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**37<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention**  
16-19 December 2022  
**Lucknow**

*Special Edition*




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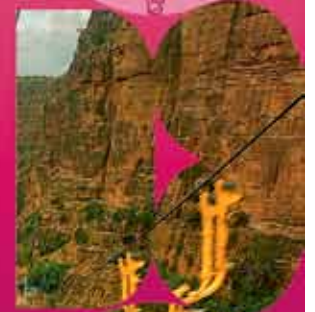
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# IATO lays red carpet for inbound

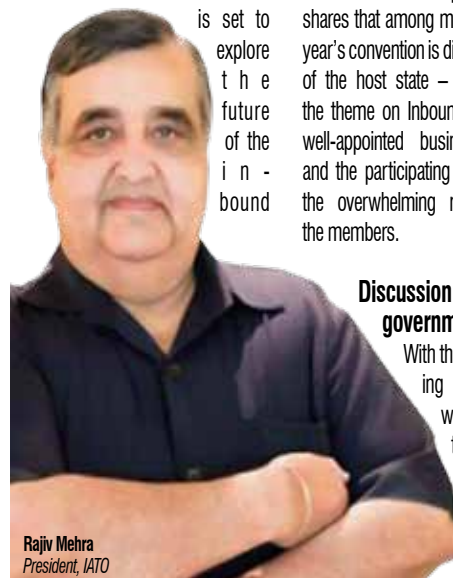
As inbound tour operators from all over the country gather for deliberations at the 37<sup>th</sup> IATO Convention, scheduled in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, from 16 to 19 December 2022, Rajiv Mehra, the association president, shares what makes the event productive and beneficial for the members and the travel, tourism and hospitality industry at large.



Nisha Verma

The stage is set for the 37<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention in Lucknow, with the team and members in full attendance, in what can be called as the inbound event of the year. The convention, with the theme 'Inbound Tourism - What

Lies Ahead!' is set to explore the future of the inbound



Rajiv Mehra  
President, IATO

segment in the post-pandemic world, where India is set to explore its tourism standing in the world as the government works towards the formation of National Tourism Board of India.

Speaking on the convention, **Rajiv Mehra**, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), shares that among many things, this year's convention is different because of the host state – Uttar Pradesh, the theme on Inbound Tourism, the well-appointed business sessions and the participating states besides the overwhelming response from the members.

## Discussion with government

With the theme focusing on inbound, which has taken the brunt of COVID, the IATO team will be putting across



many topics in front of the government, says Mehra. "Along with this we shall highlight to the government on behalf of the industry many other points. These points will be placed to the policy makers through our business sessions and informal interaction over networking luncheons and dinners," he adds. The points are:

- Marketing & Promotion at the top of the agenda. Physical road shows in target countries under the leadership of Ministry of Tourism
- Financial support under Marketing Development Assis-

tance Scheme of the Ministry of Tourism

- To re-store e-Visa from countries Germany, other European Countries that are key source markets, Canada, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait etc

- Restoration of Tourist/e-Tourist Visa for Foreign Tourists and to allow entry of foreign tourists through land borders of Nepal and Bhutan for the revival of Buddhist Tourism.

- In new Foreign Trade Policy, IATO recommended that:

❖ The benefit of SEIS scheme should be continued for the tour operators and travel agencies for the next 5 years

❖ In case if SEIS is not going to be continued, an alternative incentive scheme should be introduced.

- Cascading effect of GST on Tour Operators Services.

- Tourism industry to be treated as deemed exporter at par with IT Industry under export of service.

**The convention, with the theme 'Inbound Tourism - What Lies Ahead!' is set to explore the future of inbound segment in world**

## Host state

Mehra claims that Uttar Pradesh is already at the forefront of tourism. When it comes to further promoting the destination through the convention, he adds, "Yes, our post tours may lead to suggestions from our

members with respect to the tourism sites visited during the tour. Besides the session on inbound and a panel discussion on UP Tourism may throw up ideas that the policy makers of UP may like to visit and address."

## What's new

When asked about new initiatives at this year's convention, he claims, "Everything is nascent about the convention this year— the host state, the theme, the business sessions, the states and their policies, the speakers, and the entertainment programmes. Novelty is there but without sacrificing the essence and the virtue."

## Expectations

Mehra adds, "We are looking towards furthering the tourism growth of UP and Incredible India, especially the inbound segment. Also, the policy issues to be addressed in its viability and the intellectual inputs that shall emanate from the business sessions." ↴

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# Business on mind in Lucknow

A lot of effort has gone into planning of the 37<sup>th</sup> IATO Convention. The Convention Chairman and Co-Chairmen discuss what the members can expect in Lucknow, the venue for the meet, and what will be the takeaway from the prestigious tourism industry event, being organised after the pandemic.



Nisha Verma

**Ravi Gosain**, Chairman, IATO Convention and Vice-President, IATO, has claimed that the 37<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention will be a high-powered tourism industry event post pandemic. "Thus, we are sure of full house participation from industry delegates. We will witness great energy and enthusiasm among delegates to restart and rethink tourism in the present scenario," he says. **Sunil Mishra**, Co-Chairman, IATO Convention and Honorary Treasurer, IATO, shares, "This year the focus is on inbound and the diverse facets of tourism that go into promoting Inbound – Marketing, Connectivity, Investment, policies Tourism Products, Destinations, Circuits and new ideas."

## Expectations

**Prateek Hira**, Co-Chairman, IATO Convention and Chairman IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter, claims that members have huge expectations

from the IATO convention. "IATO Convention has gained respect within the tourism industry and among the governments because of the practically implementable suggestions and well curated knowledge sessions it organises. With this year's focus on Inbound Tourism, the idea is to help the industry revive earliest after more than two years of being in red. 2024 is our target year and with G20 Presidency with India, IATO is optimistic of surpassing the projections of inbound tourist arrivals and seeing a surge in tourism," he claims.

## Teamwork

Gosain claims, "This year we have brought business sessions with relevance to current industry requirements and we have reduced number of sessions, leaving more time for Q&A and networking. Variety in speaker panels, session topics, enhanced networking time, team building activities and evening entertainment will keep delegates busy."



**Ravi Gosain**  
Chairman, IATO Convention  
and Vice-President, IATO

## Activities and programs

Sharing details, Hira says, "Apart from business sessions, we have planned evenings with good music and excellent food menu that has been thoughtfully curated. We have gone an extra mile to try and serve the real Awadhi Cuisine at one of our dinners and also regional cuisine of Uttar Pradesh. There is a motivational session, which our members need after two years of battered business. Then there are well-thought post-convention tours." Mishra claims, "We have sessions on connectivity, invest-



**Sunil Mishra**  
Co-Chairman, IATO Convention  
and Hon. Treasurer, IATO

ment, hotel & tour operators synergy, inbound tourism – a session with key policy makers, marketing & promotion, new ideas and state presentations."

## Host UP

Hira adds that it will help members in selling Uttar Pradesh in a better way. "IATO has been very closely involved in drafting UP's New Tourism Policy 2022 and thus this policy is industry friendly and practically implementable to benefit our members and the tourism industry in general. No other travel trade



**Prateek Hira**  
Co-Chairman, IATO Convention  
and Chairman IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter

body is recognised and respected the way IATO is in the state of UP and the proof of this is that UP has come forward to host this convention in Lucknow. The first hand experience of UP will help members sell it better and relate to it better."

As per the hospitality, Hira claims, "Uttar Pradesh has really developed well in the last few years and has an enviable tourism infrastructure. Members who attended the last Lucknow IATO Convention in 1996 will see a sea change and experience many new international

brands of hotels in the city. Wide roads that lead to the monuments are in contrast with other tourist destinations of India and the delicate mix of old and new promises everything for everyone. Food of course is one thing that first comes to mind when one mentions Lucknow and at this convention we have really worked hard to plan our menus."

## Government support

Gosain claims that they have high expectations from MOT, Govt of India, to facilitate the inbound industry the desired support. "We want them to start overseas promotions both in digital and print media at earliest possible. Similarly, B2B roadshows in different source markets are required to rebuild confidence with the foreign partners. Tourism industry is resilient and we have overcome all difficulties with our hard work and dedication. I am confident that we will come back strongly, it's just matter of few more months," he claims. 🐦

# Aiming for solutions & resolutions

The IATO Convention will be a huge platform where inbound operators will be discussing not only the issues at hand, but also put forth suggestions and resolutions in front of the government for improving inbound business in the coming year. IATO office-bearers share the salient points to be discussed and their expectations from the convention.



Nisha Verma

Another year of IATO will see many new and old topics coming at centrestage. IATO team is all set to make sure that the convention offers a great networking platform for members to share issues, best practices and learnings, while ensuring that their voice is heard at the highest level of governance.

## Expectations

Sharing his expectations from the convention **EM Najeeb**, Senior Vice President, IATO, claims that he is confident about the ideation that shall take place on account of inbound tourism will find an answer to the theme of the convention - 'Inbound Tourism – What lies ahead'. "This will emanate from the crafted business sessions and meaningful state presentations," he adds.

**Rajnish Kaistha**, Honorary Secretary, IATO, adds, "The annual convention is the platform for seeing

through plans and strategy for the next year for our industry. We have invited many influencers, decision makers from states and centre with UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath inaugurating the event. We need hand holding more than ever and brainstorm ideas for post-COVID revival of our industry."

Agrees **Sanjay Razdan**, Honorary Joint Secretary, IATO. "The IATO convention is an important conclave for all our travel fraternity members. The main objective of this event is to promote tourism to India as the inbound tourism industry competes globally. We are looking forward to a revival of the industry after a tumultuous two years that have passed by and I am keen to hear and discuss how India can make the most of the opportunities presented to us as we look forward to a recovery," he says.

## Government attention

When it comes to issues to be put forward at the convention and solutions being sought from the govern-



**EM Najeeb**  
Sr. Vice President, IATO

**This (future biz ideas) will emanate from the crafted business sessions and meaningful state presentations**

ment and the authorities, Najeeb shares, "The convention is not about issues being put forward. They are



**Rajnish Kaistha**  
Hony. Secretary, IATO

**We have invited many influencers, decision makers from states and centre with UP CM Yogi inaugurating the event**

done by IATO on a regular basis in its documentation and interaction with the policy makers. Our busi-



**Sanjay Razdan**  
Hony. Joint Secretary, IATO

**The main objective of this event is to promote tourism to India as the inbound tourism industry competes globally**

ness Sessions on inbound, hotel & tour operators, connectivity, marketing, new ideas, presentations by the

participating states and a special session on Uttar Pradesh Tourism will bring out the policies of the states on tourism – specially on account of Infrastructure, safety and security.

Kaistha although believes that the government hasn't done much handholding for the industry in last 30 months. "We want government to ease the e-visas, start physical roadshows and participate in trade fairs. An imaginative and strong push for marketing is required, along with financially helping the beleaguered industry and tour operators. A short-term plan to market India aggressively in next 6 months for revival of 23/24 season and long-term overseas marketing plan for its continuity."

Sharing that they have a range of topics to be discussed, Razdan claimed, "I am sure all of us will have viewpoints from different stakeholders that leave all of us enlightened. There are some important asks from the government. 🐦





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# G20 shows world's trust on us

Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlines that G20 Presidency is not merely a diplomatic meeting for India, it is a new responsibility and a measure of world's trust in India.

TT Bureau

Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the logo, theme and website of India's G20 Presidency through a video conference recently. "From 1 December 2022, India will preside over the G20 Summit, which is a historic opportunity for the country. G20 is the premier forum for international economic cooperation representing around 85 per cent of the global GDP, over 75 per cent of the worldwide trade, and about two-thirds of the world population," he said.

