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TTJ Travel Trade Journal

Vol. 14 | Issue 12 | October 2024 | Pages 60 | ₹150

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Owned and published by: Ravi Sharma, Editor & Publisher, A-100, Upper Ground Floor, Nangal Dewat, New Delhi - 110070 and printed on his behalf at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., Okhla Industrial Area, New Delhi - 110020.



Dear Friends,
Welcome to the October issue of TTJ!

This month, we explore the inspiring stories of future leaders reshaping family-run travel businesses. Through our thought-provoking articles, we highlight their bold visions and innovations, showcasing how the next generation is transforming the industry.

We also take you on a journey through captivating destinations like Bintan and Vietnam, uncovering the unique experiences they offer. Our coverage extends to the latest in airlines, as well as domestic and international hotels, giving you a complete picture of today's travel landscape.

We're thrilled to share highlights from the IIFA 2024 Awards held on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, where we had the privilege of serving as a media partner. This issue also brings you the buzz from RDTM 2024, IATO Convention, Spectacular Saudi, and the TAAI and ATOAI elections, along with our very own TTJ TRAVMART.

We hope you find this issue both informative and inspiring!
Happy Reading!

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Uttarakhand Tourism launches Mount Kailash Darshan from Indian soil



In a significant development for Shiva devotees, Uttarakhand Tourism has successfully conducted the first pilgrimage for the darshan of Mount Kailash, Adi Kailash, and Om Parvat from Indian territory. The move comes after the cessation of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in 2020, leaving many devotees in search of an alternative.

The new route, made possible through the combined efforts of the Government of Uttarakhand, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and Border Roads Organisation (BRO), allows pilgrims to view the sacred Mount Kailash from Old Lipulekh Peak in Uttarakhand. The first batch of pilgrims began their journey on October 2, 2024, and witnessed the majestic Mount Kailash on October 3. The discovery of a point at Old Lipulekh Peak from where Mount Kailash is clearly visible was made earlier this year, and Uttarakhand Tourism made the necessary arrangements to facilitate a package tour covering all three sacred sites from Indian soil.

The pilgrims also visited Adi Kailash from Gunji in Pithoragarh on October 4 before returning. The tour package includes helicopter transport from Pithoragarh to Gunji, along with accommodation at Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN) facilities or homestays, costing Rs. 80,000 per tourist including GST.

Bookings for the 4-night/5-day package can be made on the KMVN website at 'kmvn.in'.

Air India Express completes merger with AIX Connect



The Air India Group has successfully completed the operational integration and legal merger of Air India Express Ltd and AIX Connect (formerly AirAsia India) into a larger low-cost carrier under the unified brand 'Air India Express' with airline code IX. This milestone is part of the group's transformation plan, which includes merging four airlines into two, with Vistara set to merge with Air India by November 12.

The merger of Air India Express was completed in less than a year, involving the harmonisation of operational manuals and transfer of Air Operator Certificates (AOCs), in close collaboration with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and support from other key stakeholders. Vikram Dev Dutt, Director General, DGCA, handed over the updated AOC to Alope Singh, Managing Director of Air India Express, in New Delhi.

The integration will allow Air India Express to focus on growth, with a fleet size of 88 aircraft, expected to surpass 100 by the end of the financial year. The number of routes has increased from 74 to 171, and passenger carriage has risen by over 400 per cent since Tata Group's takeover in 2022.

The unified Air India Express brand was unveiled in October 2023, and flights operated by AIX Connect have since been marketed under this brand.

Sabah Tourism Board partners with BlinkBrand Solutions to explore India's outbound potential

In a strategic move to capture the growing Indian outbound travel market, Sabah Tourism Board has partnered with BlinkBrand Solutions to promote Sabah, Malaysia, as an ideal destination for Indian travellers seeking beach getaways, exotic wildlife, and cultural experiences.

Situated in Malaysian Borneo, Sabah offers pristine beaches, rich biodiversity, and iconic attractions like Mount Kinabalu and Sipadan Island, catering to nature lovers, adventure seekers, and cultural enthusiasts. With excellent flight connectivity via Kuala Lumpur, Sabah presents an attractive short-haul option for Indian tourists.

Julinus Jeffery Jimit, CEO of Sabah Tourism Board, expressed enthusiasm for the partnership, highlighting Sabah's unique offerings, from Mount Kinabalu's majestic heights to the rich marine life of Sipadan. Noel Saxena, CEO of BlinkBrand Solutions, emphasised the potential for experiential travel from focus cities like Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai.

BlinkBrand Solutions will lead targeted campaigns, trade engagements, and collaborations with key stakeholders to drive awareness and travel demand from India to Sabah.



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US opens 2,50,000 more visa appointments for Indian travellers

The U.S. Mission to India has opened an additional 250,000 visa appointments for Indian travellers, including tourists, skilled workers, and students. These newly released slots aim to help hundreds of thousands of Indian applicants secure timely interviews, facilitating travel that strengthens the U.S.-India relationship.

For the second consecutive year, the U.S. Mission to India has processed over one million non-immigrant visa applications. During this summer's student visa season, all first-time student applicants were able to obtain appointments at the consular sections across India. The mission is now focusing on reuniting families, connecting businesses, and promoting tourism.

In 2024, over 1.2 million Indians have travelled to the U.S., marking a 35 per cent increase from 2023. Currently, at least six million Indians hold non-immigrant visas, and thousands more are issued daily.

U.S. Ambassador to India Eric Garcetti said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Joe Biden set an ambitious goal to improve and expedite the visa process, and I'm proud to say that we have delivered on that promise. Our consular teams work tirelessly to meet the surging demand."



Thailand renews VFS Global contract to handle visa applications in India

Maintaining its trusted partnership with the Thai government, VFS Global, the leading outsourcing and technology services provider for governments and diplomatic missions globally, has once again secured the contract to handle visa applications for Thailand from India.

The company will cater to travellers from India across visa categories through visa application centres and drop-off centres as per the jurisdiction of the Royal Thai Embassy in Delhi and Royal Thai Consulate General in Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai. VFS Global has been working with the Government of Thailand for nearly two decades and has handled over 2.1 million Thai visa applications since 2005.

Applications are accepted at VFS Global visa application centres in Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Chandigarh, Chennai, Cochin, Delhi, Goa, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Jalandhar, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai and Pune from Monday to Friday.

VFS Global also offers drop box services to tier 2 cities such as Agra, Amritsar, Dehradun, Jaipur, Ludhiana, Guwahati, Patna, Bhubaneswar, Jamshedpur and Siliguri.

"The renewal of the Thai visa contract highlights VFS Global's business excellence, dedication to enhancing customer experience, and the strong trust from the 69 governments we partner with, including Thailand," said Yummi Talwar, COO – South Asia, VFS Global.



Illinois Office of Tourism opens office in New Delhi, partners with Sartha Global Marketing

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Office of Tourism, has opened a new office in New Delhi, India, to boost overseas tourism. Sartha Global Marketing LLP has been appointed as the state's partner in India for marketing and promotional activities.

Sartha will develop travel trade and PR programs to attract Indian travellers to Illinois, promoting its luxury, culinary, cultural, and outdoor experiences. Illinois is known for its top-ranked dining options, vibrant festivals, outdoor activities, and diverse cultural attractions, making it ideal for Indian travellers. The state also offers a range of accommodations and easy access through Chicago O'Hare International Airport.

Daniel Thomas, Deputy Director of the Illinois Office of Tourism, highlighted the 55 per cent increase in Indian visitors from 2019 to 2023 and expressed enthusiasm about welcoming more travellers to explore Illinois' diverse offerings. Sheema Vohra, Managing Director of Sartha Global Marketing, emphasised the state's appeal, from Chicago's dynamic gateway to its outdoor adventures and rich history.



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Norwegian Cruise Line unveils its new brand positioning, 'MORE'



Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has unveiled its new brand positioning, 'MORE,' emphasising enhanced onboard offerings, more destinations, and greater value with the launch of its upgraded 'More at Sea' package.

NCL offers over 600 unique itineraries to 450 destinations through 2026, with a fleet of 20 ships featuring over 80 restaurants and activities. To further enhance the guest experience, NCL is upgrading its popular 'Free At Sea' package to 'More At Sea,' which will provide even more benefits and premium inclusions that guests want and that matter most to them on their well-deserved vacation. Starting today, guests can take advantage of this new and more inclusive package for voyages beginning Jan. 1, 2025. 'More At Sea' will feature an expanded offering of guest-favourite amenities to enjoy, including premium beverages, additional specialty dining, and improved connectivity with Starlink's high-speed internet. The package also retains features like a \$50 shore excursion credit, free airfare for a second guest, and free sailings for third and fourth guests on select voyages. Additionally, à la carte dining will be replaced with a flat cover charge.

Resorts World One to commence sailings from Dubai on November 1, 2024



In a special ceremony and press conference held at the Raffles Dubai on September 4, 2024, Resorts World Cruises announced its entry into the Middle Eastern market with the launch of the 'Resorts World One' cruise ship, set to begin sailings from Dubai on November 1, 2024. The event saw the presence of senior representatives from the Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Oman, Qatar Tourism, top management of Resorts World Cruises, and prominent members of the cruise industry and media.

Resorts World One will be homeported at Dubai's Mina Port Rashid, operated by DP World, one of the region's leading maritime hubs. The cruise ship will offer three weekly departures, providing diverse itineraries for both local and international guests.

To cater to its Muslim guests, Resorts World One will receive the official OIC/SMIIC Standard Halal-Friendly Cruise Ship certification when sailings commence from Dubai. Additionally, certified vegetarian and Jain cuisine will be available onboard, ensuring a range of dietary options. Public announcements will be made in both English and Arabic for the convenience of passengers, and shisha will also be available onboard.

Discover the World partners with AmaWaterways to expand presence in India market

Discover the World has partnered with AmaWaterways, a luxury river cruise line, to expand its presence in the Indian market. This strategic alliance aims to introduce Indian travellers to the exceptional river cruising experiences offered by AmaWaterways, known for its innovative ship design, award-winning service, and diverse itineraries.

Discover the World will promote AmaWaterways' offerings, providing Indian travellers exclusive access to premium river cruises. The partnership will focus on tailored travel experiences and leverage Discover the World's deep understanding of the Indian market.

AmaWaterways offers curated itineraries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America (2025), providing guests with luxurious journeys that include cultural immersion and fine dining. Key highlights of the partnership include exclusive access to premium cruises, personalised travel options, and promotional campaigns to raise awareness.

"We are excited to represent AmaWaterways in India," said Troy Cranmer, Head of Cruise at Discover the World. Dipti Adhia, Director of Discover the World – India, noted, "AmaWaterways' offerings align perfectly with the growing demand for luxury travel in India."



Dipti Adhia

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Louisiana Tailors Experiences for India's US-Bound Travellers on its First India Mission

The Louisiana Office of Tourism, the state's official promotional body, undertook its first mission to India from September 23 to 27, 2024, with stops in Mumbai and New Delhi. Led by Lieutenant Governor Billy Nungesser and Assistant Secretary of Tourism Doug Bourgeois, and supported by partners such as Visit Lake Charles and New Orleans & Company, the mission sought to engage with Indian travel professionals and media.

Vartik Sethi

Doug Bourgeois, Assistant Secretary of Tourism, Louisiana, passionately presented the state as the ideal destination for Indian travellers. "Louisiana shares many cultural similarities with India—our love of food, culture, and the outdoors," Bourgeois said, pointing out that Indian tourists are drawn to authentic, immersive experiences. From behind-the-scenes tours with local chefs to exploring the state's National Heritage areas, Louisiana offers a rich diversity of attractions.

Bourgeois also emphasised the role of food in Louisiana's culture, drawing parallels to India's culinary traditions. "We like our food spicy, just like in India," he noted, showcasing dishes like gumbo, jambalaya, and the state's famous Tabasco sauce, made in Louisiana's Avery Island. For travellers seeking both luxury and authentic experiences, Louisiana offers a perfect blend of both.

Speaking to Travel Trade Journal, Bourgeois highlighted Louisiana's potential as a destination that offers both luxury and off-the-beaten-path experiences. "We believe Indian travellers will find that we are more alike than different," he said.

Music, Festivals, and Outdoor Adventures

Louisiana is also celebrated for its music, being the birthplace of jazz and home to genres like Zydeco and swamp pop. Bourgeois invited Indian tourists to experience the state's festivals, especially Mardi Gras, which takes place annually,

with celebrations lasting weeks before Fat Tuesday.

In addition to cultural experiences, Louisiana offers plenty of outdoor adventures. Tourists can explore the Atchafalaya National Heritage Area, the largest freshwater swamp in the US, or enjoy the Catch and Cook programme, where visitors can catch their seafood and have it prepared at a local restaurant.

Southern Hospitality

Kaylee LeBlanc, International Sales Manager, Louisiana Tourism, made her first appearance in India and introduced the concept of 'lagniappe,' meaning 'a little something extra,' a fitting description of Louisiana's welcoming hospitality. LeBlanc also highlighted the ease of travel to Louisiana from India, with direct flights to New Orleans via London.

LeBlanc encouraged Indian travellers to explore Louisiana's diverse regions, from the lively streets of New Orleans to the tranquil landscapes along the Mississippi River. With a wide range of lodging options, including luxury hotels and charming bed-and-breakfasts, visitors are guaranteed a comfortable stay.

Growing Indian Tourist Market

Visitor numbers from India to the USA grew by 35 per cent between January and July 2024, making India the second-largest overseas market. Brian Beall, Director of the National Travel and Tourism Office, US Department of Commerce, shared that Indian travellers engage in activities such as

sightseeing, shopping, and visiting national parks, all available in Louisiana.

Jonathan Heimer, Minister-Counsellor, US Embassy, emphasised the growing relationship between India and the US, attributing much of this progress to the Indian-American diaspora. "2023 will go down in history as a turning point in US-India relations," Heimer said, highlighting that Indian visitors will find a welcoming environment in Louisiana, with familiar comforts like Indian food, grocery stores, and places of worship.

Heimer praised Louisiana for offering a quintessentially American experience and a diverse cultural landscape that appeals to international visitors. "Whether it's Indian cuisine or Hindu temples, travellers from India will feel at home in the US," he added

Louisiana is poised to play a significant role in the US government's strategy to attract 90 million international visitors annually by 2027, with India as a key market.

Future B2B Partnerships

Bourgeois outlined Louisiana's plans to strengthen ties with India's B2B travel trade. "We have done our research and understand what Indian travellers want. Our next step is to provide more training on the destination for travel agents and tour operators," he said.

Louisiana will also invest in digital marketing to promote the state to Indian travellers and make them aware of the ease of travel. It is just an hour's flight from major US hubs like Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta.



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Sharjah targets growth in tourism with airport expansion, eco-tourism, and world-class infrastructure

His Excellency Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman, Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA), shared his insights during a recent media interaction in Delhi on how Sharjah is carving out its niche within the UAE’s tourism offerings by leveraging its rich cultural heritage and unique eco-tourism offerings.

Vartik Sethi

Unlike other destinations focusing primarily on luxury and commercial tourism, Sharjah prides itself on offering an authentic experience. Its focus is cultural tourism, offering museums, art exhibitions, hiking trails, beaches, and a diverse desert outlook.

Sharjah’s accessibility and proximity to other Emirates, like Dubai and Abu Dhabi, make it an ideal choice for travellers looking to experience the UAE’s diverse offerings without travelling far. “Within half an hour, you can find yourself in a completely different environment, whether it’s the mountains, desert, or coastline,” said Al Midfa.

New Developments

Sharjah has taken significant strides in upgrading its infrastructure to improve connectivity and tourism appeal. The development of highways and tunnels has dramatically reduced travel time between key regions, such as the central city of Sharjah and the east coast, opening up areas like Khorfakkan and Kalba as eco-tourism destinations. “It used to take us over two hours to reach the east coast; now, it’s just 50 minutes,” said Al Midfa. The east coast’s mountains and pristine beaches are among Sharjah’s top natural attractions.

Another key highlight is the expansion of Sharjah International Airport, which is expected to increase its passenger capacity from 8 million to 25 million by the end of 2026. Air Arabia, Sharjah’s national carrier, continues to play a crucial role in connecting the Emirate to international markets, including India.

Commitment to Sustainable Tourism

Al Midfa outlined several initiatives that prioritise environmental conservation while enhancing the



▲ H.E. Khalid Jasim Al Midfa

visitor experience. One of the most prominent examples is the Sharjah Safari Park, the largest safari outside Africa. The park spans eight square km (and will soon double in size) and houses endangered species like the Radiated Tortoise, Black and White Rhinos, among other animals in carefully designed natural habitats.

Sharjah’s sustainability efforts also extend to waste management through the BEEAH Group, one of the leading environmental management companies in the Middle East. BEEAH operates the region’s first zero-waste-to-landfill system and converts waste to energy. This sustainable model has been adopted in Sharjah and locations such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

Additionally, the “Sustain Sharjah” platform helps stakeholders in the tourism sector reduce their environmental footprint by offering practical energy and resource savings solutions. These initiatives help protect Sharjah’s natural and

cultural resources and create long-term value for businesses and residents.

