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Dear Friends,

the transformation sweeping India's across hospitality sector. innovative models to evolving workforce dynamics, our feature offers insights from top hotel leaders on talent



gaps, training, and retention, challenges that are reshaping hospitality's human capital.

We spotlight the growing appeal of sleep tourism, where rest is no longer an afterthought but the destination itself. As wellness becomes central to travel, curated experiences focused on quality sleep are emerging as the new luxury.

Also in this issue, we bring you inspiring stories of sustainability through our ecotourism coverage and delve into global hospitality with features on iconic African brands like Sarova and Serena. Travel with us to Taiwan's vibrant cultural hubs and Western Australia's breathtaking landscapes, narrated by none other than Harsha Bhogle.

As always, TTJ delivers stories that are fresh, relevant, and forward-looking.

We also take a moment to honour the lives lost in the recent Pahalgam tragedy. Our thoughts are with the affected families.

Happy Reading!



Ravi Sharma ravisharma@sampanmedia.com



NCL announces major upgrades to Norwegian Epic and Pride of America ahead of 2025 summer sailings

orwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has announced comprehensive revitalisation plans for two of its popular ships: Norwegian Epic and Pride of America, just in time for the 2025 summer season. These upgrades aim to offer guests more flexibility, enhanced onboard experiences, and expanded accommodation options.





Norwegian Epic will return to service on May 8 with enhanced top-

deck features, including a new hot tub, a revamped Kids' Aqua Park, and an expanded Vibe Beach Club with private cabanas and ocean views. Eight new staterooms will also be added. Epic will sail nine to 11-day Mediterranean cruises from Rome, followed by winter voyages from San Juan to the Southern Caribbean.

Pride of America enters dry dock from May 3–31 for upgrades including a new Starbucks in The Capitol Atrium, a pickleball court, 15 new staterooms, and refreshed youth areas. Splash Academy and Entourage will move to deck 6, and a new Library and Card Room will be introduced.

Returning to Honolulu on May 31, the ship will resume its iconic seven-day Hawaii inter-island cruise with nearly 100 hours of port time and overnights in Maui and Kauai, offering guests deeper cultural immersion.

Adelaide to host 46th edition of Australian Tourism Exchange in May 2026



ourism Australia's flagship trade event, the Australian Tourism Exchange (ATE), will return to Adelaide/ Tarntanya in 2026, drawing tourism industry professionals from across the globe. Scheduled from May 10 to May 14, 2026, at the Adelaide Convention Centre, ATE26 marks the event's first return to Adelaide since 2018.

Phillipa Harrison, Managing Director, Tourism Australia, said, "Brisbane has done a great job hosting ATE25 and we are already looking ahead to next year to see how Adelaide and South Australia showcase the best of their state to visiting international buyers and global media," she said.

South Australia's Minister for Tourism, Zoe Bettison, expressed pride in hosting ATE26, calling it "a powerful platform" to promote the state's unique attractions. "From our world-class food and wine, natural wonders and beautiful regions, our stand-out events and festivals, and new luxury accommodation - we're looking forward to giving the world a taste of what South Australia and our passionate tourism operators have to offer," she said

ATE26 will be delivered by Tourism Australia in partnership with the South Australian Tourism Commission.

Singapore Airlines elevates in-flight dining with refreshed Shahi Thali and Ruchi Thali



ingapore Airlines (SIA) has introduced enhanced Shahi Thali and Ruchi Thali dining experiences for Suites, First Class, and Business Class customers flying between India and Singapore. Curated in collaboration with renowned chef Sanjeev Kapoor from SIA's International Culinary Panel, the upgraded menus were previewed at an exclusive media event.

The revamped Shahi Thali for Suites and First Class now includes eight main course components, six vegetable or meat dishes, rice, and paratha, served with appetisers, dessert, and lassi, all presented on copper-coloured hammered steelware for an authentic touch.

Business Class passengers will enjoy an expanded Ruchi Thali, featuring four vegetable or meat dishes, rice, paratha, salad, starter, dessert, and lassi, presented in traditional silver hammered serviceware.

Dishes across both menus highlight regional Indian flavours and cooking techniques, using wholesome ingredients like turmeric and ainger.

The Shahi Thali will be available on flights between Singapore and Delhi/Mumbai, while the Ruchi Thali will be served on all India-Singapore Business Class routes. SIA currently operates 92 weekly flights from eight Indian cities.





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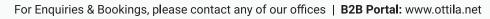
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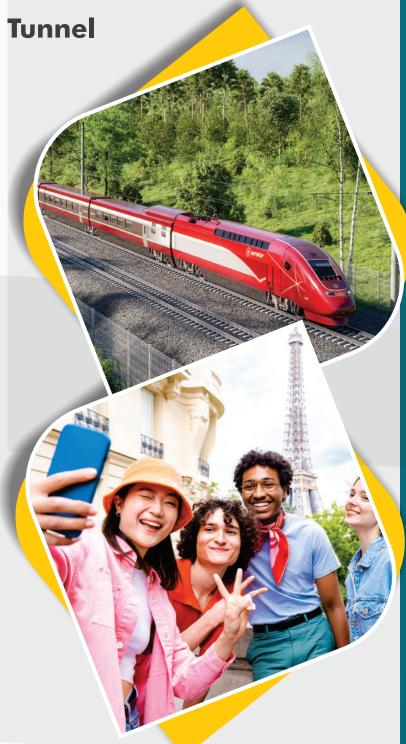
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Saudi Tourism brings an immersive Qahwa experience to Indian travel trade and media in Mumbai



he Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) recently hosted Brewtopia, an exclusive, invite-only event in Mumbai that celebrated Saudi's coffee heritage and hospitality. Held at Soho House, the immersive evening welcomed Indian travel trade leaders, influencers, and media professionals to experience the rich tradition of Qahwa, or Arabian coffee.

Curated by Coffee Mechanics and Kana founders Ganga Prabhakar and Pavan Hanbal, the session uniquely blended Saudi coffee culture with Indian brewing sensibilities, brewing Qahwa using a French press and serving it in traditional Dallah pots with Medjool dates, reflecting the signature 'Saudi Welcome'.

Guests enjoyed storytelling, sensory experiences, and networking with STA's India team, who shared insights on Saudi's growing appeal as a travel destination. Brewtopia also spotlighted Saudi's dynamic tourism offerings, from vibrant festivals to world-class sporting events and emerging luxury experiences.

As part of STA's commitment to deepening ties with India, the event highlighted the cultural synergy and expanding travel opportunities between the two nations.

BESydney launches new funding support for Indian travel agents and meeting planners



nderstanding the cost pressures on event planners across the region, Sydney's specialist bidding expert, Business Events Sydney (BESydney), has announced new funding is available for travel agents and meeting planners in India.

Applications to the new Sydney Meetings Fund (SMF) are open for a limited time and can be used to cover/offset an event's on-the-ground expenses in Sydney.

Designed for smaller (75-250 person) corporate and incentive events, the funding support is accessible through BESydney's website.

The independent and not-for-profit BESydney is also making it easier to book Sydney with planning tools, supplier connections, and their experts' best tips on the latest hot new experiences, hotels, and attractions to surprise, delight, and inspire delegates.

Planners with events larger than 250 delegates can also contact BESydney directly via their website.

OTOAI announces its 6th Convention in Moscow from July 10-13, 2025

he Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) has announced its 6th Annual Convention in Moscow, Russia, from July 10 to 13, 2025, at the Carlton Hotel Moscow, formerly the Ritz-Carlton. The event will gather over 150 leading Indian outbound tour operators, along with media and executive committee members.

Explaining the rationale behind selecting Moscow as the host city, Himanshu Patil, President, OTOAI, said, "It's a great city, a magnificent city with a lot to offer. Another important factor is the ease of obtaining a Russian visa; it's now an online process and takes just three days. That's a big plus for Indian travellers."

The convention will include panel discussions and dedicated B2B networking sessions. The convention will be followed by a three-night hosted familiarization trip to St. Petersburg, giving delegates a broader view of Russia's diverse



tourism offerings. While the theme of the convention is yet to be revealed, OTOAI leadership confirmed that it will be announced closer to the event, along with details of prominent speakers.



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Jetwing Hotels announces portfolio restructure to align with modern travel expectations

etwing Hotels has announced a refreshed brand structure, aligning with modern travel trends and reaffirming its leadership in Sri Lanka's hospitality sector. The new categorisation replaces the former "Hotels" and "Villas" with four clearly defined segments: Jetwing Luxury Reserves, Jetwing Premium Hotels, Select Hotels, and Essentials.

Jetwing Luxury Reserves offers exclusive 5-star properties, blending bespoke service, fine dining, and architectural elegance for discerning travellers. Jetwing Premium Hotels delivers refined comfort and immersive cultural experiences through full-service 4- and 5-star accommodations rooted in local heritage.

Select Hotels caters to value-conscious guests with unique 3-star properties like Hotel Sigiriyaaya and Mermaid Hotel & Club, offering authentic experiences without compromising on warmth. Essentials provides practical, centrally located 2- and 3-star options, ideal for budget travellers and explorers.

With over 35 properties, Jetwing's rebranding reflects its optimism for industry growth and commitment to sustainability, service excellence, and tailored guest experiences. The new structure ensures clarity, accessibility, and a deeper connection to Sri Lanka's rich culture and natural beauty.



Singapore Tourism Board appoints Serene Woon as Area Director, India, Middle East and South Asia (Mumbai)

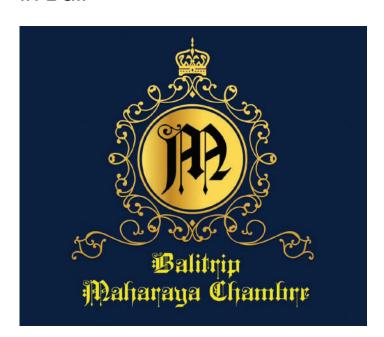


he Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has announced the appointment of Serene Woon as Area Director-Designate, India, Middle East, and South Asia (Mumbai). She will assume the full director role on July 1, 2025.

Based in Mumbai, Woon will oversee West and South India markets, as well as the Middle East and South Asia regions, while leading STB's pan-India destination marketing efforts.

Woon brings over a decade of experience at STB, having served as Area Director in South Korea and Malaysia, where she led branded entertainment initiatives and expanded STB's regional footprint. At Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry, she contributed to border reopening policies post-COVID. Most recently, as Deputy Director of Strategic Planning at STB, she played a key role in shaping the Tourism 2040 strategy for Singapore's future tourism growth.

Balitrip Wisata launches Maharaya Chambers, a new vertical for premium travel in Bali



alitrip Wisata has unveiled Maharaya Chambers, its newest premium vertical designed to redefine luxury travel in Bali. Drawing inspiration from royal heritage, 'Maha' meaning supreme and 'Raya' symbolising regality, the brand represents more than indulgence; it embodies elevated living, emotional richness, and exclusivity. With a crown as its core symbol, Maharaya Chambers curates refined, deeply personal experiences for discerning travellers. Positioned as a category-defining innovation, it blends Bali's cultural elegance with modern experiential design, setting a new benchmark for high-end India—Bali travel.

"This is not just another product line. Maharaya Chambers is a curated circle of experiences refined, rare, and deeply personal. It's a chamber, not a crowd," said Dheeraj Ranjan Kumarr, Founder of Balitrip Wisata.

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Virginia Deepens Decade-Long India **Engagement as Outbound Market Soars**

Virginia is stepping up its long-standing engagement with India as outbound travel from the country reaches record highs. In an exclusive conversation with Travel Trade Journal at a recent sales roadshow in New Delhi, Rita McClenny, President and CEO, Virginia Tourism Corporation (VTC), reiterated the state's deep commitment to India, which began back in 2012. With over 61,000 Indian visitors recorded in 2024, up from 53,000 the previous year, India now ranks as Virginia's second-largest overseas market.

Vartik Sethi

he five-day sales mission across Delhi and Mumbai brought together over 100 Indian travel professionals, reinforcing Virginia's strategy of personal trade engagement. "Face-to-face relationships are key to building trust and long-term partnerships," McClenny said. The roadshow aimed to raise awareness about Virginia's evolving tourism appeal and its versatility as a destination.

Targeting the Next Gen

Virginia is sharply focused on India's young, well-travelled demographic; Millennials, Gen Z, and well-travelled families. According to McClenny, about 60 - 65 per cent of Indian visitors are leisure travellers, primarily couples and families seeking cultural and nature-based experiences. "We want Virginia to be a destination people return to for holidays, education, weddings, and business," she noted. The demographic shift aligns with Virginia's offerings, which are a blend of luxury resorts, outdoor adventure, culinary depth, and rich heritage.

Four Season Appeal

Virginia promotes itself as a year-round destination with landscapes ranging from the Blue Ridge Mountains to Chesapeake Bay. The state's iconic Blue Ridge Parkway and Shenandoah National Park appeal to Indian travellers interested in road trips, nature, and photography, particularly in the spring and autumn.

Its burgeoning food and beverage scene includes over 300 wineries, numerous craft breweries, and fresh coastal cuisine such as Chesapeake Bay oysters, ideal for Indian travellers seeking gourmet experiences. Coupled with farm-to-table dining and smallbatch distilleries, this culinary depth adds to Virginia's luxury profile.

As the 'Birthplace of America,' Virginia offers compelling historical value for Indian visitors. Sites like Jamestown, Colonial Williamsburg, and Yorktown provide a direct link to US history. With the 250th anniversary of US independence coming up in 2026, and a Ken Burns documentary on the American Revolution set to air in 2025, VTC plans



Rita McClenny

to leverage this renewed spotlight on its historic triangle.

Film Tourism and Pop Culture

Virginia is also tapping into film tourism. The state's lush landscapes and heritage resorts have been featured in international productions, including the classic cult film Dirty Dancing. The Mountain Lake Lodge, where it was filmed, continues to attract fans. "Films inspire travel. People want to visit places they have seen on screen," McClenny said, adding that Virginia is actively courting Indian filmmakers for shoots and wedding destinations.

Improved Connectivity Drives Growth

One of Virginia's most significant logistical advantages is Washington International Airport, located in northern

Virginia. Air India now operates direct flights from Delhi to Dulles five times a week, significantly reducing travel time and enhancing accessibility. "When Indian travellers land at Dulles, they are essentially beginning their American journey in Virginia," McClenny remarked.

Dulles also acts as a launchpad for broader US trips, with Virginia easily combinable with destinations like Washington DC, New York, and Orlando. With a strong Indian diaspora, robust business ties, and tech hubs in Northern Virginia, the region sees a blend of leisure, VFR, and corporate travel.

Empowering the Trade

VTC conducts regular webinars, training sessions, and FAM trips for Indian travel agents to enhance destination knowledge. "We are not just offering itineraries, we are offering reasons to fall in love with Virginia," McClenny said. From self-drive itineraries and wine trails to heritage circuits and outdoor adventures, the focus is on delivering customised programmes.

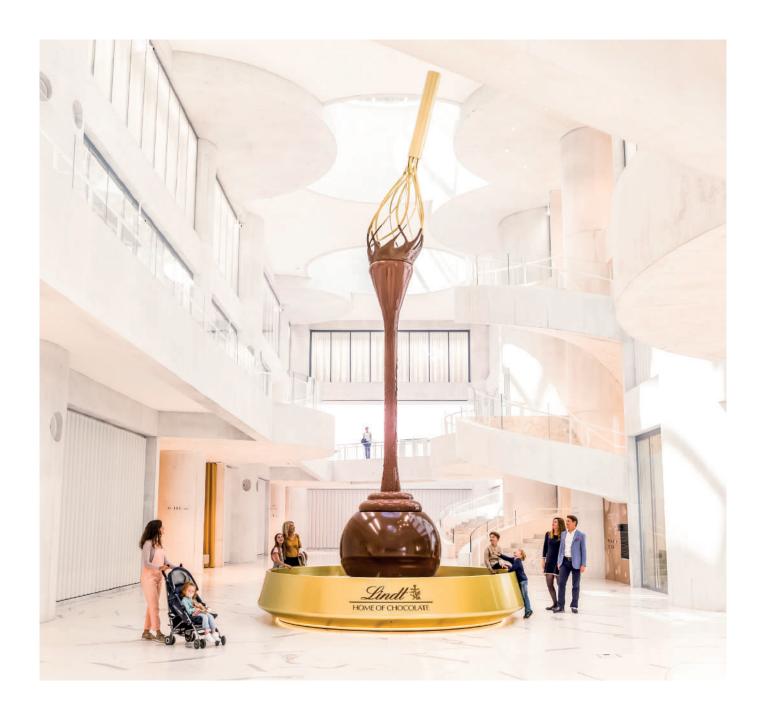
In partnership with Brand USA, airlines, OTAs, and even Bollywood production houses, VTC is launching joint marketing campaigns that blend destination storytelling with tangible offers. Co-branded packages, in-flight media partnerships, and influencer collaborations all form part of the toolkit to convert interest into bookings.

Virginia's compelling mix of nature, history, cuisine, luxury, proactive trade partnerships, and direct air connectivity makes for a powerful proposition. "We are here to build lasting relationships. Virginia is for travellers who want more, and we are ready to welcome them," McClenny concluded.





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Away&Co Curates Slow, Purposeful **Travel to Extraordinary Destinations**

Ruchi Kohli, Chief of the Experience, Away&Co, is the force behind the brand reimagining travel as a deeply personal experience, where every journey is rooted in cultural connection, environmental responsibility, and authentic connections. Under her leadership, Away&Co does not just curate trips; it champions a shift toward purposeful travel that leaves a lasting imprint on both guest and host.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

ith a heritage anchored in decades of excellence, Creative Travel has long been a trusted name in luxury travel, known for its innovation and integrity. Building on this formidable legacy, its contemporary offshoot, Away&Co, steps forward with a refreshed voice that resonates with today's new, discerning, experience-driven band of travellers.

Ruchi sees travel as a transformative experience far beyond mere sightseeing. With years of global living and a background in high-end fashion and experiential travel, she brings a nuanced understanding of what modern travellers seek. She says, "At Away&Co, we don't just plan trips, we shape experiences, curated with care, shaped by stories, and rooted in genuine connection."

Building on Legacy

Leveraging Creative Travel's global goodwill and long-standing relationships, Away&Co offers access to some of the world's most exclusive, immersive experiences, otherwise beyond the reach of most. These intimate, soul-stirring journeys are built on a deep foundation of trust and authenticity. "Every journey we curate is grounded in our core values of curiosity, integrity, accountability, and togetherness. These are not just ideals, they shape how we collaborate with partners and engage with every traveller." Away&Co is redefining luxury travel grounded in heritage, yet agile enough to evolve with shifting global sensibilities.

Away Exotics

Away Exotics has been designed to bring the cultural richness of legendary destinations closer to the traveller. Away Exotics will never be ordinary destinations; there will always be an emotional resonance and capacity to inspire. Ruchi notes, "An Exotics journey brings guests together with never more than 10 pairs of like-minded travellers, each adding a uniqueness and never feeling that they are being herded around in large groups.



Ruchi Kohli

Each Exotics journey is a carefully curated tapestry of discovery, designed to evoke wonder, reflection, and a deeper connection to the places we visit."

Challenges of Navigating Authenticity

The brand philosophy is grounded in cultural respect and meaningful twoway engagement. "It is about immersion, not observation," Ruchi asserts. Every experience is developed in close collaboration with local experts to ensure it is rooted in authenticity and that culture is not being presented as a spectacle.

