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# Editor's LETTER

*D*ear Industry Colleagues,

February is truly the month where the travel trade calendar comes alive with energy, ambition and opportunity. The year's networking momentum begins with OTM in Mumbai and reaches its grand culmination at SATTE in New Delhi — two powerful platforms where the entire travel and tourism fraternity comes together under one roof. From fresh partnerships and promising collaborations to meaningful dialogue and high-value business deals, this is a month of constant movement, vibrant exchanges and renewed synergies. For travel professionals across sectors, February is nothing short of a busy, exciting sprint into the heart of the industry's new year.

In this special February issue of BOTT – Business of Travel Trade, we bring our readers a curated overview of destinations that are perfectly suited for the new-age traveller — those seeking immersive, experience-driven journeys, authentic cultural encounters and offbeat adventures. From emerging Indian gems to international hotspots redefining travel, these destinations reflect the evolving aspirations of today's explorers.

Alongside destination inspiration, this edition features exclusive interviews with key voices shaping the future of tourism. We present insights from Tourism Minister Omar Abdullah, along with perspectives from industry veterans who continue to guide the sector with experience, vision and resilience.

A major highlight of this issue is our exhaustive coverage of Brand USA Travel Week in Bengaluru — a landmark event that reinforced the growing tourism bridge between India and the United States, opening new avenues for outbound and inbound growth.

As always, BOTT remains committed to bringing you stories that inform, inspire and connect the travel trade community.

Read all this and much more in our February issue — your companion to a dynamic month of business, networking and travel transformation..

Happy Reading!

Warm regards,

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**  
Editor, BOTT India

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**MINOR HOTELS SIGNS FIRST PROPERTY UNDER MINOR RESERVE COLLECTION**

Minor Hotels has announced the first signing under its new luxury soft brand, Minor Reserve Collection. Aventora Resort Baía Formosa, set to open in 2028 in Brazil's Rio Grande do Norte, will feature 50 rooms and 28 branded residences. Owned by Gremi International Group, the resort will offer world-class dining, wellness facilities, outdoor adventure experiences and curated leisure amenities, positioning it as a landmark eco-luxury destination.



**SUMMIT HOTELS DEBUTS RETREAT PROPERTY IN PANGTHANG, GANGTOK**

Summit Hotels & Resorts has opened Summit Signature Retreat Pangthang in Gangtok, entering Sikkim's retreat hospitality segment. The 38-room hilltop property in Pangthang offers sweeping views of the Eastern Himalayas, with Mount Kanchenjunga visible from the resort. Set amid pine plantations and mountain landscapes, the retreat is designed for travellers seeking peace, privacy, and immersive slow stays. Though located close to Gangtok township, its elevated setting ensures a calm escape from city bustle.



**THE POSTCARD OPENS NEW RETREAT ON MANDOVI RIVER, NORTH GOA**

The Postcard Hotel has announced a new opening this January 2026, The Postcard on the Mandovi River, North Goa. Set along the serene banks of the Mandovi, the retreat offers a slow luxury stay with panoramic river views, understated design, and intuitive service. Guests can enjoy fresh local flavours and curated experiences rooted in Goa's culture. A private jetty adds exclusivity and seamless river access.



**IHCL LAUNCHES GINGER GURUGRAM, SECTOR 1 AT GLOBAL FOYER MALL**

Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) has launched Ginger Gurugram, Sector 1, reinforcing the brand's expansion in leading commercial hubs. Located within Global Foyer Mall in Palam, the hotel offers 59 rooms with contemporary design and vibrant social spaces. Guests can enjoy Qmin all-day dining, an infinity pool, fitness centre, and corporate boardrooms. The opening strengthens Ginger's lean-luxe appeal for Gurugram's strong year-round business demand.



**CYGNETT SIGNS SECOND HOTEL IN AYODHYA; COZZET PROPERTY TO OPEN SOON**

Cygnett Hotels & Resorts has strengthened its footprint in Ayodhya with the signing of its second property, Cozzet Ayodhya. The upcoming 70-room value hotel will feature an all-day dining restaurant, modern amenities, gym, conference spaces, and an 8,000 sq. ft. banquet hall with lawn for weddings and gatherings. Strategically located near Ram Mandir and the airport, the hotel aims to meet rising demand from pilgrims.

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## SHORT NEWS

### SOUTH AFRICAN TOURISM ANNOUNCES 22<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL INDIA MULTI-CITY ROADSHOW 2026

South African Tourism has announced the 2026 edition of its Annual India Multi-City Roadshow, reaffirming its strong commitment to the Indian market. Launching alongside OTM Mumbai 2026, the roadshow will run from February 5–7, followed by engagements in Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Delhi from February 9–12. Now in its 22nd year, the initiative will strengthen trade partnerships, showcase new experiences and unveil refreshed strategies aligned with evolving Indian traveller preferences.



### INDIANS TO JAPAN CROSS 300,000 MARK IN 2025

From January to December 2025, a total of 315,100 Indian visitors travelled to Japan — the first time in history that arrivals from India have crossed the 300,000 mark. This record-breaking achievement represents a sharp rise of 35.2% from 233,061 in 2024, and nearly 80% higher than the pre-COVID benchmark of 2019 (175,896). The milestone underscores the growing enthusiasm of Indian travellers for Japan.



### AIR INDIA EXPANDS BOEING ORDER WITH 30 MORE AIRCRAFT

Air India has placed an order for 30 additional Boeing aircraft, including 20 737-8 and 10 737-10 narrowbody jets, taking its total Boeing orders to 250. The announcement was made at Wings India 2026 in Hyderabad. These new additions build on the airline's 2023 mega order of 470 aircraft. Air India has already received 52 Boeing aircraft, including a new 787-9 set to fly Mumbai–Frankfurt from 1 February 2026.

### QATAR TOURISM RECORDS STRONG GROWTH AND MICE MOMENTUM IN 2025

Qatar Tourism and Visit Qatar reported resilient growth in 2025, with visitor arrivals rising 3.7 percent to 5.1 million. Hospitality performance strengthened, with 10.8 million room nights sold and accommodation revenue reaching QAR 8.3 billion. The MICE sector welcomed over one million international business visitors and secured 14 global event bids for 2026–27. Doha's designation as GCC Tourism Capital 2026 further reinforces Qatar's regional leadership.



### THAI AIRASIA X MARKS ONE YEAR IN INDIA WITH STRONG LOAD FACTORS

Thai AirAsia X celebrated its first anniversary in the Indian market with a Travel Partners Meet in New Delhi, hosted in association with APG India. CEO Pattra Boosarawongse highlighted the airline's strong performance, with load factors rising from 85% in 2025 to 88% this month, and touching 92% in recent days. The airline sees growing potential on the Delhi–Bangkok route and plans to further strengthen connectivity and trade partnerships in India.



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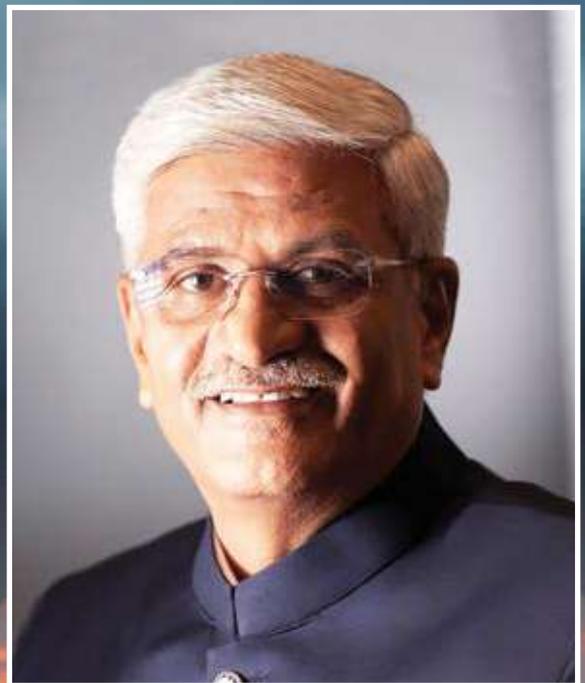


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# India sees strong tourism growth with 20.57 million foreign arrivals



Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister for Tourism and Culture

## BOTT DESK

India's inbound tourism recorded robust post-pandemic resurgence in 2024, with provisional figures showing international tourist arrivals reaching 20.57 million, exceeding pre-COVID levels of 17.91 million recorded in 2019. The data, released by the Ministry of Tourism, highlights sustained growth since 2020 despite global travel disruptions and reflects the country's increasing appeal as a travel destination.

According to the Bureau of Immigration figures, arrivals climbed steadily from 6.33 million in 2020 and 7 million in 2021 to 14.33 million in 2022 and 18.89 million in 2023, underscoring a strong upward trend over five years.

The Ministry pointed out that India's growth trajectory has outpaced overall regional recovery, with international arrivals surpassing 2019 benchmarks even as some neighbouring destinations lag. The latest UN Tourism Barometer indicated only limited regional recovery by 2024, with India emerging among the leaders in rebound.

Union Minister for Tourism and Culture, **Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat**, noted in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha that this performance results from targeted promotional efforts. Initiatives include participation in global travel exhibitions, familiarisation (FAM) tours for overseas tour operators and media, road-

shows and cultural festivals abroad, and active engagement with tourism stakeholders to amplify India's destination appeal.

The government's continued focus on marketing, partnerships with state and union territory tourism bodies, and enhanced global outreach through digital platforms and influencer engagement have all played a role in reinforcing India's tourism brand internationally.

