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GRNconnect's bold tech leap

GRNconnect showcases its renewed digital vision and strategic direction at Arabian Travel Market 2025, drawing attention with the relaunch of its businesses-to-business portal and a strong focus on innovation. With deeper global collaborations and plans to integrate Artificial Intelligence, the company signals its readiness to lead the next wave of travel tech transformation.

Janice Alyosius

GRNconnect made a strong impression at Arabian Travel Market 2025 (ATM 2025) using the international platform to unveil its latest digital enhancements and strengthen global partnerships. Reflecting on the company's participation, **Deepak Narula**, Managing Director, GRNconnect, said, "Each year ATM is

growing, and this year was no exception. There were more buyers and more suppliers to do business with. There is no match to meeting your partners from across the globe, and ATM is a perfect platform for the same."

A major highlight for GRNconnect at the event was the relaunch of its B2B booking portal. "We relaunched our portal



Deepak Narula
Managing Director, GRNconnect

with a new look and feel and with smoother, seam-

less technology—it was very well received by the audience," Narula shared. The revamped portal is designed to offer a more intuitive user experience and greater operational efficiency.

Narula also highlighted valuable market insights gained from meetings at the show. "There is a demand for more products," he observed.

Use of Artificial Intelligence is becoming visible in the industry, and it's time to incorporate the same into our system

On the technology front, GRNconnect is aligning with emerging industry trends. "AI is becoming visible, and it's time to incorporate the same into our system," Narula said. The company plans to harness AI to enhance automation, personalisation and backend operations. Backed by its success at ATM 2025, GRNconnect is poised to enter its next phase of growth.

Dilemma on dynamic pricing

A survey conducted by **TRAVTALK** on dynamic pricing reveal a split opinion, with 38.5% respondents favouring it, while an equal percentage of respondents voting against it. About 23.1% respondents were undecided on the topic. The respondents were offered to choose from following three options:

A: We need it - static pricing models are no longer enough
B: Veto – it should be a buyer's market
C: Undecided – it's a double-edged sword

The survey shows that the businesses are split between innovation advocates and consumer-rights proponents. The undecided minority reflects awareness of dynamic pricing's dual nature, for example, balancing efficiency with fairness concerns.

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Ravi Gosain takes the reins at IATO

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) has elected a new leadership team for 2025–2027, headed by **Ravi Gosain** as its new President. Bringing a fresh mandate focused on digital innovation, stronger government advocacy and global outreach, the team pledges inclusive growth and capacity building for members across all regions.

 Janice Alysius

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) has elected a new team of office-bearers for 2025–2027. The team, led by the new President, **Ravi Gosain**, has committed to collaborative leadership, continuity and advocacy to safeguard the interests of members. The association’s vision is rooted in teamwork, transparency, digital transformation and a strong push to take IATO to greater heights, both within India and on the global stage.

Gosain expressed heartfelt gratitude to the members for their trust and



Newly elected IATO President Ravi Gosain with the team and Immediate Past President Rajiv Mehra

support, acknowledging that the victory was not just his, but that of every member. He emphasised the importance of digital transformation and technological empowerment for the members. “We aim to be more inclusive and seek your continued support in the coming months,” he said.

One of the top priorities for the new team is to strengthen advocacy with the government. Gosain noted the necessity of engaging with various government departments, such as the Ministry of Home Affairs, Civil Aviation and those involved in visa facilitation. He stressed that IATO would pursue key is-

ssues like border facilitation to improve ease of travel for tourists. He also spoke about the lack of digital promotion by the Ministry of Tourism—an area that IATO is determined to address. “We have a plan for digital promotion of the IATO portal. It is now ready and will be rolled out within a month,” he said.

NEW IATO OFFICE-BEARERS

New leadership team


- ❖ Ravi Gosain – President
- ❖ Rajnish Kaistha – Senior Vice President
- ❖ Sanjay Razdan – Vice President
- ❖ Sunil Mishra – Honorary Secretary
- ❖ Deepak Kumarr Bhatnagar – Honorary Treasurer
- ❖ Viney Tyagi – Honorary Joint Secretary

Executive Committee Members


Active Members	Allied Members
❖ Manoj Kumar Matta	❖ P Vijayasarithy
❖ Harish Mathur	❖ Ashok Dhoot
❖ Tony Marwah	❖ Wasim Shaikh
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MAY 2nd FORTNIGHT ISSUE 2025

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Pause, Pivot, Proceed

Just as flight routes fluctuate amid the recent Indo-Pak tension, the Indian travel trade is once again caught in a storm—this time, fuelled by sentiment. In the latest wave of tourism's 'cancel culture', Turkey and Azerbaijan are being taken off shelves by sections of the industry. No official bans and declarations—just a collective shift in bookings and strategy, following their recent political stance. These are not fringe destinations either.

Turkey welcomed over 3.3 lakh Indian travellers in 2024 and Azerbaijan saw numbers jump from under 5,000 in 2014 to nearly 2.5 lakh in just 10 years. Both were powering ahead in the Indian market, driven by weddings, MICE and leisure. And now? A forced break.

Closer home, Kashmir is in recovery mode—not just from conflict, but from perception. To win back travellers, it will need more than just scenic ads. Safety assurances, dependable service and on-ground support will be the game changer. The real question for the trade now is—how would they navigate this changing map?

Travel agents are more than sellers today—they are problem-solvers, therapists and even last-minute miracle workers. Clients are confused if they should cancel, postpone or reroute? What is safe, what is available and what is smart? The best response is agility. Be informed. Be honest. Offer alternatives like Eastern Europe or the lesser-known gems in India. But above all, be proactive.

Destinations will come back—it's only a matter of time. But in this business, what sticks with clients is not just where you sent them—it's how you handled the turbulence along the way. Right now, the strongest value an agent can bring is not just a perfect itinerary. It's confidence, clarity and the ability to pivot fast. Because while destinations may take a break, good service can not afford to.

AI, data & tech aid airlines to customise offerings

Airlines were all about costs a few years ago, but today it is all about personalisation, says **Gavin Eccles**, Managing Partner, GE Consulting & Advisory. He explains how customer expectations have breached the realm of retailing in aviation.



TT Bureau

The intersection of technology and consumer demands has given rise to an era where one-size-fits-all solutions are no longer the gold standard. The purpose of this commentary is to explore how airlines can leverage technologies, data and a commitment to personalisation to redefine customer interactions, drive engagement and satisfaction, and create a transformative user experience.

Great experiences are not just about digitalisation, but personalisation. Therefore, a successful business strategy should not solely hinge on digital transformation. Instead, it should centre around transforming the customer experience. That is not a bad thing for airlines to be doing today,



patterns, preferences and pain points.

The availability of data provides airlines with valuable insights to fuel personalisation efforts. By leveraging data analytics and AI, carriers can uncover patterns, preferences, and trends that help them anticipate customer needs and deliv-

The rise of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) technologies has brought about exciting advancements in improving customer interactions.

Customer imp

Finally, it is imperative for airlines to foster a company culture that prioritises customer satisfaction and

understanding of their travel needs. This understanding empowers us to forge meaningful connections with them, even with



For airlines, creating compelling customer experiences hinges on an understanding of their travel needs



rather than just focusing on reducing costs, making them the same as all other airline companies.

Revolutionising customer experience

So, what can airlines do, or in some cases, re-do to revolutionise their customer experience offerings? Understand the customer journey. Personalisation begins by truly grasping the customer journey. By collecting and analysing data at various touchpoints, carriers can identify

er personalised experiences proactively. This data-driven approach enhances customer satisfaction on-board and at airports.

In today's digitally driven era, passengers often share their thoughts and experiences on social media platforms. These comments, reviews and posts have a big influence on how a brand is perceived. With technology, airlines can keep an eye on these conversations and interact with customers in real time.

empowers employees to go above and beyond to meet customer needs. This requires businesses to prioritise customer needs and empower employees to make decisions that benefit the traveller. But, as we have focused so much on cost-cutting, who was empowered to spend anything?

For airlines, creating compelling customer experiences, whether physical, digital, or a combination of both, hinges on a deep

seemingly minor interactions. We must be willing to question our assumptions about what customers truly desire in an experience.



Gavin Eccles
Managing Partner
GE Consulting & Advisory

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

Big scope in branded economy segment: HVS ANAROCK

A commercial boom is fuelling a rise in business & MICE travel, spurring demand for hospitality infrastructure. Indian hospitality is not just growing, it's gearing up to lead the world, says India Hospitality Industry Overview report by HVS ANAROCK.

