently. Destinations are expanding their appeal—beyond religious tourism. Representation firms are focusing on cruises, hotels and airline GSAs, while others are blending long-standing trade relationships with data-driven marketing in metro markets. Tech remains a core enabler, with many scaling faster via automation and improved UX. Cruise players are calling for new coastal and river routes, supported by awareness campaigns. The market is moving from off-the-shelf packages to seamless, personalised journeys. With tier II cities, younger travellers and interest in slow travel rising, companies are engaging regional agents through targeted workshops. Inbound destinations like New Zealand are seeing double-digit growth and are investing in connectivity.



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

“The Indian travel market is embracing integrated, experience-led travel. At RezLive.com, we offer hotels, transfers, sightseeing, cruises, car rentals, rail, insurance and VIP desk services under one platform. To support our B2B partners, we continue enhancing tools like Smart Match for them.”



Amruta Bangera
Director of Marketing, Israel Ministry of Tourism - India

“Over the next two years, my vision is to deepen Israel's appeal beyond traditional pilgrimage and historical tourism, and establish it as a multi-experiential destination for Indian travellers—families, luxury seekers and niche segments like film tourism, adventure tourism, wellness and sustainability tourism.”



Seema Kadam
Regional Director (India), Los Angeles Tourism & Convention Board

“Our approach for the India market is primarily B2B-focused and we have also launched an extensive marketing campaign to ensure that Los Angeles remains top-of-mind for Indian travellers. The upcoming direct airlift between India and Los Angeles will be a game-changer. We continue to prioritise key segments.”



Leena Brahme
Business Head (India) Sharaf Travel

“The cruise tourism landscape is gaining a promising traction. An important milestone was the launch of Cruise Bharat Mission under which India's port infrastructure and the number of cruise terminals should see an increase drastically. With MSC and Costa Cruises, we would like to bridge the gap.”



Edgar Lacker
CEO AVIAREPS

“India is one of the world's fastest-growing travel markets, and we are proud to be at the forefront of destination and hotel representation in the region. India will continue to gain importance in the global travel and tourism landscape as a key source market. Our aim is to enhance destination and hotel portfolio in two years.”



Elena Orland
Tourism Counsellor - Embassy of Spain & Director - Spain Tourism Board

“We want to increase the number of Indians coming to Spain. A visit to Madrid or Barcelona is not enough to understand and experience what Spain is, because Spain is diversity. For example, Spain is known worldwide for flamenco, but there are thousands of dances of ancient origins that are yet to be explored.”



Pranav Kapadia
Founder & Director Global Destinations

“India's travel market is evolving rapidly, led by a new generation of experience-driven travellers. Our aim is to strengthen our position as strategic partners by integrating traditional trade relationships with data-led digital marketing over the next two years. Our clients rely on us to curate campaigns.”



Isha Goyal
CEO STIC Travel Group

“In the next two years, India is taking centre stage in the global travel marketplace as one of the most sought-after source markets in the world. STIC Travel Group stands on a strong legacy of innovation in the travel industry. Going forward, we continue to expand our partnerships with emerging tourism brands.”



Dheeraj Ranjan Kumarr
Founder & Director Baltrip Wisata

“The Indian travel market is set to witness a surge in experiential travel. We are tapping into this momentum by curating high-value offerings like Maharaya Chambers, designed for discerning travellers. Whether it is luxury weddings, leisure escapes, or corporate retreats, our itineraries reflect local expertise.”



Sheetal Munshaw
Director Atout France India

“As India is poised to become the fifth largest source market globally, it is also gaining in prominence as a source market for France. I see well-heeled Indian travellers exploring France in more unique, exclusive, authentic and immersive ways. We also see the Indian footprint expand across France.”



Shalini Nair
Founding Member TravelBullz.com

“Over the past year, we have seen phenomenal growth in our global hotels' business, driven by strategic partnerships and robust demand. Looking ahead, our goal is to scale this success tenfold within the next two years. To achieve this, we are doubling down on technology-driven solutions, enhancing efficiency and user experience.”



Nalini Gupta
Managing Director ClickMyCruise & Lotus Destinations

“To fully realise the potential of cruise tourism, India needs a multi-pronged approach. This includes upgrading port infrastructure along the coastline and simplifying taxes on cruise services to make them attractive. We should also encourage the development of new coastal and river routes.”

Contd. on page 12 ►

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Paving way for next-gen players

► Contd. from page 10



CA Krishnan R
Director & Chief Executive Officer
Unimoni, India

“Indian travel industry is on a strong growth trajectory, attracting new players and intensifying market competition. While this expansion offers consumers a wider range of choices and better deals, it also challenges travel agencies to differentiate themselves and sustain business in a crowded market. In this evolving environment, competitive advantage will come from innovation, agility, and customer-centric strategies.”



Rahim Aslam
Founder & Consultant
OA Globe DMC

“The Indian market is evolving fast, and in the next two years, we will see a sharp move toward immersive, story-driven travel. It's no longer just about checking countries off a list—it's about finding meaning in the journey. Travellers now want to swim with turtles in Seychelles, celebrate milestones in the Maldives, explore culture in Jordan, or unwind in Bali with wellness at the center. We have set up partnerships in places Indian travellers are asking for.”



Bezawit Tasew
Regional Director - India
Subcontinent, Ethiopian Airlines

“In 2025, Ethiopian Airlines has seen significant growth and focused on partnerships and collaborations, particularly with the launch of new routes and strategic alliances. The airline has expanded its operations, including new flights to Hyderabad, and is actively pursuing collaborations to enhance its network and services. Ethiopian Airlines is exploring new technologies and innovative solutions, including the deployment of Archer Aviation's Midnight aircraft.”



Santosh Kanchan
Country Head - India
Cozmo Travel

“The role of travel agencies is not diminishing—it's transforming. In an age of online noise, travel professionals are becoming trusted curators. The future lies in specialisation, personalisation, and integration. The emphasis is shifting from just selling packages to crafting seamless journeys. The Indian travel market is on the brink of a transformative leap—fuelled by accelerated digitisation, shifting consumer aspirations and appetite for immersive and purpose-driven journeys.”



Dipti Adhia
Director, Discover the World - India
(Representing Carnival Cruise Line in India)

“The cruising habits of Indian travellers are evolving rapidly, driven by a desire for unique experiences, luxury and cultural immersion. As the cruise industry continues to cater to these preferences with innovative offerings and personalised services, the trend is likely to grow even stronger. Whether it's a family vacation, a romantic getaway, MICE, weddings or adventure, Indian cruisers are set to explore the world with renewed enthusiasm and curiosity.”



Beate HK Mauder Kakkar
Managing Director
Indiva Marketing

“The Indian travel market is on an impressive growth trajectory, driven by strong economic fundamentals and increasing demand for meaningful travel experiences. At Indiva Marketing, we see immense opportunity across domestic and international destinations, especially with growing interest from Tier II-III cities. Our role is to strategically guide partners—airlines, hospitality, and tourism boards—by aligning product offerings with evolving Indian preferences.”



Neeti Sharma
Director, Intrepid Marketing
and Communications

“Over the next two years, India's travel market will be shaped by younger travellers, a growing interest in slow travel and rising demand from tier II cities. Intrepid Marketing and Communications is aligning with these trends by deepening engagement with tier II city agents and driving destination awareness through targeted workshops. Our PR strategy highlights unique, experience-led stories through compelling media features and impactful influencer tie-ups.”