This growth reinforces expectations that international tourism will continue to be a vital contributor to India's economic recovery and cultural exchange, positioning the country as a compelling global travel destination heading into 2026. **BOTT**

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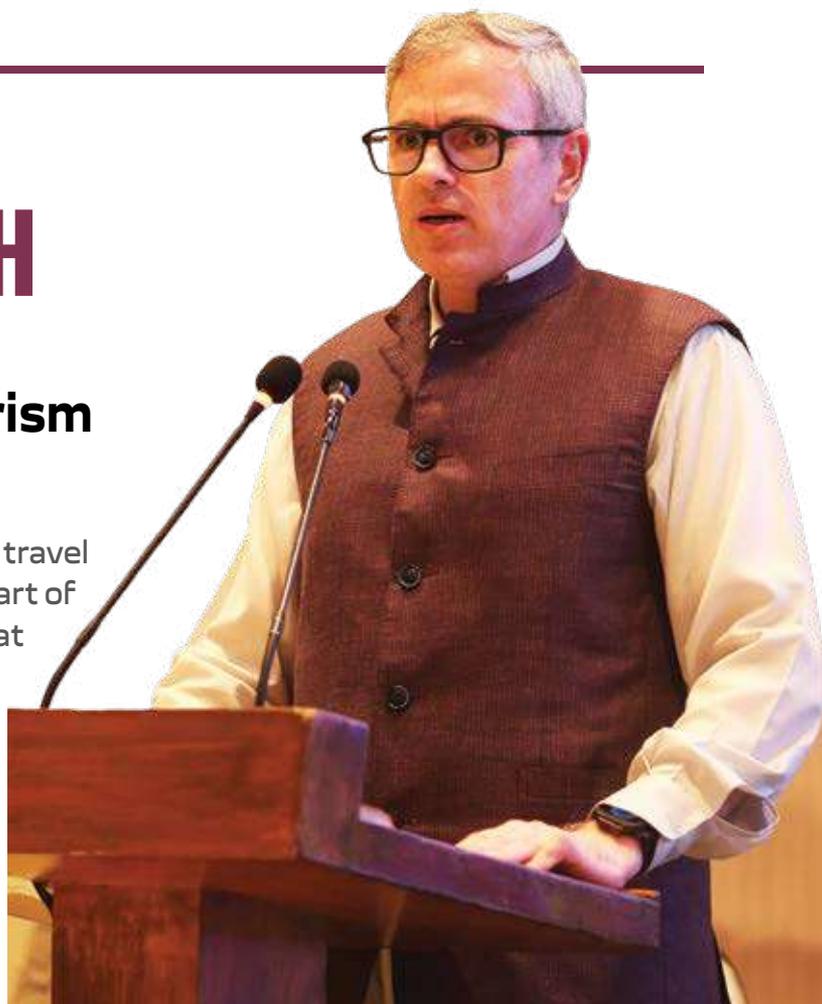
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# OMAR ABDULLAH

## highlights tourism revival, sustainability and film tourism

The Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, **Omar Abdullah**, addressed members of the travel media at a press conference in Mumbai as part of the Chief Minister's 'Maharashtra and Gujarat Travel Fraternity Outreach Programme'. He was accompanied by Nasir Aslam Wani, Advisor to the Chief Minister, J&K; Syed Qamar Sajad, Director, Tourism Kashmir, and other prominent members from the J&K Tourism Department.



Omar Abdullah, Hon'ble Chief Minister of J&K

### Shreya Shimpi

Positioning tourism as an economic lifeline and a cultural responsibility, Omar Abdullah, Hon'ble Chief Minister of J&K, said, "Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir goes beyond just the destination, as it is a source of livelihood for thousands of families intrinsically linked to the tourism industry. The Government is exploring avenues that are naturally available. Tourism is a fickle and sensitive industry, as it experienced a grinding halt post the Pahalgam attack, but active efforts are being taken for its growth and revival."

Speaking about film tourism, he said, "During our visit here, we have had interactions with the NFDC and

the IICT. For me, the idea is not just for people to come and use the valley as a destination for filming songs and movies, merely as a backdrop. I want to create an ecosystem where part of the material and manpower requirement is met from within the valley itself. This will serve two advantages — it will make filming in J&K cheaper and will also create an avenue for employment. We also hope to do the same with the larger film industry beyond Bollywood, which would be the twin area of focus."

"We are working closely with the Government of India to develop nine green-field projects with multi-lateral funding. These destinations will be de-

veloped to a very high standard in terms of sustainability and local employment. My message to my colleagues in the tourism industry in J&K is that our success is not in bringing someone to Kashmir for the first time. It lies in ensuring that they wish to come back again and again."

He also threw light on promoting MICE, border tourism, and pilgrimage tourism. The evening concluded with a networking dinner with key members of the travel trade fraternity, where he expressed heartfelt gratitude to travel associations and agents for supporting tourism's growth after the tragic attack. **BOTT**





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# AEROPRIME

## Building the future of India's aviation ecosystem

As India rapidly advances toward becoming a global aviation and logistics hub, Aeroprime Group is emerging as a key enabler at the intersection of airlines, airports, cargo and technology. **Abhishek Goyal**, CEO & Executive Director, Aeroprime Group, shares insights on alignment, market readiness, cargo transformation and the evolving role of private players in shaping India's aviation future.

**Priyanka Saxena Ray**

**A**eroprime sits at the intersection of airlines, airports, cargo and technology. How do you ensure alignment across these verticals while keeping customer outcomes at the centre of decision-making?

At Aeroprime, we view these verticals as interconnected parts of a single ecosystem. Alignment begins with a clear understanding that our end customer, whether an airline partner, cargo client or travel trade stakeholder, expects seamless outcomes, rather than fragmented services. We ensure this through integrated teams, shared data visibility and a strong technology backbone including our proprietary digital platforms such as GLID, which connect commercial, operational and customer-facing functions. Every strategic decision is evaluated through the lens of customer impact, whether it improves speed to market, enhances revenue quality, or simplifies processes.

**As India positions itself as a global aviation and logistics hub, what gaps still exist in the ecosystem that private players like Aeroprime can help bridge?**

One key challenge is the disconnect between infrastructure development and commercial readiness, particularly for international airlines and cargo operators entering or expanding in India. Private players like Aeroprime can bridge this gap by offering market intelligence, localized sales expertise, digital enablement and integrated go-to-market strategies. We play a crucial role in translating policy intent and infrastructure investments into commercially viable operations by supporting airlines and logistics players with distribution, cargo sales, regulatory navigation and trade engagement. This execution layer is essential for India to truly function as a global hub.

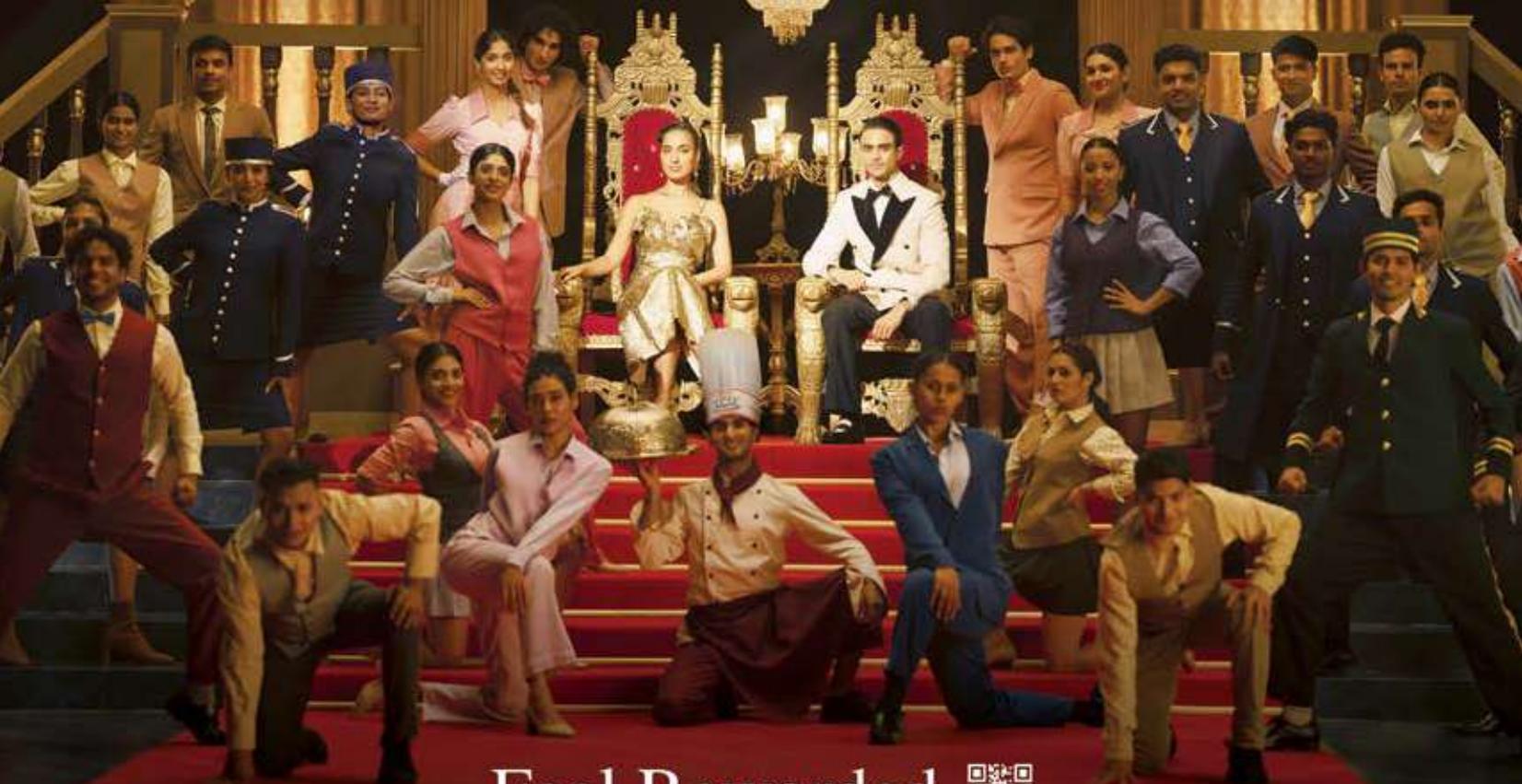
**Cargo has emerged as a strong growth driver post-pandemic. How is Aeroprime reimagining cargo sales, digital processes and partnerships to support India's export ambitions?**

At Aeroprime, we are reimagining cargo sales by combining traditional market relationships with data-driven demand forecasting and digital tools that improve visibility across the value chain. We are investing in digitized booking processes, real-time performance track-and-closer collaboration with freight forwarders, exporters and airport stakeholders. By aligning airline capacity with India's evolving export especially perishables, pharmaceuticals and e-commerce, we aim to create more predictable, scalable cargo solutions. **BOTT**

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# TATHASTU WILDLIFE RESORTS

## Building sustainable luxury in India's Tiger heartland

Known for its immersive, nature-driven experiences across India's leading tiger reserves, Tathastu Wildlife Resorts has carved a unique space in experiential hospitality. With sustainability embedded at its core, the brand continues to expand thoughtfully while deepening its commitment to conservation awareness and community engagement. **Anil Agarwala**, Managing Director, shares how Tathastu balances eco-sensitivity with guest comfort. The resort is represented by Terra Tales in Delhi NCR.



### BOTT DESK

**How do you balance sustainability, guest comfort and commercial viability while operating in ecologically sensitive destinations?**

Tathastu's journey began in 2011 with the construction of our very first resort in the Panch Tiger Reserve. From the moment of conception, sustainability and guest comfort over commercial viability was not an afterthought—it was the foundation on which Tathastu was built.

Over 1,500 varieties of plants were thoughtfully planted to recreate the immersive feeling of living within a jungle, while seamlessly blending in the comforts of modern luxury. Every element of the landscape was carefully planned so that rainwater from every inch of the property is efficiently harvested and diverted into our lakes. A well-designed network of canals, underground pipelines, natural slopes,

and drains ensures that not a drop of water is wasted.

