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Dear Friends,

With an increasing demand for domestic and international air travel, the aviation industry is proceeding on an unequivocally positive trajectory. The TTJ July 2023 issue brings forth more about aviation, as we have highlighted a few domestic and international airlines to know how they are faring in the current aviation market.

We have also covered an engaging variety of features on TCS, hotels, destinations, personal narratives, and events that will keep our readers engrossed.

Just to reiterate that we look forward to informing and entertaining you not only through our monthly magazine but also on our website traveltradejournal.com.

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma

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## Matterhorn Alpine Crossing, Europe's highest cable car crossing now open, to connect Switzerland and Italy in under two hours

On July 1, 2023, Switzerland opened its much-anticipated 'Matterhorn Alpine Crossing' – the Alps' highest three-string cable car and the highest border crossing in Europe – connecting Switzerland and Italy in just under two hours!

Passengers of this cable-car crossing will ascend over 4000 meters — the highest altitude difference in Europe and travel directly between the Matterhorn village Zermatt in Switzerland and Breuil-Cervinia in Italy. At Europe's highest border crossing (3480 m) near the Testa Grigia station, travellers can stand with one foot in Italy and the other in Switzerland!

The new cableway will open up the Valle d'Aosta region for visitors to explore its spectacular scenery and discover the quaint houses in typical Walliser style. Activities on offer include riding, biking, hiking, and golf.

At the highest mountain station in Europe — the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise — a spectacular view of the 38 peaks that make up the Swiss Alps



awaits passengers, subject to good weather conditions.

One can either buy a one-way ticket with an optional start in Cervinia (Italy)

or Zermatt (Switzerland) or a return ticket and take a day trip to destinations in any of the two countries on either side of the Matterhorn.

## Uganda Airlines appoints Minar Travels as its GSA in India



Uganda Airlines, the national carrier of Uganda, has appointed Minar Travels (India) as its General Sales Agent (GSA) in India. With extensive experience and deep understanding of the Indian travel market, Minar Travels will effectively position Uganda Airlines as the preferred choice for Indian travellers exploring Uganda and the rest of Africa.

As the newly appointed GSA, Minar Travels will play a pivotal role in driving sales, executing effective marketing strategies, and fostering business development opportunities for Uganda Airlines. With a proven track record as flight-tested GSA pioneers since 1992, Minar Travels' commitment to delivering successful campaigns and accelerating market growth has established them as a trusted partner for airlines seeking a robust presence in the Indian market.

The appointment of Minar Travels as Uganda Airlines' GA signifies a promising future as both entities work in synergy to connect India to the captivating beauty of Uganda and beyond. Uganda Airlines will operate its sales and reservations office in Mumbai, ensuring a convenient gateway for travellers and trade with easy access.

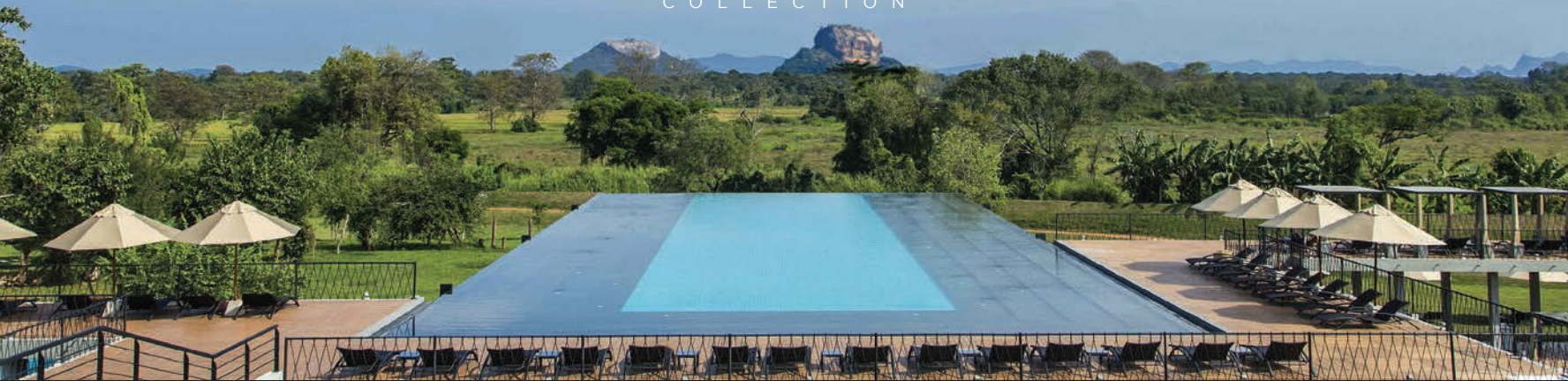
## MAG's airlines first to enable gate-to-gate connectivity in Malaysia, offers free Wi-Fi

Malaysia Aviation Group's (MAG) airlines, comprising Malaysia Airlines, Firefly, and MASwings, will provide Gate-to-Gate connectivity for passengers on its airlines, making it the first airlines to provide this feature for travellers departing from Malaysia.

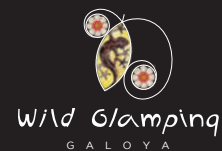
Passengers can enjoy the convenience of staying connected to their personal/portable electronic devices (PEDs) throughout their journey, from the moment they board the aircraft through to arrival at their destination airport, by enabling 'flight mode'. Passengers will no longer be required to switch off their PEDs during take-off and landing, as was previously required due to regulatory and aircraft requirements. PEDs include mobile phones, tablets, and other small hand-held devices that are stowable in the passenger's seat pocket.

Simultaneously, Malaysia Airlines will also be offering complimentary Wi-Fi for all Business Suite and Business Class passengers, as well as Enrich Platinum members, regardless of their class of travel to be enjoyed until December 31, 2023. The offer will be available on a total of 20 aircraft that are equipped with Wi-Fi. The offer comes with a generous data cap of 100 MB per sector, with a bandwidth of up to 512 kbps, ensuring they can stay connected and productive during their journey. All passengers can still enjoy the convenience of being connected through the airline's pay-per-use Wi-Fi offering (MHconnect) and wireless in-flight entertainment (MHstudio) which can be used uninterrupted on their PEDs throughout their journey.





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## SriLankan Airlines appoints AVIAREPS as its PR Representative in India



**S**riLankan Airlines has appointed AVIAREPS as its PR representative in India with immediate effect. The appointment was made as the airline seeks to strengthen its brand among Indian travellers with the ultimate goal to jump-start Indian outbound travel to Sri Lanka. AVIAREPS will play a pivotal

role in positioning SriLankan as a top-of-mind recall for travellers from India through our extensive experience and expertise.

Richard Nuttall, CEO SriLankan Airlines, said, "India has always been a part of the SriLankan Airlines lexicon and as we continue to ramp

up operations, our focus on India will only continue to grow. Given the significance of the market, it was important to partner with an agency that can help us create a localised approach in our communications with Indian customers. We believe that AVIAREPS has all that it takes to deliver a compelling public relations strategy and advance the SriLankan Airlines' brand in India, and we look forward to collaborating with them on our future plans for India."

SriLankan Airlines currently operates 80 weekly flights between Colombo and nine Indian cities. Travellers from Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kochi, Madurai, Mumbai, Tiruchirappalli and Thiruvananthapuram can expect a seamless travel experience when flying to Colombo and beyond on SriLankan Airlines.

## SpiceJet signs interline agreement with Hahn Air



**S**piceJet recently signed an interline agreement with Hahn Air. Since 2016, SpiceJet has already been available under Hahn Air's H1 code in all major Global Distribution Systems (GDSs). With the new interline agreement, the airline will be additionally available under their own SG code in the Amadeus GDS. Travel agents around the world can issue SpiceJet flights on the insolvency-safe HR-169 ticket by choosing Hahn Air as the validating carrier. In addition, travel agents using the Amadeus GDS can combine SpiceJet's flights with other Hahn Air partners' flights on one single ticket.

"We are proud to extend our partnership with SpiceJet," says Kimberley Long, Vice President-Agency Distribution at Hahn Air. "By providing a wealth of destinations and excellent service, this award-winning airline is very popular with travellers. We are excited to now give the travel agent community various options to easily access this carrier, even in markets where SpiceJet does not grant ticketing authority for SG or where the airline is not a member of the local BSP or ARC."

## Vietnam extends e-visas to 90 days, allows multiple entries



**F**rom August 15, 2023, e-visa duration will be increased from 30 days to 90 days, valid for multiple entries to meet the demands of international tourists. This new policy was approved on June 24, 2023, by the National Assembly of Vietnam to facilitate international visitors to Vietnam.

Thereby, upon being granted an e-visa, a foreigner can enter and exit

an unlimited number of times within 90 days, without having to go through procedures for obtaining a new visa.

Citizens of countries that are unilaterally exempted from visas by Vietnam will be granted temporary residence for 45 days (up from 15 days) and can be considered for visa issuance and temporary residence extension according to regulations.



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# The Role of Ancillary Services in Today's World of Travel and Tourism

Travel trends have undergone a huge shift in recent years. With leisure, as well as business travel, gradually penetrating most sectors of the population, the demand for exclusively curated travel packages has parallely gone up. This is where selling travel ancillary services comes into the picture as it adds a personal touch to a traveller's overall experience.

Dev Karvat



**W**ith the changing patterns in the travel and tourism industry, planning a trip for a client these days involves a lot more than simply booking a flight, hotel and transportation. Suggesting ancillary services; those little extras that go a long way in enhancing the customer's travel experience is sure to boost the brand value of travel advisors, besides, of course, improving their revenue as well.

## Reasons to Sell Travel Ancillary Services

**Simplify travel planning for clients:** Travellers more often approach a travel agent because they do not have the time to research and figure out the complexities of the travel booking process. All they expect is a comprehensive tour

package that offers good value for the money they spend. This is where the travel agent's expertise comes into the picture because they are expected to be aware of certain hidden risks and costs of a trip that a layman is likely to miss.

**Economise client's trips:** A travel agent's responsibility isn't just limited to providing solutions to the client's booking requirements. Being a travel expert, a travel agent also helps in cutting down the overall cost of their client's trips by suggesting practical tips like purchasing a reliable travel assistance and insurance plan like the one offered by Asego that will cover them for possible travel exigencies like medical emergencies, loss of baggage/valuables, missed flights, etc.

**Adds value to consumer relations:** In a service-dominated industry like travel and tourism, proactively offering niche services that the clients are not likely to expect adds a personal touch to the travel agent's services. Besides, delivering beyond their expectations will also lead to customer satisfaction, which is the only way to achieve brand loyalty as a travel agent.

**Provide a bespoke experience for travellers:** By adding ancillary services like dining referral and reservation, courier service assistance, special events assistance, flower delivery assistance, etc. to their bucket, travel advisors can raise their customer service standards a notch higher. This, in turn, leaves a lasting impression on the customer's mind.

**Comprehensive Travel Protection:** The Indian travel and

tourism sector has seen a makeover of sorts in the past two decades. And with that, the demands of an average Indian traveller have also gone up. So, it is safe to claim that one size fits all approach when it comes to travel assistance and insurance plans is passe. For instance, today, young travellers are increasingly inclined towards holiday spots which offer adventure sports activities or destinations where they can explore the place in a self-driven car, which calls for plans that cover risks associated with such activities. On the other end, senior citizens are looking at travel risk management plans that can protect them from possible complications of pre-existing ailments.

**Personalised support:** Asego's services are backed by personalised support and 24X7 customer service helping travellers' avail global assistance services, fast-track claims and round-the-clock support during emergencies.

**Enhanced revenues:** One of the biggest advantages of offering travel ancillary services is a significant improvement in travel agents' revenues. To gain an edge in the industry, it becomes imperative for a business to offer services that are a cut above the rest. Upselling travel ancillary services from a reputed and reliable brand like Asego offers them a chance to earn substantial revenue along with an added opportunity to retain clients.

So, in today's world, a dependable travel insurance plan accompanied by other relevant travel ancillary services will not only be a valuable asset in a traveller's kitty but also act as an up-selling point for travel agents and tour operators.

*About the Author: Dev Karvat is the Founder and CEO of Asego.*





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# India's dominant airline IndiGo charts impressively stirring expansion mode

At IndiGo, the fundamental principle that governs the business model is low-cost leadership. The airline is in a constant endeavour to lower costs and provide affordable, on-time, hassle-free travel experiences to its customers whilst simultaneously aiming for growth. Vinay Malhotra, Head-Global Sales, IndiGo, conveys that they have defined three strategic pillars of reassure, develop, and create to support their growth plans as they are looking to double in size and scale by the end of this decade.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Vinay Malhotra

**T**he growth of the aviation market in India is vigorous and back to pre-COVID levels presenting IndiGo with the opportunity to grow and flourish both operationally and financially. In the previous quarter, robust demand on account of the peak travel season was reckoned as the reason behind the surge in their topline growth. Looking ahead, with the market forces at play and an ongoing strong travel demand trend that is only expected to grow, the airline continues to add capacity and cater to its aim of providing hassle-free services and affordable travel experiences.

IndiGo is India's largest passenger airline with a domestic market share of 57.5 per cent (as of April 2023). The airline has deployed more capacity than in the pre-pandemic period and is now operating over 1800 daily flights versus 1600 daily flights before the pandemic. "We continue to see robust growth across the network. We have also witnessed a handsome return of

demand for international destinations in the last few months and have introduced connectivity to Europe via Istanbul, through our codeshare agreement with Turkish Airlines. We will be concluding FY23 on the higher side of the range of the previously guided capacity estimates," asserts Vinay.

Currently IndiGo has two B777s on temporary damp leases for Delhi-Istanbul and Mumbai-Istanbul sectors. They have witnessed an encouraging volume on these routes, which has instilled confidence to deploy these widebodies. It also helps in feeding traffic to the 33 connecting destinations across Europe and four destinations in the US. They are deploying adequate capacity through alternate sources including wet leasing and lease extensions.

IndiGo has defined three strategic pillars of reassure, develop, and create, to build and support its growth plans. Under the reassure pillar, IndiGo will focus on the basics that have made the LCC successful: on-time performance, courteous and hassle-free service, affordable fares, and an extensive network. The development pillar is key to the LCC's growth plans, in which it is developing and aligning its people, processes, and technology in line with the growing size and scale of the company. The third pillar, Create, targets the next phase of growth, strengthening the domestic network and growing its international operations.

To enhance international connections, IndiGo also added codeshares for connectivity across multiple continents. They currently have codeshares with Turkish Airways, Qatar Airways, American Airlines, KLM-Air France, Qantas, Jetstar, and Virgin Atlantic.

Globally, the aviation industry continues to face significant supply chain disruptions. However, IndiGo's immediate priority is to deploy adequate

capacity to serve its customers. To address pressing travel demand, they are in talks with the OEMs to support with swift replacement of parts for aircraft to bring them back into operation. Vinay adds, "Whilst the supply of spare engines is slower than required, we continue to receive our new aircraft and are implementing measures to minimise the economic impact. These challenges have not hindered our growth, and we remain optimistic about market opportunities, continuing to expand to new geographies in the future."

IndiGo recently placed a firm order for 500 Airbus, A320 Family aircraft and has previous orders of 480 aircraft which are to be delivered between now and the end of this decade. With this additional firm order of 500 aircraft for 2030-2035, IndiGo's order book has almost 1000 aircraft to be delivered, steadily spread over the next decade. The IndiGo order book comprises a mix of A320NEO, A321NEO, and A321XLR aircraft. "This 500 aircraft order is not only IndiGo's largest order but also the largest-ever single aircraft purchase by any airline with Airbus. Our pending order book, structural cost advantages, and our long-term relationships with our supply chain partners are our key assets," states Vinay.

With an average of one complaint per lakh passengers, IndiGo has maintained one of the lowest complaint rates in India. Vinay shares, "Our complaint rate today, as DGCA data reveals, is even better than pre-COVID times. Whilst remaining conscious of the needs of our customers, it is always our constant endeavour to provide a courteous and hassle-free experience to all, taking corrective measures where necessary."

Currently, IndiGo operates over 300 aircraft and will be adding more by the end of 2023. IndiGo is also expecting to start receiving the Airbus A321XLR towards the end of 2024 or early 2025.



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# Vistara fortifying its domestic network while expanding globally

Hailed for its distinguished flying experience, Vistara continues to maintain the highest standards of hospitality with best-in-class offerings. Vinod Kannan, Chief Executive Officer, Vistara believes that Vistara's achievements in the last eight years including being the youngest and the only Indian airline to be featured in the World's Top 20 Airlines by Skytrax, ranked 16th, and the goodwill amongst their customers keep them motivated to continue growing and setting new benchmarks in the aviation sector.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Vinod Kannan

**T**he aviation industry has demonstrated remarkable resilience, invigorated, and bouncing back faster than any other industry after the pandemic, with a strengthened resurgence in demand. In fact, some of the recent developments like the entry of new players, large aircraft orders placed by airlines, etc., pointedly bear evidence of colossal growth in the Indian civil aviation industry in the near to mid-term future. This augurs well for Vistara as it is well-poised for growth.

India is currently the third-largest and fastest-growing aviation market in the world. However, Vinod feels that the market is still largely under-penetrated. He says, "There is immense potential for airlines to grow in the domestic market by carefully planning their networks and building capacity and space accordingly. With reference to connectivity outside India, a significant

part of the international traffic originating from India is currently being carried by foreign carriers. However, with increasing preference amongst customers for direct, non-stop flights, along with the government's strong focus on developing India as a global aviation hub, the future possibilities of growth for all carriers in the Indian aviation market are unfathomable."

Speaking on the current challenges faced by the airline, Vinod says, "India has traditionally been a price-sensitive market. Although there has been a slight shift in customers' growing preference for premium cabins, especially on metro routes, the story is not the same across every network. At Vistara, we are addressing this by deploying our all-economy aircraft, which are a fraction of our current fleet but play an indispensable role in maintaining commercial viability on certain routes that have limited demand for premium cabins," he further reiterates. "Additionally, high taxes, volatility in fuel prices, and the falling value of the rupee against the dollar continue to put pressure on the airlines' bottom line. To get to grips with this, we try and control our non-customer facing expenses and constantly try to make our cost structure leaner, through innovative approaches."

Meeting customer needs and making customers feel essentially important across all segments requires a highly comprehensive range of vision maintained by any airline at all times. "At Vistara, our central focus revolves around our customers. We ensure that their slightest expectation is catered to, whether it is via the inflight product and services or ensuring operational efficiencies, we chalk out every bit meticulously. It is our constant endeavour to not just meet our customers' expectations but exceed them consistently as well," asserts Vinod.

In terms of product and service attributes, Vistara offers the experience of flying their best-in-class aircraft, including the Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner and Airbus A321neo. Vistara's Business Class cabin products are unparalleled within the domestic market and remain on par with some of the biggest airlines around the world. Furthermore, they are the first Indian airline to offer special 'wellness-focused' IFE content in association with Shyft. Partnering with the home-grown luxury brand, Forest Essentials to curate thoughtful amenity kits for business-class fliers on long-haul flights, Vistara extends an all-rounded experience of fulfilment to its fliers. Also, Vistara's new boarding and landing music, and choice of healthier meal options, are all aimed at giving a holistic wellness experience to customers onboard.

