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Vol. 14 | Issue 3 | January 2024 | Pages 64 | ₹150

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Travel Trade Journal (TTJ) • Volume 14 • Issue 3 • January 2024

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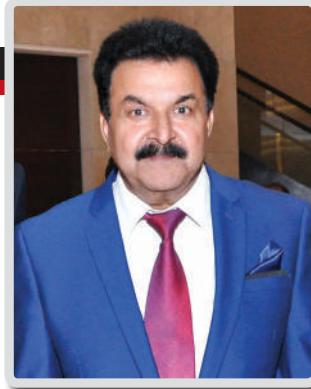
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Owned and published by: Ravi Sharma, Editor & Publisher, A-100, Upper Ground Floor, Nangal Dewat, New Delhi - 110070 and printed on his behalf at Modest Print Pack Pvt. Ltd., Okhla Industrial Area, New Delhi - 110020.

Dear Friends,

As we stand in brand new 2024, we at TTJ want to take this moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to you, our readers, and our valued patrons. Your unwavering support and engagement have been the driving force behind our success.



In 2023, the travel and tourism sector marked a robust bounce back to almost pre-pandemic levels across many destinations and businesses, and in 2024, the continued strong demand for travel is predicted, along with a renewed emphasis on sustainable travel.

It is with great excitement that we present you our January 2024 issue, a captivating mix of travel-related segments. As you turn the pages, you will find that the edition is a comprehensive retrospective of stories that shaped the global travel industry throughout the past year and a glimpse of what 2024 holds in store for the industry.

May the coming year also be filled with prosperity, joy, and a myriad of opportunities to explore and connect. I wish you and your team a joyous New Year filled with prosperity, happiness, and fulfilment.

Here's to a fantastic and amazing 2024!

Ravi Sharma

Ravi Sharma
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Visitors to Saudi spend \$27.36 billion in first nine months of 2023

The Saudi Ministry of Tourism announced a new foreign visitor spending record in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, based on data from the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA).

Total spending during the first three quarters of 2023 reached SAR 102.6 billion (\$27.36 billion).

By the end of Q3 of 2023, the surplus in the travel item in the balance of payments was estimated at around SAR37.8 billion, reflecting a growth rate of 72 per cent compared to the surplus recorded during the same period in 2022.

The Kingdom's tourism sector has fully recovered, witnessing a remarkable 150 per cent increase compared to the pre-COVID-19 levels. This revival has been evident across diverse tourist destinations, attracting an increasing number of domestic and foreign visitors.

Reports from the World Tourism Organization show that the Kingdom emerged as a leader among G20 countries in terms of growth of incoming tourists during the first three quarters of 2023. Moreover, the Kingdom has secured the second position among the fastest-growing tourist destinations globally.



Wanderlust Marketing appointed as India representative for Kavya Resort and Spa in Nagarkot



Kavya Resort and Spa, a luxury mountain resort located in Nagarkot, Kathmandu has appointed 'Wanderlust Marketing', a bespoke division of Global Destinations, as its India representative.

Nestled in the Himalayas, Kavya Resort and Spa combines exquisiteness, class, and luxury with charming ambience and sublime views. Merging Nepalese tradition with modern sophistication in Nagarkot, Kavya offers an exceptional vacation amidst snow-draped peaks and stunning sunrises. Set on a peaceful site amid rugged mountains and idyllic ravines, the resort provides magnificent views. Experience redefined luxury and warm hospitality at Kavya, surrounded by panoramic trails and breathtaking butterflies in the wildflower-strewn Kathmandu Valley.

TJ Grundl-Hong, Managing Principal, Kavya Resort and Spa, said, "India is our priority market and we are excited to appoint Wanderlust Marketing as our India representative."

"Kavya Resort and Spa is a well-suited luxury and wellness property for the Indian discerning traveller and we have seen an exponential increase, from India during 2023, both in terms of the number of guests as well as the length of stay."

ITA Airways marks first year of Rome-Delhi operations and growing ties

ITA Airways celebrated its first year of successful operations from Rome to New Delhi on December 13, 2023, at The Imperial, Janpath, New Delhi. The event not only marked a year of ITA Airways' achievements but also highlighted the burgeoning Italy-India relationship. The past year has seen a significant increase in bilateral trade and visa issuances, strengthening the cultural and economic ties between the two countries. Fabio Bigotti, Country Manager for India, expressed optimism for the future, foreseeing more achievements like this as the strategic partnership continues to evolve.



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Indonesia now offering five-year multiple-entry visas in a bid to boost tourism



Indonesia has implemented a significant change in its visa policy, aiming to boost tourism and strengthen the economy.

Starting December 20, 2023, the country introduced a five-year visa program, allowing visitors to stay up to 60 days per entry.

The program, aligned with government efforts to stimulate economic growth, permits multiple entries and offers online application options with credit card payment facilities for foreigners.

The previous standard tourist visa allowed a 30-day stay with a single entry, extendable for an additional 30 days.

Indonesia aims to attract 40 million by 2025, aligning with the trend in Southeast Asia to adopt more flexible visa policies. The initiative targets foreign visitors, particularly from emerging markets like China and India, in the competitive race to enhance tourism industries.

AI Habtoor Group unveils iconic AI Habtoor Tower at an event in Mumbai

AI Habtoor Group, UAE's leading conglomerate with expertise in luxury hospitality, recently unveiled its latest project, AI Habtoor Tower, during an exclusive Meet and Greet Event in Mumbai, India. Attended by prominent figures from the Indian real estate industry, the event presented the group's promise to showcase the all-new addition of luxury and innovation to Dubai's evolving luxury real estate market.

The 82-storey AI Habtoor Tower, strategically located in Dubai, is designed to redefine urban living with luxury at every touchpoint. The Mumbai event provided insight into the magnificence of the newly announced project, highlighting its unique features and state-of-the-art amenities. Scheduled for completion in three years, the tower will offer panoramic views of the Dubai skyline, making it a one-of-its-kind experience to witness.

Announcing the launch of the AI Habtoor Tower, Mohammed Al Habtoor, CEO and Vice Chairman, AI Habtoor Group, said, "Our AI Habtoor Tower project aims to meet the growing demand for luxury homes in Dubai. We want to offer extraordinary living experiences that go beyond expectations. The Mumbai event was just a sneak peek into what this iconic tower will bring to Dubai."

The tower's amenities include infinity pools with panoramic views, gyms, tennis courts, spas, resident cafes, and more. Nestled in AI Habtoor City, residents will have easy access to shopping, dining, entertainment, and noteworthy landmarks.

Cheval Collection launches enhanced commission rate for India market



With a range of accommodation options in prime locations, Cheval Collection promises to settle its guests into a perfect London, Edinburgh or Dubai home, either for a blissful getaway or a relaxing extended stay. Each one of these luxury locations has its own unique character, whilst still maintaining the same professional service standards. As one of the leading luxury accommodation providers, the team at Cheval Collection understands the meaning of excellent hospitality, and it aims to deliver nothing but the best.

Cheval Collection is offering an enhanced commission rate of 15 per cent for all new bookings made in London and Edinburgh for stays between January 01, 2024, and March 31, 2024.

With eight Residences and one Maison in London and three Residences in Edinburgh, guests can choose from a range of unique and varied apartments. Staying in an apartment ensures extra space in a secure environment, complemented by amenities and a 24-hour front office team assisting with reservations and more. All apartments in London, Edinburgh, and Dubai are pet-friendly.





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A New Year Resolution

In a dynamically evolving travel landscape, Asegō stands at the forefront of providing comprehensive travel assistance services. With a commitment to addressing diverse challenges and ensuring serene journeys, Asegō navigates the intricacies of modern travel to provide reliable and secure travel assistance which transforms into great experience for all. Dev Karvat, Founder and CEO, Asegō, envisions a groundbreaking 2024, anticipating that their proprietary software will revolutionise the sector.

Team TTJ

Well into the new year, what can we anticipate in terms of Asegō's outlook for 2024?

We believe that every business, be it small or big, has the potential to undergo a digital transformation and take the next step towards unparalleled success and limitless possibilities.

As pioneers of the Indian travel assistance and insurance sector, Asegō is poised to lead this charge, ushering in the next wave of digital transformation through our upcoming proprietary software. This innovative tool will empower our partners with improved business intelligence and enhanced operational efficiency, which in turn will amplify their growth, elevate customer experiences, and redefine industry standards.

We are confident that this strategic leap will also provide our partners with a deeper understanding of ancillary service businesses, unlocking new avenues for growth through additional ancillary service revenue.



Asegō's core business is travel assistance. Could you elaborate more on the assistance services the company offers?

Asegō has been a stalwart in the travel protection space for over 24 years, placing travel assistance services at the forefront of our legacy. Asegō's services extend beyond mere claim processing. We offer comprehensive real-time assistance services, including 24x7 global medical support, roadside assistance, and family protection, along with insurance.

Furthermore, we provide medical service-related referrals to travellers seeking hospitals, clinics, chemists, diagnostic centres, etc., not only for themselves but also for their families back home. This holistic approach underscores our dedication to ensuring the well-being and security of every Indian traveller.

What types of risks do travellers commonly encounter in the present day?

Travel, by nature, is an adventure into the unknown, and while the thrill is undeniable, uncertainties can cast a shadow on the overall experience.

One of the most common uncertainties being reported by travellers these days is the unpredictability of weather. Winter travels, in particular, come with the risk of flight delays or cancellations due to adverse weather conditions. Another significant uncertainty revolves around the unexpected disruptions caused by natural calamities. Whether it's a sudden snowstorm, heavy rains, or other unforeseen events, travellers may find their plans derailed. Furthermore, during the festive season, the influx of travellers can lead to crowded airports and transportation hubs, increasing the likelihood of lost baggage or theft of gadgets and valuables. Last but not least, travellers have also been fazed lately by

a looming concern about political unrest in various countries.

How does Asegō address such challenges encountered by travellers, ensuring a seamless and tranquil journey for them?

Asegō has been working tirelessly to identify and mitigate these risks with comprehensive travel assistance and insurance solutions. Our bouquet of offerings not only takes care of medical emergencies and other travel-related inconveniences but also ensures that travellers are protected against risks such as emergency medical evacuation, loss and damage of gadgets, cyber security issues, identity theft, credit/debit card fraud, etc. Further, our carefully curated standalone products offer travellers an opportunity to customise their protection plans as per their needs and preferences, rather than opting for a plain vanilla travel insurance product.

Given the significant shift in travel preferences towards offbeat and unexplored experiences, how does Asegō prioritise and ensure the safety of such travellers?

Yes! We too have seen a drastic jump in travellers seeking new experiences such as cruise trips, adventure sports, self-drive trips, etc. to end or begin the new year with a bang. However, we should be mindful of such activities, as they also come with inherent risks that require proper preparation and protection. We have therefore curated some exclusive coverage for Gen Z travellers, such as adventure sports coverage, sports equipment coverage, self-drive protection, etc.

These covers not only safeguard high-risk activities and other adventurous pursuits by travellers but also take care of emergency medical expenses in case of personal accidents, emergency evacuations, and more.



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ATHENS BEYOND ACROPOLIS

In a recent interview, Alexia Panagiotopoulou, Head of Strategy, This is Athens Convention and Visitors Bureau, shared compelling details about what makes Athens a unique and thriving tourist destination in Europe.

Sonika Bohra

Timeless Appeal

Athens is historically renowned as the intellectual epicentre of Greece and one of the earliest city-states, and it continues to maintain its reputation as one of the world's most celebrated cities. It was christened in honour of Athena, the goddess symbolising wisdom, who was also the city's guardian deity. Around 508 B.C., Athens pioneered one of the initial implementations of democracy in the ancient world.

But it's not just about the past; modern Athens vibrates with life, reflecting contemporary global developments and artistic expressions. It is a city where the essence of human civilisation – democracy, human rights, and artistic innovation – is palpably experienced by visitors.

Alexia emphasised Athens' rich blend of ancient history and contemporary culture that makes Athens exceptional when delivering luxury travel, conferences, and weddings. The city is renowned for its historical landmarks like the Acropolis and world-class museums such as the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum. Alexia explained, "Athens stands out from other European destinations because of its ancient history, the Acropolis, fantastic museums and its modern outlook."



▲ Alexia Panagiotopoulou

Tourism Recovery and Growth

In 2019, Athens witnessed a record influx of 6.4 million visitors. While the pandemic saw a downturn, the city's resilience and commitment to safe, reliable, and sustainable tourism have paved the way for a promising recovery. In 2022, Athens was ranked 8th in the world as a destination for conferences and meetings. Alexia anticipates 2023 to surpass previous records, signifying a robust comeback for Athens in the global tourism arena. She added, "We've

emerged from the pandemic with a great reputation, trust, and probably record numbers in 2023." Alexia also noted the enormous growth of interest from major film and television productions to work in Athens, promoting the creative industry and nurturing the technology sectors.

Diverse Source Markets and New Focuses

Athens has traditionally enjoyed visitors from the UK, the US, France, Germany, and Italy. However, there's a growing interest from regions like the Middle East and North Africa. The city is also exploring new markets, with India being a prime focus due to shared cultural ties and historical connections and is looking forward to having a direct flight between India and the Athens International Airport in the near future.

Target Segments and Changing Perceptions

While continuing to attract honeymooners and families, Athens has broadened its appeal to younger demographics, including Gen Z from Europe and the US. With a substantial 60 per cent increase in travel spending among Gen Z, this significant surge underscores their commitment to prioritising travel, viewing it as an essential and well-deserved respite.

Athens is no longer just a stopover; it's evolving into a destination where visitors can immerse themselves in local neighbourhoods, street life, and contemporary culture. Sharing her insights, Alexia said, "Athens has changed its outlook, attracting more Gen Z for city breaks and longer trips to enjoy the vibe of the city."

Hotel Industry Evolution

The hotel landscape in Athens is transforming, with a rise in boutique hotels and upscale accommodations. Hotels are becoming more than just a place to stay, evolving into community hubs offering unique experiences, design-focused interiors, and personalised services.

Scheduled to open in the coming years, the Conrad Hotel represents a profound transformation of the historic Hilton, a property that had long held a distinguished role in the Hilton brand's portfolio. The renovation of the Conrad Hotel is envisioned as a revival of the rich history of the property, a history so influential that it has shaped the identity of the surrounding neighbourhood.

According to Alexia, this shift in one of the city's most historic hotels also showcases the strength of investment

interest from renowned international brands that are preparing to open 5-star properties in the city. It is more than a mere rebranding for Athens; it signifies a redefinition of luxury and heritage in a contemporary setting.

The idea of turning historic buildings into hotels is enticing for a traveller looking to gain a localised experience and it has in fact served well for multiple destinations with rich history and culture. The city aims to harness its rich history besides also making it appealing to a modern-day tourist. Alexia noted, "Traditional Greek culture is contributing to global culture and vice versa." This reciprocal relationship enhances the local way of life and offers a richer experience to visitors, showcasing Athens as a dynamic hub where global and local cultures intertwine.

Beyond the Acropolis

The Acropolis of Athens, an emblematic landmark, served a dual role in the ancient city as both its fortified citadel and a state sanctuary. Its art and architecture, particularly exemplified by the Temple of Athena, established a benchmark in architectural style, now widely recognised as classical architecture. While the Acropolis' style and architectural design stand as

iconic symbols in the historical narrative of architecture, Alexia stressed the importance of showcasing Athens beyond its iconic ancient sites. She emphasised, "The city's vibrant neighbourhoods, street art, and coffee culture are aspects that prolong visitors' stays. It's about shifting the tourism mindset from destination-focused to experience-focused travel." The official visitors guide to Athens online at *thisisathens.org* is a crucial source of travel inspiration that highlights the vibes of Athens.

A panoramic experience

For those looking to extend their Greek adventure, nearby islands like Aegina, which is famous for its pistachios, great cuisine, and community of artists, will be quite interesting for travellers. Spetses and Hydra offer a mix of tradition and cosmopolitan flair, perfect for short getaways from the urban pulse of Athens. Moreover, Alexia advocated for more experiential tourism, suggesting visitors engage in activities like food tours or contemporary art tours. Encouraging intellectual debates around Athens' vast history, she shared, "You're really going to see the way people are reinterpreting ancient history and interacting with the world."

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Queensland Tourism charts an impressive economic roadmap

Queensland unveils an exhilarating new chapter, a compelling story of aspiration and growth in tourism. With newly harnessed resources and dedicated investments, a new era of enhanced visitor experiences showcases Queensland's rich diversity of destinations and experiences. The recent Queensland Ministerial and Tourism delegation to India was led by The Honourable Stirling Hinchcliff MP, Minister for Tourism, Innovation and Sport, Minister Assisting the Premier on Olympics and Paralympics Sport and Engagement.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

Known as the Sunshine State, it is a treasure trove of natural wonders, including the Great Barrier Reef, Gold Coast, Sunshine Coast, Whitsunday Islands, and the Daintree Rainforest. The biodiverse Wet Tropics and the celebrated ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures attract visitors from across the world. It offers a rich buffet of exciting experiences and bespoke itineraries such as camping, theme parks, luxury escapes, islands, beaches, and outback adventures. The state's passion for sports, particularly cricket, shares a special connection with India. Native Queenslanders and cricketing icons such as Matthew Hayden and Mitchell Johnson proudly represent Queensland as global ambassadors.

India a Top Recovery Market

India stands out as the fastest-growing international tourism market for Queensland. With 64,000 visitors arriving in the last year till June 2023, India has secured its position among the top five international markets alongside New Zealand, the UK, the US, and Japan. These visitors contributed over \$116 million to Queensland's economy within the first six months of the year. Queensland aims to deliver exceptional experiences, ensuring travellers return home with cherished memories of their Queensland adventures.

Minister Hinchcliff stated, "By 2032, Queensland aims to witness the Indian market contributing approximately \$408 million in overnight visitor expenditure, a significant rise from the pre-pandemic 2019 figure of \$150 million. This forms part of Queensland's broader ambition of achieving a \$44 billion visitor economy by 2032, with an anticipated \$11 billion specifically from international."



▲ Stirling Hinchcliff MP

Investments Drive Development

Tourism and Events Queensland (TEQ) is the official marketing entity, and its 'Towards Tourism 2032' strategy aims to grow overnight visitor expenditure to over \$44 billion. Substantial investments are being made to enhance Queensland's tourism sector and preparation for hosting the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The Games will bring global recognition as well as estimated economic benefits of over \$8 billion, with \$4.6 billion stemming from tourism alone.

The Brisbane skyline is undergoing a transformation. Noteworthy building projects include the Queen's Wharf opening in April 2024, the \$200 million Howard Smith Wharves focusing on dining and entertainment, and the \$175 million Queensland Performing Arts Centre. Cairns has invested half a billion dollars in

infrastructure investments, the Gold Coast has witnessed over \$70 million in investment.

Brisbane Airport is in a phase of extensive development, with over \$5 billion invested in refurbishments; Gold Coast Airport invested nearly half a billion dollars, while Cairns Airport allocated over \$15 billion. These developments are geared towards ensuring seamless and improved travel experiences for visitors to Queensland.

Aviation is always one of the greatest challenges for tourism. Hence, the Queensland Government has invested \$200 million in partnerships with international airports to secure more direct flights. Positive discussions held with Air India, hold hope for more direct connectivity between India and Queensland.

Sustainability and green energy are core goals, and 2024 will be a year of accessible tourism to ensure that people living with a disability can enjoy more opportunities in travel. Minister Hinchcliff emphasised, "It is not just the right thing to do, it is also a smart business step with a huge global market of people living with disability, wanting to enjoy everything that life has to offer, including great tourism experiences."

Innovative Promotional Campaigns

Along with campaigns like 'Beautiful Way to Be', Queensland has 80 upcoming promotional campaigns lined up with diverse partners such as the FIFA Women's World Cup, GoPro India, MakeMyTrip, Singapore Airlines, Thomas Cook, Panache World, Travel Duet, and regional language campaigns with Kulin Kumar Holidays, Flamingo, Transworld, and others. These strategic partnerships aim to target different segments of the Indian diaspora, notably high-spending audiences in eight major cities, including Delhi and Mumbai.

Queensland embodies aspirational travel, fostering deeper connections with nature and a humble appreciation for unforgettable experiences while embracing a sustainable and accessible 'Beautiful way to be'.



