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Dear Friends,

With the onset of summer vacations, Indians are planning overseas trips with renewed vigour. While interest in traditionally popular destinations remains high, Indian travellers are now expanding their travel horizons and looking to explore new exotic locales abroad.

In this context, India's fast-growing outbound business is being wooed by many and today, NTOs, DMCs, cruises, airlines and hotels around the globe are eyeing and enticing the Indian traveller. Last month, we received a great deal of interest from the outbound players in line with the upcoming summer season, and our TTJ April 2023 issue reflects their sentiments. Besides a great deal of outbound travel, the issue features a few destination reports, interviews, a feature on TCS, and a lot of advertisers with tempting offers to keep you occupied.

To conclude, it is encouraging to see Indian travellers exploring different destinations both within India and abroad with a more positive outlook towards travel.

Happy Reading!

*Ravi Sharma*

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## TripJack's Travel Agent Fantasy League for cricket enthusiasts is on, earn and redeem awards



**T**ripJack, one of India's leading travel-tech platforms, is now engaging with Travel Agents with its very own Fantasy Cricket League. This innovative activation allows travel agents to enjoy the excitement of fantasy cricket and also win TJ Coins, which they can redeem on TripJack.

The Travel Agent Fantasy League is an excellent way for travel agents to unwind from their regular duties and engage in some friendly competition with their peers from across the country. The application is user-friendly, intuitive, and simple to use. TJ Coins earned through the Fantasy League can be redeemed on the TripJack portal. The more TJ Coins earned, the greater the rewards.

Speaking on the activation, Hussain Patel, Director, TripJack, said, "We are excited about the Fantasy League, which offers a fun and engaging way for travel agents to win rewards while also enjoying some downtime. We believe that travel agents will enjoy this activity and help us engage with them in a fun way."

Travel agents can play TripJack's Travel Agent Fantasy League by logging into the portal, and visiting the Fantasy League section. So, what are you waiting for? Join the league and show off your cricketing skills while earning TJ Coins for the next travel booking! And if you are a travel agent who has not registered on TripJack, then wait no further and get registered at the earliest. **Visit [www.tripjack.com](http://www.tripjack.com)**

## NYC & Company is now New York City Tourism + Conventions



**A**t its Annual Meeting on March 28, 2023, President and CEO Fred Dixon debuted the new name and brand identity of the City's official destination marketing organisation and convention and visitors bureau for the five boroughs of New York City: New York City Tourism + Conventions. The destination's new brand system aimed at travellers from around the world includes a new brand strategy and comprehensive visual identity system comprising a new logo, color standards, typography, art direction and graphic elements.

The debut of the new name and brand system was launched in conjunction with a social campaign, #WHATSGOODNYC, harnessing the "opinion power" of the City's 8.5 million New Yorkers, offering them a chance to share their points of view on "what's good" and what to experience across the City's five boroughs. Tapping into travellers' desire for authentic experiences, the foundation and strength of the new branding comes from its genuine, enthusiastic perspectives shared by a diverse mix of locals, highlighting New York City Tourism + Conventions' role in amplifying these opinions to help travellers have a richer experience in NYC.

The brand's visual identity system is inspired by the graphic heritage of the City as well as the works of artists and designers who themselves were inspired by the five boroughs. The irregular shapes and intersections of the graphic elements and the logo - references to horizontal streets and vertical building shapes - play with contrast, expansion and contraction to reflect the City's energy. The secondary color palette surveys New York City icons and associations, from Liberty Green, Taxi Yellow and Ferry Orange to Lox Pink, Brownstone and Rockaway Sand.

## Free Singapore Tour for transfer and transit passengers resumes

**C**hangai Airport Group (CAG), Singapore Airlines (SIA) and the Singapore Tourism Board (STB) re-launched the Free Singapore Tour on April 03, 2023. The City Sights Tour, Heritage Tour and Jewel Tour have been refreshed to include new points of interest. A brand-new Changi Precinct tour will introduce travellers to the interesting sights and sounds of the eastern region surrounding Singapore Changi Airport. Each tour lasts 2.5 hours and will be available daily, with plans to progressively increase to nine tours a day. Monster Day Tours has been appointed by CAG, SIA, and STB to run the Free Singapore Tours.

Advance booking is now available on Changi Airport's website. Transit and transfer passengers who wish to join the Free Singapore Tour must have a layover period of at least 5.5 hours but less than 24 hours. Participants will need to have a valid entry visa for Singapore to take part in the tours.







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## Goa Tourism announces its first-ever roadshow across Europe

The Goa Tourism Department, in partnership with Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) India Chapter, is organising its first-ever Roadshow across Europe. The roadshow will start on April 18 from Frankfurt, Zurich on April 20, Vienna on April 24, and will end in Paris on April 26, 2023



Minister for Tourism, IT & EC and Printing & Stationery, Government of Goa, Rohan Khaunte, will lead the roadshow together with Sanjeev Ahuja IAS, Secretary Tourism; Pravimal Abhishek IAS, Director of Tourism, and the industry partners (sellers) which comprise registered tour operators, travel agents, hotels/resorts, airlines, and others.

Apart from its objective to ensure that Goa stands out as one of the best tourist destinations worldwide, the roadshow will also provide a platform for Goa to steer its tourism sector to greater heights.

The department also intends to position the state as a safe and all-around tourist destination by showcasing a wide range of ongoing tourism offerings such as offbeat, eco-tourism, sustainable, and hinterland tourism.

A major highlight will be the potential B2B meeting that Govt officials and sellers from Goa will hold with buyers from Europe that comprise industry experts and vendors from European markets.

The department will also focus on exhibiting the growing popularity of Goa's Hinterland Tourism worldwide, such as Nature Hikes, Bike Rides, Heritage Trails, and Sightseeing Tours through the serene villages, forests, and waterfalls of Goa.

## IndiGo announces Odisha's first international flight, to connect Bhubaneswar-Dubai



On the occasion of Utkal Divas, IndiGo announced and opened bookings for flights between Bhubaneswar and Dubai. The maiden international flight from Bhubaneswar will take off from Biju Patnaik International Airport on May 15, 2023. IndiGo is working in close collaboration with the Odisha government to commence international operations from Bhubaneswar, strengthening connectivity from the state.

International flight operations will also commence from Bhubaneswar to two more destinations – Singapore and Bangkok, for which slots and other operational requirements are being finalised. Direct connectivity to aviation hubs like Dubai, Singapore and Bangkok will help channelise the huge potential for economic growth through enhanced accessibility. IndiGo recently won the bid to operate direct flights to these three important gateways. As per the agreement, IndiGo will operate a direct flight from Biju Patnaik International Airport thrice a week. Inaugural ticket prices have been set to start at ₹10,000 per single side journey and ₹20,000 for a round trip on the Bhubaneswar - Dubai route.

## Air India launches Premium Economy Class on select flights

Air India has introduced an all-new Premium Economy experience for travellers, offering a superior cabin product, world-class inflight services, and added on-ground convenience. The airline has opened sale for the new cabin, for travel starting May 15, 2023, becoming the first and only Indian carrier to offer the choice of four cabin classes – First, Business, Premium Economy, and Economy.

Air India's Premium Economy class will be initially available to customers travelling on select routes operated by its fleet of Boeing 777-200LR aircraft, Bengaluru-San Francisco, Mumbai-San Francisco, and Mumbai-New York.

Air India's Premium Economy offers an exclusive travel experience designed for customers who do not mind paying a reasonable premium over Economy Class fares to fly in style and enjoy a lot more space, comfort, and convenience.





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## UNWTO partners with AVIAREPS to launch destination marketing grants

**A**VIAREPS, one the world's leading international representation, marketing and communications companies for aviation, tourism, and hospitality, and the World Tourism Organization UNWTO have joined forces to support the development and growth of the international tourism sector in selected European UNWTO member countries. AVIAREPS, an Affiliate Member of the UNWTO, will provide a diverse 360° portfolio of destination marketing and research services free of charge to a total of five countries chosen by UNWTO.



The UNWTO + AVIAREPS Destination Marketing Grant will include a suite of digital marketing services such as campaign websites, landing pages, webinars, online press conferences, e-learning programmes and virtual events provided via the AVIAREPS Ecosystem. The Digital Ecosystem is AVIAREPS' brand-new all-in-one marketing hub for the travel industry, which empowers everyone to market their destination and product to a global community online via a platform that combines several digital marketing services into one unified hub. The service portfolio furthermore includes Influencer Marketing services via AVIAREPS' matchmaking platform Swayfluence, which takes the guesswork out of influencer marketing by making quality connections between brands and influencers for authentic and impactful campaigns.

The UNWTO + AVIAREPS Destination Marketing Grant will also offer classic PR services and allow the recipient to participate in the various AVIAREPS Roadshows held throughout numerous international markets throughout the year.

Recipients of the UNWTO + AVIAREPS Research Grants will be provided pro bono in-depth international travel trade and consumer research spanning multiple key markets. The research will be coupled with deep-dive analysis into the destination's current positioning and perceptions in each market, along with opportunities and areas of focus to expand travel demand from each. UNWTO will choose the beneficiaries of the grants.

## Philippines Department of Tourism eyes e-Visas to boost tourism from India

**I**n anticipation of the surge of foreign tourists coming into the Philippines this summer season following President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.'s directive for the implementation of electronic visa systems, the Department of Tourism (DOT), led by Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, initiated a high-level convergence meeting with the heads and representatives of agencies such as Department of Foreign Affairs, Department of Information and Communications Technology, Department of Justice and Bureau of Immigration to discuss visa reforms to ease entry to the country's tourist source markets.

The event was in continuation of the talks initiated by DOT since September 2022 with the concerned agencies to take up visa concerns for key tourism markets in the hope of finding solutions affecting the flow of entry of international tourists.

While the Secretary has recognised tourism achievements made last year as the Philippines ended 2022 with 2.65 million international tourist arrivals, surpassing the targeted 1.7 million figures, she emphasised there are still bottlenecks, which prevent the Philippines from fully unlocking the global tourism potential.

"For this reason, our President has issued a directive to various government agencies to explore how the bottlenecks to travel into the Philippines may be addressed. He indicated one of the ways by which travel into the Philippines may be fully opened, especially to important markets. We must also explore the provision of electronic visas (e-Visa)," she said, citing the President's directive that government agencies must explore the provision of e-visas to Chinese and Indian nationals.

## Air India Group completes major milestone in the integration of Air India Express and AirAsia India

**T**he Air India Group has completed a significant milestone in the integration of its two low-cost subsidiary airlines, Air India Express and AirAsia India.

On March 27, 2023, the two low-cost airlines moved to a single, unified reservations system and website, and adopted common social media and customer support channels. This migration, which largely involved Air India Express migrating to the systems used by AirAsia India, confers significant capability and efficiency benefits for the airline and passengers.

Passengers will now be able to make and manage bookings, and check-in to AirAsia India and Air India Express domestic and international flights, on an all-new integrated website [airindiaexpress.com](http://airindiaexpress.com).

This system merger comes five months after AirAsia India was fully acquired and subsidarised under Air India, and three months after both AirAsia India and Air India Express were placed under a single CEO. In the coming months, the airlines will continue integrating other internal systems and, eventually, their air operating permits and regulatory posts.



AirAsia India flies to 19 destinations across the country, while Air India Express operates to 14 international destinations from 19 Indian cities.



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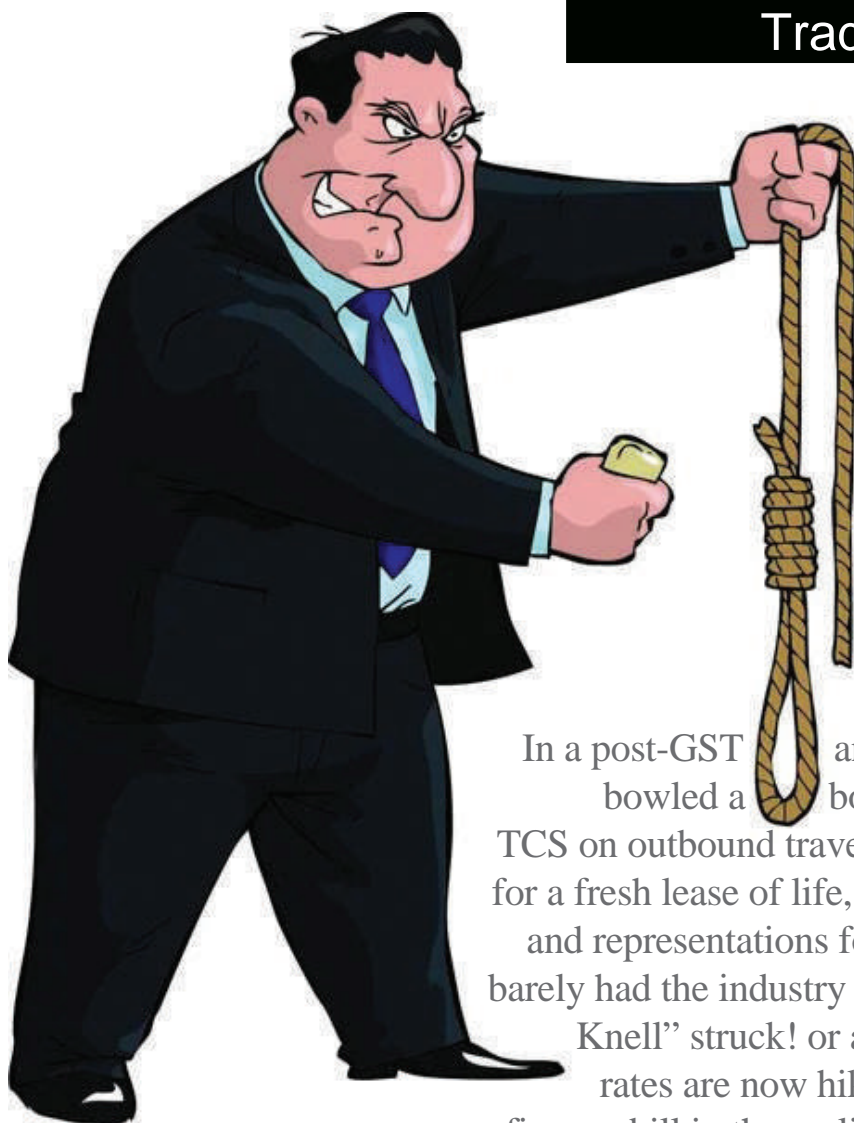


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# TCS

## Tightening the Noose

In a post-GST and COVID environment, the government bowled a bouncer with the introduction of a 5 per cent TCS on outbound travel. For an industry that was and is still gasping for a fresh lease of life, it was a hit below the belt. Immediate appeals and representations followed hoping for review and redressal but barely had the industry put its pen down to take a breather, the “Death Knell” struck! or at least that is how it is widely perceived. TCS rates are now hiked to 20 per cent and with the passing of the finance bill in the parliament is now a law. The industry stands shell-shocked, still trying to find the rationale behind this move. TTJ spoke to the captains of the industry to understand the implication, impact, and fallout of this move.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The industry was delighted to hear the finance minister extolling the virtues of tourism as a major engine of growth and employment generation and overjoyed to learn that the government intended to move Tourism into “Mission Mode.” Industry stakeholders were confident that the tourism industry, which accounts for 5.8 per cent of the country’s GDP and contributes 178 billion USD to the economy, was finally poised to get due recognition and some tangible support from the government. But there is much of a slip between the cup and the lip, and as soon as the hike in TCS rate from 5 per cent to 20 per cent was proposed, the positivity vanished.

### So why this hue and cry?

TCS is only applicable to outbound travel transactions and we have domestic travel, a very large chunk of it to cater to. “Dekho Apna Desh” is the new mantra, look inward and grow! With all due respect, the domestic travel opportunity is holistically huge on face value, but a very large chunk of it falls under religious, pilgrimage, and VFR categories where the role of the

travel agent is completely missing in the value chain or hitherto performing a very limited role.

Yes, there is a domestic corporate and business travel market and also a market for domestic leisure and the agents are already handling that. The point to be noted here is that outbound travel is the other major half or more of any travel agent’s business mix and accounts for more than half his revenue and earnings. A hike in TCS rates affects this outbound business by loading the expense outlay of a customer who in all likelihood is already a taxpayer paying advance tax or TDS on his salary or income.

Jyoti Mayal, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), elaborates, “The increase of TCS to 20 per cent from the existing 5 per cent has disturbed the entire travel agent’s fraternity, which in fact has been requesting for a complete removal of TCS since its implementation in October 2020. The proposed TCS will increase the cost of travel bookings by a whopping 25 percent (20 percent TCS and 5 percent GST). This additional levy will cause ticketing business from India to be shifted to travel agents and tour operators



▲ Jyoti Mayal

based out of the country and will also make Indian tour operators and travel agents lose vital business in the inter-region travel of South Asia.”

Ajay Prakash, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), shares his sentiment, “Announcement of the huge upward revision in the rate of TCS on overseas tour packages from 5 per cent to 20 per cent came as a complete shock! This will devastate the outbound tourism business. Indian agents and tour operators will find it impossible to compete with





▲ Ajay Prakash

overseas companies and online booking sites. It's impossible to impose the same conditions on a company that's not registered in India and is not subject to Indian taxation laws, with the combination of GST and TCS, the Indian agent will end up being a whopping 25 per cent more expensive for the identical package purchased overseas, that spells doom for the industry."

In modern India where banking KYC norms are very strictly enforced, Aadhar and PAN are linked, and all credit card, and high-value transactions are monitored, an overseas traveller from India today cannot dodge the system or escape scrutiny for his overseas trip. May it be business or leisure, there are more than ample checks and balances already in place to monitor and track the real tax evaders.



▲ Riaz Munshi

"The provisions of TCS are aimed at formalising the economy to facilitate better reporting of transactions and mitigate tax evasion. The Explanatory Memorandum to the Finance Bill, 2020, clearly states the intent to introduce TCS on tour operators is to expand the tax net. As the purchase of international tour packages is subject to TCS at 5 per cent, the information regarding the taxpayers subjected to TCS, including PAN details, is already available with the income-tax authorities. An increase in the

rate of TCS will not facilitate the objective of gathering additional information regarding tax evaders," explains Riaz Munshi, President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI).

To avoid TCS and the initial additional cash outflow that is tantamount to almost double taxation, travellers may be easily tempted to book an entire overseas tour package or its individual components through foreign travel agents or their online booking websites providing an unwarranted advantage to the foreign travel agents, resulting in a loss of business and revenue to the Indian Travel agents and Tour operators.

