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Letter from the *Editor's Desk*



Dear Readers,

As the global travel and tourism landscape continues to soar to new heights, our April issue of **BOTT** India takes flight with a special focus on aviation—the backbone of international travel. In this issue, we have engaged with several leading airlines to uncover their strategic plans for the year ahead. From new routes to technological upgrades, and most importantly, the growing emphasis on sustainable practices, airlines are stepping up to reduce their carbon footprint and align with global environmental goals.

In addition to aviation, this issue captures the vibrant energy of SATTE 2025, where we spoke with numerous outbound tourism boards and destination representatives. Their message is clear: the Indian outbound market is booming, and global destinations are keen to tap into this vast and evolving segment with renewed enthusiasm and tailored experiences.

Complementing this surge in outbound interest, several international hotel chains—including Preferred Hotels, Dusit Hotels, Accor, and Radisson Hotel Group—hosted roadshows and press events across India. Their sentiment resonates across the board: there has never been a better time to invest and grow in the Indian market.

This edition also marks our ATM Special Issue, and our BOTT team will be on ground in Dubai to circulate it at Arabian Travel Market 2025. We look forward to connecting with our readers, partners, and friends from across the globe at this landmark event.

Here's to new journeys, greener skies, and stronger global collaborations!

Priyanka Saxena Ray
Editor, BOTT India

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INTREPID MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS TO REPRESENT SUN SIYAM RESORTS IN INDIA

Sun Siyam Resorts, a renowned Maldivian-owned hospitality group with over 30 years of experience, and an attainable luxury properties portfolio in the Maldives and Sri Lanka, has appointed Intrepid Marketing & Communications as its India PR representation. This collaboration aims to enhance brand awareness, engagement, and supports the existing sales representation through strategic PR, media partnerships, and marketing initiatives targeting Indian travellers.



SOUTH AFRICA ROLLS OUT PHASE 2 OF TRUSTED TOUR OPERATOR SCHEME (TTOS)

The Department of Home Affairs has officially gazetted Phase 2 of the Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS), further advancing its mission to streamline visa processes and boost tourism in South Africa. The announcement, published in Government Gazette No. 52460 on 4 April 2025, invites domestic tour operators to submit expressions of interest to participate in this transformative initiative. Building on the success of Phase 1, where 2000 additional tourists from China and India applied, Phase 2 will further accelerate this growth as Home Affairs delivers on the commitment to replace a manual, paper-based and insecure visa system with secure, world-class digital infrastructure.

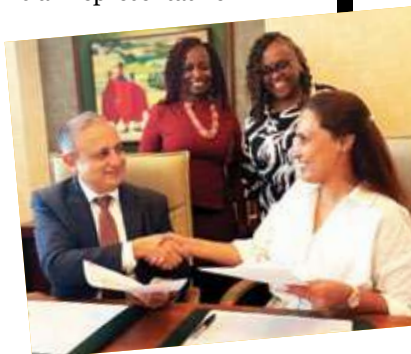
Short News

HARBOUR PLAZA HOTELS & RESORTS SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDES THREE-CITY INDIA ROADSHOW

Harbour Plaza Hotels & Resorts, one of the largest hotel groups in Hong Kong with over 9,000 rooms, renowned for its diverse portfolio of luxury and business hotels, recently concluded a successful sales mission across three key cities in India. Taking place from March 24 to 28, the mission covered Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, aiming to strengthen business partnerships and showcase Harbour Plaza Hotels & Resorts to Indian travellers.

SERENA HOTELS & ARK TRAVEL GROUP PARTNER TO CAPTURE THE INDIAN MARKET

Serena Hotels Africa, the premier collection of award-winning safari lodges and camps, city hotels and beach resorts across East and Southern Africa, has announced a strategic partnership ARK Travel Group. Anjum Lokhandwala, the Director of ARK Travel Group is a highly respected name in the Indian travel and hospitality industry. As the official representative for Serena Hotels in India, Mrs. Lokhandwala will spearhead efforts to connect discerning Indian travellers with unforgettable, premium travel experiences in East Africa.



VFS GLOBAL AND CZECHTOURISM JOIN HANDS TO PROMOTE CZECH IN INDIA

VFS Global has been appointed as the destination representation partner for CzechTourism in India to showcase Czechia's diverse travel experiences and unique attractions. Leveraging its extensive reach and expertise, VFS Global will represent CzechTourism to drive marketing, public relations and trade engagement efforts to boost visitor numbers and enhance overall awareness of Czechia as a premier destination. VFS Global will represent Czechia in India for Sales, Marketing, PR and Trade initiatives.



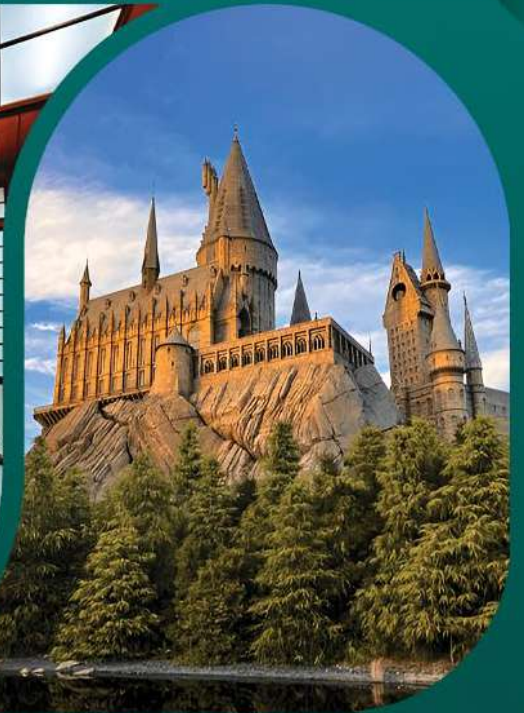
THRS EXPANDS GLOBAL FOOTPRINT WITH NEW PARTNERSHIPS IN JAPAN AND AZERBAIJAN



THRS (Travel and Hospitality Representation Services), India's leading representation firm specialising in luxury hospitality and tourism brands, announces its strategic expansion into Japan and Azerbaijan. This milestone emphasises THRS' commitment to curating distinguished travel experiences for the Indian outbound market. As part of this growth, THRS has been appointed as the exclusive sales representative for FAUCHON L'Hôtel Kyoto and Start Travel.

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- * Tokyo City Tour
- * Warner Bros Japan
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SHRI RAM MOHAN NAIDU

New Aviation law to boost aircraft leasing and safety infrastructure

*India has taken a decisive step to become a global aviation hub with the passing of the Protection of Interest in Aircraft Objects Bill, 2025, aligning the country with the Cape Town Convention (CTC) and giving a strong boost to aircraft leasing, financing, and foreign investment, says Union Civil Aviation Minister **Shri Ram Mohan Naidu***

Rai Umraopati Ray



“*T*

his is a landmark moment,” said Union Civil Aviation Minister Shri Ram Mohan Naidu in an exclusive interaction with BOTT. “Indian carriers have long suffered higher lease premiums—8 to 10% more than global averages—due to inadequate legal protections for lessors. This new law fixes that and makes India a trusted player in global aviation finance.”

The Bill ensures speedy repossession of aircraft by lessors in case of lease defaults, thus reducing risk and making India an attractive destination for aviation investments. “It’s about aligning with global norms and unlocking billions in financing,” the Minister informed.

The legislative breakthrough comes as part of a broader transformation in Indian aviation. Under Shri Naidu’s leadership, the sector is scaling new heights. From 74 airports in 2014 to 159 in 2024, aircraft numbers rising from 340 to 840, and passenger traffic doubling from 10 crore to 22 crore, the sector is witnessing unprecedented growth.

The Minister expressed concern over the variation in ATF tax across states and called for more states to follow the example of those who have reduced their rates. “Reducing these taxes will boost regional connectivity and lower costs for passengers,” he added.

Looking to the future, the Min-

istry of Civil Aviation has set ambitious targets for sustainability and capacity building. We have a total of around 80 airports that operate at 100% green energy usage and we aspire to transition over 100 airports to renewable energy, India is making a strong push toward greener aviation. The sector also faces a growing demand for trained pilots—estimated at 30,000 to 34,000 over the next 10 to 15 years.

In a parallel push for skilling and awareness, Shri Naidu also launched a ‘Career Guidance Programme in Aviation’ for school students at the Indian Aviation Academy. “We need 34,000 pilots for the 1,700 aircraft we plan to induct. Every aircraft brings opportunity. We want Indian youth to fly Indian skies,” he said, inspiring Class 11 and 12 students during a session that also featured women pilots.

“We are working on increasing the number of Flight Training Organizations (FTOs) and issuing more commercial pilot licenses annually to meet this demand,” the Minister said. In conclusion, Shri Ram Mohan Naidu affirmed the government’s long-term vision: “Civil aviation in India is not just about flying planes. It’s about connecting people, boosting economies, and creating opportunities. And we are committed to making India a global leader in aviation.” **BOTT**



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ARUNACHAL

unveils bold vision for tourism with new policy and logo

Arunachal Pradesh is positioning itself as India's most progressive tourism frontier with the launch of its Tourism Policy 2025–30 and a vibrant new logo, unveiled at a press conference in Delhi.

Shri Pasang Dorjee Sona, Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, shared the government's ambitious and inclusive roadmap—focused on experiential, sustainable, and community-driven tourism.

Anjali Pokhriyal



W

What are the government's key initiatives to promote tourism in Arunachal Pradesh?

The newly introduced Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2025–30 is the first in India to provide dedicated strategies for diverse experiential segments—ranging from farm, tea, and wine tourism to tribal, wellness, adventure, and border tourism. “Our approach is both strategic and inclusive,” says Shri Sona. “We’ve created segment-specific objectives and offerings to ensure holistic development.”

The policy emphasises formalization and support for grassroots stakeholders, including registration and guidelines for homestays and farm stays. The government is also investing in cultural infrastructure such as guest houses and tribal museums at Rang, Mwya, and Basar.

