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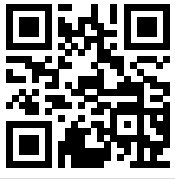
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## How fresh ideas drive business?

There is nothing wrong with offering run-of-the-mill itineraries to the new traveller, but one needs to keep innovating, fashioning something unique to create fresh demand. **TRAVTALK** speaks to a few agents creating a niche with their own ideas.



Hazel Jain

“It is better to fail in originality than succeed in imitation,” said Herman Melville, the famous novelist, short story writer, and poet of the American Renaissance period. The Indian travel industry does boast of agents and destinations that are trying to do something different from the rest. **Manish Sharma**, Chairman, Akshar Travels & Tourism Development Society,

Gujarat, introduced a new concept, Election Tourism, way back in 2012. This was during the Assembly elections in Gujarat where Narendra Modi, the then CM, encouraged this project. “We invited more than 300 tourists from all over the world and India, and we explored elections in Gujarat. This project was a huge success. After that, in 2014, we did this again at the Lok Sabha elections. That was again a huge success and we attracted more

than 2,000 tourists from around the world,” said Sharma.

His idea was to showcase the world’s biggest democracy to the world and get tourists from the USA, the UK, Japan, France, Germany, Africa, and the Middle East. This specially appeals to those living in countries with other forms of governance. “People choose their political leaders by vote. For other countries, this is a totally

new concept. And they want to know how the system works up close and how people choose their political leaders. We organise rallies, participation in sabhas, as well as one-on-one meetings with political leaders,” Sharma adds. He includes day trips to the leaders’ hometown, as well as heritage spots in the package.

### Slow travel

**Anshu Tejuja**, Managing Director,



**Manish Sharma**  
Chairman, Akshar Travels & Tourism Development Society, Gujarat

Ashoka Dream Holidays, is a big believer in slow travel. She has created an activity for her clients that includes experiencing night skies in Japan’s Achi Village, as well as



**Anshu Tejuja**  
Managing Director  
Ashoka Dream Holidays

astronomical tours. “This village is famous for its stunning night skies. Due to its location, it has a high altitude with minimal light

Contd. on page 11 ▶

## Indians love shopping!

Shopping is not just an activity for Indian travellers; it's a crucial component of their travel experience, especially while travelling abroad. Industry experts share their views on the matter.



**Mathias Sinner**  
Head of Tourism, McArthurGlen Group

“We know that Indians love to shop while they travel; it is an important activity for them. They also like a good deal and look for discounts while shopping. That is why we believe our brand and our product fits very well with this market and there is a lot of attractiveness for the Indian travellers when they come to Europe. We offer anything between 30 per cent and 70 per cent off the normal retail price – that is standard across all our outlets all year round. But we also have sale season where you get even more discounts. We also know how important VAT refunds are for Indian travellers. Our biggest outlets, especially those favoured by Indian travellers, have in-centre tax refunds.”

Contd. on page 12 ▶

## MOT's summer mantra

In a bid to lure foreign tourists to Indian shores during the summer months, and to project India as a 365-day destination, the Union Ministry of Tourism has launched a new initiative, called ‘Coolcation’.



TT Bureau

**Manisha Saxena**, Director General, Ministry of Tourism (MOT), Government of India, has revealed that to promote India as a 365-day destination, the MOT has launched a new initiative, called ‘Coolcation’, under which a plethora of destinations will be identified that would attract foreign tourists during the summers in India.

Saxena said, “India is not just a six-month destination from Octo-



**Manisha Saxena**  
Director General, MOT, Government of India

ber to March. It is a 365-day destination. We have just launched

an initiative called ‘Coolcation’ to dispel the myth that summers are hot in India. There are some cool pockets in India too. Wed in India is the focus this year as we endeavour to showcase India’s culture and traditions around weddings across the country. At the same time, while weddings and meetings are important, India is a land with vibrant cultural experiences and it offers much more. Our effort is to make India’s tourist destination much more attractive.”

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# Mumbai IATO in a fix over guide charges

Owing to the inadequate number of accredited tourist guides in Mumbai, IATO members in the city are having a tough time fixing charges for them. This is more so for cruise passengers docking in Mumbai, for which the charges need to be negotiated with Tourist Guides Association (TOGA) Mumbai. The issue has been presented to the Ministry of Tourism.



Hazel Jain

The IATO Maharashtra Chapter recently conducted its chapter meeting with members in Mumbai to discuss certain issues they are facing. This includes guide charges for cruise passengers and tourist guides as well. They had invited Dr Sagnik Chowdhury, Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, to introduce him to members, as well as bring to his notice these challenges.

**NS Rathor**, Chairman, IATO Western Region, says, "We are facing a lot of problems with the cruise guide rates. So, we want to discuss this with our members. We have a lot of international cruise liners coming into Mumbai. The regular rates for city-sightseeing and Elephanta Caves etc are negotiated by IATO



NS Rathor, Chairman, IATO Western Region and Jitendra Kejriwal, Chairman, IATO Maharashtra and Dadra, Nagar Haveli & Daman Chapter

through the Delhi national body of Tourist Guides' Federation of India (TGFI). However, for cruise passengers we have to negotiate rates locally. So, we had a meeting with the Tourist Guides Association (TOGA) Mumbai. They are asking us to pay 15-20 per cent more than the current rate negotiated with TGFI. We have not yet agreed on that. We have offered them 10 per cent. We will discuss

this issue with our members and offer TOGA this rate. We hope they will agree with this."

IATO had requested for a flat rate of 10 per cent for two years, but TOGA has disagreed. The Tourist Guides Association (TOGA) Mumbai claims to be the only group of government approved guides, licensed and trained by the Ministry of Tourism, and affiliated to TGF

and WFTGA (World Federation of Tourist Guide Associations).

Speaking for his members, **Jitendra Kejriwal**, Chairman, IATO Maharashtra and Dadra, Nagar Haveli & Daman Chapter, says, "Ever since travel has restarted, the tourist guides have started asking for a lot more money. They have started to charge more for every little thing they have to do.

For instance, if they have to climb steps, they charge extra, if there is an issue with client, then they charge extra. This is an ongoing issue, and we will sort it out soon. There is a scarcity of good tourist guides in Mumbai, a lot of guides left the market during COVID. I believe, the Ministry of Tourism is training new people, which should resolve this problem as well."



## American tourists paying more

Sharing his feedback on the inbound traffic, Rathor says that the US and UK markets have opened up and are doing well. "Thanks

to the US market, we are seeing a lot of high-end Americans coming to India. They are upgrading their package in terms of vehicle and hotels, so it has been good business for us. A lot of them are coming on charter flights, and they use high-end vehicles like S-Class and vans and opting for five-star hotels. A lot of cruise tourists have also started coming in from the US. Unfortunately, we are at the fag end of this season and a lot of cruise groups are cancelling because of the war in Red Sea."

Unfortunately, Europe has not yet started, especially France and Italy. "They don't want to do long-haul travel at the moment. A little bit of German traffic has started trickling in but not in big numbers. Unless and until they start coming to India, our budget tourism will be affected. Hopefully, this year we should get some good business from them," he shares. 🐦

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# How Indians plan their trips

A report by Booking.com unveils interesting facts about the Indian traveller. It says that about 61 per cent Indians book flights first, 37 per cent book event tickets before their stays and 33 per cent wait to book car rentals, restaurants and taxis until after securing hotels.

## Marketing will never be passé

We all know how successful 'Incredible India' branding was for the tourism of the country. However, despite the lasting imprint of the brand, the proactive efforts to capitalise on its success seem to have dwindled. A recent instance was the absence of a significant Indian presence at a global event like the ATM in Dubai. With the wealth of experiences the country can offer, we cannot afford to get lost amid neighbouring countries at an event like ATM. While some states showcased their unique attractions in individual booths, the absence of a cohesive front was notable.

