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Letter from the *Editor's Desk*



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the February SATTE Special Issue of BOTT India!

As we gear up for one of the most significant travel trade events of the year, 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, Goa, Maharashtra Tourism, Gujarat Tourism, and more, shedding light on their strategies for the year ahead.

A key highlight of this edition is a detailed analysis of the Union Budget and its impact on the tourism sector. We bring you exclusive reactions from industry veterans, sharing their perspectives on the allocations, policy shifts, and what they mean for the future of travel and hospitality in India.

Additionally, this issue features exclusive interviews conducted during OTM in Mumbai, capturing the latest trends, business strategies, and innovations shaping the industry. We also bring you special coverage of the Bengal MICE Conclave in Kolkata, organized by ICPB and the West Bengal Government, showcasing the state's potential as a premier MICE destination.

Our popular Mumbai Diaries column continues to spotlight key personalities from the travel industry. This time, we feature a candid conversation with Himanshu Patil from Kesari Tours, delving into his journey and contributions to the sector.

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

We hope this special issue adds value to your SATTE and OTM experience and provides a comprehensive view of the evolving travel industry.

Happy reading, and see you at SATTE! 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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TAIWAN WITNESSED A ROBUST 20% GROWTH FROM INDIA

Latest official figures from Taiwan Tourism administration (TTA), the national tourism agency of Taiwan, show that Indian



market has registered a strong 19.46 per cent growth in visitor arrivals in the first 10 months of 2024. Taiwan has registered a total arrival of 31,766 visitors from India during the January – October 2024 period, a near 20 percent growth over 26,591 visitors from India registered during the same period in 2023.



TÜRKIYE WELCOMED 62.2 MILLION VISITORS IN 2024

Türkiye has reinforced its position as a leading global tourism destination in 2024 as it hosted 62.2 million visitors in 2024, marking a 9.8% year-on-year growth and an impressive 20.3% increase compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019. Tourism revenue reached a historic high of 61.1 billion USD in 2024. The Indian market has emerged as a particularly strong growth driver, with visitor numbers increasing by 20.7% compared to 2023.

MNTO SUCCESSFULLY WRAPS UP ITS SHOWCASE OF MOROCCO AT OTM 2025

The Moroccan National Tourism Office (MNTO) has successfully wrapped up its showcase of Morocco at OTM 2025, with a special focus on the keen interest of the Indian traveller.



The MNTO stand received immense interest from Indian travel professionals, media representatives, and industry stakeholders. During the event, MNTO also hosted a networking evening where key trade operators and media partners were invited.

KENYA PROJECTS 20% GROWTH IN VISITOR ARRIVALS FROM INDIA IN 2025

Kenya is projecting a 20% growth in visitor arrivals from India by the close of the year. During their participation at OTM in Mumbai, about 15 Kenyan travel agencies that have been pitching camp in the key cities of India to woo travellers into the country, expressed confidence in the expected growth of the market. KTB has also announced a two-month joint sales campaign in collaboration with prime India partners promoting Magical Kenya holiday packages.



EASEMYTRIP AND SABAH TOURISM BOARD SIGN MOC

EaseMyTrip.com has officially entered into a Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) with Sabah Tourism Board (STB) to strengthen Sabah's appeal among Indian travellers. The signing ceremony took place on 3rd February 2025 at the EaseMyTrip office in New Delhi, with STB Chief Executive Officer Julinus Jeffery Jimit and EaseMyTrip Chief Operating Officer Nutan Gupta formalising the collaboration.



KOREA TOURISM ORGANIZATION SHOWCASES KEY INITIATIVES AT DELHI ROADSHOW

Korea Tourism Organization in collaboration with KTAI recently hosted the Korea Tourism Roadshow in Delhi. The event comes at a time when Indian tourism to South Korea has witnessed remarkable growth, with 176,668 Indian visitors recorded in 2024—a 44% increase from 2023. The roadshow introduced KTO's latest trade-focused initiatives, including the Korea Premium Travel Consultant (KPTC) program, K-Incentive Scheme 3.0, and MICE support programs.



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THE FERN HOTELS & RESORTS UNVEILS NEW WILDLIFE RETREAT IN RAJASTHAN

Jawai Zinc Journey by The Fern, Jawai, Rajasthan features 18 beautifully appointed rooms and tents, ensuring a personalized and comfortable stay. Guests can enjoy an array of dining options, including The Jungle Kitchen, a multi-cuisine restaurant and The Jungle Bar. For a unique dining experience, the resort offers Jawai Bagh, an open-air rustic landscape point where curated lunches, high teas and bush dinners can be enjoyed.



JW MARRIOTT EXPANDS IN MALDIVES WITH JW MARRIOTT KAAFU ATOLL ISLAND RESORT

With 80 thoughtfully designed private pool villas, including 47 overwater pool villas, JW Marriott Kaafu Atoll Island Resort blends traditional island aesthetics with contemporary luxury. Perched above the turquoise waters, the Three-Bedroom Ocean Residence offers an unparalleled sanctuary, blending luxury with breathtaking views for a truly exceptional experience.

SAROVAR HOTELS LAUNCHES TULIP INN BHOPAL

Sarovar Hotels, in partnership with Mahendra Associate, has launched Tulip Inn Bhopal. The hotel features 54 well-appointed Deluxe rooms, thoughtfully designed with a contemporary yet inviting aesthetic, along with essential amenities and facilities, including specially designed rooms for differently-abled guests.



Guests can indulge in a multi-cuisine experience at Tulipe, the all-day dining restaurant.

DUSIT HOTELS AND RESORTS ANNOUNCES SPECIAL OFFER 'DOUBLE PERKS'

Dusit Hotels and Resorts has marked the arrival of the new year by launching a special promotion offering Double Perks and up to 30% savings on stays at selected properties. Available for bookings from now until 31 March 2025, with stay dates extending until 30 June 2025, the Double Perks offer includes value-added benefits to enhance every stay. Guests will also receive two complimentary perks from a variety of options.



INDIGO ANNOUNCES DAILY OPERATIONS BETWEEN KISHANGARH AND AHMEDABAD

IndiGo announces exclusive daily direct flights between Kishangarh and Ahmedabad from March 01, 2025. Kishangarh marks IndiGo's 91st domestic and 129th overall destination in the 6E network. It will be the 6th destination that IndiGo connects in Rajasthan after Jaisalmer, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur and Bikaner. This new connection caters to the growing demand for travel to the city of Rajasthan.

OSAKA, KANSAI, JAPAN ALL SET TO HOST EXPO 2025



Expo 2025 will be held in Yumeshima Island, Osaka from April 13 - October 13, 2025. With the theme 'Designing Future Society for Our Lives', the Expo 2025 Osaka, Kansai Japan will bring the world together in one place under the theme of "Life". The expo will have numerous creative Signature Pavilions and Pavilions for the Private Sectors. Over 160 countries will showcase their latest technologies and unique cultures.



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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. **BOTT**



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BUDGET 2025-26

Impact on India's Travel & Tourism Sector

The Union Budget 2025-26 outlines key initiatives aimed at strengthening India's travel and tourism industry through enhanced connectivity, infrastructure development, and policy reforms. With a focus on medical and spiritual tourism, the expansion of the UDAN scheme, and the development of 52 new tourist destinations, the budget aims to boost domestic and inbound travel. Additionally, tax relief measures and increased investments in infrastructure are expected to support economic growth and industry expansion.