Other focus areas include developing ecotourism in unclassified forests, integrating border tourism with livelihood initiatives in vibrant villages, conducting baseline surveys to prioritize infrastructure, and collaborating with academia for tourism-specific training. “We are also leveraging the PM Internship Scheme to offer practical, on-the-job training for local youth,” adds the Minister.

How is the state balancing tourism development with environmental conservation?

The government has introduced a Green Infrastructure Mandate, which requires tourism units to adopt eco-certified operations, renewable energy sources, sustainable waste management, and STCI (Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India) accreditation.

“All farm tourism units must be plastic-free,”

Shri Sona emphasises, adding, “We are actively promoting low-impact, high-value tourism, guided by carrying capacity assessments to avoid over-tourism.”

Ecotourism is community-driven, focusing on conservation in community-conserved areas, forest reserves, and wildlife sanctuaries, while providing sustainable livelihoods. The state is also drafting Responsible Tourism Guidelines to institutionalise ethical, inclusive, and conservation-oriented tourism practices.

What steps are being taken to improve infrastructure like roads, airports, and accommodations for tourists?

To enhance the tourist experience, Arunachal is investing in comprehensive infrastructure upgrades. Standard operating procedures and mandatory registration for adventure tourism guides are being implemented to ensure safety.

Smart signage featuring multilingual QR codes will allow tourists to access site information in their preferred language via audio-visual formats. “We are also involving community representatives and local tour operators in the planning of road infrastructure across our 14 tourism circuits,” says Shri Sona.

Air connectivity is being expanded, with efforts to link Arunachal to Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Mumbai, while improving access to Tezu and Pasighat. The government is leveraging the UDAN-RCS scheme and helicopter services and plans to introduce a caravan rental model to support flexible and immersive travel. **BOTT**



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AIR INDIA

enhances customer experience with Apple AirTag Integration and Reward Bonanza

Air India, India's flagship global carrier, is taking customer experience to the next level with a tech-savvy move and an exciting new rewards offer that reflects its commitment to innovation and loyalty.

BOTT Desk

In a major first, Air India has become the first airline in Asia to integrate Apple AirTag support into its baggage tracking system and mobile app, offering enhanced peace of mind to its tech-savvy travellers. Passengers using iPhone, iPad, or Mac devices can now securely track their checked-in baggage through Apple's "Find My" network. This integration complements Air India's existing real-time tracking feature available on its mobile app and website.

The initiative comes as the airline transports over 100 million pieces of baggage annually, with an impressive delivery success rate of over 99.6%. For the small percentage that encounters delays due to airport system hiccups or missed connections, this integration will significantly expedite the recovery process and improve customer confidence.

Passengers simply need to add their flight under the "My Trips" section of the Air India app for automatic baggage updates or scan the barcode on their baggage receipt to track their luggage in real-time.

Adding to the excitement, Air India has also rolled out a limited-time 'Maharaja Club Points

Plus' offer, allowing frequent flyer members to convert reward points from partner banks into Maharaja Points, and earn up to 50% bonus points on conversions made until March 31, 2025.

Under this offer, members can accumulate up to 1 million Maharaja Points, which can be redeemed for free flights, upgrades, and more on Air India and its Star Alliance partner airlines. With just 200,000 converted points, members could, for example, claim five one-way tickets from Mumbai to London, or a round-trip from Delhi to New York in Economy Class.

The offer is available to all Maharaja Club members, including new enrollees. Eligible bank partners include ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, DBS Bank, and SBI Cards. To participate, customers simply need to sign up via the Air India website or mobile app.

With a keen eye on global standards, and loyalty-driven perks, Air India is boldly stepping into the future—blending innovation with customer-first strategies to redefine the Indian aviation experience. **BOTT**



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INDIGO

unveils expansion, sustainability, and long-haul plans for India

*IndiGo is soaring to new heights as it reinforces its global presence with a series of strategic expansions and partnerships. With a robust vision to connect India to the world more seamlessly, IndiGo recently announced a slew of international routes and a game-changing loyalty partnership with hospitality giant Accor. **Vinay Malhotra**, Head of Global Sales at IndiGo, shares more.*

Priyanka Saxena Ray



How does your airline plan to expand its presence in India, both in terms of network and frequency of flights?

Our long-term strategy focuses on three pillars: network expansion, fleet modernization, and customer-centric innovation. By 2030, we aim to double our size, supported by an order book of over 900 aircraft.

We are dedicated to providing high-frequency flights with our A320/A321 fleet, optimizing capacity to meet demand. Additionally, we're committed to delivering tailored solutions that cater to our customers' unique travel needs. IndiGoStretch-our tailor-made business product, IndiGo BluChip loyalty program, and digital upgrades further enhance the customer experience.

What steps is your airline taking to reduce its carbon footprint, especially in the Indian sector?

IndiGo is committed to reducing its carbon footprint through fleet modernization, operational efficiency, and exploring sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).

We operate one of the youngest and most fuel-efficient fleets, with Airbus A320neo and A321neo aircraft significantly reducing carbon emissions. In fact, IndiGo has been awarded the prestigious title of 'World's Youngest Aircraft Fleet 2025' by ch-aviation in the category of airlines operating 100+ aircraft—marking the third consecutive year we have received this recognition.

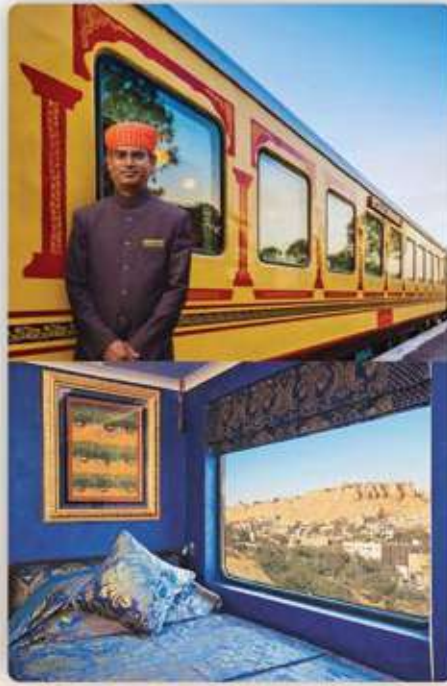
Our focus on high fleet utilization, quick turn-

arounds, and efficient operations also help minimise fuel consumption. We are also actively exploring SAF as part of our long-term sustainability goals, working with stakeholders to integrate it once commercially viable.

IndiGo is focused on eco-friendly practices and technologies to ensure a sustainable future for air travel. IndiGo has successfully reduced its CO₂ footprint by 19% in FY24 compared to seven years prior. Looking ahead, IndiGo has set a target of achieving 23% lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by FY30 compared to FY16.

Can you share insights on your airline's new aircraft acquisitions and how they align with your growth plans in India?

We are deeply rooted in the home market and our vision extends beyond domestic borders as well. IndiGo's strategic aircraft acquisitions, including the A321 XLR and A350, are central to our expansion plans both domestically and internationally. These aircraft will help strengthen our connectivity in key international markets such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. We are also adding secondary international destinations in various countries. Our recently leased Boeing 787-9 aircraft has successfully launched Delhi to Bangkok flights. With more aircraft joining our fleet, we plan to introduce direct long-haul routes to Europe in July 2025, expanding our reach. **BOTT**



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ROYAL JORDANIAN AIRLINES

expanding horizons with Sustainable Growth

*Karim Makhoulf, Chief Commercial Officer, Royal Jordanian Airlines spoke with **BOTT** in an exclusive chat in which he shared his insights about expansion plans, sustainability and more.*

Shreya Shimpi



How does your airline plan to expand its presence in India, both in terms of network and frequency of flights?

India is a crucial market for Royal Jordanian, and we are thrilled about our renewed focus on this dynamic region. As part of our expansion strategy, we are launching four weekly flights between Amman and Mumbai in June, followed by New Delhi in September.

What steps is your airline taking to reduce its carbon footprint, especially in the Indian sector? Are there any initiatives focused on sustainable aviation fuel or fleet modernization?

Sustainability is at the core of our long-term strategy. We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint through multiple initiatives. One of our biggest steps in this direction is fleet modernization. We are introducing fuel-efficient aircraft, such as the Embraer E2 and Airbus A320neo, which consume significantly less fuel and emit lower CO₂ levels compared to older models.

Can you share insights on your airline's new aircraft acquisitions and how they align with your growth plans in India?

Over the next 18 months, we are adding nearly 20 new aircraft, including Em-

braer E2 jets, Airbus A320neos, and Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners. Each of these aircraft plays a strategic role in our network development.

For India, the A320neo will be a game-changer. With superior fuel efficiency, extended range, and enhanced passenger comfort, this aircraft is perfectly suited for medium-haul routes like Amman-Mumbai and Amman-Delhi.

Additionally, our wide-body Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners will enhance long-haul connectivity, particularly for Indian travelers flying to Europe and North America via Amman.

With India focusing on boosting inbound tourism, how is your airline working with tourism boards, airports, and other stakeholders to facilitate increased connectivity and seamless travel experiences?

India and Jordan share a deep historical and cultural connection, and we see tremendous potential in promoting Jordan as a boutique destination for Indian travelers. We are closely working with the Jordan Tourism Board to drive awareness about Jordan's iconic attractions like Petra, the Dead Sea, and Wadi Rum. **BOTT**



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VIETNAM AIRLINES

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*Abhishek Goyal, Executive Director, Aeroprime Group [India GSA, Vietnam Airlines] shares his insights about their expansion plans, sustainability and more in a **BOTT** exclusive.*

Shreya Shimpi

How does your airline plan to expand its presence in India, both in terms of network and frequency of flights?

In May 2025, we are launching direct flights from Bangalore and Hyderabad to Hanoi, complementing our existing operations in Delhi and Mumbai. Additionally, we are introducing wide-body aircraft, including the Airbus A350, on our Mumbai-Hanoi route from 29th April this year to enhance capacity and passenger comfort. Our strategy for the Indian market focuses on increasing both flight capacity and frequency.

