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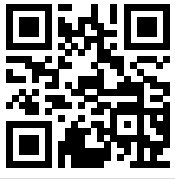
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## GRNconnect 2.0 to fast-track bookings

GRNconnect has launched an upgraded platform to improve the way agents make travel bookings. GRNconnect 2.0 introduces a seamless, intuitive and data-driven approach, ensuring smarter tools, streamlined processes and enhanced functionalities.

Janice Alyosius

GRNconnect has taken a significant leap forward with the complete revamp of its platform. The transformation goes beyond a mere logo or colour change; it represents a comprehensive technological overhaul aimed at streamlining travel bookings for agents.

Highlighting the significance of the platform's transformation, **Deepak Narula**, Managing Director, GRNconnect, said,

"The whole idea was to position ourselves for the next level. Our technology upgrading was pending for quite some time and now we have made the entire platform seamless. It's not just about aesthetics; we are adding substantial value with this upgrade."

The new platform consolidates into a single, cohesive unit for operations. "Earlier, we used to work on three different platforms — front office, mid-office and back-end. Now, we have a single platform, making it seamless for

**We used to work on 3 different platforms. Now, we have a single platform, making it seamless for searching and booking, resulting in faster and more efficient operations**

searching and booking, resulting in faster and more efficient operations," Narula elaborated.

This integration allows agents to pick up inventory more quickly, reducing search time and effort. "Agents will save a lot of time and energy while looking for properties. Besides faster results and better inventory, we have introduced new features that provide insights into industry trends, destinations in demand, and even what their own company is selling," he added.

### Empowering travel agents

GRNconnect's enhanced platform introduces several key features designed to improve the efficiency and profitability of travel agents. The revamped User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX) offer an intuitive and engaging interface for seamless navigation. A new comprehensive dashboard integration enhances accessibility and streamlines processes. Multiple payment options ensure greater flexibility and convenience for global transactions, while omnichannel support provides real-

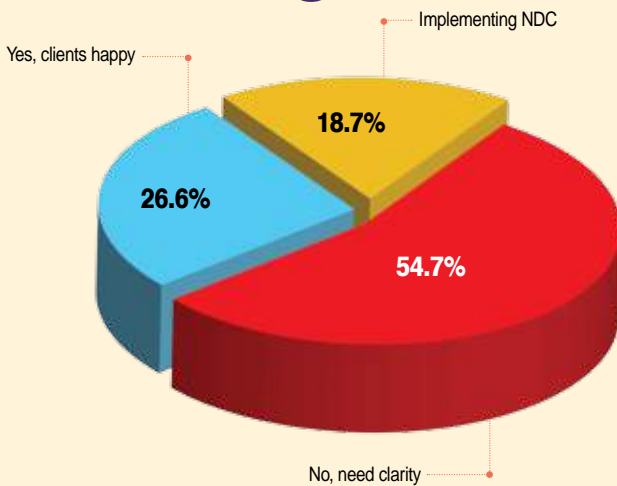


**Deepak Narula**  
Managing Director  
GRNconnect

time assistance to travel agents. The platform now includes Eurail integration, allowing seamless access to one of Europe's most popular travel networks.

Contd. on page 22 ▶

## 55% agents need clarity on NDC adoption



### Survey insights on adoption of NDC for flight bookings:

- ❖ **Dominant Uncertainty:** Over half of respondents (55%) have not adopted NDC due to unresolved clarity issues, indicating significant industry-wide confusion or insufficient education about NDC's benefits, requirements, or processes.
- ❖ **Limited Successful Adoption:** Only 27% report client satisfaction with NDC, suggesting challenges in achieving seamless implementation or demonstrating value to clients despite adoption.
- ❖ **Transition in Progress:** Nearly 19% are actively working toward NDC capabilities, reflecting gradual but cautious movement toward adoption, likely hindered by technical, financial, or training barriers.



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# Meet the new team

Network of Indian MICE Agents unveiled its new executive team, with an aim to steer its next phase of growth, on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Led by Nitin Mittal, the newly-elected National Coordinator, the association, including representation from tier III cities, underscores its commitment to inclusivity and drive growth of the global MICE industry.

 Surbhi Sharma

**N**etwork of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA) celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary organising a grand event in New Delhi recently. The organisation unveiled a reconstituted executive team on this occasion, with an aim to steer its next phase of growth. Distinguished guests from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; the Singapore Tourism Board; Ras Al-Khaimah Tourism Board and Egypt, along with NIMA members from across the country, attended the event.

**Nitin Mittal**, CEO, Hotel n Apartment, has been appointed as the new National Coordinator, while **Gajesh Girdhar**, CEO, Paryatan, who was earlier serving as the National Coordinator, has taken over as the Chairman of the Governing Council. NIMA 2.0 will be led by Mittal, with the guidance of patron



The newly constituted NIMA team at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in New Delhi

**Subhash Goyal** (STIC Group), mentor **Sanjeet** (DDP Publications), advisor **Vikas Khanduri** (Holiday Merchants), and Chairman Girdhar.

The reconstituted executive team includes representation from tier III cities like Ghaziabad, Yamuna Nagar, Sahibabad, and Akola, in addition to Metro and tier II city members. This diverse representation underscores the association's commitment to inclusivity

and reflects the association's core values. NIMA's motto, "Our Members, Our Pride," emphasises its focus on fostering stronger partnerships between its members and an expanding network of preferred suppliers. Sharing his vision for the future, Mittal said, "Technology will play a key role as an enabler, and at NIMA, we are committed to bringing futuristic tools that will empower our members to compete globally in the MICE industry. In the coming

years, our ambitious plans will focus on scaling up membership without diluting the quality of our network. We aim to ensure that only serious MICE players are part of our association."

**Educational initiatives**  
NIMA has been active in the educational space, signing partnerships with prestigious universities across India. "We are providing students with industry knowledge and placement opportunities. In

near future, we plan to introduce new technological enhancements to our members, ensuring they stay competitive with larger MICE players," Mittal said.

**Future vision**  
Looking ahead, Girdhar identifies data collection as a priority for the next decade, a critical step for building a solid foundation for both inbound and outbound MICE operations. He envisions India becoming a global MICE destination.

## EXECUTIVE TEAM 2025-2026

- Nitin Mittal**  
National Coordinator
- Rakesh Arora**  
Coordinator - Finance
- Anup Tarafdar**  
Administration & Membership
- Prashant Chaudhary**  
Coordinator - Event
- Gurmeet Singh Chhatwal**  
Coordinator - North
- Jay Agarwal**  
Coordinator - East
- Ajay Sengar**  
Coordinator - West
- Ranvir Singh**  
Coordinator, Branding & Marketing
- Jatin G Mehta**  
Member Exe. Team, Kunj Events
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# What's driving the shift in travel?

The world of travel has been changing, faster than ever before. AI-driven personalisation, aviation sustainability, and the rise of social media platforms increasingly influence the travel planning. AI-powered help and super apps will define the travel future, experts say.

## Time to walk the talk?

India's tourism and aviation sectors are finally getting the attention they deserve but talk alone won't cut it. Extending regional connectivity, streamlining hotel investments, and improving visa processes are all promising steps—but execution is key.

Travellers today seek seamless experiences, from easy airport transit to well-maintained tourist sites. While India's cultural and natural diversity is unmatched, ensuring accessibility, cleanliness, and safety will make all the difference. Independent travellers, a growing segment, need better road infrastructure, signage, and public facilities to explore with confidence.

Global competition is fierce, and India must proactively market itself, invest in experience-driven tourism and simplify travel logistics. With the right balance of policy support and on-ground implementation, the country can position itself as a world-class tourism hub.

## New age weddings

Indian weddings have always been about grandeur, but couples today want more than just big fat celebrations—they want a story. And that story is unfolding in some unexpected places. Forget the usual Udaipur, Jaipur and Goa circuit. Now, vows are being exchanged under Meghalaya's living root bridges, on the glowing beaches of the Andamans and even in the ancient ruins of Hampi.

Today, it's no longer just about luxury; it's about an experience. A wedding on the salt marshes of the Rann of Kutch under a full moon? Check. A baraat arriving on camelback in Jaisalmer? Done. Even Ladakh and Kashmir—once dismissed as too remote—are hosting intimate celebrations.

For the hospitality industry, this shift is an opportunity. If a destination has the right mix of accessibility, stunning backdrops and seamless planning, it's wedding-ready. Because in today's wedding game, unique beats predictable every time.

Devika Jeet

The future of travel is unfolding faster than ever. At ITB Berlin, WTTC and Trip.com Group revealed Technology Game Changers: Future Trends in Travel & Tourism—a report that explores how AI, quantum computing, super apps, and even space tourism are redefining the industry.

At the forefront of this revolution stood **Julia Simpson**, President & CEO, WTTC. With a vision for the future, she declared, "AI-driven personalisation, aviation sustainability, and the rise of social media platforms as travel planners are changing the way we explore the world."

Agreeing to the view, **Boon Sian Chai**, Managing Director & VP, International Markets, Trip.com Group, said, "Travellers today expect intuitive and hyper-personalised experiences. AI-powered travel assistance and super apps will define the future of seamless journeys." And the numbers proved them right.

❖ **91 per cent of travel businesses** planned to boost tech investments, ensuring they didn't just keep up—but stayed ahead.

❖ **Sustainability was no longer an option**—it was the expectation. From AI-optimised flight paths to zero-emission hotels, the industry was going green in bold new ways.

❖ **Hyper-personalisation was the new standard.** Machine learning-driven recommenda-



tions would craft vacations tailored to individual preferences, from destination guides to custom itineraries.

❖ **5G & 6G were rewriting connectivity.** With LEO satellites and private 5G networks, airports like Frankfurt were pioneering real-time, ultra-fast digital ecosystems, making travel smoother than ever.

As the industry stood at the edge of its most significant transformation since the dawn of the internet, one thing was certain—the future of travel was not coming. It was already here.

The report by WTTC and Trip.com Group highlights breakthrough technologies across four major trends shaping the future:

**Digital Technologies:** AI-powered assistants are revolutionising trip planning. Trip.com's TripGenie saw a 200 per cent

surge in usage in 2024, reflecting how AI is personalising travel like never before. AI-driven customer support, predictive analytics, and automation are shaping the next-gen travel experience, with 94 per

**Buy Now, Pay Later schemes and Central Bank Digital Currencies are revolutionising payments, making travel accessible to a broader audience**

cent of global business leaders recognising AI's critical role in future organisational success.

**Financial Technologies:** With 97 per cent of travellers preferring a seamless booking experience, super apps are set to integrate flights, hotels, and activities into a single, frictionless platform. Additionally, Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) schemes and Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) are revolutionising payments, making travel more accessible to a broader audience. According to the Phocuswright 2024 report, 41 per cent of travel businesses already support BNPL payments, yet its share in total travel sales remains a modest 1.3 per cent.

**Future of Mobility:** The return of supersonic flights, smart cities with driverless cars, and advanced air mobility are set to make travel faster and more efficient than ever. Qatar Airways has already taken the lead by integrating Starlink-powered in-flight connectivity, providing ultra-high-speed internet on select Boeing 777 aircraft. Meanwhile, Mobility-as-a-Service (MaaS) platforms are creating a unified, interconnected travel ecosystem, ensuring seamless transport experiences.