Several factors could contribute to this subdued marketing effort, including constraints imposed by election codes of conduct and limited funding for tourism promotions this year. Although the approvals and plans for events like ATM happen much in advance. Unfortunately, such circumstances primarily affect inbound tour operators, as the potential for earning foreign exchange through tourism remains significant.

The overarching goal for inbound recovery aims to reach 2019 levels by the end of this year or early 2025. However, even if this target is met, it would still fall short of the visitor numbers seen in many other countries. Consequently, there is a noticeable absence of a robust international presence that requires fortification on multiple fronts. While infrastructure development is evident across the nation, there is a pressing need to enhance communication and promotion efforts to effectively spread the word.

While initiatives like 'Coolcation' introduced by the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) are commendable, there is still a notable gap in international outreach. Without a robust international presence, the prospect of attracting large numbers of foreign tourists will remain distant. Strengthening this aspect is crucial for realising the full potential of India's tourism sector.

TT Bureau

Everyone plans their holidays differently. While some Indian travellers prioritise securing the perfect flight deal first, others crave for the comfort of booking their accommodation before planning the rest of their travel itinerary. Booking.com's Travel Trends for 2024 unveils interesting insights into the mindset and behaviour of Indian travellers when they plan their trips. While 61 per cent of travellers book flights and 37 per cent book event tickets well in advance, car rentals, restaurant reservations and even taxis are either booked along with the accommodation or left until closer to the trip date.

**Planning for takeoff – Flights lead the way:** More than half (61 per cent) of Indian travellers book their flights before securing accommodation while planning their holiday.



**The all-in-one approach:** Around a quarter of Indian travellers prefer booking multiple aspects of their trip at the same

time and are looking to book flights, accommodation, attractions, car rentals, restaurant reservations and even taxis simultaneously on a platform offering seamless travel experience.

**Foodies rejoice:** While making decisions about the choice of accommodation, Indian travellers emphasise culinary convenience. About

About 40 per cent of travellers are willing to pay extra for that delicious breakfast spread and 54 per cent crave for unique food experiences

40 per cent of travellers are willing to pay extra for that delicious breakfast spread and 54 per cent crave for unique food experiences like food tours and cooking classes.

### How Indians are booking various aspects of their travel

Booking order	Before booking the accommodation	At the same time as booking accommodation	After booking the accommodation but before the trip	During the trip
Flights	61%	26%	9%	3%
Attractions	34%	35%	18%	13%
Rental Cars	24%	33%	24%	19%
Restaurant Reservation	27%	36%	20%	18%
Trains	58%	25%	13%	4%
Taxis	23%	25%	20%	33%
Travel Insurance	51%	32%	12%	5%
Event Tickets	37%	30%	21%	12%

**Last-minute decisions on the ground:** Nearly a third (13 per cent to 33 per cent) of Indian travellers wait until after booking their stays and just before their trips, to arrange car rentals, restaurant reservations and taxis. They look for flexible and spontaneous experiences during their travels. This likely allows them to discover hidden gems and local delights.

**Train travel:** Planning is key: More than half (58 per cent) of Indian travellers book train tickets before securing accommodation to ensure a smooth journey and avoid the stress of last-minute scrambling for seats.

## Summer travel trends

### India's most searched destinations for summer 2024

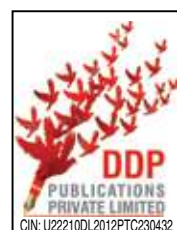
Top 20 domestic cities in India contribute 45% of all searches in Mar-Apr 23-24

Goa remains the most searched destination. Srinagar & Udaipur have the highest growth in searches. (Mar-Apr 23 vs Mar-Apr 24)

Puri & Varanasi are the most searched pilgrimage destinations this summer

Ayodhya continues to record growth in search volumes

Source: MMT



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# M!CE biz grows in North-East

With significant improvement in the North-East's infrastructure, travel to the region has become easy. Moreover, both governments and private entities have been promoting the region for M!CE and weddings. **TRAVELTALK** speaks to experts to get a better picture.



Hazel Jain

Increased attention from the Union government, including enhanced air connectivity, has played a significant role in boosting tourism in the North-East region. Hotels in the region see rise in not only leisure business, but also a slight increase in M!CE queries. **K Mohanchandran**, Senior Vice President (Operations – East & North-East India), IHCL, says his team frequently receives inquiries from the M!CE and wedding segments from various parts of India. "The demand is robust, and there is high interest in the region overall. We receive inquiries from Kolkata, Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bengaluru, as well as Bihar and Jharkhand. These are usually for our hotels in Guwahati and Darjeeling, and we are seeing encouraging early interest extending to our other hotels in the region as well," he says.

However, Mohanchandran adds, the biggest challenge that hotels still face in this region is the weather. "Both road and air connectivity can be disrupted due to adverse weather conditions. Therefore, the development of all-weather airports in key cities



**K Mohanchandran**  
Senior VP (Operations – East & North-East India), IHCL

**Keeping in view the adverse weather in North-East, the development of all-weather airports in key cities could be a game-changer**



**Shreya Barbara**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Landscape Safari

**I am more into B2B, and we get queries from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Pune, Nagpur, and Hyderabad for weddings and M!CE**



**E Banumlal Blah**  
President of Confederation of Tourism Industries, Meghalaya

**As of now, we do not get inquiries for weddings as most of the planning is done by planners from the home state**

**Shreya Barbara**, Chief Operating Officer, Landscape Safari, is also receiving queries from agents in metros. "I am more into B2B, and we get queries from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Pune, Nagpur, and Hyderabad to name a few

lot of effort to promote the region. Also, significant development in infrastructure has spread positive word of mouth," she says.

Unfortunately, flight connectivity and flight rates are a huge challenge she faces. "Connectivity to many sectors have been withdrawn and airfares are very high compared to even international destinations, especially South-East Asia. If this concern is given a serious thought, a lot more tourist footfall can be expected," Barbara adds.

**Complex socio-political situation** Weddings are hard to come by, says **E Banumlal Blah**, Chief Executive Officer, Clara Voyages, & President of Confederation of Tourism Industries, Meghalaya. "As of now, we do not get inquiries for weddings as most of the planning is done by planners from the home state. One of the most pressing issues that continues to pose a challenge for the region is the complex socio-political situation, including ethnic tensions. Despite efforts to promote peace and development, several states in the North-East still grapple with various forms of ethnic conflicts, which hinder progress and stability in the region," he rues.

Nevertheless, the Modi government's emphasis on infrastructure development has enhanced accessibility to the North-East. **Philip Logan**, Chief Operating Officer of

Royal Orchid Hotels, says, "Demand for North-East India has seen a notable increase in the last couple of years. This increase in the demand can be attributed to several factors. We see enhanced infrastructure development. There is also increased promotion and marketing efforts by tourism authorities. As a result, there is growing interest among travellers for offbeat destinations and immersive cultural experiences."

The group has two properties in the North-East: Regenta Inn Gangtok (35 keys) and Regenta Resort Dharamshala (22 keys).

Strong air connectivity and business focused policies from the government has flourished business in the region for Mayfair SpringValley in Guwahati. **Akash Gupta**, General Manager, Mayfair SpringValley, says, "It has opened doors for more business and job opportunities. Easy access to tourist places, development of tourist spots, and improved infrastructure have played a vital role in increasing demand for the hospitality industry here. The North-East is on the right track and has attracted major hospitality giants to set up their businesses successfully here. But there is a lot more desired on this front, as the region is still lagging behind in hiring and retaining skilled manpower. We expect more quality management institutes to come up and fulfil this requirement."



**Philip Logan**  
Chief Operating Officer  
Royal Orchid Hotels

**We see enhanced infrastructure development. There is also increased promotion and marketing efforts by authorities**


could be a game-changer," he opines. IHCL currently operates nine hotels across the region under various brands, along with three bungalows under amā Stays & Trails brand.