TT Bureau

The outlook for India's hospitality sector in 2025 is not just optimistic; it's electric. This momentum is expected to continue driven by vibrant events calendar, and the continued influx of travellers to spiritual destinations, such as Ayodhya, Kedarnath and Varanasi, and the growing appeal of medical tourism.

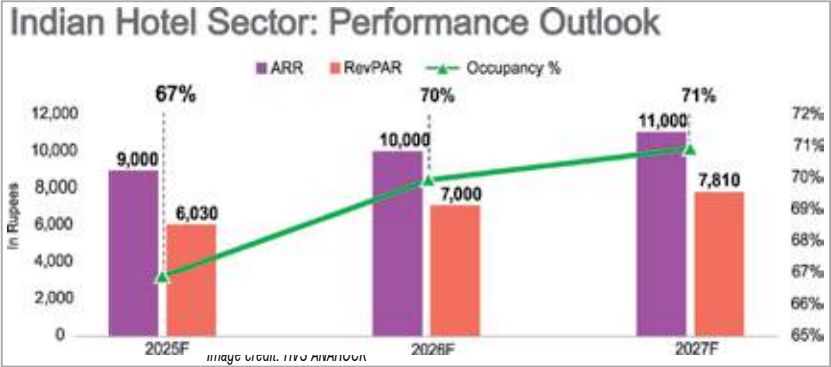
At the same time, the branded economy hotel segment, which accounts for just 5–7 per cent of total supply, is emerging as a high-potential growth frontier, particularly in Tier II, III and IV cities, where value-driven travel is on the rise.



ise on this growth, long-awaited policy reforms must be prioritised. Granting industry and infrastructure lending status to hospitality projects, irrespective of investment size, is crucial to unlocking new development in underserved and emerg-

As investor confidence remains high, a commercial boom is fuelling a rise in business and MICE travel, spurring demand for quality hospitality infrastructure. Mixed-use developments—integrating Grade-A office spaces with hotels, retail and lifestyle

India is witnessing a rising domestic demand, increasing global visibility and a new era of experiential travel



Encouraged by the current momentum, we expect nationwide occupancy to reach 70 per cent and Average Room Rates (ARRs) to cross the 10,000 mark in 2026. However, to fully capital-

ing markets. With rising domestic demand, increasing global visibility and a new era of experiential travel, India's hospitality sector is no longer just growing, it's gearing up to lead the world.

amenities—are reshaping urban business hubs into vibrant, multi-functional ecosystems.

General Managers Sentiment Survey
With India's hospitality

sector experiencing strong momentum, the HVS ANAROCK Hotel General Managers survey states that in 2025, ADR remains the top priority, especially for business hotels where 70 per cent plan to focus on ADR growth. In contrast, leisure hotels show a balanced approach, with 58 per cent prioritising occupancy. Retaining and hiring fresh talent is the biggest challenge, with 28 per cent of the respondents ranking it as the top concern.



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TRAVEL NEWS

Kerala Tourism to finish **100 projects this year**; complete current ones in timely manner: Riyas

Cruise industry sees 25% growth from 2019-2024, expands further by 5% in 2025: Tourism Economics

Unified national strategy and state promotion can place **India among top 5 MICE markets by 2025**: Suman Billa

International passenger demand up 4.9% vis-a-vis March 2024: IATA

Rajasthan showcases its tourism potential at **'Colors of the World Fair'** in Istanbul

'Original bookings for Kashmir still stand uncanceled, clients keen to visit the valley': ADTOI

Spiritual, green & inclusive Goa

Once synonymous with beaches and parties, Goa is steadily evolving into a multi-dimensional tourism destination. Speaking to **TRAVTALK**, **Rohan A Khaunte**, Minister for Tourism, Government of Goa, outlines a roadmap that goes beyond conventional tourism and responds to global trends and traveller expectations.

TT Bureau

Goa's Tourism Minister shared a bold new vision for the state's future, a vision that looks far beyond beaches and nightlife. With foreign arrivals shifting, domestic tourism booming, and the global traveller evolving, Goa is reinventing itself as a diverse, inclusive, and sustainable destination. **Rohan A Khaunte**, Minister for Tourism, Government of Goa, said, "Goa must shed its narrow image. Yes, our beaches are world-class, but our history, culture, and ecology are equally compelling."

Beyond the beach

Post-COVID, the state government has been promoting hinterlands, monsoon



Rohan A. Khaunte
Minister for Tourism
Government of Goa

tourism, spiritual circuits, and cultural festivals. "We launched the 11-temple circuit to narrate Goa's untold spiritual heritage," Khaunte notes. Waterfalls like Dudhsagar and scenic forest trails are now featured alongside sun-and-sand itineraries, encouraging visitors to explore rural life and local traditions.

State targeting quality markets

As traditional markets like Russia saw downturns, Goa pivoted to high-spending travellers from Germany, Poland and the UAE. "We are no longer just a party capital," says Khaunte. "Our aim is to attract conscious travellers who value culture, environment, and community," he adds. Underpinning this shift are four pillars, culture, economy, environment, and society, which guide all new initiatives.

Digital nomads and workations

Recognising the rise of remote work, Goa is developing co-working spaces and long-stay facilities. "Digital nomads are a growth segment," Khaunte

observes. "We want them to see Goa as their office by the sea." Additionally, monsoon months are being positioned as a

Goa must shed its narrow image. Yes, our beaches are world-class, but history, culture, and ecology are equally compelling

unique selling point. "This is Goa's best kept secret, lush greenery, culinary festivals, and cascading waterfalls," he tells.

Sustainable tourism

Goa is embracing regenerative tourism and actively enriching communities and ecosystems. "It's not enough to do no harm. We want tourism to give back. From banning single-use plastics to promoting eco-friendly stays, sustainability is our north star," he says.

MICE, weddings, & new infrastructure

With a new international airport expansion and a state-of-the-art convention centre underway, Goa is gearing up for MICE and destination weddings. "Our convention centre will put Goa on the global MICE map," Khaunte asserts. Dedicated beach-wedding zones and increased room inventory are also in the pipeline.

New from Asego: TrackMate

TrackMate, Asego's latest product, offers real-time baggage tracking and a compensation of ₹66,000 per bag for up to two bags on overseas trips if not found within 96 hours post-arrival.

TT Bureau

Over the years, Asego has safeguarded millions of journeys, setting new benchmarks in the travel protection sector. Now, Asego has launched all-new Mate Series Products – a suite of innovative products designed to provide seamless support to travellers. Whether it's ensuring a comfortable experience during unexpected flight delays, offering a hassle-free way to stay connected with loved ones, or ensuring that their luggage doesn't go astray while travelling, Asego has remained steadfast in addressing the evolving needs of modern travellers.

Baggage loss reality

Every year, nearly 26 million bags are mishandled



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego

globally, with approximately 5 per cent of all checked baggage experiencing delays, damage, or loss.

Two decades ago, Asego pioneered the concept of physical baggage tags, setting new standards in baggage protection and offering travellers peace of mind. To-

day, Asego is proud to reintroduce this game-changing innovation in a digital form with TrackMate. Over and above the basic baggage loss cover, TrackMate offers real-time baggage tracking and compensation of ₹66,000 per bag for up to two bags on overseas trips if not found within 96 hours post-arrival.

Game changer for travel partners

Since its launch, TrackMate has been a runaway success. Today, nearly 70 per cent of travel protection plans provided by Asego include TrackMate, proving its necessity in the modern travel landscape.

Note: Assistance services are provided by Asego Global Assistance Private Limited. Please note that insurance is underwritten by an IPDAI authorised underwriter. TrackMate is powered by a third-party provider.

Expedia launches 'May Sale'

Expedia TAAP works with over 160,000 travel advisors globally, offering a wide-ranging inventory. It launches its May Sale for travel agent partners to take advantage of its exclusive offerings.

TT Bureau

What: Expedia Travel Agent Affiliate Program (TAAP) launches its May Sale for travel agent partners to take advantage of exclusive offerings of at least 25 per cent off thousands of hotels in top global destinations.

This sale offers agents an opportunity to increase bookings, maximise sales and enhance client satisfaction



When: Travel agents can book until 26 May 2025, for travel through 30 September 2025.

Why: This sale offers travel agents a valuable opportunity to increase bookings, maximise sales and enhance client satisfaction by providing unbeatable savings on hotel stays worldwide.

