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# Editor's Letter

How does a four-day vacation in a month sound? I'm sure, for most even this is undoable, periodically. Wait, I'll give you one better and trust me I'm not complaining when I say that I got to spend only 4 days in the comfort of my house during the entire month.

Personally, I love travelling for more reasons than I can mention in this note but my exuberance extends beyond traveling while I pen this letter. The amplified cocktail of FAM trips, Travel marts, roadshows and similar trade events not only makes me cheery but proud of the trajectory our industry is heading upon.

At Travel Turtle, we're tirelessly striving to bring you the most diverse yet apropos content and aesthetics play a major role in making us stand out. So stay glued as we bring to you the essence & growing acceptance of the niche; photography tourism. This issue is biased towards beauty, which you'll realise as you read about Kazakhstan and Maldives; both blessed with natural extravagance but poles apart in their offerings. Heritage, wildlife, waterfalls, tea estates, choose your pick as your unwind Karnataka with Travel Turtle. With stories rich in content and pleasing to your senses, our August issue ensures every second you spend reading is worth it.

We sincerely trust that you will have as much pleasure reading this edition of Travel Turtle as we enjoyed compiling this for you, our dear readers. Do share your feedback at [bharti@travelturtle.world](mailto:bharti@travelturtle.world).

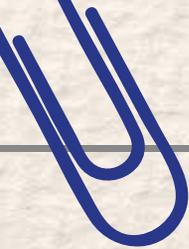
Happy Reading!

*Bharti Sharma*

**Bharti Sharma**  
Editor

   : [travelturlemag](https://www.instagram.com/travelturlemag)





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**16-19**

**KARNATAKA**

OFFERING THE MOST  
COMPREHENSIVE  
EXPERIENCES TO  
THE TRAVELLERS

**20-22**

**THE  
HOLLYWOOD  
SIGN**

A CENTURY OF  
ASPIRATIONS AND  
ADVENTURE IN LA

**30-31**

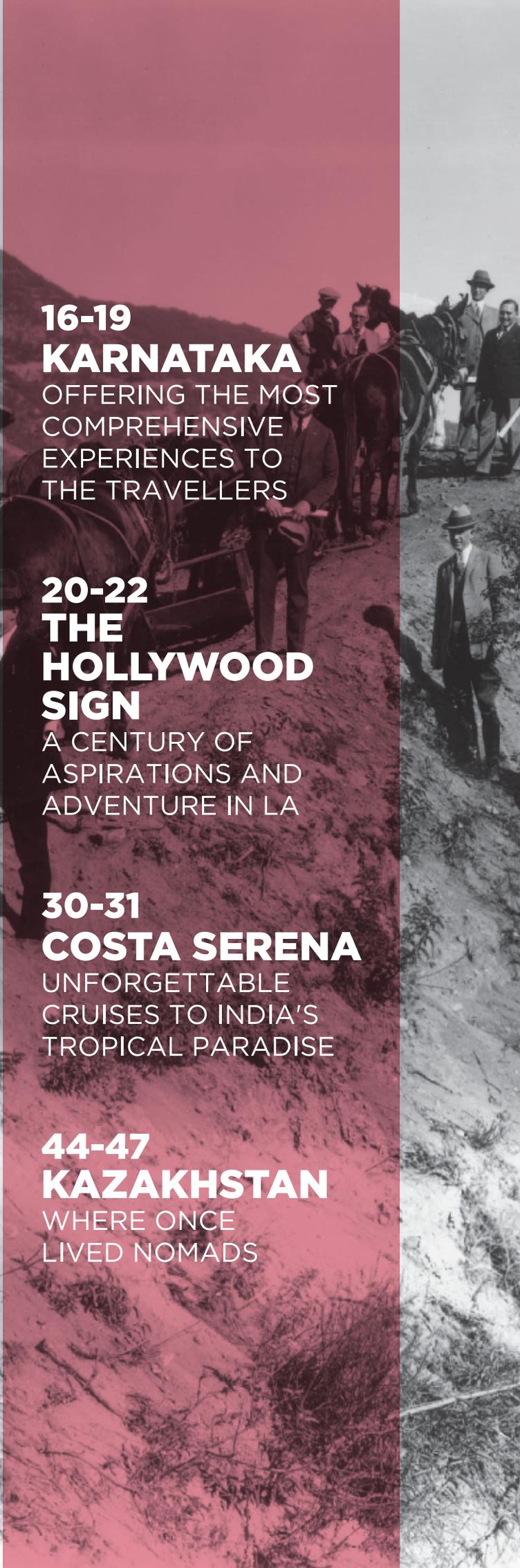
**COSTA SERENA**

UNFORGETTABLE  
CRUISES TO INDIA'S  
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**KAZAKHSTAN**

WHERE ONCE  
LIVED NOMADS



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**Western Australia's major events calendar boosted with launch of EverNow**

Western Australia has announced its long-anticipated major homegrown event, EverNow. Taking place between October 4-9, EverNow is a free local festival that will celebrate WA's unique nature and Indigenous culture during the Aboriginal season of Kambarang – the season of wildflowers and birth.



**'Outletcity Metzingen' appoints AVAIREPS as its Sales and PR Representative in India**

With an aim to strengthen its presence in the Indian market, Outletcity Metzingen, the leading luxury shopping outlet in Europe, has appointed AVIAREPS as its Sales and PR representative in India. The dedicated team of tourism experts at AVIAREPS will be responsible for curating and implementing cross-channel promotional strategies for Outletcity Metzingen with the ultimate goal of increasing visitor numbers and spending from India.

**Saudi announces new E-Visa options for travellers**

Saudi announces new instant e-visa options that will facilitate UK, US, and Schengen visas holders, as well as permanent residents of UK, US, and any EU country to obtain tourist e-visas to Saudi through [www.mofa.gov.sa](http://www.mofa.gov.sa). Saudi has previously extended regulation to provide visas on arrival to the six categories, this is just the latest step as Saudi makes it easier than ever for visitors to experience the authentic home of Arabia and contribute to Saudi's vision of reaching 100 million visits annually by 2030.

**Saudi**  
Welcome  
to Arabia



***TripJack boosts its presence with a new office in Delhi***

TripJack, one of India's leading B2B travel platforms, proudly announces the opening of its newest office in New Delhi. The strategically located office will focus on key markets of North India and boost the adoption of its seamless, intuitive and robust travel portal.



***EaseMyTrip on a major acquisition journey to acquire 3 Travel Companies***

EaseMyTrip.com announces the approval of EaseMyTrip's board to acquire 51 per cent of the aggregate paid-up share capital of each of the three travel companies incorporated in India, to solidify its position as a major player in the travel and tourism industry. The consideration for the proposed acquisition will be paid by EaseMyTrip by way of issuance of its equity shares to the selling shareholders of the respective target companies on a preferential basis.



***IATO special membership drive offer extended till 31st August 2023***

Mr Ravi Gosain, Vice President – IATO apprised that due to the overwhelming response to IATO Special Membership Drive which was valid till 31st July 2023 has been extended till 31st August 2023. Mr Ravi Gosain informed that the decision has been taken to facilitate the tourism stakeholders to join IATO in large numbers and make IATO the voice of the industry.

**CM Adityanath – Uttar Pradesh is attracting more tourists than Goa**

Yogi Adityanath, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, said that his state drew more tourists than Goa and was the top destination for tourists. Speaking to a crowd in Mathura, he declared, "UP is attracting the most tourists. Goa and Uttar Pradesh were formerly ranked first and third, respectively. However, in the previous year, 80 lakh tourists travelled to Goa, 7 crore devotees visited Kashi (Varanasi), and 6 crore devotees went to the Braj region.



**JANDEC Travel JSC, and Ambassador Cruise Vietnam appoints AllKnown as Indian Market Sales Representative**

JANDEC Travel JSC, and Ambassador Cruise, Halong Bay, Vietnam, a holistic tourism service provider and cruise liner based in Vietnam, assigns AllKnown Marketers (AKM) the task of performing its trade and marketing initiatives in the Indian market. The AKM team will be responsible for endorsing these diversified products & services, hence, to encourage Indian tourists to experience Vietnam's tour varieties in gastronomy & culture, nature & landscape, and other outdoor adventures. Since JANDEC Travel JSC, and Ambassador Cruise, Halong Bay, Vietnam debuted in the Indian market early 2023, the business penetration will further enhance its presence through a strong partnership with sustainable efforts and consistent outreach between both parties.

**Saudia expands international flights by 15 per cent**

Saudi Arabian Airlines (SAUDIA) continues to implement its operational plan for Summer 2023 by providing over 7.4 million seats for domestic and international routes during July and August, a 10 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2022. The airline will operate more than 32,400 flights, reflecting a 4 per cent increase. These measures aim to meet high demand during peak seasons and ensure smooth operations, efficient reservations for scheduled and seasonal destinations, and streamlined processes at airports.



**India-Indonesia should establish 'RICH'**

Addressing the '2nd FICCI Outbound Tourism Summit', Ambassador Krisnamurthi said that both India and Indonesia have vast opportunities to explore beautiful destinations in various states, provinces, and cities. "There is a need to establish constant, continuous, sustainable direct air traffic between both nations. We must also look at establishing a niche market for exchange of visit between Indian tourist to Indonesia and vice-versa. India and Indonesia should work on establishing 'RICH' – Religious, Cultural and social & History theme apart from other theme-based tourism plans including thematic tourism of Ramayana and Mahabharat, health, education, etc.," she emphasised.



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# PHOTOGRAPHY TOURISM

## Capturing the pulse of destinations

As I am humming Ed Sheeran's, "We keep this love in a photograph, we made these memories for ourselves", this is making me realise how incomplete are trips are without these photographs. We all go through our galleries and always checking out our travel pictures while reminiscing the good times and then in anticipation of travelling to the destination again. Due to this significant impact of photographs on tourism, marketers invest greatly in this visual stimulation tool.





### INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

Photography and tourism are inseparable. Tourism without photos of the tour destinations taken is a half-completed activity. Photography in tourism appeals to every tourist. There is no fun in a visit to a place without keeping a record of all the wonderful things you had been through while on a tour. No other form of record is as pleasing as the one that has a visual desirability, and photography fits the description exactly as does a ball into a socket.

Photography tourism is not a restricted arena but is for all having an aesthetic sense and an eye of appreciation. All you need is a decent camera, a stock of films or memory chips if you prefer a digicam.

Nature reveals herself in many forms and beauties across the globe forcing us step outdoors to enjoy and appreciate the variety. A breath-taking beauty epitomized. You cannot bring in back home a chunk of the ice, a feel of the freezing cold, the sparkling rays of the setting sun slithering along the ice fields. Neither can you bring with you a few exotic samples of the fauna like a baby penguin, but you can certainly carry home the

brilliant photography of these wonderful creations of nature. It greatly helps in reliving the memories of your amazing trip.

If you are an admirer of historical architecture, photographic tourism is for you. Taj Mahal in Agra is a magnificent feat in the field of structural design. Someone called it 'a frozen melody'. You realize the justification of the adjective if you take a photo shot of this architectural marvel. It's too good to be true and is a prized collection that will give you immense gratification whenever you look at it.

More and more tourists show their pictures on the Internet, to the great relief of family and friends who were harassed in earlier times by having to watch photo albums or slide shows. In this sense it is interesting to see how photographs have become images more than pictures, mainly because of their enormous quantities. Tourists take ten pictures of the same thing, erase five and remain in doubt about the other five, which ones are the best and should be kept. These five pictures form one image. Each photograph taken by a tourist is loaded with

symbolic significance or value. The reason why a photo has been taken and the way it is done show the vision, the ideas and referential frameworks of the photographer. The moment a picture is made, it is just that: a picture and the ties with reality have been broken.

In the Pre-tourist / Tourist / Post-tourist chain, expectations play a fundamental part. Tourists start off with expectations and finish their vacation with them. Expectations are mainly based on images and this means that photographs play a crucial role. We are talking about photos presented by travel organizations or tourist boards on the one hand and those taken by tourists on the other.

The tourist sees first of all what he expects to see. When a tourist has narrow expectations (when he has a clear idea of what he is going to experience) the tourist's eye and his camera look for what he has seen before – in travel brochures or on TV for example. This is mostly the case with main and side Impsources that are well documented on the Internet and quite familiar to the tourists, since their choice of holiday may have been based on them.



## LIVE WIRE

You may pace up and down for kilometers across the ruins of an ancient civilization like Nineveh in Northern Iraq or among the dust and rubbles of Mohenjo-Daro in Pakistan with your roving eyes hunting for a subject, an artifact or a figurine worth capturing in your lens. These individual subjects and their images become essential components of photography tourism. The creative value of these specific shots are often appraised by connoisseurs showing an intense weakness for the specific subject.

This is a key driving force that inspires the tourist to grab his camera once again and set out in quest of fresh pastures worthy of a shoot. Since photography is a strong visual media, it has enough power to promote tourist appeal a distant land may hold. It

is not the pseudo hype that a carefully framed statement with a touch of a little marketing exercise would lead.

This stuff is far more than that and is an instant hit depending upon how well that tourist photographer has done his job in capturing the hypnotizing enchantment of a valley adorned with flower or perhaps a rolling pasture land with flocks of sheep grazing. You are fascinated by the photo and feel like booking the next flight to reach this fairyland!

The socio-cultural displays and craftsmanship of the local folks serve as a powerful key driver stirring photographic tourism. Particularly, the tribal dances exhibited by the tribal folk in different corners of the globe are simply enthralling. For that matter, the traditional dance performed by

the Masai's of the East African Serengeti plains is well worth a shoot! The tribal craftsmanship constituting exquisite pieces of art may trigger a strong drive to draw tourists thousand miles away to capture a snapshot of these decorative pieces and immortalize them in celluloid for the world to see with an appreciative gaze.

Planning photographic tourism starts with setting up a direction before launching upon a trip to a distant land. The important issue is what exactly you are looking for. The preference shifts from one photographer to the other. Not all kinds of natural beauties are like to catch the fancy of the photo tourist to same degree. Some may get enchanted by the magic of the lofty snow-capped mountains, and for some no sight can be as great as a rumbling waterfall coming down through a

sheer drop of hundreds of meters against a glorious backdrop of the setting sun.

Before going for photographic tourism, one must be aware of the local customs and practices. There are many amazing touring destinations around the world where taking photos of local inhabitants, temples and shrines or a traditional ritual would invite public resentment. Here, it is wise to show respect for what is a taboo and keep your camera locked.

