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CONTENTS

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39th IATO Convention Bhopal



18

SHORT NEWS 8-10

SPOTLIGHT 12-16

COVER STORY
INDUSTRY INSIGHT 18-44

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal marks a critical juncture for India's tourism industry. As stakeholders gather to discuss and develop strategies for boosting inbound tourism, the event underscores the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. Despite limited government support, the convention will serve as a platform to explore innovative solutions for positioning India more prominently on the global tourism map. Office Bearers, Executive Committee Members and Chapter Chairmen of IATO share their thoughts on the Convention and more...

EVENTS AND MORE..... 50-51

HOSPITABLE HOTELS..... 52-53

ASSOCIATION IN ACTION 56-58

HOROSCOPE 60

APPOINTMENTS..... 62

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From the

*Editor's
Desk*

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the September Special Issue of BOTT, a landmark edition that delves deep into the heart of India's travel and tourism sector. This issue holds special significance as it aligns with the upcoming IATO Convention, a pivotal event that shapes the future of inbound tourism in India.

In this edition, we are honoured to feature an exclusive interview with Madhya Pradesh's Tourism Minister, providing invaluable insights into the state's burgeoning tourism potential, infrastructure development, and eco-tourism initiatives. His perspective, alongside those of other senior officials from Madhya Pradesh, offers a comprehensive view of the state's strategic direction in the tourism industry.

The highlight of this issue is our in-depth coverage of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO). We bring you detailed interviews with IATO President, Convention Chairman, Office Bearers, Executive Committee members, and nearly 20 State Chapter Chairmen. These conversations reveal the collective vision and strategic initiatives that are set to drive India's tourism sector to new heights, especially in the wake of the challenges posed by the global pandemic.

Beyond the extensive coverage of IATO, this issue also includes a series of engaging generic interviews, keeping you informed on the latest industry trends and developments. We've also curated the latest news, appointments, and our regular horoscope section, offering a well-rounded reading experience.

This special edition is a testament to our commitment to delivering unparalleled coverage of the travel and tourism industry. As always, we strive to provide you with the most relevant, insightful, and thought-provoking content, helping you stay ahead in an ever-evolving landscape.

We hope you find this issue both informative and inspiring as we celebrate the resilience and innovation that continue to define India's tourism sector.

Happy reading!

Warm regards,

Priyanka Saxena Ray
Editor, BOTT India
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TBO Tek Limited registers a YoY revenue growth of 21%

TBO Tek Limited, a global travel distribution platform, has announced its unaudited financial results for Q1 FY2025. The key highlight for the quarter was the increasing share of higher-margin non-air business. TBO Tek Ltd. continued to grow its hotel business at a faster pace compared to the air business. The share of non-airline business grew from 46% in Q1 FY24 to 57% in Q1 FY25.



Air India Express announces six new daily direct flights

Air India Express has launched six new daily direct flights in a single day, further strengthening its domestic network. The new flights will operate on the Chennai – Bhubaneswar, Chennai – Bagdogra, Chennai – Thiruvananthapuram, Kolkata – Varanasi, Kolkata – Guwahati, and Guwahati – Jaipur sectors. Five of these routes are new to the airline’s growing network.

IndiGo enhances connectivity to Singapore, Kuwait and Colombo

IndiGo has announced a new route and additional frequencies from prominent commercial and tourist hubs across states in South & Central India, starting October 2024. IndiGo has launched daily direct Coimbatore-Singapore flight from Oct 27, 2024 and additional frequencies from Chennai to Singapore and Colombo starting from Oct 15 and Mumbai-Kuwait from Oct 29, 2024.



Visit Orlando appoints Think Strawberries as India Rep

Visit Orlando has expanded its global trade outreach by appointing Think Strawberries as the new representative office in India. This partnership will allow the destination to dive deeper into the India market. Think Strawberries’ responsibilities will include conducting in-depth sales trainings for travel partners to educate them about the destination.

Seychelles captivates Indian Travel Market with 3-city Roadshow

Tourism Seychelles recently wrapped up a highly successful three-city roadshow in India, highlighting the archipelago’s unmatched beauty to the Indian travel trade. Held from August 5 - 9, 2024, the roadshow took Seychelles’ tourism partners to Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai. The event united 10 key tourism partners from Seychelles to fortify connections with the Indian travel trade.




Moroccan National Tourism Office reports 41% growth in India Market

The Moroccan National Tourism Office (MNTTO) reports a remarkable 41% year-on-year growth in the Indian market until June 2024, as reported in a recent analysis. This milestone marks the first year of MNTTO’s operations in India with expectations of a 45% growth by the end of 2024. MNTTO aims to attract 100,000 Indian visitors by 2026.

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ITC Hotels expand presence in Rajasthan with signings of WelcomHotel Pushkar

ITC Hotels growth trajectory continues to rise as it signs a Welcomotel property with SRK Hospitality in Pushkar. Expected to open in 2026, Welcomhotel Pushkar, spread across 3 acres, will offer 96 well-appointed guestrooms, with ample banquet facilities and various food and beverage offerings including an all-day dining restaurant, lobby lounge, a specialty restaurant and bar.



Sarovar Hotels launches Golden Tulip Agra

Sarovar Hotels, in partnership with Om Royale Group announces launch of Golden Tulip Agra that offers 54 elegantly appointed and spacious rooms. The hotel's facilities includes 60-seater all-day dining restaurant – Sumac, Veda—a rejuvenating spa, recreational Terrace Garden and the Royale Ballroom for up to 300 guests.

Fortune Hotels signs a new property in Rishikesh

Fortune Hotels has announced its latest signing in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand. With stellar views of Holy Ganges, this under development property will open in June 2025. Poised to feature stylish well-appointed rooms and suites, this upscale retreat is designed to cater to the diverse needs of the modern-day traveller, be it the soul seeker or an adventure enthusiast.



Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts creates equal job opportunities for all

Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts believes that true progress is measured not by the success of a few but by the opportunities created for all—especially for those who face unique challenges. Their journey towards a more inclusive future began with a simple yet profound step: welcoming an individual from the Speech and Hearing Impaired (SHI) community into the family as a Commi-I in its culinary team.

Cheval Collection reinitiates enhanced commission rate in India

Cheval Collection, the serviced apartment specialist with properties across London, Edinburgh and Dubai have reinitiated enhanced commission rates in India. The Group is offering an enhanced commission rate of 15% for all new bookings made before October 31, 2024 for all properties in London and Edinburgh.



Dubai expands reach in South Asia, recording 1.62 mn visitors in H1 2024

Dubai Department of Economy and Tourism (DET) has intensified its promotional efforts in the South Asia region, with a focus on wooing more travellers to the city from India. From South Asia, Dubai welcomed 1.62 million international overnight visitors from January to June 2024 compared to the 1.60 million tourist arrivals during the same period in 2023.



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MP Tourism Minister's Vision for Sustainable Tourism and Infrastructure Growth

Shri Dharmendra Bhav Singh Lodhi, Honourable Minister for Tourism, Madhya Pradesh, in an exclusive chat with BOTT, articulates an ambitious vision for advancing tourism and religious pilgrimages in Madhya Pradesh. Under his leadership, the state is set to undergo a revitalization of its rich cultural heritage, with initiatives focused on promoting pilgrimage sites and enhancing the overall tourism sector. Minister Lodhi's shares more...

Anjali Pokhriyal



With the rise in eco-tourism, how is Madhya Pradesh planning to balance tourism growth with environmental sustainability?

Madhya Pradesh is deeply committed to fostering sustainable tourism that balances economic, environmental, and social impacts. Our approach focuses on minimizing tourism's environmental footprint while maximizing benefits for local communities. We actively engage local communities by creating employment opportunities through initiatives like homestays and guide training programs. This not only generates income for residents but also ensures that tourists experience the rich cultural heritage of our state. Furthermore, we support

local arts and crafts, providing artisans with a platform to showcase their work to a global audience.

Preserving Madhya Pradesh's sensitive ecological areas is a top priority. We are implementing measures to raise awareness among tourists about responsible travel and are focused on reducing the carbon footprint of tourism activities.

In our tourism facilities, we are adopting sustainable practices such as advanced waste management, water conservation, and the use of renewable energy. These efforts are not just about preserving our natural resources but also about ensuring that tourism continues to be a source of livelihood for local communities for generations to come. By involving and empowering local communities, we aim to create a model of tourism that is both sustainable and inclusive, ensuring that the beauty and resources of Madhya Pradesh are preserved and cherished.

What steps is the government taking to improve infrastructure, connectivity, and accessibility for tourists in remote and lesser-known areas of Madhya Pradesh?

Madhya Pradesh has made significant strides in developing robust infrastructure to support tourism, making it an attractive destination for travellers. The state is well-connected with extensive road networks, a comprehensive railway system, and expanding air connectivity, ensuring easy access to its diverse attractions. In addition to modern transportation, we have invested in eco-friendly infrastructure, including eco-resorts, nature trails, and sustainable tourism facilities. The state's reliable 24x7 power supply, improved water resources, and state-of-the-art health and safety measures further enhance the visitor experience. With a focus on both convenience and sustainability, Madhya Pradesh is poised to become a premier tourism destination in India.

Madhya Pradesh also boasts excellent connectivity for travellers and businesses alike. The state has three operational airports—in Bhopal, Indore, and Jabalpur—offering direct flights from key cities across India. Its extensive railway network is equally impressive. ■

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Madhya Pradesh Shines at 39th IATO Convention as a catalyst for Tourism Growth and Innovation

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, is a landmark event for the state's tourism sector, symbolizing its emergence as a key player in India's travel industry. This convention offers a unique platform to showcase the state's diverse tourism offerings to industry leaders and stakeholders, potentially unlocking new avenues for growth, strategic collaborations, and investment. Sheo Shekhar Shukla (IAS), Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Department and Managing Director, MP Tourism Board shares more.

Priyanka Saxena Ray



What does hosting the IATO convention in Bhopal mean for Madhya Pradesh's tourism sector?

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, marks a significant milestone underscoring the state's growing prominence as a premier tourist hub. The convention presents an ideal opportunity to showcase the state's rich cultural heritage, adventure tourism, wildlife reserves, and historical landmarks. Madhya Pradesh has seen a remarkable surge in tourism, with visitor numbers soaring from 34.1 million in 2022 to 112.1 million in 2023, driven by its unique offerings. We anticipate that this event will contribute to the state's economic growth and development and ultimately solidify Madhya Pradesh's position as a leading travel destination. The

IATO convention will definitely catalyse increased domestic and international tourism, strategic collaborations, investment opportunities and job creation.

How do you anticipate the IATO convention will impact local tourism in Bhopal and the broader region?

The IATO convention is expected to have a significant positive impact on local tourism in Bhopal and the broader region. Hosting the convention will put Bhopal on the national and international tourism map. The convention will generate revenue for local businesses and provide a platform for local tourism stakeholders to connect with industry professionals. Bhopal is a welcoming and hospitable city and organising FAM tours will help to showcase the diverse attractions of Madhya Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is launching promotional campaigns to highlight the state's tourism offerings and attract visitors. We are hopeful that the IATO convention will not only benefit Bhopal but also contribute to the overall growth and development of the tourism industry in Madhya Pradesh.

Could you share some of the innovative projects or initiatives that are currently being undertaken by Madhya Pradesh Tourism?

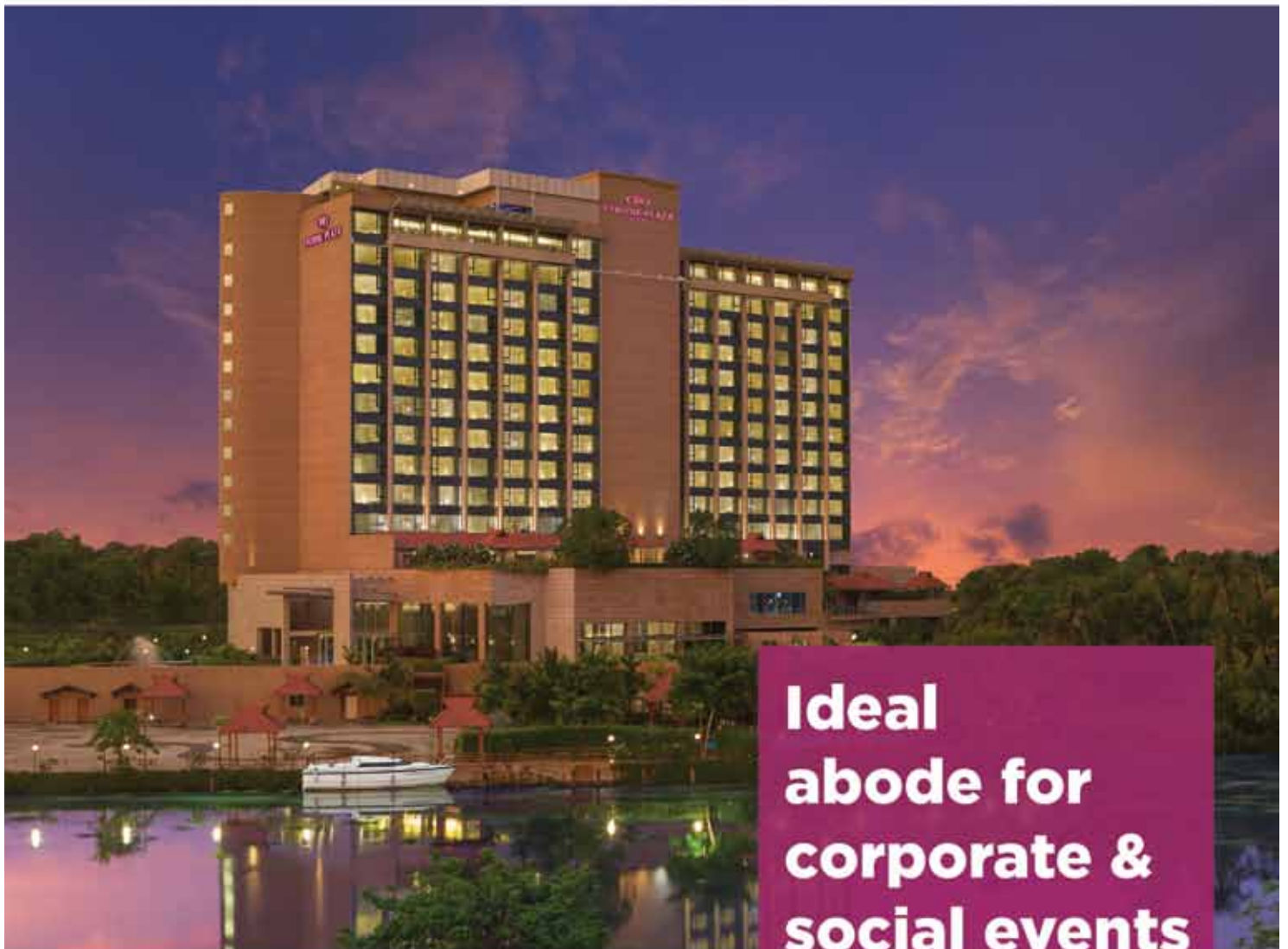
Madhya Pradesh is an offbeat multispecialty destination of first choice, boasting pristine landscapes, 11 national parks, 24 sanctuaries, 7 tiger reserves, and 14 UNESCO World Heritage Sites (11 tentative & 3 permanent sites) and revered religious destinations. The state is also evolving as a vibrant hub for adventure activities, cultural events and all-year-round luxurious glamping experiences. The destination promotional events at Chanderi, Gandhisagar, Hanuwantiya and Kuno have further enriched Madhya Pradesh's diverse offerings. Moreover, the two Sacred Jyotirlingas – Mahakelshwar and Omkareshwar, Ram Mandir at Chitrakoot & Orchha, Sandipani Ashram at Ujjain, the sacred Shaktipeeth - Harsiddhi Mata & Shondev Narmada Shaktipeeth, Amarkantak, Narmada Parikrama are drawing visitors from across the country. ■



