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Dear Reader,

As the festive season approaches and the spirit of travel ignites, we are delighted to guide you through the latest inspirations for your clients' next remarkable journey.

Welcome to TTJ's Cruise Special. In this issue, we embark on an exploration of outbound cruise tourism, showcasing some of the world's most captivating destinations. From the awe-inspiring fjords of Norway and the uncharted icy landscapes of Antarctica to the enchanting rivers of Europe, we have carefully curated features that are sure to ignite curiosity and inspire visions of exceptional adventures at sea.

Beyond our focus on cruises, this issue offers a wealth of content, covering hotels, airlines, and events, as well as insightful familiarisation trip reports to further expand your knowledge. Additionally, we highlight the rich cultural significance of Uttar Pradesh's Kumbh Mela, an unparalleled experience that is both spiritually and culturally transformative.

Thank you for your continuous support. We hope this season fills your business with new opportunities, and your journeys with new stories to tell.

Here's to a season of exploration, celebration, and discovery!

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma
ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

Editor's Desk

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Bintan Resorts and VFS Global to position Bintan Island as a premier destination for Indian travellers

In a strategic move to tap into the expansive Indian market, Bintan Resorts has partnered with VFS Global to promote Bintan Resorts in Bintan Island of the Riau Islands Province of Indonesia as a premier travel destination. This partnership was officially cemented with the signing of an agreement on August 29, 2024, at the Grand Lagoi Hotel in Bintan Resorts.

The collaboration aims to enhance the visibility and appeal of Bintan Island, positioning it as a top choice for Indian travellers and welcome them to enjoy the island’s plethora of offerings. Leveraging VFS Global’s extensive network across India in all major and secondary cities, along with its strong connections with businesses, media, and corporate entities, the partnership is expected to boost tourism from India to Bintan Island.

Bintan Resorts is committed to showcasing the island’s rich tourism potential, from its captivating culinary offerings to its high-quality services and warm hospitality. “We are excited to partner with VFS Global to introduce the beauty and charm of Bintan Island to the Indian market,” said Abdul Wahab, Chief Operating Officer of Bintan Resorts.

The partnership will roll out a targeted marketing campaign in major Indian cities, along with social media promotions with the aim of



positioning Bintan as a prime travel destination alongside Singapore.

“Together, we will work towards increasing the Indian tourist arrivals to Bintan Island and enriching their overall travel experience. Of immediate priority for both partners is to re-introduce Bintan island’s offerings to the Indian audiences and socialise them to the sheer convenience of hopping on to the island from the shores of Singapore to enjoy themselves as families, small and big groups,” said G B Srihar, Head of Tourism at VFS Global.

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Adam Gilchrist promotes Western Australia in road trips campaign for India



Australian cricket legend Adam Gilchrist and his son, Harry, are fronting a new tourism campaign aimed at the Indian market, promoting day road trips from Perth. The campaign showcases the duo exploring attractions around Perth, including four-wheel-driving in Lancelin, stargazing in the Pinnacles, winery visits in Swan Valley, and a dolphin cruise in Rockingham. Their experiences will be featured in videos and photos on Indian social media, Cricbuzz, and billboards in Mumbai and Delhi. Partnering with Thomas Cook and Skyscanner, the campaign offers packages to Perth, coinciding with the West Test cricket match between Australia and India in November 2024.

India is a top priority for Western Australia, with Indian visitors spending \$128 million in the year ending March 2024. The campaign is an Indian version of the global "Drive the Dream" initiative, which aligns with the state's "Walking On A Dream" brand, boosting WA's tourism economy. Both Tourism Minister Rita Saffioti and Adam Gilchrist highlighted the appeal of Perth as an accessible and exciting destination for Indian travelers, especially cricket fans.

New Zealand to increase visa fees across most categories from October 2024



The New Zealand government has announced substantial increases in visa fees across almost all categories, set to take effect from October 1, 2024. Immigration Minister Erica Stanford explained that the fee adjustments are aimed at reflecting the true costs of visa processing and immigration services, shifting the financial burden from taxpayers to visa applicants. The new fees and levies are expected to generate over NZD 563 million for the government in the next four years, covering the costs of processing more complex and high-risk applications, addressing migrant exploitation, asylum claims, and upgrading Immigration New Zealand's systems.

The government expects these changes will modernize the immigration system and eventually reduce running costs while improving efficiencies. The new fees, such as visitor visas rising from NZD 211 to NZD 341 and student visas from NZD 375 to NZD 750, reflect a significant shift in how the immigration system is funded and operated.

Aitken Spence Hotels marks 50 years of excellence in global hospitality

Aitken Spence Hotels celebrates 50 years of excellence in the hospitality industry, having grown into a global leader known for sustainability, quality, and innovation. Since opening Neptune Hotel in 1974, the company has expanded internationally, becoming the only Sri Lankan hotel chain with a presence in the Maldives, Oman, and India. Key milestones include acquiring Bathala Island Resort in the Maldives in 1995, expanding into Oman in 2008 and India in 2016, and a successful collaboration with RIU Hotels Spain in 2017.

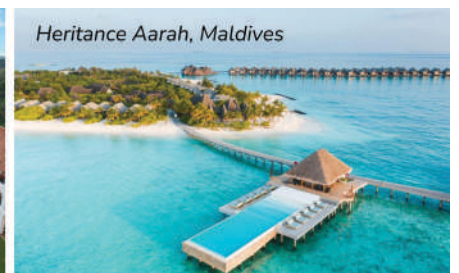
Currently managing 18 properties with 2,629 rooms, the flagship Heritance Hotels and Resorts brand is acclaimed for its architectural excellence, with Geoffrey Bawa designing three properties. Heritance Kandalama became the first LEED-certified hotel outside the U.S. and the first Green Globe-certified hotel in South Asia, reflecting Aitken Spence's commitment to blending design, nature, and sustainability.

Sustainability remains a core value, evident in initiatives like managing a 211-acre conservation forest and eliminating single-use plastics in the Maldives. Aitken Spence also nurtures future talent through hotel schools at Heritance Kandalama and Heritance Ahungalla.

Celebrating its 50-year milestone, the company reflects on its achievements while focusing on innovation, sustainability, and future growth.



Heritance Ayurveda, Sri Lanka



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Turyaa Chennai

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Distribution networks and consolidators shaping India's cruise industry

Cruising, as a vacation option, continues to be one of the fastest-growing and most resilient sectors in global tourism. As cruise tourism surges to new heights, we seek to understand the latest trends emerging in the Indian cruise market. TTJ spoke to some key B2B players in the Indian cruise space to delve into the evolving demand, needs, challenges, and new developments.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



▲ Aarish Khan



▲ Abdul Thingna



▲ Vineet Srivastava

A first-time cruise guest may opt for a three-night or four-night cruise option, but a repeat guest is willing to experiment and explore. Vineet Srivastava, Managing Director, Yorker Holidays Services, mentions, "Domestic cruises covering Goa and Lakshadweep are hot, but for international cruises, Singapore is a popular destination, followed by the Mediterranean, Caribbean, and Alaska cruises. With the advancement of the

Exploring India's evolving cruise market, from distribution dynamics and sales strategies to customer preferences and booking challenges, reveals significant growth opportunities.

India's Cruise Industry Dynamics

In India, cruise lines predominantly depend on General Sales Agents (GSAs), Preferred Sales Agents (PSAs), and cruise consolidators to distribute their offerings, focusing heavily on providing marketing and sales support to these key distribution partners. Cruise consolidators, in particular, play a pivotal role, with their relationships varying from single to multiple cruise lines, depending on their strategic agenda and market focus. Aarish Khan, Chief Commercial Officer, TBO.Com, explains, "As one of the B2B market leaders, our portfolio includes major international ocean liners such as Norwegian Cruise Line, Royal Caribbean International, Celebrity Cruises, Resorts World Cruises, MSC, Costa Cruises, Carnival Cruise Line, and Holland America. We have also recently established a partnership with Disney Cruise Lines. Additionally, we promote two prominent river cruise lines: Avalon Waterways and Uniworld Cruises. In the expedition segment, we feature Silversea Cruises. We also promote Cordelia Cruise, India's domestic cruise line. We offer a complete cruise portfolio covering all major segments of the cruise market."

Enhancing Cruise Sales

With greater online access to information and options, customers and agents must be highly responsive and well-informed to deliver the ideal cruise experience. Cruise lines are committed to continuously enhancing product knowledge throughout the distribution chain, ensuring strong brand recall and smoother sales processes.

Abdul Thingna, Vice President of Hotels and Holidays at TripJack, highlights the importance of supporting travel agents, "At TripJack, we continually enhance our offerings to provide travel agents with a diverse range of cruise options and personalised support. We focus on equipping agents with comprehensive content and precise details, enabling them to exceed customer expectations and ensure a seamless booking experience."

Aarish Khan adds, "We focus on cross-selling cruise options in metro cities while initially targeting tier two and three cities for Far East and Middle East cruises. Additionally, we conduct educational and training seminars for travel agents in metro and tier two and three cities to equip them with the knowledge and skills to promote cruise holidays effectively."

Understanding Indian Preferences

The Indian cruise client can primarily be divided into first-timers and repeat clients.

winter season, sailings ex Dubai is also manifesting a lot of interest."

Vineet adds, "In recent years, India has seen a growing preference for longer cruises, with four to seven-night itineraries becoming more popular than shorter two to three-night trips. Balcony staterooms are now the top choice, and the average age of cruise travellers has decreased."

With Dubai emerging as a significant cruise hub in the Middle East and Singapore enhancing its offerings with the launch of Disney Adventure in 2025, there will be an increase in demand for cruises by appealing to a broader audience from India seeking unique and family-friendly experiences.

Indian Cruise Booking Challenges

Like every industry, cruising has its own set of challenges. Indian customers tend to book late. This leads to higher fares and limited availability. Also, visa concerns abound. Cruise guests often face uncertainty, risking cancellation penalties due to potential visa refusals. Aarish addresses these concerns, "We collaborate with cruise lines to offer early booking promotions, encouraging travel agents to book well in advance. We also advise our partner travel agents to offer cancellation protection plans to their clients, ensuring their money is protected in case of visa issues or delays."



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'The future of cruising looks optimistic but demands strategic adaptation'

With his extensive knowledge and expertise, Nishith Saxena, Founder and Director, Cruise Professionals, provides valuable insights into various aspects of cruising. With us, he shares his perspectives on the evolving demands of Indian travellers, the dynamics of luxury cruising, and the strategic responses to industry challenges, offering a broader view of the cruise landscape.

Prashant Nayak

Cruise Professionals is a leading cruise representation, consultation, and marketing company in India, specialising in unique experiences with premium cruise lines. They aim to deliver exceptional value and unforgettable vacations through top brands like Aurora Expeditions, Cunard, Hurtigruten Expeditions, Hurtigruten, Princess Cruises, P&O Cruises-UK and Seabourn

Insights on the Fly-Cruise Segment

With India's growing middle class and increasing appetite for luxury travel experiences, there is a notable surge in demand for high-end cruises. Current trends indicate that Indian consumers are eager to embrace luxury and dynamic lifestyle cruise brands once again, especially in the fly-cruise segment.

Nishith explains, "The demand for fly-cruise options from India is relatively limited for the regions where we operate. Fly-Cruise caters to a specific segment of travellers who prefer to fly directly from their home city or country to the port of embarkation and return the same way, eliminating the need for pre- or post-stay arrangements. In India, fly-cruise options generally focus on short-haul and short-duration cruises within Asia and the Middle East. In contrast, fly-cruise options in larger markets often involve long-haul travel, charter services, and longer-duration cruises. For instance, P&O Cruises offers Back-to-Back Fly-Cruise packages from the UK to Malta, where cruises regularly embark for 7-14 nights. Fly-cruise options also work better where flight operations and connectivity are limited."

Evolving Onboard Experiences

Today, cruise lines enhance their onboard experiences to meet passengers' diverse needs and expectations, both for leisure and MICE. Onboard experiences are constantly evolving and can vary



▲ Nishith Saxena

significantly for different individuals and age groups. Nishith notes, "Over the last three decades, we have noticed that vast food choices, wholesome entertainment, and exciting onboard activities combined together and supported with exceptional service are the cornerstone of any good cruise line. It is important to note that cruise lines have consistently catered to the needs of guests of various ages, backgrounds, and nationalities, which is a crucial reason for their widespread popularity and high demand. When it comes to MICE, most cruise lines are capable of accommodating a wide range of requests and requirements. The key is communicating all needs well in advance, allowing the cruise line sufficient time to evaluate and address these requests effectively."

Ensuring Value and Excellence for Indian Cruisers

At Cruise Professionals, they have noticed that Indian travellers' buying behaviour is evolving rapidly compared to other nationalities. Therefore, it is crucial for them to continually upgrade their services, provide accurate information,

and guide clients through best practices. This approach ensures that Indian guests remain engaged with cruising and continue to seek these experiences. Nishith comments, "In terms of closing deals, Indian guests are similar to those in more evolved markets—they seek value for money, efficient service, control over their experience, and an excellent time on their chosen cruise. We ensure these needs are met to maintain strong client relationships."

Neutrality with Strong Partnerships

While Cruise Professionals do not work through a PSA model, they work closely with each of these agencies and enjoy excellent relations with all cruise specialists across India. "Our guiding philosophy hinges on the fact that all travel fraternities should be provided equal opportunity to promote cruises. We use a tiered approach to commercials, enabling each agency to manage its own clients and fulfil its cruise needs. This strategy has allowed us to maintain a neutral position, and we see no reason to alter our approach," asserts Nishith.

Navigating Over-Tourism

One of the unique challenges faced by cruise lines is over-tourism. Some ports have imposed limits on the number of cruise visits or even restricted access to large ships due to the environmental impact of accommodating 3,000-4,000 passengers simultaneously. Nishith adds, "While this harms potential revenue for these cities and ports, local governments prioritise environmental concerns. Cruise lines are accustomed to adjusting itineraries on short notice, but it is unfortunate for passengers if specific ports are omitted."

As demand for luxury and personalised cruise experiences rises, Nishith envisions a future where cruise lines must innovate to enrich passenger experiences while prioritising sustainability.

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The Indian traveller's romance with Europe is an enduring affair, whether exploring by land on coach tours, sailing on sea cruises, or uncovering the wonders of Northern Europe, Western Europe, and the Mediterranean. Indians have been visiting Europe for long and returning year after year to discover more. TTJ met with Rony Broun, Regional Vice President Sales and Marketing, VIVA Cruises, on his visit to India to learn more about river cruising.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja



▲ Rony Broun

VIVA Cruises, established in 2018, a subsidiary of Scylla AG, specialises in river cruise tours that showcase Europe's most scenic destinations.

A Fresh Perspective on European River Cruising

Civilisations and cities have prospered along rivers since time immemorial, as they served as a great way of transportation. Europe boasts an extensive network of rivers and waterways that meander through some of the continent's most breathtaking landscapes and charming cityscapes. River cruising now opens the possibility of exploring the heart of Europe by sailing on these iconic rivers and waterways. River cruising provides a unique perspective on Europe, allowing you

to leisurely take in the unfolding scenes of life along the riverbanks as you drift by.

Talking about his company, Rony explains, "VIVA Cruises is a young company that started its operations in 2018. VIVA today operates a fleet of eight river ships in the four and five-star categories." He adds, "Today, we offer our guests the best of European river cruises with our multiple itineraries covering Europe's most iconic rivers and waterways like the Rhine, Danube, Seine, Moselle, Rhone, Main, and the Douro. The VIVA river cruises take you through an immersive experience with options for France, Germany, Holland, and Portugal."

Experience All-Inclusive Luxury

A VIVA cruise is truly 'All-Inclusive,' allowing you to unwind and indulge in exclusive food and drinks, from breakfast buffets to multi-course gourmet lunches and dinners, all elegantly served at your table. They have a well-stocked minibar in the cabin, all-day high-quality cold and hot non-alcoholic drinks,

and a select choice of alcoholic beverages for all shore excursions. In addition, they also offer guests relaxing care products. Complimentary WiFi onboard and tips for the crew are also included in the cruise cost.

Modern Luxury Onboard VIVA-2

VIVA Cruises latest ship, the VIVA-2, was commissioned in 2023 and boasts three passenger decks, catering to 190 guests with 52 crew members. "All VIVA vessels are well maintained, and it is difficult to differentiate between our latest-built vessel or our refurbished ships as VIVA maintains and offers quality service on board that promises to offer an intimate experience for its guests as they enjoy their European river cruise at a leisurely pace," assures Rony.

In India, Global India Reps serves as the marketing representative for VIVA Cruises. Their mandate includes launching and promoting VIVA Cruises, training agents, and establishing a network to source and direct business to the cruise line.



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Uniworld connects Indian travellers to a world of luxury and eco-conscious river cruising

Uniworld Boutique Cruises is enhancing its offerings with a focus on luxury, unique experiences, and sustainability. Henry Yu, Managing Director, Asia, Uniworld Boutique Cruises, discusses how the company is tailoring its services to emerging markets like India, unveiling new itineraries, and introducing innovative ships. He also highlights Uniworld's pioneering sustainability efforts, including waste reduction and ambitious carbon-neutral goals.

Prashant Nayak

Uniworld has been tailoring its offerings to resonate with travellers, focussing on key selling points like luxury, unique experiences, and all-inclusive offerings that appeal to emerging markets like India. They are also aware of the cultural preferences of Indian travellers, offering vegetarian and Asian cuisine options on board and incorporating elements that appeal to this demographic.

Tailored Luxury for Indian Travellers

Uniworld offers an unmatched level of inclusive luxurious amenities such as unlimited premium wine and spirits, five-star farm-to-table cuisine, carefully curated experiences, gratuities, airport transfers, and more so guests can travel carefree and have a truly relaxing vacation. Henry emphasises, "For guests looking for something out of the ordinary, our Masterpiece Collection Experience elevates their journey with after-hour tours of famous landmarks, museums, and private vineyards."

Uniworld offers themed cruises that align with the interests of the Indian markets, such as cultural tours, wine and gastronomy cruises, and adventure-themed voyages that appeal to different traveller segments. It offers an extraordinary travel experience by curating exclusive activities on and off the ship, ensuring every journey is unique. "Indian travellers will appreciate that all Uniworld ships are one-of-a-kind, luxury floating boutique hotels, each with interior décor that is inspired by the rivers that they cruise upon, and here, guests only unpack once, which makes travelling so much easier," explains Henry.

PSA and Cruise Advisors are vital to Uniworld's strategy, and the company also works closely with meeting planners to craft unforgettable experiences for incentive groups.



▲ Henry Yu

A World of Uniworld Experiences Await

Uniworld has introduced five new itineraries for 2025: Grande Italia, Rome, Venice and the Jewels of Veneto, Wine Roads of France and Portugal, Rhine, Moselle, and Belgium Grand Discovery, and Dutch and Belgian Holiday Celebration. "As you can see, Europe continues to be our focus," points out Henry. He adds, "The rivers weave through a labyrinth of towns and cities steeped in centuries of history and diverse cultures. There is something for everyone, from wine and enchanting holiday markets to quaint towns and medieval castles."

