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Dear Friends,

As we bid adieu to spring and embrace the arrival of summer, with the holiday season on the horizon, it is our pleasure to present the TTJ April 2024 issue.

This month, we are thrilled to feature insights from several international tourism boards, offering a glimpse into the diverse attractions and developments awaiting exploration. Additionally, we invite you to discover the warmth of Himalayan hospitality at our featured hotel properties, where every stay promises a blend of luxury and authenticity.

Beyond these stories, you will find engaging interviews and some of the latest industry news to keep you informed and updated. As you flip through the issue, we hope every page inspires and delights you.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our readers and partners for your continued support. It is your enthusiasm and love for the travel business that drives us to continuously strive for excellence.

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma
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Editor's Desk



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Japan launches eVisa program for Indian residents



Indian travellers planning a trip to Japan can now take advantage of the newly introduced eVisa system. Launched on April 01, 2024, the initiative aims to streamline the visa application process and enhance convenience for travellers visiting Japan for tourism purposes.

Under the new system, Indian citizens and foreign nationals residing in India can apply for a single-entry short-term visa for tourism, allowing stays of up to 90 days. The application process remains largely unchanged, with applicants required to submit their applications through designated Japan Visa Application Centers operated by VFS Global.

However, instead of receiving a traditional visa sticker affixed to their passports, successful applicants will be issued an electronic visa (eVisa) in the form of a digital document. Applicants who have been granted the eVisa will need to present their “visa issuance notice” on a mobile device upon arrival at the airport in Japan. This notice must be accessible via the Internet, and alternatives such as PDFs, photos, screenshots, or printed copies will not be accepted.

Bulgaria and Romania join Schengen Area, air and sea border checks lifted



Bulgaria and Romania joined Europe’s Schengen area of free movement on March 31, 2024, joining the rest of Europe travelling freely by air and sea without border checks.

The implementation of Schengen rules in both Member States means that issuing Schengen visas and controls at internal air and sea borders will be lifted, aligning them with the rest of Europe.

The European Commission warmly welcomed this achievement, following the landmark Council decision in December 2023. The inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania in the Schengen area expands the world’s largest common area without internal border controls, making it more attractive for travellers.

This development marks a significant step forward in the European Union’s commitment to fostering unity, cooperation, and mobility across its Member States.

The next steps involve the Council deciding on a date for lifting checks at internal land borders between Bulgaria, Romania, and other Schengen countries. The Commission pledged continued support to ensure this decision can be made in 2024.

Centara meets GSTC Criteria, receives certification from Bureau Veritas for its 12 hotels

Centara Hotels and Resorts, one of Thailand’s leading hotel operators, has received approval for certification by Bureau Veritas, a GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) – Accredited certification body, for meeting global standards for sustainable travel and tourism known as GSTC criteria.

Twelve of Centara Hotels and Resorts are approved for GSTC certification, and the organisation is continuing to work toward its long-term goal of achieving full certification by 2025. The 12 hotels which are recognised for meeting the GSTC Criteria in 2024 are Centara Reserve Samui, Centara Kata Resort Phuket, Centara Ao Nang Beach Resort and Spa Krabi, Centara Watergate Pavillion Hotel Bangkok, Centara Q Resort Rayong, Centara Sonrisa Residences and Suites Sriracha, Centara Mirage Beach Resort Dubai, Centara Life Maris Resort Jomtien, Centara Life Cha-Am Beach Resort Hua Hin, COSI



Samui Chaweng Beach, COSI Pattaya Wong Amat Beach, and COSI Krabi Ao Nang Beach.

By adopting sustainable and green practices, Centara is actively choosing to be more aware of its environmental impact and aligning its values and vision for a more mindful and ecologically conscious future.

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Heavens Portfolio Group expands into Middle East, acquires TTC

Heavens Portfolio, an Asia-based hotel representation company, is further solidifying its strategic growth with an acquisition and expansion into Dubai. This move marks a significant milestone in the company's global growth strategy and reinforces its commitment to offering a comprehensive and integrated service offering to its clients. Dubai will be the Heavens Portfolio Group's 16th office and its first outside of Asia.

To facilitate the entry into the Middle Eastern market, Heavens Portfolio has acquired The Travel Collection (TTC), an established representation agency in Dubai founded by Jacqueline Campbell. The merged entity will be rebranded as The Travel Portfolio, and will continue executing the shared mission of both companies to represent the best global luxury travel partners in the GCC region.



L-R: Jacqueline Campbell, MD, The Travel Collection (TTC); Christine Galle-Luczak, Founder & MD, Heavens Portfolio

Red Dot Representations expands luxury travel offerings across Sri Lanka and East Africa

Red Dot Representations recently won the representation mandate for Serendipity Experiences, a well-known luxury DMC in Sri Lanka. This partnership aims to cater to the burgeoning Indian and global luxury travel markets looking for signature experiences. Serendipity specialises in crafting personalised travel experiences, featuring meticulously planned itineraries, luxurious villa accommodations, and extravagant luxury cruises through 'Sail Lanka.' Together, they promise travellers unforgettable journeys filled with cultural immersion, opulent hospitality, and breathtaking coastal vistas.

Earlier in March 2024, Red Dot also secured representation rights for Kenya's luxury DMC, Wild Whispers, facilitating the

expansion of luxury safari experiences across East Africa. Wild Whispers, known for its customised luxury hospitality and exciting excursions, offers an array of signature experiences, including private guided safaris and Masai Maramigration, bush breakfasts, photographic safaris, balloon safaris, sundowners, gorilla trekking, helicopter safaris, and luxury retreats. Together, they ensure the accessibility of Wild Whispers' unique safari adventures and partner luxury resorts with a diverse international clientele, particularly from India.



Prabhakar Kamat
VP, Red Dot Representations

Saudi Tourism Authority targets 7.5 million Indian arrivals in seven years

Kicking off the year with massive inbound numbers from last year and encouraging growth projections, Saudi tourism is racing ahead on its remarkable journey. With the aim to make India its top source market, Saudi has set a target of 7.5 million visitors within the next seven years.

Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) recently conducted a series of dynamic networking events in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Delhi. The STA delegation comprising key stakeholders engaged with over 500 travel agents and tour operators from these key cities.

Moreover, STA collaborated with leading Destination Management Companies (DMCs) to organise sales missions across all four cities, further strengthening its engagement with key trade partners.

STA also participated in OTM in Mumbai and SATTE in Greater Noida setting the tone for a year brimming with opportunities. STA delegation, comprising 20 key Saudi stakeholders and distinguished associates, engaged fervently with Indian travel agents and tour operators, paving the way for collaborations.

Throughout the events, STA engaged in meetings, signed MoUs and initiated partnerships with members of Indian travel trade associations, tour operators, and event planners. Attendees were enlightened about 17,000 events on the Saudi calendar. From showcasing electronic visa options for Indian travellers to highlighting Giga projects, newly launched hotels, and increased air connectivity, STA presented Saudi Arabia as a premier tourism destination.



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Hong Kong's overture to India focuses on increasing tourism influx

In a recent interaction, Puneet Kumar, Director for South Asia and Middle East, Hong Kong Tourism Board, shared insightful details on the growing attraction of Hong Kong as a premier destination for Indian travellers, highlighting significant achievements in 2023 and ambitious plans for 2024 and beyond.

Vartik Sethi

Visitation and Growing Engagement

With a record influx of 208,000 Indian visitors in 2023, marking a significant post-pandemic recovery, Hong Kong witnessed an encouraging trend of increased spending and extended stays among Indian tourists. The average length of stay extended to 5.6 days from the pre-pandemic average of four days, and per capita expenditure rose from 6,000 to 8,300 Hong Kong dollars.

Visa Policies and Air Connectivity

Kumar attributed this growth to several strategic advantages, including visa-free access for Indian nationals, enhanced air connectivity facilitated by both home carrier Cathay Pacific and Indian Airlines, and a range of collaborative marketing efforts.

In an effort to sustain and build upon this momentum, the Hong Kong Tourism Board engaged in a series of partnerships with airlines and the Indian travel trade. Notably, the Board organised multiple familiarisation trips in collaboration with key partners like Cathay Pacific, Marriott, and Indigo, aiming to showcase Hong Kong's diverse offerings to corporate and travel trade professionals from India. Kumar shared, "Working with travel agents is definitely our priority and part of our work plan. This year, we have brought 28 Hong Kong trade partners under our Hong Kong pavilion and it is a good mix of hotels, attractions, DMCs, and even an airline."



▲ Puneet Kumar

Hong Kong's Tourism Infrastructure

A significant aspect of Hong Kong's appeal lies in its rich tourism infrastructure, including a variety of new attractions and experiences that have emerged in recent years. These include the only Disneyland with a Frozen themed area, the Cup Noodles Museum, Monopoly Dreams, and Legoland, alongside improved mobility options that enhance accessibility to South China and Macau.

Kumar shared that Hong Kong's tourism strategy focuses on promoting its vibrant arts and culture. He explained, "Our tourism DNA is around arts, culture, outdoors, culinary,

nightlife, entertainment, and mega-events. In 2024, we will be focusing on presenting and promoting a lot of new events and festivals to drive repeatability from the Indian market among Indian visitors."

Culinary diversity is another cornerstone of Hong Kong's tourism appeal, boasting over 17 Michelin-starred restaurants, including two Indian establishments, Chachawan and New Punjab Club. This diverse culinary landscape offers a wide array of dining experiences, from traditional Chinese and Cantonese cuisine to international flavours, catering to the varied palate of Indian travellers.

Innovation and Partnership Development

Kumar's outlook for the future is optimistic, with plans to continue forging creative partnerships and enhancing the travel experience for Indian visitors. By focusing on connectivity, cultural exchange, and culinary diversity, Hong Kong aims to solidify its position as a top destination for Indian tourists.

The symbiotic relationship between Hong Kong and its Indian visitors will undoubtedly flourish, underpinned by shared values and a mutual enthusiasm for exploration and discovery. The relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation by the Hong Kong Tourism Board, as articulated by Kumar, heralds a new dawn for international travel, redefining the paradigms of engagement and satisfaction for Indian voyagers and beyond.



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Treyam



A BOLD LEAP INTO THE FUTURE

NEOM is an accelerator of human progress and a vision of what a New Future might look like. It has garnered global attention for its ambitious goals of innovation, sustainability, and technological advancement. NEOM represents a futuristic realm where the very concepts of liveability, business, urbanism, and conservation are being redefined and reimaged at their core. During his visit to India, we had the opportunity to interact with Clark Williams, Marketing and Communications Director at Trojena, NEOM, gaining insights into the latest developments of this groundbreaking project.

Prashant Nayak

NEOM is exactly not a city; it is a sprawling region nestled in the northwest of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, destined to encompass a diverse array of attractions. Envisioned as a futuristic region powered by renewable energy, NEOM spans over 10,200 square miles, surpassing the size of some small countries.

Among the four regions already announced is the groundbreaking linear urban concept, THE LINE, alongside the advanced and clean industrial hub, Oxagon. Additionally, NEOM features the serene mountain retreat of Trojena and the luxurious island resort of Sindalah. Together, these regions epitomise NEOM's innovative approach to redefining urban living, industry, and

leisure on a grand scale. Excitingly, NEOM has also unveiled the recent destinations located in the Gulf of Aqaba poised to feature futuristic hotels and further enhance the region's allure as a premier leisure and tourist destination.

Progress and Awareness

NEOM is rapidly taking shape, with a large percentage of the infrastructure works already completed. The first destination, Sindalah, will open its doors this year, followed closely by Oxagon, which has already launched Port of NEOM. Trojena is poised to become a bustling hub for living and holidaying by late 2026, while the innovative urban concept of THE LINE will see its initial modules activated shortly thereafter.

"We're here in India to raise awareness

about NEOM because there is a lot of buzz surrounding it, but not many people are aware of the progress. Currently, NEOM is in a multi-stage development phase. For instance, in Trojena, we are in the development phase; hence, for someone planning a holiday to NEOM, particularly to the mountainous region of Trojena, within the next six months, that will not be feasible. Trojena is still a few years away from completion, likely around late 2026 or early 2027," explains Williams.

A Sustainable Oasis in Natural Splendour

NEOM stands out as a model of sustainable development, with 95 per cent of its expansive territory preserved for nature. Only 5 per cent of all of NEOM



Trojena Ski Village



▲ Clark Williams

is going to be developed as part of the master plan. This commitment ensures residents enjoy an unparalleled quality of life while safeguarding the integrity of the surrounding natural landscape. Benefiting from its strategic location, NEOM boasts cooler temperatures compared to other regions in the GCC, further enhancing its appeal as a desirable destination for living and leisure. Stretching across 468 km of coastline, NEOM offers an abundance of opportunities for exploration and relaxation, with 41 captivating islands waiting to be discovered.

The Joint Push for India

India is one of the world's fastest-growing outbound travel markets. Many Indian travellers seek new and diverse destinations for their vacations, presenting an opportunity for NEOM to



Lake in Trojena

capture a share of this market. Williams says, "As India's middle class continues to expand, there is a growing trend of Indian travellers venturing abroad, with Europe being a popular choice for approximately 27 per cent of outbound leisure travel. Recognising this pattern, our independent research underscores an opportunity to redirect some of this travel interest toward the GCC region. Through strategic positioning and the creation of compelling experiences, we aspire to entice more Indian travellers to explore the diverse offerings closer to home in Saudi Arabia and NEOM."

Saudi has been increasingly investing in tourism marketing efforts, with a particular focus on India as one of its priority markets. "We're closely observing the strides made by Saudi Tourism, and their efforts in breaking down perception barriers are commendable. Their campaigns underscore Saudi Arabia's

openness to the world, which indirectly benefits NEOM. When Indian travellers witness Saudi's welcoming stance, they are more inclined to see NEOM as an attractive destination, especially given our emphasis on sustainability, environmentalism, and adventure travel. Furthermore, by raising awareness about NEOM, we ourselves are ensuring that Indian travellers recognise NEOM as a promising option within the Saudi Arabian market," points out Williams.

Inspiring and Attracting Diversity

NEOM is already home to residents spanning over 100 nationalities, including NEOM employees, their families, and commercial partners. While they are attracting investors and partners, they are also crafting distinct tourism sub-brands to appeal to future residents, employees, and travellers. "In our efforts

to reach the Indian market, our priority is creating widespread and proper awareness about NEOM throughout the country. Sub-brands are increasingly significant as they represent the specific aspects of NEOM that individuals are most interested in. For instance, tourists may be drawn to the allure of Trojena, while potential investment partners seek insights into developments within Oxagon. Once we have achieved this broad awareness, we will shift our focus to forming partnerships and launching targeted activations that showcase the unique offerings and attractions of NEOM to the Indian marketplace,” assures Williams.

Ongoing Developments

Sindalah

An all-around destination elevating the tourist experience, Sindalah will be the first physical showcase of NEOM as its vision becomes a reality. A luxury island destination in the Red Sea, the resort region will include a beach club, yacht club, spa, and wellness centre, plus 51 luxury retail outlets, luxury hotels, and a large marina. It is keen to welcome the global yachting community and visitors looking for exquisite luxury and an exclusive gateway to the stunning Red Sea.

Trojena

Located 50 km from the Gulf of Aqaba coast, Trojena is a key part of NEOM's regional plan, spanning nearly 60 square km with elevations from 1,500 to 2,600 m. Ideal for alpine and adventure sports, it offers sub-zero winter temperatures and a moderate year-round climate. Boasting stunning lake views and pure mountain air, Trojena is perfect for holidays, second homes, and permanent residences. With a focus on sustainability, Trojena uses renewable energy and offers various

residential options, setting a new standard for mountain developments.

The Gulf of Aqaba

The stunning coastline will host breathtaking destinations, comprising exclusive communities with bespoke hotels and residences that redefine contemporary international luxury and sustainable tourism. The projects across the Gulf of Aqaba that have been announced are Leyja, Epicon, Siranna, Utamo, Norlana, Aquellum, Zardun, Xaynor, Elanan, Gidori, and Treyam.

THE LINE

Stretching 170 km from the desert valleys to the Red Sea, THE LINE is a revolutionary cognitive city featuring a mirrored architectural marvel towering 500 m above sea level yet occupying just 34 square km. Eventually accommodating 9 million residents, it prioritises efficiency with a minimal infrastructure footprint and essential amenities within a five-minute walk. High-speed rail ensures swift transit within 20 minutes, while renewable energy powers its global trade hub, tourist resorts, and entertainment facilities.



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Tourism Fiji to continue elevating destination appeal with effective campaigns

Even as a small island nation, Fiji boldly rivals the world's best destinations with its stunning natural beauty, pristine beaches, clear turquoise waters, and vibrant coral reefs. Its warm hospitality, friendly locals, and laid-back atmosphere conjure appeal, positioning it as a top tourist destination in the South Pacific. Following Fiji's successful year in tourism in 2023, Robert Thompson, Executive Director of Regions, Tourism Fiji, unveils ambitious plans for 2024 aimed at sustaining and amplifying this positive momentum.

