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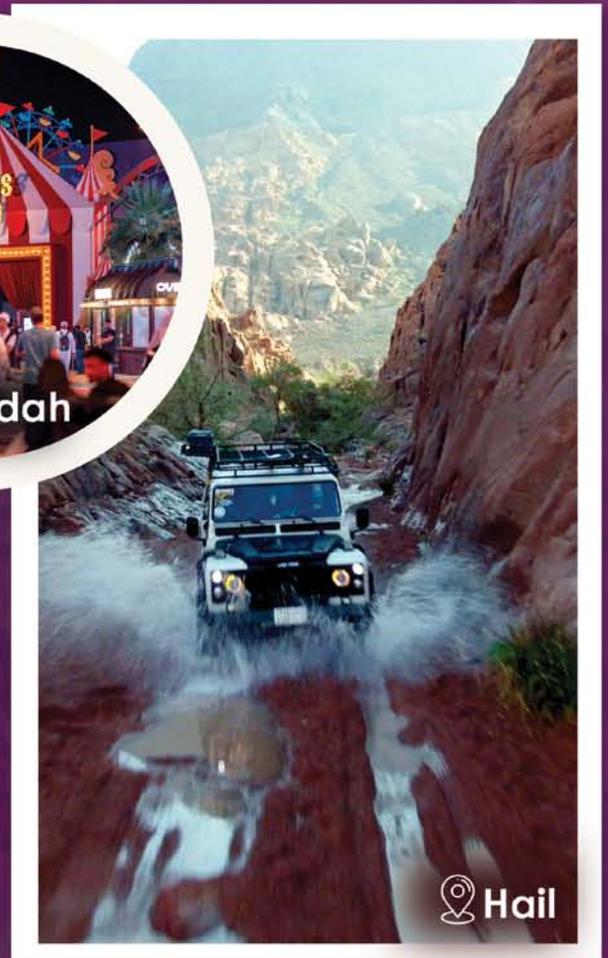
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## Editor

Priyanka Saxena Ray

## Director-Business Development

Gunjan Sabikhi

gunjan@bottindia.com

## Design Director

Rajesh Chhetri

## Consulting Editor

Aishwarya Srivastava

## Senior Correspondent

Anjali Pokhriyal

## Social Media Correspondent

Pallavi Sharma

## Mumbai Correspondent

Shreya Shimpi

## Circulation & Desk

Ashish Sarthak

Vishal Maurya

Published and Printed by  
Rai Umraopati Ray on behalf of  
**More Media Pvt. Ltd.**, B6, Ground Floor,  
Kalkaji, New Delhi - 110 019

### BOTT House

Top Floor, E-40, Anand Niketan,  
New Delhi: 110021

Email: info@bottindia.com

Phone: 011-8800437575

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## Will Ayodhya & Lakshadweep give the much-needed push to Inbound Tourism?



28

### SPOTLIGHT

**From the Front Desk to General Managers to ..... 24-27**  
leading Chefs, Women today are making a difference with their presence and their special care. In such a scenario, one is often led to wonder – what are the Hotels doing for these Women in return? When Families or Solo Women Travellers are holidaying, their first point of contact is a Hotel, and if they feel “safe” and “taken care of” in a Hotel, well, it automatically turns their holiday into a memorable experience. This Women’s Day, BOTT brings you an overview of what the big Hotels brands in India are doing to make their Hotels a safe haven for Women Travellers and Employees.

**BOTT reached out to few Inbound Tour Operators to ..... 28-31**  
know their thoughts on how Ayodhya will be a game-changer for Inbound Tourism and if Lakshadweep too will have some role to play in boosting inbound traffic. Read on to what they had to say.

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From the

*Editor's  
Desk*

Dear Readers,

**A**s we stride into the vibrant month of March, with Spring in full bloom, BOTT Magazine is thrilled to present a dynamic fusion of travel insights and advocacy. Our journey through the pages of this issue encapsulates the spirit of innovation and inclusivity that defines the travel and tourism industry.

Firstly, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the esteemed industry stakeholders who met with us at OTM in Mumbai and SATTE in New Delhi. Your meaningful engagements, captured in countless photos and fostered through invaluable networking, serve as the bedrock of our collective endeavour to shape the future of travel.

Our March issue shines a spotlight on a matter of paramount importance: women's safety in tourism. Through in-depth exploration, we aim to illuminate the multifaceted initiatives and measures undertaken by states and hotels alike to foster an environment where every woman can explore, discover, and thrive without fear.

From the sprawling landscapes of Maharashtra to the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, from the majestic forts of Madhya Pradesh to the sun-kissed beaches of, states across the nation are championing initiatives to redefine safety standards in tourism. Likewise, leading hotel chains such as IHCL, Leela, Pride Hotels, and Hilton Hotels are spearheading transformative efforts to empower and protect women travellers and employees alike.

Now, as we set our sights on the global stage, we eagerly anticipate our rendezvous at ITB Berlin. This prestigious exhibition promises to unveil the latest trends and ground-breaking developments driving the evolution of travel and tourism worldwide. Stay tuned as we bring you exclusive coverage of the excitement and innovations emanating from this seminal event.

Let me also take this opportunity to wish all our esteemed readers a very Happy Holi!

Wishing you happy reading and safe travels.

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**  
priyanka@bottindia.com

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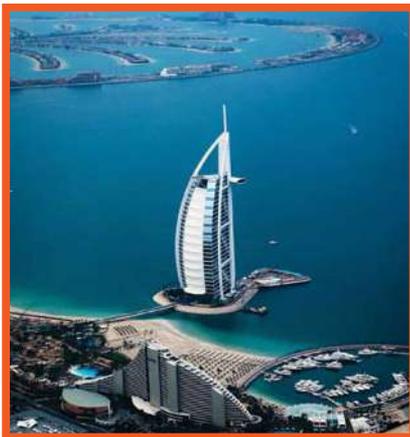
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## InterGlobe Air Transport appointed exclusive GSA for Manta Air

InterGlobe Air Transport Limited has announced its partnership with Manta Air, the fastest growing airline in the Maldives, to launch direct flights from India to Dhaalu Airport, Maldives. Through this partnership, InterGlobe Air Transport and Manta Air intend to elevate air travel between India and the Maldives by establishing direct flights from Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport to the Maldives' Dhaalu Airport.



## Dubai announces five-year multiple-entry visa for Indian tourists

Dubai has announced a Five-Year Multiple-Entry Visa to further bolster travel between India and Dubai, underscoring its commitment to fostering sustained economic collaborations and encouraging tourism and business ties. This visionary initiative has been unveiled as Dubai welcomed a record 2.46 million overnight visitors from India in 2023, marking a 34% YoY growth.

## Mastereign Group & STIC Group enter partnership

Mastereign Group (Singapore) and STIC Travel Group (India), India's foremost travel services representation and airline GSA company announces an exclusive partnership agreement. This collaboration marked a milestone for both organizations, aiming to introduce innovative educational tours specifically designed for Indian students.



## AVIAREPS and Shanghai Government launch 'SmoothTravel'

AVIAREPS together with the Shanghai Municipal Government, is excited to announce the launch of Shanghai's official online B2B travel platform, SmoothTravel. This serves as the official gateway for the global travel industry to connect with both inbound and outbound Chinese travel agencies, tour wholesalers, OTAs and MICE agents in East China market.

## OTOAI & Malaysia Tourism sign MoU to boost tourism

Malaysia Tourism took a significant stride towards fostering bilateral tourism ties with India by formalizing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Outbound Tours Operators Association of India (OTOAI). The MoU was ceremoniously signed on February 22, 2024 during SATTE in Delhi. This strategic partnership aims to facilitate seamless travel experiences, enhancing the overall appeal of Malaysia as a preferred destination for Indian tourists.





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## Leisure Hotels Group unveils Baikunth Resort

Baikunth Resort exudes colonial charm with its intricate architecture, comprising 35 elegantly appointed rooms and cosy cottages. Each accommodation offers breath-taking views of the Kasauli hills and valley views, complemented by modern amenities that ensure a luxurious retreat.



## GRT Hotels & Resorts launches 'Grand Vijayawada' by GRT Hotels

GRT Hotels & Resorts, India's premier boutique hospitality group has now opened Grand Vijayawada by GRT Hotels, their second property in Andhra Pradesh. Grand Vijayawada by GRT features 104 aesthetically designed rooms, comprising business class rooms, Grand Club Rooms, Grand Club City View, and Grand Club River View to lavish deluxe suites.

## IndiGo announces 6 new domestic routes

Commencing from March 31, 2024, the airline will be operating direct flights between Ahmedabad-Rajkot, Ahmedabad-Aurangabad, Bhopal-Lucknow, Indore-Varanasi. Direct flights will also be operated between Kolkata-Srinagar and Kolkata-Jammu from April 10, 2024 and April 21, 2024, respectively. Flights between Kolkata-Jammu via Srinagar will begin from April 10, 2024.

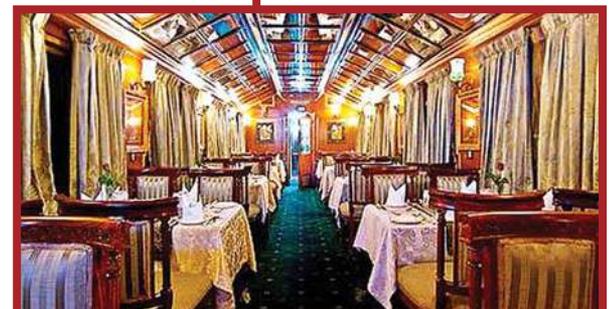


## Air Mauritius launches flights from Chennai to Mauritius

Air Mauritius will operate one weekly flight from Chennai to Mauritius from Saturday 13 April 2024 on an Airbus A330 aircraft equipped with 254 seats. Each flight will offer a seamless journey with a duration of 5 hours 45 Minutes from Chennai International Airport, India to SSR International Airport, Mauritius.

## Palace on Wheels to offer Destination Weddings & photo shoots onboard

Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari, who also holds the tourism portfolio, said that making Palace on Wheels available for destination weddings is a big decision, as it will not only give a huge boost to destination weddings in the desert state, but will also increase the attraction of foreign tourists towards Rajasthani art and culture and Vedic marital customs.



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# Maharashtra Tourism launches app for its 'Aai Policy'

*In an endeavour to empower women in the tourism sector, the Maharashtra Cabinet, last year, approved the implementation of the Gender Inclusive Tourism Policy called 'Aai' under the 'Ajadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'. This year, Shri Girish Mahajan, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, also launched an app for the Aai Policy. In addition to this, approvals have also been given to start women's bike-taxi services at some tourist spots in the State.*

## BOTT Desk

Under the 'Aai' policy launched last year, the five principles of women entrepreneurship development, infrastructure for women, prioritizing the safety of women tourists, customized products for women tourists, discounts and travel and tourism development will be adopted. When launched, it was stated that under the policy, various measures will be implemented to provide business and employment opportunities to women in the field of tourism and to enable women tourists to benefit from safe tourism. Under the policy, 10 women-owned and operated tourism businesses state registered with the Directorate of Tourism in each taluka of the state will be assisted in setting up tourism businesses. On the occasion of International Women's Day from March 1 to 8, all the resorts/units of Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation will provide 50 per cent discount on online booking to all



women tourists. For a total of 30 days in a year, 50 per cent discount will be given to women tourists in online booking in all resorts of the corporation.

