

NEXT DESTINATION

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A Year of
Extraordinary Journeys
Across Morocco, Slovenia
and Taiwan

Redefining
the Modern
Proposal

Her Choice,
Her Voice
International
Women's Day 2026

Faith Goes
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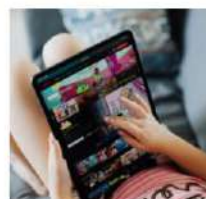
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Contents



12

Tourism Malaysia's evolving value proposition for Indian travellers

17

Delhi set for river cruise experience: Everything you need to know about the Yamuna River Cruise



19

Discovering Northeast India at its most inviting

32

Redefining guest experiences: Barun Gupta on Indeva's vision and expansion



37

How bhajan concerts are becoming a global phenomenon

40

Strengthening Colombo as a regional transit hub: SriLankan Airlines' next phase



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Letter from the

Editor-in-Chief

The travel trade today is operating in a space of heightened intent. Demand is steady, but expectations are sharper. Travellers are asking better questions, partners are choosing alignments more carefully, and destinations are under pressure to deliver value beyond visibility. From experience-led itineraries and niche travel segments to the growing role of collaboration, curation, and credibility, the industry is no longer chasing volume alone, but relevance.

Love is in the air this season, and travel is no exception. We deep dive into emerging destinations for marriage proposals, with insights from leading wedding planners on what couples are truly seeking. These trends highlight how romance-driven travel is evolving into experience-led journeys that demand creativity, authenticity, and attention to detail from the trade.

As attention turns inward, this issue also explores what women really want from the travel industry today. From safety and representation to flexibility, storytelling, and leadership, we examine how travel brands and destinations can move beyond tokenism to meaningful engagement. February and March are packed with industry activity, with OTM, SATTE, ITB Berlin, TTF Bengaluru and Chennai providing platforms where ideas, partnerships, and the future of tourism converge. These gatherings continue to shape conversations that define where travel is headed next, and we look forward to bringing back insights that matter to both the industry and the traveller.

Featuring interviews with Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali, Director of Tourism, Malaysia; Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Commercial, SriLankan Airlines; and Barun Gupta, COO of Indeva Hotels & Resorts, this issue brings practical insights and firsthand perspectives on destination strategy, airline connectivity, and experience-led hospitality.

Celebrating a love for travel, we invite you to explore new ideas, anticipate emerging trends, and stay ahead in shaping journeys that travellers will remember long after the return.

Ayushi Anand

Ayushi Anand

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FLY91 launches daily Kochi–Agatti flights, accelerates regional network expansion

FLY91 has announced the launch of daily non-stop flights between Kochi and Agatti in the Lakshadweep islands, with bookings now open. As the regional airline moves ahead with an ambitious expansion plan that will see seven new stations added to its network over the next 90 days. The new Kochi–Agatti service strengthens access to Lakshadweep through a key southern gateway, complementing existing Agatti–Goa operations and improving connectivity for both island residents and travellers. As part of its phased growth strategy, FLY91 will expand to Kochi, Rajahmundry, Vijayawada, Hubballi, Dabolim, Nanded and Indore, taking its total network to 15 destinations, supported by a fleet of six ATR 72-600 aircraft and three additional aircraft scheduled for induction shortly.



Tomorrowland to make Asia debut with Thailand edition

Belgian electronic dance music festival Tomorrowland will debut in Asia with its first-ever Thailand edition, scheduled to take place December 11–13, 2026, at Wisdom Valley, Pattaya. The three-day festival marks a significant expansion for Tomorrowland and is expected to draw large international and regional audiences to Thailand. The event is anticipated to feature the signature production scale and immersive experiences the festival is globally known for. Pre-registration for tickets are available now. Single-day passes are priced at THB 5,100, while a three-day “Full Madness Pass” is priced at THB 12,500.



Germany waives transit visa requirement for Indian travellers

Germany has removed the transit visa requirement for Indian passport holders, simplifying travel for Indians transiting through German airports. The decision was announced during German Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s official visit to India, where India and Germany elevated their strategic partnership through a series of agreements and policy announcements. The move allows Indian travellers to transit through Germany without requiring a separate visa, reducing both processing time and administrative hurdles.



India eases travel norms with free 30-day visas for visitors from Kazakhstan

India has introduced a new visa relaxation for citizens of Kazakhstan, granting complimentary visas valid for stays of up to 30 days as part of efforts to boost tourism and deepen people-to-people ties between the two nations. The announcement was made by Y. K. Sailas Thangal, India's Ambassador to Kazakhstan, at a reception in Astana celebrating India's 77th Republic Day. Under the new arrangement, Kazakh nationals visiting India for tourism, medical treatment or as accompanying attendants will be eligible for the free visa, which can be obtained for a maximum period of 30 days through online applications or direct submissions at the Indian Embassy. The initiative is expected to further energise bilateral travel, which has already shown positive momentum, with the Ambassador highlighting that around 250,000 Indian travellers visited Kazakhstan in 2025, underscoring growing connectivity and mutual interest between the two countries.



Air India allows cats and dogs up to 10 kg to fly in the cabin under 'Paws on Board' policy

Air India has updated its pet travel policy to allow cats and dogs weighing up to 10 kg, including the carrier, to travel in the economy cabin on select domestic and international flights under its 'Paws on Board' initiative. Designed to make flying with pets simpler and more comfortable, the revised rules reduce the advance booking requirement for in-cabin pets from 72 hours to 48 hours and currently apply to over 80 routes across India, North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. To ensure passenger comfort, only two pets are permitted in the cabin per flight, and pets must be at least eight weeks old. Animals that are pregnant, sedated, medically unfit, or seriously ill will not be accepted for travel, reinforcing the airline's focus on safety and welfare while addressing a long-standing challenge for pet-owning travellers.



Sikkim ends physical permits for foreign tourists, mandates online clearance

The Sikkim government has discontinued the issuance of physical Protected Area Permits (PAP) and Restricted Area Permits (RAP) for foreign nationals, making online clearance mandatory for entry into protected and restricted regions of the state. Announced by the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation, the move aligns with strict guidelines issued by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and marks a significant step towards digitising travel regulations. Under the revised rules, printed permits will no longer be granted under any circumstances, and only select areas will remain accessible to international visitors.



Kerala Tourism rolls out multi-state roadshows to boost domestic summer travel

Kerala Tourism has kicked off a series of multi-state roadshows and partnership meets to attract domestic tourists for the upcoming summer holidays and the months ahead, beginning with Chennai and extending to Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata and Indore over the next two months. The initiative aims to showcase the state's new offerings and experiential travel products to drive higher domestic footfalls. The roadshows will spotlight emerging destinations in north Kerala such as Kozhikode, Wayanad and Bekal, enhanced infrastructure in lesser-known locations, and diverse experiences beyond backwaters and beaches, including adventure sports, cycling, paragliding, mountain biking, wellness, luxury travel, destination weddings, culture and MICE tourism. In a push to strengthen heritage tourism, the state recently launched 33 heritage trails from Kasaragod to Kollam under the Muziris Heritage Project, while also anticipating an upswing in international bookings during the upcoming holiday period.



Centara to debut Centara Life Namba Hotel Osaka in Q2 2026

Centara Hotels and Resorts will strengthen its presence in Japan with the opening of Centara Life Namba Hotel Osaka in the second quarter of 2026, marking the group's second property in the country after the launch of Centara Grand Hotel Osaka in 2023. To celebrate the upcoming debut, the company has rolled out a limited-period, members-only 'Live the City' opening offer for CentaraThe1 members, featuring up to 25 per cent savings on select room rates along with triple reward points on all bookings. The promotion is valid for reservations made until 31 May 2026, for stays between 1 May and 31 August 2026, with free membership registration available to non-members. Situated in central Osaka, the hotel provides easy access to key city highlights such as Dotonbori, Kuromon Market and Shinsaibashi, making it a convenient base for travellers looking to explore the city's vibrant urban and culinary scene.



Global tourism records 1.52 billion international arrivals in 2025

Global tourism continued its recovery momentum in 2025, with international tourist arrivals rising 4 per cent to an estimated 1.52 billion worldwide, nearly 60 million more than in 2024, according to UN Tourism's World Tourism Barometer, signalling a return to pre-pandemic growth trends. Europe remained the world's most visited region with 793 million arrivals, while Africa posted the fastest growth at 8 per cent and the Middle East reached nearly 100 million visitors, standing about 39 per cent above pre-pandemic levels. Asia and the Pacific sustained its rebound with 6 per cent growth, though arrivals remained below 2019 figures, supported by improved air connectivity and visa facilitation. Tourism's economic impact also strengthened, with international tourism receipts reaching USD 1.9 trillion and total export revenues, including passenger transport, hitting a record USD 2.2 trillion. UN Tourism expects global arrivals to grow by 3–4 per cent in 2026, driven by continued recovery in Asia-Pacific, stable economic conditions and major global events, despite ongoing cost pressures and geopolitical uncertainties.