Uniworld will introduce a new ship to its fleet in 2026, just in time to celebrate its 50th anniversary. The S.S. Emilie joins other new Super Ships, including the S.S. Victoria, debuting on the Rhine and Moselle rivers this year, and the S.S. Elisabeth, debuting on the Rhine in 2025. Henry further adds, "Uniworld's commitment to

excellence is unwavering, and these outstanding new vessels reaffirm our dedication to providing the best and most luxurious ships on the rivers. We believe in delivering the highest quality to our guests, and our portfolio embodies the best of the best in the market."

Leading in Sustainability

Sustainability has become a significant focus across various industries globally, including the cruise industry, and at one point, it was a key area of concern for Uniworld as well. Now, they are at the forefront of sustainability efforts, becoming the first river cruise line to publish an impact report in 2022, transparently outlining the brand's progress towards goals supporting the planet and community. Henry notes, "Uniworld is working to advance its emission reduction objectives, aiming to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 or before."

In August 2021, Uniworld adopted Leanpath Solutions to enhance kitchen efficiency and cut food waste by 50 per cent on all ships by 2025. By 2023, the system was fully implemented across the fleet, reducing food waste by 36 per cent, preventing 50,787 kg of waste, equivalent to 354 metric tonnes of CO₂, and conserving over 1.2 million bathtubs of water. Uniworld is also advancing its emission reduction goals, aiming for net zero emissions by 2050 or sooner. As the sole cruise company in the Path2Zero project, led by Delft University of Technology, Uniworld contributes to a five-year initiative to achieve net zero by 2025. In 2023, Uniworld joined a river cruise collaboration to apply for EU funding to support decarbonisation efforts and will conduct energy audits starting in 2024 to identify new emission reduction opportunities. Additionally, Uniworld is partnering with Atlas Reizen, which provides coaches for about 50 per cent of itineraries to explore the use of HVO fuel where available.



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Carnival demonstrates a proactive approach to customer satisfaction and market expansion

Dipti Adhia, Director at Discover the World - India and representative of Carnival Cruise Line in the country, provides insights into the cruise line's remarkable growth and innovation. Carnival is expanding its fleet, enhancing global offerings, and introducing exclusive destinations, all while catering to the diverse needs and preferences of travellers.

Prashant Nayak

As part of Carnival Corporation's portfolio of premier cruise brands, Carnival Cruise Line is at the forefront of innovation and sustainability, delivering unforgettable vacations and building global connections.

Meeting Growing Demand

Carnival Cruise Line is adeptly responding to the rising demand for cruise travel by expanding its fleet with state-of-the-art ships that offer a diverse range of onboard experiences. To meet the varied preferences of their guests, they are enhancing their itineraries to include more destinations and immersive shore excursions across both popular and emerging markets. Adding on, Dipti says, "We are strengthening our global outreach by tailoring our offerings and promotions to meet the unique needs of emerging markets. For instance, we have incorporated Indian cuisine into our dining menus to better serve our Indian guests."

Exceptional Experiences for Leisure and MICE

The cruise line is dedicated to delivering exceptional onboard experiences that cater to the diverse needs of both leisure travellers and MICE passengers. For leisure guests, Carnival offers a broad spectrum of activities, amenities, and entertainment options designed to appeal to every type of traveller. Their FUNSHIPS feature thrilling attractions such as WaterPark, BOLT, SkyRide, and a trampoline park, diverse dining options showcasing global cuisine, serene spa retreats, exclusive adults-only areas like Serenity, and much more.

"For MICE clients, we transform our ships into dynamic floating venues equipped with modern conference facilities, versatile event spaces, and the latest technology, including high-speed Wi-Fi and advanced audio-visual equipment. Our dedicated event planning teams collaborate closely with corporate clients to customise every aspect of their



▲ Dipti Adhia

events while offering a unique and inspiring backdrop at sea," reveals Dipti.

Leveraging and Learning

Carnival's PSAs and cruise specialists are crucial partners in shaping their cruise offerings and enhancing the booking experience for guests. Dipti explains, "These experts bring extensive industry knowledge and a deep understanding of traveller preferences, which we use to refine our itineraries, onboard experiences, and promotional strategies. By working closely with cruise specialists, we ensure our offerings are both appealing and aligned with market demands. We also engage with cruise specialists through regular training sessions, product presentations, promotional activities, co-marketing initiatives, and much more."

India's outbound cruise market is brimming with potential, yet it encounters substantial hurdles, particularly in expanding to long-haul cruise destinations. "One significant challenge is the process of obtaining US visas, which can be time-consuming and complex for Indian travellers. Additionally, the limited availability and high cost of direct

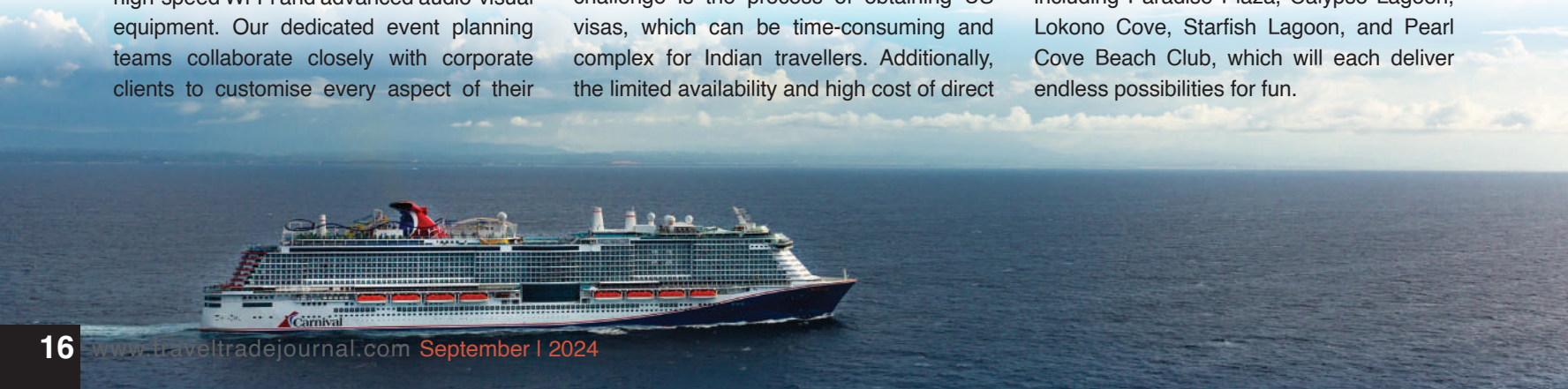
flights from India to US ports can complicate travel logistics for guests. There is also a need to further enhance awareness and understanding of cruising as a vacation option among Indian travellers. To address these challenges, we work closely with cruise specialists and our PSAs to build awareness, encourage early planning, promote advance bookings, etc.," expresses Dipti.

Innovative New Additions

Carnival's fleet of 27 ships reflects an exciting period of growth that will continue with the addition of seven ships through 2033, with the Carnival Adventure and Carnival Encounter joining in 2025 when P&O Cruises Australia integrates into Carnival. A fourth and fifth Excel class ship is scheduled for 2027 and 2028, respectively, followed by three additional new ships from an innovative new class currently under development. "This year, we debuted Carnival Jubilee, home to the Currents Zone, a technology-rich underwater-themed zone of the ship that spans two decks. In Currents, guests will find zone-specific activations, including Seaquest: A Fun Sub Adventure. The submarine-like experience takes guests on an exciting underwater excursion to visit out-of-this-world locations and encounter incredible ocean creatures," informs Dipti.

Introducing Destination Celebration Key

Next year, Carnival will open its brand-new exclusive destination on Grand Bahama Island, Celebration Key. This exclusive port destination for Carnival Cruise Line guests is designed to celebrate everything Carnival and the Bahamas offer for a memorable vacation. Once complete, it will be capable of welcoming two million guests each year. Celebration Key will feature five distinct portals for guests of all ages to enjoy, including Paradise Plaza, Calypso Lagoon, Lokono Cove, Starfish Lagoon, and Pearl Cove Beach Club, which will each deliver endless possibilities for fun.





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MSC sees rising demand from India's fly-cruise market for short and long-haul voyages

MSC Cruises is expanding its reach and enhancing its offerings with a strong focus on sustainability and luxury. Leena Brahme, Business Head, Sharaf Travel, GSA-MSA Cruises, provides insights into MSC's growth in emerging markets like India, emphasising the company's commitment to Italian hospitality and innovative cruising experiences.

Prashant Nayak

MSC Cruises' relentless focus on delivering high-quality, sustainable ships and continually developing new itineraries and shore excursion programmes has led to impressive success in recent years.

MSC's Growing Appeal

There is a growing demand for outbound and fly-cruise sectors, particularly in emerging markets like India. Leena says, "India will remain a strong fly-cruise market for MSC Cruises. The growing interest from corporates in both short-haul and unexpectedly long-haul sailings on our ships in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe signals a promising future. This motivates us to continue expanding and promoting a variety of sailing options."

Catering to the diverse needs and expectations of today's cruise passengers in both leisure and MICE segments, Leena adds, "The increasing demand from the FIT market and the rise in series agents present a promising opportunity for us to tailor onboard experiences to meet the preferences of the Indian market. Our MICE offerings are abundant, featuring impressive, complimentary venues that are nothing short of spectacular!"

Expanding Cruise Options

MSC will soon have MSC Euribia ported in the Middle East and offer sailings from Dubai and Abu Dhabi from November 16, 2024, all the way to March 30, 2025, with choices of three, four, and seven-night sailing options, which will include ports of Sir Bani Island, Doha, and Bahrain. The ship debuted in June 2023 and currently sails into Norwegian Fjords.

To experience genuine Italian hospitality, besides the new MSC Euribia, MSC Seascope (sailing in the Caribbean), MSC Meraviglia (sailing from NYC to the Caribbean), and MSC Virtuosa (sailing to the Baltics) offer a range of options to explore MSC's multi-level hospitality. Guests can also embark on unforgettable cruises from Durban, South Africa, connecting



▲ Leena Brahme

to destinations such as Cape Town, Port Louis, Pomene, and Namibia. They can explore South America with cruises from Rio de Janeiro, Montevideo, Salvador, and Copacabana.

Leena also reveals that MSC's newest ship, MSC World America, is set to debut in April 2025. With a capacity to carry 6,762 guests, World America will sail into the Eastern and Western Caribbean, sailing into Ocean Cay, San Juan, from Miami. She further mentions, "The exclusive service at MSC Yacht Club, the largest at sea, provides unparalleled luxury, accessible exclusively by keycard. Indians are now discovering previously unheard-of destinations, and with MSC's reach into 47 countries, the cruise line offers a wealth of exquisite destinations to fit every traveller's preference."

Strategies and Solutions

While B2B remains MSC's strongest bond, to help strategies and garner more support from trade, they encourage all their travel partners to book and look on www.msbook.com. Instant

quotes, itineraries, and flyers for marketing all come together under www.msbook.com. Leena also shares, "MSC's Preferred Sales Agents, or our PLB partners, are the crux of driving the brand out far and wide into our large nation, where hopeful guests are looking at options to try. We frequently present commercially viable offers to PSAs and consistently engage in training sessions and coffee meetings with our niche groups. Strengthening touchpoints with PSAs and our B2B partners will remain our primary growth driver."

Speaking about the operational challenges faced by the outbound cruise in India currently, Leena mentions, "We do have enormous possibilities to reskill and upskill our current workforce. Enticing the younger generation to adapt to the learnings of the fastest-growing tourism segments along with automation will reduce the current challenges of retaining churn. MSC India and the passenger sales office offer an array of sub-career options, including crewing business in-house."

Advancing Sustainability

Technological and environmental advancements are central to MSC Cruises' commitment to sustainability. The fleet has achieved a five per cent reduction in carbon emissions intensity since 2008, showcasing ongoing progress in environmental responsibility. The introduction of the MSC Europa, the first LNG-powered ship in the fleet, marks a significant step towards utilising lower-emission fuels. Waste management has also improved, with a five per cent increase in waste segregated for recycling, bringing the total to over 25 per cent of onboard waste. Furthermore, MSC Cruises has delivered two ships, MSC World Europa and MSC Seascope, that meet the most stringent water treatment and discharge standards.

On a final note, Leena says, "MSC's motivation is to share the true Italian hospitality. From sustainable technologies to cutting-edge entertainment, MSC's vision is to push boundaries of vacation at sea."





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HMA represents three innovative cruise lines that shell out extraordinary travel experiences

Holiday Moods Adventures (HMA) is a distributor for three international cruise companies in India, namely Havila Voyages, Swan Hellenic, and Viking Line. Tejbir Singh Anand and Arshdeep Anand, Directors of Holiday Moods Adventures, emphasise that each of these brands offers a unique approach to discovering new horizons, blending luxury, comfort, and exceptional experiences to cater to the varied tastes of the Indian audience.

Prashant Nayak

Havila Voyages, Swan Hellenic, and Viking Line offer extraordinary destinations and deeper engagements that cater to Indian travellers seeking more than conventional cruises. Tejbir Singh Anand and Arshdeep Anand emphasise that these cruise lines are enhancing their presence in the fly-cruise sectors with exceptional leisure and MICE options. The companies are firmly committed to sustainable and eco-conscious journeys, featuring well-designed ships that prioritise environmental responsibility.

Havila Voyages: Innovative Coastal Cruises in Norway

Havila Voyages is revolutionising coastal cruising in Norway with its fleet of four cutting-edge, eco-friendly ships. Launched between 2021 and 2023, these vessels—Capella, Castor, Polaris, and Pollux—are identical in design and represent the latest advancements in sustainable maritime technology. They are equipped with the world's largest battery packs, enabling several hours of emission-free sailing and reducing CO2 emissions by 25 per cent

Each ship offers spacious cabins inspired by Norwegian landscapes, and their interiors reflect high-quality Scandinavian craftsmanship. Onboard amenities include saunas, Jacuzzis, panoramic fitness centres, and lounges with glass roofs for viewing the Northern Lights or Midnight Sun. For the MICE segment, Havila Voyages provides an environment conducive to corporate events.

Havila Voyages provides a diverse range of unique experiences for both leisure and MICE passengers. The cruises include exploration of natural wonders such as the Arctic Circle, glaciers, and wildlife, with activities like snowmobiling and dog sledding. For cultural enrichment, themed cruises like the Roots and Blues Cruise offer live performances by renowned artists. Dining options feature local Norwegian ingredients and panoramic views, enhancing the overall experience.

The fleet operates year-round, offering itineraries that showcase Norway's stunning coast in every season. Summer cruises emphasise the Midnight Sun, while winter voyages provide opportunities to witness the Northern Lights. The ships travel along Norway's entire coast, with destinations including Lofoten, Geiranger,



▲ Tejbir Singh Anand

Tromsø, and the North Cape. Passengers can select from southbound or northbound routes covering key locations like Bergen, Trondheim, and Oslo.

Swan Hellenic: Remote Luxurious Expedition Cruises

Swan Hellenic Cruise offers all-inclusive expedition ships, offering journeys to the world's least-visited places, covering the Arctic Circle, Antarctica, Africa, Europe, the Mediterranean, South America, and the Indian Ocean, featuring lesser-known cultural and natural wonders. Their fleet consists of three new ships launched between 2021 and 2023: SH Diana, SH Vega, and SH Minerva. All three ships are Polar Ice-Class PC5 Technology, five-star boutique all-inclusive ships designed for expedition cruising and feature ice-strengthened hulls for navigating through polar regions.

Swan Hellenic has launched a range of new itineraries for 2024-2025, focussing on culturally rich and remote destinations, tailoring its offerings to meet the growing demand for unique and immersive travel experiences. Additionally, Swan Hellenic is utilising its fleet of boutique polar expedition ships, such as the SH Diana and SH Vega, which are designed to access remote areas while providing luxury experiences. They also feature elegant interiors, expansive, unobstructed views, and expedition facilities. A third Vega Class expedition cruise ship from Helsinki Shipyard is scheduled for delivery in



▲ Arshdeep Anand

2025. The ships have several initiatives to reduce their environmental impact and are also equipped with eco-friendly practices.

Swan Hellenic also recently introduced new itineraries and destinations for its 2025 Maris gourmet cruises. The new constellation of star chefs from JRE-Jeunes Restaurateurs will bring a different internationally acclaimed chef on each exceptional voyage of culinary discovery. Each cruise will feature a different star chef who will create a unique menu for each meal. The chefs will also host cooking demonstrations and workshops, and guests will have the opportunity to meet and chat with them.

Viking Line Cruises: Premium Baltic Voyages

Viking Line Cruises, which has six grand ships plying on the Baltic Sea routes covering Finland, Sweden, and Estonia, is currently enhancing the onboard experience by offering a mix of leisure and MICE services tailored to diverse passenger needs. For leisure travellers, they provide luxurious accommodations, diverse dining options, wellness facilities, and entertainment programmes. MICE passengers benefit from state-of-the-art conference facilities, customisable meeting spaces, and specialised event planning services. Additionally, Viking Line focuses on cultural enrichment, offering themed cruises and excursions, ensuring a blend of relaxation, business, and cultural experiences for all passengers.



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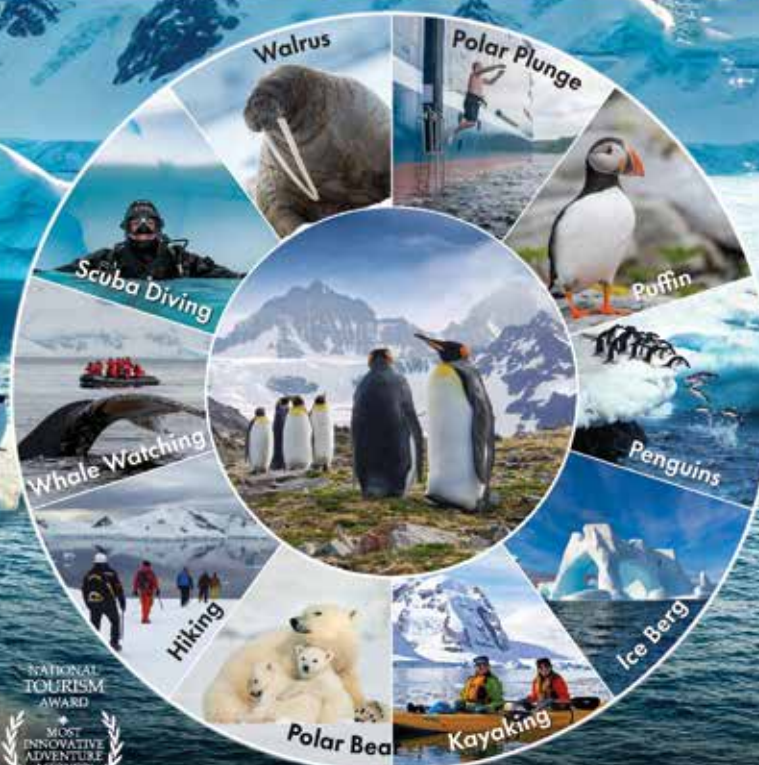


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Griffon offers exclusive British cruise experiences for Indian travellers with Cunard

Griffon Cruises, based in Mumbai, specialises in European cruise destinations including the Baltics, the Mediterranean, the Aegean Sea, and the Red Sea. The company now focuses on promoting Cunard Line, the renowned British cruise line. Vivek Jain, Managing Director, Griffon Cruises, is enthusiastic about this new addition and shares more about the exciting opportunities it brings.

