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India Travel Awards 2025 Celebrating tourism icons

The India Travel Awards 2025 concluded successfully in New Delhi with a promise to return with greater grandeur and more excitement. The night brought visionaries and innovators under one roof and honoured industry stalwarts with the iconic 'Maya' trophy across 57 categories.



(From L-R) Homa Mistry, Subhash Goyal, Ashwani Lohani, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Suman Billa, Himanshu Patil, Arshdeep Anand, and Sanjeet



Surbhi Sharma

The India Travel Awards 2025, held at Le Méridien New Delhi on 9 September, brought together the influential voices from the travel and hospitality industry. The prestigious event celebrated achievers driving growth, innovation, and excellence in Indian tourism, setting new benchmarks for the industry.

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister, Tourism & Culture, graced the occasion and congratulated DDP Group for honouring excellence. "Tourism is not



just about travel; it is a force for inclusive growth, sustainability, and cultural exchange. With public-private partnership and innovation, India can emerge as a global model where diversity, heritage, and modernity converge." **Suman Billa**, Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism, GoI, in his keynote address, highlighted India's

tourism growth trajectory. "The true challenge lies in how we grow. To become a \$3 trillion tourism economy by 2047, we must focus not just on numbers, but on excellence and quality."

Several other dignitaries, including **Ashwani Lohani**, Director, Prime Ministers' Museum & Library and **Lindy Cameron**, British High Commissioner to India, also graced the event. A highlight of the evening was the unveiling of a coffee table book chronicling the travel industry's resilience and commitment to sustainability, inclusivity, and

innovation. At the event, winners across 57 categories were felicitated with the iconic 'Maya' trophy.

Arjun Sharma, Chairman, Select Group, joined the Gallery of Legends, **Aloke Singh**, Managing Director, Air India Express bagged DDP Trailblazer Award, **Anil Parashar**, Executive Director, ITQ Technologies was honoured with the DDP Game Changer Award and **Chitra Gurnani Daga**, CEO, Thrillophilia, won the DDP Face of the Future Award. They were conferred with the 'Gold Maya' trophies. 📌

Tech & innovation driving green change

Sustainable transformation in tourism is no longer a choice but a necessity, say industry leaders, stressing the need for balanced growth coupled with responsibility.



Julia Simpson
President & CEO
WTC

“ The development of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) represents a pivotal opportunity. **SAF has the potential to cut lifecycle emissions from aviation by up to 80%**, and India is well-placed to become a regional leader in its production. By embracing innovation, championing sustainability, and ensuring inclusive growth, the country can set a standard for how travel and tourism can prosper in a rapidly changing world. The great Indian take-off is already underway. The challenge now is to sustain this momentum and to fly higher.”

“ Sustainable transformation in tourism is no longer optional — it is essential. It means **reimagining travel to respect ecological limits, empower local communities, and ensure long-term economic resilience**. At RezLive.com, this philosophy is embedded in a tech-driven model that reduces paper use, promotes eco-certified stays, and strengthens local partnerships through fair pricing. With rising demand from millennials and Gen Z for responsible travel, the platform is evolving with sustainability filters, smarter itineraries, and curated experiences.”



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

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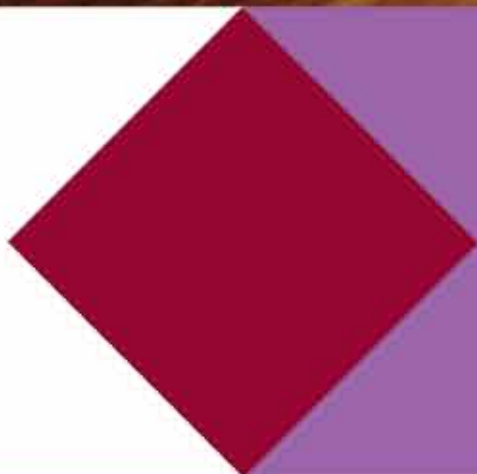
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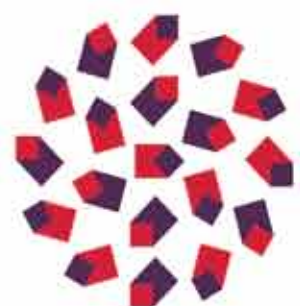
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Hailing GST cut, but seeking more

The GST Council, in its recently held 56th meeting, cleared next-generation reforms. The cut in GST on hotel rooms below ₹7,500 will make stays more affordable for a large share of Indian travellers, reinforcing demand in the domestic market. What remains unclear is whether accounting will get more complex for travel and hospitality companies with respect to ITC.



Rajiv Mehra
General Secretary
FAITH

“This reduction in GST from 12 per cent to 5 per cent fulfils a long-standing demand of the Travel and Hospitality sector. **Coming on the heels of the busy tourism season ahead, it will improve tourism prospects.** In addition, it will lead to a spike in hiring of gig workers.”



Ravi Gosain
President
IATO

“The 5 per cent GST on hotel room tariff of ₹7,500 will help mid-segment tourists. However, keeping in mind the inflation, **the threshold of ₹7,500 should have ideally been increased to ₹15,000 to be able to cover a wider network of travellers.**”



Arshdeep Anand
Vice President
ATOAI

“The latest GST reforms are expected to create a positive environment. Adventure tourism sector may benefit indirectly. **Lower GST on fuel-related inputs and logistics, and changes in GST on vehicles, may translate into more affordable transportation.**”



Sanjeev Mehra
President
Skål International India

“The proposed changes to GST will not create a significant impact unless a more decisive step is taken. **What our industry truly needs is one simplified GST slab for hospitality.** This will bring India on par with other Asian destinations and make us more competitive globally.”



K Syama Raju
President
FHRAI

“Reducing the tax on rooms up to ₹7,500 to 5 per cent will make Indian hotels more affordable to domestic and international travellers. **This reform will directly boost tourism demand, increase occupancy, and encourage spending across the hospitality value chain.**”



Pradeep Shetty
Spokesperson
HRAI

“The reduction of GST to 5 per cent on hotel accommodation services with room rates up to ₹7,500 per night is a welcome move. **It significantly improves our competitiveness with other Asian tourist destinations and will boost domestic and inbound tourism.**”

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From milestones to next moves

September has been anything but quiet. For us at DDP Group, it was a proud moment to wrap up the India Travel Awards 2025. More than just a ceremony, the Awards have become a tradition — celebrating the people and brands that keep this industry moving. This year reminded us that recognition is not about a trophy on the shelf; it is about inspiration, motivation, and setting higher benchmarks for the future.

While we celebrated, the industry was busy tackling big questions around GST changes. The new structure has triggered a debate — what will it mean for pricing, for margins, for clients? The short-term adjustments may be tricky, but this could be just the push we needed to rethink old models and bring more transparency into the system. One thing is certain — the way forward will require the industry to speak in one voice.

On the business side, the cover story highlights outbound travel, which continues to power ahead. Indian travellers are demanding more than checklists. They want tailored experiences, premium service, and meaningful value. That is where the real opportunity lies for agents, operators, and hoteliers who are ready to innovate and recalibrate.