In an era where artificial intelligence curates trips and automation dominates the travel industry, Away&Co remains committed to crafting deeply personal and genuinely human travel experiences. Ruchi explains that while technology has long supported the act of travel, it can never replace human intuition. Automation may enhance product distribution, but when it comes to services, it is the human touch that truly makes the difference. "Our journeys are crafted by passionate travel experts, not algorithms, and are based on our ability to understand unspoken preferences, cultural nuances, as well as the emotional needs and desires of our

travellers. We seek to create experiences that are as unique as they are. A typical Away&Co guest truly understands the difference between journeys sold as a product and the value of a service being delivered," she affirms.

Balancing Luxury with Sustainability

Ruchi advocates that luxury today must be conscious. "For us, sustainability means supporting local cultures, choosing responsible stays, and promoting meaningful travel. Even on our most unpredictable adventures, we never compromise on responsibility," she says. The brand works closely with host communities to champion indigenous crafts, cuisine, and eco-friendly practices, whether sourcing ingredients locally for one-on-one cooking classes or engaging with remote tribes for immersive village experiences.

In line with this ethos, the brand contributes to a tree-planting fund for every journey taken. Each tree is geo-tagged so guests can track it for years to come.

Navigating Geopolitical Uncertainties

Ruchi sees India's outbound luxury market as among the world's most dynamic. While global tensions pose hurdles, she believes they also spur innovation. Under her leadership, the company is expanding its global network of immersive experiences, investing in traveller education, and staying responsive to global shifts. While destination preferences may change, she remains confident that Indian wanderlust will never fade.

travellers increasingly meaningful, culturally immersive, and sustainable experiences, destinations like Japan, Morocco, Iceland, and Southern Africa are gaining prominence. Ruchi sums up Away&Co's ethos, "Our innovation lies in making each journey feel personal and purposeful." In the coming years, Away&Co will continue to redefine luxury travel, creating experiences that leave a lasting impact.



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The Leela Crafting a Distinctive Edge in Luxury Hospitality

Anuraag Bhatnagar, CEO, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts, outlines the brand's vision of redefining luxury through deep cultural engagement, thoughtful hospitality, and personalised experiences powered by technology. From nurturing talent and empowering women to sustainable innovation, The Leela continues its journey of delivering transformative experiences while staying rooted in its ethos, Atithi Devo Bhava.

Prashant Nayak

he Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts is on a long journey to delight guests by offering unparalleled luxury with thoughtful service, signature rituals, and immersive experiences. Their commitment to redefining luxury is also reflected in their unwavering focus on cultural heritage, sustainable practices, and empowering its people and communities.

Differentiation in a Competitive **Luxury Market**

As competition intensifies in India's luxury hospitality sector, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has successfully differentiated its offerings through three strategic pillars. By curating personalised, immersive experiences that reflect each destination's cultural and historical richness, The Leela offers more than just a stay; it offers a journey into the soul of

Signature programmes like Tishya by The Leela, Aujasya by The Leela, and Icons of India enrich the brand architecture. Their service ethos, anchored in Atithi Devo Bhava, The Leela Palace Service, and the signature butler programme, ensures every guest experience is elevated, meaningful, and steeped in heartfelt and genuine Indian hospitality.

"We are actively investing in advanced programmes training and leadership development to further enhance our service capabilities across our expanding portfolio. Simultaneously, we are investing in enhancing our brand capabilities and strengthening directto-consumer channels to deepen brand equity and customer lifetime value," said Bhatnagar.

Developing Talent and Building Leadership

At The Leela, nurturing talent and leadership is central to sustaining its position as a frontrunner in luxury hospitality. As a learningfirst organisation, the Leela Leadership Development Programme (LLDP) offers a comprehensive curriculum to shape future leaders in the industry.

"At The Leela, we are deeply committed to fostering a diverse, inclusive workforce while prioritising talent development and retention," said Bhatnagar. Beyond LLDP, the group has



Anuraag Bhatnagar

rolled out several strategic initiatives to attract and retain top-tier talent, ensuring continued service excellence as the brand's footprint expands.

The Leela also strongly champions gender diversity, with initiatives like Shefs at The Leela empowering aspiring female chefs. "Through curated dinners, masterclasses, and mentorship, we create meaningful opportunities for women to thrive in culinary leadership," shared Bhatnagar. The group also partners with organisations such as the Hope Works Foundation to provide young women with internship programmes and career-building tools.

Upskilling remains a core focus, with training like the Leela Palace Service Development Programme and the Executive Accelerated Development Programme preparing employees to meet the refined expectations of today's luxury travellers. "By investing in our people's growth and well-being, we ensure they feel valued, and that translates directly into guest experience," opined Bhatnagar.

Technology as a Silent Enabler of Luxury

At The Leela, technology is a discreet yet powerful enabler of their signature quiet luxurv. enhancing auest experiences without overshadowing the warmth of

human connection. Investments in CRM and guest intelligence tools like Salesforce, Revinate, and Hotlync enable the creation of micro-personalised moments, from pillow preferences to bespoke itineraries, well before check-in.

"We have adopted cloud-based SaaS models and Al-powered revenue systems to streamline operations, optimise costs, and enhance agility, all while upholding our commitment to service excellence," shared Bhatnagar. Their OPERA-powered central reservation system ensures dynamic pricing and unified guest profile access across properties, delivering consistency without compromising individuality.

Luxury with Purpose: People, Planet, and Provenance

At The Leela, 'luxury with purpose' is more than a mantra. It is a guiding philosophy that places people, planet, and provenance at the heart of their operations. As custodians of Indian luxury, the brand remains committed to delivering indulgent experiences that are equally mindful, sustainable, and socially inclusive. This commitment is backed by a strong ESG framework built around circularity, resilience, and cultural stewardship.

"We are eliminating single-use plastics, transitioning to green energy, and actively pursuing LEED and IGBC certifications. Purpose is a lived experience at The Leela," said Bhatnagar. Their Aujasya by The Leela in-house water bottling initiative has already eliminated over 33 metric tonnes of plastic annually, while 98.9 per cent of the group's waste was diverted from landfills in 2023. With circular economy initiatives like Leela Ke Phool, floral waste is upcycled into incense infused with the brand's signature fragrance, Tishya by The Leela.

Purpose permeates the guest experience, from farm-to-fork dining with organic local ingredients to artisan-crafted amenities and FSC-certified packaging. Collaborations like Jalinga Tea Estate, India's only carbonneutral, organic-certified plantation, reflect a thoughtful approach to luxury. "At The Leela, we are very much redefining luxury to be transformative and responsible," concluded Bhatnagar.



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Radisson's Landmark Year of 2025 **Drives Global and Local Momentum**

Radisson Hotel Group (RHG) is setting the pace for global hospitality in 2025 with bold expansion plans. With a diverse brand portfolio, strong mid-market play, and commitment to sustainability, RHG is redefining hospitality by blending local authenticity with global standards. Nikhil Sharma, Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer, South Asia at Radisson Hotel Group, reveals the driving forces behind this momentum and where it is headed.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

ith nine distinct brands from Radisson Blu to Radisson RED and Park Inn & Suites, RHG offers a tailored hospitality experience across luxury, upscale, and mid-market segments. A strong partnership approach is at the heart of its growth, offering its owners flexible, cost-effective models built for long-term success.

For RHG, 2025 is shaping up to be a landmark year in its global expansion journey. Backed by a sharpened five-year strategy, the group is making bold moves in both established and emerging markets. Europe, the Middle East, and South Africa stand out as key regions of opportunity. In



India, it continues to solidify its presence in major metros and tier 2 and 3 cities, ensuring a range of options for both business and leisure travel.

Powering Europe's Tourism Revival

In Europe, the brand continues to be a preferred choice for those seeking authenticity and consistency in their travel experiences. According to Nikhil, business travel is steadily bouncing back, especially in key European cities, and Radisson's centrally located hotels are meeting today's professional demands of seamless service, co-working spaces, and flexible meeting areas. He says, "The reopening of the Radisson Collection Hotel in Berlin captures our approach to luxury, rooted in local culture, but elevated through thoughtful design and personalised service. We aim to create similar memorable, meaningful, and deeply personal experiences across all our properties."

Expansion Strategy for India

India continues to be one of RHG's most strategic and high-potential markets. Nikhil proudly shares the incredible milestone of crossing 200 properties in South Asia and credits this success to the trust of RHG's partners and guests. Explaining the play behind the growth, he notes, "Our expansion strategy is focused on deepening our presence in both metro cities and highgrowth tier 2 and 3 markets. Cities like Indore, Raipur, Amritsar, Puri, and Siliguri are seeing increased demand from leisure, business, wellness, and spiritual travellers, and we are ensuring our brands are wellpositioned to meet these needs."

The primary focus is the upper midscale and mid-scale segments through core brands, like Radisson, Park Inn by Radisson, alongside experiential brands like Radisson Individuals and Radisson Individuals Retreats. Nikhil asserts, "Wherever there is demand, we strive to be present, offering a consistent brand promise and a deep understanding of local sensibilities. This hyperlocal, guest-first strategy drives our momentum in India."

Sustainability is Key

At RHG, sustainability is not an option; it is a responsibility. Every new hotel signing aligns with the group's responsible business framework, focusing on sustainable design and community engagement. At its core is a commitment to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, backed by initiatives like renewable energy use, water and waste reduction, and local partnerships to drive eco-conscious tourism.

"In India, we encourage our partners to adopt sustainable construction practices, integrate responsible procurement strategies, and work with local small businesses to promote community-driven development. Our ESG approach goes beyond the environment; we are focused on building inclusive teams, supporting local employment, and offering guests meaningful travel experiences. We believe that building a future-ready hospitality ecosystem means prioritising people and the planet alongside profitability," shares Nikhil.

Mid-Market Play

As global hospitality players clamour towards the mid-market segment, RHG stands out with an experience-led brand architecture that caters to the evolving needs of today's value-conscious yet experience-driven traveller. Brands like Park Inn by Radisson and Radisson RED, designed to deliver modern, functional comfort with a touch of personality, resonate deeply in both urban and secondary markets.

Nikhil notes, "Technology and operational excellence enhance our value proposition from streamlined check-ins to smart energy solutions. What truly differentiates us is our people and our signature Radisson 'Yes I Can!' service philosophy. In a crowded market, our mix of design, localised service, and reliability drives mid-market leadership.

Looking ahead, Radisson aims to be a key player in India's rise as a global tourism leader by 2035. By staying aligned with evolving travel trends and national tourism goals and keeping sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity at the heart of its strategy, RHG is positioning itself to help shape the future of Indian hospitality.





Discover the Untouched Beauty of Saudi Red Sea

Diverse Marine Life Unique Experiences Unparalleled Luxury



KK Collection Captures Sri Lanka's Essence Through Boutique Luxury

For a holiday that seamlessly blends luxury with rich cultural experiences, stunning beauty with refined comfort, and seclusion with attentive, personalised service, the three boutique hotels of KK Collection in Sri Lanka are an ideal choice. TTJ caught up with Shamila Phillips, Sales and Marketing Director, KK Collection, to discover what makes these properties truly special.

Prashant Nayak

ucked along Sri Lanka's stunning southwest coast, not far from the historic charm of Galle Fort and the calm shores of Bentota, the KK Collection invites travellers into a world of laid-back luxury. With three beautifully unique boutique hotels, the collection is all about stylish spaces, exceptional food, and warm, personalised service, perfect for those seeking a refined and relaxing stay. Also, the KK Collection opens doors to some of Sri Lanka's most captivating experiences, from golden beaches and ancient forts to lush tea estates and wildlife reserves.

Shamila said, "We are not a mass-market brand. We are a niche, boutique luxury chain with just three properties, each with a unique personality and charm."

Kahanda Kanda: A Peaceful Hilltop Hideaway

Located just outside the heritage city of Galle, Kahanda Kanda is the original jewel in the KK Collection crown. Perched on a hilltop amidst tea plantations and palm-fringed jungle, this adults-only retreat features 12 villas, most with private pools, designed with a tasteful blend of antique charm and tropical elegance.

"Our flagship property, Kahanda Kanda, is an adults-only retreat; no children under 12 unless it's a full buyout. I like to say it offers the three R's: rest, relaxation, and rejuvenation," Shamila notes.

Guests can explore the countryside by bicycle, enjoy scenic visits to Koggala Lake, or wander through nearby Galle Fort. The property is also popular for destination weddings and wellness retreats.

KK Beach: Modern Style by the Ocean



Shamila Phillips

If you prefer beach vibes with a contemporary touch, head to KK Beach, located just 20 minutes from Galle. This beachfront hotel has 10 bright, stylish rooms facing the Indian Ocean, along with a 20 mt pool and a lively restaurant.

Shamila points out, "KK Beach is hip and family-friendly. It is perfect for people who want to enjoy the ocean but also have access to adventure"

She adds, "Between Kahanda Kanda and KK Beach, you are perfectly positioned to explore what we call Sri Lanka's Big Five: whales, dolphins, elephants, leopards, and sloth bears. With Yala National Park just two hours away, you can make a full-day trip and be back in the evening. Whale and dolphin cruises, hiking, and rainforests are all within easy reach. People often think Galle is just about the fort and the beach, but it offers so much more."

Villa Bentota: Where Heritage Meets the Sea

Villa Bentota is all about heritage charm. Originally built in the 1800s and later redesigned by famed architect Geoffrey Bawa, this property was lovingly restored and reopened in 2021. Set in tropical gardens that open right onto Bentota Beach, the villa has 14 rooms with a relaxed, homey feel. Shamila shares, "It is great for families, groups of friends, and even Indian weddings. There is something very magical about the space; it feels like a private house."

Guests can enjoy garden tours, cooking demos, and water activities on the Madu Ganga River, all within reach.

India's Rise as a Key Market

With short flight times and shared cultural warmth, Sri Lanka continues to attract Indian travellers, and KK Collection is seeing notable growth.

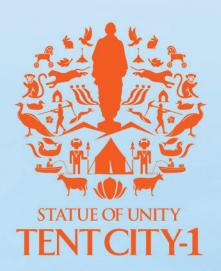
"India is a very important market for us, and we've seen strong growth. Compared to 2023, our market share from India has increased by about 8 per cent in 2024. It's nearly doubled, which is a fantastic sign," says Shamila.

"Currently, around 25 per cent of our guests are domestic, while 75 per cent are international, with the UK leading the overseas market. We're also seeing strong responses from the Middle East," she adds.

Represented in India by Outbound Marketing, KK Collection is expanding its reach into new regions, with growing interest from cities like Ahmedabad and Baroda. There has also been a marked rise in bookings for Indian weddings, family reunions, and boutique corporate retreats.















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A Heritage Hotel's Bid for the Indian Outbound Market

Overlooking the azure waters of the Indian Ocean stands the Mount Lavinia Hotel, a living museum of Sri Lanka's colonial history and a grand dame of hospitality. This two-century-old landmark, originally built in 1806 as the opulent residence of the British Governor of Ceylon, has since evolved into a palace-style beachfront hotel steeped in romance and legend. Its storied past, luxurious present and forward-looking initiatives make it uniquely poised to captivate India's outbound travel sector.

Vartik Sethi



teeped in two centuries of history, Mount Lavinia has been under the custodianship of the Ukwatte family for nearly eight decades. In a recent discussion, Saakya Ukwatte, Managing Director, Mount Lavinia Hotel, shed light on the heritage, legacy, and contemporary offerings of this grand seafront destination.

A Two-Century Legacy of **Romance and Heritage**

According to historical accounts, Sir Thomas Maitland, the British Governor in the early 19th century, fell in love with Lovinia Aponsuwa, a local dancer, at a welcome soiree. Legend has it that Maitland built a secret tunnel from his wine cellar to Lovinia's house so the lovers could meet clandestinely. This romantic lore

ultimately lent its heroine's name to the very mount on which the hotel stands. Today, a statue of "Lady Lavinia" graces the hotel's entrance fountain, a silent testament to that enduring love story.

Beyond the lore, the physical structure of Mount Lavinia Hotel is itself a heritage treasure. The main building, often referred to as the Governor's Palace, still exudes the old-world charm of its neo-classical architecture. Upon arrival, archways, grand staircases, and antique décor transport guests to colonial Ceylon. Photographs and memorabilia lining the halls chronicle over 200 years of history, allowing visitors to walk in the footsteps of governors and statesmen.

Ukwatte highlighted that his family's connection to the property extends back almost 80 years, "We have had this property for nearly 80 years in our family and have been custodians ever since." As a thirdgeneration hotelier, he stands at the forefront of safeguarding the estate's heritage while ensuring it resonates with contemporary travellers. "The hotel has taken many shapes, many forms over the years based on the need of the country," he said, noting how it has adapted to everything from wartime exigencies to modern tourism demands. Today, it is celebrated as "one of the only palace hotels you have in Sri Lanka and one



This photograph was taken between the 1870s and 1900





of the only palace hotels you have in the world on a beach," he added.

A Welcoming Haven for **Indian Travellers**

In highlighting Mount Lavinia Hotel's longstanding cultural and culinary links to India, Ukwatte pointed to the many ways in which the property caters specifically to Indian tastes. "In our buffet, every day, we offer Indian. We have an Indian section with a minimum of five curries and about 10-15 different types of chutneys. You have your breakfast dosas, biryanis every day," he said, stressing that the culinary team routinely prepares Gujarati, Punjabi, Jain, and other Indian specialties.

Destination weddings from India, in particular, have found a reliable partner in Mount Lavinia. "We can give you wedding menu prices starting at less than 2,000 to 2,500 INR per plate," he noted. Furthermore, the free trade agreement between India and Sri Lanka means that flowers, food items, and masalas can easily be brought over, encouraging Indian guests to recreate familiar traditions on Sri Lankan soil, "No questions asked, no visas, no nothing. It is like coming into Goa, only 45 minutes to get to our hotel from the airport," he added.

Beyond weddings, the hotel also celebrates major Indian events, including Holi, Diwali, and cultural festivals. "We celebrate all major Indian events in Sri Lanka. We host a fun Holi party on the beach," Ukwatte mentioned, reiterating the property's commitment to ensure Indian travellers "never feel far from home."

Strategic Partnerships and B2B Outreach in India

Recognising India as a key source market, Saakya Ukwatte shared that the hotel has embarked on robust B2B initiatives to strengthen its presence among Indian travel trade partners. The hotel recently appointed the Nijhawan Group as its official Sales, Marketing and PR representative in India, a strategic move to deepen relationships with tour operators, wedding planners, and MICE specialists across India. "We are excited to partner with Nijhawan Group to expand our footprint in India. Their expertise in trade relations, the wedding industry, and public relations make them the perfect partner

showcase to Mount Lavinia's rich heritage and premium offerings to Indian travellers," he shared. The marketing focus is on Mount Lavinia's MICE-friendly leisure packages, wedding specials, and facilities tailored for Indian clientele. This includes attractive group rates for tour series, wedding group concessions (such as complimentary add-ons

for big Indian weddings), and corporate offsite deals for companies.



Mount Lavinia Hotel's colonial façade overlooks the Indian Ocean, offering a rare combination of heritage architecture and beachfront scenery. What truly sets Mount Lavinia apart is its location; it is one of the very few palace-style heritage hotels in the world set on a beach. The hotel commands panoramic views of the Indian Ocean from virtually every vantage point. As a colonial palace with a private beach, it offers an unparalleled blend of regal ambience and seaside leisure.