Prashant Nayak

Samuel Cunard founded the historic British cruise line Cunard Line in 1840, renowned for its luxury ocean liners and distinguished service. Known for maintaining a tradition of luxury and sophistication in its transatlantic crossings between Europe and North America, Cunard's Southampton to New York journey provides a nostalgic glimpse into the era when cross-continental travel was predominantly by ship. Today, Cunard operates four flagship lines, all named after the royal family with iconic ships like the Queen Mary 2, Queen Elizabeth, Queen Victoria, and Queen Anne launched in May 2024. Each ship is known for its opulent interiors, classic style, and high level of service.

A Legacy of Maritime Excellence

Griffon has been specialising in cruises for over 20 years. Vivek believes that cruising is one of the most enjoyable and cost-effective vacations. With Cunard now part of Griffon's portfolio, Vivek shares the inspiration behind this choice: "Adding Cunard to our portfolio was a natural decision. We are inspired by Cunard's rich legacy and vast history in the cruising industry. With over 182 years of sailing, Cunard began as a pioneer in transatlantic travel and mail delivery, even earning the title of Royal Mail Ship. Notably, its fleet was involved in the rescue efforts during the Titanic tragedy."

Timeless Elegance in Modern Cruising

Cunard ships—Queen Mary 2, Queen Elizabeth, and Queen Victoria—can easily be singled out to offer the most sophisticated cruising experience, like in older times. The cruise line often emphasises a traditional,



▲ Vivek Jain

refined cruising experience, with formal evenings and classic afternoon teas. Vivek adds, "Cunard identifies itself as unique in the cruising industry. It has preserved the cruising experience as per its legacy. It still maintains the old English charm and aura aboard all its vessels and has a lot of repeat passengers. Other than the English afternoon tea, some unique British experiences are the traditional British pubs, ballroom dances every evening, west-end style theatre and shows, fencing classes, and many more."

Queen Anne: The Latest Jewel

For over 182 years, Cunard has raised the standard for ocean travel. Queen Anne embodies this legacy—a ship inspired by tradition and designed for the future. The new-age Queen Anne redefines sophistication,

exuding a distinctly British charm throughout the vessel. Queen Anne is designed for a new generation of cruise travellers, blending a respectful nod to its rich heritage and the other Queens in the fleet.

Tailoring British Charm for Indian Travellers

Vivek believes that Cunard's British heritage and its unique experiences onboard resonate with many Indian travellers. "The most important and encouraging trend we have noticed is that Indian travellers now have started to understand the meaning of a cruise holiday and want to savour it. Thus, any Indian traveller looking to have a good luxury holiday aboard a vessel is our target audience. On Cunard, we offer a range of English-inspired activities, attracting mature travellers who seek a refined and longer itinerary," asserts Vivek.

Cunard sails across Europe, including the West and East Mediterranean, Northern Europe, the British Isles, and the Canary Islands. Their routes also cover Australia and New Zealand, Japan during cherry blossom season, transatlantic crossings, Alaska, and European short breaks. Essentially, Cunard covers all the global waters.

Griffon Cruises' adaptation to Indian tastes and preferences also highlights the growing demand for luxury cruise experiences among Indian travellers. As Vivek explains, "We promote Cunard through our travel agent network, tour operators, and our potential travellers. We offer special Indian menus for groups on all our voyages and have Indian restaurants on some of our ships. We are also open to accommodating special requests for group movements."



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Stirring Disney Magic into Asian Waters

Disney Cruise Line to set sail from Singapore in 2025

The burgeoning Asian cruise market has drawn the attention of Disney Cruise Line, which is now set for its Asia debut with the launch of Disney Adventure, from Singapore in 2025. In a recent interview with TTJ, Sarah Fox, Vice President and Regional General Manager for Asia, and Lloyd Machado, Director of Hotel, New Build, and Dry Dock Operations, at Disney Cruise Line, shared insights into the enchanting new ship that promises to captivate cruise lovers and family vacationers alike.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Cruising the Disney Way

It is almost impossible to imagine anyone not being smitten or enamoured with the Disney magic. Picture a world where fairy tales come alive—whether it is the timeless stories of Snow White or Cinderella, the thrilling escapades of Moana, Mowgli, or the thunderous might of Marvel’s Super Heroes, the majestic roars of The Lion King, or the delightful antics of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse. Tinker Bell’s

pixie dust has touched generations, leaving them longing for endless doses of Disney wonder. The Disney Adventure is a vacation at sea that promises to transform Asian cruise lovers on a Disney Magic voyage.

Sarah Fox, a veteran in both Disney and the Asian market, has deep experience in the region, having previously worked with Shanghai Disneyland and Hong Kong Disneyland before leading Disney Cruise



▲ Sarah Fox and Lloyd Machado

Line’s operations in Singapore. "In 1998, Disney launched the concept of 'Family Luxury Cruising,' giving Disney enthusiasts the chance to enjoy the Disney vacation experience on the open seas," Fox stated.

She further elaborated, "Our cruises embody the essence of our parks: attention to detail, quality, storytelling, and an immersive experience. Disney Cruise Line has its



Disney Imagination Garden

own hallmark of 'Fun and Relaxation' for everyone, featuring incredible entertainment, dining, beautiful and artful accommodations, and our amazing crew. Our crew is the key differentiator of the Disney experience."

The Disney Adventure

Starting in 2025, the Disney Adventure will embark on its maiden voyage from Singapore, offering families three- and four-night journeys entirely at sea. The ship will be both a journey and a destination, providing endless opportunities for families to have an unforgettable vacation without ever needing to leave the vessel.

The 208,000-gross-ton Disney Adventure will house artful stateroom and concierge accommodations that will accommodate approximately 6,700 passengers and 2,500 crew members. Guest accommodations have been designed with family cruise vacations in mind. The ship will sail from the Marina Bay Cruise Centre as part of a collaboration between Disney Cruise Line and the Singapore Tourism Board.

The Essence of the Ship Build

Lloyd Machado, Director of Hotel for New Build & Dry Dock Operations, Disney Cruise Line, oversees the shipbuilding process for the Disney Adventure. A Disney veteran who joined the team in 1998, Machado has steadily climbed the ranks, always prioritising top-tier hospitality and operational excellence with a customer-focused approach.

"The Disney Adventure will be both a journey and a destination," said Machado, emphasising that the ship will bring to life the core pillars of Disney storytelling. "Through the magic of imagination, discovery, fantasy, and — of course — adventure, guests will embark on voyages to seven uniquely themed areas, each teeming with incredible characters and unforgettable experiences, all without leaving the ship," revealed Machado.

Aboard the Disney Adventure

Disney Imagination Garden: An enchanted valley, charming garden, and open-air performance venue all in one. Inspired by 100 years of heroic and heartwarming Disney adventures—from Moana on the high seas to Mowgli in the jungle to Rapunzel's grand adventure beyond her tower.



Disney Discovery Reef: Families will play, shop, and dine in an ethereal and ever-changing retreat evoking favourite aquatic characters and nautical stories from Walt Disney Animation Studios and Pixar Animation Studios, including 'The Little Mermaid,' 'Lilo & Stitch,' 'Finding Nemo,' and 'Luca.'

San Fransokyo Street: A family entertainment area pulsing with the energy and atmosphere of a vibrant street market, boasting an assortment of interactive games and activities, shops, cinemas, and more.

Wayfinder Bay: Where the sky meets the sea, an open-air oasis under the sun invites you to unwind and enjoy exclusive entertainment. The sophisticated yet casual poolside retreat will reflect the Pacific Islands-inspired artistry of Disney Animation's 'Moana,' offering some of the most stunning views of the sea and sky aboard the Disney Adventure.

Town Square: This fantastical forest filled with shops, lounges, cafes, restaurants, and entertainment venues will exude the enchanting feeling of summer in full bloom with nods to 'Tangled,' 'Cinderella,' 'Frozen,' 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,' 'The Princess and the Frog,' and more.

Marvel Landing: Heroes will unite in a destination for fans of all ages. As a celebration of Marvel's larger-than-life personalities, this area will offer Avengers-level adventure, with all-new attractions and experiences that showcase imaginative representations of guests' favourite superheroes.

Toy Story Place: An interactive playland with themed food venues and water play areas, where the world of Pixar's 'Toy Story' movies and shorts springs to life in surprising and inventive ways.

Accommodations Fit for Royalty

After a day filled with magical

adventures and excitement onboard the Disney Adventure, families can look forward to unwinding in their thoughtfully designed staterooms. Each stateroom is meticulously appointed, featuring special Disney touches that delight children and adults alike. With a variety of room options available, guests can choose between serene ocean-view staterooms for breathtaking vistas or promenade-view rooms to enjoy the ship's lively ambiance from the comfort of their own space.

For those seeking ultimate luxury, the Disney Adventure offers dedicated concierge accommodations, which elevate the cruise experience to an entirely new level. Concierge bookings come with a host of premium amenities, including access to private areas reserved solely for concierge guests. Among these exclusive areas is a private indoor lounge where guests can unwind in an elegant and serene environment away from the hustle and bustle of the ship.

Culinary Journey Across the Seas

"Disney Cruise Line understands that food is intrinsic to an Indian family's cruise experience onboard," Lloyd elaborated. "Our chefs have meticulously crafted menus that reflect the diverse tastes of Indian cuisine. We will be offering a wide range of Indian vegetarian dishes, as well as specially prepared Jain meals that exclude onion and garlic, catering to the dietary needs of our Jain guests."

"Non-alcoholic beverage stations are placed throughout the ship, ensuring refreshing drinks are always within reach. These are all included as part of your package, so our guests can enjoy them at leisure," he added.

The Countdown Begins

As 2025 approaches, the anticipation grows. The travel fraternity is eagerly awaiting the announcement of the exact launch date for the Disney Adventure, eager to offer their clients the opportunity to experience their Disney fantasy at sea aboard this magnificent ship.





Antarctica21 charting enchanting adventures in the world's most remote destination

Juan Cristobal Del Pedregal Bravo, Senior Commercial Director, Antarctica21, details how their cruise company pioneered the air-cruise model to Antarctica, overcoming initial challenges to become a global leader in the white continent exploration. He also highlights their tailored approach for Indian travellers, emphasising the comfort, efficiency, and sustainability aspects of their cruises. Their strategy aligns seamlessly with India’s growing interest in exclusive, high-end travel experiences.

Prashant Nayak

Antarctica21 was founded in 2003 in Punta Arenas, Chile. The founders were inspired to create a more comfortable and efficient way to explore Antarctica, bypassing the notoriously rough Drake Passage crossing. They pioneered the concept of Antarctic air cruises, flying guests directly to the continent to board small boutique expedition ships. Their innovative approach combined a passion for exploration with a desire to make Antarctica more accessible while maintaining a focus on sustainability and responsible tourism. Over the past 20 years, Antarctica21 has grown to become the global leader in Antarctic fly-cruise expeditions, offering travellers a unique and transformative way to experience the world's last great wilderness.



▲ Juan Cristobal Del Pedregal Bravo

model. We had to work hard to prove its viability and build trust with partners and customers. Also, there was operational complexity. Coordinating flights, ships, and on-ground activities in Antarctica's rapidly changing weather conditions required developing new systems and contingency plans.”

Leading the Way in Antarctic Exploration

Over the years, Antarctica21 has evolved significantly. More than any company in Antarctica, they have completed over 300 successful flight operations to Antarctica, becoming the undisputed leaders in Antarctic air cruises. This experience and expertise have allowed them to refine their processes and enhance safety. Juan adds, “We started with chartered vessels but now operate our own purpose-built ship, the Magellan Explorer, designed specifically for air cruise operations. We have increasingly emphasised responsible tourism practices and sustainability initiatives, including carbon offsetting and supporting scientific research in Antarctica. We have developed unique offerings like our Explorers House in Punta Arenas and expanded adventure options like kayaking and hiking. Over the years, we have grown to become a respected voice in Antarctic tourism, helping shape industry standards and best practices.”

The Early Challenges

When Antarctica21 was founded in 2003, the company encountered several

significant challenges. Flying tourists directly to Antarctica was a novel concept that required extensive negotiations with regulatory bodies to ensure compliance with Antarctic treaty regulations and environmental protection standards. Jaun notes that initially, there was considerable skepticism. He reveals, “Many in the industry doubted the feasibility of our air cruise



The introduction of their purpose-built vessel, Magellan Explorer, in 2019 was met with tremendous success, reinforcing the appeal of their small-ship model. Building on this momentum, they are now constructing a sister ship, the Magellan Discoverer. Located only a few blocks from the Punta Arenas hotel, Antarctica21's new Explorers House is an exclusive base for guests. This private club offers dining, a library, lecture and briefing facilities, shopping for expedition gear, and more, providing an exceptional prelude to their Antarctic adventure.

Antarctica21 is a member of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators (IAATO), and the company is CarbonNeutral® certified. "Throughout our evolution, we've maintained our core mission of providing intimate, high-quality Antarctic experiences while prioritising environmental stewardship and innovation," asserts Juan.

Delivering Unmatched Experience

As a niche specialist, Antarctica21 dedicates 100 per cent of its time and resources to creating a great Antarctic adventure. Juan says, "Antarctica21 stands out from other Antarctic operators in several ways. Our company was the gateway for the first Antarctic explorers. As a local company rooted in this remote region of Chile, we have developed a robust infrastructure and cultivated a strong network of key partnerships to ensure the success of our expeditions. As the pioneers of the air cruise to Antarctica, we remain dedicated to this venture. Our deep expertise makes us excel in coordinating air and sea operations within the unpredictable Antarctic environment. Antarctica21 uses a single flight to carry all guests on an expedition to and from the White Continent. We also have priority over the flight window, ensuring efficient operations and a reduced chance of weather-related delays."

Juan further mentions, "The Antarctica21 team comprises 12–14 expert polar guides, all committed to making your experience truly unforgettable. Our top priority is to ensure that every moment of your journey is exceptional. Our team knows the region's unique geography, natural history, wildlife, and ecology and loves sharing expertise with you. Our small expedition ships mean disembarking and embarking in Antarctica is faster and smoother. You will spend more time exploring and less time waiting for your turn."

Antarctica21 vessels, Magellan Explorer and Ocean Nova, offer a more intimate



experience with a maximum of 76 guests. Various cabin categories are available: three on Ocean Nova and seven on Magellan Explorer. Most cabins and all suites on Magellan Explorer have private balconies, individual climate control, and ample storage. A glass-enclosed observation area providing panoramic views of the Antarctic landscape is available on both vessels.

Each vessel features a spacious dining room with expansive windows, offering high-quality meals and premium beverages, including a selection of exquisite Chilean wines. A library is stocked with Antarctic-themed books and expansive windows to keep an eye on the incredible Antarctic landscapes. The vessels are equipped with fitness facilities, and Magellan Explorer also offers a sauna. Additionally, there are gift shops and stores for any last-minute expedition gear, along with an onboard clinic staffed by a doctor to provide primary medical care.

Explore the Unknown and Untamed

Juan explains that weather, ice conditions, and wildlife movements uniquely shape each Antarctica21 expedition. Their flexible itineraries focus on maximising key highlights: observing diverse penguin colonies like Gentoo, Chinstrap, and Adélie penguins in their natural habitat and whales like the humpback, minke, and orca. Guests can navigate icebergs and glacial fronts via the Zodiac cruises and set foot on the Antarctic mainland. While experiencing the dramatic landscapes with towering glaciers and massive icebergs, they can avail themselves of optional activities like kayaking and hiking, which provide adventurous perspectives. The small-scale nature of their expeditions fosters meaningful interactions between guests and the expedition team, creating lasting connections and enriching the overall experience.

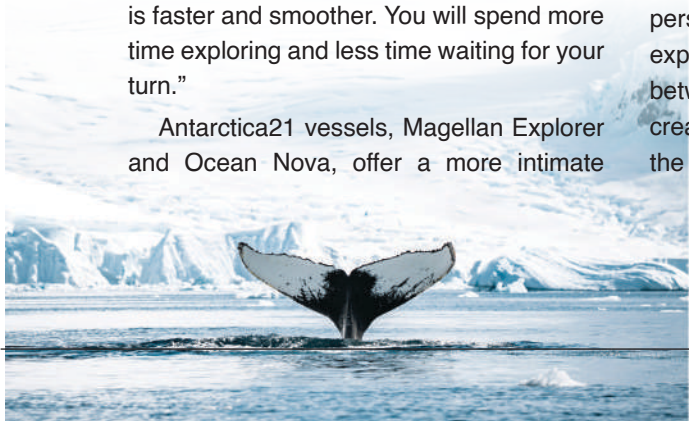
A Perfect Fit for Indian Luxury Travellers

Antarctica21, as the pioneer of the air cruise model to Antarctica, has spent the last two decades perfecting its service and refining its guest experience. "During this time, we recognised that the Indian luxury market, open to long-haul travel, aligns perfectly with the unique advantages our air cruises offer. Indian travellers, who highly value comfort and efficient travel, find our eight-day/ seven-night Classic Antarctica air-cruise an ideal option, especially when combined with an extended journey through Chile or other South American destinations," opines Juan.

Recognising that India is a market where bookings often happen at the last minute, Juan highlights the challenge of ensuring that Indian guests secure their desired cabins and travel dates. He Juan notes, "Given the small capacity of our ship, availability can be limited for those who book closer to their desired departure. To avoid disappointment and ensure the best possible experience, we strongly recommend that Indian travellers plan their Antarctic journey at least a year in advance."

Antarctica21's air cruise model is particularly well-suited to Indian travellers. By bypassing the challenging Drake Passage, they offer a more comfortable and time-efficient journey, reducing the overall trip duration from the typical 13 days to just eight days. Juan also shares, "To enhance the experience for our Indian guests, we have made several thoughtful adjustments. Our onboard menu will soon feature popular Indian dishes, and we have taken steps to ensure that our guests are comfortable after their long journey to Punta Arenas."

The future of Antarctic exploration is poised for growth as a premier travel destination. Antarctica21 anticipates that India will play a significant role in this expansion, with more Indian travellers seeking to experience Antarctica's unique wildlife and dramatic landscapes.





NCL breaking new ground in cruise offerings

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) is committed to providing immersive and flexible travel experiences, aiming to meet their global clientele's evolving diverse needs and preferences. With TTJ, Manoj Singh, Country Head, Norwegian Cruise Line, highlights the cruise line's strategic focus on expanding its appeal to Indian travellers with new itineraries and innovative ships. While emphasising various aspects of NCL's offerings, he also discusses efforts to foster partnerships with the travel trade to address challenges, ensuring a seamless journey for all guests that goes beyond just the cruise.

Prashant Nayak

Norwegian Cruise Line is seeing increased interest from Indian travellers in the outbound and fly-cruise sectors. They are expanding itineraries to top destinations like Europe, the Mediterranean, and Alaska to cater to this demand. Their newly launched 2026 Europe collection features more voyages with limited or no sea days, immersing guests in each destination entirely. Highlights include 22 overnight stays in cities like Reykjavik, Copenhagen, and Istanbul, along with first-time visits to new ports such as Portree, Leirvik, and Palamós, providing an exceptional European cruise experience. Highlights include 22 overnight stays in cities such as Reykjavik, Copenhagen, and Istanbul, and for the first time, new ports like Portree, Leirvik, and Palamós, offering an exceptional European cruise experience."