South Africa records highest ever International arrivals, tourism drives economic growth

South Africa welcomed a record 10.48 million international arrivals in 2025, a 17.6 per cent increase from 2024, underscoring tourism's role as a key driver of economic growth, investment, and job creation, Tourism Minister Patricia de Lille says. The government and industry have rolled out the Tourism Growth Partnership Plan, focusing on ease of access, coordinated marketing, safety, product development, and technology-driven innovation. Key initiatives include the Electronic Travel Authorisation system for markets such as India and

China, strengthened air connectivity with new and expanded routes, bankable infrastructure projects worth ZAR 1 billion, and AI-powered tools like Siyanda for North American travellers. The sector currently supports 1.8 million jobs, while MICE and events continue to grow, with Meetings Africa 2025 generating ZAR 690 million and 1,200 jobs, and Africa's Travel Indaba contributing over ZAR 610 million. Following the successful G20 Tourism Ministers' Meeting, South Africa will host a Special Davos Meeting next year, further cementing its global tourism credentials.



OPO Hotels expands presence in Rajasthan with Khatu Shyam Ji property

OPO Hotels has unveiled OPO Horizon Surbhi Grant, a newly operational hotel in Khatu Shyam Ji, Rajasthan, further strengthening the company's footprint in high-traffic pilgrimage destinations. Managed under a contract, the property features 40 rooms, a 40-seat café, and a 120-seat highway restaurant, catering to both pilgrims visiting the Khatu Shyam Ji Temple and business travellers passing through the area.



Oman Air launches new route to Taif, enhancing connectivity to Saudi Arabia

Oman Air has launched a new route to Taif, operating three weekly flights between Muscat and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, marking a key milestone in the airline's network expansion and the first of several destinations planned for this year. The service complements Oman Air's existing Saudi network, offering passengers greater choice and flexibility, while Taif's cooler summer climate, rich cultural and historical heritage, and proximity to major religious centres make it an attractive destination for a wide range of travellers.





Bali Trip Wisata transitions to DMC Hub, expands destination management operations across Asia

Bali Trip Wisata has transitioned to DMC Hub, marking its evolution into a multi-destination destination management company with operations across Bali, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. The transition reflects a strategic shift towards a structured, system-led operating model focused on scalable growth, strengthened trade partnerships, and consistent execution across markets. DMC Hub will continue to support leisure, group, and trade-led travel programmes while expanding long-term destination management capabilities across its growing Asian footprint.



Malaysia Airlines and Singapore Airlines expand partnership with revenue sharing and wider codeshares

Malaysia Airlines Berhad (MAB) and Singapore Airlines (SIA) have signed a wide-ranging commercial partnership agreement, subject to regulatory approvals, to strengthen connectivity and boost tourism between Malaysia, Singapore and global markets. The agreement includes revenue sharing on flights between the two countries, expanded codeshare routes and joint marketing initiatives, and covers SIA subsidiaries SilkAir and Scoot as well as Firefly, Malaysia Airlines' sister carrier. The airlines will coordinate schedules to improve frequencies, introduce joint fare products and align corporate travel programmes. Codeshare expansion will see Singapore Airlines and SilkAir access up to 16 Malaysian destinations, while Malaysia Airlines will progressively codeshare on SIA's long-haul network.



Taiwan tourism launches 2026 India market drive with Delhi roadshow and OTM participation

Building on two consecutive years of over 20 per cent growth in Indian arrivals, the Taiwan Tourism Administration (TTA) has launched its 2026 India market initiatives with a Taiwan Mega Roadshow in Delhi and participation at OTM 2026 in Mumbai from February 5-7. The Delhi roadshow will engage around 125 top travel trade buyers with immersive experiences, cultural performances, interactive zones, and Taiwanese cuisine, while a strong delegation of 25+ tourism stakeholders, including Shih Chun Travel, Relax Go

Taiwan, and the Taiwan Visitors Association, will support both events. At OTM, Taiwan's pavilion, inspired by the "Waves of Wonder" campaign, will showcase four-season tourism offerings, premium leisure experiences, and MICE infrastructure for high-end Indian travellers, complemented by cultural performances and interactive activities. Paul Shih, Director of TTA's Singapore Office, highlighted India as a strategically important market, noting 46,134 arrivals in 2025, a 20.9 per cent increase and emphasised TTA's ongoing commitment to trade partnerships, product innovation, and destination promotion.

Union Budget places tourism at the centre of India's growth and employment strategy



Nirmala Sitharaman
Finance Minister of India

Tourism emerged as a central pillar of India's growth and employment agenda in the Union Budget, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman outlining a wide-ranging roadmap focused on skills development, destination readiness, digital infrastructure and sustainable travel. Emphasising tourism's role in job creation, foreign exchange earnings and regional economic growth, the Budget proposed the establishment of a National Institute of Hospitality through the upgradation of the National Council for Hotel Management and Catering

Technology to better align education with industry needs. To enhance visitor experience, the government will launch a pilot programme to upskill 10,000 tourist guides across 20 iconic sites through a 12-week hybrid training course developed in collaboration with an Indian Institute of Management.

Destination management will be strengthened through the creation of a National Destination Digital Knowledge Grid to document cultural, spiritual and heritage sites nationwide.

Sustainability-led initiatives include eco-friendly mountain trails in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Araku Valley and Podhigai Malai, alongside Turtle Trails in Odisha, Karnataka and Kerala and bird-watching circuits around Pulikat Lake.

India will also host the first Global Big Cat Summit, reinforcing its conservation focus. Heritage tourism received a boost with 15 archaeological sites, including Lothal, Dholavira, Rakhigarhi and Sarnath, set to be developed as experiential destinations. Supporting outbound travel and easing cash flow for travellers, the



Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

Budget also announced a reduction in Tax Collected at Source (TCS) on overseas tour packages from the earlier range of 5–20 per cent to 2 per cent, a move expected to significantly benefit consumers and the travel trade. Additional measures include Buddhist circuits in the North-East, five Regional Medical Tourism Hubs, improved last-mile connectivity through 4,000 electric buses, strengthened inland waterways training, and incentives for seaplane connectivity to underserved regions.

Tourism Malaysia's evolving value proposition for Indian travellers

Ayushi Anand



Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali

Walking into Ahmad Johanif Mohd Ali's office, it is immediately evident that this is going to be a conversation he genuinely enjoys. Warm, approachable, and quick with a smile, the Director of Tourism Malaysia speaks with the ease of someone deeply invested in his market, particularly when the discussion turns to golf. A golfer himself, he lights up while explaining why the sport has become one of Malaysia's most promising niche segments for India. That enthusiasm carries through a data-driven conversation on arrivals, MICE growth, and why India is no longer just a volume market for Malaysia, but a high-value one.

Q India has emerged as one of Malaysia's most important source markets. How is the Indian market performing in terms of arrivals?

India has firmly positioned itself as Malaysia's second-largest medium-haul market after China. In 2024, Malaysia welcomed approximately 1.3 million Indian visitors, and the momentum has continued strongly into 2025. By November 2025, arrivals had already reached 1.41 million, with Tourism Malaysia confident of closing the year at over 1.5 million visitors. The official target stands between 1.52 and 1.53 million arrivals, underscoring India's strategic importance.

Beyond arrivals, how does India perform on key trade metrics such as length of stay and spending?

Indian travellers deliver strong value. The average length of stay is currently 4.3 nights, while per-capita spending is around USD 1,200 per visit. Notably, Indian visitor spending now exceeds that of China and is at par with high-

The Insider Edit

yield GCC markets.

Which segments are driving strong returns from India?

Leisure remains the largest contributor, but MICE has emerged as a significant growth driver. Indian corporates are increasingly selecting Malaysia for incentives, internal meetings, and conferences. These groups typically stay in premium hotels, host gala dinners, and spend substantially at the destination, making MICE a strong ROI segment.

What targets has Tourism Malaysia set for the Indian market going forward?

For 2026, Tourism Malaysia has set a target of 2.4 million arrivals from India. Malaysia is currently connected to 14 Indian cities and three Malaysian cities, offering about 2.4 million direct seats annually. Including indirect routes via hubs such as Singapore and Bangkok, total potential capacity increases to 3–3.5 million seats. Expanding air connectivity remains a key strategic focus.

Indian spending is higher than China actually, and they are now at par with high-end markets like the GCC.

How are you working with the Indian travel trade to drive growth?

Joint tactical campaigns with Indian tour operators and OTAs form the backbone of the strategy. Tourism Malaysia follows a co-investment model, combining destination marketing with booking-driven campaigns. Digital channels dominate, reflecting mobile-first booking behaviour, while traditional platforms continue to support brand visibility and trade education.

Malaysia positions itself as an affordable yet premium destination. How does that resonate with Indian travellers?

Malaysia's value proposition lies in offering premium experiences at competitive prices. Five-star hotels deliver comparable services to regional



competitors, often at significantly lower rates, allowing Malaysia to position itself as an affordable luxury destination rather than a high-cost one.

How extensive is Tourism Malaysia's engagement with Indian travel agents?

Rather than formal certification programmes, Tourism Malaysia focuses on direct engagement and continuous education. Over the past year, 15–20 training sessions were conducted, both online and offline, complemented by roadshows that bring Malaysian product owners directly to Indian partners.

If Indian agents had to prioritise just three Malaysian experiences, what should they sell?

Diving and snorkelling, particularly certification programmes that encourage

longer stays; Malaysia's diverse, 24-hour gastronomy scene shaped by Malay, Chinese, and Indian influences; and government-certified homestays, which offer immersive rural experiences and community engagement.

Malaysia is an affordable luxury destination, you get the same service and facilities at a much lower rate.

How does Tourism Malaysia measure ROI from trade shows like OTM and SATTE?

