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# Travel Trade Journal




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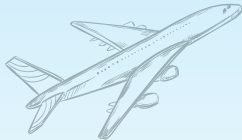
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Owned and published by: Ravi Sharma, Editor & Publisher, A-100, Upper Ground Floor, Nangal Dewat, New Delhi - 110070 and printed on his behalf at Polykam Offset, C-138, Industrial Area Phase I, Block C, Naraina Industrial Area Phase 1, Naraina, New Delhi - 110028.



Dear Friends,

As the sun-drenched month of April unfolds, the travel industry is buzzing with growth, resilience, and new opportunities. In this issue of TTJ, we bring you selected stories that matter and make you ponder - insights from industry leaders, destination highlights, and a closer look at how global tourism is adapting to shifting realities.

Mugdha Sinha, Director General of Tourism, Government of India, shares her vision for strengthening India's inbound tourism. Miami leads the way in inclusive tourism, setting an example for destinations worldwide. In the Middle East, Israel continues to navigate geopolitical complexities while keeping its tourism economy strong.

The world of cruising is making waves with Costa Cruises and Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) redefining travel on ocean liners. We also bring you reports from key industry conventions that promote the business of tourism, just as our very own TTJ TRAVMART successfully takes travel networking to India's emerging cities.

We strive to keep you informed, updated, and connected to the exciting world of travel!

Happy Reading!

*Ravi Sharma*

Ravi Sharma  
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Editor's Desk

# NEW ORLEANS

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New Orleans & Company is the official destination marketing and sales organization for the New Orleans Tourism industry.



## Jungfrau Railways announces mandatory paid seat reservations for summer travel



Railways will implement mandatory paid seat reservations for journeys to Jungfraujoch – Top of Europe from May 1 to August 31, 2025. This new measure is intended to ease congestion during the high tourist season and enhance the overall travel experience.

The seat reservation, priced at CHF 10, will be compulsory for travel on the Eigergletscher – Jungfraujoch and Kleine Scheidegg – Jungfraujoch routes. Designed with convenience in mind, the system guarantees smoother connections and shorter wait times.

Passengers who reserve their seats in advance will enjoy several benefits. They will have a guaranteed time slot, securing a fixed departure time on either the Eiger Express from Grindelwald Terminal or the Jungfrau Railway from Kleine Scheidegg. This allows for reliable and stress-free itinerary planning. With a reservation, travellers can also avoid long waits when transferring to the Jungfrau Railway at Eigergletscher station, ensuring a smooth and efficient journey. While seats are not individually numbered, each reservation guarantees availability, allowing guests to relax and enjoy the breathtaking Alpine views en route to the Top of Europe.

## Indri unveils Experience Centre for whisky connoisseurs in Haryana



Piccadilly Agro Industries Limited has launched a state-of-the-art Experience Centre in Indri, Haryana, offering whisky enthusiasts a deep dive into the art of single malt whisky making. Blending heritage, innovation, and luxury, the Indri Experience Centre features guided distillery tours, exclusive tastings, and immersive exhibits that showcase the craftsmanship behind Indri's celebrated expressions.

Set against the backdrop of the maturation hall, the centre also includes a Putting & Chipping Golf Green for added leisure, appealing to both whisky lovers and golf enthusiasts. Visitors gain insight into traditional copper pot still distillation, cask selection, and the aging process.

The centre marks a significant step in elevating India's whisky culture globally, offering an unmatched journey for both connoisseurs and curious travellers alike.

## Maharashtra to host Mahaparyatan Utsav in Mahabaleshwar this May

Maharashtra is set to celebrate its diverse cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, and rich tourism potential with the Mahaparyatan Utsav 2025, scheduled to take place from May 2 to May 4 in the scenic hill station of Mahabaleshwar.

Hon'ble Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnavis, alongside other esteemed dignitaries, unveiled the festival's logo on April 1, 2025, at the Sahyadri Guest House in Mumbai. The unveiling marks the official countdown to what promises to be one of the most vibrant tourism events in the state's calendar.

Drawing inspiration from Gujarat's famed Rann of Kutch festival, the Mahaparyatan Utsav will feature a tent city of over 100 luxury tents, offering a unique and immersive accommodation experience for tourists. These tents will serve as a modern retreat for visitors, combining comfort with the rustic charm of the region, and transforming Mahabaleshwar into a vibrant tourism hub during the three-day celebration.







# ALMATY

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# Maldives welcomes a serene new sanctuary with the opening of Centara Grand Lagoon

Centara Hotels & Resorts, Thailand’s leading hospitality group, has opened its newest luxury property, Centara Grand Lagoon Maldives. Set on a private island, the resort features 142 beachfront and overwater villas designed to blend elegance with natural beauty. Guests can enjoy world-class dining, the holistic Spa Cenvaree Retreat, and exclusive access to nearby Centara Mirage Lagoon Maldives, offering vibrant recreational attractions. This launch completes The Atollia by Centara, a visionary multi-island project redefining experiential travel in the Maldives.

Guests of Centara Grand Lagoon Maldives also enjoy privileged access to neighbouring Centara Mirage Lagoon Maldives, home to vibrant recreational offerings and water attractions. The seamless connection between the two resorts allows for a unique dual-island experience combining serenity and excitement.

With four distinctive properties now operational under the



Centara brand in the Maldives, each tailored to different traveller profiles, the new resort is seen as the final piece of the puzzle.

## Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts expands India outreach with AVIAREPS partnership



Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts has appointed AVIAREPS India to spearhead its Public Relations and brand positioning efforts in India. Leveraging its strong presence in the Indian market and the country’s rapidly growing outbound travel segment, Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts aims to refine its communications approach and solidify its leadership position among Indian travellers through AVIAREPS’s extensive network and strong media relationships.

With a portfolio of 17 properties, including Sri Lanka’s first integrated resort, Cinnamon Life -City of Dreams Sri Lanka, the brand is setting new benchmarks in luxury and immersive hospitality across the region.

Ellona Pereira, General Manager, AVAIREPS India, said, “We are thrilled to strengthen our long-standing partnership with Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts by leading its PR strategy in India. With the Indian travel market witnessing rapid growth and Sri Lanka emerging as a preferred destination, we see immense potential to elevate Cinnamon’s brand visibility among luxury and experiential travellers. Our focus will be on strategically positioning Cinnamon as the premier choice for Indian travellers seeking world-class hospitality. This collaboration is a valuable addition to our PR portfolio, and we look forward to shaping a powerful narrative for Cinnamon in the Indian market.”

## Serena Hotels Africa appoints ARK Travel Group as exclusive India Representative



Serena Hotels Africa, a premier collection of award-winning safari lodges, city hotels, and beach resorts across East and Southern Africa, has announced a strategic partnership with ARK Travel Group to bolster its presence in the Indian market. The partnership is set to unlock curated, high-end travel experiences for Indian travellers seeking authentic African adventures.

Anjum Lokhandwala, Director of ARK Travel Group, will lead exclusive campaigns promoting Indian-centric travel packages, including exclusive safaris, wellness escapes, family-friendly adventures, and destination weddings. The travel experiences will highlight Serena Hotels’ commitment to sustainability, community empowerment, and authentic African hospitality, values that align closely with the preferences of India’s conscious premium traveller.

Through this collaboration, Serena Hotels aims to welcome Indian families, honeymooners, wildlife enthusiasts, and luxury travellers to its distinctive properties in Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Zanzibar, and beyond. From the cosmopolitan charm of Nairobi Serena Hotel to the tranquil shores of Zanzibar Serena Hotel and the majestic wilderness of Kirawira Serena Camp in Tanzania, Indian guests will now gain privileged access to curated journeys that blend cultural richness with exceptional service.





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## Lufthansa rolls out new Allegris First Class experience



The travel experience in Lufthansa First Class with the new cabin interior on long-haul flights is now even more exclusive. The Allegris First Class cabin can be experienced in the summer timetable on flights from Munich to San Francisco, Chicago, San Diego, Shanghai and Bengaluru. Featuring private ceiling-high suites, heated/cooled seats, 43-inch screens, and the exclusive Suite Plus (a private double cabin), this First Class redefines luxury air travel. Lufthansa has also launched new cabin interiors across Economy, Premium Economy, and Business Class on select routes, with fleet-wide upgrades planned.

“We are completely reinventing the Lufthansa First Class travel experience with Allegris,” said Jens Ritter, CEO, Lufthansa Airlines. Enhancements extend to redesigned First Class lounges and check-in areas in Frankfurt and Munich.

Passengers across all classes will benefit from new services, including free in-flight messaging, upgraded dining, and improved lounge experiences. With nearly 500,000 passengers already flying in the new cabins, Lufthansa’s premium offensive sets the stage for its 100th anniversary in 2026. The airline is committed to combining exclusivity, innovation, and sustainability in the future of travel.

## Riyadh Air identifies India as key market, appoints Bird Travels as exclusive partner



Riyadh Air, Saudi Arabia’s new national carrier set to launch later this year, has identified India as a key market in its global expansion. With Indian tourist arrivals to Saudi rising by 50 per cent in 2023 to over 1.5 million, the Saudi Tourism Authority aims to welcome 7.5 million Indian visitors annually by 2030.

During a recent visit, Riyadh Air CEO Tony Douglas met officials from India’s DGCA and the Saudi Embassy to secure necessary permissions, and held discussions with IndiGo and Air India for potential partnerships.

“India has long been a crucial part of Riyadh Air’s network planning,” said Douglas. “Our network will help foster stronger ties between our nations while delivering exceptional travel experiences.”

To strengthen its market presence, Riyadh Air has appointed Bird Travels as its exclusive distribution and sales partner in India. Gaurav Bhatia, Executive Director of Bird Group, said, “We are confident Indian travellers will embrace Riyadh Air’s innovative offerings.”

## IndiGo commences direct flights from Mumbai and Bengaluru to Krabi

IndiGo has launched direct flights to Krabi, marking its third destination in Thailand after Bangkok and Phuket.

IndiGo will operate daily flights from Mumbai and Bengaluru to Krabi, offering seamless connectivity and a comfortable travel experience for both business and leisure travellers.

Flight 6E1085 departs Mumbai at 04:15, arriving in Krabi at 10:10, while the return 6E1086 leaves Krabi at 21:45 and reaches Mumbai at 00:40. Meanwhile, flight 6E1083 takes off from Bengaluru at 15:30 and lands in Krabi at 20:45. The return flight 6E1084 departs Krabi at 11:35, arriving in Bengaluru at 13:45.

This new route significantly enhances travel convenience for Indian tourists heading to one of Thailand’s most scenic beach destinations. By offering direct access, IndiGo minimises layovers and reduces travel time, making Krabi more accessible and affordable than ever.





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# Data-Driven Analytics to Shape India Inbound 2.0

As global travel undergoes a transformative shift, India’s inbound tourism stands at a critical crossroads. Will it adapt and thrive or struggle to reclaim its legendary momentum? In this exclusive interview, Mugdha Sinha, Director General of Tourism, Government of India, reflects on the trajectory of India’s inbound tourism industry. With a deep understanding of the forces shaping this evolution and a keen eye on the shifting dynamics of global travel, Sinha outlines the strategies that must fuel India’s tourism resurgence and highlight the emerging trends that will drive its growth and international prominence in the years ahead.

Pratiba Vaidya Bhalla

With over 26 years of experience in public policy, governance, and international trade, Sinha brings a wealth of knowledge. As a seasoned leader in the Indian civil services, she has held key positions in various ministries, making her uniquely equipped to lead India’s tourism sector into a new era. Sinha’s tenure as Joint Secretary of Culture in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Government of India, has enriched her perspective on India’s delicately woven cultural fabric. This experience now serves as a powerful asset in her current role, giving her a nuanced understanding of the diverse forces that shape the nation’s tourism landscape.

## India’s Tourism Recovery: A Decade-Long Cycle in Motion

Sinha reflects on the trajectory of India’s inbound tourism, which peaked in 2008 but suffered a sharp decline following the Lehman Brothers financial crisis in the same year. This downturn took nearly a decade to recover from. COVID-19 hit the world harder, yet the resurgence is visible to everyone. She says, “As we enter the third decade of the 21st century, projections suggest that India’s tourism industry will significantly peak by 2028-29. Foreign tourist arrivals have been steadily rising over the past four years. While 2024 remains a year of calibration, we have clearly performed better. According to the UN Tourism Barometer, global tourism has rebounded to 88.89 per cent of pre-COVID levels, with India close behind at 87.1 per cent. While the Asia-Pacific region lags at 64-65 per cent, India continues to perform strongly.”

Notably, domestic travel has surged, with 2.3 billion trips, outpacing global cross-border travel. Landmark attractions like Kevadiya’s colossal Statue of Unity and the Mahakumbh, which attracted 666 million visitors, reinforce India’s dominance in the travel sector and drive domestic tourism across state borders.



▲ Mugdha Sinha

Post-COVID, two significant travel trends have emerged - ‘revenge tourism’, which peaked but faded by 2023, and a notable rise in domestic, religious, and spiritual tourism. Sinha adds, “Despite ongoing recovery, the hospitality sector has seen two strong years, with occupancy, average room rates, and per-room profitability reaching levels last seen in 2008. Current per-room profits range from Rs 5,000 to Rs 7,000, signalling robust performance. Hotel deals and IPOs are increasing, and India’s hotel inventory, currently at 1.83 million rooms, is set to grow to 3 million by 2029 and 4.1 million by 2030-31, reflecting rapid expansion.”

She further highlights that India’s \$3.9 trillion GDP is on track to reach \$5 trillion soon and \$30 trillion by 2047. Rising incomes and a growing middle class are driving domestic travel, particularly in pilgrim tourism.

With 65 per cent of India’s population under 35, the country’s young workforce is reshaping travel trends. Millennials, who comprise 35 per cent of the population and 46 per cent of the working-age group, prioritise experiences over hustle culture. Sinha notes, “Trends like FOMO (Fear of

Missing Out) and JOMO (Joy of Missing Out) are driving new travel behaviours, one fuelled by social media, the other by meaningful, offbeat journeys.” Looking ahead to 2025, concepts like #SleepTourism #Digitalnomadism and #Workcations are set to gain traction.

## Key Principle: The 3A Triangulation

Sharing her belief in the 3A Triangulation principle, Sinha explains, “Travel decisions revolve around three key factors: Attraction, Accessibility, and Accommodation. This triangulation is driving massive infrastructure expansion, enhancing connectivity, and boosting tourism. Add the fourth ‘A—Amenities’ to the original three, and you address safety, hygiene, perception, and sentiment, particularly for solo travellers.”

India has built 150,000 km of roads, 18 cable cars for inaccessible pilgrim destinations, and key rail routes like Maharaja Express and Bharat Gaurav, while high-speed trains like Vande Bharat and the 1000 km Metros in key cities improve multimodal access. Aviation is also surging, with airports set to grow from 157 to 350 and over 900 plus new aircraft on order. She adds, “Despite the inevitable fluctuations in supply and demand, the overall outlook remains highly optimistic. The government is making significant investments, with Rs 12,000 crore allocated across four key tourism schemes, Swadesh 2, PRASAD 2, CBDD, and SASCI. Additionally, 120 new destinations are being developed under the Modified UDAN Scheme, further solidifying India’s position as a global travel powerhouse.” Besides, in 50 select destinations, hotels will receive the benefits of Harmonised Infrastructure Industry.

Yet Sinha points out, integrated bundling, seamless passes linking attractions, transport, and stays with inbuilt discounts, remains a missing piece. “This seamless travel experience is still evolving but holds immense potential. Achieving it requires



a strategic shift, one driven by industry-wide collaboration and innovation to deliver frictionless, value-driven journeys. If executed effectively, this approach could redefine how travellers experience India, making tourism more accessible, efficient, and rewarding. Use of AI, Deep ML, LLM, and Gaussian Splat technologies will elevate India to the next level by easing travel and tourism decision making, especially in India, where we are spoilt for choice, due to our rich diversity of product portfolio," she observes.

## Marketing: The Missing Link in Our Tourism Growth

In an era where attention is currency, India's tourism sector must embrace bold, data-driven marketing to stay ahead. AI-driven iteration can revolutionise travel promotion through immersive storytelling, strategic PR, and cutting-edge consumer engagement. Sinha emphasises, "Today, marketing is a key strategic tool. The marketing landscape is no longer traditional but anamorphic, emotional, and quantum-driven. To lead on the global stage, India must harness AI-powered insights, decoding volumetric data, viral narratives, and predictive trends to reshape how destinations connect with travellers. Tourism is no longer just an industry, instead, it is an experience-driven force that thrives on agility, innovation, and adaptability, qualities that will define India's journey to becoming a tourism powerhouse."

Commenting on current marketing trends, Mugdha highlights how gamification and emotional storytelling reflect the evolving direction of the industry. Citing Herbert Simon's concept of the 'attention economy,' she explains that in today's marketplace, holding a consumer's attention is key, "If I can hold your attention, I can go deeper into your pocket because money follows attention."

## Data Analytics: Mapping the Future

Effective policymaking hinges on reliable data, as accurate projections for the future are rendered incapable without it. "By proactively shaping policies, we can move beyond reactive regulations. A good policymaker anticipates trends, rather than just responding to them."

This approach is refined through extensive state-level surveys. For instance, a study of 1,286 hotels across 33 districts in Telangana revealed that 601 are concentrated in Hyderabad. Sinha shared, "We identified Hyderabad as Telangana's tourism hub, with the highest exit points, airports, railway stations, and bus terminals, alongside ten major attractions drawing the most visitors. Neighbouring

districts like Rangareddy play a crucial role in the state's tourism landscape. Mapping tools highlight such high-density zones where accommodation, accessibility, and attractions converge, making them natural tourism hotspots."

She further explains, "I use the UTSAV portal to monitor state-specific festival and events data monthly. This tool can be used to pinpoint key festivals and events to build personalised itineraries around them and to promote India as a year-round destination. By leveraging data, we can move beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to offer tailored DIY travel experiences and expand our tourism offerings." It is the need of the hour to leverage India's festivals, fairs, and events inventory to create unique IPs that can be monetised as iconic products with high recall value in the arena of sports, music concerts or gastronomy to attract global mass affluent audiences with high spending power.

Meanwhile, lower-traffic areas present nascent opportunities for new developments, from detour destinations and off-the-beaten-track hideaways to solo travel initiatives and rural tourism experiences. Heat maps also guide strategic decisions on airport placements, ensuring investments target underserved regions rather than oversaturating well-developed districts.