However, you may always make a request and seek permission beforehand from the competent authority if you really feel your trip would lose half its spirit by not taking a photo, which you so much crave for. This will not cost you more than a few polite mails and words of requests.



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# karnataka

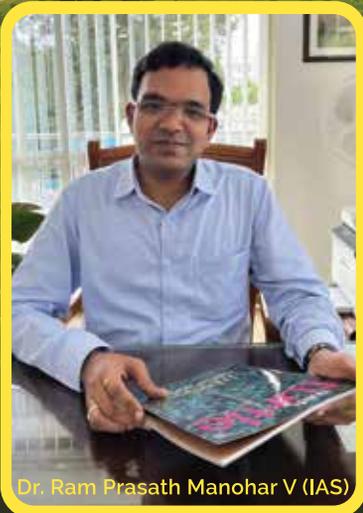
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Once the capital of Vijayanagar Empire, Karnataka boasts the glorious past which is the intrinsic part of the state. From beautiful landscapes to rich cultural heritage, serene beaches and scrumptious food, Karnataka have been fascinating travellers to explore and experience this majestic state.

- Sudipta Saha



## INDIAN SAGA



Dr. Ram Prasath Manohar V (IAS)

### An experience awaits you!

Karnataka is a hub for tourism and it has something for everybody but as its past shaped by various dynasties, the states have always known for its forts, palaces, and ancient tales. Karnataka have always been known for heritage tourism and earlier the entire focus on to promote this segment of tourism. Speaking on the same line, Dr. Ram Prasath Manohar V (IAS), Director of Tourism, Karnataka says, "But, now we would like to emphasis on nature and wildlife tourism. Bangalore is a tech hub and therefore, we intend to introduce a lot of technological introduction in the system which will lease out to travellers and tourists and other stakeholders in the ecosystem. The potential is

huge, be it heritage, wildlife, adventure, sport, urban or MICE tourism, we have plenty of offerings. The need of the hour is to rebrand and reach out to the market in a focused way."

Karnataka has everything, from its rich historical past, heritage monuments, relaxed beaches, misty hill stations, adventurous wildlife and many more. The Department of Tourism have been extensively promoting the various shades of the states and attract travellers from all across and therefore they have been extensively promoting on various platforms. Sharing his view on how the department is planning to promote the state, Dr. Ram Prasath Manohar V (IAS) shares, "Traditionally, we are participating in major a promotional event which doesn't suffice the purpose and we need to go beyond this. We need to opt for a campaign of rebranding the Karnataka Tourism brand and we also want to capture the youth market as we have a lot of offerings for them. Also, we aim

to target the nature enthusiasts and adventure seekers, this can be our forte. At the moment, we have a generalised approach of promotion and we need to move forward with a targeted focus approach and focused destination should be promoted. We also need to create our own infrastructure base, until and unless we are able to develop require infrastructure all the promotional activities doesn't get into the reality."

### Enhancing the tourism offerings

At the moment, Karnataka Tourism is moving towards promoting a lot of technological innovation in the system like AR, VR technologies creating augmented experiences for the travellers. "More than destination we are focused on experiences such as Hampi by Night where travellers can interact with the history, it also allows them to recreate their historical scenario. Similarly, in Nandi Hills, we are

aiming to introduce several experiences such as adventure activities, night shows, illumination of monuments around the region, introducing cultural shows, etc, especially for the weekend travellers," expresses Dr. Ram Prasath Manohar V (IAS). He further explicit, "Tourism doesn't end with a destination; it also includes several experiences such as crafts, community interaction, food experience, crafts and much more. During the G20 meet, our focus was to promote the traditions, culture, cuisine and handicrafts of Karnataka and we did put ample number of stalls showcasing the various shades of Karnataka. Traditionally, Karnataka is either about Mysore Palace or Hampi, Karnataka is not limited to these two destinations; there are many more offerings in the state. We would like position Karnataka as 'Feel the Experience' be it food, ecosystem, be it wildlife, we want to have a comprehensive experience based market."



## Tourism flourishing in the state of Karnataka

The state of Karnataka has been luring travellers and tourism has been flourishing in the state. Sharing on how tourism is doing, Varun Mohan, General Manager, Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore mentions, Karnataka was ranked 4th for total visitors for both Domestic and Foreign Tourists in 2022 and excelling year on year. With a brand-new airport terminal being inaugurated in 2023, Bangalore is expected to become a greater doorway for tourism sector for the state of Karnataka. Currently ranked again at fourth position, with 7.68 per cent of Foreign Tourist Arrivals, the share percentage is expected to increase with a larger base of foreign and domestic tourists. With better road and air connectivity to tourist cities, tourism sector will flourish year on year for the state."



Varun Mohan



Ashley James

On the same note, Ashley James, General Manager, Angsana Oasis Spa & Resort, Bangalore says, "Tourism in Karnataka has made a significant contribution of approximately 15 per cent towards the state's GSDP, and has been instrumental in creating a multitude of jobs both directly and indirectly. Bangalore Airport stands out as one of the premier airports worldwide, seamlessly connecting the country to major destinations across the globe. Last year, Bangalore airport catered to approximately 31 million passengers and its growth is expected to continue with the launch of a new international terminal. Karnataka, a state exuding diversity, offers a plethora of enriching experiences for discerning tourists. From the breathtaking coastline and pristine beaches to the majestic Western Ghats and the captivating wildlife of Nagarahole - Bandipur - Kabini, Karnataka has something to offer for every avid explorer. Not to mention the cultural gems like the historic Hampi and the architectural marvel of Halibedu. Moreover, the vibrant city of Bangalore is a haven, captivating travelers with its vibrant nightlife, array of shopping experiences, and delectable culinary delights."



## Current demands in the market

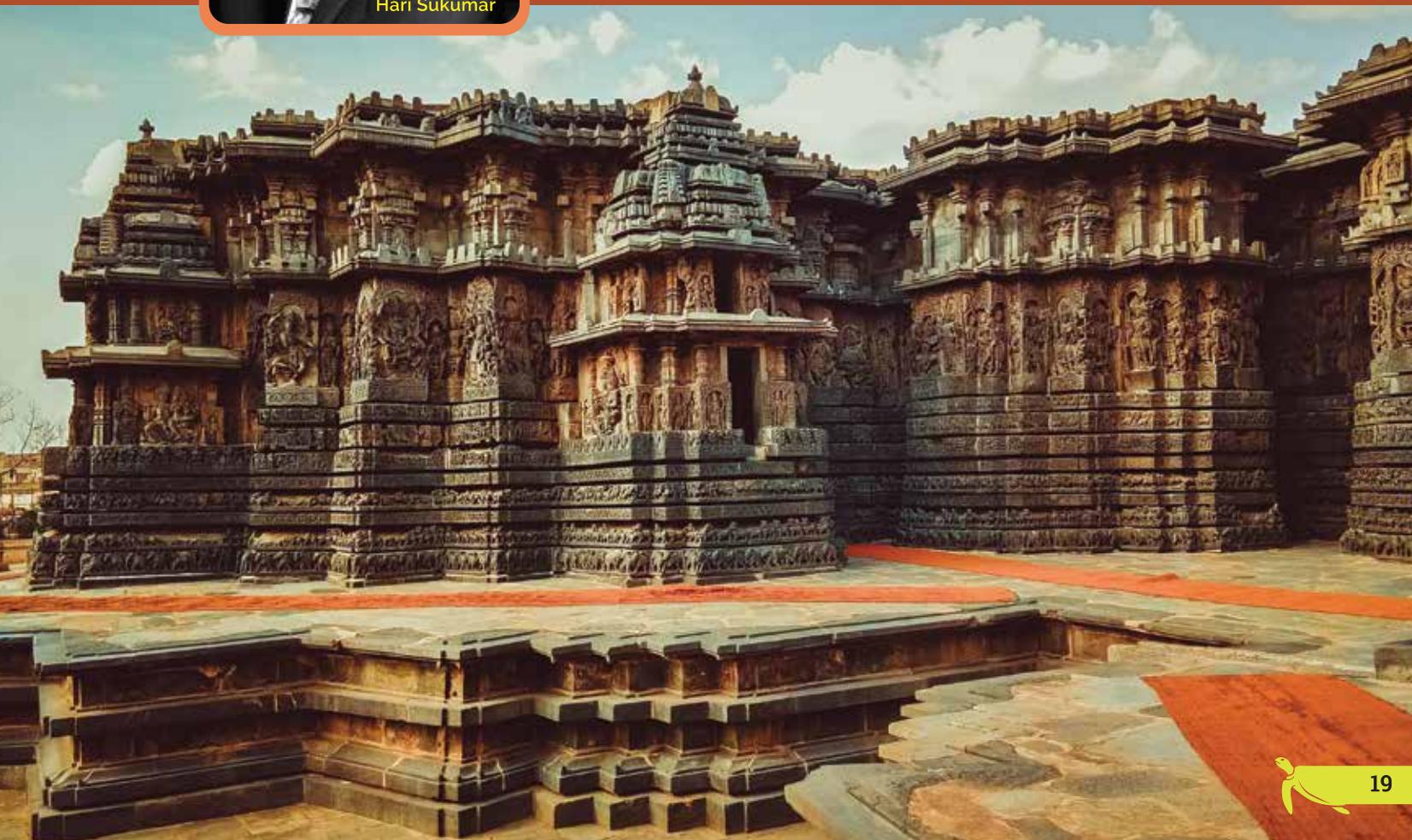
Recently, there have been a surge in domestic tourism and travellers today are keener towards experiencing something unique. In Karnataka and especially in Bangalore, the hospitality industry has witnessed an upsurge in wellness tourism. Ashley James, General Manager, Angsana Oasis Spa & Resort, Bangalore adds, "We have observed a significant surge in wellness tourism, as well as the demand for wedding venues. Our resort offers ample open spaces, providing a serene and tranquil environment for our guests. We have also noticed a constant demand for weekend staycations and exceptional event spaces for MICE." Whereas Varun Mohan, General Manager, Hyatt Centric MG Road Bangalore feels mentions that the focus currently is on ADR (Average Daily Rate) led strategies for most hotels in the city. With encouraging results in H1, for both Hotels and Aviation industry, the emerging trends observed from our guests have been on 'Value for Money', full/

half board plans as options and value additions from other services of the hotel.

The hospitality industry has evolved significantly, embracing technology, sustainability, and personalized experiences. "Online platforms, social media, and guest reviews now influence bookings. Hotels prioritize eco-friendly practices, wellness offerings, and contactless services due to changing preferences and the impact of the pandemic. Personalization, loyalty programs, and bleisure travel cater to modern travelers' needs. Overall, the industry adapts to embrace innovation and meet the expectations of today's guests," says Hari Sukumar, Assistant Vice President of Operations, Hotel Royal Orchid Bangalore.



Hari Sukumar



# The Hollywood Sign

## A Century of Aspirations and Adventure in LA

Standing tall and proud, the Hollywood Sign is a cherished icon that has come to symbolise the dreams and allure of Los Angeles. Its journey began as a marketing ploy for housing development in the 1920s, but it soon evolved into an emblem for the entire city.

- Naina Nath



Today, as the Hollywood Sign celebrates its centennial anniversary, travellers from around the world are invited to explore the myriad of outdoor activities and experiences that offer panoramic views of this legendary landmark.

The Hollywood Sign's popularity transcends its association with the movie industry. According to Jeff Zarrinam, chairman of the Hollywood Sign Trust, people are drawn to the sign because it represents aspirations and possibilities in their lives. As visitors approach the Hollywood Hills, the allure of the sign becomes irresistible, urging them to explore its history and the city it represents.

Over the past century, Hollywood Sign has faced numerous challenges, including threats from developers and potential disrepair. However, thanks to the dedication of citizens and celebrities alike, the iconic landmark and the surrounding area have been protected and preserved for future generations. The Hollywood Sign Trust, a non-profit organisation, was formed to ensure the cultural and

historic significance of the sign remains intact. Through their efforts, the 45-foot-tall letters have been meticulously maintained and refreshed, allowing the sign to continue shining brightly as a beacon of hope and inspiration.

Beyond being a symbol of Hollywood's movie industry, the Hollywood Sign holds deep cultural significance. A survey revealed that nine out of ten Americans consider the Hollywood Sign an iconic American landmark, on par with other national treasures such as the Statue of Liberty, Washington Monument, Mount Rushmore, and the Golden Gate Bridge. It is a testament to the enduring impact of the entertainment industry and the city itself on the American psyche.

To commemorate the Hollywood Sign's centennial anniversary, the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board encourage tourists to get outside and appreciate the iconic landmark from various vantage points. Hikers can choose from several trails, each offering unique views of the Sign and the city.

## SOME OF THE BEST WAYS TO EXPERIENCE THE SIGN

**Griffith Park:** Offering multiple hiking trails, Griffith Park is a perfect spot to witness the Hollywood Sign's grandeur. The Cahuenga Peak Trail rewards hikers with a spectacular view from behind the Sign, overlooking Downtown Los Angeles.

**Bronson Canyon:** Known for being the Batcave from the 1960s Batman TV show, Bronson Canyon features a selection of hikes and vantage points to view the Sign from different angles.

**Lake Hollywood Park:** For those seeking a more leisurely experience, the reservoir at Lake Hollywood Park provides a direct and stunning view of the Hollywood Sign, accessible by car and a short walk.

**Runyon Canyon:** As one of LA's most popular locations, Runyon Canyon offers distant and dramatic vistas of the Sign, along with the chance to spot celebrities and play with dogs.

**The Hollywood Bowl:** Climb to the top of The Hollywood Bowl amphitheatre for striking views of the stage and the Sign perched in the hills beyond.



**ACCOMMODATIONS WITH A VIEW**

While LA can be known for luxury, there are also affordable hotels that offer picturesque views of the Hollywood Sign.

**The Kimpton Everly Hotel:** This boutique hotel provides views of the Sign and Hollywood hills from its rooftop and selected guest rooms.

**Tommie Hollywood:** Enjoy panoramic city and Hollywood Sign views from the colourful rooftop pool and Hollywood Hills view guestrooms.

**Thompson Hollywood:** With its chic rooftop pool and dining experiences, the Thompson Hollywood offers impressive views of the Hollywood Sign.

**W Hollywood:** In the vibrant setting of Hollywood Boulevard, W Hollywood provides sweeping views of the iconic Hollywood Sign from its rooftop pool, lounge, guest rooms, suites, and event spaces.