What steps is your airline taking to reduce its carbon footprint, especially in the Indian sector?

Some of our sustainability initiatives include the modernization of our fleet. Currently, we operate next-generation aircrafts such as the Airbus A350 and Boeing 787 Dreamliner, which consume up to 25% less fuel and significantly reduce CO₂ emissions. Additionally, we are actively exploring SAF [Sustainable Aviation Fuel] integration and collaborating with global partners to adopt more sustainable fuel alternatives in the coming years.

Can you share insights on your airline's new aircraft acquisitions and how they align

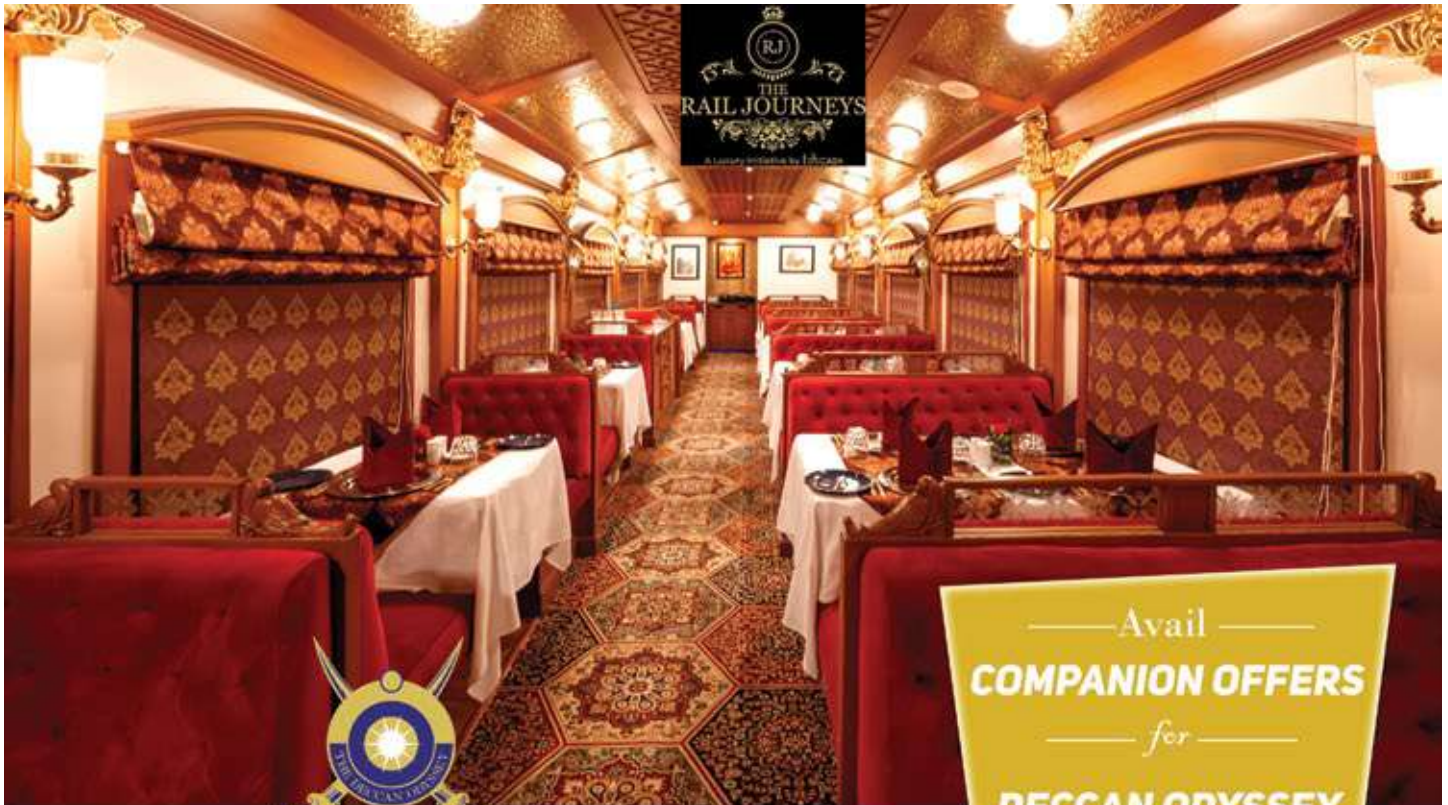
with your growth plans in India?

The Airbus A350 and Boeing 787 Dreamliner offer greater fuel efficiency and an enhanced passenger experience. As our new aircraft acquisitions are designed to enhance efficiency, passenger comfort, and environmental sustainability, they are now being deployed on both of our high-demand markets Delhi & Mumbai route, allowing every Indian passenger onboard to experience superior connectivity with an elevated travel experience.

With India focusing on boosting inbound tourism, how is your airline working with tourism boards, airports, and other stakeholders to facilitate increased connectivity?

Vietnam Airlines is actively collaborating with Indian tourism boards, airports and key travel stakeholders to develop strategic partnerships between the two countries and further enhancing flight connectivity with increased frequency alongside the introduction of new routes between major Indian cities and Vietnam. Additionally, we are working closely with various inbound agencies and tour operators to promote India as a rich-cultural destination among the Vietnamese travellers.. **BOTT**





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SRILANKAN AIRLINES

charts strong India growth with new routes, fleet expansion & Sustainability focus

*SriLankan Airlines is strategically strengthening its footprint in the Indian market with increased flight frequencies, new routes, and sustainable aviation practices. With a focus on positioning Colombo as a key transit hub for Indian travellers, the airline is expanding its fleet and enhancing connectivity to Tier 2 cities. In this exclusive interview, **Fawzan Fareid**, Regional Manager for India, Bangladesh & Nepal, SriLankan Airlines shares more.*

Priyanka Saxena Ray



How does your airline plan to expand its presence in India, both in terms of network and frequency of flights?

India is indeed a primary market for SriLankan Airlines. Our objective is to position ourselves as the most preferred carrier for travel between India and Sri Lanka, while establishing Colombo as a convenient and key transit hub for Indian travellers heading to destinations such as the Maldives, Southeast Asia, and Australia.

Our key focus in the Indian market is frequency enhancement, strategic

partnerships, and market-driven offerings. We are continuously evaluating opportunities to increase frequencies on high-demand routes and introduce new destinations, particularly in Tier 2 cities with strong potential.

Currently, we operate 88 weekly services across nine Indian cities. In response to growing demand, we reinstated the Chennai night service during the Winter 2024 schedule, making Chennai our most served destination with 21 weekly flights. We also added frequencies to Tiruchchirappalli and Madurai.



We plan to expand to 90 services with two additional flights to Thiruvananthapuram from April 2025 and aim for 95 weekly flights by Winter 2025, with the addition of five more frequencies to Mumbai, bringing the total to 19 flights per week.

Air India is one of our oldest and strongest codeshare partners. We are currently in discussions to expand our reach beyond the cities we directly operate in. These partnerships enable seamless travel options for passengers from smaller Indian cities.

What steps is your airline taking to reduce its carbon footprint, especially in the Indian sector?

We currently operate six Neo aircraft, which are frequently deployed on Indian routes—already a step toward reduced emissions. Additionally, we follow Airbus-recommended green operating procedures to minimize fuel consumption wherever possible.

We uplift a blend of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) under the RefuelEU program in Europe and the UK and are open to using SAF in the region as local regulations and supply stabilize.

Beyond fleet efficiency, we are committed to sustainable practices across our operations. We’ve shifted to eco-friendly materials, including recycled PET carpets onboard. We maintain strict waste management protocols and continually work to improve energy and resource efficiency.

Our award-winning upcycling ini-

tiative “Mathaka” repurposes retired aircraft items into memorabilia. We’re also working with government agencies in Sri Lanka to preserve biodiversity, focusing on blue carbon ecosystems like mangroves and seagrass.

Can you share insights on your airline’s new aircraft acquisitions and how they align with your growth plans in India?

SriLankan Airlines currently operates a fleet of 20 Airbus aircraft—nine wide-body and 11 narrow-body. We plan to add two narrow-body aircraft between April and June 2025, bringing the total to 13, followed by the addition of one wide-body aircraft between July and October 2025. Two more wide-body aircraft will be added between November 2025 and March 2026, expanding our fleet to 25 by the end of March 2026.

This expansion directly supports our India strategy. The upcoming increase in frequencies to Thiruvananthapuram and Mumbai is part of this growth.

Internationally, we plan to resume services to Beijing with four weekly flights starting July 2025 and Shanghai by November 2025. These routes will offer the quickest connections for Indian travellers heading to China via Colombo.

With increasing demand from India to Southeast Asia, we will also enhance our double daily services to Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore from July 2025. This will allow Indian pas-

sengers convenient dual-destination holidays, combining Sri Lanka or the Maldives with Southeast Asia—something no other carrier currently offers at such scale and convenience.

How is your airline working with tourism boards, airports, and other stakeholders to facilitate increased connectivity and seamless travel experiences?

No airline knows India quite like we do—we see India as one world with many countries. SriLankan Airlines plays a key role in promoting inbound tourism to India across multiple segments, including pilgrimage, medical tourism, shopping, and sightseeing.

We were recently recognised as the ‘Best International Airline 2024’ by Tamil Nadu Tourism for our contributions to inbound tourism.

We recently conducted a successful familiarization trip for 14 Sri Lankan travel agents and tour operators, hosted by the Telangana State Ministry of Tourism, to promote tourism to the region via our Hyderabad service.

For medical tourism, particularly to Kerala, we’ve organized two medical camps in the Maldives in collaboration with leading hospitals in Kerala and plan to conduct more, as Thiruvananthapuram remains a preferred destination for Maldivian patients.

Our larger objective is to strengthen India-Sri Lanka ties through enhanced air connectivity and mutual tourism promotion, using SriLankan Airlines as a bridge between the two nations. **BOTT**

VFS GLOBAL'S six-city roadshow draws record participation from travel trade

VFS Global successfully concluded its annual six-city roadshow, attracting an overwhelming response from the travel trade community. More than 750 travel agents participated in the events held across Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Kochi, Chandigarh, and New Delhi.