Mount Lavinia Hotel makes for a formidable address for destination weddings, corporate retreats, and large-scale events. The hotel's venues marry grandeur with tropical beauty, offering options for every scale. An authentic culinary spread is a hallmark here; from a traditional Sri Lankan kamates (feast), international gourmet selections, or a purevegetarian Jain menu for an Indian wedding, the chefs deliver with finesse. The property's kitchens are helmed by veterans, including chefs from India, ensuring that North and South Indian dishes taste just as they would back home

Towards a Net-Zero Heritage Hotel

Even as it amplifies its guest offerings, Mount Lavinia Hotel is equally focused on sustainability and responsible tourism, an aspect increasingly crucial to corporate MICE planners and leisure travellers. The





property has set an ambitious goal to become the world's first net-zero carbon-emission heritage palace hotel in the coming years. "Our vision is to transform Mount Lavinia into the world's first net-zero heritage palace hotel," affirmed Ukwatte, highlighting a comprehensive action plan spanning waste, energy, and plastics. The hotel is investing in renewables, expanding solar panel arrays on rooftops, and exploring wind energy given the seaside breeze. It already practices stringent energy conservation, switching to efficient LED lighting and sensor-based controls to reduce consumption. During Earth Hour, Mount Lavinia famously turns off 95 per cent of its lights and operates by candlelight, a gesture it has extended beyond the symbolic hour into an entire evening of awareness.

By 2027, Mount Lavinia Hotel aims to be carbon neutral, undertaking projects like offsite solar facilities to offset electricity consumption. In a nod to both tradition and innovation, the same property that once sheltered British governors now stands at the forefront of ecoconscious hospitality in Sri Lanka.

Udaan Hotels and Resorts Elevating Himalayan Stays with Bold New Approach

Ajay K. Wadhawan, Executive Director, AIR IQ and Udaan Hotels and Resorts, shares insights into their unique journey, operational challenges, and how they balance luxury with immersive cultural experiences in one of India's most pristine and serene regions.

Prashant Nayak

daan Hotels and Resorts, a prominent player in the hospitality industry, has carved a niche for itself by focusing exclusively on the majestic Himalayan region, particularly in the enchanting landscapes of West Bengal and Sikkim

A Regional Focus with Vision

Udaan Hotels and Resorts' decision to focus exclusively on the Himalayan region, particularly in West Bengal and Sikkim, stems from the deep-rooted connection the promoters have with the area. Nishi Kant Agarwal and Sashi Kant Agarwal, the founders and managing directors of Udaan Hotels and Resorts, are based in Siliguri, the gateway to these breathtaking destinations.

"Our focus has been on strengthening our base in these regions for operational efficiency, rather than exploring new destinations. Expansion will come once we have fully established our presence in this region," said Wadhawan.

Delivering Exceptional Himalayan Experiences

The core customer segment of Udaan Hotels and Resorts is primarily domestic leisure travellers, though international visitors also form an essential part of their clientele.

Wadhawan expressed, "We recognise that travellers, both from India and abroad, are drawn to the North Bengal Hills and Sikkim to immerse themselves in the majesty of the Himalayas and the richness of local culture. Our mission is to deliver exactly that. Nearly all our hotels and resorts are thoughtfully designed to showcase stunning mountain views, with



Ajay K. Wadhawan

some properties offering Himalayan vistas from every single room. When it comes to luxury, we maintain an uncompromising commitment to quality, using only the finest materials to ensure our guests enjoy a truly exceptional and authentic luxury experience."

Wadhawan further emphasises that while wellness services are available at their resorts, it is not necessarily a full wellness retreat. He explained, "Kera by Udaan is a premium spa facility offered at our properties, but it should not be mistaken for a wellness destination, as we do not position ourselves as a wellness-centric property. However, it does offer guests a professionally managed wellness experience as a valuable addition to their stay."

Overcoming High-Altitude Operational Hurdles.

High-altitude resorts come with inherent

Udaan Alpine Resort

operational and logistical challenges, but Udaan Hotels has mastered the art of overcoming them. Wadhawan mentioned, 'Fortunately, after successfully establishing and managing numerous hotels and resorts in the Himalayan region, we now have the expertise and capability to expand further, which has become a core competency and one of our key advantages."

Upholding Excellence Across Locations

Udaan's philosophy, corporate culture, and commitment to quality are clearly defined and strictly adhered to across all properties. There is no compromise on service or quality. All management and operational staff undergo thorough training to ensure consistency and excellence, regardless of the geographical location of their hotels and resorts.

A Unique Dining Philosophy

Udaan has set a new standard for vegetarian dining, crafting a culinary experience that appeals not only to vegetarians but also to discerning non-vegetarian guests who often return for more. The impeccable quality of the property, paired with its celebrated cuisine, makes Udaan the destination of choice for those who seek refined comfort and exceptional flavours. "Our personal and commercial philosophy is rooted in vegetarianism. We are proud to offer high-quality vegetarian cuisine, which has become a major draw for our guests," said Wadhawan.

Seamless Eco-Friendly Practices

While Udaan Hotels and Resorts may not have formal eco-friendly certifications, they still take responsibility for maintaining an environmentally healthy approach.

Wadhawan stated, "All Udaan properties are designed with eco-friendly principles. While we emphasise various environmentally conscious aspects, our resorts in Darjeeling, such as Udaan Dekeling Resort and Udaan Nirvana Resort, and those in Sikkim, are set in natural surroundings. We highlight the beauty of the mountain ranges, gardens, and the tranquil environment, encouraging guests to appreciate nature. Our vegetarian cuisine is also a sustainable choice that aligns with our environmental values."



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- 1 Organic Thai herbal steam ritual (30 min)
- 1 Infrared sauna (30 min)
- 1 Harmonizing massage (60 min)
- 1 Siam Botanicals body polish (50 min)
- 1 Raindrop therapy (90 min)
- 1 Hair & scalp massage (60 min)
- 1 Organic Thai herbal bath (30 min)
- 1 VOYA hand & foot retreat (90 min)
- 1 VOYA anti-aging facial (90 min)
- 3 Organic healthy drinks
- 3 Spa Cuisine meals









6 Days 5 Nights Unwind



- 5 Nights consecutively stay in a private pool villa.
- 2 Meditation sessions (30 min)
- 1 Private yoga class (60 min)
- 1 Himalayan Singing Bowl (30 min)
- 1 Organic Thai herbal steam ritual (30 min)
- 1 Infrared sauna (30 min)
- 1 Harmonizing massage (60 min)
- 1 Siam Botanicals body polish (50 min)
- 1 Raindrop therapy (90 min)
- 1 Hair & scalp massage (60 min)
- 1 Organic Thai herbal bath (30 min)
- 1 Aura crystals treatment (90 min)
- 1 VOYA hand & foot retreat (90 min)
- 1 VOYA anti-aging facial (90 min)
- 4 Organic healthy drinks
- · 4 Spa Cuisine meals

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MITA VOHRA'S VISION

for a New Bold Era at

SAROVA

Mita Vohra's journey is anything but conventional. A lawyer, filmmaker, and jewellery designer, she now leads Sarova Hotels and Resorts as Board Director, bringing grit, charm, and sharp instinct to redefine the future of the iconic Kenyan hospitality brand.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

orn into a family of hoteliers, hospitality was always in Mita Vohra's DNA. She was thriving with her jewellery brand, Ortaea, when Sarova's Managing Director Jimi Kariuki requested her support. She hesitated as she was building something successful of her own. "Once she stepped back into the business, there was no looking back. Her journey across diverse markets not only broadened her perspective but also deepened her understanding of the hospitality industry. Throughout this evolution, Jimi remained a steadfast influence who played a key role in drawing her back into the Sarova fold."

ROOTED IN LEGACY

For Mita, the true essence of Sarova's success lies not just in its properties but in the enduring relationships the brand has nurtured, especially within the Indian market.

There is a lot of Indian shareholding in the business, but the connection is more than just transactional; it is deeply personal.

"It has been over 30 years since we have been coming to this market. The relationships that began back then still exist with us today. We love coming back here to build new relationships in new markets opening up in the untapped cities of India," she reflects. The family's journey intensifies the emotional significance of this bond. "It is heart-warming to go to a country and be recognised because of your legacy.

Especially when our family has been through a lot in terms of losing our loved ones," says Mita.

DEEP BOND WITH INDIA

After establishing strongholds in the US and UK, India was one of the first international markets Sarova ventured into. What began as a strategic expansion has grown into one of the brand's most meaningful and rewarding relationships. She explains, "India is not just a market for us. It is a commitment, where legacy, culture, and community meet, that aligns beautifully with who we are."

Kenya and India share deep historical ties, with a wellestablished Indian diaspora forming an integral part of Kenyan life. One of the strongest links between the two countries is the pharmaceutical sector, facilitating a dynamic, two-way supply chain, bringing financial success to both nations. This shared success has naturally extended into tourism, with travel data reflecting a widening travel corridor between the two nations.

With an unprecedented surge in Indian arrivals, the numbers have reached record high levels previously unseen. While Sarova already commands a significant share of this market, the focus now is on expansion. Hence Sarova is now doubling down on deepening engagement with the Indian travel trade through roadshows and scaling for the long term. India is not just a strategic priority but central to the brand's vision.

The OTOAl convention in 2024 was a turning point for Kenyan tourism, sparking a surge in Indian interest. While arrivals had been steady, Mita noted, "The overwhelmingly positive wordof-mouth, endorsements by Indian attendees respected within the travel trade, resonated widely, helping to build confidence in the destination. The message spread from one social media post to another, and with it came the numbers."

DRIVING INNOVATION AND EXPANSION

For Mita, evolution is key. "The momentum has to continue, and we have to keep raising the bar," she says as someone who thrives on innovation and discovery. During the pandemic, when the industry faced an unprecedented hiatus, Sarova doubled down on transformation. "We renovated Sarova Panafric with 100 new rooms at the height of COVID, with low revenues and high risk - but creating fresh experiences is crucial," she adds.

In 2025, the brand is undertaking two major renovations, including a complete transformation of Sarova Shaba. New concepts like the curated club tent experience in the Mara with fully personalised culinary experiences are gaining traction. Initially an experiment, it is now considered a model for expansion due to positive response and revenue impact.

The tourism landscape is witnessing a significant shift, with markets like India and the US showing unprecedented growth. Mita shares, "Kenya has never seen such high numbers from India, the US, and China. Europe is in transition, but will bounce back soon." As Sarova expands, it is focusing on diverse segments, including MICE. The brand is targeting strategic locations and tailoring its approach to suit varied market needs, while actively tapping fast-evolving global markets.

SAROVA'S SPECIAL BRAND OF **HOSPITALITY**

Mita's leadership is rooted in collaboration, and what defines the Sarova experience, she believes, is its people. "I challenge myself daily, and so does my team. We have built a culture of curiosity and sustained growth. Our real strength lies in our teams. Kenyan hospitality is known for its warmth and

excellence, and our people truly embody these qualities, bringing a deep sense of care and commitment to every guest experience. The entire ecosystem works together and everyone knows their valuable role in creating something special," she says with quiet pride.

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

At Sarova, community upliftment and sustainability are not just CSR strategies but core values. It is a legacy inherited from the company's founding fathers, who believed that business must serve not just its customers, but the communities it inhabits. The commitment to this baseline philosophy is evident in running a school in Maasai Mara built jointly with Richard Branson. They employ interns from the school and train them for real-world jobs. Across all properties, from city hotels to safari lodges, initiatives like organic gardens, grey water recycling, and energy conservation are seamlessly woven into daily operations, quietly but purposefully making a difference.

At Sarova Shaba, 45 per cent of the staff come from local rural communities, reflecting the brand's deep commitment to inclusion and empowerment. Sarova prioritises hiring from the Mara region, while skilled professionals are hired from cities. It goes above and beyond employment: staff are offered quality housing, nutritious meals, and a true sense of belonging. This human-first approach also extends to the local community, with access to an on-site clinic and an annual cultural event for the Maasai, driven not by marketing but by a shared ethos.

Mita adds firmly, "We are very intolerant of any neglect when it comes to the community. We make sure our staff members are respected, supported, and treated like family, because that is exactly what they are."

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

Mita's strength is rooted in legacy, and she draws inspiration from her father and brother, whose work she proudly carries forward. Challenges, for her, are only opportunities for growth. She observes, "I am always ready to push boundaries. Hosting the OTOAI was a high-stakes move that tested our agility, but we made it work. It proved that everything falls into place when you trust your instincts."

With confidence and clarity, Mita declares, "We feel unstoppable. We are ready to grow beyond Kenya; Tanzania, and Uganda are likely to be our first new frontiers." Her enthusiasm is rooted not just in business strategy but in something more profound, almost spiritual. "Every time we begin planning something new, a force helps us get there. It feels like a gift in our system," she adds. Fuelled by purpose, she is ready to bring Sarova's next chapter to life.

When asked about the most fulfilling part of her journey, she does not cite metrics or milestones. Instead, she says, "The real reward is knowing I have made bold choices, and did what felt right, even when it was hard. That is how I measure progress. As for the future, the best is yet to come," she says with a smile.

Mita exudes warmth and authenticity that instantly puts others at ease. In an industry often defined by high stakes and fierce competition, she leads with sharp business acumen, but with heart. Unsurprisingly, the warmth she radiates in person is reflected across the Sarova experience.



A family-owned legacy of authentic Greek hospitality, Grecotel Hotels and Resorts marks half a century in 2025, celebrating 50 years as a leading family-owned Greek hotel brand. What began as a single hotel in Crete in the 1970s has grown into Greece's largest luxury hotel chain, yet it remains deeply rooted in its founding ethos: to offer high-end hospitality that is authentically Greek. In conversation with Travel Trade Journal, Vangelis Vassiliou, Director of Sales, Grecotel, and Sunny Katara, Founder, Elysian, open up on Grecotel's plans for Indian and the global travel markets.

Vartik Sethi

he philosophy of filoxenia (Greek hospitality) emphasising warm, generous service and a sense of family, has been at the heart of Grecotel's operations since its inception. Guests are not just given a place to stay; they are welcomed into an experience infused with Greek culture, cuisine, and heartfelt personal touches. It is a legacy carefully nurtured by the Daskalantonakis family over the decades, ensuring that the intimate, home-grown spirit of Greek hospitality endures even as the company has expanded.

40 Hotels Across Greece, Each with a Local Story

From the sun-kissed isles of Crete and Corfu to the historic shores of Athens' Riviera, Grecotel's footprint spans over 10 destinations across Greece with a portfolio of 40 properties. No two Grecotel properties are designed the same way. "You don't just find another Grecotel copy-and-paste; every property reflects its own destination," Vassiliou said. A stay at The Dolli at Acropolis in Athens immerses guests in elegant heritage architecture, while the Cape Sounio resort faces the ancient Temple of Poseidon, blending luxury with mythic scenery. Every property, in essence, tells the story of its locale through its décor, ambience, and experiences.



▲ Vangelis Vassiliou

Immersive Experiences and Competitive Differentiation

The brand's competitive differentiation comes from immersive local experiences that bring destinations to life. Guests can join in Cretan cooking lessons, take part in olive oil tastings from on-site groves, or explore nearby villages with guides who grew up there. "You arrive not in a hotel somewhere in Greece, but in a hotel of that destination," shared Vassiliou.

This destination-specific approach



Sunny Katara

extends to hotel design and programming. Each Grecotel property is embedded in its community, employing local staff who impart insider knowledge, partnering with area guides and producers, and adopting regional architectural styles. Such localisation creates a genuine connection: guests wake up feeling like they are truly in Crete or Corfu, not just in an anonymous luxury hotel. Vassiliou added, "Our people come from the same region, so guests feel the true local culture the moment they check in."

Expanding into New Markets with an Eye on Indian Travel Trade

Having firmly established its brand in Europe, Grecotel is now strategically expanding into new markets, and India is a top priority. Grecotel recently appointed Elysian as its India representative and rolled out plans to position itself as a top choice for Indian travellers visiting Greece. Vassiliou made his first sales visit to India to personally connect with tour operators and travel agents, signalling the importance of this market. Grecotel has hosted multiple roadshows to introduce its properties to the Indian travel trade. At these events, flagship properties like The Dolli at Acroplolis in Athens, Cape Sounio in Attica, and Corfu Imperial in the Ionian Islands took centre stage, giving Indian partners a vivid taste of Grecotel's elegance and Greek charm.

Staying true to his statement, Sunny, Founder, Elysian, shared, "You can expect to see Grecotel's presence everywhere in India this year," highlighting Grecotel's long-term commitment. Additionally, Grecotel values feedback from partners; if a tour operator suggests an emerging trend (say, wellness retreats or adventure add-ons), the team considers how Grecotel can integrate that into their offerings. The company prides itself on building and sustaining deep relationships with tour operators, travel agencies, DMCs, and other partners in each source market.

Crucially, Grecotel is also listening to Indian guests expectations and adapting to them. Recognising the needs of this segment, the hotels are prepared to offer Jain and vegetarian dining options, understand the penchant for large family travel and weddings, and even include small comforts like Indian breakfast items or kettles for tea in rooms. The outreach in India goes hand-in-hand with training staff on Indian cultural nuances, from dietary preferences to celebrating festivals like Diwali with guests on-site.

Sustainability at Heart

The company's late founder, Nikos Daskalantonakis, was a trailblazer in linking hotels with local agriculture. In the 1990s, he started contract farming agreements in Crete to supply his hotels with fresh local produce. Today, GrecoFarm (Agreco Farm) is a shining example of Grecotel's sustainability ethos. Vassiliou shared, "At GrecoFarm, guests see where their food is grown; they understand sustainability first-hand."

Environmental sustainability is another pillar. Grecotel has implemented rigorous waste reduction and plastic-free initiatives across its resorts. In recent years, the company eliminated single-use plastic items like water bottles, straws, plates, and cutlery from its operations. An extensive recycling programme is in place at each property, and



kitchen teams practise food waste reduction through careful inventory and donation of excess food. Energy-saving technologies (like keycard-controlled power and solar panels at some resorts) further shrink the environmental footprint.

World-Class MICE Facilities in Iconic Destinations

For the MICE segment, Grecotel offers an impressive range of venues that cater to both intimate corporate retreats and large-scale conventions. Several Grecotel properties are fully equipped for business events, blending state-of-the-art facilities with Greece's inspiring landscapes. Vassiliou said, "Our main MICE hotels are Amirandes in Crete, Cape Sounio near Athens, and Riviera Olympia with a 1,000-plus-seat convention centre." Just 45 minutes from Athens, Grecotel Cape Sounio provides meeting rooms overlooking the Aegean Sea and the ancient Temple of Poseidon. Imagine a conference coffee break with views of a fifth-century BC temple; it makes for quite a unique selling point that few venues can match. Over on Crete, the luxurious Amirandes resort (conveniently 15 minutes

from Heraklion Airport) similarly hosts conferences amid its sleek modern architecture and seaside ambience. Both resorts offer indoor-outdoor flexibility, high-tech audiovisual support, and the renowned Grecotel service, making them ideal for incentive groups seeking productivity and leisure.

