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SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY

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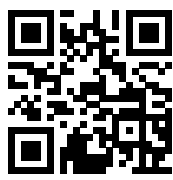
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Nikhil Jeet, Director, DDP Group, is 'PATA Face of the Future in Leadership'



Nikhil Jeet, Director, DDP Group, (second from right) has been recognised as the 'PATA Face of the Future in Leadership' in Bangkok. He pioneered COVID eLearn, training over 2,000 travel agents, and India's first digital travel conclaves. His initiatives evolved into sustainable digital ecosystems, fostering inclusivity while mentoring young professionals and supporting under-represented communities.

Ready to recognise industry icons

The most awaited event on the travel and tourism calendar, **India Travel Awards 2025** returns with even greater grandeur and prestige, bringing leading minds, visionaries and innovators under one roof.

TT Bureau

Scheduled to take place on 9 September 2025 at Le Meridien, New Delhi, the ceremony promises to be a memorable evening. For over a decade, the India Travel Awards have stood as a benchmark of credibility and recognition, spotlighting the contribution of both established and emerging talent within the tourism and hospitality fraternity.

The awards were originally conceptualised to acknowledge and reward excellence among stakeholders across the travel ecosystem. Over time, the initiative evolved into distinct regional editions, beginning with the South India Travel Awards, and has since expanded to become a truly national platform of recognition. This year, the India Travel Awards will unveil a new season of celebrations, reaffirming their role as a driving force for

growth and innovation in the sector.

The glittering ceremony honours outstanding players across multiple cate-

will feature a formal sit-down dinner and an intimate networking



gories, encompassing the vast spectrum of travel, tourism and hospitality. Winners are bestowed with the coveted 'Maya' — the golden trophy that has become a symbol of aspiration and achievement in the industry.

As always, the exclusive, invite-only black-tie gala

session for the winners, giving them a chance to engage with fellow achievers and regional leaders.

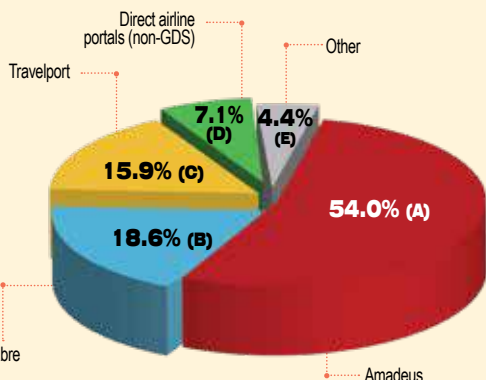
Amadeus 'most preferred' GDS

Amadeus is the most preferred Global Distribution System (GDS) for travel agents, reveals a poll conducted by **TRAVTALK**. The preference for 'direct airline portals' indicates a notable industry trend towards non-GDS booking channels.

For GDS Providers: Amadeus must defend its dominance. Travelport and Sabre need strategies to gain

share. All GDSs must devise ways to counter the threat of direct bookings.

For Airlines: A multi-channel distribution strategy is essential. While presence on Amadeus is critical, a direct connect strategy can be effective. **For Travel Agents:** While results show that using Amadeus provides access to the broadest set of trade partners, the smart agent would leverage direct portals to secure best deals.



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From 'Incredible' to 'Inevitable' India

Tourism's power extends beyond economics — it shapes perceptions, fuels jobs and builds India's soft power. At the FAITH Conclave 2025, leaders rallied around unity and resilience, envisioning a \$3 trillion economy and an 'Invincible India' where travel drives growth and elevates the nation globally. **Puneet Chhatwal**, Chairman, FAITH & MD and CEO, IHCL, shares more.



Janice Alyosius

For **Puneet Chhatwal**, Chairman, FAITH and MD and CEO, IHCL, the recently concluded FAITH Conclave was more than just another industry gathering. "Each conclave is a stepping stone towards something bigger and larger," he said, stressing the significance of uniting 10 major associations from across tourism under one roof.

According to Chhatwal, the conclave's biggest strength lay in aligning these associations on three to five common themes, while also drawing the attention of ministries



Puneet Chhatwal
Chairman, FAITH &
MD and CEO, IHCL

beyond tourism. "Getting the attention of External Affairs, Defence (ministries) and many others is very fortunate and a blessing for this conclave. I remain extremely optimistic that conclaves like this, espe-

cially this one with FAITH, will carve out a new future for tourism, hospitality and aviation in India."

Chhatwal reflected on how the sector's priorities had shifted in the past nine months, shaped by unforeseen global and domestic challenges. "When we first started, the needs and wants of the sector were very different. Since then, we have had the unfortunate incident on 22 April, followed by Operation Sindoor, an airline accident and the Middle East conflict. All this is not really helpful for tourism."

Despite these headwinds, he said, India's strength

lies in resilience. "What differentiates India and Indians from the rest of the world is an invincible spir-

What differentiates India and Indians from rest of the world is an invincible spirit. That is how the theme 'Invincible India' came in

it. That is how the theme 'Invincible India' came in. It is the journey of Incred-

ible India into Inevitable India that is now beginning to unfold."

According to Chhatwal, the real work begins after the conference. With 10 organisations under the FAITH umbrella, the focus is now on aligning their inputs, integrating external feedback from stakeholders, such as the External Affairs Minister, airline CEOs and the Deputy Chief of Army Staff, and presenting a consolidated roadmap to policymakers.

"The starting point is not the follow-up — it is the formulation of the ask. What can we do, how can we contribute, and what all

needs to get done to get to where we want to go."

FAITH DECISION

The FAITH Conclave 2025 will produce a formal set of recommendations urging the government to grant tourism infrastructure status, extend industry status to all states and strengthen global marketing efforts. The proposals will be sent directly to the PM as part of a push to make tourism a national priority.

TAAI to add travel mart to 68th convention

The 68th Annual Convention of TAAI, to be held in Abu Dhabi in September, signals more than a return to the destination — it reflects how the UAE's capital is shaping global tourism narratives. The launch of the TAAI Travel Mart will transform the event into a platform where plans turn into action and conversations lead to business conversion.



Janice Alyosius

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) will organise its 68th Annual Convention and Exhibition in Abu Dhabi from 17–19 September 2025, marking a return to the destination after nine years. Announcing the event, **Sunil Kumar**, President, TAAI, said, "I'm happy to announce that we will be going back. Abu Dhabi is a destination that keeps reinventing itself — every visit offers something new and inspiring."

The convention will be held at the Grand Hyatt Emirates Pearl, where delegates will also attend business sessions and the two-day TAAI Travel Mart.



Anurag Agarwal, Rajan Sehgal, Nikhil Jeet and Sunil Kumar

For the first time, TAAI will host a dedicated B2B platform where members can engage directly with sellers. This is a shift from earlier conventions, where the focus was largely on discussions and networking. The exhibition adds

a structured business component. Held under the theme 'Business with Goodness', the convention will unite India's travel trade to explore growth, strike commercial deals and strengthen ties — making the convention

more trade-driven. Kumar said, "The theme reflects our shared vision of building meaningful partnerships rooted in trust, purpose and progress." Delegates will also experience Abu Dhabi's cultural and spiritual landmarks.



