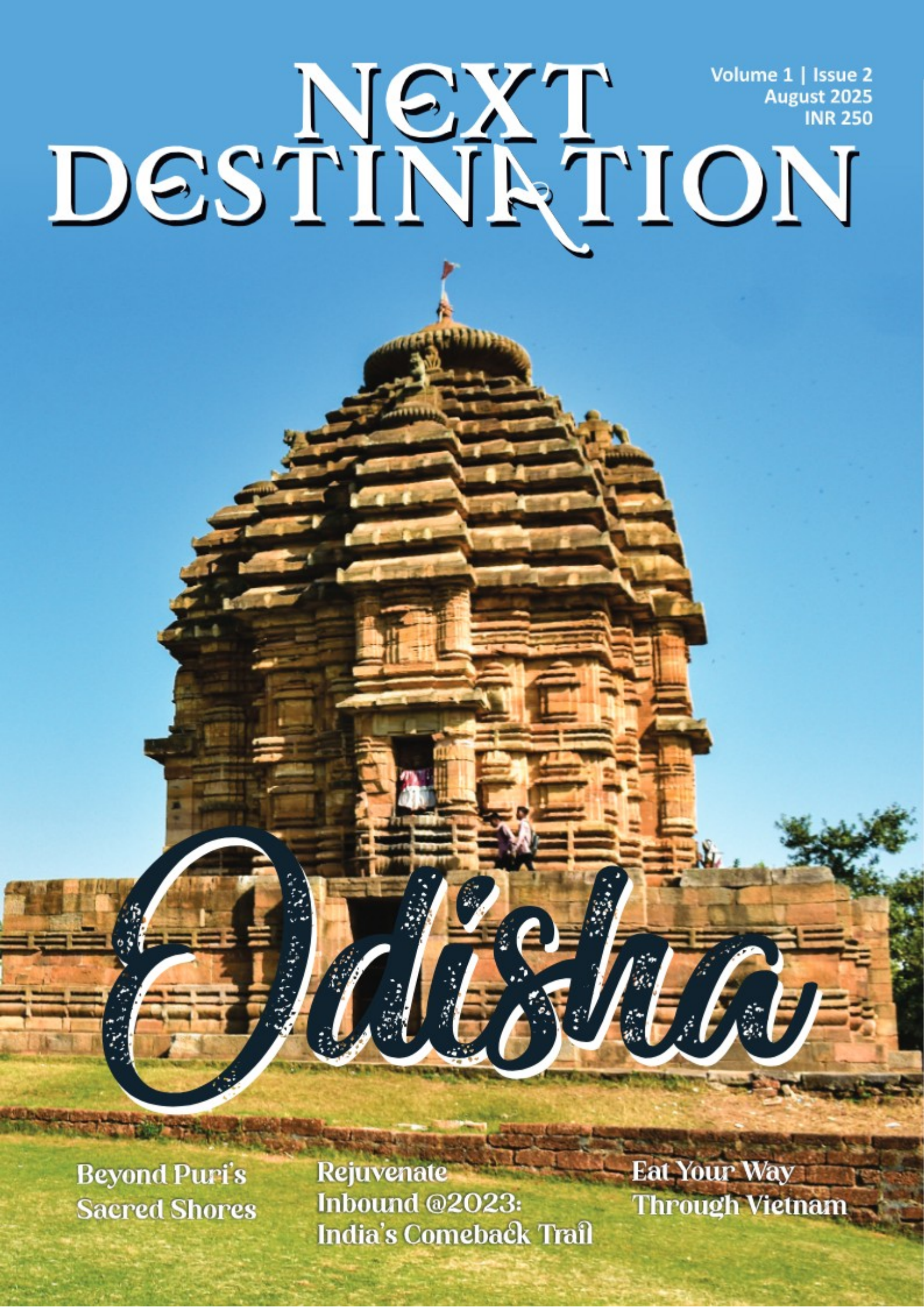


NEXT DESTINATION

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Letter from the

Editor-in-Chief

This August, we journey into the heart of India's inbound travel ambitions, capturing the pulse of the industry just ahead of the highly anticipated Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) Convention 2025 in Puri, Odisha.

In this special issue, we align with the IATO, whose recent initiatives have not only strengthened ground realities in Kashmir but also rekindled confidence in the region's tourism economy. In a compelling interview, IATO President, Ravi Gosain offers firsthand insights into the association's vision, the security upgrades in Kashmir and the broader roadmap to "Rejuvenate Inbound @2030."

We also spoke with industry veterans to understand what they expect from this year's convention. Their responses are candid, aspirational and full of actionable ideas, the kind of dialogue that can drive India's next wave of tourism growth.

As host city, Puri takes prominence in this issue, with a dedicated feature that goes beyond the sacred to explore its soulful traditions, contemporary hospitality and rising stature as a coastal destination of note. Continuing our spotlight on evolving destinations, we also connected with Mukesh Meshram, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture, Government of Uttar Pradesh, for a deep dive into the state's integrated tourism strategy and upcoming initiatives.

Our lifestyle and hospitality section features two milestone stories - the 25th anniversary of The Metropolitan Hotel celebrated at Zuri and a dynamic new menu launch at The China Kitchen, where timeless flavours meet contemporary cravings. We also feature an interview with Vikash Gupta, Founder and CEO of leather brand Threesixty, on craftsmanship, purpose and legacy in Indian design. Rounding out the section, Subhash Goyal shares timely insights into the state of aviation and what the sector must prioritise for sustainable inbound growth.

From the boardroom to the banquet and from Kashmir to coastal Odisha, this issue captures a sector in motion renewing, rethinking and rising.

See you in Puri.

Ayushi Anand

Ayushi Anand

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The Insider Edit



AlFursan unveils new cash + miles payment method

AlFursan, the loyalty programme of Saudia, has rolled out a new payment option called 'Cash + Miles,' enabling members to purchase flights using both loyalty miles and cash. This option improves booking flexibility, allowing travellers to secure seats without restrictions and easily adjust their itineraries. Integrated into Saudia's online booking system, this feature aligns with the airline's ongoing efforts to enhance customer service and improve the overall travel experience. AlFursan members can accumulate miles when flying with Saudia, 'flyadeal' or partners within the SkyTeam alliance, while also benefiting from exclusive offers and privileges.



Badrutt's Palace Hotel unveils stunning contemporary expansion in St. Moritz

Badrutt's Palace Hotel has unveiled its largest extension in 129 years, the Serlas Wing, designed by ACPV Architects-Antonio Citterio Patricia Viel. This new addition features 25 luxurious guest rooms and suites along with an innovative underground pedestrian tunnel, including Switzerland's longest hotel escalator. The design beautifully blends modern aesthetics with the hotel's historic charm, offering guests exclusive access to St. Moritz's village square. With a focus on premium materials, each room showcases spacious layouts and elegant interiors, enhancing the hotel's offering of luxury and comfort. Guests can now book rooms through the hotel's website, with winter rates starting at USD 2,600.



India rises to 77th place in the Henley Passport Index

The Indian passport has risen eight places to rank 77th on the 2025 Henley Passport Index, moving up from 85th last year. This improvement comes even though Indian travellers can now access only two additional countries without a visa, bringing the total to 59 destinations. Despite this advancement, India's mobility score remains relatively low compared to leading nations. Notably, Saudi Arabia achieved the largest gain in this edition, increasing access to 91 countries. Meanwhile, both the UK and the US passports have seen a slight decline in rankings, now positioned sixth and tenth, respectively.



Chiva-Som Hua Hin launches a four-day wellness programme

Chiva-Som Hua Hin, celebrating its 30th anniversary, has announced a special four-day wellness programme from August 26 to 29, 2025, in collaboration with Guinness World Record holder Natalie Dau and experienced yoga teacher Dawn Sim. This complimentary programme will include strength training, yoga, breath-work and sound healing, aiming to help guests enhance their physical and mental wellbeing. Guests booking any wellness retreat during this time can join in for free, enjoying expert guidance from these renowned practitioners. Spaces are limited, making this a unique opportunity to experience top-notch wellness in a peaceful setting.



Taiwan launches 'Waves of Wonder' golf tourism campaign with Kolkata roadshow

Taiwan is promoting its new golf tourism initiative, 'Waves of Wonder', with a roadshow in Kolkata, expanding its marketing efforts in East India. After a successful launch in India last year post-pandemic, the Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA) is keen to attract high-net-worth individuals (HNIs) and corporate travellers to its beautiful golf courses. With over 70 exceptional golf courses available, Taiwan offers unique experiences combining golf, luxury resorts, hot springs and fine dining. This initiative aims to cement Taiwan's position as a top golfing destination while providing tailor-made packages for discerning travellers. The TTA is excited to enhance its outreach and attract even more visitors from India.



Norwegian Cruise Line reveals nearly 500 voyages for 2027 season

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) has announced its deployment for spring and summer 2027, featuring almost 500 voyages across 20 ships. This includes eight vessels in Europe, with multiple overnight stays and late-night departures. From April to October, NCL will visit over 150 ports in 59 countries, providing guests with longer port stays in destinations like Istanbul, Reykjavik, and Copenhagen—perfect for enhancing their travel experience.



TAAI Northern Region hosts members meeting at Hilton Garden Inn, New Delhi

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) Northern Region held a members meeting on 25, July 2025 at the Hilton Garden Inn, New Delhi, bringing together influential figures from the travel and tourism industry. The event showcased TAAI's vital role in fostering collaboration among its members. A notable highlight was a presentation by representatives of VFS Global, who shared insights on evolving visa processes and recent technological advancements aimed at enhancing the travel experience for agents and travellers alike.



Malaysia welcomes over 1.13 million Indian visitors in 2024

Malaysia has recorded 1,133,331 Indian visitors in 2024, marking a remarkable 71.7 per cent increase from 2023 and a 47 per cent rise compared to 2019. This surge highlights the increasing popularity of Malaysia as a travel destination among Indians, driven by strategic promotional activities and strong air connectivity. Tourism Malaysia is also adapting to the demands of younger travellers through curated packages focused on eco-tourism and adventure experiences. Additionally, the extension of a 30-day visa-free entry for Indian nationals until December 2026 further facilitates travel.



Partnership to elevate luxury travel experiences in Mauritius

Red Dot Representations and Travel Lounge Leisure & Tours Ltd have joined forces to promote Mauritius as a premier luxury travel destination. This strategic partnership aims to highlight the island's stunning beaches, vibrant culture and tropical climate to both Indian and international travellers. With Travel Lounge's expertise in customised services and Red Dot's extensive network, the collaboration is set to enhance visibility and drive luxury tourism growth in Mauritius. Together, they are committed to delivering unforgettable travel adventures aligned with sustainable tourism practices.



New Zealand aims for sustainable growth in Indian tourist visits

New Zealand is positioning itself to attract Indian travellers by showcasing its stunning natural landscapes, rich Maori culture and exceptional adventure experiences. Catering to honeymooners, families and high-value travellers, the country boasts serene lakes, majestic alpine views and luxurious lodges. With Indian visitor numbers increasing significantly, Tourism New Zealand is focused on enhancing commercial partnerships and implementing targeted marketing campaigns to convert interest into bookings. By aligning with Indian travel trends towards offbeat and sustainable adventures, New Zealand aims to establish itself as a year-round holiday destination for Indian travellers.



Rewa Regional Tourism Roadshow concludes successfully

The two-day Regional Tourism Roadshow in Rewa, organised by the MP Tourism Board, has successfully wrapped up, culminating in engaging discussions on tourism, investment, culture and connectivity. The event brought together tourism experts, investors and government officials to explore the vast potential of Madhya Pradesh's Vindhya region, with a focus on fostering inclusive, responsible and sustainable tourism. Key initiatives discussed included improved infrastructure, enhanced connectivity via new flight and heli-services and simplified investment procedures, aiming to position Madhya Pradesh as a leading global tourism destination.



