

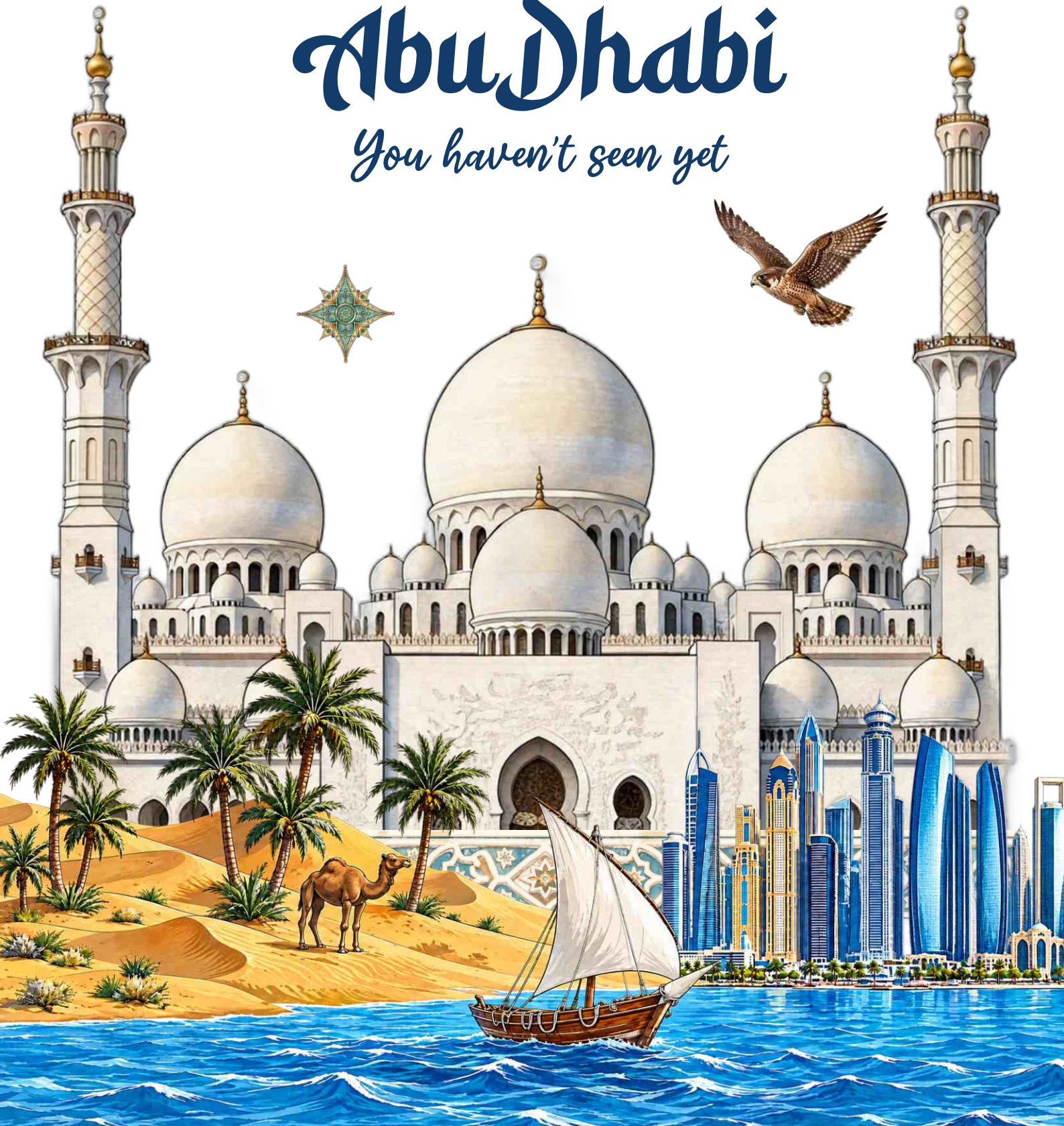
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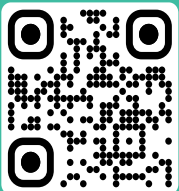
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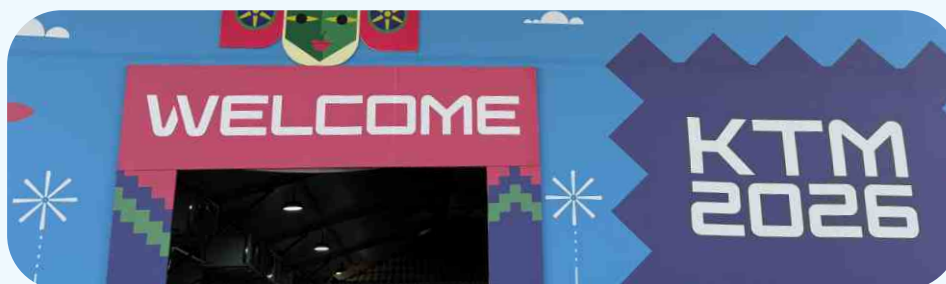


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Letter from the Editor-in-Chief

The travel industry has been on an exciting roll, with back-to-back trade shows and industry engagements keeping the calendar packed and conversations moving. From TTM to the IATO Convention, ATM and KTM, the momentum continues as we look ahead to ITB Singapore and WTM London.

This issue reflects that energy, with MICE taking centre stage as destinations, hotels and travel companies explore new opportunities in the segment. We bring you conversations with P.C Vishnunadh, Minister for Tourism and Culture, Kerala, and Julinus Jeffery Jimit, CEO, Sabah Tourism Board, offering insights into destinations and their growing relevance for Indian travellers.

We also bring you an overview of the IATO Convention and KTM, alongside a conversation with Dipti Adhia, Country Director, Discover the World, India, on the evolving opportunities in cruise MICE.

Our cover story takes a closer look at Fairways & Flyways, our first B2B networking event, bringing together the travel trade and industry partners in an engaging setting that combined business, golf and experiences. It marks an important new chapter for Next Destination as we create platforms for meaningful industry connections.

We also explore Abu Dhabi beyond the familiar, with a focus on new experiences and Michelin-starred dining.

Here's to more conversations, connections and possibilities shaping the future of travel.

Ayushi Anand

Ayushi Anand

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DCT Abu Dhabi strengthens trade partnerships at Arabian Travel Market

The Department of Culture and Tourism Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi) signed and renewed 21 trade and industry partnership agreements at Arabian Travel Market, strengthening its global commercial network and supporting the emirate's Tourism Strategy 2030.

The agreements span travel technology, tour operations, aviation, hospitality and destination marketing. DCT Abu Dhabi also signed strategic collaborations with MakeMyTrip and Musafir to drive domestic visitation across Abu Dhabi and Al Ain, while nine joint marketing partnerships with Indian travel companies are expected to target 75,500 additional visitors.

In China, new agreements with Trip.com Group and Qunar will promote longer stays and deeper engagement with Abu Dhabi's attractions. A new partnership with Accor will focus on domestic staycations, leisure breaks and repeat visits through its hotel loyalty network.

The Experience Abu Dhabi stand also received the Best Stand Feature accolade at ATM, recognising its cultural showcases, local artisan activations and sustainable practices.



Mauritius records 14.5 per cent growth in Indian arrivals

Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority (MTPA) has strengthened its engagement with India through a four city initiative across Pune, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad. The initiative marked MTPA's third marketing operation in India since January 2026.

From January to July 2026, Mauritius welcomed 51,005 Indian visitors, recording 14.5 per cent year on year growth. The initiative brought together more than 20 tourism partners from Mauritius, including hotels, DMCs and airlines, for engagements with travel professionals across the four markets.

The programme highlighted Mauritius beyond its traditional appeal for beach holidays, honeymoons and weddings, with a focus on family travel, luxury, MICE, wellness, golf, gastronomy and adventure. Travel advisors were also introduced to the destination's latest accommodation and experience offerings ahead of the upcoming travel season.

MTPA plans to continue its India strategy through trade partnerships, familiarisation trips, media initiatives and targeted activity across established and emerging markets, positioning Mauritius as a diverse, accessible and year round destination..

Ras Al Khaimah strengthens India trade engagement through roadshow and M lange 2026



Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA) strengthened its engagement with the Indian travel trade through a three-city roadshow across Delhi, Bengaluru and Hyderabad from September 21–24, followed by participation at M lange 2026 in Mumbai on September 26–27.

The engagements brought together tourism stakeholders from Ras Al Khaimah with travel agents, tour operators, MICE specialists and wedding planners. Across the roadshow and M lange, the delegation connected with more than 750 travel trade partners through presentations, one-to-one meetings and networking sessions.

Discussions focused on leisure, family travel, destination weddings and MICE, while highlighting the destination's beaches, desert, mountains, mangroves and heritage experiences. India recorded 14 per cent year-on-year growth in visitor arrivals to Ras Al Khaimah in 2025, with arrivals from May 2026 onwards up 30 per cent year on year.

The destination is also expanding its hospitality portfolio, with Rotana Ras Al Khaimah – The Mangroves, SAJI Mountain Lodge by Mantis and Wynn Al Marjan Island adding new opportunities for Indian travellers and the travel trade.

Zimbabwe strengthens India focus through Sanganai World Tourism Expo



Zimbabwe strengthened its engagement with the Indian outbound travel market through the 19th Sanganai/Hlanganani Dzimabwe World Tourism Expo, held from September 9–12, 2026, in Masvingo. Organised by the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority, the event brought together 10 Indian luxury and MICE travel buyers for destination experiences and B2B engagements with Zimbabwean tourism stakeholders.

The delegation explored destinations beyond Victoria Falls, including Gonarezhou National Park, Chilojo Cliffs, Great Zimbabwe and Lake Mutirikwi, showcasing opportunities across wildlife, heritage, adventure and experiential travel. The programme concluded in Victoria Falls, with activities including jet boating, ziplining, a scenic flight and a Zambezi sunset cruise.

The initiative comes as Zimbabwe prepares to co-host the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2027 with South Africa and Namibia. The destination aims to leverage the tournament to strengthen tourism demand from India and position Zimbabwe as a complete Southern African destination for leisure, luxury and MICE travel.



KTO strengthens Korea–Tamil Nadu travel trade ties

The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) New Delhi Office hosted a travel mart and roadshow in Chennai on September 11 at ITC Grand Chola, bringing together Korean tourism stakeholders and Tamil Nadu's travel trade community. The event attracted more than 500 travel trade professionals, with participation from 16 Korean DMCs and five airline partners.

Representatives from the Korea Visa Application Centre were also present to brief the trade on visa procedures. The event was attended by Hyeran Chun, Consul General, Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Chennai, and Raja Gopal Sunkara, IAS, Director of Tourism and Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation.

KTO Director Cho Yoonmi, on her first visit to Chennai, highlighted the industry response and the organisation's focus on strengthening partnerships across Tamil Nadu and southern India. The programme included a Korea tourism presentation and a performance by Korean live art group THE PAINTERS, followed by a gala dinner for trade and industry stakeholders.



United Parks & Resorts expands focus in India with Rayna Tours partnership

United Parks & Resorts has expanded its focus on the Indian travel market through a new partnership with Rayna Tours, aimed at strengthening travel trade relationships and increasing awareness of its portfolio among Indian travellers. Under the collaboration, Rayna Tours will provide dedicated India market representation, supporting business development, trade engagement, agent training, distribution, market intelligence, public relations and media outreach.

The partnership will also see United Parks & Resorts increase its participation in trade shows, roadshows, training programmes and other market activations. Rayna Tours, which has more than 20 years of travel trade experience and a B2B network of over 10,000 agents and tour operators across India and the GCC, will support the company's market expansion.

The portfolio includes SeaWorld Orlando, Discovery Cove, Aquatica Orlando and Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, offering Indian visitors experiences across wildlife, attractions, entertainment and family travel.



OTOAI urges Maldives to reconsider 17 per cent Tourism GST

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) has urged the Maldives Government to reconsider the introduction of a 17 per cent Tourism GST applicable to overseas tour operators, travel agents and booking platforms from 1 October 2026.

The association said the additional tax and compliance requirements could increase the cost of Maldives holidays and add pressure on the outbound travel trade amid rising costs and challenging market conditions. It also highlighted potential implications for bookings contracted and sold months in advance at agreed prices, including margins and consumer pricing.

OTOAI President Himanshu Patil called for the provision to be withdrawn and urged greater consultation between the Maldives Government and international travel trade associations, including OTOAI, along with Maldivian industry bodies such as MATATO and MATI.