ROI is assessed through forward bookings, trade leads, new agent engagement, and media exposure. When compared to overall tourism revenue from India, trade show investments account for less than 2 per cent of returns, making them highly cost-effective long-term platforms.

Golf tourism clearly excites you. Why is it such a strong focus for India?

Golf attracts high-spending travellers who often travel with families. Social golfers, in particular, spend up to 50 per cent more than the average Indian visitor. With nearly 200 golf courses, including internationally sanctioned venues, Malaysia sees golf as a powerful niche with strong revenue potential.



What women want?

Trust, control and the freedom to lead

Aditi Yadav

For decades, travel has been celebrated as one of the most aspirational industries to work in — dynamic, people-led, culturally rich and endlessly global. Yet beneath the glamour lies a persistent contradiction. Women form the backbone of the travel and tourism workforce, drive revenue, manage relationships and shape consumer behaviour, but continue to fall away from leadership pipelines mid-career. As the industry marks International Women's Day, senior women leaders across segments are questioning not ambition, but structure, and asking what it will truly take for travel to be seen as a long-term, sustainable career rather than a burnout industry.



Cover Story

Christine Galle-Luczak, Founder & CEO, Heavens Portfolio, brings a data-backed perspective to the imbalance between contribution and authority. While women dominate operational and client-facing roles globally, their presence sharply declines at the point where commercial power is exercised.



In a GBTA global survey of over 600 global business travel professionals, women represented 67 per cent of travel managers and buyers, and accounted for 57 per cent of GBTA-affiliated travel supplier and travel management company (TMC) professionals.

Christine Galle-Luczak



Despite this overwhelming presence, women remain underrepresented where long-term strategy, pricing power, investment decisions and governance are decided. The result is a structural disconnect. Women drive demand, but men continue to control the levers that define value. For Galle-Luczak, correcting this imbalance is not about optics or



Burnout happens when passion replaces structure.

Samina Munshi



token representation, but about aligning authority with accountability. Until women are trusted with budgets, partnerships and board-level influence, the industry will continue to underutilise its strongest commercial thinkers.

From India's travel trade, Samina Munshi, Director, N. Chirag Travels, distills the burnout debate to a single truth: chaos is often mistaken for commitment. Women are drawn to travel for its energy and purpose, but are pushed out when passion is allowed to replace process.

Her observation reflects a wider industry tendency to glorify constant availability, crisis management and personal sacrifice, while failing to provide clear growth paths, fair compensation and realistic expectations. For Munshi, longevity in travel depends on shifting women from revenue generation into revenue governance where pricing, partnerships

and investment decisions are made. When women influence where money flows and how value is created, the industry becomes not just more inclusive, but more resilient.

That emphasis on structure, authority and staying power is echoed strongly by Jyoti Mayal, Chairperson, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC) and Past President, TAAI. With decades of experience across associations, policy and industry leadership, Mayal rejects the idea that travel is inherently unsustainable. Instead, she argues that the problem lies in how careers are designed and evaluated.



Travel is one of the few industries where experience compounds and judgement, relationships, and cultural intelligence grow more valuable with time.

Jyoti Mayal



| Cover Story

Yet too often, women are denied the opportunity to let that experience accumulate. While women make up more than half the workforce, they remain concentrated in entry and mid-level roles, with senior management and decision-making still overwhelmingly male-dominated.

For Mayal, true decision-making power means being present at the inception of strategy and not brought in after plans are already set. It also means being trusted to take risks, make financial calls and be judged by the same standards as men when outcomes don't go as planned. The unspoken expectation that women must be endlessly accommodating, emotionally available and agreeable, she



I hope women no longer have to tolerate the idea that being constantly available equals being committed. Late nights, last-minute demands, and emotional labour are often expected without question.

Seldon Tenzing

believes, actively weakens organisations. Leadership, she insists, should be defined by clarity and impact, not by endurance or performative toughness.

That theme of trust runs strongly through the perspective of Seldon Tenzing, CEO – India, East West Marketing, who believes the industry has confused overwork with dedication for far too long.

Tenzing argues that the next generation of women will only commit to travel as a long-term career when they see proof that growth does not require exhaustion. Clear roles, realistic expectations, flexibility and leaders who respect personal boundaries are not perks, but prerequisites for sustainability. Women, she notes, often excel at building relationships and driving results, yet are excluded from decisions around budgets and partnerships – the very areas that shape a company's future.

For her, decision-making power is not about loud authority, but quiet trust. The ability to define markets, allocate resources, choose partners and challenge outdated thinking without constant justification. When women are trusted to lead end-to-end, from vision to execution, businesses become more thoughtful, more accountable and far better positioned for long-term growth.

Offering a more individualistic perspective, Vasudha Sondhi, Managing Director, Outbound Marketing Pvt. Ltd., believes confidence and staying power are equally critical. "No one should have to give you authority, your role determines it," she says, while acknowledging persistent issues such as pay gaps, safety concerns, and male-dominated leadership.

She also points to outdated visibility norms that continue to disadvantage women. "Women are doing tremendously well in many segments of the industry. I would like more women to take the absolute top jobs in the travel and hospitality industry, and this can only



Women should not have to be part of a boys' networking club to be visible or taken seriously.

Vasudha Sondhi

happen if we have the staying power and belief in our abilities," says Sondhi.

Taken together, these voices reveal a clear pattern. The issue is not women's ambition, capability or commitment. It is an industry structure that celebrates contribution but withholds control, rewards visibility over value, and confuses sacrifice with leadership. If travel is to retain its talent and remain competitive, it must redefine power – placing women not just at the centre of execution, but at the core of strategy.

Only then will travel stop being seen as an exhausting lifestyle choice, and start being recognised for what it can truly be: a lifelong career built on experience, influence and purpose.

DELHI SET FOR RIVER CRUISE EXPERIENCE: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE YAMUNA RIVER CRUISE

Daisy Saxena

For years, the Yamuna has existed on the margins of Delhi's consciousness, crossed daily by millions, yet rarely experienced, spoken about more in concern than connection. Now, in a quiet but significant shift, the capital is preparing to see its river differently. The eco-friendly Yamuna River Cruise is set to reintroduce Delhiites to the waterway not as a backdrop of neglect, but as a living corridor of history, ecology, and possibility.

Slated to begin operations in February, the Yamuna river cruise is part of a collaborative effort led by the Delhi Tourism and Transportation Development Corporation (DTTDC), in association with the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI), the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), the Delhi Jal Board, and the Irrigation and Flood Control Department. The initiative reflects a

broader push to integrate sustainable tourism with environmental awareness, rather than treating the river merely as a transport or engineering challenge.

Unlike conventional leisure cruises,

this project has been designed with restraint. The route covers a 6 to 8 km stretch of the Yamuna, chosen specifically for navigability and ecological sensitivity. The cruise will operate between Sonia Vihar, near the



Travel Goals



Wazirabad Barrage, and Jagatpur, close to the Shani Temple, an area where the river widens and birdlife becomes more visible. The journey is expected to last approximately one hour, offering passengers a slow, immersive view of the riverbanks that are otherwise hidden from the city's roads and flyovers.

The vessels themselves reflect the project's low-impact philosophy. Equipped with electric or hybrid engines, the boats are designed to minimise noise and eliminate fuel emissions. Bio-toilets with zero discharge systems ensure that no waste enters the river, while lightweight construction helps reduce drag and energy consumption. Seating capacities are expected to range between 20 and 40 passengers, depending on the final configuration, ensuring that the experience remains intimate rather than crowded.

Onboard, the experience is deliberately understated. There is no loud entertainment or party-style programming. Instead, trained guides and naturalists will offer insights into the Yamuna's ecology, pointing out native plant species, migratory birds, and the seasonal rhythms of the river. Passengers will also hear about the Yamuna's historical role in shaping Delhi from Mughal-era settlements to agricultural floodplains and how urbanisation gradually distanced the city from its river.

For many, the most striking element of

the cruise is the silence. With engines barely audible, passengers can hear birds skimming the water and watch fishermen casting nets along the banks. From river level, Delhi appears softer, less imposing. Concrete structures give way to stretches of green, revealing how much life continues to survive along the Yamuna despite decades of environmental stress.

Officials involved in the project are careful to emphasise that the cruise is not positioned as a solution to pollution. The Yamuna's challenges untreated sewage, industrial discharge, and encroachment require systemic interventions far beyond tourism. Instead, the cruise aims to address a different gap: public disengagement. By allowing



people to experience the river firsthand, the initiative hopes to foster awareness, responsibility, and long-term support for conservation efforts.

There is also an educational dimension built into the programme. Schools, colleges, and community groups are expected to use the cruise as a learning platform, combining environmental education with experiential travel. The idea is to move conversations about the Yamuna out of reports and headlines and onto the water itself, where the river's condition and potential can be seen rather than abstractly discussed.

Ticket pricing has not yet been officially announced, though authorities have indicated that it will be kept accessible and affordable, particularly for families and students. Multiple daily departures are planned, including morning and evening slots, subject to river conditions. Operations will likely pause during periods of extreme water levels, such as peak monsoon months.

In many ways, the Yamuna river cruise mirrors a global trend. Cities across the world—from Paris to Seoul, have reclaimed their rivers as cultural and recreational spaces, recognising them as essential to urban well-being. Delhi's approach, however, is notably cautious. Instead of large-scale commercialisation, the focus remains on slow tourism, limited capacity, and minimal infrastructure along the floodplains.