**Breakthrough Innovations:** Space tourism is no longer a fantasy. Infrastructure advancements are bringing commercial space travel closer to reality, while sustainability efforts like Virgin Atlantic's 100 per cent sustainable fuel flight are leading the way toward greener travel. Digital twins are being used by leading hotel brands like Radisson to create interactive virtual hotel tours, enhancing pre-trip decision-making for travellers.



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# Weddings in Andaman?

India's wedding industry is experiencing a transformation as couples look for unique and meaningful celebrations at destinations that go beyond the traditional ones. Today, it's not just about grandeur and opulence, it's about being different and unique.



**Rajeev Jain**  
Founder & Director  
Rashi Entertainment

“India’s wedding industry is renowned for its grandeur, vibrant rituals, and majestic settings, making the country a royal destination for weddings. Iconic locations like Udaipur, Jaipur, and Goa continue



**Meha Vashi**  
Director  
Nivalink Holidays

“India’s wedding scene is evolving rapidly as couples seek innovative destinations and unforgettable experiences that truly capture their love story. At Courtyard by Marriott Pune Chakan, we pride ourselves on offering

“India is one of the world's most sought-after wedding destinations, offering diverse and picturesque locations to suit every theme. For beach weddings, Goa, Kerala and Mahabalipuram provide breathtaking coastal settings, while Rishikesh and Mussoorie offer serene, scenic backdrops for mountain weddings. Those seeking a classy and elegant celebration can find luxurious venues with world-class hospitality in Delhi NCR.”



**Mita Vohra**  
Board Director  
Sarova Hotels & Resorts

to be timeless favourites, but newer spots, such as the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Rishikesh, Mussoorie, and Coorg, are fast becoming popular choices for couples.”

“Weddings are being organised in every destination with a touch of exotic charm. Themes have become central to wedding planning, and creative planners are offering their clients unique set-ups that make the event unforgettable. The trend of smaller, intimate weddings post-COVID has given way to grand, extravagant weddings once again. Smaller weddings are being hosted in remote and less traditional locations.”



**Jitendra Thakur**  
Director - Food & Beverage  
Courtyard by Marriott Pune Chakan

a spectacular venue that seamlessly blends modern elegance with rich Indian traditions. Our versatile banquet halls create the perfect place for dream weddings.”



**Vikramjeet Sharma**  
Managing Director  
Le Florence Weddings

“India’s wedding landscape is witnessing a shift, with new destinations gaining popularity for their distinct charm and beauty. Mussoorie, Shimla, and other hill stations offer scenic beauty and pleasant weather, making them attractive



**Poonam Tipnis**  
Sr. VP - Sales & Central Reservations,  
Niraamaya Wellness Retreats

“India is renowned for its grand weddings, where celebrations are transformed into immersive cultural spectacles. As destination weddings evolve, Madhya Pradesh is emerging as a premier choice with its stunning fusion of history, nature,

“Couples today are seeking more than just a venue—they want their wedding to tell a story. Imagine pheras (marriage vows) under Meghalaya’s living root bridges or a baraat arriving on camel-back across Jaisalmer’s golden sands. Hampi’s ancient ruins provide the perfect backdrop for mandaps, while the beaches of Lakshadweep offer surreal, glowing receptions. A wedding under the full moon on the Rann of Kutch’s salt flats feels otherworldly.”



**Srikant Kanoj**  
CEO & Founding Partner  
Ethereal Celebration Management

wedding locations. Bengaluru’s luxury properties like JW Marriott, Leela Palace, and Hilton, along with good connectivity, make it a favourite wedding destination.”

“Niraamaya Wellness Retreats offers couples a unique wedding experience, combining romance, luxury, and wellness in India’s most stunning landscapes. From the golden shores of Kovalam Beach to the backwaters of Kumarakom, the scenic Malabar region, and the pristine beaches of Goa, each of our destination offers an enchanting setting for unforgettable celebrations. The brand blends cultural authenticity with world-class hospitality.”



**Bidisha Mukherjee**  
Additional Managing Director  
MP Tourism Board

and opulence. Couples can exchange vows against the backdrop of Orchha’s royal grandeur, Bhedaghat’s marble cliffs, or Bhopal’s serene lakes.”

Contd. on page 26 ▶

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# Tunnel opens new J&K destinations

Infrastructure development, enhanced connectivity and added tourism facilities in Jammu and Kashmir make the destination more accessible than ever. While the existing pilgrimage sites continue to draw devotees, lesser-known destinations are also attracting adventure and leisure seekers to the state.

Janice Alyosius

Jammu and Kashmir, with its unparalleled natural beauty, cultural heritage and adventure experiences, is reclaiming its position as one of India's most sought-after travel destinations. Highlighting the union territory's vast tourism potential, **Omar Abdullah**, Chief Minister, Jammu and Kashmir, extended an open invitation to travellers and investors alike, promising a world-class experience.

**Investment and infrastructure** Abdullah underscored the union territory's growing investment potential, saying, "Today, Jammu and Kashmir is also ripe for investment in every sector of the tourism industry. We are actively seeking partnerships to develop infrastructure and enhance the visitor experience. The government's vision is to transform the region into a modern tourism hub, while preserving its natural and cultural heritage." With increased connectivity and infrastructure de-



**Omar Abdullah**  
Chief Minister  
Jammu and Kashmir



**Manzoor Ahmad Pakhtoon**  
Managing Director  
Silk Route Holidays Tours and Travel

velopment, Jammu and Kashmir is more accessible than ever. "Gone are the days when you had just one or two flights from Delhi. Today, we have direct flights from Amritsar, Chandigarh, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Delhi, with numerous connecting options. Soon, the long-awaited railway connection will further boost accessibility, making Jammu and Kashmir a seamless travel destination," he said.

**Exploring new destinations** While iconic destinations like Pahalgam and Gulmarg continue to attract visitors, Abdullah emphasised the need to explore beyond the usual. "For heritage tourism, Jammu is the City of Temples, from Raghunath Mandir and beyond. Border tourism is another emerging segment with areas like Tangdhar, Machhil, Karnah and Keran being promoted for their pristine beauty and unique location along the Line

of Control. "This emerging segment offers travellers untapped experience, as these remote destinations become more accessible, drawing a growing number of visitors," he said, adding that, "New scenic meadows like Bungus and Doodhpathri are also making their mark on the travel map." The CM also mentioned the Sonmarg Tunnel, which was inaugurated by the Prime Minister recently.

**Manzoor Ahmad Pakhtoon**, Managing Director, Silk Route Holidays Tours and Travel, said, "This tunnel will help keep Sonmarg open as a year-round destination. The tunnel is not only beneficial for Sonmarg but will also extend further towards Dras and Kargil, improving connectivity. Tourists will now have easier access to Ladakh, keeping the road open throughout the year. Earlier, the Zojila Pass remained closed for 4-5 months, restricting movement. With this tunnel, Ladakh will also see better tourist flow, benefiting both visitors and locals. Now, with better access, we hope Sonmarg

will emerge as a top winter destination, easing the pressure on Gulmarg and allowing more travellers to explore its beauty."

**Adventure, wellness & sports** The region is also fast emerging as a hub for wellness and sports tourism. "Last year, we hosted the inaugural

**J&K is a year-round destination, whether you seek pilgrimage and religious tourism, a scenic wedding or engagement venue**

— Omar Abdullah

Kashmir Marathon, and this year, we are launching the Jammu Half Marathon and the Jammu Ultra Marathon while continuing the Kashmir Marathon. These events are drawing big

attention, reinforcing Jammu and Kashmir's reputation as a sporting destination," he elaborated.

**International appeal** Despite travel advisories issued by various embassies and consulates, international tourists are gradually returning to Jammu and Kashmir. "We are steadily overcoming challenges, and international visitors are recognising Jammu and Kashmir as a safe and welcoming destination once again. Our commitment is to ensure a seamless and enriching experience for every traveller," Abdullah said."



## Tourism News

India leads Asia in sustainable travel, Sikkim among top Indian travel destinations for 2025

Starting April 2027, Centre to extend UDAN scheme for 10 years; 4 crore people to benefit, says Union Minister KR Naidu

Double GDP share of tourism to 10% in 10 years, create 25 mn jobs in five years: Suman Billa

India's hotel sector growing, nationwide ARR sees spike of 10 to 12% in 2025: HVS Anarock

Karnataka plans to increase tourism with sea planes and virtual heritage tours: Minister

Visa applications in India rise 11% YOY for 2024, surpass pre-pandemic levels by 4%

Madhya Pradesh to develop 3,300-hectare spiritual city in Ujjain before Kumbh 2028: CM

Global air traffic increases 10% in January: IATA

# Goa renews products with new alliances

Travel today is about immersive experiences, cultural exchanges and global collaboration. Goa, known for its sun, sand and beaches, is now repositioning itself as a destination to attract global travellers with improved air connectivity, cruise terminals and streamlined visa processes.

TT Bureau

Goa is positioning itself at the forefront of global tourism, embracing strategic collaborations and creating immersive travel experiences. **Rohan Khaunte**, Minister for Tourism, IT, E&C, and Printing and Stationery, Government of Goa, highlights the state's growing stature in the global tourism landscape. "We are the first state in India to champion regenerative tourism, ensuring that tourism benefits both visitors and local communities," he said.

**Experiential tourism in vogue** Khaunte noted that post-pandemic travel expectations have changed, with travellers seeking immersive experiences over simple sightseeing. "Tourism today is not just about checking places off a list, it's about cultural exchanges and fostering global collaboration that leads to shared growth," he said.



**Rohan Khaunte**  
Minister for Tourism, IT, E&C, and Printing and Stationery, Government of Goa

Khaunte said that India's growing outbound travel market is reshaping global tourism dynamics. "Indians rank among the highest-travelling nationals, prompting more countries to offer visa-free and visa-on-arrival access to Indian tourists. But tourism is a two-way street. Every Indian tourist abroad inspires international travellers to visit India," he explained.

**Enhancing accessibility** Goa is making travel to India more accessible through improved air connectivity, cruise terminals and streamlined visa processes. "The era of tourism being a zero-sum game is over. One country's growth benefits another. The more Indians explore the world, the more global travellers are drawn to India," he noted.

**Building global partnerships** Goa has been proactive in building strategic alliances to enhance its tourism offerings. "In the past year alone, we have signed about 12 MoUs, each designed to strengthen our tourism ecosystem," Khaunte shared. One of the most notable collaborations has been with Airbnb, making Goa the first Indian state to sign an MoU with the platform. "This initiative focuses on building capacity for homestays and empowering local communities," Khaunte revealed.

**Martin Joseph Thypodath**, Chairman, IATO Goa Chapter and Managing Director, Freedom Holidays, said, "Goa Tourism's initiatives,

**We are the first state in India to champion regenerative tourism, ensuring that tourism benefits both visitors and local communities**

such as early shack allotments, hinterland tourism promotion and global trade fair participation, have significantly boosted the industry. These efforts create more business opportunities for travel agents, helping us attract international and domestic travellers. The

structured approach ensures better regulation, increased visibility and sustained growth for all stakeholders." Thypodath added, "Additionally, regenerative tourism is gaining momentum, focusing on eco-tourism, heritage tourism and empowering local communities through homestays and cultural experiences. By promoting responsible tourism, Goa is not just sustaining its natural and cultural heritage but actively improving it."

