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# Letter from the *Editor's Desk*



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the February OTM Special Issue of BOTT India!

As we gear up for one of the most significant travel trade events, this issue is packed with exclusive insights and industry updates. Leading the way is our special coverage on the progress of the Mahakumbh, featuring insightful interviews with the Hon'ble Tourism Minister and Ms. Mugdha Sinha. We've also had the privilege of speaking with senior representatives from MP Tourism, Maharashtra Tourism, Gujarat Tourism, and more, shedding light on their strategies for the year ahead.

In this edition, we bring you an exciting series of exclusive interviews with trailblazers from the industry, including the founders and heads of Kazin DMC, One Above Global, and GRNConnect, who share their vision and innovations shaping the travel landscape.

Additionally, we have detailed coverage of two prominent events—the TAFI Convention in Vietnam, which was a grand celebration of networking and growth, and TEX 2025, which unfolded with great success in Pushkar, highlighting new opportunities in the travel trade.

Our new column, Mumbai Diaries, continues to spotlight key personalities from the travel industry. This time, we bring you a candid conversation with Himanshu Patil from Kesari Tours, exploring his journey and contributions to the sector.

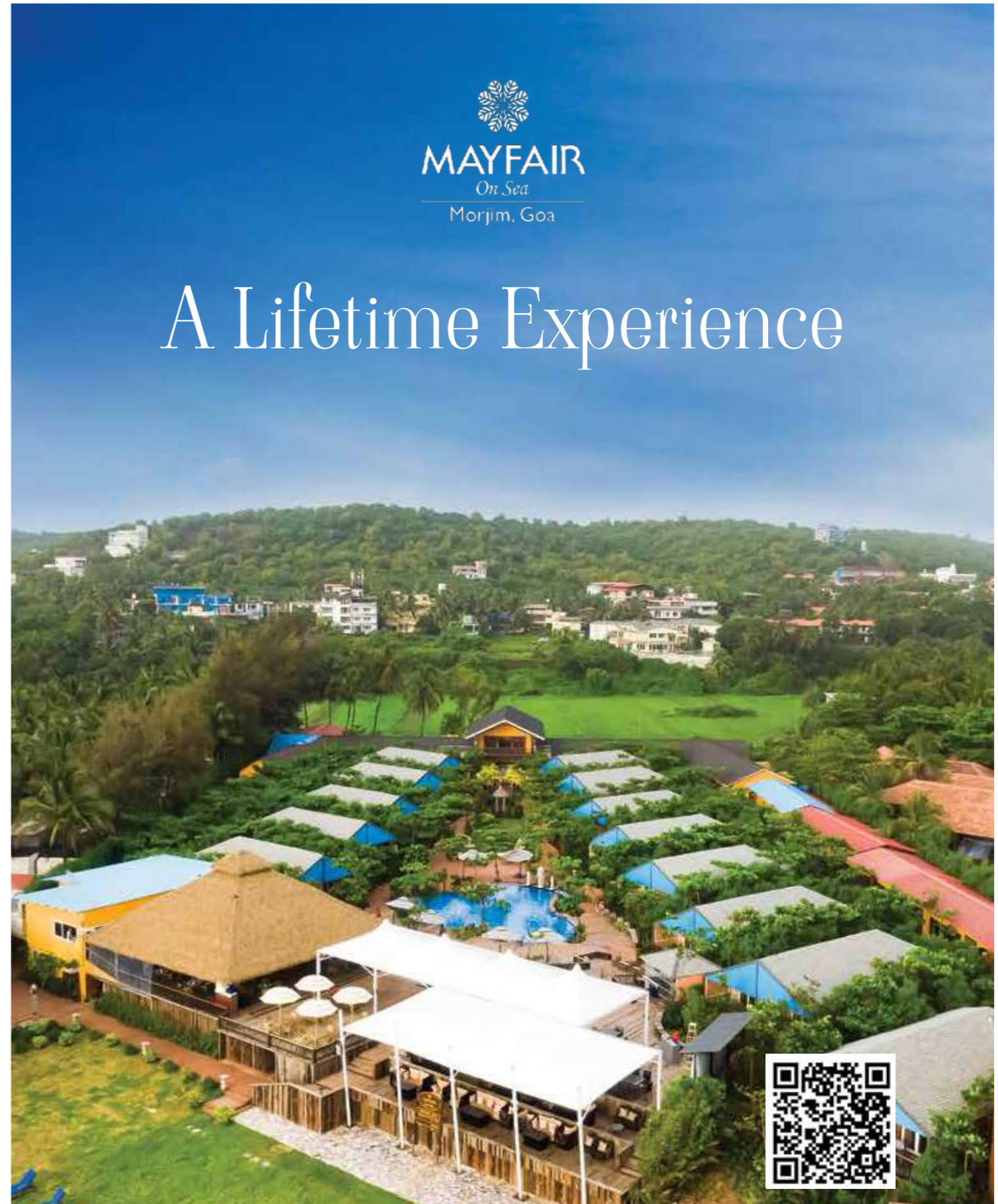
And of course, the issue is filled with regular updates, trends, and insights to keep you informed and inspired.

We hope this special issue adds value to your OTM experience and provides a comprehensive view of the dynamic travel industry. Happy reading, and see you at OTM!

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**  
Editor, BOTT India

  
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**VFS GLOBAL'S NEW INDONESIA E-VISA ON ARRIVAL OFFICIAL PLATFORM GOES LIVE**

VFS Global has launched its new user-friendly and efficient online platform to make Indonesia's Electronic - VoA application process seamless. This is in line with Indonesian government's



ongoing efforts to enhance its tourism infrastructure and services to welcome 14 million visitors in 2025. VFS Global's new e-VoA platform is available for nationals of all the 97 countries eligible for e-VoA, including India.

**EBIXCASH ACHIEVES REMARKABLE QUARTERLY MILESTONE**

Eraaya Lifespaces Limited (ELL) announces a remarkable milestone achieved by its Indian subsidiary, Ebix-Cash, signifying a pivotal advancement in its growth journey. The subsidiary's travel division (Ebix Travels Pvt. Ltd. - ETPL), has delivered outstanding performance for the quarter ended December 2024, achieving a GMV (Gross Merchandise Value) of INR 10,030 million, net revenue of INR 1,110 million, and a healthy EBITDA of INR 75 million.



**JAMAICA LAUNCHES NEW 'CONTRASTS CAMPAIGN'**

The Jamaica Tourist Board, in collaboration with Accenture Song, launched a new campaign that highlights the diverse offerings available in Jamaica. The campaign emphasises the island's unique position to provide a vacation that inspires and energizes. The 'Contrasts Campaign' aims to deliver strong, unified messages that showcase Jamaica's people and rich cultural heritage. It invites travellers to reconnect with their best selves.



**NIJHAWAN GROUP APPOINTED INDIA REP FOR RAKTDA TRADE AND MICE ACTIVITIES**

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) has appointed Nijhawan Group as its official representative in India for Trade and MICE activations. This strategic collaboration aims to strengthen Ras Al Khaimah's presence in the Indian market and promote it as a leading travel and tourism destination. Nijhawan Group will support RAKTDA's efforts in driving destination awareness, increasing footfall and enhancing engagement with travel trade partners in Tier I, II & III cities of India.

**RAKTDA APPOINTS BRANDIT AS INDIA PR AGENCY**

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) has appointed BRANDit as its official PR agency in India. BRANDit will lead the PR mandate to position Ras Al Khaimah as a must-visit destination, highlighting its diverse offerings, including pristine beaches, awe-inspiring mountains, luxurious resorts and rich cultural heritage. BRANDit will develop targeted campaigns, engage with key media and collaborate with travel trade stakeholders

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**VIETJET EXPANDS INDIA NETWORK WITH NEW ROUTES FROM HYDERABAD AND BANGALORE**

Vietjet is strengthening its presence in India with two new direct routes linking Hyderabad and Bangalore to Ho Chi Minh City starting March 18 and 19, 2025, respectively. These new services will reinforce Vietjet's position as a key player in the aviation market between the two countries, while fostering connectivity and growth across Asia. The new flights are now available for booking.



**HERITANCE AARAH MALDIVES PARTNERS WITH LEADING QUALITY ASSURANCE UK**

Heritage Aarah has partnered with Leading Quality Assurance (LQA), a renowned UK-based organization specialising in evaluating and enhancing hospitality standards. This strategic collaboration aims to elevate the resort's guest experience and set new benchmarks in the Maldives' hospitality industry. Heritage Aarah is the first property within Aitken Spence Hotels and the first Sri Lankan hotel chain to adopt LQA standards.

**LINDT HOME OF CHOCOLATE WELCOMES OVER 817,000 VISITORS IN 2024**

During 2024, 817,163 visitors came to the Lindt Chocolate Competence Foundation, at the Lindt Home of Chocolate in Kilchberg. This remarkable achievement puts the competence centre, now in its fourth year of operations, among the most popular and most visited museums in Switzerland. Tourists from the USA, the UK, Germany and India in particular visited the museum in 2024.

**VIETNAM AIRLINES UPGRADES MUMBAI – HANOI TO WIDE-BODY FLIGHTS**

Vietnam Airlines has announced the upgrade of its aircraft on the Mumbai to Hanoi route, effective May 1, 2025. Starting May 1, the flights will operate four times a week using the state-of-the-art Boeing 787 and Airbus A350 aircraft. Both models are renowned for their advanced technology, spacious design, and superior comfort. The airline will feature a specially curated Indian menu in addition to other premium amenities.



**RESORTS WORLD CRUISES EXPANDS WITH RESORTS WORLD ONE'S FIRST HOMEPORT IN MUMBAI**

Resorts World Cruises is pleased to announce that it will be expanding its footprint to India with the debut and homeport deployment of the Resorts World One cruise ship in Mumbai from 5 March until 1 June 2025. Resorts World One will depart from the soon to be completed Mumbai International Cruise Terminal at the Ballard Pier Extension (BPX) berth of the Mumbai Port with three weekly roundtrip cruise itineraries.

**VISITBRITAIN TO HOST 120 INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL TRADE ON EDUCATIONAL VISITS**



National tourism agency VisitBritain is gearing up to host more than 120 international travel trade on educational visits across the UK as part of its flagship 'Showcase Britain' event. With VisitBritain set to launch its global screen tourism campaign 'Starring GREAT Britain', many of the educational visits include film-and-tv inspired experiences, showing international travel buyers and media the real destinations at the heart of the on-screen action.