Whether the cruise becomes a popular attraction or remains a niche experience, its symbolic value is undeniable. It marks a shift in how the capital chooses to engage with its river, not as a problem to be hidden but as a resource to be respected. As the boat glides past stretches of the Yamuna that few have ever seen, it offers something rare in a city of constant motion: a moment to pause, observe, and reconsider.

In that quiet hour on the water, the Yamuna stops being just a headline or a statistic. It becomes a presence again—alive, imperfect, and undeniably worth reclaiming.

Discovering **Northeast India** *at its most inviting*

Shafika Sengupta



Travel Goals

There is a brief, beautiful window when Northeast India feels perfectly poised. Winter's sharp edges soften, the hills turn quietly green, and the monsoon still feels like a distant promise. Roads are open, skies are clear, and life across the region settles into an easy rhythm. This is when all the states, each distinct in landscape and culture offer their most rewarding selves to travellers willing to slow down and look closely.



Dr. R.K. Suman
*Deputy Director General and Regional
Director Northeast India
Ministry of Tourism*

The North-East India is a treasure trove of untapped tourism potential. From the lush green hills of Meghalaya to the vibrant culture of Assam, there is immense scope for adventure, heritage, wildlife, culture, and MICE tourism. Improved infrastructure and connectivity across air, rail, and road networks have made the region increasingly accessible, positioning it as a compelling destination for both domestic and international travellers.

Assam

Assam reveals itself through gentle contrasts. Vast tea gardens stretch under open skies, wildlife reserves like Kaziranga and Manas come alive with movement, and the Brahmaputra flows wide and calm. River islands, rural



Maguri Motapung Beel, Assam

homestays, and quiet river cruises offer a way to experience the state beyond its headline attractions, while villages prepare for the agricultural cycle ahead. It is an ideal time to explore Assam's natural wealth without heat or crowds dictating the pace.

Meghalaya

In Meghalaya, clarity defines the

experience. Waterfalls trace elegant lines rather than roaring torrents, caves are safer to explore, and the famed living root bridges sit firm and accessible. Shillong feels unhurried, and rural areas like Cherrapunji and Mawlynnong invite deeper engagement with local life. The landscape feels open, allowing travellers to appreciate the dramatic terrain without battling fog or rain.



Dawki, Meghalaya



Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh is expansive and elemental. Snow still crowns distant peaks while valleys begin to stir, creating striking visual contrasts. Monasteries in places like Tawang remain contemplative, while regions such as Ziro and Dirang are ideal for slow exploration. With roads reopening and visibility improving, the state feels both remote and reachable, offering travellers a rare sense of space and silence.



Nagaland

Nagaland shifts into a quieter, more introspective mode. After the festive rush, villages return to everyday life, revealing customs that are lived rather than performed. Treks to places like the Dzukou Valley are rewarding, and time spent in and around Kohima allows for meaningful interactions with local communities. It's a season that favours conversation, storytelling, and cultural immersion over spectacle.



Manipur

Manipur's landscapes and traditions come into balance. Loktak Lake glimmers under soft light, its floating phumdis steady and accessible, while Keibul Lamjao National Park offers a chance to spot the endangered Sangai deer. Imphal's cultural institutions, markets, and culinary traditions can be explored at an unhurried pace, revealing the state's layered identity.

Mizoram



Mizoram's quiet charm stands out. Hills around Aizawl glow in fresh greens, village roads are easy to navigate, and daily life unfolds with warmth and order. Community gatherings, local markets, and homestays provide insight into a society rooted in strong social bonds. The state's calm, uncrowded atmosphere makes it



Ujjayanta Palace Museum, Agartala

ideal for travellers seeking authenticity and reflection.

Tripura

Tripura's heritage comes into sharp focus. Rock carvings at Unakoti, the palace-on-water Neermahal, and the temples scattered across the state are all comfortably accessible. Forests resonate with birdlife, and Agartala offers a window into the region's royal and tribal past. Travel here feels layered and intimate, revealing histories often overlooked.

Sikkim

Often referred to as the 'Brother State' of the Seven Sisters, Sikkim adds a distinct Himalayan layer to Northeast India's cultural and geographical narrative. Framed by snow-fed rivers, terraced fields, and monasteries perched on ridgelines, the state blends natural drama with spiritual calm. Gangtok offers a gentle introduction, while regions such as Pelling, Yuksom, and Lachung reveal quieter stories shaped by Buddhism, mountain life, and close-knit

communities. Travel in Sikkim unfolds slowly through winding roads, prayer flags, and expansive views, making it a natural complement to the diversity of the other states in Northeast India.

A region revealed, one state at a time

What ties Northeast India together during this season is a sense of ease. Landscapes are legible, communities are open, and journeys unfold without urgency. This is Northeast India beyond extremes, experienced not through dramatic weather or festivals alone, but through everyday moments, quiet roads, and stories shared along the way.



Rumtek Monastery, Sikkim





A year of extraordinary journeys

Destinations

to travel in 2026

Ami Shah

Great travel is rarely accidental. It's about arriving when a destination is most itself. When weather, culture, and local life align effortlessly. 2026 should be the year you want to travel beyond clichés and into experiences that linger. So here's a month-by-month guide to 11 extraordinary destinations, each chosen for its most magical moment.





MOROCCO

February strips Morocco of its extremes. The desert is cool enough for overnight Sahara camps, while cities like Marrakech and Fez bask in golden winter light. In the Anti-Atlas region, Almond Blossom season transforms villages into a celebration of Amazigh culture, symbolising renewal and hope. With fewer crowds and gentle weather, Morocco in February feels personal, like a story unfolding just for you.



GEORGIA

March is Georgia's soft awakening. Snow lingers on the Caucasus peaks, but Tbilisi begins to stir with cafés, music, and warm sulphur baths. The country observes Nowruz, welcoming spring with feasts, rituals, and shared tables. It's a beautiful time to explore Georgia's ancient wine culture and layered history before tourism fully ramps up.



UZBEKISTAN

April is arguably the best month to experience Uzbekistan's Silk Road cities. Mild temperatures make wandering through Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva effortless, while Navruz celebrations fill streets with music, dance, and traditional dishes. This is Central Asia at its most alive. Historic yet celebratory, structured yet soulful.





SLOVENIA

In May, Slovenia feels like Europe's best-kept secret. Alpine landscapes reawaken, Lake Bled shimmers without summer crowds, and Ljubljana turns green and vibrant. May Day traditions, including bonfires and folk gatherings, mark the transition into summer. It's an ideal month for travellers who love slow travel—cycling through vineyards, hiking gentle trails, and lingering over long meals.



RWANDA

June begins Rwanda's dry season, offering ideal conditions for gorilla trekking in Volcanoes National Park. The landscapes are lush, paths are accessible, and wildlife encounters are at their most rewarding. The month also coincides with Kwita Izina, the annual gorilla naming ceremony—a powerful blend of conservation, culture, and community pride that gives visitors rare insight into Rwanda's soul.



FAROE ISLANDS

July brings endless daylight to the Faroe Islands, illuminating dramatic cliffs, waterfalls, and grass-roofed villages. The national festival Ólavsøka takes place this month, celebrating Faroese identity through rowing races, chain dancing, and music. Remote yet welcoming, the Faroes in July feel like stepping into a myth—raw, rugged, and wonderfully unfiltered.



BOLIVIA

August is winter in Bolivia, bringing clear skies and dry conditions which are perfect for exploring the surreal Salar de Uyuni. Culturally, this is the month of Pachamama rituals, when locals honour Mother Earth with offerings and ceremonies. Travelling during this time offers a rare window into Andean spirituality and traditions that remain deeply rooted in daily life.



KAZAKHSTAN

September softens Kazakhstan's vast landscapes. The heat fades, grasslands turn golden, and Almaty becomes a base for hiking and cultural exploration. The month often features nomadic heritage festivals, where eagle hunting, horseback games, and yurt life take centre stage. It's an immersive introduction to Central Asia beyond the expected Silk Road narrative.



SEYCHELLES

October is Seychelles at its most balanced. Trade winds calm, seas turn glassy, and underwater visibility peaks—making it one of the best months for snorkelling and diving. The islands also celebrate Creole Festival season, highlighting music, dance, cuisine, and storytelling rooted in African, European, and Asian influences. Without peak-season crowds, Seychelles in October feels intimate, indulgent, and culturally rich—far beyond its honeymoon stereotype.





MEXICO

November transforms Oaxaca into one of the world's most meaningful cultural destinations. Día de los Muertos fills streets with marigolds, candles, music, and remembrance. Far from somber, the festival celebrates life, ancestry, and continuity. Pleasant weather and fewer tourists make it an ideal time to explore ruins, mezcal villages, and Oaxaca's legendary food scene.



TAIWAN

December is one of the best times to experience Taiwan, when cooler temperatures and clear skies make both cities and nature shine. Festive lights brighten Taipei, night markets buzz with seasonal treats, and hiking trails in Yangmingshan and Alishan open up to misty forests and mountain views. From lantern-lit streets in Jiufen to coastal escapes in the south, Taiwan balances culture, food, and scenery effortlessly. With comfortable weather and fewer crowds, it's an ideal destination to close the year with ease, flavour and quiet discovery.