**AFFORDABLE EXPERIENCES UNIQUE TO LA**

For travellers seeking unforgettable experiences on a budget, Los Angeles has plenty to offer.

**Griffith Observatory -** An iconic experience in Los Angeles, and the gateway to the cosmos in Southern California, offering stunning views of the city and the famed Hollywood Sign, all accessible with free daily admission.

**TV Tapings:** Attend free TV tapings at major studios, where popular shows like Jimmy Kimmel Live and The Late Late Show with James Corden film their episodes.

**Dodger Stadium:** Catch a baseball game at Dodger Stadium, a true cathedral of Major League Baseball, where tickets start at just \$12 for home games.

**Vintage and Thrift Stores:** Unearth hidden treasures at world-renowned vintage and thrift stores, such as Crossroads Trading Company, Melrose Trading Post, and It's a Wrap in Burbank.

**DINE AND DELIGHT ON A BUDGET**

Los Angeles offers a diverse culinary scene with options for

every budget. Visitors can savour multicultural cuisine and cutting-edge fusion fare without breaking the bank.

**Iconic LA Markets:** Head to places like Grand Central Market, Smorgasburg in the Arts District on Sundays, or the Original Farmer's Market, where visitors can enjoy delicious dishes and soak in the city's vibrant atmosphere.

**Food Trucks and Stands:** Los Angeles' food trucks, often run by renowned chefs, provide an array of eclectic and affordable meals, reflecting the city's diverse culinary culture.

The Hollywood Sign's centennial anniversary invites travellers to explore the essence of Los Angeles through its numerous outdoor adventures and affordable experiences. As the iconic landmark continues to represent dreams and aspirations, visitors can hike through scenic trails, relish diverse cuisines, and create

unforgettable memories with breath-taking views of the Hollywood Sign, all while enjoying the charm and allure of the City of Angels.

"As Spring transitions into summer, opportunities to enjoy the sunshine, fresh air, and gorgeous views of The Hollywood Sign abound," said Adam Burke, President and CEO of the Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board.

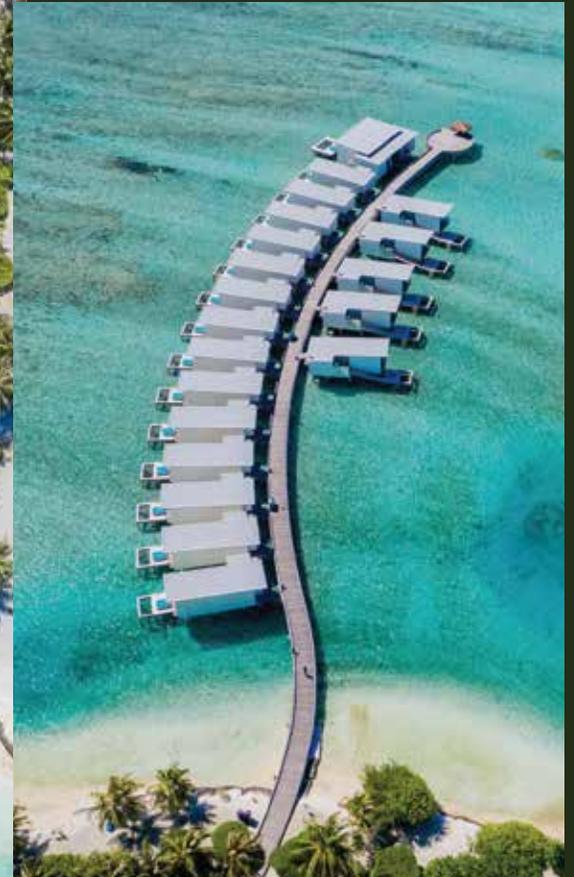
"The Hollywood sign is an integral part of the LA story. It is more than an icon; it is where dreams come true! Perched atop, the sign is visible from hiking trails, restaurants, and luxury hotels. No visit to Los Angeles is complete without visiting this iconic landmark. On the centennial anniversary of the Hollywood Sign, it allows us to celebrate the true spirit of Los Angeles," said Seema Kadam, Regional Director Los Angeles Tourism and Convention Board.



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Withstanding the highs and lows of a dynamic industry while establishing a legacy, **Subhash Goyal** is the man who has witnessed it all! Travel Turtle spoke to him about his journey through thick and thin.

- Tripti Jain



Creating anything from scratch requires a great amount of dedication and focus, while it takes minutes for an empire to come dwindling, it takes real effort to perch yourself right on top of the ladder as a source of inspiration. Subhash Goyal, Founder Chairman of STIC Travel Group, considered the 'Godfather' of the travel industry is a guiding light for so many young individuals in the industry. On the contrary, when asked about his thoughts on being the 'Godfather' he humbly says, "I don't like being called 'Godfather'; I prefer being called a true dependable friend who is always there for people in need. It is the attitude of excellence and service before self which has made STIC Travel one of the top travel companies in India."

He has been a beacon of success for a lot of people including the ones working under his shelter and guidance. His words have always motivated and guided me to work every day. It is his passion to motivate youngsters to be job creators and not job seekers for which he has addressed thousands of students through virtual and physical meetings in India and abroad. He leads as an inspiration for thousands, but when asked about his inspiration he shares, "In the course of my journey a lot of people have inspired me apart from my wife, my father and my teachers both in school and university. My biggest inspiration has been Swamy Vivekananda, his words and his speeches have always inspired me."

### Tracing through life's work!

It takes years to create a legacy that stands tall and strong, half a century old STIC Travel Group is a known name in the travel industry. The Company started as Student Travel Information Centre, STIC Travels Pvt. Ltd. is now STIC GSA Services Pvt. Ltd. with offices in all the major cities of India. The organisation is GSA's for 12 International Airlines, four Cruise Companies three Rent-a-Car companies and Luxury Trains operated by Indian Railways. The journey of the inception of the company should be documented for generations to come.

Mr Goyal shares about his journey and says, "50 Years is a long period in one individual's life but a very short period in the history of an organisation. 50 years back even in my wildest dreams, I had never imagined that I would make travel and tourism my profession and by God's grace this enterprise has been very successful."

It all started in 1970, when he was invited as a student leader i.e. as the Past President of Delhi University Student's Union and President of the Central Board of University Student Union. Unwilling to take any financial assistance, either from the University authorities or his parents, he managed to take his first student trip to Japan, while making a commission of 1000 rupees per student which was a

lot at that time. The idea of starting a tourism company was born then and there, in 1973 he started the STIC Travel Group which was inaugurated by Dr Karan Singh the then Tourism & Civil Aviation Minister on September 14.

### Time travel to the golden age!

The industry has changed dramatically and that is a reflection of how our country, travellers and their preferences have changed. The change is mainly across 3 aspects - technology, business models and travel styles and preferences. Mr Goyal shares, "In the seventies, travel was a very aspirational and elitist concept. In terms of the industry, we were very low-tech. I still remember the massive safe in which we kept the ticket stocks of all the airlines we represented and the alphabetically arranged physical booking cards placed in pigeon holes in our office in the Imperial Hotel, Delhi. When you had to issue tickets for a large group it was all hands on deck sitting in a row and writing those tickets with a 'good ball point' so you got the impression through the carbon on the airline coupon etc. Technology has tremendously helped in distribution and reach but I still feel that technology can never fully replace personal interaction, working together collaboratively and strategically whether that is with your employees or with your clients."



The Social media channel has of course changed how personal interaction happens and is an incredibly innovative way for organisations to interact with their clients. Business models for travel companies have changed dramatically especially in the last 10-15 years unfortunately due to the 'zero commission' era where it has become the survival of the fittest only.

### **The replacement of Human Touch**

Today the whole world is hooked to technologically advanced devices and is enslaved to different tools to get their work done. But there was a time when people preferred human interaction and felt a sense of satisfaction while doing the deed with their own hands. "Professionalism, innovative marketing approach and teamwork which I think can make a lot of difference; the challenges imposed by artificial intelligence in my opinion would change the current Travel Tourism and Aviation Industry. More than 50 per cent of the work which is being done by humans will be replaced by artificial intelligence; this will be the biggest threat to the people working in this Industry. No amount of artificial intelligence will be able to replace the personalised services provided by professionals who will have to be fully qualified and expert in their respective fields," shares Mr Goyal.

He further adds, "I see more travel companies focused on

providing a comprehensive service experience to their clients. I am impressed every day with the level of innovation successful agencies have employed to provide value-added services such as special Indian meals in remote locations like Alaska, South America and even the interiors of China. What I miss most is the personal interaction which we had with our customers and people who visited our offices and it was fun sharing a cup of coffee or tea with them. Now most of the work is done through email or computer."

### **Dedication leads to hard work, which leads to results!**

The years of hard work and dedication to his work are the result that so many organisations as well as the Tourism Government of India consider him to be on a pedestal. When asked about his association with different tourism associations and organisations he says, "Every association I have been associated with I have always given it my best and I always believe in making a difference and showing results and because I am passionate, whatever I do people do respect that."

Reaching different milestones through his journey Mr Goyal did an ample amount of work as the President of the Delhi University Student Union. As President of the Indian Association of Tour Operators his biggest

achievement was to get the E-tourist Visa policy announced and implemented by the Government of India. In 1995, after becoming the IATO President, he was able to get, for the first time in the history of IATO, the then Prime Minister of India, P.V. Narasimha Rao to inaugurate the IATO convention. The presence of the Prime Minister at a travel convention was a big boost for the stakeholders and the travel industry.

He adds, "When I took over IATO as the President, the total membership of IATO was only about 300 and by the time I left as President, it was over 1500. Today I am proud to say that we have a good surplus balance and IATO owns two prestigious offices in a good commercial complex. I also wrote a book on Poverty Eradication and Economic Development through Tourism which made people realise that Tourism can be an instrument for economic change and job creation and poverty eradication."

When he started the organisation, he wanted to build one of the most honest, professional, reliable and dependable organisations which would be right on the top and today STIC Travel Group is all set to celebrate 50 years of inception. Lastly, he says, "There is no other way to get success. The only mantra to get success is 'hard work', 'dedication', and 'honesty' with time-bound planning and implementation strateg.



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# EXPLORING WITH RAIL

## A One-Stop Shop for Travel Agents

During an exclusive interview with **Srijit Nair** - General Manager (Africa, Greater India, Middle East and Russia); Rail Europe's operations in the Indian market were thoroughly explored, yielding valuable insights into their future plans.

- Naina Nath

# EUROPE EUROPE



Rail Europe, a global reference brand for European train booking, caters to individual travellers and travel agents worldwide. Its mission is to enhance international mobility, simplify train travel, and encourage rail usage. Rail Europe aspires to be a one-stop shop, offering agents the best prices and convenience through its innovative platform. With advanced technology, agents can access information, book European trains effortlessly, and earn commissions. The B2B portal, [agent.raileurope.com](http://agent.raileurope.com), provides easy access to approximately 100 European rail operators. For 90 years, Rail Europe has been a trusted partner, serving over 15,000 travel professionals in 70 countries with dedicated rail expert teams.

### CONNECTING EUROPE

Rail Europe, being connected with 100 railway operators in Europe, highlights several popular routes, including the renowned high-speed rail service, Eurostar, which is favoured by Indian travellers. The Eurostar connects the UK to France, Belgium, and the Netherlands via the English Channel Tunnel. Srijit shares, "The most popular route of Eurostar is London to Paris. Travellers like taking the scenic trains in Switzerland like the Bernina Express and Glacier Express, and we have also recently launched these on our B2B Portal [agent.raileurope.com](http://agent.raileurope.com), wherein travel agents can easily book these journeys." Famous countries among Indian travellers are France, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and Spain, with popular railway routes are Paris to Geneva, Madrid to Barcelona, Milan to Paris, and Frankfurt to Paris. Despite prior seasonal travel trends, post-pandemic, travellers now explore these routes year-round.

### SEAMLESS BOOKINGS

Rail Europe offers a comprehensive booking platform to travel agents, facilitating easy and simultaneous booking of European trains while providing opportunities to earn commissions. The platform also houses valuable information to

enhance agents' knowledge of train travel. Travel agents can access the platform by registering on our B2B portal [agent.raileurope.com](http://agent.raileurope.com) or collaborating with our GSAs to meet their specific requirements. "Our GSAs in the India market are Ottilla International, Travel Boutique Online, Amigo Travels, Swiss Tours, Riya Travels, Thomas Cook, SOTC, Make My Trip, Kesari Tours and Veena World. The pent-up demand for the travel to Europe is evident, with leisure and family travellers increasingly opting for customised holidays and we see a turnaround in the business travel too, as many corporates prefer sustainable train travel within Europe," says Srijit.

### STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND PROMOTIONS

Rail Europe engages in strategic joint promotion activities with their GSAs, throughout the year. "Participation in trade events enables us to promote train travel in Europe." The company conducts trainings in major metros like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Bangalore, Kolkata, and extends its focus to Tier I and II cities like Pune, Chandigarh, Lucknow, Kochi, Coimbatore, and Guwahati, ensuring comprehensive coverage of all Indian markets. Additionally, Rail Europe actively participates in trade workshops organized by Switzerland Tourism, Atout France, Visit Britain, and German National Tourism Board. "The goal is to elevate trade partners' knowledge of Rail Europe's offerings, educate them about European trains, and establish ourselves as the ultimate one-stop shop for European train bookings," adds Srijit.

### INTERACTIVE TRAININGS AND WEBINARS

Training plays a pivotal role in educating travel agents about Rail Europe's products and offerings. Srijit shares, "At Rail Europe, we regularly organize Rail Europe Webinars monthly, which witness significant participation from trade partners and agents. On certain occasions, we are honoured to have guest speakers from different railways who join us

and share insights about their products and services." The company ensures comprehensive coverage by conducting trainings in major cities, including Tier I and II cities, to facilitate easy and streamlined train travel for trade partners. Additionally, Rail Europe offers the e-learning platform 'The Rail Agent Course' at [www.trac-raileurope.com](http://www.trac-raileurope.com), enabling agents to complete interactive modules on various European trains and earn a prestigious 'Rail Expert' certificate upon training completion.