Expedia TAAP works with over 160,000 travel advi-

sors globally, offering a wide-ranging inventory that includes more than three million properties, 170,000 tours, activities, attractions and adventures, 110 car rentals and 500 airlines. Travel agents benefit from a suite of Expedia Group technology and tools, such as a Virtual Agent for self-service, quick information retrieval and booking modifications, as well as Live Agent Chat.

‘Hotels & planners must be in sync’

As India’s big fat wedding industry evolves, so do the rules of engagement between hotels, planners and agents. The Travel Wedding Show in Jaipur spotlighted the need for stronger collaboration between hotels and wedding planners. Key discussions focused on travel agent commissions, revenue-sharing models, licensing complexities and external catering policies.

 Janice Alysius

With the wedding industry becoming more competitive in India, the relationship between hotels, wedding planners and event managers is evolving. At the Travel Wedding Show at Anantara Jewel

Travel WEDDING SHOW

Bagh Jaipur, industry experts debated the changing dynamics and shed light on the challenges and opportunities that will shape the future of wedding partnerships. They



Rajeev Jain, Pritesh Sharma, Amanveer Singh, Harkaran Singh and Rohit Chopra at the Travel Wedding Show in Jaipur

underscored the need for a stronger collaboration among the stakeholders.

Significance of TAC
Pritesh Sharma, Director, Mapsor Experiential Weddings, emphasised the centrality of Travel Agent

Commission (TAC) in their operations. “TAC is a crucial part of our business, especially at Mapsor, where we operate two divisions—hotel deals and wedding planning. For our hotel division, TAC is the foundation of our

business,” Sharma said. “If hotels don’t offer TAC, we don’t do business with them. This is a critical aspect for any businessman, event manager or wedding planner. We must treat each other as partners,” he added.

Rajeev Jain, Founder & Director, Rashi Entertainment, pointed out an emerging issue in the industry. “Hotels have become greedy. Earlier, they offered 10 per cent on room bookings. Then ITC introduced 10 per cent

commission on food. Later, Leela reduced it to 5 per cent on rooms. There is a lot of money-driven competition among hotels,” Jain said.

Fair commission practices
A significant concern discussed was the fairness of commission structures. **Amanveer Singh**, Managing Director, TEN Events & Entertainment, highlighted discrepancies in commission calculations. “If a room is sold for ₹140,000, it may be listed at ₹40,000, with 10 per cent commission on that amount. Breakfast charges might be deducted and 60-80 per

Contd. on page 16 ▶

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'Customise loyalty programmes'

Loyalty programmes are not what they used to be. The cookie-cutter format is fast replacing a more personalised and tailor-made rewards programme – both for travellers as well as agents. Done right, these programmes can not only bring in more business but can actually retain customers – something that they were created to do in the first place.



TT Bureau

Indians are always looking to maximising value while travelling. The American Express 2025 Global Travel Trends Report reveals that 79 per cent of Indians are planning to use rewards points for leisure travel (such as for flights, hotels and car rentals) in 2025. It adds that 84 per cent of Indians surveyed believe combining credit card rewards with other loyalty programmes provides the best value for international trips, and 50 per cent are linking their credit cards to dining partners in addition to everyday expenses.

Loyalty programmes have become a key part of how



Pratik Shah
Founder, APS Destinations, and India Travel Awards 2024 winner

Pratik Shah, Founder, APS Destinations, and India Travel Awards 2024 winner, plans both his own travel as well his clients'. "Over time, I have learned that points are not just for free flights or hotel stays—they can unlock real value when used smartly. I often



Manish Kriplani
Managing Director, BayWatch Stayzz, and India Travel Awards 2024 winner

use points for upgrades to business class, unique hotel experiences, or even luxury train journeys and private transfers. Sometimes, saving points for fewer—but more meaningful—redemptions bring the best rewards." He encourages clients to



Amitava Saha
General Manager
Anjushree Hotel

focus on one airline alliance and one hotel group, and to use co-branded credit cards that help them earn faster.

Timing matters too, Shah says, and booking during promotions or when availability is high can



Hari Ganapathy
Co-Founder
Pickyourtrail

make points go further. "I also help clients stack benefits, combining points with elite perks or special offers. Personally, I have used points to fly business class on long-haul routes, access premium airport lounges, and enjoy room upgrades. It's not just

about saving money—it's about enhancing the journey," he adds.

Speaking about reward programmes that many hotel chains offer for travel agents, Shah explains that Marriott's 'Hotel Excellence!' gives agents discounted rates after certification. Hilton and IHG also offer special agent rates and commissionable bookings. "Luxury programmes like Hyatt Privé, Four Seasons Preferred Partner and Accor's STEP don't offer points but provide VIP client benefits like upgrades and credits, helping agents build repeat business. Small Luxury Hotels (SLH) and Preferred Hotels have portals with agent incen-

Contd. on page 17 ▶

HNIs steering bespoke cruises

India's outbound travel market is rapidly growing, offering more choices for travellers to evaluate and select experiences that suit their preferences. While cruising has evolved from an aspirational to a must-do activity for many, luxury and experiential cruises remain exclusive to the elite. Post-pandemic, HNIs are seeking unique and bespoke experiences.



Janice Alyosius

With outbound travel from India gaining momentum, demand for luxury and experiential cruising is evolving swiftly. According to **Nishith Saxena**, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals, the trend reflects a deeper shift in traveller preferences, especially among HNIs seeking curated, exclusive experiences. "India outbound is growing and evolving rapidly in a landscape that allows travellers to choose, evaluate and decide based on individual preferences," Saxena said. "Cruising, once aspirational, has become a 'must-do' for

international travellers. But luxury and experiential cruises still remain exclusive, tailored for elite Indian travellers who now actively seek out personalised, extraordinary experiences," he added.

Saxena said that today's High-Net-worth Individuals (HNIs) are increasingly interested in once-in-a-lifetime experiences—from submarine dives and chef-curated dinners to camping under the Antarctic sky. "Whatever is imaginable on a cruise is now doable on a cruise," he noted.

Catering to clientele Cruise Professionals has focused exclusively on



Nishith Saxena
Founder & Director
Cruise Professionals

premium and luxury cruise brands since its inception. "We have never chased volume. Our business philosophy is centred around delivering meaningful experiences and personalised service," Saxena shared. He emphasised

that the company remains committed to working with top-tier cruise lines that of-

Cruising has become a 'must-do' for international travellers. But luxury cruises remain exclusive tailored for elite Indian travellers

for immersive journeys and exceptional guest service. "Even after 15 years and thousands of guests, we

continue to prioritise what is best for the client over sales targets," he said.

Experiential versus luxurious travel

Experiential travel is a growing trend, especially within the luxury cruising space. Saxena explained, "To truly understand the appeal, we must differentiate between 'experiential travel' and 'luxurious experiential travel'.

Opportunities in tier I and II markets

Saxena said that luxury cruising is not just limited to metro cities. "Old business families in tier I and II cities are well-travelled and financially sound. They

make family vacation decisions collectively, keeping multiple generations in mind," he said. Rather than chasing numbers, Cruise Professionals continues to rely on client relationships and long-standing travel partners across India.

POPULAR DESTINATIONS

- ❖ Antarctica
- ❖ Svalbard
- ❖ Iceland
- ❖ Japan
- ❖ Alaska
- ❖ Mediterranean

Personalisation & tie-ups key for GHA

India is a thriving market for luxury hospitality. Global Hotel Alliance (GHA) and two of its hotel brands – The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts and Minor Hotels, recently shared how in the world of luxury hospitality, it is important to maintain strong relationship with customers while balancing both direct and third-party bookings.



Nisha Verma

Sharing insights into the future of luxury hospitality, **Chris Hartley**, CEO, Global Hotel Alliance (GHA); **Anurag Bhatnagar**, CEO, The Leela Palaces Hotels and Resorts and **Dilip Rajakarier**, CEO, Minor Hotels, revealed how customer relationships are evolving and the role that partnerships and booking channels play in shaping the market's future.

India market

The luxury tourism market in India has grown rapidly. Bhatnagar said, Outbound Indian travellers (3x inbound) now expect refined products and services, influenced by international exposure. They are discern-



Chris Hartley
CEO
Global Hotel Alliance (GHA)



Anurag Bhatnagar
CEO
The Leela Palaces Hotels and Resorts



Dilip Rajakarier
CEO
Minor Hotels

ing, value-driven and demand excellence, shaped by global benchmarks, education and tech access."

Unique programme

Hartley said that they focus exclusively on upscale and luxury hotel brands. GHA recently conducted

an annual customer research study, which included 15 countries, with India being a key focus. "One of the standout findings is that 90 per cent of ultra-high-net-worth Indian travellers plan to spend more on luxury travel in the next 12 months.