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MP Tourism

Unveiling initiatives for Sustainable Growth and enhanced Visitor Experiences

Madhya Pradesh, often referred to as the “Heart of India,” is a state rich in cultural heritage, natural beauty, and diverse wildlife. As the state continues to attract more tourists each year, with a record-breaking 112.1 million visitors in 2023, the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is committed to promoting both well-known and lesser-explored destinations. Smt. Bidisha Mukherjee (IAS), Additional Managing director, MPTB, shares more in an exclusive chat with BOTT.

Gunjan Sabikhi

What initiatives are being undertaken by MP Tourism to promote lesser-known destinations within the state?

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board aims to promote destinations with several initiatives like destination promotion festivals. The state boasts diverse renowned for its rich cultural heritage, glorious history, breath taking natural beauty, diverse wildlife, and spiritual experiences. Madhya Pradesh has set a new tourism record in tourist footfalls in 2023, 3 times of 2022! (112.1 million as compared to 34.1 million). The state’s tourism board has masterfully crafted unforgettable all-year-round luxurious glamping experiences at Chanderi, Gandhisagar, Kuno and Hanuwantiya.

How is MP Tourism ensuring that the influx of tourists does not harm the natural and cultural resources of the state?

The clean, green, safe Madhya Pradesh’s deep efforts in Responsible Tourism empowered by community development have successfully created a new benchmark in Indian Tourism. We envision preserving and enhancing states natural heritage while empowering local communities. We are continually doing efforts to increase awareness among resident, foster a sense of pride in their local environment and create sustainable livelihood opportunities. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board has planned to introduce exciting new experiences like vehicle safaris, nature walks, jungle safaris, treehouse stays, village tours, and stargazing in collaboration with the forest department and district administration.

How does MP Tourism collaborate with local communities to create immersive and authentic experiences for visitors while also boosting the local economy?

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is committed to sustainable tourism and is implementing a comprehensive Responsible Tourism initiative. We aim to empower local communities, preserve the environment, and enhance the visitor experience. The state seeks to positively impact both tourists and residents by supporting local artisans, creating economic opportunities,



and preserving cultural traditions. We have set a goal of supporting 1,000 homestays in 100 villages. Under this project, 130 rural homestays have been built in 41 villages till now.

How safe is Madhya Pradesh for Women travellers? Are there any women-safety-centric decisions that the State Tourism has or is undertaking?

Madhya Pradesh is aptly reputed as a safe destination for travellers, especially solo women travellers. The Safe Tourist Destination for Women initiative by Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is a significant step toward ensuring women travellers feel secure in tourist destinations. The initiative aims to increase the number of female tourists, particularly solo travellers in Madhya Pradesh. Under this program, 10,000 women are being trained and connected to the tourism service sector, while 40,000 women and girls are receiving self-defence training. ■



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Rajiv Mehra

'IATO aims to synergize efforts with policymakers and MoT to bring Inbound Tourism back'

Rajiv Mehra, President of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) shares insights into the upcoming convention in Bhopal, which is centred around the theme "Resurgent India Inbound." As the travel industry recovers from the impact of the pandemic, Mehra discusses the key focus areas that will drive the resurgence of India's inbound tourism, the role of sustainability, and how technology and innovation will shape the future of the industry. He also reflects on his leadership journey and the achievements of IATO over the past four years.

Priyanka Saxena Ray



'Resurgent India Inbound'

The resurgence of India's inbound tourism is being driven by several critical factors, including marketing and promotion, budget allocation, incentivization of stakeholders, investment in tourism infrastructure, and practical policy initiatives by the central and state governments. India's resurgence as a destination is multifaceted, supported by economic stability, strategic reforms, infrastructure development, technological advancements, favourable demographics, and global integration. IATO aims to synergize efforts with policymakers and the Ministry of Tourism to elevate tourism back to pre-pandemic levels.

Sustainability and Responsible Tourism

Our members are already practicing sustainability and responsible tourism, contributing to inclusive development. This is evident as they move their FITs, Groups, MICE, and niche tourism

Achievements

I am proud of the team we have built through our collective and focused efforts. I am grateful to our valued membership and the Executive Committee for progressing in tandem. We have addressed many concerns of our

The resurgence of India's inbound tourism is being driven by several critical factors, including marketing and promotion, budget allocation, incentivization of stakeholders, investment in tourism infrastructure, and practical policy initiatives by the central and state governments.

segments to desired destinations while adhering to sustainable practices.

Role of Technology

Digitisation is now a crucial component in marketing, payment gateways, communication, transport, and accommodation. Technology and innovation at tourism sites are essential for user-friendly experiences. For instance, Madhya Pradesh has introduced technological innovations at their heritage sites. India is recognised as a hotbed for travel technology innovations, with artificial intelligence leading the way. From chatbots enhancing customer experiences to AI-driven trip planning solutions, and the use of augmented, virtual, and mixed reality for immersive experiences, technology is transforming the tourism landscape.

dedicated members, achieving success in some areas and continuing to persevere in others. Some key achievements include:

- The rescheduling of the Pushkar Fair from 20-27 November to 14-20 November 2023
- The issuance of the first Inner Line Permit (ILP) for Taiwanese nationals visiting Sikkim from Rangpo Checkpost, following IATO's initiative
- Implementation of Bengal's New Luggage Carrier Guidelines to boost tourism opportunities
- Finalization of a special quota for foreign nationals and NRIs for gondola ride tickets
- The IATO convention in Aurangabad paved the way for its airport to become international, and now, just before our convention in Bhopal, the city has also been granted international airport status. ■



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Ravi Gosain

‘The enthusiasm from Delegates & Stakeholders reflects a strong will to promote India’

This year, IATO is heading to Bhopal for its 39th Annual Convention, recognising it as the ideal location to explore new potential destinations for our tourism offerings. With its theme focussing on ‘Resurgent India Inbound’, Convention Chairman – Ravi Gosain, VP, IATO, is not just elated witnessing the record-breaking participation but it also excited for putting forth and invigorating range of Business Sessions centred on Marketing, Sustainability and AI.

Priyanka Saxena Ray



Theme Focus: “Resurgent India Inbound”

Our convention theme, “Resurgent India Inbound,” carries deep significance. It not only symbolizes the revival of India as a premier inbound destination but also underscores the importance of promoting lesser-known or underexplored tourist spots across the country. The theme reflects the need for fresh approaches in product development and marketing within inbound tourism, aiming to rejuvenate India’s appeal as a top global destination.

The concept of “Resurgent India Inbound” emphasizes the revitalization and renewed growth of India’s inbound tourism sector. It focuses on attracting international travellers to explore the country’s rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and unique experiences. The ultimate goal is to position India as a dynamic, attractive, and sustainable

destination that appeals to a wide range of international visitors, driving increased tourist arrivals, economic growth, and global recognition.

Key Business Sessions: Marketing, Sustainability, and Innovation

Our business sessions will centre around this theme, addressing crucial topics such as innovative marketing strategies, promotions, exploring lesser-known destinations, enhancing travel experiences, sustainability, women empowerment, legal challenges, digitalisation, and the growing impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in tourism. We

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, as the industry has limited resources to reach larger target markets for India.

Convention Chairman’s Vision

As the Convention Chairman, my primary goal is to oversee the entire convention and ensure it is valuable for participants. I am working diligently to implement strategies that will result in a conclusive white paper, elevating India’s position in the global tourism landscape. This includes promoting lesser-known destinations, enhancing sustainable tourism practices, and forging stronger international partnerships. All our business sessions are

There are challenges that we need to deliberate and discuss during the sessions. The foremost challenge is the promotion and marketing of India as a tourism product. For this, we need ongoing strategic support from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, as the industry has limited resources to reach larger target markets for India.

have secured renowned speakers who will share their wisdom and experiences. These discussions aim to address the current challenges and trends in inbound tourism, ensuring delegates leave with valuable insights and diverse perspectives.

Challenges in Promoting India as a Tourism Destination

There are challenges that we need to deliberate and discuss during the sessions. The foremost challenge is the promotion and marketing of India as a tourism product. For this, we need ongoing strategic support from the

designed to drive meaningful discussions around various tourism products, marketing, collaboration, and innovation in tourism.

Record-Breaking Participation

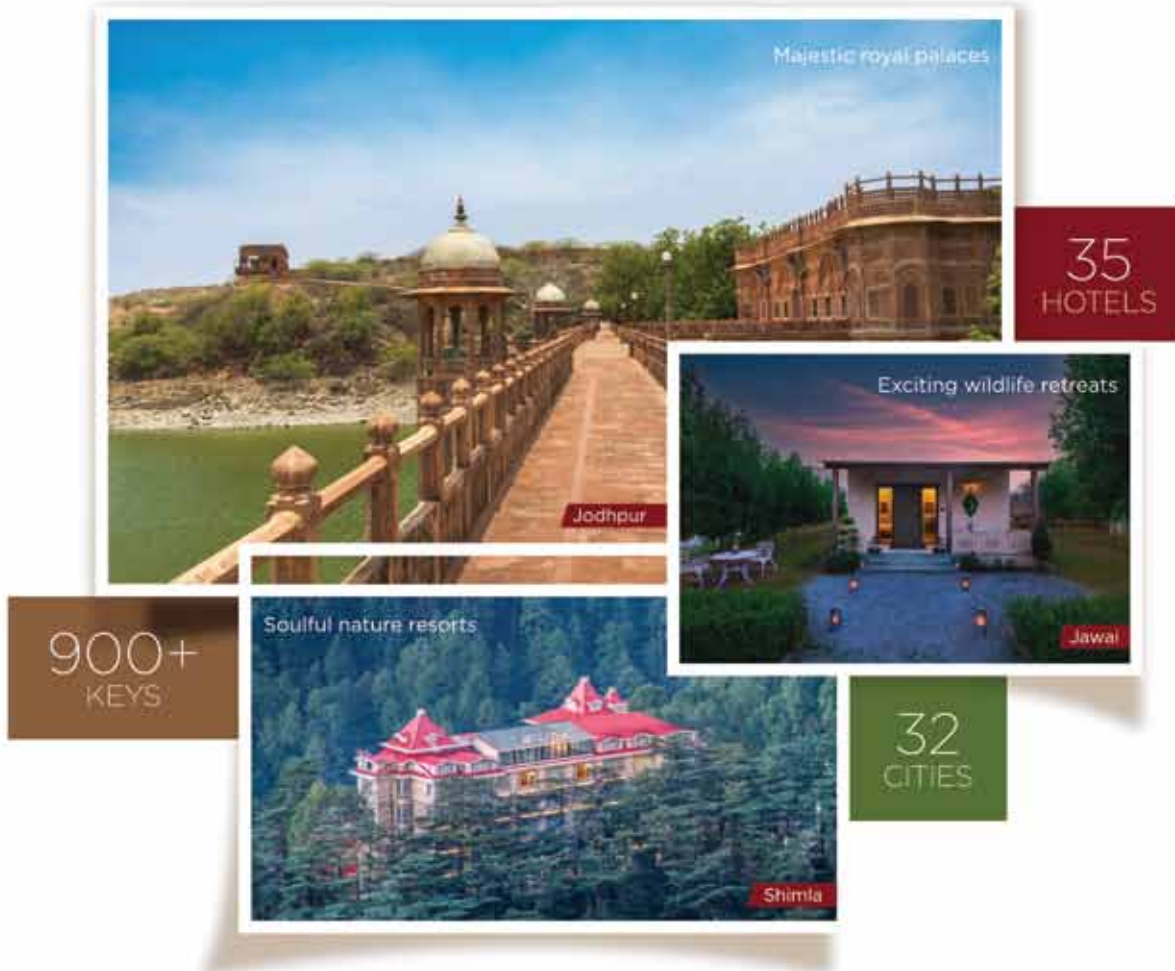
I am pleased with the response the convention has generated so far. We are assured of greater participation, breaking the all-time record of previous conventions. The enthusiasm from delegates and stakeholders reflects a strong interest in advancing India’s tourism industry and exploring new avenues for growth. ■



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Resurgent India Inbound

The Future of Indian Tourism at the 39th IATO Convention

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal marks a critical juncture for India's tourism industry. As stakeholders gather to discuss and develop strategies for boosting inbound tourism, the event underscores the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. Despite limited government support, the convention will serve as a platform to explore innovative solutions for positioning India more prominently on the global tourism map. Office Bearers of IATO share their thoughts on the Convention and evolving preferences and trends observed in Inbound Tourism.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

Rajnish Kaistha,
Sr. Vice President, IATO

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal

The 39th IATO convention in Bhopal is set to be bigger and better than ever. The strong registration numbers and the enthusiasm of our members speak volumes about their faith and trust in IATO and its leadership. The theme, "Resurgent India Inbound," highlights



the revival of inbound tourism, which is finally on the upswing after nearly 30 challenging months.