## Tour Operators: Growth Catalysts

Tour operators are pivotal in shaping India's evolving travel landscape and driving foreign and domestic tourism. Sinha asserts, "As a ministry, by strengthening our collaboration with them, we can ensure that India continues to grow as a premier destination. They invest significant resources and expertise in creating bespoke itineraries, and we must align with them. They are on the frontlines as the foot soldiers of my ministry and the most important part of our industry. It is our responsibility to support them in every way possible. Since joining the ministry, building relationships with tour operators has been a top priority. Through engaging with industry leaders at events like the WTM, I have gained invaluable, often overlooked insights. Understanding their business is crucial to shaping effective policies and strategies."

"We are organising a workshop in April to showcase our initiatives and better understand the operators' offerings, focusing on collecting data to build future strategies. This collaboration is key, as tour operators hold essential data that helps steer tourism planning," she announces.

While India attracts millions of visitors, outbound tourism currently outpaces inbound tourism by three to one. The goal

is to bridge this gap, and Sinha observes that strategic marketing efforts, in sound partnership with tour operators, are key to driving more footfalls to India.

## Overcoming Challenges: Inbound Tourism Promotion

Addressing concerns about the limited promotion of inbound tourism in India, she emphasises the need to look forward rather than dwell on past shortcomings. "We cannot change what has already happened, but we can surely look ahead," she states, acknowledging the shift in global marketing strategies. Even with the closure of the Ministry of Tourism's overseas offices, she highlights that Indian Missions abroad and Representative Agencies must continue their work, adapting to the changing landscape.

Sinha highlights that while the essence of the work remains the same, the playbook has been rewritten. The core objectives remain unchanged, but the tools and methods have evolved, redefining traditional approaches. She adds, "Today, you have social media, digital media, and virtual offices. The focus must be on marketing your product correctly." She stresses the importance of combining data, technology and marketing, pointing out that these three tools must be understood and used effectively to reach the desired goals. Hence, a redefined playbook calls for bold, innovative strategies in a reimagined world.

Reflecting on her legacy, Sinha hopes it will inspire action over inertia, driving progress rather than merely institutionalising success. She stresses the need for transformation in business practices to keep pace with a rapidly evolving world. "The box has collapsed, and the template is gone," she says, pointing to the seismic shifts brought on by virtual spaces and co-working environments and a vital need to incorporate that into tourism practices. She resolutely advocates for this change to be mirrored in government operations, especially in capital deployment and re-energised marketing efforts. "The results may not be immediate, but I am planting the seeds for lasting change," she says. Quoting Prime Minister Narendra Modi, she adds, the imperative to balance '*Vikas bhi, Virast bhi*' in the 5T talisman of-Talent, Tradition, Trade, Technology and Tourism, with focus of sustainable itineraries, leisure and MICE tourism, women, youth and local communities led responsible tourism for its transformational role in contribution to economy and local employment. With a vision rooted in innovation, collaboration, bold strategy, and precise future planning, Sinha believes this vision will steer India's tourism industry toward a new era of global prominence.



# Fiji sets sights on double-digit growth from India

Fiji witnessed strong tourism growth in 2024 and is now setting its sights on even greater success in 2025. In a conversation with TTJ, Brent Hill, CEO of Tourism Fiji, shared his insights on the progress achieved, challenges encountered, and the exciting plans ahead.

Prashant Nayak

Fiji, the postcard-perfect South Pacific archipelago known for its turquoise waters and warm hospitality, is gearing up for a new chapter in tourism growth.

## Record Tourism Growth in 2024

Fiji's tourism sector achieved an impressive milestone in 2024, surpassing expectations with a substantial increase in tourist arrivals. Brent informed, "We were projecting a three per cent growth, but we ended up with about six and a half per cent. We crossed the one million mark, combining air and cruise arrivals."

With strong numbers, Brent is optimistic about continuing the momentum into 2025. "The exciting part is the diversification, especially with our focus on Indian tourists, which is why we are here in India," added Brent.

## India's Role in Fiji's Tourism Expansion

India continues to be a top 10 source market for Fiji. While performance in 2024 was positive, Brent emphasised the need for stronger connectivity. "We need to improve flight connections, which we are actively working on. This year, we are targeting double-digit growth from India," he shared.

Tourism Fiji is broadening its approach by targeting diverse travel segments such as weddings, MICE, and family groups. Additionally, Brent points out that solo travel and women travellers are already a strong demographic for Fiji, especially from Australia and New Zealand. Brent asserted, "Fiji is a very safe destination, which appeals to solo female travellers. It will be great if we can tap into that segment from India."

Fiji's cultural appeal is another significant draw for Indian tourists. Brent highlighted the



▲ Brent Hill

strong cultural ties between Fiji and India, with 40 per cent of Fiji's population having Indian origins. Emphasising the authentic experiences awaiting Indian visitors, Brent shared, "When you visit Fiji, the warmth of its people is truly remarkable. They are incredibly welcoming and full of joy. Hindi is widely spoken, creating a strong cultural connection that makes Indian tourists feel right at home."

## Visa-Free Travel: A Key Advantage

One of the most significant advantages for Indian travellers is Fiji's visa-free policy. Brent pointed out, "For Indian tourists, the visa-free travel policy is a game-changer. You do not have to apply for a visa; you can just come and enjoy the beauty of Fiji. We hope many Indian travellers will take advantage of the visa-free policy, and contribute significantly to our double-digit growth ambitions."

While current efforts are focused on Delhi

and Mumbai, Tourism Fiji recognises the potential in Tier 2 cities. "When Bollywood actors like Rakul Preet Singh and Jackky Bhagnani visited Fiji, the PR buzz was phenomenal. We don't have the budget to reach smaller cities directly, but PR efforts can help us tap into these markets effectively," said Brent.

## Fiji's New Developments

Fiji is witnessing robust growth in its tourism infrastructure, catering to both leisure and business travellers. "The Crowne Plaza Fiji Nadi Bay is undergoing refurbishment, with new features opening in stages throughout 2025. The upgraded property will include a ballroom, event spaces, 324 premium rooms, and a beach club. Additionally, the Westin Denarau Island Resort and Spa, set to reopen in late 2025, will offer 271 new rooms. With the opening of new resorts like the second Radisson in the country, Fiji's tourism infrastructure is rapidly evolving to meet the growing demand," said Brent. Fiji is also embracing glamping, adding a unique, eco-friendly experience to its product offerings.

## Plans for the Future

Brent revealed that Tourism Fiji plans to increase its trade activities in India. He said, "Working with the Global Destinations team is important for us. Our Matai Specialist Programme, which is designed for travel agents, is seeing a lot of interest from Indian agents. While we look forward to conducting roadshows in India soon, we are hopeful that improving air connectivity will make travel easier for tourists, creating the ideal timing to hold these roadshows."

Brent concluded with a warm invitation, "Fiji is ready, and we cannot wait to welcome more Indian visitors to our shores."





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# Israel Looks to Deepen Tourism Connect with India, Targets One Million Indian Visitors in Five Years

As Indian travellers increasingly seek unique and immersive experiences, the mystical land of Israel emerges as an exciting destination offering an unparalleled juxtaposition of antiquity with groundbreaking technological marvels. As India and Israel strengthen their bilateral relationship and tourism ties, Amruta Bangera, Director of Marketing-India, Israel Ministry of Tourism, sheds light on the key developments and strategic initiatives to strengthen Israel’s presence in the Indian travel market.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

The US and the UK are Israel’s top tourism markets, ranking India among the top 10. Despite geopolitical challenges in 2024, Israel remained resilient, attracting nearly a million visitors globally. Amruta notes, “Even during the crisis, 9,600 Indian travellers visited, proving Israel’s continued appeal.” Israel’s decision to launch its e-visa programme first in India highlights its recognition of the Indian market.

## Synergy Between India and Israel

Strong bilateral ties between India and Israel provide a seamless platform for expanding tourism. Amruta shares, “We are making significant investments in India because we understand its immense potential and the quality of travellers it offers. The revenue numbers and the audience we seek all come from India. We know this market has undeniable potential.”

Food plays a crucial role in travel, and Israel presents a delightful culinary journey for Indian travellers, particularly vegetarians. With Tel Aviv hailed as the ‘vegan capital of the world,’ Israel’s plant-based options perfectly suit Indian tastes. Amruta observes, “Israel’s fresh ingredients, audacious flavours, and diverse cuisines make it a perfect fit for Indian visitors.”

## Building Better Connectivity

Obtaining a traditional visa is straightforward, but e-visas simplify entry even further. Amruta notes that e-visas for Indian travellers will eliminate intermediaries like VFS, allowing travellers to apply online and secure their visas quickly and easily. For the visa-exempt countries, the recently introduced mandatory Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) streamlines the process, allowing travellers to complete formalities online and enjoy a smooth immigration experience upon arrival.

Air connectivity between India and Israel is seeing a strong resurgence. “Discussions with Air India led to the relaunch of direct flights from Delhi to Tel Aviv from March 2, 2025, with five weekly services. Mumbai may be added soon, and we hope other



▲ Amruta Bangera

airlines will follow, reconnecting key Indian cities with Israel,” she shares.

## Geo Political Conundrum

Amruta addressed concerns about safety for first-time visitors to Israel, emphasising the country’s commitment to ensuring visitor security. She notes, “Safety is a priority for Israelis, and even in the most challenging times, not a single tourist has been harmed. We have hosted many travellers; despite the situation, over a million people have still visited Israel. To restore safety, we are doing everything in our power to provide clear facts and figures. We share transparent, official communication about the situation, and since October 2023, we have kept travellers

informed.” With recent changes in the US government, things may be moving toward a beneficial solution for all concerned parties.

## Vision for 2025

Amruta outlines the ambitious goals for Israel’s tourism growth, aiming to surpass the 70,000 arrivals that we reached in 2018. “Once we hit that target, we will aim higher, and Israel, known for its innovation, will make it happen,” she says.

Summarising Israel’s growth strategy for India, she emphasises the initial focus on Tier 1 cities, followed by expansion into Tier 2. She explains, “In 2025, we will ramp up our visits, engage with agents and the media, and host roadshows, seminars, and workshops by the end of the year. We are launching an E-meta training programme by April, followed by a destination specialist programme. We are partnering with Ease My Trip for a digital campaign and planning our own India-specific campaign focused on safety. Additionally, we have seminars lined up with the Christian community. Our goal is to stay visible and strengthen our presence in India.”

There is visible excitement about the future, with 2025 set to be a pivotal year for Israel’s tourism in India. She says, “We aim to reach at least a million Indian travellers, adapting and readjusting our strategies to achieve this goal in the next five years.” With this ambitious target in sight, Israel is committed to strengthening its ties with the Indian market, ensuring a bright and promising future for travel between the two nations.





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# Brussels Embraces Quality Over Quantity in Tourism Drive

To strengthen its position in the Indian market, visit.brussels recently organised a roadshow in Mumbai, providing an interactive platform for Belgian partners to engage with Indian travel agencies. Pieter Callebaut, International Business Developer at visit.brussels, who led the delegation, highlighted Belgium's appeal as both a leisure and business destination and emphasised ongoing efforts to improve connectivity and attract Indian tourists from cities beyond Mumbai and Delhi.

Prashant Nayak

**B**russels has seen a significant increase in global tourism over the last few years, with projections indicating that visitor numbers will surpass 2019 levels by 2025.

## Growth in Indian Tourist Arrivals

While India currently accounts for a small portion of visitors, there has been a noticeable rise since the pandemic. Most Indian tourists come from major cities like Mumbai and Delhi, with leisure tourism being the dominant reason for visits.

"While the European markets, such as France, the UK, Germany, and the Netherlands, remain the top sources of visitors, the US is the largest non-European contributor, followed by a growing segment from long-haul countries like Brazil and India. Now, we are keen on expanding our reach in the Indian market beyond just Mumbai and Delhi," said Pieter.

## A Gateway to Belgium and Beyond

Brussels is shifting its focus from volume

to quality tourism, inviting travellers to immerse themselves in the city's rich cultural, gastronomic, and historical landscape. The city presents a rich tapestry of experiences, from art galleries and museums featuring diverse themes like dinosaurs, trains, musical instruments, and comic strips, to its world-renowned culinary scene. Belgian chocolates and beer are central to the local culture, with numerous creative experiences revolving around them. For those looking to explore beyond the city, nearby destinations like Antwerp, Bruges, and Ghent of Belgium offer additional attractions.

While Brussels itself offers a wealth of attractions, the city also serves as a perfect gateway for discovering more of Belgium. Pieter mentioned, "Along with showcasing the attractions of Brussels, we also focus on educating visitors about the diverse offerings that Belgium as a whole has to offer. Staying in Brussels allows you to easily explore the charming cities of Belgium." Brussels also serves as a hub connecting travellers to nearby European cities like Amsterdam, Paris, and Berlin, with efficient train and night train services.

## Balancing Business and Leisure

Brussels is not only a major business hub but also renowned for its MICE facilities, which are complemented by stunning venues like castles and museums. Pieter shared, "While many business travellers are already familiar with Brussels, we aim to shift the focus towards leisure tourism. There is so much for visitors to explore beyond the business side of the city."

As Brussels continues to gain traction as a destination for both business and leisure events, there is also increasing potential for hosting unique events like Indian weddings.

Although the city has not yet hosted many Bollywood film shoots, it recognises the significant influence of Indian cinema and is exploring opportunities to leverage Bollywood's impact on tourism.

## Visa and Accessibility

One of the major hurdles for international travel is the visa process, but Brussels offers a seamless experience for Indian travellers. According to Pieter, the visa application process for Indian citizens is quick and efficient, with approvals being processed within 48 hours, provided all documents are in order. "There is no excuse for Indian tourists not to visit Belgium or Brussels," remarked Pieter.

Earlier, Jet Airways operated direct flights to Brussels, but this service ended following the airline's closure. However, there is strong anticipation for direct flights to resume, potentially by IndiGo or Air India, connecting Mumbai or Delhi to Belgium.

"While there are no direct flights currently, efforts are ongoing to improve connectivity between India and Brussels. Brussels Airport is actively negotiating with airlines to enhance travel options. In the meantime, travellers can easily access Brussels through connecting flights via cities like Paris, Amsterdam, and Frankfurt, etc.," adds Pieter.

## Strengthening Ties

The roadshow in Mumbai offered valuable insights into the diverse experiences Brussels has to offer, empowering agents to better promote the destination to their clients.

Pieter emphasised the importance of nurturing existing relationships while also exploring new connections to drive growth. He said, "We have had a presence in India for a long time. Our strategy is twofold: first, to strengthen the relationships we have built over the years, ensuring that those who know us well continue to deliver. At the same time, we are focused on identifying new opportunities and engaging with fresh audiences to expand our reach."

Pieter Callebaut at the visit.brussels Roadshow





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# MIAMI SHINES WITH PRIDE

## Leads the Way in LGBTQ+ Inclusive Tourism

Miami’s spirited cultural tableau, warm hospitality, and unwavering commitment to inclusivity make it a top destination for all, especially LGBTQ+ travellers. Dan Rios, Director of LGBTQ+ Tourism Marketing at the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau, introduces us to the vibrant, ever-evolving landscape of queer tourism in the city. From world-renowned Pride events to hidden cultural gems, he shares insights on how Miami continues to embrace and celebrate diversity, making it a must-visit destination for LGBTQ+ travellers worldwide.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

Beyond its idyllic beaches and avant-garde arts scene, Miami offers a thriving queer community that welcomes visitors, all 365 days of the year. From marquee LGBTQ+ events to family-friendly spaces, it celebrates Pride far beyond June, providing diverse opportunities for connection, entertainment, and cultural immersion.

Miami’s reputation as an LGBTQ+ friendly destination is deeply rooted in the creativity, contributions, and cultural influence of its local community. “In fact, Miami was put on the map by its iconic Art Deco District,” Dan reflects. “Back in the day, it was painted in all shades of white. It was a gay man who repainted the town in vibrant shades. He developed a colour palette that went on to define South Beach. Through those very colours, we became recognised as something exciting and new.”

Dan further highlights how Miami’s standout LGBTQ+ influences extend beyond architecture. “The city’s famous lifeguard stands, now emblematic of Miami Beach, were designed by William Lane, a renowned local architect and a proud gay man embedded in the community. The LGBTQ+



▲ Dan Rios

footprint is evident in our major events too. The founder of the South Beach Wine & Food Festival is a gay man, and the Miami International Film Festival is led by a gay man. There has always been a seamless mix between the general population and the LGBTQ+ community in Miami,” he highlights, emphasising the seamless integration of LGBTQ contributions within Miami’s broader cultural fabric.

### India as a Source Market

Dan identified Latin America as Miami’s top inbound market, with Brazil at the top spot, closely followed by Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico. “We see a lot of ‘snowbirds’ from Canada, people escaping the winter to

enjoy Miami’s warmth. While across the Atlantic, the UK and Germany are Miami’s top European markets,” he shares.

India, while not yet a major source market, presents strong potential. Dan says, “India’s vast population includes a significant LGBTQ+ community, offering considerable opportunities for growth. Indian travellers are open to exploring new destinations, with direct flights playing a key role in their travel decisions. The prospect of a direct Air India flight to Miami is generating excitement, with discussions underway and we are hoping for a launch soon.”

Dan added that Indian travel agents are becoming increasingly comfortable promoting LGBTQ+ travel. “Some are already working in this space, while others are seeking guidance. With the right tools and support, they will be well-positioned to promote Miami as an inclusive destination,” he says.

Dan’s visit to India was driven by the IGLTA Travel Symposium, leading him to engage with local representatives and industry stakeholders in Delhi and Mumbai. He observes, “To make an impact, we must first understand the market and cultural nuances and work within its context.” Committed to developing the Indian market, Dan plans to maintain strong ties with IGLTA and explore promotional opportunities through Brand USA and global travel shows. Integrating LGBTQ tourism into broader destination marketing, he also sees influencer marketing as a vital tool.

### Miami’s LGBTQ Headlining Events

Miami is home to a vibrant calendar of LGBTQ-focused events, with 13 key festivals created by and for the community. Among the most prominent are Miami Beach Pride in April, the Winter Party Festival, and Urge Miami Thanksgiving Festival in November. The city





also boasts one of the premier LGBTQ film festivals in the U.S., OUTshine, held in April. Given India's deep ties to the film industry, Dan sees potential for future collaborations.