To nurture this dense plantation responsibly, the entire property is equipped with the Israeli drip-irrigation system, ensuring optimal water usage with maximum efficiency.

Equal importance is given to waste management and resource regeneration. All waste generated is processed through STP, ETP, and Bio-Compost pits. The residue is reused as organic manure, completing a sustainable closed-loop ecosystem.

At Panch, this belief comes alive through our Mud Rooms, constructed using layered mud walls that naturally regulate indoor temperatures—enhancing guest comfort, reducing energy consumption, and ensuring long-term viability.

**With growing demand for experiential travel, what are Tathastu**

**Resorts' expansion plans?**

Over the past three years, Tathastu has commenced commercial operations across four key wildlife destinations—Kanha, Tadoba, Bandhavgarh, and Satpura.

We have also acquired land parcels in Panna, near Khajuraho, and in Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve, near Bandhavgarh. Construction will begin soon as our operational footprint strengthens.

My vision is simple: Wherever there is a Tiger in Central India, Tathastu should have a presence.

**What are your key growth priorities for the coming year?**

While new destinations remain important, our key priority this year is deeper community engagement.

We aim to challenge the mindset that holidays must only mean beaches or mountains but also wildlife. **BOTT**



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# 5 tips

## for Indian travellers planning a cruise in 2026



Nishith Saxena,  
Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals

The decision to book a cruise holiday is always an exciting one and sometimes in this excitement, we end up making choices which may not be aligned with our holiday needs. **Nishith Saxena, Founder & Director, Cruise Professionals** shares some tips which may help make a better choice when booking a cruise vacation.

### Book Early

Booking your cruise early is one of the smartest ways for Indian travellers to secure the best value and experience. Early reservations unlock the widest choice of cabins along with the lowest fares and attractive offers such as onboard credits, beverage packages and special promotions. With more time in hand, guests can plan visas, flights, stays and shore excursions while avoiding last-minute price surges and limited availability.

### Buy Insurance

Indian passengers booking a cruise should always purchase travel insurance because it provides essential financial protection and peace of mind. Cruise insurance covers unexpected events such as trip cancellations, medical emergencies abroad, missed departures, baggage loss and itinerary disruptions. Since cruises sail far from home ports and medical treatment onboard or overseas can be costly, insurance ensures access to emergency care and evacuation support.

### Book through your trusted travel agent

Indian passengers should always book a cruise holiday through their trusted travel agents. These agents ensure au-

thenticity, correct pricing and provide reliable end-to-end support. They guide on cabin selection, visa requirements, documentation, insurance and destinations. In case of schedule changes or emergencies, they can coordinate directly with cruise line representatives for faster resolution and customer protection.

### Premium include more value

Indian passengers should consider booking a premium cruise when they seek a more refined, spacious and personalized holiday experience. Premium cruise lines offer higher staff-to-guest ratios, superior dining, more inclusive amenities and thoughtfully designed itineraries, resulting in a less crowded and more relaxed journey.

### Big or small – the choice is yours

Different types of cruise ships — big and small — offer distinctly different experiences. Large ships deliver a vibrant resort-style atmosphere with entertainment, multiple dining venues and family activities, ideal for multigenerational families and first-time cruisers. Smaller ships provide a more intimate environment with personalized service, fewer crowds and access to unique ports, appealing to travellers seeking destination-focused journeys. [MOT](#)

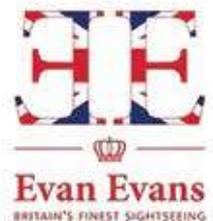
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# PERU

## bets big on India as a high-value long-haul market

As Indian travellers increasingly look beyond conventional long-haul destinations, Peru is emerging as a compelling choice for those seeking depth, diversity and immersive experiences. Speaking exclusively to **BOTT**, **Luis Cabello**, Trade & Tourism Counsellor of Peru in India highlights why India is a priority source market, how Indian arrivals are growing steadily in double digits, and why Peru is positioning itself as a destination that rewards longer, more meaningful journeys beyond Machu Picchu.

### Priyanka Saxena Ray

#### How was your experience at OTM Mumbai this year?

OTM Mumbai has been an excellent platform for us. This is our third consecutive year of participation, and it continues to deliver strong business value. We participated with 17 tourism companies, including DMCs and hotels. These are companies already familiar with the Indian market and capable of managing Indian travellers' expectations. In our first OTM in 2024, we had only 10 companies; that number has steadily grown to 15 and now 17, with nearly 50% newcomers this year—showing rising confidence in India as a source market.

#### Why is India an important market for Peru?

India is a strategic, high-quality market for us. We are not chasing volume; we are focused on travellers who have the time and means to explore long-haul destinations deeply. Indian travellers are increasingly choosing to spend more days in Peru, sometimes even longer than in other Latin American countries, which is very encouraging.

#### What destinations beyond Machu Picchu are you highlighting to Indian travellers?

Machu Picchu is a must, but Peru offers much more. Cusco, the former Inca capital, allows travellers to walk through streets and structures built over 500 years ago. We also promote the Sacred Valley, which helps with acclimatisation and enriches the journey. Beyond that, destinations like Nazca Lines, Lima, Arequipa, the Colca Canyon, and the Peruvian Amazon add incredible diversity to itineraries.

#### How many days should Indian travellers ideally spend in Peru?

Peru cannot be done in five days—that's a mistake. It's like visiting India only for the Taj Mahal. A well-planned Peru itinerary needs more time, and Indian travellers are increasingly understanding this.

#### What are your arrival expectations from India?

We are targeting around 40,000 Indian travellers by the end of 2026, with arrivals growing consistently in double digits in recent years. For us, this

quality-led growth is far more important than sheer numbers.

#### What excites you most about India-Peru tourism going forward?

The response from India has exceeded expectations. More Peruvian companies are now actively working with Indian partners, and that tells us the market is mature, promising, and here to stay. **BOTT**



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# Is travel assistance the new essential for every journey?

In today's fast-moving travel landscape, disruptions are no longer the exception but the norm. Over 25 million bags are mishandled globally and more than 35% of flights face delays exceeding 60 minutes. While travel demand has returned, journey quality often hasn't. Insurance may reimburse losses later, but travellers need something more immediate — real-time help, support, and on-ground assistance when things go wrong.

## BOTT DESK



Dev Karvat, Founder & CEO, ASEGO

Recognising this shift, ASEGO has launched ASEGO BOLT+, a powerful new travel assistance bundle created by combining three of its most effective services—TrackMate, WaitMate, and ChatMate. Together, they deliver rapid response and real protection, exactly when and where customers need it most.

TrackMate enables global, real-time baggage tracking across all airlines and routes, with guaranteed compensation of up to ₹66,000 per checked-in bag (up to two bags) if the luggage isn't recovered within 96 hours.

Similarly, WaitMate automatically activates premium lounge access if a flight is delayed by more than 60 minutes—offering travellers comfort instead of frustration. Coverage extends across up to four flight segments in a single trip and includes access to over 1,300 lounges across more than 100 countries.

Adding another layer to this assistance ecosystem is ChatMate, ASEGO's global connectivity solution that ensures travellers stay connected from the moment they land.

With instant international eSIM activation across multiple countries, ChatMate eliminates the hassle of searching for local SIM cards, unreliable Wi-Fi, or expensive roaming charges—enabling travellers to access maps, airline updates, emergency support, and stay connected with loved ones without interruption.

This isn't just a service upgrade — it's a mindset shift. Travel assistance is no longer an add-on; it's becoming a baseline expectation. As a travel advisor or booking partner, offering BOLT+ is more than an upsell — it's about being proactive, customer-centric, and aligned with what modern travellers truly value: peace of mind and dependable support.

ASEGO BOLT+ empowers travel agents to move beyond selling destinations and start offering dependable journeys. It's time to think beyond insurance and give your customers a protection layer that actually travels with them. Whether it's a family vacation, a corporate itinerary, or a solo international trip, assistance like this transforms stress into trust. **BOTT**

**ASEGO BOLT+ empowers travel agents to move beyond selling destinations and start offering dependable journeys.**

# Peru

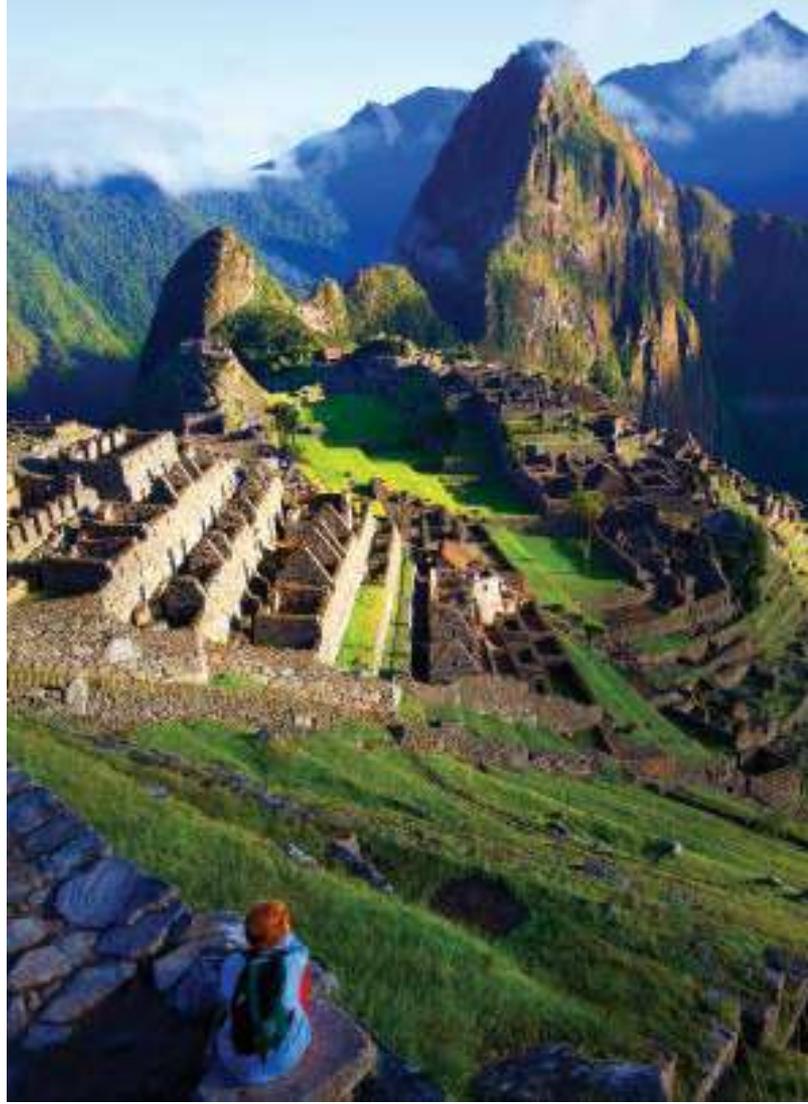
**Crafted by nature,  
shaped by Civilisation**

**P**eru is a destination that speaks to the soul—ancient yet alive, dramatic yet deeply intimate. From the mist-shrouded citadel of Machu Picchu to the living Inca heritage of Cusco city and the Sacred Valley, the country offers journeys that go far beyond sight-seeing. Every trail, temple and town tells a story shaped by centuries of culture, resilience and ritual.