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Western Australia forges ahead as Premier Events Destination

Tourism Western Australia showcases the state as a top choice for high-value travellers seeking unique experiences. The aim is to develop Western Australia as an in-demand leisure and corporate destination, catering to diverse global audiences. Carolyn Turnbull, Managing Director, Tourism Western Australia, outlines the goals and the roadmap for 2024.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

From the biodiverse Margaret River region to the Yallingup Caves with stunning rock formations, from rolling vineyards to tiny gourmet restaurants serving fresh daily catches from the river flowing outside, the state is blessed with sheer proximity to nature and provides a wide spectrum of tourism products to elevate the visitor experience. In the well-protected Rottnest island, accessible only by ferry, with a strict ban on vehicles, the Quokkas are the sweetest creatures to befriend. Perth has bars that have little sandpits outside for the kids to play in while the grownups enjoy a drink. Modern, urban monoliths like Perth and Fremantle are thriving cities with a peaceful state of mind. The term, dream state, is the perfect synonym for Western Australia.

"Western Australia's global tourism brand positions our state as an aspirational destination for high-value travellers, who like to immerse themselves in destinations and place a higher value on the unforgettable, once-in-a-lifetime experiences," Carolyn stated.

Upsurge in Event Tourism

Western Australia's event tourism market has seen a surge and is anticipated to reach USD 2.1 trillion by 2032. Successful events in 2023, like record-breaking UFC 284, set new revenue records, and the sold-out Coldplay shows attracted thousands of attending fans and earned millions. The launch of Vision for Dream Events in 2023 aims to position Perth and Western Australia as the fastest-growing event destination in Southeast Asia.

Major upcoming events in Western Australia, including WWE Elimination Chamber: Perth, HSBC Rugby SVNS, and the return of the Margaret River Pro as part of the World Surf League, are expected to bring in thousands of out-of-state visitors. The "always on,



▲ Carolyn Turnbull

year-round" action-packed calendar of events offers a compelling time-specific reason for visitors to choose Western Australia as a destination in 2024.

"We look forward to hosting the prestigious World Travel & Tourism Council Global Summit in Perth next year, which will position Western Australia as a tourism leader among nations and will enable Tourism Western Australia to influence global tourism," Carolyn surmised.

Successful Campaigns

Carolyn pointed out, "Last financial year, Western Australia recorded \$16.8 billion in visitor spending – a record for the state and \$3.3 billion higher than the pre-COVID figure. We have set an ambitious target of significantly growing the visitor economy by 2033." The recent results show that Western Australia's tourism brand is resonating with target audiences. Collaborative campaigns with partners have directly led to over 230,000 passenger bookings to Western Australia, fostering an estimated economic impact of \$377 million.

The successful 'Walking On A Dream' campaign showcases Western

Australia's unique destination profile in a competitive global marketplace and highlights its deep connection with the land. Carolyn added, "We will continue to roll out 'Walking On A Dream' globally, following high-impact marketing activity launched in the US, the UK, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and several other key visitor markets over the last year."

Tourism Western Australia recently launched its new global road trips marketing campaign, 'Drive the Dream', fronted by world-famous F1 superstar and proud West Australian, Daniel Ricciardo, which has already gained extensive social media following.

Setting Course for 2024

The upcoming year will sustain this growth momentum, emphasising innovative campaigns in new markets and fostering deeper connections in existing ones. There will be a renewed focus on securing, hosting, and promoting major sporting, cultural, and business events.

Tourism Western Australia leverages aviation and sea routes to reach new markets, like the Qantas' Paris – Perth non-stop flight enabled increased marketing in France. Tourism Western Australia strives to expand access by introducing direct flights from 18 international destinations to Perth and enhancing cruise ship itineraries for future growth.

State Tourism targets expanding aboriginal tourism offerings driven by high demand, as 84 per cent of visitors actively seek authentic aboriginal experiences.

Carolyn emphasised, "India has been one of Western Australia's fastest-recovering markets with visitor numbers now back to 94 per cent of pre-COVID levels." In the year ending June 2023, India was Western Australia's sixth-largest international market. India continues to be a high-priority market, as engaging promotions like the successful 'Walking on a Dream' continue to unfold.

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TNZ to maximise brand recall with targeted marketing and partnerships

Against the backdrop of a promising tourism recovery for New Zealand, the prevailing global economic challenges necessitate a concerted effort to draw in high-quality visitors. In the face of an intensely competitive market, particularly as a niche destination, Tourism New Zealand's endeavours must be exceptionally compelling to distinguish New Zealand from other destinations, emphasises Gregg Wafelbakker, General Manager - Asia, Tourism New Zealand.

Prashant Nayak

Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) continues to focus on attracting high-quality visitors who contribute positively to their economy, environment, culture, and communities. India is an important visitor market for New Zealand and one that has shown strong recovery signs in 2023. Between January - September 2023, total arrivals from India were 60,267, a 34 per cent increase on the same time period in 2019. They aim to continue to build this momentum by growing the desire for New Zealand and converting this demand into bookings.

"We will continue to leverage advocacy and media partnerships to drive through and elevate New Zealand's visibility in India. Through our global 100% Pure New Zealand campaign, 'If You Seek,' we will continue to encourage consumers to form an emotional connection with the country. The campaign highlights the incredible and unique experiences that New Zealand has to offer, placing the consumer at the heart of the experience. The campaign will be leveraged across paid advertising, Tourism New Zealand's owned channels, public relations activity, and trade education," informs Gregg.

When it comes to travel trade, Gregg emphasises on continuing to build strong relationships across the tourism industry through trade education and trade partnerships with the aim of converting demand into high-quality arrivals in New Zealand. In its effort to continue converting high-quality visitors in 2024, Tourism New Zealand stresses ensuring that its campaigns, partnerships, and trade initiatives include information that addresses travel barriers for Indian consumers. These include providing information on New Zealand's health and safety protocols and how to plan a trip and travel to the country. Through these strategic measures, Tourism New Zealand seeks to enhance the overall experience for Indian travellers and facilitate their seamless exploration of the destination.



▲ Gregg Wafelbakker

Standing Out Amidst Intense Competition

While Tourism New Zealand's consumer marketing efforts are mainly focused in Mumbai, Delhi, and Bengaluru, through their trade marketing initiatives, they have ventured into newer markets like Pune, Jaipur, Udaipur, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Ajmer, Kanpur, Coimbatore, Indore, Bhopal, Lucknow, Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara, and Aurangabad. In the trade education space, they are hoping to leverage massive growth opportunities shown by markets like Kochi, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad.

India is one of the fastest-growing economies globally, and there is intense competition in the tourism space to vie for an Indian consumer's attention. Speaking about competition from other destinations, Greg mentions, "We are also confident that, with high appeal and preference for New Zealand among our audience in India, New Zealand will continue to stand out to Indian consumers, thanks to the incredible and unique experiences that the destination has to offer. Our consumer research suggests that Indian travellers are interested in

covering a wide range of experiences on a holiday that encompasses food and wine, culture, scenic attractions, adventure, nature, and wildlife, and New Zealand delivers well in this space."

Exploring the Rise of Sustainable Travel

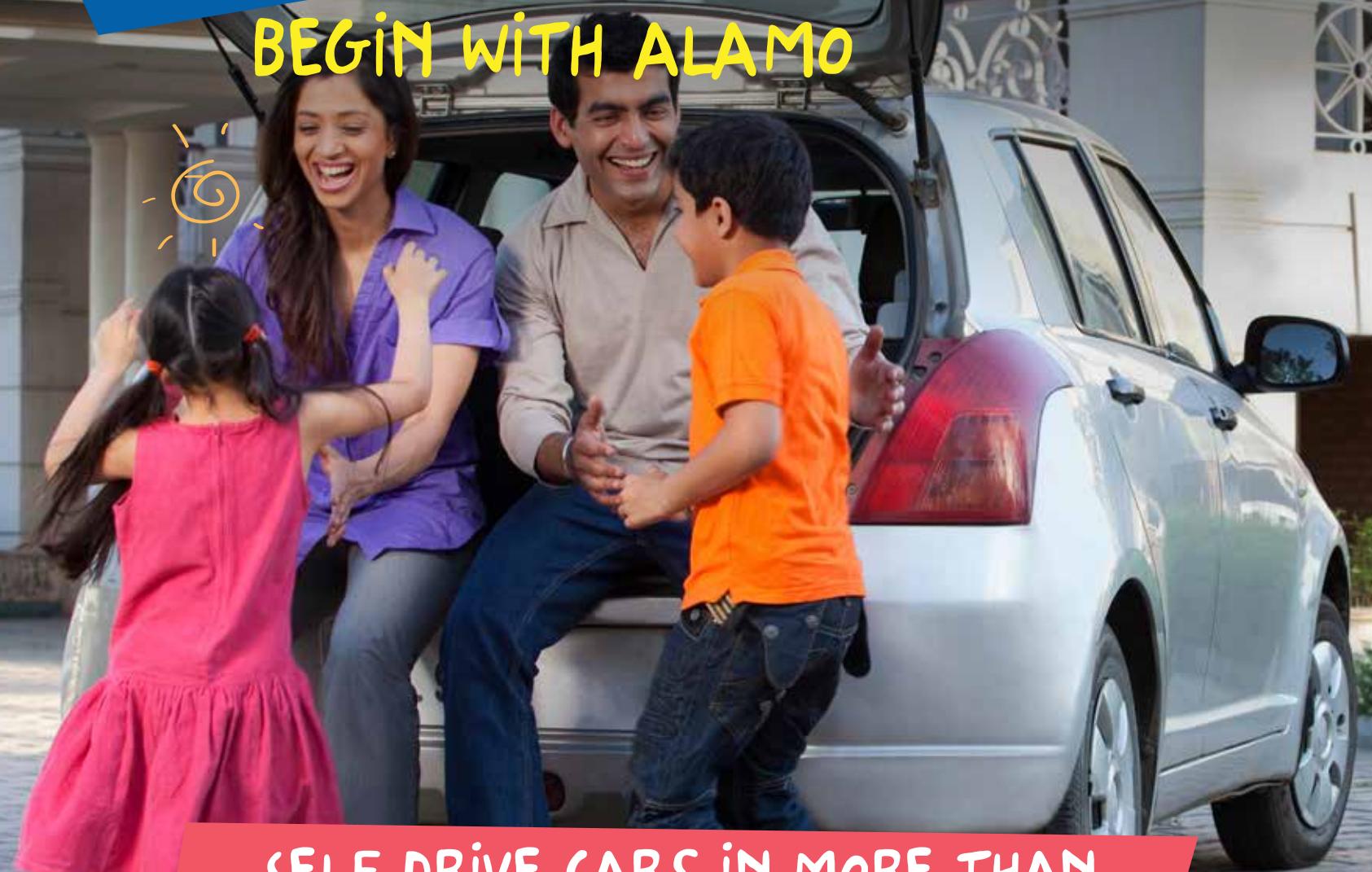
In discussing the anticipated trends that are poised to shape the tourism landscape in 2024, Gregg emphasises the need for proactive adaptation within the industry. He says, "There is a growing consciousness among travellers about the environmental impact of their travel footprint. Sustainable and eco-friendly tourism practices are likely to gain prominence, with travellers seeking destinations and experiences that prioritise environmental conservation and responsible tourism. This also ties into travellers increasingly seeking unique and immersive experiences over traditional sightseeing. The demand for hands-on, culturally enriching activities and authentic interactions with local communities is likely to continue growing. Since sustainability is on the minds of industry and consumers, Tourism New Zealand will continue to work with industry to help consumers find and choose more sustainable experiences."

"The focus on health and wellness has also gained prominence. Travellers are expected to prioritise destinations that offer wellness activities and outdoor experiences that promote physical and mental well-being," adds Gregg.

2024 Performance Goals

In 2024, Tourism New Zealand's primary key performance indicators revolve around achieving a notable uptick in visitation numbers and bolstering brand health metrics. "Our goal is to build top-of-mind recall, preference, and overall demand for New Zealand through targeted marketing initiatives and impactful partnerships," asserts Gregg.

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MTPA to focus on amplifying its presence and enriching visitor experience in 2024

The Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) is poised to effectively navigate challenges and sustainably promote Mauritius as a premium tourist destination in 2024 through a comprehensive strategy encompassing market expansion, strategic positioning, digital engagement, and a focus on diverse and sustainable offerings. Arvind Bundhun, Director, MTPA, shares more insights.

Prashant Nayak

Mauritius' tourism sector has long been a cornerstone of the island country's economy. MTPA remains steadfast in its commitment to bolster tourism by employing strategic marketing, fostering infrastructure development, and championing sustainability initiatives.

MTPA's primary goal is directed towards accelerating its efforts to enhance brand visibility, bond with the travel trade, expand its market reach to Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities in India and ultimately increase tourist arrivals for the Indian market in 2024. The core objectives of MTPA will focus on leveraging digital platforms and enhancing a strong digital presence while fostering new trade relationships and strengthening existing partnerships within the travel industry.

"We are exploring opportunities to target emerging markets, particularly in regions where there is a growing interest in experiential and sustainable tourism. Collaborative efforts with travel agencies and influencers will be key in expanding our reach in cities beyond Mumbai, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai," says Bundhun.

Beyond Beaches

Mauritius is a stunning land filled with coconut trees and blessed with beaches that greet the eyes everywhere, whilst the people and the culture rule the heart of this destination. However, Mauritius faces competition from many island destinations offering beach experiences. A heaven for honeymooners, this destination has a lot more to offer. The differentiating factor for Mauritius lies in its rich and wide variety of beyond-the-beach and unique blend of immersive and cultural experiences, live-like local opportunities, diverse landscapes, and a strong emphasis on sustainable tourism practices. It is a destination that transcends beyond honeymooners catering to families, multi-generational travel, MICE, celebrations, weddings, golf, and film shootings, and



▲ Arvind Bundhun

MTPA is promoting the island to welcome all segments of tourists.

"While there is ever-growing competition from existing and new destinations, it is therefore imperative for MTPA in their positioning and messaging to focus on differentiating Mauritius as unique. It is crucial to keep informed of and evolve travel trends, preferences, and consumer behaviour so that the destination and its products are adapted to stay relevant, satisfy the requirements of the Indian traveller, and appeal to diverse traveller segments. Furthermore, accessibility and visa-upon-arrival facilities will be focused on," explains Bundhun.

Campaigns and Collaborations

MTPA is also developing marketing campaigns to showcase its cultural richness and exclusive offerings to stand out in a competitive landscape. The recent 'Feel Our Island Energy' campaign has recently been awarded best campaign. Forging collaborations with travel industry partners, airlines, and stakeholders to collectively address challenges and enhance the overall tourism experience by adopting these strategies, MTPA aims to

navigate potential challenges effectively and sustainably promote Mauritius as a premium tourist destination in 2024.

Bundhun says, "All our 2024 activities aim to create an aspiration to travel to Mauritius, and we are engaging heavily on digital platforms, along with consistent and increased campaigns in the travel trade. MTPA will continue promoting the destination with a focus on digital platforms and social media, along with other platforms. B2B-generated joint campaigns and campaigns with TOs and airlines will be elaborated upon. To increase the level of engagement with the trade, MTPA is planning to conduct roadshows, workshops, and familiarisation trips for tour operators, MICE agents, wedding planners, golfers, film production houses, and media.

Cultivating Resilience

In light of insights gained in 2023, the paramount importance of agility is in effectively responding to unforeseen challenges. As part of its commitment to continuous improvement, MTPA is strategically enhancing its crisis communication plans and cultivating resilience within its tourism ecosystem. MTPA's key metrics for 2024 will include tourist arrival numbers, engagement on digital platforms, and the success of sustainability initiatives. Customer satisfaction and feedback will also play a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of their strategies.

Anticipated Boost in Arrivals

While Mauritius continues to be an aspirational destination considering its diverse products and attractions, Bundhun expects to see a boost in Indian arrivals from the honeymoon, weddings, families, MICE, and other segments as well. "We also anticipate a rise in demand for eco-friendly and immersive experiences. With so many destinations vying for the Indian traveller, those that provide value for money, ease of visa, and direct connectivity will definitely be preferred in 2024," concludes Bundhun.

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Key achievements set stage for Tourism Australia in 2024

The Aussie Specialist Program, aimed at empowering travel agents to effectively promote Australia as a top travel destination, has been pivotal in achieving notable market success. Under the collaborative efforts of Tourism Australia and its partners, the program excels in showcasing new experiences and destinations in Australia, marking a resurgence in the tourism sector ready for new challenges and opportunities.

Vartik Sethi

Aussie Specialist Program

The Aussie Specialist Program aims to engage and educate travel agents, enhancing their ability to sell Australia as a premier travel destination effectively. Nishant Kashikar, Country Manager, Tourism Australia, acknowledged the critical role of the travel agent fraternity, particularly the Aussie Specialist Program, in recording significant market success. A collective achievement of 'Team Australia', which includes Tourism Australia and state and territory tourism partners, the program's effectiveness is evident in the way new products, experiences, and destinations in Australia are being showcased, demonstrating a revitalised tourism sector ready to embrace new challenges and opportunities.

Fastest-Growing Market with Untapped Potential

India is currently the fastest-growing market for Tourism Australia. The country has already matched pre-COVID arrival and spending numbers, a significant milestone setting a strong foundation for 2024. Signifying a commitment to fostering easier and more appealing travel for Indian tourists, Kashikar said, "We've seen a threefold increase in aviation capacity from India to Australia. This boost, from eight flights a week pre-COVID to almost 28 now, is set to strengthen our connectivity significantly."

Strategic Achievements and Future Goals

Kashikar highlighted five key achievements that underscore the growth of the Indian market:

- Matching 2019 Visitor Numbers:** With 385,000 Indian tourists in 2023, matching



▲ Nishant Kashikar

the pre-pandemic figures.

- Increased Spending by Indian Tourists:** A rise from 1.8 to 2.2 billion AUD, marking a 24 per cent growth.
- Improved Global Ranking:** India has moved up to become the fifth-largest market in terms of arrivals and spending.
- Growth in the MICE Sector:** A surge in incentive groups, thanks to increased flights and streamlined visa processing.
- Expanded Aviation Capacity:** Enhancing connectivity and accessibility between India and Australia.

Strengthening Bilateral Ties

Kashikar emphasised the strengthened Australia-India relationship, led by Prime Ministers Anthony Albanese and Narendra Modi. Their engagements have resulted in a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement, boosting bilateral trade and

investment. The tourism Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for a five-year period, alongside improved educational and geopolitical links, has created ideal conditions for a thriving partnership. This cooperation is likened to a perfect symphony, set to yield substantial results from this market.

Marketing Strategies and Campaign Success

The 'Say G'day' campaign, launched a year ago, has resonated well with Indian travellers, positioning Australia as a top-ranked destination. Looking ahead, Kashikar's approach is to maintain and accelerate this growth trajectory. Eschewing specific growth percentages, Tourism Australia focuses on exceeding expectations, confident in the Indian market's potential.

Embracing Sustainable Luxury Travel

Globally, Australia is uniquely positioned, ranked 48th in arrivals but 10th in spending and 1st in per-night spend per visitor. This high-yield strategy is complemented by a commitment to sustainable tourism. Kashikar shared, "Our focus is not just on attracting tourists but ensuring they experience Australia in a sustainable, luxurious way. This approach is embodied in our 'Signature Experiences of Australia', offering unique and eco-friendly experiences."

The 'Signature Experiences of Australia' programme includes luxury lodges, golf, wine, cultural experiences, and luxury cruises, all delivered sustainably. Tourism Australia's strategy encompasses sustainability, accessibility, diversity, inclusivity, and promoting indigenous tourism, differentiating Australia's offerings globally.

Innovation and Growth

Tourism Australia aims for significant growth and innovation in 2024. The focus on the Indian market, combined with a commitment to sustainable and high-value tourism, is expected to set a prosperous course. The organisation's adaptability to the evolving global landscape and strong international relations, particularly with India, demonstrates a dynamic and forward-thinking approach.





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Tourism Fiji showcases strategic agility in adapting to challenges and emerging trends

Embarking on a transformative journey, Tourism Fiji is resolute in reclaiming the vibrancy of 2019 by 2024. Sunil Menon, Country Manager, India, Tourism Fiji, says that their paramount mission is to revive not only tourism but the livelihoods it sustains. Fiji, poised as the jewel of the South Pacific, is committed to leading the charge in augmenting international visitor arrivals and tourism earnings.

