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# TTJ Travel Trade Journal

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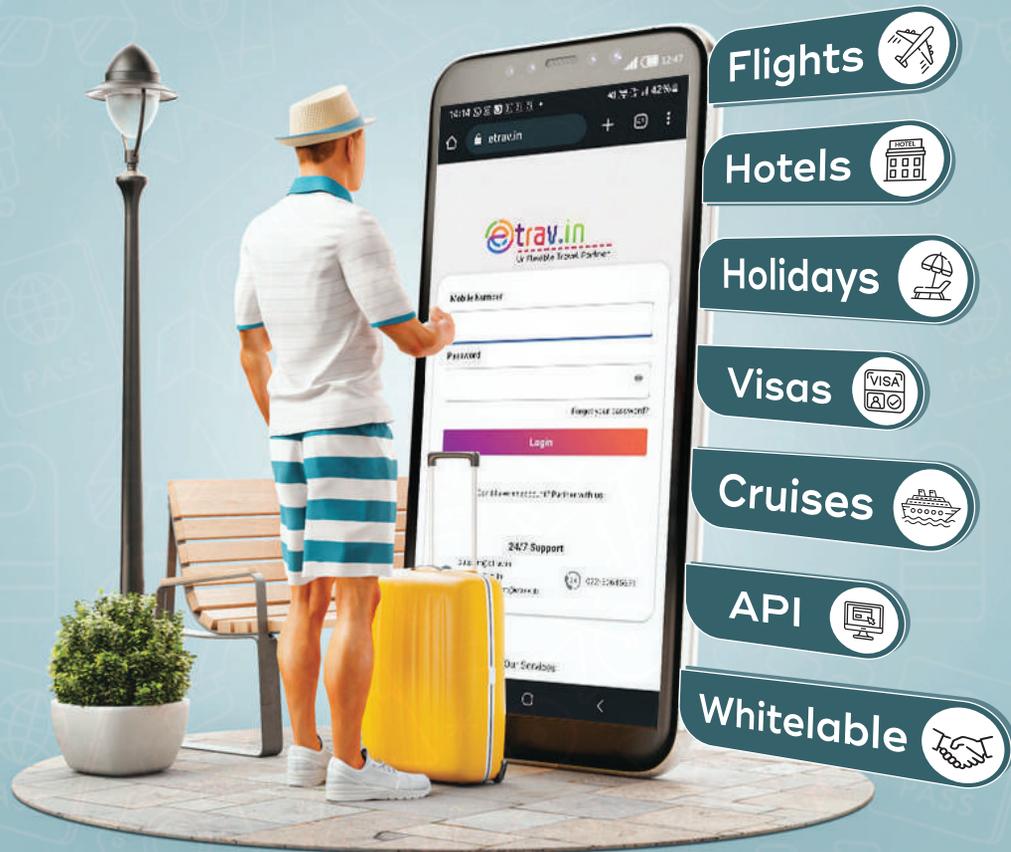
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Email: info@sampanmedia.com

Editorial and Marketing Office :  
Sampan Media Pvt. Ltd. B-20, First Floor, Nangal Dewat, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi, 110070  
Ph: 9560264443, ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

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Dear Friends,

As in recent years, this monsoon season has come down heavily across entire India. Climatic changes the world over, forecast even more erratic and unpredictable wet seasons in years to follow. Besides agriculture and infrastructure, it is adversely affecting daily life. The devastation in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Uttarakhand, this monsoon has been acute.

When it comes to our industry, the monsoon has inspired its own tourism season. However, heavy and unpredictable rainfall has had an impact on leisure travel, enforcing the suspension of many travel plans across the country. On the other hand, heat waves and forest fires in Europe have been of major concern this travel season. It is time for the world to observe and act upon the climate change factor with serious consideration. As responsible earthlings, we, on our part, need to stress more on sustainable and responsible tourism.

Moving ahead, TTJ August 2023 issue covers some interesting travel features on hospitality, airlines, destinations, and events. Monsoon doesn't stop us from inspiring you to travel.

Happy Reading!

**Ravi Sharma**  
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Editor's Desk



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## Only Globus® offers the best “Escapes” during off-season

For travel agents wondering how to ramp up year-end sales and wrap up this 2023 on a high note, Globus® has the ideal solution with the introduction of vacations during the winter season. Because traveling during the off-season is in! And no wonder: Off-season travellers are rewarded with lesser crowds, more elbow room, lower prices and also minimal visa troubles that the Indian travel industry knows too well by now. Globus® calls it the “Thinner crowds & Thicker wallets” effect. With this in mind, Globus® offers “Escapes by Globus®”, with a multitude of vacations dedicated to winter and spring travel. This allows

travellers to typically save up to 40 per cent compared with peak-season itineraries to European and many other hot spots. All Escapes departures are scheduled between November and March and are guaranteed to operate – all this, at a time of the year when the options to enjoy the benefits of escorted travel aren’t really many.



“Off-season travel is the hottest trend in touring,” says Varesh Chopra, Managing Director, Globus® family of brands. “When the heat is off and crowds are halved, Escapes travellers can wind and bend their way through Europe’s narrow streets and alleys with the locals. Even better? Escapes are priced at about \$125 a day and include Globus® signature excursions, recommendations from local guides and the support of a Tour Director apart from the top-notch Globus® service of 95 years.

Escapes departures to Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece and Ireland are leading the way. In 2023, Globus® has added new destinations including Turkey, Wales, Finland, Albania. This brings it to almost 40 itineraries with over 600 departures to 25 countries. These departures are also extremely attractive for solo travellers as there is no single supplement on many.

“Considering we are the only ones to operate such a wide range of escorted vacations even during the traditional ‘off-season’, our agent partners are extremely happy to have options for clients, especially to Europe. Infact, numerous travel plans were postponed or didn’t materialise due to the summertime visa challenges. There is a substantial set of clients willing to travel in the next few months,” concludes Chopra.

## Outletcity Metzingen appoints AVIAREPS as its Sales and PR Representative in India

With an aim to strengthen its presence in the Indian market, Outletcity Metzingen, the leading luxury shopping outlet in Europe, has appointed AVIAREPS as its Sales and PR representative in India. AVIAREPS will be responsible for curating and implementing cross-channel promotional strategies for Outletcity Metzingen with the ultimate goal to increase visitor numbers and spends from India.



Home to over 150 premium and luxury brands, Outletcity Metzingen is the only place in the world that gives the feeling of walking amongst the great designers themselves. The true-to-the-original interiors of the many flagship outlet stores confirm Metzingen as a City of Fashion for guests from all around the world.

Commenting on the appointment, Angela Rieger, Senior International Partnership Manager at Outletcity Metzingen, said, “We chose AVIAREPS as our marketing representation for India due to their exceptional track record in the travel industry, coupled with their in-depth knowledge of the Indian market. This strategic partnership will enable us to effectively penetrate the Indian market, leverage AVIAREPS’ extensive network and expertise to attract a broader audience and establish a strong brand presence in this significant region.”

Outletcity Metzingen is located in SouthWest Germany, just 30 minutes by car from Stuttgart, 1 hour from Baden-Baden and 2 hours from Munich, Frankfurt and Zurich.

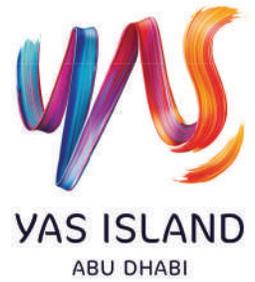
## EaseMyTrip to acquire Guideline Group, Tripshope Online and Dook Travels

EaseMyTrip.com, one of India’s largest online travel tech platforms, recently announced the approval of EaseMyTrip’s board to acquire 51 per cent of the aggregate paid-up share capital of each of the three prominent travel companies incorporated in India, to solidify its position as a major player in the travel and tourism industry. The consideration for the proposed acquisition will be paid by EaseMyTrip by way of issuance of its equity shares to the selling shareholders of the

respective target companies on a preferential basis.

EaseMyTrip is proactively expanding through acquisition of companies in order to have a prominent market presence. The trio of eclectic companies that the company proposes to acquire includes Guideline Travels Holidays India Private Limited, Mumbai, TripShope Travel Technologies Private Limited, Jammu and Kashmir and Dook Travels Private Limited, New Delhi.

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## EgyptAir commences flights on Cairo-Delhi route

**E**gyptAir, the national carrier of Egypt and a member of Star Alliance, commenced flights on the Delhi-Cairo route on August 04, 2023, following their relentless zeal to invigorate new energy in tourism and travel by developing, modernising, and expanding the airline's network.

The Cairo-Delhi route will be served by operating 4 weekly flights with state of art A320neo – the airline's newly acquired

aircraft that offers 2 Cabin service with 16 seats in Business Class and 126 seats in Economy Class.

MS973 will depart Cairo on Fridays and Sundays at 11:40 (Cairo time) and arrive in Delhi at 20:45 (Delhi time); MS975 will depart from Cairo on Thursdays and Saturdays at 23:50 (Cairo time) and arrive in Delhi at 08:55 the next day (Delhi time).

## Rail Europe launches Eurail Greek Islands Pass



**R**ail Europe, the leading provider of European train tickets and passes, has introduced its latest addition—the Eurail Greek Islands Pass. It is now part of its B2B inventory and is available via its B2B website and API.

The Eurail Greek Islands Pass serves as a gateway to a myriad of experiences across Greece's captivating islands, from the alluring glamour of Mykonos to the inspiring landscapes of Santorini, and the pristine serenity of Crete, three top destinations in Europe.

The Eurail Greek Islands Pass allows travellers to explore the Greek islands via national ferry – travel possible via the Attica Group (Superfast Ferries, Blue Star Ferries and Hellenic Seaways) – for 4 domestic travel days, as a mobile pass. It's also a great addition to the Eurail Greece pass, for travellers willing to visit highlights like Athens, Thessaloniki and Olympia, or the European continent as a whole. Eurail Pass is the perfect choice to discover the wonders of Europe by train. Rail Europe's trade partners from across the world have been promoting and selling these rail passes for decades. Considered the most popular pass, Eurail Global Pass is seen by many as the easiest way to travel within Europe. It offers unlimited rail travel across 33 destinations in Europe, giving travellers a unique experience and an in-depth knowledge of European culture.

## Heritage Aarah introduces Ocean Suites Wing



**N**estled within the pristine Raa Atoll, a 40-minute scenic seaplane ride from Male, Heritage Aarah offers a sublime and authentic Maldivian experience. The property has announced the introduction of the Ocean Suites wing, a resort within a resort that embodies the authenticity of the Maldives.

The Ocean Suites wing is an intimate, adults-only enclave boasting a dedicated overwater wading pool, an exclusive restaurant & bar and a pool bar solely for the wing's clients. The 26 duplexes of the Ocean Suites Wing are perched over water, each featuring a private lap pool. The ground floor of each suite presents a lavish sitting area, complete with a pantry and a sheltered deck that overlooks the infinity pool and the Ocean. Adding a touch of local charm, the Maldivian swing adorns the private deck, providing an idyllic setting for relaxation.

Each unit is surrounded by a tranquil oasis, offering panoramic views of the azure ocean, and breathtaking sunrises and sunsets on the horizon. With a self-contained environment, the wing offers privacy and serenity to discerning guests seeking an elevated vacation experience.



## Derseni Aresandiran appointed as MAG's Chief Commercial Officer of Airlines

**D**erseni Aresandiran (Dersi) has been appointed as the Chief Commercial Officer of Airlines, Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG), effective July 01, 2023. With over 16 years of experience, Dersi will play a significant role in shaping the commercial strategy and direction for MAG airlines – Malaysia Airlines, Firefly and MASwings.

Dersi has previously been associated with Malaysia Airlines in another capacity – as the Global Head of Revenue Management and Commercial Planning – from March 2018 to July 2021. Besides Malaysia Airlines, he has also had stints at Qatar Airways and Air Asia.

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## MTPA appoints AllKnown Marketers as its India Representative



The Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) has appointed AllKnown Marketers (AKM) as its representative in India.

The AKM team will deliver all trade, marketing and communication activities on behalf of the MTPA throughout the year to reaffirm the country's positioning by highlighting its diverse offerings, including the mosaic of cultures, traditions, religions and culinary delights.

Commenting on this appointment, Arvind Bundhun, Director of the MTPA, says, "We welcome AKM on board and are confident that with the support of our local stakeholders, there is room for further achievement. Our strategy is focused on innovative trade, PR and digital campaigns, which will give Indian travellers the true essence of the destination. Mauritius is a year-round destination, and we invite you to feel our island energy."

Sunil Mathapati, Country Manager, adds, "It gives us immense pride to represent the MTPA in India and work closely with the team to curate unparalleled travel experiences for the Indian market. Mauritius, as a destination, has bountiful offerings and hence has an immense potential to entice new-age travellers across all segments. We are working towards aligning our activities with MTPA's strategy and charting out an extensive calendar to grow the brand's presence in India."

## TUTC announces expansion to nine new destinations across India



Pioneers of glamping in the country, The Ultimate Travelling Camp (TUTC) currently runs the Chamba Camp Thiksey and Chamba Camp Diskit in Ladakh, the Kohima Camp in Nagaland which operates only during the Hornbill Festival, and the Sangam Nivas Camp in Prayagraj for the world-famous Kumbh Mela that occurs every six years.

"By the end of 2024, TUTC hospitality will be offered in nine destinations across India – this is more than double the four we are currently operating," said Rajnish Rai, Chief Operating Officer and founder member of Ultra Resorts and Hotels which now operates the brand TUTC.

Foraying into easy getaways for city dwellers, TUTC will be launching their upcoming Mohali property, The FHR Wilderness Lodge by TUTC, in September. The brand will also launch a canvas-top safari experience at Bandhavgarh with The Untamed Bandhavgarh by TUTC, with thrilling activities in the tiger homeland from October to June every year.

TUTC will soon extend its unrivalled hospitality offerings with glamping experiences in Kanha and Ranthambore, Madhya Pradesh, offering three different habitats for tiger-spotting. The brand is also crafting luxury cottages in Naldhera, in the hills of Shimla, that will operate through all seasons.

## 360 Stays by Signum Hotels announces entry into Dubai

Signum Hotels has announced its expansion into Dubai with '360 Stays by Signum'. This marks a significant milestone as the company enters the Middle East market, bringing its expertise in managing premium apartments to the renowned location of La Mer Dubai. 360 Stays by Signum will manage 24 serviced apartments in La Mer and will be offering exceptional services to cater to the needs of high-net-worth individuals.

With its entry into Dubai, 360 Stays by Signum is set to cater to the crème de la crème, targeting high-net-worth individuals who seek luxurious accommodations and world-class services. The prime location of La Mer provides an exclusive setting for guests to indulge in the finest experiences Dubai has to offer. 360 Stays by Signum's La Mer property will feature 24 fully serviced, one and two-bedroom units, managed and operated by the company.



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# Tourism New Zealand to focus on high-quality visitors

TRENZ, New Zealand's biggest international tourism business event, returned to Ōtautahi Christchurch on May 9-11, after 17 years. On the sidelines of the event, TTJ interacted with René de Monchy, Chief Executive, Tourism New Zealand.

Sonika Bohra

Aotearoa- New Zealand is a bucket list destination for many travellers and has long had a reputation for outdoor adventure and picturesque landscapes. Whilst the industry has rejuvenated after the impact of COVID, its growth curve has plateaued significantly. Staying on top of travellers' minds and getting travel numbers back to pre-COVID levels is the quest that Tourism New Zealand is confronted with today.

Pre pandemic, tourism was New Zealand's top export, contributing NZ\$17.2 billion (20 per cent of all exports) and 5 per cent of New Zealand's GDP at NZ\$40.9 billion while directly employing 8.4 per cent of the nation's workforce, totalling 229,566 people.

"Tourism is an important and integral part of New Zealand's economy. However, besides enriching the visitors, tourism must enrich the well-being of New Zealanders, contributing more than it takes, creating jobs, restoring nature, enhancing our heritage, building on our national reputation, and also making us proud. At Tourism New Zealand, we support this by influencing, first and foremost, the quality of international visitors. For the long-term benefit of New Zealand, we target visitors who are more likely to positively contribute to regenerative tourism and New Zealand's culture, nature, society, and economy," opines Rene.

Keeping in view of the positive impact on the economy, environment, culture, and communities, Tourism New Zealand now works to strategically attract and motivate high-quality visitors from their key markets. "We envision that by 2030, all visitors to New Zealand will be of higher quality and more productive and regenerative tourism will be ensured. It is imperative to note that high-quality visitors go well beyond high net worth and include all types of travellers ranging from those that engage with culture and nature," asserts Rene.



▲ René de Monchy

Addressing regenerative tourism, many visitors support the government's desire to transition into this system, and tourism operators are increasingly taking a regenerative and sustainable approach. The New Zealand government is also creating industry transformation programmes whilst regional tourism organisations (RTOs) are formulating destination management plans. Their national carrier, Air New Zealand, has a goal of being carbon-zero by 2050. "As a sector, we are presented with an ideal opportunity to lead the way, not only reducing our carbon emissions, but being a world leader in our approach to tourism where it can remain a critical part of our economy, and enrich our home, people, and visitors," says Rene.

Rene noted that their research signified a growing segment of travellers seeking immersive and meaningful travel, destinations that can simply and authentically demonstrate sustainable practices. "We are committed to playing an important and indispensable role in helping support our sustainable future and are confident of the deliverance of the New Zealand tourism industry in this aspect. For those looking at engaging in a natural environment and experiencing our unique culture, we offer a plethora of opportunities

for such deeper realisations. It is something we at Tourism New Zealand will be focusing on to amplify our activity going forward," informs Rene.

It has been observed that visitors to New Zealand, influenced by the work of the tourism department, either at a consumer or at a trade level, tend to spend more and visit more regions. New Zealand garners higher advocacy after they depart. Rene says, "This aspect is of utmost importance for us. We call that shaping demand, which is very crucial for a niche destination like Aotearoa-New Zealand."

Also, Tourism New Zealand's 'If You Seek' campaign went live globally last year and has performed strongly to date. Stressing on the success of the campaign, Rene mentions that 92 per cent of active considerers who had seen the campaign have voiced the likelihood to visit New Zealand as an impact of the campaign

As earnest effort shapes many global markets, Tourism New Zealand perceives the challenging times ahead as they are poised to compete fervently amongst other destinations. Rene says, "We continue to inspire and connect with our audiences, build a desire for destination New Zealand to support the recovery. Over the last year, we were particularly focused on Australia and the US in the first instance, but as we look ahead, we will focus on our other markets and broaden the visitor mix against a more resilient and broader portfolio of markets."

Speaking on the expectation of the Indian market, Rene says, "India is of paramount importance and undoubtedly an important market to us, for now, and also for the future. It is a market of significance, considering the population with an increasing propensity and the ability to travel. We have quite a high Indian diaspora here in New Zealand, which certainly adds to a lot of connectedness. So, as we look ahead, we have high aspirations from India, in the short term and also in the future."