Prashant Nayak

In 2023, Fiji experienced a robust tourism year, hosting 929,740 international travellers, surpassing 2019 figures by four per cent, and contributing approximately USD 3.3 billion to the visitor economy. While Australia (47 per cent), New Zealand (24 per cent), and North America (13 per cent) constituted the majority of visitors, the South Pacific Island nation also attracted over 6,135 Indian tourists, reflecting a diverse global appeal.

When it comes to India, in 2023, Indian arrivals to Fiji surged to pre-Covid levels seen in 2019, underscoring a growing demand for premium and experiential travel. December 2023 recorded a 300 per cent surge in Indian arrivals compared to the same month in 2022, with an average stay duration of 7.6 nights.

Effective Marketing

Robert attributes the effectiveness of their marketing and brand campaigns, like 'Where Happiness Comes Naturally,' to garnering more tourist footfalls. He says, "We have a few campaigns with some of our key partners, and in 2023, we ran highly successful campaigns consistently throughout the year, and we definitely propose to repeat those." Tourism Fiji actively promotes tourism through marketing campaigns and initiatives aimed at attracting visitors while also emphasising sustainable practices to preserve the environment and culture for future generations.

Besides the strategy of incorporating targeted marketing campaigns and digital platform utilisation to expand reach to a wider audience, Robert revealed that the goal is to achieve a five to seven per cent increase in Indian traffic to Fiji in 2024. He explained, "To further bolster our momentum, we are gearing up to participate in several partner shows. The upcoming Fiji Travel Exchange will see some of our partners joining us in Fiji, along with members of the media. Our India team has an array of plans lined up for influencers, media, and expanding the number of agents in Tier-II and III cities and in our Matai Specialist Training Programme."



▲ Robert Thompson

Captivating Elements for Travel to Fiji

Among the new attractions in Fiji for tourism, the Crowne Plaza Fiji Nadi Bay Resort and Spa is set to open shortly. The resort, boasting over 325 rooms, will offer guests a blend of luxury and an immersive experience amidst Fiji's breathtaking natural vistas. "We are excited about the growth in accommodations in Fiji, with numerous new properties and renovations underway. To meet evolving traveller preferences, we are emphasising enriching experiences beyond the typical pool or waterside lounging. Our focus is still on adventure, diverse excursions, and activities that highlight Fiji's vibrant local culture, including its strong Indian ethnic influence and indigenous Fijian heritage, appealing to all travellers seeking authentic experiences. For Indians, I suggest a minimum of six to seven nights to enjoy in Fiji," emphasises Robert.

Despite the lack of direct flights between India and Fiji, travellers can conveniently reach Fiji through connecting flights from major hubs like Hong Kong, Singapore, and various cities in Australia. Robert highlights, "We observe traditional travel from India primarily via Singapore. Moreover, we have witnessed a significant uptick in Indian travellers and flights into Australia and New Zealand. With just a short flight away, Fiji becomes an excellent option for Indians to include in their Australian and New Zealand itineraries. Additionally, Fiji's visa-on-arrival facility for Indian passport holders enhances the convenience and allure of our tropical destination."

Attracting Global Travellers

Substantial tourist numbers come to Fiji from countries like Australia, New Zealand, the US, China, and Japan. However, Fiji wants to stand out as the ultimate destination, catering not only to the top source markets but also to those worldwide who are eager to embark on their next adventure.

India has traditionally been a key market for honeymooners, but now, there has been a notable rise in multi-generational travel. Another compelling reason to consider travelling to Fiji is the increasing interest in MICE, particularly gaining traction in India. Fiji is strategically positioned in the South Pacific region to host premium incentive movements, offering unparalleled experiences for discerning corporate travellers.



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India a priority market for Qatar's ambitious 2030 tourism goal

From visitor numbers to market collaboration, MICE, and travel opportunities, Philip Dickinson, Vice President International Markets, Qatar Tourism, sheds light on their strategic initiatives, emphasising the Indian market.

Prashant Nayak

Advancing Towards the 2030 Vision

Aligned with Qatar's national strategy, the tourism sector aims to welcome six million tourists by 2030 and double its GDP contribution from six to 12 per cent. With the country crossing four million visitors in 2023, surpassing the 2019 visitor numbers, the objectives seem well achievable.

"Surpassing over four million international arrivals in 2023, nearly doubling pre-COVID figures from 2019, is a remarkable achievement for Qatar. This success is largely attributed to the hosting of the World Cup in late 2022, which showcased Qatar's ability to deliver world-class events. Our projection for 2024 is to welcome at least 4.8 million visitors from all markets combined," states Philip.

Qatar welcomed approximately 420,000 visitors from India in 2023, making it the second-highest source market after Saudi Arabia. Philips says, "In 2023, India emerged as our second-largest market with a notable performance of 420,000 arrivals, solidifying its position after Saudi Arabia. We are particularly pleased with the performance and growth of the Indian market."

India's Significance

With the Middle East region experiencing significant growth in tourism, every GCC country is actively pursuing opportunities in this sector. Qatar's positioning in this market is clear and ambitious. "Our growth trajectory is also targeted to create an additional 20,000 hospitality jobs in Qatar, increasing our workforce from 120,000 in 2019 to 250,000 by 2030. To achieve these objectives, we are focusing on 15 priority markets, with India being designated as a Tier 1 priority market. This signifies our commitment to working closely with the travel trade and engaging extensively with Indian travellers, supported by our dedicated full-time representative office, BRANDit in India," explains Philip.



▲ Philip Dickinson

Qatar Tourism is committed to fostering collaboration between its India and Doha-based teams, engaging with pivotal stakeholders across the tourism sector, including tour operators, OTAs, MICE organisers, travel agencies, and wedding planners. Philip elucidates, "Our support encompasses a multitude of initiatives, such as FAM trips, roadshows, and active participation in trade shows, all aimed at elevating Qatar's allure as a premier destination. Additionally, we provide substantial subventions for the MICE segment, fostering partnerships with key operators and OTAs through performance-based agreements. Our unwavering dedication to the trade industry drives us to explore avenues for enhancing public relations and consumer engagement, catalysing Qatar's tourism growth."

Rise as a Premier MICE Destination

Qatar is rapidly emerging as a premier destination for MICE travel, experiencing

notable growth driven by its expanding portfolio of offerings. Philip underscores, "With our array of world-class products and services, including flying with Qatar Airways and arriving at Hamad International Airport, we ensure a top-tier experience rated 10 out of 10." Boasting state-of-the-art hotels, venues, and attractions, Qatar guarantees a memorable visit for MICE planners and attendees alike. The nation has successfully drawn prestigious high-end incentive groups and witnessed a surge in the wedding business, with approximately 15 large-scale Indian weddings already scheduled. Qatar's appeal lies in its diverse locations, options, and exceptional value, especially in luxury accommodations. The MICE segment now constitutes a large part of business arrivals, solidifying Qatar's position as a top MICE destination.

More Reasons to Visit Qatar

Qatar boasts diverse attractions, from futuristic architecture to cultural landmarks, sports, and adventure, offering enriching experiences for visitors. Qatar Tourism is also focusing on promoting its stopover programme to capitalise on transit passengers. Many travellers' transit through Doha en route to Europe or Asia, and they are encouraged to consider a stopover in either direction. Philip shares more, "Our stopover programme offers over 100 hotels with rates as low as 14 US dollars per person per night in a four-star hotel. Fulfilment is through Discover Qatar, the local DMC of Qatar Airways. Travellers can purchase the stopover package through Qatar Airways Holidays, while the trade can book it via the Discover Qatar website. With plenty of options and affordable rates, it's an attractive opportunity for travellers, although there are time limits on stays to consider."



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Taiwan taking proactive steps to engage with the Indian travel market

With the recent inauguration of the Taiwan Tourism Information Centre in Mumbai, Dr. Trust Lin, Deputy Director General, Taiwan Tourism Administration, Taiwanese Ministry of Transportation and Communication, is brimming with optimism about creating interest among Indian travellers in Taiwan. Forecasting 10 to 15 per cent growth compared to 2019, which saw around 40,000 visitors, Dr. Lin anticipates an encouraging surge in Indian tourism to Taiwan in 2024.

Prashant Nayak

Revitalising Connections

In February 2024, the Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA) opened the Taiwan Tourism Information Centre (TTIC) in Mumbai, India, signalling a resolute return to the Indian market following a hiatus of over three years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The TTIC Mumbai Office now acts as a one-stop shop for every possible information related to travel, tourism, and hospitality in the picturesque island country to the Indian outbound travel market.

Dwelling upon the intent of the office opening, Lin expressed, "The Indian market has always held a special place in my heart. We ventured into India in 2018 and were doing well until COVID-19 disrupted our progress. This opening symbolises a rekindling of our connection with this remarkable nation and its people. It is a declaration that Taiwan is back, though we never truly left."

Strategic Engagement in the Indian Market

In addition to establishing the office, Taiwan Tourism is actively committed to cultivating the Indian market through strategic participation in travel exhibitions to foster tourism trade ties with Indian buyers. The tourism board is organising destination seminars and networking events to disseminate information, educate, and empower prominent Indian trade buyers. The flourishing IT sector in Taiwan continues to attract a significant influx of Indian visitors to its exhibitions. Thus, the primary focus is on positioning Taiwan as an enticing MICE destination, a sector receiving high attention. Moreover, efforts are targeted to attract middle to high-income families, FITs, and leisure groups for travel to Taiwan, along with seeking collaborations with Bollywood stars to promote Taiwan, a popular method for enhancing Taiwanese visibility among Indians.

The Mountains and Sea Beckons

Taiwan boasts diverse experiences, from stunning natural landscapes to vibrant night markets and a fusion of traditional



▲ Dr. Trust Lin

and modern attractions. Whether exploring Taipei's bustling city life or the serene beauty of Taroko Gorge and Sun Moon Lake, visitors are spoilt for choice. Must-visit spots include Yangmingshan National Park, Alishan National Scenic Area, Jiufen Old Street, and the iconic National Palace Museum. Taiwan's rich history, showcased through temples and museums, offers a captivating glimpse into its past. Whether seeking outdoor adventures, culinary delights, or cultural exploration, Taiwan guarantees a memorable and enriching journey for all travellers.

Lin amplifies a significant aspect of Taiwan's

topography, "For a relatively small island, Taiwan is incredibly mountainous. One-tenth of Taiwan is over 2,500 metres, while a total of 258 peaks are more than 3,000 metres high leaving hikers spoilt for options. Some of these hiking trails are conveniently close to the capital, Taipei."

Taipei: The Urban Pulse of Taiwan

Taipei, Taiwan's bustling capital, offers a unique blend of modern skyscrapers and ancient temples. Taipei 101, standing tall at 101 stories, is a prominent landmark offering panoramic views and upscale shopping. One can wander through the vibrant streets of Taipei and indulge in the flavours of numerous night markets as twilight sets in. The mountains are just a short bus or MRT ride away, offering great opportunities for outdoor activities. Exploring Taipei by bike is a favourite among locals, allowing for leisurely rides along riverside parks and city exploration amidst lush greenery.

Enhancing Outreach

Taiwan's top source markets include Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore. "With a growing interest among Indians in Southeast Asian destinations like Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, we see significant potential to increase footfalls from India to Taiwan. Therefore, we are investing in India through FAM trips and media enhancement for better mileage," says Dr. Lin.



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Bhutan's successful tourism mantra 'High Value, Low Volume'

Known as a land of peace and spirituality, Bhutan fuses kindred emotions into its tourism and encapsulates the spiritual essence of travel, which often leads travellers towards life-changing experiences. Step into the world of Bhutan Tourism with Carissa Nimah, Chief Marketing Officer, Department of Tourism Bhutan, as she outlines the tourism philosophy, reveals plans, and unveils hidden gems that transport travellers to a bygone era.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

The Kingdom of Bhutan, also known as the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon,' lies steeped in ancient culture while embracing the promise of technological advancement. Despite being the world's youngest democracy, Bhutan remains fiercely committed to preserving its centuries-old customs and pristine natural surroundings. Guided by the development principle of 'Gross National Happiness,' Bhutan has emerged as a premier travel destination, distinguished by its 'High Value, Low Volume' tourism policy. This approach occasionally considered controversial, involves levying a sustainability fee on visitors to protect its rich heritage from the threats of over-tourism. This delicate and difficult balance between heritage conservation and sustainable development makes Bhutan a unique and cherished destination.

India's Dominance in Bhutan's Tourism Landscape

The primary source market for Bhutan is India, with significant contributions from the US, the UK, various parts of Asia, Western Europe, and Australia. Carissa elaborates, "In 2023, Bhutan welcomed 103,000 tourists,



▲ Carissa Nimah

with 70,000 coming from India. Looking ahead to 2024, we aim to attract 300,000 tourists, with 50 per cent expected to be from India. This highlights the significant role of the Indian market in Bhutan's tourism." It acknowledges India as a key tourism partner owing to the extensive shared border and India's status as the world's fastest-growing

economy. Bhutan continues to cater to Indian traveller preferences while accommodating multigenerational and larger family groups. The goal is to consistently boost Indian tourist numbers by collaborating closely with key trade partners and addressing their requirements. It is also expanding its presence in the MICE sector, evident from successful events like weddings accommodating 600 attendees, despite limited infrastructure. The recent government decision to waive the daily fee for MICE participants highlights Bhutan's commitment to facilitating such events, subject to specific eligibility criteria.

Diverse Experiences

Alongside traditional tourism products like spiritual, cultural, adventure, and ecotourism, birdwatching is becoming increasingly popular, especially among Indian tourists. Motorbiking has its reverent fan following, as riders are drawn to Bhutan's safe, well-maintained roads with slower speed limits. Wellness tourism is on the rise, shaped by Bhutan's reputation as the land of medicinal herbs, offering unique experiences like hot stone baths, therapies, yoga, and meditation. It is rapidly gaining recognition for its high-end textile industry, particularly for silk



weaving known as 'Kishuthara', which can take up to a year to produce.

As the demand for authentic travel experiences continues to grow, homestays have emerged as a trending choice among discerning travellers. Heritage Bhutanese homes offer a unique opportunity to stay in traditional houses, allowing guests to interact closely with the owners, forge meaningful connections, and leave with a deeper understanding of Bhutan's culture and heritage.

As destinations, Paro, Thimphu, and Punakha remain popular, forming part of the five-star tourist trail along the country's main valleys. However, Carissa urges travellers to "Explore the lesser traversed valleys like Gangtey and Bumthang in East Bhutan showcasing remarkable festivals, homestays and friendly locals." Bumthang, known as Bhutan's spiritual heartland, offers culinary delights like honey and cheese, earning the title of 'Switzerland of Asia.' This remote region allows visitors to experience the local life in traditional textile making and yak herding villages transporting travellers to the Bhutan of yore.

Mindful Tourism

Since its inception in 1974, Bhutan has steadily pursued a strategy of high-value, low-volume tourism. With more than 70 per cent forested land, it is the first carbon-negative country in the world. Marking its 50th anniversary in the tourism sector, it reaffirms its distinct approach, placing a premium on the overall happiness of its citizens alongside GDP growth. The country's Gross National Happiness index transcends material wealth and focuses on its commitment to citizen satisfaction, health, education, and corruption-free governance.

The focus lies on ensuring that benefits are equitably distributed and shared across the entire community.

Sustainable Development Fee

This remarkable tourism strategy is reflected in implementing a sustainable development fee, which finances essential services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure upgrades for the entire population. Typically, the fee levied amounts to Rs 1,200 per day for Indians and \$100 per day for foreign guests. Further explaining the concept, Carissa adds, "Unlike other countries where only certain industries profit from tourism, Bhutan views tourism as a national asset and ensures that its benefits reach all citizens. This approach contributes to the sustainability of Bhutan's environment, people, and rich cultural heritage. By carefully managing tourism, Bhutan preserves its unique authenticity, safeguarding its appeal as a destination." This strategic approach, though different from global norms, is seen as critical for preserving Bhutan's cultural integrity and ensuring a sustainable future.

Community Engagement

The Bhutan Department of Tourism actively connects with the travel community through social media platforms, acknowledging its pivotal role in increasing awareness, particularly among younger demographics. The department closely monitors metrics like follower growth and engagement rates to assess performance, comparing them with competitor nations to authentically promote tourism. Carissa muses, "I have noticed a significant shift in the conversation surrounding Bhutan tourism over the past two years. Initially, there was a lack of regional awareness and uncertainty among agents

on how to sell Bhutan packages. Through our concerted team efforts, the conversation has now shifted. Agents now seek broader immersive experiences for clients, extending beyond typical tourist routes, such as an escalating interest in exploring further east, known as Yeti country, showcasing the old Bhutan."