René de Monchy
Chief Executive
Tourism New Zealand

“Visitor numbers from India is experiencing double digit growth and the travel trade has been integral in shaping this. We are focused on enhancing these commercial partnerships and through improved connectivity and strategically targeted high-impact marketing campaigns, we are keen to convert this interest into bookings and visitation. Tourism remains a cornerstone of New Zealand's economy, the second largest export earner behind only agriculture.”



Rajesh Kakade
Founder & CEO
Red Planner

“Tier II and III cities are giving a boost to travel. It's been proven that people are now looking for something trending, offbeat and the luxury segment is also looking at silent holiday experiences. I wish we get to cater more of such travellers moving ahead. My vision is to empower the travel agent with AI-based technology and provide them access to authentic knowledge about destinations so that they are able to sell or upsell packages.”



Huzan Fraser Motivala
Representative India - Royal
Commission for AIUla

“Our focus is on attracting the right traveller—particularly the high yield ones looking for bespoke experiences. We promote AIUla as a 3 to 4 nights destination dedicated to experiencing the heritage sites, stunning desert landscapes and rock formations, the oasis and wellness. We are working to increase visitor count, number of nights spent and expenditure. It's about inspiring Indian travellers to slow down, explore in depth and engage meaningfully with the destination.”



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

“The Indian travel market was set for explosive growth, but current political uncertainties and renewed COVID concerns may impact momentum in the short term. That said, we remain optimistic about long-term prospects. At Travstarz, we are enhancing the B2B booking journey through digital tools, while innovating with personalised, sustainable, and offbeat travel experiences. Our focus is on evolving with tech and use of AI while keeping high-touch service intact.”



Monish Shah
Founder & CEO
DreamSetGo

“The Indian sports tourism market is on the verge of a transformative boom. In 2024, we facilitated travel for over 15,000 fans—double from the previous year—which reflects the surging appetite for premium, immersive sports experiences. We have built our offerings so that no two journeys are exactly alike, yet the quality is uniformly top-notch. I envision India emerging as a global fan base and a hosting destination in two years.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

Geopolitics mars India-China travel?

The Chinese Embassy in India claims to have issued over 85,000 visas to Indian citizens between 1 January and 9 April 2025, promoting travel to China with relaxed visa rules and reduced fees. Despite this, the Chinese visa remains elusive for the Indian traveller. **TRAVALTALK** asks tour operators about the challenges they are facing and their suggestions for other agents.



Hazel Jain

The Chinese Ambassador to India, Xu Feihong, recently announced on social media that 85,000 visas had been issued to 'Indian friends' between 1 January and 9 April 2025, as he invited more Indians to visit China and experience its "open, safe and friendly environment". They have even extended the deadline for reduced visa fees until December 31, 2025 to encourage more arrivals. But agents in India continue to face hurdles. They claim that the Chinese embassy is rejecting 98 per cent visa applications without giving any reasons, and passports are being returned to applicants. They urge their fraternity to be careful and inform their clients accordingly.

NTO doesn't exist for us!

Kalpesh Bhutta, Founder, Harmony Tours, says that while China is now open for tourists, visitor visas from India is a huge challenge. "Maybe their teams in India are not equipped to handle a large number of applications or they simply don't want to issue visas to Indian travellers – it's hard to tell. The truth is that the Chinese tourism board



Kalpesh Bhutta
Founder
Harmony Tours

doesn't exist for us, so the challenge of getting visitor visa can be solved by connecting with the NTO office based in Beijing with the help of key inbound operators from China who work with Indian tour operators," says Bhutta.

Agents state that the root cause of the problem could be the geopolitical tension between the two countries. "What we understand as laymen that Chinese products have been roasted and, as a result, the Chinese authorities have reciprocated by scrutinising each and every visa application and granting limited visas for doing business," Bhutta adds.

Manoj Saraf, Managing Director, Gainwell Travel, highlights discrepancies, and says, "In Kolkata, we are unable to obtain long-term multiple-entry



Manoj Saraf
Managing Director
Gainwell Travel

Chinese visas, which are available in other jurisdictions. And, if a visa is denied, the Chinese Consulate does not issue a rejection letter. In Delhi, if a visa application is refused, reapplying immediately with the same set of documents often results in the visa being granted. Moreover, in Kolkata, applicants are required to submit their documents in person at VFS, as a live photo is taken during submission. In contrast, in other jurisdictions, agents are allowed to submit applications."

A lottery system?

Sameer Karnani, Managing Director, Arunodaya Travels and MC Member of TAAI, also says that the Chinese consulate has become increasingly stringent and unpredictable in processing visas, with a surge in unexplained rejections. "A significant



Sameer Karnani
Managing Director, Arunodaya
Travels and MC Member of TAAI

number of applications are denied due to alleged discrepancies in invitation let-

ters, though applicants often assert the documents meet official requirements. This tightening appears to be linked to broader diplomatic friction between India and China, reflecting reciprocal tensions over visa policies. The process now resembles a lottery

multiple reasons, primarily the mistrust between India and China in terms of business relations. Factors such as workload, time constraints and the sheer volume of applications can also impact the review process," Damani suggests.

Hutokshi Marker, CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India, however, says that in her experience the submission process for Chinese visa has been smooth when applied with precise



Manish Kriplani
Chairman, Southern Region (OTOAI) and
Managing Director, Baywatch Travels

and accurate documents. "However, visa processing time has increased from 7 to 10 days, and we receive no explanations for rejections as it all appears in Chinese," she adds.

Manish Kriplani, Chairman, Southern Region (OTOAI) and Managing Director, Baywatch Travels, says, "Even when the same set of documents are attached for two applications, one gets approved and the other gets rejected. Sometimes we wonder if it's the invite which is an issue or the company from where the invite has come. So, we ask our clients to try with another Chinese company for invitation which has resulted in success a few times! Go figure."

Sampat Damani, Partner, Disha Travel, believes that the main challenge he faces when processing Chinese visas or any visa for their clients is ensuring that applicants understand the complexities of the visa issuance process. "In case of Chinese visa, the high rate of rejection is due to



Sampat Damani
Partner
Disha Travel



Hutokshi Marker
Chief Operating Officer
Trail Blazer Tours India

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

❖ 85,000 visas had been issued to Indian passport holders between 1 January and 9 April 2025.

❖ The Chinese Embassy in India has announced an extension of reduced visa fees for travellers, effective until 31 December 2025. The initiative aims to simplify travel procedures



Jogi Mahal curates luxe packages

Tucked into the heart of Ranthambore, Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal is where royal heritage, wilderness and wellness converge. With 40 elegantly designed rooms—offering Aravalli vistas and private plunge pools—the resort weaves luxury into every detail. More than a stay, it offers an immersive experience through specially designed packages for trade.