Along the Pacific coast, Lima surprises with its contemporary energy and oceanfront neighbourhoods, while the Amazon rainforest opens a window into one of the planet's richest ecosystems, offering immersive experiences rooted in nature and indigenous wisdom. Peru's diversity—geographical, cultural and experiential—makes it ideal for today's traveller seeking meaning, authenticity and depth. Peru has been recognised as the 'World's Leading Culinary Destination' at the World Travel Awards for multiple consecutive years, including 2024, marking over a decade of winning this title.

Championing this multifaceted narrative globally is PROMPERÚ, whose efforts continue to position the country as a high-value destination for discerning international markets. The organisation's destination storytelling and trade engagement are driven by a passionate team in India who have been present in the market for last 12 years.

For travellers from India and beyond, Peru promises not just a holiday, but a profound journey—where history, nature, adventure, cuisine and culture converge in unforgettable ways.



# EASTERN GLOBE

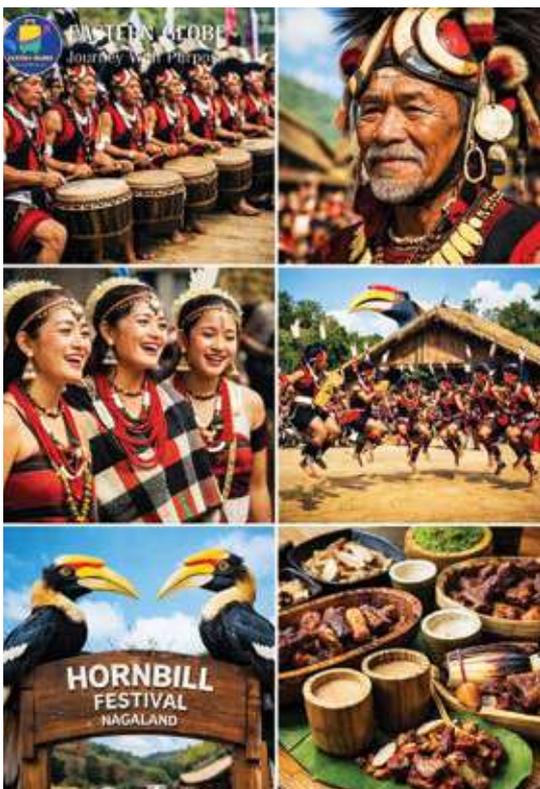
## Showcasing the Northeast through authentic, experience-led travel

Eastern Globe has emerged as one of Guwahati's most trusted travel brands, known for curating meaningful journeys across Assam and the wider Northeast. With a strong focus on authenticity, personalisation and responsible tourism, the company is shaping the region's growing appeal among both domestic and international travellers. **Sarita Devi Saha, Founder & Director, Eastern Globe** shares more.

### BOTT DESK

**W**hat core values and service philosophies have helped Eastern Globe stand out in a competitive market?

At Eastern Globe, our reputation has been built on trust, authenticity, and a deep passion for showcasing the



Northeast in its truest form. From the beginning, we believed travel should be personal, meaningful, and responsibly curated. We focus on understanding each traveller's expectations and crafting experiences rather than selling standard packages. Transparency in pricing, ethical operations, and strong local partnerships guide our work. Our team treats every guest like family, ensuring safety, comfort, and genuine hospitality. By blending local expertise with consistent service quality, Eastern Globe has earned the confidence of travellers in a highly competitive market.

**What key travel trends are you currently seeing for Assam and the wider Northeast, both from domestic and inbound travellers?**

We are witnessing exciting shifts in travel demand across Assam and the Northeast. Travellers today seek authentic, immersive experiences—cultural and heritage tourism, eco-adventures, and off-beat explorations. Longer stays and slower-paced itineraries are becoming common, especially among domestic visitors. International interest is also rising, particularly from Europe, Southeast Asia and North

America, drawn by festivals, Kaziranga safaris, tribal homestays and culinary journeys. Improved air connectivity, rail links and highways have made the region far more accessible. The Northeast is no longer a hidden gem.

**Looking ahead, what are Eastern Globe's growth priorities and new initiatives for the next phase of tourism growth?**

Eastern Globe's priorities are centred on responsible expansion, deeper destination expertise, and long-term value for travellers and local communities. We have partnered for marketing with Ms. Gita Chaudhry, who brings over two decades of experience with premium hotel brands and inbound markets. A key focus is strengthening experiential and sustainable tourism through eco-friendly itineraries, community-led experiences, and curated homestay networks that preserve culture while creating inclusive economic impact. We are also developing niche segments such as slow travel, wellness retreats, wildlife and photography tours, and culturally immersive journeys for high-value domestic and inbound travellers. **BOTT**



Sarita Devi Saha, Founder & Director, Eastern Globe



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## UK sees strong growth momentum from Indian tourists: VisitBritain highlights 2030 forecast

At a recent closed-door media roundtable in India, **Her Excellency Lindy Cameron**, British High Commissioner to India, and **Gary Robson**, Deputy Director – India, Europe & GCC, VisitBritain, underlined the growing strategic importance of Indian outbound travel to the UK, supported by strong connectivity, rising visitor spend, and increasing interest beyond London. Also present on the occasion was **Ritu Varma**, Country Manager – India, VisitBritain.

Priyanka Saxena Ray



Her Excellency Lindy Cameron, British High Commissioner to India, and Gary Robson, Deputy Director – India, Europe & GCC, VisitBritain

India continues to strengthen its position as one of the UK's priority tourism markets, with visitor numbers expected to rise sharply over the coming years. Speaking at the interaction, Lindy Cameron highlighted the enduring cultural and economic ties between the two countries, backed by a vibrant Indian diaspora of over 1.9 million people in the UK and strong bilateral business presence, with more than 1,000 Indian-owned companies in Britain and over 650 UK firms operating in India.

Tourism, she noted, plays a powerful role in deepening these connections while supporting jobs and regional prosperity across the UK. "India is a priority market for Britain, and the story ahead is a confident one," Cameron said, adding that Indian travellers are increasingly exploring destinations across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, not just London.

VisitBritain shared strong forward-looking projections, forecasting that Indian visitor numbers will grow from around 650,000 in 2025 to nearly



Ritu Varma, Country Manager – India, VisitBritain

one million by 2030. Visitor spending is also expected to cross the £1 billion mark by 2026, rising further to £1.6 billion by 2030, representing growth of nearly 74 per cent.

A key driver of this expansion is enhanced air connectivity, with over 170 weekly flights between India and the UK, including increasing access to regional gateways such as Manchester

and Birmingham.

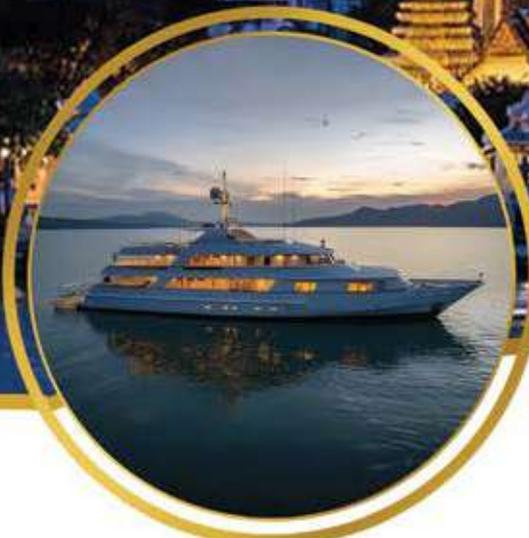
Gary Robson emphasised tourism's vital economic role, noting that the sector contributes £147 billion to the UK economy, accounting for nearly 5 per cent of GDP. "India is becoming one of the most valuable contributors to that story," Robson said. He added that Indian travellers are staying longer, spending more on premium experiences, and seeking personalised journeys rather than standard itineraries.

The discussion also highlighted changing traveller preferences, with rising demand for luxury, cultural immersion, weddings, and experience-led travel. More than 56 per cent of Indian visitors now spend nights outside London, reflecting the success of efforts to promote regional Britain.

Ritu Varma said that the focus remains on working closely with the travel trade to curate experiences that match evolving Indian expectations. "Indian travellers are looking for meaningful, memorable journeys, and we are committed to ensuring the UK remains welcoming, inspiring and relevant for them," she said. **BOTT**