Jyoti further said, "This decision is going to damage the industry on multiple levels. The fact is that more than 99 per cent of Indian travel agents are micro, small, and medium enterprises whose livelihood is based on travel bookings for outbound and domestic travel. International travel agents and tour operators do not have to the same tax structure, so the TCS increase gives them an edge over Indian agents. The additional cost of TCS and GST will make the situation worse and might even create a parallel economy with a possible relocation of Indian MSMEs to set up booking offices in international jurisdictions."



▲ Prithviraj Singh

Sharing his thoughts on the hike in TCS rates, Prithviraj Singh, Managing Director, 2HUB, opines, "Yes! it will impact the industry, only temporarily though. We may see some inhibitions in the beginning, but it will eventually be accepted. There is a huge pent-up demand for travel as people want to make up for lost travel opportunities in the past. I feel it could impact the budget or low-cost travel segment the most. I am certain that we will come up with solutions to cater to this problem too."

Outbound travel plays a big role in the development of the country's aviation scenario and route capacity build-up. Any flight into the country has an inbound

and outbound leg. While the inbound leg gets hard currency from flying tourists into the country to see and experience Incredible India, the outbound leg from India promotes international travel. Thus, globalisation is the name of the game and today, and it is impossible to sacrifice one segment on the altar of the other without implications.

In the meantime, the industry and trade associations have not lost hope and are continuing in their efforts and endeavours to highlight their pain and make the government re-look and re-examine the case from the industry perspective.

On this, Jyoti shares, "While we condemn the move on TCS, as travel agents we stand with the government to identify potential tax evaders. We have written to the government bodies, including the Finance Ministry and the Tourism Secretary, and are having meetings with officers concerned to bring about some changes. Our suggestion to the Ministry of Tourism is to make PAN cards mandatory for outbound travel bookings for amounts above a certain level. PAN card information can be reconciled with the income tax returns of the PAN cardholder to identify and check for any tax abuse."

OTOAI is also pursuing its endeavours. Riaz says, "We have written to the honourable finance minister highlighting our concerns and the consequent negative impact of the hike in TCS rates. We also engaged JMP Advisors, a leading professional services firm that offers advisory, tax, and regulatory services to put up our case with ministries. We met with senior CBDT officials to explain our concerns in detail."

"TAFI has made a representation through FAITH to the Ministry of Tourism to help reverse this retrograde step and have also made an appeal to the Finance Ministry, and called on the Finance Secretary and elaborated the implications of this proposed hike. He has appreciated the validity of our arguments and agrees that the law should not work to the disadvantage of the Indian travel industry. We are cautiously awaiting further developments," informed Ajay Prakash.

So, at present, with the passing of the finance bill 2023 with no amendments to the TCS rates, it looks like the government is in no mood to relent on its original stand. As the hike comes into effect from July 01, 2023, the Indian travel agent and traveller can still take advantage of the lower rates for their forthcoming outbound summer vacation season of April, May and June. Till then make hay while the sun shines and live to fight another day!



# Tourism New Zealand's Success Story in Attracting Indian Visitors

Despite the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealand's tourism industry has maintained its steady growth in Indian visitors. According to Angela Blair, GM International, Tourism New Zealand, the growth trend is expected to continue. New Zealand offers a variety of travel experiences for families, couples, and adventure seekers from India.

Simultaneously, the board works closely with Indian travel agents and tour operators to promote the country as a travel destination. The country has also implemented safety measures to ensure a safe and healthy travel experience for Indian tourists.

Vartik Sethi

**T**ourism New Zealand saw steady growth in Indian visitors even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Angela Blair, GM International, Tourism New Zealand, the country experienced a strong growth trajectory over the past five pre-COVID years. From 2015 to 2019, the number of Indian visitors to New Zealand doubled. This growth has been consistent for the past two decades, as people have learned about the beauty of New Zealand through films, cricket, Bollywood movies, and the country's excellent educational offerings. Blair is optimistic that this trend will continue, in the years to come, "we doubled the visitors from India, it's a continuation in the past 20 years in India, the growth has just continued," she added.

The destination is committed to catering to the unique needs and preferences of Indian tourists. For example, in most cosmopolitan cities, many Indian restaurants offer different types of cuisine. There are also plenty of vegetarian options available for visitors outside the cities, as New Zealand has a large vegetarian population. From a language point of view, Tourism New Zealand largely caters to tourists to the urban English-speaking population from India. However, the industry adapts to the strong language needs of foreign markets such as Japan and China by offering tours with guides who speak those languages.

New Zealand offers a wide variety of travel experiences for families, couples, and adventure seekers from India. Blair shared, "We pretty much have visitors from everywhere, as our iconic activity is trekking." While New Zealand is known for its beautiful landscapes, there are plenty of activities beyond picturesque landscapes. High-end retreats cater to honeymooners, and family-friendly activities like dolphin watching are available. Adventure seekers can enjoy activities such as bungee jumping and heli-skiing.



▲ Angela Blair

The visa process for Indian tourists traveling to New Zealand is relatively straightforward. Blair recommends applying for a visa online as early as possible. According to Blair, pre-COVID, the process was relatively fast, but at the moment, it takes about 20 days for the process to culminate. While there are currently no direct flights from India to New Zealand, Blair shared that the destination is in talks to have a direct flight and is working to create more flight connections that will make it easier for Indian tourists to access New Zealand.

Tourism New Zealand works closely with Indian travel agents and tour operators to promote New Zealand as a travel destination. Through targeted campaigns such as "If You Seek," Tourism New Zealand aims to showcase New Zealand as an extraordinary travel destination. These campaigns are tailored to suit individual trade partners and their specific needs.

The country responded proactively to the COVID-19 pandemic, and safety measures are in place to ensure the safety of Indian tourists traveling to New Zealand. Recollecting New Zealand's quick recovery, Blair said, "We opened up to Australia when COVID was still globally present with new variants." There is easy

access to COVID-19 tests upon arrival, and while mask mandates have been lifted, many travellers continue to wear masks. Hygiene remains a top priority for Tourism New Zealand, and the country continues to take necessary measures to ensure a safe and healthy travel experience.

On being asked to speak about one common misconception an average Indian traveller might have, Blair said, "Probably the only misconception is that it's only beautiful mountains and landscape but the truth is there are so many different kinds of activities." On the contrary, New Zealand offers a wide variety of activities beyond this, including eco-tourism and sustainable travel. She also highlighted an innovative EcoZip activity that involves ziplining and giving back to the environment by planting seeds or a tree at the end of the zipline.

New Zealand is a unique travel destination for Indian tourists due to its beautiful landscapes and wide variety of activities. Some lesser-known hidden gems in New Zealand include beautiful out-of-the-way beaches, where visitors can see dolphins and hire surfboards. There are cute little cafes in Auckland alongside the beaches, Blair also recommends exploring the fantastic wineries in Marlborough. For those who wish to experience New Zealand like the locals, Blair recommends exploring the beaches, "If you talk to the locals you'll know that there are really beautiful out-of-the-way beaches," said Blair.

Tourism New Zealand works closely with Indian travel agents and tour operators to promote New Zealand as a travel destination, and the visa process is relatively straightforward. The country also offers a variety of activities beyond picturesque landscapes, including luxury experiences, eco-tourism, and sustainable travel. With its unique natural beauty and hidden gems, New Zealand is a perfect travel destination for Indian tourists seeking adventure, relaxation, and new experiences.



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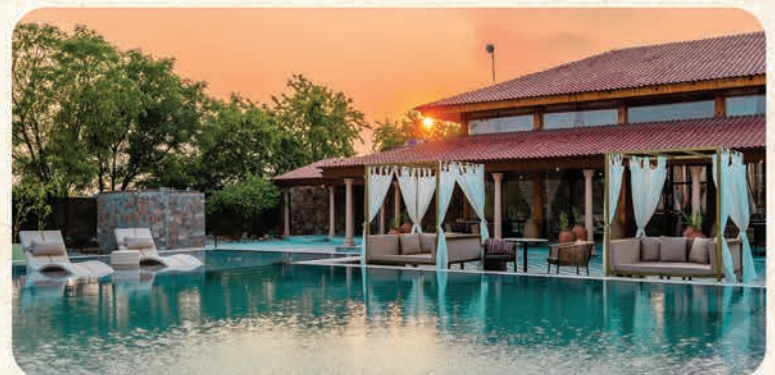
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# Western Australia eyes direct flight from India to Perth to tap into VFR market

With India being one of Western Australia's largest markets that remains unserved by a direct airline service, Hon Roger Cook, Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism, Western Australia, recently attended the CAPA India Aviation Summit in New Delhi to discuss establishing a direct flight from India to Perth. This move follows the state's tourism body meeting with top airlines in July 2022 to develop direct aviation connections between the two destinations. Western Australia's Deputy Premier highlighted various travel destinations within the state, promoting adventure, wildlife, and unique culinary experiences to attract Indian visitors.

Vartik Sethi

The Western Australian (WA) Government is committed to expanding its tourism market by increasing its aviation capacity to India. Hon Roger Cook, Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism, Western Australia, recently attended the CAPA India Aviation Summit in New Delhi to discuss establishing a direct flight from India to Perth. The visit follows the Western Australia Government's India Mission in July 2022, where the state's tourism body met with key officials of top airlines to develop direct aviation connections between the two destinations.

Highlighting India as a priority market for Western Australia, Cook stressed that the state is working with valued airline partners to build and grow its aviation capacity between the two regions. The goal is to tap into the VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) market and encourage travellers from India to stay longer and explore more of Western Australia. Cook said, "In Western Australia, we see a big return of visiting friends and relatives and people wanting to reconnect with their families in the post covid world."

With India as one of Western Australia's largest markets that remains unserved by a direct airline service, the Western Australian Government is committed to working with the Indian tourism and aviation sectors, as well as Perth Airport, to secure more aviation connections to India. Minister Cook added that direct air connectivity would provide an uplift to both the Indian and Western Australian tourism industries.

Speaking to Travel Trade Journal on the sidelines of the event, Western Australia's Deputy Premier, shared insights about various travel destinations within the state. While visiting friends and relatives is a popular choice, Cook highlighted the south-western region

of the state as a great destination for adventure-seekers. Within a 2-3 hour car drive, visitors can enjoy wide open spaces and unique experiences.

Cook also shared his personal favorite, Ningaloo Reef, located on the coast of north-west Western Australia. He added, "You can literally swim with the wild sharks. We take our goggles, snorkels and flippers and literally fall into the waters with the most amazing coral reefs and marine life." The reef offers the opportunity to swim with wild sharks and witness the stunning coral reefs and marine life. In addition, Cook also suggested heading south for great wine, food, and a crisp environment.

For the Indian diaspora, Cook stated that Western Australia offers a range of Indian and Asian restaurants. With fusion cuisine being a unique aspect of Western Australia's culinary scene, Indian visitors are sure to have a memorable experience.

In terms of wildlife, Western Australia caters to both adventure and leisure tourists. On being asked about the happiest animal on the planet, Cook shared, "Just off the coast of Western Australia on a 30-minute boat ride, you can go to Rottnest island where they have marsupials called the Quokkas, which are very small kangaroo-like creatures and are supposed to be the happiest animal on earth." Extreme adventurers

can swim with wild sharks, while those seeking a more laid-back experience can visit Rottnest Island to see the Quokkas!

Cook emphasised the importance of social media in accessing markets for their strategy. Western Australia uses platforms such as Instagram to showcase the unique experiences the state has to offer. These platforms serve as a teaser, encouraging travellers to click on the links and explore further.

In recent years, the number of Indian visitors to Western Australia has grown significantly. In 2019, India represented Western Australia's 11th largest tourism market by visitor numbers, with more than 30,000 travellers from India visiting the state. More recently, India has become Western Australia's fourth-largest international market for visitor numbers in 2023.

Supported by the AUD \$195 million Reconnect WA package, the WA Government, through Tourism Western Australia, is investing heavily in tourism and aviation to cement the state's reputation as the Western Gateway to Australia.



(L-R): Rashmi Pradhan, Manager - India; Arjun Mukund, Director - India and Carolyn Turnbull, Managing Director from Tourism Western Australia with Hon Roger Cook MLA, Deputy Premier and Minister for Tourism, Western Australia



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# Travel industry is bouncing back

## Is your business keeping pace?



The travel industry is soaring to newer heights. With bookings and inquiries skyrocketing, we finally see the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel. According to UNWTO, a notable increase in international tourism receipts has been recorded across most destinations, in several cases higher than their growth in arrivals. As destinations worldwide reopen and welcome back travellers with open arms, the question remains, is your business ready?

**Rashmi Joshi**

### LEVERAGE THE TECHNOLOGY ADVANTAGE

Market disruptive technologies like web 3.0, ChatGPT, and AI programs are already shaking the travel industry. New-age travel agents should ensure optimum utilisation of these technologies for their benefit. The next-generation web technology allows for more intelligent data processing and the ability to connect people and businesses in more personalised ways. By adopting web 3.0 technology, you can leverage AI and blockchain to streamline your processes and offer secure and transparent transactions.

### PERSONALISATION IS THE NEW NORMAL

One size does not fit all in the travel industry. You must develop products and services that cater to each customer's unique needs. Loyalty will be an assured royalty if you empower your customers with personalised experiences. Make your customers feel that they are being heard and valued. This can be achieved by offering tailored recommendations, customised itineraries, and personalised customer service.

### UNLEASH THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In today's digital age, being present on social media and other digital platforms is essential to any business. Travel Businesses must be visible where their customers are and engage with them regularly to build brand loyalty and gain new customers. Social media is an excellent tool to generate leads and convert them into bookings. Emphasise

on creating a robust social media strategy that aligns with your business goals. This can involve creating engaging content, running social media ads, and leveraging user-generated content (UGC).

### CONTENT IS ALWAYS THE KING

Travel businesses must create content that is helpful, useful, and informative. It is crucial to avoid spamming customer inboxes and focus on providing value. Creating original and relevant content is necessary. Don't just build your strategy around keywords but aim to become the authority on the topic and make the audience absorb only the truth.

Livestream content and short-form videos are the queens and offer customers a more immersive experience. Leverage these formats to entice customers to go beyond and interact to make deeper connections. This can involve creating virtual tours, showcasing local experiences, and sharing customer testimonials.

As we perceive the future of travel to be brighter than ever, you need to also look at the other side of the innovation! Technology can help boost the dynamics of travel, but what can hold it strong forever is "Sustainability". Sustainable efforts go a long way in empowering travellers to travel responsibly and leave an everlasting impact on the environment. Be vocal about your organisation, and ethics, and share even the smallest contributions that highlight the green side of your business.

The time to innovate, strategise and plan to make your business future-ready is now.

**S**o, what has changed? The answer is simple, 'customer mindset'. With the rise of digital technology, travellers today are more informed and discerning. Gone are the days of blindly booking accommodations and activities. Today a wealth of online resources allows us to compare prices, read reviews, and plan our dream vacations down to the last detail, not to forget the influence of social media, which has given rise to a new breed of jet-setters, travelling not just for fun and adventure but for the perfect Instagram shot!

So, what can the travel industry do to meet the ever-evolving expectations of the modern-day traveller. Here are some insider tips I think you can leverage to stay ahead of the game and make the next vacation unforgettable for your customer.

### HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW TODAY'S TRAVELLER?

If you assume your customer is the same as before? You may go wrong this time. As the travel industry experiences an upward surge in bookings and inquiries, it's crucial to understand the demands of today's travellers. With the rise of new digital technologies, travellers now have access to a wealth of information, making them more informed and demanding than ever before. In my opinion, running surveys and analysing customer data can help align products and services to the customers' requirements.

**About the Author:** Rashmi Joshi is the General Manager - Marketing and Communications at 2HUB.



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# ROVE HOTELS PLANS EXPANSION INTO OTHER EMIRATES, STARTING WITH RAS-AL-KHAIMAH



Rove Hotels, with nine hotels in operation in some of the best locations in Dubai city, has been catering to the young and young-at-heart demographic since its inception. In an exclusive interview with Travel Trade Journal, Sam Cooray, Head of Sales at Rove Hotels, talks about the brand's success and its strategies for growing its Indian market share in 2023.

**Vartik Sethi**

**R**ove Hotels, a contemporary mid-market hotel brand that caters to the millennial generation and the young at heart, is making waves in the UAE hospitality industry. With nine hotels strategically located in the bustling city of Dubai, Rove Hotels is set to expand to other emirates, with the first one set to open in Ras-Al-Khaimah.

In an interview with Travel Trade Journal, Sam Cooray, Head of Sales, Rove Hotels, shared the brand's plans for 2023 and how it has successfully catered to its target market.

Rove Hotels' success can be attributed to its unique approach in providing a seamless guest experience. The brand's aesthetic design and marketing strategy show a youthful spirit, but Rove's business base is much wider, attracting guests from all ages and demographics.

The group's expansion plans to other emirates are geared towards catering to the growing demand from various markets. Cooray said, "We have some expansion plans in the pipeline for other emirates and will be opening in Ras Al Khaimah next year. Apart from UAE, India is another key market for Rove Hotels. We have a good market share, and we work very closely with many destination management companies based in Dubai who are focusing on the Indian market."

To support its expansion and further penetrate the Indian market, Rove Hotels plans to participate in trade events, specifically with the Dubai Economy and Tourism Department. Cooray added, "We will also be doing marketing campaigns with destination

management companies (DMCs) based in Dubai to push more business towards our hotels. We have a focus on wedding groups as well. We believe this is a segment that could be very interesting for us, we have some properties which have big inventory which are very suitable for big groups, so we want to focus more and support the market with these initiatives."

Despite the challenges brought by the pandemic, Rove Hotels is optimistic about its prospects for 2023. He noted that the first two months of the year have been particularly strong, with sold-out days during events such as Arab Health Exhibition and Gulfood Exhibition. "We have seen that the first two months of Jan and Feb were very strong, and the rest of the year is looking positive. Most of our hotels are on the higher occupancy levels, you can say above 75-80 per cent averaging at the moment, and some of the days are also sold out, especially over event dates," Cooray said.

Their success story in the UAE hospitality industry can serve as



▲ Sam Cooray

an inspiration for mid-market hotel brands in the region. Its focus on providing an easy-to-work-with guest experience and a unique aesthetic design and marketing strategy have helped it become a preferred brand for the young and the young at heart. With its expansion plans in other emirates, Rove Hotels is set to capture new markets and continue to offer exceptional guest experiences. Besides, its focus on the Indian market and wedding groups is a smart strategy that could pay off in the long run.