Beyond LGBTQ-specific events, major global festivals like Art Basel Miami Beach and the South Beach Wine & Food Festival incorporate LGBTQ programming, further solidifying Miami as an inclusive destination. "Tennis Open, held in April, also ensures LGBTQ representation, thanks to our vast community," Dan shares. In the U.S., California has the largest LGBTQ population, with Florida coming in second.

Although the summer heat limits large-scale outdoor activities in June, Pride Month in Miami still thrives through smaller events. The most notable is Wynwood Pride, a music festival showcasing queer artists from around the world for the last six years. Dan sees potential in inviting performers from India to participate, calling it a fantastic opportunity worth exploring.

Miami's major cultural institutions actively celebrate Pride Month, hosting dedicated Pride Nights to engage the LGBTQ community. Popular venues include the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, the Frost Museum of Science, the historic Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, and Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), the city's largest contemporary art museum. The Arsht Centre's community dance event is a highlight, offering an inclusive and vibrant space, all within the comfort of indoor venues. "We don't create events, but we actively support community organisations in developing and promoting them to ensure their success, and we'll continue to do so," Dan emphasises.

We cannot overlook Miami's sparkling food scene, which entices travellers with its scale and gourmand appeal. Over the past decade, the city's culinary landscape has flourished, shaped by its rich multicultural influences. Named 'Food City of the Year' and home to numerous Michelin-starred restaurants, Miami offers more than just dining; it's an experience. "I am working to position Miami as a queer culinary destination," Dan adds, highlighting the rising popularity of guided food walks and immersive tasting tours across the city's dynamic neighbourhoods.

## Navigating LGBTQ Tourism During 'Trump' Times

In the face of rising political conservatism and binary gender narratives, particularly with the return of Donald Trump, Miami remains committed to inclusivity. Dan acknowledges, "Yes, there may be changes, but many of his policies have been challenged in court. As of now, it hasn't impacted the way we do business. The trans community remains a vibrant part of Miami. We will continue to include them in our message."

## Emerging Trends

While the core travel trends remain consistent across emerging markets, a growing demand for diverse and immersive experiences is becoming evident. Traditionally, Miami has been synonymous with Ocean Drive, beaches, and nightlife, but visitors are now seeking more. Dan observes, "There's a rising interest in our national parks, glamping, and airboat rides. People are seeking cultural connections, such as engagement with the Two-Spirit community and the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians. Unique Experiences, deeply rooted in local culture, are trending."

Neighbourhoods like Little Haiti offer rich storytelling opportunities. The Villain Theater, Florida's only queer comedy venue, serves as a safe space for trans artists and a hub for multiracial and body-diverse performers.



Dan shares, "These are the spaces I tap into when building campaigns. The people you see in our photos aren't models, they are real members of our community, representing the authentic spirit of Miami."

From its rich cultural heritage to its glorious celebration of Pride, Miami stands tall and resilient against political tides, committed to inclusivity, representation, and acceptance.







# Swiss Magic in the Making at *Lindt Home of Chocolate*



In a world where chocolate delights are endless, Lindt stands tall as the gold standard of Swiss excellence, and the Lindt Home of Chocolate is the perfect place to witness and savour the magic behind every bite.

Prashant Nayak

With its signature smoothness and rich flavour, Lindt, the Swiss chocolate brand, is synonymous with indulgence. Its presence spans across the globe, making it a beloved choice for chocolate enthusiasts everywhere. However, for those fortunate enough to visit Switzerland, there is one experience no chocolate lover should miss – the Lindt Home of Chocolate.

Located in Kilchberg, near Zurich, the Lindt Home of Chocolate offers an immersive journey into the world of chocolate. This state-of-the-art museum and visitor centre celebrates the heritage and craftsmanship behind Swiss chocolate. Visitors can learn about the intricate processes of chocolate-making, from harvesting cocoa beans to creating the silky-smooth Swiss chocolate we all love.

## A Surge in Indian Visitors

In 2024, the Lindt Home of Chocolate recorded a remarkable performance, welcoming a record-breaking 817,164 visitors from around the world. This milestone has firmly positioned it among Switzerland's most visited museums, with expectations to sustain this global momentum in the coming year.

The attraction has seen a particularly

strong response from the Indian market. As overnight stays by Indian travellers in Switzerland rose by 8.6 per cent, the Lindt Home of Chocolate reported a twofold increase in Indian visitors compared to 2023, highlighting the growing appeal of immersive chocolate experiences among Indian families.

## Exclusive Experiences

The crown jewel of the Lindt Home of Chocolate awaits on the first floor, an immersive Swiss chocolate museum that brings the story of chocolate to life. Towering at over nine metres high, the museum's centrepiece is a showstopper: the world's most spectacular chocolate fountain, where rich, molten chocolate flows in a mesmerising cascade, setting the tone for a truly indulgent experience.

For those looking to dive deeper into the art of chocolate-making, the Lindt Home of Chocolate also offers hands-on workshops where you can create your own chocolate masterpieces under the guidance of Lindt's expert chocolatiers. The chocolate courses at Lindt Home of Chocolate are designed to be highly interactive and engaging. Participants can dive into the world of chocolate and experience what it is like to be a real Lindt Maître Chocolatier, creating their

own chocolate delights with the expertise of Lindt Maîtres Chocolatiers.

The latest addition to their lineup? A deliciously trending workshop where guests can craft their very own 'Dubai Chocolate,' a creation that's become the talk of chocolate circles worldwide.

No visit to the Lindt Home of Chocolate is complete without stepping into the largest Lindt chocolate shop in the world. Here, where visitors can find exclusive treats and enjoy the iconic Lindor truffles or take home Lindt Squares as souvenirs.

## A Year-Round Delight

While the Easter festivities are ongoing at the Chocolate Museum until April 21, the Lindt Home of Chocolate is a year-round attraction. They have several special activities during Christmas, including a Christmas chocolate class where guests can make a chocolate teddy or a Santa Claus.

Lindt Home of Chocolate continues to innovate and expand its offerings. One notable project is installing a photovoltaic system on the roof, producing solar power for the museum. In addition, they recently launched 'Chocolate and Wine' tasting series, where guests can experience a wine and chocolate tasting session.



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# NCL Elevates Cruising Experience with 'More at Sea' Offerings

Cruising has emerged stronger than ever, becoming one of the most sought-after travel experiences worldwide. Leading the charge is Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), a pioneer in global cruising for over 57 years. With a fleet of 19 state-of-the-art ships sailing to 450 breathtaking destinations offering More at Sea™, NCL ensures an elevated vacation experience. As India's cruise market gains momentum, Damian Borg, Senior Director, Sales Strategy & Operations, Asia Pacific, NCL, shares the brand vision of redefining luxury cruising for Indian travellers.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

India's cruise market is thriving, and NCL is riding the wave. After a strong 2024, the brand is fine-tuning its offerings to match Indian traveller preferences. Damian observes that every cruise line has a unique appeal, but the right experience is crucial for first-time cruisers. He says, "If they are not sold the right product the first time, they may never cruise again. Hence, it is important to get it right."

## Redefining Value with the 'More at Sea' Initiative

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) is redefining the cruise experience with a fresh approach to its value proposition. Moving beyond its longstanding 'Free at Sea' programme, the cruise line has introduced 'More at Sea,' a strategic shift designed to enhance guest experiences and simplify sales for travel consultants. Damian says, "Our message in the market is not about being fully inclusive but mostly inclusive. It stems from the belief that the word 'free' has become overused and can oftentimes be misleading." Instead, the new messaging focuses on delivering the greater value of enhanced experiences, ensuring customers recognise the comprehensive bouquet of benefits on offer.

Drawing on personal experience of a 17-day family cruise that resulted in just a \$680 bill, Damian highlighted the convenience of having everything bundled into the fare. "Taxes and tipping are included, making it incredibly easy for travel consultants to sell our product with no hidden charges," he shared.



▲ Damian Borg

## Next-Gen Prima Class Ships

NCL's innovative Prima Class is setting new benchmarks in the global cruise industry, offering more space, amenities, and an elevated onboard experience. "Norwegian Prima and Norwegian Viva are already sailing from 2022 and 2023, respectively. Designed for sun-soaked destinations, it is all about space, bigger outdoor areas, seamless indoor-outdoor flow, and an unmatched connection to the sea," says Damian.

The next addition, Norwegian Aqua, debuted this March with significantly increased capacity and enhanced features. Her sister ship, Norwegian Luna, is set to launch next year, building anticipation and continuing NCL's commitment to redefining modern cruising.

Damian proudly shares, "We are constantly innovating, and Aqua debuts our first plant-based restaurant, an idea born from customer feedback. Our newest show on Aqua, Revolution, is a major in-house Prince tribute, while other ships feature Broadway and West End productions." NCL is committed to delivering a congruent mix of culinary, cultural, and visual experiences.

## Opportunities, Not Challenges

For NCL, India's cruise market is all about opportunity. The key focus is educating the trade and training agents to understand destinations, products, and opportunities better so they can confidently sell cruises to their clients. Damian surmises, "With so much to choose from, product knowledge is critical. NCL offers online programmes and actively engages with agents through events and roadshows. Once a guest sails with us, they will no doubt have a great experience. The challenge is building trust with first-time sellers." Trade partnerships remain vital in this complex, high-value market, and NCL is committed to supporting them.

## NCL Expands its Footprint in Asia

Japan has emerged as a strong destination, while Australia and New Zealand are also seeing increased inbound traffic. NCL has significantly grown its presence in Asia over the past year, with plans extending into 2026 and 2027. "We are investing more in Asia, and it is becoming a key hub for us, almost like a home port, offering short fly-cruise options not just for Indians but also Australians," says Damian.





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# Costa Cruises Sharpens Focus on the Indian Market

With a rich legacy dating back to 1948, Costa Cruises, headquartered in Genoa, Italy, is one of the most established names in the global cruise industry. Having engaged with the Indian market for several years, the brand has now taken strategic steps to deepen its presence in the country. In 2024, Costa aligned with new partners, including Sharaf Travel and other preferred sales agents (PSAs), to expand its footprint and tap into emerging market opportunities. TTJ caught up with Marta Cambiaggi, Business Development Manager, International Sales, Costa Cruises, and Leena Brahme, Business Head – India, Sharaf Travel, to understand the cruise path for the future.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Cruising is now an established option for holiday seekers worldwide. Indian travellers today aspire to indulge in a cruise vacation, and it is definitely on the bucket list for all. Over the years, we have seen a multitude of cruise brands, American, European, Asian, and now even Indian, dig into the Indian cruise pie.

### Expanding Market Share in India

Costa has shifted gears and sharpened its focus on the opportunity in India. Marta explains, “We have been cruising since 1948, and our association with the Indian market has been longstanding. India is a huge country with tremendous potential, and we are confident that Indian travellers enjoy our product. That is why we’re expanding our outreach and creating greater brand awareness by collaborating with Sharaf Travel and our PSA network.”

In 2023, Costa Serena sailed in Indian waters, reinforcing Costa’s intent to serve the region. “We hope to return soon. While we operate globally, our most popular itineraries among Indian guests include cruises in the Dubai and Emirates region, and select voyages in the Far East,” Marta adds.

### Pioneering Cruise Routes

The cruise line currently operates a modern fleet of nine ships, including Costa Toscana and Costa Smeralda. The oldest ship, built in 2003, was refurbished in 2018, and all vessels undergo periodic dry-dock maintenance.

The West Mediterranean is Costa’s hometown, so they have a ship sailing in this region all year. The ship itinerary covers sailing from Genoa or Savona, Marseille, Barcelona, and Civitavecchia, and one can embark on the ship from any of these ports. Marta adds, “In summer, we deploy three ships on West Mediterranean routes and another three on East Mediterranean itineraries. We were also the first cruise line to develop winter West Mediterranean itineraries.”



▲ Marta Cambiaggi

### Prioritising Indian Food

Factors such as segmentation, area of operation, connectivity, price point, and onboard facilities all play a crucial role in selecting the ideal cruise. However, the availability of Indian cuisine, especially vegetarian options, often tops the list.

Talking about special food requirements, Marta states, “One thing we Italians share with Indians is the passion for good food. We can customise food requirements for groups and individuals, anything the customer needs. On our Emirates itinerary, we have one restaurant that is fully dedicated to Indian food. Our onboard Indian chefs have been with Costa for many years, bringing extensive experience and expertise. They are well-versed in authentic recipes and take great care in catering to the preferences of our Indian guests.”

MICE is a significant segment eyed by every cruise line, and for Costa, it currently accounts for approximately 70 per cent of business generated from India. While the remaining share comes from leisure travellers, the cruise line is keen to increase the number of FIT guests on board.



▲ Leena Brahme

Costa has also successfully hosted numerous Indian weddings on its ships and is fully equipped to accommodate all traditional marriage rituals and ceremonies, including the Hindu agni pheras.

### Leveraging Sharaf Travels' Expertise

Regarding the infusion of dynamism and vitality into the Indian market, Marta states, “Based in Genoa, I oversee multiple markets, making it impossible to be everywhere at once. That is why I rely on trusted partners in key regions. To strengthen Costa’s presence, we strategically decided to expand into the Indian market, and we are thrilled to collaborate with Sharaf Travel and our other PSAs in India to grow brand awareness.”

On this, Leena Brahme shares, “Since the inception of PSA in India for Costa Cruises, we are positively looking ahead to share our expertise of selling cruises, especially the Mediterranean (East and West), along with thorough knowledge of Northern Europe (Norwegian Fjords). We pride ourselves on taking along Costa Cruises’ Italian hospitality to continue to support our B2B partner’s channel.”







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### The Reality of Baggage Loss

Every year, nearly 26 million bags are mishandled globally, with approximately 5% of all checked baggage experiencing delays, damage, or loss. In high-traffic airports, baggage loss incidents surge, with Europe and North America recording some of the highest mishandling rates. The impact of lost baggage goes beyond inconvenience, travellers face financial burdens, missed connections, and disrupted itineraries, turning what should be a seamless experience into a logistical nightmare.

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### A Game-Changer for Asego Travel Agent Partners

Since its launch, TrackMate has been a runaway success. Today, nearly 70 per cent of travel protection plans provided by Asego include TrackMate, proving its necessity in the modern travel landscape. Travel agents have embraced the product as a key differentiator, providing their clients with enhanced travel experiences and increasing customer satisfaction. This innovative offering helps agents gain customer loyalty by delivering practical, real-time baggage solutions that meet modern travellers' expectations.

### What's Next in Mate Series?

The success of TrackMate is only the beginning. The Mate Series is set to revolutionize travel, becoming the ultimate travel companion for every modern traveller.

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

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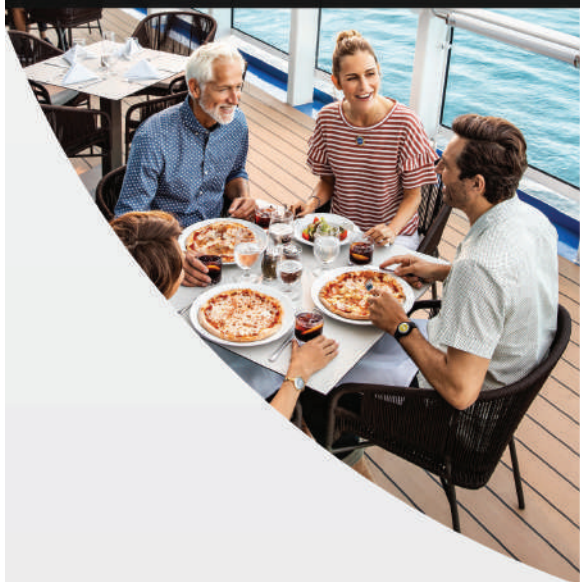




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# New partnerships set stage for robust India–New Zealand travel growth

The recent visit of New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon to India marked an important step in deepening bilateral ties between the two countries. With key developments across tourism, business, and education, this visit signals a renewed commitment to collaboration. The signing of multiple MoUs during the Prime Minister's trip lays the foundation for a promising future of travel, trade, and cultural exchange between India and New Zealand.

Prashant Nayak

Accompanied by a high-level delegation, including Rene de Monchy, Chief Executive Officer of Tourism New Zealand, and Greg Foran, Chief Executive Officer of Air New Zealand, Prime Minister Luxon attended key events in New Delhi and Mumbai. On March 19, 2025, at a tourism reception held at the Taj Palace in Mumbai, Tourism New Zealand showcased several initiatives aimed at improving accessibility and strengthening tourism ties with India. These efforts are set to streamline travel, foster strategic partnerships, and position New Zealand as a top destination for Indian travellers.

## Strengthening Air Connectivity

At the event, Air India and Air New Zealand signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) outlining plans to establish direct flights between the two countries by 2028, subject to aircraft readiness and regulatory clearances. The agreement also proposes a codeshare arrangement across 16 routes covering India, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. Indian travellers from cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai would be able to connect to destinations like Auckland, Christchurch, Wellington, and Queenstown via hubs in Singapore, Sydney, or Melbourne.

Additionally, Tourism New Zealand, Auckland Airport, and Air New Zealand signed a joint MoU committing investment to a seasonal marketing campaign aimed at boosting demand and driving off-peak visitation to New Zealand.

## Strategic Partnerships with Indian Travel Agencies

Tourism New Zealand has also partnered with nine of India's leading travel agencies to design experiences tailored for Indian tourists. These collaborations aim to offer customized packages aligned with Indian preferences. Participating agencies include EaseMyTrip.com, Flamingo Transworld, Kesari Tours, Kulin Kumar Holidays, MakeMyTrip.com, Pickyourtrail, SOTC Travel, Thomas Cook (India), and Veena World. A special winter campaign blending media outreach with promotional offers was also introduced to drive engagement.



Air NZ cabin crew, Air NZ CEO Greg Foran, NZ Prime Minister Christopher Luxon, Air India CEO Campbell Wilson, Air India cabin crew

## Growing Tourism Market from India

New Zealand's tourism sector remains a key driver of the economy, second only to agriculture in terms of export earnings. Indian travellers, who tend to take outbound trips during peak domestic holiday seasons, align well with New Zealand's traditionally quieter travel periods. In 2023, over 72 per cent of Indian holidaymakers arrived in New Zealand during off-peak months, underscoring the potential to sustain and expand this trend. With an estimated 18.3 million potential travellers from Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru actively considering New Zealand as a travel destination, and 43 per cent ranking it as their top choice, the new initiatives are expected to fuel further growth in the arrivals of Indian tourists.