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# Australia Marketplace India 2023

## Unlocking the India-Australia Travel Potential

Australia Marketplace India has been a pivotal nexus, forging connections between India's premier travel agents and Australia's thriving tourism industry. This event strategically highlights Australia's diverse offerings, captivating Indian tourists with enticing vacation possibilities. As the sun set on this historic event, a resplendent future awaited Australia's tourism industry, shining brighter than ever in the hearts of eager Indian travellers.

Vartik Sethi

In the bustling city of Bengaluru, a convergence of fervent energy filled the air as travel enthusiasts and industry veterans gathered for an extraordinary event – the Australia Marketplace. The three-day extravaganza saw a staggering participation of 86 Australian tourism businesses, showcasing their array of products and services to an unprecedented number of 94 Indian travel agents. Undeniably, this impressive attendance was a testament to Australia's allure as a sought-after holiday destination for Indian tourists.

AMI had long been the cornerstone in forging connections between India's premier travel agents and Australia's tourism industry stakeholders. The event proved instrumental in promoting Australia's diverse offerings and latest experiences, enticing Indian travellers with a plethora of vacation options.

Representatives and distributors from various sectors, including lodging, tour operators, attractions, cultural institutions, and local tourism organisations, came together to foster the growth of tourism from India. The 20 per cent surge in seller delegates compared to AMI 2019 exemplified Tourism Australia's dedication to cultivating a robust, competitive, and sustainable



▲ L-R: Susan Coghill, Nishant Kashikar

tourism sector by introducing fresh experiences and innovative products.

The participation of 94 companies hailing from eight Indian cities underscored the wide-reaching impact of AMI in kindling India's fascination with Australian getaways. As the sun set on this record-breaking event, the future of Australia's tourism industry seemed brighter than ever for the eager Indian traveller.

At the heart of this gathering was the launch of new products, unique experiences, and uncharted destinations, capturing the imagination of the new-age travellers.

Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager, India and Gulf, Tourism Australia, exuded immense pride as he shared the significance of this event. "Australia Marketplace was not just another event for us; it was a passion project close to our hearts. It offered a chance to achieve our long-term goals, capitalising on the tremendous opportunities in India," he declared.

Susan Coghill, Chief Marketing Officer, Tourism Australia, stood alongside Kashikar, resonating with his sentiments. She emphasised the immense importance of the Indian market, acknowledging its exponential rise in the world economy. "India's incredible growth drew all eyes to this remarkable country, making it an imperative mission for us to connect and interact with our friends here, who played a pivotal role in elevating Australia's profile in India," Coghill acknowledged graciously.

The camaraderie between Kashikar and Coghill was evident, reflecting their collective efforts in



shaping Australia's travel landscape for Indian tourists. They recounted their journey of successful campaigns, captivating the hearts of Indian travellers and creating immense interest in Australia's offerings. Coghill proudly presented the campaign "Come and Say G'day," which personified Australia as a warm and inviting destination, connecting with the essence of the country. The campaign's staggering success was evident through the impressive 430 million views across various social and digital platforms.

The efforts resulted in outstanding achievements in the Indian market. India had emerged as the fastest market to recover to pre-COVID levels, and the value of Indian tourist spend in Australia surged by 116 per cent, reaching nearly \$2 billion. The unexpected resurgence of the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) segment had also been a highlight of their efforts.

With direct aviation capacity increasing threefold, various international carriers were back at 100% capacity, bolstering the growth potential. Kashikar shared exciting news about potential new flight routes between India and Australia, revealing the possibilities that lie ahead in aviation.

Their relentless efforts had also been rewarded by the Department of Home Affairs, ensuring smooth and quick visa processing, making travel to Australia an easy and appealing prospect for Indian travellers.

The journey unfolded as they reflected on the warm welcome extended to the Indian cricket team during their Australian tour. The collaboration of influencers and celebrities resulted in over 1.5 billion impressions on social media, further amplifying Australia's allure.

Tourism Australia launched an inspiring campaign on February 1, 2023, unlike any other. Kashikar passionately described the campaign that stirred the

hearts of travel enthusiasts. The campaign was an embodiment of possibilities, not merely virtual but grounded in reality. Seven esteemed airline partners, including Qantas, Air India, Singapore Airlines, Malaysia Airlines, Thai, Scoot, and Sri Lankan, participated, offering enticing fares that travellers could book to explore the wonders of Australia.

The results were astounding, with over 32,000 bookings for Australia recorded in just 28 days, a remarkable 121 per cent increase compared to February 2019. Forward bookings for the following months, April, May, and June, witnessed a substantial boost, sparking significant growth in the Indian market during the campaign period.

Collaboration was the driving force behind this triumph, with ten key distribution partners in India, such as Thomas Cook, SOTC, MakeMyTrip, PickYourTrail, Kesari, Veena World, Flamingo, and Carnation, contributing to the impressive results. Kashikar expressed immense pride in the unified efforts of the Indian team, which included state integrity tourism organisations from Destination New South Wales, Tourism Queensland, Visit Victoria, Tourism Western Australia, and ACT.

With strong support from the Australian government and leaders, the India-Australia relationship had flourished. A comprehensive economic cooperation agreement between the two nations had further strengthened trade, investment, tourism, education, and people-to-people ties. Kashikar spoke of the powerful friendship displayed by the frequent interactions between the leaders of the two countries, offering a promising foundation for future collaboration.

India's soaring economy, expected to grow between six to eight per cent consistently in the next decade, and its youthful population, with nearly one billion Indians under 35 years old, presented

an extraordinary opportunity for Australia's travel industry. Kashikar shared his conviction that India's potential as a destination for Australia remained unparalleled. The focus lay on captivating Indian travellers through brand and PR partnerships, industry events, business events, and specialised travel programs.

The extensive efforts undertaken by Tourism Australia included hosting influencers and celebrities in Australia, leveraging social media to showcase Australia's captivating offerings. Sporting events, food and wine festivals, and other cultural experiences were carefully curated to resonate with Indian audiences. Partnerships with airlines like Qantas and Singapore Airlines would further elevate Australia's appeal.

The thriving India Host program educated Australian suppliers about Indian travel preferences, cultural nuances, and requirements. This was met with great enthusiasm, contributing to the growth of qualified Aussie specialists by a remarkable 26 per cent.

In the midst of all these achievements, Kashikar acknowledged that the journey had just begun. The Australia Marketplace event in Bengaluru and Dream Time, a MICE-focused event in Adelaide, were among the exciting ventures lined up to foster deeper connections and drive inbound travel from India.

In conclusion, the future holds endless possibilities for the India-Australia relationship. The unwavering commitment, collaboration, and focus on Indian travellers' aspirations, along with a keen awareness of India's potential, propelled Australia's pursuit of becoming the preferred destination for Indian tourists. With a shared vision, Tourism Australia remained resolute in unlocking the vast potential that the India market held, painting a vibrant canvas of possibilities in the years to come.

# STEEPED IN HISTORY

## The *Kempinski* Legacy in Europe

In an exclusive interview with Travel Trade Journal (TTJ), Sullivan Sananikone, Regional Director, Sales and Marketing, Western Europe at Kempinski's Regional Office Europe, shed light on the brand's exceptional performance and their strategies in the European market. Kempinski, an esteemed global luxury hotel brand with a rich history dating back to 1897, has built an extensive presence in Europe over the years, operating iconic properties in Munich, Berlin, Budapest, Austria, and Switzerland.

Vartik Sethi



▲ Sullivan Sananikone

With roots dating back to 1897, when the first Kempinski hotel graced the vibrant city of Berlin, Kempinski's strong German heritage has been deeply entwined with the European continent. As Sullivan Sananikone, Regional Director of Sales and Marketing, Western Europe, passionately expressed, "Europe holds a special place for Kempinski, boasting a considerable number of its iconic properties in esteemed locations such as Munich, Berlin, Budapest, Austria, and Switzerland."

### A Wealth of European Hotels

The European market stands as a pivotal focus for Kempinski, as most of its hotels are proudly established across diverse European landscapes. The brand's presence extends from the picturesque coasts of Spain with properties like Kempinski Hotel Bahia Marbella Estepona to the enchanting eastern parts of the continent.

### Distinctive Character

While Kempinski's DNA is centered on offering a collection of unique hotels that distinctly reflect their destinations, the European properties exude a singular charm. The brand's emphasis on heritage is evident, as Kempinski takes pride in operating hotels that are often housed within historical, listed buildings. This strong link to Europe's rich history and architecture sets the European properties apart, creating an unforgettable experience for guests seeking a deep cultural connection.

### An Uncompromising Standard

Amid the diversity of the individual properties, Kempinski maintains a consistent thread of luxury that weaves through each experience. Sananikone emphasised the brand's commitment to providing guests with not just a place to sleep and dine but an immersive experience of the destination itself. Whether traveling in Switzerland or any other location, guests will find the Kempinski touch reflecting the local culture, traditions, and unique offerings. Sananikone said, "Our most important thing is to provide a luxury experience that goes beyond just staying and eating at the hotel. We want our guests to feel the essence of the destination itself."

### A Fascination with Indian Market

Sananikone discussed the Indian market's affinity for Europe, driven by its people's appreciation of rich history and profound traditions. Indian travellers seek authenticity and are drawn to Europe's wealth of heritage, making it a cherished destination for many. Kempinski's European properties, with their deep-rooted connections to history and culture, align perfectly with the preferences of discerning Indian travellers.

Kempinski also recognises the importance of catering to Indian weddings, a significant segment of the luxury travel market. To ensure the perfect wedding experience, the brand partners with local experts to provide exceptional culinary experiences and culturally relevant services.

### Post-Pandemic Rebound

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Kempinski achieved remarkable success in 2022,

surpassing pre-pandemic levels with a staggering 20 per cent increase in rooms revenue compared to 2019. The brand's resilience, combined with its commitment to delivering exceptional experiences, has made it a preferred choice for luxury travellers seeking unique and culturally immersive stays. Sananikone said, "In 2022, we surpassed the revenue from 2019 by 20 per cent, which is a remarkable achievement for the luxury market."

Kempinski's continuous growth is a testament to its unwavering dedication to quality, authenticity, and sustainability. As the world slowly recovers from the pandemic, Kempinski remains focused on enriching the travel experiences of its guests, forging ahead with strategic expansion while staying true to its European heritage.

### Focus on Sustainability

Kempinski places great emphasis on sustainability and responsible tourism practices. The brand has partnered with Earth Check, an internationally recognised certification program, to ensure its hotels meet rigorous sustainability standards. As part of their commitment to sustainability, Kempinski aims to have approximately half of its European portfolio certified by Earth Check, demonstrating their dedication to environmental protection and community engagement.

### Future Aspirations

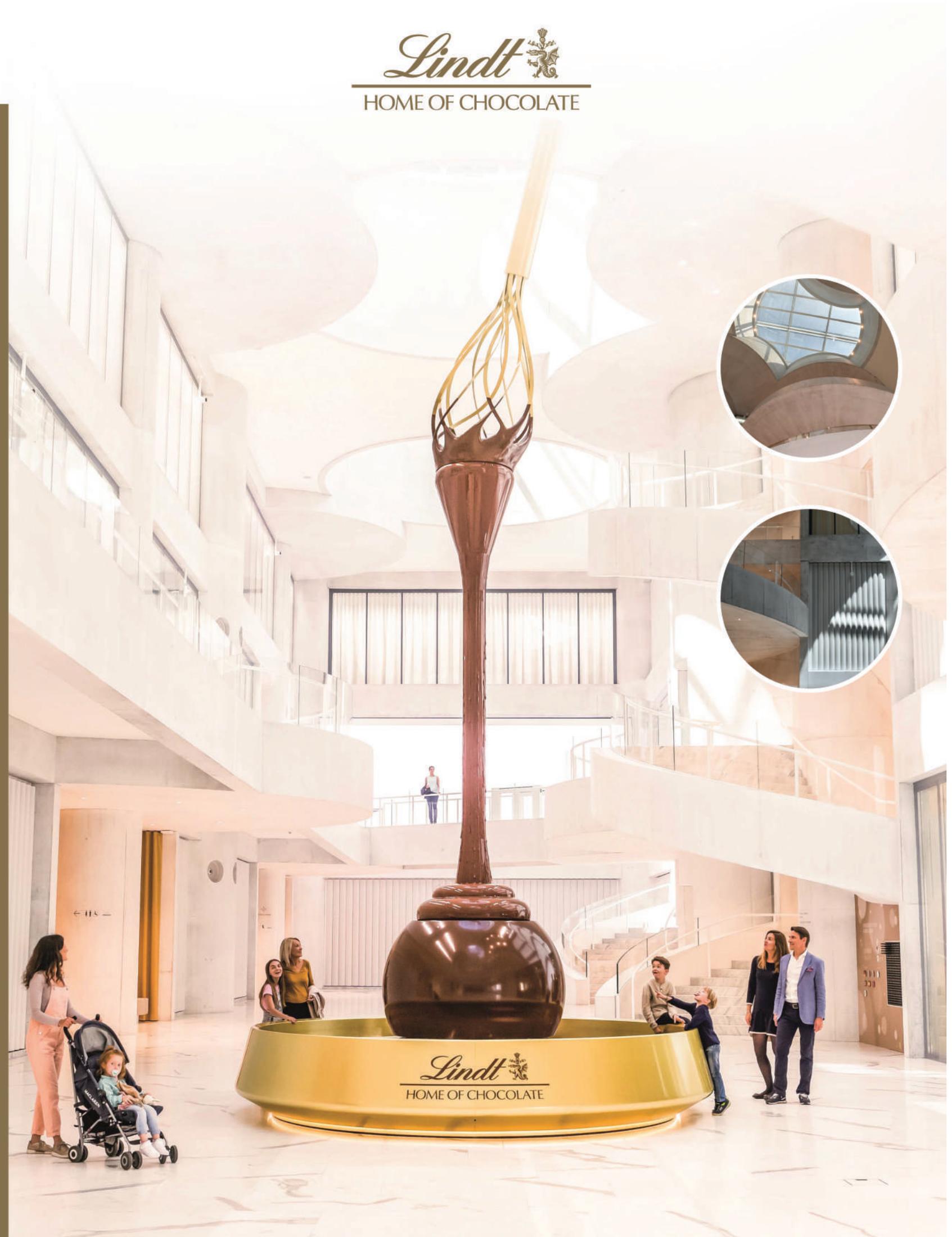
Looking ahead, Kempinski aims to enhance its presence in the American market, further reinforcing its global footprint. The brand's unwavering commitment to providing authentic and immersive experiences will undoubtedly resonate with travellers from around the world, continuing the legacy that began in the heart of Berlin over a century ago.

### In Conclusion

As Sullivan Sananikone's insights revealed, Kempinski's European properties possess a unique allure, beautifully combining luxury and cultural authenticity. With its distinguished German heritage and remarkable presence spanning the continent, Kempinski continues to enchant discerning travellers seeking an enriching and unforgettable experience in the heart of Europe.

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# Time-Travelling in Luxury at Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul

Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul continues to captivate, blending tradition and innovation in a symphony of luxury hospitality. Ralph Radtke, General Manager of Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul and Regional Director, Kempinski Residences Türkiye, highlights the transformative shift.

Vartik Sethi

In the heart of Istanbul, where the Bosphorus weaves its stories and history whispers through the air, the legendary Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul stands as a beacon of timeless beauty. Its architecture is a tapestry of magnificence, its walls hold the echoes of centuries past, and its allure is as enchanting as a tale spun by Scheherazade herself. But now, as the sun rises on a new day, the palace has embraced a grand transformation – a dance of historical threads gracefully entwined with modern elegance.

Distinguished travellers hailing from around the globe have long regarded Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul as an essential destination, drawn by its regal grandeur and exceptional location. Following its meticulous redesign, the hotel now offers guests an exhilarating journey that seamlessly traverses the past and future within the confines of its elegant walls. The result? A symphony of historical charm and contemporary sophistication that enchants all who step through its doors.

Radtke reflects on this transformative journey, stating, “We have stepped into a brand-new era where we blend a sophisticated style with a unique harmony inspired by the history of the Çırağan Palace.” Radtke’s words encapsulate the essence of this redesign – a harmonious fusion of tradition and innovation that propels the palace into a new chapter of luxury hospitality.

Leading this artistic transformation is none other than Ottoman Art Expert Serdar Gülgün. Guided by his deft hand, the palace has embraced a metamorphosis, evolving into a



▲ Ralph Radtke

realm where Ottoman artistry and modern finesse perform an elegant waltz. As the custodians of Europe’s oldest luxury hotel group, Kempinski, the Çırağan Palace now wears an even more resplendent garb, with historical intricacies interwoven with contemporary luxury. From lattice columns and dome-shaped ceilings to specially crafted chandeliers and meticulously paved floors, each detail echoes the palace’s regal heritage.

Moreover, Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul’s culinary offerings have evolved with the addition of two new restaurants that promise a unique gastronomic journey. Akdeniz by Esra Muslu, a chef’s restaurant, tantalises taste buds with Mediterranean cuisine, flawlessly blending Turkish traditions with Mediterranean flair. Esra Muslu, a prominent figure in the culinary world, has carved her niche with her remarkable talent

and extraordinary taste. The restaurant’s modular design encourages exploration, while dishes prepared over a wood fire invite communal dining experiences.

Gazebo, another culinary gem, reimagines Ottoman garden art for the modern connoisseur. Amidst an ornamental fountain and Ottoman arches, diners are invited to experience nature’s embrace. Seating areas, each adorned with flowers of Ottoman lore, evoke a sense of harmony and tranquillity. This is a dining experience where flavours intertwine with nature’s beauty, and where history paints itself upon the walls. This restaurant’s elegance and charm invite guests to savour exquisite sandwiches, salads, afternoon tea, and more, all while surrounded by a sense of timeless luxury.

As the sole Ottoman Imperial Palace and Hotel gracing the Bosphorus, Çırağan Palace carries a legacy that spans centuries. Evolving from a waterside villa to a marble palace, the property underwent meticulous restoration to combine historical opulence with modern amenities. Managed by Kempinski, Europe’s oldest luxury hotel group, Çırağan Palace Kempinski Istanbul presents elegantly redesigned rooms and suites, along with an array of indoor and outdoor venues fit for hosting prestigious events, meetings, and weddings.

Since its inception, Çırağan Palace has epitomised the seamless fusion of luxury and Turkish hospitality, leaving an indelible mark on both local and international landscapes. As the palace embraces this new era, it continues to honour its storied past while embarking on a journey that transcends luxury, promising a service that exceeds all expectations.