### EXPANDING TRAVEL OPTIONS AND CONVENIENCE

Rail Europe consistently strives to introduce new products on its system, and a recent development is the addition of seat reservation bookings for customers holding Eurail passes. Srijit explains us, "As a platform offering Eurail passes for purchase, we recognised the demand for Pass holder fare and found it essential to provide this additional feature to our trade partners. Within the Rail Europe booking platform, agents can now easily ascertain whether their travel itinerary requires an additional seat reservation for trains like TGV, Lyria, Eurostar, Frecciarossa, etc., along with the associated cost." The introduction of this new offer further strengthens Rail Europe's commitment to delivering the best travel experience and extensive options for its valued trade partners.

### THE SWISS TRAVEL PASS

Switzerland emerges as the most favoured country among Indian travellers and those keen to explore its beauty often choose the Swiss Travel Pass. This product holds significant popularity in the Indian market, owing to its numerous benefits offered to customers. He shares, "The Swiss Travel Pass presents an opportunity to discover Switzerland's various excursion destinations, mountains, lakes, and over 500 museums. As a

holder of the Swiss Travel Pass, one can easily explore Switzerland using public transport for 3, 4, 6, 8, or 15 days, offering ample time to discover all its wonders. The pass provides a 50 per cent discount on popular mountain excursions like Titlis, Pilatus, and Glacier 3000, along with a 25 per cent discount on Jungfrauoch. Additionally, one can enjoy complimentary mountain excursions to Klewenalp, Rigi, Stanserhorn, and Stoos. The Swiss Travel Pass also offers a wonderful perk - children between 6 and 16 years of age can travel for free, thanks to the complimentary Swiss Family Card." Given all these advantages, the Swiss Travel Pass truly justifies its popularity among Indian travellers.

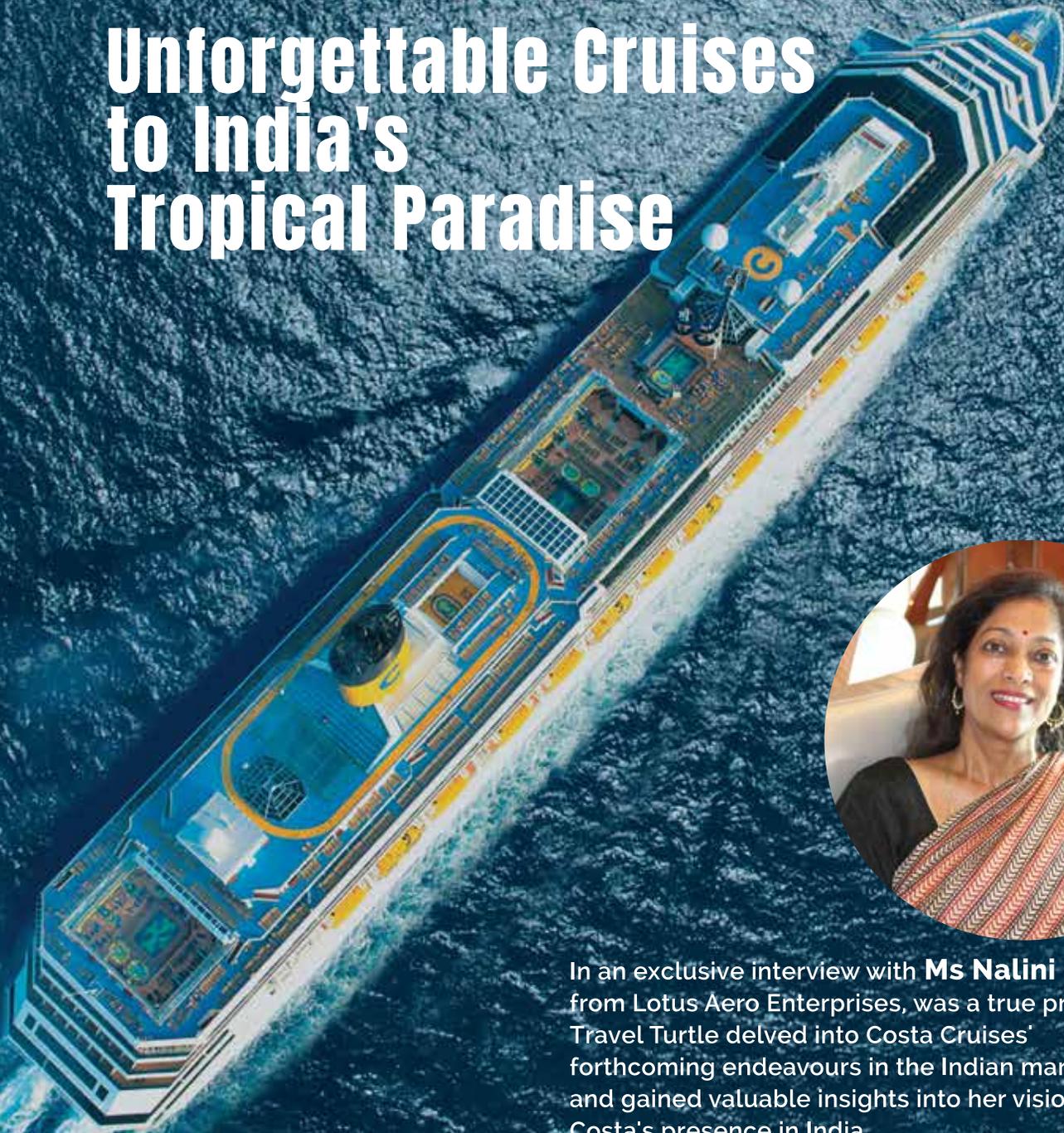
### NEW PASS HOLDER FARES

"We have recently introduced pass holder fares for the Eurail Global Pass and Switzerland's panoramic trains, including the Glacier Express and the Bernina Express, on our B2B portal. Continuously expanding our offerings, we have also launched the Berner Oberland Pass and the Eurail Greek Islands Pass. The standout feature of the Berner Oberland Regional Pass lies in its seamless integration with other train travel across Europe, making it an excellent choice for travellers seeking to explore multiple destinations in a single trip," adds Srijit. As Switzerland remains a top global destination, the Berner Oberland Regional Pass complements the array of Swiss Travel System tickets and passes offered by Rail Europe. Moreover, the Eurail Greek Islands Pass enables travellers to effortlessly explore the Greek islands via national ferries, including the Attica Group (Superfast Ferries, Blue Star Ferries & Hellenic Seaways), with four domestic travel days available as a mobile pass. It serves as an excellent addition to the Eurail Greece pass, catering to those eager to visit highlights such as Athens, Thessaloniki, Olympia, and even explore the European continent in its entirety.



# COSTA SERENA

Unforgettable Cruises  
to India's  
Tropical Paradise



In an exclusive interview with **Ms Nalini Gupta** from Lotus Aero Enterprises, was a true privilege. Travel Turtle delved into Costa Cruises' forthcoming endeavours in the Indian market and gained valuable insights into her vision for Costa's presence in India.

- Naina Nath





Costa Cruises, one of Carnival Corporation's renowned brands, has exciting news for the Indian market - the Costa Serena cruise ship is set to offer 23 extraordinary cruises to India. This marks a significant milestone as the ship becomes the largest ever to operate India-only itineraries, opening a new world of international-style cruising to the domestic Indian audience. The upcoming itineraries, which will be operated in collaboration with Lotus Aero Enterprises, Costa's general sales agent in India, promise to deliver an unforgettable holiday experience to Indian travellers.

### India, as a growing market

The domestic and outbound markets hold significant importance for Costa Cruises. According to various sources, there is a potential for cruise passenger numbers to grow to 4 million by 2041, driven by the introduction of new cruise terminals within the country. "While having a ship close to home and domestic itineraries generally attracts higher numbers, we are also experiencing substantial growth in terms of Indian guests on their Emirates and Europe itineraries. From December 2022 to March 2023, Indian guests contributed to the second-largest nationality onboard Costa Toscana's Emirates itineraries. Indians, in general, are realizing the advantages and excellent value that cruising brings to their holiday packages", shares Nalini.

### Exciting new itineraries

The Italian company has selected the Costa Serena as the chosen ship for its operations in India. Following its itineraries in Thailand, South Korea, and Taiwan, the ship will further expand its deployment in the Asian region.

Nalini explains us, "A total of 23 new sailings are scheduled in India from November 4, 2023, to January 1, 2024. These itineraries, ranging from two to five days in duration, will include stops at Mumbai, Cochin, Goa, and, notably for the first time, the Lakshadweep, a

picturesque tropical archipelago known for its stunning white beaches and magnificent coral reef. During Diwali and New Year's sailings, we plan to offer overnights in Goa, providing guests with ample time to fully enjoy the destination."

### New Year's Eve Celebrations and Gastronomic Delights

Numerous parties and celebrations are planned onboard for New Year's Eve. The specifics of these celebrations are determined after a thorough examination of the guest profile, conducted by the Cruise Director during the voyage. The sailing has already witnessed a substantial number of confirmed bookings, indicating a high level of interest and enthusiasm among the guests.

With a size of 1,14,000 gross tons and a capacity of up to 3,780 guests, the Costa Serena offers a plethora of international-style experiences, complemented by the renowned Italian warm hospitality that has been a hallmark of Costa Cruises for its 75 years of history. To cater to the preferences of Indian guests, the onboard gastronomy and entertainment will also incorporate a local touch. Notably, the Costa Serena will be the largest ship operating in domestic waters. Onboard, guests will have the pleasure of indulging in a delightful combination of international and Indian cuisine, thoughtfully served in both the Buffet and Main Dining Room. Nalini shares, "The Indian cuisine offerings will be a true showcase of flavours from all regions of India, celebrating the country's rich culinary diversity. In contrast, the international cuisine will present a delightful blend of European and American flavours, providing a diverse and satisfying dining experience for all guests."

### Strategic Outreach and Aspirations

Nalini enlightens us and tells, "Costa Cruises is actively planning to conduct webinars and participate in roadshows across various cities in India, with a

particular focus on Tier II and Tier III cities. We have observed a high level of enthusiasm among travel agents regarding our return to the Indian market, and Costa Cruises is keen on supporting these agents to effectively spread the word and promote our offerings in the country."

Costa Cruises is currently aiming to expand the market gradually, focusing on deploying one ship at a time. However, the company acknowledges the tremendous potential of the Indian market and remains open to further expansion based on market response. The intention is to establish a regular presence in India, with plans to return annually. In the past, Costa Cruises had also introduced itineraries from India to Maldives during the seasonal months of November to March, starting from 2016 and continuing until 2020. With the launch of domestic itineraries this year, the company is keen on continuing its engagement with the Indian market and exploring new opportunities for growth.

### Overcoming Challenges

Nalini shares, "From an international cruise company's perspective, the primary obstacles to establishing India as a significant cruising destination are inadequate port infrastructure and the absence of a clear cruising policy. Moreover, the complex tax components, which are not typically applicable to cruise liners, need to be streamlined to facilitate India's emergence as a major player in the cruise industry." There is optimism that with the support and vision of the current shipping minister, these challenges will be addressed, paving the way for India to become a prominent and sought-after cruising destination.

### Luxurious Amenities and Entertainment on board

The ship Costa Serena is set to sail in India during November and December 2023. It boasts a total of 1,500 cabins, with 505 offering the luxury of private balconies.

With 14 passenger decks, the cruise is designed to provide guests with an array of amenities, ensuring a delightful onboard experience. These amenities include a wellness centre and a gym with captivating sea views, a beauty salon, a theatre, and restaurants serving both Indian and international cuisine. Guests can also indulge in a variety of bars, four swimming pools (two of which feature a self-propelled glass roof), a shopping area, and a dedicated kids' club for the entertainment of children and teenagers. Regarding entertainment, the Costa Serena offers a diverse array of International and Indian performances. The theatre hosts an exciting range of shows, from acrobatic performances to Broadway-style dance shows. Additionally, the cruise organizes Bollywood-style parties on its open decks, ensuring a memorable and engaging experience for all guests.

### Exciting International Cruise Itineraries coming up

"From December 2023 to March 2024, Costa Cruises' flagship vessel, Costa Toscana, will once again set sail on short 4-night cruise itineraries from Abu Dhabi to Dubai, with stops in Muscat and Doha. Additionally, there will be 3-night itineraries that include overnight stays in Dubai, docking at the charming Dubai Marina Terminal. The previous season's Emirates itineraries witnessed significant interest from Indian guests, and we are eagerly looking forward to an even greater number of Indian guests for the upcoming season," says Nalini.

In addition to the Emirates itineraries, Costa Cruises plans to introduce unique 7-night itineraries from Athens, starting from June 2024. These enticing itineraries will encompass visits to exotic ports such as Istanbul, Mykonos, Santorini, Bodrum, and Crete, offering guests an exceptional and unforgettable cruising experience.

She adds, "The cruise market in India is poised to experience significant growth over the next 5 years. For travel players aspiring to expand their businesses, investing in and selling within this sector will be of paramount importance."





# Growing Above & Beyond Maldives

The Maldives, an archipelagic nation of tropical islands is ideal for travellers seeking unspoiled beaches, atolls encircled by reefs, and lovely water bungalows. Travel Turtle spoke to Industry veterans about the future of Tourism in Maldives as India holds its place to be a major source market for the destination.

- Tripti Jain





Mazin Mohamed

India has historically been a major source market for tourists visiting the Maldives, and it is quite expected that this trend will continue through 2023 and 2024. Due to numerous alluring trends and experiences, Indian tourists have continued to demonstrate a keen interest in travelling to the Maldives. Travellers frequently look for opulent and one-of-a-kind alternatives. They eagerly anticipate their stays at beachside resorts with breath-taking vistas, overwater bungalows, or private villas. Couples and honeymooners from India frequently travel to the Maldives. They look for chances to make enduring memories in gorgeous surroundings. Travellers are drawn to pristine beaches and marine life because they offer the chance to participate in a variety of water sports like snorkelling, scuba diving, and swimming with manta rays and whale sharks.

### Seeking wonders amidst sea splashes

A holiday wrapped in the taste of sea salt getting a tan out by the ocean view villas, Maldives is an exquisite escape for everyone. "Many Indian travellers visit the Maldives to unwind and rejuvenate. The destinations offer a wide range of spa and wellness facilities. The Maldives is known for its iconic overwater villa and bungalows. Indian travellers are often fascinated by the opportunity to stay in these unique accommodations,"

shares Mazin Mohamed, Founder and CEO, Islandlife.