Emphasising on direct bookings, Hartley said, "When customers go through third-party platforms, it costs us up to five times more than when we engage directly with loyal customers. Last year, we saw a 40 per cent increase in direct bookings."

Offline agents' value

However, he shared that the sector increasingly reliant on third-party booking channels. "Traditional agents have strong relationships with their customers, helping to create tailored itineraries and personalised experiences. That's something OTAs simply can't replicate," he added.

Road ahead

Leela Palaces Hotels and Resorts is expanding rapidly with plans to open 20 new hotels at key locations like Agra, Srinagar, Ayodhya and Ranthambore, in the next 4-5 years. Rajakarier shared that the launch of a master brand strategy will unify all of Minor's hotel brands under a single identity. "In the past, we worked

in silos. But now we have gone global," he said.

Minor Hotels is also entering new markets, including Japan, China, Singapore and Saudi Arabia. Two new hotel brands are also in pipeline for India, which includes an Avani Resort in Visakhapatnam.

BOOKING SHIFT

40%
increase in direct bookings via GHA
10x
chance that loyalty members book directly

ITQ empowering agents using NDC

From expanding NDC integrations to introducing AI-powered automation tools, ITQ and Travelport are empowering 6,500+ travel agents across India with smarter, faster and more connected solutions—bridging the gap between traditional systems and the future of global travel. ITQ's leadership remains committed to blending innovation with reliability.



Surbhi Sharma

In the dynamic world of travel and trade, innovation is key—and Inter-Globe Technology Quotient (ITQ), in partnership with Travelport, is leading the charge. Their focus is on empowering travel agents across India through cutting-edge technology, with a strong push towards New Distribution Capability (NDC) integration.

Anoop Tewari, Chief Commercial Officer, ITQ, said, "With an aim to strengthen the bridge between technology and travel trade, Travelport has made significant strides with NDC, now integrated with over



Anoop Tewari
Chief Commercial Officer
ITQ

20 airlines globally, including eight to nine major carriers relevant to the Indian market—Finnair being the latest addition." He stressed that the goal is to provide seamless multi-source content access to

the 6,500 travel agents using Travelport across India.

Beyond EDIFACT

While EDIFACT - based systems have served the industry for decades, the future lies in multi-channel content delivery.

"Travelport's ACH Connect, which we exclusively manage, now provides access to IndiGo's content both within India and globally. By embedding the latest airline developments directly into our platform, we ensure that every Travelport-connected agent has access to the most comprehensive content suite available," highlighted Tewari.

Tackling challenges

While NDC has been evolving since its initial attempts

Beyond content and automation, we have introduced a networking feature enabling agents to access each other's inventory

in 2012, the journey is ongoing, he said, while adding that despite its potential, challenges remain

around flight disruptions, interlining and post-booking processes.

"However, we are addressing these through robust post-booking automation solutions. These tools simplify complex processes like ticket reissuance and refunds—an area of concern for agents working with NDC," he further added.

Automation & AI

One of the exciting developments is the integration of AI and Large Language Models into Travelport's systems.

"These technologies are being used to create smart

tools that automate fare rule analysis and refunds in real time. Already in beta testing, these innovations promise to streamline operations for B2B travel agents and B2C operators, allowing them to better serve customers while reducing manual intervention," said Tiwari.





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BKC sees rise in weddings, events

Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) has transformed itself to one of Mumbai's most dynamic business and lifestyle districts and a vibrant destination for global conventions and luxury experiences. One such spot is the Sofitel Mumbai BKC, which continues to evolve, even after 13 years of operations. **Manish Dayya**, its General Manager, shares more.



Hazel Jain

Sofitel Mumbai BKC has continuously evolved to reflect modern luxury, while staying true to its ethos of committed hospitality and French flair. **Manish Dayya**, General Manager, Sofitel Mumbai BKC, winner of Outstanding Leadership in Luxury Hospitality award at the India Travel Awards 2024, says that being located in the heart of Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC) in Mumbai ensures that the team is constantly on its toes.

"BKC continues to evolve as one of Mumbai's most dynamic business and lifestyle districts. With the rise of iconic landmarks,

such as the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre (NMACC), Jio World Convention Centre (JWCC) and Jio World Plaza, the area has transformed from a corporate hub into a vibrant destination for global conventions, high-end retail, cultural performances and luxury experiences. This transformation has naturally reshaped the hospitality landscape. The addition of new properties, including midscale brands and other upcoming hotels, has introduced healthy competition driving innovation, differentiation and elevated guest experiences," he explains.

For Sofitel Mumbai BKC, this environment pres-



Manish Dayya
General Manager
Sofitel Mumbai BKC

ents an exciting opportunity. The proximity to JWCC and NMACC has opened doors to new guest segments from global business travellers and conference delegates to artists, dignitaries and cultural patrons. "It allows us to position the

hotel not just as a place to stay, but as a preferred partner for culture, commerce and community. Looking ahead, BKC is set to become Mumbai's definitive destination where free minds meet for business, lifestyle and leisure. As part of this growing ecosystem, we remain committed to leading with heartfelt hospitality and purposeful experiences that reflect committed luxury," Dayya says proudly.

Events and weddings

A notable trend, he sees, is the rising preference for weddings and social gatherings, especially with the recent development of JWCC in the vicinity where experience, emotional val-

ue and detail take precedence over scale. Dayya adds, "The modern Indian wedding is evolving,

With the rise of landmarks, the area has transformed from a corporate hub into a vibrant destination for events

it's no longer limited to a single grand celebration but includes multiple curated events, from cocktail

nights to after parties. At Sofitel Mumbai BKC, we have seen a steady rise in weddings where F&B takes centre stage – a natural strength for us. From a pure vegetarian Maharaj curating traditional Indian fare to our Qureshi Head Chef at Jyran offering Northwest frontier delicacies, every menu is personalised."



ECKO Hotels enters U'khand

With spiritual tourism in mind, ECKO Hotels & Resorts debuts in India with properties in Uttarakhand—Haridwar, Rishikesh and Tapovan, blending global comfort with Indian ethos.



Surbhi Sharma

ECKO Hotels & Resorts, a new-age hospitality brand blending global sensibilities with Indian warmth, has launched operations in India with 100 keys across three properties in Uttarakhand. The properties, ECKO Antarman Ganges, Haridwar; ECKO Rishikesh and ECKO Tapovan at the Ganges, aim to tap into the potential of spiritual tourism. Built on the pillars of individuality, community, sustainability and technology, the brand strives to minimise environmental footprint and support local communities through responsible practices. It aims to offer immersive guest experiences beyond the usual tourist trails.



Perkin Rocha
Founder & CEO
ECKO Hotels & Resorts

Emphasising Uttarakhand's spiritual, wellness and adventure appeal as the starting point for the brand's journey, **Perkin Rocha**, Founder & CEO, ECKO Hotels & Resorts, said, "I am sure, our unique hotels in Haridwar, Tapovan and Rishikesh will delight guests with engaging unique din-

ing, stay and bespoke experiences. Plan is to have 1,000 rooms by end of this

Built on the pillars of Individuality, community, sustainability & tech, the brand strives to lessen environmental footprint

year, or by mid-2026, depending on the acquisition."

The chain's vision is to create a brand that is uncomplicated and resonates with its customers. ✨

'Distribute earnings fairly'

▶ Contd. from page 11

cent of the revenue goes toward food, rentals and other expenses. The distribution of earnings must be fair, and commissions should apply to total revenue, whether at 5 per cent, 10 per cent or 15 per cent," Singh said.

With new luxury hotels entering markets like Jaipur and Udaipur, Jain underscored the necessity for hotels to recognise planners as key business drivers. "Seven new hotels are opening in Jaipur, three in Udaipur. Ritz-Carlton and Fairmont are entering the market. Hotels need to view us as partners who drive their profitability," he asserted.

PPL and IPRS

The discussion also touched upon the complications surrounding Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL) and Indian Performing Rights Society

(IPRS) licensing. While these licenses are often mandated for corporate events, their applicability to weddings remains debated. Sharma clarified, "In Rajasthan, particularly Jaipur, this is not a major issue for weddings. However, for corporate events in Udaipur, it's a significant challenge. Multiple licences—PPL, IPRS, NOEX, etc—are required, complicating the process. Weddings should not be subject to such licences."