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# 'Creating a sense of loyalty transcending the boundaries of transactions'

Ananta Hotels and Resorts runs landmark resorts across the country and guarantees endless pleasure with exclusive facilities and exquisite locations. From world-class hospitality encapsulated with an Indian essence to its picturesque façade and fairytale-like ambience, Ananta Hotels and Resorts create unique and enduring experiences for guests. Gagan Katyal, Vice President, Sales and Strategy, Ananta Hotels and Resorts, provides valuable insights into a few aspects of their hotel business, with a focus on remarkable hospitality and sustainable practices.

Prashant Nayak

**A**fter COVID, the strong pent-up demand for leisure travel, coupled with the rise in occupancy and room rates, and the gradual opening up of international and corporate travel, is now slowly contributing to the uprise of the hospitality and travel industry. At Ananta Hotels and Resorts, the challenges posed by the pandemic have given way to encouraging signs of recovery and growth.

In the meantime, hoteliers are still facing challenges in maintaining an even flow of revenues. "At Ananta Hotels and Resorts, we understand that maintaining a steady flow of revenues can indeed be challenging. The seasonality of business and an over-supply of quality accommodation are some of the major hurdles we face. To address these challenges, we constantly strive to innovate and offer unique experiences that attract guests throughout the year, ensuring a consistent revenue stream," says Gagan.

In today's competitive landscape, guest preferences and price sensitivity play a significant role in their decision-making. To engage their guests and foster a lasting relationship with the hotel brand, the Ananta team emphasises on the emotional aspect of hospitality. By building a personal bond with their guests and offering bespoke experiences tailored to their preferences, they aim to create a sense of loyalty that goes beyond mere transactions. Gagan also shares, "As travellers increasingly combine work with leisure, we are adapting our offerings to cater to the needs of these digital nomads. At our properties, we provide an array of amenities, such as homemade recipes for food, open lawns, and cottages for a comfortable stay. We prioritise high-quality internet connectivity and offer a variety of activities within the resort to keep our guests engaged during extended stays."



▲ Gagan Katyal

"Personalisation has always been a cornerstone of our approach, and we are delighted to see it continue as a prominent trend in the hospitality industry. Going forward, we believe that personalised experiences will remain at the forefront, as they resonate deeply with our guests and elevate their overall satisfaction," adds Gagan.

At Ananta Hotels and Resorts, responsible and sustainable tourism has always been of paramount importance. They are actively committed to minimising their environmental impact and supporting local communities in places where their hotels operate. By implementing eco-friendly practices and contributing to the well-being of the surrounding areas, they aim to be responsible stewards of the destinations that they are part of.

Long working hours coupled with low pay scales have long been cited as the major deterrent for candidates to avoid careers in the hospitality sector. Furthermore, the

industry is not in receipt of new talents or skilled people owing to the lower admissions to hotel management institutes. "Addressing the problems of long hours and low pay in the hospitality sector is essential to attract and retain talent. We take pride in the growth of hospitality as a career choice, with more students opting to work in hotels. We recognise that overseas professionals are eager to return to India post COVID, presenting us with a valuable source of skilled individuals," informs Gagan.

Be it leisure stays, destination weddings, or corporate MICE, Ananta promises to craft uniquely memorable moments for family and friends. To boost the MICE segment, they have implemented a comprehensive strategy. This includes offering tailor-made MICE packages that cater to the specific needs and preferences of their corporate clients. Additionally, they actively participate in MICE shows to connect with potential partners and clients. Incentives and subsidies are also extended to MICE operators to foster lasting collaborations.

"Weddings are undoubtedly a vital component of our hotel chain, and we cherish the opportunity to host these special occasions. Alongside weddings, we recognise the significance of other social and milestone events like birthdays and anniversaries, which also contribute to the cherished memories of our guests," assures Gagan.

As they move forward, Ananta Hotels and Resort's focus remains on maintaining a high-quality guest experience while ensuring effective cost control and being committed to eco-friendly initiatives and sustainable practices. By striking this balance, they aim to not only sustain profitability but also uphold their reputation as a trusted and cherished hospitality brand in the industry.

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# 'Skyrocketing airfares playing spoilsport in the current Indian aviation scenario'

Lords Travel, based in New Delhi, is one of India's leading IATA travel companies and has emerged as one of the top and largest airline consolidators for all major international and domestic airlines and has direct access to most of the low-cost carriers and no-frill carriers operating in and out of India. Since its inception in 1994, Lords Travel has always understood the requirements of global travellers and has served millions in the process. B S Arora, Managing Director, Lords Travel, shares his candid viewpoints on some aspects of the current aviation market in India.

Prashant Nayak

In the global space, India's aviation market is escalating to attain a new high. The industry is currently entering a period of substantial growth and transformation and the aviation market is bracing for exciting times ahead with airlines like Air India and IndiGo, leading the way. Speaking about the exciting phase that the aviation industry in India is witnessing post-pandemic, Arora says, "The aviation industry has three entities, airline, consolidators, and sub-agents. All three have different growth experiences post-pandemic. Airlines are definitely doing better post-pandemic, but covering up the deficit will take them some time. Hiking fares considerably have currently established a stable footing. On the other hand, the earnings of consolidators remain limited as they have to share every bat with their sub-agents. The sub-agents are doing well as they directly deal with passengers and keep good margins with them."

As already one of the largest and fastest-growing aviation markets in the world, the aviation landscape in India has enough and plenty more to spare for multiple players. That is evident from the expansion by the Air India group and IndiGo and also start-ups like Akasa Air. Along with that, international airlines are bullish on the Indian market and are keen to have more bilateral so that they can operate more flights. Arora also believes that the Indian aviation market has enough space for multiple airlines to thrive. However, he feels that operating an airline comes with many challenges, particularly the cost factor. He mentions, "The cost of operating an airline remains very dynamic with various factors involved, like fuel, landing and parking



▲ B S Arora

costs, airport's service through a third party, and many more. The airline that remains financially good is surely working towards expanding its wings in the international market too, which is a good sign of utilising bilateral slot advantages, unlike the past."

Whether people are flying for business or pleasure, passengers have a few basic expectations that they look for even before they step onto the plane, which could mean affordable fares, on-time performance, hassle-free and courteous service, correct baggage handling, and safely reaching the destination. Interestingly, Arora points out that, on average, the on-time performance of most of the airlines is definitely remarkable, however same cannot be said about airfares with restricted travel. He says, "All the airlines have hiked fares so much that now passengers are increasingly considering longer or time-consuming routes to reach their destination in a bid

to lower their cost. Further, to be very honest, the grievances of passengers or travel agents are not always addressed with sincerity. Lengthy follow-up time where often the response is that the headquarter is not cooperating is surprisingly a standard reply."

Frequent flyer programmes and loyalty schemes offer a range of benefits for people travelling in and out of India, who are looking for ways to maximise their travel rewards. While there are plenty of benefits to frequent flyer programs, Arora states otherwise, "Frequent flyer bookings are mostly coming out of corporate houses as these customers definitely travel only on particular carriers because of their points and not due to the service factors. The loyalty creation by offering gimmicks of additional services to travellers may not work much in today's conditions, as airlines are realising it is simply a cost which was not understood by them in the past. Passengers today are looking for smooth and reliable travel and can well do without additional benefits."

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has begun the fifth round of the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS) to further improve connection to rural and regional parts of the nation and attain last-mile connectivity after the first four rounds of bidding were successful. On this, Arora says, "The expansion with the RCS by the government is surely working positively to create the best network of operational airports. The Indian skies will surely be able to accommodate more players in the coming days after all the new airports in the pipeline are operational, with more slots available."

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Explore the hidden harbours and secluded coves of the world's most treasured destinations with Windstar. Have a whale of a time at the Watersports Platform, visit the Open Bridge, and indulge in the most exciting culinary delights. Enjoy that special destination-rich experience the cruise has in store for the discerning Indian guest. Sanjay Kapoor, Vice President, Sales Support and Marketing, STIC Travel Group, the India GSA of Windstar Cruises, shares more about the boutique cruise line that knows the way to discoveries and new destinations through its fleet of small sailing and all-suite yachts.

### Team TTJ

#### **Q** Please highlight the USP of your cruise line. How important is the Indian market for your cruise line?

Windstar Cruises is truly unique in that it is a small ship line that's casually elegant and 180 degrees from ordinary. We provide relaxation at its best and are known for immersive and authentic experiences, port-intensive itineraries, exceptional award-winning service, and innovative culinary programme as the Official Cruise Line of the James Beard Foundation.

Windstar Cruises operates a six-ship fleet. Three are iconic sailing yachts, the Wind Class, and three are all-suite luxury yachts, the Star Plus Class. All explore the hidden harbours and secluded coves of the world's most treasured destinations.

Guests can leave the crowds and cliches behind on small, elegant ships which accommodate between 148 to 342 guests, feeling more like a private yacht than a commercial cruise ship. This intimacy provides the luxuries of time, space, and freedom to immerse themselves in the destination.

Windstar's Watersports Platform affords the opportunity to swim off the back of the yacht directly into the ocean and enjoy activities such as windsurfing or stand-up paddle boarding. In certain ports, scuba diving is offered as a shore excursion through local dive operators.

Windstar also maintains an "Open Bridge" policy which allows guests to visit the bridge to see where the captain charts their course. Guests can learn about the navigation equipment and catch a behind-the-scenes look into the ship over a cup of coffee or tea.

The Indian market is a very important and fast-growing market for Windstar Cruises. Our cruises offer something special for that discerning Indian guest who is an avid traveller and wants to experience something different from the usual cruises. Windstar is perfect for the Indian traveller looking for a destination-rich experience in Private Yacht Style where they won't feel lost in a crowd and for those looking for a romantic sailing experience.

Windstar is an unregimented and unstructured environment without any formality, where you have the freedom to choose to have all the privacy you want or to be pampered. The general shipboard style is elegant yet relaxed.

The small ship size also makes it perfectly suited for corporate offsites and small to medium-sized MICE events. Whole-ship charters start at just 148 guests and provide corporate incentive clients with the ultimate platform for motivation and retention. With a ratio of one crew member for every 1.5 guests, gourmet cuisine, spacious accommodations, and thoughtful little luxuries, a Windstar voyage is the perfect reward for a job well done. Plus, the intimate and exclusive atmosphere makes it easy to keep the focus on corporate activities. Windstar ships are very popular for small family groups, weddings, and corporate charters and do very well with customisable itineraries and shore excursions.

Windstar offers a host of amenities like prepaid gratuities, onboard credits, beverage packages, and Wi-Fi, free of cost as an early booking offer, as well as special discounts and last-minute offers to increase its share in the Indian market.

**Q What strategy is your company implementing to drive growth in the cruise tourism sector, and how are these strategies adapting to the changing travel trends and customer preferences?**

With social media being such a strong influence over travel decisions today, travellers tend to be a lot more informed about their destinations even before they visit. At Windstar, we try to pre-empt our guests' expectations in every aspect of their cruising experience.

Our shore excursions, onboard experiences, and staff recommendations are regularly updated and reviewed to ensure they are aligned with the latest trends in local touring, dining preferences, and technology enhancements.

We offer world-class dining featuring an array of fresh, seasonal ingredients sourced along the journey. Windstar Cruises has partnered with the James Beard Foundation to bring you truly unique culinary experiences. You will be able to taste a variety of cuisines from around the globe created by all-star celebrity chefs recognised by the James Beard Foundation. You are free to dine when, where and with whomever you please.

Of all the things that make Windstar 180 degrees from ordinary, the most exceptional may be our crew. To them, hospitality is not just a job; it's a calling, and the more you enjoy your voyage, the more they enjoy serving you.

We believe in taking care of our guests and making them feel welcome, and so we've included all the things you'd want on your cruise – ocean view accommodations, all meals, an onboard barbecue, non-alcoholic beverages, welcome cocktails, destination briefings, entertainment, fitness centre, shoe polishing service, snorkelling gear, spa amenities, and use of all water sports equipment.

Onboard, there are many activities at hand, but they are never imposed. We give our guests absolute freedom to do what they want. You may wish to participate in a scheduled activity or jump off the Watersports Platform that opens up at the ship's stern. Maybe you want to take part in numerous activities or just relax under the sails or stars and do nothing; the choice is yours. In port, you will have the opportunity to explore some of the most intriguing places in the world, either on your own or with a vetted shore excursion partner.

**Q With a growing market of younger travellers interested in experiential and adventure tourism, how is your company tailoring its offerings to attract and satisfy this demographic?**

Sailings with Windstar include a lot of special amenities, but one of our most fun (and unique) is the Watersports Platform, which allows guests easy access to the ocean around

them. Windstar's ships are equipped with stern-mounted Watersports Platforms – your launching point for a variety of water activities, including snorkelling, kayaking, waterskiing, and windsurfing. Plus, with Windstar Cruises, water sports equipment is complimentary. This provides a very exciting and adventurous activity for young travellers.

**Q What significant trends do you foresee shaping the future of cruise tourism in the next 5 to 10 years?**

Emerging out of a restrictive phase in travel, we are already seeing a surge in demand for MICE and FIT leisure. As both these segments continue to gain momentum, we expect to see an increase in travel amongst the 35-55 age brackets. Whether it is increased family travel (aided by remote working facilities), growth in leisure, increased demand for innovative incentive travel, or increased spending on milestone holidays, each of these trends can be significant growth drivers in cruise tourism, particularly short-haul that allows travellers to stay connected while enjoying the best of land and water.

**Q What percentage of the cruise tourism business that you handle comprises repeat clientele?**

About 90 - 95 per cent of people repeat their purchases on Windstar.

**Q What steps are being taken by your company to ensure the sustainability of cruise tourism in light of growing environmental concerns?**

As a part of Windstar's \$250 Million Star Plus Initiative, three Star Class ships (Star Breeze, Star Legend, and Star Pride) received new efficient engines that meet and exceed the global International Maritime Organization (IMO) limit. One of the requirements is that the engines produce no more than 0.5 per cent sulphur content. In addition, the new engines are designed to reduce nitrogen oxide emissions and include specific technology, such as selective catalytic reactors, to do that. Windstar's Star Plus Class ships are leaner greener cruising machines to tread lightly on the oceans and waterways of the world, especially the smaller ports and rivers that Windstar is famous for visiting. These ships are also outfitted with advanced wastewater treatment systems.

Windstar's three Wind Class sailing ships can power themselves with the wind in their billowing sails, allowing the vessels to reduce fuel usage while providing a scenic and memorable cruise experience for guests. The three sailing ships often are powered by both sails and engines at the same time, so it doesn't mean that Windstar guests are stranded if the wind stops blowing. When both wind and fuel are used together, the ships move quickly to their destination, conserving fuel in the process.



# KOH TAO

## Building Sustainable Tourism

**K**oh Tao, or "Turtle Island", is a 21-square-kilometer island on the western shore of the Gulf of Thailand and is a part of Surat Thani province, with a very small native population that thrives primarily on fishing and tourism

Scuba diving is the distinctive purpose of visitors coming to Koh Tao, and the year 2019, saw a remarkable number of 6,00,000 visitors to Koh Tao.



The island exhibits a harmonious balance between man and nature, where the emphasis is on striking an ecological equilibrium without any overindulgence. The emphasis on conservation can clearly be discerned everywhere. Water conservation, LED lights, and sensor switches to save electricity are encouraged; the use of solar energy panels adds to the energy pool; locally available building materials are used wherever possible; and yes, most of the resorts and local populace harvest their own supply of rainwater for future use.

The Koh Tao Tourism Association, a non-profit body with almost 100 local entrepreneurs and stakeholders as its members, is spearheaded by Khun Rumleuk, as its president. She explains, "Koh Tao Tourism Association is committed to promoting environmentally

and socially responsible, niche tourism towards sustainability on the island. Initiatives like fish aggregation are aimed at reducing conflict between fishermen and divers. Tree plantation on the island is encouraged, and the importance of water harvesting and conservation initiatives is highlighted within the island community."

### Fish Aggregation Initiative

Prior to the introduction of scuba diving, Koh Tao was primarily dependent on fishing. Most of the best diving spots are located quite close to the shoreline. It was thus imperative for both fishing and scuba diving to coexist and flourish responsibly. Today, thanks to the cooperation between the diving operators and fishermen, designated fishing and diving zones exist around the island.

To aid coexistence, a unique low-cost fish aggregation device was developed, based on local wisdom, that not only encourages natural reef building but also creates a refuge for small fish to swarm to. This, in turn, creates rich feeding grounds, attracting bigger predatory fish closer to the coast and making the fishermen's lives more rewarding and simpler. Tourists may join the deployment and repair of these fish aggregation devices for a fee, helping the local fishermen and aiding sustainability efforts.

### Plas Tao-Plastic Recycling

To achieve the goal of zero waste, relentless efforts are directed at discouraging the use of single-use plastics. A local initiative of the island collects plastic waste, segregates it, and transforms it into multi-coloured containers, planters, coasters, tiles, soap dishes, island souvenirs, and brooms.

### ECO PRINT - An Eco-friendly Printing Process

In Koh Tao, ECO Print, one is introduced to fabric printing using only natural products where no artificial dyes, fixers, or additives are used. Printing is

The island of Koh Tao is a two-hour jet ferry ride from Koh Samui and holds the rare distinction of being the scuba diving capital of Thailand. The inhabitants and business stakeholders of this 21-square-kilometer island are aware of the implications and fallout that accompany growing tourist numbers and are actively working towards an eco-sensitive and sustainable future.

**Gurjit Singh Ahuja**



done by using leaves from local shrubs and trees as patterns and designs, transferring their colours and patterns to natural cotton and silk fabric. ECO Print uses local materials in combination with steam, using seawater as a mordant and shells from the invasive *Drupella* snails harvested from waters around Koh Tao by divers. What emerges is a one-of-a-kind fabric pattern with natural and earthy undertones that spells and bears the essence of nature.

Koh Tao has taken its first baby steps towards eco-sensitive sustainability, inculcating it into its long-term agenda, the rewarding results of which will soon successfully emerge.



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# Western Australia launches EverNow to bolster its events calendar

The Cook Government has announced a new homegrown event 'EverNow' that will further bolster the State's events calendar and support jobs and the local economy. The event has been developed by Perth Festival to celebrate Western Australia's indigenous culture and heritage.

Team TTJ

The 'EverNow' festival will run from October 4-9, 2023, and will welcome mass audiences to a series of unique free events. The multi-sensory festival draws inspiration from WA's rich biodiversity, creativity and their First Nation's people enduring connection to the land.



Boorna Waanginy

Kings Park will be home to the bold reimagining of Boorna Waanginy: The Trees Speak from October 6-9, 2023. This show attracted 300,000 people when it opened Perth Festival in 2017 and 2019. The show will transform Kings Park with a display of light, sound and projections – telling the stories of Noongar culture and the beauty and biodiversity of Australia's South West.

The Supreme Court Gardens will play host to Song Circle, a live performance and celebration of Noongar song and dance set in a future-focused immersive wonderland from October 4-8, 2023.