Moving ahead, Vistara's strategy is to densify its domestic network while expanding its international footprint across continents. They recently added Goa's Manohar International Airport to their growing domestic network, connecting it with Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. In terms of international operations, they currently connect to 15 destinations across the globe including Abu Dhabi, Bangkok, Colombo, Dammam, Dhaka, Dubai, Frankfurt, Jeddah, Kathmandu, London Heathrow, Male, Mauritius, Muscat, Paris CDG, and Singapore. "We also recently introduced a new route connecting Mumbai and London, Heathrow with 5x weekly flights between the two airports. We continue to monitor the market for opportunities to further expand our footprint. Vistara is also on course to ramp up its fleet in order to strengthen its network globally. Currently, we have a fleet of 61 aircraft, and we expect to take the number to 70 by the end of FY2024," sums up Vinod.



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# Oman Air extends horizon with impeccable service level at every touchpoint

Distinguishing itself for its personalised service, authentic Omani hospitality, and meticulous attention to all elements of the guest journey, Oman Air continues to position itself among the world's major carriers. Sunil V A, Regional Vice-President, Indian Sub-Continent and Far East, Commercial Sales, Oman Air gives an insight into the airline which is growing from strength to strength and has established a strong international presence as it now flies as far as Europe and the Far East.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Sunil V A

Oman Air passed a major milestone in March 2023 on the occasion of its 30th anniversary. The airline has a clear objective of being the best, based on the scope and size of its operations. The airline continues to represent the warm hospitality and tradition of the Sultanate of Oman, which makes it a truly boutique airline.

The Indian aviation market has been emerging rapidly over the last few years. Post-pandemic and at Oman Air, they have seen a surge in growth with acquisitions, mergers, and aircraft orders, which warrants the growth in traffic both for domestic and international travel. "The visionary decision of the government of India to have more airports across the country will be the game changer for the aviation industry in the country," hints Sunil.

India is Oman Air's second largest market after Oman, which has been

growing steadily with the increase in traffic between the multiple cities in India with the two key international airports in Oman - Muscat and Salalah, respectively. Reflecting upon some challenges, Sunil mentions, "We have seen congestion and lack of slots at airports. This presents a key challenge, which is expected to ease out with the infrastructure expansion at the current airports and the plans to have more airports across the country. However, the economic constraints are a challenge in most of the countries we operate in, which is understandable as it is being taken by regulatory authorities to mitigate long-term constraints."

Oman Air aims at delivering a seamless travel experience to all its guests and on-time performance tops its priority list in terms of deliverables. The airline offers convenient flying times and unmatched services which suit the requirements of any guest profile.

"We are constantly on the lookout to improve service levels at every supplier and guest touch point to make the selling or travelling experience unique. Our 'Sindbad' frequent flyer programme offers attractive options to all our guests and has many partners with whom the earned miles or points can be redeemed. Competition is always healthy and propels growth of the market with the regular introduction of new products and services. Oman Air is also geared up to innovate and provide unique experiences to our guests," asserts Sunil.

Oman Air also has an efficient guest relations team that works relentlessly to solve the grievances of guests and their prime objective is to address issues with compassion. Sunil adds, "As regards resolutions for our travel partners during these challenging times, we will walk that extra mile and extend our arms to support them whilst making them

comfortable working with us and forging a long-standing association."

The aviation industry is working hard to reduce its environmental impact and minimise its carbon footprint. However, more needs to be done. The industry is currently responsible for 2 per cent of human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, with an expected growth of up to 700 per cent by 2050 if no effective measures are introduced. On sustainability, Sunil says, "We are truly on the way to adopting sustainable business practices. There are quite a few challenges in this regard related to cost and availability. The industry as a whole is working hard incessantly to adopt multiple practices. These steps, we too shall embrace on our way forward as our responsibility towards the society."

Oman Air has added more flights to its existing routes in Europe, the Far East, GCC, and the subcontinent. The airline has commenced operations to Trabzon in Turkey, Moscow in Russia, and Phuket in Thailand, and the newest route has been Male in the Maldives, which commenced on June 24, 2023. "As we continue our journey to further spread our wings, we are extremely excited about our plans to recommence operations to the cities of Lucknow and Thiruvananthapuram in India effective Oct 1, 2023," shares Sunil.

Oman Air has been designated 'Best Airline Staff in the Middle East' at the Skytrax 2023 World Airline Awards. Having achieved the 'Best Airline Staff in the Middle East Award in 2011, 2014, 2015, 2017, and 2021, the airline also recently earned the 2023 Five-Star Major Airline rating by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), as well as World's Leading Airline: Business Class, World's Leading Airline: Customer Experience, and World's Leading Airline Lounge at the World Travel Awards 2022.



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# Getting there. But not there yet!

Aviation, which had come to a grinding halt owing to the pandemic in 2020, has since travelled a long way from operating evacuation flights, converting passenger aircraft to cargo, to now resuming regular operations. As the world's outlook turns positive, are things all well and good, or do challenges still persist? TTJ speaks to Anju Wariah, Director, Group Business Development (Airlines), STIC Travel Group, to get a grab on the current sequence of events.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



▲ Anju Wariah

Anju Wariah is an aviation industry stalwart with more than three decades in the industry to her credit. She spearheads the group's airline business. STIC Travel Group is one of the oldest GSA operations in the country and will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in September 2023. They currently operate with a portfolio of 10 airlines, some online from India, some offline, whilst some remain suspended.

STIC currently represents United Airlines, Ethiopian Airlines, SriLankan Airlines, and Myanmar Airways operating from India. Air China is yet to resume its India operations post-pandemic. Cambodia Airways, Croatia Airlines, Royal Jordanian Airlines, and Royal Brunei Airlines are offline operations. Owing to the conflict in Europe, Ukraine International Airlines, unfortunately, remains suspended.

## **Q** Your views on the prevailing situation in the aviation sector of India.

This year witnessed an order of almost 1000 new aircraft originating from India, which is an extremely positive outlook and elevates India to the next level of development in the aviation sector. However, it is pertinent to be observed from two different perspectives of domestic and international aviation, respectively. We have surpassed pre-pandemic passenger numbers when it comes to domestic air travel. New airports are being announced. Most of the new aircraft ordered and delivered over time will augment the domestic seat inventory and the bigger aircraft being used shall replace the aging aircraft. Route expansion will happen over time.

International aviation though has witnessed an increase in yields on account of a lot of factors at play, but the figures available from airport authorities indicate that at best we are at 75-80 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels in terms of passengers, so we are getting there but not really there yet!

## **What, according to you, are the predominant factors behind international aviation yet to attain pre-pandemic glory?**

There are a number of components contributing to the prevailing factor. Mention worthy of some are, aircraft being in short supply, maintenance facilities remaining very constrained, trained staff shortage, Russia-Ukraine war, high fuel costs, and all flight routes still not having been opened up by respective governments.

## **Kindly elaborate on the impact of the Russia - Ukraine war on the international aviation revival, and your business in particular.**

Conflict anywhere in the world today has global implications. The current war and sanctions, hence, have unquestionably impacted fuel costs globally, resulting in higher operating costs. Many international carriers are compelled to chalk out longer routes as they no longer can fly the airspace over the war zone. This resultantly has led to higher fuel payload and decreased passenger count and cargo carrying capacity.

Currently, we are operating with just one United Airlines flight a day to New Delhi, whereas pre-pandemic we had 5 flights a day to India. We are actually at 20 per cent of our original passenger-carrying capacity. Sri Lankan Airlines too is operating just about 83 flights per week in comparison to 124 flights a week pre-pandemic.

We at STIC had created a huge demand from India to Ukraine and our flights in 2022 were mostly in a sold-out position till the commencement of the war. Regrettably, the war has had a direct impact on Ukraine International Airlines, and their operations remain suspended.

## **Do you foresee the return of airfare to realistic levels in the near future?**

Currently, the demand and supply gap is vast. The choking effect, therefore, leads to higher airfares, bearing in mind the other factors delineated earlier, adding up to higher costs. But as the aircraft situation eases, routes reopen, and hopefully there is a fast resolution to the war, fares are liable to return to more realistic levels. We have already started witnessing some price rationalisation. Hopefully, towards the end of 2024, international aviation will be back to its pre-pandemic glory.

## **Kindly sketch out your wish list from the government.**

1. The impending implementation of 20 per cent TCS on overseas travel will have a major impact on international aviation to and from India. TCS needs to be done away with.
2. Pricing of domestic airfares ought to be capped. There should be an upper limit on the fares which needs to be fixed at 150 per cent of the operational cost. For a vast country like India, affordable air connectivity is a requisite.
3. Taking a cue from the open sky policy of the booming aviation markets of Singapore and Dubai, we need to implement an open sky policy as well.



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# Jazeera transcending boundaries of customers' requisites

Jazeera Airways pledges foremost focus on providing its customers with comfortable and enjoyable travel experiences. Their continuous and relentless strive is to expand their network and improve offerings. Romana Parvi, Regional Manager, South Asia, Jazeera Airways, conveys that they are constantly evaluating and looking out to add new routes and destinations, whilst being committed to providing a wide range of travel options and comfortable travel experiences for every passenger.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Romana Parvi

Jazeera Airways is driving hard to capitalise on the potential of an upsurge in the Indian aviation market in the near future. Their main objective is to stay focused on expanding their network whilst remaining committed to providing a high-quality travel experience that transcends customer expectations. Various thoughtful and effective measures have been implemented by them to ensure on-time performance, such as optimising flight schedules and managing a well-maintained fleet.

"We are dedicated to providing a safe, reliable, and enjoyable travel experience to all of our customers. Our fares are affordable and we do have flexible booking options that should make travel planning easier for our travellers. It is important to mention that apart from this, we also make travel more accessible with convenient connections and comfortable layovers at our own airport terminal in Kuwait - Jazeera Terminal 5. To ensure a continued focus on improvement, we regularly solicit feedback from customers and use this input to further enhance our services and offerings. Overall, customer safety, and impeccable customer service remain our topmost priority," assures Romana.

India's growth in the aviation sector

has been phenomenal and it is now the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world and is expected to overtake the UK to position itself as the third-largest air passenger market come 2024. Romana expresses that with a rapidly growing middle class and increasing demand for air travel, the potential for airlines to expand their operations and serve more customers is boundless. There most definitely is enough and more space for multiple airlines to thrive simultaneously. However, what remains important and noteworthy he says, "It is important that the airlines differentiate themselves to stand out and offer unique value propositions to attract and retain customers. Additionally, airlines must be able to adapt to changing market conditions to succeed in this competitive industry. Jazeera Airways has successfully implemented this practice for the past many years."

High fuel costs, complex government procedures, limited airport slots, and high airport costs are some challenges that international airlines encounter when operating in India. "One of the challenges that we face is the seating capacity allocated to us as a part of the bilateral agreement between Kuwait and India. In Kuwait, the Indian population constitutes close to 1 million, ranking the second highest after Arab ex-pats. The seating capacity allocated is limited to 12,000 seats only, per week. There has been no increase in seats since 2007 when the Indian population was just about 300,000. This resultantly has the ex-pats taking flights via other countries to visit their hometowns," states Romana. The airline has been in talks with both the Indian and Kuwait governments in this regard and Romana urges them to take significant notice of the prevailing condition and also consider negotiating and enhancing the number of seats being currently flown.

Though a low-cost carrier, Jazeera Airways ensures that they engage with their passengers at various levels. They offer a range of ancillary services, such as seat selection, extra baggage allowance,

and in-flight meals, to enhance travel experience for their customers. Adding more Romana, says, "We work with banks and offer special fares or discounts on tickets. We at Jazeera Airways decisively prioritise customer needs and satisfaction and on a regular basis track customer feedback. Our aim is to make the best use of this invaluable input to improve our services and offerings to better the needs of our customers. Our dedicated customer service team is available round the clock to address grievances, disputes, and issues that our customers or travel partners may encounter. Our customer service team works diligently to resolve these reports in an orderly and timely manner to ensure the complete satisfaction of our passengers and partners."

Jazeera Airways masters the art of reaching out to potential customers through well-planned marketing campaigns targeted and devised at promoting the brand and its offerings. Their marketing strategy revolves around providing a high-quality travel experience and building long-term relationships with their customers.

Commitment to sustainability is a well-defined and definite measure most airlines today take utmost care of to ensure that they are set apart, stand out, and outshine their competitor. At Jazeera Airways, the fleet of aircraft includes the A320neos which are fuel efficient and have significantly lesser carbon emissions. Jazeera is the first Kuwaiti airline and the region's first LCC to implement a climate compensation initiative CHOOOSE™ that helps passengers offset their carbon impact.

Jazeera Airways has added two new European destinations -Belgrade in Serbia and Tirana in Albania this summer. In addition, flights to Prague, Czech Republic, and Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina are soon to resume. The airline serves over 66 destinations with Tbilisi, Larnaca, Istanbul, Baku, and Cairo continuing to be the most popular destinations for travellers from India.



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# Malaysia Airlines strengthening customer base across the Indian network

With the reopening of borders in 2022, Malaysia Airlines has since emerged on a stable footing financially and operationally, with parent company Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG) having achieved three consecutive quarters of financial profitability since 3Q 2022. Ahmad Luqman Mohd Azmi, Chief Executive Officer-Airlines, MAG, says that now the airline is aggressively investing in their customers by elevating their products and offerings – from fleet modernisation to enhancing the overall cabin experience.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Ahmad Luqman Mohd Azmi

With significant growth and achievement in the Indian domestic aviation sector, the potential of Indian market remains highly promising for international carriers such as Malaysia Airlines. The airline has closely monitored the upsurge in demand that has transcended their expectations, prompting them to enhance services by increasing frequencies and upgrading to wide-body aircraft on select flights and sectors.

“India continues to be one of our determinant factors and a key market. We have since expanded connectivity from India to Malaysia and are now operating 55 weekly flights compared to the previous 52, with the introduction of three new flights from Bengaluru which commenced in April 2023. We are looking to return to pre-pandemic levels in the Indian market by the end of this year. Healthy competition among airlines bodes well for the Indian aviation market, as it creates ample opportunities and potential for both domestic and foreign carriers to explore and capitalise on,” says Mohd Azmi.

To support the rising travel demand,

and address the diverse needs of flyers, Malaysia Airlines continues to empower its customers by providing them with the power of personalisation through the right products and services. “Since customers are our centre of gravity, their feedback is exceedingly valuable and significant, and we are constantly enhancing our product offerings meticulously to cater to their growing requirements. We are dedicated to ensuring that our customers feel acknowledged and always supported. To achieve this, we prioritise hyper-personalisation, which involves segmenting customers, developing tailored products, crafting marketing messages for relevant channels, and utilising suitable communication tools and platforms. This enables us to efficaciously engage with our customers at the right time and in the right place,” assures Mohd Azmi.

The airline firmly believes in circumventing a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, they have punctiliously designed their products and services considering the diverse preferences of their clients. This empowers fliers with the flexibility to choose from options that best suit their regard. By diligently conforming to their customer’s wants and incorporating their feedback into the development of the products and services, they can create a more personalised and customer-centric travel experience suitable across different segments of their market and passenger profiles. Special attention is bestowed on their employees, who inherently remain the organisation’s driving force so that their workforce remains agile to withstand any economic shock and can continue to render inimitable and distinctive Malaysian Hospitality service to their guests.

Mohd Azmi also shares, “Our customers hold a position of paramount importance to us, and their feedback plays a significant role in shaping and formulating our actions.

Comprehending and acknowledging their points of discomfort has always been advantageous and expedient for us, as it confers the possibility to transform customers into loyal advocates. We are committed to delivering the best possible experience to all passengers, whether travelling for leisure or business. One notable initiative in this regard is our MHfriends programme, a platform through which we ardently engage with our frequent and loyal passengers. We conduct surveys and encourage them to provide constructive feedback, which helps us identify areas and scope for improvement. Their inputs are vitally important and invaluable since they are first-hand users of our products and services. Engaging in this two-way conversation reaps immense benefit in the fullness of time.”

As a member of the Oneworld alliance, Malaysia Airlines connects to more than 900 destinations in over 170 territories by leveraging member airlines. Their network recovery continues to be led by the domestic market, UK, ASEAN, and South Asia, and for the Indian market in particular they proximate return to pre-pandemic levels by the end of this year. “In terms of network expansion, we have increased our connectivity from India to Malaysia from 52 weekly flights to 55 weekly flights. We are continuously reviewing opportunities in the Indian market and will graduate to adding new routes, increasing frequencies, or upgrading aircraft to meet the increased travel demand. We are also exploring routes to cities like Tiruchirappalli, Thiruvananthapuram, and Pondicherry,” states Mohd Azmi.

The airline’s recent partnership with Acumen Overseas for air travel management is another initiative to strengthen its customer base across the Indian network. The collaboration will further bolster and fortify the airline’s presence and enhance services for the Indian market, by leveraging on its experience and capabilities.



# TBO Academy Offers 'Attractions' the Opportunity to Mark their Presence

TBO Academy, the leading provider of travel education and resources has announced the launch of 'Interactions with Attractions', an exciting global campaign promoting attractions around the world. Through this campaign, the academy aims to create a strong online presence for these extraordinary attractions, in order to promote tourism and cultural exchange on a global scale.

## Team TTJ

**T**B O Academy is a leading online educational platform in the travel and tourism industry. With a wide range of courses and training programs, TBO Academy equips aspiring travel professionals with the knowledge and skills required for a successful career in the field. The academy's mission is to inspire and empower travel professionals to explore the world, promoting sustainable and responsible travel practices.

In an increasingly connected world, TBO Academy understands the importance of showcasing the unique wonders and hidden gems that each destination has to offer. By highlighting these attractions through a comprehensive digital campaign, 'Interactions with Attractions,' TBO Academy aims to inspire and engage travel professionals, while at the same time supporting local communities and businesses.

Traditionally, the travel industry has focused on adrenaline-pumping activities and thrill-seeking adventures. However, TBO Academy recognises that communication experiences can be equally transformative and offer travelers a unique opportunity to connect with local cultures, history, and natural wonders on a deeper level. With the "Interactions with Attractions" campaign, TBO Academy highlights the diverse range of attractions that cater to a wide spectrum of interests, encouraging travelers to explore and engage with the world around them in a new and exciting way.

"Interactions with Attractions is a unique endeavor designed to bring together travel professionals, explorers, and cultural enthusiasts from all corners of the globe. We recognise the value of experiences and the impact they have on creating memorable journeys. By promoting attractions free of cost, we strive to foster connections between travel professionals and the incredible destinations that await their exploration," says Vidhu Lamba, Senior Director, TBO Academy.

She further adds, "Our campaign is set to inspire curiosity and cultural appreciation by showcasing the wonders of our planet. By providing free publicity, TBO Academy looks forward to enabling attractions to reach a wider audience, helping them to grow and promote sustainable tourism practices."

Attractions featured in the campaign will benefit from enhanced visibility, as TBO Academy will leverage its strong relationships with travel experts and tour operators, ensuring that these attractions are included in travel itineraries and recommendations. Additionally, TBO Academy will provide educational resources to its network of travel professionals, enabling them to better promote and sell these attractions to their clients.

"To further engage travelers and create a sense of community, TBO Academy will also host interactive online events and competitions throughout the campaign. These initiatives will give participants the chance to win exciting travel experiences and connect with other travel enthusiasts who share a passion for exploration," mentions Vidhu.

