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United push can fix inbound lag

India's tourism story looks bright — surging domestic trips, thriving business travel, and high hotel occupancies. However, leisure inbound is sliding, cautions **Suman Billa**.

Janice Alyosius

Suman Billa, Additional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, highlighted the realities facing Indian tourism at a recent event. Yes, India's tourism is on a robust growth path, but cracks are showing, particularly in leisure inbound.



Suman Billa
Additional Secretary and
Director General, MoT
Government of India

pricing, and infrastructure must be great," Billa admitted. Domestic travel, by contrast, is booming. Visits jumped from 2.5 billion to nearly 3 billion.

"Government and industry do not sit on opposite sides of the table. All of

India's tourism is on a robust growth path, but cracks are showing, particularly in leisure inbound

us have one function, one purpose — to converge our forces and make tourism deliver for India in the best way it can," he concluded.

Inbound vs outbound

India receives about 20 million inbound tourists, but once diaspora and non-leisure segments are excluded, leisure tourism shrinks to just 6–6.5 million. That is a sobering figure for a country of India's size. Meanwhile, outbound tourism tells a different story. India sends out 27–28 million travellers annually, spending nearly as much overseas as inbound generates for the country. "On the one hand, through our inbound, we earn about ₹3 lakh crore in foreign

exchange. On the other hand, outbound is rising faster than inbound — and that should be a source of great worry," said Billa.

The supply crunch

The root of the problem? Demand is outstripping supply. India has just 1.8 lakh (0.18 million) branded hotel rooms and 15 lakh (1.5 million) unbranded rooms. "When a leisure traveller looks at several options, India is just one of them. That means the experience,

GSTC certification now available in India

Thanks to UCSL, a GSTC-accredited body, and QualStar, India's leading hotel certification expert, tourism organisations can now apply for GSTC certification in the country.

TT Bureau

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) certification, the world's highest standard for sustainable tourism, is now locally available in India. This landmark move, a partnership between UCSL, a GSTC-accredited body,

experts. This cost-effective solution will help India's rapidly growing hospitality sector meet rising global demands for verified sustainability.

GSTC certification, a UN-led initiative, ensures a single, trusted benchmark for hotels worldwide. It covers four key areas:



and QualStar, India's leading hotel certification expert, makes achieving global recognition more affordable and accessible for Indian hotels.

Until now, obtaining GSTC certification required expensive international audits. The new UCSL-QualStar partnership eliminates this barrier, allowing Indian hotels to be audited by locally-based, globally-approved

sustainable management, socio-economic impact, cultural impact, and environmental impacts. By aligning with these standards, Indian hotels can attract high-spending, eco-conscious travellers and qualify for global corporate RFPs.

This collaboration positions India as a leader in responsible tourism, strengthening its competitiveness and showcasing its rich heri-

tage on the global stage. As **Olga Shuvalova**, Chief Executive Officer, UCSL, highlighted that this partnership ensures the certification remains "rigorous, impartial, and internationally credible."

UCSL-QualStar tie-up eliminates this barrier, allowing Indian hotels to be audited by locally-based, globally-approved experts

Subha Bhaskar, Chief Operating Officer, QualStar, added that it "combines UCSL's global credibility with our local expertise", empowering Indian hotels to embrace a sustainable future.

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pushes for industry tag

Uniting a line-up of policymakers and top hospitality leaders, the 55th FHRAI Annual Convention emphasised the scale of hospitality industry in India, its power to influence the economy, and the opportunities available within the tourism sector. During the three-day deliberations, stakeholders explored policies that drive tourism with sustainability and elevate the India experience for global travellers.



Lipla Negi

Siddaramaiah, CM, Karnataka, addressing the the 55th FHRAI Annual Convention, emphasised how Bengaluru is relentlessly working towards building a world-class hospitality ecosystem. “Domestic tourist footfall was projected to reach 30.46 crore in 2024, building up a strong 58 per cent surge since 2022. But behind these numbers lies the story of people — as the hospitality sector generated 12 lakh direct and indirect jobs. The sector contributes about ₹25,000 crore to our economy. Our capital, Bengaluru, has emerged as a premier global hub for MICE tourism.”



55th FHRAI Annual Convention 2025 kicked off with a lamp lighting ceremony

Spotlighting the new Karnataka Tourism Policy 2024–2029, which envisions creating 1.5 lakh new jobs and attracting ₹8,000 crore in investment by 2029, he added, “The policy focuses on enhancing infrastructure, skill development, sustainability, and global marketing.” Amplifying this

vision, **Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, Union Tourism Minister, highlighted India’s projection to become a \$30 trillion economy by 2047. Underlining the rising demand for hospitality, he noted the industry status granted to 50 iconic destinations, with 18 states having extended this recognition.


DK Shivakumar, Deputy CM, Karnataka, expressed his appreciation for the industry. “Together we will work towards strengthening Karnataka’s economy. Plans are also underway to develop the state’s 320 km coastline, further enhancing Karnataka’s position as a top-tier tourism

destination. A few weeks ago, I personally spoke to Syama Raju regarding the development of a convention centre along Nela-mangala Road, which is also seeing interest from leading international hotel chains.” **V Vidyavathi**, Secretary, Tourism, Government of India, called for a stronger public-private partnership as the government prepares its Tourism Business Plan. “To attract global tourists with meaningful experiences, we need to focus on country-specific strategies. There cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach for tourists coming to India from different parts of the world with varying expectations,” she said.

K Syama Raju, President, FHRAI, welcomed the recent GST reforms and also underlined some concerns



There are plans to develop the state’s 320 km coastline, further enhancing Karnataka’s position as a top-tier tourism destination

that require government’s support. “EoDB is an area where we expect far-reaching advancements,” he urged. 

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Drowning in events or riding the wave

This September felt like a sprint that turned into a marathon. From the beginning of the month, it has been one event after another, with barely a pause to breathe. Hotel showcases, tourism board activations, conventions, exhibitions, the calendar has been crammed across India.

On the one hand, this energy is exhilarating. It shows that the industry is buzzing with confidence. Tourism boards are eager to woo the trade, hotels are unveiling new offerings, and associations are finding their voice again. For many, the packed schedule is a sign that the market is back in full swing, and that the Indian traveller is ready to engage, network, and plan ahead for the coming winter season.

But there is another side to the story. When every week is packed with roadshows, cocktails, and seminars, you have to wonder, are we doing justice to each event? The trade barely has time to absorb one destination’s pitch before rushing off to another. The result can be a blur of logos, speeches, and faces that merge into each other.

So, what is really going on? Is this a carefully timed push to lock in winter business, or simply poor planning where everyone piles into September because it feels convenient? The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. The appetite is real, after all, Indian travellers are showing stronger intent, both for domestic and international travel. At the same time, better coordination across the industry could ensure that each event gets the spotlight it deserves.

In the end, September has proven that India’s travel and hospitality sector is bursting with energy. The challenge now is to channel that energy with more thought, balance, and collaboration. If we manage that, the trade will not just attend events, it will engage deeply, remember the stories, and translate them into actual business.

India welcomes 10 million inbound tourists, outbound reaches 31 million

Nearly 10 million foreign tourists visited India in 2024, marking a steady recovery since the pandemic, though still below the 2019 peak. At the same time, outbound travel by Indians surged to a record 31 million, outnumbering inbound by more than three to one.



Foreign tourist arrivals have shown a steady rebound over the last three years. After the pandemic setback, arrivals rose from 6.44 million in 2022 to 9.51 million in 2023, before reaching 9.95 million in 2024.