Gelephu Mindfulness City

Recently, His Majesty, the King of Bhutan, announced a ground-breaking project - the Gelephu Mindfulness City in the south of Bhutan. This special administrative zone will embody Buddhist principles and operate with its own currency and legal system. The aim is to invite select international businesses to establish themselves within the zone, with various privileges. Developed by the renowned Danish architectural firm Bjarke Ingels Group, with India as a partner, it is expected to be completed within 5 to 10 years. The design sensibility emphasises mindfulness and harmony with futuristic architecture, such as a temple integrated into a dam wall, and plans for a new international airport in Gelephu, slated for completion in two years. This high-tech, forward-thinking project aims to future-proof Bhutan's economy and growing tourism industry.

In contrast to the relentless pursuit of numbers and rapid growth seen in various parts of the world, Bhutan's singular approach stands out for its focus on sustainability and long-term well-being. This mindful approach resonates with the essence of Bhutan, reflecting its commitment to a peaceful and balanced future. While many tourism boards prioritise short-term gains, Bhutan's emphasis on careful planning and consideration for its people's future sets it apart as a beacon of responsible tourism.

Sabah taking significant strides, targets 10000 Indian visitors in 2024

For Indian travellers seeking adventure and authenticity, Sabah on the Bornean side of Malaysia promises unforgettable experiences with nature and culture, making it an enticing destination to be explored. Julinus Jeffery Jimit, CEO, Sabah Tourism Board, beckons Indians to discover the uncharted beauty of Sabah and unlock the secrets of this hidden paradise.

Prashant Nayak

Borneo: A Prelude to Sabah's Splendour

Borneo is the third-largest island in the world. This island is part of three different countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei. Indonesia's region is called Kalimantan, while Malaysian Borneo has two states, Sarawak and Sabah, that are separated by Brunei. Sarawak's capital of Kuching, and Sabah's capital of Kota Kinabalu are the usual entry points, with the two cities acting as bases for exploring Malaysia's wild attractions. Borneo is a virtual paradise for anyone who loves the dense jungle, wildlife, and adventure. Borneo, alongside Sumatra, hosts endangered orangutans in the wild, offering a rare glimpse into their intelligence and beauty. Unfortunately, because of habitat loss, their numbers are dwindling and now is the opportune time to see them when you travel to Sabah.

Sabah: The Land Below the Wind

Sabah, on the northernmost part of Borneo, is the second-largest state in Malaysia and is surrounded by three seas. Its attractions, spanning from nature reserves to cultural landmarks, reflect a commitment to conservation and preservation. Sabah has retained a large portion of its forest cover. The jungles in Sabah are classified as rainforests, and scientists estimate them to be 130 million years old—one of the oldest in the world! It is easily the best place in Southeast Asia for wildlife watching, and many of the animals and birds found here are endemic.

Julinus says, "From Sipadan, which has one of the deepest and top dive sites in the world, to Mount Kinabalu, which stands at 4,095 metres above sea level, one can discover a plethora of experiences in between, like the beaches, golfing, jungle and wildlife, birding, cuisine, ethnic and culture, community and conservation-based tourism."

Kinabalu Park, which occupies an area around Mount Kinabalu, is a botanical paradise with the most remarkable



▲ Julinus Jeffery Jimit

assemblage of plant species and wildlife in the world. The Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre in East Sabah is the most popular place to view orangutans in Borneo. At Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, visitors can get a glimpse of the highly endangered proboscis monkeys, crocodiles, pythons, and pygmy elephants. The population has more than 30 different ethnic races, and each indigenous group has its own unique dance, music, and handicrafts that differentiate it from each other.

Kota Kinabalu: The Gateway to Sabah's Enchantment

Known locally as 'KK', Kota Kinabalu, the bustling capital of Sabah, is a hidden gem surrounded by lush rainforests and sandy beaches. This off-the-beaten-track destination allows travellers to immerse themselves in its unique vibe.

In KK, by day, travellers can browse handicrafts by regional artisans at the Kota Kinabalu Handicraft Market. Tanjung Aru Beach is a tourist hotspot where locals flock, especially on the weekends. The Floating Seafood Market restaurant is an attraction in itself for its showcase of food, local arts, and music. The ecosystems around Kota Kinabalu are home to unique wildlife, which travellers can observe from a boat during an evening river safari.

When it comes to the Indian market, alongside FIT and leisure travellers, Sabah Tourism is targeting the lucrative Indian wedding and MICE markets, capitalising on Kota Kinabalu and the region's huge list of hotel properties. "With ample five-star inventories to host large groups and an international convention centre boasting a 6,000-person capacity at one time, the potential for these segments is significant. With 10 Indian weddings held in 2023 and an upcoming small medical group from India, we do look forward to huge potential. Also, Kota Kinabalu has the second busiest airport in our country and is well connected with Kaula Lumpur and other parts of the globe," highlights Julinus.

Paving the Way Forward

In 2023, Sabah surpassed its visitor arrival target of 2.2 million while hosting 2.6 million visitors. With the aim of reaching 2.8 million arrivals in 2024, Sabah is steadily progressing towards surpassing expectations. "Despite Indian visitors numbering only 501 in 2023, we are targeting 10,000 Indian visitors in 2024, especially as Malaysia offers visa-free travel for Indians until December 31, 2024. We have also started dialogues with the Indian travel trade and associations like TIA (Tourism India Alliance) to enhance the visibility of the destination," says Julinus.



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Step into the world of warm traditions, adventure, and fulfilling experiences in Bahrain

Positioned as an island nation boasting pristine beaches, vibrant nightlife, an abundance of luxurious accommodations, and warm hospitality, the Kingdom of Bahrain stands out as an ideal holiday and weekend destination for friends, families, vacationers, and business travellers seeking leisure. Sally Sedky, Head - Tourism Marketing, Bahrain Tourism and Exhibitions Authority (BTEA), sheds light on Bahrain's initiatives to enhance its allure among Indian travellers.

Prashant Nayak

As a short-haul destination from India, Bahrain presents an enticing array of attractions, events, and cultural experiences, rendering it the ultimate destination for Indians seeking a harmonious blend of relaxation, adventure, and cultural immersion.

Key Markets and India Initiatives

For Bahrain, after the GCC countries, India, the UK, Germany, and China stand out prominently as primary source markets. India holds a strategic position as a focus market for Bahrain's tourism endeavours, and the recovery from the Indian market has been great in 2023. Now, BTEA is focusing more on enhancing numbers and raising their KPIs this year. Within the Indian market, Bahrain assumes a pivotal role in fortifying connections and solidifying its stature as a preferred destination for Indian travellers.

"While Bahrain is dedicated to demonstrating its allure and accessibility to global visitors, in India, we are strategically targeting both trade and consumer segments. From FITs and MICE travellers to capitalising on our status as a wedding destination and even promoting Bahrain as a filming hotspot for Bollywood, our efforts align with our commitment to diversify our tourism offerings. We are also particularly focusing on cities with direct Gulf Air flights or easy accessibility through their routes," explains Sally.

Forging Unity in the GCC

The Middle East region is experiencing significant growth as a key tourism hub, with nearly every country in the region actively pursuing tourism initiatives. As all have similar ambitions, fostering collaboration with neighbouring countries is pivotal to positioning the GCC as a cohesive destination. On



▲ Sally Sedky

this, Sally elaborates, "We are working very closely with the GCC to promote the region as one destination. With the Saudi Tourism Authority, Oman Tourism, and the UAE, we are tailoring joint promotional packages aimed at the international and Indian markets. We are showcasing combined offerings like Bahrain and Dubai, Bahrain and Abu Dhabi, and Bahrain and Oman."

Unique Island Nation

Positioned as the only island nation in the Middle East, the kingdom is keen to emphasise its unique aspects. With a well-thought-out approach, Bahrain aims to enhance its tourism sector by spotlighting its distinct attractions and cultural landmarks. Sally underscores this by stating, "Bahrain is the only island nation in the Middle East, and we are actively conveying this. Several waterfront projects are in development, offering a diverse range of amenities, including restaurants, cafes, and entertainment facilities along the coastline. Additionally, a significant number of four- to five-star hotels

are scheduled to open between 2024 and 2026, with many providing direct beach access, thereby enhancing its appeal as a great family-friendly destination and offering a wide range of beach and water-related activities."

Dive into History, Culture, and Adventure

Bahrain's reputation for its pearls, distinguished by their exceptional quality, is intertwined with the nation's rich historical legacy. "Pearl diving is our primary USP, offering visitors the chance to engage in this immersive experience or enjoy snorkelling, both of which are highly tourist-friendly activities. Furthermore, the cost of participating in these activities is relatively inexpensive compared to other water-based recreational pursuits, highlights Sally. Enthusiastic tourists keen on pearl diving are invited to partake in this enriching activity, with the opportunity to gather up to 60 oysters. Interestingly, any pearl discovered during this captivating experience can be retained as cherished mementos. For more adventure, Bahrain offers other thrilling activities such as indoor skydiving, F1-inspired karting, 4x4s on sand dunes, and many more, keeping travellers engaged and enthralled.

Bahrain effortlessly merges its rich heritage with modern conveniences, providing a distinctive experience where tradition and innovation harmonise seamlessly. The destination abounds with forts, museums, and cultural sites, inviting exploration and discovery. The alleyways and bustling souks, where the aroma of exotic spices fills the air, are great places for shopping. There are plenty of restaurants celebrating global flavours, that cater to the varied Indian palate. Bahrainis warmly share their stories, traditions, and delectable cuisine with visitors, ensuring an immersive and unforgettable cultural journey.





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Azerbaijan

aims to double arrivals from India in 2024

Lying on the ancient Silk Road, Azerbaijan is just a three-hour, thirty-minute flight from India. Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, with its iconic Flame Towers, features regularly on the social media posts of avid Indian travellers and netizens. From mountain peaks, ski slopes, and ancient towns to sea beaches, Azerbaijan offers something exciting for everyone. TTJ recently spoke to Florian Sengtschmid, CEO, Azerbaijan Tourism Board.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

India is a very important market for Azerbaijan, reiterates Florian. "In our past six years of actively pursuing the Indian market, we have seen it rise to the position of the fourth largest source market of visitors to Azerbaijan. In 2023 alone, 1,20,000 Indians visited Azerbaijan, which was a 100 per cent growth on our arrivals from India in 2022. In January 2024, we have already received 10,000 visitors from India, which is a 140 per cent growth over 2022 January arrivals, and if this trend continues, we can see a doubling of numbers with hopefully 2,50,000 arrivals from India in 2024.

He further adds, "The performance from the India market is commendable because the other top three markets are our neighbouring countries, namely Russia, Turkey, and Iran." Azerbaijan offers 11 direct flights a week to Baku from India. The issuance of a visa is hassle-free, and an e-visa can be applied for and obtained online for a fee of US\$25 and is processed within three hours.

The Market Mix

Talking about the market share of segments among visitors to Azerbaijan, Florian mentions, "MICE constitute 60 per cent of the total arrivals, the balance, 40 per cent comprises family travellers, solo women travellers, weddings, and film shooting crews. Almost 12 movies have been filmed at various locations across Azerbaijan. He further adds, "Our proximity to India and our scenic locales and historical cities makes it a popular choice among filmmakers. We have great hotels, modern infrastructure, world-class shopping



▲ Florian Sengtschmid

for top brands, and our great traditional bazaars."

Places and Cities to Visit

Yanardag: The Fire Mountain is about a 30-minute taxi ride from Baku. Here, a natural gas fire blazes continuously on a hillside and is said to have been burning continuously for the last 4000 years.

Shahdag: A three-hour drive from Baku gets you to the Shahdag Mountain Resort, named after the majestic Mount Shahdag, which towers 4243 metres above sea level. Located near Shahdag National Park, this resort complex offers opportunities for skiing, ziplining, quad biking, paragliding, snowboarding, and snow tubing. It also boasts

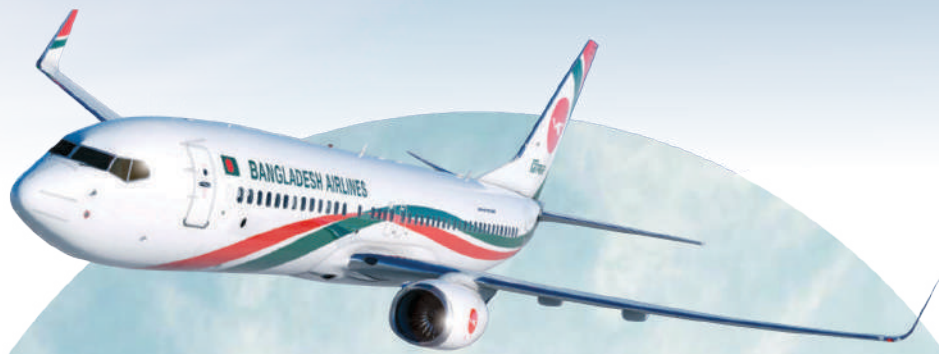
the Shahdag Coaster, a 2590-metre family thrill ride offering unforgettable adrenaline rushes.

Lankaran: Perched on the edge of the Caspian Sea in southern Azerbaijan, this city is renowned for its thermal springs, offering visitors therapeutic and recreational experiences alike. The city's beach, famous for its black volcanic sand loaded with beneficial minerals, is a notable attraction. The city was once a crucial hub on the Great Silk Road.

Sheki: In 2019, Sheki was included in UNESCO's World Heritage List as an important city along the historic Silk Road. Sheki has served as a vital hub of trade along the Silk Road since the Middle Ages. Merchants and travellers thronged here not only to exchange goods and merchandise but also ideas, customs, religions, and cultures. Sheki's unique architecture has been influenced by Safavid, Qajar, Ottoman and Russian building traditions.

Culinary Traditions

Tea drinking is a deeply ingrained tradition in Azerbaijani culture, explains Florian. Tea plantations situated around Lankaran produce excellent tea. He further adds, "Today Azerbaijani Vintener's produces some excellent Cognac and wines made from local grape varieties that are a must try if you are a wine connoisseur and visiting our country. The foodies must try dushbara—Azerbaijani dumplings, lavangi, piti, govurma, surhullu, shah plov, and kata to get a feel of the gastronomic pulse of the nation."



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VFS Global Roadshows fuel travel trade dialogue across 12 Indian cities

VFS Global conducted a series of roadshows across India, facilitating proactive engagement with the travel trade. The roadshows highlighted the offerings for the peak travel season, providing participating agents with a valuable opportunity to address their challenges.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

The outreach series commenced in Bhubaneswar on February 19, 2024, and concluded in Kochi on March 26, 2024. It covered cities like Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Jalandhar, Chandigarh, New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bengaluru, and Chennai, attracting over 1,200 participating agents.

The team representing VFS Global at the countrywide events was Vishal Jairath, Head South Asia, Visa Operations; Sharad Gowani, Regional Head, West; and Jaya Amit Mitra, Regional Head, South India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. The event also received an overwhelming response from travel associations represented by Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, and Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI.

At the Delhi chapter, Vishal Jairath, outlining the company's global presence, said, "VFS Global operates in 149 countries and serves 67 client governments. In India, we operate in 19 cities, including the recent addition of Lucknow in 2023. We have seen a significant increase in application volumes, with a 16 per cent year-on-year growth from 2022 to 2023." He further added, "Delhi, reflecting national trends, has experienced a 10 per cent year-on-year growth, though slightly lower than other parts of North India. Premium services like 'Visa at Your Doorstep' have seen a fivefold increase since 2019, catering to tier 3 and tier 4 city residents."

Insights Gathered

The events focussed on primary information dissemination, such as the need to book appointments in advance, as most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days or three months before the date of travel. According to the revised Schengen Visa

Code, effective February 09, 2020, one can apply for a Schengen visa up to six months before the date of travel. Highlighting VFS Global's rigorous ongoing efforts, Vishal said, "Our appointment management system has seen improvements with easy availability for many client governments within two to three working days. We continue to address concerns regarding appointment availability, advocating for better solutions."

Another key point emphasised during the meeting was the reminder that visa appointments are provided free of charge and exclusively available only on www.vfsglobal.com. The agents were also updated on the operational changes taking place within the regions, and VFS Global sought the opportunity to promote Visa at Your Doorstep (VAYD) and Premium Lounge Services.

Industry Challenges

The Roadshows provided an ideal platform for discussions on challenges for the travel trade. Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, addressing the issue of touts operating within the industry, said, "Their presence undermines the integrity of the visa application process and must be tackled collectively so that we can create a healthier environment by enabling legitimate travel agents." The improvement of technology solutions is essential for streamlining

processes and enhancing user experience. She further added, "Leveraging VFS Global's expertise as a trusted technology partner, we can facilitate these advancements, ensuring smooth operations for all involved."

The spirited Q&A sessions brought attention to the challenges encountered by travel agents in their daily operations. Highlighting the necessity for collaboration and mutual support, they emphasised the interdependence between VFS and the travel industry. Together, they share the goal of advancing the industry while stressing the importance of constructive dialogue and partnership. Through collective effort, the aim is to tackle challenges, promote innovation, and offer exceptional service to travellers. VFS Global was commended for their call for stronger collaboration between VFS, missions, and industry associations, as the need for a robust connection to resolve visa-related issues swiftly is paramount, given the industry's reliance on timely documentation and approvals.