Repositioning the "Brand India" in the midst of a challenging business environment is a significant task. One of our key objectives is to bring lesser-known tourist destinations and products

to the forefront, which may help alleviate the pressure on overcrowded destinations. For this to happen, last-mile connectivity to these lesser-known places is crucial. Additionally, the impact of AI on the world, particularly its positive and disruptive forces in inbound tourism, is something we must understand and adapt to.

Evolving Trends in Inbound Tourism

Tourism has always been a significant contributor to the economic growth and GDP of nations worldwide, and Indian tourism is no exception. Despite the odds, Indian tourism has shown remarkable resilience and consistent growth. However, there has been a notable lack of support from the government, yet we tour operators have persistently worked to increase inbound numbers.

Despite positive indicators, the tourism industry has been largely overlooked in recent government budgets, despite its significant contribution to the nation's economy and employment. While our airports have improved considerably, high parking fees, high airfares due to limited supply and the absence of 5th and 6th freedom of air rights hinder the growth of much-needed international flights to and from India.

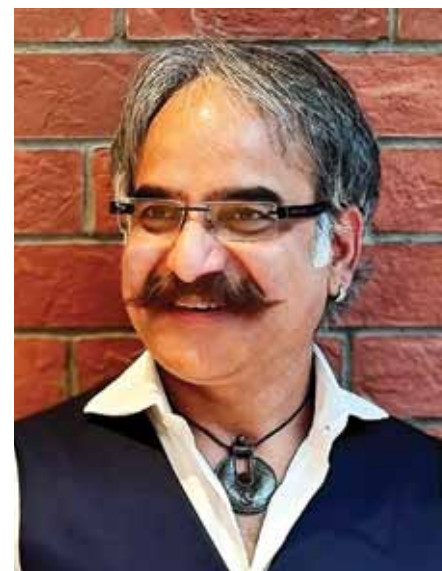
Post-COVID, the preferences of foreign tourists have changed significantly. They want to travel more, but they seek hassle-free experiences

and expect real value for their money. They have also become more health and hygiene-conscious and prefer to avoid crowded and messy places. We have quickly adapted to these new needs and are catering to them accordingly.

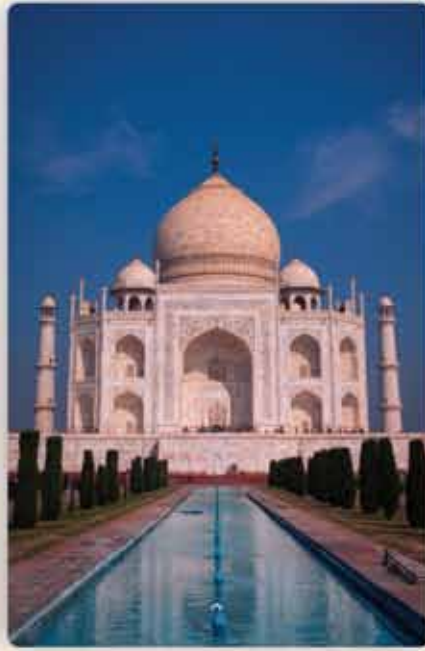
Sanjay Razdan,
Hony. Secretary, IATO

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal

The theme of this year's convention, "Resurgent India Inbound," speaks



volumes about our focus and objectives. This gathering provides us with an invaluable opportunity to collectively brainstorm and develop actionable strategies to promote India with renewed vigour. The discussions and collaborations here will play a crucial



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role in shaping future policies, marketing initiatives, and partnerships, ultimately positioning India as a more diverse and sustainable destination on the global tourism map.

By showcasing Bhopal and its surroundings, we highlight the potential of Tier 2 and 3 cities in contributing to the growth of India's tourism sector, encouraging investment and development in these areas. Madhya Pradesh offers a pivotal opportunity to redefine and enhance our strategies for inbound tourism.

Evolving Trends in Inbound Tourism

Travellers today are increasingly seeking authentic, immersive experiences that go beyond the typical tourist spots. There's a growing interest in exploring lesser-known destinations, engaging with local communities, and participating in sustainable tourism activities.

Health and safety have become paramount, with tourists now preferring destinations and accommodations that prioritise hygiene and offer flexible booking options. Additionally, there's a noticeable shift towards slower, more meaningful travel, with tourists spending more time in fewer locations to fully experience the local culture and environment.

In response to these trends, Razdan Holidays has adapted our offerings by curating itineraries that highlight India's hidden gems and emphasize responsible tourism practices. We're partnering with local communities to provide authentic cultural experiences, ensuring that tourism benefits both visitors and residents.

Sunil Mishra,
Hony. Treasurer, IATO

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal

I view this year's convention in Bhopal as a pivotal moment for shaping the future of India's inbound tourism. Our focus will be on developing actionable strategies that address the evolving needs of the global travel market. We aim to unite

experts and stakeholders to explore innovative approaches to marketing, destination management, and customer engagement. The insights and outcomes from these discussions will guide us in crafting a cohesive strategy that leverages digital transformation, enhances our global presence, and ensures sustainable growth. Our goal is to set new benchmarks in the global tourism landscape, adapting to and thriving in the new normal.

Evolving Trends in Inbound Tourism

Post-pandemic, there has been a noticeable shift in the preferences of



international tourists visiting India. There is a growing interest in wellness, eco-tourism, and experiential travel—areas where India has much to offer. Tourists now seek more personalized, meaningful experiences rather than traditional sightseeing tours. To adapt, we have evolved our offerings to include more customised experiences that highlight India's unique cultural heritage and natural beauty. We are focusing on providing more private tours, smaller group sizes, and enhanced health and safety measures to cater to health-conscious travellers. By aligning our services with these new preferences, we aim to provide an unmatched travel experience that not only meets but exceeds the expectations of our international visitors.

Viney Tyagi,
Hony. Joint Secretary, IATO

The 39th IATO Convention in Bhopal

The IATO Convention 2024 in Bhopal will serve as a crucial platform for tourism industry stakeholders to engage



in serious deliberations and discussions aimed at increasing inbound tourism to India. Unfortunately, our government's lack of recognition of the potential of inbound tourism is evident in the limited budget allocated by the Ministry of Finance this year.

The need of the hour is to "look beyond" the current challenges and explore new avenues for growth. Our inbound tourism industry has been self-reliant ("Atmanirbhar") for decades, and it appears that we will continue to operate in this way for the foreseeable future.

Evolving Trends in Inbound Tourism

Although India's demand as a tourist destination remains low on the global tourism map, there have been notable shifts in trends post-pandemic. As a long-haul destination, India is often overlooked in favour of neighbouring countries for holiday travel. However, short visits to India, particularly for Yoga, Ayurveda, and wellness holidays, have seen steady demand. As a tour operator, we are addressing these challenges by offering affordable holiday packages in the international market, which have yielded positive results. ■

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Insights from Executive Committee Members

Expectations and Opportunities at the 39th IATO Annual Convention

As the 39th IATO Annual Convention approaches, the travel and tourism industry in India is set to converge in Bhopal to discuss the future of inbound tourism. With the theme “Resurgent India Inbound,” this year’s convention promises to be a pivotal event, offering a platform for industry leaders, government officials, and stakeholders to share insights, discuss challenges, and explore new opportunities to revitalize the sector. In this feature, we bring you exclusive perspectives from prominent figures in the industry, who share their expectations for the convention, the opportunities and challenges facing India’s inbound tourism, and the crucial role that tour operators play in promoting lesser-known destinations across the country.

Pallavi Sharma

E.M. NAJEEB,

Chairman, Airtravel Enterprises Group of Companies

Expectations from IATO Bhopal Convention

The IATO Convention in Bhopal is expected to attract around 900-1000 delegates from across India, including senior officials from the Ministry of Tourism, industry leaders, tourism and hospitality professionals, and travel trade media representatives. I anticipate that the convention will foster industry connections, showcase India’s tourism potential, and address key challenges. The “Resurgent India Inbound” initiative is aimed at reviving and boosting inbound tourism, which I believe will increase business opportunities, enhance destination visibility, and drive growth. Ultimately, this will benefit the inbound tourism sector through increased demand and partnerships.

Opportunities and Challenges for India to Boost Inbound Tourism

With increased government focus, infrastructure development, and enhanced marketing efforts, India is well-positioned to attract more international visitors. The diversification of tourism products, such as adventure and wellness tourism, will also drive growth.

Natural calamities, like the recent one in Wayanad, can adversely affect inbound tourism in India. Other challenges include infrastructure gaps, regulatory hurdles, and competition from other destinations. Addressing these issues will be crucial for achieving India’s inbound tourism goals.



Role of Tour Operators in Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations

Tour operators can play a vital role in promoting lesser-known destinations by curating unique itineraries, offering local experiences, and highlighting offbeat attractions. By collaborating with local stakeholders, investing in infrastructure, and marketing these destinations effectively, they can not only diversify India’s tourism appeal but also benefit local communities and promote sustainable tourism practices.

P. Vijayarathy, Director, Benchmark Hotels

Expectations from IATO Bhopal Convention

The theme for this convention, “Resurgent India Inbound,” was selected after extensive brainstorming, reflecting the industry’s challenges and opportunities. The pandemic brought tourism to a standstill, leaving many tour operators struggling. However, there are now signs of a rebound in inbound tourism, thanks in part to IATO’s inputs to the Ministry of Tourism and the ministry’s efforts to promote various schemes. This mild growth in inbound tourism is expected to continue, and the theme “Resurgent India Inbound” encapsulates our collective effort to rise again and reclaim our livelihoods.

Opportunities and Challenges for India to Boost Inbound Tourism

The convention provides a great opportunity for inbound tour operators to benefit from the new UNESCO World Heritage sites in Madhya Pradesh, such as Gwalior Fort and the Dhamnar Rock-Cut Caves. These newly recognized sites will attract both domestic and international travelers, creating new business opportunities for tour operators.

Role of Tour Operators in Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations



Tour operators serve as ambassadors, creating unique programs that include both popular tourist spots and lesser-known destinations. For example, UNESCO has recently declared several new sites in India, particularly in Madhya Pradesh. It is the responsibility of tour operators to highlight these new destinations, promote them with innovative itineraries, and offer fresh experiences to travelers.

Zia Siddiqui, Managing Director, Alliance Hotels & Resorts & ABH Tourism

Expectatons from IATO Bhopal Convention:

There are several concerns that need to be conveyed to the Government of India: (1) High taxes on tourism products deter many potential tourists. It is essential to rationalize the GST structure to make sustainable tourism products



accessible to middle and lower-middle-income travelers. (2) The tourism industry should be recognized as a major foreign exchange earner and given the same status as the export industry. (3) There should be constant checks and balances on development projects and the maintenance of established structures to ensure continuous improvement. (4) IATO must actively engage in lobbying for improvement, rationalization, and implementation of policies, ensuring that actions match words.

Opportunities and Challenges for India to Boost Inbound Tourism:

A significant challenge lies in the closure of Tourist Offices abroad, which are crucial marketing tools. This move could lead to a devaluation of information and reduce personal interaction with overseas tourists. The internet offers an impersonal profile, whereas a human face can provide precise answers and better descriptions of tourism products. What is needed is a hard-sell approach rather than a feeble attempt to promote our country.

Role of Tour Operators in Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations:

Tour operators can hold “Know India Seminars” in countries where India is not well known. While attending events like WTM and ITB is good for networking, we need to expand our reach beyond these regular forums and explore new markets. We should think of ways to make India a unique and easily accessible destination for all.

Deepak Kumar Bhatnagar, Chief Executive Officer, Minar Travels, Inbound Travel Expert

Expectations from IATO Bhopal Convention:

We anticipate that the convention will serve as a platform for industry stakeholders to meet and discuss critical issues that are hindering the resurgence of inbound tourism. The convention will feature various business sessions with top industry leaders, culminating in the submission of a white paper to the Ministry of Tourism and other relevant bodies. This could play a significant role in reviving inbound tourism.

Opportunities and Challenges for India to Boost Inbound Tourism:

India is a diverse tourism destination with immense potential that has not yet been fully tapped in the international market. However, the lack of support from certain policies, such as visa regulations and open sky policies, has hindered this potential. By making the necessary policy changes, improving monument facilities, and extending support to foreign tour operators who promote India, we could double our inbound tourism numbers within five years. Our opportunities are currently constrained by these self-created challenges.

Manoj Kumar Matta, Director, Oriental Vacations and Journeys

Expectations from IATO Bhopal Convention:

Swami Vivekananda once said, "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is achieved." Four years after the pandemic hit, the tourism industry, particularly Indian inbound tourism, is still struggling. The theme "Resurgent India Inbound" could be a game-changer for the industry if our voices reach the policymakers and hoteliers. While other countries grapple with over-tourism, India is still trying to reach pre-pandemic levels. Unfortunately, the government's budget cuts for



Role of Tour Operators in Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations:

In the absence of government support, especially post-COVID, it is tour operators who are driving the promotion of lesser-known destinations across India. We are creating new itineraries that include these destinations and organizing educational trips for our international partners to educate them—often at our own cost—since there is little to no government support.

tourism indicate that we must become self-reliant. I am optimistic that the convention's panel discussions and brainstorming sessions will yield positive outcomes and help us revive inbound tourism.