Apart from that, this issue will delve deeper into aviation expansion, regional tourism, technology's growing influence, and emerging niches like adventure and wellness. Put together, it is a snapshot of an industry that is buzzing with ideas while also figuring out its next direction.

The takeaway? Growth is here — but clarity, collaboration, and courage will decide how far we go. The Awards celebrate what has been achieved. Now, it is time to focus on what is next.

India's MICE future hinges on action, not talk

India's MICE segment holds immense potential, yet global perception, limited infrastructure, and stagnant budgets continue to hinder growth. Without stronger government action, global marketing, and PPPs, the country risks losing its edge.

India's Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) segment has always been viewed largely through the lens of domestic corporates and associations. This segment is growing at a healthy rate of 8–10 per cent annually, driven by reward and recognition programmes.

However, the real opportunity lies in the often-ignored inbound MICE segment — attracting global corporates and associations to host large-scale events in the country. Unless this segment grows, India will miss out on significant foreign exchange earnings from what is essentially a bulk, high-value business.

Domestic versus global choices

Indian corporates today are not bound to specific destinations; budgets drive decisions. Once allocations are made, companies evaluate whether international or domestic locations fit the bill. While domestic MICE keeps revenue within India, infrastructure gaps remain a limiting factor. This is why short-haul destinations, such as Thailand, Vietnam, Dubai, Singapore, and Armenia continue to draw large Indian groups, while long-haul markets like Europe, Australia, and South Africa capture a smaller share.

Budget trends & planning challenges

Interestingly, while the number of participants in MICE programmes has grown, per-person spending has not increased in recent years. Intense competition among MICE operators has kept budgets in check, benefitting corporates but limiting margins for service pro-

viders. Compounding this is the shrinking planning cycle — what used to be a 90–120-day process pre-COVID has now reduced to under 60 days, often pushing costs higher due to last-minute airfares and ground arrangements.

Competing globally: A key challenge

When Indian MICE operators compete internationally, the key barrier is bud-

Unless the MICE segment grows, India will miss out on significant forex earnings from what is essentially a bulk, high-value business

get. Global suppliers often view Indian corporates as “budget-conscious”. This perception undermines India's positioning and bargaining power. To change this, the industry must push corporates to rethink budget allocations, balancing cost-consciousness with quality and competitiveness on the global stage.

Missing link: Infra & state support

While several state tourism boards are keen to attract MICE, much of the activity remains merely talk without action. Many states lack basic infrastructure, forcing large groups abroad. To unlock potential, the government must invest in world-class infrastructure and provide short-term incentives or subsidies to attract international players until long-term projects are ready.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Domestic MICE is growing steadily but infrastructure gaps limit India's appeal for inbound events

Short-haul global destinations like Thailand, Vietnam, and Dubai continue to lure Indian corporates

Shrinking planning cycles and cost-consciousness challenge margins and global competitiveness

Infrastructure investment and policy incentives are crucial for attracting international MICE

Stronger global marketing and leveraging India's scale can reposition the country as a top MICE destination

Marketing India as a global MICE hub

Infrastructure alone is not enough; India must overhaul its international marketing strategy. With no overseas tourist offices now, Indian Missions or High Commissions abroad should be empowered to promote MICE aggressively. Public

PR agencies must be engaged to position India beyond clichés like the ‘Golden Triangle’ or ‘Kerala Backwaters’

Relations agencies must be engaged to position India beyond clichés like the ‘Golden Triangle’ or ‘Kerala Backwaters’.

The G20 Summit was a great initiative by the government but we missed the opportunity to capitalise on it. We should have leveraged it to create last-

ing narratives and attract repeat business.

Way ahead

With a population of 1.4 billion and rising domestic consumption, the country is poised to become one of the world's top three MICE markets, second only to China. To achieve this, we need a focused approach, upgraded infrastructure, expansion into tier II and III cities, and reimagined policy frameworks to reposition India globally. Done right, India can transform from being a major outbound MICE market to a leading inbound MICE destination, creating jobs, revenue, and a new global identity.



Naveen Kundu
The writer is an industry veteran & MICE expert

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

Hotels record 7%+ ADR growth amid rising demand

The hotel industry witnessed a 7.3 per cent increase in Average Daily Rate (ADR) YoY on a lower price band, while the ADR on a higher price band was up by 5.9 per cent, finds IDBI Capital's monthly report on the domestic hotel industry.



IDBI Capital's recent report on the Indian hotel industry finds that of the eight key cities in the country, Mumbai and Delhi reported relatively better performance on ADR growth YoY. The report analysed pricing of 171 hotels with 33,000 keys across eight cities to understand the trend over the last 24 months. The report predicts a "positive outlook" on ADR in mid to long term, citing that organised players will continue to do well in FY26 on operating metrics.

New hotels additions

The organised players continued to add new hotel inventory, majorly through management contract and licence agreement. Indian Hotels and Lemon Tree Hotels added four and five hotels respectively, while Royal Orchid added three hotels in August. Further, Indian Hotels acquired a 51 per cent stake each in ANK Hotels and Pride Hospitality. The deal adds 135 mid-scale properties — 111 from ANK and 24 from Pride — operating under The Clarks Hotels & Resorts brand, to the portfolio of Indian Hotels.

Domestic industry

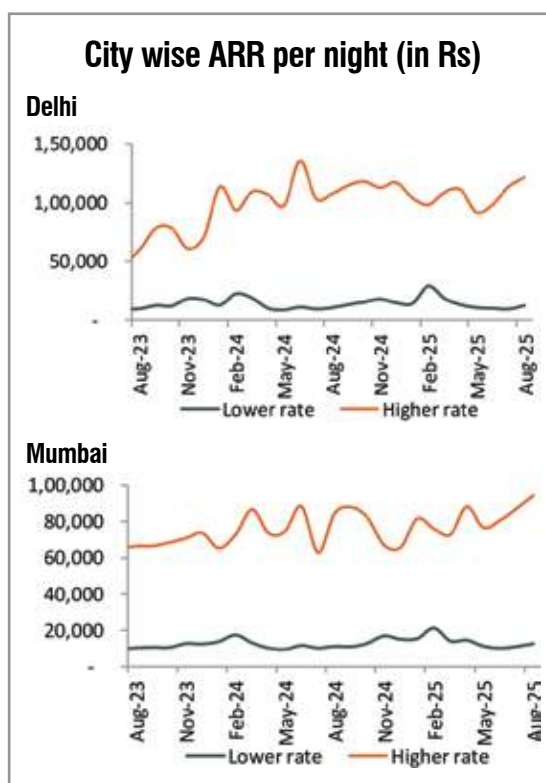
Economic uncertainty 'reshaping deal-making': Global travel and tourism sector deal activity declined roughly 8 per cent year over year in the first half of 2025 amid economic uncertainty, according to new findings from data and analytics company, Global-Data. During H1, venture financing and private equity deals in the travel and tourism sector declined around 25 per cent and 20 per cent, respectively, while Merger and Acquisition (M&A) activity contracted 3.5 per cent year over year, according to the report.