BOTT Desk



rganised ahead of the peak travel season, the roadshow aimed to strengthen VFS Global's engagement with travel agents – key partners in supporting visa applicants. The initiative was supported by leading travel trade associations such as the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI), and the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), whose leadership echoed the importance of collaboration between industry stakeholders.

“The response to our roadshows across cities has been truly heartening, and the positive feedback from the travel trade means a great deal to us,” said Yummi Talwar, Chief Operating Officer – South Asia, VFS Global. “Travel agents are an essential part of India's travel ecosystem, often being the first point of contact for visa-related guidance. It's important for us to remain connected with them, understand their concerns, and do all we can within our remit to support both them and the travellers. These roadshows reflect our continued commitment to working closely with the trade community.”

During the roadshows, VFS Global introduced a dedicated referral programme for travel agents, designed to encourage closer collaboration and improve the overall visa application experience for its customers.

Travel agents were also encouraged to advise customers to apply early for visas to avoid peak season delays. VFS Global reminded attendees that most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days in advance, with Schengen countries accepting applications as early as six months prior to travel. UK visa applications can be submitted three months ahead of the travel date.

A strong focus was placed on protecting travellers from fraudulent entities. The sessions also spotlighted the Visa At Your Doorstep (VAYD) service, an increasingly popular optional offering available on behalf of 19 client governments in India. In addition to VAYD, agents were briefed on Prime Time, VFS Global's exclusive after-hours visa application service. Another major highlight was the introduction of the Indonesia e-Visa platform, now available for 97 nationalities. **BOTT**



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T&C Apply.
*In Business Class

SIKKIM

showcases Sustainable splendour at Rural Tourism Meet 2025 in Uttarey

In March 2025, the tranquil village of Uttarey in West Sikkim transformed into a vibrant hub of cultural exchange and adventure during the Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet (SRTM) 2025. This three-day event, held from March 22 to 24, aimed to promote sustainable tourism, bolster local businesses, and celebrate the rich cultural heritage of Sikkim.

Rohan Gupta



The journey began on March 22, as participants arrived at Bagdogra Airport, where they were greeted with traditional ceremonies. Each guest received a yellow shawl inscribed with “Sikkim Rural Tourism Meet 2025,” symbolizing the state’s warm hospitality. From there, they embarked on an eight-hour scenic drive to Nagbeli Resort, a serene homestay nestled among blooming Buransh trees in Uttarey.

The following day marked the official inauguration of the meet. The Hon’ble Chief Minister of Sikkim graced the event, delivering a compelling speech that underscored the state’s vision for sustainable tourism. The day was further enlivened by vibrant cultural performances from local school and college students, showcasing the diverse traditions of Sikkim. Engaging discussions with community members and local travel agents provided deeper insights into community-driven travel initiatives.

March 24 offered participants a choice of activities focusing on adventure tourism, cultural exploration, and business networking. Some opted for the Phoktey Dara Trek, beginning with a drive from Uttarey to Chewabhanjang, followed by a 4 km trek to Phoktey Dara. The trek rewarded them with surreal views—Mount Kanchenjunga to the left, Mount Everest to the right—and the unique experience of standing with one foot in Nepal and the other in India.



In addition to trekking, the event introduced adventure tourism activities such as paragliding, hot air balloon rides, mountain biking, and notably, bungee jumping at Singshore Bridge, Sikkim's highest suspension bridge. These initiatives were aimed to position Uttarey as a prime destination for thrill-seekers and nature enthusiasts.

The SRTM 2025 also served as a platform for local artisans, farmers, and entrepreneurs to showcase Sikkimese handicrafts, handloom products, and organic food items. Business-to-business meetings facilitated connections between local tourism stakeholders and national and international travel agencies, fostering partnerships and investment opportunities in rural tourism.

This immersive journey through Sikkim's heartland was more than just travel—it was a celebration of culture, community, and sustainable tourism. From the heartfelt hospitality of the locals to the breathtaking landscapes, Sikkim truly felt like home. **BOIT**





MANOJ SAMUEL

‘Evolving and adapting to new technology is the cornerstone of success’

Manoj Samuel, CEO & Director, Riya Travel & Tours, has been a visionary force in helping the company reach the pinnacle of success. As a firm proponent of embracing and adapting to change, his inspiring story and forward-thinking approach continues to motivate the travel industry.

Shreya Shimpi

What inspired you to enter the travel industry, and how has it shaped you as a professional?

I am from Ahmedabad. When I completed my studies, I was looking for a job. At that point of time, Damania Airways was looking for some people. I joined at the airport and my journey started from there. After that, I worked at Interglobe Air Transport where we managed multiple airlines. In 2000, I joined Galileo in Mumbai now known as TravelPort.

Technology was always my passion. When I entered into this industry, the aviation industry was shifting to the tech part as it was completely manual before

that. Computer and internet was making its way into the aviation industry. Things were changing very fast with these technological developments. I then joined Thai Airways in 2003. I have been with Riya since 2006 and I have completed almost eighteen years with Riya Travels. ‘Riya Connect’, an online platform for Riya has been started by me. Today we have around 75,000 agents connected on that platform. We also have a mobile app on which almost forty per cent of the transactions take place.

Reflecting on 2024, what would you say were the three highlights

of the year for you—personally or professionally?

Last year, the way things have moved with NDC, I believe it to be the next big change. Personally, and professionally, this was a change that I had to accept. I make sure that not just myself for this as every If but my team too adapts to this. We are trying to create a system with Subject Matter Expert on this as every airline is coming up with a different aspect of this which is more personalised and content-driven. Hence, the team has to be trained well.

As a key figure in Riya Travels, what is your long-term vision for the organization?

Automation is a primary thing. Whatever is happening manually today needs to be automated. We have to create a leaner team full of automation. If AI comes into play, we will adapt to that.

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

I feel it is 'Riya Connect' which I established in 2007. Today this has reached a successful level with almost 75000 agents' network online with fourteen products.

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

I always like Japan and it continues to remain my favourite. My daughter likes to visit Korea so we go there too. The calmness that Japan brings, I don't think any other country does that.

Travel comes with its ups and downs—could you share one of your most memorable trips?

I just attended Coldplay in Abu Dhabi with my son. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience and it was a different environment which I wanted to experience.

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?



I feel that everybody needs to adapt to the new things and technology. Cribbing about it is not going to help. We have to adapt. Everyone has their own set of aims and goals which they will achieve. I am not even mentioning airlines or vendors. Everybody has their own path. One must see an opportunity in the challenges or obstacles that they face.

If you look at something like Rail, though it is a small product, agents are doing bookings on mobile. We have almost 20,000 agents connected for rail. The industry needs to adapt and move rather than saying that a particular thing is too small or not right for us. The aviation market in India today is just 4 per cent. Even a 2-3 per cent shift

in it will change the entire dynamics of this. There lies a sea of opportunities in the Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities.

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

I was born in Patna, Bihar and I hail from a small town. I did my degree in Fine Arts as well. In this company too, Marketing and HR comes under me. I am a student of marketing. Technology and marketing motivate me. I have a daughter and a son. My son is into film-making. He is just 24 and starting his journey with an Ad-making company. My daughter is in the 12th Std and aspires to make a career in the field of design.

One of my seniors in school was Saba Karim and I always aspired become a cricketer. However, Bihar being competitive in sports, it was difficult. It was always a cherished memory to see them play and to play along with them.

What is your vision for the travel and tourism industry in 2025, and how do you see your role contributing to its growth and transformation?

There are a lot of challenges out there from the industry point of view which we need to overcome. We should make sure that we keep learning. If we don't learn or adapt, things are going to change anyway. Even if we stop, the world will continue to move. The way AI has taken the world by storm, you have to make sure that you are running ahead of that. **BOTT**

QUICK SHOTS

- Birthdate & Sun sign – **5th June, Gemini**
- Mountains or Beaches – **Both**
- Window or Aisle – **Aisle**
- Favourite Holiday Destination – **Japan**
- Best Travel Hack – **Travel organised. Travel Smart**
- Favourite Cuisine – **Indian**
- Favourite Quote – **Leadership is an action, not a position**
- Hobbies – **Cycling | Listening to Podcast (Business & Tech)**
- Travel Souvenirs – **Love them**
- Best travel advice for the first time traveller – **Go, Learn & Explore**

TOURISM NEW ZEALAND strengthens tourism ties to boost Indian arrivals



Tourism New Zealand is making it easier than ever for Indian travellers to discover, visit, and experience New Zealand's breathtaking landscapes, and immerse themselves in the unique culture and warmth of the country. A series of initiatives were recently announced to remove traditional barriers, streamline booking processes and create compelling new reasons for Indian visitors to choose New Zealand as their premier holiday destination all year round.

BOTT Desk



One exciting development is a potential direct flight route between India and New Zealand, a breakthrough that would significantly remove travel barriers and streamline long-haul journeys. At a tourism reception hosted by Tourism New Zealand, the Right Honorable Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister of New Zealand, witnessed the signing of a strategic memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Air India and Air New Zealand to explore the potential for direct connectivity, which would make New Zealand more accessible than ever for Indian travellers.

Tourism New Zealand is also doubling down on its commitment to boost Indian arrivals through a combination of strategic alliances and seasonal travel initiatives.

Tourism New Zealand, Auckland Airport and Air New Zealand signed an MoU committing investment to a joint seasonal marketing campaign to build demand and drive off-peak visitation to New Zealand. This joint investment underscores the shared ambition to strengthen New Zealand's position as a preferred destination for Indian visitors, specifically during the autumn, winter and spring seasons.

Recognising the valuable role played by the travel trade industry, joint venture (JV) agreements were also signed with nine Indian travel partners. These collaborations will drive visitation via curated travel experiences specifically designed to meet Indian traveller preferences, with particular focus on promoting New Zealand's winter and spring seasons.