Meanwhile, at the recently held State Tourism Conclave in Mumbai, Shri Girish Mahajan, Minister of Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, also launched an app for the Aai Policy (<https://maharashtratourism.gov.in/aai-register/>). The Aai Policy, introduced by the Government of Maharashtra last year, aims to empower women entrepreneurs in tourism. This policy is designed to foster entrepreneurship and economic empowerment among women in the tourism industry across Maharashtra.

Meanwhile, recognising the potential of tourism to drive economic development, Maharashtra Tourism is committed to facilitating investments and business partnerships in the state.

Moving forward, the tourism board will actively engage with industry leaders, chambers of commerce, and trade associations to foster trade opportunities across hospitality, travel, food and beverage sectors, and handicrafts. Through targeted initiatives and promotional campaigns, Maharashtra Tourism aims to attract entrepreneurs and investors to explore the state's vast potential and untapped opportunities.

Maharashtra Tourism's ambitious plan to boost travel and trade opportunities aligns with the state government's vision to position Maharashtra as a global hub for tourism and commerce. By leveraging its natural and cultural wealth, the tourism board aims to create a thriving ecosystem that benefits visitors and residents, ultimately contributing to the economic growth and prosperity of the state. ■



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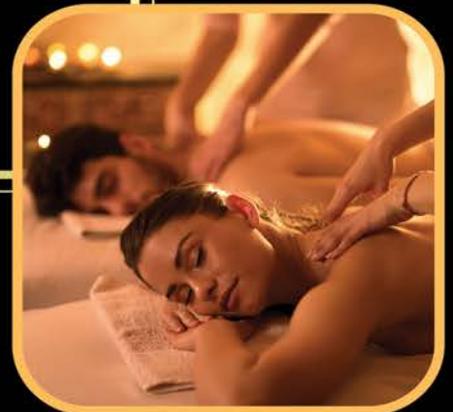
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# Kerala

## A 'She Destination' for Solo Women Tourists

*Kerala has always been a pioneer state when it comes to adopting the latest and effective tools for tourism. Realising the importance of "women travellers", Kerala has launched the 'She Destinations' initiative, which is a bold step in promoting solo female travel. The initiative has been tailored to ensure safety and empowerment of women all over the world.*

### Anjali Pokhriyal

Travelling opens doors to new cultures, wider perspectives, and creates lasting memories. It's a journey that goes beyond physical distances and connecting people. But sometimes travelling is not all fun and it comes along with little challenges, especially for Solo women travellers. One of the primary concerns for solo women travellers is safety, and Kerala takes pride in being a safe State.

Therefore, the state of Kerala, introduced the concept of 'She Destinations' last year. The Tourism Minister of the state P.A. Mohammed Riyas talked about a five-year plan (2022-2027) to make Kerala a women-friendly tourism site.

The concept under which 'She

Destinations' have been formed is to create safe and healthy environment for all the solo women travellers all over the world. This will include food, accommodation, transport and Women guide. The main agenda behind the initiative is to create technology driven and a digital application for women's use.

"We are shortlisting the destinations to provide training to women entrepreneurs. An app will also be designed exclusively for women travellers," the Minister had shared. According to him, the project will be rolled out within a year and Rs 4.75 crore had been earmarked for it for 2023-24. "All hotels, resorts, and homestays in the region prioritise safety of Women travellers. These establishments ensure the availability of 24/7 surveillance, well-lit premises, and female staff members to serve the needs of women travellers," he

added.

Kerala stands as a shining example of a destination that not only embraces diversity but actively works towards creating a secure and enriching environment for all.

Meanwhile, in the first nine months of calendar year 2023, almost 1.6 crore domestic tourists visited Kerala, clocking a 19 per cent growth over the previous year. The tourist numbers for the state are expected to cross two crores in 2024.

As part of the efforts to boost tourism in Kerala, an International Paragliding Festival is being held at Vagamon in Idukki district from March 14-17, an International Surfing Festival is being held at Varkala from March 29-31, Mega Mountain Biking event MTB Kerala 2024 is planned at Priyadarshini tea plantations in Wayanad from April 26-28, and the Malabar River Festival 2024 will be held at Kodencherry in Kozhikode from July 25-28. ■



  
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# Goa

## leads in sustainable Tourism Innovation



*The tourism landscape of Goa has undergone a remarkable transformation, characterized by innovation, diversification, and a steadfast commitment to enhancing visitor experiences. Deepak Narvekar, Deputy General Manager of the Goa Tourism Development Corporation spoke to BOTT on pioneering initiatives aimed at broadening Goa's tourism offerings while ensuring the safety and satisfaction of its visitors.*

**Pallavi Sharma**

for Regenerative Tourism at the OTM Mumbai 2024. Simultaneously, we promoted spiritual tourism, spotlighting the Ekadasha Tirtha pilgrimage across eleven historic temples in Goa, earning the region the title of "Dakshin Kashi." Additionally, the commencement of operations at Mopa Airport facilitated enhanced connectivity, symbolized by the inaugural flight of Indigo from Mopa to Dehradun. Collaboration with the Uttarakhand government further bolstered spiritual tourism ties between the states.

Moreover, the launch of the Homestay Policy aimed to offer authentic experiences, showcasing traditional Goan hospitality and cuisine. To cater to luxury travellers, the introduction of the Caravan Policy provided a unique way to explore the region's beauty at one's own pace, further enhancing Goa's tourism landscape.

### **What strategies were employed for campaign promotion?**

Various strategies were implemented to ensure the success of our promotional campaigns. Engaging a PR Agency, we conducted extensive media and social media campaigns. Additionally, we adhered to a comprehensive media plan developed by the Government of Goa, which included participation in international and domestic travel marts, along with conducting roadshows abroad. Planned roadshows in Lisbon, Austria, Spain, and Madrid served as platforms to showcase our new offerings to targeted markets, fostering partnerships with tour operators, travel agencies, and media entities. Bilateral tie-ups during these events further strengthened our tourism ties with other countries. The SATTE event witnessed significant engagement from hoteliers, tour operators, and service providers from Goa. We remain dedicated to ensuring Goa remains a preferred destination for travellers seeking unique experiences and unforgettable memories.

### **What safety measures were implemented for tourists?**

Ensuring the safety of all tourists, particularly women, remained a top priority. The Government of Goa established the Pink Force dedicated to human safety. Additionally, the introduction of the Beach Visual app allowed users to promptly report any suspicious or illegal activities on the beaches. Further enhancing safety measures, a dedicated helpline (1364) was launched to provide tourists with assistance and information, ensuring their holidays in Goa were memorable and safe. ■

### **How did the year 2023 unfold for tourism in Goa?**

2023 was indeed a remarkable year for Goa tourism, marked by significant innovation and diversification of offerings. We introduced several ground-breaking initiatives aimed at enriching the visitor experience. Towards the latter part of the year, we unveiled the concept of Regenerative Tourism, emphasizing exploration beyond the beaches. Goa Tourism won the Most Innovative Product Award

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# Jammu and Kashmir

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### How has the business performance fared recently?

If we compare the pre-Covid and the post-Covid situation, there has been a paradigm shift. We have seen a multi-fold increase in the tourist footfall in J&K. In 2022, around two crore tourists visited J&K. In 2023, the footfall was over two crores. There has been a three hundred per cent increase in foreign arrivals year after year. About 50,000 foreign tourists visited J&K in 2023.

*Majestic mountains, scenic views, picturesque valleys and the warm hospitality make Jammu and Kashmir a traveller's delight. In an exclusive interview, BOTT spoke with Mohd. Arif Lone (JKAS), Assistant Director Tourism, J&K Tourism. Here are a few excerpts from the interview.*

**Shreya Shimpi**

### What are the new policies launched by the Government to boost tourism?

The Government has launched new initiatives and identified some focus points for promoting our destination. We have identified 300 new sites which include 75 adventure sites, 75 Pilgrimage sites, 75 off-beat destinations and 75 trekking routes encompassing all the sectors. People are keen on exploring these lesser-known destinations as they are relatively unexplored and there is less chaos. For Leisure tourism and Wellness tourism, tourists like to experience peace and tranquillity. We have come up with 'Mantalai Wellness Yoga Centre'. It is one of our biggest and most ambitious projects.

We are working on the homestay policy which is new to J&K. The idea behind the Homestay policy is to give foreign tourists a chance to experience our culture and cuisine in a homely atmosphere. It is also a medium of cultural exchange between the tourists and the host. Our focus is on increasing the bed capacity to cater to a larger number of tourists. J&K is an adventure hub. We have several winter activities such as skiing, snowman-making competitions, cable car rides etc. Tourists come here in large numbers to enjoy all these activities. Along with FAM trips, we have organised various promotional events for which we invited bloggers from all across the country.

### What developments are underway regarding film shooting in Jammu and Kashmir?

Post-Covid, the film fraternity has rekindled its love for J&K. Various web series and films were shot here. In 2023, over 350 crew permissions have been granted for shooting in all other areas. Jammu Kashmir has enormous potential. We strive towards untapping it in the best possible way.

### What is the projected vision for 2024?

Our vision is to promote the lesser-known destinations. There are 37 destinations in Jammu, while the rest are in Kashmir. Our main goal is to upscale Jammu and Kashmir in such a way that it becomes the most sought-after tourist destination. ■



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# Madhya Pradesh Tourism undertaking several initiatives to empower Women

*Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPTB) is judiciously working towards inclusive and sustainable tourism, which aims at socioeconomic development of local communities with special focus on women empowerment.*



**A** Responsible Tourism Mission (RTM) has been launched by MPTB for the cultural and rural life experience-based tourism. Various projects are being implemented under this umbrella for environmental protection and conservation, economic development, community participation, social and cultural exchange with a special focus on women empowerment in the core of the project.

Madhya Pradesh, a state renowned for its rich cultural and natural heritage, has embarked on a mission to empower women and create more female-friendly tourist destinations. The 'Sankalp: Safe Tourism Campaign' seeks to train 10,000 women in various hospitality-related roles, encouraging their direct involvement in the tourism industry. Additionally, it aims to provide self-defence training to 40,000 women and raise awareness about safety among both tourists and locals.

The campaign commenced last year with a 15-day promotional phase. It was rolled out incrementally, dividing 50 tourist destinations into 20 clusters. These destinations included destinations

such as Omkareshwar, Maheshwar, Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, and Kota.

As part of the campaign, women from local villages have been receiving training for various roles such as boat operators, storytellers, guards, drivers, photographers, and self-defence experts. These trained women will host tourists at various attractions, sharing the state's rich history and culture. For instance, in Omkareshwar, women are undergoing training to operate boats, which will soon ferry tourists from one place to another.