The campaign will span several months, with a diverse range of attractions from every continent showcased. From the towering heights of the Empire State Building, offering panoramic views of New York City's iconic skyline, to the enchanting wonder of Kennedy Space Centre, where mankind's dreams of reaching the stars become a breathtaking reality, and from the immersive wildlife encounters at Victoria Zoo to the adrenaline-pumping adventures at Summit One, there is an attraction waiting for every travel enthusiast. So, get ready to be amazed by the architectural marvels, the whimsical characters, the diverse wildlife, and the thrill of exploration that await you in this extraordinary global tapestry.

Those interested in participating

in the campaign with their attractions can submit their information to TBO Academy. Once selected, these attractions will have the opportunity to showcase their uniqueness and allure through the online platform, reaching a vast network of travel professionals.



Vidhu Lamba



# Korean Air strategising on inbound-outbound traffic imbalance

As skies open up post-pandemic, 2023 sees Korean Air focus on the resumption of temporarily suspended routes. Exploring new routes will be their next main objective once all suspended routes are fully functional. The airline contemplates increasing its seat capacity on the Incheon -New Delhi route and simultaneously exploring new opportunities in South India. Kim Chan, General Manager, Korean Air, India, and Bangladesh is excited about the recommencement of their services in India, as the airline takes the Indian market with extreme earnestness. He calls upon Indians to visit and experience the beauty of Korea, winged with the efficient services of Korean Air.

Sonika Bohra



▲ Kim Chan

**F**rom an economic perspective, the main focus of Korean Air remains the revival of inbound (Korea to India) traffic. Since resuming operations in India, the airline has been applying various measures to bring around inbound traffic to pre-COVID levels. However, the same is yet to reach the desired level and remains a challenge and primary focal point.

“Our outbound load factor is very good and promising, yet the challenge remains with the inbound. I think, as with Korean Air, almost all carriers today are facing similar issues on long-haul routes except for US and Canada. Short-haul destinations are emerging as more preferred over the long-haul, post-pandemic. Since the flying time between Korea and India is around 8 hours, promoting Korea to the Indian market, as a result, is significantly challenging,” elucidates Kim.

At Korean Air, the safety and service of its passengers have always been and shall remain the primary focus. Korean Air is globally renowned for its deliverance of excellent service and on-

time operations. The MCT (Minimum Connecting Time) required at Incheon Airport is a bare minimum of 45 minutes. On-time operation is an integral and very critical part of the functioning of the airline. Instances of passenger misconnection owing to late arrival of the aircraft are an utmost rare phenomenon. Korean Air operates from Terminal 2, a newly built state-of-art terminal at Incheon Airport. This terminal is currently being used by Korean Air and six other airlines. Hence, passenger handling services like immigration, customs, baggage arrival, etc are extremely speedy and hassle-free. The airfare of Korean Air is in accord with the standard market rates and remains at par with their major competitors.

In keeping with the competitive market in air travel, it is imperative to retain frequent flyers. The main target customer of Korean Air is the segment of corporate travellers and the airline has successfully positioned itself as one of the market leaders in this segment. “To attract more frequent flyers, we are considering doing joint marketing with credit card companies and OTAs. We are also offering special fares and incentives to Indian corporates. For Small and Medium Enterprises, we have a special program called KALBIZ. By registering at KALBIZ, the SMEs can accumulate points which can be later redeemed for purchasing of excess baggage, lounge, upgrade, etc.,” notifies Kim.

It is prudent to state that immediate response to customer complaints enhances customer satisfaction and builds strong customer bonding and loyalty. Korean Air’s Global Call Centre operates 24X7 to listen to and resolve the grievances of their customers and travel partners. Kim adds, “We offer tele-customers services in Hindi, English, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese on toll-free lines. Our call centre executives are specially trained to resolve customer grievances over the phone. However,

there are certain issues that may remain unresolved over the phone, and in such instances, we encourage the customers to write on the VOC (Voice of Customer) portal. We have a separate department in Seoul that exclusively looks after our customer’s written grievances. Once anyone writes a VOC, we are bound to resolve the issue within 3 days. In case the VOC is not resolved within the stipulated period of 3 days, it automatically goes to the higher management, and the higher management personally gets involved in settling the issue. The VOC is a very successful system that has helped our millions of customers worldwide.”

Korean Air is committed to returning profit to civil society, contributing to communities, and promoting transparent corporate governance for sustainable growth. Striving to minimize greenhouse gas emissions by transitioning to eco-friendly and high-efficiency aircraft is an essential step towards responsible environment-friendly co-existence. In an attempt to improve the fuel management process, the airline has signed MoU with various research organizations for the development of sustainable aviation fuel. Korean Air is implementing a policy of reduce-reuse-recycle across all its offices.

Addressing the exciting phase that the aviation industry in India is witnessing in recent times, Kim mentions, “Privatisation of Air India is the most significant event that has shaped the aviation industry in post-pandemic India. This in itself has gone a long way to reinvigorate the aviation industry. Air India is now diligently creating more demand for air travel in India and for a country the size of India, there is enough space for international airlines to take advantage of this booming air travel demand. The thriving middle class of India is always on the look for new destinations and I anticipate Korea to be a perfect example of becoming the next Dubai or Singapore for Indian travellers.”



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# LOT Polish Airlines provides seamless connectivity throughout Europe and North America

LOT Polish Airlines entered India in September 2019 with nonstop flights between Delhi and Warsaw giving Indian travellers access to Central and Eastern Europe. Amit Ray, Director India, DACH Markets and Italy, and Head of Global Corporate and Strategic Sales, LOT Polish Airlines shares the latest insights on the airline and its India operations.

**Prashant Nayak**



▲ Amit Ray

**L**OT Polish Airlines has scaled up its frequencies to key markets worldwide post-pandemic. As far as India is concerned, it remains an important market for the airline and now operates seven weekly nonstop flights from India to their global hub in Warsaw: from Delhi every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Saturday; and from Mumbai every Sunday and Wednesday. “We imposed strong faith and always believed in the Indian market, even pre-pandemic. Today, we proudly proclaim the creation of a success story by contributing to the enormous upswing in air traffic to and from India. The country has immense potential and is decisively considered to be a very important strategic market for LOT Polish Airlines, and we certainly aspire to further strengthen our position and cooperate with Indian carriers here,” shares Amit.

Amit believes that the Indian aviation market has enough space and potential for multiple airlines to co-exist and proliferate. He says, “Our philosophy is, if you do something, do it properly, diligently, and with sincerity. India is one of the biggest

and most dynamic aviation markets in the world. So first and foremost, there is plenty of room for a number of airlines and varied business models. As mentioned before, LOT Polish Airlines is an independent carrier from Central Europe with global outreach. It made its way to India and successfully positioned itself by carefully meeting customers’ expectations, providing reliable services, and offering a huge network. It eases travel for fliers as guests from India can travel to many places across Europe and North America via our Warsaw hub, which allows fast and seamless one-terminal connectivity.”

The growth and sustainability of the aviation industry world over, including India, have been impacted band challenged by factors more than one. Limitations on infrastructure, shortage of skilled resources, security concerns, and impact on the environment are some of the leading concerns. LOT Polish Airlines strives hard to be ready and conditioned for unprecedented challenges. This includes a commercially viable business model, a contemporary product that features smooth ground and onboard experience for guests, a well-developed route network by way of their hub and spoke strategy, being a Star Alliance member since 2003, and providing frequent flyers thoughtful and meaningful value additions.

On all their flights operated from and to India, the airline deploys its flagship aircraft, the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, one of the best and most contemporary in the world, featuring three classes of service: LOT Economy Class, LOT Premium Economy Class, and LOT Business Class with competitive fares. On the culinary side, they serve Indian food catered by well-known TajSATS ex-India and by premium airline catering provider Do and Co ex-Poland. Indian movies and music are presented as part of their inflight entertainment.

“We strive to provide a pleasant

and memorable experience for our guests. And India remains a very good example. Beyond that, we are offering our guests from India fast and seamless connecting flights to many popular destinations in Europe and North America via our hub in Warsaw. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting that LOT Polish Airlines has been repeatedly recognised as one of the most punctual airlines. Additionally, on intra-European flights, LOT Polish Airlines provides complimentary tea, coffee, water, and a small snack for passengers seated in Economy Class,” informs Amit.

Speaking about their strategy to attract a higher number of frequent flyers, Amit shares, “Like in the past, we seek to create a pleasant experience for our guests, be it the first-time flyer or a frequent traveller. We are ready to traverse that extra mile and offer our guests the well-deserved hospitality they are looking for. LOT Polish Airlines is a fully integrated member of the Miles & More frequent flyer programme and provides Star Alliance benefits. With Star Alliance Gold status, one can enjoy more lounges than any other alliance and is privileged to bring a guest along. Whether its great food and refreshments or a place to work or relax, one can experience it in the lounges. The loyalty as a frequent flyer to the Star Alliance network by way of Gold Status provides recognition across the entire network with a special welcome and a set of privileges that will make the journey smoother and more comfortable.”

Post-pandemic, LOT Polish Airlines continues its well-conceived growth plans. To summarise, Amit says, “In 2022, LOT operated more than 85,000 flights carrying almost 8 million passengers. By 2030, we look forward to doubling those numbers. This growth can be fructified only with an increased fleet size and here we will continue to invest in modern, fuel-efficient aircraft to operate long-haul, medium-haul, and short-haul flights.”



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# SriLankan remarkably optimistic through the veil of visible challenges

Air passenger demand in 2023 rapidly recovers to pre-pandemic proportions on most routes, and with tourism returning to Sri Lanka, the country's national carrier, SriLankan Airlines looks forward to meeting the growing demand. Richard Nuttall, CEO, SriLankan Airlines, identifies their biggest challenge which is in restoring capacity and the main objective presently is to reinstitute their fleet and network to pre-pandemic levels. The number of flights to India is yet well below normal and restoration of the narrow-body fleet is essential for rebuilding and reinforcing their presence in terms of destinations and frequency.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Richard Nuttall

For Richard, India speaks volumes. It is not just a country; it is akin to a continent. The country's many cities with different air travel needs, in terms of market segments and destinations, are monumental. He says this aspect provides many opportunities for many domestic and international carriers. Furthermore, with India rapidly attaining the third largest position in the fastest-growing aviation market world over, the Indian Government has skilfully embarked on projects such as the UDAN scheme to promote air travel between regional airports, thus connecting more people effortlessly with metro cities and airports. "All these factors along with the number of airports doubling between 2014 and now have vastly increased the demand for both domestic and international air travel in India," opines Richard.

For SriLankan Airlines, customer expectations bear the topmost priority. On-time performance, affordable fares, hassle-free and courteous service are all important service elements the airline prioritises in deliverance. The airline especially takes care to nurture its legacy of hospitality and service onboard. Their

work has been recognised several times over at the APEX Passenger Choice Awards. However, Richard says, "There have been a number of operational challenges for airlines as we all emerge from the pandemic. The two biggest aspects are, recruiting staff- especially experienced staff, which has led to pressing issues at airports around the world. The second being the issue of supply chain which has created a shortfall of aircraft and engines. This significantly means that on-time performance has endured a setback. Our on-time performance last year was comfortably ahead of global averages, nevertheless, we are yet to achieve pre-COVID levels. In terms of service, we are looking to improve all aspects of the customer journey, and we are working to implement better feedback systems so that we can focus on the areas that are of utmost importance to our guests."

Grievances of customers and travel partners are part and parcel of business, and airlines must resolve them at the very earliest. Richards says, "At SriLankan Airlines, we try to be as proactive as possible when it comes to addressing customers' grievances, and we do this by empowering our front liners to take quick decisions when confronted with problems. We are also working to improve the use of technology, as at times of disruption, this is often the only way to handle large numbers of guests quickly and simultaneously."

The aviation industry is posed with the challenges and disruptions arising out of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, jet fuel costs, massive disruptions at airports, particularly in Europe, and cancelled flights owing to various other causes. On this, Richard mentions, "SriLankan Airlines is just as affected as every other airline. From an operational standpoint, we had to halt our service between Moscow and Colombo and the sanctions on Russia have made procuring aircraft components all the

more taxing. The crisis has also caused an increase in fuel costs, the single biggest cost component for almost all airlines across."

In the last couple of years, SriLankan has added Frankfurt and Paris back to the network and they started operations in Incheon and Sydney. Going forward, soon, the airline will mainly be concentrating on adding capacity and new frequencies to their existing routes. Further ahead, they will look to add destinations specifically in the Indian subcontinent and Indian Ocean.

To retain frequent flyers, considering the huge competition in air travel, SriLankan's FlySmiLes' customer relationship strategy is strongly pivoted on providing members with highly personalised service, exclusive rewards, privileges, and redemption opportunities. "In order to create such value to members, we try to grow our local and international partnership portfolio on a continuous basis," briefs Richard.

Conservation is the motto of SriLankan Airlines. Their corporate ethos on sustainability is six-fold and modelled on the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, overlaying a heavy emphasis on reducing their carbon footprint, conservation, and empowering people through eco-education.

"Some of our recent initiatives include promoting the study and conservation of mangroves and seagrass meadows, both of which are blue carbon sequestering ecosystems; minimising landfill waste by recycling and upcycling non-recyclable waste into lifestyle products under our award-winning 'Mathaka' project; and educating and empowering underprivileged youth to become ecotourism guides. We have many more unique projects in the pipeline, which I will be happy to share with you in times to come," concludes Richard.



# Virgin Atlantic flying high on wings of Sustainability

Virgin Atlantic's biggest focus presently is to achieve the position of the most loved travel company and maintain sustainable profitability. Alex McEwan, Country Manager, South Asia, Virgin Atlantic, elucidates the strength of the Indian aviation sector, the rationale behind satisfied customers, the airline's growth, and network expansion plans, and how sustainability remains central to the airline.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Alex McEwan

India's aviation sector is poised for phenomenal and healthy growth in terms of passengers, aircraft, and airports as experts say the sector will continue to experience robust growth owing to the surge in travel demand.

"India is Virgin Atlantic's third largest market after UK and USA, and we underline its long-term importance for us. It is a great time to be associated with India's aviation growth index. The market is already sizeable, with the thriving domestic market serving the world's most populous nation. All prognostications direct to further international growth which will propel India to be the third-largest aviation market within the next couple of years. The last four years have witnessed our growth from one direct daily service to India, to planning four direct daily services in 2024, with our launch of Bengaluru next Summer. This is a growth of more than 250 per cent in the number of seats offered," says Alex.

The inordinate growth in demand across a variety of segments shows that people have a strong avidity to travel, be it students, VFRs, holidaymakers, or corporates. The growth of Virgin Atlantic confirms and reinstates its strength in the performance they are witnessing from the Indian market. Alex is confident that the robust and strong market can support multiple airlines, which is indeed great news for customers who benefit from extra choice and competition.

Besides flight safety and enhancing service quality, customer satisfaction is a pivotal aspect for airlines. In living up to the customer expectations, Alex says, "A premium, personalised experience for our customers at every step of the journey is of paramount importance and fundamental to our vision. We aspire to become the most loved travel company, and this is what we have pioneered since day one. Our customers have always loved flying with us and frequently comment on the quality of service and warmth from our crew. We have been operating in India for nearly 23 years and we understand the pulse of the market and our customers' preferences exceedingly well."

This year Virgin Atlantic has operated a combination of A350-1000 and 787 Dreamliner aircraft to India. The cutting-edge technology of these crafts instils confidence in their customers as they are prepared to enjoy the best onboard experience available aboard the flight with Virgin Atlantic.

Considering the huge competition in air travel, frequent flyers for every airline remain an important business segment that every airline aspires to address. "Our loyalty programme, Flying Club has a variety of benefits for frequent flyers. Last year, we expanded the number of guaranteed reward seats available on each flight,

to give our customers more opportunity to use the points they earn with us or our partners. In March this year, we joined the global alliance SkyTeam as the first and only UK member airline. Our membership of SkyTeam offers members of Flying Club more opportunities to earn and redeem points across all member airlines, as well as access a network of 750 airport lounges," informs Alex.

A distinctive measure that airlines nowadays set themselves apart from their competitors is their commitment to sustainability. "As an airline founded and committed to innovation, we proudly proclaim to have won the competition to fly the first ever net zero, 100 per cent SAF flight across the Atlantic in 2023. At Virgin Atlantic, we are proud and happy to be an industry leader in sustainability. To achieve this feat, we have modernised our fleet, and multi-billion dollars have been invested to transform our fleet into what is now one of the youngest and greenest in the sky. We will be taking the delivery of 12 A330neos over the next 5 years, and they will replace older, less fuel-efficient aircraft to further strengthen our sustainability credentials. Sustainability goes beyond just our fleet choices, it permeates every aspect of our business," apprises Alex.

Stressing on the future network expansion plans, Alex reveals, "We have an exciting twelve months of growth ahead. This Winter, we will launch flights from London, Heathrow to Maldives and Dubai. Next Summer, we will launch flights to South America. This will be the very first time for us, as we are flying a daily direct service from London, Heathrow to Sao Paulo. In India, we are thrilled to continue growing, and Bengaluru will become our third destination and fourth daily service to India. Launching in Summer 2024, the addition of this new route implies that we will offer 500,000 seats in total each year between the UK and India."



# Propelled by winds of growth, Akasa spreads its wings into the boundless blue

Nine months into operations, Akasa Air, the new entrant in the Indian civil aviation sector, has already grabbed a five per cent market share, while adding a record 19 aircraft to its fleet and reaching out to 16 destinations in the country. The airline recently announced an order for four additional Boeing 737-8 jets at the recent Paris Air Show, a follow-up to the already placed order of 72 aircraft taking it to a total of 76 aircraft. For a start-up airline, this indeed is a towering achievement within a short time. To gain more insight, TTJ interacts with Praveen Iyer, Co-Founder, and Chief Commercial Officer, and Belson Coutinho, Co-Founder and Chief Marketing and Experience Officer, as they keenly share their viewpoints and some dynamics of India's newest airline.

**Prashant Nayak**



▲ Praveen Iyer

India's aviation sector is witnessing monumental expansion, with airports and airlines adding capacity amidst surging traffic post-pandemic. India is fortifying to handle over 1.3 billion passengers annually in the next 20 years. There are currently 148 airports in the country, and it is the third-largest domestic market in the world in terms of seat capacity. This is indeed an exciting phase that the aviation industry in India is witnessing post-pandemic era.

Commenting on the same, Praveen says, "The fact that India's aviation industry has unbridled growth potential is exhilarating. The rising growth of India's middle-class segment, infrastructure development and a supportive policy framework has given a commendable boost to the aviation sector. Since December 2022, the industry has been consistently witnessing over 4 lacs

passengers daily, indicating that the demand for air travel is bouncing back with a strong force. The environment is ripe and perfect for airlines to utilise the increasing travel demand and chart out their next phase of growth."

Adding to the enthusiasm, Praveen reiterates that the Indian aviation market has ample space for multiple airlines to thrive. "Absolutely," he remarks. "We are one of the most populous countries in the world and yet relatively underserved in terms of airline capacity. According to MOCA's projection, India is projected to have 40 crore air travellers on domestic and international routes by 2027 and will breach the 50 crore mark by 2030. We need multiple, well-run airlines to fulfil this swell in demand. The Indian aviation sector is extremely promising, with a bright future with unlimited potential ahead and the market is large enough for many carriers to profitably participate," adds Praveen.