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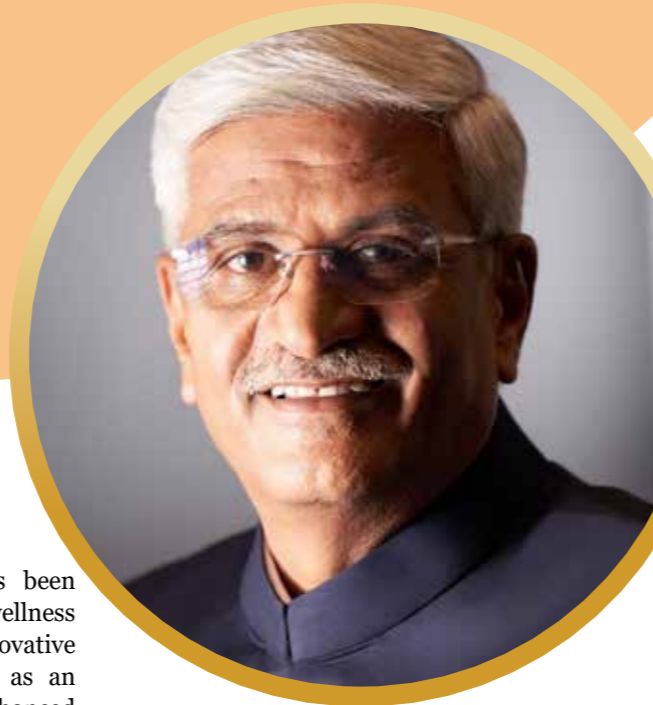


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# Showcasing India's Heritage on Global Stage



The Minister spoke about the global significance and meticulous planning of Maha Kumbh 2025, praising it as a testament to India's unity and cultural grandeur. He also emphasised transformative tourism initiatives shaping India's position as a global travel destination.

Prayagraj is buzzing with unprecedented energy as the Maha Kumbh 2025 sets new benchmarks for participation, infrastructure, and cultural integration. Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, hailed the event as a "testament to India's unity and spiritual vibrancy" while lauding the Uttar Pradesh government under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for exemplary arrangements.

Over 10 crore devotees and visitors have flocked to the holy Triveni Sangam till January 23rd, with the festival's highlight being Makar Sankranti, which alone drew 3.5 crore participants. Shri Shekhawat praised the event's capacity to draw over 45 crore people across 45 days, including 1.5 million foreign tourists. A 21-member delegation from 10 countries, representing regions such as South Africa and Fiji, also took the sacred dip, symbolizing the festival's global resonance.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has played a pivotal role in elevating the visitor experience. A state-of-the-art tent city offering Ayurveda,

Yoga, and Panchakarma has been set up, blending traditional wellness with modern amenities. Innovative technological solutions, such as an AI-driven chatbot, have enhanced accessibility, providing devotees with real-time information on parking, food courts, and healthcare facilities. The Maha Kumbh has also become a platform to showcase India's rich cultural heritage. Shekhawat inaugurated the 'Bhagwat' exhibition at the Allahabad Museum, where miniature paintings depicting Lord Ram and Krishna captivated audiences. Additionally, the Kala Gram initiative—featuring craft, cuisine, and cultural performances—immersed visitors in India's diverse traditions. Tourism in India is witnessing exponential growth, with domestic tourist numbers up by 95.64% and international rankings improving. Investments of over ₹10,000 crore are being funneled into destination development, reflecting a shift from monumental tourism to experiential tourism. The minister has emphasised that the "Whole of Government" approach championed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has redefined tourism, fostering unity and economic growth.

Maha Kumbh 2025 stands as a beacon of faith, sustainability, and innovation, bridging cultures and creating an enduring legacy for India's tourism landscape. **BOIT**

*Union Culture and Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat lauded Maha Kumbh 2025 as a symbol of India's cultural unity and spiritual vibrancy, commending the exceptional efforts in hosting one of the world's largest religious gatherings. He emphasized the event's role in promoting tourism and showcasing India's heritage on a global stage.*

**Rai Umraopati Ray**

  
**MAYFAIR**  
Spring Valley Resort  
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## A LIFETIME EXPERIENCE

Assam, the jewel of East India, has been ranked 4th on The New York Times list of "52 Places to Visit in 2025", highlighting its unparalleled natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and iconic landmarks. From the timeless charm of Charaideo Moidams, also known as the Pyramids of Assam, to the lush tea gardens that define the state, Assam offers a truly extraordinary experience.

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# Incredible India at Maha Kumbh 2025: A Cultural and Spiritual Extravaganza

*Mugdha Sinha, Director General of Tourism, shares insights on the Ministry of Tourism's remarkable efforts and the overwhelming response at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. For the first time, the Ministry has set up its Incredible India Pavilion, showcasing India's rich cultural and spiritual heritage while facilitating an immersive experience for global and domestic audiences.*

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

The Ministry of Tourism has set up its Incredible India Pavilion at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj for the first time this year, with the aim of facilitating VIP guests, high-profile dignitaries, foreign tourists, photographers, travel content creators, influencers, photo-journalists, scholars, researchers, and professionals from both the government and private sectors. This initiative aims to bring together the entire community and fraternity interested in this event.

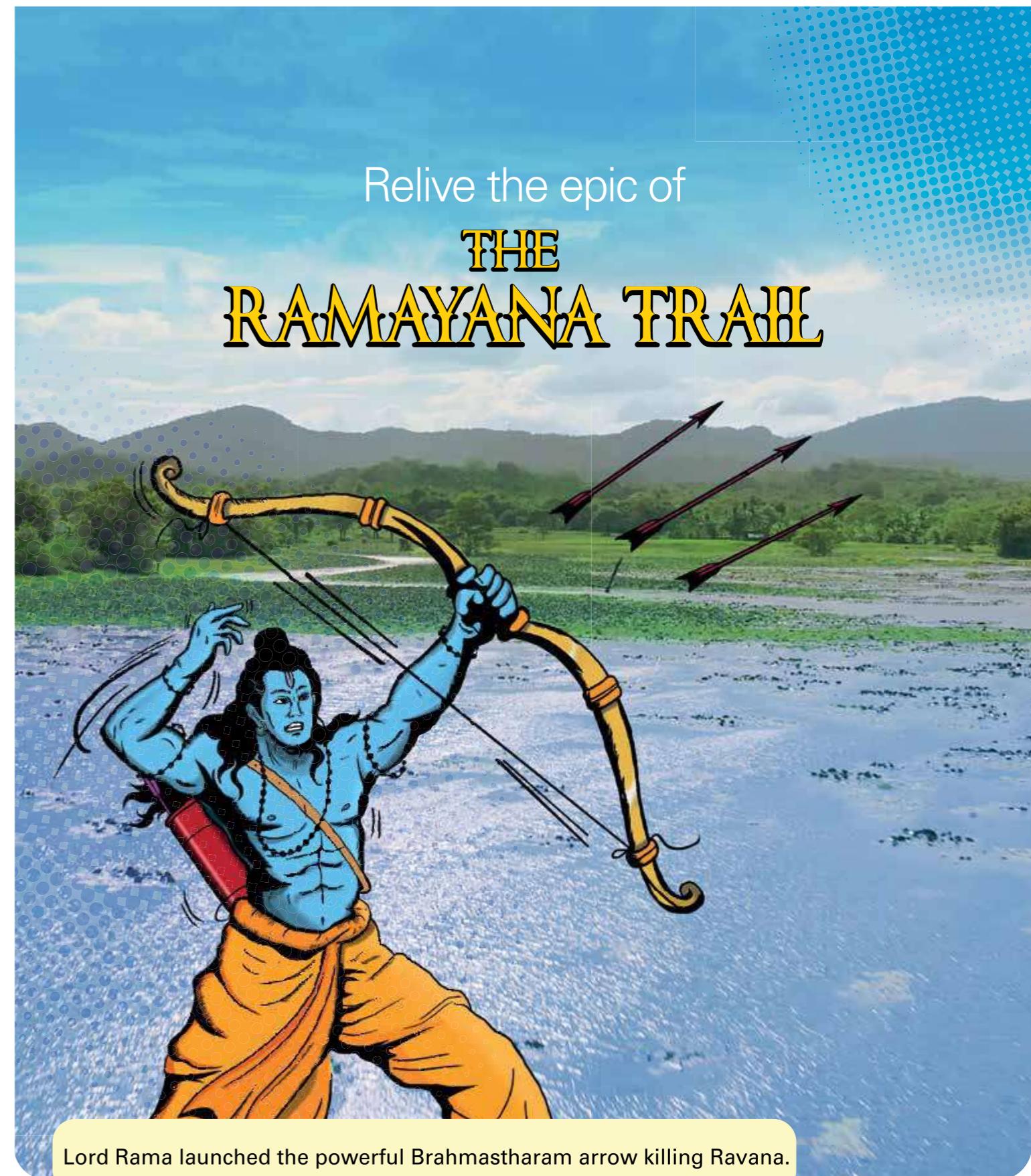
The Maha Kumbh is India's largest and most continuous cultural event, rich with an antiquarian feel rooted in tradition, while also embracing a modern outlook. We are providing all kinds of basic amenities that tourists and travellers might need. This initiative exemplifies the vision shared by Martin Luther King Jr. when he said that, "I can go to any country as a tourist, but when I come to India, my travels are more of a pilgrimage." The Maha Kumbh in 2025 beautifully encapsulates this sentiment about India.

Additionally, it is significant because on December 21st last year, at India's request, the

United Nations has declared December 21 as the International Day of Meditation—six months after the International Day of Yoga on June 21. This reinforces the global importance of meditation and India's role in this tradition.

The Maha Kumbh offers a unique meditative space, where the "method in the madness" comes to life. The confluence of three sacred rivers—the Ganga, Yamuna, and the subterranean Saraswati—at the Triveni Sangam enhances the spiritual and cultural experience. India has long celebrated the harmonious relationship between nature and culture, which continues to be a core aspect of our philosophical and cultural identity.

This is a wonderful opportunity for tourism to tap into our rich natural and cultural value system—something that many countries, particularly from the East, have adopted or learned from. We are working in partnership with UP Tourism and the Mela Adhikari, and have actively collaborated across social media to amplify our message. In fact, we are leading this collaboration and have also planned a series of familiarization (fam) trips for influencers. Every week, we are hosting 3 or 4 influencers during the two-month event. Some very prominent names will be participating and showcasing the event, all under the sponsorship of the Ministry of Tourism. **BOIT**



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# IATO hosts 2025's first Luncheon Meet

IATO recently organised its first luncheon meeting of 2025 at The Park, Saket, New Delhi, for its members and media representatives. The gathering provided a platform to discuss the association's progress, address members' concerns, and explore solutions for smoother operations. A key highlight of the meeting was the (then) upcoming Maha Kumbh 2025 in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh as Members were encouraged to participate in this grand spiritual event and experience its unmatched cultural and spiritual significance. Speaking at the event, Rajiv Mehra, President of IATO, shared, "IATO membership has grown by 35%, which is

a significant achievement, especially as memberships in other domestic international organizations have declined. This shows the trust people have in IATO. We are committed to doing more for our members, such as organising knowledge sessions like today's.