The Olympia Riviera Resort in the Peloponnese boasts of Greece's largest conference centres for large gatherings. Additionally, emerging destinations like Corfu are on Grecotel's radar for MICE development; the island's charm and improving infrastructure are opening opportunities for future conferences and destination weddings. Sunny added, "In Corfu, we can offer 500-600 rooms and 16 seafront FB outlets - a MICE paradise."

Looking Ahead

As Grecotel steps into its next 50 years, its vision remains firmly focused on combining heritage with forward-looking growth. For the Indian travel trade, there is much to be excited about. Greece is more accessible and appealing than ever, and Grecotel stands ready to host Indian guests with its signature Greek hospitality. Vangelis Vassiliou conveys a clear message: "We are here for the long run, to create memorable Greek experiences for your clients and to support you at every step." The company's recent push in the Indian travel market through dedicated representation, roadshows, and customised services solidifies that commitment.

Broader developments are set to boost Indo-Greek travel ties. "By 2027, Crete's new GMR airport and direct flights will be a game-changer for India–Greece travel," added Sunny. Greek tourism authorities are actively working to establish direct flights from India to Greece's key airports, including the new Crete airport, with Mumbai and Delhi identified as primary sources for non-stop routes.







INDIAN HOTELS BUILDING A RESILIENT AND AGILE WORKFORCE

As the Indian hospitality sector undergoes rapid transformation, workforce dynamics have emerged as both a critical challenge and a strategic opportunity. We spoke with senior leaders from five leading hotel groups to understand how the industry is tackling talent gaps, retention, and training. Their insights offer a comprehensive look into the evolving strategies shaping hospitality's human capital.

Prashant Nayak

rom ground-level hiring to longterm leadership development, hotel groups are recalibrating their workforce strategies to meet today's operational and cultural demands. What emerges is a layered picture of the challenges they face and the innovative steps being taken to future-proof hospitality talent.

A Shrinking Talent Pool

The Indian hospitality industry is navigating a critical talent crisis, intensified by the lasting impact of the pandemic. As the sector rebounds and demand surges, hotels struggle to fill key roles with skilled professionals, exposing deep-rooted workforce challenges that require urgent attention. One of the foremost workforce challenges currently facing the Indian hotel industry is talent acquisition and retention.

Harpreet Vohra, Area General Manager - East India, Radisson Hotel Group, and General Manager, Radisson Blu Faridabad, affirmed that talent acquisition and retention remain pressing issues. He pointed out, "As the sector continues to grow rapidly, there is an increasing demand for skilled professionals, yet a visible gap exists in the availability of trained talent willing to



▲ Harpreet Vohra

commit to long-term careers in hospitality. Secondly, the evolving expectations of the new-generation workforce, who seek faster career progression, work-life balance, and purpose-driven roles, present a unique challenge in aligning traditional hospitality structures with modern employee aspirations."



▲ Mielle Batliwala

He added, "Continuous skill development remains a critical concern. With technology reshaping guest experiences and operational efficiency, there is a pressing need to upskill the workforce to stay relevant and competitive. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of strategic talent management, investment in



Amit Kumar

training, and fostering a culture that values innovation, inclusivity, and growth."

Mielle Batliwala, AVP - Human Resources, Sarovar Hotels, echoed similar concerns, "Attracting and retaining skilled employees is a significant challenge across all hotel segments due to high attrition, seasonal demand, and evolving guest expectations. She further noted, "Rising operational costs further strain profitability, pushing hotels to optimise workforce management and balance wages with sustainability. While India has numerous hotel management institutes, inconsistent training quality and outdated curricula leave graduates underprepared. Smaller and independent hotels often lack the resources for ongoing staff training and development."

Despite a steady flow of hospitality graduates, there is an apparent mismatch between industry needs and available talent, worsened by the shift of skilled workers to better-paying sectors with improved worklife balance. Amit Kumar, General Manager, JW Marriott Pune, remarked, "Passion for hospitality is also waning, impacting service quality. Retention remains a major issue, driven by low pay, tough conditions, limited growth, and job insecurity, leading to high turnover, rising recruitment costs, and pressure on service standards."

Sarbendra Sarkar, Founder and Managing Director, Cygnett Hotels & Resorts, added, "One of the biggest hurdles is the unavailability of a skilled workforce, especially in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. Post-COVID, many professionals migrated to other industries and have not returned, leaving a talent gap that is hard to fill." He also highlighted high attrition rates and an inflated employee-to-room ratio in India, leading to long working hours and burnout.

Vikas Suri, Vice President – Operations and Development, Lords Hotels & Resorts, shared similar views. "It is no longer just



▲ Sarbendra Sarkar

about hiring; it's about sustaining staff morale in high-pressure environments while managing 24/7 operations."

Building Loyalty Through Purpose and Growth

With talent retention and attrition, a persistent challenge in India's competitive hospitality sector, hotel brands are transforming workplaces into growth-driven, people-first environments. Through cultural alignment, local hiring, and holistic development strategies, they are prioritising employee well-being to build long-term loyalty and engagement.

Harpreet Vohra emphasised that at Radisson Blu Faridabad, talent retention starts with cultural alignment. He said, "We believe that creating a strong employer brand begins with fostering a culture of respect, recognition, and growth. Our approach is rooted in building a positive work environment that emphasises employee well-being, open communication, and meaningful career development opportunities."

He further explained that their hiring strategy focuses on attitude first and skill development later, "Our recruitment process goes beyond qualifications, it emphasises cultural fit to ensure new team members align with our core values, including the 'Yes, I Can!' service philosophy, integrity, and excellence. We are committed to continuous learning and career advancement to retain top talent. Recognition is a key pillar of our retention strategy, and we place great importance on listening to our team."

Sarovar Hotels takes a multi-layered approach to talent acquisition and retention. Many of their properties are located in Tier 2, Tier 3, and even Tier 4 cities. In several of these markets, they enjoy the first-mover advantage and are the only branded hotel in the vicinity.



▲ Vikas Suri

Mielle Batliwala explained, "A core part of our strategy is local hiring. We actively recruit from the communities we serve. This not only creates job opportunities locally but also ensures cultural alignment, pride, and better retention since employees are rooted in their home environment. Additionally, with a network of over 140 hotels across India and abroad, internal mobility is a powerful incentive. Team members are offered opportunities to grow within the system, be it across brands, departments, or geographies, including international assignments. This flexibility fosters long-term commitment and career progression."

At JW Marriott Pune, they focus on creating a meaningful workplace experience to attract and retain talent. Amit Kumar shared, "We offer structured career development paths, robust training programmes, and cross-exposure opportunities within the Marriott network. Competitive benefits, a strong focus on wellness, and an inclusive work culture further differentiate us. By fostering an environment of recognition, continuous learning, and community involvement, we build deep associate engagement, helping to manage attrition effectively and nurture long-term careers."

Sarbendra Sarkar shared Cygnett's people-first commitment, "We are committed to creating a rewarding, enriching, and supportive workplace where employee feels valued and empowered. We recognise potential and provide ample opportunities for growth, career progression, and personal development. competitive compensation complemented by performance-based rewards that celebrate both effort and excellence. We champion work-life balance through employee wellness initiatives that promote physical and mental well-being. With continuous learning, skill-building,

and leadership development at the core, we offer more than just jobs; we build careers. At Cygnett, our people are Cygnettians, and their success is our shared pride."

Vikas Suri keeps it simple yet effective. "We position Lords Hotels and Resorts as a people-first workplace. Our focus is on offering competitive compensation, creating a positive and respectful work environment, and investing heavily in employee growth through training and development. We believe that when our team feels valued and empowered, loyalty and performance naturally follow," he said.

Learning and Training to Lead

Training and upskilling are emerging as the backbone of workforce development across India's hospitality sector, with top hotel brands prioritising learning as a strategic imperative.

At Radisson Blu Faridabad, training is seen as a necessity, not a valueadd. Harpreet expressed, "Training and upskilling play a pivotal role in our employee development, forming the backbone of our commitment to nurturing a high-performance and future-ready workforce. In an industry as dynamic and service-driven as hospitality, continuous learning is not just a value-add; it is a necessity. Our strategy is centred around equipping our team members with both technical proficiency and behavioural competencies that align with evolving guest expectations and industry standards. Upskilling is not limited to operational training; it extends to areas like digital fluency, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and sustainability, which are increasingly vital in today's hospitality landscape." The effectiveness of training programmes is measured through a structured evaluation framework.

Training and upskilling are equally central to Sarovar Hotels' people strategy. Mielle Batliwala remarked, "We believe investing in employee growth yields long-term benefits in guest satisfaction, loyalty, and efficiency. Our programmes reflect Sarovar's service values, focusing on grooming, safety, guest engagement, and operational excellence. Cross-training develops professionals ready for internal advancement. To support our widespread network, we are expanding e-learning and digital training alongside on-site sessions, ensuring continuous development. Effectiveness is measured through performance data, guest feedback, audits, and promotion readiness. Regular feedback and reviews enable us to continuously refine our approach to meet evolving needs and maintain high service standards."

Training is also a cornerstone of JW Marriott Pune's employee development efforts. Rather than relying solely on

theoretical sessions in meeting rooms, managers lead by example, demonstrating desired behaviours and working alongside $staff\,during\,busy\,periods.\,``We\,offer\,structured$ onboarding, continuous learning, and crosstraining to build flexibility. Partnerships with hospitality institutes ensure a steady talent pipeline, while ongoing assessments help refine our programmes based on performance and guest feedback," added Amit Kumar.

Elaborating on the topic, Sarbendra Sarkar shared, "Through the Cygnett Leadership Development Program (CLDP), we identify and nurture future leaders, while the Al-powered Cygnett Learning Academy offers personalised learning journeys for all employees. These initiatives enhance service quality, foster engagement, and support career growth. We assess effectiveness through career progression, internal mobility, retention data, and pre- and post-training evaluations. This ensures our team remains skilled, motivated, and guest-

He added, "At Cygnett, continuous learning is not just encouraged; it is essential to delivering exceptional hospitality and building a strong, future-ready workforce. Our investment in learning and development is a long-term commitment to our people, our service quality, and our brand promise."

Vikas Suri reinforces the practical benefits of a structured training ecosystem. "Training and upskilling are central to our employee development efforts. We provide a mix of online modules and hands-on learning covering technical knowledge and soft skills. We rely on post-training assessments, guest feedback scores, and direct input from our team to measure effectiveness. These insights help us continuously improve and adapt our programmes," opines Vikas.

Innovative Incentives Redefining the Workplace

Across the Indian hospitality sector, hotels increasingly investing in tailored employee engagement and incentive strategies to combat high attrition and foster long-term loyalty.

Employee engagement is embedded in the workplace culture at Radisson Blu Faridabad. A standout initiative is the 'Extra Pay for Extra Work' policy, which compensates staff for additional responsibilities during peak periods. Performance-based incentives linked to guest appreciation and upselling are standard, motivating both service quality and revenue generation. Non-monetary initiatives include celebration weeks, festive gatherings, skip-level feedback sessions, and structured recognition programmes, all designed to foster a culture of inclusivity and appreciation.

At Sarovar, they understand that engagement and recognition are key to fostering belonging and motivation. Some of their initiatives include monthly townhalls for open dialogue, recognition awards for outstanding performance, hightea or breakfast sessions with the General Manager, encouraging informal, crosslevel communication, employee referral programmes to tap into trusted networks, and the introduction of a Pan-Sarovar Employee Discount Programme on stays and F&B across all their hotels, including their international properties.

JW Marriott Pune drives associate engagement through a strong Reward & Recognition programme, interactive Luxury Immersion Workshops, and inclusive teambuilding activities. Wellness initiatives like yoga, health check-ups, and mental health workshops support holistic care. Open forums and anonymous surveys ensure feedback is heard. CSR efforts, including grocery donations, recycling, and promotion of natural products, foster community connection and a shared sense of purpose.

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has implemented a comprehensive suite of engagement initiatives focused on recognition, performance, wellness, and communication. Monthly and quarterly awards recognise excellence in service, innovation, and collaboration. Departmental KPIs are tied to incentive structures to reinforce accountability and performance. The company also celebrates personal milestones and encourages active feedback through town halls. Team outings, wellness activities, and cross-training programmes further build camaraderie and support continuous development.

Lords Hotels & Resorts blends formal and informal recognition. In addition to the traditional 'Star of the Month' awards, the group highlights behind-the-scenes departments and guest-nominated champions. The Lords Career Fast-Track programme mentors promising talent for leadership roles, while a unique staff loyalty programme allows employees to earn points redeemable for vouchers, stays, and additional leave. Creative touches, such as digital cafeteria boards, wellness sessions, and cultural food days, contribute to workplace morale and a sense of community.

hospitality As India's industry accelerates toward a future defined by digital transformation, heightened guest expectations, and global competitiveness, the role of human capital has never been more crucial. Talent is not just a resource, it is the heart of hospitality.

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Gleep Tourism Takes Off The World Craves Rest Like Never Before

Sleep has often been sacrificed at the altar of ambition in a world hardwired to equate busyness with success. But as chronic stress and burnout give rise to new lifestyle diseases, the narrative is shifting. Sleep is now the new luxury and a booming travel trend. TTJ speaks to travel designers and wellness stakeholders to decode this rising phenomenon and understand why, for a growing tribe of travellers, sleep is now the destination itself.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla











rom curated restorative itineraries to hospitality brands placing sleep at the heart of their wellness offerings, sleep tourism is redefining travel. No longer an afterthought, sleep is becoming the central experience in a new era of mindful, meaningful journeys.

Growing Demand for Sleep-Focused Wellness

The growing demand for restful wellness holidays is being driven by a perfect storm of modern lifestyle challenges and a shift in how people define luxury and vacation. Naresh Chandnani, Founder and CEO, Bespoke Serenity, shares, "We specialise in wellness holidays and have a dedicated section on Sleep Retreats under Healing Holidays. The pandemic has revealed a big surge in demand for wellness holidays as people's priorities have changed considerably."

Aseem Hattangadi, Founder of The Travel Therapist, has long advocated for the value of rest in holiday planning. For him, sleep is not just a trend but a core part of his travel curations. He asserts, "No matter the destination, I always make sure my clients have at least a day or two at the start and end of their trip with unscheduled intentional pauses to relax and catch up on sleep." He believes the pressure to cram every moment with activity often backfires, and they return more exhausted than when they started.

Sadhana Sharma, Curator of Experiential Journeys, The Intrepid Club, has noticed that while sleep tourism was not a dominant request earlier, it has now quietly but surely found its way into travel preferences. "My client's focus was more on activities than rest, but this growing interest in slow,

immersive stays is evident," she notes.

Vinitaa Rawat. Founderand Director, Amazing Vacations, also identifies significant rise traveller enquiries wellness-based for stays, prompting a more intentional approach to curating rejuvenation-led

itineraries. She says, "We are now more mindful and make it a point to ask the right questions before booking accommodations for certain clients."

Choosing the Right Properties

With Indian travellers becoming more discerning, demand for personalised, sleep-focused stays is rising. Aseem shares, "Clients often have their list of preferred properties to stay in, depending on previous experiences, brand loyalty, or recommendations. To ensure that accommodations meet expectations, we dive deep, evaluating pillow menus, bed linen, mattresses, mood-enhancing fresheners, low-noise room locations, sleep-inducing spa treatments, and yoga programmes." Some of his go-to properties for sleep-centric experiences include the Four Seasons in Bali, the Park Hyatt in New York City, the St. Regis in Mumbai, the Marriott Marquis Queens Park in Bangkok, and the Kimpton in London.

Naresh prides himself on finding the perfect restful solution for his clients. He says, "We have extensive experience in designing wellness breaks and a deep understanding of the strengths of most of the

Reading destination spa resorts "Among

leading destination spa resorts." Among his top choices for sleep retreats are Six Senses Bhutan, Sha Wellness Clinic in Spain, COMO Shambhala Estate in Bali, and Kamalaya in Koh Samui, Thailand.

Vinitaa focuses on hotels that provide wellness-specific amenities, like pillow selection, quality bathroom products, and bathtubs with sleep-inducing bath salts. "These key elements are vital to induce healthy sleep cycles," she says.

According to Sadhna, the secret lies in customising each programme to the client's specific needs. Luxury hotels are increasingly targeting India, with many introducing tailored offerings in the past three to four years, catering to this growing demand. Sadhna notes, "Wellness seekers often turn to renowned sanctuaries like Chenot Palace in Weggis (Switzerland) and Gabala (Azerbaijan), SHA Wellness, Bad Ragaz, and Chiva-Som, where environments are engineered for deep rest, from blackout and soundproofing to

aromatherapy and melatonin-

meals,

boosting

nutritious

anchored by holistic,





Rest Comes at a Price

The growing demand for sleep-focused travel goes beyond comfort; it is about value, and discerning travellers are increasingly willing to invest in the premium pricing. Aseem observes, "The result is a thoughtful balance of routine and rejuvenation, with quiet rooms, custom meals, and sleepfriendly touches like pillow menus to help clients truly unwind."

Reputed wellness retreats are not cheap, and the clients are willing to pay a premium for a fulfilling experience. Naresh explains, "A sleep retreat is a peaceful escape where rest is reimagined. With expert guidance from sleep specialists and holistic wellness practitioners, it is an experience of evidence-based practices in soothing environments, all designed to

the growing recognition that wellness, particularly sleep, is crucial for overall well-being. She affirms, "Clients are willing to pay a premium for specialised sleep-

reset sleep and restore well-being." Vinitaa agrees with Naresh, emphasising focused wellness treatments in sleepenhancing environments to improve their mental clarity and emotional resilience."

"Sleep is the cornerstone of physical and mental well-being and, unlike diet or exercise, it is non-negotiable," asserts Sadhna. Luxury wellness resorts have techniques that aid in restoring the circadian cycle through scientific methods, and guests are willing to pay a premium for such restorative programmes.

Client Reflections

Consistently positive feedback for sleepfocused travel and the growing demand for immersive wellness drive repeat quests to seek out similar restorative experiences. According to Sadhna, Sleep tourism is often a lifestyle choice for high-profile, celebrity clients with high-intensity lives who need to reboot every few months. A controlled, restful environment is essential for their recovery. While luxury wellness retreats cater to this niche, a parallel market is emerging for the mid-range segment. Sadhna shares, "It is no longer just for the

elite. Wellness programmes in Rishikesh, Kerala, Bali, and Sri Lanka now offer similar experiences in naturally serene settings to help people regain mental and physical balance.'

Aseem believes quality sleep is the most overlooked need in our hyper-connected lives. "We underestimate how crucial rest is for our physical and mental sanity," he says. Many of his clients now embrace intentional rest even beyond vacations. To him, sleep tourism aligns perfectly with the essence of travel, as he muses, "A holiday is meant to offer a true escape, a chance to relax and step away from the stresses of daily life."

"Repeat guests for wellness holidays are quite high, as it is almost like an addiction," says Naresh. Feedback from happy clients highlights favourites like sleep diagnostics, breathwork, yoga, meditation, aromatherapy, sound healing, digital detox, and tailored nutrition set in calming, luxurious surroundings.

"Our guests return truly rejuvenated, and even a short, well-designed wellness break away from daily chaos resets the mind," says Vinitaa. Describing the experience as transformative, a client likened the time-out to being recharged to full, a complete reset of energy and clarity.

Sleep-Focused Hospitality **Players**

As travel curators across India increasingly design itineraries prioritising rest and slower rhythms, wellness centres are stepping up to meet this growing appetite for sleepfocused experiences. The journey of sleep tourism begins with bespoke preparation and culminates in a destination where carefully set intentions manifest as real, restorative impact.