Airlines are up against multiple challenges when it comes to growth. The competition in the airline industry today has also turned highly intense. "Every industry is presented with its own set of challenges and aviation is no exception. One of the main challenges in the industry is the high value-added tax (VAT) on aviation turbine fuel (ATF) where fuel being a major cost component. This adds a lot of financial overhead to an airline. However, measures taken by the Ministry of Civil Aviation in this regard have been commendable. The reduced ATF tax rates in some states as an outcome of the ministry's ongoing initiatives have greatly assisted airlines in controlling a number of costs," mentions Praveen.

On being asked if the carrier is living up to the customers' expectations, Belson responds, "Akasa Air has



▲ Belson Coutinho

been instrumental in redefining the representation of an Indian airline. We have taken decisions that have been category-defining in many ways. Our vision behind Akasa Air was to create an airline that is dependable and that everybody can relate to. Since its inception, Akasa Air has instituted multiple industry-leading, customer-friendly products, and services to provide travellers with an inclusive, warm, comfortable, and efficient flying experience. We continue to leverage consumer technology and our recent features of automated gate number and baggage belt number notifications on mobile, bear testimony to our commitment, extending a seamless experience to our customers."

Belson further adds, "Our empathy-driven culture, the scrumptious food of Café Akasa, our distinctive in-flight music, USB ports, softer seat cushions





and spacious legroom all ensure a customer experience that is second to none. We are now escalating this experience to a whole new level with our add-on services with the use of select your seat, priority check-in, and board first, for a smoother journey. Flyers can ease travel with our branded fares, car rentals, hotel bookings and Akasa VIP experience, all offered as part of our continued commitment to their convenience.”

Akasa Air is also focused on being an inclusive airline, introducing its ‘Pets on Akasa’ policy to enable pet parents to travel with their fur babies. An in-flight safety manual has been established in Braille for the visually impaired. “Impact of our policies is reflected well in our consistently increasing passenger load and we are excited about our growth chart,” remarks Belson.

Attending to and resolving grievances of customers and travel partners, one of their most important customer links is the round-the-clock Akasa Care Centre. Belson elaborates, “Our Care Officers are always available and equipped to provide support for voice, email, and social media queries. Customer feedback, coupled with our world-class listening and response management system, helps us constantly enhance and optimise customer experience. We address consumer complaints constructively and take their feedback into consideration for the improvement of our products and services.”

Customer centricity backed by empathy-driven communication being the core marketing strategy, they connect and engage with first-time travellers as importantly and diligently as with frequent flyers. “Our marketing campaigns are designed to communicate the airline’s commitment towards creating a warm, dependable, and affordable air travel

experience that creates an inclusive environment for all. Furthermore, our focus is to deliver personalised and local content as we expand our services across the length and breadth of the country,” assures Belson.

Discussing the airline’s growth strategy in terms of domestic or international operations, Praveen believes that as part of their dedication to serving the country and its citizens, they are improving accessibility to air travel by establishing a strong national presence and providing linkages from metros to tier 2 and tier 3 cities across the country. “Our phased approach to support our network plans progressively connecting more cities, allows us to provide continuously reliable and efficient connections between sectors,” says Praveen.

Akasa is currently operating to 16 destinations across the country—Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Kochi, Delhi, Guwahati, Agartala, Pune, Lucknow, Goa, Hyderabad, Varanasi, Bagdogra, Bhubaneswar, and Kolkata. Adding more, Praveen informs, “To fulfil our commitment of progressively adding more cities to our route offerings, we are delighted to augment our network and are hopeful of commencing our international operations by the end of this year. We have the fastest-growing fleet for a new airline. Having inducted 19 aircraft to date, we are looking to take delivery of our 20th aircraft soon, which will empower us to fly internationally by year-end. By the end of FY24, we aim to have 25-30 aircraft in our fleet.”

Moving ahead, Belson highlights two pivotal focus areas of Akasa Air – a sustainable way forward for the industry and hiring the right talent to help propel their growth journey. He elaborates, “Awareness of climate change and its impact is of major consideration

amongst people today. This behavioural change reflects in their travel patterns, with travellers increasingly choosing environment-friendly options. With sustainability being the core of Akasa Air’s values, we take special pride in proclaiming to be the greenest, most environmentally progressive airline. Our commitment is reflected across the use of aircraft, products, and services, in-flight, on-ground, office premises and our engagement with partners. Some of these initiatives include fuel-efficient engines, sustainably curated crew uniforms, and eco-friendly inflight meal packaging. A key decision taken by the airline has been to move away from the ceremonial water cannon salutes at flight and route inaugurations to manage water wastage, which has resulted in saving approximately 3,00,000 litres of water to date. We shall continue to introduce many more such initiatives as we stride along in our mission to be the most environmentally progressive airline.”

The right talent pool is indeed the backbone of an airline. Aviation is a dynamic industry, and every airline needs a workforce that is equipped to meet the challenges of the industry. “In our endeavour to create a future-ready workforce, we established Akasa Air Learning Academy to enhance the airline’s capabilities in providing hands-on and experiential training to its fast-growing employee base including pilots, cabin crew, engineers and airport services, and security personnel. We have kept an immense focus on our employee training to uphold the values of Akasa Air and fulfil our promise of being a warm and dependable airline. We are positive that this investment will be beneficial in attracting current and future talent to Akasa Air,” concludes Belson.



# Jettwings Airways sets new course as first airline from Northeast India

In a significant announcement, Jettwings Airways revealed its plans to be the first airline from Northeast India to have acquired the necessary certification. The airline aims to provide luxury-oriented services, enhance connectivity, and explore international routes. Their commitment to a seamless passenger experience includes personalised services and advanced technology integration.

Vartik Sethi

**T**ransforming the landlocked region of Northeast India into an airborne destination, Jettwings is set to take off Northeast India's aviation industry. During a recent press conference held in New Delhi, the airline announced its plans to become the first airline from Northeast India. The event served as a platform to announce the airline's successful acquisition of the No Objection Certificate (NOC) for scheduled commuter air transport services from the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

While acknowledging the challenges and intricacies inherent in the aviation industry, the team expressed their unwavering confidence in their ability to navigate these obstacles. Drawing inspiration from their successful track record in various diversified businesses in the Northeast region spanning over two decades, they were poised to bring their expertise to the aviation sector.

An underlying theme throughout the conference was the favourable market conditions in the aviation industry. Jettwings' representatives highlighted the ongoing growth and prosperity of the sector, fuelling their optimism for the future. They acknowledged the inherent complexities of operating an airline business, yet reassured the audience of their long-term vision and commitment to success. The airline announced its initial phase of operations, which will begin with two leased aircraft expected to arrive by October or November. Jettwings Airways plans to gradually expand its fleet to a total of five aircraft within the first year. The company's focus will be on connecting the capitals of the Northeast states and other airports in the region to ensure better accessibility for travellers.

The Airline identified the people of Northeast India as having a fondness for luxury and a willingness to spend on premium services. They expressed their commitment to providing the best luxury services at affordable prices, as Jettwings aims to cater to the specific



needs of the region's passengers.

Central to Jettwings' strategy is the provision of unique services catering to the people in Northeast India. The airline's representatives emphasised the region's penchant for luxury and the inherent feasibility of air travel due to its landlocked nature. With a firm focus on affordable luxury and enhanced connectivity, the company aims to bridge the transportation gap within the Northeast as well as facilitate seamless travel to other parts of the country. Moreover, they expressed their intent to explore international routes in the long run, capitalising on the region's strategic proximity to five neighbouring countries.

During the interactive Q&A session, the Jettwings team responded to inquiries concerning funding, leasing arrangements, and their target market. They assured the audience that funding would not pose a challenge, citing established relationships with bankers and the robust support provided by their other successful businesses. Jettwings Airways plans to lease five aircraft within the inaugural year, with a specific focus on the segment of aircraft with a capacity of 180 seats or less, which they believe currently faces limited competition. With

a focus on luxury, affordability, and regional connectivity, the airline aims to establish itself as a prominent player in the Indian aviation industry.

In response to a question from Travel Trade Journal regarding the premium and luxury experience offered by the airline, Sanjay Aditya Singh, Group Managing Director and CEO, Jettwings Airways, expressed their dedication to enhancing the overall passenger experience. Singh stated, "We have been working very hard on developing internals in the system where we have got state coordination with the crew as well as the commander of the aircraft as well as the base system of the aircraft." He further added, "We have generated a technical system where our crew is going to have their own iPads. The iPads will be fleetted by the information of the passengers who are regular flyers, allowing us to have regular registrations and provide personalised services."

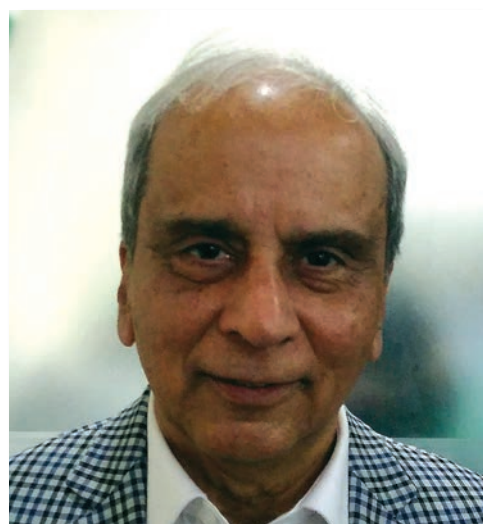
Additionally, the airline is exploring the potential of AI technology to track and enhance customer interactions. Singh emphasised that these initiatives aim to make the travel experience with Jettwings truly seamless and remarkable.



# Air travel has gained momentum, but is it affordable for the common man?

The Indian air travel industry has been going through a state of euphoria since the two mega aircraft orders by Air India and IndiGo for close to 1000 aircraft between them, from Boeing and Airbus, were announced recently. There was renewed enthusiasm from deep-pocketed investors into the air transport sector after the entry of the TATA Group, Rakesh Jhunjhunwala, and the Adani's into the airline and airport business. A palpable sense of expectation of greater things from India's aviation sector is noticed by investors, politicians, and the public in general. Home to the world's largest population and very low air travel penetration, aviation surely is viewed as the next big sector on the horizon for India.

**Narender Kumar Baveja**



▲ Narender Kumar Baveja

**T**he aviation industry in India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing industries in the country in recent years. While this is undoubtedly so, it, however, tends to ignore several speed-breakers that hamper this potential growth and are totally out of sync with the government's avowed policy to make air travel affordable for the masses.

The post-pandemic era has seen a huge growth in air travel. First, it was the return of leisure travel - dubbed "revenge travel" as people began to venture out and try to make up for all the action they missed during the three years of the pandemic. This was followed by business travel as corporations went back to face-to-face meetings even as incentive tours, conferences, and exhibitions all returned. However, a combination of policy decisions, global political events, supply chain constraints, and environmental factors have all come together, creating major headwinds for the industry. These need to be quickly addressed and resolved if India's air transport sector is to keep its

date with its destiny.

Chief amongst these was the recent announcement by the Ministry of Finance to bring about a major enhancement in tax collected at source on tour packages. This rate is expected to increase from 5 per cent to 20 per cent starting from July 1, 2023, which means that if a business trip costs Rs 100,000, the corresponding TCS amount will be Rs 20,000, which is equivalent to 20 per cent of the air travel cost. Such a steep increase in expenses has dampened demand for both business and leisure travel as it has impacted travel budget allocations and spending patterns of both corporates and individuals alike.

In a parallel development (attributed to the lack of sufficient manpower and resources), the US, Canada, and European countries have been delaying the issuance of visas for Indian nationals. This delay has resulted in serious repercussions on travel, thereby hindering the recovery of international air travel from India. The delays are causing uncertainty and making it difficult for travellers to plan their trips or defer their travel or look for alternative destinations. As a result, airlines are losing out on the traditional traffic to the EU and North America. As a consequence, the existing demand is being forced to pay higher fares to partially offset these losses.

Additionally, the high airfares are being driven by several factors. One of the biggest stumbling blocks is the supply chain constraints on aircraft spares, including engines, leading to a shortage of aircraft. Add to this a general shortage of pilots, longer routings, and load restrictions due to the ongoing Ukraine war and the closure of Russian airspace and the net result is a huge increase in

costs, which airlines have no option but to pass onto the passenger. The shortage of aircraft and pilots are also impacting the return to full schedules. With fewer flights available, airlines are forced to increase fares to cover their costs and maintain profitability.

Overall, the combination of new tax regulations, visa delays, supply chain constraints, geopolitical tensions, and shortage of aircraft and pilots is affecting international air travel out of India, making it more expensive and difficult for travellers. This situation is likely to continue until these issues are resolved, and international air travel demand returns to pre-pandemic levels.

It is imperative for the Government to step in at this juncture and view aviation as the cornerstone of its ambition to make India into a 5 trillion-dollar economy by 2025. Its active role in promoting more international air services without restricting them to Indian carriers alone will go a long way in easing capacity constraints. Likewise, proactive engagements with US and EU to find a mutually acceptable solution that streamlines the visa issuance process for Indian nationals are also urgently called for. Last but not least, open and regular dialogue with industry stakeholders is absolutely essential if regressive legislation like the TCS rule is to be avoided.

We are confident that India's steady rise to the top of air travel markets cannot be halted as we look forward to more than three decades of great growth in the sector. However, we must take care and ensure, as guardians and facilitators of this growth, all reasonable steps are taken so we are not denied our rightful place in the sun.

*About the Author: Narender Kumar Baveja is the Managing Director at Global Legend Group.*



# Beyond THE TICKET PRICE

As travel agencies and tour operators assist customers in booking their well-deserved breaks or holidays, it is of utmost importance to proactively disclose the hidden costs associated with airline travel. By transparently communicating the intricacies of additional expenses beyond the ticket prices, agencies empower their customers to make informed decisions, effectively manage their travel budgets, and avoid any unforeseen financial surprises.

Rajat Jain

**W**hen it comes to booking a flight, the cost of flying is not always the bottom line. That cheap airfare looks like a pretty great deal at first—but, by the time you hit the check-out page, the price has suddenly doubled! Here are some pointers worth looking into while booking flights.

## Baggage Fees

One of the most significant hidden costs imposed by airlines is baggage fees. While carry-on bags often remain exempt, checked luggage typically incurs additional charges. Airlines have implemented strict weight and size limits and exceeding them can lead to substantial fees. It is imperative for travel agencies to educate their customers about these regulations, enabling them to make informed packing choices and avoid unexpected financial burdens.

## Seat Selection Fees

Gone are the days when choosing a seat on an airplane came as a complimentary service. Many airlines now charge extra for seat selection, particularly for preferred seats with more legroom or desirable locations within the cabin. Travel agencies ought to inform their customers about these additional charges, empowering them to make decisions based on their preferences and within their available budget.

## Flight Change and Cancellation Fees

Unanticipated circumstances may require travellers to modify their flight schedules or cancel their bookings altogether. Airlines typically impose change and cancellation fees that can be substantial, varying as per the airline, fare type, and

timing of the changes. Travel agencies play a vital role in highlighting these potential financial implications to their customers, allowing them to make well-informed choices regarding their travel itineraries.

It is imperative to note that low-cost carriers often offer non-refundable and non-changeable tickets. Travel agencies should counsel their customers to book such tickets only if they are definite about their likelihood to make it to the flight as per schedule. Alternatively, in case of any uncertainty the traveller may possess about travel plans, he should preferably consider more flexible options offered by full-service airlines instead.

In cases where airlines are responsible for delays, cancellations, or re-routing of flights, it is essential for travel agencies to inform their customers that compensation, alternative travel arrangements, or hotel accommodation are unlikely to be provided. Travellers will need to handle such situations independently, even when the airline is blameworthy. Managing customer expectations in such situations is of significant importance to avoid discontentment and enable customers to plan the next step accordingly.

## Transportation to and from Airports

The cost of airline travel extends beyond the plane ticket itself, and travel agencies should clearly emphasise this to their customers. Ground transportation expenses including fuel costs for personal vehicles, taxi fares, or public transportation fees, should be factored into the trip's overall cost. By raising awareness about these additional expenses, agencies can assist and support customers by providing them

with insight into planning their budgets effectively.

## Airport Parking Fees

For customers who choose to drive to the airport, parking fees can be a significant hidden cost. Airport parking rates can be high, especially for long-term stays. In such instances, travel agencies should necessarily recommend the consideration of alternative transportation options or researching off-site parking facilities to mitigate expenses. By proactively providing such information, agencies can help customers save costs and enhance their overall travel experience.

## In-Flight Amenities

While airlines often provide basic amenities such as meals and drinks during longer flights, the quality and availability of these services may vary. Some airlines charge for snacks, alcoholic beverages, and even water is at times chargeable on shorter flights. It is advisable for travel agencies to inform their customers about these unrealised expenses, enabling them to be incorporated into their financial estimate. By setting realistic expectations, agencies can thus avert customers from being caught off guard by unanticipated costs during their journey.

## Additional Services and Upgrades

Airlines offer various additional services and upgrades, such as priority boarding, extra legroom, and access to airport lounges. These amenities can enhance the travel experience but often bears a price tag. Travellers stand to benefit immensely should such information about these services be provided in detail to them by the travel agency well in advance.



# SUSTAINABILITY

## A giant leap to the new generation

Each year Arabian Travel Market (ATM) focuses the spotlight on specific aspects of travel that will be pivotal in determining the direction that the travel and tourism industry will take to move forward. In line with the theme, 'Working Towards Net Zero,' ATM 2023 explored how innovative sustainable travel trends will evolve and identify growth strategies within specific key vertical sectors. The various sessions served as a platform for regional experts to analyse a sustainable future. One of them was, Sustainable Luxury: At What Cost?

Sonika Bohra

**S**ustainability surpasses just a buzzword and is now an inevitable component of any luxury business looking for traction with the new generation, but this credible advantage has a cost to it. Post-pandemic, guest perceptions have shifted with rising climate change awareness and a growing expectation amongst millennial travellers in particular. Toeing the line, luxury hospitality and travel brands are embracing sustainability. This remains challenging as the cost of switching to a full sustainability-driven operation twinned with fulfilling guest expectations of luxury, and maintaining brand standards, however, presents a test in itself.

The session on 'Sustainable Luxury: At What Cost?' included a varied range of insights into the function of luxury travel leading the tourism industry's sustainable change in the Middle East. Moderated by Joe Mortimer, Editor-at-Large at Destinations of the World News, panelists included Nadia Ibrahim, member of the Board of Directors of the UN Global Compact, Amir Golbarg, Senior Vice President-Operations, Middle East and Africa, Minor Hotels, Candice D'Cruz, VP Luxury Brands, Marriott International and William Harley Fleming, Vice President-Operations, JA The Resort and Indian Ocean.

The tourism industry in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is embracing sustainable travel. Sustainability is indeed surfacing as an increasingly important consideration within the Middle East's luxury travel sector, especially in the UAE, where 61 per cent of residents are willing to

pay a premium for more responsible, eco-friendly, and sustainable tourism experiences. However, the panelists opined that, rather than cost, the Middle East's luxury travel sector should focus on the long-term gains offered by decarbonisation, waste reduction, and community initiatives.

"Implementing sustainable practices without compromising the guest experience is a challenge for luxury hospitality brands, yet undoubtedly remains a definite future imperative," says Nadia Ibrahim. She adds, "Luxury and sustainability have not always gone hand in glove, but this is evolving. We are witnessing the emergence of a new generation of travellers that want high-end experiences that do not compromise sustainability. This has led airlines, hotels, travel agencies, and tourist destinations to inculcate sustainability into their existing services and integrate it to attract more customers."

