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Dear Friends,

We begin this issue on a sombre note, with our thoughts and prayers for all those affected by the Air India incident.

In the July edition of TTJ, we shine a spotlight on domestic tourism, featuring perspectives from State Tourism ministries and travel associations powering the trajectory of domestic tourism in India, which is already on the rise.

This issue features inspiring stories about the Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE), bringing solar electricity to remote Himalayan villages and Eco-Resorts, that are reshaping the narrative of responsible tourism in India. We also mark the rise of Silver Tourism in India, which is quietly reshaping our travel universe.

We do not shy away from asking tough questions and addressing the unsettling impact of geopolitical tensions on global tourism, as well as the direct consequences faced by regions like Pahalgam.

This edition is packed with issues that deserve attention and conversation. We believe it is time to ask ourselves: What is our individual contribution to the future of this industry we hold so dear?

Let us think, engage, and evolve together.

Happy Reading!

*Ravi Sharma*

Ravi Sharma  
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Editor's Desk

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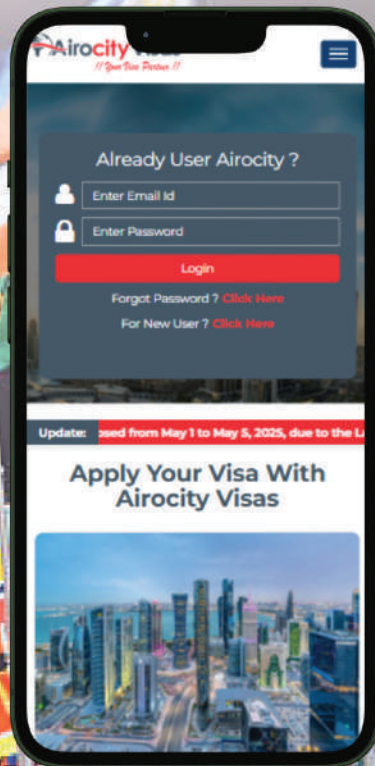


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## The Humpback Highway reopens along Western Australia’s Coral Coast

Western Australia’s iconic

Humpback Highway has officially reopened for the 2025 season, with the first humpback whales spotted off Ningaloo Reef. Coral Bay Eco Tours celebrated their first in-water whale swim, while Ningaloo Discovery reported its first sighting off Exmouth.



From now through November, around 45,000 humpbacks will journey along WA’s coastline. Ningaloo Reef remains the only place in Western Australia where you can swim with them on a guided tour. Small group tours have begun in Coral Bay, with Exmouth tours starting in August.

The season overlaps with the tail end of whale shark season, offering the rare chance to see the Ningaloo Big 5: whale sharks, humpbacks, manta rays, turtles, and dugongs, in one location.

For those staying dry, whale-watching cruises are available from Exmouth, Coral Bay, Kalbarri, and Geraldton. Tours fill quickly, so early booking is recommended. Minimum age requirements vary by operator.

## Asego launches Motorbike Road Trip Protect

As Indian travellers delve deeper into experiential tourism, such as motorbike rides and road trips across the nation, Asego steps up with a bold, first-of-its-kind offering: Motorbike Road Trip Protect, designed to meet the rising demand for safer, worry-free riding adventures.



From long-distance road trips to high-adrenaline trail biking, Asego’s new plan offers riders comprehensive protection, covering accidents, emergency evacuations, outpatient care, breakdown assistance, and even support for family during hospital stays.

Dev Karvat, Founder and CEO, Asego, said, “Motorbike tourism is booming, but adventure should never come at the cost of safety. With Road Trip Protect, we are empowering riders and travel partners alike to embrace India’s incredible road journeys with confidence.”

As adventure travel operators increasingly curate motorbike experiences for both domestic and global tourists, Asego’s latest solution positions itself as a timely game-changer, making India’s growing biking tours safer, more accessible, and fully protected.



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## Hong Kong increases visa and entry permit fees from September 8



The Hong Kong Immigration Department has announced that it will revise fees for visas, entry permits, travel documents, and international despatch services, effective September 8, 2025. The adjustment, pending legislative approval on July 2, is based on the government’s cost recovery and ‘user pays’ principles. A recent review showed that current charges fall short of covering service costs. As a result, fees will rise by 3 per cent to 51 per cent to achieve full cost recovery gradually, with limited impact on most residents and businesses.

The fee for an ordinary visa will increase from HK\$230 to HK\$330, while a transit visa will increase from HK\$120 to HK\$170. Applications for change of condition of stay will also see a rise from HK\$230 to HK\$330. A multiple re-entry permit will cost HK\$210, up from HK\$170, and a re-entry permit valid for one visit will increase from HK\$55 to HK\$70. The fee for an entry permit valid for one entry will also move from HK\$230 to HK\$330. Entry permits for multiple entries valid for one year will be revised from HK\$470 to HK\$670, and those valid for three years will increase from HK\$935 to HK\$1,350. The APEC business travel card (valid for up to five years) will now cost HK\$700, up from HK\$540, and its replacement fee will rise from HK\$210 to HK\$260. The travel pass valid for up to three years will now cost HK\$920, up from HK\$760.

## MMGY Global acquires Think Strawberries, expands into South Asia and the Middle East



MMGY Global, a US-based marketing firm for travel and hospitality, has acquired Think Strawberries (TS), a prominent travel representation and marketing company headquartered in India with a strong presence across the GCC. TS will now operate as MMGY Think Strawberries, marking MMGY’s official entry into South Asia and the Middle East.

Founded in 2011, TS is known for representing top travel brands including the Maldives, Portugal, Disneyland Paris, and Dubai Holding Entertainment. The firm offers comprehensive representation and consulting services, combining marketing, sales, and storytelling to connect global brands with Indian and GCC travellers.

Amit Kishore will serve as Managing Director and Head of Strategy, with Munnmun Marwah and Sanya Zaidi continue leading operations in India and the GCC respectively.

Katie Briscoe, CEO of MMGY Global said, “This investment amplifies our capabilities with deeper local insight, stronger cultural fluency and an on-the-ground network that’s second to none. It’s a bold and intentional step toward building a truly global offering, and we couldn’t be more excited to do it alongside the passionate, proven team at Think Strawberries.”

The addition of Think Strawberries complements MMGY Global’s growing international presence, which now includes 16 global offices and 650 teammates worldwide.

## T. Christuraj IAS takes charge as Director of Tamil Nadu Tourism and MD of TTDC



Senior IAS officer T. Christuraj has been appointed as the new Director of Tourism and Managing Director of the Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC). He succeeds Shilpa Prabhakar Satish IAS, who has been appointed Secretary to the Commercial Taxes and Registration Department

A 2016 batch officer, Christuraj previously served as District Collector of Tiruppur and has held key roles including Commissioner of Salem City Corporation and CEO of Tamil Nadu Maritime Board.

## TripJack appoints Manish Dua as Chief Growth Officer – Hotels and Holidays

TripJack, a leading B2B travel-tech platform, has appointed Manish Dua as Chief Growth Officer – Hotel and Holidays Business. With over 18 years of experience in travel technology and distribution, Manish will lead strategic growth, operational excellence, and long-term value creation. He will focus on strengthening TripJack’s market position, deepening partner relationships, and identifying high-impact opportunities. Collaborating closely with internal teams and external partners, he aims to drive innovation and ensure TripJack remains agile, competitive, and future-ready in a dynamic travel landscape.







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# Better access and affordable travel hold the key to unlocking Northeast India's tourism potential

Arijit Purkayastha, Founder and Director, Koyeli Tours and Travels, Advisor to the Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA), and ADTOI Chapter Chairman, North East, shared insights on how the Northeast is emerging as India's next tourism frontier. Deeply engaged with grassroots operators, he speaks about crafting authentic, community-driven experiences that showcase the region's cultural richness, ecological beauty, and untapped potential for transformative travel.

Prashant Nayak

The Northeast is not just a region; it is a living tapestry woven with delicate precision, each thread representing a unique culture, tradition, and landscape. Spanning the seven states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Tripura, this part of India forms a dazzling mosaic, rich in diversity and alive with stories.

As an advisor and chapter head of leading associations in the Northeast, Arijit has the privilege of working closely with some of the region's most resilient and innovative tour operators – individuals deeply rooted in their communities and passionately crafting exceptional, experience-rich itineraries. Arijit said, "As a proud representative of Assam and the larger Northeast, I can say with conviction that our tour operators do not simply arrange travel; they curate transformative experiences, helping India rediscover one of its most enchanting frontiers."

## Northeast's Transformative Tourism Journey

The region continues to reveal hidden gems that hold immense potential for domestic tourism growth. While iconic destinations like Kaziranga, Tawang, and Shillong have long attracted visitors, it is the emerging circuits that are now poised to redefine the travel map.

"Today, as we reimagine domestic tourism, the Northeast stands as an unparalleled destination that offers not just sightseeing but a deeper connection with India's soul. The rise of river cruises on the Brahmaputra, especially around Guwahati, has grown from niche offerings to mainstream experiences. Sunset and dinner cruises, featuring scenic views, traditional performances, and local cuisine, are redefining urban leisure in Assam by showcasing the river's charm and cultural richness," noted Arijit.

## Slow Travel, Deep Impact

Reflecting on their journey, Arijit said, "Curating and promoting lesser-known



▲ Arijit Purkayastha

destinations across Northeast India has been a core focus of our work. These destinations are thoughtfully designed for the slow traveller, those who seek authenticity over speed and depth over checklist tourism."

Whether it is a forgotten Sattrra on Majuli's quieter side, a tribal craft village in Karbi Anglong, or the serene, bird-rich trails of Garbhanga near Guwahati, the goal is to create spaces that invite travellers to pause, connect, and immerse. Their strategy is rooted in storytelling, community collaboration, and low-impact infrastructure. Rich cultural narratives are shared through blogs, homestay-led experiences, food trails, and seasonal events, amplified via digital platforms, familiarisation trips, and youth workshops that train locals as cultural interpreters.

"The idea is to make tourism a shared act of preservation, where both traveller and host feel seen and enriched. The response has been heartening, with mindful travellers—artists, families, and researchers—returning not just with photos, but with friendships and stories," explained Arijit.

## Rise of Authentic Travel

Emerging destinations like Dima Hasao, Shergaon, and Mechuka are gaining

attention for their cultural richness, natural beauty, and potential for slow, immersive travel. "These places remain under the mainstream radar but offer deeply rooted experiences shaped by indigenous communities and natural heritage," said Arijit.

The growth of homestays, improved connectivity, and increasing interest in sustainable travel are all accelerating their appeal. East Bhutan, accessible via Assam, presents a unique opportunity for cross-border itineraries blending spiritual, scenic, and cultural elements. "What sets these destinations apart is their authenticity – travellers become part of the local narrative, not just spectators," remarked Arijit. With continued focus on capacity building, infrastructure, and curated storytelling, these hidden gems are well-positioned to lead the next wave of responsible domestic tourism.

## Making Northeast India More Accessible

Despite its promise, a significant challenge in promoting domestic tourism in Assam and the Northeast remains cost competitiveness, particularly in terms of airfare and travel flexibility. "Many Indian travellers find it more economical to fly to international destinations like Thailand or Vietnam, where promotional fares and waived visa fees make the overall trip cheaper than exploring the Northeast," pointed out Arijit.

This perception, Arijit explained, discourages domestic travel even though the region offers unmatched cultural depth, ecological diversity, and immersive experiences. "We urge the Government of India and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to introduce key aviation reforms, enhance regional connectivity, and offer targeted airfare subsidies, APEX fares, open-jaw tickets, and travel incentives specifically for the Northeast," suggested Arijit. Such measures, he believes, would significantly increase accessibility and encourage more Indians to discover the region's unparalleled landscapes and heritage.



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# Luxury meets purposeful hospitality at Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection

Nestled in the vibrant Business Bay district along the Dubai Water Canal, Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection, comprising Hilton Dubai Al Habtoor City, V Hotel Dubai Curio Collection by Hilton, and Al Habtoor Palace, offers more than just luxury stays. Soufiane El Allam, Complex Operations and Commercial Director at Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection, shared how the iconic trio of hotels is redefining luxury, sustainability, and personalised service in the heart of Dubai.

Prashant Nayak

## A Modern Approach to Luxury Hospitality

Having spent a significant part of his career in luxury hospitality, Soufiane El Allam's leadership style has evolved into a people-focused approach driven by productivity and financial performance, complementing operational excellence. Soufiane shared, "My management style has become more people-focused and perceptive, understanding that achieving business success relies not only on tradition, precision, and delivering exceptional service but also on maximising revenue, controlling costs, and driving sustainable growth. I consider operational discipline a key driver of profitability."



▲ Soufiane El Allam

## A Global Culinary Journey

From Mediterranean and Mexican flair to Indian spices, the hotels' restaurants present a curated journey across continents. Carefully crafted menus offer authenticity while catering to individual preferences. "We strive to create personalised dining experiences without compromising the integrity of traditional cuisines," explained Soufiane.

Sustainability is also central. From responsibly sourced ingredients to energy-efficient kitchens and reduced single-use plastics, the Collection's dining venues are as mindful as they are memorable.

## Making Every Celebration Inclusive and Seamless

Dubai's multicultural fabric is reflected in the way it hosts events. With a diverse team of event managers and chefs well-versed in various traditional cuisines, they offer a wide range of options and tailored support.

"Whether it is a lavish Arabic celebration, an elegant European dinner, or a traditional Indian wedding, we make sure our clients feel heard and honoured. Our versatile venues, from grand ballrooms to intimate spaces, can host everything from small gatherings to large ceremonies. We also offer customised event packages and innovative entertainment options to deliver an unforgettable experience beyond the celebration itself," said Soufiane.

## Suites That Speak of Elegance and Identity

Each of the three hotels brings its unique character to the guest experience. At V Hotel Dubai, travellers are drawn to round beds and futuristic aesthetics. At Hilton, rooms with freestanding bathtubs offer stunning views of the city. At the same time, Al Habtoor Palace delights with Diptyque

amenities, butler service, and exclusive themed suites, such as the Bentley and Churchill suites.

## Tailored Services for the Modern Business Traveller

Business travellers are not overlooked. From high-speed internet and executive lounges to flexible check-in and shuttle services, the properties are designed for productivity and comfort. Fitness facilities, spa services, and lifestyle options ensure a holistic stay, whether guests are attending meetings or mixing work with leisure. "We understand the evolving needs of business guests - efficiency is essential, but so is wellness," noted Soufiane.

## Signature Experiences Beyond the Expected

Guests can enjoy an array of curated experiences, from a golf simulator session at Ribs and Brews to padel tennis at Al Habtoor Sports Hub. Abra rides on the Dubai Water Canal provide a scenic perspective of the city, while La Perle, the region's first resident live show, dazzles audiences at V Hotel. For a taste of adventure, Al Habtoor Palace offers a VIP desert safari designed to leave a lasting impression.

## A Vision for the Future

As Dubai continues to innovate, so does the Al Habtoor City Hotel Collection. The focus is on deepening guest engagement, integrating digital tools, and reinforcing its sustainability ethos. "Our aim is to remain a landmark in Dubai's hospitality landscape, surprising and delighting guests while staying true to our essence," emphasised Soufiane.

With an eye on global trends and local authenticity, Al Habtoor City's hotels are well poised to lead the future of luxury hospitality in Dubai and beyond.







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# Goa moves beyond beaches with bold push into hinterland tourism and regenerative travel

As Goa continues to charm travellers with its coastal beauty, Kedar Naik, Director of Tourism, Goa Tourism Department, shares how the state is shifting towards a deeper, more conscious tourism model rooted in regeneration, culture, and community.

Prashant Nayak

Once known solely for its sun, sand, and surf, Goa is now emerging as a leading example of responsible, experience-led tourism in India. The Department of Tourism has redefined its strategy to highlight the state's rich hinterlands, spiritual heritage, and community-based experiences, ushering in a bold new era of Regenerative Tourism.

## A Regenerative Vision for the Future

The Department of Tourism, Goa, has actively redefined its strategic focus by promoting Regenerative Tourism, a progressive model that goes beyond sustainability. Through the 'Goa Beyond Beaches' initiative, they have spotlighted hinterland experiences, eco-tourism, spiritual circuits, and the Ekadasha Teertha. Kedar said, "Our efforts are complemented by targeted digital campaigns, regional travel exhibitions, and collaborative promotions with travel influencers to appeal to conscious domestic travellers seeking immersive and authentic experiences. Additionally, the key campaign #GlowOnArrival launched during the monsoon season positions Goa as a destination for renewal, wellness, and cultural immersion. It highlights forest treks, heritage walks, yoga and Ayurvedic retreats, and locally-run homestays, encouraging slow, mindful travel."

## From Policy to Practice

Goa is said to be the first state in India to formally adopt the Regenerative Tourism approach, which integrates economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Kedar reiterated, "Our policies promote low-impact travel, community stewardship, eco-friendly accommodations, and green initiatives. Cleanliness drives, plastic-free campaigns in tourist areas, and awareness in collaboration with panchayats further ensure that tourism growth is aligned with Goa's ecological and cultural preservation goals."

The Department has established an ecosystem that promotes community-based tourism, particularly through its certified homestay programme and capacity-building initiatives. GTDC also works closely with private operators to curate trails and



▲ Kedar Naik

travel itineraries, ensuring that the tourism value chain benefits local communities. "We maintain continuous dialogue and engagement with stakeholders," asserted Kedar.

## Discovering Goa Anew

The state is actively promoting emerging destinations in the hinterlands, such as Chorao and Divar Island, Sanguem, Mollem, and Valpoi, as well as other hinterlands across North and South Goa. Kedar added, "Through curated experiences like heritage walks, culinary trails, and hinterland circuits, we offer travellers a deeper connection with Goa's culture and environment. Wildlife tourism in sanctuaries such as Cotigao and Mhadei, along with kayaking, trekking, and nature-based adventures, is gaining traction. Additionally, wellness tourism is a growing segment, supported by collaborations with reputed institutes like the All-India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA) in Goa."

## Goa's Strategic Push for Domestic Tourism

To promote travel from other Indian states to Goa, the department undertakes state-specific outreach campaigns, participates in interstate travel marts, and collaborates with travel associations, regional tour operators, and influencers from key markets. Partnerships with Airbnb, Mastercard, Make

My Trip, and many more have strengthened the state's commitment and visibility. Goa's Hop-On Hop-Off bus service and Let'sGoa App are significant value additions that are often promoted in these tie-ups to facilitate planning for inbound and domestic travellers.

## Revitalising Goa: New Museums, Connectivity, and Cultural Spaces

To enhance accessibility and appeal for domestic tourists, Goa is undertaking key infrastructure upgrades. The operational MOPA Airport has boosted connectivity, while road improvements to hinterland destinations are underway. Modern tourist information centres and public convenience facilities are also being developed. The historic Aguada Jail has been transformed into an interactive digital museum showcasing Goa's colonial and liberation history through 3D maps, AR/VR storytelling, and holograms, complemented by café and kiosk amenities. These immersive experiences promote regenerative tourism and encourage exploration beyond beaches.

The newly developed Porvorim Town Square offers amphitheatres, artisans' workshops, and cultural spaces to support local talent and year-round engagement. Further adding to Goa's cultural landscape is the upcoming Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Digital Museum featuring AR, VR, 5D theatre, holograms, and themed galleries, slated to open by March-April 2026. Together, these initiatives support high tourist footfall while promoting experiential, heritage-driven travel across Goa's interior regions.

## Prioritising Traveller Safety

In today's interconnected world, traveller safety is a cornerstone of tourism excellence. Goa recognises this by integrating technology, trained personnel, and real-time support systems to ensure every visitor feels secure and well-supported.

Kedar shared, "The Tourist Helpline 1364, operational 24/7, assists tourists in distress. We have also deployed the Let'sGoa App + portal, which allows tourists to access information, itineraries, and emergency services. Training programmes for frontline staff, Drishti lifeguards, and tourism police have further reinforced our commitment to a secure and seamless visitor experience."



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# Madhya Pradesh crafts an inclusive, immersive, and transformative travel narrative

Madhya Pradesh is crafting a distinct travel identity rooted in its rich culture, stunning natural landscapes, and vibrant local communities. Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB), outlines how the state is emerging as a frontrunner in inclusive and conscious tourism.

Prashant Nayak

From tiger trails and tribal homestays to spiritual retreats and sound-and-light shows, Madhya Pradesh is redefining the travel experience, emerging as a model for year-round, purpose-driven tourism in India.

## Reimagining Travel for Indians

MPTB has launched a series of targeted initiatives to promote domestic travel by enhancing accessibility, enriching experiences, and deepening engagement with local culture and nature.

Shukla shared, “Key among these is the ‘Moh Liya Re’ campaign, which captures the emotional essence of Madhya Pradesh, highlighting destinations like Tamia, Orchha, Mandu, Amarkantak, and Pachmarhi. The state also became the first in India to host a Spiritual and Wellness Summit in Ujjain, under the ‘Heal in India’ initiative, positioning itself as a hub for yoga, Ayurveda, and spiritual healing. To attract new-age travellers, we are expanding adventure and river tourism through Narmada cruises, eco-trails, and biking expeditions, while supporting over 600 certified homestays across rural and tribal regions.”

## Grassroots Collaborations Fuel the Journey

With over 600 government-registered homestays, the state’s Responsible Tourism Mission and Rural Tourism Program have empowered local communities while opening up immersive experiences for visitors. Villages are being transformed into cultural showcases, offering folk performances, craft workshops, nature trails, and regional cuisine.

“We believe tourism must benefit everyone involved. Skill-building, especially for women and youth, is integral. From local tour operators to artisans and homestay hosts, everyone is part of the tourism value chain,” explained Shukla.

## Offbeat, Authentic, and Aspirational

Madhya Pradesh is spotlighting lesser-known destinations from its UNESCO Tentative List, like Khooni Bhandara in Burhanpur, the Rock Art of Chambal, Chausath Yogini Temples, and Gond monuments of Ramnagar, to attract domestic travellers seeking unique, immersive



▲ Sheo Shekhar Shukla

experiences. The state is also diversifying through niche segments like eco-circuits, night safaris, and community-run camps across six tiger reserves for wildlife lovers, curated heritage trails, sound-and-light shows, and tribal art in places like Orchha, Mandu, and Chanderi for culture seekers, trekking, rafting, and paragliding in Satpura, Pachmarhi, Orchha, and Maheshwar for adventure enthusiasts and wellness offerings in Ujjain and Amarkantak where yoga, Ayurveda, and meditation converge.

