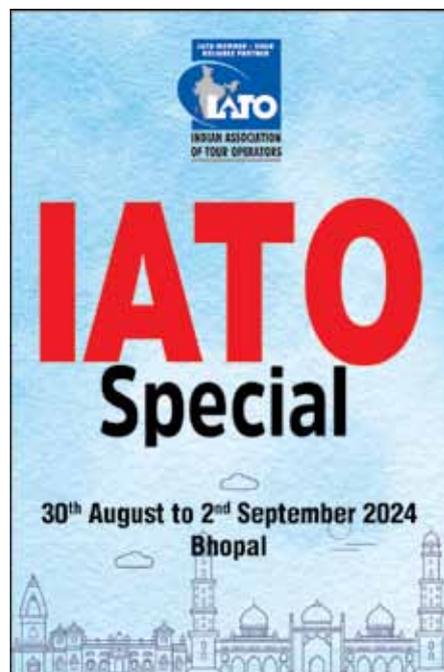


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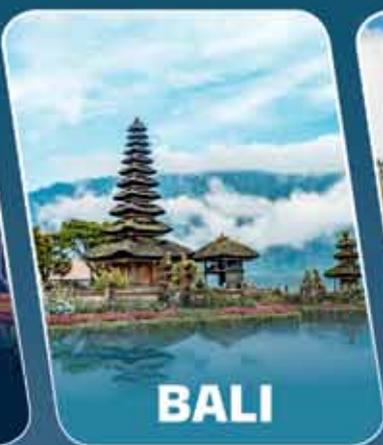
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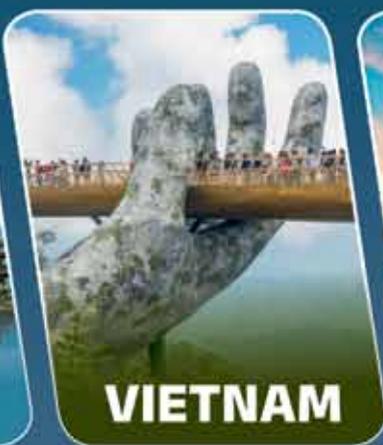
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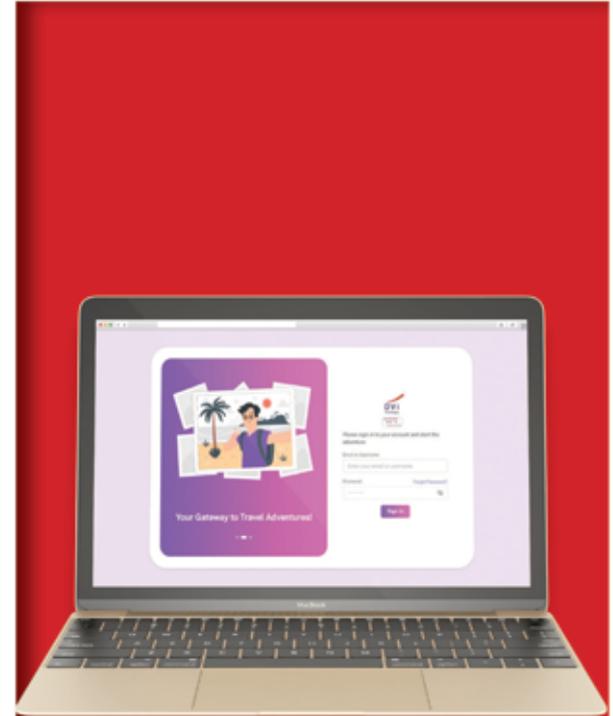
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Spotlight on Bhopal

As the 39th IATO Annual Convention begins in Bhopal, the association's president, Rajiv Mehra, offers a glimpse into how the convention not only puts spotlight on Madhya Pradesh but also contributes to the goals of revitalising India's tourism industry, enhancing the country's position as a global tourism destination.



Janice Alyosius

This year's IATO Annual Convention promises to be a unique blend of activities, as it includes several standout features and strategic goals.

On what sets this year's convention apart from the previous years, **Rajiv Mehra**, President, IATO, says, "Every convention has its unique features, so too will our convention in Bhopal. This year's event will incorporate a comprehensive range of elements, including the inaugural, business sessions, state presentations, host state special session, networking luncheons, dinners, entertainment evenings, IATO Run for sustainable tourism, awards, and prizes. All these differentiate the canvas for Bhopal. The expectation is to create significant takeaways for IATO's membership, furthering inbound tourism for Madhya

Pradesh, and enhancing the marketing of the state's destinations in alignment with state government policies."

Member participation

One of the most notable aspects of this year's IATO convention is the strong participation from IATO's membership.



"The participation by our membership this year is indeed a standout feature. This robust engagement underscores the convention's role as a vital platform for networking and addressing key industry issues," Mehra says.

Objectives & initiatives

The convention aims to provide valuable networking opportunities for members while addressing critical issues, such as marketing and promotion, budget allocation, incentivisation for the industry, and investment in tourism infrastructure. The event will also focus on practical policy initiatives from the central and state governments to address the concerns, infrastructure and connectivity, and future plans of the association for improving tourism in the state.



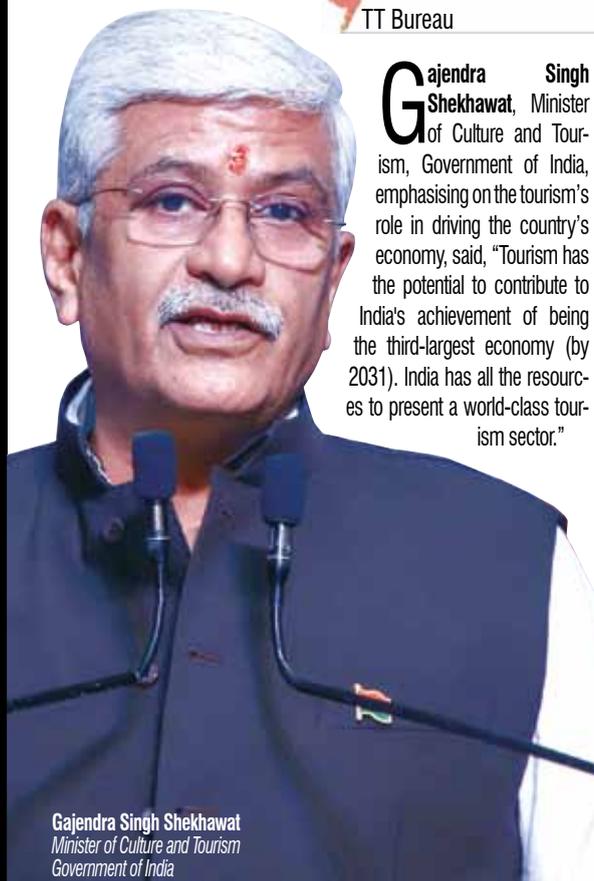
Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO

MOT unveils new initiatives

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Culture and Tourism, Government of India, says that tourism could play a crucial role in propelling India, as the ministry takes new initiatives to bolster the tourism sector, aiming to enhance the country's global reputation and drive economic growth.



TT Bureau



Gajendra Singh Shekhawat
Minister of Culture and Tourism
Government of India

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Minister of Culture and Tourism, Government of India, emphasising on the tourism's role in driving the country's economy, said, "Tourism has the potential to contribute to India's achievement of being the third-largest economy (by 2031). India has all the resources to present a world-class tourism sector."

He said that tourism, as the largest employment generator after agriculture, offers diverse opportunities. "We are witnessing diversity and new business opportunities in this sector," he said.

The minister emphasised that India is on track to become a perennial destination and highlighted the role of MICE in achieving the goal. "Progress and development in this field are crucial, and everyone involved plays a significant role, especially in bridging the gaps," Shekhawat said.

The Ministry of Tourism is advancing its mission to enhance the tourism sector by collaborating with Central Ministries, States, and stakeholders to improve infrastructure, products, and connectivity. Key initiatives include Swadesh Darshan 2.0, which focuses on sustainable tourism across 57 destinations with

a budget of Rs 644 crore. The "Challenge Based Destination Development" sub-scheme targets 42 destinations in various categories. The PRASHAD Scheme aims to upgrade pilgrimage site infrastructure, while the Incred-

Tourism has the potential to contribute to India's achievement of being the third-largest economy (by 2031) in the world

ible India Tourist Facilitator (ITF) Certification Programme trains local professionals. Additionally, 53 new tourism routes have been added under the RCS-UDAN for improved connectivity.

Convention to further boost MP tourism

Madhya Pradesh has drawn tourists looking for unique and genuine experiences, as seen by the impressive increase in visitor numbers from 34 million in 2022 to 112 million in 2023. Hosting the 39th IATO Annual Convention further supports the state's vision of establishing Madhya Pradesh as a leading travel destination in the country.

Janice Alyosius

The 39th IATO Annual Convention provides a significant opportunity for the state to assert its growing prominence as a premier travel destination. Returning to Madhya Pradesh after a nine-year hiatus, the convention brings together over 1,000 delegates from across the nation, reflecting the state's increasing appeal to travellers seeking unique and authentic experiences.

Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB), underscored the convention's importance in boosting the state's tourism. "Hosting the IATO Convention aligns perfectly with our vision to highlight Madhya Pradesh as a top travel destination. This event is more than just a conference; it's a gateway to showcasing our rich



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture, Govt of MP & MD, MPTB

cultural legacy, adventure tourism, wildlife sanctuaries, and historical sites," Shukla said.

MP as a top travel destination

Madhya Pradesh is leveraging the IATO convention to enhance its tourism profile. With its extensive array of natural and cultural attractions—including 11 national parks, 24 sanctuaries, seven tiger

reserves, and 14 UNESCO World Heritage Sites—the state offers a diverse and captivating tourism experience. The state has undoubtedly drawn tourists looking for unique and genuine experiences, as seen by the impressive increase in visitor numbers from 34.1 million in 2022 to 112.1 million in 2023.

In addition to the convention, the MPTB is organising 10 post-convention familiarisation trips. These visits aim to take travel agents and tour operators to the state's lesser-known destinations, encouraging them to develop new itineraries and promote Madhya Pradesh as a must-visit destination.

"The familiarisation trips will provide travel professionals with first-hand experiences of our state's vibrant cultural heritage, thrilling adventure activities, spiritual sites, and rich wildlife encounters. This initiative is designed to inspire travel agents to create and market

itineraries that showcase Madhya Pradesh's unique offerings," Shukla explained.

Hotel infra and connectivity

The state is also focused on improving its hotel infrastructure and connectivity to attract tourists. Significant developments include introduction of the air taxi service, PM Shri Paryatn Vayu Seva, a cruise service, and the ambitious cheetah reintroduction project at Kuno-Palpur National Park.

The MPTB is working on converting heritage sites into luxury accommodations and expanding its hotel network. Over the next five years, more than six new hotels will open, and existing properties will see increased room capacities in places like Indore, Sagar, and Kuno-Palpur. "By expanding our hotel infrastructure and enhancing connectivity, we aim to offer a seamless and enriching experience for tourists. Our goal is to make Madhya Pradesh

a top choice for both domestic and international travellers," said Shukla.

international tourism & MICE

Madhya Pradesh's year-round appeal is underscored by its rich festivals and cultural events, at-

developing new experiences, and forging global partnerships. Madhya Pradesh is also emerging as a significant player in the MICE sector. Venues such as the Maharaja Chhatrasal Convention Centre and the Brilliant Convention Centre offer state-of-the-art facilities for business events, complemented by the state's stunning landscapes and cultural heritage. "Our modern convention facilities, combined with our rich cultural backdrop, create an unparalleled setting for MICE events. We are committed to providing a unique blend of business and leisure that ensures a memorable experience for delegates," Shukla said.

Collaborating with the trade

The state tourism board is actively engaging with travel agents and MICE planners to bolster tourism. Incentive programmes, training sessions, and workshops are being designed to enhance understanding and promotion of the state's tourism potential.

Hosting the IATO Convention aligns perfectly with our (government's) vision to highlight Madhya Pradesh as a top travel destination

tracting visitors seeking spiritual and religious experiences. The tourism board is working to attract international travellers by promoting existing attractions,

Revitalising India's inbound sector

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), through its annual convention in the city of Bhopal, aims to further energise India's inbound tourism through strategic discussions on marketing, sustainability, digital transformation, and the promotion of lesser-known destinations with a special focus on Madhya Pradesh's unique destinations and cultural heritage.

Janice Alyosius

The 39th IATO Annual Convention promises to be a significant event for the Indian tourism industry, attracting a diverse group of around 1,000 delegates from the government, tourism, aviation, and hospitality sectors. Emphasising on the importance of enhancing the convention experience, **Ravi Gosain**, Vice President, IATO and Convention Chairman, said, "With each edition, we strive to enhance the quality of content and overall experience for our delegates. Our convention is one of the most anticipated events in Indian tourism, drawing prominent figures from various sectors. The attendance of around 1,000 delegates underscores the significance of our annual convention and the value it provides to participants."

The convention will revolve around the theme 'Resurgent India Inbound', a reflection of the

industry's need for innovative approaches in inbound tourism.

Gosain explained, "We have carefully chosen this theme to recognise the need for fresh perspectives in product development and marketing within inbound tourism. Our business sessions will cover key topics, such as marketing strategies, uncovering lesser-known destinations, enhancing travel experiences, sustainability, legal challenges, women empowerment, digitalisation, and the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in tourism."

Sharing his thoughts on the convention's impact, **Sunil Mishra**, Honorary Treasurer, IATO and Convention Co-Chairman, said, "The theme 'Resurgent India Inbound' is particularly relevant as we navigate the post-pandemic landscape. It emphasises the need for the Indian travel industry to not just recover but to emerge stronger and more resilient. We



Ravi Gosain
Vice President
IATO and Convention Chairman

We strive to enhance the quality of content and overall experience for our delegates. Our convention is one of the most anticipated events



Sunil Mishra
Honorary Treasurer
IATO and Convention Co-Chairman

The theme 'Resurgent India Inbound' is particularly relevant as we navigate the post-pandemic landscape



Mahendra Pratap Singh
Chapter Chairman, IATO Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh and Convention Co-Chairman

Key sessions will address policy reforms, sustainable tourism practices, digital innovation, and marketing strategies

are focusing on how India can reposition itself as a preferred destination by leveraging new trends and promoting sustainable tourism."

Mishra highlighted how this convention will be a game-changer for the industry. "Through insightful panel discussions, expert-led sessions, and collaborative brainstorming, we aim to create actionable strategies that will help our members not only recover but thrive. The exchange of ideas and networking opportunities will set a new direction for the industry," he said. He also highlighted several unique elements of this year's convention. "We have planned an unprecedented number of Fam tours to allow our members to experience the potential of off-beat destinations firsthand. The focus on digital transformation under the 'Digital India' initiative will provide our members with the tools to better compete in a

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India inbound takes centre stage

The 39th IATO Annual Convention embraces the theme 'Resurgent India Inbound' to put spotlight on the strategic push for revival of India's inbound tourism after a prolonged stagnation. Amid challenges like geopolitical conflicts and reduced government support, the theme signifies a pivotal moment to rejuvenate and reimagine India's global tourism appeal.