OTOAI noted the longstanding importance of the Maldives to Indian outbound tourism and reiterated its commitment to working with Maldivian authorities and industry stakeholders to support tourism growth and the bilateral travel relationship.



China Southern Airlines resumes daily Delhi–Guangzhou service

China Southern Airlines has resumed its daily non-stop service between Delhi and Guangzhou, marking the return of the direct connection between India and China on September 21, 2026. The service was relaunched at Delhi Airport, with Group Concorde associated with the airline's India operations and the milestone.

The resumption is expected to support renewed connectivity between the two markets, creating greater opportunities for business and leisure travel. The daily service will provide travellers with a direct link between Delhi and Guangzhou, strengthening air connectivity between the two destinations.

Group Concorde will support China Southern Airlines as it expands its presence in the Indian market and promotes the Delhi–Guangzhou service. The development comes as airlines and travel industry stakeholders continue to focus on strengthening international connectivity and facilitating travel between India and key global markets.

Atmosphere Core signs 10th Maldives resort



Atmosphere Core has signed its 10th resort in the Maldives, with ONE BANYAN Amaraa Faru An Atmosphere Hotel, Maldives, scheduled to open in March 2027. Located in Kaafu Atoll, the 118-villa island retreat will be the first property under the ONE BANYAN series of co-branded island resorts and will operate under the An Atmosphere Hotel sub-brand.

Accessible via a 45-minute speedboat transfer from Velana International Airport, the resort will combine contemporary luxury with lagoon settings and a curated mix of culinary, wellness and adventure experiences.

The ONE BANYAN concept has been developed to allow individual properties to retain their own identity while offering a distinctive guest

experience. Amaraa Faru will focus on flexibility and immersive experiences inspired by its Maldivian setting, with its name referencing eternity and the Dhivehi word for reef.

Guests will have access to the brand's signature Holiday Plan, covering dining, wellness, snorkelling and other tropical activities.

One Above partners with Hong Kong Disneyland for Diwali 2026



One Above has partnered with Hong Kong Disneyland to offer specially curated Diwali-period packages exclusively to travel trade partners through DMCBazaar. The offering combines negotiated B2B rates, ready-to-sell itineraries and on-ground support in Hong Kong, covering families, couples, FITs and groups.

The collaboration coincides with Hong Kong Disneyland's Halloween season, allowing Indian travellers to experience the park's seasonal offerings alongside its signature fireworks and nighttime entertainment during the festive travel period.

Through DMCBazaar, travel agents can access Disney products along with hotels, sightseeing and transfers to build complete Hong Kong itineraries through a single B2B platform. One Above will provide end-to-end destination support, including curated itineraries and on-ground assistance.

The Diwali-period offering is available exclusively through DMCBazaar, with trade partners encouraged to plan bookings early for high-demand festive dates.



TAT connects global buyers and Thai sellers at Thailand Golf Travel Mart 2026

The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) brought together 49 international buyer companies and 63 Thai sellers at the Thailand Golf Travel Mart (TGTM) 2026 in Bangkok, strengthening B2B connections around the country's golf tourism offering.

Held at Topgolf Megacity in Bangna, the trade meet featured business appointments, tourism product updates and media product testing. The programme highlighted opportunities to combine golf with wellness, Thai massage, gastronomy, culture, shopping and other experiences to encourage longer stays and multi-destination travel.

Thailand's golf offering spans more than 250 courses across the country, with distinct experiences across the North, South, Northeast, Bangkok, Central Plains and Eastern Seaboard. Buyers from North America, Europe, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Oceania and Northeast Asia participated alongside Thai golf courses, hotels, resorts, DMCs and tourism businesses.

TGTM 2026 opened with a networking golf tournament at The Royal Gems Golf and Sports Club in Nakhon Pathom, followed by the main trade programme and networking function.



Summit Hotels & Resorts to open new retreat in Samthar

Summit Hotels & Resorts is set to open Summit Samthar, a new retreat in West Bengal's lesser-known Himalayan destination of Samthar. Located approximately 80 km from Kalimpong, the destination offers an alternative to the more familiar hill stations of Darjeeling and Kalimpong, with forests, open skies and views of the mountains.

The property will be part of Summit Hotels & Resorts' Off Beat Collection, which focuses on destinations that offer travellers a quieter and more immersive experience. Summit Samthar will feature 24 rooms, with views extending towards Kanchenjunga. The intimate scale of the property is designed to complement Samthar's tranquil setting and appeal to travellers seeking a slower-paced Himalayan escape.

With its combination of natural surroundings, mountain views and an offbeat location, the upcoming property is expected to add a new accommodation option for travellers exploring North Bengal beyond its established tourist centres.

Kerala

looks beyond venues to build an experience-led wedding and MICE ecosystem

Ayushi Anand



P.C Vishnunadh
Tourism and Culture Minister, Kerala

Kerala is strengthening its positioning as a destination for weddings and MICE by moving beyond natural beauty to create

experiences rooted in culture, cuisine, Ayurveda, wellness and local traditions. In an interaction with P.C Vishnunadh, Tourism and Culture Minister, Kerala, he outlines the state's vision for destination weddings, business events, connectivity and closer trade engagement.

Q How is Kerala positioning itself as a destination wedding hub?

Kerala is looking beyond being merely a beautiful setting for weddings. Our vision is to make the wedding a complete Kerala experience, bringing together celebration, travel, culture, cuisine, hospitality and Ayurveda-led wellness.

Kerala offers beaches, backwaters, mountains, forests, plantations and heritage settings, allowing varied

wedding experiences. Ayurveda-led wellness can add another dimension through pre-wedding rejuvenation and post-wedding relaxation. Guests should experience Kerala's cuisine, arts, traditions and way of life.

What more can Kerala offer the MICE and wedding trade beyond its natural beauty?

Natural beauty is only the beginning. Our proposition brings together landscape, culture, cuisine, Ayurveda, wellness, heritage and local experiences.

For weddings, we can curate regional cuisine, traditional music, performing arts, crafts and village experiences. For MICE, Kerala can offer corporate retreats, incentive travel, wellness programmes and heritage experiences.



Munroe Island

The idea is to create an experience ecosystem, where a conference can include a cultural evening, a retreat a wellness experience, a wedding and a family holiday

How can Kerala Tourism work more closely with wedding planners, DMCs and tour operators?

The growth of this sector requires coordination between government and the tourism industry. Kerala Tourism can provide policy support, destination knowledge, market intelligence and platforms for industry interaction, while private-sector partners bring expertise and market networks.

Wedding planners, DMCs, tour operators, hotels, resorts and event companies all

have an important role. We can strengthen buyer-seller interactions and familiarisation programmes.

The Government of Kerala is also moving towards granting industry status to tourism, aimed at creating a more conducive investment environment and attracting investment.

What are the biggest gaps in infrastructure and connectivity for MICE and weddings?

Kerala already has international airports and an extensive road and rail network. The next step is to make the visitor journey seamless, from the airport to the destination, venue and surrounding experiences.



A Kathakali artist getting ready for the performance



Sree Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram

We need to strengthen convention infrastructure, event-ready venues, destination management, transport coordination, digital connectivity, visitor services and last-mile connectivity. Heli and seaplane services can also play a role.

Our vision is to connect experiences, allowing visitors to move between the coast, backwaters, hills and heritage destinations with ease.

Which new markets does Kerala want to target for wedding and MICE tourism?

We see opportunities across the Gulf, UK and Europe, Southeast Asia, North America and Australia, alongside the Indian diaspora and emerging high-value domestic markets.

We need to understand each market's aspirations and create relevant experiences. Kerala can cater to weddings, corporate retreats, incentive travel, wellness experiences and family gatherings.

We want every visit to create a lasting connection with Kerala.



Poovar Island

Sabah

sets its sights on India
with a focus on high
value, experience led
tourism

Mrasha Goel



Julinus Jeffery Jimit
CEO, Sabah Tourism Board

Sabah is looking to strengthen its position in the international tourism landscape by moving beyond conventional nature tourism and building a destination proposition centred on culture, adventure, nature and sustainability. For Julinus Jeffery Jimit, CEO, Sabah Tourism Board, the next phase of growth is about attracting the right travellers, improving connectivity and creating greater value for local communities.

At the heart of the strategy is the Explore Sabah brand, anchored by the four CANS pillars of Culture, Adventure,

Nature and Sustainability. While Mount Kinabalu, Sabah's islands and its wildlife remain major attractions, the destination is broadening its portfolio to include community based tourism, rural experiences, wellness, cultural immersion and gastronomy.

India is an important market within this vision. According to Jimit, the country's expanding outbound traveller base presents opportunities across leisure, family holidays, adventure, destination weddings, incentive travel and business events. Indian travellers are also increasingly exploring destinations beyond the more established Malaysian favourites, creating an opportunity for Sabah to showcase its biodiversity, cultural heritage and adventure offerings.

The Sabah Tourism Board is strengthening its engagement with the Indian travel trade through platforms such as OTM Mumbai, webinars with Tourism Malaysia offices in India, familiarisation trips and joint marketing initiatives. It is also

The Insider Edit

working with online travel platforms and airline partners to improve Sabah's visibility and accessibility.

Connectivity remains a key priority. The Board is exploring opportunities with airline partners, including Royal Brunei Airlines, to strengthen access from India and neighbouring hubs. Jimit believes sustained collaboration between airlines, travel agents, tourism organisations and media will be critical to building awareness and converting interest into arrivals.



Success is not just about attracting more visitors, it is about creating lasting value for our communities, our industry and our environment



The destination is simultaneously looking to capture the growing demand for luxury and high value travel. For Sabah, luxury is increasingly about exclusivity, authenticity and meaningful experiences rather than simply five star accommodation. Rainforest lodges, premium wildlife encounters, marine experiences and personalised cultural journeys are among the products being positioned for this segment.

Sustainability remains central to this growth strategy. Sabah's rainforests, wildlife and marine ecosystems form the foundation of its tourism appeal, making

conservation integral to long term destination development. The Tourism Board supports responsible nature based and community based tourism while working alongside agencies responsible for protected areas, wildlife and forest conservation.

Jimit defines quality tourism as creating value rather than simply increasing arrivals. Visitor spending, length of stay, satisfaction, repeat visitation, employment, community benefits and conservation outcomes are among the indicators that matter.

Looking towards 2027 to 2030, he identifies the continued strengthening of the Explore Sabah brand as a transformative priority, alongside better connectivity, improved tourism products and services, digital innovation and



Murut Tribe

greater community participation.

Sabah's experience with China, its largest international source market, has reinforced the importance of sustained destination marketing, airline partnerships and trade engagement. Jimit sees similar long term potential in India, with the destination aiming to build consistent relationships across the travel ecosystem.

For Sabah, the ambition is clear. It is not simply about welcoming more visitors, but about creating meaningful, high value and sustainable tourism that benefits the destination and the communities that call it home.



Mataking Island



Mount Kinabalu view from Polumpung Melangkap

Fairways & Flyways

Where business meets experiences

Vedika Duggal

Next Destination, in collaboration with Captivating Experiences, brought together the travel trade and corporate community for Fairways & Flyways, an invitation-only B2B experiential networking evening at Qutab Golf Course, New Delhi.

Designed to move beyond conventional networking, the evening blended business conversations with golf, curated experiences and informal interactions. Guests from the travel trade and corporate sector had the opportunity to connect with participating tourism boards, airlines, hotels and experience partners in a relaxed setting.

The event also offered partners an opportunity to engage directly with the trade while showcasing their destinations, products and experiences.



Here's what our partners had to say about an evening that brought business and experiences together.



Title Partner

EGYPTAIR


Fairways & Flyways presented a promising concept, bringing together golf, music and creative brand experiences in an engaging setting. Every successful journey begins with a first step, and this initiative has established a foundation to grow, attract wider participation and become a valuable platform for the travel fraternity in the future.

Amr Aly
Country Manager, India,
Vietnam and Hong Kong, EgyptAir

Fairways & Flyways presented a well-curated programme and a valuable platform for engagement with the travel trade. A memorable highlight was Egyptair's perfume station—an interactive experience where attendees could create personalised fragrances, complementing the golf session and live music with a distinctive touch of Egyptian warmth and hospitality.