An exclusive integrated winter campaign was also announced, combining compelling media content with promotional travel packages. This initiative will inspire Indian visitors through strategic digital media placements while offering immediate conversion opportunities through travel partners featuring New Zealand's breathtaking snow-capped destinations, adventure sports, and luxury stays during the winter season.

René de Monchy, Chief Executive, Tourism New Zealand said, "India is one of New Zealand's fastest growing markets, with holiday visitor numbers experiencing double digit growth, and huge potential to keep growing." **BOTT**

Asego has always stepped above the confines of traditional travel protection to become a comprehensive travel risk management provider for the modern traveller. Over the years, they have safeguarded millions of journeys, setting new benchmarks in the travel protection sector. Whether it's health coverage, trip assistance, or baggage protection, Asego provides seamless solutions that cater to the dynamic needs of today's global travellers.

ASEGO

redefined Baggage Protection with TrackMate

Asego has come full circle with the launch of their all-new Mate Series Products – a suite of innovative products designed to provide seamless support to travellers. Whether it's ensuring a comfortable experience during unexpected flight delays, offering a hassle-free way to stay connected with loved ones, or ensuring that their luggage doesn't go astray while travelling, Asego has remained steadfast in addressing the evolving needs of modern travellers to enhance their overall travel experience.

The Reality of Baggage Loss

Every year, nearly 26 million bags are mishandled globally, with approximately 5% of all checked baggage experiencing delays, damage, or loss. In high-traffic airports, baggage loss incidents surge, with Europe and North America recording some of the highest mishandling rates. The impact of lost baggage goes beyond inconvenience—travellers face financial burdens, missed connections, and disrupted itineraries, turning what should be a seamless experience into a logistical nightmare.

Two decades ago, Asego pioneered the concept of physical baggage tags, setting new standards in baggage protection and offering travellers peace of mind. Today, we



Dev Karvat,
Founder and CEO, Asego

are proud to reintroduce this game-changing innovation in a digital form with TrackMate. Over and above our basic baggage loss cover, TrackMate offers real-time baggage tracking and compensation of ₹66,000 for up to two bags on overseas trips if not found within 96 hours post-arrival.

A Game-Changer for Asego Travel Agent Partners

Since its launch, TrackMate has been a runaway success. Today, nearly 70% of travel protection plans provided by Asego include TrackMate, proving its necessity in the modern travel landscape. Travel agents have embraced the product as a key differentiator, providing their clients with enhanced travel experiences and increasing customer satisfaction. This innovative offering helps agents gain customer loyalty by delivering practical, real-time baggage solutions that meet modern travellers' expectations.

What's next in Mate Series?

The success of TrackMate is only the beginning. The Mate Series is set to revolutionize travel, becoming the ultimate travel companion for every modern traveller. **BOTT**

*With an aim to go beyond honeymooners and target the families and MICE segment, Mauritius is going all out to get a bigger portion of the Indian Outbound. **Hurry Krishna Boodhun**, Officer in Charge, Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority shares his insights about the importance of the India market, promotion strategies and more with **BOTT**.*

Shreya Shimpi

ENCHANTING MAURITIUS

eyeing a larger portion of Indian outbound

*Y*ear 2024 for Mauritius 2024 has been a great year. We had a twenty per cent increase from the India market. We are taking a fresh look at the India market for various reasons. Firstly, there is new connectivity in the India market with three carriers- Indigo, Air India and Air Mauritius. Indigo and Air India has a better penetration in the Indian market which has helped in improving the connectivity between the two countries including the Tier-2 cities giving us a good competitive advantage.

Importance of the India market

We receive around 1.3 million tourists every year and we have a population of 1.2 million. Sixty per cent of our tourists come from Europe. However, for several years now, India has been a very important source market for us.

Strategies to increase the outreach in the India market

Apart from the major cities, we are trying to increase our connectivity to the Tier-2 cities. We are having training programs for tour operators and travel agents in Mauritius. We are also introducing some e-learning platforms.



We are also planning to host Roadshows in Tier-2 cities.

Target market segments

We predominantly get a lot of honeymooners. The market segments that we target are mostly families, corporates and MICE.

Dealing with over-tourism

Mauritius is a small island with an area of 2000 sq. km. We are very conscious when it comes to responsible and sustainable tourism. Mauritius is not a mass tourism destination like Thailand, it is a premium world-class tourist destination in the Indian Ocean. We don't go for mass tourism

Vision for 2025

We are quite optimistic about the India market and we expect a twenty per cent growth from the India market. The relationship between Mauritius and India goes much beyond economic and commercial ties. We have a common cultural, historical and political foundation hence we should see our tourism industry as the bigger picture. **BOTT**

TÜRKIYE

welcomes 61.2 million visitors in 2024; eyes stronger Indian footprint



Türkiye Tourism Authority shares insights on Türkiye's record-breaking tourism numbers, its strategic focus on India, and plans for 2025. With India emerging as a key source market, Türkiye is ramping up efforts to attract Indian travellers, particularly in weddings, gastronomy, and cultural experiences.

Pallavi Sharma

*T*ürkiye's tourism success in 2024

2024 was a great achievement for Türkiye. We welcomed approximately 61.2 million visitors, generating \$62 billion in tourism revenues. The top three inbound markets were Germany, the United Kingdom, and Bulgaria, but emerging markets like India are playing a crucial role in our growth.

India's growing importance in Türkiye Tourism

The Indian market has shown immense potential for Türkiye. Between 2023 and 2024, we saw a 20% increase in Indian travellers, reaching 335,000 visitors. India has always been an important market for us, and with new marketing initiatives, we are strengthening our presence. Indian travellers are drawn to Türkiye's rich culture, historical landmarks, leisure options, and gastronomy. Additionally, Türkiye is gaining recognition as a premier wedding and honeymoon destination, with excellent infrastructure and human resources to host large-scale events.

Strategies to attract Indian travellers

We have positioned Türkiye as a top wedding

and honeymoon destination and are leveraging film tourism by encouraging Indian productions to shoot here. Indian travellers prioritize cultural heritage, gastronomy, and immersive experiences, and we are tailoring our offerings accordingly.

To deepen ties, Türkiye is actively participating in major Indian travel events. We are present at SATTE and will soon embark on a six-city roadshow covering Kolkata, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bangalore, and Mumbai. Around 30 Turkish companies are participating, reflecting immense interest in the Indian market. The demand from Indian travellers aligns perfectly with what Türkiye offers, and we aim to foster stronger business partnerships.

Vision for 2025

Looking ahead, Türkiye has ambitious goals for the Indian market. We aim to build on this momentum and increase visitor numbers from India. With India's outbound travel market growing rapidly, we see immense potential to expand our presence. While Istanbul and Cappadocia remain favourites, we also want to introduce newer destinations such as the Aegean coast, Antalya, Belek's golf resorts, Bodrum for luxury travellers, and the Black Sea region for outdoor enthusiasts. **BOTT**

DUSIT INTERNATIONAL

expands its presence in India

As part of this vision, Dusit is preparing to launch six additional hotels across the country. The upper-midscale Dusit Princess brand will debut in Raipur (200 keys), Bhiwadi (165 keys), Kolkata (220 keys), and Lonavala (120 keys). Meanwhile, two boutique luxury properties under the recently introduced Dusit Collection brand – in Kasol and Manali (each with 40 rooms) – will offer refined escapes in the Himalayan foothills.

BOTT DESK



Deepening its commitment to India, Dusit International, one of Thailand's leading hotel and property development companies, has announced plans to expand its presence in the country by launching its luxury and upper midscale brands in key emerging markets.

With rising disposable incomes, increasing demand for premium stays, and enhanced connectivity reshaping India's hospitality landscape, Dusit is focused on underserved yet high-potential markets nationwide.

In addition to exploring opportunities in India's Tier 1 cities, Dusit also aims to target Tier 2 and Tier 3 destinations where luxury and upscale hospitality options are currently limited – creating opportunities to deliver curated, high-end experiences tailored to local demand. This strategic expansion builds on the momentum of Dusit's recent foray into the Indian market with the opening of the contemporary, upscale dusitD2 Fagu, Shimla in December 2024, and the signings of three key properties in Karnataka: the wellness-focused Devarana Sakleshpur, Karnataka – A Dusit Retreat (set to open in 2028), and two upcoming Dusit Princess Hotels & Resorts.



With a diverse brand portfolio spanning the ultra-luxury Devarana – Dusit Retreats to upper midscale and midscale brands such as Dusit Princess and ASAI Hotels, Dusit plans to tap underserved locations where it can leverage its expertise in delivering Thai-inspired gracious hospitality to meet the needs of today's business and leisure travellers.

“India represents an exceptional growth opportunity for Dusit – across major metros and particularly in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, where premium hospitality options remain limited despite strong demand,” said Mr Siradej Donovanik, Vice President – Development (Global), Dusit International. “The country's tourism industry is evolving rapidly, with increasing demand for high-quality, experience-driven stays. By blending our unique brand of Thai-inspired gracious hospitality with wellness-led experiences and destination-driven properties, we aim to create exceptional stays that resonate deeply with Indian travellers. Through strategic partnerships with visionary local developers, we are committed to shaping India's premium hospitality landscape for the long term.” **BOTT**



VIRGINIA

rises as a top U.S. destination for Indian travellers

*With India now Virginia's second-largest international tourism market, the state is pulling out all the stops to woo Indian travellers—from direct Air India flights to immersive experiences that span history, culture, food, and nature. In an exclusive conversation with **Rita D. McClenny**, President & CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corporation, **BOTT** uncovers what makes Virginia a complete destination and why Indian footfall is surging.*

Pallavi Sharma

India has emerged as Virginia's second-largest international source market after the UK, with over 61,000 Indian visitors recorded in 2024—a significant jump from 53,000 in 2023. “The growth from the Indian market has been nothing short of impressive,” says Rita D. McClenny.

A key enabler has been Air India's non-stop service to Virginia, operating five times a week since April. McClenny emphasizes, “While non-stop flights are a big draw, many Indian travellers also combine Virginia with visits to other cities in the U.S.”