Applauding India's efforts in the field of sustainable development, he said, "We must make sustainable development a part of individual life rather than just a system of governments. The environment is a global cause for us as well as personal responsibility." He also highlighted the contribution of Ayurveda and global enthusiasm for Yoga and coarse grains.

He also pointed out that G20 is not only an event of the central government and requested the state gov-

ernments, as well as all the political parties, to actively take part in this endeavour. "The event is organised by Indians and the G20 is a great opportunity for us to showcase a glimpse of our tradition of 'Guest is God'. The events related to G20 will not be limited to Delhi or a few places, but programmes will be held in

logo juxtaposes planet Earth with the lotus, India's national flower that reflects growth amid challenges. The Earth reflects India's pro-planet approach to life, one in perfect harmony with nature. Below the G20 logo is "Bharat" written in the Devanagari script. The logo draws inspiration from the vibrant



every corner of the country. Each of our states has its own characteristics, heritage, culture, beauty, aura and hospitality," he shared. He also gave examples of the hospitality of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand and remarked that it is this hospitality and diversity that amazes the world. The G20

colours of India's national flag. The theme of India's G20 Presidency "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "One Earth, One Family, One Future" is drawn from the ancient Sanskrit text of the Maha Upanishad. The theme affirms the value of all life – human, animal, plant, and microorganisms – and their interconnectedness on the planet Earth.

# UP showcases progress

Uttar Pradesh government is eager to showcase the state's rapid development of tourism infrastructure and tourist attractions to the members at the 37th IATO Convention in Lucknow.

Janice Alyosius

With the 37th IATO convention scheduled in Lucknow from 16 to 19 December 2022, the Uttar Pradesh government is thrilled and eager to showcase the rapid development of its tourism infrastructure and tourist attractions in the state to the convention participants.

Mukesh Kumar Meshram, Principal Secretary Tourism and Director General, UP Tourism, said that the state has adopted an investor-friendly tourism strategy and the government is ready to offer full support to any investor coming to the state, particularly in the sphere of tourism and hospitality. "It is a fantastic opportunity for everyone to interact, participate in this convention, and see what we are doing. They can also learn a lot about the state, our tourist circuits, our cultures, our cuisine, and everything else related to tourism," he said.

The state has seen an increase in international visitors since the pandemic, though the number is not as high as it was before the



Mukesh Kumar Meshram  
Principal Secretary Tourism and  
Director General, Uttar Pradesh Tourism

pandemic. The state is preparing to welcome visitors and working in the fields of connectivity and hospitality. Kushinagar airport is working in full force and Ayodhya international airport is to come up in 2024, he informed.

UP is a hub of religious tourist sites with more than 5,000 temples in the state, as well as places like Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Mathura, which reflect the state's religious importance and potential to attract global tourists. The number of tourists visiting the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor since it opened in December last year has increased to 40 lakh per

month from 10 lakh per month, shared Meshram.

UP has worked hard to raise tourism's profile and provide visitors with the best possible experience. The newly launched policy of UP

**It is a fantastic opportunity for everyone to interact, participate in this convention, and see what we are doing**

Tourism includes the agenda of developing Ramayana and Mahabharata circuits in UP, as well as other places of religious significance that will be given a new identity. The state also intends to lease forts and palaces to developers for long-term conversion into heritage hotels. This step will provide experiential tourism.

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# Inbound is the only way to go

India's inbound travel is restarting, but not in the same pace as the industry would have imagined. Hence, the IATO Convention theme 'Inbound tourism - What Lies Ahead' is apt, as the members look towards resolving the issues that are hampering the way forward. IATO Executive Committee Members share their views on the same.



Harish Mathur

“ IATO has no doubt promoted tourism in all over India by joining hands with every esteemed member, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and States, industry leaders, tourism, and hospitality professionals. I expect this years

IATO convention to turn out to be a support system for everyone. We must be prepared for everything in future and must draft our plan accordingly. The future is bright for Inbound Tourism, and we all should be ready to welcome the tourists and business travelers with our open hands. India already has a strong base for tourism, and this convention will support the growth and development of inbound tourism sector. This IATO convention will be a platform for interaction and discussion to promote India as a multi-product and around the year destination with the sustainability for Inbound Tourism. The theme is a very crucial topic in the tourism industry. Inbound tourism directly supports the economy. Also, the prestige of the country gets advertised by people when they go back to their home country, ultimately contributing to the goals setup by IATO. India already has a strong base for tourism, and this convention will support the growth and development of inbound tourism sector. ”



Deepak Bhatnagar

“ The theme is relevant, as we all are going to re-start inbound tourism after a gap of over two years. Therefore, we all need to brainstorm to ensure that we as industry work together along with Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation,

Home & External Affairs, hotels & Airlines so that can revive our industry at the earliest to the same level as of 2019-20 and then start growing step-by-step. Keeping this in mind, IATO business sessions will not only have industry leaders but also senior officials of tourism ministry. Through the discussions, we hope to convey the immediate need to initiate the extensive marketing campaign to promote India, ease the visa regime and open skies to have more flights to various parts of India. Currently, the industry is hungry for business, but we have few challenges. The biggest one is shortage of human resources. We are also facing huge gap in demand & supply of hotel beds, transport etc. due to high demand from domestic market. Another issue currently is very high airfares. To take a big leap, all stakeholders must work closely to ensure that we create good demand for India by remaining competitive, provide best services and send back satisfied clients. ”



Manoj Kumar Matta

“ The theme has been wisely chosen after hours of deliberations among 20 odd themes. Undoubtedly, we are on the road to recovery however the journey may not be as smooth as it was pre-COVID due to obvious reasons like non-avail-

ability of trained tourism and hospitality professionals, increased airfare, visa delays, exponential hike in hotel rates (courtesy domestic MICE and weddings), delay in resumption of SEIS etc. I believe the theme is ideal considering the present scenario. Hope this convention provides platform to the fellow tour operators to raise their voice among hoteliers, government and other stakeholders and some positive policy decisions are taken. I really doubt that we are going to see influx of tourists in large numbers immediately and even if they come, we are not geared to render services to them for the reasons explained above. Pre-Covid levels may not come before 2025, courtesy delayed marketing efforts by MOT in overseas market, increased airfare, geo-political scenario, inflation and recession in the global market. Besides, as no incentives are available in terms of SEIS and MDA, tour operators are not willing to spend on international market. ”



Zia Siddiqui

“ The business is opening now after a gap of two and half years owing to the pandemic. This is the time that we must meet, discuss and sort-out the issues being faced by tour operators, and hence the IATO convention is

happening at the right time. The current series of booking trends look very good for 2023-24. However, it would be a challenge to handle the tourist movement in 2023-24. The agents must adapt digitalisation and automation to suit the demand of the customers and effectively deliver according to their needs. After COVID, customers are looking for smart services and accurate information, and hence people will prefer more online information than what is available on paper. The theme of the convention is 'Inbound tourism - What Lies Ahead' and we will focus on inbound tourism, which has taken the brunt of COVID. Apart from this, we will also highlight to the government many other issues on behalf of the industry. These will include marketing & promotion; financial support under Marketing Development Assistance Scheme of the Ministry of Tourism and Restoration of Tourist/ e-Tourist Visa for Foreign Tourists. ”

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# Regions ring the bell

IATO Regional Chapter Chairmen are doing extraordinary work with their respective governments and have taken a number of initiatives for members to help revive their businesses.



Sunil C. Gupta  
Chairman, IATO Northern Region

“The theme is relevant, as we all are going to re-start inbound tourism after a gap of over two years. Therefore, we all need to brainstorm to ensure that we as industry work together along with Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Home & External Affairs, hotels & Airlines so that can revive our Industry at the earliest to the same level as of 2019-20 and then start growing step-by-step. Keeping this in mind, IATO business sessions will not only have industry leaders but also senior officials of tourism ministry. Through the discussions, we hope to convey the immediate need to initiate the extensive marketing campaign to promote India, ease the visa regime and open skies to have more flights to various parts of India. Currently, the industry is hungry for business, but we have few challenges. The biggest one is shortage of human resources. We are also facing huge gap in demand & supply of hotel beds, transport etc. due to high demand from domestic market.

Another issue currently is very high airfares. To take a big leap, all stakeholders must work closely to ensure that we create good demand for India by remaining competitive, provide best services and send back satisfied clients, which would help us to grow our business.”

“The IATO convention is a place to meet your colleagues in the trade and share different strategy and concepts with each other. In addition, during the convention, listening to the plans by different government bodies, states and industry leaders will help in planning and thinking in the right direction, which will lead us to recovery. The IATO Convention also gives an opportunity for all the members to address their issues to the right people, so that right action can be taken, and help the industry move forward. In the past one year, we have done several regional level chapter meetings to understand the different issues faced in different states of the country. We have also taken up the matter to the different state ministers and urged them to address the issues and resolve them forthwith. Apart from that, we have discussed different measures to implement the same for promotion of South India.”



Sejo Jose  
IATO Southern Region

# UK e-visa comes a little too late

India looks forward to holiday season to boost tourism. Recently, the UK e-visas were announced, but the opportunity to leverage inbound from the UK has been missed, shares, Rajnish Kaistha, Honorary Secretary, IATO.



Janice Alyosius

The High Commissioner of India to the UK, Vikram K Doraiswami, announced that India is set to resume the e-visa facility for UK citizens travelling to the country. **Rajnish Kaistha**, Honorary Secretary, IATO, feels that the decision on e-visa to the UK citizens comes late. He said the UK is an important source market for India and when the UK visa was stopped, it affected the Indian market considerably.

“IATO had taken this up with the ministries and at last the e-visas were finally started. I'm glad that UK e-visas are now permitted, which will help our tourism industry. But the fact of the matter is that it has arrived a little too late because bookings for Christmas and New Year holidays have already been made. When the season arrives for the months of February and March, the price of hotels skyrockets due to weddings and the G20. There will be little hope for British tourists to come at such a short notice of

less than two months, especially since international airfares have been high. Traditionally, the British used to plan their vacations 18 to 12 months in advance. The



Rajnish Kaistha  
Honorary Secretary, IATO

lead time has been reduced to six months. But we're not expecting much in the next two months. Perhaps something will start happening for Holi or, more so for Easter,” he said.

Inbound visitors from the United Kingdom have been arriving, but they mostly come to visit friends and family, though some do take vacations, he informed.

“I believe the numbers will start to show up gradually in July and August for adventure activities and locations that offer them. Because UK operators haven't really included India in their brochures yet, the numbers and brochure sales will begin in September or October for the season 2023-24. So, if we look at it, 2022-23



**The fact of the matter is that it has arrived a little too late because bookings for Christmas and New Year holidays have been made**

has gone affecting our industry. Now, it's 23-24 that we're looking at and the government should also open up Canada e-visas to further help reviving inbound to India,” he added.

# ‘Being in nature is our USP’

From being local Rajasthan company, Ananta Hotels and Resorts is now becoming a national player in the industry. Gagan Katyal, Head, Sales & Marketing, Ananta Hotels & Resorts, Jaipur, shares its brand expansion plans and upcoming projects.



TT Bureau

Ananta Hotels and Resorts is a growing hospitality brand, which owns and manages resorts across the country. “From being a local Rajasthan based company we are now gradually becoming a national player with resorts coming across the country. Curating the most rejuvenating experiences for people, to become the leading hospitality chain of India is the vision of the hospitality brand,” says **Gagan Katyal**, Head of Sales & Marketing, Ananta Hotels & Resorts, Jaipur.