India and Sharjah

India remains a crucial market for Sharjah’s tourism sector. He noted that Sharjah has witnessed steady growth in Indian visitors, with approximately 160,000 Indian hotel guests annually, accounting for 11 per cent of the total market share. The Chairman’s vision for the future includes increasing this number by 10 per cent over the coming year, capitalising on India’s burgeoning middle and high-income segments.

“We’re seeing a new segment of Indian travellers looking for niche, luxury experiences, and Sharjah has an array of offerings tailored to these discerning tourists,” Al Midfa said. From glamping retreats like the Moon Retreat to luxury desert resorts like Al Faya Retreat, Sharjah offers high-end, immersive experiences beyond the typical city and shopping-centric tourism many associate with the UAE.

Cultural and Experiential Tourism

The UAE’s cultural capital boasts over 50 per cent of the country’s museums and luxury heritage hotels like The Chedi Al Bait and Al Faya Retreat, blending history with five-star amenities. Significant events include the Sharjah Light Festival, known for its laser projections on iconic buildings, the Formula One Powerboat Championship, and the Sharjah International Book Fair, which adds to Sharjah’s global appeal.

By investing in infrastructure, eco-tourism, and luxury offerings, Sharjah is paving the way for a prosperous future in the global tourism market while maintaining its unique identity and values. As Al Midfa aptly concluded, “Sharjah – A place to create your own story”.

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Abdul Wahab, COO, Bintan Resorts, and G.B. Srithar, Head of Tourism, VFS Global

Bintan Resorts and VFS Global Unite to Position Bintan Island as Prime Destination for Indian Travellers

In a strategic move to capitalise on the expansive Indian market, Bintan Resorts has partnered with VFS Global to promote itself as a premier travel destination. This partnership was solidified with the signing of an agreement on August 29, 2024, at Bintan Island. Key figures at the signing included Abdul Wahab, Chief Operating Officer, Bintan Resorts, and G.B. Srithar, Head of Tourism, VFS Global. Following this collaboration, TTJ discussed the exciting developments and offerings of Bintan Resorts and the island's appeal with both of them.

Sonika Bohra

Bintan Island, part of Indonesia's Riau Archipelago, is situated South-East of Singapore, across the Straits of Singapore. One of the island's key advantages is its accessibility for travellers from India. With flights ranging from 3.5 to 5.5 hours from most major Indian cities to Singapore, Bintan is within easy reach. After arriving in Singapore, it's just a 60-minute ferry ride to the serene and beautiful Bintan Island. This seamless connection allows travellers to experience the best of both worlds, Singapore's vibrant cityscape and Bintan's natural beauty, within a short journey.

Bintan Island is renowned for its pristine beaches, rich culture, and delicious cuisine. Travellers can enjoy a variety of activities, from relaxing on stunning Lagoi Bay Beach to snorkelling and diving in crystal-clear waters. Pantai Tanjung Berakit offers peace away from the crowds for quieter escapes, while Trikora Beach boasts white sands perfect for sunbathing. The island features ancient temples reflecting its cultural heritage

and several nature reserves for hiking and wildlife observation. Adventure-seekers can explore dense forests on jungle treks or take mangrove tours to spot local fauna.

A Premier Gated Beach Destination

Bintan Resorts is an award-winning beach destination boasting 23 independent resorts, four internationally renowned golf courses, and a growing portfolio of recreational activities. "Bintan Resorts is a well-maintained, gated community offering a diverse range of accommodations, from private villas to serviced apartments, all within a safe and secure environment," says Abdul Wahab, COO of Bintan Resorts. The

community's resorts cater to diverse guest preferences, making it a versatile destination for everyone from families to honeymooners.

Ambitious Expansion Plans

Driven by the Indonesian government's focus on enhancing tourism, Bintan Resorts has experienced significant expansion. "Over the past five years, the number of hotel rooms has nearly tripled from 1,000 to 2,800, with three hotels operational in Lagoi Bay—The Sanchaya, Grand Lagoi Hotel, and Pantai Indah Lagoi Bintan," shares Wahab. He further elaborates that additional projects are already underway, including the opening of three new hotels- Hotel Indigo Bintan Island, Holiday Inn Resort Bintan Island, and Four





Points by Sheraton in Lagoi Bay—by the end of this year, with plans for another 10 hotels over the next five years.

Adding to the allure, a convention centre capable of hosting 5,000 people is also in development, further cementing Bintan's status as not just a leisure hotspot, but a business and events destination as well. The expansion is poised to position Bintan as a competitive force on the global tourism stage.

Abdul Wahab envisions Bintan as a premier international resort destination in the next five years. He says, "Our plan includes increasing hotel capacity from 2,800 to 6,000 rooms, with three new hotels opening this year. One of the most significant developments is the construction of a new airport, expected to be completed by 2026 or 2027. This airport will greatly enhance air connectivity to Bintan, complementing the existing ferry services, which currently operate 12 times daily. We are upgrading our ferry terminal and establishing partnerships with major airlines, ensuring that Bintan becomes a thriving hub for both tourism and business."

A Sustainable Oasis for Connection and Culture

While Bintan continues its expansion, sustainability remains at the forefront of its strategy. Wahab emphasises, "Bintan Resorts spans 20,000 hectares, but only 45 per cent of that land will be developed, leaving 55 per cent preserved for nature. Our installation of solar panels and introduction of electric vehicles are part of our broader efforts to reduce reliance on fuel-based energy and maintain Bintan's natural beauty. We are also launching conservation initiatives to protect our mangroves and marine life, such as sea turtles."

Srithar echoes this sentiment, noting that Bintan's blend of modern amenities and untouched nature makes it a unique

getaway. "Bintan is not just a destination; it's an experience. Imagine a group of friends reconnecting in a serene environment, away from distractions. Whether it's a family getaway or a group celebration, Bintan provides the perfect backdrop for creating unforgettable memories."

Srithar adds, "For those seeking a more immersive cultural experience, a short journey to Tanjung Pinang offers a chance to engage with local life, taste authentic Indonesian cuisine, and explore the historical origins of Bahasa Indonesia. This offers a rich cultural experience that adds depth to any trip, allowing visitors to connect with the local community."

VFS Global: Facilitating Indian Tourism to Bintan

The partnership with VFS Global is a strategic move to increase Bintan's visibility, particularly in the Indian market. Srithar highlights the ease with which Indian travellers can reach Bintan from Singapore, "The ferry terminal is just 20 minutes from Changi Airport, ensuring a smooth transition from flight to the ferry. Once on board, travellers can enjoy a comfortable ride to Bintan, where they are greeted by lush greenery, minimal traffic, and world-class infrastructure."

Bintan is far from an underdeveloped island. "It is a well-established resort destination that seamlessly blends modern amenities with stunning natural beauty, making it a popular choice for visitors," adds Srithar.

While Bintan offers an ideal setting for Indian travellers, Wahab expressed concern about the challenge of effectively marketing the island. He recognises the need for a strategic approach to highlight Bintan's unique offerings. However, he is confident that collaborating with VFS Global will significantly boost Bintan's visibility.

With VFS Global's extensive expertise

across 151 countries, this collaboration aims to position Bintan as an attractive global destination. Currently, Bintan Resorts identifies Singapore as its primary market due to proximity and ongoing marketing efforts, but the focus is also on expanding into key markets, specifically China and India. While the immediate focus is promoting Bintan in India, this partnership will leverage VFS Global's network and connections to reach potential travellers from various regions.

Bintan's India Focus

"We are excited to deepen this partnership to introduce the beauty and charm of the Island to the Indian market. We eagerly look forward to welcoming more visitors from India and offering them exceptional experiences," says Wahab.

While leveraging VFS Global's extensive network across India, a targeted marketing campaign in major Indian cities aims to position Bintan as a prime travel destination alongside Singapore. The dual-destination approach capitalises on the appeal of two exceptional travel experiences. Srithar noted that the Indian market presents a promising opportunity for Bintan's tourism sector, as India is one of Singapore's largest markets, with 1.08 million Indian visitors in 2023. Bintan plans to entice and welcome a significant share of these travellers from Singapore. Srithar affirms, "Our foremost objective is to reintroduce Bintan Island's offerings to Indian audiences and emphasise the convenience of an effortless and quick journey from Singapore, highlighting its appeal and making it a perfect and ideal destination for families and groups of all sizes."

In conclusion, having personally visited and thoroughly enjoyed Bintan, I can attest to its beauty. With its abundant offerings, I am confident it will attract Indian travellers looking for a relaxing retreat in a natural setting and enriching cultural experiences.

An Insight into Veena World's Journey with Neil Patil



Challenges arise from both expected and unforeseen circumstances, but only few demonstrate the ability to persevere and thrive like Veena World. At the helm of this success is Neil Patil, Co-Founder, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Technology Officer, Veena World, who has played an instrumental role in shaping the company's trajectory since its inception in 2013. Patil's deep insights into technology, operations, and leadership have not only fuelled the company's growth but have also contributed significantly to the Indian travel trade ecosystem.

Vartik Sethi

Established in 2013, Veena World has rapidly grown into a major player in the Indian travel trade, backed by its leadership team and over 750 members. With a keen eye for innovation and a deep understanding of both technology and operations, Patil has been pivotal in guiding the company's transformation into a leading travel brand. His efforts have not only propelled the company's growth but have also significantly contributed to shaping the travel experience for millions of Indians.

The Early Days

Veena World was founded in 2013, with Neil Patil as one of the co-founders. From its early days, the company established itself as a one-stop-shop for all things travel, carving out a niche in the Indian market. Patil recalled, "We didn't start just once, we started twice—once in 2013, and again after the COVID-19 pandemic. We had to rebuild from scratch, and that experience has been both humbling and eye-opening."

Veena World's model centres around five key verticals: group tours, customised holidays, corporate travel, inbound travel, and foreign exchange. The company prides itself on its unique value proposition, offering a full-service travel experience without engaging in smaller, transactional activities like visa-only or flight-only services. Patil explained that their core strength lies in their group travel experiences and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) offerings, propped up by a team of over 350 tour managers.

Technology as a Pillar of Growth

As Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Patil took on the responsibility of steering Veena World's technological innovation. His background in banking and finance may not have initially indicated a propensity for technology

leadership, but as Patil reflected, “Someone had to take up the technology challenge. While I had no prior expertise, I’ve always been a fan of design and user experience. We’ve built a strong tech backbone with a customised ERP and CRM that powers everything from sales to post-tour feedback.”

This in-house system, Patil emphasises, is crucial to delivering a seamless customer experience. Technology at Veena World is not merely an operational tool, but a critical enabler that strengthens customer retention and internal efficiency. According to Patil, technology alone won’t bring in customers, but it plays a massive role in retaining them by ensuring a superior user experience.

In recent years, the travel industry has been abuzz with terms like artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML). Patil, however, took a more grounded view. “Everyone is talking about AI and ML, but only a small percentage are actually implementing it meaningfully. For us, technology is about building ‘stickiness’ with our customers, ensuring that they keep coming back for more.”

Challenges, Setbacks, and the Road to Recovery

Like many in the travel sector, Veena World faced significant challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The global crisis brought the industry to a standstill, forcing companies to adapt or perish. Reflecting on this tumultuous period, Patil remarked, “COVID was disastrous for everyone, but it also taught us a lot. If we could survive when zero people were travelling, we can survive anything.” He further emphasised the importance of developing resilience, especially in an industry as volatile as travel. “Building a thick skin is essential for surviving in a B2C environment. Whether it’s a bad review on social media or an unexpected geopolitical event, you must be prepared to face the storms head-on. We’ve seen it all, from airline bankruptcies to natural disasters, and each time we’ve come out stronger.”

Rather than dwelling on setbacks, the company focuses on swift recovery and problem-solving. Patil cited an example, “In 2022, we saw floods in Himachal Pradesh and economic upheaval in some of our key markets. Our ability to manage these challenges internally and externally has been crucial to our continued growth.”

The Indian Traveller

One of the recurring themes in Patil’s conversation is the unique character of the Indian traveller. “Indian travellers are not a monolithic group,” he said. “They come with varying preferences and expectations. Some want the cheapest option, while others are willing to pay more for a premium experience. It’s all about value for money.”

Patil believes that destinations need to take note of this and provide sustained engagement to capture the attention of Indian travellers. “It’s not enough to do a one-time promotion. Countries and tourism boards need to engage continuously, ensuring that they remain top of mind for Indian tourists. A sustained approach, even with a smaller



▲ Sudhir Patil, Sunila Patil, Veena Patil, and Neil Patil

budget, goes much further than short-lived, high-visibility campaigns.”

Positioning Veena World for the Future

As Veena World continues to grow, its mission remains clear: to make the world more accessible and affordable for Indian travellers. Patil is ambitious about the future, outlining the company’s goals for 2027 and beyond. “We want to double our group travel numbers to 200,000 by 2027 and grow even further to 500,000 by 2030. We’re also looking to increase our inbound travel numbers significantly.”

The company’s success in scaling operations is supported by its unique marketing strategy. Veena World has embraced content marketing, with a strong focus on blogs, podcasts, and other digital touchpoints. Patil proudly shares that the company has created over 2,000 blogs and 500 podcast episodes. He said, “We’re not just a travel company. We’re building an ecosystem where travellers can find inspiration, advice, and real value. From our podcasts to our extensive photo bank, we want to position Veena World as a trusted partner in every stage of the travel journey.”

Collaboration with the Trade

Veena World also understands the importance of B2B relationships in sustaining its leadership in group travel. The company works with air and hotel consolidators to secure competitive pricing and has built strong partnerships with tourism boards in destinations like Australia and Japan. “Tourism boards are essential partners in our effort to showcase destinations beyond the usual highlights. We’ve worked to make places like Australia and Japan year-round destinations, not just seasonal ones,” Patil added.

Patil remains focused on maintaining the company’s innovative edge. His advice for aspiring entrepreneurs in the travel sector is both practical and inspiring: “It’s easy to start a travel company, but it’s difficult to get your first customer. Work smart, not just hard, and understand that OTAs aren’t the enemy—they’re expanding the market for all of us.” With clear goals for the future and a solid foundation in place, the company is well-positioned to continue its upward trajectory in the Indian travel trade industry.





Ruhani Duggal



Dheeraj S. Kandur



Zamir Munshi

BREAKING THE MOULD

Young Guns Lend a Fresh Perspective to the Legacy of Family-owned Travel Businesses

A whole new generation of leaders is redefining the travel industry, blending traditional values with modern innovation. We speak to some of the rising stars about the dynamics, challenges and opportunities faced by this new wave of leaders and understand how they are reshaping their family enterprises.

Vartik Sethi

With a focus on technology, personalisation, and sustainability, the new age leaders are pioneering novel ways to engage with today's eco-conscious, tech-savvy traveller. From AI-driven travel solutions to wellness tourism and immersive experiences, these leaders are forging ahead with strategies that blend the best of tradition and forward-thinking innovation.

Background and Motivation

In today's fast-changing travel industry, a fresh wave of leadership is emerging from family-run businesses. These next-generation leaders are not just inheriting their parents' legacies—they are



Vansh Arora



Karan Vakharia



Nishant Jain

reshaping them, infusing new ideas and modern strategies to meet the evolving demands of the global traveller.

With a path shaped by a unique combination of academic curiosity and a love for luxury travel, Ruhani Duggal, Director, Minar Group, recognised a gap in how India's diverse experiences are perceived globally. In response, she developed Vilasa, a brand that caters to the growing demand for experiential and exclusive travel, positioning her as a leader in redefining luxury travel from India on the world stage.

Dheeraj S. Kandur, Partner, Flight Shop Holidays, brings a fresh perspective to his family's business. His passion for travel was nurtured from a young age. "Growing up, I spent weekends accompanying my father on work trips, which ignited my curiosity about different cultures and experiences," he recalled. After gaining experience in the finance sector, Kandur's love for travel led him back to the family business in 2012. "I realised that my true calling was in creating unforgettable experiences for our clients, combining my business acumen with my passion for travel," he shared.

Zamir Munshi, Director of Strategy and Growth, N. Chirag, is another leader leveraging his financial background to drive growth. With experience in mergers and acquisitions at UBS in New York, Munshi returned to India with a vision of applying strategic insights to scale the family business. His leadership reflects a broader trend in the travel industry: merging traditional hospitality with strategic, data-driven decision-making.

Similarly, Vansh Arora, Executive Director, Flag Travel

Services, brings a strategic corporate perspective to his family's business. Having honed his skills at Deloitte and UCL, Arora focuses on expanding Flag Travel's offerings, recognising the potential in niche markets such as corporate travel and MICE. His ability to blend corporate strategy with a passion for exploration exemplifies how the next generation is adapting family businesses to tap into untapped sectors.

Meanwhile, Karan Vakharia, Chief Operating Officer, Pathfinders Holidays, saw his entry into the family business as an opportunity to elevate client experiences. With his marketing expertise and experience at IMG, Vakharia is well-positioned to refine Pathfinders' offerings, focusing on curating personalised travel experiences.