### 3 PILLARS OF GOA TOURISM

- ❖ Global partnerships to drive inbound and outbound travel
- ❖ Enhanced connectivity to stimulate tourism growth
- ❖ Experience-driven tourism to attract high-value travellers

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# Adapt to flexible work trends

The future of tourism will be defined by seamless work-leisure integration, tech-driven MICE events, and immersive, sustainable travel experiences. As traveller expectations shift, businesses must adapt to flexible work trends, automation in MICE and demand for personalised, eco-conscious leisure journeys.

This year, tourism will see significant evolution in Bleisure, MICE and Leisure Travel, driven by changing traveller expectations, technological advancements, and shifting work patterns. Here is how each sector will likely develop:

## Bleisure Travel (Business + Leisure)

Bleisure travel, where business trips are extended with leisure time, is expected to continue growing, especially as remote and hybrid work trends continue to gain traction. Key developments include:

❖ **Blended work-leisure travel:** With remote work and flexible work schedules on the rise, business travellers will extend their work trips for personal exploration.

❖ **Increased interest in long-term stays:** Instead of traditional short business trips, more professionals will opt for extended stays.

❖ **Workcation packages:** Travel companies and hotels will increasingly offer tailored "workcation" packages like local tours, wellness experiences, or excursions.

❖ **Travel flexibility:** Bleisure travellers will demand greater flexibility in terms of flight changes, accommodation cancellations, and itineraries.

## MICE Tourism

The MICE sector is showing phenomenal uptrend, and by 2025 end, it will look different due to the integration of new technologies, changing safety protocols, and evolving preferences: Events are

expected to grow at a Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 10 per cent. However, it will depend on the availability of visas from certain countries, airline and hotel rates. The demand for high-quality tech-

**The demand for high-quality tech-enabled experiences will increase and it is time automation in MICE is given utmost importance**

enabled experiences will increase and it is time automation in MICE is given utmost importance.

❖ **Sustainable events:** MICE organisers will be under pressure to meet sustainability targets.

❖ **Focus on health and safety:** Event organisers will continue to prioritise attendee safety with advanced health protocols.

❖ **Smaller, more intimate events:** Instead of large, sprawling conferences, there could be a rise in more personalised and intimate events.

❖ **Destination-based incentives:** Incentive travel will be more personalised and experiential.

**Leisure Travel**  
Leisure travel will evolve significantly in the next few years, influenced by changing societal trends and technological progress:

❖ **Sustainable and conscious travel:** Consumers will increasingly seek destinations that align with their values, focusing on sustainable tourism, eco-friendly accommodations, and local experiences.

❖ **Tech-enhanced travel experiences:** Virtual and augmented

reality will enhance the travel experience, allowing travellers to "try before they buy" through virtual tours of destinations, hotels, or activities.

❖ **Experiential and immersive travel:** Leisure travellers will seek unique, immersive experiences that go beyond traditional sightseeing.

❖ **Focus on health and wellness:** As part of a broader trend, wellness tourism will continue to rise, with many travellers seeking destinations and experiences that promote physical, mental, and emotional health. This will include yoga retreats, wellness spas, hiking trips, and meditative experiences.

❖ **Digital detox and remote escapes:** Many travellers will seek destinations that allow them to disconnect from their digital devices and enjoy solitude or reconnection with nature.

❖ **Luxury and personalisation:** Travellers of luxury segment will

increasingly demand highly personalised experiences.

❖ **Shorter, more frequent getaways:** With more people working remotely and having flexible schedules, shorter but more frequent vacations will become common.

Key factors driving these changes across all sectors are technology, sustainability, Health and safety and Changing work trends



**Naveen Kundu**  
Managing Director, Ebix Travel Group

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



# MP invests in films, theme parks

With its rich cultural heritage, thriving wildlife, and investor-friendly policies, Madhya Pradesh is setting a benchmark for sustainable tourism and investment. As the state continues to expand its tourism infrastructure and attract global investors, it is poised to become one of India's leading destinations for travellers and businesses alike.

Janice Alyosius

Madhya Pradesh presents a vast potential for tourism investments. Speaking at the Global Investors Summit (GIS) recently, **Mohan Yadav**, Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh, highlighted the state's enhanced air connectivity. "Regular air services are being operated in Madhya Pradesh to enhance tourist confidence. In addition to affordable air travel for general passengers, Madhya Pradesh also provides free ambulance services for Ayushman Card holders," he said.

## Tourism investments

**Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Tourism Minister, Government of India, highlighted tourism as one of India's key growth sectors, alongside technology and textiles. "By 2047, tourism's contribution to India's GDP is expected to exceed 10 per cent," he said, attributing the sector's rapid expansion to increased



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Dharmendra Bhav Singh Lodhi and Sheo Shekhar Shukla at the Global Investors Summit

domestic tourism and rising middle-class spending power, driven by income tax relief measures.

Considering these factors, Madhya Pradesh holds immense potential for investment in the tourism sector. Shekhawat said the state stands at the gateway of vast opportunities and investments in the state would yield strong returns. Encouraging investors to seize this opportunity, he said, "If I were not in politics, I

would have been doing business in the tourism sector today."

Madhya Pradesh secured investment proposals worth ₹4,468 crore in the tourism and hospitality sector during GIS. These investments aim to expand infrastructure in key areas, such as cruise tourism, film production, hotels & resorts, water parks, golf courses and ultra-mega projects. The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

(MPTB) signed six key agreements in the presence of Shekhawat and **Dharmendra Bhav Singh Lodhi**, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Tourism, Culture, and Religious Trust and Endowment, Government of Madhya Pradesh.

**Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Culture, and Religious Endowment Department, and Managing Director, MPTB, outlined the state's investment poten-

tial. He explained the advantages of Tourism Policy 2025 and Film Tourism Policy 2025. "We aim to attract discerning travellers by prioritising low-volume, high-value tourism, offering tranquil destinations for rejuvenation and promoting inclusive, sustainable travel," he said.

## Gaining industry confidence

Industry leaders echoed confidence in Madhya Pradesh's tourism potential. **Rohit Khosla**, Executive Vice President - Operations, North and West India, The Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), said that the company, which operates nine hotels in MP, has signed an MoU for six more and plans to add 11 additional properties while preserving the state's history, nature, and wildlife.

**Ilayaraja T**, Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (MPTDC), highlighted the state's appeal across religious, heritage, wildlife and nature-based tourism.

## KEY INVESTMENT PROPOSALS

- ❖ Amazon Prime, Hollywood Projects, Zee5 and others – ₹300 crore in film production
- ❖ Treasure Group – ₹600 crore for ultra-mega projects, including luxury resorts
- ❖ IHCL – ₹1,960 crore for five new hospitality units in Madhya Pradesh
- ❖ ITC Hotels – ₹250 crore for heritage and luxury hotels
- ❖ Imagica World Entertainment – ₹200 crore for a water park near Indore
- ❖ MRS Group – ₹200 crore for luxury boutique projects
- ❖ Oberoi Group – ₹450 crore for a hospitality unit in Khajuraho
- ❖ Hilton Group – ₹200 crore for two hotels in Jabalpur and Bhopal
- ❖ IndiGo – Expanding tourism facilities at Gwalior Fort


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# KTO offers \$14 per MICE pax

With an ambitious goal of welcoming 250,000 Indian travellers this year, the Korea Tourism Organisation continues to deepen engagement with the Indian travel trade by enhancing resources, streamlining travel processes and offering innovative marketing initiatives to make South Korea a top outbound destination for Indians.

Hazel Jain

Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO), aiming to further boost Indian tourist arrivals to South Korea, reinforces its commitment to the Indian travel trade by introducing key programmes. It was reflected in KTO's recently concluded two-city India roadshow in New Delhi and Mumbai, which was organised in collaboration with the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI). **Myong Kil Yun**, Regional Director – India & SAARC Countries, KTO, said, "With evolving traveller preferences and increasing demand for unique experiences, we are committed to providing our partners with tailored support, from exclusive training programmes to performance-based incentives."

With 176,668 Indian visitors travelling to South Korea in 2024—a remarkable 44 per cent increase from



**Myong Kil Yun**  
Regional Director – India & SAARC Countries, KTO

the previous year—KTO continues to focus on equipping its trade partners with enhanced tools and incentives to sustain this momentum.

The roadshows provided a platform to introduce KTO's latest trade-focused initiatives, including the Korea Premium Travel Consultant (KPTC) programme,

K-Incentive Scheme 3.0, and MICE Support programmes, designed to enhance outbound travel, and facilitate seamless access to South Korea for Indian travellers.

The KPTC programme is an exclusive certification initiative designed for travel agents looking to specialise in premium travel to Korea. Through structured training, it provides in-depth insights into luxury experiences, equipping agents with the expertise to curate high-end itineraries. Certified KPTC members gain access to continuous training, direct support from KTO, and exclusive rewards. Top-performing agents will be rewarded on case-by-case basis for Korea-bound travellers booked by KPTC members between April and December 2025, provided the package includes at least a one-night stay, a minimum value of US\$250 (excluding airfare), and

accommodation in a four-star or higher property. The first webinar for the KPTC programme was done on 28 February 2025.

**Through initiatives like KPTC, we aim to empower our partners with enhanced resources, exclusive benefits, and greater opportunities**

KTO's MICE Support programmes cater to corporate groups with streamlined visa processes, financial assistance for preliminary visits, and attractive incentives for large incentive groups, reinforcing

South Korea's appeal as a premier destination for both business and leisure travellers. In addition to the MICE Support and KPTC Programme, KTO has unveiled the Designated Travel Agency Programme, a strategic initiative under the K-Incentive Scheme 3.0, designed to recognise and support travel agencies actively promoting South Korea.

Myong Kil Yun added, "India continues to be a key market for South Korea, and we are thrilled to witness such impressive growth in arrivals. As we move forward, our target for 2025 is to welcome 18.5 million global visitors, including 250,000 from India. Through initiatives like KPTC and the K-Incentive Scheme 3.0, we aim to empower our partners with enhanced resources, exclusive benefits, and greater opportunities to promote South Korea as a top travel destination."

## MICE SUPPORT

Financial aid for MICE groups includes 20,000 Korean won per pax (\$14), which can be used for one of the following:

- ❖ Special Luncheon/ Dinner Support (One-time)
- ❖ Facility Rental Fee
- ❖ Special Performance Support
- ❖ Bus (Regional) Rental Fee
- ❖ Special K-Pop-up Booth
- ❖ K-food and Café Truck
- ❖ Team Building Program
- ❖ Welcome Event (Airport, Cruise Terminal, etc)
- ❖ Filming Travel Highlights

# 3 Aussie states meet Indian agents

In a strategic effort to strengthen travel ties between Australia and India, Tourism Northern Territory, the South Australian Tourism Commission, and VisitCanberra visited India to conduct an exclusive training programme for travel agents. The initiative aimed to equip the Indian partners with in-depth knowledge about the regions and promote outbound tourism from India to Australia.



# 233k Indians visited Japan in 2024

It has been a record-breaking year for India-Japan tourism with a 40 per cent increase has been recorded over 2023. Ryo Bunno, Executive Director, Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) Delhi, gives a peek into what is in store for travel agents this year and a deeper focus on the MICE segment, particularly incentive groups.



Hazel Jain

The Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) Delhi office has announced a historic milestone in 2024, with 233,000 Indian tourists visiting Japan—a 40 per cent increase compared to 166,394 visitors in 2023. This surge underscores Japan's growing popularity among Indian travellers, driven by improved connectivity, targeted marketing efforts, and the allure of Japan's diverse cultural and natural attractions.



