

TRAVEL

JUNE 2025

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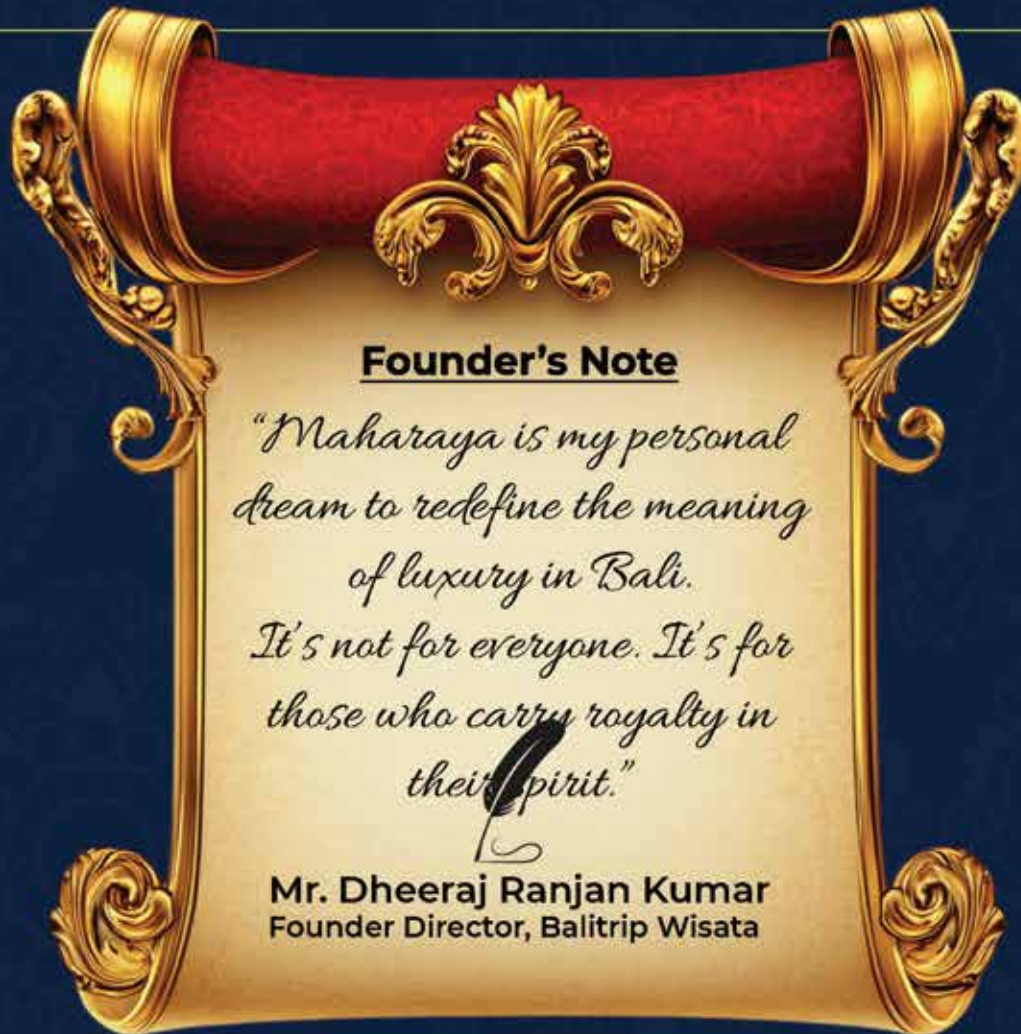
Brussels

Belgium's best-kept secret!

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Editor's letter

There's a certain chaos that seems to follow us everywhere- in our cities, in our minds, in every destination we chase. The airports are louder. The headlines, heavier. And yet, we travel- not to escape, but perhaps to make sense of the noise.

Why do they say let go, breathe, trust the flow? Because for those leading the charge in the travel industry—the silent warriors, the “Lord Commanders,” as I like to call them—the weight can be overwhelming. From rerouting long-haul flights due to war zones to battling the impact of inflation, unpredictability is no longer an exception; it's our everyday. And amid all this movement, all this madness, we forget to pause—to simply be.

This issue, we decided to do just that- hit pause. Our cover story is a quiet rebellion in itself: Silence Tourism. A growing global phenomenon that asks us not where we want to go, but how we want to feel when we get there. In a world that celebrates speed, it's a reminder that stillness is also a destination. Last month, for the first time in six months, I gifted myself some office time. No flights, no hotel beds- just strategy boards, vision maps, and deep dives into unexplored directions. Meanwhile, my incredible team was out there living the tales we tell- climbing Everest base camps, gazing down from the Eiffel Tower, and soaking in the peace of Schweizerhof in Bern while tasting the finest cheeses.

This issue is rich with their stories, and ours- from the romantic lanes of France and Belgium to the vibrant energy of Pride Month, which we joyfully celebrate. Because travel, after all, is for everyone. And everyone deserves to feel seen. Also in this edition, a big shoutout to our team that aced two major shows, ATM Dubai and GITB Jaipur. They caught the pulse of the industry, and let me tell you, it's beating loud and strong.