For Nishant Jain, CEO, TravelDhaam.com, joining the family business was more than just continuing a legacy. Driven by a deep appreciation for his father's vision, Jain recognised the agility required to thrive in an asset-light, fast-paced travel industry. His focus on connecting with people globally and embracing the inherent vibrancy of travel allows TravelDhaam to stand out in a competitive market.

These future leaders are not just building on the legacies of their predecessors—they are innovating and adapting their businesses to an industry that values customisation, technology integration, and unique experiences. Their individual stories highlight the importance of blending tradition with modernity, and their collective impact will likely shape the future of the travel industry for years to come.

Vision

At N. Chirag, Munshi is focused on delivering deeply personalised and transformative travel experiences. "We want to become the most trusted name in personalised travel," he explained, sharing his ambition to create journeys that transcend the ordinary. By 2030, Munshi envisions seamlessly integrating high-touch service with cutting-edge technology, crafting intuitive and enriching travel experiences that reflect the evolving desires of modern travellers.

Vakharia at Pathfinders Holidays is taking a different route, combining luxury with technology. He prioritises AI and augmented reality in travel planning while committing to eco-friendly practices. "Sustainable luxury is the future, where indulgence meets environmental responsibility," he shared. His vision for 2030 positions Pathfinders as a leader in providing unique, luxurious, and sustainable travel experiences that appeal to an increasingly conscious clientele.

Kandur envisions a future where Flight Shop Holidays evolves from a traditional travel agency into a comprehensive travel consultancy. "We aim to leverage our in-depth knowledge of destinations to provide personalised travel solutions that go beyond standard itineraries," he explained.

At Flag Travel Services, Arora is steering the company toward innovation while maintaining its reputation for high-end, customised itineraries. "Our goal is to blend the efficiency of AI with the human touch that defines luxury," he noted, outlining plans to streamline services for both leisure and MICE travel. By 2030, Arora expects Flag Travel to stand out for its seamless combination of technology and personalisation.

Jain's plans for Traveldhaam.com involve aggressive digital expansion and a franchise model that empowers smaller agencies. "We want to provide a seamless, user-friendly experience that resonates with modern travellers," he explained. By leveraging technology, Jain aims to position the company as a key player in sustainable and personalised travel by 2030.

Meanwhile, Duggal at Minar Group drives diversification, particularly in aviation education, while expanding her luxury brand, Vilasa. "We're focused on wellness and mindfulness travel, offering unique experiences that cater to a discerning clientele," she shared. Her vision for 2030 is to lead the charge in creating enriching, transformative travel experiences that redefine luxury and well-being.

Together, these leaders are shaping a new future for family travel businesses, where personalisation, sustainability, and technology will define the industry's next chapter.

Modernisation and Innovation

Today's leaders are not just fuelled with young blood but are also sought-after visionaries. By blending innovation with the human touch, the new generation is setting the standard for the future of travel.

Arora's focus is on optimising customer service through AI, with an emphasis on speed and personalisation. Rather than simply adding tech for the sake of it, he is exploring how AI can enhance service delivery. "It's about offering tailored experiences faster and more efficiently," he explained, ensuring each client receives a personalised journey.

Innovation for Duggal revolves around AI and virtual reality, adding a modern twist to luxury travel. She is changing how clients plan their trips by leveraging AI for tailored experiences and VR for destination previews. "These tools allow clients to explore before they book," she noted, giving them a taste of the experience long before they embark.

To stay competitive, Kandur is focused on incorporating new technologies into Flight Shop Holidays. The company has partnered with leading travel tech firms to provide real-time destination updates, ensuring travellers are informed about local conditions and events. "We've also implemented comprehensive ERP solutions to streamline operations across all departments—marketing, sales, operations, and finance. This enables us to generate timely quotations and curate exceptional holiday solutions," he explained.

Vakharia, on the other hand, is blending luxury with technology. His digital dashboard is designed to transform the client experience by offering real-time updates and concierge services. "This tool is all about enhancing the journey," he shared, though he stressed that, even with these innovations, "keeping a personal touch at the forefront remains essential."

Meanwhile, Munshi is reshaping his company's infrastructure by implementing CRM systems, cloud telephony, and an updated online presence. "The rebranding reflects our shift towards a more modern, experiential offering," he shared, positioning the company as a leader in digital transformation while staying true to its customer-first philosophy.

In Jain's approach, modernisation means streamlining operations for a smoother customer journey. With a focus on efficiency, he is enhancing client interactions through faster response systems on WhatsApp and digitising the visa process. "We want to make travel planning more intuitive and stress-free," he explained, making technology a key ally in simplifying traditionally complex steps.

Challenges and Growth

While introducing new technologies and expanding their services globally, these leaders face the challenge of honouring their company's legacy while pushing for growth. From streamlining operations to fostering social responsibility, they are redefining what it means to lead in the travel sector, blending fresh ideas with time-tested values.

Duggal's strategy has been to innovate without disrupting Minar Group's core business. By establishing Vilasa as a distinct brand, she has had the freedom to introduce fresh ideas. "My father's expertise in risk management has been invaluable in maintaining balance," she explained. The result has been a seamless blend of innovation and tradition, positioning Minar Group for continued success while keeping the door open to new ideas and markets. She has also driven Minar Group's growth in luxury and experiential travel, with a key milestone being Vilasa's recognition as a Serandipians DMC partner. "This achievement in just four years reinforces our commitment to luxury travel," she shared.

Munshi has approached family business challenges with collaboration in mind. "Respect and communication are crucial," he noted, explaining how each family member plays a role in distinct areas of the business. By sharing responsibilities, the Munshi family has successfully blended tradition with innovation, allowing the company to evolve without losing sight of its core values. Moreover, Munshi has also been instrumental in expanding N. Chirag into bespoke travel, with safaris and luxury expeditions driving new business. "Our rebranding and tech investments have boosted revenue and solidified our position in the market," he said.

Manoeuvring the complexities of a family-run business has been a learning curve for Jain. He admits that keeping pace with rapid technological advancements has been challenging. "Onboarding our team and ensuring they are comfortable with new systems has been a hurdle," he explained. Despite these obstacles, TravelDhaam.com has expanded its digital capabilities, growing from servicing corporate executives to entire companies. Additionally, Jain's commitment to social responsibility is evident in the launch of Rising Star Khilte Chehre, an NGO empowering over 500 differently-abled individuals to experience travel.

For Vakharia, the challenge lies in balancing innovation with the legacy his parents built. "Honouring tradition while staying relevant is key," he shared. Managing generational differences has required careful communication and respect. Under his leadership, Pathfinders Holidays has not only attracted a younger, international clientele but also expanded operations to the United States, enhancing the company's global footprint. Strengthened relationships with suppliers have further improved the client experience.

Arora has focused on decentralising Flag Travel Services and incorporating digital solutions like payment gateways and CRM systems. "The shift was capital-intensive and a lot for my parents to take in," he noted, but their belief in his vision kept the momentum going. Flexibility in managing generational differences has allowed him to introduce technological advancements without alienating traditional values. Besides, regarding the MICE segment, Arora noted significant growth within the family business. "A breakthrough came with an 800 plus pax MICE movement to Dubai in 2024," he explained.

Like many second-generation leaders, Kandur has faced challenges in promoting change within the family business. "One of the biggest hurdles has been cultural resistance. Changing long-standing mindsets and convincing team members to embrace new technologies can be difficult," he shared. However, by focusing on education, clear communication, and demonstrating the tangible benefits of innovation, Kandur has been able to foster a culture of openness and adaptability.

Future Outlook

Next-generation leaders in the travel industry are setting ambitious goals, blending innovation with tradition to stay ahead in a highly competitive market. Vakharia, for instance, is determined to lead in personalised travel, focusing on crafting bespoke journeys that offer much more than the usual holiday experience. "Every trip should be life-enriching," he explained, highlighting how unique, tailored experiences are becoming critical differentiators in today's market. Similarly, Jain is steering his business towards complete digitisation and launching a franchise model, recognising the need to focus on niche markets overbroad, generic offerings. "We aim to deliver specialised solutions that build trust," he noted, emphasising the importance of establishing a clear identity in a crowded industry.

Meanwhile, Duggal has her sights set on pushing the boundaries of luxury travel while maintaining her company's deeply rooted values. "We set stretch goals every year," she shared, underlining the balance she strikes between innovation and tradition. The careful blend ensures continued growth without losing sight of the brand's heritage. On the other hand, Arora is concentrating on expanding the MICE portfolio and integrating digital processes to improve efficiency and response times. By doing so, he is ensuring that his business remains agile and ready to meet the evolving demands of corporate clients. Munshi, too, is focused on the future, positioning his business as a leader in transformative travel by blending data insights with a commitment to exceptional service. "We aim to become the go-to choice for discerning travellers worldwide," he said, reflecting the growing trend of hyper-personalised, high-end travel experiences that are increasingly sought after in the market.

Kandur's most ambitious goal for Flight Shop Holidays is to develop a team of travel consultants who can provide tailored guidance and insights. "We want to invest in their development to ensure each consultant embodies our commitment to exceptional service and client satisfaction," he explained. With travellers increasingly willing to invest in their holidays, Kandur also aims to capitalise on this trend by offering unique, enriching experiences that justify the higher spending. "We aspire to encourage clients to take two long holidays and two short getaways each year, promoting the benefits of regular travel for relaxation and cultural enrichment," he added.

Collectively, the future of travel combines modern technology with personalised service to carve out distinct niches and redefine the travel experience for their clients.

Advice for Aspiring Entrepreneurs

While plenty of advice is available online, young entrepreneurs are best served by seeking guidance from those who have walked at least a mile in their shoes.

When asked for advice for young entrepreneurs, Arora took a direct approach: "Stop procrastinating, make decisions, and don't fear failure," he said, stressing the need for action and resilience, while recognising the value of blending older generations' wisdom with modern ideas. Duggal echoed the same sentiment – 'to carve out one's own identity is essential'. "Go for it, but remember to carve out your own space beyond the family name," she shared. Like the others, Munshi emphasised respecting tradition while challenging the status quo. "Challenge the status quo, but with respect for the business's core values," he explained, focusing on long-term success and building strong relationships.

Kandur's advice to young individuals considering joining their family businesses is to be patient and strategic. "Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither is a thriving family business," he said. He encourages young leaders to explore new trends, innovate, and leverage technology to stay competitive. "Strategic thinking and collaboration are key to paving the way for your family business to reach new heights," Kandur added.

Vakharia, with a balanced approach, stressed the importance of respecting tradition while introducing fresh ideas. "Honour the foundation your family built, but don't be afraid to innovate," he advised. Jain encourages young entrepreneurs to build on their family's legacy rather than reinventing the wheel. "The second generation should focus on adding more spokes to the wheel," he explained, reflecting his belief in evolving within established foundations. With India's travel market still largely untapped, he sees immense potential. "With over 9.26 crore valid passports, there is a massive chance for the next generation to make an impact," he added.

Industry Trends and Future Prospects

While honouring the legacy built by previous generations, these leaders are introducing innovative solutions that align with current global trends, ensuring their businesses remain competitive in an increasingly digital and eco-conscious world. Each of these visionaries brings a distinct perspective, driven by a desire to innovate while maintaining the personal touch that family-run enterprises are known for. Whether it is through adopting AI, rethinking how travellers engage with nature, or focusing on mental well-being through travel, they are charting a new course for the future of the industry.

Recognising the growing demand for eco-friendly and wellness tourism, Vakharia envisions introducing 'Silent Travel,' offering peaceful, undisturbed experiences. "It would allow people to relax and connect with their surroundings," he suggested, aligning this trend with travellers' increasing desire for tranquillity and off-the-beaten-path destinations.

Solo travel and the rise of Gen Z travellers are creating unique opportunities for family businesses, according to Duggal. She envisions a future where holistic wellness trips, guided by positive psychology, take centre stage, offering experiences that nurture both mind and body. Duggal is also excited about micro-adventures—short, thrilling excursions designed to push people out of their comfort zones and provide a fresh take on adventure travel.

Emphasising the need for technological evolution, Arora believes family businesses must adapt to stay competitive. "Traditional systems must evolve; embracing digital media is critical," he advised. His commitment to sustainable travel is unwavering, seeing it as a key market driver for the environmentally conscious younger generations. Arora is convinced that sustainability will be central to the future of the travel industry, particularly in addressing the demands of eco-aware travellers.

For Munshi, the future of travel lies in hyper-personalisation. "Today's travellers want journeys that align with their values," he explained. He advocates for 'adaptive travel,' a concept where AI shapes itineraries in real-time, evolving based on travellers' changing preferences. This innovation would take personalisation to a new level, allowing travel experiences to be more flexible and customised.

Kandur emphasised that technological advancement is the biggest trend family businesses need to pay attention to. "To compete with big online companies, smaller travel businesses must adopt advanced travel tech tools. Only tech can fight tech, and this will enable the industry to grow faster and better," he explained.

According to Jain, adaptability is the key to success in the ever-changing travel landscape. "The key is to stay proactive and seek new opportunities, especially in this AI-driven era," he noted. His focus extends to wellness travel, emphasising how personalised, mentally rejuvenating experiences can help businesses connect with today's travellers. "Just as food nourishes the body, travel rejuvenates the soul," Jain remarked, highlighting the emotional and psychological benefits that travel can offer.

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Nok Air's Mumbai-Bangkok flights to make premium travel affordable

Nok Air has announced the upcoming launch of a nonstop daily service between Mumbai International Airport and Bangkok's Don Muang Airport, starting October 28, 2024. In an exclusive conversation, Ranon Viputsiri, Chief Commercial Officer, Nok Air, shared his excitement and provided insights into the finer details and exciting developments at the airline.

Prashant Nayak

Nok Air is Thailand's renowned premium budget airline, known for its exceptional Thai hospitality, competitive pricing, and professional service, with a firm commitment to safety and hygiene. Celebrating 20 years of operations this year, Nok Air serves over 15 domestic destinations across Thailand and operates international routes to China and, notably, India. The airline currently operates a fleet of 14 Boeing 737-800 aircraft, each accommodating 189 passengers.

The New Mumbai-Bangkok Route

In India, Nok Air launched its flights from Bangkok to Hyderabad on February 21, 2023, marking a significant expansion of its international network. It operates four weekly flights from Hyderabad to Bangkok, offering seamless connections to over 15 destinations across Thailand.

With the introduction of the Mumbai-Bangkok route in October 2024, we asked Ranon about the motivation behind this new service. He emphasised that Mumbai, a key business and leisure hub, offers significant growth potential for Nok Air. Ranon explains, "Launching a nonstop service with eight flights per week between Mumbai and Bangkok reflects our commitment to expanding our network and enhancing connectivity between India and Thailand. Given the high demand for both leisure and business travel, this route aligns perfectly with our strategy to tap into key markets." Ranon also noted that strategic pricing and targeted marketing campaigns will support strong performance, with a capacity of over 13,000 seats per month and an expected average load factor exceeding 80 per cent throughout the year on the route.

"Our market research revealed a strong demand for travel between Mumbai and Bangkok, driven by a mix of business, tourism, and cultural exchange. By



▲ Ranon Viputsiri

launching this route, we aim to further solidify our position as a preferred airline, offering passengers an enjoyable journey filled with smiles, 'We Fly Smiles,' aligned with our slogan," adds Ranon.

Positive Outlook - Hyderabad-Bangkok Service

While the Hyderabad market is smaller than Mumbai's, Nok Air is experiencing steady growth in its Hyderabad-Bangkok service. The airline expects continued positive traction as awareness of the route increases. Currently, Nok Air has a capacity of 6,400 seats per month, with a year-to-date average load factor of 78 per cent. Ranon notes, "Since launching our Hyderabad route, we have seen impressive performance metrics. Passenger load factors have been high, and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. This reinforces our belief that Indian travellers appreciate our blend of affordable pricing and premium service. Our distribution partners support this route for inbound traffic to Thailand and beyond, contributing to our success in Hyderabad."

Why Nok Air?

Positioned as a premium budget airline, Nok Air is committed to providing a high-quality travel experience at affordable prices. Ranon emphasises that Indian routes facilitate tourism and strengthen business ties, enhancing passenger and cargo traffic, which is central to Nok Air's long-term strategy. "Operating from Don Muang Airport (DMK), which primarily serves domestic and budget airlines, enables us to provide competitive pricing and convenience for travellers flying in and out of Bangkok. Being the original airport and closer to the city centre than the Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Don Muang is ideally situated for passengers heading to other destinations in Thailand," assures Ranon.

What indeed will set Nok Air apart on the Mumbai-Bangkok route is its focus on creating an enjoyable journey. The Airbus 737-800, which will operate this route, is optimised for comfort, featuring spacious seating and an excellent seat pitch. Ranon notes, "We aim to make the journey an experience in itself, with surprises like flight giveaways, souvenirs, and soon-to-be-launched in-flight entertainment service, all aligned with our slogan - We Fly Smiles." The airline's extensive domestic network connects Indian travellers to popular Thai destinations like Phuket, Chiang Mai, and Krabi.