Amita Pandey

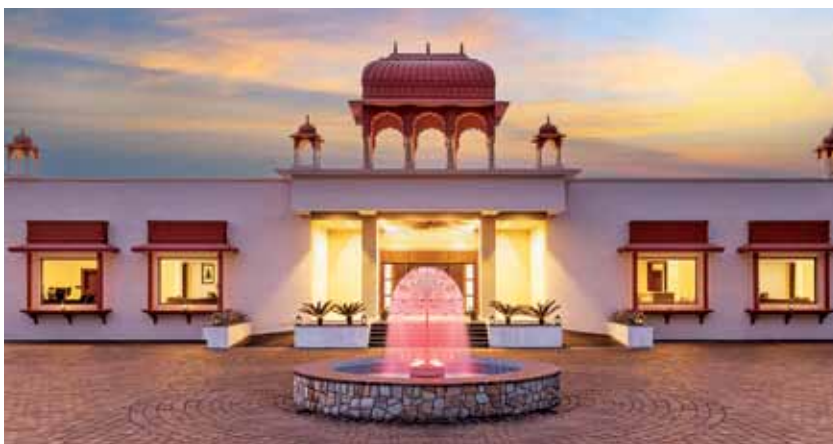
Rajasthan whispers royalty at every turn—its grand forts echo tales of valour, mystery and legacy. Among them, Ranthambore Fort carries a particularly enchanting story of love and betrayal that lingers in its ancient corridors. For those eager to uncover it, the journey begins with Ranthambore itself—a realm where one can find regal architecture, thrilling tiger safaris and vibrant local flavours mingled.

At the heart of this experience lies Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal by Onora Hospitality, where every corridor of the hotel seems to be greeting guests with



Karan Bakshi
GM, Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal, Ranthambore

evocative paintings of majestic tigers and staff ready to offer authentic Rajasthani drinks. Each corner of the property is designed to delight—where visitors are invited to explore the region's soul through hands-on pottery sessions, lac bangle making and stargazing nights. Speaking about the core ideation behind Onora



Hospitality, **Karan Bakshi**, GM, Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal, Ranthambore, said, "Onora was envisioned as a brand that bring together art, destination and local soul to provide travellers with immersive getaways rooted in comfort and storytelling."

Room inventory

Bookmark Resorts Jogi Mahal promises to be a luxurious gateway blending wildlife and wellness. Speaking about the property, Bakshi said, "The Resort features 40 luxury and spacious rooms across four categories,

including premium & luxury rooms.

Expansion plans

Sharing their expansion plans, Bakshi said, "Onora Hospitality is set to launch properties in destinations, such as Jawai, Chail, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Amritsar and

Lonavala, while long-term vision includes establishing 15-20 resorts in next five years across India."

EXCLUSIVE PACKAGE

Chase The Tiger

❖ 2-Night double occupancy Premium Room

❖ 2-Canter Safari (Morning-Afternoon)

❖ Breakfast + Lunch + Hi-tea & packed snacks during safari

❖ Rate: ₹32,999

Restoring traveller confidence key

► Contd. from page 3

Association of Tour Operators (IATO), led by its newly elected President **Ravi Gosain**, exemplifies this approach. Recently, IATO addressed France's negative travel advisory against India by writing directly to senior officials, including Vikram Misri, Foreign Secretary, MEA and Suman Billa, Additional Secretary & DG, Tourism, Government of India, to highlight that the situation across India remained stable for foreign tourists. The association urged diplomatic engagement to get the advisory rescinded to prevent a decline in French inbound traffic.

Similarly, in the wake of recent terror attack in Pahalagam and subsequent India-Pakistan conflict, IATO urged Air India, IndiGo, the



Bobby KS Sawhney
Hony. Secretary ITTA

FHRAI and HAI to waive cancellation charges of groups/ FITs at least till 31 July 2025 and full refund of the advance payments to the tour operators. "These actions are part and parcel of our service to members," Gosain emphasises.

Sanjeev Mehra, President, Skål International India, said that their association works closely with tourism boards and government



Nitin Mittal
National Coordinator NIMA

agencies to ensure a swift and structured response. "Our strong regional structure enables rapid information flow, resource mobilisation and coordinated action to keep tourism momentum intact," he notes.

Restoring confidence via advocacy

When instability clouds perception, restoring traveller confidence becomes critical. For Skål Interna-

tional India, the key lies in leveraging its global credibility. Tourism India Alliance (TIA) takes a nuanced route by curating its communication strategy. **Jagdeep Bhagat**, President, TIA, said, "Even in adverse situations, we issue only such advisories that help travellers make informed decisions." Indian Tourist Transporters Association (ITTA) plays a pivotal role in the movement of travellers. "We work with government agencies to ensure transportation remains safe, and circulate timely updates to reduce uncertainty," says **Bobby KS Sawhney**, Hony. Secretary, ITTA. "Our close collaboration with stakeholders, including its role within FAITH, the umbrella body, ensures a unified front in tourism communication," he added.

Operational support for members

The Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA) focuses on contract standardisation. "We encourage our members to adopt watertight

Amid challenges, India's tourism associations have emerged as guardians of the sector, working tirelessly

contracts for corporate and wedding and other MICE clients to minimise risk of disputes during unforeseen circumstances," says

Nitin Mittal, National Coordinator, NIMA. The association also provides expert consultations on various industry-related matters, including clarifications on Tax Collected at Source (TCS), best practices for structuring contracts with customers across small, medium and large events, as well as strategies for operational risk management—arming its members to manage risks and maintain business continuity.



Indians redraw domestic travel plans

After the current unrest in Jammu & Kashmir, which impacted many parts of northern India, domestic travellers are turning towards safer, scenic alternatives for their summer vacations. New trends are shaping the summer getaway plans, as safety and flexibility take priority for the travellers. Tour operators report a surge in interest for South India and the Northeast.



Surbhi Sharma

As security concerns disrupt travel plans to Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and other border areas in the northwest, Indian domestic tourism is witnessing a marked shift. Travellers are now opting for alternative destinations within India, particularly in the South and Northeast.

Northern destinations take a backseat

Ather Narwari, Founder, Earth Explorer, says, "Given the recent security concerns in Kashmir, many tourists are cancelling or postponing their bookings. We are diverting interest towards Uttarakhand and Ladakh, but they are cautious



Ather Narwari
Founder
Earth Explorer

in approach." However, he remains hopeful with celebrity-led campaigns like Agli Chutti Kashmir Main, which promise long-term recovery potential.

Zahoor Ahmed Qari, Kashmir Chapter President, TAAI, agrees to Narwari's views. "Following recent



Mariamma Jose
Managing Director
Athena Travels

attack (in Pahalgam), traveller sentiment has clearly shifted. Bookings to the northern states are down and travellers are heading towards South India and Northeast," says Qari.

South India and Northeast see upsurge
Mariamma Jose, Manag-



H Radhakrishna Sharma
Director
Seven Sisters Holidays

ing Director, Athena Travels, observes that "travellers are moving away from politically sensitive regions and heading to quieter, wellness-focused destinations." She highlights Coorg, Munnar and Kodaikanal in the South and Meghalaya and Sikkim in the Northeast as top picks

this summer. Beach destinations like Gokarna and Varkala are also trending due to their peaceful, scenic appeal, she adds.

H Radhakrishna Sharma, Director, Seven Sisters Holidays, notes a "marginal increase" in queries for the Northeast, especially Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. "Sikkim and Darjeeling remain popular," he observes.

"With uncertainty around North India, people are travelling to Ooty, Coorg and Kerala while pilgrimage routes in Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand continue to attract domestic traffic," said **Lokesh Bettaiah**, Vice President, TAAI.

Looking forward

As travellers increasingly demand real-time safety updates and flexible bookings, industry experts emphasise the need for strong security reassurances and promotional campaigns.