This campaign is a pivotal component of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board's larger initiative, 'Safe Tourism Destination for Women.' This initiative aims to empower women in hospitality, security, driving, photography, self-defence, and more, with the ultimate goal of creating women-friendly tourist destinations across Madhya Pradesh.

The ambitious project plans to train 10,000 women for roles in the tourism industry and provide self-defence skills to 40,000 women in and around 50 destinations, enhancing safety for female travellers.

Women in the villages were trained to drive e-rickshaws, create local and responsible souvenirs, set up and run their own homestays and arrange even picnics. They transformed into artisans and guides as their latent skills and hidden talents were discovered and trained by social enterprises, supported by the tourism board, creating alternate sources of revenue. Responsible souvenirs were created by training local communities at centres where you can also interact and buy from them.

Additionally, MPTB will adhere to the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act 2013. MPTB will have its own punitive mechanism. Non-compliance with the policy may result in disciplinary actions, ranging from counselling and training to suspension or termination, depending on the severity and recurrence of the violation. Instances of non-compliance will be thoroughly investigated, and appropriate actions will be taken to ensure a gender-sensitive and harassment-free workplace. ■

# A look at the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of PATA India Tourism PowerHouse

*The 3rd edition of the PATA India Tourism PowerHouse, was held on February 21, 2024 at The Claridges Hotel, New Delhi. The event attracted a packed house of 100+ and consisted of a curious and participative audience. DG Tourism, FHRAI & HAI presidents were amongst business luminaries who attended the event. The theme of the PowerHouse was 'Trailblazing the Future of India Tourism'*



BOTT Desk



Shrmt. Manisha Saxena, Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India presented her views on India's emerging tourism potential opportunities and challenges. She assured tourism partners that reduced budget for overseas tourism promotion should not be topic of concern among stake holders as there will be no dearth of fund. Ministry has allocated collective budget for both domestic and international markets which will be used for promotion and marketing.

Noor Hamid, CEO PATA, addressed & share global tourism development perspective with membership and tourism stakeholders. PATA CEO said that the Indian market is likely to double in the next 5 years, however it will not reach the size of China, but will remain the third largest market in the world. He added that India is growing on the domestic front with its local population propelling business of tourism within India. PATA CEO highlighted India's unparalleled aircraft acquisition spree. The country is poised to witness delivery of nearly 3 new aircrafts per week over the next 2 years.

Prof Haiyan Song, Research Head at PATA, and Dean of Hospitality and Tourism at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, shared the outcome and implications of the recently released PATA Tourism Monitor report and provide an insight into tourism trends and forecast. He stated that South Asia including India is going to be a powerhouse of tourism in next 4-5 years. India will fully recover to pre-pandemic level in 2024 and exceed that in 2026 by about 58.5% and 20.5% in mild and medium



scenarios, respectively.

Ministry of Tourism with its election to the PATA Board will be amongst the few NTOs leading the charge for tourism growth in Asia Pacific markets for the term 2024-26. Coupled with this development, PATA India Chapter will represent 28 global PATA Chapters on the PATA Board for the same term.

The event also saw a Panel Discussion on 'Trailblazing the Future of India Tourism'. The Speakers of the Session included Noor Hamid Ahmed; Vikram Madhok, Hon Vice Chairman PATA India; Homa Mistry, Chief Executive Officer, Trail Blazer Tours India and Rohit Khosla, EVP Operations (North & West India) IHCL Ltd., (Taj Hotels Group). All the speakers and opinion leaders shared invaluable insights and trends, thereby, encouraging Indian tourism experts to think above and beyond the status quo and enhance the product offering and successfully compete with world class tourism products and services. ■



# Sarovar Hotels

## Maintaining high hospitality standards amidst expansion

*He is a hospitality veteran, who is best known for his knowledge of the industry and an immaculately pleasant demeanour. Synonymous with the Sarovar Hotels & Resorts in India, his foresight and sharp sense of business has taken the hospitality chain to new heights, adding as many as 12 new properties to the portfolio each year. In an exclusive chat with BOTT, Ajay Bakaya, Managing Director Sarovar Hotels and Director Louvre Hotels India, shares more...*

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

service.

### Looking ahead to 2024, what are your future plans and outlook?

We're cautiously optimistic about 2024. While I typically don't forecast beyond five years in India due to the dynamic nature of the market, we're anticipating strong growth, aiming for a 10-11% increase. Additionally, we plan to open at least twelve new hotels, expanding into both new and existing markets.

### Can you share more about the new destinations you're exploring?

We're venturing back into Africa with projects in Nairobi, Lusaka, Kampala, and Hargeisa. Additionally, we are aiming to open three hotels in Nepal in 2024. These expansions reflect our commitment to diversifying our portfolio and tapping into emerging markets.

### With the rising trend of hotel buyouts for weddings and events, how is Sarovar Group adapting to this trend?

Weddings are indeed a significant aspect of our business. We prioritise large banquet halls to accommodate such events, and we're increasingly

offering buyout options in select hotels. We've even introduced the concept of a wedding studio in some properties, providing a dedicated space for clients to explore wedding setups and options. This aligns with the government's push to promote destination weddings in India, and we're optimistic about the opportunities this presents.

### How important is Food and Beverage (F&B) revenue for your hotels?

Honestly, F&B hasn't really been our strength. Hoteliers tend to focus more on room revenue, but I believe there's untapped potential in our F&B offerings. With over 110 hotels and more openings, our corporate chefs are stretched thin. To inject creativity and elevate our F&B reputation, we've brought in seasoned chefs to introduce new concepts. For instance, we're launching a rooftop restaurant in Rajkot, and Pondicherry is set to become a culinary hotspot.

### What sustainability initiatives is Sarovar implementing?

We've taken significant steps towards sustainability. Around 53 of our hotels now have their own bottling plants, reducing plastic usage. Additionally, we're pioneering a new approach in our upcoming hotel in Chennai, where every room will have RO water on tap, eliminating the need for bottled water entirely. ■

### How did businesses fare in 2023?

Excellent for us! We operate on a Jan to December fiscal year, and we've experienced a remarkable year-on-year growth. Throughout the year, we opened twelve new hotels, signed 37 new projects, and are actively expanding.

### You have always believed on focusing on quality rather than just numbers. Can you elaborate on what quality means to you in terms of partnerships and deals?

Absolutely. When considering new partnerships, our focus is always on where we can add value, particularly from the perspective of enhancing guest experiences. However, it's crucial not to compromise on quality for quantity. Opening twelve hotels in a year presents significant challenges, and maintaining a high standard requires strong bench strength. Additionally, we're also starting our own management training program to ensure we have a skilled and dedicated team to deliver exceptional

# One Above

## Striving for Global DMC excellence

*B.A. Rahim, Founder of One Above Destination Management Services shares insightful perspectives on the current state of the travel industry and the anticipated trends for the upcoming year in an exclusive interview with BOTT.*

Shreya Shimpi

### What was the business landscape like in 2023 and what is the future outlook?

The business has been thriving over the past year, with 2023 marking an excellent period for us. We witnessed a remarkable growth of thirty per cent across all our Destination Management Companies (DMCs), particularly in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) segment. Looking ahead, we are optimistic about our future prospects. We are implementing a focused sales and business module where all three directors will concentrate on our DMCs, aiming to elevate them to rank among the top DMCs globally. Our vision is to sustain this growth momentum and further solidify our position in the market.

### What are the anticipated new trending destinations for 2024?

After OTOAI, Kenya is doing pretty well. Baku is doing well for the group series. Sri Lanka has seen almost a hundred per cent growth from the Indian market. Group series, MICE and leisure segments too have been picking up well. With Kenya granting Visa-Free entry, we are seeing considerable growth in the numbers since December.

### Post-pandemic, have you noticed any changes in the travel patterns?

Behavioural change is always expected in travellers since the generations are changing. Though there are a lot of behavioural changes, it is good for the travel and hospitality industry. Holidays are no longer a luxury, they are a must. People look forward to enjoying stress-free vacations which enhances the bonding between families. People are no longer taking holidays or vacations to show others but they have been doing it for themselves. Vacations are no longer a status symbol. Companies are focusing on MICE to improve the bonding between co-workers.

### What are your growth plans moving forward in the upcoming FY?

In the upcoming FY, we do not wish to increase the number of DMCs as we already have thirty DMCs. My colleagues, Irshad, Vishal and I shall be focusing on the growth of our existing DMCs. As I always say, 'We don't represent, we are present'. All these DMCs are owned and operated by us. We have our inbound licenses and staffing in the destinations where we operate. We have three departments in all these countries: Inbound, Outbound as well as a separate MICE department. We endeavour to



develop the existing DMCs and enlarge our presence in all these DMCs. We plan to have our own vehicles-coaches, jeeps, safaris for Desert as well as Jungle Safaris. We also plan to have our in-house professional and flexible India guides. We would like to emphasise more on the service and the expansion of our DMCs. ■

# Hospitality chains in India undertaking several initiatives for **Women Safety & Empowerment**

*The term hospitality is synonymous with Women. A home is made hospitable by the lady of the house. It is her warmth and her touch that turns brick and mortar into a warm cocoon. Similarly, in the Hotel Industry, from the Front Desk to General Managers to leading Chefs, Women are making a difference with their presence and their special care. In such a scenario, one is often led to wonder – what are the Hotels doing for these Women in return? When Families or Solo Women Travellers are holidaying, their first point of contact is a Hotel, and if they feel “safe” and “taken care of” in a Hotel, well, it automatically turns their holiday into a memorable experience.*

*This Women’s Day, BOTT brings you an overview of what the big Hotels brands in India are doing to make their Hotels a safe haven for Women Travellers and Employees. Here’s a look at some of the initiatives being undertaken by these hospitality chains –*

**Priyanka Saxena Ray &  
Anjali Pokhriyal**



## The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts Promoting Gender Diversity & Inclusion with #LeelaEmpowersHer

Anuraag Bhatnagar, Chief Executive Officer, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts explains, "We are committed to fostering a safe and inclusive environment



**Anuraag Bhatnagar,**  
Chief Executive Officer,  
The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

for women travellers and our employees. The Leela supports a productive work environment and promotes a culture of gender diversity and inclusion, continuously striving to embrace equity by providing equal opportunities for women associates across all levels and departments.

As a testament to our commitment to go beyond, we have designated several diversity and inclusion initiatives under our overarching campaign, #LeelaEmpowersHer. Among these initiatives is our in-house program, 'The Leela Leadership Development Programme (LLDP),' which focuses on nurturing women in various roles to cultivate their potential as future leaders in the hospitality industry. This tailored management training program provides world-class training and propels associates toward a fulfilling career with The Leela Palaces, Hotels, and Resorts. Another initiative is #IAmLeela, which highlights the extraordinary journey and the achievements of women at The Leela on the brand's social channels. Each woman at The Leela is special and

empowered to be the best version of herself.