“At the moment our main destinations are Udaipur, Pushkar, Ranthambore, Jawai and Gir. Our philosophy is to offer five-star luxury at the best value to the guests. Being in nature is our USP. Sustainability is a core practice that we follow,” he adds.

“The brand strives to fulfil five missions: Empower each member of the organisation to excel individually and contribute to the holistic



Gagan Katyal  
Head of Sales & Marketing  
Ananta Hotels & Resorts, Jaipur

growth of the organisation; inspire humanity with empathy; help people rediscover, revitalize & rejuvenate while embracing Mother Nature; centralize the interests of our stakeholders in all our activi-

ties; and nourish relationships with guests and members through our ethical practices,” he further adds.

Gujarat is a large market for Ananta, while Delhi and Mumbai are growing, shares Katyal.

Speaking further on the brand expansion plans and the upcoming projects, he says that the group's projects are coming up in Goa, Ajabgarh and Jaiselmer. Ananta Hotels & Resorts caters to leisure travel, weddings and MICE segments.

In terms of hotel occupancy levels, Katyal shared the times are good for Indian hospitality, and

all other segments, be it leisure, weddings or MICE, are working for them. He is positive for the upcoming year. “This year (2023) should be a great year with a good



**2023 should be a great year with a good mix of international and Indian travellers. We plan to grow our distribution**

mix of international and Indian travellers. We plan to grow our distribution, capture more markets, offer more resorts in 2023,” he adds.

Over incentivising the travel trade, Katyal shared that they plan to host FAM trips during the off season.

# Lucknow gets ready for IATO Run

P. Vijayasathya, EC Member, IATO, shares how the IATO Run for responsible tourism has been evolving through the years.



Nisha Verma

IATO Run is a regular fixture at every IATO Convention, which sees members enjoy a fun morning with the colleagues and participate in a 'Run for Responsible Tourism'. However, it will be a first for Lucknow, reveals **P Vijayasathya**, EC Member, IATO, who has been successfully organising this run for many years and bringing new ideas into this event. “This year for the first time we are conducting a Green Marathon in Lucknow. It's a collective initiative that IATO has EC has taken for raising awareness on climate change and our responsibility towards a sustainable future. We have made all efforts to make this run a zero-plastic marathon with zero carbon footprints,” he insists.

Sharing that the focus for this year's IATO run is to bring all industry partners under one roof in Lucknow and create more awareness and benefits of running to locals and members. “The pandemic has taught us all many lessons and one of them is being health conscious. This is the 10th IATO Run for responsible tourism, and we have seen the growing



P Vijayasathya  
EC Member, IATO



**This year for the first time we are conducting a Green Marathon in Lucknow. It's a collective initiative that IATO has EC has taken**

enthusiasm and interest amongst young and dynamic members for this event and actively participating in this event. It is one of the most interesting events of our convention,” he reveals.





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The Ananta, Udaipur

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Set against the breathtaking Aravalli Hills, Ananta Udaipur creates a fairytale experience for guests with the finest 5-star luxuries available. Our Udaipur resort spans 90 acres of lush greenery and features 239 opulent villas, four eclectic dining options, and two banquet halls. Our resort serves as a unique escape in the beautiful City of Lakes, with an outdoor swimming pool, a rejuvenating spa, a well-equipped gym, and a special kids activity area.



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The Baagh Ananta Elite, Ranthambore

### ROYALLY RANTHAMBORE

The Baagh Ananta Elite is one of Ranthambore's luxury resorts, located on the periphery of the Ranthambore National Park. Visit our resort to experience nature at its purest, with architecture inspired by the rugged wilderness of the place. We have luxurious rooms and cottages, two distinct dining experiences, a luxury pool, a gym, grand gardens, and a banquet hall. The Baagh Ananta Elite, a perfect blend of nature, luxury, and comfort, is the ideal place to explore Ranthambore's exotic wildlife.



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### GRACIOUSLY GIR

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# States raise their concern

State Chapter Chairmen look at the 37th IATO Convention at Lucknow as an opportunity to raise their challenges and future plans. Ahead of the convention, many of them list out the issues and initiatives they have taken respectively in their states, and how there is a need for the government to bring about change wherever needed.

“Tamil Nadu Government needs to issue tourist permits for all-size vehicles including 18-seater, 23-seater, 27-seater and 35-seater coaches. Tourist permits are not available for coaches in Tamil Nadu. This is a major hurdle for state tourism to flourish as it is losing revenue to other states such as Puducherry, Kerala and Karnataka as neighbouring states are issuing permits for vehicles registered in their state. If the Tamil Nadu government issues tourists permit for all-size vehicles, this can stop people from buying vehicles in other states and plying them illegally in Tamil Nadu. This will also stop investments being made in other states. Another important benefit is the creation of employment opportunities in Tamil Nadu. There are no permits being issued for high-end cars.”



**Pandian K.**  
Chairman - IATO Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar and Puducherry Chapter

“Interstate taxes payment is still a challenge in South India, though there is a centralised option of payment. Transport operators are not preferring this since it is expensive. We have submitted our appeal to our Hon. Chief Minister to consider waiving off interstate taxes and permits to boost domestic tourism. Officials are changed frequently in Karnataka Tourism, which is affecting the promotion of Karnataka Tourism. We have requested government to consider not to change officials in Department of Tourism (DOT) and to continue for minimum of three years, especially Commissioner and Secretary of Tourism in the state. We are working with the department to come out with one pass or entry ticket for all sightseeing places in the state.”



**S. Mahalingaiah**  
Chairman - IATO Karnataka Chapter



**Manmeet Singh**  
Chairman - IATO Punjab Chapter

“IATO Convention is just not a convention it is tourism and hospitality industries Mega event and a trend setter. All stake holders of industry get to come together in this event which sends a very strong message not only within India across the world & deliberations done in various panel discussions help delegated to update themselves with new changing trends & also updating their business methodologies. Convention also provides opportunity to All stake holders to meet each other and develop business tie ups amongst themselves, which helps in business growth. State tourism department has been participating in various exhibitions, roadshows, association conventions to strengthen the feeling that we are ready to move out and welcome tourist to come into Punjab from domestic and global markets.”

“Investment by outsiders, taking local hotels and guest houses on lease by non locals, or even partnership in any form will not be allowed in Ladakh at all and local travel trade community has been successful in this mission since beginning. That's the reason why there are no chains in Ladakh. But we are seeing pressure is building up, sleeping partners are there and infact this year Travel Trade alliance in Leh openly blacklisted six properties having outside investment or having partnership with non locals. Therefore, IATO Ladakh supports local sentiments and stands with the travel trade community of Ladakh in order to protect tourism industry for our future generations. This is the most pertinent demand and issue with people of Ladakh.”



**Tsering Namgyal**  
Chairman - IATO Ladakh Chapter

“Recently, Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) has announced a financial incentive scheme of up to Rs.5 lakh per tour operator for tour operators booking international tourists for the upcoming International Yoga Festival (IYF) 2023 to be held at Rishikesh from March 1 to 7 March 2023. This initiative will help us to revive the international tourist numbers to the state. The other issues that we are requesting the government is especially for inbound tourism for which we have requested that UTDB should regulate guide licencing and professional tour guides. And organise FAM for domestic and international markets separately to educate and familiarise about the offerings of the state.”



**Sunil Singh Rana**  
Chairman - IATO Uttarakhand Chapter



**Nasir Shah**  
Chairman - IATO Jammu & Kashmir Chapter

“We have seen significantly high growth of tourism coming since last year. But unfortunately, the hotel rates have gone tremendously high. There is three times increase in room rates; if the hotel used to charge ₹5,000 cost per room, now they would start charging ₹15,000 for the same. Since international borders were closed and they had no other option but to visit Kashmir because it's a complete destination. And currently with such huge number of tourists, it is difficult to manage them. Another important thing is that the government need to prioritize those areas where tourist destinations are connected. We need public facilities at many places. These needs to be put in place before the ensuing season starts from April onwards. So, these are two major things the private sector needs to control the crisis and the government should help.”



**Debjit Dutta**  
Chairman IATO West Bengal Chapter

“IATO West Bengal Chapter has closely worked with the state tourism department to ensure sustainable development and promotion of both domestic and inbound tourism in the state. The government constituted six tourism sub-committees in April 2022 and IATO is part of this. The Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal has also signed an MoU with FAITH to initiate a strong industry partnership for sustainable development of tourism in state. To take this further a joint strategy meeting with the Government of West Bengal was held in June 2022 wherein its chairman, members, and representatives in Kolkata discussed the tourism vision statement, along with members of the state tourism Task Force under the Chairmanship of Chief Secretary to the State Government.”



**K. Ranga Reddy**  
Chairman-IATO Andhra Pradesh and Telangana Chapter

“Due to the pandemic many service providers lost their jobs, money, places, interest to continue further. Post-pandemic, the main challenges are to source the trained professional manpower. I, being the chapter chairman, have identified those service providers who are in the business for quite long years. We have identified the pulse of post-pandemic tourist requirements, developed new tourism products like experiential tourism; took guides on several fam tours; got the guides ₹1 lakh financial assistance with MOT and tried to work with reduced guiding fees to boost incoming tourists. We also conducted several seminars and educational lectures; participated in govt initiatives like Yoga, Swachh Bharat; worked closely with TGFI Dekho Apna Desh series and motivated to participate in every webinar to gain knowledge.”



**Mahendra Singh Rathore**  
Co-Chairman IATO Rajasthan Chapter

“Rajasthan being film industries favourite destination has a major potential if film tourism can be promoted. We are in touch with govt authorities and will soon come up with special offers to the producers who are willing to show the beauty of Forts and palaces of Rajasthan. During COVID, the amount for safaris, royal trains, hotel accommodations were not refunded to the agents who did booking and paid advance. We are in touch with govt authorities of Rajasthan as well as the concerned departments to get the amount refunded to agents. We are also trying to get some special discounts like reduction in entrance fees of the monuments in Rajasthan so that more and more tourist traffic is attracted towards Rajasthan.”



**Jitendra Kejriwal**  
Chairman IATO Maharashtra

“One of the major problems that the tourism industry is facing today is parking near the main tourist hubs. The tourist cars and buses don't have any designated parking space in or around these tourism centres. We as IATO have shared our concern and challenges around this with the authorities and are obviously in contact with the traffic police and Director of Tourism as well. We have requested them to look into the matter and to provide some sort of parking solution for the same. Another problem we face is adequate and clean public toilet facilities around tourism areas. There are no proper public toilets around the tourist places. We are in negotiations with the BMC to resolve this issue.”



**Bengia Mrinal**  
State-in-charge, IATO Arunachal Pradesh

“The IATO convention will be a hope to recover financially, mentally and spiritually. This will bring nearly 1,000 tour operators from India and other allied service providers together. Post pandemic, the Northeast got more importance as a travel destination. The convention will throw light and open the gateway to Northeast. The first airport was opened in Arunachal Pradesh recently. With improved connectivity and infra development, tourism will grow manifold with IATO's support. The IATO Central Executive members visited the Northeast three times. They met the stakeholders in Agartala in Tripura, attended ITM (Northeast) in Aizawl and participated in the Manipur Travel Congress in Imphal, Manipur.”





Ram Ghat

# CHITRAKOOT

## Natural beauty in the lap of Vindhyas

Nestled in the northern Vindhya range of mountains spread over the states of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, Chitrakoot is a holy place famous for its natural scenery and spiritual altitude. It is a place that echoes the story of Ramayana, where Lord Rama spent 12 years in exile, and now tells the tales of His experiences.