Opportunities and Challenges for India to Boost Inbound Tourism:

Inbound tourism has been repeatedly neglected by the government. While creating world-class infrastructure is important, it is futile if the world remains unaware of these developments. Although our Prime Minister often speaks about tourism, the actions of the government, particularly regarding inbound tourism, do not reflect this enthusiasm. The closure of overseas marketing offices, the elimination of financial incentives for tour operators, and budget cuts are all troubling signs. Furthermore, hotels' reluctance to confirm rooms and offer competitive rates to inbound tourists is another major challenge.

Role of Tour Operators in Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations:

India has a rich abundance of natural and cultural attractions, from world heritage sites to unique wildlife and man-made wonders. Tour operators play a crucial role in spreading awareness about these new tourism products. By showcasing these destinations to foreign tour operators, bloggers, and travel media, we can increase their visibility. In today's world, "What is seen is sold," so it's essential to keep promoting unique products through digital platforms. With the government's limited resources for tourism promotion, the responsibility of destination promotion now falls squarely on tour operators.



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Harish Mathur, Owner - Concord Travels & Tours

Expectations from IATO Bhopal Convention:

The theme of the 39th IATO Annual Convention, “Resurgent India Inbound,” is especially meaningful to the travel industry. After the global pandemic, there is renewed interest in India as a travel destination. Our nation’s rich heritage, cultural diversity, and rapidly evolving infrastructure offer a unique opportunity to reclaim our position as a preferred destination. This resurgence is about more than just recovery; it’s about reimagining how India can offer immersive, safe, and transformative experiences to inbound tourists.

Having witnessed the industry’s evolution over my 60 years of experience, I firmly believe this convention can be a game-changer. With a focus on sustainable tourism, the event aims to highlight India’s resilience and innovative strategies to attract international travelers. It provides a platform for stakeholders to discuss trends, build strategic partnerships, and explore new markets. By fostering collaboration among industry leaders, the convention will drive momentum for a more dynamic and inclusive travel ecosystem.

Role of Tour Operators in Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations:



In the current scenario, where travelers seek authentic, localized experiences, the industry must adapt and innovate. The IATO convention is poised to be a catalyst, steering India’s travel sector into a new era of growth and global recognition.

Ashok Dhoot, Founder - Harsh Travels



Expectations from IATO Bhopal Convention:

IATO conventions typically focus on advancing the tourism industry, fostering connections between stakeholders, and addressing current challenges and opportunities. The 39th IATO Annual Convention in Bhopal is expected to continue this tradition, with discussions centered around the theme

of “Resurgent India Inbound.” Participants, including representatives from tour operators, travel agents, hoteliers, and government officials, will explore strategies to revive and promote inbound tourism to India. The convention is anticipated to be a significant platform for knowledge sharing, networking, and collaboration within the industry.

Opportunities and Challenges for India to Boost Inbound Tourism:

India’s tourism sector holds immense potential, with its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and growing infrastructure. However, challenges such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, regulatory hurdles, and global competition remain significant. The convention will likely address these challenges and seek ways to overcome them. In particular, the theme of “Resurgent India Inbound” suggests a focus on revitalizing inbound tourism through innovative approaches, digital marketing, and improved infrastructure. It also highlights the importance of sustainable and responsible tourism practices.

Role of Tour Operators in Promoting Lesser-Known Destinations:

Tour operators play a crucial role in promoting and facilitating tourism, particularly in attracting international visitors to lesser-known destinations. By curating unique travel experiences and promoting India’s hidden gems, tour operators can contribute to the growth of inbound tourism. The IATO convention is expected to emphasize the role of tour operators in this regard, offering insights into emerging trends and opportunities in the tourism industry. ■



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Madhya Pradesh

A Safe Haven for Every Traveller



Sheo Shekhar Shukla
Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Department,
Managing Director Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

Safe Tourist Destination for Women initiative of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is winning praise both nationally and internationally.

If you are a woman traveller interested in exploring many beautiful places and adventure activities without fear? Or you wish to witness the making of beautiful keepsakes with locals and take a memory to cherish lifelong? Then green, clean and safe Madhya Pradesh is the place for you! The Heart of Incredible India has emerged as a top-tier tourist destination renowned for its natural beauty, rich heritage, and vibrant culture. With its vast expanse and diverse offerings from wildlife safaris to spiritual pilgrimages, the state caters to every traveller desires.

in collaboration with the Nirbhaya Fund of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India a benchmark step to ensure women travellers feel safe at tourist destinations to increase the number of female tourist's especially solo travellers. Under this initiative, 10 thousand women are

being trained and linked with tourism related service sector and 40 thousand women and girls are being given self-defence training. The sense of comfort and security among women traveller especially solo women travellers is increasing along with women getting employment in the tourism sector. With the motto of "Dil Khol ke Ghumo, Hindustan ke dil mein aap safe hai" the efforts being made by the Tourism Board in collaboration with the community are leading to a significant increase in the number of female solo tourists in the state.

Principal Secretary Tourism and Culture Department and Managing Director Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board Shri Sheo Shekhar Shukla said that ensuring the safety and comfort of visitors, especially women, is a key concern for the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. We've made significant strides in creating a secure environment



by empowering local women to take on leadership roles within the tourism industry. From driving safaris to guiding treks, women are at the forefront of providing exceptional experiences. The board is consistently working on promoting rural tourism as by opting for homestays during tours, travellers to promote sustainable tourism and strengthen local community and economy. The rural as well as urban homestays in Madhya Pradesh are now becoming increasingly popular. The Tourism Board has set a target of supporting 1000 homestays in 100 villages in the coming time.

Gypsy Driver to Boat rider

Safe Tourism Destination for Women initiative aims to revolutionize the

tourism landscape by encouraging women to take up key roles across the sector, from Gypsy drivers and boat riders to e-rickshaw drivers, taxi operators, tourist guides, and even local managers. The initiative extends to shopkeepers, security guards, front office staff, chefs, delivery personnel, vendors, and tourist experts, ensuring a wide array of opportunities for women in tourism. With this initiative, Madhya Pradesh is not only promoting tourism but also setting a new benchmark for women's safety and empowerment in the region, making it a trailblazer in gender-inclusive tourism.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is continually putting efforts on implementing environment-friendly projects in the state. Under the Rural

Tourism Mission, homestay project is one such initiative. 130 rural homestays have been constructed in 41 villages under this project so far. The success of which can be deciphered from fact that thousands of tourists who have these homestays to experience the rural lifestyle. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is dedicated to strengthening the rural community and making them self-reliant by handing over the responsibility of running homestays. The aim is to reduce migration, create employment opportunities in the villages and reduce the negative impacts on the environment. Sustainable building practices to build mud houses (vernacular architecture) are being promoted using organic farming, local cuisine and local architecture. ■

ASEGO introduces “Anywhere to Anywhere” travel assistance & insurance for new-age globetrotters

As India's leading Travel Assistance & insurance providers, ASEGO has been keeping a close eye on the way inbound travel is evolving, and have curated a new product - “Anywhere to Anywhere” travel assistance and insurance for such new-age globetrotters. **Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego, shares more.**

BOTT DESK



What innovative products have you introduced to shape the future of this dynamic travel segment?

The “Anywhere to Anywhere” travel assistance and insurance for such new-age globetrotters is a

I believe that the rising demand for domestic travel is a testament to India's growing economic prosperity and our burgeoning spirit of exploration. We at Asego have been following this trend closely and are committed to protecting travellers' adventures and enhancing their experience with Travel protection solutions, exclusively curated for domestic trips and staycations.

revolutionary product that will allow travellers including NRI's and foreign nationals to depart from and arrive at any destination in the world without

worries. For instance, whether your travellers are departing from New York, Dubai, or Sydney, and heading to any corner of the globe, they're comprehensively protected against unforeseen medical emergencies and risks such as trip cancellations, interruptions, loss/ delay of checked in baggage and more.

With the rise in domestic travel, how is ASEGO responding to this trend, and what new strategies are you implementing to enhance the travel experience within the country?

I believe that the rising demand for domestic travel is a testament to India's growing economic prosperity and our burgeoning spirit of exploration. We at Asego have been following this trend closely and are committed to protecting travellers' adventures and enhancing their experience with Travel protection solutions, exclusively curated for domestic trips and staycations.

Furthermore, in line with the Indian Governments initiative to promote Domestic tourism, we've developed tailored Travel Assistance and Insurance

solutions for domestic travellers. Our Domestic travel protection includes essential assistance services such as Emergency Medical Assistance,

Concierge Assistance and Domestic Roadside Assistance along with exclusive insurance benefits that protects travellers against unexpected medical and non-medical emergencies.

Moreover, our bouquet of offering also includes exclusive covers for high-risk adventure sports activities and self-drive trips, perfect for those seeking thrilling experiences or exploring remote locations. Additionally, we've crafted coverage that protects travellers against new-age risks such as gadget loss, credit/debit card frauds etc. ensuring that every aspect of their trip is comprehensively addressed.

With various Travel Insurance Providers available in India, what makes ASEGO the preferred choice for travel agents?

To start with, I believe it is our sole focus on the travel assistance & insurance business that sets Asego apart in the industry. This vision and the close ties with our partners allow us to step into the travellers' shoes, gauge their requirements and curate innovative and relevant products and services for them. Today, we are proud to be serving our clients with more than 200 customised products catering to leisure, business and student travel.

Besides, we constantly analyse the various risks involved while travelling and accordingly design exclusive offerings like our global assistance services to alleviate these risks. Also, we conduct regular engagement and training programmes for our business partners to aid upselling and cross-selling. ■

Mayfair Elixir

Expanding Horizons and Redefining Luxury Across India

Mayfair Hotels has long been a symbol of luxury and refined hospitality in Eastern India. With the creation of Mayfair Elixir, the brand is embarking on a new chapter, expanding its reach to offer its signature blend of opulence and nature-inspired tranquillity across the subcontinent. Bjorn DeNiese, Managing Director, Mayfair Elixir shares more...

BOTT Desk

What inspired the creation of Mayfair Elixir, and how has the brand evolved since its inception? Could you highlight some significant milestones that have shaped its journey?

Mayfair Elixir was born out of the growing demand from our patrons who have long desired to bring the Mayfair experience closer to them. While the Mayfair brand has been a staple in Eastern India for many years, Elixir is our response to making this experience more accessible across the subcontinent. The brand has evolved by focusing on delivering the essence of Mayfair—luxurious comfort intertwined with nature—in new and diverse markets.

Mayfair has traditionally been a prominent hotel brand in East India. What motivated the decision to expand beyond this region, and how do you plan to position the brand in new markets?

Mayfair has always been synonymous with opulent, maximalist luxury deeply connected to nature. In today's fast-paced, ever-evolving world, we offer a unique proposition: a chance to slow down, indulge, and reconnect with what truly matters. While there are many quick, minimalist brands, we offer a deliberate contrast, encouraging guests to savour life's luxuries. This vision has motivated us to venture beyond Eastern India into exotic and emerging destinations, aiming to establish landmarks wherever we go. Moving forward, we will also introduce sub-brands that uphold our core ethos while offering distinct styles.

Could you share details about the upcoming hotel openings that Mayfair has in the pipeline? What can guests expect from these new additions to your portfolio?

We are excited to launch Mayfair Manor in Alibag near Mumbai this season, which has already commenced soft operations. This property is part of our diverse portfolio of sub-brands that we will be introducing in various markets. Mayfair Manor is a boutique, luxurious brand offering guests unique



experiences at their own pace. While it is designed for private family getaways, it is also ideal for leadership retreats and intimate social gatherings. In addition to Alibag, we are planning new properties in Goa, Meghalaya, Assam, and Rajasthan, each promising to deliver the distinctive Mayfair experience.

In terms of revenue growth, what new channels are you exploring in both B2B and B2C markets? How do these initiatives align with your overall business strategy?

Our existing portfolio is witnessing steady revenue growth, and we are optimistic about the future. To further enhance our reach, we are launching a sales partner program under Elixir, which will offer significant benefits, particularly to our property partners. This program is designed to provide ample rewards at every level of partnership with the Mayfair brand. We believe this initiative will be a game-changer in the industry and are looking forward to its formal launch in the last quarter of this financial year. ■

Regional Leaders Driving India's Tourism Revival

Insights from IATO Chapter Chairmen

In the ever-evolving landscape of India's tourism industry, the role of regional leaders is crucial in shaping the future of travel. As India steadily regains its foothold in the global tourism market, the insights and strategies of IATO (Indian Association of Tour Operators) Chapter Chairmen offer a unique perspective on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. From advocating for policy changes to fostering local tourism initiatives, these leaders are at the forefront of driving growth and innovation in their respective regions.

Anjali Pokhriyal

Mahendra Pratap Singh

IATO Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh Chapter



Shortly after assuming the role of Chapter Chairman for IATO Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, we organized a workshop involving tour operators from Madhya Pradesh, leading inbound tour operators from across India, and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. During this workshop, we addressed the challenges hindering the growth of tourism in Madhya Pradesh. Additionally, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between IATO and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board. Through this agreement, IATO will play a pivotal role in promoting Madhya

Pradesh as a destination and will educate its members on how to effectively boost tourism in the state.

I am the Co-Chairman for the 39th IATO Convention this year and I view this as a catalyst for boosting inbound tourism in Madhya Pradesh. Despite Madhya Pradesh being home to vibrant destinations and immense potential, it remains an underutilized asset in the tourism sector. Through this convention, we aim to invigorate various tourism segments in Madhya Pradesh, such as rural tourism, heritage tourism, cultural tourism, and wildlife tourism. The state is well-equipped with the necessary infrastructure, including road connectivity, airports, accommodations, and a highly trained hospitality industry that meets global standards.

The post-convention familiarization (FAM) tours will provide members with firsthand experience, which will subsequently aid in the resurgence of inbound tourism in Madhya Pradesh.

Prateek Hira

IATO Uttar Pradesh Chapter

IATO has been a major influence in Uttar Pradesh, advocating for policy changes and promoting tourism. The Government of Uttar Pradesh is very inclusive and involves IATO in all major decision-making processes related to tourism. In turn, IATO has been unconditionally supporting the state of Uttar Pradesh in quickly regaining its top



position in inbound tourism and fulfilling its mission of becoming a USD 1 trillion economy by making tourism a major contributor.