Prashant Nayak

Anticipating challenges of 2024

Tourism Fiji acknowledges potential economic and geopolitical obstacles, a potential slowdown in travel demand, and resource limitations. To address these challenges, Tourism Fiji is engaging in scenario planning, strategic financial management, and the diversification of marketing efforts. Continuous monitoring, adaptation, collaboration with stakeholders, and innovative approaches are central to their strategy, ensuring resilience and sustained success in Fiji's tourism industry.

Competition from destinations like Hawaii and Bali is also a challenge, but Fiji prioritises the creation of a distinct global identity, showcasing the richness of its people and culture. "Recognising competitors, Fiji sets itself apart through authentic warmth, rich cultural experiences, and pristine natural beauty. Strategies are tailored to highlight these unique qualities, emphasising genuine Fijian hospitality

and diverse offerings. Despite the competition, Fiji aims to appeal to travellers seeking an authentic and unforgettable experience, carving out a niche in the global tourism market," assures Sunil.

Sunil ambitiously believes that by the end of 2024, Tourism Fiji can support an expansion of the visitor economy to an estimated FJ\$3.37 billion and attract 1 million international visitors.

Embracing Trends, Creating Memories

As we look ahead, several emerging trends are expected to influence tourism in 2024, reflecting evolving consumer preferences and behaviours. On this, Sunil says, "Fiji, with its diverse offerings, aligns seamlessly with emerging trends, like blending business with leisure travel. The destination caters to a growing appetite for diverse and immersive activities, boasting rich cultural experiences and adventure tourism. Notably, the luxury market is ever-trending and seeing growth, and Fiji beckons with opportunities for exclusive,



▲ Sunil Menon

immersive experiences. We anticipate continued demand for unconventional experiences, and we stand ready to create lasting memories for our visitors, offering opportunities for both luxury seekers and those seeking high-quality yet accessible adventures."

Tourism Spain focuses on marketing mix optimised for Indian market

Spain has indeed been one of the preferred destinations for Indian travellers and it allured visitors even when travel restrictions were imposed between India and Europe. Elisa Robles Fraga, Director Tourism Office, Spain in India, elucidates on the focus and their goal this year of further strengthening their position in this market, especially in segments such as gastronomy, art and culture, luxury, and shopping, among others.

Prashant Nayak

Spain's Unique Allure

Western European countries such as France, the UK, Switzerland, and Germany offer interesting experiences to the Indian market. However, Spain boasts distinct advantages, of which Tourism Spain is proud of. Indian travellers to Europe, typically from the upper-middle or higher economic segments, find Spain uniquely appealing among Western European countries. "Among other things, it offers a wide variety of experiences on one single trip. With the country's remarkable diversity, encompassing its urban landscapes and heritage sites, along with its consistently pleasant weather and delectable gastronomy, it remains a very alluring destination not only for individual travellers and small groups but also for large groups, wedding events, and business travels," assures Fraga.

Tailoring the Essence of Spain

For the year 2024, Tourism Spain is looking at a marketing mix that is optimised for the Indian market. The plans are in the process of final approval as they are in conversation with various Spanish regions for media FAM trips as well as multiple B2B presentations for the travel trade. Besides, they have a few exciting digital campaigns lined up for end consumers as well.

Quality over Quantity

The absolute number of arrivals is indeed important for any tourism destination, but it is imperative to evaluate the value added—to the individual traveller as well as to the destination. Fraga points out, "Spain has always tried to strike a perfect semblance between the two by not only focusing on our already-popular tourism products, such as



▲ Elisa Robles Fraga

luxury or cultural heritage, among others, but also by providing the opportunity to get to know some of the hidden gems of our beautiful country."

Utah Tourism progresses with transformative road trips and experiences

Utah is optimistic about a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels of international spending and visitation in 2024, particularly from key markets. Zach Fyne, Global Markets Specialist, Utah Office of Tourism, shares insights into the pivotal role of road trips in defining tourism in the state and the increasing popularity of glamping experiences.

Prashant Nayak

Unveiling America's Beauty with Road Trips

The United States boasts unique and visually stunning scenery, making an All-American road trip an experience to savour culinary, cultural, and natural wonders. Utah is exploring multi-state collaborations with its neighbours to showcase road-tripping possibilities across the US for international travellers.

"We secured some great content and videos from hosting content creators last year and are hoping to continue building these assets that both increase our overall exposure and also showcase that Indians are discovering Utah for the first time and learning about how to take on this new form of travel that involves lots of new habits of self-drive road tripping. Discovering pleasures of the off-the-beaten-path for a better overall travel experience, and exploring these

places during seasons they would otherwise not have thought of travelling," mentions Zach.

Utah's Glamping Revolution

For the state of Utah, as an emerging trend, glamping sites are popping up in every single town, trying to get visitors on an unexplored path to seek pleasures in the open lands of Utah and connect with nature amongst breathtaking landscapes.

Expanding Tourism Horizons

Utah Tourism prioritises visitation and spending as key performance indicators (KPIs). The focus is on collaborating with tour operators to highlight innovative itineraries that go beyond national parks, showcasing Utah's stunning landscapes in national monuments, state parks, ski resorts, and charming towns. "We will be looking at how



▲ Zach Fyne

that product expansion progresses as we enter our third year in the Indian market. Our office will be travelling to India in mid-January, and we are looking forward to connecting with the direct consumer, too," says Zach.

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Punjab paves its path for global prominence with groundbreaking developments

Punjab's tourism strategies are characterised by a blend of sustainability, technology integration, and a focus on local experiences, ensuring that its industry keeps up its continued growth and adaptability in a dynamic global landscape. Rakhee Gupta Bhandari, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Cultural Affairs, shares her vision that will shape Punjab's tourism landscape, creating a blend of authenticity and modernity for an unforgettable visitor experience.

Prashant Nayak

Charting Punjab's Tourism Trajectory

In 2023, Punjab's travel and tourism industry faced both challenges and successes that are likely to shape its future strategies. The state hosted its first tourism summit and travel mart, which will go on to be a key determinant of its tourism landscape both on the demand and supply end and address the most significant challenge the state has dealt with in this sector post-COVID-slowdown. To support a tourism market, it was crucial to kick off dialogues around Punjab's assets, policies, and ecosystem. The tourism value and service delivery chain were briefed and sensitised about the challenges the state faces in domestic and international markets. Three months after the summit, the state can assert with certitude that it has been a resounding success.

"The year of strong deliberation has thus managed to narrow down the state's priorities as 'sustainability' and 'responsible tourism', aligning with global environmental concerns. The region intends to invest in eco-friendly initiatives while engaging its cultural and natural assets as part of a sustainable tourism approach," asserts Rakhee.

Local Synergies

With a potential shift towards local and regional tourism, Punjab Tourism has also collaborated with local businesses for a mutually beneficial impact. Digital marketing and personalised customer experiences can also be prioritised, recognising the significance of staying connected with travellers in an increasingly online world. "Under the visionary leadership of our Hon'ble Chief Minister S. Bhagwant Singh Mann, our plan is to make continuous progress by connecting the dots, leveraging our assets, and developing potential sites and skills to promote sustainable tourism," accentuates Rakhee.



▲ Rakhee Gupta Bhandari

Adapting and Prioritising Tourism Strategies

In 2024, several emerging trends are likely to significantly impact Punjab's tourism sector. Firstly, the continued integration of technology will demand a robust online presence, encouraging Punjab to invest in user-friendly platforms, virtual experiences, and innovative digital marketing strategies. This shift aligns with the global trend towards personalised and contactless travel experiences. Rakhee highlights, "Sustainability will remain a key focus, with Punjab embracing eco-friendly initiatives, promoting responsible tourism, and showcasing its cultural and natural heritage. This commitment to environmental consciousness responds to the growing demand for green travel options and aligns with lessons learned from global challenges."

Punjab tourism shall prioritise the regional focus on local and authentic experiences, which will continue to flourish, with collaborations between the tourism industry and local businesses fostering community engagement and economic growth. Additionally, niche and experiential tourism will be key focus areas for Punjab in the years

to come, as evidenced by its policy concentration. Wellness, water, and adventure tourism are all recognised as significant industry shifts, with more investors and stakeholders sensitised about the potential of the same in Punjab. A combination of innovation, cultural preservation, and a commitment to responsible tourism will propel Punjab to navigate the evolving landscape and position itself as a resilient and sought-after travel destination in 2024.

Embracing the Adventure Lifestyle Trend

In a groundbreaking move to actuate Punjab into the forefront of adventure tourism, the state government has unveiled the Punjab Adventure Tourism Policy 2023. This visionary initiative aims to capitalise on Punjab's diverse topography, including the foothills of the Shivalik Range, wetlands, forests, and rivers, offering a playground for adrenaline enthusiasts. Activities such as rappelling, river crossing, ziplining, forest walks, camping, hot air ballooning, helicopter rides, bungee jumping, and water sports are set to redefine the adventure landscape.

Complementing this thrust into adventure, the Punjab Water Tourism Policy 2023 invites private sector proposals to develop tourist sites along the state's major rivers and canal networks. Rakhee further informs, "Exciting activities like boating, camping, trekking, ziplining, and jungle safaris are set to transform picturesque locations like Chamrour, Phangota, Thana Dam, Chohal Dam, and Siswan Dam into must-visit destinations."

Punjab Tourism made an indelible mark at ATOAI's 15th Convention held in Gujarat last month, where the state was recognised by the association as the "Friend of Adventure" state. This recognition serves as motivation for Punjab to aim higher, striving to transform itself into the best state for adventure.

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THE TURNING POINT

In Tourism Representation Business

With an unprecedented surge in the number of representation firms, the industry faces a dual challenge: differentiating services in an increasingly saturated market while safeguarding profitability against aggressive pricing strategies. This report delves into the collective insights gathered from top tourism representation companies across India, offering a comprehensive overview of the current state and future prospects of this vital sector.

Vartik Sethi

Tourism representation, a sector that finds itself at a crossroads, yet imbued with untapped potential and opportunities for transformative change seeks guidance from its leaders. From consistent efforts in relationship building and providing up-to-date

market intel to emphasising hard work, team coordination, and synchronisation, the industry leaders provide a roadmap for navigating the complexities of the current landscape. Their insights not only reflect the challenges faced but also illuminate the pathways towards a more resilient, sustainable, and prosperous future for tourism representation in India.



▲ Lubaina Sheerazi



▲ Priyanka Nijhawan



▲ Munmun Marwah



▲ Arjun Mukundd



▲ Ellona Pereira



▲ Yeishan Goel



▲ Pranav Kapadia



▲ Vartik Sethi



for past 21 years." Specialising in luxury, leisure, MICE, and weddings, Nijhawan Representations has mastered the art of understanding and catering to the consumer psyche in varied sectors.

Underscoring BRANDit's objective to provide disruptive sales, marketing and communication solutions to tourism brands in India, Lubaina Sheerazi, CEO and CoFounder, BRANDit, and her team boast an impressive ten decades of collective experience in the travel and tourism industry. "We are not just about changing perceptions; our focus is on driving desired outcomes for some of the most recognised brands in travel. With a robust blend of commercial awareness, trade experience, and marketing tactics, we provide customised solutions covering all aspects of travel and tourism," said Sheerazi.

Following a strategic travel-corporate approach under her leadership, Munnmunn Marwah, COO, Think Strawberries ensures there exists a dynamic blend of top travel professionals and corporate achievers coming together. Marwah explained, "Our company is a dynamic venture, combining the finest travel professionals with senior achievers from top corporates. We offer 360-degree travel representation services, which is a testament to our commitment to innovation and a client-centric approach."

Highlighting a longstanding mark in the representation business, Pranav Kapadia, Founder, Global Destinations shared, "With our rich legacy of over 15 years, we stand out through our extensive global network and our commitment to providing innovative and personalised solutions. Our focus on being a 100% B2B representation company, with ethical practices and a resourceful team, ensures complete and trustworthy client representation."

Ellona Pereira, Head, AVIAREPS India brings in a unique global-local approach. Pereira shared, "Our affiliation with the global AVIAREPS Group, spanning 67 offices across 61 countries, empowers us with a vast network. This global-local approach enables us to execute targeted local initiatives while managing multi-market campaigns, a key differentiator in our service offering."

Yeishan Goel, Group CEO, Travel and Hospitality Representation Services, highlighted their niche

specialisation in representing global as well as Indian hospitality and tourism brands in the luxury lifestyle segment. "We are singularly focussed on delivering exceptional results with significant sector expertise sales, marketing and digital solutions with our in-house team spread across Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Dubai. Our ability to deploy the finest experts across multiple disciplines that work cohesively for greater and faster impact on our clients' businesses has built our reputation as the top choice for luxury hospitality brands worldwide."

Arjun Mukundd, Associate Director, T&A Consulting, has fostered growth and partnerships with notable clients like the Western Australia, Marina Bay Sands, and Sands Resorts Macao. As T&A Consulting celebrates 17 years, Mukundd's leadership continues to drive the firm's success in the tourism industry. He shared, "Our specialisation in advisory services across investment, trade, education, and tourism, combined with a commitment to embracing diversity and harnessing a vast knowledge pool, sets us apart."

Influx of New Entrants

The influx of new, smaller players in the tourism representation industry has sparked a wave of strategic adaptations among established firms. What has also spiralled into a controversy is that the industry might find itself in a 'Race to the Bottom' if the industry's intent revolves overly around price wars.

Goel from THRS views this as a positive development, he said, "Entry of new companies showcases the vitality of our industry. As a mature player, our focus is predominantly on results and innovation, versus client acquisition."

Echoing a similar sentiment, Sheerazi from BRANDit emphasised the opportunities that arise from increased competition. She said, "This has encouraged us to constantly innovate and refine our strategies. We view competition as an opportunity for growth. At BRANDit, our focus is on delivering value through strategic partnerships and market insights, ensuring our clients receive bespoke solutions."

Despite the proliferation of newer, smaller players, Nijhawan noted that their market strategy remains unimpacted and uniquely tailored to their clients' needs. "The rise of new companies has not affected us, as our strategy revolves around the individual requirements of our clients, driven by their global strategy and revenue targets," she explained.

Pereira, spearheading AVIAREPS, draws a parallel between the impact of new entrants in the tourism sector and the automobile industry in India. "Like the impact of brands like MG and KIA in India's automobile industry, new entrants in tourism representation have led to healthy competition," she added. Pereira highlighted the positive effects of competition, spurring innovation and fostering a culture of continual development.

Addressing the critical issue of competitive pricing strategies, Mukundd observes, "New players are reducing their prices to attract clients, which risks portraying India as an inexpensive option and can adversely affect businesses, especially in tender submissions where pricing is crucial." He believes that a balance between competitive pricing and the rising cost of living and labor expenses is essential for fostering healthy competition and sustaining business growth in the industry.

Thinking Out of the Box

Adaptability and innovation are key drivers for success, particularly in response to the shifting competitive landscape. AVIAREPS, adapting to the evolving market, has strategically pivoted towards a B2B2C model. Pereira explained this shift: "Our strategy is to bridge businesses and end consumers, creating direct channels for interactions and transactions."

Nijhawan emphasised the importance of flexibility and responsiveness to changing market conditions. "From a COVID to a post-COVID world, we've made multiple strategic shifts," she noted, highlighting the transition from virtual show-around to online PAN India product training. In mid-2022, there was a further shift to offline modes, a strategic decision aimed at countering webinar fatigue.

On another front, Kapadia revealed an innovative approach tailored to the current market trends, he shared, "We launched 'Wanderlust Marketing' to represent unique products and bespoke experiences." Their strategy involves a heightened focus on digital marketing and online platforms. "We've embraced technology, leveraging our CRM system to align with our goals. Our focus remains on showcasing our unique strengths, like our industry experience and global network, which sets us apart from the competition," he added.

These strategies, while diverse, all point towards a common theme: the need for continuous innovation and a keen understanding of both the market and customer needs.

By analysing travel data, T&A Consulting identifies new markets and sales channels in India, continually adapting their approach based on the effectiveness of promotional efforts. Mukundd added, "Our research team's insights enable us to devise effective marketing and sales strategies."

Locking Horns Amidst Price Wars

The trends suggest that key players sought to move away from aggressive price competition towards a focus on service quality and client-centered strategies. As observed through the lens of various industry leaders, it reflects a deeper, more strategic response to the evolving market demands.

Offering a balanced view, recognising that while the price is a factor, Sheerazi explained that pricing should not be the sole determinant of value. This perspective points to a broader trend in the industry: a shift towards offering comprehensive, tailored services that meet unique client needs, moving away from price as the primary competitive tool.

Nijhawan exemplified this transition by prioritising the quality of work over engaging in price wars. This approach suggests a strategic move towards building long-term client relationships and focusing on sustainable growth rather than short-term gains.

When asked about maintaining service standards in the face of price competition, Goel shared, "We believe in enabling a deeper positive impact on our clients' businesses with an approach that is data-oriented and outcome driven. This directly contributes to our sustained long-term relationships, while demonstrating the strength of our performance in the region."

Marwah outlined their approach to maintaining high standards, she explained, "Our success lies in delivering meticulously crafted strategies and campaigns that align with our clients' precise needs and desired outcomes. We focus on hardcore sales while ensuring our marketing and PR initiatives contribute towards this overarching goal."

Kapadia's strategy of focusing on unique value propositions and leveraging client feedback for continuous improvement further underscores the industry's move towards more client-centric models.

Besides, Pereira commented on the passion driving their service standards over a three-decade journey suggests a deep-rooted commitment to excellence in client service.

Highlighting their firm's focus on employee focused approach, linking team happiness with work quality. "Our HR team emphasises appreciating each team member, rooted in values like integrity and honesty," stated Mukundd.

Sustaining Long Term Relationships

Think Strawberries has demonstrated its prowess in maintaining long-standing client relationships. Marwah elaborated on their success, "Since 2014, we have maintained a successful partnership with the Jordan Tourism Board. Our relationship with destinations like the Maldives and enduring partnerships with Sharjah and Disneyland Paris highlight our position as a benchmark in the travel industry."

Kapadia takes pride in their long-term associations. He shared, "Our long-standing relationships with clients like General Travel New Zealand and Tourism Fiji exemplify our commitment to providing a diverse range of services and invaluable industry insights."

Shedding light on their strategy for enduring client relationships, Nijhawan shared, "Consistent efforts in relationship building, providing up-to-date market intel, and swiftly changing strategies as needed," she explained, are key components. The team's proficiency in meeting revenue targets and developing innovative strategies for the untapped Indian market further strengthens their position.

Bringing on table a well-rounded strategy that combines market intelligence, data-driven insights, and a robust network to nurture and sustain client partnerships, Pereira shared, "Our strength lies in our deep understanding of the socioeconomic landscape, backed by data analytics and a comprehensive marketing approach. Our extensive network of agents and media has been pivotal in exceeding client expectations and fostering lasting relationships."

Mukundd shared insights on maintaining long-term client relationships. "We focus on long-term benefits rather than short-term gains," he explained. He highlighted the importance of transparency and effective communication in building trust, which is essential for these enduring relationships.

Challenges and Opportunities

Highlighting the challenges, Kapadia noted, "Global uncertainties, the rapid evolution of technology, and increased competition are significant challenges. We focus on delivering exceptional value and differentiation to navigate these challenges." He anticipates future trends in the tourism representation sector to include enhanced digitalisation, sustainability initiatives, and a shift towards unique travel experiences.

Sheerazi noted India's growing economy, increasing disposable income and a rising demand for unique international travel experiences. "We're committed to connecting our clients with this burgeoning market," she affirmed, indicating a focus on linking international boards and hospitality brands with the growing Indian market.

Goel highlighted that the primary challenge facing THRS is talent acquisition. He exclaimed, "We are hiring impact professionals for several roles currently, and finding the right talent that aligns with our vision and culture is our biggest challenge." He added, "India's growing recognition globally as a burgeoning source market is opening up more opportunities for us."

Pereira acknowledged the growing challenges and opportunities in the sector. "The biggest challenge is the shift where B2B is becoming the new B2C. Building strong relationships with industry partners is increasingly important in tapping the market's potential.

Looking ahead, Pereira sees promising growth opportunities. "The rise in outbound tourism from India sets the stage for substantial growth. The sector will likely see advancements in AI-driven tech tools and an increased presence of niche destinations and entities in the Indian market."

The need to constantly innovate and stand out in a crowded market is a primary challenge for Nijhawan. Looking ahead, she sees immense growth potential in luxury and boutique hospitality, ski and wellness products, golf, yacht experiences, and offbeat destinations.