Exceptional Experiences for Leisure and MICE

NCL aims to enhance the onboard experience by offering top-notch holidays at sea for leisure travellers and the MICE segment. Manoj says, "Our fleet of 19 contemporary ships that redefine traditional cruising offers a wide array of experiences across six distinct classes, including the Sun, Dawn, Jewel, Breakaway, Breakaway Plus, and Prima Classes, with each class designed to cater to different tastes and preferences."

NCL provides a hassle-free, all-in-one solution for the MICE segment that seamlessly blends business with pleasure. Manoj explains, "Our ships are equipped with state-of-the-art conference facilities, versatile event spaces, and various accommodation options to suit different group sizes and needs. Whether it



▲ Manoj Singh

is a corporate meeting, an incentive trip, or a large conference, our ships are ideal venues for the perfect combination of productivity, entertainment, and relaxation."

NCL offers diverse dining options, from speciality global restaurants to casual dining with stunning ocean views, ensuring memorable experiences. They provide more dining choices



on sea sailing days. Onboard, entertainment and activities cater to all ages and interests, including world-class shows, live music, fitness centres, spa treatments, and race tracks, ensuring something for everyone.

Beyond the ship, their itineraries to over 450 destinations include exclusive stops at their private island, Great Stirrup Cay in the Bahamas, and the resort destination Harvest Caye in Belize, offering unique opportunities for both leisure travellers and MICE groups to explore and engage in enriching experiences. Manoj says, “We understand the importance of accommodating diverse traveller profiles. Our fleet offers a variety of accommodations, from solo cabins designed for individual travellers to our exclusive suites in The Haven—our ship within a ship for those seeking the ultimate in comfort. We also cater to wedding parties of all sizes, providing personalised services to make every celebration special.”

Committed to the Indian Market

NCL’s dedicated Mumbai office ensures that they understand and meet the unique needs of the Indian market, fostering strong partnerships with local travel agents. Manoj says, “To connect with potential customers, we work closely with our valued trade partners in addition to participating in travel expos such as SATTE each year.”

NCL is also doubling down on its investment in the travel trade, fostering strong partnerships and collaborations through its ‘Partners First’ initiative to focus on maximising its reach in India. “We provide innovative tools and resources to help our partners increase their selling potential, such as the Book-A-BDM platform, which allows seamless communication with our regional Business Development Managers (BDMs) through various channels. Our Norwegian Central Asia platform is a comprehensive knowledge hub, keeping our partners updated on the latest trends and developments while offering access to NCL University (NCLU), our award-winning travel agent training programme,” informs Manoj.

Manoj further adds, “Our promotional efforts highlight the diverse itineraries and destinations available across our 19 ships, including the innovative Prima Class vessels. We are significantly expanding our offerings in Europe, reflecting the Indian market’s preference for



more immersive travel experiences. With 11 embarkation ports across 10 different European countries, including the brand-new homeport of Helsinki, NCL allows travellers to begin and end their journey in the location that best suits their European travel aspirations. We are excited to introduce the new European ports this season, enhancing our offerings.”

The cruise line’s PSAs also provide valuable insights into market trends and customer preferences, significantly aiding Norwegian Cruise Line in shaping and curating its cruise offerings. To cater specifically to Indian food preferences, they have introduced Indian dishes and added more vegetarian options on several of their ships. With guests increasingly seeking value for money, NCL’s ‘Free At Sea’ programme offers significant savings and convenience with a range of upfront inclusions.

The Prima Class: Revolutionary Ships

Following the successful launch of Norwegian Prima in 2022—the first of six vessels in their revolutionary Prima Class—and her sister ship Norwegian Viva in 2023, which offers breathtaking Mediterranean itineraries, NCL is now looking forward to 2025.

Manoj is very excited about what NCL offers to cruisers across the world in the years to come. He says, “Next year, we will debut Norwegian Aqua, featuring the world’s first hybrid rollercoaster and waterslide, the Aqua Slide-coaster, and a Glow Court, a digital sports complex that transforms into a nightclub after sunset. The ship will feature Sukhothai for authentic Thai cuisine, Planterie for plant-based delights, and Swirl, a cosy global wine bar.

Enhanced dining includes expanded spaces at Hasuki and Cagney’s Steakhouse, while Palomar returns with refreshed décor. Guests can also enjoy a greater variety of spacious suites, including the two-story Duplex Suite in The Haven.”

Norwegian Aqua will feature attractions from the Prima Class, including The Drop, a 10-story free-fall slide, and immersive VR experiences. The final two Prima Class ships, due in 2027 and 2028, will use green methanol to enhance sustainability. NCL is also investing in fuel-saving technologies such as Waste Heat Recovery, HVAC upgrades, and LED lighting to reduce their carbon footprint.

Enriched CruiseTour Experiences

At NCL, they are continually expanding their offerings to provide guests with new and immersive experiences. Recently, they introduced several new itineraries and pre-cruise land programmes, including the addition of Lisbon, Portugal, to their lineup. This destination joins iconic cities in its CruiseTour programme, such as Athens, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Istanbul, London, Paris, Reykjavik, Rome, Venice, and Tromso. Manoj notes. “With our CruiseTours, guests can enjoy an all-inclusive package that combines the cruise with guided land tours, hotel stays, and transfers, allowing them to fully explore each destination before or after their voyage. We aim to offer our guests a comprehensive and seamless travel experience beyond just the cruise. This approach reflects our commitment to providing meaningful and flexible travel experiences tailored to the diverse preferences of our guests.”

While NCL is poised to offer extraordinary journeys for Indian travellers with its diverse ship offerings, Manoj highlights that one of the main challenges in the outbound cruise sector is the long wait time for visa appointments, which can discourage potential travellers. To address this, they are closely collaborating with their travel partners to guide and support guests through the visa process. Additionally, they are advocating for faster visa processing to make outbound and fly-cruising more accessible and hassle-free for Indian travellers.





Avalon Waterways strengthens ties with Indian market to boost presence and appeal

Avalon Waterways remains steadfast in its commitment to excellence, continually expanding its global reach. Varesh Chopra, Managing Director, Avalon Waterways, South Asia and the Middle East, offers key insights into what distinguishes Avalon in the river cruising industry. His perspectives highlight Avalon’s unique approach to river cruising and its strategic focus on strengthening its presence in the dynamic Indian market and beyond.

Sonika Bohra

Avalon Waterways offers exceptional river cruises with unique and innovative features like the large 'Panorama Suites', 'Open-Air Balcony', and 'Comfort Collection Beds' with sweeping views. Avalon Waterways’ commitment to customer preferences includes increased health-focused and sustainability efforts while sailing across the world, including Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America.

Revolutionising River Cruising

Avalon Waterways has established a strong reputation for pioneering the concept of 'Relaxed Luxury,' rooted in the customer-focused and high-quality standards of its family-owned business. This commitment to excellence is consistently reflected in both their onboard services and on-the-land experiences. Varesh further explains how Avalon has perfectly balanced the physical aspects of their ships with the exceptional service provided by their crew. “Just like any other travel experience, there is always the hardware (as in our case, our ships and their features) and the software (our excellent crew and service staff) on board. Around 20 years ago, when we entered the river cruise space brimming with aging ships and outdated experiences, we were determined to infuse fresh perspectives



▲ Varesh Chopra

into this unique style of discovering destinations, and we did just that. Avalon has now brought in the most modern fleet of ships, including their award-winning Suite Ships. These innovations have positioned our river cruising concept as unparalleled and difficult to surpass in the industry.”

Delivering Unmatched Luxury

Varesh also highlights the specific features and amenities of Avalon Waterways ships that travellers find most impressive. “Our

die-hard cruisers (a fast-growing tribe) find the on-board ambiance fresh and inviting, contemporary and classy, and akin to a boutique hotel-inspired luxury experience. This is accomplished through our young and modern fleet, thoughtful public spaces, as well as the design of the suites—not to mention the views and vistas we allow them to savour from the comfort of their private spaces.

Avalon deliberately builds a lesser number of suites in the same space that others pack in more, and that allows for a more spacious stateroom and a larger bathroom for the guests. Varesh exclaims, “Guests love it. This leads to more space and more relaxation as there are fewer people on board and a more indulgent experience.”

There is a strong sense of pride and confidence when Varesh further mentions, “Our cruisers are always choosers, as we offer 'Flexible Dining' options on board, both in terms of timings and dining venues. The food is always fresh and gourmet, prepared by a highly experienced F&B team. There are multiple choices for included sightseeing excursions that suit different tastes, as well as our now-so-popular 'Active & Discovery' sailings that offer even more of the active and fun quotient to adventurous guests on board.”

Expanding Global Appeal

Avalon Waterways caters to the diverse needs and expectations of travellers from different regions. Speaking of India and the South Asia market, Varesh explains, “With our rising popularity in this region, we have made a deliberate effort to include more South Asian and Asian crew members on board, who bring a deep understanding of our travellers' unique needs and preferences. Their insight has been invaluable, helping us provide tailored solutions that resonate with our guests. This approach has successfully attracted not just FITs but also groups, making Avalon Waterways the preferred choice for those seeking to sail, explore, and celebrate together.”

The Rhine, the Danube, and the newly introduced Douro are the most popular among Avalon's European River selections. On the other side of the globe, Galapagos, Irrawaddy, and the Nile are favourites, too, with discerning guests. Avalon Waterways previously offered river cruises on the Ganges. On this, Varesh especially mentions, “Our Ganges cruises were not in operation for the 2024 sailing



Avalon Visionary Panorama Suite

season. We are looking forward to the right opportunity and timing to restart, as, post-pandemic, we re-prioritised our plans for the entire portfolio of rivers. Of late, the Indian authorities have been talking a lot about boosting and supporting the river cruising potential on the Indian rivers, and we are currently tuned in to the developments very keenly.”

Pioneering Sustainability

When it comes to river cruising, it is crucial to deploy the "right products" while ensuring that the river ecosystem is always

protected. Avalon is charting an ambitious course towards zero emissions and sustainability in every aspect of cruising. Their state-of-the-art fleet of 'Suite Ships' and top-of-the-line technology limit energy consumption and emissions. Avalon's waste and recycling programmes reduce the environmental footprint, save water, and foster a sustainability culture among crew and guests worldwide. “This is just the beginning of what we have planned to protect our planet,” assures Varesh.

India Inclined

Avalon Waterways recently hosted a River Cruise Symposium and a weeklong FAM trip on the River Danube for Indian trade, signifying the importance of the Indian market. For the River Cruise Symposium, they specially flew in a professional and senior Cruise Director who took care of their guests while they cruised on any of the rivers from our European portfolio. Varesh optimistically says, “There cannot be anything better than this—you hear directly from the GM of the ship services, and you do not need any more convincing. This also provides the Cruise Directors an opportunity to understand and appreciate our market requirements even better and convey the same to our central cruise operations. The three days spent together yielded valuable insights that will significantly enhance the growth of the river cruising market.”

For those who have the opportunity to sail with Avalon Waterways, experiencing it firsthand truly makes all the difference. Varesh emphasises, “Seeing is always believing! Getting aboard Avalon Waterways isn't a far-fetched dream for any of our supporting agents. The entitlement levels to the FAMs are very exciting and easy. One gets to witness a completely new style of travelling and discover unseen destinations, and that too with the best brand experience on the rivers. It cannot get better than this.”





Pool friends



Show

From Southeast Asia to the Middle East

Resorts World Cruises enhancing the fly-cruise experience for Indian travellers

Resorts World Cruises, a pioneer in innovative hospitality at sea, continues to expand its offerings, including the highly anticipated Resorts World One homeporting in Dubai. Naresh Rawal, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Resorts World Cruises (South Asia and the Middle East), oversees the strategic leadership and operational management in both regions and is dedicated to enhancing fly-cruise experiences and overcoming operational challenges in the growing Indian market.

Prashant Nayak

Resorts World Cruises has been a pioneer and trendsetter in luxury cruising. They offer fresh, innovative experiences with a diverse range of global cuisine, entertainment, and themes, ensuring a cruise experience like no other. At present, Resorts World Cruises operates two ships, the flagship Genting Dream and the Resorts World One.

For Unforgettable Voyages

Resorts World Cruises launched on June 15, 2022, with the luxurious Genting Dream, a 3,352-passenger, 150,695-gross-tonne ship from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur (Port Klang). This magnificent vessel offers thrilling activities, gourmet dining, and opulent accommodations. Resorts World One complements this with premium amenities and diverse cuisine, promising a boutique lifestyle and entertainment voyage through the Arabian Gulf and beyond starting in November this year. For the ultimate luxury, both ships feature The Palace—a private all-suite enclave with an exclusive restaurant, sundeck, gym, and 24-hour European-style butler service.



▲ Naresh Rawal

Resorts World Cruises offers exciting itineraries to some of the best and most exotic locations.

Boosting Fly-Cruise Opportunities

For Resorts World Cruises, the fly-cruise

segment, especially from India, remains one of their key contributors to the business. Naresh says, “Demand has been strong and positive for our fly-cruise to Singapore on the Genting Dream with our two- and three-night itineraries to Kuala Lumpur, Penang, and Phuket. We are also creating new choices and boosting demand with new itineraries to the Gulf, with Resorts World One homeporting in Dubai and commence sailing from November 1, 2024. These include the two-night Sir Bani Yas Weekend Cruise with departures on Fridays; the three-night Oman Cruise to Khasab and Muscat departing on Sundays; and two-night Doha Cruise departing on Wednesdays from Dubai.” With regular flight connectivity from India to Dubai, travellers can visit multiple places with the convenience of a cruise on Resorts World One.

Naresh is also excited to begin a new chapter with Resorts World One homeporting in Dubai to sail to the Gulf in November. He says, “We had started various campaigns across multiple platforms to create awareness about the convenience of a fly-cruise from India, especially with

frequent flight connectivity to Dubai. We are making strong inroads as more people become aware of the benefits and value of a fly-cruise to the Gulf. Travellers can visit multiple destinations on a cruise with us without the hassle of booking multiple accommodations, transportation, etc., at each destination. We are also enhancing our onboard offerings to cater to the Indian market, from entertainment to dining to onboard activities. In addition, we are working very closely with travel partners to promote Dubai as one of the next fly-cruise destinations."

Elevating MICE Events at Sea

Resorts World Cruises is seeing growing interest in MICE and corporate events on their ships. However, leveraging their vast experience and expertise, they offer a comprehensive, one-stop solution for MICE events at sea. This seamless service covers everything from accommodations and dining to customising onboard events, all while sailing to premier destinations. This creates convenience for planners without going through multiple sources. Naresh further mentions, "We also create special thematic cruises to cater to different groups, such as Bollywood concerts and parties. As an international cruise line homegrown in Asia, we know and understand Asian culture with all its subtle nuances. For example, for our Indian passengers, our ships provide certified vegetarian and Jain cuisine, which we know is important."

Overcoming Challenges

As the outbound cruise market in India continues to grow, there are several operational challenges to address. Despite increasing demand, cruise penetration remains relatively low, particularly in the fly-cruise segment, highlighting the vast potential for expansion. Reaching new customer segments and raising awareness

about the benefits of fly-cruise options is a key challenge. Naresh reflects on the other challenges, stating, "While the potential for growth in India's cruise market is immense, we are actively working to overcome barriers such as flight arrangements and visa processes. Our focus is on educating potential travellers about the fly-cruise experience and expanding our reach to tap into this promising market."

Empowering Partners

In this digital age, striking the right balance between 'hardware' and 'software' is important for Resorts World Cruises. Utilising cutting-edge technology, they are dedicated to enhancing every aspect of their guests' journey—from the initial check-in to the final disembarkation. This commitment extends to optimising onboard services, such as payments and cabin checkouts, to create a smooth and integrated experience. "In addition, we are actively working on improving our guests' connectivity at sea," emphasises Naresh.

Meanwhile, both PSA and cruise specialists continue to play an important role in promoting fly-cruises for Resorts World Cruises. Naresh emphasises, "As mentioned, we work very closely with our partners to regularly provide training and ensure that they have the latest marketing tools and financial support to promote our brand. Importantly, we encourage our partners to join our familiarisation cruises so they can experience cruising first-hand to promote effectively."

Sustainable Sailings

Regarding sustainability, Resorts World Cruises remains committed to sound environmental practices, in which a high standard of responsibility has been established to preserve the environment in which they operate. These include



Genting Club VIP Lounge

increasing energy efficiency, conserving fuel and water, reducing solid waste generation, increasing recycling, protecting marine life, and preventing oil pollution. Naresh further adds, "We also strive to contribute towards the communities we call onto by ensuring shore excursions support local businesses and offer eco-friendly activities with low carbon emissions such as jungle tracking, cycling, walk tours, etc."

Resorts World Cruises strives to create a luxurious resort experience at sea, blending tradition with modernity. As a dynamic cruise brand with deep Asian roots, it offers guests a tailored journey with personalised cruising experiences enriched with various international adventures. Travellers can expect a sophisticated voyage, exploring the most exquisite destinations across Southeast Asia and, now, the Middle East.



Palace Restaurant, Genting Dream



Genting Dream

Singapore reinforces its role as a premier hub for exceptional cruising in Asia

With a focus on enhancing infrastructure, expanding offerings, and catering to Indian travellers, Markus Tan, Regional Director for India, Middle East, South Asia, and Africa (IMESA), Singapore Tourism Board (STB), showcases Singapore's evolving role in global cruise tourism.

Prashant Nayak

Southeast Asia is ideal for year-round cruising with its tropical climate and calm waters. The region is culturally rich and diverse in destination offerings, with vivid contrasts between old and new, boasting some 25,000 islands and 41 UNESCO World Heritage sites. Singapore located in Southeast Asia is also well-positioned to be a major cruise hub in Asia, with its geographical location, world-class cruise infrastructure, and excellent air connectivity. Every year, they welcome new cruise brands and ships to their shores, adding to the vibrant pipeline of deployments.

A Premier Maritime Destination

Singapore has two cruise ports: the older Singapore Cruise Centre at The Sentosa Harbourfront and the Marina Bay Cruise Centre, which opened in 2012. The Marina Bay Cruise Centre's capacity to accommodate two mega ships simultaneously makes it one of the largest cruise terminals in Asia. However, both centres are excellent jump-off points to explore many of Singapore's top sites after docking here.

Despite already having top-notch infrastructure, Singapore is very proactive about enhancing and advancing its cruise tourism industry. Markus says, "Looking ahead, too, we are committed to advancing cruise tourism and ensuring our infrastructure is future-ready. We will continue to enhance our cruise offerings and support our industry partners. Ongoing improvements to port facilities and efforts to expand our cruise ship deployment pipeline will further strengthen Singapore's position as a leading cruise destination in Southeast Asia."

Preferred Cruise Destination of Indians

Cruises are experiencing a significant surge



▲ Markus Tan

in popularity in the Indian market, making Singapore a top preference for Indian travellers due to its strategic location, year-round cruising season, excellent air connectivity, efficient port infrastructure, and world-class attractions. Singapore Port is also an excellent gateway to the Malay Peninsula. "India is our second-largest cruise source market, with over 100,000 Indian travellers visiting Singapore for cruises in 2023, representing nearly 25 per cent of our global cruise International Visitor Arrivals (IVA)," informs Markus.

