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Email: info@sampanmedia.com

Editorial and Marketing Office :
Sampan Media Pvt. Ltd. B-20, First Floor, Nangal Dewat, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi, 110070
Ph: 9560264443, ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

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Dear Friends,

In our TTJ November 2023 issue, we are delighted to present meticulously curated content on inbound tourism in India, showcasing exceptional destinations, one-of-a-kind experiences, and invaluable insights from key industry stakeholders. Despite the less-than-ideal global environment, marked by escalating airfares, visa issues, and human conflict, most stakeholders are optimistic about the resurgence of inbound tourism in 2024.

In October, we had the privilege of attending the 38th IATO Convention in Sambhaji Nagar and the Tourism Expo in Osaka, Japan. In addition to these events, we are equally excited to share the resounding success of our very own TTJ TRAVMART in Indore.

As the festive holiday season unfolds, India's travel aspirations are on the rise, driven by a strong demand for unique experiences and a notable shift in preferred travel destinations in India and abroad. The outbound tourism market of India is poised for expansion, spurred by the bold and adventurous spirit of modern travellers. Stay tuned for our upcoming December issue which promises to be, an exciting Outbound Special that delves into various facets of the outbound travel business. So, until we are back...

Happy Reading!

Ravi Sharma

ravisharma@sampanmedia.com



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BOOK YOUR SPACE

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CGH Earth launches Lockhart Bungalow, a colonial bungalow in Munnar, Kerala

Extending their impeccable hospitality services to the tea plantation estates of Munnar, the leading responsible tourism hospitality chain, CGH Earth recently launched Lockhart Bungalow in one of the oldest tea plantations in the region, Lockhart Estate – established in 1879.

Nestled amidst 1500 acres of tea plantation located amid lush green slopes and mountain views, Lockhart Bungalow features a three-bedroom colonial bungalow that was originally built in the 1940s. CGH Earth has carefully restored and refurbished the bungalows to recreate the charm of a planter's life from a bygone era. Cuisine, an integral offering at all CGH properties, includes a curated menu of International, Indian, and traditional dishes.

Lockhart Bungalow also comes equipped with an intriguing library at the estate and offers experiences such as tea-tasting sessions at the Lockhart Tea Factory, trekking, tailor-made guided birding tours, sunrise walks and guided herping tours to explore the rich biodiversity of the region.



Rann Utsav – The Tent City: PM Modi puts the cultural extravaganza in spotlight

Evolve Experiences introduces Rann Utsav – The Tent City, commencing on November 10, 2023, and running until February 24, 2024. This year's edition features over 400 luxurious tents and aims to welcome about 500,000 guests during the Rann Utsav festivities.

The Honorable Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, has actively championed the cultural splendour of Rann Utsav and the scenic beauty of Dhordo village. Reflecting on his visits to Dhordo in 2009 and 2015, PM Modi expressed immense joy at Dhordo's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty being acknowledged globally. He commended the people of Kutch, especially, for their dedication and efforts in achieving this recognition.

Nestled within the expansive Great Rann of Kutch, Dhordo village in Gujarat has gained prominence for hosting the annual Rann Utsav. This

Kakarla Usha IAS is the new Principal Secretary/Commissioner, Tourism, Govt of Tamil Nadu

Kakarla Usha, an IAS officer of the 1994 batch of Tamil Nadu cadre, has been appointed as the Principal Secretary/Commissioner of Tourism. She will also hold additional responsibilities as the Chairperson and Managing Director of Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC).

The Ultimate Travelling Camp brings thrilling Bandhavgarh

The Ultimate Travelling Camp (TUTC) brings thrilling Bandhavgarh wildlife safaris with a fresh forest glamping experience in their true signature style - consciously and stylishly. With luxurious canvas living and lavish amenities, The UnTamed Bandhavgarh is a testament to the new Indian luxury safari experience and is at par with the famous African luxe-wilderness and safari offerings. Located across the reserved core zone of the Bandhavgarh National Park, The UnTamed is spread across 16 acres and consists of 8 expansive and exquisitely designed luxurious tents that come with private patios with panoramic views of the surrounding nature. Eco-sensitive with no compromise on the luxury factor, all tents are 100 per cent canvas and feature facilities and exclusive custom-made amenities for the well-heeled global traveller, including beautiful, well-appointed en suite bathrooms. The highly experienced naturalist team ensures riveting game drives at the Bandhavgarh National Park's core and buffer zones along with some flavour of culture and history found within these sal forests.



vibrant cultural festival serves as a platform to showcase the regions deeply rooted traditional arts, music, and crafts, offering visitors a glimpse into the rich cultural tapestry of the area.

Adding to the excitement, the Dhordo village in the Kutch region recently earned the prestigious title of "Best Tourism Village" (BTV) by the United Nations Best Tourism Village, making it the sole village from India to achieve this recognition.



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Ahmedabad: +91 93761 20982

Bengaluru: +91 80 4165 6324

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Coimbatore: +91 99527 17750

Hyderabad: +91 40 4020 0301

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Uganda Airlines launches new route connecting Entebbe and Mumbai

Uganda Airlines launched its new direct service, connecting Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport and Entebbe International Airport in Uganda, on October 07, 2023. The exciting development will be the first time in more than 50 years that India and Uganda will be connected by a non-stop air service.

The direct service will last approximately 5.5 hours in each direction, bringing unmatched convenience to people travelling between the two points for business, family or tourism.

Uganda Airlines will operate 3 weekly flights to Mumbai on brand-new A-330 aircraft. The schedule has been designed to fit neatly into our existing network to meet the needs of those passengers who might wish to continue their journeys beyond Uganda.

"We are excited to introduce this, the latest addition to our network, which affirms Uganda Airlines' commitment to expand travel options for our passengers. Besides convenience, we hope this route will add energy to the existing business and commercial relations between India and Uganda that date back more than a century," said Jenifer Bamuturaki, Chief Executive, Uganda Airlines.



Air India to commence non-stop flights on Mumbai - Melbourne route from December 15

Air India will be launching the first-ever non-stop services to Melbourne in Australia from Mumbai, as it expands its global route network.

Air India will operate three times a week between Mumbai and Melbourne starting December 15, 2023, becoming the only non-stop operator between Mumbai and Australia currently.

The new Mumbai-Melbourne services will add nearly 40,000 seats per year into the Australian state of Victoria, where the Indian community is estimated at over 200,000, constituting about 40 per cent of the total Indian diaspora in Australia. The new services aim to respond to the growing demand to visit friends and relatives as well as to capture demand for business and leisure travel to the region.

The flights on the Mumbai-Melbourne route will be operated by Air India's Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner aircraft, featuring 18 flat beds in Business Class and 238 spacious seats in Economy.



Vistara to commence daily non-stop flights between Delhi and Bali from December 01

Vistara will commence daily non-stop flights between Delhi and Bali, starting December 01, 2023. This makes Vistara the only airline offering direct connectivity between the two cities currently. Vistara will be deploying its A321LR aircraft, with a three-class configuration, giving its customers the option to fly in Business, Premium Economy, or Economy cabins when travelling on the route.

On October 29, 2023, Vistara inaugurated daily, non-stop flights between Delhi and Hong Kong. The inaugural flight, operated on Vistara's A321neo aircraft, commenced from Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi at 21:05 Hours (IST) and arrived at Hong Kong International Airport at 05:55 Hours (HKT) the next day. Vistara's A321neo is distinguished for its exceptional features, including comfortable three-class seating with full-flat beds in Business Class, contemporary interiors, in-flight wireless connectivity, and a state-of-the-art entertainment system with Live TV, among others.





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India, often dubbed "Incredible India," is far more than just a catchphrase. It's a land where the ancient and the contemporary walk hand in hand, creating a unique blend of experiences that resonate with travellers worldwide. As a seasoned expert in the world of tourism, I confidently say that any journey here will be nothing short of extraordinary.

At its core, India is a land of stories – tales that are as diverse as its geography, cultures, and people. While India proudly embraces its ancient history, it is equally committed to shaping a promising future. In the bustling streets of Delhi, the soaring skyscrapers of Mumbai, and the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, you'll witness a mesmerising juxtaposition of old and new. It's a place where a thousand-

In the world of travel, there exists a vibrant tapestry of destinations that beckon explorers from across the globe. Within this kaleidoscope, India stands as a unique masterpiece, a realm where timelessly rich traditions interweave seamlessly with the pulse of a thriving modern economy. I invite you to embark on a journey beyond the clichés and into the heart of a country that has evolved, diversified and now stands as one of the most significant players on the global stage in 2023.

Rajeev Kohli

year-old temple can stand in the shadow of a gleaming tech park, where a traditional spice market thrives next door to a high-end shopping mall.

But what truly sets India apart is the warmth of its people. Hospitality here is not merely a gesture; it's a way of life. 'Athithi Devo Bhava' or the guest is god as we put it.

You will find yourself invited into the homes of strangers, sharing stories over a cup of masala Chai (tea), and savoring cuisine that dances on your taste buds. In every smile, and every gesture, India extends a hand of friendship that transcends boundaries and touches the heart.

Today in 2023, India is not just an ancient civilisation; it's a global economic powerhouse. With a burgeoning middle class, a tech-savvy workforce, and a commitment to innovation, India's economic prowess is undeniable. The country's modernity is showcased in its world-class infrastructure, efficient transportation networks, and a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. We are now a global space power and an economic diplomat. From the thriving tech hubs of Bengaluru and Hyderabad to the financial epicenter of Mumbai, India is a land of opportunities and growth.

Beyond the business corridors, India is a treasure chest of experiences waiting to be unravelled. We are a nation of diverse landscapes, from the pristine Himalayan peaks to the sun-kissed

beaches of Goa. Each region has its own distinct flavour, whether it's the regal grandeur of Rajasthan's palaces or the serenity of Kerala's backwaters. India's natural beauty is as diverse as its cultural heritage.

While India's cultural tapestry is as ancient as time itself, it continues to evolve, embracing the modern world without losing its essence. Art, music, dance, and literature flourish here, giving life to a vibrant contemporary culture that pays homage to its roots. The streets buzz with festivals that blend tradition and modernity, and you'll find ancient stories retold through contemporary mediums.

So, why should you visit India? Not because I say so, but because India calls to the adventurer, the explorer, the dreamer within you. It's a land that challenges perceptions and defies expectations. It's a country that will immerse you in history, captivate you with its charm, and inspire you with its resilience.

Let me be clear – India is not a destination to be conquered. It's an experience to be embraced. It's a journey that will open your eyes, expand your horizons, and leave an indelible mark on your soul. In India, you're not just a visitor; you're a participant in a story that's still being written.

So, pack your bags with curiosity, leave behind the clichés, and embark on a voyage to India – a land where timelessness and modernity intersect, where the past whispers to the future, and where every step you take is a brushstroke on the canvas of your own unique adventure. India awaits, and it's ready to unveil its magic to you, as it has done for countless seekers of beauty, wisdom, and wonder over the millennia.

About the Author: Rajeev Kohli is Joint Managing Director of Creative Travel and President of the global DMC group, Euromic. He is also a member of the CII National Tourism Council and has held other leadership positions in the global travel and tourism industry.



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Inbound Tourism Experts Highlight India's Changing Travel Landscape

Industry leaders offer valuable insights into India's dynamic inbound tourism landscape. In conversation with seasoned professionals to explore existing challenges, upcoming trends, and innovative concepts in inbound tourism.

Prativa V Bhalla

Ravi Kalra Founder & MD, Travel Inn

Ravi Kalra joined the industry in 1974, founded Travel Inn (India) in Srinagar in 1987, and moved headquarters to Delhi in 1991. The company specialises in B2B wildlife tourism, serving high-end individual clients and small groups across India. He shares his learnings with TTJ.



Sunirmol Ghosh Founder & Director, Indo Asia Tours

Sunirmol Ghosh started his travel career as a student guide in Udaipur in 1974. He has since established and led a successful organisation, encompassing key verticals of MICE, hospitality, inbound, domestic, and outbound travel. He highlights the emerging trends of inbound tourism.



The Post-COVID Metamorphosis

The domestic market is growing significantly, reshaping inbound operations dynamics. Demand now influences rate fluctuations, with hotels adopting a "rate of the day" approach. Inbound tourism is recovering but still at 70-80 per cent of pre-pandemic levels due to economic challenges and high airline fares. Domestic tourism is boosted by new destinations like Ayodhya, drawing pilgrimage tourists. This is a great time to promote inbound tourism in Kashmir, which still faces restrictions for UK and European travellers, limiting its potential.

Emerging Trends of Inbound Tourism

A trend towards shorter trips, focusing on yoga, nature, and walking excursions, is growing. Family and group travel are popular, especially in Ladakh and Himachal. Domestic tourism in India has led to increased hotel and infrastructure development, offering a significant opportunity for inbound tourism. Varanasi's success in inbound tourism due to domestic travel is a notable example. Gujarat and the North East show promise as future inbound tourism leaders. The North East, with improved connectivity, has great wellness tourism, and experiential travel is driving significant growth.

The Road Ahead

Enhance government marketing in overseas markets, create awareness of India's safety for travel, and provide well-made marketing collaterals. The Ministry of Tourism should facilitate and collaborate with the private sector to tap India's potential. These measures will lead to promising times ahead.

The Changing Face of Travel

There is a notable shift towards shorter trips, with a growing interest in yoga, nature excursions, and walking tours. Family and group travel experiences are gaining popularity, particularly in regions like Ladakh and Himachal.

The surge in domestic tourism has driven the growth of new hotels and infrastructure in India, creating a vital opportunity for inbound tourism. Drawing a parallel with the impressive success story of Banaras, which now attracts great inbound numbers due to the boom of domestic tourism, Gujarat and the North East offer unique opportunities.

Unlocking the Inbound Potential

To boost inbound tourism in Kashmir, Ladakh, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, the Indian government should proactively work to lift international travel advisories in regions that are no longer at risk. Some countries, like the Netherlands, still advise against travel to these areas despite their improved safety. Effective promotion of inbound tourism is best achieved through the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and its skilled professionals. Collaborating under MOT's leadership enhances India's impact. Centralising resources through a unified agency improves the targeting of top source markets, which are expected to contribute 80 per cent of inbound tourism.

The Change I Envision

The government should treat inbound tourism as favourably as outbound tourism. We must remove existing barriers, streamline processes, and shift to a user-friendly online system to ensure ongoing tourist support. Effective promotion can be achieved through the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) and its skilled professionals. Collaboration under MOT's leadership will enhance India's impact. I am highly optimistic about the future of tourism, believing the best years are still ahead.

Lajpat Rai MD, Lotus Trans Travels

With a master's degree in Japanese language and literature from Delhi University, Lajpat Rai established his company in 1983, focusing on inbound tourism from Japan as the primary source market. He shares post-COVID recovery challenges, driving the development of innovative products to boost sales.



Slow Post-COVID recovery

The company's post-COVID business growth did not meet initial expectations, but inquiries have since accelerated. Pre-COVID, they accommodated up to 3,500 Japanese travellers. In 2023, the company aims to return to pre-COVID levels, acknowledging the challenge of rising costs and setting 50 per cent as a benchmark for success.

Harnessing Best Opportunities

The Ayodhya and Kashi Vishwanath corridors mainly cater to Indian-origin religious tourists, offering limited appeal to foreign nationals like the Japanese. India's appeal to the Japanese market has now shifted towards yoga and Ayurveda, replacing the once-popular Buddhist pilgrimage sites. India still holds potential due to its association with Lord Buddha, revered by 750 million Buddhists worldwide. However, low tourist numbers are largely due to misconceptions about India's infrastructural facilities, which require effective promotion to address.

Northeastern regions, specifically Sikkim and Meghalaya, should be promoted as uncharted destinations. Overseas high school educational tours offer untapped potential to boost inbound tourism.

Our new tourism offerings feature Ayurveda, holistic facilities, yoga, dietary programs, and wellness packages in places like Bengaluru with excellent feedback.

Effective Promotion of Inbound Tourism

To enhance overseas tourism, we need to change perceptions and promote lesser-known Indian destinations with MOT's assistance. India's inbound tourism is projected to exceed pre-pandemic levels by 2025.

Sunil Gupta MD, Travel Bureau

Founded in 1980, Sunil Gupta's organisation has grown from a single employee to a team of over 150. Specialising in interest-based tours, the company provides distinctive experiences. He identifies value additions to emerging inbound destinations.



The Post-COVID Challenge

The company has navigated challenges with a positive trend and currently operates at around 40 per cent of the 2019 peak. This year, the company maintains optimism and foresees achieving 50 per cent of pre-COVID performance. The path to recovery is well underway, with a focus on sustained growth.

Emerging World-Class Inbound Destinations

Varanasi's rising popularity stems from better infrastructure, increased media coverage, and diverse attractions beyond religious tourism. Ayodhya is gaining attention from domestic religious tourists but holds the potential for increased foreign visitors upon the completion of the temple and its infrastructure. The goal is to offer a unique experience akin to visiting the Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, which is less faith-driven and more experience-based.

Kashmir must invest in winter tourism enhancement and overcome safety concerns to attract year-round international tourists, especially from the Southeast and Far East markets, where it holds appeal. The new circuit of Lucknow, Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Prayagraj is gathering huge interest and can bring in big numbers. Kumbh 2025 is slated to bring in 13 million tourists.

Expert Recommendations

To enhance the tourist experience, extend monument hours, create pedestrian zones, and establish night markets for a better visitor experience. Promote India through impactful campaigns and FAM tours with coordination between the Ministry of Tourism and State Tourism Boards. India can potentially surpass European countries in inbound tourism.

Sanjeev Ticku Vice President, Yatra Online

With 35 years of experience, Sanjeev Ticku has been with Yatra for 13.5 years. He is fluent in three foreign languages and offers valuable tourism strategies.



The Changing Dynamics Of Travel

Business dynamics have evolved significantly, with the gestation period for queries and bookings shrinking from six to eight months to just 15 days.