The arena of travellers has expanded from the pool and shopping to including climate change and local produce. A decrease in ecological footprint is what environment-conscious travellers are increasingly looking for in a destination stay.

Candice D'Cruz pointed out that these considerations are increasingly reflected by consumers, "We are seeing that luxury travellers want to spend more time connecting with the places they visit. They also want to be involved with brands. It's no longer a one-way conversation, and if you're having two-way, how transparent are you being? Luxury consumers tend to be less forgiving. They want to connect with brands that reflect their values, and

sustainability is unquestionably one of those values."

Luxury travellers have coupled their demand from just a room with a view to tourism with a conscience. Some guests feel guilty about soaking in a bathtub and wasting too much water. The only solace is when the owner assures them that the wastewater would be recycled or treated and released into the nearby fields.

"Sustainability is no longer a choice, it is something we sincerely need to work upon," remarks William Harley Fleming as he emphasises the necessity of positive action, noting there is a genuine business case for sustainability. "This is not Plan B. The cost of not investing in sustainability can adversely affect both your business and reputation. And at the end of the day, our industry does generate jobs, so we ought to be responsible and act right now," says Fleming.

Change being perpetual, the luxury hospitality sector is surging forward in the positive direction, whereas strategising remains the short-term to green-light. The long-term benefit still needs to be addressed and implemented.

Referencing the approach, Minor Hotels' Anantara brand has taken to sustainable luxury, Amir Golbarg says, "As globalisation has opened doors to the world, localisation is now of equal importance. Our decision to go indigenous has a lot to do with the costs incurred with sustainability related to the importation of goods. It's all about how you are adding benefit to the communities in which you operate. We need to shift our focus away from short-term costs towards long-term gains."



# Unveiling the treasures of New Zealand



New Zealand, a land renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and warm hospitality, offers a treasure trove of experiences for travellers seeking unforgettable adventures. In this article, Travel Trade Journal invites you to embark on a virtual journey, exploring the remarkable activities that await in Christchurch and Akaroa. From vibrant cityscapes to idyllic retreats nestled amidst nature's splendour, let us unveil the wonders that make New Zealand a must-visit destination.

Sonika Bohra

## CHRISTCHURCH — Aromatic Adventures and Scenic Delights



### Craft Your Signature Scent

Christchurch, the gateway to the South Island, offers a blend of aromatic adventures and scenic delights that are sure to captivate travellers. Begin your exploration by immersing your senses in the art of perfumery at Fragranzi. Step into a unique workshop where skilled artisans will guide you through the secrets of blending fragrances, allowing you to create your very own signature scent. Unleash your creativity and leave with a personalized perfume that captures your essence, a truly memorable memento of your time in Christchurch.



### Unleash Your Inner Master Chef

For those with a passion for culinary delights, Riverside Kitchen beckons with its Master Chef experience. Join expert chefs in a hands-on cooking class and dive into the world of gastronomy. Learn techniques, discover local flavours, and craft delectable dishes using fresh, seasonal ingredients. The best part awaits at the end, as you indulge in the fruits of your labour, savouring the exquisite flavours you've created.

Just like in the famous Master Chef show, you'll venture to the local market to select fresh, seasonal produce that will be the foundation of your culinary masterpiece. With ingredients in hand, return to the kitchen and let your creativity shine. As you prepare your dish, pay attention to every detail, from





presentation to plating, as these elements will be evaluated by judges. Showcase your skills and strive for perfection in taste, texture, and overall execution. The judges will assess your creation based on a variety of factors, ensuring a true Master Chef experience.

The Master Chef experience at Riverside Kitchen not only satisfies your culinary cravings but also fosters teamwork and camaraderie. Whether you're participating as an individual or as part of a MICE group, the journey from market to plate will strengthen bonds, encourage collaboration, and create lasting memories.



**Paddle the Historic Avon River**

To further enrich your cultural experience, embark on a serene adventure along the historic Avon River. Paddle a waka, a traditional Maori canoe, and immerse yourself in the serenity of nature while learning about Maori history, customs, and traditions. Guided tours with Waka on Avon provide a deeper appreciation for the cultural heritage of Christchurch as you glide along the picturesque river, surrounded by breathtaking scenery.

The Maori are the indigenous Polynesian inhabitants of New Zealand, have a deep connection to the land and water. By paddling a waka along the Avon River, you'll experience a sense of unity with nature and gain insights into the Maori way of life. Knowledgeable guides will share captivating stories and legends, allowing you to appreciate the cultural significance of the river and its surroundings.

**Explore the City's Heritage**

No visit to Christchurch would be complete without hopping aboard the iconic Christchurch Tram. This vintage tram takes you on a delightful journey through the city's rich history and architectural marvels. Sit back, relax, and admire the landmarks, gardens, and charming neighbourhoods that showcase the vibrant heart of Christchurch. As you ride along, fascinating commentary



about the city's past and present add depth and context to your exploration.



As you traverse the streets, keep an eye out for the captivating murals, graffiti, and wall art that adorn the city's buildings. Christchurch has embraced street art as a vibrant form of expression, and the result is a visual feast that adds a touch of creativity to the urban landscape. From colourful murals depicting local stories to thought-provoking graffiti, the street art scene in Christchurch is a testament to the city's resilience, creativity, and spirit.





# Akaroa — Serene Retreats and Celestial Wonders

Nestled on the Banks Peninsula, just 75 kilometres southeast of Christchurch, lies the picturesque town of Akaroa, a tranquil paradise. The journey begins with a stay at the Akaroa Criterion Motel, offering stunning harbour views and a haven of comfort. Enjoy rooms with balconies or patios, and revel in the convenience of being surrounded by the town's finest culinary and shopping establishments.



### Explore an Alpaca Farm

Akaroa's charm extends beyond its accommodations. A haven of serene retreats and celestial wonders, it invites you to immerse yourself in its captivating offerings. Begin your journey at Shamarra Alpacas, where an alpaca farm tour awaits. Explore the farm, interact with these gentle creatures, and learn about sustainable farming practices. Feel the softness of their fleece and take in the tranquillity of the picturesque surroundings. Don't forget to visit the Shamarra Alpaca Shop, where you can find luxurious, natural, and dye-free alpaca knitwear to commemorate your visit.

The experience offers a unique opportunity to connect with these adorable animals, learn about sustainable farming practices, and support a local business that values the well-being of its alpacas. It's an experience that will leave a lasting impression on animal lovers and nature enthusiasts alike, reminding us of the incredible bonds we can forge with the animal kingdom and the beauty of coexisting harmoniously with nature.



### Experience the Thrill of Jet Boating

For thrill-seekers, Alpine Jet Thrills offers an adrenaline-pumping adventure. Hop aboard a jet boat and embark on a thrilling ride through Akaroa's pristine waters. Surrounded by stunning landscapes and breathtaking cliffs, hold on tight as the boat deftly manoeuvres through narrow gorges, sending sprays of water cascading around you. Immerse yourself in the natural beauty of the area while experiencing the excitement of jet boating. The sheer intensity of the experience will leave you breathless, your heart pounding in your chest as you become one with the exhilarating rush of the ride.



### Scenic Helicopter Ride over the Southern Alps

GCH Aviation presents an opportunity to take your Akaroa experience to new heights with a scenic helicopter ride over the Southern Alps. Prepare to be awestruck as you soar above the rugged peaks, beholding untouched wilderness and glistening rivers flowing from the majestic Southern Alps through the Canterbury Plains to the Pacific Ocean. This unforgettable journey promises panoramic views and a sense of freedom amidst nature's grandeur.

As the helicopter soars above the rugged peaks of the Southern Alps, a panorama of untouched wilderness unfolds before your eyes. Look down in awe as you witness the mighty Waimakariri River. Like a graceful serpent, the river twists and turns, carving its path through the vast Canterbury Plains, from the majestic Southern Alps to the expansive Pacific Ocean. The sight is truly awe-inspiring, a testament to the raw power and beauty of nature.

### A Celestial Symphony

As the day turns into night, uncover the celestial symphony with Akaroa Stargazing. Venture into the darkness of the countryside, away from light pollution, and witness the brilliance of the night sky. Marvel at the twinkling stars, planets, and constellations as knowledgeable guides unravel the mysteries of the universe. Through fascinating insights and stories, you'll gain a deeper appreciation for the wonders that adorn the night-time canvas.

The region's pristine skies offer an ideal setting to explore the wonders of the universe. Gaze at a tapestry of stars, planets, and celestial phenomena as you learn about the constellations and their mythological stories. Witness the captivating Southern Cross, the Magellanic Clouds, and other astronomical marvels that are visible in this remarkable part of the world. This enchanting experience promises to leave you in awe of the vastness and beauty of the universe.





# A picturesque Swiss train journey on the Zentralbahn

The Zentralbahn connects the fresh air mountain village of Engelberg and Mt Titlis to Interlaken and the mountains of the Bernese Oberland via Switzerland's most beautiful city of Lucerne. The journey is part of the Grand Train Tour of Switzerland and an official Scenic Train journey as recognised by Switzerland Tourism.

## Luzern–Interlaken Express

Lucerne and Interlaken are no doubt two of Switzerland's most popular tourist destinations. That's Luzern–Interlaken Express is the most beautiful way to travel from Lucerne to Interlaken. The journey is rewarding as the ride on the Luzern–Interlaken Express connects two world-famous destinations and draws to its close more quickly than one would like

and countless waterfalls that adorn the scenery.

The most beautiful part is the route that connects guests while getting amazed, like climbing on board in Central Switzerland, sitting back and relaxing, and arriving in the Bernese Oberland duly impressed by breathtaking scenic splendour – all in just under two hours. That's the Luzern–Interlaken Express!

The train operates 365 days a year and there are 14 connections per day and direction, hourly between 7.00 and 20.00. The travel time is 1 hour and 50 minutes.

## Luzern–Engelberg Express

Ready to climb new heights? The Zentralbahn Luzern–Engelberg Express takes guests from Lucerne to Engelberg in only 43 minutes. On the way, ride along the banks of a lively mountain stream, view the snow mountain, Titlis, and witness the idyllic valley landscape. Enjoy the relaxing, comfortable, and rapid journey to Engelberg, an excellent



day-trip destination. And from there the Titlis-Rotair aerial cable car will lift you up to 3238 metres above sea level, to the eternal snow and ice of the Titlis range, and to many more views that will make their heart soar.

This is the fastest and most comfortable way to travel with direct access to downtown Engelberg and Lucerne. The train operates 365 days a year with 17 connections per day and direction, hourly between 6.00 and 22.00. The travel time is 43-47 minutes to/from Engelberg.



– guests could forever go on looking at the mountain panorama, turquoise lakes,

# RSG to develop sailing adventures with WAMA Sailing Club

The Red Sea and Amaala has announced a major step towards building a sailing legacy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and providing world-class guest experiences at its destinations. The WAMA Sailing Club, operated by RSG's water sports subsidiary brand, will give visitors and Saudi sailors the chance to experience the beauty of the Red Sea and its idyllic sailing conditions – until now largely overlooked by the sporting community.

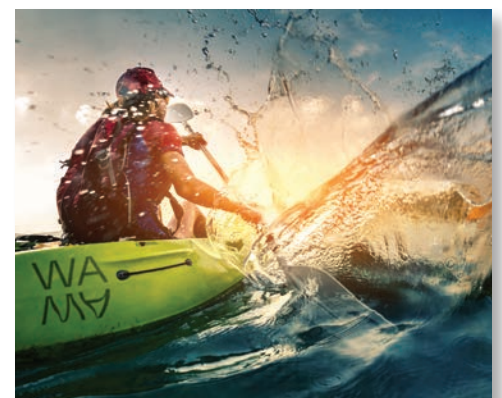
## Team TTJ

**G**uided by WAMA's expert instructors, now guests will enjoy activities such as sailing, crewing, trapezing and windsurfing, with visitors able to explore the islands and magnificent marine and bird life of Saudi Arabia's northwest coastline through 'Blue Hole' orienteering and destination sails. WAMA's 'Respect for the Sea' program will also see guests developing a deeper understanding of staying safe and sailing responsibly.

The Club will also create exciting employment opportunities for Saudis and international sailors, boosting the Kingdom's hospitality and sports sector and contributing to Saudi Vision 2030.

This will include work experience for Saudi teenagers, who will be able to learn new skills and enhance their understanding of water-based careers. There will be other voluntary and paid work experience roles, allowing local people to learn from and work alongside seasonal staff, as they educate visitors about protecting the oceans.

"The WAMA Sailing Club will provide everyone, regardless of background or ability, the opportunity to explore the wonders of the Red Sea archipelago, experience an exhilarating sport, learn more about marine conservation, and enjoy the sense of independence and freedom sailing offers," said John Pagano, Group CEO, Red Sea Global.



WAMA Sailing Club is supported by RS Sailing, an international leader in providing world-class sailboats and specialist equipment. The organisation is also a pioneer for sustainable sailing with smart designs to reduce its footprint while on the go.



# INDIA EMERGES AS FASTEST-RECOVERING MARKET FOR SYDNEY AND NEW SOUTH WALES

Destination New South Wales (Destination NSW), Australia's premier destination, continues to captivate tourists from around the world with its diverse landscapes, vibrant cities, and rich cultural heritage. With his vast experience in the travel and tourism sector, Samar Chokshi, Country Manager, Destination NSW, has an important role to play in implementing strategies to enhance New South Wales's tourism offerings. In this article, we examine Chokshi's insights and the impact of his vision on the tourism landscape in New South Wales.

Vartik Sethi



▲ Samar Chokshi

In a recently held media roundtable event hosted by Destination NSW, Samar Chokshi, the Country Manager, shared insightful statistics and updates on the Indian tourism market. The event shed light on the strategies employed by Destination NSW to foster relationships with key stakeholders and promote Sydney and its regional destinations.

## Creating Unforgettable Experiences

Samar Chokshi firmly believes that the key to attracting and retaining tourists lies in offering exceptional experiences that leave an indelible mark on their memories. He emphasises the importance of curating diverse itineraries that cater to the preferences of different types of travellers. Chokshi states, "Our aim is to provide a holistic travel experience where visitors can immerse themselves in the natural beauty, cultural richness, and thrilling adventures that NSW has to offer."

## Harnessing the Power of Digital Innovation

Recognising the ever-evolving digital landscape, Chokshi has championed the use of technology and digital platforms to reach a wider audience. "Digital innovation has revolutionised the way we connect with travellers. Through strategic partnerships, we leverage social media, mobile applications, and data-driven insights to engage with potential visitors and showcase the myriad attractions of NSW," he affirms. By embracing cutting-edge technologies, Chokshi aims to ensure that NSW remains at the forefront of the global tourism industry.

## The Feel New Brand

To encapsulate the transformative effect that Sydney and NSW have on visitors, Destination NSW launched a brand platform called "Feel New" in 2021. This brand promise reflects NSW's commitment to energising and rejuvenating travellers, leaving them with a lasting sense of renewal. By combining the diverse natural wonders, vibrant culture, and captivating experiences, the board wishes to ensure that a trip to Sydney and NSW is an experience like no other.

## Sustainable Tourism and Conservation

As the world becomes increasingly conscious of the need for sustainable practices, Chokshi has spearheaded initiatives that promote responsible tourism and the conservation of Destination NSW's pristine natural resources. "We have implemented eco-friendly policies and encouraged sustainable practices among our tourism operators. This way, we can protect our environment while providing tourists with unique experiences," says Chokshi. By prioritising sustainable tourism, he envisions NSW as a leading example of harmonious coexistence between visitors and the natural world.





## Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement

Chokshi firmly believes that successful tourism initiatives require close collaboration with stakeholders and strong partnerships within the industry. By fostering relationships with local communities, travel operators, and government agencies, he has been able to create synergistic efforts to boost tourism in NSW. Chokshi states, "Our collective efforts are crucial in ensuring that every visitor has a truly remarkable and fulfilling experience in NSW."

Chokshi's remarks revealed the significant growth and potential of the Indian market for Sydney and New South Wales. "India has emerged as the fastest-recovering market for Sydney and NSW," emphasised Chokshi. "We have witnessed a remarkable 90 per cent increase in arrivals compared to the previous year, positioning India as the fourth largest market for us."

He highlighted the collaborative efforts of various government departments, including Study New South Wales, US Business Events Sydney, and Partners, to ensure continued visitation from India, not only for incentive travel but also for student tourism. "Our collaborative efforts with government departments and organisations have played a crucial role in promoting Sydney and the broader Sydney Plus strategy, including regional destinations such as the Blue Mountains, Hunter Valley, and Port Stephens," added Chokshi.

Under the Sydney Plus strategy, Destination NSW focuses on promoting not just Sydney but also at least one or two regional destinations in all their marketing programs and initiatives. This approach highlights the diversity and richness of experiences offered by locations such as the Blue Mountains, Hunter Valley, Port Stephens, Coffs Harbour, Bowral, Wollongong, and Jervis Bay.

There has been positive growth from the Indian market, the country currently ranks as the fourth largest market for Sydney and New South Wales, with 103,550 arrivals as of the year-end of February 2023. This represents a remarkable 90 per cent increase compared to the previous year, putting India only 15 per cent away from pre-COVID arrival numbers. The top three markets include New Zealand, the USA, and the UK.

"Sydney remains the gateway to Australia, surpassing other destinations in terms of knowledge, awareness, and visitor arrivals," said Chokshi. "India stands as the second-ranked market for experience awareness, indicating the strong appeal of Sydney and NSW to Indian travellers."

Speaking about the aviation sector, Chokshi highlighted the significant increase in direct non-stop flights between India and Sydney. "Air India's direct aviation capacity has doubled, with daily flights compared to just three to four times a week pre-COVID. Qantas also resumed its flights, offering four weekly direct flights between Bengaluru and Sydney. Other airlines, including Singapore Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, SriLankan Airlines, and Scoot, have also increased their flights, resulting in a 300 per cent overall increase in direct non-stop aviation capacity from India to Sydney."

Acknowledging Sydney's global performance, Chokshi presented research statistics showing Sydney's strong position as the gateway to Australia. The city enjoys a considerable advantage over other destinations in terms of knowledge, awareness, and visitor arrivals. Indian travelers demonstrate a high level of awareness and consideration for Sydney, ranking it among the top destinations for experiences.

India's significance as a source market for Sydney and NSW is undeniable. "Indians spend the most number of nights

in Sydney, making them the top market for the duration of stay. Their expenditure while in Sydney also contributes significantly, making India the third-ranked market for tourism expenditure," revealed Chokshi. The compounded annual growth rate for Indian visitors over the past three years stands at 10 per cent, highlighting the market's steady expansion.

Chokshi further emphasised that Indian travelers seek unique experiences, particularly in dining, shopping, and coastal and nature experiences. With its diverse offerings, unparalleled experiences, and warm hospitality, Sydney and NSW are poised to solidify their position as the preferred destination for Indian travelers seeking unforgettable adventures Down Under.

Answering a pertinent question raised by Travel Trade Journal at the conference about the recommended stay duration during the post-COVID-19 era, Chokshi said, "Great question, as we receive this inquiry frequently, and it's a constant topic of discussion with our partners. We highly recommend a minimum stay of four nights in Sydney and at least one to two nights in a nearby region. During these excursions, visitors have the option to explore nearby attractions on day trips, or venture to more distant locations that offer unique activities and experiences. It is advisable to spend at least one night in these regions, as it not only provides a more immersive experience but also makes other neighboring regions easily accessible."