Abdulla Yousuf, Director — International Operations, DCT Abu Dhabi, said, "India continues to be a priority market for us, not only in terms of visitor volume but also in long-term strategic collaboration. We are honoured to welcome TAAI's esteemed members to Abu Dhabi and look forward to showcasing our destination's remarkable evolution across world-class cultural icons, family attractions, luxury, adventure and business travel offerings."

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

Grand Opening Ceremony – 17 September, followed by a welcome dinner with live entertainment

Plenary Sessions – 18 & 19 September; discussions on tourism innovation, collaboration and sector growth

TAAI Business Buzz (B2B sessions) – networking and commercial engagement between exhibitors and delegates



From wins to what's next

August gave us reasons to celebrate at DDP Group. Winning the AIM Award for our campaign with VisitBritain and seeing our director recognised as PATA's Face of the Future in Leadership were proud moments. More importantly, they are reminders that innovation speaks louder than routine, and that fresh ideas have the power to move the industry forward. With our own India Travel Awards around the corner, we are excited to honour the stalwarts whose work continues to inspire us all.

That spirit of reinvention is exactly what defines the current travel and tourism landscape. The cover feature in this issue puts the spotlight on the outbound market, where Indian travellers are rewriting the rules of engagement. No longer content with just volume, they are demanding curated experiences, deeper personalisation and meaningful value for their spend. For the trade, that means agility, creativity and differentiation are more critical than ever.

Meanwhile, domestic tourism is proving its resilience by uncovering new frontiers — regional cities, hidden escapes and short-break destinations are stepping confidently onto the stage, aided by better connectivity and infrastructure. Aviation growth, too, is expanding opportunities, though capacity, pricing and sustainability remain challenges that call for strategy, not just expansion. Add to that the role of technology in transforming every step of the traveller's journey, and it's clear that the industry is entering a phase where efficiency and innovation go hand in hand.

The message is clear: growth is not the challenge anymore — direction is. As the trade gears up for the next season, collaboration will be the true game changer. It is time for us to move beyond silos, think bigger and deliver smarter. Awards and recognition are milestones, but the real reward will be an industry that leads with vision, adapts with speed and grows with purpose.

Future consumer habits for discerning travellers

Curious about what shapes the future of travel? Mastercard's Economics Institute provides crucial insights into global spending trends, offering a glimpse into how traveller preferences are evolving and what 2026 travellers can expect.



The future of travel is all about purpose-driven experiences, value-led choices and seamless digital journeys, according to Mastercard's 2026 Travel Forecast.

Experiential travel: Beyond sightseeing

The long-standing trend of prioritising experiences over material goods is set to reach new heights by 2026. Travellers are no longer just booking trips; they are investing in memorable, transformative experiences.

Wellness Retreats & Self-Care Journeys: Expect a surge in demand for wellness tourism, from serene eco-lodges to immersive

Adventure travel to majestic national parks and wilderness areas will continue to attract thrill-seekers and nature lovers

meditation retreats. Travellers will prioritise trips that enhance physical and mental well-being, even exploring 'sleep tourism' for ultimate relaxation.

Adventure & Wilderness Escapes: The allure of untouched nature remains strong. Adventure travel to majestic national parks and wilderness areas (think Scandinavia, Namibia, Canada and Argentina) will continue to attract thrill-seekers and nature lovers.

Global Sporting Events: Major sports tourism



events will act as powerful magnets, driving significant spending as ardent fans globe-trot to support their teams and witness iconic competitions.

Culinary Explorations: Food will remain a cornerstone of travel. Foodie travellers in 2026 will seek out unique local dining experiences and immersive culinary adventures, moving beyond typical tourist traps.

Bucket List Dreams: The desire to fulfill lifelong travel dreams will remain a key motivator, pushing consumers towards those once-in-a-lifetime travel experiences.

Value & purpose: Smart choices Economic realities mean travellers are becoming increasingly shrewd, seeking value without compromising on quality or purpose.

Exchange Rate Influence: Currency fluctuations will significantly impact destination choices, particularly for travellers from Asia. Destinations offering favourable exchange rates (like Japan recently) will see spikes in popularity, highlighting the importance of value.

Affordable Alternatives: The pursuit of both unique

experiences and affordability will lead to the rise of 'travel twins' — lesser-known, budget-friendly destinations gaining traction as alternatives to popular, more expensive spots.

Authentic Local Immersion: Travellers are increasingly focused on supporting local economies and experiencing genuine culture. This means a preference for local businesses, authentic tours and community-

The pursuit of both unique experiences and affordability will lead to the rise of 'travel twins' — lesser-known, budget-friendly destinations

based tourism, fostering a deeper connection with the destination.

Biz travel reimaged: The 'bleisure' boom The frequency of traditional business trips may be below pre-pandemic levels, their nature is changing.

Extended Business Trips: Expect business travel-

lers to prolong their stays, blending work with leisure. This 'bleisure travel' trend allows individuals to maximise their time, exploring the destination beyond their work commitments.

Digital journey: Seamless & secure The expectation for a fully digitised and friction-free travel will be non-negotiable for 2026 travellers.

Integrated Travel Apps: Mastercard's collaboration with tourism boards (like Tourism Malaysia for Visit Malaysia 2026) highlights the move towards one-stop travel apps. These apps will offer personalised content, itinerary planning, seamless bookings and location-based offers, streamlining the entire journey.

Universal Digital Payments: The ability for all merchants, especially local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to accept diverse digital payments (e-wallets, QR codes, globally issued cards) will be critical.

Advanced Fraud Prevention: With travel fraud a growing concern, secure payment solutions and AI-driven fraud detection systems will be paramount, ensuring travellers' peace of mind. 📶

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TRAVEL NEWS

Odisha plans new conservation policy to bring **3,000 heritage monuments** back to life: Deputy CM

Tier II, III cities and pilgrimage centres to drive hotel growth: CEO, Residency Group of Hotels

Foreign trips to rise from 40 to 100 million in coming years: Co-Founder, Pickyourtrail

Rationalise tourism GST to aid India's global competitiveness: FHRAI urges FM

Finland-India tourism workshop 2025 showcases unique experiences for Indian luxury travellers

India & China to resume direct flight connectivity, update air services agreement

'Tourism connects more than diplomacy'

S Jaishankar, MEA, GoI, addressing the FAITH Conclave, struck a chord with the industry when he said, 'Even more than diplomacy, it is actually tourism that connects any nation to the world.' Coming from India's top diplomat, this was a reminder that the sector carries immense responsibility.

Janice Alysius

Addressing the audience at the FAITH Conclave recently, S Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India, said tourism does not merely bring visitors into a country but actually shapes its identity in the eyes of the world. "It not only shapes an understanding of other countries for us, but it actually determines our image in their eyes," he pointed out, adding that the Prime Minister has repeatedly urged the government to measure foreign relationships on the basis of the "three Ts — tourism, trade and technology." That framing elevates tourism into a core part of India's international strategy.



S Jaishankar
Minister of External Affairs
Government of India

Jaishankar then highlighted how India has been steadily enriching its global narrative by expanding its presence on the UNESCO's World Heritage List. "Almost every year, there are Indian additions," he noted, citing the recent recognition of the Maratha Military Landscapes and the

Maidams of Assam. For the industry, this means fresh storytelling opportunities and new reasons to draw travellers in.