Post-COVID, there is a decline in group bookings, shifting toward smaller groups or individual reservations. Inbound has not fully rebounded, with numbers currently at a realistic 60 per cent recovery, and further improvement will take time. Key markets of operation are North America, Australia, Germany, France, and Spain.

Inbound Tourism Trends across India

Current Inbound tourism distribution in India is Rajasthan (60 per cent in the north), Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka (20 per cent in the south), and 20 per cent spread across other regions. Kashmir is a popular summer destination with improved infrastructure but limited by its seasonality. Emerging destinations are Khajuraho, Varanasi, Kashmir, Ladakh, and Gujarat (Rann of Kutch and Vadnagar).

Strategies to boost inbound tourism

India must launch a robust marketing campaign to combat safety misconceptions and perceived overcrowding. Collaborative efforts are essential as individual state promotions require significant resources. India can learn from countries like Thailand, which welcomes over 50 million visitors. To achieve 50 million inbound tourists by 2025, India must invest in infrastructure, set clear goals, and follow a strategic approach. This long-term strategy will unlock vast tourism opportunities.

'Sharp focus needed to tap India's huge tourism potential'

Operating in the inbound travel segment for over 31 years, a company that had the biggest charter movement with almost 800 charter flights a year, accounting for approximately 80,000 – 90,000 passengers to Goa alone, Minar Travels is one of the largest inbound tour operators in India. TTJ spoke to H.S. Duggal, Managing Director, Minar Travels (India), to get his current perspective on the market, industry dynamics, and the opportunities and threats that loom large.

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

Minar Travels today is a diversified company with interests in aviation, inbound, and MICE, a fact that contributed strongly to weathering the tsunami that the COVID-19 pandemic unleashed on the world of travel.

Not to be held back by global influences, Minar is constantly reinventing itself; its VILASA Luxury Travel Division is one such step in the direction. Associated with Serandipian and XO Private Network, VILASA curates uber luxury experiences for its discerning high-end clientele and has garnered market share from Latin American, American, French, and now the Middle Eastern markets.

The Conference and Events division of Minar, Elbon Conferences and Events has been doing exceptionally well on the domestic conferences and events front, explains Duggal. He further elaborates, "Our airline GSA division has just recently added Uganda Airlines to its portfolio, and earlier, we had also added Air Peace from Nigeria.

"Last year, we reached almost 40 per cent of our pre-pandemic business; however, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the current escalations in Israel, and our own diplomatic stalemate with Canada, have again cast their large shadows on the business and the overall travel sentiment reducing my optimism for the current year", says Duggal.

Sharing his concern about the downturn in the charter business to Goa, Duggal explained, "We had large volumes of business from Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and CIS countries. The current war between Russia and Ukraine has spelled disaster for this business, adding further to our woes has been the changing attitude of the Goa hoteliers."



▲ H.S. Duggal

He explains, "An average charter guest to Goa is looking at an uninterrupted stay of 7-10 days at a hotel; however, hotels are actively opting for wedding groups and so cannot accommodate requests for uninterrupted long stays. This has resulted in this segment looking at alternative destinations."

“Our airline GSA division has just recently added Uganda Airlines to its portfolio, and earlier, we had also added Air Peace from Nigeria”

Goa's loss is a big gain for Sri Lanka and Maldives, whose hoteliers and tour operators are actively pursuing and welcoming this business with open arms and with very competitive costs. "Our currently high hotel costs are outricing us internationally as an inbound destination," further adds Duggal.

The inflow of tourism sustains a large ecosystem at any destination, so it is not just hotels but excursion operators, restaurants, shopping outlets, taxi operators, and small-time hawkers who survive to fulfil the daily needs of tourists. The absence of this international tourist leaves a huge dent in the local economy. We have a very long and beautiful coastline; we have islands and the Himalayas. So perhaps it is time to develop and promote newer destinations and rejuvenate our product portfolio as a country.

Talking about religious tourism into India, Duggal explains, "There exists a huge potential, and we have been receiving Hindu pilgrimage groups to Varanasi and Ayodhya from Mauritius and even groups from Korea to Ayodhya. We feel there is a strong need to market and promote the Hindu Pilgrimage Circuit, Sikh Pilgrimage Circuit, and the Buddhist Circuit." We need to develop a robust infrastructure to support our product. Our road networks have improved, and our air connectivity is better, yet a lot needs to be done.

"Joh-Dikhta-Hai- Woh-Hi-Bikta-Hai" only what is visible sells. The current decision of the government to shut down overseas Indian tourism offices, citing cost constraints without installing alternative mechanisms in place, has left a huge void in our global visibility, accessibility, client servicing, and marketing efforts. A destination locally not visible is "Out of sight, Out of mind."

It needs to be very clearly understood that there are other countries vying for the same traveller, competing with their large promotional war chests, attractive marketing campaigns, local international presence, and marketing initiatives. The results are clearly visible, and tourist arrival numbers for Dubai, Thailand, and Singapore speak for themselves.

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Punjab Tourism Summit opens new avenues for tourism prospects

The Punjab Tourism Summit and Travel Mart organised in September 2023 sought to put the spotlight on the state's rich heritage, traditions, art forms, and customs and to position Punjab as a prime tourist destination by 2030. TTJ met up with Rakhee Gupta Bhandari, IAS Secretary, Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Govt. of Punjab, to understand the impact of the summit.

Prashant Nayak

Punjab, often referred to as the land of five rivers, is renowned for its historical significance, warm hospitality, and colourful traditions and is a state rich with culture and beauty that one should experience firsthand. Punjab has a lot to offer, from lush green fields to free-flowing rivers, from rich cultural and natural heritage to varied architecture, from traditional arts and crafts to cheerful fairs and festivals, from mouth-watering cuisines to a never-ending list of enthralling festive experiences.

While the Punjab Travel Summit and Mart aimed to showcase the state as a potential global tourist destination, it also brought together the country's forward-looking tourism professionals to help catapult the state as a top tourist destination. Investors in the tourism and hospitality sectors were also present with the promise of a conducive, hassle-free business environment.

Regarding the summit, Rakhee says, "This is something Punjab has never done before. Punjab has always believed in the organic growth of things and never really marketed itself well. However, this time it has been different. We organised five road shows just before the summit within one month, providing the kind of publicity we had never pursued earlier. We decided to do this because we recognised the need for Punjab to market itself, as other states were also promoting their offerings. We have so much to offer beyond the Golden Temple. We have also introduced new policies, such as the adventure tourism and the water tourism policy. With the cultural policy on the anvil, we have also envisaged wellness and entertainment policies. We have several new developments in the pipeline that will make Punjab a strong player on the world stage."

The Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Anmol Gagan Mann, recently introduced the initiative titled Rangla Punjab (Colourful Punjab), which seeks



▲ Rakhee Gupta Bhandari

to celebrate the unique aspects of Punjab through a diverse array of fairs and festivals, offering visitors immersive and unforgettable experiences. Elaborating on the Rangla Punjab initiative, Rakhee explains, "It is time that Punjab shows all its colours." Presently, Punjab reflects red for sacrifice and green for fecundity and prosperity. However, it is time to display and showcase Punjab's huge tourism potential and prospects in all its forms, be it heritage, culinary, water-based, adventure, wellness, medical, agro-eco-tourism, and more. Each of the 22 festivals within the line-up of Rangla Punjab holds its own charm and cultural



We have several new developments in the pipeline that will make Punjab a strong player on the world stage

significance, showcasing different facets of Punjab's heritage."

Five cities—Amritsar, Roopnagar, Ludhiana, Patiala, and Fatehgarh Sahib—have emerged as top draws for

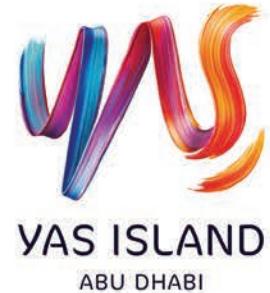
foreign tourists. Among these, Amritsar attracts more than 1 lakh daily tourists, and its Attari border receives around 20,000 tourists daily. With this kind of footfall, it gives the state a tremendous opportunity to enhance tourism in other areas as well.

"There is a huge diaspora of Punjabis in different corners of the world, and they would all like to be connected to their roots. Hence, Punjab is emphasising the development of home and farm stays in rural areas, which is the essence of Punjab. Further, the state's rich rural landscape can be integrated into wellness experiences. The state has many locations with peaceful surroundings, such as near riverbanks or amidst rural landscapes, to establish itself as a hub for wellness," reveals Rakhee.

On a final note, Rakhee says, "Following the summit, there is immense interest from travel stakeholders, and we have been receiving inquiries from all over the world. We are in touch with people who are eager to connect with Punjab. We are relying on word of mouth and are eager to partner with tour operators to promote our offerings and new policies. Our focus is to offer diverse experiences to travellers, both within Punjab and from other regions, including inbound tourists. We aim to be the destination of choice for them, and we foresee a great deal of visitors in the near future. With our ambitious plans, we expect tourism in Punjab to grow significantly. The Punjab government is also keen to enhance the role of women in tourism, as this leads to their empowerment and the overall socio-economic development of Punjab. We are in the early stages of all this effort and are open to suggestions and partnerships."

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Multifaceted Bihar bridges pilgrimage and modern tourism

While Bihar has traditionally been known for its religious tourism, it has yet to gain widespread popularity in other tourism segments. Nand Kishor, Managing Director, Bihar State Tourism Development Corporation (BSTDC), emphasises that the state government now recognises the tremendous potential of tourism and the significance of integrated development of tourist destinations. They are now actively working on a mission to promote tourism on a significant scale.

Prashant Nayak

Among all Indian states, Bihar is the one most intimately linked to the life of Buddha, resulting in a trail of pilgrimages that have come to be known as the Buddhist circuits. Bodh Gaya, a World Heritage Site, is the location in Bihar where the Buddha attained enlightenment and is one of the most important Buddhist pilgrimage sites in the world. Other Buddhist sites of Nalanda, Vaishali, Vikramshila, and Rajgir also get a lot of inbound tourist traffic.

"Religious tourism is our asset and a significant draw, especially when it comes to Buddhism and Jainism, and needs to be developed more. Besides the Jain pilgrimage spots like Jalmandir in Pawapuri and several Hindu temples like the Janki Mandir at Sitamarhi and the Mangala Gowri temple, we have Takht Sri Patna Sahib - the birthplace of the 10th guru of Sikhism, Guru Gobind Singh. Also, there are many holy places associated with Sufi saints in Bihar forming Sufi circuits," informs Nand Kishor.

Bihar is the amalgamation of religion, spirituality, history, and education, which makes the state one of a kind. While Bihar is perceived as a religious destination, there are many flavours and fervours of the state. It is totally at par with any other Indian state, and the Bihar Tourism Department has taken serious note of this aspect in the current years. Nand Kishor says, "Besides religious tourism, the Bihar government is focusing on eco-tourism, rural tourism, and water-based tourism. This shift aims to observe and meet the changing preferences of tourists who seek more developed and diverse experiences."

Bihar is a versatile destination that meets the expectations of varied interests, be it religious, art and culture, heritage, adventure, or eco-tourism. The Terai region of Bihar bordering Nepal boasts beautiful landscapes and is rich



▲ Nand Kishor

in wildlife and natural resources. It is home to the Royal Bengal Tiger and offers wildlife adventures in places like the Valmiki National Park. There are other wildlife hotspots in Bihar like the Bhimbandh Wildlife Sanctuary, which has a diverse range of flora and fauna; the Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary, which is known for its natural beauty; and the lesser explored Bhagalpur Dolphin Sanctuary.

The state is dedicated to policy development and promotion to ensure sustained growth and is set to unveil a new tourism policy featuring fresh and unique offerings

The region offers a blend of ecotourism and adventure tourism, with opportunities for water adventures in manmade lakes, dams, and natural lakes. A notable development is the expansion of adventure tourism, particularly along the

river Ganges, of which at least 445 km of the mighty river flows through Bihar. To promote tourism in the River Ganges, the Tourism department, in February 2023, launched a floating river restaurant in Patna and looks forward to introducing two Ro-Ro vessels.

"Efforts are being made to transition towards wildlife tourism and ecotourism, with plans to create dedicated zones for these activities. Unique products, like eco-tourism hotspots, wildlife safaris, and river cruise tourism, are being developed to enhance tourist experience and extend their stays. We want tourists to stay in the state for at least four to five days. For the same, we are leveraging infrastructure development and instilling confidence among the tourists regarding safety. Building confidence is essential to create positive memories and generate a cascading effect for tourism," opines Nand Kishor.

Nand Kishor underscores Bihar's proactive marketing strategy to establish itself as a premier Indian destination. He says, "The state is dedicated to policy development and promotion to ensure sustained growth and is set to unveil a new tourism policy featuring fresh and unique offerings. Bihar is actively participating in major travel events, with the landmark hosting of TTF Patna in October 2023. Additionally, the state is arranging events and familiarisation trips for international tourists, including those from Vietnam planning to visit India in December. Social media is being harnessed to disseminate these efforts. Despite stiff competition from other states, Bihar is resolute in its goal to position itself as a leading tourist destination."

Bihar possesses significant untapped tourism potential. With substantial room for growth in its tourism sector, the state is now striving to secure a prominent position on the tourism map, a potential that has thus far remained underutilised.

A photograph of the London Eye at sunset, with the sky transitioning from orange to blue. The river Thames is in the foreground, and the city skyline is visible in the background.

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Pitching Madhya Pradesh as most exciting inbound destination in India

Mahendra Pratap Singh, Founder and CEO, Travel India Tourism and Chairman, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Chapter, is on a mission to connect people to life-enriching travel experiences. With his dual portfolio, he is also keen on balancing the interests of stakeholders and fostering collaboration among the members of the tourism body he is associated with.

Prashant Nayak

Travel India Tourism was established in 2006 and is one of the leading DMCs and inbound tour operators in Madhya Pradesh based in Bhopal. Besides specialising in crafting both custom and unique pre-designed tours within the beautiful landscapes of Madhya Pradesh, they have a comprehensive range of travel related services.

Travel India Tourism beckons inbound tourists to explore India's vivid tourist destinations and its cultural extravaganzas, which promise an enriching journey filled with diversity and warmth. Mahendra says, "The inbound market is steadily recovering. India is fully vaccinated, and this has instilled trust in travellers. India has shown immense resilience in managing the COVID-19 situation, and in a way, 2023 was a promising start for inbound tourism."

Travel India Tourism meticulously designs tour packages catering to a wide spectrum of preferences and interests that capture the essence of India's myriad landscapes, cultures, and traditions. As an inbound player, Mahendra mentions, "Our key markets for inbound tourism include the US, UK, Spain, France, Italy, and Germany. The heritage attractions in India draw a lot of tourists from Spain, Italy, and France, while wildlife enthusiasts primarily visit from the US and the UK. Madhya Pradesh, with its abundant forests and wildlife, is an appealing destination for those seeking something new."

"Our primary focus is on Madhya Pradesh, which offers tremendous potential regarding wildlife, heritage, culture, and adventure. The state's infrastructure, airports, and accommodations are well-developed, making it an ideal destination for foreign tourists. Also, we are well-prepared with guides, transportation, and quality hotels to welcome foreign tourists. Over the past two years, we have actively participated in both domestic and international trade fairs, establishing recognition as a central India-



▲ Mahendra Pratap Singh

based operator. Further, we will continue participating in trade fairs such as WTM London, FITUR, and ITB Berlin to promote Madhya Pradesh," adds Mahendra.

Mahendra Pratap Singh was recently appointed as the Chairman, IATO Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh Chapter. Now, he takes on the work of engaging the

“The state's infrastructure, airports, and accommodations are well-developed, making it an ideal destination for foreign tourists”

chapter members, focusing on destination promotions, and providing information. The chapter also collaborates with local operators, foreign agents, and government departments to promote Madhya Pradesh as a formidable inbound tourism destination in India.

Madhya Pradesh lies in the heart of India and is surrounded by other states, including Chhattisgarh. It has myriad elements to be awed about, like the three UNESCO World Heritage sites of Sanchi, Bhimbetka, and Khajuraho. The state is also blessed

with rich flora and fauna and is home to numerous wildlife sanctuaries and National Parks. It has two of India's finest game sanctuaries – Bandhavgarh and Kanha. Madhya Pradesh offers some elegant monuments, such as the Buddhist stupa of Sanchi and the 15th - 16th-century citadels of Mandu.

Chhattisgarh is also a unique Indian experience. It is home to the country's widest waterfalls, caves, lush green forests, ancient monuments, rare wildlife, exquisitely curved temples, Buddhist sites, and hill plateaus. Chhattisgarh has begun to receive a large number of tourists who come here to experience the rich culture, which consists of traditional art, crafts, folk music, tribal dances, fairs, and festivals.

"At IATO, our mission is to unveil and celebrate the distinctive attractions of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, unearthing the hidden gems that these states have to offer. We aim to create engaging marketing campaigns that spotlight the region's exceptional features, including lesser-known destinations, cultural heritage sites, wildlife sanctuaries, and untouched natural landscapes with immense tourism potential," informs Mahendra. He further adds, "Across various social media channels and travel publications, our aim is to bring to the forefront the rich historical tapestry, the vibrant diversity of cultures, and the unspoiled splendour that defines Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh."

Very recently, an MoU was signed between Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board (MPBT) and IATO to strengthen, promote, and develop cooperation in research, promotion, and tourism development in Madhya Pradesh. MPTB and IATO will also jointly identify some lesser-known but potential tourism sites for developing and marketing amongst tourists and create new circuit itineraries depending upon the available approach to the sites and comfortable accommodation at those locations.

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India Assist assures peace of mind to travellers while on the move

India Assist, a leading provider of emergency assistance services for travellers, is revolutionising the travel industry through its patented platform. Harish Khatri, Founder and MD, India Assist, says, he started the assistance and distress management setup to ensure travellers have an easy time in new locations, amidst new cultures, and in unknown environments during their journey.