Chitrakoot Parvat Mala includes Kamad Giri, Hanuman Dhara, Janki Kund, Lakshman Pahari, and Devangana, which are famous religious mountains. It is believed that Lord Rama spent a major part of his exile here. It is in Chitrakoot, according to Ramayana, where Bharat, Lord Rama's brother came to visit him and asked him to return to Ayodhya to rule the kingdom. The legend has it that the supreme Gods of Hinduism—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—took incarnations here.

A perfect blend of divinity, serenity, and natural beauty, Chitrakoot has many temples and religious sites, and everything relates

to Lord Rama. Chitrakoot is a spiritual retreat, thronged almost throughout the year by travellers, who have a penchant for the unknown and unexplored.

### Places to visit

#### Rajapur

Rajapur is the birthplace of Goswami Tulsidas, who wrote the popular Shri Ram Charita Manas. It is located 38 km from Chitrakoot Dham Railway Station and 42 km from Chitrakoot. A Tuli Mandir is situated here.

#### Kamad Giri

It is a forested hill that has prime religious significance. It is believed to be the original Chitra-

koot. It is here that the Bharat Milap Temple is located. Pilgrims perform a ritual circumambulation of the hill to seek blessings.

#### Ramghat

Those visiting this site will see stepped edges leading into the river Mandakini and a serene environment. It is believed that at this riverside Lord Rama, Goddess Sita and Lord Laxman interacted with Saint Goswami Tulsidas.

#### Bharat Koop

Bharat Koop is a huge well near Bharatpur village, located around 20 km west of Chitrakoot. It is believed that Lord Rama's brother Bharat brought water from all the holy places to honour Lord Ram as the King of Ayodhya. It is said that taking a bath from the water of this well means bathing in all teerths. There is also a temple here dedicated to Lord Rama and his family.

#### Bharat Milap Temple

It is the Bharat Milap temple, where it is believed Bharat met Lord Rama during his period of exile to persuade him to return to the throne of Ayodhya. One can still see footprints of Lord Rama and his brothers imprinted on these rocks.

#### Ganesh Bagh

Built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Vinayak Raj Peshwa, Ganesh Bagh consists of a temple which has carvings on its interiors, resembling the art and style of Khajuraho. This place is also known as mini Khajuraho, owing to its architectural similarity with original Khajuraho.

#### Hanuman Dhara

It's a Hanuman temple situated on top of a huge rock, and comes after a steep climb of several carved steps. While climbing these steps one can see splendid views of Chitrakoot underneath.

and Laxman. The outside of these caves are covered with shops for purchasing memorabilia.

#### Sati Anusuya Ashram

Sati Anusuya Ashram is known to be the resting place of the sage

#### Sphatik Shila

Upstream from the Rama Ghat, the Sphatik Shila is a small boulder situated on the banks of River Mandakini. This place is believed to be the spot where Mother Sita did her Shringaar (makeup).



Shabri Waterfall



Ganesh Bagh

Legend says that inside this temple Lord Rama stayed with Lord Hanuman, after the latter set Lanka on fire and returned.

#### Gupt Godavari

Located 18 kms from Chitrakoot, Gupta Godavari is the place where Lord Rama and Lakshman stayed for some part of their exile, according to Ramayana. Gupta Godavari is a two cave system inside a mountain with knee high water level. The bigger cave has two stone carved thrones believed to be belonging to Rama

Atri. Atri meditated here with his devout wife Anusuya. Legend says that during the exile Lord Rama and Mother Sita visited Sati Anusuya at this ashram.

#### Ram Darshan

Ram Darshan temple is a unique temple. Puja (worship) and offerings are prohibited at this temple. This temple helps people enter integral Humanism by imparting them the valuable moral lessons. The temple gives an insight to Lord Rama's life and his interpersonal relations.

### How to Reach

**By Road:** Chitrakoot is connected by all famous cities with National Highway & other road track

**By Rail:** Main Railway station is at Karwi, which is connected with all famous cities

**By Air:** Bamrauli airport at Allahabad is the nearest airport, which is 106 km. away from Chitrakoot. Next is Khajuraho Airport which is 167 km away from Chitrakoot. Both the airports have daily flight services to Delhi.



Kamadgiri Temple



# Panoply of experiences in PRAYAGRAJ

Prayagraj, or the erstwhile Allahabad, is one of the oldest cities in India, situated at the confluence of three holy rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati, also called Triveni. A Hindu pilgrimage centre famous the world over for the Kumbh Mela, the city has a number of places to visit for tourists.

Originally named Prayag, it was renamed Allahabad by the Mughal ruler Akbar around 1575 or even later. In 2018, the name of the city was changed back to Prayagraj by the state government ruled by Yogi Adityanath. Ancient scriptures call it 'Prayag' or 'Teer-tharaj', naming it the holiest of pilgrimage centres of India, especially because it is situated at the confluence of three holy rivers- Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswati, which is called Triveni and is sacred to Hindus. This is where The Kumbh is held every six years and Mahakumbh in every 12 years, which are the largest gatherings of pilgrims in the world.

## Places to visit

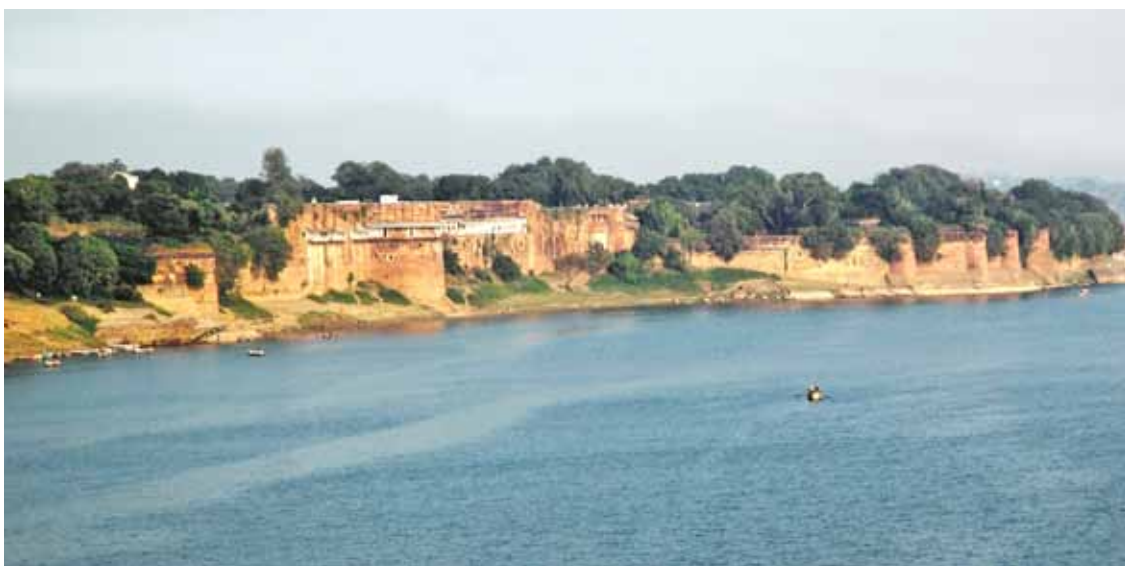
### Sangam & Kumbh Mela

It's at Sangam where the brown water of the Ganga meets the green water of the Yamuna, along with the mythical Saraswati, which remains unseen but believed to run underground. One can see wide flood plains and muddy banks protruding towards the sacred Sangam. Priests sit on small platforms at the mid-river point to perform puja and assist the devout in their ritual ablutions in the shallow waters. Pilgrims and tourists can rent boats to the Sangam at the ghat near the fort. However, the best time to visit the Sangam is during the Maha Kumbh/ Kumbh, when

it truly comes alive, attracting the devout from across the country. Legend has it that Vishnu was carrying the kumbh (pot) of amrit (nectar), when a scuffle broke out and four drops were spilled. They fell to earth at the four Tirthas of Prayag, Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain. A tirtha is a place where the devout can attain salvation. The event is commemorated every three years by the Kumbh Mela, held at each tirtha in turn; the Sangam is known as Tirtharaj, the 'King of Tirthas' and here the Kumbh is held once in every 12 years, which is the greatest and holiest of all.

### Allahabad Fort

Allahabad Fort is the massive fort built by Emperor Akbar in 1583 A.D. and it stands on the banks of the Yamuna, close to the confluence site. This enormous fort has three magnificent galleries fringed by high towers. Currently, it is used by the army and only a limited area is open to visitors. The impressive outer wall is intact and rises above the water's edge. Visitors are allowed to see the Ashokan Pillar and Saraswati Koop, which is a well believed to be the source of Saraswati river and Jodhabai Palace. The Patalpuri temple and Akshaya Vat or immortal Banyan tree are also great attractions for religious visitors. This tree lies within this underground temple, inside the fort. It is said that the temple was visited by Lord Rama, which was



Allahabad Fort

also seen by the famous Chinese traveler and writer Hiuen Tsang during his visit to this place.

### Khusro Bagh

It is a walled garden that contains four important Mughal tombs built in the 17th century. The garden is known for its artistic beauty, which leaves the visitors awestruck. This emerald garden complex has a rich history. One of the tombs belong to Prince Khusro who was the eldest son of Jahangir. Another one belongs to Khusro's mother Shah Begum. The third tomb was constructed by Khusro's sister Nesa Begum is beautiful to look at with multiple artistic carvings over it but remains empty. The last one which is smaller is known as Tamerlan's tomb and remains a secret.

### Allahabad Museum

Located in the Chandra Shekhar Azad Park (Company Bagh), Allahabad Museum is among the National level museums of India. It comprises a well-kept repository of historical artefacts, paintings, sculptures and photographs, which sprawl across galleries of the museum.

There is a striking statue of freedom fighter Chandra Shekhar Azad twirling his moustaches outside the red-bricked building. What makes it special is the beautiful location, large sprawling green lawn and nicely laid out garden. The same complex also houses the Gandhi Smriti Vahan which was used to carry the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi to the Sangam.

### Chandra Shekhar Azad Park (Alfred Park)

This park, spanning 133 acres and situated in the heart of the city's English quarters—Civil Lines, was built to commemorate the arrival of Prince Alfred of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, who visited Prayagraj (earlier known as Allahabad) in 1870. It was here that revolutionary freedom fighter Chandra Shekhar Azad engaged in a fierce gun fight with the British, and died on 27 February 1931.

### Anand Bhawan

The Anand Bhawan is a historic house museum in Allahabad, which belongs to the Nehru family. It was constructed by Motilal Nehru in the 1930s to serve as the residence of the Nehru family when the original mansion Swaraj Bhawan was transformed into the local headquarters of the Indian National Congress. The Bhawan houses the Jawahar Planetarium.

### Allahabad Central University

Allahabad University is the fourth oldest university in India and was established on 23 September 1887 under the aegis of Sir William Muir, the Lt. Governor of the United Provinces. The building was designed by Sir William Emerson. The architecture of the college premises reflects influences from Egypt, England and India architectural elements.

### How to Reach

Prayagraj is an important pilgrimage destination in the Ganges plain and is well connected to all the major cities in Uttar Pradesh and India.

**By Road:** It is well connected to rest of the country via National and State Highways. The three bus stands of Prayagraj cater to different routes of the country through interstate bus services. Local transportation like tourist taxis, cabs, auto rickshaws, and local buses are also available that connects you to various parts of Prayagraj and some neighboring cities.

**By train:** Being the headquarters of the North Central Railway Zone in India, Prayagraj has eight railway stations within its city limits, all of which are well connected to many of the major cities of India.