Growth in tier II and tier III cities:

The Hotel Association of India (HAI) has unveiled a landmark initiative — an industry-first, structured mentorship platform designed exclusively for the hotel sector. This programme comes at a time when the industry is witnessing significant growth, especially in tier II and tier III cities, covering about 50 locations. This initiative aims to address the widening talent gap in the Indian hotel sector and support its sustainable growth.

Tourism and Hospitality poised for record growth:

Domestic tourism of India is the main driver of this growth, with the number of visitors expected to double from 2.5 billion in 2024 to 5.2 billion by 2030, equivalent to a



Source: IDBI Capital Research

currently boasts 3.4 million hotel rooms as of 31 March 2024, but the organised sector, including branded hotels and high-quality independents, represents only 11 per cent of this total, amounting to 375,000 keys. The luxury hotel segment comprises just 17 per cent of this.

Hilton Hotels sees growth across all segments:

Hilton Hotels is witnessing exponential growth across all its segments in India — from luxury to upscale and mid-scale, prompting the company to see the country as one of its top priority markets for growth. Currently, Hilton Hotels has 35 operational hotels in India and 31 in the pipeline — up from 20 operational hotels and 12 under development in 2020.

Growing influence of weddings, MICE, and F&B:

The Food and Beverage (F&B) sector plays a crucial role in the profitability of hotels. In luxury hotels, F&B revenue per occupied room is 1.9 times the industry aver-

age. Additionally, the weddings and MICE segments are driving strong growth in the hospitality sector. The Confederation of All India Traders reported 3.8 million weddings in India between 23 November and 15 December 2023, generating ₹4.74 lakh crore in revenue.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

IDBI Capital's report predicts further strengthening of ADR aided by the festive season followed by the wedding season.

Outlook positive on domestic hospitality space, led by demand-supply mismatch; FTAs, increased corporate travel, & MICE aiding RevPAR growth.

Outlook positive on Indian Hotels, Chalet Hotels, The Park Hotels, and Lemon Tree Hotels.

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Union government to fund **greenfield airport studies for Northeast states** annually, says Kinjarapu

Pakyong Airport's restoration key to Sikkim's aviation and tourism growth, says Minister

MHA names 37 airports, 34 sea and river ports, and 37 international land crossing points as **designated immigration posts**

SAF can cut aviation sector CO₂ emissions by up to 80%: Minister of Civil Aviation, Gol

Industry anticipates 25% **boost in inbound biz from China** in 12–18 months: Ravi Gosain

Govt plans to make **Delhi a global hub for live events:** Mandaviya

Pune agents get structured training

The TAAP has launched a free certification programme to empower members. The objective is to ensure that even the smallest agencies can function in an organised manner, in an attempt to bring some structure to an industry that has earned a reputation for being fragmented and disorganised.

Hazel Jain

In a move aimed at empowering the travel trade at the grassroots level, the Travel Agents Association of Pune (TAAP) has launched a free certification course titled 'Professional Tour Operator Certification Programme' to help members operate with the structure and systems of a corporate organisation. This initiative is being offered without any external funding and is fully developed and delivered by TAAP's in-house team of experts.

Sharing details, **Nilesh Bhansali**, Chairman, TAAP, said, "This course goes beyond theoretical learning. It is a practical, hands-on training programme covering vital areas, such as

legal compliance, communication skills, CRM systems, office operations, banking protocols, data management and organisational structure. Our goal is to help even the smallest travel agencies become system-driven and future-ready." The programme will be run and managed in the guidance of Hemant Pai, a senior member who has designed the programme.

While many associations offer knowledge-based sessions, what sets TAAP's initiative apart is its commitment to practical support and real-time implementation. For example, one of the most critical topics covered is legal documentation — an area often neglected by small travel agents due to high costs. "Hiring a legal



Nilesh Bhansali
Chairman
TAAP

firm for contracts or operational documentation can cost thousands of rupees, which most small agents cannot afford. Understanding this gap, TAAP has proactively created and distributed 16 legally vetted drafts to all members — ranging from client contracts to staff-related agreements.

The programme is specially curated for TAAP members only. In case someone is not our member but still wants to do this programme, they can become a member and complete it," he adds.

TAAP's documentation framework offers much-needed protection and standardisation. This initiative reflects TAAP's commitment to uplifting the regional travel trade by promoting operational excellence, risk mitigation and professional growth for all its members. "We are not just launching a programme; we are walking the journey with our members to ensure they evolve from traditional set-ups to professionally managed enterprises," Bhansali emphasises.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Legal – Registration & Compliance Branding
- ❖ Office Systems & Personnel Management
- ❖ Communication & Operations
- ❖ Records/ Database Management
- ❖ Accounts & Finance
- ❖ Sales & Marketing
- ❖ Use of Advanced Business Methods

Manila, Colombo on Balitrip's radar

Balitrip Wisata strengthens its trade offerings in India with two new destinations in its quiver. The Destination Management Company is also doubling down on Bali's wedding potential and premium experiences, eyeing the Indian wedding and luxury travel markets. **Dheeraj Ranjan Kumarr**, Founder Director, Balitrip Wisata, discusses details.

Hazel Jain

Balitrip Wisata, a Destination Management Company (DMC) specialising in Bali, is set to diversify its portfolio by introducing the Philippines and Sri Lanka to the Indian travel trade from 1 October. The move marks a strategic expansion beyond its Bali stronghold, catering to growing demand for alternative beach and cultural destinations.

Sharing insights on the expansion, **Dheeraj Ranjan Kumarr**, Founder Director, Balitrip Wisata, said, "The Philippines holds immense potential for the Indian market, much like Indonesia.



Dheeraj Ranjan Kumarr
Founder Director
Balitrip Wisata

We always operate with our own set-ups — no third parties — and are in the process of establishing legal entities in both Manila and Colombo to ensure seamless operations. The Philippines Tourism Board's visa-free initiative

for Indians and increased flight connectivity signal a booming future. By next year, we expect the Philippines to emerge as a top performer in India."

While content for the new destinations is not yet live on Balitrip's portal, Kumarr emphasises a deliberate approach. "We are formalising all legalities first. Once we launch sales, we are confident of immediate traction." Bali remains a favourite for Indian weddings, but Kumarr notes a surge in diverse celebrations. "Over the past 18 months, we have handled everything from five-star luxury weddings to intimate 50-guest af-

fairs. Bali's cultural affinity with India — coupled with hassle-free logistics for rit-

The Philippines Tourism Board's visa-free initiative for Indians, and increased flight connectivity, signal a booming future

uals and décor — makes it a natural choice." Balitrip's portal continues to focus exclusively on Bali for now,

but with enhanced features. The DMC has rolled out 150 pre-designed itineraries, simplifying bookings for agents. "Clients can still request minor customisations," Kumarr says. "It's about making the trade's job easier while maintaining quality."