So, wherever you're reading this- on a mountain, by a beach, or from your corner office- take a deep breath. Pat yourself on the back. The journey is far from over, and the road ahead is waiting. As always, we hope you love reading Travel Turtle as much as we love curating it. Write to me at bharti@travelturtle.world, I'd love to hear what moved you. Until then, keep wandering. Keep wondering.

Bharti Sharma

Bharti Sharma
Editor

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BUZZWORD IS
SILENCE TOURISM

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WHERE THE SNOW SINGS,
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Balitrip Wisata soft launches Maharaya Chambers in Bali

Balitrip Wisata celebrated a significant milestone with the soft launch of its Maharaya Chambers, at Queen's Tandoor Seminyak. The event, marking Balitrip's 10th anniversary, was attended by over 60 top ultra-luxury hotel partners, who congratulated the company on a decade of success and the strategic expansion into the elite luxury segment.



Saudi Arabia Tourism Authority unveils 'Saudi Summer 2025' program

Saudi Arabia transforms its summer tourism landscape with the launch of the 2025 edition of the 'Saudi Summer' program, themed Color Your Summer. Announced by Minister of Tourism and Saudi Tourism Authority Chairman Ahmed AL-Khateeb, the initiative aims to attract over 41 million visitors from 18 countries and generate SAR 73 billion in tourism revenue between May and September.

IATO signs an MoU with Nepal Association of Tour & Travel Agents (NATTA)

Mr Ravi Gosain, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) and Mr. Kumar Mani Thapaliya, President, Nepal Association of Tour & Travel Agents (NATTA) signed the MoU today at Buddhist International Travel Mart (BITM 2025) being held in Kathandu in the presence of Hon'ble Mr Badri Prasad Pandey, Minister of Tourism, Culture, Civil aviation and Mr. Deepak Raj Joshi, CEO, Nepal Tourism board.



Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators announces new executive committee for 2025-2027

The Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO) announces the successful completion of its Executive Committee elections for the term 2025-2027. The elections were conducted in a smooth, fair, and transparent manner under the supervision of the appointed Election Officer, Mr. Sanjeev Kumar (Advocate).

Korea Tourism Organization appoints Hina Khan as honorary ambassador in India

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) appoints Indian actress and celebrated media personality Ms. Hina Khan as the Honorary Ambassador of Korea Tourism from India for the term May 2025 to April 2026. The official appointment ceremony takes place on 9 May 2025 at the KTO Seoul Center (HiKr Ground), in the presence of Mr Andrew JH Kim, Acting Executive VP, International Tourism Division, KTO.

Congratulations on Hina Khan's Appointment as Honorary Ambassador of Korea Tourism **Hina Khan 한국관광 명예홍보대사 위촉식**





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COMMUNIQUÉ



Disney and Formula 1 team up for Mickey & Friends launch in 2026

Disney's Mickey Mouse is one of the most beloved and recognizable characters of all time, so fans can look forward to seeing Mickey & Friends in the high-speed world of Formula 1 through experiences, content, and merchandise around the globe.

Norwegian Cruise Line begins summer cruises to Alaska, Europe on new ships

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) unveils brand-new, post dry-dock images of Norwegian Breakaway and Norwegian Bliss during the 2025 summer travel season showcasing the company's commitment to delivering guests MORE to do and MORE to enjoy.



Shirui Lily Festival returns in 2025 with enhanced security and cultural showcases

After a two-year hiatus, the much-anticipated Shirui Lily Festival is set to return in full bloom, with the Manipur Tourism Department announcing that comprehensive security arrangements will be in place to ensure the safe and successful conduct of the five-day event.



Vietnam Airlines strengthens South India presence with new nonstop flights from Hyderabad to Hanoi

Strengthening its footprint in the Indian market, Vietnam Airlines launches direct flight services from Hyderabad to Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, starting 7th May 2025. This new route marks the airline's fourth gateway in India — following Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru, and reinforces its commitment to enhancing connectivity between India and Vietnam.



House of Travel Bahrain partners with QuadLabs to launch its next-gen corporate travel platform, HOTBizz.

House of Travel (HOT), a leading travel management company in the Middle East, has partnered with QuadLabs, a global travel technology leader, to launch its dedicated corporate travel platform – HOTBizz.





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Shhh... The New Buzzword is *Silence* (Tourism)

In a world where notifications are constant, playlists play in loops, and every vacation seems to scream for Instagram likes, a new trend is quietly tiptoeing in- Silence Tourism. Yes, you heard it right or maybe you didn't, and that's exactly the point. Welcome to the hush-hush world of travel where peace is the new luxury, silence is the latest indulgence, and less noise equals more soul.

- *Bharti Sharma*



Mute Mode: Activated

Silence tourism is not just about turning off your phone or avoiding talkative tour guides. It's a conscious travel experience that prioritizes solitude, quietude, and inner reflection. Think monasteries in the Himalayas, no-talking retreats in the Italian countryside, or remote forest cabins in Finland where even the wind respects your space. This movement is less about sightseeing and more about insight-seeing- exploring the stillness within.