Industry experts share mixed reactions, expressing both optimism about the positive developments and concerns over areas that need further attention. Here's a look at some of their reactions –

Priyanka Saxena Ray, Anjali Pokhriyal, Pallavi Sharma and Shreya Shimpi

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

1. Medical and spiritual tourism boost with easier visa norms, private sector collaboration, and a focus on wellness tourism.
2. 22 key destinations to be developed in partnership with state governments to enhance tourism infrastructure.
3. UDAN scheme expansion to 120 new destinations, improving regional air connectivity.
4. Patna Airport expansion to increase passenger capacity and boost regional tourism.
5. 50 top tourist destinations to be developed under a challenge-mode partnership with states.
6. Greenfield airports in Bihar to enhance connectivity and economic growth.
7. TCS threshold on LRS remittances increased from ₹7 lakh to ₹10 lakh, benefiting outbound travellers.
8. Tourism and hospitality industry growth, with major hotel chains and travel-related businesses expected to gain.
9. Infrastructure investment of ₹10.18 lakh crore, including urban redevelopment and maritime development.
10. Mixed industry reactions, with optimism over growth-focused initiatives and concerns over areas needing more support.



Subhash Goyal, Chairman - Aviation and Tourism Committee, ICC

I appreciate the Hon'ble Minister's initiative to develop 50 tourist destinations in collaboration with state governments, a significant step toward enhancing India's global image as a premier travel destination. Strengthening infrastructure and improving accessibility to key monuments and sites will undoubtedly attract more visitors. However, I am deeply disappointed by the Union Budget's allocation of just ₹3 crore for the Ministry of Tourism. With such a minuscule budget, global tourism promotions will come to a standstill. Even the limited B2B marketing efforts through trade fairs will be severely curtailed. As a result, India's visibility in international markets will suffer, while smaller countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives etc. will continue to make their presence felt with grand pavilions at global trade shows."



Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO

I thank the Hon'ble Finance Minister for recognising tourism's role in economic growth and employment. The development of 50 new tourist destinations, with a special focus on Buddhist sites, will enhance India's global appeal. Initiatives like Mudra loans for homestays, the "Heal-in-India" push for medical tourism, and support for technological innovation and startups are welcome steps. The expansion of the UDAN scheme and visa fee waivers will further boost inbound tourism.

However, I am deeply dismayed by the drastic cut in the overseas promotion budget for the Ministry of Tourism—from ₹33 crore to just ₹3 crore. Even the previous allocation was

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insufficient for effective global marketing. With this reduction, India will struggle to participate in international tourism fairs, conduct overseas roadshows, or promote the country effectively to international travellers. I hope the government reconsiders this critical aspect of tourism growth.



Chander Mansharamani, Vice Chairperson, ICPB

The Union Budget 2025 is a commendable step towards strengthening India's tourism industry, with the development of 52 new destinations, improved connectivity under UDAN, and a strong focus on Buddhist, medical, and wellness tourism. These initiatives will not only enhance India's appeal as a global travel destination but also open new avenues for the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) industry.

As India continues to invest in tourism infrastructure and simplify travel procedures, it is crucial to recognise the economic and social impact of the MICE sector. The industry contributes significantly to business tourism, employment generation, and overall economic growth.

We at ICPB urge the government to prioritise the MICE industry within the tourism framework, ensuring policies and incentives that position India as a leading global MICE destination. With strategic initiatives, India has the potential to become a preferred hub for international conferences, exhibitions, and corporate events, driving long-term growth and positioning the country as a powerhouse in the global meetings industry.



Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI

Thanks to the Union Minister, the budget gifts reliefs to middle income earners on several fronts. An excellent gesture is to exempt from tax, earnings up to ₹12.75 Lakhs, excluding Capital Gains. On Travel & Tourism, the much awaited "Industry Status" continues to evade the stakeholders.

The various measures announced in Tourism, reflects that the Government is finally focusing on higher revenue streams from Tourism. The Top 50 Destinations to be developed in partnership with States in a "Challenge Mode" can support growth and higher employment.

Modified UDAN scheme will surely enhance regional connectivity. Getting extended to 120 new destinations boosts connectivity which will usher in more travel. GST & TCS challenges the agencies are currently facing, will unfortunately continue. The only relief in TCS is the increase of threshold from ₹7 Lakhs to ₹10 Lakhs.

Government promoting homestays by extending MUDRA Loans will surely encourage development of more "homestays" infrastructure to support and promote tourism. Offering Visa fee waivers and e-visa options for certain tourist groups to be introduced is a welcome-

gesture, that will attract more visitors. This is a welcome budget, with adequate attention focused on Tourism Sector.



Himanshu Patil, President, OTOAI & Director, Kesari Tours

"For aviation, the budget has announced many positive developments regarding the expansion of the UDAN scheme and infrastructure, which is a good sign for the domestic sector. However, on the outbound front, we are a bit disappointed as the TCS issue remains unresolved. The threshold has only been increased from ₹7 lakh to ₹10 lakh per annum. As an association, we made representations to both the Tourism Ministry and the Finance Ministry, requesting relief on the TCS slab structure to ensure a level playing field. Currently, TCS is not charged on credit card payments or when booking through a domestic agent, which creates an imbalance. While we expected some relief, overall, this is a middle-class-centric budget that will benefit them. The tax-free income savings for the middle class may lead to increased travel spending, helping the travel industry thrive."



K Syama Raju, President, FHRAI

The focus on developing 50 destinations in partnership with state governments will boost infrastructure and spread tourism across the country. The inclusion of hotels in the harmonized master list is a great move, granting easier access to financing for upgrading facilities. The 'Heal-in-India' initiative is a forward-thinking step to capitalize on India's reputation in medical tourism. The visa fee waivers and e-visa options will make India even more attractive to international visitors.



Ajay Prakash, President of TAFI and Vice Chairman, FAITH

I find the budget fairly positive for tourism. It was encouraging to see tourism mentioned multiple times, with key highlights such as more airports, especially in Bihar, the expansion of the UDAN scheme to 120 destinations, and the development of 50 new tourist spots with state incentives. Granting infrastructure status to hotels in these areas is a welcome move.

Improvements in the e-visa process and potential visa fee waivers for certain groups are also positive steps. Religious tourism, particularly the Buddhist circuit, has received much-needed attention, along with initiatives like Medical Tourism and 'Heal in India.' The increase in the TCS threshold to ₹10 lakh and tax relaxations could boost disposable income, benefiting travel and tourism.



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However, effective coordination between the Centre and states will be crucial to ensure these initiatives translate into real growth. Unlike previous years, I am not disappointed with the budget.



Jyoti Mayal, Former President, TAAI, Chairperson THSC

The 2025 Union Budget sets a strong foundation for India's tourism sector, with key initiatives like expanding the UDAN RCS scheme to 120 destinations and the development of 50 key tourist sites. These moves will improve regional connectivity, boost investments, and create jobs. The 'Heal in India' initiative and streamlined visa norms position India as a global hub for wellness and medical tourism. MUDRA loans for homestays, performance-linked incentives, and e-visa fee waivers will support local businesses and broaden tourism access. The focus on skilling, especially in hotel management, will elevate service standards and create more employment. However, critical concerns such as restoring GST input credit, abolishing TCS, and granting industry status to tourism remain unaddressed. While the ₹33 crore for international tourism marketing is a step forward, a stronger push in global branding is needed. The budget reinforces tourism's economic role but requires more industry reforms for sustained growth.



Sanjeev Joshi, President, SITE India

I welcome the Union Budget and appreciate the government's continued focus on infrastructure and economic growth. However, the tourism and MICE sectors require more targeted support to unlock their full potential. While investments in connectivity and hospitality are positive steps, there is a need for concrete incentives, lower taxation, and enhanced marketing efforts to position India as a global MICE destination. A robust policy framework and increased budgetary allocations would help the industry recover faster and contribute significantly to GDP and employment. The government must prioritize tourism and MICE with structured initiatives to ensure sustained growth and global competitiveness. We look forward to stronger measures in the future."



Amaresh Tiwari, Immediate Past Vice Chairperson, ICPB

The Union Budget lays a strong foundation for India's tourism growth with the development of 52 new destinations, a boost to the Buddhist circuit, and enhanced medical and wellness tourism through easier visa policies. The increased support for women entrepreneurs and improvements in connectivity

under UDAN are also commendable. These initiatives will undoubtedly strengthen tourism infrastructure, making India a more attractive destination for both domestic and international travellers. Additionally, the increased disposable income among the middle class will likely lead to higher tourism spending, benefiting both domestic and outbound tourism.