“By integrating culture, nature, and wellness, Madhya Pradesh is building a more inclusive and year-round tourism model rooted in authenticity and sustainability,” asserted Shukla.

## Strong Partnerships, Seamless Access

Strategic partnerships with platforms like MakeMyTrip, IndiGo, and IndiaHikes have enabled the state to broaden its appeal among interstate travellers. Initiatives like Pink Toilets for women, new trekking circuits, and heritage restoration demonstrate how these partnerships extend beyond promotion - they build infrastructure and improve the traveller experience.

The recently launched PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva has enhanced air connectivity between key cities like Bhopal, Jabalpur, Satna, and Ujjain. New airports at Satna and Datia, as well as metro connectivity in Indore,

and expressways such as the Narmada Expressway and Chambal’s Atal Progress Way further ensure last-mile connectivity to even remote destinations.

## Rooted in Sustainability and Purpose

To promote responsible domestic tourism, the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has made sustainability a core focus through its Responsible Tourism Mission. From eco-retreats in Tamia, Gandhisagar, and Madhai to certified homestays in rural areas, the Board supports low-impact, community-driven travel. Initiatives like the Responsible Souvenir Project, traveller education campaigns, and partnerships with organisations like Pashoo Pakshee help train locals in guiding, crafts, and hospitality, ensuring tourism benefits both people and the planet.

Shukla stated, “These integrated efforts reflect a balanced approach that benefits both the environment and host communities, making Madhya Pradesh a model for sustainable domestic tourism.”

## Safety, Technology to Enhance Visitor Experience

Through the Safe Tourism Destinations for Women initiative, over 50 destinations have been upgraded with security infrastructure, with more than 40,000 women trained in self-defence. Digital advancements include QR-based audio guides, multilingual tours, and pilot projects for AI-driven WhatsApp assistance. Shukla added, “We are not just making travel safer, we are making it smarter. From e-permits for forest reserves to mobile-based booking systems for homestays, we are leveraging technology to make travel seamless and empowering.”

## A State with Vision and Momentum

With a supportive tourism policy that offers single-window clearances and investment incentives across wellness, heritage, film, and adventure tourism, Madhya Pradesh is not just maintaining momentum; it is setting new benchmarks. As Shukla stated, “With sustained government focus, strong stakeholder collaboration, and innovative destination development, Madhya Pradesh is not just maintaining its momentum-it is setting new benchmarks in domestic tourism.”





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# The GROWING TRIBE of SILVER TRAVELLERS changing the TRAVEL GAME

It is early morning in Kyoto, and under a canopy of cherry blossoms, a group of Indian travellers in their 60s and 70s gather for a guided meditation session. Later, they will head to a local market for a culinary tour, followed by a soak in an Onsen. This is not a retirement dream; it is the new reality of ‘Silver travellers’ embracing travel in their golden years. TTJ explores this phenomenon, asking industry leaders what makes this demographic tick, the trends fuelling its rise, and how India’s travel sector is waking up to its immense potential.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla



▲ GB Srithar



▲ Dipti Varma Narain



▲ Nishant Chaudhary



▲ Gaurav Kumar

Welcome to the world of Active Silver Tourism, a quietly growing yet powerful force in the global travel industry. According to ResearchAndMarkets.com, the market is expected to rise from \$1.72 trillion in 2024 to \$2.62 trillion by 2030, growing at a strong compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.3 per cent. With the Asia-Pacific region accounting for more than half of the global share, the 60-plus age group of high-spending, time-rich travellers is stepping into the spotlight, not as passive vacationers, but as active explorers.

## Defining the Demographic

GB Srithar, Head of Tourism Services at VFS Global, views Silver Tourism as travel by those in their late 50s and beyond, often still working or recently retired, with the time, means, and desire to explore the world on their own terms. “They prefer stretched-out, leisurely holidays and seek journeys that are enriching, well-paced and immersive, that enable a deeper engagement with a destination,” Srithar says.

It is a subject that resonates deeply with Dipti Varma Narain, Founder,

The Silver Surfers Club. She shares, “As we have seen first-hand, this dynamic demographic is redefining travel. This is a reawakening of wanderlust in life’s second act.” Dipti believes that silver travellers are no longer on the fringes; they are shaping the industry’s direction, and over the next decade, they will influence everything from product design to how destinations market themselves.

For Nishant Chaudhary, Founder, Travel Seasons, Silver Tourism is more than a market segment; it is a philosophy rooted





in care, comfort, and conscious travel for individuals aged 60 and above. “Our guests have spent decades working, raising families, and supporting others. Now, they want to invest in themselves through travel that feels safe and meaningful. Often retired or semi-retired, this group finally has the time, financial freedom, and emotional readiness to explore the world.”

Gaurav Kumar, Founder, Phurr Tours, defines the segment as curated travel for those aged 50 and above with comfort, safety, and cultural engagement as top priorities. “Unlike younger travellers chasing adventure or budget options, seniors travel smarter with care, curiosity, and comfort,” he says. With improving health and a lifelong bucket list in hand, they seek well-planned itineraries, cultural immersion, and camaraderie.

### Boomers On the Move!

There has been a marked rise in interest from older travellers, especially post-pandemic, highlighting a shift driven by intent, rather than impulse. Srithar observes, “From spa retreats and yoga getaways to culinary trails and heritage walks, older travellers are seeking depth and comfort. Multi-destination trips that blend leisure with light adventure are on the rise, often timed during off-season for a quieter, more reflective pace.”

In 2024 alone, senior-only departures to Europe have doubled at Travel Seasons, with new itineraries built entirely around comfort and culture. “Some clients tell us - We have waited long enough and it is our time now,” shares Nishant, who sees growing interest in destinations like Dwarka, Ayodhya, Kerala, Japan, Egypt, and Bali.

At Phurr, too, the trend is unmistakable. “The modern seniors are not limiting themselves to pilgrimages; they are curious, intentional, and often more excited to explore than younger travellers,” says Gaurav. Ladakh, Arunachal, and Meghalaya are popular domestically, while Vietnam, Kenya, Bali, and Europe top the international list.

In agreement, Deepti adds, “Older adults in India are embracing travel as a lifestyle.

From Kashmir and Coorg to Japan and Myanmar, they are choosing journeys that are immersive, meaningful, and soulful. The common thread is connection over consumption.”

### Travel, Reimagined for Seniors

Travel for the silver segment is being thoughtfully reimagined across the board. At VFS Global, GB Srithar shares, “We collaborate closely with client destinations to design offerings that align with the evolving needs of the silver traveller, who values comfort, clarity, and well-paced experiences.” Wellness holidays now include gentler activities, rest days, and accessible stays. Scenic train rides, late starts, shorter transfers, and smaller groups are adjusted for ease. Srithar also notes the rise of ‘active silvers’ who seek soft adventure, from hot air ballooning to tandem skydiving.

Dipti’s approach at The Silver Surfers Club centres around ease, warmth, and personalisation with later starts, engaging local hosts, and single-friendly accommodations. “It is about keeping things gentle yet joyful. We thoughtfully tailor every aspect. The experiences we create, to the pace we set, everything is crafted to suit the unique needs and preferences of our seniors,” Dipti says.

At Travel Seasons, itineraries are designed with familiarity, mobility, and emotional connection at the core. Their soft-paced tours include fewer hotel changes, coach support, and dedicated tour managers from Delhi. Nishant recalls a Vietnam tour where the team organised a surprise 50th anniversary celebration for a couple, complete with video messages from family, and it turned a regular group trip into an unforgettable experience.

For Gaurav, this has been the core mission from the start. Phurr focuses on accessibility, seamless logistics, and balanced itineraries with space to rest and



*The Silver Surfers Club in Iceland*

reflect. He says, “It is about constantly refining what brings ease and joy to our travellers.” Local interactions, wellness elements, and immersive, unhurried experiences are carefully crafted into every journey.

### The Silver Bucket List

Silver travellers are redefining what matters most on the road, blending comfort, culture, and emotional fulfilment. Nishant calls it ‘a beautiful blend of priorities.’ He explains, “For our guests, luxury means comfort, respect, and seamless care. Heritage experiences, like meeting artisans in Kutch or attending private classical music evenings in Kerala, are increasingly sought after.”

GB Srithar echoes the emphasis on depth and well-being. “Wellness retreats alone made up over 34 per cent of global silver tourism in 2024,” he notes, highlighting the growing demand for travel that restores both body and spirit. Luxury, for this group, often means ‘affordable luxury’; it encompasses thoughtful details, ample space, and comfort. Many are also exploring genealogy travel to reconnect with their roots.

Dipti points to a similar shift in preference. While value is appreciated, there is a strong tilt towards comfort and curation. Wellness is about how travel makes them feel mentally and emotionally uplifted. She adds, “Heritage, of course, is also close to



*The Silver Surfers Club in Korea*



the heart, and we are seeing more interest in journeys that trace roots, stories, or forgotten histories.”

Gaurav offers a nuanced take: “While silvers value comfort and are willing to spend, they are not chasing luxury in the traditional sense.” At Phurr, travellers prefer peace, personal care, and meaningful pacing. Heritage and wellness are central pillars, but he sees a rise in intergenerational trips designed to create shared, lasting memories across age groups.

## Logistical Challenges and Safety

“Yes, challenges do crop up, but they require sensitivity, not shortcuts,” says Nishant. Common concerns like medical needs, mobility differences, and the balance between independence and support are addressed through flexible planning, extra rest stops, vehicle-based sightseeing, and a ‘choice-of-the-day’ module that allows travellers to opt for downtime or activity. Travel insurance is firmly encouraged. He recalls a guest in Europe developing a knee issue, and thanks to local partners, a doctor arrived promptly, allowing the trip to continue smoothly.

Dipti asserts strongly that health and safety are non-negotiable. She is seeing a growing demand for travel insurance, on-call medical support, and customised meals. “We see these not as challenges, but as areas of care. Through deep planning, trusted partnerships, and an empathetic team on the ground, we build trust into every journey,” she says.

Gaurav echoes this view, especially when it comes to healthcare in offbeat or international destinations. At Phurr, travel insurance is essential, dietary needs are taken into account, and medical concierge services are available as needed. “Peace of mind is non-negotiable,” he says.

Srithar considers these needs as opportunities, not limitations. “Improvements made for older travellers end up benefiting everyone. Safety, healthcare access, and dietary needs are no longer extras; they



Travel Seasons Group Tours

are essentials,” he affirms. Increasingly, destinations are responding with step-free access, proximity to medical care, diabetic-friendly menus, and wellness-trained staff.

## Tech Savvy Silvers

Silver travellers are steadily adopting digital tools to enhance their travel planning. Dipti shares, “They may not be digital natives, but they are digital adopters.” She notes a sharp rise in seniors browsing itineraries via WhatsApp, joining online sessions, and sharing travel photos digitally. Convenience and clarity, she adds, are key drivers of this shift.

Nishant calls it a quiet digital revolution with many seniors now browsing itineraries online, watching destination videos, and even posting Google reviews with pride. While they still value personal conversations, digital tools have become an integral part of their journey.

Gaurav agrees, describing his silver clients as ‘surprisingly engaged.’ They actively use WhatsApp, email, and social media to explore travel ideas, though many prefer human guidance at the time of booking. “A well-written PDF or a personal call can make all the difference,” he adds.

GB Srithar observes that some older travellers are so digitally adept that they qualify as ‘mobile natives.’ “From comparing itineraries to watching travel content, their digital engagement is growing. Their research is more thorough than that of younger travellers,” he notes. While some

hesitate with online payments, a hybrid approach of digital discovery followed by expert validation is preferred.

## The Role of Tourism Boards

Stakeholders across the travel industry agree that the silver travel segment is quietly reshaping how travel is delivered. According to the World Health Organisation, the global population aged 60 and above is expected to reach 1.4 billion by 2030 and over 2 billion by 2050; a demographic shift that will profoundly shape the future of travel. While encouraging steps are being taken, are the needs of this discerning demographic being met?

Srithar shares that destinations are beginning to recognise the value of silver travellers, not just in numbers but in how they travel. “It is not about special treatment, it is about thoughtful inclusion,” says Srithar. He also stresses the importance of age-positive storytelling to inspire both the industry and older travellers.

Dipti believes that progress is underway, but limited. “The conversation has begun, but we have only just scratched the surface,” she says, calling for greater visibility of seniors in tourism campaigns, age-friendly trails, and inclusive infrastructure by design, not as an afterthought.

Nishant echoes this sentiment, noting that while awareness is rising, on-ground execution is lacking. He advocates for dedicated campaigns, staff training in senior care, and certified Silver Tourism products grounded in empathy and comfort.

Gaurav sees the intent, but urges action. He asserts, “This segment is shaping how travel is experienced, and it is time for policymakers to lead with intent and empathy.” He believes strong public-private partnerships are key to building an ecosystem that truly welcomes silver travellers.

As older adults reclaim their passports with purpose and passion, they will soon be influencing everything from trip design to industry values. For the travel industry, the message is clear: the future is silver, and it is time to get ready.

Phurr Tours





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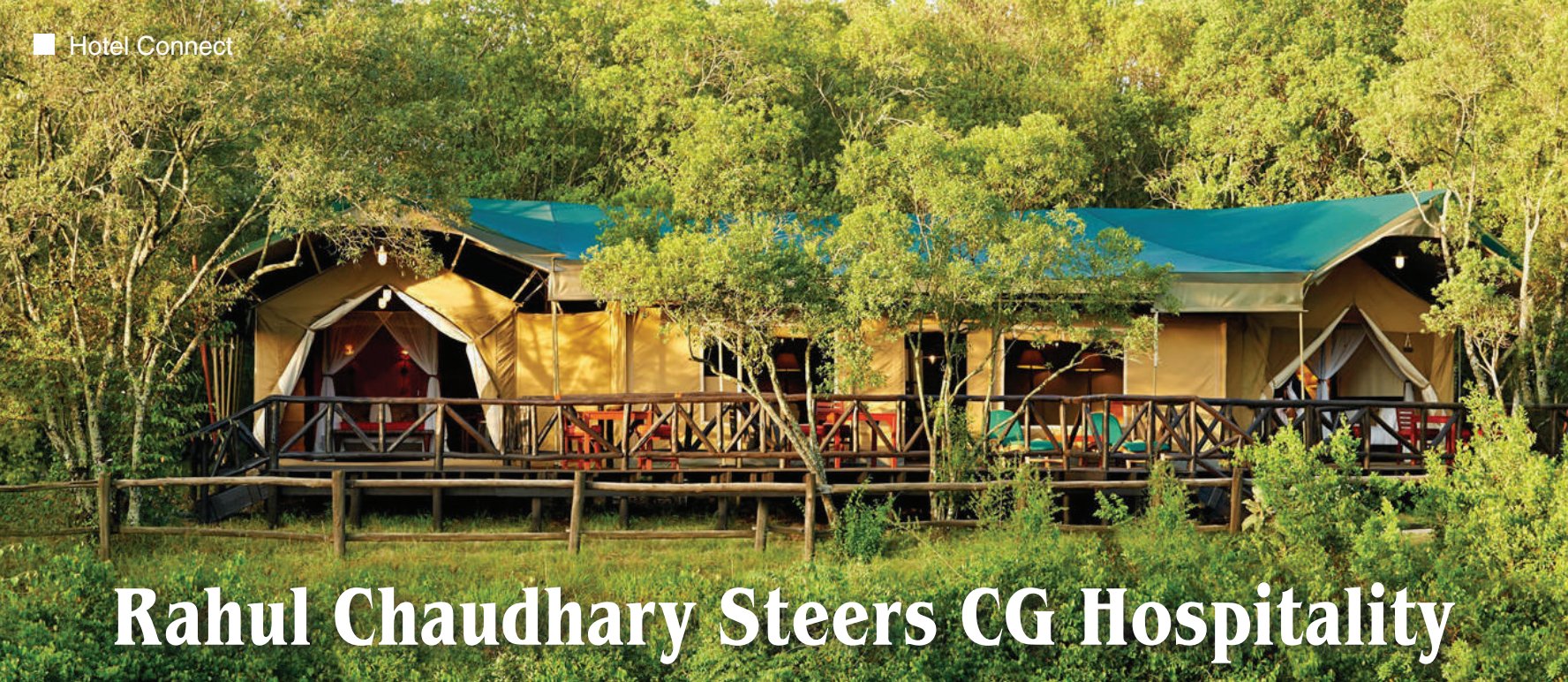


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# Rahul Chaudhary Steers CG Hospitality

## Towards Ambitious Goal of 700 Hotels by 2030

Rahul Chaudhary, Managing Director, CG Corp Global and Chief Executive Officer, CG Hospitality Holdings, is quietly reinventing his family legacy into one of the world's most distinctive experience-led hospitality portfolios, with a growing presence across Nepal, India, Southeast Asia, and Africa. In conversation with TTJ, he shares his bold vision for CG Hospitality, the values guiding its evolution, and how legacy, when paired with ambition, is a powerful tool for reinvention.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

**W**hat began in the late 1800s as a textile venture of Chaudhary Group (CG) in Nepal has since evolved into one of South Asia's most influential business conglomerates. CG Corp Global today operates a vast multinational network of over 160 companies and 123 brands, spanning industries as diverse as FMCG, electronics, energy, real estate, financial services, telecom, biotech, construction, just to name a few.

Launched in 2001, the group's hospitality arm, CG Hospitality, has grown into a formidable player on the global stage, with a presence in over 12 countries and 91 destinations, scaling with a sharp focus on experience-driven and culturally rooted hospitality. In his capacity as CEO, Rahul oversees more than 190 hotels across 12 countries, curating wellness retreats, eco-conscious resorts, and culturally immersive properties. As a third-generation entrepreneur leading a billion-dollar empire, Rahul is placing Nepal on the global hospitality map while betting big on India as the centre of wellness travel.

### Iconic Brand Partnerships

A core pillar of CG Hospitality's success is its strategic alliances with some of the world's most iconic brands, including Taj, Radisson, Marriott, and Fairmont. Rahul believes that partnering with these global iconic brands gives them the unique advantage of blending world-class standards with deep local authenticity. Explaining further, he says, "These collaborations let us offer guests superior service, advanced technology, and access to renowned loyalty programmes while accelerating our growth across India's expanding market. By leveraging our partners' global reach and brand strength, we are able to introduce innovative concepts, expand into new cities, and consistently deliver quality. In my experience, this approach makes CG Hospitality a top choice for our guests."

Experience-led hospitality has also become a defining trait of CG Hospitality, especially through niche brands like Zinc Journey, Fern, Miraaya, and Ekho. Sharing his commitment to curating immersive, locally rooted experiences for his clients, Rahul asserts, "We believe every destination has its own unique story, and that is what we aim to bring to life at our properties. By immersing ourselves in the local heritage, cuisine, and community, we create experiences that feel both authentic and memorable. As a brand, we emphasise storytelling, collaborating with local partners, and practising sustainability. This approach resonates with today's Indian travellers, especially the younger generation, who are seeking genuine connections. The reason why our hotels in heritage and emerging destinations are so well-loved is that they are thoughtfully designed to offer the perfect blend of modern comfort and local character."

### The Wellness Pivot

Under Rahul's leadership, CG Hospitality has moved beyond conventional hotels to offer conscious retreats, spiritual journeys, and deep cultural immersion through its Zinc Journey, Fern, Miraaya, and Ekho brands. Following the success of The Farm at San Benito (Philippines), Rahul is now bringing Marriott's Autograph Collection to India. It is a first-of-its-kind wellness resort merging ancient Indian wisdom with global luxury.

Rahul Chaudhary



Sharing the news, he says, “We are excited about our partnership with Marriott to bring India its very first Autograph Collection wellness resort. This project is inspired by the incredible success of The Farm at San Benito in the Philippines. While it is still in the early stages and too soon to share all the details, our goal is to blend India’s rich wellness traditions with modern luxury. By building on The Farm’s award-winning approach, we want to put India on the global wellness map, offering guests truly transformative stays while supporting local communities and setting new benchmarks for sustainable hospitality.”

With this pivot, CG Hospitality is positioning itself to serve the demands of a new generation of travellers who prioritise wellness, spirituality, and sustainability. Properties across its portfolio are now thoughtfully curated to offer holistic wellness programmes, environmentally conscious operations, and deeply immersive spiritual experiences. A prime example is The Farm at San Benito, renowned for its focus on integrative healing, organic cuisine, and mindful living. With this approach, CG Hospitality has struck a chord with today’s Indian travellers in search of meaningful, experience-led stays.

### Investing in Nepal’s Spiritual Destinations

CG Hospitality is also deepening its footprint in Nepal by investing in, and bringing premium hospitality to culturally and spiritually significant destinations in Nepal, from Vivanta Kathmandu to the soon-to-be-launched Vivanta Lumbini. The brand is redefining how premium hospitality can align with cultural context. “A strong sense of place is at the heart of everything we do. In Nepal, we are designing hotels that reflect local architecture, traditions, and natural beauty. Whether it is the bright energy of Kathmandu or the spiritual calm of Lumbini, we aim to deliver an authentic connection,” adds Rahul. These properties are thoughtfully designed, often in collaboration with local artisans, and aim to preserve and celebrate Nepal’s unique heritage.

### Responsible Hospitality

At the heart of CG’s growth strategy lies its stellar commitment to social impact. Sustainability and community empowerment play a pivotal role in their brand policy, and through the CG Foundation, it champions green building, energy efficiency, and community engagement across all their properties. Rahul says, “For us, giving back is a core value, and we tailor our initiatives to fit regional needs, ensuring our growth uplifts communities wherever we operate. We are proud to have partnered with reputable organisations such as the Melinda Gates Foundation, Jack Ma Foundation, Tata Trusts, and PwC Foundation on projects spanning disaster relief, healthcare, and women’s empowerment. As a family, each of us is hands-on with the Foundation, and we are all committed to making a real, lasting difference and giving back to the community that supports us.”

### Competitive Edge

Though India’s hospitality market is both vast and fiercely competitive, Rahul is clear on what gives CG Hospitality the winning edge. He asserts, “We stand out because we blend global expertise with authentic local experiences. Our partnerships with iconic brands like Taj, Marriott, and others enable us to bring world-class standards to both mid-scale and luxury segments. We are quick to adapt to changing market trends and always prioritise guest-centric innovation. Above all, our track record of entering untapped markets and building strong community partnerships gives us a competitive



edge in India’s fast-evolving hospitality landscape.”