*Stay tuned...*

## Music inspired holidays at Hard Rock Hotel Marbella

Hard Rock Hotel Marbella is a new yet iconic adults-only hotel situated in Marbella, a unique city in Spain's Costa Del Sol region. The hotel offers remarkable experiences while reflecting the immersive music environment for which Hard Rock Hotels are known.

**H**ard Rock Hotel Marbella opened its doors for guests in July 2022 after extensive renovations. It is managed by Palladium Hotel Group. The hotel is situated in the glamorous Puerto Banús, one of the most stunning parts of the Costa del Sol. The location is the best new spot for adults (16 years and older), to enjoy a vibrant atmosphere. The hotel is a few steps away from the renowned Nueva Andalucía Beach.

Hard Rock Hotel Marbella features 383 rooms, including 64 suites, and the very recently opened Oasis building with 174 rooms. Let us look at the unique and immersive brand experiences at the hotel.

### A Fascinating Hard Rock-themed Hotel

In true Hard Rock style, a variety of signature brand experiences and amenities exclusive to Hard Rock Hotels can be found here. The hotel relates to the music-inspired design featuring a curated collection of music memorabilia, distinctive luxurious decor, and a lush and oasis-like garden. Known for sparkling events and incredible live concerts and performances, guests have free access

to the hotel's music events and those visiting the hotel can prepare for a memorable program of star-studded line-ups and shows.

### The Sound of Your Stay® The Soundtrack of Your Holidays

Guests can turn their room into a tailor-made musical experience with Hard Rock's Sound of Your Stay® program. The program allows guests to listen to Tracks® curated playlists inspired by the city they're in. Crosley record players are available upon request with Wax®, or they can play a Fender guitar with Picks® in the privacy of their room. The high life is never far with 24-hour room service and in-room Rock Om® yoga.

### Unparalleled Relaxation and Culinary Scene

When guests need a break during their stay, the Hard Rock Hotel Marbella has got two exclusive bars for them, right by the hotel pools: Sun Society and Eden Pool Club. Both offer a fabulous menu full of delicious snacks, exclusive cocktails, premium spirits, and all sorts of refreshing drinks so that they can toast to the good life. The hotel has varied culinary offerings that will excite even the most exquisite palates.



### Pampering Spa Experiences at Rock Spa® Wellness Centre

Guests can pamper themselves with body and facial treatments, and massages, or just relax in the sauna, hammam, or spa pool. Here, they will find everything they need to recharge their energy.

### Weddings Rock at Hard Rock Hotel Marbella

Hard Rock Hotel Marbella offers glamorous options for a wedding. They have large spaces and wedding planners to help customise a party and make a couple's wedding dreams come true. The hotel places couples close to the local nightlife, beautiful beaches, and unique shopping and dining opportunities.





# US witnesses good rebound and strong growth in Indian arrivals

Special screenings of Brand USA's big-screen movie, 'Into Nature's Wild' in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru showcase the stunning natural beauty of the United States.

**Neha Kirpal**

**A**fter a gap of three and a half years, the ninth Brand USA India Sales Mission took place in Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai and Bengaluru between March 19 and March 25, 2023. Brand USA also premiered its third big-screen film, *Into Nature's Wild*, exploring some of the most beautiful landscapes in the USA. Attendees included 25 US exhibitors, select senior Indian buyers and key stakeholders including airlines, hotels and US Embassy and Consular Services members.

India ranks fourth among all overseas markets for the USA excluding Canada and Mexico, with 1,256,915 in total arrivals between January and December 2022. The latest figures released at the end of February revealed that 203,540 Indians travelled to the United States, showing continuing strong growth in visitor arrivals. Air connectivity between the two countries also further strengthened, with Air India launching two direct flights to San Francisco from Bengaluru and Mumbai in December 2022 and Mumbai to New York (JFK) on February 14, 2023, taking their total number of non-stop flights to 46 weekly. These are in addition to seven weekly direct flights operated from Newark to Delhi by United Airlines and seven weekly direct flights from New York (JFK) by American Airlines.

Jackie Ennis, Vice President, Global Markets, BrandUSA, mentioned that the



▲ Jackie Ennis

rebound has been very good, as the numbers only represent about a 15 per cent decline on the 2019 figures. "In addition to high volume, the money that is spent by the average visitor from India in the US is very high. In 2019, this number was \$16.5 billion. In 2021, there were only 433,000 arrivals, but the spend was \$8.2 billion," informed Ennis.

*Into Nature's Wild*, which released just before the pandemic in 2020, takes viewers on a cross-country journey to explore the hidden wonders of the great outdoors in the US. Narrated by Academy Award winner Morgan Freeman, it celebrates the transformational essence of nature and wilderness, showcasing the beauty of some of North America's lesser-known landscapes. It's a non-

stop ride via kayak, bike, train, hot-air balloon, zipline, kite surfboard and more into some of the most beautiful but little-known landscapes of North America – from the wilds of Alaska and the lush coastline of Oregon to the ancient canyons of the Southwest and the rolling hills of the Appalachian Trail. Throughout the journey, three trailblazers, Native American astronaut John Herrington, Alaskan pilot, youth advocate Ariel Tweto and record-breaking long-distance hiker Jennifer Pharr Davis, all with a shared passion for nature, serve as on-screen guides.

The film is the third of the Brand USA's giant screen movies. The first one, *National Parks Adventure*, released in 2016, was created for the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the national parks system. Brand USA's research found that the film generated nearly \$700 million in direct incremental visitor spend and 172,000 additional visitors to the US. It created an economic impact of over \$1.5 billion. The second film, *America's Musical Journey*, which released in 2018, celebrated American heritage through the lens of music.

During the COVID pandemic, Brand USA launched its virtual platform, Global Marketplace, in order to maintain contact between the global travel trade industry and their US partners. Over the course of two years, they did market updates, kept



everyone informed about the landscape and what the shifts were in those different key markets. They also facilitated one-on-one business meetings between the markets and the key leaders in them, as well as US partners. Further, between 2020 and 2022, Brand USA implemented an ongoing robust PR outreach programme with the Indian consumer, lifestyle,



news and travel trade media. In the summer of 2022, they supported Padma Shree Ajeet Bajaj and his daughter Deeya Bajaj for their climb of North America's highest mountain, Mount Denali, Alaska. Two media dinners were also organised during Thanksgiving in Mumbai and Delhi. "Our emphasis now though is on face-to-face connection," concluded Ennis.

## Miami City: A Year-Round Destination with Something for Everyone

Beaches, nightlife, shopping, food, music, sports, art and culture...Miami is a year-round destination that has something for everyone. Joe Docal, the Director, Travel Industry Sales at the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, was recently in India for Brand USA's multi-city roadshow. A travel industry veteran, Joe started his career in the car rental industry, then moved onto the cruise industry where he worked at Cunard Line, Seabourn Cruise Line, Carnival Cruise Line and Costa Crociere before joining the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau in 2016. At the Greater Miami CVB, he has been responsible for working with the team of global representatives for the GMCVB, tour operators and travel advisors in key domestic and international markets. Joe is currently responsible for overseeing Europe and Emerging Markets.

Neha Kirpal

In this exclusive interview, he enlightens us on some of Miami's new offerings as a destination as well as various events that take place in the city throughout the year.

**Apart from the usual well-known tourist circuit, what are some new offerings of Miami Tourism?**

Miami, as a destination, has the perception that there is just the beach, nightlife and shopping. But Miami has a whole lot to offer. What we see as one of the strongest elements of the destination is the diversity of its residents. Little Havana is a place where one can enjoy Latin and Caribbean culture. Then there is Wynwood, a very trendy neighbourhood, which is sort of like the epicentre of the art scene in Miami as a whole, with the largest concentration of murals, more than 70 art galleries and microbreweries. There are also several other places, such as Coral Gables

and Coconut Grove, that one can go and discover.

**Tell us a little about Miami's vibrant culinary scene.**

Last year, the Michelin Guide for Florida State was introduced. It includes Miami, Orlando and Tampa. Eleven of the fifteen restaurants that were awarded Michelin stars are in Miami. One of the eleven received two stars, and it's the only two-star Michelin restaurant in the state. In May, they will be announcing another eight. So in a sense, Miami has become a kind of mecca for the culinary scene.

**What are some of the different sports, music, and arts and culture events that take place in Miami?**

At the beginning of the year, there are lots of events that happen in Miami which make it fun and exciting for visitors to come. We start the year with the Miami Half Marathon, after which we move on to the international boat show as well



▲ Joe Docal

as the Miami Open, a tennis tournament that also starts in March. Last year, we had our first Formula One Grand Prix racing event in Miami. The second event will happen on May 7, 2023. That obviously brings in a very unique side of high-end visitors to the destination. Further, Miami has been selected as one of the host cities for the 2026 World Cup.

The art and culture scene

has also increased in the last 10-15 years. We have one of the biggest art events in the world, called Art Basel, which takes place in the first week of December. It happens during Miami Art Week. While it's the exclusive event that week, there are more than 20 art events throughout the destination. The annual Winter Music Fest in Miami, an EDM festival, culminates with the Ultra Music Festival on March 26, 2023. A lot of the DJs that perform at the festival later take over at a hotel, so there are many events, including pool parties. So, the whole week is quite fun and brings very young and active visitors to Miami.

But then again, Miami is a year-round destination, so there's always something to do. We're constantly looking for new events related to sports, culinary as well as arts and culture in order to keep the destination fresh for returning visitors.



# KISSIMMEE

## The Vacation Heart of Florida

On the Northwest shore of Lake Tohopekaliga, in the heart of Sunny Florida, just a 20-minute taxi ride from the Orlando International Airport, and in close proximity to all the major attractions like Walt Disney World Resort, Universal Studios, SeaWorld, Legoland, and the Kennedy Space Centre lies a town that goes by the synonym 'Vacation Home Capital of the World,' Kissimmee.' TTJ interacted with Yinglu Tian, Director, International and Domestic Sales, Experience Kissimmee, who recently visited India to share with the Indian travel fraternity, the latest developments and offerings that the region offers across the various travel segments.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

With sunny and warm weather year-round, and located just minutes away from world-famous theme parks and incredible outdoor adventures, Kissimmee in Florida is called the 'Vacation Home Capital of the World' with more than 50,000 vacation homes to choose from. These vacation homes are located in gated communities that have an array of unique amenities like golf courses, restaurants, water parks, and more.

No Indian traveller's vacation to the United States of America is complete, without a visit to its world-famous mega Parks and themed attractions, and just adjacent to Kissimmee, is where all the action is. India is a major emerging market for Experience Kissimmee. Yinglu elaborates, "We saw the immense potential and opportunity that India presented, and way back in 2017 decided that we needed a physical presence here in India. So, we have Seldon Tenzing, Account Director for Experience Kissimmee, who is our point of contact based in New Delhi. Her key agenda is to spread awareness about the brand Kissimmee, meet and interact with all industry stakeholders and train them, imparting product knowledge, helping them create new itineraries and connect them with the DMCs in the USA."

"We have noticed that Indian families love to travel together, and hence we regularly come across family groups with multi-generation travellers," adds Yinglu. She further said, "Kissimmee is the perfect match for these Indian family groups as our extensive choice of vacation homes offer real value, privacy, larger accommodation space, and attached kitchenettes."

For families looking for a long and



▲ Yinglu Tian

relaxed family vacation with the flexibility to cook their own Indian food, combined with easy proximity to groceries and attractions, make these vacation homes the perfect fit. Also, the Indian summer holiday months of May and June happen to be shoulder seasons for Kissimmee, adding further value to the whole proposition.

A family can very comfortably spend a wonderful 7-to-15-day vacation in Kissimmee, visiting the various theme parks and attractions located all around without repeating a park or a ride. A family vacation becomes fun when parents relive their childhood by participating in activities, watching parades, shows, and fireworks, or taking adrenaline-rushing roller coaster rides with their kids, not to mention shopping for branded merchandise.

The Theme parks of the region are the biggest draw and may it be Disney, Universal, Epcot or SeaWorld, all have

been very busy lately adding new attractions and improving the existing ones, informed Yinglu. "Disney has four different theme parks and each offering its own unique flavor, they are constantly innovating and adding newer experiences. Magic Kingdom has the beautiful 'Cinderella Castle' and the fireworks and is now adding a new roller coaster called 'Tron Lightcycle Run' which is currently under testing and to open soon. In the Animal Kingdom, the Pandora, themed on the sci-fi movie Avatar with its floating islands, is a big attraction. Hollywood Studios had opened the Star Wars-themed Galaxy's Edge, which is a huge draw for all Star Wars fans across all age groups. Epcot launched the Guardians of the Galaxy, which is one of the world's largest fully enclosed roller coasters that rotates 360 degrees," said Yinglu.

SeaWorld is investing a lot of effort to bring educational information to the children about marine animals and their environment, meet and greet the penguins and dolphins. Also, their Dolphin, Whale, and Sea Lion shows are always a big draw. Universal is just 30 minutes from Kissimmee and has two theme parks, 'The Studio' and the 'Island of Adventure' and it is the only place in the world where Harry Potter lives in both parks. Not to miss out on the fun and action at LEGOLAND and the 'Peppa Pig' theme park.

Talking about emerging markets post-COVID, Yinglu mentioned that India was among the top ten fastest-growing markets for them, probably just behind Mexico. Further explaining the stalemate caused by the extended timelines for obtaining tourist visas to the USA, Yinglu mentioned that it was a priority area and was being looked into very seriously at all levels.





# Lindt

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Treat your taste buds to the indulgent and sinfully delicious flavours of chocolate as you set off on a one-of-a-kind experience at the Lindt Home of Chocolate in Zurich, Switzerland- a haven of every chocolate lover's dreams

**A** mesmerising paradise unparalleled, Switzerland is a pinnacle of unique experiences steeped in luxury, set against the beauty of nature. If you're looking to eat well on your next vacation, the Land of Chocolate is the perfect destination- after all, what country produces better chocolate than Switzerland? And if you're a real chocolate lover, head for the logical place: The Lindt Home of Chocolate in Zurich which takes you on a sweet retreat unlike any other.

The Lindt Home of Chocolate is a major project of the Lindt Chocolate Competence

making expertise. In 2020 the foundation opened a museum and a pilot plant that will educate visitors from all over the world on chocolate production.

If you're a chocolate lover, the Lindt Home of Chocolate is an experience you cannot afford to miss. Designed by celebrated architects, Christ and Gantenbein, the home houses an interactive chocolate world that ensures an adventure—a delight for all traveller types, be it young or old. Visitors are beckoned to embark on an enchanting chocolate journey through an exciting tour that offers insight into the process of

Foundation that aims to sustain, cultivate and promote Switzerland as a business location for chocolate and strengthen Swiss chocolate-

cocoa cultivation, the history of chocolate, and much more. That's not all. Guests can also visit the impressive pilot plant, with open-view production to follow the making of a filled chocolate Lindt SQUARES step by step.

Guests can even see what it's like to be a real Lindt Master Chocolatier in the Chocolateria, and have a chance to make their chocolate creations through courses, or even celebrate through workshops for Christmas or Valentine's Day. With a nine-metre-high chocolate fountain that even Willy Wonka would be impressed by, a multimedia museum, and the Lindt Café with delicious offerings of sweet and savoury goods, the building houses the biggest Lindt chocolate shop in the world, offering a unique and exciting chocolate experience for the whole family. Learn the history of the enchanting Swiss chocolate—with ample to taste and try, of course!

**A ticket reservation in advance is recommended. For more information and tickets, visit [www.lindt-home-of-chocolate.ch](http://www.lindt-home-of-chocolate.ch)**



# Destination DC keen on investing to encourage more visitations from India



▲ Elliott L Ferguson II

**D**estination DC is a private, non-profit corporation that manages and markets Washington, DC, the United States' Capital City as a premier global convention, tourism and special events destination, focusing specifically on the arts, cultural, and historical communities. By developing and implementing centralised and cohesive sales and marketing strategies, DDC generates economic development for the city by attracting tourism and meetings. DDC is member-based, with over 1,000 member businesses and organizations that support the city's travel and tourism sector. A veteran of the travel and hospitality industry, Elliott L Ferguson II leads DDC's efforts to generate economic opportunity for the district through meetings and tourism, overseeing the organisation's convention and tourism sales, marketing, finance and business development operations.

The year 2022 marked the first time that the



DC Jazz Festival

US border was reopened to fully vaccinated international travellers for the entire year post-COVID, and Destination DC saw the effects of this through an increase in total visitation numbers to Washington, DC. Elliot remarked, "2022 was a great step in the right direction for travel to Washington, DC."

On asked about how Washington, DC stands out from other destinations on the Eastern coast, Elliott shares, "Washington, DC is the capital of free things to do, including dozens of museums, live cultural performances, and signature festivals. This aspect provides added value for travellers and allows them to invest in other exciting experiences, like our Michelin Guide-rated culinary scene, boutique shopping, and luxury accommodations."

Apart from iconic monuments and memorials embellishing the National Mall, Washington, DC offers insight into the culture and history of the district through its neighbourhoods. Washington, DC boasts one of the nation's greatest collections of riverfront communities, including Georgetown and the Wharf in Southwest.

Elliott further shared, "While we are known for our iconic monuments, museums, and memorials, Washington, DC offers so much more to explore. Many people don't know that the city is awash with green space and river views. With 643 parks and two rivers, travellers can enjoy the tranquillity of nature alongside all

the advantages and access of a big city. Spring features the National Cherry Blossom Festival (20 March – 16 April), a free festival celebrating spring and the blooming of 3,700 Japanese cherry trees along the National Mall, and more throughout the city. It's the largest display of Japanese cherry trees outside of Japan and the whole city participates in themed culinary offerings and events – it's a fantastic time to visit. We have also seen a boom of development in Washington, DC which also provides ease of access for Indian travellers."