IN DEMAND

❖ Popular destinations in South & Northeast India: Coorg, Munnar, Kodaikanal & Gokarna

❖ Northeast hotspots: Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh & Sikkim

CIS, EU & SE Asia garner interest

Contd. from page 3

many choices to our B2B partners like Egypt, Georgia, Greece, Abu Dhabi, Oman and the USA, apart from the regular favourites like Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Vietnam," he said. "Some of the visa friendly destinations are Egypt, Georgia, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Thailand and UAE, and we will definitely see increased traffic to these destinations in the near future," he said, adding that many tourism boards are already quite active in India and the recent turn of events gives them an extra opportunity to pull traffic to their countries.

Indian tourists remain cost-conscious, but recent geopolitical issues have made them conscious and rethink their travel plans.



Valmiki Hari Kishan
Founder, Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions

"While affordability is still crucial, the current climate has made travellers more conscious. This might be temporary, but it is real," Nagpal shares.

Bali & CIS nations top picks for leisure
Painting a stark picture, **Valmiki Hari Kishan**, Founder, Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions, said, "We have seen 100 per

cent cancellations in leisure travel to Turkey and Azerbaijan. Business travel is down by 50–60 per cent." His agency is re-directing bookings to Bali

We have seen 100% cancellations in leisure travel to Turkey and Azerbaijan. Business travel is down by 50–60%

and CIS nations, such as Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Belarus. "Social media and news channels have played a big role. Unless these nations change their stance, it's hard to see

Indian travel returning," he said.

Highlighting the unifying power of tourism, he said, "It's the strongest weapon to bring nations together. But if political ties weaken, even the most tourist-friendly places will suffer."

Mediterranean circle
Emphasising that the company sees a significant drop in new bookings for Turkey and Azerbaijan over the last two weeks, **Karan Agarwal**, Director, Cox & Kings, said, "We have noticed travellers exploring alternatives, such as Greece, Egypt, Croatia and Morocco in place of Turkey, while Georgia, Armenia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are attracting those who had considered Azerbaijan, offering similar vibe and affordability."



Karan Agarwal
Director
Cox & Kings

He added, "We are supporting impacted travellers with free cancellation, rescheduling to alternative destinations, including free-visa support." Cox & Kings has also taken a firm stance on prioritising national sentiment. "Nation comes first. We will always align our offerings with what is safe and appropriate for Indian travellers," Agarwal said.

Curated travel

Travel agents agree to the fact that outbound tourism from India is entering a more curated, values-aligned phase now. "Destination curation is no

We have noticed travellers exploring alternative destinations, such as Greece, Egypt, Croatia and Morocco in place of Turkey

longer just about logistics," said Goyal, adding that, "It is about aligning with what Indian travellers feel, believe, and want to support."



Checklist for camel safaris

Camel safaris are a unique desert adventure, but they require careful preparation to ensure client safety and animal welfare. ATOAI provides comprehensive guidelines for camel safaris. Here are the key points every B2B agent should know:

Camel health and safety

Only mature, healthy camels should be used; saddles must be secure, safe & comfortable.

Weight limits

Two riders only if combined weight of the riders is under 65 kg to prevent stress on the camel.

Guide qualifications

Guides need 5-year experience with animals, first aid certification and desert ecosystem understanding.

Guide training

Training must cover soft skills, hospitality, hygiene, desert knowledge and medical emergencies like snake bites.

Client briefing

Explain how to mount, dress, hydrate and stay safe in desert weather and conditions.

Documentation

Clients must sign a disclaimer; disclose health issues and carry necessary medicines for remote locations.

Emergency preparedness

Guides must know medical evacuation plans and keep first aid kits accessible.

Operator standards

Operators must use quality gear, employ qualified staff, be recognised and promote sustainability practices.

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.

Taste Oman's unique culture, cuisine & adventure

As Oman develops tourism as a pillar of its national growth strategy, Indian travellers—whether corporate & MICE, celebratory, adventure or leisure-focused—are being welcomed with open arms. The country touched 7 lakh Indian footfall in 2024, and is eyeing for more this year. From Muttrah Fort to Royal Opera House along with the recently opened Oman Across Ages Museum, it is offering diverse tourism offerings to Indian agents for their clients with diverse needs.



Surbhi Sharma

As the summer travel starts, Oman has raised the bars to welcome the highest number of globetrotters around the world, particularly Indians. Nestled on the southeastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, it is a culturally rich, naturally stunning and easily accessible destination.

With direct flights from major Indian cities, such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru, and an increasingly India-friendly tourism strategy, the country is fast emerging as a hidden gem in the Gulf. From the coastal elegance of Muscat to the cool and rugged charm of Jabal Akhdar, the country is a compelling mix of heritage, leisure and adventure, making it an ideal destination for Indian travel agents seeking fresh and diverse itineraries for FITs, families and even MICE travellers.



Muscat: Elegant gateway to Oman

Oman's capital city, Muscat, is a charming blend of tradition and modernity, where ancient souqs (markets) and forts stand gracefully alongside world-class culinary and cultural experiences.

Rozna: For authentic Omani cuisine

A true immersion into Oman begins with its cuisine. For food-loving Indian travellers, Rozna offers a delightful introduction to authentic Omani dishes in a setting that reflects traditional architectural charm

and homely vibes. With a menu rich in meat stews, Hummus, Uzbeki, Shuwa,

Nestled on the southeastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, it is a culturally rich, nature-filled & accessible destination

Fattoush salad and Luqma, the restaurant provides a cultural and culinary feast, perfect for Indian palates seeking both familiarity and novelty.

Royal Opera House: A cultural jewel

India's culturally inclined travellers will find an unexpected treasure in the Royal Opera House Muscat, a symbol of the Sultanate's love for the arts. From classical operas and ballets to Arabic music and contemporary world performances, the venue is a perfect addition to high-end leisure itineraries.

Muttrah Fort & Muttrah Souq

For a deep dive into Oman's trading legacy, Muttrah Fort, perched on the hillside overlooking the sea, offers panoramic views of the Muscat coast. Below it lies the bustling Muttrah Souq, one of the oldest marketplaces in the Arab world. Here,



WHY OMAN A GOOD PICK?

Accessibility: Multiple direct flights from Indian metros and a visa-on-arrival facility for Indian passport holders with a valid US, UK or Schengen visa.

Safety & cleanliness: Oman is among the safest and cleanest countries in the Gulf, making it ideal for families and solo travellers.

Diverse experiences: From desert to mountains, forts to perfumeries, zip-lines to rose gardens — Oman's range fits all types of travellers.

Contd. on page 18 ►

Aviation navigates sustainability puzzle

The India Travel and Tourism Sustainability Conclave 2025, organised by the MakeMyTrip Foundation, witnessed top aviation leaders discussing the real challenges and opportunities on the road—rather, on the runway—towards greener skies.

TT Bureau

India's aviation sector is preparing for a massive leap with domestic travel expected to rise from 160 to 320 million passengers in five years while international travellers likely to grow up to 150 million. However, the growth comes at a steep environmental cost. Rais-

space and airport coordination, but these have not moved fast enough."