Wellness destinations are offering immersive sleep retreats that combine



Dr. Narendra K Shetty



Dr. Swetha R



Margy Leander

ancient wisdom with modern-day science of sleep diagnostics, guided breathwork, blue light detoxing, aromatherapy, personalised nutrition, and tech-free zones, all expertly calibrated to help guests reset their internal

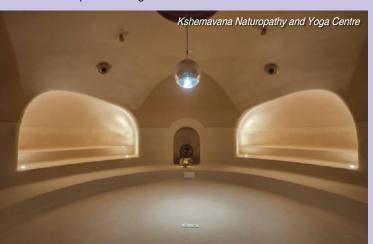
Dr. Narendra K Shetty, Chief Wellness Officer, Kshemavana Naturopathy and Yoga Centre, Karnataka, has noticed the considerable surge of sleep-centric tourism in recent years. He notes, "With increasing sleep disorders, people are turning towards integrative retreats that provide natural, non-pharmaceutical methods of enhancing sleep quality. Travellers are no longer looking for a holiday, they are looking to

Dr. Swetha R, HOD - Naturopathy Department at SwaSwara, CGH Earth Wellness, Karnataka, also observes a growing trend of travellers, both domestic and international, seeking rest as their primary reason for choosing a wellness destination. "At SwaSwara, we understand that sleep is an intricate, layered process, not something that can be 'fixed' in isolation," she says.

Margy Leander, Associate Director of Digital Marketing and Communications, Mandapa, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, Ubud, Bali, has observed a similar significant shift in traveller priorities from traditional sightseeing to rest and restoration. Sleep tourism, once a niche, is now central to the luxury wellness narrative. She says, "We curate experiences that deeply honour rest. From our tranquil riverside setting to bespoke sleep rituals, we offer a calm setting where guests can fully decompress."

The Restorative Process

Sleep well-being is central to Kshemavana's







healing philosophy. It is designed for rest, right from the peaceful forested spot of Kshemavana to the architecture with minimal EMF exposure, natural illumination, and silence-proof construction. Rituals like Yoga Nidra, Shirodhara, acupuncture, sound healing, hydrotherapy, and aqua yoga have proven their efficacy in enabling guests to achieve restorative sleep.

SwaSwara's holistic approach includes assessments. acupuncture. aromatherapy, nature walks, sleep-inducing diets, and guided meditation techniques, designed to gently restore the body's circadian rhythm. The newly launched Sleep Program integrates melatonin and tryptophan boosting diets, rhythmic routines, and mindbody therapies to guide the body back to its natural sleep rhythm. They create an ecosystem for rest, offering an environment rooted in silence, nature, holistic therapies, and mindful rhythms.

> Mandapa offers tailored sleep therapy through personalised assessments, guided meditation, and one-on-one sleep coaching. It includes Balinese treatments, yoga, and sound therapy, all aimed at improving sleep quality, reducing stress, and restoring balance.

Sleep Stories

True success stories come from guests who fully immerse themselves in the hands of experts to rejuvenate Α SwaSwara themselves. guest overcame long-standing sleep issues through a 10-day holistic programme combining naturopathy, acupuncture, and aromatherapy. Dr. Swetha says, "By the fifth night, she reported deep, consistent sleep and renewed mental clarity."

At Mandapa, guests are known to find deep healing through mindful rest. A guest recently called the experience 'transformational,' saying it was the first time in years they achieved uninterrupted sleep, thanks to the serene valley setting and guided Sleep Therapy. Another credited Mandapa's natural rhythm and spa therapies for helping reset years of insomnia. With such successful feedback, Mandapa has carved a niche in this seament.

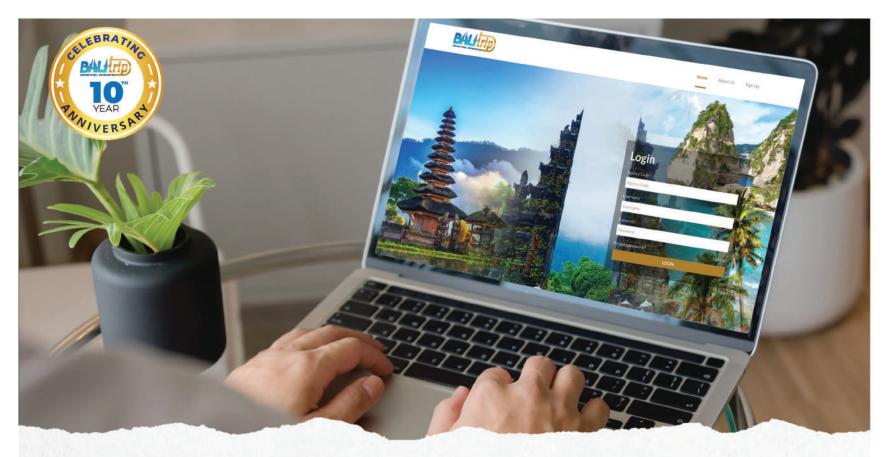
The Future of Sleep Tourism

As sleep evolves from a wellness trend into a transformative lifestyle movement, plans are underway to expand with dedicated sleep retreats, integrate wearable tech for real-time monitoring, and launch digital detox programmes to restore circadian health. "Sleep tourism will be a major vertical in wellness travel, especially for corporate clients facing burnout," says Dr. Reddy.

"Sleep tourism is no longer niche as it is becoming central to wellness travel. Guests do not just want to relax, they want to relearn how to sleep naturally," says Dr. Swetha. Their evolving Sleep Program focuses on long-term impact through virtual follow-ups, emotional wellness, and personalised circadian rhythm coaching for lasting results.

Margy shares the Mandapa belief that true luxury lies in stillness. She says, "It is about deep rest and self-reconnection as guided by Balinese principles of harmony, mindfulness, and nature-led healing."

Sleep is no longer just a personal health goal; it is the cornerstone of wellness travel as we seek more intentional rest.' For a growing number of travellers, that choice begins with a well-planned escape and culminates in a deeply curated stay designed to bring body and mind back into alignment.



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- Day 3: After Breakfast Ulundanu Temple (Lake temple) followed by Handara Gate + Tanah Lot temple (sunset temple) Transfer on PVT Basis
- Day 4: After Breakfast, Day Free for leisure.
- Day 5: After Breakfast Kintamani + Ubud Tour + Mas Village followed by Inter hotel Transfer on PVT Basis
- Day 6: After Breakfast, Day Free for leisure.
- Day 7: Departure Airport transfer back to India.

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rom mist-covered hills to sun-kissed beaches, wildlife sanctuaries, and temple towns, Tamil Nadu offers a rich variety of experiences for every traveller during summer. The State's appeal extends beyond its hill stations, with vibrant cities, historic temples, national parks, and coastal stretches blending heritage, cuisine, and sunshine into a uniquely Tamil summer adventure.

The All-Time Summer Favourites

Sure, the classics like Ooty and Kodaikanal never lose their charm, both perched high and cool in the Nilgiris and Palani Hills, respectively. The quieter hill towns of Coonoor, Kotagiri, Gudalur, or Masinagudi in the Nilgiris are perfect for those seeking serenity. With local summer festivals adding charm to these towns, alongside the historic Nilgiri Mountain Railway, these destinations offer an escape with nostalgia and beauty.

Moving from the Nilgiris, Yercaud, nestled in the Shevaroy Hills, is another peaceful retreat known for its scenic lake and aromatic coffee plantations. Similarly, Yelagiri, located in the Eastern Ghats, offers a mild climate year-round, making it a perfect destination for both adventure seekers and those looking for a quiet getaway. Valparai, perched in the Anamalai Hills, is another picturesque hill station that invites visitors to unwind in its serene atmosphere, while Topslip, located 37 km from Pollachi, offers a cool climate and

opportunities for wildlife viewing.

Visitors to the Nilgiris district, including areas like Ooty and Kodaikanal, are required to obtain an e-pass for entry, especially during peak tourist seasons, to manage traffic and protect the environment.

The Summer Wildlife and Nature Escapes

Summer in Tamil Nadu brings the wild to life, as animals gather around waterholes and nature puts on a spectacular Mudumalai National show Park, situated at the foothills of the Nilgiris, is home to tigers, elephants, leopards, and over 200 species of birds. The park offers opportunities for safaris, nature walks, and birdwatching. Similarly, Anamalai Wildlife Sanctuary, with its cool climate and dense forests, offers a serene escape and the chance to spot unique wildlife such as

the Nilgiri Tahr and lion-tailed macaques. Other noteworthy wildlife destinations in Tamil Nadu include the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve and Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve, both offering immersive nature experiences and ample opportunities for photography and safaris.





Chennai - The Coastal Capital and Gateway

Chennai, vibrant and historic, makes for a perfect summer holiday destination where coastal beauty meets cultural splendour.

Wander through its iconic temples like

Kapaleeswarar, Parthasarathy, Arupadai Veedu Murugan, Ashtalakshmi, and Kalikambal.

Start your mornings with breezy walks along Marina or Elliot's Beach and enjoy the cool sea breeze with nibbles. For nature lovers, Guindy National Park, located within the city, provides an urban wildlife escape. If you are in the city during the turtle nesting season, you might even get a chance to participate in Olive Ridley Turtle Conservation activities along the coastline.

Mamallapuram: A Journey Through History

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Mamallapuram is famous for its ancient rock-cut temples, shore temples, and monolithic sculptures. The Five Rathas, Arjuna's Penance, and the Shore Temple are must-see attractions that showcase the town's rich history and architectural marvels. Located on the Coromandel Coast, some 60 km from Chennai, Mamallapuram also offers panoramic views of the sea, with the cool sea breeze providing a refreshing atmosphere, especially in the early mornings and evenings.

Covelong Beach, located just 23 km from Mamallapuram and 35 km from Chennai, is a Blue Flag beach known for its clear waters, making it an ideal destination for beach lovers and water sports enthusiasts.

Rameswaram: Spiritual and **Natural Wonders**

For those seeking a blend of spirituality

and nature, Rameswaram, located at the southern tip of Tamil Nadu, some 560 km from Chennai, offers an enriching summer experience. The Ramanathaswamy Temple is a major pilgrimage site, renowned for its grand architecture and sacred wells. Pilgrims flock to Agni Theertham Beach to take a holy dip, while the Pamban Bridge, one of India's longest sea bridges, offers stunning views of the surrounding waters.

For history and beauty, Dhanushkodi, a ghost town with pristine beaches, provides a peaceful escape. Gulf of Mannar Marine National Park is perfect for snorkelling and diving, allowing visitors to explore the region's vibrant marine life.

Kanniyakumari: The Meeting **Point of Oceans**

Kanniyakumari, where the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal, and Indian Ocean converge, is a geographical marvel and a spiritual destination. The town is famous for its mesmerising sunrises and sunsets, offering some of the most breathtaking views in India. Visitors can also explore iconic landmarks like the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, the towering Thiruvalluvar Statue, and the Kanniyakumari Temple, all of which hold deep cultural and spiritual significance.

Nearby beaches such as Thengapattinam, Sanguthurai, and Chothavilai are perfect for those seeking solitude by the sea. Padmanabhapuram Palace, located nearby,

offers a glimpse into the grandeur of ancient architecture, while the vibrant local markets are great for picking up traditional handicrafts and souvenirs.

Other Notable Destinations

For a well-rounded summer getaway, consider visiting cities like Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Madurai, Vellore, Thanjavur, and Trichy.

Coimbatore, with its cool climate and proximity to hill stations like Ooty and Kodaikanal, offers a refreshing summer retreat. Along the Coromandel Coast, Cuddalore invites visitors with its quiet beaches and historic landmarks, creating a peaceful escape. Madurai, home to the magnificent Meenakshi Amman Temple, promises a deep dive into Tamil Nadu's rich cultural heritage. Meanwhile, cities like Vellore, Thanjavur, and Trichy, set along riverbanks, blend history, spirituality, and scenic beauty, making them ideal for a tranquil yet enriching summer journey.

Package Tours by TTDC

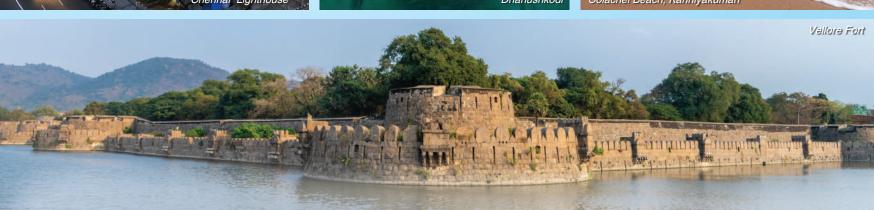
For those looking for a hassle-free way to explore Tamil Nadu this summer, the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) offers package tours ranging from 1 to 18 days. Many of these packages are all-inclusive, covering meals, a guide, transportation, accommodation, and entry fees. Additionally, TTDC provides convenient 3-day weekend packages to scenic hill destinations from Chennai, perfect for a quick and refreshing getaway.























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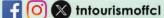
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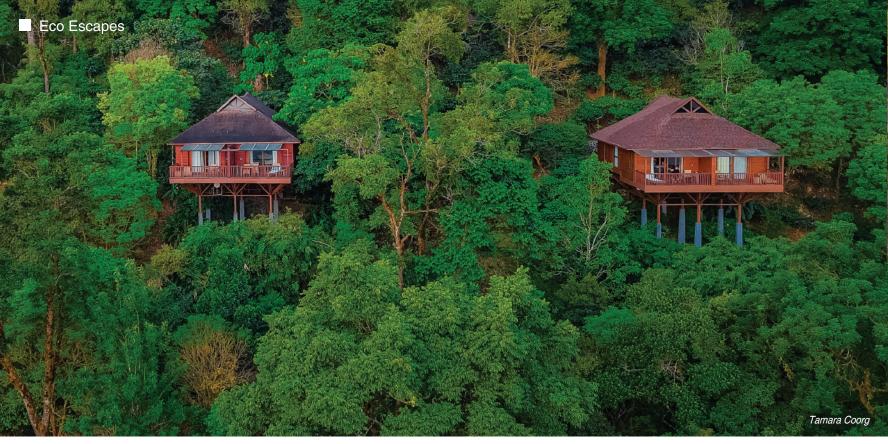
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Echoes of Valparai

Untamed, Untouched, and Unforgettable.





Eco-Stays in India Define Green, Immersive, Mindful, And Regenerative Travel

Imagine waking to birdsong, sipping tea in a treehouse above misty forests, or planting a tree that marks your journey. Across India, a quiet revolution is redefining travel, where luxury flows in harmony with nature, people, and purpose. In this exclusive feature, we explore India's leading eco-retreats and speak with the visionaries behind them to discover how sustainability, soulful design, and immersive storytelling are reshaping hospitality.

Prashant Nayak

ith sustainability at the forefront of travel, ecostays across India are redefining the boundaries of luxury and responsibility. By prioritising ecological conservation and community engagement, these properties are offering guests immersive experiences that foster a deep connection to nature while embracing the comforts of modern hospitality.

Tamara Leisure Experiences Crafts Conscious Luxury Rooted in Sustainability



Shruti Shibulal

Tamara Leisure Experiences combines luxury with responsibility, offering resorts and hotels that prioritise sustainability, community involvement, and respect for local culture. Whether tranquil retreats or dynamic business hotels, every Tamara property embodies eco-conscious design and practices.

Shruti Shibulal, CEO and Director, Tamara Leisure Experiences, believes ecotourism is becoming mainstream. She said, "Ecotourism is no longer

niche; it is central to how people think about travel. In the future, it will serve as a custodian of the environment and a platform for fostering awareness."

For Tamara, eco-stays are immersive and transformative. "Our properties act as experiential educators. They redefine leisure as synonymous with preservation, inclusion, and restoration, creating

spaces that shift behaviour and catalyse change," opined Shibulal.

Sustainability is woven into every aspect of Tamara's operations. At The Tamara Coorg, for example, food waste is composted and used for landscaping, with excess donated to local farms. "Rainwater harvesting and reverse osmosis water filtration systems are part of our eco-efforts, scaled to meet the needs of each property. We also prioritise local hiring and procurement, and our teams support community initiatives like tree planting and clean-up drives," explained Shibulal.

Tamara's concept of luxury focuses on authenticity and intentionality. "Luxury is not about excess. It is about rare, meaningful experiences. Experiences like farm-to-table dining, Ayurvedic wellness, and stargazing connect guests deeply to the place," shared Shibulal.

Despite challenges, Tamara proves that ecotourism is not too rustic or expensive. "Boutique eco-properties deliver exceptional value and personal experiences. Guests can engage in memorable activities like coffee plantation tours, tree planting, and Ayurvedic treatments, fostering mindful living and an intuitive connection to sustainability," Shibulal concluded.

Jungle Camps India Redefines Ecotourism through Conservation-Focused Hospitality

Jungle Camps India (JCI) offers distinct wildlife hospitality experiences in the tiger reserves of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. With a strong conservation ethos, JCI blends ecoconscious living with luxurious comfort, allowing guests to engage deeply with nature while uplifting local communities.

Gajendra Singh Rathore, Managing Director and Founder, Jungle Camps India, says, "Tourism in India is evolving as more people seek





Gajendra Singh Rathore

real, nature-based experiences. Ecotourism destinations are no longer just places to stay but hubs of conservation, education, and community support."

JCl's approach prioritises sustainability. Camps like Kanha Jungle Camp are built on reforested land, use natural materials, and run on solar energy. Rathore explained, "We avoid single-use plastics, source most of our food locally, and compost food waste for our organic gardens. 85 per cent of JCl's staff are from nearby

villages, and we collaborate with indigenous Gond and Baiga tribes to preserve local traditions."

Blending rustic charm with comfort, JCI offers canvas tents with open verandas, soft beds, hot showers, and meals comparable to luxury hotels. Guests enjoy immersive experiences like safaris with expert naturalists, stargazing, and cooking with village chefs. "True luxury is being in a peaceful place that brings you closer to nature," said Rathore.

Rathore also highlights the challenge of balancing ecotourism with mass tourism. He mentioned, "Many properties host loud events, compromising the eco-lodge experience. We stand apart with our conservation-first philosophy. Eco-friendly does not mean sacrificing comfort; it enhances the overall experience."

With limited safari permits, JCI advises guests to plan ahead and offers guidance on responsible travel. Through nature-based activities, guests learn to minimise waste, respect wildlife, and support local communities.

30 Years of Eco-Luxury Rooted in Sustainability and Serenity at The Machan

Marking three decades of unmatched hospitality, The Machan, with a steadfast commitment to carbon neutrality, offers one-of-a-kind accommodations and experiences that allow guests to reconnect with nature. With its flagship eco-resort located in Lonavala, Maharashtra, this Machan features unique treehouses elevated 30 to 45 feet above ground level, providing complete serenity for those seeking an escape from urban life.

Sanat Hooja, Partner, Machan Resorts LLP, sees ecotourism accommodations moving from niche offerings to essential travel experiences. He said, "Today's travellers are actively seeking experiences that are both meaningful and environmentally conscious. Eco-resorts are no longer a novelty; they are becoming central to responsible travel, contributing directly to the preservation of biodiversity and the support of local communities."