Beyond air access, Virginia offers rich diversity—from the Blue Ridge Mountains and historic towns to coastal retreats and vibrant music scenes. With excellent infrastructure, including Amtrak and Metro services, travellers can explore the state seamlessly.

Virginia's tourism appeal spans across multiple travel segments. While Millennials and Gen Z form a growing segment—especially with the “YOLO” mindset and social media sharing—the state also caters to Boomers and family travellers. Culinary experiences, outdoor adventures, historical sites, and seasonal escapes make Virginia a year-round destination. “We want Virginia to be that place people return to—not just for one vacation, but for future trips, education,

business, and even weddings,” said McClenny. The state already hosts a large Indian diaspora and is home to several Indian businesses, especially from Mumbai and Delhi.

The state is also making inroads in destination weddings, with growing interest among Indian families based in the U.S. “It's often more practical and meaningful to celebrate here,” McClenny notes.

To better connect with Indian travellers, Virginia Tourism is actively working with the travel trade in India through training sessions, educational programs, and incentive-based collaborations. They're also leveraging content-led campaigns, showcasing the evolving stories and attractions across different parts of Virginia to inspire future travel. “We're not just offering itineraries; we're offering reasons to fall in love with Virginia—whether through partnerships, technology, or authentic storytelling,” she shared.

Looking ahead, the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution in 2026 is expected to draw global attention to Virginia's Historic Triangle. Positioned as a complete destination, Virginia invites Indian travellers to tick off multiple experiences in one unforgettable trip. **BOTT**

Crete, Greece’s largest island, is steadily rising on the radar of Indian travellers. Often described as a “small continent” for its sheer diversity, the island offers a rich tapestry of experiences. In an exclusive conversation with **BOTT**, **Nikos Alexakis**, Head of the Tourism Directorate for the Region of Crete, shares his vision for promoting Crete in India.

Shreya Shimpi

CRETE BECKONS

A Mediterranean gem eyeing the Indian traveller

The unique appeal of Crete

Crete’s charm lies in its versatility. Whether you’re seeking a relaxing beach holiday, an adventurous mountain trek, or a deep dive into history and gastronomy, the island delivers it all—backed by excellent infrastructure and authentic local experiences. Its varied offerings have earned it the nickname “small continent,” a nod to the vast range of experiences available in one compact destination.

India: A market of Strategic Importance

India is emerging as a strategic market for Crete, and preparations are well underway to tap into its potential. “We’re eagerly anticipating the launch of our new airport in 2027, which could pave the way for direct flights from India,” says Alexakis. “We see tremendous opportunity in welcoming Indian travellers.”

Strengthening outreach in India

To build awareness and engagement, the Crete tourism board is planning targeted outreach in India. This includes collaborations with travel agents via e-learning modules and familiarization (FAM) trips. “We want agents to experience Crete first-hand so they can confidently recommend and promote it,” he adds. Promotional campaigns are also in the pipeline to further raise visibility in the



Indian market.

Focused market segments

Crete is well-positioned to cater to a broad spectrum of travellers—families, luxury seekers, and honeymooners—as well as the growing MICE and destination wedding segments. From family-friendly resorts to exclusive adults-only retreats, the island offers curated options for every traveller’s taste and budget.

Tailored experiences for Indian travellers

Understanding the specific preferences of Indian guests, Crete is ready to offer personalized travel packages. From Indian dining options and exceptional hotel infrastructure to unique cultural encounters, the destination promises a seamless, comfortable, and memorable holiday for Indian tourists.

Future-ready connectivity

While Indian travellers currently reach Crete via connecting flights through hubs like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, or Istanbul, the future looks even more promising. “We’re actively working toward establishing direct air connectivity from India by 2027,” confirms Alexakis—an upgrade that would significantly enhance convenience and attract more visitors from the subcontinent. **BOTT**

VISIT BRUSSELS

geared towards increasing the volume of ‘quality tourism’

*Brussels is known for its historical and architectural landmarks, idyllic landscapes and the unmissable local waffles and chocolate. In an exclusive chat with **BOTT**, Pieter Callebaut, International Business Development, Visit Brussels shares how the year gone by was for Brussels in terms of tourism and what are they targeting for the current year...*

Shreya Shimpi

The year 2024

In general, as a destination, we are doing very well. We have recovered completely after the Covid crisis. We are gradually receiving more tourists and have achieved pre-Covid levels. Now, the expectation is to go over those numbers.

Importance of the India market

India is an important market. The US is the first outbound long-haul market for us. India together with Brazil is upcoming and is going well. We don't aim to have mass tourism but we are looking at receiving quality tourism from India. We are happy to see these numbers grow each year and we are expecting 2025 to be an even better year!

Top five key markets

Our top five key markets include France, Germany, the UK, Holland and Spain

Marketing strategies

We are represented throughout the year by our local representation office here working with all



agencies and promoting it all over India as well. Though they are concentrating on Mumbai and Delhi mostly, they are also trying to target the other parts of India. Our main target is to increase the volume of quality tourism to Belgium. Quality tourism is where the tourists stay at the destination, and take their time to explore the city as well as the other parts of Belgium.

USP of Brussels

It is difficult for any tourism board to pinpoint just one thing but I feel that the advantage of Brussels is that it is a walkable city which can be explored on foot. It is green, has a unique culture, offers varied gastronomical experiences and is multi-cultural. It is the capital of Europe and represents Europe so beautifully because every European nationality that lives there has also created its own little village. It is the perfect example of a European village combined with everything. Belgium is a surprising country. It is not a big country but has great diversity. **BOTT**

MOROCCO

achieves record tourism in 2024, sets sights on Indian market expansion



*With record-breaking numbers and a bold vision for the future, Morocco is fast cementing its place as a global tourism leader and the top destination in Africa. In an exclusive conversation with **BOTT**, Jamal Younes KILITO, Country Manager – India, Moroccan National Tourism Office, shares his insights on Morocco’s remarkable tourism achievements in 2024 and its ambitious plans to strengthen ties with the Indian market.*

Shreya Shimpi

*T*he Year 2024 for Morocco

“It was a wonderful year,” beams Kilito. “We achieved our 2026 target two years early.” Morocco welcomed 17.4 million visitors in 2024, recording a 20% growth over 2023. Officially ranked as the number one destination in Africa, Morocco’s success is driven by its rich and diverse cultural heritage, captivating landscapes, strong tourism infrastructure, and a wide variety of activities for all types of travellers.

Looking ahead, the future is just as promising. Morocco is preparing to host two major sporting events: the AFCON – African Cup of Nations in 2025, and the FIFA World Cup in 2026 (as a co-host), both of which are spurring massive investment in infrastructure, hotels, and tourist attractions. The country is targeting 26 million visitors by 2030, and with the momentum in place, that goal appears well within reach.

Importance of the India Market

The Indian market is gaining strategic importance for Morocco. “From India, we saw a 43% growth last year with 41,000 In-

dian passport holders entering Morocco. This followed an incredible 120% rise in 2023 compared to 2022,” says Kilito. Encouragingly, January 2025 has already seen a 63% year-on-year increase in Indian arrivals.

Kilito notes that India’s growing interest in Morocco is being supported by meaningful partnerships with Indian tour operators and active engagement in the market. “India will remain a key market for us,” he affirms.

Strategies to increase outreach in India

To further boost awareness and interest, the Moroccan National Tourism Office is ramping up its B2B engagement. “We’re conducting a series of training programs, roadshows, seminars, and fam trips to educate and inspire travel agents,” Kilito explains.

While efforts were focused on Mumbai and Delhi last year, this year will see the expansion of outreach efforts to Kolkata, Bangalore, and Ahmedabad, ensuring wider regional connectivity and engagement. **BOTT**

2024 has been a remarkable year for Israel's tourism industry, with over 9,100 visitors from India and close to 1 million travellers from across the globe exploring the country. This significant growth reaffirms Israel's position as a premier destination for both leisure and faith-based travel. **Amruta Bangera**, Director of Marketing, Israel Ministry of Tourism, shares more insights with **BOTT**.

Pallavi Sharma

ISRAEL TOURISM sees remarkable growth, sets sights on India for 2025

*S*afety First, always: A priority for every traveller

One of the key pillars of Israel's tourism strategy is safety. With ongoing global concerns, Israel has taken significant measures to prioritise the security of its visitors. In fact, despite the challenges faced globally, Israel has maintained a track record of zero harm to tourists, showcasing its commitment to providing a safe environment for all. The country ensures the protection of tourists, whether they are solo travellers, families, or large groups, in a manner that reflects its unwavering dedication to safety.

In addition, Israel's transparent approach to tourism ensures that visitors have access to accurate and timely information, enabling them to make informed decisions about their travels. This commitment to openness is further reinforced by the return of international airlines to Israel's skies in 2025. When airlines resume operations, it's a sign that the skies are safe, and Israel is ready to welcome visitors from around the world once again.

Building stronger ties with Indian travellers

Recognising India as a high-potential



market, Israel is increasingly focusing on strengthening its ties with Indian travellers. Israel's strategy goes beyond simple promotional campaigns; the aim is to foster long-term relationships and enhance awareness among Indian tourists. This is being achieved through several initiatives designed to educate and empower travel agents, who are instrumental in guiding potential travellers.

Israel is rolling out a range of initiatives, including educational workshops, seminars, roadshows, webinars and E-learning programs aimed at helping agents better understand and sell Israel as a destination

Message to Indian travellers

Israel is more than ready to welcome Indian travellers in greater numbers. With its unparalleled blend of history, culture, spirituality, and safety, Israel promises an experience like no other. Whether you are seeking a spiritual journey, a historical exploration, or simply a relaxing vacation, Israel offers something for every traveller. The country invites you to explore its wonders, embrace its rich heritage, and create memories that will last a lifetime. **BOTT**

In a remarkable initiative to showcase the rich heritage and royal hospitality of Castle Mandawa, Numen Hospitality, in association with Castle Mandawa and KK Holidays N Vacations, organised an exclusive Familiarization (FAM) Trip for the travel trade fraternity. The trip was scheduled from March 27 – 29, 2025, and promised an immersive experience into the heart of Shekhawati's royal charm.

