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PATA award of merit comes home

SanJeet, Director, DDP Publications, becomes the first Indian to be conferred with the 'PATA Award of Merit' at the PATA Annual Summit 2025, held recently in Istanbul, Türkiye.

TT Bureau

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) honoured two distinguished leaders in the Asia Pacific travel and tourism industry during the PATA Annual Sum-

mit 2025 (PAS 2025) in Istanbul, Türkiye.

SanJeet, Director, DDP Publications, was honoured with the prestigious PATA Award of Merit. The award recognises his longstanding service and

significant contributions to Asia Pacific's travel and tourism industry. The PATA Life Membership Award was bestowed upon **Dr Chris Bottrill**, Associate Vice President, International, Capilano University, at the event.



SanJeet, flanked by PATA Chair Peter Semone and PATA CEO Noor Ahmad Hamid, with the award

Incentivise green efforts

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary & Director General, Tourism, says India's tourism sector is poised for growth with a renewed focus on infrastructure development and sustainable measures.

Janice Alyosius

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary & Director General, Tourism, said that India's tourism demand is rapidly outpacing its supply. "India's economic rise over the last decade has increased disposable incomes and aspirations among its youth, but destination development has not kept pace," he said. He added, "For 50 to 60 years, the quality of destinations



Suman Billa
Additional Secretary &
Director General, Tourism

has not changed. They are declining in terms of visitor experience," he said.

Billa has been appointed as the new Director General of Tourism, taking over from Mugdha Sinha, who has now assumed charge as Managing Director of the India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC). Billa was speaking at the India Travel & Tourism Sustainability Conclave 2025, organised by the MakeMyTrip Foundation and the World Travel & Tourism Council's India Initiative.

Contd. on page 15 ▶

Sustainability stuck in limbo

Outdated policies, lack of direction and fragmented efforts across states are stalling India's sustainable tourism ambitions and there is need for a clear policy and framework.

Janice Alyosius

India may have a sustainable tourism framework in place, but it no longer aligns with today's global standards. Elaborating on the issue, **CB Ramkumar**, Vice Chair, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), said, "Tourism is a state subject, so the states are meant to adopt and implement sustainability guidelines. But they often look to the Union Ministry of Tourism for direction."



CB Ramkumar
Vice Chair
Global Sustainable Tourism Council

Recalling the launch of Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) in

2011-12, he said, "While the STCI document still exists, it is outdated. The GSTC criteria have evolved through two more iterations since then, but India's framework has not kept pace. Though we are in 2025, we still do not have a proper framework."

Subha Bhaskar, COO, QualStar, underscored the role of the GSTC criteria in promoting hotel sustainability. As India's first

Contd. on page 18 ▶

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Governments rewrite travel's future

Tourism leaders from across the world come together at the PATA Annual Summit 2025 in Istanbul to discuss the pressing issues facing the industry. The leaders share real-world solutions to tackle the issues. A consensus emerges at the summit that sustainable tourism isn't just about intentions it's about implementation, investment and inclusive growth.



TT Bureau

A high-powered panel of global tourism leaders came together at the PATA Annual Summit 2025 to tackle the most pressing issue facing the industry, sustainability. The session focused on building a sustainable future, spotlighted practical examples and policy innovations from many countries, including Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, Nepal, Azerbaijan and the Philippines. Their collective message? Sustainable tourism isn't just about intentions it's about implementation, investment and inclusive growth. Kicking off the session, **Randy Durband**, CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), urged the industry to move from



Randy Durband, CEO, Global Sustainable Tourism Council; Onur GÖZET, Deputy Director General for Promotion, Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Republic of Türkiye; Alhasan Aldabbagh President of APAC Markets, Saudi Tourism Authority; Florian Sengstschmid, CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board; Sharlene Batin, Assistant Secretary, Department of Tourism, Philippines and Deepak Raj Joshi, CEO, Nepal Tourism Board

ambition to action. "Sustainability is hard work. If it were easy, everyone would already be doing it. We need frameworks, enforcement and industry-wide commitment," he said. Representing Türkiye, **Onur Gözet**, Deputy Director General for Promotion, highlighted the country's pioneering regulatory steps. "Since

launching our Green Certification Programme, over 19,000 establishments have been certified," he shared. "We are aligning national efforts with global standards, from climate goals to UNESCO heritage protection, and linking sustainability with gastronomy, culture and community," he added.

From Saudi Arabia, **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President, APAC Markets, painted a picture of "sustainable luxury" through megaprojects like The Red Sea and AIUla. "Our definition of sustainable tourism has three layers, story, place and purpose. We build experiences rooted in heritage, committed to ecologi-

cal protection and designed to uplift local communities. Desert Rock, for example, blends into mountain cliffs without disturbing wildlife," Aldabbagh explained.

Sharlene Batin, Assistant Secretary from the Philippines, discussed about the bold grassroots initiatives in the country like the Tour-

ism Champions Challenge, which funds local tourism projects. "By listening to what local governments



Sustainability is hard work. If it were easy, everyone would already be doing it. We need frameworks

– **Randy Durband**

need, we have helped create destination infrastructure that is both culturally

Contd. on page 18 ▶

OTOAI fortifies India-Russia bond

OTOAI's annual convention in Moscow highlights the historical camaraderie between India and Russia and the mutual efforts to enhance tourism exchanges. It promises impactful business sessions, immersive cultural experiences and a curated post-convention tour to St Petersburg, marking another milestone in India-Russia tourism relations.



Janice Alyosius

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) is all set to host its much-anticipated 6th Annual Convention in Moscow, Russia. Scheduled from 10-13 July 2025, the convention is expected to draw around 180 leading travel professionals from across India. A post-convention tour to the historic city of St Petersburg for three nights adds further allure to this unique industry gathering. **Himanshu Patil**, President, OTOAI, highlighted the historical camaraderie between India and Russia and the mutual efforts to enhance tourism ex-



OTOAI and Moscow Tourism team members during the convention's press conference

changes. "Post-pandemic, Russia has made a very positive move by simplifying the visa process for Indian travellers. This clearly reflects their intention to welcome us and strengthen tourism ties between our countries."