These sessions help members stay informed and equip them to guide their foreign agents better. I am confident we will achieve even more this year." Adding to this, Ravi Gosain, Vice President of IATO, said, "We are thrilled to see such an enthusiastic turnout at our first luncheon meeting of 2025. It's great to see our membership growing, which is a positive

sign for the year ahead. The Maha Kumbh is not just a spiritual gathering; it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for everyone to witness and cherish an event of this magnitude."

Further elaborating on the Maha Kumbh, IATO Secretary Sanjay Razdan remarked, "The Maha Kumbh is being held from January 14 to February 26, 2025, and we are expecting over 400 million visitors. To prepare, IATO is working to educate members about the facilities available at the event. Events like the Kumbh require thorough information sharing as most facilities are temporary. It's crucial to guide members on how tourists will travel to and within the camps in Prayagraj. The Maha Kumbh is not just a religious event; it's a cultural experience that happens once in 144 years. We are all excited and blessed to be part of this extraordinary occasion." **BOTT**



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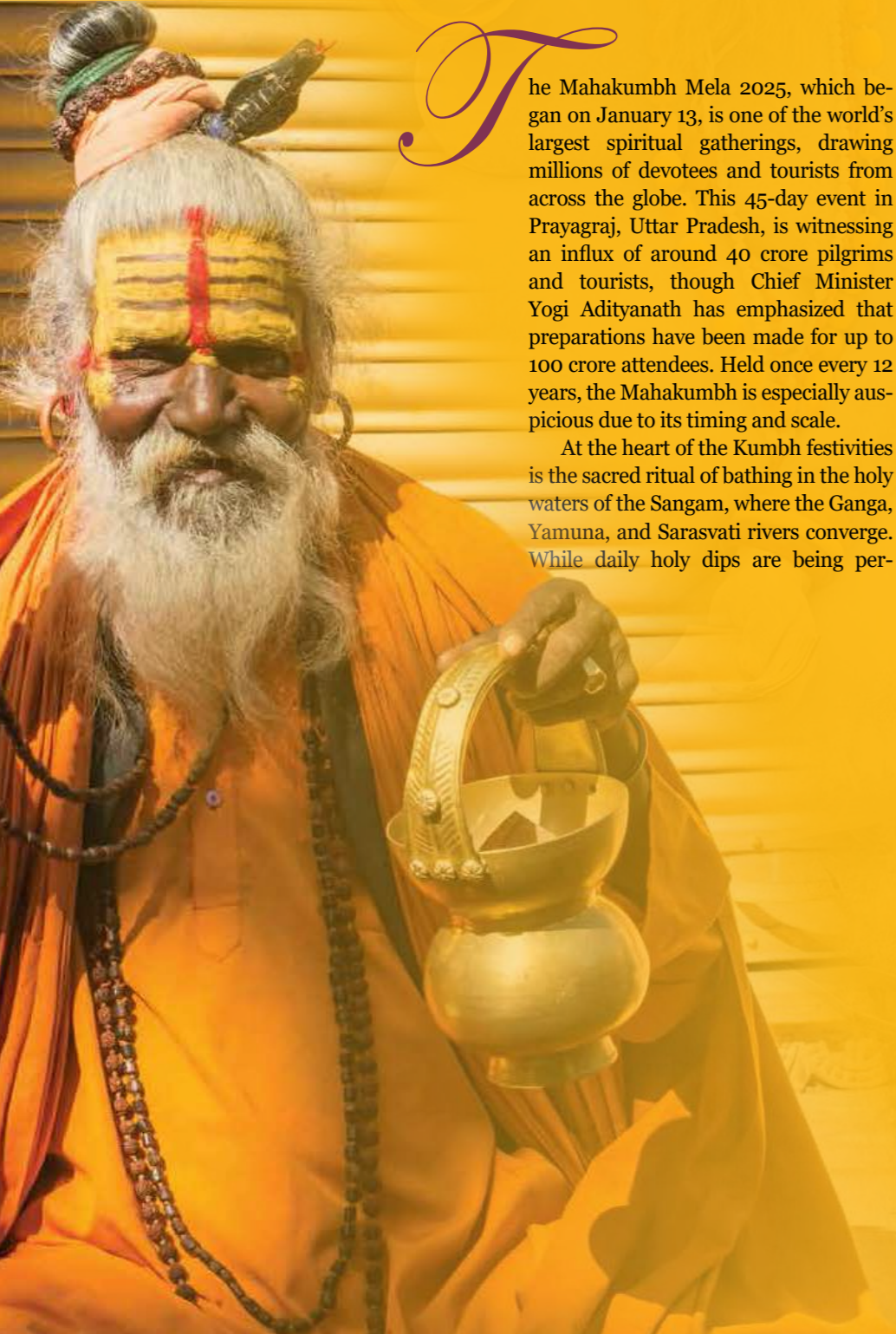
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# Mahakumbh 2025

## A Global Convergence of Culture, Spirituality and Tourism



The Mahakumbh Mela 2025, which began on January 13, is one of the world's largest spiritual gatherings, drawing millions of devotees and tourists from across the globe. This 45-day event in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, is witnessing an influx of around 40 crore pilgrims and tourists, though Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has emphasized that preparations have been made for up to 100 crore attendees. Held once every 12 years, the Mahakumbh is especially auspicious due to its timing and scale.

At the heart of the Kumbh festivities is the sacred ritual of bathing in the holy waters of the Sangam, where the Ganga, Yamuna, and Sarasvati rivers converge. While daily holy dips are being per-

formed, special Shahi Snan (royal baths) are taking place on select auspicious dates, including Paush Purnima (January 13), Makar Sankranti (January 14), Mauni Amavasya (January 29), Basant Panchami (February 3), Maghi Purnima (February 12), and Mahashivratri (February 26).

### A City for 40 Crore Visitors and Beyond

A massive, temporary city has been established to accommodate the influx of visitors. Spanning 4,000 hectares along the banks of the Sangam, the area houses 150,000 tents, 3,000 kitchens, 145,000 restrooms, and 99 parking lots. A key focus of the event is ensuring cleanliness and sanitation, in alignment with India's Swachh Bharat mission. The site is equipped with 10 walk-behind sweeping machines, over 150,000 toilets, 25,000 dustbins, and 5,000 urinals, all serviced by 160 waste management vehicles. Additionally, two battery-operated vacuum litter pickers are maintaining cleanliness across the grounds. The advanced sanitation systems, which have cost between ₹45-50 lakh, are essential for managing such a large-scale event.

Electricity needs are also a major consideration. Authorities have installed 450,000 new electricity connections to meet the enormous demand, which surpasses the monthly consumption of 100,000 apartments in the region.

### Seamless Connectivity and Security

The crowd at the Sangam is immense, and ensuring smooth transportation is critical. Indian Railways has introduced

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98 special trains, offering 3,300 trips during the festival to ferry visitors, in addition to regular trains connecting Prayagraj with other regions. Due to the packed nature of the event, attendees should be prepared for significant foot traffic in the area.

In terms of security, over 40,000 police personnel, along with cybercrime experts, are working in tandem with artificial intelligence (AI) surveillance to ensure safety and assist attendees. To handle any medical emergencies, the event is equipped with 125 road ambulances, seven river ambulances, and air ambulances for swift responses.

### MY EXPERIENCE...

As a jaded tourism professional who has travelled the world and had the privilege of encountering some of the world's most incredible experiences, the Maha Kumbh will probably stand out as one of the most unforgettable ones. Aside from the fact that the Maha Kumbh holds the highest spiritual significance and it's a once in a lifetime event etc. etc., my biggest takeaway was the highly impressive management of this mega event. Handling the entire population of Australia on any given day in an area 1/10 the size of Chennai is an incredible accomplishment in itself, but the spotlight needs to be on the way the Kumbh is managed, in a word – flabbergasting. Credit has to be given where credit is due, I have never witnessed more polite and professional police and security personnel anywhere, especially not while managing crowds of this size. Clearly the mandate is well-defined. The temporary infrastructure created is nothing short of extraordinary. This has truly been a journey of discovery on many levels.

—Rohit Kohli, Joint Managing Director, Creative Travel

### International Attention and Tourism Opportunities

The Mahakumbh Mela is drawing global interest, with over 15 lakh foreign tourists currently attending. The Ministry of Tourism has actively promoted the event at international tourism expos and invited foreign dignitaries and representatives to witness the grand spiritual gathering. A dedicated Incredible India Pavilion has been set up to accommodate foreign visitors, scholars, and the Indian diaspora. Spanning 5,000 square feet, the pavilion offers an immersive experience, showcasing India's rich cultural heritage and the spiritual significance of the Kumbh. The pavilion also features the Dekho Apna Desh People's Choice Poll, where visitors can vote for their favourite tourism destinations in India. Additionally, facilities such as Ayurveda, Yoga, and Panchakarma are being offered, allowing visitors to experience holistic wellness during their time at the Kumbh.

As the world's largest spiritual gathering, Mahakumbh 2025 is not only a religious event but also a celebration of India's cultural and spiritual essence, offering a transformative experience for all who attend. **BOTT**



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Yashshree Imperial , Siliguri



Yashshree Accom Kanyam, Nepal

## YASHSHREE Category



Sumitel , Darjeeling



Sumitel Queen's Yard, Darjeeling



Sumitel Vista , Darjeeling



Sumitel JB Park, Darjeeling ( Coming Soon )