As Destination NSW continues its collaborative efforts, the future of Indian tourism to Sydney and NSW appears promising. With an increase in direct flights, targeted marketing initiatives, and a focus on regional destinations, Sydney aims to welcome more Indian visitors and forge lasting connections that will drive the recovery and growth of the tourism industry in the region.





# Kuda Villingili

## A Fusion of Opulence, Adventure, and Sustainability

The Maldives, renowned for its stunning island properties, welcomes a remarkable addition to its hospitality landscape. Kuda Villingili, an ultra-luxury resort, sets itself apart from the competition with its unparalleled features and exceptional services. In an exclusive interview, Gaurav Makhijani, Director, Sales and Marketing, Kuda Villingili, sheds light on the distinctive qualities of this captivating property. With a focus on Indian travellers, Kuda Villingili delivers an extraordinary experience, seamlessly blending luxury, convenience, and cultural immersion.

Vartik Sethi

### Exquisite Features and Unmatched Hospitality

Gaurav Makhijani highlights the exceptional qualities that distinguish Kuda Villingili from other island properties. Boasting a prime location in the Maldives, the resort offers an ideal getaway with its solid infrastructure, private pools, and all-inclusive amenities. With its close proximity to the airport and a 25-minute speedboat transfer, Kuda Villingili ensures a hassle-free and swift arrival for its discerning guests.

### A Culinary Haven

Catering to the diverse palate of its guests, Kuda Villingili stands out with its extraordinary culinary offerings. Makhijani proudly introduces "Spice," the resort's Indian restaurant curated by the revered Qureshi brothers, descendants of a 450-year-old family renowned for their Mughal-style cooking. The fusion cuisine, including exquisite kebabs and lamb chops, provides an unparalleled gastronomic experience that transcends boundaries. Additionally, the resort offers

an array of seven food and beverage outlets and three bars, a rare find among all-inclusive resorts.

### Enchanting Activities and Experiences

Makhijani elaborates on the captivating activities and excursions that await guests at Kuda Villingili. The resort showcases a breathtaking coral garden, providing easy and safe snorkeling experiences for guests of all ages. Diving enthusiasts can explore diverse marine life, from enchanting dolphins and manta rays to awe-inspiring sharks. Kuda Villingili's strategic location ensures that guests can witness these mesmerising creatures within a short boat ride. Additionally, the resort offers a range of exclusive experiences, including a sunset cruise, floating breakfast, and access to a dedicated wellness spa island, all of which are thoughtfully incorporated into the all-inclusive packages.

### Luxurious Accommodations

Meticulously designed to cater to diverse preferences, Kuda Villingili offers 75 keys in total. The resort comprises 36



▲ Gaurav Makhijani

water villas, half of which feature private pools, while the remaining 47 villas are nestled along the pristine beachfront. Ranging from one-bedroom to four-bedroom configurations, these spacious accommodations provide guests with the utmost comfort and privacy, ensuring an unforgettable stay in paradise.





## Tailored Offers and Pristine Luxury

Acknowledging the price sensitivity of Indian travellers, Makhijani emphasises Kuda Villingili's commitment to offering attractive deals and discounts without compromising the quality and exclusivity of the experience. The resort's marketing strategy revolves around limited-time offers, generating significant buzz in the market and securing bookings. These offers include a host of value-added amenities such as spa treatments, sunset cruises, and floating breakfast experiences, exclusively tailored for Indian guests booking a private pool villa.

## Embracing the Family Market

Makhijani acknowledged the changing dynamics of the market, stating that honeymoons were no longer the sole focus. Instead, family vacations have become the primary segment driving the industry's growth. To cater to this demand, Kuda Villingili has undergone a significant reconfiguration of its room offerings.

Makhijani explained, "We have clubbed two rooms together, allowing families to stay in proximity while maintaining individual privacy. This approach ensures that families can enjoy their vacation together comfortably."

## Optimising Stay Duration

When asked about the ideal duration for a visit to Kuda Villingili, Makhijani stressed the importance of maximising the value for guests. He recommended a minimum stay of four nights to fully indulge in the resort's offerings. Makhijani pointed out that guests staying for three nights miss out on exclusive experiences such as spa treatments, sunset cruises, and floating breakfasts. By extending their stay to four nights, visitors can enjoy these premium amenities without incurring additional costs. He emphasised, "Booking for four nights ensures that guests get the best return on their investment, enabling them to fully immerse themselves in our resort experience."

## Sustainability at the Core

Recognising the growing importance of sustainability in the hospitality industry,

Makhijani highlighted Kuda Villingili's commitment to eco-friendly practices. While many resorts have adopted basic sustainability measures, Kuda Villingili has taken it a step further. Makhijani revealed, "We have shut down our operations for two hours to shift the entire resort to solar energy. This extensive project took us six months to complete, and we are immensely proud to be a 100% solar-powered resort." He emphasised that the resort's ownership's involvement in the real estate sector enabled them to understand the significance of sustainable practices fully.

## Diverse Source Markets

Discussing Kuda Villingili's primary source markets, Makhijani noted that they experienced fluctuations over time. Currently, the largest chunk of guests originates from Russia, followed by the Middle East and the UK. Surprisingly, the resort attracts visitors from unexpected corners of the globe. Makhijani revealed, "We have a specific niche market from Brazil and Australia due to our exceptional wave surfing opportunities. The waves can be as high as 10 meters, we attract avid surfers seeking a unique experience."

In conclusion, Gaurav Makhijani shed light on the remarkable changes occurring in the Maldives' luxury hospitality sector. Kuda Villingili's adaptability to cater to the growing family market, emphasis on optimal stay duration, commitment to sustainability, and ability to attract diverse source markets make it a frontrunner in providing an unforgettable resort experience. As the industry evolves, Kuda Villingili sets new standards and continues to redefine luxury in the Maldives.





# Enjoy India's Most Magical Monsoon Moments in Chhattisgarh

Monsoons are magical in India. Rains blow a breath of fresh life into the heart of India as nature blossoms into a beautiful, green, and enchanting fairyland during this season. It is a great time to travel if you wish to enjoy the perks of the off-season. If you are one who has a penchant for travelling during the rains, Chhattisgarh presents a perfect hideout to enjoy the magic. The natural landscapes and cascading waterfalls here are some of the best in India during monsoons. See it for yourself to believe.

Team TTJ

**M**onsoon season in Chhattisgarh settles in from late June to October and is an exceedingly welcome respite from the scorching heat of summer. The captivating beauty of the state reaches its zenith as the splash of rain transforms it into a green utopia. Chhattisgarh is transformed into an oasis with many natural sites, mighty waterfalls, countless streams, and little

water bodies transforming into natural pools. Monsoon enlivens the rivers, lakes, and waterfalls, and the season is important for the state in terms of agriculture as well. Nature lovers and couples on a romantic adventure would enjoy the most as the abundance of sightseeing becomes immersive. There is an inherent tone of charm and beauty captivating your senses in everything you see and everything you do. Some of the most fascinating and exciting

places to visit in Chhattisgarh during monsoon are:

## ***Bastar: Monsoon weaves a different spell in this tribal heartland of India***

Bastar is known for its natural grandeur, rich history, and culture. It is home to some of the oldest indigenous tribes in the country. Bastar is moulded in exceptional and unparalleled scenic beauty weaved in forests, waterfalls, wildlife, ancient temples, tribal dances, and music that creates a paradise for lovers of nature. Located at a distance of 264 km from Raipur, Bastar is one of the most significant eco-friendly destinations in the country. It has a stupendous amount to offer to its visitors with its valuable tribal art and culture that lie scattered abundantly in and around the city of Jagdalpur.

Jagdalpur in the district of Bastar is the gateway to some of the prettiest waterfalls in the country. Monsoon awakens seasonal waterfalls and adds charm to the most famous falls of Chhattisgarh - Chitrakote, and Tirathgarh waterfalls in Bastar. Along with these waterfalls, it would be a treat for the travellers to explore Kanger Valley National Park and the Kutumsar caves from Jagdalpur.







## Chitrakote Waterfalls: The spectacular Niagara Falls of India

Nestled in the heart of Bastar district in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh, the Chitrakote waterfall is a natural attraction that is truly a sight to behold! With a width of about 300 meters, it is the widest waterfall in India and has a unique horseshoe shape that is akin to Niagara Falls. Surrounded by dense forests and unequivocally tranquil and serene surroundings, Chitrakote is a peaceful and picturesque getaway to the sublime. The echo of the falling water and the unruffled surroundings make it a perfect place to relax and unwind. The waterfall is at its most spectacular during the monsoon months, hence, make it a point to plan your visit accordingly. Visitors to Chitrakote enjoy a variety of activities ranging from trekking, and rafting, to rock climbing in the surrounding area, but travellers need to keep a check on the availability of activities during the rainy season.

## Dandami Luxury Resort: A perfect monsoon staycation

Possibly the best place to stay near Chitrakote Falls. The property is a value-for-money accommodation offering a decent stay to its patrons. There are 16 double-bed cottages and 13 huts that

are equipped with essential requisites. Here the rooms are beautiful, and some have majestic views of Chitrakote Falls from the balconies. The watchtowers here can be accessed by any guest, and these provide the best views of the falls. The resort flaunts a wide expanse of natural surroundings, including beautifully maintained gardens and roads. During monsoons, the night and day-long roar of the falls is captivating to the senses and the whole place is a natural treat for the eyes, ears, and soul.

## Tinathgarh Waterfall: A gushing white cascade of Milk in rains

Situated 35 kilometers from Jagdalpur, this stunning waterfall is a sizeable and significant tourist attraction and one of the most visited waterfalls in Chhattisgarh. Located on the river Munga Bahar, in Kanger Valley National Park in Bastar district, this waterfall has a drop of 300 feet and provides breathtakingly spectacular views. The fall is uniquely featured as it splits into multiple falls on its way down, offering a magnificent, out-of-the-world sight to behold. This mesmerising waterfall is also named the Milky Fall as the water takes on a white colour as it gushes forth downwards. Best enjoyed during the monsoons when the water cascades



down at a torrential pace, Tirathgarh remains tranquil and beautiful the rest of the year. This place is famed in folklore for being visited by Ram, Sita, and Laxman during their exile. You can take a walk down the stairs to see the famous Ram Kund and Sita Kund.

## Satrenga: The Goa of Chhattisgarh

Satrenga, in the Korba district, has been developed into an Eco-tourism site and is surrounded by Mahadev hills, with several small islands in the middle of the reservoir. It is located at the end of the Mini Mata Bango Dam. During the monsoon season, many people visit because the Dam is at its most beautiful. Satrenga is one of the most enthralling and serene tourist attractions in Chhattisgarh.

## More places to visit during monsoons in Chhattisgarh

The Gangrel Dam, officially known as the Pandit Ravishankar Sagar, is located on the Mahanadi River and is a very beautiful spot to spend a day with your friends and family. There are a lot of water activities for adventure enthusiasts as well. During monsoons, this place is a must-visit with picturesque views and enriched flora and fauna.

Mainpat in Chhattisgarh is an underrated hill station with green pastures, deep valleys, breathtaking waterfalls, dense forests, and untouched rivulets. Mainpat is an adventurer's and trekker's paradise with still a lot of places to be discovered. Because of its large Tibetan community and influence in the area, Mainpat is sometimes referred to as the Shimla of Chhattisgarh and Mini Tibet, making it an excellent spot to learn about Tibetan culture and traditions.

Jashpur is known for its natural eco-tourism and waterfalls. The Rajpuri Waterfalls, Danpuri Waterfalls, Ranidah Waterfalls, Bhiringraj Waterfalls, Gullu Waterfalls, Churi Waterfalls, and Bane Waterfalls are among the many stunning waterfalls in the area. Aside from the waterfalls, temples and tea gardens are among the other attractions of Jashpur.







# TRAVEL INDUSTRY *navigating* THE TCS MINEFIELD

Tour operators in India are facing significant concerns over the impending increase in Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on tour packages. However, the Ministry of Finance has provided some respite by postponing the implementation of the higher TCS rate from 5 per cent to 20 per cent. This move aims to alleviate the immediate financial burden on travellers and address the challenges faced by the travel industry.

**Rajat Jain**

**T**he TCS rate on tour packages was scheduled to increase from 5 per cent to 20 per cent on July 1, 2023. The implementation has now been postponed to October 1, 2023, providing temporary relief to tour operators and travellers. This delay allows stakeholders to adjust their operations and prepare for a higher TCS rate in the future. In response to the comments and suggestions from several stakeholders, The Ministry of

Finance informed that it has decided to make suitable changes.

## **No TCS on Overseas Tour Packages up to ₹7 lakh per FY**

The Ministry of Finance reinstated the threshold of ₹7 lakh per financial year per individual for TCS on all categories of Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) payments. No TCS will be applicable for the first ₹7 lakh remittance under LRS, regardless of the mode of payment or purpose of the remittance. TCS will only

be levied at different rates beyond the ₹7 lakh threshold, based on the nature of the transactions.

## **Respite for the Travel Industry**

Several representations made by the travel and tourism associations and industry professionals highlighted the immediate challenges and shortcomings of the increased TCS rate. In response, the Ministry of Finance announced that there will be no change in the rate of TCS for all purposes under the LRS



and for overseas travel tour packages, up to ₹7 lakh per individual per annum. This decision aims to address the concerns raised by the travel industry and alleviate the financial burden faced by thousands of tourists. The higher Tax Collection at Source (TCS) rates on foreign remittances and international credit card payments are causing financial strain and challenges for the travel and tourism industry in India. The implementation of these rates, initially scheduled for July 1, 2023, has been postponed to October 1, 2023.

## Higher TCS Rates from October 1, 2023

Effective from October 1, 2023, the TCS rate on foreign remittances made through the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS) will increase from 5 per cent to 20 per cent, except in specific cases.

Outward remittances for medical treatment and educational expenses exceeding ₹7 lakh will attract TCS rates of 5 per cent and 0.5 per cent, respectively. Overseas outward remittances for non-medical and non-educational purposes exceeding ₹7 lakh in a financial year will be subject to a TCS rate of 20 per cent.

## Exemption of TCS on International Credit Card Payments

To give adequate time to banks and card networks to put in place requisite IT-based solutions, the government has decided to postpone the implementation of its May 16, 2023, e-gazette notification. This would mean that transactions through international credit cards while being overseas would not be counted as LRS and hence would not be subject to TCS.

## Impact on Travel Budgets and Choices

The higher TCS rates increase expenses for Indian tourists, making international travel less accessible and forcing travellers to reconsider destinations and itineraries. Travel budgets are directly affected, leading to compromises on

travel quality and limiting choices for shorter trips. The financial burden discourages spontaneous travel decisions and reduces the frequency of outbound trips.

## Challenges Faced by Travel Agencies and Tour Operators

TCS implementation adds administrative complexities and compliance requirements for travel agencies and tour operators. Collecting TCS from clients and ensuring accurate and timely remittance to the government poses operational hurdles. Small and medium-sized travel agencies may struggle to navigate tax regulations and adapt their business models to manage the increased financial burden.

## Can you claim the 20 per cent TCS back?

Travel stakeholders can get their taxes back once they file their returns. It's essentially an advance tax paid by them. While they will have to pay more for international travel upfront, they can claim the tax back through Your Form 26AS—your annual tax statements—when they file their returns.

The higher TCS rates on foreign remittances and international credit card payments have significant implications for Indian travellers and the travel industry. Travel budgets are impacted, travel choices are limited, and tour operators face operational challenges. The postponement of the implementation provides temporary relief, but stakeholders in the industry should prepare for the eventual commencement of the higher TCS rates and seek solutions to mitigate the impact on the sector.

## TCS clarification

TCS is not a tax unto itself. It can be adjusted when taxpayers file their tax returns concerning their overall income tax liabilities. The individual who has already paid the amount of TCS is eligible to set off against their tax liability for the particular financial year,

If a person files taxes, there will be a cash flow problem because the credit for TCS recovered from him can only be claimed in the tax return (either as an adjustment of tax or as a refund of tax). After completing the tax return, any tax refunds that are included will be sent back. But the TCS he bought for the travel package represents an additional expense for him if he doesn't file a tax return.

## QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE INDUSTRY PARTICIPANTS ON TCS ON INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL

1. Does selling only activities without accommodation and flight booking attract new TCS provisions?
2. Is it a tax burden or financial burden on the traveller?
3. Does the new TCS provision apply to Travel Insurance?
4. What If the traveller booked directly through an overseas agent using an overseas credit card?
5. Does the LRS scheme cover business visits of employees?
6. If your package is both inbound and outbound travel, does TCS apply to the total tour package, or does only the international travel fall under the ambit of the TCS provision?
7. In case of cancellation of tours before the travelling date but after the deposition of TCS by the travel agency, how do we claim a refund of the TCS paid?
8. What is the impact on travel and incidental expenses related to education and medical treatment?
9. If a traveller buys the foreign currency exchange and books his tour through an overseas agent after reaching the destination, does it also provoke the TCS provision?
10. If yes, how such a transaction is being taxed, and if not taxed, does such a transaction provoke unfair business competition?
11. How may the tax cascading effect and double taxation be computed in such transactions?



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI

As understood from the government circular, TCS will continue to be 5 per cent up to ₹7 lakh per individual on outbound tours even after October 1, post which 20 per cent will be levied on ₹7 lakh-plus spent. If this is so, then even if not a full relief this is partial relief for our travel agents in retaining their competitiveness

somewhat against global players. I think the government needs to consider the compliance deliverables of the agents. The transaction needs to be under the purview of the traveller and the bank. The agents do not have so much back-office support.

**Guldeep Sahni**  
Managing Director,  
Weldon Tours and Travel

By providing this benefit to all travellers, regardless of their choice of booking channel, the government can level the playing field and encourage a vibrant and competitive local travel market. In recent times, concerns have been raised regarding the implementation of TCS on international travel bookings made by Indian travellers. While the government's objective to streamline tax compliance is commendable, the current regulations seem to inadvertently favour international operators over their Indian counterparts.







**Manoj Matta**  
Director, Oriental  
Vacations and Journeys

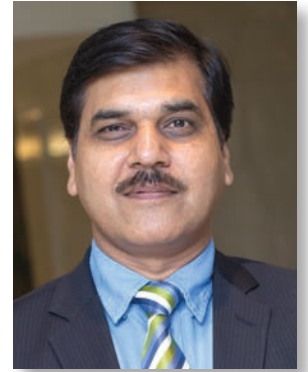
The impact of TCS on credit card transactions has two significant consequences. Firstly, travellers will opt for direct bookings to save on 5 per cent GST and 20 per cent TCS, resulting in a total impact of 26 per cent. They may resort to cash payments upon arrival to

avoid TCS, leading to a boost in non-banking transactions and hawala channels. Additionally, Nepalese, and Bhutanese hotel and tour operators, who have bank accounts in India, won't need to transfer payments to their respective countries, resulting in a substantial revenue loss for the government and making Indian tour operators 26 per cent more expensive than their counterparts. Secondly, smaller agents relying on personal credit cards for working capital will face challenges, as TCS applies to transactions exceeding ₹7 lakhs unless paid through corporate cards. Monitoring expenses under the LRS and distinguishing business travel expenses pose additional hurdles for credit card companies. These factors create obstacles for both agents and credit card companies in managing transactions effectively.