Addressing concerns over safety, Patil said, "I understand there are questions about safety due to the ongoing situation, but it is completely safe and welcoming. From food to sightseeing, the hospitality is top class in all aspects."

Shravan Bhalla, Vice President, OTOAI and Convention Chairman, expressed optimism about Russia becoming a sought-after destination for Indian travellers. "We are expecting a new destination for the Indian market that is great

for honeymooners, MICE, social events like birthdays and anniversaries, bachelor parties, film shoots and even destination weddings," he said.

Anastasia Popova, Head of Business Tourism De-

velopment, Moscow City Tourism Committee, welcomed the announcement with enthusiasm.

FAST CHECK

10-13 July
6th OTOAI Annual Convention

Moscow
host city for convention

180
leading travel professionals from India expected to attend



India's crown bleeds, tourism weeps

"No matter what happens in Kashmir, tourists are never targeted," said our houseboat staff, when we visited Srinagar in 2018 for the TAAI Convention. They pleaded with the media—"Write good things. Tell the world to come." Back then, Kashmir was still struggling to regain its footing. Hotels were half-full, tour operators were hopeful, and the scars of militancy and political turmoil were still raw.

Then came the turnaround Post-Article 370, post-COVID, Kashmir's tourism exploded. Over 2.1 crore tourists visited in 2023. The number hit 2.36 crore in early 2024. The Valley was alive. Travel businesses flourished. From Gulmarg to Pahalgam, the hospitality sector saw a revival we all cheered for.

And then came the attack. The ambush on tourists in Pahalgam wasn't just tragic—it was a seismic blow. For the first time, the very backbone of Kashmir's economy was targeted. This wasn't just an act of violence. It was a direct assault on the perception we had all worked so hard to rebuild.

Condemnations have poured in. Security has been beefed up. But trust—once broken—takes far longer to restore. In travel, perception is everything. And safety is non-negotiable.

Today, the industry stands heartbroken, yet united. Those who built Kashmir's revival from the ground up—hoteliers, guides, transporters—are devastated. The very people who turned Kashmir's fortune around are now at risk of losing it all.

Kashmir is still one of the most stunning destinations on Earth. But the crown of India, once gleaming with promise, is now stained with grief. We can only hope that the heart of Kashmir—its people and its spirit—can recover once more.

India to become third largest aviation market by 2030?

With record aircraft orders, impressive growth and world-class infrastructure developments, India's place in international aviation has changed dramatically over the last decade, says **Willie Walsh**, Director General, IATA.



Year 2025 will be exciting for the Indian aviation. June will be a highlight when Delhi will turn into the global aviation capital as industry leaders from around the world gather for the 81st IATA Annual General Meeting and World Air Transport Summit, sponsored by IndiGo.

Those gathering for the event will be impressed. India's place in global aviation has changed dramatically over the last decade. With record aircraft orders, impressive growth, and world-class infrastructure

India is established as 4th largest aviation market. Within this decade, IATA's projections point to India rising to be 3rd largest

developments, India is firmly established as the fourth largest aviation market. And within this decade IATA's own projections point to India rising to be the third largest.

India's rapidly modernising and expanding aviation sector is good news for the country. The aviation industry in India employs 369,700 people directly and generates US\$5.6 billion of economic output. When you include the additional benefits that aviation brings, such as tourism, the number rises to 7.7 million jobs in India and US\$53.6 billion in economic contribution. That is 1.5 per cent of India's GDP!



Throughout my career, I have been a keen observer of India's aviation industry. I have never been more excited about India's aviation prospects. Part of the excitement is due to the remake of India's airline sector. Air India's rebirth with new ownership is placing renewed focus on its service with exciting developments in its fleet and product offering. And IndiGo has built-up an impressive footprint across India and regionally. With a world-leading market capitalisation, there is enormous confidence in its prospects.

India's consumers have never been so well-served by its domestic carriers – with a rapidly expanding network, additional frequencies and connections, and growing competition. And with gateway airport capacity expansions in Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Hyderabad, along with the imminent commissioning of second airports in Delhi and Mumbai – before IATA's AGM in June – the potential for further aviation development is well-laid.

Critically, India has the talent needed to achieve a growing future, unlike many parts of the world which are facing some challenges. With the high-

est proportion of female commercial pilots in service, India clearly demonstrates that aviation is a solid career choice regardless of gender. And more great jobs will be created as India recognises the opportunity for greater investment in maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities.

India has the talent needed to achieve a growing future, unlike many parts of the world which are facing some challenges

We are also seeing policy measures by the Indian government, and the Civil Aviation Ministry in particular, that are supporting future success. There are several examples.

❖ Clarity was established with regard to the rights of aircraft lessors in the context of India's bankruptcy laws – and an impending parliamentary bill ratifying and aligning India's stance with international conventions will

help with predictability and consistency.

❖ Airline objections against overreach by India's GST investigation agencies were addressed. The government exempted the import of services into India between airline HQs and their local branches, respecting international conventions.

❖ AERA—the Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India—is establishing a track record of countering the natural monopolistic behaviour of airports and protecting consumer interest.

While we can truly celebrate these achievements, we must not take for granted the success of India's aviation future. There is more work to be done.



Willie Walsh
Director General
IATA

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

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TRAVEL NEWS

'We will do our best to **minimise the dent** on tourism in Jammu and Kashmir': GS Shekhawat

Tourism Secretary urges industry to **waive off cancellation fee**, MoCA advises airlines against price surge

Arunachal looks to develop **Buddhist circuit** in the region to promote spiritual tourism

Himachal CM urges Centre to **remove inner line check posts** to boost border tourism

India highlights Northeast region at MATTA Fair held in Kuala Lumpur

EaseMyTrip keen to scale up **EasyDarshan**, as spiritual tourism sees rise in India: Rikant Pittie

Inbound strategy needs reset: Sinha

India's tourism sector is at a crossroads, balancing rapid growth in foreign arrivals with a surge in outbound travel. As the country prepares to expand its infrastructure and branding, strategic collaborations between airlines, hotels and niche providers are seen as essential to creating a long-term, impactful tourism model.