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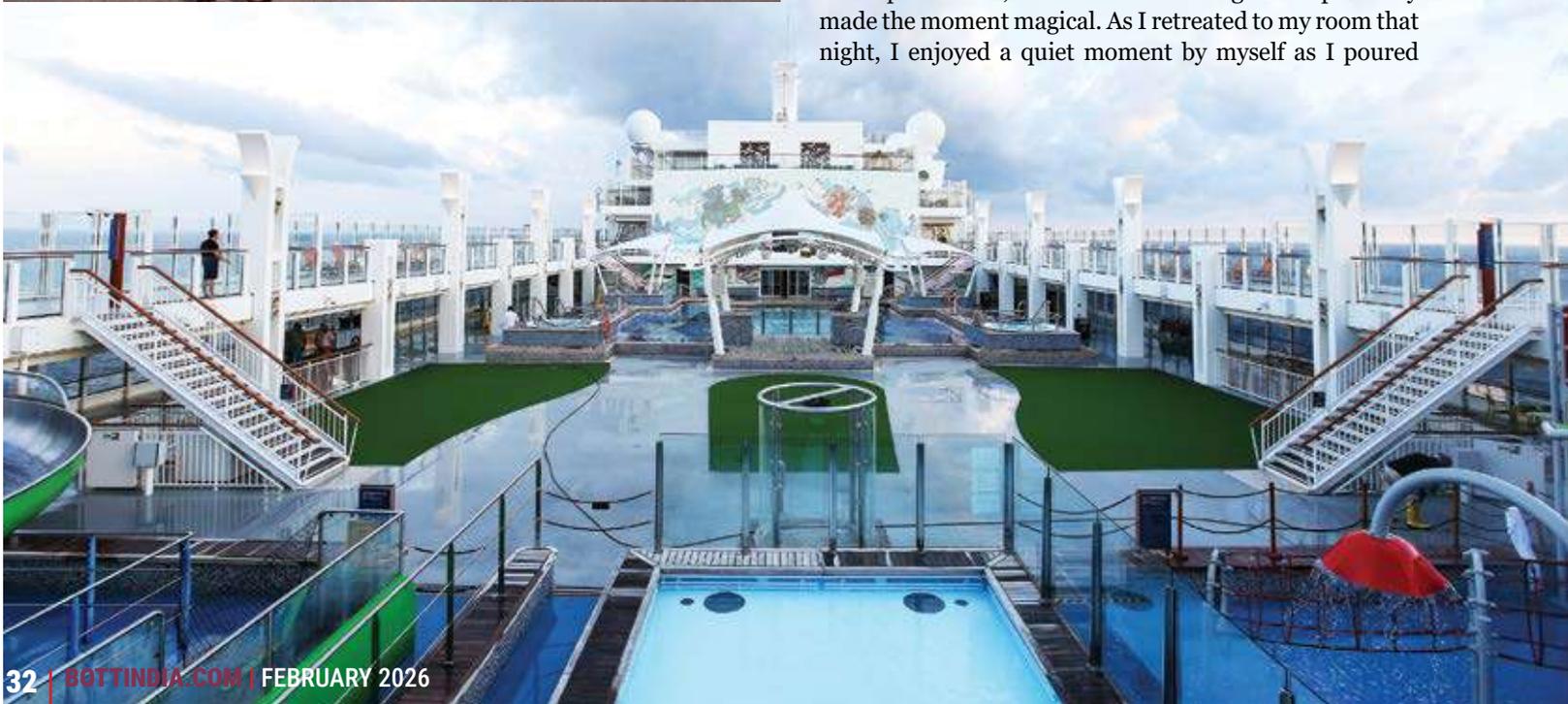
In today's fast-paced world, it often feels like we are always connected — to our phones, our deadlines, and endless routines — yet somehow disconnected from the people who matter most. That is why my cruise holiday with StarDream Cruises felt like the perfect pause — a chance to truly 'Disconnect to Reconnect'.

**Shreya Shimpi**



As I embarked on the majestic Genting Dream for my 3N4D sailing from Singapore to Phuket, it felt like opening a box of chocolates- you never know what you are going to get! The magnificent ship welcomed us with warmth and its signature world-class hospitality. I checked into my cosy Oceanview Balcony Stateroom. Lunch at The Lido felt like a culinary journey with a delightful spread of flavours and cuisines, ensuring that every guest found something to enjoy. Enjoying the 'Dhokla' and 'Chhas' miles away from home, felt incredibly comforting! A friendly cricket match on the deck with friends was an enthralling experience. That evening, the Zodiac theatre was filled with the appetising aroma of caramel popcorn (a must-have onboard!) and the avant-garde performers bowled us over with spellbinding acrobatics and scintillating dance performances.

After enjoying a sumptuous dinner at the Dream Dining, our group enjoyed a memorable conversation garnished with hearty jokes at the lounge by the deck. The nip in the air, sea breeze and seeing the ships sail by made the moment magical. As I retreated to my room that night, I enjoyed a quiet moment by myself as I poured





myself a coffee and sat in the balcony. This felt like my moment- Disconnecting with everything to reconnect with myself under the starlit sky with the moon and the song of the ocean for company. The second day unfolded at a leisurely pace with a shore excursion to Patong Beach, followed by dinner before returning to the ship.

Day three brought an adrenaline rush with zip lining, offering idyllic panoramic views of the sea. The other activities, such as rock-climbing and water slides too looked equally exciting. The Foam Party that evening unleashed the inner child in me and was one of the most fun experiences on-board. The Red Carpet Gala that evening was all about glitz and glamour with everyone dressed their best and

keeping the style quotient high. The highlight was meeting the Captain of the Ship and getting a picture with him! The gourmet dinner at The Bistro felt ambrosial, and desserts Squisito!

The fourth day, we disembarked the ship bidding an emotional farewell- a heart full of memories to be cherished for a lifetime. The trip was the perfect retreat to 'Disconnect to Reconnect' with my family, friends and above all- Myself! **BOTT**



*"The skies met the ocean and the waves greeted me with a smile,  
The song of the sea made the journey worthwhile.  
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# Beyond Beaches and Temples

## Odisha's bold adventure Tourism Vision

Odisha is steadily carving a distinct identity on India's tourism map—one that goes beyond heritage temples and cultural richness to embrace the fast-emerging world of adventure travel. Recognising the immense potential of this high-growth segment, the state has notified the Odisha Adventure Tourism Guidelines 2025, a forward-looking framework aimed at building a safe, regulated and sustainable adventure tourism ecosystem.

### BOTT DESK

**G**lobally, adventure tourism has witnessed a sharp rise in demand, driven by travellers seeking immersive, experience-led journeys. Odisha, with its extraordinary diversity of landscapes—pristine coastlines, expansive wetlands, forested hills, rivers and valleys—is uniquely placed to become a year-round hub for land, water and aero-based adventure activities. The newly introduced guidelines provide the much-needed structure to harness this opportunity responsibly, while ensuring ecological balance and community participation.

Odisha Tourism, the guidelines are an integral part of the Odisha Tourism Policy 2022, and are designed to unlock new tourism circuits across seasons. "Adventure tourism is among the fastest-growing segments globally, and Odisha's natural assets make it a compelling destination. The framework ensures transparency, regulation and sustainability, while encouraging growth in a niche that can significantly boost visitor interest."

A key pillar of the initiative is safety and

regulation, often considered the biggest challenges in adventure tourism. Odisha has introduced a robust multi-tier institutional mechanism to ensure strict compliance. The framework includes the State Level Advisory Committee (SLAC), State Level Technical Committee (SLTC), Adventure Tourism Technical Cell (ATTC) and District Level Committees. Every adventure tourism project will undergo detailed scrutiny—covering site assessments, safety audits, equipment certification and manpower verification—before receiving a License to Operate.

The guidelines also mandate regular inspections, surprise audits, annual safety certifications, and the establishment of a dedicated Rescue and Communication Grid to ensure preparedness and swift response in case of emergencies. This institutional backbone reinforces Odisha's commitment to making adventure tourism both exciting and secure for travellers.

Equally significant is the state's empha-





sis on encouraging private sector participation through an investor-friendly, asset-light approach. Entrepreneurs, tour operators and institutions are being invited to be part of the adventure tourism growth story through a simplified approval mechanism. A dedicated Go-Adventure Portal will streamline applications, approvals, renewals and compliance processes, while defined timelines and incentives—including capital investment subsidies under the tourism policy—make the ecosystem predictable and attractive for responsible operators.

Odisha's adventure tourism portfolio is among the most diverse in the country. The state plans to promote aero-sports such as paragliding, hot air ballooning and air safaris, along with land-based experiences like trekking, rock climbing, zip-lining and ATV trails. Water-based adventures such as kayaking, snorkelling, scuba diving and river cruising will be developed across iconic destinations including Chilika,

Satkosia, Hirakud, Deomali, Daringbadi, Puri and Gopalpur. Importantly, these activities will be carefully zoned, geo-referenced and developed with environmental sensitivity.

Marketing and community involvement form the final cornerstone of Odisha's strategy. The state is adopting a digital-first promotion approach, supported by influencer collaborations, participation in national and international travel events, and familiarisation trips for operators and media. At the grassroots level, local communities—especially youth—will be empowered through training, certification and employment opportunities, ensuring adventure tourism becomes a tool for inclusive socio-economic development.

With the Odisha Adventure Tourism Guidelines 2025, the state is making a decisive, future-ready push to emerge as one of India's leading adventure tourism destinations—structured, safe, sustainable, and globally competitive. **BOTT**

# KAZIN DMC

## marks 10 years of specialist-led growth

Marking a decade in destination management, Kazin DMC has built its reputation on deep expertise, strong on-ground teams and a pure B2B approach. From Kazakhstan to a growing CIS portfolio, the company has expanded with intent while keeping service quality at its core.

**Rohit Shorey**, Founder & CEO, Kazin DMC shares more.

**Gunjan Sabikhi**



**L**ooking back at 10 years, what would you say were the pivotal moments or decisions that shaped Kazin's journey and helped it stand out in a competitive scenario?

One of our most defining decisions was choosing depth over scale. From early on, we structured Kazin so that each team specialises in one destination only — no individual handles multiple portfolios. This is not the most cost-effective model, but it is essential for quality and accountability. Product knowledge and local nuances cannot be diluted. While many DMCs operate with teams juggling several destinations, we consciously avoided that. Alongside this, remaining a pure B2B partner, investing in strong on-ground teams, and building our proprietary CRM to empower agents were pivotal choices that shaped Kazin's identity as a dependable, specialist-driven DMC.

**Over the years, how has your growth strategy evolved and what role have acquisitions and partnerships played?**

Our growth has been measured and intentional. We expand only when we can replicate the same operational depth, destination expertise, and service DNA. Strategic partnerships with tourism boards, airlines, hotels, and local stakeholders have played a vital role in building credibility. The expansion into Uzbekistan through acquisition and Armenia through structured partnerships reflects our belief that growth should strengthen capability, not dilute standards.

**Indian outbound travel trends have shifted significantly. How has Kazin adapted, and what are the key learnings from promoting the CIS region?**

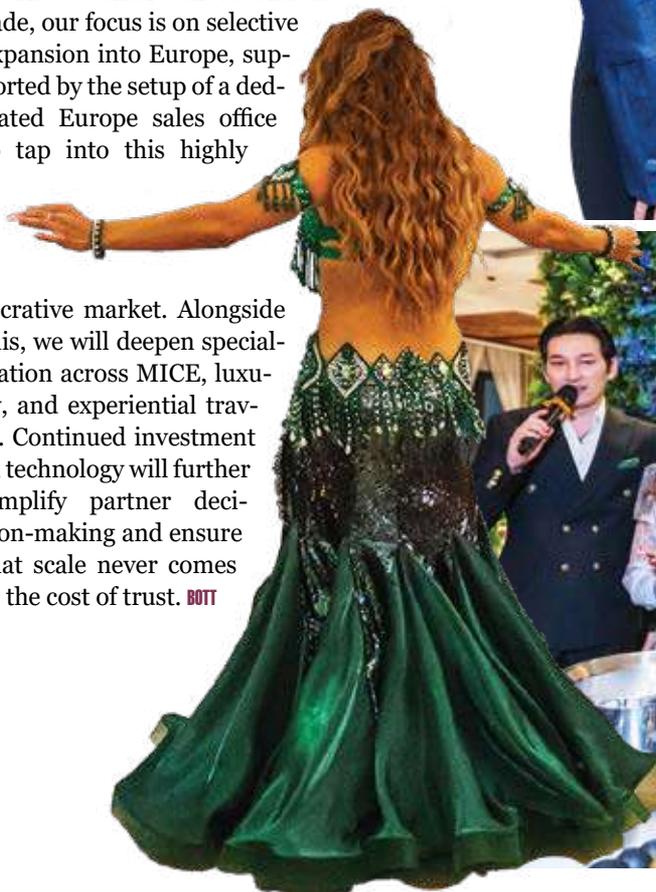
Indian travellers today seek experiences, flexi-



bility, and value. We adapted by curating immersive itineraries, strengthening Indian-friendly services, and equipping agents with deeper destination understanding. A key learning has been that education drives confidence — once agents understand the region well, demand follows naturally.