Adding something to every memory, the numerous resorts on every atoll add a charm to the destination. Rahim Aslam, Founder, ONE ABOVE adds, "Resorts are enhancing guest experiences by incorporating elements like hammocks, swings, and unique designated spaces, all of which are promoted as highlights of the stay. The inclusion of water slides within the villas adds an exciting dimension. Notably, manta ray feeding moments and specialized occasions like weddings and anniversaries are being offered to create cherished memories."

The tourism trend between Maldives and India has evolved by leaps and bounds. Saroj K Jena, Director, Ark Travel Group shares, "In earlier days Maldives used to be a luxury destination but now it's affordable luxury and every Indian who has a passport wants to travel to Maldives."

Indian travellers often seek out these world - class accommodations to enjoy a relaxing and romantic getaway. Roshan Jain, Founder, Tatabye Tours and Travels highlights, "Travellers from India often seek seclusion and privacy during their holidays, making the Maldives an ideal destination. The private islands and exclusive resorts cater to this preference, offering a tranquil environment away from the hustle and bustle of daily life."



Rahim Aslam





Saroj K Jena

### Sipping the local flavours

Indian Travellers look forward to exploring the local culture and traditions of the Maldives. Mazin shares, "There are travellers who stay on the local island, interacting with locals, and learning about the Maldivian way of life, history, and traditions. When it comes to culinary experience, Indian travellers love Indian food. Now many resorts offer Indian food experiences. The resorts also offer fine dining experiences, themed restaurants and even underwater dining options. It's important to note that these points are general trends and experiences that Indian travellers often look forward to in the Maldives."

India is a country of diversity, which is one of the major reasons why Indians prefer interacting and warming up to the local people and understanding different cultures. "Visiting local islands, attending cultural events, and trying Maldivian cuisine can be part of this experience," adds Roshan.

Initially, Maldives had a reputation for being a honeymooner's paradise, but the shift in the past few years clearly shows that it is a destination for families, business and leisure as

well. Rahim enlightens us and says, "With the shift from couples to family travel, resorts are increasingly focusing on providing comprehensive experiences for children. Kids clubs are becoming central attractions, offering various engaging activities. Interactions with marine life, including fish and turtles in the BAA atoll resort, contribute significantly to enriching the lifelong memories of young travellers."

"Creating a market for almost every segment, Maldives is creating a very simple trend for the travellers, first comes the beaches with clear water, and then experiencing different cuisine, followed by some water sports and a lot of peace with bliss," adds Saroj.

### Evolving Tourism segment

The Maldives has invested in developing infrastructure to cater to MICE and group travel. This includes the construction of conference facilities, meeting rooms and event venues within resorts and hotels. "The Maldives' private island resorts offer an element of exclusivity and privacy, which can be appealing to MICE and group travellers. The seclusion allows for focused meetings, networking opportunities, and customized experiences that cater to the specific needs and preferences of the group," shares Mazin.

While the Maldives is a year-round destination, the MICE and group travel market may prefer certain seasons based on weather conditions, crowd levels, and available activities. Roshan highlights the fact that "The Maldives has been emphasising sustainable practices in its tourism industry, and this extends to MICE and group travel as well. Sustainable conferences and events have gained importance, and the Maldives' commitment to preserving its marine environment and local culture aligns with this trend."

In response to the evolving tourism landscape in the Maldives, DMCs have taken proactive measures to embrace the shift towards MICE and group travel. "We understand that businesses and organizations seek unique and awe-inspiring settings for their events, and the Maldives offers just that. Our dedicated MICE team collaborates closely with corporations to curate bespoke experiences that combine business objectives with the destination's breath-taking beauty," adds Rahim.

Saroj tells us the major reason for Maldives evolving as a MICE destination, "Reasons are quite simple 2 hours flying time, visa on arrival and meeting the requirements of the corporates. Imagine meetings happening amidst nature, under the blue sky and around beautiful beaches. The most important thing is everything can take place on one island which gives immense time to everyone for engagement and team-building activities.

Overall, the emergence of the Maldives as a MICE and group travel destination diversifies its tourism industry and opens up new opportunities for businesses, organizations, and group travellers to experience the unique blend of natural beauty, luxury, and exclusivity that the Maldives has to offer.



Roshan Jain





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HEADS IN BEDS

# An Eco-luxury oasis

Championing responsible luxury with splendid service, regal interiors and exquisite food, ITC Grand Central shines brightly, thanks to its incredible staff.

- Misbaah Mansuri





There are hotels that take you on a journey to a world away, filling your heart with nostalgia even before you step inside. Stepping inside Mumbai's grand dame, ITC Grand Central is one such experience where I immediately felt like I had been transported to a bygone era of elegance and splendour. The fusion of south Mumbai's architectural charm with the grandeur of the British Raj was a sight to behold, leaving me in awe.

### Palatial feels

The service standard is set on arrival as I'm greeted with a Namaste by the doorman wearing white, red and gold Raj-era military regalia. Staff is incredibly respectful and incredibly attentive – they'll even make an effort to remember your name for that extra personal touch.

My room was a true reflection of British colonial elegance, featuring thick, toe-hugging carpets and a regal ambiance that made me feel like a distinguished guest. Ample space allowed for relaxation on the sofa or productive work at the desk. The bathroom was well-stocked

with amenities, including thoughtful items like detergent for hand-washing and pumice stones. The most delightful surprise awaited me as I entered my room - a pillow with my name beautifully stitched on it, taking personalisation to extraordinary heights.

The palatial feel of the hotel, inspired by the architectural styles of that era, greeted me with marble floors, plush carpets, and elegant gold touches that exuded regal vibes. As I explored the lobby and hallways, I couldn't help but admire the nods to the city's heritage through artworks and old photographs of Colaba.

The views from my west-facing room on the higher floors were simply breath-taking. The sight of the crumbling, overgrown India United Mill and the city's seafront skyline on a clear day created a mesmerising backdrop, with glimpses of the ocean beyond.

### The food factor

tFood is definitely one of the highlights of my stay. Dining at Kebabs and Kurries was nothing short of a culinary revelation, an

unforgettable experience that left an indelible impression on my taste buds. As I entered the restaurant, the open kitchen captivated my senses with the sight of skilled chefs expertly cooking marinated meats in fiery tandoors, infusing the air with tantalising aromas.

The first bite of the gilawat ki kebab was a moment of pure bliss. Its melt-in-your-mouth texture and the burst of rich, aromatic flavours transported me to a culinary paradise. The qorma was a masterful creation, the tender meat immersed in luxurious gravy that indulged every taste bud, and then came the biryani, an exquisite symphony of fragrant rice and succulent spices, weaving a tapestry of flavours that left me longing for more.

The highlight of the meal was undoubtedly the velvety lentil dal bukhara. Its richness and depth of flavours were truly extraordinary, a dish that touched the soul and left a lasting imprint on my gastronomic journey.

For desserts, the kulfi and gulab jamun were the perfect conclusion to the meal. The kulfi's

creamy texture and the gulab jamun's divine sweetness was an enchanting finale that left me with a satisfied smile.

But the culinary adventure didn't end there. I couldn't resist trying the monsoon bites, a treat unique to this vibrant city. The vada pav, bhajiya, and cutting chai brought a sense of nostalgia, hitting home right with the authentic flavours of Mumbai. Each bite was a symphony of familiar tastes that resonated deeply with my palate. As I savoured each dish, I felt like a discerning food critic, appreciating the artistry and skill that went into creating this culinary masterpiece. The chefs' dedication to their craft shone through in every morsel, leaving me with an overwhelming sense of culinary satisfaction.

Dining at Kebabs and Kurries was more than just a meal; it was a culinary journey that touched my heart and soul. The exquisite flavours, the skillful craftsmanship, and the nostalgic monsoon bites all came together to create an unforgettable dining experience that will forever hold a special place in my heart.



### Pure splendour

It was the promise of a blissful spa experience that beckoned me immediately. Yani, the spa therapist, wove her magic, guiding me into a state of blissful relaxation. With each soothing touch, the cares of the outside world melted away, and I found myself immersed in a world of tranquility. Gratitude filled my heart for the gracious spa manager, Mary, who orchestrated every detail of my spa journey with care and thoughtfulness.

But what made this hotel truly special was the genuine warmth and personal touch from the team. Arif from the salon gave me a fabulous hair blow dry, adding that extra touch of pampering to my stay. Chef Ruffy Shaikh's guidance during the Vada Pav making experience was an interactive delight, and Chef Paul's culinary brilliance and graciousness left me in awe.

Reflecting on my time at the ITC Grand Central, I felt like I had come home to my roots. The hotel's grandeur and impeccable service embraced me with a sense of belonging that was truly special.

I was also struck by the profound commitment to responsible luxury that permeated every facet of the experience. From harnessing renewable energy, recycling water, treating/recycling solid waste, sourcing consumables locally to eco-sensitive architecture and design protocols being the measures in the journey for a brighter tomorrow. It wasn't just a stay; it was a journey into a world where opulence seamlessly blended with ethical values and sustainable practices.

The blend of timeless elegance and warm hospitality left an indelible mark on my heart. And as I bid adieu, I look forward to the day when I can return to this magical abode and reconnect with my heritage once more. After all, this feels like not just a hotel but home away from home, it is Mumbai's beating heart created with responsible luxury and lots of warmth and love.



**How has 2023 been for ITC Grand Central?**

The year has started well for ITC Grand Central as the urge to travel remains strong. While business travel continues to grow, Trade shows and Conferences are selling out which equally reflect the pent-up demand that persists across all industries to get out of the office. Overall the year definitely holds a lot of promise.

**As a GM, what will your approach, strategy and leadership style be like for the property?**

As a leader my endeavour is to encourage communication, support a collaborative culture and at the same time encourage workplace innovation to develop and refine the skills of the team yet be strategic and hold the teams responsible for delivering results. In a nutshell, transparent work culture with a healthy work life balances.

**What was your approach during the pandemic?**

The well-being of our guests, associates and partners has always been of paramount importance to us and was more significant than ever. ITC Hotels worked with medical professionals, leading certification bodies and disinfection experts like DNV GL and Savlon to further enhance the hygiene and cleaning protocols. This allowed our guests to enjoy their visit, minimise their concerns regarding hygiene and safety, without any compromise on the renowned legacy of warmth and signature services. We assure our commitment towards health, hygiene and safety.

This Responsible luxury brand emphasised on Sustainability and Unity during the challenging times of pandemic.

**Mumbai is inundated with properties, what gives the property an edge over the rest?**

ITC Grand Central, A Luxury Collection Hotel is LEED Platinum rated Green Hotel and Maharashtra's first LEED Zero Carbon Hotel. The hotel is inspired by Victorian architecture of Old Bombay, this landmark hotel is situated in the commercial heart of Mumbai and in proximity to other business districts.

With a decade strong 'Responsible Luxury' as its guiding premise, ITC Grand Central is committed to delivering luxury experiences with sustainable practices embedded in the process. Some of the initiatives that the hotel works with include Sunya Aqua or zero kilometer water in glass bottle pioneers the mitigation of single use plastic, harnesses renewable energy, recycling water, treating solid waste, sourcing consumables locally, eco-sensitive architecture.

**If you were a guest at the property, what would your 24-hour itinerary look like?**

A morning workout at the gymnasium followed by a Zesty Breakfast to start the day! Discover exquisite getaways of the city in consultation with the concierge while the second part of the day would include exploring the property for its colonial style architecture, award winning cuisine at Kebabs and Kurries and wellness offerings at Kaya Kalp – The Spa.

In the evening, I would immerse by blending in with the evening rituals rooted right in the tradition and heritage of Mumbai with mesmerising ambience created by the Accordion eliciting joy in the air.



Bhagwan Balani, General Manager, ITC Grand Central



TRAVEL THERAPY

# Penang

## The Oriental Pearl

In the matter of an hour, I'd stepped back literally half a century. If Kuala Lumpur is all about the 'world's tallest, highest, fastest,' Penang is diametrically the other extreme. Count your blessings!

- Inder Raj Ahluwalia



## TRAVEL THERAPY

Isn't it amazing that one short flight can get you into another world...?

Lying off the north-western coast of Peninsular Malaysia, the 'Pearl of the Orient' as Penang is known, comprises the 285 - square km island of Penang and a narrow strip of some 760 square km on the mainland known as Seberang Perai (Province Wellesley), separated by a channel 3 km wide at the closest point. Linking the two is a 24-hour ferry service and the Penang Bridge.

Various communities thrown together make Penang a true cultural melting-pot and a resort island in full bloom. It does not take long to see that it's an idyllic playground for sea and sun worshippers, and for those pursuing pure relaxation.

From the airport located at the island's southern tip, we drove through dense vegetation interspersed with low-slung houses wedged between trees and shrubbery, headed for the north where the beach hotels lie, and then onwards to the islands north-eastern tip to Georgetown.

Local history - With successive foreign influences having left their mark - permeates throughout the region. Right from the early Indian civilization that took root in northern Malaya, to that of the Portuguese, Dutch and later the British who barged into this part of the world in search of spices, and stayed back to enjoy the fruit of lucrative trade.

Modern Penang's history goes back to 1786 when Captain Francis Light persuaded the Sultan of Kedah to cede 'Pulau Pinang' (Betel Nut Island) to the British East India Company. Light landed at the site of the present Esplanade and supposedly fired gold coins into the surrounding jungle to induce his men to clear the area. The island was originally named Prince of Wales Island and the settlement formed was named Georgetown after King George III. In 1800, the Sultan further ceded a strip of land on the mainland across the channel that Light named Province Wellesley, after the then Governor of India.

Sprightly and naively welcoming, Georgetown is one smart town. The seat of administration and the state's commercial hub, it is the centre of the buzz. East meets West in beautiful white Colonial style buildings. Its seafront is inspirational; while inland you find large parks surrounding old structures.

My sojourn started with the town's famous, enormously charming golden beaches and calm warm seas, followed by a conventional city tour. I passed the ENO Hotel, then the impressive City Hall, before ending up at Fort Cornwallis, built on the site of Light's historic landing in 1786. Once there was a fort, but today you find an open-air amphitheatre, a history gallery and a handicraft and souvenir centre. Some half dozen cannons point menacingly out to sea. You have to queue up for ten minutes to have yourself photographed at the famous Dutch canon on wheels presented to the Sultan of Johor by the Dutch, and which finally ended up in Penang after being looted by the Portuguese.