Janice Alysius

Mugdha Sinha, a 1999-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre, has been appointed as the Managing Director of India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC). Prior to this, she served as the Director General of Tourism.



Mugdha Sinha
Managing Director, India Tourism Development Corporation

Addressing the PATA India's 19th Update and Outlook Meeting, Sinha highlighted some key developments in Indian tourism. "Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) have increased to 9.95 million in 2023, up from 9.5 million in 2024," she revealed.

Alongside this growth, outbound tourism has also surged, with approximately

30 million Indians travelling abroad in 2024, an increase from 27 million in 2023. This uptick has contributed to an increase in foreign exchange earnings, from \$28 billion to \$33 billion.

Emphasising on India's vast natural and cultural wealth, Sinha said, "We

don't need to create new destinations; we already have so much with 43 UNESCO world heritage sites, nearly 3,700 protected monuments and 7,500 km of coastline." These, along with India's vibrant crafts, cuisine and intangible heritage, serve as key attractions for both domestic and international tourists.

Sinha stressed on the need for a reset in India's inbound tourism strategy, shifting the focus from just numbers to sustainability, value and long-term impact. "Tourism advocacy must go beyond the numbers. Are we providing the kind of experience that justifies the investment? Are we delivering value for money? Are our poli-

cies truly enabling inbound growth, or are they inadvertently favouring outbound traffic?" she asked.

Tourism advocacy must go beyond the numbers. Are we providing the kind of experience that justifies the investment?

On the infrastructure front, Sinha pointed out that India currently has 1.82 million branded hotel rooms, with projections for this number

to grow to 3.1 million by 2028 and 4.1 million by 2030. Yet, she raised an important question, "Who will fill these rooms?" While India ranks 18th globally in terms of price competitiveness, its offerings remain expensive for many inbound markets. The solution lies in experience-led storytelling, smart destination marketing and a careful evaluation of the impact of policies.

India's aviation sector also received attention from Sinha, who said that the country boasts 167 airports, 45 of them international. With Indian airlines ordering over 900 wide-body aircraft, she sees a major opportunity to expand connectivity to long-haul markets.

Accor says 'thanks' to Indian trade

Accor held its 'All thanks to you' roadshow recently in Mumbai at the newly-opened Fairmont Mumbai where more than 60 Accor hotels from more than 15 countries converged to meet trade partners. Leading the show were **Pratima Badhwar**, Head of Commercial (India & South Asia) and **Mohammad Ali**, Director of Global Sales (India & South Asia).





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Indo Jaya promotes Indonesian 'gems'

In a bid to strengthen tourism ties with India, Bali-based DMC Indo Jaya Travel wrapped up a successful seven-city India roadshow. The roadshow, held in Kolkata, Surat, Ahmedabad, New Delhi, Jaipur, Indore and Bangalore with 21 exhibitors and over 730 buyers in attendance, aimed to promote among Indians not just Bali but also Indonesia's hidden gems.



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Inclusive travel, promising segment

With the travel demand from the elderly and people with special needs rising, industry leaders push for better infra, tech solutions and care-led experiences to cash in on the business opportunity. From spiritual circuits to international cruises, the future of inclusive travel lies in thoughtful design, empathy and enabling freedom for all travellers, they say.



Nitin Mittal
CEO
Hotel n Apartment



Sanjeev Mehra
President
Skål International India



Deepika Arora
Head – Indian Subcontinent
Dusit International



Arun Iyer
Managing Director
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Ashmi Dharia
Founder and Holiday Curator
Gypsy Soul Holidays



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

“ Tourism for the elderly and those with special needs has an immense growth potential in India, with Silver Tourism projected to reach US\$190 million by 2030. While accessibility has improved in select airports, monuments, and luxury hotels, broader infrastructure still lags behind. ”

“ Summer travel should be a season of joy and inclusion for everyone, especially for the elderly and those with special needs. True hospitality shines when destinations go beyond accessibility checklists to create heartfelt experiences that respect comfort, mobility, and dignity. ”

“ With global demographics shifting and life expectancy increasing, the travel industry is witnessing an increasing demand for elderly-friendly and accessible experiences. However, gaps in inclusive service design still exist. We are committed to fostering compassionate and inclusive travel. ”

“ Senior-friendly and assisted spiritual travel is no longer a niche — it is the next big market. We are increasingly seeing demand for elderly-friendly and special needs travel — especially in the context of spiritual and heritage destinations across India. We tapped into the rising demand. ”

“ We proudly design and book holidays for seniors and travellers with disabilities, focusing on comfort, accessibility, and ease. We regularly curate trips to accessible destinations like the UAE, Singapore, Japan and New Zealand. Cruises are also a top pick, offering both luxury and convenience at sea. ”

“ Senior travel is evolving from a niche trend into a powerful mindset shift. In 2025, Indian Baby Boomers are leading the charge, with 37 per cent preferring to invest in bucket-list trips over leaving inheritances. This generational change is fuelling demand. ”

Compiled by TT Bureau

Night of gratitude & celebration

Atlantis Resorts Dubai recently organised an exclusive appreciation event for its cherished travel partners in Mumbai, celebrating over 16 years of bond with them. The evening kicked off with a heartfelt welcome by **Kyp Charamlambous** (VP Sales, Atlantis Resorts Dubai) and graced by **Rutuja Patil** (Director, Sales & Leisure – Indian Market).