Vishal emphasised, "Efforts to curb touting activities and enhance customer service are ongoing, with infrastructure expansion and additional hiring to meet peak period demands. Overall, we are committed to providing efficient visa processing services while addressing stakeholder concerns."



Intrepid Travel charts impactful rise in sustainable tourism

A global name in adventure tourism, Intrepid Travel welcomed its Founder and Chairman, Darrell Wade, on March 27, 2024, in New Delhi. The event highlighted Intrepid Travel’s growth strategy for 2030, emphasising the significance of India as a key travel destination. The company reiterated its commitment to responsible travel practices and its dedication to shaping a sustainable tourism landscape in India, aligning with its long-term business objectives.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

With a legacy of over 30 years in providing sustainable experiential travel opportunities to remarkable destinations, Intrepid Travel's core mission revolves around fostering positive change through the transformative power of travel. With a network of DMCs in 26 countries, Intrepid Travel ensures unparalleled local expertise in crafting over 1,150 meticulously curated immersive travel experiences. Notable milestones include achieving carbon neutrality in 2018, solidifying its position as the largest travel company to obtain B-Corp certification, and being recognised as the first tour operator to establish science-based climate targets through its Science Based Targets Initiative.

Darrell, based in Australia, is travelling to all 27 country offices this year to present Intrepid's 2030 Strategy to the team and stakeholders. He said, "Travel is now more about curiosity

and exploration than ticking a checklist. This shift is particularly crucial for India, given its rapid growth as it transitions from religious to leisure tourism, mirroring global trends. We are exploring opportunities in both outbound and domestic travel sectors in India, though significant changes may take time."

Commenting on the growth trajectory of Intrepid, Darrell highlighted, "We have seen a remarkable scale of growth. In our first year, we had 47 travellers; now, it is over 330,000, and we project to reach 600,000 by 2030. We have evolved from niche to semi-mainstream as clients seek more authentic, immersive experiences." He concluded by saying, "We



L-R: Rama Mahendru (Country GM - India), Darrell Wade (Chairman & Co-Founder), Natalie Kidd (MD Asia), Intrepid Travel

aim to promote exploration beyond typical tourist spots, addressing over-tourism issues. By showcasing lesser-known destinations and unique experiences, we strive to attract more visitors, offering memorable experiences off the beaten path."



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Rah Bagh is a luxury boutique resort and an ode to Kashmir, the brainchild of – Nazir and Katherine Rah. Rather than succumbing to the allure of constructing a sprawling hotel with a multitude of rooms, the RaHS opted for a more intimate approach, prioritising quality over quantity. Rah Bagh boasts a modest 41 rooms, each meticulously designed to provide guests with an unparalleled experience of luxury and tranquillity.

Prashant Nayak

Rah Bagh is a scenic new retreat on the outskirts of Srinagar, set against the mighty Himalayas. It sits in the lap of nature and captures the beauty of the Kashmir valley in its entirety. This luxury boutique resort has a distinctive character with its Alpine chalet-style units and cottages set over four acres within an apple orchard, sprawling gardens, and picturesque views of the Dal and Nageen lakes, framed by towering poplars and the Zabarwaan mountains as the backdrop. Rah Bagh offers an authentic escape, eschewing malls and swanky buildings for the serenity of apple orchards, lakes, and mountains.



Luxurious Escapes Amidst Rustic Spaces

For those looking for an ultra-luxury escape with the spectacular vistas of the Dal and Nageen lakes in sight at all times, the Royal Attic Suite at Rah Bagh is the perfect place to be. These chalet-style units have a 12-foot ceiling and wall-to-wall window, a spacious master bedroom, a separate living area, and expansive balconies that open up to views of the constantly changing landscape of the city and the lakes.

The Garden Cottages, clad in pine with

sloping roofs, exude a rustic charm and offer an exclusive and private setting. Each cottage, with its beautifully furnished bedroom, comes with a king-size bed and an ensuite large bath with a Jacuzzi. The private sit-out area allows you to enjoy the vibrant hues of the rose garden, the delightful presence of apple trees, or a captivating view of a cascading waterfall. The newly built Mountain View Cottages are perfect for families with kids who need a bit more space. Also available are Queen and Twin Deluxe Rooms, as well as Garden Suites.

A Fusion of Global and Kashmiri Flavours

Guests at Rah Bagh can savour meals and beverages from around the world as well as indulge in local Kashmiri flavours through a selection of dining options. Wan Posh, the all-day restaurant with a live kitchen and a wood-fired oven, offers sumptuous buffets and a la carte fare from across India and the world, as well as dishes from Kashmir. Café Sky, the terrace deck restaurant, is an ideal place to catch the sunrise, have an indulgent breakfast or a high tea, or sample the freshly grilled food directly from a live grill.



Royal Attic Suite

Nazir Rah, Managing Director, Rah Hotels and Resorts, specially mentions, "Much of the local produce served at Wan Posh is sourced from our own kitchen garden. If you order any local dish, be it Haaq Saag or Tamatar Chaman, don't be surprised that the fresh collard greens, tomatoes, and kohlrabi have been freshly plucked from the garden to create these delicious dishes, often part of the elaborate Kashmiri Wazwan or wedding feast."

Memorable Experiences: In and Out

For a relaxing and wholesome experience, Rah Bagh also boasts an open-air pool as well as a hot tub to chase away the blues. By the pool is the Urban Nirvana Spa, offering a tranquil retreat to indulge in a variety of modern and traditional relaxation treatments. There are enough cosy corners across the property to curl up and read a book, especially under the fruit trees. One can also simply take a stroll in the gardens and sip on a hot cup of cappuccino or Kashmir's famous Kahwah. For fitness enthusiasts, there is also the gym or nature's bounty for a bike ride or a hike to explore the surrounding mountains.

Talking about beyond the resort experiences, Nazir says, "The well-known tourist spots like Sonamarg, Gulmarg, and Pampore are just a few hours' drive. A must-visit for nature and wildlife enthusiasts is the Dachigam Wildlife Sanctuary, just about a 10-minute drive. Golfing enthusiasts can tee off at the Royal Springs Golf Course nearby. And of course, there is the charming city of Srinagar, where one can experience many curated excursions to discover the old architecture and heritage as well

as enjoy shopping for Kashmiri handicrafts."

A Perfect Gathering Place

Rah Bagh offers more than 2000 sq. ft. of conferencing, banqueting, and event space, including a large pre-function area, balcony, and alfresco areas. The indoor area can accommodate up to 80 people. It is fully equipped with modern conference facilities and Wi-Fi access and has ample parking facilities for visitors. The hotel has hosted many dealer meetings, conferences, and corporate events.

Inbound Challenges and Domestic Tourism Opportunities

Kashmir has the potential to become the global market for adventure tourism, says Nazir. However, the state is lacking in infrastructure to attract high-end tourism, and he feels that the government must address this concern. "We also need to proactively promote Kashmir as a safe travel destination to attract more international tourists. A lot of foreign tourists do not visit owing to travel restrictions. Even if they want to visit, they are not covered by travel insurance companies," states Nazir.



Apple Orchard Cottage



Facade-Waterfall cottage

But, it is encouraging to see that, in recent years, Kashmir has once again positioned itself as a hot favourite among domestic tourists. "We have a regular stream of travellers from the major metros as well as tier-two towns in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Punjab. Recently, we have also seen demand from the southern states. However, it is all season-wise. We work closely with all our trade partners and also attend trade shows regularly to network and increase our market base," mentions Nazir.

LADAKH'S FIRST LUXURY 5-STAR HOTEL TAKES MICE TO THE NEXT LEVEL AT 11,562 FT.



As one of the most sought-after tourist hotspots and a rapidly emerging MICE destination in India, The Grand Dragon Ladakh offers state-of-the-art conference facilities and diverse leisure options. Join Danish Din, Director, The Grand Dragon Ladakh, for an insider's look into the extent of MICE possibilities at this breathtaking property.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

Ladakh is a cold desert nestled within the majestic Great Himalayas, flanked by the imposing Karakoram and Zaskar mountains. It showcases breathtaking scenery, crisscrossed by several rivers like the Indus, which sculpt deep valleys, dramatic gorges, lakes and glaciers, including the renowned Pangong Lake and Siachen Glacier. This stunning panorama serves as the backdrop for The Grand Dragon Ladakh, one of the first luxury hotels in Leh, Ladakh, established in 2007. Owned and operated by the esteemed Abdu family of Leh, the hotel boasts over 50 years of expertise in extending warm hospitality to travellers exploring this remote corner of the world situated at 11,562 ft.

Pioneering Luxury

Addressing the proud heritage of the hotel, Danish says, "It was the first to offer facilities and services on par with international standards, and since its opening, it has been credited as the pioneer in showcasing luxury standards to the hospitality sector in Ladakh. It is also Ladakh's only certified five-star, international standard hotel." Open year-round, this artistically designed hotel



▲ Danish Din

showcases indigenous architecture and features paintings by Gulam Mustafa, the first modern artist of Ladakh.

Only a five-minute drive from Leh Airport and a short walk from the main market, the hotel offers luxurious accommodations with unobstructed views of the Himalayas. With 76 rooms, it offers all modern comforts infused

with the renowned Ladakhi warmth. The luxurious, spacious rooms with breathtaking views of the Stok Kangri mountains offer high-end in-room facilities like Nespresso coffee makers, humidifiers, TWG teas, Kronokare paraben-free amenities, floor heating in rooms and bathrooms as temperatures in Ladakh in winter go down to minus 25 degrees Celsius. Special precautions are advised upon arrival due to the high altitude and oxygen cylinders are available in all rooms and vehicles.

The hotel also features a fully equipped wellness centre with a gym and an upcoming international-class spa. It offers diverse dining options, including local, Indian, Pan-Asian, and European cuisine. Zasgyath offers all-day dining, while Solja serves as the Tea & Coffee Lounge. BBQ and bonfire events are hosted on the hotel's lawns, while a speciality Pan Asian Restaurant is soon to be unveiled.

MICE Services

The Grand Dragon Ladakh offers comprehensive amenities to the business traveller, including in-room Wi-Fi, separate sitting areas in all suites for meetings, a boardroom accommodating up to 20 people,

a dedicated breakout session lounge, a well-equipped business centre and a state-of-the-art banquet hall ideal for national and international conferences. Danish highlights, “In April 2023, The Grand Dragon Ladakh hosted the Youth G20 Summit, accommodating over 70 delegates from different countries and Indian government representatives for three days. Beyond the official sessions, the hotel organised a gala dinner, a musical evening, and a local artefacts exhibition.”

The hotel gardens offer a stunning mountain backdrop for outdoor events. Additionally, Ladakh's landscapes are perfect for team-building activities like rafting, cycling, trekking, or picnics by the Indus River.

From hosting a G-20 summit to launching automobiles, the team at The Grand Dragon Ladakh is trained to provide the requisite support for arranging special themed events, evening soirees with bonfires, and local cultural shows. The hotel's F&B team provides extensive catering choices for up to 200 pax. The hotel can help to curate packages as per client requirements, both within the premises of the hotel or offsite in Ladakh. The hotel has a close network of local and specialist vendors and works with Ladakhi freelance interpreters for multilingual requests from international guests.

Beyond Business

The Grand Dragon Ladakh serves as an ideal base for post-MICE events, offering day trips to explore ancient monasteries such as Hemis, Thiksey, and Alchi. Guests can also embark on overnight journeys to experience the surreal landscapes of Pangong Tso, Nubra Valley, and Lamayuru or partake

in adventures like the acclaimed Chadar Trek and snow leopard expeditions. In Leh activities can include a variety of cultural tours, trekking, mountaineering, rafting, and wildlife safaris. The hotel offers unique experiences such as Ladakhi script calligraphy classes, local cultural shows, BBQs, bonfires, and riverside picnics.

Experience Ladakhi Culture

Danish articulates, “The Grand Dragon Hotel is an ode to the famed Ladakhi pride in the land's ancient cultural heritage. Its architecture incorporates the famous Rabsal tradition of Ladakh, visible in the window treatments and balconies and the resplendent hand-carved colourful traditional Ladakhi frescos. The imposing entrance in intricately carved wood, ubiquitous in Ladakhi palaces and mansions, welcomes guests to the portals of the hotel.” He also points out, “Paintings by my uncle Gulam Mustafa, the first modern artist of Ladakh, adorn the walls of the property, reflecting his deep feelings for Ladakh – the emotions of people and the fragrance of the land. They provide an insight into the local culture of different tribes, imposing mountain panorama, traditional buildings, majestic palaces, stupas, and homes of Ladakh.” At The Grand Dragon, every room has elements of Ladakh

be it in the artefacts, décor or traditional ceilings. In addition, guests can indulge in traditional Ladakhi cuisine, and enjoy local produce like yak cheese and apricots. The cultural shows offer guests a deep dive into Ladakh's rich heritage.

Sustainable and Responsible Goals

The hotel prioritises sustainability by minimising one-time plastic use, offering artisanal water in glass bottles from its bottling plant, and providing paraben-free, bamboo in-room utilities. It encourages linen reuse, utilises non-toxic laundry detergents, and promotes biodegradable consumables and local ingredients like buckwheat, sea buckthorn, yak cheese, and apricots for farm-to-fork dining. The hotel has practised stringent wet waste management for over a decade, sending leftovers to the “Live to Love” animal shelter at Nang. The hotel supports local community development by training Ladakhi youth in hospitality careers.



Luxury Suite with Balcony



Picnic by the river



Zasgyath All-day Dining Restaurant



Banquet Hall



Breakfast by the River Indus



RAISING THE 'STANDARD'

A Luxurious Leap into Maldivian Paradise at

THE STANDARD, HURUVALHI

Offering a potent combination of luxury, stunning natural beauty, and adventurous spirit, this exclusive, contemporary retreat provides a serene getaway for discerning travellers. Lijo John, Director, Sales and Marketing, The Standard, Huruvalhi Maldives, provides insights into crafting the ultimate Maldivian experience - The Standard style.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

Nestled in the Raa Atoll on Huruvalhi island, a seaplane ride from Male, lies The Standard, Huruvalhi Maldives. The hotel enjoys an idyllic location surrounded by a vast lagoon and is close to the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, which provides a glimpse into Maldives' stunning underwater marine life.

The Island Experience

Explaining the lay of the land, Lijo says, "Our Island oasis is a perfect, romantic escape for friends and families alike. Each of our 115 pool villas, overwater or settled on the beachfront, has its own private lounge deck and plunge pool. Villas have large bathrooms equipped with oversized bathtubs overlooking disco balls." They have direct access to the lagoon, ocean, or beach, depending upon their category and location on the island. Hints of bright colours and shiny disco balls add a touch of whimsy to the indulgence of the resort decor. The luxuriously appointed Standard Spa provides peaceful relaxation with amenities such as a communal hammam, aroma steam rooms, and aerial yoga sessions. Culinary delights abound with diverse dining options, including all-day dining at Kula, authentic Maldivian cuisine at Guduguda, sunset views at the overwater Izakaya Beru Bar, and fiery beachfront BBQ at BBQ Shak.



▲ Lijo John

Among the popular activities, the sunset cruise is a crowd favourite, promising an unforgettable experience of a Maldivian sunset along with the added excitement of dolphins leaping into view at any given moment. Guests can choose from a wide range of water activities, such as snorkelling in the protected house reef, boating, and deep diving, among others. The inflatable water park is available all year round and is located in the shallow waters of the turquoise lagoon with enough slides, obstacles, walls, and rafts for a perfect day of water play. The

overwater Beru Bar beckons visitors with its Japanese Izakaya menu and a massive glass dance floor under the biggest glittering disco ball. The in-house Lil' Shark Kids Club takes care of little guests and keeps them entertained.

Lijo highlights the guest demographic: "It is one of the few resorts to attract a highly diverse mix of guests. In 2023 alone, the resort welcomed visitors from over 90 different nationalities. On any single day of the year, over 40 different nationalities are on the island. It is a perfect place to make new friends."

Unique Luxury Offering

Guests can experience the thrill of owning their own island through the resort's Island Buyout option, where they can immerse completely in customised luxury for a couple of days for special occasions or exotic weddings, as the resort aims to transform their dreams into reality. They can also reserve the intimate 'Baby Island' for exclusive starlit occasions, offering a once-in-a-lifetime experience of having a secluded island all to themselves.

Indian Guest Preferences

Addressing the importance of India, Lijo emphasises, "India ranks among the top 10 feeder markets for The Standard Maldives. Indian visitation to the hotel is all year round, and demand peaks coinciding with



The Standard Residence



Lagoon Beach Villa



Kula, All-day Dining Restaurant



Custom-made Tubular Ping Pong Table



Snorkeling

long weekends, wedding festivities, and honeymoon seasons. The resort welcomes leisure, group, business, and MICE travel.”