In Washington, DC, the Metro Silver Line opened in November 2022, which now brings travellers from Dulles International Airport straight into downtown Washington. New museums, like the contemporary Rubell Museum, provide major exploration for new visitors, and for return visitors, many museums and iconic sites have received facelifts. This includes their most visited museum, the National Air and Space Museum, which added eight interactive galleries and a reimaged planetarium last year. Washington, DC has 24 Michelin-starred restaurants and 36 cost-effective Michelin Bib Gourmand restaurants. The city has also been witnessing a wave of celebrity Chef openings like The Bazaar at Waldorf Astoria by DC legend, José Andrés, and Gordon Ramsay's Hell's Kitchen at the Wharf. New upscale boutiques are springing up in the historic Georgetown neighbourhood,



Capitol Building

Elliott L Ferguson II serves as President and CEO of Destination DC (DDC), the official destination marketing organization for Washington, DC. In this exclusive interaction with Elliott, we get to know more about the destination which has quietly grown from a political and historical city into a serious arts, culture and gastronomical destination, this shows that the city isn't relying just on its history to attract visitors.

**Prashant Nayak**





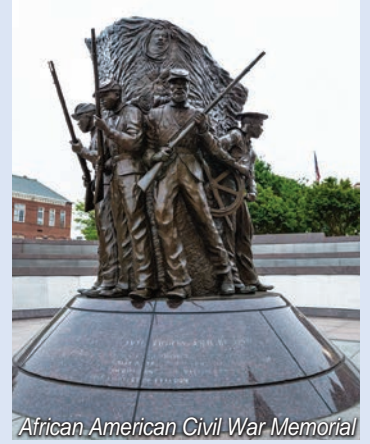
The Lincoln Memorial

representation in India for Sales and PR, Indiva Marketing. They have always represented us well and kept us well-connected to India when we are not there in person. With Destination DC's upcoming investment in the market, we predict that visitation from India to Washington, DC will surpass 2019 pre-pandemic levels in 2023," says Elliott.

are now able to book sooner appointments."

The main travel segments that Destination DC is focusing on in 2023 continue to be the students and visiting

friends and relatives, as the majority of them already have visas. The organisation does anticipate visa wait times improving over time, and they also have plans to focus on leisure and business travellers in the coming months.



African American Civil War Memorial

and new tours are consistently added to explore the deep-rooted culture and history of the city.

In January 2023, Elliott visited India to promote the city's new attractions and strengthen ties with the Indian travel trade, reflecting the importance of India market for Washington, DC. Elliott says, "India is currently Washington, DC's second-largest overseas market, after the UK. India has always been an important overseas market for us, historically in our top ten for overseas. As India's population is poised to surpass China this year as the most populous in the world, we understand that investment in the Indian market is vital."

Destination DC sales and media representatives were on the ground in Mumbai and New Delhi in January to meet with Indian agents and media in person, and they are looking at international promotion opportunities for the future. "We will continue to work with our

Speaking of the current challenges when it comes to India regarding visas and connectivity, Elliott shared, "There are 3 million current Indian passport holders with a 10-year U.S. visa, and the United States has issued a record-breaking 82,000 student visas in 2022 to Indians, making up nearly 20 per cent of all international students studying in the U.S. Despite these numbers, we understand that many Indians are waiting longer than a year just for an interview. We have been working tirelessly with the U.S. Travel Association to advocate for policies that help decrease visa wait times. Many Indians



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# WelcomHeritage partners with SunFuel to install EV Charging Stations across its hotels

For some time now, sustainability has become more than a mere buzzword in the travel and hospitality world. While initially, it was simply a “good to have”, it is gradually becoming a “must have” going forward. WelcomHeritage Hotels, a joint venture of ITC. and Jodhana Heritage Resorts, has always had a strong philosophy when it comes to socially responsible tourism. In line with its responsible driveable holiday itineraries, the brand took a new step in this direction and partnered with SunFuel Electric, a prominent EV charging player, to install charging stations across its hotels in India. The agreement signing ceremony took place in Delhi-NCR between Gul Panag, Co-Founder at SunFuel, and Abinash Manghani, CEO of WelcomHeritage.

Neha Kirpal

A couple of years ago, when the brand's new resort in Shimla opened, there were a number of people driving up in their electric vehicles from nearby cities, such as Chandigarh. According to Manghani, their primary anxiety would be where to charge their EVs. This led him to do market research, where he finally zeroed in on SunFuel. With Siemens as a technology partner, SunFuel Electric, which calls itself an experiential electric vehicle charging company, has design professors from IIT Delhi on board. Elegantly designed and extremely effective, the company's slick chargers are the only ones in which the charging cable is located conveniently at the back.

The EV chargers are currently operational at the WelcomHeritage Parv Vilas Resort and Spa in Solan, Himachal Pradesh. By the year-end, the brand intends to cover the popular driving-holiday route that runs through Himachal Pradesh, from Panchkula via Kasauli and Solan to Shimla. In addition, EV charging stations will also be installed at WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort and Spa in Jawai, Rajasthan and WelcomHeritage Tadoba Vanya Villas Resort and Spa in Tadoba National Park, Maharashtra. Apart from that, the brand's properties in Ooty, Coorg, Pench and Goa have also been signed on. “Adding to the feasibility and mindfulness of electric vehicles and Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV), our guests will be able to enjoy the beautiful drives up to these WelcomHeritage destinations without the anxiety and stress of access to EV charging stations,” said Manghani.

The path-breaking initiative comes in a further push towards a wider narrative of sustainable practices in the tourism and travel space. Panag, who leads the company's platform of e-trails or electronic road trips,



elaborated on the community of EV enthusiasts – the passionate early adopters of electronic vehicles – a group of like-minded individuals who are more aware, evolved and ahead of the curve as compared with their contemporaries. “A hotel is a home away from a home. In World 2.0, there will be electric cars in each home. Just like Wi-Fi and other amenities that we require in hotels, an electric charger will be an emerging requirement for the end user,” said SunFuel Electric's Founder and CEO Sudhir Nayak.

Nayak explained that destination charging is an important pillar among the three pillars of EV charging – city charging, highway charging and destination charging. “If we have to catalyse the adoption of high-end electric vehicles in India, then luxury hotels and resorts need to be equipped with a seamless destination charging experience,” he said. A leader in the destination charging space, SunFuel Electric has previously partnered with 109 hotels of the Radisson group, 39 hotels

of the IHG Hotels and Resorts group as well as some properties of the Marriott group and the Accor Hotels group. The company will soon also be announcing a collaboration with another group having 96 resorts.

Needless to say, sustainable practices like water harvesting have been incorporated into all the properties of WelcomHeritage. However, the brand believes in going a step further and involving the social fabric of a destination. Manghani reiterated that the idea of responsible tourism involves tapping into the local flora and fauna, employing local talent, creating menus that support the local population, giving the customer indigenous experiences, and building local economies. “A lot of our hotels have local farms where organic vegetables and fruits are grown, and we do farm-to-plate menus. As far as possible, local cuisine is imbibed into all our menus. Further, we offer local experiences to guests,” he added.





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# From Back Office to Boardroom The Evolution of

## Priyanka Nijhawan and Nijhawan Representations



Priyanka Nijhawan, Director, Nijhawan Group, in an exclusive interview with Travel Trade Journal, shared her journey from a maths and computer science student to becoming an integral part of Nijhawan Group's representation vertical. Her journey began in 2005 when she started handling the back-office accounts. After taking a sabbatical to focus on her family, she jumped back in and grew the representation vertical from just two accounts to multiple accounts and established various verticals, including PR and marketing, over the years. Today, Nijhawan Group offers end-to-end solutions for B2B travel, account management, influencer campaigns, and joint marketing activities.

**Vartik Sethi**

### A STORY OF GROWTH, EXPANSION, AND EVOLUTION

With over a decade of experience in the representation business, Priyanka Nijhawan's journey is a story of growth, expansion, and evolution. Starting her journey in 2005, her first assignment was to handle the back-office accounts. However, with her first child on the way, Priyanka decided to take a sabbatical to focus on her family. She beautifully explained, "My sabbatical taught me the importance of work-life balance. It's about maintaining a balance and finding what excites you." It was during this time that the representation vertical was launched, that she jumped in to pursue it.

Coming from an academic background, sales and marketing seemed like no work to Priyanka. But as she started making extensive sales calls, meeting people, and building relationships, she found the process very exciting. What started with just two accounts in 2012 slowly grew to multiple accounts and various verticals, including PR and marketing over the years. Speaking from her decade of experience, Priyanka shared, "Representing a brand is not just a job, it's a decade-plus journey of growth and innovation."

Today, Nijhawan Group offers end-to-end solutions for B2B travel, account management, and joint marketing activities. The group's representation vertical has evolved and expanded over the years, thanks to Priyanka's vision and commitment. Her journey is a testament to the power of representation, relationship building, and continuous growth. As the travel industry faces unprecedented challenges, Nijhawan Group's story offers hope and inspiration to businesses looking to adapt, evolve, and thrive.

### WORK-LIFE BALANCE, A MYTH?

Priyanka believes that there is no perfect balance between work and personal life, but rather a tilt towards one side, depending on what requires attention at the moment. At times, work may take precedence, while at other times, personal matters may need attention. Crediting her team, Priyanka said, "One of the ways I think where you can get some work-life balance is, of course, also to build a great team where all of us empower each other."



Priyanka acknowledges the hardships of being a female leader, and that everything can come crashing down all at once, but urges women not to quit on either their careers or personal lives.

## BREAKING BARRIERS

### *Gender Roles and Changing Workforce Dynamics in India*

While the gender roles in India are still skewed towards women taking care of the home, the dynamics are changing as more and more women are entering the workforce. Priyanka believes that it is essential for women to be financially independent. However, having a support system at home and building a strong team can make a significant difference in achieving this dream. Additionally, Priyanka stresses the importance of having mentors and role models who can guide and support women as they navigate their careers.

As a Former Chairperson, CII, IWN Delhi Chapter, she suggested that organisations like the Confederation of Indian Industry's IWN can offer mentor-mentee programs to help women groom themselves for leadership roles and fill the pipeline for future generations. Priyanka is a big believer that women should be encouraged to strive for financial independence and leadership roles, while men should be taught from a young age to value equality and to share domestic responsibilities. A thorough professional and a selfless family woman, Priyanka chooses to let her work make all the noise. "When you choose to work and you want to have a family life, you're round the clock, you're 24/7. Weekends are when you make up on what you didn't do during the week, but in the end, it's really worth it," she added.

## ESTABLISHING A PILLAR OF RELIABILITY

### *Commitment to Client Success*

Nijhawan Group has established itself as one of the most reliable and trusted travel partners for its clients. The company has been able to sustain its position in the market by adhering to its core principle of being a B2B company that prioritises its travel partners.

Backing the might of her team, Priyanka said, "We are the only representation company that works out of Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai as we have physical offices and dedicated sales resources who make sales records daily." This has allowed them to have a strong sales presence and a dedicated sales team that works towards growing their clients' businesses. Stating the group's focused approach, Priyanka shared, "The principle is that we have never steered away from our core B2B business. Even today we don't do anything that overjumps our travel partners."

## LESSONS FROM COVID-19

### *Constant Innovation, Resilience, and Adaptability*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nijhawan Group adapted quickly and started conducting regular check-up calls to support their team members. To break away from the routine Zoom calls and webinars, the company also organised various activities to keep the travel trade motivated and engaged, such as the Dubai Tourism workshop where they hosted a bingo game with hotel stays as prizes and a live singer to entertain everyone.

Nijhawan Group has displayed immense innovation in representing Lindt Home of Chocolate, a museum in Switzerland, by inviting the media to a virtual tour with a live presentation and serving them Lindt chocolates to give them the complete experience. In a takeaway from COVID, the company has started offering virtual tours for all its representation clients,

including hotels and destinations, allowing clients to experience them even when they can't physically be there.

Highlighting the contrast between pre and post-pandemic ways of working, Priyanka shared, "Pre-COVID, we were not doing many Zoom calls and we would want everyone to fly down but during COVID-19, we got digitised faster and started moving online." This not only saved company expenses but also saved a lot of time!

Priyanka shared that the group has already signed up new products and added properties from Vietnam to their portfolio. They have also signed up the Marriott chain in Mauritius, which is expected to be a game-changer for the company. The addition of Mayfair Cruise in Egypt is yet another feather in their cap. If that was not enough, there are many more projects to be announced later this year! With more people joining their team and more products being added to their portfolio, 2023 promises to be a stronger year for the company.

Looking forward, Nijhawan Group plans to be the one-stop shop for all travel needs. They are pushing their team every day to become experts in weddings, MICE offerings, and luxury travel to further solidify their presence as a leading player in the travel business.

## THE GOLD STANDARD

### *Retaining Clients to Steer Growth*

Retaining clients is like having recommendation letters that make adding new clients much easier. "For us, signing new accounts is very important but what is more important is retaining the accounts we already have," shared Priyanka. To achieve this, the company places a strong emphasis on constant innovation, active market involvement, and quick response times. The team of 40+ maintains a shared calendar to coordinate sales meetings and events, ensuring that every client is given the attention they deserve. In addition, the team is always prepared to organise product roadshows on short notice due to their deep knowledge of the industry.

Ultimately, Nijhawan Group's success comes down to meeting targets and achieving strong numbers. By prioritising client retention and constant innovation, the company continues to grow its portfolio and provide top-quality service to clients across the globe.

## EMBRACING DIGITAL TOOLS AND SUSTAINABILITY

The company has recently transformed its functions digitally during the COVID-19 pandemic by embracing various digital tools like MS Teams, Google, Zoom and WhatsApp.

"We use MS Teams for our online meetings, but between MS Teams, Google, and Zoom, I no longer want to talk to anybody on the phone as video calls are much more interactive," added Priyanka.

Nijhawan Group has also leveraged WhatsApp as a means of communication in India, where it is widely used. The company has a dedicated design team that creates flyers and brochures for various destinations and shares them with travel agents through WhatsApp groups to build a constant recall. Additionally, during roadshows, a QR code was provided to the participants to join the WhatsApp group, making it easier for them to stay connected.

Apart from using technology for communication, Nijhawan Group is also actively working towards sustainability. This initiative not only helps promote tourism but also encourages responsible travel. By embracing technology and innovation, Nijhawan Group is leading the way in the B2B travel industry, making communication easier and more effective while promoting sustainable tourism practices.



## Oman Air marks three-decade legacy in the skies

Oman Air passed a major milestone in March 2023 with the occasion of its 30th anniversary. The airline's journey began in March 1993 with a single flight between the cities of Muscat and Salalah, followed by its first international flight between Muscat and Dubai. Over the past three decades, the airline has gone from strength to strength and now flies to over 45 destinations as far as Europe and the Far East, with a strong international presence and a reputation for providing high-quality products and outstanding customer service.

Team TTJ

Keeping pace with the rapid development of the aviation industry, the airline operates a fleet of modern, fuel-efficient aircraft, while driving its commitment to operational excellence.

"Thirty years as Oman's national airline is a milestone to be proud of," said Eng. Abdulaziz Al Raisi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air. "In that time, Oman Air has grown from a small regional carrier connecting Oman across the country to an award-winning airline connecting visitors from around the world to Oman's diverse natural beauty and rich culture. Despite the challenges of the last few years, our goal continues to be to serve our country by enabling Oman's Vision 2040 ambitions, whether through job creation, supporting the tourism and logistics industries, or increasing inward investment. With three

decades of experience and expertise to build on, we're looking to the future with renewed optimism."

A cornerstone of Oman's socio-economic development, since its maiden flight, Oman Air has carried millions of passengers into the country, providing them with an authentic introduction to Omani hospitality and culture. It has laid the foundations for a tourism industry that has increased tenfold over the last 30 years, contributing to the creation of hundreds of thousands of direct and indirect jobs.

In 2022, Oman Air was ranked most punctual in the Middle East and Africa, as per the results of the 2022 On-Time Performance Review by global aviation



analytics leader, Cirium. At the same time, its onboard products have attracted much international acclaim.

In the coming years, Oman Air is working towards joining the oneworld Alliance, which will see it broaden its network's global reach and provide guests with huge benefits and greater travel options, while further strengthening its leading position in the Middle East by focusing on agility, efficiency, and new market opportunities.

## Etihad Airways makes a comeback to Eastern skies

With international air travel momentum becoming steady, Etihad Airways is touching down the cultural capital of India and connecting it to its global network. Salil Nath, General Manager- Indian Subcontinent, Etihad Airways shares the latest info about the advantages enjoyed by the flyers on Etihad Airways.

Swaati Chaudhury

It comes as good news for flyers looking to travel to Abu Dhabi and the United States from the Eastern belt of India. Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways, the national carrier of the United Arab Emirates, resumed flight services from Kolkata's Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose International Airport post-COVID crisis on March 26, 2023.

Travellers visiting the United States on Etihad Airways are highly benefitted since the United States Customs and Border Protection facility at Abu Dhabi International Airport which forms the only US immigration preclearance service in the region enables travellers to clear all immigration formalities in Abu Dhabi itself and makes them have easy and quick access to their ultimate destination. Salil Nath, General Manager, Etihad Airways commented, "We are quite excited to restart our flight operations in Kolkata. With international travel bouncing back in the post-pandemic era, Kolkata is our premier destination in the Eastern



▲ Salil Nath

region of India. From being an airline to a full-fledged aviation group, we have completed 20 years of service in the aviation world."

Etihad Airways is currently flying out from 14 destinations across the Indian Subcontinent. Salil Nath said, "India remains one of our most significant markets outside

Abu Dhabi. We are operating non-stop, seven weekly flights from Kolkata to Abu Dhabi. There are eight seats in business class and 150 seats in the economy category. Owing to Abu Dhabi's proximity to India, we have our choice of destinations in the country. As of now, we have our flight services from eight Indian destinations. Kolkata is our focused market and we have remained over-competitive. Abu Dhabi has emerged as a great wedding destination and Kolkata has a fair share of wedding travellers. Our Eastern market is growing constantly."

The airline offers seamless connectivity to flyers with a global network of 67 destinations. Travellers from the Eastern region can reach global destinations with Etihad Airways. Salil Nath further said, "We have 21 weekly flights from New Delhi and Mumbai to Abu Dhabi. We are quite strong in providing world-renowned luxury brands that are offered to our first-class flyers."



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## Soneva Unveils Next Phase of Wellness Development

*Soneva Soul*

**A**ward-winning sustainable luxury resorts brand Soneva recently launched its next phase of wellness development at Soneva Soul, adding a team of expert international doctors and healers and the latest cutting-edge treatments and equipment to offer an even higher level of wellbeing and healing. Leading the way in world-class treatments, the new outcome-based menu welcomes science and innovation to address every aspect of guests' wellbeing through personalised programmes and transformative treatments.