Align GDP growth with green finance

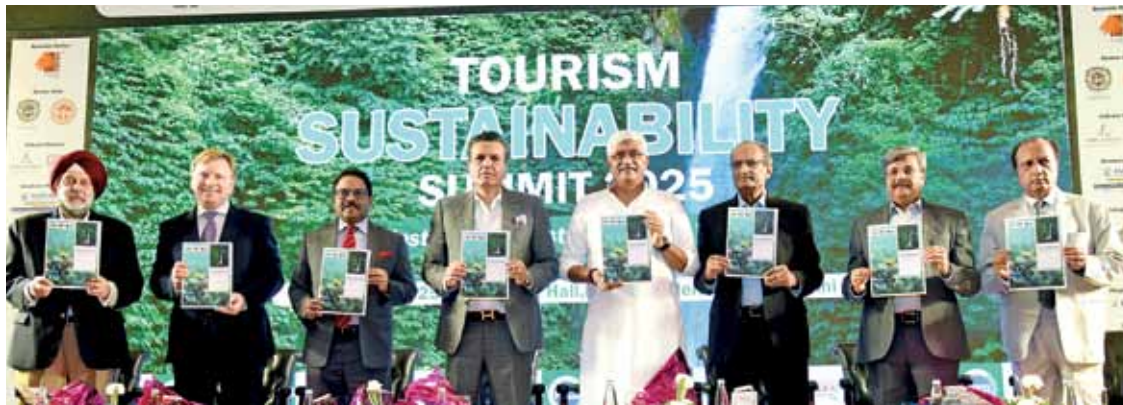
Tourism Sustainability Summit 2025 brought together global hospitality leaders and stakeholders in New Delhi recently, reinforcing sustainability in tourism as a key driver for long-term economic growth. Industry experts explored strategies to balance economic growth with green finance, emphasising on sustainable infra and community-driven tourism initiatives.



Lipla Negi

A collaborative effort by FHRAI, PHDCCI and HRANI, the second edition of the Tourism Sustainability Summit was supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, with Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat joining as partner states. The event featured insightful panel discussions on four themes comprising 'Reimagining Sustainability', 'Leveraging Technology for Greener Travel', 'Sustainable Tourism as a Policy Imperative' and 'Investing in Sustainability'.

Industry experts and thought leaders explored innovative strategies to balance economic growth



Dignitaries showcase the Knowledge Report by PHDCCI and FHRAI at the Tourism Sustainability Summit 2025

with green finance, environmental stewardship and technological innovation, emphasising sustainable infrastructure and community-driven tourism initiatives. The summit also marked the inauguration of a Knowledge Report by PHDCCI and FHRAI, further strengthening the dis-

course on responsible and resilient tourism.

Collective responsibility

Urging the industry to act now, **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Minister of Tourism, Government of India, said, "The challenge of climate is now knocking on our doors. If timely

action had been taken, the situation could have been better." Echoing similar sentiments, **Suman Billa** (IAS), Additional Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, emphasised the need to design tourism growth in a mindful manner. "Tourism is a rapidly growing sector, and

the industry is at the beginning of a long-term growth cycle for tourism and hospitality," he said.

K Syama Raju, President, FHRAI; **Hemant Jain**, President, PHDCCI; **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Government of Madhya

Pradesh and Managing Director, MPTB; **Glenn Mandyuk**, CEO, World Sustainable Hospitality Alliance (UK); **Pradeep Shetty**, Vice President, FHRAI and **Surendra Kumar Jaiswal**, President of HRANI & Hotel and Restaurant Association of Uttar Pradesh and Vice President, FHRAI, also addressed the summit.



Time to uplift destinations

► Contd. from page 5

He said, "At the destination, who is putting on the thinking cap to say how do we manage this destination in a way that the tourist experience is great and it's also great for the host community?" he asked.

Give incentives to sustainable efforts

Stressing the importance of a policy framework driven by positive incentives rather than prohibitive regulations, Billa announced a new challenge-based reward system, "We need to run a challenge. We need to ask the states to nominate a couple of destinations. Then we will set these benchmarks across sustainability, cleanliness, hygiene, safety and security. Each time they cross a level, there is a

reward which is there," he explained.

The initiative is designed to ensure sustained improvements rather than short-term cosmetic clean-ups. Additionally, the government has pledged to develop 15 new destinations with support from state governments and private stakeholders to help decongest oversaturated tourist hotspots. "If you are not going to make India compelling to domestic travel, you are just going somewhere else," he warned.

Uplifting destinations

Billa revealed that the Centre is actively working on a comprehensive plan to develop India's top 50 tourist destinations in close collaboration with state governments. "The Centre is

working on the guidelines in pursuance of the top 50 tourist destinations in the country that are proposed to be developed in partner-

India's growing aircraft fleet will boost the number of arrivals, but capacity building is crucial to meet the rising demand

ship with the states. The first set of it is expected to be identified by end of this year," he said.

Recognising the constraints within the hospital-

ity sector, Billa spoke about the urgent need to expand tourism infrastructure, particularly in view of the rising hotel prices and the surge in air connectivity. "We know that there are going to be a thousand new aircraft joining the Indian fleet. This means people are going to come in, but we also need to build capacity to absorb the demand," he said.

Other key initiatives

Billa also shed light on several new initiatives aimed at fortifying the sector:

Digitalisation of destination management systems:

Plans are underway to introduce real-time data systems that track tourist footfall, monitor ecological carrying capacity and gather visitor feedback, enabling smarter destination management.

Skill development in tier II and III cities: Targeted programmes will upskill the hospitality workforce, especially in emerging hubs, with a focus on service excellence, languages and sustainable practices.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):

The ministry will deepen its collaboration with private stakeholders to enhance infrastructure ranging from homestays to last-mile transport in rural and remote areas.

Thematic tourism circuits:

New circuits around wellness, adventure, spiritual and rural tourism are being developed to spread tourism benefits across the country and attract niche traveller segments.

Brand India 2.0: A refreshed marketing cam-

paign is in the works, designed to position India as a year-round, inclusive and sustainable destination. This digital-first campaign will showcase India's cultural depth and modern appeal to global audiences.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES

50 destinations to be developed in close collaboration with state governments
New challenge-based reward system to develop destination in states

India-Vietnam route on full capacity

With 21 flights per week between India and Vietnam, Vietnam Airlines touches 100% capacity of the bilateral agreement. With India ranking among the top five biggest international markets for the airline, its plan is to further increase capacity and frequency to and from India. With support from the travel trade and Aeroprime Group in India, this will not be a difficult task.