## Tourism New Zealand's Strategic Initiatives

During a media briefing, Rene de Monchy, Chief Executive Officer of Tourism New Zealand, highlighted India's rapid growth as one of the key emerging markets for New Zealand, stressing the importance of enhancing connectivity and refining marketing strategies to maintain this momentum. "India ranks fifth among New Zealand's top inbound markets, following Australia, China, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Indian arrivals grew 15 per cent year-on-year

in 2024, and we expect a 20 per cent increase this year, driven by rising demand for leisure travel," he stated. While acknowledging that overall visitor numbers remain below pre-COVID levels, he noted that travel from India has made a strong comeback, highlighting its considerable potential for future growth.



▲ Rene de Monchy

New Zealand and India are set to commemorate 100 years of sporting relations in 2026, with cricket taking centre stage in the celebrations. Rene stated that New Zealand plans to leverage this milestone to attract more Indian visitors, especially within the



sports tourism segment. He also addressed visa-related concerns, stating, “New Zealand Immigration is focused on working to ensure faster visa processing.”

When asked about the MICE sector, Rene acknowledged its importance. He shared, “MICE travel is certainly an important area for us, particularly for people attending conferences. We have built new infrastructure in recent years, including a new convention centre set to open early next year. We see this as a great complementary way to experience New Zealand. Our Business Events Promotion team is actively pitching around the world, and we believe MICE tourism will continue to grow. It is a great way to enjoy the country and potentially return with their families. However, our primary focus remains on leisure travel.”

Rene further informed that Indian travellers typically spend around 17 days in New Zealand, exploring multiple destinations from Rotorua to other key locations across the country, demonstrating significant growth opportunities for tourism.

Rene further highlighted New Zealand’s strength in digital film production, an area of interest given the prominence of Bollywood in India. He expressed a keen interest in

exploring new opportunities for collaboration that would benefit both countries, particularly within the film industry.

Air New Zealand’s Strategic Focus on India



▲ Greg Foran

In 2024, more than 83,000 people travelled from India to New Zealand, with around half visiting friends and family. This trend reflects the growing Indian diaspora, now accounting

for 6 per cent of New Zealand’s population. Additionally, over 59,000 Indian students are currently pursuing education in New Zealand, further supporting visitor flows through VFR (visiting friends and relatives) and education-related travel.

Greg Foran, CEO, Air New Zealand, highlighted India’s growing tourism market and increasing travel demand. “India represents a key growth market for Air New Zealand, and we are excited about the opportunity to enhance connectivity for travellers between our two countries.”

Greg emphasised the potential of students, friends-and-family visits, and cricket tourism to drive traffic. “The biggest opportunity lies in those who want to travel for leisure. With codeshare arrangements, we aim to deepen our service offerings and provide a seamless experience for customers travelling to New Zealand, with better connection times through Singapore. Our partnership with Air India and Singapore Airlines is key to this effort.”

Looking ahead, Greg shared, “As we secure regulatory approvals and aircraft become available, we are exploring the possibility of direct flights in two or three years between New Zealand and India, possibly starting with Delhi.”

Dusit International unveils ambitious expansion plans for India

Marking a renewed commitment to the Indian market, Thailand’s leading hospitality company, Dusit International, has announced an ambitious expansion strategy that will see the brand establish a strong footprint across India’s Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities

Team TTJ

With a diverse brand portfolio spanning the ultra-luxury Devarana – Dusit Retreats to upper midscale and midscale brands such as Dusit Princess and ASAI Hotels, Dusit plans to tap underserved locations in India where it can leverage its expertise in delivering Thai-inspired gracious hospitality with curated, experience-led stays to meet the needs of today’s business and leisure travellers.

Expanding Footprint

Following the successful launch of dusitD2 Fagu in Shimla in December 2024, Dusit has signed three additional properties in Karnataka. These include the wellness-focused Devarana Sakleshpur, Karnataka – A Dusit Retreat (scheduled to open in 2028), and two new Dusit Princess Hotels and Resorts.

New Launches

The company is also preparing to launch six



Siradej Donavanik, VP – Development Global and Deepika Arora, Head - India, Dusit International

more properties across India. Under the Dusit Princess brand, new hotels will open in Raipur (200 keys), Bhiwadi (165 keys), Kolkata (220 keys), and Lonavala (120 keys). Two boutique luxury hotels under the recently introduced Dusit Collection brand will also debut in Kasol and Manali (each with 40 rooms), offering refined escapes in the Himalayan foothills.

Visionary Approach

Prioritising quality over quantity, the company is thoughtfully selecting locations that align with its ethos of premium, experience-driven hospitality, offering a distinctive blend of holistic wellness, contemporary design, and exceptional service.

“India represents an exceptional growth opportunity for Dusit across major metros and particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, where premium hospitality options remain limited despite strong demand,” said Siradej Donavanik, Vice President – Development (Global), Dusit International.

Siradej added, “The country’s tourism industry is evolving rapidly, with increasing demand for high-quality, experience-driven stays. Through strategic partnerships with visionary local developers, we are committed to shaping India’s premium hospitality landscape for the long term.”



# Cape Town Tourism Prioritises Connectivity, Visa Ease, and Indian Market Growth

A delegation from Cape Town, South Africa, including the Mayoral Committee for Economic Growth and Tourism and Cape Town Tourism, recently visited India to exchange best practices on water and energy conservation, gain insights into IT development, and explore potential tourism opportunities. TTJ had the opportunity to meet with the delegation, during which Enver Duminy, CEO, Cape Town Tourism, discussed challenges such as connectivity and visas, new tourism developments in Cape Town, the city’s appeal for Indian travellers, and strategies to enhance tourist flow from the Indian market.

Prashant Nayak

## How crucial are direct flights from India for boosting Cape Town tourism?

Two of the most significant barriers to growing tourism from India to Cape Town are visa processing and air connectivity. The recent visit by the Cape Town Mayoral Committee and tourism delegation to India was a strategic step toward removing these hurdles, especially the absence of a direct air route, which remains a critical bottleneck.

Indian travellers currently transit through the Middle East, East Africa, or the Indian Ocean Islands. A direct flight would revolutionise travel, unlocking demand, simplifying logistics, and driving higher arrivals. We remain optimistic.

We also promoted the recently launched Trusted Tour Operator Scheme, an initiative by our Departments of Home Affairs and Tourism to improve the processing and approval of visitor visas from India. There are at least 14 trusted Indian operators approved by the South African government, including Thomas Cook India, whom we also met with to explore future synergies for collaboration. The visit also strengthened trade and media partnerships and deepened government and industry dialogue, which we see as essential groundwork for future route development.

## What impact do you foresee from the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme on improving visa processes for Indian travellers?

Visa ease is crucial. The Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS) is one of the most promising developments, it allows for reduced documentation and an accelerated visa turnaround time. Standard visa processing times have also been reduced through the TTOS. This fast-tracked, simplified system boosts confidence among Indian travellers and tour



▲ Enver Duminy

operators and is a vital enabler in converting interest into actual bookings. These measures are precursors to online e-Visa applications planned by the South African government.

## How has the Indian travel market evolved in its response to Cape Town pre- and post-pandemic?

Cape Town’s deep-rooted historical connections with India and its vibrant Indian community make the city a familiar and exciting experience for Indian travellers. Today’s Indian outbound traveller is more adventurous, experience-driven, and globally savvy, and Cape Town delivers on all fronts.

With everything from luxury shopping at the V&A Waterfront, stunning beaches, helicopter flips, yacht experiences, and world-renowned wine farms to a thriving food scene and strong cultural resonance, Cape Town is perfectly

suited to both traditional family groups and younger, experience-hungry travellers.

## Could you highlight some top tourist attractions and experiences that resonate with Indian travellers?

Cape Town is a city embraced by nature, nestled between the ocean and majestic mountains. Its breathtaking landscapes offer Indian travellers a rare blend of adventure and serenity. Picture paragliding from Signal Hill, ziplining through lush canopies, exploring wildlife on jeep safaris, whale watching, or cruising along the scenic coastline! Cape Town’s wine farms, cultural hotspots, and adventure activities, combined with luxurious stays and authentic experiences, are a perfect match for Indian travellers seeking ‘Instagrammable’ moments, connection with nature, and memorable activities.

For nature and scenery, explore Table Mountain, Cape Point, and





Boulders Beach, home to African penguins. The Winelands, stretching from Constantia to Franschhoek and Stellenbosch, offer breathtaking landscapes and exceptional wines. Cricket enthusiasts should visit Newlands Cricket Stadium in the summer, especially with the ICC World Cup 2027. Cape Town's vibrant culture is reflected in its film and photo tours, with Bollywood films often shot here. Adventure seekers can enjoy shark cage diving, paragliding, and nature trails. Festivals like Diwali, Holi, and the Cape Town International Jazz Festival highlight the city's rich cultural vibrancy.

**What safety measures are in place to ensure a secure and comfortable experience for international visitors, especially Indians?**

Cape Town takes the safety of its visitors seriously. Our official visitor platform, TravelWise Cape Town, provides real-time safety updates, tips, and emergency contacts. Through a partnership with the Namola safety app, travellers can access 24/7 emergency response services via their smartphones, making support a tap away.

In addition, the Band-Aid Programme is designed to support visitors who may experience distress while in Cape Town. From lost documents to emergency accommodation or police assistance, we ensure no visitor is left without help.

**What initiatives are being taken to create tailored experiences and deepen engagement with the Indian outbound market?**

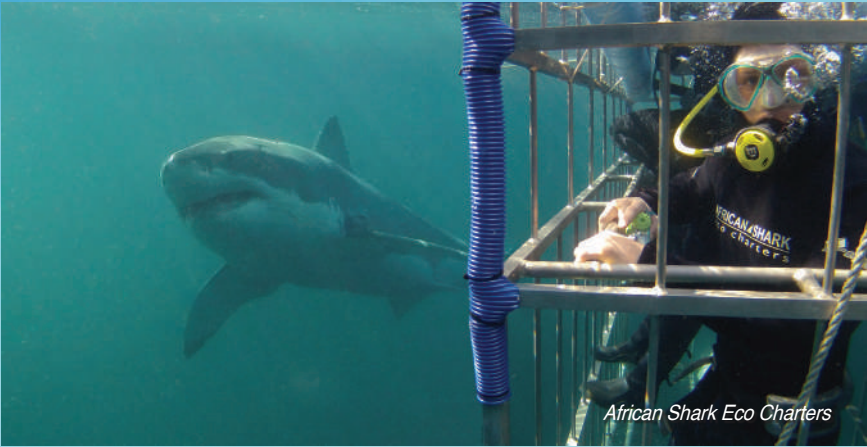
Cape Town is strategically working to strengthen its appeal to the Indian outbound market by building long-term awareness through various initiatives. These include forming partnerships with local marketing agencies, key Indian tour operators, airlines, and affiliates. The city also runs training programmes for its tourism sector to better cater to Indian preferences, such as cuisine, group travel, and service expectations. Additionally, Cape Town is co-developing tailored travel packages, experiences, and digital content for Indian travellers. Bridging the cultural gap, particularly in hospitality and food offerings, is a key focus to ensure a more personalised experience.

**How is Cape Town positioning itself as a destination for MICE tourism, and what unique offerings does it have for corporate groups?**

Cape Town is positioning itself as a premier destination for MICE tourism by offering a unique blend of world-class infrastructure and stunning leisure experiences. Key venues like the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) and Century City Conference Centre (CCC) are award-winning, with strong sustainability credentials. The city also boasts unique spaces like Zeitz MOCAA, wine farms, and oceanside resorts, ideal for meetings and gala events. For corporate groups, Cape Town offers adventure-based team-building activities like shark cage diving, hiking Table Mountain, and wine tasting. The city is supported by a professional, globally recognised conventions bureau and government-run events departments, offering a range of benefits and services for events, conferences, and film productions.

**How do you envision Cape Town's tourism growth in the next five years, especially in attracting Indian tourists, and what strategies will drive this growth?**

We see India as a high-potential market with exponential room for growth. Our strategy to strengthen Cape Town's appeal to the Indian market focuses on reducing travel barriers, such as simplifying visa processes and improving air access. We aim to build strong media and trade partnerships to boost visibility and promote cultural, culinary, and cricket-linked exchanges that resonate with Indian travellers. Embracing tech-enabled tourism allows us to engage digital-first Indian travellers better. Additionally, we are positioning Cape Town as a leading aspirational destination for Indian families, couples, millennials, weddings, and corporate groups. Our vision is to more than double Indian arrivals through innovative collaboration, inclusive experiences, and relentless innovation.







# Moab Unleashed

## Conquer Canyons by Day, Gaze at Galaxies by Night

Nestled in Utah’s southeastern desert, Moab is a dream destination that embodies the rugged spirit of the American West. With breathtaking landscapes, two renowned national parks, and a vibrant local culture, this adventure hub attracts explorers, thrill-seekers, and nature lovers year-round. Whether rafting through the wild rapids of the Colorado River, hiking through red rock arches, or stargazing in one of the world’s darkest skies, Moab offers an unforgettable escape.

Prashant Nayak

When planning a vacation to the U.S., Utah should undoubtedly be at the top of your list. Known for its unparalleled natural beauty, diverse landscapes, and endless outdoor adventures, Utah offers an experience like no other.

### Utah: A Journey Through History and Adventure

Rich in history, Utah's past is rooted in ranching, farming, mining, and the cowboy way of life, embodying the spirit of the 19th-century Western frontier. Utah is also home to iconic national parks like Zion, Arches, and Bryce Canyon, making it a paradise for nature lovers and thrill-seekers. The state's stunning landscapes feature towering red rocks, deep canyons, and striking arches, offering some of the most breathtaking scenery in the American Southwest. From hiking and mountain biking to skiing and stargazing, Utah offers year-round activities for every traveler. Whether exploring its parks, enjoying resorts, or delving into its heritage, Utah is a destination full of adventure and beauty.

### Discover Moab: Adventure Unlimited

Located in southeastern Utah, Moab is a must-visit destination for those drawn to adventure and natural beauty. Nestled in the heart of the American Southwest, Moab serves as the gateway to two iconic national

parks: Arches and Canyonlands. The town is renowned for its stunning red rock landscapes and a wide variety of outdoor activities, including hiking, mountain biking, rock climbing, and off-roading. With a charm of its own, Moab offers a unique blend of adventure and relaxation, enhanced by the tranquil presence of the Colorado River winding through the area.

Moab's small-town hospitality and vibrant local culture are key highlights. The downtown district is filled with microbreweries, galleries, and a wide array of restaurants offering everything from Southwestern comfort food to gourmet dining. After a day of outdoor activities, visitors can explore local art, shop for unique souvenirs, and attend cultural festivals. With its year-round festivals and ideal climate, Moab captures the spirit of the Southwest, offering a memorable escape for adventurers and those looking to unwind.

### The Colorado River: A Perfect Summer Escape

Summer in Moab is the perfect time to explore the Colorado River, one of the area’s top attractions. Water activities are available from March to October, providing a welcome break from the heat. For families looking for a laid-back adventure, raft

trips in the calmer Fisher Towers section offer a relaxing experience, while adrenaline junkies can tackle the more intense rapids of Westwater and Cataract Canyons. For a more leisurely approach, consider kayaking, paddleboarding, or canoeing along the flat stretches of the Moab Daily section while enjoying the cool, refreshing waters.

For those who crave speed, jet boat tours provide a thrilling way to navigate the river's twists and turns. After an exciting day on the water, don't miss Canyonlands by Night and Day, a sound and light show that adds a magical touch to end a perfect day in Moab.

### A Peaceful Retreat During Winter

While Moab is known for its red rock landscapes and outdoor adventures in the warmer months, winter (typically from November to March) reveals a quieter, more serene side of this desert paradise. The cooler temperatures make it an ideal







*Night Sky in Arches National Park*



*Rocky Mountaineer Train running between Moab and Denver*

time for outdoor activities, especially for those looking for a peaceful, less crowded experience.

Winter in Moab also comes with added perks, such as discounted hotel rates, with many accommodations offering special deals during this time. To the surprise of many visitors, a large number of Moab's retail shops and art galleries remain open throughout the winter, showcasing unique local artwork and souvenirs.

## The Iconic National Parks of Moab

**Arches National Park:** Famous for its stunning natural sandstone arches, Arches National Park is a must-visit for anyone interested in geology and outdoor adventure. The park is home to over 2,000 arches, and the 18-mile paved scenic drive provides access to some of the most iconic viewpoints and hiking trails, including the popular trail to Delicate Arch. Whether you're taking a leisurely walk or pushing yourself on a more challenging hike, the vibrant red rock landscapes and dramatic formations make it a dream destination for nature lovers and photographers.

**Canyonlands National Park:** The Island in the Sky District of Canyonlands offers

some of the most breathtaking views in the Southwest. Perched on a 1,500-foot mesa, this district features 20 miles of paved roads leading to stunning viewpoints and short hiking trails. The expansive vistas, rugged rock formations, and towering mesas create the perfect setting for photography, hiking, and simply soaking in the beauty of the American West.

**Dead Horse Point State Park:** Just 32 miles from Moab, Dead Horse Point State Park boasts one of the most photographed views in the world, overlooking the Colorado River and Canyonlands' dramatic pinnacles and buttes. Visitors can explore pet-friendly hiking trails, including a paved path leading to scenic overlooks. Mountain bikers will love the Intrepid Trail System, which combines slickrock, singletrack, and sandy washes, all with breathtaking views of the river and Canyonlands.

## A Celestial Experience at Moab's Dark Sky Parks

Utah is home to several International Dark Sky Parks, and the Moab region is fortunate to host three of them: Arches, Canyonlands, and Dead Horse Point. These parks provide an unparalleled opportunity for stargazers to escape city lights and experience the night sky in its clearest form. Both summer and

winter offer unique stargazing experiences, making Moab a top destination for astronomy enthusiasts. Visitors can also take part in ranger-led events and astronomy programs for an even deeper appreciation of the cosmos.