As part of its next phase and following the addition of new technology and equipment, traditional wellness philosophies such as Chinese medicine, Ayurveda and medicinal mushrooms now sit alongside cutting-edge integrative medicine such as hyperbaric oxygen therapy, ozone therapy, nutritional IV therapy, regenerative joint injections, platelet-rich plasma therapy, micro-needling and cryotherapy, amongst others.

Each treatment is administered by experienced doctors and wellness specialists, who also oversee the development of guests' personalised programmes. Soneva Soul's robust on-site team includes a Naturopathic doctor and an

Ayurvedic doctor at each resort, a traditional Chinese medicine doctor, Ayurvedic therapists, an experienced resort physician and nurse, as well as a broad range of spa therapists and visiting wellness specialists. Bringing their vast experience to Soneva Soul across a spectrum of healing therapies and wellness practices, the team's level of expertise is unparalleled in the region and serves to provide care that is luxurious and deeply rejuvenating while being effective and targeted.

Leading the team at Soneva Fushi is medical and naturopathic doctor, Dr Arsallan Ahmad, whose expertise lies in regenerative injections, intravenous nutrient therapy and sports medicine. Dr Arsallan also treats various health concerns including digestive issues, food sensitivities, Lyme disease, mould exposure, heavy metal toxicity, osteoarthritis and auto-immune diseases through comprehensive nutritional programmes and treatments.

Also in residence at Soneva Fushi is Dr Fabio Pacciuci who has a rich toolkit offering comprehensive traditional Chinese medicine therapies including acupuncture, cupping, gua sha, qi gong, aesthetic acupuncture and micro-needling, breathwork and more. Dr Fabio works with all health concerns

The latest in cutting-edge wellness technology added to Soneva Soul's transformative treatment offering in the Maldives.

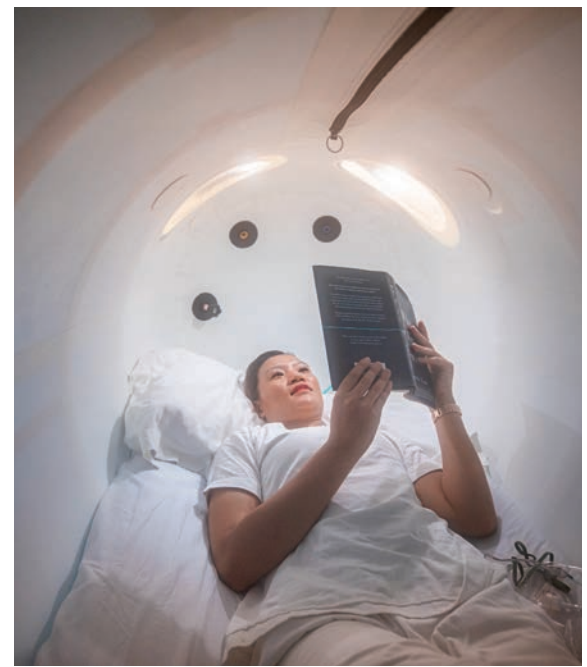
**Neha Kirpal**

through the lens of traditional Chinese medicine to diagnose, rebalance and heal on every level.

"Our new comprehensive wellness and medical offerings at Soneva Soul come from the clear awareness that to feel truly well, all systems must be in balance. The body must receive the nutrients it needs, and we must remove all obstacles to regeneration," says Medical Director for Soneva Soul, Dr Lilly-Marie Blecher. "For this reason, we focus on detoxifying, supporting cellular metabolism, nourishing on every level and regenerating compromised cells and tissues. Ancient medicines such as Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine have known and practiced these principles for millennia. Modern medicine offers new therapies and expert acute care. Together, we can understand, heal and rejuvenate more deeply and completely. We recognise that health is our greatest asset and deserves the highest and most refined level of care."

Naturopathy doctor at Soneva, Dr Michelle Valdes, explains that auto-immune diseases are reversible. However, this model is not a replacement for conventional medicine. "We call ourselves integrated medicine. That means we work alongside conventional medicine," explains Dr Eric





experiences that inspire and enthrall. Soneva is also a pioneer for responsible tourism, combining a conscientious, proactive approach to sustainability with exquisite luxury and intuitive personalised service. Carbon neutral since 2012, Soneva launched its Total Impact Assessment in 2016, a first for the hospitality industry, measuring its social and environmental impacts. A mandatory 2 per cent environmental levy is added to every Soneva stay, with proceeds going towards the not-for-profit Soneva Foundation to offset both direct and indirect carbon emissions from resort activities and guest flights. The Foundation funds a range of global projects that have a positive environmental, social and economic impact.



result of Soneva's experience at the forefront of the luxury hospitality and wellbeing industry over the last 27 years. It harnesses the knowledge and expertise gathered on Soneva's journey since launching its first spa at Soneva Fushi in 1995 – from traditional therapies, naturopathy, and healing rituals, to the latest in diagnostics and scientific advances.

Adding to its already extensive list of wellness offerings, Soneva also recently announced a new limited-edition Wellness Package across its award-winning hideaways in the Maldives and Thailand. Valid for a three-, five- or seven-night stay at Soneva Fushi, Soneva Jani and Soneva Kiri, the indulgent package is ideal for guests who wish to explore a health transformation at Soneva Soul. Each package includes a complimentary consultation with integrative medicine doctors to design an individualised, optimised programme. Combining conscious

movement and meditation, luxurious spa treatments, regenerative therapies and nourishing menus across selected dining destinations, guests will find their every health need addressed. The package starts from USD 3,000 and is based on one guest in a one-bedroom villa. A second adult may join the Wellness Package for an additional USD 500 per night at Soneva Fushi and Soneva Jani and for USD 450 per night at Soneva Kiri.

At Soneva Fushi, Soneva Jani and Soneva in Aqua in the Maldives, and Soneva Kiri in Thailand, true 'luxury' is defined by peace, time and space. Each day, guests are encouraged to discover the SLOW LIFE, reconnecting with themselves and the natural world through rare, unforgettable



Raymond Buckley, Traditional Chinese Medicine Doctor. Further, both Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda have similar ways of approaching the body. "Ayurveda is more a way of living. Each individual is different. Ayurveda focuses on understanding the need of a person and prescribes best practices in the form of medication and day-to-day life corrections," adds Dr GN Lakshman, Ayurvedic Doctor.

Launched in late 2021, Soneva Soul is a transformative wellness brand from Soneva that combines ancient healing with modern science to reconnect mind, body and soul. It is guided by the principle of 'lifestyle evolution', tailoring personalised care plans to help guests realise their utmost potential and achieve their long-term wellness goals. Surrounded by the majesty of nature, it is the



# Aitken Spence Hotels

## Ready to Cater to Indian Travellers in the Maldives

Aitken Spence Hotels, operating 18 hotels and resorts across Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and Oman, is eyeing further expansion in the Maldives. Darell De Cruz, VP and Head, Sales and Marketing, Aitken Spence Hotels, credits the Maldives' success in handling the pandemic while keeping tourism afloat to India's efficient vaccination drive and crisis management. Aitken Spence Hotels is well-prepared to cater to the Indian traveller, with a range of Indian cuisine available at its properties. The hotel group also focuses on sustainability and reducing its carbon footprint while providing a luxury experience to its guests.

Vartik Sethi

**A**itken Spence Hotels is a leading hospitality company operating a chain of 18 hotels and resorts across Sri Lanka, India, Oman, and the Maldives. The company's two premier brands, Heritance Hotels and Resorts and Adaaran Resorts, offer a unique blend of luxury and comfort to cater to diverse client bases. With properties located in key tourist destinations, Aitken Spence Hotels provides an unparalleled experience to travellers looking for quality service and premium accommodations. In an interview with Travel Trade Journal at SATTE 2023, Darell De Cruz, Vice President and Head, Sales and Marketing, Aitken Spence Hotels, discussed Maldives and the future of tourism and hospitality in the region.

According to De Cruz, the Maldives has been one of the most successful destinations in cushioning the pandemic while keeping tourism afloat. The destination was able to draw a lot of travellers, including those from India, crediting India's efficient vaccination drive and crisis management. The hotel occupancy levels have now returned to pre-pandemic levels, and the recovery has been quite positive. Recognising India as a key market, De Cruz notes, "The Maldives is one of the destinations that emerged strongest from the pandemic. The destination attracted many travellers, with India being one of the major source markets. We are grateful to India for all the support during the difficult times, and we look forward to continuing this momentum."

The Indian market is a significant generator of incoming numbers to the Maldives and its resorts. The hotel occupancy levels in the Maldives have now returned to the pre-pandemic levels of 2019, indicating a complete recovery. De Cruz notes, "If good business opportunities come our way, we are certainly willing to look at expanding our portfolio in the Maldives."

Aitken Spence Hotels already has five resorts in the Maldives including its flagship resort Heritance Aarah and its Adaaran



▲ Darell De Cruz

portfolio which includes Adaaran Prestige Vadoo, Adaaran Select Meedhupparu (and Adaaran Prestige Water Villa), Adaaran Select Hudhuran Fushi and Adaaran Club Rannalhi, and the company is actively looking at expanding its Indian market segment at each of the resorts. "We have lined up several marketing campaigns with our partners to support the momentum to the destination."

All resorts cater to the diverse segments within the Indian market. With a unique offering centred around a culinary journey in seven restaurants and five bars, superior pampering in Maldives' first medi spa and a host of other exciting indulgences, Heritance Aarah has something for everyone. Adaaran Prestige properties are designed for couples and the romantics, whilst Adaaran Select resorts are focused more towards families and activity seekers including those looking for over and underwater excursions. With a young vibe, Adaaran Club Rannalhi is geared more towards backpackers and friend groups.

The hotel group is well-prepared to cater to the Indian traveller, with a range of

Indian cuisine available at its properties as well. De Cruz shared, "We are certainly ready and experienced to meet the culinary requirements of Indian travellers along with their other travel preferences."

De Cruz also spoke about the sustainability aspects that Aitken Spence Hotels is focusing on. The group has always been committed to sustainable practices, and it has won many accolades in this area. The company has made a significant investment in sustainability, such as introducing LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) architecture to Maldives with Heritance Aarah and taken several other initiatives to protect the environment and conserve resources. The hotel group is committed to promoting responsible tourism and reducing its carbon footprint. De Cruz added, "Sustainability is something that is very close to our heart. We do a lot of initiatives in terms of recycling, water conservation, energy conservation, coral replanting, awareness creation and promoting renewable energy sources."

Luxury is a defining aspect of the Aitken Spence Hotels experience, and the hotel group understands that its guests expect nothing but the best. "As a destination, I believe the Maldives is well geared in terms of handling the luxury traveller, and will continue to strive in that segment," shared De Cruz. "At Aitken Spence Hotels, through our flagship property Heritance Aarah, we have curated a niche product offering that targets the luxury holidaymaker who looks forward to a seamless, experiential and an immersive indulgent stay in paradise."

The Maldives has always been a bucket-list destination for many travellers, and the beaches, product offerings, and the entire atmosphere are geared to give the client the feel of luxury and enjoyment. Aitken Spence's resorts offer premium all-inclusive packages with a host of activities like experiencing the local culture and cuisine, dine around concepts and giving guests a holistic experience of the destination and its people.



For more information : [www.tourismthailand.in](http://www.tourismthailand.in)



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# Trisara – A sanctuary for the senses with harmonious experiences

Indian tourists are Phuket's second largest international visitor group and amongst them, leisure travellers continue to be the most popular category. In Phuket, Trisara Resort, a hidden paradise between Banana Beach and Layan Beach, offers sincere, generous experiences that celebrate spiritual and physical wellbeing along with moments of self-reflection and connection. Panjama Leamsuwan, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Trisara, shares more on the property which focuses on sustainability, wellness, and culture that appeals to Indian travellers seeking an all-around luxury experience that is also environment friendly.

Prashant Nayak

Phuket is loved by the Indians because it is loaded with natural beauty, pristine beaches, and cultural attractions, where they enjoy island hopping, shopping, snorkelling, wellness, scuba diving and various other activities meant for diverse travel interests. Phuket is also a widely popular destination for weddings and honeymoons for couples because the island's beauty is unparalleled and provides a breathtaking backdrop for a holy union as well as milestone celebrations. Moreover, it is perfect for couples who want to have a destination wedding across different budgets.

Speaking about Trisara's USP in the island destination, Panjama says, "At Trisara, we value our guests' complete privacy. All of our villas are completely secluded with a private pool, panoramic ocean views, and are surrounded by lush gardens. We are also very proud of the sustainable culinary endeavours that distinguish us from other resorts in the destination. Two of Thailand's three Michelin Green Star restaurants are operated by Trisara; PRU, Phuket's sole Michelin-starred restaurant, and Jampa Restaurant, which specialises in zero-waste cooking. We are committed to sustainable practices, all the while providing exceptional dining experiences for our guests."

Trisara offers diverse accommodation categories like private pool villas, suites and 2-to-8-bedroom residences that have a juxtaposition of modern luxury and traditional Thai elements. With only 64 villas spread across 55.3 acres of land, there is a guarantee of absolute privacy during the stay. Trisara's dining experience adheres to the "Dine Good



▲ Panjama Leamsuwan

Do Good" principle. It reflects the resort's environmentally conscious choices; prioritising fresh, nutritious, and locally sourced ingredients that benefit both the health of guests and the local economy.

Jara Spa is Trisara's in-house wellness retreat, placed in the midst of the lush jungle. At Jara, a wellness advisor guides the guests who are willing to experience restoration with nature therapy and helps plan a personalised wellness journey tailored to their individual requirements. Trisara's own private beach owns rights to Phuket's only private jetty that helps one get on one of the greatest cruise experiences of their lives right from their villa. Other activities available at Trisara include

snorkelling, Thai boxing, tennis, non-motorised activities, private cooking classes and photography services provided by DDEN Studio.

Trisara's is also

a well-known resort for MICE and weddings. "Trisara's dedicated events team can tailor events to one's preference and budget, including options for customised menus, floral arrangements, and entertainment. Trisara has various indoor and outdoor venues that can accommodate events from small to large gatherings. Weddings, in particular, can be held in a variety of stunning outdoor settings, including the romantic beachfront lawn, the oceanfront restaurant, or even the spacious private residential villa. Equipped with state-of-the-art amenities and panoramic ocean views, the meeting rooms are perfect for all kinds of corporate events; ranging from high-profile product launches to relaxing evenings with executives and employees," shares Panjama.

Over the years, there has been a steady increase in the number of Indian tourists visiting Phuket, making India one of the top source markets for the rapidly expanding tourism industry in Phuket. Elaborating on Indian preferences, Panjama mentions, "Indian visitors to the destination typically prefer properties that are close to beaches, shopping centres, and tourist attractions. They also prefer accommodations that serve Indian cuisine. However, recently we have noticed that Indian travellers have become more experimentative. Guests are increasingly seeking out newer, more unique experiences and some of them are to connect with local communities and give back to nature."

Trisara plans to engage in marketing initiatives aimed at attracting higher numbers of intimate groups for weddings, vacations and other special occasions. In line with this, they have announced a luxury break package for Indian travellers for bookings of a minimum of three nights, starting now until the end of May. The guests can choose from a variety of private pool suites, villas with an ocean view and enjoy a range of inclusions and benefits. These include daily breakfast served at the comfort of their villa, complimentary return transfers by a private car, a 60-minute complimentary wellness experience at Jara Wellness and many more.





# Pack your Bags and enjoy the summer breeze of Madhya Pradesh!



Summer is knocking at the door and the travellers are all set to enjoy their vacations/staycations. With the new trends in the travel industry, Madhya Pradesh has emerged as one of the hotspots for travel lovers post-COVID because of its responsible and activity-based tourism. MP is home to several verticals which can attract any travel lover. The state is rich in wildlife, heritage, culture and spirituality and on top of that, countless potential destinations are relatively untapped in MP. However, talking about the unique summer experiences, 'The heart of Incredible India' offers an eclectic mix of forests, waterfalls and hills which is rich with natural beauty and recreational activities specially designed to promote wellness tourism.

Talking about the best summer spots in Madhya Pradesh, it's impossible to miss out on the crown jewel of Madhya Pradesh; Pachmarhi. The hill station provides a sublime tourism experience for visitors for wellness and spiritual tourism.

Pachmarhi is one of the most enchanting hill stations of central India, which flourished around 10,000 years ago and is an exemplary example of archaeological treasure. It's also regarded as 'Satpura ki Rani' and is situated over 1000 meters from sea level, which is also the highest point in Madhya Pradesh. The administration of the Pachmarhi is under the Pachmarhi Cantonment Board, which serves the Indian Army. The hill station is developed around the Satpura Forest Area and there are plenty of natural



recreational activities that are arranged for tourists. These activities include gypsy camping, tree camping, bird watching, stargazing, mobile camping and many more activities. Tigers, Leopards and Bisons are easily sighted in this region, which is a once-in-a-lifetime experience for many tourists.

Other than that, plenty of adventure activities like paragliding, ziplining, trampolining and bungee jumping are also facilitated. Sunrise-Sunset walks and cycling tours have also emerged as one of the most anticipated activities in Pachmarhi. The laser and sound show is conducted for the tourists to enjoy after the sunset, along with that tourists can also enjoy a bonfire and live music. Pachmarhi is a great family destination that fits the adventure needs of all members of the family. Waterfalls like Bee Falls, Apsara Vihar Falls and Silver falls are must-visit for visitors traveling in the summer.

## HOW TO REACH PACHMARI

### By Flight

The nearest airport is Raja Bhoj Airport in the state's capital Bhopal (around 222 km) which has daily flight services from Delhi and Mumbai and 13 major cities of India. One can easily get a taxi from Bhopal to Pachmarhi. Jabalpur to Pachmarhi is

also just 300 km, so one can opt for this route as well.

### By Train

Pachmarhi is just 54km by road from the Pipariya railway station. Several direct trains link Pipariya with important cities like Surat, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Patna, Pune, Kolkata, Agra, Delhi, Varanasi, etc. One can easily get a taxi from Pipariya to Pachmarhi, as it is the most accessible way of reaching Pachmarhi.

### By Road

Plenty of state-owned and private buses are available for Pachmarhi from nearby cities like Bhopal, Jabalpur, Nagpur, Indore, and from prominent tourist attractions like Kanha National Park and Pench National Park.





# ITC unveils its first MEMENTOS

## by ITC Hotels, Ekaaya Udaipur, a new gem in its portfolio



ITC's Hotel Group in March 2023 announced the opening of its first property, Mementos by ITC Hotels, Ekaaya, Udaipur under the new brand, Mementos. With this brand, ITC Hotels brings bespoke experiences at immersive locations through atypical hotels and resorts that are unique by character, design, heritage and strive to co-exist with the environment and the community.