Prashant Nayak

Whether it is a medical emergency, loss of baggage or wallet, altercations, or unforeseen circumstances, India Assist is there to bridge the gap and provide 24x7 assured assistance. Their goal is to ensure that travellers feel safe, supported, and empowered throughout their travels, both within India and abroad.

It is always inspiring to hear about innovative ideas that stem from personal experiences like those of Harish. The concept behind India Assist is not only relatable but also addresses a genuine need in the travel industry. When travellers face unexpected challenges or emergencies, having access to immediate assistance and support can make a significant difference in their overall experience and peace of mind.

It is impressive to hear about the rapid expansion of India Assist within India and abroad within just a year of its inception, and this reflects ambition and global reach. Harish says, "Within a short span of time, in one year, our presence can be felt in 140 cities in India. We have found potential in 100 more cities where tourism is gaining ground, and by next year, we plan to expand to these cities. We are looking forward to partnering with business and service partners across India to fuel this growth. We have entered international markets like Nepal and look forward to Singapore soon."

India Assist employs a range of approaches to assist its travellers and tourists. Through its extensive network of partners and alliances, it provides comprehensive solutions for various travel-related challenges, including medical emergencies, theft, loss of baggage, language barriers, and verified information, when travelling to a completely new location. Additionally, at India Assist, they work closely with travel partners and other service providers to deliver connected travel experiences as a whole. With their user-friendly



▲ Harish Khatri

mobile app, travellers can access comprehensive solutions to a wide range of problems they may encounter during their journeys. Their dedicated team of professionals ensures round-the-clock support and reaches travellers in distress without any hassle.

India Assist has been a lifeline for travellers facing a wide array of challenges, including over 10,000 cases to date, with more than 3,000 during the challenging COVID-19 pandemic. These cases encompass diverse situations, but one common thread is the critical need for

We have found potential in 100 more cities where tourism is gaining ground, and by next year, we plan to expand to these cities

assistance and support. Harish mentions, "In particular, language barriers have proven to be a significant challenge for travellers. Consider a situation where a traveller from South India loses his wallet in Himachal Pradesh and needs to file a police report! The language barrier can

make this situation even more stressful, as he may struggle to converse in Hindi or comprehend the written complaint. India Assist steps in to bridge this gap, providing invaluable assistance to ease their distress."

In the wake of COVID-19, metasearch engines, such as Google, have emerged as dominant players in the travel booking segment. However, it is important to recognise that metasearch engines, like any other technology or service, have limitations, especially when it comes to unforeseen circumstances. They may not be able to provide timely responses or solutions. Harish says, "A common set of actions that travellers typically undertake when planning a trip is to use search engines to research, book flights and accommodations, create an itinerary, and purchase travel insurance. However, the real challenge often arises when unexpected situations or emergencies occur during travel, as the standard pre-trip preparations may not provide immediate solutions on the ground."

The company has also formed strategic partnerships with organisations like IRCTC to simplify travel via railways, IIM Lucknow (Startup Programme), and MotoGP Bharat to provide personalised assistance to spectators. Overall, the idea behind India Assist seems promising and aligned with the growing demand for travel-related services, especially as the world becomes more interconnected.

On an ending note, Harish says, "Travellers are the foundation of the travel industry, and their satisfaction and well-being are paramount. Collectively, all stakeholders in the travel industry need to collaborate and adapt to meet the evolving needs and expectations of travellers. Happy travellers not only enjoy their journeys but are more likely to become repeat customers and recommend the services to others, ultimately benefiting the entire travel industry."



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Unveiling the Mystique of Ladakh through Experiential Tourism

Ladakh offers a diverse cultural tapestry with numerous tourist attractions, yet two products particularly shine in their extraordinary potential in inbound tourism. Hemis National Park is India's top destination for snow leopard expeditions, and the Hemis Festival is a unique Ladakh gem. TTJ explores India's role as a global hub for these experiences, emphasising the critical importance of nature and heritage conservation.

Dorjay Namgyal and Prativa V. Bhalla

Hemis National Park: The enigmatic Snow Leopard

Situated in the heart of the Himalayas in Ladakh, Hemis National Park is renowned as the habitat for one of the world's most enigmatic big cats, the snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*). Over time, this majestic feline has become the focal point of leopard expeditions, elevating Hemis National Park to a prominent wildlife tourism destination. Snow leopard expeditions have emerged as a significant tourism product within the park, drawing enthusiasts and enhancing its reputation as a key wildlife tourism site.



© Morup Namgail



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with extensive knowledge of snow leopard behaviour, which increases the chances of sightings. These expeditions often include interactions with Ladakhi communities, immersive cultural experiences, and traditional homestays to enable visitors to go back home with a deeper understanding and respect for local culture. Hemis National Park is not just home to snow leopards but also a natural habitat for the Eurasian Ibex, Tibetan Wolf and Red Fox. Visitors get the opportunity to observe other wildlife species, vibrant birdlife and capture stunning landscapes through their cameras. In turn, expedition fees also contribute to local conservation initiatives, directly supporting the protection of snow leopards and their habitat.

These adventures in Hemis National

Park have gained immense popularity as it offers tourists a rare and unforgettable wildlife experience, often described as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness these elusive cats in their natural habitat. It attracts more tourists and provides economic benefits to the local community, increasing employment opportunities for guides, trackers, cooks, and accommodation providers. It has also played a crucial role in promoting sustainable livelihoods in the region. Moreover, this tourism product also contributes significantly to snow leopard conservation efforts. The data collected during expeditions aids researchers in understanding snow leopard behaviour, distribution, and population dynamics, which in turn informs conservation strategies.

They play a pivotal role in instilling

a deep-seated appreciation and awareness for wildlife and conservation among tourists. They offer a valuable opportunity to gain insights into the delicate Himalayan ecosystem and understand the critical importance of preserving both the snow leopards and their habitat.

These expeditions are meticulously executed with a strong commitment to responsible tourism practices and strategies. Stringent measures are taken to safeguard the majestic snow leopards while minimising disruption to their daily routines. The success of snow leopard expeditions in Hemis National Park is a great example of striking a perfect delicate balance between conservation and tourism.

Hemis Festival 2024 - Celebrating Ladakh's Rich Culture

The Hemis festival is celebrated in the sacred Hemis Monastery, located 45 kilometres from Leh, in the serene Ladakh landscape. This illustrious two-day celebration transforms the monastery into a tapestry of colours, and the very air seems to hum with reverence and joy. It is a homage to Guru Padmasambhava, the visionary founder of Tibetan Buddhism. To be held on 16-17 June 2024, it holds immense potential as a tourism product, offering an array of experiences that can captivate and enrich the traveller's journey.

This festival is a mesmerising spectacle of vivid pageantry, a profusion of vibrant costumes, and deeply spiritual ceremonies. At its heart lies the sacred masked dance, a captivating presentation by the Lamas – Buddhist monks, bedecked in elaborate, ornate costumes and masks that embody various deities and demons. These enchanting dances, accompanied by the haunting strains of traditional music, intricately weave the timeless story of good prevailing over evil, imbued with profound spiritual and cultural significance.

The Hemis Festival is also graced by the unveiling of the Thangka, a grand and intricately embroidered silk painting portraying Guru Padmasambhava. This masterpiece, displayed to the public only once a year, draws pilgrims and visitors from every corner of the globe. It's a momentous occasion that unites people in reverence and celebration.

The festival is a cultural immersion into Ladakh. Visitors witness ancient rituals, interact with local monks, and gain insights into the spiritual traditions of the region. The vibrant masked dances performed by



the monks, with their colourful costumes and intricate choreography, are a visual delight. Ladakh's rich culinary heritage is on display during the festival, with an array of traditional Ladakhi dishes and snacks offering a taste of the region's unique flavours. The festival often hosts bustling local markets where local artisans and

craftsmen showcase exquisite, handcrafted souvenirs, textiles, and jewellery. For those seeking a spiritual experience, the Hemis Festival provides a chance to witness Buddhist rituals and teachings in a tranquil and reflective atmosphere. Visitors can explore the stunning Ladakhi terrain, visit other monasteries, and go on hikes.

While the Hemis Festival presents significant tourism potential, several challenges must be addressed to ensure its sustainability and preservation. The tourism influx strains local resources and the Himalayan ecosystem; hence, sustainable practices, like waste management and responsible trekking, must be strictly followed. Infrastructure upgrades for accommodations and transportation are needed to accommodate the growing number of visitors while minimising environmental impact. Effective crowd management is crucial for safety and experience. Engaging local communities for tourism revenue benefits is vital for sustainable development.

The Hemis Festival in 2024 is poised to shine as a vibrant tourism product, drawing travellers from around the world to Ladakh's cultural heart. With its rich history, colourful traditions, and stunning surroundings, the festival offers a diverse range of experiences that cater to a wide array of interests. However, to ensure its long-term success and preservation, it is imperative to strike a balance between tourism development and the conservation of Ladakh's unique culture and environment. With careful planning and sustainable practices, the Hemis Festival can continue to enchant and inspire travellers for generations to come.





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Ayodhya

India's newest destination in the making

Prateek Hira

For tourism to live and be lively, it is imperative that we offer new avenues to tourists; these could be new programmes, new products or even lesser-known destinations. Offering a new destination is the most difficult task, as it requires huge investment by way of creating infrastructure, facilities, amenities, and marketing, and this only becomes possible, when the government is willing

to pitch in and earmark a proper budget to develop a destination with an aim to make it welcoming for tourists.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is known to be a creator of tourism destinations. It all started with the Sabarmati river-front development, creation of Rann Utsav and Ahmedabad Heritage City Redevelopment in his own state of Gujarat, during his tenure as its Chief Minister. Later, his incumbent continued the trend and created the Statue of Unity in Kevadia, making a small unknown town of Gujarat, a new tourist destination.

Taking inspiration from the Prime Minister and taking the momentum forward, the visionary Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Yogi Adityanath, took the pledge to make Ayodhya, India's newest tourist destination. Till the city was embroiled in the legal battle of deciding between the existence of a mosque or a temple, nothing was actually done in Ayodhya. In fact, Ayodhya a town only one and a half hours away from the capital of Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow was left untouched all this while, with no development projects, not even proper basic amenities for the residents.

In the year 2019, the Supreme Court of India restored the rights to Hindus, declaring that the city had an ancient Ram Temple, and immediately thereafter, Ayodhya redevelopment took wings. The vision of the government of Uttar Pradesh is clearly to surpass the annual footfall of Mecca and Vatican in Ayodhya and to

cater to this influx, Ayodhya is being re-planned, restructured, and readied. Much of this has already been done, and much is being done in a time-bound manner, very strategically. The projections of footfall in Ayodhya may be a bit worrisome for the advocates of responsible tourism, but the government is looking at this aspect too, and thus, the infrastructure is being readied in tune with the expected inflow (or overflow) of pilgrims and tourists. The new master plan of Ayodhya is in place for restructuring this ancient holy city, without disturbing its innate character and has taken the aspect of huge footfall expected in the coming days.

The main Janam-Bhoomi (birth-site) temple complex with huge columns and corridors is under construction after reclaiming a lot of occupied and private land. The partial temple complex will be opened on January 22, 2024, when idols of Lord Rama, Mata Sita, and Laxmana will be shifted from a temporary makeshift temple where they now are, to their original place in the sanctum sanctorum of the under-construction temple complex. The artery roads of Ayodhya and other important roads leading to the main temple complex and numerous other temples in the city, have been widened and are aesthetically done up. The facades on both sides of the main road are redone to give aesthetic similarity. Public spaces, such as memorials, parks, and amphitheatres, all have a new lease of



Ram temple under construction



Deepotsav

life and are once again alive with activities. Ghats of Ayodhya, including the three main Ghats, Naya Ghat, Ram Ki Pairi, and Guptar Ghat, have been renovated to welcome pilgrims and tourists. River Saryu has been a lifeline of this spiritual city, and great attention is being paid to the riverfront development, making the river lively, with regular boat cruises and entertainment. A new grand museum is already in place to provide insights into Ayodhya and its epic connection with Lord Rama.

Ayodhya now has a new international airport in place, awaiting flight operations and the existing railway station has been upgraded to provide seamless connectivity to all corners of India and rest of the world. Many new hotels have come up in and around the town, and many international hotel chains are underway, including the Taj Group, ITC and Sarovar. Many others are scouting for land and contracts with investors, to begin their operations soonest and be ready in time to cater to the huge influx of tourists expected in Ayodhya.

Entertainment is yet another area that the government is very keenly developing through public-private partnerships. Ramayana Spiritual Forest and Ramayana Spiritual Theme Park would be a highlight

for the travellers and will help in increasing the night stay of tourists in Ayodhya.

The flagship event of Ayodhya, 'Deepotsav', which celebrates the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile, is already an internationally acclaimed event, with an impressive attendance of tourists from India and abroad. This event has not only maintained its position in the Guinness Book of World Records for the largest display of earthen oil lamps each year, consecutively, but it has also broken its own previous records too. Last year, the number stood at 1.57 million earthen lamps being lit at Ram ki Paidi on the last day of the Deepotsav celebration, and this year, the target is to break the previous year's record and clock a figure of 2.1 million earthen lamps at the same spot.

Huge investments are flowing in, and the entire tourism industry is keeping a close watch on this destination in the making, which would change many itineraries and attract tourists' attention. By all means, Ayodhya, in times to come, will be a perfect model of a new tourism destination and of course, make it "India's newest."

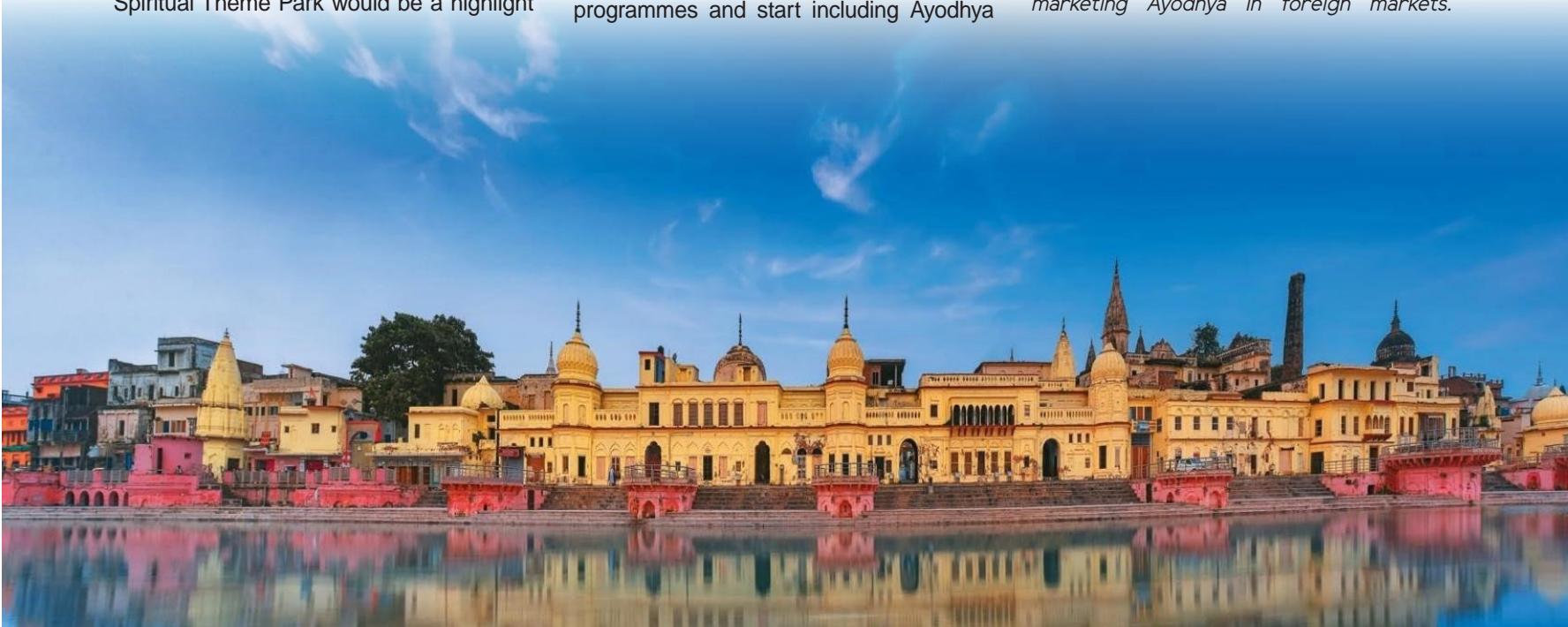
This is just the right time when tour operators must relook at their existing programmes and start including Ayodhya

for its unpretentious spiritual experience, showcasing and narrating the eternal religion, Hinduism, and even to attract the 'not so religiously inclined' tourists to showcase innately spiritual India. Ayodhya can also be a big uptick for attracting repeat tourists on spiritual trails. The need is to understand the uniqueness of the city as a destination, differentiate it from other popular spiritual places in India, and appreciate its convenient route and connectivity with other tourist destinations in the state of Uttar Pradesh, particularly Lucknow, Varanasi, and Prayagraj (Allahabad) and each of its contrasting product profile.

Undoubtedly, Ayodhya - the birthplace of Lord Rama, who is considered an 'ideal man,' is fast becoming a quintessential spiritual tourist destination. The government in all seriousness, is working overtime in a mission mode to make Ayodhya, a preferred tourist destination very soon – 'India's newest'.



About the Author: Prateek Hira is the President and CEO of Tornos, a 30-year-old tour company based out of Lucknow that had set up Ayodhya's oldest and the first tour company. Prateek's company ventured into Ayodhya in 2015, much before there was any whiff of temple construction. Prateek is credited with extensive research on the tourism profile of Ayodhya, conceptualising and curating many events there and to marketing Ayodhya in foreign markets.