The company recently wrapped a four-city (Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Kochi) roadshow in India, drawing 215+ travel agents and showcasing 20+ Bali hospitality partners. The theme — "Focus, Delivery, Value" — underscored Balitrip's shift from scaling numbers to elevating service standards. A key high-

light was the launch of Maharaya Chambers, a luxury vertical curating bespoke Bali experiences. "Year 2025–26 for us is about value-driven growth," Kumarr stresses, adding, "We are investing in immersive, high-end travel — not just volumes."

NEW OFFERINGS

- ❖ Balitrip Wisata introduces the Philippines and Sri Lanka to trade from 1 Oct
- ❖ Move aims to meet demand for beach and cultural destinations

‘Balance growth & green tourism’

▶ Contd. from page 3



Harmandeep Singh Anand
Managing Director
Global Panorama Showcase

“ Sustainable transformation in tourism means **integrating environmental, social, and economic responsibility across the travel value chain**. The industry has progressed, with growing adoption of green infrastructure and community-driven experiences, yet it faces challenges balancing high demand with resource limits. Our organisation acts by supporting local businesses, reducing plastic use, and prioritising green-certified partnerships. ”



Romil Pant
Executive VP & Head – Holidays
Thomas Cook (India)

“ Sustainable tourism is witnessing strong interest, especially among Young India’s millennials and Gen Z. With rising environmental awareness driven by global warming and its visible impact, **travellers are increasingly drawn to destinations that preserve biodiversity, cultural heritage, and local communities**. At Thomas Cook India, we view sustainable transformation as creating meaningful travel that balances discovery with responsibility. ”



Tekla Maira
Founder
And The Story Continues

“ Sustainable transformation in tourism is about rethinking travel to balance environmental protection, social equity, and cultural preservation while ensuring long-term benefits for destinations and communities. Beyond reducing carbon emissions, conserving water, and promoting eco-friendly infrastructure, **it emphasises supporting local communities, fair wages, and preventing overtourism**. In the luxury space, this balance is easier to maintain. ”



Bobby KS Sawhney
Managing Director
Bakshi Transport Service

“ Sustainable transformation in tourism means adopting practices that minimise environmental impact, foster social equity, and ensure economic viability. While progress has been made through ESG adoption, certifications, and alignment with SDGs, greater efforts are still required. **Balancing growth with responsibility requires eco-tourism models, policy support, and green innovation**. Many travellers now prioritise sustainability. ”



Tanushka Kaur Chadha
Co-founder
Jastans Bespoke Luxury Vacations

“ In Jastans Bespoke Luxury Vacations, we view **sustainable transformation in tourism as creating enriching experiences that protect the environment, respect cultures, and uplift communities**. While the industry has made commendable progress, a great deal remains to be achieved. At Jastans, we partner with eco-conscious properties, support artisans, and promote low-impact travel, ensuring growth aligns with sustainability. ”



Pankaj Nagpal
Managing Director
Travstarz Global Group

“ Sustainable transformation in tourism is basically the industry shift towards accepting policies and technology to minimise the negative environmental, social, and economic effect while enhancing the positives for a long-term sustainability of the destination, its people, and the travellers. **It includes steps like minimising wastage of food, water, electricity, besides use of green and renewable sources** and maximising use of technology. ”

Shielding travel biz from financial risks

Claims related to service lapses and cyber incidents have reportedly surged nearly 40% in the past three years, which has heightened the scrutiny on travel agencies and tour operators. Since they are accountable not only for their own operations but also for partners, Asego has launched a product that offers broad protection across operational and legal risks.



TT Bureau

In today’s evolving travel industry, partners face a competitive yet risk-laden environment. Even minor errors can lead to heavy financial or legal consequences. Claims related to service lapses and cyber incidents have surged nearly 40% in the past three years, underlining heightened scrutiny on travel operators.

The risks are tangible. A single name error on an air ticket cost one agency ₹85,000. Another bore re-booking charges when a missed flight forced an elderly couple to cancel their trip. More seriously, the Supreme Court upheld a



Dev Karvat
Founder and CEO
ASEGO

₹13.5 lakh compensation order against a leading OTA after a medical emergency abroad was mishandled. Beyond service errors, exposure includes fraud and cybercrime: in 2022, a forex operator absconded

with client funds, while in 2023, a Goa-based agency suffered a data breach. Even vendor issues can trigger claims, such as the 2024 negligence lawsuit against an OTA over an unsafe homestay in Leh.

Travel businesses are accountable not only for their own operations but also for partners, vendors, and staff. They handle sensitive data, finances, and life-critical situations — where missteps can damage both reputations and bottom lines.

Recognising this, ASEGO has launched Travel Business Protect, India’s first dedicated cover for travel agencies and tour operators.

Unlike generic products, it is tailored to the sector, offering broad protection across operational and legal risks. It covers legal defence, lawyer fees, court costs, and pay-



outs if clients win claims. It safeguards against staff errors, lost documents like passports, and third-party bodily injury or property damage. It extends to accidents such as slips, falls, or transport mishaps.

Addressing modern threats, it protects against cyber-

crime, phishing, identity theft, employee fraud, and losses from supplier defaults or payment delays. Emergency travel assistance, including tele-support, further enhances customer confidence and service quality.

This comprehensive suite ensures safeguards from routine mishaps to crises. “Travel partners today are custodians of trust, finances, and safety,” says **Dev Karvat**, Founder and CEO, ASEGO. “We designed Travel Business Protect to secure their work and reputation at every level.”

The message is clear: the cost of inaction is rising.

With Travel Business Protect, agencies gain not just insurance, but a sustainability strategy — enabling them to focus on creating memorable journeys while safeguarding their future.

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Tax rationalisation to help tourism

► Contd. from page 5



Rikant Pittie
CEO and Co-founder
EaseMyTrip

“The GST reforms are transformative for India’s travel and tourism sector. The simplified tax regime with two key slabs — 5 per cent and 18 per cent — will make travel more affordable for people and boost overall demand. The reduction to 5 per cent GST on hotel rooms up to ₹7,500 will not only encourage tourism but also help hoteliers increase occupancy across budget and mid-scale segments. These changes come at a perfect time ahead of the festive season and will significantly stimulate demand.”



Mahendra Pratap Singh
Chairman
IATO MP & Chhattisgarh Chapter

“Our foremost ask is that the concessional GST rates should come with ITC. At present, many hotels and operators prefer the higher 12–18 per cent slabs to avail ITC, which limits the pass-through of benefits to the end customer. If ITC is allowed at the lower slab, or if inbound tourism is zero-rated, then the rate rationalisation will actually translate into lower package prices, better margins for operators, and ultimately stronger demand. Simplifying the place-of-supply rules for bundled travel services is also crucial.”



Mahesh Iyer
MD and CEO
Thomas Cook (India)

“We welcome the government’s simplification of the GST structure. The elimination of the 12 per cent slab and the lowering of several categories to the 5 per cent bracket mark a decisive shift towards boosting affordability and driving increased consumption. Income tax exemption for income up to ₹12 lakh is expected to result in higher disposable income. For the travel and tourism industry, this is a positive development across B2C and B2B segments. The domestic tourism sector stands to benefit.”