The USA emerged as India’s leading source market in 2024, with 1.80 mn tourists, followed closely by Bangladesh with 1.75 mn

Three-year trend			
Year	FTAs (in mn)	Growth vs Previous Year	Benchmark
2019	10.93	–	Pre-COVID peak
2023	9.51	+47.7% (over 2022)	Recovery underway
2024	9.95	+4.5% (over 2023)	Still -8.9% vs 2019

Top 5 source countries for India			
Rank	Country	Arrivals (mn)	Share of FTAs
1	USA	1.80	18.1%
2	Bangladesh	1.75	17.6%
3	UK	1.02	10.3%
4	Australia	0.52	5.2%
5	Canada	0.48	4.8%

Top 5 States for foreign tourist visits			
Rank	State	Visits (mn)	Share (%)
1	Maharashtra	3.70	17.7%
2	West Bengal	3.12	14.9%
3	Uttar Pradesh	2.27	10.9%
4	Gujarat	2.27	10.9%
5	Rajasthan	2.07	9.9%

Indian outbound (2024)

Total Departures: 30.89 mn (+10.8% over 2023)

Top Destinations: United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, USA, Thailand, Singapore

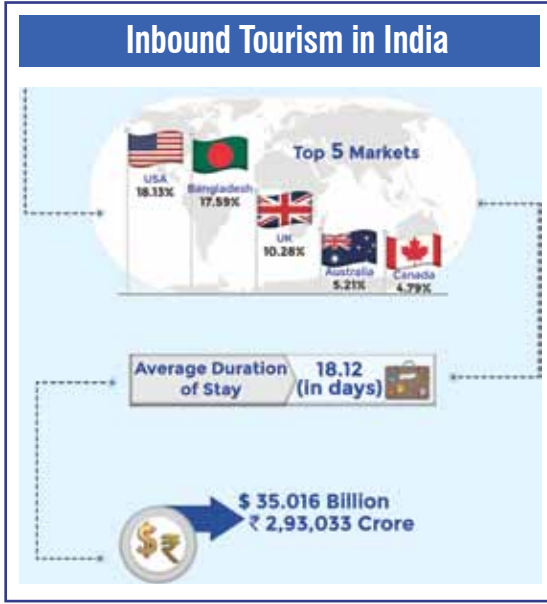
Purpose of Travel: Leisure & Recreation (42.5%), Diaspora (34.7%), Business & Professional (14.9%)

Preferred hotels by foreign tourists

Delhi & Mumbai: Entry hubs funnelling over 57% of arrivals into international branded hotels

Rajasthan & UP: Heritage & luxury hotels top choices

Goa: Resorts woo leisure travellers from the US, UK and Europe



Empowering agents globally through revamped platform

The renewed platform of GRNconnect is set to transform the booking experience of agents with a smarter UI/UX, faster search tools, and new integrations. From Eurail bookings to flexible payment gateways, the upgrade promises greater efficiency to boost agent sales.

Janice Alyosius

GRNconnect has unveiled its revamped platform, designed to empower travel agents with smarter tools, faster access, and seamless booking experiences. Speaking to **TRAVEL TALK**, **Deepak Narula**, MD, GRNconnect, highlighted how the upgrade not only enhances efficiency but also strengthens the company's commitment to Indian agents. "The new UI/UX, designed with the latest technology, enables seamless browsing of the system," Narula explained.

The interface now includes Fast Search, Internal Staff Management, Sub-Agent Management, and a Ticket Management System. Agents can also benefit from features like GRN Pick Hotels, similar hotel suggestions, quick search links, and a smart dashboard enriched with high-quality content.

One of the standout additions is Eurail, now book-



Deepak Narula
Managing Director
GRNconnect

able directly on the platform in just a few clicks. "We have implemented features that save time and simplify the booking journey, ensuring agents can focus more on growing sales," Narula said.

Benefits for agents

Narula emphasised that GRNconnect's relaunch is particularly beneficial for smaller Indian agents. "Even the smallest requirement of a travel agent has been kept in mind while creating the system. With just a few clicks, it will offer the most exclusive inventory," he said.

To further encourage adoption, GRNconnect has rolled out a range of incentives. "We have various offers like booker's incentives, triple booking rewards, and deposit incentives which

Even the smallest requirement of a travel agent has been kept in mind while creating the system

entice the agent to book more and earn more with us," Narula added.

New integrations and payment flexibility

The relaunch also brings fresh integrations aimed at improving convenience and flexibility for Indian agents. "We are bringing in new payment gateway

platforms with multiple modes of payment — from credit cards to net banking to wallet and mobile payments. Every mode of payment has a benefit attached to it," Narula noted.

Rate parity and margin protection

A unified backend now ensures consistent pricing across all distribution platforms, helping agents protect their margins. Narula elaborated, "The new agent mid-office brings in a wonderful experience of managing bookings — whether it is booking finalisation, voucher issuance, or online payments, all aspects are well taken care of."



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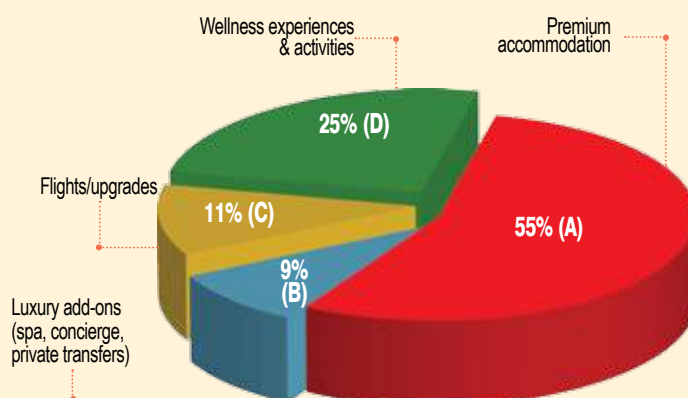
Clients willing to spend more on premium stays

Premium accommodation is the top choice for travellers willing to increase their budgets, reveals a poll conducted by **TRAVEL TALK**. The strong preference for premium accommodation highlights a growing demand for comfort, exclusivity, and memorable stays. Wellness experiences also show notable interest, reflecting travellers' focus on holistic, rejuvenating journeys. Meanwhile, flights and luxury add-ons remain lower priorities, suggesting clients are selective about extras.

For Travel Agents: Curating premium stays and wellness experiences can drive higher client satisfaction and loyalty. Agents who position themselves as experts in authentic,

high-quality expe-

periences will likely capture this trend. **For Hoteliers and Wellness Providers:** There is an opportunity to capitalise on travellers' willingness to invest in superior stays and wellness offerings, while creatively packaging add-ons to appeal to the discerning client.



TRAVEL NEWS

Tourism investments surge as Chhattisgarh enters 'speed of doing business' era: CM

India generates over 12 billion travel-related searches every year, reveals Google data

Andhra plans heritage tourism policy to preserve historic buildings, says Kandula Durgesh

Agencies urged to invest in AI as Asia leads with 77% adoption in China, India: Travelport

Noida International Airport set to be inaugurated on 30 October: KR Naidu

Major tourist destinations in J&K now open after security reviews: Omar Abdullah, Chief Minister

MoUs & launches @MoT's Tourism Day

On World Tourism Day 2025, leaders reflected on India's tourism journey, asking: How can we create world-class destinations while protecting nature? The focus was on collaboration, livelihoods, & responsible growth — making tourism not just about visits, but about meaningful experiences & sustainable impact.