SRI LANKA

January is one of the best months to experience Sri Lanka, with dry weather along the south and west coasts and ideal conditions for travel across the island. Beach towns like Galle, Mirissa, and Tangalle come alive under clear skies, while the cultural heartlands of Kandy and the tea-covered hills of Ella offer cooler temperatures and scenic train journeys. Wildlife safaris in Yala and Udawalawe are at their peak, and the country's rich food culture rooted in spice, coconut, and coastal produce adds depth to every stop. Balanced, diverse, and effortlessly immersive, Sri Lanka is an ideal way to begin the year slowly yet meaningfully.



Extraordinary travel isn't about chasing trends but mostly it's about the timing. From Morocco's almond blossoms to Seychelles' calm October seas and Patagonia's endless summer light, each month in 2026, leading up to 2027 offers a destination at its most authentic. Travel this way, and the world doesn't just impress you, it stays with you.

I Do, But **DIFFERENTLY!**

Daisy Saxena

This Valentine's Day, proposals are shedding their performative gloss and returning to something far more meaningful. The idea of a 'dream proposal destination' is no longer defined by postcard-perfect backdrops or viral visuals, but by emotion, personal relevance, and the experience of the moment itself.

Wedding planners across India are witnessing a decisive shift in how couples, particularly millennials and Gen Z are choosing to ask the question. While millennials still appreciate visual romance, Gen Z is leading a quieter, more emotionally grounded movement where the 'why' matters far more than the 'where'.

Kaveri Vij and Akshay Chopra of

Designer Events Inc. explain, proposals today are being designed for the couple first, not an audience.



“What we are seeing today is a strong shift towards emotion first. More than 'where did it happen', couples care about why it happened there.”

Kaveri Vij

This emotional recalibration has pushed experience-led proposals to



“Proposals are no longer about being flashy or performative. They are about doing something that feels true to the relationship.”

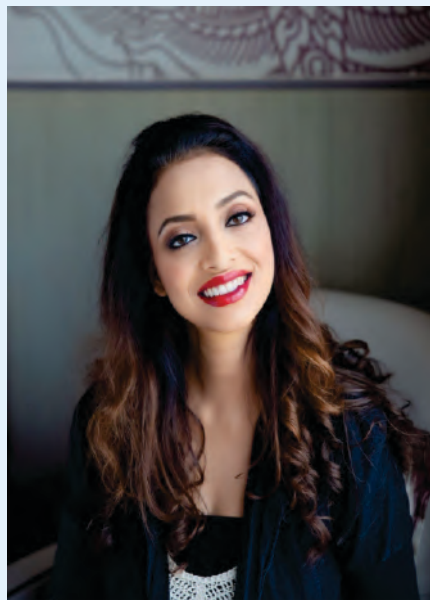
Akshay Chopra



In the Moment

the forefront. Private dinners, wellness retreats, slow travel, and culturally immersive moments are replacing crowded landmarks and choreographed spectacles. According to the duo, couples are increasingly planning proposals around shared memories, rituals, and conversations - moments that already exist within the relationship and are simply being elevated.

Mehrotra echoes this sentiment, noting a fundamental shift in priorities.



Today's couples want the proposal to feel right before it looks right. Emotion and experience now come first; aesthetics are secondary.

Neha Mehrotra



The rise of experience-led destinations

Both Designer Events Inc. and Neha Mehrotra, Founder and Chief Designer, Foreign Wedding Planners, agree that destinations which allow stillness and presence are winning hearts this year. From vineyard dinners in Tuscany to tea ceremonies in Kyoto, proposals are becoming emotionally immersive rather than visually loud.

Destinations, both domestic and international, which support this slower,

Current proposal favourite destinations include:

India: Rishikesh, Kumaon, Coorg, Wayanad, Udaipur (heritage properties), Meghalaya, Jawai and Andamans.

International: Tuscany, Kyoto, Sri Lanka, Cappadocia, Portugal's Douro Valley, Slovenia, Bhutan, Oman and Georgia.

more intentional style are seeing growing interest.

These locations allow couples to be present, offering privacy, cultural depth, and emotional resonance rather than a ready-made spectacle.

What are couples choosing (and avoiding)?

Interestingly, while iconic destinations haven't lost their charm entirely, planners agree that how a place is used matters more than the place itself. Rome still works if the Colosseum holds meaning; Kerala resonates when the backwaters are part of a shared story. However, certain formats are being consciously stepped away from.

Designer Events Inc. points to fatigue around predictable global icons, while Mehrotra highlights template-driven proposals that feel replicated rather than personal.



In the Moment

Destinations and formats that are quietly being retired

- Eiffel Tower and Santorini cliffside proposals
- Times Square-style public proposals
- North Goa beach setups with standard décor
- Balloon-and-fairy-light hotel room surprises
- Overproduced yacht or palace proposals done purely for visuals

"A destination becomes predictable only when it's used without personal meaning," Vij and Chopra emphasise.

Intimacy is the new luxury

Perhaps the most telling shift is the changing relationship couples have with social media. Privacy, especially among Gen Z, is becoming aspirational. Posting less or not at all is now a form of quiet luxury.



Especially among Gen Z, privacy is becoming aspirational. Couples are choosing to live moments fully and share them later, or sometimes not at all, say Vij and Chopra.



Mehrotra adds that destinations offering quiet luxury without being 'Instagram-first' are increasingly sought after from Swiss villages beyond Interlaken to forest lodges in Kabini, or the raw solitude of the Scottish Highlands.

These destinations allow the proposal to feel real, personal and timeless, without designing the moment for the camera.

The new proposal code

As Valentine's Day approaches, one thing is clear: proposals are no longer about grand declarations for the world to see. They are about authenticity, emotional depth, and moments that feel deeply personal.

Trends may evolve, destinations may rotate in and out of favour but as both

planners agree, doing something that truly reflects a couple's love story will never go out of style.




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Barun Gupta

Redefining guest experiences

Barun Gupta

on Indeva's vision and expansion

Ayushi Anand

Barun Gupta, Chief Operating Officer, shares his perspective on building a focused hospitality brand rooted in strong operations and thoughtful guest experiences. He speaks about Indeva's philosophy, his hands-on leadership approach, and how the brand is shaping premium stays for the modern Indian traveller.

Q Indeva Hotels & Resorts is still a tight, focused brand with just three properties. What was the original vision behind creating the brand?

From the outset, the vision behind Indeva Hotels & Resorts was unmistakable, not to replicate international hotel chains, but to build a truly Indian lifestyle hospitality brand that understands India in all its diversity, aspirations, and evolving travel behaviours.

Conceived as a unit of India Exposition Mart Limited, Indeva Hotels & Resorts was designed with deep sensitivity to the modern Indian traveller, business leaders and MICE delegates, families, celebration seekers, millennials, long-stay guests, and experience-driven explorers. The brand is inherently inclusive, contemporary, and versatile, serving multiple customer segments with equal relevance from value-conscious travellers to discerning luxury seekers without compromising its core identity.

Indeva's ambition is bold yet

purposeful—to expand to 50 hotels across South Asia by 2030. Each destination will be thoughtfully crafted to reflect local context, contemporary design, and the warmth of Indian hospitality.

With a small portfolio, attention to detail becomes even more critical. How personally involved are you in shaping day-to-day operations across the hotels?

I am personally and deeply involved in the day-to-day operations across all properties. I work closely with on-site leadership teams, regularly review performance metrics and guest feedback, and stay actively engaged in key operational, commercial and development decisions to ensure standards, consistency, and quality are upheld at every level.

While each property benefits from strong on-site management, accountability and strategic direction ultimately rests with me. This hands-on approach ensures operational discipline, brand consistency, and continuous improvement across the portfolio.

Each Indeva property has its own personality. How do you balance individuality with a consistent brand experience?

Each Indeva property is intentionally designed to reflect its location and character, which is a core part of the guest experience. At the same time, consistency at the brand level is non-

negotiable. We define clear brand standards around service culture, operational discipline, design principles, and guest expectations, and those standards apply across every property.

Individuality comes through in the architecture, design details, and local storytelling, while the fundamentals on how guests are welcomed, how teams operate, and how quality is delivered, remain consistent.

What does luxury or premium hospitality mean to you in today's Indian travel landscape?

Luxury and premium hospitality in today's Indian travel landscape is less about excess and more about intention, authenticity, and consistency. Guests increasingly value thoughtful service, a strong sense of place, and experiences that feel personal rather than standardised.

My approach has always been customer-first. To me, premium hospitality means anticipating guest needs, delivering seamless and genuinely warm service, and maintaining uncompromising standards across every touchpoint. It also means respecting the local context through design, culture, and cuisine while consistently providing the comfort, reliability, and operational excellence that discerning travellers expect.

In a market as dynamic and diverse as India, true luxury is ultimately defined

by attention to detail, credibility, and the ability to deliver a refined experience consistently.

From an operational standpoint, what are some small but impactful details that truly elevate a guest's stay?

It's often the smallest, most consistent details that have the greatest impact on a guest's experience. Things like the quality and timing of the welcome, seamless check-in and check-out, and a room that feels intuitively prepared. Lighting set correctly, amenities thoughtfully placed, and everything functioning exactly as expected, set the tone immediately.