Rajnish Kaistha
Senior Vice President
IATO

“ After considerable deliberation, we decided on the theme of the convention from many options. The theme reflects our thoughtful process of reviving inbound tourism after more than 30 months of stagnant activity due to COVID-19. Around September 2022, leisure inbound foreign tourists began trickling into the country, but this resurgence was soon hindered by geopolitical upheavals like the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the suspension of tourist visas for Canadians. Although the government reports increased foreign arrivals for 2023-24 compared to the previous year, these numbers are nowhere near pre-COVID levels. Despite this, industry sentiment is gradually improving for 2024-25 and beyond, which is why the theme 'Resurgent India Inbound'. It is crucial for hotels, airlines, and especially the government to support this revival. ”



Sanjay Razdan
Honorary Secretary
IATO

“ The theme, 'Resurgent India Inbound', for the 39th IATO Annual Convention reflects a strategic focus on boosting the inbound tourism sector in India. After facing significant challenges due to the pandemic, this theme suggests a forward-looking approach to re-establishing India as a major tourist destination for international travellers. Emphasising resurgence highlights the need to rejuvenate and adapt strategies to attract tourists back to India, addressing both safety concerns and shifting travel preferences. India offers a diverse range of attractions, from historical sites and cultural experiences to natural beauty and wellness tourism. The theme suggests a comprehensive effort to showcase these strengths and position India as a must-visit destination. The convention can provide a platform for sharing innovative strategies and best practices. ”

“ Post-COVID, the inbound tourism sector has faced immense challenges as it strives to survive, revive, and thrive. Despite its critical importance, this segment has unfortunately been given low priority by our government. Our repeated calls for appropriate budget allocations for overseas marketing promotions, global media campaigns, and roadshows involving inbound tourism stakeholders have been consistently overlooked by the relevant ministries. The 2024 convention, with its focused theme, represents a crucial opportunity for the IATO to bring these pressing concerns to the forefront. We aim to make these issues both impactful and eye-opening for government tourism authorities, hoping to prompt necessary action and support. ”



Viney Tyagi
Honorary Joint Secretary
IATO

“ The most important thing for IATO at present is to capitalise on its membership numbers, positioning itself as a pan-India body that can make a difference. The tourism mandarins and the Government of India should recognise and believe in the association's ability to share responsibility and partner with authorities to develop, grow, and enhance facilities, connectivity, and skilled personnel in public undertakings. IATO should be allowed to have its officials on board to help develop locations and select officers who will be shortlisted to manage tourism offices in India and abroad. We can offer our professional guidance to find the right candidates who are dedicated to tourism in India. This approach will ensure a focus on professionalism rather than comfort postings. ”



Zia Siddiqui
Executive Committee Member
IATO

“ The IATO convention, themed 'Resurgent India Inbound', emphasises on the critical need to revitalise and fortify India's inbound tourism industry, which has encountered significant challenges due to the pandemic. This theme is particularly relevant as the industry seeks to recover and grow. By focusing on recovery and strengthening, the convention aims to address the current obstacles and leverage India's unique tourism offerings. The convention's emphasis on rebuilding and revitalising the sector is poised to be transformative. It will showcase India's diverse and unique attractions while promoting innovative solutions tailored to current industry needs. The event will offer invaluable opportunities for networking, knowledge sharing, and capacity building. ”



EM Najeed
Executive Committee Member
IATO



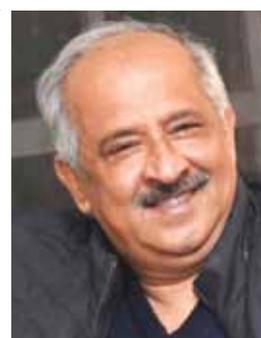
Deepak Kumarr Bhatnagar
Executive Committee Member
IATO

“ I think the theme 'Resurgent India Inbound' for the 39th IATO Convention is the most apt one. We in India are struggling to return to the pre-COVID levels of tourism, and we have received almost no support from government agencies, especially for marketing Indian destinations. Although there has been some participation in key international tourism fairs from various source markets, this effort is insufficient. We need to immediately resume the marketing efforts we had in place before COVID. Therefore, it is crucial to brainstorm on how we can revive India's inbound tourism. At IATO, we are working diligently to organise business sessions with key speakers on various subjects related to the resurgence of India's inbound tourism. ”



Manoj Kumar Matta
Executive Committee Member
IATO

“ One of the biggest challenges for any event is deciding on its theme. This year, many options were considered before settling on 'Resurgent India Inbound'. As Swami Vivekananda said, 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is achieved'. It has been four years since the pandemic, and India's inbound tourism industry remains severely impacted. The theme 'Resurgent India Inbound' could be a game-changer if the industry's concerns reach policymakers and hotelier friends clearly and loudly. The current apathy towards inbound tourism is reflected in the declining number of tourists. While destinations like Santorini, Venice, and Machu Picchu are concerned about overtourism, India struggles to return to the pre-pandemic levels. ”



Harish Mathur
Executive Committee Member
IATO

“ The theme for this year's IATO Annual Convention, 'Resurgent India Inbound', feels incredibly timely and significant. After the global challenges of the past few years, India is ready to welcome the world again with open arms. Our country's rich cultural tapestry, ancient traditions, and modern advancements make it an irresistible destination for global travellers. This resurgence is not just about reopening doors—it's about reimagining how we invite the world to experience the true essence of India. With six decades in the travel industry, I have seen firsthand how India has evolved as a destination. This convention has the potential to be a turning point for our industry. It's an opportunity for all of us to come together and redefine our approach to inbound tourism. ”

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Hyderabad Passengers by Region - 2023



Hyderabad Takes Off : A Booming Tech Hub & Aviation Powerhouse

Colliers Research ranks Hyderabad as Asia's 3rd fastest-growing city, with a remarkable 7.8% annual surge. Telangana boasts the title of India's fastest growing economy. With a per capita income of Rs. 3.1 Lakh (1.9x the national average) and a GSDP valued at US \$160 Billion in 2023, Telangana attracts wealth; it houses the country's second highest number of ultra high net worth individuals (Knight Frank 2022). This robust economic ecosystem fuels aviation growth.



Hyderabad's strength lies in its diverse industry base. Major MNCs, its status as India's vaccine capital, and a flourishing IT hub with giants like Google, Microsoft, and Amazon all contribute significantly. T-Hub, the world's largest innovation hub and start up eco system enabler is driving force behind the transformational change in the city's start-up eco system. Additionally, leading aviation players like Safran and P&W, Tata Boeing Aerospace Ltd, Brahmos Aerospace and Collins Aerospace, to name a few, solidify Hyderabad's potential as a major aviation hub.

Promote India through social media

It is high time India should focus more on international promotion and invite ambassadors from the top 10 nations to show them India's tourism potential. Sharing insights on ways to amplify the promotional efforts, regional heads from North, East, West and South regions of IATO agree that aggressive campaigns on social media platforms are need of the hour for wider outreach.



Sunil C Gupta
Chairman
Northern Region, IATO

“ The reduced budget for overseas tourism promotion will hinder India's efforts to attract foreign tourists. To overcome this scarcity, stakeholders must unite and contribute for a strategy to promote India. This would involve partnering with international hotel chains, create a marketing cell within tourism associations for collaborations, and join forces with state bodies to promote inbound tourism. Government agencies, industry, and local businesses must leverage resources, expertise, and networks for sustainable tourism promotion. By adopting sustainable destination promotion, we

can ensure long-term growth and overcome limitations of reduced budget and promote India as a premier tourist destination. The 39th IATO Annual Convention presents an ideal platform to address the inadequate government support for promoting tourism. As a strong and unified body, IATO has the potential to bring together top stakeholders in the tourism industry in order foster a collaborative goal. IATO can leverage the expertise and network of its members to create a powerful marketing tool. Exploring alternative government support such as partnerships and empowering the travel trade to take ownership of promotions are crucial steps to be taken. The travel trade can leverage their skills and capacity in a bid to showcase India as a premier tourist destination. IATO's strong membership and industry influence make it an ideal catalyst for driving change and finding solutions to the challenges facing inbound tourism. ”



Sejo Jose
Chairman
Southern Region, IATO

“ The reduction in tourism budget by the Government of India has created a big challenge for the country's tourism industry. However, the state tourism and the private players have invested to bring international tourists to India. It's interesting to see that the budget for tourism has come down at a time when tourism is considered one of the top five foreign exchange earners and creating employment for the country. Indian Association of Tour Operators) should be addressing the matter to the tourism department the effects of reduction in budget for tourism promotion. These acts of

reductions send out a wrong picture to the youth of the country, as they will not be interested to be a part of tourism but look for other industry or get out of the country. The IATO convention is always a platform where industry leaders meet to discuss and share ideas to resolve the issues faced in tourism. It is also a platform where we invite the government body and update issues so corrective steps are done. IATO members can come together and understand how to plan and improve promotion for the country. IATO can start doing roadshows or take a huge stall at various trade shows for its members. End of the day, there is a limitation on how much a private party can spend. Therefore, together all should speak to tourism and finance departments to increase amount for promotion in the budget, so that we can reach our dream target of higher forex for the country. ”

“ Despite emphasis towards making India a premier tourist destination by focusing on development of spiritual and cultural sites, the primary concerns of the hospitality industry regarding upgrading infrastructure and granting industry status, implementing reforms for EoDB (Ease of Doing Business), specific budget allocation for the promotional campaign to attract foreign tourists, rationalisation of GST among others, were not addressed in the Union Budget. After the Union Ministry of Tourism closed tourist offices abroad, all global promotion is being done through the Embassies controlled by the Union Ministry of External Affairs. It is, therefore, necessary to invite officials of the Embassies of the top 10 countries, sending highest number of tourists to India, on FAM tours to Odisha, to get view of the vast tourism potential of India. Aggressive campaigns on digital and social media platforms by engaging eminent content writers are also necessary to promote Indian tourism. The IATO convention can be a valuable platform for addressing various challenges being faced by the travel and tourism industry. It brings together stakeholders, including travel agents, tour operators, and government officials, to discuss challenges and opportunities within the sector. The convention would provide a unique opportunity for industry players to collaborate, share best practices, and discuss common challenges. This collective approach can lead to innovative solutions that individual businesses may not have the resources to pursue on their own. ”



JK Mohanty, MHCIMA
Chairman
Eastern Region, IATO

“ The USA and UK markets have opened and are doing well; we are seeing many high-end Americans coming to India. Most of them are upgrading their hotel and vehicle packages, so it has been good business for us. Several tourists are even coming on charter flights and hiring S-Class vehicles and vans and opting for five-star hotels. A lot of cruise tourists have also started coming in from the USA. Unfortunately, several cruise groups have cancelled their trips because of the Red Sea crisis—we recently had a 20-pax cancellation. We hope this issue will be sorted out by next season. European market, especially France and Italy, has not yet fully started because of recession. The tourists of this region, I believe, do not want to engage in long-haul travel presently. German tourist traffic has started trickling in, but not in big numbers. Unless and until they start coming to India, our budget tourism will remain affected. Hopefully, this year we will get good business from them. We are facing a lot of problems with the rates of cruise guide. We will discuss this with our members; there are many international cruise liners coming into Mumbai. The regular rates for city-sightseeing, including Elephanta Caves among others, are negotiated by IATO through the Delhi-based Tourist Guides' Federation of India (TGFI). However, for cruise passengers, we negotiate the rates locally. In this regard, we had a meeting with the Tourist Guides Association (TOGA), Mumbai. They are demanding 15 per cent to 20 per cent more than the current rate negotiated with TGFI. We will discuss this issue with our members. ”



NS Rathor
Chairman
Western Region, IATO

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Swosti Premium Beach Resorts Puri sets a new standard for luxury in Odisha, inviting guests to experience the perfect blend of opulence, comfort, and natural beauty in the heart of Lord Jagannath Dham. The resort features 125 luxurious rooms, including suites, each meticulously designed to blend sophistication with comfort.



TT Bureau

On 25 August 2024, the scenic city of Puri welcomed a new pinnacle of luxury with the inauguration of Swosti Premium Beach Resorts Puri, marking a significant milestone in the region's hospitality sector. Nestled along the pristine shores of the Blue Flag Beach in Puri, this resort emerges as the first five-star accommodation in the area, blending opulence with the spiritual and cultural richness of the holy town.

A jewel on the shoreline

The property promises an unparalleled experience, combining stunning architecture with world-class amenities and exceptional service. Located just 60 minutes away from Bhubaneswar Airport and Railway Station, the resort offers the perfect gateway for both leisure and business travellers. Its strategic location on Puri's Blue Flag Beach enhances the allure of this seaside paradise, which har-

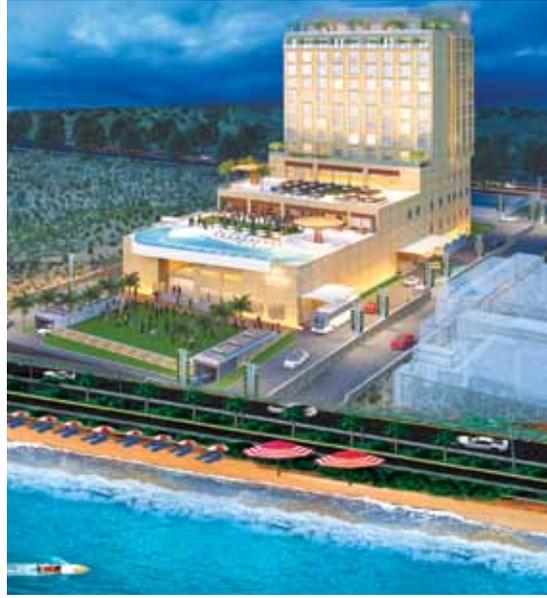
moniously merges luxury, comfort, and natural beauty.

Elegant accommodations

The resort features 125 luxurious rooms, including suites, each meticulously designed to blend sophistication with comfort. Guests are treated to state-of-the-art technology and breathtaking views of the Golden Sea Beach. Every room is a haven of tranquility, ensuring a memorable stay with its refined decor and thoughtful amenities.

Culinary excellence

Dining at Swosti Premium Beach Resorts is a journey of indulgence. The resort boasts a variety of culinary experiences, with menus crafted by renowned chefs to delight every palate. Beach Hut, the all-day dining destination, offers a rich array of multi-cuisine dishes and buffets. For seafood enthusiasts, 'Saltwater' serves fresh and exquisite seafood dishes, while the Sky Bar on the roof-



top presents a luxurious dining experience with panoramic views and an exclusive seafood menu.

Wellness and relaxation

The resort's commitment to wellness is evident in its state-of-the-art fitness centre and the luxuri-

ous 'Ekayaa SPA'. Spanning over 1,352 sq ft, this spa provides a sanctuary of rejuvenation with a wide range of treatments designed to soothe the body and mind. For entertainment, the 'Relay' Games Room and the kids' Game Zone 'Breakk' provide endless fun, en-

suring a vibrant and playful environment for all ages.

Exceptional event spaces

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts is also a premier destination for meetings and events, offering versatile banquet halls equipped with the latest technology. The expansive 'Boita Voyage' can accommodate up to 1,000 guests, making it perfect for grand events and weddings. For more intimate gatherings, 'Panorama' and 'Portrait' offer cozy settings for up to 150 guests. The 'Mahari' Courtyard, with its 2,400 sq ft of adaptable space, is ideal for medium-sized events.