Khajuraho Dance Festival

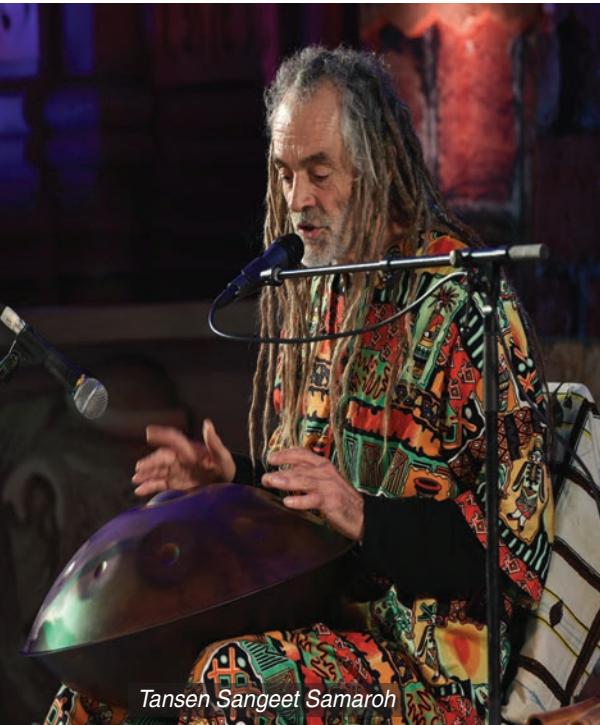
A Journey Through Festivals Madhya Pradesh's Cultural Tapestry

Madhya Pradesh is a melting pot of different cultures, celebrated through grand annual events orchestrated by the Department of Culture and Tourism at various enchanting locations across the state. Among the captivating festivals that magnetise a global audience, you'll find the harmonious melodies of the Tansen Sangeet Samaroh, the vibrant and traditional celebrations of Lokrang Samaroh, the mesmerising performances at the Khajuraho Dance Festival, and the spirited revelry of the Bhagoria Festival.

Team TTJ

Tansen Sangeet Samaroh (December 19-23, 2023)

In the enchanting city of Gwalior, the Tansen Sangeet Samaroh, held in December, pays tribute to the legendary musician Tansen and other renowned composers. This event becomes a platform for maestros and instrumentalists from across the globe to showcase their compositions and mesmerize a live audience. If you find yourself in Gwalior in late December, don't miss the soul-stirring performances held at Behat and Hazira, offering free entry passes for music enthusiasts.



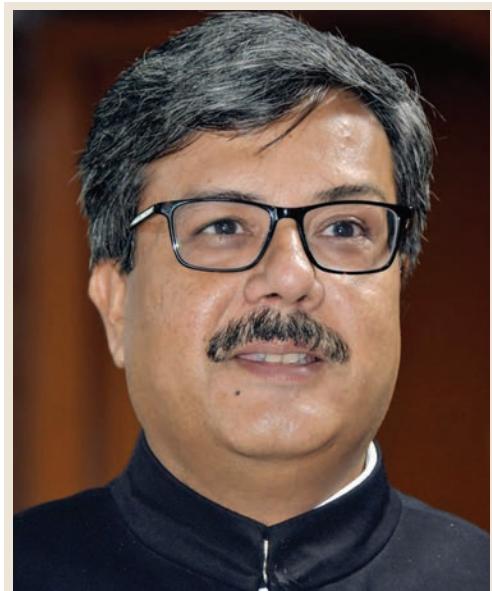
Tansen Sangeet Samaroh

Lokrang Samaroh (January 26-30, 2024)

Every year the City of Lakes, Bhopal hosts the Lokrang Samaroh presented by the Directorate of Culture and Madhya Pradesh Tribal Museum, from 26th - 30th January. This five-day cultural festival emboldens rich tribal and folk traditions of India through various cultural performances such as performing arts, classical dance, tribal folk dance, and exhibitions of artefacts, handlooms and crafts. Bracing rural culture for two decades, Lokrang Samaroh has become a synonym to the cultural diversity of India. If you love exploring rural culture Plan a trip to Bhopal during the Republic Day vacation and witness this phenomenal event at Ravindra Bhavan, entry is free.

Khajuraho Dance Festival (February 20-26, 2024)

The Khajuraho Group of Temples, known for its magnificent architecture and sensuous sculptures, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in the Chhatarpur district of Madhya Pradesh. During February, as winter gives way to spring, these temples become the backdrop for the Khajuraho Dance Festival. Organised by the Madhya Pradesh Department of Culture, this week-long celebration of dance showcases India's rich classical dance forms. Against the backdrop of



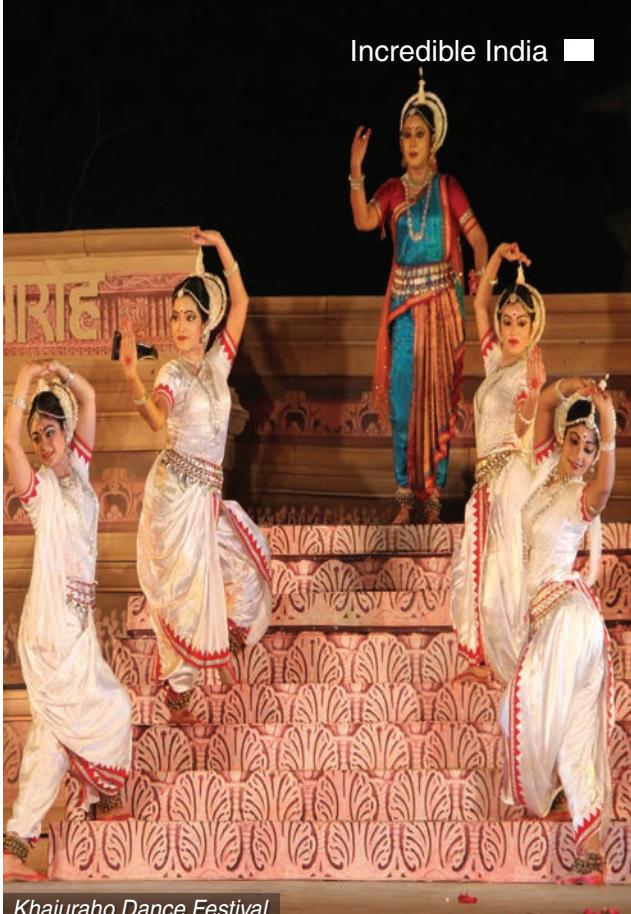
Sheo Shekhar Shukla, I.A.S.

Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture,
MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

Welcome to the Incredible Madhya Pradesh where each stone has a story to tell and every tradition is a vibrant testament to our rich heritage. Our state is a treasure trove of historical marvels and cultural splendors. Explore the ancient Khajuraho temples, the majestic Mandu forts, and vibrant festivals that resound with the echoes of the past throughout the state. Immerse yourself in the diverse traditions, art, and music that have thrived here for centuries. Madhya Pradesh is not just a destination; it's a journey through time, a celebration of culture, and an invitation to discover the soul of India. Come, let the heart of India open its doors to you, and experience the timeless beauty of our heritage and culture.



Khajuraho Dance Festival



Khajuraho Dance Festival

ancient temples, artists from across the nation mesmerise the audience with dance forms like Manipuri, Kathak, Odissi, Bharathanatyam, and Kuchipudi. It's a visual and cultural feast not to be missed.

Bhagoria (March 2024)

Madhya Pradesh is home to various tribal communities, each with its own unique traditions and culture. To gain insight into their way of life, you must partake in their vibrant fairs and festivals. Bhagoria, celebrated by tribes like Bhils and Bhilalas in Jhabua, Dhar, Alirajpur, and Khargone, is a lively tribal festival. It holds agricultural significance, marking the end of the harvest season and is celebrated a week before Holi. The festival is a jubilant gathering of people, music, dance, and

more. Young tribal boys and girls perform traditional tribal dances, filling the air with joy and energy.

What makes it an amazing site is the vibrant clothes worn by the tribal boys and girls. Girls from each village adorn themselves in matching saris or ghagra cholis, adorned with intricate silver tribal jewellery, allowing them to be easily distinguished amidst the bustling fair. This creates a delightful spectacle, as various groups of girls flaunt their dazzling and colourful attire, each vying to stand out in the lively crowd.

The festive atmosphere radiates an infectious cheer, keeping your spirits high as you explore every nook and cranny of Bhagoria. Moreover, an array of shops brimming with silver jewellery, clay pottery, succulent fruits, and fresh vegetables provides ample opportunities for shopping to your heart's content. The bustling haats (markets) during this festival promise a fulfilling and delightful shopping experience.

Embark on a journey to Madhya Pradesh and unlock the treasure trove of its rich culture through these captivating cultural festivals!



Bhagoria



Bhagoria



Lokrang Samaroh



Tansen Sangeet Samaroh



Lokrang Samaroh

Trekking in UTTARAKHAND

Where Adventure Meets Nature's Splendour



Uttarakhand, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, is a land of unparalleled beauty. The state is known for its snow-capped mountains, crystal-clear rivers, lush green valleys, and vibrant culture. Uttarakhand is also home to some of the most popular pilgrimage sites in India, including Badrinath, Kedarnath, and Gangotri, making it a perfect destination for spiritual and adventure enthusiasts alike. Uttarakhand offers a wide variety of trekking routes, each with its own unique charm and adventure. The state's stunning landscapes and the warm hospitality of the locals make it an ideal destination for explorers. From high-altitude thrills to serene meadow walks, we want to take you on a journey through some of the most breathtaking treks in this scenic state.

Rakesh Pant

Let us embark on an epic odyssey commencing with the awe-inspiring Bali Pass Trek, an eight-day sojourn that will leave you spellbound. At an astonishing 16,207 feet, the Bali Pass summit offers a 360-degree panorama of the mighty Himalayan peaks, including Kalanag, Bandarpooch, and the Swargarohini group. This trek, connecting the Har Ki Dun and Ruinsara Valley, promises striking vistas unlike any other. Along your path, the glacial Ruinsara Tal enchants, while the ancient villages of Osla and Gangad whisper tales of timelessness. The ideal seasons for embarking on this enthralling adventure are the vibrant summer or the resplendent autumn.

Next we venture into the enchanting realm of the Kuari Pass, a six-day

moderate trek that leads you to an elevation of 12,763 feet. Situated in the Nanda Devi Biosphere, this trek is a complete package of nature's bounty. You'll traverse dense rhododendron

forests, open meadows, and high-altitude alpine zones while enjoying stunning views of Dronagiri Parvat, Hathi, Gauri Parvat, Nanda Devi, and other Himalayan peaks. Don't miss the spectacular sunrise





Valley of Flowers

views of Dronagiri Parvat and the charm of traditional Garhwal villages.

Combining the thrill of high-altitude trekking with a profound spiritual experience, the Gaumukh Tapovan Trek is a must for your adventure bucket list. Over eight days, you'll reach a maximum altitude of 14,600 feet and visit the sacred Gangotri Temple, the source of the sacred Ganges River. Gaumukh Glacier, Mt. Shivling, and the Bhagirathi group of peaks will leave you spellbound. The sunrise and sunset views on this trek are nothing short of divine. Summer and autumn are the ideal times to embark on this spiritual and adventurous journey.

The Kedartal Trek is another popular hiking destination in the Garhwal region, leading to the picturesque Kedartal Lake. Surrounded by towering peaks like Thalay Sagar, Bhrigupanth, Jogen, and Kedar Dome, this trek offers a breathtaking panoramic view. It's a great opportunity to visit the Gangotri Temple and spot Himalayan wildlife in the Gangotri National Park.

For a more beginner-friendly adventure, the Dayara Bugyal Trek unfolds before you like a beautiful meadow. These alpine meadows, set against a backdrop of snow-capped peaks and deep valleys, are perfect for those looking to experience the Garhwal Himalayas' pristine beauty. You'll be treated to breathtaking views of Bandarpunch, Srikanth, and Black Peak. Another great thing about this trek



Ali Bedni Bugyal

is that it is beautiful in whichever season you visit.

Let's talk a little bit about a trek that showcases a beautiful nature's canvas. Valley of Flowers is nothing short of a floral dream where every step delves deep into the enchanting world of Himalayan biodiversity. Rare flora like the Brahma Kamal and Blue Poppy, along with a myriad of other flowers and plant species, add a touch of exclusivity to the trek. Not to mention, a visit to the highest Gurudwara in the world, Hemkund Sahib, is a divine experience in itself.

Our final destination is the remote

yet accessible Milam Glacier Trek. This 12-day moderate trek, located in the Kumaon region, offers panoramic views of the Himalayan Ranges, including Hardeol Peak, Deo Damla, Mangraon, and Sakram Peak. The trek takes you through lush green meadows, pine forests, waterfalls, streams, and some of the most isolated settlements in the Kumaon Himalayas.

Uttarakhand is a paradise for adventure enthusiasts, offering a diverse range of trekking experiences. Whether you seek a spiritual journey, a challenging climb, or a serene walk, these treks will fulfil all your trekking dreams to the tee.

About the Author: Rakesh Pant is the Co-founder of Trek the Himalayas and is a seasoned adventurer with over 15 years of experience in trekking and mountaineering. His remarkable journey is adorned with accomplishments such as leading challenging treks, holding certifications in Basic and Advanced Mountaineering. A former instructor at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Rakesh has been a part of prestigious IMF-funded expeditions and successfully conquered high-altitude peaks like Kang Yatse 2, Mount Kamet (twice), and Mount Satopanth. Rakesh's dream is to provide a platform for fellow mountain lovers to pursue their passions.





Staycation

The Perfect New Mini Holiday

Staycations, the travel industry's latest trend, has gained significant traction as the preferred choice for quick and accessible breaks. Let's delve Prativa V Bhalla into the roots and future potential of this emerging phenomenon, dissecting its impact on the travel landscape and the evolving preferences of modern travellers.

Prativa V Bhalla

The Perfect Local Getaway

A Staycation is a nearby leisure vacation, spanning from day trips to overnight getaways in the local vicinity. The primary distinction of a staycation is the absence of international travel requirements, such as passports, costly airfare, or visas. It allows individuals to take a leisure break and explore novel destinations and experiences within reasonable proximity to their homes without burning a hole through their pockets. Furthermore, it signifies that numerous brief leisure excursions can be undertaken in lieu of a single, costly, extended journey.

The Rise of the Humble Staycation

Staycations became a cherished commodity during the pandemic years when the global travel industry came to a grinding halt. Borders closed, travel plans were postponed, and people stayed home. Staycations emerged as the sole option for a nearby getaway, providing a much-needed break. As the world gradually regained normalcy, the travel desire resurged, leading to an extensive travel boom where people made up for lost time. Nevertheless, the modest staycation endured, showcasing the charm of this trend.

The hospitality industry quickly adapted to the evolving landscape, with an influx of resorts, homestays, and exclusive private accommodations. This surge in offerings perfectly aligned with people's eagerness to explore their immediate surroundings.

As the travel trade regains its momentum and international borders once again open

to eager travellers, the desire to explore the world has become one of the most highly sought-after leisure activities. This renewed enthusiasm for travel, driven by a collective desire to overcome the pandemic's stagnant period, reaffirms the enduring allure of wanderlust in the hearts of adventure-seekers.

Good News for the Domestic Travel Market

The surge in staycations, just a stone's throw away from home, is fuelling a spike in the desire for domestic leisure travel. Rather than opting for air travel, vacationers are increasingly leaning towards road trips to nearby destinations. The growing trend of staycations situated in close proximity to one's residence has significantly contributed to the heightened interest in domestic leisure travel. This shift in travel behaviour has significant implications for the tourism and hospitality industry, emphasising the need to enhance local tourism experiences and offer easily accessible road-trip-friendly destinations that cater to the evolving preferences of modern travellers.

The Soaring Popularity of Staycations

The conspicuous staycation trend is undeniably linked to the escalating travel expenses, a challenge exacerbated by the global financial crisis. The preference for driving vacations is a direct response to this economic reality, as it enables travellers to remain within proximity to their homes. Road trips offer an economical alternative, with the flexibility to choose the desired distance for

reaching their vacation destination. Whether opting for a local stay or embarking on a journey to a neighbouring state, the allure of driving vacations lies in their cost-effective nature. Typically, the accommodation represents the most significant portion of the budget, allowing individuals to consider an upgrade to a more luxurious stay due to the absence of transportation and flight costs.

The available vacation time is diminishing, with extended holidays now a luxury that eludes many due to constraints faced by both working adults and school-bound children. As soon as school calendars are released, parents find themselves meticulously planning weekend getaways. Long weekends and national holidays have become the modern-day equivalent of a gold rush, resulting in resorts and hotels being consistently fully booked due to the influx of staycationers and domestic travellers. In increasingly busy and stressful lives, these brief respites provide much-needed relief and invaluable moments for bonding with friends and family. Given the limitations on extended vacations, domestic holidays and weekend breaks are becoming the more practical choice.

One can attribute the abbreviation of vacations to the pandemic or the economic downturn, yet these factors only scratch the surface of the situation. Travel habits are changing, and weekend breaks are fast-growing markets. As the number of people eager to embark on weekend getaways continues to rise, this community emerges as a crucial customer segment in reigniting the local tourism and domestic hospitality industry.

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Cultivating Hospitality Excellence

A conversation with Samir MC

Samir MC, Managing Director, Fortune Hotels, highlights the brand's notable advancements in the hospitality industry and its core area of focus. The Fortune Hotels consistently expands into new and unexplored markets, positioning itself for rapid growth in both business, leisure, and pilgrim segments.

Prativa V Bhalla

Can you highlight the key strategies that have contributed to the remarkable growth of Fortune Hotels in recent years?

Our strategy has always revolved around the customer – keeping the guest at the centre; we have focussed on providing unique experiences, whether it is through our prime locations, diverse culinary offerings, or cultural immersion. Our varied food and beverage outlets and the proud ITC lineage behind us further enhance the culinary experiences we provide our guests, leaving them asking for more. Events, too, are our strength. We take pride in offering one-stop event solutions to our customers, helping them pull off successful corporate, social, and weddings.

We have been the first branded hotel in many locations, bringing a fresh demographic to those areas because we understand where the customer is moving.