### Future Focus

Rahul shares his vision of shaping CG Hospitality into a truly global group that is rooted in its brand legacy, yet remains adaptable and entrepreneurial

in spirit. He affirms, “My goal is to reach 650 to 700 hotels by 2030, especially across Asia and other fast-growing markets. It is essential to me that all our properties strike a balance between world-class standards and authentic local character. I want our hotels to set new benchmarks for sustainable, experience-led hospitality, while uplifting communities and celebrating the unique cultures we are privileged to serve.”

India is key to this vision, with its untapped potential, booming middle class, wellness tourism potential, and growing appetite for unique travel experiences. “We are especially excited about moving beyond the big cities and bringing our brands to Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns, heritage sites, and places that have not really been explored yet. We are currently focused on new formats like wellness retreats, eco-lodges, and boutique hotels to meet today’s eco-conscious demands,” he notes. The brand plans to replicate the success of the Autograph Collection in India and rapidly scale its Series by Marriott portfolio, aiming to make world-class, experience-led hospitality accessible across the country.

As one of Asia’s 25 Most Powerful Hoteliers, Rahul’s advice on leadership in hospitality to aspiring entrepreneurs is, “Honour your legacy, but never stop innovating.” In an industry shaped by constant change, he believes true success lies not in chasing profits but in staying purpose-driven, humble, and deeply attuned to the guest experience. By remaining curious, adaptable, and grounded in values, he suggests ambition can be turned into impact. The future of hospitality is not just about building empires; it is about creating a lasting impact.







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# Domestic Tourism Anchoring India's Travel and Hospitality Future

India's tourism story is being rewritten from within. Fuelled by domestic demand, bold government initiatives, expanding infrastructure, and a growing middle class, the sector is undergoing a transformative shift. From boutique stays to cultural corridors, Tier 2 and 3 cities are emerging as new travel frontiers. As India eyes 15 billion domestic trips by 2047, responsible, inclusive, and sustainable growth is the only way forward.

M P Bezbaruah

Once seen primarily through the lens of foreign exchange and international arrivals, Indian tourism is now being reshaped by a powerful internal force, its own people. Now, with growing disposable incomes, better connectivity, and a thirst for exploration, domestic travellers are leading a quiet revolution.

## Homegrown Travel Powering India's Tourism Rebound

Domestic tourism has long been the bedrock of India's tourism and hospitality sector. Its resilience in the face of past crises has highlighted its critical role. At the beginning of the new millennium, when a series of crises, including 9/11, SARS, the tsunami, and later the 2007–08 financial downturn, severely disrupted international travel, it was domestic and regional travellers who sustained tourism, kept destinations alive, and helped the industry stay afloat. COVID-19 was an entirely different experience. Tourism had never before been so completely grounded, and the future looked bleak. Yet, Indian tourism bounced back, driven by the strength of domestic demand. In 2021 alone, there were a staggering 677 million domestic tourist visits. The significance of domestic tourism is evident in the fact that, although foreign tourist arrivals have remained below 2019 levels, India's hospitality industry achieved its best-ever performance in terms of occupancy and Average Daily Rate (ADR) by 2023, surpassing pre-COVID levels in 2024.

## The Expanding Horizon of Domestic Tourism

In the initial years of Indian tourism planning, the primary focus was on foreign exchange earnings and fostering international understanding. The first tourism policy, introduced in 1982, acknowledged the vast potential of domestic tourism. The National Action Plan for Tourism in 1992 explicitly mentioned its importance and even made a radical suggestion that all recognised tour operators and travel agents should



▲ M. P. Bezbaruah

allocate a certain percentage of their turnover to domestic tourism.

Over the past two decades, this segment has witnessed remarkable growth. Globally, the ratio of international to domestic tourists is estimated to be around 1:7. In India, the scale is phenomenal—domestic tourist visits increased from 1.6 billion in 2016 to over 2.3 billion in 2019. Even in the aftermath of the pandemic, recovery was swift: 677 million visits were recorded in 2021, rising now to 2.5 billion. HAI's Vision 2047 document projects up to 15 billion domestic tourism visits by 2047. This growth has been driven by multiple factors: a burgeoning middle class, increased purchasing power fuelled by sustained economic growth, and a younger population eager to explore and experience leisure.

## India on the Travel Mode

The recent expansion of transport networks road, rail, sea, and air has supported not just trade but also boosted hotel investments, contributing to the tourism boom we see today. The development of iconic sites like Varanasi and Ayodhya, along with events such as the Mahakumbh, has served as a major catalyst. It is reported that domestic

tourism expenditure is expected to account for 89 per cent of total tourism spending by 2030, underscoring a future where the Indian traveller is the industry's primary driver.

This transformation is not just quantitative but also qualitative. Today's domestic travellers are venturing beyond conventional destinations, seeking authenticity and immersive experiences. Boutique hotels, homestays, and nature-centric accommodations in smaller towns are witnessing growing demand. Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, once considered peripheral to India's hospitality landscape, have become vital centres of travel. Reports suggest that more than half of India's upcoming hotel inventory is being planned in these cities.

Improved connectivity, particularly air links to remote areas through the UDAN scheme, has been a game changer. Another major factor is enhanced digital access, which has made previously remote destinations more accessible and appealing. This shift has democratised travel, enabling more Indians to explore their homeland.

## Government Initiatives Powering Domestic Tourism Growth

The government's recent approach reflects this evolving understanding. Initiatives such as Swadesh Darshan, PRASAD, and Dekho Apna Desh have strengthened domestic tourism by focusing on both destination development and awareness generation. Programmes like SAATHI have encouraged the adoption of quality and safety standards across the hospitality sector. The decentralisation of G20 events, hosting them across various Indian cities, including many in Tier 2 and 3 locations, was a thoughtful step in showcasing the diversity of Indian destinations. In the process, much-needed infrastructure has been created in lesser-known areas.

To fully realize the vast potential of tourism in a sustainable manner, much work remains. The future will depend on



proactive government policies across key areas of accommodation, transport, communication, and comprehensive destination development, to ensure tourism is evenly spread across the country. These developments benefit both domestic and international tourists.

**Investing in India's Hospitality Future**

Various projections indicate that the hotel industry's contribution to GDP, which was approximately Rs 3.3 lakh crore in 2022, could reach nearly Rs 82 lakh crore by 2047. This future rests on five foundational pillars: the rise of travel and tourism, evolving policy environments, technology adoption, a strong commitment to sustainability, and the powerful identity of Brand India. Currently, the accommodation supply falls significantly short of demand, and this gap is expected to widen with the projected growth in tourism unless proactive steps are taken to encourage investment. Building accommodation is both capital-intensive and time-consuming. Incentives such as infrastructure status, industry benefits, and improved ease of doing business could

significantly accelerate sectoral growth.

**Transforming Travel Infrastructure into Cultural Gateways**

Transport is a crucial component of planning for sustainable domestic tourism. Integrated transport development, linking air, rail, and road to destination planning is essential. Gati Shakti is a commendable initiative for convergent planning, and tourism must be made an integral part of it. A WTTCII report in 2014 noted that approximately 80 per cent of domestic travellers use private vehicles. While good road connectivity is vital, two critical but often overlooked elements are wayside amenities and international-standard signage. In the 1990s, the Ministry of Tourism had a scheme for wayside facilities, and highway petrol pumps were required to provide them. However, the concept needs to be expanded. Creating comfortable, globally benchmarked wayside facilities should be a mission. There is vast potential to involve local communities in turning these hubs into showcases of regional culture, crafts, and cuisine.

**Towards a Responsible and Resilient Future**

Several other areas require attention: the maintenance of protected monuments, interpretive services, adequate tourist facilities, and a strong emphasis on safety, cleanliness, and hygiene. Collaboration between local administrations and tourism service providers, as well as professional guides, is also essential, along with robust systems for water, sanitation, and waste management.

Lastly, we must not forget the lessons learned during and after COVID-19 regarding responsible tourism. There must be shared responsibility among tourists, communities, and service providers. The world has embraced the mantra of 'People, Planet, and Prosperity.' The growth and development of tourism must enrich, not exploit, the only planet we have.

**About the Author:** M P Bezbaruah is the Secretary General of Hotel Association of India (HAI).



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# Belluna eyes India expansion, builds on Sri Lankan success

Belluna Lanka Hotels and Resorts recently hosted an interactive networking event in Mumbai, reinforcing its commitment to the Indian market. On this occasion, TTJ caught up with Reyhan Morris, Managing Director, Belluna Lanka, whose clear-eyed optimism and focused approach provided valuable insights into the group's expansion plans, increasing focus on India, and evolving hospitality strategy.

Prashant Nayak

Belluna Lanka serves as the South Asian strategic base of Belluna Co, a Tokyo-based company with over five decades of global experience in hospitality, real estate, and lifestyle ventures. The group currently operates two hotels in Sri Lanka – Granbell Hotel Colombo and Le Grand Galle. From hosting serene beachside weddings in Galle to strengthening its presence in Colombo and exploring new projects across Sri Lanka, Belluna is steadily establishing itself as a key player in the boutique luxury hospitality space.

## Exploring Hospitality and Real Estate Partnerships in India

Belluna is also turning its attention to India, with plans to explore opportunities in both hospitality and real estate, especially in the southern region. Reyhan revealed, “India is our top market; nearly 25 per cent of our Colombo hotel's business comes from here, and a little less in Galle. Thus, we are committed to strengthening trade ties, brand awareness, and direct access to Indian guests. Although we are still in the early stages, we are serious about India. We have conducted a reconnaissance in Chennai and Bangalore, and Chennai appears to be the more likely location for our first venture. We are open to investment, whether in hospitality or real estate, through a potential partnership. If all goes to plan, Belluna India will be greenfield and operated via its Sri Lanka headquarters, which currently oversees properties in Sri Lanka.”

## Sri Lanka: A Rising Favourite for Indian Travellers

Following the pandemic, the Maldives experienced a surge in Indian arrivals, but Sri Lanka is quickly catching up. Reyhan noted that Sri Lanka is now being seen as ‘Bali 2.0’. It offers



▲ Reyhan Morris

surf, sunsets, beaches, and dining experiences, just without the crowds. However, he mentioned, “We need more or increased flight connectivity. Additionally, not all passengers disembark at Colombo. Most are transiting to other countries like Australia or Southeast Asia.”

## Belluna's Growth in Sri Lanka

Granbell Colombo is a vibrant city hotel that blends sleek, minimalist Japanese architecture with the warmth of Sri Lankan craftsmanship, creating a space that is both edgy and rooted. Le Grand, Galle is where refined luxury meets the historic charm of Galle Fort. “We are also seeing niche Indian weddings in Galle. With only 56 rooms, it is an intimate venue, and its location is highly sought after. The Galle property also attracts small group business and MICE travel from India,” informed Reyhan.

The group's current expansion strategy in

Sri Lanka is focused on Colombo, with plans for a new, larger property featuring robust MICE capabilities. “That will cater not just to Indian weddings, but also to what we call the ‘big fat Sri Lankan wedding’,” chuckled Reyhan. The group is also finalising a new hotel in Ella, the scenic highlands, famed for its Nine Arch Bridge and Ravana Falls.

## Strengthening the India Connection

Belluna is not new to the Indian market; it has been working consistently with Indian travel agents over the last three years. Reyhan explained, “Most of our business from India still comes via trade, particularly in small groups and MICE.” Personally, Reyhan had not been to India in a decade, but now he has promised to be in India at least twice a year. “This visit covered Mumbai and Bangalore. Next time, we will focus on Delhi and Ahmedabad,” he assured.

Belluna recognises that strengthening partnerships with the Indian travel trade is critical. While they do not yet have a loyalty programme for either guests or agents, the idea could be well on the table. “We offer incentives, yes. But we are still debating whether we are large enough for a global loyalty platform,” explained Reyhan.

The brand operates 26 hotels in Japan, comprising 23 under the Grandbell name and three as Le Grand properties, as well as overseas hotels in Sri Lanka and Hawaii. Westin manages their Maldives property and falls under its global loyalty system.

As Belluna Lanka steadily builds its brand presence across South Asia, its journey from the shores of Sri Lanka to the vibrant cities of India reflects a strategic move grounded in intent and opportunity.







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# GHE Powers Change in the Himalayas Through Purpose-Led Travel

Harnessing the power of tourism, Paras Loomba, Founder, Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE), has transformed purpose-led travel into a catalyst for change across India's most remote mountain regions. In conversation with TTJ, he reflects on GHE's mission to electrify off-grid villages, enable local livelihoods through renewable energy, and position tourism as a powerful driver of climate action and rural development.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

**G**lobal Himalayan Expedition (GHE) has pioneered a model of impact tourism that brings clean energy to some of the world's most isolated mountain communities. Through carbon-neutral expeditions, travellers help fund and install solar microgrids that power homes, schools, and clinics, while villagers are trained to maintain these systems, ensuring long-term sustainability. GHE's model also offsets carbon footprints through initiatives like clean cookstoves and reforestation, turning treks into climate-positive missions. Recognised with the UN Global Climate Action Award, GHE is redefining how

tourism can drive environmental resilience and local empowerment.

## The Journey That Sparked A Movement

It all began with the founder's life-changing expedition to Antarctica in 2012, led by renowned polar explorer Sir Robert Swan. The journey demanded weeks of travelling deep into the southern hemisphere, spending days at sea, and pushing financial and physical limits. His worldview shifted irreversibly as he witnessed the stark realities of climate change, something he could no longer ignore.

Back in India, Paras realised that the real work had to begin at home. In 2013, he founded the Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE) with a mission to electrify remote Himalayan villages through solar energy, using sustainable tourism as a catalyst for empowerment. The model underwent years of relentless refinement. From the ice fields of Antarctica to the remotest mountains of Northeast India, Paras's journey evolved into a clear purpose of turning climate awareness into community-led action, one village at a time.

## Powering the Mountains

GHE started with leading 'Impact Expeditions' to remote villages in Ladakh, combining adventure travel with the mission of setting up solar microgrids to bring electricity to villages that had never experienced power before.

The approach was practical, shaped by Paras' training as an electrical engineer and personal familiarity with the rugged terrain of Ladakh, where his father, an army officer, had once been posted. With his team, he started with one simple tangible goal: to provide energy access to the remotest villages of Ladakh. Many villages in the region lacked roads due



Paras Loomba with Rob Swan

TEDx

Antarctic Peninsula



to the sheer difficulty of the terrain, yet they were situated along trekking routes and ancient Silk Road trails, offering a unique opportunity to merge sustainable development with purposeful travel.

Paras explains, “This became the foundation of our expedition model. Travellers who joined us would fund the electrification of a village as part of their expedition fee, with an additional cost that was allocated toward solar panels and batteries. The villagers would transport the equipment in advance from Leh, often by foot or mule, and by the time the trekkers arrived, the material would be ready, and we would work alongside the community to set up the system guided by our engineers.”

For GHE, it was more than just installing solar panels; it was about creating awareness. Participants were briefed before each expedition about the technology and the larger purpose behind the journey. This was not just a trek; it was a mission to power a village.

From the outset, GHE was never intended to be a voluntary initiative; it was designed to generate real, measurable change. Inspired by how his own expedition had changed his life, he reimagined the GHE model, asking what if a journey could transform not just the traveller but also the place they visited?

That idea became the foundation for GHE's unique approach. Travellers would pay to join an expedition, and in doing so, directly fund and help install a solar microgrid to light up a remote village. It was a cycle of mutual impact, clean energy for the village, and a transformative experience for the traveller. This was not point-and-shoot tourism; it was purpose-led, responsible travel with lasting impact

### From Power To Ownership

With energy access established, GHE shifted its focus to creating sustainable livelihoods. In Ladakh, where over-tourism was putting pressure on popular areas, GHE launched Mountain Homestays, a community-driven initiative in lesser-known villages of Ladakh to decentralise tourism and spread its benefits. Traditional village homes were upgraded with solar lighting, water heating systems, passive space heating, and greenhouses, offering visitors an authentic, eco-friendly experience rooted in local culture. These homestays not only generated income for host families but also served as a replicable model of community-owned, climate-resilient tourism.

Even as they scaled up, the approach stayed grounded in grassroots collaboration. “No village has ever said, we do not want this. Most only had basic solar lanterns from earlier government schemes. What we provided was closer to a decentralised



*Villager Experiencing light for First Time*

grid of multiple LED lights per home, power for TVs, and street lighting, transforming near darkness into fully lit villages.” But the intention was never to replace government infrastructure. Their systems are designed to serve as a backup when the government-provided grid eventually arrives. However, the reality is that, even after 10 to 12 years, most of these villages are still waiting.

This demand-driven model shaped GHE's scale-up. Recognising that they could only conduct a few expeditions per year due to high logistics costs and their development-first model, unlike mass trek operators, they turned to CSR funding and international development support to expand reach. In response to further feedback, GHE introduced rocket stoves for heating, powered schools, and medical centres. Paras says, “The beauty of it is that the residents told us where the gap was, and we just filled it with whatever resources we had.”

### Redefining Responsible Travel in Fragile Ecosystems

As Overtourism threatens fragile landscapes like Ladakh, GHE is working to redefine responsible travel, one that empowers rather than exploits. It uses technology to track water and energy consumption per traveller, helping guests understand their footprint in real-time. This enables the setting of booking guidelines to avoid overuse and reinvests tourism revenue directly into local infrastructure.

GHE's model attempts to integrate tourism management through systems like enforced booking buffers, which necessitate two-day gaps between guests to prevent homestays from turning into hotels, responsible pricing, and experience-based offerings such as stargazing and local farming experiences. Paras believes that environmental stewardship must ultimately come from within the community. He gives the example of the village of Stok, which shut down tourism to its peak destination,

Stok Kangri, due to water shortages. They lost income, but they protected their ecosystem.

### Blueprint For The Future

Paras envisions GHE's model being replicated across other climate-vulnerable geographies. Already active in Meghalaya and having piloted a solar school project in Uganda, GHE is now advising on policy in border villages with India's Ministry of Tourism, while looking at Central Asia and East Africa for future projects.

“We do not just advocate policy, we build pilots, fund them ourselves, and show the government how it can work and be replicated,” says Paras. To date, GHE has electrified over 235 villages across India, set up 90-plus homestays, powered 30 health centres and 30 schools, and introduced clean cookstoves to reduce wood use and carbon emissions. They have even created a carbon credit registry, allowing travel companies to offset their tours by supporting regenerative energy interventions.

Paras concludes with a call to action, “Tourism 2.0 for India means enabling real change from the top. Operators on the ground are doing the work. However, we need systems and leadership that understand how to manage tourism, rather than restrict it. That is the way forward.”

#### The GHE Impact

- 235-plus villages electrified with solar microgrids
- 90-plus homestays co-developed across Ladakh and Meghalaya
- 30 schools and 30 health centres powered
- Thousands of clean cookstoves deployed across the Northeast
- Millions of tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> offset through carbon credit partnerships



# PAHALGAM HIT PAUSE

## *Can the Industry Press Play Again?*

Until April 2025, Kashmir's tourism landscape was on an unrelenting upward curve. The first four months of the year had set unprecedented benchmarks for domestic footfall. Srinagar, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, and Pahalgam were witnessing record occupancy, aided by expansive air connectivity, the launch of the semi-high-speed Vande Bharat rail corridor into the valley, and a concerted marketing push across Indian metros. For the first time since the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, the region's tourism sector was not merely reviving, it was thriving.

Vartik Sethi

According to figures released by the Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Department, Kashmir welcomed over three million domestic tourists in 2024. Srinagar Airport had scaled to managing over 50 flights a day by April, with hotels in both capital cities reporting 80 to 85 per cent occupancy. Pahalgam, in particular, was gaining traction as a year-round destination with the introduction of winter carnivals, snow-biking activities, and a notable increase in registered homestays. The travel trade was buoyant, packages were selling, and the region's hospitality stakeholders were doubling down on investments.

### The April Attack That Shook India's Crown

#### Then came 22nd April.

The mass shooting at Baisaran Valley near Pahalgam sent shockwaves through

the industry. A group of heavily armed terrorists targeted tourists in what was later described as the deadliest attack on civilians in the valley in over a decade. 26 civilians were killed, including several Hindu and Christian tourists, along with a local Muslim pony operator who attempted to shield the victims. The atrocity, carried out by members of the Resistance Front, drew immediate national and international condemnation.

### Sudden Collapse and Economic Fallout

Within 72 hours, the tourism sector in Kashmir collapsed. The panic was swift. Tourists evacuated en masse, cancelling not just their existing bookings but also those for upcoming months, including the pivotal Amarnath Yatra period. Up to 80 per cent of bookings across the region were scrapped. Hoteliers reported occupancy plummeting to single digits. Travel agents

across Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Bengaluru faced a deluge of refund requests. The ripple effects were immediate: shikara operators, guides, pony-men, local transport providers, and artisans were abruptly cut off from their livelihoods.

Sectors dependent on tourism: handicrafts, horticulture-linked agri-tourism, and event-based MICE travel also experienced a downturn. In Srinagar, once-busy houseboats sat deserted. The dynamic that had fuelled Kashmir's tourism resurgence was turned on its head in a matter of hours.

### Security Response and Government Intervention

In the aftermath, the administration's response was two-pronged: enforce security and repair perception. The Lieutenant Governor's office coordinated with local police to ensure a swift cordon and search operation in Pahalgam and



adjoining districts. Within weeks, the region witnessed a heightened deployment of paramilitary forces at all major tourist destinations. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Tourism and the Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Department activated their crisis communications strategy.

## Rail as a Symbol of Resilience

One of the immediate confidence-building measures came in the form of the launch of the Katra-Srinagar Vande Bharat Express. Inaugurated in early June by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the train's arrival was heavily publicised as a symbol of resilience and progress. The messaging was clear: Kashmir remains open, safe, and welcoming. The launch was followed by high-profile visits by central and state leadership, including the Tourism Minister's inspection of key sites across the Valley.

Adding to the symbolic value of this rail link is the engineering marvel of the Chenab Bridge, the world's highest railway bridge, which forms part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link. Its completion has not only improved all-weather access to the Valley but has also emerged as a visual icon of India's commitment to integrating Kashmir into the national tourism grid.

## Reclaiming the Narrative

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah played a crucial role in shaping the recovery narrative. Addressing a travel trade convention in Srinagar in mid-June, Abdullah acknowledged the economic devastation caused by the attack but urged stakeholders not to allow terror to dictate the region's future. His now-viral statement, "Snow will melt. Spring will come again," was picked up by national media and widely disseminated across digital platforms.