Hazel Jain

SkyTeam member Vietnam Airlines will introduce two new nonstop routes from Hanoi to Bengaluru and Hyderabad from May 1, operated by its two-class Airbus A321 aircraft with recliner seats in business class. The airline says the new routes reflect its ongoing commitment to offering convenient travel options and strengthening cultural and economic ties between Vietnam and India.

Underlining importance of the Mumbai market, **Abhishek Goyal**, Executive Director & CEO, Aeroprime Group, says, "Mumbai is a key market for us. We are launching our wide-



Abhishek Goyal
Executive Director & CEO
Aeroprime

body operations from Mumbai from 1 May. So, our Mumbai-Hanoi flight, which operates four times a week, will be operated by wide-body aircraft, which will be the Airbus 350 or Boeing 787 offering premium onboard services and flight entertainment,

curated Indian meals, flatbed, and business class in all our new flights between Mumbai and Hanoi."

In all, we will have 21 flights in a week, and we are utilising 100% of the bilateral agreement between India and Vietnam

In fact, this year the airline is expanding its capacity from India by more than 50 per cent year-on-year. "We are adding two more

destinations from India. This expansion will be in South India, in Bengaluru and Hyderabad. Again, we are launching those from May 2025, so Bengaluru will operate four times in a week to Hanoi and Hyderabad will operate three times a week to Hanoi. Initially, we will operate the A321 aircraft with economy and business class, but eventually looking at the demand, we will be able to increase our capacity and upgrade the aircraft," Goyal says.

From May 2025, the airline will have daily flights from Delhi, which operates with wide-body aircraft A350. "Then we will have four flights per week from Mumbai, which will be on



Pham Thi Nguyet
Director for Marketing & Sales
Vietnam Airlines

wide-body aircraft to Hanoi," he adds.

Pham Thi Nguyet, Director for Marketing & Sales, Vietnam Airlines, says, "According to our strategic plan, we want to increase capacity and frequency to and from India, and we

believe India will become one of our top five biggest international markets. From this May, we will

From May, we will have 21 flights per week between India & Vietnam. In the long term, we will increase capacity to Australia

have 21 flights per week between India and Vietnam. In the long term, we will continue to increase capacity to Australia."

Aviareps acknowledges trade

Aviareps India, on behalf of Visit Brussels and Brussels Airport, recently hosted a special evening in Mumbai to celebrate its incredible travel trade. This was a celebration of a journey—from 2018 to 2025—filled with milestones and collaborations that have helped position Brussels and Belgium in the Indian market effectively.



Goa launches spiritual circuits

With a focus on heritage and regenerative tourism, Goa has been busy doing a series of roadshows in newer international markets. Its aim is not just to promote hinterland tourism but also to facilitate more charter flights into Goa.

Hazel Jain

Goa Tourism is showcasing its commitment to sustainable and responsible travel by focusing on regenerative tourism. The state is working towards preserving its natural beauty while offering visitors enriching experiences that celebrate Goa's heritage. It is also focusing on regenerative tourism, blending environmental conservation with community engagement.

Regenerative tourism promotes responsible travel that benefits both local communities and the environment. With a commitment to eco-friendly initiatives, community-based tourism and cultural preservation, Goa is leading the



Rajesh Kale
Deputy Director, South, Department of Tourism, Government of Goa

way in offering authentic experiences that will help safeguard its future.

Rajesh Kale, Deputy Director, South, Department of Tourism, Government of Goa, says, "As of 2024, Goa received a total of 1.24 crore tourists that also includes international arrivals.

We have seen a slowdown in charters from Russia, which was our traditional market because of the war. However, of late, we have been receiving a lot of charter flights from Poland apart from Kazakhstan and the UK. To tap newer markets, we have been organising a series of roadshows in key international source markets of CIS and European countries like Kazakhstan, Georgia and Poland and trying our best to facilitate more charter flights from these markets."

Visit the hinterland

With its focus shifting from beach to the hinterland, Goa has also been promoting homestays and giving a lot of incentives to homestay owners. Kale adds, "We have recently launched

spiritual circuits and one of the key highlights of Goa is the new Ekadasha Teertha circuit—an array of 11 his-

To tap newer markets, we have been organising roadshows in key source markets of CIS and European countries

toric temples that provide spiritual and cultural experiences for travellers. There will be two circuits – one in North Goa and one in South Goa."



Checklist for travel agents

Jeep safaris offer thrilling wilderness exploration, and agents must ensure bookings follow safety standards. ATOAI provides essential guidelines for Jeep and 4x4 safaris. Here are the key points every B2B agent should know:

Vehicle safety: Ensure vehicles are road-worthy, have seat belts, a first aid kit and fire extinguishers.

Driver qualifications: Drivers must have valid licenses, off-road experience and basic first aid training.

Documentation: Clients must have valid licenses, and an indemnity form should be signed before the safari.

Emergency preparedness: Equip vehicles with rescue tools and ensure drivers know emergency procedures.

Environmental responsibility: Follow a 'leave no trace' policy and ensure all garbage is carried back.

Driver training: Conduct regular training on driving skills, safety and customer service.

Client briefing: Provide a pre-trip safety briefing covering health, safety and environmental guidelines.

Health and safety briefing: Provide a pre-trip briefing on health concerns, emergency procedures, and respect for the wilderness.

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

Royal offerings enthrall agents

Numen Hospitality, in collaboration with KK Holidays N Vacations, gave a taste of royal stay and experience to travel agents and wedding planners from Delhi-NCR through a fam-trip to Castle Mandawa in Rajasthan.