**Akash Gupta**  
General Manager  
Mayfair SpringValley

**Easy access to tourist places, development of tourist spots, and improved infrastructure have played a vital role**



for weddings and M!CE. Greater awareness about North-East as a destination is a prime reason for the rise in demand. State tourism boards, Ministry of Tourism and local tour operators have put in a



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## Tourism News

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Tamil Nadu sees tourism surge with 97% rise in foreign arrivals in 2023 vis-a-vis 2022

India's medical tourism estimated to surpass US\$ 50,671 million by 2034: Future Insights Market

'GCC Grand Tours' to allow travellers visit all 6 Gulf countries and stay for over 30 days, says UAE Minister

'Slow travel' gains traction as prominent travel trend, Ahmedabad among Asia's top destinations for 2024

Goa showcases holistic approach for sustainable tourism at ATM, exhibitors forge value tie-ups

Over 40 Indian trade partners to attend Africa's Travel INDABA, to be held from 13-15 May

# Leisure travel sees significant surge

RezLive.com, a B2B global reservation system, is committed to providing support and solutions to its travel partners. In an interview with **TRAVELTALK**, Jaal Shah, Founder & Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group, shares travel trends, plans to engage with travel trade partners and new developments at the company.



Surbhi Sharma

## What are the top destinations Indians are planning to visit this year?

Indian travellers are eager to explore a diverse range of domestic and international destinations, each offering its unique allure and experiences. While preferences may vary based on individual interests and travel trends, certain destinations stand out as perennial favourites among Indian globetrotters.

Some of the top domestic destinations preferred by Indian travellers include Goa, Kerala, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand. On the other hand, top international destinations favourite among Indian travellers are Dubai, UAE, Singapore, Thailand, and Switzerland. While these destinations remain popular choices among Indian travellers, it's essential to acknowledge the

dynamic nature of travel preferences and the influence of factors such as seasonal trends and emerging destinations.

## Have you experienced an increase in bookings from your clients recently?

Indeed, RezLive.com has witnessed an increase in bookings from our travel partners. This positive trend underscores the resilience and adaptability of our network of agents, as well as our ongoing commitment to providing them with exceptional support and solutions. The key factors that contribute to this increase are our continuous investment in enhancing technology and user experience, expanding our product offerings to meet diverse demands, providing personalised support and training to our agents, and remaining agile in response to market dynamics and trends. Moving forward, we remain dedicated to supporting our agents and fostering strong



**Jaal Shah**  
Founder & Group Managing Director  
Travel Designer Group

partnerships that drive mutual success and growth.

## What are the key demands of your travel partners?

The key demands of our travel trade clients encompass a variety of factors that are essential for their success in the dynamic and competitive travel industry, including comprehensive inventory, competitive pricing,

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## How are you engaging with the travel trade for business?

We prioritise proactive and meaningful engagement with the

and collaboration, participation in industry events and technology integration & innovation, we engage with the travel trade for business, aim to build trust, foster collaboration, and drive mutual success for our partners and RezLive.com.

**This positive trend (rise in bookings) underscores the resilience and adaptability of our network of agents and the support extended to them**

## Among leisure, business, or group travel, which category has seen a surge in demand?

Based on recent trends and observations, leisure travel has seen a significant surge compared to business or group travel. The surge can be attributed to several factors such as pent-up demand, remote work and flexible schedules, shift in preferences and travel deals & promotions.

## Are there any new developments at Rezlive?

Our latest achievement is the launch of our NEW UI, which gives a refreshing look to the platform. It also significantly improves its speed..

## 'Talks with stakeholders key'

TAAI claims that constant communication with members is key. The association is regularly working with states & UTs, as well as organising roadshows for members across the country.



Surbhi Sharma

Taking forward the Travel Agents Association of India's (TAAI's) aims and objectives, **Jyoti Mayal**, President, TAAI, said, "TAAI always believes in doing better and contributing more to the industry through our efforts. We always look for how the tourism sector can be better with our meetings with different stakeholders, including the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, travel agents and airlines. We keep communicating with them, so that the process of ease of doing business become smooth."

Sharing details of what TAAI has done in the past one month, Mayal said, "We went to Srinagar and discussed how tourism can be made better and robust industry in Kashmir, not only in the terms of earning revenue but also in terms of deliverables. We also stressed on better infrastructure for the UT to attract more tourism."

Underling the importance of TAAI in the promotion of Indian tourism,



**Jyoti Mayal**  
President  
TAAI

Mayal said that TAAI had done multiple roadshows in the past few months in countries like Türkiye and Sri Lanka. "We are in talks with more nations to do outbound roadshows and that is how we bring value to our members," she added.

Speaking about the inbound tourism, Mayal said, "To attract inbound and promote domestic tourism, we have carried out a series named 'Pathshala' with MOT in Southern India. With the help

from them, we will now be able to take the series forward to other states across India. Besides, we have been in continuous dialogue with VFS and BLS, who are our visa partners." She added that TAAI has also been in contact with the ambassadors of many countries to ease visa for its members.

**We are in talks with more nations to do outbound roadshows and that is how we bring value to our members**

TAAI has added over 550 memberships in recent months, and keeps on organising educational programs to upskill its members. It recently signed an MoU with the Cambodia Association of Travel Agents.

## TAFI adds 183 new members

With 12 chapters across India, TAFI has done commendable work. It has managed to add not just 183 new members in India over the last two years, but also organised unique events.



Hazel Jain

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAFI) has managed to add 183 new members over the last two years to its existing 1,400-odd members distributed across 12 chapters. Giving more information on this, **Ajay Prakash**, President, TAFI, says, "The new members are in chapters other than Mumbai and Delhi, which shows that our chapter teams are doing good work. New members indicate that the trade believes TAFI is an organisation worth belonging to."

Moreover, for the first time ever, TAFI Western India Region organised a 'Stakeholders Showcase' in Mumbai, which brought together eight key suppliers like DMCs, hotels, OTAs, and destinations, and more than 100 TAFI members for a unique one-on-one networking experience. Prakash says, "We hope to host many more tabletop meetings like this in future. No association has done this so far. The Western India chapter took the lead, and within four or five weeks, our



**Ajay Prakash**  
President  
TAFI

Gujarat Chapter replicated it, albeit on a larger scale in Ahmedabad. It was an immersive experience filled with opportunities for networking and collaboration."

This was the first time it organised the B2B tabletop meet that saw 22 exhibitors, and more than 80-odd members participated from across Gujarat like Mehsana, Vadodra, and Surat. TAFI Western India also organised an educational evening for its members in Mumbai.

Sponsored by Global Destinations, the event saw presentations from **Fernando Heredia Nogueer**, Consul General of Spain, in Mumbai, as well as **Elisa Robles Fraga**, Director - Spain Tourism Board (Tourism Counsellor - Embassy of Spain India). Also present at the event

**The new members are in chapters other than Mumbai and Delhi, which shows that our chapter teams are doing good work**

were BLS representatives and Visa Heads from the Spain Embassy. Apart from this, TAFI's North India Chapter also conducted a meeting in Delhi, which saw over 120 members meeting representatives from airlines, BLS and VFS Global.

# 'India a fly-cruise segment for us'

RW CruiseBuddy, an initiative by the India team of Resorts World Cruises, received enthusiastic response from its Indian travel partners. It is an innovative B2B portal designed to empower them and enhance their collaboration with the cruise liner. Naresh Rawal, Vice President – Sales & Marketing, Resorts World Cruises, shares more information.



Hazel Jain

**N**aresh Rawal, Vice President – Sales and Marketing, Resorts World Cruises, says India has been a prominent source market for them. "It is by far one of the larger contributors for the Genting Dream out of Singapore. India is a fly-cruise segment for us, and shows very strong demand, not only from the FIT perspective but also due to repeat business from our corporate clients," he says, adding that, "This is because of the flexibility and service we provide."



**Naresh Rawal**  
Vice President – Sales and Marketing  
Resorts World Cruises

and make seven or eight different calls to get one quotation. RW CruiseBuddy seamlessly connects our travel partners with us and our PSAs with a click," Rawal explains.