Sumitel Shangrila, Gangtok



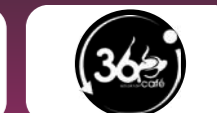
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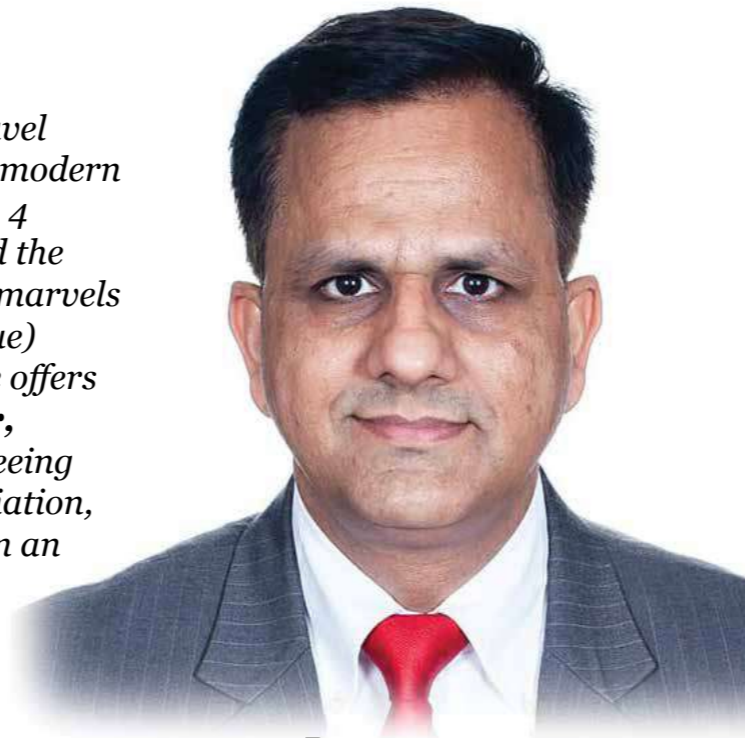
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Gujarat is transforming itself into a holistic travel destination by leveraging its cultural richness, modern infrastructure, and innovative initiatives. With 4 UNESCO Heritage Sites, such as Dholavira and the historic city of Ahmedabad, alongside modern marvels like the Statue of Unity (the world's tallest statue) and Asia's longest ropeway at Girnar, the state offers unparalleled diversity. **Dr. Rajender Kumar**, Secretary to the Government of Gujarat, overseeing Tourism, Devasthanam Management, Civil Aviation, and Pilgrimage shares more about his vision in an exclusive chat with **BOTT**

Anjali Pokhriyal



# Gujarat celebrates its identity through vibrant festivals and cultural experiences

**W**hat are the key strategies Gujarat Tourism is adopting to position the state as a holistic travel destination in 2025

Key strategies include the AATI-THYAM portal and Project Moni-

toring System (PMS), which tracks real-time tourist footfall across 150+ destinations, helping refine visitor experiences. Iconic destination development projects focus on regions like Greater Gir, Rann of Kutch, and Ekta Nagar, ensuring global appeal. The Gujarat Tourism Policy 2021-2025 incentivizes investment in wellness resorts, heritage properties, and adventure tourism. Notable initiatives like tent city developments in Dhordo and eco-tourism in Saputara enhance the visitor experience while prioritizing sustainability.

Gujarat's world-class infrastructure includes four international airports, nine domestic airports, and a network of national and state highways exceeding 21,000 km. These connectivity enhancements, combined with focused campaigns on heritage, eco, and cinematic tourism, position



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## SPOTLIGHT

Gujarat as a seamless blend of heritage and modernity.

### What measures is Gujarat Tourism taking to enhance women's safety and security across the state's tourist destinations?

Safety is a cornerstone of Gujarat Tourism's vision, with a strong emphasis on creating a secure environment for women travellers. Gujarat is ranked among the best in safety and security by the NCRB report, reflecting the state's commitment to protecting its visitors. Ensuring safety, particularly for women travellers, is a top priority for Gujarat Tourism. The state has introduced several proactive measures to create a secure and welcoming environment across its tourist destinations.

The programs like Abhayam 181 Women Helpline, Mahila Police Volunteer Scheme, Police Station-Based Support Centres, etc, ensuring that women travellers feel secure and supported. State Disaster Relief Force (SDRF) centres are being established at prominent coastal destinations to respond swiftly to emergencies. The Pathik Portal plays a crucial role in verifying homestays, ensuring safe and reliable accommodations for women travellers. Enhanced monitoring through advanced surveillance systems at major attractions further strengthens security.

Gujarat's commitment to safety is reflected in its consistent efforts to integrate technology, infrastructure, and human resources to provide a secure travel experience, empowering women to explore the state with confidence and peace of mind.

### Gujarat is known for its vibrant festivals and cultural richness. How is the state leveraging its unique traditions and events to promote tourism on a larger scale, both domestically and internationally?

Gujarat celebrates its identity through vibrant festivals and cultural experiences that resonate both domestically and globally. The state is renowned for hosting more than 300 fairs and festivals annually, including Rann Utsav, Navratri (featuring UNESCO-listed Garba), and the International Kite Festival. These events showcase Gu-

jarat's diverse arts, crafts, and traditions, from Bandhani textiles to intricate Patola weaves.

Cultural landmarks such as the Sun Temple at Modhera, which now features a popular light and sound show, and spiritual circuits like Krishna Corridor and Shakti Corridor, complement the festive offerings. Through robust international marketing campaigns, Gujarat ensures global visibility for its traditions, attracting millions of tourists annually. In 2023 alone, 170 million domestic tourists and 24 million international visitors explored the state.

Gujarat's festivals are immersive experiences where travellers can dance, savour local delicacies, and connect with the rich history of the region. This makes the state as place where life is a celebration.

**Safety is a cornerstone of Gujarat Tourism's vision, with a strong emphasis on creating a secure environment for women travellers. Gujarat is ranked among the best in safety and security by the NCRB report, reflecting the state's commitment to protecting its visitors.**

### With the growing demand for MICE and Destination Weddings, how is Gujarat Tourism positioning itself as a preferred choice in these segments?

Gujarat has emerged as a prime destination for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions) and luxury weddings, thanks to its advanced infrastructure and diverse settings. The Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre, Ekta Nagar, and venues like Tent City in Rann of Kutch and Mandvi cater to large-scale events with state-of-the-art facilities. The state's commitment to sustainable luxury is reflected in the Blue Flag-certified Shivrajpur Beach, ideal for upscale beachfront weddings.

Under the Gujarat Tourism Policy 2021-2025, capital subsidies encourage investment in resorts and event

spaces. High-profile events, such as the Filmfare Awards 2024, have highlighted Gujarat's ability to host global gatherings. From corporate conventions to grand celebrations, Gujarat's unique blend of modern venues and cultural backdrops makes it the perfect choice for unforgettable events.

### What new campaigns or promotions is Gujarat Tourism launching to attract its target audiences, and how is the state engaging with younger travellers and international markets?

Gujarat Tourism is actively engaging younger audiences and international travellers through dynamic campaigns and innovative strategies. The Gujarat Tourism portal provides tourists with personalized travel planning tools, offering insights into destination footfall

and attractions. Digital campaigns showcase Gujarat's breathtaking locales, including the Blue Flag-certified Shivrajpur Beach, and highlight adventure activities like paragliding and trekking in the Saputara Hills.

The state also emphasises cinematic tourism, attracting filmmakers to iconic sites like the Statue of Unity and Dholavira. High-profile events like the upcoming Coldplay concerts in January 2025 and Rann Utsav engage millennials and Gen Z travellers. Participation in global expos and partnerships with international tourism boards amplify Gujarat's global visibility. With initiatives like the development of eco-tourism policies and support for sustainable luxury travel, Gujarat is not just a destination—it's an experience designed for the modern traveller. **BOTT**

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# Madhya Pradesh rolls out the red carpet to strategically attract global tourists in 2025

From hosting seasonal Influencer Meets in 2025 to showcase offbeat destinations to actively participating in international travel trade shows and conferences to connect with key stakeholders and promote Madhya Pradesh as a destination, there is much that Madhya Pradesh Tourism is doing in its endeavour to attract more tourists to the destination. In an exclusive chat with **BOTT**, **Smt. Bidisha Mukherjee**, Additional Managing Director of Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board shares more.

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

**What is your vision for Madhya Pradesh Tourism by 2025, and how do you plan to position the state as a leading destination for both domestic and international travellers?**

The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board will host seasonal Influencer Meets in 2025 to showcase offbeat destinations & create unique travel stories leveraging OTT and digital platforms. Besides Gandhisagar, Chanderi and Kuno, plans are underway to launch new tourist destinations. As a comprehensive destination promotion program, diverse destination promotional events like year-round tent cities with cultural and adventure activities at Mandu, Orchha, Tamia and others will be implemented. As 'Moh Liya Re' starring Pankaj Tripathi captured nationwide attention in 2024 with 1,460,926 views as of now, another TVC featuring international Sitar adroit Anoushka Shankar is in the pipeline to enhance international appeal. Additionally, a comprehensive Destination Handbook is being curated to showcase the state's captivating attractions. To stay ahead of the curve, Madhya Pradesh embraces technology by creating 360-degree VR videos, audiobooks, and digital tours to engage a wider audience.

**Could you highlight your key strategies to enhance tourism infrastructure, improve connectivity, and ensure a seamless experience for visitors across the state?**

In 2024, Madhya Pradesh emerged as a leading tourist destination, welcoming over 13 crore visitors. This surge, driven by a record 7.25 crore pilgrims to Ujjain's Mahakal temple, solidified the

state's position as a global spiritual tourism hub. Madhya Pradesh has achieved a significant milestone in heritage preservation. Plans are underway to expand PM Shri Paryatan Vayu Seva. Bhopal is set to receive a state-of-the-art convention centre worth ₹100 crore near Minto Hall. Orchha's heritage is a priority and the state is committed to preserving Orchha's historical significance while promoting tourism with investment of ₹100 crore to support sustainable development in the region. Furthermore, the state is actively pursuing UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status for the Bhagoria dance, Gond painting, and Narmada Parikrama.

**Please share details regarding any new promotional campaigns or marketing strategies that are being planned to showcase Madhya Pradesh's diverse offerings to a global audience?**

Madhya Pradesh has plans to strategically attract global tourists in 2025. The state tourism board is working on an 'Outreach Programs' to build a connection with sources market and leverage global reach. We aim to actively participate in international travel trade shows and conferences to connect with key stakeholders and promote Madhya Pradesh as a destination. Lately, we are planning to participate in FITUR, International tourism trade fair at IFEMA Madrid and ITB at Berlin to showcase its tourism offerings and connect with potential partners. The board is planning to organize roadshow in Barcelona post FITUR to promote Madhya Pradesh to travel agents, tour operators, and media. The roadshows will highlight the state's

unique experiences and encourage partnerships.

**Are there particular regions or tourism segments in Madhya Pradesh, such as eco-tourism, heritage tourism, or wellness tourism, that you are focusing on for special promotion or development?**

Sarsi Island Resort situated in the backwater region of Bansagar Dam in Shahdol district, the resort is close to prominent tourist destinations like Bandhavgarh National Park and divine Maihar. Visitors can expect a unique and memorable experience at this eco-circuit destination, aimed at promoting regional tourism. The resort has modern facilities & boasts three boat clubs, offering thrilling water sports experiences. 10 eco-huts have been built, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the natural beauty for accommodations. An attractive restaurant caters to food enthusiasts, while a modern conference room is perfect for corporate and other events amid nature. Apart from this, health and recreation facilities include a gym, library and a play area for children ensuring a wholesome experience for all age groups.