Team TTJ

**M**ementos Udaipur is set to transform the city's hospitality landscape with its offerings, making it an ideal destination for leisure travellers and events. Nestled in close proximity to Nathdwara and Eklingji temple, 40 minutes from Udaipur airport and just 20 km from the city, Mementos Udaipur is spread over an area of around 50 acres and is an exquisite resort which holds the promise of a relaxed and an intimate getaway.

This hillside resort blends classical elegance with a distinctive regional allure that's infused in its service, cuisine, and rituals – promising a truly immersive experience. The resort has cluster villas with 117 keys; every villa opens to a beautiful view of the panoramic Aravali, bringing fine modern heritage set amidst an uninterrupted landscape that provides all the ingredients for an invigorating or intimate, relaxed getaway. The clusters come with an exclusive pool and a personal deck for bespoke moments.

The luxury property also boasts versatile meetings, banquets, and events space with over 1 lakh square feet of collective area. This includes a magnificent pillarless Stateroom, spacious pre-function areas and

sprawling lawns. Mementos Udaipur's event spaces offer various options to guests, making it a much sought-after MICE and wedding destination.

"The addition of brand Mementos to our luxury hotels segment further strengthens ITC Hotels luxury portfolio. Building on the legacy of ITC Hotels' iconic properties in India, Mementos Udaipur is a befitting tribute to the rich heritage, grandeur and vibrant spirit of Rajasthan. We are confident that this world-class property will make a meaningful contribution to the tourism landscape of Rajasthan," said Anil Chadha, Divisional Chief Executive, ITC Hotels.

Vijendra Singh Choudhary, Owner, Mementos by ITC Hotels, Ekaaya, Udaipur mentioned, "The Mementos brand will stand for luxury the Indian way in Udaipur. With ITC Hotels, expertise in this space, and our strength in delivering this landmark product. I am very confident that the property will enhance the tourism potential of Udaipur."

The sprawling Mementos Udaipur property symbolises traditions of the region through culinary marvels that include the heritage cuisine 'Kebabs & Kurries', an award-winning northwest frontier cuisine that has been fine-tuned through years of research by

the celebrated chefs of ITC Hotels. Mementos Udaipur will also house Royal Vega, offering a melange of flavours from the luxury vegetarian cuisine of India. Inspired by the city Udaipur is the Udai Pavilion, the all-day dining and a la carte restaurant offering a range of Indian and international cuisines. Aravali Lounge, a boutique tea lounge, shall unveil unparalleled views of the Aravali hills. The Rock Bar, the luxury bar, will offer a range of exciting cocktails and more.

The ITC promise of responsible luxury comes with its commitment to the environment and its resources. Right from developing the site to construction and operations, sustainability has been at the heart of design at Mementos Udaipur with an enhanced focus on energy efficiency, water efficiency, sustainable site development, use of sustainable materials and indoor environment quality. A series of sustainability initiatives such as rainwater harvesting, recycling water, using construction materials with high recycling content and deploying energy efficient systems for air conditioning, refrigeration and water pumping among other key functions, have been actively taken up as a sustainable practice at Mementos Udaipur while offering unmatched luxury hospitality to its patrons.





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# Swiss-Belhotel International

## eyeing leisure and MICE business from India



Swiss-Belhotel International is one of the leading global hospitality companies committed to providing comprehensive and highly professional management services throughout its growing portfolio across hotels, resorts and serviced residences. The hotel group has built a strong presence in Indonesia and remains firmly committed to expanding its Indonesian portfolio. With Indonesia emerging as one of the most popular tourist destinations for Indians, Swiss-Belhotel International is also eyeing potential leisure and MICE business from India. TTJ interacts with Emmanuel Guillard, Senior Vice President of Operations and Development for Indonesia at Swiss-Bellhotel International and CEO of Zest Hotels International. Read on...

**Prashant Nayak**

**Y**ou have been with Swiss-Belhotel International for around 28 years. What is it about the hotel group that is very dear to your heart?

Swiss-Belhotel International has a unique approach in comparison with many international hotel management companies, with its philosophy of active and open communications, as well as working closely with property owners and investors to build great partnerships.

An increasing number of owners wish to be informed about the day-to-day operations, which tends to be discouraged by the majority of international hotel management companies. Partnership with owners is embraced by Swiss-Belhotel International to create a strong bond between the management company and owners. Other than a strong bond with owners, the relationship between the regional and hotels team is strong, which creates a company culture that helps everybody in

the ecosystem, including myself, to perform our best.

**Tell us about Swiss-Belhotel International's Indonesia hotel collection and the wide range of hotel brands in the Indonesian portfolio.**

Swiss-Belhotel International manages 78 hotels in operations in Indonesia which include 1 Māua, 4 Swiss-Belresorts, 1 Swiss-Belboutique, 29 Swiss-Belhotel, 2 Swiss-Belresidences, 24 Swiss-Belinn, 3 Swiss-Belcourt, 2 Swiss-Belexpress, 8 Zest, and 4 Ciputra Hotels.

With our passion and professionalism, we strive to provide the best product and services to exceed clientele expectations, while continue appreciating local culture and values in building a strong bond with all stakeholders, employees, and guests.

As markets are growing and demanding, Swiss-Belhotel International has developed brands ranging from luxury 5-star to budget-economic hotels and resorts, to accommodate the growing demands of all travellers.

**How is your contemporary budget brand, Zest Hotels, faring in the Indonesian market? Please share more on the brand as a large share of modern travel is also budget focussed.**

Zest Hotels aims to become an innovative value-for-money hotel brand delivering a







product for young and modern clientele. It is identified as the hotel brand that provides guests with clean, comfortable, modern, and efficient accommodation at an affordable price. Zest hotels are highly visible and prominently situated in strategic and easily accessible locations in major metropolitan and regional destinations.

Zest offers all the facilities business and leisure travellers require an ideal location, friendly service, a smart and well-arranged room, a comfortable bed, a clean bathroom, free internet, and an international standard of service.

**How challenging is it for you to manage both the brands, Swiss-Belhotel International and Zest Hotels?**

Both have different target segments and markets. Both complement each other, especially in the cities where we have both Zest hotel and our higher brands, providing clients with the best options suiting their budget and requirements.

**Besides leisure, MICE and business travel are gaining momentum year after year. How are your hotels positioned to attract this segment?**

Swiss-Belhotel International provides various brands to meet all segments' budget requirements with comprehensive facilities for business and leisure travellers. The majority of our hotels offer multi-purpose ballrooms and meeting rooms, providing international standard venues and services. Each meeting room is an ideal choice for meetings, seminars, gala receptions, and other social events. Our professional team will assist clients every step of the way to ensure all events run smoothly.

**How are you strategising, promoting, and marketing your hotels to the Indian outbound audience for bookings and the recall value?**

The India market has a huge potential for our hotels and Indonesia in general. An increase in flight service from Indian cities into Bali or from other areas in India will definitely help the Indonesian market to bounce back to pre-pandemic times. Other than individual travellers, Swiss-Belhotel International is also targeting the MICE business.

Swiss-Belhotel International has appointed a General Sales Agent to represent and

cover the sources of India's outbound market. In addition to the appointment, at a local level, we build a stronger partnership with inbound agents and other related companies driving promotions and business from India to Indonesia.

**Indonesia gets a fair share of Indian outbound traffic travelling to South East Asia. What is your expectation from the India market?**

We still see a large potential for the Indian market to Bali and Indonesia in general, from various segments, including Individual travellers, Group travellers, and Events, such as Corporate Meetings, Conventions, and Incentives to Weddings. The arrival of Indian tourists continues to grow despite lack of direct flights and high airfare. However, we are hopeful the situation will improve with easier flight services.

**What are your thoughts on responsible and sustainable tourism?**

Responsible and sustainable tourism continues to be an important factor in doing business nowadays. We implemented measures in supporting sustainable tourism, including reducing plastic and other waste, and recycling and reusing materials whenever possible. Small containers of amenities have been changed with a refillable dispenser, and in-room plastic-bottled water has been replaced with a refillable jug as well. We also prioritise local suppliers when purchasing certain items to help small industries grow. Responsible and sustainable tourism are our ways to give back to the community and mother nature.

**Tell us about the potential of the Indonesian market in the hospitality business and Swiss-Belhotel International's continued expansion and growth plans in the fast-evolving tourism landscape of Indonesia.**

Swiss-Belhotel International currently manages 78 operating hotels in Indonesia and expects more development is coming soon. Within the next two years, at least eight more hotels with over 1,000 additional rooms will be open in Indonesia, from luxury resorts to mid-scale hotels across the archipelago, including Java, Sumatera, Kalimantan, Papua, West, and East Nusa Tenggara.

In early 2023, Swiss-Belhotel International took over the management of two mid-scale hotels in East Indonesia, including a Swiss-Belcourt branded hotel in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, and a Swiss-Belinn brand in Timika, Central Papua. The rebranded two mid-scale hotels will take place in the first quarter of 2023 and will add more of the Group's brand collections in the Eastern region, including a Māua branded resort that will open in Labuan Bajo, East Nusa Tenggara.

We are also expecting more developments with several project signings, including the two Swiss-Belexpress hotels in toll area Cipali, the Swiss-Belinn hotel's projects in Indramayu - West Java, and Tuban - East Java. The Swiss-Belhotel brand will also open in the Kulonprogo Airport area of Yogyakarta by the third quarter of 2023, and there will be more project development in Lampung and Jember in 2024. Moreover, the West Borneo area will soon welcome a Swiss-Belinn hotel in Pontianak in 2024.





# Singapore's Bird Paradise and Mandai Wildlife West opening soon, set to thrill visitors

Visitors will soon be able to walk through Singapore's new bird park and get a glimpse of how the birds and their caretakers are settling into their new home at Bird Paradise, which soft-launches on May 8, 2023. Next to the new park, enjoy the many dining and retail options as well as playgrounds at Mandai Wildlife West, the new ungated public node which serves as the gateway to Bird Paradise and the upcoming Rainforest Wild.

Team TTJ

**T**he 17-hectare Bird Paradise will include eight large walk-through aviaries which reflect different biomes of the world, such as dense African rainforests, South American wetlands, Southeast Asian paddy fields, Australian dry eucalypt forests, and more.

The Bird Paradise is a celebration of birds and their stories and will be home to some of the world's most threatened species – from Philippine Eagles and Negros Bleeding-heart Doves to Straw-headed Bulbuls, Black-winged Mynas and Blue-throated Macaws. One of the species, the Socorro Dove, is in fact extinct in the wild, and only survives because of the breeding efforts undertaken by the Mandai Wildlife Group and other conservation-minded institutions.

## Immerse in the symphony of colours of Bird Paradise

The Hong Leong Foundation Crimson Wetlands will come to life with vibrant bursts of red, as flocks of Scarlet Ibises and Roseate Spoonbills take up residence in their new habitat with their striking hues, creating a stunning contrast against the greenery. Visitors will also be able to see the world's largest population of hornbills under human care, many of them flying free in some of the eight large walk-through aviaries, which are inspired by different habitats from around the globe. At Sky Amphitheatre, two new avian

presentations will take flight – Predators on Wings and Wings of the World.

Guests can also look forward to taking a "backstage pass" to discover what goes into caring for the feathered residents of Bird Paradise. At the Avian Breeding and Research Centre, they will be able to have a glimpse of the many conservation breeding programmes for Asian Songbirds, threatened parrot species, Birds-of-Paradise, and many more. Additional behind-the-scenes tours will be launched throughout the year.

Feeding sessions, a much-loved highlight in Jurong Bird Park, return here with new varieties of birds that guests can take part in for \$8 per session. These include feeding sessions with the Starlings, African Hornbills and Barbets at Heart of Africa, Pelicans at Kuok Group Wings of Asia, and the Lories at Lory Loft.

From May 8, 2023, onwards, Bird Paradise will be open daily from 9 am to 6 pm, with the last admission into the park at 5 pm. For the soft opening period from May 08 to May 26, 2023, single-park admission is at a special rate of \$38 for adults, \$23 for children (aged 3 to 12 years old) and \$20 for senior citizens.

## Mandai Wildlife West – Bringing together nature and active learning

The Mandai Wildlife West will also be opened as a new, ungated community space.



This marks another major milestone moment for the Mandai Rejuvenation Project, with other openings to follow in the years ahead. Access to Mandai Wildlife West is free. Aside from F&B and play areas, the space will be used for public events and activities in the future. The Pangolin Adventure and Pangolin Hideout here will encourage junior guests and the young at heart to mimic the behaviour of the mammal with movements like climbing, burrowing and sliding. Educational interpretive all around also offer intriguing insights into the diverse flora, native wildlife, and various ecosystems.

At the heart of Mandai Wildlife West is a variety of dining and retail options. From garden-themed interior designs to sustainable furnishings, and menu choices thoughtful of the planet, foodies and lovers of the outdoors can indulge in all-new flavours by familiar household names and new brand partnerships.





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# QATAR

## Where Blooms the Desert Rose

First mentioned in the writings of the Roman statesman, 'Pliny the Elder', around the mid-first century AD, who coined the word "Catharrei," referring to the inhabitants of this region. Qatar has since come a long way today, from once being the source of some of the best pearls in the world that its pearl divers harvested, to being the poster child of the world oil economy. Today the Doha skyline boasts magnificent superstructures by leading names in architecture, malls, hotels, stadiums, and marinas that reflect the spending and buying power of a country that boasts the fourth-highest per capita income in the world. Host to the 2022 FIFA world cup, Qatar is now working to welcome the fruits of the global tourism economy as the world moves toward alternative energy sources.

**Gurjit Singh Ahuja**

**L**ocated just four hours by air from New Delhi, Doha is the capital city and your port of entry to the State of Qatar. Doha's Hamad International Airport has been described as the most luxurious and architecturally significant terminal complex in the world and is the hub airport for Qatar Airways. Indian citizens get a free tourist visa on arrival at Doha. All they need is confirmed return air tickets, mandatory medical insurance, and confirmed hotel reservations, booked through 'Discover Qatar'. You can feel the Qatari opulence right from the airport which showcases top luxury brands and a wide array of Duty-Free shopping. A visitor can find a lot to see, explore, and experience. Qatar offers something for every age and interest group, whether it is museums, shopping malls, souks, beaches, sports, amusement parks, activities, and great dining options, not to forget its impressive line-up of fine hotels.

### **NATIONAL MUSEUM OF QATAR**

#### *In the Footsteps of Time*

Inspired by the complex form of the 'Desert Rose', a crystalline formation found in the deserts of Qatar, and crafted in nature by wind, salt water, and sand. French architect Jean Nouvel conceived and designed the awe-inspiring beautiful building that is home to The National Museum of Qatar.

Completed in 2019, the museum's building has been constructed around the centrepiece of Sheikh

Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani's original palace. The palace has now been carefully restored and conserved. The museum exhibits delve deep into Qatar's rich heritage and culture, offering an immersive experience and a physical manifestation of Qatar's proud identity, connecting the country's past with its present. It promotes learning for all ages through interactive experiences.

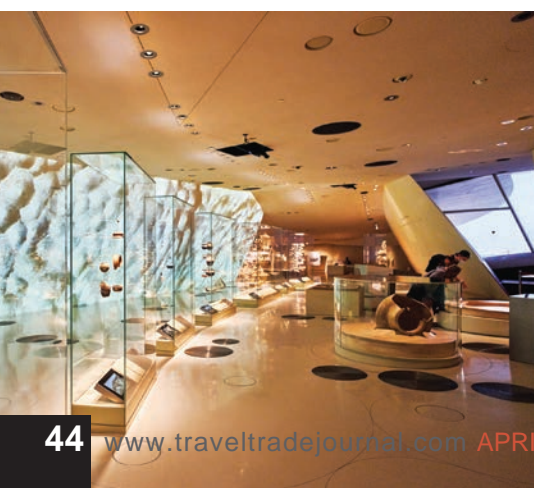
The museum exhibits priceless treasures, coins, illuminated manuscripts, pieces of jewellery, and Qatari pearls. It is also home to the priceless and famed "Baroda Pearl carpet" and an immediate connection between India and Qatar.

### **MSHEIREB DOWNTOWN DOHA**

#### *Exploring the Heritage*

A free tram ride through Msheireb Downtown Doha serves as your perfect introduction to this historical old quarter of Doha that is now a homogeneous blend of historical and modern buildings, both commercial and residential. The Msheireb Museums showcase the history of Qatar through four heritage houses in the heart of Msheireb Downtown.

Here, history blends in perfectly with modern times with its retail, cultural, dining, and entertainment offerings. Msheireb Downtown is located in the heart of Doha, adjacent to the Souq Waqif.







## SOUQ WAKIF

### *Shopping Experience not to be missed*

Perhaps Doha's oldest market, located within walking distance, across Msheireb Downtown 'Wakif,' literally translates as 'Standing' in Arabic, and this name was likely adopted due to the fact that both buyers and sellers always transacted here standing due to the close proximity of the sea that regularly played spoilsport flooding the area. Souq Waqif was once a weekend trading market that facilitated transactions between nomadic Bedouins and the locals of the area.

Today, with the backdrop of modern Doha with its majestic skyscrapers, Souq Waqif with its mud-daubed structures takes you a step back in time. Feel the hustle and bustle of a traditional Arab marketplace with its labyrinth of narrow winding alleyways lined with shops and kiosks selling, spices, tea, coffee, dates, attar, bukhoor, dry fruits, garments, fabric, carpets, handicrafts, and souvenirs. Not to be missed is also the Falcon Souk, which is one of its kind special market solely catering to everything to do with falconry, including trained and un-trained falcons for sale. The souk also is home to a Super Specialty Falcon Hospital.

Find your footing in the bustling alleys of the Souk, as 'Hamalis' or porters vie with each other for traffic rights pushing their wheelbarrows through these winding alleys carrying shopper's purchases and looking out for customers. For the sweet-toothed, the wafting smell of fresh Knafeh, Baklava, Umm Ali and Ghraybeh from Al Aker Sweets can be irresistible.

## QATAR FACULTY OF ISLAMIC STUDIES

### *A Centre for Higher Learning and Research*

Winner at the 2015 world Architecture Festival, this iconic piece of modern architecture was designed by the British firm Mangera Yvars. The magnificent white complex covered in Arabic calligraphy is an architectural marvel located in Doha's Education City. The whole complex is supported by five columns representing the five pillars of Islam.