Hari Ganapathy
Co-founder
Pickyourtrail

“The government’s move to lower GST on flights and hotels is more than just a tax revision; it’s an invitation to travel. Airfares across both economy and business classes have become lighter, while the majority of hotel stays, which fall in the ₹1,000–₹7,500 bracket, now carry less tax weight. For everyday travellers, this translates into more accessible journeys. The impact is immediate: a family may choose to stay an extra night and groups could explore new destinations without stretching budgets.”



Salil Nath
Founder & CEO
Travesla

“The recent GST overhaul is a key step for Indian aviation — keeping economy fares affordable at 5 per cent while increasing premium fares to 18 per cent. This approach ensures that air travel remains accessible to the broader population while capturing additional revenue from premium travellers who tend to maintain their travel choices despite fare increases. Such a tax structure supports sustainable growth, fuels infrastructure investment, and reinforces India’s rise as a global aviation market.”



Santosh Sharma
Founder & CEO
BookMyJet

“As far as private charters are concerned, GST on buying a private jet under private category has gone up from 28 per cent to 40 per cent. This would definitely discourage the individual and corporate houses who are deliberating buying their private jet under private category. Thankfully, there is no GST implication on people who are willing to buy aircraft under NSOP category where the tax is about 5 per cent. However, flying has increased tremendously since the pandemic.”



Dharmesh Advani
National General Secretary
ETAA

“Tourism industry is one of the largest contributors to employment and foreign exchange in India but continues to be burdened with a high GST rate structure. Our association’s key ask is for the government to rationalise GST on tourism-related services — particularly on hotels, airfares, and packaged tours — to make Indian tourism more competitive with other global destinations. A lower and uniform GST slab will not only encourage domestic travel but also attract more global tourists by making India a value-driven destination.”



Mahendra Vakharia
MD, Pathfinders Holidays &
Ex-President, OTOAI

“I feel, we should aim and ask the government to reduce the rate of 5 per cent GST towards International Package Tours to a lower 1–2 per cent maximum. At present, 5 per cent is not fair, more so when one is unable to take ITC of this 5 per cent GST. For domestic tourism to flourish, the government should allow the GST to be adjusted with ITC to the Registered with GST end user (customer). Reduction of GST from 12 per cent to 5 per cent for hotel room rate up to ₹7,500 per night is a welcome relief for customers for sure.”



Sanjay Sethi
MD & CEO
Chalet Hotels

“The recent GST announcements are a big positive for Chalet and the hotel industry in general. Placing room tariffs below ₹7,500 in the 5 per cent GST slab is a welcome step. At the same time, it is important to address a key concern for the smaller and budget hotels. Simultaneous withdrawal of ITC creates an unintended anomaly. I would urge retention of ITC for this segment, threshold revision up to ₹12,000 and linking of future tariff thresholds to the Consumer Price Index, so that periodic resets are not required.”



Rasmi Ranjan
Director of Operations
Monday Hotels

“This is a fantastic step. It’s a win-win situation where guests get more value for their money, and we can attract a larger number of travellers. The lower GST will make a significant difference for people planning trips, especially in the budget and mid-market segments. At Monday Hotels, we are excited about this move, as it allows us to offer even more affordable and memorable experiences to our guests, reinforcing our commitment to delivering value without compromising on comfort and service.”



Rajesh Magow
Co-founder and Group CEO
MakeMyTrip

“The rationalisation of GST slabs is a welcome move that will act as a stimulus to the Indian economy by boosting discretionary income and fuelling consumption across sectors. For travel and tourism, the cut in GST on hotel rooms priced below ₹7,500 will make stays more affordable for a large share of Indian travellers, reinforcing demand in the domestic market. The reform delivers a two-pronged impact: directly, through lower GST on travel-related services, and indirectly, by enhancing purchasing power.”



Pushpendra Bansal
COO
Lords Hotels & Resorts

“We wholeheartedly welcome the government’s decision to reduce GST on hotel rooms priced up to ₹7,500. This progressive move is a win-win for both guests and the hospitality sector. By lowering the GST rate from 12 per cent to 5 per cent, we expect a notable increase in occupancy levels, making quality stays more accessible to a wider audience. This step is anticipated to drive a growth of around 7–10 per cent in revenues, empowering us to reinvest in elevating our services, and delivering an exceptional experience.”

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Winter holidays gaining traction

Gone are the days when Indians holidayed only in the summers. Winter is fast becoming a season for exploration. From scenic train journeys through the Swiss Alps to chasing the Northern Lights, Indian travellers are increasingly opting for immersive cold-weather experiences. The trend extends beyond Europe to Japan's ski resorts and South Africa's winter safaris.



Srijit Nair
General Manager
Rail Europe

“Indian travellers are increasingly embracing train travel as a key part of their winter Europe adventures. **There has been lots of new interest regarding ski and snow holidays,** Northern Lights, Christmas markets, and winter festivals. Indians are using Eurail and Swiss Travel Passes to cover multiple countries via scenic routes.”



Elena Orland
Tourism Counsellor – Embassy of Spain & Director, Spain Tourism Board

“Indian travellers are increasingly interested in travelling to Spain for its unique winter experiences. There has been a 5 per cent growth in Indians travelling to Spain from November 2024 to February 2025, compared to 2023–24. **Indians love festivals, and winter in Spain is no exception** with its Christmas markets.”



Alefiya Singh
Founder
IRIS Reps

“I have seen a shift in how Indian travellers, especially families, couples and honeymooners, HNI and corporate travellers are embracing winter. Earlier, winter used to be a quiet season, with most people choosing to stay in or wait for summer. But not anymore. **Places like Fiji, New Zealand, and Australia see increasing winter demand.**”



Nikolaos Kavalieros
Managing Director
World of Travel Factory

“Winter travel is becoming a season of choice for many. We have been curating more itineraries that showcase the cultural charm and festive spirit of Greece, and the **response has been encouraging, especially from cities like Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru.** There is interest in less conventional destinations like Greece.”



Yasuhiro Wada
DG (Tourism & MICE Promotion),
Department of Sapporo City

“We are witnessing a remarkable rise in Indian interest for winter travel. **Indian travellers are now actively seeking out destinations that offer unique seasonal experiences.** The idea of playing in real snow, attending winter festivals, trying out local street food, and soaking in onsen baths is no longer considered niche.”



Shravan Bhalla
Director
Hightlyer

“**Indian travellers are increasingly swapping tropical winters for snowy escapes, with up-market tourists leading the charge.** Over the past year, demand has surged for unique experiences like skiing, snowmobiling, stays in glass igloos or ice hotels, Northern Lights sightings, reindeer safaris, and visits to Santa Claus villages.”

SalamAir promotes Oman to Indians

SalamAir is sharpening its India focus with plans to expand beyond metros into high-demand tier II cities, target destination weddings and MICE travel, and strengthen digital distribution through OTAs and GDS tie-ups. Backed by AeroPrime Group as its India GSA, the airline is positioning Oman as a short-haul alternative for Indians seeking affordable, flexible, and experiential travel options.