Commitment to sustainability

The property is deeply committed to sustainability, integrating eco-friendly practices throughout the property. From energy-efficient systems and water conservation initiatives to the use of locally sourced materials and food, the resort's green initiatives reflect

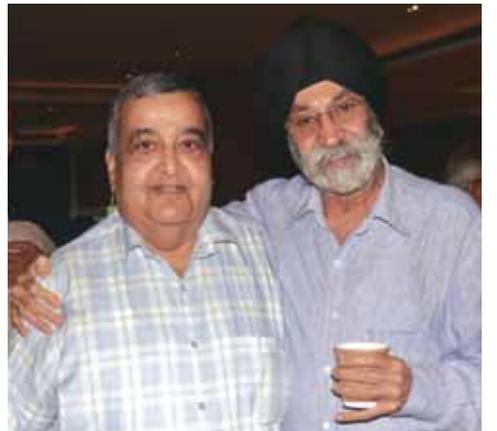
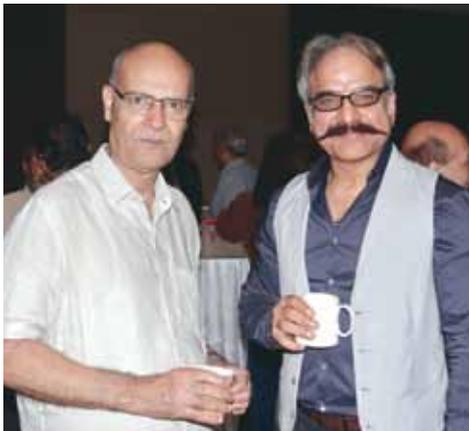
its dedication to minimising its ecological footprint while delivering a luxurious experience. Exceptional service is the hallmark of the Swosti's property. A highly trained team of professionals is available 24/7, providing personalised

Dining at the resort is a journey of indulgence. It boasts of a variety of culinary experiences, with menus crafted by renowned chefs

and attentive care to each guest. Whether it's concierge services or in-room dining, the resort is committed to exceeding expectations and ensuring a quality stay.

IATO's curtain-raiser in Delhi

IATO recently held a curtain-raiser event at The Lalit Hotel, New Delhi, where Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture, Government of MP & MD, MPTB, highlighted Madhya Pradesh's attractions. The 39th IATO Annual Convention provides valuable networking opportunities for members while addressing critical issues in the industry.



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Robust marketing strategy paramount

Providing an ideal platform to dive deeper into inbound tourism and its distinctions, the IATO Convention this year focuses on 'Resurgent India Inbound'. Sharing tourism concerns and measures to counter aggressive competition from foreign destinations, IATO State Chapter heads point out the need for a robust marketing strategy.



Manmeet Singh
Chairman
Punjab Chapter, IATO

“Of late, Punjab has been on looking up in terms of tourism; there has been an increase in domestic and foreign tourists. According to the New Punjab Tourism Policy, the tourism industry is engaged with the state government in developing an inclusive tourism strategy. The upcoming IATO annual convention will provide an ideal platform to delve deeper into inbound tourism and its distinctions. Key areas for discussion at the convention should include the benefits and drawbacks of inbound tourism, identify the hurdles inhibiting its growth. As an industry, we recognise the deliberations that more often than not fall short of tactile results.”



Prateek Hira
Chairman
Uttar Pradesh Chapter, IATO

“The IATO convention will lay the spotlight on inbound tourism, which is currently facing many challenges, a sector critical to economy of the country. Despite infrastructural improvements, enhanced global perception and international rating, India's inbound market is struggling to survive. A decline in traditional markets such as the UK, USA, Canada and Europe coupled with inadequate government support, exemplified by a drastic cut of 67 per cent in the budget, underscores the sector's plight. A robust marketing strategy is needed to counter aggressive competition from other destinations luring Indian travellers.”



Tsering Namgyal
Chairman
Ladakh Chapter, IATO

“The IATO Ladakh Chapter is prominent among the travel trade fraternity of India. The chapter members have been actively involved in addressing tourism concerns. We have met the Commissioner Secretary, Union Territory Tourism and held constructive discussion with him and the members of the local travel trade community. There is optimism about the new Commissioner Secretary's potential to drive the industry's growth through initiatives in Ladakh. The annual IATO Ladakh Chapter members meeting, which was held in capital Leh, yielded positive results. IATO should prioritise strategies in a bid to enhance inbound tourism to India.”

“As Chapter Chairman, my focus is two-pronged—external and internal issues. Externally, we have pressed the Indian Government that the USA, the UK, and European nations must withdraw advisories to Jammu and Kashmir due to the region's improved conditions. Internally, we have worked to ease business for our members by eliminating FRRO forms for foreign tourists at Srinagar Airport, Market Development Assistance (MDA) for our members, and promotional participation at various marts. We are committed for eco-friendly tourism. Our efforts cannot be spared to prevent Kashmir from slipping from its 'Paradise on Earth' status.”



Nasir Shah
Chairman
Jammu & Kashmir Chapter, IATO

“We proposed three key initiatives to bolster Uttarakhand's tourism. Firstly, we advocated the recognition of tour operators as accredited entities. This accreditation would elevate the industry's standards and enhance the overall tourist experience. Secondly, we suggested prioritising helicopter tickets to Kedarnath for foreign travellers and senior citizens. This would ensure their safety and comfort during the pilgrimage. We also proposed a reduction in entrance fees for Chaurasi Kuti, a popular tourist spot, to attract more foreign visitors. Recognising the significance of these initiatives, the Civil Aviation Department has adopted our first proposal.”



Sunil Singh Rana
Chairman
Uttarakhand Chapter, IATO

“In the past year, our Rajasthan chapter has made significant strides in cultivating a strong community of tourism professionals, boosting inbound tourism, and elevating the state's reputation as a premier destination. A key accomplishment is the successful completion of a comprehensive membership drive, resulting in a substantial increase of 30 new active members. This growth has fortified our network and fostered enhanced collaboration among industry partners. We have participated in promoting inbound and domestic tourism by attending key industry events, such as the Great Indian Travel Bazaar and Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart.”



Bhim Singh
Chairman
Rajasthan Chapter, IATO



Mahendra Singh
Co-Chairman
Rajasthan Chapter, IATO

“The Rajasthan Chapter engages in regular interactions with its members to gather insights and recommendations for boosting tourism in the state. Membership drives are undertaken regularly to expand the chapter's reach. Collaborative efforts with the Department of Tourism are maintained for promotion-related initiatives. Additionally, the chapter actively participates in hotel classification and inspection processes alongside the hotel association team. A key focus at the upcoming IATO convention will be on the Market Development Assistance scheme. This scheme holds the potential to assist Rajasthan's tour operators in showcasing their products internationally.”



Bhuvanendra Vikram Singh
Co-Chairman
Uttar Pradesh Chapter, IATO

“Our Varanasi chapter has experienced significant growth in the past year. A membership drive targeting local agents has been highly successful, increasing membership from 17 to over 60 members. Additionally, I have actively represented the association during inspections to uphold our standards. Overall, our efforts in Varanasi are yielding positive results. Key issues for IATO convention: There is a clear demand for trade fairs in regions like Europe and the USA, but there is a notable absence of such events in Asian countries. The performance of embassies in promoting tourism is concerning. For instance, the Vietnam Embassy prioritises promoting Vietnam over India.”



Pandian K
Chairman
Tamil Nadu Chapter, IATO

“We have developed a cordial relation with the Tamil Nadu State government, critical for an association like ours to remain in business. The Tamil Nadu chapter promotes tourism in the region through many initiatives. One such recent accomplishment is obtaining approval from the Director of Chennai International Airport for reserving a space near the airport's arrival gate for IATO members to receive tourists. This will benefit the members in providing smooth airport assistance to their guests. However, implementing such ideas might take time. During chapter meetings, we plan knowledge-sharing sessions for our members.”

Activities galore in state chapters



K Ranga Reddy
Chairman
Andhra Pradesh & Telangana Chapter, IATO

“ IATO is a major event in the tourism industry of India. As far as this year's convention is concerned, it would be an opportunity for the tourism industry to showcase the region's attractions, network with industry peers, and discuss strategic developments. This year, we want the IATO to address issues like

the need for smaller boats at Nagarjuna Sagar, Nizams Jewellery should be exhibited in Hyderabad, all the monuments and museums should be kept open 365 days, skill development for all the tourism stakeholders, One Tourism Taxi permit system, animal services like elephants, mules, horses fees should be included in the entry ticket price, better roads and infrastructure, and other safety measures in tourist areas witnessing heavy footfall. ”



S Mahalingaiah
Chairman
Karnataka Chapter, IATO

“ We submitted our representation to Karnataka to reduce the vehicle entry taxes so that our neighbouring state may follow the same. We suggested a few changes to be incorporated in our new state tourism policy 2022-26—increase MDA assistance from ₹75,000 to ₹2 lakh, thus making the process of applying and claiming the MDA process

easy. Requested new guidelines for homestays and service apartment. IATO is set to host its annual convention for 2024 in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh and we are excited to take part in it. This year, we would expect IATO to negotiate the best pricing with selected hotels pan-India for members operating small to medium scale businesses to support inbound and domestic markets. ”



James Kodianthara
Chairman, Kerala and Lakshadweep
Chapter, IATO

“ The Chapter's members have been in constant touch with the state government tourism officials to ensure that all problems anticipated regarding inbound tourism are continuously addressed. IATO has also been liaising with the local representative of the Union Ministry of Tourism for its support. The chapter has also requested the ministry to take up the

issue concerning the high domestic and foreign airfares with the respective airline/civil aviation. IATO has been in constant dialogue with the authorities in improving and developing the Ayurveda sector as well as the houseboats. Recommendations have been given by IATO regarding the over-tourism activities in Munnar region during certain periods of the year. ”

“ I welcome everyone on behalf of the peoples of Tripura. One of the North-eastern states, Tripura is bordered by Bangladesh on the west, south and north, by Assam on the north-east and by Mizoram on the east. Its total geographical area is 10,492 sq km. The glory of the land lies in picturesque hills and dales, and deep, green valleys. 60 per cent of the land enjoys hilly terrain. Tripura is ideally located to become the 'Gateway to North East India'. Tripura is well connected with the rest of India by air, train and road. It has strong air connectivity with Delhi-Agartala, Chennai-Agartala, Bangalore-Agartala, Kolkata-agartala, Guwahati-Agartala, Shilong-Agartala, Aizal-Agartala routes. Railway connectivity is also strong. ”



Soumen Dutta
State In-charge
Tripura, IATO

“ As the IATO West Bengal chapter chairman, I have been engaged in advancing our state's tourism sector. A pivotal achievement this year was the industry status for tourism in West Bengal, which was officially granted on 8 November 2023. This recognition opens opportunities for growth, such as easier access to subsidised

loans, enhanced investment prospects, and financial incentives, all of which are set to benefit the tourism ecosystem in the region. The chapter has made progress on long-standing issue concerning the fitment of luggage carriers on commercial vehicles. IATO, in collaboration with West Bengal Department of Tourism hosted a workshop titled 'RTSP Accreditation: Elevating Service and Building Trust for Sustainable Tourism Business'. ”



Debjit Dutta
Chairman
West Bengal Chapter, IATO

“ As one of the lesser-known destinations in India, Arunachal Pradesh's tourism sector has yet to realise its full potential. I have been working diligently to increase membership in IATO, and I am pleased to note that we have gained two new members in the past year. I have successfully convinced Arunachal Tourism about the significance of IATO as a key stakeholder in tourism industry. They have recognised how aligning with IATO can benefit the state in promoting tourism. I am happy to share Arunachal Tourism has agreed to sponsor the IATO convention. During this event, Arunachal Tourism will present the tourism potential. I am organising a capacity-building training programme for tour operators of Arunachal Pradesh under the IATO banner. ”



Bengia Mrinal
State In-charge
Arunachal Pradesh, IATO



Jitendra Kejriwal
Chairman, Maharashtra and Dadra,
Nagar Haveli & Daman Chapter, IATO

“ As the IATO Chapter Chairman, I have undertaken several initiatives to boost inbound tourism. Key efforts include organising roadshows and participating in international travel marts to showcase Maharashtra's attractions. Collaborations with state tourism bodies and private stakeholders have im-

proved infrastructure and visitor experiences. I have also focused on promoting lesser-known destinations through digital marketing campaigns. Training programmes for the local guides and hospitality staff have been introduced to enhance service quality. Additionally, efforts to streamline visa processes and ensure safety have been prioritised to reassure and attract international tourists. ”



Mahendra Pratap Singh
Chairman, Madhya Pradesh &
Chhattisgarh Chapter, IATO

“ Over the past year, the Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Chapter has launched several impactful initiatives. We have introduced new eco-tourism circuits, promoted tribal tourism, cultural tourism, and heritage walks that highlight the region's natural beauty and cultural richness to boost domestic and

international tourism. These initiatives, combined with infrastructure improvements in key tourist areas, has enhanced the overall visitor experience. We have prioritised collaboration with local businesses to create unique travel offerings. I called executive committee members and inbound tour operators in Bhopal for a workshop on how to increase inbound tourism. ”



Randhirsingh Vaghela
Chairman
Gujarat & Diu Chapter, IATO

“ We organised members' visits to newly-opened hotels—mostly 3 to 5-star—so members get product awareness and can have a direct approach with the respective hotels. We met Gujarat Tourism officials to discuss the challenges members face and meet the new Managing Director and later met with the

new Secretary. We have increased our membership by 24 new members. After IATO Gujarat Chapter's follow-up with Gujarat Tourism for members request of five years of fair and festival dates, we finally received the same from Gujarat Tourism on 9 August 2024, which was given in the presence of Secretary, Managing Director, Joint MD, AGM of Gujarat Tourism. ”



Madhya Pradesh

Transforming to upgrade travel experiences

New Initiatives by Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

Madhya Pradesh, an off-beat multispecialty destination of first choice is rapidly transforming into a one-stop destination for diverse travel enthusiasts. With a rich tapestry of history, culture, adventure, and natural beauty, the state is leaving no stone unturned to cater to every kind of traveller. The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is at the forefront of revolutionising the state's tourism landscape. Several ground-breaking initiatives are being implemented to enhance the overall travel experience.



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary, Department of Tourism and Culture, Govt of MP & MD, MPTB

Adventure

The Skydiving Festival in Khajuraho and Ujjain offers an exhilarating experience for adventure enthusiasts. Participants can dive from 10,000 feet and witness the stunning landscapes and historical monuments, including the iconic temples of Khajuraho and the sacred city of

Ujjain, from a unique aerial perspective. This festival not only celebrates the thrill of skydiving but also showcases the rich cultural heritage of these UNESCO World Heritage Site.

New experiences in tiger safari buffer zone like trekking,

marathon, cycling, camping, bird-watching and other soft adventure activities are promising initiatives of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board in collaboration with the Forest department.



At Madhya Pradesh Tourism, we are committed to transforming our state into a premier destination for all kinds of travellers

Spiritual & Cultural Enrichment

The state is witnessing a spiritual renaissance with the development



of Mahakal Lok in Ujjain, Devi Lok in Salkanpur, Hanuman Lok in Chindwara, Ram Raja Lok in Orchha, Sant Ravidas Temple in Sagar, and Shri Ram Van Path Gaman. These initiatives are attracting devotees from across the country and solidifying Madhya Pradesh's position as a significant pilgrimage destination.

Weaving Tourism

Chanderi, known for its world-famous sarees, is another UNESCO World Heritage tentative site from Madhya Pradesh as Iconic Saree Weaving cluster of India. The transformation of Pranpur, located 4 km away from Chanderi, into India's first craft handloom village is a testament to the state's commitment to promoting textiles of state and textile tourism. In the village with 5,500 population, about 900 weavers weave Chanderi cloth on about 550 handlooms. Here handloom weaving is done in about 243 houses of weavers. Pranpur gives a unique opportunity to immerse in the rich textile heritage of Madhya Pradesh.