The doors to Government House Gardens will also be opened to the public as it is transformed into Fire Gardens, a dreamscape of leaping flames, shadow and wonder. The

event from October 5-8, 2023 will be free to attend but will require a ticket to gain entry.

This brand-new homegrown event is expected to put Western Australia on the global map. The festival program has been carefully crafted to engage the senses and celebrate the State's rich Aboriginal culture and breathtaking nature while attracting visitors from far and wide. Western Australia wants to make sure there is a reason for visitors to visit the state every month and every season and thus they are building a strong calendar of events that offer something for everyone.

EverNow will run for an initial two years, with the intention for the event to become an annual staple on the State's major events calendar. One can register for event information and find out more at [evernow.com.au](http://evernow.com.au).

## Beachcomber Resorts and Hotels represented by IRIS Reps takes center stage at trade events

Beachcomber Resorts and Hotels, supported by IRIS Reps, aims to build and strengthen its position in the Indian market and has been actively participating in trending events across the country, to elevate its brand awareness, foster meaningful connections, and contribute to the growth of the tourism industry.

Team TTJ

Beachcomber Resorts and Hotels created a significant impact by actively participating in prominent trade events. Their eminence gained visibility with their extensive participation in the WOW Awards Asia - 2023 and WOW Expo, Asia's largest platform for experiential



marketing, MICE, LIVE Entertainment, and wedding industries.

The Beachcomber Group also participated in TTJ TRAVMART 2023 in Jaipur and Chandigarh, renowned markets for hoteliers with many travellers exploring international destinations. The showcasing of trending resorts in Mauritius during this event aimed to create enhanced B2B opportunities in these vibrant cities.

Beachcomber presented its latest products and services, including the "Book Early, Save Big: 25% Off until D-0" offer. For specific room categories in Royal Palm Beachcomber Luxury, Shandrani Beachcomber, and Mauricia Beachcomber, guests enjoyed "Kids Go Free" with

complimentary access to Beachcomber Kids Clubs and engaging activities tailored to different age groups.

Alefiya Singh, Director of IRIS Reps, highlighted Beachcomber's strong brand presence in the Indian market, fostering trust and resonance with its diverse and distinct travellers. With a luxurious spa, warm service, well-appointed rooms, and mouth-watering cuisines, Beachcomber properties provide the ideal setting for an unforgettable island escape.

By participating in trending events, Beachcomber Resorts and Hotels continues to elevate its brand awareness, foster meaningful connections, and contribute to the growth of the tourism industry.



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# QATAR

## caters to every discerning need of MICE travellers

With deserved recognition for the potential of the MICE industry, Qatar has invested heavily in its infrastructure to attract events from around the world. Today, Qatar is a growing MICE destination and home to world-class, state-of-the-art facilities, venues, and museums. A modern hub with deep cultural roots, exceptional hospitality, and a strategic site at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, Qatar has emerged as a premier destination for hosting successful MICE events. We look into some of the top reasons for choosing the destination as a MICE-friendly option.

### Team TTJ

#### Qatar's Strategic Location

With an average of 3-5 hours of flying distance from anywhere in the world and free visa-on-arrival for citizens of over 95 countries, India included, ensures Qatar to be an accessible destination option. The compact nature of the peninsula allows visitors to entwine work with leisure while also exploring the country. The destination ensures guests have a memorable time with top-notch facilities at their service. Furthermore, Qatar is blessed with pleasant year-round weather for all kinds of activities.

#### High on Safety

With an average of 3-5 hours of flying distance from anywhere in the world and free visa-on-arrival for citizens of over 95 countries, India included, ensures Qatar is an accessible destination option. The

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#### World Class Airport at Doha

Since its commencement in 2014, Qatar's Hamad International Airport has rapidly transformed into one of the most prominent airports in the world, offering a wide range of services and facilities to passengers and welcoming them to an incredible destination. The airport has been ranked as the second-best airport in the world and has won titles for 'World's Best Airport Shopping' and 'Best Airport in the Middle East' for the ninth

time in a row at the Skytrax World Airport Awards 2023. The airport continues to grow and connect global travellers through its world-class premises, both for passengers and businesses. Qatar Airways, the nation's flag carrier, plays a crucial role in enabling entry to Qatar by offering convenient and multiple flight connections.

#### State-of-the-art MICE Venues

Qatar has taken over as a key MICE attraction for the burgeoning Indian travel market. Boasting a rich cultural heritage that blends with modernity, the country extends world-class facilities and state-of-the-art MICE infrastructure. This has placed Qatar in a coveted position and is increasingly transmuting into the preferred destination for events and holidays, beckoning event organisers to

explore its landscape. Popular venues for MICE include the purpose-built Qatar National Convention Centre and the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre. These cutting-edge venues with state-of-the-art amenities and stunning architectural aesthetics make Qatar an excellent choice for business dealings.

### Exciting MICE Options

Qatar's world-class hotels and wide range of experiences make it a standout destination for business travel. Every leading global hotel chain has its presence in Qatar; all hotels are geared and upgraded for business travellers with high-level professional equipment and technological advancements. Many exhibition centres, including enormous ballrooms and conference spaces inside the hotels, create the perfect ambience for business and professional requirements.

### Simplified Booking Process

To provide quality service and assistance, there are multiple destination management companies (DMCs) in Qatar that provide end-to-end personalised services and packages, ensuring

business bookings remain a seamless process. To add on, from desert safaris to dream cruises, helicopter rides, and custom private tours, these qualified local travel experts successfully make every business trip unforgettable.

### Amazing Tourist Attractions

Qatar is home to stunning indoor venues and incredible landmarks like the iconic National Museum of Qatar, the Museum of Islamic Arts, the 3-2-1 Qatar Olympic and Sports Museum for sports fanatics, Katara Cultural Village, Souq Waqif, and more. Attendees have the option of undertaking adventurous desert safaris, participating in water sports, or taking in the sights and sounds of traditional dhow excursions along the scenic coastline. In addition, the stunning heritage and fascinating natural sights and wildlife of this Middle Eastern wonder, complete well-rounded business trips.

### Leveraging Other Strategic Advantages

Qatar's infrastructure has undergone recent noteworthy changes with special emphasis placed on public

transportation, and the introduction of a new, easily accessible, and sustainable multimodal transportation system. This includes brand-new tram and metro networks, a revitalised road system, and improved rail lines. With some exciting future events lined up for 2023 and 2024, the destination hopes to continue expanding MICE numbers, particularly from the Indian market. While the FIFA World Cup 2022™ marked a defining moment in the country's history, Qatar is ready to deliver new, diverse, and incredible experiences to event organisers and attendees.

### Qatar Specialist Programme

To assist the commercial partners in better understanding and promoting the destination, Qatar Tourism also launched the Qatar Specialist Programme. The Qatar Specialist Programme focuses on various aspects of Qatar's tourism offering, covering history, heritage, attractions, and experiences. Travel and trade partners can increase sales and exceed customers' expectations with this specialisation.

## TBO to promote Yas Island's Kids Go Free packages in India

Miral Destinations, the promotional partner for Yas Island Abu Dhabi, has partnered with Travel Boutique Online (TBO) to promote its exciting Kids Go Free packages in India.

#### Team TTJ

The Kids Go Free package allows two children under the age of 12 accompanied by a paying adult to stay, play, and dine for free. Available to guests who book their stays at any of the participating hotels till September 30, the package will offer kids to stay free of charge in the same room as their parents. The offerings also include benefits such as playing free of charge at Yas Island's record-breaking theme parks with unlimited access and dining free of charge on the same hotel meal plan as their parents.

Popular for its award-winning theme parks, be it at Ferrari World Abu Dhabi, home of the world's fastest rollercoaster, Yas Waterworld Abu Dhabi, where families can enjoy over 45 splash-tastic rides, slides, and attractions, Warner Bros. World™ Abu Dhabi, the world's largest indoor theme park with over 35 fan-favorite Animation characters and DC Super Heroes or the region's first marine life theme-park SeaWorld® Abu Dhabi, where travellers can immerse themselves in eight magical realms, all under one roof.

Liam Findlay, CEO, Miral Destinations commenting on the partnership said, "Many Indian families travel to Yas Island every year to experience the destination and its theme parks. Keeping these trends in mind we introduced Kids Go Free packages to make their holidays affordable. Partnering with TBO to promote the package will aid in our endeavor of constantly working with trade partners in India to ensure exceptional offers to suit their preferences."

"Through our collaboration, we aim to inform and empower travel agents and industry professionals to help families make the most of this remarkable promotion and create lifelong memories," mentioned Vidhu Lamba, Vice President, TBO Academy.

The partnership will enable Yas Island to showcase its offerings to Indian travellers, who



have played a significant role in propelling the island to become one of the most preferred short-haul destinations. Yas is also home to a world-class shopping mall, a wide range of leading hotels, over 165 dining outlets, a links golf course, exciting water and motorsports, and a year-round line-up of spectacular musical, entertainment, and family-friendly events.

# Current and future sustainable tourism initiatives of Rajasthan

## A Macro View

Rajasthan Tourism has come out with a Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy in which sustainable tourism takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities. The state understands the holistic approach of eco-tourism and sustainable tourism, both of which focus on responsible travel that has a minimal impact on the environment and local communities.

Gyan Prakash

**S**ustainable tourism refers to sustainable practices in and by the tourism industry. It is pertinent to acknowledge all impacts of tourism, both positive and negative, whilst aiming to minimise the negative impacts and maximise the positives.

Negative impacts on a destination include economic leakage, damage to the natural environment, and overcrowding, to name a few. Positive impacts lead to creation of jobs, cultural heritage preservation and interpretation, wildlife preservation, landscape restoration, and more.

Additionally, sustainable tourism refers to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and strikes a suitable balance between these three dimensions to guarantee long-term sustainability.

Responsible travel refers to the behaviour of individual travellers aspiring to make choices according to sustainable tourism practices minimising the negative impacts and maximising positives upon one's visit to a tourism destination. Overall, sustainable tourism does not refer to a specific type of tourism; it is an aspiration for the impacts of all forms of tourism where all aspects ought to be sustainable. The GSTC criteria serve as the global standard for sustainability in travel and tourism.

According to Fennell, "Eco-tourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature,

and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally-oriented (control, benefits, and scale)."

The state of Rajasthan offers a conducive environment for investment in the state. Domestic tourists are significant in boosting the economy, and there is a need to segregate the demands of the tourists and cater to all kinds of tourism, such as luxury tourism, niche tourism, religious tourism, etc. A SWOT analysis of the infrastructure available at these sites also needs to be taken into consideration to ensure that there is no stagnation in the industry.

Rajasthan is fast developing as an important MICE and wedding destination. The numerous heritage properties in the state serve as great venues for weddings and MICE events. Golf courses are also being developed to boost golf tourism. There appears a need of developing a PPP model to synergise efforts of the public and private sectors to boost sustainable tourism.

It is important and relevant to have the required mindfulness to achieve a fine balance between how we use natural resources and what we give back to the environment. The knowledge of 'vocal for local' and the three R's of reduce, reuse, and recycle should be underlined to reduce the carbon footprint.

Sustainable tourism is gaining utmost importance as increasingly more and more people around the world seek to explore popular destinations. The growing number of tourists risks depletion of natural resources, and local

communities often bear the brunt of its negative impact. To preserve the natural beauty and cultural heritage of tourist destinations for future generations, it is essential that all stakeholders in the tourism industry work together to promote sustainable practices. This includes minimising the environmental impact of tourism, supporting local economies, and ensuring that the local community attains maximum benefit from the presence of tourists.

Prerequisite of the day is to focus on ethical and sustainable tourism by way of which we leave minimal impact on the places we visit. Rajasthan boasts of the maximum number of heritage hotels in the country. Special concessions are being extended by the state to heritage properties that have contributed to tourism. Smaller interventions can take us a long way toward practicing responsible tourism since ethical and sustainable tourism in Rajasthan has only explored around 20 per cent of its potential.

Without losing money and making heavy investments, we can make a conscious effort to source food locally, employ locals, and involve the global community. By recycling waste, valuing our water and electricity, and reducing plastic waste, we can keep culture and environment at the heart of our businesses.

The Government of Rajasthan is in the process of formulating a 'New Tourism Policy,' taking initiatives to maximise, socialise and economise benefits to the local communities, conserve natural

resources, protect heritage, and begin awareness campaigns.

Sustainable activities like hiking and cycling, now a part of Rajasthan's state tourism, have opened new doors and given a much-needed boost to the state's tourism, especially during the current times. Apart from increasing the revenue generated by attracting domestic travellers, this new policy also aims at creating employment opportunities for state residents.

Rich in terms of natural beauty and heritage, Rajasthan is an ideal destination for eco-tours. Eco-tours in the national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, besides visiting the heritage sites, are worth enjoying activities. These tours in Ranthambore National Park, Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, and Keoladeo National Park, are delightful and equally remarkable, where one can experience some of the spectacular elements of wildlife and eco-tourism. The trip will remain memorable with many exciting experiences. Entertainment in the natural environment is the mantra of Rajasthan eco-tours. In the year 2019, the domestic tourists arriving in the state of Rajasthan accounted for approximately 52 million, while foreign tourist arrivals accounted for over 1.6 million. This state, which lies in northwest India and shares a land border with neighbouring Pakistan, is one of the most popular tourist destinations for both Indians and foreigners alike.

The desert state of Rajasthan is a rich stockholder of plethora of flora and fauna. These parks provide a natural habitat to plenteous species of wild animals, birds, reptiles, and floral kingdoms. Whilst catering to the needs of the tourists, special care and attention is taken to preserve and restore endangered wildlife. The eco-parks of the state strive to restore the ecosystem of the environment and aim at developing a harmonious coexistence between wildlife and plant kingdoms.

Eco with sustainable tourism travel needs to have the following wish list to be observed:

- \* Avoid littering and dispose of non-degradable such as empty bottles, tins, plastic bags, etc, in dustbins or in an organised and responsible manner.

- \* Avoid use and littering of non-biodegradables such as polythene and plastics, which are unhealthy for the environment.

- \* It is illegal to take away flora and

fauna in the form of cuttings, seeds, or roots.

- \* Pollutants like detergent in streams or springs while washing and bathing should be avoided.

- \* Refrain from aerated drinks, alcohol, drugs, or any other intoxicant.

The principles of eco-tourism are about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. Implementation and participation in eco-tourism and sustainable activities should undertake the following eco-tourism-sustainable principles:

- \* Minimise impact.

- \* Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect.

- \* Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.

- \* Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.

- \* Provide financial benefits and empowerment for locals.

- \* Raise sensitivity to host country's political, environmental, and social climate.

Rajasthan is to develop eight eco-tourism sites, including Mount Abu, Udaipur, and Jaisalmer, as windows to its diverse flora and fauna. The government will develop and upgrade the Jhalana and Nahargarh biological parks in Jaipur into eco-tourism sites for tourists to get a glimpse of the state's wildlife and learn about its biological diversity. Tourists would be provided detailed information about the trees, plants, their medicinal values, and the wildlife at these places. Wildlife experts will speak on conservation. Mount Abu, Udaipur and Jaisalmer are among the other proposed eco-tourism sites. The forest department would provide special tents to tourists at the Jhalana site. The Shikargaha, or hunting lodges, will also be major attractions.

Responsive to the environment today, the 'green laws' of conservation are making people aware of how man and the environment can live symbiotically for more time to come, and eco-tourism is the only way that maximises the economic, environmental, and social benefits of tourism. Everyone is a stakeholder in the process, and we clearly need to avoid our past shortcomings and the negatives that have impacted the ecosystem. In India, the movement is gaining momentum with more and more travel and travel-related organisations addressing the needs of eco-tourists and promoting eco-tourism in the country.

Some basic do's and don'ts of eco-tourism that we endorse in the country are listed below:

## Do's

- \* Carry back all non-degradable litter, such as empty bottles, tins, plastic bags, etc. Littering or burial of waste should be avoided, and disposal should be managed in an appropriate manner only.

- \* Observe the sanctity of holy sites, temples, and local cultures.

- \* Reduce noise pollution. Limit the decibel level of audio systems such as radios, tape recorders, or other electronic entertainment equipment in nature resorts, sanctuaries, and wildlife parks.

- \* In case of temporary toilets being set up near campsites, waste is to be covered with mud or sand. It is important to ensure that the spot is at least 30 meters away from water source.

- \* Maintaining people's privacy while taking photographs is important. Permission is to be sought before taking a photograph.

## Don'ts

- \* Do not take away flora and fauna in the form of cuttings, seeds, or roots. It is illegal, especially in the Himalayas. The environment is delicate in this region, and bio-diversity needs to be protected at all costs.

- \* Do not use pollutants such as detergent in streams or springs while washing and bathing.

- \* Do not use wood for cooking at the campsites.

- \* Do not leave cigarette butts or make open fires in the forests.

- \* Do not consume aerated drinks, alcohol, drugs or any other intoxicant and refrain from throwing bottles in the wild.

- \* Respect and regard local civilisation. Do not tempt the locals, especially children by offering them foodstuff or sweets.

- \* Polythene and plastics are non-bio-degradable and harmful to the environment and must not be used and littered.

In a nutshell, if the usefulness, appropriateness, and applicability of these indicators of the sustainability of tourism are considered, it would contribute to the understanding of what different interest groups (including local community members, tourists, ecologists or businessmen) perceive as sustainable tourism development. A better understanding of these perceptions would help the planning of tourism that is able to satisfy the needs of most groups for now and in the future.

**About the Author:** Gyan Prakash is a Jaipur based Tourism Consultant and Advisor, Founder EC Member, Former Secretary General, Federation of Hospitality and Tourism of Rajasthan (FHTR) and Former Director, FICCI.

# Archaeology meets Spirituality

Renowned for its natural diversity and rich cultural and traditional history, Chhattisgarh is emerging to be the most popular holiday destination in India. Waterfalls, wildlife, ancient temples and caves, monuments, and culture located in dense forests speak volumes of the old history and traditions of the state. There are many temples and monuments in Chhattisgarh that are known for their historical significance and impressive architecture and are a major attraction for many tourists. Let us delve into the wonders of a few of these fascinating sites with an ancient past.

## SIRPUR

### An Archaeological Wonder

Sirpur has a rather different experience to offer, remote from the usual hill or seaside vacation. Sirpur, about 85 km from Raipur, is a hidden town from the past. This fascinating town has a profound archaeological significance and a deep connection to Buddhism, Shaivism, and Jainism. Residing quietly by the Mahanadi River, Sirpur is a treasure trove of archaeological wonders and cultural heritage. With a history that dates back over a thousand years, this enchanting place offers a glimpse into the region's glorious past.



Sirpur Buddha Vihar

The magnificent Laxman Temple dedicated to Lord Vishnu in Sirpur is an architectural marvel. Built in the 7th century, this temple showcases exquisite carvings and sculptures that display the artistic prowess of the ancient artisans. Sirpur also boasts the enchanting Swastik and Teeverdev Vihar, a Buddhist monastery complex that flourished during the reign of emperor Ashoka. The Sirpur Festival celebrates the region's rich cultural heritage, attracting artists

and performers nationwide. Situated near this town are several remarkable places that are worth exploring, like the Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary.