**By air:** The Allahabad Domestic Airport, also known as Bamrauli Air Force Base, is 12 Km from Prayagraj. Although it is operational for domestic flights, it serves only a limited number of cities in India. Other two nearest airports from Prayagraj are Lal Bahadur Shastri Airport in Varanasi (150 Km) and Amausi International Airport in Lucknow (200 Km). Both these airports are well connected to rest of the major cities of India. Daily flights from major airlines are available.



A view of the holy Sangam



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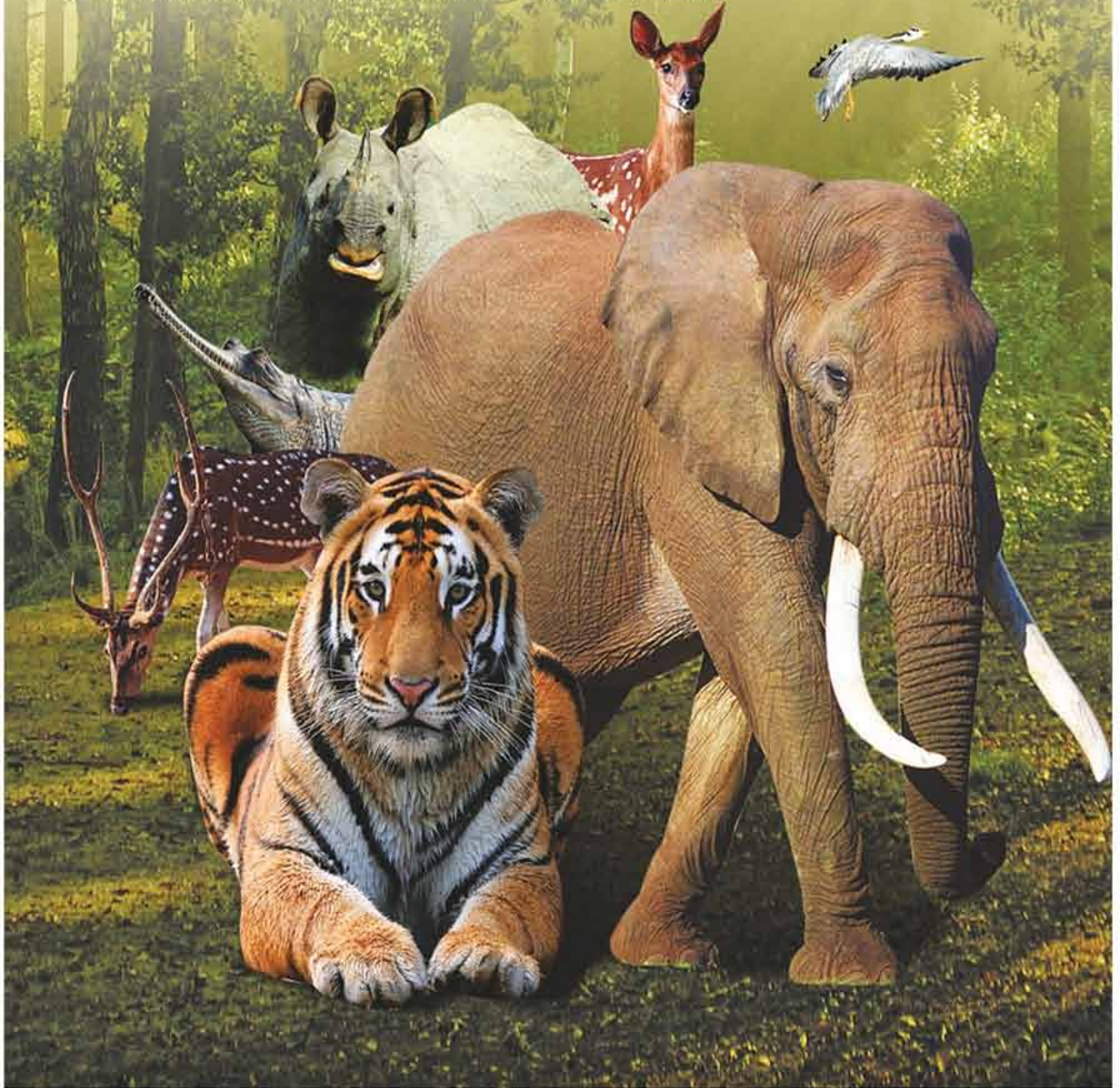
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# The city of nawabs and tehzeeb

Lucknow, the state capital of Uttar Pradesh, which used to be referred as the Awadh region in old times, serves as the administrative centre for both the Lucknow district and the Lucknow division today. It has always been a city with many different cultures, affectionately known as the 'City of Nawabs' or the 'City of Tehzeeb'.



Bryan

**S**hia Nawabs of the city, who adored Persian literature, had become patrons of its lovely spreading gardens, refined manners, superb cuisine, music, and poetry (Shayari). Other names for the city include Shirazi-Hind, the Golden City of the East, and The Constantinople of India. It is presently regarded as

eventually granted to the Nawabs of Awadh. It came under the control of the East India Company after Lord Clive routed the troops of the Mughals, the Nawab of Bengal, and the Nawab of Awadh. It passed into the control of the British Empire in 1857. The Khilafat movement accelerated and established a strong foothold in the city thanks to Maulana Abdul Bari of Firangi Mahal Luc-

know. The United Provinces, later known as Uttar Pradesh, designated Lucknow as their provincial capital in the year 1920.

fully kept its old-world charm, which attracts tourists. The Uttar Pradesh state capital is undoubtedly one of the top towns in the country when it comes to culture and etiquette. The inhabitants of Lucknow have a beautiful sense of culture that blends high standards of living, total sophistication, kindness, and good manners (etiquette). Many local cultural symbols have developed into Tehzeeb landmarks. Drama, literature, Urdu poetry, dance, and music are all given a lot of emphasis here. The Nawabs of Awadh deserve praise for this because they were curious about every facet of life. They placed a high priority on excellence.

The cooking style of Lucknow, often known as Awadhi cuisine, is distinctly Nawabi. The biggest draws are the kebabs, biryanis, and particular breads (nahari-kulchas, roomali rotis and warqi parathas). Tunde ke kebabs, Kakori kebabs, Shami kebabs, Galawati kebabs, Boti ke kababs, Patili ke kababs, Seekh kebabs, and Ghutwa kebabs are just a

have over a thousand entrances, but there is only one way out. When you're inside the maze, you can hear someone whispering from several feet away thanks to the amazing architectural design. The Prince of Wales Zoo, formerly known as the Lucknow Zoo, is situated in the center of the city and provides tourists with the opportunity to see amazing exotic animals. Its total area on land is 71.6 acres. Numerous species of animals call the zoo home, some of which include the black bear, lion, wolf, blackbuck, hog deer, and so on.

The wealthy and aristocracy of the time used to enter through the majestic Rumi Darwaza, a type of regal archway. That's how incredible it was! It was created to be an exact replica of a previous edifice in (what is now) Istanbul that had beautiful architecture. Its epic majesty has been lessened by the passage of time, yet its immortal glory is still evident in every inch of its structure. It still shapes the city's skyline and is a stunning representation of Luc-

out among them for providing the greatest services at a competitive price. Among the alternatives you can think about are Hotel Raj and The Residency Inn.

There are many luxurious hotels where visitors may unwind and take in the splendor of this ancient city. To guarantee that visitors have a wonderful stay, these

home to a large number of eateries, shopping centers, and well-known tourist destinations. Others, such as The Centrum Hotel where the 37th Annual Convention is taking place, The Fortune Park, ANR Hotel, York Inn, and Best Western Plus Levana, are close to the city's primary train station and a number of tourist destinations. You can count on



Rumi Darwaza

one of the most significant cities in the nation and is rapidly growing in a variety of industries, including manufacturing, retail, and business. The city of Lucknow has something special to offer visitors that is a seamless fusion of its illustrious traditions and the contemporary expansion of new fashions. Its USP is the same. It is Uttar Pradesh's second largest city after Kanpur.

## History

The old city of Lucknow is situated along the Gomti River. Although Hindi is the city's official tongue, it actually has Urdu as its root. Historically, it served as Awadh Pradesh's capital and was governed by the Delhi Sultanate during Mughal authority. It was

## Culture and cuisine

The Golden City of the East, also known as Lucknow, has



Lucknow Cuisine

few of the many varieties of kebabs available. Lucknow can be compared to a culinary paradise.

## Places to visit in Lucknow

The amazing architectural wonder Bara Imambara will astound you with more than just outmoded styles. While you're here, you can view three of its USPs, or areas of expertise. The first structure in this style is the mosque built by Imam Hussain. The planet's oldest maze, which is its second gem, is a tall and dependable structure. The maze is said to

know's identity.

## Accommodation

The beautiful architecture and rich history of Lucknow, the city of the Nawabs, have drawn tourists for years. There are hotels in Lucknow for every price range. Station Road is the ideal place to stay cheaply in the city because it is lined by some of the best eateries. It is the finest place for travelers because it is teeming with guesthouses, hostels, and inexpensive motels. Shivam Inn and Charans Guest House stand

Bhool Bhulaiya Lucknow

resorts provide friendly, individualized services in addition to contemporary conveniences. Only two kilometers from the main bus station and the Charbagh railway station, York Inn is the perfect choice if you want to take in the charm of old Lucknow. For those looking for riverside lodging in the city, Clarks Avadh is well situated on MG Road, adjacent to the Palace of the Nawabs. The Lineage Hotel's rooms all provide stunning views of the downtown skyline. Other boutique hotels in the city are Golden Tulip Lucknow and The Piccadilly.

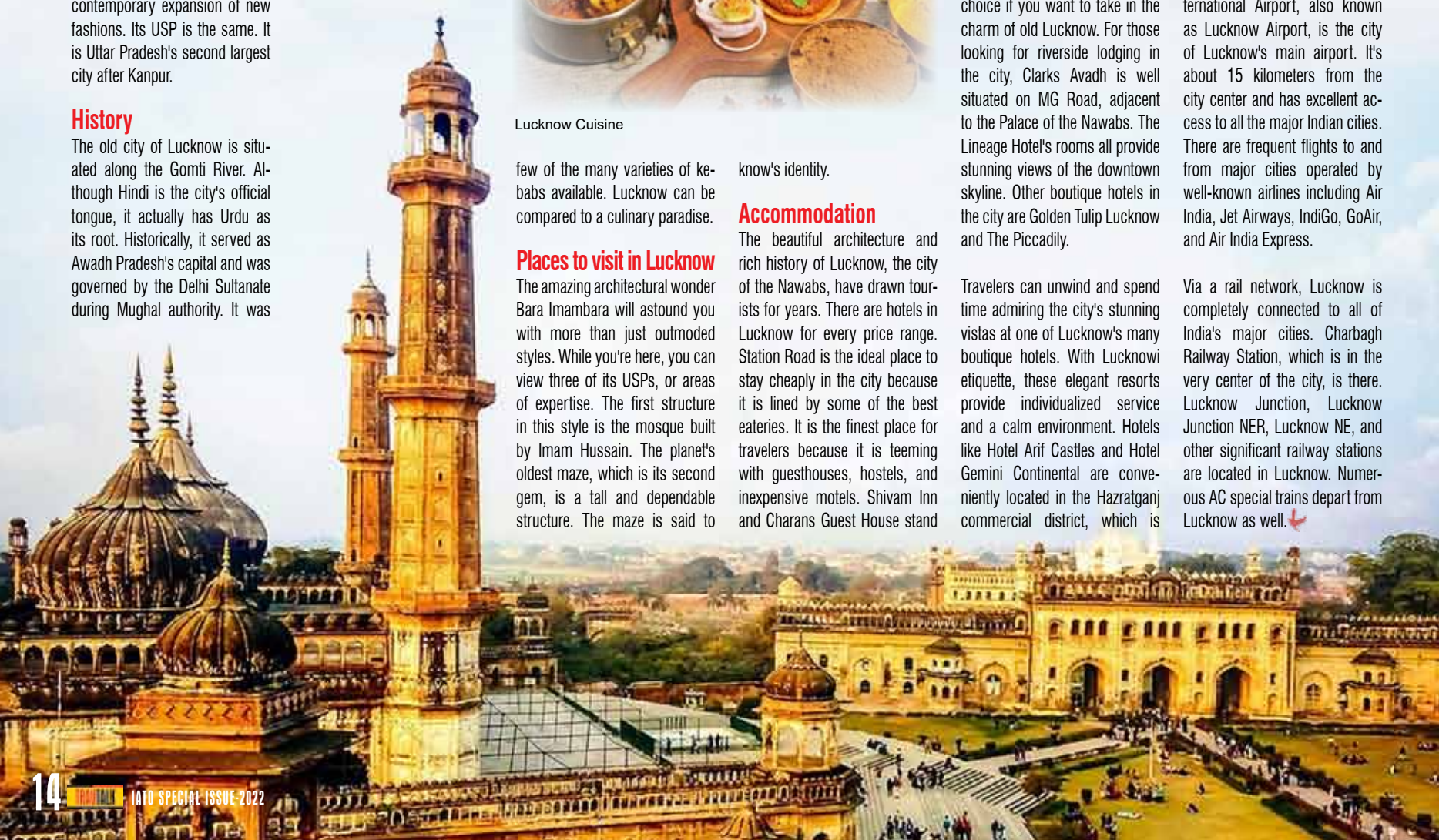
Travelers can unwind and spend time admiring the city's stunning vistas at one of Lucknow's many boutique hotels. With Lucknowi etiquette, these elegant resorts provide individualized service and a calm environment. Hotels like Hotel Arif Castles and Hotel Gemini Continental are conveniently located in the Hazratganj commercial district, which is