Anjali Mehra, Chief Brand Officer and Senior Vice President Marketing, The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts elaborates, "We extend our commitment to the culinary arts through 'Shefs at The Leela,' a progressive culinary initiative that celebrates Indian women chefs and the workforce. We are gearing up for our fifth edition this year, developed in collaboration with Dean with Us



**Anjali Mehra,**  
Chief Brand Officer &  
Senior Vice President Marketing,  
The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts

(Rupali Dean and Akanksha Dean), this innovative program strives to enhance the visibility of women in kitchens by organizing meticulously crafted dinners, thought-provoking panel discussions, and exclusive masterclasses. 'Shefs at The Leela' aims to cultivate a landscape that not only appreciates diversity but also nurtures and inspires emerging talent."

Additionally, the safety and comfort of woman travellers is of utmost priority for The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts. The brand practices strict security measures, such as surveillance cameras, secure access points, with trained staff, creating a safe and secure environment.

Besides that, all The Leela properties also ensure that a woman guest have a comfortable and memorable stay with highly personalised services and amenities which are tailored to give them an experience filled with luxury. The services include 24-hour lady butler service, assisted city tours, unique amenities, airport pick-up and drop

services by hotel's lady chauffeurs, check-in and check-out experiences conducted by lady team members, to name a few.

Our experienced Palace Services Team curate experiences and assigns dedicated Palace Service Associates to become the single point of contact during the stay, ensuring that every need is met and personalized with thoughtful service. The Leela is rooted in the timeless ethos of "Atithi Devo Bhava – Guest is God" and continue to redefine luxury through a lens of responsibility and comfort."

## IHCL Supporting Women through its initiative 'She remains the Taj'

In May 2022, the Indian Hotels Company (IHCL), India's largest hospitality company, launched 'She Remains the Taj', a holistic framework of women-centric initiatives for all stakeholders including guests, employees, partners and the community. This encompasses enhanced experiences for women travellers at its hotels across the globe. IHCL also announced its goal to raise women participation in its workforce to 25% by 2025, and support women led businesses and partners.



**Puneet Chhatwal,**  
Managing Director and Chief Executive  
Officer, IHCL

"IHCL is known for championing the cause of women and enhancing their participation both, within and outside the organization. Cognizant of the growing economic influence of women consumers, 'She Remains the Taj' re-iterates our commitment to

creating customer-centric experiences for travellers. Under the promotion, we will introduce a series of initiatives and enabling policies to increase workforce participation. Keeping community at the core, IHCL will continue to extend economic opportunities to the larger ecosystem,” shared Puneet Chhatwal, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer, IHCL at the time of the launch.

Based on extensive research, the customer value proposition for women travellers has been developed to include heightened levels of privacy, security, bespoke amenities and stay offerings. As part of its commitment to increase women in leadership positions, 25% of these roles at upcoming IHCL hotels will be women.

Over the years, IHCL has implemented pioneering initiatives including the opening of South Asia’s first all-women managed luxury residences, Taj Wellington Mews in Chennai, and the all-women engineers’ team to build Ginger’s flagship hotel in Mumbai. Its industry leading policies include extended maternity leave, crèche facilities, healthcare benefits including IVF treatments, and skilling of women in under-served communities and regions.

## Marriott International Running the first all-women managed Hotel

Having women in leadership positions is a vital part of Marriott International’s strategy for growth and success. They are focused on advancing women in the company’s management and executive ranks, gaining their loyalty as customers, creating economic opportunity as hotel owners, and including women-owned businesses in our supply chain.

Marriott International believes in empowering women and enabling them to join in the ‘Empower Through Opportunity’ effort. It regularly works with non-profit organizations to develop skills and opportunities for women, supporting women-owned hotels, purchasing from women-owned businesses and providing development and advancement opportunities for our workforce.

The Westin Hyderabad Hitec City,

opened last year, became the first all women – managed property in the city. Led by a formidable team of women, this exciting new venture has the right mix of strength, talent and spirit. Sitting in the very swish and upscale Mindspace Hi Tech City, this Westin showcases women at the helm across all operational aspects, including the bustling kitchens and banquets, where the heavy lifting is known to be done, along with engineering, and security.



**Ranju Alex,**  
Area Vice President South Asia,  
Marriott International Inc

“The launch of our all-women hotel has been an initiative that is poised to make a profound impact on the local community and the hospitality landscape in Hyderabad. The opening of this hotel serves as an inspiration for women in the country, strengthening their ambitions to explore a career in the hospitality industry, while it also expounds the multitude of opportunities that such initiatives unlock for the immensely talented pool of female workforce in India,” shared Ranju Alex, Area Vice President - South Asia, Marriott International.

## Pride Group of Hotels Pampering Solo Women Travellers

It’s encouraging to see the travel industry adapting to the evolving needs of women, especially solo travellers. The efforts by Pride Group of Hotels to provide women-centric facilities contribute to a more inclusive and safe travel experience for female travellers in

New Delhi, Kolkata, Pune, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bengaluru, and Nagpur.



**Atul Upadhyay,**  
Senior Vice President,  
Pride Group of Hotels

Apart from offering all the contemporary amenities, Pride Hotels also provides a special “We Care” vanity kit with extra essentials, room allocation near the elevator, a chocolate platter, and a special 20% discount on room bookings to pamper the female guests. There is a separate section of rooms or a wing in the building exclusively dedicated to single lady travellers. The rooms are serviced only by female attendants. About 30% of the hotel’s workforce across all the units comprises women who have set benchmarks in the hospitality segment.

“Over the years women from all age groups have been extensively traveling. We have witnessed a significant uptick in women guests including solo travellers at all our properties nationally. Keeping in mind the preferences of the single lady traveller we have now introduced special amenities to ensure their stay is comfortable, convenient, and safer. It is our endeavour to encourage female travellers by providing them all tailor-made facilities to make their stay memorable,” shared Atul Upadhyay, Senior Vice President, Pride Group of Hotels

## Hilton Hotels Promoting ‘flexibility mindset’ through ‘It’s Okay’ campaign

Hilton is desirous of driving a culture that promotes more flexibility at the

workplace. In 2022 Hilton had initiated a campaign called 'IT'S OK.' This campaign highlighted the human side of the Hilton brand, revealing the Company's desire to promote flexibility in its culture. Hilton wants to drive a workplace culture that is ready to offer flexibility to employees in terms of work timings, short breaks in between work, or planning a leave at the last moment to fulfil family commitments or taking a day off.

last year, on the occasion of the International Housekeepers Week (September 10 – 16), Hilton India announced #YouAreTheSparkleAndShine, a heart-warming digital campaign and a first-of-its-kind initiative aimed at shining the well-deserved spotlight on the tireless efforts of the housekeeping teams in the hospitality industry, marking the first time that the industry's housekeeping heroes are being celebrated with a dedicated digital campaign. Whether it's ensuring hygiene and sanitation or adding a personal touch to hotel rooms, housekeepers are dedicated to ensuring

that guests have a comfortable and memorable stay. However, despite their hard work, the housekeeping staff often remain the unsung champions behind picture-perfect hospitality experiences.

As a global leader in hospitality, Hilton has an unwavering commitment to creating mentoring and development opportunities for every Team Member to improve diversity and inclusion for all. In 2014, Hilton launched the Women in Leadership program which has empowered more than 182 female Team Members into their promotions and career journeys.

## **IHG** **Creating Women Leaders with** **'RISE' mentoring initiative**

IHG is growing its global network of 'Lean In circles' to empower its female colleagues to realise their ambitions by supporting one another through small peer groups that meet regularly. These help them to learn and grow together

while providing advice and sounding boards. "We want all our women to be in a position to consider opportunities that encourage career growth, and which help them fulfil their potential."

"We know that women are still hugely underrepresented at the high level of hotel management. Our global RISE mentoring initiative plays a key role in increasing the number of women in GM and other senior positions in our managed hotels. By Q1 2022, we were proud to say that more than 100 colleagues had graduated from the programme. We want to create a future where aspiring female General Managers RISE up and succeed in achieving their ambition. This programme aims to inspire confidence in its participants, helping to grow their networks and provide a range of opportunities for personal and professional growth. Almost 130 hotel-based female leaders have so far joined the 12-month programme, with nearly a third of them having since been promoted." ■



# Will Ayodhya & Lakshadweep give the much-needed push to Inbound Tourism?



*The year 2024 heralded the launch of a new touristy state in the country – AYODHYA. According to official estimates, Ayodhya is preparing to welcome around 100,000 visitors daily. The inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya has marked a historic milestone, resonating profoundly with millions worldwide. Beyond its historical significance, the event not only unveiled promising tourism opportunities for the city with a rich past, but also gave reasons to many across the globe to visit India. The construction of the temple is expected to boost Ayodhya's economy and turn it into a popular destination for religious tourism. However, the bigger question is – will it boost just Domestic Tourism or will it also provide the much-needed impetus to Inbound Tourism.*

***BOTT** reached out to few Inbound Tour Operators to know their thoughts on how Ayodhya will be a game-changer for Inbound Tourism and if Lakshadweep too will have some role to play in boosting inbound traffic. Here is what they had to say –*

**Priyanka Saxena Ray & Anjali Pokhriyal**



**Subhash Goyal**  
Chairman – STIC  
Travel & Air Charter  
Group; Chairman  
– Aviation and  
Tourism Committee  
of Indian Chamber  
of Commerce (ICC)

The inauguration of Ram Mandir and strong positioning of Ayodhya as a tourist destination will definitely help Domestic and Religious Tourism only but not Inbound Tourism as yet,

as there is a problem of accommodation in Ayodhya. Yes, there is interest in Ram Mandir but for general tourists, it is very difficult to promote. NRIs will be flocking but at the same time we have to look at the non-NRI tourists from all over the world. There is drop in pure tourists after

Covid and momentum has still not picked up. Further where is the infrastructure? As it is people are finding it difficult to visit Ayodhya because no proper hotels are there, the one which are there are full all the time. People have to stay in Lucknow and Varanasi to do a day trip to Ayodhya so what are we looking at here?

Meanwhile, the Hon'ble Prime Minister's visit to Lakshadweep has definitely given tremendous boost to the island but it will take at least another 02 years for tourism to pick up when there will be more connectivity and more world class hotels will come up. We are flooded with Lakshadweep queries but how to send the tourists there. There is one Cordelia Cruise operating and they also stay only one day in Lakshadweep. People find it expensive plus it remains sold out most of the time. There is one flight to Lakshadweep from cochin and that is also not daily. There are no proper hotels and resorts there and the facilities, which are already developed and doing well in Maldives, are not there in Lakshadweep at all. How do you look at the tourist traffic at this stage?