STB Leads Southeast Asia Cruise Development

To cater to this growing demand, STB and their travel trade partners are implementing targeted strategies, including exclusive deals, to offer Indian cruise passengers' exceptional value

and experiences, encouraging repeat visits and fostering long-term loyalty. Markus shares, "We have successfully partnered with major cruise lines such as TUI Cruises, Marella Cruises, and Silversea Cruises to establish seasonal homeports in Singapore, significantly boosting traffic and enhancing our cruise offerings. Notably, Singapore is home to major brands like Resorts World Cruises, Royal Caribbean International, and the upcoming Disney Adventure in 2025, a 208,000-gross-tonne ship with a capacity for around 6,700 passengers and 2,500 crew members. This five-year partnership with Disney Cruise Line marks their debut in Asia and solidifies Singapore's role as a gateway to Southeast Asia."

Singapore: A Dynamic Destination

While Singapore is a promising fly-cruise market for Indian travellers, Markus highlights Singapore's dynamic evolution as a top-tier destination. He mentions, "The island features iconic attractions, a packed calendar of lifestyle events like the Singapore Grand Prix, Singapore Food Festival, and Christmas Light Up, along with a vibrant culinary, shopping, and nightlife scene."

Singapore is constantly enhancing its tourism experiences, and now Indian visitors can explore the recently added Sensoryscape on Sentosa Island. In late 2024, Resorts World Sentosa will host the interactive art exhibition "Harry Potter: Visions of Magic," making its debut in Asia. Early 2025 will bring the new Singapore Oceanarium, three times the size of the current S.E.A. Aquarium. Additionally, Universal Studios is introducing a new Minion Land Zone. Nature enthusiasts can discover the latest addition at Mandai Wildlife Reserve: Bird Paradise, Asia's largest bird park, home to approximately 3,500 birds.



Valid Till 30th Sep'24

Price Per Person In USD

Hotel Name	TWN	CNB
Admiral Plaza	207	122
Fortune Pearl	215	129
Gateway Hotel	215	122
Ascot	221	135
Fortune Grand	223	129
Sea View	229	135
Royal Ascot	235	122
Premier Best Western	243	127
Omega	249	143
Arabian Courtyard	260	122

Optional Tours On Sharing Basis

Particular	Per Adult	Per Child
Upgrade To Marina Dhow Cruise	USD 10	USD 10
Burj Khalifa - 124 floor with	USD 61	USD 53
Museum of Future Ticket with Transfers- Slots Timings & Rates Subject to availability	USD 55	USD 55
Dubai Frame	USD 32	USD 28
Abu Dhabi City Tour + Ferrari World Standard Pass OR Warner Bros With Transfer	USD 104	USD 104
Abu Dhabi City Tour + Sea World Abu Dhabi Standard Pass With Transfer	USD 110	USD 110

Inclusions

- 04 Nights Stay With Breakfast.
- Return Dubai Airport Transfers
- Dubai Half Day City Tour On Sharing Basis
- Dessert Safari With BBQ Dinner On Sharing Basis
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TÜRKİYE



At the Crossroads of Two Continents

Spanning both Europe and Asia, Türkiye is a remarkable blend of ancient Greco-Roman heritage, the Byzantine Empire, and the legacy of the Ottoman Sultans. This convergence creates a progressive Türkiye that proudly celebrates its modern achievements while seamlessly co-existing with its rich historic past. An ancient empire that presented the tulip to the modern world, where the motifs of the carnation, tulip, and pomegranate still inspire its artists and weavers to create pieces of art that adorn many a living room mantle worldwide. A recent trip to Türkiye took us to Istanbul and beyond to discover more.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

A Turkish Airlines flight to Istanbul serves as your gateway to Türkiye. After breezing through immigration and connecting onwards, we arrived at our destination city, Antalya. We were hosted at the grand Ali Bey Resort Sorgun for two days to experience its warm hospitality, luxurious accommodations, and expansive surroundings while exploring the historical attractions in the surrounding areas.

Side: Hidden Jewel on the Turkish Riviera

Side, the first on our itinerary, is an ancient Greco-Roman city steeped in time, offering a unique and charming experience for every visitor. Nestled on the Turkish Riviera, Side is a captivating blend of ancient history combined with sun, sea,

and sand, attracting both history buffs and beach lovers.

Side is a major tourist draw with its beautiful sandy beaches perfect for sunbathing and swimming in the crystal-clear, lapis blue waters of the Mediterranean. Its historical monuments and temples are a treasure trove for history enthusiasts. The ancient Temple of Apollo offers panoramic views of the Mediterranean, while Agora, once a bustling marketplace, now co-exists with a small market



offering a mix of traditional Turkish shops and modern boutiques.

The harbour area is particularly known for its shops and lively atmosphere. Side offers a wide range of accommodation options, from budget-friendly guesthouses to boutique establishments. The city is dotted with charming cafes and restaurants serving delicious Turkish cuisine and international delicacies, providing the perfect ambience for a leisurely meal.

Archaeological excavations continue to this day, with more remnants from the past being discovered. The ancient theatre, a colossal amphitheatre, is still used for performances today.

Hierapolis: City of Mysticism and Healing

We drove down to Hierapolis, a UNESCO World Heritage City. The name 'Hierapolis' means 'holy city,' suggesting the religious significance it held in ancient times. The city's roots go back to the Phrygians, who dedicated it to the Anatolian mother goddess Cybele. Later, it transformed into a Greco-Roman city nestled around thermal water travertine terraces. Under Roman rule, this city flourished as a prominent cultural and religious centre, benefiting from its thermal springs and strategic location.

Hierapolis has one of the largest necropolises, a vast cemetery extending over 2 km that offers a fascinating glimpse into the funerary practices of ancient times. Elaborate tombs and sarcophagi highlight the diverse beliefs and social status of the city's occupants.

Hierapolis features impressive ruins of imposing public buildings and extensive infrastructure. The public thermal baths, renowned for their hot springs, were not just for relaxation but also believed to have miraculous healing powers. The city was dotted with numerous temples dedicated to various deities, including the prominent Temple of Apollo, making it a major pilgrimage site. It was built over a geological fault line from which arose poisonous gases, believed to be the breath of the God of the Underworld 'Hades' This area was called the Plutonium.



Pamukkale

Priests were said to be immune to the deadly gases and could enter the Plutonium unharmed to perform rituals. The mystery of the Plutonium captivated visitors for centuries.

Pamukkale: The Cotton Candy Cliffs

After visiting the Antique Pool, also referred to as Cleopatra's Pool, at Hierapolis we took a short golf cart ride to the Cotton Candy – calcium carbonate travertine terraces of Pamukkale. Standing on the viewing deck, the first look at the icy landscape before us was mesmerising.

What appeared to be cotton candy or snow was actually a natural formation created by the hot spring waters, rich in calcium carbonate, that emerged from the earth and cascaded down the hillside. As the water cooled, the calcium carbonate deposited, forming the distinctive white travertine terraces. This process has been ongoing for thousands of years, creating the surreal landscape we see today. The terraces glistened under the sun, their pristine whiteness contrasting with the clear blue pools that dotted the slopes. It was as if nature itself had sculpted a masterpiece, each terrace a testament to the ceaseless flow of time and the earth's ever-changing beauty.

For centuries, people have believed in the healing powers of the thermal waters of Pamukkale. The water is rich in minerals, including calcium, magnesium, and

bicarbonate, which are believed to have curative powers for Skin conditions, Rheumatism and Arthritis. Soaking in the warm, mineral-rich waters of Pamukkale can be a truly relaxing and rejuvenating

experience. We spent our night at the boutique Lycus River Thermal Hotel located just around 6 km from Hierapolis.

Ephesus: The City of Artemis

A two-hour bus ride from our hotel at Pamukkale brought us to the gates of the ancient and grand Greco-Roman city of Ephesus. Once a thriving metropolis, it exerted immense cultural and economic influence. The city, dedicated to the Greek goddess Artemis, was inseparably linked to her worship. The Temple of Artemis, regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, was a pilgrimage site for devotees from across the ancient world, its burning down by a deranged individual, 'Herostratus', is a recorded act of vandalism in history.

Our guide advised us to wear good cushioned walking shoes and to carry drinking water, hats, and sunblock to fully explore and appreciate the length and breadth of this great city. Though now in ruins, Ephesus displays layers and layers of history, each corner a testament to its glorious past. As we navigated its stone-lined streets, alleys, temples, theatres, and the famed Library of Celsus, we were transported back in time, marvelling at the grandeur that once was. The city, even in its silent decay, spoke volumes of the life and vibrancy it once harboured.

The Roman influence is evident in imposing structures like the Temple of Hadrian, the Great Theatre, capable of seating 25,000 spectators, and the Library of Celsus, one of the most iconic landmarks. The highlight of exploring Ephesus is the meticulously curated and vividly presented digital journey through the city's ancient history at the Ephesus Experience Museum. This immersive experience offers a compelling and realistic portrayal of Ephesus's rich past.

Izmir: Gem of the Aegean Coast

A one-hour drive post-lunch from Ephesus brought us to the coastal town of Izmir, a vibrant city on the Aegean coast of Türkiye. Formerly known as Smyrna during the Greek, Roman, and Byzantine eras, it grew into a key trading port under Ottoman rule.



Library of celsus in Ephesus



The Cistern Basilica



Hagia Sophia

Post the Turkish War of Independence, it was renamed Izmir. Now, it stands as a modern metropolis, beautifully blending contemporary vibrancy with its historical legacy.

We checked into the strategically located Swissotel Buyuk Efes – Izmir, within walking distance to the waterfront and the Ataturk Monument. Our evening included a short visit to Alacati, a traditional seaside town with stone houses, narrow streets, boutique hotels, street-side restaurants, and shops. Our dinner was a seafood extravaganza at the Fahrinin Yeri Seafood Restaurant, washed down with Turkish Raki.

We checked out of our hotel and headed to Asansör, a historical building in Izmir’s Karataş quarter. Built in 1907 by a wealthy Jewish banker, Nesim Levi Bayraklıoğlu, the two elevators within the building carry people and goods up the steep cliff. It offers the best views overlooking the Aegean coastline of Izmir.

We enjoyed the sweeping vistas of Izmir, sipping on chilled pints of Efes Beer, and then headed to the airport for a 75-minute

flight to Istanbul, our final destination.

Hello Istanbul! Exploring the Historical Peninsula

Upon arrival, we checked in at the Swissotel The Bosphorus Istanbul, our host for the next two days. This grand hotel, perfectly situated next to the majestic Dolmabahce Palace, exudes elegance and charm. The highlight of our stay was undoubtedly the 16th Floor Terrace Bar, ‘16 ROOF’. Here, we enjoyed the most stunning, unobstructed view of the Bosphorus and the historical peninsula, with its magnificent ancient buildings.

The historical peninsula of Istanbul can be termed the heart of this thriving city. It is home to the most important historical monuments, palaces, mosques, and bazaars. Hagia Sophia, a Byzantine church transformed into a mosque after the Ottoman conquest,



Hierapolis

tells tales of yore, with Christian frescoes and mosaics adorning the walls and ceilings alongside Arabic calligraphy. The Blue Mosque, with its elaborately painted walls, ceilings, and domes, is a must-visit.

The Basilica Cistern, Istanbul’s largest underground reservoir, was historically used for water storage and now attracts visitors with its grandeur. Adjacent to the Blue Mosque, the Topkapi Palace served as the official residence and administrative centre of the Ottoman Sultans, offering a glimpse into their opulent lifestyle and governance.

A visit to Istanbul is not complete without experiencing the Grand Bazaar, one of the largest covered markets in the world. It has 61 covered streets and over 4,000 shops offering Turkish delights, dry fruit, carpets, ceramics, pottery, glassware, perfumes, leather garments, spices, souvenirs, and more. Approximately 300,000 visitors visit the Grand Bazaar daily.

A trip to Türkiye is deeply fulfilling, as it allows you to unravel layers of history and culture, each visit leaving you yearning to return and explore more.



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Maldives' Tourism Renaissance

Insights from MMPRC's CEO Ibrahim Shiuree

As bilateral relations between the two nations continue on the path to improvement, the Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC) is amongst the organisations leading efforts to revitalise tourism from the Indian market. In an exclusive interview, Ibrahim Shiuree, CEO and Managing Director, MMPRC, provided a comprehensive overview of the strategies and initiatives designed to reverse the recent decline in Indian tourist arrivals.

Vartik Sethi

With an ambitious vision and a multifaceted approach, Shiuree outlined the corporation's plans to not only reclaim India as the top source market but also explore untapped opportunities across various sectors.

Achievements Amidst Market Fluctuations

Ibrahim Shiuree articulated the organisation's strategic endeavours to reinvigorate Indian tourist arrivals. The Maldives has achieved significant milestones, particularly in February, recording the highest daily tourist influx with 10,213 arrivals. Notably, on June 27, the country welcomed its one-millionth visitor for the year, surpassing expectations by several weeks.

India, an essential source of outbound tourists and one of the major source markets for the Maldives has contributed significantly to these figures. As of July 28, 2024, the Maldives had welcomed over 71,000 tourist arrivals from the Indian market, accounting for a 6.2 per cent market share of total tourist arrivals.

Addressing the Indian Market's Decline

Acknowledging the decline in Indian tourist numbers, which now ranks as the sixth largest source market, Shiuree attributed this to seasonal variations and heightened competition from other destinations. He emphasised MMPRC's proactive



▲ Ibrahim Shiuree

measures, including targeted marketing campaigns and roadshows, designed to stimulate interest and an uptick in arrivals from India.

Collaborative Ventures with the Indian Government

Shiuree highlighted recent high-level engagements with the Indian Ministry of Culture, revealing a mutual eagerness to diversify the tourism portfolio beyond traditional avenues. Discussions encompassed innovative sectors such as film, education, and health tourism, reflecting a shared commitment to exploring and capitalising on these nascent opportunities.

Strategic Roadmap for 2024

Looking ahead, MMPRC aspires to restore India's status as the top source market, a position it held for three consecutive years. Upcoming trade shows, including those in Bangalore and other Indian cities, are expected to play a pivotal role in regaining lost momentum. Shiuree outlined plans for an array of promotional activities,

including familiarisation trips (FAM trips) and extensive roadshows in tier-two and tier-three cities across India.

The Maldives is also witnessing an upsurge in arrivals from unconventional markets, with Poland now featuring in the top ten source markets and Bangladesh showing substantial growth.

Expanding Wedding Tourism

Wedding tourism, particularly among Indian visitors, has emerged as a significant focus for MMPRC. Shiuree emphasised the Maldives' popularity as a premier wedding destination and highlighted efforts to make the process seamless for international couples. The MMPRC plans to expand its offerings and facilitate easier arrangements for wedding ceremonies, catering to the growing demand from Indian and global markets.

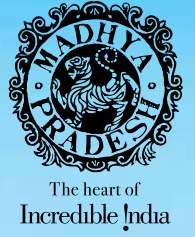
Simplified Processes and Future Prospects

Shiuree reassured potential visitors of the ease of travel to the Maldives, with a straightforward visa-on-arrival process facilitating a 30-day stay. He stressed that enhancing flight connectivity remains a priority, contingent upon generating sufficient demand through diversified marketing efforts.

Beyond traditional sectors, MMPRC is set to delve into sports tourism, education tourism, and the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) sector. The Maldives aims to foster academic exchanges and research collaborations, alongside promoting wellness and culinary tourism, aligning with global trends.

Commitment to Sustainability

Sustainability remains a cornerstone of MMPRC's strategy. The Maldives as a destination has underscored the importance of eco-tourism and sustainable practices, focusing on the development of underutilised islands to enhance the Maldives' tourism offerings while preserving its natural heritage.



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Step into Madhya Pradesh, an offbeat multi-specialty destination of first choice for an escape that has captured the hearts of millions. With a staggering three-fold increase in tourist footfall in 2023 compared to the previous year, it has reached a monumental 112.1 million visitors. Indulge in the adrenaline-fuelled festivals of Madhya Pradesh held at its captivating destinations, which offer a plethora of exciting land, water, and air-based activities along with all-year-round luxury glamping experiences.

A Symphony of Festivals

Madhya Pradesh isn't just a state; it is a vibrant canvas where tradition, adventure, and luxury blend seamlessly. These fairs and festivals interweave the souls of different destinations and drench them in variegated colour. The events are meticulously crafted by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board to promote the destinations, increase tourist footfall, and generate local employment opportunities.

Jal Mahotsav

A SPLASH OF ADVENTURE - DEC/JAN

Unleash your inner adventurer at India's largest water carnival. From heart-pounding water sports to serene stargazing, this festival offers an unforgettable experience. Explore nearby historical gems like Maheshwar and Mandu to complete your journey to Hanuwantiya. Must visit this super-adventurous carnival held at the composed waterscape of Indira Sagar Dam in Khandwa district to relax from the bustling life of the city.

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Nearest Railway
Khandwa • 49 Km

Gandhisagar Festival

BEYOND THE ORDINARY STAY - SEPTEMBER

Sail through crystal-clear water, indulge in thrilling activities, and immerse yourself in the wilderness at the Gandhisagar Festival. Discover the rich history and the cultural marvels of Mandsaur, including the renowned Chaturbhuj Nala rock shelters, Pashupatinath Temple, and the ancient temple dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Nearest Airport
Indore • 287 Km

Nearest Railway
Bhawanimandi • 49 Km.

Chanderi Festival

A FUSION OF HERITAGE & ELEGANCE - OCTOBER

Experience the perfect blend of tradition and modernity at the Chanderi Festival. Immerse in a world of exquisite handwoven textiles, explore architectural marvels and indulge in thrilling activities. Discover Chanderi beyond the festival and visit architectural wonders like the Chanderi Fort and Koshak Mahal. The royal weaves and vibrant prints at Pranpur Village, the first Craft Handloom Village in India, make it a perfect destination to explore.

Nearest Airport
Gwalior • 250 Km

Nearest Railway
Lalitpur • 37 Km

Kuno Forest Festival

UNLEASH WILDERNESS WITH COMFORT - OCTOBER

Explore the stunning Kuno National Park and experience the thrilling safaris, treks, and adventure activities. Immerse yourself in nature and experience the magic of the wilderness. Try not to miss out on being a guest of nearby attractions here worth exploring, like Palpur Fort or Garhi, Amet Fort, Maitoni Fort, Kair-Khoh and Gravity Pipeline, Dev Kho, Aamjhir, and Dobkund Waterfall. This festival is a blend of the beauty of the wild with local traditions, offering adventures and tranquil experiences in the lap of nature.

Nearest Airport
Gwalior • 176 Km

Nearest Railway
Shivpuri • 70 Km

Asego addresses both traditional and new-age travel risks

Asego is leading the way in travel insurance with innovative products that meet the needs of modern globetrotters, offering comprehensive global coverage. Dev Karvat, Founder and CEO, Asego, highlights the company's strategic alignment with both inbound and domestic travel trends, providing tailored travel insurance solutions for today's travellers. Asego's commitment to diverse travel experiences and its emphasis on trust and reliability in the travel trade ensure its prominence in the dynamic travel landscape.