This award-winning building includes a research centre, teaching areas, and two stunning, futuristically designed minarets nearly 300



feet tall, inclining toward Mecca from where resonates the call of the Muezzin. The complex houses a place of higher education and a mosque, the classrooms, auditorium, and library are connected to the mosque, reflecting the important link between knowledge and spirituality.

## PLACE VENDOME, LUSAIL

### *Where Uber Luxury Beckons*

Located in Lusail City, Place Vendôme is a mega mixed-use development project that opened its doors in April 2022. The complex hosts two five-star luxury hotels, Le Royal Méridien and



Palais Vendôme, and a mall featuring about 560 different retail outlets with an exclusive luxury wing dedicated to the top echelon of designer labels.

The architecture is intended to exude luxury and opulence. Place Vendôme is the perfect fit for both local and international visitors seeking a combination of varied entertainment and retail choices all under one roof.

## 3-2-1 QATAR OLYMPIC AND SPORTS MUSEUM

### *Showcasing the History of Sports*

A member of the Olympic Museum Network, which currently unites 22 Olympic museums worldwide this museum serves as a national and international centre for sports history, heritage, and knowledge. Visitors can walk through various galleries that showcase the history of sports, historical and ancient artefacts, and memorabilia.



The museum features hands-on, interactive activities in galleries dedicated to sports heroes and history. You can walk through the gallery that showcases all Olympic Flame torches to date to another gallery that showcases all Olympic mascots and Olympic medals to date.

As part of its endeavour to collect and share the story of sports, the museum has curated a large collection of objects. One of the crowning jewels in the museum's collection is a match-used Adidas 'Master Blaster' signed by Sachin Tendulkar.



# MOKSHA

Luxury in the tranquil foothills  
of the Himalayas



Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort near Chandigarh offers a serene getaway with wellness amenities, nestled in the tranquil Himalayan foothills. This idyllic retreat offers a multi-sensory experience that pampers the mind, body, and soul. Immerse yourself in a world of natural beauty and peacefulness, where only the sounds of birds and rustling bamboo interrupt the calm.

**Sonika Bohra**

**O**n a misty winter morning in Delhi, I embarked on a journey to the captivating landscape of Parwanoo in Himachal Pradesh for a wellness retreat at Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort. The 5-hour drive from New Delhi led me to a delightful surprise - the resort was accessible by a Swiss Gandola, offering a breathtaking view of the majestic Shivalik range. The cable car ride instantly transported me to a natural haven, surrounded by a carpet of lush greenery that left me mesmerised. The enchanting ascent left me eagerly anticipating the serenity and tranquillity that awaited me at the resort.

## A blissful feeling to be at Moksha

With its cool climate coupled with beautiful natural vistas and peaceful surroundings, the Shivalik Hills in the lesser Himalayas make for an ideal visit for travellers looking for calm and serenity. The Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort offers a

similar escape amidst the magnificent mountain ranges. This wellness resort offers a range of luxurious room categories to suit every traveller's preference. During my recent stay, I had the pleasure of experiencing the Deluxe Moksha Suite, which offered stunning mountain views from a private balcony. The room was spacious, spanning 850 sq. ft., and featured a comfortable king-size bed and tasteful furnishings. The en-suite bathroom was equally impressive, with a walk-in shower and a gorgeous bathtub overlooking the valley. The attention to detail in the room's design and amenities was exceptional, reflecting the resort's commitment to providing a luxurious and memorable stay for its guests.

## A promise of memorable culinary affairs

This wellness resort takes its culinary offerings to the next level, with an in-house restaurant serving an exquisite array of Indian, Asian, and Continental delicacies, catering to both vegetarian





and non-vegetarian preferences. What sets this restaurant apart is its use of fresh, locally sourced produce, including ingredients grown on the property itself. During my stay, I had the pleasure of indulging in Dham- the traditional Himachali thali, a must-try dish that showcases the region's local cuisine. But it wasn't just the formal dining that won my heart - the outdoor live chai and parantha station offered a simple yet delightful start to my day. The resort's chefs are attentive to guests' personal preferences and leave no stone unturned in ensuring that their dining experience is a memorable one. It's no wonder that food is a major draw for guests who keep returning to this culinary haven.

## Spa at Moksha for a truly transformative experience

The Spa at Moksha is a sprawling 70,000 square feet oasis that overlooks the breathtaking valley, offering a serene ambiance for guests to rediscover their well-being and achieve



harmony. Combining the best of International Spa treatments with Ayurveda and Yoga, this wellness resort provides a holistic approach to life by integrating the elements of nature to create the ultimate union of mind, body, and soul. During my stay, I indulged in the Ayurvedic abhyanga massage, which proved to be an exceptionally serene experience. The massage is performed by two therapists working in perfect harmony, utilising kneading, stroking, and pummelling techniques to effectively relieve stress and promote relaxation. Additionally, there are daily yoga sessions every morning, providing the perfect opportunity to breathe in the fresh mountain air and rejuvenate your senses.

## Rounded up with the best outdoor activities

If you're looking to add a dash of adventure to your stay, then you're in luck! The resort offers an array of outdoor activities that are sure to get your adrenaline pumping. From mountain biking to ziplining and archery, there's no shortage of heart-pumping thrills. And if you prefer to take it easy, the temperature-controlled all-weather infinity pool is the perfect spot to relax and soak in

the stunning valley views. Plus, there are two outdoor hot Jacuzzis to really take your relaxation to the next level. And let's not forget about the stunning banquet facilities that can cater to any kind of gathering, whether it's a meeting or a celebration. The modern and glamorous interiors of the ballroom are complemented by beautiful lighting details and show windows

that offer breathtaking views of the mountains. And if you prefer the great outdoors, there are expansive and scenic garden terraces and manicured lawns to enjoy.

## A host of adventure and thrilling activities all around

As part of its diverse range of activities, Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort offers guests a selection of locally-inspired extracurricular options. These include sunrise walks, village and hill trekking with a knowledgeable guide, cooking classes, and yoga sessions with an experienced instructor. During my stay, I decided to embark on a day trip to Gurkha Fort in Subathu, and we covered half the distance in a Jeep and trekked the remaining 1.5 km, with our guide presenting us with two route options: a steep, challenging path or a longer, easier path. The trek to the fort was progressive, taking us to the hill's highest point where the fort was located. From here, we enjoyed a breathtaking panoramic view of the valley on both sides, with the fort once used as a watchtower. Despite its current state of ruin, the fort was still in relatively good shape. After reaching the top, we rested, pitched a tent, and had some food and water before beginning our descent. The descent was tricky, and we had to watch our footing carefully.


**Verdict:** Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort offers a luxurious and serene getaway in the Himalayan foothills, with breathtaking views, delicious cuisine, and a holistic wellness experience. The resort's attention to detail and commitment to guests' satisfaction make it an ideal destination for those seeking relaxation and adventure. Highly recommended.



Mohali International Airport is the closest airport to Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort and it takes approximately 1.5 hours by car to reach the resort from the airport.

The nearest railway station to Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort is Kalka, and it takes approximately 20 minutes by car to reach Timber Trail Resort. From there, guests can take the Swiss Gondola, which will take them to Moksha in just 10 minutes.

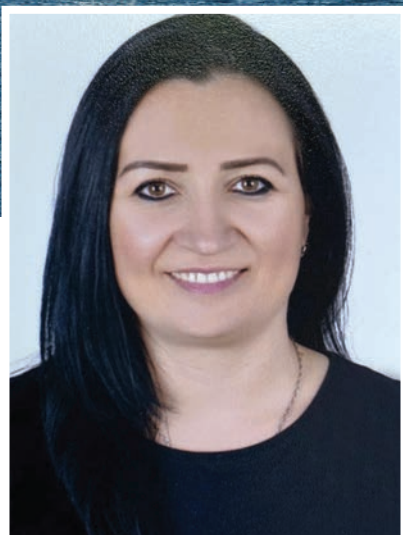
Rooms at Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort can be booked from INR 28,000 onwards.

 Moksha Himalaya Spa Resort, C/o Timber Trail Resort, NH 22, Near Village Banasar, Parwanoo, Himachal Pradesh 173220

 [www.mokshaspa.com](http://www.mokshaspa.com)



# Get Bedazzled on the Nile...



▲ Maggie Petrova

Operating an elegant and luxurious fleet of three cruise vessels plying the Nile, Mayfair Cruises is one of the top river cruise operators in Egypt. With great expectations from the India market, Maggie Petrova, Commercial Director, Mayfair Cruises, was in Mumbai recently to share more about their product portfolio and their readiness for the India market as she invites more Indians to visit Egypt and unravel the mysteries of the Nile, on-board one of their luxurious vessels.

**Prashant Nayak**

2022 has been a rewarding year for tourism in Egypt, says Maggie. 2022 was expected to be a better year as compared to 2021. However, they were not expecting the figures to be as good as they were. In some regions, they surpassed the pre-COVID levels, which indeed was remarkable.

All three Mayfair cruise vessels, M.S. Mayflower, M.S. Mayfair, and M.S. Esplanade were running with good occupancy without running any special promotions or offers. Maggie states, "This only reflects that the worldwide interest in Egypt has increased. People are now booking their Egyptian vacations and adventures four to six months in advance, which is a new trend."

"When it comes to Indian travellers, we have noticed that they book at the very last minute. However, we have also noticed that some discerning Indian travellers looking for quality experiences are booking two to three months in advance," Maggie added.

Mayfair Cruises has always been very proactive when it comes to discovering and approaching business potentials from around the world. India blinked on their radar way back in 2019, and they had drawn strong plans to enter the market in 2020. Unfortunately, COVID put them on hold for quite some time. When Maggie visited India back in October 2022, she was not sure about the market. However, with the way the tourism business has been recovering and growing in India, she is convinced about the India market and its tourism potential. For her, India, with its growing economy, looks

promising and cannot be ignored. "Lots to work on, but cannot be ignored," remarks Maggie.

With established business in markets like the America, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, Japan and Canada, Mayfair cruises is now planning to foray into the Asian markets like India and China. "As a brand that's fairly new to India market, we have done our research and development to understand the market requirements and have accordingly adjusted our operations, especially in terms some of the F&B offerings on our vessels. We have partnered with Nijhawan Group to grow and excel in the India market and I'm hoping this partnership will yield prolific results for us," elucidates Maggie.

Mayfair Cruises has especially introduced some Indian food items in their menu and is now looking forward to host their Indian patrons on the Nile Cruise whilst they are on a vacation in Egypt. They are also considering one special departure from India for the upcoming Diwali season, with lots of entertainment and Indian chefs on board. Preparations are underway, and once finalised, a special announcement will be made.

Mayfair Cruises sails from mid-September through late April or early May. They are closed throughout the summer. Maggie informs, "During summers, the temperatures are very high, sometimes reaching over 50 degrees. Cruising on the Nile involves 80 per cent of the time being outdoors for recreation and active outdoors for visits and exploring. It is not recommended for people to be out in such high temperatures and it could be dangerous for



our clients. Thus, we would rather not operate than expose our clients to such weather. It wouldn't be right. However, you will find many of our cruise colleagues operating during the summer. For us, this is misleading the client."

Indian river cruise aficionados can now experience safe and true luxury in Egypt aboard the Mayfair Nile cruise sailings between Luxor and Aswan, where exceptional service is standard on all

the decks. They can enjoy tastefully decorated public spaces, a spacious sundeck for relaxation, and homely accommodations, all serviced by attentive and friendly staff while they explore Egyptian temples and tombs such as Karnak and Luxor Temple and many more. Their trip on the Nile is sure to be memorable, not only from the cruising angle but also from exploring the impressive ruins and relics of Egypt's ancient past that they will discover along the way.

## M.S. MAYFAIR

### *Feel pampered in every way*

Aboard M.S. Mayfair, retreat to elegant interiors, comfortable cabins, serene surroundings, and lavish dinners topped off with natural sightseeing. A cruise aboard M.S. Mayfair will be a truly unforgettable experience. The Deluxe cabins here have a blend of unmatched intimacy and comfortable individuality with tasteful attention to detail. The Presidential Suite has lavishly appointed rooms with verandas. They also have an executive cabins equipped with a queen size bed and a private veranda to watch the Nile drift by. The elegant 'Nile Avenue' restaurant located on the Nile Deck features a savoury modern fusion of contemporary and authentic dishes prepared by internationally trained chefs. Designed with guests' comfort in mind, the Bel Air sophisticated lounge bar features distinctive and intimate spaces providing an ideal retreat for individuals and small groups. There are also soothing aromatherapy and a variety of therapeutic massages in their rejuvenating spa.



## M.S. MAYFLOWER

### *Cruise past the rich history and timeless beauty of Egypt*

Guests can indulge in the sweet life aboard M.S. Mayflower and discover grandeur and elegance set off by regal accommodation, succulent flavours, and a flair of fun and exciting night-time celebrations. Mayflower's deluxe and executive cabins come with refined interiors and art deco the details featured in the elegant cabins provide every facility for an ultimate luxury experience. The Royal Presidential Suite is an Ottoman-styled luxury weaved in grandeur elegance. The Lounge and Reception surround guests with exquisite design and unique ambiance while sipping colourful cocktails or having refreshing snacks and the Pasha restaurant delights guests in every bite. On the Mayflower's Sun Deck, one can get a sun-kissed tan while cruising or watch breathtaking sunsets.



## M.S. ESPLANADE

### *An intriguing place to be as ancient history drifts by*

Glistening in bold sophistication from bow to stern, the luxurious M.S. Esplanade offers guests a dream-like journey to uncover the land of ancient history and its captivating natural mysteries along the Nile. Guests can enjoy breathtaking sunsets on board contemporary lavishness as they retreat to artistic interiors. The deluxe and executive cabins on the cruise boat are extravagantly comfortable and tastefully done. The Presidential suites have heart-warming interiors complimented with an oriental touch of black and white photography. The classy Belle Vue Restaurant located on the Nile Deck features a variety of contemporary and authentic dishes, meticulously prepared by the chef. Guests can relax at the Plaisir lounge and bar's bright surroundings and enjoy an afternoon snack or digestifs from the large selection.





# ANTALYA

## A perfect playground for MICE and Leisure

Antalya has a history of more than two thousand years and was founded in 159 BC, originally called Attalia. During its existence, apart from the Greeks, it managed to be a part of the Roman and Ottoman Empires for several centuries, followed by Byzantine and Seljuk warlords. The result is Antalya today is not just a centre of beach tourism from around the world, but also a place that holds priceless treasures of ancient civilisations.

During my recent visit to Türkiye to check out some MICE properties in Antalya and Istanbul, this city impressed me most with its regal MICE venues, splendid attractions, and its charming Mediterranean vibes.

**Prashant Nayak**

Indian arrivals to Türkiye are growing at a very steady rate thanks to its recognition as a top tourist destination. The most popular tourist destinations for Indians visiting Türkiye include Istanbul, the buzzing cultural heart of the country, as well as the resorts in Antalya, the fairytale landscapes of Cappadocia, and winter ski resorts in Bursa. Those looking to get off the beaten path may also venture into Ankara or Izmir.

With Istanbul's reputation as a worldwide hub, it's easier than ever to travel from India to Türkiye. Turkish Airlines operates a B777-300 ER in its daily service between Istanbul and Mumbai. I had a great time during the seven hours non-stop journey in the extremely comfortable business class flatbed seat coupled with great inflight service and F&B options. From Istanbul, it's about a 1 hour 30 minutes flight to Antalya.

Antalya on the Mediterranean coast is always favoured by wonderful weather and is a destination with two seasons, summer and spring. It is one of the most visited destinations in Türkiye and it is the biggest international sea resort, located on the Turkish Riviera. Large-scale development and governmental funding have promoted tourism to a great extent. Antalya is particularly popular with visitors from Europe, the Middle East, Ukraine, and Russia.

Antalya is renowned for its upscale

hotels, gaining popularity with tourists due to their high-quality service underpinned by reasonable prices. Many hotels and resort here operate on the 'All Inclusive' concept which has proven to be a successful model in Türkiye. These properties have distinguishing lifestyles and offer special pleasures in having your meals and beverages. I have started liking the 'All Inclusive' concept in hotels as it surely gives a different dimension to the word 'enjoyment' during a vacation. In Antalya, I was glad to have some very enriching experiences and to be showcased to some excellent MICE and wedding venues, which I highly recommend.

### The Gloria Golf Resort, a wonderful combination of golf, beach, and luxury

The Gloria Golf Resort in Serik, Belek is a stunning beachside 5-star property and a

popular golf destination. The resort offers golf lovers two 18-hole championship courses and a 9-hole course, as well as access to the Gloria Golf Academy. The resort has 515 rooms in different capacities which boasts of pure comfort.

Gloria has a remarkable selection of event spaces, and infinite dining and catering options, with a dynamic range of entertainment options for groups. Gloria's event spaces overlook vistas of rolling greens, making it an opulent destination venue fit for memorable events, whether for grand family celebrations, weddings, or landmark corporate events. The brand also consists of Gloria Serenity Resort and Gloria Verde Resort, which are again fabulous properties nearby. In addition, resort guests enjoy free golf training, as well as the use of the shuttle service operating from the hotel to the Gloria New Course, Gloria Old Course, and Gloria Verde Course golf courses. My stay at this charming place has made the trip more memorable.

### Variety is the name of the game at Regnum Carya Hotel

Regnum Carya is a modern five-star 'All Inclusive' hotel positioned on a private beach in Belek. With a giant water park, a golf course, and a sprawling private beach, the resort redefines what it means to be a massive hotel. This property, with a great choice of 553 luxurious rooms and suites, comes with a convention centre







for MICE and weddings. The rooms have high ceilings and receive natural light and are equipped with advanced visual, audio, and light systems technologies. Private meetings for different group sizes in this special area can be arranged by dividing them into different sections. Regnum Carya had been chosen as the central hotel for the G-20 Summit 2015 in Antalya.

## A larger-than-life feeling at the Titanic Mardan Palace

The magnificent Titanic Mardan Palace is more of a kingdom than a castle, and this palatial resort holds the distinction of having one of the largest outdoor pool complexes in all of Europe. The “All



Inclusive” property offers 546 elegant rooms and offers 19 meeting spaces that can accommodate more than 2,500 people. Framed by the most breathtaking view and brimming with natural beauty, it is one of Türkiye’s most fascinating wedding venues.