## Other Unforgettable Experiences

### Scenic Flights and Hot Air Balloon Rides:

For a truly unique perspective of Moab's dramatic landscapes, consider taking a scenic flight or hot air balloon ride. These aerial adventures provide an incredible bird's-eye view of the vast canyons, mesas, and rock formations that define Moab's iconic scenery, creating unforgettable memories.

**Rocky Mountaineer Train Journey:** The Rocky Mountaineer Train Journey offers a two-day rail adventure through extraordinary landscapes between Moab and Denver. This scenic train ride passes through canyons, deserts, natural archways, and hoodoos, with an overnight stay in Glenwood Springs. Upon arrival in Moab, visitors are just steps away from endless adventure opportunities in the heart of downtown.

Moab is packed with even more thrilling experiences and hidden gems waiting to be explored. Want to dive deeper into Moab's many adventures?

Visit [www.discovermoab.com](http://www.discovermoab.com)



*Scenic Byway Near Moab*



# Sabah Tourism doubles down on India with nature, culture, and strategic collaboration

One year after his first conversation with TTJ, Julinus Jeffrey Jimit, CEO, Sabah Tourism Board (STB), returns with renewed energy and a compelling story of progress. With a sharp focus on nature, culture, and adventure, Sabah is positioning itself as an enthralling destination for Indian travellers seeking immersive experiences beyond the usual hotspots.

Prashant Nayak

Borneo is a virtual paradise for anyone who loves the dense jungle, wildlife, and adventure. Sabah, Malaysia's second-largest state on the island of Borneo, and STB aim to showcase its unmatched beauty and inspire more Indian tourists to explore its manifold offerings.

### Remarkable Growth of Indian Visitors in 2024

Sabah, Malaysia's second-largest state on the island of Borneo, experienced a significant upswing in Indian tourist arrivals in 2024. Jimit shared, "We saw a 58 per cent growth in Indian visitors to Sabah, which is very encouraging, with 9,316 Indian visitors in 2024, compared to 5,885 arrivals in 2023." This growth demonstrates that the efforts put into promoting Sabah as a travel destination have been fruitful, and Jimit hopes that 2025 will surpass this milestone.

### Focus on Nature and Wildlife

Sabah's strength lies in its eco-tourism, which resonates strongly with Indian travellers increasingly seeking nature-based getaways. Jimit added, "We have noticed that many visitors from India are particularly drawn to our wildlife and natural beauty. As a result, the Sabah Tourism Board has ramped up efforts to promote ecotourism, especially in regions like the Golden Triangle (Sipadan, Mabul, and Kapalai islands), Imbak Canyon, Maliau Basin, and Danum Valley, all of which have received the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) certification."

In support of the growing tourism influx, Sabah is expanding its hospitality infrastructure. "We have added around eight new hotels, with the most notable being the upcoming launch of Club Med Borneo in November 2025," informed Jimit. The resort, which will offer



▲ Julinus Jeffrey Jimit

360 premium rooms and 40 luxury suites, is expected to become a key attraction for Indian families and honeymooners.

### Strategic Trade Marketing in India for 2025

Sabah's marketing strategy for 2025 is centred around key travel segments in India. "Our focus will be on families, honeymooners, MICE travellers, and those interested in adventure and culture," said Jimit. He also emphasised the importance of working with established Indian travel agencies like Thomas Cook to position Sabah as a destination for Indian travellers. Jimit also highlighted the spending power and importance of travellers from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, noting their growing role in outbound travel from India.

### Collaborations for Greater Engagement

To boost awareness and visibility in the

Indian market, Sabah Tourism has laid out a robust calendar of trade and influencer engagements. "We plan to collaborate with key opinion leaders and influencers to highlight Sabah's offerings. Additionally, Sabah will be hosting a group of 10 movie producers who will visit Kota Kinabalu for a recce," revealed Jimit.

Improving air connectivity is another top priority. "We're working closely with Malaysia Tourism, Batik Air, and Royal Brunei Airlines. For instance, Brunei Airlines now operates flights from Chennai to Brunei, with onward connections to Kota Kinabalu, just a 20-minute hop," he shared. Discussions are also underway with Air India and possibly IndiGo to explore further route development.

### Motivations for Choosing Sabah

When asked about traveller trends, Jimit noted that Indian tourists to Sabah come from across the country, with notable traffic from Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. He shared, "There is not one specific region that dominates, but for the whole of Malaysia, we see a strong influx from Southern India."

When discussing what motivates Indian travellers to choose Sabah, Jimit acknowledged that many Indian tourists are looking for something different. "Feedback from Indian travellers has shown that they seek new destinations beyond Langkawi and Genting. Also, Sabah offers an alternative that rivals popular destinations like the Maldives but at a more affordable price," said Jimit.

In his closing remark, Jimit had a message for Indian travellers, "If culture, adventure, and nature are your passions, Sabah is definitely your destination. Sabah is not just a place, it is an experience of a lifetime."





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# Morocco's rising appeal unlocks new opportunities for Indian travellers

Morocco has seen impressive growth in recent years, solidifying itself as one of Africa’s leading travel destinations. In an exclusive conversation with Jamal Kilito, Country Manager, India, Moroccan National Tourism Office (MNTOT), we get an insight into the factors driving this growth, the destination’s appeal to Indian tourists, and what lies ahead for this vibrant North African gem.

Prashant Nayak

According to the latest UN tourism data, Morocco welcomed 17.4 million international tourists in 2024, a 20 per cent increase from 2023, making it the most-visited country in Africa.

## Morocco's Tourism Appeal

Morocco's outstanding tourism performance in 2024 is a direct result of its rich and diverse cultural heritage, coupled with modern infrastructure, making it a unique and highly attractive destination for travellers around the globe.

On the appeal, Jamal elaborated, “We have an incredible variety of touristic assets. Our cultural heritage, with nine UNESCO World Heritage sites, over 30 medinas, and numerous monuments, truly sets us apart. Morocco’s landscapes—ranging from vast deserts to towering mountains and stunning coastal regions—are breathtakingly diverse.”

## Investment in Infrastructure

Morocco has made significant investments in its infrastructure. The country boasts Africa's first high-speed rail network. Moreover, with modern highways and increasing international flights, Morocco is becoming more accessible to global tourists. In addition to transportation, Morocco has also invested heavily in its hospitality sector, increasing the number of hotel beds to over 300,000. Major international hotel brands have also established a presence or are actively investing in prime tourist destinations.

Jamal shares, “As we prepare for major sporting events, including the African Cup of Nations later this year and Morocco’s co-hosting of the 2030 FIFA World Cup, the country is poised to welcome even more international visitors. These events, coupled with our enhanced infrastructure, will undoubtedly elevate Morocco’s global tourism profile.”

## Attracting Indian Tourists

As Morocco looks to expand its reach beyond its traditional top French, Spanish, and European markets, Jamal said, “In Asia, India is one of the most promising markets for us. With our representation office in India, our focus has been on building relationships with the Indian trade and travel agents.”



▲ Jamal Kilito

Introducing an easy-to-obtain e-visa system has also been instrumental in attracting more Indian tourists. The visa process, which takes just a few minutes to complete online and a few days to receive, has made last-minute travel decisions much more effortless for Indian travellers. However, the key to further growth lies in better connectivity. Jamal noted, “We need direct flights from Indian cities. Once that happens, we believe we can significantly increase Indian visitor numbers.”

## MICE and Weddings

Given its breathtaking scenery and rich cultural heritage, Morocco is poised to be a premier destination for leisure and MICE travellers from India. Morocco has already been welcoming MICE groups from India in recent months.

For weddings, Morocco is the opportunity to combine the rich cultural traditions of India with the exotic Moroccan culture. “We have experience hosting Indian weddings and are fully prepared to accommodate large, luxurious celebrations. There is a growing demand for Moroccan-themed weddings, particularly among the Indian community in the UK and the US. We aim to expand this further, offering Indian guests a distinctive and exotic wedding experience,” said Jamal.

## Exploring Morocco

Morocco offers diverse experiences tailored to the interests of Indian tourists. “For first-timers, the Imperial Cities tour is a must. This five- to seven-night journey covers Fez, Marrakech, Meknes, Casablanca, and Rabat, offering deep cultural and historical insights. With extra time, add Tangiers, Chefchaouen, or Essaouira,” suggested Jamal.

Morocco’s unique desert landscapes are another draw for many tourists. Jamal assured, “Our desert experience is unmatched. We have been organising desert tours for decades, offering camel rides, luxurious tents, and authentic cultural activities, all delivered with professionalism.”

## Enhancing Visibility in India

Morocco has set ambitious targets to attract 26 million visitors by 2030, and India has the potential to play a key role in achieving these targets.

MNTOT is expanding its outreach beyond Delhi and Mumbai to cities like Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Bengaluru to boost awareness and offer exceptional experiences to Indian travellers.





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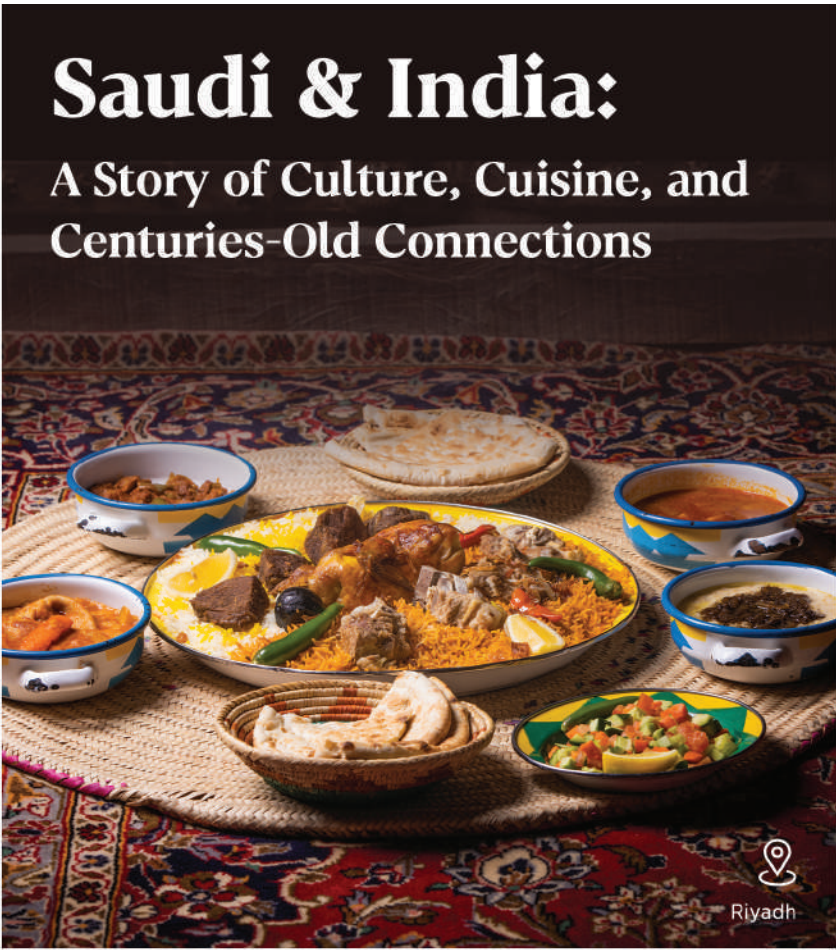


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The vast Arabian Sea separates the two nations of Saudi and India, and yet these two countries warmly reach out to hold hands while sharing so many things in common. Picture walking through a bustling souq in Saudi, and compare it with a busy bazaar in an Indian city. Or how both nations share the love for good food and are known for their warm hospitality. The ties run deep over and continue to do so.

## Sugar & Spice

India and Saudi enjoy cuisine enhanced with aromatic spices. So, if you enjoy the biryani, you'd be surprised to know that Saudi kabsa is similar and equally delicious. Both include layers of fragrant rice, meat, and aromatic spices like cardamom, cinnamon, and star-anise, served on celebratory occasions, festivals, and family dinners. Samosa, a streetside favorite in India, is similar to samboosa from Saudi. It is a Ramadan favorite that is usually stuffed with either meat, cheese or spinach. How can we forget the love for chai or karak as Saudis call it? The way this favorite brew is prepared in both cultures—strong and spiced—is a conversation starter, from Riyadh to Delhi.

## Threads & Treasures

Saudi and Indian traditional garments find strong influences in each other. The flowing thobe and abaya of Saudi might appear different from Indian attire, but the hand embroidery and embellishments find similarities in Indian craftsmanship. Even the henna or mehndi applied during weddings and festivals is a great case in point of shared traditions.

## Language & Words

Would you believe it if we told you that Arabic and several Indian languages, especially Hindi and Urdu have much in common? Owing to historical trade and the travellers moving back and forth between the two nations, several Arabic-derived words made their way into Indian speech. Words like kitab (book), dukan (shop), maafi (sorry) and so many more are used in the same capacity in both cultures.

## Hospitality & Values

One of the most prominent similarities between Saudi and Indian civilizations is the value placed on warm hospitality. Visitors are treated with the highest respect in both cultures, and sharing meals is regarded as a generous and thoughtful gesture. Whether it is a Saudi majlis or an Indian dawat, the idea of getting together for a feast is a long-standing tradition that is still prevalent in both countries.

The mixing of cultures continues to thrive in real time today. Many Indians now live and work in Saudi, building on a connection that dates back to many years. So, if you are planning to experience Saudi food, culture, and hospitality, now is the right time with easy visa options for those holding tourist or business visa from the UK, US or Schengen countries.

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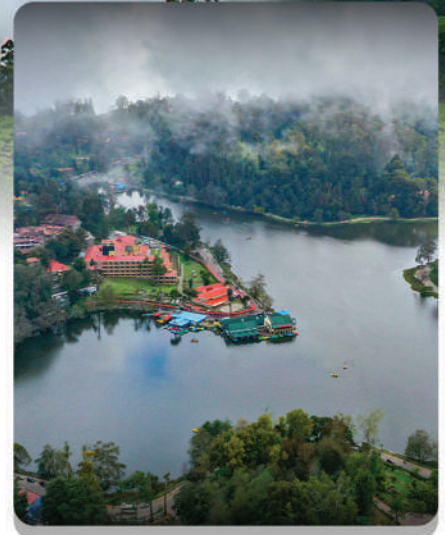
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# Taiwan’s bold push to win over India’s thriving outbound travel market

With its diverse landscapes, rich heritage, and cutting-edge infrastructure, Taiwan is making strides in expanding its footprint in the Indian tourism market. Paul Shih, Director, Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA), Singapore office, outlined the country’s tourism aspirations, marketing initiatives, and the ever-growing relationship with the Indian market.

Prashant Nayak

Paul Shih is tasked with managing and boosting tourism outreach across India, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the Middle East. With a focus on driving Taiwan's tourism growth, Shih aims to strengthen Taiwan's visibility, enhance destination awareness, and increase visitation from these key markets. Shih's primary objective is to make Taiwan a preferred travel destination for visitors from India and beyond. He stated, "India is our number one South Asian market, not just in terms of visitor arrivals, but also in spending."

### India: A High-Potential Growth Market

India is seen as an incredibly high-potential market, thanks to its rapidly growing outbound tourism sector. Shih noted the impact of this trend on global tourism, stating, "The remarkable growth of this market, especially in the post-COVID era, has been a boon not only for the Indian tourism industry but also for destinations across the world. With the country boasting the largest population of travellers, coupled with an economy that is booming and raising the wealth of many, TTA recognises India as a key market for future growth."

Taiwan has seen robust growth in Indian arrivals, with 38,158 Indian visitors in 2024,



▲ Paul Shih

marking a 20 per cent increase from the previous year. Taiwan’s global tourism numbers have also been impressive, with 7.85 million international visitors in the same period, up by 21.13 per cent compared to 2023.

Looking ahead, Shih expects total Indian

arrivals to surpass 50,000, and the overall international visitor numbers are expected to reach around 10 million by year-end. He highlighted, "We have made great strides with our marketing efforts, including roadshows, travel exhibitions, influencer collaborations, and digital campaigns. These initiatives have been critical in driving growth, and we plan to refine and expand these efforts in 2025."

### ‘Waves of Wonder’ Campaign

The ‘Taiwan – Waves of Wonder’ campaign is specially designed to amplify Taiwan’s appeal to international tourists. The campaign focuses on the country's vibrant culture, stunning natural landscapes, exceptional cuisine, and modern infrastructure. Shih believes the campaign will significantly enhance Taiwan’s positioning as a must-visit destination for leisure, MICE, and luxury





travellers. He said, "Taiwan is a destination that offers something for everyone," noting the island's diverse attractions, from the serene beauty of tea plantations and hiking trails to the bustling night markets and vibrant city life.

### MICE: A Rising Opportunity

Taiwan's MICE industry has been growing steadily, with world-class convention centres and strong government support. Shih sees MICE tourism as a crucial area of growth for the country, especially in the Indian market.

Taipei, Taiwan's capital, is home to some of Asia's most sophisticated convention facilities, including the Taipei International Convention Centre (TICC) and the Nangang Exhibition Centre. Other cities like Kaohsiung, Taichung, Taoyuan, and Tainan are also becoming increasingly popular for hosting large-scale events.

Taiwan's appeal as a MICE destination was further solidified with the arrival of six incentive travel groups from India in February 2025, including around 800-plus employees and their families from Mumbai-based Asian Paints. Shih noted, "The Indian MICE market is burgeoning, and Taiwan's infrastructure and support make it an attractive option for incentive travel and business events."

Taiwan's robust and advanced industry base hosts over 80 professional exhibitions annually, spanning a wide array of sectors. Several exhibitions, such as COMPUTEX Taipei and the highly popular Taipei Cycle Show, have gained global recognition.

### Welcoming, Safe, and Vegetarian-Friendly

As we know, many Indian travellers follow a vegetarian diet. When visiting a new destination, one common question is, 'Will I be able to find suitable vegetarian food?' Shih assured, "Taiwan is a fantastic place for vegetarians, and it is incredibly easy to find delicious vegetarian options there. Whether in the city or exploring more local areas, Taiwan offers a wide variety of vegetarian-friendly dishes that will surely cater to your tastes and dietary needs, including Jain food."

Shih added, "Moreover, Taiwan is known for its safe environment. A woman can feel



Scuba Diving in Xiaoliuqiu

completely comfortable walking around, even at 4 am. The streets are safe, and you can easily find food in a convenience store or a nearby restaurant without concerns. It is a welcoming destination for everyone."