The popular choice of accommodation for Indian guests is the expansive overwater villa with private pools perched over the endless Indian Ocean accompanied by the floating breakfast experience. Guests treasure the hotel-organised photoshoots, creating lasting memories of their stay. Most importantly, under the guidance of an Executive Chef from India, the culinary team consistently surpasses the culinary expectations of Indian travellers. They cater to vegetarian and Jain dietary preferences with ease, readily preparing staple and favourite Indian dishes upon request.

“The resort offers tailored packages designed specifically for the Indian market, featuring options for three nights and four days. These packages include various meal options, ranging from breakfast and dinner inclusive to a

premium all-inclusive option. Exclusive complimentary offers for Indian travellers include one floating breakfast per stay, one boat excursion from the choice of a sunset cruise, dolphin cruise, or sunset fishing, and 30 minutes of complimentary photoshoots,” explains Lijo.

India Dynamics

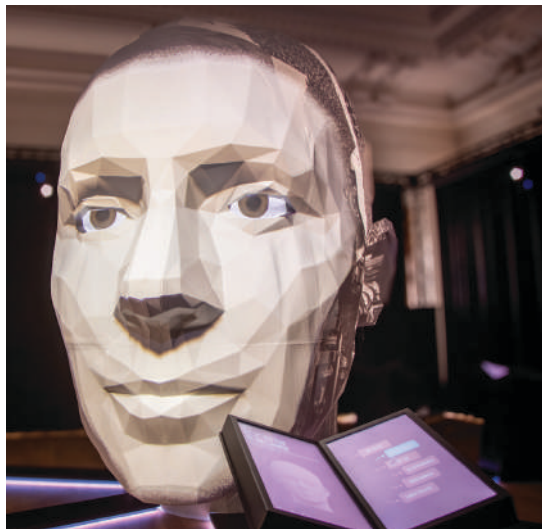
Talking about the demands of the Indian market, Lijo says, “India is a complex market with varied needs due to its market size, regional diversity, and customer requirements. We understand and accommodate requests to ensure an unforgettable experience. For special occasions, such as honeymoons and wedding anniversaries, extra care is provided with our compliments - we offer a three-course romantic dinner on the beach, bubble baths set up in the villa on oversized bathtubs, and a Love Platter - a special dessert arrangement to celebrate the special occasion.”

Stringent Eco-Friendly Values

The Standard Maldives has been distinguished as a level three sustainable resort by leading travel agents worldwide, embodying sustainability as its core ethos from inception to current daily operations. The key priority is to maintain and protect the island's natural integrity. The resort primarily operates on solar energy, utilising it to power 80 per cent of its consumption. The resort implements regular waste management and recycling procedures and cultivates local vegetables and sources produced locally to reduce its environmental impact. With a firm commitment to environmental conservation, the resort adopts a strict 'No to Plastic' approach, favouring glass bottles, paper straws, and eco-friendly packaging. The Standard Maldives actively engages in socially responsible collaborations with neighbouring local islands, fostering mutually beneficial relationships to ensure positive contributions to the local island community.



Baby Island



From Stocks to Brews



Belgian Beer World

Step into a world where finance meets fermentation. Once the bustling epicentre of Brussels' Stock Exchange, the magnificent 'La Bourse' building now houses the spirited Belgian Beer World. Dive into beer brewing, uncover the secrets of crafting the perfect pint, and tantalise your taste buds with a diverse range of brews. Not just as a mere visitor - but a brewmaster in the making, with the chance to concoct your very own special blend. Cheers to the thrilling fusion of history, flavour, and fun.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

The Bourse, or the erstwhile Brussels Stock Exchange, consists of a public space with a central gallery with benches, co-working spaces, exhibitions, and meeting rooms. The Belgian Beer World is located within this architectural marvel and is a permanent exhibition of Belgian beer culture. Conveniently located in Brussels Central Square near the Grand Palace, nestled in a lively, pedestrian, and bike-friendly area, surrounded by historic architecture, the Bourse is easily accessible with an adjacent tram stop and parking available near the Grand Place.

Belgian Beer History

Belgium upholds a proud tradition of beer brewing, lovingly preserved and passed down through generations, earning it UNESCO World Heritage recognition. The basement of the Bourse unlocks the medieval tale of Brussels, and legend has it that herein lies the tomb of John I, Duke of Brabant, also known as Gambrinus, revered as the inventor and patron saint of beer. The upper floors have undergone a modern transformation into a dynamic experience centre that seamlessly blends science, art, and emotion to provide a fresh perspective on Belgium's legendary beer production. Since ancient times, beer has been integral to Belgian daily life, from craft to culture and public health. Explore every facet of beer, from its deep roots in Belgian culture aptly named 'belgitude' to its profound impact on industry and the meticulous scientific processes behind its creation. Belgian Beer World paints

a vivid picture of this national treasure and emerges as a premier attraction in Brussels.

The Beer Lab is the Bourse's rooftop bar with all-glass walls, featuring breathtaking views of the city centre while offering a selection of over 100 beer varieties. It showcases a panoramic view of Brussels' iconic landmarks, from the majestic 15th-century tower of Brussels Town Hall to the elegant dome of the Palais de Justice and the soaring spires of St. Gudula. The Skybar is accessible beyond the Belgian Beer World's opening hours and can also be booked for corporate or private events.

Nearby Attractions

Other iconic landmarks awaiting exploration include The Grand Palace, Royal Museums of Fine Arts, Choco Story, and Brussels Town Hall, among others. Do not forget to browse the quaint shops for unique souvenirs to commemorate your visit. The Brussels Square plays the perfect host to festive Christmas markets, thrilling concerts, the remarkable Ommegang Parade, and the breathtaking Flower Carpet, which transforms the square into a vibrant tapestry of flowers every two years. The Hilton Hotel Brussels Grand Place, Hotel Amigo, and Juliana Hotel provide quiet and indulgent luxury. Tread through the quaint lanes to discover the UNESCO World Heritage sites of the townhomes of Victor Horta and the Stoclet House, adding another layer of charm to your Brussels adventure!

Barefoot Bliss at HERITANCE AARAH MALDIVES



Nestled in the picturesque Raa Atoll, Heritance Aarah Maldives is a premium all-inclusive resort that offers guests a serene escape with a host of attractions. Tailored to each guest's room category and length of stay, the experience is carefully crafted for relaxed indulgence and discovery.

Team TTJ

At Heritance Aarah Maldives, island living is a way of life and it embraces you in a gentle hug from the moment you land on its shores. From the sandy floors of the reception area to the rustic-chic design of the villas, every detail exudes the laid-back, barefoot serenity that defines the Maldives. Guests experience a seamless blend with nature as they dine in relaxed open-air restaurants with their feet on the soft sand, creating an atmosphere of pure relaxation and connection with the surroundings.

Taking the all-inclusive experience to unparalleled levels, the Premium package features superior in-villa amenities, access to excellent resort facilities, snorkelling

and dive excursions, wine tastings, a complimentary IASO face scan, spa credit, and a culinary journey featuring cuisine crafted by award-winning chefs. Experience deliciousness at Ranba, the main restaurant, where diners can enjoy their meals with toes buried in the sand, relishing Maldivian flavours. From freshly grilled seafood to authentic local dishes, there is something to suit every palate. The Bandi Bar and Ginifati Restaurant encourages guests to unwind while soaking in the stunning panoramic views of the Indian Ocean. The extensive range of exhilarating activities and immersive programs keeps the guests entertained all day long.

A standout feature of Heritance Aarah

is its deep commitment to preserving and honouring Maldivian culture. This dedication is showcased in the meticulously curated Live Maldivian Village Museum, providing glimpses into the island's rich history, traditional crafts, and lively local music and dance. Guests can also savour the exquisite flavours of traditional Dhivehi cuisine, delve into the intricate craftsmanship of ancient artefacts, and immerse themselves in the pristine natural surroundings.

Responsible travel is a key priority and a pivotal aspect of the cultural ethos. As the Maldives' pioneering LEED Gold-certified and green-rated building, Heritance Aarah sets the standard for sustainable hospitality. Guests are encouraged to participate in the resort's eco-initiatives during their stay.



RAIL EUROPE **empowering travel agents with seamless rail bookings**

Headquartered in Paris, Rail Europe provides an easy platform for travellers to book train tickets for popular routes across Europe, including high-speed trains, scenic routes, intercity connections, and access to a wide range of destinations. Srijit Nair, General Manager - India, Middle East and Africa, Rail Europe, is dedicated to shaping the company's future in the global travel industry by focusing on expanding strategic partnerships and prioritising seamless, eco-friendly, and customer-centric rail travel experiences.

Prashant Nayak

Rail Europe offers travellers a diverse range of experiences that combine the convenience of train travel with the opportunity to explore Europe's rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and iconic landmarks. Whether it is a solo adventure, romantic getaway, family vacation, or group tour, Rail Europe caters to the needs and preferences of travellers seeking unforgettable moments and rewarding experiences

Forward-Thinking Approach

Rail Europe continuously evaluates traveller preferences and market trends to expand its product offerings. The company stays attuned to the changing needs and preferences of travellers, ensuring that its services remain relevant and competitive in the dynamic travel



▲ Srijit Nair

market. Other than leisure travellers, to ensure that business travellers experience seamless and productive journeys, Srijit says, "Rail Europe understands that business travellers need connectivity, and hence we are always looking to offer an expanded network of train journeys. We are always thinking ahead; our product team is more attuned than ever to emerging trends, ensuring people's desire is not just a part of our planning but a driving force behind it."

Recently, Rail Europe opened ÖBB's international routes towards Hungary for all B2B partners, connecting Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. This move is a direct response to the feedback from customers who have expressed a growing demand for more cross-border train travel options. "We envision seamless travel through various



countries, allowing passengers to enjoy unique cultures, food, and picturesque sights, all while relaxing on a train,” says Srijit.

Sustainable Corporate Travel

Rail Europe is committed to leading sustainable initiatives that champion train travel as an eco-friendly transportation choice. The company also recognises the shifting preferences of business travellers in favour of sustainable options and has positioned itself as the prime choice for eco-friendly travel in Europe.

Actively engaging with travel agents, Rail Europe advocates for the integration of train travel packages into corporate policies, emphasising the environmental benefits of choosing trains over other modes. By fostering partnerships with businesses, promoting awareness, and aligning with Europe's ambitious sustainability goals, Rail Europe aims to significantly reduce the carbon footprint associated with corporate travel, contributing to a more sustainable and responsible travel landscape.

Simplifying Travel Choices

The introduction of seat reservation sales for Eurail and Interrail pass holders is a strategic move that aligns with the demand for passholder fares. As a platform facilitating the purchase of Eurail passes, the company has recognised the need to enhance its

services for trade partners. On the Rail Europe booking platform, customers can now swiftly assess whether an additional seat reservation is required for their travel itinerary, especially on trains like TGV, Lyria, Eurostar, Frecciarossa, etc. Srijit adds, “This feature not only streamlines the booking process but also provides transparency on associated costs, contributing to a more seamless and informed customer experience. The introduction of this new offer underscores Rail Europe's commitment to continually improving its business strategy and ensuring the best possible travel experience for its trade partners.”

Bridging Knowledge Gaps

In the B2B travel market, one of the key challenges that Rail Europe encounters is the need to educate an expanding base of travel agents about train travel in Europe. On this, Srijit mentions, “To address this, Rail Europe has implemented a proactive strategy involving regular training sessions and monthly webinars. By encouraging travel agents to enhance their knowledge about train travel in Europe, we aim to empower them to better assist their clients in planning seamless and enjoyable rail journeys.”

Cutting-Edge Tech Solutions

Technology is at the forefront of enhancing Rail Europe's B2B client experience, and

they recently announced their revamped tech solutions range at the WTM (World Travel Market) in London. Designed to offer businesses greater flexibility and scalability, Rail Europe introduced a blend of old favourites and an innovative newcomer tailored to meet the evolving demands of the travel industry. “Our exciting newcomer, RailFlash, is a sleek API-like solution, ideal for businesses aiming for swift, lightweight connectivity without the need for comprehensive integration. This new solution is designed with simplicity, efficiency, and speed in mind, ensuring partners can get up and running in no time. Then we also have RailLink, the simplest connectivity solution, perfect for businesses looking to establish an affiliation with Rail Europe and earn commissions without the complexities of deeper integration,” informs Srijit.

As a comprehensive platform for European train travel, Rail Europe serves as a one-stop shop for travel agents. Through its user-friendly interface, travel agents can seamlessly book trains and passes for their clients, earning commissions on rail revenue in the process. This streamlined approach allows travel agents to efficiently plan and book train travel for their customers while also benefiting from the convenience and reliability of Rail Europe's services.



TAMIL NADU

CREATING ROBUST TOURISM ECOSYSTEM, PRIORITISING VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH



Nilgiri Mountain Railway

Tamil Nadu beckons travellers on a timeless journey, promising a blend of heritage, culture, and nature. As the State continues to evolve and innovate, its tourism sector stands poised to capture hearts and minds for generations to come. Dr. K. Manivasan, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, Tourism, Culture, and Religious Endowments Department, Tamil Nadu, unveils some of the State's allure while offering fresh insights into its evolving tourism developments.

Prashant Nayak

In India's tourism landscape, Tamil Nadu stands as a beacon of rich heritage, diverse culture, and natural splendour. Over the years, the State has welcomed millions of visitors from across the globe, setting remarkable benchmarks in both domestic and international tourism. In 2023 alone, the State witnessed a staggering 28.6 crore domestic visitors, showcasing its unwavering appeal as a favourite destination in India. Heritage tourism, medical tourism, and business travel are strong segments for international visitors to Tamil Nadu.

Timeless and Vivid Enchantments

Tamil Nadu is not just a destination; it is a journey through time, where ancient temples, classical arts, and lush landscapes offer a truly immersive experience. Further, the State's tourism narrative is intricately woven with tales of antiquity, echoing its status as one of the oldest civilizations in the world. From the ancient Tamil language



▲ Dr. K. Manivasan

to the 2000-year-old cultural tradition of Jallikattu, the State exudes a timeless charm. Dr. K. Manivasan emphasises, "Tamil Nadu offers a diversity of experiences for travellers, both domestic and international, through its rich heritage,

vibrant festivals, and breathtaking natural landscapes. Our cultural heritage, including classical dance forms like Bharatnatyam and the Carnatic music tradition, serves as a testament to our enduring legacy."

Beyond its heritage and cultural treasures, Tamil Nadu is blessed with diverse ecosystems and abundant natural wonders. With over 700 temples spanning a millennium, 18 sanctuaries, five tiger reserves, lush landscapes, hill stations, the second-longest coastline in India, the UNESCO Heritage Train, and more, the state offers a myriad of experiences for the discerning traveller. These are some aspects that very few states can boast of. Dr. K. Manivasan notes, "Our efforts extend beyond heritage tourism to embrace ecotourism, coastal tourism, and wildlife sanctuaries, ensuring a holistic experience for visitors."

Roadmap for the Future

Looking ahead, Tamil Nadu's tourism sector is poised for further growth and development. Dr. K. Manivasan reveals



Danish Fort, Tranquebar (Tharangambadi)



Shore Temple, Mahabalipuram

plans to enhance the splendours of destinations such as Madurai and use them as transit points for further exploration of the State. Madurai, a city steeped in over 2000 years of history, offers a glimpse into authentic street food traditions, often overlooked by visitors. From there, travellers can journey to Kodaikanal, the only hill station developed by Americans in India. Here one can further unveil the rich Chettinad heritage and cuisine while also providing access to the spiritual Rameswaram.

Similar to Madurai, they have identified many places, like Thanjavur, which has the potential to unlock other lesser-known destinations. Tamil Nadu's coastal tourism flourishes with numerous attractions. From Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram) to the Danish fort in Tranquebar, visitors can experience a plethora of cultural confluence along the extensive coastline. "We are actively developing master plans for these destinations and seeking international funding to support our initiatives. By engaging top agencies and consultants, we are ensuring meticulous planning and execution. We are on track to realise our vision for Tamil Nadu's tourism development," says Dr. K. Manivasan.

Central to Tamil Nadu's tourism strategy is the active engagement of stakeholders and collaboration with the private sector. Dr. K. Manivasan acknowledges the challenges but remains optimistic about the synergies created through such partnerships. "By working closely with tour operators, hoteliers, and other agencies like the Forest Department, we aim to create a robust tourism ecosystem that prioritises visitor experience and sustainable growth," he asserts.

Cultivating Value-Driven Tourism

Dr. K. Manivasan is a stalwart advocate for sustainable and responsible tourism practices. He underscores the importance of eco-tourism and responsible tourism in

preserving the state's ecological treasures for future generations. "We are conscious of the need to balance tourism growth with environmental conservation," he states. Measures such as plastic bans and community awareness campaigns further reflect the state's commitment to minimising its ecological footprint.