Sustainability is not an afterthought at The Machan; it is the foundation. "We are entirely powered by renewable energy. Our treehouses are built with minimal disturbance to the surrounding ecosystem, often elevated on stilts to preserve the natural flow of the forest floor. We implement strict water harvesting



techniques, composting, and greywater recycling to minimise our footprint," explained Hooja. In addition, The Machan prioritises local sourcing and employs staff from nearby villages, reinforcing its commitment to community engagement and sustainable operations.

Balancing immersive nature experiences with modern-day comforts is a hallmark of The Machan. Hooja remarked, "Luxury and sustainability can go hand in hand. Our treehouses



Sanat Hooja

are thoughtfully crafted to blend into the forest while offering highend comforts, premium bedding, solar-heated showers, curated amenities, and private decks. Each detail is selected not only to delight our guests but also to reduce environmental impact."

Despite growing interest in ecotourism, challenges persist, especially in reshaping guest perceptions. Hooja noted, "One of our biggest hurdles is the misconception that eco-friendly means sacrificing comfort. We work to change that through active guest engagement, from welcome kits and in-room educational materials to guided nature walks and personal interactions with our staff. These efforts help guests better understand the importance of sustainable travel and inspire them to make more thoughtful choices during and beyond their stay."

ONENESS Rishikesh: A Riverside Sanctuary Where Wilderness and Reflection Meet

Tucked in a serene riverside forest, 30 km beyond Rishikesh, ONENESS is a luxury wilderness resort offering guests a rare experience of stillness and renewal. With the Ganga flowing past two private white-sand beaches and 12 beautifully designed cottages nestled into the landscape, the resort fosters a deep connection with nature.

As ecotourism gains traction in India, Tarun Gulati, Director, Himalayan Hotels (Ganga



Tarun Gulati

Kinare Resorts and Hotels Group), explained, "Ecotourism accommodations are becoming the bridge between conscious travel and immersive experiences. Guests now seek more than beauty; they seek purpose."

At ONENESS, sustainability is integral to the resort's design. "Our reception and spa areas were designed to blend into the forest, not apart from it. The bamboo hall, used as a yoga pavilion and restaurant, is a testament to renewable architecture and traditional craftsmanship. Our resort replaces single-use plastics with biodegradable alternatives, creates green zones for native

biodiversity, and sensitively manages water use," informed Gulati.

A highlight at ONENESS is the "Memory Plantation" programme, where guests plant native trees in the forest, leaving a meaningful connection to the land. Gulati emphasised, "We hire locally, source regionally, and collaborate with artisans and farmers to ensure our impact is regenerative."

True luxury at ONENESS is not about extravagance but quiet richness. "Luxury today is about authenticity and a deep connection to place. Our resort's riverfacing cottages offer unmatched privacy and uninterrupted views, while activities like riverside yoga and Himalayan wellness therapies invite guests to slow down and reconnect," said Gulati.

Gulati added, "Comfort does not have to come at the cost of ecology. We have built a space where both can flourish." ONENESS challenges misconceptions

of eco-travel, redefining luxury as mindful indulgence, elegant, yet in tune with the earth.

Think Taj Corbett Resort and Spa for Immersive Nature and Thoughtful Luxury



Nivedan Kukreti

Nestled in the stunning landscapes of Jim Corbett, Taj Corbett Resort & Spa is a premier destination that combines luxury, nature, and wellness. The resort blends exceptional hospitality with local experiences, creating a haven for those seeking relaxation and immersion in the wilderness.

Nivedan Kukreti, General Manager, Taj Corbett Resort & Spa, said, "Wildlife and nature tourism in India is flourishing, and ecotourism accommodations are evolving into stewards of land and

culture. We aim to create authentic, responsible travel experiences that preserve ecosystems and uplift local communities."

Sustainability is at the heart of the resort's philosophy. Taj Corbett has implemented several eco-friendly initiatives, including renewable solar energy, rainwater harvesting, zero single-use plastics, and an automated water bottling plant. Additionally, the resort supports the local economy by sourcing produce locally, showcasing local artisans such as Aipan artists, and employing local staff. Kukreti adds, "Our conservation efforts extend to wildlife protection and habitat restoration through collaborations with the local forest department and communities."

For Kukreti, luxury is defined by rich, immersive experiences rather than material offerings. At Taj Corbett, guests enjoy activities like guided forest walks, private dining under the stars, and meals inspired by local traditions. He stated, "Thoughtful details, sustainable practices, eco-friendly amenities, and personalised service ensure we meet the warmth and elegance expected by today's travellers."

A challenge in promoting ecotourism, Kukreti acknowledges, is shifting perceptions. "We focus on inspiring rather than instructing. We gently raise awareness through nature trails, conservation talks, and community interactions. Under IHCL's sustainability framework,



our Paathya initiatives aim to create a ripple effect, encouraging conscious choices beyond our guests' stay," emphasised Kukreti.

Eco-Conscious Design Meets Elevated Wilderness Hospitality at Aamaghati Wildlife Resort

Aamaghati Wildlife Resort, the latest luxury addition to the Ranthambore hospitality scene, opened its doors in December 2022. Located just five minutes from the Ranthambore National Park entrance, the resort offers a seamless blend of sustainability and luxury, crafted with ecosensitivity at its core. The design was inspired by the natural surroundings of Ranthambore and guided by the late architect Revathi Kamath, known for her expertise in mud architecture and sustainability.



Gaurav Mudgal

Gaurav Mudgal, Managing Partner and Vice President of Commercials, Aamaghati Wildlife Resort, said, "As travellers seek experiential tourism, sustainability has become a key factor in their choices. We ensured environmental sensitivity was integrated into the ethos of Aamaghati from the very beginning."

The resort's architecture reflects a harmonious mix of tradition and modernity, with village-style exteriors and plush interiors featuring hand-painted details and modern amenities. To minimise environmental impact, Aamaghati operates an in-house bottling plant that uses glass bottles for safe drinking water, reduces plastic usage, and recycles water for landscaping through a sewage treatment plant and rainwater harvesting systems. Additionally, all kitchen waste is composted to keep their carbon footprint low.

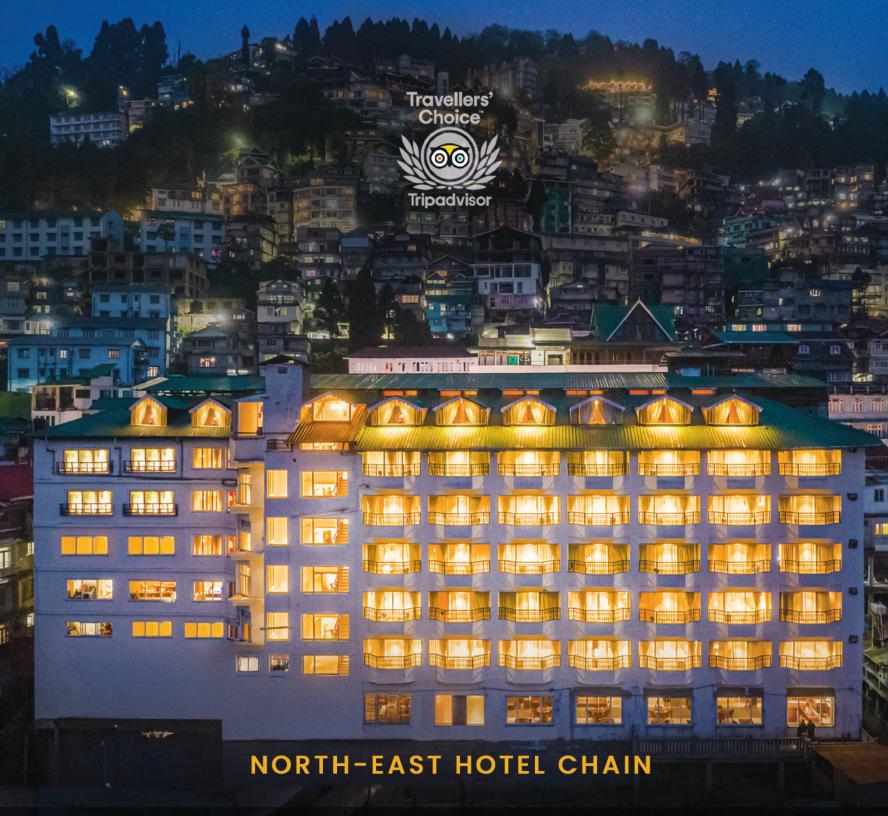
Mudgal further shared, "Our rooms are designed for relaxation after a day of safaris. We space out activities so guests can truly unwind. For example, guests enjoy a local high tea with dance and music performances after an afternoon safari."

Aamaghati also invites guests to participate in its sustainability journey through simple practices like requesting bed linen changes only when necessary and using glass water bottles. "We want guests to feel they are contributing to the ecology, and we hope they take these practices home," said Mudgal.



NATURE MEETS **MODERN LUXU**

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Accord Hotels Channels South Indian Warmth Across Its Properties

Accord Hotels and Resorts delivers distinctive, unforgettable stays by blending luxury, comfort, and heartfelt hospitality across its premium properties in four prime destinations across South India. Pankaj Katyal, General Manager, Accord Metropolitan, highlights the Accord brand's dedication to crafting memorable experiences that celebrate local culture while delivering top-notch service and modern amenities.

Prashant Nayak

ccord Hotels boasts its presence in Chennai, Puducherry, and Ooty, offering something for every kind of traveller. Whether seeking the ideal corporate setting for a high-stakes business meeting or a serene retreat nestled in nature's embrace for a peaceful escape from city life, Accord has them covered with comfort, elegance, and thoughtful hospitality.

Distinct Charm of Accord Hotels

Accord Metropolitan, Chennai, is a beacon of luxury and culture, blending traditional South Indian elegance with world-class amenities. With award-winning dining like Royal Indianaa, T-plush suites, an expansive spa, and grand banquets, it sets the gold standard in the city.

Accord Chrome, Chennai caters to the new-age traveller, offering contemporary designs, smart technology, and wellness amenities. It is chic, edgy, and effortless.

Accord Puducherry is a perfect seaside sanctuary, just minutes from Promenade Beach. Its design draws inspiration from the Franco-Tamil culture, offering a peaceful retreat paired with vibrant gastronomy and serene spa experiences.

Accord Highland, Ooty, is a dreamy hill station escape where misty mornings, trekking trails, and bonfire-lit evenings converge with luxury, making it a haven for nature lovers and adventure seekers.

Soulful South Indian Hospitality

Rooted deeply in the traditions of South India, Accord Hotels is dedicated to offering more than just a place to stay. Pankaj says, "At Accord Hotels, we do not just offer stays. We curate soulful journeys. Our mantra, Service from the Heart, ensures we go above and beyond every customer's expectations. Every experience, whether it is savouring authentic South Indian delicacies, indulging in Ayurveda-inspired spa therapies, embarking on cultural discovery tours, or enjoying the signature warmth of our service teams, reflects the timeless hospitality ethos of South India.



Pankaj Katyal

It is about heartfelt connections, local immersion, and creating lasting memories."

The Art of Events at Accord

MICE play a significant role in the hospitality industry. Accord Hotels redefines business and celebration venues with grandeur and innovation. They offer spacious ballrooms, flexible meeting spaces, cutting-edge audiovisual tech, expert event management teams, and curated dining and banquet services. "Whether it is an international conference, a leadership retreat, a dreamy destination wedding, or a gala awards night, we craft flawless, memorable events with finesse and flair," asserts Pankaj.

Embracing Digital Revolution and Innovation

Given the rise of digital transformation in the hospitality industry, Accord Hotels has embraced the digital revolution wholeheartedly! From a seamless website experience with instant bookings to smart in-room technologies like WiFi, mobile key access, and IPTV, Accord Hotels is geared for the future.

Pankaj also shed light on the pressing challenges shaping the hospitality industry. He explains, "Today's hospitality landscape demands agility and innovation. Key challenges include rising customer expectations, dynamic pricing battles, and the need for hyper-personalised service. Accord Hotels navigates this with strategic investments in digital, talent upskilling, enhancing guest loyalty programmes, and creating unique, culturally rich experiences that stand apart from the noise."

Building Relationships, Not Just Reservations

In an increasingly competitive hospitality landscape shaped by online travel agencies and other booking platforms like Airbnb, Pankaj believes Accord Hotels focuses on building relationships, not just reservations. He mentions, "By offering value-packed direct booking benefits, exclusive experiences, loyalty perks, and personalised stays, we ensure that guests always find something at Accord that platforms like OTAs or Airbnb simply can't replicate, the magic of heartfelt hospitality wrapped in curated luxury."

Eco-Conscious Hospitality

With sustainability becoming a defining factor in travellers' choices, Accord Hotels has embraced eco-conscious hospitality as a core part of its identity. "Sustainability is woven into our DNA at Accord. We practice solar power utilisation, rainwater harvesting, eco-conscious landscaping, and local sourcing of ingredients, and have committed to phasing out singleuse plastics. Beyond operations, we also raise guest awareness and promote green tourism practices, ensuring every stay is as planet-friendly as indulgent," expresses Pankaj.

Expansion Beyond South India

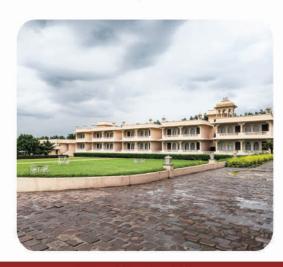
Exciting times are ahead for Accord Hotels. The hotel group is actively exploring expansion into key metros and emerging Indian cities, aiming to bring their signature blend of tradition and innovation to new audiences. International forays are also on the radar, driven by their vision to showcase the spirit of Indian hospitality on a global canvas.

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Crafting calm and conscious living at Au Revoir Wellness Retreat

Tucked away in the serene hills of Palakkad, Kerala, Au Revoir Wellness Retreat is a hidden sanctuary that is off the beaten tourist track yet easily accessible. In an exclusive interaction with TTJ, Ismail Khalid, Executive Director, Au Revoir, shares insights into what makes this wellness haven truly unique.

Prashant Nayak

Palakkad city, the journey to Au Revoir along the Malampuzha Dam is an experience in itself. This area, home to the largest reservoir in Kerala, is steeped in cultural heritage. Malampuzha has been the backdrop for iconic Malayalam and Hindi films, yet remains unspoiled and full of untapped tourism potential.

A Vision Beyond Leisure

The genesis of Au Revoir Wellness Retreat lies in the vision of K P Khalid, a successful entrepreneur in the cosmetics and FMCG sector. His dream was to create a space beyond traditional hospitality, inspiring healing, peace, and holistic well-being. This dream was realised in 2021 with the opening of Au Revoir.

The resort's design seamlessly marries Kerala's architectural heritage with subtle European aesthetics. What truly stands out is how harmoniously the structures merge with the surrounding forested terrain. The property boasts an infinity pool that offers a panoramic view of the hills and the vast Malampuzha reservoir, creating a perfect backdrop for reflection and rejuvenation.

Ismail explained, "Our USP is the 'Giving Green' philosophy, an eco-conscious, toxinfree, smoke-free, and alcohol-free approach to hospitality. Today's travellers increasingly seek authenticity, health-focused experiences, and a deeper connection with nature. That is exactly what we offer."

Retreat in Harmony

Every room at Au Revoir is designed as a sanctuary of calm, encouraging guests to unplug from the noise of everyday life. The resort offers three categories of accommodation: Classic Rooms, Deluxe Rooms, and its signature suite – Pool Villa. The Pool Villa is an architectural marvel, crafted almost entirely from reclaimed boat wood sourced from historic vessels in Beypore. The rustic charm and luxurious finishes embody



▲ Ismail Khalid

the resort's dedication to sustainability and heritage.

Ayurveda at its Core

Wellness at Au Revoir is deeply rooted in the ancient Ayurvedic tradition. The retreat specialises in personalised wellness programmes targeting modern lifestyle ailments such as arthritis, obesity, diabetes, and digestive issues. One of the key therapies offered is Panchakarma, an intensive Ayurvedic detox designed to restore balance and vitality. Treatment packages range from three to 21 days, offering flexibility for both short-term visitors and those seeking deeper healing.

Ismail emphasised, "Our focus is on preventive wellness. We do not just treat health issues; we help detoxify, rejuvenate, and boost immunity. The idea is to empower guests to maintain healthy lifestyles long after their stay."

Wellness in a Vacation Mode

Unlike many wellness centres that resemble clinical spaces, Au Revoir has carefully curated a warm, inviting atmosphere "We

have moved away from the sterile, hospital-like feel. Our therapies are medically supervised but delivered in a comfortable, homely setting," said Ismail.

Even the Ayurvedic meals served are far from bland. Prepared with doctor-prescribed nutrition in mind, they are crafted to be flavourful and satisfying. This thoughtful blend of authenticity and luxury sets the resort apart, promising a perfect vacation.

Promoting Palakkad tourism

The resort has adopted a location-first marketing approach to attract domestic and international travellers. Ismail mentioned, "We promote Palakkad as an experiential destination. The retreat offers easy access to natural wonders like Parambikulam Tiger Reserve and Silent Valley National Park, and cultural attractions like Kerala Kalamandalam, Kalpathy Heritage Village, and Kuthampully Weaving Village. Spiritual seekers will also find solace in the nearby Isha Foundation."

Looking Ahead

Au Revoir is expanding both within and beyond its current location. Upcoming additions include five new luxury rooms, one new premium suite, and six Ayurvedic treatment rooms, all part of a new wellness block slated to open on June 15th.

In addition, the retreat is rolling out new packages focused on detox, immunity, stress relief, and weight management. Guests can also engage in ecotourism experiences through the property's nearby high-tech organic farm, offering hands-on learning about sustainable agriculture.

"Our long-term goal is to bring the 'Giving Green' philosophy to other parts of India through resorts and retreats grounded in sustainability, wellness, and mindful living," shared Ismail.



Madhya Pradesh: Where craft meets legacy

Explore timeless treasures where tradition meets innovation. From regal Chanderi sarees to vibrant tribal art, uncover the heart of India's craft heritage.

Madhya Pradesh seamlessly blends the past and present, weaving a vibrant future rooted in rich artistic traditions. Each community and region offers a unique legacy, embellished with its handcrafted creations. When you take home one of these treasures, you carry with you a piece of history. Join us on a journey through the heart of India, where the gems of its craft heritage come to life.

Embrace Elegance

Chanderi, renowned worldwide for its exquisite silk-cotton blend sarees, is celebrated for its delicate texture and royal motifs. Legend has it that Emperor Akbar once received this fabric, wrapped in bamboo, as a tribute to its rare beauty. Today, Chanderi's legacy continues in sarees, suits, and scarves, embodying timeless elegance.

Maheshwari sarees, born from the patronage of Queen Ahilyabai Holkar along the Narmada River, are woven from fine cotton and silk. Their iconic five-striped border adds a classic touch to this luxurious fabric, making each piece a symbol of heritage and grace.

Inspired by ancient Buddhist paintings near Dhar, Bagh prints feature intricate geometric and floral patterns created with finely carved wooden blocks and vegetable dyes. These signature red, black, and white prints adorn sarees, kurtas, lehengas, and high-quality home linens, adding a timeless charm to any wardrobe.

Nandna prints, a tribal block-printing tradition from the Bhil community, are crafted by the Chippa artisans of Tarapur. Dyed with natural pigments, these pure cotton creations narrate stories through floral patterns and scenes from the legendary Dhola Maru.