IATO has ensured that Uttar Pradesh has its own tour operators' approval system, which is now operational. These state-approved operators, apart from other benefits, have the opportunity to participate in all major domestic and international travel marts through the UP state pavilion at no cost. IATO's strength lies in its members, and in Uttar Pradesh, IATO members are being empowered through regular training programs, networking events, and knowledge sessions to equip them with the latest destination and product knowledge.

Through knowledge exchange programs and familiarization tours of other states, members of IATO in

Uttar Pradesh have the opportunity to broaden their horizons and expand their businesses. Membership of IATO from Uttar Pradesh has increased the most compared to other states and continues to grow. This is a testament to how valuable the membership of IATO is perceived by the trade.

In the future, IATO has planned many meaningful engagements for its members from Uttar Pradesh, focusing on increasing UP's market share in inbound tourism and encouraging its members to explore uncharted inbound markets. IATO Conventions are known to stimulate thoughts, generate ideas, and bring about positive change. The outcomes of IATO conventions influence our state and central tourism policies, rekindling hope for better days ahead among the travel trade.

Members of IATO are looking forward to the Bhopal Convention and have pinned their hopes on positive outcomes, especially regarding inbound tourism.

Manas Mukherjee

IATO Jharkhand Chapter



Jharkhand is a state full of untapped potential, and it has been my mission to establish a strong presence for the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) in the region. It's encouraging to see renowned brands like Radisson and Sarovar now among our members. When I first embarked on this journey, I was the sole advocate, working tirelessly to increase IATO membership in Jharkhand, despite numerous challenges. However,

through perseverance and dedication, we've managed to set a solid foundation.

I am eagerly anticipating the upcoming IATO convention in Bhopal, which serves as a vital platform for the travel industry. This convention not only brings together industry leaders but also offers an exceptional opportunity to showcase Madhya Pradesh as one of India's premier tourism destinations. With its rich cultural heritage, stunning landscapes, wildlife, and architectural marvels, Madhya Pradesh possesses all the essential elements that make it an ideal choice for inbound tourism. I believe the convention will highlight the state's tourism potential and inspire further development in regions like Jharkhand.

Jitendra Kejriwal

IATO Maharashtra and Dadra, Nagar Haveli & Daman Chapter



As the IATO Chapter Chairman for Maharashtra, I have undertaken several initiatives to boost inbound tourism. These efforts include organizing roadshows and participating in international travel fairs to highlight Maharashtra's attractions. We have strengthened collaborations with state tourism bodies and private stakeholders to enhance infrastructure and visitor experiences. Additionally, I have focused on promoting lesser-known destinations through digital marketing campaigns and introduced training programs for local guides and hospitality staff to elevate service quality.

Moreover, we've prioritized efforts to streamline visa processes and ensure

robust safety measures post-pandemic to reassure and attract international tourists. As a specialist in wedding tourism, I have promoted India as a premier destination for weddings, aligning this with the Ministry of Tourism's "Wed in India" campaign. At the convention, I am particularly interested in the marketing and promotion of Madhya Pradesh's tourist sites, especially its heritage monuments, and exploring how these can be integrated into my wedding tourism portfolio. Madhya Pradesh, with its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty, and diverse wildlife, holds immense potential as an inbound tourism destination. Its unique blend of historical landmarks, national parks, and adventure tourism opportunities make it a key destination for international visitors. With ongoing infrastructure improvements and efforts to promote eco-tourism, Madhya Pradesh is well-positioned to attract more global tourists.

Namgyal P.

IATO Sikkim Chapter



I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) for hosting their convention in Madhya Pradesh. This vibrant state has long been a cherished destination, renowned for its world heritage sites such as Khajuraho. Beyond its rich historical and cultural heritage, Madhya Pradesh offers immense potential for eco-tourism and homestays, providing unique and immersive experiences in its picturesque

locales. With its diverse landscapes and rich biodiversity, Madhya Pradesh is poised to become a leading hub for sustainable tourism. I encourage all stakeholders to develop strategic plans that emphasize conservation and community engagement. By doing so, we can enhance the state's appeal and ensure that the benefits of tourism are widespread and lasting. Let us work together to unlock Madhya Pradesh's full potential and showcase its remarkable offerings to the world.

Sejoe Jose

Chairman - IATO Southern Region



As the Regional Chapter Chairman for South India, my primary responsibility has been to ensure that all chapters develop and implement effective strategies for the year. Our focus has been on identifying new markets to fuel tourism growth. The year 2023-2024 witnessed remarkable growth in tourism across South India, and it was gratifying to hear from members that it was one of the best years since their inception. Another key focus has been on improving tourism infrastructure, which is crucial for enhancing the experience of every tourist.

I will be attending the IATO convention in Bhopal with great interest. My expectation is to participate in discussions on the challenges facing the tourism industry and to contribute to finding practical solutions. Although I am not very familiar with tourism in Madhya Pradesh, I am looking forward

to gaining valuable insights into the state during the convention, along with over 1,000 other members. The impact of an IATO convention is significant, often leading to a substantial increase in tourism for the host city or state. The additional flights and increased tourism activities that follow are clear indicators of the convention's positive influence on inbound and domestic tourism.

Bengia Mrinal

State In-Charge, IATO Arunachal Pradesh



Arunachal Pradesh, as an emerging tourism destination, is still in the early stages of seeing significant growth in tourist inflows. Currently, the number of IATO (Indian Association of Tour Operators) members in the state is quite limited. Many of my colleagues in the tourism sector are still struggling to recover from the impact of the pandemic, which has made it challenging to encourage them to join IATO. To address this, I have proposed a series of training programs in collaboration with Arunachal Tourism. These programs will focus on digital marketing, the importance of participating in fairs and festivals, and understanding the GST regime in travel and tourism management. I believe these initiatives will build trust and encourage more of my colleagues to join IATO. I have already discussed this proposal with the IATO President and am hopeful that he will take the necessary steps to support it.

I am eagerly looking forward to attending the most anticipated event

of the year. My expectations are that the central executive members of IATO will give greater attention to North East India, supporting efforts to promote, market, and develop it as the next emerging destination. I seek guidance on how to further develop tourism in the North East and how we can effectively collaborate with our respective state governments to achieve this.

Manmeet Singh

IATO Punjab Chapter



For participants at any convention, especially IATO, meaningful sessions that address real-time challenges faced by the industry and offer viable solutions are of utmost importance. The IATO Convention also serves as an excellent networking platform for one-on-one interactions. As Chapter Chairman, my objective is always to contribute to the success of the convention to the best of my ability, and it's also a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with industry colleagues.

Madhya Pradesh is aptly known as the "Heart of India" in the tourism industry, offering a wealth of attractions. From the National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries like Kanha, Bandhavgarh, and Pench to the majestic forts and palaces in Gwalior and Mandu, Madhya Pradesh caters to diverse segments of travellers.

Speaking of Bhopal, where the IATO 2024 Convention will be held, it is one of the most climate-friendly cities in Madhya Pradesh, thanks to its lakes. These Bhopal lakes not only offer water sports activities but also create a pleasant environment with their

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Pandian K

IATO Tamil Nadu, Andaman & Nicobar and Puducherry Chapter



The Tamil Nadu IATO Chapter has established a strong and cordial relationship with the Tamil Nadu State Government, which is vital for an association like ours to thrive and sustain business. On behalf of IATO, the Tamil Nadu chapter undertakes numerous initiatives to promote tourism in the region. One such recent achievement is securing approval from the Airport Authority Director for an exclusive spot near the arrival gate (Terminal 2, A5) at Chennai Airport, dedicated to IATO members for receiving inbound guests. This will greatly assist IATO Tamil Nadu members in ensuring smooth airport assistance for guests.

I have never missed an IATO convention, as they provide an excellent platform for learning and professional development in tourism. I am once again looking forward to attending all the sessions at this year's IATO convention, as they offer valuable insights into various aspects of tourism. I firmly believe that any destination hosting an IATO convention experiences a significant boost afterward. With thousands of tour operators from across the country attending each convention, it provides an excellent opportunity for participants to explore the destination

in depth and gain firsthand experience. This, in turn, enables tour operators to effectively promote the destination. I am confident that Madhya Pradesh will benefit greatly in terms of business as a result of being the host city for this year's IATO convention.

Tsering Namgyal

IATO Ladakh Chapter



IATO Ladakh is a prominent member of the travel trade community in Ladakh and has been actively involved in addressing key issues related to tourism. As Chapter Chairman, I have held discussions with the Commissioner Secretary of UT Tourism and members of the local travel trade community on various tourism matters. These discussions have been positive, and I am hopeful that the current Commissioner Secretary will take significant initiatives to help grow tourism in Ladakh. The annual IATO Ladakh chapter members meeting, held in Leh, was also very fruitful.

Attending the IATO Convention provides valuable insights into the current situation in the tourism industry. I expect this year's convention to address the practical challenges faced by the travel trade fraternity in bringing inbound tours to India and to focus on enhancing overseas promotion efforts. Madhya Pradesh is already established as one of the key destinations for inbound tourists, with monuments like Khajuraho Temples, Sanchi Stupa, Gwalior Fort, and Bhimbetka Caves featuring prominently

in many foreign tour operators' itineraries. However, there are still many other places in Madhya Pradesh that need better promotion and could benefit from increased visibility.

Sunil C. Gupta

IATO Northern Region Chapter



In 2024, our Northern Region Chapter has made significant progress. Our chapters in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, Kashmir, Ladakh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh have been actively engaging with local government officials, state tourism boards, and industry stakeholders, including the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), airport authorities, and railway officials. We have hosted successful networking events, welcomed new members, and fostered valuable connections.

Notably, the Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Bihar Tourism Boards have been instrumental in our success, offering local stakeholders opportunities to participate in national and international travel marts under their auspices. Their support has significantly amplified our marketing efforts, resulting in a greater impact.

I am delighted to be attending the Convention in Bhopal. My expectations are high, as I hope for thorough and inclusive discussions among all tourism stakeholders to address pressing issues, especially the sluggish recovery of inbound tourism. I anticipate the convention will produce concrete and actionable solutions for both immediate



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and long-term growth, including innovative strategies for destination promotion and marketing. Ultimately, I look forward to a fruitful exchange of ideas, collaborative insights, and a unified approach to propel the industry forward.

K. Ranga Reddy

IATO Andhra Pradesh and
Telangana Chapter



To enhance Telangana's tourism experience, several strategic improvements are needed. Firstly, introducing smaller boats at Nagarjuna Sagar would offer more personalized and intimate tours. In Hyderabad, prominently exhibiting Nizam's exquisite jewellery could attract and educate visitors. It is crucial that all monuments and museums remain open every day of the year to ensure accessibility and convenience for tourists. Implementing skill development programs for tourism stakeholders will bolster service quality and professionalism.

Declaring 2025 as "India Visit Year" could significantly boost international tourism. Additionally, centralizing tourism information under a single platform and introducing a unified "One India, One Tourism Taxi" permit system would streamline travel logistics. Including fees for animal services, such as elephants and horses, in entry ticket prices would enhance transparency. Lastly, improving road conditions and safety measures in high-traffic tourist areas is essential for a safer travel experience.

Sunil Singh Rana

IATO Uttarakhand Chapter



Upon assuming the role of Chairman of the Uttarakhand Chapter, we quickly initiated several key initiatives. We have submitted three crucial proposals aimed at enhancing tourism services in the region - Recognition as Accredited Tour Operators in Uttarakhand, Priority Helicopter Tickets for International Travelers to Kedarnath and Reduction in Entrance Fees for Chaurasi Kuti (Beatles Ashram). We are fully committed to advancing these proposals and will continue to work diligently to ensure their approval.

I am looking forward to attending the convention this year and I expect it to focus on pressing challenges such as sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, managing overcrowding, assessing the carrying capacity of fragile destinations, and adopting a unified "One State, One Inbound Product" approach to collective marketing. Madhya Pradesh is already a distinguished inbound destination with its rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and historical significance. The state is home to several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, including the Khajuraho Group of Monuments and the Bhimbetka Caves, which attract history and culture enthusiasts from around the world.

Randhirsingh Vaghela

IATO Gujarat & Diu Chapter

Recently, we organised a tour for our members to explore newly opened

3 to 5-star properties, providing them with firsthand product knowledge and opportunities to establish direct connections with the hotels. Our engagement with Gujarat Tourism officials has been fruitful; we addressed the challenges faced by our members and facilitated meetings with the new Managing Director and Secretary, who assumed their roles on July 1, 2024. Additionally, we welcomed 24 new members into our organization.

Thanks to our persistent advocacy, Gujarat Tourism provided the 5-year Fair & Festival dates on August 9, 2024, in the presence of key officials including the Secretary, MD, Joint MD, and AGM—a gesture that was highly appreciated by all members.



I am attending the convention in Bhopal and will continue to advocate for increased inbound tourism by improving air connectivity to less-visited states. Furthermore, I recommend involving stakeholders in planning major events to attract inbound tourists and negotiating special rates with hotel groups like Taj and ITC, as we successfully did last year. It's also essential to highlight enhanced wildlife tourism options, religious tourism, and architectural marvels.

Nasir Shah

IATO Jammu & Kashmir Chapter

As Chapter Chairman, I have focused on two major areas: external and internal issues. Externally, we have been pressuring the Government of India and various European, U.S., and U.K.

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authorities to remove travel advisories, as the situation in J&K has significantly improved. Internally, we've been working to ease business operations for our members, including the removal of FRRO forms for foreign tourists at Srinagar Airport, securing MDA for our members, and facilitating promotional participation in various marts.



We are also committed to sustainable and eco-friendly tourism to protect our national heritage, environment, and ecology. It is crucial that Kashmir does not degrade from its status as "Paradise on Earth" to an environmentally compromised destination. Some of the major issues we've resolved include hassle-free entry to Srinagar Airport for our transporters and representatives—a significant obstacle due to ongoing security concerns.