Pieter Elbers, CEO, IndiGo

"The Union Budget 2025 has outlined various great initiatives to further develop a future-ready travel ecosystem, with emphasis on people and infrastructure, and aviation as a key enabler. Investment in developing world-class airports, enhancing regional connectivity, capacity upgrades, procedures, regulatory framework and streamlined visa facilities, will all play critical role in bringing this vision of developing India into a global aviation hub to life. By strengthening both domestic and international connectivity, we are fuelling economic progress, bridging communities, and reinforcing aviation's role as a catalyst for national growth and collectively building India as a leading global economic powerhouse."



Vaibhav Kala, Sr. Vice President, ATOAI

The Union Budget's focus on investment in tourism for employment-led growth is commendable. With the proposed development of 50 new tourism destinations and the performance-linked incentives for states to manage existing destinations effectively, India is setting itself up to become a global tourism hub. The e-visa waiver for special tourist groups and the support for alternative accommodation models like homestays are key to stimulating inbound tourism. The expansion of the UDAN RCS scheme to cover 120 destinations, including remote and hill routes, will also improve connectivity and bring tourists to even the most remote corners of the country. Moreover, the proposed changes in shipbuilding should have a positive impact on cruise tourism, opening up new avenues for growth.



Ravi Gosain, Vice President, IATO

While strengthening infrastructure for tourism growth is important, the Union Budget still lacks concrete plans and funding for promoting tourism abroad. While there are many positive initiatives domestically, such as developing new destinations, improving connectivity, and providing financial support to homestays, the government must prioritize an aggressive, comprehensive plan for pro-



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moting India internationally. If we want to increase foreign tourist arrivals, there needs to be a larger budget and a more focused approach on overseas promotion. We need a global strategy to raise India's profile as a prime tourist destination.



Shreeram Patel, Hon. Secretary General, TAAI

The budget raises the income tax threshold, aiming to boost savings and consumption among the middle class. This increase in disposable income may lead to higher spending on travel and tourism services. Air connectivity to 120 new destinations over the next decade is expected to make travel more accessible and attractive, potentially increasing both domestic and international tourism. In summary, while the 2025 budget introduces initiatives that could bolster the travel and tourism industry through infrastructure development and increased consumer spending, certain industry expectations remain unaddressed, potentially affecting the sector's overall growth trajectory.



Pronab Sarkar, Managing Director, Swagatam Tours

Despite submitting our concerns to the Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Commerce to boost inbound tourism, we are disappointed by this year's budget. The focus is primarily on domestic tourism and to a lesser extent, outbound tourism. Our key demand for an enhanced marketing budget to promote India abroad, through roadshows and exhibitions, has been ignored, with the marketing budget reportedly reduced from ₹30 crores to just ₹3 crores. This cuts foreign promotion efforts, leaving it to individual states to handle, which undermines the unity of the 'Incredible India' brand. While domestic tourism and workforce skilling are positive steps, the lack of support for inbound tourism is troubling. The Government's initiative for startup loans is commendable, but the tourism industry needs similar soft support. Tourism is vital for foreign exchange and job creation, and with Government support, it can grow back to pre-COVID levels.



Aditya Pande, Group Chief Executive Officer, InterGlobe Enterprises

"This budget outlines a compelling roadmap for a Viksit Bharat. The focus on boosting consumption through targeted tax relief for the middle class, coupled with the government's commitment to streamlining tax procedures, will significantly improve ease of doing business and unlock further economic potential. At

InterGlobe Enterprises, we are particularly encouraged by the strategic investments and vision for strengthening the holistic tourism ecosystem in the country, with the development of infrastructure and focus on skilled workforce. These initiatives lay a solid foundation for sustained economic progress and a brighter future for the country."



Arshdeep Anand, VP, ATOAI

We welcome the government's strong focus on tourism in the Union Budget 2025-26, particularly initiatives aimed at infrastructure development, regional connectivity, skill enhancement, and financial support for homestays. The planned upgradation of the top 50 tourist destinations, the development of Buddhist sector and the expansion of the UDAN scheme are significant steps that will boost domestic and inbound travel. The "Heal in India" initiative, which promotes medical and wellness tourism, also aligns well with nature-based and adventure experiences, making activities like trekking, yoga retreats, and eco-tourism more appealing. We look forward to collaborating with policymakers to ensure that adventure tourism gets the recognition and support it deserves, ultimately making India a world leader in thrilling, sustainable, responsible, inclusive & safe tourism experiences.



Prateek Hira, President & CEO, Tornos

The Indian government has unveiled the Union Budget for the fiscal year 2025-2026. Within the positive announcements by the Finance Ministry that include relaxation in visas for some countries, a focus on 50 tourist destinations, an infrastructure push and a few other initiatives, there is also a deep wound that has been inflicted on the tourism industry, particularly the inbound sector. The budget includes only a slight increase of 4% in the allocation for tourism, which is less than India's inflation rate, but the worst part, which will have a ramification on the already bleeding inbound sector, is that the international marketing budget for tourism has been reduced to ₹30 million, a reduction of 97% of the already minuscule budget that India had for international tourism marketing. Interestingly, ₹30 million is the budget of many mid-size and large companies for their own marketing and promotions. This move of the Indian government is beyond anyone's understanding and only points to the fact that India does not want inbound tourists or wants to earn foreign exchange through tourism. The move is in stark contrast to what the government of India speaks at different forums regarding making India a global hub and doubling its foreign tourist arrivals. In this budget, there was no mention of the tourism board, which is an incomplete exercise and could have set many issues right. **BOTT**



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GOA TOURISM

Pioneering Sustainability and Responsible Travel

Goa Tourism showcased its commitment to sustainable and responsible travel. It highlighted the state's dedication to preserving its natural beauty while offering visitors enriching experiences. In addition, Goa showcased its beauty beyond the beaches, the vibrant festivals, rich local cuisine, and sustainable beach tourism, all integral elements of the Goan experience. **Rajesh Kale**, Deputy Director Tourism, Department of Tourism, Government of Goa shares more in an exclusive chat with **BOTT**.

Shreya Shimpi

Goa's participation at OTM 2025 emphasised its status as a premier global travel destination. With a commitment to eco-friendly initiatives, community-based tourism, and cultural preservation, Goa is leading the way in offering authentic experiences. One of the key highlights of Goa Tourism presence was the promotion of the Ekadasha Teertha circuit—an array of 11 historic temples that provide spiritual and cultural experiences for travellers.

Tourism in Goa in 2024

Overall, Goa is doing very well. We have launched various new activities. Last year, we had the Exposition of St. Xavier for which many tourists visited Goa. We have crossed more than one lakh tourists per year, which is record-breaking.

New Campaigns

We are excited to introduce 'Ekadasha Teertha', a specially curated tourism circuit that highlights Goa's rich spiritual and cultural heritage. This initiative is designed to provide visitors with an immersive experience of Goa's most revered temples, historical sites, and sacred destinations, offering a deeper understanding of the region's spiritual significance. The 'Ekadasha Teertha' circuit is divided into two sectors - North Goa Sector and South Goa Sector.

USP of Goa in comparison to other beach destinations

Goa cannot be compared to other beach des-



tinations as Goa has its unique charm. It has been our constant endeavour to promote Goa in the best possible ways to attract more tourists. We may start the single window system for beach weddings through which you can apply for all the licenses in one department. Goa is the only state in India giving all the facilities to all tourists across all age groups. We don't have snow and desert, but apart from that Goa is a great 365-day destination.