What particularly stood out was his acknowledgment of the power of social media. "These armies of creative talent of influencers and vloggers, they have a field day whenever they come here," he said, pointing to the recent Wave Summit in Mumbai as an example of how digital creators are amplifying India's image. "Social media itself has become a very powerful force to promote tourism. And I know that you are all seeking to harness that energy to your advantage." For a sector still catching up with the digital age, this was a clear nudge.

Equally important was his emphasis on wellness and medical travel. "The mainstreaming of Ayush tradi-

Tourism not only shapes an understanding of other countries for us, but it actually determines our image in their eyes

tional practices, the promotion of the International Day of Yoga, the launch of Mission LIFE or even the popularisation of millets have all contributed to the

goal of promoting tourism and hospitality," he said. The government's 'Heal in India' campaign is fast becoming a global mantra. "We see that reflected in the growing number of medical tourists to India." Closing on a philosophical note, Jaishankar tied tourism to India's civilisational ethos. "Our approach has long been driven by Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and Atithi Devo Bhava," he said.



'Incredible India needs over \$2 bn push'

India's tourism sector has a once-in-a-generation chance to become the nation's growth engine. **Amitabh Kant**, former G20 Sherpa, says that the roadmap calls for a global campaign and private-sector-led tourism boards. By targeting high-value travellers, tourism can be positioned to deliver jobs, economic impact and stronger national brand power.

TT Bureau

Speaking at the FAITH Conclave 2025, **Amitabh Kant**, former G20 Sherpa and architect of the iconic 'Incredible India' campaign, laid out a blueprint that places tourism at the heart of India's growth story. He urged the travel and hospitality industry to seize what he called a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to reposition India on the world tourism map.

Central to Kant's vision is a call for the government to allocate ₹20,000 crore (\$2.26 billion) for a high-impact global tourism campaign. "This is the



Amitabh Kant
Former G20 Sherpa

minimum required to penetrate key source markets and re-launch Incredible India with fresh energy," he said. "A country the size of India cannot have a tourism budget of just a few hundred crore. ₹20,000

crore is nothing compared to the returns this sector can generate. With the right campaign, India can attract high-value travellers who stay longer, spend more and experience the depth of our culture, heritage and hospitality."

Kant believes the focus must shift away from chasing numbers alone. Instead, India should target premium visitors seeking authentic, experiential travel. "Don't go for garbage tourism. Aim for the high-value traveller who spends 20 days across India and truly experiences what we have to offer." In his speech, Kant listed three critical reforms besides

marketing — rationalisation of GST rates, major urban renewal and the creation of private-sector-led

If India wants to compensate for the tariff... make your tourism grow. It will more than compensate for the US tariff

tourism boards. He urged state governments to treat tourism as a priority sector

and build strong state-level brands under the umbrella of Incredible India. On GST, he asserted that tax simplification is overdue. "We should use this opportunity to make our GST very simple, just two slabs. We should use this opportunity to simplify our personal tax," he said, adding that sectors like tourism, which have long struggled with multiple slabs and higher tax rates on hotels, would directly benefit from such reform, boosting India's attractiveness as a destination.

"Every state must see tourism as a jobs strategy. Kerala and Rajasthan have shown what is possible."

He also called for greater private sector involvement, arguing that government must exit hotel operations and allow entrepreneurs to lead. "From arrival to departure, the tourism experience should be private sector driven. Government should focus on facilitation, not running hotels," he suggested. On the looming US tariffs, Kant reframed the crisis as an opportunity.

"There is no other sector to beat Trumpian tariff than travel and tourism. If India wants to compensate for the tariff... make your tourism grow. It will more than compensate for the US tariff," he said.

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Launched last year, 'The Ramayana Trail' takes you to 20 significant locations in Sri Lanka, each deeply woven into the Ramayana story. This experience will immerse you in the places where Lord Rama, Sita, and Hanuman's adventures unfolded, set against the lush backdrop of Sri Lanka.



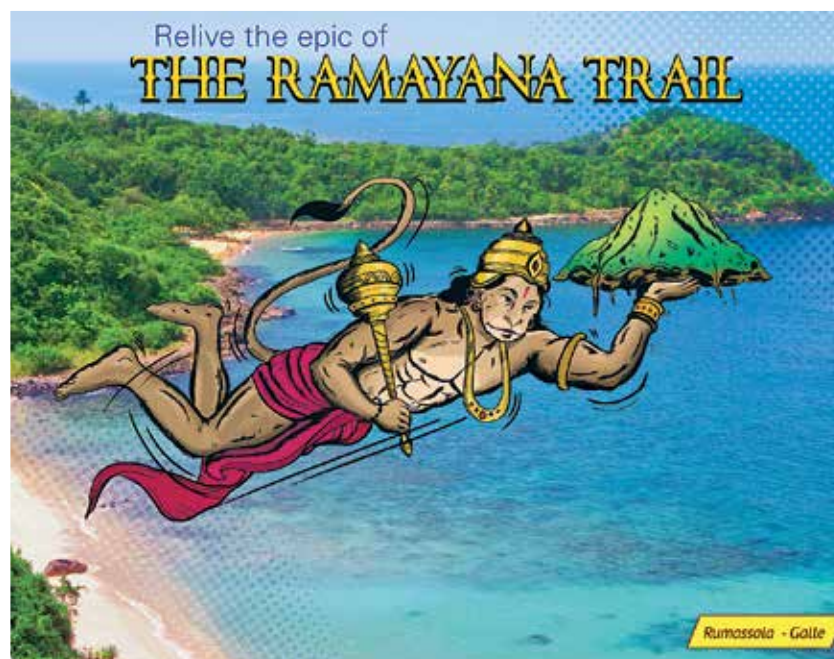
Saminda Perera
Head of Marketing
SriLankan Airlines

Visit Seetha Amman Temple, where Sita is said to have prayed during her captivity, and stand in awe

calling to the discerning travellers of India. This brings out the undertones of ancient grandeur and

a prime tourism source market for Sri Lanka."

Fawzan Fareid, Regional Manager India, Bangladesh & Nepal, SriLankan Airlines, said, "We currently connect approximately 90 flights a week to Sri Lanka out of 9 Indian cities, and over the years, we have seen a significant increase in leisure-travellers into Sri Lanka who are first-timers, as well as repeat visitors. Having launched the campaign late last year, it is heartening to see many Indian travellers embarking on this journey of spirituality and discovery."



at Rumassala Hill, where a piece of the Himalayas is believed to have landed, dropped by Hanuman. Every stop is a connection to your spiritual heritage, bringing the stories of the Ramayana alive.

Saminda Perera, Head of Marketing, SriLankan Airlines, said, "Ramayana Trail with SriLankan Airlines, is our quintessential

allure of the epic in a visual dialect that appeals to travellers of all ages, and with varied interests. We, at SriLankan Airlines, feel honoured to have the opportunity to retell this well-loved epic, and this endeavour symbolically reinforces our role as a prime connector between the two countries, where India is not only our single largest market, but is also

Ever since its launch, the campaign has been very well received by the travellers, the travel trade fraternity and the creative industry alike, with many accolades already under its belt. On social media platforms, it has recorded over 83 million views so far.

Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority statistics show the cumulative tourist arrivals from January to July 2025 under-

scoring India's dominant position as Sri Lanka's primary source market, contributing 279,122 arrivals, a substantial 23.7



Ramayana Trail with SriLankan Airlines is our quintessential calling to the discerning travellers of India

son. The transition from the comic panel to real-life location is emphatically portrayed using panoramic shots panning in, to present a closer look to the viewer—with every frame revealing more the inherent scenic beauty of the site.

This is a celebration of the fabled air travel between the two countries, recorded in the epic and retold over millennia, and that if anything has stood the test of time, it is not only the story, the location, but the air ties, now serving the purpose to fulfil a pilgrimage, satisfying a hunger for discovery and comfort of rediscovery.

per cent increase compared to the same period in 2024 (225,641). In the month of July alone, out of the total arrivals from India, 28.4 per cent has travelled for religious/spiritual purposes.

The Ramayana Trail video unfolds the fundamental human fascination of storytelling, where a well-loved, widely told story is brought back to life, in its original form—a story narrated by a grandmother to her grand-

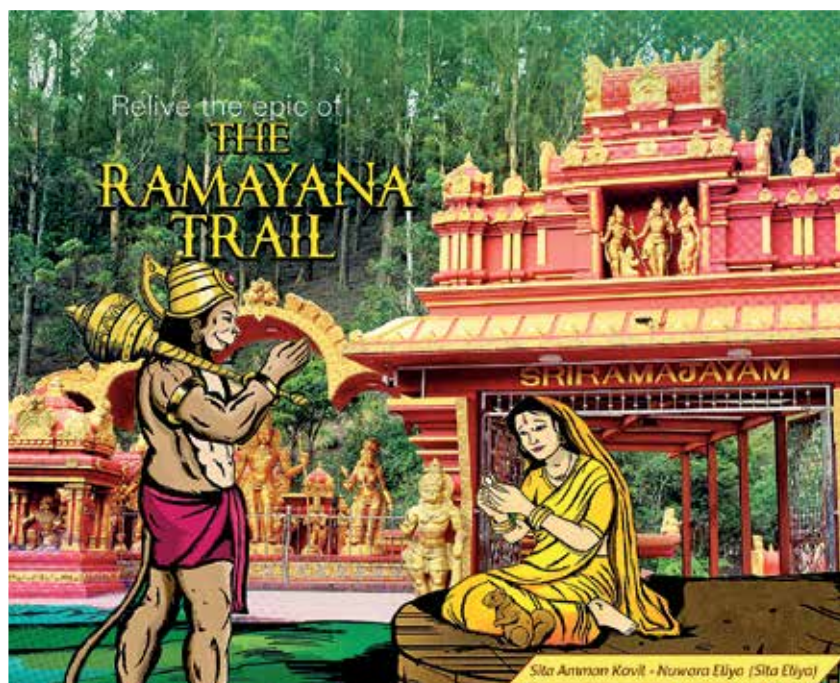
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pilgrimage not only spiritually fulfilling but convenient and stress-free. SriLankan Airlines offers convenient flight schedules from many cities across India, making it an accessible and hassle-free journey.

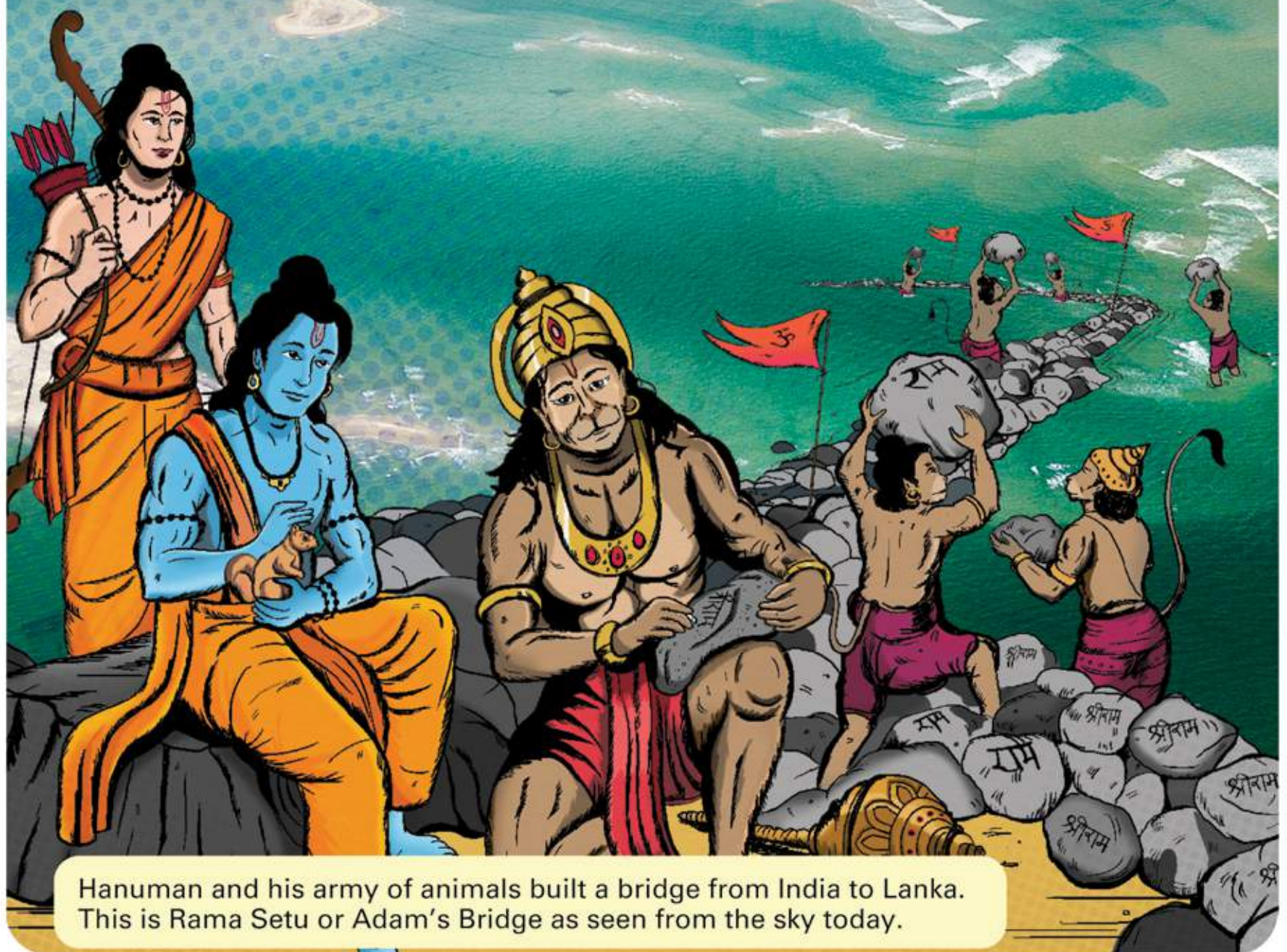
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More Indians Oz bound in 2025

The latest edition of Australia Marketplace India unfolded in Jaipur with the energy of a reunion and the promise of deeper opportunities. Described by Tourism Australia as a 'festival of Australia in India', the three-night, four-day event brought together over 80 Australian sellers and over 100 handpicked Indian buyers, reaffirming the destination's commitment to the Indian market.