Janice Alyosius

The World Tourism Day celebrations marked major strides for India's tourism sector with the signing of MoUs with OTT service provider Netflix, Atithi Foundation, and leading Online Travel Agencies (OTAs).

The day also witnessed PMIS launch for tourism project monitoring, release of the 66th India Tourism Data Compendium, and a MUDRA home-stay loan guide, enhancing growth, infrastructure, and global outreach.

Speaking at the celebrations, organised under the theme 'Tourism and Sustainable Transformation' in New Delhi, **Suman Billa**,



Gyan Bhushan, Suresh Gopi, Suman Bery, and Suman Billa at the lamp-lighting ceremony on World Tourism Day

Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, pointed out that domestic tourist visits have grown from 1.2 billion in 2014 to nearly 3 billion today and international arrivals reached 20 million, but the sector's contribution to GDP remains just 5 per cent compared to the glob-

al average of 10 per cent. "The task before us is to double tourism's contribution to the economy from 5 per cent to 10 per cent. We also need a strong campaign, which we will roll out in the next financial year, to kickstart inbound tourism and strengthen foreign exchange earnings," Billa said.

Suresh Gopi, Minister of State for Tourism, Petroleum and Natural Gas, said, "The future of tourism lies in sustainable transformation, where connectivity meets culture, technology empowers tradition, and every journey contributes to people, planet, and prosperity." In his vote of thanks, **Gyan Bhushan**,

Senior Economic Advisor, Ministry of Tourism, said, "Tourism must stand on the pillars of sustainability, innovation, and inclusion — strengthening livelihoods,

The day witnessed PMIS launch for tourism project monitoring and release of the 66th India Tourism Data Compendium

empowering communities, and positioning India as a global benchmark for responsible tourism."

PMML hosts roundtable

The World Tourism Day roundtable at PMML highlighted India's focus on positioning the state-of-the-art museum as a must-visit cultural landmark through strong industry collaboration.

Surbhi Sharma

On World Tourism Day, the Prime Ministers' Museum and Library (PMML), New Delhi, hosted a roundtable discussion to position itself as a premier cultural destination. **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary and Director General Tourism, Government of India, **Ashwani Lohani**, Director, PMML, along with leaders of national tourist associations and tour operators, attended the event.

It focused on collaborative strategies to boost cultural tourism and enhance visitor engagement, to establish PMML as a must-visit landmark in Delhi. Speaking to **Billa** said, "Although we have



Ashwani Lohani
Director
PMML

not actively promoted the PMML, it is already attracting significant visitors. The goal now is to position and market it as a destination where people can be inspired by India's history and the leadership of its Prime Ministers. One of the key steps forward is to build a strong connect with the tourism industry."

Lohani said, "We want to create awareness among Delhiites about this unique institution that showcases the lives and contributions of all 15 PMs of India. Our goal is to make this facility a must-visit attraction on every tourist's Delhi itinerary, for which we are undertaking massive outreach initiatives. The first step is showcasing PMML and ensuring it becomes part of curated travel itineraries."

"We are actively collaborating with the travel and trade fraternity. Their support is key to making PMML a prominent tourist destination. We also aim to position the complex as the finest centre for research in modern India," he added.

Mayfair enters north with 'Elixir'

Continuing with its focus on expansion, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts has made its foray into Uttarakhand. It will also soon launch its loyalty programme — for guests as well as travel agents.

Hazel Jain

Mayfair Hotels & Resorts is taking baby steps towards expanding its presence in the north and west of India. After Mayfair Manor Alibag, it has signed its first property in the north. The hotel brand has made its foray into Uttarakhand with a boutique property in Almora that will focus on wellness under its Elixir brand. This will be one of the new sub-brands of Mayfair under the new company.

Bjorn DeNiese, MD, Mayfair Elixir, says, "We are looking to expand our market to much beyond the east of India through the asset-light model. Mayfair has consolidated and is



Bjorn DeNiese
Managing Director
Mayfair Elixir

considered the brand leader in the east of the country. We are certainly looking to build on the legacy as we go further into other parts where we see potential. We currently have properties being managed in Goa, Guwahati, Pune, and Alibag. We are looking at pan-India expansion and looking at the larger format

hotels that fit our style at the moment."

Mayfair Elixir is the management company working on expanding the Mayfair brand. It will have its Mayfair Sanctuary in Bhubaneswar operational soon and Mayfair Paradeep commencing work as well.

UPCOMING PROPERTIES

- ❖ Mayfair Sanctuary, Bhubaneswar
- ❖ Mayfair Bay Resort, Paradeep
- ❖ Mayfair Shirdi
- ❖ Mayfair Varanasi

Dynamic pricing realigns tie-ups

Dynamic pricing has become the defining force in travel, bringing both opportunities and challenges for the trade. As hotels and airlines push for real-time rates, travel agents and intermediaries find themselves balancing unpredictability with client expectations. While suppliers see it as a tool for revenue optimisation, agents often face credibility concerns when prices shift between quote and confirmation. Industry leaders highlight a growing disconnect — suppliers increasingly act unilaterally, leaving the trade out of key pricing conversations. Yet, the consensus is clear: dynamic pricing is here to stay, and the way forward lies in collaboration and technology. From AI-driven insights and agile platforms that bring transparency to advisory-led strategies that convert complexity into client trust, stakeholders agree that the role of the travel consultant is evolving. No longer transactional, agents are becoming strategic partners — guiding customers through volatility and leveraging dynamic pricing into a competitive advantage rather than a constraint.



Abhishek Goyal
CEO & Executive Director
Aeroprim Group

“Integrating dynamic pricing tools and enabling real-time updates ensure that our partners always have accurate information. Technology enables transparency by giving real-time visibility of pricing and inventory. This **transparency minimises disruptions and allows for more effective collaboration**. Our partners have access to all the same data, in real time.”



Indiver Rastogi
President & Group Head – Global
Business Travel, Thomas Cook (India)

“Dynamic pricing today is shaped by multiple factors — seasonality, competitor pricing, distribution channels, PoS, occupancy, etc. Customers often perceive the price volatility as unfair. Our teams **counter unpredictability by negotiating fixed rates, securing LRA deals, leveraging relationships** for better offline pricing, and deploying rate shopping tools.”



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

“Dynamic pricing is now an integral part of our industry. **Rather than seeing it as a challenge to transparency, we view it as an opportunity to add value**. Travel partners rely on us not just for rates, but for expert guidance, smarter booking strategies, and access to the right inventory at the right time. This is where our expertise and technology bridge the gap.”



Rohit Arora
VP - North & Goa Operations and Head
of Leisure Sales, THE Park New Delhi

“We have been following dynamic pricing in our company for many years. Now, we have technology supporting us. **We can set the parameter in a competition, in case they are increasing or decreasing**. So, if my competition is going up by ₹2,000, I get an alert — would you like to adjust your rates? With a click, I can change rates across all distribution channels.”



Pradeep Shetty
Spokesperson, HRAWI &
Past President, FHRAI

“Dynamic pricing has become an indispensable strategy for optimising revenue and operational efficiency within the industry. **By enabling real-time adjustments it allows businesses to maximise profitability**. However, its effectiveness is dependent on implementation with transparency. A lack of clear communication can lead to customer confusion.”



SD Nandakumar
President & Country Head – Holidays
& Corporate Tours, SOTC Travel

“We view dynamic pricing not as a challenge, but as an enabler of modern retail travel. Given our scale, **dynamic pricing acts as a catalyst — fuelling market momentum and enhancing value delivery**. From transparency point, it reflects the digital reality of today's marketplace. Price fluctuations based on demand and supply are now widely understood.”