Anjali Pokhriyal

CASTLE MANDAWA

The perfect royal canvas for dream Weddings



The journey started from Delhi in the morning, and the five-hour drive was filled with the excitement of discovering a new region. Upon arrival at Castle Mandawa by early afternoon, we checked in and enjoyed a traditional lunch, followed by a unique Hi-Tea experience at Mandawa Safari (Stables) with a variety of horses and thrilling horse riding. A guided show-around of the heritage property showcased 80 distinct rooms spread across four categories – Standard Rooms, Deluxe Rooms, Suites, and Royal Suites – each space uniquely themed and adorned with antiques, chandeliers, and vibrant murals reflecting the grandeur of Rajasthani royalty. The accommodations are not only comfortable but also give guests a historic vibe.

Speaking of weddings, Castle Mandawa is a popular choice for its regal ambience and historical significance. The hotel takes care of every detail, from lavish decorations to exquisite food, ensuring a royal experience for the wedding party and guests. It also offers an ideal setting for conferences and corporate events. The property blends traditional Rajasthani architecture with modern facilities, creating an environment that is both culturally rich and professionally equipped.

Day two began with breakfast at the elegant Jai Mahal Dining Room, followed by an insightful City Haveli Tour at 10:30 AM, allowing participants to witness the intricate frescoes and architectural wonders Mandawa is renowned for.

The highlight of the day was undoubtedly the Dinner and Cocktail evening on the dunes – a spectacular experience under the stars that celebrated the spirit of Rajasthan in all its glory. The trip concluded on March 29 with breakfast and a heartfelt farewell to the group, wrapping up the journey on a warm and memorable note. **BOTT**

RADISSON HOTEL GROUP revives India Sales Roadshow, eyes annual expansion

Radisson Hotel Group has officially reignited its India sales roadshow after a five-year hiatus, underscoring its commitment to strengthening B2B partnerships and showcasing its rapidly expanding hospitality portfolio. The 2025 edition kicked off at the Radisson Blu Plaza Delhi and is set to continue in Mumbai on April 11 at the Radisson Blu Mumbai International Airport.

With more than 130 operational hotels across India—including strong footprints in tier-one, tier-two, and tier-three cities—the group is positioning this roadshow as an annual marquee event. The current edition has drawn robust participation, featuring representatives from over 60 Radisson properties. The enthusiastic response from industry stakeholders highlights the renewed interest in collaborative opportunities, with plans already in motion to scale the initiative in future editions. **BOTT**



10 immersive experiences you can't miss in TAIWAN

Taiwan is much more than Taipei 101 and night markets. Beyond its urban charm lies a rich tapestry of culture, tradition, and nature that offers travellers immersive and unforgettable experiences. From dyeing your own fabric in ancient indigo to brewing bubble tea from scratch, here are 10 must-do activities that will let you explore Taiwan like a local.

1 Create your own Indigo Masterpiece in Sanxia

Step into the world of traditional Taiwanese craftsmanship at the Sanxia Indigo Dyeing Centre in New Taipei City. This hands-on workshop lets you fold, tie, and dye fabrics the old-fashioned way using natural indigo. The calming process results in a beautiful, one-of-a-kind piece you can take home—perfect for a keepsake or gift. The centre operates daily and advance booking is a good idea to secure your slot.



2 Pluck and sip Fresh Tea in Yilan

In the lush tea plantations of Yilan County, you can spend a morning with local farmers learning the art of tea picking. Under their guidance, you'll carefully harvest tea leaves and then enjoy a steaming cup of freshly brewed Oolong tea. This experience offers a serene break from the city and a deeper appreciation for Taiwan's iconic beverage.



3 Dress the part in Dadaocheng, Taipei

Wander through the historic streets of Dadaocheng in Taipei dressed in a traditional qipao, Taiwan's elegant take on Chinese fashion. Various rental studios offer vintage-style dresses that transport you to the early 20th century. It's not just an outfit—it's a cultural experience and the perfect photo opportunity against Dadaocheng's retro backdrop.



4 Witness the ancient art of Fire Fishing in Jinshan

A truly unique night-time adventure awaits in Jinshan, New Taipei City. During summer, you can watch fishermen use blazing torches to attract fish—a practice passed down through generations. The glow of fire against the water and the quiet anticipation creates a magical and surreal experience.





5 Learn Calligraphy and carve your own seal in Tainan

Channel your inner scholar in Tainan's Anping District, where you can join a traditional Chinese calligraphy and seal carving workshop. You'll be guided in mastering brush strokes and chiselling your own personalized seal—something uniquely yours to take home. It's both meditative and creative, and a wonderful way to connect with Chinese art and history.



6 Pick fresh fruit with farmers in Tainan

Visit a local fruit farm in Nanxi District, Tainan, and pick your own seasonal produce straight from the orchard. Depending on the time of year, you might gather juicy guavas, plums, or citrus. Some farms even offer jam-making sessions where you can turn your harvest into a sweet souvenir.



7 Brew Millet Wine with Atayal Elders in Wulai

In the scenic mountains of Wulai, south of Taipei, join the indigenous Atayal community in crafting millet wine, an ancient beverage steeped in tradition. From learning about local crops to participating in the fermentation process, it's a cultural journey complete with a tasting session at the end.



8 Meditate at Taiwan's largest Monastery in Kaohsiung

Escape the noise and find inner peace at the tranquil Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Kaohsiung. Whether you join a silent Zen retreat or a guided meditation session, the serene surroundings and spiritual atmosphere provide a rejuvenating experience. Programs vary in length and are open to beginners and seasoned practitioners alike.



9 Shake up your own Bubble Tea in Yilan

No trip to Taiwan is complete without bubble tea—and what better way to enjoy it than by making your own? At the Kili Bay Pearl Milk Tea Cultural Centre in Yilan, you can learn the secrets of this beloved drink, from selecting ingredients to shaking up the perfect cup. Fun, flavourful, and totally Instagram-worthy.

10 Soak in the steamy bliss of Wulai Hot Springs

Nestled in the mountains of New Taipei City, the Wulai Hot Springs are perfect for winding down after days of exploration. Surrounded by rivers and waterfalls, these mineral-rich waters soothe both body and soul. Pair your soak with a stroll through the nearby Atayal village for a complete cultural and wellness experience.. **BOTT**



JAMAICA TOURIST BOARD

hosts networking evening for Travel Trade and Media in New Delhi



Jamaica Tourist Board successfully hosted an exclusive networking evening on March 26, 2025, at The Leela Palace, New Delhi, bringing together the esteemed travel trade fraternity and Indian media. The event aimed to strengthen partnerships and enhance awareness about Jamaica as a premier travel destination among Indian travellers. Guests enjoyed an immersive experience into Jamaica's vibrant culture, learning about its world-famous hospitality, scenic landscapes, and adventure offerings. The evening was also graced by the virtual presence of Ms. Stacian Virtue, Senior Business Development Officer, Jamaica Tourist Board, engaged the Indian audiences with a detailed virtual presentation on destination Jamaica. She shared valuable insights into the island's diverse attractions, ease of travel, and unique experiences.

During the event, Ms. Virtue made an exciting announcement about Jamaica's online training programs designed for travel agents. She mentioned that this program offers in-depth knowledge about the destination, equipping agents with the necessary expertise to promote Jamaica effectively to Indian travellers. By participating in the training, agents can enhance their skills, stay updated on the latest travel offerings, and gain exclusive access to resources that will help them boost sales.

The event also featured interactive sessions, networking opportunities, and an authentic taste of Jamaican hospitality, reinforcing the destination's appeal in the Indian market. **BOTT**



CINNAMON LIFE

Redefining luxury, leisure & MICE in Sri Lanka

*2024 has marked a transformative chapter in Sri Lanka's tourism landscape with the grand launch of Cinnamon Life – City of Dreams in Colombo. As one of the country's most ambitious hospitality developments to date, this \$1.3 billion project has captured global attention and is poised to reshape how the world experiences Sri Lanka. In an exclusive conversation with **BOTT**, **Radhey S Tawar**, Chief Commercial Officer at Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts, shares insights into this game-changing venture, its strategic partnerships, and more.*

Pallavi Sharma



Cinnamon Life – City of Dreams has been one of the biggest developments in Sri Lanka's hospitality sector. Can you tell us more about it?

Cinnamon Life – City of Dreams is our most ambitious project yet—a \$1.3 billion integrated development, making it the largest private investment in Sri Lanka's history. With 687 operational rooms and plans to expand to 800 across two hotel brands, it's more than a hotel—it's a destination in itself.

The complex features two residential towers, an office tower, high-end retail and dining outlets, and will soon introduce South Asia's first onshore casino in partnership with Melco Resorts & Entertainment—one of the world's top five casino operators. This development is set to revolutionize Colombo's tourism and lifestyle offering.

How is Cinnamon Life positioning itself in terms of MICE and leisure tourism?

Cinnamon Life offers 160,000 sq. ft. of flexible event space, accommodating up to 5,000 guests. Since opening in October, we've focused on engaging partners from MICE, leisure, and weddings. February alone saw incredible traction.

Colombo is cleaner, more cost-effective, and less congested than many metropolitan

cities, making it ideal for international conferences and incentives. We've also launched the Sri Lanka Conference Ambassador Programme with SriLankan Airlines and the Sri Lanka Convention Bureau to bring global industry leaders onboard to promote the country's MICE potential.

Weddings seem to be an emerging segment. What's Cinnamon's strategy there?

Destination weddings are key for us. Cinnamon Bentota Beach and Cinnamon Ventura Beach are gaining popularity among Indian couples. We hosted 6 weddings in 2023, and 12 in 2024—that's double the growth. With Cinnamon Life's luxury offerings and lifestyle experiences, Colombo is now stepping onto the global stage as a premium wedding destination.