Long-term Growth and Expansion Plans

The Mumbai route is crucial to Nok Air's long-term growth strategy. With this expansion into India, the airline plans to target more major cities next year while continuing to grow in China and North Asia. Ranon concludes, "As a premium budget airline, we aim to expand into regions with strong demand for affordable yet premium travel options. While additional expansion plans are underway, we remain dedicated to delivering a high-quality experience, continuing to keep our passengers smiling."



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Connecting Cultures

Vietnam Airlines elevates aviation excellence, expands presence in India

In an insightful interaction with TTJ, Nguyen Trung Hieu, Country Manager, India, Vietnam Airlines, shared valuable insights into the airline's strategic initiatives in the Indian market. He emphasised introducing innovative services and curated offerings to meet the evolving preferences of Indian travellers.

Prashant Nayak

Vietnam Airlines is known for its modern fleet of over 100 aircraft, including Boeing 787s, Airbus A350s, Airbus A320 NEOs, and Airbus A321s, aiming to provide high-quality service and comfort. In recent years, the airline has focused on enhancing its in-flight services, including improved meal options to cater to diverse passenger needs, making it a popular choice among travellers.

Vietnamese Hospitality Onboard

Vietnam Airlines aims to deliver unforgettable experiences to international travellers by showcasing Vietnamese hospitality at every touchpoint, from smooth booking processes to airport interactions and the onboard experience. Trung Hieu states, "On board, we have a specially curated menu featuring local and international cuisine, ensuring high service standards throughout the flight." This commitment to quality service and culinary excellence is reflected in the airline's recognition as a Skytrax four-star airline and its SkyTeam global airline alliance membership. Additionally, Vietnam Airlines ranks among the top 20 airlines worldwide for service quality."

Enhancing Indian Routes

Over the years, Vietnam Airlines has established a significant presence in India by operating 14 weekly flights from Delhi and Mumbai to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. This strategic move aligns with the growing interest among Indian travellers in Vietnam, which was reported as the 'Most Searched Destination for Indians in 2023,' according to Google Trends. The airline has introduced Airbus A350 aircraft on selected routes from India to cater to this demand. Introducing these state-of-the-art aircraft indicates a positive outlook on passenger demand from India, reflecting their intent to leverage this trend for expansion plans.

Introducing the Airbus A350 on routes from India is part of Vietnam Airlines' broader strategy to enhance customer



▲ Nguyen Trung Hieu

experience and attract business and leisure travellers. Trung Hieu explains, "For corporate travellers, with the introduction of the A350 featuring fully flat beds in business class, passengers can arrive fresh at their destination after a comfortable night's sleep with cosy beds and fluffy blankets. We aim to provide the best product for consumers, featuring state-of-the-art amenities that ensure a luxurious experience at 36,000 feet. Our commitment to quality is also reflected in our well-curated menu, which includes specially designed meals catering to diverse tastes, including Indian cuisine."

Committed to Indian Travellers

Vietnam Airlines faces unique challenges in serving Indian travellers, particularly regarding dietary preferences and customer service expectations. To address these needs, the airline has introduced a specially curated Indian menu featuring Jain, Western, and Eastern vegetarian options. Trung Hieu notes, "We believe every passenger deserves to enjoy familiar flavours while flying. In addition to Indian cuisine, we also offer a broad selection of meals from various Asian and international cuisines, allowing passengers to choose according to their tastes. We actively

engage with travellers for their feedback while continuously innovating to enhance its meal offerings to meet the diverse expectations of our Indian customer base. Additionally, we invest in staff training to improve attentiveness and accommodate the cultural norms of Indian travellers, ensuring a welcoming atmosphere on board."

Enhancing Passenger Experiences

Vietnam Airlines is committed to exploring innovative initiatives aimed at enhancing passenger engagement. These include interactive in-flight entertainment options and personalised travel experiences that reflect Vietnamese culture and vibrant traditions. Trung Hieu states, "In a market increasingly dominated by low-cost carriers, Vietnam Airlines plans to maintain its competitive edge through superior service offerings and enhanced passenger experiences."

The airline also provides value for money to its travellers by offering all-in fares, which are easier to understand for international passengers. Furthermore, Vietnam Airlines has launched the 'Lotus Smiles Loyalty Program,' rewarding frequent flyers with benefits designed to elevate their travel experience. For travellers holding elite status with other airlines, Vietnam Airlines offers a status match programme that allows them to enjoy similar privileges within the Lotus Smiles framework.

Positive Outlook for India

India represents a crucial growth market for Vietnam Airlines, and the airline is actively exploring opportunities for further expansion, focusing on adding routes to several Tier II cities. Trung Hieu shares, "We are currently operating under a bilateral agreement between the two countries. However, we see tremendous growth potential based on our continuous evaluation of market demand in India. Expanding our route network in this fast-growing market is our priority."

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Saudi's Unique Appeal Captivates Indian Travellers



Saudi has emerged as a top choice for travellers with a long list of unforgettable experiences. Its proximity to India, direct flight options, and easy visa process* make it attractive for multi-generational vacationers and families travelling with kids. The country offers many family-friendly resorts with water parks, kids' clubs, and recreational activities making it perfect for a great Indian summer vacation.

Entertainment

Every city in Saudi has numerous entertainment options for families with kids. Pick Jeddah to witness the joy on your kids' faces while they discover the sea creatures at the Fakieh Aquarium and enjoy the Scenic waterfront at the King Fahd Fountain. One can also explore a myriad of options in Riyadh, from shopping and dining at the Boulevard to enjoying the beautiful view of the city from the Sky Bridge on the 99th floor of the Kingdom Center. Last but not the least! Camp in AIUla and enjoy the starry night sky free from city lights with an exceptional stargazing experience at Gharameel.

Gastronomy

From aromatic kebabs and biryanis to sweet dates and Arabic coffee...there's something for every taste. There are fine dining spaces and speciality restaurants serving global cuisine. Families can also enjoy familiar flavours with many Indian restaurants available in every major city. Additionally, one can also enjoy Italian specialties at chi SPACCA, crafted by the award-winning chef Nancy Silverton, or relish some of the classic French dishes at Les Deux Magots. And if you're looking for an exclusive dining experience, Al Mamlaka Social Dining at Kingdom Centre Tower brings together over 20 local and international brands under one roof.

Sports & Adventure

Saudi is a playground for sport-loving families. Dive into the Red Sea in Jeddah to explore the marine life, scale the picturesque mountains of Abha, and trek through the stunning landscapes of Aseer National Park. In AIUla, zipline through rugged terrain, soar in a hot air balloon or explore ancient caves. To enhance your adventure journey further, take day trips to Al Ahsa Oasis, Asfar Lake, and Al Qarah Caves.

Heritage & Culture

Let your children immerse themselves in history by visiting Diriyah and AIUla, the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. If you happen to be in Dammam, head to Ithra, where they can enjoy fun activities and shows as well as visit the Children's Museum. These adventures provide a captivating journey through centuries of cultural heritage, broadening your children's perspective and deepening their understanding of history.

At the heart of every experience lies the warmth and hospitality of its people. Saudi is known for its Hafawah, which means rich hospitality. Whether engaging in a conversation with locals while visiting the souks in Jeddah or relishing local cuisine at the Ushaiger Heritage Village in the Najd region, families can find themselves embraced by the Arabian spirit.

**Stopover Visa, e-Visa, and Visa-on-Arrival come with conditional eligibility and are not valid for all travellers*

For information on visa applications and eligibility for e-Visa, please visit the official platforms visa.mofa.gov.sa and vc.tasheer.com. To explore Saudi's tourism offerings and travel guidelines, log on to www.VisitSaudi.com.

Top Reasons to Add Saudi to Your Travel List

Saudi continues to invite travellers to discover its unique landscape, culture and modern entertainment options. From seven UNESCO listed heritage sites dotting the country, high-rise buildings that touch the skies of Riyadh to lively souks and the coast of the Red Sea in Jeddah, it offers a host of experiences for modern travellers to add the destination to their travel list.

Exceptional Culinary Landscape to Elevate Your Palate

From Michelin-starred chef plating culinary traditions with innovation in Riyadh and Jeddah to Via Riyadh, which conceals behind its façade of Salmani architecture housing international restaurant chains like the Gymkhana and Wolfgang Puck's Spago, the culinary scene in major cities of Saudi is exceptional. Those who prefer something a little more exclusive can take to the skies at Skybridge to experience a candle-lit meal while seated 300 metres above the city lights. Additionally, Jeddah might have you asking for thirds with its impressive culinary offerings. Lastly, you can also indulge in king-size breakfast spreads in the morning and hearty dinners with views of the Red Sea in the evening.



Culture Trails to Coastal Tales

Just a stone's throw away from its cultural and historical wonders, Jeddah serves a big dose of adventure. It offers travellers to explore the hidden gems along the Red Sea coastline, with the world's fourth-largest barrier coral reef system, and over 90 pristine islands. One can dive into crystal-clear waters teeming with diverse marine life including coral reefs and uncover mysterious shipwrecks. The coastline with kayaking through mangroves and thrilling jet ski rides is another experience visitors must not miss. They can also saddle up for a horse-riding experience on Arabian horses known for their strength and stamina.

A new realm of unparalleled luxury travel experiences has emerged ever since Saudi welcomed tourism in 2019. So, experience Saudi hospitality, locally known as Hafawah amid the fragrance of coffee and warm smiles.

Saudi offers easy visa options for Indian travellers that can be applied through Tasheer centres across India. Stopover Visa, e-Visa, and Visa-on-Arrival come with conditional eligibility and are not valid for all travellers. For information on visa applications and eligibility for e-Visa, please visit the official platforms visa.mofa.gov.sa and vc.tasheer.com. To explore Saudi's tourism offerings and travel guidelines, log on to www.VisitSaudi.com.



Extravagant Saudi Seasons

Saudi has been organising global-scale music festivals, sporting events, and kids' entertainment shows for all kinds of travellers. Among the most anticipated annual gatherings is the Jeddah Season which lasts two months over summer and features 2,500 events scattered across the port city's streets. Apart from this, one can't afford to miss the Riyadh Season which spans nearly six months from the start of October. It is known to attract luminaries from sports and music, with the Boulevard transforming into a carnival hub. Its impressive exhibitions and attractions, have set Guinness World Records for being extravagant and exceptional. Saudi also showcases its heritage and cultural brilliance against the mesmerising backdrop through AIUla Season, held from December to January.

Additionally, Formula 1 glamour invites a VIP experience with accommodations offering track views alongside a marina. On the other hand, MDL Beast has brought the most epic music festivals to Riyadh, featuring international stars alongside local talent. The upcoming MDLBEAST Soundstorm 2024 is set to rock Riyadh from December 12 to December 14. Previous editions featured mega line-ups including David Guetta, Swedish House Mafia, 50 Cent, Metallica, Bruno Mars, and Post Malone.



Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort

French Elegance Meets Arabian Charm in Ras Al Khaimah

In an exclusive interview with Travel Trade Journal (TTJ), Karim Abdelhamid, General Manager, Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort, provided an in-depth look at the distinct qualities that set the resort apart, its strong appeal to global markets and the forward-looking vision shaping its future growth.

Sonika Bohra



Karim Abdelhamid

Nestled along the magnificent Ras Al Khaimah coastline, this exclusive luxury destination is rapidly earning recognition for its prime setting and distinctive infusion of French elegance and charm. Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort, the only French-branded luxury hotel in the Northern Emirates, offers an opulent escape that blends world-class service with the charm of French sophistication.

As Abdelhamid enthusiastically describes, the Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort is unlike any other property in the region. He explains, “Strategically located between two luxury brands, the resort is connected by a beautiful boardwalk, making it an integral part of the high-end hospitality landscape in Ras Al Khaimah. Beyond location, the French identity of the Sofitel brand makes us stand out.”

Every aspect of the resort reflects its French heritage, from its signature Diptyque amenities in the guest rooms to the luxurious Clarins Spa and the upcoming French Brasserie slated to open in October. “It is a complete French experience,” says Abdelhamid. “We also offer Levantine cuisine at Citron and Veritas and are proud to feature the largest swimming pool in the UAE, providing our guests unparalleled leisure and relaxation.”

Targeting International Markets

The resort’s unique offerings have already begun attracting a diverse range of international travellers, with a particular focus on European markets. “We are heavily targeting luxury tour operators in Europe, specifically in Germany, the UK, France, and the CIS countries, including Russia,” explains Abdelhamid. These markets have traditionally provided a strong base for luxury tourism in the UAE and Sofitel Al Hamra.

When asked about the Indian market, one of the most significant source markets for tourism in Dubai and the UAE, Abdelhamid acknowledged its importance. He says, “India is definitely an important market, especially when it comes to high-end weddings. With our large event lawns, beachfront spaces, and restaurants that can accommodate 300 guests, we are perfectly suited for Indian destination weddings, known for their grandeur.”

A Holistic Approach to Luxury

Beyond its physical beauty and French identity, the Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort excels in creating a comprehensive luxury experience for its guests. “Travellers today want more than just a room; they want a fully immersive experience,” says Abdelhamid. The resort offers a wide range of amenities, including a Clarins Spa with four treatment rooms, nine food and beverage outlets, 245

rooms, and 47 suites, nine of which feature private swimming pools. The beachfront suites provide guests with direct access to the sand, enhancing the overall experience of a beach holiday.

The resort's varied pool facilities are another highlight. Abdelhamid shares, "We have pools for everyone. There is an adult-only pool for those seeking peace and quiet, a family pool, and even a kids' pool with slides to keep the little ones entertained. We also have dedicated kids and teens clubs to ensure families have everything they need for a fun and relaxing vacation."

For guests looking for a more extended stay, Abdelhamid recommends spending at least five to seven days at the resort, especially during the cooler months between October and May. "The weather during this period is ideal for beach activities, and with all our restaurants and amenities fully operational, there's plenty for guests to explore," he adds. "It is not just a stopover; it's a full vacation experience."

MICE and Corporate Events

In addition to its appeal to leisure travellers, Sofitel Al Hamra also positions itself as a prime location for corporate events and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions). "We have three meeting rooms, and our large restaurants can easily accommodate private dining events," says Abdelhamid. "For VIPs, we have our executive club lounge with a private meeting area, making it ideal for intimate gatherings or high-profile business meetings."

While the resort does not have a traditional grand ballroom, it has developed creative solutions for hosting large events, particularly weddings. "We're able to set up beautiful temporary tents on our beachfront event lawn, which is perfect for large-scale weddings," Abdelhamid shares. "For instance, we have a wedding coming up in December with 1,000 guests, and most of them will be staying at the resort."

Ras Al Khaimah's Growing Potential

Abdelhamid points out the resort's proximity to natural attractions, such as the desert and mountains, which are just 15 to 20 minutes



away. Just a 20-minute drive from the resort, guests can experience the world's longest zipline at Jebel Jais, combining exhilarating outdoor adventure with the tranquillity of the beach.

In addition to these natural attractions, Ras Al Khaimah is set to host the region's first casino, located directly across the Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort. "The casino is going to be a game-changer for the destination," says Abdelhamid.

"It will attract a wide variety of international visitors, including many from India, where no casinos meet international standards. We are very excited about what this will mean for the future of Ras Al Khaimah."

India and Beyond

Recognising the importance of the Indian market, particularly for weddings and events, Sofitel Al Hamra is preparing to ramp up its marketing efforts in India. "We are planning several trips to India this year and early next year," shares Abdelhamid. "We will meet with the top wedding planners and tour operators to ensure that our property is on their radar for destination weddings and luxury vacations."

As a new property, the resort also focuses on building long-term relationships with its guests. "Repeat travellers are significantly important to us," says Abdelhamid. "We work hard to understand each guest's preferences and tailor their experience to ensure an exceptional stay." Whether providing personalised vegetarian menu options or offering private beach dining experiences, the resort's team strives to exceed guest expectations at every turn.



Looking Ahead

Though Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort has only been operating for a short time, it has already established bold aspirations for the future. "Our goal is simple: to become the number one luxury resort in the Northern Emirates," Abdelhamid states confidently. "We're well on our way to achieving that goal, with a steadfast commitment to delivering exceptional service to every one of our guests." He expressed confidence that the resort is moving in the right direction. "We have been ramping up in the right way, and we have high expectations for the coming quarter," he says.

Sofitel Al Hamra's Role in the Future of Ras Al Khaimah

As Ras Al Khaimah's tourism sector continues to evolve, Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort is poised to play a central role in promoting the region as a top travel destination. "The addition of the casino will certainly put Ras Al Khaimah on the map, but there is so much more to this destination," Abdelhamid reflects. "Our beaches are unique, our proximity to Dubai makes us easily accessible, and our luxury offerings will attract travellers from around the world. We are excited to be a part of this journey."

In closing, Abdelhamid expressed his eagerness to welcome guests worldwide, mainly from India. "We look forward to creating unforgettable memories for our guests," he said warmly, "and we are committed to making Sofitel Al Hamra Beach Resort a truly exceptional destination."