Pratik Shah
Proprietor
APS Destinations

“Packaging products with dynamically priced components is one of the toughest parts of my work. The **constant fluctuations make it difficult to secure costs, and even a small change can impact margins and profitability**. At the same time, clients expect clarity and consistency, so explaining why a package price has shifted can be challenging.”



Hussain Patel
Director
TripJack

“**Dynamic pricing can be an opportunity to respond faster to market shifts rather than be limited by static rates**. By bringing live rates and availability into a single, clear view, we help agents cut through the noise and build trust with their clients. We aggregate content from multiple sources, giving our users broader access to inventory and more competitive price options.”



Bethelhem Dibaba
Regional Director – India Sub
Continent, Ethiopian Airlines Mumbai

“Dynamic pricing has indeed become a necessary tool for efficiency and profitability in the industry. It **allows businesses to adapt to demand, maximise revenue, and improve customer engagement through personalisation**. However, if not implemented carefully with transparency, it can lead to negative customer reactions, price wars, and a perception of unfairness.”



Mahendra Vakharia
Managing Director
Pathfinders Holidays

“Dynamic pricing is a double-edged sword. It can create unpleasant situations as the rate at time of enquiry and at time of booking changes, and clients do not want to understand the effect. **Dynamic pricing definitely helps in inducing the client to be interested in the service**, but since many of them do not decide immediately, it defeats the purpose of the dynamic pricing.”



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

“Over the last few years, most agent partners ask for separate pricing for hotels and land services since most hotel bookings have now gone online, especially for destinations like Thailand and Singapore. **Land prices are not dynamic and have little variations. So, it does not make much of a difference to B2B companies**. However, we do face challenges.”



Pranav Kapadia
Founder & Director
Global Destinations

“Airlines and hotels often don't consult the trade when designing pricing strategies, making it harder for agents to sell effectively. In certain cases, dynamic pricing can work to our advantage — **allowing us to leverage higher commission structures to offer clients a superior product at a more competitive rate**, while still ensuring reasonable profitability.”

TAAI puts up grand show in Abu Dhabi

The 68th TAAI Convention and Exhibition was a spectacular showcase of Abu Dhabi's luxurious offerings and saw in attendance over 540 delegates, including senior stakeholders from all sectors of tourism and travel, as well as association members. The three-day convention was packed with inspiring sessions, impactful discussions, and enriching networking opportunities





ASTAR ACADEMY



An institute for the industry, by the industry, of the industry

For an industry built on human connection, traditional hospitality education has often fallen short by being overly theoretical. **Romie Dutt**, Executive Director, Aamby Valley City and Hotel Sahara Star, has come up with a transformative solution for this. A-Star Academy, India's only hotel school embedded within live five-star properties, is redefining the hospitality education.



TT Bureau

Hospitality is among the oldest professions known to humankind and one of the most human. From the earliest days when man hunted for survival, roasted meat over fire, and discovered that salt elevated taste, food has always been about more than sustenance. It has been about experience. Over centuries, this journey evolved from primitive cooking to elaborate feasts for kings and emperors, to the Michelin-starred dining of today, where skill, artistry, and presentation define excellence. At its core, hospitality has always been driven by people — their skill, their warmth, and their ability to create memorable experiences. And yet, hospitality education in India has too often remained theoretical,



Romie Dutt
Executive Director, Aamby
Valley City & Hotel Sahara Star

cal, leaving students under-prepared for an industry that demands practical expertise and human connection above all.

The visionary

This gap was acutely understood by **Romie Dutt**, Executive Director, Aamby Valley City and Hotel Sahara Star. Having led two of India's most iconic five-star properties, Dutt realised that the industry

needed graduates who could step in as professionals on day one — not as trainees still learning the basics.

He envisioned an academy that was for the industry, by the industry,



A-Star Academy combines the credibility of government-recognised degrees with unmatched industry immersion

and of the industry — where students would learn in live hotels, not just in classrooms. His belief



is clear: "The need of the hour is skill. If students are skill-oriented, opportunities will find them. But if they leave with only theory, their expectations from the industry will never match reality."

Real hotels. Real guests. Real learning

Thus was born A-Star Academy, India's only hotel school created within the very heart of hospitality — five-star hotels. With campuses at Hotel Sahara Star, Mumbai and Aamby Valley City, Lonavala, the Academy ensures that students learn in real kitchens, banquet halls, guest rooms, and restaurants from the very first day.

Preparing leaders, not just employees

The curriculum, co-designed by academic mentors and industry professionals, is constantly

refreshed to reflect today's realities. Beyond fundamentals, students are trained in:

- ❖ Contemporary recipes used in modern kitchens
- ❖ Hotel technology and software
- ❖ Financial acumen and business strategy
- ❖ Social media marketing and digital hospitality
- ❖ Grooming, leadership, and entrepreneurship

A-Star graduates are groomed to enter the industry with confidence, skill, and the entrepreneurial spirit to shape its future.

Backed by legacy

Academically partnered with Savitribai Phule Pune University, A-Star Academy combines the credibility of government-recognised degrees with unmatched industry immersion. Its programmes — from B.Sc. degrees in

Hospitality Studies and Culinary Arts to diploma and certificate courses — are designed to provide both knowledge and skill, giving students the tools to explore global opportunities.

A new chapter in hospitality education

With Romie Dutt's vision guiding it, A-Star Academy represents the evolution of hospitality education in India. It acknowledges the industry's most pressing need: graduates who are skilled, adaptable, and ready to lead. It is not



A-Star Academy acknowledges the industry's most pressing need: graduates who are skilled, adaptable, and ready to lead

merely an institute — it is a living, breathing ecosystem of hospitality, preparing the next generation to carry forward an industry that began with fire and salt and today aspires to the (Michelin) stars. Take your first steps towards becoming a star — or earning one. Incredible achievements both. 🌟



(L-R) Romie Dutt, Executive Director, Aamby Valley City & Hotel Sahara Star, Savitribai Phule Pune University's Vice Chancellor Prof (Dr) Suresh Gosavi and Pro Vice Chancellor Prof (Dr) Parag Kalkar

RDTM gives cultural boost to biz

The Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart 2025, jointly hosted by the Federation of Hospitality and Tourism of Rajasthan and the Department of Tourism, concluded successfully, with spotlight on women empowerment and cultural promotion. The event highlighted the state's rising leadership in hospitality through impactful B2B meetings and inspiring showcases.



Intelligent travel drives Indo-Russia ties

The OTOAI Convention in Russia left an indelible mark on the minds of the delegates who attended the event and the knowledge sessions at the convention were about more than just telling the attendees what to do to boost their business. They focused on elevating the membership, not just in terms of sharing knowledge on Russia, but also sharing best practices and knowing how to fill the gaps.



Nisha Verma

A panel discussion was held taking forward the convention's theme — Fast Forward Future — The Intelligent Travel — which saw dignitaries from all sectors of travel industry share their views. Moderated by **SanJeet**, Director, DDP Group, the discussion touched upon a number of issues and presented the offerings by Moscow City Tourism Committee for the trade, while stakeholders from the industry shared their product advantage and how they are catering to the trade. Aptly titled 'Connected Travel: Building Speed, Safety & Scale for the Intelligent Traveller', the panel saw a lot of engagement with the trade.