## Marketing Realignment and Ground Campaigns

Marketing campaigns were swiftly realigned. Industry associations launched the 'Tap & Konnect Kashmiriyat' initiative in coordination with the tourism board. It focused on cultural immersion, safety assurance, and short-term incentives for domestic travellers. Familiarisation trips for journalists, influencers, and top-tier travel agents from across India were conducted in late June to counter the fear narrative that was visibly present. Special emphasis was placed on amplifying stories of local heroism during the attack, particularly the pony-men and guides who risked their lives to save others.



Pahalgam Kashmir

## Return of Tourism, Albeit Cautious

By the last week of June, Srinagar's Dal Lake once again saw shikaras returning to service, albeit at reduced capacity. In Pahalgam, the return of the first group of Amarnath Yatra pilgrims brought cautious optimism. Travel agents began reporting enquiries from Tier II cities where price sensitivity drove spontaneous travel decisions. Many operators revised their packages to include rail connectivity, more flexible cancellation terms, and shorter-duration itineraries that favoured weekend travel.

## A Changed Landscape for Stakeholders

Nevertheless, the scars of the attack remain fresh. By early July, Kashmir's tourist numbers were still estimated to be 40 per cent below projected benchmarks. Foreign tourist arrivals, already negligible, virtually disappeared. However, domestic leisure travel, especially among repeat visitors familiar with the region, showed gradual signs of return.

From a B2B perspective, the episode has prompted a re-evaluation of operating frameworks in conflict-sensitive geographies. Travel wholesalers have begun insisting on trip insurance clauses, dynamic pricing models, and optional rerouting for itineraries involving Pahalgam. Destination management companies are investing more heavily in real-time crisis communication tools, satellite phones for off-grid tours, and curated experiences that combine security with novelty, such as guided heritage walks led by ex-servicemen or women-only group departures guided by local Kashmiri hosts.

## Continued Infrastructure Development

Tourism infrastructure continues to advance. Despite the April setback, projects

such as the Pahalgam Gondola and Aru Valley Ski Lift are progressing. Hotel chains including Radisson, IHCL, and Marriott have publicly reaffirmed their commitment to the region. The Katra Marriott's successful May opening served as a bellwether of industry confidence. The houseboat sector, a barometer of international interest, is being revitalised through digital listings and heritage conservation funds.

Notably, the hospitality industry in Kashmir has demonstrated resilience shaped by decades of operating in a state of flux. Local hoteliers and restaurateurs, while shaken, are accustomed to disruption and have developed instinctive contingency models. For example, many properties have temporarily repurposed their spaces for conferences, training seminars, and local weddings, helping offset the loss in traditional tourist revenue.

## Outlook and Industry Sentiment

As of early July, industry sentiment is cautiously optimistic. Key travel aggregators are beginning to see a gradual uptick in Kashmir package queries, especially those routed through the Vande Bharat Express. Analysts predict a full recovery by winter 2025, contingent on continued security stability and confidence-building measures.

Kashmir remains a high-reward market requiring nuanced engagement. The events of April 22 have postulated the need for agile strategy, deep local partnerships, and contingency planning. However, they have also revealed an enduring truth: Kashmir's tourism is not only driven by landscapes, but by its people: the guides who stayed behind, the houseboat owners who lit their lanterns again, and the communities who continue to say, with resolve, "We are open. We are ready. Welcome back."

In the months ahead, the travel trade will need to walk the tightrope between caution and conviction. But as history has shown time and again, Kashmir's tourism story may bend, but it will never break.



# India’s Tourism Associations recalibrate for domestic travel growth

India’s domestic tourism landscape is undergoing a dynamic transformation, driven by shifting traveller preferences, digital evolution, and the rise of niche segments. Leading industry associations like FAITH, TAAI, TAFI, ADTOI, and ATOAI are playing pivotal roles in steering this growth through collaboration, policy advocacy, sustainability efforts, and capacity building. Together, they are trying to shape a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready ecosystem that aims to unlock the full potential of India’s travel economy.

Prashant Nayak

## FAITH: Building a Unified Front for Domestic Tourism Growth



According to **Rajiv Mehra, General Secretary, FAITH (Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism & Hospitality)**, FAITH member associations are witnessing a sharp upswing in domestic travel. This growth is largely fuelled by a burgeoning middle class, enhanced connectivity, and heightened interest in spiritual, rural, and experiential tourism. However, gaps in infrastructure, complex regulations, and the slow pace

of digital adoption continue to be key concerns. Thus, FAITH plays a critical role in convening stakeholders, pushing for policy reform, and spearheading skill development and digital transformation initiatives to ensure the sector remains robust and future-ready.

### Aligning Centre-State Tourism Policies

FAITH acts as a central coordinating body, liaising with the Ministry of Tourism, other central ministries, and state governments to ensure cohesive tourism policy across India. Mehra highlights FAITH’s involvement in pre-budget meetings, policy forums, and joint task forces that advocate for regulatory simplification, better infrastructure, and seamless interstate travel. The federation also works on destination branding and capacity-building efforts in partnership with state governments, ensuring that domestic tourism grows under a unified national strategy.

### Driving Digital and AI Integration

Emphasising the transformational potential of digital tools and artificial intelligence, FAITH is championing their adoption across the tourism value chain. Mehra points to AI’s role in enhancing traveller experiences through personalisation, predictive insights, and automation. FAITH supports capacity-building, especially among MSMEs, and engages government bodies to promote smart tourism infrastructure, digital payment ecosystems, and virtual interfaces that make travel more seamless and appealing.

### Fostering Sustainability and Responsibility

Sustainable tourism is also at the top of FAITH’s agenda. The federation promotes eco-friendly and responsible practices through policy advocacy, workshops, and collaborative initiatives. From reducing carbon footprints to promoting lesser-known destinations, FAITH’s sustainability roadmap is aligned with both national priorities and international benchmarks. The goal is to create tourism models that respect environmental and social boundaries while expanding economic opportunities.

### Policy Priorities for the Road Ahead

Looking forward, FAITH believes that reforms such as uniform interstate permits, rational GST, and single-window clearances are vital to unlocking domestic tourism potential. Infrastructure upgrades, greater digital integration, and a focus on niche travel segments will further drive growth. Mehra said, “I believe collaborative policymaking, skill development, and public-private partnerships will be essential to unlock India’s vast domestic tourism potential and ensure inclusive, resilient growth.”

## TAAI: Strengthening the Domestic Pulse of Indian Tourism



**Sunil Kumar, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI)**, observes a robust rise in domestic travel, further propelled by global uncertainties. With over 2,300 member companies, TAAI has placed domestic tourism at the forefront of its agenda. One recent standout initiative is the ‘Rally for Valley – Let’s Go to J&K’ campaign, which has not only drawn global attention but also contributed to the

revival of tourism in Jammu & Kashmir. This campaign reflects the association’s strong belief in leading promotional drives that create real, measurable impact, reinforcing its commitment to boost domestic travel.

### Creating a Collaborative Ecosystem

To connect stakeholders across the tourism value chain, TAAI has launched the ‘TAAI DMC Connect’, aimed at building synergy between DMCs and its vast member base. This platform facilitates greater collaboration between tour operators, hotels, airlines, and tourism boards, eliminating redundant efforts and fostering reliability. Additionally, TAAI’s 20 active regional chapters are instrumental in hosting local events to bring together ecosystem



players, encouraging deeper engagement and cooperation. These efforts strengthen the fabric of domestic tourism by making collaboration more streamlined and structured.

**Digitising for Wider Reach**

Recognising the importance of digital transformation, TAAI has taken significant steps to help members integrate technology into their operations. The digitisation of membership processes through an online portal is one such milestone. Looking ahead, TAAI aims to support members with CRM tools and interactive digital platforms that enhance B2B and B2C engagement. These initiatives align with TAAI’s vision of expanding its network to over 3,000 companies while improving operational efficiency, client servicing, and market outreach through digital empowerment.

**A Call for Sustainable Practices**

TAAI promotes sustainable and responsible tourism through regular meetings, workshops, and grassroots engagements

across its regions and chapters. The association is keen to form partnerships that advance eco-conscious travel practices. With a vast network and deep industry penetration, TAAI is well-positioned to influence positive change in responsible tourism, and it actively invites collaborators to join hands in this mission.

**Policy Change for Inclusive Growth**

Sunil Kumar strongly advocates for a rationalised GST structure, proposing a 50 per cent reduction for domestic tourism to stimulate growth. He also highlights the need to simplify the government recognition process for tour operators, suggesting TAAI’s robust membership framework be accepted as a credible qualification.

Sunil invites the tourism boards of all states of India to collaborate with TAAI. “Through our vast network, governments can collaborate with TAAI to reach out to more companies in India to prioritise the promotion of domestic tourism and also MICE, including specialised wedding events, which many TAAI members specialise in,” said Sunil.

**TAFI: Promoting Growth with Responsibility in Domestic Travel**



**Ajay Prakash, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI),** notes that domestic tourism has experienced unprecedented growth since the pandemic. Members have embraced this booming sector, capitalising on emerging segments such as senior citizen travel, women-only tours, soft adventure, wildlife, and religious tourism. The rapid expansion of India’s highway infrastructure has further enabled impromptu

getaways and weekend escapes, fuelling a culture of spontaneous domestic travel. TAFI members are tapping into this evolving demand with tailored offerings that reflect the changing preferences of Indian travellers.

**Collaboration through Ground-Level Engagement**

TAFI actively promotes regional engagement through its chapters and recently demonstrated its commitment to collaborative development with a high-profile delegation to Kashmir. Comprising 45 members, including national committee leaders and regional office bearers, the delegation visited Srinagar and Pahalgam, engaging with the local government and industry stakeholders. This was not just a show of solidarity with Kashmir tourism but a strategic move to strengthen partnerships and rebuild confidence

in the region. Such collaborations, built on trust and shared goals, are vital for unlocking the full potential of domestic tourism.

**Leveraging Technology to Shape Behaviour**

Prakash highlights the importance of using modern digital tools – especially AI and social media – not just for marketing but to shape responsible traveller behaviour. He said, “This is where contemporary technology, especially social media and AI tools, can play a big role by sending out constructive and positive messages. We have held workshops and demonstrations in various chapters on how to use these tools.”

**Responsible Travel – A Non-Negotiable**

While domestic travel growth is welcome, it presents significant challenges. The strain on hill stations and other popular destinations from overcrowding and misbehaviour is a concern. TAFI has consistently advocated for responsible tourism and expects its members to instil a sense of sensitivity and respect in their clients. Tourism, Ajay Prakash believes, must be a bridge for cultural understanding and national unity, not a source of disruption. This principle underpins all of TAFI’s engagement strategies.

**Policy Focus: Cleanliness and Awareness**

Looking ahead, Prakash stresses the urgent need for a revived public awareness campaign. He laments the decline of the Swachh Bharat momentum, warning that unchecked tourism growth without waste management could undermine the very assets travellers come to experience. With domestic tourism projected to grow at 12 per cent annually, he calls for strong policy support and national initiatives to keep destinations clean, welcoming, and sustainable.

**ADTOI: Championing Domestic Discoveries with a Grassroots Approach**

**Ved Khanna, President, Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI),** highlights a notable shift in traveller behaviour post-pandemic. Indian tourists are increasingly drawn to experiential, wellness-focused, and short-haul escapes, with growing interest in offbeat, nature-based destinations. However, infrastructural limitations and last-mile connectivity issues continue to hinder seamless experiences. In response, ADTOI has ramped up support through regular webinars, capacity-building workshops, and FAM trips to help members stay ahead of emerging trends and adapt

to evolving customer expectations. The association also acts as a conduit between members and government bodies, voicing ground realities and advocating for targeted improvements.

**Unifying Industry Stakeholders**

ADTOI plays a vital role in bringing together the fragmented tourism ecosystem. Through conventions, roadshows, B2B networking events, and MoUs with state tourism boards, the association creates collaborative platforms for dialogue and business development. Its





initiatives foster synergy between tour operators, hoteliers, transporters, and tourism boards. One of the key strategies is promoting bundled experiences by enabling tie-ups between members and service providers, ensuring travellers receive seamless, value-added packages that boost customer satisfaction while benefiting multiple stakeholders across the value chain.

Digital Empowerment for Members

Recognising the rapid digitisation of the travel industry, ADTOI is actively upskilling its members through dedicated training on digital marketing, CRM integration, and travel-tech adoption. From content automation to social media branding and onboarding members onto online booking engines, the association is working to future-proof its members’ businesses. Strategic partnerships with tech solution providers have enabled ADTOI to offer affordable

tools specifically designed for small and mid-sized domestic tour operators, thus levelling the playing field in a highly competitive environment.

Sustainability Through Education and Action

ADTOI has embedded sustainability into its core programming. Ved Khanna said, “We advocate for responsible tourism through member education, destination sensitisation, and inclusion of eco-conscious travel experiences. We actively promote low-impact travel, homestay-based itineraries, and community tourism, while encouraging our members to adopt environmentally friendly practices. In partnership with local NGOs and green certification bodies, we also help members adopt sustainability frameworks that align with global tourism standards.”

Policy Imperatives for Future Growth

Looking ahead, ADTOI sees opportunities in policy shifts, such as GST rationalisation for tour operators, interstate travel simplification, and expanded regional air connectivity under UDAN. Ved Khanna emphasises the impact of public-private partnerships and tourism’s alignment with national schemes like PRASAD and Swadesh Darshan. Integrating these with India’s G20 tourism legacy can unlock the full potential of domestic travel and establish India as a model for inclusive, sustainable tourism development.

ATOAI: Leading India’s Adventure Tourism with Safety, Strategy, and Sustainability



Adventure tourism in India is witnessing remarkable growth, driven by increasing interest in nature-based and experiential travel.

According to **Arshdeep Anand, Vice President, Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI)**, the sector holds immense promise but faces persistent challenges. Members seek streamlined permissions, especially in eco-sensitive

and border regions, along with demands for the legalisation of satellite phones and adventure-ready infrastructure. ATOAI is addressing these by professionalising the sector through Certified Responsible Adventure Tourism Guide Courses, capacity-building programmes, and persistent policy engagement with the Ministry of Tourism to institutionalise best practices and safety norms.

Strategic Collaborations to Uplift Ecosystems

ATOAI fosters robust partnerships with state tourism boards, airlines, and hospitality providers to co-develop regional adventure policies and promote emerging destinations. The association’s conventions are often held in lesser-known locales, such as Arunachal Pradesh, to spotlight untapped potential while supporting local stakeholders. These events bring together operators, policymakers, and small businesses, creating inclusive tourism models that deliver mutual benefits and enrich the domestic adventure economy.

Technology as a Tool for Transformation

In a sector where real-time data, safety, and digital reach are vital, ATOAI is helping members embrace technology. Arshdeep said, “ATOAI recognises that technology is a game-changer in today’s travel ecosystem, especially for adventure tourism where real-time information, safety, seamless bookings, and digital visibility are crucial.”

The association hosts sessions on CRM tools, SEO, content creation, and data analytics, with expert-led webinars tailored to the needs of remote and emerging operators. Future plans include partnerships with tech platforms to provide discounted tools for weather tracking, booking engines, and digital waiver systems. ATOAI also guides members on influencer outreach and visual storytelling to enhance customer engagement and showcase India’s rich adventure diversity to younger, digitally savvy travellers.

Sustainability: From Principle to Practice

Responsible tourism is deeply embedded in ATOAI’s DNA. Through extensive on-ground and online programmes, the association trains members in environmental stewardship, waste management, risk mitigation, and cultural sensitivity. Its guide certification courses promote sustainability through low-impact practices, the use of reusable equipment, and biodiversity education. ATOAI is also shaping sustainability policy nationwide, encouraging state tourism boards to adopt the association’s safety guidelines and align their regulations with national environmental and adventure standards.

Policy Reforms to Unleash Potential

ATOAI advocates for a uniform adventure tourism law across states, low-interest financing for operators, rescue infrastructure, the legalisation of satellite phones, and reduced import duties on high-grade equipment. It also pushes for national certification of trained adventure professionals. Together, these reforms will unlock rural employment, enhance safety, and elevate India’s domestic adventure tourism to world-class standards.



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- 5 nights onboard Celestyal Journey (06-11 Dec)

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*Inclusive of F1 ticket for North Straight Grandstand & transfers*

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- 5 nights onboard Celestyal Journey (06 - 11 Dec)

Starting from **US\$ 539\*** per person

plus optional F1 ticket starting from **US\$ 879\***



📍 Grand Prix in Abu Dhabi



## Schedule

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4\* hotel  
Abu Dhabi marina

Saturday

Grand Prix Practice  
Practice 3: 14:30 - 15:30  
Qualifying: 18:00 - 19:00

Board ship from 20:30  
Abu Dhabi UAE

Monday  
Dubai UAE  
>10:00 (Overnight)

Wednesday  
Sir Bani Yas Island\* UAE  
>09:00-19:00>

Friday

Grand Prix Practice  
Practice 1: 13:30 - 14:30  
Practice 2: 17:00 - 18:00  
Abu Dhabi UAE

Sunday

Grand Prix race  
Race: 17:00  
Board ship by 02:00 (08 Dec)  
Abu Dhabi UAE

Tuesday  
Dubai UAE  
16:00>

Thursday  
Abu Dhabi UAE  
>09:00>

> Arrive/Depart. \* Tendering weather permitting.  
Ports of call and their order may vary.

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# Evoked Experiences leads India's shift toward experiential and conscious tourism

In an exclusive interaction with TTJ, Bhavik Sheth, COO, Evoked Experiences, discusses the company's dynamic approach to luxury tented hospitality. From managing at iconic destinations like Rann Utsav and the Statue of Unity Tent City to upcoming projects across culturally and ecologically rich landscapes, Bhavik outlines how the brand has successfully positioned itself at the intersection of tradition and innovation, delivering curated stays that go far beyond conventional hospitality.

Prashant Nayak

As the creators of iconic projects like Rann Utsav – The Tent City, Statue of Unity Tent City-1, White Rann – The Tent City, and the upcoming Gandhisagar Forest Retreat, Evoked Experiences has redefined immersive luxury across some of India's most diverse landscapes. Looking ahead, the future appears promising, with a pipeline of projects in notable destinations such as Sasan Gir Forest, Shivrampur, Dwarka, and Velavadar in Gujarat, as well as Puri and Jagannath in Odisha, and Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh.

## Redefining Tented Hospitality

Evoked Experiences' journey into luxury tented hospitality is anything but ordinary. According to Bhavik Sheth, the answer lies in a deep-rooted commitment to excellence and innovation. He said, "At Evoked Experiences, our 150-year legacy deeply influences our approach to luxury tented hospitality. Our heritage instilled a commitment to excellence, attention to detail, and a passion for delivering unforgettable experiences. This legacy drives our innovation in experiential tourism, exemplified by projects like Rann Utsav and Evoked Dholavira, where we blend traditional hospitality with modern glamping concepts."

Evoked also prioritises sustainability and community engagement, working closely



▲ Bhavik Sheth

with local artisans and preserving cultural traditions. Bhavik looks ahead, aiming to expand further, creating immersive retreats that celebrate India's heritage, all while upholding the values passed down through his legacy.

## Behind the Scenes of Rann Utsav

Currently, Evoked Experiences is overseeing the operations, branding, and entertainment of Rann Utsav. Managing such large-scale events comes with both significant

challenges and unique opportunities. Bhavik mentioned, "Logistically, coordinating transportation, accommodations, and amenities for thousands of visitors in a remote desert location requires meticulous planning. The infrastructure needs are immense, with temporary setups for sanitation, electricity, and water, all while ensuring the preservation of the cultural heritage of the Dhordo village and local communities. Balancing the influx of tourists with environmental sustainability also poses a challenge, particularly in such a delicate desert ecosystem."

On the other hand, the event presents numerous opportunities. Bhavik explained that Rann Utsav serves as a platform for uplifting local communities, generating employment opportunities, and promoting local artisans and their crafts. It showcases the rich traditions and cuisine of Kutch, fostering cultural exchange on a global scale. Additionally, the festival opens doors for sustainable tourism, allowing them to set benchmarks for eco-friendly practices and responsible tourism. The event also significantly boosts local businesses, from hospitality to retail, driving economic growth in the region. "At Evoked Experiences, we embrace these opportunities while carefully navigating the challenges to create a memorable and impactful experience for all," stated Bhavik.



## The Seven-Year Roadmap to Transform Rann Utsav

Evoke Experiences also has a new seven-year partnership to manage Rann Utsav, and their strategic goals are centred on enhancing both the festival's reach and the guest experience. First and foremost, they aim to strengthen their portfolio by expanding the range of experiences and services offered. "We are now more aggressive in focusing on elevating guest experiences, ensuring that every visitor has a truly immersive and memorable stay. We are looking forward to collaborating with more local artisans, businesses, and communities to bring out the true, untapped essence of India. Our goal is to uncover and celebrate lost heritage, be it through food, art, craft, or culture, providing guests with authentic and unique experiences," asserted Bhavik.

Evoke also plans to streamline its booking and feedback systems to make the entire process more seamless and efficient for its guests. Everything is being taken to the next level in terms of quality and offerings, from accommodations to entertainment. Also, they now have more artists on board, further enriching the cultural fabric of the festival. Bhavik expects all of these efforts to contribute to making Rann Utsav a more dynamic, inclusive, and world-class event.

### Destination-Specific Approach to Hospitality

Evoke Experiences' upcoming projects span diverse landscapes—from the wildlife-rich forests of Gir and Velavadar to spiritual and cultural hubs like Ayodhya, Puri, and Dwarka. When asked how they



Haat at Rann Utsav

tailor their hospitality offerings to reflect the unique essence of each destination, Bhavik explained, "In Ayodhya, our focus is on creating spiritual and cultural experiences, such as immersive pilgrimages and visits to iconic temples, allowing guests to connect deeply with the city's divine heritage. In Gir, we enhance wildlife experiences through bespoke safaris, nature walks, and educational excursions, with an emphasis on conservation and ecological awareness. We also prioritise hiring local teams, ensuring authentic connections to the land and its culture. This approach allows us to provide guests with truly immersive, meaningful experiences."

### Expanding Portfolio of Immersive Stays

Evoke Experiences keeps on introducing unique entertainment and cultural programming across its properties. In addition to the Rann Utsav, guests at the Statue of Unity can enjoy guided tours and riverfront activities. At Gandhisagar, when operational, they will focus on eco-friendly experiences like boating, wildlife safaris, and local craft workshops, alongside traditional Rajasthani folk music and dance performances. In Kuno, when operational, guests can participate in wildlife safaris, nature trails, and stargazing sessions, along with cultural highlights such as tribal art showcases and local music performances. Each property will offer immersive experiences that seamlessly blend culture, history, and nature, creating a truly unforgettable stay.