Mukund observed a lack of collaboration in the industry, presenting a significant opportunity. "Competitors with distinct strengths can benefit from shared skills, technologies, and assets through collaboration," he explained.

Advice for Newcomers

Sheerazi emphasised the importance of understanding the local market and forging strong relationships. "Learn the intricacies of the local market and develop strong relationships," she suggested. She also stressed on the significance of maintaining ethical standards, advising, "Prioritise ethics and honesty in all aspects of your business."

Besides, Kapadia advised newcomers to target specific niches and cultivate strong, enduring partnerships.

Adding to this chorus of advice, Nijhawan highlighted, "Tourism representation requires hard work, team coordination, and synchronisation," she advised. Stressing the importance of client relationships, she added, "It's crucial to aim for long-term relationships with clients, as the business is all about a company's reputation."

Mukundd advised, "Know your market well. Be brutally honest to your stakeholders and to yourself. Be patient - one needs to give 'time' some time. Shortcuts will look lucrative but not sustainable."



Bleisure and Events Galore at Yas Island in 2024

Yas Island, an emerging hotspot in Abu Dhabi, has steadily grown into a premier destination for tourists. This island presents a unique blend of leisure, luxury, and corporate facilities, making it ideal for MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), corporate events, leisure, and luxury travel. As an oasis of entertainment and business opportunities, Yas Island stands as an epitome of unmatched leisure.

Vartik Sethi

Yas Island's appeal lies in its multifaceted nature. It is not just a destination for leisure travellers but has become a hub for corporate and business events. With its array of state-of-the-art venues, world-class hotels, and award-winning attractions, Yas Island caters to a diverse range of needs and preferences.

For MICE and corporate events, the destination offers a variety of venues equipped with modern amenities and technology. These include world-class venues such as the Etihad Arena, Etihad Park, and numerous high-end hotels capable of hosting conferences, exhibitions, and corporate meetings. The convenience of having premium accommodation and event spaces in close proximity enhances the appeal for corporate clients.

On the leisure front, Yas Island is home to several world-renowned attractions, including Ferrari World™ Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, Yas Waterworld™ Yas Island Abu Dhabi, Warner Bros. World™ Abu Dhabi and the recently launched SeaWorld® Yas Island, Abu Dhabi. These theme parks offer unique experiences that blend entertainment with adventure, appealing to a broad audience range, from families to thrill-seekers.

Its strength lies in its tailored packages and offers that cater to various groups. The island provides exclusive packages that include hotel accommodations combined

with access to its award-winning theme parks. These packages are designed to provide an all-inclusive experience, ranging from single-day tickets to multi-park experiences, covering two, three, or even four theme parks. Such variety ensures that every visitor, whether on a short business trip or an extended leisure holiday, finds something that suits their interests and needs.

The integration of business and leisure is a key factor in Yas Island's success. Business travellers can enjoy world-class facilities for their professional needs while also having easy access to leisure activities. This blend of work and play is becoming increasingly important in the business travel sector, where attendees seek more than just a conventional conference or meeting experience.

Yas Island readies itself for a spectacular array of events, promising an enthralling experience for visitors from all corners of the globe. This jewel in the crown of Abu Dhabi's leisure and entertainment offerings is set to host a variety of activities that span the spectrum of sports, culture, and entertainment, making it a magnet for diverse audiences.

As the new year ushers in, Yas Island is also all set to host the award-winning musical, HAMILTON, making its Middle East debut from January 17 to February 11, 2024! Guests will get to enjoy the ultimate musical concert featuring hip-hop, jazz, R&B and Broadway with lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda, direction

by Thomas Kail, choreography by Andy Blankenbuehler and musical supervision and orchestrations by Alex Lacamoire and more from January onwards. Following this, on Sunday, February 18, 2024, at Etihad Arena in Abu Dhabi, Live Nation Middle East presents popular comedian Zakir Khan- a performance not to be missed, characterized by his anecdotal, personal, and heartfelt approach to comedy.

In early March, Etihad Arena will host "Scooby-Doo! and The Lost City of Gold", a new adventure featuring the iconic Scooby-Doo and his friends. This event promises to be a family favourite, combining technology, music, and interactive experiences.

The musical journey continues with "Queen by Candlelight", a concert direct from Carnegie Hall, New York, showcasing Queen anthems performed live at Etihad Arena on March 30, 2024.

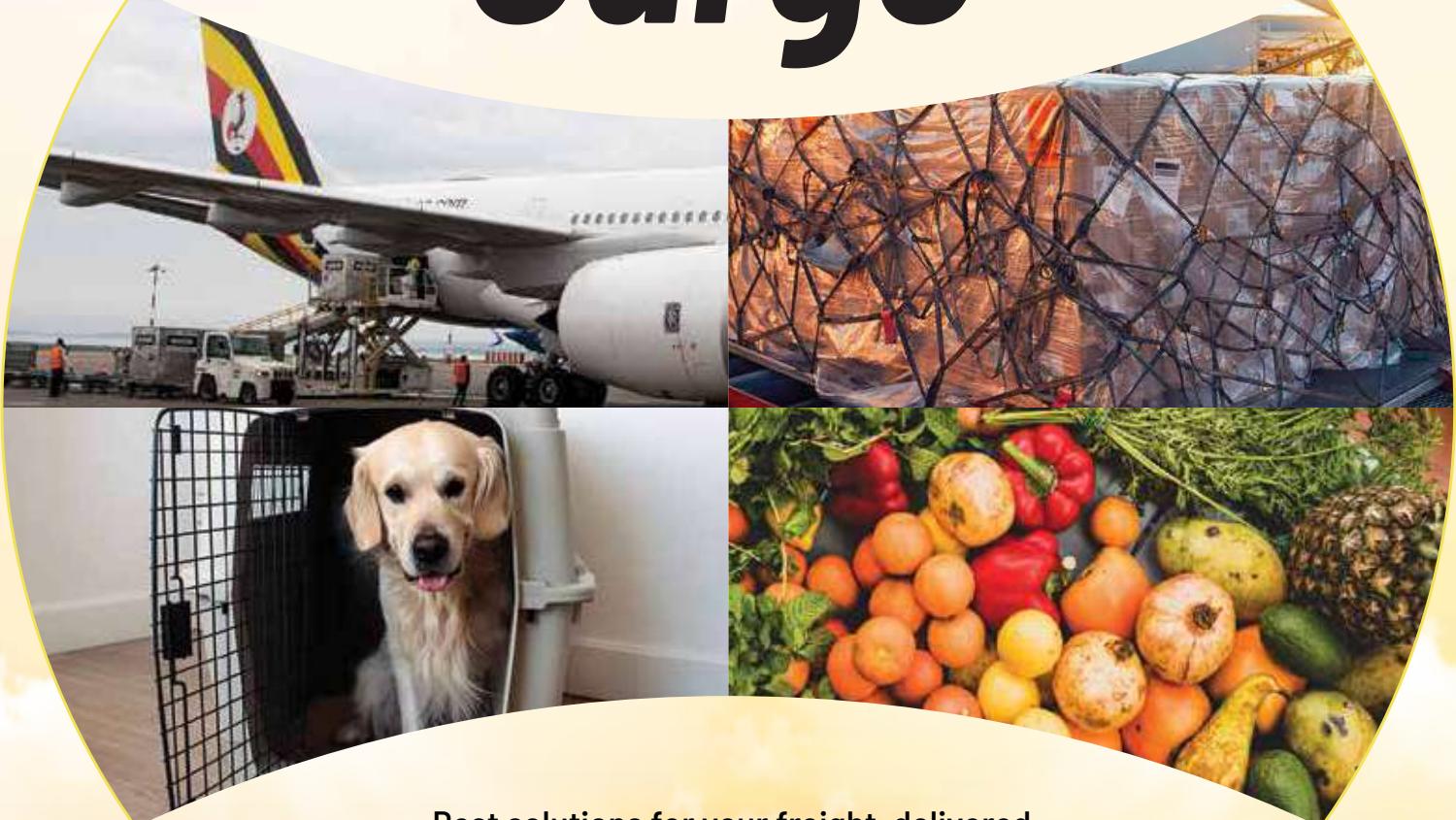
In June, the thrill of Monster Jam returns to Etihad Arena on the 8th and 9th, bringing an adrenaline-packed motorsports experience with the world's biggest trucks in a competition of race and skill.

Yas Island is not just a destination but a journey through diverse and vibrant experiences. Each event, unique in its essence, contributes to the tapestry of entertainment, sports, and cultural celebrations that define Yas Island, ensuring that every visit is an adventure to remember.

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SAROVA *weaves exciting dreams in* KENYA'S HOSPITALITY STORY

With a rich 45-year history, Sarova Hotels and Resorts embodies a deep respect for nature and community across its portfolio of nine family-run hotels. Mita Vohra, Director, Sarova Hotels and Resorts, Kenya, champions the brand's dedication to revitalising African hospitality. With a consistent focus on luxurious accommodations, immersive experiences, and unwavering sustainability initiatives, the brand sets the stage for a successful hospitality story.

Prashant Nayak

Sarova Hotels and Resorts encapsulate the enduring charm of Victorian opulence intertwined with the bold essence of Neo-Africa. From prime city locations to lush tropical game lodges and serene, unspoiled beach resorts, each property is meticulously designed for guests to immerse themselves in thrilling expeditions or discover the rich ethos of colourful Swahili culture. Mita states, "Our hotels, resorts, and lodges are renowned for unique locations and stories, food, which is key for India, stunning landscapes, a high standard of sustainability, cultural encounters, indoor and outdoor safaris,

and beach and city experiences. Most of all, we are known for warm service and unparalleled hospitality."

The Influential India Market

The Sarova brand has experienced remarkable growth and is geared up for new challenges in the future. Mita points out, "Our properties are doing very well post-pandemic. We have surpassed 2019 numbers in all our source markets (except China), with the top four being the USA, UK, India, and Europe. We have invested significantly in our properties and experiences, and we now have nine properties as opposed to seven."

Sarova Hotels' journey with India began in 1994 when pioneer Heena Munshaw opened the market for Kenya and the region. This market has been a priority for a long time. "We consider India a robust and important market for our business. The participation and commitment to the recent OTOAI convention in Kenya is a testament to the significance of the Indian market to us. We believe that Kenya will benefit enormously from this market, as will Sarova," Mita says.

India plays a vital role in Sarova's growth metrics, and 2024 marks a keen focus on devising promotional strategies specifically tailored to the dynamic Indian market landscape. Mira outlines the meticulously curated, robust marketing roadmap, encompassing active participation in pivotal industry shows, strategic deployment of targeted roadshows, and sales calls across diverse cities based on comprehensive data insights. It will also include a thoughtfully curated series of

familiarisation trips slated to be executed throughout the year with specially tailored offers during relevant periods.

Opulence Meets Untamed Beauty

Mentioning Sarova Hotels without highlighting its lodges and the accompanying luxury experiences would be incomplete, as the brand is renowned for seamlessly blending luxury accommodations with the unique charm of its lodges. "With regards to 'luxury wildlife experiences', we have just separated out 20 tents in Masai Mara and are finalising our new luxury club lounge, where occupants of these tents get to experience a complete luxury service design. This is already proving to be a success, even though the lounge is not yet completed," informs Mita.

Sarova Shaba Game Lodge is a stunning property nestled on a riverbed, with natural spring water flowing throughout the premises, artfully creating cascades and fishponds. Abundant trees offer refreshing resting spots after game drives. The gated lodge is high on security, with rooms offering excellent river views. Experiences such as sunrise climbs, gorge walks, sundowners, and private dining add to the charm.

Rated as one of Kenya's best luxury safari properties, Sarova Lion Hill Game Lodge lies almost concealed amidst the lush vegetation of "The Lion Hill" in the renowned Lake Nakuru National Park and offers unparalleled panoramic views of Lake Nakuru. Featuring African-style chalets and exquisite cuisine, the lodge echoes with the sounds of lions, adding to its enchanting ambience. Baboon Cliffs and Makalia Falls offer stunning viewpoints to complete the hilltop experience.





Sarova Stanley, Nairobi



Sarova Stanley, Nairobi



Sarova Shaba Game Lodge, Samburu



Sarova Shaba Game Lodge, Samburu

Regarding Sarova Hotels' expansion plans within Kenya and the potential consideration of extending its presence to other regions, Mita says, "This year, we have already added Sarova Mayan in the Mount Kenya region to our portfolio, and we do indeed have plans for expansion in the region as a whole."

Kenya's Tourism Landscape Evolution

While charting the booming growth of the tourism landscape in Kenya, Mita acknowledges, "I think that the range of products has expanded significantly over the years, as has the market mix and the growth in tourism numbers. There are many layers of products, and Kenya caters

to a diverse demographic." Notably, Mita acknowledges the unmistakable rise of the East, citing India and China as increasingly significant markets. Furthermore, she notes a growing presence from Latin America.

Leading the Way in Eco-Friendly Hospitality

Sustainable tourism has become a core focus for many travel and hotel businesses, and wildlife tourism is even more so. Mita emphasises, "Ecotourism has always been a part of the Sarova Hotels and Resorts' DNA for over 40 years of operations. We have proudly embraced several best practices that have ensured responsible travel within our properties." Listing out some conservation activities out of many,

she elaborates, "We prioritise wastewater management, with a focus on water conservation and purification. Acquiring water dispensers equipped with reverse osmosis purifiers enhances our hydration efforts. Across all our lodges, we maintain pesticide-free organic gardens, producing on-site compost. Additionally, we recycle waste cooking oil into renewable energy (bio-diesel), preventing pipe-clogging in sewerage systems while kitchen waste and leftovers are transformed into organic fertiliser for in-house organic kitchen gardens."

At both Sarova Lion Hill and Sarova Mara lodges, Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP) have been established that utilise a futuristic aerobic digestion system to process raw waste, eliminating toxin matter before discharging clear and inoffensive by-products into the environment. At Sarova Mara, treated water supports a watering hole for wild animals, while at Sarova Lion Hill, it nurtures vegetation. Sarova Hotels also prioritises energy efficiency by incorporating solar energy for water heating. Mita concludes, "There is also an elaborate, state-of-the-art water filtration and plant-based bottling at Sarova Lion Hill Lodge for drinking water. We aim to pick up lessons from this pilot project and later roll them out to all our other properties."



Sarova Mara Game Camp, Masai Mara

Jazeera Airways soaring high, setting new benchmarks in air travel

Jazeera Airways stands out with its modern fleet, dedication to operational efficiency, and recognition for exceptional services while providing passengers with accessible and efficient travel options. Romana Parvi, Regional Manager, South Asia, Jazeera Airways, says that their steadfast commitment lies in strategic network diversification, unwavering operational efficiency, and fostering a positive customer experience.

Prashant Nayak

With an unwavering commitment to excellence, Jazeera Airways charts a course for success that seamlessly blends innovation network expansion and passenger-centric service. In 2023, the airline continued its growth trajectory, adding 10 routes, including direct flights from Kuwait to Moscow, Samarkand, Larnaca, Sphinx (Cairo), Shiraz, Tivat, Belgrade, Tirana, Islamabad, and Tehran. The airline now serves 64 destinations across the Middle East, Central and South Asia, Africa, and Europe. With a focus on the business plan, aiming for 86 destinations in the next three years, 2024 will see an exploration of new destinations in Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Eastern Europe.

In India, the airline serves six cities: Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Kochi. "As always, we remain keen to expand our presence in India to serve the expat population, but we are limited by the seating capacity, which has not increased since 2007," says Romana.

Conquering Adversities

At the end of 2022, Jazeera Airways registered record profits despite perhaps the highest fuel prices in history. The effects of this spilled over into 2023, as did supply chain problems, which affected aircraft deliveries. During the year, even with the tough regulatory, geopolitical, and regional landscape, the airline carried a record number of passengers, delivered a strong load factor, and built an attractive network of destinations. This also resulted in the airline having the biggest market share in its home base of Kuwait. Romana also pointed out, "Depressed yields related to overcapacity remain a challenge, but we are well placed to leverage our low-cost base to maintain margins."



▲ Romana Parvi

Sustainability a Priority

In 2024, sustainability is also high on the agenda for the aviation industry, and airlines are under pressure to reduce their impact on the environment. "At Jazeera, we recognised our responsibility earlier on and have taken small steps to adopt environmentally friendly and sustainable practices into our operations. We have been running CHOOSE, a platform that offers customers an option to offset their flight emissions, for the last two years. In 2023, we introduced sustainable food service ware on all flights with a goal to reduce 300 kg of plastic per month," affirms Romana.

Enhancing Ground and Air Experience

Jazeera Airways' unique advantage is that it owns and manages Jazeera T5, its airport terminal in Kuwait, enabling direct control for an enhanced customer experience. In 2023, the terminal saw significant upgrades, including new gates, more check-in counters, and improved transit areas with added amenities like seating, changing rooms, restaurants, and a new Duty-Free shop. The terminal

also has independent arrival and departure areas, enhancing security and operational efficiency. This also makes it easier for transit passengers, with only one security screening on arrival at the terminal.

Romana further expressed their commitment to sustainability and innovation in 2024, stating, "We also introduced 100 per cent biodegradable cutlery on all our flights, making us the first low-cost carrier in the Middle East to switch from plastic to eco-friendly food service ware in-flight. In 2024, our aircraft will also be retrofitted with over 2000 seats from Expliseat, making us the launch airline for these seats. These new model TiSeat E2 seats are the world's lightest aircraft seats. With the Expliseat seats, each aircraft in the Jazeera fleet will reduce its empty weight by 1,200 kilograms, reducing jet fuel consumption."

Accolades and Aspirations

For the first nine months of 2023, Jazeera Airways reported positive financial performance with a group net profit of KD13.27 million. Despite challenges like overcapacity impacting yields and margins, the airline maintained a strong market share and experienced passenger growth. The airline was listed in Fortune 500 Arabia for its contributions to the regional business landscape, recognised as one of the Best Workplaces in Asia for 2023 by Great Place to Work, and received the ICT Leadership Award for actively embracing and pioneering digital transformation in their operations.

Romana conveys an optimistic outlook for 2024. She says, "The outlook for 2024 continues to remain positive with a consistent demand for travel, Jazeera's stringent cost control, and a solid balance sheet. Overcapacity in the market will continue to put yields under pressure and could impact margins. However, we continue to remain focused on growth with new destinations, aircraft, and initiatives."



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Vistara propels growth with continuous focus on sustainability

In the highly competitive Indian aviation market, Vistara has successfully crafted a well-balanced product, winning travellers' hearts and customer loyalty. In an exclusive interaction, Vinod Kannan, Chief Executive Officer, Vistara, offers valuable insights into the airline's recent advancements, delving into key areas such as fleet expansion, international routes, and sustainable aviation initiatives.

Prashant Nayak

Vistara currently has a fleet of 66 aircraft, including 50 Airbus A320neo, 10 A321, and six Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner aircraft. The airline looks forward to receiving one more Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner and three more A320neo aircraft from the order that they placed with Airbus and Boeing in 2018 and having a fleet of 70 aircraft by the end of FY2024. With these aircraft joining the fleet, the airline is committed to expanding its domestic and international network.

Expressing a sense of pride in these notable advancements, Kannan says, "We recently added three international destinations, namely Hong Kong, Bali, and Doha. Additionally, our operations in Mumbai have witnessed remarkable expansion in recent times, especially as a gateway to our international network. Vistara now connects Mumbai to a total of 14 international destinations, including Abu Dhabi, Bangkok, Colombo, Dammam, Dhaka, Doha, Dubai, Frankfurt, Jeddah, London Heathrow, Male, Mauritius, Muscat, and Singapore."

Soaring Ambitions to Reach New Horizons

Vistara has also enhanced connectivity to many of its existing international destinations. The airline recently increased the number of flights from 4x to 6x weekly between Pune and Singapore and introduced a second daily flight from Mumbai to Singapore. The flight frequency from Mumbai to London has been ramped up to daily from the previous 4x weekly. They also introduced a new route connecting Delhi and the Maldives with daily direct flights. "These additions are in line with our continued efforts towards offering more flexibility and ease to our customers when planning their travel with India's best airline. We are continuously exploring opportunities to further expand our international network by introducing new destinations and



▲ Vinod Kannan

connecting our existing destinations with more Indian airports," informs Kannan.