Arctic Circle and Scandinavian Wonders

A New Frontier for Indian Travellers

The Arctic Circle and Scandinavian countries have become increasingly attractive destinations for Indian travellers in search of unique, unforgettable experiences. Holiday Moods Adventures (HMA) specialises in crafting bespoke journeys explicitly tailored for the Indian market. Tejbir Singh Anand and Arshdeep Anand, Directors at HMA, provide brief insights into these captivating destinations and their exclusive offerings.

Team TTJ

HMA offers customised packages for both land and sea explorations, ensuring seamless experiences across iconic regions. They proudly serve as exclusive distributors in India for renowned cruise lines, including Havila Voyages, Swan Hellenic, and Viking Line. This expertise allows them to combine luxurious cruises with land activities, creating unforgettable experiences for Indian tourists.

The Allure of Scandinavia and the Arctic Circle

Scandinavian countries and the Arctic Circle offer a unique blend of breathtaking natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and outdoor adventures. From witnessing the ethereal Northern Lights to exploring vast wildernesses, these destinations provide something extraordinary for every traveller. With ready-to-book packages and quick solutions, HMA empowers retail travel agents in India to showcase the remarkable offerings of Norway, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, and Greenland.

Norway: The Land of the Northern Lights and Fjords

Norway is renowned for the Northern Lights, and cruises with Havila Voyages offer an ideal way to witness this natural wonder. Passengers can enjoy the spectacle from the comfort of their cabins while gliding past UNESCO-listed fjords like Geirangerfjord and Sognefjord. Tejbir notes, "Our land packages in Norway feature a range of winter activities, from husky sledding and snowmobiling to thrilling RIB safaris and king crab fishing. In summer, travellers can embark on a luxury boutique cruise in Svalbard, spot polar bears, or experience Norway's spectacular Arctic Train."

Finland: A Winter Wonderland

Finland's Lapland is a dream destination for those chasing the Northern Lights. HMA's packages combine igloo stays and visits to the famous Ice Hotel with exhilarating activities such as polar icebreaker cruises, snowmobiling, and reindeer sledding. Arshdeep adds, "In addition to winter adventures, we offer visits to Santa Claus Village in Rovaniemi, a magical experience for



▲ Tejbir Singh Anand

families. In summer, Finland transforms into an outdoor paradise, featuring midnight sun hikes and world-renowned sauna experiences."

Iceland: Land of Fire and Ice

Iceland's dramatic landscapes make it a sought-after destination for Indian travellers. Iceland consistently impresses, from the Blue Lagoon geothermal spa to the stunning Golden Circle, which includes Gullfoss Waterfall and Geysir. On this, Arshdeep elaborates, "Our packages include guided tours to the Silver Circle, Black Beach, and the stunning Glacial Lagoon at Vatnajökull. Travellers can also enjoy whale-watching tours, experience the Northern Lights, and explore the unique Diamond Circle route, which features the magnificent Dettifoss and Goðafoss waterfalls. For those seeking adventure beyond traditional trails, our luxury boutique summer cruises offer a unique way to discover Iceland's stunning coastline."

Sweden: A Blend of Culture and Nature

Sweden is perfect for travellers looking for a mix of culture and nature. The northern Lapland region provides opportunities to chase the Northern Lights, stay at the Ice Hotel, and embark on a polar icebreaker cruise. In the capital, Stockholm, visitors can explore



▲ Arshdeep Anand

historical sites like Gamla Stan (Old Town) and the Vasa Museum. Tejbir states, "Our Sweden packages blend cultural exploration with outdoor activities, including archipelago boat tours and wildlife safaris in Abisko National Park, known for its clear skies and unrivalled Northern Lights views."

Greenland: The Final Frontier

Greenland, the world's largest island, remains an exotic frontier for adventure travellers. The luxury summer cruises offer up-close encounters with pristine wilderness. Travellers can walk on the Greenland Ice Cap, explore ancient Viking ruins, and enjoy the region's rich history and nature. Tejbir informs, "In winter, activities include dog sledding, snowmobiling, and watching the Northern Lights dance across the sky. Wildlife enthusiasts can spot polar bears and whales in their natural habitats."

Looking Ahead: Winter 2024-2025

As Winter 2024-2025 approaches, HMA is excited to offer exclusive Northern Lights packages in Finland's and Sweden's Lapland regions and Norway's Tromsø and Lofoten Islands. These ready-to-book packages will help Indian retail travel agents promote the magic of the Arctic Circle to their clients. With HMA, the wonders of the North await!

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La Mamounia, for those seeking an enchanting escape in the heart of Morocco

TTJ recently had the opportunity to meet with Pierre Jochem, General Manager, La Mamounia, Marrakech, during his visit to India. Under his leadership, this iconic property has masterfully redefined itself, seamlessly blending its rich heritage with contemporary elegance. He shared valuable insights into the property's unique selling points and offerings, highlighting why it stands out as an ideal destination for Indian travellers.

Prashant Nayak

Marrakech, one of Morocco's most vibrant cities, is renowned for its stunning architecture, lively markets, and deep historical roots. Visitors come to soak in the city's imperial past, relax in luxury hotels and spas, and indulge in exquisite dining. Marrakech also offers activities such as golfing, desert excursions, and hot air balloon rides, attracting travellers of all kinds. This ancient city has also become a sought-after wedding destination. Among its gems, La Mamounia, once a palace, stands as a destination in itself, offering an immersive experience of Moroccan tradition intertwined with unparalleled luxury.

A Timeless Luxury Experience

Founded in 1923, La Mamounia has long been synonymous with luxury and grandeur. Over the years, the hotel has undergone multiple reinventions, and now offers a range of luxurious accommodations, including rooms and suites with stunning views of the Atlas Mountains and the stunning surrounding gardens. Over the decades, the hotel has hosted a myriad of celebrities and dignitaries from around the globe, providing all guests with



▲ Pierre Jochem

memorable vacations or lavish celebrations.

As Pierre Jochem eloquently puts it, "La Mamounia truly stands out among luxury hotels in Morocco and beyond due to its great history and unique blend of tradition and modernity. Recently celebrating a century of

service, the hotel is situated on 20 acres in the heart of Marrakech, with two-thirds dedicated to stunning gardens. The atmosphere is captivating; entering the hotel evokes a sense of timeless elegance you can't replicate. It is not just a luxury stay. It is an experience steeped in history, attracting a clientele that appreciates both the heritage and the refined ambiance."

Renovations: A Long-Term Vision

This legendary Moroccan palace has seen multiple redesigns and renovations, including the most recent in 2020 and 2023, all while preserving its historical essence. Jochem says, "This balance of history and modern sophistication makes La Mamounia a unique gem, often described humbly as 'the only palace' in a city filled with five-star options. It is a place where the past and present coexist beautifully, offering guests a truly unforgettable experience."

The recent renovations also have a long-term vision and are a significant step towards enhancing the guest experience. In two stages, this renovation project focused on refreshing public areas and reimagining the food and beverage offerings to align with contemporary



trends and guest expectations. “As we look ahead to 2030, particularly with Morocco co-hosting the World Cup alongside Spain and Portugal, we are exploring plans for potential expansions and room upgrades. This includes increasing room sizes and introducing new design aesthetics to align with evolving guest preferences and future demands. With new hotels expected to emerge in Marrakech and across the country, innovation will be key to staying competitive and ensuring that we continue to offer the highest standards of luxury and comfort,” shares Jochem.

Crafting Unique Guest Experiences

La Mamounia distinguishes itself in the luxury hospitality sector by crafting individualised encounters that mirror the specific desires of its guests. The hotel focuses on creating bespoke experiences, including curated tours of Marrakech, exclusive culinary classes, or private excursions to local attractions, ensuring that every visit feels distinct. Jochem notes, “We try to think beyond conventional boundaries, delivering experiences that are truly one-of-a-kind. Unlike the constraints of larger hotel chains, our independence gives us the freedom to innovate and tailor every aspect of our offerings to suit the unique preferences of each guest. This flexibility fuels our creativity, allowing us to craft bespoke solutions that elevate the guest experience. From ever-evolving decor updates—like fresh floral displays to chic new sunbed designs—our surroundings remain as dynamic and vibrant as the service we provide.”

The high number of repeat guests at La Mamounia is a testament to its exceptional service and meticulous attention to detail. To cater to these returning visitors, the staff makes a concerted effort to understand their preferences and needs. Jochem explains,

“When you have a repeat guest, you must know them well. This familiarity allows the hotel to personalise each stay, ensuring that guests feel comfortable and valued. Additionally, the staff actively seeks feedback, listening to suggestions for changes or improvements. These actions enhance guest satisfaction and encourage repeat visitors to introduce new customers to our hotel.”

A Dream Destination for Weddings

Weddings in Marrakech, particularly at La Mamounia, have traditionally drawn guests from North America and Europe. However, there is now a growing market from India and the Indian diaspora in locations like London. Jochem shares, “The city’s exotic and romantic ambiance makes it an ideal destination for lavish celebrations, reminiscent of ‘One Thousand and One Nights.’ La Mamounia has hosted several weddings, including full hotel buyouts, allowing for complete customisation of the event. With 20 acres of stunning gardens and lawns, the venue offers a breathtaking backdrop for celebrations. While guests can enjoy great flexibility, the hotel maintains strict regulations to protect its beautiful grounds, ensuring a memorable and elegant experience for all.”

Inviting Indian Travellers

Having spent several years in India, working with luxury properties like The Oberoi and The Imperial in Delhi, Jochem has a deep understanding of Indian travellers' expectations and preferences. His experience in Indian hospitality has shaped La Mamounia's approach to attracting Indian guests, with a particular focus on authentic cultural experiences and personalized service.

In collaboration with Indiva Marketing, La Mamounia is actively working to promote the



hotel's unique offerings to Indian travellers. The partnership aims to introduce the charm and elegance of La Mamounia to a discerning Indian audience, especially those seeking an exotic alternative to European and American destinations.

Jochem highlights the hotel's ability to offer Indian guests a rich cultural experience, including creative vegetarian options. “We offer an introduction to Moroccan culture through our gastronomy, our decor, and the emotions we create during each guest's stay. Marrakech is a safe and beautiful city, and we are confident that Indian travellers will find it an appealing destination for leisure, weddings, or special celebrations.”

Additionally, improved air connectivity through Qatar Airways and various European hubs has made it easier for Indian travellers to reach Morocco, further boosting the appeal of Marrakech as a travel destination.





Enchanting Vietnam

Busy Streets, Cultural Connections, and Culinary Delights

In August 2024, Vietnam Airlines rolled out the red carpet for an extraordinary adventure, uniting a lively group of Indian travel and mainstream media, YouTubers, and influencers to explore the captivating wonders of Hanoi, Halong Bay, Dalat, and Ho Chi Minh City, with a promise of thrilling discoveries and rich cultural experiences. Living up to their promise, every moment blended comfort and excitement, weaving together unforgettable memories showcasing this incredible country's enchanting essence.

Prashant Nayak

With cherished memories from my past visit to the vibrant streets of Ho Chi Minh City and the scenic charm of Danang, I was filled with excitement at the prospect of discovering new wonders in Vietnam, the Land of the Blue Dragon.

Vietnam Airlines: The A350 Business Class Experience

Our adventure began with a night flight from Delhi to Hanoi—a five-hour journey we eagerly anticipated. With the newly introduced Airbus A350, which debuted on this route in May 2024, our expectations for an exceptional travel experience soared, especially as we were flying business class. Vietnam Airlines stands out as one of the first carriers in Southeast Asia to operate the A350, demonstrating a commitment

to comfort and innovation. The aircraft on this route features a two-class cabin configuration with 276 economy seats and 29 full-flat beds in business class.

The entry into business class left a remarkable impression—visually striking, fresh, and inviting. The unique ceiling design also fosters spaciousness and openness, featuring a staggered 1-2-1 seating arrangement that provides direct aisle access for every traveller.

Business class seats are noticeably wider and capable of reclining to a fully flat position, ensuring a comfortable flight experience. Each seat included reading lights, entertainment screens, headphones, and USB chargers. From the moment of boarding, the warmth of Vietnamese hospitality was evident. The dining experience was delightful, featuring

a choice of beverages, including cocktails, alongside a thoughtfully crafted Indian meal with delicious appetisers and desserts. Such top-notch service set the perfect tone for the journey ahead to Vietnam.

Exploring Nature's Masterpiece at Halong Bay

Upon landing in Hanoi, the group set off on a scenic two-hour journey through the beautiful Vietnamese countryside to Halong Bay, a UNESCO World Heritage site. A sense of eager anticipation surrounded us as we prepared to explore this highly praised and breathtaking destination. Upon arrival at Halong Bay, a sense of awe washed over us. Though a bit cloudy, there was a serene ambience in the air.

The biggest cruise in the bay, the Ambassador Cruise, awaited us. Alongside

breakfast, the refreshing creamy Vietnamese iced coffee made with condensed milk was the perfect choice for many of us to start the day. Sailing through the breathtaking emerald waters of Halong Bay, the stunning limestone islets rising majestically from the sea created a magical atmosphere.

The Ambassador Cruise offers excursions to iconic spots, including the mesmerising Sung Sot Cave, where the stunning stalactites and



VA A350 Business Class



VA Business Class Appetiser



Sung Sot Cave Halong Bay

© Adam Jones



Halong Bay Luvon Cave

stalagmites illuminated in soft colours left visitors in awe of nature's artistry. A visit to Titov Island provided a leisurely hike up to a viewpoint with panoramic views of the bay—an unforgettable sight. Exploring Luvon Cave was another highlight, gliding through tranquil waters surrounded by dramatic rock formations. As the cruise returned to the harbour, relaxation on deck was accompanied by a stunning sunset over the water, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink. This day was a flurry of hiking and exploration, exhausting yet perfectly embodying the essence of Halong Bay in one unforgettable outing.

A Day of Iconic Discoveries in Hanoi

Back in Hanoi, the morning commenced photographing some of Hanoi's most iconic landmarks. The first stop was the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, a solemn yet inspiring

site where modern Vietnam's revered leader and founding father rests. The atmosphere looks charged, with guards standing watch and a strict code of conduct for visitors, including silence and appropriate attire. Next was the visit to Tran Quoc Pagoda, the oldest pagoda in Hanoi. Nestled on the banks of West Lake, its stunning architecture and serene surroundings offered a peaceful retreat from the city's hustle and bustle. Absorbing the tranquillity of the site allowed for reflection on the beauty of Vietnamese spirituality.



Ambassador Cruise

The highlight of the day was indulging in the famous egg coffee at Hanoi Coffee Culture. The creamy, frothy concoction was a delightful surprise—unlike anything tasted before. Watching the coffee expert prepare the coffee added to the enjoyment. To cap off the day, experiencing a Xich Lo, or traditional Vietnamese cycle rickshaw, is a delightful way to explore the city. As you sit back and relax, a skilled driver navigates the bustling streets, allowing you to soak in the vibrant sights and sounds of everyday city life right in front of you.

One of Hanoi's most remarkable experiences is its Beer Street, often called 'Bia Hoi Corner.' As night descends, Beer Street comes alive as a vibrant social scene, where crowds gather to relax, enjoy street food, and soak in the rich local culture. Just a short walk away is Train Street, a narrow passage alongside railway tracks where trains pass by, often just inches from cafes and homes lining the way. This unique street has become a favourite destination for locals and tourists alike, who come to

Presidential Palace beside Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum



Train Street Hanoi



Dalat town

enjoy a drink or meal while waiting for the train to rumble through.

Dalat: A Blend of Coffee Culture and Scenic Beauty

Dalat, a charming mountain resort town, was once a favoured summer retreat for the French, and its European-inspired architecture adds to its distinctive charm. Situated about 4,900 feet above sea level, it boasts one of the coldest climates in Vietnam. The cool weather and fertile soil nurture lush landscapes and a flourishing coffee culture, renowned for its high-quality Arabica beans. A scenic drive through the countryside offers breathtaking views of rolling hills, tranquil lakes, and organic gardens.

In our exploration, we first visited The Puppy Farm. In addition to dogs and puppies, it features a variety of other animals, like goats and llamas, creating a mini-zoo experience for visitors. The journey continued with a fascinating farm tour showcasing many organic vegetables and fruits. Our next stop was the Clay Tunnel, an impressive underground complex crafted entirely from clay, featuring intricate sculptures and stunning artwork. Here, you will be immersed in dreamlike landscapes, bursting

with vibrant colours and creative designs that beautifully showcase Vietnamese culture and folklore, making it a perfect spot for capturing memorable photos.

The Bao Dai Summer Palace offered insights into Vietnam's royal past,

with its beautiful gardens and architecture standing testament to its former grandeur. To top off the Dalat experience, a local coffee farm and roastery visit provided a chance to learn about the coffee-making process from bean to cup, savouring the rich flavours that make Dalat's coffee so renowned. The city centre near the lake was alive with energy at night, creating a vibrant atmosphere filled with fun and entertainment. To reminisce, each stop revealed a different facet of this enchanting town, making our time in Dalat truly unforgettable.