External catering & revenue models

The role of external caterers in hotels also surfaced. **Rohit Chopra**, Area Commercial Director, India, Minor Hotels, said, "Hotel chains follow specific SOPs for external caterers due to hygiene concerns. If an organiser signs an LoA (Letter of Agreement), we can explore options, especially for niche cuisines like Sindhi or Marwari." Jain

added, "Internationally, we allow external caterers for celebrations, provided they meet hygiene regulations and sign documentation."

Wedding tie-ups

Harkaran Singh, General Manager, The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, shared their strategy. "The main challenge arises when we are not on the same page. When we collaborate, the process is smooth. But when we find ourselves on opposite sides, difficulties arise. Mutual respect is key," he said.



Sikkim levies eco-tourism fee

Sikkim has introduced a fee of ₹50 with an aim to support eco-conscious tourism and protect the state's natural and cultural assets. While industry voices support the initiative, many stress the need for transparent fund use.



Janice Alysius

In a move, aimed at promoting responsible tourism in Sikkim and preserving its natural resources and cultural heritage, the state government has imposed a ₹50 Tourism Sustainability Development (TSD) fee on tourists visiting the state. The regulation came into effect on 10 April 2025, and is applicable to all commercial tourist accommodations, including hotels, guest houses and homestays.

According to an official notification issued by the Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, the one-time TSD fee is being collected either at the time of booking or during check-in. The fund will be used as a collective



investment in sustainable tourism initiatives focused on conserving Sikkim's pristine landscapes, local biodiversity and rich cultural heritage.

Ganesh Shivakoti, President, Sikkim United Tourism Organisation (SUTO), has voiced strong support for the state's decision,

calling it a step toward sustainable tourism. "This sustainable development fee is being collected purely on behalf of the stakeholders," he explained. Sharing his views, **Rajiv Mehra**, Immediate Past President, IATO, said, "These kinds of taxes are being charged in every city in Europe, and also in Dubai. If the

money is used for infrastructure improvements and traffic management, it is acceptable," he said. **Prakash Subba**, Manager, Brothers Tours and Travels, said, "Many stakeholders believe this tax might negatively impact tourism rather than promote it. Instead of imposing additional fees, the government should first focus on enhancing infrastructure."



AI personalising rewards

► Contd. from page 12

tives and seasonal bonuses. Consortia like Virtuoso and Signature also include perks, higher commissions and exclusive offers. These programmes reward agents with discounted stays, Fam trip invites and added-value benefits for clients," Shah adds.

Creating one's own programme

A few travel agents have also started thinking of creating their own loyalty programme for their clients. Chennai-based **Manish Kriplani**, Managing Director, BayWatch Stayzz, and India Travel Awards 2024 winner, says, "With so many options available, retaining clients requires more than just good service—it requires giving them a reason to return. Loyalty programmes do just that by rewarding repeat business and encouraging referrals. Even budget carriers like

IndiGo, despite having a dominant market share, have introduced their own loyalty initiatives. We believe that offering rewards and appreciation not only helps retain customers but also strengthens our brand's relationship with them over time."

Using guest data to tailor rewards

But loyalty programmes have evolved far beyond traditional, points-based systems. Today, they are about building meaningful guest relationships through personalised experiences and seamless digital integration. **Amitava Saha**, General Manager, Anjushree Hotel, says that their focus is now on using guest data to tailor rewards and understand guests' preferences to create a deeper emotional connection. "As the hospitality landscape becomes competitive, loyalty programmes are shifting

toward offering more experiential, memorable and tech-enabled solutions that enhance guest satisfaction. Moving forward, we plan to

With options available, retaining clients requires more than just good service—it requires giving them a reason to return

explore new ways to further enhance our programme's impact," he adds.

AI-powered loyalty programmes

The future lies in AI-powered loyalty programmes that go beyond generic discounts, says **Hari**

Ganapathy, Co-Founder, Pickyourtrail. "These systems can use traveller behavior and preferences to offer meaningful value—curated deals, early access, contextual offers and concierge-like experiences. Unlike subscriptions, which do not always fit the infrequent nature of travel, AI-based loyalty can deliver relevance without asking for upfront commitment," he says.

Pickyourtrail's programme is called PYT Coins—a system designed to reward regular travellers. "These programmes also help us build long-term relationships while nudging conversions for new users by giving them a tangible reason to return or complete their first trip. The most effective way to use PYT Coins is through wallet-based discounts. Customers can accumulate these pointers and redeem them," he adds.



Skål India expands to Diamond City

Skål International Surat – South Gujarat has been officially launched, marking a new milestone in Skål's India expansion.



TT Bureau

The vibrant city of Surat witnessed a landmark moment as the Installation and Inauguration Ceremony of the newly formed Skål International Surat – South Gujarat club took place recently at Emerald 1, Orange Megastructure LLP (formerly TGB). The ceremony was graced by the presence of Skål International India board members and filled with enthusiasm and commitment from all participants.



Sanjeev Mehra
President
SKÅL International India

is set to become a beacon of positive change for the region's tourism community. Our mission remains to be the unified voice of progress and co-operation in Indian travel and hospitality."

It is heartening to see the spirit with which Surat has embraced Skål. This club is set to become a beacon of positive change

This newest addition to the Skål India family marks a significant step in the organisation's mission to establish active clubs in every state and union territory of the country. The event was characterised by valuable discussions, forward-thinking suggestions and a shared vision for collaborative growth in the tourism and hospitality sector.

Sanjeev Mehra, President, Skål International India, said, "It is heartening to see the spirit with which Surat has embraced the Skål movement. This club

The Skål International Surat – South Gujarat team also expressed its eagerness to contribute actively to the network. "We are honoured to become part of this global movement. With passion, purpose and partnership, we aim to elevate Surat's presence in the international tourism map," said **Rajiv Shah**, President, Skål International Surat – South Gujarat.

The newly inaugurated club, led by Shah, comprises **Vikas Gupta** as Vice President, **Sumit Bansal** as Secretary, **Vimal Vaghani** as Treasurer, **Sumit Saluja** as Director of PR, Communication & CSR and **Nitin Gupta** as Membership Development Officer. Skål India continues its journey with renewed zeal to foster professional camaraderie, build bridges across borders, and create opportunities that benefit the industry.

55k attendees @Arabian Travel Market

Arabian Travel Market 2025 concluded on a historic high, drawing over 55,000 attendees, marking a 16 per cent year-on-year surge. With over 2,800 exhibitors and a 26 per cent expansion in the Travel Tech zone, the show witnessed impressive growth across all verticals, as Asia registered a 20 per cent uptick and the Middle East grew by 19 per cent.



Tapping into women’s travel boom

Saudi Arabia's sweeping reforms, cultural awakening and bold hospitality agenda make it one of the most welcoming, safe and culturally immersive destinations for Indian women. In a candid conversation with **TRAVALTALK**, **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President – APAC, Saudi Tourism Authority, shares what is changing on the ground in the Kingdom.



TT Bureau

Saudi Arabia is now boldly stepping into the spotlight and it’s turning heads. The Kingdom’s sweeping reforms, cultural awakening and bold hospitality agenda are rewriting narratives and inviting Indian women to discover a destination that is not just safe, but surprisingly soulful.



Alhasan Aldabbagh
President – APAC
Saudi Tourism Authority (STA)

For the travel fraternity, this shift signals a golden moment where old hesitations give way to new possibilities. In an inspiring conversation with **TRAVALTALK**, **Alhasan Aldabbagh**, President – APAC, Saudi Tourism Authority (STA), shares the

changes, why they matter, and how agents can ride the wave of Saudi’s transformation. “India is one of our most important markets,” says Aldabbagh with conviction. “And women travellers from India are at the heart of this story,” he adds.



Diriyah, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, lit up at night

He is not just being diplomatic. Saudi Arabia is actively rolling out the red carpet for Indian women backed by data, design and a strong desire to connect cultures. Take safety, for instance, Saudi Arabia ranks higher than the US and UK.

According to the Numbeo Safety Index 2025, Saudi Arabia is now ranked as the 14th safest country in the world, jumping from 26th position last year. Madinah has also consistently ranked among the safest cities globally. “You can walk alone at night in Riyadh or

Jeddah, and feel completely secure,” Aldabbagh assures. And this is not just a rhetoric. Indian women who have travelled there confirm a sense of calm and confidence during their stay.

But the safety story is just the beginning. What truly excites is the growing bouquet of experiences designed with women in mind. Picture this: women-only beaches on the Red Sea coast, cooking classes led by Saudi women in traditional homes, perfume-making workshops, and intimate cultural walks through ancient souks. “There is a rising demand for soulful, immersive travel, and we are curating

those moments,” Aldabbagh explains.