**Jyoti Mayal,**  
President, TAAI

The consecration of Ram Mandir in Ayodhya is a huge milestone for religious tourism sector. People are flocking in huge numbers to seek the blessings of Lord Ram and according to Ministry of Tourism more than 60% of tourism in India is associated with religious and spiritual tourism and,

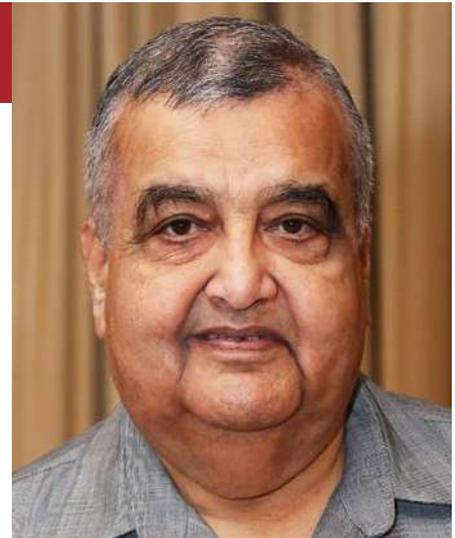
the places of religious tourism earned ₹1,34,543 crore in 2022, up from ₹65,070 crore in 2021. It may also interest you to know that the combined hospitality, travel, and tourism industry has created 20,000 jobs in Ayodhya ahead of the much-anticipated 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony. There is a huge untapped potential in religious tourism segment. I feel collaborative efforts between travel agencies, religious organizations, and cultural bodies can create comprehensive packages that cater to different interests, including heritage tours, art exhibitions, and culinary experiences. This will also address the challenges of unrealised potential of religious tourism is a compelling prospect for destinations seeking to diversify their offerings and boost local economies.

Our Prime Minister is an avid influencer and he does not shy away from exploring newness. His recent visit to the Lakshadweep has already prompted people to wish list the destination to discover the pristine beaches it has to offer. India is also working to push tourism infra in islands such as Lakshadweep to address the emerging fervour for domestic tourism. The natural beauty of Lakshadweep is unmatched in any region of India therefore infrastructure building must not be at the cost of scenic beauty. If tourists will flock over Lakshadweep, they will be coming there for nature. To carry all the needs of the tourist Lakshadweep has to be prepared for the different spectrum of tourists. Currently, both are underinvested. Therefore, infrastructure building has to be a necessity.

**Rajiv Mehra**  
President, IATO

The inauguration of Ram Mandir and strong positioning of Ayodhya as a tourist destination has made it the hub of Spiritual Tourism in India with Varanasi, Prayagraj, Ayodhya and Mathura forming the famed circuit. With nearly 80 Hotel Organisations looking to invest in Ayodhya, Airlines connecting it with various parts of the country, a nascent Airport and a Railway station – all have strongly positioned Ayodhya as the most sought-after destination in India. Yes, it will help India to slowly climb towards the 2019 figure but then what the country needs is aggressive marketing overseas.

Lakshadweep too has added value and buzz in the tourism market place. A rise in Inbound Tourists will depend upon the substantial growth of Infrastructure in the form of quality accommodation and effective connectivity at a rapid pace and also ease of doing business. Presently there is only one flight of Alliance Air which flies thrice a week to Lakshadweep. We need atleast 2-3 flights a day to/from Lakshadweep to meet the requirement. There are not enough good quality hotels in Lakshadweep. Government needs to create land bank for building



3 to 5-star category hotels. Stakeholders should be encouraged to build hotels by providing tax holidays for 5 to 10 years. There are not enough tourism and sports activities. Govt. needs to make some tourist spots with tourism and sports including water sport activities. Police Clearance Certificate is required for any Indian tourists to visit Lakshadweep which takes 15 – 20 days. Thereafter, one has to apply for the permit submitting the Aadhaar Card and Police Clearance Certificate. Lakshadweep is part of our country and there should not be any requirement of Police Clearance Certificate, and any government photo id like Aadhaar Card should be good enough to visit Lakshadweep.



**P. P. Khanna**  
President, ADTOI

The inauguration of the Ram Mandir was a grand event that carried international media coverage and had a positive impact on the foreign nationals as well as NRI across the world. Hopefully, inbound tourism will get a boost from this and pick momentum in the months to come. The G20 Summit, concluded last year, has already made a

dent and showcased country's tourism potential besides Tourism Ministry's participation in foreign travel marts like WTM, ITB, time is not far when we will reach closer to 2019 figures. Also International Travel Mart organised by Ministry of Tourism every year to showcase the North East destination will substantiate to the value addition to the numbers.

Meanwhile, Lakshadweep has also added value to India Tourism with regards to Inbound Tourists. The destination needs development of infrastructure and improvement in the connectivity and Government is at it after Hon'ble PM's visit to the island. Hopefully, this archipelago will be developed similar to other international destinations to attract foreign tourists depending on Govt. and stakeholder's initiatives.



**Ravi Gosain**  
Vice President, IATO

Inauguration of Ram Mandir at Ayodhya will significantly play an important role to not only attract domestic religious

tourist but also approximately 32 million of Indian diaspora living all over the world. The buzz has been created and we are getting enquires from our overseas client, so I believe this will generate lots of interest among inbound tourist for both religious and spiritual purpose. We have already floated packages covering Ayodhya at Indian ethnic markets and getting fabulous response. I personally think that this will definitely contribute to the increase in some inbound numbers. However, we still have to wait and watch to reach closer to 2019 figures. On other side Lakshadweep has also got lot of attention in last few months. It's a great product but it needs proper infrastructure, connectivity and variety of accommodation facilities, in order to receive international tourists. No one has doubts that once things are in place, as desired, it can be a premium tourist destination for inbound travellers. In the meanwhile, our popular destinations, such as, Rajasthan, Kerala, MP and Maharashtra are doing well.

**Prateek Hira**  
President & CEO,  
Tornos & Indian  
Frontiers

Many in the Inbound Tourism Industry are of the opinion that Ram Mandir in Ayodhya may not be a product for foreign tourists and has a religious inclination rather than being inclined to the IBT market of India. Respectfully I would differ with this notion, as it is now upon us, the inbound



trade of India, to project Ayodhya as India's newest destination in the foreign markets and project it as a spiritual and cultural destination. Ayodhya is one powerful story of India's culture and beliefs that is waiting to be unfolded and told to create the much-required inquisitiveness in the foreign markets. For a very long time, India has harped upon medieval history, particularly in the north and the ancient history including the edifice-based history has only been a successful product for the south of India. We in the inbound trade, were quite parenthesised in our product development and marketing approach, but with the hype created due to the construction and the opening of Ram Temple, we have a great opportunity to extend our markets and go out to tell the world that there is more in the North of India, from the ancient scriptures that calls for a visit and even a repeat visit. I am sure Ayodhya in the times to come will be a catalyst in bringing in the inbound numbers back very soon and mind you, this would extend beyond the non-resident Indians, foreigners as foreigners waiting to explore the mystery called, 'India'.

In case of Lakshadweep with one picture and a video of our Prime Minister the much-required buzz has been created which has put our attention on this neglected part of India, which we never realised existed as a holiday destination - Of course quite

late but better than never. If we look at it as an effort of our Prime Minister to bring the government's and tourism industry's attention towards the development and projection of yet another island destination of India, we are in the right direction. At the same time, we ought to realise that tourism works on three basic fundamentals, 'connectivity', 'facilities' and 'attraction'. In case of Lakshadweep, which no doubt is an attractive destination, it is largely lacking connectivity, facilities and amenities. But I am sure and having experienced the willingness of the government to turn tables in a time bound manner, all these shortfalls will be addressed very soon. A destination's growth in terms of tourism begins with domestic tourists, and should always be like that too. Domestic tourists create the much-required ecosystem of tourism, making a destination ready for the foreign tourists who follow. Lakshadweep may not be immediately ready for the inbound market, but the work is in progress and in the coming years, we will see Lakshadweep gaining popularity in the inbound market as well. With all this positivity in the air for Lakshadweep, my only concern is Lakshadweep's fragile nature. In my opinion, instead of rushing in all fronts just to garner numbers we ought to responsibly plan the destination for tourism and responsibly promote it, keeping in mind the ill effects of over-tourism that can irreversibly ruin the ecology there.

and positive impact on Inbound Tourism in 2024. Firstly, it will serve as a beacon for spiritual and religious tourism, attracting visitors from around the globe who seek solace and enlightenment in India's rich cultural heritage. Additionally, the strengthened positioning of Ayodhya on the global tourism map will boost NRI tourism inflow, as people of Indian origin seek to reconnect with their roots and participate in this momentous occasion. Furthermore, tours to Ayodhya can be incorporated into various conference pre and post-tour packages, enriching the visitor experience and promoting cultural exchange.

From an economic standpoint, the influx of tourists will lead to a surge in revenue for local businesses, hospitality sectors, and ancillary services, thus contributing significantly to the economy. This development represents not only a milestone in India's cultural narrative but also a promising opportunity for inclusive tourism growth.

Meanwhile, Lakshadweep, on the other hand, undoubtedly holds immense potential to add value to India's tourism landscape. Currently, the destination is in the developmental phase, with various projects aimed at enhancing infrastructure and amenities for tourists. However, it's important to acknowledge that the immediate influx of tourists may be limited due to existing infrastructure constraints, including limited flight connectivity. Nevertheless, with ongoing efforts and planned projects, there might be a gradual rise in tourist visits to Lakshadweep in the coming years. As infrastructure improves and accessibility increases, Lakshadweep can be positioned as an attractive leisure destination, boasting pristine beaches and rich marine biodiversity. Moreover, beyond leisure tourism, Lakshadweep has the potential to emerge as a sought-after MICE destination in India, offering unique settings for corporate events and incentives. ■



**Naveen Rizvi**  
Vice President,  
SITE India Chapter

The inauguration of the Ram Mandir and the enhanced positioning of Ayodhya as a tourist destination will undoubtedly have a profound



# Good networking takes centre stage at SATTE 2024





# ARK Group

## Redefining travel experiences

*ARK Group, formerly known as ARK Travel, has evolved into a dynamic entity encompassing a wide array of travel services. From its roots in cruising to expanding into outbound representation, technology platforms, villa rentals, and island destinations, ARK Group offers a diverse portfolio to cater to various travel interests. In an exclusive chat with **BOTT**, Kishan Biyani, Managing Director, ARK Travel Group speaks about the gamut of offerings under the ARK Group umbrella, its growth trajectory, and the evolution of the cruising sector.*

Priyanka Saxena Ray



### What offerings fall under the ARK Group umbrella?

The ARK Group encompasses a diverse range of travel services tailored to various interests and destinations. Formerly known as ARK Travel, the company expanded its scope post-pandemic. It now comprises several distinct segments. We have ARK Rep that specialises in outbound representation, facilitating partnerships and representation services. ARK Tech is a comprehensive technology platform for cruise liners, enabling online cabin booking with real-time inventory updates. We then have ARK Villas where we offer villa rentals in Goa and Lonavala through partnerships with villa owners, focusing on B2B sales. At ARK Islands we specialise in destinations such as the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles, with partnerships extending to numerous resorts. This diversified approach allows ARK Group to cater to a wide range of travel needs with specialized teams managing each segment.