Surbhi Sharma

India has emerged as one of SalamAir's strongest international markets, contributing significantly to the airline's overall network. The Muscat-based low-cost carrier currently operates flights from eight Indian cities — Delhi, Jaipur, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Kozhikode, and Mumbai — making India the single largest contributor to its international operations.

Waheed Al Bulushi, Regional Manager – Sales, SalamAir, emphasised that India remains central to their expansion plans. With Indian nationals ranking among the top three

expatriate communities in Oman, demand for two-way connectivity continues to grow steadily.

Route expansion

The airline operations extend across 42 global destinations, with India alone accounting for nearly 20 per cent of its network. The airline is actively exploring new Indian routes, including potential revival of flights from Suhar and Salalah. Expansion into tier II cities is also on the radar, driven by rising demand from regional hubs like Jaipur and Lucknow.

Travel your way

Sajid Khan, Country Manager – India, SalamAir, said that the brand's tagline



Waheed Al Bulushi
Regional Manager – Sales
SalamAir

“Travel Your Way” reflects its flexibility-driven model, allowing passengers to pay only for what they use, from baggage and meals to seat selection and lounge access. This appeals strongly to millennials, Gen Z, Gen X, and budget-savvy travel-



Sajid Khan
Country Manager – India
SalamAir

lers, offering them greater control and value compared to traditional carriers.

Beyond regular traffic, SalamAir is positioning itself as a preferred carrier for leisure, MICE, and destination weddings.



Abhishek Goyal
Executive Director & CEO,
AeroPrime Group

Boosting distribution

The airline has strengthened its India presence through collaborations with OTAs like MakeMyTrip, and integration with Sabre GDS and Han Air. Additionally, its partnership with AeroPrime Group

as its General Sales Agent (GSA) in India has provided the airline strong local representation. **Abhishek Goyal**, Executive Director & CEO, AeroPrime Group, said, “We are proud to partner with SalamAir in connecting India with Oman and beyond, offering affordable fares and seamless service.”

While the airline increases its Indian footprint, the larger vision is to position Oman as a must-visit destination. With its pristine coastlines, cultural heritage, and reputation as a peaceful and welcoming nation, the country offers Indian travellers an alternative to crowded Gulf hubs. 🇦🇴

‘Cruise lines are innovative geniuses’

The cruise industry is attaining new heights in innovation, offering travellers more than just a journey — it offers an experience. ‘The audience just needs to choose the destination, and we will help them match with the right ship,’ says **Leena Brahme**, Business Head – India, Sharaf Travel, in an interview with **TRAVTALK**. She shares the trends shaping this dynamic sector.

Hazel Jain

For **Leena Brahme**, Business Head – India, Sharaf Travel, the value proposition is clear and exciting. “Cruise lines are innovative geniuses. The audience just needs to choose the destination, and we will help them match with the right ship,” she says. She points to Costa Cruises, which has upped its entertainment factor by introducing ‘Sea Destinations’. “These are the iconic parties and entertainment of the port replicated on board, and it is inclusive. Be it in the Mediterranean, the Norwegian Fjords, or the Caribbean — the stunningness will follow.”

For high-octane thrills, the focus turns to MSC, a long-standing partner with F1. “This year for the Qatar Grand Prix in November 2025, we are ready with offering the most wanted shore excursions that get you up close and personal on the grandstand to experience the thrill rides of the race,” says Brahme.

And for the ultimate ship-based adventure, all eyes are on Royal Caribbean’s newest marvel. “Royal Caribbean’s newest — Star of the Seas — is ready and cruising into the East and West Caribbean from Port Canaveral. The largest cruise ship in the world is ready to thrill beyond imagination.”



Leena Brahme
Business Head – India
Sharaf Travel

With compelling offers across the board, Brahme highlights key opportunities. “As Singapore is a lucrative destination, Royal Caribbean offers some superb discounts on its beautiful ship, Ova-

tion of the Seas. On MSC, the season for UAE will begin November onwards till March 2026. This is a catch with F1 in Qatar in late November. Please get in touch with us for extraordinary rates. While Costa Cruises also has some stunning pricing already out for summer for the Mediterranean. Their hero ship plies the waters, and we are happy to cater,” she elaborates.


When it comes to marketing, Brahme notes a balanced approach. “Traditional means of B2B marketing, along with word of mouth, have always been steady and strong. Email marketing takes quite the precedence with us.”

A significant part of the business is crafting unique experiences for groups. “We had a Rotary group,

Repeat customers are going for newer ships. Interest towards the Northern Fjords and the Mediterranean has grown




all doctors, who took their leisure trip in the Mediterranean for seven nights. They had their private events in-

cluding dance parties! All exclusive. We cater to exclusivity very well for diners and lunches, minding the food sensibilities. We also had a group who requested an All-Women Spa Day, and voila! 15 women had a great time with the service and post-spa gathering arranged exclusively for them.” Brahme is also seeing some interesting trends in traveller preferences. “Repeat customers are going for newer ships. Interest towards the Northern Fjords has grown. Then next up, Eastern Mediterranean comes up delightfully. UAE sailings are gaining popularity year on year due to the stunning ships that ply and the multi-country options they cruise to.”



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A salute to achievers changing

India Travel Awards 2025 brought together leading voices of the travel & hospitality industry for an evening of recognition and celebration at Le Méridien New Delhi. The prestigious event honoured visionaries who have driven growth, innovation, and excellence in India's tourism sector, setting new benchmarks for the industry.



the face of travel and hospitality



Oman's first B2B event in Jaipur

With a view to strengthening Oman's position as a luxury short-haul destination for Indian travellers, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, recently hosted its first B2B showcase in Jaipur. The event, titled 'Focus Oman', witnessed participation from 25 Omani stakeholders and over 150 Indian luxury, MICE, and wedding planners.



McArthurGlen celebrates 25 yrs

McArthurGlen Group marks 25 years of redefining luxury shopping in Italy with its flagship Serravalle Designer Outlet near Milan. The brand has pioneered fashion-led destinations, combining growth with community engagement.



Twenty-five years ago, McArthurGlen Group changed the rules of shopping in Italy. Today, as its first Italian Designer Outlet in Serravalle near Milan celebrates its 25th anniversary, the Group highlights a journey of growth, international vision, and a deep connection to surrounding territories. With record results, new openings, and innovative guest experiences, McArthurGlen has cemented itself as a global benchmark in luxury retail.



The Italian story began in September 2000 with the Serravalle Designer Outlet, a pioneering project linking Milan's fashion capital with surrounding regions. Home to luxury brands like Gucci, Prada, Burberry, and Versace, Serravalle quickly became a must-visit destination for locals and international travellers alike. Building on this success, McArthurGlen ex-

panded in Italy with Castel Romano in Rome (2003), Noventa di Piave near Venice (2008), and La Reggia near Naples (2010), now celebrating its 15th anniversary. More recently, the Group extended its portfolio with openings in Málaga and Paris-Giverny in 2023.