### Driving Growth Together

At Evoke Experiences, they offer several incentives to encourage collaboration with travel agents and tour operators. These include competitive commission rates, FAM trips to experience their properties firsthand, and flexible, customisable packages for clients. Bhavik added, "We also provide marketing support, joint campaigns, and priority access to new properties and offers. Travel partners



Darbari at Rann Utsav Tent City



Rajwadi Suite Rann Utsav Tent City

benefit from dedicated account managers and incentive programmes, including rewards such as complimentary stays for top performers. These efforts help ensure successful partnerships and promote our destinations effectively. We have an exclusive channel partner loyalty programme for all our travel partners, offering them additional perks and benefits. "

### Eco-Conscious Hospitality Model

Sustainability is a growing concern in luxury tourism, but it is a key focus at Evoke properties, including Rann Utsav – The Tent City, Evoke Dholavira, and Statue of Unity Tent City 1. They have implemented eco-friendly practices, including the use of sustainable materials in infrastructure, solar power for energy efficiency, and water recycling systems. Waste management is prioritised through segregation, recycling, and composting.

Briefing further on the subject, Bhavik added, "At Rann Utsav, we also ensure minimal environmental disruption by using eco-friendly tents and promoting responsible tourism that celebrates the region's natural beauty without compromising its ecosystem. For the local communities, we are committed to fostering economic growth through employment and training opportunities, as well as sourcing locally. We promote local crafts and traditions, working closely with local artisans to showcase their work and incorporate it into our guest experiences. This holistic approach ensures that both the environment and the local communities benefit from our operations, creating a sustainable and enriching experience for our guests," concluded Bhavik.



Statue of Unity Tent City-1, Pool-1



Boat ride near Statue of Unity- Tent City 1



Statue of Unity Tent City-1



# Tip Top International elevates premium stays and MICE offerings with a distinctive touch

With a shared vision for delivering exceptional hospitality, Hetal Shah, Managing Director, Tip Top International, along with Devendra Sharma, General Manager, Tip Top International Pune, are transforming the brand into a benchmark for elegant stays, grand events, and seamless MICE experiences in Maharashtra and beyond.

Prashant Nayak

Hotel Tip Top International, the flagship property of the Tip Top International Group, is strategically located in Hinjawadi, Pune. This premium business hotel has been delighting guests with unparalleled offerings in weddings and MICE events. Set amidst captivating surroundings, it combines world-class amenities with the warmth of Indian hospitality, delivering exceptional service and memorable experiences for every guest.

### A Grand Address for Every Occasion

Tip Top International, Pune, offers 207 well-appointed rooms and suites designed for comfort and elegance. The hotel features six spacious banquet halls, perfect for grand celebrations and corporate gatherings, along with four boardrooms and two meeting rooms, all equipped with state-of-the-art amenities. An expansive lawn adds to the property's versatility, making it ideal for outdoor events and receptions. The hotel can host up to 6,000 guests, making it an ideal venue for weddings, conventions, exhibitions, and large-scale events. Dining options include Pune's first thali restaurant in the premium segment, as well as all-day dining venue serving a diverse range of global cuisine.

### Differentiation in a Competitive Luxury Market

As competition intensifies in India's luxury hospitality sector, Tip Top International Pune has been able to differentiate its offerings to maintain and enhance its market position. Their differentiation strategy rests on three strategic pillars: wedding, MICE, and 100 per cent vegetarian thali food. At the same time, Tip Top International Pune continues to emphasise personalised, immersive experiences that are reflective of the cultural and historical essence of Pune by integrating local heritage and artistic narratives into the guest experience.

While their service ethos remains at the core of the brand, their various experiential signature programmes, personalised guest services, and use of technology elevate the guest experience, while brand ethos like 'Padharo Mhare Des' and 'Atithi Devo Bhava', ensure that each interaction is imbued with warmth and genuine hospitality.

"We are actively investing in advanced training programmes and leadership development to further enhance our service capabilities across our expanding portfolio. Simultaneously, we are



▲ Hetal Shah

investing in enhancing our brand capabilities and strengthening direct-to-consumer channels to deepen brand equity and customer value," said Hetal.

### Developing Talent and Building Leadership

At Tip Top Pune, they recognise that nurturing talent and leadership is pivotal to maintaining their position at the forefront of premium hospitality. Hetal explained, "We are deeply committed to building a diverse, inclusive workforce while prioritising talent development and retention. Also, we strongly emphasise gender diversity by empowering women in hospitality, especially through our initiative in Banquet Sales and Décor, where we offer structured opportunities to lead and deliver exceptional, well-designed wedding experiences."

The hotel group also runs several upskilling initiatives, including the Tip Top HOD Development Programme, which trains staff to deliver personalised and elegant service. The Executive Development Programme focuses on structured career growth and leadership training, grooming future leaders from within the organisation.

"Beyond professional development, we offer competitive compensation packages, which include salaries and a variety of benefits. By investing in the growth and well-being of our team, we ensure that our employees feel valued and are motivated to deliver the exceptional service



▲ Devendra Sharma

that defines The Tip Top," asserted Devendra.

### Luxury with Purpose

At Tip Top Pune, hospitality with purpose is a philosophy deeply rooted in their responsibility to people, planet, and provenance. As custodians in the Indian hospitality business, they are committed to offering indulgent experiences that are equally mindful, sustainable, and socially inclusive.

Hetal shared, "We are eliminating single-use plastics, transitioning toward green energy, and fresh food with single-time food gravy method, while ensuring that purpose is a lived experience for every guest, even with vegetarian cuisine."

"We are championing local communities beyond employment, supporting their culture, like organising local food festivals at Tip Top Pune," added Devendra.

### Strategic Expansion with Purpose

The Tip Top remains focused on expanding its presence in key gateway markets both in Maharashtra and pan-India through a combination of greenfield developments, inorganic acquisitions, and hotel management arrangements. "Our approach to expansion is guided by favourable demand and supply dynamics in the luxury segment. All developments will continue to reflect the brand's quality standards and sustainability framework as we grow with intention and purpose," concluded Devendra.



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Delegates







# Is Geopolitical Turbulence Grounding Global Tourism?

In a world increasingly shaped by shifting geo-political power dynamics, the ripple effects are being felt far beyond situation rooms and war zones. They are hitting runways, visa counters, and travel itineraries. As geopolitical tensions rise and travel, once again, feels vulnerable, TTJ turns to a cross-section of key voices in the tourism industry to ask: Will the current global realignment reshape the business of travel?

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

Tourism has witnessed unprecedented growth over the past decade. Incredible India, once a rising star on the global tourism map, experienced a remarkable run until the pandemic brought global tourism and the world to a standstill. In the aftermath, recovery was slow and uneven. However, when it came back, it did so with force. Inbound and domestic tourism emerged as the twin drivers powering India's resurgence as a formidable player in the global travel landscape. According to Statista, in 2024, India's travel and tourism sector contributed approximately 256 billion USD to the country's GDP, projected to reach 523 billion USD by 2034.

## A World in Chaos

Today, the world finds itself in a new era of uncertainty. Geopolitical tensions from escalating conflicts in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the US are beginning to cast a shadow over tourism prospects not only for the countries involved but also for the world. The United States government issued a Level 2 travel advisory to

India on June 16, 2025, advising its citizens to 'exercise increased caution' due to concerns over crime and terrorism. This advisory highlights America's limited capacity to provide emergency services to US citizens in rural areas of India. It also warns women against travelling alone in India, while urging US citizens to review their personal security plans and remain alert to their surroundings.

As tensions across the world escalate from wars and trade disputes to visa bans and restructured alliances, tourism is no longer immune. Entire corridors of movement are vanishing, flights are being rerouted, visas are being suspended, and tourism boards once overflowing with international arrivals are watching bookings vanish. Travel, once again, feels vulnerable as global power structures realign and partnerships between nations undergo transformation. Tourism, more than many other industries, is directly affected by escalating geopolitical tensions, since it is a sector that is fundamentally dependent on open borders, diplomatic stability, and the free movement of people. It now faces a moment of reckoning. What does this bode for Indian tourism?

## Manav Soni, Chairman, TAAI Tourism Council



The industry is responding proactively, says Soni, with closer monitoring of travel advisories, investment in risk mitigation, and enhanced customer education. "Flexible booking policies and dynamic planning tools are reshaping supplier partnerships," he shares. While route diversions are raising costs, airlines are adapting with alternative stopovers and improved communication to reassure passengers. Despite

current challenges, he remains optimistic about India's outbound travel prospects, but cautions that adaptability, transparency, and safety will be key to sustaining traveller trust.

## Vasudha Sondhi, Managing Director, Outbound Marketing India

Emphasising the industry's vulnerability to geopolitical turbulence, Sondhi notes, "The travel and hospitality industry is very fragile and is held ransom by shifting geopolitics." Witnessing an evident slowdown in queries, she says, "Air India has reduced or stopped a majority of their international flights, and people are adopting a wait-and-watch approach, while incoming flights from Europe are either being rescheduled or rerouted. Reduced travel from key markets such as the U.S. is further weakening demand."

She predicts that regional tourism will strengthen globally





within Asia, as well as within Europe, and domestic tourism in India will continue on its upward momentum. She also expects destination weddings to international destinations to be impacted, and high-profile celebrations may increasingly move to destinations within the country. She believes that the pandemic has taught travel professionals to diversify beyond single-market expertise. Today's travel designers are

curating experiences both within India and internationally, ensuring resilience in the face of evolving global dynamics.

### **Mahendra Vakharia, Managing Director, Pathfinder Holidays**



Having witnessed just how swiftly global power shifts can disrupt well-laid travel plans, he observes, "When nations enter conflict and get into war-like situations, it impacts all walks of life. Travel is, in fact, one of the first industries to be impacted. Closure of borders and airspace significantly disrupts travel itineraries, and making alternative arrangements on short notice is an expensive affair."

Though the impact of geopolitical disruptions may be unavoidable, Vakharia offers a measured perspective, stressing the importance of remaining calm and composed as an industry. "On the ground, we have to take immediate action by making alternate arrangements for our clients and ensuring their safety while remaining in constant contact to avoid panic. Fortunately, as we have seen before, such disruptions tend to be temporary and do not usually have a long-term impact, which is a relief!"

### **Meeta Shah, CEO, Flamingo Transworld**



She does not mince words when assessing the global travel climate and says, "Given the geopolitical environment prevailing currently, we at Flamingo believe that this uncertainty will continue to manifest in different forms and across various international destinations." She warns that challenges will continue to emerge, so the industry must be prepared to adapt and recover.

While tourism demand remains strong, she stresses the need to modernise internal systems from booking mechanisms and cancellation policies to trend forecasting and product development to stay agile in an increasingly volatile world. As new technologies reshape the market and unforeseen crises emerge, future-readiness will be the key to survival. Shah also calls for financial resilience, urging the trade to collectively push for better rollover of deposits during crises as a necessary buffer in turbulent times. She urges her compatriots to come together as an industry and prioritise the safety of customers.

### **Vinod Sharma, President, TACT**

He reflects on the past few years as nothing short of a rollercoaster ride for the global travel industry, shaken by war, terrorism, and aviation tragedies. He notes, "The Ukraine-Russia war has halted leisure travel, and students who once flocked to the destination have now relocated. The terror attack in Pahalgam not only made the nation's heart bleed, but also halted the local Kashmiri economy that thrives on tourism."

The India-Pakistan tensions significantly impacted air connectivity, leading to widespread cancellations of flights to destinations such as Azerbaijan and Turkey. He adds, "Travel advisors faced major losses as clients backed out of pre-planned trips, but many pivoted quickly, demonstrating our resilience as an industry and redirected travellers to safer options like Mauritius, Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore, proving that flexibility and foresight are now essential tools in our kit."

Through all these insurmountable challenges, Sharma asserts, "We, the passionate custodians of this industry, continue to stand tall, adapt, and evolve. Despite everything, tourism remains a pillar of India's GDP and a source of livelihood for millions. As an industry, we have already weathered the worst storm: the COVID-19 pandemic. If we could rise from that darkness, these newer challenges, while serious, are manageable with unity, professionalism, and resilience."

### **Hemant Mendiratta, Founder, One Rep Global**

History suggests that when political instability and strained international relations come into play, travel restrictions and uncertainty often follow. This, in turn, usually leads to fewer tourists, hurting a country's image and impacting both inbound visitors to India and outbound Indian travellers. But within this uncertainty lies a strategic opportunity. Strong regional cooperation, as established by the European Union, proves that when nations collaborate, tourism flourishes.

Speaking from his experience in the business, Mendiratta shares that while uncertainty can dampen travel, it also creates opportunities for those ready to adapt. India, too, can seize this moment by doubling down on its distinctive strengths. He suggests, "India should double down on its unique, high-value tourism offerings such as wellness retreats, adventure travel, and heritage tours, that attract intentional, resilient travellers who are less likely to cancel due to geopolitical instability because they are travelling with intent, not impulse. Secondly, India should launch a 'Safe & Smart Tourism' global tourism campaign positioning the country as a safe, sustainable, and digitally connected destination, to signal to the world that it is not only welcoming, but future-ready as well."

### **Mohammad Azam, President - TTAUP**

He echoes the thoughts shared that tourism remains among the most vulnerable sectors to geopolitical unrest. "Destinations like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Armenia, once favoured





by Indian travellers, have seen a steep decline due to airspace closures and mounting uncertainties. Travel across Central and Eastern Europe has also been hit hard. In contrast, Southeast Asia has emerged as a safe, accessible, and politically neutral region. For professionals who pivoted quickly, Southeast Asia became a cushion in a volatile season,” Azam notes, pointing to the rise in MICE, leisure, and honeymoon travel

to Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam.

For Azam, the message is clear: “Resilience and agility are more important than ever. In this shifting landscape, the industry’s role is clear: guide travellers wisely, adapt swiftly, and ensure that the spirit of exploration endures.”

**Sandeep Bhasin, Managing Director,  
BINGO Travels**



He notes that travel to the Middle East and Europe was significantly disrupted as flights were forced to take alternate routes; however, these challenges also shifted demand toward safer, more accessible destinations. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Mauritius saw a surge in interest as travellers sought stability. While renewed COVID concerns briefly slowed momentum, particularly in Singapore, Mauritius remained resilient. “Mauritius is still going

strong, and business from West, North, as well as South India has increased. But business to the Maldives remains sluggish,” he adds, highlighting the uneven nature of the recovery across destinations.

**Jaspreet Bhatia, President, Chhattisgarh Travel  
Trade Association**



Pointing out the tourism sector’s vulnerability to global upheavals, he says, “Just as we began recovering from the pandemic, a new wave of geopolitical crises has disrupted travel routes and eroded traveller confidence. Popular destinations like Baku and Turkey saw a sharp decline in demand, while travel agents faced relentless crisis management and constant client reassurance. Yet amidst the chaos, a shift emerged as

travellers turned to domestic exploration of destinations across India.”

He believes that this period of uncertainty only highlighted the irreplaceable value of experienced travel agents over digital platforms. Destinations perceived as peaceful, such as Japan, Mauritius, the Seychelles, and Bali, experienced rising demand, reinforcing that trust, expertise, and adaptability are key to sustaining travel through global instability.

**Rohit Shorey, CEO, Kazin DMC**

He reflects on the far-reaching impact of global conflicts, highlighting how uncertainty has disrupted travel even in regions untouched by violence. “At Kazin DMC, we have felt this firsthand. Despite our destinations, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus, being peaceful and far removed from these flashpoints, we faced mass cancellations and significant revenue loss during our peak season. The challenges were not due to safety concerns, but a sharp dip in overall traveller confidence,” he shares.

This sentiment, he believes, has affected even the most stable destinations, underscoring the fragility of tourism in the face of global perceptions. He chooses to believe in the singular truth that tourism thrives on peace. Looking ahead, he adds with quiet optimism, “When the world is ready to travel again, we will be ready to welcome our travellers; stronger, safer, and more prepared than ever.”

**Ritu Makhija,  
Director-Sustainability  
TOFT,**

She points out how recent geopolitical instability has shaken inbound tourism, leading travellers to avoid regions perceived as unsafe. Yet, she urges the industry not to retreat but to lead. “India’s travel trade has always shown incredible resilience. Even in the face of glaring uncertainty, I believe India has a unique opportunity to reaffirm its place as one of the most captivating, soulful, and welcoming destinations in the world.”

She calls on both public and private stakeholders to unite and project a bold, confident image of India. With its rich heritage, biodiversity, and commitment to sustainable tourism, India has the tools to rebuild trust and attract travellers seeking meaning and reassurance. “Now is the time to tell India’s story through a strategic digital campaign that positions India not just as a destination, but as a journey of revival. Let us lead with intention and remind the world why India is worth believing in.”

**The Way Forward**

The seasoned voices of India’s travel trade, who have weathered disruption time and again, offer their valuable advice on survival and speak a singular truth: travel thrives on open borders, and a healthy, connected world depends on the freedom to explore. While global uncertainties may have momentarily shaken their confidence, history has shown that tourism is inherently resilient. People return to the places they love. They seek meaning, connection, and healing through travel, as the post-pandemic resurgence has already proven.

Now is India’s moment to lead with intent and take charge of its narrative, reshape global perceptions with clarity and confidence, and reaffirm India’s significance. In a world marked by inherent instability, India’s enduring strength lies in its ability to adapt, inspire, and bounce back again.







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# Clarissa Resorts prioritises elevating guest experience over rapid expansion

Clarissa Resorts currently operates three properties in India and envisions becoming the most admired and responsible hospitality brand, showcasing Indian traditional values while upholding international standards. At the helm of this nature-first, innovation-led brand is Harshal Dilwali, Co-founder and CEO, Clarissa Resorts, whose educational foundation and forward-thinking approach have been instrumental in steering the group's growth and resilience.

Prashant Nayak

From the untamed wilderness of Jim Corbett to the coastal calm of Goa and the serene hills of Mukteshwar, Clarissa Resorts is carving a niche in India's boutique, tech-driven hospitality space.

## Learning, Leading, and Expanding Horizons

Coming from a family rooted in real estate, Harshal transformed Clarissa from a single property at Jim Corbett into a growing portfolio by mastering every facet of the business, from structural planning to regulatory compliance. However, the initial journey was not without its hurdles. As a family-run business, Harshal faced its fair share of internal challenges, including generational differences in management styles and navigating the unfamiliar terrain of hospitality. However, for Harshal, formal education became the cornerstone of Clarissa's journey. He shared, "Hotel management taught me operations, my MBA taught me how to scale, and LLB gave me the legal edge."

## Why Corbett, Goa, and Mukteshwar?

Clarissa's locations reflect an intentional connection with nature. "We wanted to be close to nature in everything we do," stated Harshal. The brand's first foray into Jim Corbett offered a rare opportunity to create luxury amidst the wilderness. Goa, a long-cherished family dream, presented a chance to offer a boutique stay in India's most vibrant beach destination. Mukteshwar, meanwhile, was a strategic move into India's emerging spiritual and wellness tourism circuit. "Each destination represents our philosophy of offering something beyond the ordinary- forest, mountain, or beach, but always immersive. We want people to experience something beyond just a stay and to leave with memories they take pride in. That is the Clarissa difference," added Harshal.

## The Owner-Driven Touch

Clarissa's unique positioning stems from



▲ Harshal Dilwali

being an owner-driven brand. "When owners are directly involved, it creates a personal touch that is hard to replicate," said Harshal. The brand, with its presence at various locations, emphasises deep customer engagement and tailored experiences, including voice-enabled rooms, adventure parks, saunas, and Jacuzzis, all based on guest preferences.

Clarissa was also the first in Uttarakhand to implement fully electronic check-ins during the pandemic, paving the way for tech-enabled hospitality in remote zones. Harshal said, "We brought tech used in aviation and cinema to our hotels, allowing guests to choose rooms and check out via QR code without front desk delays."

## Facing Challenges Head-On

Building properties in remote regions has meant battling logistical hurdles, sourcing materials and talent from both local and far-off cities. Harshal also candidly addresses generational differences in leadership styles within a family business and resistance to tech adaptation from older staff. However, he firmly stated, "As technology evolves every six months, constant employee upskilling becomes non-negotiable."

There are also legal and social

challenges. As a trained lawyer, Harshal believes guests and staff both must respect hotel SOPs or eco-norms. He emphasised, "People must understand rules exist not just for service, but for maintaining the order around us. For example, at a wildlife destination like Jim Corbett, it is essential to maintain silence, avoid playing loud music, and refrain from using focused lighting that disturbs animals. Littering is strictly prohibited. These rules are not just policy; they are essential for sustainable tourism."

Clarissa does not treat sustainability as a checkbox but as a guiding principle. From wildlife conservation initiatives to women's empowerment and job creation for local communities, the brand seamlessly integrates eco-tourism with a positive impact.

## Empowered Sales and Tech Driven Marketing

Clarissa has dedicated teams that handle B2B, B2C sales, and bespoke event services that cater to weddings and MICE. Harshal proudly shared, "We bring customised service to the doorstep. If a couple planning a wedding cannot visit Mukteshwar, we bring the proposal to them at home."

The Clarissa team is savvy in digital, influencer, and social media strategies. Clarissa is also a regular attendee at leading trade shows, such as OTM, and focuses on outreach in demand-rich markets, including Delhi NCR, the South, and West India.

## Scaling with Intention

On further expansions, Harshal clarified, "We have short-term and long-term plans, and currently not in a rush to expand. Stabilising our existing properties is our immediate goal. For instance, we intend to position our Mukteshwar property as India's highest altitude destination wedding resort, situated 7,000 feet above sea level."

In the long run, Clarissa aims to expand across Uttarakhand, South India, and select international markets, with plans to add five to six properties in the next five years.