Weddings and MICE

With the help of hoteliers, many different packages and discounts are being offered during the off-season to attract the MICE segment. The single window system which we are trying to start will make it hassle-free to host weddings in Goa. **BOTT**

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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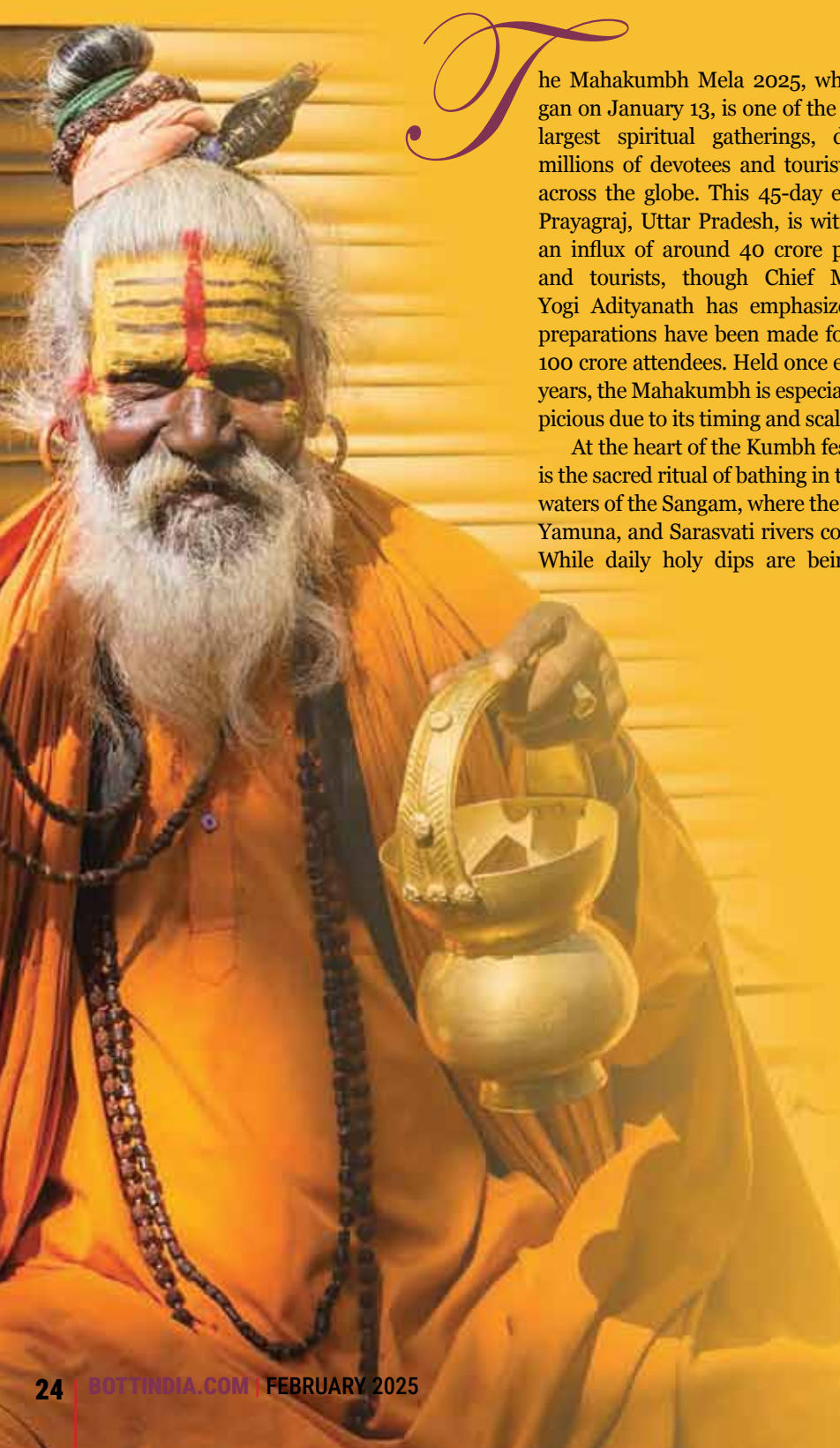
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A Global Convergence of Culture, Spirituality and Tourism



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.

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**

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

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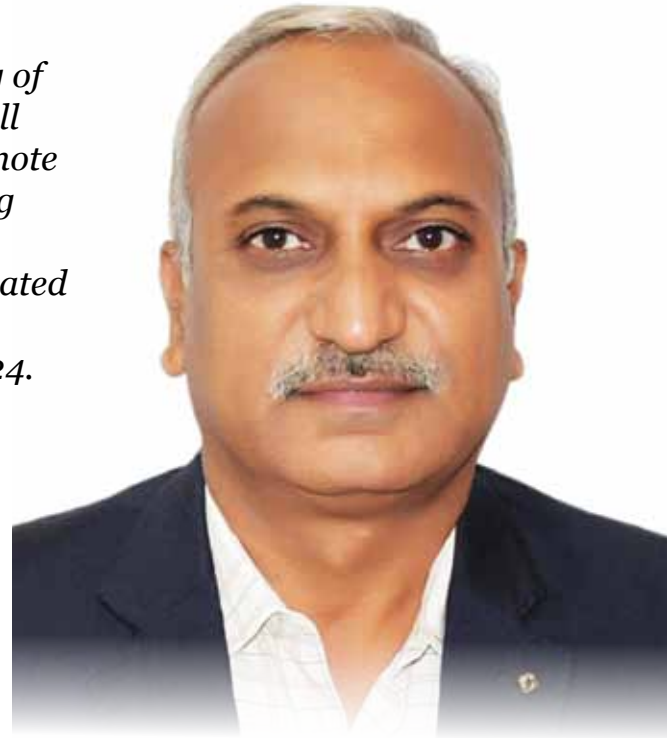
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Maharashtra as a state has unique and rich diversity of tourist attractions. Over the period, the tourist footfall in the state has increased in a positive trend. To promote further development in tourism sector and developing it as one of the prime economical sector, Govt. of Maharashtra and Directorate of Tourism has formulated and implemented strategies that envisages the goals and objectives of Tourism Policy of Maharashtra 2024.

Dr. B.N. Patil, Director, Directorate of Tourism (DoT), Government of Maharashtra shares more about all that Maharashtra is doing to get more tourists in an exclusive chat with **BOTT**.

Gunjan Sabikhi



Maharashtra Government to establish Tourism MICE Bureau to promote events

W

hat are the key strategies Maharashtra Tourism is adopting to position the state as a holistic travel destination in 2025?

The Key strategies being undertaken are:

- Developing Special Thrust Sector like MICE tourism, Cruise tourism, wedding and wellness tourism, rural and agro tourism, experiential tourism, adventure tourism etc.
- Branding and Promotion through online and offline media
- Ease of doing business through online applications, single window applications etc.
- Safety, security and sustainability through implementation of green tourism, tourism mitra / police and tourism yuva clubs etc.
- MAHA Special Destination Development Programme
- Granting performance based financial and non-financial incentives
- Institutional structure for policy implementation

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

The NCRB report of 2022 showcases that crime against women all encompassing is comparatively much less than other states in India with comparable geographical area and demography. Every year the state observes million of tourist footfall which also has a good share of female travellers. To encourage more tourists especially female tourist and to maintain the safety security of them, Govt. of Maharashtra and Directorate of Tourism has proposed to launch both Tourism Mitra and Tourism Police.

Tourism Mitra are personnel who are preferably ex-service- personnel who will be onboarded with Directorate of Tourism and District Tourism Offices to ensure better tourism experiences including safety and security.

The Tourism Police is special police unit to be deployed to manage and maintain safety and security of tourists in tourist places especially where physical carrying capacity of the location is less.

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Apart from the aforementioned, Maharashtra police has also created special crime branch unit to attend crime against women and have implemented various components like PAW (Prevention of Atrocities on Women) Cell, Mahila Police Kaksha (Women Help Desk), Mahila Suraksha Samittee and social security cell. Women Police stations are also established for ease of accessibility for women to reach out for help.