We have a unique ability to open hotels in tier II and III towns where other branded chains hesitate to enter. This can be attributed to our deep understanding of the Indian customer and the demographic of India and the operational excellence at the centre. The Fortune brand has evolved from being primarily business-focused to embracing the leisure and pilgrim sectors, demonstrating our adaptability to evolving guest needs, so much so that we have a healthy mix of 50: 50 business and leisure hotels in our portfolio.

Your perceived primary challenges and the latest trends emerging in the hospitality industry.

Post-pandemic, the hospitality industry is witnessing an impetus growth of hotels across all segments in India. Both domestic and international chains are making inroads into unexplored/new markets in the country. There is a growing need for trained/ skilled hospitality resources, and this remains to be the industry's key challenge today. In the current landscape, employee hiring and retention pose a substantial threat.

Recognising these issues, there is an expanding wave of initiatives aimed at upskilling and helping employees learn and grow with the changing demand patterns. Organisations are also looking for alternate sources of talent to fill in multi-faceted job roles at the entry-level. At Fortune Hotels, we are committed to increasing our hiring efforts by 8-10 per cent compared to the previous year, during which we hired about 2,500 employees across our chain.

How has 2023 been for Fortune Hotels? Any notable properties experiencing high rates/occupancy, or any locations yet to pick up on occupancy and visibility?

This year, much like the last, has been remarkably fortunate for us. We experienced consistent growth in various aspects, including rising occupancy rates, increased demand, and a notable expansion of our property portfolio. The Fortune brand is on an upward trajectory.

Our hill properties, in particular, hold a unique charm that resonates in our performance records. The Hills of Fortune have consistently attracted guests throughout the year. The allure of these properties, coupled with our unmatched services and the beauty of nature, has proven exceedingly popular among our guests. Though inbound leisure travel is yet to pick up in the country, the domestic demand has compensated for its absence. While the hills suffered a tiny setback due to unprecedented rains for a short period this year, Q3 of this FY looks very promising, with Indians looking to holiday in the backdrop of the festive period.

Besides, the leisure properties, hotels in secondary and tertiary locations have also shown great promise. In H1 of this year, we have launched hotels in five unique markets – Kalimpong, Khajjiar, two hotels in Amritsar, and Hoshiarpur. All of which have shown early shoots of growth. While positioning ourselves in unexplored locations requires patience

for tourism to gain momentum, the results have been rewarding.

What is your take on sustainability? Is it a part of the Fortune agenda?

It is no secret that sustainability is the key to a better future for all. Organisations worldwide and demographics are actively working towards adopting planet-safe practices and becoming more responsible. Like all our conscious branded hotels, we too have taken small steps towards environmental protection, such as cutting down on the single-use plastics in our hotels, controlling energy emissions by optimising the use of air conditioners in our rooms, light sensors in the corridor and the relevant public areas, etc. Fortune Hotels is a wholly owned subsidiary of ITC Limited, known for its stalwart practices towards sustainability. Coming from the ITC lineage, we absolutely stand by it.

Please share insights into your expansion strategy and target markets for future growth. What is your vision for the Fortune chain of hotels for 2024-25?

Fortune Hotels is rapidly expanding its presence in PAN India with a focus on entering untapped markets, smart cities, leisure, and pilgrim locations, as well as potential business districts. Today, we stand at 62 signed alliances across 52 cities, under 4800 rooms.

14 of our project hotels are under development in 12 new locations, with an almost 50:50 mix of business and leisure hotels. Our primary focus remains delivering value to our stakeholders, and we aim to serve delight to our customers, a happy, safe workplace culture to our employees, and owner satisfaction by driving operational excellence growth for the hotel. Relationships, thus, form the core of all our activities.

Our focus on growth into newer locations, tier I and tier II cities, including attractive leisure and pilgrim locations, continues as we steadily increase our footprint across India.

Lemon Tree unveils ambitious plans for expansion

With their commitment to providing exceptional service and comfortable accommodations, Lemon Tree Hotels has become a trusted name in the hospitality industry. In this exclusive interaction, Vikramjit Singh, President, Lemon Tree Hotels, shares about the group's growth plans and his insights on inbound travel.

Prashant Nayak

Lemon Tree Hotels established footing with its first hotel of 49 rooms in May 2004 and, since then, has become a prominent name in the Indian hospitality industry. They operate hotels under various brands, viz., Aurika Hotels & Resorts, Lemon Tree Premier, Lemon Tree Hotels, Red Fox Hotels, Keys Prima, Keys Select, and Keys Lite. These diverse brands of hotels are tailored as per travellers' preferences, from luxurious indulgence to economical and exceptional stays. From serene hill stations to bustling city centres, each Lemon Tree hotel exudes a refreshing charm, combining modern comforts with warm, personalised service.

Lemon Tree Hotels are strategically located in prime areas of the city, ensuring easy accessibility for travellers. With properties near the airport, train station, or city centre, Lemon Tree Hotels has travellers covered. Their well-placed properties allow guests to make the most of their stay without wasting time commuting.

Lemon Tree Hotel has upscale, upper midscale, midscale, and economy business and leisure accommodations, and the hotel group is in a considerable expansion mode with the recent opening and signing of new hotels in places like Dehradun, Vishakhapatnam, Badrinath, Kasauli, Sonmarg, Vadodara, etc. Vikramjit says, "Today, Lemon Tree operates 95 hotels in 60 cities with approximately 8750 rooms. We have another 4,100 rooms in the pipeline, along with 52 more hotels. In total, we will be accommodating close to 13,000 rooms." The hospitality chain is all set to unveil a collection of new hotels, promising unforgettable experiences for travellers. They have an ambitious plan to expand to around 20,000 rooms in the next 4–5 years.

Recently, Vikramjit was at the IATO Convention in Aurangabad, where over 900 inbound operators were under one



▲ Vikramjit Singh

roof. October marks the beginning of peak tourist season in India, and with the pandemic eased, the travel industry expects a better inbound season this year. Speaking about inbound tourism, Vikramjit

"Today, Lemon Tree operates 95 hotels in 60 cities with approximately 8750 rooms. We have another 4,100 rooms in the pipeline, along with 52 more hotels"

said, "At the convention, we all sensed inbound business was coming back, and it was great to see the enthusiasm of the stakeholders. In terms of inbound tourism, it has improved in 2023 but is yet to return to pre-COVID levels. However, we see positive signs, especially for the upcoming winter season. Inbound tourism is expected to grow significantly as there is a new perception about rising India and new attractive destinations are adding up." While this may be true, the ongoing conflicts worldwide may impede the recovery plans of the Indian travel

industry, which is keen on reviving the inbound business.

On the MICE business, Vikramjit mentioned that besides leisure, they are focused on increasing yield from the MICE segment, too. "Regarding MICE and wedding events, we are proud to mention that we have opened India's largest hotel with 669 rooms at Mumbai International Airport. This significant inventory in a prime location will be a game-changer for the industry, particularly in one of India's deepest micro-markets," informs Vikramjit.

Lemon Tree Hotels has launched a 669-room hotel, Aurika Mumbai Skycity, the largest hotel in the country by number of rooms. This is their third hotel under the Aurika Hotels & Resorts brand, with the other two being Aurika, Udaipur, and Aurika, Coorg. This is also their third hotel in Mumbai. This addition will help to fulfil the increasing needs of both business and leisure travellers. Aurika, Mumbai Skycity is close to Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport's Terminal 2.

Apart from its excellent hospitality services, Lemon Tree Hotels is also known for its environmental and people-related initiatives. Lemon Tree believes that the brand should stand for more than 'just profit'. They have focused their efforts on creating a socially inclusive work environment that seeks to bring in people of different backgrounds, abilities, and ethnicities and offer them work as a unified team with a common goal. The Hotel Group has been consistently awarded several citations and awards, a testament to the outstanding value and experience they provide to their employees, guests, partners, and society.

Lemon Tree Hotels has its own developed hotels but is now focused on adopting an asset-light growth strategy where it will be managing stock-franchising hotels that are owned by third parties.



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Arts Meets Hospitality at ibis Styles Goa Vagator

In a joint endeavour, InterGlobe Hotels and Accor have inaugurated their latest venture in Goa, the ibis Styles Goa Vagator. Situated amidst the terrains of North Goa, encompassing age-old fortresses, beguiling shores, and notable tourist sites, this 142-room establishment elegantly captures the quintessence of Goan heritage.

Vartik Sethi

"First impressions last," as they say. One look at ibis Styles Goa Vagator and its art-infused interiors will leave a permanent mark on your memory. Original artwork by emerging artists adorns the lobby, while chic wallpaper reproductions set a stylish ambiance in the rooms. "The goal was to create an environment that stimulates the senses and evokes a sense of belonging," comments J.B. Singh, President and CEO of InterGlobe Hotels. The emphasis on contemporary art ensures that every corner of the hotel tells a story, making guests feel like they're a part of something bigger than themselves.

Setting the Stage: In 2004, when InterGlobe decided to venture into the hospitality sector, they noticed a significant void in the mid-segment and smart economy space of hotels. The high-end hotels were flourishing, but as one delved deeper into the mid-market segment, the structure became more chaotic.

The Joint Venture: With a vision to bring world-class products to India, InterGlobe sought partnerships. Their search led them to the successful brand, Accor. Their collaboration resulted in a 60-40 joint venture, laying the foundation for a transformative journey in India's hospitality space.

Why Goa?

Pandemic Resilience: Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, Goa emerged as one of the top-performing markets in India and Asia. This resilience underscores the region's potential as a key player in the hotel industry.

A Flourishing Landscape: With the upcoming Mopa Airport set to boost international traffic and an infrastructure that's continuously improving, Goa's future as a tourist hotspot looks promising. Companies like Accor have recognised this potential, with six hotels already in operation and more in the pipeline.

Local Art and Aesthetics: The hotel celebrates contemporary art and artists through curated pieces in its beautifully adorned rooms and public areas. While artists' original artwork is displayed in the lobby, wallpaper reproduction can be seen in the stylish rooms, complementing the curated art, pictures, and photographs from emerging artists.



Adapting to the Indian Market

Local Adaptation: Recognising the unique preferences of the Indian clientele, Accor tailored its offerings. From including tea and coffee-making facilities in rooms, adapting F&B facilities to cater to Indian tastes, and introducing the IBIS styles, Accor ensured their services resonated with the local market.

Innovation: The partnership with InterGlobe has allowed Accor to continuously innovate and adapt to local requirements.

The Green Commitment

Tackling Plastic Pollution: Accor took a monumental step in curbing plastic pollution by removing 40 single-use plastic items from all their hotels globally.

Food Wastage and Environmental Impact: Leveraging AI, Accor is addressing food waste and ensuring a sustainable approach when building their properties.





Diwali DHAMAKA

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Travel Agent

The KHYBER'S Surreal Experience in Snow-Capped Gulmarg



Situated amidst the snowy embrace of the Himalayas, The Khyber Himalayan Resort and Spa in Gulmarg stands as a beacon of unparalleled luxury and bespoke experiences. As the B2B travel industry continues to evolve, catering to the nuanced needs of affluent travellers becomes crucial. This property does precisely that, bringing together impeccable service, sophisticated design, and immersive experiences.

Vartik Sethi

Unparalleled Luxury Amidst Pristine Nature

What truly distinguishes the Khyber Himalayan Resort from other establishments in Gulmarg is its innovative approach to luxury. Here, the essence of Kashmir's enchanting beauty converges with world-class amenities. From rooms that boast an impressive 386 sq. ft. size onwards to bathrooms designed with panoramic vistas of the forests and mountains, every detail has been meticulously crafted to elevate the guest experience.

Additionally, the resort offers exclusive

amenities such as the all-weather swimming pool and The Khyber Spa by L'OCCITANE. Managed by international experts, these amenities ensure guests feel the comfort and luxury they seek.

Riding the Tourism Wave

Gulmarg's escalating popularity as a tourist destination has proven beneficial for The Khyber. With a remarkable 30-35 percent increase in year-round bookings and off-season occupancy soaring above 75 per cent, the resort is poised to achieve an 85 per cent occupancy rate in 2023-24.

Loyalty Beyond the Stay

The beauty of Gulmarg combined with the unmatched hospitality of The Khyber results in a clientele that keeps returning. It's not just about the location, which is undoubtedly breathtaking, but the unique experiences the resort offers. From the sight of snow-capped Himalayan peaks to leisurely walks amidst wildflower meadows, each visit ensures cherished memories and renewed experiences.

Innovating Luxury: What's New?

Keeping with evolving luxury standards, the rooms at The Khyber have undergone a modern transformation, replete with top-notch fixtures and amenities. A special mention must be made of Brava - Italian Pizzeria & Grill. This fine dining establishment, a first of its kind in Kashmir, seamlessly blends European aesthetics with local culinary brilliance, offering a gastronomic adventure unlike any other in the region.

Winter Wonderland Experiences

As winter drapes Gulmarg in a snowy blanket, The Khyber transforms into a magical realm. From backcountry skiing and heli-skiing to the simpler joys of sipping kahwa amidst falling snow, the resort ensures guests have a plethora of activities to choose from.



The Khyber Sojourn

Guests at The Khyber can anticipate a rejuvenated experience as the resort has recently undergone a thorough refurbishment of its rooms. These revamped spaces now emanate a modern, eclectic charm. Every room, be it the premium ones or the luxury balcony variants, now boasts top-tier fixtures, ensuring guests are cocooned in comfort. The attention to detail is evident with the provision of plush beds complemented by special mattresses, curated pillow menus, and premium bath amenities, enhancing the overall in-room experience.

Further elevating the luxury quotient, the Presidential and Luxury Cottages at the resort now offer a unique perk – on-demand butler services. Ensuring each guest's need is not just met but exceeded, this personal butler service underscores The Khyber's commitment to unmatched hospitality.

Culinary Adventures at Brava

Taking its gastronomic offerings up a notch, The Khyber has introduced Brava - Italian Pizzeria & Grill. A significant milestone, Brava is Kashmir's maiden fine dining Italian Restaurant. Not only has it garnered a wave of accolades from resident guests, but it has also made a mark among the locals.

The setting of Brava is an artful blend of Kashmir's natural beauty and European aesthetics. The decor, reminiscent of a cozy trattoria nestled in the Alps, offers both indoor and alfresco dining options amidst lush green lawns. This space, whether after a thrilling ski adventure or a leisurely day exploring the outdoors, promises an ambiance perfect for both intimate dinners or lively gatherings.

The real magic, however, lies in Brava's culinary narrative. With a menu that

gracefully transitions from bite-sized delights to hearty sharing platters, it aspires to redefine Gulmarg's gastronomic scene. Incorporating local ingredients, from the coveted Gucchi (morel) mushrooms to the intense Kashmiri Red Chillies and the native Haaq (collard greens), Brava celebrates the fusion of Italian culinary techniques with Kashmiri flavors. And of course, the pièce de résistance - hand-crafted pizzas, fresh from a mango wood-fired oven.

An Array of Dining Delights

The Khyber's culinary journey doesn't end at Brava. For those seeking varied palate experiences, the resort houses multiple dining avenues. Cloves offers an all-day dining experience, while Chaikash provides a serene ambiance for tea enthusiasts. Nouf, the terrace restaurant, offers panoramic views to accompany your meal. Additionally, guests can unwind at Calabash, the hookah lounge, or rejuvenate with a refreshing detox at Aabshar by the poolside.

F&B and MICE Offerings

While the picturesque beauty of Gulmarg serves as a perfect backdrop, The Khyber goes a step further, positioning itself as a leading MICE and wedding destination. With over 10,000 square feet dedicated to meetings, banquets, and events, including an amphitheatre and beautifully landscaped gardens, the resort offers unparalleled venues for memorable events.

Commitment to Responsible Tourism

In an age where sustainability is paramount, The Khyber exemplifies the perfect balance between luxury and responsibility. Initiatives such as planting 3,000 trees annually, recycling water even at sub-zero temperatures, and championing local

Kashmiri crafts underscore the resort's dedication to eco-friendly practices.

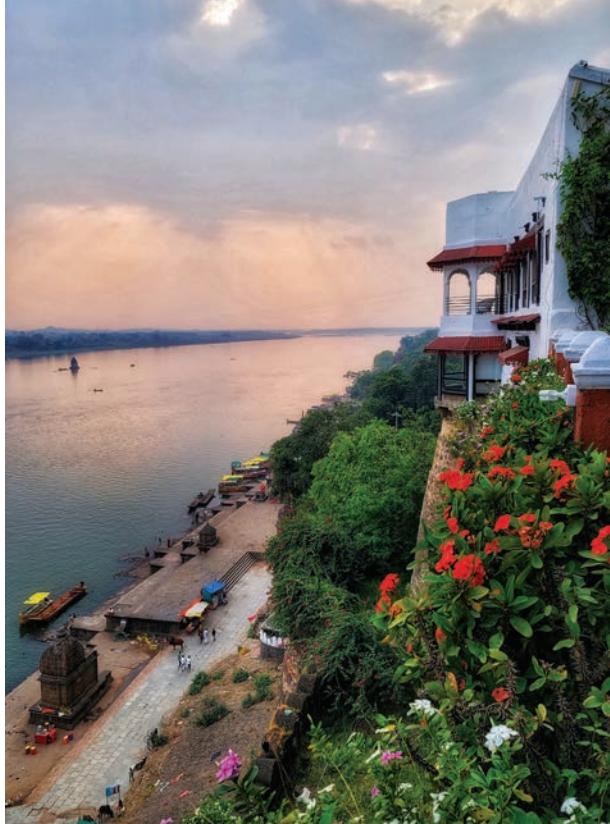
2024 and Beyond

As The Khyber gears up for another promising year, the agenda remains clear: maintain the momentum, advocate responsible tourism, and foster a symbiotic relationship with the local community and economy.