**As Kazin enters its second decade, what are your top priorities?**

As we enter our second decade, our focus is on selective expansion into Europe, supported by the setup of a dedicated Europe sales office to tap into this highly



lucrative market. Alongside this, we will deepen specialisation across MICE, luxury, and experiential travel. Continued investment in technology will further simplify partner decision-making and ensure that scale never comes at the cost of trust. **BOTT**



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The event concluded with the celebration of New Year 2026.



Event was Supported By Incredible India, India Tourism Mumbai

Thanks & Regards

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# BRAND USA TRAVEL WEEK INDIA

## sets a new benchmark deepening USA - India tourism momentum

Brand USA Travel Week India concluded recently in Bengaluru (January 19–22), marking a landmark moment in the United States' tourism engagement with one of its most significant outbound markets. This year's edition witnessed an exceptional turnout, with the largest-ever delegation of U.S. destinations and tourism partners travelling to India. The atmosphere throughout the week reflected strong optimism, growing synergies, and a shared commitment to expanding travel between India and the United States.

### Priyanka Saxena Ray

The structure of the event was both strategic and engaging. Mornings were dedicated to timed, targeted one-on-one business meetings, enabling Indian travel trade professionals to connect directly with U.S. destination representatives, suppliers, and Brand USA leadership. Evenings, meanwhile, brought the industry together in a more informal setting—filled with food, laughter, cultural exchange, and networking—creating a vibrant space where partnerships deepened beyond the boardroom.

“As a priority growth market and a key driver of visitation to the United States, bringing Brand USA Travel Week to India was a clear choice,” said

Fred Dixon, President and CEO of Brand USA. “India now ranks second globally for total visitor spending, with Indian travellers generating \$24.4 billion in the United States in 2024 alone. This expanded platform is designed to strengthen collaboration, build the right travel products, and expand distribution as we work together to grow the market.”

India's importance to U.S. inbound tourism continues to rise sharply. In 2024, Indian travellers accounted for 6 percent of overseas arrivals to the United States (excluding Canada and Mexico), up from 4 percent in 2019. Arrivals surpassed 2 million in 2025 for the second consecutive year,





with visitation remaining nearly 40 percent above pre-pandemic levels. Forecasts indicate travel from India could reach 2.3 million visitors by 2028, reinforcing the market’s long-term strategic significance.

The event also introduced Brand USA’s upcoming Global Ambassador Program, aligned with America’s 250th anniversary celebrations. Launching in March 2026, the initiative will recruit 250 travel trade ambassadors worldwide to strengthen engagement across priority markets.

Reflecting on the week’s success, Sheema Vohra, Managing Director, Sartha Global Marketing, said: “Brand USA Travel Week has been a fantastic week for us. Now elevated to a Travel Week format, we’re truly excited about the energy and momentum we’ve seen here. A big thank you to our partners in India, both travel trade and media, and to all the U.S. destinations who travelled here—this truly reflects America’s commitment to the Indian market.”

With mega-events such as the FIFA World Cup 2026, the 100th anniversary of Route 66, and the America 250 celebrations on the horizon, Brand USA Travel Week India concluded with renewed enthusiasm and clear momentum. The event brought together nearly 75 U.S. destination partners with leading travel trade, media, and senior decision-makers from across India. U.S. participants engaged with over 90 travel trade professionals and 30 travel and lifestyle journalists through dedicated Trade, Media, and C-Suite tracks, supported by targeted one-to-one meetings and educational programming. The week not only strengthened commercial partnerships but also reaffirmed India’s position as a powerhouse market shaping the future of U.S. tourism growth.



**In Conversation**



**JACKIE ENNIS,**  
Vice President – Global Trade Development, Brand USA

**Brand USA recently launched the “America the Beautiful” campaign. How does it connect with Indian travellers?**

We are incredibly excited about “America the Beautiful.” India is one of our key target markets, as it should be, given its scale and growth. The campaign is built around pillars that resonate strongly with Indian travellers—family travel, outdoors, luxury, and wellness. It speaks directly to what motivates Indian visitors today: meaningful, multi-generational and experience-led journeys. What has been especially impressive is that the response from India so far has been among the highest across all our global target markets.

**What is Brand USA's outlook and target for the India market going forward?**

The forecast for 2026 is around 2.1 million Indian visitors, and that is certainly our immediate target. Of course, we would love to see that number grow even further.

India is a priority growth market, and we are committed to expanding partnerships, promoting new destinations, and sustaining this momentum.

**How is Brand USA supporting Indian travel agents and the trade ecosystem?**

One of our strongest resources is the USA Discovery Program, our online travel trade training platform, which was relaunched in 2024. It has seen terrific engagement from Indian agents—not only as a certification tool, but also as a trusted resource platform. In today’s world, where there is so much information and even misinformation online, it is important for travel professionals to have curated, accurate content. The platform also enables agents to share inspirational itineraries directly with clients, making it an effective sales tool—especially as demand grows for newer and more diverse U.S. experiences.



# NATURE MEETS MODERN LUXURY

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# TRIPSTAQ

## targeting execution gaps to become a trusted hotel partner

In a crowded travel-tech market, Tripstaq is focusing on execution over excess inventory. By addressing margin protection, payment flexibility and post-booking support, it aims to solve real trade challenges. **Louis D'Souza**, Managing Partner, Tripstaq shares more details.

### BOTT DESK

address these operational gaps. With over 500,000 global hotels, real-time availability, instant confirmations, zero additional card charges, and dedicated backend assistance, we combine technology with human reliability. The gap we identified was not inventory — it was dependable partnership. Tripstaq ensures agents can book confidently, protect margins, and resolve issues quickly, which remains a critical unmet need in the Indian market.

**The travel-tech space is crowded with aggregators and platforms—what real gap is Tripstaq solving for Indian travel sellers that others still haven't addressed?**

While the market is saturated with platforms offering large hotel inventories, the real challenge for Indian travel sellers isn't access — it's execution, margin protection, and accountability. Many aggregators provide scale but fall short on pricing transparency, flexible payment structures, booking hold options, and reliable post-booking support. Tripstaq was built to

**With India emerging as a key global travel source market, which segments or distribution opportunities excite you most for Tripstaq?**

India's outbound growth is broad-based and accelerating. We see strong opportunity in corporate and SME travel, where mid-sized businesses require seamless global hotel access without complex contracting structures. Experiential and luxury leisure is another fast-growing segment, with Indian travellers demanding curated,

high-value experiences. The rapid rise of Tier II and Tier III travel businesses is reshaping distribution. Tripstaq democratises global access for these agents, enabling them to compete with larger players.

**How is Tripstaq moving beyond being a technology platform to becoming a true business enabler for the Indian travel trade?**

Tripstaq goes beyond transactions by aligning with agents' commercial realities. We prioritise transparent margins, flexible payments, and operational support backed by a dedicated team. Our rewards programme reinforces long-term engagement, while our roadmap includes insights and tools to support smarter selling. We aim to help agents grow, not just book.

**What are the top two priorities shaping Tripstaq's India roadmap, and how will you personally define success over the next year?**

Our priorities are deep trade penetration built on trust and strengthening payment infrastructure. Success will be measured by repeat usage, retention, and becoming a dependable primary hotel partner for Indian travel sellers. **BOTT**



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# ONE ABOVE DMC

## Powering global growth through Operations, Alliances & Trade Focus

As Indian outbound travel becomes increasingly experience-driven and value-led, One Above DMC is sharpening its global strategy across operations, sales, partnerships and on-ground innovation. Senior leaders from the organisation share how focused investments in people, infrastructure and alliances are enabling One Above DMC to deliver seamless journeys, stronger trade conversions and differentiated experiences across key outbound markets.

### BOTT DESK



#### Strengthening North America through on-ground control

**NOVALIS RODRICKS**

General Manager - Operations (USA & Canada)

With North America firmly emerging as a high-value outbound market from India, One Above DMC has taken a proactive, long-term approach to strengthening its on-ground operations across the USA and Canada to deliver truly seamless, experience-led itineraries. Our two registered offices in the USA and one registered office in Canada form the backbone of this strategy, giving us end-to-end operational control—from planning and contracting to on-ground execution. This local presence allows real-time coordination with hotels, transport providers, attractions and guides, ensuring faster issue resolution and consistent service quality.

For Indian travellers, this translates into thoughtfully designed itineraries that go beyond standard sightseeing.

#### Responding to a Value-Led Indian Travel Trade

**AMAN SHARMA**

General Manager - Sales

A clear shift is visible in the Indian travel trade from volume-driven selling to value-led, experience-focused travel. Agents today are looking for faster turnarounds, differentiated products and higher-margin opportunities. Our sales strategy is centred on premiumisation, operational speed and stronger trade partnerships. By combining curated product design with agile execution, we are focused on driving stronger conversions across leisure, MICE and luxury verticals. As outbound travel demand continues to accelerate, One Above DMC aims to further strengthen its positioning as a high-performance, trade-centric DMC partner aligned with the evolving needs of the Indian market.



#### Scaling through Strategic Partnerships

**KARAN GROVER**

Senior Vice President - Growth & Alliances

At One Above DMC, strategic partnerships form the backbone of our scale and sustainability strategy. Our alliance-driven approach spans deep hotel contracting, co-created campaigns with tourism boards, airline synergies and technology integration. These partnerships ensure preferential rates, exclusive inventory, marketing support and seamless air-plus-land solutions, particularly for group, MICE and luxury segments. By aligning with established hospitality brands, airlines and tourism authorities, we reduce entry risk while expanding into new markets. Our long-term vision is ecosystem expansion—building a global network that drives sustainable growth, profitability and service excellence.

#### Enhancing Safety, Service and Experiences in South Africa

**AAMIR SHAIKH**

Deputy General Manager - Operations (South Africa)

South Africa continues to be one of the most preferred destinations for Indian travellers, especially for wildlife safaris and adventure experiences. Our focus remains on customer satisfaction through seamless operations and dependable execution. A dedicated on-ground team provides 24/7 assistance, while a modern fleet of vehicles and professional English-speaking drivers and guides ensure comfort, safety and insightful travel experiences. Through strong local expertise and reliable service delivery, One Above DMC continues to craft memorable South African journeys that Indian travellers truly cherish.