You'd do well to stop by at Penang Museum & Art Gallery, housed in a Colonial style house, and prime up on local history and heritage illustrated by maps, charts, paintings, old photos, Malay daggers (Keris), embroidery, and Chinese furniture. Amidst a century - old setting, the items trace the history of Penang through the ages. The Art Gallery on the first floor displays the works of local artists and hosts special exhibitions.



Once the seat of local government, the 1880s stately City Hall is a fine example of British Palladian architecture featuring huge windows and magnificent Corinthian columns. Nearby lays another local landmark, presented to Penang by local millionaire Cheah Chen Eok in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the 60 - feet high Clock Tower today looks down at the traffic that swirls around it.

The stately Anglican Saint George's Church, among the city's oldest landmarks, features a memorial canopy dedicated to Captain Francis Light. Fascinating sculptures of Gods and Goddesses, and a priceless 'gold, diamonds, and emeralds embellished' statue of Lord Subramaniam are featured in Sri Mariamman Temple. Lapital Keling Mosque features an ocher yellow façade and dome-shaped minaret reflecting Moorish Islamic influence.

Visitors in general and foodies in particular, take heart from the fact that Penang is 'Malaysia's food capital'. Scattered around the island are eateries that range from

modest shacks to classy establishments with porcelain and China. While just about all cuisines are available, try out the Chinese, Malay, and Indian food.

Offbeat guides come in handy and much of my city initiation came from my run-in with Ahmad Bukhari Hamzah, then General Manager of the Sheraton Penang, a 5-Star, 237 room downtown hotel, who enlightened me about the city's character, about it being safe, about the government's decision to promote it as a film locale and gold shopping centre, and about how it provides value for money. And also about how the city's famed health and medicinal facilities boosted 'health tourism'. He also traced the shift in local economic sectors, with fruit like Mangostein, Durian, and Rambutam, and spices like cloves and nutmeg - the traditional mainstays of the island - happily yielding ground to economy - boosting tourism.

Two days and two nights! Not too long, but long enough to get a feel for the place. I left Penang feeling I'd done only partial justice to the region. It's got more to it than meets the eye.

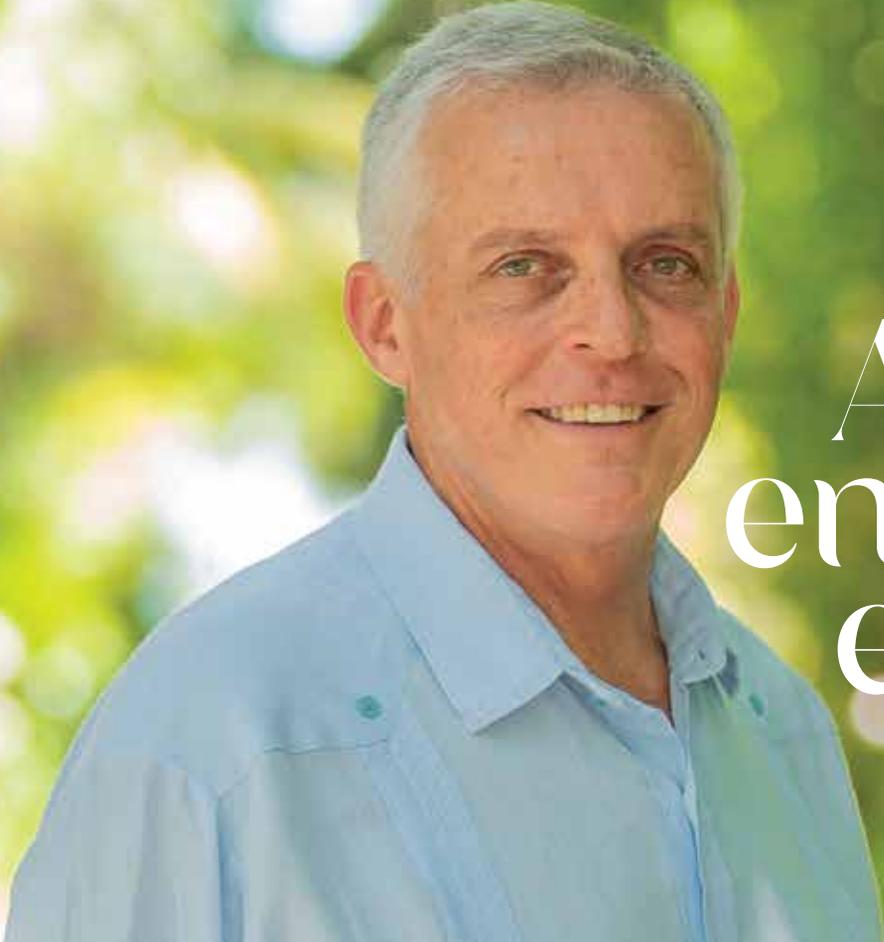
### Facts

- Penang has daily flights from Kuala Lumpur and several-South East Asian cities. The airport is half an hour's drive from the city centre, and taxis and buses are available. While there's a ferry service, the Penang Bridge linking it with Peninsular Malaysia's mainland has facilitates driving to the region.
- You need transport to explore the region. In Georgetown, take a coach tour, walk, or ride a trishaw.
- Vast mixes of hotels provide a vast accommodation network of different categories.
- Eating out is easy, convenient, and exciting, and generally speaking, the quality of food served is good.



### About the author

Inder Raj Ahluwalia is a world-renowned international travel journalist & author. His professional profile features awards from several European and Asian countries, among others.



# An enchanting escape

Travel Turtle was in a conversation with **Sjefke Jansen**, General Manager, Anantara Kihavah Maldives Villas

- Misbaah Mansuri

## The Maldives is inundated with hotels, what gives the property an edge over the rest?

Anantara Kihavah stands out for its ability to capture the essence of its destination and provide guests with exceptional experiences. This is reflected in the high number of our repeat guests, who consistently express their satisfaction with the resort. In addition to offering a diverse range of accommodations that cater to couples, families, and larger groups, the resort benefits from the natural beauty of its island location. Guests are drawn to the mesmerising house reef, famed for its Yellow Wall, while the multi-award-winning SEA underwater restaurant and the remarkable over-water observatory, SKY, and add to the resort's allure. At Anantara, our concept revolves around offering indigenous luxury and hospitality that's seamlessly woven into unique experiences to bring guests closer to the local culture, resulting in unforgettable moments that

affirm the beauty of life. What sets us apart is the warmth and sincerity of our hospitality, which creates lasting connections with guests and ensures that they leave with unforgettable memories.

## Which are the most important markets for the property?

Our core clientele is comprised of couples and families, with the top five nationalities being Russia, Germany, UK, India, UAE, and China.

## If you were a guest at the property, what would your 24 hour itinerary look like?

If I were a guest, my itinerary would be filled with exciting activities and luxurious experiences. I would start the day by waking up early and embarking on a morning snorkelling adventure at the house reef, where I would be mesmerised by the incredible marine life. Then, I would fully indulge in the amenities of my spacious room, relishing in its private pool and the exquisite bathroom. To satisfy my taste

buds, I would head to the Plates Restaurant, where I would savour the most delectable breakfast treats while enjoying a breath-taking view of the Indian Ocean.

Afterwards, I would embark on a bicycle tour around the island, immersing myself in the beauty of Mother Nature. Along the way, I would explore enchanting places like the orchid garden and herb garden, appreciating the wonders of the natural world. To pamper myself further, I would treat myself to a pampering spa experience, including rejuvenating Ayurvedic treatments, a luxurious Hydra facial, an enlightening epigenetic analysis, and soothing sound healing sessions.

As the day draws to a close, I would indulge in a private and tailor-made dinner on the beach, where dedicated staff would cater to my every need. While savouring a delectable meal, I would be captivated by the mesmerising sunset painting the sky with vibrant colours. To top off the evening, I would head to the SKY Rooftop, a remarkable venue

offering stunning views, and sip on handcrafted cocktails meticulously prepared by the talented mixologist.

## What are your big plans and focus areas for 2023?

In preparation for an upcoming peak and festive season, several exciting renovations and preparations are underway at the resort. The eagerly anticipated renovation of the Over Water Pool Villas is scheduled to launch in August 2023. Guests can look forward to a refreshed and enhanced experience in these stunning accommodations, which will offer even more luxurious amenities and breath-taking views.

Another notable renovation taking place is at the FIRE restaurant. This popular dining venue is being revamped to create a vibrant and captivating atmosphere for guests to enjoy exceptional culinary experiences. From its new design to the innovative menu, the renewed FIRE restaurant is set to ignite the senses and provide an unforgettable dining adventure.



# Scouring the trails of Kazakhstan

Where once lived nomads

Kazakhstan is a whirlpool of flavours, with high cultural values and people taking you back to the Silk Road to impart a wholesome experience.

- Tripti Jain



Somewhere over the border of Kazakhstan and Afghanistan looking out the window of the flight Flyarystan, I realised that this trip is going to be one to be cherished in postcard memories. The anticipation grew stronger as I landed in Shymkent, a city in south Kazakhstan that is the third largest city in the country. Often called Texas of Kazakhstan, the city is bustling with people and historic relics. The city is filled with parks and is called the 'green city' as you see kids running up and down through the parks hopping on rides and swings. The Shymkent airport is like a little portal to visit different parts of Kazakhstan while creating a perfect transit hub for travellers.

### Walking on the Silk Road route

While touching the grounds of the city, we fell back to the nomadic times and traced back time to the II World War. The nomadic Kazakh people were compelled to settle down in large numbers. In addition, Shymkent was one of Kazakhstan's most significant cities during World War II. A sobering reminder of the difficulties of the Silk Road may be found by touring the Citadel, a fortification perched atop a hill in the middle of Old Town that has been gradually excavated since 2007 and reveals continuous habitation for more than 2,200 years. Bronze Age items have also been discovered there, while 2021 saw the public opening of the rebuilt fortification with its citadel walls, it is like a trip to the yesteryears surrounded by artefacts and relics.

The old Silk Road city needed to be protected from adversaries from the steppe, according to our local guide, it turned into a crucial garrison. As soon as the new city heart of Shymkent was constructed a few kilometres away, the fortress' significance declined during the Russian



Empire. Time travel is now possible at this archaeological open-air museum, which features mounds that have been excavated beneath tents, display dwelling units, artificial irrigation, and an on-site museum featuring pottery, ceramics, elaborate saddles, candlestick holders, and water jugs. I adore the yurt, a nomadic person's home, which displays traditional Kazakh nomadic clothing, carpets, and traditions. The camels depicting the trails of the Silk Route were the highlight of the citadel tour. Post our Citadel tour and a wholesome Kazakh meal, we made our way to the Shymkent airport to our main destination Almaty, the largest city in Kazakhstan.



## The biggest city in Kazakhstan

The most populated city in the nation and frequently referred to as the capital of the south is Almaty. The largest and most ethnically and culturally diverse city in Kazakhstan, it is situated in the hilly southeast of the country, among the foothills of the Trans-ili-Alatau mountains. It is surrounded by spectacular and picturesque scenery. With warm summers and chilly winters, it has a humid continental climate. The city in all its glitz and glamour looked sparkly at night as we landed at the Almaty International Airport.

The morning in Almaty was bright and early, with a view of the Tian Shan mountain range from my Hotel balcony. Our city tour began with a visit to the Zenkov Cathedral at Panfilov Park, where every corner had a different species of trees, squirrels running circles throughout the green grass and kids hopping on toy train rides. Zenkov Cathedral was a vision in itself with the entire structure made out of wood it was a colourful splash that could inspire anyone to bow their head and wish for good. The cathedral is composed of wood but has no nails because it was finished in 1907. It is reputed to be the second-tallest wooden church in the world, standing at a height of 56 metres. The interiors of the church were all the more mesmerising with golden carvings and intricate detailing on the walls. It is believed that while you enter the church you are supposed to cover your head in respect.

## Burst of flavours

Our next trip was to Green Bazaar, the major market in the city and a relic of the Soviet era, where we sampled local cuisine and bought trinkets. Fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meats and cheeses can be found in the several aisles and divisions that line the high-ceilinged room. We were invited by welcoming shopkeepers to sample Tajik dried fruits and nuts, Georgian sweets, tea brews, and hard balls of the regional kurt cheese.

The Kazakhs were once nomadic people because they had no choice, according to my tour guide Victoria, they created meals that could be stored and transported easily. To keep it fresh, they spoiled pork and milk. Due to their nomadic existence, they were unable to plant crops; hence they were dependent on meat. Today's Kazakh cuisine is a kaleidoscope of tastes and cultural influences from nearby nations including Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Iran. Due to its location along the renowned Silk Route, it also received spices from other countries. Our city tour went on to a whole new level when we visited the world's best chocolate, according to our guide and the people of Kazakhstan. The pockets were left empty as once we tasted the chocolates there was no looking back. We went back to our hotel with bags full of goodies on the very first day in Almaty.

## Mountain tops and stories behind it

The next day was an early wake-up call as it was the mountain day. Visit the Shymbulak ski resort, one of Almaty's many fantastic attractions; it is at the top of the list of things to do in Almaty. One of the top Almaty tourist destinations all year round, Shymbulak is the biggest ski resort in Central Asia with groomed slopes. Our ride to the point where we started with the cable car was filled with twisty ways reaching the starting point to Shymbulak.

As the hopping on and off through cable cars began, we were all excited to capture as much of the mountains as we could, but the view left me appreciating the natural beauty crafted by the almighty. The way to the top of the ski area was out of this world. It felt like a journey to heaven and back but with tummies filled with exotic Kazakh lunch and musical tones from the winds blowing in the mountains. The day was a fulfilling and hectic one that ended with an amazing Italian meal at a cute little restaurant in the city.





### The nomadic culture brought back to life

Our next day was a series of experiences in a nomadic village created by the people to own and foster their culture and traditions. A genuine nomad experience is waiting for visitors to Kazakhstan's old capital, which is only a 30-minute drive from Almaty. The Huns' Ethno Village gives visitors a close-up look at nomadic tribes' way of life and how Kazakh tribes' customs are upheld. This incentive will undoubtedly leave a lasting effect on you, whether it's through partaking in local cuisine or witnessing their relationships with horses.

A unique method to learn about their culture is to listen to a musical group consisting of two grandparents and a grandson playing the dombra, a traditional string instrument. A yurt, the nomadic residence of the tribes, is part of the ethno village and proudly welcomes visitors, introducing them to the vibrant selection of native carpets and patterns. The best way to comprehend Kazakhstani culture and its reverence for horses is to mount one, which I tried.