## BHORAMDEO TEMPLE

### The Khajuraho of Chhattisgarh

The Boramdeo temple, carved on rocky stones in the Nagar style, is an ancient Hindu temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. Situated in the Kabirdham district of Chhattisgarh, this temple was built in the period of the 7th to 11th century AD and is beautifully located amidst mountain ranges. The Boramdeo temple bears a resemblance to the Sun Temple of Konark and The Khajuraho temple. When visiting Chhattisgarh, the Boramdeo Temple is a must-see destination for all. The nearby attractions of the Boramdeo temple include Madan Manjari Mahal, the Boramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary, Mandawa Waterfall, and the nearby villages to enjoy rural India and the tribal dance.

## TALA

### The Pride of Chhattisgarh

Tala is famous for its two temples, Devrani and Jethani. It is around 29 km south of Bilaspur. A classic example of Indian sculpture and art, these temples, located within a single complex and situated side-by-side, owe their names to their dimensions. Built way back in the fifth century, these temples have a variety of sculptures, including different gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, demigods, animals, and mythical figures, with floral depictions and a variety of geometrical and non-geometrical motifs. The temple complex also holds the most important piece of sculpture of Tala, a more than two metres high figure of Lord Shiva in red sandstone, called Rudra Shiva.

## BARSUR

### The City of Temples and Ponds

Barsur, in Dantewada, is a fond destination for one who loves history and ancient sculptures. It is believed that there were once 147 temples and an equal number of ponds here. Although the grandeur of Barsur has dwindled with time, the ancient ruins of temples and structures speak volumes about its historical significance.

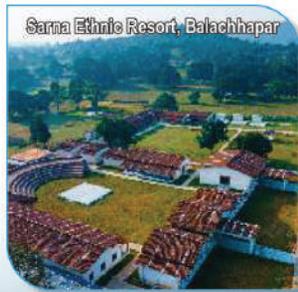
Battisa Mahadev Temple in Barsur is one of the rarest Hindu temples with two garbhagrihas. Battisa literally means 32 pillared temple. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, as per the inscriptions available in the temple, this temple was constructed in 1209 AD. There is also a Twin Ganesha Temple in Barsur which is equally remarkable. There are two statues of Ganesh built with sandstones; the large idol is 7.5 feet, and the height of the smaller is 5.5 feet. The two idols of Ganesh are exquisite and unique. Along with the ruins of various temples, the Mama-Bhanjaa Temple and the Chandraditya Temple are also a must-visit for any traveller.



Barsur



*Our Resorts are*  
**DESTINATION**  
*itself*



# Sayaji Vadodara creates unforgettable event experiences

Considered one of the top business hotels in Vadodara, Sayaji Vadodara is situated in an enviable location that is equidistant from the most important landmarks of the city, including the airport and train station. It is the perfect place for jet-setters who love to balance business with leisure. The hotel has noted a substantial pick-up in MICE queries in 2023. Big-ticket conferences and seminars are leading the trend at the hotel. Hari Krishnan, Director, F&B and Events, Sayaji Vadodara, shares more on their MICE offerings at the hotel.

Prashant Nayak

**S**ayaji Group of Hotels is known for its bespoke experiences and signature hospitality. This is a home-grown Indian brand competing with the biggest hotel entities across the globe. The management primarily believes in providing exemplary luxury, quality, and service. Today, Sayaji Hotels is around three decades old and has three hotel brands: Sayaji, Effotel by Sayaji, and Enrise by Sayaji, under its umbrella.

With the infrastructural amenities on par with those of developed countries, India is poised to be a preferred destination for MICE events. Major cities, including Vadodara, where infrastructure is adequately developed, are well-equipped to host world-class MICE events. However, organising MICE events requires a very high degree of professionalism and service quality. Hari Krishnan says, "Large-scale events require multiple teams working at different levels, like booking rooms, decorating conference venues, arranging dining experiences for the organisers and their invitees, etc. We at Sayaji Vadodara try our best to overcome challenges in organising an intimate or large-scale event with our highly trained manpower, smart infrastructure, and meticulous planning."

The banquet halls at Sayaji Vadodara are impressive and likely to create a strong appeal with the guests. The halls, which are attractively decorated with subtle ceiling lighting, handmade carpets, and fitted furnishings, can accommodate a gathering of a few hundred people. Their well-trained and experienced event planners meticulously organise events to ensure a memorable experience. The in-house chef and F&B team at the hotel are always delighted to present exquisite delicacies to the guests. Overall, they have a team of



▲ Hari Krishnan

highly motivated and professional staff to ensure that all event requirements are met skilfully and with ease.

"Opulent banquet halls, unparalleled meeting spaces, and expansive lawns welcome our guests in an extraordinary manner at Sayaji Vadodara. We also offer a distinctive dining experience with our mouth-watering delicacies, which adds taste to the grand events," assures Hari Krishnan.

Sayaji Vadodara has eight venues, including a lawn for events. The Mahal Hall, their state-of-the-art facility, can accommodate up to 500 people and is perfect for conferences, seminars, conventions, and more. Sapphire Hall is perfect for weddings, receptions, business gatherings, and celebrations. The Topaz Hall is convenient, comfortable, and impeccably styled to give any event the professional edge it deserves. Vatika Lawn is the perfect choice for hosting grand events. The sprawling lawn and lush green surroundings provide a beautiful setting for weddings, conventions, and concerts.

In 2021, Sayaji Group of Hotels introduced 'Shubh Vivah by Sayaji', a one-stop solution for all dream destination weddings. The concept offers carefully curated wedding packages that perfectly epitomises the grandeur of the ceremony with personalised care. The initiative has garnered an overwhelming response, generating an uptick in business.

Sayaji Vadodara will soon announce the launch of their stunning lawn, Kohinoor, an extravagant venue that captures the essence of Rajasthan's royal charm. It is the only destination inside Vadodara City with the capacity to accommodate up to 1500 guests in a 34,200-square-foot space.

MICE business has witnessed significant transformation with the advantageous application of technology and innovations, where virtual and hybrid events have taken over in a big way. "Technology plays a vital role in streamlining operations and automating processes, among many other of its uses in events. A wide range of technologies and tools, such as mobile apps, voice control assistants, temperature control, security, and surveillance leverages, are used to enhance guest experiences at Sayaji Vadodara," asserts Hari Krishnan.

Amidst the countless ways that India garners world attention as a tourist paradise, there also exists a dynamic business opportunity as a splendid venue for MICE tourism of global standards. When asked about what the Indian government needs to do to strongly build MICE tourism in India, Hari Krishnan says, "The government can allocate budget in the Ministry of Tourism for developing India as one of the grand MICE destinations in the world. They can also actively participate in global MICE trade fairs, events and showcase India's presence to global buyers looking for venues with unique offerings."

# Yorker Holidays- Shifting Gears

Sanjeev Gosain has recently taken on the full-time role as the CEO of Yorker Holidays Services after serving as the Associate Director of the company. With almost three decades committed to the travel industry, Sanjeev got his initial foothold with International Travel House, servicing key accounts of the company. Since then, Sanjeev has donned multiple hats across many organisations and industry verticals, establishing brands, aiding market penetration, and establishing distribution networks. TTJ presents views of Sanjeev on his roadmap for the future of Yorker Holidays.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

**M**emories of COVID evoke spine-chilling disturbances within the travel industry. This industry perhaps bore the maximum impact of the pandemic and is at least a year away from returning to pre-COVID normalcy. This period impelled the industry to go back to the drawing board to plan and redraw the roadmap for the future.

The unpredictability of the future impels all businesses to be provisioned with checks and balances to cater to contingencies. The suddenness and magnitude of devastation unleashed by the pandemic were unprecedented in modern history, and its unfathomable impact created a devastating impact on the entire world. No exigency plans were ever formulated to cater to such a situation of distress.

Other than emergency travel, the travel industry, on the whole, remained frozen. Slowly isolated pockets started opening up, and the smart entrepreneurs were back in the game.

## Q How challenging was the time for your organisation?

We were equally affected like the entire industry, but the intrinsic need for humans to travel cannot be undermined, and as soon as lockdowns were lifted, the world wanted to travel. Yes! It was restricted travel with pre-conditions, guidelines, and in isolated pockets but travel nevertheless! It was challenging and we were there to assist with our expertise.

## Q What trends emerged during that period?

As you are aware that the shift was gradual and things started opening up very slowly, and cautiously, in isolated pockets but domestic tourism provided the first respite. Thanks to work-from-home guidelines, long stays and staycations gained popularity. We used our expertise and focused on destinations like Goa, Leh and Ladakh, Kashmir, and



▲ Sanjeev Gosain

Andaman, and the results were phenomenal. Pilgrimage sectors of Varanasi, Prayagraj, Ayodhya, and Chitrakoot were in great demand, and this prompted us to open our own office in Varanasi to service the demand we were handling.

As soon as international sectors started opening up, we were handling great movement to Maldives, Dubai, and Thailand. Vietnam, Bali, and Turkey were also very much in demand, and we did great business for these markets. We are also the PSA for Resorts World Cruises and NCL Cruises, but cruises out of Singapore were in demand, and we achieved numbers to be proud of.

## Q What are your plans for the immediate and near future?

Here, I would first like to highlight that our focus has always been and will always remain B2B travel. We exist with the sole purpose of working hand in hand with our partner agents and value long-term relationships and strive very hard to maintain them. With a keen eye on quality and delivery, we offer them the best product basket at competitive pricing.

We will consolidate our market in Punjab and North India and increase our market share in central, west, south, and east India. Internationally we are now a full-fledged licensed DMC in the Maldives with our own office and have also registered in the UK, whilst Dubai and Thailand are in the pipeline.

With our buying power and deep understanding of our focus destinations, we will soon be offering our product basket to business partners in neighbouring countries, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka.

## Q What do you intend to be your business mix for the future?

Managing risk and business mix is a prudent activity for any business leader; we are working to position our business under three main verticals, Cruises, Domestic Travel, and International travel.

## Q What, according to you, are the major challenges or threats faced by our industry?

I call them the 3 T's, namely technology, taxation and trained staff. It is an accepted fact that the future revolves around technology. It is with this acceptance of understanding, we are all working diligently to balance costs and technology and incorporate it into our workflow as consumer buying patterns change. However, disruptive technologies can be game changers and AI- Artificial Intelligence will be the next game changer and we have to remain prepared to embrace it and manage its fallout.

All businesses need a level playing field, however, proposed taxes like 20 per cent TCS can put us at a disadvantage compared to overseas agents. Regarding trained manpower, I think it needs no elaboration as we all experience constraints on a regular basis.

# THERE IS MORE TO DISCOVER IN *Mauritius*

Popular with honeymooners as well as families looking for exotic getaways, Mauritius features among the world's best island destinations. The country presents a plethora of captivating experiences for visitors beyond its dazzling beaches and aquamarine waters. Visitors can enjoy an amazing selection of activities, attractions, and places of interest, from traditional museums and nature parks to thrilling activities like zip lining, sea cruises, island hopping, fishing, and more. Our group of eight found many such fascinating discoveries and experiences, all of them in Mauritius!

Prashant Nayak

## Know why Mauritius is called Little India

Mauritius was uninhabited until 1598, when the Dutch first came, though Arab and Malay sailors are known to have visited the island as early as the 10th century. Then the French came, and finally, the British colonised the island before it gained independence in 1968. During British rule, many Indians from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were taken as indentured labourers to work on the sugarcane farms in Mauritius. Today, it is not surprising that over 68 per cent of Mauritians are of Indian origin, whose forefathers migrated to Mauritius as indentured labourers. The Indians in Mauritius still retain their distinct Hindu identity, and one can find massive statues of Durga and Shiva in the Ganga Talao, a tranquil area near the airport.

## Walk through the sugarcane fields

The first sugarcane plant was brought to the island by the Dutch in 1635 from Java, Indonesia. Red sugarcane changed the history of Mauritius. Initially, the Dutch used it to make an alcoholic beverage called arrack, and with the French, the sugar industry set the pace. Today, most of the agricultural land in Mauritius has vast stretches of sugarcane fields that provide a spectacular backdrop behind the turquoise water and the scintillating white sands.



## Close Encounters at Casela

Casela World of Adventures is the most visited attraction in Mauritius and is a scenic nature park with the beautiful Rempart Mountain serving as the backdrop. Casela is an opportunity to discover and approach a large number of animals from Africa and the Indian Ocean. One has the choice to discover them on safari buses, jeeps, quadbikes, or segways. Sighting of zebras, antelopes, ostriches, giraffes, and rhinos on our Jeep safari was exhilarating. At the Casela, one can walk with lions and tigers and admire the tallness of the giraffes. We were excited at the opportunity to feed giraffes and behold the Aldabra giant tortoises. It has been the experience of a lifetime to see these animals up close and be able to touch them.



We had an incredibly thrilling moment inside the submarine. 35 metres down, though hazy, we viewed corals, some colourful tropical fish, an octopus, and a shipwreck. The experience of going down aboard a submarine was of exalted elation and will remain etched in the mind as a most cherished experience. The professional approach of The Blue Safari Submarine deserves special mention as they guided us deftly right from the pre-diving briefing instructions until our landing back on the main island. The Blue Safari submarine dive is indeed a unique, breathtaking adventure that one should not miss when visiting Mauritius!



## Culinary traditions echo Mauritian multiculturalism

Mauritius is a crossroads of a number of different cultures, and this is reflected in its cuisine, which is a mix of Indian, African, Chinese, and French Creole. Most of the cuisine developed here is the result of settlers having to adapt their indigenous food habit to the available local produce and ingredients. So, don't be surprised if your dal puri tastes different from the one you find in India



or if you find aubergines in your chicken and prawn curries.

They all taste lovely and appealing to the taste buds. Rice and seafood, including salted fish, are also staple ingredients used in Mauritian cuisine. An Indian may find a shortage of spicy food here. Piment écrasé (crushed chilli in Creole), is available with almost every street vendor, fast food outlet, or restaurant in Mauritius. This chutney-type dip tends to be spicy as the aim is to keep it simple to bring out the flavour of the unique-tasting chillies.

## An experience of a lifetime

The Blue Safari Submarines is located on Coastal Road, close to Trou Aux Biches beach.



## Taste the Gold

L'Aventure du Sucre literally means 'adventure of sugar'. Here one learns all about the process of sugar-making. It is important to note that sugar was valued no less than gold in the colonial era. L'Aventure du Sucre, once a sugarcane factory, was later converted into a museum in 1999. Follow a trail of 250 years of history through the museum, and end your tour with some proper sugar tasting as well as a tasting of local rum. Mauritius also has a long history of rum production. There are many rum producers here, who have mastered the art of distilling, aging, and blending rich dark and white rums.

## A picture-perfect village

Cap Malheureux is a small fishing village and is surely one of the most beautiful villages on the island of Mauritius. Any visit to Mauritius would remain incomplete without visiting the splendour of the Notre-Dame

Auxiliatrice Church, also known as the red-roofed church.

Admired for its beauty and simplicity, the church is a great place for Instagram images, as from here,

one gets a majestic view of the ocean, boats, and fishing activities nearby.



## Mellowed by the wine

Takamaka is a boutique winery making exclusive lychee wines. Their wine is made exclusively with lychees grown in Mauritius. Watercolour, Apérichy, Eclipse, Icon, and Tanara are the five distinct vintages on offer, with a wide range of aromas, colours, and palate contents. One is inspired to pack a bottle or two for home after the wine tasting, and we most definitely did so!



## Capturing the heart and soul

Nature lovers are bound to love Vallée des Couleurs Nature Park. It offers a unique experience with

indigenous fauna and flora, along with various fun activities and excursions catering to all ages. There are four wonderful waterfalls where visitors can listen to the rustling water, relax in natural intimacy, and experience inner peace. The main attraction however is the fascinating 23 coloured earth, whose origin dates back to millions of years following the eruption of the Bassin Blanc volcano. Volcanic ashes, which bear witness to that event, are unique in the world.

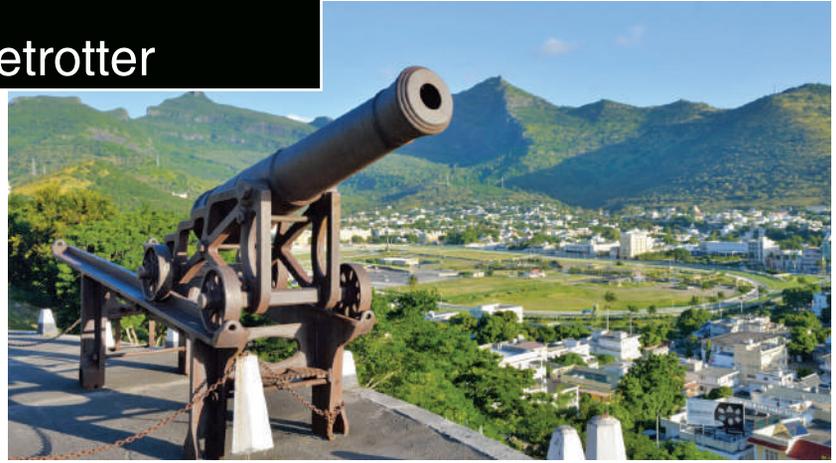
## More in Mauritius

The Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam Botanical Garden has a massive collection of around 500 plant species, including a spice garden. One will be amazed by the exquisite collection of 85 varieties of palm trees. The famous giant waterlilies 'Victoria Amazonica' from the Amazon region of South America were introduced to the botanical garden, and the place where they are located is a sight to behold.

Le Caudan Waterfront is a popular destination that offers a complete shopping, leisure, eating, entertainment, and commercial experience. From the waterfront, we had a memorable two-hour catamaran sunset cruise, which had a great view of the Port Louis coastline while sailing and enjoying snacks and rum. The sunset view was mesmerising and hypnotic.

A place of discovery, education, and awareness, Odysseo Mauritius is the first oceanarium in Mauritius. Visitors here will come across some 200 species of fish and aquatic life and can immerse in a world of vibrant marine life where every corner reveals a captivating spectacle.

The beaches at Ile Aux Cerfs offer several water sports activities, restaurants, and a five-star hotel with a golf course, all making this amazing paradise island the perfect setting for a relaxing day. An hour of glass bottom speed boating, a golf course tour, and a great lunch at the open beach restaurant were fulfilling and soul-elevating experiences.



Fort Adelaide is known as a famous spot for its impressive views of Port Louis. With the wall made of huge cut stones of basalt rock, the fort still holds some remnants from the past, such as cannons. The historical architecture is impressive and must be included in one's bucket list. A tour of the Curious Corner of Chamarel, which is an optical museum unlike any others in Mauritius, was equally fascinating and enriching. We also visited Trou aux Cerfs, the dormant volcano located in the heart of Curepipe town.