Looking beyond mere visitor numbers, Tamil Nadu Tourism sets its sights on value-driven tourism experiences. "Our aim is not just to attract crowds but to create meaningful connections with our cultural heritage and natural wonders," Dr. K. Manivasan affirms. Embracing sustainable tourism practices and fostering collaborations across sectors, Tamil Nadu charts a course towards more inclusive, responsible, and enriching tourism experiences.



Kanadukathan Palace

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and ICC steer India towards economic and tourism excellence

The Round Table Discussion on the "Role of Civil Aviation in promoting Indian Economy and Tourism" hosted by the Aviation and Tourism Committee of the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) on March 22, 2024, at the India International Centre brought together a formidable array of speakers, including Shri Vumlunmang Vualnam, the esteemed Secretary of the Ministry of Civil Aviation. With a focus on civil aviation's pivotal role in enhancing India's economy and tourism sector, this gathering underscored the transformative power of aviation in national development.

Vartik Sethi

Sky's the Limit

Subhash Goyal, Chairman of the Aviation and Tourism Committee, ICC, highlighted the importance of civil aviation in job creation and poverty eradication. He pointed out that tourism, fuelled by robust aviation connectivity, is expected to be a major job generator, underscoring the government's vision to leverage tourism and technology as key drivers for economic growth. Goyal's remarks shed light on the direct and indirect employment opportunities stemming from this sector, emphasising the critical role of aviation in ensuring the influx of tourists, which in turn, supports the burgeoning tourism industry. Goyal has also been an avid advocator of the open sky policy. He shared, "With the fast pace we are surging ahead, we need to open the skies, and if we have open skies, it'll really help us propel growth."

Fostering Growth Across Diverse Sectors

Nikhil Kanodia, Chairman of the Northern Region, ICC, delved into the historical roots and evolution of ICC, touching upon its national and international presence. His insights on the diverse sectors represented within the chamber, including manufacturing, education, tourism, civil aviation, and technology startups, illustrated the comprehensive approach ICC adopts towards fostering industry growth. Kanodia also celebrated India's progress in civil aviation, marking it a testament to the country's developing infrastructure and economic dynamism.

An Era of Irreversible Stability

Kapil Kaul, CEO and Director of CAPA India offered an analytical perspective on the Indian aviation industry's trajectory, comparing it with global trends. Kaul's detailed analysis of the deregulation patterns, financial challenges, and strategic consolidations in the aviation sector worldwide provided a backdrop for understanding India's journey towards establishing a more stable



and growth-oriented aviation ecosystem. Optimistic about the industry's future, Kaul coined this era of aviation as being in an 'irreversible stability phase.'

Further enhancing his positive outlook for the industry, Kaul added, "For the first time, we have 70 wide-body aircraft. You will see more wide-body orders going forward than ever before." He emphasised the significance of government reforms, infrastructural enhancements, and the necessity for rationalising taxes and operational costs to foster a competitive and sustainable aviation landscape.

India's Aviation Leap

Sanjiv Edward, Chief Commercial Officer at Delhi International Airport, expressed profound gratitude for the significant strides made under the current leadership, notably highlighting the restoration of open skies for cargo, which was a longstanding demand of the industry.

Edward underscored the promising growth trajectory of Indian aviation, driven by rising middle-income groups, healthy competition, and supportive government policies, projecting an optimistic future. He pointed out the expected exponential growth in passenger numbers, aligning with India's ambitious goals to attain the position of top air freight market by 2025. Reflecting on global perspectives about India's economic and geopolitical ascent, Edward emphasised the pivotal role of aviation in leveraging this growth for the nation's benefit. He stated, "We have been given

a very ambitious target of achieving 10 million metric tons by 2030, approximately 3x growth from where we are currently, and I'm sure, it is very much within achievable limits."

Call for Collaboration

Vumlunmang Vualnam, Secretary, Ministry of Civil Aviation, highlighted the close linkage between transport, including air transport, and the travel tourism industry and emphasised the potential for enhanced collaboration in these sectors. Vualnam acknowledged the maturity and growth potential within the civil aviation and tourism sectors, encouraging direct engagement and dialogue with industry stakeholders to address specific challenges and opportunities. He noted, "I'm convinced that innovation, even more than in the past, as well as collaborations, would be essential for both sides."

Vualnam invited inputs and suggestions from the industry, emphasising a comprehensive approach to addressing issues, including the intricate aspects of baggage allowances and pilot duty times. Stressing the importance of sustainable growth beyond subsidies and the potential for collaborative route development under the RCS Udan scheme, Vualnam called for a shared effort to make new routes viable in the long term.

EgyptAir connecting India with the land of the Pharaohs

With an almost four-decade presence in the Indian market, with flights connecting Mumbai to Cairo and beyond, Egypt Air opened its second gateway in India with four weekly flights from New Delhi in August 2023. TTJ interacted with Amr Ali, Country Manager, EgyptAir, to learn more about the airline's current offerings and roadmap for future growth in India.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

A dynamic aviation industry veteran with a career spanning over 24 years with EgyptAir, Amr Ali has worked across multiple departments, functions, and roles within the airline. His initial years saw him promote inbound tourism into Egypt from the Japanese market for EgyptAir. He was part of the first team that formed the EgyptAir call centre, then moved on to international affairs and was elevated to the post of GM-International Relations of the airline. He has also served a stint with the Egyptian Ministry of Civil Aviation and as Country Manager at EgyptAir in Ethiopia. Currently based out of New Delhi in his new role as country manager for the last eight months, Ali is optimistic about the growth potential between India and Egypt.

The India Opportunity

EgyptAir currently operates four weekly flights from Delhi to Cairo, in addition to five weekly flights from Mumbai. The Delhi-Cairo route is operated using an Airbus 320 Neo aircraft, which offers a twin-class configuration with 16 seats in business and 126 in economy class.

With a flying time of just over six hours, Cairo is the gateway to the wonders of Egypt, and travellers can also connect to destinations in Africa, Europe, and North America. Bombay has a steady flow of business and VFR travellers to Egypt and beyond, along with MICE movements and leisure. Delhi offers a great scope for official government travel, leisure, MICE, and VFR traffic. Great connections exist to cities in



▲ Amr Ali

Europe like London, Manchester, Paris, Madrid, Barcelona, Moscow, and also other cities like Geneva, Athens, Larnaca, and more.

Ali further elaborates, "EgyptAir also flies to four points on the North American continent, to cities that are very popular with the Indian market and especially from North India: EWR-Newark, New Jersey, JFK-New York, IAD-Dulles International Airport, and YYZ-Pearson, Toronto. EgyptAir offers a two-piece baggage policy to North America that makes it very convenient for VFR and student segments."

Making it Convenient

EgyptAir provides STPC at Cairo to

passengers of long-haul destinations depending on their earliest flight connection and connecting times. A transit visa for 24 hours is free for EgyptAir passengers in transit. Passengers can visit the pyramids, museums, and markets or take a cruise on the Nile. Passengers of EgyptAir long-haul destinations transiting through Cairo can also obtain a free 96-hour transit visa if they hold a valid USA, UK, Schengen, Japanese, or Australian visa. Ali also mentions, "The Egyptian Embassy has a fast-track visa programme for passengers of EgyptAir; the visa is granted in a maximum of two working days. Holders of valid USA, UK, Schengen, Japanese, or Australian visas can also obtain a visa on arrival at Cairo".

All land arrangements, sightseeing tours, and Nile cruises can also be booked at the EgyptAir offices through Karnak, which is the tourism arm of EgyptAir and is one of the subsidiaries of EgyptAir Holding Company.

Making Inroads

Talking about plans for business development, Ali mentions, "It is very important for us to reach out to multiple feeder markets across North India. We will soon be doing promotional visits to Punjab, Jaipur, and Lucknow and explaining the tourism potential of Egypt and its cultural heritage to industry players in these markets. Also, I would like to emphasise that Egypt is an extremely safe destination, and the conflicts in the neighbourhood have no impact on us. Egypt has a lot to offer throughout the year, and we look forward to an increased number of visitors between our two countries."



Aeroprime redefining standards of airline management

As a new-age GSA, Aeroprime is dedicated to revolutionising airline representation with innovative sales distribution and exceptional service. Offering comprehensive GSA services, Aeroprime ensures revenue growth and customer satisfaction through advanced technology and tailored solutions, solidifying its position as a market leader and trusted partner. Led by Abhishek Goyal, Executive Director, Aeroprime Group, the company employs a data-driven strategy across all facets of business, from marketing to strategic alliances.

Prashant Nayak

Aeroprime offers a comprehensive range of cutting-edge GSA services, prioritising quality, revenue growth, and customer satisfaction. Excelling in all sectors, they manage every aspect of airline management, from sales and marketing to trade distribution and relationship management. With services spanning B2B and B2C contact centre support and administrative and financial assistance, Aeroprime employs advanced technology and data analytics for seamless distribution and customer-centric solutions. Their agile approach swiftly identifies new opportunities, aiding airlines in cost reduction, market share expansion, and superior service delivery.

Accelerating Global Aviation Networks

FY23–24 has been a phenomenal year for Aeroprime, marked by continuous growth and the establishment of significant new partnerships, notably with Vietnam Airlines, Fly Arystan, and Turkmenistan Airlines, amongst others. “As we actively seek out technological solutions and embrace the power of data, the expansion of our network in India and overseas serves as a testament to our increasing prominence and success in the airline management industry,” says Abhishek.

As the company continues to enhance its presence with its existing partner airlines, its long-term goal is to prioritise expansion and venture into new markets globally. They are keen on focusing on the Middle East, Southeast Asia, America, and Africa. The company is committed to building a global network, and that is evidenced by its global partnerships across over 15 countries. It aims to provide comprehensive local market expertise and data-oriented representation services to its partner airlines.

“Our future plans include expanding our international footprint, particularly in high-potential markets such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the Americas. Our goal is to address the ongoing shifts



▲ Abhishek Goyal

and fragmentation in airline management, backed by a scientific, data-led approach to marketing, sales, and analytics for our partner airlines and forging extensive partnerships to offer local market knowledge,” asserts Abhishek.

Challenges

Abhishek mentions that a significant challenge that they encounter is persuading airlines to move away from the traditional model and embrace new, dynamic GSA models that are scientific and data-driven. This challenge is pivotal as it directly affects the implementation and efficiency of their innovative strategies, and they are constantly working towards solving this with partner airlines. Further, as the sector rebounds from previous downturns, the challenge of securing adequate and skilled manpower in the face of exponential growth is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach.

Marketing Strategy for 2024

Aeroprime is already present in 10 plus cities across India and has offices abroad as well. In 2024, their marketing strategy will aim to further solidify their presence across India

and beyond, leveraging both traditional and digital channels to connect with their target audience effectively.

Abhishek adds, “While we are already well-established in major cities with international airports, our focus remains on expanding our reach and ensuring that we are accessible and visible to potential customers worldwide. For the same reason, our strategy will include increased participation in trade events and leveraging social media platforms to increase our share of voice and improve brand visibility. We propose to further invest in customised marketing materials to enhance visibility, attract new clients, and generate positive word-of-mouth across various relevant stakeholders. This multifaceted approach aims to fortify our standing in the Indian aviation market and secure the long-term success of our business.”

Emerging Trends in Aviation Business

According to Abhishek, the shift towards a scientific approach to airline representation and market analysis is increasingly gaining significance. Airlines are focusing on connecting more effectively with trade people and adapting to the rapidly changing needs of consumers by adopting technological solutions for distribution to optimise costs and enhance efficiency. Advancements in technology will continue to revolutionise air travel.

Sustainable aviation practices such as eco-friendly technologies, alternative fuels, carbon offset programmes, etc., are expected to gain prominence as environmental concerns intensify. Further, the rise of artificial intelligence, data analytics, etc., will enhance operational efficiency, safety, and the passenger experience.

Lastly, geopolitical factors, regulatory changes, and economic shifts will impact global aviation dynamics. Open-sky agreements, trade relations, and geopolitical stability will influence market access and competition.

Kavya Resort and Spa

Immersive Experiences for Conscious Travellers

Fuelled by an unwavering aspiration to elevate Nepal's hospitality sector and driven by the ambition to venture into the realm of luxury wellness, Hitesh Golcha, Managing Director, The Leaf Hospitality, envisioned and brought fruition to Kavya Resort and Spa. Today, the peaceful retreat assures a life-altering experience, beckoning guests to discover a serene haven amidst the awe-inspiring Himalayan panoramas.

Prashant Nayak

Nestled amidst verdant pine forests and embraced by pristine mountain peaks, Kavya Resort and Spa. unveiled its doors on July 16, 2022, in the picturesque setting of Nagarkot, Nepal. Today, the wellness and lifestyle retreat has redefined luxury experiences with its introduction of meditation, yoga, and Ayurveda in a lavish setting, marking a first for the country.

Tranquil Setting

Nagarkot, a scenic village 32 km east of Kathmandu, offers breathtaking sunrise and sunset views, inviting travellers to often stay overnight for an experience of the stunning Himalayan sunrise. Kavya Resort and Spa, located a mere 45-minute car ride from Kathmandu Airport, has swiftly transformed Nagarkot into a highly sought-after multi-night destination for travellers from Kathmandu and beyond. First-time visitors often extend their stay from four to five nights to fully engage with the resort's comprehensive wellness programmes and experiences and immerse themselves in the serene surroundings of the Himalayas.

"Kavya denotes lyrical inspiration. More than a mere retreat, Kavya crafts an experience that harmonises with the poetic rhythms of nature, revitalising the spirit amidst the majestic Himalayan landscapes. This is a place where you come to connect with nature and yourself," says Hitesh.

Immersive Wellness

Guests can embark on a holistic wellness

journey with a diverse range of activities at the resort. Whether it's finding inner peace through meditation and yoga, indulging in traditional Ayurvedic treatments, savouring satvik meals, or pampering oneself with multi-spa services, there's something for everyone to unwind and recharge. The resort has skilled therapists for personalised services and is also open for walk-in guests looking to indulge in a few hours of relaxing and rejuvenating therapies and sessions. For outdoor enthusiasts, multiple adventurous activities such as guided walking trails, bird watching, mountain biking, hiking, and cultural explorations are offered to keep the guests enthralled.

Hitesh especially remarks, "In essence, Kavya Resort and Spa has become a beacon for those seeking profound wellness and lifestyle experiences. Kavya epitomises a deep commitment to wellness, offering meticulously crafted programmes designed to ensure that the essence of the mountains resonates deeply within each guest."

Expansion and Target Clientele

Nestled at 2,175 m above sea level, the resort boasts unparalleled vistas of the Himalayan range, offering enchanting glimpses of Mount Everest on clear days. Presently featuring 24 rooms, with 12 more under construction, Kavya is set to expand into a 39-room property, inclusive of suites, one-bedroom, and two-bedroom villas.

Hitesh highlights Kavya's target demographic as wellness-conscious individuals seeking a tranquil retreat amidst

nature, predominantly comprising high-net-worth individuals from India, the Middle East, Asia and Australia. Additionally, Kavya Resort and Spa aims to attract small corporate groups of 25-30 pax and comfortably attend them for strategy meetings or board gatherings due to its limited inventory for larger events. With partnerships with air charter operators, Kavya offers convenient helicopter rides, allowing guests to indulge in the exclusive experience paired with champagne brunches and meals overlooking Mount Everest, making it truly memorable. According to Hitesh, this is one novel proposition that can entice corporate groups and high-net-worth individuals.

Environmental Commitment

Sustainability lies at the core of Kavya's ethos, guiding every aspect of their operations to minimise the environmental impact and contribute positively to the local community. For instance, they have preserved the natural contours of the hills by constructing all their rooms and villas on existing terraces rather than cutting into the mountainous landscape.

To sum up, Hitesh says, "At Kavya Resort and Spa, the journey extends beyond mere relaxation and rejuvenation; it is about integrating the entire experience into your lifestyle. Our objective is singular: to inspire guests to embody the best version of themselves. Through immersive experiences and teachings, we empower individuals to carry these transformative lessons back home, fostering well-being long after they depart from our sanctuary."



A Serene Abode

Amidst the Jungles of Corbett

In the tranquil outskirts of the renowned Jim Corbett National Park, The Golden Tusk Resort emerges as a quintessential sanctuary for those seeking a blend of luxury and nature. Spanning across ten acres of beautifully landscaped gardens and situated merely a stone's throw from the Jhirna and Dhela safari zones, this leisure resort is an embodiment of serenity and biodiversity.

Vartik Sethi

The Golden Tusk Resort

The Golden Tusk Resort boasts an impressive array of 60 accommodations, varying across nine distinct styles to cater to the diverse preferences of its guests. From the expansive Tiger Suites, offering luxurious two-bedroom sanctuaries, to the intimate Nature View and Garden Suites, each space is thoughtfully designed to merge comfort with the raw beauty of Corbett's wilderness. The resort's commitment to providing a holistic experience is evident through its wellness centre, featuring a spa, gymnasium, and yoga lawn, encouraging guests to rejuvenate mind, body, and soul amidst nature's calm. Additionally, the Forest View and Infinity pools provide a refreshing oasis of leisure, further enhancing the serenity of the resort.