Eco-Friendly Flight Path

Airlines, in general, have been increasingly recognising the importance of sustainability due to the environmental impact of aviation. Vistara has shown tremendous interest in sustainability initiatives and reducing environmental impact. "At Vistara, it has been our constant endeavour to make a positive impact on the communities and environment that we operate in by keeping a sharp focus on sustainability. Since its inception, we have been investing strategically to reduce the impact of our operations on the environment. For instance, our fleet of A320Neo, A321Neo, and B-787 Dreamliner aircraft is powered by leading-edge technologies and advanced systems, resulting in a reduction of engine noise and better fuel efficiency," mentions Kannan.

In March 2023, Vistara achieved a milestone by operating a wide-body aircraft on a long-haul international route using a blend of 30 per cent SAF and 70 per cent conventional jet fuel, reducing approximately 150,000 pounds of CO2

emissions. Building on this achievement, the airline also operated a commercial domestic flight on a wide-body aircraft using SAF, another industry-first initiative. This flight, utilising a blend of 17 per cent SAF and 83 per cent conventional jet fuel, resulted in a reduction of approximately 10,000 pounds of CO2 emissions.

For a Greener Tomorrow

In its commitment to sustainability, Vistara has been investing in cutting-edge green technologies as well. "Notably, we have adopted Aerowash, an automated aircraft cleaning solution by AeroTech Support Services, optimising fuel efficiency by minimising aerodynamic drag. Pioneering in India, we've implemented SITA eWAS and SITA OptiClimb®, leveraging data-driven solutions to enhance flight planning, reduce fuel consumption, and slash yearly carbon emissions by 15,000 tonnes," asserts Kannan.

As part of Vistara's commitment to environmental sustainability, the airline advocates reusable stainless-steel cutlery in business and premium economy cabins on all flights and has introduced biodegradable bamboo cutlery onboard. The paper napkins used on all flights are produced with recycled paper, while the garbage bags are made of biodegradable compost material. All beverages onboard are served in paper glasses instead of plastic. The airline also recycles its inflight magazines and has responsibly recycled over 12,000 kg of the previous issues since 2022.

Furthermore, with the objective of increasing the green cover in the country, the airline launched the Vistara Green Miles initiative, under which it organises regular tree plantation drives across its network. "All these initiatives represent our ongoing commitment to innovation and sustainability, propelling Vistara towards a future where technology and eco-friendly practices converge to shape the aviation industry's sustainable future," concludes Kannan.



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IndiGo exemplifies customer-centric approach with focus on all-round efficiency

At the heart of IndiGo's mission is the dedication to extensively serve India, acting as a unifying link that connects people and their myriad aspirations. Vinay Malhotra, Head- Global Sales, IndiGo, eloquently captures this essence, stating, "Our mission is to extensively serve India, connecting people and aspirations under the overarching theme of 'giving wings to the nation,' embodying our commitment to India by IndiGo."

Prashant Nayak

IndiGo's growth strategy revolves around delivering an affordable, efficient, and convenient product to an expanding customer base. IndiGo's substantial fleet order of nearly 1,000 aircraft positions them to add capacity at competitive prices for an extended period. This advantage is amplified by the fleet's low age, incorporating new-generational technologies that efficiently manage fuel and maintenance costs. Ongoing efforts include improving utilisation and productivity, investing in technology and process enhancements, and collaborating with external stakeholders to reduce externally influenced costs. These continuous processes aim to deliver affordable capacity growth.

Redefining Passenger Experiences

Airlines continuously strive to improve the travel experience for passengers by implementing various enhancements. On this aspect, Malhotra says, "Our customers remain at the heart of everything we do. We have focused heavily on enhancing the passenger experience by improving our multi-channel sales experience, a brand-new in-flight menu, and innovations such as the world's first 3-point disembarkation process. All our efforts have resulted in greater efficiency and some of the highest rates of on-time performance at home and globally."

To add to passenger convenience, in early 2023, IndiGo launched Super 6E on routes from India to Colombo, Kuala Lumpur, Dammam, Jeddah, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Doha, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, Male, Kathmandu, and Riyadh. With these additions, IndiGo now offers Super 6E fares on flights to 23 international destinations, which include an extra 10 kg baggage allowance, free seat selection, including XL seats, meal or snack combos of choice, priority check-in and anytime boarding, delayed and lost baggage protection service, a reduced



▲ Vinay Malhotra

change and cancellation fee, as well as no convenience fee.

Global Ambition and Alliances

In the past year, IndiGo strategically expanded its global footprint, launching new routes to Jakarta, Nairobi, Almaty, Tashkent, Baku, and Tbilisi, marking entry into Central Asia and Africa and reinforcing its Southeast Asian presence. New flights from key cities like Hyderabad to Male, Colombo, Ras Al Khaimah, Singapore, and from Ahmedabad to Abu Dhabi and Jeddah were added. MOPA airport in Goa now connects to Abu Dhabi. Also, Delhi-Hong Kong and Delhi-Male flights have been reinstated.

Going ahead, codeshare partnerships with Turkish Airlines and British Airways extended their global reach, connecting passengers to North America, Europe, Morocco, and the UK. Domestically, they expanded their network to 85 destinations. "Looking ahead, our commitment remains strong, with plans to introduce flights to Bali, Indonesia, and Medina, Saudi Arabia, aiming to reach our target of carrying 100 million passengers in the current financial year," affirms Malhotra.

Technology and Sustainability Driven

IndiGo is also at the forefront of leveraging technology to improve operational efficiency and other touchpoints. "We are investing strongly in technology to strengthen our processes and build capability. Our investments in digitisation range from the cockpit to the cabin, on the tarmac, and at various touchpoints in the terminal, all intended to improve efficiency, reduce the turnaround time, and create a more sustainable platform to operate from. To enhance operational efficiency, we introduced sensor technology for faster and more accurate scanning of life vests in 3–4 minutes per aircraft, which would normally take 90–120 minutes," updates Malhotra.

The airline has also introduced 6Eskai, a revolutionary AI chatbot powered by GPT-4 technology. This milestone innovation adeptly handles customer queries in 10 languages and provides a unique platform for ticket booking across the network. 6Eskai simplifies the process with natural-language conversations, offering customers a seamless and user-friendly booking experience.

IndiGo maintains a robust commitment to sustainability, evident through strategic investments in carbon reduction initiatives. The induction of energy-efficient NEO aircraft has slashed fuel consumption by 15 per cent, preventing over 1 million metric tonnes of CO₂ emissions. Operational optimisations and eco-friendly practices, such as single-engine taxiing, electronic flight bags, and biodegradable alternatives, have contributed to a 20 per cent reduction in CO₂ emissions per available seat kilometre since 2016. The airline's waste management programme, coupled with CSR efforts like running 9,500 plus biogas units through IndiGoReach, underscores a holistic approach to sustainability. While exploring avenues for greater SAF utilisation, IndiGo remains steadfast in its pursuit of a greener, more eco-conscious future.

Malaysia Airlines setting new standards with hyper-personalised approach

Reflecting on 2023, Malaysia Airlines stands triumphant with a remarkable recovery, restoring 90 per cent of its pre-COVID-19 capacity. Dersenish Aresandiran, Chief Commercial Officer, Airlines, Malaysia Aviation Group, notes flourishing travel demands on domestic and international routes. Strong load factor performance and forward bookings indicate a balanced increase, with destinations like India making significant contributions. In 2024, Malaysia's national carrier confidently extends its network, taking pride in seeing the state flag soar over new horizons.

Prashant Nayak

In 2023, Malaysia Airlines announced expansion plans for most of its key markets, including India, China, Australia, and ASEAN.

In Q4 of 2023 alone, they resumed operations in Kertajati, Indonesia, and launched three new routes to India, namely Amritsar, Trivandrum, and Ahmedabad, which bring direct connectivity to India to nine key hubs. In addition to these three routes, the airline is also operating flights to six other cities in India, including New Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Kochi, bringing the total India operations to 67 weekly flights. Furthermore, following a positive response and load factor performance, they will also be increasing their frequency from Kuala Lumpur to Amritsar from two to four times weekly beginning January 15, 2024, raising the count of their weekly flights to the country to 69.

Boosting Global Frequencies

In 2023, the airline also added 248 flight frequencies up to March 2024 on their domestic and international routes in anticipation of the surge in demand due to the year-end and new-year festivities. "In addition to our domestic routes, we will be ramping up frequencies on key international routes, including Sydney, which will increase from 14x to 18x weekly; Melbourne, from 14x to 17x weekly from December 2023 onwards; and Narita, from 12x to 14x weekly, effective March 28–29, 2024. In 2024, we will continue to expand our international presence by enhancing frequencies to fully cater to the expected rise in demand. Additionally, we will aim to establish more strategic partnerships and continue leveraging existing ones to solidify our presence in global networks while ensuring customer experience remains the focal point in our decisions," informs Aresandiran.



▲ Dersenish Aresandiran

Flight Amidst Headwinds

While travel sentiment was upbeat in 2023, the aviation industry had to battle multiple disruptions amid the volatile economic and geopolitical environment. On this, Aresandiran says, "Factors such as pent-up demand, restricted capacities, impacts from fuel and FOREX, as well as supply chain issues, have impacted our plans to further expand our international network. In the near term, a key challenge lies in managing the balance between supply and demand amid heightened competition, overcapacity, and travel demand. We are proactively addressing this by strategically monitoring and adjusting our capacity to mitigate risks associated with unprofitable routes, driven by rising fuel costs and market conditions."

Revitalising the Fleet

As part of its ongoing fleet modernisation programme, Malaysia Airlines received its second Boeing 737-8 aircraft in December 2023. They have an orderbook of 25 of the aircraft type

through an operating lease with Air Lease Corporation, which will be delivered progressively through 2026. They are also currently undergoing a refurbishment on 39 of their 47 Boeing 737-800 NG aircraft, which is targeted to be completed in early 2024. In addition, the group recently acquired one A350-900 aircraft to support its growth requirements and will be receiving 20 Airbus 330neo aircraft, with the first delivery scheduled for September 2024.

The Hyper-Personalised Approach

Malaysia Airlines is also investing in its onboard offerings. In its commitment to elevating customer satisfaction, it will be focusing on three key customer value propositions, which Aresandiran explains. "First, we are dedicated to enhancing cabin comfort by investing in improved amenities, free Wi-Fi connectivity, and retrofitting the cabin space for a more practical and comfortable experience. Second, we are determined to enhance our in-flight dining, spotlighting unique local delicacies to showcase Malaysia's vibrant heritage. Lastly, our cabin crew will undergo ongoing training to consistently deliver the warm embrace of Malaysian hospitality. These are in addition to the many other efforts taken by our team to be brilliant at the basics in addressing all matters across the customer touchpoint. In terms of our product offerings, by introducing MHsports and MHcruise, we have further expanded our products to cater to the range of travellers, becoming the first airline in the Asia Pacific to provide such targeted offerings."

Aresandiran further sums up, "Moving forward, we will continue to use the hyper-personalised approach to uphold the highest standards of customer service, be it in terms of our in-flight or product offerings."

Cathay Pacific restoring connectivity, investing for superlative customer experience

Cathay Pacific, driven by a commitment to excellence, aspires to claim its position among the world's greatest service brands. Anand Yedery, Regional Head, Customer Travel and Lifestyle, South Asia, Middle East, and Africa, Cathay Pacific, articulates that the commitment to this vision is manifested through significant investments, introducing the latest aircraft, revolutionary cabin amenities, lavish lounges, enticing dining experiences, and a spectrum of entertainment options.

Prashant Nayak

Cathay Pacific proudly represents Hong Kong as its home carrier, anchoring itself in the city for over 77 years. With the resurgence of major international events and a revitalised economy, Hong Kong has reclaimed its position on the global stage. As the city's home carrier, the airline's mission is to be a catalyst, seamlessly linking Hong Kong, the Greater Bay Area, and the Chinese Mainland to the rest of the world. In response to the recovery of global connectivity, the airline is swiftly restoring its flights to meet customer demands. Their ongoing efforts include the progressive expansion of passenger flight capacity and the addition of more frequencies, especially to key destinations like the Chinese Mainland, the US, South Asia, and Japan.

Reuniting the Global Community

In 2024, Cathay Pacific's steadfast commitment to reconnecting the world remains resolute. Anand says, "Having successfully reinstated 70 per cent of our pre-pandemic passenger flights, spanning approximately 80 destinations by December 2023, our focus now extends to meeting the burgeoning demand for post-pandemic travel. Our primary emphasis has been on facilitating travel for both Hong Kong residents and visitors to the city. Projections indicated that by the end of 2023, we should have reached 95 per cent of pre-pandemic passenger numbers in these two key travel directions. As we further rebuild, we will add more transit traffic via the Hong Kong hub. Further, we resume our operations from Colombo and Chennai to Hong Kong on February 2, 2024, after a hiatus of four years. In 2024, we shall continue to work towards fully rebuilding our flights."



▲ Anand Yedery

Achieving Ever-Higher Service Standards

At Cathay Pacific, they recognise, celebrate, and empower their people for quality service delivery and performance. The airline is committed to ever-higher service levels through evolving culture, upskilling people, improving the customer experience, and upgrading tools and technology. There is a digital experience journey through the next-generation Asia Miles platform to position Cathay at the gateway of premium lifestyle experiences. They are also constantly revamping and resourcing customer engagement channels to continually improve service levels—web, mobile, ground, and in the air. Anand also highlights some substantial investments and developments, marking a pivotal era for Cathay Pacific.

Investing in Redefining In-Flight Comfort

The airline purchased 32 Airbus A321neo and A320neo aircraft. As a group comprising Cathay Pacific and HK Express, the new aircraft deliveries will total up to more than 70 aircraft. Adding state-of-

the-art, fuel-efficient aircraft enables them to continue growing their network and connecting their customers with more flights and destinations.

Presently, Cathay has brought back its first-class service on selected flights: London Heathrow, Paris, Tokyo (Haneda), Los Angeles, and Beijing. The airline is excited to bring its customers an all-new business-class experience—the Aria Suite—in the second quarter of 2024 as part of redesigning its long-haul Boeing 777-300ER cabins. This will be followed by a new world-leading first-class experience onboard their 777-9 aircraft, the first of which is scheduled to join the fleet in 2025.

Lounges: Comfort and Hospitality

As they add more flights, the airline has reopened the majority of their global lounges. The new Cathay Pacific lounge at Shekou Ferry Terminal in Shenzhen opened in November 2023. The airline's first-ever lounge at a ferry terminal provides an enhanced travel experience for customers travelling from the Greater Bay Area via ferry codeshare and connecting onto Cathay Pacific flights at Hong Kong International Airport.

Coveted Inflight Dining and Entertainment

The airline is known to churn out new culinary delights for customers from time to time. In 2023, the airline launched new partnerships with Hong Kong-based brands like Michelin-starred local restaurant Duddell's, a plant-forward restaurant VEDA to bring customers a new contemporary range of plant-based dishes, and Italian restaurant Pirata, serving timeless Italian dishes.

Cathay Pacific has received the award for World's Best Inflight Entertainment and is back in the top 10 of the world's best airlines in a number of industry rankings. They are also the first airline in Asia-Pacific to bring Disney+ Original titles to the skies.

Virgin Atlantic sets target of 850,000 seats in India for 2024

Shivani Singh Deo, Country Manager - India, Virgin Atlantic, has played a pivotal role in elevating Virgin Atlantic's brand presence in India, spearheading successful launches like Mumbai operations, the second daily Delhi service, and a strategic codeshare partnership with IndiGo.

Prashant Nayak

Virgin Atlantic is known for its distinctive brand image and its innovative approach to in-flight services and amenities, as it aims to achieve the position of the most loved travel company.

Achieving new milestones

In 2023, Virgin Atlantic achieved another milestone in India, recording its highest-ever number of seats flown—over 620,000. Looking ahead, the airline plans to surpass this achievement in the coming year by offering 850,000 seats. "This ambitious goal will be supported by the launch of a daily direct Bengaluru to London service in April 2024. Our robust performance in the Indian market, where we experience consistently full flights, reflects the enduring demand for travel in the region, making India our third-largest market globally," reveals Shivani.

The airline expanded its partnership with IndiGo

in 2023, extending coverage to 35 destinations beyond Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru. Shivani shares, "This strategic move ensures comprehensive reach in this key market. We extend our gratitude to our trade partners for their continuous support in selling Virgin Atlantic and assisting our customers throughout the year."

Strengthening Sustainability Credentials

While sustainability remains central to the airline, it permeates every aspect of its business. "As an airline, we are committed to leveraging technological advancements and innovations to enhance our services and ensure sustainable profitability. A recent milestone in this journey was achieved with the world's first 100 per cent SAF flight across the Atlantic, powered by Rolls-Royce Trent 1000 engines. This aligns with our pathway to Net Zero 2050. Our strategic plan positions us to return to profitability in 2024, with a laser focus



▲ Shivani Singh Deo

on route performance, as we strive to achieve and maintain sustainable profitability," explains Shivani.



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Dynamic Packaging the Online Game Changer

In an era of ultra-fast technology adoption, both by the service provider and the user, the formula to stand out and beat the race is innovation. TTJ spoke with Chirag Agrawal, Co-founder, TravClan, to find out what makes their proposition unique in the crowded space of online B2B travel.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Since its inception in 2018, when three friends came together to work on an idea, TravClan today has come a long way. Armed with their learnings at IIT, IIM, in-depth travel domain knowledge and technology, the foremost focus of its three founders, Arun Bagaria, Chirag Agrawal, and Ashish Thapliyal, was to first establish a first-class product targeting the B2B travel space.

They were very clear that technology was the way forward, and the technological

foundation of the company would have to be very robust and scalable. Senior and seasoned developers were brought on board under the stewardship of Ashish, himself a senior IT professional with more than two decades under his belt. Arun and Chirag brought with them the travel industry product and operational knowledge and learnings.

Scaling Heights

Five years have passed since, and today, TravClan has grown to a 200-headcount organisation headquartered out of New Delhi, with satellite offices in six Indian cities and international offices in Dubai and Singapore. Approx. 20,000 agents are registered on their platform, with about 40 per cent transacting online on a monthly basis. Chirag proudly explains, "We still retain 75 per cent of our original agents that started working with us since our inception years".

"We are an IATA agent and offer online air ticketing services and online hotel bookings and are integrated with almost all major providers worldwide. Online ticketing is now almost in auto mode and a very competitive low-margin product; hotels provide better retention, but what is unique about us is our dynamic online package product," explains Chirag.

Beyond the Norm

He further adds, "We are currently concentrating on dynamic packaging of 18 destinations, 11 international and 7 domestic; we can offer a customised quote in less than 60 seconds to these destinations". We work on the hotel and the land component and offer an itinerary with a quote. This product has been internally developed based on the specific needs, habits, and requirements of the Indian customer. We have researched

the exact market requirements and also incorporated our partner agent feedback to develop this product, Chirag further explains.

This instant quote can be branded by our partner agents and shared with their individual clients, drastically cutting turnaround times, enthusing customer confidence, and increasing confirmation numbers.

Bullish Bets

Currently concentrating on short-haul markets, TravClan is bullish on Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Singapore, Thailand, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bali, and Vietnam. Saudi Arabia is also a fast-emerging market with the incorporation of Alula along with the Dubai product offering.

Nautical Ventures

The other leisure products that TravClan focuses on are cruises; special tie-ups with Royal Caribbean Cruises, Resorts Worlds Cruises, and Cordelia Cruises have yielded good business. Indians can now cruise from Indian shores at very short notice, and TravClan facilitates that through Cordelia Cruises.

Customer-Centric Approach

User and customer experience teams constantly monitor processes and incorporate agent feedback to facilitate product betterment. Online webinars are conducted for partner agents, and at least two person-to-person contact programmes are organised every month across India in association with tourism boards and hotel partners for their partner agents.

Indians are fast emerging as avid travellers, and TravClan is gearing up by constantly adding more destinations and products to its offer bucket. Being a cash-and-carry B2B platform with a no-credit policy, TravClan is in a position to negotiate better deals for its supporting partner agents.





The heart of
Incredible India

Splash yourself with the artistic hues of Madhya Pradesh in 2024



Get ready to inhale the cultural fragrance of Madhya Pradesh at the Khajuraho Dance Festival and the Lokrang Festival this New Year. The Madhya Pradesh government invites you to savour the multi-hued cultural canvas where heritage fuses with modernity and history is embellished with contemporary colours.