Rural Excursions & Homestays

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is targeting to establish 1,000 homestays in 100 villages. To promote rural tourism and cultural exchange, 305 homestays have been established, including 41 rural homestays in 16 villages.

This initiative offers travellers an authentic and immersive experience. Partnerships with major travel platforms like Redbus and MakeMyTrip are being forged to promote rural tourism and reach a wider audience.

To ensure the travellers can experience rural lifestyle away from the busy city zones, Madhya



Pradesh offers rural excursions like bullock cart ride, organic farming, savour local cuisines, experience folk culture, cooking in chulha and much more.

Connectivity and Accessibility

PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva is India's first Intra-State Air Taxi Services. Improved connectivity is a key focus area for the state. Dr Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister,

which has significantly enhanced accessibility to various tourist destinations. The air service is attracting tourist from all over the country.

Enhancing Guest Experience

❖ Madhya Pradesh Tourism Experience Centres have been established in Kidzania at Delhi and Mumbai to create awareness and generate interest among potential visitors.

❖ Film Production and VR Experiences: Video films on iconic landmarks and 12 VR videos of key destinations have been created to showcase the state's rich heritage and natural beauty.

❖ QR Code Enabled Audio Guides: The state is introducing QR code-enabled audio guides in Bhojpur, Bhimbetka, Lal Bagh Palace, and the Tribal Museum to delve deeper into the historical and cultural significance of iconic sites. This innovative approach offers



visitors a personalised and informative experience.

❖ The development of Marshall House, approach roads, light and sound show, tourist facilitation centre in UNESCO World Heritage Site Sanchi, Buddhist theme park, meditation kiosk are some initiatives to enhance tourist experiences.

Breaking Records

Madhya Pradesh has also made its mark on the global stage by setting three world records at the stunning and epic tourism destinations –

❖ Tal Darbar, Gwalior - The largest Tabla ensemble is 1,276 and was achieved by Department of Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh, during the 99th Tansen Samaroh on 26 December 2023 at the beautiful location of Gwalior fort.

❖ Kathak Kumbh, Khajuraho – As many as 1,484 Kathak exponents dancing on the rhythm of 'Raga Basant' in Khajuraho, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Madhya Pradesh, created a Guinness World Record on 20 February 2024 showcasing the talent and cultural richness of the region.

❖ Ujjain Damru record - A new Guinness World Record was created at Mahakal temple in Ujjain on third Sawan Monday on 5 August 2024 when around 1,500 people played Lord Shiva's musical instrument, 'damru' together.

Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Government of Madhya Pradesh and Managing Director, Madhya

Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB), said, "At the Madhya Pradesh Tourism, we are committed to transforming our state into a premier destination for all kinds of travellers. Our recent initiatives, from adventure festivals to spiritual landmarks, and from rural homestays to improved connectivity, reflect our dedication to creating a holistic and immersive experience. Madhya Pradesh

To ensure the travellers can experience rural lifestyle away from the busy city zones, Madhya Pradesh offers rural excursions

is not just a place to visit; it's a place to experience history, culture, and adventure in a way that resonates with the spirit of India. We believe these efforts will position Madhya Pradesh as the first choice for discerning travellers worldwide."

Madhya Pradesh is poised to become a leading tourist destination offering a diverse range of experiences for every traveller.

The Skydiving Festival in Khajuraho and Ujjain offers an exhilarating experience for adventure enthusiasts

Madhya Pradesh, launched the first intra-state air taxi services connecting eight cities - Indore, Bhopal, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Rewa, Singrauli, Khajuraho and Ujjain -



Manpower shortage hits industry

There is a shortage of quality manpower across the country and across verticals. While hotels are doing their bit to train and upskill their staff, more needs to be done on an industry-wide scale to resolve this issue that threatens the very core of our industry – its service quality. Industry leaders share their views on the issue.



Hazel Jain

Not only is the industry facing a scarcity of qualified personnel, but this is compounded by the challenge of timely availability of talent, which poses significant hurdles for our operations. While hoteliers recognize the importance of addressing this issue promptly to ensure the smooth functioning and growth of their organization, their efforts are not bearing timely fruits.

Perhaps more efforts by the government may help. **Amitabh Kant**, G20 Sherpa, India, says, "Skilling is another cornerstone of my vision, reflecting my belief in India's potential to produce world-class talent in the hospitality sector. By 2035, India is projected to provide 30% of the world's skilled manpower. Many of our experts in sectors like hospitality will emerge from India. It's not just about producing manpower; it's about producing the best talent. This century will be India's century, and Indians will



Amitabh Kant
G20 Sherpa
India

engage significantly in outbound tourism. Major hotel chains like Four Seasons, Rosewood, and Ritz Carlton will be led and managed by Indians. Therefore, I believe states should be recognised for their efforts in skilling across all levels of the hospitality sector."

This problem has persisted for quite some time, particularly affecting positions such as those in frontline service, management,



Rajan Kalra
Head of Sales
The LaLIT

culinary, and wine stewardship. **Rajan Kalra**, Head of Sales, The LaLIT, says, "We are experiencing a huge shortage of professional skilled manpower especially for MICE and weddings. This has aggravated post covid. People have changed their industry. So we are trying to train our own people. But there is a kind of vacuum. We are trying to handle it in our own way. We are also trying to train a lot of freshers from the schools. We also



Smita Jain
Director of MGLuxM & MIHB
SP Jain School of Global Management

have the LaLIT school in Delhi and we get people from there. But it will take some time to fill the gap."

The shortage stems from several factors, including the industry's perception as offering low-paying, physically demanding jobs, and its high turnover rates. To combat these challenges, there are courses and programmes that emphasise comprehensive industry knowledge and practical skills, preparing



Dhriti Prasanna Mahanta
Vice President & Business Head
TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship

students for diverse roles in hospitality. Educator **Smita Jain**, Director of MGLuxM & MIHB, SP Jain School of Global Management, says, "These programmes also prioritise industry collaborations and internships to provide hands-on experience. We have witnessed a significant increase in demand for hospitality courses from the last two years. This surge is largely driven by the ongoing manpower shortages in the hospitality indus-

try. To address these shortages, I recommend enhancing the industry's image with better remuneration and advancement opportunities. Investing in employee training and development can also help bridge the skills gap."

Look at apprenticeship models

To address this issue, companies can leverage apprenticeship models as a pivotal strategy to address the escalating demand for skilled professionals in the burgeoning tourism industry. **Dhriti Prasanna Mahanta**, Vice President & Business Head, TeamLease Degree Apprenticeship, suggests, "Apprenticeship models facilitate the bridging of the skill gap but also provide a framework for upskilling and reskilling existing industry professionals. By blending education with hands-on apprenticeship experiences, businesses can cultivate a talent supply equipped with the in-demand skills essential for roles in hotel management, culinary arts, customer service management, and beyond." 📌

Tailor-made insurance for inbound

Dev Karvat, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Asego, shares how they are curating their products for inbound and domestic travel requirements, insisting that their core focus remains on working with the travel trade. 'We conduct regular engagement and training programmes for our business partners to aid upselling and cross-selling,' he says.



TT Bureau

The travel and tourism sector is going through numerous changes and Asego is ensuring that its offerings cater to current requirements of the market, which includes inbound travel. Elaborating on their offerings, **Dev Karvat**, Founder & CEO, Asego, said, "As India's leading travel assistance and insurance providers, we have been keeping a close eye on the way inbound travel is evolving, and have curated a new product - 'Anywhere to Anywhere' travel assistance and insurance for such new-age globetrotters. This revolutionary product will allow travellers, including NRIs and foreign nationals, to depart from and arrive at any destination in the world without worries. For instance, whether your travellers are departing from New York, Dubai, or Sydney, and heading to any corner of the globe, they are comprehensively protected against unforeseen



Dev Karvat
Founder & CEO
Asego

medical emergencies and risks such as trip cancellations, interruptions, loss/ delay of checked in baggage and more. Looking at the upsurge in the number of overseas tourist arrivals in India, it is evident that this product will soon prove to be a travel essential for today's travellers."

Domestic offerings

Asego is moulding its offerings

keeping in view the trend. "I believe that the rising demand for domestic travel is a testament to India's growing economic prosperity and our burgeoning spirit of exploration. We, at Asego, have been following this trend closely and are committed to protecting travellers' adventures and enhancing their experience with travel protection solutions, exclusively curated for domestic trips and staycations," Karvat said.

"Furthermore, in line with the Indian Government's initiative to promote domestic tourism, we have developed tailored travel assistance and insurance solutions for domestic travellers. Our domestic travel protection includes essential assistance services, such as Emergency Medical Assistance, Concierge Assistance and Domestic Roadside Assistance, along with exclusive insurance benefits that protect travellers against unexpected medical and non-medical emergencies," he added.

"Moreover, our bouquet of offerings also includes exclusive covers for high-risk adventure sports activities and self-drive trips, perfect for those seeking thrilling experiences or exploring remote locations. Additionally, we have crafted cover-

We constantly analyse risks involved while travelling and accordingly design exclusive offerings like our global assistance services

age that protects travellers against new-age risks such as gadget loss and credit/ debit card frauds, ensuring that every aspect of their trip is comprehensively addressed," he further added.



Asego's USP

While a range of Travel Insurance Providers are available in India, Asego remains a preferred choice for travel agents. Explaining the same, Karvat said, "To start with, I believe it is our sole focus on the travel assistance and insurance business that sets Asego apart in the industry. This vision and close ties with our partners allow us to step into the travellers' shoes, gauge their requirements and curate innovative and relevant products and services for them. Today,

we are proud to be serving our clients with more than 200 customised products catering to leisure, business and student travel."

He added, "Besides, we constantly analyse the various risks involved while travelling and accordingly design exclusive offerings. Also, we conduct regular engagement and training programmes for our business partners to aid upselling and cross-selling. Importantly, it is the trust our travel partners have in us that gives us the edge." 📌



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Need to deal with overtourism?

With domestic tourism in India growing, it poses the overtourism challenges, such as increased waste, pollution, and environmental damage. The Indian tourism ecosystem must adopt a multi-pronged approach, making existing activities sustainable, while promoting alternative destinations to reduce stress on overvisited locations, suggest experts.



TT Bureau

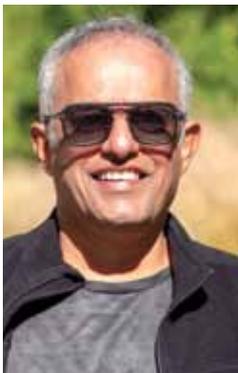
Domestic tourism in India is expanding rapidly, with Indians likely to spend US \$410 billion on travel by 2030. While tourism supports many families and boosts the country's economy, it also poses the challenge of overtourism. For instance, last Christmas saw 28,000 vehicles congesting the Atal Tunnel in Manali, and 55,000 vehicles overwhelming Shimla's traffic system.

Many tourist destinations are located in ecologically-sensitive areas that cannot handle excessive tourism for a short time. These areas are experiencing visitor numbers that far exceed their capacities. A blanket ban on tourism will have negative effects, so regulated and sustainable tourism is the only viable solution. The Indian tourism ecosystem must adopt a multi-pronged approach, making existing activities sustainable, while promoting alternative destinations to reduce stress on



Shikhar Kumar
Managing Director
Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts

overvisited locations. **Shikhar Kumar**, Managing Director, Stone Wood Hotels & Resorts, suggests, "To address overtourism, hospitality chains should focus on boutique properties with limited inventories in various Indian destinations. Dispersing accommodations across different locations can prevent overcrowding and preserve the authenticity of these areas." Overtourism causes issues such as increased waste,



Michael Dominic
Managing Director and CEO
CGH Earth

pollution, and environmental damage. It affects the local population's quality of life and impacts the natural landscapes and culture that attract tourists. If not controlled, excessive tourism can lead to permanent changes. It also increases resentment among locals as the cost of living rises with the influx of wealthier travellers. Local governments are exploring various measures to reduce excessive tourism, including environmental taxes,



Erika Rathi
Director
Namaste Dwaar Resort

entry permits, water conservation, and solid waste management.

The authorities in tourism-dependent areas are creating laws to attract environmentally conscious tourists and reduce tourism's negative impact. Eco-tourism resorts promote sustainable practices and organic lifestyles that can play a key role in this strategy. **Michael Dominic**, Managing Director and CEO, CGH Earth, said, "There is a

discernible shift towards what we term as the alert independent traveller. The alert independent traveller is characterised by a sophisticated approach, seeking more than just luxurious built spaces. Instead, they are drawn to destinations that offer enriching experiences, focusing on personal benefits and educational value. This evolution in traveller preferences has been keenly observed and adapted to at CGH Earth. Our properties are thoughtfully designed to meet the needs and preferences of the alert independent traveller. We place emphasis on crafting experiences that transcend surface-level satisfaction, aligning with the traveller's pursuit of depth and significance. This commitment, however, does not diminish the importance. We attribute to providing comfort and exceptional service."

infrastructure could help in limiting the negative aspects of tourism. Hotel operators too have a role to play. By spreading out inventory across destinations and increas-

ing awareness through targeted campaigns, organised players can play their part in supporting sustainable tourism. **Erika Rathi**, Director, Namaste Dwaar Resort, said, "In a developing country such as India

Overtourism causes issues such as increased waste, pollution, and environmental damage. It affects the local population's quality of life

where tourism generates employment, seasonal overtourism often poses challenges for hill stations and pilgrimage centres. To counter this, promoting less frequented destinations such as the Lakshadweep Islands can provide opportunities for tourism development."

IHG to double India hotel count in 3 yrs

IHG Hotels & Resorts, currently operating 46 hotels in India under five core brands, plans to double its portfolio in the next two to three years, adding 49 hotels with over 7,600 keys in India. Outlining IHG's vision for South West Asia, Chief Executive Officer Sudeep Jain says that the company is poised for robust growth in the region in the coming years.



Lipia Negi

What are short-term and long-term plans for IHG in South West Asia? Do you anticipate any key challenges?

India is a crucial market for IHG, and we have been experiencing growth in the country for several years. At present, we operate 46 hotels in India spanning five core brands. Looking ahead, our current pipeline indicates that we will

double our portfolio in the next two to three years, adding 49 hotels with over 7,600 keys to our offerings in India. We are expanding our presence in tier I and secondary cities in the country to meet the increasing demand for quality, branded accommodation.

Tell us about IHG's efforts in sustainability and the success rate of its implementation?

At the core of our culture and business is the commitment to operate

responsibly and sustainably. Our 'Journey to Tomorrow' campaign, launched in 2021, is a 10-year action plan aligned with our purpose of 'True Hospitality for Good' and the UN SDGs. This roadmap challenges us to promote workplace well-being, diversity, and human rights, while taking care of our planet by reducing waste, CO2 emissions, and improving millions of lives career option. To maintain industry growth, the sector must position itself appropriately within



Sudeep Jain
CEO
IHG Hotels & Resorts

the workforce, especially targeting millennial and Gen Z segments.

What is IHG's strategy for expanding its portfolio in India, particularly in tier II cities? Would you consider franchising for hotel operations?

We are committed to long-term growth in India, strategically focusing on expanding

our portfolio across key cities, including secondary markets. Currently, our India portfolio comprises 46 hotels across five core brands—InterContinental, Crowne Plaza, Holiday Inn, Holiday Inn Express, and Six Senses. We are expanding across key markets, from 10 to 15 new hotel signings across our brands in 2023 alone. Holiday Inn and Holiday Inn Express, which constitute 75 per cent of our operating portfolio and majority of our pipeline, are pivotal to this strategy, especially in tier II & III cities where there is an increasing demand for quality accommodations.