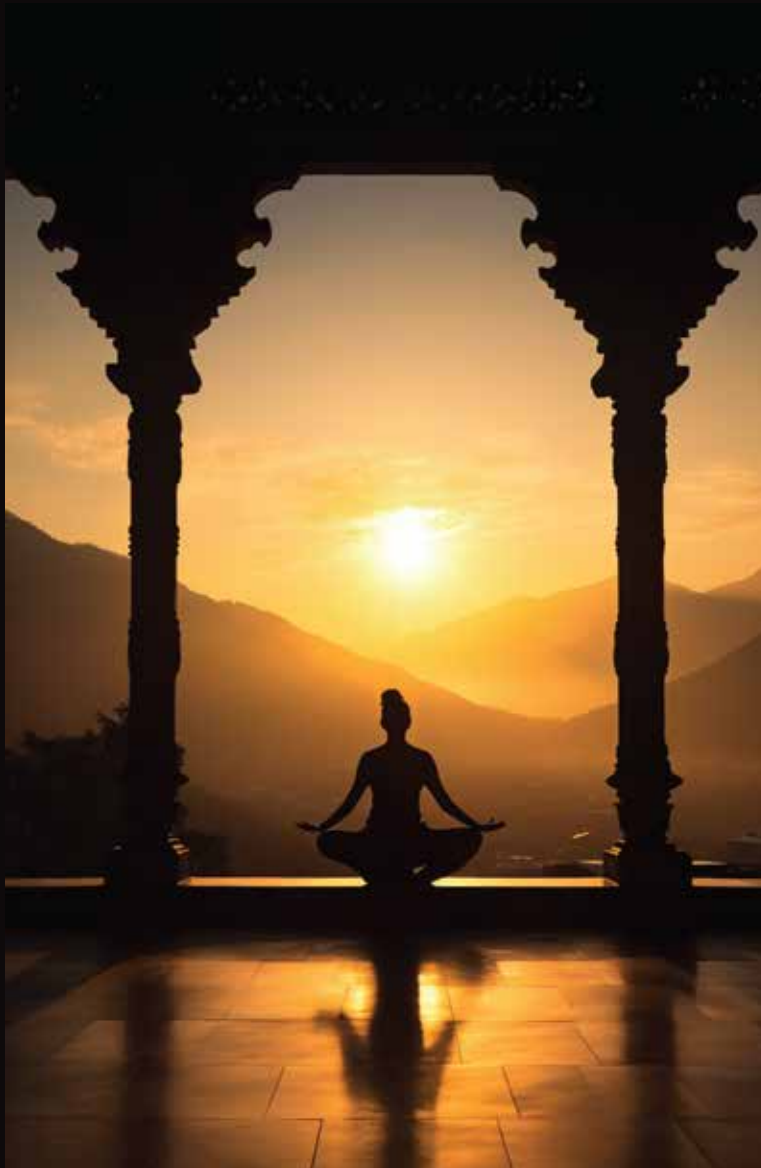
From Chaos to Calm

Let's be honest- the modern human is fried. Between doomscrolling, work calls that "could've been emails," and the anxiety buffet of modern life, the brain craves an escape. Silence tourism answers this desperate call. It's not just travel; it's therapy, detox, and a quiet revolution rolled into one.

According to the World Health Organization, noise pollution is now the second biggest environmental threat to human health in Europe after air pollution. That's not just annoying; that's alarming. No wonder people are craving decibels of nothingness.

Show Me the (Silent) Money

Silence tourism, once a niche tucked under wellness or spiritual travel, is now carving a market of its own. While it's tough to pin down a distinct market size (since



it often overlaps with wellness retreats, spiritual journeys, and mindful getaways), the global wellness tourism market is projected to hit \$1.4 trillion by 2027. Within that, silent retreats and no-speaking zones are seeing a significant uptick- especially post-pandemic.

Booking platforms report a growing interest in digital detox holidays, silent yoga retreats, and off-the-grid forest bathing stays. Airbnb saw a 41 per cent increase in stays tagged "secluded" or "off-grid". Google searches for "silent retreats near me" have grown exponentially since 2022. Let's just say, the silence is golden and lucrative.

Where the Loud Crowd Isn't

If your idea of a vacation includes no itineraries, no selfies, and definitely no small talk, here are a few whisper-worthy destinations:

- Vipassana Meditation Centres, Worldwide: 10-day silent retreats where even eye contact is off the menu.
- Monasteries in Bhutan and Ladakh: Where monks speak less and mean more.
- Aare, Sweden & Finnish Lapland: Frozen landscapes and the loudest sound is your heartbeat.
- Dharamkot, India: The unofficial capital of quiet introspection, with forest trails and healing vibes.
- Tuscany's No-Talk Farms: Where the only moos come from cows.



Whispers of Wellness

When was the last time you heard your own thoughts? Silence has proven psychological and physiological benefits. Studies show that just 2 minutes of silence can be more relaxing than listening to music. It lowers cortisol levels, reduces blood pressure, boosts creativity, and improves sleep. Some neuroscientists even claim that silence helps regenerate brain cells in the hippocampus (hello, better memory!).

For people constantly overstimulated by modern life, silence isn't just peaceful — it's restorative.

Not for the Faint-Hearted

Here's the catch — silence tourism isn't all spa robes and mountain views. Doing nothing can be confronting. When the external noise dims, the internal chatter gets loud. People often face buried emotions, unresolved grief, or big life questions. But that's where the magic lies.