**How does Madhya Pradesh Tourism plan to collaborate with private players, local communities, and international organisations to drive sustainable tourism and create lasting economic benefits for the state?**

The state is collaborating with private players, local communities to drive sustainable tourism and create lasting economic benefits through initiatives including cruise tourism, rural tourism, wellness tourism, heritage tourism, eco-tourism and many more. Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board aims at enhancing experiential tourism in Madhya Pradesh. We are working in expansion of homestays to 350 by 2025 to provide authentic rural experiences and allowing tourists to immerse themselves in local culture and lifestyle. Thereafter, develop-

**Madhya Pradesh has plans to strategically attract global tourists in 2025. The state tourism board is working on an 'Outreach Programs' to build a connection with sources market and leverage global reach. We aim to actively participate in international travel trade shows and conferences to connect with key stakeholders and promote Madhya Pradesh as a destination.**

ment work in 40 villages along the Narmada River, including the establishment of 17 homestays, will promote river-based tourism and offer unique experiences. The focus on textile tourism in Maheshwar, Unchehra, and Bherugarh will allow visitors to experience traditional weaving techniques, interact with skilled artisans, and purchase authentic handicrafts. And with an intent to develop Ujjain as a skydiving hub, along with the Skydiving Festival in Ujjain, hot air ballooning and paramotoring will attract adventure enthusiasts and provide thrilling experiences.



*Kazin DMC is on an ambitious journey to transform from a leading India-focused DMC to a global player. Currently catering to 13 source markets, the company is expanding its reach and enhancing its services to cater to a wider audience worldwide. Their vision is to become a trusted global destination management brand, delivering seamless and memorable experiences. The man behind it all – **Rohit Shorey**, Founder and CEO, Kazin DMC shares his plans and vision with **BOTT**.*

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**



## KAZIN DMC

### Expanding Reach and enhancing Services to cater to wider audience worldwide

*How have destinations like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia performed in 2024 from an Indian market perspective? Have they seen significant growth in tourist arrivals?*

In 2024, these destinations witnessed significant growth in Indian tourist arrivals, driven by improved air connectivity, simplified visa processes, and rising interest in offbeat travel. Overall, strategic marketing, influencer collaborations, and targeted campaigns have fuelled this growth. We have seen a growth of 300% in 2024 figures as compared to figures of 2023.

*Have you observed any noticeable shifts in travel trends or preferences among Indian travellers to these destinations over the past year?*

Indian travellers increasingly seek unique experiences, leading to a rise in adventure, ski, and golf tourism. Destinations like Gudauri (Georgia) and

Shymbulak (Kazakhstan) have become popular for skiing, while Azerbaijan and Georgia attract golf enthusiasts. Simplified visa policies and better connectivity have boosted accessibility, with these destinations also gaining popularity for MICE, weddings, and their less-crowded appeal. This reflects a clear shift toward experiential and niche travel options.

*What is the primary type of traffic you cater to for these destinations—MICE, weddings, or leisure? Is there a particular segment driving the majority of bookings?*

The primary traffic to destinations like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia is a balanced mix of MICE, weddings, and leisure travel. MICE and weddings drive the majority of bookings due to their high-value group travel nature, with these destinations offering affordability, stunning venues, and excellent facilities. Leisure

travel, especially for unique experiences like skiing and cultural tours, is steadily growing.

*What are your future plans for Kazin DMC? Are there specific initiatives or campaigns you're planning to further strengthen your presence in the Indian market?*

Kazin DMC is expanding its presence in the Indian market through targeted campaigns promoting adventure, cultural, and ski tourism. Key initiatives include introducing school tours for educational and cultural exchanges, enhancing MICE and wedding offerings,



and strengthening partnerships with Indian travel agencies. The company is also increasing its sales force by establishing regional sales teams and conducting more roadshows across India to directly engage with travel partners. Improved air connectivity and tailored packages are central to Kazin DMC's strategy to cater to diverse traveller segments.

*Are you planning to add new destinations to your portfolio in the near future? If so, which ones, and what makes them attractive to Indian travellers?*

Kazin DMC plans to add Armenia to its portfolio, leveraging the introduction of direct flights from India and its close proximity to Georgia. Armenia's rich cultural heritage, historic landmarks,

and scenic landscapes make it a perfect complement to Georgia for combined itineraries. This addition offers Indian travellers a seamless experience of exploring two culturally vibrant and picturesque destinations in a single trip.

*With increased competition in the DMC space, what sets Kazin DMC apart when it comes to offering bespoke destination management solutions? How do you ensure a seamless experience for your clients?*

Kazin DMC stands out by owning and operating its offices across destinations, ensuring consistent service and direct local expertise. We have our own fleet of vehicles, providing reliable and seamless transportation, and employ specialised teams for each destination, offering expert advice and tailored itineraries.

These unique advantages ensure superior service quality, personalised experiences, and a trusted partnership for clients.

*Is there any more information that you would like to share with us?*

Kazin DMC is on an ambitious journey to transform from a leading India-focused DMC to a global player. Currently catering to 13 source markets, we are expanding our reach and enhancing our services to cater to a wider audience worldwide. Our vision is to become a trusted global destination management brand, delivering seamless and memorable experiences across all our destinations. With ongoing innovations and a focus on excellence, we are committed to achieving this milestone in the near future. **BOTT**

## ONE ABOVE GLOBAL: ‘Truly Yours’ – A Promise of Personalised and Exceptional Experiences

The vision for One Above Global in 2025 is to elevate the company to the next level by expanding its destinations, services, and engagement. The focus will not only be on growing the portfolio but also on highlighting the uniqueness of each destination, aiming to capture the attention of both large agents and reach into tier 2 and tier 3 markets. **B.A. Rahim**, Founder, One Above Global shares more about the year gone by and plans for the future in an exclusive chat with **BOTT**.

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

*How has the year 2024 been for One Above DMC? Could you share some key milestones or achievements that stand out for the company?*

Year 2024 was an exciting year for One Above Global DMC, filled with achievements that truly reflect our commitment to creating exceptional travel experiences. We expanded into new destinations such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and Egypt, along with Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet, while continuing to promote established favourites like Langkawi and the Maldives. A key milestone for us was being recognised at TTM Maldives by Adaaran Resorts, which was a proud moment for our team.

On the trade front, we actively participated in events like the MTF Cricket League 2024 and hosted several FAM trips and networking events to strengthen relationships within the travel fraternity. Collaborations were another highlight, with celebrity trips like Sunny Leone’s Maldives getaway

and Shakti Mohan’s ‘Dance with the World’ campaign in Dubai. These initiatives allowed us to bring experiential travel to life, offering travellers unique connections with destinations.

Additionally, we’ve bolstered our team with experienced professionals such as Saroj Jenna, our new COO, who brings 15 years of expertise in managing operations and sales, and Pravin Yadav, our CTO, who is developing a world-class portal with a decade of technical experience. This strategic growth in leadership further strengthens our ability to deliver top-notch services to our clients.

*What trends have you observed in the travel industry this year, particularly in the destinations and services that One Above DMC specialises in?*

This year, we’ve seen a strong demand for unique and experiential travel, especially in the destinations we specialise in. Travelers are seeking more than just sightseeing—they want immersive cul-

tural experiences, off-the-beaten-path adventures, and personalised itineraries. Places like Saudi Arabia, Oman, Jordan, and Egypt have gained popularity for their rich heritage and authentic experiences, while Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet are drawing attention for their spiritual and natural appeal.

We’ve also noticed a growing interest in multi-generational travel, where families are traveling together to create meaningful memories. Additionally, wellness and sustainable travel are on the rise, with people wanting to connect with nature and prioritise their well-being. As a DMC, we’ve focused on tailoring our services to meet these evolving preferences, ensuring every journey we create feels personal and enriching.

*Are there any new destinations or services you are planning to add to your portfolio? How do you see these additions enhancing your offerings?*

At One Above Global, growth and expansion are part of who we are. We’re always exploring new opportunities to bring unique and enriching experiences to travellers. Whether it’s wellness getaways, culinary adventures, or immersive cultural journeys, we’re focused on creating offerings that resonate with today’s travellers. These new additions will allow us to cater to diverse preferences while ensuring each journey is meaningful and unforgettable.

*One Above DMC is known for delivering exceptional experiences. How are you ensuring that your services continue to meet the evolving expectations of travellers?*

At One Above DMC, ‘Truly Yours’ isn’t just a tagline—it’s a promise to deliver personalised and exceptional experiences every step of the way. We stay ahead of evolving traveller expectations by listening closely to their preferences and curating services that go beyond the ordinary. From tailored itineraries to immersive experiences that connect travellers with local cultures, we ensure every journey feels unique and meaningful. Our focus is always on creating moments that leave a lasting impression, staying true to our commitment to being ‘Truly Yours’.

*As we look ahead, what is your vision for One Above DMC in 2025, and what strategies will you implement*



*to achieve these goals?*

Taking One Above Global to the next level in terms of destinations, services, and engagement is our vision for 2025. We will focus on not just expanding our portfolio but also on promoting the uniqueness of each destination, capturing the attention of both large agents and tapping into tier 2 and tier 3 markets. Our strategy will include building a team of specialists equipped to handle large MICE movements and wedding groups, ensuring we can deliver exceptional experiences at scale. By continuing to deepen our relationships with trade partners and focusing on highly personalised, immersive travel experiences, we aim to reach new heights and cater to the evolving needs of travellers.

*What is your perspective on the overall growth of the travel and*

*tourism industry? Are there any challenges or opportunities you foresee impacting your business and the industry at large?*

Travel is not just about destination; it’s about the journey, and that journey continues to evolve. The growth of the travel industry is strong, with more travellers seeking personalised and customised experiences. This creates opportunities for DMCs like us to offer tailored services that stand out.

However, challenges like rising costs and global uncertainties remain. But we view these challenges as opportunities to innovate—by offering more flexible options, enhancing digital engagement, and refining the overall experience. At One Above Global, we’re focused on using these shifts to elevate our services and strengthen our relationships with both travellers and partners. **BOTT**



# GRNConnect

## Shaping the Future of Travel Tech with Innovation and Global Reach

*GRNConnect has firmly established itself as a key player in the travel tech space, continuously strengthening its position as a leader in the B2B travel industry. Over the past year, the company has achieved several milestones, including serving over 35,000 registered agents in India and 10,000 globally. With a commitment to innovation, multilingual capabilities, and a growing portfolio of services, GRNConnect is set to redefine the future of travel technology. Deepak Narula, Managing Director, GRNconnect shares more...*

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**



**GRN Connect has established itself as a prominent player in the travel tech space. How has the company performed over the past year, and what have been the key highlights of your journey so far?**

GRNconnect continues to strengthen its position as a leading player in the B2B travel space, achieving significant milestones. The company serves over 35,000 registered agents in India and 10,000 globally, reinforcing its presence as a global brand. It will offer multilingual capabilities on its platform, starting with Spanish, to cater to a diverse audience and expand accessibility. GRNconnect has also introduced GRNExperts, a new business vertical aimed at giving back to the travel industry by training travel professionals, students, and travel entrepreneurs and diversifying its portfolio.