This year, around 10-12 members have already registered for Bhopal, and as you'll see from the attached banner, we hold a flag-off ceremony every year under one banner before departing for the convention. Our primary focus is to ensure IATO members promote Kashmir as a regular destination in the overseas market. We also hope that the Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with IATO, will now highlight Kashmir's potential at international marts like WTM, FITUR, BIT Milan, ITB, and WTM.

Debjit Dutta

IATO West Bengal Chapter

In 2023-24, the IATO West Bengal Chapter has made significant strides

under my leadership. One of our key achievements was securing the "industry status" for tourism in Bengal, granted in November 2023. This recognition has opened new avenues for growth by facilitating easier access to subsidized loans, investment opportunities, and financial incentives for the tourism sector.

Another noteworthy initiative was our successful advocacy with the West Bengal Transport Department regarding the fitment of luggage carriers on commercial vehicles, an issue under discussion since 2015. The notification issued in February 2024 has been a game-changer for tourist transport operators, especially in Kolkata, by increasing the carrying capacity and enhancing the overall efficiency of tourist vehicles.



Additionally, our chapter has been actively involved in promoting the RTSP (Recognized Tourism Service Provider) Guidelines introduced by the Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal, in 2021. We organized a workshop on August 23, 2023, to assist our members in applying for RTSP accreditation, further strengthening the tourism ecosystem in the state.

I will be attending the IATO Convention in Bhopal where my primary expectation is to advance the "LOOK EAST" initiative, which I had the privilege of introducing during the Kolkata convention.

Mahendra Singh

IATO Rajasthan Chapter



In 2024, our chapter has been actively engaged in various initiatives aimed at promoting tourism and fostering collaboration among industry stakeholders. We have conducted regular meetings with local tour operators and government officials in Rajasthan, which have been instrumental in aligning our strategies and addressing key challenges. These efforts have significantly strengthened our network and enhanced the overall experience for inbound tourists.

Yes, I will be attending the IATO Convention in Bhopal. I expect the convention to provide a valuable platform for industry professionals to exchange ideas, share best practices, and explore new opportunities for collaboration. I am particularly looking forward to discussions on how we can collectively work towards reviving inbound tourism and positioning India as a preferred destination for international travellers.

Madhya Pradesh holds tremendous potential as an inbound destination, particularly due to its rich wildlife and natural beauty. The state's diverse landscapes, coupled with its historical and cultural significance, offer a unique experience for tourists. With the right marketing strategies and support from local stakeholders, Madhya Pradesh can emerge as a top choice for international travellers seeking authentic and immersive experiences. ■

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India Assist

One-stop solution for travellers in distress

In an exclusive interview with BOTT India, Harish Khatri, the visionary Founder and Managing Director of India Assist, delves into the journey of his groundbreaking venture. India Assist, a company dedicated to providing on-ground assistance and distress management services across 140+ cities in India and expanding into international markets, is revolutionizing the way travellers experience safety and convenience. Harish Khatri shares insights into the inspiration behind India Assist, its rapid growth, and the future of on-ground support in the travel industry.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

India Assist has made significant progress since your leadership began in 2017. What were the primary challenges you faced during the transformation, and how did you address them?

Well, taking the big leap forward with India Assist in 2017 was a defining moment, and to be honest, the road wasn't exactly smooth. One of the primary challenges was instilling trust in a service that, at the time, was relatively new to the Indian market. Travel assistance wasn't something people readily understood or

sought out. The concept of on-ground support, especially for tourists in distress, was still in its infancy. We had to educate our potential customers while simultaneously building a robust network capable of delivering on our promises.

To tackle these challenges, we focused on creating awareness through targeted campaigns that highlighted real-world scenarios where our services could be life-saving. We also concentrated on forging partnerships with local authorities, hotels, and travel agencies, which helped to build credibility. Our approach was hands-on — learning from every small win and loss, refining our processes, and always staying agile. The key was patience, consistency, and never losing sight of the big picture.

With the company's expansion into over 100 cities and international markets, what strategies have you put in place to ensure consistent and high-quality service delivery across such a broad network?

Being there in 140+ cities and beyond our borders was no small feat. The primary strategy has been a strong focus on decentralization without compromising on our core values. We've set up regional hubs with dedicated teams trained extensively in our standard operating procedures. These hubs i.e. our distributor network acts as the nucleus for their respective areas, ensuring that local nuances are understood and addressed, but always within the framework of our overarching quality standards.

Another key strategy has been imbibing technology. We've invested heavily in real-time monitoring systems that allow us to keep a pulse on operations across all locations. This means that any issue, no matter where it occurs, is flagged immediately and can be addressed swiftly. Moreover, we have a feedback loop that is critical to our operations — every incident is reviewed, and the insights gained are fed back into our training modules. This continuous improvement cycle ensures that we're always learning, adapting,

and maintaining the high standards our customers expect.

How do you uphold the core values and mission of India Assist while managing rapid growth and expansion? Can you share any specific initiatives or practices that have contributed to this?

It has been a balancing act. One practice we've put in place is what I like to call "value checkpoints." At every stage of expansion — whether we're entering a new city or rolling out a new service — we pause to ask, "Does this align with our mission of providing reliable, compassionate, and effective assistance?" If the answer is anything less than a resounding yes, we rethink our approach.

Another initiative is our Induction Program, where every new team member, regardless of their role, undergoes a comprehensive orientation that focuses not just on their job functions, but on the ethos of India Assist. This program emphasizes empathy, understanding, and the importance of the human touch in all interactions. We've found that when everyone in the organization is aligned with our values, it naturally reflects in the service we deliver.

As a 'Showcase Start-up of the Government of India,' how has this recognition influenced your business operations and strategic direction? What role do you foresee government support playing in your future plans?

Well, indeed it was a significant milestone for us. It validated the hard work we've put in and, more importantly, brought our mission into the national spotlight. This recognition has opened doors to collaborations and partnerships that would have been much harder to achieve otherwise. For instance, it has given us a platform to engage with policymakers and contribute to discussions on improving travel safety and assistance protocols in India.

Government support has been instrumental, particularly in helping us understand regulatory corridors and

gain the necessary approvals to operate in various regions. Moving forward, we hope to make the most out of this relationship to expand our reach even further, possibly into underserved or more challenging areas where our services can make a real difference. We're also exploring the possibility of collaborating on national-level initiatives that promote safe and secure travel in India.

In a competitive landscape, how does India Assist distinguish itself from other providers of on-ground assistance and distress management services? What unique value proposition do you offer to your customers?

What sets us apart is our comprehensive approach to travel assistance. Unlike many providers who specialise in just one or two areas, we offer a complete suite of services — from medical emergencies and police support to lost and found, and language assistance. Our focus is on being a one-stop solution for travellers in distress.

Our unique value proposition lies in the way we deliver these services. We combine technology with the human touch. For instance, our 24/7 helpline isn't just an automated service. Rather, it connects travellers with real people who are trained to offer empathetic, personalised assistance. This blend of efficiency and compassion is what keeps our customers coming back, and it's something we're incredibly proud of.

Looking ahead, what are your major goals and vision for India Assist over the next five years? Are there any new markets or services you are considering exploring?

The next few years are going to be pivotal for India Assist. Our major goal is to solidify our presence not just in India, but on a global scale. We're looking at entering markets in Southeast Asia and the Middle East where there's a significant influx of tourists and a growing need for reliable on-ground assistance services. We are already present in Nepal and quickly vesting into key areas. ■

Aeroprime Group's Innovations and Strategic Vision contributing to Aviation Growth



Aeroprime Group has established itself as a key player in the aviation industry, consistently pushing the boundaries of innovation and excellence. In this interview, we explore the recent developments, resilience strategies, and future plans that position Aeroprime Group as a leader in the sector. From enhancing passenger experiences to expanding global operations, the company's forward-thinking approach continues to set new benchmarks in the industry. Abhishek Goyal, Executive Director, Aeroprime Group shares more.

Priyanka Saxena Ray

edly faced unprecedented challenges in recent years. At Aeroprime Group, we've adapted by being agile, technology-driven, and proactive. We've diversified our service offerings while elevating the

to leverage these developments. We anticipate a growing demand for contactless travel solutions, personalized services, and increased transparency in operations. To cater to

Can you share some of the recent innovations or developments your company has introduced to enhance the passenger experience?

At Aeroprime Group, our primary focus has been to elevate the passenger experience by integrating advanced technology and personalized service solutions. With our API Konnect tool, we've provided our partner airlines' customers with a seamless booking experience across various platforms. Additionally, our carefully crafted marketing initiatives have helped passengers learn more about the airlines, their products, networks, and the destinations they serve.

The aviation industry has faced significant challenges in recent years. How has Aeroprime Group adapted to these changes, and what strategies have you implemented to ensure resilience and growth?

The aviation industry has undoubt-

In the coming years, our key areas of focus will include launching innovative customer-centric services, enhancing our global network, and achieving a significant increase in market share in targeted regions. We are expanding our global reach, forging strategic partnerships, and investing in our people and infrastructure to better serve our customers around the world.

benchmark in customer service, which has helped us build strong relationships with both customers and the trade. Additionally, we've increased our focus on technology, cargo, and logistics operations. By fostering partnerships and exploring new markets, we've maintained resilience and continue to position ourselves for sustained growth in a rapidly changing environment.

What trends do you foresee shaping the future of air travel, and how is Aeroprime Group positioning itself to capitalize on these trends?

The future of air travel will be heavily influenced by technological advancements, sustainability, and evolving consumer expectations. We are strategically positioning ourselves

these emerging trends, we are deeply investing in cutting-edge technologies to enhance operational efficiency, elevate the passenger experience, and optimize maintenance processes.

Looking ahead, what are the key areas of focus for Aeroprime Group, and how do you plan to continue driving innovation and excellence in the aviation industry?

In the coming years, our key areas of focus include launching innovative customer-centric services, enhancing our global network, and achieving a significant increase in market share in targeted regions. We are expanding our global reach, forging strategic partnerships, and investing in our people and infrastructure to better serve our customers around the world. ■

Visa applications in India surpass pre-pandemic volumes in H1 2024

Robust pent-up demand for outbound travel from India for the first time went past the pre-pandemic levels in H1 2024 (January to June 2024). According to VFS Global that manages visa applications for 52 countries from India, the volumes recorded in H1 2024, surpassed the same period in 2019 by 2%. It also witnessed a steady 11% YoY growth in application counts over H1 2023.

“Outbound travel demand from India has remained robust and it was a matter of time that pre-pandemic levels were restored. India has been witnessing an extended travel season over the past two years and we are confident the momentum would last till the year-end. We remain committed to providing exceptional customer service through technology-led, seamless, highly secure and reliable solutions,” said Yummi Talwar, Chief Operating Officer - (South Asia), VFS Global.

Talwar emphasised the importance of applicants being cautious of counterfeit websites and fraudulent social media pages that pose as VFS Global and offer appointments in exchange of money. “Appointments are free and are exclusively available through www.vfsglobal.com on a first-

come, first-served basis. As a responsible service provider, we persist in raising awareness about this concern and encourage applicants to arrange their travel plans well in advance,” she adds.

Some of the popular destinations comprise Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, USA and UK. (in alphabetical order). The preference for tailored services persisted as a predominant trend in visa application behaviours. VFS Global noted a significant increase in the demand for personalised services such as Visa At Your Doorstep (VAYD). ■



Yummi Talwar,
Chief Operating Officer - (South Asia),
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Universal Travel Conclave in Guwahati

A Triumph for North East Tourism

The Universal Travel Conclave (UTC) concluded its two-day event at the Hotel Radisson Blu in Guwahati, marking a significant milestone in promoting North East India's tourism. Held from August 2 - 3, 2024, this international tourism conclave, themed "UTC Connect," successfully brought together a diverse array of stakeholders from the travel, tourism, aviation, and hospitality sectors.

Anjali Pokhriyal

The inaugural session was graced by distinguished guests, including Mr. Ruhul Amin, Assistant High Commissioner of Bangladesh in Guwahati, Mr. P. P. Khanna, President of the Association of Domestic Tour Operators of India (ADTOI), Dr. Saumen Bharatiya, Patron-in-Chief of Byatikram Group, Dr. Rajan Parekh, Secretary of the Medical Tourism Association of India (MTOA), and Mr. Mukul Medhi, President of the Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA), among other notable industry figures.

Key Highlights of the Inaugural Session

Mr. Pradip Kumar Karar, CEO and Chairperson of Fairview Media Pvt. Ltd.

(FMPL), delivered the welcome address, expressing his enthusiasm for the event: "UTC Connect will elevate global tourism connectivity, foster new relationships, and unlock transformative business opportunities both in India and abroad."

Mr. Ruhul Amin underscored the conclave's significance, stating, "The Universal Travel Conclave presents a significant opportunity to strengthen bilateral ties and promote cultural exchange through tourism between Bangladesh and North East India."

Dr. Saumen Bharatiya highlighted the event's broader impact: "I am delighted to witness such an impactful initiative that not only showcases the potential of North East India but also fosters sustainable tourism practices essential

for our region's development."

A Platform for Insightful Discussions

UTC featured an impressive lineup of keynote speakers and panel discussions that explored pivotal topics such as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) in global business travel, wellness and medical tourism, and the latest trends in inbound and outbound tourism in India. These discussions provided industry professionals with invaluable insights and a platform to address current challenges while exploring new collaborative ventures.

The event was further bolstered by the support of esteemed governmental tourism boards, international





stakeholders, and industry influencers from South East Asia. Together, they contributed to fostering global partnerships and driving business opportunities through a dynamic program of roadshows, audio-visual presentations, conferences, and networking sessions.

Looking Ahead

Abhishek Chaudhuri, Director & COO, and Kaustuv Das, Executive Director of The Universal Travel Conclave, announced that UTC will

continue its journey across India and Southeast Asia, with upcoming events scheduled in Delhi, Hyderabad, Dehradun, and Bangkok through 2025. This ambitious schedule reflects UTC's commitment to expanding international tourism partnerships and exploring new opportunities for growth.