What can you tell us about the wellness and culinary offerings at Cinnamon Life?

We've launched five signature restaurants and multiple dining venues. Our in-house wellness brand Purundu is exclusive to Cinnamon Life—focused on high-end, holistic rejuvenation. We offer two swimming pools—one family-friendly and another adults-only—for tailored guest experiences. **BOTT**



MOUNT LAVINIA HOTEL

courts Indian Market with Royal Wedding appeal and MICE edge

*Mount Lavinia Hotel is more than just a luxury property—it's a living monument to Sri Lanka's colonial past, a haven of timeless romance, and now a rising star in destination weddings and MICE for the Indian market. In conversation with **Saakya Ukwatte**, Managing Director of Mount Lavinia Hotel and Resorts and Director of the International Hotel School, we uncover the rich legacy of this iconic hotel and its exciting future.*

Anjali Pokhriyal

*M*ount Lavinia Hotel has an incredible legacy. Can you share more about its history?

Absolutely. Mount Lavinia Hotel is the oldest hotel in Sri Lanka, originally built in 1806 as the British Governor's residence. It turns 220 next year. More than a hotel, it's considered a national monument. Built as a beachside retreat, it was later transformed into a palace by Governor Sir Thomas Maitland, who famously fell in love with a local dancer named Lovina. He even had a secret tunnel built from the palace to her house—so the hotel is quite literally built on a love story.

That's a romantic story! Does that legacy reflect in your current operations? And how many rooms and event spaces does the hotel have today?

Very much so. We've hosted more weddings than perhaps any other hotel in Sri Lanka—from celebrities and politicians to generations of local families. The emotional ties to Mount Lavinia run deep. Currently, we have 200 operational



rooms and eight banqueting spaces, two of which can host up to 800 guests. We also offer a beachfront marquee venue—ideal for private weddings, something hard to find in destinations like Goa.

Are you actively targeting the Indian destination wedding and MICE markets?

Absolutely. India is a key focus. We've already hosted Indian weddings and are preparing for a confidential 11-day wedding for the family of a prominent political leader from Andhra Pradesh. Thanks to our bilateral trade agreements, even mandap setups, flowers, and ingredients are brought in tax-free.

Sri Lanka offers seamless access—Mount Lavinia is just 6.5 km from Colombo city centre, like staying in a palace next to a metro city. With 20 direct flights from India daily and competitive pricing—rooms from \$80–\$120 and wedding packages starting at just \$15–\$20—we offer unmatched value for a truly royal experience. **BOTT**

The year 2024 Preferred Hotels & Resorts has announced its latest developments from the brand, including the expansion of its leadership and portfolio in India, significant growth within its renowned Legend Collection, and the launch of a new Travel Advisor Portal.

BOTT Desk



PREFERRED HOTELS & RESORTS announces global expansion and strategic initiatives

The company has also expanded its presence in India with an impressive portfolio of 26 member hotels including 11 luxurious properties from The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts. This marks a milestone of 16 successful years of partnership with the prestigious brand. In 2024, the portfolio welcomed five exciting new additions including The Leela Gandhinagar (L.V.X. Collection), two standout properties from Aurika Hotels & Resorts: Aurika, Udaipur - Luxury by Lemon Tree Hotels and Aurika, Mumbai Skycity (Lifestyle Collection), The Resort Mumbai (Lifestyle Collection), from the Chalet Hotels' portfolio, and Kinwani House by Aalia Collection (Lifestyle Collection) in Rishikesh, further supporting the brand's commitment to providing exceptional, innovative experiences for its partners and guests across the region.

Preferred Hotels & Resorts continues to celebrate the most exciting new independent hotels, resorts, and residences opening up around the world, with highlights for the end of 2024 and into 2025 including Peter Island Resort (Legend Collection), a treasured Caribbean private island hideaway which opened in December 2024 in the British Virgin Islands; The Newman (Legend Collection) launching in London, United Kingdom in September 2025 with extensive wellness facilities. Additional highlights for summer 2025 include Royal Hideaway Corales Villas (L.V.X. and Residence Collections)



in Tenerife, Spain; ÓROS Luxury Beach Resort (L.V.X. Collection) in Crete, Greece; and Romègas Hotel (L.V.X. Collection) in Valletta, Malta.

Saurabh Rai, Executive Vice President for South Asia, Middle East & Africa at Preferred Hotels & Resorts, states, "As we continue to grow in India and globally, our commitment to delivering exceptional luxury experiences remains at the core of everything we do. Our recent expansion in the Indian market, with the appointment of key leadership and a strong regional portfolio, is a testament to our dedication to offering unparalleled service and innovative solutions for both our guests and industry partners."

Seema Roy, Area Managing Director for South Asia, Middle East & Africa at Preferred Hotels & Resorts, adds, "We are witnessing exciting growth for the brand, particularly with our new hotel openings and the expansion of our elite Legend Collection. Our focus is on curating unique, memorable experiences that reflect the highest standards of luxury and personalization." **BOTT**

Know what your stars say about April 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 April 2025.



March 21 – April 20

This month will be phenomenal for you, with significant progress on both professional and personal fronts. You'll feel happy, joyful, and experience rapid growth. However, be mindful of your health. There will be numerous opportunities to innovate and gain widespread recognition.



July 23 – August 21

It might be the right time to consider a job change that's been on your mind for a while. You may begin exploring new opportunities this month. Social gatherings and community events are likely. Watch out for minor health issues.



November 23 – December 22

Your sharp work ethic and attention to detail could lead to career advancement and peer recognition. Avoid deals that seem too good to be true, and carefully evaluate your options before making commitments. Take good care of your health.



April 21 – May 21

This month, you will play a key role in empowering others and contributing to their success. Your business will expand, and professional achievements will follow. Your disciplined and balanced approach will help maintain both mental and physical well-being.



August 22 – September 23

You'll receive several professional opportunities, but you'll wisely choose the ones with long-term potential. Invest time in nurturing your relationships and be attentive to your health.



December 23 – January 20

Your work life will be marked by harmony and balance, and signs of career growth are strong. This is a favourable time to consider a business partnership. Spiritual pursuits will bring peace, and a potential romantic connection may be on the horizon.



May 22 – June 21

You'll need to stay focused and avoid distractions at work, as carelessness could affect the quality of your output. Channel your energy constructively to reach your full potential. Avoid arguments with loved ones. Yoga, meditation, and steering clear of overthinking will be beneficial.



September 24 – October

You'll need to put in extra effort to keep up with a tight schedule. Only take on as much work as you can realistically handle. Maintain a harmonious relationship with your spouse and follow a healthy lifestyle.



January 21 – February 19

Love, warmth, and excitement will define your relationships this month. You are nearing a breakthrough in your career and have a clearer vision for your future. Your efforts will be recognised. It's also a good time to make wise investments.



June 22 – July 22

You have many ideas and the drive to bring them to life, refocus, and realign your priorities. Mood swings may affect your family life, so strive for emotional balance. Be cautious with any investment that claims to be risk-free.



October 24 – November 22

You might face challenges in communicating with your family. Misunderstandings at work could be hurtful, so clarity and patience are key. Professional projects will require thorough planning. Prioritize your health.



February 20 – March 20

Take time to understand your strengths and work on your weaknesses. Those beginning their professional journey will find opportunities opening up. Couples can focus on relaxation and strengthening their bond.

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APPOINTMENTS

ACCOR HOTELS

Accor has appointed **Vineet Mishra** as Vice President – Operations, India & South Asia. With over 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Vineet will oversee Accor's operational strategies across its diverse portfolio, reinforcing the brand's presence in the region. In his new role, he will take on an elevated leadership position, overseeing overall operations and driving business performance.



VISIT UTAH

The Utah Office of Tourism has named **Tera Atwood** as its new Global Markets Specialist, a strategic move aimed at strengthening Utah's presence in key international markets—particularly India. With outbound travel from India on the rise, Atwood will focus on increasing Utah's visibility, building strong travel trade relationships, and executing targeted campaigns to position Utah as a premier U.S. destination for Indian travellers.



ANTARA CRUISES

Vineet Arora has been appointed Chief Operating Officer (COO) at Antara Cruises. With over 22 years of experience in hospitality, Arora returns to the brand with a strong leadership portfolio. Notably, he previously played a key role in launching the world's longest river cruise during his tenure as Vice President at Antara.

FOUR SEASONS HOTEL MUMBAI

Mayurdeepsinh Rathod has been appointed Director of Revenue at Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai. In this pivotal role, he will lead revenue growth strategies through dynamic pricing, market analytics, and distribution management, optimizing the hotel's overall revenue performance.



COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT PUNE HINJEWADI

Courtyard by Marriott Pune Hinjewadi has promoted **Aniket Kulkarni** as the new General Manager of the hotel. In his elevated role, he will lead overall operations with a continued focus on guest satisfaction, operational excellence, and people-first leadership. He has been an integral part of the hotel's success, previously serving as Hotel Manager.



Hyatt Centric Janakpuri

Anirudh Sanjeev has taken charge as General Manager at Hyatt Centric Janakpuri. A Hyatt veteran with over 14 years of experience, his journey from Sales Coordinator at Hyatt Regency Chennai to Director of Operations at Hyatt Regency Gurgaon underscores his deep expertise in hospitality leadership.

PULLMAN CHENNAI ANNA SALAI

Vinodh Ramamurthy has been named General Manager of Pullman Chennai Anna Salai. With over 26 years of industry experience, Ramamurthy combines deep operational knowledge with strategic foresight and people-focused leadership, aiming to steer the hotel into its next phase of growth and innovation.



NAUKUCHIA HOUSE, IHCL SELEQTIONS

Sanjeev Kumar has been appointed General Manager at Naukuchia House, IHCL SeleQTions. With nearly two decades of experience in luxury hospitality, Sanjeev brings strong leadership in strategic planning, operational efficiency, and guest experience enhancement across multiple hotel and resort properties.





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