Italy remains one of McArthurGlen's strongest markets, with steady growth

and promising projections for 2025. Driving much of this growth are visitors from the GCC region, led by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE.

"The ability to constantly renew itself is the foundation of the group's success," says **Donatella Doppio**, Managing Director Italy, McArthurGlen. "We have invested in all our centres through con-

tinuous upgrades and expansions, but also by enhancing the overall experience with new services, attractions, and a distinctive retail offering. This approach has allowed us to strengthen our positioning as a dynamic, forward-looking player."

McArthurGlen outlets are not just shopping destinations — they are cultural and social hubs. 🇮🇹

Tamilnadu Travel Expo returns

The 2nd edition of Tamilnadu Travel Expo is all set to unfold from 26–28 September at the IDA Scudder Auditorium in Madurai. Going beyond Tamil Nadu's heritage tourism, this year's edition aims to showcase the state's cultural, wellness, and wedding potential.



With the tagline 'Explore Beyond Heritage', Tamilnadu Travel Expo (TTE) 2025 will showcase the cultural, wellness and wedding experiences that define the spirit of Tamil Nadu. While heritage remains a proud anchor, this year's edition ventures deeper — inviting attendees to discover the state's evolving narrative.

It is being organised by Travel Club Madurai and Friends of Hospitality, with

support from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Tamil Nadu Tourism, South India Hotels and Restaurants Association (SIHRA), and Confedera-



tion of Indian Industry (CII). From luxury hotels and tour operators to destination curators, wedding plan-

ners and décor specialists, the expo brings together key players from across the travel ecosystem.

More than just an exhibition, TTE serves as a dynamic platform to promote tourism with themed storytelling and create new business avenues in one of India's most diverse states. Tamilnadu Travel Expo is not just about looking back — it is about exploring forward. The 1st edition of TTE, organised last year, witnessed 130 exhibitors and around 300 buyers

from across the country. The three-day event also saw the launch of a new portal 'travel2tamilnadu.com', which showcased the lesser-known gems of the state.



Skål celebrates record membership

Skål International India has been crowned the world's largest national committee, surpassing the USA in membership, which was celebrated in Mumbai recently.



The Skål International National Congress, held in Mumbai from 12–14 September, saw record participation from all over India and abroad. At the event, Skål International India (SII) applauded the outstanding activity of its clubs across the country, with over 200 successful events hosted in the past year. Recognising this collective commitment, the organisation announced the 'Skål International Indian Excellence Awards', dedicated to honouring the efforts of Skålleagues who tirelessly support their respective clubs in India.



Sanjeev Mehra
President
Skål International India

Looking ahead, the next National Congress for 2026 will be announced soon, and Skål International India reaffirms its ambition to host both the World Congress and the Asia Congress in the

'Skål International Indian Excellence Awards' will be dedicated to honouring the efforts of Skålleagues

From 1 September onwards, membership was officially opened across India, with new clubs expected to launch in multiple states over the next four months. This expansion will further strengthen Skål India's national presence, ensuring that every state becomes part of its growing network of travel and tourism professionals.

Skål membership offers unparalleled opportunities to connect, collaborate, and grow — providing business networking, friendship, and global engagement under one banner. "The idea is to work within India, with our own Skålleagues, and simultaneously engage with the international community," said **Sanjeev Mehra**, President, Skål International India.

coming years — creating new opportunities for members to showcase India on the global stage.

With strong retention and record membership growth, SII has surpassed Skål International USA to become the number one committee in the world. The leadership's vision remains clear: to grow not just in numbers but also in clubs, ensuring a vibrant, united future for Skål in India.

EVENT TALK		
Published from : ★ India ★ Middle East		
OCTOBER 2025		
Date	Event	Time
1-3	Magical Kenya Travel Expo	10:00 am
4-6	India Travel Mart Bhopal	9:00 am
6-9	IMEX Frankfurt	9:00 am
6-9	ILTM North America	9:00 am
7	Conztruct	4:00 pm
7-8	GPS – Kochi	10:00 am
10-12	Global Luxury Travel Expo	9:00 am
15-17	ITB Asia	9:30 am
21	Czech Travel Market	9:00 am
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
7-10	Taipei International Travel Fair	10:00 am
25	Arabian Travel Awards	6:00 p.m

WTM registration now open

WTM London 2025 expects to return with its largest edition yet, following last year’s success that saw over 34,000 meetings and an 11% rise in qualified buyers. This year promises expanded content, immersive experiences, and deeper global engagement.



WTM London 2025 is now open for registration, introducing several new features, programme additions and experiences. Returning to London’s iconic Excel from 4–6 November 2025, this edition is expected to be the largest in its history. Last year’s edition saw an 11 per cent rise in qualified buyers and more than 34,000 meetings. This momentum is set to continue this year.

With Excel London’s ongoing expansion, the show will grow by 25,000 sqm, offering more space, enriched content and greater engagement. A highlight



this year will be the launch of WTM Trend Fest, a new cultural programme featuring immersive global experiences through live performances, themed activations, and daily presentations. Exhibitor participation is already showing signs of record-breaking

growth, with strong representation across destinations, experiences, transport, accommodation, and technology solutions.

This year’s conference will follow a unified theme across all six tracks: ‘Reimagining Travel in a Changing World’. With increasing floor capacity, and last year’s 29 per cent rise in session attendance,

WTM London will also debut bookable, fee-based masterclasses led by experts and exhibitors.

A highlight this year will be the launch of WTM Trend Fest, a new cultural programme featuring immersive global experiences

Important events confirmed to return this year include the Ministers’ Summit at WTM.

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MOVEMENTS

EASEMYTRIP

New Delhi

EaseMyTrip has announced that its Founder **NISHANT PITTI** has taken on the role of Chairman cum Managing Director, following the approval of the company's board, subject to shareholders' approval. This move further strengthens his ongoing leadership at the company while supporting growth and strategic initiatives. In his new role, Pitti will continue guiding the company's long-term vision, with a sharper focus on innovation, expansion, and stakeholder value creation.



MARRIOTT INTERNATIONAL

Mumbai

Marriott International has appointed **KIRAN ANDICOT** as Senior Vice President, to lead its South Asia region. The promotion will see Andicot overseeing Operations and Development across Marriott International's South Asia portfolio. In this new role, he will align growth with operating performance, deepen owner partnerships, and accelerate conversions and openings. He has 30 years of experience leading teams across various hospitality disciplines in India and abroad.



THRILLOPHILIA

Jaipur

Thrillophilia promotes **ABHISHEK PURI** to the position of Chief Business Officer (CBO). Puri began his journey at Thrillophilia eight years ago in sales. He has led the company's partnerships and supply operations at scale, built and grown high-performing business teams, and played a pivotal role in expanding into new categories and driving revenue and geographical growth. In his new role, Puri will oversee the commercial strategy, supply networks, and category innovation.