The Château de Labourdonnais is an old sugar estate that dates from 1777 and has now been converted to a museum and restaurant with a colonial period theme. One can walk through the grand mansion, and admire the antique furniture, beautiful rooms, and verandah. The restaurant serves excellent food. Adjoining, is a quaint little shop with a place for rum sampling.

## Hotels with bespoke experiences

Our stay at Ocean's Creek Hotel, Intercontinental Resort Mauritius Balaclava, Preskil Island Resort, and Tamassa Resort deserves special mention. We had a stupendous time at the Ocean Creek Hotel, a relatively new hotel near the beach and creek, equipped with great entertainment, cozy rooms, excellent food, and bar service. Highly recommended.

At Intercontinental Resort Mauritius Balaclava, the service and the facilities absolutely justify five stars. Situated on a beach, the big hotel gives a jaw-dropping view of the ocean from the reception. With sea-facing rooms, and utmost luxury, our stay was indeed perfect!

Preskil Island Resort is situated in an outstandingly beautiful and tranquil location, nestled in a lagoon. Besides the stunning location, the hotel was equipped with full amenities, and the staff was welcoming and friendly. Again, highly recommended.

Located in Bel Ombre, on the island's southwest coast, Tamassa Resort is a beautiful all-inclusive beach hotel. This resort has a selection of pools, water sports, and land activities. In the evening, local dancers, concerts, and more, keep guests entertained. From food to the rooms, this all-inclusive resort radiates warm, playful energy and has everything set up to have guests live spirited, the Mauritian way.

If you are looking for more than just a romantic interlude, Mauritius offers more than you can expect in your average four- to seven-day trip. So, pack your bags and head for this remarkable island, because there is still more to be discovered in Mauritius.



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SONIKA BOHRA  
Director-Marketing

✉ [sonika@sampanmedia.com](mailto:sonika@sampanmedia.com)

☎ +91 9560614446

NEHALI JAIN  
Sr. Manager-PR & Marketing

✉ [nehali@sampanmedia.com](mailto:nehali@sampanmedia.com)

☎ +91 9920050680

PARTH SHARMA  
Coordinator-Special Projects

✉ [parth@sampanmedia.com](mailto:parth@sampanmedia.com)

☎ +91 9560264446

# The Lalit Great Eastern

## Betting big on MICE travel

MICE tourism is considered one of the key revenue spinners of the tourism industry in the contemporary world. In an attempt to ride a new wave of MICE opportunities, The Lalit Great Eastern Kolkata has elaborate plans for this segment. Kamal Raza, General Manager, discusses a slew of initiatives taken up by the property to ameliorate footfalls in MICE.

Swaati Chaudhury

**T**alk about hospitality in colonial times, and the name of The Lalit Great Eastern springs to mind that carries the legacy of timeless charm and luxury of the Raj era. The property stands tall with its historic and strategic location in the “City of Joy” and enjoys the distinction of being the oldest luxury property not only in India but also in Asia.

When it comes to the unique selling point of the property, Kamal Raza elaborates, “Our property has its rich historic stature, and apart from its decent inventory of rooms, we have one of the largest venues for hosting MICE events with the hall size of 8,000 sq ft, the space of the open terrace being 14,000 sq ft and there are multiple board rooms. We offer single-window solutions to deal with all MICE businesses, and our set-up is equipped with dedicated resources to address all MICE queries. For business queries in the MICE segment, we have multiple experts on board to provide end-to-end solutions. Our hotel is replete with 243 rooms that play a crucial role in strengthening MICE business at any point in time.” Food and beverage has a significant role in churning out successful events with the support of an experienced hospitality team, and with world-class standards of brands, the property has emerged as a perfect combination to host prestigious events.

The hospitality group is bent on capitalising on the current demand for MICE business in the city. Raza said, “Based on the global forecast, the MICE market will rise to a size of \$971 billion, and the major chunk is expected to be in Asia-Pacific, which witnessed a fair share of 44 per cent last year. This is evident from the fact



▲ Kamal Raza

that we are experiencing an upsurge in the MICE business. Our property is offering competent rates with value-added services like sound concierge services, transport, laundry services, in-house spa, and night bar.”

Our country has emerged as one of the most preferred MICE destinations in recent times. Raza further added, “Bengal has an active role to play in the MICE market in terms of the kind of infrastructure on offer. MICE tourism is moving fast in Kolkata and other areas of the state owing to its improved connectivity, presence of luxury hospitality groups, and state-of-the-art, renowned convention centres.”

The post-pandemic world discerned a great deal of changes. Challenges encountered in procuring skilled manpower have seen an increase in airfares. Raza informed, “The hosts and organisers have explored immense possibilities for hosting city events. We are into offering a gamut of experiences to the organisers for executing MICE events, with

our property serving as a one-stop shop for all arrangements. There has been a sound response from aspiring professionals interested to build their careers in the hospitality stream. Kolkata boasts of convenient connectivity with all major Indian cities and with prominent economic South-East Asian destinations by regular flight service. We have teamed up with West Bengal Transport Corporation to offer a one-of-a-kind tram ride and river cruise experiences to our guests. The Indian hospitality industry has brought a number of global brands to build their operations in the country. The well-developed network of road and rail transport has attracted a lot of MSME business in the city’s suburbs, leading to a surge in MICE business. The government should look at offering tax benefits to MSMEs if they intend to host MICE events.”

The property has drawn up investment plans to beckon MICE travellers. Raza reiterated, “We are expanding our offerings with the addition of new banqueting space in the Victorian block and a nightclub in order to ensure that visitors do not have to move beyond our hotel complex while attending the event. With a view to pull global and domestic visitors, we are looking ahead to open the doors of a new, upscale food outlet that will highlight all five specialties of the city.”

The world is moving towards sustainable and environment-friendly business models, and India should aim at emerging as one of the most environment-friendly destinations. “With a view to positioning our country as a prospective MICE destination, the Ministry of Tourism should ideally come up with a sub-brand- Meet in India, under the aegis of Incredible India,” further added Raza.



The heart of  
Incredible India

# Monsoon Bliss in Madhya Pradesh



Madhya Pradesh, The Heart of Incredible India, has a huge potential for tourism during the monsoons.

Mandu

**M**P's multi-hued landscapes from lush forests, rolling hills to magnificent water bodies, come alive with vibrant greenery and gushing waterfalls during the monsoon months. The national parks and wildlife sanctuaries such as Kanha, Bandhavgarh, and Pench, offers an unforgettable experience for wildlife enthusiasts to witness the flora and fauna in their natural habitat. The historical sites and architectural marvels, such as Khajuraho temples, Gwalior Fort and Sanchi Stupa, are enhanced by the monsoon. The natural settings of Madhya Pradesh becomes even more picturesque, attracting nature lovers and adventure seekers alike. With its rich cultural heritage, sublime beauty, and salubrious weather, Madhya Pradesh offers a colourful kaleidoscope for tourists looking to explore the state during the monsoons.

There is a lot to be served on the plate for the tourists. Pachmarhi, Mandu, and Amarkantak offers unique experiences and an enthralling natural beauty. While these places are popular throughout the year, they have a special charm during the monsoons. Let's explore the scope of tourism in each of these destinations during the rainy season:

## Pachmarhi

Pachmarhi a hill station located in



Madhya Pradesh is known as the "Queen of Satpura." It is nestled amidst lush green forests, cascading waterfalls, and picturesque valleys. During the monsoons, Pachmarhi transforms into a paradise with fresh greenery, misty mountains, and gushing waterfalls. The pleasant weather and rejuvenating ambience make it an ideal retreat for nature lovers and adventure enthusiasts. Visitors can enjoy trekking through the dense forests, explore the cave shelters, and tread through Rajat Prapat and Bee Falls during the monsoon season.

*Nearest Railway Station – Pipariya 55 Kms*

*Nearest Airport – Bhopal 210 Kms*

## Mandu:

Mandu, also known as City of Joy, is a historic city in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. It is renowned for its magnificent medieval architecture and romantic legends. During the monsoons, Mandu becomes even more beautiful as the ancient palaces, mausoleums, and gardens get covered in lush greenery. The rain-washed landscapes and misty atmosphere create a romantic ambience, attracting tourists seeking solitude and tranquillity. Visitors can explore iconic attractions like Jahaz Mahal, Hindola Mahal, and Rani Roopmati Pavilion while enjoying the refreshing monsoon breeze and occasional drizzles.

*Nearest Airport – Indore 96 Kms*

*Nearest Railway Station – Indore 99 Kms*

## Amarkantak

Amarkantak is a pilgrim town located in the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh, where the Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges meet. It is considered a sacred place as it is the source of rivers like Narmada, Sone, and Johila. Monsoons bring life to Amarkantak with lush green forests, mist-covered peaks,



and numerous waterfalls. The natural beauty of this place is at its peak during the rainy season. Visitors can go on nature walks, visit ancient temples, and enjoy the serenity of the surroundings. The waterfalls like Kapildhara and Durgdhara are especially mesmerizing during the monsoons, offering a beautiful sight and a refreshing experience.

*Nearest Railway Station – Pendra Road 25 Kms*

Several other destinations of the state offers a serene and rejuvenating experience . From exploring historical sites to savouring the cascading waterfalls and enjoying pleasant weather the state has a special buoyancy during the monsoons. . One such hidden gem is Chitrakoot, known for its resonating waterfalls and lush greenery that comes alive during the rainy season. Another destination that is worth a visit is Maheshwar, where the Narmada River flows majestically, surrounded by ancient temples and architectural marvels. For nature enthusiasts, Bargi Dam is a perfect retreat, with its vast reservoir that becomes a haven for migratory birds during the monsoons. Lastly, Orchha, with its magnificent palaces and cenotaphs, takes on a mystical charm as the raindrops gently cascade over its historical structures, making it an ideal monsoon getaway in Madhya Pradesh.

# Staying ahead of the curve in MICE business

SKIL Events has a range of unique selling points and strengths in the MICE business that distinguish it from the competition. Their dominance lies in their unmatched ability to source exceptional venues for events. With a global logistics capability in-house, SKIL Events is empowered to efficiently manage transportation and ensure seamless event operations. Ramanpreet Singh, Vice President-Growth and Strategy, SKIL Events, asserts that their team is commended for generating and implementing unique and creative ideas and concepts that leave a lasting impression on attendees.

Prashant Nayak

In 2023, SKIL Events observed a significant increase in MICE inquiries, with the market showing a threefold rise over the previous year. Resultantly, the organisation has capitalised on this surge in demand and has been acquiring new clients regularly. “Even in the face of high demand, we maintain a focus on sustainable growth and selectively choose clients, predominantly favouring premium clients to ensure quality service,” says Ramanpreet.

The post-COVID landscape has introduced challenges of its own kind while organising MICE events. Addressing these issues, Ramanpreet says, “Among these challenges are increased costs for various aspects of event planning, which have nearly doubled due to higher demand and limited supply. Additionally, issues related to human resources, turbulent airfares, complex tax structures, unregulated infrastructure, and capacity, persist within the industry. However, our organisation excels in these areas, as they are our core differentiators. With our expertise in logistics, venue sourcing, and trained staff, we have managed to stay ahead of the curve. This has significantly boosted aspirations of our brand, attracting numerous applications from potential employees regularly.”

With the use of technology and innovations, and with virtual and hybrid events taking over in a big way, the MICE business has evolved by large proportions. SKIL Events, prioritises technology and innovation, using engaging ideas such as virtual and augmented reality-based experiences to enhance guest interactions and overall event experiences. “Technology and innovation are being used judiciously at SKIL Travel. We have adapted our events to incorporate virtual and hybrid formats. Hybrid events allow thousands of guests to



▲ Ramanpreet Singh

join remotely, while we use various engaging tech-based ideas for on-site attendees. Our guests enjoy experiences like the Virtual Paparazzi Wall, Augmented Reality-Based Games, the signature Champaign Wall, Mosaic Wall, Interactive Table Tops, LED Entrance Arches and Standaes, and more, enriching their overall event participation,” states Ramanpreet.

In line with their commitment to growth, SKIL Events is investing substantially in the MICE business. Their turnover in the events space is expected to triple compared to the previous year, highlighting their dedication to expansion and progress. The rapid expansion of their teams aims to meet the growing demands and expectations of their clients.

India, with its abundance of diverse tourist attractions, presents an excellent opportunity to establish itself as a world-class venue for MICE tourism. The government’s focus and promotion of regional destinations through global familiarisation (FAM) tours

will reinforce MICE tourism on a major scale in India, believes Ramanpreet. Active efforts to bid for more international exhibitions and events would draw attention to the country as a preferred destination. Moreover, improvements in infrastructure for hosting global concerts and other large-scale events would enhance India’s appeal to international business and leisure travellers.

“The Indian MICE industry looks at a promising future. There are several tailwinds that are aiding rapid growth in demand, like the industry’s adaptation to virtual and hybrid event formats, which indicate a positive trajectory. As technology continues to evolve, the integration of new-age innovations will promise elevated guest experiences. However, a favourable regulatory environment and continued investments in infrastructure, along with skilled manpower, will be essential for the sustainable development of the MICE industry in India,” opines Ramanpreet.

With a commitment to delivering magical experiences, SKIL offers a range of services that cater to every aspect of corporate event planning. SKIL’s expert team provides concept and theme recommendations that align with the client’s objectives, which the team subsequently proceeds to design and give shape to, creating end-to-end creatives that bring the concept to life.

“These are exciting times for the MICE industry in India, presenting abundant opportunities for growth and success. Choosing expert players in the industry, like our organisation, can ensure a seamless and sustainable journey toward achieving event excellence. As we move forward, we remain committed to delivering exceptional service and creating unforgettable experiences for our clients and, in turn, their attendees,” concludes Ramanpreet.

# Hotelzify piloting hotels into a new era of autonomy

Hotelzify is a self-serve website development and booking management platform for hotels and resorts. The platform empowers independent property owners to achieve greater productivity and success, fully leveraging their potential, optimising processes, and harnessing the power of their existing tools. Anirudh Ganesh, Co-founder and CEO, Hotelzify, calls upon hotels, resorts, and homestays to look beyond the intermediaries and embrace a new era of autonomy with Hotelzify as their invaluable partner.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Anirudh Ganesh, Co-founder & CEO, Unnikrishnan, Co-founder & CTO

Hotelzify aims to empower short-term rental accommodations and hotels to get more direct bookings to increase margins and gain visibility via Google Hotel Ads. It has established partnerships with over 700 plus hotels and resort properties in India, delivering significant value to its businesses within a short span of time, and intends to grow its reach significantly in the coming years.

Speaking about the inspiration behind establishing Hotelzify, Anirudh said, “My work schedule led me to travel extensively, where I chanced to interact with hoteliers in Indian cities and Southeast Asia. Post this, during COVID, we had a work-from-home model, so I backpacked across Himachal, Ladakh, and Northeast (Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal), where I interacted with a lot of vacation rental owners aspiring to build a digital presence. This recurring request became the genesis for Unnikrishnan CJ, my co-founder, and me to build Hotelzify.”

Hotelzify currently offers a freemium model where properties pay a commission ranging from 2.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent depending on the source of booking. They also have a monthly fixed fee model, which provides additional features like a website domain, custom themes, and a chatbot on the website.

Hotelzify’s primary focus is on accelerating market entry processes while minimising costs by eliminating the reliance on OTAs and reducing high commissions. Elaborating on the advantages of Hotelzify over OTAs, Anirudh shares, “Our belief is that as a property, you present the end product to the guest, and in this case, it is the room and experience that is provided. OTA’s distinct advantage is with regards to their technology, better website, ad tech, and data. With our strength in technology and the advent of AI, a lot of this can be built and handed to hotels to operate smoothly. Our goal is to be able to provide a hotel with OTA equivalent technology while they continue to do what they do

best viz provide great guest experiences while in turn increasing their profits.”

There are a lot of tech products to digitise operational activities, but Anirudh is of the opinion that democratising deep tech directly in the hand of hoteliers and property owners should be the next big step in the process. Examples of deep tech are website performance, retargeting past guests, and much more optimised ad tech. For example, Google Hotel Ads are currently used predominantly by only the big OTAs and big hotel chains, but over 90 per cent of hotels do not run them.

Most of the clients who come to them face two major challenges, the first being the commission percentages bleeding their business, which Hotelzify addresses by building a direct booking channel to reduce dependency on OTAs. The other issue to be noted is the lack of visibility and awareness of their property. For this, Hotelzify has a self-serve tool where any property can run Google Hotel Ads directly from the Hotelzify app, which is different from Google Ads (as hotel ads are built by Google for the industry). Here, their AI-based ad engine optimises the hotel’s ad performance so that they can focus on providing the best possible experience to their guests.

Hotelzify recently raised a round of seed funding led by TBO and All In Capital as their lead investors, showcasing confidence in the product. They also have Abhinav Pathak’s angel group, GTM ventures led by Revant Bhate (CEO of ManMatters and Bodywise) and DeVC (a fund backed by Matrix founders) to close the round.

Sharing their growth plans, Anirudh mentions, “The funds will primarily be used to build our product, including a Google Hotel Ad engine with AI-based pricing, a customisable marketplace module for hoteliers, and expanding our engineering team. Additionally, we will run sales experiments in emerging tourist destinations in Southeast Asia and the Middle East.”

Apart from focusing on ad tech, Hotelzify is building a marketplace where hoteliers can purchase different software like channel manager, review manager, custom themes built by freelance developers, guest engagement tools like e-check-in, etc. “All these software would be integrated into the Hotelzify platform so that they do not need to re-register or fill data in two places while it would provide an acquisition avenue for hotel tech software providers,” concludes Anirudh.





# PM Modi inaugurates IECC the icon of modern India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the newly revamped Pragati Maidan complex in Delhi on July 26, 2023, unveiling the impressive International Exhibition and Convention Centre (IECC), which will be now known as the 'Bharat Mandapam.' During the inauguration, Modi said that the world will see India's rising stature when the newly built 'Bharat Mandapam' will host the G20 Summit this year in September.

## Team TTJ

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, dedicated to the nation, Bharat Mandapam, the International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre, IECC, Pragati Maidan. The G-20 coin and G-20 stamp were unveiled at the grand opening ceremony by the Prime Minister, and he participated in the naming ceremony of the convention centre. Developed as a national project at a cost of about Rs 2,700 crores, the new convention complex will help showcase and promote India as a global business destination.

The inauguration ceremony commenced with the Honourable Prime Minister offering puja at the complex and felicitating the shramjeevis involved in the construction of the International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre.

In his welcome address at the inaugural function, Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Textiles, thanked Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for sparing his valuable time to participate in the inauguration of the International Convention Complex – Bharat Mandapam. He said that Prime Minister Modi has introduced the country to a new way of thinking and has inspired and stimulated us to move towards a united goal of becoming a developed nation. He highlighted the role of shramjeevis and architects in the development of the complex.