  
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Arshdeep Anand and Tejbir Singh Anand

## NORTHERN EUROPE

### The new frontier for Indian Outbound Travel

**Tejbir Singh Anand**, Managing Director, Holiday Moods Adventures feels that Indian outbound market is witnessing a clear and exciting shift, with travellers increasingly turning their attention towards Northern Europe—especially Scandinavia, the Nordic region, and the Arctic Circle.

A clear shift is underway in Indian outbound travel, with a newfound interest and growing demand for Northern Europe—particularly Scandinavia, the Nordic region, and the Arctic Circle countries. This rise is driven by several compelling factors, from climate considerations to the lure of extraordinary, once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

With overtourism impacting many parts of Europe, travellers have already explored much of East, South and West Europe. Add to this the reality of climate change, where summer temperatures in these regions now often touch 40°C, and the appeal of cooler, pristine northern landscapes becomes obvious. Northern Europe is fast emerging as the perfect escape—refreshing, scenic, and still relatively uncrowded.

Scandinavia itself comprises three kingdoms—Norway, Sweden and Denmark—each offering distinctive natural and cultural richness. However, it is important to note the broader definition of the Nordic countries, which

also includes Finland, Iceland, and associated territories such as Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland. Together, they represent some of the most aspirational bucket-list destinations in the world today.

Social media and influencers have further accelerated interest, showcasing magical experiences such as the Northern Lights (September to mid-April), the midnight sun (June to August), reindeer and husky sledding, snowmobile adventures, Arctic wildlife encounters, and skiing from December through April. Unique attractions include Norway's king crabs, deep fjords and dramatic mountains, the Lofoten Islands' white-sand beaches, Finland's Santa Claus celebrations and glass igloos, Iceland's year-round whale watching, frozen sea adventures, polar icebreaker cruises, and even snow hotels operating throughout the year. Add Viking history, heritage mansions, treetop hotels, scenic rail journeys and luxury cruising along Norway's coastline and the Baltic archipelagos, and

the region becomes irresistible.

Connectivity is also improving significantly. Direct flights to Copenhagen—gateway to Greenland, Faroe Islands and Svalbard—are being introduced by airlines such as IndiGo, Air India and SAS from June 2026 from Delhi and Mumbai. Visa processes through Norway and Sweden are also becoming quicker and smoother.

The next phase of growth lies beyond capital-only itineraries. Specialist companies like Holiday Moods Adventures are empowering the travel trade to promote deeper, experiential journeys. Promoted by Arshdeep Anand and myself, Holiday Moods Adventures is a B2B Destination Strategist & Specialist (DSS), ISO 9001:2015 certified, Forbes India listed, National Geographic Adventure top-rated, and globally awarded since 1997. We are also distributors in India for cruise brands including Swan Hellenic Cruises, Havila Voyages, Viking Line and Silja Line—helping Indian travellers discover the true magic of the polar world. **BOTT**



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## AIR iQ Travel Fraternity Cricket League scores big in Guwahati

The 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the AIR iQ Travel Fraternity Cricket League (AIR IQ TFCL) 2026 turned Guwahati into a spirited sporting hub as ten travel trade teams competed from February 12 – 15, 2026. Organised by the Tour Operator Association of Assam (TOAA), the league once again blended competitive cricket with camaraderie and networking within the industry.

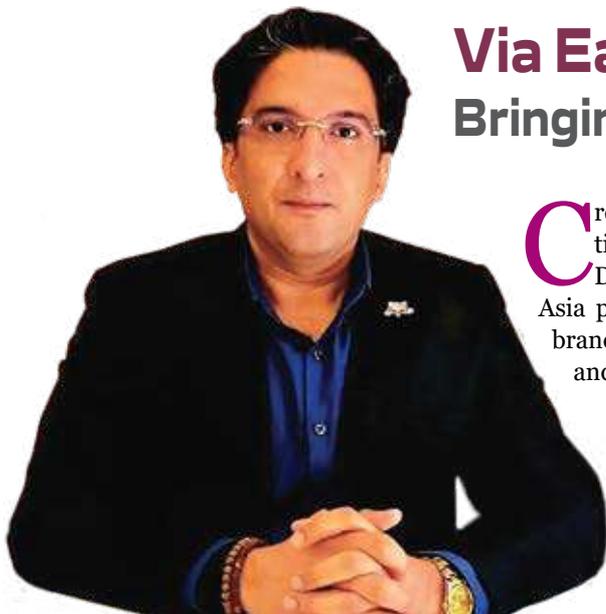
Title sponsor AIR IQ, sup-

ported by Udaan Hotels and Resorts, along with co-sponsors Thai Airways, IndiGo and Hyundai Motor Company, elevated the tournament's scale and excitement.

AIR IQ's Group Executive Director Ajay Kumar Wadhawan, East India Head Dipak Giri, North East India Sales Manager Subhajit Gope and Sanjay Sarma graced the award ceremony. Cash prizes were presented to the Best Team, Best Player of the Tournament and the

highest six-hitter, along with two-night stays for couples at any of AIR IQ's 24 properties across Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Gangtok, Pelling and Lachen.

Addressing the gathering, Ajay Wadhawan thanked participants for their presence and applauded the performers and organisers for delivering an exceptionally thrilling and entertaining tournament. **BOTT**



Pranay Nath,  
Founder & CEO, I Love Japan DMC

## Via East DMC Bringing our East Asia products together

Created to keep multi-destination operations in sync, Via East DMC brings together our East Asia products under one consolidated brand. Built on the same ownership and experienced teams behind I Love Japan DMC and And South Korea DMC, Via East represents a more connected way of presenting and delivering our destination offerings to the travel trade.

Our Japan and South Korea products continue to be designed and operated by dedicated

local teams, each working from their own in-country offices. What has changed is the way these products are aligned—allowing easier combination of itineraries, consistent service standards and smoother coordination across destinations.

Via East has been created to support growing demand for multi-country programs, offering trade partners a single, streamlined framework while retaining the depth and reliability of destination-specialist teams. Additional East Asian products are currently in development, extending the same approach to new markets in the future. **BOTT**

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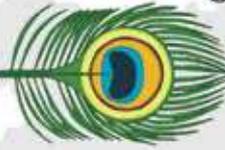


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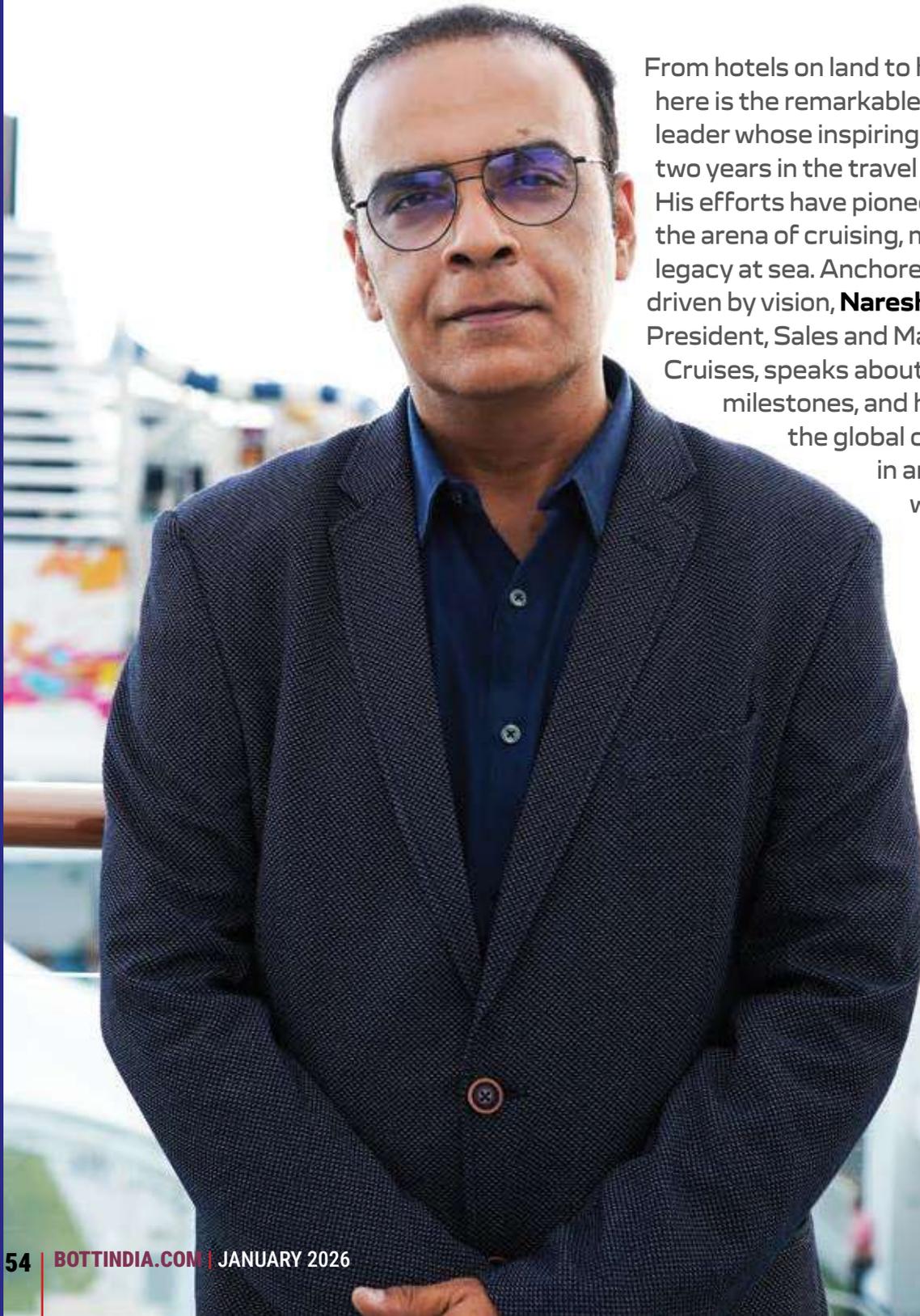
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# Naresh Rawal

## The Charismatic Trailblazer of the Cruise Industry



From hotels on land to hospitality at sea, here is the remarkable journey of a dynamic leader whose inspiring odyssey of twenty-two years in the travel industry stands out. His efforts have pioneered a new wave in the arena of cruising, marking a noteworthy legacy at sea. Anchored in experience and driven by vision, **Naresh Rawal**, Senior Vice President, Sales and Marketing, StarDream Cruises, speaks about his memories, milestones, and his vision for India on the global cruising map in an exclusive chat with **BOTT**.