Rajat Chadha
Sales Manager, EgyptAir



Cover Story



Wanderlust Partner

TOURISM
MALAYSIA



Fairways & Flyways was a truly enjoyable and enriching experience. The event provided an excellent platform to showcase Malaysia's strengths as a leading golf tourism destination while connecting with industry professionals, exchanging ideas and exploring new collaborations. It was rewarding to share Malaysia's world-class golf experiences and renowned hospitality.

Razieha Razali
Deputy Director (North & East India),
Tourism Malaysia

Fairways & Flyways was an excellent platform to connect with the golf and travel fraternity and showcase Malaysia as an exciting golf tourism destination. Tourism Malaysia valued the opportunity to engage with industry professionals, build meaningful connections, and highlight Malaysia's diverse offerings. We appreciate the partnership and look forward to continued collaboration.

Poonam Nautiyal
Marketing Manager, Tourism Malaysia





Golf Retreat Partner



Represented by IRIS Reps



What I loved most about Fairways & Flyways was that it allowed me to experience golf beyond just a networking platform. From trying my hand at the sport to engaging with fellow travel professionals, every detail felt thoughtfully curated. Representing Beachcomber Resorts & Hotels made it even more special, with the entire experience naturally reflecting the brand's passion for golf and exceptional resort experiences.

Alefiya Singh
Founder, IRIS Reps

Fairways & Flyways was a first-of-its-kind experience for me, and honestly, one I thoroughly enjoyed. I had never experienced an event where business networking and golf came together in such an engaging way. From picking up the club for the first time to staying on the course and playing right till the end, every moment was exciting—and definitely came with a few laughs along the way! What I loved most was getting to experience the Beachcomber Resorts & Hotels product through the world of golf, which gave me a real feel of the resort's premium, active and experiential side. It was a refreshing experience, beautifully curated and something I would definitely love to experience again.

Priyanka Mehta
Associate Director, IRIS Reps



Cover Story



Ajay Kakkar
Vice President, Radico Khaitan

As the Celebration Partner, Radico Khaitan added another dimension to the evening, highlighting the growing role of premium beverages in India's evolving travel and hospitality landscape.

We spoke to Ajay Kakkar, Vice President, Radico Khaitan about the evolving relationship between premium beverages and travel, the role of spirits in creating memorable traveller experiences, and what meaningful connections mean in today's travel industry.

Q Travel and hospitality are closely linked with premium beverage experiences. How do you see this relationship evolving in India?

India's travel and hospitality landscape is increasingly being driven by experiences, and premium beverages have become an integral part of that evolution. Today's travellers are looking beyond destinations and seeking experiences that reflect luxury, authenticity, and local culture. Whether it is enjoying an Indian single malt at a



Celebration Partner

Radico
SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE

luxury resort, discovering a curated cocktail program, or exploring destination-inspired food and beverage pairings, premium spirits are enriching the overall travel experience.

“The right connection is one that turns relationships into experiences and experiences into lasting memories.”



As the hospitality sector continues to premiumise, hotels, resorts, and restaurants are creating immersive beverage-led experiences through tastings, mixology sessions, and curated dining concepts. At the same time, premium Indian spirits are earning global recognition and emerging as symbols of modern Indian craftsmanship and excellence.

Going forward, premium beverages will become an even stronger differentiator for hospitality brands, helping create memorable guest experiences while offering travellers a deeper connection with the destination and the evolving story of Indian hospitality.

Fairways & Flyways is about business meets experiences. What does 'the right connection' mean to you in the travel industry?

To me, the right connection goes beyond networking. It is about bringing together the right people, ideas, and experiences



to create meaningful value and lasting relationships. In the travel industry, strong connections are built on trust, shared experiences, and genuine engagement. Whether through business partnerships, hospitality collaborations, or interactions that create memorable moments, the most successful relationships are those that focus on delivering exceptional experiences rather than simply facilitating transactions.

The right connection is one that inspires innovation, strengthens relationships, and creates lasting memories. Much like premium hospitality and premium spirits, it is ultimately about bringing people together and enhancing the overall experience.





“

It was an excellent event and a great opportunity to meet our trade partners, connect with the industry and discuss business opportunities. Wishing the entire team all the very best for their upcoming events, and looking forward to many more successful collaborations.

Vineet Nayar
Manager – North India, Oman Air

”

Supporting Partners



MINOR HOTELS



“

I had the pleasure of attending the Fairways & Flyways Golf & Networking Event, which was exceptionally well organised and provided an outstanding platform for both relationship building and professional engagement.

The event brought together a distinguished group of travel industry professionals, creating valuable opportunities to exchange insights, strengthen existing partnerships and establish new connections in a relaxed yet productive environment. The combination of excellent hospitality, engaging conversations and a memorable golfing experience made the event both enjoyable and impactful.

I look forward to nurturing the connections made and participating in future editions of this remarkable event.

Rohit Chopra
Area Commercial Director, India, Minor Hotels

”



Cover Story



“

It was a pleasure to be part of the experience at Fairways & Flyways. The event was thoughtfully organised and provided a wonderful platform to connect with key travel partners and industry colleagues. A special thanks to the entire team for the warm hospitality, attention to detail, and for making everyone feel so valued. Congratulations to the team for putting together such a memorable experience. Wishing you continued success and looking forward to many more such wonderful interactions in the future!

Mohammad Ali
Director of Global Sales -
India & South Asia, Accor Group

”



Beverage Partner



Shobhit Gupta
Co-Founder, Gunsberg

The evening saw guests enjoying Gunsberg's refreshing range of ginger ales and other flavours, adding a lively and refreshing touch to the gathering.





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Madhya Pradesh

tracing the threads of history

Daisy Saxena

Heritage in Madhya Pradesh is not confined to monuments and museums. It lives in temple towns, old forts, ancient settlements, handloom traditions, local cuisine and communities that continue to carry their history forward. Across the state, centuries of history sit alongside a tourism landscape that is evolving with new experiences and ways to explore its cultural legacy.

Madhya Pradesh is home to three UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the Khajuraho Group of Monuments, Buddhist Monuments at Sanchi and the Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka. Yet its heritage story extends well beyond these recognised landmarks. Orchha,



Sanchi Stupa, Sanchi



Chitragupt Temple, Khajuraho

Mandu, Gwalior, Chanderi, Maheshwar, Burhanpur, Ujjain, Omkareshwar and Amarkantak each offer a different window into the state's past and living traditions.

"Heritage is not simply about preserving what belongs to the past. It is about keeping these stories relevant for future generations. In Madhya Pradesh, we are looking at ways to conserve our heritage while creating experiences that allow visitors to understand and engage with it, while also creating opportunities for local communities," says Dr Ilayaraja T, IAS, Secretary to the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Secretary, Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board.

The state's heritage landscape is also being shaped by changing visitor expectations. Improved infrastructure, connectivity, interpretation and visitor facilities are making it easier to explore destinations that were once largely experienced by a niche set of travellers. Spiritual centres such as Ujjain and

Omkareshwar have emerged as important tourism hubs, while historic destinations continue to attract travellers interested in architecture, culture and history.

The experience extends into local communities. Chanderi and Maheshwar remain closely associated with their handloom traditions, while destinations such as Prannpur offer opportunities to discover crafts, food and everyday life. Heritage stays, local experiences and community led initiatives are creating ways for visitors to engage with destinations beyond conventional sightseeing.



Bhimbetka Turtle Rock

For travellers, this creates the possibility of following different threads through the state. A journey can move from prehistoric rock art at Bhimbetka to Buddhist history at Sanchi, from the architectural legacy of Khajuraho to the medieval grandeur of Mandu and Orchha, and then into the living traditions of its towns and villages.

The appeal of Madhya Pradesh's heritage lies in this continuity. Its monuments tell stories of dynasties, faith and artistic expression, while its crafts, cuisine and communities show how those stories continue to evolve. Here, history is not simply something to be observed. It remains woven into the places and people that define the state.

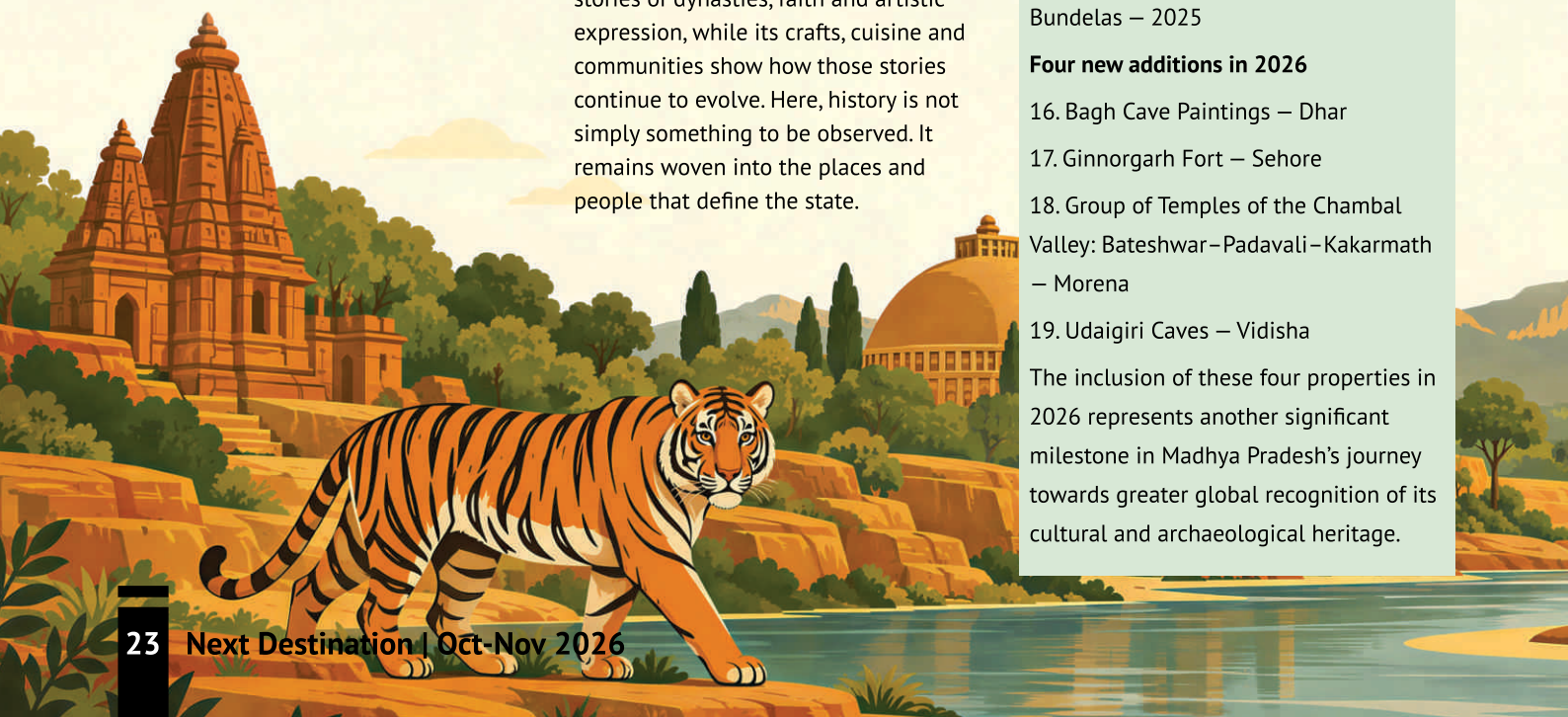
19 Madhya Pradesh heritage properties on UNESCO's tentative list

Madhya Pradesh's UNESCO Tentative List now comprises 19 properties, reflecting the State's remarkable diversity of cultural, archaeological, architectural and natural heritage.

Earlier tentative list of properties

1. Monuments of Mandu – 1998
2. Iconic Saree Weaving Clusters of India – 2014
3. Historic Ensemble of Orchha – 2019
4. Satpura Tiger Reserve – 2021
5. Bhedaghat–Lamheta Ghat, Narmada Valley – 2021
6. Gwalior Fort – 2024
7. Rock Art Sites of the Chambal Valley – 2024
8. Bhojeshwar Mahadev Temple, Bhojpur – 2024
9. Kundi Bhandara, Burhanpur – 2024
10. Historic Group of Dhamnar – 2024
11. Gond Monuments of Ramnagar, Mandla – 2024
12. Ashokan Edict Sites along the Mauryan Routes – 2025
13. Chausath Yogini Temples – 2025
14. Gupta Temples in North India – 2025
15. Fortified Palaces and Forts of the Bundelas – 2025
- Four new additions in 2026**
16. Bagh Cave Paintings – Dhar
17. Ginnorgarh Fort – Sehore
18. Group of Temples of the Chambal Valley: Bateshwar–Padavali–Kakarmath – Morena
19. Udaigiri Caves – Vidisha

The inclusion of these four properties in 2026 represents another significant milestone in Madhya Pradesh's journey towards greater global recognition of its cultural and archaeological heritage.