### Ease of Access and Visa Policies

Accessibility is key to attracting international tourists, especially from India. Taiwan has been enhancing its connectivity, with discussions ongoing for direct flights from major Indian cities. The country has also streamlined its visa policies, offering visa exemptions for Indian travellers holding valid visas from countries such as the US, UK, Schengen Area, Canada, Japan, Australia, and South Korea. Furthermore, introducing an e-visa facility for business travellers and high-end tourists is another step towards making Taiwan more accessible.

### Natural and Cultural Allure

Once a Japanese colony before World War II, Taiwan reflects strong Japanese cultural influences, particularly in Taipei, and carries traces of Dutch and Spanish influence. The country officially recognises 16 indigenous tribes, each with distinct cultures and languages. Also, Taiwan's rich topography and cultural heritage make it an attractive leisure destination for Indian travellers. From the rugged mountains in the east to the fertile plains in the west, it offers a host of natural wonders, including national parks and coastal areas. The island is also known

for its extensive cycling routes, earning it the nickname 'Bicycle Kingdom.'

Night markets like Keelung Miaokou Night Market and Shilin Night Market offer a taste of Taiwan's vibrant street food culture, while attractions like Sun Moon Lake and Taipei 101 add to the diverse experiences the island has to offer. Taiwan's growing reputation as a hiking paradise and its many Potential World Heritage Sites in Taiwan also contribute to its growing allure as a leisure destination.

Shih pointed out that the country's natural beauty, hospitality, and culinary delights offer an irresistible package for MICE and leisure tourists. "Whether it is exploring the tea plantations, taking a boat ride at Sun Moon Lake, or hiking through our national parks, Taiwan offers experiences that are hard to beat," said Shih.

### Future Plans for the Indian Market

Looking ahead, Shih outlined several key initiatives to further engage the Indian market. "We are expanding our outreach beyond metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai, focusing on Tier 2 cities to introduce Taiwan to a wider audience," Shih said. Through market campaigns and trade engagements, TTA aims to connect with more tourism agencies and strengthen industry relationships. It is also working to build deeper partnerships with OTAs and airlines, developing tailor-made travel packages that specifically cater to the needs of Indian travellers. Additionally, TTA is focused on organising FAM trips to further promote Taiwan as a leading travel destination.

In addition to the tourist information centre established in Mumbai last year, TTA plans to open a new office in the city by the end of 2025. This expansion will enable more direct engagement with the travel trade, strengthen Taiwan's presence in India, and foster stronger B2B relationships.



Keelung Miaokou Night Market



# KAZIN DMC – Introducing New Destinations to the Indian Market

As a second-generation travel entrepreneur, Rohit Shorey joined his father’s flourishing corporate travel company, Destination Travels, in the 1990s after completing his studies overseas. Over the next two decades, he gained deep industry insight while witnessing the Indian travel sector evolve, particularly with the rise of OTAs.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Having spent over two decades learning the ropes, Rohit, energetic and full of zest, leveraged his family legacy to gain deep insight into the evolving market dynamics. Simultaneously, a strong desire to create something new and independent continued to drive him. This passion led to the launch of KAZIN DMC in 2015. Today, the company operates offices in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia, and is widely recognised as a trusted partner across these markets.

## The Beginning of KAZIN

With the rise of online air-ticketing companies, their business naturally began to take a hit. Rohit shared, “Ticketing was no longer as lucrative, and combined with

the prevailing market environment, and my passion for doing something entirely different within the same industry, it nudged me to take action. That’s when KAZIN was born.”

Rohit’s first trip to Almaty in 2014 marked a turning point. “I sensed an opportunity, an entirely new and untapped destination that could be introduced to the Indian market. The idea started to take shape, and in 2015, we set the ball rolling. We’ve never looked back since. Today, we are an established DMC for Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia,” he explained.

## Unique Selling Proposition

In the B2B travel market, reliability, fast turnaround, competitive pricing, and service quality are critical when choosing a DMC.

Speaking about his company, Rohit elaborated, “Our biggest USP is that we are a true-blue DMC. We do not work with intermediary partners in our inbound destinations. We own and operate our own offices and have our own team on the ground. Additionally, we have our own fleet of vehicles, which is expanding as we speak. This gives us a particularly strong edge, backed by a dedicated team of destination specialists who support our business partners.”

He added, “Our team specialises in individual destinations. We do not have team members handling multiple destinations, which ensures our product knowledge remains deep and focused. Our partners can rely on us for accurate and up-to-date information.”

KAZIN is headquartered in Delhi-NCR, with its products and services well distributed across India. Rohit noted, “After 10 years in the market, our brand is quite recognisable, but it was not easy to get here. We’re known for our high service standards, and word of mouth has played a crucial role in our growth. We regularly participate in and organise roadshows, and exhibit at key industry events and travel trade shows to stay

connected with the local travel community.”

On the subject of turnaround times and operational reliability, Rohit proudly shared, “I believe our strongest USP is our operations team. Our Kazakhstan operations, both FIT and GIT, are handled from India, as are those for Azerbaijan and Belarus. However, quotations for Georgia are generated from our local office in Georgia. We take great pride in our client servicing and consistent product delivery.”

## Destination Appeal

Each KAZIN destination: Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia, offers distinct experiences that appeal to the Indian market. Rohit elaborated, “Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have been present in the market for some time, while Georgia is relatively newer, and Belarus is the most recent addition. All of these destinations resonate well with the Indian audience, be it for cultural experiences, luxury travel, milestone celebrations, nature-focused getaways, or vibrant party scenes. We’re noticing a growing segment of travellers who have already explored Europe, the USA, and Australia, and are now seeking fresh and less-explored alternatives. When they choose our destinations, they’re certainly not disappointed.”

He continued, “Our destinations offer genuine value for money, a quality travel experience at a competitive price, making them a compelling alternative to Europe or even Eastern Europe. Although prices have been on the rise in recent years, these destinations remain relatively affordable for Indian travellers. However, I do believe the perception of affordability is gradually evolving, as more travellers recognize the premium experiences on offer.”

## Convenient Visa Policy

Visas continue to be a concern, often playing spoilsport for many travel plans. As a result, Indian travellers have increasingly gravitated towards countries with friendly and convenient visa policies, especially



Rohit Shorey



those offering shorter processing timelines.

Speaking about the visa processes for destinations in the KAZIN portfolio, Rohit explained, “Entry to Kazakhstan is completely visa-free, there’s no visa required and no visa on arrival either. All you need is a valid passport, confirmed hotel bookings, and a travel plan. For stays of up to 14 days, travellers can simply clear immigration.”

He added, “Azerbaijan has a straightforward process. Indian travellers are required to apply for a visa, but the procedure is simple, and rejections are rare for bona fide applicants.”

Continuing on the subject, Rohit said, “For Georgia, Indian passport holders who have a valid visa from the USA, Canada, the Schengen zone, or Australia do not require a separate Georgian visa. Others must apply online, and the process is easy to navigate, provided your financial documents and travel history are in order. Belarus is also fairly simple, the process involves obtaining a letter of invitation, which our company facilitates, followed by passport stamping at the embassy.”

What’s New on the Charts

As traveller expectations evolve, KAZIN is staying ahead of the curve by curating unique experiences and enhancing its service infrastructure. Rohit highlighted the company’s latest focus, “We are placing a strong emphasis on adventure tourism, introducing soft adventure activities that allow us to actively engage our clients. At the same time, we are promoting destination weddings as a growing niche with great potential.”

Rohit added, “We have started investing in our own fleet. In Almaty, we have acquired two 58-seater coaches and added two Mercedes V-Class vans. Similar expansions are underway in Georgia and Azerbaijan. In 2025 and 2026, we plan to invest heavily in fleet development, which will enhance our competitiveness and give us greater control over the quality of our services.”

In Almaty, KAZIN has launched an exclusive offering, the party bus, a first-of-its-kind in the region. “As the name suggests, it’s a disco on wheels, complete with music, a DJ, and a dance floor. The bus

accommodates 30–35 guests and delivers a high-energy, two-hour party experience. We are currently the only company that owns and operates a party bus,” Rohit proudly shared.

Food is Key to the Indian Hearts

Indian food is integral to Indian travellers’ experiences, whether for celebrations, milestone events, FITs, or MICE. There is no shortage of Indian restaurants, whether in Kazakhstan, Georgia, or Azerbaijan. Rohit informed, “In Almaty, we have our own small restaurant called the Silver Spoon. In addition to that, there are at least eight to nine other Indian restaurants. We have catered to groups ranging from 100 people to as many as 1,000.”

Diversification and Product Enrichment

In May 2025, KAZIN is launching an upscale, high-end summer bar in the heart of Almaty. Set in an open-air space surrounded by nature, the venue is designed to capture the essence of summer leisure. Rohit shared, “We call it a summer bar, ‘JALSA’, because it will only operate during the summer months, around six to seven months, as winters here are always snowy.”

Jalsa will have a total capacity of 400–500 guests and will offer a variety of delicious food, premium drinks, and signature cocktails. The experience will be elevated with live musicians, DJs, dance performances, and everything needed to

create an unforgettable party atmosphere. “It’s our brand-new concept, and it’s going to be one of the hottest topics in town,” claimed Rohit.

Constantly Evolving and Expanding

A decade ago, KAZIN began its journey with just one destination in its portfolio. Today, the company has expanded its presence across four countries and is steadily growing its own fleet of transport vehicles, reinforcing its position as a full-service DMC.

Rohit concluded, “We’re not in a rush, as we don’t want to dilute our focus. However, we do plan to add more destinations within the CIS region. That said, we’re not limited to the CIS, we’re open to exploring new ideas and destinations. When we started, we had no idea we’d come this far. Every day is a new experience for us. We are cautious, yet ambitious.”







# FEEL THE BEAT OF NEW ORLEANS

## Joy and Discovery All Year Long

Looking for a destination in the United States that pulses with energy, history, and culture? New Orleans is the place to be. From the infectious rhythms of jazz to the mouthwatering flavours of Creole and Cajun cuisine, this city is a nonstop celebration. With its colourful festivals, historic streets, and vibrant neighbourhoods, New Orleans offers an adventure that captivates all your senses. Get ready to dive into a world where every corner holds something unforgettable!

New Orleans is a city in the Southern United States, located in the state of Louisiana, brimming with history and culture blended with the charm of modern-day innovation. It is a dynamic hub of unique attractions and experiences that showcase the story of a city like no other. New Orleans is often called the "Crescent City" because of the distinctive crescent shape of the Mississippi River as it flows through the city.

### Tapestry of Cultures and Celebrations

New Orleans' culture is a unique blend of Spanish, French, African, and Caribbean influences, shaping its rich history and modern identity. Known for its food, festivals, music, and traditions, the city has evolved through centuries of cultural exchange and innovation. Mardi Gras, the most iconic celebration, culminates on Fat Tuesday, drawing visitors worldwide to witness spectacular parades, vibrant costumes, and lively festivities. Elaborate floats, marching bands, beads, and hand-crafted collectibles

fill the streets, making this celebration a bucket-list experience.

The architecture of New Orleans reflects the city's multicultural identity. Every neighbourhood, such as Uptown, the Garden District, the Marigny, the Treme, the French Quarter, and Algiers, is a living architectural museum showcasing homes and buildings that combine classical styles with New Orleans whimsy.

Culture sets New Orleans apart from other destinations. The city is also a haven for art lovers, from its live music scene and celebrated cuisine to its vibrant arts and festivals. Galleries, antiques on Royal Street, museums like the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Historic New Orleans Collection, and exhibits dedicated to Mardi Gras and World War II offer visitors of all ages an endless window into the city's history, culture, and heritage.

### Music, Entertainment, and Vibrant Nightlife

New Orleans is the birthplace of jazz music,

and live music permeates everyday life in the city. One can find everything from traditional jazz to zydeco, rock, and blues on street corners, in music venues, and at world-renowned festivals. Venues like Preservation Hall, Tipitina's, Music Box Village, and Mid-City Lanes Rock 'n Bowl, along with events at the New Orleans Jazz Museum, Orleans Jazz National Historic Park, and the







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Jazz Fest



French Quarter



St. Charles Streetcar

Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra, highlight the city’s rich musical culture. Festivals like Jazz Fest, Crescent City Blues & BBQ Fest, Cajun Zydeco Festival, and French Quarter Fest are a must-see for music lovers.

As the sun sets, the city comes alive with live music, cabaret shows, and vibrant nightlife. Frenchman Street and Bourbon Street offer the best spots for nightlife, with popular venues like Pat O’Brien’s and The Spotted Cat providing authentic New Orleans vibes.

Culinary Journey Through Creole, Cajun, and Varied Flavours

New Orleans’ cuisine is a delicious fusion of Creole and Cajun influences, reflecting the city’s multicultural heritage. Creole dishes like gumbo and jambalaya blend French, Spanish, and African flavours, while Cajun classics such as boudin, andouille sausage, and crawfish étouffée offer hearty comfort. Seafoods, particularly crawfish and oysters, shine alongside sweet treats like beignets, po’boys, and pralines. The city’s culinary scene is also reviving, with new restaurants like Dakar NOLA offering Senegalese-inspired dishes and Queen Trini Lisa serving authentic Caribbean flavours.

For food enthusiasts, New Orleans’ culinary tours provide a mouthwatering journey through the city’s rich heritage, from iconic Creole and Cajun dishes to hidden gems and street foods. A visit is incomplete without sampling legendary cocktails, such as the Sazerac from The Sazerac Bar or the French 75 from Arnaud’s French 75 Bar. New Orleans’ culinary innovation and timeless flavours make it a must-visit for food lovers.

Fun for All Ages

New Orleans offers an array of kid-friendly activities, making it a perfect destination for families. The Audubon Aquarium and Audubon Zoo are two of the best attractions for children. The Audubon Aquarium offers an immersive experience with a stunning display of wildlife from around the world. At the same time, the Audubon Insectarium, located within the same complex, is a fascinating journey into the world of creepy crawlies. The Audubon Zoo is equally enchanting, featuring a pride of lions, elephants, and rare white alligators. Children can discover endangered species like orangutans, Amur leopards, and whooping cranes, with must-see exhibits like Jaguar Jungle, Wings of the World, and the award-winning Louisiana Swamp.

For a more whimsical experience, head to Storyland in City Park, where kids can explore a playground filled with miniature houses, life-sized animals, and storybook characters. Right next door, Carousel Gardens offers traditional carnival rides, including a historic carousel and a ladybug-themed rollercoaster. The park also features a train that weaves through City Park, adding an extra element of fun.

Another highlight is the Louisiana Children’s Museum, located within the lush City Park. Kids will enjoy interactive exhibits like Move with the River, which teaches them about the mighty Mississippi and can explore the LCM’s Big Backyard, a sprawling 8.5-acre outdoor play and learning space.

For a colourful, Instagram-friendly experience, visit JAMNOLA, a vibrant space that showcases the music, art, and culture of New Orleans. Inspired by Mardi Gras Indians,

jazz musicians, seafood, and alligators, the exhibits offer great photo opportunities, with fun spots like a crawfish boil pot and a po-boy wall. Another must-see is Mardi Gras World, where families can go behind the scenes to witness the creation and decoration of Mardi Gras floats and learn about the history of this iconic celebration.

Lastly, the National WWII Museum offers children a compelling, interactive experience. It tells the American story during World War II with special exhibits and 4D theatre experiences. The entire family can also enjoy a nostalgic ride on the historic St Charles Avenue streetcar, offering a unique glimpse into the past.

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# 'I Love Japan' curates bespoke travel experiences showcasing Japan's hidden charms

The Land of the Rising Sun conjures an array of captivating images: snow-capped Mt Fuji, the sleek bullet train racing past the countryside, the vibrant lights of the Ginza District, the serene cherry blossom gardens, and the tranquil presence of Ushiku Daibutsu. In an exclusive conversation with Neha Pranay Nath, Director, I Love Japan, we delve into the lesser-known marvels of this fascinating destination.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

## The Passion Behind I Love Japan

The inspiration behind launching 'I Love Japan' is as heartfelt as its name. Neha passionately shares, "I truly love Japan. The country captivates me in so many ways. From its deep-rooted mindfulness to the vibrant experiences it offers, every visit feels invigorating. The warmth and respect in every interaction, whether through a bow, a greeting, or the genuine hospitality extended in even the smallest corner store, are simply extraordinary. The humility, politeness, and kindness woven into the fabric of this remarkable nation leave a lasting impression."

With this deep-rooted admiration, Neha's endeavour is to promote tourism to Japan by curating itineraries and creating enriched, unique experiences for travellers to carry back home.

Neha notes that Indian tourists often associate Japan with Tokyo, Mt. Fuji, Osaka, Kyoto, and cherry blossom season. "We get a lot of mixed inputs from Indian tourists," she explains. "Many have a limited perception of Japan, but we want to take it to the next level. Japan has so much more to offer, and that is where our expertise helps travellers discover new possibilities."

## Japan's Hidden Destinations

When asked about lesser-known yet must-visit destinations, Neha enthusiastically suggests the beautiful town of Takayama in Gifu Prefecture. "This town is like stepping into Japan's Edo Period. Everything about Takayama touches your soul, from the



▲ Neha Pranay Nath

beautiful float festival to its temples and shrines. It pairs well with Toyama and Kanazawa."

Ise Shima National Park in Mie is known for its rich tradition of freediving, fishing, and pearl farming, where visitors can extract pearls from real oysters. Beyond Hiroshima, places like Fukuyama and Etajima remain unexplored but have much to offer.

In Northern Japan, the Tohoku region offers breathtaking beauty with fewer crowds. Destinations like Fukushima, Sendai, Aizu Wakamatsu, and Niigata provide an authentic slice of Japan. Further north, Aomori, Hakodate, Sapporo, and the canal town of Otaru are equally mesmerising and await Indian travellers to experience their charm.

## Exclusive Cultural Experiences

Beyond destinations, I Love Japan curates immersive experiences that bring Japan's traditions to life. A stay at a Ryokan, the traditional Japanese inn, offers a deep dive into Japan's cultural heritage, with tatami mat rooms and kaiseki meals.

Guests can meet a real samurai, learn the art of using a katana, and even try their hand at ninja dart-throwing. For those seeking a spiritual retreat, temple stays in Koyasan provide an opportunity to live like a monk. Awaji Island is a dream for anime lovers, with attractions themed around Japanese manga comics. Traditional tea ceremonies and kimono dressing further offer a glimpse into Japan's refined aesthetics and hospitality.