Equally important are behind-the-scenes disciplines: proactive maintenance, attention to cleanliness, and teams that communicate well and anticipate needs before they're voiced. Remembering guest preferences, responding quickly especially to feedback, and ensuring service feels warm rather than scripted all contribute to a stay that feels effortless and considered. When these details are executed consistently, they elevate the experience from satisfactory to memorable.

Food and beverage often becomes the soul of a hotel. How important is F&B in defining Indeva's identity?

At Indeva Hotels & Resorts, it plays a central role in defining who we are. F&B is not treated as an add-on, but as a core expression of our brand, one that reflects authenticity, quality, and a strong sense of place.

Our culinary philosophy is anchored in thoughtfully curated menus, locally influenced flavours, and well-executed concepts that resonate with both in-house guests and the local community. While consistency in quality, service, and execution is non-negotiable, creativity is actively encouraged. This ensures that each property's F&B offering feels distinctive, destination-led, and memorable.

How do you build a strong service culture on the ground?

A strong service culture is built through



clarity, consistency, and leadership by example. It starts with setting clear expectations around service standards and behaviour, and ensuring teams understand not just what we do, but why we do it and how we do it. Training is continuous and practical, focused on real guest interactions rather than scripts.

Equally important is empowerment and accountability on the ground. Teams are encouraged to take ownership, make decisions in the guest's best interest, and take pride in their work, while leaders remain visible, engaged, and supportive. By recognising good performance, addressing gaps quickly, and staying closely involved in daily operations, we create a culture where service excellence is not an initiative, but a habit.

What are some guest behaviours or expectations you're seeing more frequently across Indeva's hotels (Plume & Expolnn Suites and Convention) ?

Across Plume and Expolnn Suites & Convention, we're seeing guests become more discerning and more intentional about their stays. There is a strong expectation for efficiency which includes smooth arrivals, quick service response, and well-coordinated operations particularly at a convention-focused property like Expolnn, where time and scale are critical.

At the same time, guests increasingly value personalisation and warmth. Whether it's business or solo travellers or event and group guests at Expolnn or

Plume, they appreciate being recognised, having their preferences remembered, and experiencing service that feels thoughtful rather than transactional. Cleanliness, comfort, and reliability remain non-negotiable, while the quality and flexibility of food and beverage especially for meetings, events, and group dining play a growing role in overall guest satisfaction.

We're also seeing guests engage more actively with feedback, both during and after their stay, reinforcing the need for teams to be responsive, empowered, and operationally sharp.

Looking ahead, what excites you more—deepening the Indeva experience at existing properties or thoughtfully adding new ones when the time feels right?

Our focus remains on deepening the Indeva experience across our existing properties, while staying open to thoughtful expansion when the timing and strategic fit are right. Strengthening operations, service culture, and the overall guest experience at our current hotels is always the priority because scale only works when the foundation is strong.

We are already in the process of expanding across South Asia, along with destinations in India such as Jaipur, Palampur, Nashik, Ahmedabad, Raipur, Guwahati, Agra, and Ghaziabad in the pipeline.

The New Table

REDEFINING THE WAY WE EAT

Aditi Yadav



Food trends are no longer driven by fleeting fads. Instead, they reflect deeper, long-term shifts in how people eat, cook, and experience food. Wellness, comfort, sustainability, and storytelling have merged into a single, holistic approach to dining. Across restaurants and homes alike, the focus is on food that feels good, tastes honest, and carries purpose. To understand what is shaping this evolution, renowned chefs share how they see food culture unfolding.

Purposeful cooking, wellness and regional depth



For Chef Nishant Choubey, Culinary Consultant (Organic Bistro, Khan Market | Street Storyss, Bengaluru | Rani, New Jersey | 1978, Saket), 2026 is defined by intention. Food is no longer divided into healthy and indulgent categories. He believes that if ingredients are respected and techniques are sound, well-being follows naturally.

Gut health has become a daily consideration rather than a niche interest. Fermented vegetables, kanji,

“People don't want healthy food as a label anymore. If food is done well, health comes automatically. Guests want food that feels good and tastes great.”

Nishant Choubey



kombucha, kefir, sourdough, and fermented fruit-based desserts are now part of everyday eating. Protein is being integrated organically into meals, particularly breakfasts and snacks, instead of being artificially added.

Plant-forward food is seeing renewed interest, but with greater clarity. "Vegan food is rising again, but it's cleaner and more ingredient-led. It's no longer about highly processed alternatives," he explains, noting that flavour retention remains key in Indian kitchens.

Comfort food continues to anchor menus, but with elevated ingredients and technique. Traditional dishes like khichdi, curries, pasta, and stews remain relevant, now reimagined using heirloom rice varieties and regional grains. Sustainability, he adds, is assumed rather than advertised. Local sourcing, seasonal menus, and zero-waste thinking are expectations, not differentiators.

Comfort, simplicity and regional revival



What people want today is comfort over complications.

Parth Saxena

Parth Saxena, Corporate Chef, Ambrosia Hospitality, views 2026 as a return to clarity. Food lovers are gravitating toward familiar flavours prepared with confidence rather than overly complex dishes.

Indian flavours are taking centre stage globally, not through fusion but through authenticity. Regional cuisines are being



rediscovered, with chefs travelling deeper into food cultures to understand techniques, ingredients, and stories. This revival has also moved comfort food from homes into restaurants, where traditional dishes are now presented with refinement and context.

Menus are becoming more focused. Smaller, thoughtful selections are replacing long lists, allowing guests to enjoy food without excess. Beverages are evolving alongside food, with fermented drinks like tepache and kvass, as well as functional beverages that support hydration and gut health, gaining popularity.

Technology plays a supporting role rather than a disruptive one. AI tools are helping streamline recipes, manage consistency, and improve traceability, reinforcing sustainability and transparency across kitchens.

Digital influence and experience-led dining



Vaibhav Bhargava, Partner Chef at ABV Hospitalities Pvt Ltd., believes food trends in 2026 are inseparable from digital culture. Social media continues to shape what people cook, order, and aspire to eat.

Food today is influenced by how we scroll. Visual appeal and shareability matter more than ever.

Vaibhav Bhargava

At home, convenience has become premium. Consumers are choosing high-

Palate Play

fibre pastas, gut-friendly ingredients, artisanal vinegars, and natural sweeteners, along with quick yet authentic meals such as one-pot dishes and fast biryanis.

In restaurants, food is increasingly experience-led. Tasting menus, chef's tables, pop-ups, and storytelling-driven concepts are attracting guests who value immersion over volume. Comfort food has become elevated and playful. Familiar dishes reworked into shareable, visually striking formats without losing emotional appeal.

Beverages mirror this visual-first approach, with matcha, hojicha, and black sesame lattes standing out for both flavour and aesthetics. Technology, he adds, supports transparency and personalisation without replacing the soul of cooking.

Farm-to-plate, authenticity and conscious indulgence



For Swapnadeep Mukherjee, Executive Chef at The Metropolitan Hotel & Spa, 2026 is about mindful indulgence. Fresh, organic, farm-to-plate food has become the baseline expectation, but flavour remains paramount.

“

Guests no longer accept a trade-off between health and taste. A well-curated menu must deliver both.

Swapnadeep Mukherjee

”

Authenticity plays a major role, particularly in global cuisines. Japanese cuisine continues to enjoy strong relevance when executed with integrity.



“People seek genuine flavours rather than generic interpretations,” he shares.

Vegetarian and vegan cuisine has entered a more adventurous phase, driven by hyper-local sourcing and thoughtful innovation. Comfort food has evolved into functional meals. Wholesome, single-plate dishes that offer warmth, nutrition, and convenience, including smaller portions for on-the-go consumption.

Traditional Indian sweets are also seeing a revival. Gourmet mithai with healthier positioning, regional identity, and bite-sized formats are gaining popularity during celebrations.

Gen Z and millennials are the strongest drivers of change – environmentally

conscious, well-travelled, and open to experimentation. Beverage trends reflect this shift, with functional drinks, plant-based milks, specialty coffees, and innovative non-alcoholic beverages becoming central to menus.

Transparency is non-negotiable. “People want to know exactly what they’re consuming when it comes to ingredients, sourcing, and nutritional details. Trust is built through openness,” he says.

Across all perspectives, one thing is clear: food in 2026 is about balance. Comfort without guilt, wellness without labels, and experiences without excess define today's eating culture. Regional authenticity, sustainability, and thoughtful innovation are no longer trends. They are expectations.



How ***Bhajan Concerts*** are becoming a global phenomenon

Aditi Yadav



What's Trending?



In packed halls from Delhi to Berlin, a quiet cultural shift is unfolding. Bhajans, once associated with temple courtyards, satsangs, and early-morning prayer circles are finding new life as full-fledged concerts. These gatherings are neither religious sermons nor conventional gigs. Instead, they sit somewhere in between, blending collective singing, stillness, and



emotional release within the familiar structure of a live music performance.

What makes bhajan concerts distinctive is not scale or spectacle, but participation. There are no elaborate sets, no dramatic lighting cues, and often no clear division between performer and audience. People come not just to listen, but to sing, to pause, and to feel. In an age of constant noise and performance, bhajan concerts offer something radical in its simplicity - presence.

This shift is visible across generations and geographies. In India, bhajan

concerts are drawing young audiences who might never have attended traditional satsangs. Internationally, especially in parts of Europe such as Germany, these concerts attract a mix of Indian diaspora, yoga practitioners, spiritual seekers, and music lovers, many with no prior connection to bhakti traditions. Language becomes secondary to rhythm, repetition, and shared emotion.