As one seasoned silence traveler puts it, "It's the vacation that made me cry the most — and grow the most."

No WiFi. No Agenda. No Problem.

The joy of silence tourism isn't just in the silence- it's in the freedom from performance. No need to check in, dress up, or pretend you're having the time of your life for the 'gram. It's just you, maybe a journal, a tree, and the soft whisper of wind through leaves. More luxury properties and boutique retreats are also catching on, offering silent rooms, "no-talking floors," or even scheduled hours of no speech, no screens, and no artificial sound. It's not backward- it's forward by being still.

The Future Is (Quietly) Bright

Silence tourism may not be everyone's cup of green tea, but for an increasing tribe of travellers, it's the soulful pause their life needed. As the world gets louder, in climate crisis, political chaos, and digital distractions-choosing silence is not escapism. It's resilience. It's rebellion. And in this fast world, maybe slowing down and shutting up is the bravest thing we can do.

So the next time someone asks, "Where are you off to?"

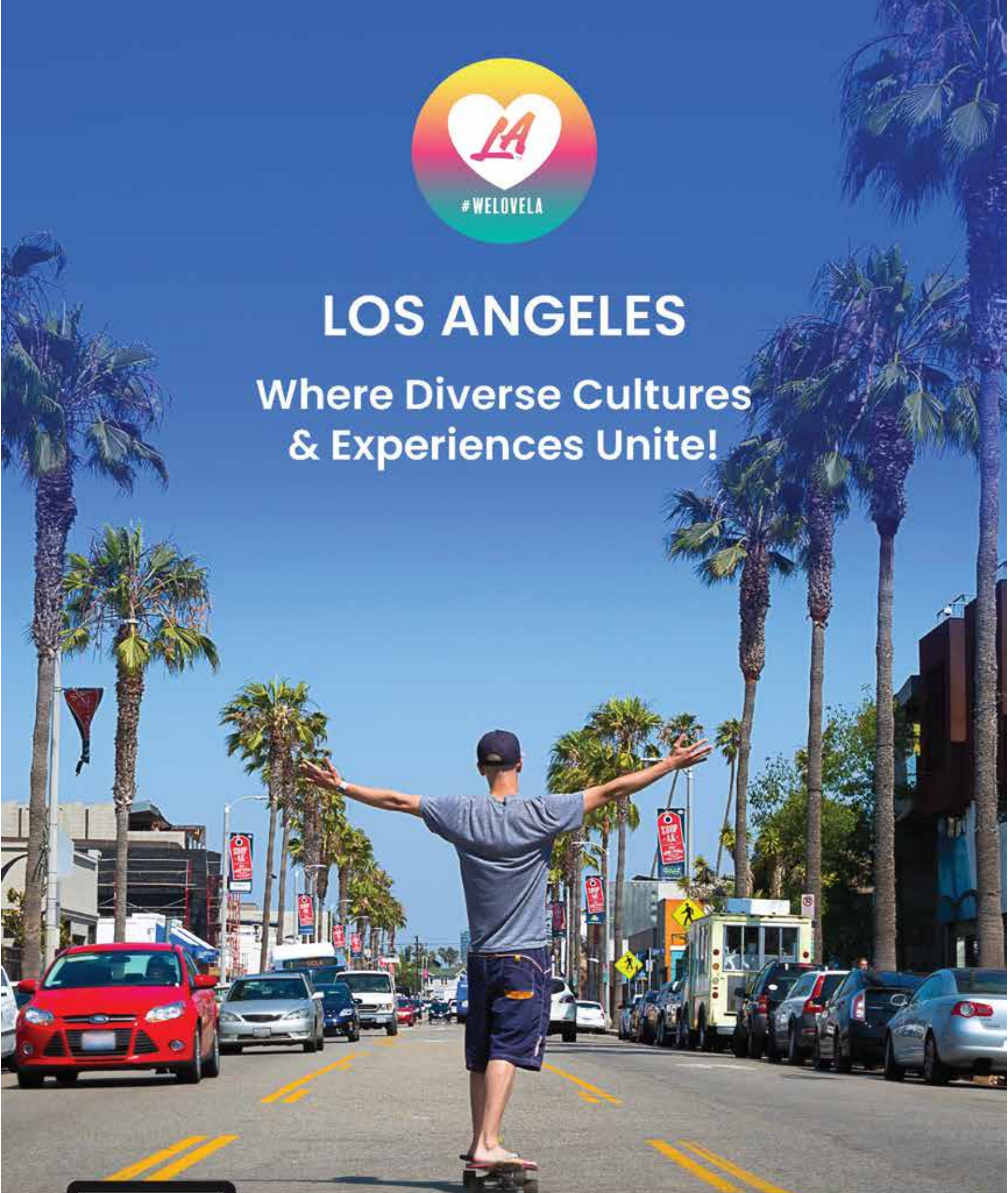
Just smile and say, "Nowhere loud."





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Alpe d'Huez

Where the Snow Sings, the Cheese Melts,
and the Heart Soars

A love letter to the sunny side of the
French Alps, where even beginners dare
to ski and raclette tastes like home.