"This allows them access to the inventory and the best available fare. They can also access the resource centre from where they can download videos, images, flyers, and presentations to show clients. We also incentivise our travel



Resorts World Cruises recently launched RW CruiseBuddy, a web portal that offers a marketing resource centre with promotional materials and resources for travel partners to boost marketing efforts and drive customer engagement. A special reward point system has also been introduced via the portal where travel partners earn valuable points with every

booking. "Since its launch, RW Cruise Buddy has garnered significant interest from our partners and the uptake has been strong and encouraging, reflecting the value that RW CruiseBuddy brings to their business operations. It was created because all our travel partners – more than 7,000 across India – had one big problem. They had to reach out to our PSAs for every quotation,

**More couples are choosing to celebrate their special day aboard our ship as it offers the opportunity to host all events in one location**

partners on every single booking they make with us," he adds.

**Groups are loving cruising**  
Rawal observes an uptick in interest for cruising among groups, particularly MICE, weddings, and social events like birthdays and anniversaries. "MICE in 2023 came back very strongly. It has been a huge contributor to business. We will also be launching a few thematic cruises, which would possibly include Indian food festivals onboard and Bol-

lywood performances," shares Rawal. For group bookings, they offer travel partners exclusive benefits and amenities tailored to the needs of the group. These may include dedicated group dining arrangements, private event spaces for meetings or gatherings, and curated shore excursions.

The cruise liner specialises in two and three-night itineraries. The Genting Dream out of Singapore offers various itineraries to ports in Malaysia and Thailand.

## Weddings at sea

Many are discovering the uniqueness and convenience of having weddings on a cruise ship as well. Rawal shares, "We have noticed an increasing interest in couples choosing to celebrate their special day aboard our ship, as it offers the opportunity to host their ceremony, reception, and even honeymoon in one location. We have an experienced wedding planning team that works closely with couples to cater to their demands onboard."

# Making a mark in uncharted territory

► Contd. from page 5

pollution—ideal for stargazing. I wanted to offer clients a unique experience that connects them with the beauty of the cosmos. We believe that observing the stars can be a transformative experience, allowing people to escape the hustle and bustle of daily life," she says.

It has become popular among her domestic and international visitors, particularly families, couples, and astronomy enthusiasts. For her astronomical tours, she provides telescopes and expert guides to help clients understand the constellations, planets, and other celestial phenomena. The tours often include storytelling and educational elements to make the experience both engaging and informative.

## Gazing at the stars

Astronomy has found more takers than one would imagine. Starscapes has been working closely with Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board to host several astronomy related camps besides promoting the same through its chain of experience centres and observatories in the



**Ramashish Ray**  
Founder  
Starscapes

state. **Ramashish Ray**, Founder, Starscapes, says, "We have received an overwhelming response for each of our earlier events, and that is when we decided to curate an annual Astro tourism campaign that can be conducted on a much larger scale. This was the genesis for 'Nakshatra Sabha'. The campaign has been conceptualised with a twofold goal in mind; one, to position Uttarakhand as the ideal astro tourism destination, and secondly, to institutionalise the same through building of grassroots



**Sheo Shekhar Shukla**  
Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture  
Dept, MP and MD, MPTB

competencies and communities with some stake in it. Astro tourism has started gaining popularity only recently. Anyone interested in experiencing Astro-tourism can walk into our observatories."

Starscapes has observatories in Kausani, Mukteshwar and Bhimtal, and mobile observatories in Jaipur, and Coorg. It also partners with hospitality chains to offer stargazing experiences to their guests. Similarly, Madhya Pradesh has also implemented a



**Arun Iyer**  
Managing Director, Super Holidays - A  
division of Maa Air Ticket Centre

new Star Gazing project in tourist places to promote astronomy tourism. The stargazing adventure is offered at five places: Pachmarhi, Mandu, Orchha, Khajuraho and Madhai. **Sheo Shekhar Shukla**, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture Department, Madhya Pradesh and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, says, "Stargazing tourism in Madhya Pradesh is a fresh and promising initiative due to multiple factors, which include minimal light pollution and the

rich astronomical heritage. Many areas, especially outside major cities, offer pristine night skies perfect for stargazing. Apart from this, Madhya Pradesh is home to ancient observatories like the one at Ujjain, showcasing India's long history with astronomy. Madhya Pradesh offers some of the best stargazing experiences during festivals, including Kuno forest retreat. The board has also been working to develop stargazing camps and workshops."

## A moment for seniors

Another interesting product is for senior citizens and differently-abled – something India doesn't do very well. **Arun Iyer**, Managing Director, Super Holidays - A division of Maa Air Ticket Centre, saw a growth in seniors booking three-four holidays in a year. "They expressed a desire to visit pilgrimage places provided they are customised and assisted as these places are generally crowded. We hit the plan to develop a product, Divine Destinations, which would offer seniors with assisted escorts for helping them like boarding boat rides at

the riverbanks, climbing up temple stairs and coordinating with local priests," he explains.

Iyer says there are no ramps at riverbanks to bring seniors down. "I did recess to various places to understand the needs of seniors. There is a demand for it. It works through word of mouth and

**The Indian travel industry does boast of agents and destinations that are trying to do something different from the rest**

through community groups and seniors WhatsApp groups. Most of the requirements come from NRIs who want to arrange this for their parents, as they are not able to accompany them personally," Iyer adds.

# Shopping prominent feature in itineraries

► Contd. from page 5



**Rikant Pittie**  
Co-Founder  
EaseMyTrip

“Indians have always loved shopping, especially when travelling international. But over the past few years, interest in shopping has seen a definite increase. We are noticing that clients are ensuring that they now

“Shopping significantly impacts travel decisions, as it is often correlated with cultural experience. Many travellers are attracted to destinations known for unique local products, artisanal goods, or bargain prices, making shopping a primary travel motivation. However, the impact varies among individuals as some prioritise sightseeing or adventure over shopping. Additionally, some travellers are also mindful of the environmental impact of their shopping habits.”



**Nagsri Sashidhar**  
Chief Happiness Officer, NAGSRI  
Creating Special Memories

factor in some dedicated time for shopping. We see this trend among the millennials and families more than any other segment. Depending on the city they are going to, we keep at least one day dedicated to shopping alone.”



**Rajeev Kale**  
President & Country Head - Holidays,  
MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India)

“Travel has often been seen as an opportunity to delve into new cultures, and for Indians, that exploration frequently extends to the world of retail. Shopping enthusiasts appreciate the chance to unearth unique treasures and local specialties, transforming their trip into a treasure hunt for memorable keepsakes. From handcrafted silver jewellery in Rajasthan, to paintings and handicrafts from Tamil Nadu, these experiences not only add a layer of cultural immersion but also create lasting memories.”

“Shopping tourism is currently one of the main strategic lines for countries to promote sustainable and quality tourism. It gained momentum recently after shopaholic people started travelling. On the other hand, it is



**Valmiki Hari Kishan**  
Founder & Managing Partner,  
Valmiki Travel & Tourism Solutions

also a fact that when anyone visits a foreign destination, the person ends up buying something for their loved ones. Dubai is among those few destinations that lure travellers for shopping. Likewise, there is Europe also.”



**Guldeep Singh Sahni**  
Managing Director  
Weldon Tours & Travels

“Indians love shopping and the shopping outlets that offer good deals attract consumers. Shopping has always been a key factor when people plan their holidays, especially Indians. People are increasingly brand conscious and often choose stores based on the brands they carry, aiming to be associated with a certain status. Additionally, Indians are becoming more aware of the quality of products they purchase, especially considering the amount they spend.”

“Shopping has been integral part of Indians travelling abroad. Luxury travellers specifically travel to destinations that have high street shopping and outlet mall options for specific brands. Discerning shoppers prefer



**Meha Vashi**  
Director  
Nivalink Holidays

their itineraries designed to include specific shopping areas. Outlet malls and shopping specific areas of Dubai, Ireland, UK, Spain, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, and USA are extremely popular.”