The Blossoming Tourism Landscape

Indeed, Kashmir's tourism landscape is experiencing a paradigm shift. With over 25 lakh arrivals (excluding Amarnath Yatris) in 2022-23 alone, the region is witnessing an unprecedented influx of travellers. It's essential that infrastructure development keeps pace to ensure sustainable tourism and prevent overcrowding. For the discerning traveller seeking unmatched luxury amidst nature, The Khyber remains a destination par excellence.





Ahilya Fort

A Heritage Abode by the Narmada

A two-hour drive from Indore in Madhya Pradesh, gets you to the historic town of Maheshwar, located on the banks of the Holy Narmada, a town known for its temples, ghats, handwoven Maheshwari sarees and legends of Devi Ahilya Bai Holkar

Gurjit Singh Ahuja

The 250-year-old Ahilya Fort offers one of the most beautiful and panoramic settings for a heritage boutique hotel enclosed within the walls of the 18th-century Maheshwar Fort. Ahilya Fort is perched on the edge of a cliff and offers breathtaking views over the sacred river Narmada and the ghats below.

This expansive property offers an opportunity to experience unobtrusive and unfiltered luxury with understated elegance, combined with its history and elements of Hindu architecture that reflect its timelessness and blend it perfectly with its surroundings.

There are shaded courtyards and verandas on different levels, linked by stone walkways. Its 19 rooms and tents are set amidst six different buildings, some with khaprail roofs that reflect their earthly central India charm.

Numerous gardens, ancient turrets, battlements, and a stunning swimming pool all make a perfect setting for a boutique heritage hotel that spells an authentic Indian experience that is Maheshwari.

Meals are served in different areas of

the fort, and you are well informed about the same. All meals are included in your package, and fixed menus are based on recipes created by the owner, Prince Richard Holkar, a reputed gourmet, culinary author, and chef.

Lunch is generally light Western cuisine, with cold soups, organic salads, grilled vegetables, and various pasta dishes that pay homage to the new-age farm-to-table concept of dining. Organically grown vegetables and herbs are sourced from the hotel's own vegetable and herb garden. Additionally, Indian recipes 'with a Holkar twist' are featured at dinner.

For special occasions and dinners, 'The Burj,' located on the highest point of the fort complex, provides the perfect romantic setting. The oil lamp-lit stairway leading to the Burj and the candlelit ambience surrounding it make for a memorable experience as you sip your mocktails and enjoy delicacies from 'Cooking of The Maharajas' a book authored by Prince Richard Holkar.

A morning boat ride on the Narmada is a must-do and a surreal experience. The golden sunlight falls diagonally over

the river, its ghats, and the fort walls that rise right behind the ghats. The whole experience is magical as the ghats are abuzz with the daily activities of the townsfolk and visiting pilgrims.

The town still maintains its weaving traditions that live through its weavers, who create magic with their combination of extra-fine cotton, mulberry silk, and gold brocade. The support to the weaving traditions continues through Rehma Society, a not-for-profit foundation established in 1978 by Prince Richard and Sally Holkar. Shoppers will love the woven options offered in sarees, fabric, stoles, and suits.

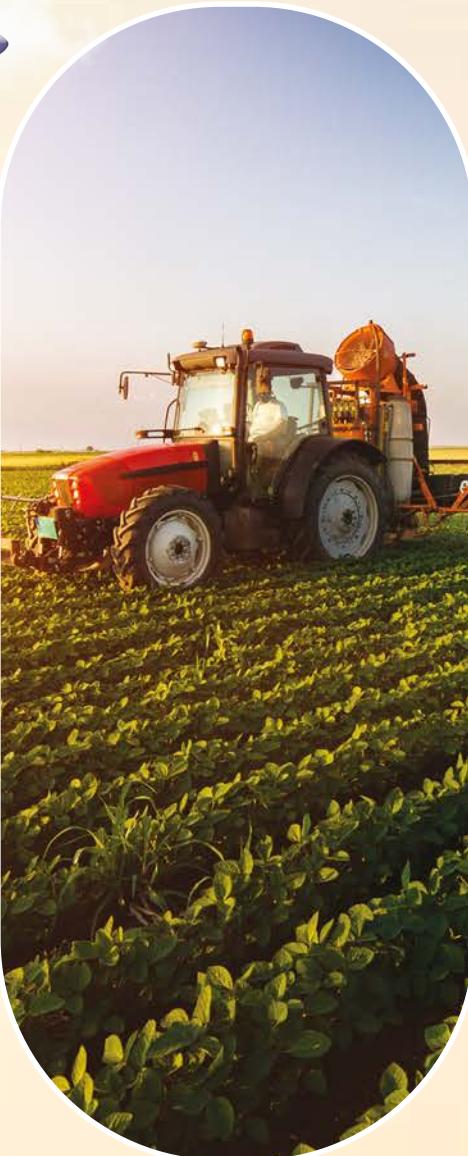
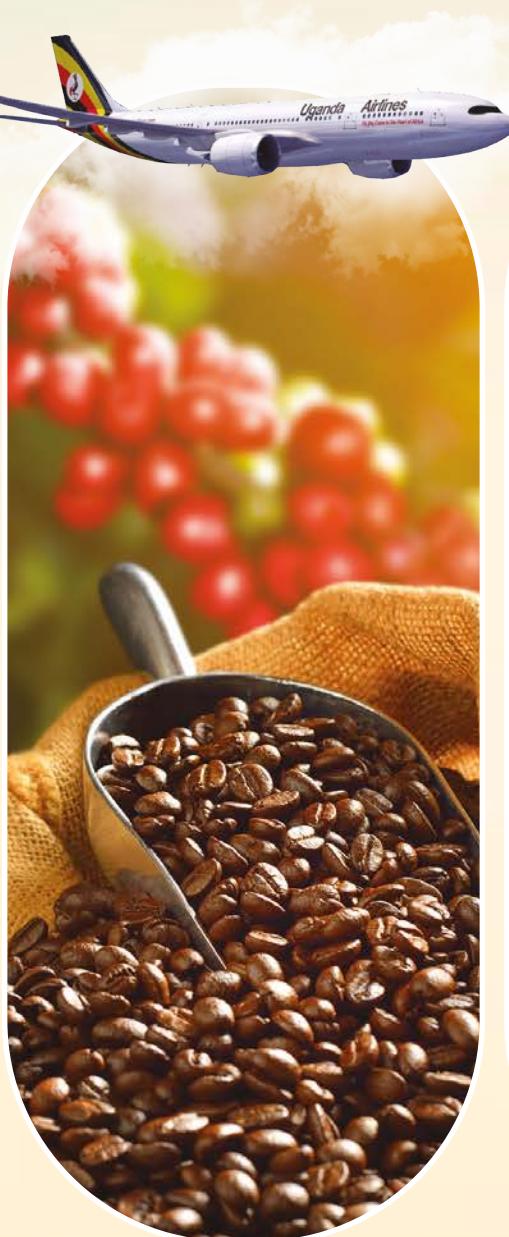
Ahilya Fort is one of those off-the-grid destinations that are bound to relax you and heal your soul, beckoning you to return.

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LATAM to launch London-Lima connection in December

The London-Lima route is scheduled to commence operations on December 02, 2023. This move is in line with the airline's strategic endeavours to augment its global footprint.

Vartik Sethi

Eduardo Patta, Sales Manager Asia, LATAM Airlines Group, was in India recently to meet the travel trade and showcase the airline and its network in South America. InterGlobe Air Transport, GSA for LATAM Airlines Group in India, organised a B2B workshop in New Delhi and Mumbai.

LATAM Airlines, with its expansive reach across 144 destinations in 23 countries, is steadily making headway in the business travel segment. Boasting a modern fleet of 320 aircraft that surpasses several European and American carriers, LATAM is an attractive proposition for businesses focusing on South America.

A key offering that stands out is the Air Pass, exclusive for international passengers travelling within South America. Pricing for this pass is mileage-based and ties in with the international carrier used to arrive in South America, with significant cost benefits when flying in on LATAM or Delta.

Adopting a branded fares system, LATAM offers flexibility to passengers. Depending on the attributes chosen, businesses can tailor their travel packages. Highlighting LATAM's



dedication to its trade partners, an exclusive LATAM trade portal, latamtrade.com, has been introduced, offering comprehensive details on commercial procedures, contingencies, and more.

Their network's strength lies in its connectivity. European cities such as London, Paris, Frankfurt, and Madrid link to LATAM's hub cities – São Paulo, Lima, and Santiago. This ensures seamless travel for businesses from Europe to the length and breadth of South America. Crucially, from India, LATAM offers interline connections via European cities, partnering with carriers like Air India, British Airways, and Virgin Atlantic.

Adding to its burgeoning route map, LATAM recently announced a new route, London to Lima, commencing from December 02, 2023, operated on a Boeing 787 with a total of 313 seats, combining both business and economy classes.

Eduardo emphasised the significance of the Indian market, stating, "We believe there is a huge potential in the Indian market." The airline operates in partnership with interlines for routes from India to Europe. With a focus on expanding their South America-US-Europe routes, they harness partnerships with airlines like Delta and Virgin to serve the Indian demographic.

Tourism Malaysia focuses on Golfing and Homestay

Tourism Malaysia New Delhi organised a golf and homestay presentation on October 20, 2023, at the Shangri-La Eros Hotel in New Delhi, which was well attended by professionals from the tourism trade and media.

Team TTJ



promote golfing in India as well as homestay packages for student groups and families.

Malaysia, according to Akmal Aziz, is a thriving and prominent golf destination with a long history. Golf aficionados can enjoy a broad selection of experiences with over 200 golf courses scattered around Peninsular Malaysia, as well as the islands of Penang, Langkawi, and Borneo. Malaysia provides stunning golf locations, ranging from championship-quality courses tucked in towering mountains to beachfront greens along the South China Sea.

There are options to fit every desire, whether it is playing in the chilly hills and tea plantations, in the heart of a bustling city, or within ancient rainforests. Additionally, the homestay program in Malaysia provides opportunities for school kids and families to immerse themselves in local culture by staying with registered host families in rural villages. It offers a unique experience to become a part of the family, learn their way of life, and even participate in agricultural activities like coconut farming, rubber farming, palm oil farming, and fruit farming.

The programme began with a welcome speech by Akmal Aziz, Deputy Director, Tourism Malaysia, New Delhi, followed by a golf presentation by Dato' Sahariman Hamdan, Chairman, Pahang Golf Association and Kampungstay Desa Murni, and a homestay presentation by Kairul Hakimin Bin Sahariman, Director, Kampungstay Desa Murni. The objective of these presentations was to



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Experience THE SACRED NARMADA PARIKRAMA WITH MADHYA PRADESH TOURISM!

In the tapestry of Hindu mythology, the Narmada River weaves a sacred narrative that transcends time. Born from the sweat of Lord Shiva's celestial dance (The Tandav), this mystical river embodies purity and spirituality. Often personified as the goddess Narmada, the water of the river is believed to cleanse the soul and wash away sins. As you embark on your journey along the banks of this revered river, you'll discover a profound connection between nature and spirituality, an experience that has beckoned pilgrims for generations. Welcome to the enchanting realm of the Narmada, where legends come to life: Welcome to Madhya Pradesh!

Are you ready to embark on a spiritual journey like no other? Madhya Pradesh Tourism invites you to join our exclusive 13 Night/14 Day Narmada Parikrama Tour Package, where you can traverse the holy banks of the Narmada River as it flows through the heart of Madhya Pradesh. Get ready for a soul-enriching adventure that will leave you with memories to cherish for a lifetime.

Destinations that Awaken the Soul

Our meticulously crafted Narmada Parikrama Tour will take you on a captivating voyage with 2 flexible itineraries including the following enchanting destinations.

Itinerary 1 (Jabalpur to Jabalpur) -
 Jabalpur – Amarkantak – Mandla – Karel –
 – Hoshangabad – Handia – Omkareshwar
 – Badwani – Rajpipla – Kathpor – Mithi Talai
 – Barodra – Jhabua – Maheshwar – Ujjain –
 Salkanpur – Budni – Jabalpur – Amarkantak
Itinerary 2 (Indore to Indore and Bhopal to Bhopal)
 Indore/Bhopal – Ujjain – Omkareshwar –
 Badwani – Rajpipla – Kathpor – Mithi Talai –
 Jhabua – Mandu – Maheshwar – Salkanpur –
 Jabalpur – Amarkantak – Mandla – Karel –
 Hoshangabad – Omkareshwar – Indore/Bhopal

Activities to Elevate Your Journey ---

Throughout the Narmada Parikrama Tour, Madhya Pradesh Tourism will facilitate a range of activities to enhance your experience:



Narmada Aarti: Witness the mesmerizing Narmada Aarti, a spiritual ritual that will leave you enchanted.

Boat Rides: Enjoy peaceful boat rides along the Narmada River, allowing you to connect with nature and spirituality.

Sightseeing: Explore all the major pilgrimages of Madhya Pradesh and immerse yourself in their sacredness.

Worship at Omkareshwar Temple: Seek blessings at the Omkareshwar Jyotirlinga Temple, a significant pilgrimage site.



Holy Dip: Take a dip in the purifying waters of the Narmada River and cleanse your soul.

Maheshwar Delight: Enjoy a sightseeing tour of Maheshwar, where history and spirituality blend seamlessly. Interact with Rehwa Society



of Weavers and buy authentic Maheshwari silk sarees.

Jabalpur City Tour: Discover the charm of Jabalpur and witness the stunning Kapildhara waterfalls.

Day Trip to Amarkantak: Visit the birthplace of the Narmada River and experience its spiritual significance.

Bhasma Aarti (Optional): Participate in the sacred Bhasma Aarti at the Mahakaleshwar Temple, a profound spiritual experience and a must-do for any spiritual devotee.

Tailored for All Age and Income Groups ---

Our Narmada Parikrama Tour is designed to cater to individuals of all age groups and income levels. Whether you're a seasoned traveler or embarking on your first spiritual journey, we ensure that this experience is accessible to all.

Comfortable Travel ---

Travel in style and comfort with our well-equipped semi-luxury AC and NAC buses and sports utility vehicles (Toyota Innova Crysta) that will take you comfortably from one destination to another, ensuring a hassle-free and enjoyable journey. Don't miss this unique opportunity to embark on a transformative spiritual journey along the sacred Narmada River. Join us on the Narmada Parikrama Tour and let the divinity of Madhya Pradesh's holy sites rejuvenate your soul. Reserve your spot today and prepare for an unforgettable adventure with Madhya Pradesh Tourism!

For booking contact:

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Kashmir introducing new destinations to cater to the surge of growing tourism

Ghulam Jeelani Zargar, CEO, Tourism Development Authority, Lolab-Bungus Drangyari, J&K, shares with TTJ the latest tourism development in Jammu and Kashmir.

Prashant Nayak

Jammu and Kashmir witnessed one crore tourist footfalls in 2022, creating a record. This has prompted the UT to promote 75 offbeat destinations at the start of this year. In August, they further earmarked another 75 tourist destinations to foster spiritual experiences in the region.

The government's efforts to promote lesser-known destinations have yielded substantial results with the coordinated efforts of all tourism stakeholders. Jeelani says, "In the last two years, we have received a tremendous response from tourists, and arrivals are breaking all records. Our major tourist attractions are getting crowded, and we wanted to divert the tourists and offer them new experiences. In Jammu and Kashmir, the iconic destinations of Pahalgam or Gulmarg, due to their popularity, are getting congested as well. Some of these new destinations are fresh, tourist-friendly, and people are experiencing the essence of beautiful nature in these destinations."

Jeelani has been travelling extensively across India and meeting tourism representatives and



▲ Ghulam Jeelani Zargar

stakeholders, but the one question he is always asked time and again is - Is Kashmir safe for

tourists? On this, Jeelani says, "Considering the huge rush of tourists, Kashmir has become one of the safest travel destinations in India. There is a positive change that we see, and there are no security concerns now. We are trying to mitigate all the concerns gradually with the help of the government. Kashmir was always famous, but this is a new Kashmir, and it is a completely new feeling."

Kashmir was earlier an ideal destination for foreign tourists, but the charm faded due to insurgencies. However, Jeelani says, "The G20 summit has had a significant positive impact on tourism in the area, and it has been a game changer. The capability of hosting the G20 summit in Srinagar will instil confidence among foreign tourists intending to visit the UT. We will be effectively marketing the event to our advantage on the global platform and hope that most of the foreign nations will gradually remove their advisory for the UT."

Vibrant Village Festival at Harsil Village, Uttarakhand, hailed as a success

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, in association with the Department of Horticulture, Tourism, Government of Uttarakhand, ITBP, organised a two-day Vibrant Village Festival from October 19-20, 2023, at Harsil, district Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand.

Team TTJ

Harsil Village is a hidden treasure for tourists. Its scenic beauty, cultural richness, adventure opportunities, pilgrimage significance, apple orchards, and homestay experiences make it a must-visit destination for those seeking an authentic and enriching travel experience in the lap of the Himalayas.

Delegates at the event were members from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India officials, tourism stakeholders, Yuva Tourism Clubs, and villagers of eight Vibrant Villages near Harsil. More than 600 people participated in the festival.

Local farmers displayed an array of apple varieties at stalls, and artisans displayed their handloom and handicraft items. An apple festival, in collaboration with the Horticulture

Department of Uttarakhand, was a major highlight. Mahila Mangal Dal Bagori organised a captivating cultural programme, showcasing the local culture and traditions. A group of 20 foreign tourists from Hungary and 12 tourists from Australia also participated in the event.

A workshop on the Yuva Tourism Club (YTC) was conducted at the festival. Yuva Tourism Club was formed by the government schools of Harsil, Dharali, Jhala, and Mukhwa. This educational programme aimed to engage the youth in promoting tourism and preserving the local heritage.

Sanjay Kumar, Tourist Information Officer, India Tourism Delhi, sensitised the locals regarding registration under the Homestay and B&B Establishment Scheme. Local youths were also sensitised about the Incredible India Tourist Facilitator Programme.