A journey through Kerala one experience at a time

Ayushi Anand

Kerala is best experienced through its contrasts, from temples and beaches to backwaters, bustling cliffs, traditional cuisine and contemporary cafés. My journey began the moment I landed in Thiruvananthapuram, where I checked into Sagara Resort in Kovalam and settled into the easy rhythm of a coastal holiday.



Local cuisine



House boat in Alleppey

The next morning began at the Crafts Museum, offering an introduction to Kerala's artistic traditions and craftsmanship. From there, I headed to Poovar Island, where the journey itself became an experience. A boat ride through the waterways revealed a quieter side of Kerala, with coconut

palms, calm waters and stretches of untouched landscape. Lunch at Poovar Island Resort was followed by a property visit, allowing me to experience its lush island setting.

The following day began at the Aazhimala Shiva Temple, where the atmosphere was peaceful and deeply



Varkala Beach



Kathakali performance

rooted in local traditions. From there came one of Kerala's most memorable culinary experiences, a delicious Sadya at Mother's Veg Plaza. Served with an array of traditional dishes, the meal offered a flavourful introduction to Kerala's food culture.

No visit to Thiruvananthapuram is complete without stepping into the Padmanabhaswamy Temple. Its magnificent architecture, intricate details and atmosphere of devotion made the visit particularly memorable.

By evening, I had reached Varkala, where the mood changed completely. Exploring the North Cliff meant walking through a lively stretch filled with cafés, restaurants, shops and a buzzing market,

all overlooking the Arabian Sea. It was the kind of place where wandering without a plan became part of the experience.

The next morning took me to Jatayu Earth's Centre, where the imposing Jatayu sculpture and expansive landscape offered another striking experience. Later, in Kollam, I watched a Kathakali performance, where expressive eyes, elaborate costumes, gestures and dramatic storytelling brought Kerala's traditional art form alive.

The following day was dedicated to the backwaters. A visit to Munroe Island revealed Kerala at its most tranquil, with narrow waterways, lush greenery and village life unfolding around the canals. After exploring the island, lunch aboard Allegory on the Spice Route luxury cruise added another memorable layer to the



Market at the North Cliff in Varkala



Jatayu Earth Centre

journey, combining the pleasure of being on the water with an unhurried dining experience.

The journey eventually led to Marari, where Kerala slowed down once again. After temples, boat rides, Sadya flavours, Kathakali, cliffs and bustling streets, the quiet beach offered the perfect way to end the trip. A walk along the shore, the sound of waves and the unhurried pace of Marari brought the journey to a natural close.

Kerala had been less about ticking places off a list and more about collecting experiences, each one revealing a different side of the state.



Boat ride through Munroe Island's backwaters

Abu Dhabi

beyond the obvious

Akshita Duggal

Golden dunes, endless horizons and the thrill of an Arabian desert safari.

Abu Dhabi, with its deep rooted Emirati culture, has opened its doors to an increasingly ambitious contemporary cultural scene, blending art and heritage with tourism to create an immersive experience where the modern traveller gets the best of both worlds.

Al Ain was perhaps the first surprise of my Abu Dhabi trip. Roughly 90 minutes from downtown Abu Dhabi, the UAE's Garden City felt slower, greener and quieter. There was something warm and unhurried about the city. The people we met were welcoming, and I never felt like I was simply passing through a tourist destination.

The Al Ain Oasis was where I began to understand the city. Its fascinating traditional Falaj irrigation system,

recognised by UNESCO for its long history of water management and oasis agriculture dating back to the Iron Age, offers more than just a green patch in the desert. It tells a story of settlement, adaptation, engineering and survival. The Al Ain Museum added another layer to that understanding, with representations of the actual Falaj system and its workings.

By the time we sat down for Emirati food at Al Fanar, history had begun to feel less like something to be observed and more like something to be experienced. The food added another dimension to the story. Their version of Ferni was familiar in concept, yet different enough to make me curious about how traditional flavours evolve across cultures. It made me wonder how a meal like this would feature in a traditional Emirati family gathering, meant



Traditional Emirati artefacts offering a glimpse into the region's rich cultural heritage.



Objects from Emirati life that tell stories of a culture shaped by the desert

to be shared and cherished. The highlights for me, however, were the traditional date pudding and Legaimat, a Middle Eastern cousin of gulab jamun, although its taste is distinctly different.

Next came the desert experience, which felt like stepping into another chapter of the same story. The landscape transformed into endless dunes beneath a setting sun. Dune bashing provided a complete contrast to the calm we had experienced earlier. As the car climbed the dunes, tilted sharply and raced down with sand shifting beneath us at every turn, it became one of the most thrilling experiences of my trip.

What I loved was how many experiences were packed into a single evening. From energetic belly dancing and fire performances to mehendi art and shisha, the evening eventually slowed down with a quiet stargazing session, allowing us to simply take in the landscape.

The following morning brought yet another shade of Abu Dhabi as we entered its cultural landscape with our first stop at Louvre Abu Dhabi. Even before entering, the enormous white dome caught my eye, with sunlight filtering through its geometric layers and the faint sound of water flowing nearby. The Louvre name was brought to Abu Dhabi through an unprecedented cultural partnership between France and the UAE. Walking through the galleries, however, I realised that the partnership extends beyond France, with works and exhibits representing cultures from across the world, including India.



Luqaimat, golden Emirati dumplings served warm with a touch of sweetness

There was something fitting about ending our Louvre visit with lunch at Fouquet's, the French restaurant within the museum. I opted for the Rigatoni with Black Truffle, which was rich, comforting and distinctly French in character. The Mille Feuille, served with vanilla cream and berry compote, was a beautiful finish to the meal.



A taste of traditional Emirati hospitality, where heritage finds its way to the table

The next morning took us to another of Abu Dhabi's newer landmarks, the Zayed National Museum, which offered an insight into the UAE's story of origin and the life and legacy of Sheikh Zayed. The Natural History Museum took us much further back in time, to 13.8 billion years ago, with an extraordinary journey through the evolution of the universe and life on Earth.

Among its highlights was a remarkably preserved Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton, approximately 67 million years old and 11.7 metres long. From the Murchison meteorite, which predates our solar system, to the 25 metre blue whale, the sheer scale of the museum left me fascinated. Suddenly, the idea of history seemed much bigger than I had imagined.

Lunch at Erth was another highlight, and one that demonstrated how Abu Dhabi's culinary scene continues to evolve. The restaurant's Michelin star is reflected in both its flavours and presentation, bringing together Emirati influences and contemporary gastronomy.

We ended the day at teamLab Phenomena, which was unlike anything I had experienced before. Across its constantly changing spaces, light, sound, movement and water interact with the artworks to create an environment where you feel less like an observer and more like a part of the art itself.

The evening ended at Niri, a contemporary Japanese restaurant overlooking the Saadiyat coastline. Perhaps this is what makes Abu Dhabi





An evening of Arabian traditions and desert magic

such an interesting destination: its culture does not stop at art and architecture but extends effortlessly into Emirati heritage, gastronomy and global influences.

But Abu Dhabi's ability to shift gears becomes particularly apparent when you leave the calm of Saadiyat Island and head towards Yas Island. Here, the city takes on a completely different rhythm: faster, louder and unapologetically focused on entertainment. Yet you are not disconnected from the destination; you are simply experiencing another facet of the same city.

SeaWorld Yas Island was one of those places whose scale I understood only after stepping inside. Spread across eight immersive realms, it moves from tropical ecosystems to frozen polar landscapes within minutes. For me, the most memorable moments were actually the simplest: watching a flock of flamingos

and later finding myself surrounded by swimming penguins. For a moment, it felt like a world away from the desert outside.

There is a cinematic quality to the way marine life is woven into the architecture. At different points, vast viewing windows and underwater perspectives place sharks, rays and schools of fish directly in view, creating a spectacle that is difficult to ignore.

If SeaWorld is about immersion, Ferrari World is about speed, precision and the theatre of the automobile. I got behind the wheel for the go karting experience, tried Formula Rossa, the world's fastest roller coaster, and got a glimpse into the mechanics behind the machines, from changing a Ferrari tyre to exploring the brand's racing heritage.

But perhaps what makes Yas Island interesting is that the experience does not end when you leave the theme parks. A short ride away, Yas Mall brings the familiar world of luxury retail and dining, while Yas Waterfront slows things down with boats, restaurants and the circuit looming nearby. There is a sense that this part of Abu Dhabi has been designed around experiences rather than simply destinations.

Even getting from one place to another became part of the experience. I took a driverless Uber, an experience that still feels surreal: sitting inside a car moving through Abu Dhabi without anyone behind the wheel. It is a small but telling detail about the city. The future is not



A mesmerising glimpse into the underwater world

something you are waiting for; sometimes, you are already living it.

Then there is the Etihad Arena, which has given Yas Bay a distinctly international identity. With artists such as Diljit Dosanjh scheduled to perform, the city's cultural calendar increasingly feels as global as its architecture, food and hospitality.

Yet what has arguably placed Abu Dhabi in the global spotlight is Formula 1. At Yas Marina Circuit, the atmosphere changes completely as Abu Dhabi prepares to host the season finale. The race is more than a sporting event here; it transforms Yas Island into a world of racing, music, hospitality and late night celebrations.

Lewis Hamilton, a five time winner of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, has spoken warmly about the atmosphere, describing it as a great event and saying he cannot wait to return.

It is perhaps the perfect punctuation mark to an Abu Dhabi itinerary. After museums, galleries, Michelin starred restaurants and waterfront evenings, the journey ends with pure adrenaline at Yas Island, beneath the lights of Yas Marina. In many ways, it brings together the contrasting sides of Abu Dhabi in one final spectacle: heritage and innovation, art and entertainment, tranquillity and adrenaline.



SeaWorld at Yas Island

IATO Convention

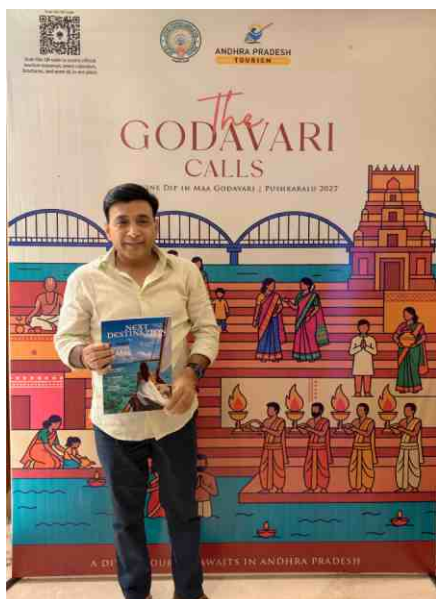
puts the spotlight on India's untapped tourism potential

Shafika Sengupta

The 41st IATO Annual Convention, which concluded in Visakhapatnam, brought the Indian travel trade together to discuss the opportunities and challenges shaping the country's tourism growth. Beyond established circuits, a key conversation emerging from the convention was the potential of lesser-known destinations and the need to make India more accessible, better connected and more effectively positioned for international travellers. We caught up with travel policy makers and members of the trade at the convention, and this is what they had to say.

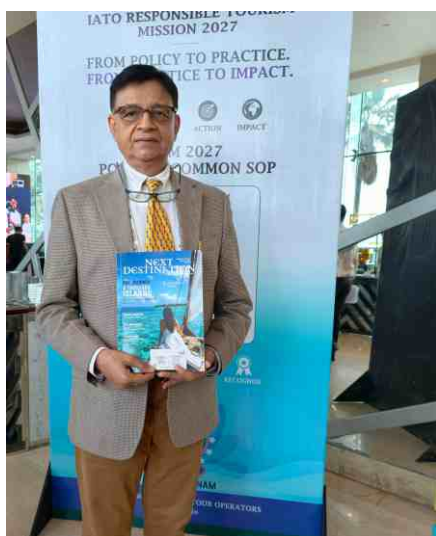


In the Moment



Ravi Gosain
President, IATO

Ravi Gosain, President, IATO, identified Araku Valley in Andhra Pradesh as one of the country's underrated destinations. He said the destination has many of the experiences sought by today's travellers, including slow travel, wellness, peace and natural beauty. However, he pointed to the need for better infrastructure and more accommodation options catering to different segments of travellers. Gosain also highlighted safety and security as important considerations for foreign visitors, while noting that negative publicity can sometimes influence perceptions of India. He stressed the need for the industry to work collectively to address these concerns.