Dubai International Airport breaks records with 46 Million passengers in H1 2025

Dubai International Airport (DXB) has reported its busiest first half in history, handling a record 46 million passengers in the first six months of 2025. This 2.3 per cent year-on-year increase highlights strong international travel demand despite some regional airspace disruptions. The airport is on track to surpass its annual passenger record, projecting 96 million travellers by year-end. India remains DXB's leading country market, with London being the top city destination. The airport also maintained high operational efficiency, with quick clearance times at passport control and security.

The new tourism playbook: Uttar Pradesh's multi-circuit push

Ami Shah



Mukesh Kumar Meshram

As Uttar Pradesh continues its remarkable ascent in India's tourism landscape crossing an unprecedented 64 crore visitors in 2024, the state stands as a compelling case study in vision-driven growth. At the helm of this transformation is Mukesh Kumar Meshram, Principal Secretary, Tourism & Culture whose leadership has been

pivotal in blending tradition with technology and pilgrimage with progressive policy.

In this exclusive conversation, Meshram outlines how UP's strategic focus on infrastructure, digital innovation and inclusive development has broadened the state's appeal far beyond its famed spiritual circuits. From eco-tourism in the Terai and adventure zones in Bundelkhand to immersive cultural festivals and tent cities, the state's tourism blueprint is as ambitious as it is diversified.

He also shares insights on the 2025-26 tourism budget, landmark connectivity projects and the growing momentum around culinary tourism with Lucknow's UNESCO bid taking centre stage. As UP Tourism pushes to redefine the travel experience, this interview offers a behind-the-scenes look at how India's most populous state is emerging as one of its most dynamic travel destinations.

Uttar Pradesh has demonstrated remarkable growth in tourist footfall, exceeding 64 crore in 2024. Could you elaborate on the key strategies that have driven this impressive increase in both domestic and international visitors?

Uttar Pradesh's record-breaking growth is the outcome of comprehensive planning, world-class infrastructure and a focus on visitor experience. Events like the Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj were meticulously managed with AI-driven surveillance, eco-friendly mobility solutions and lakhs of bio-toilets ensuring safety and sanitation for millions. A digital-first approach through multilingual apps, real-time updates and help centres enhanced convenience for visitors. Attractions such as laser shows, cultural festivals, river cruises and water sports enriched spiritual tourism with modern experiences. By integrating tradition, technology and efficient crowd management, we have transformed Uttar



The Insider Edit

Pradesh into a seamless and enriching tourism destination.

With significant focus on religious circuits like Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Mathura, what are the next emerging niche segments or destinations that UP Tourism plans to aggressively promote to diversify its offerings?

We are expanding beyond spiritual circuits with 12 mega tourism circuits covering eco-tourism, heritage, adventure and rural experiences. Sites like Dudhwa and Pilibhit Tiger Reserves, Bundelkhand and the Terai region are gaining traction. Initiatives like Tent Cities in Ayodhya and Prayagraj, river cruises and adventure tourism are drawing new demographics. Cultural festivals—Deepotsav in Ayodhya, Dev Deepawali in Varanasi and Rangotsav in Braj have become global attractions. Our strategy connects tourism with local artisans, culinary heritage, and handicrafts, ensuring inclusive growth and sustainable economic development.

The state budget for 2025-26 includes a substantial allocation for tourism infrastructure development, including new expressways and site enhancements. How will these investments specifically improve the visitor experience and accessibility to lesser-known attractions?

Investments in new expressways, upgraded airports and improved road networks are making Uttar Pradesh's lesser-known treasures more accessible. Projects like the Ganga Expressway and enhanced connectivity to Shravasti, Kushinagar and Chitrakoot are opening up eco-tourism and heritage circuits. Improved visitor amenities, digital signage and upgraded site facilities ensure a safe, convenient and immersive experience, encouraging tourists to explore beyond the established religious hubs.

Beyond major religious sites, what strategic infrastructure projects are underway to bolster eco-tourism, adventure tourism and rural tourism, aligning with initiatives like 'Buffer mein safar' and dam transformations?

We are developing eco-friendly lodges,



adventure circuits and rural homestays to promote nature-based and community-driven tourism. 'Buffer Mein Safar' highlights our rich biodiversity, with projects around Dudhwa, Pilibhit and Chambal. Darn-front areas are being reimagined as hubs for water sports and leisure activities. By integrating sustainability, skill development and conservation, we're creating unique tourism experiences that benefit both visitors and local communities.

What are the key priorities for enhancing hospitality infrastructure, such as hotels, homestays, and convention centres, to meet the growing demand from both

leisure and MICE segments across various regions of Uttar Pradesh?

We're investing in a diversified hospitality ecosystem—boutique heritage hotels, wellness retreats, eco-resorts and homestays. Incentives under our tourism policy encourage private players, especially women and SC/ST entrepreneurs, to develop accommodation in emerging destinations. For MICE tourism, world-class convention centres and upgraded urban infrastructure are being established, inspired by our success in hosting events like the Mahakumbh. These initiatives create jobs, empower local communities and deliver authentic experiences.

The 2025-26 budget allocates over INR 2,026 crore to tourism, with significant portions earmarked for religious sites. How does UP Tourism balance this focus with funding for other crucial areas like marketing, skill development and lesser-developed tourist regions?

Our approach balances faith tourism with strategic investments in marketing, skill development and emerging destinations. We're running global campaigns with multilingual digital content, VR experiences and international roadshows. Collaborations with influencers, media and travel agents enhance visibility. Capacity-building programmes are

The Insider Edit

upskilling guides, artisans and hospitality professionals. This holistic strategy ensures that benefits reach every region, making tourism a true driver of inclusive growth.

Beyond government allocations, what initiatives are in place to attract private investment in Uttar Pradesh's tourism sector and what incentives are being offered to encourage private players to contribute to infrastructure development and service enhancement?

Our 'Tourism Policy 2022' offers single-window clearances, capital subsidies and incentives for boutique hotels, wellness retreats and eco-resorts. Investor summits, roadshows and PPP initiatives have drawn leading hospitality brands to tier-2 and tier-3 cities. Improved connectivity and upgraded airports in Shravasti, Kushinagar and the Terai region make new destinations viable. This public-private synergy boosts infrastructure, creates employment and drives sustainable growth.

With the emphasis on 'One district, one cuisine' and promoting local delicacies, how does the tourism budget support these culinary tourism initiatives to empower local communities and generate sustainable livelihoods?

We are integrating culinary tourism into our broader cultural strategy. 'One district,

one cuisine' highlights regional delicacies through food festivals, curated experiences and training for local chefs and entrepreneurs. Support for farm-to-table initiatives and tie-ups with homestays connect visitors with authentic local flavours, ensuring that tourism directly benefits farmers, women's groups and small businesses.

Lucknow is nominated for 'UNESCO's Creative City of Gastronomy', how is the city preparing to showcase its culinary legacy to a global audience?

Lucknow, the 'City of Nawabs', is gearing up to present its rich culinary heritage on the world stage as part of its UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy nomination. The city is curating a narrative that goes beyond flavours, celebrating centuries-old Awadhi traditions shaped by royal kitchens and enriched by diverse communities. Iconic delicacies such as Tunday kebabs, galawati, nihari, biryani, khasta, kulfi and jalebi will showcase the finesse of dum pukht cooking and the artful layering of spices. Through culinary festivals, chef collaborations and immersive food experiences, Lucknow is positioning its cuisine as a living cultural legacy where every dish tells a story of history, craftsmanship and evolving traditions capturing the imagination of global gastronomes and cultural enthusiasts alike.



What measures are being taken to ensure transparency and efficiency in the utilisation of the tourism budget, particularly regarding large-scale infrastructure projects and promotional campaigns?

We have instituted robust monitoring systems with real-time dashboards, third-party audits and digital payment tracking to ensure transparency. Performance-linked evaluations and strict adherence to timelines guarantee accountability. For promotional campaigns, measurable KPIs like visitor engagement, footfall growth and media reach guide resource allocation. These measures ensure every rupee spent translates into tangible improvements in infrastructure, accessibility and visitor satisfaction.





Ravi Gosain

In the wake of the April 2025 terror attack in Pahalgam, questions around tourist safety in Kashmir resurfaced just as the region was gaining momentum as a year-round destination. But the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), in collaboration with the government and local stakeholders, has since launched a

IATO leads the charge to rebuild confidence in Kashmir travel

Daisy Saxena

multifaceted recovery strategy—balancing reassurance with reinvention.

From enhanced crisis protocols to curated roadshows and infrastructure upgrades, the goal is not only to restore confidence but to reshape the Valley's tourism economy for the long term. In this exclusive interview, Ravi Gosain, IATO president outlines how the trade body is actively engaging with partners and the public to support a safer, more sustainable and community-led revival of travel to Jammu & Kashmir.

During your recent visit to Kashmir - what tangible security upgrades have you seen being implemented in tourist areas since April 2025?

Security was beefed up in all tourist places not just for us but, for general tourists also. The Govt of J&K has taken all the steps towards safety and security of tourist, it was there earlier too, but now they have taken it to the next level,

which we all appreciated.

How is IATO actively communicating Kashmir's current safety status to the public?

It was highlighted in our 'fortnightly report' to the members with pictures and also at our bi-monthly magazine 'IATO Speaks'. Further in our meetings at the chapter level both physical and online, Kashmir was specially mentioned and how successful our FAM was.

Are there new crisis management protocols specifically for tourists in Kashmir?

Following Pahalgam terror attack, authorities have implemented broader security and emergency measures for all visitors. Measures now include drone and facial-recognition surveillance, deployment of rapid response teams, tourist help desks and police advisories—especially for Amarnath Yatra convoys.



What fresh tourism experiences are now being promoted to draw visitors back?

Local and state tourism bodies have rolled out fresh experiences such as a high-speed Vande Bharat Express linking Katra to Srinagar, reopening of 16 prime destinations (such as Betaab and Achabal Valleys), discounted 'Fame Tour' packages, cultural roadshows ('Tap & Konnect Kashmiriyat') and plans for adventure tourism like zip-lining and mountain biking.

How is IATO addressing the impact of cancellations and encouraging new bookings?

We have requested to FHRAI, HAI, Air India and Indigo not to levy cancellation charges on the bookings. They have responded favourably. Our members are already engaging in bookings to J&K and carrying it to their foreign counter part too.

What role are local communities playing in this 're-imagined' tourism push?

Local communities in Kashmir are central to the newly re-imagined tourism model. Across the valley, villagers run homestays, eco-parks and adventure experiences. Youth in border areas like Karnah are being trained as guides. The 'Chalo Kashmir' roadshows, handicraft fairs and boat rides empower locals while reviving regional culture.

Are there specific campaigns you are working on? Could you share some details if you are?



We have already done it. The "Rubaroo Jammu & Kashmir" campaign (June 14–17, 2025) to bring 30 senior tour-operator delegates to Kashmir, assess safety, conduct B2B meetings, visit demo sites and generate confidence among Indian travellers. They reinforce via state support and promotional outreach that Kashmir is 'as safe as any other place'. Our members on an individual front are promoting Kashmir to their consumers aggressively.

How is IATO ensuring sustainable tourism development alongside recovery efforts in Kashmir?

IATO is integrating sustainable tourism into revival efforts in Kashmir through coordinated public-private strategies. Their delegation met with J&K government to promote eco-friendly infrastructure, nature circuits and local

community partnerships. We advocate capacity limits, green practices in homestays and adventure zones and thematic circuits emphasising low-impact travel.

What infrastructure improvements have been prioritised for tourist benefit?

Major infrastructure upgrades in Kashmir focus on boosting tourist convenience and connectivity:

The Chenab Railway Bridge and completion of the Udhampur–Srinagar–Baramulla rail link now enable a Vande Bharat Express cutting travel to 3 hours.

The 6.5 km Sonamarg (Z-Morh) tunnel delivers all-weather road access, making winter tourism viable.

Major highway modernisations, including Srinagar–Gulmarg and Pahalgam circuits, along with wayside amenities and toilets, enhance visitor experience.