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

Directorate of Tourism, Maharashtra has given major thrust upon MICE and Destination Weddings and promoting the state as one of the front runners for the same.

The Maharashtra government plans to establish the Tourism MICE Bureau to promote events in the state. The bureau will be chaired by the Principal Secretary/Secretary (Tourism), and will include state government, event organisers, and associations. Private members can be reconstituted periodically for fair representation. The establishment cost will be borne by the Department of Tourism for the first four years, followed by self-sufficiency. The role of the bureau will be marketing and promotion, sales and business

development, event planning and support, advocacy and partnership building, destination management etc. Tax Rebate on annual turnover for MICE tour packages in Maharashtra State has been announced by the government.

Special thrust has been given to promotion of destination wedding as well. Tax Rebate on annual turnover for Destination Wedding tour packages in Maharashtra State has been announced by the government. Locations are identified for branding and promotions. Wedding Destinations list are to be published by DoT in consultation with stakeholders. MTDC is looking forward to revamp the resorts for promoting the destination weddings in these properties more.

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

Maharashtra Tourism recently launched its brand campaign, 'Larger Than Life', aimed at attracting younger travellers and international audiences. This campaign's primary objective is to present a unified and compelling brand narrative for Destination Maharashtra. By blending the state's traditional charm with contemporary attractions, 'Larger Than Life' aims to

captivate the evolving tastes of modern travellers. It seeks to enhance the visibility of Maharashtra as a prime tourist destination by highlighting both its rich heritage and new-age offerings.

As part of the 'Let's Go Maharashtra' campaign, Maharashtra Tourism has introduced various content pegs that serve as pillars appealing to the younger generation and international markets. This campaign promotes tourism in Maharashtra as an experiential package rather than just a destination to visit. It covers adventure, wildlife, heritage, culture, and other aspects that encapsulate what Maharashtra stands for. The content strategy includes short, snackable pieces like informative reels, value-added listicles, and interactive content, which resonate well with the target audience and have significantly increased content viewership on the platform.

To complement these campaigns, the Directorate of Tourism has launched a revamped, SEO-optimized website along with a dedicated booking engine, www.mahabooking.com. This platform offers tourists a seamless way to discover, plan, and book their travels across Maharashtra. It provides comprehensive information about tourist spots, accommodations, and travel itineraries, making it easier for visitors to experience the state's offerings. **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 cul-

ture and lifestyle. Thereafter, development 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. **BOTT**



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.

Saraca Hotels and Resorts are focussed on creating bespoke experiences

Saraca Hotels and Resorts is a premium hospitality brand known for its luxurious properties, exceptional service, and immersive guest experiences. Amit Razdan, COO – South Asia, Saraca Hotels and Resorts talks about the properties, existing plans, sustainability initiatives and more.

Priyanka Saxena Ray



Saraca Hotels has carved a niche in the hospitality industry. What was the vision behind launching the brand, and how has the journey evolved so far?

Brand 'Saraca Hotels and Resorts' was launched in January 2024 with a vision to offer guests looking for a harmony of cultural heritage and experiential luxury hospitality. We have been in forefront of safeguarding the legacy and character of each location through our iconic properties in 'Saraca Collection'.

Few of our hotels were managed by Lebua Hotels & Resorts until December 2023, the journey has been both challenging & exciting to re-brand & present these iconic hotels gain to our loyal guests & patrons at Lucknow, Jim Corbett & Goa.

We are proud to offer 'heritage excellence' with 'immersive experiences and adventures' through bouquet of tailored experiences exclusive to 'Saraca Collection' starting from welcome at the property, room amenities, food & beverage, cultural, wellness rituals, intimate weddings and lifestyle events.

In an era where travellers seek unique and immersive experiences, how does Saraca Hotels differentiate itself from competitors?

At Saraca Hotels and Resorts, we offer guests tailored experiences to embrace the destination through local art & culture, cuisines, sustainable practices at our properties.

Each hotel & resort offer distinctive design reflecting the location with use of local craft & culture integrating with modern day luxury.

We focus on creating be-spoke experiences starting from pre-arrival to post check out, focus of understanding the specific needs of guests with unique personalised offers for their comfort and engagement. It has helped us to retain more than 60 % of repeat guests across our locations.

What steps is Saraca Hotels taking to integrate sustainable practices across its properties?

At Saraca Hotels & Resorts, we take pride in sustainable practices, eco-friendly hospitality without compromising guest comfort and luxury.

We are consciously transitioning into renewable energy sources, especially solar to promote clear energy alternatives. From locally produced food in our organic farms to waste management measures, eco-friendly toiletries, plastic free initiatives to sustainable building materials for construction and renovations has impacted in minimizing environmental impact.

The management has been investing energy efficient technologies, water saving and recycling measures. Properties have been designed with sustainability in mind incorporating passive cooling, natural ventilation, energy-efficient materials with rainwater harvesting systems integrating with the architecture.

We actively engage guests in sustainability initiatives by offering options to reduce energy and water use, such as towel and linen reuse programs, as well as promoting awareness about the hotel's environmental efforts. **BOTT**

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The Spiritual Triangle

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Varanasi



Shri Ram Mandir
Ayodhya Dham

A Journey Through Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya

Uttar Pradesh stands as a lighthouse of spiritual richness and cultural grandeur, in the heart of northern India. Among its myriad of sacred sites, three cities form an unparalleled spiritual triangle: Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya. These cities are not just geographical locations; they are a witness to India's ancient traditions, faith, and timeless heritage. Together, they weave a narrative that travelled beyond centuries, drawing millions of pilgrims, tourists, and spiritual seekers from across the globe. This sacred triangle showcases the pious spiritual aura of Uttar Pradesh, reflecting its deep-rooted cultural ethos and serving as a vibrant witness to the state's historical significance.

In recent years, these destinations have surged to the forefront of global tourism, captivating the hearts of international and domestic travelers alike. They offer more than just religious sanctity—each city narrates stories etched in time, reverberating with chants, rituals, and celebrations that have been preserved through generations. From the bustling ghats of Varanasi, where the Ganga mirrors the lights of evening aartis, to the sacred confluence in Prayagraj that hosts the world's largest religious gathering, and the serene grandeur of Ayodhya, the birthplace of Lord Rama, this triangle is a spiritual journey that encapsulates the very soul of India.

Prayagraj: The Confluence of Faith

Prayagraj is renowned for the Triveni Sangam, the sacred confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers. This site is the focal point of the Maha Kumbh Mela, held every twelve years, and is considered the largest religious gathering on earth. The 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela, spanning from January 13 to February 26, happens to be a rare cosmic event, on the verge of which the Maha Kumbh Mela is falling after 144 years; on the completion of 12 Kumbhs. This Mahakumbh is expected to draw more than 40 crore participants, establishing Prayagraj's spiritual significance and the inclination of people towards the Sanatan religion and its principles from all over the world. The city is also home to revered sites like the Bade Hanuman Mandir, Anand Bhavan, and the historic Allahabad Fort. Prayagraj serves as a spiritual confluence where religious traditions, scholarly pursuits, and ancient rituals continue to thrive in a timeless manner.

Varanasi: The Eternal City

Varanasi, also known as Kashi, is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. The city is said to be resting on the trident of Lord Shiva and it is believed that it will exist till the end of time, unaffected. Situated along the banks of River Ganga, it is a major center for Hindu devotion, attracting pilgrims who seek spiritual solace and purification, known for the Kashi Vishwanath temple dedicated to Lord Shiva. This city of 'ghats' has eighty six ghats in total, including famous ghats like Dashashwamedh ghat, Manikarnika ghat, Namo ghat and Assi ghat. These ghats are incessantly bustling with activities, ranging from spiritual rituals and religious ceremonies. At dawn, the ghats come alive with devotees performing Surya Namaskar, offering prayers, and taking holy dips in the sacred waters of the Ganga and at dusk the mesmerizing Ganga Aarti captivates every heart. The city's narrow lanes, bustling markets, and ancient temples resonate with timeless traditions, while the aroma of incense, the sound of temple bells, and the sight of saffron-clad sadhus create an aura of divine

mysticism. Varanasi is not just a city; it is an experience that intertwines spirituality, history, and culture, leaving an indelible mark on every soul that visits.