Tell us about IHG's efforts in sustainability and the success rate of its implementation?

At the core of our culture and business is the commitment to operate responsibly and sustainably. Our 'Journey to Tomorrow' campaign, launched in 2021, is a 10-year action plan aligned with

our purpose of 'True Hospitality for Good' and the UN SDGs. This roadmap challenges us to promote workplace well-being, diversity, and human rights,

To maintain industry growth, the sector must position itself appropriately within the workforce, especially targeting millennial and Gen Z segments

while taking care of our planet by reducing CO₂ emissions. To maintain industry growth, the sector must position itself appropriately within the workforce, especially targeting millennial and Gen Z segments."

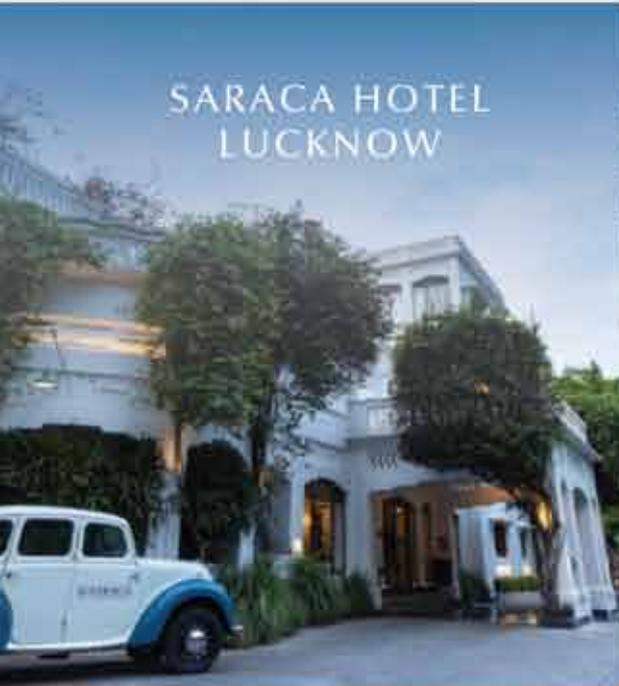




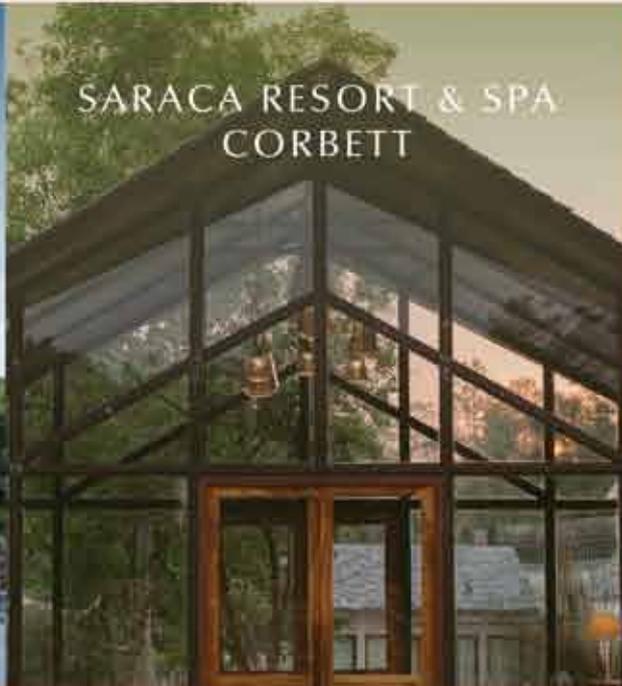
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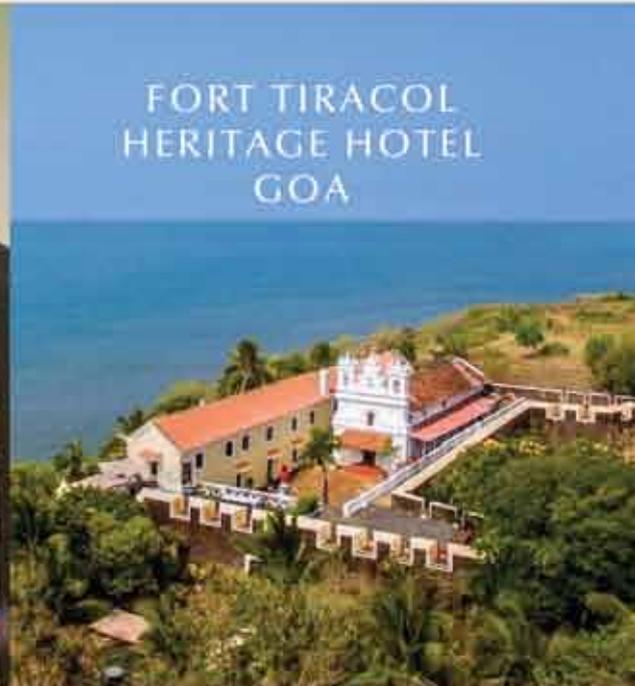
Saraca Hotels & Resorts is an independent collection of luxury boutique hotels and resorts, currently managing close to 100 keys across three distinct properties in India. Our hotels are not just places to stay—they are destinations in themselves, where culture, nature and modernity converge.



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FORT TIRACOL
HERITAGE HOTEL
GOA

Housed in a 1936 classic heritage building, this hotel is a testament to Lucknow's regal and opulent past. Surrounded by lush green lawns and canopy of massive Asoka trees, this property is a gem in the heart of Lucknow.

Nestled in the laps of nature, surrounded by the Jim Corbett National Park, this experiential jungle resort is a sanctuary of tranquility, offering a serene escape with immersive nature experiences and wellness activities.

Perched on the confluence of the Tiracol river and the Arabian Sea, this 17th century Portuguese fort has been transformed into a luxurious beach-facing resort.

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Paradigm shift in luxury travel

Luxury travel has long been synonymous with opulence, extravagance, and exclusivity. However, the idea about luxury travel in India has rapidly changed from an emphasis on 'things' to 'experiences'. **TRAVTALK** seeks to explore this evolving concept through the eyes of travel advisors and how their luxury clients want to holiday within India today.

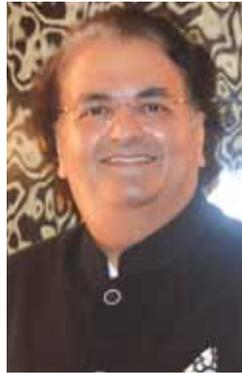


Hazel Jain

The concept of luxury travel in India is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by changing consumer preferences, technological advancements, and the growing desire for unique experiences. **Jay Bhatia**, Director, Tulsidas Khimji Holidays, says, "The definition of luxury is certainly changing for today's travellers. With disposable and double incomes, couple and families want to travel on their holiday in luxury. This is not only seen in travellers from metros but also from those in tier II and III cities. In fact, a lot of senior citizens and retired persons are wanting to travel in luxury and visit unexplored destinations in India."

He adds that luxury travel is now based on lesser points of destination to cover in a relaxed manner. "Travellers want to spend a few hours sightseeing and the balance in enjoying the facilities of the hotel/resort and indulge in culinary delights of the location. For most travellers desirous of travelling in luxury, the primary point is business class air travel. Requirement of larger rooms of minimum 60-75 sqm, butler services, spa facilities in the hotel, multiple multicuisine restaurants in and around their stay, private transfers/chauffeur drives, sightseeing on private basis, skip the line sightseeing and many more. Almost all destinations in India where luxury accommodations are available travellers are seeking to visit," Bhatia adds.

From materialism to meaning
One category of luxury travellers



Jay Bhatia
Director
Tulsidas Khimji Holidays



Jay Kantawala
Founder
WIYO Travel



Philip Logan
Chief Operating Officer
Royal Orchid Hotels

The definition of luxury is changing. With disposable and double incomes, couple and families want to travel on their holiday in luxury

Today's travellers are increasingly independent and discerning, often approaching us with clear ideas of what they wish to experience

Our commitment to sustainability and community engagement also ensures that our (luxury) guests enjoy a responsible stay

Jay Kantawala, Founder, WIYO Travel, caters to request for comprehensive services where they desire a dedicated person to accompany them throughout their journey, overseeing every detail such as suites at hotels, private transfers, luxury vehicles, and even charter planes. "These clients are willing to pay for such personalised service. Another category focuses on luxury vacations where clients seek the finest hotels, private transfers, curated sightseeing tours, restaurant reservations, and opportunities to experience local cuisine and culture. We have arranged luxury travel for

those exploring the wonders of India. Why clients opt for these services, it's challenging to pinpoint a singular reason. Today's travellers are increasingly independent and discerning, often approaching us with clear ideas of what they wish to experience," he says.

For hotel guests, luxury means a seamless blend of comfort, exclusivity, and personalised service. It's about creating an experience where every detail is meticulously crafted to meet their needs and exceed their expectations. **Philip Logan**, Chief Operating Officer,

Royal Orchid Hotels, "Luxury is not just about lavish amenities but also about delivering moments of genuine hospitality. Our commitment to sustainability and community engagement also ensures that our guests enjoy a responsible stay. Our clients seek luxury experiences that blend sophistication with personalised touches. They look for exclusive and immersive experiences, such as private dining with bespoke menus, rejuvenating spa treatments tailored to individual preferences, and curated local excursions that offer a deep dive into the region's

culture and heritage. Additionally, they value seamless and intuitive service, where their needs are anticipated and met with utmost care. Our guests also appreciate the luxury of space and tranquillity. Luxury and experience-seeking travellers are drawn to several of our properties like Royal Orchid Metropole and Royal Orchid Brindavan in Mysore that offer a blend of regal charm and modern comforts. Regenta Resort Sakleshpur provides a serene retreat amidst lush greenery, while Regenta

comfort of premium vehicles, and the reliability of professional, verified and well-trained chauffeurs. Whether it is for business travel or personal getaways, they value experiences that allow them to maximise productivity, and enjoy stress-free journeys without compromising on safety. These travellers are gravitating towards destinations like Udaipur for its royal heritage, spa resorts in Rishikesh, Goa and Daman for their upscale beach resorts, and hill stations like Kashmir, Manali, Dehradun and



Rajiv K Vij
Chairman & Managing Director
Carzonrent India



Biswajit Gupta
Executive Assistant Manager
Mayfair Spring Valley Resort Guwahati

They (travellers) appreciate the ease of personalised travel, the comfort of premium vehicles, and the reliability of well-trained chauffeurs

Our guests seek more than just lavish accommodations; they seek moments that blend unparalleled comfort

Spring Resort Kabini offers an immersive wildlife experience."

Wayanad for their adventurous yet exclusive experiences," he adds.

Personalised travel

For clients of Carzonrent, luxury means unparalleled convenience, comfort, and premium experience in their travels. It is about having access to top-tier, well-maintained vehicles with personalised in-car amenities, exceptional customer service, and the flexibility to choose between chauffeur-driven or self-drive options tailored to their specific needs.

Rajiv K Vij, Chairman & Managing Director, Carzonrent India, shares that his clients seek luxury experiences that combine sophistication with practicality. "They appreciate the ease of seamless and personalised travel arrangements, the

Luxury for guests at Mayfair Spring Valley Resort Guwahati transcends opulence and comfort—it's about crafting personalised, immersive experiences. **Biswajit Gupta**, its Executive Assistant Manager, says, "Our guests seek more than just lavish accommodations; they seek moments that blend unparalleled comfort with the unique cultural essence of their destination. They are particularly drawn to our property not only for its exceptional service and the exquisite in-house luxury spa but also for the tranquil environment that provides a perfect retreat from the fast-paced world. Today's luxury travellers are on a quest for destinations that offer a distinctive sense of place."



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India Travel Awards triumphs

The India Travel Awards 2024 celebrated a resounding triumph of homegrown excellence, as numerous indigenous hotel brands and Indian destinations claimed the coveted Maya trophy. In a heartening display of national pride, India's diverse hospitality talent shone bright, underscoring the country's emergence as a powerhouse of innovation and warm hospitality.




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Saraca Hotels: True to local ethos

Saraca Hotels & Resorts properties are not just places to stay—they are destinations in themselves, where culture, nature and modernity converge. The brand's philosophy is rooted in providing an immersive experience that go beyond traditional hospitality, creating lasting memories for its guests, says Amit Razdan, COO – South Asia, Saraca Hotels & Resorts.



TT Bureau

Saraca Hotels & Resorts is an independent collection of luxury boutique hotels and resorts, currently operating 100 keys across three unique properties in India. Their hotels are not just places to stay—they are destinations in themselves, where culture, nature and modernity converge. The brand's philosophy is rooted in providing an immersive experience that go beyond traditional hospitality, creating lasting memories for its guests.



Amit Razdan
COO – South Asia
Saraca Hotels & Resorts



leading domestic and international industry networking events and travel fairs.”

The company has been extremely focussed on catering to FIT guests looking for personalised service



This year, we have introduced brand 'Bandhan Weddings, Curated Nuptials' for the guests looking to organise crafted intimate weddings

Hotel locations:

❖ **Saraca Hotel Lucknow:** Housed in a 1936 Classic Heritage building, this hotel is a testament to Lucknow's regal past.

❖ **Saraca Resort and Spa, Corbett:** Nestled in the heart of nature in Jim Corbett National Park, this experiential jungle resort is a sanctuary of tranquillity. It offers a serene and immersive experiences with wellness activities.

❖ **Fort Tiracol Heritage Hotel, Goa:** Perched on the confluence of the Tiracol River and the Arabian Sea, this 17th-century Portuguese fort has been transformed into a luxurious beach-facing resort. The property offers stunning views, a quaint church, and a tropical retreat that blends heritage with modern comforts.

The target audience for Saraca Hotels & Resorts seek intimate quaint properties offering high

level of customised or personalised services. They are looking for properties reflecting a unique design, décor, top notch food and beverage outlets with a sense of style. The group is focussed on attracting guests that look for hotels that offer comfort, luxury and intimacy with a few unexpected extras to add that 'wow factor' such as luxurious bathroom

amenities, fine linen, exotic culinary delights.

Saraca Hotels & Resorts properties are true to local culture in terms of décor, experiences and service ethos. **Amit Razdan**, COO – South Asia, Saraca Hotels & Resorts, says, “For our current portfolio hotels in Lucknow, Jim Corbett and Goa – leading source

markets are Delhi NCR, Mumbai and Gujarat. We are expanding our portfolio of hotels and resorts in India and South Asia with two properties expected to open in second half of 2025 – Uttarakhand (with 140 keys) and Sri Lanka (with 70 keys). Saraca Hotels and Resorts is a new brand, the leadership team is opting to introduce the brand in both B2B & B2C platforms across

and tailormade experiences. “However, this year we have introduced our newest brand called 'Bandhan Weddings, Curated Nuptials' for the guests looking to organise crafted intimate weddings,” he says. ↴

Members gung-ho about IATO Run

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) gears up for one of its most celebrated traditions—the Run for Responsible Tourism—which is set to take place on 1 September this year. This event, held annually during the IATO convention, is more than just a run; it symbolises the resilience and revitalisation of India's tourism sector.



Janice Alyosius

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) has once again set the stage for one of the most anticipated events in its annual convention calendar—the Run for Responsible Tourism. This year's event promises to be a landmark occasion, highlighting the spirit of tourism recovery and the stunning natural beauty of Madhya Pradesh.