Elucidating the motivation and importance of creation of a world-class convention and

exhibition centre, Shri Goyal pointed out the significance of showcasing the assets of our country to the whole world. It is the visionary in the Prime Minister and his incredible ideas of looking into the future that resulted in the building of this complex. The world will now witness the output of our farmers, MSMEs, artisans, and industries. He said that the various policies of the government to promote industry and to ensure the progress of the nation are also being supplemented with the building of our modern infrastructure. Goyal explained that the name, Bharat Mandapam, derives its root from Lord Basaveshwara's idea of Anubhav Mandapam, which was a pavilion for public ceremonies. This complex will be available for all people and will be provided with advanced facilities to help the country position itself as a developed and modern nation.

International Exhibition-cum-Convention Centre (IECC) project revamps the old and antiquated facilities at Pragati Maidan and has been developed as a national project. With a campus area of approximately 123 acres, the IECC complex has been developed as India's largest MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) destination. In terms of the covered space available for events, the IECC Complex finds its place among the top exhibition and convention complexes in the world. The newly developed IECC complex at Pragati Maidan comprises multiple state-of-the-art facilities, including the convention centre, exhibition halls, amphitheatre, etc.

The convention centre is developed as the centrepiece of the Pragati Maidan complex. It is a grand architectural marvel, designed to host large-scale international exhibitions, trade fairs, conventions, conferences, and other prestigious events. It is equipped with multiple meeting rooms, lounges, auditoriums, an amphitheatre, and a business centre, making it capable of hosting a wide range of events. Its majestic multi-purpose hall and plenary hall have a combined capacity of 7,000 people, which is larger than the seating capacity of the famous Sydney Opera House in Australia. Its magnificent amphitheatre is equipped with a seating capacity of 3,000 individuals.

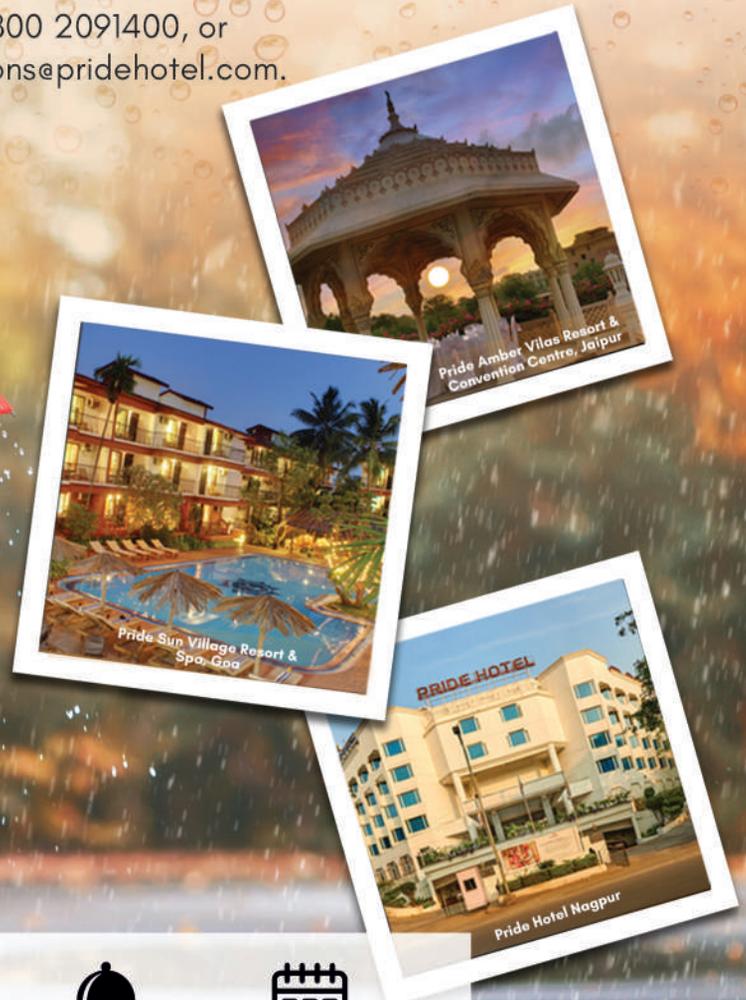
Intertwining modern facilities with age-old Indian traditions is evident in the architectural design of the convention centre, as it showcases the country's confidence and conviction in its rich past, whilst embracing modern facilities and a progressive way of life. The shape of the building is derived from the shankha (conch shell), and different walls and facades of the convention centre depict several elements of India's traditional art and culture, including surya shakti highlighting India's efforts in harnessing solar energy, 'Zero to ISRO,' celebrating our achievements in space, Pancha Mahabhuta signifying the building blocks of universal foundation - aakash (sky), vayu (air), agni (fire), jal (water), prithvi (earth), among others. Also, various paintings and tribal art forms from different regions of the country adorn the convention centre.

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# Unparalleled magnificence of Darjeeling and Sikkim

## Unravelling by Himalayan Travels and IDMC World

Himalayan Travels, well-known for its unwavering commitment to promoting the Northeastern region as an exclusive tourist destination, recently partnered with IDMC World, a leading organisation that showcases India's diverse attractions to the world, to organise a captivating Sikkim and Darjeeling familiarisation (FAM) trip which provided an exceptional platform for travel agents to immerse themselves in the rich tapestry of these picturesque locales.

### Team TTJ

Over five captivating days from July 15- 19, 2023, the breathtaking landscapes and cultural wonders of the enchanting Himalayan region of Sikkim and Darjeeling were showcased in the country's largest FAM trip ever organised. With an overwhelming participation of more than 150 travel agents from across India, this extraordinary event, a joint effort by Himalayan Travels and IDMC World, aimed to highlight the mesmerising beauty and potential of the Northeast as a destination and India on the global stage.

"We are thrilled to have organised this monumental fam trip to showcase the untapped potential of Sikkim and Darjeeling," said Aditya Bothra, MD, Himalayan Travels. He continued, "The overwhelming response from travel agents across the country indicates the growing interest in exploring the hidden gems of the Northeast. We are grateful to IDMC World for joining hands with us in this remarkable endeavour."

The event witnessed the active



participation of esteemed hotels from the region, including Udaan Hotels, Mayfair Hotels, Ramada, Lemon Tree, Summit Group, Mount Group, ITC Fortune, Denzong Regency and Mount Siniolchu Hotel. These prominent hospitality establishments warmly welcomed the travel agents and showcased the unique experiences they offer to discerning travellers.

One of the key highlights of the FAM trip was the visit to the iconic Happy Valley Tea Estate in Darjeeling. The travel agents were treated to an immersive tea-tasting experience, introducing them to the world-

famous Darjeeling Tea. This exclusive experience highlighted the region's significant contribution to India's tea culture.

"We firmly believe that experiences like these fam trips are instrumental in fostering a deeper appreciation

for our country's diverse offerings," said Ashish Jain, Director, IDMC World. He added, "By presenting India as a captivating destination, we aim to attract travellers from around the world and provide them with unforgettable memories."

Throughout the FAM trip, participants were exposed to the region's unparalleled beauty, ancient traditions, and warm hospitality, which left a lasting impression on their hearts and minds. The carefully curated itinerary introduced the agents to the inordinate beauty of Sikkim and Darjeeling that deserves to be on every traveller's bucket list.

The Sikkim and Darjeeling FAM trip stood as a testament to the power of collaboration between Himalayan Travels and IDMC World in promoting tourism in the Northeast and the nation. This extraordinary initiative provided a unique opportunity for travel agents to become ambassadors for these destinations, further enhancing their appeal to tourists from India and beyond.





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# TTJ TRAVMART Chandigarh concludes successfully with 1800-plus business meetings

The eighth TTJ TRAVMART for the year 2023 was organised in Chandigarh on July 22, 2023, with 27 exhibitors who displayed their products and services to 167 pre-registered buyers, resulting in more than 1800 business meetings.

Participating exhibitors included state tourism boards, international tourism boards, airlines, hotels, destination management companies, cruise lines, tour operators, and air ticket consolidators. They presented their products and services to travel agents from Chandigarh, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Ambala, Mohali, Panchkula, Bhatinda, Hissar, Patiala, Yamuna Nagar, and Delhi.

Senior office bearers of most of the trade associations, like TAAI, TAFI, ADTOI, SKAL, IATO, TACT, and ALTO, were present at the event. Presentations were made by India Tourism, Rajasthan Tourism, and Sharjah Tourism. Musafir Media Hub

and the Voice of Chandigarh were the official media partners for the event.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja, Co-Convener, TTJ TRAVMART, informed the audience about forthcoming TTJ TRAVMARTs in Indore, Ahmedabad, and Nagpur.

Ravi Sharma, Convener, TTJ TRAVMART, announced that the first edition of East India TRAVMART will be held at the Vedic Village Spa Kolkata, from September 15 - 17, 2023, and will be the first fully hosted two-night and three-day buyer-seller programme. He invited the buyers of Haryana, Punjab, and Himachal Pradesh to participate in our future TRAVMARTs.



**Harraj Singh Sidhu, Chairman, TAAI Chandigarh Chapter**

The TTJ TRAVMART organised in Chandigarh was immensely successful. The event was a rewarding experience and served with an opportunity of meeting a variety of travel vendors under one roof. The dedicated team effort of TTJ was commendable and benefited both buyers and sellers equally. We aspire to participate in many more such shows in days to come.



**Khusvinder Sarna, Chairman, TAFI Northern India Chapter and Director, The Federal Travels and Tours**

The quality of the 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 pleasantly surprised to witness so many business meetings made possible by team TTJ in less than eight hours. The takeaway was a bouquet of high-value connections provided by TTJ. Brilliant Show!



**Vinod Sharma, President, TACT**

The impressive TTJ TRAVMART in Chandigarh indeed deserves accolades and paves the way forward for many such enriching future events. As an avid traveller and industry professional, I found the show to be informative, engaging, and thoroughly enjoyable. Almost all our members of TACT and Skal International - Chandigarh Chapter attended the show, which deserves a special mention. The grand success of the event bears testimony to the hard work and dedication of the TTJ team, and I would like to extend my gratitude to TTJ for consistently promoting and supporting the travel industry.



# Events



# Events



## Manmeet Singh, Chairman, IATO Punjab and ADTOI Punjab, Haryana Chandigarh, Northern India

TTJ TRAVMART is managed by professional personalities from the industry. Ravi Sharma, with his vast media experience, and Gurjit Singh, who has a bundle of travel industry experiences, together form an unparalleled combination. They are also well supported by their organising team. 2023 TRAVMART Chandigarh bears testimony to this talent and amalgamation. The large group of attendees could experience the imprint of diligent work in organising the meetings between exhibitors and buyers.



## Sanjeev Gosain, CEO, Yorker Holiday Services

As always, the event was very well thought out, planned, coordinated, and presented by Ravi Sharma and Gurjit Singh in Chandigarh. It was nice to see some new buyers coming from all parts of Punjab and Haryana actively participating in the TtJ TRAVMART. I am also happy to see the TtJ TRAVMART family grow as a whole. The buyers in Chandigarh also were very confident about the market growth and assured full support to sellers. TtJ platform as a whole is a great way for both seller and buyer to meet, grow and explore new dimensions in the tourism industry, at the same time being informed of all the new developments through their TtJ Updates on WhatsApp. Kudos to Team TtJ for the great work and support.



# UNFORGETTABLE EXPEDITION

## Exploring the Wild Wonders of Gir

Special curated trip for ETAA members, by Tripotus.

**Dipti Pradhan Thakoor**

**R**elentless downpours and widespread waterlogging in Mumbai threatened to cancel my much-awaited trip to Sasan Gir, but my determination and excitement refused to be quelled! I was on the verge of embarking on an extraordinary adventure to Rajkot, and nothing was going to stand in my way! Some may have cancelled but finally, a resolute and spirited small group of us braved the challenges and arrived at Rajkot on the July 20, 2023, ready to make memories that would last a lifetime!



The coach picked us up from the Airport, and we headed straight to the Rajkot Railway station at a distance of 7-8 km. Despite the small group, our spirits were soaring, and everyone was eager to explore.

After a journey of approximately 4.5 hours, with a couple of stops in between, we finally reached Gir. Our destination was the charming Gir Lion Pugmark Family Resort, located deep within the forest, equipped with ten quaint cottages with ample open space. Interestingly, we were informed by the resort staff that just a week ago, a lioness had taken a calf from a nearby village, reminding us of how close we were to the wild!

In the evening, we took a delightful stroll to a small stream within the property, a mere 20-minute walk from the resort, and had

a relaxing time on its bank. The night was nothing short of thrilling, with the knowledge that I was as close to the heart of the forest as I could possibly be!

The next morning, I embarked on an unforgettable journey to the revered Somnath Temple, only an hour's drive from the resort. The exquisite temple shone like a beacon of tranquillity amidst the world's chaos. The darshan was spellbinding, and an ingeniously constructed sit-out near the ocean enthralled us, as the sea's rhythmic embrace captivated our souls. My heart craves more as I eagerly continue my pilgrimage to Gir.

Next on our list was the Devaliya Safari, as the main Safari remained closed during the Monsoon months. The enclosed jungle area was vast, housing numerous animals roaming freely. We learned that lions and leopards were known man-eaters, so the Jeep safari had a protective cage, which could limit viewing. Opting for the bus safari was the perfect option, as we enjoyed a higher vantage point for spotting and viewing the animals

The thrilling safari, started with the incredible sight of seven lions gathered together, leaving us in complete awe. We also had the immense pleasure of spotting herds of spotted deer, vibrant peacocks, and a remarkable group of 8-9 leopards. To top it off, we even caught a glimpse of a fox relaxing with its adorable baby. The entire experience turned this glorious safari into an awe-inspiring spectacle, etching unforgettable memories in our hearts.

The resort stay was incredibly comfortable, specially curated for us and the Gujarati food was simply amazing, leaving us impressed after every meal. A peacock's graceful dance

at the viewpoint during breakfast was a daily treat, and we even happily spotted some deer. Birdwatching with binoculars near the resort was a delightful experience, as Gir is a birder's paradise.

The following morning, we bid farewell to this remarkable holiday, forever grateful for such an unforgettable opportunity specially curated for us. Until the next adventure!

A heartfelt thank you to Kushal Shah, Partner at The Lion Pugmark Family Resort and Founder of Tripotus and Sasan Lions, for proposing and organising this incredible trip for ETAA Members. We are immensely grateful to Chetan Jotwa, Partner at The Lion Pugmark Resort, for his warm hospitality and for serving us delicious food at the resort. Their efforts made this trip an unforgettable experience for all of us.

A special thank you goes out to all the participating Members for making this study trip truly remarkable. Your enthusiasm and exemplary behaviour were appreciated by Kushal, who remarked, "ETAA has quality Travel Agents, a wonderful group, and amazing people." Your presence and positive attitude contributed immensely to the success of this trip. Cheers to a fantastic group!



**About the Author:**  
Dipti Pradhan Thakoor is Director at Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA).

# RDTM 2023: Sustainability Empowering the Future



The third edition of the Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM) was organised by the Department of Tourism, Government of Rajasthan, and the Federation of Hospitality and Tourism of Rajasthan, (FHTR) from July 14–16, 2023, in Jaipur. The theme of RDTM 2023 revolved around Sustainable Tourism, and the venue for the event was the brand-new Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC).

**Gurjit Singh Ahuja**

**R**DTM 2023 was inaugurated by Vishvendra Singh, Tourism Minister, Rajasthan, with the ceremony of ribbon cutting, on July 15, 2023. The guests of honour on the occasion were Dharmendra Singh Rathore, Chairman, RTDC, and Rajiv Arora, Chairman, Rajasthan Small Industries Corporation.

TTJ was the exclusive "knowledge partner" for RDTM 2023 and curated a special commemorative publication titled 'Regal Rajasthan,' with the theme, Sustainability Empowering the Future, which was released at the press conference at the event venue on July 15, by Dharmendra Singh Rathore in the presence of Gayatri Rathore, IAS, Principal Secretary - Tourism, Gov of Rajasthan. Also, present were Lalit K Panwar, Patron of FHTR; Dr. Rashmi Sharma, IAS, Director - Tourism; Bhim Singh, President Honour, FHTR; Apurv Kumar, President, FHTR; Randhir Vikram Singh Mandawa, President, Indian Heritage Hotels Association (IHHA); Kuldeep Singh Chandela, Senior Vice President, FHTR and President Hotel and Restaurant Association of Rajasthan (HRAR); Khaled Khan, Vice President, FHTR; Mahendra Singh Rathore, President, Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO); Mohan Singh Mertia, Secretary General, FHTR; and Gyan Prakash, Founder Executive Committee Member, FHTR. TTJ was represented by Ravi Sharma and Gurjit Singh Ahuja.

RDTM 2023 aimed at increasing tourism inflow to the state responsibly and with a clear focus on sustainability. The mart commenced with the experience of Amber Fort for the delegates. The domestic tour operators, travel agents, and visiting delegates from across the country were taken on a guided tour of Amber

Fort and beheld the mesmerising sound and light show. Both the buyers (domestic tour operators) and sellers (owners of tourism products) expressed enthusiasm at the response received at the mega travel mart.

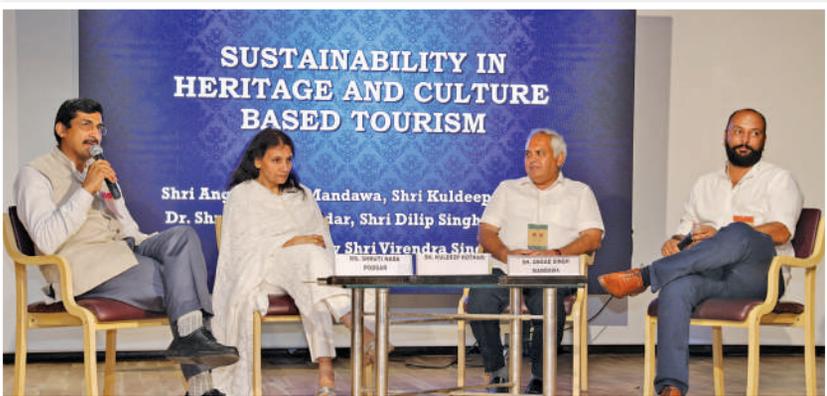
Over the course of the two days, over 7,000 pre-structured B2B meetings transpired between more than 200 exhibitors from Rajasthan and over 200 domestic tour operators from across the country. The tour operators showcased the prowess and potential of their 600 tourism products, like hotels, motels, resorts, eateries, heritage properties, amusement parks, etc. Participation was complete, with buyers from almost all the states, including Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, and Odisha.