India is one of our (Saudi Tourism's) most important markets. And women travellers from India are at the heart of this story

And it’s not just FITs or families, solo and small group travel is gaining traction. STA is working closely

Contd. on page 22 ▶

Viacation – Taking the D2C road!

Since the inception, **Viacation Tourism Pvt Ltd (VTPL)** have had a single core agenda, being customer centric. Taking this philosophy further, Viacation is expanding its wings in the D2C market. While we are already present in Gurugram with a dedicated Sales, Products, Ticketing and Marketing Team with a head count of 150, we are expanding to twice this number by the end of Q3-25'. From Vietnam to Char-Dham and Europe to Ladakh, covering everything for the discerning traveller. Groups, Fit's and Corporate Travel, it's all in the bouquet. With repeat travellers and customers becoming Patrons, we are all about putting customer first.

 4.9 Rating	 1M+ Customer Base	 1500+ Destinations	 500+ Operators	 150+ Team Members
 24/7 Support	 Price Match Guarantee	 100% Package Customization	 Visa Guidance	 Flexible Payment Plans

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FITUR celebrates Dual Tourism Year 2026

FITUR organised a high-impact networking event at the Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, to engage with India’s inbound tour operators and strengthen ties with the country’s travel trade community. The event aimed to deepen collaboration with key Indian stakeholders ahead of the India–Spain Dual Year 2026, a landmark initiative to promote bilateral tourism.



Oman: A rising star for Indian leisure

Oman is fast emerging as a top pick for Indian travellers. With Muscat's coastal charm and Jabal Akhdar's scenic mountain beauty, the country offers world-class hospitality, cultural richness and adventure. Backed by focused promotions and growing air connectivity, the country is tapping into India's booming outbound travel market.



Surbhi Sharma

As Indian outbound tourism continues to surge, Oman is positioning itself as a premier destination for Indian travellers, with Muscat and Jebel Akhdar leading the charge. Known for their blend of natural beauty, luxury hospitality, cultural richness, and adventure, these regions are fast emerging as hotspots for MICE, destination weddings and leisure travel.

Push for India market

Oman welcomed around 600,000 Indian visitors in 2023, and the country is eyeing even stronger growth in 2024. **Arjun Chadha**, Country Manager, Oman Tourism - India, said



Arjun Chadha
Country Manager
Oman Tourism - India

that the goal is to surpass 700,000 Indian arrivals this year. "India has been identified as one of Oman's primary source markets outside the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)," he said.

With proximity, short flight durations, streamlined visa processes and increasing

air connectivity, the country is leveraging its advantages to target Indian corporates and wedding planners. Chadha added, "The focus is on building a loyal base of Indian clients for MICE and destination weddings by showcasing Oman's versatile offerings."

Hospitality at its best

Muscat and Jabal Akhdar are home to some of the region's most luxurious and well-equipped hotels, ideal for both business and leisure. The W Muscat offers a vibrant, modern luxury experience perfect for high-energy corporate retreats. Hotel Indigo Jabal Akhdar provides a scenic getaway with relaxation and rejuvenation and eco-tourism appeal, while the

St. Regis Al Mouj Muscat Resort brings opulence to the capital, making it an ideal venue for grand

India has been identified as one of the primary source markets of Oman outside the Gulf Cooperation Council

weddings, MICE and executive gatherings.

Rich culture

Oman's charm lies in its

blend of traditional and contemporary experiences. In Muscat, visitors can immerse themselves in the country's rich heritage at sites like the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque, Muttrah Fort and the Royal Opera House. The Amouage Factory offers a fascinating look into luxury perfume-making, while the Muttrah Souq is a shopper's paradise for authentic Omani goods.

Celebration point

The rise of destination weddings has added another layer to Oman's appeal. Chadha shared that an increasing number of Indian couples have selected the country—especially its luxurious venues in Muscat. Nature lovers have been

exploring the scenic Jabal Akhdar mountains.

Looking ahead

With strategic promotions, including roadshows in India, Oman is investing in awareness and partnerships. The "A Journey to Explore Oman" campaign launched by the Omani Embassy in 2023 continues to fuel momentum.

TOURISM TRENDS

600,000
Indian arrivals
in 2023
700,000
Oman targeting
in 2025

DMC business vital for GRT Hotels

GRT Hotels & Resorts recently celebrated their success with travel trade partners, along with promoting their summer packages. Jit Bose, VP, Commercial Sales and Shubhangi N, VP, Sales & Marketing of GRT Hotels & Resorts gave insights into the brand's inbound business from tour operators and future course of action to strengthen relationship with them.



Amita Pandey

Emerging as one of the South India's best hospitality junctions, GRT Hotels & Resorts every year celebrates its success with tour operators and Destination Management Companies (DMCs) in New Delhi.

Praising the efforts of the travel trade partners at this year's celebrations, **Jit Bose**, VP, Commercial Sales, GRT Hotels & Resorts, said, "Travel trade partners are important for us. We own and operate 22 hotels across South India, and a large number of them cater to leisure tourists."



Jit Bose
VP, Commercial Sales
GRT Hotels & Resorts

Traction from agents

Speaking about their business traction from agents and DMCs, he revealed, "GRT's business from the DMCs has been strong for the last six months. Additionally, as the domestic market is currently doing



Shubhangi N
VP, Sales & Marketing
GRT Hotels & Resorts

extremely well, we are offering exclusive summer getaway products to tour operators for our key resort destinations, which we recently launched."

Building on Bose's insights, **Shubhangi N**, VP,

Sales & Marketing, GRT Hotels & Resorts, offered a closer look at the destinations driving the brand's inbound business. "When we map the pulse of our properties," she shared, "Chennai continues to lead the pack, closely followed by the heritage-rich corridors of Mahabalipuram and Pondicherry. The Grand Madurai has earned the favour of tour operators. Tanjore (Thanjavur) is steadily gaining momentum, while Coimbatore too contributes a healthy slice of inbound business. We discovered there is a growing potential at Wayanad in Kerala, which was a pleasant surprise," said Shubhangi, adding, "Inbound

business contributes around 20 to 25 per cent of our overall revenue."

Travel trade partners are important for us. We own 22 hotels, and a large number of them cater to leisure tourists

-Jit Bose

Shubhangi acknowledged the evolving definition of luxury in hospitality, shifting from product-centric

to experience-driven travel and shared how brands like GRT are making sure to cater to these evolving preferences. "Luxury today is about stories, emotions and immersion," she noted.

FACT SHEET

- ❖ Tier II cities in South India getting traction include Kanchipuram, Thiruttani, Madurai and Coimbatore.
- ❖ GReaT Escape packages for summer getaways are currently live for tour operators.

EVENT TALK		
Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East		
MAY 2025		
Date	Event	Time
15-17	Guangzhou International Travel Fair 2025	9:00 am
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
22-25	Thailand Dive Expo 2025	11:00 am
23-26	Taipei International Tourism Exposition 2025	10:00 am
27	Resorts World Sentosa Webinar	3:00 pm
27-28	GBTA APAC Conference 2025	9:00 am
27-29	ITB China 2025	9:00 am
28	Oman Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
30-31	Nepal International Tourism Expo 2025	9:00 am
JUNE 2025		
1-3	IATA AGM & World Air Transport Summit	10:00 am
5-8	Seoul International Travel Fair	10:00 am
10	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Hyderabad	10:00 am
12	Oman Tourism Roadshow- Indore	10:00 am

Tailored offering for women in KSA

► Contd. from page 19

to create women-specific itineraries guided by female tour leaders. Think: Diriyah’s historical trails, camel rides at sunset, desert glamping and front-row seats at Riyadh Season’s spectacular shows. “We want Indian women to see Saudi as a destination where they are not just welcome, they are celebrated,” he adds.

Statistics back the story. In the first half of 2024, women made up 44 per cent of Saudi’s inbound visitors. Within the country, 37 per cent of the workforce is now women, and nearly 44 per cent hold mid-to-senior management roles, showing that empowerment is not just promised; it’s practiced.

This evolution is a game changer for the travel trade. Travel agents, especially

women entrepreneurs in India’s booming travel ecosystem, can now tap into a fresh product line. From wellness retreats and cultural immersions to luxury experiences and shopping tours, Saudi offers variety and value. “This is no longer just a pilgrimage stop. It’s a place of discovery,” says Aldabbagh.