### What is the growth plan for ARK Group, and how does 2024 look?

Looking ahead, ARK Group anticipates continued growth and expansion in the travel industry. With a positive outlook for tourism over the next five years, the company aims to capitalize on evolving travel trends, particularly among the emerging B2B client base. The modern traveller today seeks multiple holidays annually, reflecting a shift towards travel as a stress-relieving activity. ARK Group is poised to meet this demand by offering diverse travel experiences across its various segments. Despite challenges posed by the pandemic, the company remains optimistic about surpassing pre-pandemic performance levels soon.

### What sets ARK Group apart, and how has the cruising sector evolved?

The unique selling proposition of ARK Group lies in its comprehensive suite of travel services, honed over decades of industry experience. Formerly known as ARK Travels, the company has a rich history in the cruising sector, dating back to its pioneering efforts in signing up with cruise liners in India during the early 1990s. Under new leadership since 2008, ARK Group dedicated significant resources to cruise liners, achieving substantial passenger numbers before the pandemic temporarily disrupted the industry. However, with the gradual recovery and changing perceptions about cruising, the sector is experiencing renewed growth. Cruising is no longer confined to traditional destinations but has expanded to include exotic locales like Alaska and Copenhagen, appealing to a broader demographic, including elderly travellers seeking enriching experiences combined with leisure. ■

# ACCOR Showcase 2024 brings together 80+ Partner Hotels from across the globe

**A**CCOR Showcase 2024, which recently concluded in Delhi and Mumbai, was a resounding success. With more than 30 International Hotels and 60 Domestic Hotels participating in the roadshow, the Tour Operators and Travel Agents in both the cities got a wonderful opportunity to interact with the hoteliers and conduct some meaningful meetings.

Rohit Chopra, Director of National Sales – India & South Asia, Accor, talking exclusively to BOTT said, “We have the largest participation from the ACCOR Group this year in the Showcase and few first-time entrants too, such as New York, Bahrain, Ras Al Khaimah, Cambodia, Oman and more. The large representation is proof of the fact that India today is an important market and everyone wants a share of the growing outbound pie. India has provided good business to hotels internationally, be it UAE, Indonesia, Australia, Bahrain and they all want a larger chunk of the growing India outbound market.”

Talking about the year 2024 he shared, “2024 is looking very exciting because we’re going to have Raffles Jaipur opening up and we also have a few Ibis and Novotel opening across India. There are almost around six hotels opening. We are also excited for the opening of our new Novotel in Delhi city centre and there will be on in Chandigarh too.”



# Millennium Hotels balancing expansion, innovation & sustainability



*Millennium Hotels and Resorts (MHR), with a reputation for excellence, owns, manages, and operates over 130 properties worldwide including in New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Auckland, Beijing, and Singapore. In an exclusive interview with BOTT, Andy Tan, Senior Vice President - Global Sales & Partnership Operations Sea, MHR shares more.*

## Priyanka Saxena Ray

instance, the Grand Copthorne Waterfront underwent a remarkable transformation, investing over 30 million dollars to enhance every aspect of the property, from guest rooms to meeting spaces.

### What expansion strategies are in the pipeline for this year?

We're actively pursuing expansion opportunities to expand our global footprint. Currently, we're in the process of rebranding our hotel in Knightsbridge, London, which will soon be unveiled as MSocial Knightsbridge by the end of the year. Additionally, we're excited to announce a new hotel project underway in Silicon Valley, USA, which is currently in the construction phase. The launch of MSocial Silicon Valley is eagerly anticipated, and we're also preparing to rebrand several other hotels in the vicinity.

### What sustainability initiatives has Millennium Hotels undertaken as a brand?

Sustainability is a cornerstone of our brand ethos, and we're dedicated to implementing impactful initiatives across our properties. At a recent conference in Glasgow, our parent company, City Development, made a monumental pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030, underscoring our commitment to environmental responsibility. In line with this goal, our hotels worldwide are actively working towards eliminating single-use plastics, with a target to achieve zero plastic use by 2025. Additionally, we've transitioned to eco-friendly amenities, such as Christine Laqua products, to minimise plastic usage by nearly 98%. We have also introduced innovative "green meetings" initiatives, prioritising sustainable practices in food sourcing and temperature control to minimise environmental impact.

### How much is India an important market for you as a source market?

India holds significant importance as one of the top five source markets for Millennium Hotels and Resorts. We've witnessed steady growth in India, particularly in key markets such as Singapore and gateway cities in Thailand. The ease of obtaining visas has facilitated travel, contributing to the rise of the Indian middle class's penchant for exploration. ■

### Could you provide insights into the recent hotel openings?

Yes, we've had several exciting developments in our hotel portfolio. In Suzhou, China, we proudly launched the first MSocial hotel in the country, marking a significant milestone for our brand's expansion. Additionally, we recently celebrated the grand opening of MSocial Phuket in Thailand, further solidifying our presence in the vibrant Southeast Asian market. Furthermore, we've made notable progress in the Middle East, with the successful opening of several hotels in the region. In response to evolving customer preferences, especially in the post-COVID era, we've witnessed a trend of hotels undergoing extensive renovations and refurbishments to ensure impeccable cleanliness and safety standards. For



# Hotel Chandela Khajuraho

## Offering Refined & Contemporary Experience



**Pratibha Arora,**  
Sales Director

**K**hajuraho, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Madhya Pradesh, beckons with its exquisite temples and intricate sculptures that depict love, spirituality, and everyday life. In this captivating and touristy place, Hotel Chandela is perfectly positioned to cater to the needs of discerning traveller.

With the best of facilities, luxury and comfort available, Hotel Chandela in Khajuraho promises a memorable holiday to all its guests.

Hotel Chandela, Khajuraho is an exquisite 5-star deluxe property that epitomises luxury and elegance amidst the world-renowned backdrop of Khajuraho. Formerly managed by Taj Hotels, the hotel has undergone a comprehensive renovation, ensuring a refined and contemporary experience for our guests.

Travellers can indulge their senses at the newly unveiled bar and multi-cuisine restaurant, where culinary delights await to tantalise your palate. Rejuvenate your body and soul at the hotel's serene spa, or maintain your wellness routine at its state-of-the-art fitness centre.

With 100 meticulously designed rooms and 8 opulent suites, Hotel Chandela offers a haven of comfort and sophistication. Each accommodation is thoughtfully crafted to provide the utmost in luxury and relaxation.

Located in the neighbourhood of Hotel Chandela Khajuraho lies the Panna Wildlife Sanctuary, a sanctuary of natural beauty and biodiversity, perfect for wildlife enthusiasts and adventurers alike.



Visit us at : [www.chandela.in](http://www.chandela.in) | Connect: +91 9810110007

# Uzbekistan

## sets a target of 100,000 Indian visitors in 2024



*Uzbekistan's allure as a tourism destination has been steadily gaining traction, particularly among the Indian travellers. In an exclusive chat with BOTT, Axror Valijanov - Director of the "Silk Road" office, Uzbekistan, talks about the burgeoning potential, strategic initiatives, and captivating destinations that Uzbekistan offers to Indian travellers, aiming to propel the country's tourism industry to new heights.*

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

### How many Indians have visited Uzbekistan, and what targets have you set for this year?

Prior to the pandemic, in 2019, approximately 20,000 Indian visitors explored Uzbekistan. However, with concerted efforts and strategic events like the 25th UNWTO General Assembly held in Uzbekistan last year, we witnessed a notable surge, welcoming around 45,000 Indian tourists. Looking ahead to 2024, we aim to double our reach and welcome 100,000 Indian travellers, buoyed by the increasing accessibility afforded by direct flights between our countries.

### What marketing plans/initiatives do you have to meet the ambitious target of 100,000 Indian arrivals?

Our marketing strategy centres on showcasing Uzbekistan's rich cultural heritage, which serves as a major draw for Indian tourists. With over 8,000 cultural sites, including awe-inspiring historical monuments, Uzbekistan offers a unique tapestry of experiences unmatched in the region. Additionally, we've observed growing interest from Indian couples seeking picturesque wedding destinations and corporations eyeing Uzbekistan for MICE events. Furthermore, our investment in infrastructure, particularly in mountain tourism, with world-class facilities for skiing and extreme sports, presents a compelling proposition for adventure enthusiasts.

### What destinations are you promoting in India, and what is the best time to visit Uzbekistan?

Uzbekistan beckons travellers year-round with diverse offerings for every season. From winter packages for mountain enthusiasts to spring and autumn escapes, where the landscape bursts into colour, our country caters to all preferences. Accommodation is plentiful, with over 3,500 hotels including renowned brands like Intercontinental, Hilton, and Radisson, ensuring a comfortable stay amidst Uzbekistan's cultural splendour. Moreover, visitors can indulge in shopping sprees, exploring both international luxury brands and authentic local designs that encapsulate our rich heritage. ■

### What potential do you see in India as a tourism market for Uzbekistan?

Our relationship with the Indian government is exceptionally warm, fostering collaboration across various fields. Notably, we've engaged with the vibrant community of "Incredible India" through joint events, such as our recent collaboration just before the pandemic in 2019. With each passing year, the Indian market's presence in Uzbekistan has grown significantly, particularly with the introduction of direct flights like IndiGo and Uzbekistan Airways. Last year alone, over 45,000 Indian tourists explored the rich tapestry of Uzbekistan, marking a substantial increase from previous years' figures.

# UDAAN HOTELS AND RESORTS

## CONTINUES WITH ITS FOCUSED EXPANSION PLAN FOR THE HOTELS & RESORTS CHAIN IN NORTHEAST- INDIA

### Udaan Hotel and Resorts' Strategic Expansion

Udaan Hotels & Resorts and AIR iQ's journey in the Travel and Hospitality business was laid from the year 2011. Informing about the group's journey, Ajay Kumar Wadhawan, Executive Director, AIR iQ and Udaan Hotels & Resorts, says, "The great passion of two **Managing Directors, Nishi Kant Agarwal and Sashi Kant Agarwal** towards the Travel & Tourism Industry, enabled them to set up business in Siliguri, West Bengal. Currently, more than 800 people are engaged in the Group's Business in West Bengal, Northeast and Rest of India."

Both Managing Directors have a clear focus on Quality, Perfect Service Delivery and Customer Orientation in each vertical of their Business – Hospitality and Travel-related divisions.

### Empowering Tour Operators with "airiq.in"

The Group's leading B2B Fixed Departure Online Solution, "airiq.in", was introduced as a blessing for all Tour Operators and other Agents of different categories, to add land with the Air Tickets supplied by AIR iQ for Holidays or Business Travel of their customers. AIR iQ sells more than 275 routes on its platform and has



**Nishi Kant Agarwal and Sashi Kant Agarwal**  
Managing Directors, AIR iQ and Udaan Hotels & Resorts

more than 60,000 agents registered. AIR iQ did a business of more than 1000 crores in 2022 - 23, with a target to get it to 1500 crores in this FY.