**Ryo Bunno**  
Executive Director  
JNTO Delhi

Enthusied by the record-breaking numbers, Ryo Bunno, Executive Director, JNTO Delhi, said, "In 2024, we achieved the highest number of Indian visitors to Japan ever, crossing the 200,000-mark for the first time. This is a significant jump from 2019, when we welcomed 1.7 lakh Indian tourists," he said. "The growth is largely driven by young travellers aged 20-40,

families, and the high-end luxury segment. We are also seeing more group travel and a rise in the incentive market, particularly in the MICE segment," he added.

#### Key highlights of 2024

Year 2024 saw several notable peaks in Indian tourist arrivals. March recorded approximately

27,206 visitors, reflecting an impressive 83 per cent year-on-year growth. May emerged as the most popular month, with around 29,068 arrivals—a 61.6 per cent increase compared to the previous year. Bunno attributed this to the alignment of India's summer vacations with Japan's 'Golden Week,' a period when domestic travel in Japan slows down, making it an ideal time for Indian families to visit.

#### Evolving tourism landscape

JNTO Delhi has been actively promoting Japan as a multi-faceted destination. At OTM 2025, JNTO showcased Japan's tourism offerings with 10 leading sellers and a dedicated booth for the Expo 2025 in Osaka, a highly anticipated global event. "We are showcasing Japan's evolving tourism landscape and the excitement surrounding the Expo 2025. The response has been overwhelmingly positive," Bunno said.

To further boost interest, JNTO recently concluded a three-city India roadshow in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, along with familiarisation trips for travel agents. Bunno emphasised the importance of collaboration with Indian travel agents. "We appreciate the efforts of all travel agents in increasing the number of visitors from India to Japan. With airplane capacity increasing and customer interest growing, we hope to continue working together to promote Japan," he said.

#### Beyond the Golden Route

While first-time Indian visitors often favour the 'Golden Route'—encompassing Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Hiroshima—JNTO is actively promoting lesser-known regions to diversify travel itineraries. "We are now focusing on the Tohoku area in northeastern Japan, which offers authentic Japanese tourism products. We believe Indian travellers will find it appealing," Bunno opined.

Other regions gaining attention include Hokkaido, famous for its powder snow and flower fields, and the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route, known for its stunning 'Snow Wall'.

#### MICE & improved connectivity

Year 2024 also marked a significant shift in the MICE segment, with incentive tours expanding beyond Tokyo to include Kansai and Hiroshima. "This demonstrates the growing interest among Indian corporates and MICE planners to explore new locations for their events," Bunno noted.

#### India-Japan tourism future

The record-breaking numbers reflect India's economic prosperity, rising disposable incomes, and a growing appetite for unique international experiences. "Affluent Indian travellers are increasingly seeking fresh, culturally enriching experiences, and Japan is perfectly positioned to meet this demand," Bunno said.

## JAPAN'S NEW ATTRACTIONS

❖ **Celebrating Yokohama:** Yokohama city has earned a spot among top 3 municipalities for Japanese cities with the most spectacular night views

❖ **Tagore's connection:** Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore visited Yokohama's iconic Sankeien Park twice during his travels in Japan

❖ **Sister cities:** Yokohama and Mumbai have been sister cities since 1965

❖ **Yokohama-India Centre and Little India:** Yokohama is home to the Yokohama-India Centre. A historic 'Little India' community, preserves a slice of Indian heritage in Japan

# Easy visa & incentives click for Taiwan

Taiwan is gaining popularity among Indian tourists, thanks to its streamlined visa process, attractive incentives, and focus on MICE sector. With a 20 per cent increase in Indian visitors in 2024, Taiwan aims to attract 50,000 Indian tourists by 2025 end, highlighting its scenic beauty, vibrant culture, and seamless travel experience.



Surbhi Sharma

With its strategic initiatives, Taiwan is well on its way to becoming a favoured destination for Indian tourists, offering a seamless travel experience and an exciting blend of natural beauty and cultural attractions.

Paul Shih, Director, Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA), Singapore Office, said, "The Indian tourism market is growing rapidly, catching the attention of global tourism boards, including the TTA. Taiwan has become a significant destination for Indian travellers, offering a variety of attractions and a streamlined visa process. After the pandemic, we have launched several marketing campaigns, cultural initiatives, and incentive programs to attract more visitors from India."

#### Big plans for 2025

Indian footfall to Taiwan is experiencing significant growth. Ac-



**Paul Shih**  
Director, Taiwan Tourism Administration  
(TTA), Singapore Office

cording to Shih, they expect nearly 20 per cent increase in Indian visitor arrivals in 2024. They were confident of surpassing 38,000 Indian arrivals in 2024.

"This trend is expected to continue, with projections indicating over 50,000 Indian visitors by 2025-end. This increase is due to continued focus on the incentive travel market, which is part of the MICE sector. This market is

particularly vital for us, as it helps spread awareness through word of mouth, allowing employees from large firms to share their experiences of Taiwan's beauty with their friends and families," he said.

#### Incentives for business promo

Taiwan's Tourism will continue to focus on incentives coupled with the luxury travel segment from India through various strategic campaigns, while continuing to work closely with the travel trade, ensuring the country remains a top travel choice. Subsidies are provided for travellers staying in Taiwan for at least 4 days and 3 nights. For a group of 30 to 300 people, agents are provided a subsidy of ₹1,033 per person globally, for group of 301 to 1,000, ₹1,549 per person given, while ₹2,066 per person incentive is provided for a group of 1,001 people or more.

Additionally for Indians, a group of 200 people or more will be given a subsidy between ₹212,695 and

₹319,042 per group for visiting local historical or cultural sites recommended by the local government.

He also highlighted that TTA's focus to build incentives business from

**A group of 200 people or more will be given a subsidy between ₹212,695 and ₹319,042 per group for visiting local historical or cultural sites**

India in 2024 has resulted in significant growth in the segment. Collaboration with airlines such as Thai Airways and Scoot Airlines has allowed for trade shows and itinerary sharing. Taiwan also partners with local Indian travel operators to cre-

ate travel packages that cater to Indian travellers, making Taiwan more accessible and attractive.

#### Streamlined visa process

One of the highlights for Indian travellers is Taiwan's simplified visa process. Indian nationals holding valid or expired visa from countries like the US, United Kingdom, and Australia within the past 10 years can apply for a free e-visa. This streamlined process ensures a hassle-free experience for tourists who wish to explore Taiwan without long visa approval waits, Shih explained.

#### MICE & weddings

Talking about MICE business, he said, "Taiwan has also seen an increased interest from Indian tourists for MICE and wedding events. However, the tourism board acknowledges the need to educate local Destination Management Companies (DMCs) to better cater to the unique requirements of Indian weddings, which can last several days and involve large, late-night ceremonies."

#### Engaging Indian travel trade

TTA aims to build stronger partnerships with OTAs and airlines, creating tailor-made travel packages. "We plan to reach out to East India market as part of our market development strategies, further expanding market outreach beyond metros to tier II cities across India. Indian travellers are particularly drawn to Taiwan's stunning landscapes like Sun Moon Lake," he said.

## TAIWAN IN NUMBERS

**20%** increase in Indian visitor arrivals to the destination in 2024

**38,000** total number of Indians arrived in 2024

**50,000** Indian visitors the destination aims to attract in 2025

# Industry decodes Union Budget

The Union Ministry of Tourism recently conducted a post-budget webinar to discuss the future of the country's tourism sector. Key stakeholders from the government and industry deliberated on policies and initiatives aimed at boosting tourism's contribution to GDP, enhancing infrastructure and positioning India as a global tourism powerhouse.

 Nisha Verma

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** set the vision of the webinar, highlighting the immense potential of tourism in driving economic growth and employment. Other experts stressed the need for infrastructure development, improved connectivity, streamlined visa processes and a stronger focus on wellness, regional and experiential tourism.

## Setting the vision

PM Modi emphasised that tourism has the potential to contribute 10 per cent to the India's GDP and create millions of jobs. "To achieve this, 50 destinations will



**Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**  
Tourism Minister  
Govt. of India



**Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu**  
Minister of Civil Aviation  
Govt. of India



**V Vualnam**  
Secretary  
Ministry of Civil Aviation, GoI

underscored India's rapid economic and aviation growth, saying, "India is set to become the third-largest

"The PPP model has enhanced construction timelines, service quality, and air traffic efficiency."

land acquisition and environmental clearances, reducing delays and costs. Tax holidays in underdeveloped zones can attract investment. Expanding skill development centres in partnership with the industry will create jobs, as one hotel room generates eight direct and 16 indirect jobs. A nationwide assessment will help finalise 50 destinations, ensuring investment, connectivity and long-term economic growth."

## Ease licensing

**Mandeep S Lamba**, President, South Asia, HVS, reinforced the need for infrastructure status for the hospitality industry, saying, "Infrastructure status is crucial for the hotel industry as it enables long-term financing. Currently, pay-back periods are restricted to 10-12 years, whereas the sector needs 25-30 years. Infrastructure classification would lower borrowing costs, driving exponential growth. The ease of doing business must improve, reducing licence require-

## Strategic planning for tourism growth

**Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Tourism, encapsulated the webinar by outlining a strategic approach to doubling tourism's GDP contribution from 5.04 per cent to 10 per cent in the next decade while creating 25 million jobs in five years. "Developing 50 destinations is crucial, but execution must be meticulous, integrating infrastructure such as roads and air connectivity," he said. According to Billa, a whole-of-government approach is essential, with collaboration between



**Suman Billa**  
Additional Secretary  
Union Ministry of Tourism

aviation and tourism sectors to align air traffic with travel demand. Performance-linked incentives should be introduced for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to ensure effective governance. While ₹10,000 crore has already been invested in tourism infrastructure, better destination management is required. DMOs that successfully maintain experience integrity and optimise local benefits should be rewarded. Destinations must be selected with a balance of established and emerging locations, ensuring experience-based tourism, infra readiness and policy support. Infrastructure status will help lower capital costs, but careful implementation is necessary. Local entrepreneurs should be empowered to maintain authenticity. The hub-and-spoke model should enhance connectivity, while collaboration among stakeholders can streamline visas, encourage stopover tourism, and facilitate joint marketing efforts."

## Sustainability at the fore

Pointing to Kerala's success as a model for responsible tourism, **Jose Dominic**, MD & CEO, CGH Earth, explained, "Kerala's success as a top tourism destination stems from responsible tourism and local entrepreneurship, which should guide India's tourism growth."

Dubai and Singapore's success by positioning Mumbai and Delhi as global transit hubs, creating North-South and East-West corridors for seamless connectivity. Simplified visa processes and stopover programmes will enhance tourist arrivals. Lowering VAT on ATF on key destinations will reduce costs."

## India: Global aviation hub

**P Balaji**, Group Head – Governance, Regulatory, Compliance and

## Basic infra must improve

Emphasising the need for better infrastructure **K Pandian**, Managing Director, Cholan Tours, shared, "India must address basic tourist infrastructure, especially clean toilets and wheelchair accessibility at key destinations. Poor sanitation affects India's global image, despite having luxurious hotels. Cleanliness around monuments, temples and tourist spots is essential. Women's safety concerns and negative perceptions further impact arrivals."