Efficiency in action
Airlines are innovating within their limits. **Aloke Singh**, Managing Director, Air India Express, outlined over 30 internal initiatives to boost fuel efficiency. "From keeping aircraft surfaces clean to adopt-

SAF: The bottleneck
The real sustainability depends on scaling SAF, and that is where the crisis lies. Ajay Singh shared, "We have flown a few test flights with 50 per cent SAF blends. Technically, it's feasible. However, to scale it, we need the government to cover the price gap, at least for the first 10 years. Otherwise, it is not viable

Hope flies higher
Fleet renewal gives hope. Ghosh pointed out that India will soon operate the youngest fleet globally, lowering per-passenger emissions significantly. Closing the discussion Ajay Singh said, "Indian aviation will grow rapidly and will also be among the lowest emitters per capita in global aviation."



Kapil Kaul, Ajay Singh, Aditya Ghosh and Aloke Singh at the India Travel and Tourism Sustainability Conclave 2025

ing the issue at the India Travel and Tourism Sustainability Conclave 2025, **Kapil Kaul**, CEO & Director, CAPA India, said, "Our emissions will double in the same period. By 2030, we will need three times the Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) we use today."

Are operational fixes enough?

The industry has long discussed efficiency tweaks—continuous descent, shorter air routes, single-engine taxiing—but implementation has been sluggish. Kaul said, "Look at the Delhi-Mumbai sector. Block times have increased to over two hours. There is no real progress."

Ajay Singh, Chairman and Managing Director, SpiceJet, echoed the frustration, saying, "We are actually going in the opposite direction. Congestion is forcing airlines to schedule longer flights. Sustainable operations need reforms in air-

ing AI-powered tools like OptiClimb, we are chipping away at inefficiencies. Even small gains of 4–5 per cent matter."

Industry has been discussing efficiency tweaks like shorter air routes for long, but implementation has been sluggish

Highlighting post-flight analytics and pilot learning as underutilised tools, he said, "Data from flight recorders can help crew review their performance and fly more efficiently." Agreeing to the view, **Aditya Ghosh**, Co-Founder, Akasa Air, said, "Every drop of fuel saved hits your bottom line."

for airlines or passengers." Aloke Singh added that the cost and availability of SAF will directly impact the CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) obligations starting in 2027. "We are less than two years away and India is not ready. If SAF is not available, the offset burden on airlines will rise sharply."

Who will pay?

The central dilemma remains unresolved. Ghosh used an analogy: "Think of sustainable packaging on Amazon. We pay more for recycled boxes. Same logic applies to flying green. Passengers may have to pay ₹100 or ₹500 extra, depending on the route."

Kaul argued that consumer willingness alone will not get us there. "India needs revenue assurance from the government, maybe even sovereign guarantees to de-risk SAF investments," he underlined.

एसबीयू: ट्रेवल & वेकेशंस
SBU: Travel & Vacations
निर्धारित अवधि के आधार पर नियुक्तियां
Positions on Fixed Term Contract Basis

उप प्रबंधक (बिक्री) - एमआईसीई
1 पद - दिल्ली में
Deputy Manager [Sales] - MICE
1 position in Delhi

सहायक प्रबंधक (बिक्री) - एमआईसीई
1 पद - दिल्ली में
Assistant Manager [Sales] - MICE
1 position in Delhi

जूनियर ऑफिसरी (बिक्री) - एमआईसीई
1 पद - दिल्ली में
Junior Officer [Sales] - MICE
1 position in Delhi

सहायक प्रबंधक (कॉर्पोरेट व्यवसाय) - बीआईएस
1 पद - दिल्ली में
Assistant Manager [Commercial] - BIS
1 position in Delhi

सहायक प्रबंधक (कॉर्पोरेट व्यवसाय) - बीआईएस
4 पद - चेन्नई, मुंबई, कोलकाता, कलकत्ता और चंडीगढ़ में
Assistant Manager [Corporate Businesses] - BIS
4 positions - 1 each in Chennai, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chandigarh

कनिष्ठ ऑफिसरी/ऑफिसरी (कॉर्पोरेट व्यवसाय) - बीआईएस
4 पद - दिल्ली, कोलकाता, चेन्नई, कलकत्ता और चंडीगढ़ में
Jr. Officer/Officer [Commercial] - BIS
4 positions - 1 each in Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Chandigarh

ऑफिसरी (कॉर्पोरेट व्यवसाय) - बीआईएस
1 पद - दिल्ली में
Officer [Corporate Businesses] - BIS
1 position in Delhi

प्रबंधक (बिक्री) - इनबाउंड
1 पद - चेन्नई में
Manager [Sales] - Inbound
1 position in Chennai

सहायक प्रबंधक (बिक्री)
1 पद - विजयवाड़ा में
Assistant Manager [Sales]
1 position in Vijayawada

ऑफिसरी (मार्केटिंग)
1 पद - चेन्नई में
Officer [Marketing]
1 position in Chennai

जूनियर ऑफिसरी (मार्केटिंग)
1 पद - चेन्नई में
Junior Officer [Marketing]
1 position in Chennai

ऑफिसरी (बिक्री) - एमआईसीई
1 पद - दिल्ली में
Officer [Sales] - MICE
1 position in Delhi

कनिष्ठ ऑफिसरी (संग्रह)
1 पद - दिल्ली में
Junior Officer [Collections]
1 position in Delhi

प्रबंधक (बिक्री) - इनबाउंड
1 पद - चेन्नई में
Assistant Manager [Sales] - Inbound
1 position in Chennai

कनिष्ठ ऑफिसरी (बिक्री)
1 पद - विजयवाड़ा में
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1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

EVENT TALK

Published from : India Middle East

JUNE 2025

Date	Event	Time
1-3	IATA AGM & World Air Transport Summit	10:00 am
4-6	Thailand Travel Mart Plus 2025	9:00 am
5-7	Zambia Travel Expo 2025	8:30 am
5-8	Seoul International Travel Fair	10:00 am
9	Conztruct 2025	4:00 pm
10	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Hyderabad	10:00 am
10	GBTA Sustainability Summit 2025	9:00 am
11-13	Bali & Beyond Travel Fair 2025	9:00 am
12	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Indore	10:00 am
12-15	Hong Kong International Travel Expo 2025	10:00 am
13	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Kolkata	10:00 am
17	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Bhubaneswar	10:00 am
18	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Kochi	10:00 am
20	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Goa	10:00 am
27	Turtle Down Under Webinar	12:00 pm

Oman eyes Indian adventure travellers

► Contd. from page 16

Indian travellers can shop for frankincense, silver, spices and handcrafted artefacts — ideal souvenirs and a nostalgic nod to India's own market culture.

Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque

One of the most iconic landmarks in Muscat, the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, is a masterpiece of Islamic architecture. Open to every visitor, it welcomes Indians with a sense of peace and grandeur, featuring intricate chandeliers, Persian carpets and beautiful mosaics — perfect for those seeking cultural and spiritual enrichment.

Amouage Factory

A unique stop for luxury seekers and culture buffs is the Amouage Perfume Factory, where visitors can witness the crafting of one of the world's most

luxurious perfume brands. With its origins rooted in Omani heritage and frankincense, this experience offers visitors a sensory and luxurious journey like no other.

Jabal Akhdar: Green mountain retreat

A 2.5-hour drive from Muscat, the cool highlands of Jabal Akhdar (Green Mountain) offer a striking contrast to Oman's coastal regions. With its terraced farms, rugged canyons and a climate that stays pleasant even in summer, it is a haven for tourists looking to escape the heat and dive into nature, adventure and sustainability.