Prashant Nayak

Asego's steadfast commitment to delivering exceptional value and reliability ensures that they are well-positioned to meet the evolving needs of the travel insurance market.

Revolutionary New Product

The company is adapting to the evolving trends in inbound travel and is keen to shape the future of this segment. Dev says, "As India's leading travel assistance and insurance provider, we have been keeping a close eye on the way inbound travel is evolving and have curated a new product—'Anywhere to Anywhere' travel assistance and insurance for today's globetrotters. This revolutionary product will allow travellers, including NRIs and foreign nationals, to depart from and arrive at any destination in the world without worries. For instance, whether travellers are departing from New York, Dubai, or Sydney and heading to any corner of the globe, they are comprehensively protected against unforeseen medical emergencies and risks such as trip cancellations, interruptions, loss or delay of checked-in baggage, and more.

Dev adds, "Looking at the upsurge in the number of overseas tourist arrivals in India, it is evident that this product will soon prove to be a travel essential for today's travellers."

Exclusive Domestic Travel Covers

With the rise in domestic travel, Asego is responding to this trend by implementing new covers to enhance the travel experience within the country. Dev mentions, "I believe that the rising demand for domestic travel is a testament to India's growing economic prosperity and our burgeoning spirit of exploration. At Asego, we have been following this trend closely and are committed to protecting travellers' adventures and enhancing their experience with travel protection solutions exclusively curated for domestic trips and staycations."

In line with the Indian government's initiative to promote domestic tourism, Asego has developed tailored travel assistance and insurance solutions for domestic travellers. Their domestic travel protection includes essential assistance services such as emergency medical assistance, concierge assistance, and domestic roadside assistance, along with exclusive insurance benefits that protect travellers against unexpected medical and non-medical emergencies. Dev further reiterates, "Our bouquet of offerings includes exclusive covers for high-risk adventure sports activities and self-drive trips, perfect for those seeking thrilling experiences or exploring remote locations. Additionally, we have crafted coverage that protects travellers against new-age risks such as gadget loss, credit/debit card fraud, etc., ensuring that every aspect of their trip is comprehensively addressed."



▲ Dev Karvat

Strong Agent Partnerships

What distinguishes Asego from other travel insurance providers is its dedicated focus on the travel sector, ability to customise offerings based on deep insights into travel risks, and strong partnerships with travel agents. This is what makes Asego the preferred choice for travel agents. Dev further explains, "This vision and the close ties with our partners allow us to step into the travellers' shoes, gauge their requirements, and curate innovative and relevant products and services for them. Today, we proudly serve our clients with more than 200 customised products catering to leisure, business, and student travel."

Asego constantly analyses the risks involved while travelling and accordingly designs exclusive offerings like their global assistance services to alleviate these risks. On a final note, Dev says, "We also conduct regular engagement and training programmes for our business partners to aid upselling and cross-selling. We are happy that this has positively reflected in their ancillary services revenue. Most importantly, it is the trust our travel agent partners have bestowed on us that gives us the edge."





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WelcomHeritage Bringing Luxury to Offbeat Destinations

In a world where travel preferences constantly evolve, WelcomHeritage stands as a symbol of timeless luxury and heritage preservation. Since its modest beginnings in 1997, the brand has grown into a collection of 35 distinct properties that offer more than just a stay; they provide a journey through India's royal history, natural beauty, and cultural richness. As travel trends shift toward authenticity and responsibility, Abinash Manghani, CEO, WelcomHeritage, shares how the brand is redefining luxury travel for the modern adventurer.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

WelcomHeritage distinguishes itself by providing authentic experiences deeply rooted in India's rich heritage. Abinash shared, "Our unparalleled collection of palaces, forts, havelis, wildlife, and nature retreats in offbeat destinations with immense cultural and historical significance offer guests a unique opportunity to immerse themselves in royal splendour and timeless charm." This commitment to authenticity allows travellers to experience the grandeur of India's history, while also enjoying modern comforts.

Amplifying Impact

Strategic partnerships and active participation in international travel fairs have been instrumental in expanding WelcomHeritage's global reach. Abinash said, "Strategic partnerships with travel agencies and participation in international travel fairs amplify our brand's global reach. Our heritage properties transport guests to a bygone era characterised by royal hospitality, while our hill stations offer absolute serenity amidst nature's beauty, and spiritual seekers find solace in our properties near sacred sites. Each WelcomHeritage hotel offers a curated experience that resonates with the individual traveller."

Consistent Service Standards

Maintaining high service standards remains a foremost priority at WelcomHeritage. Regular quality audits are conducted across all properties to ensure that the highest standards of service are upheld. "We utilise advanced technology through a centralised system for reservations, operations, and guest feedback, leveraging a globally recognised Online Reputation Management (ORM) platform to closely monitor performance and enhance service delivery," Abinash pointed out. The brand's emphasis on digital commerce



▲ Abinash Manghani

and online tools has further enhanced its ability to showcase unique tourism offerings and expand its global reach.

Local Community Development

WelcomHeritage is firmly dedicated to sustainable tourism and the empowerment of local communities. It offers guests immersive and authentic experiences that extend beyond luxurious accommodations. Abinash shared, "Our collaborative approach integrating the local community into our workforce fosters the economic vitality of the communities in addition to promoting local culture. We are actively engaged in several sustainability initiatives, such as implementing eco-friendly practices, reducing waste, conserving water, and supporting renewable energy projects." This commitment to sustainability is reflected in the brand's efforts to preserve heritage while providing contemporary comforts. The integration of local culture into

the guest experience ensures that every visit is not only luxurious but also meaningful and responsibly curated.

Key Traveller Trends

Abinash observed, "We are witnessing a growing demand for personalized, immersive, and sustainable travel experiences, along with an increased focus on expanded and enhanced wellness offerings. At WelcomHeritage, we remain committed to meeting these emerging trends by creating tailored itineraries that reflect the individual preferences of our guests. Furthermore, our commitment to sustainability is evident through adopting eco-friendly initiatives throughout our properties." One of the brand's recent initiatives includes the introduction of EV charging stations at select properties, further underscoring its commitment to sustainability.

The brand also offers a diverse range of activities designed to immerse guests in the local culture and environment. "From cooking classes and heritage walks to wildlife safaris, our offerings enable guests to engage deeply with their surroundings, ensuring that each visit is memorable and aligned with contemporary travel aspirations. WelcomHeritage is dedicated to providing meaningful experiences that cater to the evolving desires of modern travelers," Abinash added.

Expanding the Portfolio

The post-pandemic resurgence in demand for hill and wildlife destinations has influenced significant growth. Recent additions include WelcomHeritage Cheetahgarh Resort in Jawai, Badi Kothi in Prayagraj, Elysium in Shimla, Parv Vilas in Sola, Ayatana in Ooty, Grand in Srinagar, and Santa Roza in Kasauli. This expansion reflects a dedication to offering guests a more comprehensive array of experiential options.

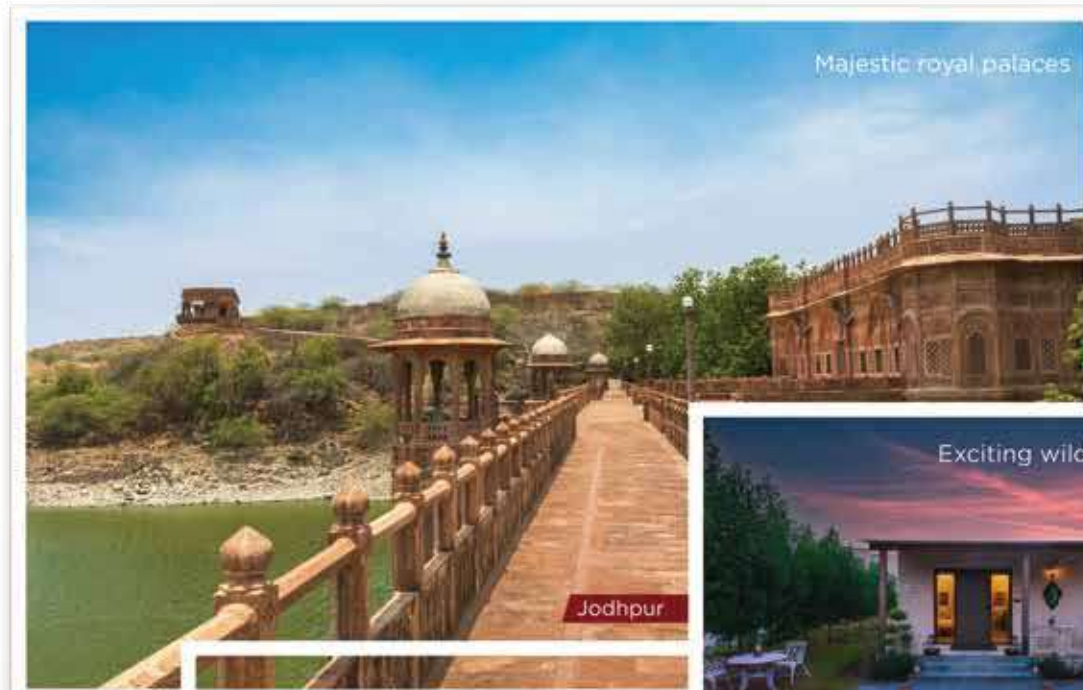




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Etrav continues to elevate its B2B strategies with advanced technology solutions

Henil Ruparelia, Managing Director, Etrav Tech Limited, highlights the company’s impressive growth and strategic advancements. Headquartered in Surat with operations in Mumbai, Etrav has expanded globally, embracing innovative technologies and enhancing B2B offerings, thereby solidifying its position in the travel industry.

Prashant Nayak

Etrav Tech’s B2B website provides comprehensive travel services, including the Flights API, Holiday Packages API, Hotel API, White Label/XML, Bus API, and Visa. The company’s Flights API is its top revenue-generating product. With over 35,000 registered travel agents, including 10,000 unique transacting agents, the tech-focused company emphasises automation to streamline fare bookings for its agents.

Expansion with Innovations

Under the leadership of Henil, Etrav has experienced exponential revenue growth, exceeding 100 per cent from FY 2021–22 to FY 2022–23. On the 2024 outlook, Henil says, “Our business has nearly doubled from what we did in 2023 because we have onboarded a team of 100 people for sales. We are now present across India in every state with three levels of sales hierarchy, which has boosted our business. Moreover, we started selling our hotels in December last year, so our hotel numbers have also greatly improved, and we are increasing somewhere around 30 to 35 per cent monthly with the hotel business.”

Initially, Etrav focused solely on-air products but has now shifted its strategy to aggressively develop non-air products. With their air product business well-established and automated, Henil is concentrating on new product development. Henil notes, “Our industry is increasingly service-integrated. We’ve launched a 24/7 WhatsApp chatbot that allows agents to connect seamlessly with every department. Additionally, we are developing tools to help agents promote their businesses, including media creation tools for photos, reels, and advertisements. Agents will also have access to Lead Management Services, where they can generate leads by developing their own promo sections. We expect to deploy this new system around Diwali, to enhance agents’ business growth by 20 to 30 per cent.”

Looking ahead, Etrav plans to integrate AI into its system, with implementation

slated for the second quarter of 2025. This will include an inbound voice AI chatbot and an outbound sales AI chatbot, supporting over 35 languages.

Strategic Moves to Enhance B2B Offerings

Expanding its horizons, Etrav recently acquired the UAE’s Eagle Crest DMC. This strategic move diversifies Etrav’s portfolio and aims for global expansion, which is poised to enhance its market presence and industry growth. “Henil shares, “Following the acquisition, we expanded by establishing three additional offices under our Eagle Crest DMC in Bali, Vietnam, and Thailand, bringing our total to four international locations. Each office is staffed with local operations teams who maintain strong relationships with hotels. We also have a dedicated fleet at every office, enabling us to efficiently manage ground operations for travellers from India. This allows us to offer top-tier service and competitive rates.”

Recently, EaseMyTrip.com made a strategic investment in E-Trav consisting of 4.94 per cent (post-allotment) of the paid-up equity share capital of Etrav. The primary objective of this strategic investment was to strengthen EaseMyTrip’s B2B segment offerings, catering to the diverse requirements of its corporate clients. In this collaboration, Henil says, “After flashing this news across India, we have a good market boost. We are still in talks about collaborations and going aggressive. EaseMyTrip’s strategic focus on diversifying into non-air segments aligns perfectly with our vision for expansion and innovation. By combining EaseMyTrip’s investment with our tech capabilities and B2B expertise, we aim to deliver unparalleled services to corporate clients.”

Agent Outreach

So how does Etrav reach out to agents? Henil explains, “We utilise two primary strategies to connect. Our contact centre team first engages directly with travel agents, evaluating their needs and



▲ Henil Ruparelia

determining how we can provide enhanced travel solutions compared to their existing suppliers. Second, our field sales team, present in every state, visits agents to analyse their business and buying patterns, ensuring we provide better solutions than competitors. This dual approach helps us effectively cater to agents’ needs and stay ahead in the market.”

Celebrating Excellence

Etrav and Eagle Crest DMC recently celebrated their highly anticipated Award Show in Ahmedabad, honouring over 500 of their outstanding agents for their exceptional dedication and performance in the travel industry. Henil says, “We are thrilled to recognise the remarkable agents who have been crucial to our success this year. Their dedication, hard work, and innovation have driven our growth. This event was our way of expressing gratitude and celebrating their achievements.”

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Small Luxury Hotels of the World (SLH), founded in 1991 and headquartered in the UK, is renowned for its luxury boutique hotels across the globe that offer personalised experiences with local flair. Mark Wong, Senior Vice President - Asia Pacific, SLH, who drives the brand's growth and visibility in the region, recently visited India. TTJ interacted with Wong about the exciting hotel brand and its foray into the Indian market.

Prashant Nayak

Small Luxury Hotels of the World offers independently spirited hotels that suit travellers with a strong sense of individuality. SLH provides high-quality, personalised experiences with boutique properties in prime locations, reflecting local culture and flair. Their diverse collection ranges from cutting-edge design hotels and city centre retreats to historic mansions and remote islands. Imagine luxury at rustic fishermen's huts, woodland treehouses, rainforest retreats, alpine chalets, and desert ranches. Each one is unique, offering secluded, discrete options with the highest standards of luxury and guest well-being. SLH ensures that no two stays are the same. The SLH team has personally visited, verified, and vetted each of their 570 hotels across more than 90 countries.

Distinctive Approach and Benchmarks

Mark oversees over 130 hotels across the Asia-Pacific region, from India to Japan and South Korea to Fiji. While most SLH properties are in Europe and the Americas, each hotel typically averages 50 rooms, positioning them in a unique segment. Mark explains, "Our hotels stand out because they are not cookie-cutter. We focus on quality and personalised service—our 'hardware.' The 'software' involves customisation, showcasing the destination, and delivering



▲ Mark Wong

an authentic, localised experience. This is how we differentiate our product."

Mark explains that SLH typically selects hotels with no more than 50 rooms to maintain an intimate, personalised experience. However, in markets like China and Thailand, where 50 rooms might be considered small, SLH occasionally accommodates hotels with more rooms. Though they have a property in Thailand with 200 rooms, they aim to keep the benchmark between 50 and 100 rooms. He notes that

the personal touch often diminishes as the number of rooms increases.

Mark adds, "We work closely with property owners from a business perspective. Many of our hotels are multi-generational, developed with the owners' passion for hospitality. For example, an owner might share their personal art collection to enhance the guest experience. We aim to introduce guests to the owners and their back-stories, making their stay more than just a check-in and check-out transition. The personal touch extends beyond the experience and destination, reflecting the owners' creativity and vision. We amplify how the hotel came about, rather than how big the rooms are."

To offer diverse experiences across different regions of a country, SLH analyses requests for various properties to see if they meet this unique requirement. For instance, travellers to Thailand now seek more than just Bangkok; many are exploring rural areas as well. SLH aims to highlight the country's rich diversity and extend this approach to the broader regions, moving beyond city centres to showcase a range of experiences, from rural to hills and beaches.

SLH's Venture and Expansion into India

In Asia, SLH has its largest cluster in China with 20 hotels, followed by Thailand with 18 hotels, 15 in Japan, and about 10 in

Malaysia (the number of hotels change due to membership expirations). They also have a notable 11-room property in Islamabad. SLH recently announced its expansion into the Indian market through a strategic partnership with the MRS Group of Hotels. The union of SLH and MRS includes integrating SLH's carefully selected collections, like Suryagarh Jaisalmer, Narendra Bhawan Bikaner, and Mary Budden Estate Binsar. On the development, Mark said, "We are thrilled to re-establish the SLH brand in India with a distinguished brand partner like the MRS Group of Hotels. Their brand philosophy aligns perfectly with our conscious travel journey towards sustainability and conservation. We look forward to sharing their bespoke experiences through our story-telling channels and global distribution networks."

Mark sees India as a significant growth opportunity, highlighting its vast cultural and natural diversity, and is particularly interested in exploring the northern regions, such as more of Rajasthan. During his current visit to India, he also participated in a familiarisation trip with another hotel group to Rajasthan to explore additional opportunities. He also disclosed that SLH has signed its second member in India, Brij Hotels, marking another significant development. SLH will first evaluate the properties in the Brij Hotels portfolio to ensure they meet SLH's global standards and appeal to an international audience before onboarding them. Brij Lakshman Sagar Pali is the first hotel to join SLH.



Suryagarh Jaisalmer

SLH plans to expand into Southern India next year, aiming to offer a broader range of experiences across the country and provide diverse regional options for customers. Although 80 per cent of SLH's business is generated through the travel trade, Mark pointed out that despite frequent enquiries from the trade regarding India, there is a need for more hotels in the region. Thus, SLH is now actively working to address this gap by increasing its presence in India. However, besides the hotels, entering the Indian market requires considering additional factors such as accessibility, connectivity, and visa requirements for inbound guests.



137 Pillars House, Chiang Mai

the Global Sustainable Tourism Council's (GSTC) framework. They are sustainable innovators who are community-minded, cultural custodians, and environmentally conscious.

SLH's 'Finest Collection' hotels represent the pinnacle of luxury travel, offering exclusive and extraordinary experiences. These properties are destinations in their own right and consistently push the boundaries of hospitality excellence.

SLH also offers a collection of 240 handpicked villas across Japan, Thailand, Australia, Europe, Africa, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. These villas combine the perks and services of boutique hotels with the privacy of a standalone residence. Wong points out, "These villas with kitchenettes are ideal for Indian travellers, who often prefer to travel with families and groups, providing them with both luxury and privacy."