Shreya Shimpi

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

I have always been a hotelier. After completing my hotel management, my entire professional journey has been rooted in the hospitality industry—whether with the Taj Group or with McDonald's. It was during this phase that an opportunity with Star Cruises came my way, to join as Senior Manager – Marketing. I decided to take the leap, largely because cruising felt like 'Hotels at Sea'. That connection to hospitality drew me in, and as luck would have it, I joined Star Cruises in 2003—marking the beginning of what has now been over 21 years in the cruising industry.

Interestingly, this was my first role in the travel industry, and since then, my entire career has been dedicated to cruising. I joined the company on 15th January 2003, with my very first day spent onboard the SuperStar Virgo. We all grew up with her, and we used to call her the 'Mother Ship'.

### What is your long-term vision with StarDream Cruises?

The company is gearing up for major expansion, with plans to explore multiple new ports. As the industry matures, this is the right time to be part of cruising—the most rapidly evolving segment of travel. Over the years, the market has come to appreciate the advantages of cruising over land-based holidays, and the industry is now poised for its next big growth phase.

### Talking about travel memories, sometimes there are great memories and sometimes they are not so great. Can you tell us one of those memories?

We are in the business of creating memories. I don't believe we are in the business of selling cabins—we create experiences that stay with guests long after they leave the ship. You see it all around you onboard: smiling faces, families walking together, guests constantly taking photographs. For me, that's the clearest indicator of happiness.

As for not-so-great memories, I honestly don't think there are any specific ones. Every day is different, and every guest is different.

### Tell us something about your family and a cherished memory, probably from childhood or with your family.

I am an Army kid and have grown up across the country due to my father's service in the Army. It instilled a deep sense of discipline in me. He retired as a Colonel. My mom was a teacher. I'm blessed with two kids. My elder daughter, Mehak, is a home-based chef specializing in bakery and patisserie. My son, Jai, is currently in the US, studying film at the New York Film Academy, with aspirations to build a career in advertising. **BOTT**



## QUICK SHOTS

- Mountains or Beaches: **Mountains**
- Window seat or Aisle seat: **Aisle**
- Favourite cuisine: **Japanese**
- Favourite travel hack: **Travel light**
- Favourite quote: **'I am the Michelangelo of my life'. You carve your own destiny.**
- Advice for the first-time traveller: **Enjoy your holiday. Make the best of it. Always create memories which you will cherish forever. Share those memories so that others can also create those beautiful memories.**

## APPOINTMENTS



### HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS

SAMHI has appointed **Priyanka Ahluwalia** as Cluster General Manager of Holiday Inn Express hotels. In this leadership role, she will oversee operations of the 12 Holiday Inn Express hotels across India owned by SAMHI. Ahluwalia has 25 years of experience spanning hotels, tourism boards, and golf resorts. She has a proven track record of leading large, multi-location businesses, with previous responsibilities covering sales, marketing, operations, and revenue strategy across India, Afghanistan, and the Middle East.



### ROYAL ORCHID HOTELS (ROHL)

Royal Orchid Hotels (ROHL) has appointed **Gaurav Goyal** as Senior Vice President, Business Development. With 22 years of experience in hospitality business development, strategy, and expansion Goyal's career spans leadership roles at Taj Residency, Spree Hotels & Resorts, and Lemon Tree Hotels. In his new role with ROHL, Goyal will spearhead ROHL's expansion roadmap, focusing on portfolio growth, strategic alliances, management contracts, and long-term value creation across both established and emerging markets.



### EBIX TRAVELS

Ebix Group has appointed **Arun Batra** as Managing Director of Ebix Travels, strengthening leadership across its travel and mobility portfolio. Batra will lead Ebix's travel and mobility businesses across domestic and international markets, with accountability for overall performance, governance, and long-term value creation. His mandate includes strengthening alignment across Ebix's travel businesses, deepening partnerships, and refining customer offerings as the Group builds a more integrated and execution-driven travel platform.



### RAFFLES UDAIPUR

Raffles Udaipur has appointed **Gurnoor Bindra** as its new General Manager. With 16 years of experience across Asia and the Middle East, Bindra brings a nuanced understanding of modern luxury hospitality, shaped by global exposure and an appreciation of diverse cultural expectations. In her new role, Bindra will oversee all aspects of resort operations, with a focus on elevating guest experiences, driving service excellence, and nurturing a high-performing, engaged team.



### RAMADA ENCORE DWARKA EXPRESSWAY

Ramada Encore Dwarka Expressway has appointed **Gaurav Vashisht** as the General Manager. In his new role, Vashisht will lead overall hotel operations, including team management, guest services, sales and marketing initiatives, and business performance. He brings strong leadership experience to the position, having previously served as General Manager at Yashail Hotel (formerly Radisson Blu), Haridwar, where he oversaw hotel operations and commercial functions.



### OBLU XPERIENCE AILAFUSHI & OBLU SELECT LOBIGILI

Atmosphere Core has appointed **David Alan Burley** as General Manager of OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi and OBLU SELECT Lobigili. In his new role, Burley will lead the resort management teams, oversee operations and guide both properties, ensuring its growth and guest-focused excellence. David brings a wealth of international hospitality experience to the role, having held senior leadership positions across the Caribbean, China, France, the Middle East, and the UK with globally renowned brand.



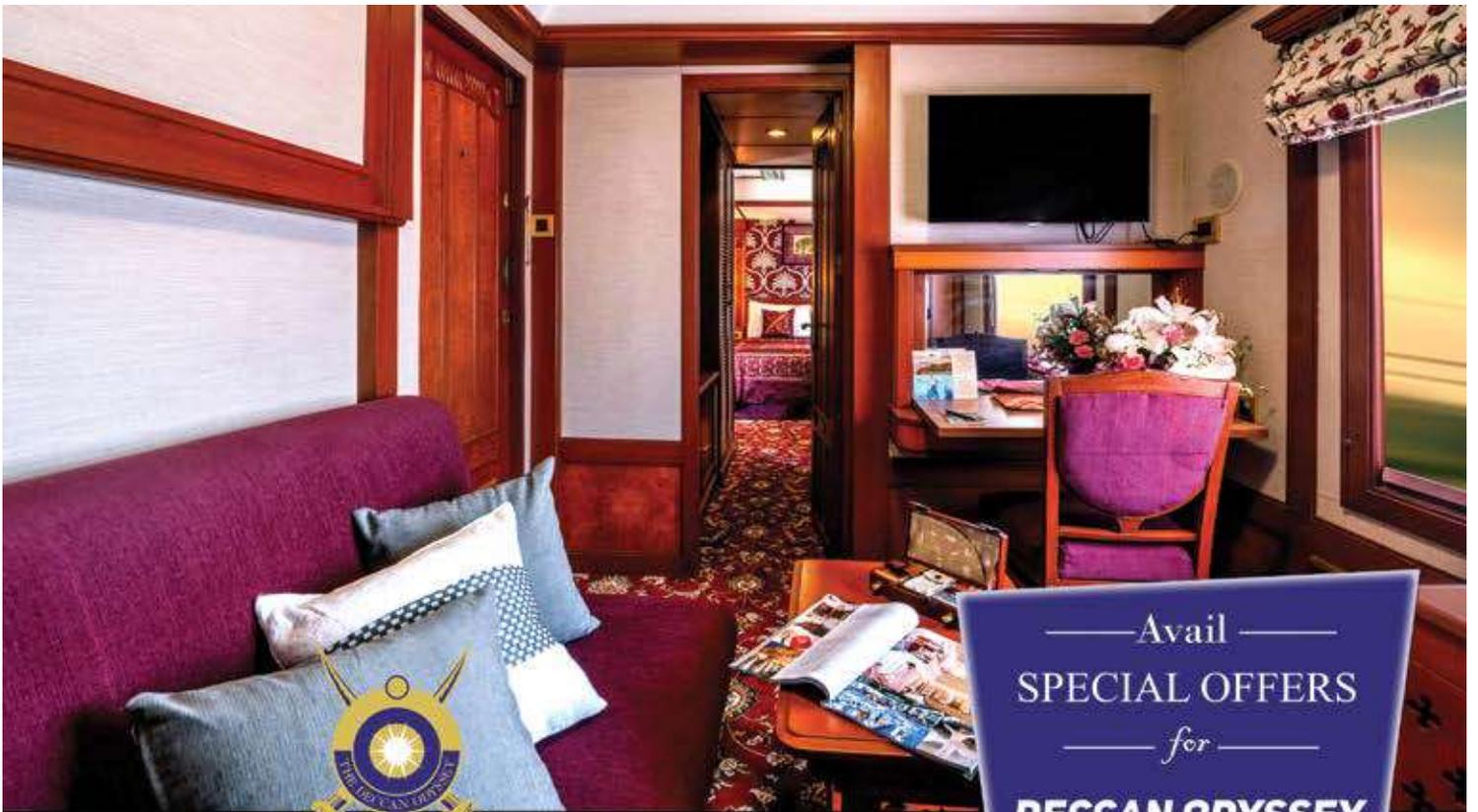
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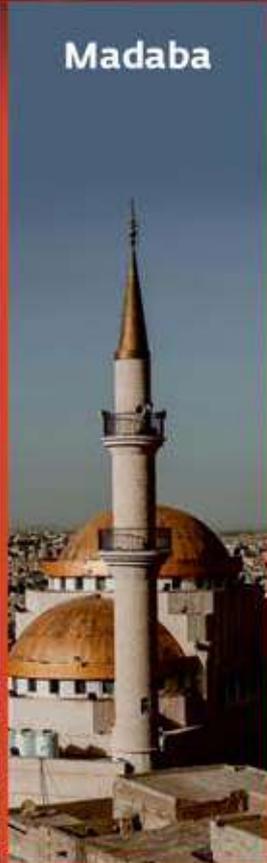
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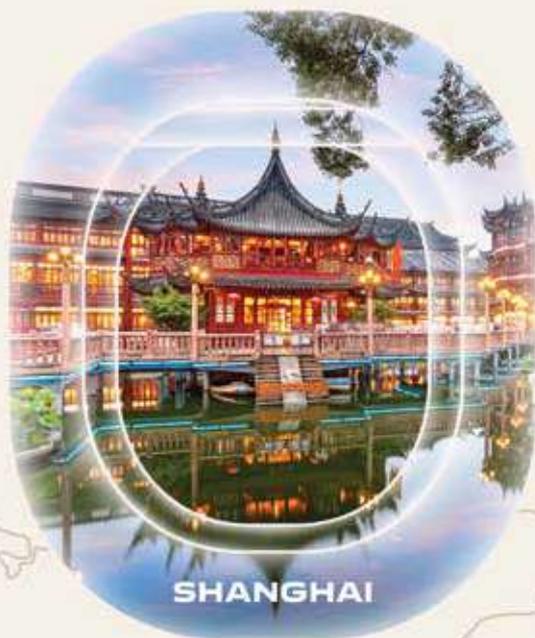
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