**Anshu Tejuja**  
Managing Director  
Ashoka Dream Holidays

“While outlet shopping experiences can be a significant drawcard, we have ensured to seamlessly integrate shopping opportunities into our itineraries. Imagine finding that perfect handcrafted brassware from Kutch to navigating

“When it comes to shopping, there is no specific segment that indulges in it. Indians love shopping regardless of age and gender. A lot of them don't shop much in their own city but when they are travelling, shopping is the highlight of the trip. So, it is crucial for them to include it in every international vacation. Indians love brands and they love good deals! We have so many of our clients going to Europe for McArthurGlen Designer Outlets. If clients book through us, they get a special voucher.”



**Daniel D'Souza**  
President & Country Head -  
Holidays, SOTC Travel

the colourful textile markets of Varanasi, or buying Nilgiri tea from Ooty. These shopping adventures not only unearth unique treasures but also offer a deeper cultural immersion, creating memories that extend far beyond the destination itself.”



**Santosh Kumar**  
Country Manager for India, Sri Lanka,  
Maldives and Indonesia, Booking.com

“Indian travellers are increasingly seeking unique experiences while travelling. One such experience is shopping, which is more than just an activity, but a gateway to the destination's heritage and culture enabling travellers to make authentic connections with the places they visit and bring those memories back home. According to Booking.com's Travel Trends data for 2024, 43 per cent of Indian travellers stated that shopping had an impact on their destination decisions.”

“Shopping has always been an integral part of tourism activities where tourists purchase things or brands they cannot find in India or find the same goods at a more reasonable price. Sometimes, they are



**Sandeep Arora**  
Head  
Brightsun Travel

just collecting memories in the form of a souvenir. However, recently the trend of travelling primarily for shopping has increased, especially among luxury travellers. Dubai is a good example of this where people visit mainly for shopping.”



**Pranav Kapadia**  
Founder Director  
Global Destinations

“Shopping has always been an important part of any holiday for Indian travellers. Even when we travel, we shop like there is no tomorrow. And its attractiveness has only increased. I have had clients going to Greece where we have an office, and they have shopped in Santorini and Mykonos also! You may think what you could possibly shop on an island except souvenirs but it has many lifestyle and fashion stores as well. We have had clients who splurged on shopping.”

“Shopping influences travel decisions for many Indian travellers, with around 20-25 per cent selecting destinations based on available shopping options. Shopping often features prominently in itineraries. For a lot of our



**Ashmi Dharia**  
Founder and Holiday Curator  
Gypsy Soul Holidays

clients, we create itineraries keeping one full day for their shopping. Destinations like the USA, Singapore, Dubai, and Paris remain favourites for shopping. Indians generally favour good deals and outlet shopping experiences.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

# ME frontrunner in tourism innovation?

The Middle East region stands out as a leading hub of technological innovation in the tourism industry. With continuous growth and a focus on enriching visitor experiences, the region is drawing increasing numbers of global travellers. Industry experts weigh in on whether the Middle East holds the title of the most innovative tourism market today.



**Riaz Munshi**  
President  
OTOAI

“It is certain that the Middle East is undergoing a dynamic transformation in its tourism sector. We can see the Middle East has made significant strides in tourism innovation, particularly in unified visa and product development, it's essential to acknowledge that other regions also exhibit considerable innovation in this regard.”



**Pankaj Nagpal**  
Managing Director  
Travstarz Global

“The Middle East is the most booming market today. Previously, it was primarily Dubai, but now destinations such as Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, and Oman are all becoming active. This diversification is positive for the tourism industry as it offers travellers options. A unified visa initiative among these nations would be a good idea.”



**Shравan Bhalla**  
Vice President  
OTOAI

“I believe that currently the Middle East is the most innovative market, especially for visa purposes. One significant aspect is that if you possess certain visas, such as a valid US visa, you can obtain a visa-on-arrival. Alternatively, if you do not have a visa, they process within two-three days. Given its proximity to India, people prefer speedy visa.”



**Chirag Agrawal**  
Co-Founder  
TravClan

“The Middle East has a strong potential to be among the most innovative tourism markets currently, driven by several factors. A growing and diverse population is creating a tourist base. They prefer multi-generational travel and luxury villas. The market is ripe for innovation. Opportunities lie in customised group tours and family-friendly hotels.”



**Raveesh Kullar**  
Senior Category Manager, Delhi,  
Pickyourtrail

“Yes, the Middle East is growing on an innovative basis. However, I will still not say it's very, very innovative, because if you look at the products themselves, whether it's dune bashing, ATV experiences, the promotion of beach experiences, or even the valleys, they are more or less the same. A unified visa system would be helpful.”



**Prabhakar Kamat**  
Vice-President  
Red Dot Representations

“A key travel market for international travellers eyeing luxury hospitality, state of the art infrastructure, natural biodiversity, and a plethora of experiences to immerse in, the Middle East has burgeoned in the current times. Promoting ease of travel, the countries in the Middle East have unveiled new direct air routes.”

Compiled by TT Bureau

## TAAI members meet MOT official

TAAI Western Region Chapter recently conducted an introductory meeting between its Mumbai members and Dr Sagnik Chowdhury, the newly appointed Deputy Director General & Regional Director (West & Central), Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India. The idea behind the meeting was to encourage the members to register as MOT-accredited travel agents.



# 'Replicate Thenmala model in India'

Nestled in the dense woods of Kollam district in Kerala, Thenmala, a UNESCO World Heritage site, offers plenty of tourism opportunities. The destination, with its winding roads dotted with rubber and tea plantations, is a haven for nature lovers and an ideal spot for tourism stakeholders to attract travellers from diverse backgrounds.



Surbhi Sharma

Thenmala, being the first planned ecotourism spot in India, has been selected by the World Tourism Organisation as one of the best eco-friendly projects in the world. **EM Najeeb**, Chairman, ATE Group of Companies, gives credits to KG Mohanlal, Ecotourism Director, Kerala, for the popularity of Thenmala. "Mohanlal was the man behind the development of Thenmala ecotourism and the conceptualisation of responsible tourism classification in Kerala with other industry visionaries," says Najeeb.

Expressing his views on the India's first planned ecotourism spot, **Sejoe Jose**, Managing Director, Marvel Tours, says, "The project represents a remarkable endeavour to harmonise tourism development with environmental preservation and community welfare. Thenmala provides visi-



**EM Najeeb**  
Chairman  
ATE Group of Companies

**Responsible tourism of Kerala model should serve as a blueprint for economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability**



**Sejoe Jose**  
Managing Director  
Marvel Tours

**As a DMC in South India, we are committed to identifying and developing ecotourism destinations**



**PV Valsaraj**  
Managing Director  
Alhind Group of Companies

**It is one of the pioneer planned ecotourism projects and has attracted a lot of domestic and international tourists**

tors with unique opportunities to gain insights into environmental conservation and sustainable living practices. By advocating for responsible tourism, we contribute to safeguarding the region's biodiversity for the benefit of future generations."

Echoing similar sentiments, **PV Valsaraj**, Managing Director, Alhind Group of Companies, says, "It is one of the pioneer planned ecotourism projects and has attracted a lot of domestic and international tourists. It still has a lot of potential to attract more tourists."

**Sustainability attracting visitors** Stressing on the need to promote Thenmala, Valsaraj says, "In today's scenario, we would like to promote such destinations for ecotourism. As of today, thenmala is popular among local tourists as a picnic spot but lost its importance among domestic and international tourists. The lack of

infrastructure facilities could be the reason." Jose says, "One of the key advantages of Thenmala is its proximity to other popular tourist spots, such as Ashtamudi Lake and Kovalam Beach, making it an ideal stop for seasonal travellers."