P Vijayarathy, Executive Committee Member, IATO and the key organiser of the run, shared his excitement about the event's significance. The Run for Responsible Tourism is scheduled for 1 September, and it promises to be a fitting start to what is expected to be a landmark convention for the tourism industry. “The IATO Run for Responsible Tourism is organised every year during our convention, and it has become one of the most attractive features of the event. This year's run is set to be one of the



P Vijayarathy
Executive Committee Member
IATO

most memorable yet, taking place amid the breathtaking landscapes surrounded by lakes and greenery. It's going to be an event that people will be talking about for years to come,” Vijayarathy said.

The enthusiasm for this annual run is palpable, with IATO members participating eagerly each year. To enhance the experience and encourage more participants, ad-

ditional prizes, such as digital wrist-watches and ear buds, have been introduced, alongside the traditional cups and medals for winners.

This year's theme for the IATO convention, Resurgent India Inbound, reflects the tourism industry's ongoing recovery. The



This year's theme for the IATO convention, Resurgent India Inbound, reflects the tourism industry's ongoing recovery

theme was carefully chosen after extensive brainstorming sessions. “The entire world witnessed a significant downturn in tourism during



the pandemic. For several years, inbound tourism in India was virtually nonexistent, and many tour operators were left grappling with a complete halt in business. However, we have started to see a mild rebound, thanks to the concerted efforts of IATO and the Tourism Ministry,” Vijayarathy explained.

The convention, to be held in Madhya Pradesh, is poised to be a game-changer. The state, known for

its rich heritage and newly declared UNESCO sites, is set to captivate attendees. “Madhya Pradesh is home to stunning locations like Pachmarhi and the Ahilya Fort. With six new UNESCO sites, including the Gwalior Fort and the Rock Cut Caves of Dhamnar, the state is a treasure trove for both domestic and international tourists,” Vijayarathy said.

The early response to the convention has been overwhelming. “It

was incredible to see all 10 post-tours sell out within the first week of announcing the convention. We had nearly 200 registrations on the second day, and with a month still to go, we anticipate record-breaking numbers,” Vijayarathy added.

This year's IATO convention not only aims to showcase the destinations of Madhya Pradesh but also promises to boost the inbound tourist count. ↴



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A seaside haven of warm hospitality

Mayfair on Sea, Morjim - Goa, a 35-key property with a restaurant and bar, a banquet hall and beachside lawn, a gym, and a wellness spa, blends Mayfair culture and experience with Goan style so well that it makes it one of the most preferred properties in the hospitality landscape of Goa, says Paul Dhanraj, Manager, Mayfair on Sea, Morjim - Goa.

 Surbhi Sharma

Perched on the white sands of the sleepy beach town, Mayfair on Sea, Morjim, is a lifestyle resort in Goa. Nestled amid a tropical seaside garden with native fauna, it is a perfect vacating spot for leisure and relaxation. The resort houses a total of 35 keys, a restaurant and a bar, a banquet hall and beachside lawn, a gym, a swimming pool, and a wellness spa, which makes it perfect for small incentive groups, small corporate conferences and events or even families who wish to stay in North Goa.

Sharing the latest developments at the resort, **Paul Dhanraj**, Manager, Mayfair on Sea, Morjim - Goa, said, "It has been about two years since Mayfair on Sea has been in operation and judging from guest experiences, as well as revenue and occupancy, we have been experiencing a positive trend. At Mayfair, we have always strived to bring forth new experiences for



Paul Dhanraj
Manager
Mayfair on Sea, Morjim - Goa

guests at regular intervals. With this, there will always be a good reason to revisit the resort and have new experiences."

Adding to this, he highlighted that the food and beverage spaces of the resort are being completely revamped for the upcoming season to bring an urban, beachside experience for guests desiring great gastronomy and spellbinding views of the Arabian Sea.



IATO Convention

Expressing his excitement and happiness over IATO's Convention, Dhanraj said, "IATO has always been a great forum to interact with peers from the industry, as well as network and brief industry partners on the activities happening at

 **Nestled amid a tropical seaside garden with native fauna, Mayfair on Sea, Morjim, is a perfect vacating spot for leisure and relaxation**

our property as well as within our Mayfair group. The knowledge sessions have also always been informational and of tremendous value with many stalwarts of the industry sharing insights." 

Expansion plans

Shedding light on their expansion plans, Dhanraj revealed that Mayfair is gradually expanding with the new Elixir vertical. Adding further presence to the western region, he said, the group will be starting Ali-bag operations with the luxurious 7-bedroom villa this October. "It is an ideal getaway for residents of Mumbai and a perfect setting for celebrations with expansive open spaces in addition to exquisitely

set common areas, lounges and gardens," he added.

Goa connecting to world

Dhanraj said, "The good thing for our resort at Morjim Beach, Goa, is that we are quite close to the MOPA Airport, which has now got several international flight operations. This factor will certainly be beneficial to increase charter movement into Goa from the European countries."

Engagement with travel trade

Explaining about how they engage with the travel trade, he said, "We work with our network of agents and corporates to ensure steady and mutually beneficial business. Our sales teams participate in the various forums and conventions related to tourism and hospitality to keep the engagement on with the rest of the industry as well as keep abreast with latest trends and developments."

Deep discussions at IATO convention

 *Contd. from page 6*

tech-driven market. Additionally, the emphasis on sustainable tourism and exploring new itineraries will encourage more responsible and innovative travel offerings," Mishra said.

He said, "IATO will actively track the key points raised during the sessions and form dedicated committees to address the issues, ensuring that the discussions lead to actionable outcomes. Follow-up meetings post-convention will be conducted to monitor progress and implement solutions that directly benefit our members."

Talking about the convention highlights, **Mahendra Pratap Singh**, Chapter Chairman, IATO Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh and Convention Co-Chairman, said, "With 800 members already registered and the potential for around 1,000 attendees, there is a lot of excitement. The strong support from the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board will ensure a well-organised event, showcasing the warmth and hospitality of the region."

Singh elaborated on the convention's agenda.

"The theme 'Resurgent India—Inbound Tourism' focuses on revitalising India's inbound sector. Key sessions will address policy reforms, sustainable tourism practices, digital innovation, and marketing strategies to boost international arrivals. The convention will also explore partnerships between government and industry stakeholders to overcome challenges and position India as the top global destination."

He also mentioned the special focus on Madhya Pradesh. "A dedicated session will promote inbound tourism to Madhya Pradesh, highlighting the state's unique destinations and cultural heritage," Singh said.

As the IATO Convention approaches, anticipation is building for what promises to be a landmark event in India's tourism calendar, setting the stage for a revitalised and resilient inbound tourism sector. 

Maidam gets World Heritage status

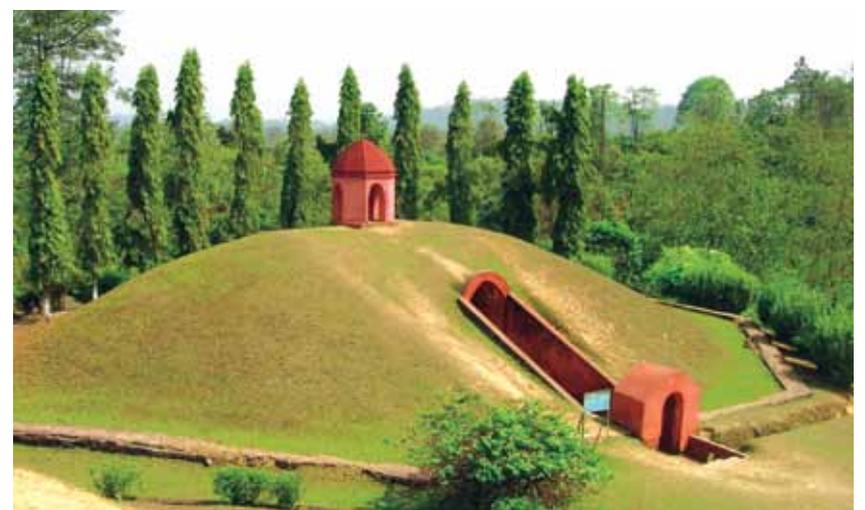
In a momentous occasion for India's cultural and historical landscape, the country hosted for the first time World Heritage Committee session. The 46th Session of the World Heritage Committee was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

 TT Bureau

The World Heritage Committee is tasked with overseeing all matters related to world heritage and making decisions which sites should be added to the World Heritage List. The session, therefore, represents a crucial moment for shaping global heritage preservation policies.

 **In his address, the PM extended his congratulations to Northeast India's Maidam for joining UNESCO's World Heritage List**

During the inauguration, Modi highlighted the importance of the event by applauding the



committee's role in fostering global heritage awareness. He also applauded the return of more than 350 heritage items from abroad.

In his address, the Prime Minister extended his congratulations to Northeast India's Maidam for joining UNESCO's World Heritage List, expressing belief that Maidam

with its unique cultural significance will become more popular and gain more traction after bagging a place in the list. Modi emphasised the significance of the expertise gathered from around the world at the session, noting that India's ancient contributions to science, engineering, urban planning, and water management are pivotal to understanding global heritage.

He encouraged the international community to promote mutual appreciation of each other's heritage, boost tourism, and create job opportunities through the discussions and outcomes of the 46th World Heritage Committee meeting. In a gesture of international collaboration, India will contribute US\$1 million to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 

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Shaping the future of corporate travel

Ascot Hospitality's ambitious expansion plans and innovative strategies reflect its commitment to excellence and adaptability in a dynamic industry. With a focus on sustainability, personalised service, and employee development, the company is well-positioned for continued success and growth, says Neeraj Balani, Chief Operating Officer, Ascot Hospitality.

 Janice Alyosius

Ascot Hospitality is undergoing a significant expansion phase, diversifying its portfolio and embracing innovative strategies. Sharing insights into the company's expansion plans, upcoming projects, and strategies, **Neeraj Balani**, Chief Operating Officer, Ascot Hospitality, said, "Our recent strategies involve integrating sustainable practices, leveraging advanced technology to enhance guest experiences, and exploring unique locations that offer distinctive travel experiences." The company's expansion includes several exciting projects:

- ❖ **Tullamore House:** A luxury boutique hotel in Mussoorie, designed to offer personalised services and exquisite amenities.
- ❖ **Club Savoy:** A modern luxury hotel in Noida featuring premium club memberships and state-



Neeraj Balani
Chief Operating Officer
Ascot Hospitality

of-the-art facilities, including an all-weather swimming pool, gym, tennis courts, and a large banquet space for events.

- ❖ **Savoy Greens Jabli:** Plans for a new ropeway and additional rooms to enhance the property in Kasauli.
- ❖ **Savoy Suites:** Expansion with additional rooms at existing prop-

erties in Manesar, Noida, and Greater Noida.

In the competitive wedding services market, 'Vivaah by Ascot' stands out by offering bespoke solutions tailored to each couple's vision. Balani noted, "Vivaah by Ascot, distinguishes itself by providing comprehensive planning and coordination. We ensure that every detail, from themed décor to gourmet catering, reflects the couple's unique preferences." The dedicated team at Vivaah works closely with clients to craft memorable experiences, ensuring that each wedding is as unique as the couple's journey together.

In addition to weddings, Ascot Hospitality caters specifically to corporate clients through its MICE sector offerings. "We offer state-of-the-art conference facilities, advanced audio-visual equipment, high-speed internet, and flexible meeting spaces," said Balani.



The company's services extend to curated experiences, such as team-building activities and thematic breaks, designed to enhance the corporate experience and set Ascot apart in the MICE sector. The Savoy Executive Membership program is another way Ascot Hospitality enhances the guest experience. Members benefit from exclusive perks like complimentary upgrades, early check-ins, late check-outs, and special dining discounts. "These benefits are crafted

to provide additional comfort and convenience, fostering loyalty by ensuring members feel valued and appreciated," Balani emphasized.

Sustainability is a core principle at Ascot Hospitality. "We are committed to energy efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable sourcing," Balani stated. The company integrates eco-friendly designs, uses energy-efficient appliances, and promotes recycling programs. By sourcing local and sustain-

able materials and engaging in community-based environmental initiatives, Ascot aims to contribute positively to the environment.


Our recent strategies involve integrating sustainable practices, leveraging advanced technology to enhance guest experiences

Investing in employees is a priority for Ascot Hospitality. The company offers training programmes, leadership development, and career advancement opportunities. "We believe in fostering a culture of continuous learning and development," he said. 

Excellence in luxury car rentals

For over five decades, Ramniranjan Kedia Rent A Car (RNK) has set the gold standard in luxury car rental services across India. Sharing details about the company profile, their offerings and future plans, which involves the travel trade, Vaibhav Kedia, Director, RNK, emphasises that their focus will remain on expanding services while maintaining the high standards.

 TT Bureau

Founded in 1969, Ramniranjan Kedia Rent A Car (RNK) has grown from a small operation in Mumbai to a nationally recognised brand, synonymous with superior service, luxury, and reliability. Serving a clientele that includes top corporate houses, diplomatic missions, and international travellers, RNK has become the preferred choice for those who seek the best in travel comfort.



Vaibhav Kedia
Director
RNK

Vaibhav Kedia, Director, RNK, says, "We offer all types of luxury cars and vans. We suggest vehicles based on the client's requirement. It can be for one day or two days or even one week and so on. Our car rental services are perfect for individuals, families, corporates, weddings and even events in more than 160 cities across India."

RNK's success is rooted in a commitment to quality and customer satisfaction. As a member

of several prestigious industry associations like the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) and Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), RNK adheres to the highest standards of service. The group has been recognised with the Best Tourist Transporters Award in India, granted by the Directorate General of Tourism and the Vice President of India, for five consecutive years.

Comprehensive services for discerning travellers

RNK offers a wide range of services tailored to meet the needs of its diverse clientele. Whether it's a high-profile business executive requiring a luxury sedan for city travel or an international tourist


Our car rental services are perfect for individuals, families, corporates, weddings and even events in more than 160 cities across India

looking for a comfortable and reliable car for a road trip, RNK provides an unparalleled experience. The group also offers self-drive options under a restricted All India Rent-Car License, allowing clients



the freedom to explore India at their own pace.

National reach, local expertise

With operations in over 160 cities across India, RNK combines national reach with local expertise. This extensive network ensures that clients receive consistent, top-tier service no matter where they are. From airport transfers to full-fledged travel itineraries, RNK's fleet of well-maintained vehicles and professional chauffeurs guarantee a seamless travel experience.

Innovating for the future

In an ever-evolving industry, RNK remains at the forefront by embracing innovation. The group continuously invests in state-of-the-art technology to enhance the customer experience, from easy booking systems to advanced GPS tracking in vehicles. RNK also places a strong emphasis on sustainability, incorporating eco-friendly vehicles into its operations.

Clientele that speaks volumes

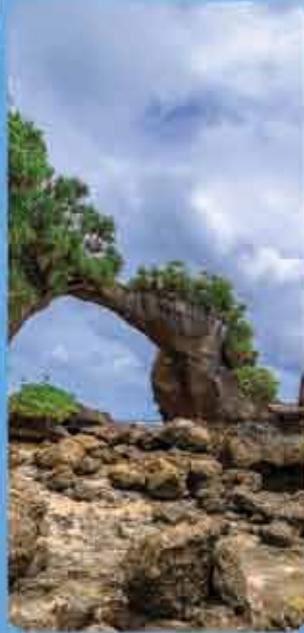
The list of RNK's clientele is a tes-

tament to its excellence. The group serves top-tier business houses and government entities, including the Ministry of External Affairs.