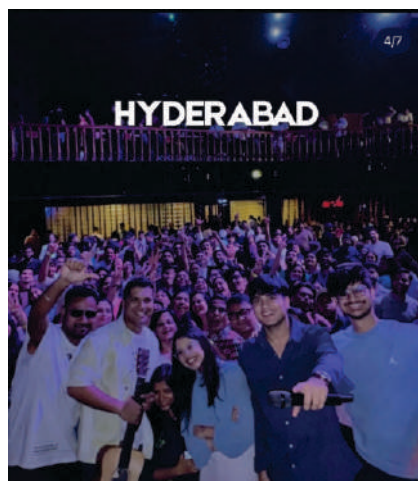
At the heart of this movement is a growing desire for experiences that feel



grounding rather than performative, communal rather than curated. Bhajans, with their cyclical melodies and open structures, lend themselves naturally to this moment.

From satsang memories to bhajan jamming

Among the artists shaping this contemporary bhajan concert culture are the Kolkata-based Backstage Siblings -



Prachi and Raghav Agarwal, a brother-sister duo whose journey began not with a strategy, but with memory.

Growing up, they would attend satsangs with their father, sitting beside him without fully understanding the words or even knowing how to sing. What stayed with them, however, was the feeling. "The



energy, the vibrations in that one hour felt magical," they recall. "That same feeling has stayed with us, and singing devotional songs still brings us back to that moment."

About a year ago, driven purely by instinct, they decided to recreate that sense of shared peace. With no long-term plan and no professional training, they organised their first bhajan jamming session in Kolkata for around 50-70 people. "We simply followed a feeling," they say. "We wanted people to experience the same peace we felt when

What's Trending?

we sat and sang our hearts out.”

That first session laid the foundation for what would become their defining philosophy. They often repeat a line during their gatherings: “bhajan aur bhojan mein kabhi sankoch nahi karte”—a reminder to stop holding back and to show up as oneself. For them, bhajan jamming is about collective vibration. When everyone sings together, they believe, the sound is felt not just in the ears but within the body.

“When everyone sings together, the vibrations aren’t just heard, they’re felt in the body and the heart.”

Redefining the bhajan concert experience

As bhajan concerts gain popularity, the Backstage Siblings are careful to point out that this isn’t a reinvention of bhajans, but a rediscovery. “There was never a time when bhajans weren’t present,” they say. “People are now consciously choosing presence over noise, and depth over distraction.”

Their sessions have remained intentionally simple. From the beginning, they have followed a strict no-food, no-alcohol policy. People attend solely for the music and the experience. “Seeing people show up just to connect with the music and with themselves makes us genuinely happy,” they add.

Structurally, their gatherings remain fluid. There is no fixed setlist and no predetermined emotional arc. The audience shapes the evening in real time. This philosophy is also reflected in their name. “We call ourselves Backstage Siblings because the spotlight is never on us,” they explain. “It belongs to the people.”

The bhajans they choose are deliberately accessible. Compositions like Ram Ram Jai Raja Ram or Shree Krishna Govind Hare Murari are bhajans that anyone can sing, regardless of musical background. The simplicity allows emotion to take precedence over performance.



A young audience, a shared floor

One of the most striking aspects of contemporary bhajan concerts is the audience they attract. Around 80 per cent of those attending Backstage Siblings’ sessions are Gen Z, with an average age between 18 and 35. Yet the space remains genuinely intergenerational.

“Bhajan jamming isn’t about religion or performance. It’s about pausing, being present, and finding a different kind of high, one rooted in music and togetherness.”

Grandparents sit alongside college students; families attend together; partners and friends arrive as groups.

“There’s no age restriction, and that’s something we truly love,” they say. “Most people choose to sit on the floor, regardless of age, fully present.” Over time, they have witnessed tears, laughter, quiet reflection, and spontaneous joy—often within the same session.

This cross-generational resonance is echoed globally. From Indian auditoriums to European concert halls, the experience remains strikingly similar. People arrive as individuals and leave as a temporary community, formed through shared sound and stillness.

Taking bhajans across borders

What began as a local experiment has since travelled widely. The duo’s India tour covered cities such as Pune, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata. Internationally, they have performed in Singapore and Dubai, with a US tour scheduled for April–May.

While every city has responded warmly, Mumbai, Pune, and Kolkata stand out for their especially engaged audiences. Ticket prices range from INR 799 to INR 1,500, but the siblings are clear that this has never been about commercial success. “This has always been a passion project,” they emphasise. “Something we do purely for the love of it.”

Their journey mirrors a larger global pattern. Artists like Krishna Das and Radhika Das have taken kirtan and bhajan formats to international stages, particularly in Europe and North America. In Germany, cities like Berlin and Munich regularly host devotional concerts that draw diverse, non-traditional audiences. Bhajans, in these settings, function as cultural bridges experienced through sound rather than explanation.

More than a trend

Asked whether bhajan jamming is a passing trend or a lasting shift, the answer is unequivocal. “This is a paradigm shift,” they say. “It’s about embracing yourself, finding a pause in this hectic world, and giving yourself an hour to simply be present.”

In a time when people are constantly seeking escape through screens, substances, or endless activity, bhajan concerts offer a different kind of high. One rooted in music, breath, and collective energy. “That feeling,” they say, “is deeper and stronger than any substance.”

As bhajan concerts continue to fill halls across India and beyond, they signal not a departure from tradition, but its natural expansion. Rooted in devotion yet open to all, these gatherings are becoming global experiences quiet, communal, and profoundly human.



Dimuthu Tennakoon

As SriLankan Airlines charts its course for the upcoming financial year, the focus is firmly on strengthening high-performing regional markets, deepening trade partnerships, and leveraging Colombo's position as a strategic transit hub. In this conversation, Dimuthu Tennakoon, Head of Commercial, SriLankan Airlines, outlines the airline's market mix, capacity growth plans, load factor targets, revenue strategy, and the pivotal role of India and the travel trade in driving future performance.

Q What percentage of SriLankan Airlines' total passenger traffic is projected to come from India, the Middle East, Europe, and East Asia in the upcoming financial year, and which market is expected to grow the fastest?

In the upcoming financial year, SriLankan Airlines expects a strong contribution from its key regional markets. India is projected to remain

Strengthening Colombo as a regional transit hub: SriLankan Airlines' next phase

Ayushi Anand

the single largest source market, contributing approximately 30 per cent of total passenger traffic. The Asia Pacific region is expected to contribute around 30 per cent, followed by the other points within the Indian subcontinent region at 15 per cent, the Middle East at 15 per cent, and Europe at 10 per cent.

Among these regions, India is projected to record the fastest growth, driven by network expansion, strengthened partnerships, and increasing demand for both leisure and business travel.

In percentage terms, how much capacity growth is planned over the next 12 months, and which routes or regions will see the highest increase in available seat km?

SriLankan Airlines is planning approximately 10 per cent capacity growth over the next 12 months, reflecting our strategic focus on strengthening high-demand markets. The Asia Pacific region will see the highest increase in available seat kms (ASKs), driven by expanded frequencies and enhanced connectivity to key Asian gateways.

This growth is aligned with rising travel demand and our commitment to building a more dynamic, regionally competitive network.

What load factor targets has the airline set for the next financial year, and which sectors are currently outperforming the network average?

For the coming financial year, SriLankan Airlines is targeting an overall load factor in the mid-80 per cent range, supported by focused capacity planning and steady demand recovery across the network. Markets such as India, the Middle East, and the Far East are expected to perform above the network average, driven by strong passenger flows, improved connectivity, and consistently high travel demand in these regions.

What is the expected revenue split between passenger, cargo, and ancillary income in the coming year, and how strategic is cargo to the airline's overall commercial performance?

In the year ahead, SriLankan Airlines expects its revenue mix to be driven primarily by passenger operations, which are projected to contribute



strength as a convenient connector in the region. This flow is driven mainly by traffic moving between India and the Middle East, as well as India and the Far East, where strong demand and well-timed connections continue to support high volumes of through-passengers.

From a commercial perspective, how does the airline measure ROI on trade initiatives such as roadshows, preferred agent programmes, and joint promotions, and what percentage of total sales is attributed to trade-led channels?

From a commercial perspective, we evaluate the effectiveness of our trade initiatives by looking at the tangible outcomes they deliver; whether that's growth in bookings, improvements in market share, stronger agent performance, or the revenue uplift generated through roadshows, preferred partner programmes, and joint marketing efforts.

Every activity is measured against defined commercial objectives to ensure it contributes meaningfully to our broader strategy. A good example is the series of joint roadshows we carried out with SLTDA across key Indian cities late last year, which translated into stronger cabin factors and a noticeable strengthening of our competitive position in those markets. Today, trade-led channels as mentioned above account for around 60 per cent of our total sales, underscoring the pivotal role our trade partners continue to play in driving both our revenue and market share gains.

around 88 per cent of total income. Cargo is expected to account for approximately 10 per cent, while the remaining comes from other revenue streams. While passenger traffic continues to be the main driver of performance, cargo provides an important boost by supporting route economics, improving aircraft utilisation, and adding stability to the overall commercial portfolio.

What percentage of total bookings currently come from the travel trade versus direct digital channels, and how does SriLankan Airlines plan to rebalance this mix going forward?