## Seamless e-visa

Stressing the importance of streamlining visa processes, **GB Srithar**, Head of Tourism Services, VFS Global, suggested, "E-tourist visa processing must be seamless, with real-time feedback to address pain points. A key issue is the lack of standardised visa costs, which vary across different time windows. Streamlining pricing and application processes will enhance convenience."



**Anuraag Bhatnagar**  
CEO, The Leela Palaces  
Hotels and Resorts



**Mandeep S Lamba**  
President, South Asia  
HVS



**Jose Dominic**  
MD & CEO  
CGH Earth

be developed, and hotels will receive infrastructure status to drive growth and employment. The MUDRA scheme now supports homestays, while initiatives like 'Heal in India' and 'Land of Wonders' aim to attract global tourists.

economy by 2030, alongside emerging as the biggest aviation market. The UDAN scheme will be extended for 10 years from April 2027, adding 120 new destinations and benefiting 4 crore people."

## Destination development

Highlighting the need for a structured development approach, **Anuraag Bhatnagar**, CEO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, said, "Tourism growth must

He shared that the government's focus is on enhancing infrastructure in remote areas. "A special focus will be on helipads and water aerodromes, especially in the Northeast and aspirational districts," he said.

## Strengthening RCS & UDAN

**V Vualnam**, Secretary, Union Ministry of Civil Aviation, highlighted the impact of the UDAN scheme on regional connectivity, saying, "The modified UDAN scheme aims to cover 120 destinations and serve 4 crore passengers in 10 years. The RCS UDAN has already introduced 619 routes. India's air passenger numbers have doubled in a decade to 22 crores and are projected to reach 40 crores in five years."

Highlighting the role of PPP in improving infrastructure, he said,



**P Balaji**  
Group Head – Governance, Regulatory,  
Compliance and Corporate Affairs, Air India



**K Pandian**  
Managing Director  
Cholan Tours



**GB Srithar**  
Head of Tourism Services  
VFS Global

focus on balanced development, selecting destinations with strong potential, diverse experiences and infrastructure readiness. States should implement single-window clearance to streamline licensing,

ments and cutting the gestation period from 48 to 36 months. Infrastructure status should cover the entire hospitality sector, including budget hotels, to support nationwide growth."

Corporate Affairs, Air India, highlighted the importance of aviation in boosting tourism, saying, "Collaboration between government, private and public sectors boosts tourism and aviation. India can replicate



# Empowering agents with modern APIs

GlobalTix, under the leadership of CEO Chee Chong, is revolutionising the tours and attractions market by connecting travel agents and resellers with global attractions through a seamless B2B platform. With advanced technology, competitive pricing and strategic partnerships, the company is expanding its footprints, especially in India.

Surbhi Sharma

GlobalTix is positioning itself as a leading channel manager in the global tours and attractions market. The company helps tour operators and attractions distribute their products worldwide, providing a comprehensive one-stop solution for resellers and travel agents.

With an extensive range of global products and competitive rates, GlobalTix offers access to popular attractions, such as Disneyland, Merlin products, and Universal Studios. The company partners with major Online Travel Agents (OTAs), banks, and Destination Management Companies (DMCs), reinforcing its presence in the tourism ecosystem.

### Unique value proposition

Chee Chong, Chief Executive Officer, GlobalTix, said that a key dif-



Chee Chong  
CEO  
GlobalTix

ferentiator for the company is its 100 per cent B2B approach. In a sector that has recently embraced digitalisation, the company connects agents directly with attractions, ensuring seamless operations. With the growing potential of the Indian market, where travellers increasingly seek diverse experiences, the firm is well-positioned

to capitalise on the demand for unique attractions.

Chong highlighted that post-COVID, the international tourism industry has been rapidly adopting technology. "Travellers now expect instant confirmation and a wide variety of options, driving the need for streamlined operations and advanced APIs (Application Programming Interface). We address these demands by offering a singular, stable API that connects resellers to attractions around the world, providing access to real-time sales data and enabling direct negotiations for better rates and marketing support," he said.

### Opportunities in India

Highlighting the immense potential of the Indian market, where attractions and activities play a pivotal role in travel, Chong said, "As OTAs increasingly integrate tours and activities into their platforms, the demand

for these offerings continues to grow. Our strategy for India focuses on pricing flexibility, charging a flat transactional fee per ticket, which allows agents to maximise their

**Our strategy for India focuses on pricing flexibility, charging a flat transactional fee per ticket, which allows agents to maximise their margins**

margins. Top-tier agents who meet certain sales volumes can also benefit from rebates on these fees."

Chong added that by providing agents with the tools to customise

packages and push key products to their clients, the company enables a more personalised and efficient approach to selling attractions and experiences.

### Expansion & partnerships

The company aims to expand its presence in India by working with key partners in major cities and regions. "These B2B and B2C agents will help us reach a broader audience, empowering local agents to connect with consumers and other agents across the country. This partnership-driven

approach will allow us to cover the vast Indian market while providing localised support and expertise," Chong explained.

The company's expansion efforts are not limited to India as it recently opened offices in the UK and South Korea, further solidifying its global footprint. "With a growing team in India and these new international offices, the company is poised for continued success in the rapidly evolving travel and tourism industry," Chong concluded.

### Global presence

- GlobalTix is well-positioned to capitalise on the demand for unique attractions in India
- The company recently opened offices in the UK and South Korea

### India strategy

- Pricing flexibility
- Rebate on fee for top-tier agents
- Personalised and efficient approach

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# Indian presence felt at ITB Berlin

ITB Berlin 2025, held from 4-6 March at Messe Berlin, offered networking opportunities for industry stakeholders from around the world, including tour operators, travel agencies, hoteliers and tech firms, facilitating partnerships and collaborations. A 40-member delegation from India, led by the MOT, showcased the country's vast range of tourism products and experiences at the event.



# Adopting tech for bespoke services

Speedbird is revolutionising the travel industry by seamlessly combining technology with personalised services. With a focus on innovation and streamlined operations, the company is well-equipped to thrive in a competitive environment. Leveraging its vast global network, Speedbird is making travel planning faster, simpler and accessible to all.

 Surbhi Sharma

With over 35 years of industry expertise, Speedbird Travels has transitioned from a traditional travel agency to a globally recognised aggregator. The platform provides a comprehensive, one-stop solution for all travel needs, offering clients access to competitive rates and an extensive selection of options, all integrated into a seamless and user-friendly interface.

### Global expertise & personalised solutions

In-depth knowledge of global destinations makes Speedbird Travels different from others in the Indian travel market. "Our first-hand experience and worldwide partnerships enable the company to deliver unparalleled services. From destination advice to flights, hotels, transfers, and sightseeing, the company ensures every client's



**Xavier Peres**  
Director  
Speedbird Travels

journey is crafted with precision and expertise," said **Xavier Peres**, Director, Speedbird Travels.

### Harnessing advanced technology

Since September 2023, Speedbird Travels has embraced state-of-the-art German technology to elevate its offerings. "Powered

by a platform featuring nearly 100 APIs, the company can create real-time, customised travel plans in as little as three minutes. Whether it involves hotel reservations, flights, sightseeing, or transfers, the technology seamlessly integrates all elements of the travel experience, ensuring efficiency and excellence," Peres informed.

### Comprehensive & tailored services

He said that Speedbird Travels' ability to provide an all-encompassing range of travel services sets them apart from others. Guided by the motto, "You dream it, we deliver it," the company caters to everything from exclusive travel experiences to routine business trips. "Real-time quotes and quick turnaround time make us a go-to platform for travellers with diverse needs and aspirations," he shared.

### Strategic collabs for unmatched offerings

Peres said that their partnerships with industry leaders, such as Booking.com, Uber, Viator, Bokun, and Rail Europe, further

 **Powered by a platform featuring nearly 100 APIs, the company can create real-time, customised travel plans in as little as three minutes**

expand the company's reach and enhance its services. The collaborations enable the firm to provide a wide array of travel options at competitive rates, solidifying its

position as a leader in the Indian travel sector.

### Customised travel & hassle-free services

Highlighting their customised travel packages, Peres said, "Catering to both individual and group travellers, we deliver bespoke travel packages tailored to specific needs. Additionally, our visa assistance services streamline international travel, ensuring a smooth and hassle-free experience from start to finish."

### A lean, tech-driven approach

The company's commitment to quality over quantity is reflected in its lean operational model. "We invest heavily in cutting-edge technology rather than expanding our manpower. This strategic focus ensures operational efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and uncompromised service quality. Gradually enhancing technology

and building an exceptional management team, we continue to prioritise sustainable growth," Peres explained.

### Vision for future

With its innovative mindset, extensive experience, and unwavering dedication to excellence, the company is setting new benchmarks. "By offering transformative journeys and redefining travel planning, we inspire confidence and elevate the travel experience," he said.



# Bali numbers rising from tier II cities

Bali is set to become even more accessible and attractive to Indian travellers with the Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow 2025. Designed to strengthen tourism ties between Bali and India, the event will showcase new experiences, direct flight options and seamless connectivity, says Ketut Diana, Director, Indo Jaya Travel.

 Janice Alyosius

Designed to strengthen tourism ties between Bali and India, Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow 2025 is planned in cities across the country. It will showcase new travel experiences, direct flight options and seamless connectivity, said **Ketut Diana**, Director, Indo Jaya Travel. It will be held in Kolkata on 17 March, in Surat on 19 March, in Ahmedabad on 20 March, in New Delhi on 21 March, in Jaipur on 22 March, in Indore on 24 March and in Bangalore on 25 March.

Sharing the key objective behind the initiative, Diana said, "Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow 2025 is all about bringing Bali closer to Indian travellers. It showcases Bali's amazing tourism experiences, connecting travel businesses from both sides. With direct flights from Delhi and Bengaluru, easier visas and special promotions, the goal is to attract nearly a million Indian tourists to Indonesia this year. It's a win-win,



**Ketut Diana**  
Director  
Indo Jaya Travel

Indians get more dreamy Bali vacations and Indonesia strengthens its tourism economy."

### Strategic city selection

The roadshow will visit Kolkata, Surat and Indore cities that are emerging as key contributors to Bali's inbound tourism from India. "Kolkata, Surat and Indore were picked for the roadshow because they are rising travel hotspots. With booming economies and more people eager

to explore international destinations, Bali sees huge potential here. More families, honeymooners and adventure seekers from these cities are looking for that perfect getaway, so why not Bali? By focusing on these markets, Indonesia is making it even easier for Indian travellers to turn their Bali dreams into reality," Diana said.

### New experiences

Bali remains a favourite among Indian travellers but Indo Jaya Travel is ensuring "there is always something fresh to offer". "At the roadshow, we are bringing fresh Bali experiences to Indian travellers. Think deep cultural dives with local ceremonies, thrilling adventures like jungle treks and ultimate relaxation at wellness retreats. Plus, foodies can enjoy immersive culinary tours and cooking classes. Whether you are a beach lover, an explorer or just need a peaceful escape, Bali has something new for you," he said.