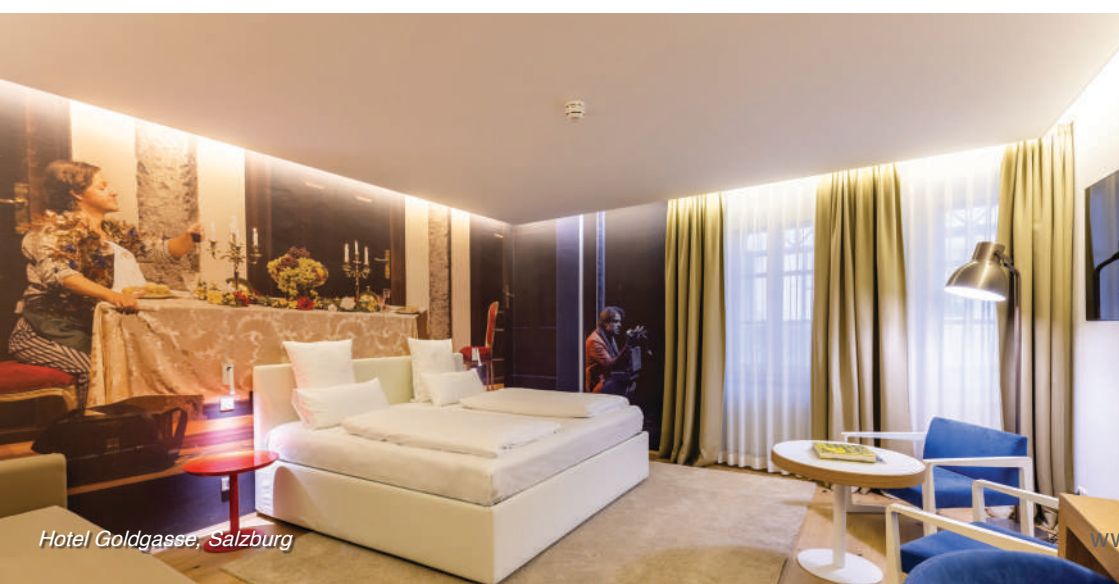
In February 2024, SLH entered into an exclusive strategic partnership with Hilton to expand the global hospitality leader's portfolio with nearly 400 boutique properties from the SLH collection. Guests can now book these properties through Hilton Website, Hilton App and Hilton Worldwide Toll-free Reservations. Hilton Honors members can now earn and redeem their points at participating SLH hotels.

Exquisite Collections and New Partnerships

SLH does not have sub-brands but offers collections of hotels, each curated to meet different standards. Hotels within the 'Considerate Collection' have been handpicked for fulfilling SLH Sustainability Pillars (Environmentally Conscious, Cultural Custodian and Community Minded) that align with



Punta Tragara, Capri



Hotel Goldgasse, Salzburg

With a forward-looking strategy, IndiGo is well-positioned to lead the aviation industry in India

As IndiGo marks 18 years of soaring success, Vinay Malhotra, Head of Global Sales, IndiGo, unveils the airline's dynamic vision for the future. From ambitious fleet expansions to innovative customer experiences, the airline is set to redefine travel in India and beyond. With a robust strategy aligning with India's growing aviation sector, IndiGo aims to connect more destinations and elevate passenger comfort on its journey towards 2030.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Vinay Malhotra

As IndiGo celebrates 18 years of operation, what are the key strategic goals to shape the next phase of growth?

IndiGo is poised for early double-digit capacity growth in FY25, demonstrating our resilience and proactive planning. We are committed to expanding our capacity to meet the growing demand and continue our trajectory of robust growth. Our journey towards 2030, with the goal of doubling in size by the end of the decade, will be further fuelled by our expanding fleet and growing network. This will enable us to further our purpose of "giving wings to the nation by connecting people and aspirations."

As part of the airline's commitment to enhancing customer services and embracing digitisation, IndiGo has recently announced the launch of its much-anticipated loyalty programme, IndiGo BluChip. This new initiative marks yet another significant

step in IndiGo's aim to recognise and reward its most frequent flyers. Further, IndiGo has also announced 'IndiGoStretch' on its busiest and business routes. With IndiGo Stretch, we are creating an option for travellers to enjoy a superior travel experience. IndiGo has also revamped its Passenger Services System (PSS) by introducing a comprehensive digital transformation programme for greater efficiencies in the check-in to the boarding process. All these steps are part of a cohesive strategy for the future.

The economic growth in India has driven an increasing demand for direct connectivity (within India and overseas), a need that we aim to improve even further with our forthcoming aircraft. IndiGo, with its solid foundation of cost leadership and a strong network in India, sees this as a natural progression. By 2030, IndiGo aims to solidify its position as the leading airline in the country.

How does IndiGo manage the complexities of domestic and international operations, and what are its growth aspirations in both segments?

India's air travel market, both domestically and internationally, holds immense potential. Our goal is to cater to this by expanding demand through our increasing international routes and meeting the ever-changing needs of our customers.

While we continue to maintain a strong focus on domestic connectivity, international expansion is also an integral part of our growth strategy. With 88 domestic and 34 international destinations currently in our 6E network, we provide our customers with an unparalleled network within India and abroad. In line with the burgeoning demand, we are delighted to have added capacity to our various destinations internationally, including Tashkent, Almaty, Baku, Tbilisi, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Singapore, etc., as well as announced flights to Jaffna in Sri Lanka, in addition to Colombo.

IndiGo's recent aircraft order enhances our capacity to meet the rising demand across metro cities and our international network. The strategic deployment of A320s enables us to effectively serve routes from metro to regional cities, while the use of ATR aircraft allows for efficient connectivity between regional destinations. To expand further, internationally, IndiGo also ordered Airbus A350-900s and will begin receiving its previously ordered XLRs next year.

How will IndiGo manage and integrate its 1,000-plus new Airbus aircraft into operations in the coming years?

The outstanding fleet order of nearly 1,000 aircraft enables IndiGo to add capacity and introduce new destinations across markets. Over the coming years, the demand is set to grow for both domestic and international travellers, and this order will play a vital role in catering to the growing demand. In addition to increasing frequency on the existing routes, the induction of new aircraft will help us offer

even better connectivity to our customers with new destinations within India and overseas. We are committed to providing hassle-free services to our esteemed customers.

How are IndiGo's codeshare partnerships enhancing travel options, and are there any new ones planned?

IndiGo is continuously working towards increasing its penetration in both domestic and international markets, now serving 122 destinations. We also have codeshare partnerships with Air France, KLM, Virgin Atlantic, Qatar Airways, American Airlines, British Airways, Turkish Airlines, Qantas, and JAL. These partnerships expand our global reach and offer seamless connectivity and convenient, enhanced travel options for passengers. With Qantas, we offer connections via Singapore to Australia. Turkish Airlines allows our passengers to travel to multiple destinations across Europe, North Africa, and the US via Istanbul.

Having established a strong foundation with affordable fares, on-time performance, and hassle-free service, why does IndiGo believe it is time to redefine premium travel in India?

It is interesting to note the quote from our Chief Executive Officer, Pieter Elbers, during IndiGo's 18th-anniversary celebrations: "IndiGo is embarking on a new path of its incredible growth story by introducing a tailor-made business product on the nation's busiest routes. With India's soaring economy and the evolving aspirations of Indian society, we believe it is time for IndiGo to redefine business class in India, increasing the availability of this service for the nation. IndiGo Stretch will provide our customers the on-time performance and hassle-free and courteous experience they can

expect from us, while adding more space and increased priority at a great value for money."

After Stretch Seats and rewards like the IndiGo BluChip Loyalty Program, are there any other upcoming innovations or services IndiGo plans to introduce?

IndiGo is proud to introduce a new feature to make the travel experience more comfortable for our female passengers. This has been introduced based on market research and is currently in a pilot mode, aligning with our #GirlPower ethos. The feature offers visibility of seats booked by female passengers only during web check-in. It is specifically tailored to PNRs with women travellers—solo and those forming a part of family bookings. We are committed to providing an unparalleled travel experience for all our passengers, and this new feature is just one of our many steps.

While IndiGo focuses on giving wings to the nation, does the airline have specific plans or strategies to support and strengthen both inbound and domestic tourism within India?

India continues to develop as one of the world's largest civil aviation markets, propelled by the growth of its economy and the aspirations of its people. Air traffic in India is expected to reach 300 million passengers by the end of this decade. With the goal of doubling in size by the end of the decade, we, too, will continue to expand our fleet and network. Our outstanding fleet order of nearly 1,000 aircraft enables us to add capacity for an extended period. Strengthening domestic operations is a crucial tenet of our growth strategy, and we will continuously focus on adding capacity, destinations, and connections within India as well as overseas.

EGYPTAIR celebrates a year of connectivity and growth on the New Delhi-Cairo Route

In August 2023, EGYPTAIR launched its second Indian route with four weekly flights from New Delhi. One year into operations, TTJ spoke with Amr Ali, Country Manager, EGYPTAIR, about the journey and current offerings.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The Journey So Far

EGYPTAIR operates four weekly flights from Delhi to Cairo. The Delhi-Cairo routes are operated using an Airbus A320neo aircraft that offers a twin-class configuration with 16 seats in business class and 126 seats in economy class. Due to operational requirements, the aircraft type shifts to an Airbus A330 in the winter schedule.

"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. Delhi offers a great scope for official government travel, leisure, MICE, and VFR traffic. We have now included Lisbon, Prague, Zurich, Mogadishu, Djibouti, and Abidjan to our network," informs Ali.

Making Travel Convenient

EGYPTAIR provides Stopover Paid by Carrier (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 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 further shares, "We, as EGYPTAIR, with our partners Bird Travel Group, have started a special service, where EGYPTAIR guests can submit their Egyptian VISA application at our office, and we facilitate the visa in coordination with the Egyptian Embassy. Holders of valid USA, UK, Schengen, Japanese, or Australian visas can also obtain a visa upon arrival at Cairo."

Expanding in Indian Market

Talking about business development activity carried out over the year, Ali mentions, "It is imperative for us to reach out to multiple feeder markets across North India. We visited Chandigarh, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Amritsar, and Raipur, explaining the tourism potential of Egypt and its cultural heritage to industry



▲ Amr Ali

players in these markets. Egypt has much to offer throughout the year, and we look forward to an increased number of visitors between our two countries."

Maha Kumbh 2025



A Divine Confluence of Faith and Culture

Every 12 years, the city of Prayagraj transforms into a focal point of one of the most significant spiritual gatherings in the world—the Maha Kumbh Mela. Rooted in ancient Hindu tradition, this grand festival commemorates the mythological churning of the ocean by the gods and demons, seeking the nectar of immortality. As millions of devotees and pilgrims converge in the sacred city, they are drawn by the promise of spiritual renewal through a ritual bath in the holy waters of the Triveni Sangam, where the rivers Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati meet.

Team TTJ

A Unique Geographical and Spiritual Hub

Prayagraj, strategically located in northern India, holds a distinctive geographical and spiritual significance due to its location just below the Tropic of Cancer. It is believed that the sun's rays here have a direct and potent influence, enhancing the spiritual and healing benefits of bathing in the Sangam's waters during the Maha Kumbh. The confluence is



considered a source of divine energy, believed to have life-enhancing and disease-preventing properties, attracting millions of believers.

Preparations and Provisions

As January 2025 approaches, Prayagraj prepares to host the Maha Kumbh once again. The last event in 2013 saw unprecedented attendees, and the upcoming festival is expected to be even larger and more significant. To accommodate the massive influx of pilgrims, the Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC) has planned an expansive Tent City at Arail Ghat, providing a range of accommodations from basic to luxurious tents, ensuring a comfortable stay for visitors from all walks of life.

This temporary city is not just about shelter; it is designed to support the various Akhadas, traditional monastic orders that play a central role in the Kumbh Mela. Akhadas such as





Mahanirvani, Atal, Niranjani, Anand, Juna, Avahan, and Agni will establish their camps, offering a unique insight into the spiritual and cultural practices that have shaped Hinduism for centuries.

Key Bathing Days of Maha Kumbh

The Maha Kumbh's spiritual journey is marked by nine significant bathing days, known as snans, each carrying profound religious significance. The festival begins on January 13 with the Paush Purnima snan, a day believed to liberate the soul from the endless cycle of rebirth. The next day, January 14, marks Makar Sankranti, the first Shahi snan, which signals the start of the summer solstice—a time of renewed vitality and health.

Following these, other key snans include the Ekadashi snan on January 21, promising blessings of health and prosperity, and the Mauni Amawasya snan on January 29, symbolising the initiation of new ascetics into various monastic orders. Basant Panchami on February 3 marks the final Shahi snan, celebrating the arrival of spring and the hope for a bountiful harvest.

As the festival progresses, pilgrims will also participate in the Ratha Saptami snan on February 4, dedicated to the Sun God, and the



Bhishma Ekadashi snan on February 7, a day honouring Bhishma's revelation of Lord Vishnu's 1,000 names during the Mahabharata. The Maghi Purnima snan on February 12 celebrates the full moon, and the festival culminates on February 26 with the Maha Shivratri snan, a night of vigil and prayer dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Beyond Spirituality

Beyond the spiritual, the Maha Kumbh offers a feast for the senses. A multispecialty food court will introduce visitors to the rich tapestry of Indian cuisine, while various cultural and spiritual activities, including yoga sessions, spiritual discourses, traditional rituals, and evening bhajan performances, provide a holistic experience.

For those seeking adventure, the festival also offers helicopter rides for a breathtaking

aerial view of the Sangam and the sprawling Kumbh Mela grounds, along with options for water sports and other recreational activities. This blend of spirituality and adventure makes the Maha Kumbh a unique event transcending mere religious observance.

Exploring Prayagraj

Prayagraj is steeped in history and spirituality, with several ancient temples adding to its mystique. The Hanuman Temple near the Allahabad Fort, with its 20-foot-long reclining idol, is a must-visit, as is the Narayan Ashram, a tranquil temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. The Mankameswar Temple, known for fulfilling devotees' wishes, and the Kalyani Devi Temple, a revered Shaktipeeth, enhance the city's spiritual aura. The presence of the Shri Venkateshwara Swamy Temple, dedicated to South India's most revered deity, exemplifies the cultural diversity that thrives in Prayagraj.

A Global Spiritual Awakening

As Maha Kumbh 2025 approaches, the city of Prayagraj is poised to once again become the epicentre of a global spiritual awakening, a place where tradition, faith, and culture converge in a celebration of life, devotion, and the eternal quest for enlightenment.



Uttar Pradesh advances Responsible Tourism initiatives with key stakeholders

The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable tourism with a workshop that brought together key industry stakeholders and global experts to discuss responsible tourism.

Team TTJ

The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department organised a Responsible Tourism Workshop on September 3, 2024, to showcase the state's rich cultural heritage and highlight its potential in both responsible and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism. The workshop emphasised the importance of balancing tourism growth with environmental stewardship and community benefits.

Awanish Kumar Awasthi, Adviser to the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, served as the Chief Guest and underscored the state's leadership in global tourism. "Uttar Pradesh is a treasure trove of religious and spiritual tourism sites," Awasthi noted. "The 'One District, One Product' (ODOP) project reflects the uniqueness of our state, strengthening the MSME sector. Tourists flock to places like Agra, Mathura, Kashi, and Ayodhya, boosting local products' visibility on a global scale. As informed tourists, we must differentiate between responsible and irresponsible tourism by treating these places as our own."

Principal Secretary of Tourism and Culture, Mukesh Meshram, highlighted Uttar Pradesh's spiritual heritage, describing the state as a confluence of the Panch Bhoot—sky, air, fire, water, and earth. "Uttar Pradesh has immense potential for religious and spiritual tourism, offering answers to all who seek them," Meshram said. "This is the land where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon and where the timeless love of Lord Krishna is celebrated."

Special Secretary of UP Tourism, Eesha Priya, emphasised the need for sustainable development through responsible tourism practices. "Our goal is to create employment opportunities and promote sustainability by encouraging informed travel choices," Priya stated. "A collective movement towards sustainability can benefit both communities and future generations."

Dr. Harold Goodwin, Head of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT) in London, praised India's potential in responsible

tourism. "Through our partnership with the Department of Tourism and Culture, Uttar Pradesh, we are committed to making the state not only a better place to live but also the best place to visit," Goodwin said. "Our aim is to implement successful responsible tourism practices from South Africa here in Uttar Pradesh."

Uttar Pradesh's Tourism and Culture Minister, Jaiveer Singh, addressed the environmental challenges posed by irresponsible tourism. "Increased tourism is key to economic growth, but it also puts extreme pressure on the environment and resources," Singh remarked. "There is a global need to define and establish responsible tourism. This workshop brings together government officials and private organisations to take the right steps toward making tourism more responsible."

Anuj Wadhwa, Executive Director at the International Convention Promotion Bureau, highlighted Uttar Pradesh's growing potential as a MICE tourism destination. "Uttar Pradesh, with its natural and cultural diversity, is emerging as a formidable MICE destination," Wadhwa stated. "The recent G-20 summit has spotlighted the state's potential. With its rich heritage and historical monuments, Uttar Pradesh could soon become a leading MICE destination."

During the workshop, the Uttar Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (UPSTDC) signed a Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) with Wizcraft Entertainment Agency Pvt. Ltd. to promote the state's historic forts, havelis, and palaces as prime wedding destinations under the "WED IN INDIA" mission. This initiative aims to enhance inbound tourism by identifying and promoting these properties for destination weddings.

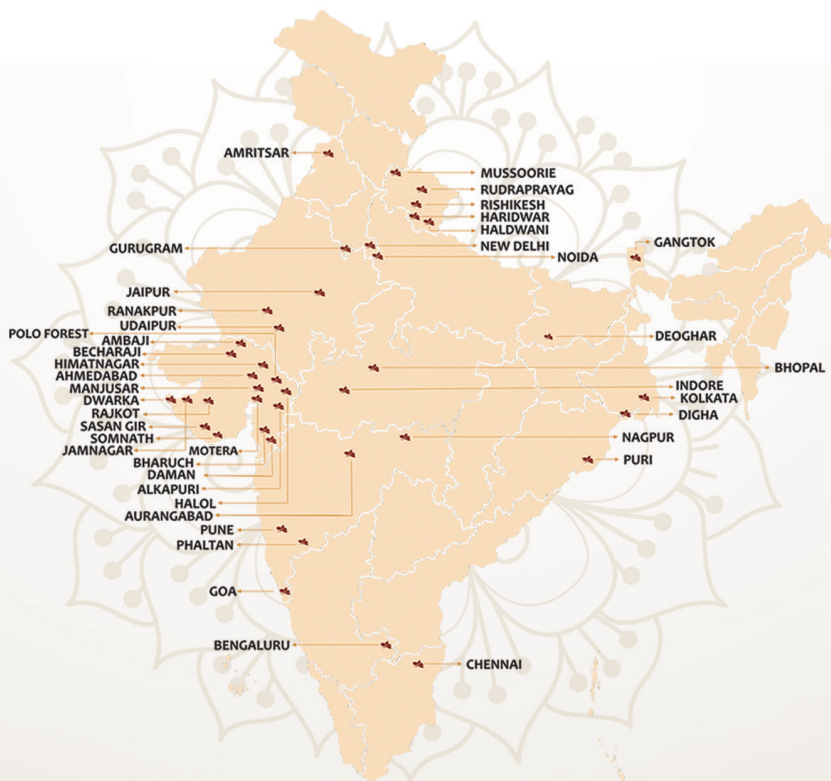
The event also featured a delegation from Vietnam, which toured sites associated with Lord Gautam Buddha in Uttar Pradesh. "Uttar Pradesh is fortunate to have important sites related to the life of Lord Gautam Buddha," Minister Jaiveer Singh commented. "We are continuously developing tourism facilities to attract Buddhist devotees from around the world to experience our hospitality."