Ayodhya: The Birthplace of Lord Rama

Ayodhya, revered as the birthplace of Lord Rama, holds immense spiritual and historical significance in Hinduism, the city is considered first among the seven Saptपुरी's spread across India. This ancient city, situated on the banks of the Saryu River, is a focal point of devotion, especially with the newly built Shree Ram Janmbhoomi temple, attracting pilgrims from across the world. As per the official data available with the department of Tourism, Ayodhya saw over 16.44 crore visitors in 2024. The magnificence of the Shree Ram Janmbhoomi temple has become a major attraction for the pilgrims and as well the travellers from across the world. Ayodhya is mentioned in the Ramayana as the grand capital of the Ikshvaku dynasty. The city's serene ghats, temples, and the vibrant celebrations of festivals like Deepotsav make it a divine destination that symbolizes faith, devotion, and cultural heritage.

Tourism Statistics and Global Interest

In 2024, Uttar Pradesh recorded a total tourist footfall of 64.90 crore (649 million), marking an increase of over 17 crore (170 million) from the previous year. This surge is attributed to the state's rich cultural and spiritual sites, with Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya at the forefront. These cities not only showcase the spiritual aura and heritage of Uttar Pradesh but also captivate tourists from around the globe, fostering a growing international interest in India's spiritual and cultural offerings. Collectively, the spiritual triangle of Prayagraj, Varanasi, and Ayodhya encapsulates the essence of Uttar Pradesh's cultural and spiritual heritage, offering visitors an immersive experience that resonates with the timeless traditions of India.



Sangam, Prayagraj



Dev Deepawali, Varanasi



Deepotsav, Ayodhya Dham



*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



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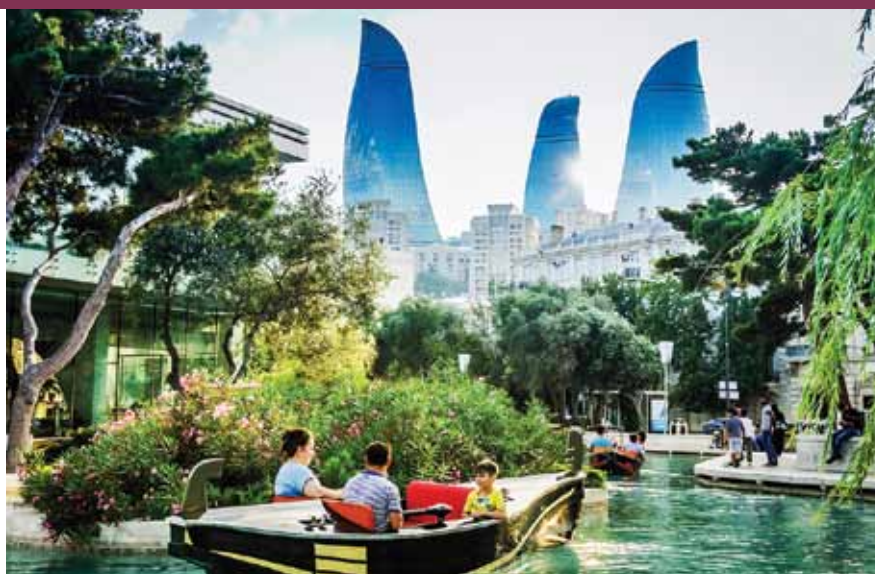
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INDUSTRY INSIGHT

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**

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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

*A*uxilia'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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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-

efficient 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**

FIJI

Where Happiness Comes Naturally

*Fiji offers an enchanting bouquet of options for traveller. The natural splendour, adventure, gastronomy, endless vistas and the warm hospitality make it indeed memorable. In an exclusive chat with **BOTT**, **Brent Hill**, CEO of Tourism Fiji shared insights about Fiji as a premier travel destination, its unique and diverse offerings, and its ongoing initiatives to attract Indian travellers.*

Shreya Shimpi



Why should Indian travellers opt for Fiji as their next preferred holiday destination?

Fiji offers Indian travellers a truly unique experience, setting itself apart with its rich Fijian culture and the warmth of its people. More than just a picturesque paradise of stunning oceans, serene rivers, and lush rainforests, Fiji is a destination where happiness comes naturally. While many places boast breathtaking landscapes, what truly makes Fiji special is its welcoming and joyful spirit. For those seeking an escape from the usual tourist hotspots, a deeper cultural connection, and a genuinely heartwarming experience, Fiji is the perfect choice.

How important is India for Fiji as a key source market?

India is one of the key growing source markets for Fiji, currently among our top ten, with the potential to reach the top five. The visa-free entry for Indian nationals further enhances accessibility, making travel seamless. Approximately 40% of Fijians trace

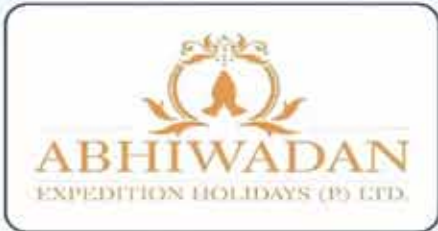
their ancestry to India. Indian influences are evident in the language, cuisine, temples, and vibrant celebrations of festivals like Diwali and Holi. Many Indian visitors are pleasantly surprised to discover a thriving community of Fijians of Indian descent, making them feel at home while exploring an exotic paradise.

How do you plan to cater to the MICE and wedding segment?

Fiji is well-equipped to cater to the MICE and wedding segments with world-class audio-visual facilities and dedicated event planning services. From stunning beachfront setups to seamless corporate events, our local businesses specialize in creating memorable experiences.

For MICE groups, Fiji offers unique cultural engagements, including visits to local villages and schools. With a blend of breathtaking venues, top-tier services, and warm hospitality, Fiji ensures that every event—whether a dream wedding or a corporate retreat—is truly unforgettable. **BOTT**

INTERNATIONAL PAVILION PARTNERS





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

L

ooking 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**

field if you want to run a business or build a career from it. If you're not passionate or a foodie, it will feel like a typical 9-5 job. Follow your passion. As a young individual, you need to be inquisitive, because travel is all about that. Travel has completely changed my life. It has given me a lot of exposure as I've travelled around the globe, and I still feel that same inquisitiveness in me.

- 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 traveler**–Just go and enjoy. Travel is a habit. If you enjoy your first tour you will continue it as a habit.

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

Aeroprime Group represents Vietnam Airlines in the Indian market. Vietnam Airlines has been operating for the last two years from India. **Abhishek Goyal**, Executive Director, Aeroprime Group shares more in an exclusive chat with **BOTT**.

Shreya Shimpi

AEROPRIME GROUP

Strengthening India-Vietnam connectivity with Vietnam Airlines

The **new flight launch**

We are operating daily flights from Delhi and Mumbai. We have been operating wide bodies A350s from Delhi to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. From May 1st, we are launching wide body aircraft A-350 and Boeing737 from Mumbai as well, which will enhance our capacity by almost 50% and it will add more comfort to the travellers and bring more offerings to the travellers in terms of premium business class which is flatbed and one of the best aircraft like A350s and 787. We are announcing some new destinations in India. Starting May, we are going to launch two more destinations in South India.

Business in 2024

2024 has been a wonderful year for Vietnam Airlines as their frequencies and capacity from India, especially from Delhi, in mid of the year has increased. The flights have done fabulous because of the growth and the interest from the market. The numbers to Vietnam have grown significantly with

almost 700,000 passengers in a year travelling to Vietnam now. We foresee Vietnam to be one of the most popular destinations for leisure passengers from India.