Nisha Verma

India's growth story for Australia continues to impress. "We continue to be the fastest growing inbound market for Tourism Australia. Pre-COVID we were the seventh largest market, today we are the fifth," said **Nishant Kashikar**, Country Manager — India & Gulf, Tourism Australia.

In an exclusive presentation, it was highlighted that arrivals from India had crossed 450,000 in the year ending May 2025, marking a 10 per cent growth over the previous year. More importantly, Indian tourists are staying longer — con-

tributing 29 million nights, a 21 per cent jump — and spending more, with expenditure rising 14 per cent to AUD2.7 billion.

Connectivity is key

Stating that connectivity remains central to sustain this growth, Kashikar noted, "Aviation becomes a critical part of our growth story, and we can only achieve incremental growth out of India due to incremental aviation capacity."

With direct services from Qantas and Air India, alongside one-stop options through Singapore, Malaysia and other destinations, the access to Australia has



Jane Phillips, Nishant Kashikar and Jennifer Doig

been smoother. Highlighting the visa process, he said that ease of entry is equally critical. "Australia's visitor visa process is truly best in class. No interviews, no biometrics, no standing in long queues — the entire process is digitised," said Kashikar. He added that

multiple-entry visas of three to five years are encouraging repeat visits.

Beyond the icons

While Sydney and Melbourne remain big draws, Tourism Australia is consciously pushing dispersal. All eight

states and territories were represented at the Jaipur event for the first time, showcasing regions like Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia. "We have seen very high-value bookings," he revealed.

Jane Phillips, General Manager — Distribution Development & Partnerships, Tourism Australia, underlined the depth of experiences. "Australia can cater to everyone's passion points — from coast and adventure to food, wine and indigenous culture."

Sports and stories

Sports has remained a

powerful hook for numbers going to Australia from India. The upcoming cricket series is expected to draw thousands of Indian fans. Celebrity advocacy also plays its part. "Advocacy plays a significant role in driving people-to-people links," said **Jennifer Doig**, Regional General Manager — South and Southeast Asia, Tourism Australia.

Future in focus

Australia is repositioning itself for India market. "There is no other market that offers as much opportunity or potential at this point of time than India," said Kashikar. 🇮🇳

How industry woos repeat visitors

Repeat travel is about revisiting a destination with fresh experiences. Industry experts say personalisation and authentic storytelling make travellers return. However, success comes when hotels, tour operators and tourism boards deliver memorable moments that inspire guests to explore again. Travel agents play a key role in selling the same destination again to a client by curating new experiences.



Himanshu Patil
President, OTOAI &
Director, Kesari Tours

“If you want to sell a destination to the same traveller again, the key is always what you offered during the first visit. **When it comes to the second time, you must create value by presenting something new and different.** The country may remain the same, but the experiences and offerings should change. Travellers love to explore new offerings.”



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Managing Director
Jagsons Travels

“We believe repeat travel thrives on personalisation and creativity. For second visits, we remind clients of their earlier highlights while showcasing new experiences. **Our message is simple, “return as an insider.” Loyalty programmes today must go beyond points,** offering authentic experiences crafted with local partners.”



Bobby KS Sawhney
General Secretary
ITTA

“For promoting repeat travel, the key lies in improvisation and differentiation. At ITTA, **we believe in understanding a client's mindset and then proposing unique experiences,** such as heritage stays, village life, wellness retreats. Loyalty programmes alone may not drive returns. Instead, curated experiences create fresh appeal.”



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

“When selling a destination to the same traveller again, **a lot depends on feedback from their first visit, as this helps us recommend what they might like to explore further.** Short itineraries, like 6–7 nights in Turkey or Egypt, are rarely enough, so we highlight additional experiences. Pricing is not a major issue, except when clients seek enhanced experiences.”



Pranav Kapadia
Founder and Director
Global Destinations

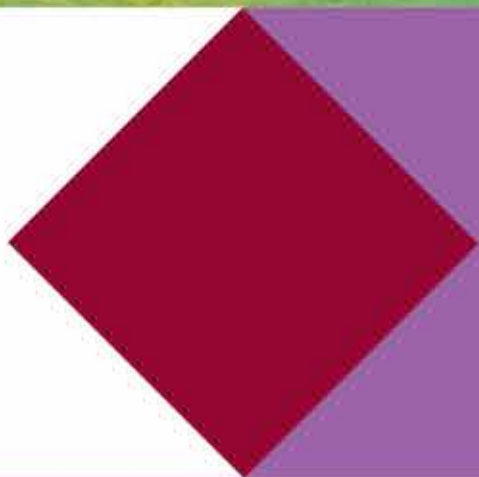
“For repeat travellers, the narrative has to evolve. That is where we work with our partners to **shift the messaging from “explore” to “rediscover”, showcasing hidden gems, seasonal experiences or thematic journeys.** A good example is Japan. While first-time visitors travel to Tokyo and Osaka, we also highlight Sapporo's winter fests for repeat travellers.”



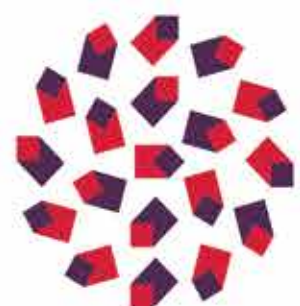
Tejbir Singh Anand
Co-Founder & MD
Holiday Moods Adventures

“The key is showing travellers that even familiar destinations can feel brand new. **Our approach is to showcase the same destination in new ways, encouraging travellers to return again and again.** Most visitors only see the capitals — Stockholm, Oslo, Helsinki — yet there are unexplored regions.”

Contd. on page 22 ▶



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IATO launches Responsible Tourism

At this year's IATO Annual Convention, conversations went far beyond policy — they reflected the pulse of Indian tourism today. IATO also launched the Responsible Tourism Mission 2027, moving the industry from talk to measurable action. Keeping up the momentum, the 41st IATO Annual Convention heads to Visakhapatnam (Vizag) in August–September 2026.



Mission 2027; next convention in Vizag





puts up great India show

TravelBullz marked its 15th Foundation Day with a three-city roadshow in India this year. Talking about the company's performance thus far and plans for the future, **KD Singh**, Founder & President, TravelBullz, said that their overall global hotel business has grown 400% over the last three years. The company will be clocking \$55 million worth of global hotel sales this year.



Surbhi Sharma

The second edition of TravelBullz' Great India Roadshow 2025 successfully concluded in Delhi recently after covering Kolkata, Ludhiana and a special stop in Amritsar. The roadshow aimed to showcase both new and existing products — ranging from hotels to attractions while updating partners on renovations, upgrades and fresh offerings.

Insights on India market

KD Singh, Founder & President, TravelBullz, said that the unique element of the event was its focus on showcasing the diversity of India's travel



KD Singh
Founder & President
TravelBullz

markets to international exhibitors. Travel agents from across Eastern India, Punjab and Delhi NCR were highlighted as distinct buyer segments.

Strengthening core portfolio

The roadshow coincided

with the company's 15th Foundation Day. "Known as a market leader for Thailand, we are now aggressively expanding our portfolio," revealed Singh. In the roadshow, the spotlight was on three key destinations — Thailand, Singapore and the grand launch of Destination Dubai. "India has seen strong momentum with over 1,000 contracted hotels, while Singapore remains one of the company's most reliable zero-error markets. Dubai, relaunched during the roadshow, was promoted with a unique incentive: the first 1,000 travellers booking a full package will receive a complimentary stretch limo ride on Sheikh Zayed Road culminating in a Burj Khalifa experience."