With a consolidated global hotel inventory sourced from over 85+ sup-

pliers and partnerships with more than 500 API clients worldwide, the company ensures seamless booking experiences. Operating in 16 countries, including key markets like the USA and UAE, GRNconnect leverages state-of-the-art technology to reflect its commitment to innovation and excellence. These ongoing accomplishments underscore its dedication to growth and delivering exceptional value to its partners.

**What is GRNConnect's long-term vision, and how do your core values guide your approach to providing innovative solutions for the travel industry?**

GRNconnect's long-term vision is to establish itself as a global leader in the travel tech space by continuously enhancing its platform, expanding its network, and delivering exceptional value to its partners. The company aims to provide innovative, seamless, and ef-

ficient solutions that empower travel agents and partners worldwide.

Being Tech first, fostering strong relationships with suppliers and clients, and prioritizing the needs of its partners, GRNconnect ensures it remains at the forefront of the industry. These values drive the company's mission to create a future where travel planning is more accessible, reliable, and efficient for everyone.

**Are there any plans to expand GRNConnect's portfolio, reach, or services in the near future? If so, which markets or products are you focusing on?**

Yes, GRNconnect has ambitious plans to expand its portfolio, reach, and services in the near future. The company is focused on strengthening its presence in existing markets while entering new and emerging ones.

Key areas of focus include further enhancing the multilingual capabilities of the platform to cater to a broader audience, with plans to add more languages beyond Spanish. GRNconnect is also working on expanding its GRN-Experts vertical to offer more specialized services and solutions to emerging travel trade professionals and partners. Additionally, the company is exploring opportunities in high-potential markets like Southeast Asia, while consolidating its presence in key regions like the USA and UAE.

**On the product side, GRNconnect aims to integrate advanced technology-driven features, such as enhanced API solutions, to provide an even more seamless booking experience.**

These efforts align with the company's vision of becoming a comprehensive, innovative leader in the global travel tech industry.

**The travel industry is constantly evolving. How is GRN Connect staying ahead of trends and ensuring your offerings remain relevant and competitive in a dynamic market?**

As a technology-driven platform, how does GRNConnect leverage innovation to improve customer experience and support the success of travel agents and partners?

GRNconnect introduces a revamped platform with advanced features de-



signed to enhance user experience and business efficiency. The new comprehensive dashboard provides a centralised view of key metrics, including bookings, cancellations, revenue, and alerts, offering users a clear and concise overview of their business performance.

The platform also boasts an enhanced UI/UX experience, featuring a modernized design and intuitive navigation for seamless operation.

Additionally, the integration of new-age communication channels ensures greater efficiency for agents and businesses by enabling seamless interactions across preferred platforms. These updates underscore GRNconnect's commitment to innovation and empowering its partners with tools to drive productivity and success.

**What is your take on the current state of the travel industry? Are there any emerging trends or developments that you believe will significantly impact the sector in the coming years?**

The travel industry is currently in a state of rapid transformation, driven by advancements in technology and evolving traveller expectations. There is a strong rebound in global travel demand, with a growing emphasis on personalized experiences and sustainable tourism.

Emerging trends such as the integration of AI and machine learning are significantly reshaping the sector, enabling tailored recommendations and seamless booking processes. The rise of digital nomadism and remote work has created new opportunities for long-term travel solutions. Additionally, the industry is witnessing increased adoption of blockchain for secure payments and transparent transactions.

Sustainability is another critical focus, with travellers and companies alike prioritizing eco-friendly practices. These developments, combined with ongoing innovations, are expected to redefine how the travel industry operates in the coming years, creating more efficient, accessible, and customer-centric experiences. **BOTT**

# TAFI Convention 2025: A celebration of Travel, Sustainability, and Cultural Exchange in Vietnam

The TAFI Convention 2025 unfolded with grandeur and vibrancy, bringing together over 260 delegates in Ninh Binh, Vietnam, a land celebrated for its breath-taking landscapes and rich cultural heritage.

Shreya Shimpi

Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has always taken pride in hosting their Convention in unconventional destinations. This year, the TAFI Convention took place from January 17 – 21, 2025 in the exquisite province of Ninh Binh. A relatively unexplored gem of Vietnam, Ninh Binh is the quintessential example of unsurpassable beauty, captivating to-

pography, tranquil lakes, serene pagodas and unmatched hospitality. The theme for the convention, “Tourism for Tomorrow, Protecting the Planet,” emphasised sustainable travel practices, echoing the importance of preserving the planet while fostering global tourism. The Convention was a great mix of engaging business sessions, sightseeing tours, net-



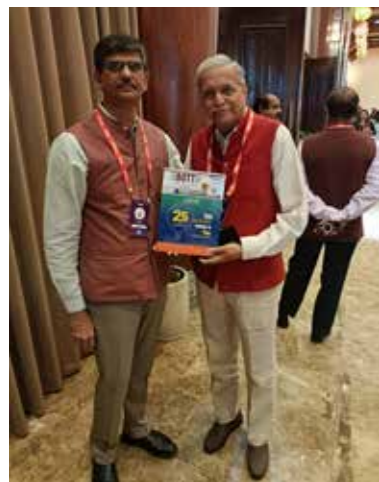
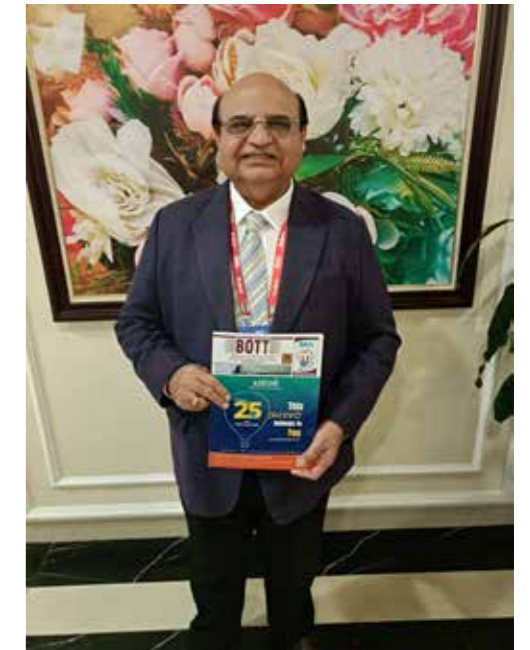
working lunches and lavish dinners.

## Day 1

The inaugural dinner was hosted by Ninh Binh Department of Tourism at Ninh Binh Legend Hotel. The event started with a Welcome Speech by Ajay Prakash, TAFI President in which he said, “TAFI always looks at bringing their members and exposing them to comparatively unconventional destinations. Our countries share a very old and warm bond and it’s the Buddhist idea of a middle path which is what is followed here and in India. The two countries share good business relations which is very important. We have the opportunity to build upon the old ties and connections that our two countries share.”

The TAFI – TravelBiz Monitor Awards were presented to distinguished

members organisations of the travel fraternity. The ‘Game Changer in Global Travel and Mobility’ was presented to Zubin Karkaria, Founder & CEO, VFS Global Group. Some of the other awards presented were ‘Leadership in Hospitality, Design and Innovation’ award to Bjorn DeNiese, Managing Director, Mayfair Elixir, ‘Excellence in Premium Travel & Lifestyle Solutions’ to ‘Liberatha Kallat, Founder, Chairperson & MD – Dreamfolks Services Ltd, ‘25 Years of Sterling Service to the Travel Industry’ award to Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, Asego. The ‘Hall of Fame’ award was presented to Sham Nijhawan, Chairman, NIJHAWAN GROUP. The evening concluded with a traditional Vietnamese cultural performance and a networking dinner.





**Day 2**

Dr. Scott Smith, PhD, USA gave the Key-note Address in which he spoke about the seventeen SDGs-Sustainable Development Goals at the Bai Dinh Pagoda. The first business session was on 'Responsible, Inclusive and Sustainable Tourism' with a distinguished panel of speakers including Shireen Mistree –

Head – ESG, VFS Global, David Van Hove – Faculty, Vin University, Nguyen Thao Van – CFO Dynapath and Ngo Munh Quan – Director Vietravel. The session emphasized the need for sustainable tourism and creating a preserving the planet for the future.

The second session was on the highly debated 'NDC: Boon or Bane?' The speakers were Samual Machado – MD, India & South Asia, Sabre, Manish Puri – Head of Sales, Air India, Ronald Lim – Head of Account Management, SEA, Travelport and Manoj Samuel, CEO and Director, Riya Travel & Tours. The concept of NDC was explained and the need to adapt to the changing technology was highlighted. A sightseeing boat tour was organised to Trang An, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is a pristine landscape complex, a labyrinth of tranquil lakes surrounded by verdant mountains, mystic caves and idyllic natural beauty. The day concluded with a lavish dinner hosted by Vietravel at the stunning Thung Nham Resort.

**Day 3**

The first business session was on 'Generating Revenue from Allied Services' with the following speakers- Liberatha Kallat – Founder, Chairperson and MD – Dreamfolks, Rajan Dua – Founder and MD, Udaan India, Dev Karvat – Founder & CEO Asego, Anahita Avari – Zonal Head West – VFS Global and Prajay Bangur, Head of Business Strategy and Alliances, EbixCash

The second session was on 'Emergent Technologies influencing Customer Travel Behaviour' with Manoj Samuel – CEO & Director – Riya Travel & Tours, Ravi Jakkula – CCO India & Sub-Continent – Amadeus and Bjorn DeNiese MD, Mayfair Elixir sharing their views on emerging technologies, artificial intelligence shaping travel trends and customer needs. A B2B Expo was organised with the Vietnam suppliers. This was followed by a visit to the Tam Chuc Pagoda, the largest pagoda in Southeast Asia. The day concluded with a gala dinner followed by a Vote of Thanks from the TAFI President Ajay Prakash. A lucky draw was held in which the delegates won hotel stays and cruise vouchers for properties across Vietnam. The TAFI Convention 2025 concluded on a successful note. **BOTT**



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# Himanshu Patil

## TAKING THE KESARI LEGACY FORWARD

*With the world as his destination and several accolades to his name, the dynamic **Himanshu Patil**, Director, Kesari Tours and President OTOAI, has carved a niche for himself in the travel fraternity. Celebrating a rich legacy of over 40 years, Kesari Tours is known for curating beautiful travel experiences for travellers and crafting everlasting memories.*

**Shreya Shimpi**

**Looking back on your journey so far, what inspired you to enter the travel industry, and how has it shaped you as a professional?**

My father started this company 40 years ago. I was a kid, and I used to go for fun and to help my parents, which is when I realised how amazing it is to visit different places and meet different people. I enjoyed that and realized that this would be my career path. I wasn't too keen on studying much, but going out was always on my mind. I started conducting tours and taking responsibility at the age of 16, and here I am now.