To sum up a personal experience, “We arrived unsure of what to expect. We left with stories, laughter, and a newfound love for a country that showed us warmth behind the veil of mystery.” Now is the time to re-frame the Saudi narrative. Break the myths. Build women-centric itineraries. Share real stories. The market is ready, and Saudi is waiting. In a region full of familiarity, Saudi Arabia offers the thrill of the new, wrapped in the comfort of safety and connection. 🇸🇦

NEW OPENINGS

Flights

Airline: Vietnam Airlines
Route: Direct flight from Hyderabad to Hanoi
Frequency: Three times a week; on Wednesday, Friday and Sunday

Airline: Vietnam Airlines
Route: Wide-body operations on Mumbai-Hanoi route
Frequency: Four weekly flights

Airline: Maldivian
Route: Direct from Bengaluru to Northern Maldives from 15 May 2025
Frequency: TBA

Airline: Air India
Route: Delhi-Tokyo Haneda route from 15 June
Frequency: Daily flights

Hotels

Brand: Pride Hotels
Hotel: Three properties in North India – Pride Elite Jodhpur, Pride Premier Noida and Pride Elite Alwar.

Rooms: Pride Elite Jodhpur (64 keys), Pride Premier Noida (80 keys) and Pride Elite Alwar (81 keys)

Brand: Hilton
Hotel: Hilton Garden Inn Jabalpur
Rooms: 101 keys

Brand: Lords Hotels and Resorts
Hotel: Lords Hrim Akshara Resort in Basar
Rooms: 42 keys

Brand: CGH Earth Saha
Hotel: Hibiscus Villa, Kerala
Rooms: 3 bedrooms

RezLive.com raises a toast to partners

RezLive.com brought together industry leaders for a memorable evening of cocktails and conversations at the Preferred Partner Cocktail Party, during Arabian Travel Market 2025. Held at the stunning poolside of Novotel World Trade Centre, Dubai, the event saw partners from across the globe raising a toast to shared success, making it a night to remember.



Serravalle Outlet ranked EU's best in '25

Serravalle Designer Outlet has been ranked Europe's best outlet centre in the 2025 Outlet Centre Performance Report Europe by Ecostra and Magdus. The report also highlights McArthurGlen's dominance, with its eight centres finding place among the top 20. The recognition coincides with Serravalle's 25th anniversary and its growing partnerships.



Serravalle Designer Outlet has been named the best outlet centre in Europe in the 2025 edition of the Outlet Centre Performance Report Europe (OCPRE), curated by the real estate consulting firm Ecostra and the French research institute Magdus.

The report is based on an annual survey conducted across Europe among international brands, focusing on the economic performance of individual stores within various outlet centres. In addition to providing a comprehensive ranking of centres based on their economic performance and the evaluation



by tenants of the operators' performance, this year – for the first time since 2016 – the importance of specific criteria related to location and ownership in the decision to lease outlet space was analysed. Commenting on the per-

formance, **Matteo Migani**, General Manager, Serravalle Designer Outlet, said, "We are thrilled to learn that Serravalle has been ranked as the most successful outlet centre in Europe by our business partners. In the year, we celebrate our 25th anniversary, a journey

marked by excellence and innovation in the retail sector. We are proud to receive this recognition, which highlights how much our strategic partnerships are valued by our tenants." The success is not limited to Serravalle: McArthur-

Glen's centres in Roermond and Málaga have been ranked second and third, respectively, further

McArthurGlen the prestigious title of "Best Outlet Operator in Europe 2024".

In total, eight McArthurGlen centres found place among the top 20 in Europe: Serravalle (1st), Roermond (2nd), Málaga (3rd), Cheshire Oaks (6th), Castel Romano and Noventa di Piave (tied for 8th), Parndorf (10th) and York (11th).

We are thrilled to learn that Serravalle has been ranked as the most successful outlet centre in Europe by our partners
– Matteo Migani

consolidating the group's leadership in the European outlet landscape. In recognition of these results, Magdus also awarded



Compliance: A double-edged sword?

The tourism industry is a compliance-heavy sector. While some see this as a burden, others view it as a growth driver. Beyond making it a level-playing field, it can protect consumers - particularly in light of increasing AI data breaches and cyberattacks - offer significant business advantages and build trust equity. How do you see it?



The travel and tourism industry is notoriously compliance-intensive with many layers of taxes like GST and TCS. Many view this as a burden and unnecessary. But rules are important, and these compliances are "mostly" justified, says **Sanjay Ghare**, CEO, Vervotech. "The necessity for such stringent compliance could be understood just by looking at the increasing sophistication of cyber threats, particularly AI-driven fraud in travel insurance. A recent industry survey revealed that 65 per cent of insurance claims handlers have noticed a surge in fraudulent claims facilitated



Sanjay Ghare
CEO
Vervotech



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego



Rajesh Poddar
Partner
Rightchoice Tours N Travels

by AI, which highlights the escalating challenges in this sector," he explains.

POV: Technology platform provider

Despite the comprehensive nature of existing compliance frameworks, there are critical gaps, especially

in cybersecurity. Given that the travel industry ranks as the third most targeted industry for cyberattacks, the existing measures are evidently not sufficient. Ghare adds, "The pace at which technological threats evolve, we need a more dynamic approach

to compliance, far beyond the current standards. In today's market, where 76 per cent of travellers prioritise sustainable and ethical operations, the ability to demonstrate superior compliance can be a decisive factor in winning customer trust and loyalty."

Insurance provider

Insurance compliance is complex, with over 2,200 unique compliance obligations and a rapidly evolving regulatory landscape. **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego, says, "The compliance landscape in this industry is multi-layered and continually evolving. We don't view compliance as a mere box-ticking exercise, we treat it as a cornerstone of trust."

lations for online portals, visa regulations, airlines compliances, and many more. **Rajesh Poddar**, Partner, Rightchoice Tours N Travels, says, "These are necessary – we need to be compliant as many regulations are changed on a regular basis which needs to be updated. Data security is another reason why we need this."

For travel agents

For a travel agent, there are multiple compliances to adhere to – IATA compliances in the form of BSP statements on weekly basis, IATA bank guarantee, ADM issues, GST, TDS, TCS, FEMA, DGCA regu-



MOVEMENTS

SINGAPORE TOURISM BOARD

India

The Singapore Tourism Board appoints **SERENE WOON** as Area Director-Designate, India, Middle East and South Asia (Mumbai). She will assume the full director role on 1 July 2025. Based in Mumbai, Woon will oversee West and South India markets, as well as the Middle East and South Asia regions, while leading STB's pan-India destination marketing efforts. Woon brings over a decade of experience at STB since 2010, having served as Area Director in South Korea and Malaysia.



NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HOTEL MANAGEMENT AND CATERING TECHNOLOGY

Noida

DR SAGNIK CHOWDHURY has assumed the position of Director (Administration and Finance) at the National Council for Hotel Management and Catering Technology (NCHMCT), Noida. At NCHMCT, his focus will be on bringing the hospitality academia closer to the industry, and on collaborative international exposure for the faculty and students of the NCHMCT system.



MINOR HOTELS

India

Minor Hotels has appointed hotelier **NICHOLAS SMITH** to its Asia regional leadership team as Vice President of Operations. In the new role, Smith will be responsible for overseeing and strengthening the group's fast-growing portfolio in Asia and leading and mentoring a team of experienced leaders across Asia. He has over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry. He developed his operational expertise at the Shangri-La Group, joining the group in 2008 as Food & Beverage Manager in Malaysia.



TITLIS CABLEWAYS

Mumbai

ZAAL CHOKSI joins the Titlis Cableways team in India as the Business Development Manager. He will primarily be responsible to expand the business module and look for other sales avenues in promoting Mt Titlis, the popular Swiss mountain excursion. Choksi has worked as a Sales Consultant with Bucherer and on Mt Titlis, as an Assistant Project Manager with Swissminiatur. He has Masters in Business Communication with a Major in Tourism from the University of Lugano in Switzerland.



HYATT REGENCY JAIPUR MANSAROVAR

Jaipur

Hyatt Regency Jaipur Mansarovar has appointed **NAVEEN YADAV** as the General Manager. With over 16 years of experience in the hospitality and tourism industry, Yadav brings a comprehensive mix of operational insight, strategic vision and leadership expertise. In his new role, he is committed to enhancing the guest experience, fostering a culture of excellence, and positioning the hotel as a preferred destination for business and leisure travelers. Yadav earlier served as GM at Hyatt Regency Amritsar.



MESSE BERLIN INDIA

India

KATRINA LEUNG, Managing Director and Vice President - Asia Pacific, Messe Berlin, will now additionally lead Messe Berlin India as the Managing Director, further strengthening Messe Berlin's growth across the Asia Pacific region. ITB India, which has laid the foundation for its presence in the region, will continue under the new entity. The next edition of ITB India will take place from 2-4 September in Mumbai.