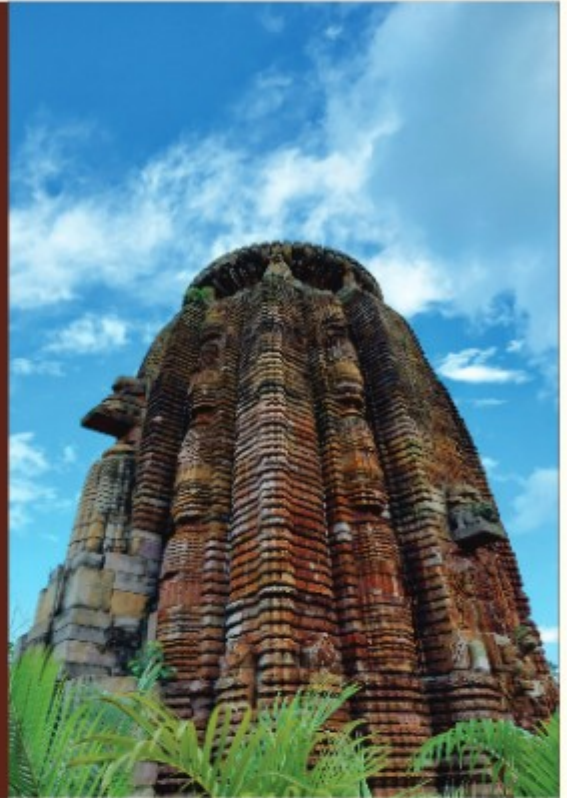
What long-term vision does IATO hold for Kashmir's tourism sector?

IATO envisions positioning Jammu & Kashmir as a high-value, repeat-visit destination with a strong emphasis on adventure, culture and sustainability. Their long-term goals include developing nine new tourist circuits, forging MoUs with international boards for global outreach, expanding connectivity, improving infrastructure and focusing on eco-friendly experiences while ensuring positive return visitation.



Reimagining India's inbound future: IATO 2025 sets the stage in Odisha

Ayushi Anand



As India's travel and tourism sector eyes a bold new chapter, all roads lead to Puri, Odisha this month for the much anticipated 40th IATO Annual Convention. With the theme 'Rejuvenate Inbound@2030', the convention arrives at a pivotal moment when the country is not just aiming to revive inbound tourism, but to radically reshape it. Hosted in a state rich with cultural heritage and natural beauty, this year's edition is more than a gathering, it's a call to action.

In the lead-up to the event, we spoke to a wide cross-section of the industry such as veteran hoteliers, new-age OTA platform leader, hotel management companies, state tourism officials and policy makers. Their expectations echo a common sentiment, India needs to pivot from reactive promotion to strategic transformation.

From infrastructure upgrades and integrated digital solutions to visa policy reforms and global marketing roadmaps, the discourse is charged with urgency and optimism alike.

The stage is set. But, the question remains - can this convention truly set the wheels in motion for an inbound revolution by 2030?



Driving inbound momentum through strategic partnerships

Bidisha Mukherjee

Additional Managing Director at
Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board

Looking at IATO 2025 as a springboard for new inbound partnerships, the state of Madhya Pradesh is focusing its energies on attracting both international tour operators and forward-thinking technology collaborators. These are the partnerships that, according to Mukherjee, will help position the state not just as a heritage-rich destination but as one offering deeper, more diverse experiences for global travellers. "We're looking to build on what we started last year in Bhopal with real outcomes, not just visibility," she said, underlining the importance of continuity in engagement.

From conversations to commitments

Mukherjee is candid about the need to evolve IATO beyond its current role. For her, it's not enough for the convention to be an annual meeting point. She envisions it becoming a space that facilitates measurable progress. Structured post-convention mechanisms like MOU tracking and dedicated follow-up forums are vital to keep the momentum going long after the event wraps. Equally, she advocates for expanding the scope of industry conversations. "Discussions should also expand to under-addressed topics like rural tourism infrastructure, women-led initiatives and tourism's intersection with crafts, agriculture and local economies," she notes. These, she believes, are critical pillars for inclusive tourism development and economic sustainability.

Rethinking format and policy alignment

While IATO continues to serve as a key deal-making platform, Mukherjee points

to the importance of refining the convention's structure to enable better matchmaking. "There's a need for curated B2B formats that allow real matchmaking and implementation," she said. In her view, such formats would support targeted, high-value connections between buyers and sellers. She is also optimistic about a greater degree of alignment this year between central tourism policies and state-level initiatives. At the same time, she sees a role for IATO in bridging the gaps between ministries, creating a more connected approach that could accelerate policy implementation across the board.

Equity, visibility and capacity building for the grassroots

Ensuring equity and representation remains a core focus for Madhya Pradesh. One of Mukherjee's key priorities is that smaller operators, homestay owners and lesser-known destinations are given a meaningful platform. She recommends curated showcases and focused buyer-seller sessions that result in real inclusion particularly for stakeholders who don't always get national or international visibility. "Capacity building, digital storytelling and tech integration for destination management are top areas I want to see reflected in the session line-up," she said, reiterating the importance of equipping grassroots players with tools to participate effectively in the tourism economy.

By focusing on partnerships, policy alignment and inclusive growth, Madhya Pradesh is approaching IATO 2025 not just as an event, but as an opportunity to steer the future of inbound tourism in a more equitable, action-oriented direction.



Bidisha Mukherjee

The 60 second scoop

This year at IATO, I want to walk away with...concrete partnerships that enhance Madhya Pradesh's global reach.

One speaker or session I don't want to miss this year is...a session focused on building sustainable, multi-state tourism circuits.

The buzzword I'm hoping we don't overuse this year is... 'Post-pandemic'—we need to look forward.

One thing I hope IATO 2025 does differently from previous years...facilitates real-time matchmaking for small and medium operators.

If IATO could help unlock one roadblock for the Indian travel trade, it should be...streamlining the integration of digital infrastructure across destinations.



Ankush Nijhawan

As India sharpens its focus on inbound tourism, Nijhawan believes the domestic market's upward momentum and growing connectivity present the perfect platform for global outreach. "Every tailwind is in the favour of domestic tourism," he said, noting how government-backed schemes like Udaan are linking Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities more efficiently. He highlights the positive impact of new airports and a broader network of roads, trains and flights that are making destinations from the Northeast to Ladakh more accessible than ever.

From visibility to conversion: A call for smarter marketing

While acknowledging IATO Convention as a well-structured and high-impact event, Nijhawan urges deeper government engagement to strengthen India's global tourism footprint. "Domestic tourism is well settled. It will organically grow," he said. The real challenge, in his view, lies in attracting international visitors, which requires improved branding and a stronger messaging strategy particularly around perceptions of safety. "There's a myth that India is unsafe," he adds. "It's actually contrary. But the marketing we

Leveraging connectivity and technology

Ankush Nijhawan

Co-founder and Joint Managing Director,
TBO.com

do is a little poor."

The untapped power of technology

Nijhawan points out a key gap in the current conversation, the under utilisation of technology to drive inbound tourism. While traditional methods like booths and brochures remain important, he questions how effectively platforms like Incredible India are being used to convert interest into bookings. "What are we doing to use tech to drive inbound travellers whether it's AI or digital platforms?" he asks. For him, real progress will come when inbound operators and national campaigns start using tech tools to reach global travellers directly.

Networking still matters

For a B2B leader like Nijhawan, IATO remains a valuable space for real-time connections and relationship-building. "It makes me meet all the suppliers and people in the ecosystem," he said. With over 500 attendees, the convention stands out as a rare opportunity to engage with both supply and demand under one roof. While digital communication has its place, he believes nothing replaces human interaction in building trust and long-term business relationships.

Empowering the smaller players

Smaller operators stand to gain significantly from the exposure IATO offers. Many of them, Nijhawan observes, don't have visibility into how larger industry players operate. "It gives a very good opportunity to get insights into how the world is moving," he said. Whether it's

about supply chains, tech adoption or inventory management, these insights can inspire small businesses to scale and evolve toward more competitive models.

Spotlight on Odisha: A rising hub

With Odisha as the host destination, Nijhawan underscores the significance of its growing role in India's tourism landscape. From international flights connecting Bhubaneswar to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, to Tier 2 developments like new call centres and infrastructure upgrades, the state is positioning itself as an emerging hub in eastern India. "Connectivity ensures the economy moves both ways," he remarks, aligning Odisha's progress with the broader goals of India's travel trade.

The 60 second scoop

This year at IATO, I want to walk away with...my breakfast and a relaxed morning.

One speaker or session I don't want to miss this year is? ...something on how to drive traffic into India.

The buzzword I am hoping we don't overuse this year is?...infrastructure

One thing I hope IATO 2025 does differently from previous years is?...how to use technology into marketing India

If IATO could help unlock one roadblock for the Indian travel trade, it should be... manage media - show positive news not just negative.

Cover Story

Focus on models supporting industry alignment on revival and growth

Jyoti Mayal

Chairperson of Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council and Past President TAAI

Skill-led growth must take centre stage

Jyoti Mayal underscores the critical need for skill development across the entire tourism ecosystem as a foundation for sustainable growth. From frontline workers serving tourists to small business owners managing local experiences, she stresses that equipping industry stakeholders with practical digital skills is essential.

These include proficiency in customer relationship management (CRM) systems, digital booking platforms and storytelling-driven marketing strategies that resonate with modern travellers. "Skilling is not just a trend, it's a necessity for sustainable tourism," Mayal asserts. To advance this, she advocates for integrating THSC supported workshops directly into the IATO convention programming. Such integration would make skill-building more practical, accessible and aligned with current industry needs, helping professionals adapt to technological shifts and rising traveller expectations.

From convention to execution

Mayal identifies a key challenge in the tourism sector's collaborative efforts, a gap between discussions at annual conventions and their actual implementation. While industry conferences like IATO's generate resolutions and insights, she calls for stronger mechanisms to ensure measurable follow-through. "Conventions need continuity. We can't keep restarting conversations each year," she says firmly.

Mayal proposes establishing dedicated working groups, detailed roadmaps and mid-year progress reviews to monitor and drive execution. Additionally, she stresses the importance of a robust accountability system that would hold stakeholders responsible for delivering on

commitments related to visa facilitation, infrastructure upgrades and market development. This shift from talk to tangible action is vital for reviving inbound tourism and strengthening India's position as a global destination.

Making the convention matter for smaller players

Recognising that conventions are crucial platforms for visibility and networking, Mayal highlights the need to make them more inclusive for smaller operators and emerging destinations. She suggests innovative approaches such as curated B2B matchmaking sessions, state-supported marketing showcases and centralised access to technological tools that can level the playing field. "We must spotlight voices and products that often get lost at larger platforms," she said. This includes businesses from underrepresented regions, women-led ventures and experiential travel models that align with evolving traveller preferences. By empowering these groups, the convention can foster a diverse, vibrant tourism ecosystem where new ideas and offerings thrive alongside established players.

Policy alignment and stronger state-centre linkages

Mayal sees a unique opportunity to strengthen coordination between central government policies and state-level execution. "We have the vision, but the delivery varies drastically across states," she notes. She emphasises IATO's potential to bridge this gap by encouraging states to adopt central schemes more fully and facilitating knowledge exchange among regions.

Scaling public-private partnerships focused on skills development, safety standards and infrastructure improvements could be transformative for the industry. Consistent, aligned



Jyoti Mayal

efforts between the centre and states are critical to ensuring sustainable growth, enhancing tourist experiences and accelerating India's inbound tourism recovery.

The 60 second scoop

This year at IATO, I want to walk away with... tangible business leads, meaningful connections with industry peers, potential partners and actionable insights into the latest trends and innovations in tourism that can help travel service providers to stay ahead in the game and drive growth for their business.

One speaker or session I don't want to miss this year is... on the adaptation of technology into our daily use business; sustainability, eco-tourism and reducing carbon footprint.

The buzzword I'm hoping we don't overuse this year is... disruption. While innovation is crucial, I hope we focus on practical, actionable strategies rather than just using trendy terminology.