### Post-pandemic travel trends

Indian interest in Bali has surged

post-pandemic, with travellers seeking richer, more meaningful experiences. "Post-pandemic, Bali has become even more popular among Indian travellers and it's easy to see why. More people are seeking meaningful experiences, whether it's exploring Bali's rich

 **Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow 2025 will visit Kolkata, Surat and Indore cities that are emerging as key contributors to Bali's inbound tourism from India**

culture, enjoying thrilling adventures like ATV rides and water sports or unwinding at a peaceful wellness retreat. The demand for Indian-friendly food and luxury stays has also grown, making Bali

feel like a home away from home. With direct flights and easy visas, it's now simpler than ever for Indians to turn their Bali dreams into reality," he shared. Diana said that the average length of stay has also increased from five to nine nights, with Indian travellers now exploring beyond Bali to destinations like Lombok, Labuan Bajo and the Raja Ampat Islands. "With easier visas and more direct flights, Bali is now closer than ever. So why wait for a big occasion? Your next adventure could be just a flight away," he said.

Indo Jaya Travel is ensuring Bali as a year-round destination for Indian travellers. Beyond its dreamy weddings and honeymoons, Bali offers something for everyone—theme parks for families, adventure for friends and serene retreats for wellness seekers. With world-class venues, it's also an ideal spot for business events. With easier visas and more direct flights, Bali is now more accessible than ever.

## A YEAR-ROUND DESTINATION

❖ **Perfect for families and friends:** From theme parks to adventure activities and luxurious resorts, Bali caters to all types of travellers.

❖ **Spiritual and wellness getaways:** Yoga retreats, meditation centres and stunning landscapes make Bali a top choice.

❖ **Business with a view:** Bali is an ideal location for corporate events.

❖ **Exploring beyond Bali:** More Indian travellers are venturing to Lombok, Labuan Bajo and Raja Ampat for pristine beaches and untouched nature.

❖ **Festivals and foodie adventures:** From traditional temple festivals to vibrant local markets, Bali offers something new every season.

# How accessible is India for tourists?

With technological advancements and shift towards inclusivity reshaping industries, especially tourism, identifying existing challenges is an important step to promote accessible tourism in India. Besides infrastructure limitations and inaccessible modes of transport, the mindset of people needs to change and become more socially conscious.

 Somya Deep

Accessible tourism, the idea of making tourism convenient for all, ranging from differently abled to elderly, presents a significant economic opportunity for India. Talking about this opportunity, **Prateek Hira**, Chairman, IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter and President & CEO, Tomos & Un-DMC, said, "Accessibility is not only limited to providing a facility to persons with disabilities but is, in fact, a barometer of thoughtfulness and inclusivity of the society in general." While Indian law mandates accessibility for everyone, legal declarations do not always translate into societal consciousness. "Unless we become socially conscious and inclusive of persons with disabilities, we cannot have an 'Accessible India'," he emphasised.

 **While Indian law mandates accessibility for everyone, legal declarations do not always translate into societal consciousness**

**Challenges**  
In order to promote accessible tourism in India, identifying existing challenges is an important step. Besides infrastructure limitations and inaccessible modes of transport, the mindset of people around accessibility needs to change. "India is the most populous country. Data suggests five to six per cent of the population constitutes persons with disabilities. However,



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO & Director, Uday Tours & Travel

this figure is likely an underestimation, as many are not officially registered, and it does not include senior citizens who also require accessibility," he said.

Providing a hospitality perspective to the issue, **Gaurav Mudgal**, Managing Partner & Vice President - Commercial, Aamaghathi Wildlife Resort, said that retrofitting existing properties, especially heritage properties, to make them accessible to all is a significant challenge. "There is a need for a mindset change and for accessibility to be ingrained in the built architecture," Mudgal said.

**India's context**  
Keeping in view the current state of accessible tourism in India, there is a need to do a lot more. **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO and Director, Uday Tours & Travel, mentioned Kerala as a positive example, being the first state to implement the 'Barrier-free Kerala Tourism Project'. He highlighted the Ministry of Tourism's efforts, including guidelines for barrier-free facilities and awards for accessible monuments. "For those specially-abled persons struggling to fulfil their dreams of travelling, a silver lining



**Prateek Hira**  
Chairman, IATO UP Chapter & President & CEO, Tomos & Un-DMC

has emerged, with Kerala, the first state in India to become elderly and disabled-friendly, putting in place all the basic infrastructure and facilities at tourism centres," he said.



**Mahendra Pratap Singh**  
Chairman, IATO Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter and MD, Travel India Tourism

**Mahendra Pratap Singh**, Chairman, IATO Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter and Managing Director, Travel India Tourism, noted that while some cities and destinations, like Delhi and Agra's Taj Mahal, have made progress, a lot more efforts are required in many rural areas and less-visited states like Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. "These areas are often less



**Gaurav Mudgal**  
Managing Partner & Vice President - Commercial, Aamaghathi Wildlife Resort

explored by both Indian and foreign tourists, but with the right improvements, they could become popular destinations. There is a need for more attention to be given to these



**EM Najeeb**  
Chairman, ATE Group of Companies & Executive Committee Member, IATO

hidden gems, making them more welcoming for everyone, including people with disabilities," he said.

**EM Najeeb**, Chairman, ATE Group of Companies and Executive Committee Member, IATO, emphasised the inconsistency across the country. "Rajasthan has taken steps to improve access to heritage sites, adding ramps and braille signage in places like Jaipur's City Palace. Delhi has introduced accessible transportation options, and many metro stations have elevators and braille signage. Meanwhile, airports across the country have also enhanced accessibility services, such as wheelchair assistance and sensory rooms," he said, adding that such moves need to be replicated in other destinations.

Hira acknowledged progress in aviation, metro-rail network, and certain ASI monuments, but stressed for more. "Unless we have it across all facilities and product class, our efforts to have accessible places in

good numbers become ineffective and meaningless," he said.

**Potential solutions**

Envisioning India as a leader in accessibility, Hira stressed that it requires a sweeping social change and social consciousness, a change that must permeate every facet of society. "The good news is that the movement has support from the highest levels. Our Prime Minister himself has been propagating the cause quite loudly," he said.

Citing the Supreme Court's recent commentary on the importance of using respectful language while referring to the people with disabilities, Hira said, "Now the need is to spread this idea in the society for making India truly accessible."

Mehra stressed on utilising the economic potential of the market, saying that travellers with disabilities often travel with companions. "Accessibility is not only about human rights; it is also a business opportunity," he said. Singh advocated for improving infrastructure, including ramps, elevators, and accessible bathrooms. He called for inclusive public transportation and staff training. "Creating special travel packages and tours that cater to people with specific needs can help India attract more tourists from around the world," he said.

**Global numbers**

The World Health Organisation's (WHO's) data indicate 16 per cent of the global population requires accessible facilities, and almost 60 per cent of those from developed economies have the means to travel but avoid inaccessible destinations. Moreover, there are around 950 million elderly, half of whom require accessibility. "If we in India become accessible, just for the purpose of making lives of our own people easier, we can be an attraction for this huge market that constitutes more than a billion people waiting to explore the world with dignity," Hira said.

Accessibility in tourism facilities, products, and services should be a central part of responsible and sustainable tourism. Almost 50 per cent of people aged more than 60 have a disability, according to the UN DESA 2022. Mehra said that two-third of people with disabilities in developed economies are likely to have means to travel with them.

**Inclusive nature of tourism**

Inclusivity has always been the essence of tourism. However, it is a social trend now. Hira emphasised, "Tourism is inclusive and non-discriminatory. Accessible India gives out a loud social message and is a great soft power." He believes that becoming accessible will enhance India's global image. "As the world looks at India for all solutions, we should take affirmative and meaningful steps in the direction of accessibility," he suggested. Sharing similar sentiments, Najeeb said, "By embracing accessibility as a

 **16% of global population requires accessible facilities & 60% of those from developed nations have the means but avoid inaccessible destinations**

core part of its tourism strategy, India can expand its appeal and build a reputation as a country committed to inclusive travel."

**Strategies**

With the right strategies and intentions, India has the potential to become an accessible tourist location. Najeeb advocated for promoting accessible destinations, and fostering public-private partnerships. Mudgal believes that accessibility will become a key differentiator for hotels. Mehra pointed out that the inclusion of accessibility in hotel classification guidelines is a positive step. "The condition of making hotels accessible for people with different abilities has been included in the MOT's guidelines for approval and classification of 4 and 5-star category hotels," he informed.





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# Wellness isn't just spa treatments

Modern travellers are no longer content with superficial relaxation; they seek experiences that nurture their well-being, ignite personal growth and foster deep self-connection. From sunrise yoga on Goa's tranquil beaches to meditation in the Himalayas' serene heights or detox retreats in Kerala's lush landscapes, these experiences are investments in a revitalised lifestyle.



**Santosh Kumar**  
Country Manager - India, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia, Booking.com

“Travel is no longer just an escape; it's a journey of personal transformation. Travellers are now seeking experiences that enrich their well-being and fuel personal growth. Wellness travel has evolved beyond the spa day to become a quest for deep self-connection, passion nurturing and mindful exploration.”



**Ajay Mehtani**  
Partner  
TreeHouse Hotels & Resorts

“We go beyond traditional spa services and fitness centres to offer unique wellness experiences. We have recently launched a new wellness product called Aura, a virtual reality wellness experience, in partnership with avika Mind Health, a deep tech company that combines emerging technologies like Gen AI.”



**Ajay Kanojia**  
Cluster General Manager  
Sayaji Hotels

“Wellness is not just about spa treatments or retreats; it's about feeling good, inside and out. At our hotels, we integrate wellness into the everyday guest experience, ensuring restful sleep, fresh and nutritious food, and spaces designed for relaxation and focus. Our approach includes calming ambiance and wellness touches.”



**Rahul Janve**  
General Manager  
Courtyard by Marriott Mahabaleshwar

“We redefine wellness tourism by blending nature, adventure, and relaxation. Our wellness offerings include an indulgent spa experience, rejuvenating treatments and a serene escape amid the lush Western Ghats with a sundowner at Quarter Deck. Guests can immerse themselves in natural environment.”



**Manish Kriplani**  
Managing Director  
Baywatch Travels

“Inbound to India is seasonal, the places that people shy away for a few months in a year will see maximum inbound in the other half of the year and vice versa, a Classic example is Rajasthan where you will not get a place during winter. This has been going on for many years, what we see is 'slow life' trend.”



**Shikhar Kumar**  
Managing Director  
Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts

“India offers exciting new destinations and experiences perfect for inbound visitors, blending adventure, history, nature, and culture. Kumbhalgarh in Rajasthan, known for its majestic UNESCO-listed fort with the world's second-longest wall, offers a glimpse into India's medieval, past.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

## Protection plan for students

Asego's Global Assistance & Travel Insurance for Students offers all-round protection for students beyond university insurance, so that they can focus on education without the stress of unforeseen disruptions.



As educational opportunities expand globally, the number of students travelling abroad for higher studies continues to rise. According to recent data, over 1.33 million Indian students are pursuing higher education abroad as of January 2024, reflecting a growing demand for international education. While this transition offers unparalleled academic and career growth, it also comes with inherent challenges—ensuring personal safety, financial security, and uninterrupted education. This is where Asego's Global Assistance & Travel Insurance for Students plays a crucial role, offering all-round protection beyond standard university insurance. From personal accident coverage to study interruption and sponsor protection, Asego ensures that students can focus on education without the stress of unforeseen disruptions.

### Comprehensive protection

Asego's student insurance goes beyond medical assistance, covering vital aspects of student life abroad. Key highlights include:



**Dev Karvat**  
Founder & CEO  
Asego

❖ **Study Interruption Coverage:** Financial support in case a student must discontinue studies due to a medical emergency or other covered reasons.