Vision for 2025

The prospect for Vietnam Airlines is great and Vietnam, as a destination is huge and there is a growing interest. There is a lot of interest from the MICE segment. Last year, we took the biggest MICE group to Vietnam from India with almost 2000 passengers for Sun Pharma. We have done a lot of MICE groups last year and we foresee a lot of interest from MICE segment in the Indian market. There's a lot of growth in the leisure segment too. We are noticing some growth on the corporate side as well because as trade is increasing between India and Vietnam, there is a lot of interest for business as well. **BOTT**





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Give your customers' gadgets a new lease of life with ASEGO



The digital age has brought about an unprecedented surge in gadget usage. Today, smartphones, laptops, tablets, and other devices are indispensable tools for work, communication, entertainment, and travel. As of January 2025, India remains one of the largest smartphone markets globally, with approximately 700.58 million users, according to recent data from Statista. This figure underscores the growing reliance on gadgets and highlights a significant opportunity for the travel protection service providers to provide innovative protection solutions.

However, carrying valuable gadgets while travelling also brings an inevitable concern: what if they are lost, stolen, or damaged? Such incidents not only disrupt the travel experience but can also result in unexpected financial strain. For travellers, this worry can overshadow the joy of exploration. This is where Asego Gadget Protection Cover steps in as a game-changer, ensuring that your customers' travels remain stress-free and memorable.

Comprehensive Protection for Modern Travellers

Asego offers a robust solution to safeguard your customers' devices during their journeys. Here's what makes it a must-have:

1. Repair or Replacement Coverage Accidents happen, but they don't have to ruin the trip. Whether it's a cracked screen, water damage, or a completely malfunctioning device, Asego provides coverage for repair or

replacement, ensuring that your customers are back online without delay.

2. Sports Equipment Protection Adventure enthusiasts often carry specialized gear like cameras, GoPros, or drones to document their experiences. Asego goes beyond gadgets by offering reimbursement for the cost of hiring or purchasing replacement sports equipment in case of loss or damage.
3. 24/7 Medical Assistance Travelling to unfamiliar destinations can come with unforeseen challenges. Asego provides 24/7 medical assistance, adding an extra layer of security and convenience for your customers.
4. Customisable Travel Insurance Recognizing that every traveller is unique, Asego offers customizable travel insurance plans that cater to individual needs and preferences. From gadget protection to comprehensive coverage, customers can choose what works best for them.

Travel is about exploration, relaxation, and adventure—not worrying about the safety of expensive gadgets. Asego's Gadget Protection Cover allows your customers to embrace their journeys with confidence, knowing that their valuable devices are in safe hands. Whether it's a lost smartphone or a damaged laptop, Asego ensures that your customers are supported every step of the way.

Empower your customers to travel smarter and safer with Asego. Together, let's give their gadgets a new lease of life and redefine travel insurance experience for all travellers. **BOTT**

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 Excellence 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**



Moscow hosts Gala Dinner in Mumbai celebrating partnerships with India

Moscow City Tourism Committee hosted a prestigious gala dinner that brought together more than 170 key partners including prominent associations like TIA, OTOAI, NIMA, MICE agencies, TO and TA, government officials and media, along with delegates from Moscow, to celebrate the strengthening bond between India and the Russian capital.

BOTT Desk

The event highlighted the growing collaboration in tourism and business sectors, underscoring Moscow's commitment to enhancing ties with India's outbound tourism market. This initiative aligns with Moscow's strategic focus on the MICE sector, aiming to position the city as a premier destination for Indian business and leisure travellers.

The evening welcomed guests with the unique traditional "Moscow Tea Time" followed by captivating performances from the renowned 'Rusy' dance troupe, blending Russian folk songs with modern choreography to showcase Moscow's rich cultural heritage. It was an unforgettable spread of elaborate cuisines and extraordinary lucky draw prizes generously offered by the Moscow travel and MICE industry.

Distinguished delegates included Ivan Fetisov, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Mumbai; Dr. Elena Remizova, Head of Rossotrudnichestvo in India and Director of the Russian

House in New Delhi; and Evgeny Kozlov, First Deputy Head of the Office of the Mayor and the Government of Moscow, and Chairman of the Moscow City Tourism Committee, addressed the audience, emphasizing India's significance as a top focus market and highlighting the growing popularity of the hassle-free e-visa among Indian travellers, noting a 1.4-fold increase in 2024 compared to 2023 with over 61,000 visits in the first nine months. Their speeches emphasized strengthening of unparalleled business opportunities and new attractions for the Indian travellers.

Speaking on the occasion Evgeny Kozlov, First Deputy Head of the Office of the Mayor and the Government of Moscow, and Chairman of the Moscow City Tourism Committee quoted, "Moscow is a modern capital of business tourism, boasting world-class infrastructure, including cutting-edge congress and exhibition venues, over 22,000 dining establishments, and advanced technological services. The Moscow City Tourism Committee reaffirms its commitment to supporting the growth of India's MICE industry and enhancing our bilateral relationship through continued engagements and partnerships." **BOTT**





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YASHSHREE Category



Yashshree Mall Road, Darjeeling



Yashshree Sanderling, Darjeeling



Yashshree Karbari, Yangang



Yashshree Sikkim Blossom, Gangtok



Yashshree Lachung, North Sikkim



Yashshree Imperial, Siliguri



Yashshree Accom Kanyam, Nepal

SUMITEL Category



Sumitel, Darjeeling



Sumitel Queen's Yard, Darjeeling



Sumitel Vista, Darjeeling



Sumitel JB Park, Darjeeling (Coming Soon)



Sumitel Shangrila, Gangtok



Sumitel Oriental, Gangtok



Sumitel Pelling, West Sikkim

Our Other Flagship :



UPCOMING PROPERTIES

Yashshree Lachen	Lachen
Yashshree Kolkata	Kolkata
Yashshree Pelling	Pelling
Sumitel JB Park	Darjeeling
Sumitel Sanderling	Darjeeling
Sumi Stays	Sonada



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Skal International Bombay 144 in partnership with Air Mauritius hosts a networking event in Mumbai

Skal International Bombay 144 in partnership with Air Mauritius hosted a networking event in which the key management representatives of the award-winning airline interacted with members of the travel trade and media.

Shreya Shimpi



The exclusive business networking event showcased the routes, facilities and services offered by Air Mauritius. It also highlighted cultural, religious and gastronomic offerings of Mauritius highlighting the bond that India and Mauritius share. Present at the event were Burjis Mehta, President, Skal International Bombay 144 Club, Skal members, key members of the Air Mauritius team such as Ziyaad Parthasee, Gagan Sharma, Dooshant K Bucktowar, Consul & Head of Mission, Consulate of the Republic of Mauritius, senior officials of Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority along with other esteemed dignitaries. Addressing the gathering, Burjis Mehta, President, Skal international Bombay 144 highlighted the major attractions of Mauritius and the warm cultural bond that the two countries share. Speaking to BOTT in an exclusive chat he said, “This is an exclusive event in which Skal Bombay 144



has partnered with Air Mauritius in which senior management people from Air Mauritius, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority and the Consul General of Mauritius are attending the event. They have come here for the OTM and took this opportunity to partner with Skal for this event with travel agents, tour operators, wedding planners, and destination management companies.”

A presentation was shown at the event showcasing the offerings, routes and services of Air Mauritius. The dignitaries were felicitated by the Skal members followed by cocktail and a networking dinner. **BOTT**

Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts

A Visionary Journey in Hospitality



Sadip Lama,
MD, Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts



Shreya Gurung,
CEO, Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts, Founder of
Nom Nom Bakery and Korean Cafe



Pinak Ranjan Guha,
General Manager - Corporate Sales & Marketing,
Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts,

With a firm foothold in the Eastern Himalayas, Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts is poised for even greater heights. The brand is actively pursuing pan-India expansion, ensuring that its signature blend of warmth, luxury, and impeccable service reaches more travellers across the country.