Enriching knowledge sessions on topics such as Sustainability in Tourism, Holistic Growth While Conserving Our Heritage, Sustainability in Heritage and Culture based Tourism, Tourism for Rural Resurgence, Responsible Tourism, and Wildlife Tourism, were organised.

As a precursor, and to lift the spirits for RDTM 2023, several roadshows were organised across the state for promotion of the event. These were held in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Bharatpur, and Pushkar. Post mart, 60 domestic tour operators from across the country, participating in RDTM 2023, were taken on a familiarisation (FAM) tour to introduce them to the many facets of various popular tourist places in Rajasthan. The objective of the FAM tour was to showcase Rajasthan as a preferred tourist destination.



# Events



# TAAI Convention in Colombo sets new milestone in India and Sri Lanka relations

The 67<sup>th</sup> TAAI Convention and Exhibition that recently concluded in Colombo, Sri Lanka, was a resounding success. The participation of President Ranil Wickremasinghe of Sri Lanka proved to be a historical moment as this has been the first instance of a host country's president being a part of the convention.



## Team TTJ

**W**ith 550 Indian travel stakeholders and media personnel, the 67th TAAI Convention solidified its position as a premier travel event in the region. It attracted industry professionals seeking networking, knowledge exchange, and partnership building. The convention aimed to foster partnerships and cooperation between the two countries, strengthening bilateral ties.

The Sri Lankan hospitality was at its best, and they skilfully organised every detail to leave a captivating and memorable experience for all the delegates. As the event unfolded over the three days, attendees experienced a myriad of activities and insightful business sessions aimed at fostering collaborations, knowledge sharing, and business opportunities.

The inaugural function of the 67th conference of TAAI commenced at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) in Colombo, setting the stage for an awe-inspiring opening ceremony that left the audience captivated. The conference centred around the profound bond shared by India

and Sri Lanka, showcasing the vibrant essence of Sri Lankan culture through a mesmerising performance by the renowned Channa-Upuli Dance Troupe.

Nishad Wijetunga, President, SLAITO, warmly welcomed the distinguished delegation. Both Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, and Gopal Baglay, Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, addressed the gathering, emphasising the significance of India-Sri Lanka relations in the context of tourism.

The chief guest of the evening, His Excellency President Ranil Wickremasinghe, further reiterated the profound bond between the two nations with a brilliant speech highlighting the awe-inspiring sights of Sri Lanka. Harin Fernando, Minister of Tourism and Lands, graced the event as the guest of honour.

The second day set in motion with a houseful of travel and hospitality professionals, eagerly waiting for engaging business conclave, followed by a B2B session showcasing the best of Sri Lanka's accommodation providers and destination management companies.

The session on India Tourism Vision 2047: A transformed Landscape of Experiences and Connections, witnessed an exciting discussion between Arvind Singh, former Secretary Tourism, Government of India; Madhavan Menon, Managing Director, Thomas Cook India Limited; Nipun Agarwal, Chief Commercial and Transformation Officer, Air India; K.B. Kachru,



Chairman Emeritus and Principal Advisor, South Asia, Radisson Hotels Group and moderator Ashish Gupta, Consulting CEO, FAITH.

Insightful presentations were made by Pieter Elbers, CEO, IndiGo, and Thisum Jayasuriya, Chairman, Sri Lanka Convention Bureau. An interesting discussion on the potential of aviation was moderated by Kapil Kaul, CEO and Director, CAPA India, with panellists Amitabh Khosla, Country Director, India, IATA; Praveen Iyer, Co-Founder and Chief Commercial Officer, Akasa Air; Rajeev Bhatia, Chief Commercial Officer, Amadeus India; Vinay Malhotra, Head of Global Sales, Indigo and Richard Nuttall, CEO, Sri Lankan Airlines.

Adding a stimulating perspective to travel were two captivating sessions. One was a detailed presentation on the experiential travel-a paradigm shift in tourism by Dr. Navina Jafa, Expert Cultural Skills, and Sustainable Development, and the other was a motivational story of a true journey by Ajeet Bajaj and





daughter Deeya Bajaj on climbing the Seven Summits – the trailblazer’s journey!

A brilliant evening to cap off an enthralling day two was held later at the event named “An Evening in Colombo” and featured enthralling dance performances, oriental music, and delicious meals and drinks.



The final day of the TAAI Convention took delegates to a new venue, The Shangri-La Colombo. The morning commenced with the signing of the MoU between Nexus DMC CEO Vinay Gupta and TAAI President for its new landmark website – NEXTAAI. Keeping the energy-momentum going, Yogesh Chhabria, author, speaker, and founder of The Happionaire Way, stepped in and motivated the gathering to always have a positive and ‘I can do it’ attitude towards everything in life.

Roping in international viewpoint, the session on ‘Transcending Borders – Strengthening International Relations for a Transformed World,’ brought together Ho Thi Thanh Truc, Ambassador of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to Sri Lanka; Paul Stephens, High Commissioner, High Commission of Australia, Sri Lanka; Katsuki Kotaro, Chargé d’affaires, Embassy of Japan, Sri Lanka; Fakhri Alivev, Chargé d’affaires, Embassy of Azerbaijan, New Delhi and Maged Mosleh, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Sri Lanka.

In a noteworthy discussion on tourism titled, Differentiating Travel – Perspectives from Industry Experts, the panellists included Dev Karvat, Founder and CEO, Asego Travel LLP; G B Srithar, Regional Director, India, Middle East, and South Asia, Singapore Tourism Board; Commander Nevil Malao, Senior Vice President, JM Baxi and Co; Noel Swain, COO, Passport, e-Visa, Identity and Citizen Services, VFS Global and the session was moderated by Amish Desai, Member, Managing Committee, TAAI.

A stunning end to the TAAI 67th Convention with a night of scintillating entertainment was organised at the beautiful Heritage Negombo. Set overlooking the beautiful golden beaches of Negombo, the TAAI delegates were treated to the very best of English, Sinhala, Tamil, and Hindi entertainment with the likes of Umara, Roy Jackson, Judy De Silvia, Jacqueline Hettiarachchi, Danu Innasithamby, Ricky Bahar and many more. The performances were complimented by dances, fireworks, and a delicious spread of food and beverages. Numerous lucky draws ensured that the delegates went back happy after having attended a landmark TAAI Convention.

“ **Harin Fernando**  
Minister of Tourism and  
Lands, Sri Lanka

We have a target of four million tourists, which we are confident of achieving because India tops our source market. We are not just a beach destination but also a beautiful island that is brimming with touristic offerings; we are a 365-day destination. Sri Lanka is called the Pearl of the Indian Ocean for its beauty and multitude of attractions.

“ **Jyoti Mayal**  
President, TAAI

For us, it was important to stick to our commitment to holding the convention in Sri Lanka. I believe that Sri Lanka, as a destination, has much to offer, and as a neighbouring country, we must do everything in our power to help the country emerge from its economic crisis. India’s relationship with BIMSTEC countries presents a significant opportunity for enhancing tourism ties, and we should collectively work on it. We are thrilled to be hosted by Sri Lanka and completely overwhelmed by the warm response that we have received.



## Visit Almaty conducts roadshow in Delhi, highlights Almaty City's tourism potential and Air Astana's growth strategy

The Tourism Department of Almaty City, Kazakhstan, organised a roadshow at The Metropolitan Hotel and Spa, Delhi, on August 04, 2023. The roadshow showcased Almaty City's tourism potential, captivating the audience with its enchanting allure. At the event, Air Astana, the country's premier airline, highlighted its growth strategy to handle the travel surge to Kazakhstan.

Serik Rys-Uly, Senior Regional Manager, Indian Subcontinent and Gulf region, Air Astana, highlighted the airline's commitment to excellence, underlining an impressive 89 per cent on-time performance. The airline's focus on customer care, timely operations, and seamless connections has won several accolades.

To cater to the booming Indian market, Air Astana aims to deliver exceptional value for money, leveraging its unique advantage of offering direct flights to Almaty. Currently, Air Astana operates daily flights on the Delhi-Almaty route on Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and double daily flights on Mondays and Thursdays. Effective October 31, 2023, the operations will be increased to double daily flights daily, making it a total of 14 weekly flights. The airline's ambitious expansion plans involve upgrading to Boeing 787 Dreamliner and expanding their network to new destinations like Tel Aviv and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

Indian passport holders can now travel to Kazakhstan without a visa for up to 14 calendar days for business, private, and tourism purposes.

The roadshow successfully highlighted Almaty City's allure and Air Astana's dedication to providing a superior travel experience, making them a preferred choice for Indian tourists seeking memorable journeys.

## TripJack expands its footprint in North India, opens its third office in Delhi



TripJack, one of India's leading B2B travel platforms, opened its third office in Delhi on August 01, 2023. The expansion marks a significant milestone in TripJack's journey of providing hi-tech and innovative travel solutions to its travel partners.

Strategically located in Connaught Place, the new office will serve as a hub for cutting-edge development that will deliver even greater value to its travel partners.

Speaking on the announcement, Hussain Patel, Director, TripJack, said, "The inauguration of our Delhi office embodies the culmination of our vision and commitment to our travel partners. The new office will be a pivotal centre for us in the North, strengthening our ability to cater to the evolving needs in the B2B travel space."

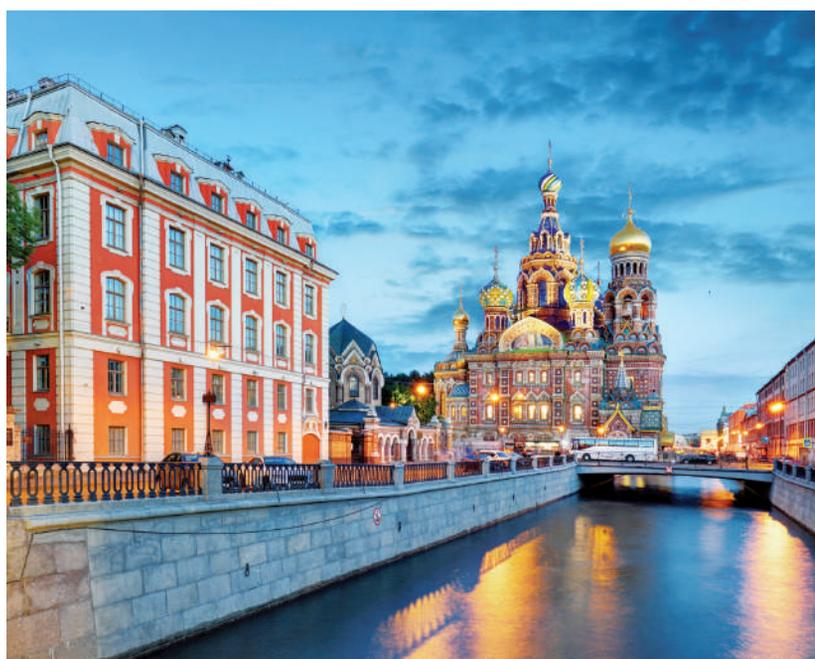
Hasan Patel, Director, TripJack, said, "It has been quite some time now that we have thrived in this market, and we have observed the market potential, presenting opportunities for immense growth. Our office is designed to look beyond today and cater to the needs of the future. We aim to provide our team with a vibrant, conducive, and healthier environment."

He further added, "Creativity culminates amidst healthy surroundings. It is essential to provide people with the right environment for bringing forth their creative worth. We now have a space that would doubly or triply multiply our growth trajectory in terms of capacity. And as we surge forward with investments, we will definitely invite more people to join our clan of TripJack."

## Russia launches e-Visa for India Passports holders

Russia launched the e-Visa facility for Indian passport holders on August 01, 2023. This will facilitate Indian nationals to apply for their visa quickly and conveniently. The visa would allow entry into the Russian Federation on a guest, business, or tourist visit as well as to participate in events. The term for issuing a single-entry visa would be no more than four calendar days and the consular fee would be around \$40.

"This is a great initiative to boost tourism and ensure hassle-free visas for tourists without much documentation. Now, with e-Visa and direct Delhi-Moscow flights operated by Aeroflot, Russia is more accessible than ever. The e-Visa would be valid for 60 days and will allow travellers to stay in Russia for no more than 16 days," explained Prashant Chaudhary, Managing Director, Salvia Promoters and Representative of Russian Union of Travel Industry in India.





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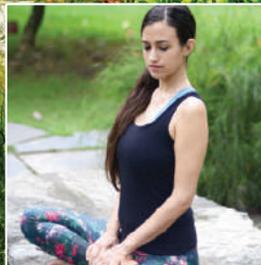
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## Akasa Air welcomes its 20<sup>th</sup> aircraft



Akasa Air welcomed its 20th aircraft, becoming the first airline in Asia to add the 737-8-200 variant of the Boeing 737 MAX aircraft to its rapidly expanding fleet. Bearing the registration VT YAV, the airline received the ceremonial keys to the milestone aircraft in Seattle, USA on July 28, 2023, and the aircraft arrived in Bengaluru on August 01, 2023.

Akasa Air is one of the world's fastest-growing airlines, having reached a fleet size of 20 aircraft within a year of commencing operations. Indian regulations require airlines to have at least 20 aircraft in their fleet to become eligible for international operations and this milestone enables Akasa Air to fly internationally.

The Boeing 737-8-200 aircraft aligns with Akasa Air's continued efforts to control operating costs while enhancing the customer experience. In addition to being the most environmentally progressive aircraft, the best-in-class legroom complements Akasa Air's commitment towards building an airline that is customer obsessed, economically sustainable and socially responsible.

## VietJet to commence direct flights between Ho Chi Minh City and Tiruchirappalli from November 2



Vietnam's leading new-age carrier, VietJet officially welcomes Indian passengers on direct flights connecting Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) and Tiruchirappalli (Tamil Nadu) from November 2, 2023. Constantly expanding the flight network connecting India with Vietnam, the airline will operate with a frequency of three flights/week on this route.

Flights from Tiruchirappalli will depart at 00:30 and land in Ho Chi Minh City at 7:00 (local time) on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Return flights will depart from Ho Chi Minh City at 20:00 (local time) and arrive in Tiruchirappalli at 23:30 every Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday.

With the addition of this new route, the airline will now operate 35 weekly return flights between India and Vietnam, connecting big cities in India – Mumbai, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Kochi and Tiruchirappalli and the Southeast Asian country.

## Air Seychelles hosts Achievers Night event in Mumbai

Air Seychelles, the national airline of the Republic of Seychelles, held the event to thank and recognise its top-performing travel agent partners, on August 03, 2023. The airline hosted 75 agents from Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Cochin, Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Rajkot. Present at the event were Sandy Benoiton, Acting CEO, Air Seychelles, Charles Johnson, CCO, Air Seychelles, Mukesh Sharma, Vice President, Bird Group (India GSA for Air Seychelles), Praful Khosla, Executive VP, Bird Group, Harshvardhan D. Trivedi, Manager India Sales and Marketing, Air Seychelles India.

Addressing the guests at the event, Charles Johnson highlighted the airline's commitment to India market and informed them about the interline agreements with SriLankan Airlines, Turkish Airlines, AIRLINK, and FlySafair, which provide seamless connections to Asia, Europe, and Africa.

In May 2023, Air Seychelles signed a significant interline agreement with SriLankan Airlines, expanding travel opportunities for passengers from southern India and Delhi to Seychelles.

The strategic collaboration between Air Seychelles and SriLankan Airlines aims to enhance connectivity and provide seamless travel experiences for customers seeking to explore the breath-taking beauty of Seychelles and beyond. Under this interline agreement, passengers traveling from Chennai, Bengaluru, Tiruchirappalli, Hyderabad, Cochin, Thiruvananthapuram, Madurai, and Delhi will now have the convenience of connecting flights to Seychelles, Johannesburg, and Mauritius.





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## Jandec Travel JSC, and Ambassador Cruise, Halong Bay, Vietnam appoints AllKnown Marketers as its Exclusive Indian Market Sales Representative



L-R: Vu Cong, VP, JanDec Travels JSC, Madhuri Verma, Director, AllKnown Marketers

Jandec Travel JSC, and Ambassador Cruise, Halong Bay, Vietnam, a holistic tourism service provider and cruise liner based in Vietnam, assigns AllKnown Marketers (AKM) the task of performing its trade and marketing initiatives in the Indian market. The AKM team will be responsible for endorsing these diversified products and services, hence encouraging Indian tourists to experience Vietnam's tour varieties in gastronomy and culture, nature and landscape, and other outdoor adventures. Since Jandec Travels JSC Vietnam and Ambassador Cruise debuted in the Indian market in early 2023, the business penetration will further enhance its presence through a strong partnership with sustainable efforts and consistent outreach between both parties.

Jandec Travels JSC Vietnam deviates from any traditional travel companies in promoting holiday packages by catering to all age groups, including individuals, families, groups, or corporate organisation.

Ambassador Cruise is a 5-star cruise company that operates in Halong Bay, the renowned UNESCO World Heritage Site. A state-of-the-art cruise company, premium options of cruise packages have been delicately designed from the exquisite experience of overnight cruises, superb day cruise and magnificent dinner cruise. Every cruise offers intriguing shore excursions, onboard entertainment and well-crafted dining options to suit Indian travellers.

## MoT organises Yuva Tourism Club Seminar to inspire youth

With the aim of establishing Yuva Tourism Clubs in educational institutions across the nation, the



Ministry of Tourism, Government of India – North Region, organised a Seminar on Yuva Tourism Club at Hotel Samrat, New Delhi on July 25, 2023. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from approximately 150 attendees, including professors, teachers, and students. The seminar emphasised the significance of the Yuva Tourism Clubs and outlined the various activities they will be undertaking. The Ministry of Tourism has ensured support and assistance to these clubs for their successful implementation.

Manisha Saxena, IAS, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, addressed the gathering along with distinguished dignitaries, including M R Synem, Joint Secretary Tourism, R K Suman, Regional Director (North) MOT, Kamal Kant, Principal of IHM PUSA, Dean JNU, and Dr. Charu Yadav from IITM.

## 38<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention to be organised from Sep 29 – Oct 02, 2023, in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar

The 38<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention is scheduled from Sep 29 – Oct 02, 2023, in Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra, the theme being inbound tourism and emerging sustainable trends.

Rajnish Kaistha, Senior Vice President, will act as the Chairman of the Convention along with Sanjay Razdan, Hony Secretary, and Jitendra Kejriwal, Chairman, IATO Maharashtra Chapter, as the Co-Chairman. Jaswant Singh, an IATO member from Aurangabad, will be the convention coordinator.

The convention will be hosted at WelcomHotel by ITC Hotels, Rama International, Aurangabad. Scheduled activities on all three days, i.e., registration for the convention, inaugural function, business sessions, and evening programmes will be convened at Rama International.

The association expects participation of 900-1000 delegates from all over the country, which will include senior officials from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and states, industry leaders, tourism and hospitality professionals,



and travel trade media. Five post-convention tours will be organised in various sectors.

Experts from all fields will be deliberating on burning issues during the business sessions of the three-day convention.



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