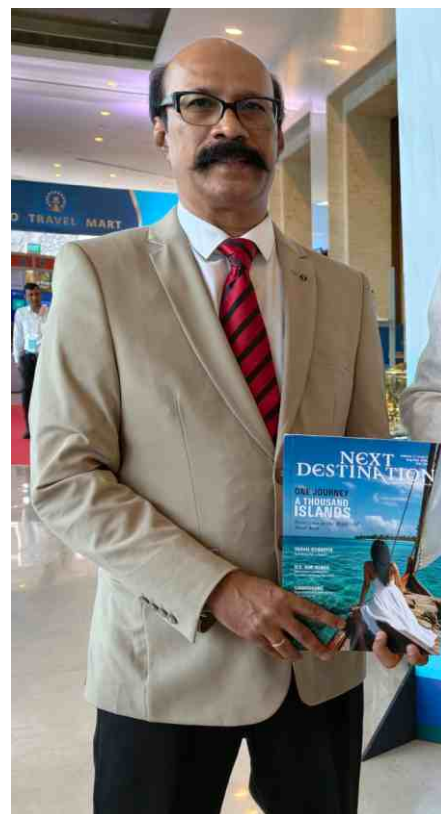
Rajnish Kaistha
Sr. Vice President, IATO

Rajnish Kaistha, Sr. Vice President, IATO highlighted a range of destinations that he believes have significant untapped potential. These include Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh, parts of the Northeast, Jabalpur and Bhedaghat in Madhya Pradesh, as well as Badami, Hampi and Vijayapura. He noted that connectivity, particularly air connectivity, remains a challenge for several destinations. Kaistha also highlighted the need to strengthen overseas marketing for India, which he feels has declined, and said greater collaboration between the government and private sector is essential for inbound tourism. According to him, states need to work as part of a larger India proposition rather than promoting destinations in isolation.



Nilu Sharma
Chairman, Chhattisgarh Tourism Board

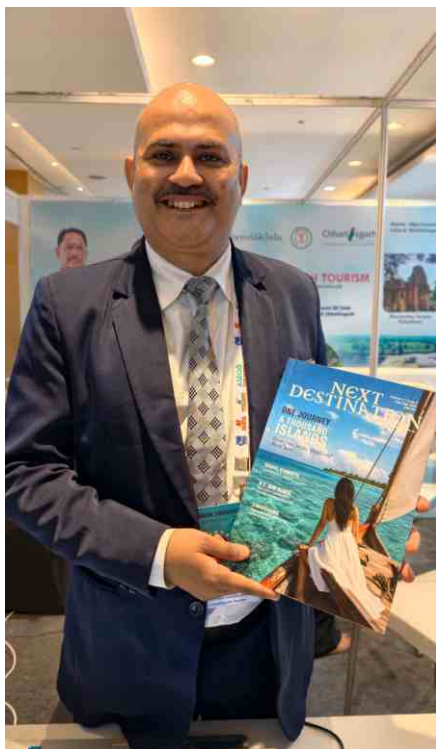
Nilu Sharma, Chairman, Chhattisgarh Tourism Board, highlighted the state's forests, waterfalls, water bodies, traditional cuisine, festivals and cultural heritage. He pointed to Bastar, Surguja and central Chhattisgarh as regions with their own distinct tourism identities. Sharma also emphasised India's wider strengths in spirituality, literature, culture and heritage, while highlighting the importance of promoting domestic tourism alongside international tourism.



P. Vijayasathya
International Sales and Marketing Director
Benchmark Hospitality

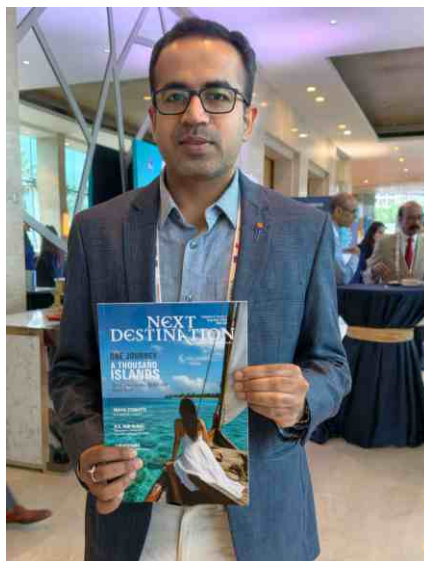
For P. Vijayasathya, International Sales and Marketing Director, Benchmark Hospitality, the focus should be on identifying and developing new destinations rather than simply looking at destinations as underperforming. He cited Visakhapatnam and its Buddhist heritage as an example of an offering that could be developed further for international markets. According to him, infrastructure will play an important role in creating new tourism destinations and incorporating them into international itineraries. He also pointed to the need for easier visa processes and more manageable pricing for international travellers.

Akhilesh Ojha, Operations Manager, Maira Resort and Convention Centre, believes central India offers considerable scope for growth, particularly its forest regions in Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. He said these areas remain relatively undiscovered and could appeal to international travellers interested in wildlife. Ojha believes India already has the experiences required by foreign



Akhilesh Ojha
Operations Manager,
Maira Resort and Convention Centre

visitors, with its diverse states, cultures, cuisines, languages and landscapes. For him, the greater requirement is to market and present these offerings effectively. He noted that the scale of India is such that even a month-long visit would only offer a glimpse of the country.

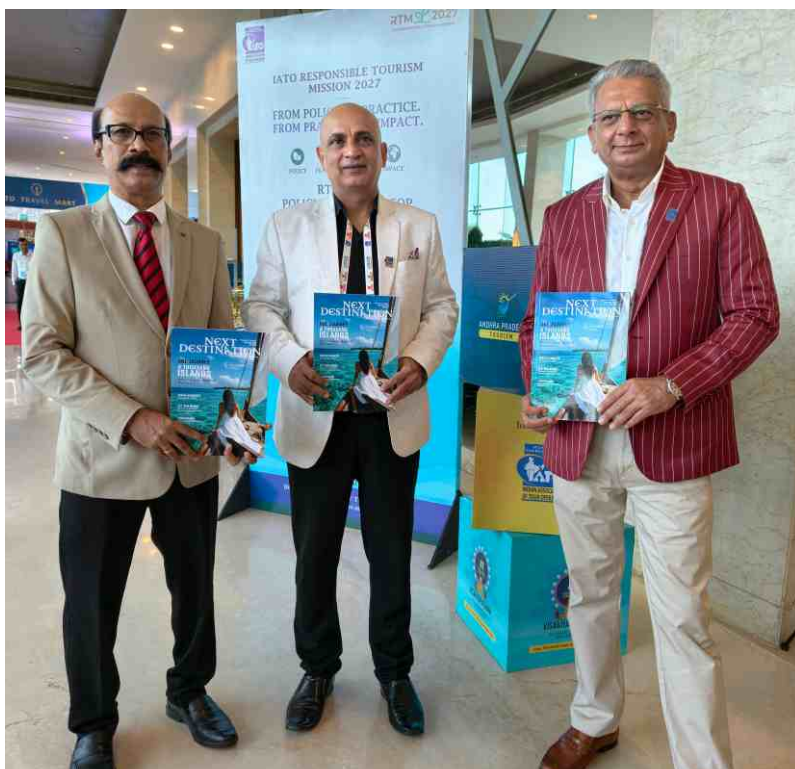


Chirag Agrawal
Co-Founder, TravClan

Chirag Agrawal, Co-Founder, TravClan, pointed to perceptions around safety, particularly for solo and women travellers, as one of the challenges for Indian tourism operators when addressing international markets. Infrastructure remains another consideration in certain states, although he noted improvements across rail, air and road connectivity. He believes these developments need to be communicated more effectively to overseas travel operators. Among lesser-discovered

destinations, Agrawal highlighted Diu, which he sees as having potential for greater tourism traction as connectivity improves.

Across the conversations at the IATO Convention, the opportunity lies in taking travellers beyond India's conventional tourism circuits. Developing new destinations, strengthening infrastructure and connectivity, addressing safety concerns, simplifying travel processes and improving overseas marketing emerged as important areas for the industry as it looks to expand India's tourism proposition.



KTM 2026

puts Kerala's new tourism ambitions in focus

Ami Shah

Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) 2026 showcased a state looking beyond its established backwaters, beaches and Ayurveda offerings, with tourism stakeholders highlighting new opportunities across forest tourism, cruise travel, MICE, heritage and sustainable experiences.





V. D. Satheesan
Chief Minister, Kerala

Addressing the gathering, V. D. Satheesan, Chief Minister, Kerala, outlined the government's tourism ambitions, including forest tourism, jungle lodges and trekking experiences. A keen trekker himself, he spoke about Kerala's Western Ghats and their biodiversity. He also highlighted plans for cruise development, including a new cruise terminal in the Calicut region and proposed services connecting Kerala with destinations such as Dubai, Goa, the Maldives and Sri Lanka. A future vision includes linking cruise programmes with Kerala's 44 rivers for river-cruise experiences. Other proposed projects include an oceanarium and an international maritime museum in Kochi, drawing on Kerala's centuries-old maritime history.



We want to integrate all the ports and make entire Kerala into a port city.



Anjana M. IAS, Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, highlighted the strong domestic market, noting that Kerala welcomed around 2.5 crore domestic travellers in 2025. She urged trade partners to look beyond the state's familiar attractions and explore Wayanad, Vagamon, Bekal and Kollam,



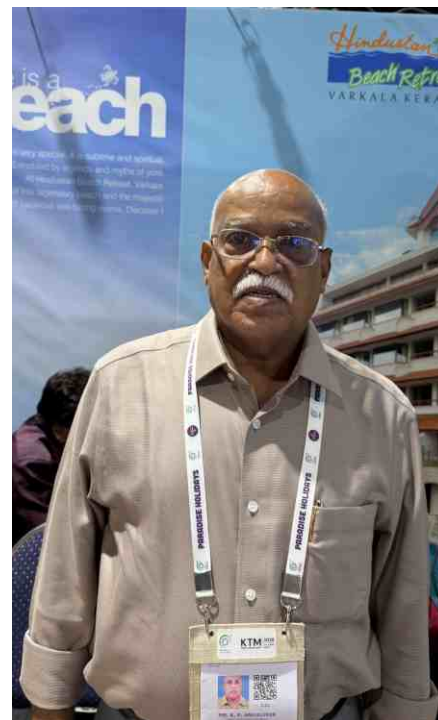
Anjana M.
IAS, Director, Department of Tourism,
Government of Kerala

among other destinations. She also highlighted festivals and events as marketable travel occasions, encouraging buyers to use post-KTM tours to discover lesser-known experiences.



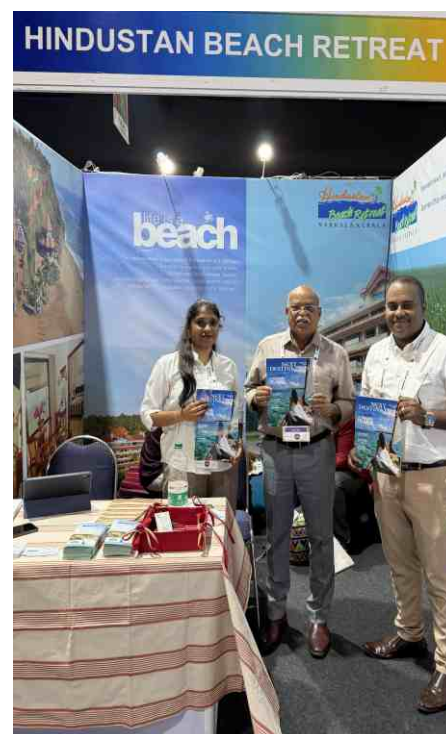
Karthika B Kurup
Manager – Marketing and
Communication, Xandari Resorts

For Karthika B Kurup, Manager – Marketing and Communication, Xandari Resorts, KTM remains an important platform for connecting Kerala's tourism industry with international and domestic buyers. She highlighted the property's focus on sustainability through its three Cs – community, collaboration and conservation – while noting encouraging enquiries from foreign agencies and the MICE segment.