A Welcome Immersed in Nature and Melody

The experience begins with lunch at the Golden Forest, where the culinary excellence of the resort introduces guests to flavours as exquisite as the views. As the sun begins to set, the resort decks up for a high tea on the restaurant deck. This is not just about savouring teas and delicacies; it is about doing so with a view that stretches over lush forests and the distant sounds of wildlife, setting a perfect preamble to the evening.

The highlight of the evening is a live guitar performance on the Plumeria Lawn. This musical rendezvous under the starlit sky amidst the gentle evening breeze creates an

enchanting atmosphere, making it an ideal backdrop for the private dining experience that follows.

Here, guests enjoy a meticulously prepared meal in the privacy and comfort of an elegantly set outdoor space, offering a unique dining experience that combines gourmet flavours with the rustic charm of the wilderness.

An Insightful Exploration and Culinary Journey

Among the myriad of experiences offered by The Golden Tusk Resort, the Jungle Jeep Safari stands out as a highlight, promising an exhilarating journey into the heart of the Jim Corbett National Park. Aboard an open jeep, guests venture into the dense forest, guided by the expert knowledge of seasoned naturalists. This safari is not merely a tour; it is an adventure that brings guests face-to-face with the vibrant wildlife inhabiting this renowned sanctuary.

The journey through the rugged terrain of the park unveils sightings of graceful deer, majestic elephants, playful monkeys, and an array of rare birds that adorn the canopy. Boars shuffle through the underbrush, and peacocks display their splendid feathers, creating a spectacle of nature's diversity.

Although the elusive tiger remained out of sight, the discovery of fresh tiger paw prints along the muddy

tracks added an element of excitement and mystery to the excursion, hinting at the presence of these magnificent predators just beyond view. This tangible sign of the tiger's proximity within the sprawling wilderness served as a fascinating reminder of the untamed beauty that thrives in the park.

The safari, while brimming with the thrill of the wild, also carried a lighter moment when one might whimsically note, "Seems the tigers knew we were coming and decided to play a game of hide and seek, and quite expertly at that!"

After a tiring exploration of the jungle, what follows is lunch! A celebration of local culture with a Kumaoni-themed meal. This culinary journey offers guests a taste of the region's traditional flavours, serving as a delightful exploration of the local cuisine, which is as rich in taste as it is in history.

The day concludes with a private dinner at the Jungle Grill, offering an intimate dining experience amidst the wilderness. This meal is not just about savouring barbecue delicacies; it is an adventure in itself, with the spellbinding view of the forest and the subtle sounds of the nocturnal wildlife adding to the ambience.



Exploring the Essence of Anantum Gateway Resorts with ETAA

The Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) organised a memorable familiarisation trip to Anantum Gateway Resorts from March 01 to 03, 2024. As assured by the association, the trip was an adventure brimming with discovery and serenity amidst the breathtaking wilderness of Jim Corbett National Park.

Parth Sharma

In a picturesque journey that commenced from New Delhi, 42 ETAA members and a few media embarked on a scenic bus expedition bound for the tranquil haven of Anantum Gateway Resorts, nestled in the majestic embrace of Jim Corbett National Park.

The bus journey was a delightful experience, brimming with fun and a strong sense of camaraderie among fellow travellers. Following a hearty breakfast, the enthusiasm to reach the resort soared to new heights and each passing moment fuelled the anticipation for the experiences that awaited us.

As we stepped onto the resort's premises, the princely welcome we received was grand and pompous. The embrace of genuine warmth instantly immersed us in the vibrant tapestry of a Kumaoni-style reception and cultural wrap-up.

Opulence, Adventure, Tranquillity, and More

Anantum Gateway Resorts offers a serene retreat amidst lush greenery. Located at Motipur Negi village, on Dhela Road, this idyllic resort is enveloped by verdant landscapes, creating an ambiance of tranquillity and rejuvenation. Situated near the Dhela and Jhirna safari gates, guests are seamlessly connected to the wilderness with the promise of exciting adventures.

Anantum Gateway Resorts beckons travellers with its opulent charm and sprawling expanse across 12 acres of meticulously manicured lawns. Boasting over 170 rooms of diverse categories, each offering a blend of comfort and sophistication, guests are treated to a haven of relaxation and refinement.

Standing as a beacon of indulgence, the resort's amenities are nothing short of impressive, with two expansive conceptual swimming pools serving as focal points of

leisure and recreation. For those seeking entertainment, the discotheque provides a modern twist on traditional nightlife, while cabanas offer secluded retreats for intimate gatherings. One of the resort's most unique features is the cascade in-pool water dining concept. They also have an in-house, well-equipped, and professional Ananta Spa and Salon.

Anantum Gateway Resorts is not only unparalleled for family outings but also the finest place for corporate groups, destination weddings, and other social events. The resort boasts the two largest convention halls in the region, capable of accommodating 650 to 1000 guests. It also has seven party lawns that can easily accommodate 500 to 1000 guests, making it an ideal venue for both social and corporate functions.

The Everlasting FAM Impression

During my stay at Anantum Gateway Resorts and Spa, there were several standout moments that left a lasting impression on me. First, the culinary experience was nothing short of exceptional and deserves special mention. Additionally, I thoroughly enjoyed the live performances that graced both evenings of my stay. The entertainment and live performances provided a vibrant atmosphere, enhancing the overall experience and adding

a touch of enchantment to the nights. The deep tranquillity of the surroundings reflected profoundly on my countenance. Amidst all the luxurious amenities and activities, there was a sense of peace and serenity that enveloped the entire property and beyond, creating the perfect environment for relaxation and rejuvenation. Though a few others went for the safaris, it was the sense of connection with nature at the resort that truly resonated with me to stay back.

Rajesh Goyal, Managing Director, Anantum Gateway Resorts, undoubtedly played a pivotal role in ensuring a memorable and enjoyable experience for all guests. His humbleness and aspiration to work for social causes, coupled with his genuine warmth and hospitality, truly set the tone for an unforgettable stay.

The FAM Trip, orchestrated by ETAA, was not just a journey; it was a harmonious blend of opulence and adventure that left a lasting imprint on all participants. Amidst the backdrop of nature's serenity, gestures of gratitude flowed freely, fostering a profound sense of unity and camaraderie among ETAA members, encapsulating the essence of mutual respect and admiration. Throughout the experience at Anantum Gateway Resorts, we were constantly reminded of great hospitality and the simple joys that nature offers.





Unwind in Paradise at The Orchard Retreat and Spa

For the languid soul seeking solace, adventure, or a memorable event venue, The Orchard Retreat and Spa in Srinagar promises an unforgettable stay in the heart of Kashmir. Here, every moment is infused with luxury and tranquillity, rendering the true essence of Kashmir with promises of a dream come true.

Prashant Nayak



For a Blissful Stay in Srinagar

Conveniently located just a short drive from Nigeen Lake, The Orchard Retreat and Spa, nestled amidst the picturesque orchard in Srinagar, offers guests an unparalleled experience surrounded by lush fruit trees and the stunning Zabarwan mountain range. With its tranquil setting, this retreat is truly a haven for those seeking relaxation and rejuvenation.

Accommodation options at the resort include 20 luxury chalets boasting

balconies that offer breathtaking views, eight luxury bedrooms, and two lavish suites, each providing a serene sanctuary for guests. Whether you desire to unwind in a cosy retreat or a lavish escape in the lap of nature, The Orchard Retreat and Spa caters to diverse preferences.

Unwind, Dine, and Celebrate

Guests can indulge in a range of experiences at the resort, from live cooking sessions to a world-class dining experience featuring aromatic therapies and massages at the well-equipped spa. For those seeking to stay active, the resort offers amenities such as a gym, swimming pool, steam room, and sauna. Additionally, there are recreational facilities, including an indoor gaming room and outdoor sports activities for adults and children.

Delectable culinary delights at the resort's four dining outlets are an experience in itself for the guests. From Flavours, offering an all-day dining experience, to Little Bites, a cosy café and a poolside nest for alfresco dining, there is something appetitive for every

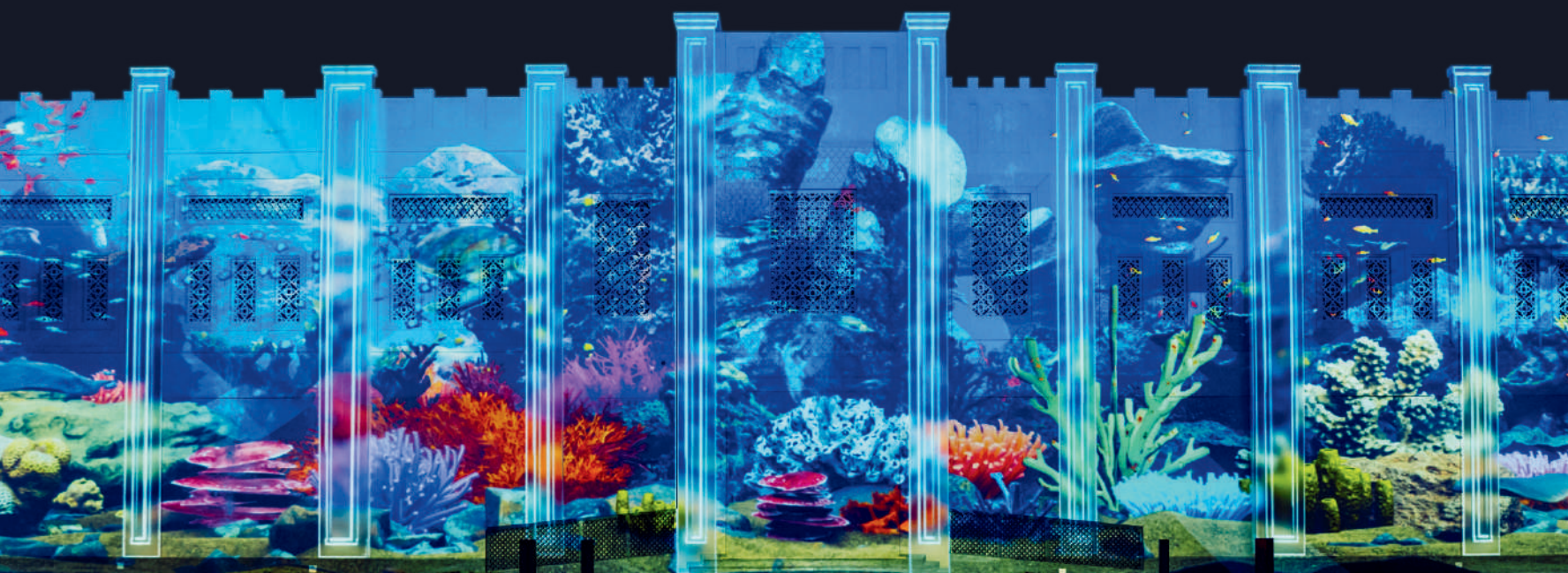
palate. The resort also offers pit roast and barbecue options, ensuring a memorable dining experience for guests.

An ideal destination for varied occasions, The Orchard Retreat and Spa is suitable for weddings, conferences, seminars, or parties. The spacious banquet hall is equipped with modern amenities, making it perfect for hosting events ranging all sizes.

Stay Pattern: Unforgettable Kashmir Experiences

The Orchard Retreat and Spa is marketed by Stay Pattern. Headquartered in Srinagar, Stay Pattern manages a prestigious collection of hotels and accommodations across the Kashmir Valley. Their other portfolio includes Hotel Wood Venture Residency, Lake Avenue, Harmukh Houseboat in Srinagar, Shaw Inn, and Gulmarg Woods in Gulmarg. Recently, Stay Pattern has expanded its offerings in partnerships with Riverfront Luxury Cottages in Pahalgam and Hotel Marina in Drung. Each property promises guests an exceptional experience, blending comfort with the natural beauty and cultural richness of Kashmir.





SHARJAH LIGHT FESTIVAL

An Incredible Play of Light and Music

The 13th edition of the Sharjah Light Festival illuminated the night skies of the Emirate, captivating audiences with its dazzling displays of light and colour.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

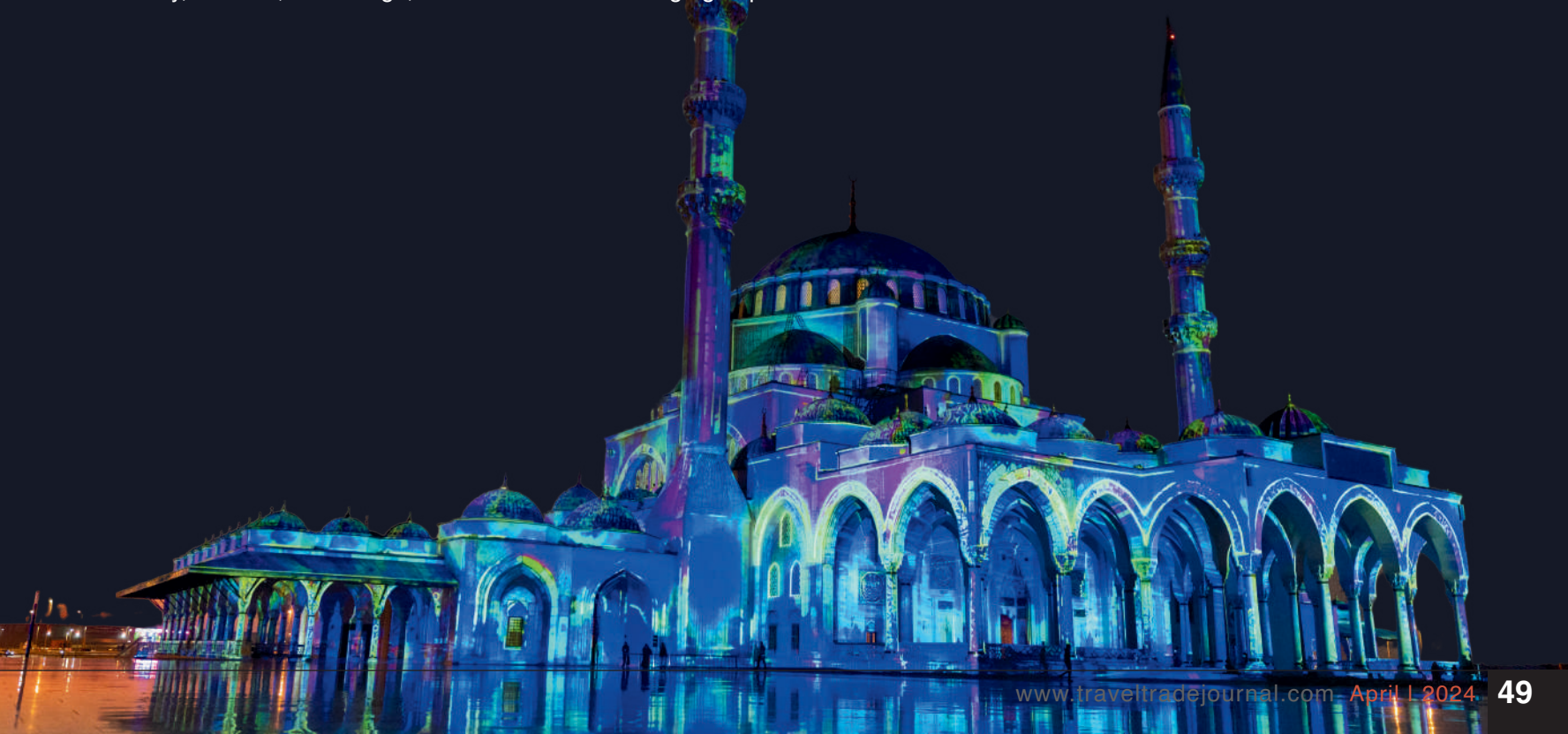
Organised by the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), the scintillating Sharjah Light Festival took place from February 7 to 18, 2024, under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah. The Sharjah Light Festival draws inspiration from Sharjah's cultural heritage, showcasing scenes that depict the Emirate's progress in education, arts, communication, environment, history, science, knowledge, and vision

for the future. Prominent sites across the Emirate of Sharjah were illuminated with captivating light and music displays.

Magnificent projection displays incorporated geometry, decorations, calligraphy, special effects, and patterns of Islamic arabesque inscriptions found in Sharjah's architectural gems. This remarkable event seamlessly blended the expertise of renowned artists, light specialists, and composers. Known for its family-friendly atmosphere, the festival holds widespread appeal across various age groups.