### Introducing "airiqonline.in" – A User-Friendly B2B Online National FIT Portal

With the humongous success of the B2B Fixed Departure Online solution, Air iQ has recently launched a new B2B Online National FIT Portal "airiqonline.in". The USP of this introduction is a great user-friendly system, with access to all the Airlines and other travel-related services being added. With their existing strength, they



**Ajay Kumar Wadhawan**  
Executive Director, AIR iQ and Udaan Hotels & Resorts

have been very successful in creating a better distribution network of additional 5,000 agents.

### Expansion Plans in Northeast India

About the group's Hospitality Vertical, Udaan Hotels & Resorts, Wadhawan says "We are the most popular Boutique Hotel and Resort Chain in West Bengal and Sikkim Hills, duly endorsed by our guests in Trip Advisor. With nine operational properties in Darjeeling, Gangtok, Pelling, Kalimpong and Siliguri." The group has great expansion plans, with Eight more resorts to be launched by the end of the current FY, and to be increased to 30 by the end of 2025, followed by 50 sooner, thereafter. Hospitality Business's plan is very clear with expansions all over North East- India only, which will help in strengthening a particular geographical belt deserving the most attention. This focused plan shall surely help further in boosting the economy of North East-India and excellent tourism opportunities too, due to the extremely naturally most beautiful and unexplored destinations, by many Indians and Foreign Tourists too.

### Showcasing Northeast Tourism with WTM and ITB

The WTM and ITB's role is going to be commendable and extremely helpful to Udaan in showcasing the potential of Northeast Tourism and Udaan's contribution in the form of an opportunity to Tour Operators from all over the world reading in TravelScapes to understand more about the best of North East- India and an opportunity to offer the True Value Luxury stay Packages in Boutique Resorts. The Inbound Tour Operators too will be able to combine our hospitality segment in their itinerary, to make a wonderful experience for their Overseas Suppliers. Additionally, our Travel Business's strength, further makes the offers of our Tourism Associates more attractive to their overseas clients.



# From MICE to Honeymooners, MAURITIUS caters to all markets

*Golden sandy beaches, idyllic landscapes, crystal clear lagoons, surfing, snorkelling- Mauritius has it all! Zeenat Gangee, Tourism Promotion Manager, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority in an exclusive chat with BOTT at Mumbai shares more about the mesmerising destination.*

**Shreya Shimpi**

## How has the business been so far this FY?

There has been a gradual increase in air access for India which has been a major factor for the rise in numbers. Air Mauritius is back on track after Covid. Delhi flights have been launched. Chennai flights shall commence operations soon. Vistara has entered the market. With all such developments, we expect our business to expand. Many big hotel chains have expressed their interest in the India market. Today, at OTM Mumbai, we have around eighteen hotels and DMCs exhibiting with us. This stands testimony to the fact that the numbers are significantly increasing.

## How important is India to you as a source market?

Historically, Mauritians have origins in India fostering a natural bond between India and Mauritius. Mauritius gives 'Visa-on-Arrival' which is one of the key factors for making it a sought-after destination for the Indian traveller. Mauritius offers a variety of culinary options which cater to the needs of the Indian traveller. India is an extremely important market. It is our constant endeavour to strengthen these ties with



regards to tourism. Though Mauritius is famous as a honeymoon destination, we also have a lot of multi-generational tourists, sports lovers, and filmmakers.

## How is Mauritius positioning itself as a MICE destination?

Mauritius is strategically positioning itself as an ideal MICE destination through various initiatives. We offer excellent logistical facilitation for MICE activities, ensuring smooth coordination and execution of events. In addition, we have introduced attractive incentives to further entice MICE organizers and participants. For instance, for a three-night stay associated with MICE events, travellers can enjoy a 15% VAT refund on accommodation costs, adding significant value to their experience. This incentive is applicable for groups as small as fifty people, demonstrating our commitment to catering to a wide range of MICE needs. These efforts underscore our dedication to standing out in the competitive MICE market

## What are your promotional strategies for the India market?

Our promotional strategies are very segment-focused. We have strategies focusing on MICE and the B2B segment. We are participating in all forums catering to that. Along with the metros, we are also introducing strategies for the Tier II cities since these cities are showing keen interest. We are developing strategies to penetrate these markets since we now have daily connectivity between India and Mauritius. We have a digital strategy which is extremely important for increasing our outreach in the B2C segment and for the specialists selling Mauritius. We are participating in Roadshows, traveling to cities and also having a celebrity-driven strategy. ■

# GATE

## networking evening strengthens India-Nepal tourism ties



The recent networking evening hosted by the Global Association of Tourism and Expert (GATE) emerged as a pivotal event, fostering stronger ties between India and Nepal in the realm of tourism. The esteemed gathering was graced by the presence of distinguished guests including Shri Narayan Prasad Saud, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Government of Nepal; Shankar Prasad Sharma, Ambassador of Nepal and Shri Yogesh Gauchan Thakali Member of Parliament along with Shazia Ilmi, BJP National Spokesperson.

The highlight of the evening was the keynote address by Shri Narayan Prasad Saud, who highlighted the cultural richness of Nepal by showcasing it as a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multi-religious nation.

The honourable Ambassador's vision for a collaborative approach laid the foundation for a renewed era of tourism cooperation, further solidifying the diplomatic commitment to strengthening bilateral tourism relations between India and Nepal. The ambassador's emphasis on cultural exchange and people-to-people connections resonated well with the overarching goal of the networking evening – to create lasting partnerships that extend beyond official channels.

This was the 3rd event in a row of one year by GATE. The organisers also announced Nepal as the next big destination where GATE Global meet will take place, dates for which will be announced shortly, said by Global Advisor Dr Hari Kishan Valmiki. President Atma Singh announced the opening of the membership of GATE shortly so that interested members can join the forum. General Secretary Ankur Kalra played a key role in making it a successful event. ■



# Taiwan Tourism Administration expands presence with TTIC in Mumbai

*Amidst Taiwan's resurgence into the global tourism arena post the Covid-19 pandemic, a significant milestone was achieved with the inauguration of the Taiwan Tourism Information Centre (TTIC) in Mumbai, India. Led by the Taiwan Tourism Administration, this strategic move signals Taiwan's renewed commitment to engaging with the Indian market after a hiatus induced by the pandemic. In an exclusive interview with Trust H.J. Lin, Deputy Director General of the Taiwan Tourism Administration, insights into Taiwan's tourism outlook, growth projections, and innovative strategies for captivating the Indian traveller were unveiled.*



Familiarization trips (Fam trips) to Taiwan, aiming to encourage them to promote Taiwan as a tourism destination. Additionally, various online and offline campaigns offering incentives to Indian travellers are being launched. Notably, there is currently a significant lucky draw campaign titled 'Taiwan the Lucky Land' for FIT (Free Independent Traveller) travellers, offering attractive travel prizes worth NT\$5000.

## What is the vision of Taiwan Tourism Administration for the year 2024?

The vision for 2024 is to achieve a growth rate ranging from ten to fifty per cent in tourism from India. To realize this vision, Taiwan Tourism Administration aims to increase cooperation and collaboration with industry partners. By fostering stronger partnerships, the administration seeks to maximize outreach and achieve its growth targets for the year. ■

Shreya Shimpi



## What are Taiwan Tourism Administration's expectations for tourism growth from India in the upcoming year?

Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA) anticipates further growth ranging from 10 to 50 per cent compared to 2019 figures. To achieve this objective, the administration has established an office in Mumbai located at Raheja Platinum on Andheri-Kurla Road, a landmark business hub in Mumbai. The Taiwan Tourism Information Centre (TTIC) in Mumbai was opened on February 07, 2024 and is a one-stop shop providing information related to travel, tourism, and hospitality in Taiwan. It offers information on visas, MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), access to brochures and collaterals on Taiwan, a picture and video gallery, special event information, and support to companies selling Taiwan. It also serves as a meeting space for discussions, aiming to build a strong connection with travel agents in Mumbai.

## What promotional strategies are being implemented to increase Taiwan's appeal as a tourism destination in the Indian market?

Presently, Taiwan Tourism Administration is focused on achieving full recovery and enhancing non-stop airline services. Recognizing that many Indian travellers perceive Taiwan primarily as an IT destination, efforts are being made to shift this perception. I always say that 'IT' stands for India-Taiwan as they have a strong connection with the IT industry. The administration plans to invite media and key travel agents on

# Qatar

## A Gateway to your Arabian Dreams

*World-class cuisines, alluring landscapes, riveting activities, enchanting deserts and unsurpassed hospitality make Qatar a traveller's delight in the most magical ways. In an exclusive chat, BOTT spoke with Philip Dickinson, International Markets, Qatar Tourism at the OTM. Excerpts...*

**Shreya Shimpi**

### How important is India to you as a source market?

From the Qatar Tourism perspective, India is our second largest source market after Saudi Arabia and it's a very important market. Last year we had 420,000 arrivals from India, an increase of twenty-five per cent compared to 2022. India is a priority market for us. We have fifteen priority markets that we are focusing on. Our Rep office BRANDit looks after our Trade engagement and Trade Business Development for MICE, leisure and weddings. We are heavily focusing on the trade through FAM trips, Roadshows, Trade shows, events, marketing and agreements.

### Have you seen a significant increase in tourist footfall post-World Cup?

Yes, there has been an increase due to a combination of things. The World Cup was a springboard for us. Qatar's Vision 2030 has tourism as one of its pillars along with economic development, sustainability and

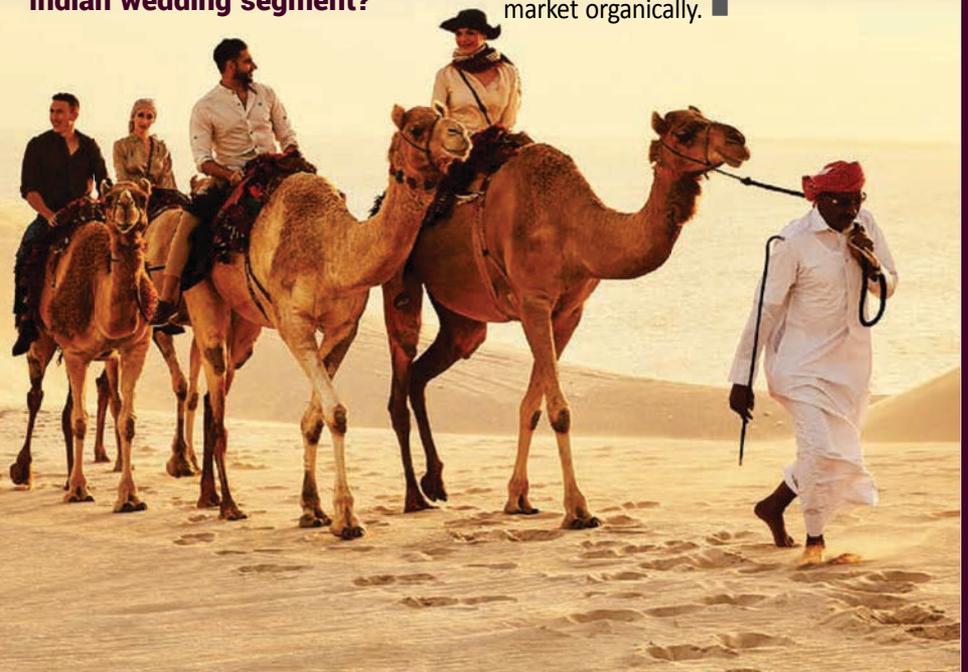
innovation. As a part of that, huge infrastructural changes are going on in Qatar. The World Cup has been a catalyst for that. We have added many more hotels, restaurants, attractions, water parks and theme parks to complement what we always had. We have world-class museums and a vibrant art, culture and dining scene. To increase the footfall of tourists, we are also having a lot of upcoming sporting events, Balloon festivals, entertainment performances, Formula One etc. We recently had the Shopping festival, Doha Jewellery and Watches Exhibition and a lot of such events which enhance the overall travel experience in Qatar.