❖ **Sponsor Protection:** Ensuring students can continue their education even if their financial sponsor faces unfortunate circumstances.

❖ **Gadget Protection:** Covering the replacement for essential electronic devices like laptops, tablets, and smartphones, enabling students to

stay connected and productive during their study trips abroad.

❖ **Customizable Add-On Covers:** Students can tailor their insurance to include baggage loss, trip delays, adventure sports coverage, and more, based on their needs.

❖ **Hassle-Free Claims:** With a seamless process for claims and minimum paperwork for baggage and trip delay claim settlements, Asego ensures swift resolution and end-to-end support to travellers.

❖ **24/7 Global Assistance:** Round-the-clock support for medical emergencies and travel assistance.



## GRNconnect revamps platform

▶ Contd. from page 5

Additionally, multilingual support has been introduced, starting with Spanish, to cater to a diverse global audience. Recognising the increasing demand for mobile accessibility, GRNconnect is set to launch dedicated mobile solutions that will allow users to manage their travel bookings on the go.

In addition to the technological overhaul, GRNconnect has launched GRNExperts, a learning platform tailored for students, travel professionals, and entrepreneurs. “This initiative is designed to upskill and empower users by offering courses, industry insights, and professional development opportunities,” Narula shared, adding that, “GRNExperts is poised to revolutionise the learning experience for travel industry professionals, fostering growth and knowledge-sharing in an ever-evolving market.”

### Roadmap for the future

Narula also expressed enthusiasm over future developments. “We have an entire roadmap ahead with a big wish-list. Some of the features we are introducing are unique to GRNconnect and



not seen elsewhere in the market,” he shared.

The platform revamp was driven by extensive customer feedback, ensuring that the enhancements align with the real needs of travel agents. “There has been a lot of feedback and suggestions from our loyal customers, and all of these have been incorporated into the system. Our platform is now more robust and seamless than ever before,” Narula claimed.

With these cutting-edge developments, GRNconnect is set to revolutionise the B2B travel booking experience, making it easier, faster, and more efficient for travel agents worldwide. “We have some amazing features coming up, it's going to be exciting, and

we are going to rock the B2B market,” Narula concluded.

### NEW GRNCONNECT PLATFORM

- ❖ Modern UI/ UX for a smooth and user-friendly experience
- ❖ Integrated dashboard for improved accessibility and workflow
- ❖ Diverse payment methods for greater transaction flexibility
- ❖ Real-time omnichannel support for instant assistance
- ❖ Seamless Eurail connectivity for European travel bookings

## India vital market for BIT

BIT 2025 concluded in Milan with resounding success, reinforcing its position as a leading travel exhibition. The event featured intense discussions on key topics with a focus on India's tourism potential.

TT Bureau

India's outbound travel market remains one of the most dynamic, and its participation at BIT 2025 reflected the trend. "We saw encouraging engagement from Indian travel stakeholders," said **Paolo Pizzocaro**, Exhibition Director, BIT 2025, Fiera Milano. "India's demand for luxury, wellness, and sustainable travel is shaping global tourism strategies," he added.

India's involvement at BIT 2025 was supported by the convenient air connectivity between India and Italy, making it easier for Indian travellers to explore European destinations. The event highlighted India's growing preference for personalised experiences, digital bookings, and eco-friendly tourism choices.

BIT 2025 featured dedicated sections on leisure tourism, wellness travel, hospitality and technology, including digital technology. Indus-



**Paolo Pizzocaro**  
Exhibition Director  
BIT 2025



try experts discussed the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on travel planning, personalised customer experiences, and operational efficiency.

Sessions on overtourism and responsible travel explored how destinations can balance growth with sustainability. "Wellness tourism is gaining traction worldwide, and India is playing a vital role in this segment," Pizzocaro noted. "Travellers

are seeking retreats that integrate health, nature, and local cultures, which was a major theme in our Wellness Village," he added.

With Milan-Cortina set to host the 2026 Winter Olympics, BIT capitalised on the opportunity to position Italy as a top global destination. "The upcoming Olympics will attract millions of visitors, and we expect an increased flow of Indian travellers to Italy," Pizzocaro explained.

BIT 2025 demonstrated a renewed commitment to expanding its international footprint, with India emerging as a key focus area.



## Cross signs resort in Bali

Cross Hotels & Resorts continues to strengthen its foothold in Indonesia with the signing of a Hotel Management Agreement with Geonet Property & Finance Group for a 120-suite resort in Berawa, Bali.

Surbhi Sharma

Cross Hotels & Resorts continues to strengthen its foothold in Indonesia with the signing of a Hotel Management Agreement (HMA) with Geonet Property & Finance Group for a new 120-suite resort in Berawa, Bali. Set to open in 2028, the resort promises to be a family-friendly destination with immersive, all-in-one hospitality experiences.

### Vibrant destination

Located in one of Bali's most dynamic districts, the property is poised to attract modern travellers looking for convenience and lifestyle-driven experiences. Expressing his excitement over the partnership, **Harry Thaliwal**, Chief Executive Officer, Cross Hotels & Resorts, said, "This collaboration marks a major milestone as we strive to become APAC's leading alternative to global hotel operators. We are confident this venture will deliver long-term value for investors while setting new standards in guest experience."



**Set to open in 2028, the 120-suite resort in Berawa promises to be a family-friendly destination with immersive, all-in-one hospitality experiences**



Executive Officer, Geonet Group, said, "This development will not only offer exceptional guest experiences but also serve as a solid hospitality asset for investors."

### Vision for future of hospitality

**Evan Burns**, Indonesia Country Manager, Cross Hotels & Resorts, said, "We are thrilled to introduce a next-generation hospitality experience in Berawa. The project is designed to offer an immersive and seamless stay for guests."

### Prime location

The property is strategically located near Bali's entertainment and social hotspots, including Café del Mar and Batu Belig Beach. **Chad Egan**, Chief

# U & I targets luxury & wellness biz

U & I Holidays brought in 23 exhibitors from Bali at its ninth roadshow in India, highlighting its luxury, wellness, and unique attractions. The show, aiming to promote Bali as a wellness and luxury destination among Indians, focused on empowering Indian travel agents with tech-driven solutions for efficient itinerary creation, competitive rates, and customised packages.



# Singapore's 3-city India roadshow

Singapore Tourism Board (STB) recently organised its 3-city India roadshow in Mumbai, Chandigarh and Bengaluru. The roadshow evoked good response bringing 63 exhibitors. Markus Tan, Regional Director - India, the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, STB, said that Singapore welcomed 1.2 mn Indians, making India its third-largest source market.





# sees record-breaking 63 exhibitors





MARCH 2025

Date	Event	Time
17	Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow Bali 2025-Kolkata	10:00 am
17-19	Pacific Asia Travel Association Annual Summit	9:00 am
18-19	GPS-Bengaluru	10:00 am
18	TourFox Webinar	3:00 pm
18	South African Tourism's India Roadshow 2025- Delhi	10:00 am
19	Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow Bali 2025-Surat	10:00 am
19	Annual Destination Australia Conference 2025	9:00 am
19	South African Tourism's India Roadshow 2025- Chennai	10:00 am
20	LA Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
20	Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow Bali 2025-Ahmedabad	10:00 am
20	South African Tourism's India Roadshow 2025- Mumbai	10:00 am
21	Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow Bali 2025-New Delhi	10:00 am
21-23	Travel & Tourism Fair-Chennai	10:00 am
21-23	India Travel Mart- Goa	10:00 am
22	Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow Bali 2025-Jaipur	10:00 am
22-23	Travel Wedding Show	10:00 am
24	VisitBritain Webinar	3:00 pm
24	Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow Bali 2025-Indore	10:00 am
25	Indo Jaya Travel Roadshow Bali 2025-Bangalore	10:00 am
27	LA Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
28	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm

APRIL 2025

6-8	International Luxury Travel Market Africa 2025	9:00 am
7	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Hyderabad	10:00 am
8	LA Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
9	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Chandigarh	10:00 am
9-11	World Travel Market Africa 2025	10:00 am
10-11	International Tourism Fair Kosova 2025	10:00 am
11	Abu Dhabi Tourism Roadshow-Pune	10:00 am
24	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm

Form - IV

Statement about ownership and other particulars about newspaper TravTalk to be published in the first issue every year after the last day of February

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I, SanJeet, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Date : 01/03/2025

Sd/-  
SanJeet  
Signature of the Publisher

## VM2026 aims to boost India numbers

With a focus on sustainable tourism, enhanced connectivity and visa-free entry for Indians, Tourism Malaysia has launched the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign.



Janice Alyosius

Tourism Malaysia introduced the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 (VM2026) campaign at an exclusive Malaysia Networking Dinner at Hotel Pullman, Aerocity, in New Delhi recently. The event was inaugurated by H.E. Dato' Muzafar Shah Mustafa, High Commissioner of Malaysia to India, alongside Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali, Director, Tourism Malaysia Delhi.

A key moment of the evening was the unveiling of VM2026 logo, featuring Wira and Manja-Malayan Sun Bears, serving as campaign mascots. The vibrant design represents Malaysia's biodiversity, cultural harmony and dedication to sustainable tourism.

Mohd Ali emphasised, "Visit Malaysia Year 2026 is more than a cam-



Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali  
Director  
Tourism Malaysia Delhi

paign, it is an invitation to experience Malaysia's warmth, diversity and natural wonders. India remains a crucial market for us and with our visa-free initiative, enhanced connectivity and sustainable tourism focus, we aim to welcome more Indian visitors for unforgettable experiences."

## Couples vouch for unique settings

▶ Contd. from page 9



Anjali Tolani  
Vice President  
Tamarind Global

India's wedding landscape is constantly evolving, with couples seeking new, offbeat destinations that offer luxury, culture, and exclusivity. While Udaipur, Jaipur and Goa remain timeless favourites, emerging destinations like the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Coorg, and Meghalaya are gaining attention for their natural beauty and unique settings. In North India, Dehradun and Mussoorie are popular for their views and cool climate.

India has long been known for its extravagant wedding culture, but in recent years, new destinations have emerged beyond the traditional favourites like Udaipur, Jaipur, and Goa. Couples are now exploring lesser-known



Sarbendra Sarkar  
Founder & MD  
Cygnett Hotels & Resorts

but beautiful locations for their big day. For instance, Pushkar in Rajasthan is perfect for couples seeking a soulful and scenic celebration.

Compiled by TT Bureau



## 10 India members join global committees

Skål International has announced that 10 distinguished Skålleagues from India have been appointed to all 9 global committees of Skål International, which is an 'incredible achievement'.