## MICE & FIT: Growing Travel Segments

Japan is attracting a balanced mix of MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) and FIT (Free Independent Traveller) tourism. "We have had a 50-50 business mix between MICE and FIT travel. While we have handled groups of up to 40 guests, we recommend an ideal group size of 20-24 for a more personalised experience. Over the years, we have been educating travel agents about Japan, resulting in a three-digit year-on-year growth in tourism from India," Neha shares.

Japan is a land of contrasts, seamlessly blending the ultramodern with the deeply traditional. Yet, beyond the famed Tokyo-Kyoto-Osaka circuit lies a treasure trove of experiences waiting to be explored.







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# Telangana Charts Ambitious Path to Join India's Top Three Tourism Destinations

With its rich heritage, thriving medical tourism sector, emerging eco-tourism offerings, and global events like Miss World 2025, Telangana is poised to redefine its position as a top tourism destination, both in India and globally. Nyalakonda Prakash Reddy, IPS, Managing Director, Telangana Tourism Development Corporation, sheds light on the state's ambitious plans, sustainable tourism strategies, and vision to attract a broader and more diverse traveller base.

Sonika Bohra

Hyderabad, the cultural heart of Telangana, is renowned for its Charminar, Golconda Fort, pearls, and cuisine like biryani and haleem. However, with the new Tourism Policy 2025-2030, Telangana Tourism aims to expand the focus beyond Hyderabad. The government seeks to promote other districts and towns, diversifying the state's tourism offerings.

### Hyderabad: The Gateway

While Telangana Tourism looks to diversify across other districts, Hyderabad remains a cornerstone of Telangana's tourism landscape, offering a blend of heritage, healthcare, and film attractions. Reddy said, "Hyderabad is rapidly emerging as a top medical tourism destination, drawing patients from across India, including the Northeast, as well as the Middle East and Africa. The city's hospitals are renowned for excellence in gastroenterology, liver care, cardiology, and orthopaedics. Moreover, the state attracts tourists to iconic film locations like Ramoji Film City and the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Ramappa Temple, drawing visitors from across the globe."

### Expanding Global Reach

Telangana is strategically working to increase its foreign tourist arrivals, a segment where the state traditionally saw limited footfall. To reverse this trend, the state is actively participating in major international tourism fairs, including WTM London, IMEX in Las Vegas, and ITB Berlin. Reddy informed, "We are also focused on promoting our Buddhist circuit, especially with attractions like Nagarjuna Sagar's Buddha Vanam, which draws visitors from Southeast Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and Singapore."

The state is also targeting markets in the Middle East and Africa, with plans to participate in the ATM Dubai and conduct roadshows in Africa to increase its global tourist footprint.



▲ Nyalakonda Prakash Reddy

### Telangana's Ecotourism Drive

Telangana is focusing on enhancing ecotourism through key developments in its wildlife reserves. The state is upgrading infrastructure in its two wildlife regions, the Amrabad Tiger Reserve and Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary, introducing new accommodations, safari experiences, and visitor routes to enhance appeal.

Reddy said, "We are working closely with our forest department to improve the overall experience and create more immersive ecotourism opportunities. The Telangana Tourism Policy for 2025-2030 also aims to drive growth through public-private partnerships (PPP). In the next five years, we envision Telangana as a major ecotourism destination."

### Miss World 2025: A Global Spotlight on Telangana

In May 2025, Hyderabad will host the Miss World 2025 pageant, marking a significant milestone for

the state's tourism promotion. The event is expected to help Telangana reach a broader audience and attract more international visitors. Reddy said, "We are excited to welcome contestants from 140 countries and showcase the best of Telangana to a global audience. The event will highlight Telangana's rich cultural heritage, including iconic landmarks like the Ramappa Temple and unique crafts such as Pochampally sarees and handlooms."

### Empowering Local Communities: The Real Essence of India

Telangana is dedicated to empowering local communities by actively engaging indigenous tribes and women skilled in handlooms and traditional arts. The state also supports tribal communities practising unique art forms such as the Koya and Kambu Koya dances. These communities are being given opportunities to perform at both national and international events, helping them gain wider recognition. Additionally, the state is providing training and support to enhance their skills and showcase their crafts globally.

Telangana is committed to fostering responsible tourism by incorporating eco-friendly practices in all new projects. "The state is also focusing on increasing green spaces and promoting sustainability through its public-private partnerships," said Reddy.

### Setting Sights on the Top Three

Currently ranked 12th in domestic tourism and ninth in international arrivals, Telangana has set its sights on becoming one of the top three tourism destinations in India. "Our goal is to be on par with established circuits like the Golden Triangle and Goa," said Reddy.

To realise this ambition, the state plans to attract over ₹25,000 crore in investments for developing hotels, resorts, and supporting infrastructure over the next five years.

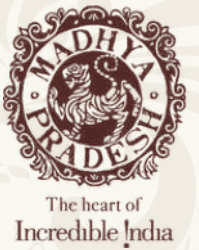
Buddhavanam





# Madhya Pradesh

## A TRAIL OF TIMELESS AND UNDISCOVERED HERITAGE TREASURES



Wherever you wander in **Madhya Pradesh**, history breathes beneath your feet and all around you, waiting to be discovered. This land is not just rich—it is overflowing with treasures. After all, the only diamond-producing state in India is bound to have gems beyond just the sparkling kind.

Imagine a place where, in **less than 100 km** of travel, you find yourself on the trail of archaeological wonders and ancient marvels—each site revealing a different chapter of time. Madhya Pradesh is an open-air museum where relics of the past stand untouched by time: **majestic forts, intricate temples, prehistoric rock art, and awe-inspiring monuments** scattered like jewels across the landscape.

The world already knows Madhya Pradesh for its UNESCO-recognized wonders—the sensuous sculptures of Khajuraho, the serenity of Sanchi, and the prehistoric artistry of Bhimbetka. Beyond these, 15 more hidden treasures are now rising to claim their place in history, quietly drawing in travellers who crave the undiscovered.

Known for its **clean, green, and safe destinations**, Madhya Pradesh is also recognised as a women-friendly travel destination. It ensures a comfortable and secure experience for solo and group travellers alike. The state wears its ethos—Atithi Devo Bhava—with pride.

Here, you are not just a visitor; you are part of a story thousands of years in the making. Pause the world's noise. Listen. Let history reveal itself to you.

### Step Into The Stories of the Past

Picture a grand city, well-connected to the rest of the country, its majestic fortress standing like a pearl under the golden sun. Every stone holds a story; every alley echoes with the footsteps of kings, poets, and travellers from centuries past. This city is also the keeper of the first-ever written mathematical Zero. Gwalior invites you to walk through its regal corridors.

A little further, the whispers of a bygone era draw you into a city standing tall since the 6th century BC. Here, breathtaking monuments and delicate palaces hold secrets of royal romances,

moonlit serenades, and timeless muses that inspired poets and dreamers alike. It is here that the vision of the Taj Mahal was born. Welcome to the enchanting **Mandu**.

### Unearth Hidden Mysteries

Wander into a town where wonders lie beneath the surface—splendid ancient stepwells carved deep into the earth. Their mesmerising symmetry and labyrinthine stairways transport you to a world filled with awe and mystery. Legend has it that these stepwells will never run dry as long as the oceans have water. Dare to test it? **Chanderi** awaits.

For a refreshing escape, take a boat ride through towering white marble cliffs that glow under the sun as waterfalls crash in a roaring symphony. The cool mist on your face and the rhythmic sound of oars slicing through the Narmada River is a moment of pure, exhilarating freedom. **Jabalpur** offers a dreamlike retreat.

Or perhaps you seek something even more enigmatic. Imagine stepping into a hidden world where stone craftsmanship and nature's mystique come together. Over 51 monolithic caves, sculpted and carved into a rugged hill, stand in breathtaking precision, a silent testimony to the artistic and spiritual mastery of the 5th-7th century CE. Wander through grand doorways, towering stone columns, and intricate sculptural symbols that radiate peace, tranquillity, and wonder. **Dhamnar** is your gateway to an era long past.

### Taste the Essence of Tradition

No journey is complete without indulging in the unique flavours of Madhya Pradesh! Stop in a town where even the simplest dishes are transformed into culinary masterpieces. The streets are alive with the aroma of thick, creamy mawa jalebis, a sweet treat that lingers on your taste buds. Even a humble plate of dal and chawal is reimagined with yellow pepper and served with mahua chutney—a wild, tangy, floral dip made from forest blossoms. Burhanpur offers a feast with unique flavours.



*Bir Singh Dev Palace, Datia*

### The Legacy of Kings and Queens

Step into a town that has seen charismatic queens, chivalrous kings, and powerful kingdoms and rule for nearly four centuries. The echoes of sword clashes and courtly whispers still seem to linger in the air. **Mandla**, with its understated yet distinct palaces, offers an intriguing view of Madhya Pradesh's regal valour and heritage.

### A Story That Never Ends

And yet, we have only just begun. We have not even spoken of the rest of the archaeological and heritage wonders—hypnotic places, legendary tales, and hidden marvels, now on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage sites, waiting for another story to be told some other time.

Madhya Pradesh is a land of endless discoveries, where every road unveils a story, every corner holds a secret, and every moment invites wonder. So, until we meet again—stay curious, keep exploring, and embrace the extraordinary. See more to remember, and remember more than the eye can see. See you soon!

*See you soon in Madhya Pradesh!*



*Chausath Yogini Temple, Mitawali*

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 For any queries call on toll free number: 1800 233 7777



# Meetings Africa 2025 heralds Africa's MICE Revolution

The 19th edition of Meetings Africa, the continent’s premier MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) gathering held at the Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, was bigger, bolder, and proudly African. With enthusiastic participation and a clear vision for the future, Meetings Africa showed the world that Africa is not just ready to share its story but poised to lead as a key player in the MICE industry. TTJ provides exclusive access to the goings-on and key insights from the event.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

With record-breaking participation, the event was a dynamic convergence of industry leaders, innovators, and stakeholders, buzzing with energy, ideas, and game-changing collaborations. It was a colourful celebration of South Africa's rich culture and relentless drive to position Africa as a global business powerhouse. Over two action-packed days, all four floors of the Sandton Convention Centre came alive as 410 exhibitors, 320 plus buyers, and 113 SMMEs participated in over 8,000 high-powered meetings, executed with clockwork precision. Indeed, a true testament to Africa's innovation, ambition, and unstoppable momentum in the global tourism arena. The Sustainability Village, a highlight of the event, showcased the homegrown artistry and craftsmanship of local small businesses, ready to capture a global audience.

### BONDay (Business Opportunities Networking Day)

The event kicked off with a panel session, setting the stage for industry leaders to

emphasise the power of collaboration in positioning Africa as a prime destination for investment and innovation. Professor Gregory Davids, Chair of the SA Tourism Board, greeted delegates from over 60 countries, including first-time exhibitors from Morocco, Madagascar, Guinea, and Chad. He declared, “For far too long, others have controlled our story - today, we take ownership of our narrative. This is a story of strength and resilience.”

His Excellency Albertus Aochamub, Namibian Ambassador to France, delivered a striking message on Africa's rising global influence, stating, “We are a young, skilled population looking for trade, not aid.” Nombulelo Guliwe, Chief Executive Officer SA Tourism, said, “Meetings Africa is deeply rooted in fostering connections and promoting business events across the continent. Our commitment extends to ensuring an inclusive industry that benefits all players, from small businesses to large enterprises.”

On day two, the trading floor erupted with jubilation as Patricia de Lille, Minister of Tourism South Africa, rang the ceremonial

bell, marking the start of Meetings Africa 2025, dedicated to trade, networking, and building strategic partnerships.

Africa has so much to offer to the world, and the Meetings Africa venue was the perfect example of the colours, music, genuine warmth and pride that symbolise Africa. With brilliant performances highlighting Africa's colourful culture, the Soweto Choir had everyone join in as they swayed to the haunting beats of the djembe and sang the story of Africa in their beautiful, powerful voices.

Minister De Lille delivered a keynote address highlighting the significance of this year's event, with South Africa gearing up to host the G20 later this year. “Africa is not just rising, it is ready. Africa is proving to the world that we are a powerhouse of global gatherings, innovation and opportunity,” she declared.

### Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS)

The TTOS panel session was led by distinguished dignitaries - Patricia de Lille, Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Leon





Schreiber, and Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Business Council of South Africa (TBCSA). The initiative aims to boost tourism, create jobs, and position South Africa as a leading destination for business events by ensuring that tour operators uphold high standards of 'trust' and accountability. Dr Schreiber explained, "Visa inefficiency has long been a barrier to growth, especially for key tourism markets like China and India. With TTOS, we are digitally transforming our visa processes, sometimes issuing visas within three days or even hours." This rapid digital transformation will open the gateway for accessibility and connectivity and build investor confidence, which is critical to building a stellar reputation in the global MICE industry.

Minister de Lille said, "By relaxing visa conditions for major markets like China and India, we are opening our doors wider and creating a breakthrough for our tourism sector. South Africa recorded almost 9 million visitors in 2024, a robust figure that sets the stage for even greater growth." With an ambitious target of reaching nearly 15 million tourists by 2030, this exciting new visa transformation is expected to drive sustained growth in the industry.

Tshivhengwa also highlighted the crucial role of trust and collaboration. "This initiative is not merely about facilitating travel but maintaining trust. Tour operators must ensure every visitor has a memorable experience, while the government must deliver on its promise of a seamless process," he observed.

**Marketing New Air Routes to South Africa**

On the final day of Meetings Africa 2025, Minister de Lille engaged with

aviation leaders to address challenges in implementing South Africa's Tourism Route Development Marketing Plan. She shared, "We have made progress, but in this pivotal G20 year, improving air access is more urgent than ever to grow tourism." Recognising business tourism's economic impact, the Government of National Unity (GNU) is committed to strengthening partnerships to drive transformation.

**Trade Floor Exchanges**

The trade floor was a hub of activity, with national and international tourism organisations coming together to build partnerships and introduce new travel experiences, with Africa's legendary hospitality on full display. As the continent looks to expand its business tourism footprint, India has emerged as a key focus market in discussions.

Elmarie Swanepoel, Business Development Officer, CISR International Convention Centre, emphasised Pretoria's potential as a premier MICE destination and said, "We are responsible for welcoming inbound meetings business to Pretoria. We have the facilities and look forward to hosting Indian delegates and sharing our beautiful biosphere with them."

Glenton De Kock, Chief Executive Officer Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), identified India and China as new core markets for South Africa. "TTOS is transforming how MICE groups can apply for visas more effectively, assuring ease of access and movement. Through advocacy and lobbying, we are ensuring that access to our country becomes easier."

James Mwaura, Chief Executive Officer, Kenyatta International Convention Centre, noted the steady rise of Indian arrivals

to Kenya. He stated, "We have noted a consistent growth in arrivals from India. In 2023, we had 96,000 Indian arrivals; in 2024, we closed at 105,000. We share good business relationships, and India remains a key market for us."

Katia Gasper, Investment and Development Officer, INATUR (Mozambique's Tourism Authority), highlights India's historic connection with Mozambique, which dates back to the passage of Vasco Da Gama to India for trade. She shared, "We are getting many inquiries from Indian tour operators. We already have an online promotional campaign for the region."

**A Future-Ready South Africa**

As South Africa solidifies its status as Africa's gateway, the government is taking bold steps to ensure seamless travel through key digital visa reforms. TTOS is simplifying group visa applications for key markets like India and China, with plans to expand accredited operators from 65 to 150 by December 2025. Meanwhile, the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) is set to launch this year, accelerating approvals with a likely 72-hour turnaround, and the Digital Nomad Visa is poised to attract long-term business travellers and remote professionals.

Beyond policy and innovation, the real vision is a tourism ecosystem that works for all and fuels economic growth, strengthens communities, and creates opportunities in even remote villages and townships. Meetings Africa 2025 has declared a defining message that South Africa is not just adapting to the future of business tourism, it is leading the way, all while ensuring that tourism's benefits reach every corner of the continent.





# VFS Global ramps up trade engagement with multi-city roadshow ahead of peak season

VFS Global, the world's largest outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions, successfully concluded its six-city roadshow across India. The initiative received an overwhelming response, engaging over 750 travel agents in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kochi, Chandigarh, and New Delhi.

Team TTJ

Organised ahead of the peak travel season, the roadshow aimed to strengthen ties with travel agents, who play a vital role as the first point of contact for visa applicants. The event was supported by leading travel trade associations, such as TAAI, TAFI, and OTOAI, whose leadership echoed the importance of collaboration between industry stakeholders.

“The response to our roadshows across cities has been truly heartening, and the positive feedback from the travel trade means a great deal to us,” said Yummi Talwar, Chief Operating Officer – South Asia, VFS Global. “Travel agents are an essential part of India’s travel ecosystem, often being the first point of contact for visa-related guidance. It’s important for us to remain connected with them, understand their concerns, and do all we can within our remit to support both them and the travellers. These roadshows reflect our continued commitment to working closely with the travel trade community.”

A key highlight of the roadshow was the introduction of VFS Global’s dedicated Referral Programme for travel agents, designed to encourage closer collaboration and improve the overall visa application experience for its customers.

Agents were also encouraged to advise customers to apply for visas well in advance to avoid peak season delays, as most countries accept applications up to 90 days prior to travel, Schengen states up to six months, and the UK up to three months in advance.

A strong focus was placed on protecting travellers from fraudulent entities. VFS Global reiterated that all appointments are free of charge and can only be booked via the official website – [www.vfsglobal.com](http://www.vfsglobal.com).

The roadshow also highlighted the growing popularity of Visa at Your Doorstep (VAYD), an optional service offered in India for 19 countries, including France, Germany, the UK, and Switzerland. This enables applicants to complete their



visa process from home or office. Additionally, agents were briefed on Prime Time, an after-hours service designed for travellers with tight schedules, offering extended appointment slots and reduced wait times.

For the UK, VFS Global has also introduced new temporary service locations across India, with further expansion planned in the coming quarter.

Another major highlight was the introduction of the Indonesia eVisa platform, now available for 97 nationalities. Travel agents were briefed on the advantages of this digital solution, including group bookings and seamless integration into B2B portals via a dedicated API.