Khajuraho Dance Festival

Feb 20 – Feb 26, 2024

Dexterous Dance

Brace yourself for a riveting experience at the 50th edition of the Khajuraho Dance Festival from February 20 to 26. The annual event hosted by the Madhya Pradesh Culture Department is an eclectic mix of modern and classical dances staged against the backdrop of historical monuments. Feel the ancient stones come alive as the Khajuraho Dance Festival oscillates through various dance forms - Bharat Natyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, and more.

Drown yourself in the cultural narrations of the artists at the Chitragupta Temple, dedicated to the Sun God and the Vishvanatha Temple devoted to Lord Shiva.

More on the Menu

Whether you are a history buff, an adventure seeker, a wildlife enthusiast, or someone looking for a relaxed vacation, there is a lot on the plate beyond the realms of dance.

- Panna National Park: Wildlife exploration (50 km)
- Raneh Waterfalls: Natural Rejuvenation (24 km)
- Pandav Falls: Picnic Spot (32 km)
- Adivart Tribal Museum: Collection of art, sculptures & tribal antiques (5 km)
- Kutni Island: Serene landscape (18 km)

Khajuraho Dance Festival isn't just about dance; it's a celebration of India's soul, its art, and its legacy.

Khajuraho Marathon

The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board is conducting the first-ever Khajuraho Marathon prior to the Khajuraho Dance Festival. The Khajuraho Marathon will commence on February 11, 2023, where participants from the age of five years can test themselves against more than 400 candidates. The participants will get a taste of the rich heritage of the area, like the Western Group of Temples, Datta Mountain, and Raneh Falls.

For participation, please visit <https://www.mptourism.com>

Lokrang Festival

Jan 26 – Jan 30, 2024

Cultural Confluence

Embark on a cultural odyssey during the five-day Lokrang Festival, where the rich tapestry of India's tribal and folk traditions takes centre stage. From enthralling performing arts to classical and tribal folk

dances, every performance narrates a story deeply rooted in the cultural ethos of the region.

For two decades, Lokrang has been a beacon of rural culture, celebrated annually from Republic Day on January 26 to its vibrant culmination on January 30. The festival attracts enthusiasts, connoisseurs, and artists from every corner of the globe.

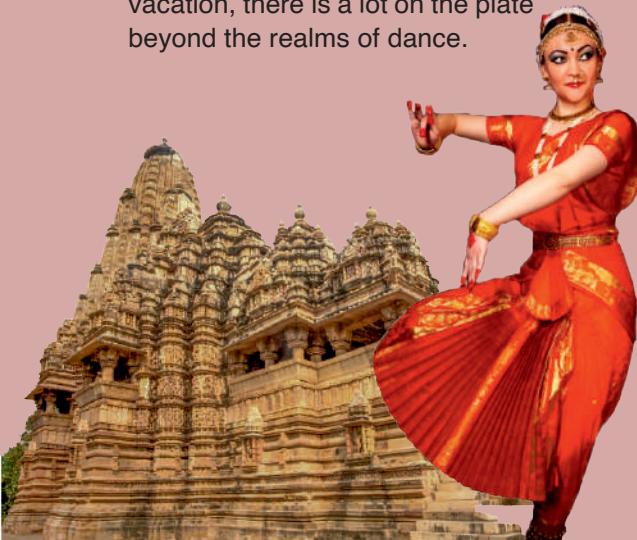


Heritage Hues

These festivals aren't just events; they are gateways to India's soul. They are an amalgamation of intricate artistry and soul-stirring rhythms that form the cultural backbone of Madhya Pradesh.

Join us in celebrating the cultural splendour of the state.

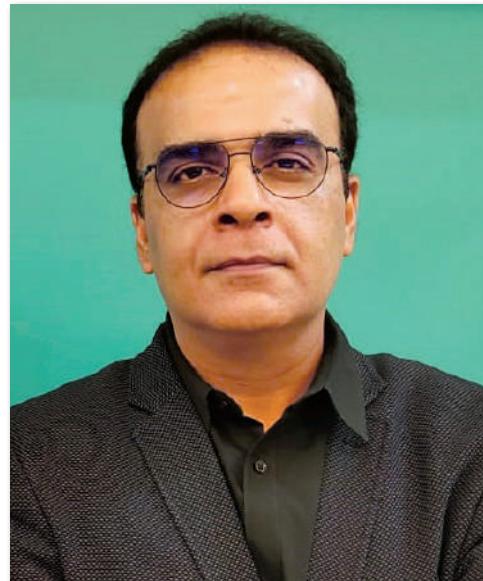
Embrace the magic of tradition, knitted with the beats of heritage. Madhya Pradesh awaits!



Casting a fresh spotlight on India WHILE CRUISING TOWARDS NEW HORIZONS

The allure of cruises lies in their ability to provide a comprehensive and captivating travel experience, catering to the diverse tastes and desires of travellers. Recently, cruise operators have focused on India, bringing forth the nation's potential as an untapped and promising market. As cruise enthusiasts embark on a journey to discover new horizons, the stage is set by distinct cruise companies for an era of exploration, luxury, and unforgettable adventures.

Prashant Nayak



▲ Naresh Rawal

Cruising stands out as a dynamic and rapidly expanding segment and aligns seamlessly with the preferences of many Indians, proffering precisely the kind of leisure they seek. As the Indian economy continues to develop steadily and the middle class expands, individuals are increasingly equipped with disposable incomes that could be directed toward leisure pursuits. This presents a significant opportunity for the burgeoning cruise industry to gain traction among Indians on a substantial scale.

In India, while cruise tourism may have started as a niche segment, the evolving landscape suggests a trajectory toward broader appeal and market expansion.



▲ Manoj Singh

Now, cruising not only attracts traditional cruise enthusiasts but also new customers, and Millennials and Gen X are identified as particularly enthusiastic demographics.

Adapting, Evolving, and Staying Relevant

Cruise companies are constantly adapting to emerging travel trends and taking various innovative steps to ensure that the cruise experience remains relevant and attractive to Indian travellers. Naresh Rawal, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Resorts World Cruises, India, says, "We are constantly anticipating and adapting to new trends to stay ahead of the curve. We have been seeing an uptick and steady increase in demand for Fly-Cruise from India throughout 2023. To further support this



▲ Manish Sonar

surging trend, we will continue to introduce more exciting thematic cruises in 2024 that resonate with our Indian market, be it on-board activities, performances, food, and beverages, including Jain cuisine."

Considering the current trend for port-rich itineraries among travellers that provide them with opportunities to explore unique destinations on the ground and fully immerse in local culture, Manoj Singh, Country Head, India Norwegian, Cruise Line, says, "Innovation is ingrained in NCL's DNA. We consistently prioritise our guests, adapting and evolving our offerings based on their cruising preferences. For port-rich itineraries, we can offer more overnights and fewer sea days. In Europe, for instance, our seven-day itineraries have expanded to 9, 10, and 11 days, featuring late-night





▲ Kishan Biyani

departures in vibrant locations like Ibiza and Mykonos. Travellers are increasingly drawn to experiences that provide in-depth exploration. Whether it's a port-rich itinerary with minimal sea days and late-night stays or shore excursions encouraging them to 'Go Local,' our goal is to facilitate a genuine connection with the communities and the places they visit."

Emerging travel trends indicate that today's travellers are increasingly drawn to unique destinations, such as the subtropical islands of Japan or Antarctic coasts, steering away from the overcrowded bucket-list spots. Ponant, in response to this shift, is continuously developing itineraries that promise bespoke experiences at distinctive locations, some of which remain unexplored hence, from the North to the South Pole. Manish Sonar, Ponant's Business Development Executive for India and Sri Lanka, shares, "The luxury offered by Ponant's small ships ensures access to these destinations on expedition itineraries that seamlessly blend wellness and luxury qualities highly sought after by modern travellers and contribute to a truly exceptional journey no matter which vessel the guest is sailing aboard in any part of the world. Ponant's itineraries not only provide the unlooked-for chance to explore unique locales but also offer opportunities to connect with local cultures and the surrounding environment. To maximise the guest experience when visiting these unique locations, Ponant also offers all-inclusive shore excursions on voyages starting October 2024."

Ark Travel Group's cruise vertical, Ark Cruises, also discerns plenty of opportunities and has added more products to its cruise portfolio, including domestic and river cruises. Kishan Biyani, MD, The Ark Travel Group, reveals, "We have only touched the tip of the iceberg when it comes to cruises as an option, be it domestic or international. However, it is interesting to witness that more and more cruise companies are



▲ Abdul Thingna

looking at either visiting Indian ports or deploying ships for a shorter duration."

Need to Cultivate Cruise Awareness

There is a lack of widespread awareness about the benefits and experiences offered by cruise tourism among the general population in India. Nurturing this segment involves extensive marketing and educational initiatives to showcase the unique advantages of cruise vacations.

TripJack, over the past couple of years, has dedicated holidays and a cruise division to cater to their travel partners' demands. Abdul Thingna, Vice President, Hotels and Holidays, TripJack, says, "There is a shift towards experiential tourism; people want to explore diverse cultures and have immersive holiday experiences. With curated content for holidays and partnerships with domestic and international cruise lines, our aim is to offer our travel partners a one-stop solution for all their travel needs."

Expanding Market Reach and Capitalising on MICE

Resorts World Cruises has been stepping up its advertising and promotions, and social media and digital campaigns, to boost awareness of the benefits and value of cruising to enhance reach to a wider demographic, including the younger crowds and MICE segment. "Moving ahead with a close rapport with our travel partners, we will also continue to equip them with updated 'tools and training' to promote cruising to vacationers and potential MICE groups. We are also exploring collaborations with key consumer brands to elevate our brand and the concept of cruising as a choice vacation," apprises Naresh.

The MICE segment holds tremendous potential for NCL, and they actively focus on

tapping this market by collaborating closely with their trusted travel agents and meeting planners across the globe. Manoj elaborates, "Choosing a cruise ship for corporate events provides organisers with an all-inclusive and immersive brand experience. Everything they need is on the ship, making it easy to navigate and manage large teams from different locations worldwide. Whether it's our diverse accommodation options for large, multi-generational, and small groups, well-equipped, state-of-the-art conference rooms, diverse multi-cuisine dining choices, or the plethora of entertainment we offer on board and at the destinations, the NCL fleet of ships provides the perfect balance both between work and leisure."

When it comes to MICE, as a B2B player, for Ark Travels, their scope of work is to educate and inform about the principles to their travel partners so that they can convince corporates to choose cruises over land as a destination. "Cruise is a hassle-free destination itself, where all facilities are under one roof and adept for MICE events. We are noticing that cruise companies are open to change and creating events and entertainment for MICE and are increasingly depicting more flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of the MICE," asserts Kishan.

Abdul emphasises, "Cruise as a segment still needs nurturing. TripJack's aim is to engage our travel partners and create strong awareness of the category by positioning the said business as a premier choice for travellers seeking distinctive coastal experiences. As a B2B platform, our aim is to empower our travel partners, and our objective is to be their backbone in the cruise category."

Charting New and Unique Courses

For the Genting Dream, the cruise ship of Resorts World, both Singapore and Kuala Lumpur will remain its key homeport departure points for their Fly-Cruise customers, as well as their other popular destinations, together with Phuket and Penang on the itinerary. These destinations remain attractive to their potential customers. In January 2024, a special sailing from Resorts World One in Hong Kong to Boracay and Manila in the Philippines adds to the allure, complementing existing itineraries to Okinawa, Da Nang, Nha Trang, and Sanya.

Norwegian Cruise Line is reinforcing its dedication to Asia, a crucial market for the company. In the upcoming 2024–25 season and beyond, NCL is deploying a record four ships—the Norwegian Jewel, Norwegian Spirit, Sun, and Sky—offering Indian travellers an unparalleled array of options. A major highlight is the debut of Norwegian Sun in the Asia-Pacific region,

presenting 12 exotic itineraries, including four never-before-offered routes. These cruises, spanning from December 2024 to March 2025, traverse Melbourne, Australia; Auckland, New Zealand; Bali, Indonesia; Honolulu; Papeete; and French Polynesia. Norwegian Sky also contributes seven sailings from various Asian ports, promising immersive experiences in destinations such as the Philippines and Japan. The Mediterranean cruises by NCL boast over 250 port-rich itineraries, allowing travellers to explore a new city almost every day across more than 170 ports of call.

Sustainable Voyages

A prevailing trend among cruise companies is a significant shift towards sustainable practices, demonstrating a commitment to environmental responsibility. From energy efficiency initiatives and fuel conservation to waste reduction and recycling efforts, these companies are actively safeguarding marine life and curbing their ecological footprint.

In 2024, Ponant is set to captivate guests with novel experiences in thrilling destinations. Le Jacques Cartier will embark on an enthralling exploration of Kyushu's secret islands and ancestral heritage in Japan from April to May. This new flight-inclusive itinerary promises a seamless blend of enchanting nature and unexpected Christian heritage, where Western and Japanese traditions intersect harmoniously. For those craving more distant adventures, Ponant's 2024–25 Arctic season unveils immersive itineraries in Greenland during spring, offering guests the chance to discover extraordinary landscapes and engage with the local Inuit communities. Additionally, new itineraries aboard Le Commandant Charcot, the world's sole luxury icebreaker, unveil the enchanting Baltic cities in the magical Christmas season. Above the Arctic Circle, guests can explore Norway's Lofoten Islands on horseback, forging connections with local communities, including the Sami and Norwegian reindeer herders. These off-peak destinations present a unique opportunity for detachment from the world, coupled with the chance to witness the ethereal Northern Lights.

Shaping Cruising Through Technology

Embracing and adopting the latest technologies is an ongoing and constant process for Resorts World Cruises. "Over the year, we have implemented various applications to enhance our guests' experiences, from booking online

to checking in digitally to checking out, making payments, and more. It's also part of our efforts to reduce our carbon footprint and minimise paper usage. Other digital enhancements in 2024 are in the pipeline and will be announced in due course," assures Naresh.

NCL is committed to continuously adjusting and enhancing their offerings to align with guest preferences, ensuring an exceptional cruising experience across their fleet of 19 ships. The launch of the Norwegian Prima in 2022 marked the commencement of their innovative Prima Class, featuring six vessels. Building on this success, NCL introduced the Norwegian Viva in 2023 as the second ship in the Prima Class, boasting the same upscale design and structure that made its predecessor, the Norwegian Prima, a record-breaking sensation. With the launch of Norwegian Aqua in 2025, NCL will be introducing the world's first hybrid rollercoaster and waterslide—the Aqua Slide-coaster—that will take guests on an adrenaline-pumping ride through dual slides and magnetic lifts. This new ship will also have a Glow Court, which is a cutting-edge digital sports complex with an interactive LED floor that transforms into a pulsating nightclub after sunset. "You will find some of our favourites from our Prima Class fleet, including The Drop, a 10-story free-fall slide, and an expanded stadium game space on Norwegian Aqua. Our immersive virtual reality experiences allow guests to explore captivating destinations and embark on underwater adventures right on the ship," adds Manoj.

Implementing a combination of technologies allows travel agents to stay competitive, provide excellent customer service, and adapt to the evolving landscape of the travel industry. "Technology does play an important role, and we at Ark Travels have also been encouraging our partners to book on our online platform, Deckpro," shares Kishan Abdul. "Travel agents are using newer technology to check out different cruise options, including sail dates and itineraries. Although people still have questions before booking cruises, we think that as the cruise industry grows, the booking process will get even better."

Environmental Commitments

At Resorts World Cruises, their unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship is evident through stringent practices aimed at preserving the ecosystems in which they operate. Their focus includes bolstering energy efficiency, conserving fuel and water, curbing solid waste generation, and amplifying recycling efforts. They actively safeguard marine life and prevent oil pollution. Upholding this responsibility,

Naresh affirms that they will continue to implement sustainable practices in all forms, which include getting their crew and shore staff informed and involved in executing sustainable policies effectively, designing and offering more onboard activities and shore excursions that help reduce carbon footprints (like trishaw rides, walking, and trekking), supporting local arts and crafts (shopping, workshops, etc.), and more.

NCL, with ships visiting 400-plus global destinations, acknowledges its profound connection to the planet and communities. The Sail & Sustain programme embodies its commitment to societal and environmental impact. Through a robust ESG strategy with pillars focused on climate action, ocean preservation, waste reduction, freshwater conservation, and sustainable sourcing, NCL aims for net zero by 2050. Specific targets include a 10 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas intensity by 2026 and a 25 per cent by 2030. Manoj reveals that anticipated launches in 2027 and 2028 feature ships configured for green methanol, a cleaner fuel option, aligning with NCL's dedication to emissions reduction.

In 2024, Ponant will continue its sustainability initiatives following 2023's breakthroughs. Like the ship, Le Champlain, part of Ponant Explorers, now runs on revolutionary B100 biofuel from recycled cooking oil, a move aligned with the goal to reduce CO₂ emissions by 30 per cent per navigation day by 2030. The Swap2Zero project, utilising Syroco EfficientShip, aims for a carbon-neutral sailing ship by 2030 with renewable energy, fuel cells, and carbon capture. Ponant's Cleanship fleet, certified by Bureau Veritas, actively reduces single-use plastics, implements eco-friendly itineraries, and upholds environmental commitments, setting a new standard for sustainable exploration in 2024 and beyond. Manish mentions that "Ponant's many holistic approaches reflect its dedication to environmental responsibility, setting a precedent for future exploration in 2024 and beyond."

Overview

In the wake of shifting travel landscapes, cruise tourism in India emerges as a beacon of promise and potential. From being finely tailored to the diverse tastes of Indian travellers to the strategic focus by cruise operators on the untapped Indian market, a new scope of exploration and luxury unfolds. As cruises align their strategies with evolving travel trends, technology, and sustainability, the cruise experience is set to become more diverse, personalised, and appealing to a broad spectrum of travellers.



TRAVMART



2024

MARCH

16 RAIPUR

APRIL

12/13 LUCKNOW

JUNE

28-30 SITM

SOUTH INDIA TRAVMART

JULY

12/13 CHANDIGARH

SEPTEMBER

20-22 EITM

EAST INDIA TRAVMART (KOLKATA)

DECEMBER

14/15 BHOPAL/INDORE



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A Colourful Journey through BAHRAIN'S Culture and Charm

Bahrain's twinkling lights lay out a warm welcome as I landed on my first foray into the Middle East. Deeply interested in experiencing authentic Arabic culture, I hoped to discover its native charm beyond its gleaming exterior. As I ventured into the historic bylanes, I was transported into a world of enchantment, just like the captivating tale of Scheherazade.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

A small Arab state on the Arabian Gulf, Bahrain is an archipelago of 33 islands. Its name comes from the Arabic term 'al-bahrayn,' meaning 'two seas'. The former capital, Muharraq, was renowned as a hub for the pearl diving trade. The discovery of oil and the subsequent economic boom propelled the city of Manama into prominence as the capital

and chief port of Bahrain. The multicultural fabric of Bahrain is a harmonious blend of diverse Middle Eastern nationalities thriving within its borders. Engaging with locals from Yemen, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and even India, it is evident that they find contentment in Bahrain's simple, seamless, and well-organised lifestyle.

An Ode To The Past

Bahrain's charm originates from its deep commitment to honouring its historical legacy. While it shares the contemporary steel and concrete elements common to its Middle Eastern counterparts, Bahrain distinguishes itself by maintaining and showcasing its heritage. It seamlessly blends the towering skyscrapers of the business district with the ancient burial mounds of the Dilmun civilisation dotted along the city streets. It evokes the excitement of an ongoing excavation, not knowing which century-old masterpiece is waiting to be discovered.

The largest and oldest public museum in the Gulf region, The National Museum of Bahrain, showcases the island nation's era of The Dilmun Dynasty. Unfolding a mesmerising narrative from over 4000 years ago, the museum chronicles history through ancient grave mounds, rituals, and urn burials, preserving the tales of a bygone era. Intriguing mythological stories are brought to life via sculptures and life-

size installations, vividly recreating age-old Bahraini traditions of daily life, narrating lyrical tales of the past.

Qal'at al-Bahrain, or Bahrain Fort, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site of the remnants of a fortress that dates back to 2,300 BC. The excavated site reveals the fort's importance in defence, residential, religious, and military purposes. Remains of the stable walls, reservoir for storing water, watchtower, and an ingenious system of extracting date syrup, tell the story of a clever and thriving civilisation.