Nizwa Fort: Gateway to the highlands

On the way to Jabal Akhdar lies Nizwa, once the capital of Oman. The towering Nizwa Fort and its adjacent souq are must-visits for history lovers. ➔

NEW OPENINGS

Flights

Airline: Air India Express
Route: Bengaluru to Kathmandu (direct)
Frequency: Starts 1 June; daily service

Airline: Azerbaijan Airlines
Route: Baku to Ahmedabad (direct)
Frequency: Starts 4 July; 4 flights a week

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

Airline: IndiGo
Route: Bhubaneswar to Abu Dhabi (direct)
Frequency: Starts 12 June; 3 flights a week

Airline: IndiGo
Route: Madurai to Abu Dhabi (direct)
Frequency: Starts 13 June; 3 flights a week

Hotels

Brand: Radisson Hotel Group
Hotels:

- ❖ Radisson Hotel Jamshedpur, Jharkhand
- ❖ Park Inn & Suites by Radisson Yelahanka, Bengaluru
- ❖ Radisson Hotel Koti, Shimla
- ❖ Radisson Hotel Gaj, Punjab
- ❖ Radisson Hotel Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh

Rooms: Room counts vary

Brand: IHCL
Hotel: Taj Alibaug Resort & Spa, Maharashtra
Rooms: 156 rooms

Brand: IHCL
Hotel: Ginger Dehradun
Rooms: 72 rooms

Brand: Wyndham Hotels
Hotel: Ramada by Wyndham Ghaziabad Vasundhara
Rooms: 160 rooms

Castle Mandawa ups 'wedding game'

Castle Mandawa, known for its allure among international tourists, is now positioning itself as a top destination for Indian weddings, events and cultural tourism. **Angad Singh Mandawa**, Owner, Castle Mandawa, shares how the property is leaving no stone unturned to tap domestic markets and creating a heritage wedding haven in the heart of Rajasthan.

Nisha Verma

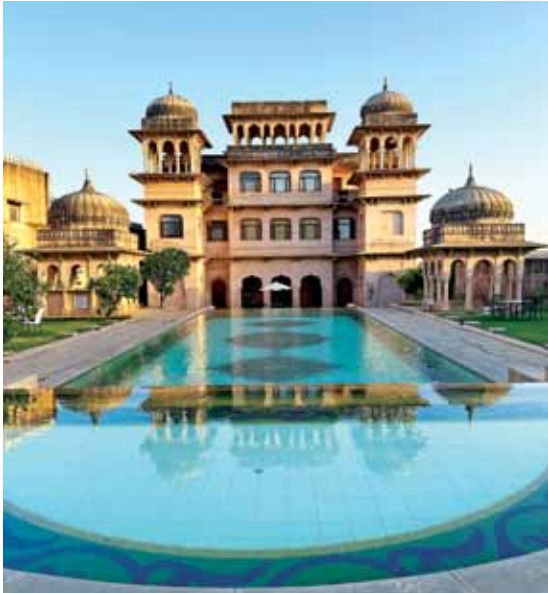
The iconic Castle Mandawa, known for its charm among international tourists, is now positioning itself as a top destination for Indian weddings, events and cultural tourism. **Angad Singh Mandawa**, Owner of the Mandawa Group of Hotels, shares how the post-pandemic shift in travel trends has shaped a renewed vision for the property—and for the Shekhawati region at large. To create buzz for Castle Mandawa, a Fam tour was conducted recently, where wedding planners and travel agents were invited to experience the venue first-hand.



Angad Singh Mandawa
Owner
Castle Mandawa

Tapping domestic weddings

Earlier, Castle Mandawa was mostly known in the inbound market. "We used to cater almost exclusively to international travellers. However, post-COVID, the whole business landscape



changed. A large portion of the 15 million Indians who used to travel abroad for

weddings or leisure have turned inwards, exploring domestic sites," he said.

Experiences, not just stays

With this focus, the Mandawa Group is also reimagining the property to better suit weddings and experiential travel. "We are creating spaces tailored for specific wedding functions, as well as beautiful backdrops for pre-wedding photo shoots. The charm of a heritage hotel like ours is the natural grandeur—you do not need artificial sets when you already have arches and courtyards that look like film sets," he claimed.

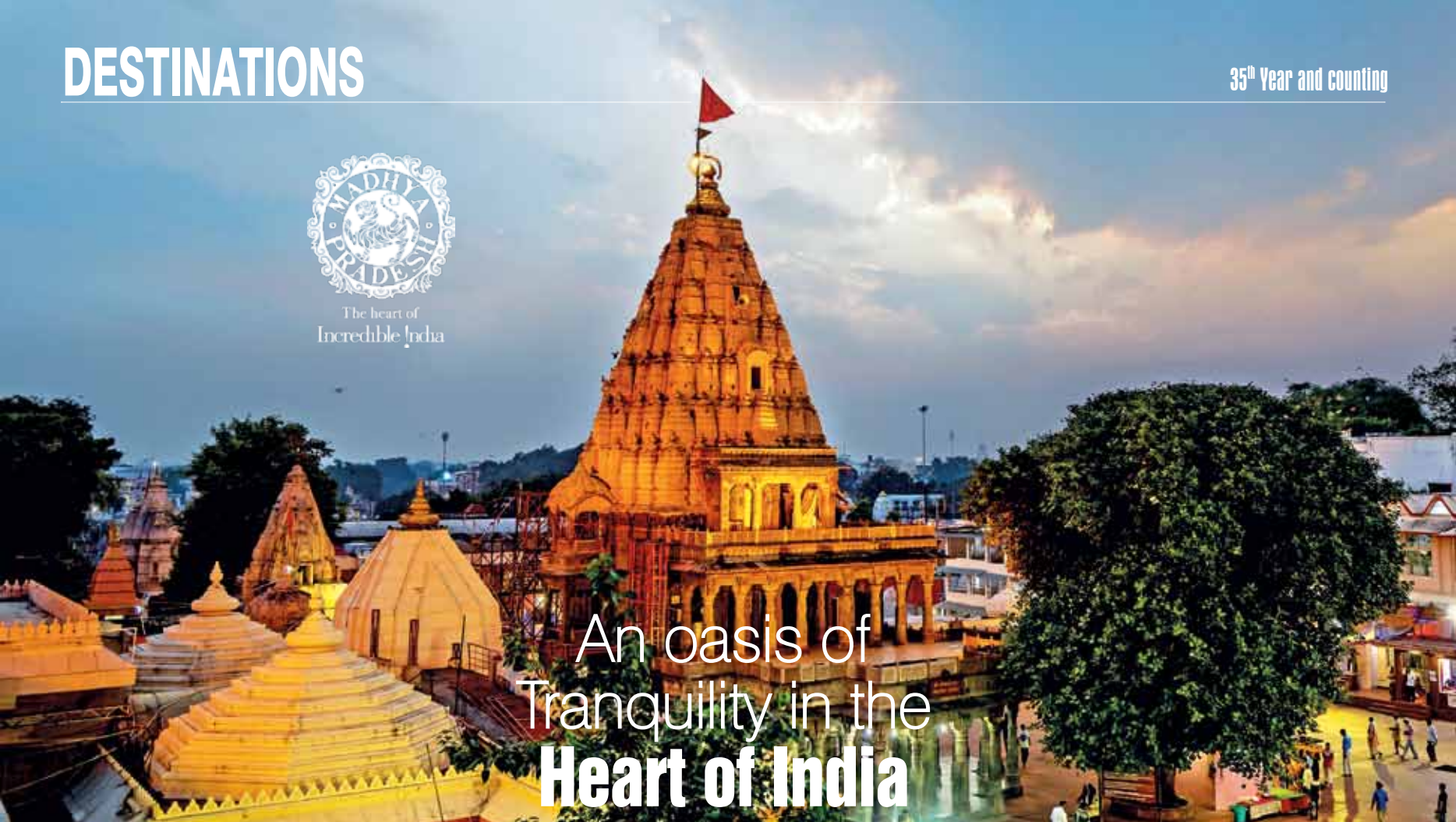
Offline relationships

In a world of properties going on OTAs and direct channel, he emphasises

the importance of offline engagement. "There is a limit to what you can showcase online. Weddings are