The country of Kazakhstan is regarded as the birthplace of horseback riding. In Kazakhstan's highlands, wild horses were domesticated millennia ago. Even now, horseback riding is inextricably linked to regional history and culture. The Huns' Ethno Village sported skilled riders doing daring exploits on their horses that send shivers down the spectators' spines, to learn what the noble creatures signify to Kazakhs. Visitors can also experience first-hand what it was like for the nomadic tribes that once wandered the huge country's limitless steppes.

### Lakes, Plateaus and rivers!

While cruising through the region area of Kazakhstan, the best days were the ones nearing the end of the trip. Issyk Lake, often referred to as Esik Lake, is a vividly coloured alpine lake located immediately south of the settlement of Esik in Southeast

Kazakhstan. It is surrounded by gorgeous mountain scenery, thick woods, and enormous flower fields. The lake is only approximately 70 km to the east of Almaty and is situated at an altitude of 1760 metres above sea level in the Issyk Canyon of Trans-Ili Alatau. The gorgeous turquoise water surrounded by lush green hills felt like a paradise. It was a picture-perfect moment for the ones looking for peace and tranquillity.

Now coming to the most special part of my journey to Kazakhstan, the Asy Plateau! Words fall short when I tend to describe what I experienced. It was like a whirlwind of emotions all at once. I have never in my life seen something so healing and gorgeous. Along the Kishi-Turgen River, the Asy Plateau reaches for 60 kilometres (37 mi). The plateau is located between 2800 and 3200 metres (9000 to 10500 feet) above sea level. Early Iron Age burial mounds have been preserved in this area. The Asy Plateau has a long history of serving as a summer pasture for Kazakh farmers to graze their livestock. The plateau was also traversed by caravans travelling from Europe and Central Asia to China and India. Sitting at one of the mounds of the plateau and looking at the clouds inching closer one could only feel peace and gratitude to witness something wondrous.

This was followed by a little trek to the Turgen waterfall, where splashes of water and a mighty rainbow peeping from one end were the highlights. Local people were swarming up to the waterfall and enjoying the cold water cleansing the sweat of the climb up the hill.

This trip was a mixed bag of experiences that have left a mark on my life. Kazakhstan has a piece of my heart which will be safely hidden between the topsy-turvy ways to the plateau and the lanes of the green bazaar.

# Kwantu Private Game Reserve



## Where Wildlife Governs!

A short drive from Nelson Mandela Bay, the Private Game Reserve Eastern Cape is situated on the fabled Sidbury Plains, in the heart of Frontier Country, along the banks of the Bushman's River. Travel Turtle spoke to **Alefiya Singh**, Director, IRIS Repts India Pvt. Ltd. about Kwantu Private Game Reserve's numerous adventures.

- **Tripti Jain**



Zebra, giraffe, wildebeest, and numerous other common and uncommon animals that have walked the plains for generations will astound you. There is never a dull moment at Kwantu, from the fragile, lone Blue duiker that emerges from the underbrush at the edge of a clearing to the towering kudu bull that locks his gaze on you as he browses close by.

### Empowered by Wildlife

You see the spectacular BIG 5 grazing freely on the Sidbury plains from the comfort of our open Land Rovers that have been carefully outfitted. Here, white rhinos—monarchs of the African bush—roam the plains with the same freedom that they did hundreds of years ago.

"At Kwantu Private Game Reserve, they understand the deep historical significance of wildlife in Africa. To help travellers connect with this rich heritage, they offer immersive experiences that showcase the region's diverse ecosystems and the coexistence of wildlife and humans over centuries. Their expert guides share captivating stories, shedding light on the cultural importance of animals in African folklore and traditions. Through engaging game drives and guided bush experiences, travellers witness the majesty of the Big Five and the delicate balance of nature, fostering a profound connection to the history of wildlife in this pristine wilderness," shares Alefiya.

### Cherished Safaris

Kwantu Private Game Reserve presents a plethora of unique experiences that leave an indelible mark on our guests. Alefiya enlightens us about the various details at Kwantu and shares, "Apart from exhilarating Big Five game drives and safaris, they offer specialised Indian cuisine, prepared by their Indian chefs. Additionally, their Conservation Centre offers travellers to actively contribute to wildlife preservation. Among these exceptional offerings, Kwantu's guests particularly love the up-close encounters with the Big Five during the game drives, as it remains an awe-inspiring and cherished experience for many. Of course, Kwantu's various

accommodation types and experiences are also popular and offer unique experiences for our guests."

### Adhering to sustainable living!

As a historic safari destination, Kwantu Private Game Reserve is deeply committed to sustainability and conservation. "They implement eco-friendly practices across the reserve, including responsible waste management, water conservation, and renewable energy utilisation. Their Conservation Centre conducts on-going research and wildlife monitoring to ensure sustainable game management and habitat restoration. Furthermore, they actively involve local communities in



their conservation efforts, empowering them through educational initiatives and livelihood opportunities. By prioritising sustainability, they strive to protect the natural beauty of the surroundings, ensuring that future generations can continue to experience the splendour of Africa's wilderness," says Alefiya.

### Ensuring the Indian travellers

Catering to the Indian market comes handy when creating a sustainable and adventure centric zone. Alefiya highlights the importance of penetrating into the Indian market and shares, "At Kwantu, they understand the unique preferences of Indian travellers, and they have tailored offerings to cater to traveller's needs. Indian cuisine is readily available at Kwantu's on-site restaurants prepared by their Indian chefs; alternatively kitchen access is also available where required. The staff is well-versed in Indian customs and traditions, providing a warm and welcoming experience. These all make Kwantu a convenient and preferred destination for Indian travellers seeking an authentic African safari experience."

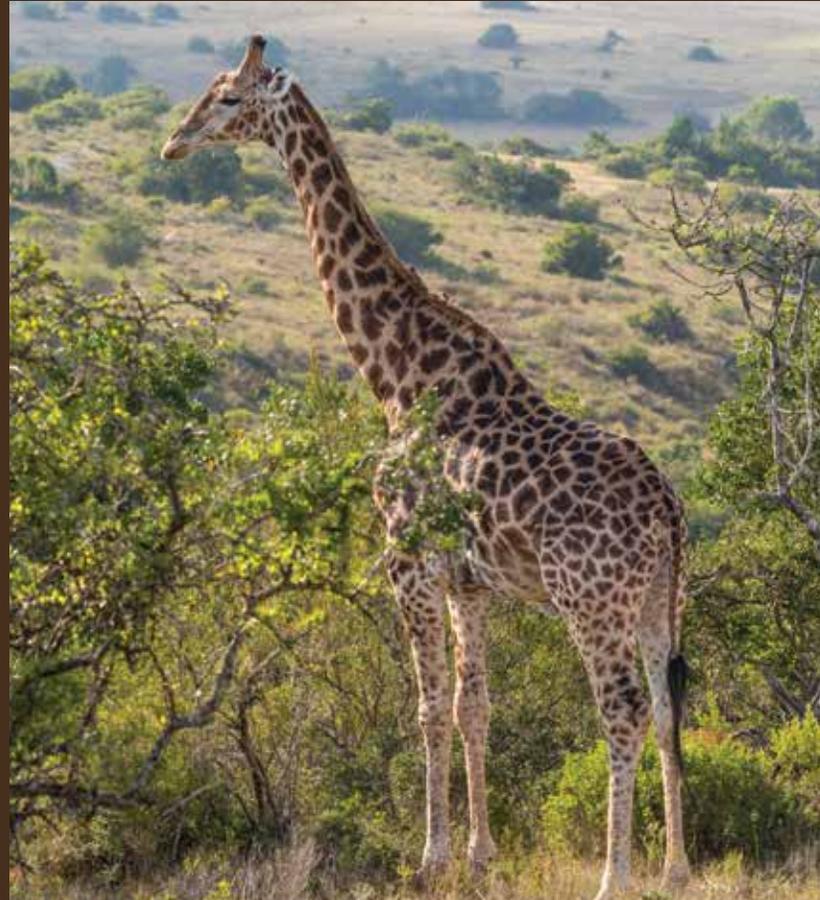
### Expansion on the horizon

Alefiya helps us understand the market share of India and adds, "Indian travellers hold a significant market share at Kwantu Private Game Reserve, and we are witnessing a steady increase in their numbers over the years. The allure of Africa's wildlife and our tailored Indian-friendly experiences has attracted many from the Indian subcontinent. To further expand our reach, we plan to collaborate with prominent Indian travel agencies and tour operators, promoting Kwantu as a top-notch African safari destination. Additionally, we aim to launch targeted marketing campaigns in India, showcasing the uniqueness of the experiences; to engage and inspire more Indian

traveller's to explore the wonders of Kwantu."

### Penetrating into the apt market

Constant marketing and campaigning is what keeps any rewarding property on the market, Kwantu ensures to keep the marketing block going. "We are currently developing India-specific campaigns to reach out to our valued Indian audience. These campaigns will highlight the personalised experiences we offer, showcasing our commitment to ensuring Indian travellers feel at home while being immersed in the African wilderness. We plan to collaborate with Indian influencers and travel bloggers to create captivating content, promoting Kwantu as the ultimate destination for Indian travellers seeking a remarkable safari adventure. These campaigns aim to capture the essence of Kwantu's unique appeal and create a strong resonance with the Indian market," shares Alefiya.





The heart of  
Incredible India

# Monsoon Bliss in Madhya Pradesh



Madhya Pradesh, The Heart of Incredible India, has a huge potential for tourism during the monsoons.

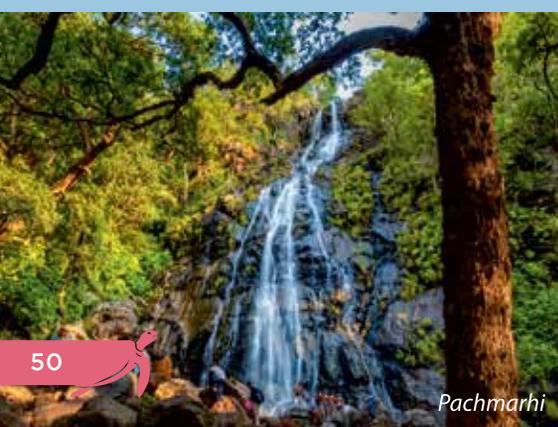
Mandu

MP's multi-hued landscapes from lush forests, rolling hills to magnificent water bodies, come alive with vibrant greenery and gushing waterfalls during the monsoon months. The national parks and wildlife sanctuaries such as Kanha, Bandhavgarh, and Pench, offers an unforgettable experience for wildlife enthusiasts to witness the flora and fauna in their natural habitat. The historical sites and architectural marvels, such as Khajuraho temples, Gwalior Fort and Sanchi Stupa, are enhanced by the monsoon. The natural settings of Madhya Pradesh becomes even more picturesque, attracting nature lovers and adventure seekers alike. With its rich cultural heritage, sublime beauty, and salubrious weather, Madhya Pradesh offers a colourful kaleidoscope for tourists looking to explore the state during the monsoons.

There is a lot to be served on the plate for the tourists. Pachmarhi, Mandu, and Amarkantak offers unique experiences and an enthralling natural beauty. While these places are popular throughout the year, they have a special charm during the monsoons. Let's explore the scope of tourism in each of these destinations during the rainy season:

## Pachmarhi

Pachmarhi a hill station located in Madhya Pradesh is known as the "Queen of Satpura." It is



Pachmarhi

nestled amidst lush green forests, cascading waterfalls, and picturesque valleys. During the monsoons, Pachmarhi transforms into a paradise with fresh greenery, misty mountains, and gushing waterfalls. The pleasant weather and rejuvenating ambience make it an ideal retreat for nature lovers and adventure enthusiasts. Visitors can enjoy trekking through the dense forests, explore the cave shelters, and tread through Rajat Prapat and Bee Falls during the monsoon season.

Nearest Railway Station – Pipariya 55 Kms  
Nearest Airport – Bhopal 210 Kms

## Mandu

Mandu, also known as City of Joy, is a historic city in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. It is renowned for its magnificent medieval architecture and romantic legends. During the monsoons, Mandu becomes even more beautiful as the ancient palaces, mausoleums, and gardens get covered in lush greenery. The rain-washed landscapes and misty atmosphere create a romantic ambience, attracting tourists seeking solitude and tranquillity. Visitors can explore iconic attractions like Jahaz Mahal, Hindola Mahal, and Rani Roopmati Pavilion while enjoying the refreshing monsoon breeze and occasional drizzles.

Nearest Airport – Indore 96 Kms  
Nearest Railway Station – Indore 99 Kms

## Amarkantak

Amarkantak is a pilgrim town located in the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh, where the Vindhya and Satpura mountain ranges meet. It is considered a sacred place as it is the source of rivers like Narmada, Sone, and Johila. Monsoons bring life to Amarkantak with lush green forests, mist-covered peaks, and numerous waterfalls. The natural beauty of this place is at its peak during the rainy season. Visitors can go on nature walks, visit ancient temples, and enjoy the



Amarkantak

serenity of the surroundings. The waterfalls like Kapildhara and Durgdhara are especially mesmerizing during the monsoons, offering a beautiful sight and a refreshing experience.

Nearest Railway Station – Pendra Road 25 Kms

Several other destinations of the state offers a serene and rejuvenating experience. From exploring historical sites to savouring the cascading waterfalls and enjoying pleasant weather the state has a special buoyancy during the monsoons. One such hidden gem is Chitrakoot, known for its resonating waterfalls and lush greenery that comes alive during the rainy season. Another destination that is worth a visit is Maheshwar, where the Narmada River flows majestically, surrounded by ancient temples and architectural marvels. For nature enthusiasts, Bargi Dam is a perfect retreat, with its vast reservoir that becomes a haven for migratory birds during the monsoons. Lastly, Orchha, with its magnificent palaces and cenotaphs, takes on a mystical charm as the raindrops gently cascade over its historical structures, making it an ideal monsoon getaway in Madhya Pradesh.

# BENGAL TRAVEL MART 2023



THE BIGGEST DOMESTIC  
TRAVEL MART OF  
EAST & NORTH EAST INDIA

9th - 11th  
September

Venue -  
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## The blend of a Spiritual Journey and Modern Living

# Karavansaray, Turkestan

The spiritual and cultural centre of Kazakhstan, Turkestan, often known as the 'Second Mecca of the East,' Travel Turtle spoke to **Leya Khamitova**, Director of Sales and Marketing, Karavansaray about how Karavansaray proudly enchants travellers.