Panelists at the OTOAI Convention in Russia

Tech plays big role

SanJeet asked **Anastasia Popova**, Head of Business Tourism Development Department, Moscow City Tourism Committee, about their navigation tools and how effective they are in the complex city of Moscow. Starting by defining intelligent traveller, she said, "What

makes intelligent traveller different is the information and the level of preparation, as well as a desire to make it special. Moscow is one of the most developed metropolises, which pays a lot of attention to sharing information. While this information can be available on many platforms, what makes this

service special is personalisation. Response is a digital ecosystem in Moscow and Russia, which has personalisation at its core, and has transformed from being a travel planning service into a digital ecosystem.

"Apart from offering B2C services, it also offers

B2B services and uses AI to offer personalised information. One can find partners for their companies, including hotels, tour operators, and other service providers. You can use this platform to bring groups to Moscow. We have even created a partner service for MICE industry where one can

find many hotels using a filter. It is easy and convenient, making it the best service for travellers and travel companies."

India market

Claiming that the India market is the second largest market in terms of tourist flow for them, Popova revealed, "We see



that the growth is 40 per cent as compared to 2023 and 2024. To boost the numbers, we use many initiatives — business meetings, familiarisation trips, and participation in travel fares.

Contd. on page 18 ▶

'Outbound' opportunities for agents

India's outbound travel market is on the move, and it's only getting bigger. In the last financial year alone, Indians spent ₹2.7 lakh crore (US\$ 31.7 billion) on international travel. By 2034, that figure is expected to hit US\$ 55 billion. That is not just growth; it's a seismic shift in how Indians see the world, and opens up plenty of business opportunities for travel agents.



TT Bureau

India's outbound travel growth is not limited to metro cities anymore. Tier II and III cities are fuelling a fresh wave of demand, proving that global travel aspirations are now truly nationwide. The appetite for international holidays is stronger than ever. Indian travellers are venturing to short-haul favourites like Thailand, the UAE, Vietnam, and Indonesia, as well as long-haul classics, such as the USA and Europe. What is even more exciting is that this demand is no longer confined to metros — tier II and III cities are churning out a new wave of first-time and repeat global travellers.



Atendra Singh Yadav
AVP
TravelTriangle

The evolving role of agents

Digital discovery matters. Travellers research online, scroll through reels, and compare itineraries. But when it comes to execution, trust, and those last-



mile details, they still turn to agents. Today's holiday-maker is not just looking for flights and hotels; they want curated journeys, guidance on visas and forex, and the assurance that every detail is handled seamlessly. This is why the role of agents has evolved so dramatically. They are no longer just service providers; they are experience curators, advisors, and trusted partners in making international travel stress-free and memorable.

Marketplaces as growth enablers

At TravelTriangle, we do

not see ourselves as replacing agents. We see ourselves as amplifying them. By connecting high-intent travellers with verified agents, we are helping agents achieve conversion rates of 15–20 per cent, far beyond cold enquiries. That is the power of marketplaces: not competition, but collaboration.

Technology driving change in travel

AI-driven tools, real-time dashboards, and secure payment systems are transforming the way agents operate. The right

tech not only simplifies workflow; it gives agents the speed, personalisation, and confidence to win in today's competitive landscape.

Looking ahead

With airlines expanding global routes, IndiGo alone has announced 10 new international destinations, and younger Indians showing a strong appetite for premium and luxury experiences, the outbound story is only set to accelerate. This is the moment for agents to grow and innovate. Those who embrace digital tools, marketplaces, and niche offerings will be at the forefront of this travel revolution.

At TravelTriangle, our mission is clear: to keep agents at the very centre of India's global travel story.

Those who embrace digital tools, marketplaces, and niche offerings will be at the forefront of travel revolution

Because the world is waiting — and Indian travellers are ready. 🌏

(Advertorial)

Meaningful exchange, valuable insights

mélange 2025 brought together an eclectic mix of participants from the industry at NESCO Ground in Mumbai, setting new standards for the industry after two successful days of purposeful networking, business meetings, and collaborations. The presence of strong MICE players underlined Mélange’s position as a meaningful marketplace.



Mega milestones on the sea

From lavish cruise vacations in the Greek Isles to intimate lakeside celebrations within India, travellers are increasingly marking life's biggest milestones with experiential, memory-led journeys. Whether it's a 50th birthday aboard NCL or a private rooftop gala in Brussels, celebratory travel is booming, prioritising togetherness over traditional sightseeing.



Manoj Singh
Country Head – India
Norwegian Cruise Line

“We are witnessing a steady rise in Indian guests choosing cruise vacations to mark milestone occasions. They range between 40 and 50 guests, sometimes more depending on the occasion. **Most groups from India prefer 7-night or longer sailings.** The Greek Isles and Mediterranean continue to be in demand.”



Varun Godia
Manager – Product Development
Varun Worldwide Vacations

“We began receiving such requests in 2023 and have already executed several events since, with more in the pipeline. **Given our boutique size and strong focus on personalised luxury, we typically cap these groups at 30–40 guests.** The average length of stay is 3 to 4 nights, depending on the destina-



Vinay Victor Albuquerque
Director
Alcon Victor Group

“On average, **these groups range from 10 to 20 guests, depending on whether it is a small family celebration or a slightly larger gathering.** For bigger events, such as destination weddings or landmark anniversaries, group sizes can be much larger, ranging from 50 to 150 guests depending on the celebration.”



Ellona Pereira
General Manager
Aviareps India

“**There is a clear rise in travel for birthdays, anniversaries, baby showers, and even retirement trips.** Group sizes typically range from 4–8 for intimate celebrations to 8–20 for milestone events. We are also seeing strong participation from multi-generational families, solo women, ‘frolleagues’, and empty nesters.”



Sarika Bulsara Dalvi
Director of Sales, Hilton Garden Inn, Mumbai International Airport

“For us, such bookings are typically for small groups, usually ranging from 8 to 12 guests. Our location near the airport and city landmarks are popular with this segment. The average stay for these celebratory guests is around 1–2 nights. **Their average spend is notably higher than that of a standard leisure traveller.**”



SD Nandakumar
President & Country Head – Corporate Tours, SOTC Travel Limited

“We are witnessing a **shift among Indian travellers, who are increasingly choosing travel experiences over traditional celebrations** to mark life's significant milestones. Be it anniversaries, milestone birthdays, babymoons, graduations, or reunions, travellers are seeking meaningful ways to create lasting memories.”

Growth is good, but safety seals the deal

With its \$16.7 billion adventure tourism industry booming, India can be among the top 10 global adventure tourism destinations. But only if we put safety at the core of our growth strategy, says **Arshdeep Anand**, Vice President, ATOAI. She calls for certified operators and stronger regulations, along with a national safety framework.



Surbhi Sharma

India is emerging as a serious contender in the global adventure space with a market now valued at \$16.7 billion and growing at a CAGR of 17–18%. However, the growth in adventure tourism sector is outpacing the safety and infrastructure standards required for making the sector truly sustainable, say experts.

A market on the rise
According to **Arshdeep Anand**, Vice President, Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), over the past decade, the adventure tourism sector

in India has nearly doubled in value, thanks to shifting travel preferences, rising disposable incomes, and improved digital access. Adventure is no longer just for hardcore explorers, Gen Z and millennials are embracing it as a lifestyle.

“Land-based activities like trekking, camping, and rock climbing remain the bedrock, but the real surge is happening in water and air-based segments. Scuba diving in Andaman and Lakshadweep, whitewater rafting in Rishikesh, and paragliding in Bir-Billing attracted six-digit footfalls in 2024 alone,” said Anand. “Professional operators, in-



Arshdeep Anand
Vice President
ATOAI

ternational certifications like PADI, and better accessibility are contributing to this credibility. India has never looked more ready to take centre stage on the global adventure tourism map.”