Now people understand the value of culture. Social media, education and even govt initiatives have helped promote this trend

about understanding client needs and building trust," he underlined. ➔



An oasis of
Tranquility in the
Heart of India

Madhya Pradesh

Make the transition from the stress of urban chaos to a mindset of serenity. Close your eyes and let your senses take in clean air, while listening to the sound of the wind blowing through a forest. Set your own pace exploring a hidden heritage site far from the maddening crowd. Soak in the atmosphere of a spiritual destination. Pamper yourself at a rural homestay. Or simply lie back and do nothing! For those seeking a wellness break on the eve of World Yoga Day, Madhya Pradesh presents a rich variety of destinations to rejuvenate.

Balmy by the Betwa
Wander through the timeless portals of Bundela palaces at Orchha. Watch

the Betwa gently go past the memorials of long-forgotten kings. Admire striking murals inside a temple that acts as a medieval art gallery. A place so relaxed that even Lord Rama is worshipped here not as a God, but as a King.

Divine journeys to the Jyotirlingas

Connect with the divine in the Bhasma Aarti, early on a crisp Ujjain morning at the iconic Mahakaal Temple. Allow yourself to be touched by the spiritual light of the Shiva Linga and come out with an energy only the truly faithful have experienced. Close your eyes and become one with the cosmic consciousness at the island-shrine of Omkareshwar. Or join a

Yoga session on the banks of the Narmada.

Monsoon magic in Mandu

Put away those cameras and listen to the drumming of incessant rain atop the Mandu plateau. Meander through monuments in India's original City of Joy and allow yourself to be soaked. You might just be tempted to shed your inhibitions and start dancing in the rain!

Tranquil temptations at Tamia

Mountaintop Tamia combines with the horseshoe-shaped Patakot Valley below, creating the state's best-kept secret in the Satpura Hills. Untouched forests and little-visited moun-

tains form a perfect setting for treks and long walks. Be amazed at how the Gond and Bharia tribes live in harmony with nature, making it central in everything from their art to medicines.

Sanctuaries for the soul

Perhaps nothing detaches the mind from stress as much as watching



With nearly three dozen sanctuaries and national parks, visitors to the state can take their pick for a holiday that is a balm for the soul

a mighty tiger prowling around its habitat or zooming in to admire the antics of a rarely sighted bird. Or merely having a slow day watching creatures frolic in the stunning landscape of a sanctuary's buffer zone. With nearly three dozen sanctuaries and national parks - such as Band-

havgarh, Kanha, Pench, Kuno, Pachmarhi and others - visitors can take their pick for a holiday that is a balm for the soul.

Immortal peace at Amarkantak

Follow the footsteps of Sant Kabir and meditate close to the mouth of the Narmada. Enjoy a picnic at one of the gigantic waterfalls or be startled by one of the many strikingly attractive temples here, such as the Shri Yantra shrine. Spend time at a natural tree grove dedicated to the Goddess Narmada.

Village visuals: Taste the rural way

Immerse yourself in a

rural community. Select from a range of rural homestay options across Madhya Pradesh and experience the joy of an eco-friendly lifestyle - partake of the earthy flavours of home-cooked food or join an impromptu pottery session and village sports or volunteer for a project that could transform lives. Enjoy retail therapy at places like Art Ichol in Maihar and interact with skilled artisans.

Nestled in India's heart, these extraordinary experiences will live with you forever. Simply choose to embark on the journey—and you may find yourself never wanting to leave.



MOVEMENTS

INDIGO

New Delhi

VIKRAM SINGH MEHTA has been appointed as the Chairman of the IndiGo's Board, succeeding Venkataramani Sumantran, who stepped down from the post after completion of his five-year term as a Board Member. Mehta has been a Member of the Board of InterGlobe Aviation (IndiGo) since May 2022. He started his professional journey with the Indian Administrative Services (IAS) in 1978 and served the country for two years before moving to the corporate sector.



THE LEELA PALACES, HOTELS AND RESORTS

Mumbai

PRASOON PANDEY has been appointed General Manager at The Leela Palace Udaipur. His elevation from the position of Hotel Manager marks a natural progression in a journey defined by dedication, operational expertise and a commitment to guest satisfaction. He has over two decades of experience in luxury hospitality. An alumnus of the Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development (OCLD), where he was awarded a Gold Medal, Pandey also holds a degree from IHM Bhubaneswar.



ACCOR

India

Accor has appointed **SANDEEP JOHRI** as Area General Manager – Karnataka. With an illustrious career spanning over 30 years in the hospitality industry, including more than two decades in General Manager's roles, Johri will oversee Accor's strategic and operational initiatives across its prominent portfolio in Karnataka. A seasoned professional, he brings exceptional experience in hotel management, operational excellence and people-centric leadership.



SHERATON GRAND BENGALURU WHITEFIELD HOTEL & CONVENTION CENTER

Bengaluru

OJAS A VAGAL has been appointed as the Multi-Property Director of Human Resources at Sheraton Grand Bengaluru Whitefield Hotel & Convention Center, Marriott Executive Apartments UB City and The Artiste, Kochi – a Tribute Portfolio Hotel. With over 19-year experience in HR management, learning & development and hotel operations, Vagal brings with him a blend of strategic insight and people-centric leadership.



NOVOTEL GOA RESORT & SPA AND NOVOTEL GOA CANDOLIM

Goa

TANYA VIEGAS has been appointed as the Director of Sales & Marketing by Novotel Goa Resort & Spa and Novotel Goa Candolim. In her new role, Viegas will be responsible for driving commercial strategy for the Novotel Candolim Complex. With a focus on sales strategy, brand positioning, digital outreach and customer engagement, Viegas brings with her over 17 years of rich experience in the hospitality industry.



Accor has appointed **ZARA SINGH** as Director of Revenue – India & South Asia. With two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Singh will be responsible for leading Accor's revenue management and distribution strategy across India & South Asia. She has led in revenue and distribution roles with renowned domestic and international brands, including The Oberoi Group.



DREAMFOLKS

Gurugram

DreamFolks has appointed **SHEKHAR SOOD** as the Chief Financial Officer. With nearly two decades of global experience across listed entities, multinationals and high-growth private companies, Sood brings a proven track record of delivering strategic outcomes and building financial resilience. As CFO, he will lead DreamFolks' overall finance function, spearhead value-driven initiatives and support the company's next phase of technology-led expansion. Previously, he served as CFO at Bajaj Capital Group.