The Al Fateh Mosque is a serene oasis that stands as a testament to the Bahraini faith. Dressed in our Abayas, as we wander its haloed walls, the magnanimity, sacrifice, discipline, and power of Islam can be felt. It is indeed a learning experience to be walking in the shoes of a community so easily judged by the rest of the world.

The Colourful, Historical Souks

Standing the test of time, the 43-year-old Bab Al Bahrain is the gateway to Manama Souk. This spot is the perfect place to admire the past and the present, with the ultra-modern financial district on one side and historic Manama on the other. Once upon a time, the sea stopped just outside this gateway, through which traders entered Bahrain to conduct business and today, the financial district stands on this reclaimed land.



Qal'at al-Bahrain or the Bahrain Fort



The Disappearing Jarada island



Colourful shops in Manama Souk

The aromatic Arabian scents wafting from the Souk entice visitors into a realm of rich perfume oils, bakhoor incense, fragrant spices, exquisite gold jewellery, colourful Bahraini souvenirs, textiles, and delightful local delicacies. Shopkeepers exuding enthusiasm, kindness, and a unique sense of humour create a comforting and enjoyable ambience. Tucked into a tiny lane lies the resplendent Shrinivas Temple, meticulously maintained by its devoted followers. A stroll down another quaint lane reveals the Haji Cafe and the Arabic café, both popular hotspots, seemingly frozen in time, filled with historical photographs and vintage artefacts.

Centre of High Octane Sporting Activity

For thrill-seekers, Bahrain offers an exhilarating array of activities. These include the exciting, simulated indoor skydiving at Gravity, the absolute thrill of go-karting on a world-class track at the Bahrain International Go Karting Circuit, and the high-speed

excitement of Formula 1 racing at the Bahrain International Circuit. The acclaimed International racetrack features a highly acclaimed hairpin bend, personally designed by the racing legend Michael Schumacher, revered for its difficulty level in the racing world.

With exclusive permission, I was fortunate enough to visit the control centre, a hub pulsating with a subdued thrill, where multiple TV screens capture every angle and moment of the thrilling races.

Kayaking in the crystal blue waters of the 'Disappearing Island', also called Jarada Island, was an unforgettable experience. Reachable only by a 40-minute private boat ride, with a restricted number of people allowed per day, it was indeed a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The island is a magical little strip of sand, playing hide and seek, appearing only in low tide and disappearing in high tide. The day tour includes a freshly cooked barbecue organised by the boat crew, looking for pearls in fresh oysters, kayaking, or just walking around the sand strip marvelling at the vagaries of nature.

The Food of Bahrain - Mashallah!

The culinary experience in Bahrain is simply exquisite; it captivates taste buds and nourishes the soul. Visitors are treated to a splendid array of delicacies such as Machboos, Falafel, Shish-touk, Biryani, Kebabs, and Balaleet, amongst others. The warm hospitality, generous service, and the hosts' graciousness add to the whole experience.

For foodies, the variety of options presented is like entering Alibaba's cave of riches, with Naseef at the Marina, Wahed Falafel at Manama, and the Attic at Block 388, just to name a few. Experiencing the traditional style of relishing meals while seated on the floor at a tiny local Muharraq eatery



Bab-Al-Bahrain - Gateway to Manama



Pearling adventures in the Arabian Gulf



Delectable Bahraini cuisine with Karak Chai

offered a dreamily flavourful experience. Not to be missed is the Karak, an aromatic rendition of Indian masala chai, capable of rejuvenating the weariest soul. Meandering through narrow lanes of souks, visitors can purchase local food souvenirs, including Halwa, Samboosa, Baklava, Spices, and various versions of Arabic coffee.

The Bahraini Charm

The tale of Bahrain remains incomplete without honouring its remarkable people—kind, polite, helpful, and filled with humour. Their warm greetings and quick wit, always aimed at ensuring comfort, made our visit immensely enjoyable and unforgettable. The enchanting Bahraini charm indeed worked its magic, embedding the melodious poetry of this small kingdom in our hearts.

Our exceptional tour guide, Eman Hasan Ali, guided us through a captivating journey, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the ancient world through experiences and flavours. Her profound knowledge and affection for her city were evident as she joyfully engaged with the locals and introduced us to the traditional treasures of her country.



Trip to the Last Frontier - ALASKA

Alaska, the largest state in the United States of America, stands as a testament to the extraordinary wonders crafted by nature. My journey to this pristine land was a captivating reminder of the unparalleled artistry that nature possesses.

Chintan Shah

Unquestionably one of the last true wilderness areas on Earth, Alaska offers unparalleled experiences for nature enthusiasts. From majestic glaciers and towering mountains to countless lakes, breathtaking fjords, the mystical northern lights, and hot springs amidst icy landscapes – Alaska embeds itself deeply in the tapestry of travel memories.

For those seeking to explore Alaska, there are two predominant avenues: cruising or land travel. Opting for the latter, I embarked on a journey that promised a more intimate connection with the heart of Alaska, a choice I recommend for those wishing to be travellers rather than mere tourists.

Anchorage

My expedition began with a flight from Mumbai to Anchorage, a southern gateway to this vast state. Despite the 30-hour journey with two stops, Alaska welcomed me with a refreshing embrace. The natural breeze, unspoiled and unsullied beauty, and the warm hospitality of the region set the tone for a remarkable adventure. Over the ensuing 10 days, we traversed the diverse landscapes, uncovering some of the most awe-inspiring sights.

Anchorage itself unfolded a treasure trove of attractions, from museums detailing Alaskan history to wildlife conservatories and scenic trails. Walking through its streets offered an unforgettable experience, revealing surprising facts such as Alaska having the highest density of people with flying licenses, a necessity in navigating its extreme terrains.

Seward

Venturing from Anchorage to Seward, a town in the southern reaches of Alaska and once a vital port, we encountered the mesmerising Kenai Fjord. The cruise through this fjord exposed me to sea otters, seals, whales, and rare marine life, providing an up-close view of glaciers and icebergs. A visit to Exit Glacier underscored the impact of global warming on Alaskan glaciers, serving as a poignant reminder of environmental changes.

Talkeetna

Continuing our journey to Talkeetna, nestled near the Denali National Park, we explored the spectacular Knik Glacier. A helicopter ride landed us in the heart of the glacier, an awe-inspiring experience that emphasised the isolation of certain corners of the world.

Denali National Park

Moving north towards the Denali National Park, home to North America's tallest peak, Mount Denali, the landscape transformed from vibrant fall foliage to snow-covered trees and frozen lakes. The journey unveiled the harsh beauty of the region, with sparser human settlements and moments of solitude, a stark contrast to the crowded urban world.



Denali National Park



Seward



Helicopter ride on Knik Glacier



Knik Glacier

Cantwell, Healy, and North Denali

Cantwell, a town with just two hotels and one grocery store, offered a glimpse into the remote Alaskan lifestyle, with encounters with brown bears, moose, and even polar bears in the backyard. The proximity to the Arctic Circle heightened the anticipation of witnessing the aurora borealis, a phenomenon that graced us with its ethereal display on our first night at Denali National Park. Seeing the dancing northern lights in the night sky was on my bucket list, and the display not only lived up to my expectations but exceeded them.

Fairbanks

A trek to a frozen lake in the park revealed a picture-perfect landscape, followed by a drive to Fairbanks, the commercial hub of Northern Alaska. Here, we soaked

in the Chena Hot Springs, bathing in the warm water while snow fell over our heads amid negative temperatures, a surreal experience that epitomised the harmonious coexistence of extremes.

Train journey on the Alaska railroad

The final leg of our journey involved a train ride by Alaska railroad through the untamed beauty of Alaska, traversing towering mountains and snow-covered valleys, ultimately leading back to the relatively warmer Anchorage.

Having explored destinations ranging from the Everest Base Camp to New Zealand, the Bornean rainforest to the Swiss Alps, Alaska indisputably claims the top spot on my list of admired places. For a nature lover, it transcends being a must-visit; it becomes a destination beckoning you back time and again.



Alaska Railroad



Chintan at Denali National Park

About the Author: Chintan Shah is a finance professional with a love for travel and nature. A true adventure enthusiast, Chintan thrives on the thrill of trekking and seeks out offbeat destinations, turning each expedition into a captivating exploration of the unknown.



TENT CITY DHORDO KUTCH GUJARAT

A Luxurious Oasis in the Great White Desert

Experience glamping at its finest amidst the enchanting landscape of the Rann Utsav - a unique winter wonderland.

Shashi Sunny

If you are a travel enthusiast, do yourself a favour. Take a trip to the Rann Utsav, from November 20, 2023, to February 25, 2024, at the Great Rann of Kutch, Gujarat, because this is a destination that should be on every travel enthusiast's bucket list. A unique desert festival, held every year from November to February, qualifies in every way as a top travel destination to a completely different winter wonderland - a white desert born of the salt given up by the sea as its backwaters evaporate through the summer months. Spread over a vast 7,505 sq km, the Great Rann of Kutch is part of the Thar Desert, touching Pakistan's Sind province on one side, making it the largest salt marsh in the world. To facilitate an intrepid traveller's quest for a taste of this unusual, Rann Utsav The Tent City provides the perfect platform.

Rann Utsav The Tent City is an endeavour by Evoke Experiences to support the Rann Utsav Festival

organised by the Gujarat government. The state tourism department takes the lead in coordinating and managing the festival, ensuring its successful execution and promotion. Evoke Experiences is the hospitality brand of the parent company Lallooji and Sons, and Evoke Experiences owns and manages Tent City, which is a core component of the Rann Utsav. The Tent City has over 400 luxurious tents, and Evoke's involvement includes managing the entire experience, from accommodations to experiences like getting local artists, activities like camel safaris, and showcasing local crafts. The government has been organising the festival since 2009. Since 2013, Lallooji and Sons have been operating the tent city for the festival.

Besides the region's natural beauty, the luxury tents are a unique experience in themselves. These ultra-comfortable and beautiful tents are made of exquisite material, and local craftsmen and artisans from Kutch, as well as Bengal, have contributed to the setting up and beautification of the Tent City. The erection of the Tent City begins in September, and it takes six to eight weeks. The tents are fully equipped with all the modern amenities that are available in five-star hotels, and the charming ambience of the tent city is sure to fascinate any guest who opts to stay here.

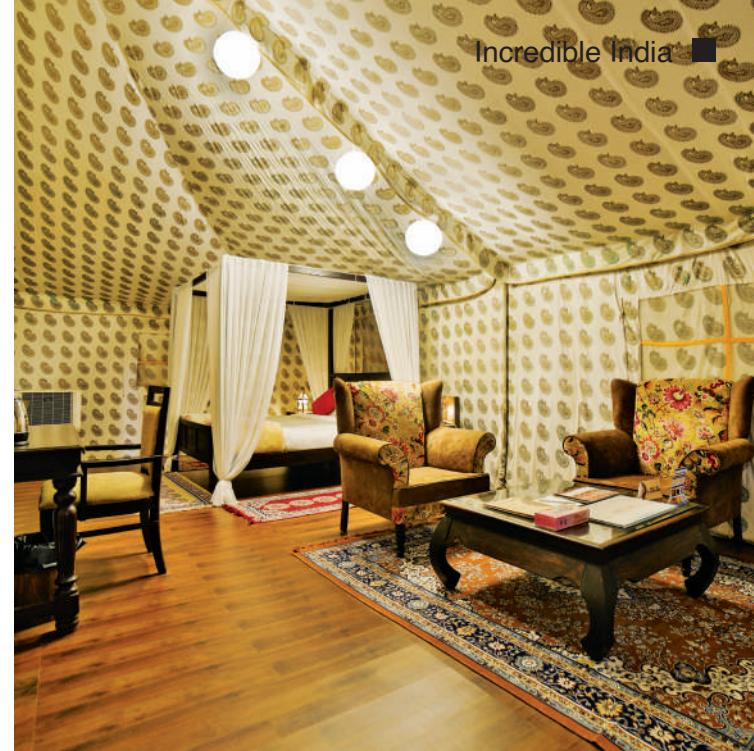
Bhavik Sheth, COO, Evoke Experiences, explains the enterprising



▲ Bhavik Sheth

endeavour. "Our tent city is a one-of-a-kind idea that combines an emerging new concept of glamping with curated unique experiences in a unique natural habitat. It is a totally different type of tourist experience, where anyone visiting us becomes our brand ambassador, and word-of-mouth publicity is our best marketing tool. The Rann Utsav is something that can't be replicated elsewhere. The tented accommodation is a temporary four-month set with all hospitality essentials, experiential tours, and the involvement of the local people to give an authentic flavour of Kutch. It is a 360-degree view of what Kutch is, with all cultural and local aspects merging





to create the experience. Ever since we began operation of the Tent City at Dhordo, the migratory families in the village are now staying back because they can earn a good living and also stay close to their roots."

The tent city takes 45 days to set up and dismantle leaving no scar on the fragile environment of Kutch. 350 artisans work at the venue during this period to set up the city and then again to take it down. The tents house approximately 1100 people a day; for weddings, when occupancy of three beds in a tent is allowed, it can go up to 1200. The entire operation is handled environmentally friendly, considering the sustainability aspect. The parent company, Lallooji and Sons, has been the largest provider of tents at the Kumbh Mela, says Bhavik, and they have immense experience in setting up a tent city. Not surprisingly, therefore, Evoke is well versed in the technical requirements to create hospitality facilities as well as holistic experiences at temporary venues. The Rann Utsav Tent City, he informs, has been a success from the very first year. In the ten years that they have been in operation, over two and a half lakh guests have enjoyed the facilities. The beauty of the Rann is the biggest USP here. The white desert lasts only for the 4 winter months, and so the excitement about this wonderful natural phenomenon is infectious. This ensures that the Tent City runs at full



occupancy, making it a viable venture for the company.

Bhavik says, "We are looking at exciting natural sites like Kuno for future expansion. We would like to show that remote sites can be commercially viable for tourism by creating, curating, and operating such facilities in a short time. When choosing a site, we look at its connectivity, its special natural features, and what experiences can be created. We are mainly looking at sites in MP, UP, and Gujarat. My personal, as well as my company's, belief is to invest in guest experiences, and our main task is to create a complete combined itinerary involving the local population as closely as possible."

In promoting the cultural and crafts experience, local artists and performers of Kutchi art, music, and dance are carefully selected by the Evoke team;

this in itself is an added attraction of the tent city, where guests are enthralled in a complete Kutchi experience. Special attractions of the region include the unique White Desert or salt marsh, wildlife like the flamingos, migratory birds, and the wild ass. The ruins at Dholavira, Harappan site, the Road to Heaven en route to Dholavira, camel safaris, and sampling the Kutchi cuisine, as well as stargazing in the desert are also special activities you can indulge in.

Rann Utsav The Tent City, presents you with an exquisite opportunity to combine the thrill of camping coupled with celebrating and enjoying a local culture in a sustainable and luxurious manner. The tented accommodation is at par with the best hotel rooms without the need for extensive civil construction. It strongly adheres to the core principles of minimising environmental impact, preserving resources, and fostering economic and social sustainability, reflecting a holistic approach to tourism.

Rarely is there a destination that has so much to offer whilst catering to visitors of all ages and tastes. The enjoyable glamping combined with natural wonders that cannot be found elsewhere ensures that a visit to the Rann Utsav Tent City remains etched in memory. Not for nothing do the locals boast "Kutch nahi dekha to kuch nahi dekha!"





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OTOAI's strategic triumphs in Kenya

The 5th annual Convention of the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) took place in Nairobi, Kenya, from November 24 to 27, 2023, marking a return after a hiatus of four years. With over 150 participants, the convention set the stage for future collaborations geared toward business-driven growth between India and Kenya.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

The announcement of the OTOAI convention generated considerable interest, especially due to the intriguing choice of the destination. As it turned out, not only was the destination a perfect choice, but the exceptional care extended by hospitality partner Sarova Hotels was indeed unparalleled. The event took place at Sarova Stanley, a cutting-edge venue in Nairobi. One Above was responsible for the ground handling and pulled off the event with panache.

The Phenomenal Destination

The OTOAI convention took the delegates to stunning locations such as the Masai Mara National Reserve, Lake Nakuru, and Shaba National Park, where they experienced the true bounty and essence of Kenya. It was an excellent introduction to the country's tourism potential. Commenting on the choice of the destination, Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI said, "The immersive experience offered by Kenya's rich cultural tapestry, picturesque scenery, and renowned wildlife set an ideal stage for the event. The country's accessible and well-connected infrastructure ensured smooth logistics, and its international allure added a global dimension to the convention. In essence, the harmonious blend of culture, infrastructure, and international appeal

made Kenya a compelling choice for hosting the globally resonant event."

Significance of AI

Along with the smoothly organised pre and post-FAMs, official opening, well-laid-out entertainment, and gourmet cuisines, the knowledge sessions encompassing wildlife, luxury, and beach experiences were brilliant. Shravan Bhalla, Vice President, OTOAI and Convention Chairman, highlighted the key insights of the convention theme "Smart Tourism, the Role of AI & Chat GPT," which has the potential to revolutionise the travel industry. He said, "The sessions were highly acclaimed by our members, who undoubtedly understood how to design and present products in a much more professional way by adding key insights to the destination with the help of ChatGPT.

In recent times, ChatGPT has emerged as a powerful tool in customer engagement and support, and its ability to understand and generate human-like text makes it an invaluable asset in streamlining communication processes within the travel trade. From answering customer inquiries to providing personalised recommendations, ChatGPT brings efficiency to customer interactions, and automated responses facilitate quicker resolution of queries."

Transformative OTOAI FAM

Addressing the relevance and impact of Familiarisation Trips in fostering growth and advancing tourism, Siddharth Khanna, General Secretary, OTOAI, said, "OTOAI always strives to pick a new destination, which is unexplored and has the potential for great outbound tourism from India." He further explained, "Visiting Nakuru, Masai



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Mara, Shaba, and Mount Kenya with our host Sarova and experiencing the thrill of game drives in the open bush with 4x4 jeeps is an experience of a lifetime. Each game drive is thrillingly unique, and one may be lucky to see a chase or even a kill during the drives. These experiences simply cannot be put into words; they have to be experienced first-hand, which in return enhances the knowledge of every participating delegate to sell Kenya and the safari experience with confidence and assurance."

Beyond The Savannah

The question arises, beyond the famed wildlife parks and safaris, are there undiscovered leisure and luxury destinations for discerning Indian travellers? Himanshu Patil, Executive Committee Member adroitly answered, "Kenya offers Indian tourists' diverse leisure and luxury options beyond wildlife tourism. Explore the pristine beaches of Diani and Watamu while immersing in Swahili culture, enjoy serene lakeside escapes at Naivasha and Elementaita luxury lodges, or discover Swahili architecture on Lamu Island. The Great Rift Valley beckons with adventure, from hot air balloon safaris to hiking Mount Longonot. Culinary tourism offers diverse flavours; spa retreats add a touch of luxury, and community-based tourism offers authentic cultural experiences."

Strategic Plans

Irshad Dadan, Director and Group COO, One Above, laid out strategic plans for packaging and promoting Kenya, especially for the Indian market. Irshad stated, "At One Above and Sarova Hotels, we aim to market Kenya to the Indian travel trade vigorously. We recognise India's potential and aim to provide a comprehensive

view of what Kenya offers across various travel segments, including MICE. Notably, we emphasise showcasing Kenya's city nightlife, ensuring that the trade recognises the diverse experiences beyond wildlife that the country offers. We are committed to going beyond the conventional. Through our initiatives, we ensure they recognise and promote Kenya as a destination that offers a blend of natural wonders and vibrant urban experiences."

Adding on, Riaz said, "OTOAI's plans to position Kenya as a premier destination encompasses a comprehensive strategy, which includes launching targeted marketing campaigns to highlight Kenya's unique attractions, forming collaborations with key players in the travel industry to create appealing packages, fostering cultural exchanges between Kenya and India, while positioning the destination as one of the best choices for experiential travellers."

Unlocking Opportunities

India serves as a pivotal source market for Kenya, presenting significant prospects for further business-driven growth. Monia Kapoor, Joint Secretary and OTOAI and Convention Co-Chairman, explains why Kenya represents such a compelling value-for-money destination for Indian travellers. She stated, "A combination of thrilling wildlife encounters, cultural immersion, stunning landscapes, affordable accommodation, and ease of travel makes Kenya an ideal choice for a memorable and budget-friendly adventure. With a range of accommodation options, from comfortable guesthouses to well-appointed mid-range hotels and luxury resorts, there are choices to suit every budget. This allows Indian travellers to enjoy their stay without compromising on comfort or overspending." She further

emphasised, "With Air India and Kenyan Airlines' regular flights connecting major Indian cities to key destinations, getting to Kenya is not only convenient but also economical, and the visa process is also straightforward."