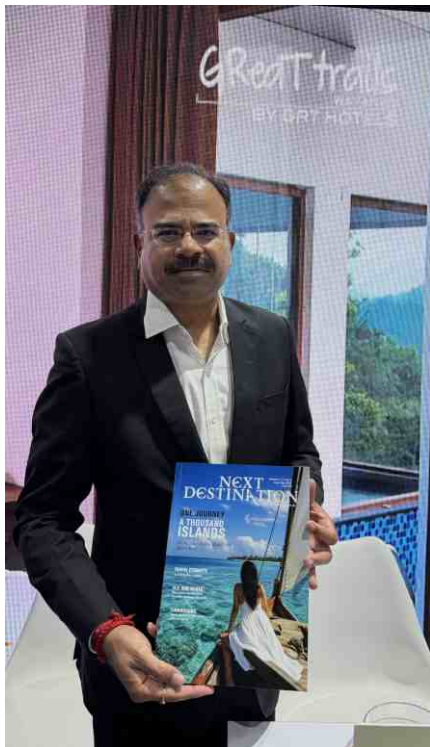


K.P. Anil Kumar
Partner, Hindustan Beach Retreat

K.P. Anil Kumar, Partner, Hindustan Beach Retreat, said the property is looking for increased business from both inbound and domestic markets. He specifically encouraged travel agents to focus on Varkala, while putting current occupancy at around 60–70 per cent and expressing an ambition to reach higher levels. He also pointed to the role of new technology in future development.

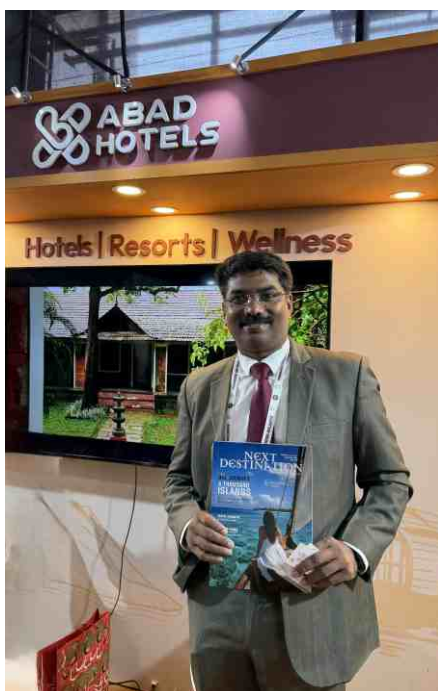


In the Moment



Ranjith Reddy
Vice President – Sales, Distribution & Business Development,
GRT Hotels & Resorts

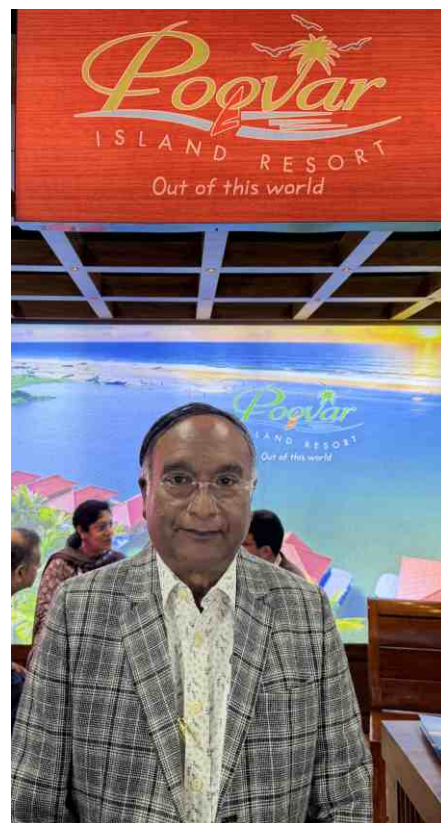
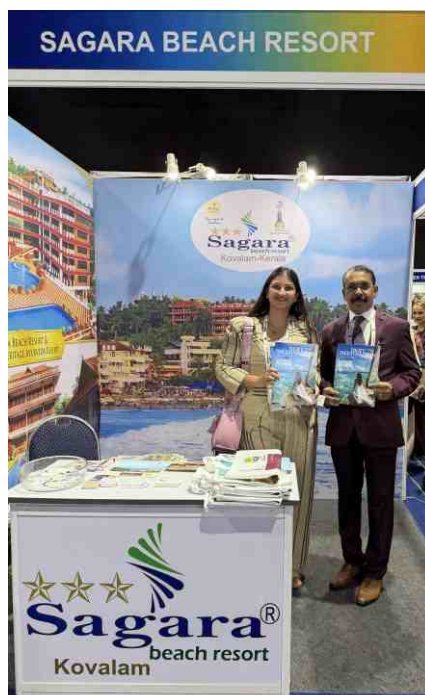
Ranjith Reddy, Vice President – Sales, Distribution & Business Development, GRT Hotels & Resorts, described KTM 2026 as a vibrant platform, with strong participation from buyers and enquiries for the group's properties across South India. He expects the engagement generated at the mart to translate into increased business.



R. Jayan
Director, Sagara Beach Resort,

At Sagara Beach Resort, R. Jayan, Director, said the property is looking at enhancing its facilities, including its conference hall and convention infrastructure. He also noted strong footfall at KTM and expectations of increased international participation during the event.

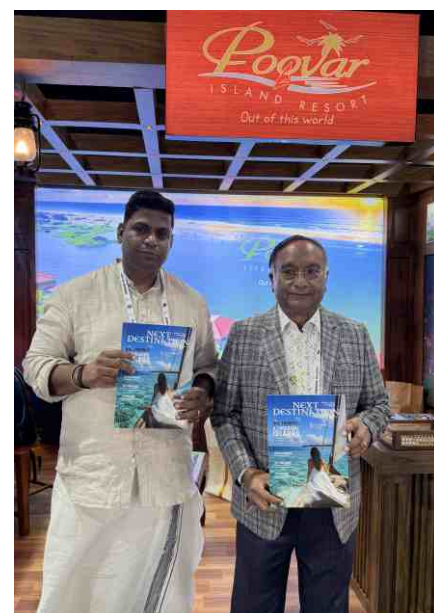
M.R. Narayanan, Managing Director, Poovar Island Resort, emphasised the resort's appeal for FITs, leisure travellers and honeymooners, particularly through its floating cottages and backwater setting. He stressed that preserving

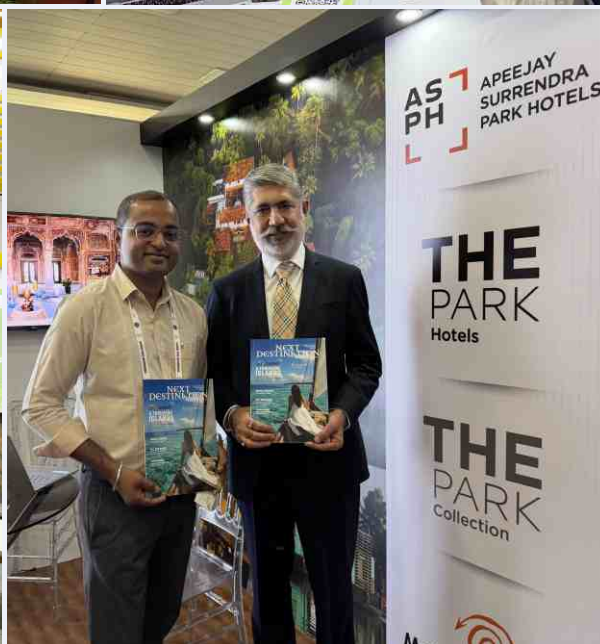
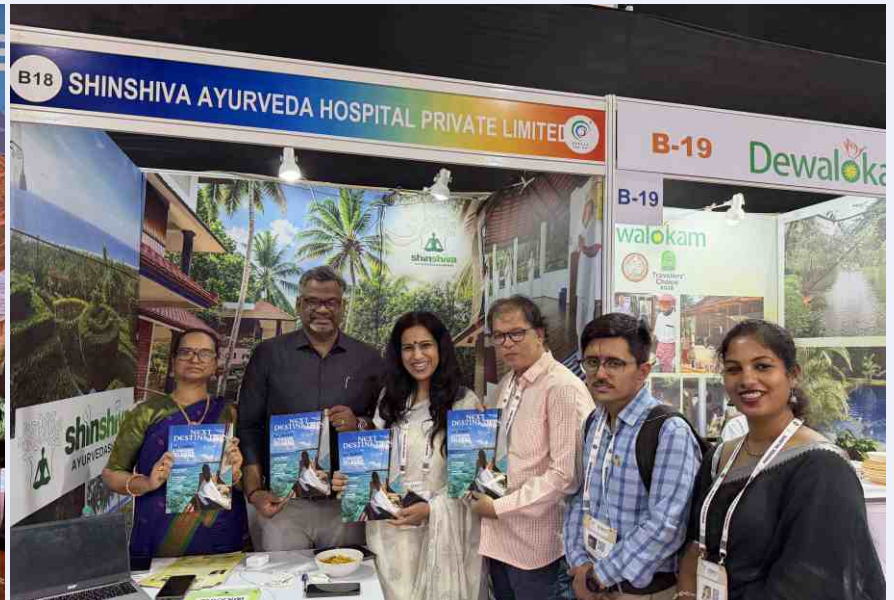
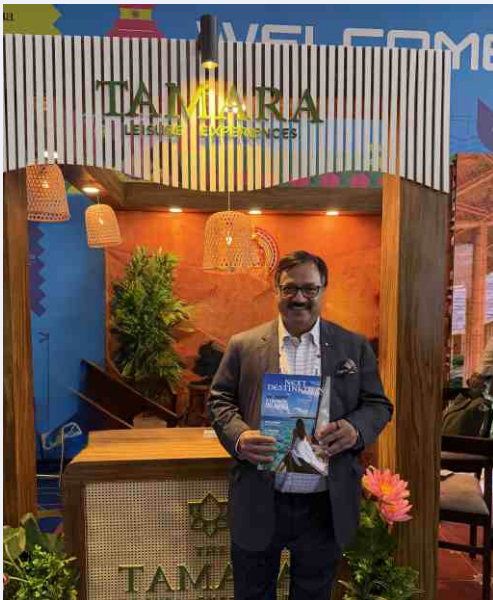


M.R. Narayanan
Managing Director, Poovar Island Resort

Poovar's natural environment remains central to the property, with upgrades focused primarily on improving room interiors and guest comfort.

Together, the voices at KTM 2026 reflected a Kerala tourism sector seeking to diversify its product mix while strengthening its appeal across domestic, international, leisure, MICE, cruise and experiential travel markets.





NOOE Kunaavashi:

Life is never odd or even

Ayushi Anand

The Maldives has no shortage of resorts promising turquoise waters, overwater villas and uninterrupted relaxation. NOOE Kunaavashi takes a different route. A lifestyle resort built around the philosophy 'Never Odd Or Even', NOOE brings together contrasting elements of a holiday, from adventure and wellness to food, entertainment and local culture.



The property features 72 villas across beach and overwater categories, with accommodation ranging from One Bedroom Beach Villas and Sunset Beach Villas to Duplex Overwater Villas with private pools. Larger options, including two-bedroom villas, provide additional space for families and groups. The overwater accommodation places the lagoon at the centre of the stay, with direct access to the water and views stretching across the surrounding seascape.

For a destination where slowing down comes naturally, NOOE makes a deliberate effort to keep things active. Marine excursions include snorkelling with nurse sharks, while a selection of adventure and water sports gives visitors opportunities to spend time in and around the ocean. The idea is less about choosing between an action-packed holiday and a restful one, and more about



Chicken curry, rice and roshi

having both within the same stay.

Wellness forms another part of the offering. The in-house spa provides a range of treatments, while a complimentary 15-minute massage gives visitors a brief introduction to the experience. Those looking to take memories home can also make use of a complimentary 30-minute photography





session, which includes one printed photograph.

Food is approached with similar variety. The buffet features an international spread, while the resort's dining options extend across different cuisines and settings. There is also an opportunity to move from the dining table into the open kitchen through cooking sessions focused on Maldivian cuisine. Learning to prepare local dishes offers an introduction to the flavours and techniques that form part of everyday island food traditions.

Culture comes into the picture through Bodu Beru evenings, where traditional Maldivian music and dance bring a distinctly local element to the programme. It provides a change of pace from the contemporary surroundings and water-based activities, adding a cultural dimension to the stay.