Global hotel business

The company also emphasised the rapid growth of its global hotel stack, now

Dubai was promoted with a unique incentive: the first 1,000 travellers booking a full package will receive a stretch limo ride

featuring more than one million properties worldwide. Partnerships with global chains like Marriott and regional groups, such

as Anantara, Onyx and Sentara have strengthened both static and dynamic offerings. The global hotel business has grown 400% over the past three years, with projected sales of \$55 million this year.

Future roadmap & expansion plans

Looking ahead, the firm plans to add Bali, Vietnam, New Zealand and Australia to its portfolio, alongside a return to Hong Kong and Macau by the year-end.

Rising demand from tier II & III cities

Luxury and experiential travel remain central to the company's growth strategy. Singh highlighted that luxury demand is no longer limited to metros

but is growing strongly in tier II and III cities. To support this, the company has partnered with the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) and Singapore Tourism Board (STB) for training and joint campaigns, ensuring agents from smaller cities can effectively sell high-end products.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

3-city roadshow: in India — Kolkata, Ludhiana, Delhi

Future plans: Bali, Vietnam, Australia, Hong Kong, Macau and New Zealand



GRT saves ₹1.2 cr in ‘green money’

What started as a decision to remove plastic bottles from guest rooms has grown into one of the Indian hospitality industry’s strongest sustainability stories. GRT Hotels has not just gone green, they have proven that doing so makes financial and emotional sense. **Vikram Cotah**, Chief Executive Officer, GRT Hotels, shares the sustainability journey with **TRAVTALK**.



When **Vikram Cotah**, CEO, GRT Hotels, decided to eliminate plastic bottles across all 22 GRT Hotels properties, it was not about PR. It was about principle and profitability. “The board was happiest,” he said, referring to the ₹1.2 crore saved in just 12 months after the switch to in-house alkaline water. The ripple effects were immediate: reduced landfill waste, enhanced guest experience and measurable cost savings.

of initiatives anchored in WTTC’s Hotel Sustainability Basics. From recycling water and cutting power use to replacing mini toiletries with refillable, paraben-free alternatives, the group has gone deep. Roughly 70 per cent of resort employees are hired locally and every GRT hotel is now pet-friendly and smoke-free. The average AQI inside their hotels remains between 25 and 30, even when Delhi hits 600. The company has also invested in regenerative practices. In Kodaikanal, where forest land was cleared for a new resort, the timber was reused to build rooms. Today, 23



Vikram Cotah
CEO
GRT Hotels

bird species have returned to the area, proof that circular thinking pays off, said Cotah. GRT’s hyper-local food philosophy also came

under the spotlight. Ingredients are sourced within a 50 km radius and used across even global dishes, offsetting carbon emissions tied to long-distance sourcing. Even their breakfast offering termed the ‘Great Sunshine Breakfast’ is part of the offset model. Ingredients are not just local, but hyper-local, sourced within 50 km. “We serve global recipes using local produce. A pain au chocolat might come with Tamil Nadu cocoa,” he quipped. What stands out is the emotional connection guests form with GRT. At their Thanjavur property, the chef is also a farmer,

guests leave with hand-picked vegetables from the hotel’s kitchen garden,

From recycling water and cutting power use to replacing mini toiletries with refillable, paraben-free alternatives, the group has gone deep

ter being gifted vegetables grown onsite in Thanjavur. “She said it reminded her of going back to her mother’s home,” he said.

GRT’s push into sustainability didn’t stop at internal operations; it extended into guest-facing innovations too. Each property now offers ‘Great Meetings’, a carbon-neutral MICE initiative that offsets emissions through afforestation.

Cotah capped his talk by challenging the industry to stop waiting for regulation and instead lead the transformation. “Sustainability isn’t a cost, it’s an investment.”

shines with VisitBritain’s winning campaign



VisitBritain and **India** have been honoured at the AIM-e4m Magzimize Awards 2025, winning in the category Most Effective Performance-Driven Magazine Campaign for the standout initiative “Starring Great Britain – A Premium Collection 2025 In Association with TravTalk India.” The recognition follows a rigorous jury evaluation and highlights the campaign’s innovative approach in positioning Great Britain as a premium travel destination. By combining powerful storytelling with measurable impact, the collaboration set a new benchmark for performance-driven magazine campaigns in the travel trade.

Skål International Delhi elects new EC, Homa Mistry is the new President

Skål International Delhi has announced its new Executive Committee for the 2025–2027 term, with all members elected unopposed. **Homa Mistry**, Chief Executive Officer, Trail Blazer Tours India, takes over as President, succeeding Ranjit Vig, who now serves as Immediate Past President. “I hope I’m able to add value to Skål club in the coming future,” said Mistry, while the committee expressed confidence in driving Skål Delhi’s vision forward under his leadership.



Homa Mistry
President, Skål International Delhi
& CEO, Trail Blazer Tours India

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The FAITH Conclave 2025 brought together top leaders from India's travel, tourism and hospitality sectors alongside key government representatives. The discussions centred on repositioning India's global image, unlocking the sector's growth potential and charting a roadmap towards achieving a \$3 trillion tourism economy by 2047.



Switzerland Tourism Webinar

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- **Rail Europe** and its various products and services for the Travel Trade
- Ticino Region's famous Swissminiatur and FoxTown Stores with **Lake Lugano Group**
- Rhätian Railways's iconic premium panoramic trains – **Glacier Express** and **Bernina Express**

Date	Day	Webinar	Time	Registration QR code
2nd Sept 2025	Tuesday	Travel Switzerland & Rail Europe	3.00 PM IST	
10th Sept 2025	Wednesday	Lake Lugano Group, Glacier Express & Bernina Express	3.00 PM IST	

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

EVENT TALK

Published from : India Middle East

SEPTEMBER 2025

Date	Event	Time
17	Red Carpet Webinar	3:00 pm
17	Luxury Travel Mart	10:00 am
17-19	TAAI Annual Convention	10:00 am
17-20	Travel and Tourism Fair Hyderabad	9:00 am
18-20	Asian Tourism Fair 2025	10:00 am
18-20	FHRAI Annual Convention	10:00 am
18-20	PATA Forum on Tourism Trends and Outlook	8:00 am
19-20	GPS - Kolkata	10:00 am
20-22	Tamilnadu Travel Expo 2025	10:00 am
23-25	IFTM Top Resa	9:00 am
24-25	GBTA Mexico Conference	9:00 am
25-28	Tourism Expo Japan 2025	9:00 am
26-28	Rajasthan Travel Fair	10:00 am
27	World Tourism Day	10:00 am
28-30	WTTC Global Summit	10:00 am

Cross Hotels shines at Thai event

Cross Hotels & Resorts has placed strong emphasis on India as a key source market, showcasing its Thailand portfolio at TravelBullz' three-city roadshow, covering Kolkata, Ludhiana and New Delhi from 18-22 August 2025.