One thing I hope IATO 2025 does differently from previous years... is incorporate more interactive and immersive experiences, such as workshops, masterclasses or live pitching sessions, to engage attendees and foster meaningful connections.

If IATO could help unlock one roadblock for the Indian travel trade, it should be... streamlining regulatory processes and advocating for policies like marketing, taxes etc. that support the growth of small and medium-sized tourism businesses, enabling them to compete in the global market.



Ajay Wadhawan

Active participation, government collaboration and knowledge-sharing to navigate inbound tourism's recovery phase

Ajay Wadhawan

Executive Director, AIR IQ and Udaan Hotels and Resorts

Networking remains the core

For Wadhawan, the enduring value of the IATO Convention lies in its ability to bring together stakeholders in one place to exchange updates and build meaningful relationships. While it has never been a direct deal-making forum, Wadhawan sees networking as the convention's prime objective. "Networking surely helps, even if it is the prime objective," he said.

For hotels, it's an opportunity to share new policies and updates that can support inbound tour operators. For operators themselves, it's a platform to assess business conditions and understand the broader economic climate influencing tourism. According to Wadhawan, it's this kind of engagement that ensures the industry stays cohesive and aligned, especially during a period of ongoing recovery.

Government engagement and policy updates

Wadhawan emphasises that consistent advocacy by IATO has led to tangible improvements over the years—particularly in connectivity and infrastructure. He sees the convention as a platform to maintain that momentum. "IATO should continue to pursue the ministries concerned in government for further relaxation and benefits to tour operators," he notes. Updates on government schemes, seasonal forecasts and new infrastructure developments help operators prepare for the upcoming season and make informed decisions.

Wadhawan also stresses the importance of inviting key ministers and officials to the convention to create an environment of open dialogue. "The presence of government officials enhances conversations and helps align industry needs with government initiatives," he adds.

Aligning state and central efforts

With Odisha as the host for this year's convention, Wadhawan sees a symbolic alignment between local values and national tourism goals. Destinations like Puri remind tour operators of India's deep reservoir of cultural experiences, and the host state format reinforces this message. "The host destination keeps changing every year. It carries local Indian values and helps tour operators remember that we have a lot to sell, including Puri, for example," he said. Wadhawan is also optimistic about the growing alignment between central tourism policy and its execution at the state level. He observes that the government is visibly serious about encouraging tourism and this visible intent strengthens confidence in public-private efforts across the board.

Supporting smaller operators and industry learning

Wadhawan believes that conventions like IATO play a critical role in helping smaller players grow. By offering opportunities to collaborate with larger partners and gain insights from industry experts, the event supports sector-wide

development. "Small operators definitely learn a lot to plan their goal for a much better future," he said. He recommends sessions focused on understanding international tourism policies, government regulations and ways to market India's unique selling points globally. "As much knowledge as experts can provide is valuable especially on changing regulations and how we promote our USPs to the world," he adds. For Wadhawan, IATO remains a platform for active learning, representation and strategic alignment for everyone involved in inbound tourism.

The 60 second scoop

This year at IATO, I want to walk away with .. at least 50 more business relations.

One speaker or session I don't want to miss this year is ... not a single I would miss; every session has its own importance.

The buzzword I'm hoping we don't overuse this year is .. 'we will try to.'

One thing I hope IATO 2025 does differently from previous years .. can't say, as last year was too good.

If IATO could help unlock one roadblock for the Indian travel trade, it should be .. more closure alignment with the Ministry of Tourism and Finance.

Cover Story

Bringing the boutique sector into the national conversation

Geeta Maheshwari

Director of H&M Services

This year's convention must move beyond traditional formats and elevate the voices of smaller, independent players. "We need frameworks that connect boutique hotels, experience curators and regional operators with national tourism planning," she said. The ideal outcome? Shared purpose, grassroots visibility and actionable partnerships that extend well beyond the event.

Reimagining convention impact through structure and accountability

While Maheshwari acknowledges the strides IATO has made especially around sustainability, wellness and tech, she feels the convention is still catching up with post-pandemic realities. "There's a decentralisation of tourism and a shift in traveller behaviour. We need deeper sessions on new business models, succession planning, burnout and gender equity." She advocates for mid-year progress reviews to ensure the convention doesn't end with inspiration alone.

She also points to the need for more structured and inclusive programming. "We often leave these events motivated but unsure of what happens next. If IATO can follow up with digital check-ins or create working groups to monitor implementation, it would lend continuity to the ideas generated." For Maheshwari, it's about turning dialogue into momentum and ensuring convention goals translate into meaningful change on the ground.

From visibility to viability for small players

Maheshwari highlights that while networking is valuable, true impact lies in intentional deal-making. She calls for

curated matchmaking sessions, pitch zones for small operators and buyer-seller meets backed by state support. "If these elements are woven into the agenda, we'll see real outcomes," she said. She also points to training and tech support like CRM workshops and hands-on digital marketing tools, as a critical need.

"Workshops should focus on practical tools, CRM systems, sustainability audits, converting digital leads to bookings. Many smaller players want to adopt tech, but they need guided learning and mentorship to get there," she noted. For her, the convention should go beyond discussion panels and include knowledge-building experiences that smaller businesses can act on immediately.

Building a more inclusive tourism ecosystem

According to Maheshwari, the alignment of Odisha as a host with the convention's theme is both timely and symbolic. "Destinations like Odisha tell us that India's future lies beyond the Golden Triangle," she notes. She urges stronger participation from the Northeast and tribal states, alongside more visibility for women-led ventures and sustainable startups. For IATO to drive real transformation, it must focus on equipping and empowering the people who represent India's new travel experiences.

She also hopes to see better coordination between central and state governments. "We have vision at the top, but uneven execution on the ground. IATO can be the bridge advocating for accountability and interstate knowledge sharing," she said.

In Maheshwari's view, this year's



Geeta Maheshwari

convention is a chance to truly redefine how tourism stakeholders collaborate by giving the boutique segment a seat at the table and the tools to thrive once they're there.

The 60 second scoop

This year at IATO, I want to walk away with... renewed purpose, new partners and actionable ideas to grow responsibly.

One speaker or session I don't want to miss this year is... a session that brings state tourism officials and private sector disruptors into the same dialogue.

The buzzword I'm hoping we don't overuse this year is... 'Post-pandemic'; it's time to look forward, not backwards.

One thing I hope IATO 2025 does differently from previous years... foster measurable takeaways and a transparent follow-up mechanism.

If IATO could help unlock one roadblock for the Indian travel trade, it should be... creating simplified, unified processes across state lines to encourage seamless travel and business expansion.



Pratibha Arora

The strength of IATO lies in its ability to connect the right people at the right time. "This convention should lead to partnerships that spotlight emerging destinations and promote innovative travel experiences," she said. The potential for inbound growth, she believes, rests in moving beyond traditional circuits and nurturing new regions and formats.

Arora hopes this year's edition will create a framework that not only promotes new circuits but also supports their growth with integrated strategies. "I'm hoping the convention drives meaningful partnerships that directly contribute to the revival and growth of inbound tourism," she said. She identifies collaboration especially cross-state and public-private as a long-term catalyst.

Need for future-ready, inclusive conversations

Arora notes that while IATO has adapted in recent years especially with digital tools and hybrid formats, there's still scope for more focused dialogue on health protocols, crisis preparedness and climate action. "We often miss conversations on inclusivity, community integration and tourism's environmental impact," she adds. These topics, she believes, are critical for building a resilient industry post-pandemic.

She emphasises that sustainability must

Focusing on new destinations and meaningful partnerships

Pratibha Arora

Founder, PALS Hotel & Marketing Solutions

go hand in hand with digital transformation and traveller confidence. "We need targeted sessions on crisis management and sustainable travel practices to better prepare the industry for future disruptions," she said. Arora also points to the need for government-industry alignment on safety standards and visa processes to ensure India presents itself as a seamless destination to global travellers.

Turning visibility into viability for smaller players

While digital access has grown, Arora stresses that conventions like IATO continue to be crucial for smaller operators. "Face-to-face connections still drive trust and business," she said. She supports structured matchmaking sessions and joint state-private showcases that give independent players greater visibility. When backed by follow-up roadmaps and implementation mechanisms, these connections can lead to tangible change on the ground.

"The convention provides them a platform to showcase their offerings to a wider audience, connect with established players and gain credibility and visibility that can accelerate their growth," she said. Arora believes that introducing follow-up mechanisms would enhance continuity and strengthen the convention's long-term impact.

She would also like to see practical, skill-based sessions that reflect where the industry is heading. "Digital marketing best practices, AI-driven customer engagement tools and crisis response training should be prioritised to future-proof the sector," she said.

The Odisha advantage and the promise of alignment

Arora applauds the choice of Odisha as host state, calling it a reflection of India's broader push to highlight lesser-known destinations. "Odisha's mix of nature and heritage is exactly what inbound needs more of," she said. With a growing focus on cross-state circuits and cohesive infrastructure planning, she's hopeful that policy and execution will finally move in sync this year.

She's especially looking forward to collaborations that result in shared booking tech, AI-powered engagement tools and sustainable tourism models, elements she believes will define the next decade of travel in India. "Announcements on cross-state tourism circuits or collaborative tech platforms would be game-changers," she added.

The 60 second scoop

This year at IATO, I want to walk away with... some solid deals and cool new connections.

One speaker or session I don't want to miss this year is... the one about sustainable tourism

The buzzword I'm hoping we don't overuse this year is... 'synergy' — let's keep it real.

One thing I hope IATO 2025 does differently from previous years... actually follow up on what we decide, not just talk.

If IATO could help unlock one roadblock for the Indian travel trade, it should be... making visas easier for tourists to get.

Cover Story

Practical pathways, policy priorities and partnerships that last

Naresh Arora

Founder and CEO, Trully India Hotels & Resorts

From surviving to scaling

For Arora, this year's IATO Convention marks more than another date on the industry calendar. It represents a turning point for inbound tourism in India. "We've all worked hard to stay afloat post-pandemic. Now it's time for real traction," he said. Arora sees the event as an opportunity to push past inspiration and into execution, with strategic collaborations, better government facilitation and a national platform for regional players.

Trully Hotels operates across multiple states and for Arora, the goal is clear: embed his properties and destinations more meaningfully into India's broader tourism conversation. "We want this year's outcome to feel actionable not just another networking event, but something that moves the needle," he adds.

Evolving, but not yet fully inclusive

While Arora acknowledges that IATO has made progress with more focus on technology, safety and decentralisation he feels there's room for improvement. "We could use more hands-on workshops and real skill-building sessions," he said, especially for Tier-2 and Tier-3 entrepreneurs who are underrepresented. He believes the convention must create space for those doing impactful, on-the-ground work in lesser-known regions.

He's also quick to point out the need for broader conversations. "We often skip over operational issues that matter, like dynamic pricing for small hotels or how to apply AI in guest experience." Arora wants panels that focus on digital storytelling, automation in itinerary planning and deeper engagement with local communities.

From visibility to value creation

While networking remains valuable, Arora believes that deal-making should still be a core outcome of the convention. "If you walk in with a strategy, IATO can still be a strong platform for serious partnerships," he notes. To strengthen that function, he recommends more curated B2B zones and pre-scheduled buyer-seller meetings.

For Trully Hotels, past IATO conventions have already yielded practical results, from greater access to tourism boards in Rajasthan and Gujarat to better recognition among national associations. But he emphasises that it's up to each operator to act on the momentum.

Odisha as this year's host state

Arora sees this year's host destination, Odisha, as both symbolic and strategic. "It reflects the kind of destination India should spotlight—rich in heritage, spiritual depth and natural beauty, yet still under explored." He believes Odisha represents the future of Indian tourism which is decentralised, diverse and experiential.

Looking ahead: The roadmap India needs

For this year's convention to feel different, Arora wants continuity and accountability. A review of last year's resolutions, co-created 12-month plans and stronger inclusion of youth voices would signal progress. He also urges IATO to lobby for tangible reforms like improved e-visas, joint marketing campaigns and a unified digital infrastructure for small operators.