As UTC concluded in Guwahati, it left an indelible mark on the region's tourism landscape, reinforcing the importance of the North East as a key destination for both domestic and

international travelers. The conclave not only showcased the immense potential of the region but also laid the groundwork for future collaborations that promise long-term benefits for the local economy and the broader tourism industry.

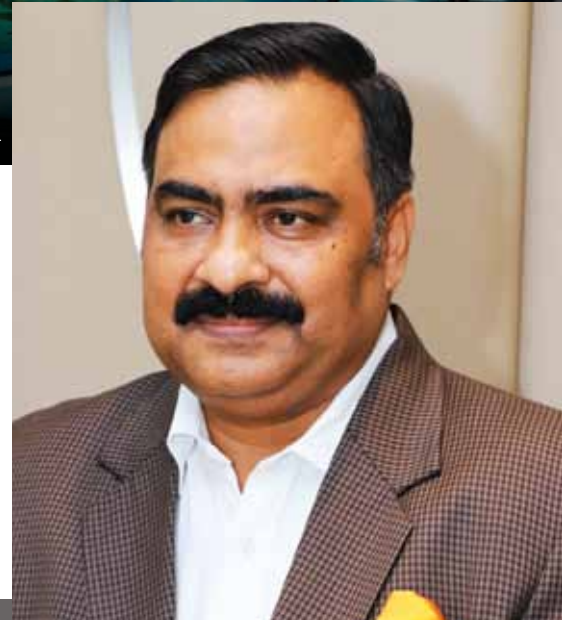
As UTC embarks on its next phase, it remains poised to elevate the tourism sector, foster global connections, and continue its mission of creating transformative opportunities for stakeholders across the industry. ■



Atmosphere Core

aiming to launch 25 properties in 2025 in India

*Atmosphere Core is a dynamic and fast-growing international hospitality company currently operating nine resorts within the Maldives and is set to further expand in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Bhutan. Atmosphere Core's distinguished portfolio comprises THE OZEN COLLECTION, ATMOSPHERE HOTELS & RESORTS and COLOURS OF OBLU, with a rich diversity of experiences within each of these brands. In an exclusive chat with **BOTT**, **Souvagya Mohapatra**, Managing Director (India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka) for Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts, shares more.*



Gunjan Sabikhi

Could you share your vision for the future expansion of Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts in India?

Atmosphere Core is launching in India with a strong promise of twenty-five (25) in 2025, which will include our existing and active pipeline of hotels and resorts in the Indian subcontinent. We have already signed hotel management agreement for thirteen (13) properties as follows:

India will soon witness the introduction of our flagship brand **"THE OZEN COLLECTION"** at the City of Joy in form of **"OZEN MANSION KOLKATA"**. This is a lifestyle luxury hotel which will cater to high end Corporate & Leisure, MICE and Wedding clientele.

"BHOPAL CITY" – The heart of

India will witness an amazing Heritage property called **"SADAR MANZIL-HERITAGE BY ATMOSPHERE BHOPAL"**. Sadar Manzil – erstwhile Darbar of the Begam rulers amidst historical royal set up, cuisines, wellness, and unique stay experiences.

"COORG" is an amazing destination amidst nature in Southern India. **"STILLWOOD RETREAT A SIGNATURE ATMOSPHERE – COORG"** will take travellers to a 40 acres coffee estate where guests can rejuvenate in the beautiful surroundings.

"ATMOSPHERE LAKE VIEW KOLKATA" as the name suggests is set by a lake, nestled in verdant countryside on the outskirts of Kolkata. This luxury retreat will feature overwater villas and spa, iconic restaurants, and event

spaces.

We have also signed a convention hotel at the temple city – Bhubaneswar, **"ATMOSPHERE BHUBANESWAR"** will have modern state of the art facilities for MICE segments and will be one of the iconic destinations for weddings. It will also cater to the corporate and leisure customers.

Goa will soon have a luxury beach front Resort in form of **"OZEN PRIVADO GOA"** offering uber luxury amenities. **"VARSA ELEMENTS OF NATURE BY ATMOSPHERE KANNUR"**, A Wellness Resort will be set up in Kappimala is spread across an expansive 24 acres of verdant hills on the border of Chikkamagaluru and Coorg. **"OZEN NANDI HILLS BANGALORE"** will be set up in enchanting Nandi Hills range, this



breakdown of the key aspects that we are approaching:

Asset-Light Model: By adopting an asset-light model, we are focusing on operational efficiency and marketing strategies without the burden of heavy capital investments in property ownership. This allows the company to allocate resources effectively towards enhancing guest experiences, expanding market reach, and driving profitability.

O&M Priority: Prioritizing Operations and Marketing underscores the importance of delivering exceptional service quality and implementing effective marketing campaigns to attract and retain guests. By emphasizing these aspects, Atmosphere Core aims to differentiate its offerings in the competitive hospitality landscape and build strong brand equity.

ROI Focus: Ensuring Return on Investment (ROI) within stipulated periods aligns with industry standards and investor expectations. By implementing sound financial management practices, optimizing operational efficiencies, and executing targeted marketing initiatives, Atmosphere Core aims to deliver consistent and sustainable returns to investors.

Could you elaborate on the sustainable tourism initiatives your company has implemented across its properties in India?

Atmosphere Hotels Resorts is committed to creating a sustainable future through the efficient use of resources. We ensure conservation, preservation, and restoration of local biodiversity. For example, we have coral reef restoration projects led by marine biologists at our resorts in the Maldives. We are among the leading hospitality companies having one of the largest solar power generation capacities in the Maldives. All our resorts are Green Globe Certified. Green Globe is the world's leading certification for sustainable operation and management of travel & tourism industry.

All our upcoming properties in India and Southeast Asia will follow the same practices in addition to latest best practices of hospitality industry's sustainable approaches. ■

lifestyle luxury resort is spread across 7.60 lush acres with a tranquil lake.

Recently we have signed a Tea Resort in Darjeeling Hills in Avongrove Tea Estate, an all-villas property in Jaipur which will be named as **OZEN VILLAS JAIPUR** and two properties in Nagpur in the name of **EDEN GREENZE BY ATMOSPHERE** and **ATMOSPHERE URBAN NAGPUR**.

What technological innovations has Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts adopted to stay ahead in the competitive hospitality market?

By providing technology to the guests to check in remotely through their mobile device, hotel managers can better manage their staffing needs and save considerably on manpower costs. This technology can also alert hotel staff when guests arrive, offer appropriate allocation of rooms, and provide them with a more personalized guest experience.

Next, Online Reputation Management Technology is an important aspect now a days in hospitality industry. A hotel's online ratings can not only help predict

future bookings, but they offer owners valuable insight into how well a property delivered on guest expectations. Therefore, operators will continue to invest in platforms that help them monitor online reviews, manage their online reputation, and use that feedback to improve both their operational and guest experience standards. Indeed, online reviews not only provide a source of direct feedback from guests, but they also impact a property's bottom line.

Can you share some personal insights or philosophies that guide your approach to leading a luxury hospitality brand in today's dynamic market?

My induction in Atmosphere Hotels & Resorts and the passion as a hotelier from India are the perfect combinations to fulfil my dreams. I am sure we will achieve the objective that we set for ourselves in days to come within the stipulated timeline.

It's clear that Atmosphere Core has adopted an asset-light business model focusing on Operations and Marketing (O&M) as its priority in India and the Asia-Pacific region. Here's a

ETAA hosts Successful Business Partner Meeting in Mumbai

The Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) recently held its first-ever Business Partner Meeting at the IMC Churchgate in Mumbai on August 20th, 2024. The event was a resounding success, with participation from twenty-five exhibitors and over eighty-five registered attendees.

Shreya Shimpi

The event served as an excellent networking platform, bringing together domestic and international Destination Management Companies (DMCs), tourism boards, and airlines. In addition to networking, two insightful knowledge sessions were organised by AVNI MICE Tourism and Rupee Boss, providing valuable insights for members.

Exhibitors at the event included prominent names such as India Tourism, Travel Advisor, AVNI MICE Tourism, FlyRemit, Andaman Insider, Paradise Holidays, Elite Holidays, Travnet, ITB India, VFS Global, Asego, Fairmont Mumbai, Tourism Malaysia, GRN Connect, Neptune, Nisha Prime Rajasthan, Tara Travels, Fishtail Nepal, Rupee Boss, and Turtle Down Under, among others. These exhibitors showcased their services and products,

engaging in one-on-one conversations with attendees and addressing their queries.

Nurul A'in, Manager-Buyer Program and Partnerships at Messe Berlin Asia Pacific, an exhibitor at the event, expressed enthusiasm, stating, "We are excited to participate in ETAA's Business Partner Meeting with the hope of engaging with travel industry professionals to provide in-depth perspectives on trends, challenges, and the future of the rapidly growing Indian luxury travel market."

In an exclusive chat with BOTT India, ETAA National Board Members shared their thoughts on the event's success. Jagat Mehta, National Board Member, ETAA, commented, "This is the first time ETAA has organized an event like the Business Partner Meet. We have received overwhelming support from both exhibitors and members. This success has encouraged us to consider hosting similar events in other cities. Today, we have a diverse range of exhibitors, including finance companies like Rupee Boss, ITB India, VFS Global, tourism boards, and DMCs from Rajasthan, Kerala, Nepal, and more."

Dipti Pradhan Thakoor, another National Board Member, added, "ETAA has always aimed at bridging the gap between industry partners, travel agents, and tour operators. With this in mind, we organized this event, bringing together DMCs, representatives from airlines, hotels, insurance companies, and various leaders in the travel industry. The event saw participation from both domestic and international sectors, with travel agents and tour operators from Mumbai connecting and expanding their business networks. This platform serves as a bridge to build new relationships and foster mutual growth."

National Board Members Abhijit Khadilkar and Dharmesh Advani were also present, contributing to the event's success. ■





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Expanding Horizons

Turkish Airlines' Strategic Growth and Innovations in India

Turkish Airlines, the national flag carrier of Türkiye, has long been a key player in the global aviation industry. As the airline expands its reach across Asia and the Far East, India stands out as one of its most crucial markets. In an exclusive interview, Umit Develi, Vice President of Asia & Far East for Turkish Airlines, shares insights into the airline's growth, strategic plans, and innovations in the Indian market.

Priyanka Saxena Ray



How has the year 2024 been so far for Turkish Airlines? What kind of growth have you seen and from which markets?

India is one of the most important markets in the Asian region. Our India flight network includes New Delhi, to which we first flew in 1987, and Mumbai, to which we have been flying since 2006.

Türkiye has seen a remarkable surge in tourism from India this year. In the first six months of 2024, the number of Indian visitors reached 1,64,373 representing a 33.2% increase compared to the same period in 2023. Several

regions and cities in Türkiye have seen a notable increase in Indian tourists. Istanbul, renowned for its historical landmarks, vibrant culture, and unique gastronomic experiences, remains a top destination.

As Türkiye's flag carrier, we increased our capacity in terms of available seat kilometres compared to that of 2023. As of June 2024, Turkish Airlines carried 40.6 million passengers, achieving an increase of 4.8% compared to same period in 2023.

Additionally, during the period of January – June 2024, international to international passenger carried increased by 7.8% to 15.2 million from 14.1 million. Our available seat kilometres increased from 110.8 billion to 122.1 billion during the same period, reflecting a 10.2% growth. Furthermore, our cargo and mail services saw a significant increase of 32.3%, from 747.9 thousand tons to 989.4 thousand tons during the period of January – June 2024.

How important is the India Market for Turkish Airlines? Are you planning to expand to newer destinations in India or look at increasing frequencies?

India is a vital market for us, and we are exploring ways to expand our operations here. Currently, we operate 14 weekly flights, but we are in discussions with the Indian government to increase this number. Our codeshare partnership with IndiGo Airlines is a strategic move to enhance connectivity and provide more travel options for Indian passengers. We are optimistic

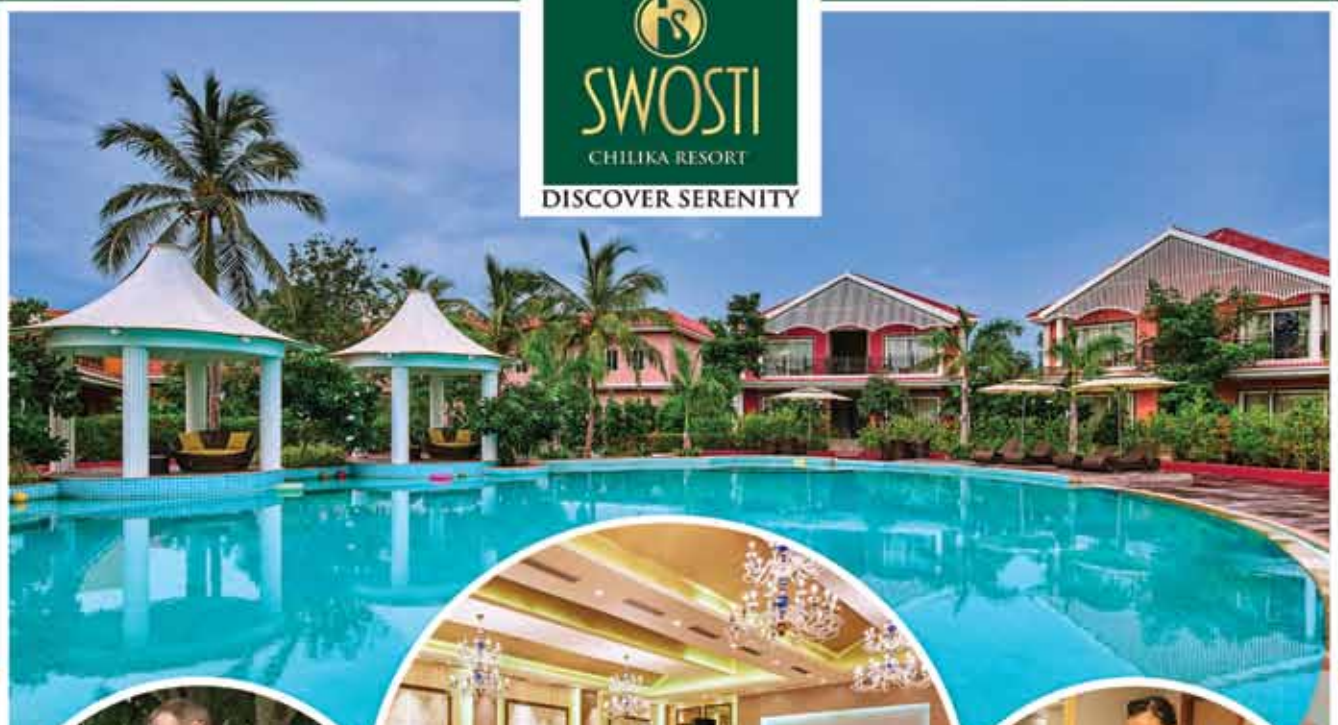
about increasing our flight frequencies and possibly adding new destinations within India soon.