- *Bharti Sharma*



A Soft Place to Fall (In Love with Skiing)

They call it L'Île au Soleil, The Island of the Sun. Perched at 1,860 metres in the French Alps, Alpe d'Huez is no tropical escape, but it's where the snow glistens like scattered diamonds, and the skies stay impossibly blue even in April. I arrived with spring in my suitcase and a quiet fear of skis in my heart. But the little alpine town welcomed me like a warm croissant, flaky nerves and all.

Slopes of Courage: Where Beginners Glide with Grace

For a town that's home to the legendary Sarenne (the longest black run in Europe), Alpe d'Huez is incredibly kind to beginners. I started on gentle nursery slopes, where even my anxious snowplough turns earned polite nods from instructors. What surprised me wasn't just the progress- it was the quiet confidence that crept in with every glide. By day two, I wasn't just keeping up; I was leading. (Yes, the group might debate that, but I choose my truth.)

Footprints on Frost: Discovering the Joy of Snow Hiking

Snow hiking felt like a whisper of adventure, a slow-paced walk through frosted forests, snowshoes crunching gently underfoot. Except it wasn't slow. It was heart-pumping, soul-lifting, and, at times, breath-stealing. I surprised myself by being the fastest in the group, as if the mountain knew I needed a win. With every step through the pine-scented silence, I felt lighter, braver, more alive.

The Ice Cave That Sparked Childlike Wonder

Hidden beneath the glacier at 2,700 metres lies La Grotte de Glace- a wonderland carved entirely from ice. Each chamber is a story sculpted into stillness—dinosaurs, athletes, creatures of mythology, all frozen mid-thought. It's the kind of place where adults rediscover awe, and selfies feel like postcards from a



dream. My hands froze, but my heart melted.

Raclette Reverie: The Cheese That Stole the Evening

You haven't truly been to Alpe d'Huez until you've surrendered to raclette. In a cozy tavern wrapped in alpine charm, I watched molten cheese pour like golden silk over potatoes, gherkins, and bread. The conversation around the table was warm, wine-fuelled, and glowing. In that moment, everything else melted away, except the cheese.

Spa Whispers and Quiet Restorations

After days of tumbling down slopes and conquering trails, the spa felt like a sacred pause. There was no dramatic music, no Instagram theatrics—just the gentle hush of steam, warm stones, and the quiet kindness of being still. My muscles thanked me, my mind exhaled, and my skin glowed with something gentler than sunburn: peace.



The Village That Dances After Dark

When the skis are off, Alpe d'Huez doesn't slip into silence. It hums with a laid-back charm. Cobblestoned lanes lead to little wine bars, chocolatiers, ski boutiques, and bakeries. You'll find souvenirs and smiles in equal measure. And if you time it right, you might just catch Tomorrowland Winter- where electronic beats echo through snow-covered valleys, turning this sleepy town into a dreamscape.

An April Affair to Remember

April in Alpe d'Huez is a paradox of seasons- snow underfoot, sun on your cheeks, and the slow bloom of spring in every balcony flower box. It's the kind of place that makes you want to write postcards, ski a little longer, and maybe stay for one more plate of fondue.

Final Words from the Girl Who Skied Into Spring

I came to Alpe d'Huez uncertain. I left a little braver, a little brighter, and a lot more in love with the mountains. If you're looking for a place where the snow feels personal, where even the clumsiest skier finds their rhythm, and where melted cheese becomes a form of therapy — this is it.

Pack your boots, your sense of wonder, and yes, maybe a bit of SPF. The Alps are waiting.

Turtle's Travel Snippets

Because some moments deserve a box of their own

- Alpe d'Huez made me fall in love with skiing, one tumble at a time.
- Raclette is not a dish. It's a warm, cheesy embrace from the Alps.
- I came for snow. I found clarity.
- La Grotte de Glace reminded me: the world still holds quiet magic.





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TRAVEL THERAPY

Brussels

Belgium's best-kept secret!

From iconic landmarks to hidden gems, this city offers an experience that's indulgent and inspiring for every Indian traveller's bucket list.

- Naina Nath





Surrounded by European favourites like France, Germany and the Netherlands, Belgium often finds itself neatly slotted into travel itineraries thanks to its prime location and seamless train connections. Cities are compact, travel is easy, and that high-speed Paris-Brussels-Amsterdam triangle is too convenient to ignore. It would be a mistake to treat Belgium as just a transit point. With its striking Gothic architecture, time-frozen medieval towns, and a culinary culture that punches well above its weight, Belgium holds its own among Europe's top destinations. Indian travellers are warming up to Belgium, and not just as a stop on their whirlwind Europe tour. Yes, Brussels still pulls in business travellers—it is the EU's political heart, after all—but there's more driving this uptick. Bollywood has had its say, with several films shot in Bruges and Brussels, and there's growing interest in luxury holidays, MICE trips, and even Indian weddings. Traditionally, most Indians squeeze in a quick one or two night stay, usually in Brussels, but let's be honest, that's barely enough time to scratch the surface. With better flight connections and niche interests like war history, Belgian chocolates, and even Tintin drawing attention, Belgium is slowly earning its place as more

than just a pitstop.