The safety question
With this growth comes a sobering reality. Tragic cases like the paragliding accident in Himachal Pradesh which led to a tourist from Gujarat succumbing to his injuries, and the Manali zipline incident in which a young girl got seriously injured, have thrown into stark relief the risks posed by unregistered operators and substandard safety practices in India's adventure tourism sector. ATOAI has issued comprehensive safety guidelines and a Model Law for adventure tourism, but implementation is still voluntary across most states. “Making these guidelines mandatory na-

tionwide would significantly enhance safety standards.”

Professional operators, international certifications like PADI, and better accessibility are contributing to this credibility (of adventure sector)

What needs to change
“Expansion is not the problem — irresponsible expansion is. We need to pause

and prioritise strengthening existing destinations with robust safety infrastructure, certified operators, and regulated practices before opening new frontiers. Emergency response systems, public liability insurance, and certified equipment must be non-negotiable,” she concluded.



Exploring new horizons with GPS

The Chandigarh and Pune editions of Global Panorama Showcase (GPS) registered strong participation from the surrounding regions. While the Chandigarh event saw participation from 450 buyers and 35 exhibitors, the Pune showcase welcomed 650 buyers and 35 exhibitors. Next GPS stops are: Kolkata on 19–20 September and Kochi on 7–8 October.



Skål India becomes largest Skål nation

The Skål International India National Congress 2025, held recently in Mumbai, welcomed more than 200 fully paid delegates and featured distinguished speakers like Maneka Gandhi and Shashi Tharoor. The meeting served as a powerful platform to announce India’s new status as the largest Skål nation in the world by membership, surpassing the USA.



The much-anticipated Skål International India National Congress 2025 concluded in Mumbai recently. The three-day event welcomed a record-breaking participation of more than 200 delegates, from India and abroad, all paying full congress fees to be part of this gathering.

Distinguished personalities, including **Maneka Gandhi**, **Shashi Tharoor**, and **Subhash Ghai** spoke about the power of tourism. Finalists for the Skål International India National Congress 2026 were announced — Skål Jaipur, Skål Coimbatore, and Skål Jammu & Kashmir. Skål International India is also reaffirming its ambition to host both the



Dignitaries at the lamp-lighting ceremony of the Skål International India National Congress 2025

Skål International World Congress and the Skål International Asia Congress in the coming years.

Skål International India’s AGM for the 2024–2025 financial year was held on day one, preceded by the National Board meeting. The roadmap for Vision 2025–2030 was also shared, laying out strate-

gies to strengthen Skål’s footprint in India and deepen global engagement. “This congress is not just about numbers; it is about values, vision, and vitality,” said **Dr Mukesh Batra**, President, Skål International Mumbai South.

India as global leader
Sanjeev Mehra, President, Skål International India,

said, “Our board’s vision for 2025–2030 is rooted in collective growth: more clubs, stronger retention, deeper engagement, and a unified Indian presence on the world stage. This is the biggest congress in India in the last 91 years with more than 220 members in attendance. We are now looking forward to our 2026 congress. We will

likely be welcoming more than 500 to 750 members in our next congress.”

Skål International India is now the largest Skål country in the world in terms of membership, surpassing Skål USA. Four Indian clubs rank among the global top 10, underscoring the country’s dynamic contribution to international tourism networking. “We have the largest clubs in the world today, even beating USA. I look forward to every state having a minimum of one club,” Mehra added.

Ambitious plans were announced to expand Skål clubs into every Indian state and Union Territory. “India is now firmly at the centre of global Skål activity,” said

Shekhar Divadkar, President, Skål International Asia. “The future of Skål lies in Asia, and India is leading the

We have the largest clubs in the world today, even beating USA. I look forward to every state having a minimum of one club

way.” **NSN Mohan**, Deputy Vice President and Director Region 10, Skål International, praised the organisation for providing a collaborative ecosystem.”



1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

EVENT TALK

Published from : India Middle East

OCTOBER 2025

Date	Event	Time
15	Universal Tourism Exhibition 2025	9:00 am
15-17	ITB Asia	9:30 am
18	Utah Travel Expo 2025	3:00 pm
19-22	Global Incentive Summit 2025	9:00 am
21	Czech Travel Market	9:00 am
22-24	Tourism Innovation Summit 2025	9:30 am
25	Japan Expo 2025	10:00 am
30	Switzerland Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm

NOVEMBER 2025

3-5	Korea MICE Expo	10:00 am
4-6	World Travel Market London	10:00 am
7-8	Holiday Expo – Visakhapatnam	9:00 am
7-9	International Tourism & Travel Show – Canada	12:00 pm
17	JNTO Roadshow – Delhi	10:00 am
19	JNTO Roadshow – Bangalore	10:00 am
21	JNTO Roadshow – Mumbai	10:00 am
21	GBTA India Summit	8:30 am
25	Arabian Travel Awards	6:00 pm

WTM spotlights Gen Z careers

WTM London 2025 welcomes ITT Future You, exploring how evolving policies and Gen Z values are reshaping travel careers. Students will gain mentorship and discover new opportunities in sustainability, cultural connection, and innovative tourism roles.



ITT Future You is an initiative founded by the Institute of Travel and Tourism to inspire the next generation of aviation, travel, tourism, and hospitality professionals. It acts as a bridge between the education sector and industry, and has been developing a portfolio of collaborations focused on helping travel and tourism students find jobs, introduce them to mentors, and offer networking opportunities with peers and industry leaders.

The forum has taken place at WTM London every year since 2009. It attracts more than 500 students and graduates, making it one of the most attended sessions over the three days.



WTM London 2025 returns to ExCeL London from 4-6 November, with this year's Future You Forum taking place on the last day in the Orange Theatre, followed by a 30-minute student networking session. Under the theme 'Reimagining Travel in a Changing World', the forum will explore how evolving global policies and

shifting traveller behaviours are reshaping the industry. As Gen Z seeks careers that align with its values — particularly around sustainability, cultural connection, and social impact — it is redefining what it means to build a career in travel, pushing the industry to adapt and innovate.

The line-up for ITT Future You is currently being finalised, with a number of high-profile executives

already confirmed, including **Kate Irwin**, Managing Director – EMEA, Skift, as well as a panel of this year's TTG 30 Under 30: Tomorrow's Travel Leaders. **Claire Steiner**, Chair of Education and Training, Institute of Travel and Tourism, and Co-founder of ITT Future You, comments: "Our longstanding relationship with WTM London has helped ITT Future You to cement its role as the leading industry-led student initiative helping inspire and deliver more value for tourism students." **Chris Carter-Chapman**, Event Director, WTM London, said: "ITT Future You is an initiative that WTM is proud to support. We are looking forward to welcoming the best and brightest students and graduates."

'Ease of visa helping outbound travel'

Contd. from page 13

What makes a destination click?

When asked what makes one destination attract more tourists than another, **Rahim Aslam**, Founder & Consultant, OA GLOBE DMC, shared that accessibility does the trick for Indians. "Today, Russia has made it easy for Indian travellers in terms of visas and flexibility, which is the most important thing to choose a destination and sell. The country is the best example, offering fantastic flight connectivity and electronic visa. In fact, in terms of MICE, I can see it as one of the top 5 for the Indian market," he claimed.