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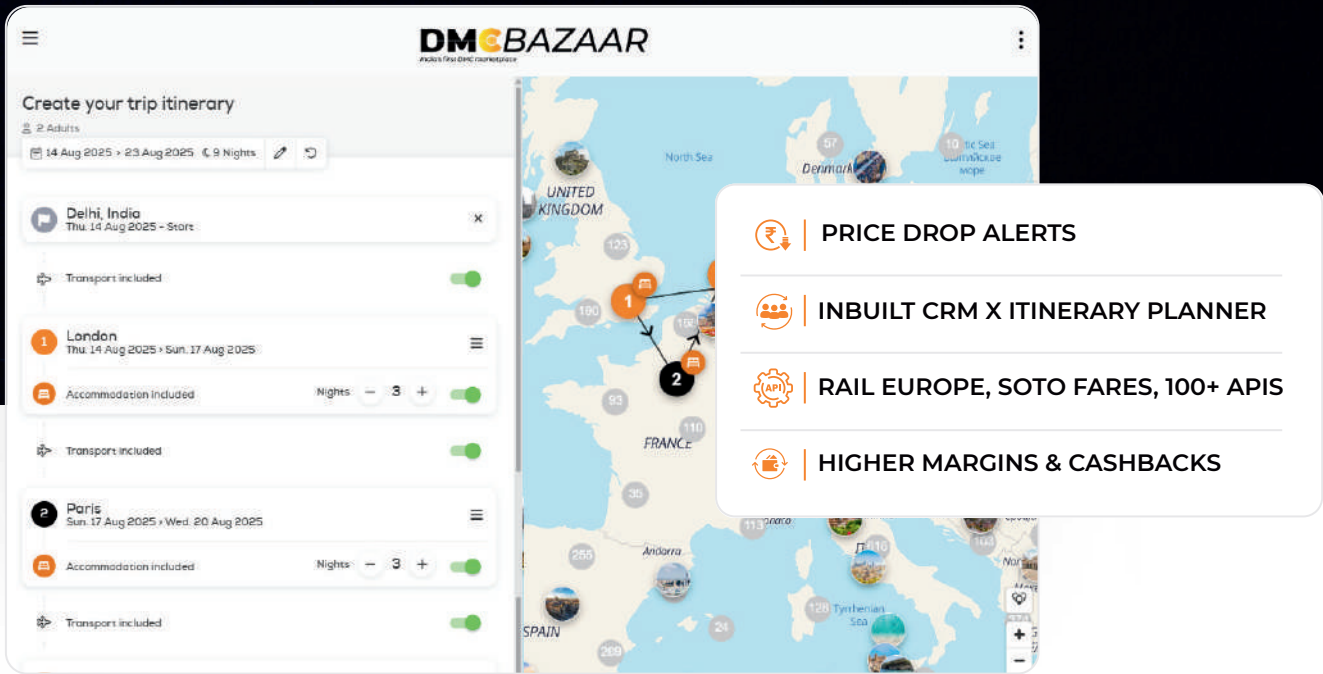
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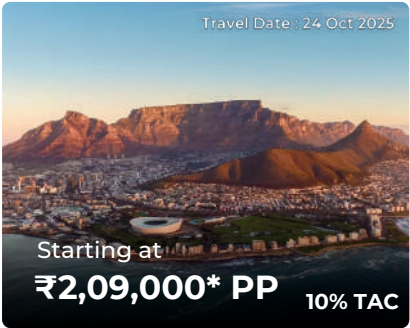
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# The eco-tourism shift driving India's new-age domestic travel

Eco-tourism in India is no longer a fringe movement; it is becoming a defining pillar of domestic travel. It is rapidly emerging as a preferred choice among Indian travellers seeking mindful, nature-connected experiences. As sustainability takes centre stage, hospitality brands are reimagining travel with purpose and impact. We spoke to a few key voices from the ecotourism sector to understand how this segment is evolving, as well as the challenges and opportunities shaping its future.

Prashant Nayak

As domestic tourism in India rebounds with new energy, a decisive shift is unfolding in how and why people travel. With rising awareness of sustainability, conscious travellers are opting for meaningful escapes that offer authenticity, connection with nature, and community impact, rather than conventional vacations.

### Nature Beckons Travellers

As travellers across India become more mindful of their environmental footprint and seek deeper purpose in their journeys, the domestic ecotourism landscape is undergoing a quiet but powerful transformation.

According to Tejas Chavan, Director, Grape County Eco Resort and Spa, Nashik, the evolving preferences of Indian travellers reflect a more conscious and immersive approach to tourism. “The trend toward wellness and eco-travel is leading the way, with many travellers looking for digital detox and mindful travel experiences in natural settings. Long stays are becoming the norm as visitors transition from two-day weekends to four to seven-day immersive experiences. Regenerative travel is trending,” noted Tejas.

Tejas, also a sustainability consultant, pointed out, “Experiences in ecotourism



▲ Tejas Chavan



▲ Abhijit Dey



▲ Dushyant Singh

have replaced material-based luxuries, with travellers wanting environmentally and socially responsible wildlife encounters, traditions of crafts offered by local leaders, and cultural engagement over luxuries. Slow tourism is gaining traction, with many opting for fewer destinations but engaging with them more authentically. Nature-based tech like bird-watching apps, wildlife tracking tools, and even VR conservation tours is helping expand these experiences. Sustainable gastronomy, such as farm-to-table dining or local cooking classes, is another growing pillar.”

Echoing his sentiment is Abhijit Dey, Vice President, Stone Wood Hotels and Resorts, who underscores the rising interest in offbeat,

nature-rich destinations. Abhijit said, “There is a noticeable shift in the preferences of domestic travellers who are increasingly drawn to offbeat, nature-based destinations that offer deeper, more immersive experiences. Today’s guests are actively seeking escapes that allow them to disconnect from urban chaos and reconnect with the natural world. The new-age traveller values authenticity and purpose in their journeys, and our portfolio is evolving to reflect and serve that very demand.” Stone Wood’s brand portfolio in destinations like Amboli, Gokarna, and Dandeli has seen growing traction, prompting expansion into luxury wildlife retreats across Jawai, Pench, Gir, Tadoba, Kanha, and Chail.





Dushyant Singh, Hotel Manager, Mulberry Shades Bengaluru Nandi Hills, offers a similar observation from a more wellness-oriented perspective, “There is a noticeable shift among domestic travellers toward ecotourism and nature-centric getaways. More people are seeking mindful escapes that emphasise sustainability, wellness, and a deeper connection with the natural world.” Interestingly, Dushyant notes that guest profiles are becoming increasingly broad. Beyond traditional nature lovers, they are now welcoming a younger audience, families, and even corporate groups.

### **Crafting Authentic Encounters with Nature – Responsibly**

As ecotourism becomes an increasingly integral part of India’s travel landscape, the need to balance access with preservation is more crucial than ever. At Grape County Eco Resort & Spa, the commitment runs deep from landscape to lifestyle. “We occupy 15 acres nestled within 3,000 acres of protected forest and 300 acres of biodiversity park, which allows guests to engage with nature as it is meant to be- untouched. We have also planted over 52,000 trees, creating a thriving habitat for over 50 species of birds and 30 species of butterflies. Everything from cycling trails to guided nature walks is curated to be non-intrusive and in harmony with the environment,” informed Tejas.

Their signature initiative, the Keeda Fest, exemplifies this ethos. Guests embark on monsoon nature trails to discover insects and flora in their natural habitat. From kayaking in rain-harvested lakes to horse grooming and staying in lake-facing condos or eco-villas designed with open-air architecture and minimal impact, Grape County blends environmental stewardship with curated comfort.

At Stone Wood Hotels and Resorts, the strategy starts from the ground up. Abhijit shared, “Our approach is deeply rooted in offering authentic wildlife and nature-driven experiences with minimal ecological disturbance. Properties are located in remote, biodiversity-rich regions, and our activities- safaris, treks, nocturnal trails - are led by local guides and trained naturalists.”

Built with eco-sensitive materials and powered by solar energy, each resort operates under the principles of zero waste and rainwater harvesting. “We are working toward a 100 per cent carbon-neutral footprint. Even our farm-to-table concept reinforces our sustainability ethos while offering guests an authentic taste of the local landscape,” added Abhijit.

Dushyant echoes the same thought with an emphasis on mindful operations. He said, “Each activity, from wildlife sightings to flora tours, is developed with naturalists and sustainability experts. We prioritise low-

impact practices, limit group sizes, and avoid ecologically sensitive zones.”

### **Sustainability Rooted in Community**

Authentic ecotourism goes beyond scenic views and green buildings- it uplifts local communities, preserves traditions, and builds economies from the ground up. In Grape County, community involvement is deeply interwoven with their operations. Tejas shared, “Most of our staff are hired and trained from nearby tribal villages. This not only empowers local youth with employable skills but also ensures that the region benefits economically from tourism. Our resort frequently hosts farmers’ markets, offering a platform for local farmers and vendors to connect directly with guests. Tribal artisans also feature in our on-site souvenir shop, and local performers are engaged regularly to showcase their cultural arts.”

Abhijit emphasised that sustainability without community integration is incomplete. He said, “At each of our properties, we employ educated local personnel, particularly in guest-facing cultural roles. It enhances authenticity and supports the regional economy. We also prioritise locally sourced materials and seasonal produce, reducing our carbon footprint while keeping our experiences rooted in place.”

At Mulberry Shades, community sourcing is an integral part of the culinary concept. “Our ‘Sustainable 0 Mile Indigenous Menu’ highlights produce from nearby farms and ingredients tied to the region. Beyond food, we hire locally across departments to build a workforce that understands and reflects the region’s culture,” said Dushyant.

### **Balancing Conservation and Tourism: A Delicate Line**

As wildlife tourism and eco-resorts gain popularity, there is growing awareness of the potential risks posed to the very ecosystems they celebrate. Tejas acknowledges this aspect. He opined, “Wildlife tourism can potentially overload forest ecosystems if ineffectively supervised, but it also has great potential as a conservation tool.” Citing past examples, such as crowding in Ranthambore, Tejas stresses the need for greater collaboration between policymakers and sustainability experts, like the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, and sets clear guidelines for eco-tourism management.

At Stone Wood, precautionary design and policy alignment are non-negotiable. Abhijit voiced his concerns: “Wildlife tourism, if unchecked, can indeed exert pressure on fragile ecosystems. Clear regulatory frameworks and a conservation-first approach must be at the heart of tourism development. We are committed to slow,

mindful expansion that puts the environment first.” Abhijeet believes sustainable growth hinges on vigilant oversight and shared responsibility.

Dushyant agrees that unchecked growth can strain ecosystems. He stated, “If not managed responsibly, ecotourism and wildlife tourism can indeed place stress on natural ecosystems. We believe the key lies in mindful planning, ongoing collaboration with communities and experts, and an unwavering commitment to environmental principles.”

### **Challenges and the Road Ahead: Eco-Hospitality in Transition**

For all its promise, running eco-sensitive retreats is not without complexity. From infrastructure limitations to managing guest expectations, operators often walk a tightrope between sustainability and service.

“Operating a 15-acre eco-retreat like ours comes with continuous challenges. From the high cost of sustainable materials and renewable energy systems to the need for ongoing staff training, it is a careful balancing act. Seasonality also plays a major role. Monsoons affect outdoor activities, while the dry months demand careful water management across our artificial lakes and landscaped areas. We often need to align guest expectations with environmental realities, creating luxury experiences within ecological boundaries,” said Tejas.

Abhijit shares similar operational hurdles. He explained, “Operating in remote, eco-sensitive regions is rewarding but not without its challenges. We struggle with sourcing high-quality supplies, maintaining reliable connectivity, and retaining skilled staff in remote areas. We rely on off-grid technologies, source and hire locally, and sustainability remains our guiding operational principle. A major challenge remains achieving near-zero carbon impact, but that is the goal we are relentlessly working toward.”

Dushyant adds that sustainability must be more than a philosophy, it must be embedded in design and operations. “From glass water bottles and wooden keycards to EV charging stations and sustainable architecture, our property reflects our values in every detail. The challenge lies in aligning these values with the comfort of our guests. But as awareness grows, eco-conscious hospitality will not just be an option, it will be a defining pillar of India’s travel industry.”

Yet for Abhijit, the long-term vision is crystal clear. He said, “The future of ecotourism in India is incredibly promising. Travellers today seek more than luxury; they want experiences with purpose. Our goal is to bridge untouched nature with curated indulgence. We call it ‘exponential experiences’; that is the future of new luxury.”



# TAAI leads the charge to restore confidence in J&K tourism with the 'Rally for the Valley' campaign

In response to the recent terror attack in Pahalgam, the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) in June 2025 launched a powerful initiative titled 'Rally for the Valley'. The campaign aimed to combat fear, counter negative perceptions, and revive tourist footfall in Jammu and Kashmir, reaffirming the region's identity as a safe and welcoming destination.

Team TTJ

TAAI's Rally for the Valley was a bold and timely event launched in Srinagar from June 10 to 12, 2025. Over 75 delegates travelled to Kashmir from across India to join the other 100-plus members of the TAAI J&K Chapter. Several events were held, including a special event to launch the rally with Chief Minister Omar Abdullah as the chief guest. A mega press meet and a special managing committee meeting were also held at Srinagar.

During the press conference, Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, emphasised the association's unwavering commitment to restoring confidence among travellers. Sunil said, "The primary purpose of this campaign is to promote J&K as a safe tourist destination and support the local livelihood. We are here to show the world that Kashmir is safe. Many of us have come with our families. This is our way of leading by example."

On the mission, TAAI was clear. This was a big step, once again, for the revival of tourism. No chaotic act can ever stop tourism and cause challenges to livelihoods - that is TAAI's clear motto. Thus, 'Let us go to J&K' was the loud call given by TAAI. On behalf of the 2,000-plus companies that are members of TAAI, the entire TAAI team, spread across 20 regions and chapters in India, is geared up to challenge the current crisis and help revive tourism in J&K.

The president commended the strong teams at regions and chapters who will herald a great show in the coming months. Sunil also reminded that in 2018, during difficult times in the J&K Chapter, TAAI



J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah honoured with the Award of Leadership

organised its convention in Srinagar with a large delegation, which surely resulted in the revival of tourism. He stated, "Again, it is our responsibility to address this trying situation in J&K and extend all possible promotion and support."

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah narrated how the massive growth pattern of J&K was suddenly reduced to 'vacant seats and vacant rooms,' which threatened the livelihood of J&K. He thanked TAAI for this most timely gesture. The advisor to the Chief Minister, three members of the Legislative Assembly, a large number of hoteliers, and the heads of various travel and tourism associations joined to declare their support.

Calling on the government to prioritise tourist safety, Sunil emphasised, "Confidence stems from visible action. Authorities must ensure the safety of those who choose to visit. Tourism here is not just about leisure; it

is the lifeline for thousands across Kashmir." TAAI also seeks the support of all travel and tourism associations in India for the revival of tourism in J&K.

During its three-day campaign, TAAI delegates visited the most prominent locations, including Lal Chowk, Dal Lake with a Shikara Ride, Moghul Gardens, Hazrathbal Shrine, and Pahalgam. Some delegates also visited Gulmarg and Sonmarg to help promote these destinations.

TAAI's aggressive, bold, and strategic launch was widely acknowledged, appreciated, and applauded. TAAI has an impressive and aggressive way forward, which will soon be announced in its definitive bid to help revive tourism. On an optimistic note, Sunil stated, "This is not just a campaign; it is our responsibility. The campaign has begun, and it will continue until it creates a meaningful impact."







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Jungle Machan

# The Machan Lonavala: A Soulful Stay Story, Etched in Green

Tucked away beyond the usual bustle of Lonavala, The Machan offers more than just a forest stay – it is an immersive, off-grid escape. Harmonising eco-luxury with wild serenity, it invites travellers to slow down, reconnect with nature, and rediscover life among the treetops.

Prashant Nayak

Lonavala in Maharashtra has long been a favourite getaway for city dwellers – a quick escape with misty hills and postcard-perfect views. But for me, it was always just a pit stop – a place to grab essentials before heading into the wilder stretches. I have been drawn more to its fringes – like winding roads that lead to Tikona Fort or further on to Mulshi. The outskirts hold a different kind of magic: quieter, deeper, and less interrupted.

So, when I was invited to The Machan, tucked away in a remote forest patch beyond Lonavala, I did not hesitate. This was not just another weekend escape; it felt like a chance to disappear into the wild with my family and reconnect with nature and ourselves.

## Call of the Wild

What made The Machan even more intriguing was that I had heard about it for years, from nature lovers and travel stories, and now

the time had finally arrived. As a wildlife enthusiast and keen birder, the idea of living in a jungle always appeals. The thought of waking up among treetops, surrounded by birdsong, felt like a long-awaited calling.

We were booked for a two-night stay at The Machan, and the drive from Mumbai to the countryside calm of Lonavala was refreshingly smooth. But it was the final stretch, off the main road, that truly set the tone. That quiet transition, flanked by dense



Tree Trunks inside Jungle Machan



Bed with Forest View



2nd Storey Canopy View



green and filtered sunlight, felt like stepping into something gently magical.

## Among the Treetops, a World of Our Own

The Machan, the luxury eco-resort in Lonavala, offers treehouse accommodations elevated 30 to 45 feet above the forest floor, giving a unique view of the landscape. We had been allotted the Jungle Machan, a name that echoed promises of wilderness and adventure. A short climb from the reception led us to our treetop abode, and in that instant, we were transported to another world.

The Jungle Machan is a two-storey wooden sanctuary suspended among towering trunks and dense greenery. As we explored the space, it resonated with both the head and the heart. This was not just a room; it was a living, breathing experience. The lower level offered space, comfort, and a seamless forest view right from the bed and balcony, while the upper floor, a compact, dreamy alcove above the canopy, felt truly special. From its tiny balcony, we saw distant hill silhouettes, birds flitting through branches, and mist drifting in and out. It was surreal.

## Simple Pleasures, Wild Surroundings

Our Machan was full of little details that made us smile. Along with two washrooms and a beautiful bathtub, it featured a partially open-to-sky shower. The furniture had an old-world charm, but what truly delighted me were the vintage black rotary switches, a nostalgic nod to a slower, simpler time.

Meals at The Machan are typically served at the main restaurant, although in-room dining is also available. Since we arrived later than expected, the team graciously offered lunch in our room. Sitting on the veranda of our Machan felt like a picnic in the wild. No urban buzz – just rustling leaves, a curious squirrel, and bulbuls flitting nearby. It was not just a meal; it was an experience.

## Eco-Luxury, Rooted in the Forest

One of the most remarkable aspects of The Machan is that it is thoughtfully designed to preserve both privacy and the forest. The architecture speaks the forest's language, using honest textures, wood, stone, bamboo, and other organic elements to create a warm, earthy palette. Great care has been taken not to disturb the terrain or tree cover and we had four trunks spiralling right through our room. This is not just eco-conscious design; it is a deep respect for the land. The entire resort

feels built around nature. Slopes remain untouched, and trees have not been trimmed for views.

Beyond our Jungle Machan, we explored the property and glimpsed other categories of accommodation, each with its own charm. The Forest and Canopy Machans offered stunning elevation and privacy. The Woods are preferred by couples. The Starlight Machan, designed for stargazing, stood out. But it was The Cocoon – a dome-shaped, elevated villa that left a lasting impression. Blending cutting-edge design with deep immersion in nature, it felt less like a room and more like a retreat. During the monsoon, it becomes even more magical.

## Unplug, Unwind, and Just Be

There is plenty to-do or not to-do at The Machan, depending on the kind of traveller you are. You could go on guided nature treks and local exploration, try your hand at yoga on a forest deck, curl up with a book and a blanket, have a spa or bonfire session, or simply gaze at the stars if the skies are clear. There is no pressure to 'cover an itinerary' here – this is your time to reconnect with nature.

Phones barely work here; however, the Machan offers limited internet access at a price, but guests are gently encouraged to disconnect from devices and reconnect with nature, and that is what we did – birdwatching.

## Of Birdsong, Butterflies, and Fireflies

We spent our mornings exploring the surrounding thickets, eyes and ears tuned to the wild. The forest here comes alive with birdsong, especially at dawn. Being monsoon, we spotted only resident species, not the migratory ones. The most magical sound was that of the Malabar Whistling Thrush, the forest's own flautist. Red-whiskered Bulbuls were everywhere, while bursts of stunning colour came from Common Ioras, Orange-headed Thrushes, Orange Minivets, White-cheeked Barbets, Tickell's Blue Flycatchers, Sunbirds, and Shrikes. We were also lucky to spot a solitary owl and a vibrant Kingfisher.

We searched in vain for the Shekru (Indian Giant Squirrel) and the elusive Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, but the forest had other wonders to present: tree frogs, butterflies, agama lizards, and rock banana trees and we had magical evenings with fireflies. As darkness descended, they blinked around our Machan like living stars. A few even landed on our glass windows, pulsing softly. It was pure, childlike wonder.



The Cocoon- Pool & Deck

## A Resort that Serves and Sustains

Over the next two days, we dined at the restaurant – a lovely space with open views. The buffet was generous, offering both Indian and continental choices, with a live kitchen. The chefs were happy to tweak dishes, and the staff remembered our preferences. There was a genuine warmth in every interaction, the kind that makes you feel welcome without being overbearing. It gave us a deep appreciation for the effort and enthusiasm of the entire F&B team.

The Machan is predominantly off-grid, generating its energy from renewable sources like solar and wind. It also features a seasonal man-made lake. Spread across 25 acres, it is a space meant to be explored. Buggies are available for ease. It also offers a unique setting for business events, featuring an arboreal executive centre that is popular for corporate off-sites and team-building activities. The tranquil, nature-focused environment adds a refreshing touch, and a cheerful, efficient team, right from reception to housekeeping and service, is always on hand to guide and assist.

## An Experience Etched in Green

The Machan is not your everyday resort. Its remoteness may feel like stepping away from the world, but it actually brings you closer to your own rhythm and the beauty of unfiltered connection. Bring your loved ones, friends, children, and parents, and watch as nature quietly reshapes every conversation and moment. The Machan is an experience that must be felt at least once. And when you do, you will carry its silence, beauty, and spirit with you long after you have left the forest behind.



Out on a stroll



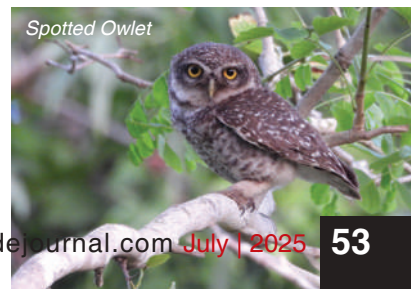
Malabar Whistling Thrush



Orange Minivet



White Breasted Kingfisher



Spotted Owlet



# USA Broadens its Travel Appeal at IPW 2025; India Emerges as a Strategic Focus

The US Travel Association hosted IPW 2025 at McCormick Place in Chicago, celebrating a successful return to the Windy City for the nation’s flagship international travel trade event.