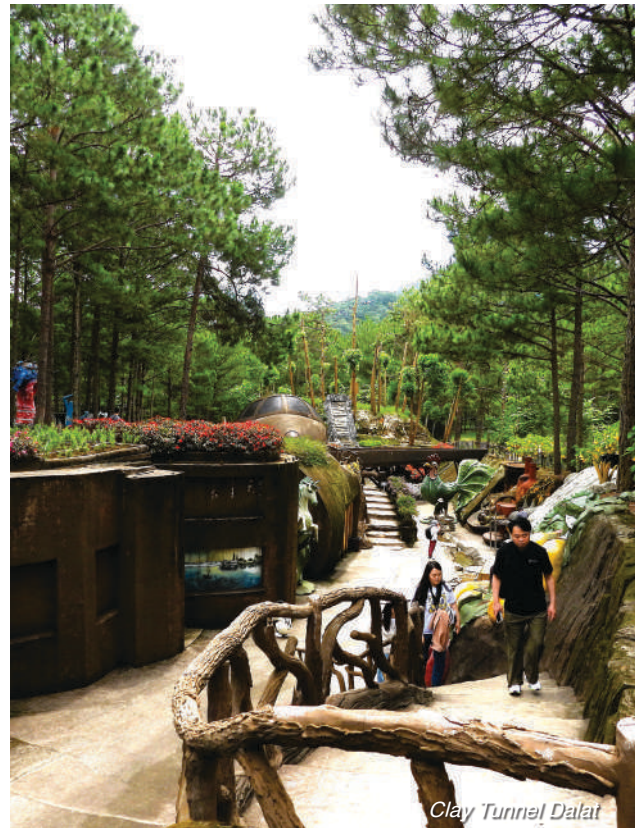
Always Vibrant: Ho Chi Minh City

Having previously visited Ho Chi Minh City and explored the War Memorial, the Saigon Post Office, and Ben Thanh Market—all fascinating places—I took some personal time for souvenir shopping. Later, I relaxed at a street-side café, admiring the lively street culture surrounding the market. The city's energy was undeniable, with street vendors, bustling shops, and a lively mix of locals and tourists, all creating a vibrant atmosphere that perfectly embodied the essence of urban life in Vietnam.

Many of us were eager to explore the Mekong Delta and the Củ Chi Tunnels. However, with limited time, we opted instead to visit an incense-making factory about 20 km outside the city, which provided fascinating insights into this traditional craft. The experience allowed us to appreciate the meticulous process and artistry of creating these fragrant sticks. While the entire lane was dedicated to incense production, we learned that the incense-making industry in Hanoi is significantly larger.

A Cultural Gem for Indian Travellers

Vietnam has emerged as a favoured destination for Indian travellers, and it is easy to understand why. Across the country, Indians are seen exploring its



Clay Tunnel Dalat

rich culture and breathtaking landscapes. Offering a wide range of experiences for different budgets, Vietnam is highly accessible. We observed an increasing number of Indian companies organising MICE events, further enhancing Vietnam's appeal as a business travel destination. Our stays at the Silk Path Luxury in Hanoi, Golf Valley Hotel in Dalat, and Paragon Saigon in Ho Chi Minh City were outstanding.

A significant draw for Indian tourists is the abundance of Indian cuisine in nearly every major city. Eateries run by both Indians and locals serve delicious meals that evoke a sense of home, with familiar names like Namaste, Mazze, Tandoor, Mama Masala, Dalcheeni, Tadka, India Gate, Sagar India, etc., making it easy to enjoy comfort food while exploring. Throughout our trip, we thoroughly enjoyed both Vietnamese and Indian cuisine, leaving no room for complaints. Our group was also delighted by the impressive variety of fruits in Vietnam, offering another delicious food option.

With Vietnam Airlines providing exceptional service and comfortable flights, the seamless travel experience perfectly complements the cultural explorations and culinary delights that await at every turn in Vietnam. This is a destination that promises to leave a lasting impression on every traveller.



Hanoi Coffee Culture



Incense lane



Incense factory



'Spectacular Saudi' event in Mumbai, tailored for Indian travellers, receives overwhelming response

The recent 'Spectacular Saudi' event in Mumbai showcased the destination's rich culture and hospitality, strengthening ties with India. Featuring immersive exhibits and traditional experiences, this eight-day celebration offered a captivating glimpse into Saudi's diverse attractions and vibrant heritage, inviting attendees to experience its wonders firsthand.

Team TTJ

Saudi's national tourism brand, 'Saudi Welcome to Arabia,' held its first-ever immersive event, 'Spectacular Saudi' in India. The event, held at the R2 Ground in Bandra Kurla Complex (BKC), Mumbai, was an eight-day extravaganza that commenced with an exclusive VIP preview on September 24, 2024. This event served as a platform to introduce the vibrant culture, heritage, and diverse attractions of Saudi to the Indian market, further enhancing the ties between the two nations.

The exclusive showcase brought together prominent figures from diverse industries, including cinema, sports, business, and fashion. Popular Indian film personalities such as Vicky Kaushal, Shraddha Kapoor, Bhumi Pednekar, Arjun Kapoor, Aditya Roy Kapoor, Sonakshi Sinha, and Suniel Shetty were in attendance, getting a firsthand taste of Saudi's warm hospitality and iconic experiences. Each interaction was enriched with cultural elements, including traditional Saudi coffee, dates, and the aromatic Bakhour, offering guests an immersive introduction to the Saudi customs.

Beyond Bollywood, the event attracted celebrated fashion designers like Gaurav Gupta and JJ Valaya, who explored the exhibits alongside legendary sports stars, including Sania Mirza, Saina Nehwal, PV Sindhu, and Mary Kom. The presence of these prominent figures from the fashion and sports industries underscores Saudi's commitment to promoting its culture to a diverse and influential Indian audience. Business tycoons such as Yash Birla and Suketu Shah also graced the event, adding a touch of the corporate world to this cultural celebration.

'Spectacular Saudi' featured a series of curated exhibits, each designed to offer an authentic and immersive glimpse into the wonders of Saudi. Among the highlights was the 'Mountains and Mirrors' installation, inspired by the iconic Maraya Hall in AlUla. This exhibit brought a slice of Saudi's breathtaking natural beauty to the heart of Mumbai, leaving attendees in awe. Another attraction that drew significant attention was the '360 Selfie Corner,' a modern and interactive setup where guests could capture

themselves surrounded by stunning visuals representing Saudi's varied landscape. The VIP guests also had the opportunity to apply for their Saudi visas by presenting a valid Mastercard or Visa credit card and prep for their forthcoming visits to Saudi with exclusive travel deals and packages.

After the VIP showcase, 'Spectacular Saudi' opened to the public from September 25 to October 2, 2024. During this period, visitors experienced an array of activities celebrating Saudi culture, including culinary explorations of traditional dishes, cultural performances, and interactive exhibits that allowed attendees to connect with the essence of Saudi.



The Machan expands footprint while upholding sustainability and innovative guest experiences

In an engaging conversation with Varun Hooja and Sanat Hooja, Partners, Machan Resorts LLP, TTJ delves into their flagship property in Lonavala and the group's upcoming ventures across India. Marking three decades of unmatched hospitality, The Machan exemplifies a perfect blend of luxury and sustainability, offering unique accommodations and experiences with a commitment to carbon neutrality.

Prashant Nayak

The Machan in Maharashtra's Lonavala is an exclusive eco-resort spread over 25 acres featuring unique tree houses that rise 30 to 45 feet above the forest, offering complete serenity for those looking to escape into nature. The mesmerising stay concepts at The Machan include Cocoon, Starlight, Heritage, Canopy, Sunset, Forest, Jungle, Cabin, and Woods. Each experience provides unparalleled tranquillity and breathtaking views in Lonavala.

A Green Sanctuary

Situated in the Western Ghats, one of the world's top biodiversity hotspots, The Machan Lonavala is conveniently located just 2.5 hours from Mumbai and 1.5 hours from Pune, making it an accessible weekend getaway. For travellers keen on bonfires, hikes, and yoga, The Machan is the perfect destination for them. Varun states, "Our brand was built for experiential leisure, particularly suited to non-metro destinations. Our Lonavala property is near two of Maharashtra's largest cities—Mumbai and Pune. It is not isolated, but when you visit our property, you will find a core connection to nature, peace, and sustainability layered with enriching experiences. Even though you are just a short drive from the metropolises, the escape you find here is highly sought after. We have welcomed guests from the Middle East, Africa, the UK, and the US."

As an eco-friendly resort, The Machan at Lonavala generates energy through renewable sources, prepares meals using parabolic solar cookers, and recycles 80 percent of its water, among other sustainable practices, demonstrating that environmental responsibility and business success can coexist. Their ongoing commitment to carbon neutrality sets a benchmark for others to aspire to.

Royal Experiences in Rajasthan

In 2022, the group acquired Harlalka Haveli in Rajasthan, a 250-year-old regal Indian haveli, marking its first attempt to expand its footprint across India. This

property has been rechristened The Legacy Mandawa by The Machan and offers royal accommodations. Varun explains that the Mandawa property has retained its old-world charm, which attracted them to acquire it. He says, "You feel regal as you walk in. This unique setting is loved by both domestic and international guests who wish to discover royalty."

The property is well connected to major cities such as Delhi and Jaipur, is well suited for weddings and MICE, and offers a range of activities in the enchanting desert wilderness.

Expanding across India's Diverse Landscapes

The Machan is poised to redefine luxury experiential hospitality while expanding its presence in diverse regions of the country. Upcoming developments will include five new properties in prime locations in Jaisalmer, Udaipur, and Jawai in Rajasthan, as well as Mulshi and Pawna near Lonavala in Maharashtra. Each property will be meticulously designed to offer guests a harmonious blend of comfort, sustainability, and immersive experiences.

Sanat mentions, "Rajasthan is a key area in our expansion plans due to its rich cultural heritage. We are ready to take our Legacy brand forward, and in Jaisalmer, we are exploring the acquisition of a 200-year-old fort, which will enhance our offerings for weddings and MICE movements. In Jawai, we strengthen our ecologically sound travel options. Jawai is home to significant wildlife, including leopards, making for an exciting new experience for our guests."



▲ Sanat Hooja and Varun Hooja

Sustainable Growth in Every Segment

As The Machan group progresses, they also plan to evolve and cater to other segments, such as business travel, and indulge in concepts like staycations. "We are developing our own sub-brands, Myst by The Machan and Moments by The Machan. We are also considering adding city hotels catering to business travellers and corporates. While questions may arise about an environmentally and nature-friendly hospitality company venturing into segments like MICE and corporate travel, we remain steadfast in our commitment to green certification and maintaining our carbon neutrality, firm wide" adds Varun.

The Machan Group has reinforced its status as India's leading carbon-neutral company since 2021. Their holistic approach to sustainability allows guests to enjoy a truly immersive natural experience without compromising luxury. Sanat emphasises, "In the future, there will be a strong demand for sustainability and responsible tourism from travellers worldwide. Our loyal guests appreciate our environmental responsibility and cherish their Machan experience as a retreat, connecting them to nature while disconnecting from the outside world."



The heart of
Incredible India

GREEN, CLEAN & SAFE

MADHYA PRADESH

A TRAVELLER'S PARADISE

Are you seeking a destination that blends natural beauty, rich heritage, and security? Madhya Pradesh, the green, clean, and safe Heart of India, has it all. From wildlife safaris and spiritual pilgrimages to cultural exploration and adventure, this state offers a wealth of experiences.

Madhya Pradesh is a haven for nature lovers, with lush greenery, vast national parks, and wildlife sanctuaries. With a large forest cover of 94,689 sq km, the state's commitment to conservation is evident in its efforts to preserve natural resources and promote sustainable tourism. As the 'Tiger State of India,' it is home to 785 tigers, alongside significant populations of leopards, vultures, and gharials. Also known as the 'Cheetah State,' Madhya Pradesh has 11 national parks, seven tiger reserves, and 24 wildlife sanctuaries. Additionally, it is recognised as the 'Gharial State,' with a thriving population of 2,400 gharials. The state's commitment to conservation is evident in its expansive forest cover and sustainable tourism efforts.

Madhya Pradesh is often called the 'Paternal Home of Rivers,' given the many rivers that flow through it. Rivers like the Narmada, Betwa, Tapti, and Chambal shape the state's landscapes. The hill station of Pachmarhi, nestled in the Satpura Range, offers a mix of stunning landscapes, verdant forests, and a refreshing climate.

Madhya Pradesh has also earned a reputation as one of India's cleanest states, with cities like Indore and Bhopal consistently ranking among the top in the country. In 2023, the state was named the cleanest in India for the second consecutive year, according to the Swachh Survekshan Awards. Indore and Bhopal have garnered national and international recognition for their outstanding cleanliness and hygiene efforts, consistently ranking among the cleanest cities in India.

Safety is paramount, especially for women travellers, and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is taking significant steps to ensure their security. With comprehensive training programmes in tourism and self-defence, thousands of women are being empowered to play an active role in the state's thriving tourism industry. These initiatives enhance safety and enable women to make meaningful contributions to the sector's growth.

The Safe Tourist Destination for Women initiative by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is a significant step toward ensuring women feel secure at tourist destinations. Under this programme, 10,000 women are being trained and connected to the tourism service sector, while 40,000 women and girls are receiving self-defence training. The state has taken significant measures to create a secure environment by empowering local women to take leadership roles in the tourism industry. Women are at the forefront of delivering exceptional experiences, from driving safaris to guiding treks.

Madhya Pradesh invites you to discover its green, clean, and safe environment. Whether you seek adventure, relaxation, or cultural immersion, this eco-friendly destination has a lot to offer for everyone.



Westbay Resort and Spa is emerging as a vibrant getaway for hospitality on the Konkan coast

TTJ had the opportunity to meet Chaitanya Tendolkar, Director, Westbay Resort and Spa, during a visit to the resort. This meeting provided valuable insights into the hotel's offerings and the evolving hospitality landscape in this increasingly popular destination in Maharashtra. As a Chartered Accountant by qualification, Chaitanya's passion for hospitality is evident, along with his commitment to enhancing guest experiences, supporting the local community, and promoting the destination.

Prashant Nayak

Westbay Resort and Spa is located along the picturesque Konkan coast in Ganpatipule in Ratnagiri, celebrated for its stunning beaches and tranquil environment. The resort offers a range of accommodations, featuring 52 rooms and cottages that provide breathtaking ocean views, all equipped with modern amenities. Its proximity to attractions such as the revered Ganpatipule Temple, Aare Waare Beach, and the Prachin Konkan Museum enhances its appeal, making it an ideal retreat for travellers.

The Evolution of Westbay Resort and Spa

Known initially as Abhishek Beach Resort, the rebranding of Westbay Resort and Spa signifies a substantial shift towards a more sophisticated and upscale image. This transition aligns perfectly with the resort's enhanced focus on luxury and wellness. Chaitanya explains, "The hotel, originally started by my uncle in 1989 as Abhishek Beach Resort, underwent a significant transition when my family acquired it in 2006 through an internal settlement. The property was struggling then, so we focused on gradual renovations from 2006 to 2010. After fully renovating the rooms, the influx of guests reaffirmed my father's belief in the property's potential."

Chaitanya became fully involved in the resort in 2011, shortly after qualifying as a Chartered Accountant. Recognising the pressing need for modernisation, he introduced essential elements such as a user-friendly website, email communication, and an active social media presence—features that had previously been lacking. As a result of these initiatives, the resort began to see a significant surge in online bookings, mainly through popular platforms like MakeMyTrip. Chaitanya noted, "I was the first to reach out to online travel agents, as the area was



▲ Chaitanya Tendolkar

relatively under-represented at the time. I sent numerous emails and messages to promote our upcoming location and resort, navigating the challenges of getting listed. My efforts gradually expanded our reach beyond Mumbai, laying the groundwork for the resort's new booking phase."

Thriving and Flourishing

Westbay Resort and Spa is thriving today, maintaining impressive occupancy rates throughout the year, especially during weekends. Given its expansive area and numerous activities available, Westbay is also well-suited for MICE activities, particularly due to the industrial presence in nearby Ratnagiri and Chiplun. Chaitanya mentions, "It is not that we don't host events; we do see some activity, but it is typically three weddings yearly and around seven or eight conferences. We still need to leverage this aspect further."

Ganpatipule: Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its advantages, Ganpatipule faces challenges. While it serves as an ideal weekend getaway, travel time can be

considerable for visitors from major cities like Mumbai, Pune, and Goa, often requiring six to eight hours of commuting by road or bus. Although rail access is relatively good, issues on the Mumbai-Goa highway can affect travel times. Additionally, air connectivity still needs to improve despite a small airport in Ratnagiri. Chaitanya reveals that, "Thirty per cent of our hotel guests come solely for the Ganesh temple, a prominent pilgrimage site and the biggest attraction. A decade ago, Ganpatipule was relatively less known than other coastal destinations in Maharashtra, like Malvan or Alibaug, but there is now growing awareness of the area. However, there is still a need for increased awareness to attract more visitors."