Surbhi Sharma

Cross Hotels & Resorts recently join hands with TravelBullz for its three-city India roadshow across Kolkata, Ludhiana and Delhi, showcasing its Thailand properties to the Indian travel trade. The collaboration underlines the importance of India as a key source market for the group's Thailand and Bali properties.

India key market
Terming India a highly important market, Sandeep Raghav, Director Business Development – India, Cross Hotels & Resorts, said, "It is a promising source market for our Thailand and Bali properties." The group



Cross Hotels & Resorts is deepening ties with Indian leisure, luxury & MICE travellers

showcased all 12 of its Thailand hotels during the roadshow, including six in Bangkok, three in Pattaya and three in Chiang Mai.

Trade response
The response from Indian agents was highly encouraging, said Raghav. "Agents were happy to discuss our

hotels, brands and destinations in Thailand."

Tailored offerings
To attract Indian leisure, luxury and MICE travellers, the brand has been proactive in trade engagement through trade shows, webinars and tactical campaigns.

Future growth
Raghav highlighted noticeable difference in booking behaviours across Eastern India, Punjab and Delhi, but emphasised that all three regions hold strong potential for Thailand.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ C12 Thailand properties across Bangkok, Pattaya & Chiang Mai showcased
- ❖ Upcoming expansions in Thailand, Bali, Vietnam & Japan
- ❖ Focus on leisure, luxury, weddings & MICE travellers

NEW OPENINGS

Flights	Hotels
Route: Amsterdam–Hyderabad Frequency: Three times weekly (from Sept 2) Airline: KLM	Hotel: Ginger Genome Valley, Telangana Rooms: 75 Brand: IHCL
Route: Bengaluru–Phuket Frequency: Daily (from Oct 1) Airline: Akasa Air	Hotel: The Ritz-Carlton Vaikom Island, Kerala Rooms: 70 (all-villa retreat), to open in 2029 Brand: The Ritz-Carlton
Route: Ahmedabad–Bengaluru Frequency: Twice daily (from Sept 1) Airline: Air India Express	Hotel: JW Marriott Chennai OMR Rooms: 250, to open in 2030 Brand: JW Marriott
Route: Chandigarh–Bengaluru Frequency: Twice daily (from Sept 1) Airline: Air India Express	Hotel: Thiruvananthapuram Marriott Hotel World Trade Centre Rooms: 200, to open in 2030 Brand: Marriott Hotels
Route: Dehradun–Bengaluru Frequency: Daily (from Sept 15) Airline: Air India Express	Hotel: Courtyard by Marriott Chennai World Trade Centre Rooms: 45, to open in 2027 Brand: Courtyard by Marriott

Repeat visits hinge on what's new

Contd. from page 12



Rohit Chopra
Area Commercial Director – India, Minor Hotels

“Repeat travel is built on personalisation, trust and consistent standards. **For FIT travellers, ‘me time’ experiences — private spaces, preferred cuisines, spa and wellness encourage returns.** MICE guests value creative F&B concepts and reliable service standards, while weddings create lasting memories that attract families back. Loyalty programmes play a pivotal role. The biggest challenge is matching expectations from prior stays.”



Reena Sachdev
Founder, Travel Arena

“We have been specialising in second visits to every possible country that our clients have been to. **The trick is not giving unrealistic expectations to your travellers, and at the same time assuring them that the experience will be completely different** from the last time. The biggest challenge in promoting any destination again is the mindset of why spend on going to the same place again when there is so much more and new to see.”



Ranjit Vig
Managing Director, CAAIR Travels

“Marketing a second visit to a destination requires a different approach from a first-time trip. **While first visits often focus on structured itineraries and must-see attractions, repeat travellers, particularly Gen Z and those with disposable income, seek deeper, more personalised experiences.** They prefer flexibility, authenticity and the chance to explore at their own pace rather than normal packages.”



Guldeep Singh Sahni
Managing Director, Weldon Tours & Travels

“In order to sell a destination to a repeat traveller, agents must have good knowledge of the destination. Agents can then look into what their customers have seen in the first go and then offer what is different. **Knowing what your customer needs is important, what they are interested in because most want value for money.** The tourism boards of countries should keep on bringing something new. For example, Singapore sees a lot of repeat customers.”



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Accommodation

Impiana Private Villas Seminyak offers a refined escape in the heart of Seminyak, where spacious private pool villas blend comfort, elegance, and warm hospitality. Spread across three neighboring locations, the resort delivers a seamless and tranquil experience—combining the intimacy of a private retreat with the convenience of a central setting.

Prana Spa

The award-winning Prana Spa offers an indulgent escape where ancient healing traditions meet modern luxury. Recognized as one of Bali's premier spas, it invites you to unwind with signature treatments and pampering experiences delivered by internationally trained therapists. From its exotic design to the opulent Private Suite, every detail is crafted to awaken your senses and restore balance in true royal style.

Frangipaani Indian Restaurant

Frangipaani at Prana offers an elegant dining experience inspired by the rich heritage of North India. Set within the majestic surrounds of Prana Spa, reminiscent of a royal Maharaja's residence, guests are invited to savor authentic North Indian cuisine in a setting that blends opulence with cultural charm.

Oswego Ball Bar & Dining

A stylish all-day dining destination offering a vibrant mix of Asian, Indonesian, and international cuisine. With both indoor and outdoor seating—including an island bar centerpiece—guests can enjoy a relaxed yet refined atmosphere. From afternoon tea to sunset cocktails, every moment is crafted for comfort and indulgence. Perfect for casual dining or social gatherings, this is where great taste meets a laid-back tropical vibe.



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MOVEMENTS

ACCOR India



Accor has appointed **RANJU ALEX** as its CEO for South Asia (covering India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Alex is a highly accomplished hospitality professional. Until recently, Alex was the Regional Vice President for South Asia for Marriott International — which runs over 170 hotels across the region. She began her career with The Oberoi Group in 1993 and has been in several leadership positions since.

RAKTDA Ras Al Khaimah



The Government of Ras Al Khaimah appoints **PHILLIPA HARRISON** as the CEO of Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA). Harrison, the ex-MD of Tourism Australia, will spearhead the emirate's vision to become the 'Destination of the Future', bringing decades of international tourism expertise across Australia and other global markets. Harrison's appointment will help advance Ras Al Khaimah Government's objectives.

VISITBRITAIN Mumbai



VisitBritain has appointed **RITU VARMA** as Country Manager for India. Based in Mumbai, Varma will lead VisitBritain's activity in India to boost inbound tourism to Britain. The role will focus on product development and implementing VisitBritain's distribution strategy, working closely with travel trade and industry partners to encourage Indian visitors to discover more of Britain. She has more than two decades of experience in business development.

ISRAEL MINISTRY OF TOURISM Mumbai



The Israel Ministry of Tourism has appointed **GALIT HOFFMAN** as the Consul – Tourism Affairs for India, reaffirming its strategic commitment to deepening tourism ties with the Indian market. Galit comes with a rich professional background spanning diplomacy, strategic communication, international market development and private sector leadership. She previously served at the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi as Spokesperson and later as Deputy Defense Attaché.

TAJ WEST END, BENGALURU Bengaluru

Taj West End, Bengaluru appoints **TARONISH KARKARIA** as the General Manager. A second-generation hotelier with over two decades of experience in the luxury hospitality industry, Karkaria brings with him a dynamic leadership style, deep operational expertise and a passion for crafting unforgettable guest experiences. In his new role, Karkaria will focus on advancing strategic operations across the property, enhancing bespoke guest experiences and introducing strategic initiatives.