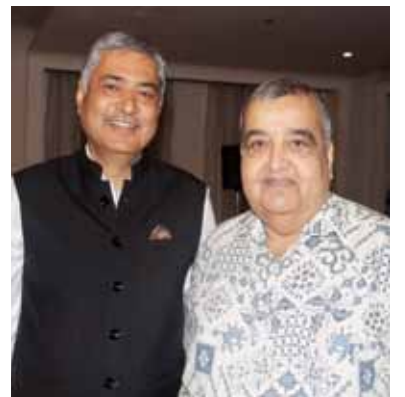
**Need to introduce more ecotourism spots in India**

Citing that there is a need to encourage other states to follow the Thenmala model in the country, Valsaraj says, "We should ensure that the concept of ecotourism should be implemented in such a way so that it impresses both local and international tourists."

Najeeb says, "In my view, Kerala's responsible tourism model should serve as a blueprint for India, fostering economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability. Sustainable tourism anchored in responsible practices remains the linchpin for achieving long-term goals in any destination."

# IATO discusses Bhopal convention plans

IATO organised an interactive luncheon meeting at The Park Hotel, New Delhi, recently. Speaking on the occasion, Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, emphasised on the association's commitment to expanding its membership base nationwide. Plans for the 39<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention in Bhopal, scheduled from 30 August to 2 September, were also discussed.



# MP creates buzz with festivals

The state of Madhya Pradesh has created an events calendar that will help tourists immerse themselves in local cultures through its many festivals. Yuvraj Padole, Deputy Director - Events, Marketing and Film Tourism, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, shares details of what the state has in store for the tourists.



Hazel Jain

Festivals and events are a great way to experience a destination. Madhya Pradesh has realised this and curated an events calendar for the entire year that travel agents and tour operators can promote to their clients. **Yuvraj Padole**, Deputy Director - Events, Marketing and Film Tourism, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, says, "We have a long list of festivals and events in Madhya Pradesh. We have curated and created a kala panchang (events calendar) for the entire year. We have so many festivals, not only tourism events but also cultural festivals."

For instance, it has its annual Jal Mahotsav, the Gandhi Sagar festival started two years ago, Mandu Festival, and Orchha Festival. The state has also recently initiated something new to become the only state in India to do this. It has rehabilitated cheetahs and created



**Yuvraj Padole**  
Deputy Director - Events, Marketing and Film Tourism, MPTB

the 'Kuno Forest Festival' for cheetah tourism. The inaugural Kuno Forest Festival, also known as the Kuno Forest Retreat, was held in December 2023.

It also promoted the Chanderi Festival, which showcases not only its world-famous Chanderi textile, but also highlights Chanderi city

for film tourism. "That is also very rapidly developing in MP because of our film tourism policy. A lot of filmmakers are coming to our state for their film projects. We are also promoting rural and skill tourism in a big way – one may call it experiential tourism - in which people come and stay in our beautiful homestays. They are located close to the main tourist attractions. For example, we have developed Ladpura Khas village



**We have created an events calendar for the entire year. We have so many festivals, not only tourism events but also cultural festivals**



close to Orchha so that visitors to Orchha can also stay in this village. The aim of developing this kind of rural tourism is to involve local communities and empower them by giving employment in tourism. This is important for the success of tourism," Padole adds.

He explains that this has taken off well because tourists enjoy working in fields with farmers and staying with villagers, enjoy their

local food, local music, and local traditions. "Storytelling is also an important part in all this. This also

highlights the important role that travel agents play in promoting these products," Padole adds.

## 6 sites in UNESCO tentative list

UNESCO has included six places of interest in Madhya Pradesh in its tentative list. Madhya Pradesh Tourism will work on the dossier of the below destinations, efforts will be made to include them in the permanent list: Gwalior Fort, historical group of Dhamnar, Bhojeshwar Mahadev temple-Bhojpur, rock art sites of Chambal valley, Khooni Bhandara, Burhanpur and Ramnagar and Gond monuments of Mandla.

# Spanish lessons for TAFI members

TAFI Western India Chapter organised an exciting educational evening for its members in Mumbai. Sponsored by Global Destinations, the event saw presentations from Fernando Heredia Noguera, Consul General of Spain in Mumbai and Elisa Robles Fraga, Director - Spain Tourism Board (Tourism Counsellor - Embassy of Spain, India).



# Oman wraps up 3-city India mission

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman, recently completed a successful three-city sales mission across India, covering Delhi, Ahmedabad, and Lucknow. The mission, aimed at strengthening ties with the Indian market through strategic joint marketing promotions, engaged key trade partners in each city through tailored programmes.





# Wahiba Sands: Desert splendour

If you are planning to visit Oman, do not forget to include Wahiba Sands in your itinerary. A two-hour drive from Muscat, this desert region not just offers you a serene escape from the humdrums of life, but provides an experience of a lifetime. You can enjoy dune bashing, quad biking, sandboarding, camel riding, desert trekking, sunset drives and more.


 Inder Raj Ahluwalia

All you need to do is take a two-hour drive from Muscat to immerse yourself in a different, exotic place that is a world distinctly apart. Resembling something that has stepped right out of the pages of the Arabian Nights, Wahiba Sands personifies desert scenery and charm. No matter what your personal perspective, this is certainly not your run-of-the-mill type of destination.

It's a place that engenders poetry. Sand dunes stand as silent sentinels guarding vast tracts of desert and scrubland, and there is not a soul in sight, and not a sound to disturb the senses.

While essentially, this is a place to chill, a short stay reveals there is plenty to do. One can climb up to the top of the sand dunes, feel his feet sink into the soft sand,



 **Sand dunes stand as silent sentinels guarding vast tracts of desert, and there is not a soul in sight, and not a sound to disturb the senses**

walk around as far as one can, and, significantly, watch the sunrise and sunset.

The primary local attraction are the dunes that entice one to climb to their top, and pose a few challenges. Though they look like a cakewalk, they turn out to be higher, softer, and more difficult to climb than imagined. But the effort brings ample rewards in the form of pristine sunset views, and bracing winds.

An absolute delight is Desert Nights Camp, a good place to bed down, which sprawls between sand dunes, close to a city named Bidiya, and has all the trappings of a desert holiday centre. Servicing guests is a spacious dining room, accommodation in both rooms and tents; and a host of activities like trekking, desert walks, dune-buggy rides, safaris, and camel rides.

Dinners are a highlight here, and present an experience in them-

selves. A large, varied buffet spread with a 'live' kitchen, serving staff scurrying about, and a band singing ballads make for memorable evenings to be cherished. And if all this isn't enough, a mere glance up to the heavens,

reveals hundreds of twinkling stars that seem to be part of a giant mosaic.

Everything here is slow-paced, with the exception of time, which seems to pass by in a blur.



## Korea promotes MICE in Mumbai

Korea Tourism Organization recently conducted its two-city India roadshow in Bengaluru and Mumbai with focus on MICE business. More than 10 DMC sellers from South Korea, led by Changwook Jung, Executive Director, Korea MICE Bureau, Korea Tourism Organization, interacted with Indian travel agents showcasing their offerings at the event.



# 1 IN CIRCULATION & READERSHIP SOUTH ASIA'S LEADING TRAVEL TRADE FORTNIGHTLY		
EVENT TALK		
Published from: India Middle East		
MAY 2024		
Date	Event	Time
15-17	PATA Annual Summit 2024- Macao	8:30 am
16-18	Guangzhou International Travel Fair 2024	9:00 am
16-18	MICE Nepal Expo 2024	10:00 am
16-19	Thailand Dive Expo 2024	11:00 am
21	Malaysia Tourism Webinar	3:00 pm
24-26	Global Conference on Hospitality and Tourism Management 2024	1:00 pm
27	Indonesia Travel Expo - Table Top 2024	9:00 am
27-29	Riyadh Travel Fair 2024	3.30 pm
27-29	ITB China 2024	9:00 am
31-3 June	Taipei International Tourism Exposition 2024	10:00 am
JUNE 2024		
4-6	Global Sustainable Tourism Summit 2024	9:00 am
5-7	CAPA India Aviation Summit 2024	9:00 am
10-13	Annual International Conference on Tourism 2024	9:00 am
13	Mauritius Tourism Webinar	11:00 am
13-14	Sustainable Tourism Africa Summit 2024	9:00 am
13-16	Hong Kong International Travel Expo 2024	10:00 am
14-16	Beijing International Tourism Expo 2024	9:00 am
25-27	Africa Travel and Investment Summit 2024	9:00 am

# Now, Bengaluru-Bhutan via charter

Thomas Cook & SOTC successfully operated an inaugural charter from Bengaluru to Bhutan recently. Operating at 100 per cent capacity, the inaugural flight underscored the strong demand for unique destinations like Bhutan from Karnataka.