Community and Staff Engagement

Out of the 120 staff members at Westbay Resort and Spa, around 80 are local, highlighting the hotel's commitment to community support. Chaitanya emphasises staff retention through various initiatives, including competitive salaries that exceed local rates. He says, "This year, the resort is organising a special party to recognise its employees while also offering staff the chance to stay at the hotel with their families, giving them the unique opportunity to experience the guest's perspective. Building on last year's introduction of team-building activities that helped foster camaraderie and awareness among employees, the resort aims to further strengthen staff engagement."

Under Chaitanya's leadership, Westbay Resort and Spa has not only modernised its offerings but also embraced local culture, significantly enhancing the overall guest experience. This interaction also reflected that he is very much dedicated and keen in shaping the future of tourism in this picturesque locale.

Sunil Kumar is back as TAAI President for 2024-26 term

Sunil Kumar R has been elected as the President of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) for the 2024-26 term, having previously served for two terms from 2015 to 2019. The announcement was made today at the ITC Grand Maratha in Mumbai, following the elections conducted after TAAI's 73rd Annual General Meeting.

The presidential post was contested by Sunil Kumar, outgoing President Jyoti Mayal, who served the association for the past five years, and Harmandeep Singh Anand. Sunil Kumar secured 304 votes, Harmandeep Singh Anand received 286 votes, and Jyoti Mayal garnered 177.

Joining Kumar in the leadership team are Betaiah Lokesh, appointed as Vice President with 417 votes, Shreeram Patel as Honorary Secretary General with 344 votes, and Paras Lakhia as Honorary Treasurer. The Managing Committee for the 2024-26 term includes Amish Desai, Gopal Unadkat, Hema RV Chander, Manav Soni, P. Lalith Kumar Jain, Rajan Sehgal, Sameer Karnani.

Sunil Kumar shared his immediate plans with TTJ, stating, "We will soon have a managing committee meeting to create a collaborative plan. We must all come together and take collective responsibility for this plan, centred around 'Mission:

Members First.' It will demand substantial time and effort from both the office bearers and the Managing Committee. To elevate TAAI to new heights, the leadership must be highly proactive, motivating the entire organisation to actively participate in and champion these initiatives."

Reflecting on the elections, Sunil



remarked, "We have never had this kind of attendance before. 768 members casting their votes is a remarkable achievement. Members travelled from across the country to participate, demonstrating their eagerness for progress. We must live up to their expectations. People have the right to choose their leaders, and we accept the verdict of the general body."

ATOAI elects new leadership for 2024-26 term

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) successfully held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on September 16, 2024, at The Metropolitan Hotel and Spa in New Delhi, culminating in a Fellowship Dinner. The event featured leadership addresses, a review of achievements, and elections for the 2024-26 term.

The AGM began with an inspiring address by ATOAI President Ajeet Bajaj, highlighting the association's dedication to advancing sustainable adventure tourism in India and applauding members' efforts in promoting responsible tourism. Honorary Secretary Ronny Singh Gulati presented the annual report detailing ATOAI's key initiatives and accomplishments in 2023-24. Honorary Treasurer Nirat Bhatt provided an overview of the financial performance for 2023-24, offering insights into the association's economic stability and operational performance.

The AGM approved previous minutes, the financial report for 2023-24, and the appointment of SPH & Associates as



auditors for 2024-25. Senior Vice President Tejbir Singh Anand delivered a vote of thanks, recognising the support of various stakeholders in advancing adventure tourism.

Elections were conducted, and the following office bearers were elected unopposed: Ajeet Bajaj as President, Vaibhav Kala as Senior Vice President, Arshdeep Anand as Vice President, Ronny Gulati as Honorary Secretary, and Nirat Bhatt as Honorary Treasurer.

The new Executive Committee members include Vishwas Makhija (Immediate Past President), Milind Bhide, Amit Periwal, Yog Dutt, and Shekhar Babu.

The new leadership team aims to expand adventure tourism in India through collaboration with government and international partners. The Fellowship Dinner celebrated the shared vision of the adventure tourism community, with support pledged by Col Vijay Singh and Brigadier Ashok Abbey for advancing the industry.



IIFA Festival 2024

A Dazzling Celebration of Cinema, Empowerment, and Legacy

The 24th Edition of the IIFA Festival 2024, held from September 27 to 29 on Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, was a spectacular three-day celebration of Indian cinema, combining glitz, glamour, and a profound commitment to social change and empowerment. With an array of events and performances that enchanted audiences worldwide, IIFA reaffirmed its standing as a global cultural phenomenon, etching unforgettable moments for film enthusiasts.

Team TTJ

A Grand Kickoff with a Mission for Change

From the outset, the IIFA Festival 2024 radiated cinematic magic. The celebration launched with a dynamic press conference, bringing together stars from five renowned film industries—Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada. Amid the excitement, IIFA introduced its groundbreaking initiative, "I Can Make A Difference," partnering with Sobha Group as the official Cause Partner to drive positive change on a larger scale. This initiative aimed to empower women and promote collective action toward social change, reinforcing the powerful message, "When You Lay A Strong Foundation, You're Not Just Building For Today—You're Shaping Tomorrow." Another significant highlight of the day was the announcement of the Kuberan Film City and Institute, a state-of-

the-art production and talent development facility in Goa, poised to make the region a key hub for films and OTT projects.

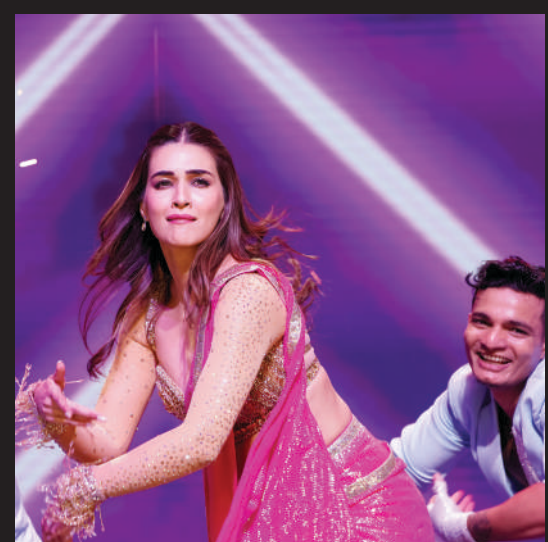
Celebrating Southern Cinema at IIFA Utsavam 2024

The first day of festivities featured IIFA Utsavam 2024, a celebration of the triumphs of South Indian cinema. The event honoured the best in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Kannada films, showcasing the immense talent of these industries. The star-studded event effortlessly combined glamour and prestige, with notable appearances from icons like Mani Ratnam, Chiranjeevi, AR Rahman, and Samantha Ruth Prabhu. Hosted by South actors Rana Daggubati and Teja Sajja, the ceremony recognised winners across popular categories such as Best Picture, Best Direction, and Best Performance in Leading and Supporting

Roles, highlighting the rich diversity and cultural impact of South Indian cinema. Chiranjeevi was also honoured with the prestigious Outstanding Achievement in Indian Cinema Award.

NEXA IIFA Awards: Honouring Excellence and Emotional Moments

The excitement continued on the second day with the NEXA IIFA Awards 2024, where thought-provoking cinema and legendary filmmakers took centre stage. One of the most memorable moments came when Vidhu Vinod Chopra received the Best Director award for his film 12th Fail, and Mani Ratnam, alongside AR Rahman, presented Shah Rukh Khan with the Best Performance in a Leading Role (male) award. An emotional SRK expressed, "Receiving this award from



Mani Ratnam and A.R. Rahman is one of the greatest moments of my life. I have learned everything I know about filmmaking from them.”

Another emotional highlight of the night came when Hema Malini was presented with the Outstanding Achievement in Indian Cinema Award by Shah Rukh Khan. With warmth and pride, she recalled her role in introducing SRK to the film industry and celebrated his journey to becoming the ‘king of Bollywood.’ The audience was touched by the shared history between these two beloved stars, embodying the spirit of legacy and progression that IIFA so deeply cherishes. However, the legendary actress Rekha truly captivated the audience with her graceful performance of iconic songs, including ‘Piya Tose Naina Lage Re’ from Guide. Dressed in a pink Anarkali, Rekha’s timeless charm lit up the stage, creating an

unforgettable closing moment for day two of the IIFA Festival 2024.

IIFA Rocks: Electrifying Performances Light Up Yas Island

The grand finale arrived with IIFA Rocks 2024, a breathtaking conclusion to the festival that set Yas Island ablaze with an electrifying fusion of music and stardom. Hosted by the dynamic duo Siddhant Chaturvedi and Abhishek Banerjee, the evening featured spellbinding performances from some of India’s finest talents. The legendary musical trio Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy led the charge with a tribute to their illustrious 30-year career in Indian cinema, blending timeless classics with contemporary hits that had the crowd swaying. Playback singer Shilpa Rao followed, dazzling the audience with her

powerful vocals and versatility, seamlessly transitioning between soulful ballads and high-energy numbers.

The energy soared to new heights when Honey Singh hit the stage, blending his signature rap with Bollywood beats, igniting the crowd’s excitement. On the other hand, Lulia Vantur’s mesmerising vocals brought a graceful elegance to the evening, leaving the audience spellbound.

The 24th IIFA Festival will be remembered not only for the dazzling display of cinematic brilliance and star power but also for its powerful messages of unity, change, and empowerment. Celebrating Indian cinema in its entirety, from Bollywood to the Southern film industries, IIFA 2024 showcased the best of what Indian films have to offer—creativity, passion, and a commitment to making a difference in the world.



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WICE at the Forefront

RDTM 2024 Highlights Rajasthan's Expanding Tourism Landscape

The fourth edition of the Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart (RDTM) was held in Jaipur from September 13 to 15, 2024. Organised by the Federation of Hospitality and Tourism of Rajasthan (FHTR) in collaboration with the Rajasthan Tourism Department and with active participation from the Central Ministry of Tourism, RDTM-2024 showcased the immense tourism opportunities available in the state, with a particular focus on promoting domestic and village tourism.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

This year's event highlighted the theme of Weddings, Incentives, Conferences, and Events (WICE), emphasising Rajasthan's appeal as a leading destination for these segments. The Mart featured over 200 stalls and showcased over 600 hotels, drawing significant attention from domestic and international audiences. The increased participation in B2B and B2C meetings demonstrated the growing interest of tourists and event organisers in the state. A series of engaging activities, such as cultural performances, talk sessions, and showcases of Rajasthan's handloom and handicrafts, gave delegates an immersive experience of the region's vibrant culture.

At the event, Rajasthan's Deputy Chief Minister, Diya Kumari, expressed optimism about the state's tourism potential. She stated, "Rajasthan has immense tourism potential, and events like RDTM play a crucial role in promoting it. This mart provided an opportunity to showcase the state's rich cultural heritage, unique natural beauty, and diversity to buyers nationwide and beyond. We continuously improve the tourism infrastructure and facilities to offer unforgettable experiences to

tourists visiting Rajasthan. With this in mind, further development plans for tourism are in preparation."

FHTR President Kuldeep Singh Chandela shared his views on the importance of collaboration, saying, "RDTM brought together all the stakeholders in the tourism sector under one roof. While promoting rural tourism and new destinations, the event also emphasised the enormous potential of MICE and wedding tourism. Various tourism stakeholders discussed new plans to enhance Rajasthan's tourism while committing to providing a rich and safe experience for tourists visiting the state."

The event also recognised notable contributors to Rajasthan's tourism industry. Chairman and Managing Director, Rajasthan Tours, Bhim Singh, was honoured with the 'Lifetime Honour Award' for his 65 years of dedicated service to developing tourism in the state. Dr Lalit K. Panwar was presented with the 'Enduring Impact on Tourism, Art, and Culture Award' for his contributions to the sector.

The late Randhir Vikram Singh Mandawa was remembered and honoured with the 'Legacy of Tourism Award' for his transformative contributions. Sudhir Patil of Veena World

received the 'Hall of Fame Award' for his company's immense contribution to promoting tourism in Rajasthan.

The Rajasthan Domestic Travel Mart 2024 not only celebrated the state's tourism potential but also served as a platform to further strengthen Rajasthan's position as a hub for weddings, incentives, conferences, and events, solidifying WICE as the key mantra for the state's tourism growth.








TRAVMART
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 With New Opportunities

Surat
 18 SEPTEMBER 2024
 Orange Megastructure LLP (Le Meridien)
 Magdalla Circle, Dumas Road, Surat, Gujarat



TTJ TRAVMART - Surat 2024

A Full House of Business Success

The Orange Megastructure LLP (Le Meridien) served as the venue for a vibrant business gathering as TTJ TRAVMART Surat brought together 27 sellers/exhibitors and more than 120 buyers from the travel fraternity on September 18, 2024. The event was a full house, with over 1,400 business meetings conducted during the day, fostering valuable connections within the travel industry.

The exhibitors included a diverse range of sellers, such as airlines, hotels, cruise lines, destination management companies (DMCs), tourism boards, and travel technology companies. Their participation offered the buyers an opportunity to explore an extensive array of travel products and services.

The event received strong support from national and local trade associations, with their members and senior office bearers actively engaging with the sellers throughout the day. A special delegation of 16 members from the Vadodara Travel Trade Association (VTTA) also travelled from Vadodara to attend the TRAVMART, highlighting the widespread interest in the event.

Sharjah Tourism, the 'Gold Sponsor' of the event, conducted a presentation and set up a special themed photo booth, offering attendees a chance to capture memorable moments. Presentations were also delivered by Celestyal Cruises and Sampan Tech, introducing the TTJ Marketplace to the Surat market and showcasing the benefits of the online business platform.

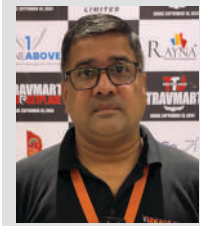
One of the standout features of the event was the series of lucky draws, with the grand prize being a round-trip economy class ticket to Johannesburg, generously provided by the Country Manager of Uganda Airlines. The event was filled with business opportunities, learning, and excitement, making TTJ TRAVMART Surat 2024 a resounding success.





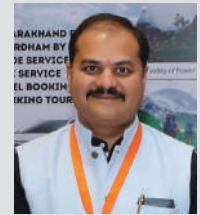
Vishaal Nair
Sr. Manager Sales (West & South), Sharjah Tourism

It has been a fantastic experience so far, with many travel agents showing strong interest in promoting our destination to their clients, which is very exciting. This event has been a valuable learning opportunity, allowing me to connect with a diverse range of suppliers and vendors. The venue is bustling, with attendees from across the Surat region and beyond.



Joy Joseph
VP - Sales & Operations, Virkauf DMC

We participated as a seller in TJJ TRAVMART Surat. Having previously attended events like OTM, SATTE, and other travel-related exhibitions, what stood out at TJJ TRAVMART Surat was the emphasis on quality over quantity. The attendees, primarily from Surat, Baroda, and other cities in Gujarat, were highly relevant, which made the experience truly valuable and enjoyable.



Sunil Kumar Saini
CEO, DMC Uttarakhand

Thank you, TJJ, for inviting us to Surat. We received a great response from the Surat travel trade partners and are hopeful for good business opportunities from the region. We also look forward to being part of future TJJ TRAVMARTS in other cities.



Sumit Saluja
Owner, TRAMILY - A Travel Family

I want to thank the organizers for the fantastic experience at TJJ TRAVMART Surat. The energy at the event was incredible, and it was wonderful to connect with such a vibrant community of buyers and suppliers. I'm excited about the connections made and eagerly look forward to future events to continue building these relationships. A big thank you to the entire team for making it all happen!



Varishal Singh Deora
CEO, BOOKNFLY

We participated in TJJ TRAVMART Surat and had a positive overall experience. The event facilitated well-organized one-on-one meetings, providing ample opportunities to showcase our products. A highlight for us was having our company's promotional video featured on the giant LED wall throughout the event.





Harpreet Singh
Managing Director, Trip Inventor

I recently participated in TTJ TRAVMART in Surat and was thrilled with the experience. The event provided an excellent platform for B2B networking, where I had multiple successful meetings with potential clients. The quality of attendees and the overall organisation of the event exceeded my expectations. I am grateful to be associated with TTJ, a prestigious organisation in the travel trade industry. The Surat TTJ event was outstanding, and I look forward to future collaborations. I highly recommend TTJ events to travel industry professionals seeking meaningful connections and business opportunities.



Siddharth Sonkar
Asst. VP, One Above

Our participation in TTJ TRAVMART Surat was an excellent experience. The crowd was great, and we received many inquiries. I am hopeful for significant conversions from this event. I wish team TTJ the best of luck for future events.



Sandeep Galhotra
Director, Vaayu Trip

I'm thrilled to be at TTJ TRAVMART Surat. The environment here is very business-friendly, with a lot of buyers and sellers under one roof engaging in quality meetings. I am optimistic about receiving a positive response from this event.