Farewell Reflections

As participants bid adieu, expressing gratitude to their gracious hosts and Kenyan counterparts, Shravan pointed out, "Major highlights of the convention were the unique theme and discussion on AI & Chat GPT, and the healthy business relationships formed between Indian agents with their Kenyan counterparts. Showcasing the beauty of Lake Nakuru, Shaba Shaba, and Masai Mara with outstanding dinner locations during FAMs was the icing on the cake."

Mita Vohra, Director, Sarova Hotels and Resorts, stating the reason behind the collaboration with OTOAI, said, "The connection to OTOAI came through One Above, to be the hospitality partner. Sarova has been very focused on the Indian market for years. Heena Munshaw established our entry into the market in 1994, and we have never looked back. Our number for India grew steadily and significantly over 2022 and 2023, and involving ourselves with key players in India, such as OTOAI, was a very exciting prospect."

Mita further appreciated the appropriate theme, amazing speeches, and insights into AI. She added, "We received wonderful responses from all the agents and media vis-a-vis Kenya. Finally, the feedback on our product, quality, service, food and hospitality was overwhelming, and the wonderful friendships formed, I believe, will be longstanding."

■ Events



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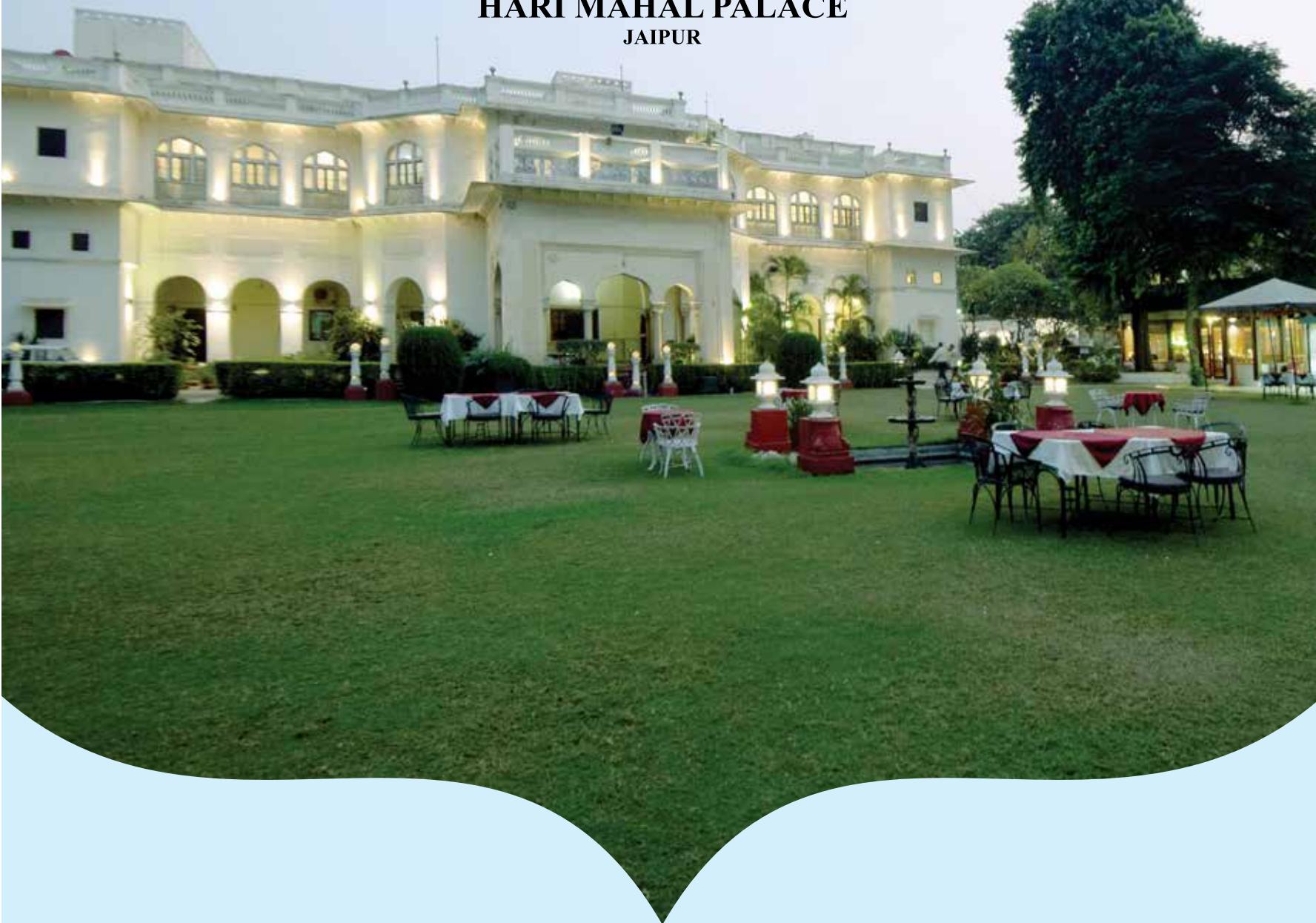


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The 14th CIC Convention reflects CHANGING LANDSCAPE IN MICE RECOGNITION

The India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), the national apex body focused on promoting India as an attractive MICE destination, organised its flagship event, the 14th Conventions India Conclave, from December 7-9, 2023, at the Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre, Gandhi Nagar, Gujarat. The event, supported by Gujarat Tourism, brought together domestic and international stakeholders on a single dynamic platform with a series of insightful sessions and varied business opportunities.

Prashant Nayak

The 14th Conventions India Conclave returned after a gap of four years, and this three-day event served as a strategic initiative to position India as a leading choice for MICE. The conclave delved into various crucial topics pertinent to the industry and featured a series of insightful sessions and meaningful interactions contributing to knowledge-sharing and fostering collaboration within the MICE and tourism sectors. This convergence also facilitated and presented a plethora of business opportunities for all participants.

Along with the representatives from 50 corporate entities, hotel chains, and convention centres across India, around 250 more delegates actively

participated in the conclave. The global representation from countries such as the USA, Argentina, France, Greece, Cyprus, Mexico, and more highlighted the event's international significance, contributing to the exchange of ideas and fostering collaborations on a global scale. The Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre, as the chosen venue, provided a conducive environment for such a showcase.

The event commenced with Gujarat CM Bhupendra Patel inaugurating the conclave. He emphasised that with the success of the Vibrant Gujarat Global Investment Summit initiative and the visionary leadership of PM Modi, India is now being positioned as a leading global MICE destination, and Gujarat is well on its way to becoming the preferred choice for the MICE industry. There were notable speeches from Mulubhai Bera, Minister of Tourism; Hareet Shukla, Secretary of Tourism; and Amaresh Tiwari, Vice Chairman, ICPB.

Amaresh Tiwari provided insights into the role of ICPB and offered a comprehensive overview of the current global scenario in the MICE sector, along with its potential. Highlighting that MICE is an 800-billion-dollar industry globally, he pointed out that India's current contribution is less than one per cent. Acknowledging this gap, there has been a concerted effort, guided by PM Modi, to develop the MICE sector in India. The day concluded with captivating folk dance performances representing various regions of Gujarat. Before that, the ICPB Hall of Fame Award was presented posthumously to the late Shri Girish Kwatra.

With the Convention's theme, "Sustainable MICE: Empowering events towards a \$5 trillion economy," the notable sessions on the first and second days featured at the CIC included discussions on "Meet in India," positioning India as a prime MICE destination and exploring the cultural, natural, and heritage aspects influencing MICE potential. Topics also encompassed sustainable practices, gender equality for future empowerment, sustainability in the tourism industry, sponsorship and bidding opportunities for major conferences in India, enhancing attendees' experiences, supply-driven MICE competitiveness in India, and leveraging modern technology (AI) to accelerate MICE industry growth.



In his concluding remarks, during the valedictory session, Hareet Shukla affirmed unwavering support from Gujarat Tourism, assuring that the state government would actively collaborate to propel Gujarat to the forefront of MICE destinations in India. Shukla emphasised a commitment to providing comprehensive assistance to the MICE industry, signalling a determined and aggressive pursuit of excellence in this sector.

Overall, Gujarat Tourism played a pivotal role as the host state, providing substantial support for the event. With the support, CIC showcased the state as an attractive destination for meetings and events, leveraging its unique offerings and infrastructure. Gujarat's strategic efforts are

positioning it as a premier MICE destination, with plans to host significant events in the future. The success highlights Gujarat Tourism's impactful strides in advancing the MICE sector, aligning with its vision for regional tourism development.

The collaboration between ICPB and Gujarat Tourism underscored the commitment to the growth and development of the MICE industry in India. It was also decided at the convention to establish ICPB's Gujarat chapter within a set timeframe, develop a criterion to categorise convention venues, and introduce national MICE awards to acknowledge excellence across all categories of MICE stakeholders. The conclave witnessed the signing of several Memoranda of Understanding



(MoUs), symbolising a commitment to provide renewed impetus and direction to the MICE industries in Gujarat.



Amaresh Tiwari
Vice Chairman, ICPB

“We have experienced unparalleled cooperation, with the entire Gujarat Tourism team and government officials providing unwavering support to ensure the seamless functioning of the conclave. Gujarat stands out as an exceptionally business-friendly destination for MICE, evident in the active involvement of the Chief Minister and top government and tourism officials who not only endorse but actively participate in such events. This level of support underscores the state's pro-business mindset, creating an environment that fosters collaboration and positions Gujarat as a preferred destination for MICE activities.



Madan Kak
Secretary and Treasurer, ICPB

“The Indian and state govts have started acknowledging the MICE sector's pivotal role in achieving a \$5 million economy in three years, highlighting its immense significance. With robust infrastructure and convention centres, Gujarat holds the potential as a top MICE destination. Inspired by Gujarat's successful model, states are advancing their efforts in the MICE sector. Nationally, India boasts numerous MICE venues, requiring sustained business inflow for cost sustainability. The collective momentum positions the country for continued success in the MICE industry.



Chander Mansaramani
Governing Board Member, ICPB

“For the first time, the state government actively sought a partnership with the ICPB and proposed the establishment of a state chapter—an impressive milestone. This signifies a growing recognition across states of the significant social and economic impact of MICE events on cities. While many bureaus lack government support, there is a pressing need for collaboration, where bureaus should engage with governments to leverage and capitalise on relevant policies for mutual benefit.



Naveen Rizvi
Executive Director, ICE

“The forum was engaging, and the sessions were informative. I commend the Gujarat government's efforts to showcase cultural aspects alongside MICE initiatives and promotion. Having visited the state for a decade to host

our events, for me, this convention has unveiled the state's growing MICE potential across various cities. Ahmedabad, bolstered by Gandhinagar as a twin city, shows significant capacity for MICE development and business.



Vikas Sood
GM, The Leela Gandhinagar and Mahatma Mandir Exhibition Centre

“A convention like this provides a comprehensive experience and exposure to Gandhinagar city. First-time visitors, especially business and MICE planners, are impressed by the city's MICE

potential. Despite its distance from Ahmedabad, Gandhinagar boasts essential MICE infrastructure and is strategically located near government offices. The city authorities actively facilitate and support MICE event organisers, enhancing the overall appeal of Gandhinagar as a prime MICE destination. Leela Gandhinagar is making remarkable strides in the MICE sector, exceeding expectations for business generation in the twin city. The hotel possesses the capabilities to host world-class MICE events, complete with top-notch security solutions.

TBO acquires online business of Jumbo Tours Group for 25 million Euros

Tek Travels DMCC, a wholly owned subsidiary of TBOTekLimited(TBO), has acquired 100 percent shareholding of Jumboonline Accommodations and Services S.L.U., a demerged online business from Jumbo Tours Group. This strategic move aims to enhance TBO's footprint in Europe.

Jumbo Tours Group, a major global tourism operator, provides diverse services and products to tour operators and travel agencies worldwide. The Jumboonline business streamlines product distribution for wholesalers and tour operators through a comprehensive single platform. The advanced API solution grants quick access to over 120,000 hotel inventories, including 15,000 directly contracted hotels. Additionally, complementing the business are two other brands, viz, Jumbobeds, a leading online wholesaler for travel agencies and Jumbotransfers, offering competitively priced transportation services.

This acquisition mirrors TBO's global growth initiatives,



underscoring its commitment to expansion, investment, and enhanced customer experience. TBO remains dedicated to simplifying and empowering the travel ecosystem, actively seeking similar partnerships to further its vision.

IHCL unveils Vivanta in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh



Indian Hotels Company (IHCL) recently opened a new Vivanta hotel in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh. The hotel, situated at a height of 10,000 feet, offers panoramic views of the scenic Tawang Valley and the majestic Himalayas.

Nestled within ten acres of verdant landscapes, Vivanta Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang is a sanctuary located just a short drive from the majestic Tawang Monastery, the second largest in the world. The spacious 80 rooms and suites provide an expansive and breathtaking panorama of the surrounding valleys and mountains. Mynt, the signature all-day diner, tantalises the taste buds with a fusion of culinary delights. Wink, the chic lounge bar, serves up exotic cocktails, and Swirl, the deli, presents a tempting array of the finest confectionery.

Vivanta Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang stands as an unrivaled venue for both conferences and sophisticated social events, offering a selection of banquet spaces, including the largest ballroom in the state, and charming open-air lawns. The hotel provides a spectrum of recreational facilities, including a temperature-controlled indoor swimming pool, a state-of-the-art fitness center, and a spa as well as a play zone for children and an amphitheater for cultural events.

LA Tourism celebrates Hollywood Sign's centennial milestone in Mumbai



The Hollywood Sign stands as a premier tourist attraction in the vibrant City of Los Angeles, solidifying its status as Hollywood's biggest star. This year marks a significant milestone as the iconic landmark reached its 100th anniversary. To celebrate this momentous occasion, the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board in India held a grand event alongside their esteemed travel partners in Mumbai on December 8, 2023.

While the Hollywood Sign remains an enduring symbol of the entertainment industry on a global scale and stands as Los Angeles' most iconic landmark, Seema Kadam, Regional Director, India, Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board, shared her sentiments on the noteworthy occasion.

She expressed, "After several years, this celebration marks a coming out moment for LA. The Hollywood Sign, our global icon, is one of the compelling reasons for people to choose Los Angeles – not merely for a photo opportunity against its backdrop, but because LA embodies a city of boundless possibilities. Happy 100th Anniversary!"

Uttarakhand launches India's first Himalayan AirSafari, unveils Gyrocopter Adventure



Uttrakhand is set to revolutionise tourism with the launch of India's first-ever Himalayan AirSafari using gyrocopters. This pioneering venture promises to offer an unparalleled experience, blending adventure with breathtaking panoramas of the Himalayas.

In collaboration with Rajas Aerospots and Adventures, the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board is introducing gyrocopters—compact, agile aircraft—as a novel way to explore its stunning landscapes. The state marks a new chapter in tourism with the successful completion of the first gyrocopter trial flight from Bairagi Camp, Haridwar, on December 16, 2023. Under the innovative Himalayan AirSafari scheme, part of the visionary Breakfast Tourism initiative, tourists will embark on a journey unlike any other. They will soar across the skies, enjoying aerial views of the majestic Himalayan ranges and serene rivers, transitioning smoothly from one exotic location to another.

This venture is more than just a scenic tour; it's a bridge connecting tourists to the lesser-known, remote jewels of Uttarakhand. It offers a unique opportunity to explore hidden destinations, all within a short, exhilarating gyrocopter ride.

Air Mauritius promotes Gagan Sharma to Country Manager-India

Gagan Sharma's elevation to Country Manager-India marks a noteworthy milestone in his career, showcasing his extensive experience in Sales and Marketing and substantial contributions to the Aviation Industry. With over 27 years of professional expertise, Gagan has established himself as a respected figure, known for his reliability as a trusted partner.

He has managed Air Mauritius' commercial objectives in the North and Eastern Region of India and Nepal, with a consistent and collaborative approach for years.

Sixtine Marot, Head of Sales and Marketing at Air Mauritius, expressed confidence in Gagan's leadership capabilities as he takes on the new position. He said, "I have full confidence in his ability to lead our team in India through the challenges ahead."

Air India opens bookings for Airbus A350 flights on domestic sectors



Air India's brand-new aircraft and India's first, Airbus A350, will enter commercial service on January 22, 2024. The carrier opened bookings for the flights to be operated by the A350 on January 2, 2024, as a New Year tribute to the soaring aspirations of the nation.

Initially, while the aircraft is deployed on domestic routes for crew familiarisation and regulatory compliance purposes, passengers from Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mumbai will have the opportunity to fly and experience the unparalleled comfort and state-of-the-art technology of the Airbus A350 aircraft in Air India's bold new livery. The A350 aircraft will be later deployed for longer-haul flights to destinations across continents.

Air India's A350-900 aircraft comes in a three-class cabin configuration with 316 seats: 28 private Business suites with full-flat beds, 24 Premium Economy seats with extra legroom and other amenities, and 264 spacious Economy seats. All seats on the aircraft feature the latest-generation Panasonic eX3 in-flight entertainment system and HD screens to provide a superior flying experience which will be offering all-new content for our guests on board.



State Tourism Boards to push for adventure tourism in the country



The 15th Annual Adventure Tourism Convention 2023, supported by the Tourism Corporation of Gujarat, was a great success in propelling the state government's adventure tourism pursuits.

The Chief Guest, Pema Khandu, CM of Arunachal Pradesh, remarked that in terms of adventure tourism, Arunachal Pradesh, along with the Northeastern region, has numerous locations and activities to offer. Sharing his insights, Mulubhai Bera, Minister of Tourism, Government of Gujarat, said, "The adventure tourism sector plays a crucial role in both our economy and employment, contributing significantly to the GDP. With ATOAI's support, we aim to further explore and enhance Gujarat's adventure tourism sector."

The convention witnessed various presentations on adventure tourism by states like Punjab, Jammu, and Kashmir, including an audio-visual film on adventure tourism in Gujarat. The President of ATOAI, Padma Shri Ajeet Bajaj, stated that ATOAI is working closely with the Bureau of Tourism to enhance the guidelines for adventure tourism across the country.

MOT Northern Region organises FAM trip to Sariska and Alwar

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (Northern Region), organised a FAM trip for travel trade members, mainly Inbound Tour Operators and Domestic Tour Operators, to Alwar and Sariska on December 17-18, 2023. On the first day, participants visited Alwar city and explored attractions like the Govt Museum, Moosi Rani ki Chhattari, Sagar Lake, Bala Fort, and Moti Doongari.

A Tourism Stakeholders Conference was held, addressing infrastructure, tourist amenities, and other promotional aspects for Alwar and Sariska. Shri RK Suman, Regional Director (North), Ministry of Tourism, urged trade members to promote the region, emphasising its heritage, history, forts, adventure, culture, wildlife, and nature. The following day, the group visited Sariska National Park, witnessing a tiger sighting, and marveled at the serene Siliserh Lake and charming Lake Palace Hotel.



ETAA North India Chapter organises Business Coaching Session for its members



ETAA- North India Chapter organised a Business Coaching Session by, "Action Coach" at The Lalit, New Delhi for its members on December 16, 2023.

The interactive session was attended by almost 50 ETAA members comprised of business owners, directors and CEOs of Travel companies. The session began with a welcome note by the ETAA – North, Committee members.

Business Coaches Abhimanyu Yadav, Indranil Mukherjee and Ratish Pandey gave valuable inputs on how to enhance profitability, and effectively conduct business with defined road maps and plans for business growth.

The ETAA North India Team of Saurabh Tuteja, Chairperson; Punit Bhasin, Senior Vice Chairman; Deepika Khanna, General Secretary, Praveen Ghai, Treasurer; Gaurav Arora, Joint Secretary; and Arush Mittal, Alliance Head; presented a memento to the Action coach team for their valued support and knowledge sharing with the ETAA members.



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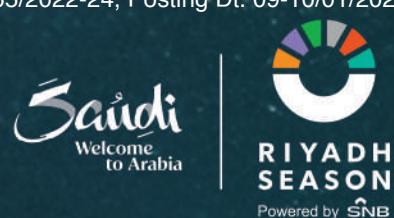
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