EVENT TALK		
MAY 2025		
Date	Event	Time
2-4	Travel Malaysia Fair 2025	9:00 am
4-6	The Great Indian Travel Bazaar 2025	9:00 am
5-8	ILTM Latin America 2025	9:00 am
6-8	Trenz Rotorua 2025	9:00 am
6-9	Global Meeting & Incentive Travel Exchange 2025	9:00 am
8-9	CAPA Airline Leader Summit-Athens	10:00 am
8-11	Travel and Leisure Expo 2025	9:00 am
10	IATO Elections: 2025-2027	10:00 am
14	Cruise Professionals Webinar	3:00 pm
20	Digital Aviation & Travel Annual Forum 2025	10:00 am
20-22	IMEX Frankfurt 2025	10:00 am
22-23	International Conference on Cultural and Tourism Innovation 2025	9:00 am
23-26	Taipei International Tourism Exposition 2025	10:00 am
27-28	GBTA APAC Conference 2025	9:00 am
28	Oman Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
30-31	Nepal International Tourism Expo 2025	9:00 am

Implementation key to sustainability

► Contd. from page 7

authentic and environmentally sound. In Siayan, for instance, we funded a nature-based tourism model led by the fishing community,” Batin shared.

From Nepal, **Deepak Raj Joshi**, CEO, Nepal Tourism Board, emphasised a dual approach, economic empowerment and ecological conservation. He cited the success of the Annapurna Conservation Area, “where community-managed tourism has helped increase endangered species like the snow leopard while delivering livelihoods to locals.” **Florian Sengstschmid**, CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board, stressed on behavioural change as the real frontier. “It’s not about strategy, it’s about will. We brought tourism into climate commitments at COP29, created bottom-up destination

plans and revived historic Silk Road villages. Real success lies in balancing preservation with people-powered tourism,” he emphasised.

As the session closed, panellists agreed that governments must lead by example, setting clear policies, funding local initiatives and encouraging innovation at every level. Durband’s closing note summed it up. “There are three layers for governments to lead; set policy, resource local management and incentivise the private sector. We can’t choose just one. We must pull all three,” he said.

For the travel trade, tour operators and industry professionals, the session was more than a policy update, it was a call to action to re-think, rebuild and reimagine tourism through the lens of sustainability. ↴

NEW OPENINGS

Flights

Airline: Air Astana
Route: Almaty and Mumbai (non-stop)
Frequency: Starts with 3 flights a week; to scale up 5 flights a week flights during summer; plan to make it daily within next 12 to 18 months

Airline: Vietnam Airlines
Route: Bengaluru and Hyderabad to Hanoi (direct)
Frequency: Starts in May; 4 flights a week from BLR & 3 flights a week from HYD to Hanoi

Airline: Air India Express
Route: Goa to Kuwait and Abu Dhabi (direct)
Frequency: To start on 3 & 5 May, respectively

Hotels

Brand: IHCL
Hotel: Gateway Coorg,
Rooms: 55-key resort

Brand: ECKO Hotels & Resorts
Hotel: ECKO Antarman Ganges, Haridwar; ECKO Rishikesh and ECKO Tapovan by the Ganges, Uttarakhand
Rooms: 100 keys

Brand: Cygnett Hotels & Resorts
Hotel: Cozzet Mahad
Rooms: 66-key

Brand: Minor Hotels
Hotel: Avani+ Sunray Beach Visakhapatnam Resort
Rooms: 117 rooms and 58 villas

‘Global norms give India green edge’

► Contd. from page 5

certification body focused on hotel-specific sustainability standards, QualStar partners with UCSL—an internationally accredited GSTC organisation—to offer globally recognised sustainability certifications to hotels across India and South Asia.

The GSTC criteria is comprehensive, aligning closely with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). “What makes the criteria unique is their holistic approach; they span the full scope of the SDGs, ensuring every aspect of sustainability is addressed,” Bhaskar said. GSTC functions as the accreditation body for sustainability certifications, having authorised 10 certification bodies worldwide, including UCSL. “This accreditation process elimi-

nates conflict of interest, meaning the hotels earning GSTC certifications are committed to meeting stringent sustainability standards,” she explained. This structure is essential to combat greenwashing and upholding the credibility of the certification process. “By keeping the standards current, GSTC helps hotels maintain their sustainability commitments throughout the entire certification period, which lasts three years, after which recertification is required,” Bhaskar said.

States need direction

While Indian states are ready to act on sustainable tourism, they need a clear roadmap. “States are smart enough to implement the tourism policy, but what they need is direction from the Centre,” Ramkumar said.



Subha Bhaskar
COO
QualStar

“Kerala has crafted its own sustainable path. Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have included provisions in their tourism policies offering 50 per cent subsidies on GSTC certification fees for tour operators and hotels,” he added. “Gujarat is the first state in India to offer a subsidy for hotels. But when I asked the Tourism Secretary if there were any budgetary allocations, the answer was negative. That

is the gap between policy on paper and real-world impact,” he further added.

State-level incentives are playing a crucial role in promoting sustainability. Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat are helping hotels become GSTC-certified by subsidising up to 50 per cent of application costs. Maharashtra offers perks for any globally recognised certification, thereby broadening the scope for adoption. “These incentives make the certification process financially viable for hotels. They give pace to the industry’s shift towards sustainable practices,” Bhaskar reasoned.

Common framework

A recurring theme in Ramkumar’s message is the need to adopt a common global standard. “The ministry talks about making

states competitive, but what everyone needs is a framework. When governments globally adopt GSTC standards, they align themselves for comparability,” he said.

Global action

Pointing to Turkey’s bold move, Ramkumar man-

dated that every tourism establishment be certified by a GSTC-accredited body within 10 years or risk losing their license. Singapore also has set a target that by 2030, 60 per cent of its hotel inventory must be certified sustainable under GSTC standards.

EMPOWERING HOTELS

Bhaskar said that GSTC certification helps hotels improve their environmental practices and comply with governmental sustainability reporting requirements, Bhaskar said. In India, Qualstar’s partnership with UCSL allows auditors based locally to perform the certifications, thereby making the process affordable for hotels. “This local approach reduces the cost for hotels, and with the GSTC certification, they are also eligible for state government incentives,” she said.



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EVOKE
RAMBAGH
AYODHYA

MOVEMENTS

MINOR HOTELS

India

Minor Hotels has appointed **SHOBHIT KHATTRI** as the Associate Vice President of Development for India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Based in New Delhi, Khattri reports to Omar Romero, Chief Development & Luxury Officer for Minor Hotels, and works closely with the Asia Business Development team. In his new role, he is responsible for identifying new development opportunities in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, managing the entire process from site identification to hotel openings.