In the vibrant world of hospitality, there are hotel owners—and then there are those rare visionaries who transform their establishments into reflections of their own unique personalities. Sadip Lama, fondly known as ‘The Monk of the Hospitality Industry,’ is one such dynamic leader. His energetic approach and vision have shaped an unforgettable guest experience that feels less like a business and more like a journey of discovery.

For Sadip Lama, every new property, every guest, and every community initiative is a step toward a larger vision—one where hospitality is not just about comfort, but about creating lasting memories and making a positive impact. His journey proves that with passion, purpose, and a personal touch, the art of hotel ownership can truly transform lives.

Mr. Lama’s vision extends beyond elegant stays to culinary excellence. In 2021, Sumi Yashshree ventured into Asian flavors with the launch of Sumi Nom-Nom, Bakery & Korean Café in Darjeeling.

At the helm of this expansion is Ms. Shreya, CEO of Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts and founder of Nom Nom Bakery & Korean Café. Her leadership over the past three years has been deeply rewarding, driven by a vision of inclusivity, respect, and opportunity. This commitment has enriched the lives of staff, guests, and communities, fostering a shared purpose that defines the brand.

Under Ms. Shreya’s leadership, Sumi Yashshree has expanded to over 20 properties while staying true to its core values: service excellence, inclusivity, sustainability, and integrity. Each property reflects local culture while maintaining the high standards that have become the brand’s hallmark.

Another key visionary in the Sumi Yashshree team is Mr. Pinak, General Manager of Sales & Marketing. With a keen strategic foresight, he has seamlessly led a high-performing team while aligning Sumi Yashshree’s revenue goals with its broader ambitions. His industry expertise has been instrumental in solidifying the brand’s position within the competitive hospitality landscape.

As Sumi Yashshree Hotels & Resorts continues to grow, it remains steadfast in its commitment to redefining hospitality with innovation, warmth, and an unwavering dedication to excellence. **BOTT**

JAPAN

receives record-breaking number of visitors in 2024

Around 233,000 Indians visited Japan in 2024 creating a remarkable milestone. **Ryo BUNNO**, Executive Director, Delhi Office, Japan National Tourism Organization shares more with **BOTT**.

Shreya Shimpi



Year 2024 has been a phenomenal year as Japan has received a record-breaking number of visitors from India. What would you like to say about it?

We are very happy to have reached over 200,000 visitors from India market as this is the first time that JNTO Delhi Office has reached such record-breaking numbers. There are several reasons for this such as the economic growth in the India market because of which the overseas travel is booming nowadays. The capacity of airlines too has been recovering to the pre-pandemic levels contributing to the increase in the number of visitors. At the beginning of 2024, for instance, the flights from Bangalore to Narita by JAL were three days a week. However, from the latter of 2024 (winter schedule 2024/2025), it is five days a week. They are planning to increase it to daily flights from Bangalore to Narita from summer flight schedule 2025. Also, Indian people are quite familiar with the Japanese society. Hence, they are opting for Japan as their tourist destination.

Where does India rank as a source market?

In 2024, Japan received a total of approximately 36.87 million international visitors. Among these, about 233,000 were from India. Despite not being among the top source markets, the Indian tourism segment has demonstrated significant growth. The number of Indian visitors to Japan increased by 40.0% in 2024 as compared to 2023. A notable surge was noticed in March and May. This upward trend displays the growing interest among Indian travellers in exploring Japan's diverse attractions.

Looking forward, what is your target for 2025?

For 2025, we anticipate a further increase in the number of Indian visitors to Japan, building on the strong momentum from 2024. Major events like Expo 2025 Osaka-Kansai, promotional efforts, roadshows aim at directly targeting Indian travellers and Indian agents. While it is too early to predict exact numbers, we remain optimistic about a strong upward trend in 2025. **BOTT**

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BENGAL MICE CONCLAVE 2025

Shaping the Future of Business Tourism

The Bengal MICE Conclave 2025, held from February 4 to 6, marked a significant milestone in West Bengal's business tourism sector. Organized by West Bengal Tourism in collaboration with the India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), the event brought together industry leaders, policymakers, and tourism experts to explore strategies for positioning the state as a leading hub for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE). The conclave featured insightful discussions, networking opportunities, and key partnerships, setting the stage for West Bengal's growth as a premier destination for global business events.

Compiled by Anjali Pokhriyal and Pallavi Sharma

ICPB and West Bengal Tourism have come together to curate a landmark event – the Bengal MICE Conclave 2025, setting a new benchmark for the state's business tourism sector. Held from February 4 to 6 at ITC Royal Bengal and ITC Sonar, the event coincided with the prestigious Bengal Global Business Summit (BGBS) at the Biswa Bangla Convention Centre. Industry leaders, policymakers, and tourism experts gathered to discuss strategies for positioning West Bengal as a premier hub for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE).

The conclave began with an inaugural ceremony led by West Bengal's Tourism Minister, Shri Indranil Sen, alongside key dignitaries such as Rudra Chatterjee, Smt. Nandini Chakravorty, IAS, Chander Mansharamani, and Sanjiv Puri. Their addresses emphasized Kolkata's strategic advantages, including its rich cultural heritage, evolving infrastructure, and connectivity, making it an ideal destination for international business events.

The event featured insightful panel discussions on various aspects of the MICE industry. The opening session, moderated by Chander Mansharamani, explored how West Bengal can establish itself as a preferred choice for global conferences. Esteemed speakers like Anil Chadha of ITC Hotels, Harshvardhan Neotia of Ambuja Neotia Group, and Darshan Dudhoria of Bari Kothi discussed the role of boutique venues, hospitality expansion, and private sector collaborations in boosting the sec-



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tor. Industry experts also explored strategies to attract major international medical and business conferences.

A significant highlight was a session led by Jyoti Mayal and Anoop Kumar Agarwal, IAS, which focused on building a skilled workforce for the MICE industry. The discussions underscored the importance of education, training, and policy support in developing a competitive workforce. Another key session, moderated by Rajani Nair Deb of Hilton Hotels, examined the potential of West Bengal as a leading MICE destination in Southeast Asia. Panelists, including Dr. Ashok Gupta, Amaresh Tiwari, K. Mohanchandran, and Abhishek Kumar Tiwary, IAS, emphasized infrastructure development, branding strategies, and innovative land-use planning.

The event also facilitated valuable networking opportunities, with the first day concluding with a grand networking dinner at Taj Taal Kutir. The second day was dedicated to Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings, enabling buyers and suppliers to explore collaborative ventures. Later, the Bengal Global Business Summit was inaugurated, bringing together investors and industry leaders to discuss opportunities in

tourism, logistics, and connectivity, further reinforcing Bengal's growing presence in the global MICE industry.

On the final day, the conclave spotlighted innovative marketing strategies, with a session on reverse marketing urging businesses to adopt unconventional approaches for growth. The event concluded with a landmark signing of a tri-party Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between West Bengal Tourism, ICPB, and six leading organizations, including Alpcord Network Travel & Conferences Management Co., IA Meetings, the AIDS Society of India, the Indian Dental Association, ISBTI, and the International Neonatology Association. These agreements signified a commitment to implementing actionable initiatives that will drive Bengal's MICE industry forward.

To provide delegates with a firsthand experience of West Bengal's tourism potential, a post-event familiarization tour was organized to North Bengal, covering scenic destinations like Bagdogra and Siliguri. The Bengal MICE Conclave 2025 successfully positioned West Bengal as a rising force in the MICE industry, laying the foundation for future investments and growth in the state's business tourism sector. **BOTT**

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Know what your stars say about February 2025



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 February 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

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.



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.

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.



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.



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