**Reflecting on 2024, what would you say were the three highlights of the year for you—personally or professionally?**

The first thing we accomplished was creating our Corporate Office in 2024,

which is a major milestone. Secondly, after 2022, we all faced a lot of challenges with visas, but we successfully navigated 2023-24, and the business has grown. Though we haven't yet reached our target numbers, we have surpassed our revenue goals, and we're happy about that. We've exceeded the 2019 revenue figures, which is a great achievement. On a personal front, I have been selected as the new OTOAI President, which now brings additional responsibility.

**What is your long-term vision for Kesari Tours? Could you share a major initiative or change you've been proud to lead?**

We already have a presence in almost all major cities in India as a brand, but we still need to expand to many more cities. In the next one or two years, we

will be a pan-India company. I aim to take our company to a global level by opening international offices and operations, and we are actively working toward that.

I believe in systems, and I personally feel that systems should work efficiently. In the travel industry, the attrition rate is very high, with people often moving for small pay hikes. Since it's a knowledge-based industry, recruiting and training new staff is a lengthy process, so we focus on systems. We have our own software systems.

**What has been your proudest achievement to date, and what keeps you motivated to push boundaries in this industry?**

This industry has given me everything I have today, and I am very happy about that. My father started this company, and we are following in his footsteps and teachings, which is why we are successful. I feel proud to be part of this industry. It's the only industry where you get to visit different countries, and for me, the whole world is my destination. So far, I've travelled to more than 120 countries, and my dream is to visit all the countries before I die.

**If you could pick one dream destination to visit in 2025, where would it be, and why does it captivate you?**

I love Europe. I'm a hardcore self-drive person and enjoy that experience. In addition, there are many countries I wish to explore in Africa and Central America. In 2025, I'd like to visit Tunisia, Malta, and Mongolia. Mongolia, in particular, fascinates me. My goal is to visit 10-15 new countries this year.

**What advice would you give to young professionals in the travel trade who aspire to reach the heights of success you've achieved?**

You have to be passionate about this



You also have to stick to quality service because, as travel agents, we sell hopes. Once the money is paid, the customer only travels a month later without having received a tangible product. When you're selling hopes, you need to be careful and deliver quality service.

**The travel industry has its challenges. What do you find to be the biggest obstacles, and if given the chance, what one change would you make to improve the industry?**

It's a completely dependent business. We don't run airlines or hotels; we're just mediators. If airlines shut down, the responsibility falls on us. There are many challenges because everything is beyond our control, and we're answerable for any issues despite having no control over third parties. Also, the passport ranking of India needs to be stronger.

**Could you tell us a bit about your family and share one cherished childhood memory that still makes you smile?**

I have three siblings, and my father started this business in 1984. My first air travel experience was from Srinagar to Jammu, which I still remember. I used to go on vacations to Kashmir and stay there for nearly two months. Kashmir is a beautiful place and is close to my heart. Most of my school vacations were spent there. **BOTT**

### Quick shots

- **Your Birthday/Sun Sign**—June 18, Gemini
- **Mountains or Beaches**— Both, but I still love the mountains.
- **Favourite Holiday Destination**—Innsbruck
- **Best travel hack**—I travel with my Apple Airtags
- **Window/Aisle seat**—Window
- **Favourite Cuisine**—Thai
- **Favourite Quote**—"It's so difficult when

- I have to and so easy when I want to"
- **Hobbies**— I am a foodie. I wish to learn the piano in 2025
- **Travel souvenirs—love them or leave them** — Take them, they are, after all, a remembrance that I have travelled to a particular place.
- **Best advice for a first-time traveller**—Just go and enjoy. Travel is a habit. If you enjoy your first tour you will continue it as a habit.

# VFS Global wins two prestigious awards at TAFL Convention in Vietnam

The Game-changer in Global Travel and Mobility award and the Excellence in Sustainability award VFS Global, the world's largest outsourcing and technology services specialist for governments and diplomatic missions, bagged two prestigious awards at the Travel Agents Federation of India's (TAFI) annual convention, which took place in January 2025 at the Legend Hotel in the Ninh Binh province of Vietnam.

The first award, the Game-changer in Global Travel and Mobility to VFS Global in recognition of transforming international travel and making travel dreams come true for travellers globally, was presented to Zubin Karkaria, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, VFS Global Group, by Bui Van Manh, Director, People's Committee of Ninh Binh province, Department of Tourism.

The second award was for Excel-


lence in Sustainability. This was in recognition of its unparalleled efforts to integrate sustainability into the core of its business operations and inspire stakeholders in global travel. Sampath Damani, a senior office bearer at TAFI, presented this award to Shireen Mistree, Head, ESG, VFS Global.

Commenting on the awards, Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, said, "The Travel Agents Federation of India is honoured to present VFS Global as the Game-changer in Global Travel and Mobility Award for the company's pioneering and continuous efforts in enhancing cross-border mobility of people and enabling ease of travel in a secure and efficient manner," adding, "We also congratulate them on winning the Excellence in Sustainability award, which aligns with our 2025 convention theme, Tourism for Tomorrow: Protecting the Planet. This achievement highlights their leadership in driving sustainable practices."

On receiving the award, Karkaria said, "Back in 2001 we recognised a significant challenge--securing a visa appointment was a difficult process. We saw an opportunity to simplify and streamline visa applications not just for travellers but also for embassies, by introducing innovative solutions. Recognitions such as this one inspire and energise us to continue building innovative solutions to keep enhancing the visa application experience."



On winning the sustainability award, he added, "It is a recognition of our unwavering commitment to responsible practices. This recognition reflects the collective efforts of our team in driving meaningful impact through sustainable initiatives." **BOTT**






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# Tourism Exchange TEX 2025 brings Industry together at The Westin Pushkar Resort & Spa Pushkar

The Tourism Exchange TEX 2025, hosted by the Tourism India Alliance, concluded with resounding success at the picturesque Westin Pushkar Resort & Spa. The two-day extravaganza, held on January 9–10, 2025, brought together visionaries, industry leaders, and stakeholders from around the globe to discuss, innovate, and shape the future of the tourism industry.

**Pallavi Sharma**



The event opened with an elegant check-in and a cultural immersion experience, setting the tone for an inspiring two days. Guests enjoyed high tea at the serene Nurture Lawn, followed by a grand inaugural ceremony.

The inaugural day's highlight was a captivating presentation by Alka Kapoor from Punjab Tourism. Her insightful session showcased the state's vibrant cultural experiences and diverse destinations, positioning Punjab as an unmissable travel hotspot.

Ras Al Khaimah Tourism took center stage with a compelling presentation on the emirate's luxury offerings, heritage, and thrilling adventures, solidifying its place as a premier global destination. The evening concluded with an immersive cultural program and a lavish gala dinner at the Central Lawns, blending business with cultural exchange.

The second day began with a networking breakfast, fostering connections among attendees. The day's agenda included impactful sessions led by distinguished speakers who shared actionable insights and forward-thinking strategies for the tourism sector.

G B Srithar, Head of Tourism Services at VFS Global, delivered the keynote address, highlighting global tourism trends and the importance of seamless travel services. This was followed by a presentation on The Westin Pushkar Resort & Spa's luxury and experiential offerings, emphasizing its role as a significant





player in Rajasthan's tourism landscape.

Syeda Borchmeyer, from the U.S. Commercial Service, offered strategic insights into strengthening tourism ties between India and the U.S. Her session reinforced the value of international collaboration for sustainable growth.

Hemant Mendiratta, Founder & CEO of One Rep Global, captivated the audience with the "Show Me the Money" session, which focused on strategies to drive profitability in the tourism sector. Anahita Avari from VFS Global delved into the nuances of visa processes, underlining their critical role in boosting international tourism.

The "Weddings & MICE – The India Story" session by Gaurav Sekhri and Manuj Ralhan explored the booming weddings and MICE sectors, while Gaurav Gupta's "Tech Smart" session provided a glimpse into cutting-edge tools shaping tourism's future.

Dr. Manohar Sajani's session on tourism education emphasized the importance of innovation in curricula to prepare the next generation of tourism professionals. Concluding the day, Paritosh Pathak's "Beyond Handshakes" session highlighted the art of building authentic business relationships.

The event culminated in a vote of thanks by Jagdeep Bhagat, President of the Tourism India Alliance, who acknowledged the collective efforts in making TEX 2025 a transformative platform. Final B2B table-top meetings fostered meaningful collaborations, while the Gala Networking Dinner, featuring a fusion of Sufi music, provided a perfect ending. TEX 2025 Pushkar emphasised the importance of innovation, sustainability, and global partnerships. It served as a dynamic platform for knowledge exchange, leaving attendees with renewed optimism and actionable strategies for the future. **BOTT**

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# BENGAL MICE CONCLAVE 2025

## Showcasing Kolkata as South Asia's Premier MICE Destination



The Bengal MICE Conclave 2025, a landmark event in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) sector, is set to take place from February 4 to 6, 2025, at the prestigious ITC Royal Bengal and ITC Sonar, Kolkata. Organized by the India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), in collaboration with the Tourism Department, Government of West Bengal, and the Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS), this conclave aims to position West Bengal as a leading MICE destination in South Asia. The Bengal MICE Conclave is designed to be South Asia's premier networking event for buyers and sellers in the Indian MICE industry, modelled after renowned global events like EIBTM Barcelona and IMEX



ner hosted by the West Bengal Government on February 5, 2025, at Biswa Bangla Convention Centre.

- Insightful Sessions and Exhibitions: Featuring participation from associations, medical and engineering institutes, the corporate sector, and technology firms.
- Valedictory Session: Hosted at the iconic Dhono Dhanyo Auditorium on February 6, 2025.

### Promoting West Bengal as a MICE Destination

This conclave is a one-of-a-kind initiative in the region, showcasing the state's state-of-the-art venues such as the Biswa Bangla Convention Centre, Biswa Bangla Mela Prangan, and Dighashree International Convention Centre. The event empowers Indian associations to attract international counterparts, fostering global collaborations and unlocking India's potential as a leading MICE destination.

"The Bengal MICE Conclave will change the way the world looks at West Bengal and India as MICE destinations. This event is a groundbreaking initiative to bring the best of the global MICE industry to Kolkata. We aim to showcase the state's exceptional potential, foster new partnerships, and solidify its position on the global stage," said Chander Mansharamani, Vice Chairman, ICPB. **BOTT**



**BENGAL MICE CONCLAVE**  
Kolkata, West Bengal  
4th-6th Feb, 2025

Frankfurt. The event is expected to attract over 200-250 hosted buyers, exhibitors, and attendees, including key stakeholders from government departments, ICPB members, and prominent industry leaders.