Unified approach

Agreeing with Aslam's view, **Irshad Dadan**, Director, OneAbove, claimed that to cater to all types of clients, they are col-



Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego at the OTOAI Convention in Russia

laborating with a variety of stakeholders and creating a one-stop shop for the travel industry. "We are trying to connect with every possible vendor and put them through the APIs. All the hotels are there on the platform through the APIs and bed managers. However, we are also trying to connect all the suppliers, as well as putting

insurance on the platform. As a DMC, we are trying to include insurance from our side because until that is not a compulsion at a destination, people will not take it," he revealed.

Make insurance integral

Insurance is vital for travellers. Are agencies doing enough on this front? Commenting on the is-

sue, **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego, said, "We have got better than what we were 10-15 years ago. There is awareness now that it is an essential and revenue-generating product. But are we doing enough? I don't think so. The industry is always talking about the number of tickets, hotels, or visas. However, insurance

is not considered high priority. Unless it is a high priority for travel agency owners, they can't get every customer to buy an insurance product."

Unless it (travel insurance) is a high priority for travel agency owners, they can't get every customer to buy an insurance product

Working in tandem

OTOAI signed an MoU with VFS Global at the convention as well. This initiated structured dialogue with the Moscow City Tourism Committee and other Russian travel partners, laying the foundation for

strengthening long-term cooperation between the two nations and creating a structured framework for future collaborations. **Sharad Gowani**, Regional Head – West & South India, VFS Global, also addressed the panel and shared that while they work closely with the travel trade, things in their business depend on how the embassies function.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Intelligent travel theme drives trade dialogue
- Moscow showcases tech-driven traveller solutions
- E-visa boosts India-Russia tourist flow
- MoU with VFS strengthens industry cooperation

Madhya Pradesh

Where Every Journey Becomes a Celebration

Close your eyes and imagine a land where music echoes through medieval forts, where dancers move in the glow of moonlit temples, where rivers and forests become your companions, and where every season feels like a festival. That land is Madhya Pradesh, the heart of Incredible India, unfolding as a festival for the world. This festive season, Madhya Pradesh invites you not just to witness, but to belong, to step into a celebration where every note, every colour, every journey is yours to experience.

Where the Wild Beckons, Draped in Luxury

At **Gandhi Sagar Forest Retreat**, water greets you at sunrise, lapping softly against your tent as though composing its own welcome. Hours drift away in kayaking and sailing, until night gathers everyone around the bonfire, where tribal rhythms rise with the

sparks, and the wilderness itself feels like a stage.

By 5 October, the journey takes you to **Kuno Forest Retreat**, where after seven decades, cheetahs once again roam the wild grasslands. Safaris blur into

Gwalior awakens with the Tansen Samaroh, a gathering where maestros and disciples alike transform the city into a sanctum of sound

dreams here, and nights are spent under star-filled skies with gourmet feasts laid out like rituals.

At **Chanderi Eco Retreat** (25 October), the town itself becomes a festival.

Vintage cars glide past medieval gateways, hot-air balloons drift above ancient forts, and twilight stepwells shimmer with the glow of performances. Days are filled with workshops and bustling craft bazaars, while evenings unwind in music and dance, carrying with them the delicate grace of Chanderi's timeless weave and regal heritage.

Music that Transcends Time

In December, as winter descends, Gwalior awakens with the **Tansen Samaroh** (14–19 December), a gathering where



Ancient Temples, Moonlit Dances

When February arrives, Khajuraho becomes a temple of light and movement. As the **Khajuraho Dance Festival** (20–26 February) begins, dancers

endures, and with spirit that binds.

One Season, A Thousand Celebrations

The Madhya Pradesh Travel Festival is not a calendar; it is a tapestry. Each thread

❖ **Skydiving Festival, Ujjain (November)** — courage meets clouds as you leap from 10,000 feet with the sacred city below.

❖ **Jal Mahotsav, Hanwantiya (Dec–Jan)** — Asia's largest water carnival, where the backwaters of the Narmada come alive with houseboats, hot-air balloons, parasailing, speed-boating, and island camping, turning winter into a season of adventure and celebration.

❖ **Lokrang Festival, Bhopal (26–30 January)** — a vibrant celebration of folk and tribal arts, where music, dance, crafts, and cuisines from across India transform Bhopal into a living canvas of cultural diversity.



maestros and disciples alike transform the city into a sanctum of sound. It is more than music, it is memory. Sitting within the fort city, a raga unfurls into the night sky, each note rising not just from an instrument but from the very soul of the land.

perform against the backdrop of UNESCO-listed temples bathed in moonlight. The chime of anklets echoes the rhythm carved in stone centuries ago. It transcends performance, becoming instead a communion — with art that breathes, with history that

is a festival, a retreat, an encounter waiting for you.

Beyond the iconic retreats and flagship festivals lie treasures waiting to be discovered:

This is your season to be part of something extraordinary. Plan your journey with Madhya Pradesh Tourism. Explore more and book your experience at: www.mptourism.com

Madhya Pradesh awaits — where every journey is not travel, but a celebration.

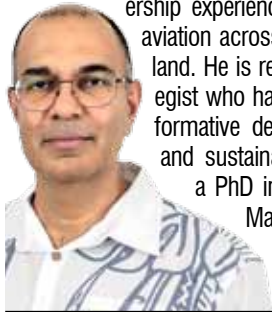


MOVEMENTS

THE TOURISM FIJI BOARD

Fiji

The Tourism Fiji Board has appointed **PARESH PANT** as the Chief Executive Officer. Pant brings over 25 years of leadership experience in tourism, hospitality, and aviation across Fiji, Australia, and New Zealand. He is recognised as a visionary strategist who has consistently delivered transformative destination marketing strategies and sustainable visitor growth. He holds a PhD in Tourism Strategy & Aviation Management from Griffith University, Australia, along with post-graduate qualifications.



CATHAY PACIFIC

India

Cathay Pacific has appointed **ABHIJIT ABHYANKAR** as the Regional Head of Customer Travel and Lifestyle. In his new role, Abhyankar will oversee customer travel experiences, passenger sales, marketing communications, and lifestyle marketing initiatives across India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa. With a career spanning over two decades in aviation and hospitality, he brings expertise in sales, marketing, and customer engagement to this role.



IHG HOTELS & RESORTS

India

IHG Hotels & Resorts has appointed **JAIDEEP DANG** as Head of Development, South West Asia. In his new role, Dang will be responsible for driving IHG's growth strategy across the region and will report directly to Sudeep Jain, Managing Director, South West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts. Dang brings with him over 22 years of diverse experience in the hospitality and real estate sectors. He joins IHG from JLL India, where he served as Managing Director – Hotels & Hospitality Group.



THALES

New Delhi

Thales has appointed **ANKUR KANAGLEKAR** as Vice President for India. In his role, Kanaglekar will oversee Thales' strategy and operations in India, focusing on scaling up industrial collaboration, reinforcing local innovation and engineering capabilities, and delivering advanced solutions across defence, aerospace, and cyber and digital markets. With over 25 years of experience in the aerospace and defence industry and consulting, he brings a wealth of expertise in driving strategic growth and fostering partnerships.



MBD GROUP

MBD Group has promoted **PARMEET SINGH NAYAR** from Vice President – Operations & General Manager – Hospitality to Executive Vice President – Hospitality Operations, in recognition of his visionary leadership and exceptional contributions. With over 35 years of distinguished experience across leading global brands, Nayar is widely respected for his strategic foresight, operational excellence, and people-first leadership. In his new role, he will drive the strategic growth and operational excellence of MBD Hospitality.