FORTUNE SELECT SG HIGHWAY, AHMEDABAD

Ahmedabad

Fortune Select SG Highway, Ahmedabad (Member of ITC Hotels Group) welcomes **SHREESH MISHRA** as the General Manager. A seasoned professional with over 12-year experience in the hospitality industry, Mishra has worked with renowned brands, such as Accor, IHG, Hyatt, Taj and Sayaji. In his new role, he will be responsible for overseeing the hotel's overall operations, development of the new inventory, driving strategic initiatives and spearheading business growth.



SAYAJI HOTELS

India

Sayaji Hotels has elevated **AJAY KANOJIA** to the position of Associate General Manager – Operations. With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Kanojia brings with him a wealth of experience. He has worked with renowned brands, including Hotel Park Plaza, Hotel Jaypee Residency and Lemon Tree Hotels. In his expanded role, Kanojia will be responsible for providing strategic direction, driving year-on-year growth and strengthening staff engagement.



DEEPIKA UNNI has been appointed as the Director, Exhibitions & Market Development of Messe Berlin India. Unni is Messe Berlin India's first employee and is the main person who handles operations in India. In her current role, she manages pan-India operations for Messe Berlin, overseeing the comprehensive execution of the company's exhibition portfolio across India, Singapore and Berlin, including ITB India, ITB Berlin, ITB Asia and the newly launched ITB Americas.



IBIS INDIA

Mumbai

ibis India has appointed **SANDIP SATANGE** as the General Manager of ibis Mumbai BKC. Known for his operational knowledge, Satange brings with him over 14 years of hospitality experience and a proven track record in driving operational excellence, team engagement and guest satisfaction. In his recent role, he led ibis Navi Mumbai. He holds a Master's degree in Hospitality Management from the University of Wales, UK, and a Bachelor's degree in Hotel Management from RTM Nagpur University.



ONE REP GLOBAL


Mumbai

One Rep Global has appointed **APARNA ANAND** as the Head of Sales. With a career spanning over a decade across luxury, lifestyle and hospitality sectors, Anand brings a unique blend of creativity, cultural fluency and commercial acumen to her new role. She joins One Rep Global with years of extensive experience in public relations, marketing and sales. In her new role, Anand will spearhead sales and operations, aiming to expand One Rep Global's footprint and build partnerships.



SAURABH SHUKLA has been appointed as the Head of Sales at Messe Berlin India. With over a decade of experience in the travel and tourism industry, Shukla brings an expertise in sales, business development and stakeholder engagement. After his appointment, Shukla said, "With Messe Berlin India, I am working towards strengthening India's position in the global travel industry by leading exhibitor sales for ITB India and contributing to ITB Asia."



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94% Indians love visiting UK's film locations

VisitBritain is building momentum in India with its ongoing multi-year campaign, Starring GREAT Britain. With a focus on screen tourism and trade engagement, the campaign encourages Indian travellers to explore beyond the usual hotspots.



Janice Alyosius

VisitBritain, in association with the British Council, hosted the GREAT Culture and Tourism Reception in New Delhi recently as part of its ongoing 'Starring GREAT Britain' multi-year campaign. The reception was a highlight of an official programme of events, led by UK Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy, who led a delegation of cultural leaders and institutions to Mumbai and New Delhi.

Oranised at the British Council, the event was hosted by Lindy Cameron CB OBE, British High Commissioner to India, and attended by India's Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat. The evening brought together key stakeholders from the travel and cultural sectors. A special screening of the Starring GREAT Britain campaign and exclusive performances by India's Serendipity Arts Festival were among the highlights.

Speaking at the event, **Patricia Yates**, Chief Executive Officer, VisitBritain

Patricia Yates
Chief Executive Officer
VisitBritain

CULTURE IS A BRIDGE THAT CONNECTS

Addressing the audience at the GREAT Culture and Tourism Reception in New Delhi, Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat highlighted the signing of the India-UK Programme of Cultural Cooperation. He described the agreement as a powerful example to the shared commitment to fostering creativity, promoting dialogue and nurturing mutual understanding through the arts. "Our cultural tapestry is woven with mutual admiration and creative synergy," he said.

tain, said, "We know that film and TV is a really powerful motivator for travellers from India. We have committed to running this campaign for two to three years, and the travel trade has really welcomed that. It means destinations in Britain can build products that tour operators can include in their programmes."

Yates also emphasised the importance of Indian visitors, celebrating the ties between the two countries and VisitBritain's role in harnessing the strong growth in visits and spend. "From the power of storytelling through our Starring GREAT Britain campaign to our hugely important trade and industry networks that help sell our tourism products and experiences, we are driving growth," she noted.

VisitBritain's strategy goes beyond marketing, focusing on trade enablement as well. "We are working with the travel trade in India to ensure those destinations are on sale. We know how important the travel trade is in India, so it will continue to be the focus of our work here," Yates added.

Earlier this year, VisitBritain organised a familiarisation trip for Indian buyers to North East England — a region less visited by Indian tourists — to help diversify the UK's tourism offering. "We want to help

We (VisitBritain) have committed to running this campaign for two to three years, and the travel trade has really welcomed that

Indian tour operators put more destinations in their programmes and sell a wider range of experiences. We want Indian visitors to stay longer, explore more and spend more," Yates said.

According to VisitBritain's research, 94 per cent of visitors from India are interested in visiting film and TV locations during their trip to the UK. The Starring GREAT Britain campaign is tapping into this trend—using the global popularity of British film and television to promote dynamic and diverse destinations.

Sabre takes smart-shift with AI-led solutions

Samual Machado, MD – India & South Asia, Sabre Travel Solutions, reflects on the company's evolving role in the travel ecosystem and why adaptability—not size—will determine who survives in the fast-changing B2B travel landscape.



Nisha Verma

Sabre Corporation's Global Capability Centre (GCC) in Bengaluru recently celebrated two decades in India. The state-of-the-art facility has gone from being a modest delivery outpost to a strategic engine of innovation. With a deep focus on AI-driven transformation and customer-first problem-solving, the GCC is now central to Sabre's global vision.

Speaking on how Sabre has evolved through the years, **Samual Machado**, Managing Director – India & South Asia, Sabre Travel Solutions, admitted that they have not talked about themselves with the media over the years, but they have achieved a lot in India over the years. "This 20-year celebration was our way of saying—come see the work, the innovation, the value we are creating not just in technology, but in sales, partnerships and the entire travel value chain."

Samual Machado
Managing Director – India & South Asia, Sabre Travel Solutions

Sabre's Bengaluru hub is not just a technology centre—it's also where commercial and product teams work in tandem. "We are cooking and selling at the same time. We wanted to showcase how the GCC contributes to global travel in very tangible ways," he quipped.

Come see the work, the innovation, the value we are creating not just in tech, but in sales, tie-ups, and the entire travel value chain

Legacy GDS to smart solutions

The traditional GDS model—once focused on inventory management—has undergone a transformation. "We do not call ourselves a GDS anymore. Today, we are a multi-source content hub. One pipe, one API call, and you get Edifact, NDC, LCC, and hotel aggregator content—all flowing together."

The smart pipe, as he calls it, uses AI to optimise shopping, pricing and display. "You don't need to worry about server costs or caching mechanisms.

We do the heavy lifting for agencies. We are helping partners shop smarter and improve user experience."

He also mentioned that the Sabre Mosaic platform is another game changer in this realm.

NDC vs GDS

Much has been said about NDC 'killing' the GDS, but Machado disagrees. "They are going to co-exist. The issue was that agents were used to GDS flows. When NDC came in, it was at a nascent stage. Agencies were not wrong to hesitate."

However, Sabre is offering both types of content and allowing agents to decide. "If Mumbai to London flight is \$10 or \$100 cheaper on NDC as compared to Edifact, may be for convenience. But if the savings are \$1,000, maybe it's worth the extra effort. We empower agents to choose."

Teamwork is trust

One of Sabre's defining traits is the collaboration between its tech and sales teams. "I always have Sri Ram Gopalswamy – VP, Site Reliability Engineering, from technology side with me for big meetings. Customers appreciate that we say yes only when we can do something and a no, if something is not possible. There is no over-promising. That is a big differentiator," he shared.

AI-POWERED EDGE

❖ Sabre leverages AI to personalise travel

❖ Intelligent recommendations enhance traveller satisfaction

❖ AI-driven automation improves agent productivity



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