The success of this year’s roadshow reinforces VFS Global’s commitment to working hand-in-hand with the travel trade, ensuring streamlined visa services and a more seamless travel experience for all.





# ATTOI Annual Convention 2025 paves the way for a new era in Wayanad's tourism

The ATTOI Annual Convention 2025, held in Wayanad, Kerala, united over 100 tourism professionals to discuss strategies for rebuilding the region's tourism sector after last year's landslide disaster. The event emphasised innovative marketing, sustainability, and networking opportunities to boost Wayanad's tourism growth.

Team TTJ



Organised by the Association of Tourism Trade Organisations of India (ATTOI), the three-day convention took place at Saptha Resort and Spa, Kuppadi, Sulthan Bathery, from March 28–30, 2025.

## The Inaugural Ceremony

Priyanka Gandhi, Member of Parliament for Wayanad, inaugurated the convention and underlined the importance of enhancing homestay networks to empower local entrepreneurs and boost tourism. She pledged her full support for the region's tourism development.

Subash Ghosh, President of ATTOI, welcomed the dignitaries, including Faizal Kottikollan, Founder of Tulah Clinical Wellness; MLAs I C Balakrishnan, T Sidhiq, and K P Anil Kumar; Vancheeswaran, President of WTO; and Ramanunni C Nair, General Manager of Saptha Resort and Spa.

A dedicated B2B networking session was inaugurated by O R Kelu, Minister for Welfare of SC/ST and Backward Classes. The session facilitated interactions between industry stakeholders to foster meaningful partnerships.

## Tourism Marketing Sessions and Wellness Presentations

On March 29, Kerala Tourism Minister P.A. Mohammed Riyas inaugurated the tourism marketing sessions via video conferencing. Parishit Khanna spoke on 'Maximising Marketing Efficiency with ChatGPT' and explored AI-driven marketing techniques. Neha Nambiar, a renowned travel vlogger, discussed 'How to Make a Viral Travel Vlog,' offering valuable insights into content creation and audience engagement.

Additionally, a panel discussion on 'Future Travel Trends & Predictions for 2025-26' provided in-depth perspectives on the evolving expectations of travellers and the industry's response to global changes.

The event also featured presentations on Veiiia by Tulah and Au Revoir Wellness Resort. Tulah is a one-of-a-kind holistic healing sanctuary that integrates Ayurveda, yoga, Tibetan medicine, and modern science to bring about transformative results. Ismail Khalid, Executive Director, Au Revoir Wellness Resort, shared their story, philosophy, and the immense tourism potential of Palakkad—a region rich in heritage, wellness, and experiential travel opportunities. The evenings culminated with curated sightseeing and walking tours followed by an evening networking dinner.

## Rebuilding Wayanad's Tourism Sector Post-Landslide Disaster

The landslide disaster last year was a significant setback for Wayanad's tourism sector, affecting livelihoods, businesses, and the overall perception of the region as a safe travel destination. Speaking exclusively to TTJ, Subash Ghosh, President, ATTOI, said, "This year's ATTOI Annual Convention was crucial in addressing these challenges by bringing together industry stakeholders, policymakers, and tourism professionals to strategise on

recovery and rebuilding efforts. The convention emphasised innovative marketing approaches to rebuild Wayanad's image as a must-visit destination. Through our discussions and collaborations, we aimed to instil confidence among travellers, attract investments, and strengthen the resilience of Wayanad's tourism sector."

"Our primary expectation was to create a strong platform for industry professionals to discuss practical and actionable strategies to boost Wayanad's tourism. We focused on positioning Wayanad as a sustainable and high-value destination, leveraging digital marketing, AI-driven tourism solutions, and strategic collaborations. The B2B networking sessions were instrumental in fostering new business opportunities between travel agents, hoteliers, and tour operators. The overwhelming participation and enthusiastic engagement from delegates reaffirmed that Wayanad is on the path to recovery, and we are optimistic about its growth in the coming months," added Ghosh.

Supported by Veiiia by Tulah, with the Wayanad Tourism Organisation (WTO) as the event partner and Saptha Resort and Spa as the venue partner, the convention proved to be a powerful forum for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and actionable outcomes for the tourism sector.





# Game-Changing Chapters in B2B Travel Networking

In March 2025, TTJ TRAVMART Raipur 2025 and the inaugural West India TRAVMART (WITM) marked significant milestones in the Indian B2B travel industry. Both events highlighted regional growth, strong networking opportunities, and an influx of new buyer-seller agents. These events served as powerful platforms for collaboration, fostering meaningful business connections and expanding opportunities for growth in India’s dynamic travel and tourism sector.

## TTJ TRAVMART Raipur 2025 Records Outstanding Participation

The 8th edition of TTJ TRAVMART Raipur, held on March 8, 2025, was organised in collaboration with the Chhattisgarh Travel Trade Association (CGTTA), with active support from TAAI, TAFI, TIA, and JTOA. The event brought together key travel professionals, promoting strong industry engagement and regional market expansion.

45 travel service providers, including DMCs, airlines, hotels, international tourism boards, car rental companies, cruise operators, visa facilitators, and travel technology firms, showcased their offerings to over 120 travel agents from Raipur, other Chhattisgarh cities, Nagpur, and Ranchi.

Chhattisgarh Tourism Board served as the host state and also sponsored the gala dinner. Vivek Acharya (IFS), Managing Director of Chhattisgarh Tourism Board, delivered an engaging presentation on the state’s tourism potential and policy framework. Additional presentations were given by IndiGo Airlines, One Above–DMC Bazaar, Bali DMC, and Sampan Tech, sharing valuable insights into their offerings.

With its highest-ever participation of suppliers and a growing number of first-time buyer agents, TTJ TRAVMART Raipur 2025 further cemented its position as a premier regional networking and business platform.















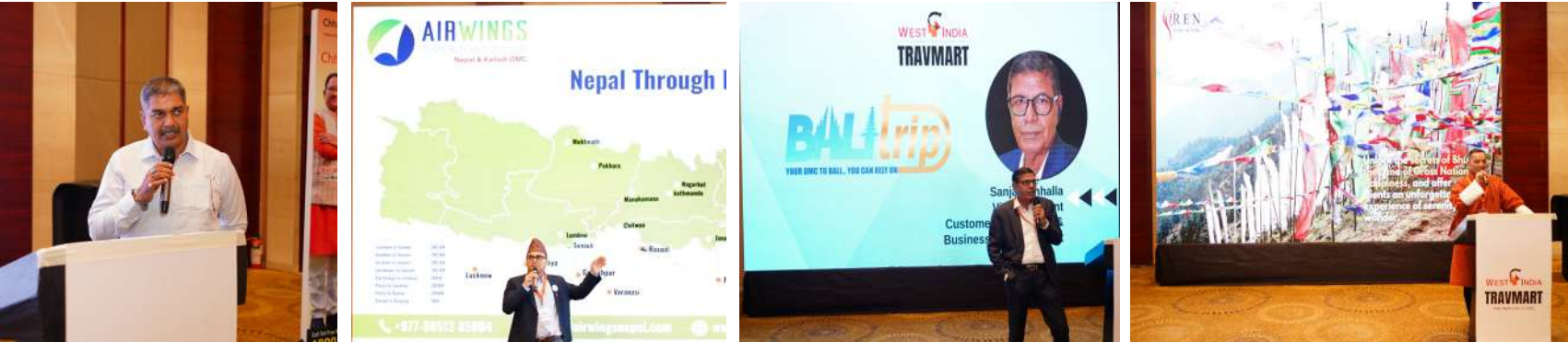
# WITM Pune marks a pivotal moment in TTJ TRAVMART's regional expansion

The first edition of West India TRAVMART (WITM) took place at Hyatt Regency Pune on March 26–27, 2025, drawing 47 sellers from across the travel spectrum, airlines, cruise lines, hotels, tourism boards, air ticket consolidators, car rental companies, and DMCs. These suppliers engaged in more than 5,700 business meetings with over 240 pre-registered buyers during the two-day event.

The event commenced with a traditional lamp lighting ceremony, followed by a soulful Ganesh Vandana and an energising performance featuring the tutari and dhol, setting the stage for the high-powered networking that followed.

Presentations were delivered by Airwings of Nepal, Ren Tours of Bhutan, Bali DMC, Holland America Cruise Line, Booking Cabs, and Experience Kissimmee, which highlighted its multiple USPs, given their close proximity to Orlando. Chhattisgarh Tourism also showcased its rich and diverse tourism offerings.

50 outstation buyers from Mumbai, Thane, Nashik, Kolhapur, Akola, and Sambhaji Nagar were hosted for the event. The buyers lauded the organisers for planning this unique and first-of-its-kind event in Pune, the quality and product mix of the sellers and the well-coordinated event flow.













## Jamaica Tourist Board hosts networking evening in Delhi



The Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) successfully hosted a networking evening on March 26, 2025, at The Leela Palace, New Delhi, bringing together key members of India’s travel trade fraternity and prominent media representatives. The event aimed to strengthen partnerships and build deeper engagement with the Indian market by showcasing Jamaica’s rich culture, hospitality, and diverse travel offerings.

Attendees enjoyed informative sessions, interactive activities, and the unmistakable warmth of Jamaican hospitality. During the event, Stacian Virtue, Senior Business Development Officer at JTB, did an online presentation and announced the launch of JTB’s online training programme for Indian travel agents. Harjit Singh, Founder of Twist of Travel, also shared his personal experiences of Jamaica and highlighted itineraries that would appeal to Indian travellers. Adding a fun cultural twist, a Jamaican slang quiz engaged participants, challenging them to match Jamaican words with their common English equivalents. Twenty lucky winners walked away with exciting prizes.

## NIMA signs MOU with Russian Union of Travel Industry



The Network of Indian MICE Agents (NIMA) marked a significant milestone on March 20, 2025, by signing an MOU with the Russian Union of Travel Industry (RST). This momentous agreement was formalised during the International Conference on Uniting North and South – For Sustainable Development in the Arctic in Delhi.

The MOU outlines a long-term partnership aimed at fostering mutually beneficial cooperation between Russian entities and NIMA, with a focus on advancing the tourism industry. The partnership will focus on the joint development and expert evaluation of various projects designed to promote Russian tourism in the international market.

The agreement was signed by NIMA's National Coordinator, Dr Nitin Mittal, and Vadim Mamontov, Vice President of RST. The signing ceremony was attended by distinguished guests, including the head of the Vivekananda Foundation, the Indian Ambassador to Russia, NIMA's prominent members and other senior dignitaries. NIMA has already established a close working relationship with the Moscow City Tourism Council.

## Eros Hotel New Delhi hosts exclusive gala evening to celebrate partnerships

Showcasing an exemplary example of hospitality, Eros Hotel New Delhi, Nehru Place, hosted an exclusive cocktail dinner evening. The gala gathering witnessed the presence of over 150 entrepreneurs, travel partners, esteemed clients, socialites, influencers and media.



Through this event, Eros Hotel New Delhi expressed gratitude towards its business partners and valued guests for their contribution to the hotel’s growth.

The event also offered valuable networking opportunities for travel, tourism, and hospitality professionals, fostering connections and collaborative partnerships in preparation for the upcoming 2025 season.





**TRAVMART**

Connecting Travel Partners  
With New Opportunities



EVENT  
CALENDAR

**2025**



APRIL  
17

**LUCKNOW**

JULY  
09

**CHANDIGARH**

AUGUST  
29-30

**SOUTH INDIA**  
(CHENNAI)

SEPTEMBER  
19-20

**EAST INDIA**  
(KOLKATA)

OCTOBER  
30-31

**NORTH INDIA**  
(DELHI)

NOVEMBER  
19

**SURAT**

DECEMBER  
17

**INDORE**

**2026**

JANUARY  
16-17

**WEST INDIA**  
(PUNE)

MARCH  
11

**RAIPUR**

MARCH  
28

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The above schedule may change due to unforeseen or unavoidable circumstances.  
If there are any changes, they will be communicated 30 days prior to the event.



## Thailand to introduce mandatory digital arrival card for all foreign nationals from May 1



Starting 1 May 2025, Thailand will require all non-Thai nationals entering by air, land, or sea to complete the Thailand Digital Arrival Card (TDAC). This paperless system replaces the traditional disembarkation form and aims to streamline immigration procedures, enhance border security, and improve the arrival experience for international travellers.

The TDAC is a digital entry form that provides essential information to immigration authorities. It must be completed within three days before arrival via the official portal: [tdac.immigration.go.th](https://tdac.immigration.go.th).

To complete the TDAC, travellers must visit the portal, enter their personal details including name, nationality, passport number, phone number, and email address, followed by travel information such as flight number, purpose of visit, and accommodation address in Thailand. Once submitted, an acknowledgment email will be sent to the provided address.

Upon arrival in Thailand, travellers must present the acknowledgment email along with their passport and other necessary travel documents to the immigration officer.

## Arunachal Pradesh unveils new tourism policy and brand identity



The Government of Arunachal Pradesh has launched its new tourism policy along with a vibrant logo, aiming to position the state as a leading destination for domestic and international travellers. Unveiled in New Delhi by Pasang Dorjee Sona, Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, Education, RWD, Library, and Parliamentary Affairs, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, the policy focuses on preserving Arunachal's pristine landscapes, tribal culture, and biodiversity, while promoting sustainable and experiential tourism. Key segments include farm tourism, wine tourism, wellness, adventure, film, ecotourism, tribal, MICE, and border tourism.

The government aims to double domestic tourist footfall and increase international arrivals tenfold. Skill development and capacity building will be prioritised, with collaborations planned with IITTM, IHM, and state institutions for tourism training.

To attract investments, district-level land banks for tourism projects will be established and made accessible via the tourism website. A dedicated facilitation cell and collaboration with Invest India will support investor outreach. A robust marketing strategy, including digital campaigns and event promotions, will boost the state's tourism visibility on national and global platforms.

## LaRiSa Hotels and Resorts has launched 8fold, a new brand in the mid-market

LaRiSa Hotels and Resorts has unveiled its newest brand, 8fold by LaRiSa, aimed at the growing segment of upper-middle-class travellers seeking comfortable, sustainable, and affordable stays in the INR 4,000–9,000 range. The brand debuts with properties in Shimla, Jibhi, Bhimtal, and soon, Siolim in Goa.

Positioned within the rapidly expanding mid-market segment, 8fold embraces mindful hospitality inspired by Buddha's Eightfold Path, focusing on guest-centric service, sustainability, and authentic experiences. The properties offer boutique accommodations that blend contemporary comfort with cultural and environmental consciousness.

Founded by Priya Thakur, LaRiSa Hotels and Resorts currently operates 32 properties across three brands: LaRiSa Resorts, AM Hotel Kollection, and now 8fold. The company aims to expand to 50 hotels by the end of 2025.

Commenting on the launch, Priya Thakur, Founder and CEO of LaRiSa Hotels and Resorts, said, "8fold by LaRiSa is not just about boutique stays, it's about reimagining hospitality through a lens of mindfulness, integrity, and guest-first service. Welcome to a hotel experience that values authenticity as much as guest comfort."











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**RateGain**

RateGain Travel Technologies has appointed **Anurag Jain** as Executive Vice President – APMEA. With over 20 years of leadership experience at companies like Expedia and Amazon, Anurag will drive growth, partnerships, and expansion in the region. His expertise in revenue strategies and business transformation will support RateGain’s mission to empower travel and hospitality businesses

with AI-powered solutions and help customers stay competitive in a dynamic market.



**DMC Bazaar**

One Above, a destination management company, has appointed **Dilshaad Buhariwala** as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of DMC Bazaar. With 26 years of industry experience, Dilshaad Buhariwala is a seasoned travel and tourism professional with deep expertise in leisure travel, incentive travel, and hotel management. One Above’s new AI-powered B2B platform, DMC Bazaar, is transforming travel

bookings through customised itineraries, instant confirmations, and automation.



**Radisson Hotel Group**

Radisson Hotel Group has redesignated **Nikhil Sharma** as Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer, South Asia. Formerly Managing Director and Area Senior VP, Nikhil will continue to lead operations and strategic growth in the region. His deep understanding of South Asia’s hospitality landscape and proven leadership will support RHG’s expansion and reflect the Group’s commitment to

strengthening its leadership in line with evolving industry needs.



**Accor**

Accor has appointed **Vineet Mishra** as Vice President—Operations, India and South Asia, to lead operational strategies across its diverse portfolio and strengthen the brand’s regional presence. A seasoned hospitality veteran, Vineet brings extensive experience, strong industry networks, and a team-first leadership style. His business acumen and operational expertise will be instrumental in enhancing guest experiences and

driving business growth across Accor’s properties in the region.



**Grand Hyatt Mumbai**

Grand Hyatt Mumbai has appointed **Vikas Yadav** as Area Director of Digital Marketing. With over 18 years of experience across hospitality, e-commerce, and media, Vikas brings deep expertise in digital strategy, performance marketing, and analytics. He previously led digital marketing for Hyatt’s North India hotels and held key roles at IndiaMart, Amar Ujala, and Vconnect in Nigeria. Vikas will

drive digital transformation and enhance online engagement for the brand.



**Mayfair Hotels & Resorts**

Mayfair Hotels and Resorts has appointed **Varun Mehrotra** as Assistant Vice President – Sales and Marketing. With over 23 years of experience, Varun will lead performance-driven strategies to boost revenue, expand market reach, and strengthen Mayfair’s presence across its 18 luxury resorts in eight states. His focus includes enhancing MICE and wedding segments, forging strategic alliances, and driving

digital transformation and data-led marketing to fuel long-term growth.



**Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts**

Cinnamon Hotels and Resorts has appointed **Gaurav Arora** as Director of Global Sales for India. With over 20 years of experience with brands like Shangri-La, Hilton, and Marriott, Gaurav brings deep expertise in sales strategy and market expansion. He will focus on driving revenue growth across Corporate, Leisure, and MICE segments while strengthening Cinnamon’s brand

presence and partnerships in India, a key source market for the group.




**UFTAA**

**Sunil Kumar R**, President of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), has been re-elected as Global President of UFTAA for the 2025–2026 term. With UFTAA’s Diamond Jubilee in 2026, the new Board will focus on celebrations, new initiatives, and global expansion. Headquartered in Monaco, UFTAA represents travel agents worldwide, promoting sustainable tourism,

industry advocacy, and global networking opportunities.



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