Future of continued excellence

As RNK looks to the future, the focus remains on expanding its services while maintaining the high standards. Whether through strategic partnerships, enhanced service offerings, or continued investment in quality, RNK is dedicated to ensuring that every journey with them is a journey of excellence. 

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Luxury stay with eco-friendly hospitality

Expolnn Suites & Convention is set to redefine luxury and sustainability in the hospitality industry. With new initiatives like the Evara amenities line and Club Nouvelle membership, the brand aims to stay ahead of evolving guest expectations and trends, says Barun Gupta, General Manager, Expolnn Suites & Convention.

 Janice Alyosius

Highlighting the brand's commitment to luxury, sustainability, and guest satisfaction, **Barun Gupta**, General Manager, Expolnn Suites & Convention, said, "We have recently launched Evara, our exclusive in-room amenities brand. Evara embodies our commitment to both luxury and sustainability, offering guests premium and eco-friendly products designed to elevate their stay." Additionally, the hotel has rolled out Club Nouvelle, an elite food and beverage membership programme initially tailored for exhibition organisers and exhibitors but now available to all guests. "Club Nouvelle provides exclusive dining privileges, personalised services, and access to special events, fostering a strong sense of community among our visitors and enhancing their overall experience," he said.

Guest demographics & trends
Regarding guest demographics, Gupta noted a shift in recent trends.



Barun Gupta
General Manager
Expolnn Suites & Convention

"Currently, about 40 per cent of our guests are here primarily for business, 30 per cent for leisure, and the remaining 30 per cent for a combination of both. We have seen a rise in 'bleisure' travel, where business travellers extend their stays for leisure purposes. This trend highlights a growing blend of work and relaxation." He also observed an increasing interest in wellness and eco-conscious living.

"Guests are increasingly seeking accommodations that align with their values of sustainability and wellness. This shift has reinforced our focus on offering sustainable luxury and wellness-centric amenities," Gupta said.

Long-term vision and industry evolution

Expolnn Suites & Convention is poised for significant growth, with plans to expand by adding two new hotels, increasing their total number of keys to 308. "One of these new hotels will be positioned in the luxury segment, while the other will cater to the upper mid-scale market," Gupta said, adding that, "This expansion is a part of our strategy to cater to diverse guest segments and elevate our global presence."

Gupta highlighted the evolving trends influencing their vision. "We are focusing on sustainability, personalisation, wellness, and technology integration. As environmental consciousness grows, we

are enhancing our sustainability efforts. We aim to offer personalised experiences through advanced technology and data, expanding our wellness offerings, and integrating innovative technology to elevate the guest experience."

Addressing industry challenges

Gupta also addressed some of the key challenges in the hospitality



 **Club Nouvelle provides exclusive dining privileges, personalised services, and access to special events, fostering a sense of community feeling**

sector. "Balancing luxury with sustainability is increasingly complex

as eco-friendly practices become more essential. We are addressing this by investing in green technologies, sustainable amenities, and waste reduction programs."

"With guests expecting more personalised experiences, we are leveraging data and technology to tailor each stay. Post-pandemic, health and safety have become paramount, so we've adopted rigorous protocols and expanded our wellness offerings, including healthy meal options," he added.

Future demand and strategic adaptations

Looking ahead, Gupta anticipates a continued focus on sustainability, personalisation, and wellness among guests. "We are adopting a guest-first approach, centering our strategies around enhancing the guest experience. This includes deepening our commitment to sustainability, offering personalised services through advanced technology, and expanding our wellness offerings with nutritious dining options like our Healthy Food Bowls." 

Indian hospitality bets big on skilling

Hospitality and tourism sectors in the country face several skill gaps and challenges. With many professionals lacking the skills to effectively use advanced technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and digital platforms, skilling and upskilling them could be the biggest game-changer, says Rajan Bahadur, CEO, Tourism & Hospitality Skill Council.

 TT Bureau

What skill gaps currently exist in the hospitality and tourism sectors?

The two sectors currently face several skill gaps and challenges. There is a notable deficiency in technological proficiency, with many professionals lacking the skills to effectively use advanced technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and digital platforms. Enhanced customer service skills are also needed to meet the increasing expectations of guests. Additionally, there is often a lack of proficiency in multiple languages and strong communication skills, which is especially important in regions with diverse clientele. Training in eco-friendly practices and sustainable tourism methods is also insufficient. Management and leadership skills are in short supply, impacting team performance and operational efficiency.

Where do you see opportunities for growth and innovation in the



Rajan Bahadur
CEO, Tourism & Hospitality
Skill Council

hospitality and tourism industry?

Opportunities for growth and innovation in the hospitality and tourism industry lie in sustainable tourism, digital transformation, and health and safety enhancements. Developing eco-friendly practices and promoting sustainable options can attract environmentally conscious travellers. Utilising advanced technologies such as AI, VR, and data analytics can enhance customer experiences and streamline opera-

tions. Promoting domestic tourism through unique local experiences and adventure tourism can tap into the growing market of travellers seeking local adventures. Leveraging big data for personalised marketing strategies tailored to individual preferences can increase customer engagement and loyalty, driving growth and innovation in the industry.

Is the subcontinent headed to become the supply chain for skills in the hotels across the world?

THSC has enrolled more than 1.5 million youth and successfully certified over a million. With a network of over 1,000 institutes, 100 colleges, and 2,000 industry units, THSC aims to create a robust, industry-aligned skilling ecosystem to promote the tourism and hospitality sector. Our 1,000 training centres impart training to urban and rural youth. Of these, 150 centres offer student-funded programmes, which are directly linked with industry, providing employment or apprenticeships.



Can you highlight some of the key training programmes or initiatives that the THSC offers?

Formed as part of the Skill India mission and under the umbrella of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, THSC has an independent Governing Board, comprising representation from the government, industry partners and industry associations.

THSC is actively collaborating with government initiatives and central ministries on schemes such as PMKVY, DDUGKY, NULM, Seekho

aur Kamao, and Sankalp. It has undertaken the following initiatives:

- ❖ Developed 67 NSQC-approved qualifications in alignment with industry partners
- ❖ Developed adventure tourism courses to meet market requirements and prepare a pipeline for future industry demand, with a focus on domestic tourism
- ❖ Partnered with international organisations such as the American Hotel Lodging and Education

Institute (AHLEI) to offer globally recognised courses.

- ❖ Created participant handbooks and e-content that reflect evolving industry requirements

 **Opportunities for growth and innovation in the hospitality and tourism industry lie in sustainable tourism and digital transformation**

- ❖ Introducing many courses aligned with the hospitality industry, such as Assistant Chef, Food & Beverage Service Associate, Customer Service Executive (Meet & Greet), and Guest House Caretaker, among others to help youth excel in the hospitality sector. 



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Eco-resorts shaping the future of travel

Grape County Eco Resort & Spa offers a unique blend of luxury and sustainability, continually evolving to meet the changing desires of its guests while maintaining a deep commitment to nature. The resort has recently observed a significant shift in traveller preferences, with a growing emphasis on eco-friendly and nature-centric experiences.

 Janice Alyosius

Grape County Eco Resort & Spa has been drawing a diverse array of guests seeking a blend of luxury and nature. Recently, the resort has witnessed a notable shift in traveller preferences, with an increased interest in eco-friendly and nature-related experiences.

Rising international interest

Sharing the resort's evolving guest demographics, **Tejas Chavan**, Director, Grape County Eco Resort & Spa, said, "We attract visitors from across India, with the highest number coming from Mumbai, Pune, Surat, Baroda, and Ahmedabad. Post-COVID, our international guest numbers have also risen. We have hosted expats from Germany, Sweden, and Africa frequently, and recently, the International Laughter Yoga Conference brought delegates from 70 countries, including the UK, Russia, Italy, Israel, Singapore, China, and the Philippines."



Tejas Chavan
Director
Grape County Eco Resort & Spa

Eco-friendly experiences

The resort offers an extensive range of nature-centric activities to attract guests. "Our guests particularly enjoy nature trails and treks, which allow them to encounter diverse local flora and fauna. City dwellers especially value the opportunity to reconnect with nature," Chavan said. Other popular activities include kayaking, horse riding, fishing, and bird watching. Seasonal

experiences like fireflies sighting and hidden waterfall excursions also attract significant interest.

Average stay and cost range

Guests at Grape County tend to stay for a minimum of two nights to fully enjoy the resort's offerings. "We have had international guests book a villa for up to three months, enjoying the serene environment while working remotely," Chavan shared. Accommodation ranges from luxurious tents and rooms to expansive villas, with rates starting around Rs 10,000 per night and going up to Rs 60,000 per night for the more exclusive villas. "The activities are priced modestly, with a focus on providing memorable experiences rather than commercial gain," Chavan said.

Trends in guest preferences

Chavan highlighted a notable shift in guest preferences over the past few years. "Post-COVID, people have shown a stronger inclination towards outdoor activities. They



 **Our guests particularly enjoy nature trails and treks, which allow them to encounter diverse local flora and fauna**

want to disconnect from screens, immerse themselves in nature, and

spend quality time with loved ones. This trend towards appreciating the natural world is evident in our guests' choices," he explained.

Luxury & sustainability

One of the Grape County's unique features is its ability to combine luxury with eco-conscious practices. "There is a misconception that eco-resorts mean sacrificing comfort. At Grape County, we have integrated numerous green initiatives without compromising on luxury or guest comfort. Our goal is to offer a high-quality

nature experience while being sustainable," Chavan asserted.

Future plans

Looking ahead, Grape County aims to further enrich its eco-friendly offerings. "We plan to expand our horse riding school to include equestrian therapies and establish a dedicated star gazing centre. We are also exploring the development of camping sites for motor homes and collaborating with the forest department to create a vulture conservation centre," Chavan revealed. 

Bhopal: A smart city in the making

Selected as one of the first 20 cities to be developed as a smart city in the country, Bhopal has been awarded a 5-star Garbage Free City rating, making it the cleanest State capital. Also, the city ranks 5th among the cleanest million plus cities. Bhopal has come a long way from the Union Carbide disaster to become one of the important financially powerful cities in Madhya Pradesh.

 TT Bureau

Bhopal, also known as the City of Lakes, is one of the greenest cities in India. Founded by Dost Mohammed Khan in 1723, the city is situated on the fertile Malwa Plateau. During the colonial days, the city was the second largest Muslim principality. It was a princely State ruled by Nawab Nazar Mohammed Khan. After Independence, the Bhopal state was taken over by the Union Government of India on 1 June 1949.

Presently, Bhopal is considered one of economic and financially important cities in Madhya Pradesh. Bhopal has many industries, medium and large, operating in the city. Bhopal has many educational and research institutions and installations, including ISRO's Master Control Facility, BHEL, Regional Science Centre, among others. It also has several universities. The city gained global attention following the Bhopal gas



disaster, leading to the worst industrial disaster in history.

The Bhoj Wetland comprises Upper Lake and Lower Lake. The catchment of the Upper Lake is mainly rural, while the Lower Lake gets subsurface seepage from the Upper Lake. Named Bhojtal, the Upper Lake gets its name from Raja Bhoja, while the Lower Lake

was created by Nawab Chhote Khan, Minister of Nawab Hayath Mohammad Khan, in 1794. The place is renowned for its avian diversity. One can have an eyeful of diverse flora and fauna, including the Indian skimmer and bar-headed goose and absorb in the ecological significance of wetlands. They have also been designated a wetland of international impor-

tance under Ramsar Convention since August 2002.

Bhopal was selected as one of the first 20 cities to be developed as a smart city. Bhopal, which was chosen as the second cleanest city in the country in the first two years of the cleanliness survey, was chosen as the 5th cleanest city in 2023.

Jama Masjid, which was built in the 17th century, is visited many tourists. View the works by artists at the Bharat Bhavan Arts Centre. After shopping in the colourful and bright markets of the city, watch the sun set over the lakes. Another highlight is Taj-ul-Masajid, construction of which was started by Nawab Shah Jahan Begum in the walled suburb of Shahjahanabad.

The masjid was built between three lakes—Munshi Hussain Talab, Noor Mahal Talab, and Motia Talab. The Gohar Mahal was built by ruler of Bhopal, Qudisiya Begum or Gauhar Begum, in 1821. The mahal is a true amalgam of Hindu and Mughal architecture. The palace conveniently sits on the banks of the Upper Lake. Other places to visit in Bhopal include Yodasthal, Rani Mahal, Chaman Mahal, Moti Masjid, and Ginnor-garh Fort, among others.

A paradise for foodies, Bhopal's cuisine has a mix of Rajasthani and Gujarati cuisines, with a Mu-

ghlai tinge. The staple food is jowar and wheat. Bhopal's famous dish is bhutte ki kees. The dish is made of corn, milk and ghee. Tapu is another famous dessert made of wheat. Dal-baffa is a

 **Bhopal, considered among economic and financially important cities in Madhya Pradesh, has many medium and large industries in the city**

snack prepared from wheat as cakes, including chakki ki shaak, malpua, palak puri, and mawa baati. Non-vegetarians can gorge on spicy achar gosht, seekh kebab, keema, rogan josh, biryani pilaf, keema pulav, and Bhopali gosht korma. 

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Healing holidays in India

Wellness travel is revolutionising the way Indians explore their own country, with a surge in travellers prioritising self-care and holistic experiences. As the wellness sector continues to flourish, **TRAVTALK** delves into the business of wellness, investigating whether this trend presents a golden opportunity for Indian hospitality providers to tap into a lucrative and growing market.



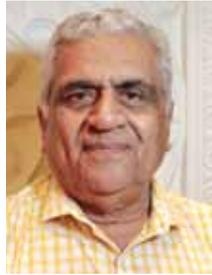
Sushma Rai
Director of Wellness
The Claridges, New Delhi

“Wellness offerings are indeed a revenue enhancer. Our aim is to contribute 5 per cent of the hotel's total revenue through Cinquair Spa services. Currently, we are achieving 2 per cent compared to the F&B revenue, and 3 per cent compared to the rules. Wellness offerings are not just a complementary feature but a strategic revenue enhancer for our hotel.”



Hitesh Golcha
MD, The Leaf Hospitality
Kavya Resort & Spa

“Kavya Resort & Spa in Nagarkot caters to Indian travellers seeking a holistic wellness experience. There has been a noticeable shift in travel patterns, with a substantial number of Indian travellers prioritising wellness. We cater to leisure, as well as corporates and MICE groups. Our wellness packages range from 2 to 4 nights.”



Swadesh Kumar
Managing Director
Shikhar Travels (India)

“Wellness is now a big part of travel, and many hotels and resorts include sumptuous spas where guests can unwind and rejuvenate. Therefore, it is essential to have a deep understanding of this specific but expanding niche. For hospitality, it is important to do exclusive wellness as a focused area work and make this offering free.”



R Parthiban
Founder
Swagatam Tours

“Wellness tourism provides unique experiences. It can combine ancient healing practices with modern therapies to offer restorative interlude or even entire journeys focused on enhancing physical resilience and managing stress. Wellness tourism allows guests to prioritise caring for their physical, mental and spiritual health.”



Khushvinder Sarna
Owner
The Federal Travels & Tours

“Wellness tourism is a growing segment, that encompasses a blend of health, fitness, spirituality, and travel. It offers various activities and treatments that aim to nourish the human spirit and promote holistic well-being and health. Wellness offerings are indeed a revenue enhancer for hotels, agents or companies.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

Wellness & spiritual tourism

KPMG in India and PHDCCI have released a report titled 'Sacred journeys: Unfolding the evolution and growth of pilgrimage and spiritual tourism in India' and delves into the motivators behind spiritual tourism, and the prospects it offers to destinations.