Responsible Tourism Workshop in Taj Mahal, Lucknow, witnessed an influencing aura as the influencers from across the nation set ablaze a distinctive sensation of influence and knowledge, followed by their felicitation.



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*Himatnagar | *Surendranagar
*Vardha

The Clarks Hotels and Resorts adapting, innovating, and thriving in a dynamic hospitality landscape

In this insightful interaction with Rahul Deb Banerjee, Chief Operating Officer, The Clarks Hotels and Resorts, he highlights the brand’s strategic growth, commitment to service excellence, and focus on innovation and expanding global reach.

Prashant Nayak

The Clarks Hotels and Resorts has grown significantly across India in recent years, strategically expanding into key markets and emerging destinations. Their evolution includes diversifying their portfolio across 11 sub-brands to cater to a wide range of guests, establishing The Clarks Hotels and Resorts as a trusted name in Indian hospitality.

Domestic and Global Reach

As The Clarks Hotels and Resorts continues to innovate and grow, they stay dedicated to adapting to the evolving preferences of their guests while pursuing their vision of establishing a presence on every continent and embodying the essence of vacation for all.

Most Clarks’ guests are domestic travellers, reflecting the strong trend of Indians exploring their own country. While international tourists represent a smaller segment, they have seen consistent growth, mainly from Europe, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, with interest in our heritage and scenic destinations. Rahul says, “We cater to both segments by offering tailored experiences—convenience and cultural connection for domestic guests, and authentic Indian hospitality with world-class amenities for international visitors. We expect international numbers to rise as travel patterns evolve, but domestic travellers will remain our primary market, driving most of our occupancy.”

Expanding Brands

Over the last two decades, The Clarks Hotels and Resorts has proudly grown to oversee a portfolio of 135 plus hotels today across 11 sub-brands, including The Clarks, Clarks Premier, Clarks Exotica, Villas and Suites by The Clarks, Clarks Inn Suites, Clarks Safari, Clarks Residences, Clarks Inn, Clarks Collection, Clarks Inn Express and aôtel. Rahul shares, “aôtel, is our latest brand, designed for the discerning, contemporary traveller. With its tasteful accommodations and vibrant spaces, aôtel aims to make every stay unforgettable while remaining affordable. Our debut aôtel property in Palampur marks the beginning of an exciting new chapter for The Clarks Hotels and Resorts.”



▲ Rahul Deb Banerjee

In a highly competitive industry, The Clarks Hotels and Resorts distinguishes itself by blending its rich legacy with innovation. “Our heritage of warm, authentic Indian hospitality resonates deeply with guests, offering them unique, culturally immersive experiences that stand apart from more standardised offerings,” emphasises Rahul.

Enhancing Visibility and Service Consistency

Clarks uses a multi-channel marketing strategy to leverage digital platforms, social media, and targeted campaigns to reach a diverse audience to enhance visibility. Their collaboration with travel platforms, influencers, and local communities further amplifies their brand presence and underscores the commitment to the destinations where they operate. Rahul conveys, “Innovation drives our differentiation. By integrating advanced technology, we personalise and monitor guest experiences and streamline operations, ensuring we meet the evolving expectations of today’s travellers. Technology plays a crucial role in maintaining service consistency.”

Maintaining consistent quality of service across their diverse locations is a top priority for The Clarks Hotels and Resorts. On this,

Rahul mentions, “Our approach begins with rigorous training programmes for our staff, ensuring that every team member, regardless of location, embodies the same high standards of hospitality. We invest in continuous learning and development, allowing our employees to refine their skills and stay updated with industry best practices. Furthermore, we foster a strong internal culture of accountability and excellence. Each property’s leadership team is empowered to take ownership of their service quality, and we encourage cross-property collaboration to share insights and best practices.”

Commitment to Community Well-Being

At The Clarks Hotels and Resorts, their success is closely tied to the well-being of the communities they serve. Rahul explains, “We engage with local communities through several key initiatives, including prioritising local hiring and offering equal opportunities to physically challenged individuals. This supports the economy and infuses authentic local culture into our guest experiences. We collaborate with local artisans, farmers, and suppliers, incorporating regional products into our offerings to sustain traditional livelihoods.” Sustainability is at the core of Clarks’ operations, focusing on reducing waste and improving energy efficiency to safeguard the environment.

Expansions and Upgrades

Rahul is excited about several upcoming developments at The Clarks Hotels and Resorts. He says, “We are expanding with new properties in key locations in India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives while focusing on featuring modern facilities and enhanced amenities for both business and leisure travellers.”

Adding on, Rahul shares, “We are also upgrading our existing hotels with smart room features, improved meeting spaces, and advanced technology. Additionally, we are enhancing our wellness offerings with expanded fitness facilities, spa services, and healthy dining options.”

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European Union's Entry/Exit System (EES) to launch on November 10

The European Union's Entry/Exit System (EES) is set to launch on November 10, 2024, as confirmed by EU Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson. She highlighted the importance of the launch, stating that final testing is underway and there is momentum as carriers, operators, and airports prepare for the rollout.

The Entry/Exit System (EES) is an automated IT system that is transforming how non-EU nationals are registered when traveling to European countries for short stays. This system, which covers numerous European countries, is designed to enhance security, streamline border processes, and provide accurate data on the movement of travellers across the EU's external borders.

The EES is in operation across a significant number of European countries, including Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. For the purposes of this system, a 'non-EU national' refers to any traveller who does not hold citizenship in an EU country or Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, or Switzerland.

The system applies to travellers making short stays, defined as visits up to 90 days within any 180-day period. This duration is calculated collectively across all participating European countries.



Sterling Holiday Resorts unveils 'Navrasa – Intimate Weddings by Sterling'

Sterling Holiday Resorts has unveiled 'Navrasa' – Intimate Weddings by Sterling. This meticulously crafted initiative aims to enhance destination wedding experiences nationwide, offering the option to reserve the entire resort exclusively for your cherished day.

As the name signifies 'Navrasa' embodies the essence of fundamental human emotions – laughter and celebration, bitter-sweetness, wonder, peace, and above all love – seamlessly woven into the fabric of a wedding journey. This initiative offers exclusive resort bookings for weddings, incorporating the essence of human emotions like laughter, celebration, and love into the wedding journey. Guests can choose from Sterling's award-winning resorts, set in scenic locations such as hills, beaches, and heritage spots, for events like pre-wedding shoots, ceremonies, honeymoons, and anniversaries.

Navrasa also ensures a tailor-made selection of services for couples looking for their once-in-a-lifetime event. Choicest of gourmet specials to thematic presentations and décor, organising traditional and customary rituals, live streaming of wedding ceremony, pick-up and drop services for guests, and a host of bridal services, including therapeutic treatments at the signature Subuthi Spa, etc. A dedicated manager will ensure smooth planning, allowing families to enjoy the event stress-free.



Uttarakhand Tourism launches first state-sponsored homestay booking portal

Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) has launched an online booking portal for booking homestays in the hill state. Bookings for homestays in Uttarakhand can now be made through www.uttarastays.com.

The homestay owners can integrate their homestays on the platform by providing information about the property and signing an agreement for the same. They need not pay any fees or share revenue.

The portal shall provide authentic information about Homestays to the general public and provide a seamless mechanism to book the homestays online. Uttarakhand Tourism has close to 5,000 Homestays registered with the Department. Along with subsidies, training is also being provided to homestay owners in various skills and services to enhance their customer service skills.





Affordable fares



On-time performance

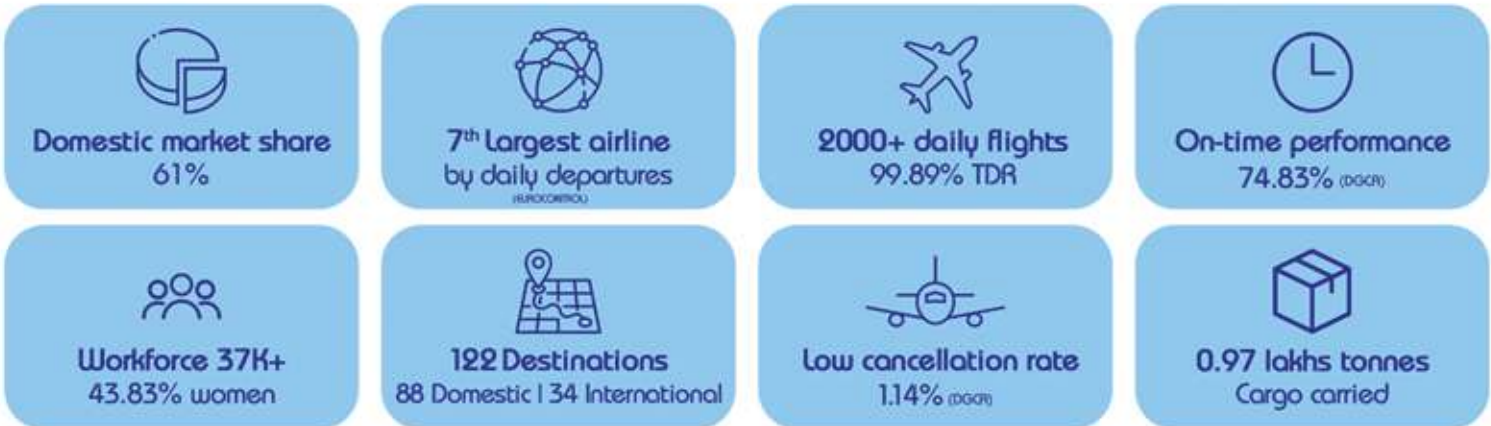


Courteous and hassle-free service



Unparalleled network

6€ footprint Q1 FY 2025



One of the largest training academies in the world with 2,200+ staff trained every day

Our customers	Our fleet				
<p>27.8 million</p> <p>+6% vs Q1 FY2024 (26.2 million)</p> <hr/> <p>107 million customers in FY2024</p> <hr/> <p>3,25,925 customers a day on 18th May, 2024</p>	<p>382</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>196 A320 neo</td> <td>98 A321 neo</td> <td>45 ATR</td> <td>2 B777</td> </tr> </table> <hr/> <p>3 A321 freighter 38 A320 ceo</p> <hr/> <p>Order backlog of ~977 aircraft (including ATR and A350) <small>(% of 30th June 2024)</small></p> <hr/> <p>Average age of our aircraft is 4.75 years <small>(including wet-leased aircraft)</small></p>	196 A320 neo	98 A321 neo	45 ATR	2 B777
196 A320 neo	98 A321 neo	45 ATR	2 B777		

Financial performance Q1 FY 2025



ESG footprint FY 2024

Environment	Social	Governance
<p>Fleet modernization (CEO - NEO) 15% reduction in Fuel usage ~ 78% neo fleet</p>	<p>Strong focus on DEI with 200+ PwD employees</p>	<p>Fostering ethics and integrity through 6€ code of conduct</p>
<p>Ground support equipment automation 5% in carbon emissions</p>	<p>Committed to IATA's 25 by 2025 initiative</p>	<p>Risk management and emergency response framework</p>
<p>CO₂ emissions 19% per ask in FY24 vs. FY16</p>	<p>IndiGoReach - 41k Women empowered</p>	<p>First airline in India to release ESG report</p>

Air India introduces Airbus A350 aircraft on Delhi-London Heathrow route

Air India has introduced its brand-new Airbus A350-900 aircraft on the Delhi-London Heathrow route. This twice-daily service is the first deployment of the ‘new Air India’ experience on long-haul flights. The Air India A350 cabin product includes a fresh three-class configuration offering full-flat beds in Business, a new Premium Economy experience and the latest generation seats in Economy.

Air India’s A350 aircraft features 28 private suites with full-flat beds in Business, 24 seats in a dedicated Premium Economy cabin offering extra legroom and other enhancements, and 264 spacious seats in Economy.

All seats on the A350 come with the latest-generation Panasonic eX3 in-flight entertainment system and HD screens that offer more than 3000 hours of entertainment content from around the world.

Air India started inducting the A350s earlier this year, which have since operated flights within India and on short-haul international routes. The A350-900 will replace the currently



deployed Boeing 777-300ER and Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner on 14 of 17 weekly flights. As a result, an additional 336 seats will be available on the Delhi-London Heathrow route each week.

Vistara to cease operations on November 11

Vistara is all set to embark on a new chapter in its journey as it merges into Air India, creating a world-class airline with limitless possibilities. The airlines ceased bookings on September 03, 2024, customers will no longer be able to make bookings with Vistara for travel on or after November 12, 2024. All Vistara aircraft thereafter will be operated by Air India and bookings for the routes operated by these aircraft will be redirected to Air India’s website. Vistara will continue to take bookings and operate flights as usual till November 11, 2024.

As the merger process moves ahead, regular updates will be shared with customers on the websites and social media channels of Vistara and Air India, and via e-mail. This includes information



on web check-in, lounge access, ancillary services, and all other possible touchpoints.

Yorker Holidays expands international presence with new office in Bali

Yorker Holidays Services, a fast-growing B2B consolidator specialising in leisure travel and cruises, has expanded its global footprint by opening a new office in Bali. Headquartered in New Delhi, the company is known for its expertise in providing comprehensive travel solutions and has established itself as a key player in the industry.

The opening of the Bali office marks another significant milestone in Yorker Holidays’ expansion strategy. “For a long time, we have been sending a lot of business to Bali, but the rapidly evolving market dynamics dictate that a presence in key markets is essential to maintain the quality of service delivery and offer competitive pricing,” said Srivastava. “The opening of our Bali office is a step in this direction, and we are confident that it will strengthen our ability to serve our partners and

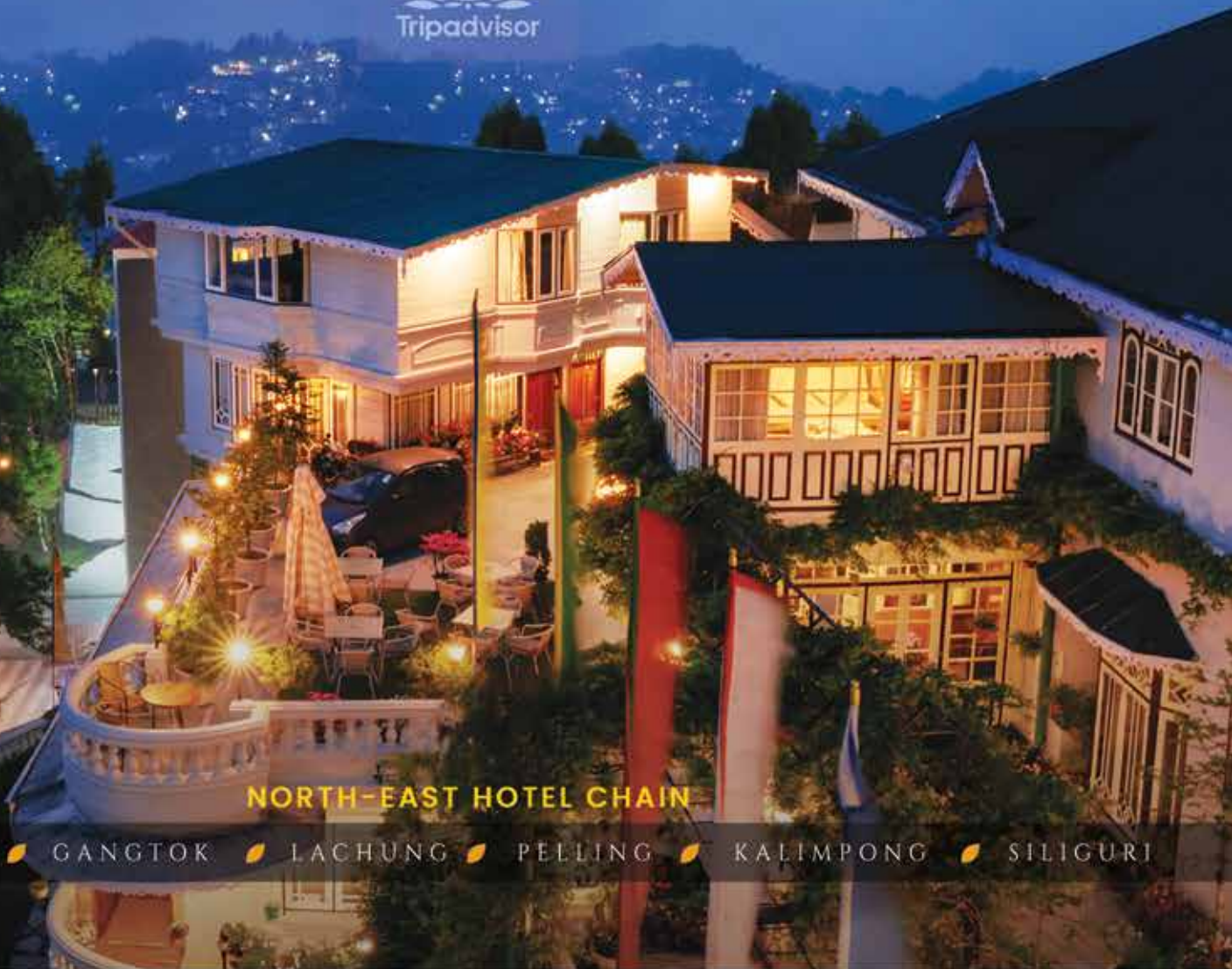


clients more effectively.” He also hinted at future expansions, complementing the company’s existing offices in the Maldives, Malaysia, and London.



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Dep. dates 2024:
Dec 07, 14, 21, 28
Dep. dates 2025:
Jan 04; Feb 15, 22; Mar 01



7 Night Desert Days from Dubai

from only **US\$509** pp/cruise

Dubai - Khasab - Sir Bani Yas - Abu Dhabi - Doha - Bahrain - Dubai

Dep. date 2024:
December 09, 16, 23, 30
Dep. date 2025:
February 17, 24



7 Night Desert Days & Grand Prix

Qatar Grand Prix:

Doha - Dubai - Khasab - Sir Bani Yas - Abu Dhabi - Doha

from only **US\$609** pp/cruise

Dep. date 2024: Nov 30

Abu Dhabi Grand Prix:

Dubai - Khasab - Sir Bani Yas - Abu Dhabi - Doha - Abu Dhabi - Dubai

from only **US\$609** pp/cruise

Dep. date 2024: Dec 02



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Abu Dhabi - Doha - Bahrain - Dubai

Dep. dates 2024:
Dec 13, 20, 27
Dep. dates 2025:
Jan 03; Feb 21, 28



4 Night Desert Days

from only **US\$339** pp/cruise

Dubai - Khasab - Sir Bani Yas Island - Abu Dhabi

Dep. dates 2024:
Dec 09, 16, 23, 30
Dep. dates 2025:
Jan 06; Feb 17, 24; Mar 03



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Bathing Dates

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
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| 2. Makar Sankranti (1st Shahi Snan) | - 14 th January, 2025 |
| 3. Mauni Amavasya (2nd Shahi Snan) | - 29 th January, 2025 |
| 4. Basant Panchami (3rd Shahi Snan) | - 03 rd February, 2025 |
| 5. Achala Saptami | - 04 th February, 2025 |
| 6. Magh Purnima | - 12 th February, 2025 |
| 7. Shri Mahashivratri | - 26 th February, 2025 |

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