**Amaresh Tiwari**  
MD, A.T. Seasons and  
Vacations Travel

There is a lack of clarity regarding the applicability of TCS on overseas tour packages that do not involve remittances under the LRS. For countries like Nepal and Bhutan, where Indian rupees are widely accepted and payments can be made using Indian debit and credit

cards, there is confusion surrounding whether TCS should be charged. Nepalese and Bhutanese tour operators, who have set up bank accounts in India, are not collecting GST or TCS from clients, resulting in revenue loss for the government and a competitive disadvantage for Indian tour operators promoting these destinations. The inconsistency and ambiguity surrounding TCS also extend to B2B transactions, where the ultimate service receiver is a foreign tourist. In these cases, Indian inbound operators may engage the services of other Indian agents for services in neighbouring countries. While the ultimate service receiver, the foreign tourist, is exempted from TCS, the intermediary agent within India is still liable to collect TCS. This ambiguity needs to be addressed to avoid unnecessary confusion and ensure a level playing field.



**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

Though we are happy with this rollback, our long-standing demand is that the TCS should be reduced to 2.5 per cent as the main objective of the government is to bring more people into the tax net. If the government reduces the TCS percentage on overseas tour packages, a higher number of people will book through

Indian tour operators who are registered in India, instead of booking tours directly with foreign tour operators or booking online tour operators who are not registered in India and are not liable to collect tax at source. We also believe that the international credit card should not be included in the LRS i.e., that was being followed before May 16, 2023, should continue. The new taxation regime would put the onus of collection of tax on the tour operators for which tour operators neither have the bandwidth nor the resources required for implementing it. Tax regimes should foster ease of doing business while the new regime would work cross purposes to it. We would want the government to reconsider this aspect as well.

**Mahesh Iyer**  
Exec. Director and CEO,  
Thomas Cook (India) Limited

On behalf of the Travel Services Industry, we welcome the Government's announcement to defer the proposed increase in the TCS rate for remittances under LRS to Oct 1, 2023. We appreciate the Government's initiative that will help create a level playing field - taking

on board inputs from relevant stakeholders, including travel and authorized foreign exchange players. The clarification regarding the threshold of ₹7 lakhs per individual per financial year across all modes of payment regardless of purpose, will go a long way in aiding the buoyancy being witnessed in the travel industry, which is still recovering from 2 consecutive years of the impact of the global pandemic. As India's leading foreign exchange provider, we believe this positive announcement also brings in much-needed clarity with Prepaid Forex cards (the preferred mode of transactions for overseas travellers) now being treated on par with credit/debit cards.



## Proposed Solutions

1. Extending the ₹7 lakh exemption to tour packages and components booked through Indian tour operators to create a level playing field and encourage domestic bookings.
2. Enhanced consultation and open communication channels between the government and industry stakeholders to address concerns, explore alternatives, and ensure inclusive policies. Clarifying the applicability of TCS on overseas tour packages that do not involve remittances under the LRS to provide clarity for travellers and travel agencies.
3. Creating a level playing field that treats all operators equally, regardless of their origin, to promote healthy competition and support the growth of the Indian travel industry.





# Lords Hotels and Resorts poised to expand internationally

Lords Hotels and Resorts is committed to providing exemplary service and hospitality to its guests and aims to expand its footprint across India and beyond. The brand now operates over 42 hotels across India, and Pushpendra Bansal, COO, Lords Hotels and Resorts is looking forward to expanding its portfolio in India and internationally. One can very soon look forward to more of their upcoming hotels across India, Nepal, Africa, and the USA.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Pushpendra Bansal

Lords Hotels and Resorts in May 2023 announced the opening of two new properties, The New Orchid Lords Inn and Denzong Shangrila Lords Inn in Gangtok, Sikkim strengthening its portfolio with 5 operating hotels in the northeast region. These hotels are perfect choices for travellers looking for comfort, convenience, and true value hospitality. The brand's vision is to become trustworthy for delivering true value experiences to guests in the super-exciting value-driven hotel market segment.

The Lord's brand has its maximum number of hotels in Gujarat. Gujarat, being his birthplace and home state, Bansal's expert liaison building and networking with locals, has powered him to develop and establish more properties in the state. They also have a remarkable presence in Rajasthan with hotels in Sumerpur, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Udaipur, and Nathdwara. "Currently, we also have hotels in Punjab, Assam, Arunachal, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Telangana. Internationally, the group has hotels in Nepal and the USA, and we

have plans to expand our international portfolio to Uganda and Kenya in Africa and add one more property in the USA," informs Bansal.

Lord's business model is based on the franchisee and management-run hotels. Other than these hotels, the brand has 5 of its hotels in Gujarat, owned by Bansal, which are doing exceedingly well. These hotels offer their guests the best services and amenities bundled with great economical tariffs. "These hotels reflect traditional values and modern hospitality with good standards as a result of which, by word-of-mouth publicity and recommendations, we have most investors and franchisees partnering with us," shares Bansal. "We manage our manpower shortages in other units efficiently by relocating the workforce from my units to these units within 48 hours to fulfil the requirement," points Bansal.

The brand also operates the Lords Institute of Management in Surat, a renowned institute that has been conceptualised to develop students for a promising career in hotel management. The institute's mission is to deliver trained and market-ready professionals to suit the requirements of the industry. The institute is managed by Bansal's wife, Sangita, who is the Director of Operations. There are plans to open another institute in Rajkot soon.

Stand-alone hotels can take advantage of the brand's pan India sales network, dedicated revenue and market intelligence team, deepest pool of talent, and extensive pre-opening support. "Our criteria to select or attract investors and franchises is in a different league. As owners of hotel properties, we understand them, and we know the nitty-gritty of managing a hotel. We give them full support, and they are comfortable with us as we go to the grassroots level to solve problems. We leave no leaf unturned in managing properties," asserts Bansal. However, Bansal says that he is on the lookout

for owners who passionately feel for the hospitality business rather than possess only commercial aspirations.

Bansal adds, "They need to understand that we don't have a magic wand. We cannot immediately turn it around when we take in the franchise. We do our hard work and expect our effort to be appreciated and recognised. That is the most important factor which we look into." At Lords, to run a franchise, the property should clear all the three-star conditions. Having a proper infrastructure, like rooms for the physically challenged, ramps for loading and unloading, proper rain harvest water, solar panels, electricity saving LED lights, heating system, and so on.

Speaking of the current challenges that they are presented in running their operations, Bansal says, "After the pandemic, we are indeed facing a lack of experienced, skilled, or learned manpower. The workforce which is available in the market doesn't quite know their job well enough, demands high salaries, and is less responsible. Also, rocketing airfares have acted as a deterrent, imposing financial restrictions for both business and leisure travellers."

Lords has started a flotel restaurant in Diu, which is built on a sturdy floating platform, allowing guests to indulge in a memorable culinary journey while enjoying breathtaking views of the Arabian Sea. Live music performances and entertainment add to the enchantment, creating an immersive hi-tea or dining experience. The flotel can host 150 people at a time.

Over the years, Lords Hotels and Resorts have broadened their portfolio of hotels to accommodate and better the needs of leisure tourists, business traveller, the bag-packer, and the pilgrimage tourists, thus broadly covering the entire spectrum of tourist segments. Their penchant for perfection lies in the fact that they have always been a preferred choice of travellers, whether for business or leisure.



# Rangla Punjab to showcase Punjab's vibrant heritage

In an exciting development for travel enthusiasts, the Punjab government has unveiled its ambitious plans to organise a series of captivating heritage fairs and festivals throughout the year. Spread across various regions of the state, this ground-breaking initiative aims to offer a broader audience and a glimpse into the magnificence of Punjab's rich heritage and vibrant culture.

Rajat Jain



▲ Anmol Gagan Mann

The Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Anmol Gagan Mann, recently heralded the much-anticipated announcement during a press conference, introducing the initiative titled -Rangla Punjab. With 22 fairs scheduled throughout the year, the festivities will commence with the Dhiyan Festival in Sangrur from August 18 - 20, 2023.

Punjab, the land of five rivers, is famed for its historical significance, warm hospitality, and colourful traditions. The Rangla Punjab initiative seeks to celebrate these unique aspects through a diverse array of festivals, offering visitors an immersive and unforgettable experience. Each festival within the line-up holds its own charm and cultural significance, showcasing different facets of Punjab's rich and magnificent heritage.

One of the prominent festivals included in the Rangla Punjab initiative is the Maghi Festival in Muktsar. Celebrated in January, this festival commemorates the valour and sacrifice of the forty Sikh warriors who fought against the Mughals. Basant Festival in Ferozepur celebrated to usher in the spring is yet another festival worthy of note. The Kapurthala Heritage Festival, known for its regal splendour, takes participants on a journey through the princely state's glorious past.

In addition to these iconic festivals, Rangla Punjab encompasses a wide range of events that highlight Punjab's cultural diversity. The Kila Raipur Rural Olympics, largely known as the "Rural Olympics of India," showcases traditional sports and rural activities that have been a part of Punjabi culture for centuries. One may immerse in spirituality, dance, and music or admire the traditional handicrafts at the Baisakhi fair in Bhatinda, which commemorates the season of ripening. Behold the grandeur of the erstwhile princely state, Patiala, in The Patiala Heritage Festival, another gem in the Rangla Punjab lineup. Hola Mohalla at Anandpur Sahib is a martial arts festival that pays homage to Sikh valour and spirituality. Among the lineup of festivals, the Inquilab Festival in Khatkar Kalan stands out as a celebration of the Malwa region's rich culture and cuisine.

Skilful craftsmanship by local artisans showcasing their artistic skills is a much-awaited Punjab Handicraft Festival in Fazika. November sees the Equestrian Fair in Jalandhar. This exciting festival brings together horse enthusiasts and showcases various thrilling equestrian events. Literature aficionados can look forward to the enlightening Military Literature event in Chandigarh, which congregates military historians, authors, and connoisseurs to celebrate the rich

literary heritage of Punjab's armed forces. The land of Punjab pays homage to the rivers that have filled its lands with immense fecundity for centuries, in the unique festival, The Rivers Fair in Pathankot. Finally, the soul-elevating Sufi Festival in Malerkotla celebrates and brings forth the rich, enchanting Sufi tradition of Punjab.

To kick off the year with grandeur, the highly anticipated Rangla Punjab festival will captivate and enthrall audiences in January 2024, taking centre stage in the holy city of Amritsar. This awe-inspiring event promises to encompass every facet of Punjabi culture, with esteemed novelists and poets gracing the occasion.

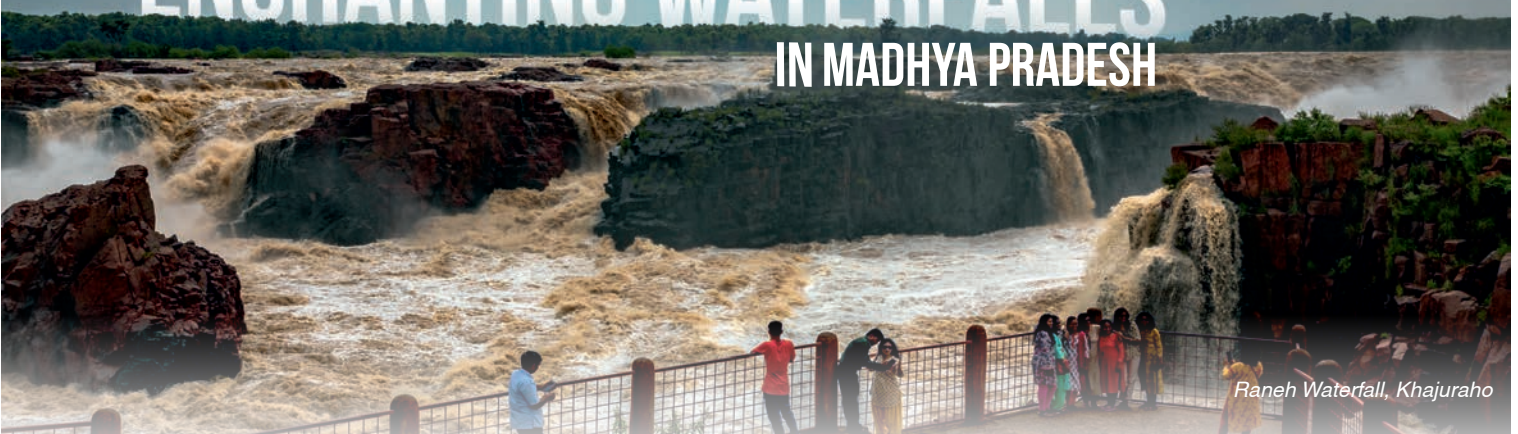
The Rangla Punjab initiative positions Punjab as a top-tier destination for cultural enthusiasts and travellers in search of an immersive experience. Through these fairs and festivals, Punjab passionately celebrates its diverse heritage, shedding light on the essence of its glorious past and crafting indelible memories for all who delve into its vibrant tapestry of culture and traditions.

Whilst breathing new life into the tourism sector and fostering economic growth, this initiative furnishes a vital platform for local artisans, musicians, and performers to showcase their exceptional talents, which hitherto remaining unexplored. It instils a deep sense of pride and belonging among one and all, elevating these festivals to remarkable endeavours that warrant sincere appreciation and recognition.

In conclusion, the Rangla Punjab initiative serves as a gateway to Punjab's glorious past and vibrant present. As we walk through this diverse line-up of festivals, the initiative invites visitors to immerse themselves in the rich cultural heritage and warm hospitality of Punjab. The Punjab government's visionary approach and unwavering commitment to preserving and promoting the state's cultural heritage remain commendable, as the state gears up to blend and promote culture, heritage, and tourism on a bejewelled platter.

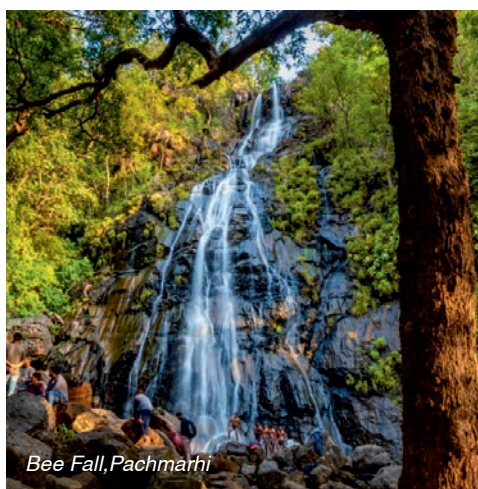


# Explore ENCHANTING WATERFALLS IN MADHYA PRADESH



Oscillating through dense forests, steep hills and cascading waterfalls, Madhya Pradesh is a paradise for travellers. The waterfalls spread across the state have a special place in the tourist landscape of the state. There is nothing more relaxing and exhilarating than spending your time near enchanting waterfalls, and Madhya Pradesh is home to an eclectic mix of natural bodies. So how about including some of these waterfalls in your next trip? You will return energised and rejuvenated.

**Here are some waterfalls that can be included in your itinerary**

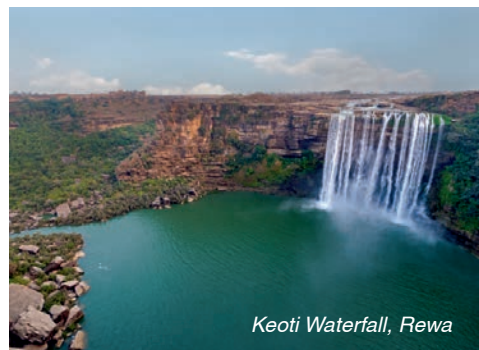


## Raneh Waterfall, near Khajuraho

Raneh Waterfall is about 22 km from the UNESCO World Heritage site Khajuraho on the Ken River. The main attraction here is a crystalline granite canyon that is 5 km long and 100 feet deep. Situated in a salubrious environment, this is an ideal place to de-stress. Kutni Island Resort (27 km), Jhankar (21 km) and Payal Resorts (19 km) in Khajuraho are some accommodations near the falls that you can book to stay.

## Dhuandhar Waterfall, Jabalpur

This waterfall is a must-see for tourists in Jabalpur. Magnificent 100-foot-tall marble cliffs rise on either side of the Narmada River. The river flows gently over these tall marble cliffs, and after a short stretch, it tumbles down to form the Dhuandhar Falls. The waterfall gets its name from the smoke-like appearance of the water rushing down the cliffs. Motel Marble Rocks, Bedhaghat, is a luxury MP Tourism property for a comfortable stay near the waterfall.



## Keoti and Bahuti Waterfalls near Rewa

Located near Rewa, Keoti (100 meters) and Bahuti (198 meters) are one of the highest falls in Madhya Pradesh. The waterfalls percolate a natural bliss for the travellers. Vindhya Retreat, situated at a distance of 35 km from Keoti Falls and 68 km from Bahuti Falls, is a good option to stay.



## Kapildhara Waterfall, Amarkantak

Amarkantak lies at the meeting point of the three central India hill ranges- Vindhyas, Satpuras and Maikal and is popularly known as 'Teerthraj', or the King of pilgrimages. Situated near the source of Narmada, the two waterfalls, Dugdha Dhara and Kapil Dhara, are surrounded by a dense forest and towards the south-west of Dugdha Dhara is the Kapil

Dhara. The distance between both the waterfalls is not more than 1 km. Holiday Homes Amarkantak is an exclusive accommodation facility that is only 8 km from the Kapil Dhara Falls.



## More on the plate

Chachai and Purwa Falls in the Rewa, Pandava Falls in the Panna district, Patalpani Falls near Indore, Bee and Silver Falls in Pachmarhi and Sankua Falls in the Gwalior district are some other waterfalls that can rejuvenate you.

What are you waiting for? Plan a trip with your loved ones and explore these amazing creations of nature.





# TTJ TRAVMART in Jaipur concludes with 2000-plus meetings

The seventh TTJ TRAVMART for the year 2023, was organised at the Pink City, Jaipur on June 24, 2023. TTJ TRAVMARTs in 2023 have been a roaring success as were the earlier ones, at Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Surat, Pune, and Lucknow. All marts have been exceedingly productive and gainful and have been very well participated both by sellers and buyers.

**T**he TTJ TRAVMART in Jaipur concluded successfully at the Radisson City Centre, MI Road, on June 24, 2023. The event saw the participation of 28 exhibitors, including India Tourism, Sharjah Tourism, Experience Kissimmee, ALULA, hotels, airlines, cruise lines, visa facilitation companies and DMCs. More than 160 pre-registered agents and tour operators from all across Rajasthan, including hosted agents from Bikaner, Udaipur, Kota, and Delhi-NCR, were attendees of the business networking sessions resultantly generating 2000 plus meetings.

Also honoured at the event were senior office bearers of FHTR, IATO, RATO, TAAI, ADTOI, and FRTO.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja, Co-Convener, TTJ TRAVMART, apprised all present at the event that TTJ was honoured as the Exclusive Knowledge Partner for RDTM 2023, to be held at Jaipur from 14 to 16 July 2023.

Ravi Sharma, Convener, TTJ TRAVMART, announced that the first edition of East India TRAVMART will be held at the Vedic Village Spa Kolkata, from 15 to 17 September 2023 and will be the first fully hosted, 2-night 3-day buyer-seller programme.