SHANGRI-LA BENGALURU

Bengaluru

Shangri-La Bengaluru has appointed **RAHUL JOSHI** as General Manager. Joshi has worked with 5-star properties across India and abroad for over 25 years. His operational strengths, forward-thinking management style, and focus on team empowerment have contributed to exceptional guest experiences and business growth. His commitment to integrating locally resonant guest experiences supports the property's reputation for distinguished service and brand excellence.



PULLMAN AND NOVOTEL NEW DELHI AEROCITY

New Delhi

Pullman and Novotel New Delhi Aerocity have appointed **MANISH DAYYA** as General Manager. With a career spanning over 27 years, Dayya brings deep expertise in leading India's luxury and premium hotels while driving exceptional performance across operations, sustainability and guest experience. Known for transforming properties into award-winning destinations, he brings a unique combination of commercial acumen, people-first leadership and innovation-led strategy.



PLANET HOLLYWOOD THANE

Thane

Planet Hollywood Thane has appointed **SANA NASEEM** as General Manager. Naseem brings with her nearly two decades of experience in the luxury hospitality sector, having worked with globally renowned hotel brands, including IHG, Hyatt, The Imperial, and Machan Resorts LLP. She is recognised for her expertise in operations, guest experience design, and commercial growth. In her new role, she aims to position Planet Hollywood Thane as a premier lifestyle and luxury destination.



THE WESTIN MUMBAI POWAI LAKE AND LAKESIDE CHALET – MARRIOTT EXECUTIVE APARTMENTS

Mumbai

The Westin Mumbai Powai Lake and Lakeside Chalet – Marriott Executive Apartments have appointed **SAVIO FERNANDES** as Hotel Manager. He has more than 22 years of experience in hospitality management and a passion for delivering exceptional guest experiences. His recent stints include Deputy GM at Camellias, DLF Hospitality in Gurgaon, and Director of Food & Beverage at Four Seasons Bengaluru.



NOVOTEL PUNE NAGAR ROAD

Pune

KINSHUK SHRIVASTAVA joins as Cluster Director of Revenue for Novotel Pune Nagar Road and Novotel Imagica Khopoli. With over 10 years' experience in revenue strategy and hotel operations, Shrivastava brings expertise in forecasting, competitive benchmarking, data analytics, and yield management. In his new role, he will be responsible for driving revenue growth and optimising business performance across both properties. Prior to this, he was the Cluster Revenue Manager at Hyatt Pune and Hyatt Place Pune.



AKASA AIR

Mumbai

Akasa Air has appointed **NAARAYAN T V** as its Chief Marketing Officer. In this role, he will oversee the airline's marketing, corporate communications & ESG, customer experience, eCommerce, customer analytics, and partnerships functions. He will also serve as a member of Akasa's Executive Committee. He has more than two decades of cross-industry experience spanning eCommerce, fintech, banking, D2C broking, and global consumer brands.



BENGALURU MARRIOTT HOTEL WHITEFIELD

Bengaluru

Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield appoints **SUMIN MARTIN** as Director of Sales. With over a decade of experience across leading luxury hospitality brands, Martin brings with him a proven track record in driving business growth, building client relationships, and mentoring high-performing sales teams. He joins the hotel from The Ritz-Carlton, Bangalore, where he served as Assistant Director of Sales. In his new role, Martin will spearhead the sales strategy for Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield.



NOVOTEL GOA CANDOLIM AND NOVOTEL GOA RESORT & SPA

Goa

Novotel Goa Candolim and Novotel Goa Resort & Spa have appointed **RHYTHM K GANDHI** as Marketing & Communications Manager. This strategic move underscores the resorts' commitment to strengthening guest engagement and enhancing brand presence across Goa's dynamic hospitality landscape. Gandhi joins the team with extensive experience in marketing and communications.




RAFFLES UDAIPUR

Udaipur

Raffles Udaipur has appointed **SHRI RAJ GOSWAMI** as the Director of Food & Beverage. With over 12 years of experience across the finest global luxury hospitality brands, Goswami brings with him an impeccable depth of expertise, refined sensibilities, and a strong commitment to curating extraordinary gastronomic journeys. In his new role, he will helm the operations of Raffles Udaipur's diverse dining landscape, comprising nine restaurants and bars, as well as the resort's exceptional banquet and event offerings.



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'30% growth in Indian arrivals during winters'

Switzerland is solidifying its position as a year-round destination for Indian travellers, with a 30% surge in winter visits complementing the traditional peak season. In an exclusive interview with **TRAVTALK**, **Christian Schoch**, Director India, Switzerland Tourism, shares details.



Hazel Jain

Switzerland has been receiving a robust response from Indian travellers this year. "We had a really promising start to 2025. We have seen a growth from January to March 2025, indicating that wintertime is picking up in Switzerland among Indian visitors," said **Christian Schoch**, Director India, Switzerland Tourism.



The positive trend continued through the first half of the year. "Overall, from January to June 2025 we had a growth of over 10 per cent of hotel overnights in Switzerland from Indian guests, which is quite a good number for us, and we are definitely in tune with our goal of 10 per cent hotel overnights throughout the whole year," he added.

This follows a strong performance in 2024, which saw 11 per cent growth in hotel overnights from Indian guests. "That means we counted more than 660,000 hotel over-

nights from guests from India, which is really good compared to the year before. Now we are looking forward to 2025, where we expect another growth of around 10 per cent of hotel overnights," Schoch explained.

A key insight is the evolving travel pattern. "We see that Switzerland turns into a 365-day destination as well for Indian guests. Peak season is still from April to June. But we did see a growth in wintertime of about plus 30 per cent, which shows that people are travelling throughout the year," he noted. "Autumn is picking up, which is a beautiful season in Switzerland. So, when we talk to the travel agents, we hear that Switzerland is becoming an all-year destination."

Engagements in tier II & III cities

A core part of Switzerland Tourism's strategy involves intensive engagement with the travel trade across India, with a special focus on emerging cities. "In the first half of 2025, we conducted around 10 train-

ing sessions in several cities across India, especially tier II and tier III cities. For example, we were in Jaipur, Coimbatore, Goa, Chandigarh, and Lucknow because we really want

We see that Switzerland turns into a 365-day destination as well for Indian guests. Peak season is still from April to June

to engage with the travel trade in the smaller cities in India and transfer our knowledge to these parts of India," Schoch said.

He highlighted the different needs of travellers from metros versus non-metros. "We see a lot of repeat travellers from the metros. That means they are coming a second time, or a third time, and they want to go beyond the highlights of Switzerland. They want to explore hidden gems, stay longer in Switzerland, which is definitely in tune with our strategy, where we want to focus on sustainability by

public transport and longer stays."

"In contrast, when we go beyond the metro — to tier II and tier III cities — we still see that people are travelling, for example, the first time to Switzerland. So, they really want to see the highlights of Switzerland. There, we try to create mono Switzerland tours," he elaborates. More initiatives are planned for the latter part of the year.

Symbiotic role of trade and OTAs

When asked about the balance between OTAs and traditional trade partners, Schoch emphasises that both are crucial.

"For us, both the consumer and the trade are equally important. That is why we do the awareness with consumer activities and then go deep when we do the trade activities. Both complement each other."



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