GRAND MERCURE BANGALORE

Bangalore

Grand Mercure Bangalore appoints **PARAG SHAH** as the General Manager. Shah brings with him over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, including over 10 years with Accor, where he has successfully contributed to iconic brands, such as Raffles, Fairmont, Sofitel, Novotel and Mercure. Prior to this, he served as General Manager at Mercure Hyderabad KCP, where he played a pivotal role in driving operational excellence and elevating guest satisfaction.



PULLMAN AND NOVOTEL

NEW DELHI AEROCITY

New Delhi

Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity has appointed **MOHIT KHANNA** as the Director of Finance. With over 15 years of dynamic experience spanning hospitality, retail and oil sectors, Khanna brings a wealth of financial expertise for operational efficiencies to the dual-branded flagship property. A qualified CA, Khanna began his professional journey as an Audit Manager at PKF Sridhar and Santhanam (a consultancy firm).



JIM CORBETT MARRIOTT RESORT & SPA

Ramnagar (Uttarakhand)

Jim Corbett Marriott Resort & Spa has appointed **PAWAN CHAHAR** as the General Manager of the newly launched property. Chahar will be responsible for spearheading the resort's launch, managing operations, guest engagement and relationships. Chahar brings an extensive background in luxury hotels and residences. An alumnus of the Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development (OCLD), he has demonstrated a consistent ability to lead teams and elevate guest experiences.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MUMBAI

Mumbai

Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai has promoted **JYOTIKA SAHANI** to the position of Director of Business Development. The strategic promotion reinforces the hotel's commitment to excellence, innovation and personalised guest experiences. With nearly two decades of experience in luxury hospitality, Sahani brings a wealth of expertise to her new role. In her new role, she will lead the hotel's business development initiatives, driving revenue growth and forging brand partnerships.



FOUR SEASONS HOTEL BENGALURU

Bengaluru

Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru has appointed **BAKUL PEDNEKAR** as the Director of People & Culture. Pednekar brings over 17 years of cross-continental experience. His Four Seasons journey began in 2007 in stewarding operations at the Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai. He blossomed into a remarkable leader through his innate guidance, emotional intelligence and people-first approach. He has since held key Human Resource roles across some of the brand's most iconic properties.



THE WESTIN HYDERABAD MINDSPACE

Hyderabad

The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace appoints **SUDIPTO MUKHERJEE** as the Director of Sales. With a career spanning over two decades in the hospitality industry, Mukherjee brings a wealth of expertise, strategic insights and a proven track record of success to his new role. Prior to this, Mukherjee held the position of Account Director – National Sales at Marriott Hotels India. He was responsible for developing and executing comprehensive sales strategies and managing key corporate accounts.



SHERATON GRAND BANGALORE HOTEL

AT BRIGADE GATEWAY

Bengaluru

Sheraton Grand Bangalore Hotel at Brigade Gateway appoints **GAURAB DEY** as the Director of Operations. With over 14-year experience in the luxury hospitality industry, Dey brings a proven track record in operational excellence, pre-opening expertise and delivering exceptional guest experiences. In his new role, he will oversee the hotel's daily operations.



CROWNE PLAZA TODAY NEW DELHI OKHLA

New Delhi

Crowne Plaza Today New Delhi Okhla appoints **KESHARI RANJAN TIWARI** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. A visionary commercial leader with over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Tiwari brings a wealth of knowledge in business development, market expansion, brand building and hotel operations. With a dynamic career spanning across leading hotel brands, Tiwari has demonstrated excellence in sales strategy, revenue optimisation and client relationship management.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT

MAHABALESHWAR

Mahabaleshwar

Courtyard by Marriott Mahabaleshwar appoints **SIDDHARTH CHITNIS** as the Operations Manager. With a career spanning 13 years with Marriott International, Chitnis brings a wealth of operational expertise, leadership acumen and a deep understanding of guest service excellence. In his new role, he will be responsible for overseeing the day-to-day operations, ensuring seamless guest experiences and enhancing operational efficiencies.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT ARAVALI RESORT

Faridabad

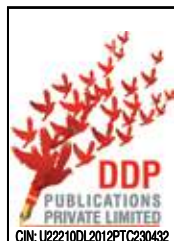
Courtyard by Marriott Aravali Resort appoints **ABHINITI BHARADWAJ** as the Marketing and Communication Manager. Bharadwaj brings valuable expertise to elevate marketing initiatives and enhance the brand's presence in the luxury hospitality sector. She joins Courtyard Aravali Resort from Fujifilm. In her new role, she will lead brand positioning, digital engagement and strategic campaigns, aiming to elevate guest experiences.



THE WESTIN HYDERABAD MINDSPACE

Hyderabad

The Westin Hyderabad Mindspace appoints **JAYEESHA MERCHANT** as the Associate Director of Marketing Communications. With over a decade of experience in luxury hospitality marketing, Merchant brings a wealth of expertise in brand positioning, media relations, digital marketing and strategic communications. Prior to this, she has held many leadership roles, including at ITC Kohenuur and Marriott Hyderabad Hotel & Convention Centre.



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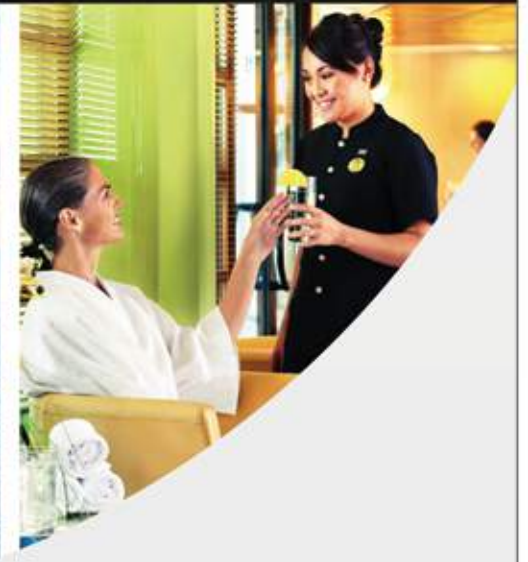
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'More Indians choosing sustainable travel'

Deep Kalra, Founder & Chairman, MakeMyTrip & Chairman, World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTICII), outlines a clear vision for how India and the world can steer the tourism sector towards a more responsible model.