Brussels, for me, was a surprise, the best kind. It felt like the best of all worlds: a little bit of France, a touch of the Netherlands, some German precision, and yet entirely its own. The people are effortlessly cool, the food is downright addictive, the streets are buzzing, and the beer? Don't even get me started. Between comic book murals peeking from alley walls and Art Nouveau houses scattered across quiet neighbourhoods, the city has a way of catching you off guard, in the best possible way. From where to stay, what to do, and how to make the most of your time in this wonderful European capital. Here are some top recommendations:

The Belgian beer world experience

If you're in Brussels and even mildly curious about beer, Belgian Beer World is worth a visit. Located inside the striking old stock exchange building, La Bourse, it's one of those places that surprises you right from the start. You're stepping into a national obsession, told through interactive exhibits, playful installations, and stories that explain why beer here is more than just a drink.

It doesn't feel like a museum at all, more like an interactive experience that's fun to walk through. You'll learn about the brewing process, the different styles Belgium is



famous for, and what makes the country's approach to beer so distinct. (For starters, Belgium uses four types of fermentation; no other country does that.) The exhibits even help you discover your own taste profile and match it with beers you're likely to enjoy.

Belgium produces more beer brands than any other country in the world, and it's not just about quantity. There's real creativity here, rooted in tradition but open to experimentation. That cultural importance is why UNESCO gave Belgian beer culture an Intangible Cultural Heritage status. After the exhibits, head up to the rooftop bar for one of the city's best views and trade your ticket for a 33cl glass of beer from a selection of 150 varieties. It's relaxed, the music's great, and the setting alone is worth the visit.

It's a great way to spend an afternoon; interesting, easygoing, and with a cold beer waiting at the finish line.

Choco-Story Brussels: A treat for all ages

On the sweeter side of Brussels is Choco-Story, a museum devoted entirely to the journey of chocolate. Choco-Story is a great way to spend an afternoon in the city. From its roots in ancient civilisations to its transformation into the iconic Belgian praline, the museum takes you on a multi-sensory voyage. It's

informative, interactive, and yes, delicious.

The visit starts with a self-guided tour, where you can see more than 500 objects related to cocoa and chocolate.

Displays are well-organised, and the audio guide keeps things clear and engaging. You'll learn how cocoa trees were first cultivated, how chocolate arrived in Europe, and how Belgium became such a major player in the chocolate world.

Real chocolate craftsmanship is on display here. Live demonstrations by expert chocolatiers let visitors witness pralines being made from scratch, with plenty of samples to go around. For those looking for a more hands-on experience, the museum offers workshops where you can craft your own chocolate creations.

The chocolate-making workshop is the true highlight: with the help of a professional chocolatier, you can create your own chocolate treats, from lollipops to tablets, with access to a buffet of toppings. Our workshop was a delicious success! And the best part? Everything you create, you get to take home with you. It's a great activity for both adults and children.

If you love chocolate or just enjoy trying something different, Choco-Story is a fun, tasty way to explore the sweet part of Belgian culture.

Tootbus: A smarter way to see the city

Tootbus offers a relaxed, panoramic way to explore Brussels, ideal for first-time visitors or anyone short on time. The hop-on hop-off service allows you to see the city's major landmarks at your own pace.

Several Tootbuses operate across the city at any given time, making it easy to catch the next one without long waits. You can move conveniently from one attraction to the next, hopping on and off as you please. It's an efficient and flexible way to explore the city without worrying about transport.

Buses are 100% electric, with free Wi-Fi on board and audio guides available in 11 languages, including special commentary for kids. The upper deck is open-air, equipped with closable roofs and blankets on colder days, perfect for taking in the view comfortably. The Tootbus' mobile app lets you track buses in real-time, plan routes, and access your pass digitally. The ticket includes access to four self-guided walking tours through areas like the Grand Place, the Sablon district, and the European Quarter. These Tootwalks are a great way to get closer to the comic murals and the Art Nouveau architecture that Brussels is known for.

Even as a skeptical traveller, this turned out to be one of the most convenient and surprisingly enjoyable ways to experience Brussels.

Inside the Atomium: Brussels' most iconic structure

The Atomium doesn't look like anything else you've seen — and that's the point. Built for the 1958 World Expo, this futuristic structure was only meant to stand for six months. More than six decades later, it's still the most visited attraction in Brussels, and one of the most recognisable buildings in Europe.

At 120m tall, it represents an iron crystal magnified 165 billion times. Nine massive stainless-steel spheres are connected by futuristic tubes containing escalators, stairs and a lift. Inside, six spheres are open to visitors, featuring exhibitions on Expo 58, science, design, and digital art. The highlight? A light show inside the escalator tunnels, a kaleidoscope of colour and motion that turns the journey itself into an immersive, otherworldly experience.

The top sphere has floor-to-ceiling views of Brussels and a restaurant with the best seat in the city. The Atomium is also beautifully lit at night with nearly 3,000 LEDs, resembling a space station floating above the city. Right next door is Mini-Europe and the Design Museum Brussels.

It's one of those places that stay with you — part monument, part time machine, and still unlike anything else in the world. It's hard to describe until you see it — and even harder to forget once you do.

The perfect stay — Brussels Marriott Hotel Grand Place

Brussels Marriott Hotel Grand Place is right where you want to be — in the vibrant heart of the city, surrounded by its most iconic sights, shopping streets, and cultural spots. The hotel is modern, spacious, and comfortable, with everything you'd expect from a top international brand, plush beds, great bathrooms, fast Wi-Fi, and a 24-hour gym. Each morning, a generous breakfast buffet is ready to kickstart your day, offering plenty of international options. The concierge team is always on hand to help with restaurant recommendations, local tips, or anything else you need to make your visit smoother.