WELCOMHERITAGE CHEETAHGARH RESORT & SPA

Rajasthan

MANOJ KUMAR has been appointed as General Manager of Cheetahgarh Resort & Spa, Bera, a WelcomHeritage Resort. With over 14 years of distinguished leadership in India's premier hospitality sector, Kumar brings a wealth of experience in elevating guest experiences, enhancing operational excellence, and driving sustainable growth. He has worked with esteemed hospitality organisations, including JW Marriott Mumbai Sahar.



HILTON AND HILTON GARDEN INN BENGALURU EMBASSY MANYATA BUSINESS PARK

Bengaluru

Strengthening its leadership team, Hilton and Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park welcomes **SANJAY PANDITA** as the Hotel Manager. With over 20 years of hospitality experience, Pandita brings deep expertise in hotel operations, service excellence, and revenue growth to the role. In his new role, he will be responsible for driving operational excellence, ensuring profitability, and delivering exceptional guest experiences.



FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT KOLKATA

Kolkata

Fairfield by Marriott elevates **ABHISHEK MUKHERJEE** to the position of Director of Sales & Marketing at Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata. Mukherjee has been with the hotel since December 2022. His career in hospitality spans over 15 years, starting at The Zuri Hotels & Resorts and moving through well-known brands, such as Fortune Hotels, The Park, Oakwood, The Leela, Shangri-La, and Hyatt Regency Kolkata. In his new role, he will lead both sales and marketing efforts for Fairfield by Marriott Kolkata.



SUMMIT HOTELS & RESORTS

Gurugram

Summit Hotels & Resorts appoints **PRARIT AGGARWAL** as Chief Resorts Officer (CRO). With over 27 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Aggarwal brings deep expertise in resort management, large-scale operations, and people-first leadership. He began his career with ITC Hotels during multiple pre-openings and went on to lead operations at Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India, where he managed 18 resorts across Uttarakhand, West Bengal, the Northeast, and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.



SAYAJI HOTELS

India

Sayaji Hotels has elevated **SABA DHANANI** to the role of Corporate Head – Marketing & Communications. The move underscores the Group's commitment to strengthening its leadership team and driving brand transformation, revenue growth, and long-term stakeholder value. Dhanani will spearhead marketing initiatives in line with the Group's 2026 Brand Vision. In her new role, she will drive revenue-focused strategies through impactful campaigns, budget optimisation, and cross-functional alignment.



LE MÉRIDIEN MAHABALESHWAR RESORT & SPA Mahabaleshwar

Le Méridien Mahabaleshwar Resort & Spa has appointed **RESHMA GODBOLE** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. With over 20 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Godbole brings a strong track record of driving sales strategies, building market presence, and delivering business growth for leading luxury hotel brands. In her new role, she will spearhead the resort's sales and marketing initiatives, overseeing strategic partnerships, market expansion, and revenue growth.

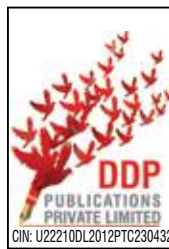


HYATT REGENCY TRIVANDRUM

Trivandrum

Hyatt Regency Trivandrum appoints **SANDEEP MOHAN** as Director of Food & Beverage. With close to two decades of rich hospitality experience, Mohan has held leadership roles across some of the world's most prestigious hotel brands, including Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, Jumeirah Hotels & Resorts, and Grand Hyatt Kochi. Known for his strong operational expertise and guest-centric approach, Mohan has consistently contributed to enhancing food and beverage offerings across luxury hospitality environments.



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GPS INITIATIVES



IndiGo is 'fit for purpose'

Pieter Elbers, CEO

From strengthening domestic connectivity in India to venturing deeper into Europe, Central Asia, and Africa, IndiGo is strategically aligning itself with India's growth story, shares **Pieter Elbers**, CEO, IndiGo, in an exclusive conversation with **TRAVELTALK**.



Nisha Verma

Emphasising that scale, technology, and globalisation will define IndiGo's next phase of growth, **Pieter Elbers**, CEO, IndiGo, said, "The airline will continue to transform from a dominant domestic carrier to a global player."

Deepening trade ties

For Elbers, engaging with trade is not a once-in-a-while exercise but a continuous relationship. Speaking on the sidelines of the TAAI Convention in Abu Dhabi, he said that such events play a unique role in reinforcing that bond. "While IndiGo's sales teams maintain close ties with agents across India daily, such forums allow the airline to share its vision, priorities, and future plans directly with the trade community."

Distribution channels

Despite the perception that airlines are not always pro-trade, Elbers highlights IndiGo's inclusive approach. "I never believe that these distribution channels are exclusive. It is the entire portfolio, because it is the customer who is deciding where to go. IndiGo distributes through direct online channels, OTAs,



and travel agents, ensuring customers have choice and flexibility. For the trade, IndiGo's vast network of 94 domestic destinations offers opportunities to grow their own businesses alongside the airline," he added.

Closest reach

In his presentation, Elbers mentioned that 90 per cent of the Indian population lives within 100 km of an IndiGo-served airport. "This reflects how IndiGo has transformed accessibility in tier II and tier III cities, fuelling tourism, creating jobs, and reducing reliance on metros. By doubling and tripling routes in cities like Ahmedabad, IndiGo is knitting the country closer together, making air travel more inclusive and affordable," he elaborated.

Beyond Europe

Elbers sees immense opportunities across geographies thanks to India's strategic location. "The Airbus A321XLR, due this year, will enable direct flights to cities like Athens and expand connectivity to Nairobi, Africa and then to China. By 2027, the induction of Airbus A350s will further extend IndiGo's reach to Australia, Japan, Korea, and beyond."

India's infra boom

With India's airport network expanding signifi-

cantly, Elbers underlined that the focus must now shift to world-class hubs. Delhi is already ranked among the world's top 10

For the trade, IndiGo's vast network of 94 domestic destinations offers opportunities to grow their own businesses

airports, but Elbers sees potential for Bengaluru and Hyderabad to emerge as international transfer hubs.

Product strategy

While questions keep cropping up about IndiGo competing with full-service carriers, the airline's product strategy is evolving, especially with the introduction of its Stretch class. Elbers stressed

that many so-called full-service airlines are changing their economy profile by reducing benefits like meals and baggage, while IndiGo focuses on punctuality, reliability, and flexibility. With Stretch, the airline is targeting corporate travellers and international passengers who value comfort at competitive prices. "I think our Stretch can compete with any full-service carrier."

Global expansion

Marking its 19th anniversary this year, IndiGo is on an international expansion spree. After launching flights to Manchester and Amsterdam, the airline is set to add connections to Heathrow, Copenhagen, and Athens.

Pieter Elbers
CEO, IndiGo

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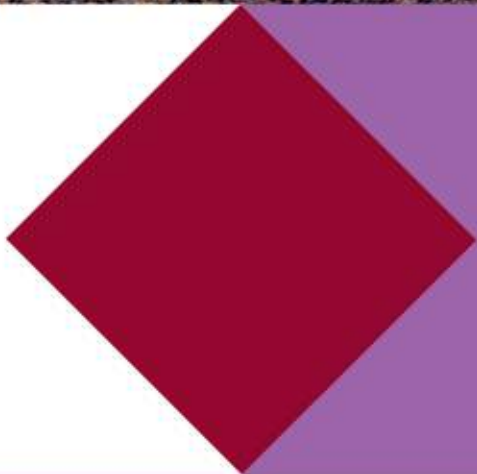


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