FORTUNE HOTELS Kochi

Fortune Hotels has appointed **SHARATH RAJAN** as the General Manager of Fortune Airport Road, Kochi. With over 18 years of diverse experience, Rajan brings a strong track record of driving operational excellence and delivering exceptional guest experiences. In his new role, he will oversee the hotel's operations, including guest services, team leadership, quality assurance and overall property performance. Rajan's career spans leadership positions across some of the world's renowned hospitality brands.



RAMADA BY WYNNDHAM VARANASI KATESAR Varanasi



Ramada by Wyndham Varanasi Katesar has appointed **NAVEEN PANDEY** as the General Manager. Pandey will lead overall hotel operations, manage staff performance and spearhead initiatives in sales, marketing and guest services to ensure exceptional hospitality experiences. He brings a wealth of expertise to the role, with an impressive background in the hospitality sector. Previously, he served as General Manager at Svenska Hotels, a European hospitality company operating in Andhra Pradesh.

ITC HOTELS Ahmedabad



ITC Hotels has appointed **AKSHAY KAVRA** as the General Manager of ITC Narmada, a Luxury Collection hotel in the heart of Ahmedabad. A seasoned hotelier with a strong foundation in hospitality and over 18 years of experience, Kavra brings with him operational expertise, strategic leadership and a commitment to excellence in guest experience. An alumnus of the Welcomgroup Graduate School of Hotel Administration (WGSHA), Manipal, he later joined the Management Trainee Programme at the HMI.

THE GLOBAL REP New Delhi



The Global Rep, a new-age travel distribution and technology company, has appointed **VARTIKA CHATURVEDI**, founder of The Resourceful Co, as its Regional Sales Development Partner for Tamil Nadu. In this strategic role, Chaturvedi will spearhead B2B trade engagement and market outreach for ZoTrav and ZoRoam platforms in one of India's fastest-growing travel markets. She brings a dynamic and consultative approach to travel trade development.

TAMARIND GLOBAL Mumbai

Tamarind Global has elevated **AMAL SENAN** to the position of Head – South India Sales & Operations. He will be supervising the operations of Tamarind Global's offices across Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. He has been working with the company for more than 14 years. In his new role, Senan will spearhead business development and growth initiatives across all company verticals. He is known for driving strong partner relations and exploring new business avenues.



BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD Bengaluru

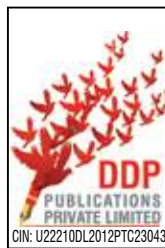
Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield appoints **SOORAJ THOMAS RAJAN** as Senior Marketing & Communications Manager. With over a decade of cross-industry experience in hospitality, technology and digital media, Rajan brings a well-rounded perspective to brand building and strategic communications. His most recent role was with Hyatt Centric Hebbal Bengaluru. Previously, he served as the Multi-Property Marketing & Communications Manager for Courtyard by Marriott in Madurai and Trichy.



GRAND MERCURE BENGALURU AT GOPALAN MALL Bengaluru

Grand Mercure Bengaluru at Gopalan Mall has appointed **ANURADHA KONAR** as Assistant Manager, Marketing & Communications. With a solid academic foundation in strategic communications and a knack for creative storytelling, Konar is set to bring a fresh outlook to brand development, public relations and engaging with consumers. Her journey in the hospitality industry kicked off with ITC Hotels.





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Circulation:
Ashok Rana

CIN: U22210DL2012PTC230432

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DDP is printed, published and edited by SanJeet on behalf of DDP Publications Pvt. Ltd., printed at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., C-52, DDA Sheds Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-I, New Delhi-110020 and published at 72, Todarmal Road, New Delhi - 110 001 Ph.: +91-9818767141, +91-9650399920

MUMBAI:
504, Marine Chambers, 43, New Marine Lines, Opp. SNTD College, Mumbai - 400 020, India, Ph.: +91-22-22070129; 22070130

MIDDLE EAST:
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Oman makes bold India push for a million arrivals

Yousuf Khalaf Al Mujaizi, Assistant Director, Business Development Department, Ministry of Heritage & Tourism, Oman, says 'Focus Oman 2025' roadshow in Jaipur was aimed at reinforcing the country as the perfect destination for corporate events & weddings.



Surbhi Sharma

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, in collaboration with 25 leading Omani stakeholders, including hotels, DMCs and attraction partners, successfully hosted 'Focus Oman 2025', its first B2B showcase, in Jaipur recently. The four-day event witnessed participation from over 150 top travel planners across India, including specialists in luxury travel, MICE and weddings, underlining Oman's growing prominence as a short-haul premium destination for Indian travellers.

Early feedback from participants has been positive, with praise for the quality of meetings, effective networking opportunities and smooth organisation, making the event a key step in enhancing bilateral tourism ties.

India emerges as top source market

According to official statistics,



Participants at the 'Focus Oman 2025' roadshow

India topped tourist arrivals to Oman in 2024, contributing more than 600,000 visitors — a 40 per cent increase over 2019 levels. Speaking on the occasion, **Yousuf Khalaf Al Mujaizi**, Assistant Director, Business Development Department, Ministry of Heritage & Tourism, Oman, said, "India is one of Oman's fastest-growing source markets. Our goal is to position the country as a high-end destination, attracting premium travellers across leisure, corporate events and weddings. With stakeholder collaboration, we aim to grow arrivals to 1 million in the coming years."

Strong appeal for MICE and weddings

India's reputation as a global leader in outbound weddings and corporate travel makes it a strategic priority for Oman. Al Mujaizi highlighted Oman's 5-star hotels, infrastructure, luxury resorts, authentic cuisine and exceptional services as a natural fit for Indian weddings and corporate events. The country is also placing greater emphasis

on adventure tourism, targeting youth and families. From soft nature-based experiences in the south to more challenging mountain and desert activities, the Sultanate of Oman offers a diverse adventure portfolio. These experiences are now

The 4-day event saw participation from over 150 top travel planners across India, including experts in luxury travel, MICE and weddings

being regulated and offered through licensed operators to ensure quality and safety. Additionally, the country's rich cultural fabric with over 1,000 castles and forts remains a strong attraction for Indian travellers interested in heritage tourism.

Engagement with Indian market

Al Mujaizi revealed that the success of the Jaipur roadshow will pave the way for wider engagement across multiple Indian cities in future editions. Plans are already underway for an India roadshow in 2026, which will bring more Omani stakeholders

face-to-face with Indian partners across regions. Marketing will also play a key role in Oman's India push. The ministry plans to support local operators in India through joint campaigns, Fam trips and B2B gatherings, alongside strong participation in major trade events. Recognising changing traveller behaviour, he stressed that influencer-led outreach will be central to engaging India's younger audiences and diversifying the market base.

A premium short-haul destination

Oman is positioning itself as a premium short-haul destination for Indian travellers by strengthening partnerships with Indian agents, tapping into MICE and wedding demand and showcasing its mix of luxury, culture and adventure. Al Mujaizi said that 'Focus Oman' roadshow is not just a one-off event in this direction, but a foundation for sustained engagement and a long-term tourism partnership with India.



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