Policy clarity, GST rationalisation and tech-forward platforms are top of mind for Arora. "We need a national content bank, startup funds and better public-



Naresh Arora

private sync. These are the things that will transform talk into traction," he said.

From ideas to impact

Arora's top priorities for IATO are clear - partnerships, policy insights and business leads. He believes the convention should open doors for smaller operators, newer destinations and tech-enabled tourism ventures. "Visibility is currency. IATO's role is to keep the doors open for all of us shaping the next chapter of Indian travel."

The 60 second scoop

This year at IATO, I want to walk away with... partnerships that help us create better, more inclusive guest experiences across India.

One speaker or session I don't want to miss this year is... any discussion on digital transformation and AI in tourism—it's the next big wave.

The buzzword I'm hoping we don't overuse this year is... "post-COVID recovery"—it's time to move from recovery to reinvention.

One thing I hope IATO 2025 does differently... track outcomes from the previous year and publicly showcase progress.

If IATO could help unlock one roadblock for the Indian travel trade, it should be... seamless coordination between central policies and state-level execution, especially around infrastructure and accessibility.

Beyond the beach

10 unmissable day trips from Puri

Daisy Saxena



Puri may be famed for its spiritual pull and the grand Rath Yatra, but for the curious traveller, it's also the launchpad to some of Odisha's most fascinating escapes.

Within a two-hour radius lie sun-temples carved in stone, placid lagoons teeming with dolphins, artists' villages bursting with colour and caves echoing with ancient philosophies. Here's how to turn your stay in Puri into an unforgettable adventure through Odisha's cultural and natural mosaic.

Unlock Odisha's heritage, wild wonders and artistic soul all within a short drive.

Konark Sun Temple: Odisha's stone symphony

A short coastal drive brings you to the majestic Konark Sun Temple, where the

Sun God rides a chariot of stone wheels and horse sculptures frozen in time. This 13th-century UNESCO World Heritage Site is both an architectural marvel and a celestial calendar, its carvings narrating stories of mythology, timekeeping and erotic art.

Udayagiri and Khandagiri: The Whispering caves of Bhubaneswar

Step into Odisha's spiritual past at these ancient rock-cut caves, once dwellings for Jain monks. With inscriptions dating back to the 1st century BC, these caves combine religion, rebellion and rock art in a hauntingly beautiful blend.

Chilika Lake: Where birds fly free and dolphins dance

A haven for migratory birds and the rare Irrawaddy dolphins, Asia's largest

brackish water lagoon is a boat ride into serenity. Head to Satapada for dolphin-spotting or linger at Mangalajodi for world-class birdwatching.

Raghurajpur: Odisha's living art gallery

Just 15 km from Puri lies Raghurajpur, where every home doubles as an artist's studio. Watch intricate Pattachitra scrolls come alive, see palm-leaf engravings in progress and take home authentic handmade souvenirs infused with centuries of tradition.

Pipili: The town that stitches light

No trip to Odisha is complete without a stop at Pipili. This vibrant village is a riot of colour with its famed appliqué work on umbrellas, wall hangings and festival decor. Shopping here not only supports local artisans but lets you carry a piece of

Travel Goals



Satapada Dolphin Sanctuary in Puri

Odisha home.

Dhauli Peace Pagoda: Where war gave way to wisdom

Overlooking the Daya River, the white dome of the Shanti Stupa at Dhauli marks the turning point in Emperor Ashoka's life from a ruthless warrior to a patron of peace. Today, it offers panoramic views and quiet contemplation.

Satapada: Dolphins on the horizon

Tucked on the southern fringe of Chilika Lake, Satapada is the best place to spot playful Irrawaddy dolphins. Hop on a boat and drift through mangroves, small islands and tranquil waters an ideal family outing or solo escape into nature.

Alarnatha Temple: Puri's spiritual side road

When Jagannath Temple's sanctum closes during the Lord's symbolic rest, devotees flock to Alarnatha in Brahmagiri. This serene Vishnu temple offers a peaceful, less crowded spiritual experience and a glimpse into Odisha's layered ritual traditions.

Baliharachandi Temple: Where the goddess meets the sea

Set against a backdrop of crashing waves and windswept dunes, this coastal temple dedicated to Goddess Harachandi is a favourite among solitude seekers. Bring picnic essentials and let the sea breeze wash over you as you take in the

views.

Markandeshwar Temple: A slice of Puri's inner sanctum

Tucked within Puri's temple-scape, this ancient shrine is believed to be where sage Markandeya meditated. Quiet and often overlooked, it's perfect for travellers seeking a contemplative corner steeped in spiritual lore.

From sacred groves and historic battlefields to craft havens and coastal serenity, Puri's central location makes it the perfect hub for short yet spectacular excursions. Whether you're a history buff, a spiritual seeker, a nature lover or an art enthusiast, Odisha reveals itself one day trip at a time. All you need is curiosity and a comfortable pair of shoes.



Dhauli Shanti Stupa



Solo in Seychelles

A complete guide to island bliss

Ami Shah

Seychelles may have earned its stripes as a lovers' retreat, but for the solo traveller, this Indian Ocean gem holds an entirely different kind of promise. Think quiet coves with no footprints but yours, serene hikes through prehistoric forests and lazy afternoons in seaside cafés where time drips by like warm honey. This isn't about ticking boxes or photo ops, it's about carving your own rhythm on islands where solitude feels like a luxury.

From visa-free access to mindful hikes and beach cafés, here's everything you need to know about travelling solo to Seychelles.

Best time to travel

Seychelles is blessed with year-round warm weather (24–32°C), but the experience varies with the seasons:

May to September (Dry season): Ideal for hiking, snorkelling and sailing, with lower humidity and steady trade winds.

October to April (Wet season): Expect short, intense showers followed by sunshine. The seas are calmer, perfect for diving and quieter beaches with fewer tourists.

If you prefer fewer crowds and lush green landscapes, the wet season offers a more intimate feel along with off-peak prices.

Travel Goals

Entry essentials

One of the easiest international getaways for solo Indian travellers, Seychelles offers visa-free entry. All you need is:

A valid passport

Confirmed accommodation booking

Proof of return or onward travel

Sufficient funds for the duration of your stay

Visitors are granted a visitor's permit upon arrival, free of charge, valid initially for 30 days.

A perfect six day itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Mahé

Explore Victoria's local markets and the Sir Selwyn Clarke Market.

Visit the Botanical Gardens.

Unwind at Beau Vallon Beach with a sunset drink.

Day 2: Hike and Café culture

Morning hike to Morne Blanc for panoramic island views.

Afternoon coffee at Café Eden or Café 74 Seventy Faure.

Try fresh grilled fish or octopus curry at a local takeaway.

Day 3: Ferry to Praslin

Check in to a cozy guesthouse or eco-lodge.



Visit Vallée de Mai, a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Sunset swim at Anse Lazio.

Day 4: Island time on La Digue

Cycle to Anse Source d'Argent, one of the world's most photographed beaches.



Picnic under ancient takamaka trees.

Sample a tropical smoothie from a beach shack café.

Day 5: Marine adventures

Join a group snorkelling or diving trip around Coco Island or St Pierre.

Spend the afternoon reading or journaling on Grand Anse.

Dine at a local Creole kitchen for an authentic taste of island life.

Day 6: Return to Mahé

Indulge in a beach side massage or yoga session

Final souvenir shopping at Victoria's craft markets

Depart, rested and renewed

Getting around

Mahé and Praslin: Public buses are safe and budget-friendly, but can be infrequent. Rent a car or hire a taxi.

La Digue: Bicycles are the go-to mode of transport.

Island hopping: Use ferries or domestic flights (Air Seychelles) to move between islands.

Where to stay

Seychelles offers accommodation for every style of solo travel:

Budget: Guesthouses and self-catering villas

Mid-range: Boutique hotels and eco-lodges

Luxury: Seaside resorts with wellness packages and spa retreats



areas

Safety: Violent crime is rare. Basic precautions are enough

Sun Protection: High SPF sunscreen, a hat, and hydration are essential

Seychelles offers a unique kind of solitude not one of loneliness, but of presence. It's the kind of destination where you reconnect with nature, find clarity in the quiet and perhaps even strike up meaningful conversations with fellow travellers along the way.

Whether it's a spontaneous bike ride through La Digue or a serene morning swim off a secret beach, every moment is yours to shape. So if you're craving space, sun and soulful solitude, Seychelles just might be the solo journey you've been waiting for.



Snorkelling or Scuba Diving: Group tours are a great way to meet fellow adventurers.

Hiking Trails: Explore Copolia Trail or Glacis Trois Frères.

Wellness: Many resorts and beach huts offer yoga sessions and massages.

Cultural Stops: Visit Creole heritage sites, art galleries, or attend a local music night.

You can easily balance moments of introspection with social interaction. Most locals speak English and are known for their friendliness, making solo travel feel secure and welcomed.

Money and safety tips

Currency: Seychellois Rupee (SCR); carry some cash for small vendors

Cards: Widely accepted in most tourist



Solo travellers will find the local hosts warm and welcoming, with many properties happy to help with activity bookings and local tips.

What to eat

The food is a fusion of African, French, Indian, and Chinese influences. Solo-friendly dining spots are easy to find:

"Takeaway" vans serve delicious and affordable meals like grilled fish, fried breadfruit, and curries.

Sit-down cafés and casual beach bars often have communal tables.

Don't miss out on fresh mango juice, breadfruit chips, and coconut-based desserts.

Activities for solo travellers





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Shafika Sengupta

Tired of filling out visa forms and waiting for approvals? You're not alone. Luckily, Indian passport holders have the luxury of skipping the paperwork and jetting off to some stunning destinations all within five hours from home. Whether you crave sun-soaked beaches, vibrant cultures or tranquil retreats, there's a world of adventure just a short flight away, no visa stress required.

Maldives: Barefoot luxury just hours away



Maldives

When you think of paradise, chances are you're picturing the

Maldives crystal-clear waters, overwater villas and postcard-perfect beaches. Just three to four hours from cities like Bengaluru or Kochi, this island haven offers visa-on-arrival for Indians. Whether you're planning a romantic escape or looking to recharge in serenity, the Maldives is as dreamy as it gets.

Mauritius: A cultural mosaic with stunning scenery



Mauritius

With its sugar-sand beaches, lush greenery and Indo-Creole charm, Mauritius delivers the best of both adventure and relaxation. Visa-on-

arrival makes planning easy and once there, you can snorkel in lagoons, hike forested trails or simply indulge in the island's colourful food scene.

Seychelles: Remote, raw and ready for you



Seychelles

Seychelles may feel like a faraway fantasy, but flights from Mumbai will get you there in just over four hours. This archipelago grants visa-free entry to Indian travellers and serves up everything from dreamy beaches like Anse Source d'Argent to jungle treks and coral reefs. It's luxury, nature and escapism rolled into one.

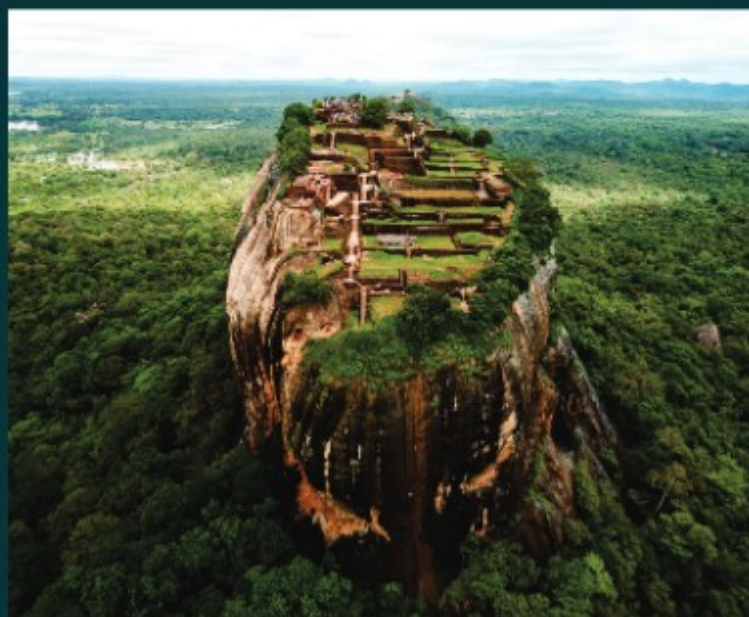
Philippines: Sun, sea and street life



Philippines

Fancy beach-hopping or diving into a lively street culture? The Philippines ticks both boxes. With visa-free entry for up to 14 days, Indians can explore island gems like Palawan or Cebu, dive in marine sanctuaries or wander through the energetic chaos of Manila. It's tropical, affordable and always an adventure.