#### Key highlights include:

- B2B Meetings: Facilitating targeted business interactions between buyers and sellers.
- Reverse Marketing Sessions: Providing sellers with direct access to prospective buyers.
- Exclusive Networking Opportunities: Gala dinner at Taj Tal Kutir on February 4, 2025, and a cultural program and din-

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# AUXILIA NETWORKS

## A personalised boutique consultancy

Auxilia is primarily a B2B consultancy dedicated to enhancing the global knowledge base of the Indian travel trade. Its core mission is to connect Indian travel professionals with potential overseas contacts, fostering increased business opportunities and the expansion of global networks. **Paramjit S. Bawa**, Founder & Principal, Auxilia Networks shares more.

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

### Auxilia's Unique Edge

I believe a successful consultancy business needs to have in-depth knowledge of the market it is in. In India this is especially important because our travel ecosystem is so diverse and complex. One size doesn't fit all. The other vital aspect is a highly developed trade network. Auxilia has both in good measure but we are a small-scale boutique consultancy business with premium clients and products which we see as an advantage because we aren't so big that clients are just clients. We treat them as partners, are invested in their success and being small-scale allows us to be personalised in our approach towards each partner's needs. Of course, new entrants need an extra push in market in the first months – more B2B engagement, training, PR exposure, etc. We structure our plans and allocate resources for them accordingly.

### Vision and Goal for the future

We pride ourselves on our knowledge of how the various segments and geographical regions of India are positioned and how they work, as well as our relationships and network within the Indian travel fraternity. Our ambition is to be recognised as a reliable and trustworthy partner for any overseas entity looking to grow their India business and the above strengths I've mentioned stand us in good stead. I believe our work should speak for us rather than us blowing trumpets about it. So, we have never pitched aggres-

sively for business but have grown organically and in a phased manner. The journey is more important than the destination for us. We don't want to become so big that we lose focus on the core principles that make us valuable for our clients. A key principle we follow is "Don't over-stretch, don't over-commit, don't under-deliver". Growth is bound to happen if one is efficient and sincere, because word gets around in our business.

### Remaining relevant and impactful

Auxilia is primarily a B2B consultancy. At the core of what we do is a commitment to increase the global knowledge base of the Indian travel trade and connect them to potential overseas contacts which will ultimately lead to increased business and global networks for them. At the same time, we are committed to increase engagement with the Indian trade for overseas travel entities. LVG Learning, our UK based e-learning partner, is a key platform that allows us to connect operators in India and overseas via online networking spaces and provides programmes not only for destination learning but personal and professional skill development. It's a medium that benefits both buyers and suppliers and takes members on a journey of knowledge and onward to business dealings. And these are not just simple power points but state-of-the-art interactive modules with google maps, conversational and other technology integrations. Going forward, LVG Learning will continue to be an important part of Auxilia's portfolio. **BOTT**



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# MAYFAIR MORJIM

## Experiencing steady growth and offering exceptional experiences

Mayfair Morjim continues to shine as a beacon of luxury and leisure in Goa's vibrant hospitality landscape. Despite market challenges, the resort has maintained steady growth, offering its guests an exceptional blend of opulence, culinary delights, and heartfelt service. Paul Dhanraj, Resort Manager Mayfair On Sea, Morjim offers a glimpse into the hotel's performance, new initiatives, and distinctive offerings in 2024.

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

**How was the overall performance of the hotel in 2024, particularly in terms of occupancy rates and revenue?**

The year 2024 proved to be successful for Mayfair Morjim, even as Goa experienced a slight slowdown. The resort maintained a consistent growth trajectory in both Average Room Rate (ARR) and occupancy. This resilience can be attributed to its prime beachfront location at Morjim and the trust and loyalty inspired by the Mayfair brand.

**Did the hotel introduce any new services or facilities in 2024?**

This year, Mayfair Morjim embraced collaboration by introducing the renowned Farzi Café for its guests. The café offers a modern twist on Indian cuisine while also serving the signature delights that Mayfair Hotels & Resorts are known for nationwide. With Mayfair expanding its footprint, several similar collaborations are in the pipeline, particularly for its newer and larger properties.

**What is the unique selling proposition (USP) of the hotel that sets it apart from its competitors?**

Mayfair Morjim stands out in Goa's competitive market due to its opulent, luxuriously appointed rooms that are a hallmark of the brand. Complementing this is its exceptional beachfront location on Morjim beach and a



dedicated team that delivers authentic Mayfair service with warmth and care.

**How does the hotel position itself in the market – as a business hotel, a leisure destination, or a combination of both?**

Mayfair Morjim positions itself predominantly as a leisure destination. From the tranquil spa experiences to the sea, sand, and culinary indulgences, the resort promises unparalleled relaxation. However, recognizing the occasional business need, the resort ensures robust Internet connectivity to facilitate virtual meetings and work requirements, blending leisure with convenience.

Mayfair Morjim continues to set benchmarks in hospitality, creating memorable experiences for its guests while solidifying its position as a premier luxury destination in Goa. **BOTT**



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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 January 2025.



March 21 – April 20

This month sparks new beginnings in your career. You'll feel energized and ready to tackle challenges. Avoid impulsive decisions, especially in financial matters. Romantic connections deepen as Venus shines in your favor.



July 23 – August 21

Your confidence will be at an all-time high, making it a great time to chase your goals. Romantic sparks fly, but ensure your partner feels heard. Opportunities for travel or learning may arise.



November 23 – December 22

Adventure calls, whether through travel or learning something new. Financially, it's time to stick to a budget. Singles may meet someone exciting, while those in relationships will enjoy newfound clarity.



April 21 – May 21

February calls for self-care and introspection. Focus on balancing your personal and professional life. Financial rewards come through hard work. Romantic opportunities may arise unexpectedly—be open to new possibilities.



August 22 – September 23

Practicality will be your guiding light this month. Focus on creating routines that support your well-being. A surprise development at work could lead to a promotion. Romance blossoms if you let your guard down.



December 23 – January 20

Your hard work pays off this month, especially in your career. Take time to celebrate small victories. Family matters may require attention, so prioritize meaningful conversations. Love will be steady and fulfilling.



May 22 – June 21

Communication will be your superpower this month. Use it to resolve lingering conflicts. Social gatherings bring joy, but don't neglect alone time to recharge. Career-wise, stay organized for long-term success.



September 24 – October 23

February emphasizes harmony in your relationships. Collaboration at work proves fruitful. Financially, it's a good time to invest or plan for the future. Love takes a positive turn, especially for singles.



January 21 – February 19

With the Sun in your sign, February is your time to shine. Pursue creative projects and don't hesitate to share your ideas. Romantic energy is strong—make bold moves. Financially, avoid unnecessary spending.



June 22 – July 22

February brings a mix of emotions, but trust your intuition to guide you. Family and relationships take centre stage—be ready to offer support. Financially, avoid risks and focus on saving.



October 24 – November 22

This month encourages transformation. Focus on shedding what no longer serves you. Career growth is on the horizon, but patience is key. A romantic partner may need extra attention—listen to their concerns.



February 20 – March 20

Your compassionate nature shines this month. Friends and loved ones may seek your advice. Career-wise, networking brings unexpected opportunities. A romantic connection deepens, bringing warmth and joy.



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## APPOINTMENTS

### WYNDHAM HOTELS & RESORTS

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts has appointed **Rahool Macarius** as Market Managing Director for Eurasia. Rahool will be responsible for regional operations and driving the growth of Wyndham's diverse portfolio of brands across Eurasia covering; India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan and the Maldives. Rahool brings over 25 years of experience including financial acumen, operational excellence, and stakeholder relationship management, developed through leadership roles at a variety of leading hotel groups.



### THE LEELA GANDHINAGAR

The **Leela Gandhinagar** has appointed Rahul Mehta as its new Director of Sales and Marketing. With a stellar career spanning over 15 years, Mehta brings a wealth of experience in sales, marketing and client relationship management. Mehta's expertise encompasses strategic sales planning, stakeholder engagement and finance management, supported by a strong analytical mindset and thorough understanding of P&L management. His diverse experience includes leadership roles at renowned hospitality brands such as Novotel Ahmedabad, Park Hyatt Hyderabad and The LaLiT Hotels, Palaces & Resorts.



### CHALET HOTELS LIMITED

Chalet Hotels Limited has appointed **Gaurav Singh** as its Chief Operating Officer (COO). In his new role, Gaurav will be focusing on asset management, driving operational excellence, ensuring efficiency to strengthen the business and design scalable processes for Chalet Hotels. With a robust portfolio and an ambitious pipeline of additional rooms, Chalet is poised for significant growth, and Gaurav's leadership backed with 26 years of experience in hospitality will play a crucial role in steering this exciting journey.



### IBIS INDIA

ibis India has appointed **Akshay Bhasin** as Director of Revenue for ibis and ibis Styles India. A seasoned expert with 12 years of experience in revenue management, Bhasin's leadership promises to bring fresh perspectives and impactful strategies to the organization. With this appointment, ibis India reinforces its dedication to innovation, growth, and excellence in the hospitality industry. Under Bhasin's leadership, the brand aims to set new benchmarks in revenue performance and guest satisfaction, staying ahead in a competitive market.



### HOLIDAY INN

Holiday Inn **Amritsar Ranjit Avenue** has appointed Ravi Dhankhar as the new General Manager. In his new role, Ravi will oversee all aspects of hotel operations, focusing on enhancing guest satisfaction, improving operational efficiency, and maintaining the hotel's commitment to excellence in service. Ravi brings deep insights into the evolving hospitality landscape of Amritsar, a city known for its rich cultural heritage and a growing magnet for both leisure and business tourism.



### MRG GROUP

**Sandhya Nair** has been appointed as Deputy General Manager Marketing & Communications at MRG Group. Sandhya's expertise spans a broad spectrum of skills essential for her new role, including strong communication abilities, media planning, budget management, corporate communication, brand building, website management and people management. Her outstanding rapport with print, electronic, and online media will continue to be an asset to strengthen brand presence and market reach.



### INDIGO

Indigo has appointed **Rashmi Soni** as Vice President-Corporate Communications (Media & PR). With her extensive industry experience and passion for aviation, Rashmi is set to take IndiGo's communication strategies to new heights, in the role of Vice President - Corporate Communications (Media & PR). She takes over from C. Leekha.



### HILTON AND HILTON GARDEN INN BENGALURU EMBASSY MANYATA BUSINESS PARK

The Hilton and **Hilton Garden Inn Bengaluru Embassy Manyata Business Park** has appointed Pushpinder Chambial as Cluster Director of Finance. He has more than two decades of experience in Finance and Accounting within the hospitality sector and brings an unparalleled expertise and leadership to the organization.



See you at  
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