People from across the UAE, including both residents and visitors, made their way to Sharjah to witness the mesmerising displays at the Light Festival. Iconic landmarks like the Sharjah Mosque, Police Headquarters, Al Majaz Waterfront, Al Noor Mosque, and many more were illuminated with fairytale colours, patterns, and imagery that created surreal and awe-inspiring scenes straight out of Arabian Nights.

The Light Village, created especially for the event, hosted a variety of outlets, providing a vibrant space for local businesses and families.



TTJ TRAVMART Raipur witnesses record participation

On March 16, 2024, at Hotel Babylon Capital in Raipur, the TTJ TRAVMART event attracted a significant turnout, marking an increasing participation year after year. The event's growing prominence in the city reflects its increasing impact on the regional and national travel landscape, drawing attention from industry stakeholders and participants alike.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

At the TTJ TRAVMART event in Raipur, intense networking transpired among 29 sellers representing diverse sectors, including tourism boards, airlines, cruise lines, DMCs, and technology facilitators. Additionally, approximately 105 registered buyers from Chhattisgarh and adjacent cities in Orrisa, Maharashtra, and Jharkhand participated actively.

Prominent international tourism boards such as Tourism Malaysia, German National Tourist Office, and Sharjah Tourism utilised the TTJ TRAVMART platform to engage industry stakeholders. The event received overwhelming support from the Chhattisgarh Tourism and Travel Agents Association (CGTTA) as the partner association, alongside backing from other major industry associations.



Kapil Jain
President, CGTTA

The event has indeed been very positive and successful. We have had more than 25 industry stakeholders showcasing Europe, the cruise lines, and every part of the world, like Singapore, Dubai, and more. Participation of local agents has been active.



Jaspreet Singh
Senior Vice President, TIA

It is wonderful to see TTJ TRAVMART return to Raipur, where it first began almost seven years ago. Since then, it has continued to come back each year, with an increasing number of exhibitors and buyers at every show.



Noriah Jaafar
Director, Tourism Malaysia, Mumbai

We find the TTJ TRAVMART events to be very fruitful.



Monica Walter
Director, Eurocursions

TTJ TRAVMART presented this excellent opportunity and platform to come to Raipur, and we found the response very good at the roadshow.





Pranav Kapadia
 Founder & Director, Global Destinations

With our focus on strengthening relationships with trade partners in tier II and III cities, we are committed to attend the TTJ TRAVMART in 5 cities during 2024.

We attended our first TTJ TRAVMART in Raipur and were very impressed by the quality of agents, who attended the mart, not only from Raipur but neighbouring cities as well. Looking forwards to the next city, Lucknow, on 20th April.



Anika Tandon
 Manager, Sales & Marketing,
 German National Tourist Office (GNTO)

Raipur is the first ever Tier 3 city where German tourism has participated, and it has been a tremendous experience for us to promote Germany as a tourist destination in this city.



Pradeep Agrawal
 General Manager, Worldwide DMC

TTJ TRAVMART provides a great opportunity for us as suppliers to showcase our products, enter new markets, meet with new and prospective business partners, and also for buyers to find new suppliers like us.

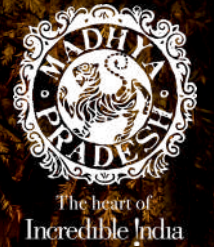


Bharat Dev
 CEO, Dev Travel

TTJ TRAVMART has been coming to Raipur for many years, and they bring the best DMCs, cruise lines, tech partners, and tourism boards. This year was a grand show. Hosting these events is a selfless service to the travel trade. I wish Team TRAVMART all the very best.







Divine Experience in Madhya Pradesh

Where Spirituality Meets Culture



Travel through the glories of richness and diversity in MP



Madhya Pradesh, known as the Heart of Incredible India, is a choicest multispecialty tourism destination where vibrant cultural dances and age-old traditions whisper, where beauty holds you spellbound, and diversity welcomes you with open arms. Flourishing spiritual tourism unfurls its arms to delve into the heart of India and connect with its soul. The state is beyond its three UNESCO World Heritage Sites, adventure and beauty, and cultural delights. Indulge in the spiritual tapestry of two divine Jyotirlingas – Omkareshwar and Mahakaleshwar, Chitrakoot, Orchha Temple, Sandipani Ashram at Ujjain each a testament to India's rich culture.

Unveil the Sacred Jyotirlingas

Madhya Pradesh is home to two out of twelve Jyotirlingas, one of the most sacred Shiva shrines in India. Ujjain, known as the "City of Temples," is home to the Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga, nestled on the banks of the Kshipra River. Walk the newly inaugurated path of Mahakal Lok, leading to the revered Mahakaleshwar Jyotirlinga. On a visit to Mahakaleshwar temple, do not forget to seek blessings from Harsiddhi Temple, Kal Bhairav Temple, Mangalnath Temple, Shri Chintaman Ganesh Temple, Navgrah Shani Mandir, and

Gadhkalika Temple. Another key attraction is the Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga. The ancient temple, located at the sacred island shaped like 'Aum', is vibrant with elaborate sculptures and attracts those seeking comfort and blessings as a symbol of unwavering faith. The 108-foot-tall "Statue of Oneness" of Adi Shankaracharya at Omkareshwar is a must-explore spiritual destination in the precincts.

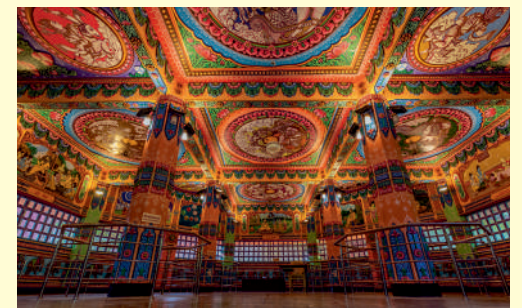
Ram Mandir at Chitrakoot and Orchha

Ram Raja Temple, Orchha: Witness a unique tradition where Lord Rama is worshipped as king. Explore the historic town of Orchha, nestled on the banks of the Betwa River, founded in the 16th century by the Bundela Rajput chief, Rudra Pratap, and delve into its captivating architecture and vibrant history. Enjoy the nearby attractions and activities like river rafting and kayaking, jungle safari, captivating architecture, and light and sound show at Orchha.



Chitrakoot: Owing to its mythological significance and natural beauty, Chitrakoot is popularly described as the "Hill of Many Wonders". The Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh are believed to have taken their incarnation in Chitrakoot. This sacred place is believed to owe its name to the presence of 'cheetal' (deer) in the region. According to folklore, Lord Ram and Sita spent eleven of

their fourteen years of exile in the deep jungles of Chitrakoot.



Sandipani Ashram at Ujjain

Ancient Ujjain also thrived as a prestigious centre of learning around the beginning of the Mahabharata period. The text mentions renowned figures like Lord Krishna and Sudama receiving education at the ashram of Guru Sandipani. The location of the ashram on Mangalnath Road and the presence of numbers engraved on a stone are believed to be by Guru Sandipani himself. Ankpat is where Lord Krishna washed his writings. Gomti Kund is an ancient water source mentioned in the Puranas and served as the lifeblood of the ashram, further emphasising its historical roots.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board welcomes you to embark on a transformative spiritual journey, discover the divine within, and experience the magic this incredible land unfolds. Immerse in the divine state, where ancient temples resonate with devotion and vibrant culture, igniting the senses. Madhya Pradesh boasts of an unmatched tapestry of religion, culture, and languages, offering a feast for every soul seeking solace. Whether you seek architectural marvels or spiritual bliss, the state offers it all. This spiritual haven, steeped in ancient traditions and diverse practices, has beckoned pilgrims and seekers for centuries and created a symphony of holiness, peace, and tranquility.

Uttarakhand Tourism launches Adi Kailash and Om Parvat Darshan by Helicopter package

Uttarakhand Tourism has introduced a new tourism package, offering Adi Kailash and Om Parvat Darshan by helicopter, aimed at promoting tourism in remote areas of the state and creating employment opportunities for local communities.

The inaugural trip of the Adi Kailash and Om Parvat Darshan package took place on April 01, 2024, with 16 tourists from various states including Delhi, Maharashtra, Orissa, and Gujarat among others. The package includes pickup and drop from hotels in Pithoragarh, a two-hour helicopter ride providing aerial Darshan of Adi Kailash and Om Parvat, along with several other peaks, followed by breakfast.

A 4 Nights/5 Days package is scheduled to commence on April 15, 2024. This package will include overnight stays in Pithoragarh for one night and three nights at Gunji/Nabhi/Nepalchu, with six helicopter rides and transfers by All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs). Bookings for this package can be made through triptotemples.com.



6th Edition of UP Travel Mart to be held in Gorakhpur from April 25 - 29, 2024



The Tourism Department of Government of Uttar Pradesh, in collaboration with FICCI, has announced the 6th Edition of the UP Travel Mart, scheduled to take place from April 25 to April 29, 2024, in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh.

A Curtain Raiser event, including a joint Press Conference, was organised at The Taj Mahal Hotel in Lucknow on March 12, featuring esteemed speakers: Jaiveer Singh, Minister of Tourism and Culture of Uttar Pradesh; Mukesh Kumar Meshram, Principal Secretary and DG Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh; Prakhar Mishra, Director Tourism; and Prateek Hira, Chair of FICCI's Tourism Committee.

Minister Jaiveer Singh highlighted the state's ambition to lead in foreign tourist arrivals and showcased Uttar Pradesh's unparalleled safety, infrastructure development, and rich cultural heritage. Mukesh Kumar Meshram elaborated on the state's efforts to unlock the potential of its heritage sites, emphasizing the success of the PPP model. Prateek Hira discussed the upcoming event's insights, including plans for familiarization trips to Buddhist and Eco-Tourism sites. He stressed FICCI's strong presence in the tourism domain and the revival of UPTM as a catalyst to increase tourist footfall. Prakhar Mishra thanked attendees and emphasized UP's empowerment of the travel trade and private sector to harness tourism potential. The revival of UPTM has generated excitement among the travel and hospitality trade, with foreign operators eager to explore Uttar Pradesh's new infrastructure and product offerings since the last edition in 2019.

Ercos Travels celebrates Silver Jubilee, unveils new logo



Ercos Travels, a pioneering force in the Indian inbound travel industry, commemorated its Silver Jubilee on March 15, at Le Meridien, New Delhi. The event was a momentous occasion for the company, marked by the unveiling of its new company logo, symbolising its journey of growth, resilience, and commitment to the tourism industry.

The new logo, a fusion of the Conch Shell and Mandala art, embodies Ercos Travels' core values of new beginnings, prosperity, harmony, and unity. The design encapsulates the essence of the company's evolution from its modest beginnings to becoming a beacon of excellence in the travel industry.

Established in 1999, Ercos Travels is headquartered in New Delhi, specialising in inbound tours and travel services. Ravi Gosain, Managing Director, expressed gratitude for the milestone, emphasising the company's dedication to showcasing India's beauty while embracing sustainability.

Recognised for excellence and innovation, Ercos Travels boasts a dedicated team, offering personalised experiences and a customer-centric approach. Over 25 years, it has evolved to meet travellers' changing needs, earning trust and loyalty worldwide.



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TIA Connect hosts vibrant 'Rang-Utsav' celebration in Delhi

On March 21, 2024, Tourism India Alliance (TIA) hosted an exciting networking evening with Holi fervour at the Qutab Golf Club in New Delhi, attracting enthusiastic participation from TIA members alongside representatives from tourism boards, hotel chains, airlines, visa facilitation companies, and travel media.

The event fostered valuable networking opportunities, allowing attendees to reconnect with industry peers and establish new connections amidst lively music, drinks, and dinner. Additionally, a few lucky participants were rewarded with exciting prizes, including complimentary hotel stays in London, a 500 Euro cruise voucher, and multiple free hotel nights within India, enhancing the evening's allure. The event also reinforced TIA's commitment to promoting collaboration and camaraderie within the travel fraternity.

TAFI North India Chapter meet showcases key insights from CGST officials

The North India Chapter of the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) convened a gathering for its members at the Park Hotel, New Delhi, on March 20, 2024. Led by Khushwinder Sarna, Chairman, TAFI's North India Chapter, the event was well attended by its office bearers and about 95 members. Sarna provided an overview of the chapter's recent endeavours and encouraged input for future enhancements.

Dinesh Kumar, Secretary, TAFI (North), extended a warm welcome and introduced Manish Mohan Govil, Principal Commissioner (CGST), along with Vishal Singh, Deputy Commissioner (CGST), and Charu Dhankar, Assistant Commissioner (CGST), who provided a comprehensive presentation on the latest features of the GST Portal.

Product presentations were delivered by Alliance Air and Udaan India. A lucky draw was conducted, and Alliance Air gave away tickets for a couple anywhere on its network to the lucky winner. In attendance at the meeting were also representatives from the TAFI National Board, including Anil Kalsi, Vice President, and Rai Achal Krishna, Joint Treasurer.



OTOAI hosts networking dinner spotlighting Tajikistan's cultural splendour

In a bid to showcase the captivating allure of Tajikistan's cultural landscape, the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) orchestrated a networking dinner event in collaboration with Javohir Travel Company Tajikistan. Held in the vibrant Vasant Kunj district of Delhi, the event unfolded as a mesmerising journey into the heart of Central Asia.

Umeda Kurbonbekova, representing Javohir Travel Company Tajikistan, delivered a presentation, delving deep into the essence of Tajikistan's rich cultural heritage. OTOAI Members had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the breathtaking vistas and historical marvels that define this fascinating destination.

The event witnessed a successful journey of discovery, as attendees forged connections and uncovered the hidden gems of Tajikistan. Together, they paved the way for a new era of exploration and cultural exchange, fostering deeper understanding and appreciation between India and Tajikistan.



TRAVMART



2024

APR

20 LUCKNOW

JUL

27 CHANDIGARH

AUG

16-18 SITM

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Air India's 'Flying Returns' loyalty programme to adopt spend-based model

Air India has launched its transformed Flying Returns loyalty programme, introducing a simplified new structure, more customer-friendly features, renamed tiers, and an updated identity. In its first overhaul in more than a decade, Flying Returns moves away from the legacy model of miles-based collection of points to a fairer, more equitable spend-based approach. Flying Returns Members will now enjoy the benefits of the new programme and collect points based on the new structure. The revamped Flying Returns prioritises greater ease, more rewards, and recognition for Members, while offering them instant global status and privileges around the world.

Some salient features of the new loyalty programme are that active members now enjoy points with no expiry and no blackout



dates, offering an always-available award ticket inventory with a 'Cash+Points' redemption option. Tier privileges remain consistent across Star Alliance partners, ensuring seamless collection and redemption worldwide. A new digital interface streamlines transactions, serving as a convenient one-stop platform for members. Additional options like family pool offers cater to a wider range of members.

EaseMyTrip acquires 4.94 per cent stake in B2B travel portal Etrav Tech for INR 33 crore

EaseMyTrip.com has announced a strategic investment in Etrav Tech Limited consisting of 4.94 per cent (post allotment) paid-up equity share capital of Etrav Tech. As a part of the brand's expansion strategy to diversify its portfolio, the acquisition translated as a cash deal. Etrav Tech offers a diverse array of travel-related services, ranging from Flight API, and holiday packages to Hotel API, white label, Bus API, and visa applications. The primary objective of this strategic investment is to acquire a minority interest and strengthen EaseMyTrip's B2B segment offerings, catering to the diverse requirements of its corporate clients.

On the development, Nishant Pitti, CEO and Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip, said, "We are aiming at diversifying our portfolio in the non-air segments. After investing in hotels, we now intend to enhance our services for our corporate clientele, and investment with Etrav Tech Limited will be pivotal in the same."



L-R: Nishant Pitti, CEO & Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip; Heniel Rupaarelia, MD, Etrav Tech Ltd.

"By combining EaseMyTrip's investment with our tech capabilities and B2B expertise, we aim to deliver unparalleled services to corporate clients," stated Heniel Rupaarelia, Managing Director, Etrav Tech Ltd.

One Rep Global adds Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah to its illustrious portfolio

One Rep Global, an award-winning sales, marketing, and PR representation for luxury hospitality, has forged an exclusive partnership with Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah.

Perched on Palm Jumeirah, Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah offers luxury with panoramic views of the Arabian Gulf and Dubai Skyline. Indulge in an immersive array of recreational offerings, including a 200-meter private beach, two temperature-controlled swimming pools, tennis courts, water sports activities, and a dedicated Kids Club—ensuring an immersive escape for guests of all ages.

Conveniently located, Dubai Marina is a short 10-minute drive, while iconic landmarks such as the Burj Khalifa and the Dubai Mall are within a 30-minute car ride. Dubai International Airport is a mere 35 minutes away, ensuring ease of accessibility for all travellers.



Natalie Litowtschik, Commercial Director, Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah, stated, "I am very excited about the appointment of One Rep Global to represent our PR interests in the vibrant market of India. The Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah values the support of our new business partners, and we eagerly anticipate a successful and fruitful collaboration ahead. Together, we are poised to create memorable experiences and elevate our presence in the Indian market."

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