In Bhopal, discover the regal craft of Zari-Zardozi embroidery, once favoured by the Begums of Bhopal. Intricate gold, silver, and metallic threads, alongside beads and sequins, come together to create dazzling garments, accessories, and home décor that shimmer with royal allure.

Near Ujjain, Bherugarh offers an Indian twist on Batik, using wax-resistant dyeing techniques to create vibrant apparel and linens. Meanwhile, in Jhabua and Alirajpur, artisans craft exquisite bead jewellery that blends traditional styles with contemporary flair, earning accolades across the globe.

Creative Craft

The ancient Dhokra metal-casting technique, perfected by the Gond and Bharia tribes of Betul, brings lifelike brass and bronze figurines of tribal life, animals, and deities to life.

The Turi tribe of Betul and bamboo artisans from Shahdol, Mandla, and Balaghat craft functional treasures like baskets, furniture, and trays, all with a deep reverence for nature, sought by top design houses worldwide.

Gond paintings from Mandla and Dindori capture the beauty of nature in vivid detail, gracing corporate offices and prestigious collections around the globe.

In Indore, artisans create miniature to lifesized animal figures from treated leather, perfecting every curve and posture. Nearby Ujjain is home to stunning Papier Mâché crafts, turning scrap paper into collectable works of art.

Gwalior's Batto Bai dolls, crafted from recycled materials like paper, cloth, and bamboo, showcase eco-friendly craftsmanship.

Even the smallest towns in Madhya Pradesh offer treasures, from vibrant Durries of Sironj to marble art near Bhedaghat, each piece breathing life into any space.

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Serena Hotels Targets Pan-African Growth While Expanding Brand Presence in India

Serena Hotels, one of the leading brands in Africa's hospitality sector, is entering a new phase of strategic growth, driven by innovation and commitment to sustainability. Ashish Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, Serena Hotels Africa, is focused on strengthening brand visibility in emerging markets such as India to support this long-term growth.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

erena Hotels currently operates with a portfolio of 22 properties in six countries of East and Southern Africa, spanning Kenya, Tanzania (including Zanzibar), Uganda, Rwanda, Mozambique, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The hotel chain features an extensive portfolio thoughtfully balanced across city hotels, safari lodges, beach resorts, and wilderness camps, each offering a unique window into the landscapes, cultures, and histories of the destinations.

From gorilla trekking Rwanda to circuit safaris across Kenya and Tanzania, to heritage stays in coastal destinations like Zanzibar, the Serena properties are designed to deliver immersive, seamless, and unforgettable journeys.

A Distinctive Value Proposition

Serena Hotels value for today's evolved traveller lies in its seamless integration of access, experience, and accountability. Explaining further, Ashish shares, "What sets us apart is the consistency of service across our network, where personalised care is delivered with deep regional insight and cultural relevance. Whether you are staying at Polana Serena Hotel in Mozambique, Goma Serena Hotel in DRC, or exploring the Savannah from Mara Serena Safari Lodge, guests experience the same hallmarks of Serena hospitality: local authenticity, comfort, and a deep respect for the surrounding environment."



▲ Ashish Sharma

Indian Guests

Serena Hotels is experiencing a surge of interest from Indian travellers across its East African Safari Circuit, especially from families and groups looking for multi-stop journeys that combine wildlife, culture, and comfort. Ashish responds to this rising demand, "We have enhanced culturally familiar offerings, from Indian and vegetarian cuisine to services tailored for multigenerational travellers. To strengthen our presence in India, we are excited to introduce Anjum Lokhandwala, Director, Ark Travel Group, as our official representative. Her deep industry knowledge will be key to helping us grow our

market access across major cities." Serena Hotels is also collaborating with Indian influencers like Siddhi Karwa and Shivaan Patil to amplify its safari experiences in a more relatable way.

The focus will remain on three key areas: boosting brand visibility through targeted campaigns, expanding co-created itineraries with Indian tour operators, and strengthening presence at major travel trade platforms. "We see immense opportunity in creating deeper, tailored experiences for the Indian traveller. Our new safari to beach coast packages, which combine wildlife, heritage, and relaxation, aim to position Serena as the preferred brand for immersive, cross-border East African travel," notes Ashish.

Digital Innovation and MICE

Serena Hotels is sharpening its digital edge by investing in technology to enhance and simplify the guest journey, from seamless online bookings to upgraded systems for personalized service delivery. Digital marketing continues to play a pivotal role and is also key to reaching new audiences in India, whose travel choices are increasingly shaped online.

According to Ashish, the MICE segment in Africa continues to demonstrate resilience and significant growth. He points out, "At Serena Hotels, several of our city properties are purposefully positioned to meet the evolving needs of this segment. Kampala Serena Hotel, Kigali Serena Hotel, Dar es Salaam Serena Hotel, and Nairobi



Serena Hotel offer spacious, well-equipped conference facilities and experienced event management teams. Their central locations make them preferred venues for diplomatic, corporate, and institutional events. We continue to enhance our infrastructure and service offering to ensure these properties remain at the forefront of Africa's meetings and events landscape."

Sustainability Initiatives

Sustainability is at the core of Serena's operations. Ashish shares his pledge, "We remain committed to long-term sustainability. Our operations are anchored in responsible tourism, with continued investment in clean energy, conservation, and community development."

Several initiatives are in place to promote sustainable tourism at the Serena properties. In Kenya, eco-conscious infrastructure is visible at the Kenya Amboseli Serena Safari Lodge, Kilaguni Serena Safari Lodge, and Mara Serena Safari Lodge, which are run fully powered by solar energy. Serena Beach Resort & Spa and Lake Elmenteita Serena Camp operate on a hybrid model that combines solar power with electricity from the grid. The Kirawira Serena Camp, Mbuzi Mawe Serena Camp, Lake Elmenteita Serena Camp, Sweetwaters Serena Camp, Kigali Serena Hotel, Lake Kivu Serena Hotel, and Kampala Serena Hotel utilise thermal solar heating systems.

Ashish further shares proudly, "Serena Hotels Africa has established a decarbonisation action plan for its operations, aligning with the latest climate science to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This requires an annual reduction in GHG emissions of at least 4.2 per cent from our 2019 baseline until 2030, and to date, we are on target."

For wildlife and biodiversity conservation, the brand partners with the government and NGOs to support habitat restoration and wildlife conservation programmes in key ecosystems where the properties are located. Amboseli





Serena Safari Lodge has successfully transformed the surrounding landscape through a tree-growing initiative, turning previously barren land into a lush, green environment. Reducing waste, minimising the usage of single-use plastics, and recycling water are key priorities for responsible waste management.

Community empowerment is another foundational pillar to encourage local hiring, support small-scale farmers through farm-to-table programmes, and support educational and healthcare programmes to uplift communities.

Nurturing Guest Loyalty

Serena's loyalty strategy is built around delivering consistent value and rewarding returning guests. The flagship loyalty programme, Serena Prestige Club, offers members stay upgrades, exclusive deals, and early access to seasonal promotions. The circuit travel model encourages guests to discover multiple destinations within the brand portfolio while enjoying the same trusted service standards.

New Horizons for African Hospitality

With global interest in Africa's immersive, experience-driven tourism on the rise, there is a significant opportunity to develop regional circuits that encourage longer, multidestination stays. Continued development

Lake Elmenteita Serena Camp



of infrastructure and air connectivity will support this growth and strengthen regional collaboration. The goal is to create cohesive journeys that blend heritage, conservation, and hospitality that actively resonate with today's evolved traveller.

For Serena, the post-COVID focus has been on internal investment to strengthen its core from within. Ashish shares, "Our immediate aim is to enhance associate training, upgrade our products and integrate smart, guest-focused technology that supports a seamless and elevated experience." These foundational improvements are not just upgrades but strategic building blocks designed to enhance brand strength and operational efficiency, setting the stage for sustainable future growth."

Once these internal initiatives are fully realized, Serena will be well-positioned to scale up by exploring strategic collaborations.

Looking ahead, Serena Hotels has identified key markets across Africa as areas of strategic interest. Each expansion will be carefully evaluated based on market potential and brand alignment. With a revitalized foundation and a clear-eyed vision for the future Serena Hotels is focused on increasing brand visibility and strengthening its presence in both regional and international hospitality spheres.





As a celebrated cricket commentator who has travelled extensively across Western Australia, Harsha Bhogle bridges sports and travel in an exclusive conversation with Travel Trade Journal, sharing his first-hand insights to inspire Indian travellers to explore this dynamic destination.

Vartik Sethi

estern Australia impresses tourists not only with its natural wonders but also with the way it combines upscale comfort and adventure. "I was amazed that in Western Australia you can indulge in relaxation without losing the thrill of adventure," Bhogle shared.

A Dance Between Indulgence and Adventure

One morning in Perth, Bhogle boarded a plane for a spectacular aerial tour, a journey that epitomises the region's highend adventure offerings. The flight offers a billionaire's view of Western Australia's beauty. He quipped, "When I was up in the air, I saw a fabulous light, and because of that light the water looked a different shade of blue—like I had landed straight in the Margaret River Brewery," noting that such unique excursions can be a huge draw for incentive groups or leisure clients seeking something extraordinary.

Later, back on land, he found himself savouring a gourmet winery lunch in Margaret River. Surrounded by vineyard vistas, he was struck by the quality of Western Australia's food and wine scene. "At Margaret River, I realised Western Australia could make extraordinary white wines. The food and wine pairing there was

so well thought out, it felt like a five-minute romance story for every dish," he recalled. Whether it is boutique wilderness lodges, or private charters to remote beaches, Western Australia offers plenty of ways to wow upscale travellers.

Beyond the Classics

Western Australia opened Bhogle's eyes to treasures beyond the usual circuits. Drawing parallels to how a foreign traveller with little knowledge about India might view the country, he shared, "Much like people come to India and think only of Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur, I used to see people heading to Sydney and Melbourne, but I want to





show there is so much more to Western Australia."

On a recent trip, he also ventured to Rottnest Island, a short ferry ride from Perth, and found an experience like no other. Famous for its smiling quokkas (tiny marsupials found chiefly in this region), Rottnest charmed him completely. He even joined the trend of taking a 'Quokka Selfie'.

The Swan Valley is Western Australia's oldest wine region, located just outside Perth. Bhogle sampled fresh produce and award-winning wines, all within a short drive from the city. Reminiscing about his multidecade relationship with Western Australia, he shared, "I first visited Perth in 1991, and every time I went back, I took a walk along the river. I never miss that chance."

A Cricketing Connection to Western Australia

Western Australia, and Perth in particular, have featured prominently in Bhogle's commentary career. "Cricket has taken me around the world, and Perth quickly became one of my favourite stops on the circuit," he said. He fondly recalled the historic WACA Ground famed for its pace and bounce where he witnessed memorable India-Australia clashes that forged a mutual respect between the two cultures. "If you had asked people in India what they knew about Perth in the early days, they would have said, 'WACA, pace, bounce.' That was Western Australia's identity," he added. Over the years, this cricketing connection has evolved into a genuine fondness for the destination.

In 1992, Bhogle made history as the first Indian commentator to cover an overseas cricket series in Western Australia. Two standout moments from that tour particularly stayed with him: India's nailbiting one-day encounter against the West Indies, capped by Sachin Tendulkar's seam bowling at a crucial stage, and one of the greatest Test centuries he ever witnessed, a sparkling hundred by a young Tendulkar on his first tour to Western Australia. He vividly remembered the WACA's vastness, central to India's early perceptions of Western Australian cricket.

He noted that sporting ties often spark travel inspiration. The sight of Indian fans at Perth's new 60,000-seat Optus Stadium, cheering as passionately as in Mumbai, underlines how cricket can drive tourism. "When India plays in Perth, you almost feel it's a home game," he observed. As the stands swell with blue jerseys, Indian travellers not only travel to watch this spectacular game between the two countries but they also stay back to explore. Major events like test series and World Cup fixtures serve as catalysts for tourism, and

Bhogle's interaction with visitors has shown him how a cricket pilgrimage can convert into a full-blown Western Australian holiday.

The Role of Sports Tourism

Sports has long been a bridge between India and Australia, and Bhogle believes Western Australia is leveraging this connection effectively. As a commentator, he has seen how a cricket match can boost a city's profile overnight. He noted, "For Indians, cricket is huge, so sportslinked tourism naturally emerged. Perth transformed into a proper Test match venue, and you could see a real culture for watching cricket there." The recent highprofile fixtures, from test matches at Optus Stadium to Big Bash League games, have not only filled stadium seats but also hotel rooms and restaurants. Describing how wholesome a cricketing match can be for spectators in Western Australia, he shared, "I was thrilled to see so many Indians travelling to the new Optus Stadium. The spectator experience was outstanding: you could arrive ten minutes before the match, find your seat easily, and walk back afterwards along the river."

He emphasised that sports tourism is more than just the game, it is about the entire journey. Western Australia's government and tourism bodies recognise this, hosting cricket legends and organising events to promote the state. A cricket-lover might fly to Perth for a match, but once they are there, they are much likely to travel further to see a quokka on Rottnest or head to Margaret River for a day, suddenly the trip becomes much more than cricket.

A Destination for Every Traveller

Western Australia appeals to a broad spectrum of travellers, and this is a message Bhogle stressed the most in his conversation with Travel Trade Journal. Despite its vastness, Western Australia is remarkably accessible. Perth is the closest Western Australian gateway to India, with emerging flight connections that cut down travel time. The convenience makes Western Australia a practical option for



Indian tourists, including those considering their first long-haul trip.

On the ground, Western Australia is easy to navigate and safe, attributes important for family holidays and self-drive enthusiasts alike. He was particularly impressed by the self-drive opportunities, remarking, "A road trip in Western Australia is a joy."

Crucially, Western Australia's cosmopolitan food and culture helped him feel at home even while exploring new frontiers. Perth's dining scene offered everything from modern Western Australian gastronomy. "I urge people not to look only for Indian restaurants as Western Australia offers its fresh produce, brilliant coffees and amazing breads, so you could truly relish how abundant Western Australia is for every kind of traveller," he remarked. Moreover, the warmth of local hospitality and the presence of a vibrant Indian diaspora mean visitors are greeted with a friendly, inclusive atmosphere.

He also pointed out the potential of a significant rise in Indian visitors to Western Australia within a year, fuelled mainly by improved flight connectivity and streamlined visa processes. Moreover, Air India's upgraded fleet, once fully operational on its Far East routes, would make travel simpler and more direct. Combined with growing free trade agreements and support from strategic partnerships like the Quad, these developments can strengthen ties and encourage even more Indians to explore destinations across Western Australia.





In this article you're being taken on a journey across the Sun Moon Lake featuring a soul soothing boat ride, mountaintop cable car, indigenous performances, and a luxurious lakeside hotel. So hold tight as we capture the sensory riches, cultural immersion, and harmonious blend of calm and discovery that this destination offers.

Vartik Sethi

ncircled by undulating green hills, Sun Moon Lake is a sanctuary of serenity that attracts travellers from around the world. As Taiwan's largest and most famous alpine lake, drawing around six million visitors annually, it has earned renown as a must-see scenic attraction. A place where nature's artistry and cultural heritage merge in sublime fashion. The lake's very name is inspired by its shape, one side of Sun Moon Lake's crystalline basin resembles a round sun, the other a crescent moon, a poetic reflection of yin and yang mirrored in tranquil waters. Here you find a celestial panorama of sky and mountains reflected on the lake's surface, a cultural mosaic of indigenous traditions, and a welldeveloped visitor experience that still retains an aura of peace.

Crossing the Lake to Xuanguang Pier

Morning at Sun Moon Lake often dawns in a gentle mist, the lake's surface smooth as glass. Stepping aboard a ferry, visitors begin a picturesque boat excursion across the water. As the boat glides through a tableau of jade-green water and distant layered mountains. This serene boat excursion is not only visually stunning but emotionally soothing which provides a counterpoint to the relentless pace of everyday life.

Depending on the route you take, the ferry's first stop is generally the Xuanguang



Pier, home to the petite Xuanguang Temple perched just above the landing. Disembarking here, the lake's iconic Lalu Island is visible just offshore regarded as sacred ground by the local Thao tribe. From the pier, you can gaze out at this remnant of indigenous heritage framed by shimmering water. Here, enjoying a simple snack while overlooking the ripples of the lake with temple bells faintly chiming nearby makes for a moment that is both sensory and serene. It's a reminder that travel often finds its deepest meaning in small cultural experiences.





Beyond the pier, a short path leads up to Xuanguang Temple itself, a modest lakeside shrine that offers a quiet vantage point. Although modest in size, it holds significant spiritual resonance, as it is dedicated to Master Xuanzang, the renowned Chinese monk who journeyed to India in the 7th century to study Buddhism at its source. Xuanzang spent years traversing the Indian subcontinent, eventually returning to China with an extensive collection of Sanskrit scriptures. He played a pivotal role in translating these texts, thereby enriching East Asian Buddhist thought.

Ascending to the Clouds



Winding away from the pier, a waterfront boardwalk leads towards the Sun Moon Lake Ropeway station. This leisurely walk (around 10 minutes long) is a delightful part of the experience. On one side, gentle waves lap against the wooden planks below, and on the other side you pass small shops, food stalls, and cafes that hint at Taiwan's cultural character. Boarding the Sun Moon Lake Ropeway (also called the Sky Rail) is an experience of both excitement and awe. The cable car system connects the lakeshore with the highlands above, merging 'water, land, and air' in one seamless journey. The gondolas are bright, spacious, and entirely enclosed in glass, offering 360-degree views as they begin their ascent. With a slight jolt, your cabin lifts off from the station and soars upward and suddenly the world below expands in panorama. The turquoise lake shrinks beneath your feet, and each moment more of the surrounding landscape comes into view. A 7-minute ride to the top, covering nearly 1.9 kilometers and climbs to about 1,044 meters above sea level.

The lake's two distinct sections now clearly appear, the Sun side and the Moon side, divided by the tiny speck of Lalu Island far below. The Michelin Green Guide awarded Sun Moon Lake is both visually grand and emotionally uplifting. As for many travellers, this aerial voyage becomes a highlight of their Taiwan travels.

Cultural Immersion at the Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village

On the approach to the upper station, the sky rail crests a ridge and the focus shifts from the lake to the Formosan Aboriginal Culture Village. It is a unique attraction that combines the fun of an amusement park with the richness of indigenous Taiwanese culture. Visitors are greeted by representatives of Taiwan's aboriginal tribes in a vibrant traditional dress, with ornate headdresses proudly on display. The atmosphere is immediately engaging.

One of the first experiences to captivate groups is the schedule of cultural performances. In an open-air amphitheatre or dedicated performance plaza, members of various tribes showcase their heritage through song and dance. As you take a seat, the stage comes alive with energy as soon as the performers emerge in full regalia. The theme of the performances include re-enacting hunting dances, harvest celebrations, and warrior chants passed down for generations. The performers' smiles are genuine as they often invite audience members to join in a simple group dance at the end, a delightful opportunity for visitors to participate and feel the warmth of Taiwan's native hospitality.

Beyond the stage, the Culture Village sprawls across a wooded hillside, divided into areas that represent nine of Taiwan's main indigenous tribes. It's easy to discover authentic replica villages constructed with careful detail to reflect each tribe's architecture and environment. There are wooden longhouses, bamboo stilt huts, stone slate homes, each set in a naturalistic enclave. For travel groups with diverse interests (or families with young ones), this blend of culture and fun is ideal. Yet, the heart of the park remains its cultural mission. In a single visit, one can appreciate how the island's cultural diversity is as beautiful as its offerings which is a message that resonates strongly with travellers seeking enriching experiences.