having an amazing experience when you stay at one of these upscale Lucknow hotels.

## Connectivity

Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport, also known as Lucknow Airport, is the city of Lucknow's main airport. It's about 15 kilometers from the city center and has excellent access to all the major Indian cities. There are frequent flights to and from major cities operated by well-known airlines including Air India, Jet Airways, IndiGo, GoAir, and Air India Express.

Via a rail network, Lucknow is completely connected to all of India's major cities. Charbagh Railway Station, which is in the very center of the city, is there. Lucknow Junction, Lucknow Junction NER, Lucknow NE, and other significant railway stations are located in Lucknow. Numerous AC special trains depart from Lucknow as well.







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# Forging a new island experience

Mohammad H Jadwet, Director, Makruzz, claims that being a pioneer in offering luxe high-speed catamaran ferry experience, they have created a niche for themselves in the market. Makruzz marketing rests on a two-fold strategy. The first, to reach out to travellers directly and second, to form long-standing partnerships with agents.



Nisha Verma

**M**akruzz is a pioneering initiative, which was founded in 2009, when a high-speed catamaran ferry, first of its kind in India, was acquired from Singapore and pressed into service in the Andaman Islands, connecting Port Blair to Havelock. "Over a decade later, Makruzz is the largest private fleet in the islands having ferried over 1.8 million passengers in its lifetime and with three state-of-art ferries that have truly transformed both the tourism landscape of the islands and the travellers' high sea experience. It is testament to the brand that it consistently ranks 4th among top 10 attractions in the Andamans on TripAdvisor and that it is recognised as the first and the only passenger ferry service by the Ministry of Tourism, GoI, as Approved Tourist Transport Operator in the Experienced Service Provider Category," says Mohammad H Jadwet, Director, Makruzz.

## On a recovery path

Last year, claims Jadwet, "The sector was in full recovery mode after two long and strenuous years. This was the same for Makruzz too. Having been shut for over 18 months owing to strict government regulations in the Andamans, the latter half of the previous tourist season gave a glimmer of hope as to a quick recovery. That said, what also aided and benefited the Andamans and concurrently Makruzz was international travel restrictions, which gave an uptick on demand to domestic destinations like the Andamans. As the Andamans has now completed its first full season since COVID-19, the industry and Makruzz, is secretly hopeful although air fare escalations in recent times have made Andamans a more expensive destination than SE Asian countries like Thailand and Indonesia, which is bound to hurt demand. For better or worse though, it is evident that post COVID, the industry has changed owing to changes in con-



Mohammad H Jadwet  
Director, Makruzz

sumer behaviour, most drastically the unwillingness of consumers to book in advance, which has impacted business.

## Innovations at core

When asked about innovations in business, he says, "The foundation of Makruzz' existence was innovation and this has been the guiding principle of the company since its initiation. Makruzz became the first ferry service in India, whose bookings could be done online through a booking portal. After pioneering the

introduction of the first private catamaran ferry, the company partnered with the biggest players in the industry including MMT, Thomas Cook and Yatra and grew its agent base to 700+ agents. To stay ahead of the curve, Makruzz has over the years introduced new routes like the Niel and Baratang sector, added to its fleet and increased the number of routes being offered to ensure flexibility and seamless connectivity for its travellers. Makruzz has recently also introduced a mobile application for its registered agents, to enable easier and seamless bookings."

"In a nutshell, At the heart of all Makruzz innovations, is the aim to improve and enhance the traveller and trade partners experience with us, who have been the key to its' success. As a company that doesn't like to rest on its' laurels but rather exceed them, Makruzz has interesting plans to continually innovate and bring new products within the shipping segment, into the Andaman market, to ensure

that the islands remain competitive in both domestic and international circuits," he adds.

## Spreading the word

Makruzz marketing rests on a two-fold strategy, claims Jadwet. "The first, to reach out to travel-

values that distinctly differentiate it from its competitors; its 12+ years of experience that has constantly focused on enhancing of services by way of improving connectivity, provide greater timeliness, flexibility, ease and efficiency of use and a luxe and comfortable experience on the Andaman sea."

**Makruzz marketing rests on the strategy to form long-standing, meaningful partnerships with travel agents across the country**

lers directly and the second, to form long standing meaningful partnerships with agents across the country. For both approaches though, what remains constant is communicating Makruzz' key

"For the former, which is the direct travellers, Makruzz continues to use digital marketing which includes strengthening and enhancing the website and leveraging social media to consistently communicate with travellers. Makruzz' dependence on Brand Andaman, means that digital outreach also relies on promoting the destination itself since our success is directly proportional to that of the destination. For trade partners, Makruzz has consistently done significant outreach through participation in exhibitions etc. and using established networks of organisations like IATO to build meaningful and mutually beneficial connections across the country," he informs.

# The brighter side of aviation

It has been over a year that BookMyJet was launched offering people an online platform for booking private jets and helicopters in India. Santosh Sharma, Founder – BookMyJet, claims that the future of charter aviation and technology is bright and the company is leaving no stone unturned to ensure they offer both to their clients.



Nisha Verma

**S**antosh Sharma, Founder – BookMyJet, shares that currently, they are working internally with their technology team to incorporate more features on the platform. "In next 6 months, BookMyJet would have fleet of aircraft based out of international locations on its platform. This would also give avenues for flyers to locate aircraft in international bases and book it. We are also working on the back-end technology to incorporate features like 'Jet Sharing' and subscription model," he says.

## Year that was

Sharma claims, "Year 2022 has been full of interesting development as far as our organisation is concerned. Apart from few awards and accolades, BookMyJet took a very bold step to hire more people and allocate a good amount of budget in technology. We are extremely posi-

tive that with the way the business aviation market is evolving, our business would only take upward trajectory. Our biggest achievement for 2022 is that this has been our best year for us since inception."

## Bringing in New Year

For the coming year, there is a lot on the cards for Sharma. "Personally, I am very excited for 2023. Firstly, because we are working on some highly



Santosh Sharma  
Founder – BookMyJet

promising features of BookMyJet, which have never been incorporated in business aviation. Secondly, we have some international tie-ups in pipeline followed by starting our overseas office as well," he says.

## Working with the trade

Sharma believes that the travel trade is still recovering, but not as fast as they expected. "However, the good news is that the trend is extremely promising. We are contacting our travel partner

with information about latest aircraft and helicopters that have been introduced in the market recently. We are also assisting the travel agents, tour operators and DMCs in preparing packages to be offered to their clients," he said.

## Technology is the way to go

New technology, claims Sharma, is revolutionising air travel across the world. "It is making flights more efficient and eco-friendlier. Aviation is certainly not a new field. In fact, the industry has a very long history. However, as with every other industry, technology has played a key role in changing the way things are done. The use of technology in aviation has become a necessity. The ability to collect and analyse data more efficiently has allowed airlines to better understand their customer base, improve customer experience, and increase revenue. Blockchain technology is being

**We are contacting our travel partner with information about latest aircraft and helicopters that have been introduced in the market recently**

looked at as a potential solution to threats and security breaches. Blockchain has gained popularity as a secure means of storing and transferring data," he points out.

He also highlights, "We will see airports embracing Artificial Intelligence (AI) to enhance aviation security and operations – both in terms of passengers and their baggage, as well as cargo. As technology in this area

becomes more sophisticated with the adoption of machine learning, it will be easier to detect weapons and other prohibited items."

## government policies

When asked about how supportive has the government been towards the industry, he shares, "Considering, some of the very important steps taken by the government in the last couple of years, I would say that the government is taking this industry very seriously. Earlier, we had special lounge or separate terminal for private jets only in Delhi and Mumbai. But now, we see the same in Ahmedabad and Cochin and very soon, it is going to be in some other cities of India as well. Many small airfields have been made operational which has increased our business as now small planes like turboprops or light jets can land at the airstrips, thus increasing connectivity."



# Centrum Hotel: A green space

Centrum Hotel has a reputation for offering modern feel, sophisticated style and intuitive service. Sarvesh Goel, Promotor, Centrum Hotel, highlights the hotel's green initiatives making it a luxurious, comfortable space for its guests. Leaving minimum carbon footprint has been its mantra right from its inception.



TT Bureau

In a very short period of time Centrum Hotel has established a reputation for offering modern feel, sophisticated style and intuitive service. Structured around 'The Fingerprint' impression that is omnipresent through all of its spaces in various forms- on the walls, the ceilings, and the floor, is a unique element of branding thus far. **Sarvesh Goel**, Promotor, Centrum Hotel, says, "Representing the individuality that each of our guests endorses, and leaves an imprint for us to cherish, the Fingerprint is vital to exude the elements that The Centrum brings forth. Our 116 keys property boasts about several menus and different types of experience in terms of gastronomical experiences, recreational facilities, rooms and lush green spaces which makes you feel closer to the nature."

Most of the properties are built in such areas which are densely populated and also have an added



**Sarvesh Goel**  
Promotor, Centrum Hotel



**Bhagwati Pant**  
General Manager, Centrum Lucknow

advantage of holy river, sea, desert, mountains and forests. This property, says Goel, does not have

these natural resources advantage yet it was a deliberate effort to bring nature flowing into the prop-

erty with a lot of greenery, choice of earthy colours, taking into consideration a lot of environmentally friendly initiative taken to build the property such as leaving minimum carbon footprint during the construction, sourcing the material locally, engaging to local artisans to the maximum and henceforth making a green building.