A morning can begin with an ocean adventure, followed by time at the spa, a cooking session in the afternoon and a Bodu Beru performance later in the evening. There is no single way to spend a day.

The property is also designed for different styles of travellers. Couples can opt for private overwater accommodation and wellness experiences, while families and groups have larger villas and a broad range of activities to choose from.

Rather than defining a Maldivian holiday solely through seclusion and relaxation, NOOE Kunaavashi positions itself around choice. Adventure can sit alongside wellness, international flavours alongside Maldivian cooking, and contemporary hospitality alongside traditional entertainment.



Candle lit dinner set up at Flame



Lunch at Veli Bar

The result is a holiday that does not require travellers to pick one mood and stick with it. True to its name, life here is designed to be neither one thing nor its opposite, but a little bit of everything in between.



Nurse sharks, up close



NH Kuda Rah

expands focus on diverse travellers and intimate celebrations

Mrasha Goel



Mohamed Rishfan

Director of Sales, NH Kuda Rah, Maldives

NH Kuda Rah is witnessing a shift in its guest profile, with the property seeing growing demand from solo travellers, families, friends and small groups alongside its traditional honeymoon clientele. The 50-villa resort is also exploring new opportunities in intimate celebrations and wedding buyouts as traveller preferences continue to evolve.

"The Maldives has seen quite a bit of change in the last couple of years, especially post-COVID. We've seen a lot of solo travellers coming in, which is quite different to how we were known before as a honeymoon destination," said Mohamed Rishfan, Director of Sales, NH Kuda Rah, Maldives.

Families travelling with children, groups of friends, girls' trips and mother-daughter holidays are also emerging as notable segments. Rishfan said the latter is becoming a distinct category, with mothers travelling with their daughters following milestones such as graduation. The changing demand has encouraged properties to broaden their offerings and cater to a wider range of traveller profiles.

For NH Kuda Rah, Europe remains a key source market, particularly French and German speaking travellers from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Italy and Russia are also important markets, alongside India and the Middle East. Saudi Arabia and the UAE contribute significantly to the latter segment.

India continues to remain among the resort's top six markets, with Indian guests recording an average stay of around 3.2 nights. Most stays range between three and four nights, while honeymooners generally opt for four nights. The property is also seeing guests combine their Maldives holiday with other destinations and experiences.

"India is in our top six through and through at any given time," said Rishfan.

The resort has also seen business recover following disruptions in the Middle East,



which affected some European travellers relying on connecting flights through the region. While some guests rescheduled their holidays, the overall business outlook remains positive. Rishfan noted that arrivals to the Maldives are increasing, even as the number of resorts in the destination continues to grow.

Small-group leisure is another area NH Kuda Rah is looking to develop, particularly for weddings and post-event celebrations. With 50 villas, the resort sees its size as well suited to intimate groups and private buyouts.

"We are taking quite seriously leisure small groups because we are an inventory of 50 villas," said Rishfan, adding that the property is currently in discussions on a couple of wedding enquiries.

For wedding buyouts, the resort can use its outdoor spaces and adapt restaurant areas for events, while giving groups greater privacy to personalise their celebrations.

While a full wedding buyout would be a new milestone for NH Kuda Rah, the resort already hosts small groups and sees intimate celebrations as a natural extension of its existing offering.



The business of Memorable Meals

Ami Shah



Vipul Kohli
Founder & CEO, Baraat Catering,
Clove Hospitality Pvt Ltd

As destination weddings and MICE travel continue to grow across India, food is taking on a larger role in shaping the overall guest experience. From regional flavours and personalised menus to local sourcing and seamless large-scale execution, catering is becoming an integral part of how destinations are experienced and remembered. Vipul Kohli, Founder & CEO, Baraat Catering, Clove Hospitality Pvt Ltd, shares his perspective on the evolving business of destination catering and the opportunities ahead for India's hospitality and travel ecosystem.

“

A thoughtfully curated regional dinner, interaction with a local cook, traditional cooking techniques or a modern interpretation of local cuisine can become as memorable as any sightseeing experience.

”

Q How is the growth of destination weddings and MICE travel influencing catering requirements across India's hospitality and travel ecosystem?

Destination weddings and MICE travel are changing catering from being a support service into a much more integral part of the overall guest experience. When people travel for an event, food becomes one of the strongest memories they take back with them.

For caterers, this means the requirement is no longer limited to delivering one excellent lunch or dinner. A three- or four-day destination wedding may involve airport welcomes, brunches, sundowners, poolside menus, themed dinners, after-parties and recovery breakfasts. Each occasion needs a distinct food identity while still maintaining consistency in quality and service.

MICE events bring another layer of complexity because the catering has to be efficient, scalable and time-sensitive while still offering an experience. As a result, caterers today need stronger logistics, menu planning, production systems and the ability to work seamlessly with hotels, venues and event planners.



What are destination wedding planners, hotels and travel partners increasingly looking for from catering partners when designing food experiences for international and domestic guests?

Increasingly, they are looking for partners who can think beyond a conventional buffet. The expectation today is that a caterer should understand the complete event journey: who the guests are, where they are travelling from, what the destination represents and what experience the host wants to create.

There is also much greater demand for flexibility. One event may need authentic regional Indian cuisine, international comfort food, live cooking stations, vegan menus, Jain options and late-night food, all within the same itinerary.

Hotels and planners therefore value caterers who can collaborate early in the planning process, engineer menus intelligently and execute consistently across multiple formats and venues.



At Baraat Catering, our approach is to first understand the occasion and the guest profile and then build the food experience around it rather than starting with a standard menu.



The challenge for caterers is therefore not simply providing more dishes. It is creating thoughtful variety while keeping the operation disciplined.



With travellers becoming more conscious about personalised experiences, how can catering help destinations and hotels create a stronger sense of place through food?

Food is perhaps the easiest and most emotional way to connect a guest with a destination. If somebody travels to Rajasthan, Kumaon, Kashmir, Goa or Kerala, the food experience should ideally tell them something about where they are. That does not mean every meal needs to be completely regional, but even a few thoughtfully introduced local dishes, ingredients or cooking techniques can create a very strong connection to the destination.

Presentation and storytelling also matter. A regional breakfast, a local chaat experience, a traditional slow-cooked dish or even a locally sourced ingredient

explained properly can become part of the travel memory.

The best destination menus, in my view, balance familiarity with discovery. Guests should find food they are comfortable with, but they should also taste something they could only have experienced because they travelled to that destination.

International and domestic guests often have very different dietary preferences. How is the catering industry adapting to increasingly diverse requirements at destination weddings and MICE events?

Dietary requirements have become far more detailed than they were even a few years ago. Today we routinely have to plan for vegetarian, vegan, Jain, gluten-free, lactose-free and allergy-sensitive requirements alongside guests who may prefer international cuisines or lighter food.

The important change is that these requirements can no longer be treated as an afterthought. They need to be incorporated into the menu from the planning stage.



For international guests, we also try to create a balance between introducing Indian flavours and providing familiar options. Not every guest may be comfortable eating rich or heavily spiced Indian food for three consecutive days.

Similarly, Indian guests themselves have become extremely well travelled and expect diversity, from Asian and Mediterranean food to modern Indian, regional cuisine and high-quality comfort food.

Looking ahead, what opportunities do you see for Indian caterers to collaborate more closely with hotels, DMCs, wedding planners and travel companies to build food-led destination experiences?

I see a significant opportunity for caterers to become part of the destination planning conversation much earlier. Traditionally, the destination or hotel might be selected first, followed by the event planner, and catering would enter the conversation later. Going forward, food can itself become one of the reasons a destination or property is chosen.

Hotels, DMCs, wedding planners and caterers can collaborate to create curated culinary programmes around destinations, regional welcome experiences, chef-led dinners, local market visits, destination brunches, farm experiences, food trails and specially designed menus that showcase local culture.

India has an enormous advantage because almost every region has its own ingredients, traditions and cooking styles. For Indian caterers, the opportunity is to combine that culinary heritage with contemporary presentation, strong hospitality and professional large-scale execution.

That is where I believe the next phase of destination catering will evolve from simply feeding guests at a destination to making food an important part of why they remember the destination.



Fouquets Abu Dhabi

A taste of France beneath the Louvre dome

Akshita Duggal



There are restaurants you visit for the food, and then there are places where the setting becomes an integral part of the experience. Fouquets Abu Dhabi brings both together, pairing French gastronomy with contemporary art and a striking waterfront setting.

Located within the iconic Louvre Abu Dhabi on Saadiyat Island, the celebrated Parisian brasserie offers a taste of France beneath the museums spectacular dome. With views of the distinctive architecture and the Arabian Gulf, the restaurant provides an elegant setting where lunch can easily extend into a leisurely afternoon, particularly after exploring the museums galleries.



Palate Play



Fouquets carries the legacy of its original Parisian outpost, which has been a fixture on the Champs Elysees since 1899. In Abu Dhabi, its Parisian identity has been developed in collaboration with celebrated French chef Pierre Gagnaire. The menu draws on classic French traditions while introducing contemporary touches, balancing familiarity with refinement.

The restaurant has also featured in the MICHELIN Guide Abu Dhabi, appearing in the inaugural 2023 selection and continuing through subsequent editions, including 2026.



Mille-feuille fouquets

My dining experience began with a curated three course set menu. The Avocado Salad offered a fresh and light start to the meal, setting the tone for what followed. The main course, Rigatoni with mushrooms and truffle, was comforting and indulgent, with earthy mushroom flavours complemented by the richness of truffle and pasta.



Smashed avocado salad

Dessert brought the signature Mille Feuille, which proved to be a particularly delightful finale. Crisp layers of pastry gave way to a creamy mascarpone filling,



Rigatoni à la truffe

creating a pleasing contrast of textures and flavours in every bite.

Yet what stayed with me at Fouquets was not simply what arrived on the plate, but the way food, architecture, art and hospitality came together. The service was warm and attentive throughout, with the team adding to the sense of occasion without overwhelming it.

Dining here feels like a natural extension of the Louvre Abu Dhabi experience, offering a place to pause after the galleries, take in the architecture and allow the worlds of art and gastronomy to meet.



TAAI gears up for 69th convention in Kolkata

Mrasha Goel



The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) is gearing up for its 69th Annual Convention and Exhibition, set to take place in Kolkata from October 25–27, 2026, at ITC Royal Bengal. The convention will be a particularly significant milestone as TAAI celebrates 75 years of its journey in India's travel and tourism industry.

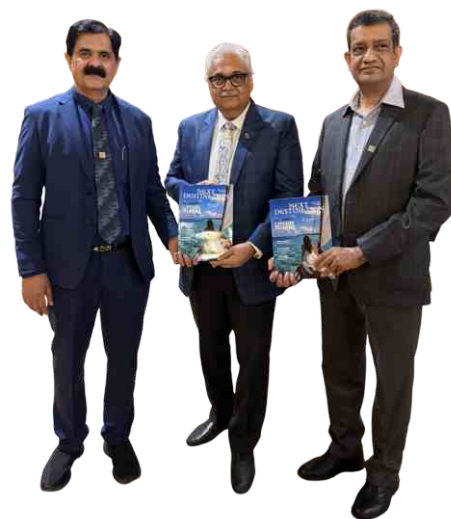
Details of the upcoming convention were shared at a gathering at The Ashok, New Delhi, attended by TAAI President Sunil Kumar and the association's Managing Committee. Kumar spoke about the significance of the year and invited members and the wider travel trade to be part of the three-day event.

The convention, themed 'Beyond the

Known', is expected to bring together around 500 delegates. TAAI currently has around 2,600 members, with another 600 awaiting induction. The association also plans to renew key MOUs and place a special focus on the Northeast, encouraging stakeholders from the region to engage more closely with TAAI.

Post-convention tours will offer delegates opportunities to explore Kolkata and its surroundings, including the Sundarbans and Mayapur, while longer itineraries covering Darjeeling and Gangtok are also being planned, with further details to be announced.

ITC Sonar will also accommodate convention delegates alongside the headquarters hotel, ITC Royal Bengal.





Cruising beyond the cabin

Unlocking India's MICE and celebrations market

Ayushi Anand



Dipti Adhia

Country Director, Discover the World - India

As Indian travellers increasingly seek experience-led holidays, international cruises are emerging as an attractive proposition for MICE movements and celebrations. Dipti Adhia, Country

Director, Discover the World – India, discusses the opportunity and the role of travel advisors in taking cruises beyond leisure.