Step outside and you're just moments away from the stunning Grand Place, the historic square that forms Brussels' beating heart. Nearby, you'll find the quirky Manneken Pis statue and the colorful comic strip trail. The area is also packed with museums, lively cafes, traditional Belgian beer bars, and buzzing nightlife, giving you plenty of options after hours.

Getting around is effortless thanks to the hotel's proximity to key metro and train stations, and the nearby Tootbus stop means you can easily hop on one of the city's iconic sightseeing buses. Whether you're in Brussels for business or leisure, the Brussels Marriott Hotel Grand Place delivers comfort and service that keeps you coming back.

Tasty bites and iconic sights

Belgian fries are a must-try, and Fritland is one of the most popular spots (expect a line!), but is worth the wait. For waffles, head to Gaufres & Waffles or Waffle Factory for delicious, freshly made treats. Belgium is famous worldwide for its beer, and places like Beer Central and Delirium offer a vast selection, including the local favourite cherry beer. Of course, you can't miss the Belgian chocolate and Cuberdons, with plenty of shops around the city. Brussels also celebrates its rich comic strip culture, so keep an eye out for Tintin, Asterix & Obelix, and the Smurfs in murals and shops around the city! The Manneken Pis statue, a cheeky little boy peeing, is one of the city's most famous icons, appearing on souvenirs, balloons, and even waffles! Nearby, Jeanneke-Pis offers a fun female counterpart. And of course, don't miss the Grand Place, a stunning UNESCO World Heritage site surrounded by impressive 17th-century buildings rebuilt after 1695; it's truly the heart of Brussels. Time flies in Brussels, each moment packed with flavour and fun, and it's no surprise that every visit feels far too short. So if your next European journey has you passing through Belgium, do yourself a favour: stop, stay, and savour. Brussels may be in the middle of it all, but it deserves to be front and centre.

Come for the beer and chocolate. Stay for everything else.



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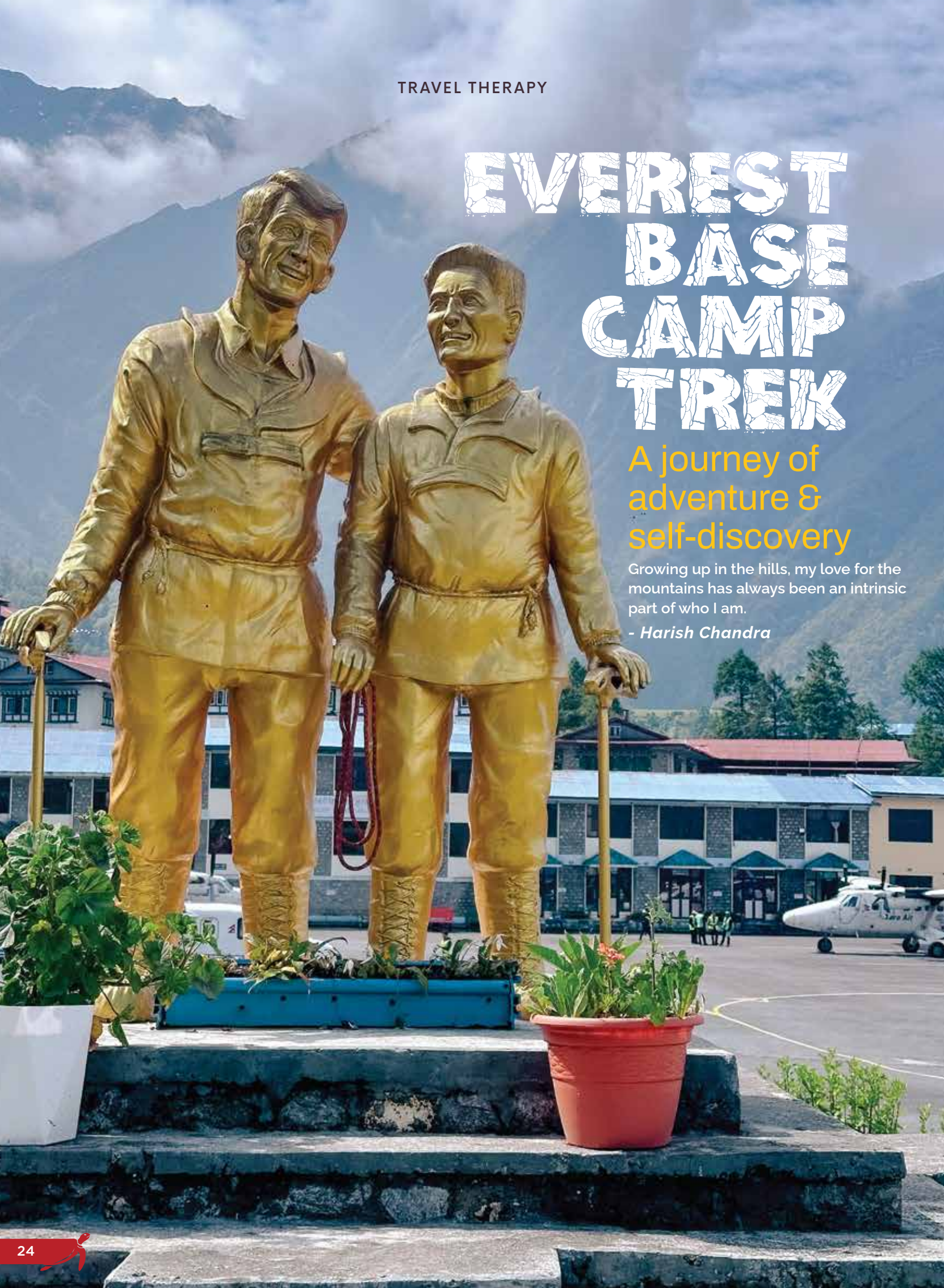
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EVEREST BASE CAMP TREK