Sonika Bohra

As the foremost platform for promoting inbound travel to the United States, IPW connects global buyers with American destinations, travel products, and experiences, driving future visitation and fostering strong business partnerships across the industry.

Held from June 14 to 18, the five-day event brought together more than 5,000 attendees from 64 countries, including over 1,800 international buyers and media, for a dynamic week of strategic business appointments, immersive cultural experiences, and global networking.

The event began with the much-anticipated IPW Press Brunch, hosted at the legendary Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs. Set against the thrilling backdrop of a live Cubs vs Pittsburgh Pirates game, the atmosphere was electric and undeniably Chicago.

Later that evening, delegates were treated to a showstopping opening night at the Field Museum, where they were greeted by Máximo the Titanosaur, the largest dinosaur ever to walk the earth. The museum was reimagined into a vibrant celebration of Chicago’s rich culture, blending immersive soundscapes, contemporary art installations, and local culinary delights, setting the stage for a week that celebrated the best of American hospitality with a truly global outlook.

## A Catalyst for the US Tourism Growth



Geoff Freeman, President and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association, highlighted the event’s economic significance. He projected that the show will bring over 11 million new international visitors to the U.S. over the next three years, generating \$26 billion in travel spending, supporting 63,000 American jobs, and producing \$3.3 billion in tax revenue. Freeman also addressed the need to enhance the U.S. travel experience to remain competitive, noting that while travel contributes \$1.3 trillion annually to the U.S. economy, including nearly \$200 billion from international visitors,

the country has lost market share over the past decade. This year’s IPW focused on efforts to grow lawful visitation and improve visitor experiences, supported by new data from U.S. Travel and Rockport Analytics. The three-day event saw over 100,000 business appointments, connecting U.S. destinations with international buyers and media, and spotlighting both iconic and off-the-beaten-path attractions across America.

## Spotlight on Chicago



As the host city, Chicago shone throughout the week. Choose Chicago, the city’s tourism arm, curated vibrant off-site events that showcased the city’s rich cultural offerings and urban flair. From art-filled receptions to live music, delegates experienced the many facets that make Chicago a world-class destination.

“Congratulations to the US Travel Association on a spectacular IPW 2025. It has been an honour to partner with the US Travel team to deliver a seamless, world-



class event that showcases both Chicago and the US. We are proud to have welcomed the world to our city that is never done and never outdone, and look forward to building on IPW’s success to drive future visitation to Chicago,” said Kristen Reynolds, President and CEO, Choose Chicago.

## Brand USA launches ‘America the Beautiful’ Campaign to Reignite Global Travel

Brand USA unveiled its bold new global tourism campaign, America the Beautiful, designed to reignite international travel to the United States by highlighting its emotional appeal, diversity, and cultural richness. Launching in August 2025, the campaign serves both as an invitation and a celebration of the U.S. experience.

Fred Dixon, president and CEO of Brand USA, said, “As we set our sights on 2026 and beyond, we are proud to announce America the Beautiful, a bold and unprecedented global tourism campaign. There has never been a better time to explore the beauty and energy of the USA, which continues to be the world’s most aspirational long-haul travel destination. With this campaign, we’re sending a clear message: the USA is open for business and ready to welcome legitimate international travellers. We are confident this effort will spark renewed interest and deepen connections with audiences around the world.”

Featuring a scalable, storytelling-focused approach and a personalized AI-powered platform, the campaign is built for global integration. Key initiatives include The Great American Road Trip, spotlighting 250 points of interest in partnership with the U.S. Department of Transportation.







## India at the Forefront



Among the international delegations, India emerged as a key growth market. With 34 travel, trade, and media professionals attending, the delegation reaffirmed India's strong interest in the US as a long-haul destination.

**Sheema Vohra, IAC Chair, India for IPW and Managing Director, Sartha Global Marketing,** shared, "IPW 2025 in Chicago was a tremendous success. Our Indian delegation, comprising representatives

from the travel trade and media, had a series of productive meetings. From

all accounts, the feedback has been extremely positive. IPW continues to be a premier platform for connecting with US suppliers and our trade partners to refresh and expand their US offerings. The United States remains the most aspirational long-haul destination for Indian travellers. I am optimistic that we will see an even larger delegation from India next year. At IPW 2025, we had 34 participants, and many of my colleagues reported high-quality meetings and meaningful engagements. For the trade, IPW is an excellent opportunity to discover what is new across the United States, a destination that is constantly evolving. It is equally valuable for media partners, who gain insights into fresh stories and emerging trends. The US continues to be a top-tier destination for Indian outbound travel, both in aspiration and experience."

## Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, Positions Itself on the Global Tourism Map at IPW 2025



Participating for the first time at the US Travel Association's IPW 2025 in Chicago, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, made a strong impression as an upscale yet accessible destination for international travellers. The history of Lake Geneva is shaped by time and grandeur. It is a beautiful, spring-fed lake of 5,000 acres, surrounded by the gilded-age mansions and estates that were made famous just after the Great Chicago Fire in 1871.

Today, Lake Geneva remains a thriving destination for luxury vacations, attracting residents of Chicagoland and beyond. Its proximity to Chicago makes it an easy escape. It is also a quiet retreat for hunting and fishing.

**Deanna Goodwin, Vice President, Marketing, Lake Geneva,** shared, "Summer remains the most popular season for visitors, thanks to a range of water-based and historical experiences. It is a lake destination, so very popular in the summer months with water activities, boat cruises, and historical cruises. One of the standout attractions is the Geneva Lake Shore Path, a public walkway that winds through the front yards of the

area's opulent estates. This is very unique to the country, to America." Another quirky yet iconic experience is the US Mailboat Tour, where guests can witness an old tradition in action.

Lake Geneva also boasts cultural and scientific significance. Goodwin highlighted the Yerkes Observatory, often referred to as the 'birthplace of modern astrophysics.' The observatory, once operated by the University of Chicago for over a century, has recently reopened for public tours following a multimillion-dollar restoration.

When asked about the value of participating in IPW and engaging with long-haul markets such as India, Goodwin emphasised the importance of visibility and accessibility. She said, "IPW helps us build connections like the ones we are making today. We are a small destination located between two major metropolitan areas, Chicago and Milwaukee, so this platform helps put us on the map and highlights just how easy it is to access Lake Geneva."

While acknowledging India's growing importance in the global tourism landscape, Goodwin mentioned that India is one of the fastest-growing outbound travel markets today. While Lake Geneva is new to the Indian market, the destination sees promising opportunities for future engagement.



## Explore Fairbanks Highlights Growing Interest from Indian Travellers in Alaska's Unique Offerings



**Bill Wright, Director of Tourism and Meeting Sales**, Explore Fairbanks, highlighted the increasing interest from Indian travellers in Alaska's rich and diverse experiences during a conversation at IPW 2025.

"We have seen a noticeable increase in inbound travellers from India, particularly post-pandemic. Many of them are visiting friends and family in the US and then extending their trips to Alaska," said Wright. He also noted that Indian visitors are especially drawn to summer experiences under the midnight sun, exploring

Denali National Park, wildlife, and local cultural interactions, all of which showcase Alaska's natural and authentic way of life.

Regarding India's importance in their international strategy, Wright emphasised, "India is quickly becoming our second-largest overseas market, just behind Europe and Australia. It is a primary focus for our international travel trade

and sales efforts." Explore Fairbanks is now preparing to transition from B2B to direct B2C outreach in India, recognising the market's rapid growth and appetite for long-haul, experiential travel.

When asked about unique experiences beyond the Northern Lights, Wright pointed to a growing demand for adventure and offbeat excursions. He explained that only about five per cent of Alaska's visitors make it to the Arctic, and Fairbanks is the ideal jumping-off point. Visitors often take flightseeing tours above the Arctic Circle and engage with Alaska Native culture, both in the Arctic and within the Fairbanks area itself. He also highlighted the Chena Hot Springs, located just 100 km from Fairbanks, offering a blend of natural hot springs, an ice museum, and scenic wilderness, a 'one-of-a-kind experience' just a short drive away.

Positioning Fairbanks as Alaska's premier year-round destination, Wright elaborated on its three distinct travel seasons: the Midnight Sun Season (April–August), the Aurora Season (August–April), and the Winter Season (within the Aurora Season), each offering its unique appeal and activities. "Fairbanks offers Indian travellers a unique combination of natural wonder, adventure, culture, and exclusivity- a destination truly unlike any other," Wright concluded.

## Visit Mississippi to Tap into Music Heritage and Cultural Storytelling to Engage Indian Travellers



Mississippi, often referred to as the 'Birthplace of America's Music', is leveraging its deep-rooted musical legacy to appeal to international audiences, including the growing Indian travel market. Speaking at IPW, **Katie Coats, Director of Marketing and Communications**, Visit Mississippi, emphasised the state's cultural positioning and international strategy.

"We are the birthplace of the blues, and by extension, the birthplace of America's music. This year, we are especially celebrating musical legends like Elvis Presley, who would

have turned 90, and BB King, who would have turned 100. Our year-long theme

focuses on this musical heritage, and it is a consistent narrative across all our international marketing efforts, including in India," said Coats.

When asked about must-visit destinations, Coats recommended starting with Jackson, the capital city, where music, culinary traditions, arts, and history all intersect. Among attractions that resonate globally and particularly with Indian audiences, Coats mentioned the Elvis Presley Birthplace in Tupelo and the Ground Zero Blues Club in Clarksdale.

Visit Mississippi is also responding to evolving global travel trends. Speaking specifically about India, she said, "We are just entering the Indian market through Travel South USA, working collaboratively with other Southern states. We are taking a regional approach to raise visibility and are looking forward to launching in-market activations and FAM opportunities soon."

## Visit Lake Charles Presents a Blend of Cultural Fusion, Nature Trails, and Luxury for Indian Travellers



Lake Charles, Louisiana, is positioning itself as a unique destination for Indian outbound travellers seeking an authentic cultural experience blended with luxury and Southern hospitality.

**Timothy Bush, Chief Marketing Officer**, Visit Lake Charles, shared, "For travellers looking for experiences deeply rooted in community and culture, Lake Charles offers a compelling mix. It is a place where you can enjoy luxury with a casual, down-home feel, a bit like a little

black dress with flip-flops."

Highlighting its Creole and Cajun heritage, Bush emphasised Lake Charles' appeal through food, festivals, and outdoor activities. Signature events, such as the Food and Wine Festival and the Rum Revival Grand

Tasting, attract visitors throughout the year. At the same time, cultural staples like local museums and lakefront developments offer immersive experiences.

Recognising India as a fast-growing market, Visit Lake Charles has already begun engaging with Indian travellers through familiarisation trips and influencer collaborations. "We hosted Indian influencers during Mardi Gras and welcomed writers like Varsha recently. It is part of our larger effort to understand and prepare for Indian visitors. We know we may not be the first stop in the US for many, but we want to be on the itinerary," Bush said.

Bush explained that Lake Charles is strategically located just three hours from New Orleans and is often likened to the Vegas of the South - upscale yet approachable, making it perfect for families and explorers alike, and an ideal addition to Southern US travel circuits. With growing interest from India and a rich portfolio of authentic experiences, Lake Charles aims to become a must-visit for Indian travellers seeking more than the ordinary.

## IPW Through the Eyes of Indian Delegates



**Manvendra Singh, Assistant Vice President**, DreamSet Go

Right now, our core focus at Dream Set Go is on building an entire portfolio that blends holidays with sporting experiences. Whether it's spectator sports or participatory ones, the opportunities in the U.S. are just immense. What excites me the most is how open and enthusiastic everyone is about the concept we're working on. The destinations and

experiences on offer are simply incredible, after all, sports is such a huge part of American culture.

From NASCAR driving to the Kentucky Derby, MLB games, and behind-the-scenes stadium tours, there's so much available from a destination standpoint. While Indian travellers are already heading to the U.S., we are now considering introducing certain sports, like MLB, which may not be as familiar in India, as culturally immersive experiences. Many of us have grown up seeing baseball games, hot dogs, and beer in Hollywood films; it's iconic. We want to bring that into the experiential fold. For niche luxury travellers, events like the Kentucky Derby are ideal, and then, of course, there's the NBA, another fantastic offering.





**Joseph D'silva, General Manager,  
SOTC Travel**

IPW has always been a great platform for building new connections. This was my seventh time attending, and each year, there's something fresh to discover. What I really appreciate about the U.S. is that it's not just about the big, well-known cities; there's so much more beyond that. I love how there's always more to explore in depth, with new regions constantly emerging.

For the Indian market, I strongly believe in offering more experiential and niche products for the U.S., beyond the typical itineraries. Experiential travel has become incredibly popular, and today's travellers are looking for experiences aligned with their personal interests, especially nature and adventure. That's why we're focusing more on promoting national park holidays and activity-based itineraries like kayaking and outdoor adventures.

Cities like Chicago, for instance, offer a completely different and enriching experience that hasn't yet been fully tapped in the Indian market. I believe Chicago has immense potential and can definitely be promoted in a much bigger way.



**Sufail Husain, Co-Founder,  
JourneyLabel**

This was my third IPW, after attending previous editions in Orlando and Los Angeles. For JourneyLabel, IPW is one of the important events we attend throughout the year. It provides an opportunity to explore new and emerging destinations within the USA territory. This is crucial for our business as it allows

us to continually refresh and expand the options we offer our guests, ensuring we can provide unique and memorable travel experiences.

This year in Chicago has been especially exciting and productive. We've invested significant time and resources into uncovering unique, enriching experiences that we believe our guests will absolutely love. IPW Chicago provided us with inspiring ideas and meaningful insights, and we're already integrating many of them into our upcoming plans. We are committed to continually growing and evolving, ensuring we always provide the most unforgettable experiences for you.



**Monia Kapoor, Proprietor,  
Travel O Holidays**

IPW is a crucial event for the global travel industry. As America's premier inbound travel trade show, it offers an unmatched platform to connect international buyers with destinations across the United States. This year's edition in Chicago was particularly

vibrant and inspiring. The city did a fantastic job of showcasing its global appeal, and it was wonderful to meet with so many U.S. states eager to engage with the Indian travel market. What stood out was the growing interest among Indian travellers in discovering lesser-known U.S. destinations and investing more in unique experiences and luxury stays.

I am returning with a refreshed perspective and an exciting list of remarkable new products to offer our clients. There is so much potential ahead!



**Sajjan Kumar Gupta, Travel Curator,  
Vayu Seva**

Attending IPW 2025 in the U.S. was truly an eye-opening experience. From engaging in over 50 impactful meetings with tourism partners to witnessing how the U.S. is thoughtfully curating immersive travel experiences for Indian travellers, the energy throughout was simply incredible.

One unforgettable personal highlight was riding a Harley-Davidson along the legendary Route 66. It was a dream road trip that perfectly captured the adventurous spirit of America.

The U.S. travel landscape is clearly evolving, with a growing emphasis on culture, wellness, and exploring second-city destinations. We are now more inspired than ever to design unique itineraries and group journeys that reflect this exciting new America.

IPW wasn't just a trade show; it was a powerful platform to build global bridges and craft unforgettable travel stories.



**Rajesh Kakade, Founder and Director,  
Red Carpet Travels**

It has been over five years since I started attending IPW, and each edition brings its own shades and colours. IPW is like a booster for my business. Red Carpet Travels, which has a strong hold on USA destinations, gains tremendous value by attending.

As one of the most influential international travel trade shows, IPW

connects us with top global buyers, especially from emerging markets like India. With 40+ pre-scheduled meetings, it's a powerful platform to present curated U.S. experiences, build alliances, and generate quality leads. It enhances our brand visibility among CVBs, hotels, and attractions, while providing insights into global trends to help us create culturally attuned itineraries.

This year's IPW meetings were dynamic, impactful, and above all, purpose-driven. Every meeting was well-curated and filled with opportunity. It reminded us why in-person trade shows are irreplaceable, the energy, spontaneity, and relationship-building. We return from IPW 2025 with renewed confidence, strong leads, and exciting plans for the future.



**Ashmi Dharía, Founder,  
Gypsy Soul Holidays**

This was my very first IPW experience, and it was both a strategic and inspiring experience. The event offered unparalleled access to a diverse array of U.S. travel partners, from destinations and DMCs to boutique hotels and off-the-beaten-path attractions, all in one place. It is a rare opportunity to explore fresh offerings, cultivate meaningful

relationships, and design bespoke itineraries that reflect the evolving interests of our travellers. I came away not just with great connections but with genuine inspiration for how we can elevate and reimagine the experiences we design for our clients.

The quality of meetings was exceptional, with U.S. suppliers demonstrating a refreshing openness and eagerness to collaborate. Every conversation felt purposeful, centered on fostering lasting partnerships. Chicago proved to be an outstanding host city, brimming with energy, culture, and character, which truly enhanced the overall experience. Everything was so well organised that we could fully focus on connecting, learning, and making the most of every moment.



# ITTA repositions to meet the needs of India's expanding domestic tourism market

Satish Sehrawat, President, Indian Tourist Transporters Association (ITTA), shared insights on how the association is adapting to the surge in domestic tourism, supporting its members through digital and sustainable practices, and advocating for policy reforms to drive inclusive growth.

Prashant Nayak

Although ITTA has traditionally focused on inbound tourism, the rapid surge in domestic travel is reshaping priorities. Recognising this shift, Satish Sehrawat notes that domestic tourism has now become equally crucial for its members, who are actively participating in and substantially contributing to this growing segment.

## Supporting Members Through Shifting Landscapes

As domestic travel continues to expand, ITTA regularly receives feedback from members highlighting key challenges in this evolving landscape. "Members frequently cite issues related to government regulations, taxation, and compliance. Operational concerns such as vehicle upkeep, driver training, and customer service are also prominent," informed Sehrawat.

To address these, ITTA engages with government departments to advocate for more industry-friendly policies. It also conducts regular training and capacity-building programmes for drivers and support staff to improve service quality. Additionally, the association provides a robust networking platform, enabling members to exchange best practices and discover business opportunities. ITTA keeps its members updated on industry trends and provides guidance on regulatory and operational matters, ensuring they remain competitive in a rapidly evolving market.

## Building Bridges

Recognising that domestic tourism thrives on synergy, ITTA plays an active role in fostering collaboration among key industry stakeholders like tour operators, hotels, state tourism boards, and airlines. "We create platforms where all stakeholders can engage, exchange ideas, and work toward common goals," said Sehrawat.

The association regularly participates in industry events, conferences, and seminars, while also signing MoUs with other associations and service providers to encourage strategic cooperation. ITTA facilitates networking opportunities for members to connect with various players across the tourism value chain.

In terms of long-term goals, Sehrawat affirmed, "We aim to promote not just travel,



▲ Satish Sehrawat

but responsible travel that highlights India's cultural richness and natural beauty. By encouraging sustainable practices and high service standards, we want to uplift the overall quality and impact of domestic tourism in India."

## Driving Digital Adoption

In an increasingly digital-first travel environment, ITTA is taking proactive steps to help its members embrace technology and expand their customer reach. Sehrawat stated, "We are committed to ensuring our members are not left behind in the digital shift."

From facilitating a pan-India WhatsApp group for B2B lead exchange to offering regular updates on market trends and regulatory changes through circulars, ITTA ensures that members remain informed and connected. "Through our Capacity Building Scheme, we also train drivers and support staff, equipping them with essential digital and operational skills. Our website and communication channels provide a hub for knowledge sharing, while ITTA's policy advocacy helps shape a tech-friendly environment that indirectly benefits transport operators nationwide," shared Sehrawat.

## Driving Sustainability

ITTA is also embedding sustainable and responsible tourism practices among its members, recognising the growing demand

for environmentally and socially conscious travel. "Sustainability is no longer a choice, it is a responsibility we must all embrace," said Sehrawat.

The association encourages members to adopt eco-friendly measures like reducing waste, conserving energy, and exploring cleaner transportation options. Through regular capacity-building programmes, ITTA trains drivers and support staff on sustainable tourism principles.

ITTA collaborates with industry stakeholders and government bodies to promote shared sustainability goals and advocate for responsible tourism policies. Sehrawat added, "We aim to help our members deliver high-quality, sustainable travel experiences that also benefit local communities."

## Policy Reforms to Shape the Future of Domestic Travel

India's domestic tourism landscape is poised for transformational growth, driven by forward-looking policy changes and industry developments. Key among them is the National Tourism Policy 2022, which emphasises green tourism, digital enablement, destination management, and skilling, creating a solid foundation for sustainable growth.

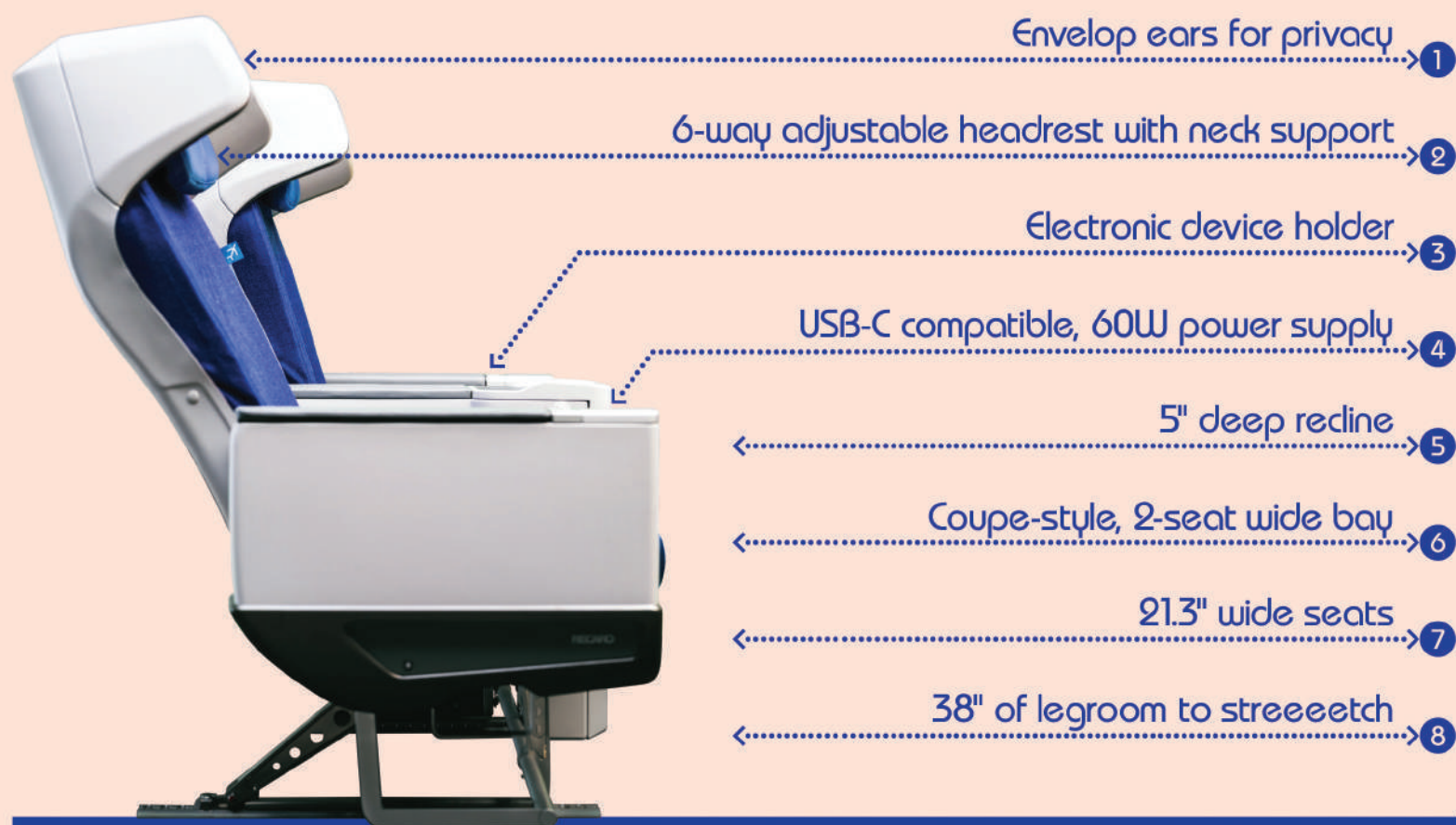
Digital tools, such as e-visas, web-based ticketing, and platforms like the National Integrated Database of the Hospitality Industry (NIDHI), are streamlining processes and enhancing tourist experiences. Improved last-mile connectivity to remote destinations through public-private investments will further unlock regional tourism potential.