Q How do you see the MICE and celebrations segment evolving for international cruise holidays in the Indian market?

MICE and celebrations are becoming increasingly important for international cruising in India, across both ocean and river cruises. Ocean cruises offer scale, variety and entertainment, making them relevant for corporate incentives, reward programmes, weddings, religious groups and milestone celebrations. Combining accommodation, dining, entertainment, activities and multiple destinations under one roof is a strong proposition.

River cruises offer a more intimate and immersive experience, working well for

CXO retreats, leadership programmes, intimate celebrations, wellness retreats and premium incentives. The key is matching the right product to the group and its objective, and selling an experience, not simply a cabin.

With river cruises better suited to smaller groups, what opportunities do you see for intimate weddings, milestone celebrations and private occasions?

River cruises have strong potential for intimate weddings, milestone celebrations, private occasions and family gatherings. Their appeal lies in privacy, exclusivity and destination immersion. Guests can wake up in a new destination, enjoy curated dining and experiences onboard, and celebrate against a changing backdrop.

With the right planning, a river cruise can turn a private celebration into a shared

On the Go

journey. However, the ship, itinerary, season and level of customisation need to match expectations.

What type of MICE groups or celebrations are currently showing the most interest in cruise experiences?

We are seeing interest across both ocean and river cruises. Ocean cruises attract corporate incentive groups, weddings, reward trips, religious groups, larger celebrations and families. River cruises are seeing growing interest from smaller, premium groups seeking intimate and personalised experiences.

Full-ship chartering is another opportunity, particularly for river cruises. It allows groups to customise menus, entertainment, branding and other onboard requirements. The opportunity is to create a cruise around the group.

For Indian travel advisors, what are the key opportunities and challenges in selling long-haul ocean cruises for celebrations and MICE?

The biggest opportunity is to move from selling a cruise to designing an experience. Advisors can combine the right ship, itinerary, dining, entertainment and pre- or post-cruise arrangements into a complete journey.

Challenges include product knowledge,



VIVA ENJOY

visa requirements, flight connectivity and securing group air capacity, particularly for long-haul movements. Advisors must also set expectations around fixed schedules, ports of call and private venue availability.

Full-ship charters provide greater flexibility and customisation. Advisors can become experience designers, matching the client's objective with the right product and level of customisation.

How can the Indian travel trade better position cruises beyond leisure holidays and tap into experiential MICE and celebrations?

The trade needs to see a cruise as the destination itself, rather than simply part of a destination. Advisors should include cruises in MICE and celebration proposals instead of waiting for clients to ask for them.

At Discover the World – India, we invest in trade presentations, product training

and FAM trips, enabling advisors to experience ocean and river cruising firsthand.

Most importantly, advisors should look beyond the cabin and sell the entire journey, including flights, visas, pre- and post-cruise arrangements and the experience itself.

Looking ahead, which cruise segments or products do you see having the greatest potential in India?

Ocean cruises will continue to offer opportunities for larger corporate incentives, reward programmes and celebrations, given their scale and breadth of facilities. River cruises have significant potential among smaller, premium groups and intimate celebrations, with full-ship charters offering greater customisation.

Luxury and small-ship cruising could appeal to high-end incentives, CXO groups and milestone celebrations, while expedition cruising offers a distinctive proposition for clients seeking once-in-a-lifetime experiences in destinations such as Antarctica and the Arctic.

The opportunity is to match the right product to the group, occasion and objective, making cruises an increasingly versatile canvas for India's MICE and celebrations market.



Nicko Cruises

Events Recap



TTM Maldives brings two days of trade engagement to a close

Travel Trade Maldives (TTM) wrapped up its two-day programme with a strong focus on business meetings, networking and engagement between international buyers and Maldivian tourism suppliers. The 10th edition brought together more than 100 resorts and 250 operators, before concluding with the TTM Awards & Gala at Crossroads Maldives, featuring the awards ceremony, dinner and entertainment.

Marriott Maldives concludes three-city India roadshow

Marriott Maldives concluded its three-city India roadshow with its final stop in New Delhi, following engagements in Ahmedabad and Mumbai. The roadshow brought together travel trade partners across the three cities, providing an opportunity to connect with the Marriott Maldives team, explore its portfolio and exchange market insights. The initiative underscored the brand's continued focus on strengthening partnerships with India's travel trade.





TripJack hosts Bowling Championship in Gurugram

TripJack hosted its Bowling Championship for travel partners at Smaaash Airia Mall, Sector 68, Gurugram. The event brought together TripJack's travel partners for an evening of bowling, networking and friendly competition. Supported by leading hotel partners, the championship provided an engaging platform for travel professionals to connect and strengthen industry relationships beyond business.



KK Collection hosts media luncheon in New Delhi

KK Collection hosted a media luncheon in New Delhi, represented by Chandrani Chakraborty, introducing its portfolio of boutique properties in Sri Lanka. The collection includes Kahanda Kanda, a hilltop retreat near Galle; KK Beach, a contemporary beachfront property; and The Villa Bentota, a heritage villa overlooking the Bentota River. The luncheon highlighted the collection's focus on intimate stays, personalised hospitality and distinctive Sri Lankan experiences.



APPOINTMENTS



Kushal Kejriwal
joins Patina Hotels & Resorts
as Director of Marketing
& Communications



Rajesh Namby
joins The Leela Coorg Forest
Sanctuary as General Manager



Harish Kumar
joins The Westin Hyderabad
MindSPACE as Director of Rooms



Prasad Rane
joins Trehan IRIS as Chief
Business & Marketing Officer



Pradeep Kandari
joins The Leela Gandhinagar
& MMCEC as General Manager



Projjwal Ghosh
joins IHG Hotels & Resorts
as Area Champion –
Sales & Marketing, Southwest Asia



Ravindra Singh Rao
joins JECC and Novotel Jaipur
Convention Centre as Associate
Director of Sale



Arman Chaugule
joins Radisson Hotel Group
as Account Manager –
Sales, South Asia



Nagi Reddy Bhadri
joins Sheraton Hyderabad Hotel
as Director of Sales



Vikas Sood
joins JECC and Novotel Jaipur
Convention Centre
as General Manager



Bhumika Sain
joins Andaz Delhi, by Hyatt
as Director of Celebrations



Mehek Sharma
joins The Leela Hyderabad
as Head of Marketing
& Communications

APPOINTMENTS



Chitra Awasthi
joins Anya Gurgaon
as General Manager



Rubina Sharma
joins Crowne Plaza New Delhi
Mayur Vihar Noida
as Hotel Manager



Kumar Rathod
joins Novotel Goa Resort &
Spa and Novotel Goa
as Director of Finance



Mohamed Mansour
joins OBLU XPERIENCE Ailafushi
& OBLU SELECT Lobigili
as General Manager



Suryaveer Singh
joins Trance Hotels
& Resorts as CEO



Ashok Sivashankar
joins Courtyard by Marriott
Tiruchirappalli as General Manager



Neeraj Seth
joins Atmosphere Core
as Assistant Vice President –
Communication



Kamana Oliya
joins ONE Atmosphere
Suites at Corner Walk
as Marketing Manager



Henna Punjabi
joins Raffles Udaipur
as Director of Marketing
and Communications



Harshad Makasare
joins JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu
as Director of Sales



Rahul Chauhan
joins The LaLiT Chandigarh
as Resident Manager



Bhuwan Chandra
joins Hyatt Place Vithalapur
as General Manager

UTEN EVOLVE BACK RESORT, HAMPI FAM TRIP WITH BIG TRAVELS CONCLUDED SUCCESSFULLY ON A HIGH NOTE



The UTEN - Evolve Back Hampi FAM Trip, organised in association with BIG TRAVELS, concluded successfully, bringing together travel trade partners for an immersive experience at Evolve Back Hampi.

A sincere thank you to the entire Evolve Back Hampi team for their warm hospitality, attentive service and for providing the participants with an opportunity to experience the property and its offerings. Set in the historic landscape of Hampi, the resort combines luxury with the destination's rich history, culture, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and distinctive natural surroundings.

A special thank you to Jagadeesh, Syed and the entire BIG TRAVELS team for their continued support of UTEN and its travel trade partners, and for facilitating this familiarisation trip.



Rogeeboy, Honeypalm Holidays

"A heartfelt thank you to Satya, Norman, Wini and the entire team for organising such a wonderful and educational trip. It was an enriching experience filled with learning, great memories and amazing company. Grateful for your efforts, hospitality and support throughout the journey."

Irshad Patel, Discover Destinations Tours and Travels

"I am falling short of words to express our heartfelt gratitude to the entire team who worked to make this FAM trip successful. With Evolve Hotels, I have always had fond memories at Coorg and Kabini, and now Hampi. It is a brand that does not compromise on service. I thoroughly enjoyed the luxurious experience, and the entire team was warm, professional and supportive."

Swapnil Jagtap, Tripstoworld by Shivtej Ventures LLP

"It was a truly wonderful and memorable experience. A big thank you to BIG TRAVELS, Evolve Back and UTEN for organising such a fantastic FAM trip. Evolve Back Hampi is an impressive property, and the entire team made our stay special with their warm hospitality. I feel truly blessed to be part of the UTEN family and grateful to Wini, Satya and Norman for this opportunity."

Pallavi, TPHOLIDAYS LLP

"Some journeys are planned, some are experienced, and then there are journeys that become beautiful memories. Evolve Back Hampi was magnificent, with incredible hospitality and warmth. Thank you to BIG TRAVELS for the excellent coordination and to UTEN for creating a platform where travel professionals can connect, learn and grow. The wonderful group and the memories we created together made the journey even more special."



We also extend our appreciation to Satya, Wini and Norman from UTEN for bringing together the travel fraternity and creating another opportunity for industry professionals to connect, learn and experience a destination firsthand.

Here's what the participants had to say:

Ishita Shah, The Pink Aeroplane

"Thank you to UTEN, Satya, Wini and Norman for this opportunity. A special thank you to the Evolve Back team for the wonderful hospitality and for giving us the opportunity to experience such a beautiful property. Thank you to BIG TRAVELS for making this FAM trip possible."

Munira Basrai, Ice International

"We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone for making our FAM Tour with Evolve Hotels such a wonderful and memorable experience. The warm hospitality, excellent arrangements, professional support and personal attention throughout the tour were truly appreciated. The experience gave us valuable insights into the exceptional experiences offered by Evolve Hotels. We look forward to a long-lasting and successful association with Evolve Hotels and BIG TRAVELS."



Nitin Bhoire, Mangalmurti Holidays

"What a wonderful and memorable experience. A heartfelt thank you to BIG TRAVELS, Evolve Back and UTEN for organising such a fantastic FAM trip. The destination was beautiful, but the people made the experience unforgettable. The group was friendly, humble, positive and warm, making the journey even more special."

Riddhi Shah, Shripal Tours and Travels

"A beautiful property with a peaceful ambience, delicious food and truly warm hospitality. The entire team made us feel welcome and comfortable throughout our stay. Thank you to Evolve Back, UTEN and BIG TRAVELS for the lovely memories. Definitely a place we would love to visit again."

Murtaza Khalil, Pack N Fly Holidays, Mumbai

"A big thank you to UTEN, BIG TRAVELS, Evolve Back Resort and everyone involved. Thank you for making this educational and familiarisation trip memorable and productive. It was wonderful connecting with everyone, and I hope to see you all again."

The FAM trip provided an opportunity for travel professionals to experience Evolve Back Hampi, strengthen industry connections and gain firsthand insights into the destination and property.



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About Us

Next Destination is a bi-monthly travel and lifestyle magazine published under AVS Media Network. The publication is designed as a platform for both the travel industry and the inspired traveller. We bring together stories, insights and updates that resonate with professionals and passionate explorers alike.

With a dynamic presence across print, digital and social media platforms, our mission is to streamline the news that matters. We curate stories, industry updates and perspectives that are as relevant to travel professionals as they are to travel enthusiasts.

We go beyond the usual. Our editorial team is committed to producing original, thought-provoking content that highlights emerging trends, addresses pressing industry issues and showcases destinations through a fresh and engaging perspective. Each edition is thoughtfully crafted to inform, inspire and spark meaningful conversations that contribute to the growth and evolution of the travel industry.

With pan-India distribution and a strong network of seasoned correspondents and marketers, we are headquartered in New Delhi and focused on delivering maximum reach and visibility—whether in print, online or through experiential events. Next Destination is where travel finds its voice and its vision.



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