TT Bureau

Thomas Cook (India) and its group company, SOTC Travel, achieved a significant milestone with their inaugural charter taking off from Bengaluru to Paro (Bhutan) at 100 per cent capacity. This exceptional delivery

per cent booking status for all its charters of 27 April, 4 May and 11 May. To leverage this strong and growing appetite, Thomas Cook and SOTC have launched two additional charters in May.

Thomas Cook and SOTC identify South India as a vital market,

We had handpicked Bengaluru airport as the hub/ gateway for this initiative based on three clear opportunities: 1. Karnataka is our top source market 2. The high demand for consumers for unique destinations-experiences 3. The absence of direct connectivity for Bhutan from South India. What is

& SOTC, as the flight will help to boost tourism and foster closer ties between India and Bhutan. Through this charter flight, Bhutan becomes more accessible to travellers eager to explore the country's unique culture and stunning landscapes, driving economic growth and cultural exchange."



Thomas Cook and SOTC officials at the inauguration of their first charter from Bengaluru to Paro (Bhutan)

underscores the robust demand from Karnataka, particularly Bengaluru, for premium destinations.

After the announcement of their ground-breaking Bhutan charters ex-Bengaluru, Thomas Cook and SOTC have witnessed a surge in demand for the Himalayan Kingdom. This has resulted in a 100

contributing over 50 per cent to Bhutan's business, with significant growth potential.

Rajeev Kale, President & Country Head – Holidays, MICE, Visa, Thomas Cook (India) Limited, said, "This has given us the confidence to operate two additional charters on 18th and 25th May.

noteworthy is that all our flights are currently at a 100 per cent booking position – reflecting a resounding success of our pioneering Bhutan Charter strategy."

Carissa Nimah, Chief Marketing Officer, Department of Tourism, Bhutan, said, "This is a wonderful initiative from Thomas Cook India

Satyaki Raghunath, Chief Operating Officer, Bangalore International Airport, commented, "We are happy to welcome this charter service that will connect BLR Airport to Bhutan's Paro International Airport. This move further strengthens BLR Airport's vision to serve as a crucial hub for South and Central India."

# NDC for personalised offerings

Amadeus is bullish on the Indian market. The company is committed to support and provide solutions to airlines, airports, and travel agencies to automate processes like check-in and baggage handling for airlines and airports, while enhancing passenger experience, says Jyothi Plappara, Head of Engineering, Airport and Airline Operations, Amadeus Labs.



Nisha Verma

India is a crucial market for Amadeus and the travel technology company is keen to offer different products and solutions in the market regularly. Sharing the company's plans for the India market, Jyothi Plappara, Head of Engineering, Airport and Airline Operations, Amadeus Labs, said, "As India's travel sector evolves in 2024, we remain committed to support and provide solutions to airlines, airports, and travel agencies to automate processes like check-in and baggage handling for airlines and airports, while enhancing passenger experience; leverage AI (Artificial Intelligence) to refine search technology; explore innovative solutions like integrated payment gateways and digital wallets; support airlines in adopting the New Distribution Capability (NDC) standard for personalised offerings through travel

agencies; provide tools and technology to help airlines, hotels, and travel agencies track and reduce their carbon footprint. By focusing on these areas, we aim to be a valuable partner in the Indian travel ecosystem, contributing to a more efficient, personalised, and secure travel experience for passengers while driving the industry's growth."

### Year gone by

Plappara said that Amadeus witnessed significant growth in the Indian market in 2023. "We further grew our team and product offerings. We partnered with Paytm to integrate our travel platform into their systems, providing a smoother booking experience with AI. Our partnership with Air India expanded to include local domestic content and NDC distribution capabilities, to offer greater flexibility and retailing options. To empower travel sellers, we part-



Jyothi Plappara  
Head of Engineering, Airport and Airline Operations, Amadeus Labs

nered with Akbar Travels, allowing them to access over 600,000 hotels and content from over 400 airlines through the Amadeus Travel Platform," she elaborated.

### Vision-Box

Sharing details on the recent acquisition of Vision-Box and Amadeus biometric solutions for

airports and airlines, she commented, "The acquisition of Vision-Box is an important step towards achieving biometrics interoperability between airports, airlines, and border control authorities. Amadeus biometric solutions are built on a single, cloud-based platform, which can seamlessly integrate with existing systems. This enables instant deployment at airports, connecting them to airline DCSs (Departure Control Systems), third-party identity managers, and all passenger servicing points from enrolment to check-in, bag drop, security, lounge access, and boarding. We firmly believe that biometrics will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of travel, and this strategic move will further help Amadeus with new capabilities for biometric hardware and software, including border control solutions, ensuring a comprehensive end-to-end passenger experience."

### Air India content

Amadeus has been working closely with Air India to support its growth and deliver a seamless and convenient travel experience for its passengers. "In 2022, Air India embraced the complete

**Our partnership with Air India expanded to include local domestic content and NDC distribution capabilities to offer retailing options**

Amadeus Altéa Passenger Service System Suite (PSS) to enhance its customer interfaces. Building on existing agreement for internation-

al content, Amadeus now offers both domestic and international Air India content through the Amadeus Travel Platform," she shared.

### NDC in India

Stressing that Amadeus is dedicated to supporting airline innovation and modernising travel retailing in India through NDC to help travel sellers and corporations' shop, buy and service airline travel offers, Plappara said, "Widespread NDC adoption requires strong infrastructure and collaboration between airlines and travel agencies. However, India's rapidly growing air travel market and tech-savvy consumers offer immense potential for NDC adoption. Our cloud-based booking platform, Amadeus Selling Platform Connect (SECO) allows travel sellers to leverage NDC connectivity to seamlessly shop and compare, order, pay, and service airline offers."



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# MOVEMENTS

## CYGNETT HOTELS & RESORTS

New Delhi

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has announced key appointments as the hospitality company moves ahead with its growth plans. **DEBA PRASAD** has been appointed by the company as the Director of Operations. Prasad, an alumnus of IHM Pusa with a Bachelor of Commerce (Hons), and an MBA from UBI, Belgium, brings to the role a robust 27-year track record in hospitality management. Having held key positions with prominent global hotel groups like Oberoi and Taj, Prasad has demonstrated his proficiency across various aspects of hotel operations both in India and internationally.



## COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT AND PORT MUZIRIS, KOCHI AIRPORT HOTEL

Kochi

**NARAYAN THAROOR** has been appointed as the Cluster General Manager for Courtyard by Marriott and Port Muziris, Kochi Airport Hotel. With a career spanning over two decades within the hospitality industry, Tharoor brings a wealth of experience and a proven track record of excellence to his new role. In the capacity as Cluster General Manager, he will provide strategic oversight and operational guidance to Courtyard by Marriott and Port Muziris, Kochi Airport Hotel.



## TAMARA LILAC KUMBAKONAM

Kumbakonam (Tamil Nadu)

Tamara Leisure Experiences has appointed **UNNIKRISHNAN V MENON** as the General Manager of The Tamara Lilac Kumbakonam. He has 29 years of experience in the hospitality industry and has held pivotal positions across prestigious hospitality establishments, including 18 years in the capacity of GM & CGM in various recognised groups namely Olive Eva – Cochin, Vivin Luxury Suites, Trichur Towers, Contour Holiday Resorts, Swagath Holiday Resorts Kovalam, Kerala, Tangerine Boutique Resort, Calangute, and Goa Taj Group of Hotels.



Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has appointed **RAJEEV SHARMA** as the General Manager of Operations & Pre-Opening Support. Sharma, a seasoned hospitality expert with a Postgraduate Degree in Hotel & Hospitality Management and a Bachelor in Commerce, brings to the company over two decades of extensive experience in the hospitality sector, both in India and internationally. In his new role, he will oversee the operational aspects and support the pre-opening phases of new properties, ensuring that each venture aligns with Cygnett's standards of excellence and operational efficiency.



## ALILA DIWA GOA

Goa

Alila Diwa Goa welcomes **ANISH KUTTAN** as the General Manager. With more than 20 years of experience in luxury hospitality, Kuttan brings with him a wealth of exceptional leadership qualities and a proven track record in the luxury hospitality sector. During his two-decade-long journey in the industry, he has held various leadership roles at acclaimed hotel brands, including Hyatt Hotels, Kempinski Hotel, and Four Seasons, where he efficiently managed operational aspects, including food and beverage, guest relations, sales and marketing, and performance management.



## THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS

Mumbai

In the appointments announced by The Fern Hotels & Resorts recently, **AMIT KUMAR THAKUR** has been appointed as the General Manager of The Fern Residency, Katra (Vaishno Devi). Thakur brings with him more than 16 years of experience in the hospitality sector. With a strong background in budgeting and marketing, he will focus on overseeing hotel operations, and ensuring the success of the gross operating profit. During his career, he has worked with renowned established, such as Cygnett Hotels Dharamshala and AV Resorts Manali.



## GRAND HYATT MUMBAI

Mumbai

Grand Hyatt Mumbai welcomes **STEPHANIE GURURANI** as the newly appointed Director of Sales & Marketing. She has more than 20 years of experience in the hospitality sector and demonstrated her leadership by spearheading revenue and distribution, marketing, and sales. Gururani's distinguished career journey includes significant roles at prestigious hospitality establishments, such as The Westin Mumbai Garden City under the Starwood umbrella, JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu, and Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai. Recently, she served as the Director of Sales & Marketing at Taj Mahal Palace.



## RAFFLES UDAIPUR

Udaipur

Raffles Udaipur has appointed **KARTIK R BHAT** as the Director of Talent and Culture. With over two decades of exemplary experience in Human Resources within the hospitality sector, Bhat brings a wealth of expertise and strategic vision to his new role. In his previous engagements, including his tenure as General Manager of HR/ L&D at Red Apple (Toscana & SALT), Kartik showcased unparalleled leadership and transformative initiatives, leaving an indelible mark on organisational culture and performance. His contributions extend beyond conventional HR realms, with instrumental involvement in landmark events.



The Fern Hotels & Resorts has also appointed **SAYEL MANDAL** as the General Manager of Valley View Beacon Resort, Mahabaleshwar. Mandal comes with 13 years of experience in establishments like Treat Beach Resort & Spa, Gholvad & VITS Dapoli, Maharashtra. In his new role, he will focus on overseeing overall operations, maximising gross operating profit, and ensuring guest satisfaction. Valley View Beacon Resort, Mahabaleshwar, is located amid the mountains of Western Ghats in Satara district of Maharashtra. The hotel is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities.



## DOUBLETREE BY HILTON PUNE - CHINCHWAD

Pune

DoubleTree by Hilton Pune - Chinchwad appoints **VARUN MARWAH** as the Commercial Director of Sales & Marketing. With over 18 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Marwah brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his new role. Prior to this, he served as the Director of Sales and Marketing at Novotel Pune, where he played a pivotal role in driving sales strategies and enhancing the hotel's market presence. His career has seen him associated with renowned brands such as Taj Group of Hotels, Le Méridien, Lalit Suri Hospitality Group, Holiday Inn, Pride Hotels, and Ibis Hotel.



## JW MARRIOTT BENGALURU PRESTIGE GOLFSHIRE RESORT & SPA

Bengaluru

JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa has elevated **DEBALINA DUTTAGUPTA** as the Room Division Manager. With a rich background in hospitality spanning over 16 years and a diverse portfolio, including esteemed hotels. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Hospitality Management from Napier University Edinburgh, Scotland, and a Diploma in Hotel Management and Catering Technology from the Institute of Advanced Management, Kolkata.



## EROS HOTEL

New Delhi

Eros Hotel New Delhi has appointed **AMIT ANAND** as the Front Office Manager. With an exemplary career of 16 years in the hospitality industry, Anand brings a great deal of knowledge and expertise. In his new role, he will head the front office team, supervising all guest service operations, making sure guests are welcomed cordially, checked-in swiftly, and helped with any needs during their stay at the hotel. He will set up high protocols for emergency circumstances, monitor security precautions, and ensure adherence to health norms and safety rules. Anand has worked with renowned hospitality brands.



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# 39 mn visitors to Abu Dhabi by '30

Highlighting double digit growth from India market last year, Abdulla Yousuf, Director of International Operations, Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi, reveals that Q1 2024 has already registered a 40 per cent growth.

TT Bureau

**A**bdulla Yousuf, Director of International Operations, Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi, has said that they exceeded last year's growth performance of Q1 from India by more than 40 per cent. "India is our top source market for tourism. The team in charge for India is doing an amazing job. This added with the proximity, connectivity, travel trade engagement, a new airport and amazing campaigns is doing the trick for Abu Dhabi," he revealed.

### Right strategies

Talking about their newly approved 2030 Strategy, Yousuf said, "The 2030 tourism strategy is about attracting 39 million visitors by 2030, which would add more than AED 90 billion to the UAE's GDP; and we are expecting it to create more than 178,000 jobs by 2030. It serves as a blueprint and roadmap for the

stakeholders from Abu Dhabi to align their strategy with the vision of the emirate itself. This strategy is focused on four pillars, the first being offers and activations; second being marketing and promotion; third being infrastructure and the last one being visa regulation."

**The 2030 tourism strategy is about attracting 39 million visitors by 2030, which would add more than AED 90 billion to the UAE's GDP**

He added that they are diversifying their offerings by ensuring to have a compact back-to-back calendar of events. "We work closely with our stakeholders in Abu Dhabi to create products that speak to different segments that come to Abu Dhabi, be it family, couples, or business travellers. We are looking to develop destinations within the destination by 2030. We have a successful story with the Yas Island and Saadiyat Island. Today, we are looking at Abu



Dhabi as nine different districts and opportunities to develop each of them," claimed Yousuf.

### Successful campaign

Sharing that they had a successful campaign last year, Yousuf said, "Many people who saw the campaign came to Abu Dhabi and enjoyed the destination. Since there is a lot to do here, the situation came for the second campaign, which was '101 Abu Dhabi do's."

### Maintaining the appeal

Yousuf said that looking at the size of the outbound market in India, a destination needs to stand out in their offering to grab as much as it can. "Our performance is extremely good. In the first three month of the year, we had more than 81,000 hotel guests in Abu Dhabi, with 40 per cent growth compared to the last year. We have participated in ATM 2024 with 82 partners on our stand," he explained.

### Indian trade connect

Insisting that connecting with the Indian travel trade is a priority, he said, "At ATM, we announced the

new e-learning platform, which I call its 2.0 version - [www.experienceabudhabiexperts.com](http://www.experienceabudhabiexperts.com). It is a fully revamped platform with nine modules focusing on different things, including destinations and segments." Apart from that, he shared that their focus is not only on metro cities in India, but also on tier II and III markets.

### Unique aspects

Yousuf asserted that one of the things that Indians love is shopping. "Hence, apart from Yas Mall and Galleria Mall, they also explore some of the old traditional districts like spice shops and experience bargaining. A lot of Indians coming to Abu Dhabi love the theme parks," he said.

### Connectivity boost

Yousuf claimed that they are doing very well in terms of connectivity. "Etihad is clear that they want to expand in India, not just for flying and connecting with India, but also building the brand in India. Even Indian carriers are expanding to Abu Dhabi as part of their global expansion," he said.

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