Sri Lanka: Tea trails and temple tours



Sri Lanka



Thimphu, Bhutan

Hop over the Palk Strait and you're in Sri Lanka, where golden beaches, misty highlands and ancient ruins await. Thanks to its visa-free access, Indian travellers can enjoy impromptu trips to iconic sites like Sigiriya, explore colonial hill towns or feast on fragrant curries without a moment's delay.

Bhutan: Where happiness reigns

High in the Himalayas lies Bhutan, a country where joy is measured not by GDP but by Gross National Happiness. Just a few hours from



Bhutan

Kolkata or Delhi (via connecting flight), Bhutan offers visa-free access to Indians (with a small Sustainable Development Fee). Expect prayer flags, peaceful monasteries and treks to spiritual landmarks like the Tiger's Nest.

Nepal: Mountain magic, no visa needed

Adventure and serenity coexist in Nepal, a neighbour that feels both



Mardi Himal Base Camp, Lumle, Nepal



Nepal

familiar and fresh. Only 1.5 hours from Delhi, Indian citizens can walk in visa-free. Hike in the Himalayas, explore ancient temples in Kathmandu or soak in sunrise views from Nagarkot. Spiritual and scenic, Nepal is an ideal quick escape.

Thailand: A feast for the senses

From Bangkok's buzzing streets to the chill islands of the south, Thailand offers it all—temples, street food, beaches and nightlife.



Phra Nang Beach, Krabi, Thailand

It's just 2.5 to 4 hours away, with easy visa-on-arrival or digital visa options for Indians. Whether you're partying in Phuket or wandering through Chiang Mai's markets, Thailand delivers every time.

Vietnam: Beauty, history and buzz

Vietnam is Southeast Asia's rising travel star. With flights taking under five hours and a straightforward e- visa, it's never been easier to visit. Cruise through



Vietnam



Bangkok, Thailand



Golden Bridge on Ba Na Hills, Vietnam, Da Nang

Ha Long Bay, explore the lantern-lit town of Hoi An or dive into Vietnam's rich street food scene in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City.

Hong Kong: Fast-paced and fascinating

Looking for a dynamic city break? Hong Kong blends skyscrapers and street markets like no other. Indian travellers get 14 days of visa-free access to shop, eat, explore and

enjoy this electric metropolis. From Victoria Peak views to dim sum delights, Hong Kong makes for an unforgettable urban adventure.

Why wait months for travel plans to come together when these

dreamy international destinations are so close and hassle-free? With nothing more than your passport and a packed bag, your next escape could be just hours away. Go on and book that ticket!



Hong Kong



Stonecutters bridge, Hong Kong

India's first museum of inner revolution : Abhay Prabhavana

Ayushi Anand



Nature trail

Tucked away on the tranquil banks of the Indrayani River near Pune, the Abhay Prabhavana Museum is not just a place, it's an experience. Conceived as a 'Museum of ideas' this sprawling 162+ acre space challenges the conventions of what a museum should be.

Founded by industrialist and philanthropist Abhay Firodia, the museum reflects his lifelong commitment to peace, non-violence and the power of ideas to shape the society. There are no dusty relics here, no velvet ropes around ancient artefacts. Instead, it's a world where philosophy, technology and art come together to tell the timeless story of Jain values.

At its core, Abhay Prabhavana is about fearlessness not in the heroic sense, but in a deeper, spiritual one. The museum invites visitors to explore principles like ahimsa (non-violence), anekantavada (pluralism) and aparigraha (non-possessiveness) through more than 30 immersive galleries. These are not passive displays. They engage, challenge and prompt reflection. Through cutting-edge digital storytelling, virtual reality

experiences and striking commissioned artworks, visitors don't just learn about these ideals they feel them.

What makes Abhay Prabhavana especially compelling is its universality. While grounded in Jain thought, its message transcends cultural boundaries, personal beliefs and intellectual disciplines, offering a space for reflection that speaks to every being. It's a place where a tech-savvy teen, a curious traveller or a quiet seeker can all find something that speaks to them.

Landmarks like the 43-foot statue of Rishabhdev and the towering Manastambha inspire awe, while the Plaza of Equanimity offers space for pause and reflection. The air itself seems to echo with questions: How can we live more gently? What does it mean to offer fearlessness to the world?



Manastambha



Rishabhdev

In an age dominated by noise and speed, Abhay Prabhavana is a sanctuary. It's a reminder that timeless wisdom, when thoughtfully presented, still holds the power to move hearts, reshape minds and reawaken conscience. And that's precisely why it deserves a place on every traveller's map.

Visiting days and timings

Wednesday to Friday: 9.15 am to 5.30 pm

Saturday and Sunday: 9.15 am to 8.30 pm

How to reach

Abhay Prabhavana - Firodia Institute of Philosophy, Culture & History

By air: Pune airport is the nearest airport, approximately 48.5 km away.

By train: Pune, Lonavala, Karjat and Dadar in Mumbai are the nearest railway stations.

By road: Cabs are easily available from Mumbai and Pune.

Address: Village Parwadi, Taluka, Maval, Pune, Maharashtra 412106

Contact: 1800 268 5001(toll-free), 90283 83019

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Legacy in leather

Vikash Gupta's vision for Indian craftsmanship

Ayushi Anand



Vikash Gupta isn't just building a brand, he's shaping a movement in modern Indian design. As the Founder and CEO of Threesixty, a high-end leather label launched in 2009 under Ranvik Exports Ltd, Gupta has carved out a niche that blends heritage craftsmanship with bold, contemporary thinking. His journey is defined not by trends, but by a deep-rooted commitment to originality,

storytelling and a belief that the future of luxury can and should be Indian.

Raised in Kolkata, a city he credits with giving him both perspective and purpose, Gupta describes his personal journey with the same warmth and clarity that runs through his brand.

Designing with a point of view

Threesixty's core philosophy is built

around creative independence and championing local talent. "We're committed to Indian design and craftsmanship, not just manufacturing," Gupta said. "Many brands go abroad for inspiration. We do the opposite."

His in-house design team, made up of graduates from top institutes like NID and NIFT, doesn't replicate global styles. Instead, they interpret Indian stories with





fresh eyes, creating pieces that work across continents but are unmistakably homegrown.

That commitment was recently put to the test when a U.S. retailer approached Gupta for an India-inspired capsule collection. "We built it around three cities that mean something to me—Varanasi, Agra and India's wildlife zones," he shared. "It was personal. Varanasi inspired a vibrant, color-rich range. Agra led us to create a bar cabinet lined with a Taj Mahal print and the safari theme brought in bold, textural patterns."

The result? One of the largest international orders the brand has received. "It proved that authenticity resonates, no matter where the customer is," he said.

New shores, new stories

Threesixty's upcoming launch in Goa is a leap of faith and a strategic move. "It's not the obvious location for leather," Gupta admits, "but Goa has soul. It attracts travellers who value design, stories and originality."

With the store set to open soon, his team is working on a Goa-inspired line that challenges the perception of leather as seasonal or formal. "We're creating pieces that reflect the place—casual, elevated, unexpected."

Collaborations that matter

For Gupta, collaborations are never just commercial. They're deeply considered and emotionally charged. Take his recent partnership with Glenfiddich, the iconic

Scotch whisky brand. After nearly a year of brand alignment and due diligence, Threesixty was selected for a long-term collaboration that has seen its pieces placed in luxury destinations like The Peninsula and Raffles London.

"It wasn't just about product—it was about values," Gupta said. "And I was clear: our brand name had to sit alongside theirs. It was important to represent Indian design, not just supply it."

Then there's the limited-edition collaboration with Kapil Dev, the cricket legend who led India to its historic 1983 World Cup victory. For Gupta, the connection was personal. "That win

changed something in me. I was in school, and I remember crying tears of joy. Collaborating with him was my way of preserving that moment for the next generation."

The capsule line, which honours Dev's legendary innings, has been widely celebrated. "It's not just memorabilia. It's about evoking emotion through design," he said.

India, to the world

Looking ahead, Gupta is focused on expanding Threesixty's global presence with one clear ambition - to put Indian craftsmanship on the world's luxury map. "Who's to say the next big global design house can't come from India?" he asks. "Maybe it'll take fifty years. Maybe a hundred. But someone has to start the journey."

He concluded with quiet confidence, "I may not see the end of that journey in my lifetime. But if what we're doing now inspires even a handful of designers or brands to believe in their roots and aim higher, I'll know it was worth it."

In that belief lies the true legacy of Threesixty—not just as a leather brand, but as a design house with a soul and a vision, proudly made in India.



Gastronomic glamour at Zing as the Metropolitan Hotel & Spa celebrates 25 years of excellence

Daisy Saxena



Savoury, umami-rich and perfectly balanced with crunchy greens and silky noodles that soak up the sauce just right.

Ending the meal on a sweet note, a decadent slice of German chocolate cake arrives at the table, served with a scoop of vanilla ice cream—an indulgent treat to a truly memorable dining experience.

Whether you're exploring the delicate flavours of Japan, the boldness of Indian spice or the comforting familiarity of global favourites, The Metropolitan's anniversary celebration promises something for every taste—but at Zing, the experience feels just a little more indulgent.

For a limited time, the exclusive anniversary tasting menu is offered at INR 2500 plus taxes, making it a fitting celebration of both luxury and accessibility.

Where: The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa, Bangla Sahib Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi – 110001, India.

For reservations, contact: +91 11 42500200



Nasi Goreng



Fungi Pizza

Celebrating 25 years of impeccable hospitality, The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa in New Delhi is marking the occasion not just with accolades but with a thoughtfully curated culinary tribute across all its celebrated restaurants. From Sakura, India's first authentic Japanese restaurant to Chutney, Bar + Tandoor, known for its inventive take on Indian cuisine, each dining venue is presenting a limited-edition anniversary menu crafted with guest favourite dishes and timeless flavours.

Long admired for its global approach to comfort food, Zing is serving up a four-course menu that blends nostalgia, innovation and culinary flair—revisiting its most beloved classics with a fresh perspective.

A spectacular four-course feast at a steal!

Zing's special four-course menu is a celebration of global flavours with thoughtfully curated options for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians, all at an unbeatable price point.

To begin, vegetarians can warm up with the velvety mushroom cappuccino, a creamy and comforting soup that's



Quesadilla

perfect for the monsoon season. Non-vegetarians can choose between the robust garlic chicken soup or the classic hot and sour, both packed with depth and flavour.

The appetisers are equally tempting. The quesadillas, generously stuffed and served with a trio of salsa, cream cheese and guacamole, are a crowd-pleaser. For seafood lovers, the prawn taro nest is a standout—crispy and beautifully spiced, garnished with finely chopped bell peppers and onions for a fresh crunch.

When it comes to mains, the choices might leave you happily indecisive. Think handcrafted pasta, wood-fired pizza or a fragrant bowl of Indonesian-style nasi goreng. The grilled fish in lemon butter sauce is a light yet indulgent pick. But the real surprise is the stir-fried noodles with Chinese greens in black bean sauce.