Lakeside Abode at the Wyndham Sun Moon Lake

After a day filled with exploration and inspiration, a comfortable haven awaits just minutes from the lakeshore. The Wyndham Sun Moon Lake hotel, a newly opened upscale property near Ita Thao, offers guests a refined retreat without compromising the natural connection to Sun Moon Lake's beauty. The hotel takes full advantage of its surroundings with expansive wall of windows frames the lake and mountains, ensure that the serenity of Sun Moon Lake is never out of sight. Most rooms feature a private hot spring pool fed by the region's natural hot springs, an indulgent way to soak and relax after a long day of exploration.

In the span of a day, guests can voyage across calm waters, immerse themselves in local culture and history, feel the adrenaline of ascending into the sky, and then unwind in the lap of lakeside abode. It's a journey that engages all the senses. At Sun Moon Lake, the modern and the ancient, the adventurous and the serene, are not in competition but in concert inviting travellers to slow down and savor the journey, ensuring that when they depart, they carry with them not just photographs, but a touch of Sun Moon Lake's peaceful spirit and a story worth sharing with their friends and family.



Experiencing Iceland: A Journey

Through Fire and Ice







Visiting Iceland was nothing short of stepping into another world, a land where nature unfolds in its most raw, powerful, and beautiful form. From thundering waterfalls and volcanic landscapes to glaciers and serene fjords, every corner of Iceland offered something magical. In Iceland's dramatic landscapes, where fire meets ice, I found not only the sublime force of nature but also a culture steeped in tradition, people radiant with warmth, and a way of life marked by quiet simplicity and deep serenity.

Manisha Singh

Reykjavík: Vibrant Streets, **Arctic Skies**

The journey began in Reykjavík, Iceland's northernmost capital, full of character and culture. Despite its small size, the city offers vibrant streets with colourful houses, cosy cafés, and lively harbour areas. The iconic Hallgrímskirkja Church, inspired by basalt lava flows, provides a panoramic view of the city. Exploring Laugavegur, Reykjavík's main shopping street, one can browse local design shops, bookshops, and taste Icelandic delicacies in family-run restaurants, an experience full of charm and excitement.

The Sun Voyager sculpture, overlooking the ocean, offers a peaceful spot for reflection. By night, Reykjavík transforms with its live music scene, comfy pubs, and, if fortunate, the northern lights dancing in shades of green and violet. Reykjavík seamlessly blends tradition and modernity, making it a destination in itself.

Golden Route to Iceland's **Natural Wonders**

Leaving Reykjavík, my adventure through Iceland's Golden Circle was pure delight. First, I visited Þingvellir National Park, a UNESCO site rich in history and geology, where the world's first parliament was formed and where the North American and Eurasian tectonic plates meet. Next, I saw Geysir, with its Strokkur geyser erupting every few minutes,

shooting boiling water high into the air. Finally, the awe-inspiring Gullfoss Waterfall, a majestic two-tiered cascade, left me speechless with its raw power and beauty.

Down South: Where Waterfalls Roar and Glaciers Whisper

Heading south, travelling along the South Coast, a region rich with black sand beaches, waterfalls, and glaciers, there is Seljalandsfoss, a waterfall one can walk behind, and Skógafoss, one of Iceland's largest and most photogenic falls. The sound of cascading water, mist in the air, and the chance of spotting rainbows made these spots unforgettable.

One of the highlights was visiting the black sand beach of Reynisfjara, near the village of Vík. The mighty Atlantic waves crashing against the black shoreline, with towering basalt columns and sea stacks rising from the water, felt like a scene from a fantasy film. At Sólheimajökull Glacier, the trail led across ancient ice fields etched with blue crevasses and streaked with volcanic ash, stunning, silent markers of Iceland's ever-evolving geological story.

Moving towards the southeast is where one encounters one of Iceland's true gems: Jökulsárlón Glacier Lagoon. Watching giant icebergs float peacefully in the lagoon before drifting into the Atlantic Ocean was a surreal experience. Just across the road is Diamond

Beach, where ice chunks washed ashore shimmer like gems against the black sand.

Eastern and Western Gems: From Serene Fjords to Mystical Volcanoes

The eastern fjords offered a guieter, more remote side of Iceland. Driving through Djúpivogur, Seyðisfjörður, and picturesque towns nestled among mountains and inlets was like discovering hidden secrets. The calm waters of the fjords reflected the surrounding peaks perfectly, and visiting small fishing villages and art galleries that offered a glimpse into local life was truly remarkable.

In the west, there is the Snæfellsnes Peninsula, often called 'Iceland in Miniature' because it offers a bit of everything: lava fields, glaciers, cliffs, and fishing villages. The highlight here is Snæfellsjökull, a glaciercapped volcano famous from Jules Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Earth. The landscape was so mystical that it felt like the land had stories to tell.

Before returning to Reykjavík, I made sure to visit the Blue Lagoon, Iceland's iconic geothermal spa. Soaking in the milky-blue waters surrounded by black lava fields was the perfect way to unwind and reflect on the journey.

About the Author: Manisha Singh is the Deputy General Manager, Icelandair - GSA Bird Travels.



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Air Astana celebrates 20 years in India with new Almaty-Mumbai service

ir Astana commemorated 20 years of connecting Kazakhstan and India with the launch of a new thrice-weekly direct service between Almaty and Mumbai, which commenced on April 20, 2025. The milestone was celebrated with a vibrant reception at the Taj Palace, Mumbai, on April 24, attended by dignitaries, airline personnel, and select members of the travel trade and media.

The evening reception beautifully showcased Kazakhstan's rich cultural heritage, featuring captivating traditional performances that enthralled the audience. A highlight of the evening was the lucky draw, where one fortunate guest won a complimentary round-trip Business Class ticket between Mumbai and Almaty.

























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

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2026

JANUARY 16-17

WEST INDIA

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MARCH 11

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Events







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TTJ TRAVMART Lucknow 2025 draws record participation and trade engagement

TTJ TRAVMART Lucknow 2025 was successfully held at the Regnant Hotel, marking yet another milestone in the series of TTJ's regional travel trade networking events. This year, the show witnessed record participation, drawing 51 exhibitors from across the travel and tourism industry, including leading airlines, cruise lines, hotels, DMCs, travel insurance providers, visa facilitation services, and travel technology companies.

ndia Tourism participated as the Gold Sponsor, while Uttar Pradesh Tourism was the Host State for the event. Malaysia Tourism joined as the International Destination Partner, further elevating the global appeal of the event.

The event commenced with a traditional lamp lighting ceremony in the presence of senior office bearers and representatives of prominent national and regional trade associations, including ADTOI, IATO, TAAI, UPTTA, TAFCA, SKAL, GAEHP, TTW, and BTA, symbolising unity and collaboration within the travel fraternity.

Key presentations were delivered by India Tourism, Uttar Pradesh Tourism, One Above, and Celestyal Cruises, offering valuable insights into destination updates, new products, and partnership opportunities.

Adding excitement to the event, lucky draws were held where Rezbook offered three fully-loaded holiday packages to winners. MONDY India also announced 10 visa service vouchers covering visa fees for 10 lucky attendees, further engaging the crowd.

The event attracted 165 buyers, including 30 hosted buyers from key cities across Uttar Pradesh, such as Kanpur, Rae Bareilly, Gorakhpur, Jhansi, Varanasi, and Basti, ensuring strong regional trade participation and networking opportunities.

TTJ TRAVMART Lucknow 2025 reaffirmed its role as a vital platform for connecting the travel trade, encouraging dialogue, fostering partnerships, and supporting regional tourism growth.





























































Events **E**

























Gaurav Karnik Partner, Swahili Safaris

The event was excellently executed and provided a valuable platform for us to connect with a wide range of enthusiastic and professional travel agents. We at Swahili Safaris were delighted by the strong interest shown in Tanzania as a destination, and are excited about the potential collaborations that lie ahead. Kudos to the TTJ TRAVMART team for bringing together such a meaningful and productive event. We look forward to participating in more such initiatives in the future!



Priyanka Puri

General Manager, IslandLife Maldives

The event was excellent, and overall, the execution was commendable. However, I personally observed that while there were a good number of agents in attendance, many were only meeting with partners they already knew or already conducting business with. As a result, not all exhibitors had the opportunity to engage with the full range of attendees. However, we look forward to attending future events as well.































































Events



















Rajpal Manhas

Head Sales and Marketing, Tourkeys DMC India

The event served as a valuable platform for connecting with travel professionals and industry peers from across the region. Overall, it was a productive and insightful experience that strengthened our regional network and opened doors to promising business opportunities. We look forward to building on these connections and participating in more such interactive events in the future.



Avanish Srivastava

Director, Magic Worldwide Representations

The event proved to be highly beneficial for our B2B vendors, offering valuable insights into the UP market and providing opportunities to connect with new agents. We look forward to participating in future events and exploring more opportunities in the region.



Devang Bhasin

Founder & Director, Mondy India

Although we could not participate earlier, we are grateful that everything aligned perfectly this time. The event was exceptionally well-organised, and the results exceeded our expectations, we recovered our investment within just one week of the show. Our usual conversion rate is around 30 per cent at similar events, but the organiser confidently promised over 90 per cent within a week, and, trust me, they delivered! I would highly recommend participating in all TTJ TRAVMARTs.



Akshay Mehta

Regional Sales Manager North, Central and East India, Travel and I

The event brought together travel partners from cities such as Lucknow, Kanpur, Varanasi, Kannauj, Prayagraj, and several others, an impressive achievement in itself. Organising an event at this scale, enabling travel partners to connect one-on-one with vendors they otherwise search for online, is commendable.



Siddharth Sonkar

AVP Sales North, One Above

We had the opportunity to present our latest offering, DMC Bazaar, to travel partners in Lucknow. At the event, we showcased our ability to deliver a fully detailed travel itinerary, including real-time pricing, wherein we proved that a complete, price-inclusive travel itinerary can be created in only five minutes. Yes, you read that right!



Rahul Sikarwar

Director, Infinity Adventure Travel And Tour Dubai DMC

TTJ TRAVMART in Lucknow was a well-organised and insightful event that provided great networking opportunities for travel industry professionals. The venue was spacious, well-located, and easily accessible. B2B meetings were effectively organised, fostering valuable partnerships. Overall, the exhibition was an excellent platform to explore and connect.























Be Happy Travel & Tourism LLC and TTJ Set Sail for Success at 'Meet & Greet Dubai 2025'

e Happy Travel & Tourism LLC, a Dubai DMC, in partnership with TTJ, hosted the Meet & Greet Dubai 2025 on April 30, 2025, delivering an evening of exclusive networking and hospitality aboard a luxury yacht at Marina Harbour. The event brought together key players from the travel and tourism industry, including partners, professionals, and special guests, for a refined experience set against Dubai's iconic skyline.

The event was marked by seamless hospitality, curated experiences, and a warm atmosphere, perfectly reflecting the professional excellence that Be Happy Travel & Tourism is known for. From complimentary shuttle services to a wellcoordinated boarding experience, every detail was carefully planned and executed.























GRT Hotels and Resorts hosts exclusive meet in Delhi for DMCs



RT Hotels and Resorts hosted an exclusive meet in the capital, bringing together key players from the fraternity for an evening of networking, knowledge sharing, and partnership building. The event witnessed participation from some of the most respected names in the industry, reinforcing GRT's commitment to strengthening its travel trade relationships across the country.

The gathering showcased GRT Hotels' expanding portfolio and innovative experiences across South India, with special emphasis on its award-winning resorts and urban escapes. Guests were also given exclusive updates on new offerings, signature experiences, and the brand's vision for the year ahead.

Speaking on the occasion, Vikram Cotah, CEO of GRT Hotels and Resorts, said, "Our travel trade partners have been integral to our growth journey. Events like these allow us to reconnect, exchange ideas, and explore new possibilities. At GRT Hotels and Resorts, we believe in creating not just stays but stories, and our partners help us take those stories far and wide."

Travstarz Global Group hosts networking evening and training for Agra travel agent partners



ravstarz Global Group, a Trip.com Invested Company, hosted a Networking Evening and Training for its Travel Agent Partners at Hotel Grand Mercure, Agra on April 28, 2025. The event saw a packed crowd with over 35 agent partners joining in for the evening from Agra and surrounding cities.

Pankaj Nagpal, Managing Director, said, "We showcased our entire portfolio of products and destinations, with a special focus on Abu Dhabi, Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Vietnam, Japan, and Georgia, which have been recently added to our DMC list, bringing our total DMC offices to 21 destinations. We already offer unmatched itineraries for the USA and Canada, with over 600 short- and long-haul programs for these countries alone, supported by our headquarters in Los Angeles, USA. We look forward to strong support from Agra for all our DMC locations."

Vice President Vani Singh emphasised Agra's importance and said such events help reconnect with partners and introduce new products. Travstarz plans to expand these events across India, including South India, in the coming months.

Infinity World Tourism and Dubai Holding Entertainment host networking event in Ludhiana

Infinity World Tourism, in collaboration with Dubai Holding Entertainment, successfully hosted a networking event on April 12 at the Lake House restaurant in Ludhiana, bringing together over 60 travel agents from the region. The evening aimed to strengthen travel trade partnerships and spotlight Dubai's latest entertainment offerings, with a special focus on the newly launched Real Madrid World, the world's first football-themed park, celebrating the legacy of Real Madrid with thrilling rides, immersive experiences, and iconic memorabilia.

Led by Amit Soni and Rahul Sikarwar of Infinity Adventure Travel & Tour Dubai DMC, with Sarabjot Singh of Dubai Holding Entertainment, the event promoted Dubai's worldclass entertainment offerings. Infinity World Tourism continues to offer curated travel services and experiences across Dubai.

Established in 2021, Infinity World Tourism offers a comprehensive range of tours, transfers, and travel services in Dubai, including customised holiday packages, sightseeing tours, activities, and visa services.





Ministry of Tourism, India

Senior IAS officer Suman Billa has been appointed Director General (Tourism) in the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. A 1996-batch Kerala cadre officer, he previously served as Additional Secretary in the ministry and held key roles in the state government of Kerala and at the UNWTO in Madrid. Billa brings extensive experience in national tourism policy, sustainable development, and international tourism

cooperation to his new position.



ITDC

India Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) has appointed Mugdha Sinha, IAS (1999 batch, Rajasthan cadre), as its new Managing Director. With over two decades of experience in governance and tourism, Sinha previously served as Director General of Tourism and Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Culture. At ITDC, she will lead key verticals such as The Ashok Group of Hotels and Ashok Travels & Tours, focusing on modernisation,

enhanced hospitality, and promoting India's cultural tourism globally.



IndiGo

IndiGo has appointed **Michael Whitaker**, former Administrator of the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), as an Independent Director on its Board, pending regulatory and shareholder approvals. Whitaker brings over 30 years of aviation expertise, spanning safety, operations, and international regulatory affairs. His past roles include Chief Operating Officer at Supernal, Deputy Administrator at the FAA, and

senior executive positions at United Airlines and Trans World Airlines.



RAKTDA

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) has appointed Vishal Bhatia as India Market Director to strengthen its presence in one of its top five source markets. Based in Mumbai, Bhatia will lead strategy and operations to position the Emirate as a preferred destination for Indian travellers. With over 20 years of experience, including his role at VisitBritain, Bhatia brings deep market expertise and a

collaborative approach to drive growth.



Atmosphere Core

Atmosphere Core has promoted **Ashwin Handa** to Chief Operating Officer, South Asia, marking a strategic move as the company expands across the region. With over 30 years of hospitality experience across India, the Maldives, and Nepal, Handa will now oversee operations in the Maldives, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. He will focus on operational excellence and

deepening the brand's ethos, Joy of Giving, across guest and team experiences.



Fairmont Mumbai

Rajiv Kapoor, General Manager of the newly opened Fairmont Mumbai, launched on April 10, brings with him over 20 years of expertise in luxury hospitality. Having successfully led Fairmont Jaipur, his strategic vision, operational excellence, and award-winning leadership now guide Fairmont Mumbai's entry into the city's competitive luxury market. Rajiv aims to blend Fairmont's timeless elegance

with modern innovation, delivering elevated guest experiences and positioning the hotel as a premier destination.



Udaipur Marriott Hotel

Udaipur Marriott Hotel, the city's first under the flagship Marriott Hotels brand, has appointed Vaibhav Sagar as its new General Manager. With nearly two decades of diverse industry experience, Sagar brings a strong background in hospitality and banking, having held leadership roles at major hotel chains including IHG, Hilton, IHHR, and Radisson. Most recently, he served as GM at Le Méridien Hyderabad, where he

significantly enhanced performance and guest satisfaction.



Sun Siyam Iru Veli

Sun Siyam Iru Veli has appointed Shama Rashid as Assistant Public Relations and Communications Manager. A Maldivian national with a background in PR, media engagement, and tourism marketing, Shama will support the resort's global communication strategies through storytelling and media relations. With prior experience at Pulse Hotels, Villa Group, and the Ministry of

Transport, she brings a strong passion for promoting Maldivian culture and enhancing brand visibility.







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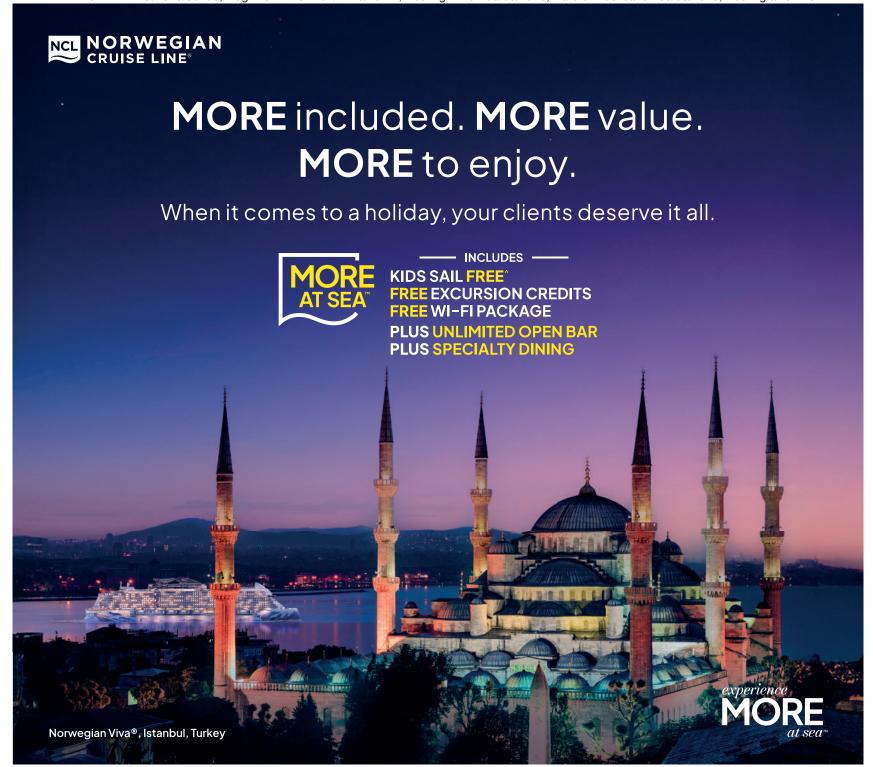
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