## A mighty MICE venue- The NEST Congress and Exhibition Centre

NEST is relatively a new property opened in Belek. As Türkiye’s largest pillar-free meeting hall, NEST is expected to bring Türkiye’s event industry to a new level. Offering infra and upper structures designed to accommodate meetings, congresses, fairs, concerts, galas, launches, and all types of events, NEST



provides a seating capacity for 10,000 people in the main hall, offering Türkiye’s largest capacity in a single hall. A 5,000 m2 ground floor comprises 24 meeting halls with 5-meter ceiling heights, in addition to the airy main hall, featuring 10-meter-high ceilings. These can be divided into five sections. There are plenty of hotels around to accommodate the biggest of meetings if booked well in advance.

## Great time ensured at The Land of Legends Theme Park

Featuring a 5D cinema that offers guests a unique experience, a crazy river, a wave pool and water coaster, and a 4265 feet-long Hyper Coaster, the Land of Legends Theme Park offers a multi-sensory experience concept in Antalya. The Aqua Park inside offers complimentary access to adrenaline-pumping rides and relaxed explorations including 55 water



slides. The Nemo restaurant here was amazing. This legendary theme park, with a unique world of fairy tales, is designed for a great family time. The theme park is also available for MICE events with team-building activities.

## Notable moments

At the heart of Antalya is its oldest part known as the Kaleiçi district, which is still reminiscent of the Roman period. Perched above the historic harbour with fantastic views, Kaleiçi is a pedestrianised zone and one can take a stroll down the

area’s interesting narrow streets and spot ancient mosques as well as bars and cafes along the way, and can try local cuisine.

The RuinAdalia Hotel is a delightful looking ‘adult only’ property with 26 excellent rooms in five separate refined Ottoman period mansions which surround a lovely sun-filled courtyard with a pool. This boutique property is well located for accessing Kaleiçi. However, do not miss visiting the astonishing ancient museum, located right under the hotel!

Antalya’s most beautiful monument is undoubtedly the monumental Hadrian gate leading into the Kaleiçi. The gate resembles a typical Roman triumphal arch and was built in 130AD to commemorate the visit of Emperor Hadrian to Antalya. Currently, it is one of the highlights of a visit to Antalya and the place where almost every tourist wants to take a commemorative photo. In Antalya, besides the old city walls, tourists can often encounter citrus trees laden with fruits while walking on the street.

The ancient city of Aspendos, approximately 50 km east of Antalya, is one of the big-time historic attractions for tourists. The site’s theatre is one of the Roman empire’s greatest remaining pieces of architecture and is the monument every tourist should see. During the Aspendos Opera and Ballet Festival, many locals and tourists come to experience the theatre used for its original purpose and hear its stunning acoustics.



Aspendos Theatre



Hadriana Gate



RuinAdalia Hotel



# Surat and Pune play perfect host to TTJ TRAVMART – 2023

In March 2023, both Surat and Pune witnessed exciting B2B networking action as the 6th edition of the TTJ TRAVMART raised the curtains in these cities with their fourth and fifth mart, respectively. The marts following the footsteps of the back-to-back Tri-City TRAVMART held at Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai in January 2023 were also a major success.

The marts planned for the 6th edition of TTJ TRAVMART 2023 are a conscientious effort by the TTJ team to reach out to the travel fraternity in the cities that were missed out in 2022. The objective is to take the travel suppliers to the travel agents (buyers) in tier 2 and tier 3 cities across India, get them both on a single platform and emphasise on transactional benefits for both parties, particularly for the buyers in the comfort of their own home turf.

With business networking as a central factor, both the events in Surat and Pune were a grand success and were well supported by the national and local trade associations. The office bearers and members of these associations extended full support by attending in large numbers and interacting with the suppliers who

showcased their travel products and services.

After the networking sessions, the Association office bearers were honoured with mementos by the TTJ TRAVMART team. The luminaries of the industry and respective Chapter Chairmen of the national and regional associations, such as TAAI, TAFI, ETTA, SKAL, SATA, TAAP TAAPI, SGTC and TAAN, expressed their appreciation and hoped TTJ TRAVMART continued to return annually to their respective regions.

The 4th TTJ TRAVMART for the year took off at the Le Meridien, Surat on March 15, 2023, with a homogeneous mix of 12 exhibitors ranging from Hotels, Airlines, DMC, Cruise Lines, Visa Facilitation Companies, Car Rental to Travel Technology who highlighted

their products and services to 160 pre-registered buyers from Surat and around.

The 5th TTJ TRAVMART was organised at the Novotel Pune on March 25, 2023, and saw 17 sellers interact with 200 + pre-registered local buyers from Pune and 32 hosted buyers from Nashik, Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Mumbai and Thane. A lucky draw was conducted and Kazin DMC presented a 2-night 3-day stay for a couple in Almaty with transfers to the winner. Udaan Hotels also gave away a stay for a couple at their hotel for 2 nights and 3 days. A lucky draw for smartwatches was also conducted.

The TTJ TRAVMARTs for March 2023 concluded on a cheerful note and TTJ TRAVMART now moves on to Lucknow as its 6th city on April 28, 2023.

## TTJ TRAVMART Travel Trade Journal Glimpses of TRAVMART Surat



“

**Malcom T. Pandol**

**Chairman, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI)  
South Gujarat Chapter**

It is great to see TTJ TRAVMART organised here in the diamond city of Surat. We have more than 100 agents from and around Surat doing meetings with suppliers at this mart and we hope TTJ TRAVMART returns to Surat year after year.





## Events



“

**Minesh Naik**

**President, South Gujarat Association of Travel Agents (SATA)**

There was a strong need for this kind of event in Surat. We are very happy that TTT TRAVMART organised this event and got a really impressive mix of Sellers to this mart.







# TTJ TRAVMART

Travel Trade Journal

## Glimpses of TRAVMART Pune



“

**Bahram P. Zadeh**

**Managing Committee Member, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI)**

It is great to witness the TTJ TRAVMART here in Pune and see so many agents network with and benefit from the suppliers who are present.





## Events



**STIR**  
GSA SERVICES  
PRIVATE  
LIMITED

**KAZIN**  
DMC



“

**Rajendra Bothra**  
Director, Ease Voyages

It is indeed rewarding to be a seller on the TTJ TRAVMART platform. Today at this Pune event, we are witnessing a record footfall of relevant agents not only for Pune but also hosted buyers from Nasik, Mumbai, Ahmednagar and Aurangabad.



**RAYNA**  
Destination Management



**TravClan**

**tripjack**

**2HUB**





## Events

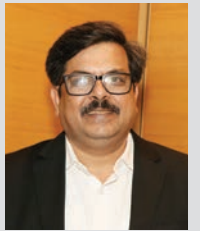


“

**Neeraj Kumar Ailawadi**

**Head of Sales and Marketing, Udaan Hotels and Resorts**

I am a regular exhibitor with TTJ TRAVMART but exhibiting here at Pune with them for the very first time to promote my portfolio of eight properties in Darjeeling, Pelling, Gangtok and Siliguri. I am just delighted with the amazing and overwhelming response I have received here.



“

**Manoj Vaswani**

**Vice President, Travel Agents Association of Nasik (TAAN)**

It is great to see an excellent mix of exhibitors at the TTJ TRAVMART here in Pune. The travel fraternity had turned out in large numbers, including our members from Nasik and we all will benefit from the exchange of Product Knowledge with the suppliers.





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## Vistara commences direct flights between Mumbai and Mauritius

Vistara, on March 26, 2023, started direct, 5x weekly flights between Mumbai and Mauritius. Mauritius is the 15th international destination, and the first in Africa, that Vistara has added to its growing network. The airline has deployed its recently inducted A321LR aircraft with a three-class configuration, as it becomes the only carrier to offer customers the choice of Premium Economy cabin in addition to Business and Economy Class on this route.

Vinod Kannan, Chief Executive Officer, Vistara, said, "We are delighted to take India's finest airline to Africa, as we launch operations to Mauritius. The long-standing relations and strong trade ties between the two countries, in addition to the growing tourism potential of the destination, make it a perfect fit in our network. We are confident that customers will appreciate having the option of experiencing Vistara's award-winning products and services on this sector."



## ETAA Western India Chapter conducts knowledge session in Pune

The ETAA regional session was in continuance to similar events conducted by Global Destinations with ETAA in New Delhi, Mumbai, and Ahmedabad and was conducted by Pranav Kapadia, Founder, Director, Global Destinations.

Smita Garg, India Representative of Threeland Tours DMC, gave an in-depth presentation on Destination Vietnam. Threeland Tours is represented in India by Global Destinations.

Jeevan Hendre, the newly appointed Chairman of ETAA Western India Chapter in his speech, thanked the presenters for conducting the session and encouraged fellow ETAA members to attend such knowledge sessions regularly, to enhance their product and destination knowledge. He also assured members of his 100 per cent commitment to work together with them during his tenure as a Chairman of ETAA's Western India Chapter.



## Azerbaijan drops COVID passport requirement for travellers

Foreign travellers will no longer be required to present COVID passports for entry into Azerbaijan. The decision was made in recognition of the declining number of COVID-19 cases and is expected to make travel easier for those wishing to visit Azerbaijan.

Travellers to Azerbaijan are still advised to follow all recommended health guidelines for their own safety. The government also encourages visitors to get vaccinated before travelling, but this is no longer a requirement for entry.

This decision to no longer require COVID passports is a positive step forward for Azerbaijan's tourism industry. Azerbaijan has been investing heavily in its tourism industry in recent years, intending to become a leading travel destination in the region. The needs of today's travellers are met by the availability of a wide range of modern amenities, such as world-class hotels, restaurants, and shopping centres. The country boasts a wealth of attractions, including the UNESCO-listed Old City of Baku, the Caucasus Mountains, the Caspian Sea, and the ancient Silk Road. The focus on the development of the local



wine industry established Azerbaijan as one of the thriving viticultural centres in the region. To celebrate its contribution to promoting viticulture, winemaking, and wine tourism, ATB has been granted with a number of prizes by the Council of Europe and the European Institute of Cultural Routes.





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Pending Bookings

23

Pending Service Requests

Booking Queues

My Bookings

Enquiry Queue

Pending Ticket Issuance

Unconfirmed


Pending Refunds

Pending Payment

BOOKING REF	CLIENT NAME	BOOKING DATE	TRIP DATE	SERVICES	DESTINATION	STATUS
UT8806	Shishir Tour & Travels	12 Jan 2022	15 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8812	Patty Granderson	23 Jan 2022	22 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8818	Shizue Finnerty	28 Jan 2022	03 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8822	Guillermo Klutts	28 Jan 2022	10 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending
UT8836	Ressie Molinari	29 Jan 2022	11 Mar 2022	Flight	DXB	Pending

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Activities 

<

March 2022

>

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THR	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

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## Fortune Hotels appoints four new General Managers to drive growth and guest experiences

Fortune Hotels, a member of ITC's hotel group, recently announced a future-forward, strategic decision of appointing four highly experienced professionals as growth leaders. These able leaders, while owning specific areas of operations, are expected to make a significant contribution to the brand's strategic goals. Fortune Hotels has created these positions to drive efficiencies within the chain and to further strengthen the brand's commitment to providing exceptional guest experiences across the country.

Ajay J Sharma, Area Manager for North region, an experienced hospitality professional with over 30 years of experience, will be leading the North cluster of hotels. Kunal Banerjee, Cluster General Manager for East region, a seasoned hospitality professional with over 20 years of experience in successfully launching several hotels across India, will now lead the East cluster. He joined Fortune Park Hotels Limited in 2013 as General Manager. Saravanan Dhanabalu, Area Manager for South region, with 28 years in hospitality, is a highly skilled and experienced hotelier, with a global education and leadership roles in prominent hospitality brands. In his new role, he will be responsible for brand operations and administration of units in the south region. Ricardo D'Lima, Cluster General Manager for Goa and West Coast region, a talented hospitality management professional with over 22 years dedicated to pre-openings, F&B operations, revenue management, guest relations and overall quality assurance, was recently promoted to Cluster General Manager for Goa and West Coast. He has been with Fortune Park Hotels for eight years.

The General Managers in their new roles are tasked with driving brand operations, improving the guest experience, and managing stakeholders to deliver consistent growth for regional hotels while focusing on the bottom-line results. Their previous experience of working with successful hospitality brands, multi-property management, and brand strategy, make them important growth drivers.



Ajay J Sharma



Kunal Banerjee



Saravanan Dhanabalu



Ricardo D'Lima

## ICONIC 2023 Forum and Awards concludes on a highly successful note

ICONIC 2023, the premium event of RedHat Communications, was recently held at the ITC Maurya New Delhi. ICONIC, an initiative by Jyoti Mayal, President of TAAI and Founder of Red Hat Communications, brings together the worlds of luxury, travel, and hospitality and beyond. It is both a forum for discussion and a stage to recognise the stalwarts of the huge value chain from the tourism industry.

ICONIC 2023, supported by various travel and hospitality bodies, saw a great industry turnout of tourism stalwarts who networked and interacted and also gained recognition. The ICONIC Forum kick-started with three-panel discussions and a keynote address scheduled by an eminent board of business leaders and thinkers, who discussed and delved into trends in lifestyle and luxury that are impacting the travel and tourism industry. The Knowledge Sessions were focused on Tourism in Mission Mode: Techourism - Feasible or Fashionable, MoT's Visit India Year and India's G-20 Presidency.

The ICONIC Awards in the evening was a balanced mix of achievers from tourism as well as other sectors. The panel discussion that took place in the evening focused on 'Tourists Soaking in Luxperiences.'

Some of the industry stalwarts at the forum

included Hon Harin Fernando, Minister of Tourism and Lands, Government of Sri Lanka, Ajay Bhatt, Minister for Tourism, Government of India, Arvind Singh, Secretary, Union Ministry of Tourism, Arvind Yadav, Chairman, Haryana Tourism, Anju Choudhary, Regional Tourism Officer, Uttar Pradesh Tourism, Geetika Sharma, General Manager, Delhi Tourism and many more from the tourism, hotel and airline sector.

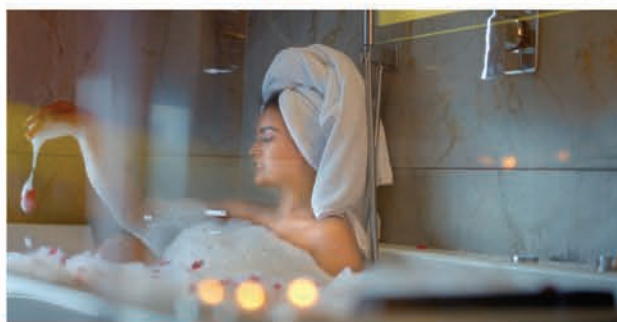
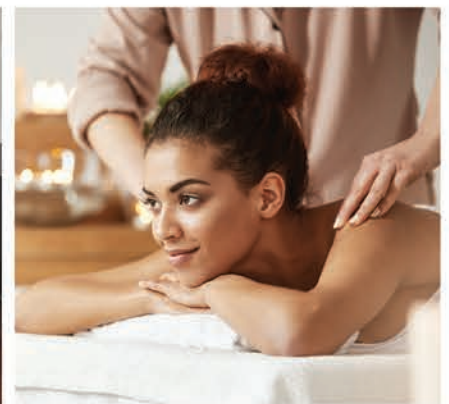






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## Norwegian Cruise Line

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has appointed **David J. Herrera** as the Brand's new President. Herrera, who served as NCL's Chief Consumer Sales and Marketing Officer, has been with NCLH since 2015, and previously served as a Senior Advisor to the Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of Prestige Cruise Holdings from 2012 through 2015. As the President, Herrera will be responsible for the overall strategic vision and business plan execution for the Brand, as well as expand his reporting line to now include revenue management, guest services, brand finance, international sales, and the recently formed Experiences at Sea division.



## Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) New Delhi Office

**Siriges-a-nong Trirattanasongpol** has joined the TAT office as the Director succeeding Vachirachai Sirisumpan. She has been with TAT for almost 30 years with extensive experience working in various divisions, including Service Development, ASEAN-South Asia and South Pacific Region, as well as in the overseas offices at TAT Ho Chi Minh Office and TAT Seoul Office. As the Director of TAT New Delhi Office, she is responsible to promote Thailand as a preferred destination for travellers from South Asia in the area of Northern and Eastern India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.



## The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group

**Vivek Shukla** has been elevated to the position of Chief Executive Officer at The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group. Shukla has over 31 years of experience in the luxury hospitality industry, out of which 18 years have been with The Lalit Group. A key member of the organisation's senior leadership team, Shukla is responsible for product enhancement, driving key initiatives along with leading the overall business performance of the brand. He has been one of the core members of the Strategic Management Committee, a key management core group of the company to formulate strategies, and oversee the operations, business and corporate affairs.



## Brij Hotels

Brij Hotels has appointed **Sandeep Singh** as Vice President Sales. At Brij, Sandeep will lead the sales efforts for seven operational hotels and develop strategies for upcoming properties. Prior to joining Brij Hotels, Sandeep served as the Director of Sales and Marketing for the Gujarat region at The Leela Palace Hotels and Resorts. With over 25 years of extensive experience and a proven track record in the luxury hospitality segment, Sandeep will play a vital role in enhancing the revenue and business verticals at Brij Hotels. He will take on a further leadership role to guide a dynamic team and steer the sales roadmap for the brand.



## The St. Regis Goa Resort

An experienced professional with over two decades of cumulative experience in sales and marketing, **Gargi Guha** joins The St. Regis Goa Resort as Director of Marketing and Communications. A seasoned communications specialist, Gargi has been a part of the pre-opening teams Four Seasons Hotel Bengaluru and Park Hyatt Chennai. Previously, she has also worked with Marriott International under the Ritz Carlton brand in Bangalore. In her current role, Gargi will be largely responsible for positioning and leveraging the brand's legacy in delivering its messaging as a luxury brand offering exceptional services and experiences.



## Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport

**Shalini Sharma** has been appointed as the Director of Sales and Marketing at Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi Airport. Shalini has served the hotel for almost three years back in 2005. With an impressive skill set and an extraordinary knack for creativity, Shalini started her applaudable career in 2003 as a senior sales associate at intercontinental the Grand, New Delhi and has never looked back since. During her tenure, Shalini has worked for other impressive hotel chains which include Starwood, Carlson, IHG and JW Marriott. She firmly believes that discipline is the touchstone for a balanced life.





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