TT Bureau

The appointment of 10 Skålleagues from India to the 9 global committees of Skål International marks a new era of Indian representation, leadership, and influence within the global Skål community, announced Skål International recently. Their selection reflects India's dedication to excellence, collaboration, and global engagement, ensuring that India plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of Skål In-



Sanjeev Mehra  
President  
SKÅL International India

ternational. Here is the list of appointees:

- ❖ Finance – Sk. B Gopinath (Skål International Chennai 205)
- ❖ Governance, Statutes & By-laws – Sk. Shekhar Divadkar (Skål International Goa 690)
- ❖ Media, PR, Branding & Marketing – Sk. J Earnest Immanuel (Skål International Hyderabad 606) | Sk. Mark Mendes, (SKAL international Goa 690)
- ❖ Membership Development & Florimond Volckaert Fund – Sk. Ranjini Nambiar (Skål International Bangalore 407)
- ❖ Sustainability – Sk. Upendra Kulkarni (Skål International Pune 452)
- ❖ Congress, International Meetings & Sponsorships – Sk. Manoj Mathew (Skål International Bangalore 407)
- ❖ Technology – Sk. Vipul Tanna (Skål International Mumbai South 732)
- ❖ Trade Shows, Global Partnerships & Advocacy – Sk. Greesh Bindra (Skål International Delhi 125)
- ❖ Training – Sk. Som Prakash Malik (Skål International Goa 690)

This reinforces our commitment to strengthening Skål India's global footprint and fostering impactful contributions to the industry

Speaking on the occasion, Sanjeev Mehra, President, Skål International India, said, "It is a proud moment for Skål International India as our esteemed members take on key roles in the global

committees of Skål International. Their appointment is a testament to the leadership, dedication, and excellence that India brings to the global tourism and hospitality industry. We congratulate them and look forward to their valuable contributions in shaping the future of Skål worldwide." Mehra added, "Skål India needs to ensure that because it is the world's biggest associations and one of the oldest associations in the world at 90 years. If we are to move forward, we need to collaborate with each other. That is a vision for Skål India. This milestone reinforces our commitment to strengthening Skål India's global footprint and fostering impactful contributions to the travel and tourism industry."

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# MOVEMENTS

## RAMADA BY WYNDHAM JAIPUR NORTH

Jaipur

**NANDAN NISHANT** has been appointed as the General Manager of Ramada by Wyndham Jaipur North. In his new role, he will be responsible for overseeing the hotel's staff and operations, sales, marketing, client relationship management, corporate liaisoning, P&L and cost management. Previously, he served as General Manager of Regenta Palace & Royal Orchid Central in Jaipur. A dynamic manager with just the right mix of supervisory and motivational skills, Nishant believes in leading his team to operational skills. He is focused on revenue and yield management. A native of Patna in Bihar, Nishant has a degree in Hotel Management.



## SHYANU LORDS ECO INN AIROLI

Navi Mumbai

Shyanu Lords Eco Inn Airoli, Navi Mumbai, has appointed **SUBHODEEP GHOSH** as the General Manager. With more than 26 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Ghosh possesses a robust background in Sales and Operations management. His areas of expertise include strategic operational planning, team leadership, client relationship management, and development of innovative sales and marketing strategies. In his new role, Ghosh is committed to delivering an exceptional guest experience, fostering a positive workplace culture, and strengthening stakeholder relationships to drive profitability.



## STAR AIR

Bengaluru

Star Air has appointed **SHILPA BHATIA** as the Chief Commercial & Marketing Officer (CCMO). Bhatia is a seasoned professional in the aviation industry, known for her significant contributions to various airlines. She served as the Chief Sales and Revenue Officer and later as the Chief Commercial Officer (CCO) at SpiceJet, playing a pivotal role in the airline's commercial strategies. She also served as the Chief Sales and Revenue Officer at IndiGo. Beyond SpiceJet and IndiGo, Bhatia has held significant positions at Sahara Airlines, Amadeus, and GMG Airlines. She has a proven record leadership positions.



## IHCL

Goa

Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) has appointed Vivek Batra as the General Manager of Taj Cidade de Goa Horizon. With extensive experience across the Luxury Collection of ITC Hotels, Batra initially joined the organisation as Director of Food & Beverage at Taj Bangalore, Bengaluru. He then moved on to lead the food and beverage operations at the flagship hotel, The Taj Mahal Palace & Tower, Mumbai, in the role of Director of Food & Beverage. He also demonstrated his leadership capabilities as Hotel Manager at Taj Cidade de Goa Heritage. His ability to drive excellence and elevate guest experiences makes him an invaluable asset.



## CINNAMON HOTELS & RESORTS

India

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts appoints **GAURAV ARORA** as the Director of Global Sales for India. With over two decades of experience in international hospitality sales, Arora has driven outbound business for leading global hotel brands, including Shangri-La, Hilton and Marriott International. In his previous role, Arora led Enhance Hospitality, a luxury hotel representation firm, successfully managing top-tier international brands in the Indian market. In his new role, he will drive revenue growth across Corporate, Leisure and MICE segments and execute sales strategies to strengthen Cinnamon's brand presence in India.



## HILTON BANGALORE EMBASSY GOLFLINKS

Bangalore

Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks has appointed **BAVANI SRINU** as the Cluster Marketing Communications Director. With an impressive career spanning over 18 years, Srinu has built a reputation for transforming brands, driving market expansion, and generating significant revenue growth across multiple industries. She has held leadership roles in Singapore, Dubai, and India, while also managing marketing strategies for the Australian market. In her new role, she oversees marketing strategies for three properties in Bangalore.



## HILTON GURUGRAM BAANI CITY CENTRE

Gurugram

Hilton Gurugram Baani City Centre appoints **CHANDNIP SHARRMA** as the Cluster Commercial Director. With nearly two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, Sharrma brings deep expertise in business planning, sales strategy, budgeting, and revenue management. In her new role, she will lead commercial initiatives to drive growth and further enhance Hilton's market presence in North India's dynamic hospitality landscape. She has held leadership positions with renowned hospitality brands, such as Hyatt Hotels & Resorts, The Oberoi Hotels & Resorts, Shangri-La Hotels.



## TAMARIND GLOBAL

Mumbai

Tamarind Global has promoted **LOUIS D'SOUZA** as its Managing Partner. A founding member of the company, D'Souza will now lead the business across Tamarind Global's offices in India and overseas. For the past 18 years, he has played a key role in Tamarind Global's success, shaping the company's excellence in tourism, events, and hospitality. His expertise in curating personalised experiences and driving technological advancements has been instrumental in the company's growth. Louis' elevation is a testament to his dedication, strategic vision, and deep industry expertise.



Hilton Bangalore Embassy Golflinks has appointed **NIHAL KURIAN** as the Commercial Director. Kurian has extensive experience in hospitality and commercial management, developed over an impressive 17-year career. Kurian's career journey is marked by his association with some of the esteemed hospitality brands, including Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru, and Hilton Garden Inn Pune Hinjawadi. In his new role, he will lead Hilton EGL's commercial strategy in the Bengaluru region, focusing on strengthening market share, boosting revenue, and driving long-term growth.



## ATMOSPHERE CORE

India

Atmosphere Core promoted **SRIBANTA ACHARYA** to the position of Resort Manager at OBLU SELECT Sangeli. Acharya, a valued member of Atmosphere Core since 2016, has steadily risen through the ranks, demonstrating a keen eye for operational excellence and an unwavering commitment to guest satisfaction. His leadership at OBLU SELECT Sangeli has cemented the resort's reputation for world-class service. His journey within Atmosphere Core began as part of the OZEN LIFE MAADHOO pre-opening team before moving on to the OBLU SELECT Sangeli pre-opening team.



## NHCC & HICC

Hyderabad

Novotel Hyderabad Convention Centre (NHCC) & Hyderabad International Convention Centre (HICC) has appointed **ANAHITA NAIR** as the Director of Marketing & Communications. With over 13 years of domestic and international experience, Nair brings a wealth of expertise in strategic brand development and partnerships to her new role. In the leadership position, she will focus on driving brand visibility, guest engagement, and positioning the property as a destination for business and leisure. She will lead integrated marketing efforts to enhance brand reach and revenue growth.



## GRAND MERCURE BANGALORE

Bangalore

Grand Mercure Bangalore has appointed **CHANDAN RANI** as the Talent & Culture Manager. With a distinguished background in human resources within the hospitality industry, Rani brings a wealth of experience from leading global brands, including Marriott International, Oberoi, and Compass Group. Her journey in hospitality spans over seven years, with expertise in talent management, and employee engagement. Prior to joining Grand Mercure Bangalore, she served as Deputy Manager-People at Food+ by Compass and held important Human Resources roles at Marriott International.



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28th March 2025	Tuesday	Schilthorn	3.00 PM IST	

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# India #3 source market for Singapore

Markus Tan, Regional Director - India, the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, Singapore Tourism Board, assured trade partners at its India roadshow that 2025 will be an action-packed year with loads of offers, entertainment and activities.



Hazel Jain

As India and Singapore celebrate 60 years of diplomatic relations in 2025, the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) is making significant strides to strengthen tourism ties between the two countries. Leading this effort is **Markus Tan**, Regional Director - India, the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, Singapore Tourism Board (STB), who recently spearheaded a three-city roadshow in India with a record-breaking 63 exhibitors. The roadshow, held in Mumbai, Chandigarh and Bengaluru, showcased Singapore's commitment to deepening its engagement with the Indian market.

### A growing market for Singapore

In 2024, Singapore welcomed 1.2 million Indian visitors, marking a 12 per cent increase from the previous year and solidifying India's position as Singapore's third-largest



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



source market. "We have big plans for 2025, which also marks 60 years of India-Singapore relations," Tan said. "The response to our roadshow in India has been fantastic. This is the highest number of exhibitors we have ever had, reflecting the growing interest in the Indian market."

Last year, STB held two successful roadshows in India, prompting the decision to expand this year's efforts. "This is the third time we have brought Singapore partners to India for roadshows," Tan explained. "The turnout from Singapore partners has been amazing, with 63 companies participating this year compared to 50 last year. This is a testament to their interest in growing the India market and creating exciting products to attract Indians," he added.

### Strategic city selection

The choice of Mumbai, Chandigarh and Bengaluru for the roadshow was deliberate, based on several key factors. "First, we considered air connectivity—whether the cities are currently connected or have the potential to be connected in the next 12 months. Second, we looked at the size

of the market and whether it is big enough to excite our Singapore partners. Third, we evaluated the level of education and awareness in the market," he explained.

**In 2024, Singapore welcomed 1.2 mn Indians, marking a 12% rise from 2023 and solidifying India's position as Singapore's third-largest source market**

### Positive trends from Indian

The Indian market has shown remarkable growth in both quantity and quality. "In 2024, we saw Indian tourists spending more on shopping and accommodation. Shopping expenditure increased significantly, and accommodation spending rose from 16 per cent to 19 per cent of total expenditure. These trends indicate that Indian travellers are willing to pay for premium travel experiences," he said.

### Enhancing travel experiences

One of the key initiatives to attract

Indian travellers is the partnership between STB and PhonePe, a leading fintech company of India. "In 2024, we signed a strategic MoU to raise awareness of cross-border payments in Singapore. When we started, there were about 2,500 to 3,000 UPI-enabled merchants in Singapore. Today, that number has grown to over 33,000. This means Indian travellers can easily make payments using QR codes at restaurants, attractions, and retail outlets, making their travel experience more seamless and enjoyable," the STB regional director said.

### 60 years of friendship

As India and Singapore celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their diplomatic relationship in 2025, Tan reflected on the strong ties between the two nations. "The relationship is robust across all levels—government to government, business to business, and people to people," he said. "At STB, we aim to deepen these people-to-people linkages and drive more affinity for travel to Singapore," he added.

### TOP 5 SOURCE MARKETS IN 2024

- 3.08 million**  
China
- 2.49 million**  
Indonesia
- 1.20 million**  
India
- 1.19 million**  
Malaysia
- 1.17 million**  
Australia

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