With the growing emphasis on sustainability, how is Turkish Airlines working towards reducing its environmental impact?

Turkish Airlines is deeply committed to sustainability, exemplified by being awarded the "Most Sustainable Flag Carrier Airline" by World Finance for the third consecutive year. Our approach encompasses several key initiatives:

- **Carbon Offset Platform (CO2mission):** We offer passengers the opportunity to offset their carbon emissions, contributing to global efforts to combat climate change.
- **Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF):** We incorporated SAF into our climate change mitigation plans in 2022 and expanded its use to new routes in 2023. This initiative is a critical component of our strategic goal to become a Carbon-Neutral Airline by 2050.
- **Sustainable In-Flight Products and Waste Management:** We have implemented sustainable in-flight products and robust waste management practices to reduce our environmental impact.
- **Operational Optimization Projects:** Since 2008, we have undertaken over 100 projects aimed at reducing our carbon footprint, achieving significant successes in fuel savings and greenhouse gas emissions reduction in 2023. ■


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Jyoti Mayal

Leading the charge in transforming travel with visionary leadership and innovative solutions

Under the dynamic leadership of Jyoti Mayal, the Travel Agents Associations of India (TAAI) has experienced a remarkable transformation. As President, Mayal has been instrumental in steering the association and the industry through a period of immense change and challenge, particularly during the global pandemic. Here's a look at some of the noteworthy achievements.

BOTT DESK

International Recognition and Influence

Mayal's influence extended beyond national borders, especially in her pivotal role during the G20 summit. She actively contributed to the policymaking processes for the National Tourism Policy, Cruise Tourism, Adventure Tourism, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions). Her work with the Ministry of External Affairs led to the timely reopening of visas, essential for reviving international travel post-pandemic.

Her efforts in Sri Lanka, where she engaged with the President and Speaker, resulted in significant funding and deliverables, further enhancing India's international tourism partnerships. The MoUs signed with various countries and states under her guidance have strengthened India's tourism ties globally.

Policy Advocacy and Reforms

Mayal has been a relentless advocate for policy reforms. Her work with the Ministry of Tourism has influenced all major tourism policies, including significant contributions to the ministry's website and Market Development Assistance (MDA) initiatives. In aviation, her collaboration with the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Ministry of Aviation led to crucial reforms that protect consumer and travel agent money, ensuring greater financial security within the sector.

Mayal also played a key role in pushing for the reduction of the Tax Collected at Source (TCS) and lowering the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rates, working closely with the Ministry of Finance. Her efforts in this domain have been vital in easing the financial burden on the tourism industry.

Championing Skilling and Education

Her initiatives with the Ministry of Skilling & Entrepreneurship and the Ministry of Education have integrated tourism into the curriculum of State School Boards and CBSE, laying the foundation for a more knowledgeable and skilled future workforce in the



industry. Skilling programs initiated in collaboration with the Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC) and the Ministry of Tourism have been instrumental in uplifting the skill sets of industry professionals.

Technological and Women Empowerment Initiatives

Mayal's tenure also witnessed significant technological advancements within TAAI, positioning the association as a forward-thinking body in the digital era. Additionally, her commitment to empowering women in the travel industry is evident in the creation of the Women in TAAI initiative, which now supports over 700 women.

In sum, Jyoti Mayal's presidency has been marked by visionary leadership, strategic reforms, and an unwavering commitment to the growth and resilience of India's tourism industry. Her legacy at TAAI is one of innovation, empowerment, and enduring impact. ■

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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 September 2024.



March 21 – April 20

With Mars moving into your sign, you'll feel more ambitious. Use this momentum to start a new project or tackle something you've been putting off. In your personal life, communication is key. Be open and honest with loved ones to avoid misunderstandings.



July 23 – August 21

With Jupiter influencing your house of expansion, you might feel drawn to new hobbies, courses, or even travel. In love, single Leos might find a surprising connection, while those in relationships should focus on deepening their bond.



November 23 – December 22

With Saturn's influence, you'll feel a strong desire to set new goals and work towards them. This is a great time to seek mentorship or further training to enhance your skills. In your personal life, balance is key—make sure to spend quality time with friends and family.



April 21 – May 21

With Venus in retrograde, it's a good time to revisit your personal goals. Financially, you may find new opportunities for growth. Be cautious with spending. Relationships could be tested, but patience and understanding will help.



August 22 – September 23

Happy Birthday, Virgo! With the sun in your sign, you'll feel more confident and ready to take charge. Use this energy to set new personal and professional goals. Financially, this is a good time to review your budget and make any necessary adjustments.



December 23 – January 20

With Jupiter in your house of education and travel, you may feel inspired to learn something new or embark on an adventure. Professionally, this is a good time to push your boundaries and take on new challenges. In love, be open to new experiences and let go of past grievances.



May 22 – June 21

Your social life is set to thrive this month. With Mercury in your house of communication, expect a lot of invitations and opportunities to connect. However, don't neglect your responsibilities at work. Stay focused and organized to keep everything running smoothly.



September 24 – October 23

As you approach your birthday season, take time to reassess your priorities and goals. With Venus in retrograde, you may feel drawn to past relationships or old habits—choose wisely. Professionally, stay focused and avoid taking on too much.



January 21 – February 19

With Neptune influencing your house of secrets, you may feel the need to delve deeper into your emotions and past experiences. Great time for therapy, journaling, or meditation. Professionally, stay focused and avoid getting distracted by office drama.



June 22 – July 22

Focus on career and ambition for you, Cancer. The stars align to push you towards new professional heights. For a promotion or starting a new venture, now is the time. Make sure you're giving enough time to your loved ones, especially during the full moon.



October 24 – November 22

The stars are encouraging you to step out of your comfort zone and connect with new people. This could lead to exciting opportunities, both personally and professionally. In your personal life, deepening connections with loved ones will bring you joy.



February 20 – March 20

The sun in your house of partnerships, you'll feel more connected to those around you. Whether it's a romantic partner, a friend, or a colleague, now is the time to nurture these bonds. Professionally, stay organized and focused to avoid unnecessary stress.

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Accor

Accor has appointed **Mohammad Ali** as the Director of Global Sales – India. This promotion highlights Accor’s dedication to recognizing and nurturing exceptional talent within its organization. Throughout his tenure, Mohammad Ali has played a crucial role in expanding

Accor’s presence in India’s diverse markets. His strategic insight and leadership have been pivotal in delivering impressive results and fostering long-term relationships with key stakeholders.



The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi

The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi has appointed **Abhishek Basu** as its new Hotel Manager. With over 23 years of distinguished experience in the hospitality industry, Basu brings a deep

understanding of hotel management, operations planning, and food and beverage excellence to his new role. As Hotel Manager, Basu will oversee all aspects of the hotel’s operations, ensuring that The Leela Ambience Convention Hotel, Delhi, maintains its reputation as a premier destination for both business and leisure travelers.



Tamarind Global

Tamarind Global has appointed **Indranil Sen** as the new Head of Human Resources. Sen brings with him nearly two decades of extensive experience in the HR function, making him a valuable addition to Tamarind Global’s leadership team, that excels in tours, weddings,

corporate services and events. Indranil Sen’s impressive career trajectory spans multiple industries and includes key roles in renowned organisations.



Le Meridien Hyderabad

Le Meridien Hyderabad has appointed **Mervin Mathew** as the Director of Sales & Marketing. Mervin brings with him a wealth of experience and a proven track record in the hospitality industry, making him a valuable addition to the team. In his new role, he will be responsible for

leading a dynamic team to achieve the hotel’s sales, marketing, and revenue goals.



7 Apple Hotels

7 Apple Hotels has appointed **Abhishek Haru** as Digital Marketing Manager. With a proven track record and a deep understanding of the digital landscape, Abhishek will drive the hotel chain’s online growth and engagement. In his new role, he will oversee the digital

marketing strategies for 7 Apple Hotels, eight business hotels, two resorts and many more to come, ensuring a solid online presence across all platforms.



Atlantis Resorts

Atlantis Resorts has appointed **Rutuja Patil** as their new Account Director, Leisure Sales (India). Rutuja brings with her a wealth of experience in the hospitality sales industry, making her a valuable addition to the Atlantis team. Prior to her new role, she served

as the Sales Manager for Leisure Sales (UK & Scandinavia) at Atlantis Dubai.



Courtyard by Marriott Agra

Courtyard by Marriott Agra has appointed **Prateek Wadhwa** as Director of Sales. With over 15 years of distinguished experience in the hospitality industry, Prateek brings

extensive knowledge and expertise to this role. In this role, Prateek will focus on leading the team to new heights and will be responsible for overseeing and leading a dynamic team to achieve revenue goals for Courtyard by Marriott Agra.

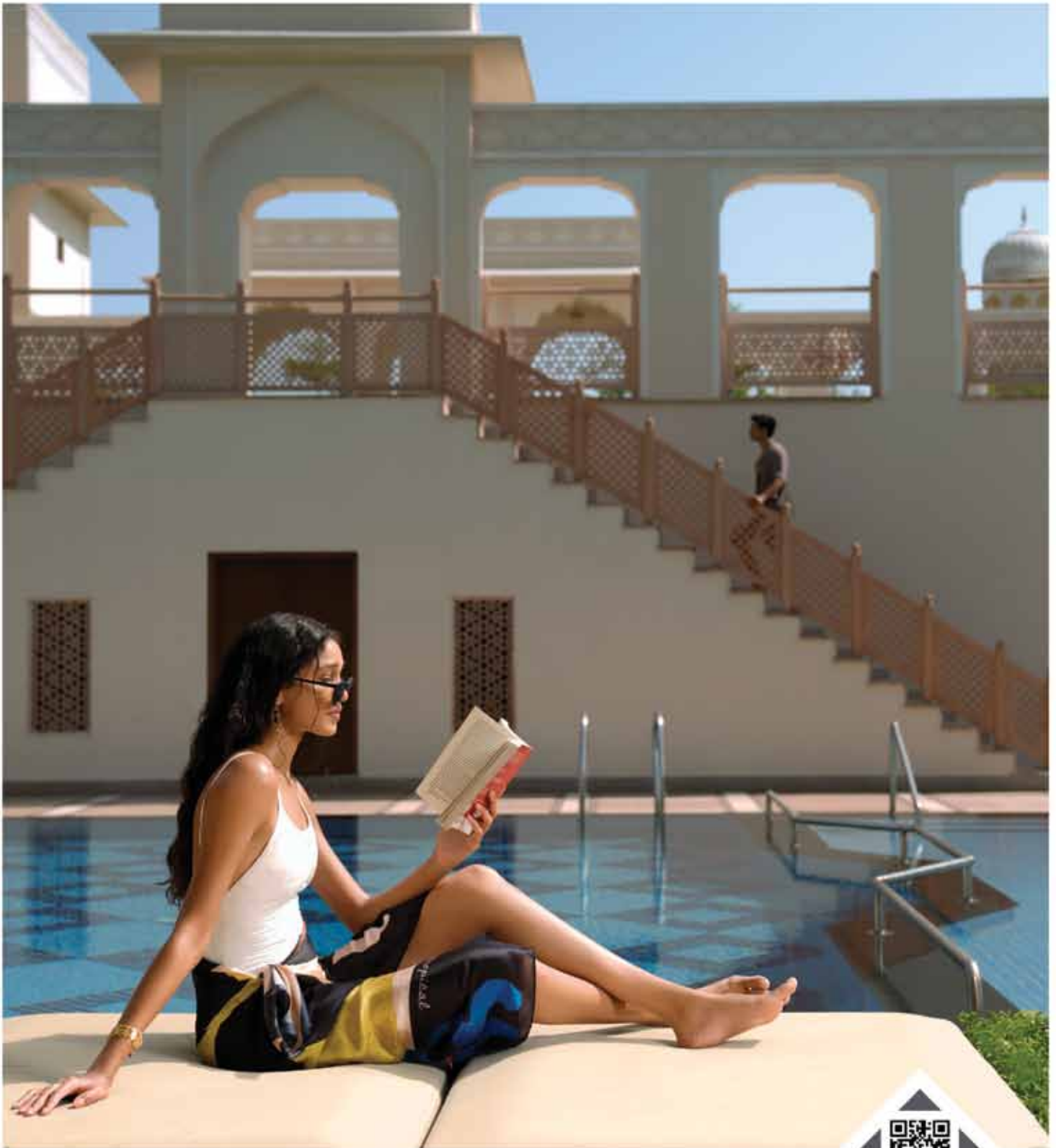


Madinat Jumeirah

Madinat Jumeirah has appointed **Neil Shah** as the new Associate Director of Sales, where he will be overseeing the regions of India, Africa, GCC, Asia, China, and the Americas. An ambitious international sales professional, Shah brings over 15 years of sales expertise,

with 11 years dedicated to the Hospitality and Travel & Tourism industry. In his new role, Shah will lead a dedicated sales team to further promote Madinat Jumeirah’s luxurious offerings.

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153
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Statistics as on 30 June 2024.