Manish B. Shah
Proprietor, Heights & Sights

16 delegates from Baroda attended the TTJ TRAVMART event in Surat. It provided an excellent opportunity for travel agents to explore a wide range of innovative travel products showcased by numerous sellers. I gained valuable insights into new products and hope to see TTJ TRAVMART organised in Baroda in the future as well.



Maulik Vichhiya
Founder & Director, Fly&Joy

The event organized in Surat by TTJ was excellent, clearly reflecting the hard work that went into its curation. TTJ provided an outstanding platform for one-on-one meetings with multiple sellers, making it highly valuable for everyone involved.



Tourism Leaders Convene at 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal to Chart the Future of Inbound Tourism

The 39th Annual Convention of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) was held in Bhopal from August 30 to September 1, 2024. The convention was inaugurated by Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister for Tourism and Culture, along with Dr Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh. Approximately 1,200 members from across the country attended the event, including senior representatives of tourism ministries from 13 different states.

In his inaugural speech, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Tourism and Culture Minister, highlighted India's historical appeal to global travellers. He emphasised the vast tourism opportunities available in the country, combined with the current government's focus on improving rail, road, and air connectivity. He urged tourism stakeholders to capitalise on these opportunities to boost inbound tourism.

Dr Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister, Madhya Pradesh, also addressed the gathering, highlighting the state's rich heritage, wildlife, and cultural tourism potential. He stated, "The state is endowed with multiple UNESCO World

Heritage sites, and some of our monuments remain a challenge for experts even today. As for our wildlife, it is not uncommon to spot tigers roaming the roads in Bhopal!" He further expressed his confidence in the state's ability to attract more foreign tourists.

Rajiv Mehra, President, and Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO, outlined the role of IATO in promoting inbound tourism, particularly in Madhya Pradesh. They promised to leave no stone unturned in increasing inbound tourism to the state.

Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Culture and Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh, spoke about the government's initiative to develop 50 new tourist destinations in the state. He emphasised the importance of coordination between different stakeholders to achieve better outcomes from policy initiatives.

Puneet Chhatwal Honoured with IATO Hall of Fame Award

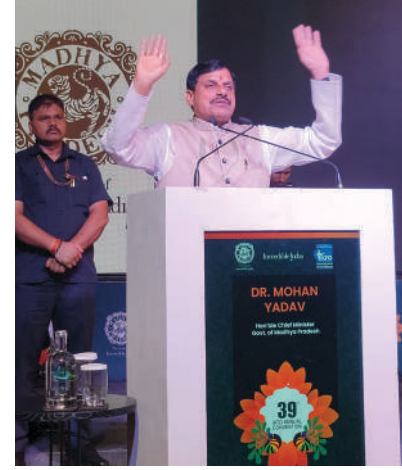
Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), was

honoured with the prestigious IATO Hall of Fame Award for his outstanding service and invaluable contributions to the travel and tourism industry. In his acceptance speech, Chhatwal unveiled a series of strategic measures to strengthen collaboration with the travel trade sector, emphasising IHCL's commitment to fostering growth and providing a competitive edge for its partners. He also announced an increase in travel agents' commissions from 10 per cent to 12.5 per cent, along with other benefits to support IATO member agents.

Late M.L. Razdan Honoured for His Legacy

The IATO Hall of Fame Award was posthumously awarded to the late M.L. Razdan for his significant contributions to the tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Remembered as a pioneer in the industry, Razdan was celebrated for his remarkable vision and dedication. His daughter-in-law, Anita Razdan, accepted the award in the presence of his son, Sanjay Razdan, who honoured his enduring legacy as a trendsetter and an inspiring figure in tourism.





Saudia partners with QuadLabs to power the B2B Business Travel Solution

QuadLabs
#ReshapingTravel



Saudia, the national flag carrier of Saudi Arabia, has signed a strategic partnership with QuadLabs, a leading travel technology solutions provider, to launch an advanced B2B solution tailored for corporates. The solution aims to revolutionise the business travel experience for companies across the region.

This collaboration marks a significant milestone in corporate travel management. It combines QuadLabs' innovative technology with Saudia's renowned service and extensive network. The solution is designed to meet the unique needs of business travellers, offering a comprehensive suite of features that streamline the entire travel management process.

The new solution is based on QuadLab's next-generation platform, 'Travog,' which provides a range of value-added benefits specifically designed to support business travel requirements. With a focus on convenience, efficiency, user experience, and cost-effectiveness, the platform offers seamless booking management, allowing corporates to manage their entire travel itinerary and ancillaries, through an integrated and user-friendly interface. It also features flexible travel policies, enabling companies to easily enforce travel policies and budgets, ensuring compliance and optimizing travel expenditures.

Kamah Hotels and Resorts partners with Wyndham for \$70 million expansion



Kamah Hotels and Resorts, a luxury and wellness brand, has partnered with Wyndham Hotels and Resorts in a \$70 million deal to develop four new hotels—one in Dubai and three in India—under the Trademark Collection by Wyndham. This partnership, formalised at the Future Hospitality Summit 2024 in Dubai, marks a significant expansion for Kamah's portfolio, which is developed by Fine Acers Group in India and Global Branded Residences (GBR) internationally.

The exclusive signing ceremony included dignitaries such as Dimitris Manikis, President of EMEA at Wyndham, and Dinesh Yadav, Managing Director of Fine Acers Group and GBR. Yadav highlighted the success of their previous collaboration with Wyndham Grand Jaipur, expressing excitement for the new partnership. The properties will be located in Dubai, Coorg, Jawai, and Udaipur, with plans for expansion to North America, Australia, Europe, and other prominent Indian destinations.

Imran Khan, International Director of Kamah, emphasised the need for strategic partnerships in the wellness hospitality sector. The new properties include Kamah Hotel, Al Jaddaf Waterfront, Dubai, and three Indian resorts: Kamah Resorts Coorg, Jawai, and Udaipur, under a branded residences model. This partnership marks the introduction of the Trademark Collection by Wyndham in the UAE, a significant milestone for both brands.

Cocoon Maldives reopens with transformative upgrades

The Cocoon Collection has reopened Cocoon Maldives following extensive upgrades, offering an elevated luxury experience. The resort now features five brand-new Beach Suite Pool Villas, providing an exclusive beachfront experience, as well as five Lagoon Suite Pool Villas and ten Sunset Lagoon Suites equipped with water slides for added fun and adventure.

The resort also introduced a state-of-the-art gym and a Sunset Yoga Pavilion for wellness activities. The Loabi Loabi Bar has been expanded, creating a vibrant social space, while the Kurum Bar has received a stylish makeover for a refreshed ambiance. Villa accommodations have been upgraded with new furnishings, including high-end LAGO furniture, Gamba linens, and Laufen and Grohe bathroom fixtures.

Jay, COO of The Cocoon Collection, stated, "We are excited to invite our valued guests to enjoy our refreshed accommodations and new amenities that embody the beauty and tranquillity of the Maldives." With these upgrades, Cocoon Maldives aims to redefine luxury, providing guests with an unforgettable stay.



Ministry of Tourism launches key initiatives on World Tourism Day

On September 27, 2024, the Ministry of Tourism celebrated World Tourism Day 2024 at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, with the theme 'Tourism & Peace.' Hon'ble Vice President of India, Jagdeep Dhankhar, along with key officials, including Ministers Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu, and Suresh Gopi, attended the event. Representatives from foreign missions, government bodies, and the tourism industry were also present.

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat highlighted the success of the 'Whole of Government' approach, which has significantly enhanced tourism infrastructure, including new roads, airports, high-speed trains, and improved digital services. The Ministry announced a Masterlist of Tourism Destinations for Development, to be developed in collaboration with various ministries over the next three years, with public access for private sector planning.

Key initiatives launched included the 'Paryatan Mitra' and 'Paryatan Didi' programs promoting responsible tourism, MoUs with hospitality groups and institutes, the announcement of the Best Tourism Villages Competition winners, and the launch of the Incredible India Content Hub & Digital Portal. The 'Chalo India' campaign was introduced, offering 100,000 gratis visas for foreigners to boost tourism.

Minister of Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu emphasised the importance of air connectivity in tourism growth, while Vice President Dhankhar stressed the "Whole of Government" approach and highlighted the potential for job creation through innovation in tourism.



OTOAI and ITOA sign MoU to strengthen tourism ties between India and Iran

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) and the Iranian Tour Operators Association (ITOA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) during ITB India 2024. The agreement marks a key milestone in strengthening tourism ties between India and Iran, aiming to enhance cultural exchanges and create new opportunities for both nations.

The MoU was officially signed by Riaz Munshi, President of OTOAI, and Mostafa Shafie Shakib, Chairman of ITOA, in a formal ceremony held at the OTOAI Booth (No. D29). The event was witnessed by prominent members from both associations, including Shравan Bhalla, Vice President of OTOAI, and Monia Kapoor, Joint Secretary of OTOAI. Several distinguished members of the Iranian delegation were also in attendance, further emphasising the importance of the agreement.

This event underscored the shared commitment to fostering tourism growth, exploring new opportunities, and creating sustainable partnerships between the two nations. The presence of Mostafa Shafie Shakib as the primary signatory from the Iranian delegation highlighted the significance of this initiative. Other esteemed members of the Iranian delegation were also in attendance, further reinforcing the importance of the agreement.



Pune's travel fraternity rallies for social change at SKAL Pune Cyclothon

SKAL International Pune hosted the "Pedal for a Purpose" Cyclothon on September 22, 2024, bringing together Pune's travel fraternity for a social cause. The event, which saw participation from over 80 riders and 220 attendees.

Riders made stops at three "Impact Stops" along the route, pledging to plant trees, follow road safety, and reduce plastic use. Upon completing the ride, participants were greeted by 30 Dhol Tasha players, creating a festive atmosphere. Non-riders enjoyed activities like Yoga, Zumba, a painting competition, and games, along with entertainment that included dance performances and beatboxing.

The event concluded with a hearty breakfast and lucky draws, with many participants winning prizes. SKAL Pune President Shaberam Rabbani praised the support from partners TAAI, TAAFI, PHA, and IIHM. Medical support was provided by Manipal Hospitals, and insurance by Asego, ensuring the event ran smoothly.



RezLive.com expands global footprint, appoints GSAs in Indonesia and Canada

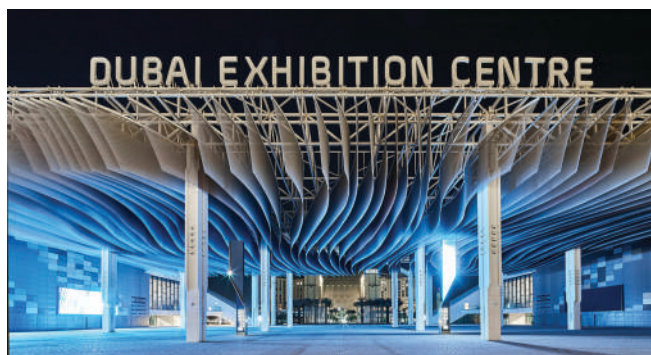
RezLive.com, a leading B2B global travel wholesaler, has expanded into Indonesia and Canada through partnerships with PT Pantravel and International Travel Inc as General Sales Agents (GSAs) respectively. These partnerships aim to provide enhanced services to travel partners in these regions.

RezLive.com, the flagship product of the Travel Designer Group, is an award-winning booking platform offering hotels, apartments, tours, activities, and transfers. The partnerships with Pantravel and International Travel Inc provide travel agents in Indonesia and Canada with access to over 500,000 hotel rooms, 45,000 sightseeing options, and 5,000 transfer services globally. The platform's features include RezRewards, direct hotel connectivity, flexible cancellation policies, and 24/7 support.

Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director of Travel Designer Group, expressed excitement about the partnerships, reinforcing the company's commitment to key markets.



Dubai Exhibition Centre set for US \$2.7 billion expansion



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum has approved an AED10 billion (\$2.7 billion) expansion plan for the Dubai Exhibition Centre (DEC) at Expo City Dubai, part of the Dubai 2040 Urban Master Plan. This expansion will make DEC the largest indoor events and exhibitions venue in the region.

The expansion will occur in three phases. Phase 1, by 2026, will increase the space to 140,000 square metres. Phase 2, by 2028, will expand it to 160,000 square metres, while Phase 3, by 2031, will increase it to 180,000 square metres with 26 halls, a hotel, retail outlets, and offices.

His Excellency Helal Saeed Almarri noted that this expansion aligns with the Dubai Economic Agenda D33, aiming to boost the MICE sector's economic contribution to AED54 billion (\$14.7 billion) annually by 2033.

NORWAY

ICELAND

DMC for Scandinavia

GREENLAND

FINLAND

Arctic and Antarctica

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 Website: www.holidaymoods.in



IndiGo

IndiGo has nominated **Isidro Porqueras** as Chief Operating Officer (COO), effective November 1, 2024, pending regulatory approvals. He will succeed Wolfgang Prock-Schauer, who has led operations for the past seven years and will retire later this year. Porqueras, with over 25 years of experience leading high-

performance teams across operations, commercial, strategy, and finance in competitive environments, joined IndiGo as Chief of Transformation in April 2024. Previously, he was Chief Operating Officer at Volotea and worked for companies like McKinsey and Uralita.



Kempinski Hotels

Kempinski Hotels has appointed **Massimo Brancaleoni** as Chief Commercial Officer, effective November 1, 2024. With over 25 years of commercial experience, Brancaleoni previously served as Sr. VP Sales and Revenues at Silversea Cruises. Brancaleoni spent 20 years with Costa Crociere, holding key roles such as Vice

President Asia Pacific Operations and Senior Vice President Global Sales, working across cities like Paris, Genoa, and Hong Kong. His expertise in pricing, revenue management, commercial planning, and digital transformation will be instrumental in driving Kempinski's growth and success.



RedBeryl

RedBeryl, a luxury lifestyle management company, has appointed **Salil Nath** as Chief Strategy Mentor – Travel Experience. With over 17 years in the travel and aviation industry, Nath will lead RedBeryl's travel division in forming strategic alliances and innovations, enhancing offerings for HNIs and Ultra HNIs. His leadership experience at Etihad Airways, Kingfisher Airlines, and

American Express Global Business Travel has earned him recognition in the industry. Nath is also the Executive Director and CEO at Travesla, helping international and domestic travel brands scale in the market.



Atlantis Resorts

Atlantis Resorts has appointed **Paul Baker** as President, overseeing Atlantis, The Palm and Atlantis The Royal, with plans to also oversee Atlantis Sanya in China. Reporting to Philippe Zuber, CEO of Kerzner International, Baker will lead Atlantis Dubai's operations, strategic direction, and growth, including administrative, commercial, retail, F&B,

events, and recreational services. With nearly 20 years of international experience, Baker previously served as President of Grand Lisboa Palace in Macau and as Deputy COO of Genting Malaysia Berhad, managing large integrated luxury resorts.



Cinnamon Maldives Resorts

Shihab Mohammed has joined Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts, bringing over 20 years of hospitality expertise. Previously, he served as Group Director of Sales and Marketing at Sun Siyam Resorts in the Maldives, where he led the launch of the country's largest resort and managed the region's biggest buyout. Based in the Maldives, Shihab

will lead the commercial teams for Cinnamon Dhonveli, Velifushi, Hakuraa Huraa, and Ellaidhoo Maldives, focusing on achieving strategic commercial objectives, fostering strong partnerships, and driving continued success.



Fortune Hotels

Fortune Hotels, part of ITC's hotel group, has appointed **Rajesh Nath** as Head of Sales and Marketing. With over 30 years of experience in hospitality sales, Nath will play a key role in guiding the brand's growth and establishing it as a market leader. Nath's career began as a management trainee, eventually becoming Head of

Sales-South Region at ITC Hotels. In his new role, he aims to drive revenue growth and expand the brand's portfolio, strengthening Fortune Hotels' presence across business and leisure segments while ensuring exceptional guest experiences.



FCM Travel Asia

FCM Travel Asia has appointed **Gursheel Dhillon** as Head of Marketing. Dhillon has been instrumental in overseeing Public Relations and Communications across six key Asian markets. In her first year, she was named Global Corporate Marketer of the Year by the ASX-listed Flight Centre Travel Group (FCTG), securing over 800 media features and expanding FCM's brand presence in trade and mainstream

media. With over a decade of experience and an extensive regional network, Dhillon has crafted successful strategies for lifestyle businesses and is also an award-winning entrepreneur.



TripJack

TripJack has appointed **Subhodeep Bhattacharya** as the Chief Human Resources Officer. Bhattacharya will lead a major HR transformation, focusing on growth and innovation at TripJack. He joins from DreamSetGo by Dream Sports, where he was instrumental in organisational development and strategic HR initiatives. Previously, he led Business HR and Talent Acquisition

at TransUnion CIBIL and served as Head of Corporate HR at Aditya Birla Sun Life Mutual Funds. Bhattacharya's expertise in talent acquisition and HR transformation will shape TripJack's people strategy as it enters a new growth phase.

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