Luxury, rewired: How Randhir Gupta is scaling Mayfair Hotels & Resorts without losing its soul

Ayushi Anand



Randhir Gupta

In an industry where buzzwords often overshadow substance, Randhir Gupta, Vice President – Commercial and Business Development at Mayfair Hotels & Resorts, is a rare breed. Measured in tone but expansive in vision, Gupta is quietly but decisively steering one of India's most loved regional luxury hotel chains into national prominence.

"We've always been deeply rooted in the East and Northeast," he says with a calm confidence that belies the scale of what he's building. "But the time has come to take Mayfair beyond the comfort zone."

And so begins the next chapter of Mayfair Hotels—one defined not just by its signature tea estates and temple-side retreats, but by a modern portfolio of wedding destinations, convention centres, coastal getaways and soon, a national footprint curated under Gupta's leadership.

From regional pride to national plans

Mayfair's journey began in 1982 and for decades, its story has been synonymous with luxury hospitality in states like



Mayfair Lagoon, Bhubaneswar

Odisha, Sikkim, West Bengal and Assam. Gupta, who leads the group's strategic development and commercial outreach, is now expanding that narrative.

"Today, out of our 18 hotels, 14 are owned and operated. But the future is management contracts," he says. "The asset-light model gives us scale without the time-consuming capital investment. We already have the brand equity; now, it's about replication and speed."

This shift, timely and tactical is already visible. Gupta has overseen the expansion of Mayfair Elixir, the group's management-led vertical, into high-potential destinations like Goa, Alibaug, Purnia and Guwahati, with several more in the pipeline. "Elixir is the fast-track to the future," he says. "And the response so far has been phenomenal."

Pilgrimage, legacy and the business of faith

Gupta's vision doesn't just chase markets. It understands cultural rhythms. He's acutely aware that India's luxury segment isn't monolithic. For every wedding party

in Goa, there's a spiritual seeker looking for tranquility near Neem Karoli Baba's temple in Almora.

"Pilgrimage has always been a strong vertical for us," he says, referencing Mayfair's two legacy hotels in Puri, which date back to the 1980s. "Now, we're creating spaces for the new generation of spiritual travellers—those who want devotion and design in equal measure."

The upcoming Almora property, for instance, is situated just 45 km from the Neem Karoli Ashram. Phase one will include only 12 to 13 luxury cottages. "We're not chasing room counts. We're chasing resonance," he emphasises.

Building horizontally, thinking vertically

What truly sets Gupta's Mayfair apart in a crowded luxury market is its design philosophy. "We don't build vertical," he says flatly. "We build across the land. We integrate, not impose."

Indeed, Mayfair's properties are often sprawling retreats where the architecture bends to nature. The Siliguri property, for instance, is set amidst 1,000 acres of tea

Hospitality

gardens, with only 50 acres developed for hospitality use. The Jungpana Estate, once a summer home of the King of Nepal, spans across 450 acres and includes 11 waterfalls and a functioning tea factory.

"These are the kinds of experiences you can't replicate in city hotels," says Gupta. "This is where Mayfair is different. We don't just serve guests, we immerse them."

The Guwahati power play

One of Gupta's most ambitious projects to date is the Mayfair Elixir Guwahati, a 260-key resort spread over 50 acres with one of the largest convention centres in India. With an 80,000 sq. ft. ballroom, 15,000 sq. ft. pre-function area and capacity to host events for up to 10,000 people, it's a signal to the MICE and destination wedding segment that Mayfair is ready for the big league.

"We call it India's northeast gateway," Gupta says. "Guwahati isn't just a city. It's a springboard, both for business and leisure."

The property is set to grow further, with 180 more keys in development, which would bring the total to 440—making it one of the largest in the country by room count.

The loyalty factor (and what's in store)

Gupta is also overseeing the creation of Mayfair's first official loyalty programme, set to launch in Q3 of 2025. But he points out that brand loyalty already runs deep without one.

"Over 80 per cent of our guests are repeat visitors," he says. "If you stay at Mayfair Darjeeling and love it, chances are, the next time you're in Goa, you'll look for Mayfair again. That's not transactional loyalty, it's emotional."

The new programme aims to formalise this relationship while keeping it personal. "We're not about collecting points. We're about collecting memories," Gupta smiles.

Domestic first, but global on the horizon

For now, Gupta is focusing on India. "We're evaluating a lot of



Mayfair Manor, Jungpana

destinations—Almora is just the beginning," he says. "There's so much untapped beauty here that just needs the right kind of luxury product."

But he doesn't rule out international expansion. "We're getting ready. India is the focus right now, but we're definitely exploring options abroad. When we do go out, it'll be with the same DNA—nature-first, experience-driven luxury."

Calm in the chaos

Even as the global hospitality market navigates uncertainty from wars in Europe to economic stagnation, Gupta remains measured in his optimism.

"Yes, inbound tourism is still soft," he acknowledges. "But domestic demand has been our backbone. Summer is full of MICE and leisure travel, winter brings in weddings. We've learned to read the cycles and stay resilient."

He's not a fan of knee-jerk strategies. "Markets will always swing. The key is not to panic. Build value, stay consistent and the guests will keep coming."

Looking ahead: More land, fewer rooms

In a time when many luxury chains are obsessed with scaling room inventory, Gupta has a counter-intuitive philosophy: more land, fewer rooms.

"Our new properties won't be about packing in rooms," he says. "They'll be about maximising experience per guest. Almora will start with just 13 cottages for a reason. We're creating sanctuaries, not hotels."

That belief, almost spiritual in its clarity, is what defines Gupta's leadership. He is not trying to outpace the competition. He's trying to outlast them.

As Mayfair prepares to expand its footprint from the beaches of Goa to the foothills of Uttarakhand, Randhir Gupta is proving that hospitality doesn't have to shout to stand out. In his quiet, calculated way, he's remapping Indian luxury, one thoughtful destination at a time.

"We're not chasing trends," he says. "We're building legacies. And we're doing it with nature, heritage and heart."



Mayfair On Sea, Morjim, Goa

What's next for Mayfair?

Almora (Uttarakhand): Opening Q1 2026, 13 ultra-luxe cottages in phase 1

Mayfair Elixir loyalty program: Launching late 2025

Expansion pipeline: Several management contract properties under discussion.

Current strength: 18 hotels, with majority in East/Northeast India.

New markets: Goa, Alibaug, Purnia and Guwahati.

Focus areas: Pilgrimage, MICE, destination weddings, boutique luxury.

Flavours that fire up your senses: **The China Kitchen's hot new drop!**

Ayushi Anand



Are you ready for a flavour bomb? The China Kitchen at Hyatt Regency, Delhi is turning up the heat this summer with a brand-new menu that's anything but ordinary. Curated by the culinary genius Chef Zhang Hongsheng, this revamp is your ticket to a taste trip across China—one plate at a time.

Forget what you knew about Chinese food. This is regional, refined and ridiculously good. Think: spicy Sichuan-style dumplings that pack a punch, hand-pulled Dan Dan noodles you'll dream about later and crystal dumplings so delicate they practically float—filled with lotus root, edamame and water chestnuts.

Craving a little drama? The signature spicy sliced chicken fungus, bell pepper is an indulgent showstopper, while the wok tossed Hunan chilli Chinese cabbage and wok tossed Hangzhou style prawn deliver texture, spice and serious satisfaction. Even the soups get a glow-up—don't miss the seaweed tofu vegetable clear soup.

And just when you think it can't get better, the dessert arrives. Light, luscious and full of finesse, it's a sweet surprise in every spoon. There's the coconut chia seed pudding, creamy yet refreshing; the

mango custard chocolate tart, which hits all the right notes—tropical, rich and beautifully balanced; and the classic egg tart, flaky, golden and just the right amount of indulgent. Each one is a thoughtful finish to a flavour-packed meal.



Lunch: 12:00 pm – 3:00 pm.

Dinner: 7:00 pm – 11:30 pm.

Where: The China Kitchen, Ground floor, Hyatt Regency Delhi, Bhikaiji Cama Place, Ring road, Rama Krishna Puram, New Delhi, Delhi 110066.

Contact: 011-6677 1334 or +91-96543 83388.



Sip, slurp, savor

A journey through Vietnam's flavour-forward soul

Shafika Sengupta

In Vietnam, the clink of a spoon in a glass and the hiss of meat on a street-side grill tell stories as vividly as its war museums or limestone karsts. Here, coffee isn't just a morning ritual, it's a cultural cornerstone. Food isn't merely sustenance. It's theatre, history and daily poetry. And nowhere does the bond between cuisine and identity come alive more vibrantly than in this narrow, S-shaped country where every region serves a distinct taste of place.

A nation brewed in coffee

Coffee in Vietnam isn't an import—it's an inheritance. Introduced by the French in the 19th century and adapted to local taste and climate, the result is one of the world's most unique and dynamic coffee cultures. It starts with the phin: a small metal drip filter placed atop a glass, slowly dripping thick, inky brew over sweetened condensed milk. The process is unhurried, and that's the point. Coffee here is a pause button, an excuse to sit, talk and observe.

In Hanoi, egg coffee (cà phê trứng) is a



Gỏi cuốn (fresh spring rolls)

local legend. Invented during a milk shortage in the 1940s, this concoction whips egg yolks, sugar and condensed milk into a velvety foam that floats atop hot coffee like a custard crown. The first sip is pure indulgence—creamy, rich and gently bitter underneath. Meanwhile, in Ho Chi Minh City, coconut coffee offers a tropical twist: smooth espresso blended with frozen coconut cream and ice, perfect for humid afternoons. And at roadside stalls, locals sip on cà phê sữa đá, a sweet iced coffee so potent it feels almost like jet fuel in a glass.

The café landscape is equally layered. Tiny alley cafés in Hanoi double as family living rooms. Trendy Saigon coffee bars serve cold brew in chemistry-lab glassware. Each is a microcosm of Vietnamese life - communal, creative and endlessly caffeinated.

Bites of identity

Vietnamese cuisine reflects its geography, long coastlines, fertile deltas and colonial echoes. The north tends toward subtlety and warmth. Think savory broths and delicate seasoning. The central region is fiery and bold, while the south leans sweet and herbaceous. Together, they compose a national palate that's fresh, balanced and deeply soulful.

At the heart is pho, Vietnam's most famous dish. But no two bowls are ever

the same. In the north, the broth is clear and elegant, with flat rice noodles and minimal garnish. Head south and the same dish brims with herbs, lime and bean sprouts—a build-your-own adventure in every bowl.

Then there's bánh mì, the ultimate fusion food. A legacy of French colonialism transformed by Vietnamese ingenuity, it layers a crusty baguette with grilled meats, pickled vegetables, coriander, pâté and chili sauce. Each bite crackles with contrast—hot and cold, soft and crisp, sour and savory.

For a taste of Vietnam's light, herb-



Vietnamese Iced Coffee (Cà phê sữa đá)



Vietnam food lane



Vietnam Soup-Pho

forward cuisine, goi cuon (fresh spring rolls) deliver with elegance. Packed with shrimp, pork, vermicelli and mint, then dipped in hoisin-peanut sauce, they're a refreshing antidote to the country's humid heat.

Markets, stalls, and midnight broths

True culinary immersion happens not just in restaurants but in motion, at bustling markets, night stalls and curbside kitchens. In Hoi An's night market, sizzling skewers and bubbling pots beckon under lantern light. In Hue, vendors serve bún bò Huế, a spicy beef noodle soup born from imperial kitchens. And in Da Nang, tiny carts offer bánh xèo, crispy rice pancakes folded with shrimp, pork and bean sprouts, wrapped in lettuce and dunked in dipping sauce.

No matter where you go, food is an open invitation. Pull up a plastic stool and you'll likely be greeted with a smile and perhaps even a lesson on how to properly roll your herbs or mix your dipping sauce.

Vietnam's culinary journey isn't confined to menus. It is lived, shared and steeped in memory. From the slow drip of a morning coffee to the communal clatter of dinner bowls, every meal reveals a story of survival, adaptation and passion. To eat and drink your way through Vietnam is not only to taste its traditions but to tap into the very rhythm of its life.