Key highlights from the report:

- Many pilgrims combine religious visits with medical wellness retreats. Ayurvedic centres, yoga retreats and spiritual healing practices are integrated into religious tourism offerings.

- Holistic development of religious sites; With the emergence of new traveller segments seeking offbeat experiences, there is an opportunity to integrate religious tourism with other forms of tourism.

Focus on innovation, efficiency & quality

InterGlobe Hotels thrives through a relentless focus on innovation, efficiency, and quality. The brand's guiding principles of integrity, customer orientation, and future mindedness permeate every facet of the organisation, fostering agility, innovation, and continuous learning, shares JB Singh, President & Chief Executive Officer, InterGlobe Hotels.



Lipla Negi

What unique guiding principles has the InterGlobe Hotels set in the competitive hospitality industry?

InterGlobe Hotels stands out in the competitive hospitality industry due to its unwavering commitment to innovation, efficiency, and quality. Our core philosophy revolves around driving value by efficiently building high-quality products. Triple A locations, right-sizing assets, high-build quality and focus on design are some of the fundamentals that form the foundations of our business model. For us, attention to sleep quality and comfort is critical. Therefore, selection of mattresses and linen, quality of air conditioning and award-winning acoustics are critical. Operations are optimised at every level, ensuring consistency across our network. Quality teams, commitment to learning and development, high-quality resources to help teams deliver, good work-life balance are our focus areas.



JB Singh
President & CEO
InterGlobe Hotels

How did InterGlobe Hotels cultivate a company culture that fosters sustainable and successful growth?

Our guiding principles of integrity, customer orientation, and future mindedness permeate every facet of the organisation, fostering agility, innovation, and continuous learning. We empower our most valuable asset—our people—and invest in their skills and development. A culture of open commu-

nication, collaboration, and transparency builds trust and a positive work environment. We focus on a performance-driven approach, but one that prioritises empathy and understanding the needs of our team. Our focus on employee engagement fosters opportunities for cocreation and drives a commitment to cross functional learning.

How are you attracting the millennial travellers? What are their expectations?

Our strategy for attracting millennial travellers involves a keen understanding of contemporary trends and the evolving expectations of this demographic. Millennials are known for being tech-savvy and desire. They expect hotels to offer high-speed internet, mobile check-in, and other amenities that make their stay more comfortable and efficient. We have incorporated curated libraries into our latest hotel designs, creating intellectual spaces that resonate with millennials' desire for knowledge and discovery.



Availability of trained staff is a growing concern in the industry. Does InterGlobe have any plans of venturing into skill development?

Through a range of training programmes, workshops, and online courses, we equip our employees with new skills and foster an environment of continuous learning. Our experiential learning platform offers courses across various genres. This platform serves as a significant source of learning for our employees, enabling them to upskill and progress in their careers. Additionally, we offer self-development

enrolment guidelines, allowing employees to join any course that aids in their career progression or upskilling with reimbursement from the organisation.

Sustainability is a serious concern across organisations. Have you instituted any measurable initiatives and what has been the success rate?

At InterGlobe Hotels, sustainability is of the importance. We have integrated sustainable development practices into every aspect of our operations, from the construction

phase to the daily operations of our hotels. Our initiatives include constructions that are IGBC-certified Gold Rated, reflecting our adherence to stringent environmental standards. We harness solar energy for our day-to-day operations, dem-

Our guiding principles of integrity and customer orientation permeate every facet of the organisation, fostering agility and innovation

onstrating our proactive approach towards renewable energy sources. We have reduced plastic waste and eliminated single-use plastic from guest interface areas.

Lords plans Madhya Pradesh debut

Lords Hotels & Resorts has a huge portfolio of properties across India and planning to open one in Madhya Pradesh soon. 'We are in advanced discussions with several prospective clients and confident that we will soon make our debut in the state capital with a luxurious offering,' announces Pushendra Bansal, COO, Lords Hotels & Resorts.



TT Bureau

Lords Hotels & Resorts is in expansion mode and opening more than 10 hotels, some of which are already operational. **Pushendra Bansal**, COO, Lords



Pushendra Bansal
COO
Lords Hotels & Resorts

Hotels & Resorts, said that they are planning to tap the wedding market in India and optimistic about the upcoming wedding season.



"The upcoming wedding season is looking very promising. Our wedding specific hotels in Ankleshwar, Amreli, Bharuch, Bhavnagar, Chotila, Gir, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Jammu, Karjat, Kankidham, Nathdwara, Saputara, Shrivardhan, Surat, Udaipur, Zirakpur, having large banquet halls and open lawns capable to accommodate high volume gatherings, are already having bookings on most of the say dates and we are continuing to get more queries," he revealed.

B2B engagement

Claiming that travel agents are important source of business for them, Bansal mentioned that in today's time of speed, the logistics, time and distance are prohibiting factors. "However, we do collaborate with TAs for Fams of new properties based on the circuit or destination promotion. Additionally, we do participate in roadshows with respective tourism boards, associations and travel and tourism trade fairs like

SATTE, TTF, IITM, OTM, IATO, ITB, WTM etc." he said.

MP shining

With Madhya Pradesh looking more promising as a tourist destination, Bansal is keen to open a property in the state. Sharing details, he said, "Madhya Pradesh, often referred to as the 'dil' (heart) of India, holds a special place in our strategic expansion plans. We are excited to announce that we are in advanced discussions with

several prospective clients and are confident that we will soon make our debut in the state capital with a luxurious offering."

Growth galore

Talking about the growth plans, he shared, "With over 60 properties and more than 2,500 rooms

across India and Nepal, Lords Hotels & Resorts is synonymous with exceptional service and hospitality for business, leisure, wedding, and pilgrim travellers. We have set an ambitious goal to expand our portfolio to 100 operational hotels within the next three years."

Lords in the business

New openings:

Lords Plaza Kathmandu, Nepal - 10 July 2024
Lords Plaza Lumbini, Nepal - 10 Aug 2024
Lords Plaza Nepalgunj, Nepal - 31 Aug 2024

Upcoming Hotels

Lords Prime Kathmandu, Nepal - Oct 2024
Lords Eco Inn Dera Bassi, Punjab - Oct 2024
Lords Resort Upper Igatpuri, Maharashtra, Nov 2024
Lords Eco Inn Sumerpur, Rajasthan - Nov 2024
Lords Resort & Wellness Spa Muduba, Karnataka - Nov 2024
Lords Inn Katra, Jammu - Jan 2025
Lords Eco Inn Purulia, West Bengal - March 2025
Lords Inn Kota, Rajasthan - Dec 2025

Multi-products at Unimoni

Unimoni Travel & Holidays, an IATA-accredited agent approved by the Union Ministry of Tourism, offers comprehensive travel services, including airline ticket booking, holiday packages, and visa services, besides arranging charter flights to domestic and international destinations. CA Krishnan R, Director & CEO, Unimoni Financial Services, shares details.



Hazel Jain

Operational since 2001, Unimoni Travel & Holidays' user-friendly travel portal facilitates easy bookings for flights, hotels, and holiday packages. The platform is designed to simplify the travel planning process and provide access to a wide range of options and services. Unimoni Travel & Holidays, accredited by IATA since 2004, operates 10 IATA stations across India to serve its customers. **CA Krishnan R**, Director & CEO, Unimoni Financial Services, explains, "India has a total of 153 airports, with 29 international airports and 114 serving domestic passengers. Over 108 airlines operate on domestic and international routes within the country. In 2019, 81.75 million passengers travelled, indicating a robust growth rate in the aviation sector."

Holidays & hotels

Unimoni Travel & Holidays is an approved tour operator by



CA Krishnan R
Director & CEO
Unimoni Financial Services

the Union Ministry of Tourism since 2012. It assists customers with domestic and international holiday planning, including hotel reservations and bookings worldwide. Krishnan R says, "Our dedicated staff includes destination specialists certified by global tourism boards. In recent years, 26.3 million Indians travelled abroad for holidays, reflecting a year-on-year growth rate of 9.8 per cent. Domestic tourism is

also robust, with 1,854.94 million domestic tourists, showing consistent growth over the years." Unimoni Travel also assists customers with visa services, passport services, and various attestation requirements.

In recent years, 26.3 million Indians travelled abroad for holidays, reflecting a year-on-year growth rate of 9.8 per cent

Working with agents

The IATA travel planners play a crucial role in facilitating travel, including arranging air travel, transfers, accommodations, resorts, and activities. Krishnan R adds, "We have developed a B2B

travel portal that enables other travel agents to easily sell travel products to their customers. Our extensive network of entrepreneurs relies on our agent portal to thrive in the travel industry. Our innovative travel portal and mobile app enable users to book air tickets, hotels, e-visas, and holiday packages from the comfort of their homes. Additionally, for the corporate and business community, Unimoni has created a state-of-the-art corporate booking tool. This tool provides businesses with ultimate control over their travel needs, offering significant savings and access to exclusive corporate travel benefits from airlines and hotels."

The Indian travel landscape is undergoing significant changes and evolution, driven by several factors. More Indians are travelling than ever before, the Indian aviation industry has responded to the increased demand by expanding route capacities. Moreover, Indian travellers are seek-

ing diverse destinations. The digitisation of the travel industry has transformed the overall experience for travellers. Online bookings, digital payments, and virtual tours are just a few examples of how technology is making travel more accessible and efficient. "These trends highlight a transformative period for

India's travel and tourism industry, making it an exciting time for both travellers and businesses in the sector. While traditional favourites like the United States and Europe remain popular, there is a notable shift towards exploring newer, less-travelled regions, such as Japan and Vietnam," adds Krishnan R.

Unimoni offerings

Bharat Dekho Holidays: This initiative aims to introduce travellers to India's rich culture, heritage, and monuments. It helps both Indian and foreign tourists gain deeper insights into India's heritage, wildlife, culture, festivals, and more.

Sports Tourism: The product supports Indian talents by facilitating training at renowned sports centres, both within India and abroad, providing opportunities for professional development.

Self-Drive Holidays: Catering to the youth, this product allows for the enjoyment of long weekends or work breaks through adventure tours in the Himalayas or leisurely family trips.

Online Visa Portal: It enables customers to obtain visas instantly.

Online Holidays Booking Portal: This initiative allows passengers to book holidays, hotels, transportation, and activities at any destination through its website, www.unimonitravel.com

Why is outbound > inbound in India?

There were three times as many Indian nationals that left the country than foreign tourist arrivals from January to November in 2023. Is the lack of international connectivity into India from key tourism source markets the reason for lower inbound numbers? Gavin Eccles, Managing Partner, GE Consulting & Advisory, delves deeper into the issue.

According to the figures provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT), for the period up to end-November 2023, there were three times as many Indian nationals that left the country than foreign tourist arrivals. Why is there such low interest in discovering the country's delights?

During January to November 2023, there were around 8 million international arrivals to the country. However, the numbers were down 16 per cent compared to the same period (Jan to Nov) in 2019. In essence, Indian tourism has not been able to recover to pre-COVID levels. Is it the connectivity issue or the challenges of not having the correct promotion what is affecting the numbers? Or is the tourism infrastructure not aligned with the needs of the travellers? For sure, the emergence of new winter sun destinations, particularly Mom-



basa and Zanzibar, has made the offer of Goa not as attractive for Northern Europeans. And the frustrations of always having to connect through the Middle East may be putting off the more independent traveller. What makes the situation worse was that of the 8 million international tourist arrivals, 25 per cent were actually Indian diaspora coming to India. So, in reality, India only

had 6 million 'true' foreign tourist arrivals during 2023.

Meanwhile, the number of Indian nationals leaving the country (for holiday, work, who knows), was nearly 25 million - 1 per cent increase on the pre-COVID numbers. So, it is fair to say that outbound has been able to build back, but foreign tourists coming into the country has not seen such success.

Can an incentive programme that looks at drawing airlines into the country, and, with that, the ability to bring-in more international arrivals be a working proposition? It is clear that Saudia Arabia, with its 'Saudi Vision 2030', has looked specifically at the importance of a connectivity scheme.

In conclusion, India does not

have a connectivity problem, as 25 million Indians were able to take trips out. The reality is that the traffic is very much aligned with a vision for airlines to work with such travellers who are with work or friends and family com-

are needed, especially with the UK, the USA, Canada, and Australia as they are four of the five largest inbound to India tourism markets. From which cities, and, with which carriers? It is time to better align the vision of Incredible India with a strong air connectivity programme that works these markets well. It is time for India to reverse the 'out versus in' perspective.

It is time to better align the vision of Incredible India with a strong air connectivity programme that works these markets well



Gavin Eccles
Managing Partner
GE Consulting & Advisory

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

mitments across the GCC countries of the Middle East. But, if only 6 million true international tourists visited the country in the first 11 months of 2023, it is clear that new air connections

Is India ready for bicycle adventures?

Jose Inaki, a Spanish cycling enthusiast, who undertook a three-day expedition trip to Rajasthan with assistance from Pramod Singla, Director, Services International, emphasises on the infrastructure that India lack for such adventure trips.

TT Bueau

Someone taking up expedition of covering hundreds of kilometres on bicycle is rare in India. But 47-year-old **Jose Inaki**, a Spanish cycling enthusiast, conquered Jaisalmer roads on bicycle, covering over 180 km in three days. Inaki was assisted by **Pramod Singla**, Director, Services International, a company providing travel packages in India.

Inaki, a Madrid-resident, connected with Singla to express his desire of attempting the bicycle expedition in India. He had never been to In-

dia and was intrigued to know its people and their way of life. Singla advised him to explore Rajasthan. However, the conditions in Jaisalmer were extremely challenging.

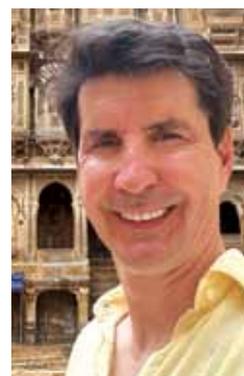
Inaki said that his mission would not have been possible without the expertise of Services International. "Pramod and his team at Services International gave me all the support I needed to fulfil my dream of exploring Jaisalmer. His team helped in every minor and major issues and found solutions— be it the costume for the ride, eating food at the restaurants or booking of the hotels," he said.

Motorbike touring is popular in places like Ladakh but there are no facilities or connectivity for bicycle touring

Singla, on the other hand, highlighted the lack of infrastructure for bicycle touring enthusiasts.

"It was difficult, India is not ready for such expeditions on bicycle. There are no facilities available for cyclists on their way. Something as basic as parking a cycle becomes a challenge. You must specially request hotels to keep a check on the bicycle and one can't even park a bicycle to visit a monument, as it would risk the theft of the vehicle. The infrastructure, specifically for such activities, is missing. Motorbike touring is still very popular in India, but not cycling," he said.

He also emphasised on the obstacles faced by Indian tourism sector for adventure sports like bicycle



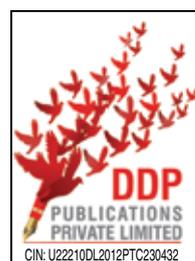
Jose Inaki
Cycling enthusiast
from Spain



Pramod Singla
Director
Services International

expedition. "Bicycle expedition or touring needs more promotion in India. Motorbike touring is popular in places like Ladakh but there are no facilities or connectivity for bicycle touring," Singla said. On the chal-

lenges faced by tourists in India, Inaki said, "Riding for hundreds of kilometres in Rajasthan was far more challenging than in England or Spain. The weather conditions are extremely challenging."



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