### How are you catering to the Indian wedding segment?

We hosted the DWP in Qatar last year and it was a massive success. Our teams in India and Qatar work very closely with all the major wedding planning companies. We host regular reces and facilitate an introduction to hotels to ensure they get the best deals. Qatar is a ten out of ten experience because of which we are attracting a lot of weddings.

### What is your vision for 2024?

We are looking at having 4.7-4.8 million visitors. We are optimistic and clear about our goal of welcoming 6-7 million passengers by 2030. We will be in good shape if we can get 4.7-4.8 million passengers this year with a twenty per cent growth from the India market organically. ■



# Travel Trade comes together for a successful **OTM 2024**





# The 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the Sharjah Light Festival concludes successfully

*Returning for the thirteenth year, the Sharjah Light Festival took place from February 07-18, 2024. The festival was a scintillating and dramatic blend of lights, music and storytelling depicting the rich culture and heritage of Sharjah. The stunning architectural monuments, iconic landmarks and waterfronts were illuminated with dazzling displays during this colourful and vibrant festival.*

Shreya Shimpi



The vibrant city of Sharjah was awarded the Cultural Capital of the Arab World by UNESCO. It is a quintessential example of a remarkable blend of tradition and modernity. Sharjah is a melting pot of rich history, cultural heritage, exceptionally diverse terrain, family-oriented environment and unsurpassed hospitality. The Sharjah Light Festival (SLF) is now an integral part of the Emirate's landscape which attracts thousands of visitors annually. The Sharjah Light Festival has scripted its success story year after year. This year was no exception. The illuminations showcase the artistic ingenuity and skills of local talent and internationally acclaimed artists.

As a part of this captivating festival, there were Light shows, Light installations and experiences across the beloved landmarks of Sharjah. 'The Light Village' was specially created, offering 'SLF Eats and Shops' where visitors could enjoy food and beverages under the stars.

Under the generous patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, the synergy of Sharjah's beautiful architecture, cultural heritage and light first came to be in 2010 with the first Sharjah Light Festival, an event rooted in the Emirate's cultural identity and heritage. The Light shows were specially

curated enchanting experiences with a poignant blend of lights and music making the city glow in all its resplendent glory. The interplay of animations, lights, geometric and modern abstract forms merging with designs inspired by local culture and traditions transported the spectators into a fantasy land offering them a one-of-a-kind experience.' The 'Luminous Guardians' was an alluring show displayed at the Sharjah Police Headquarters. It took the onlookers through a fascinating journey depicting the cultural richness of Sharjah. The iconic landmarks of the Emirate, such as the Sharjah Mosque and the Al Majaz Waterfront were lit up innovatively and creatively. The other illuminated



locations were the Kalba Waterfront, New General Souq (Al Hamriyah), Al Dhaid Fort, Al Rafisah Dam- Khorfakkan, Masjid Sheikh Rashid Al Qasimi Mosque (Dibba Al Hisn) and BEEAH Headquarters to name a few. 'Waves of Reflection' was a dazzling kinetic lights installation nestled in the heart of Al Majaz Waterfront, offering a fascinating view of the city of Sharjah.

'The Light Village' was one of the key attractions of this prismatic festival as it had over fifty mobile food trucks offering various local and international cuisines. Burgers, coffee, desserts, fusion food and traditional specialities were available here just outside Sharjah's University City Hall. There were various

activities for kids as well as youngsters. A digital padel, an Immersive Gallery with a mirror ball exhibition and a ball pit were among the key attractions at 'The Light Village'. Visitors could also indulge in retail therapy as a number of shops participated in the SLF this year. 'SLF Eats and Shops' was open to the public from 1st to 18th February and was thoroughly enjoyed by visitors of all ages.

The area dedicated to Light Installations and Experiences was an interesting addition to 'The Light Village' this year. It also included an Immersive Gallery with beautiful conceptual light-inspired exhibits and a play area full of riveting activities. A Hyper Sonic Multi-

Media Tunnel was another interesting installation flashing quotes and images from one end to the other. A stunning, imaginative, multisensory ball pit experience with spheres rolling beneath an ethereal sky of multi-coloured clouds gave visitors memorable photos and videos. The Drone Show and Bubble-texture inflatable spheres were among the other highlights.

The highly anticipated annual 'Sharjah Light Festival' was a grand success which has now become an indispensable part of the Emirate's legacy. The energy of this event is loved by everyone and the symphony of lights is a reflection of the aspirations of the city and its people. ■

# Know what your stars say about March 2024



Tarot Card Reading is the art and science which helps understand the present status and the future course. It helps to apply course correction, if required. Tarot Card can be used for shaping Career, Health, Finance, Business,, Relationship, Marriage, Match-making, etc. Ms. Richa Srivastava, a renowned Tarot Card Reader conducts exclusive Tarot reading under the banner - Tathaastu. Here are her predictions for March 2024.



## March 21 – April 20

March has you too fired up to deal with emotionally charged challenges diplomatically, then step away from situations with inflammatory potential until you can approach them with a cooler head. Which is currently available through Mars and planet healer.



## July 23 – August 21

Your own, short fuses and stubborn mindsets could cause tempers to flare and opinions to clash during the first half of March. It may be better to purr so that peace, love and harmony can be more easily achieved around the late March full-moon eclipse.



## November 23 – December 22

Something you may regret. After last month's head trips, touchy-feely March is about process rather than goals, about embodying the concept that all the way to heaven is heaven. About slowing down, tuning in, simplifying your life, finding love.



## April 21 – May 21

You may receive important messages in dreams, and your psychic skills will be highly sensitive. Unfortunately, however, this also means that you might feel extra sensitive. There are plenty of excellent reasons to tap into your introverted side and stay in this month, Taurus.



## August 22 – September 23

You are in makeover mode. The new moon in poetic Pisces is a date that could see you meeting someone new of great importance, especially if you're single and dating. And, your horoscope shifts from beauty rituals and love to your career.



## December 23 – January 20

Be aware that you may need to negotiate with a roommate over a lease or some situation at home. A new moon in Pisces brings out your creative side in ways that manifest blessings far into the future. March sees you negotiating in professional matters as well.



## May 22 – June 21

During your power planet Mercury's introversion in the first week of March, it's worth taking a break from digital persistence and revisiting the organic technology of your own inner vision. Focus on keeping communications simple and uncomplicated.



## September 24 – October 23

Business dealings can be dodgy this month, and Venus is in her most trusting transit, so think no-nonsense financial discussions and clear, basic agreements. As much as you love keeping everything in the feelgood zone, Saturn is insisting on 'eyes wide open'.



## January 21 – February 19

If vague, indecisive or needy people have you wanting more personal space this month, then take it, because you already know from experience that it's more energy-efficient to restrain rash reactions than deal with damage control.



## June 22 – July 22

You're more likely to get what you want if you ask for it. Time to get creative during the new moon in fellow water sign Pisces. You start to miss those you love. After is the Libra eclipse, which could lead to everyone feeling a little insecure.



## October 24 – November 22

You're encouraged to talk about your anxiety, whether with a therapist or best friend when Mercury moves into Aries and your 6th House of Health. The new moon in Pisces encourages you to reconnect with your body. You've been stressed this year.



## February 20 – March 20

Your season ends this month, Pisces, but with that fire energy comes a welcome burst of confidence and self-assuredness. March is all about being a little delusional. When Mercury illuminates your 2nd House of Possessions, there's an opportunity for financial negotiations.

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# #First Opinion



“We are very excited for the year ahead - it is looking good with tremendous growth. Right from the beginning of the year we have seen some exciting numbers, which can be primarily because internally we have made our systems more efficient and the market is responding very well to GRN’s new enhanced user-interface. So put together, it looks like a very exciting time ahead. Going forward, our focus is going to be to keep evolving technology and improve our user-interface and user-experience. We are looking at adding new products also this year. We would be making some announcements soon about the same.”

**Deepak Narula, Managing Director, GRNconnect**



“We’re delighted to launch the Red Dot Green City program, a pioneering initiative designed specifically for Indian students and corporates. This immersive experience spans five nights and six days, offering an interactive journey into sustainable living. Participants will explore first-hand a living laboratory, gaining valuable insights and sparking ideas to drive sustainability within their communities and organizations. Join us on this transformative adventure to champion the global mission of sustainability.”

**Isha Goyal, CEO, STIC Travel Group**



“We had launched this B2B platform in 2019 but then Covid struck. However, we picked our pace and in last three years we have made our presence pan India. Currently we are leading in travel B2B market because the quality of services and competitive fares that we offer is unbeatable. This year looks very promising for tourism as last year also we witnessed 35% per cent growth over 2022 and this year we are looking for a minimum of 50 per cent growth as our team size is also increasing and so is agent’s trust on our services. Thus, we are hoping for good growth this year.”

**Vaseem Parvez, Vice President (Sales & Operation), FLY24HRS Holiday**



“We are extremely excited to sign with Blue Wings Tours & Travel to introduce the Wyndham Grand Resort in Udaipur – a significant destination for weddings and MICE events. This venture aligns with the Wyndham Grand brand’s promise of delivering luxurious and unforgettable experiences to our guests. Wyndham Grand Udaipur Fateh Sagar Lake will create over 200 job opportunities, contributing to the local economy and reinforcing Wyndham Hotel & Resorts’ commitment to responsible and sustainable growth.”

**Nikhil Sharma, Market Managing Director Eurasia, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts**



“At Cordelia Cruises, we are enthused to witness the significant progress and strategic vision Prime Minister Modi has unveiled for Tamil Nadu’s development. Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the Central Government and Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways in India. We are committed to contributing to the realization of Prime Minister Modi’s Vision 2047 for waterways and cruise tourism. Dedicated to offering exceptional value to our passengers, creating job opportunities, and promoting sustainable tourism practices, we aim to propel India towards becoming a leading cruise destination by 2047.”

**Jurgen Bailom, President and CEO, Waterways Leisure Tourism, Cordelia Cruises**

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