## Monumental architecture

Speaking about the hotel's architecture, Goel says, "It replicates the architecture of the monuments and structure of the old-world charm giving it an Oudhi touch. Also, the

material used to develop the club are vastly derived from the roots of the city. Chinhat Pottery, a dying art, is resuscitated through this project as the use of the art is widely and creatively infused in the structure of the building. Whether it is the uniquely inverted earthen pots placed on the ceiling, the Bridge- a masterpiece with its railings designed with old city Lucknow inspired art or the use of Jaali as a reference of the element prominent in traditional architecture, The Centrum bridges the gap between the modern and time-honored architecture, nature, and heritage."

Sharing some details of the hotel, **Bhagwati Pant**, General Manager, Centrum Lucknow, says, "With 111 rooms and six suites, the hotel plans a specialty restaurant and an Italian restaurant. The Centrum offers a plethora of lifestyle facilities/activities such as Semi Olympic size swimming pool with separate kids' pool, two squash courts, two lawn tennis courts



and a basketball court, table tennis/ billiards room, cards room, mini theatre and wellness centre. It also hosts activities round the year such as Lucknow Run, cycle ride, yoga and meditation sessions, gala dinners, live bands, fashion shows and much more, to keep the guests engaged."



## LIST OF AFFILIATES

### Alleppey

- Marvel Cruise
- Spice Routes – Luxury Cruises

### Athirapally

- Rain Forest Resort

### Hassan

- Hoysala Village Resort

### Idukki

- Silver Oak, Nedumkandam

### Jaipur

- Indana Palace

### Kumarakom

- Lakesong Resort. Kumarakom

### Lonavala

- Fariyas Resort

### Munnar

- Eastend, Munnar

### Mumbai

- Fariyas Hotel

### Poovar

- Poovar Island Resort

### Ranthambhore

- The Kipling Lodge - By Nature Kalp

### Thekkady

- Carmelia Haven Resort

### Udaipur

- Yaan Wellness Retreat

- Marvel Tours

- The Clement Village Retreats. Dausa (Rajasthan)

- The Clement Dune Retreat. Jamba (Rajasthan)



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Dera Dunes



Yaan Udaipur



Spice routes luxury cruises



# 'Rates are no longer a criterion'

Zia Siddiqui, Managing Director, Alliance Hotels & ABH Andaman says if the market remains stable, the company will perform better in 2023-24 with a surge in Andaman visitors.

Janice Alyosius

ABH Tourism is a Destination Management Company that promotes the destinations of Andaman, Bhutan, the North-east, and Karnataka, with over 50 resorts in each. They provide services to meet the needs of all travellers, including lodging, transportation, ship tickets, water sports, Helicopter & Sea Plane tickets, fishing, trekking, and cycling. They are experienced in managing groups and FITs for leisure, business, and honeymoon travel.

Families, leisure, honeymooner are the major segments followed by corporate and MICE that has picked well post-pandemic, shared **Zia Siddiqui**, Managing Director, Alliance Hotels & ABH Andaman.

Pre-pandemic, ABH had DMCs in Andaman, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Lakshadweep, and Maldives, but post-pandemic, they have only opened Andaman in October 2021 due to airport closure for runway upgrade. "We have a comfortable number of clients this year, but we anticipate a surge in Andaman



**Zia Siddiqui**  
Managing Director  
Alliance Hotels & ABH Andaman

visitors in 2023-24. We will open Maldives, Bhutan, Goa, Karnataka, and Lakshadweep later this year," said Siddiqui.

The tourism industry had a roller-coaster ride in 2022, but Siddiqui believes that if the market remains stable, the company will perform better in 2023-24, surpassing the figure of 2019-20. The DMC will restart the company in 2023 with a new look on the website, will go online for promotion and information, and will automate in a few areas so that operators can get the information they need about the organisations immediately, 24x7x365.

Siddiqui further shared that they intend to change their marketing approach to tour operators in the future, based on 'what we can do for them and what we expect'. Rates are no longer just a criterion for future business, we will begin knowledge-

**We have a comfortable number of clients this year (2022), but we anticipate a surge in Andaman visitors in 2023-24**

sharing sessions with micro and small operators. How systems and automation have helped us grow and will help them grow their business.

Speaking of inbound traffic, he said, "Good number of FITs and small groups has been started."

# Lords eyes mid-market leadership

With the rising India phenomenon driving the demand and economy, Lords Hotels expect the growth story to continue for the next few years. They have an aggressive growth strategy in place.

Janice Alyosius

Lords Hotels & Resorts is managing 40 properties across at 3 countries – India, Nepal and USA. Speaking of the new developments post-pandemic, **Sudhir Jena**, Vice President Corporate, Lords Hotels & Resorts informed, "In the current year we have opened new properties in Jaipur, Karjat, Bharuch, Rajkot and Noida during the last few months. Additionally we have signed MOUs with 20 properties which are at different stages of completion. We are poised to open 6 new properties in the first quarter of 2023."

With the lifting of COVID restrictions and opening up of international travel, there is a huge surge of business at all locations, particularly in Delhi, Mumbai, Surat, Jaipur, and Ahmedabad, which are their largest source markets.

Travellers are looking for unique destinations, value for money and warm hospitality, which Lords hotels are known for. "We are buoyant on the business prospective. We cater to business, leisure and



**Sudhir Jena**  
Vice President, Corporate  
Lords Hotels & Resorts

pilgrim segment and all these segments have performed extremely well," he said.

Jena said that with the rising India phenomenon driving the demand and economy, Lords Hotels expect the growth story to continue for the next few years. The hospitality industry is adapting to the new age demands of integrating technology and AI into service modules to delight customers.

"Going forward AI will provide the required analytical data to the hospitality and travel industry for targeted marketing, operational efficiency, customer experience,

customer retention, revenue maximisation and sustainable growth," he said.

Speaking of the business strategies, he informed that they have an aggressive growth strategy in place and would like to concentrate

**We (Lords Hotels) cater to business, leisure and pilgrim segment and all these segments have performed extremely well**

in their endeavour to be the leading mid-market hospitality chain in India, catering to the budget conscious traveller looking for the best value for the money spent. "We have 20 signed MoUs and are exploring new properties in the B and C category cities across India and international locations," he said.

# Widening the horizon

Crowne Plaza Kochi is making sure that not only it caters to business travellers, but also leisure and MICE business with its variety of offerings in F&B, activities and services. Known for its business facilities, the hotel is leaving no stone unturned to better its offerings for its corporate, MICE, as well as leisure clients.

Nisha Verma

Crowne Plaza Kochi is an upscale premium property, with a resort look boasting the sprawling views of the Vembanad Backwaters around the periphery. Dinesh Rai, General Manager, Crowne Plaza Kochi, claims, "Although the brand caters to the need of business travellers, the design, offerings and the infrastructure makes it ideal for MICE and leisure guests. Our room sizes are quite large, and we have several pools and outdoor lawn areas for all the different needs of our guests."

Rai added that during pandemic, with active refurbishment they launched the Skygrill lounge. "It is now the city's most popular fusion tapas rooftop lounge. We have also opened a luxury pan-Asian restaurant ZOKA," he says.

Post pandemic, he adds, "a significant demand is being wit-

nessed in travel, especially for the domestic segment which is seeing a tremendous rise in comparison to the pre-pandemic period.



**Dinesh Rai**  
General Manager, Crowne Plaza Kochi

There has been a growth interest in staycation, where locals choose to stay in other accommodations preferably in their own cities. However, domestic travel has gained momentum owing to the uncertainties in international travel that include higher airfares, tedious documentation, and hefty administrative costs."

## Business focus

Known for its business facilities, Crowne Plaza Kochi is leaving no stone unturned to better its offerings for its MICE as well as leisure clients. "Making business travel work better is our motto. We also cater to inbound tourists as well as locals who choose our property for weddings, events, celebrations, and MICE. There is a huge increase in numbers for incentive groups and leisure groups as well. Our meeting and event spaces span over 14,000 Sq ft," he informs.



When it comes to engagement with the travel trade, Rai shares, "Travel Agents & Tour operators play a significant role in terms of getting business for the destination and the hotel. Connecting with them regularly, participating in the domestic and international roadshows and fairs enables us to meet new agents frequently and extends an opportunity to reinforce relationships with existing ones."

## Promotions & marketing

Saying that today's travellers

are empowered to do their own comparative research, he claims, "If your hotel isn't easy to find online, no wonder your bookings are few and far between. So, staying on top of SEO and maintaining the position is extremely crucial. Also, talking about the promotion and market strategy, we strongly believe in word of mouth to build a brand reputation which is driven by customer testimonials and feedbacks on OTA platforms. We ensure executing special offers at the right time which can potentially help F&B gain new customers."

"We have IHG One Rewards loyalty program of IHG (InterContinental Hotels Group). Additionally, we have Crowne Privilege programme and the IHG business Edge programme," he adds.

## New additions

Talking about what's new at the property, he informs, "We have recently launched a 15,000 Sq.Ft.

German Hanger structure, which can accommodate up to 2,000 guests, all within a tranquil waterfront setting and for those who want to enjoy the luxurious space

**We have launched a 15,000 sq.ft. German Hanger structure, which can accommodate up to 2,000 guests, all with a tranquil waterfront setting**

to host a grand event or wedding ceremony. Plans are afoot to give our hotel lobby a complete facelift, with extensive remodelling of our ConneXions bar along with Aroma Cafe & Lounge, we are bent on redesigning the premises for our guests."





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WHERE GODS DANCE FOR MEN  
IN A KALIYATTAM



WHERE SANDALWOOD ADORN FOREHEADS

WHERE FLOWERS ARRANGE THEMSELVES  
AS POOKALAM



WHERE NAALUKETTU HOUSES SING  
PRAISES OF ARCHITECTURE

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# Local markets supported business

Abad Hotels and Resorts used the pandemic as an opportunity to spruce up its properties and add newer destinations. Year 2022 has been encouraging, shares Riaz Ahmed - MD, Abad Hotels and Resorts.

Janice Alyosius

Since the opening of its first hotel at Cochin in 1982, Abad has over the years marked its presence at major tourist destinations of Kerala with 14 properties. "We have three properties in Kochi city centre, two in the heritage area of Fort Kochi, Munnar, Thekkady, Kumarakom, Marari beach, Alleppey, Kovalam and Wayanad. Our recent additions have been Dutch bungalow in fort Kochi and two resorts in Wayanad - Brookside Lakshidi and Parisons plantation experience," shared **Riaz Ahmed** - Managing Director, Abad Hotels and Resorts.

Speaking of how 2022 has been for the hotel brand, Ahmed said that the year has been encouraging with domestic travel surging and international travel trickling in. The additional boost has been from local markets with guests choosing for staycations. "In a way it has reached pre-pandemic levels," he adds.

According to him, all the segments of travel has shown improvement



**Riaz Ahmed**  
Managing Director  
Abad Hotels and Resorts

post pandemic. Destination weddings have also picked up. More families are seen travelling to leisure destinations while MICE and corporate business has improved in city hotels.

The coming year appears to be very promising. The present scenario gives great hopes for 2023. "We are focused to offer local experiences at our leisure destinations understanding each customer's needs. Visa restrictions are gradually lifting, and our prime inbound markets will open up along with domestic and MICE bookings for 2023 it seems bright," he says.

He adds that COVID has been used to spruce up their properties. All their properties are now updated, and they are drawing plans for adding newer destinations.

With many joint collaborations done to promote specific destinations, tour operators and travel agents have always been our backbone, expresses Ahmed. "However, in

**Visa restrictions are lifting, and our prime inbound markets will open up along with domestic and MICE bookings for 2023**

order to generate better cash flow, credit policy was tightened post-pandemic. Travel agent bookings complement, and we value our relationship with our travel agents," he adds.