Matcha at a crossroads

*As global supplies dwindle,
India cultivates a new ritual*

Ami Shah

With climate disruptions threatening Japan's famed tea-growing regions, matcha once a symbol of serenity and wellness is now facing a crisis. But in India, a growing movement is quietly redefining how we source, sip and savour this emerald elixir.

Once an esoteric Japanese ceremonial drink, matcha has gone mainstream. Today, it powers everything from wellness lattes to skincare serums, embodying both health and hedonism. But as global demand accelerates, the very qualities that make matcha unique its slow, shade-grown production and regional specificity are now its greatest vulnerabilities.

"Ceremonial-grade matcha is not a product you can mass-produce without compromise," said a tea sourcing expert based in Tokyo. "It demands patience, precision, and pristine climate conditions." Unfortunately, these

conditions are becoming increasingly erratic in Japan's core growing regions of Uji and Nishio, thanks to rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall and shrinking agricultural labour.

As a result, matcha is on the cusp of becoming a luxury good, with prices already climbing and supply chains tightening. But amid this global unease, India is quietly cultivating its own relationship with matcha. One that goes beyond fleeting trends to embrace ritual, wellness and design-forward hospitality.

India's emerging matcha culture

From artisanal cafés to wellness studios and online tea ateliers, a new generation of Indian establishments is building a thoughtful, experience-driven matcha scene. These are not simply aesthetic-driven spaces, they are shaping a matcha narrative grounded in quality, community and mindful consumption.

Where to experience India's matcha renaissance

Espressos Anyday, Delhi



Espressos Anyday

For those looking to experiment, this upbeat café offers a bold twist. A matcha-infused espresso that melds the intensity of coffee with the earthy depth of green tea.





Fig at Malcha

Fig at Malcha, Delhi

Located in a leafy corner of the capital, Fig at Malcha is a haven of calm. Their matcha menu ranges from traditional teas to inventive desserts, offering a refined take on the green trend.

The Matcha Bar, Bandra (Mumbai)

India's first dedicated matcha café, The Matcha Bar offers everything from ceremonial shots to tropical-inspired lattes, all crafted with premium Japanese-imported matcha. Its clean, minimalist design echoes Japanese tea houses, reinforcing a focus on calm and craft.

Sequel, Mumbai



Sequel, Mumbai

A front-runner in clean eating and organic indulgence, Sequel serves ceremonial-grade matcha in a sleek, minimalist space. Its antioxidant-rich matcha offerings feel like luxury without compromise.



The Matcha Bar, Bandra

Quick Brown Fox Coffee Roasters, Bengaluru

This Indiranagar favourite is known for balancing serious coffee with superfood-forward options. Their Matcha Latte, made with house-made nut milk, has become a staple for Bengaluru's health-conscious clientele.

The Kind Roastery & Brewroom, Chennai

Blending sustainable sourcing with third-wave café culture, The Kind stands out for its matcha smoothies and latte especially the Matcha & Banana Smoothie, which has become a cult favourite among the city's wellness crowd.

The Tea Shelf (Online + Kolkata Studio)

More than an e-commerce brand, The Tea Shelf's Kolkata studio offers curated tastings and immersive matcha rituals



The Kind Roastery & Brewroom, Chennai

designed for those looking to understand the craft rather than consume the commodity.

As the world's matcha supply faces mounting challenges, India's rising matcha scene offers more than just an alternative. It signals a shift in how the drink is perceived and enjoyed. Matcha is not just a product, it's a practice and India is making it its own.



Quick Brown Fox Coffee Roasters, Bengaluru

Talk like a traveller

When in

Shafika Sengupta

Ahlan wa sahlán.

I heard it before I saw the smile. Cairo airport was a blur of luggage carts and call-to-prayer echoes, but the greeting cut through like a beam of sun on a desert morning. Warm, musical and strangely grounding. That's Egypt for you! A place where the words don't just welcome you. They weave you in.

Language as a handshake

In Egypt, Arabic isn't just a language, a gesture, an embrace and a rhythm. It rolls off tongues with the confidence of centuries, but somehow never feels too formal for a stranger.

Shukran (thank you) was the first word I mastered – simple, sincere and enough to open doors. But it's how you say it that counts. Add a nod, a hand to heart or a genuine smile and it transforms into something deeper - connection.

Later, in a spice shop in Aswan, I said shukran and the vendor replied with Ya'ni eih shukran bass? translating to - what do you mean just thank you? before handing me a bag of hibiscus tea for free. That's Egypt - dramatic, generous and never content with half-measures.

Egypt

In the streets, on the Nile

Egyptian Arabic (Masri) is fast, expressive and full of personality. In Cairo when I was on the way Khan el- Khalili market, my driver threw out phrases like yalla bina! (let's go!) and kullo tamam (all good) as if narrating a high-speed action movie.

But my favourite phrase? Malesh. It's impossible to translate. It means something like no worries, never mind or it's okay. Missed your train? Malesh. Spilled tea on your white shirt? Malesh. It's Egypt's way of telling you that the world spins on and you're still welcome.

Food, faith and familiarity

Language shows up everywhere, in food stalls, calligraphy-covered mosques, even WhatsApp voice notes from new friends. At a koshari stand, I heard hna a'la a'adim zomana – we're just like the old days – a nostalgic way to say life is good, even if it's just over lentils and fried onions.

On Fridays, outside mosques, you hear Jumu'ah Mubarak – blessed Friday, exchanged like a secret handshake between strangers.

The warmth isn't just in what's said – it's in how people linger on vowels, lean into jokes or offer you bread with tafaddal – please, go ahead.

The unspoken and untranslatable

Tayeb: Ok, fine, but it also means sure, why not or if you insist.

Aiwa: Yes, but with enthusiasm. A

thumbs-up of a word.

Baraka: A blessing, luck or spiritual goodness – found in people, food or quiet moments under fig trees.

These are the words that stay with you not because you memorise them but because you feel them.

Not a goodbye, just a pause

On my last night in Luxor, I watched the sun melt behind the mountains, feluccas floating silently on the Nile. My guide waved and said, 'Ma'a salama'. Not just 'goodbye,' but 'go with peace.'

It felt like closure – and an open door all at once.

You don't need to master Egyptian Arabic to feel at home. Just let the words meet you halfway with laughter, with patience and with stories wrapped inside them. Because in Egypt, it's not about speaking perfectly. It's about speaking warmly.



Your quick-fire phrasebook

Phrase	Meaning	Use it when
Ahlan / Ahlan wa sahlan	Hello / Welcome	Greeting locals, being greeted
Shukran	Thank you	For kindness, service, gifts
Malesh	It's okay / No problem	When things don't go as planned
Yalla	Let's go / Come on	Moving, starting an adventure
Kullo tamam	All good / Everything's fine	Reassurance, check-ins
Habibi / Habibti	My love / sweetheart (M/F)	Friendly term for friends or anyone, really
Ma'a salama	Goodbye / Go in peace	Farewell, respectfully

Wings of reform : Subhash Goyal on unlocking India's aviation potential

Ayushi Anand



Subhash Goyal

India's aviation sector is poised for take off but only if policy, sustainability and partnerships evolve with the times. Subhash Goyal, Founder Chairman of STIC Travel Group of Companies, greeted me with a warm smile as I stepped into his Connaught Place office, immediately offering something from Wenger's nearby. Dressed in a sharp suit with an airplane lapel pin - a subtle nod to his lifelong connection with aviation he was ready to dive into a conversation about India's aviation potential, offering insights shaped by decades in the industry.

Open skies and missed opportunities

India may boast some of the world's most advanced airports, but many remain underused due to limited international access. Goyal sees this as a policy failure. "We've built world-class airports, but many remain underutilised due to limited international connectivity," he explains. "An open skies policy is vital. Any airline wishing to operate in India should be welcomed."

The lack of direct flights from entire continents, he argues, is stalling India's global tourism ambitions. "We have no direct flights from most of Africa or South

America. This limits inbound tourism and weakens our global presence."

Policy reform must match infrastructure

While the government has made strides, Goyal urges a shift in how bilateral air agreements are approached.

"Bilateral agreements are often restrictive," he notes. "If a foreign airline has used its quota, but no Indian carrier flies there, we should still increase access in our national interest."

He points to the broader economic impact of air travel. "Tourism creates jobs. One in every nine jobs over the next two decades will come from this sector provided aviation enables it."

Elevating the passenger journey

From digitisation to better staffing, India's major airports have evolved dramatically. "Airports in Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad are now world-class," Goyal said. "Initiatives like DigiYatra and e-visa queues have made a big difference."

In fact, he sees India as setting a new global benchmark. "Compared to many Western airports, Indian hubs are more efficient, well-staffed and customer-friendly. We've come a long way, and this progress must continue across all cities."

Greener skies, smarter investments

Sustainability, Goyal insists, cannot be delayed. "Climate change is real and aviation must act," he said. "ATF accounts for 25 per cent of operating costs and we need greener, cost-effective alternatives."

He believes in the potential of hydrogen and solar power. "The government should lead by example, starting with solar-powered government buildings and hotels. Sustainability isn't a choice anymore; it's a responsibility."

Safety, transparency and trust

When it comes to safety, Goyal is confident in India's systems.

"India follows ICAO and DGCA norms strictly," he affirms. "Permit applications are now online and transparency has improved significantly."

He points out that India has its own national security manual. "It's stronger than many global standards. I'm confident about the safety and regulatory framework we have in place today."

Making India investor-ready

With aviation being highly capital intensive, Goyal sees an urgent need to attract more global capital.

"Aviation is capital intensive and we must allow more foreign participation especially in domestic operations," he suggests.

He also calls for fairer pricing. "There must be a cap on ticket pricing. Charging INR 50,000 for short-haul routes during high demand is unfair. Profit must not come at the cost of exploitation."

Power in partnership

The role of travel agents in airline success, Goyal stresses, is often underplayed. "Travel agents are the extended arm of airlines," he said. "With over 25,000 agents in India, they offer unmatched reach."

He advocates for stronger collaboration: "Airlines should invest in relationships with agents and provide commissions to build loyalty. It's far more cost-effective than opening hundreds of offices."

India's aviation story is still being written but according to Goyal, the next chapter must focus on open access, green fuel, better pricing and deeper collaboration. The sky, as he sees it, isn't the limit—it's the runway.

Singapore Tourism Board unveils revamped roadshow format and fresh MICE incentives during two-city B2B showcase in New Delhi and Kochi.



Balitrip Wisata's India Roadshow draws 250+ travel agents in Kolkata



A new chapter in travel begins

Presenting the first edition of our magazine, crafted for the travel trade, inspired by explorers and supported by ambassadors, visionaries and change makers who shape the journeys of tomorrow.



Randhir Gupta, Vice President - Commercial and Business Development, Mayfair Hotels & Resorts



Markus Tan
Regional Director (India, Middle East, South Asia and Africa)
Singapore Tourism Board



Abhay Firodia, Chairman, Force Motors and philanthropist



Michael Ma, Assistant CEO, Sentosa Development Corporation

Events Recap



H.E. Mahishini Colonne, High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to India



H.E. Stella Nkomo, High Commissioner of Zimbabwe to India



Subhash Goyal, Chairman STIC Travel Group

APPOINTMENTS



Amarinder Sadana
joins Hyatt India
& Southwest Asia
as the Director of
Revenue
Management.



Guneeta Duggal
joins Raffles Udaipur
as Director of
Sales and Marketing.



Parag Sawhney
joins The Park
New Delhi as the
General Manager.



Vivek Kakria
joins Radisson Blu
Plaza Delhi Airport
as the Rooms
Division Manager.



Pooja Gaur
joins Jaisalmer
Marriott Resort
& Spa as the
Director of Marketing



Kunal Shanker
joins Intercontinental
Chennai
Mahabalipuram as
the General
Manager.



Shikha Mishra
joins Think
Strawberries
Founder's Office
as a Senior Advisor.



Pravin R. Yadav
joins One Above
Global as the CTO to
lead the launch of
new B2B travel portal
- oaglobe.com



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