SAYAJI HOTELS

India

Sayaji Hotels has elevated **PAWANDEEP SINGH MAGO** to the role of Director – Business Development. Mago's journey with Sayaji Hotels began with a strong foundation in the finance department, where his exceptional analytical abilities and sharp business acumen led to his promotion as Deputy Manager Finance. In his new role, he will be responsible for spearheading strategic expansion initiatives, forging key partnerships and identifying innovative avenues for growth.



NHCC & HICC

Hyderabad

RAGHAVENDRA KOLLIPARA has been appointed by Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre (NHCC) & Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) as the Financial Controller. With a background in finance and strategic management, Kollipara brings a wealth of experience to the role. He will be responsible for overseeing financial planning, risk management, budgeting and compliance to drive operational excellence and sustainable growth.



JW MARRIOTT HOTEL BENGALURU

Bengaluru

JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru has appointed **ERANNA NEELUR** as Assistant Director of Engineering. With over 15 years of experience in engineering and operations within the hospitality industry, Neelur brings a wealth of expertise to his new role. In his new role, he will be responsible for managing the engineering operations at JW Marriott Hotel Bengaluru. His focus will be on maintaining the hotel's mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems, ensuring that infrastructure runs smoothly and efficiently.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT MAHABALESHWAR

Mahabaleshwar

HITEN CHAURASIYA has been appointed as Sales Manager at Courtyard by Marriott Mahabaleshwar. With a background in hotel sales and a career spanning leading hospitality brands, he brings with him a wealth of experience. Prior to this, he served as Assistant Sales Manager at Sofitel Mumbai BKC. He has also worked at Trident Bandra Kurla and Radisson Mumbai Goregaon.




SHERATON GRAND PUNE BUND GARDEN HOTEL

Pune

Sheraton Grand Pune Bund Garden Hotel has appointed **DHANANJAY NANGARE** as Director of Rooms. Nangare brings with him over 12 years of experience with a proven track record of leadership, innovation and customer service excellence to his new role. A passionate and adaptive leader, he began his career as a front desk associate in 2012 and steadily rose through the ranks. Nangare will be responsible for overseeing all aspects of guest rooms, including front office and guest services.



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'Compliance a cornerstone of trust'

Travel insurance is a compliance-heavy sector, but it isn't just a regulatory requirement – it's a moral imperative, says **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego. It not just helps travellers but gives them a peace of mind during unpredictable scenarios.



Hazel Jain

When you are in the business of safeguarding travellers during their most vulnerable moments, often in foreign territories, it becomes imperative to adhere to the highest standards of governance, ethics, and regulation. The compliance landscape in the insurance industry is multi-layered and evolving, says **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego.

"It spans regulatory approvals, product filings, data protection laws, cross-border regulations, and anti-money laundering norms, among others. Each geography comes with its own regulatory frameworks, which make global operations both a challenge and an opportunity for innovation. We don't view compliance as a mere box-ticking exercise, we treat it as a cornerstone of trust. For instance, ensuring transparent communication of policy wordings, seamless claims support aligned with local regulations, and robust grievance redressal mechanisms are non-

negotiable. With the rise of digital platforms, cybersecurity and data privacy have also emerged as critical compliance pillars," Karvat explains.

Need for compliance
Karvat believes that compliance in travel insurance

What new vulnerability could impact travellers? This mindset helps us design solutions that go beyond what is required to what is needed

is not just a regulatory requirement, it's a moral imperative. "We collaborate with underwriting partners who share our values and uphold an impeccable reputation for regulatory compliance. When we talk about protecting travellers, we are not just offering them travel assistance, we are offering them a peace of mind during high-stress, unpredictable scenarios far from home. In such moments, trust becomes everything," he says.

Travel assistance and insurance, by nature, spans multiple jurisdictions, involves sensitive medical and financial data, and touches on healthcare, legal liabilities and emergency assistance. Karvat elaborates, "Without a strong compliance framework, there is a real risk of inconsistencies, misinformation, or worse, failure to deliver when it matters most."

Be ready for emerging risks

However, while compliance ensures you meet regulatory standards, it does not guarantee that you are safe from evolving threats. "It sets the minimum threshold for responsible operations, ensures regulatory alignment and builds public trust. But the truth is, compliance is often retrospective; it evolves in response to known risks and established patterns. The threats we face today, particularly in the travel ecosystem, are far more unpredictable. Think pandemics, sophisticated cyberattacks, geopolitical instability or climate-induced disruptions. These are not always covered by existing regulatory frameworks in real-time. So, while compliance might keep you on the right side of the law, it does not necessarily keep you ahead of emerging risks," Karvat says touching on a relevant topic today.

That is where proactive risk management and innovation come in. Asego views compliance as the starting point, not the finish line. "We constantly ask: What new vulnerability could impact travellers? This mindset helps us design solutions that go beyond what is required to what is truly needed," he says.



AI-powered agents are future of travel

Travel industry must embrace tech not just as a tool but as a core part of its strategy. The real edge will come from finding the right balance between smart automation and personal service to deliver faster, more tailored experiences for today's travellers.



Janice Alyosius

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation reshape the global travel industry, travel agents must adapt or risk falling behind. **Dhruv Shringi**, Co-Founder and CEO, Yatra.com, urges the trade to take the bot revolution not as a threat, but as a powerful ally. He outlines three key trends that travel businesses must stay ahead of to remain competitive.

Trend 1: Automate to dominate

Shringi says the biggest impact of AI and bots is being felt behind the scenes. "From a travel company's perspective, the amount of automation opportunities that bots offer is quite phenomenal. If you don't take advantage of those, your competitors will have a cost structure significantly leaner than yours," he says.

Relevance for agents:

Travel agencies must automate repetitive tasks, such as booking confir-

mations, itinerary generation, invoicing and FAQs.

Agent tip: Adopt tools like AI-driven CRMs and chatbots to handle common customer interactions and internal workflows. The result? Faster service and more time to focus on high-value clients.

From a travel company's perspective, the amount of automation opportunities that bots offer is quite phenomenal

Trend 2: AI-based personalisation

While AI can churn out endless options, it's the agent who knows the customer best. "Mix the inspiration AI provides with the personalised touch you bring. Use the long history and understanding you have of your travellers to tailor the results AI gives you," Shringi urges.

He explains how agents already have data goldmines, past bookings, preferences and travel patterns which, when fed into

AI tools, can generate highly relevant suggestions. "Today, if a customer is coming to you, you know where they have stayed, what flights they have taken. Use that data with AI to suggest similar properties," he elaborates.

Relevance for agents:

AI does not replace you; it enhances your ability to curate. With AI tools, agents can now offer hyper-personalised recommendations in seconds, rather than hours.

Agent tip: Integrate AI with your CRM to automatically suggest trips, upsell opportunities or even remind you of a client's anniversary trip habits.

Trend 3: Make trip planning effortless

Acknowledging a critical challenge, Shringi says, "One of the problems customers face is that they have to do a lot of the grunt work when it comes to trip planning. With the right tools, agents can provide better and faster responses.

Relevance for agents:

AI can equip even junior staff with expert-level suggestions by quickly scanning customer history, preferences and current travel trends.

Agent tip: Use AI platforms that suggest itineraries based on traveller profiles or tools that generate quick responses to complex travel queries.

WINNING FORMULA

Think of bots as enablers, Shringi emphasises. "They help you understand demand patterns, automate responses and deliver better customer service. But the personal connection — that is still your superpower," Shringi said.



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO, Asego



Dhruv Shringi
Co-Founder & CEO, Yatra.com

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