# Foray into corp travel, ODMV

Travel at Blue (TAB) strives to showcase untouched corners of Odisha. It has now diversified into business travel for corporates and also organising ODMV (on demand mobile visa) services for VFS in the state.

TT Bureau

Travel at Blue (TAB) is an ambitious venture of a travel enthusiast who transformed his passion into professional perfection, organising exceptional travel programmes to discover wonderful people, places and cuisines of the world within India or abroad. **Chandi Prasad Pattnaik**, Business Owner & Chief Travel Advisor, Travel At Blue, says, "TAB is all about humans seeking exciting travelling opportunities to experience life's adventures around the world. In the outbound segment, we are recognised for our hand-picked luxury experiences while in the inbound and domestic segments, TAB has been gradually increasing its presence by organising exceptional tour programmes to explore the eastern part of India from a different perspective."

Speaking about achievements this year, Pattnaik says, "Apart from our core business in leisure travel segment, TAB now successfully handles business travel of some discerning corporates and regularly organising



**Chandi Prasad Pattnaik**  
Business Owner & Chief Travel Advisor  
Travel At Blue

ODMV (On Demand Mobile Visa) services for VFS in Odisha that brings huge relief to the people of the state to submit their visa application for UK and Schengen countries in the comfort of a local hotel in Bhubaneswar instead of travelling to a metro city."

He has high expectations from 2023. "As travel is rebounding to pre-pandemic levels, despite inflation and, at times, significant operational challenges in 2022, travellers are expected to head to all corners of the globe in the following year. As diversified into business travel segment in recent past, we are in process of setting

up some implants in few corporate clients from the next financial year," he adds.

According to Pattnaik, Odisha is not just about temples, monuments or gorgeous beaches and lakes although it certainly does these well. "We strive to showcase the untouched corners of the state and alternative hidden spaces to

**Apart from our core business in leisure travel segment, TAB now handles business travel of some corporates and organising ODMV**

those willing to head out on offbeat tracks in the state. We believe that locals are the brand ambassadors of their places and can show a tourist more beautiful version of their places," he says.

# Last-minute bookings new trend

Though COVID restrictions have gone, the scare has not completely subsided, leading to clients asking service providers to book last-minute trips, says Geeta Maheshwari, Director, Hospitality & Marketing Services.

TT Bureau

Hospitality and Marketing services has 15 properties all over India. Earlier, their leanings were towards South India, but now their focus has expanded towards North and Central India. This diversification in their portfolio makes them learn new things and develop strategies accordingly.

Speaking of new additions to the brand, **Geeta Maheshwari**, Director, Hospitality and Marketing Services, informed that they have added Fariyas Hotel, Mumbai, which is located in the heart of Colaba, and Fariyas Resort in Lonavala is located in the Frichley Hills. It is the only 5-star resort with a water park near Mumbai and Pune, as well as a spa and therapy centre. These Fariyas Properties are ideal for conferences, weddings, vacations, or simply a luxurious stay. Another addition is the Clements Retreat Dera Dunes, The Clements Retreat and Dera Village. A luxury in the lap of desert, the Dera emphasizes comfort through sustainability.



**Geeta Maheshwari**  
Director, Hospitality and Marketing Services

After the pandemic subsided, they saw a huge increase in the tourism business with weddings and conferences playing a huge role in the domestic market. They have an estimate of 30-40 per cent hike in the inbound business. However, other segments are showing huge increase with a new trend of last-minute bookings. "It seems that though we do not have any covid restrictions, the covid scare has not completely subsided leading to last minute decisions of clients directing us to provide them with last minute bookings. This is something, we still are deliberating upon and creating new ideas

around. There is a need to be more organized and prepared for this incoming trend," she shared.

She further added, "We are seeing a sharp post-covid market recovery with corporate packs and domestic leisure family trips. With surplus funds for the travellers now, these areas have spiralled up the ladder with luxury

**H&M saw a huge increase in the tourism business with weddings and conferences playing a huge role in the domestic market**

stays. A special increase can be seen in the requirement of private pool villas. Keeping that in mind, we have Yaan Wellness Retreat in Rajasthan.

# Events galore at Novotel Vizag

Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach is a property that is not only catering to its MICE clients, but has also become a well-known wedding destination in India.

TT Bureau

Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach is one of the largest hotels in Andhra Pradesh, facing the famous RK Beach. **Ravi Rai**, Cluster General Manager, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach, shares that the location is advantageous being next to Inox theatre and a walkway that extends to the Submarine and Aircraft Museum. "With one of the largest international convention centres for weddings and MICE, Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach offers 225 rooms overlooking the ocean. Rai shares that they are seeing a gradual rise in MICE and wedding demand since September 2020. "In light of the pandemic, we have not laid off any Novotel members. We have a team that is working hard to satisfy the increasing demand," he says.



**Ravi Rai**  
Cluster General Manager  
Novotel Visakhapatnam Varun Beach

markets. Due to the overwhelming demand for MICE, all anticipated dealer meetings, business summits, investment meetings, yearly summits, partnership summits, and exhibitions have begun or will take place soon. The popularity of bachelorette parties is also booming."

## Agent engagement

They engage with travel agents through various activities like Fam trips, stay vouchers, and festive hampers. "We use a variety of methods to increase the reach of our social media posts. Posting photographs, videos, or

infographics is one scenario. Options also involve establishing a Facebook page, a Twitter account, an Instagram account, a LinkedIn presence, and so on," he informs.

**In light of the pandemic, we have not laid off any Novotel staff. We have a team that is working hard to satisfy growing demand**

## Digital is key

Known for destination weddings, Rai shares, "We promote our hotel extensively on social media. There are several websites and online marketplaces where excursions may be purchased. As a result, promoting our items on these platforms helps. Sites like Facebook have become the most effective marketing tool for travel firms."



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# Hotels buoyant on wedding business

Hoteliers are rolling out the red carpet for the much-expected rebound of big fat Indian weddings minus the pandemic restrictions. The professionals are hopeful of a fabulous wedding season coupled with demand in domestic wedding destinations and rise in wedding expenditure.



Lipla Negi

Amidst zero COVID curbs, pent up demand and fear of pandemic on the wane, have raised the hopes and raised the hopes of a fabulous wedding season this year. The market continues to look buoyant with big fat Indian weddings making a strong comeback. "COVID has taught people one thing—it is one life and they must enjoy it to the fullest. During the pandemic, people did not have the opportunity to host grand weddings. However, today the High Networth Individuals (HNIs) clientele is back to 400–500 guests," reveals Rajeev Kapoor, GM, Fairmont Jaipur. "Physical travel is back and I see people traveling on business as well as leisure. November onwards, MICE will be driven by weddings and I see RevPAR surpassing pre-COVID levels," said **Ajay Bakaya**, MD, Sarovar Hotels. November and December are packed with 'saaya



**Ajay Bakaya**  
Managing Director  
Sarovar Hotels

**Travel is back. From Nov, MICE will be driven by weddings and RevPAR will surpass 2019 levels**



**Puneet Dhawan**  
SVP Operations  
Accor

**Fairmont Jaipur and Raffles Udaipur are among top favoured wedding destinations in the country**

is specific to offbeat locations and properties with limited inventory, as 'intimate weddings' have been a norm and trend," says Abinash Manghani, CEO, WelcomHeritage

with incredible manpower as well as passion for hospitality," he further explains. The scenic beauty and easy accessibility of domestic locations is also one

Kerala, Shimla, Uttarakhand, and Andamans. "We have curated new packages for the guests, which can be customized as per their needs, bringing it all



Hotels. Meanwhile, industry professionals believed while there are fewer guests at 'small and cosy' weddings, the events come at a big-ticket price with focus on small details, storytelling through food, entertainment and more spends on bespoke experiences for the couple and the guests. "This creates opportunities for smaller hotels to be a part of the bandwagon," says Manghani.



**Rahul Joshi**  
General Manager,  
Taj Hotel & Convention Center, Agra

## Domestic destinations in demand

The rising fuel prices and higher air ticket fares are turning people towards domestic wedding destinations. "With some of the usual overseas wedding destinations struggling with COVID protocols, the wedding buyout momentum continues in India. We are witnessing a continuity of business queries that have started after the pandemic for this season," informed Manghani.

**Safety and hygiene are significant factors in selecting the premium hotels as wedding venues**

However, Kapoor felt it is the tradition of *atithi devo bhava* that strengthens India's position in the global wedding market. "From NRIs to HNIs, our cultural diversity and rich heritage blends effortlessly with the wedding sentiments of various communities across the world. And they cannot get the kind of guest service and hospitality we provide. We are blessed

of the prime reasons people are deciding to tie the knot within the country, giving a boost to the domestic destination wedding business. "The destination wedding market may witness a yoy growth rate of 30 per cent in 2022-23," said Mehul Sharma, Founder and CEO, Signum Hotels & Resorts. Some of the top wedding destinations include Rajasthan, Goa, Srinagar,

together under one roof, leaving them hassle-free. Demand for bespoke solutions, an attractive ambience and cuisines to choose from, are on the rise. Our mid-scale economy brands, Novotel and ibis are sought-after venues, while Fairmont Jaipur and Raffles Udaipur are among top favoured wedding destinations," says **Puneet Dhawan**, SVP Operations, Accor.

## Big budget, more experience-centric

While the wedding budgets have expanded, the hoteliers agreed the wedding expenditure has also gone up due to multiple reasons such as rise in prices of fuel, rooms, and perishable items. He said, "Today, we see 45–50 per cent more expensive weddings," said Kapoor. "There is a huge demand for big weddings, and limited premium destination wedding options. For the past two years, the rates were low, and hotels too compromised on the salaries. But these prices will continue and not come down."

However, Kapoor said, People of late are buying rich and unique experiences. "Safety and hygiene are significant factors in selecting premium hotels as wedding venues," added Joshi. Demand for branded hotels outruns the supply. 🐦



dates' and most hotels are packed for the wedding dates of this year. "Q4 will surely see a revenue jump for our wedding-positioned hotels, ideally over 25 per cent," said Rajan Kalra, Director, Sales (India), Suba Group of Hotels.

## Big fat wedding is back

Two years back, the pandemic had shrunk the size and scale of Indian weddings, but it failed to diminish people's appetite for grandiose wedding celebrations. "People were forced to compromise due to COVID outbreak. Fat Indian weddings aren't going anywhere—they will be back with a bang," said **Rahul Joshi**, GM, Taj Hotel & Convention Center, Agra.

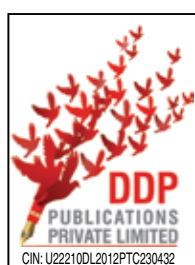
Ameet **Raj Kundu**, Cluster Commercial Head of JRT, "We are still having boutique weddings with 100 guests. But people are also looking at bigger weddings where 2,000 people are attending the wedding. So, the 'small and intimate' trend was limited post-pandemic. Right now, the clients can go as big as they want, and this trend will continue for the next two years."

## Buy-out trend continues

The hotels are witnessing an escalation in demand for wedding venues across locations with a significant increase in the number of room bookings and banquet sales. "Since November to Feb-

ruary period is the peak season, we have sold out 90 per cent of these months. Only 10 per cent is remaining for the 'non-saaya' or non-auspicious dates. Especially in the case of Jaipur, where an outdoor setup comes with lovely weather, most hotels are sold out to capacity," says Kapoor.

Atul Upadhyay, Senior VP, Pride Hotels Ltd., says, "We have done about 142 weddings in 2019-20. Currently, we have about 257 bookings for November to March 2022-23. Most of our banquets are all booked." The buy-out trend continues to gain ground and attract big and small wedding parties. "The buyout trend currently



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