Tour operators, YouTubers, influencers (invited by IT Delhi), and India Tourism officials explored key villages like Harsil, Mukhwa, Dharali, Bagori, and Gangotri Dham. Opportunities for soft adventure activities, nature trails, and trekking routes were explored. Homestays, cafeterias, and local handicrafts and souvenirs were also searched for promotion on social media.

'India is witnessing a spectacular rise in spiritual tourism'

Sushil Kumar Singh, MD, Jatak Travels, says that with a plethora of spiritual and religious destinations in the country, the pilgrimage segment is going to get bigger than ever before!

Prashant Nayak

Jatak Travels is a pioneer in authentic spiritual tour organising and caters to the real needs of spiritual tourists in India and abroad. India's Buddhist heritage is not only important from the tourism point of view but is also a binding factor that strengthens its relationship with Asian countries. Sushil Kumar Singh says, "Jatak Travels is based on Buddhist and spiritual tourism. This is our USP. Our 80 per cent market is inbound, and 20 per cent domestic. The majority of our clients are from Southeast Asia and European countries."

Being based in Varanasi, Jatak Travels has several innovative tour itineraries in and around the ancient city, which will certainly satisfy the spiritual hunger of any Hindu traveller. Also known as Banaras or Kashi, Varanasi has limitless treasures to explore and observe and the power to reenergise the mind, body, and soul. For those seeking a transformative journey, Bodh Gaya in Bihar offers an enchanting experience as one dives deep into the ancient roots of Buddhism.



▲ Sushil Kumar Singh

Travellers can also look forward to witnessing the divine spectacle of Magh Mela or Ardh Kumbh Mela in Allahabad. Jatak Travels is committed

to offering the best assistance to explore all these paths of religious, spiritual, and historical significance.

"Pilgrimages are a way of finding spiritual solace, expressing gratitude, and having a chance to connect with the great outdoors, too. Since the onset of the pandemic, many of us have spent more time close to nature for psychological recovery, spiritual recharge, and as a form of meaningful travel," asserts Sushil Kumar.

As India awaits its inbound tourists in large numbers, Sushil Kumar says, "This year, inbound travel has fairly recovered, but not unlike pre-pandemic times. The ongoing adverse situations like rising airfares, wars, and visa issues are not supporting inbound growth. So, it will take a year or more to recover fully. However, spiritual tourism is a new trend among young travellers, and we should get more footfalls in 2024. The segment has the potential to grow tremendously, and there will be a spectacular rise in spiritual tourism in the country."

Proactive government support boosting Punjab's tourism industry

Punjab has a very small pie of inbound tourists compared to Rajasthan or Kerala. However, Manmeet Singh, Director, Sky High Tours & Travels and Chairman, IATO Punjab Chapter, is happy with the fact that in the last decade, the small pie of inbound tourists has increased by 30 per cent and the state stands poised to become a prominent tourist destination.

Prashant Nayak

Home to the humble and amazingly welcoming Sikh community and embezzled with Gurudwaras and greenery, Punjab is a promising tourist destination. Manmeet says, "Punjab has its niche, and every state should have its own. However, when tourists experience and explore a particular state, along with the local offerings, they should feel the essence of India. In Punjab, other than Amritsar, which is famous for the Golden Temple, there are a plethora of enticing destinations in the state. As an agricultural state, rural and rustic experiences are a must for travellers while in Punjab. The state is also giving impetus to rural tourism concepts like homestays and farm stays and promoting wetlands for eco-tourism. We want people to experience the earthiness of Punjab with its tradition, culture, hospitality, and most importantly, the food, which is mouthwatering."



▲ Manmeet Singh

According to Manmeet, the recently organised Punjab Tourism Summit has offered a major push to the state's tourism industry. He explains, "The Punjab government has become very proactive, and we are lucky to

be a part of it at this juncture. The government is helping us immensely in promoting Punjab. The recent Punjab Tourism Summit and Mart was a mega event. Along with deliberations and discussions to see tourism grow in Punjab, the event hosted a large number of buyers and sellers, not only from India but from all major countries. It has created a huge impact and will give a good impetus to the travel industry as deals materialise."

Inbound travellers have a stipulated time, and they are on the lookout to explore the best within the time frame. Manmeet says, "While Punjab gets its fair inbound share, we still need to inform and share more about the unexplored and new touristic offerings of Punjab and incorporate them into our itineraries. This way, they will tend to stay in the state longer rather than exploring the neighbouring states, which is being done at present."



Peru Beyond Machu Picchu

PROMPERU's recent media briefing highlighted the blossoming travel synergy between Peru and India. The two nations celebrate six decades of diplomacy by keenly fostering their tourism relationship by initiating free trade and educating the trade on their diverse tourism and cultural offerings.

Vartik Sethi

In a high-profile media briefing hosted by PROMPERU, key stakeholders convened to spotlight the burgeoning travel ties between Peru and India. Leading the roster of dignitaries were His Excellency Javier Paulinich Velarde, Ambassador of Peru to India; Magali Rodriguez, Tourism Specialist from the Sub Directorate of Promotion of Incoming Tourism; and Luis Miguel Cabello, the esteemed Trade Counsellor of Peru in India.

At the commencement of the event, Velarde emphasised the profound diplomatic bond between the two nations, "This year, we are celebrating 60 years of diplomatic relations between Peru and India, and we are organising several activities to commemorate this milestone." He noted, "The most significant activity is that we have just resumed discussions on the free trade agreements in both countries."

In the years leading up to the pandemic, there was a marked growth in the number of Indian tourists visiting Peru, rising from a mere 1,500 to a staggering 10,000. Cabello acknowledges that, while this number might seem minuscule compared to India's vast population, it's the quality of these travellers that stands out. Indians are keen on new experiences and often have higher spending patterns, making them a key target for Peru's tourism sector.

Peru promises a diverse range of experiences for tourists. In places like Cusco, visitors can immerse themselves in local culture, from tasting the cuisine to engaging with the local community. Activities such as collecting potatoes at farms, knitting with alpaca fibre, and partaking in local festivals like the Sun-Festival at Cusco are just a few examples

of the rich cultural tapestry awaiting Indian tourists. Magali added, "We offer tourists the opportunity to be part of our cuisine. They can learn how to prepare dishes like ceviche, our national delicacy. This immersive experience fosters a deeper connection with our culture."

Post-pandemic, Peru has set an ambitious target, aiming to see 50 per cent growth in Indian tourists next year. For Cabello, India is firmly back on the Peruvian map. He believes iconic destinations like Machu Picchu are high on the bucket list for many Indians. In fact, Peru plans to participate in several international tourism shows, thereby increasing visibility in the Indian market.

Indians are keen on new experiences and often have higher spending patterns, making them a key target for Peru's tourism sector

The potential spending capacity of Indian tourists is another driving factor. With projections suggesting that Indian travellers will be the globe's biggest tourism spenders, Cabello said, "We anticipate that by 2025, Indian travellers will spend upwards of \$42 billion on overseas travel. Even a fraction of that directed towards Peru would significantly bolster our tourism sector."

Addressing Travel Trade Journal's question at the event, Cabello spoke about flight connectivity being a crucial factor for boosting tourism. Currently, Indian travellers prefer routes via Doha or Dubai or through European

hubs like Amsterdam and Milan, given the visa conveniences. While there are no direct flights yet, the potential for future direct or reduced stop routes is being explored, potentially enhancing the ease of travel.

Magali outlined the varied interests of Indian travellers when visiting Peru. From honeymoon trips and family holidays to adventures and cultural explorations, there's something for every traveller. A keen interest in Peruvian gastronomy has also been observed among Indian tourists, as they are eager to delve deeper into the flavours of Peru beyond just hearing about them.

While Machu Picchu remains a significant attraction, Magali emphasised the importance of exploring the diversity of Peruvian destinations, from the history-laden streets of Cusco, where one can touch walls built 600 years ago, to the stunning Nazca lines, a marvel that leaves tourists and locals amazed.

When questioned about the possibility of expanding roadshows to Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities in India, Cabello acknowledged that while the current focus is on major cities, the plan is to extend their reach in the future. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a renewed interest in forging stronger business and tourism ties. Cabello highlighted that the present collaboration involves both the public and private sectors, all working in tandem to optimise budgets and opportunities.

As for the much-anticipated direct flights between India and Peru, it remains contingent on several factors. Cabello indicated that once bilateral business ties flourish further, facilitated by ongoing negotiations and agreements, the introduction of direct flights will become a viable reality.



Berlin, the ever-evolving metropolis of Europe

In a recent presentation held against the backdrop of the growing buzz in the global travel sector, Ralf Ostendorf, Director of Market Management, Visit Berlin, shed light on what makes Berlin stand out in the European landscape.

Vartik Sethi

The vibrant city of Berlin, according to Ralf Ostendorf, Director of Market Management, Visit Berlin remains emblematic of the mantra, "life is for living." It beckons visitors to immerse in the present, to "enjoy the moment." Ostendorf underscored Berlin's uniqueness by delineating its ever-evolving character. Unlike other German cities, Berlin is often seen as the "city of contrast." Boasting 12 distinct districts, each with its own unique vibe, Berlin is in a constant state of reinvention.

Dr. Stephan Hesseleemann, Minister Counsellor and Deputy Head of Department, Economic & Global Affairs, German Embassy in New Delhi, shared his insights on India's burgeoning tourism industry and its economic trajectory.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. Hesseleemann commended India for its remarkable tourism potential, which he observed to be complemented by its impressive economic growth. Recognising the opportunities for bilateral tourism and cultural exchange, he extended a gracious invitation to Indian tourists, urging them to explore the rich tapestry of experiences that Germany offers.

Berlin's rich history, especially events from 35 years ago, is palpable in its streets. As Ostendorf remarked, Berlin is indeed "the city of freedom." It's a freedom not only rooted in politics but also in personal expression. In Berlin, individuality is not only tolerated but celebrated.

Highlighting Berlin's multicultural fabric, Ostendorf emphasized the city's growing Indian community – the largest in Germany.

Such growth isn't merely a consequence of business prospects, but also due to Berlin's prestigious universities and the influx of global companies like Tesla.

Tourism for sports aficionados next year promises to be electrifying. With Berlin hosting eight games, including the final of the Euro 24 European soccer championship, it is poised to become the sport's epicentre.

Visitors are encouraged to savour all Berlin has to offer, and as they return, they discover that their experiences were, in fact, sustainable

Berlin is not just a feast for the eyes but also the palate. The city's culinary scene is a reflection of its diverse populace. Ostendorf stated that the city continually reinvents its gastronomic offerings. From Michelin-starred restaurants to the more traditional tastes, there's a dish for every discerning diner. On

the sustainability front, Berlin adopts a more subtle approach. Visitors are encouraged to savour all Berlin has to offer, and as they return, they discover that their experiences were, in fact, sustainable.

Romit Theophilus, the Director of Sales & Marketing, German National Tourist Office in India, shared Germany's triumph over the pandemic slowdown. He shared that the country hosted approximately 643,000 Indian tourists in the previous year, reaching about 60 per cent of the figures from 2019. In a further breakdown, he mentioned that the country had already seen around 500,000 visitors from India until July of this year. This figure equates to around 45 per cent of the numbers seen during pre-pandemic times. Germany is sure to pass its 2022 numbers and looks to grow exponentially over the next five years.

Ostendorf underscored the importance of fostering better connectivity to Berlin. Direct flights, he mentioned, remain a priority. As for Berlin, the future remains as promising as its illustrious past. The director signed off with an invitation to all, stating, "Let the party begin."



India's rapid rise as San Francisco's booming source market

The San Francisco Travel Association and San Francisco International Airport (SFO) recently conducted a joint Sales Mission to showcase San Francisco's potential as the key gateway to the U.S. West Coast. Kevin Bumen, SFO's Chief Financial Commercial Officer, and Hubertus Funke, the Executive Vice President and Chief Tourism Officer at San Francisco Travel, highlighted their focus on the burgeoning Indian market.

Prativa Vaidya Bhalla

India ranks as San Francisco's third-largest international visitor market, with 158,000 arrivals. With an expected 34 percent growth and a remarkable 63 per cent increase in spending, India stands out as one of the most rapidly expanding source markets. The travel sector in Asia is experiencing a distinct phase of recovery, and while Japan and Taiwan exhibit robust rebounds, India outperforms all markets in this recovery. Indian visitors often have extended stays and higher expenditures, making them a valuable market segment. Business travellers are incorporating leisure activities into their trips, a trend commonly referred to as 'Bleisure', adding to the length of stay.

In 2019, San Francisco received a notable influx of 210,000 visitors from India, contributing significantly to the local economy with a spending of \$497 million. Projections indicate that by the end of 2023, India is poised to reclaim its position as the first overseas market to reach this level with an expected 211,000 visitors. Despite its relative newness, India's performance in the market sets it apart from well-established European and Asian markets, showcasing its exceptional potential.

Kevin stated, "SF Airport serves approximately 1,100 passengers daily, commuting between San Francisco and India, encompassing all airlines. Air India recently expanded its network to include Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, doubling the weekly flights from 9 to 17 and increasing seating capacity from 2,142 to 4,396." Daily passengers from India to the San Francisco Bay Area have risen by 186 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels in the first half of this year. Air India sees tremendous growth potential in Ahmedabad and Chennai.

San Francisco offers a wide array of experiences, encompassing arts and culture, shopping, culinary offerings, and sports while consistently introducing new attractions to enhance its appeal. Hubertus said, "San Francisco will witness the



▲ Kevin Bumen



▲ Hubertus Funke

opening of five new hotels in 2023. These include notable properties like LUMA Hotel, 1 Hotel San Francisco, The Line SF, and Beacon Grand." The 2023 Michelin Guide California has awarded Michelin stars to 27 restaurants in San Francisco. Among the 87 California restaurants recognised with Michelin stars, 50 are situated in the San Francisco Bay Area, further establishing Northern California's status as a top-tier culinary destination. The city is known for its scenic beauty and abundant green spaces, including the newly developed Presidio Tunnel Tops, a remarkable addition to the national park space. The recently completed Central Subway now connects Chinatown, downtown San Francisco, and the vicinity of the sustainable Chase Centre, establishing ease of connectivity.

The San Francisco Bay Area houses a substantial Indian heritage population, presenting great potential for innovation, fostering business connections, and facilitating technology and education exchanges to the benefit of both regions. Notably, San Francisco currently hosts 11 of the top 20 AI research centres, underscoring the city's strong commitment to AI innovation. The Mayor, the Bay Area

Council, and a Silicon Valley consortium are actively driving AI innovation initiatives across the wider San Francisco Bay Area, indicating promising opportunities ahead.

San Francisco places core emphasis on sustainability, targeting net-zero carbon emissions by 2040 across various industries. The city runs the greenest public transportation fleet in North America, a premier LEED Platinum convention centre, and the world's first entirely LEED Platinum-certified airport. Furthermore, San Francisco spearheads the autonomous vehicle revolution, with self-driving electric taxi services available round-the-clock, providing an exciting addition to the city's transportation choices. These endeavours have established new industry benchmarks and solidified San Francisco's global leadership in sustainability.

Hubertus concluded, "San Francisco has a longstanding reputation for being a culturally welcoming city, and this characteristic remains one of its strengths. The city's vibrant cultural scene, culinary arts, and rich history reflect its deep commitment to diversity and inclusivity. Embracing diversity is a key objective for the city, echoing its historical legacy."

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TTJ TRAVMART - Indore Highlights the Market's Business Potential

Indore, the buzzing business capital of Madhya Pradesh, played host to the TTJ TRAVMART - Indore 2023 at the Sayaji Hotel on October 14, 2023.

The event received a warm reception, drawing around 135 pre-registered buyers from Indore and nearby cities, as well as outstation buyers from Bhopal, Gwalior, Ratlam, Dewas, and Ujjain.

Tourism Malaysia, Sharjah Tourism, and Gold Sponsor Rajasthan Tourism showcased their offerings and product portfolios, accompanied by a delegation of 18 exhibitors. These exhibitors encompassed a variety of sectors, including hotels, DMCs, air ticket consolidators, and travel technology.

Rajasthan Tourism presented its comprehensive tourism portfolio and showcased the state's diverse tourism offerings and latest developments to a large audience of travel industry stakeholders at TRAVMART.

The event was supported by leading travel industry associations, such as TAAI, IATO, ADTOI, and TAFI. It was attended by senior officials of TAAI, including Hemendra Singh Jadon, Chapter Chairman MP and Chhattisgarh, and Amit Navlani, Hon. Secretary.

Mahendra Singh Bhagel, Chapter Chairman IATO, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, extended his special greetings and best wishes for the event's success, from Bhopal. His sentiments were conveyed through his designated representative and esteemed industry colleague, Dr Basant Kumar Ochani. Furthermore, he expressed his hope for the possibility of hosting a comparable event in Bhopal next year.

The management team of TTJ TRAVMART presented mementos to the senior officials of associations in attendance at the event and to the representatives of Tourism Malaysia, Sharjah and Rajasthan Tourism.

The evening was marked by productive business networking and was also the perfect occasion to celebrate India's resounding cricket triumph over Pakistan in the ongoing World Cup. The live telecast of the match was displayed on the expansive LED wall at the venue.

Lucky winners from the audience had the opportunity to secure fantastic prizes such as international travel packages, hotel accommodations, guided tours and smartwatches.



Noriah Jaafar

Director Tourism Malaysia - Mumbai

"One should definitely participate in the next TTJ TRAVMART and explore all the new opportunities and networking avenues provided through the TTJ platform in various tier-2 and tier-3 cities."



Vikas Gupta

Director, IDMC World

"We have participated in TTJ TRAVMART for the very first time and it has been a wonderful experience for us."



Hemendra Singh Jadon

Chapter Chairman, TAAI Madhya Pradesh & Chhattisgarh

"TTJ's consistent effort in organising roadshows in tier-2 cities is indeed commendable. It is a great opportunity for tier-2 city agents to interact with different DMCs, tourism boards and suppliers. These interactions boost agents' confidence and enable them to sell products more effectively. Kudos to TTJ for their ongoing initiatives, and best wishes for their future endeavours."