- Tripti Jain

Turkestan, home to numerous Islamic structures, known as the second mecca of the east, the mausoleum constructed for spiritual leader Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in the 16th century, has earned the moniker 'Holy City.' Due to its long history—dating to the tenth century—Turkestan is a city of tremendous historical significance. From 1456 to 1723, it served as the capital of Kazakhstan's Kazakh Khanate. It was built as a significant trading hub on the Silk Road. While the modern parts of the city are a few years old, Karavansaray is the touristic complex that speaks volumes about the local culture and traditions wrapped up in a modern way.

### Going back and forth in history

The beginning of the city's history may be discovered in the 6th century BC when it was established as a Greek town. Since then, it has played a key role as a cultural and economic hub, and it is still a popular tourist destination today. The city has had various conquests and occupations over the years, including times under Roman, Ottoman, Byzantine, and Venetian administrations. The city's size and population increased significantly throughout this time, as well. Today, it is the location of a plethora of historical structures and places that reflect its illustrious past,

including fortresses, gorgeous churches, and ancient ruins.

Karavansaray ensures to keep the historic relevance of the city alive. Leya shares, "The most important thing about Karavansaray is the unique touristic centre which is located in the heart of the Turkic world in a wonderful and ancient city, Turkestan. We are only two years old and Turkestan as the new modern city is only five years old. We are an integral part in the development of touristic potential in the South of Kazakhstan, especially in the Turkestan region."

### Enchanting little Venice

The Kazhak government thought of creating a new metropolis with contemporary residential buildings, shopping centres and a cutting-edge airport to draw more tourists. "The expansive Karavansaray complex, which belongs to the Rixos Group and was inaugurated in 2021, is the focal point of this construction. It is delightful to imagine a Silk Road fantasy world with five-star hotels, upscale shops, an amphitheatre, and dining options. A boat can be used to navigate the entire resort complex, which is modelled after Disneyland, by using its waterways," adds Leya.





### The Golden Egg of Dreams

Visitors may practically fly above prominent locations in Kazakhstan, such as the Tien Shan Mountains and the cutting-edge cityscape of Astana, thanks to the Flying Theatre, a golden egg-shaped structure. She helps us understand the concept of the place and says, "The idea behind creating the touristic attraction was to build a desert-based Venice. The Flying Theatre is for the people to experience the true story behind the existence of the country in the most aesthetic and wholesome way."

You'll find a wrecked ship right in the middle of the complex trailing a water route throughout the property. It is almost like visiting Disney land in the early days with structures with high toms and twinkling stars over your head.

### The Mausoleum of Yasawi

The majority of people go to the mausoleum of Yasawi, a poet

and philosopher who lived at the same time as Rumi. The mausoleum was built by Timur in 1389 and features bulbous domes, brickwork, vibrant tiles, and mosaics in a beautiful shade of turquoise decorated with geometric patterns and Islamic calligraphy. Nevertheless, it was never completed since the conqueror passed away in 1405. Leya shares, "The mausoleum is a blessing creating a swamp of travellers for the complex, people do come to visit and pay their respects at the mausoleum but stay for the attractions offered by Karavansaray, including the mesmerising water show with dancing fountains and blazing fireworks."

The mausoleum, with its brick masonry exposed to the weather and scaffolding resembling the ribs of an ancient beast, only its enormous south gateway has withstood the test of time. In addition to the mausoleum's original wooden doors with intricate carvings, muqarnas, or alabaster stalactites, are used to decorate its vast interior. Inscriptions from the Koran are found on a massive cauldron that stands in the middle and is constructed of an alloy of seven metals. Karavansaray creates a perfect window for the travellers to peep into the yester life along with indulging in the reality of the contemporary town.



ADVERT



# *Embrace a journey from Sultanganj to Baba Baidyanath Temple*

The incessant chanting of 'Bol Bam' and devotees assembling in huge crowds to celebrate the onset of the rainy season is when you know Shravani Mela is being celebrated in every corner of India.



In the eastern and northern part of India, mainly in Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh, the Shravani Mela is one of the biggest religious gatherings. For followers of Lord Shiva, this month-long fair is of utmost spiritual importance. Millions of Kanwariyas travel on a holy journey each year to bring holy water from the Ganges River at Sultanganj to the Baba Baidyanath Temple and dedicate it to Lord Shiva as part of this annual pilgrimage. The mela, which takes place in the sacred month of Shravan, will take place this year from July 4 to August 31, with thousands of people coming down from different parts of India to worship Lord Shiva.

Shravan (July-August) is a yearly religious festival celebrated according to the Hindu calendar. This festival takes place from July through August (four weeks). Because of the extra month (Malmas) this year, the Shravani Mela will be held in two stages. The first phase will take place between July 4th and July 17th. Malmas will run from July 18th to August 16th. The Shravani Mela's second phase will take place from August 17th to August 31st.

### Essence in the history

Beginning in the month of Sawan is the Shravani Mela includes a large number of Shiva devotees who

congregate in Baidyanath Nagri Deoghar during the Sawan month, covering the entire area in saffron-coloured garb. A large number of Shiva devotees/Kamaria (Pilgrims) from all around, and other countries travel from Sultanganj to Baba Baidyanath Temple carrying Ganga Jal (holy water from the Uttarvahini Ganga) to worship Lord Shiva. The distance is 105 km, and the scenery on the way is like a one-month fair.

### The divine journey

It is indeed a divine feeling when you see lakhs of kanwariyas carrying the holy Ganges water, with the kanwars on their shoulders, walking 105 km up to Baba Baidyanath temple at Babadham, reciting Bol Bam on the way. The journey starts from Sultanganj, Bihar, where they filled their vessels with sacred Ganga Jal (holy water) and starts their 105-kilometre holy journey to Baba Dham. This holy yatra is a prominent festival in Bihar and is celebrated on a large scale, the majority of devotees travel 105 kilometres to Baba Dham on foot. While travelling the distance, they chant prayers of Lord Shiva to show their devotion, and the whole atmosphere is filled with serenity and the chant of 'Bol Bam' will soothe your mind and soul.

To offer Ganga water to the Jyotirlingam, Kanwariyas first enter



Shivaganga and then the Baba Baidyanath shrine. It is the longest religious fair, taking place from July to August, and is significant to the people. The mela offers people the opportunity to remember Lord Shiva and feel blessed for the goodness and path he offers.

The sacred land of Baidyanath Nagari As soon as they arrive at the Baidyanath Nagari in Deoghar, devotees form a long queue to wait in line for a chance to see the deity. When the devotees finishes their Jalabhishek at the Baba Baidyanath Temple, they move on to the Baba Basukinath Temple in Dumka District, which is 45 kilometres away from Baidyanath Nagari in Deoghar.

An essential Hindu pilgrimage location, Baidyanath Nagri Deoghar is a famous place for devotees to seek blessings. It is a Jyotirlinga, one of the 12, and one of the 51 Shaktipeeths. Shravan, is the fourth month in the Hindu calendar, and is known for its auspiciousness. The location of Jyotirlinga and Shaktipeeth next to one another makes it one of the most unique pilgrimage sites in India. It is amazing to witness both Jyotirlinga and Shaktipeeth together. Shravani Mela allows the devotees to sing,

dance, pray, and experience freely. **Initiatives by Bihar Tourism**

The 105 km of journey is filled with positive aura, the kanwariyas starts from Sultanganj and reaches Baidyanath Nagri to offer the holy water and seek blessings. The Bihar Tourism Board has geared up and is providing plenty of assistance and services on the route to offer some comfort and ease to the Kanwariyas. Starting from Sultanganj till the borders of Bihar, the department has set up a help desk to provide them with adequate information. Under the leadership of Shri Abhay Kumar Singh, Secretary, Department of Tourism, Bihar, a mobile app, Kanwar stand, clean toilets, rain centre, and drinking water have been made available for the Kanwariyas. A medical help centre have also been set up on the route. In the Banka district, a tent city has been set up, providing a space for the kanwariyas to rest, and the tent is equipped with the basic facilities required to offer a relaxing setting to the kanwariyas before they continue on their journey.

पर्यटन विभाग, बिहार सरकार  
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# Trulyy India Hotels & Resorts crafting distinctive experiences

Spread across India's scenic landscapes, Trulyy India Hotels & Resorts is known for its splendid hospitality and amazing experiences. Known for their unparalleled expertise in boutique hotel projects, hotel management operations, and sales & marketing, Trulyy India Hotels & Resorts has won a reputation in the travel trade industry for their committed towards client satisfaction.

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## EVENT AFFAIR



### **Crown and Champa Resorts coming up with a new property in Maldives**

Crown and Champa Resorts, one of the oldest resort chains in Maldives is all set to actively promote its properties in India and market the newest one in their bag. To showcase their luxurious collection of resorts, Crown and Champa Resorts presented a Gala Night with Presentation for their travel and trade media along with their travel partners.



### **India Assist and NDORSE' host meeting with Hotel Representative Companies**

India Assist, the world's first patented real-time assistance services platform, in strategic partnership with NDORSE', a leading sales and marketing company in the travel industry host meeting with major hotel representative companies from Delhi & NCR. The meeting aims to enhance the sales and marketing efforts of India Assist, leveraging NDORSE's travel and hospitality network across India. Both India Assist and NDORSE' are excited to collaborate with hospitality partners to provide travel assistance and enhance travel experience for their customers worldwide. This collaboration aims to drive growth and deliver exceptional value to travellers.



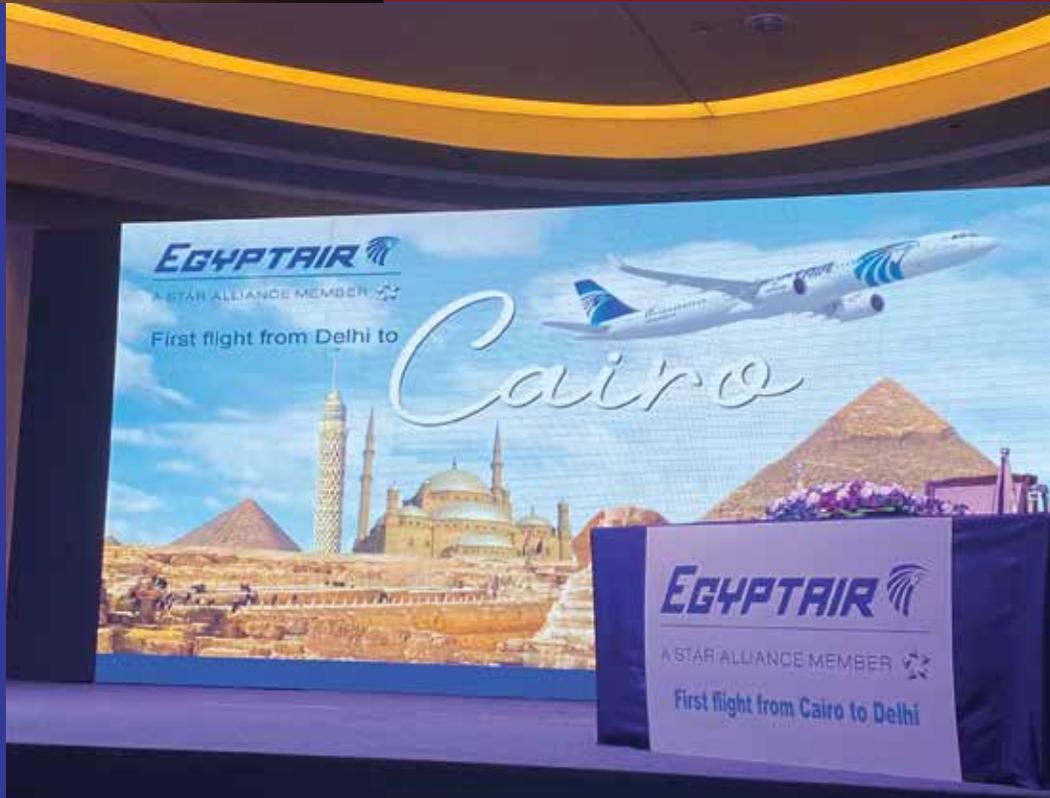


**Island Life organises roadshow in Chandigarh**

The leading DMC promoting Maldives and curating vacations that stand out organised a roadshow in Chandigarh on 27th July at The Hard Rock Cafe. The roadshow was a raging hit which was attended by eminent people from the travel trade industry. They have been generating business for the island country and impressing travellers with the destination. Maldives is the perfect destination for all travel segments.

**EgyptAir expands its network – opens new route to Delhi**

In line with its endless efforts to stimulate movement of tourism and travel, and in continuation of the ongoing plans of development, modernisation, and expansion of airline's network, EgyptAir the national carrier of Egypt and a member of Star Alliance started flights from Cairo to Delhi on 4th August 2023.



## APPOINTMENTS



### **Minor Hotels**

Minor Hotels has announced the appointment of Ian Di Tullio PhD as the company's new Chief Commercial Officer, effective from June 2023. He joins the Bangkok-based group from his most recent position as Chief Commercial Officer Europe at Accor, where he led the commercial management and marketing efforts for Europe & North Africa across a portfolio of nearly 3,000 hotels ranging from economy to luxury and management to franchise operating models.

### **Saraca Hotels and Resorts**

Saraca Hotels and Resorts announced the joining of Amit Razdan as COO – South Asia in July 2023. The company currently operates Lebuva Lucknow and Lebuva Corbett under its portfolio. Amit brings with him a rich strategic and leadership experience of 20 years in business restructuring, operations & improving customer acquisition and retention. He has a strong background in sales, marketing, pre-opening and operations, worked successfully with leading brands such as The Imperial, Taj Hotels, The Aman New Delhi, RHG, Jaypee Hotels and Resorts and Louvre Hotels Group.



### **Malaysia Aviation Group**

Dersenish Aresandiran (Dersi) has been appointed as the Chief Commercial Officer of Airlines, Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG), effective 1st July 2023. With over 16 years of experience, Dersi will play a significant role in shaping the commercial strategy and direction for MAG airlines – Malaysia Airlines, Firefly and MASwings.

### **7 Apple Hotel Pratap Nagar**

7 Apple Hotel Pratap Nagar, a renowned name in the hospitality industry, proudly announces the appointment of Mr Manvendar Singh Tomar as its new General Manager. With over 25 years of outstanding experience in the field, Mr Tomar brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to lead the hotel toward new heights of success.



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