## TTJ TRAVMART

Travel Trade Journal

### Glimpses of TRAVMART Jaipur

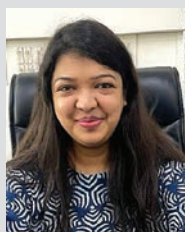


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**Nishant Gupta**

**Managing Director, Rezbook Global DMC**

Well, I must say that Rajasthan is one of the very potential and productive markets for DMCs and Hoteliers where the majority of travel to international destinations happens. After the Lucknow mart, it is our second experience with TTJ in Jaipur, and for Rezbook Global DMC, it was a great opportunity to meet old and new outbound and domestic travel agents where we showcased our products and educated the local agents about Central Asia destinations such as Baku, Almaty, Tashkent, Georgia, Bishkek, Armenia, Turkey and Russia which is still new for them. It was indeed a great experience with TTJ to enhance B2B business from Rajasthan.



**Sneha Murarka**

**Travelling Pants LLP - Destination in your Pocket**

As always the event was very well thought, planned, coordinated and presented by Mr. Ravi Verma & Mr. Parth on the 24th of June in Jaipur. It was nice to see some new exhibitors also participating and TTJ family grow as a whole. The buyers in Jaipur also were very confident about the market growth and assured full support. TTJ platform as a whole is a great way for both seller & buyer to meet, grow and explore new dimensions in Tourism Industry, at the same time being informed with all the new developments through their TTJ updates on whatsapp.

Kudos to team TTJ for the great work and support.

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पर्यटन मंत्रालय  
MINISTRY OF  
TOURISM



अतुल्य भारत  
Incredible India



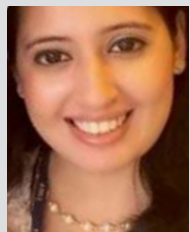


## Events



### Swaytank Maheshwari Director, Rainbow Vacations

Networking opportunities were abundant, and I found them highly beneficial. The event provided ample time and space for networking with other buyers and industry professionals. The highlight of the event was some unique new products like Woods at Sasan Gir, Polar Cruises, Tourism Kissimmee, etc. I engaged in meaningful conversations, exchanged ideas, and gained valuable insights from my peers. These interactions expanded my professional network. The takeaway was a bouquet of high-value connections provided by TTJ. Brilliant Show!



### Taniya Sumrani Director – Sales & BDM Walker Corporation Co.

The quality of exhibitors was impressive. I encountered a wide range of suppliers, all offering relevant products and services in line with my business requirements across various segments. I was able to establish valuable connections and initiate promising discussions with several suppliers, which has the potential to lead to fruitful business opportunities.





## Events



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**Rajeev Sanwariya**

**Co-Founder, Timessharewala.com**

Attending TTJ TRAVMART in Jaipur was great meeting old and new industry partners. It generated motivating ideas to explore the new world in the travel industry. The buyer services provided throughout the event were exceptional. The pre-event communication was prompt and informative, and the assistance from the event organisers in scheduling appointments was highly appreciated. The team was responsive to my inquiries and went above and beyond to ensure that my needs were met.



“

**Sumit Gupta**

**Sales Head, Taj Voyages Tours**

In terms of improvement, I would suggest considering extending the duration of the event. Although the allotted time was sufficient, having more time for in-depth discussions and follow-ups with suppliers would be highly beneficial.







# **EAST INDIA**

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# **TRAVMART**

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# Cordelia, the Sri Lankan Highlight

With its seasonal repositioning to Chennai, the Cordelia Empress, set sail on its first voyage to Sri Lanka on June 05, 2023. The Ship set sail on a 4-night cruise from the port of Chennai to the island nation, calling on at ports of Hambantota and Trincomalee before returning to Chennai. The cruise line will offer 3, 4, and 5 nights cruise options to Sri Lanka from Chennai.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

In a glittering launch ceremony on board the Cordelia Empress, Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal flagged off Cordelia Empress on its first international voyage from Chennai to Sri Lanka on June 05, 2023, in the presence of Tamil Nadu Tourism Minister Thiru K. Ramachandran, Chennai Port Chairman, Shri Sunil Paliwal, and Chennai Port Deputy Chairman, Shri S Viswanathan.

The International Cruise Terminal at Chennai, constructed at a cost of Rs 17.21 crores, came into function with the flagging off of MV Empress. "International Cruise terminals at Andamans, Puducherry, Lakshadweep, Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Mormugao, and Kolkata will soon ramp up cruise tourism in India," said Sarbananda Sonowal.

The Empress features a variety of exciting excursions and activities, with an array of onboard amenities, dining, and entertainment options for its guests.

"We are delighted to offer this memorable experience to our guests at Cordelia Cruise. A cruise of hope, love, and joy, Cordelia is definitely the most majestic destination on the sea. With the launch of our international sailing, we are set to further strengthen bonds between nations and transcend boundaries. Where it is commonly said that sky is the limit, we invite you to come cruise with us and discover a boundless world of limitless possibilities. The enchantment of Sri Lanka, the island of wonders, offers a diverse array of attractions, transforming it into an ideal holiday destination, complete in weaving dreams with beauty and entertainment. We are proud to present this unique opportunity to cruise to Sri Lanka as pioneers in this endeavour," says Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO of Waterways Leisure, Cordelia Cruises.

Talking about the new launch, Jurgen said, "With our launch in the Indian market, we are pledged to providing world-class amenities and unmatched hospitality, as we aim at redefining the cruising experience for our esteemed guests. Cordelia Cruises served 84000 guests between June and September 2022. In the year 2023, we



hope to host over 50000 passengers for Sri Lanka alone, between June and September 2023. We are beyond doubt that our new route will be well-preferred and most sought after. This initiative is a testament to the Government's commitment to promoting tourism and strengthening bilateral ties between India and Sri Lanka."

The ship received a very warm and gregarious welcome upon arrival at its first port at Hambantota. The red carpet was rolled out and guests were presented with a lotus in full bloom as they walked down the gangway to proceed on the various shore excursions. Folk Dancers in all their finery and regalia danced to the synchronised beating of the traditional drums, enthralling, and welcoming the cruise guests to Sri Lanka.

Onboard the ship, an official welcome ceremony and press conference was organised for a VVIP delegation led by The Governor of the Northern Province and included Johnson Liu, the CEO, Hambantota International Port Group, Keith Bernard, Chairman, Sri Lanka Ports Authority, Ruwan Waidyaratne, Managing Director, Advantis Group, and Dushan Wickramasuriya Director, Marketing, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau.

Also present were Dipin P. R., the Honorary Consul General of India in Hambantota, Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Cordelia Cruises, Capt.

Denis Korop Master of Vessel, and Lydia Almeida Hotel Director, Cordelia Cruises.

The second port of call for Cordelia was the port city of Trincomalee. A grandiose water canon salutation by tug boats welcomed the cruise as it sailed into this beautiful and picturesque natural harbour.

Trincomalee was captivating with its fascinating beaches, local attractions, and temples, many steeped in folklore from the Ramayana era. Guests gleefully indulged in handicrafts and spice shopping as the Indian rupee is well accepted in many local shops and offers great value owing to the current advantageous exchange rates.

Onboard, the Cordelia Empress presented great Bollywood-style entertainment, combined with scrumptious, delectable Indian food options, a spread of vegetarian, non-vegetarian, and food adapted for the Jain palate. The lip-smacking jalebi, ras malai, and puran polis cooked up by the ship's exclusive halwai onboard left a lingering taste of pleasure and satisfaction among the guests. Those looking for indulging in tingling their taste buds with a variety of soul-savouries, pizza, burgers, biryani, vada pao, paani puri, and bhel puri were some more options on the offering at the 10th floor during the evenings.



## Ministry of Tourism (Northern Region) celebrates International Day of Yoga 2023 at iconic landmarks



The Ministry of Tourism (Northern Region) Government of India, organised yoga sessions on the occasion of the International Day of Yoga 2023 at iconic and historical landmarks in the cities of Delhi, Jaipur, Agra, and Varanasi.

In New Delhi, the yoga session was organised in the front lawns of the UNESCO world heritage monument, Qutub Minar. The yoga session was well attended by citizens of Delhi, foreign tourists, and members of the travel, tourism and hospitality fraternity. R.K. Suman, Regional Director (North), India

Tourism, welcomed all on the occasion and highlighted the importance of incorporating yoga into the daily way of life.

In Jaipur, the yoga session was organised at the iconic site of Amer Fort. Swami Soham Yogacharya conducted the session. The event was well attended by 200-plus participants.

At Agra, the session was organised at the world heritage site of Agra Fort, and around 500 participants attended the event. Simultaneously, another session of yoga was organised in association with ITDC on the lawns of the Taj Restaurant at Taj Mahal Western Gate, with around

200 participants attending this event.

The Varanasi event was organised in collaboration with "Subah-e-Banaras" at Assi Ghat, where more than 600 participants performed yoga and meditation under the guidance of a Yogacharya.

The yoga sessions were well attended by residents, school students, officials from ASI, state tourism officials, tour operators, hoteliers, bed-and-breakfast establishments, homestays, Incredible India tourist guides, Incredible India tourist facilitators, and Yuva Tourism Club members.

## Rajasthan Tourism and FHTR hold fourth Promotional Roadshow for RDTM 2023 in Bharatpur



The fourth Promotional Roadshow for Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM) was held on June 23, 2023, at the Laxmi Vilas Palace, Bharatpur. The Mart is being jointly organised by the Department of Tourism, the Government of Rajasthan, and the Federation of Hospitality and

Tourism in Rajasthan (FHTR) from July 14 to July 16, 2023. The event is supported by the Hotels and Restaurants Association of Rajasthan (HRAR), Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA), and Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO).

Present at the event were Gayatri Rathore, Principal Secretary, Department

of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan, and the organising committee of RDTM-2023, including Apurv Kumar, President of FHTR, Maharaj Raghuraj Singh of Bharatpur, Randhir Vikram Singh, Former President of FHTR, Mohan Singh, Secretary General of FHTR, and Mahendra Singh, President of RATO.



## Palladium Hotel Group to manage the new 45 Times Square Hotel in New York



Located a few meters from Times Square, in the heart of Manhattan, is the new 45 Times Square Hotel. Owned by the company Ferrado Hotels,

belonging to the Rosp Corunna group, the family office of Sandra Ortega, it will be managed by Palladium Hotel Group. 45 Times Square Hotel is the ephemeral

brand that the hotel group has chosen to operate the property, until its conversion into Only YOU Hotels, a premium-lifestyle brand with which the hotel group places itself in urban destinations.

The hotel, very characteristic and typical of New York aesthetics and life, specifically, has 139 rooms. Located in a prime location, it offers guests the opportunity to make the city of skyscrapers their own. The 45 Times Square Hotel is the perfect option to experience the city. Under their slogan, "Enjoying every NYC minute", they will surprise even the most curious and restless travellers.

During this transition period, the company wants to turn "45" into a symbol for urban adventurers – the individuals who make the destination their own, visiting museums and dining in the most coveted restaurants recommended by locals. Those travelers who choose to stay at 45 are looking to recharge their energy to get out of the routine and continue discovering the city, transforming 45 into The Seeker's Number.

## Finland introduces world's first phone-free tourist island, Ulko-Tammio

Those travelling to the island of Ulko-Tammio, located in the Eastern Gulf of Finland National Park, will be asked to keep their phones in their pockets this summer. The aim is to encourage holidaymakers to switch off their smart devices, take a break from social media and enjoy nature. The campaign is hoped to encourage people to take a break from social media and smart devices outside the island, too. Ulko-Tammio is believed to be the world's first phone-free tourist island.

The Eastern Gulf of Finland boasts a 30-nautical-mile-wide national park, where the island of Ulko-Tammio is located. There are plenty of beautiful islands awaiting explorers. Rugged islands, lush swimming spots and charming coastal villages are all characterised by nature, peace and the Baltic Sea.

Summer holidays are a fantastic opportunity to take a break from technology and enjoy genuine experiences, and Ulko-Tammio is an ideal phone-free island. Located far from the mainland, the island boasts an interesting history, nature, birds – along with a birdwatching tower – and a cabin maintained by Parks and Wildlife Finland.

Participation in digital fasting is voluntary, and the island is covered by a functioning mobile network.



## Cordelia appoints Walkers Tours as its partner for Sri Lankan shore excursions

Walkers Tours recently announced its partnership with Cordelia Empress, the luxury cruise liner operating out of Chennai to Sri Lanka in Summer 2023. The partnership will see Walkers Tours operating shore excursions in all three ports of Hambantota, Trincomalee, and Kankasanthurai (Jaffna) on a weekly basis until the third week of September 2023.

With a capacity of 1800 passengers, Cordelia Empress is the first cruise liner to operate regional cruising in South Asia. Walkers Tours, with over 50 years of experience in the industry, offers a wide range of excursions and private arrangements for Cordelia passengers in all three ports.

"We are thrilled to be partnering with Cordelia Empress to offer their passengers unforgettable shore excursions in Sri Lanka," said Nalaka Amaratunga, CEO of Walkers Tours. "Our team has worked tirelessly to create unique experiences that will showcase the best of Sri Lanka to Cordelia's passengers. We look forward to welcoming them and providing them with an unforgettable experience."

Cordelia's passengers will have the opportunity to explore Sri Lanka's rich culture, heritage, and natural beauty through Walkers Tours' excursions. The excursions include visits to historical sites, wildlife safaris, and cultural experiences. Passengers can also choose to customize their excursions to suit their interests.





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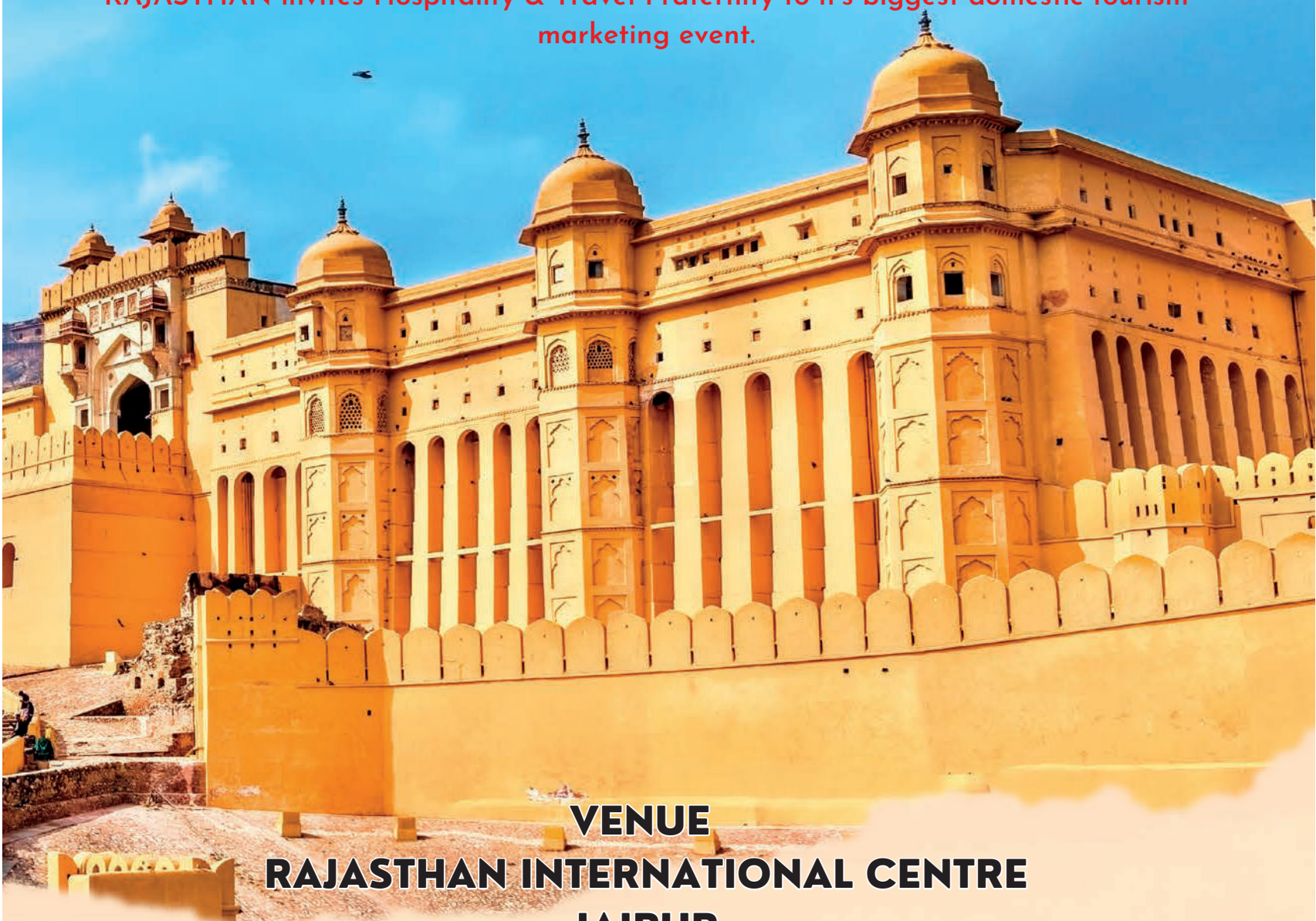
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## 109 By Newlink appoints The Global Rep as its Rep for India and Middle East

The Spanish Destination Management company – 109 by Newlink, recently appointed The Global Rep LLC as its exclusive representation partner in India and the Middle East.

The Global Rep LLC is one of the distinguished companies in the world of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events (MICE) services.

Sandeep Khetarpal, Founder and CEO, The Global Rep said, "We are excited to bring the expertise and excellence of Spanish MICE and Destination management services to the Indian and Gulf markets, creating exceptional and unforgettable business events."



the  
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## Austria and Netherlands Visa applications can now be submitted in Lucknow

Austria and Netherlands visa Applicants from across Uttar Pradesh can now visit VFS Global Visa Applications Centres on the 1st floor of the Interstate Bus Terminal, Alambagh (Shalimar Gateway Mall) in Lucknow, from Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm to submit their applications with ease by booking a prior appointment through VFS Global website. For applicants seeking enhanced submission experience services, the centres also offer optional services such as Premium Lounge that enables application submission without having to wait in a queue. Form-filling assistance, Courier service, Courier Assurance, Photo service, Printing and Photocopy service, and SMS Alerts are some of the other optional services available at the centres.

## Tatabye Tours organises its first-ever Destination Maldives Roadshow in Hyderabad



Tatabye Tours, an India-based Destination Management Company, recently organised its Destination Maldives Roadshow at Hyatt Place Hyderabad Banjara Hills. With six participating resorts from the Maldives and 70 agents attending the show, the event was a success.

The Maldivian hotel and resort properties that participated in the roadshow were Sun Siyam Resorts, Adaaran Resorts, Atmosphere Hotels and Resorts, Holiday Inn Resort Kandooma Maldives, Angsana Velavaru and Centara Hotels and Resorts. During the roadshow presentations were made by Tatabye Tours and all the properties, followed by networking cocktails and dinner.

Representing the hotel and resort properties were, Mohamed Shihab, Cluster Director of Sales and Marketing, and Rakesh Gupta Indian Sales Head, Sun Siyam, Moumitha Mukherjee, Centara Hotels and Resorts, Dhawal Vyas, Director of Sales, Holiday Inn Kandooma Maldives, Arun Aravind, ADOS, Atmosphere Core, Vignesh Mohan, Director of Sales, Adaaran Resorts, and Rahim Ibrahim, Sales Manager, Angsana Velavaru.

This was the first Maldives Destination Roadshow that happened in Hyderabad and Tatabye Tours was proud to break the record and complete the Hyderabad Roadshow. Roshan Jain, Founder, Tatabye, thanked all the hoteliers and agents who joined them for the successful event.



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