Janice Alyosius

Deep Kalra, Founder & Chairman, MakeMyTrip and Chairman, World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative (WTTICII), speaking at the India Travel & Tourism Sustainability Conclave 2025, laid out a visionary roadmap for India to lead the sustainable tourism charge globally. Kalra emphasised that sustainable tourism lies at the intersection of environment, culture and economy—and true sustainability is about maintaining a delicate balance among all three.

Sustainable tourism: \$3 trillion opportunity

Kalra underscored a powerful shift in the travel industry saying that sustainable travel is no longer a niche but a major economic force. Citing global figures in his keynote, he shared that the sustainable tourism market has surged from \$2.73 trillion in 2022 to \$3.12 trillion in 2023, and it is expected to reach \$11.39 trillion in the next decade (2034), accounting for 10 per cent of total travel. "While these numbers are impressive globally, India still has

a long way to go—both in absolute terms and in its share of sustainable travel," he noted.

MMT's research

New research from MakeMyTrip shows a clear trend among Indian travellers toward sustainability:

- ❖ 87 per cent of Indian travellers are willing to adopt eco-conscious habits, such as using reusable water bottles or supporting local artisans.

Sustainable tourism market has surged from \$2.73 tn in 2022 to \$3.12 tn in 2023, and it is expected to reach \$11.39 tn by 2034

- ❖ 80 per cent of respondents would pay ₹250–₹500 more per night for a stay at a hotel actively promoting sustainability and eco-friendly practices.

- ❖ 69 per cent of Indian travellers expressed their willingness to choose destinations that actively promote responsible travel, with an emphasis on local sustainability initiatives.

Kalra pointed out that these statistics are a powerful signal that consumers are ready for change. "The market is ready, and travellers are increasingly aligning their travel decisions with their values," he said. The challenge now is for the industry to provide the products and services that meet this demand.

Global best practices in sustainable tourism

Kalra also referenced several successful global initiatives that India could learn from:

- ❖ **Copenhagen:** The Danish capital rewards tourists who choose eco-friendly modes of transport—such as cycling and walking—by offering them free access to local experiences like museum visits and guided tours.

- ❖ **Satoyama in Japan:** This rural region has embraced a form of community-based tourism, offering visitors authentic stays with local families and access to nature preserves.

- ❖ **Bhutan:** The Himalayan kingdom charges a daily sustainability fee for tourists, which funds conservation efforts and supports the community.

Kalra suggested that India could adapt similar models for national parks, heritage sites and environmentally sensitive areas. A significant part of his message was focused on city-led initiatives. "Sustainability must begin at the grassroots level, in cities and towns. It's not just about national policy; it's about getting local communities involved, driving eco-conscious initiatives and creating awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism," Kalra said.



RHG plans 14 new Indian locations in 3 years

Radisson Hotel Group is ramping up its India presence with a renewed B2B push. The group is targeting tertiary markets, weddings, MICE and domestic tourism while focusing on sustainability, talent development and innovative brand tie-ups.



Surbhi Sharma

Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) is making strategic moves in the Indian hospitality landscape with a renewed focus on B2B outreach. It recently organised a roadshow in Delhi and Mumbai after a gap of five years. Over 30 unique Radisson properties participated in each city.

The Delhi leg of the roadshow, which took place at Radisson Blu Plaza Hotel Delhi Airport, attracted more than 160 buyers. The Mumbai edition, hosted at Radisson Blu Mumbai International Airport, consolidated RHG's aggressive push to connect with the travel trade ecosystem. The events served as critical platforms to showcase the group's growing portfolio, engage with travel partners, and solidify its standing in India's competitive hospitality market.

Expansion plans

With a legacy spanning over 26 years in India, RHG now operates 130 hotels across 75 cities and is poised to expand into 14 more locations over the next

36 to 48 months. This robust expansion covers metros, tier I, II, III and IV cities—demonstrating the group's commitment to destination development across the country.

A hallmark of Radisson's strategy has been its early mover advantage in less-travelled and spiritual destinations, such as

We were the first branded hotel to open in Ayodhya, and that is a testament to our long-term view on market development

Katra, Varanasi, Ayodhya and Saputara. Elaborating on the strategy, **Nikhil Sharma**, Managing Director and COO, South Asia – Radisson Hotel Group, said, "We have always believed in taking hospitality where it is most needed. We were the first branded hotel to open in Ayodhya, and that is a testament to our long-term view on market development."

In terms of brand architecture, RHG has crafted a diversified offering catering to India's varied traveller profiles. The mid-scale, India-specific Park Inn & Suites targets tier III and IV markets, uniquely integrating strong food and beverage elements, recognising India's dining-driven culture. The core Radisson brand and Park Plaza dominate the upscale segment, while Radisson Blu and the recently launched Radisson Collection cater

to the growing demand for luxury. The luxury segment is gaining remarkable traction, with flagship properties in Srinagar and upcoming launches in Jaipur and Udaipur.

Focus areas

A unique focus area for the group is wedding and MICE segment. Its 'Art of Weddings' programme is designed to offer timeless and culturally rich experiences for Indian couples—42 per cent of whom, according to internal research, now self-fund their weddings. Radisson properties are increasingly being designed to host "Instagram-worthy" moments that blend tradition with millennial aesthetics.

Recent tie-ups

The group is also exploring collaborations to enhance customer experience. One such initiative is Literary Escapes, a partnership with global publishing house Simon & Schuster. These retreats offer book lovers a serene getaway focused on reading and reflection—an innovative approach to experiential travel that merges leisure with cultural enrichment.

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Deep Kalra
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