Currently, about 60 per cent of SriLankan Airlines' bookings come through the travel trade, while direct digital channels account for the remaining 40 per cent. We place strong value on the trade community's continued support, which remains essential across many of the key markets. At the same time, we are steadily enhancing our digital presence to meet changing traveller expectations. The aim is to evolve towards a balanced mix where both channels grow together and each contributing to a stronger and more resilient commercial performance.

What share of SriLankan Airlines' total capacity will be allocated to the Indian market in the next scheduling cycle, and which Indian cities are delivering the strongest revenue performance?

In the next scheduling cycle, around we

plan on operating close to 100 weekly flights which will be an increase from the 89 weekly flights we operate out of nine key cities in India spanning from the North, West and South of India and that reflects the steady and resilient demand seen across the region. Within the network, Madurai, Cochin, and Trivandrum are currently delivering some of the strongest yields, supported by consistent passenger flows, balanced traffic mix, and solid performance across leisure, MICE and VFR segments.

What percentage of passengers are expected to use Colombo as a transit hub in the next year, and which long-haul or regional connections are driving this traffic?

In the year ahead, SriLankan Airlines expects roughly 30 per cent of its passengers to use Colombo as a transit point, reflecting the hub's growing



Inside China's *new photography-themed tourism train* A journey aboard Train Y783

Ami Shah





China has taken experiential travel to an entirely new track with the launch of Train Y783, the country's first photography-themed tourism train. Operating between Harbin and Yabuli in Heilongjiang province, this innovative service transforms a routine rail journey into a curated, camera-ready experience. It is especially designed for travellers who want more than just a seat and a window view.

Launched on January 25, 2026, Train Y783 blends rail travel, cultural immersion, and

professional photography, reflecting China's growing focus on experience-led tourism and the booming appeal of ice-and-snow destinations in the country's northeast.

A train designed for the age of visual travel

Train Y783 has been conceptualised with one idea at its core that travel today is as much about memories and storytelling as it is about movement. Recognising the rising demand for personalised content

and high-quality travel keepsakes, China Railway Harbin Group has reimagined the train itself as a mobile photography studio.

Passengers onboard are offered complimentary professional photography services, allowing them to capture their journey through Heilongjiang's winter landscapes in a way that feels cinematic and personal. From candid moments to styled portrait shoots, every element of the experience is built to be visually engaging both offline and on social media.

Costumes, creativity and curated settings

One of the most distinctive features of Train Y783 is its wardrobe of approximately 40 costumes, available for passengers to choose from. These include ice-and-snow-inspired outfits, traditional ethnic attire, and European-style ensembles, allowing travellers to align their look with the mood and backdrop they prefer.

To complete the transformation, make-up and hair services are available onboard, turning the train journey into something akin to a moving studio shoot. Once dressed, passengers can pose across various themed interiors designed to provide multiple photographic



| On the Go

backgrounds within a single carriage.

Inside the themed carriages

The train's carriages have been refurbished and reconfigured to prioritise space, lighting, and visual appeal. Interiors feature themed décor ranging from icy winter motifs to cultural and European-inspired designs, ensuring a wide variety of settings without leaving the train.

Expanded spaces allow photographers to capture full-frame shots, group photos, and creative angles, while props placed strategically inside the carriages help add character and narrative to each photograph. The result is a journey where every corner feels intentional and crafted.

A scenic winter route from Harbin to Yabuli

The route between Harbin and Yabuli is a key part of the experience. Known for its snow-covered landscapes and winter sports appeal, Yabuli is one of China's most popular ski destinations. As the train moves through Heilongjiang's frozen vistas, passengers can capture changing scenery that adds authenticity and atmosphere to their photographs.

The inaugural service began at Harbin East Railway Station, where the parked train itself became a photographic backdrop. Train staff welcomed the first passengers with themed props at the station, setting the tone even before departure.



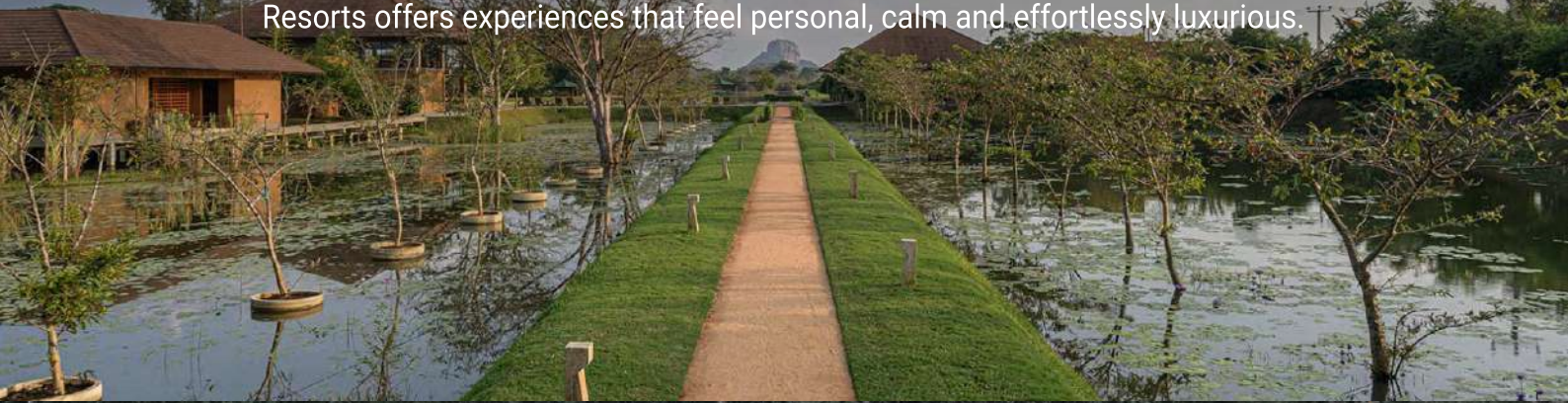
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Saudi Tourism Authority hosts 'Essence of Saudi' experiential showcase in Kolkata



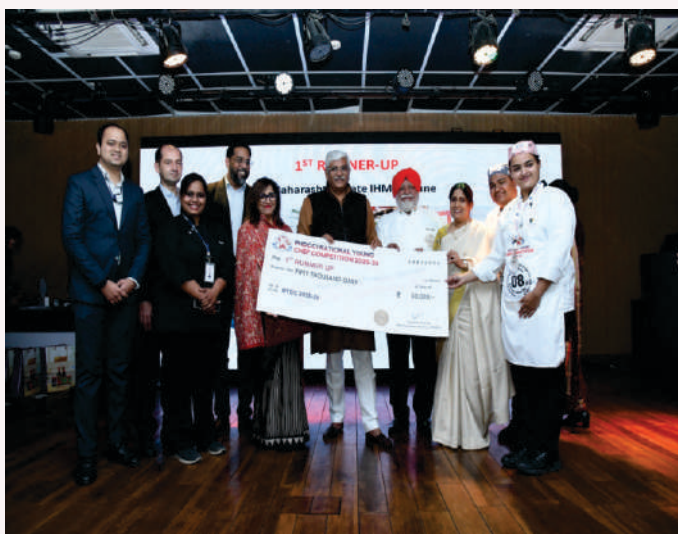
Le Meridien, New Delhi hosted The Great Delhi Dreams a signature wedding showcase held across its Desire and Sovereign Ballrooms, offering a narrative-led exploration of Delhi's wedding traditions through design, performance, and cuisine



Utah Office of Tourism strengthens India outreach with trade and media engagements in Mumbai and Delhi



Union Minister for Tourism and Culture, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat highlights the role of 'Young Chefs in Culinary Tourism' at PHDCCI National Young Chef Competition 2025–26



APPOINTMENTS



**J. Innocent Divya
joins
Tamil Nadu Tourism
as
Commissioner
and MD of TTDC.**



**Roopa Singh
joins
The Renaissance
Goa Hotel
as
General Manager.**



**Mahesh Singh
Jasrotia
joins
Noormahal Palace
as
General Manager.**



**Rupam Dutta
joins
Mango Hill Hotels
as
Chief Operating
Officer.**



**Rajeev Sharma
joins
Cygnett Hotels
Resort & Spa
as
Area Director Operations
Rajasthan and Gujarat.**



**Anup M.
joins
Minor Hotels
as
Account Director
– India.**



**Karen Mendes
joins
JW Marriott
Phuket
as
Resident Manager.**



**David Alan Burley
joins
OBLU XPERIENCE
Ailafushi and
OBLU SELECT
Lobigili
as
General Manager.**

APPOINTMENTS



Ravindra Singh S.
joins
Intrepid Travel
as **Country**
General Manager
India.



Tanuja Sawant
joins
Le Meridien
Navi Mumbai
as **Marketing &**
Communications
Manager.



Gorav Arora
joins
JW Marriott
Kolkata
as
General Manager.



Deepak Booneady
joins
Sun Siyam Resorts
as
Group Chief
Executive Officer.



Somrup Chanda
joins
Fairfield by
Marriott Kolkata
as
General Manager.



Gurnoor Bindra
joins
Raffles Udaipur
as
General Manager



Sharad Sharma
joins
Espire Hospitality
Limited
as
Director of Sales



Karen Martin
joins
Holiday Inn
Bengaluru Racecourse
& Holiday Inn Express
OMR as
Cluster Assistant
Marketing Manager.

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