Sehrawat pointed out, "Tax simplification across services, from transport to hospitality, can reduce cost burdens and level the playing field. Equally critical is investing in skill development, particularly in customer service and cultural sensitivity, to uplift service quality across the board. Promoting niche tourism segments like wellness, medical, and adventure tourism, combined with aggressive online and offline marketing, will help position India as a year-round, multi-interest destination."

Closing on an optimistic note, Sehrawat said, "We need progressive, unified policies to ensure inclusive, high-quality travel experiences for everyone."



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# MP Tourism hosts roadshow in Lucknow to boost inter-state collaboration and promote MP Travel Mart 2025

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board organised a roadshow at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Lucknow on Wednesday, June 25, 2025. The roadshow is part of the preparations leading up to the forthcoming Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart – Bhopal, announced from October 11 to 13, 2025, and the Regional Tourism Conclaves at Rewa, Gwalior, and Indore in July, August, and September 2025, respectively.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Rajendra Shukla, Deputy Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, was the Chief Guest, and Dharmendra Bhav Singh Lodhi, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Culture, Tourism, Religious Trusts and Endowments Department, Government of Madhya Pradesh, was the Guest of Honour. Jaiveer Singh, Minister of Tourism and Culture, Uttar Pradesh, Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Culture, and Religious Trusts & Endowments Department, and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Mukesh Kumar Meshram, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh, Prateek Hira, Chairman, FICCI Tourism Committee, Uttar Pradesh, Mahendra Pratap Singh, Chairman, FICCI Tourism Committee, Madhya Pradesh and Pankaj Tripathi, renowned Indian actor, were also present on the occasion.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Department of Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh, and the Department of Tourism, Government of Uttar Pradesh, for strategic collaboration in tourism promotion and development. Recognising the rich and complementary tourism offerings of both states, including shared cultural heritage, religious significance, natural landscapes, and historical assets, both states seek to establish a framework for strategic collaboration to jointly promote tourism, develop thematic circuits, and enhance infrastructure and connectivity.

Sheo Shekhar Shukla remarked, “Madhya Pradesh is a land of extraordinary richness and diversity in tourism. The state’s cultural legacy, natural beauty, historic heritage, and wildlife diversity provide visitors with a truly holistic experience. The state has already made an indelible mark on the global tourism map. Tourism is not just about economic growth; it is also a bridge for cultural connection and social inclusion. It is an enabler that empowers local communities, generates employment, and presents our cultural heritage on the world stage. In Madhya Pradesh, tourism is not just about visiting destinations; it is about discovering experiences. We welcome you not only as visitors but as partners in this journey. Your collaboration is vital in strengthening Madhya Pradesh’s standing on the world tourism map.”



## Stakeholders Engage in Dialogue

The roadshow provided a platform for bilateral discussions between tour operators, hotel industry representatives, and tourism stakeholders from both Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. These sessions will not only help drive regional tourism growth but will also contribute to the broader vision of national tourism prosperity.

## Showcasing Madhya Pradesh’s Rich Cultural Heritage

Shining a spotlight on Madhya Pradesh, the roadshow presented a vibrant showcase of the state’s cultural abundance, majestic landscapes, natural splendour, historic legacy, spiritual heritage, and rural allure.

Notably, the state welcomed 134.1 million visitors in 2024. Sacred sites such as Baba Mahakal, Omkareshwar, Chitrakoot, Maihar, and Amarkantak – the source of the Narmada River – continue to draw pilgrims and spiritual seekers.

Madhya Pradesh is home to 18 UNESCO sites (three inscribed and 15 in the tentative

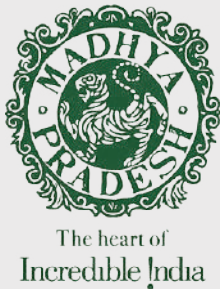
list), including the Khajuraho Group of Monuments, Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, and Sanchi Stupa. Known as the Tiger State, Leopard State, Gharial State, Cheetah State, and Vulture State, MP boasts the largest forest area in the country and unmatched natural treasures. Pachmarhi, Amarkantak, Bhedaghat, Hanuwantiya, Gandhi Sagar, Tamia, Sailani Island, and Sarsi Island stand as key nature tourism hotspots.

As part of the comprehensive programming, the event included Thatia dance performances by the Gond tribals of Madhya Pradesh, a press conference, and a B2B networking workshop.

## Seamless Connectivity from Uttar Pradesh

Travel from Uttar Pradesh to Madhya Pradesh is now more convenient than ever. Major cities like Lucknow, Varanasi, Agra, Kanpur, and Prayagraj enjoy excellent air connectivity with Gwalior, Khajuraho, Bhopal, Indore, and Jabalpur. Rail routes link Rewa, Orchha, Gwalior, and Khajuraho, complemented by an extensive road network that ensures easy access to key destinations within the state.





# MONSOON MAGIC IN MADHYA PRADESH

Gurgling streams, gushing rivers, and thunderous waterfalls

## PARADISE IN PACHMARHI

Escape the summer heat with a monsoon road trip to Pachmarhi, the "Queen of Satpura." Cruise across the serene waters of Tawa Dam and Reservoir, weaving past tiny islets nestled amid rolling hills. Trek through the rain-washed forests to Apsara Vihar, home to the magical Fairy Pool. Marvel at Bee Falls, named for the humming sound of cascading water. And if you are up for a challenge, join the Pachmarhi Monsoon Marathon on July 13, an unforgettable run through misty, green-clad trails.



DHUANDHAR FALLS, JABALPUR



MONSOON MARATHON, PACHMARHI



BUFFER ZONES OF KANHA



PURVA WATERFALL, REWA

## MANDU'S MONSOON MAHALS

Perched high on a plateau, the historic city of Mandu comes alive in the rain. Medieval monuments like the Jahaz Mahal, which appears like a ship floating in monsoon-filled pools, and the slanted arches of Hindola Mahal exude a dreamlike charm. As mist wraps around the Rani Roopmati Palace, it is easy to believe you are inside a timeless love story. Monsoon is when Mandu's poetry-in-stone reveals its most romantic self.

## BLISSFUL BUFFER ZONES OF KANHA

Experience the quieter side of the jungle in the lush buffer zones of Kanha, including Khatia and Sijhora. While the big cats often retreat deeper into the forest, you may glimpse sloth bears, barasinghas, or an elusive jackal crossing your path. The rain-drenched Sal and Saaj trees shimmer, and new foliage on Kusum and Tendu trees adds bursts of red to the green canopy, nature's seasonal makeover.

In Madhya Pradesh, the monsoon is not just a season; it is a celebration of the senses. As the first drops kiss the earth, the parched landscape sheds its summer browns for vibrant shades of green, interwoven with ribbons of blue. The mood shifts with the clouds, some visitors seek stillness, soaking in the countryside charm; others take to the drenched forests for a rejuvenating walk; while the adventurous feel the thrill of rain on long, winding road trips. How would you like to celebrate the rains?

## TRANQUIL TAMIA

The monsoon transforms Tamia into a picture-perfect paradise. Streams join hands to form cascading waterfalls, mist hugs the hillsides, and dramatic cloud formations paint the sky. It is a dream for photographers and nature lovers alike. Settle into a British-era bungalow, sip on hot tea, and gaze out over the horseshoe-shaped Patakot Valley, home to the Gond and Bharia tribes. From your misty mountain perch, you will feel suspended in a moment, paused in reverence, untouched by time, and surrendered to the stillness.

## WHISPERS OF WATERFALLS AROUND KHAJURAHO

When the rains arrive, the wild landscapes near Khajuraho transform into a realm of cascading beauty. Just 34 km away, Pandav Falls in Panna National Park tumbles nearly 100 feet into a heart-shaped pool, surrounded by lush greenery and ancient caves believed to have sheltered the Pandavas. Nearby, the volcanic rock canyons of Raneh Falls erupt with seasonal cascades plunging into the Ken River gorge. It is a spellbinding mix of nature, myth, and monsoon magic, where every drop tells a story.

## RUGGED ESCAPES NEAR REWA

Prepare to be awestruck by the power of water. Near Rewa, the Bahuti Waterfall roars down from a staggering height of 650 feet, its mist rising like a curtain of clouds. Close by, Chachai Waterfall, one of India's highest single-drop falls, plunges 427 feet into a lush gorge. The nearby Purva Waterfall adds to this trio of dramatic spectacles. In this quiet, rugged corner of the state, nature's raw power and beauty captivate photographers, artists, and nature lovers alike.



JAHAZ MAHAL, MANDU

Madhya Pradesh in the monsoon is a journey through moods, memories, and mist. Come, let the rains reveal a wilder, greener, and more poetic side of the heart of India.

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## US opens student visa applications



US State Department Deputy Spokesperson Mignon Houston announced the reopening of student visa applications for the United States, urging applicants to apply while underscoring that visa decisions are rooted in national security concerns. She stressed that student visas must be used solely for academic purposes and that immigration policies aim to protect both US citizens and international students. Addressing US-India relations, Houston called India a key partner in the Indo-Pacific and reaffirmed ongoing trade negotiations. She emphasised the need for a fair and reciprocal trade relationship, aligning with the Trump administration’s America First policy. Houston also defended US tariffs, citing their role in addressing unfair trade practices that have impacted American farmers and industries. Bilateral trade talks between India and the US continue ahead of the July 9 deadline, which ends a 90-day pause on reciprocal tariffs. President Trump has indicated that a trade deal is likely soon, though India remains firm on agricultural issues, prompting extended negotiations in Washington.

## Dusit International to launch its first all-inclusive lifestyle resort in the Maldives with dusitD2 Feydhoo



Dusit Hotels and Resorts will launch dusitD2 Feydhoo Maldives, its first all-inclusive lifestyle resort and second Dusit-branded property in the Maldives, complementing the luxury Dusit Thani Maldives. Soft opening on July 27, 2025, the resort is just seven minutes by speedboat from Malé airport.

Located on a pristine island fringed by a lagoon and coral reefs, the resort offers 127 stylish beachfront and overwater villas ranging from 77 to 306 sq m, most with private decks and plunge pools. Guests can enjoy à la carte dining at five venues, unlimited premium drinks, live entertainment, and generous resort credits.

From snorkelling and spa treatments to beach cinema and floating breakfasts, dusitD2 Feydhoo promises curated experiences for modern travellers seeking connection and discovery. A full-service conference facility for up to 240 guests also makes it ideal for corporate retreats and incentive travel, all within close proximity to the capital.

## Rudra Reps to represent and market LAAX, Switzerland in India

Nikita Rawtani, Founder of Rudra Reps and TravelGyaan, has been appointed as the official representative for LAAX, Switzerland, in India. In this role, she will drive destination awareness, promote LAAX’s unique offerings, and boost Indian tourist arrivals.

Located in the Swiss Alps, LAAX is globally renowned for its world-class ski resorts, adventure activities, vibrant lifestyle, and sustainable tourism. With Rawtani’s expertise in destination marketing and deep connections in the Indian travel trade, the partnership aims to position LAAX as a top choice for both leisure and MICE travellers from India.

Through Rudra Reps, Rawtani provides strategic representation services for global tourism boards and hospitality brands, while her platform TravelGyaan is a leading travel education resource in India.

Her focus will be on engaging with travel agents, tour operators, media, and consumers, highlighting LAAX’s skiing, family-friendly attractions, culinary experiences, and eco-friendly initiatives. This collaboration is set to unlock LAAX’s full potential in the Indian outbound travel market.



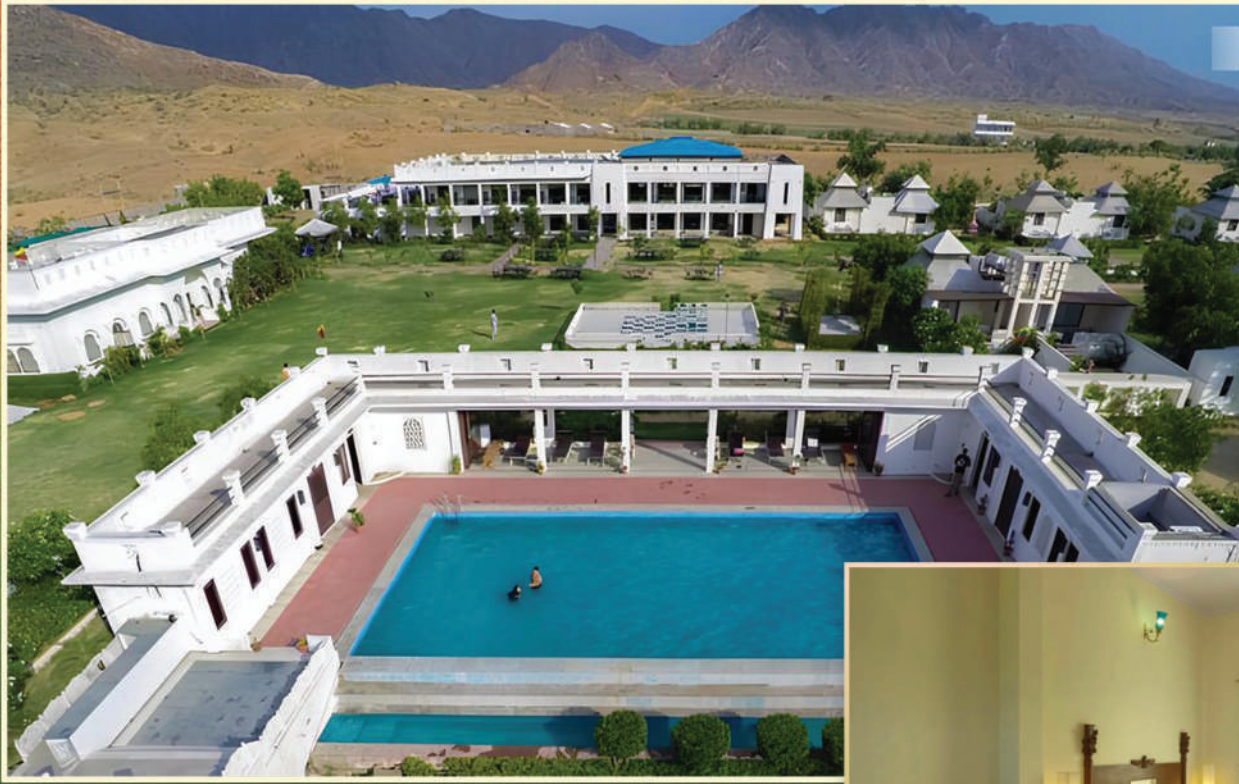




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## Oman Air joins oneworld alliance as 15th full member



Oman Air has officially joined the oneworld alliance as its 15th member airline, marking a significant milestone in the carrier’s international growth strategy. As the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, its entry significantly expands oneworld’s presence in the Middle East and opens new travel opportunities for passengers worldwide.

With this development, oneworld customers now have access to Oman Air’s growing global network, including the newly launched non-stop Muscat–Amsterdam route. Members of the oneworld Emerald, Sapphire, and Ruby tiers can enjoy key privileges such as priority check-in and boarding, lounge access, and the ability to earn and redeem miles across the alliance. Oman Air’s top-tier members will similarly benefit from access to nearly 700 premium lounges worldwide, including new oneworld-branded facilities in Amsterdam and Seoul.

Operating from its hub at Muscat International Airport, Oman Air serves 42 destinations across 22 countries, offering a premium three-cabin experience.

## Jaspreet Bhatia elected CGTTA President, unveils ambitious plans for Chhattisgarh’s travel trade



At the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Chhattisgarh Travel Trade Association (CGTTA) held in Raipur on May 31, 2025, Jaspreet Bhatia, Founder, Ice Cubes Holidays, was elected President for the upcoming term. Sumit Agrawal of Seeta Travels was appointed Secretary, while Reena Jotwani from Let’s Travel will serve as Joint Secretary.

The AGM focused on key challenges and opportunities in the travel industry, with the new executive team outlining core priorities. These include improving regional and national air connectivity, facilitating international flight operations from Raipur, expanding CGTTA’s membership, and creating long-term value for stakeholders in Chhattisgarh’s tourism sector.

A six-month strategic roadmap was finalised, emphasising advocacy, partnerships, and capacity-building. The new leadership remains committed to promoting collaboration and innovation while working closely with government bodies, tourism boards, airlines, and industry professionals to strengthen the state’s position in the national and international travel trade ecosystem.

## Indiatourism Delhi celebrates International Day of Yoga at Qutub Minar Complex in New Delhi

The Sun Dial Lawns at the iconic Qutub Minar Complex hosted a vibrant celebration of the International Day of Yoga on June 21, 2025, organised by Indiatourism Delhi under the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Aligned with this year’s global theme, ‘Yoga for One Earth, One Health,’ the mass yoga session brought together over 400 participants from across the tourism and wellness sectors.

The session witnessed the presence of distinguished guests, including Gajendra Singh Yadav, Member of Legislative Assembly; Lakshay Singhal, IAS, District Magistrate, South Delhi; Priyanga Wickramasinghe, Deputy High Commissioner, Embassy of Sri Lanka; Wathsala Amarasinghe, Minister Counsellor, Embassy of Sri Lanka; and senior officials from the Ministry of Tourism.

Renowned Yoga Instructor Gopal Rishi from Sukrit Wellness, along with his team, guided participants through a well-curated sequence of Yogic postures and Pranayama techniques. Attendees included members of ADTOI, TAAI, and IATO; Regional Level Tourist Guides; Yuva Tourism Club students; IHM Pusa faculty and students; ASI officials; and local residents.

Participants also viewed the live-streamed address by the Hon’ble Prime Minister, which served as a moment of inspiration during the session.





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## AURGRF urges India to adopt updated Montreal Convention Compensation limits



Following the tragic crash of Air India Flight AI171 in Ahmedabad on June 12, which claimed 241 onboard and over 30 lives on the ground, the Airline Users Rights and Grievances Redressal Forum (AURGRF) has urged the Civil Aviation Ministry to adopt the revised Montreal Convention 1999 (MC99) compensation limits, effective globally from December 28, 2024.

While Air India and the Tata Group announced Rs 1 crore compensation per victim, AURGRF highlights major inconsistencies in India's passenger rights framework. Current domestic limits fall short of the updated MC99 standards, 151,880 SDR (~USD 202,500) for death/injury, and significantly higher thresholds for baggage, cargo, and delays.

MC99, supported by ICAO annexes, provides a uniform liability standard across domestic and international flights, critical for Indian carriers operating mixed-route fleets and code-shares. AURGRF calls for immediate ratification of the new limits, amendments to the 2019 charter, and equal protections for all passengers. This, they say, is a crucial moment for India to demonstrate leadership in aviation safety and passenger rights.

## IndiGo commences long haul flights direct between Mumbai and Manchester



IndiGo has launched its first-ever direct long-haul flights from Mumbai to Manchester and Amsterdam, marking a significant milestone in its global expansion strategy under the 'Towards New Heights and across New Frontiers' vision. Operated thrice weekly, these new routes enhance connectivity between India and key European hubs, benefiting business travellers, students, tourists, and the Indian diaspora.

The flights are operated by Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft on damp lease from Norse Atlantic Airways, featuring 56 IndiGoStretch and 282 Economy seats. Passengers enjoy over 300 hours of inflight entertainment and complimentary hot meals in collaboration with leading Indian brands.

Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport further connects Indian travellers to Europe, North America, and Canada, while Manchester opens doors to Northern England. IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers highlighted the airline's commitment to delivering seamless, affordable global travel. The long-haul expansion will continue with Airbus A321XLRs later this year and Airbus A350-900s from 2027.

## Air Astana expands Mumbai–Almaty route with increased frequencies

Air Astana has announced a significant expansion of its Mumbai–Almaty route, enhancing connectivity between India and Kazakhstan to meet rising demand. Effective June 24, 2025, the airline has increased its frequency from three to four weekly flights as part of its Summer Schedule. Flights now operate on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday from Mumbai, with return flights from Almaty on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Sunday.

Building on this momentum, Air Astana will further upgrade the route to daily operations, starting October 28, 2025, under its Winter 2025 schedule. This strategic move is designed to offer greater travel flexibility and seamless onward connections for both MICE and leisure travellers.

The direct flights, averaging 4.5 hours, will provide enhanced accessibility to Almaty and support expanding interest in Central Asia from Indian outbound markets. With daily service, Air Astana reaffirms its commitment to the Indian travel trade and to strengthening bilateral tourism and business ties between India and Kazakhstan.





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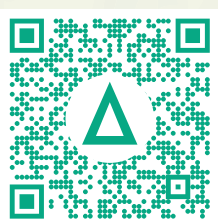


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