Dr Basant Kumar Ochani

CEO, Travel Club - Indore Malaysia - Mumbai

"This event serves as an excellent platform for travel industry professionals to gather, exchange experiences, and gain valuable insights. I extend my best wishes to TTJ and hope to see more of TTJ TRAVMART in Indore in the future."

Amit Navlani

Secretary TAAI, MP, and Chhattisgarh Chapter

"TTJ TRAVMART consistently brings innovation to the forefront by introducing new vendors, destinations, products, and people to the local travel markets. TTJ TRAVMART has done a remarkable job here in Indore."





Sandeep Shrivastava

Additional Director - Rajasthan Tourism

We are here at TTJ TRAVMART Indore to share extensive product knowledge and updates with the travel community in Indore and throughout Madhya Pradesh. The event is witnessing a remarkable turnout of agents, many of whom are enthusiastic about exploring Rajasthan. We applaud TTJ for organising such a successful event.





TRAVMART

2023

DEC

02

AHMEDABAD

2024



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20

PUNE

MAR

16

RAIPUR

APR

12/13

LUCKNOW

JUN

28-30

SITM

SOUTH INDIA TRAVMART (CHENNAI)

JUL

12/13

CHANDIGARH

SEP

20-22

EITM

EAST INDIA TRAVMART (KOLKATA)

DEC

14/15

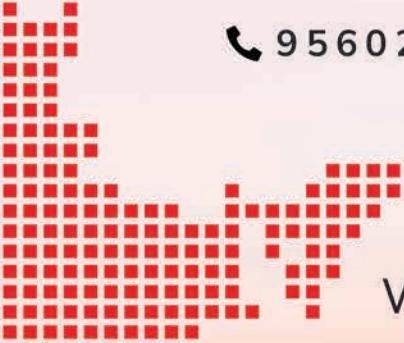
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ravisharma@sampanmedia.com

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The 38th IATO Annual Convention

A collective pursuit of travel trade excellence

The 38th IATO Annual Convention took place at Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra, from September 29 to October 2, 2023, and was an incredible opportunity to showcase Aurangabad's rich heritage and culture to the delegates. It is now anticipated to be a game changer for the local tourism industry and help enhance the arrivals of domestic and international tourists in and around Sambhajinagar in the future.

Prashant Nayak

The 38th IATO Annual Convention was held in the beautiful city of Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar (Aurangabad) in Maharashtra.

While the majestic Ajanta Caves and Ellora Caves were on everybody's minds, The WelcomHotel by ITC Hotels Rama International provided a befitting backdrop for this significant convention and its activities.

The inaugural function saw classical Maharashtrian dance performances, followed by remarkable speeches from Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, and the other esteemed dignitaries, such as Ambadas Eknathrao Danve, Leader of Opposition, Maharashtra Legislative Council; Rakesh Kumar Verma, Additional Secretary,

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; and Radhika Rastogi, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Cultural Affairs Department, Government of Maharashtra.

Danve expressed delight at IATO's choosing Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar city for the annual convention. With a rich history and culture, there are many more offerings that tourists can explore. He said he was hopeful that the convention would boost tourist arrivals in the city once again. The IATO Hall of Fame Awards were presented to Nakul Anand, Executive Director, ITC Hotels, and the veteran Syed Salimuddin, Director, Aurangabad Transport Syndicate, for their outstanding contribution to the tourism industry.

The second day saw high anticipation

with an estimated 900 delegates from across India, including IATO members, government officials, state representatives, industry leaders, hospitality professionals, and travel trade media. This strong presence made the business sessions a valuable knowledge-sharing opportunity.

The convention theme, "Inbound Tourism and Emerging Sustainable Trends," highlighted the increasing focus on eco-friendly practices in the tourism sector. Discussions and sessions delved into sustainable tourism practices, aiming to shape the future of travel. Further, this gathering of expertise set the stage for significant discussions and collaborations, sharing insights on the way forward and shaping the future of Indian tourism.

The 38th IATO Convention saw delegates from all over the country in powerful and knowledgeable sessions. During the two days of business sessions, experts from various fields like airlines, hotels, travel technology, tour operators, cruises, state tourism boards, etc., led discussions on pressing matters affecting the tourism industry. Their insights and solutions will definitely contribute to shaping the future of travel in India. With the changing landscape and continuous growth of the



business travel industry, keeping oneself updated with the latest developments and trends is vital. Sessions such as Sustainability: Strategy and Emerging Trends, Connectivity: New Dimensions, Air, Rail, and Road: The New Era of Cruise Tourism, River Tourism and Coastal Tourism, and State Tourism: Synergies for Success were inspiring and eye-opening.

A significant focus of the convention was to strengthen collaborations between state governments and IATO. Various states are eager to promote and revive inbound tourism in their regions. The participation of around 15 states highlighted the growing interest in boosting tourism across India. Each state presentation further gave an insight into the unique experiences they behold in Incredible India.

From enlightening business sessions, to memorable award sessions, to the invigorating IATO Run and delightful evening programmes, it has been an absolute success at the 38th IATO Annual Convention. The convention concluded seamlessly under the capable leadership of Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, and Rajnish Kaistha, Senior Vice President of IATO. Kaistha took on the role of IATO Convention Chairman, and assisting him were Sanjay Razdan, Honorary Secretary, and Jitendra Kejriwal, Chairman, IATO



Maharashtra Chapter, serving as Co-Chairman. Jaswant Singh, a local IATO member from Aurangabad, clearly ensured seamless coordination as the Convention Coordinator.

Five post-convention tours were organised, covering places like Lonar, Nashik, Shirdi, etc., allowing attendees to explore and experience different regions in this part of Maharashtra. After the tours, IATO submitted the feedback of the members who visited the heritage sites in and around Aurangabad to the tourism authorities. Rajiv Mehra suggested that a single-window ticketing system at the Ajanta Caves will boost footfalls, as tourists currently have to buy tickets for parking, at the T-point entrance, shuttle bus boarding,

and monument entry. At Ellora, the tourism body has suggested capping tourist visits per day.

Mehra also noted that the state ought to focus on road infrastructure. "Though the Samruddhi Motorway is taking shape, roads connecting various tourist places and monuments with the motorway need a major revamp. The roads near monuments should be wide and pothole-free," he said. IATO has also unveiled its plans to promote the "triangle" of Shirdi, Nashik, and Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, along with various other alluring tourist destinations scattered throughout Maharashtra and other religious destinations, to attract more tourists.



Rajnish Kaistha
Senior VP, IATO, and Convention Chairman



Jitendra Kejriwal
Chairman, IATO Maharashtra Chapter
Convention Co-Chairman



Sudhir Patil
Chairman, Veena World

"I was glad that this convention was not only a knowledge takeaway for our members, but they enjoyed it immensely as well. Our conventions are certainly getting better every year. The theme of the convention, which revolved around sustainability, was very important this time because, in the future, it will play a bigger role, and our members very much understand this aspect. Most of the foreign operators abroad advocate sustainability, and they want to reduce carbon footprints, plastic waste, etc. As inbound players, most of our members are either aware of this factor or are getting to know it through IATO.

"The 38th IATO Annual Convention has been a good platform for propelling destination Aurangabad, which retains its cultural flavour. The early charm of this ancient city was beginning to fade, and we at IATO were keen to revive and retain the charm of this old city. However, our work does not end here. We are trying our best to maximise the tourist potential of the region and get Aurangabad back on the map. We will work towards showcasing the destination by introducing the city once again in our itineraries and packages. It will take time for inbound tourists to come in, but they will definitely be there. In the meantime, we will also need government support on this from time to time.

"I am very happy to know that Maharashtra Tourism has taken the lead in presenting this convention and am glad to be here. Maharashtra has huge potential for domestic as well as inbound travel, and this convention will open many doors to make the state a prominent destination in the country. I think the convention was very professionally managed and has also been effective in connecting with the members through the various business sessions, panel discussions, and networking. Also, there were many learnings for me to take home as well."

India shines at Tourism Expo Japan 2023, showcases its tourism potential

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, formidably strengthened its presence with the Incredible India Pavilion at the Tourism Expo held in Osaka, Japan, from October 25-29, 2023. Besides the Ministry of Tourism, Tamil Nadu Tourism, Rajasthan Tourism, Goa Tourism, Bihar Tourism, Uttar Pradesh Tourism, Sikkim Tourism, and IRCTC also showcased their offerings at the ninth edition of the Expo. The intention to attend the Expo was to develop new strategies and chalk out new plans for tourism ties with Japan. The Incredible India Pavilion was graced by various Japanese ministers. The Indian delegation had many business meetings with the leading travel agencies such as JTB and tour operator associations of JATA, JTB, etc.

"We were aware that the Japanese market was open for Indian tourism products, but knowledge of Indian destinations was limited, which needed addressing; hence, we had remarkable

Indian participation there. We also had meaningful and fruitful interactions and engagements with our Japanese counterparts and will continue the engagements through different activities such as webinars, seminars, and familiarisation trips. We have extended our invitation to them to visit India and explore our diverse tourism products. So, in totality, our participation at the event was highly satisfactory," said Roshan Thomas, Director, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Tejashwi Yadav, Deputy Chief Minister of Bihar, led the Bihar Tourism delegation and unveiled the state's new global tourism policy during an interaction with the Bihar diaspora in Tokyo. Abhay Kumar Singh (IAS), Secretary of the Department of Tourism, and Nand Kishor, Managing Director of the Bihar State Tourism Corporation, were part of the delegation.

Gayatri Rathore (IAS), Principal Secretary; Sumita Singh, Joint Director; Sumita Saroch; and Dilip Singh, Deputy Director from Rajasthan Tourism, informed the Japanese travel industry representatives about the USP of Rajasthan tourism and its offerings, including the iconic Palace on Wheels.

Sanjay Goel (IAS), Secretary Tourism, Government of Goa, was seen addressing the media persons at the expo. The state is now diversifying tourism by inviting tourists to the Hinterlands and has recently launched the Homestay and Caravan Tourism Policy.

The Tamil Nadu Tourism delegation was led by the Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, Tamil Nadu, K. Ramachandran, and Dr. K. Manivasan, IAS, Principal Secretary, Tourism, Culture, and Religious Endowments Department, and Chairman, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation. The state was conferred the Executive Committee Award for the Mannar Eco-Tourism Project. The state has established eco-tourism sites within the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, highlighting specific ecosystems like mangroves, coral reefs, and more.





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Fortune Hotels enters Aligarh with Fortune Park Aligarh

Set to be the city's favourite go-to place, Fortune Park Aligarh offers 65 well-appointed, stylish rooms featuring chic interiors and a contemporary setting. Top-of-the-line amenities, an array of F&B outlets, lavish event spaces and a dedicated hotel team make sure to make every guest stay special.

For city residents, looking to appease their taste buds a visit to Zodiac, the all-day dining multi-cuisine restaurant is a must. Those looking to celebrate, cheer or simply unwind with family and friends can plan to head to Nakshatra the stunning soon-to-open, rooftop restaurant that is set beside the swimming pool along with a trendy discotheque, pegged to be the first in the city.

Additionally, the hotel features large multifaceted banquet spaces, state-of-the-art facilities, a dedicated events team, lip-smacking gourmet options, and tailor-made services to make every event a success. With a capacity to host up to 500 guests, the hotel transforms into a perfect destination for small weddings, company off-sites, social events, celebrations, conferences and more.

Located on the Grand Trunk Road just off the RTO office and well connected with via the upcoming Noida International Airport by Aligarh – Palwal Road the hotel offers easy access to the iconic Aligarh Muslim University, the industrial belt and prominent tourist attractions like Jama Masjid, Aligarh Clock Tower, and Khereshwar Mandir.



Thailand waives tourist visas for India, Taiwan and Russia

Thailand is extending a temporary visa exemption for tourists from India, Taiwan and Russia as part of the government's quick-win policy to boost tourism during the high season.

For Indian and Taiwanese citizens, they will be granted a temporary visa exemption for a 30-day stay for tourism purposes in Thailand, effective from November 10 until May 10, 2024.

From today until April 30, 2024, holders of Russian passports or travel documents will be entitled to a tourist visa exemption for a 90-day stay in Thailand, up from the original 30 days.

The latest stimulus visa schemes for tourists from India, Taiwan and Russia followed the temporary tourist visa exemption implemented for tourists from China and Kazakhstan, effective from September 25, 2023, to February 29, 2024.

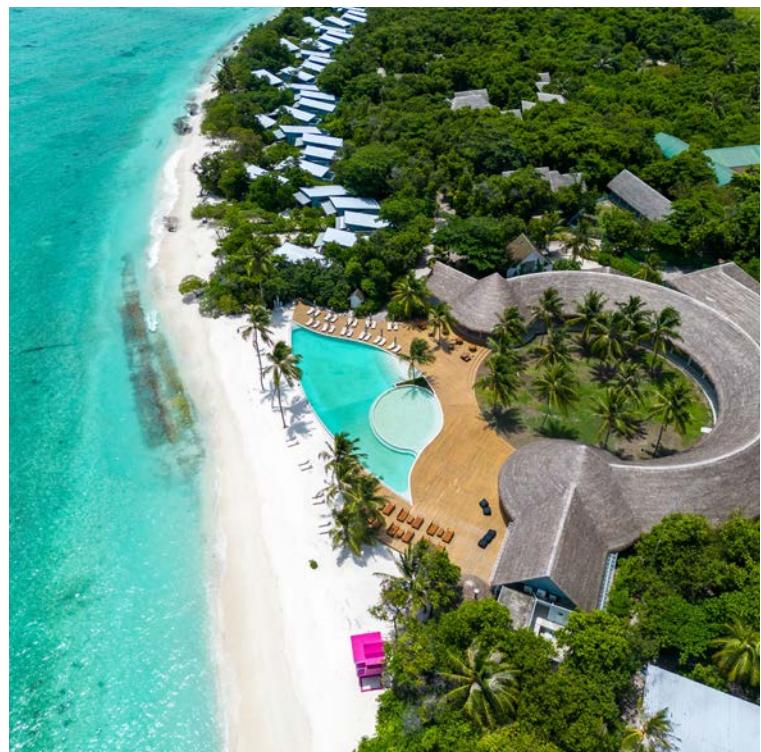


Ifuru Island Maldives appoints Black Turtle as its India Representative

Ifuru Island, Maldives, is an exhilarating new luxury resort where every moment is magical and adventures are sensational. It is an independent, private sanctuary that promises the first and only permanent skydiving dropzone in the Maldives. Ifuru Island made its enchanting debut in September 2023 and is nestled in Raa Atoll, a well-kept secret in the Maldives.

With 147 sunset beach suites and villas providing stunning sunset views, Ifuru Island offers an array of opportunities for guests to experience their dream holiday. The resort boasts four bars and six exquisite dining establishments that redefine luxury in the Maldives. Guests can indulge in a premium all-inclusive package and enjoy carefully curated amenities that exceed expectations.

At Ifuru Island, guests can create lasting memories filled with laughter, breathtaking sunsets, and total immersion in this tropical paradise. The resort is built on four pillars: Social, Fun, Lifestyle, and Great Value, fostering a vibrant and social atmosphere to make every moment unforgettable. It's time to uncover the captivating charm of Ifuru Island, a hidden gem waiting to be explored.





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Foreign tourists to get easy permits for restricted and protected area in three North East states

Earlier, obtaining Restricted Area Permits (RAP) or Protected Area Permits (PAP) was challenging for foreigners visiting North East border states like Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Nagaland. However, the Indian government has significantly eased these restrictions to promote tourism in the North East. According to Anil Oraw, the Union Ministry of Tourism's Regional Director in North East, these permits are now more accessible, with very few rejections.

Foreign travellers can visit these states through organised tours, which must be arranged by local tour operators based in the respective state. While the process has become more streamlined, travellers are advised to apply early to ensure a smooth experience.

In addition, the Indian government is planning to open up border areas to tourism, allowing visitors to explore regions near the China and Myanmar borders. This initiative aims to create more opportunities for the local population and stimulate economic activities in these areas.



Air Canada resumes seasonal daily service between Mumbai and Toronto

Air Canada has resumed its daily seasonal service between Mumbai and Toronto, operating via London Heathrow until March 16, 2024. This route marks Air Canada's third service from India and complements the airline's existing year-round services from Delhi to Toronto and Montreal.

The resumed service between Mumbai and Toronto will be operated with state-of-the-art Boeing 787-9 aircraft, accommodating 298 passengers, with a choice of three classes of service: Economy, Premium Economy, and Air Canada Signature Class, which offers customers superior comfort and convenience in an exclusive cabin, with spacious lie-flat seating, personalised service, fine cuisine, extra baggage allowance and access to priority airport services. All flights are timed to optimize connections with Air Canada's extensive North American network. Seats are available for booking at [aircanada.com](#), via the Air Canada App, Air Canada's Contact Centres and travel agencies. Seats are available for sale now at [aircanada.com](#), via the Air Canada App, Air Canada's Contact Centres, and travel agents.



Malaysia Airlines offers free Wi-Fi across all classes

Malaysia Airlines will provide unlimited complimentary Wi-Fi service to all passengers travelling on selected widebody aircraft, regardless of cabin class or loyalty tier, beginning November 01, 2023.

The service initially will be available on 20 selected widebody aircraft and subsequently, will be rolled out on selected narrowbody aircraft in phases.

This enhancement follows the airline's complimentary in-flight Wi-Fi offering introduced on July 01, 2023, for Business Suite and Business Class passengers, as well as Enrich Platinum members, including those seated in Economy Class, with a data cap of 100 MB per sector.

With this new enhanced offering, passengers, including those travelling in Economy Class and non-Enrich members, will no longer be required to subscribe to the airline's pay-per-use Wi-Fi. Passengers can simply connect their devices to the

'MHconnect' network to enjoy the airline's free in-flight Wi-Fi to keep in touch with their loved ones or for browsing the internet.





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