A journey of
adventure &
self-discovery

Growing up in the hills, my love for the mountains has always been an intrinsic part of who I am.

- Harish Chandra



Trekking and exploring rugged terrains comes naturally to me, and over the years, I have completed remarkable expeditions such as the Chadar Trek in Leh and Roopkund in Uttarakhand, among others. Yet, there was one trek that had remained on my bucket list for far too long—Everest Base Camp (EBC). The opportunity finally arrived when my friend Rupak Sen expressed his desire to embark on this trek. Without hesitation, I convinced two more friends, Sanjay Dimri and Vikram Varma, to join us. The idea of escaping the scorching heat of Delhi to the crisp air of Nepal's mountains was too tempting to resist.

The journey begins

Our adventure commenced with a flight from Delhi to Kathmandu, where we received a warm welcome from Mr Kumar Thapa of Himalayan 360, the team responsible for organising our trek. After a relaxing night in Kathmandu, we boarded a small aircraft bound for Lukla, a flight that lasted merely an hour but turned out to be one of the most thrilling experiences of the journey. Flying low over Nepal's lush green valleys, meandering rivers, and towering Himalayan peaks, the aerial view was nothing short of a scene out of a story book. All 17 passengers aboard, the flight was brimming with excitement, ready to embark on the 13-day adventure ahead. Our seasoned guide, Mr Bir Bahadur, with over 15 years of experience, briefed us on what lay ahead.

Landing at Lukla Airport, widely regarded as one of the world's most dangerous airports due to its short runway and steep approach, was an adrenaline rush in itself. The moment we stepped foot in Lukla, the adventure truly began.

Away from the chaos

Over the next nine days, we trekked approximately 90 kilometres, traversing stunning landscapes and gaining altitude from 1,400 meters to 5,545 meters. We passed through Phakding, Namche Bazaar, Dingboche, Lobuche, and Gorakshap, each place offering breathtaking scenery and unique experiences. The journey was filled with emotions — excitement, joy, exhaustion, and



occasional frustration. Harsh weather conditions, freezing winds, and altitude sickness made the last two days exceptionally difficult. Breathing became laboured, headaches and nausea set in, and fatigue weighed us down. But reaching Everest Base Camp, standing in the shadow of the world's highest peak, was an indescribable joy—a moment of sheer triumph.

One of the most surreal moments of the trek was witnessing a small avalanche. As we trekked through the rugged terrain, a distant rumble caught our attention, growing louder within seconds. A portion of ice and rock came sliding down the mountain, sending a cloud of powdery snow billowing into the air. Though it was a controlled, minor slide, the sight was both awe-inspiring and humbling, a stark reminder of nature's unpredictable power. Watching the snow settle and the trail become eerily silent again left us with a deep respect for the mountains and their might.

Untouched beauty

Every step on this trek revealed nature's untouched beauty—dense pine forests, cascading rivers, charming villages perched on hillsides, glaciers shimmering under the sun, and endless views of snow-clad peaks. Horses, yaks, and mountain goats accompanied us along the trails, reinforcing how deeply connected human life remains with nature here.

A surprising aspect of the trek was the diverse group of travellers we met along the way. Unlike popular Indian trekking routes, EBC saw fewer Indian trekkers but a significant presence of international travellers spanning ages from their twenties to seventies.

One of my most memorable encounters was with a three-generation family from the United States—a 74-year-old grandfather, his middle-aged son and his 25-year-old granddaughter trekking together. Another inspiring duo was a father and son from Indore, aged 68 and 30, embracing the challenge together. Meeting a solo female traveller from Dubai, exploring Nepal for 25 days, was equally intriguing. Each had a story to share, a reason that brought them here, and an experience that left them transformed.

TRAVEL THERAPY

Stay of a lifetime

Despite the challenging terrain, the hospitality throughout the trek was exceptional. Small lodges along the way offered well-equipped kitchens and diverse menus, far exceeding our expectations for such remote locations. The porters, the true backbone of Himalayan expeditions, displayed immense strength, carrying loads far beyond their weight across rugged trails where even walking felt like a challenge.

The ultimate test

During our trek, we encountered athletes preparing for the Everest Marathon, an annual event held at Everest Base Camp on May 29 to commemorate the historic first ascent by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Sir Edmund Hillary in 1953. With its starting point at 5,401 meters, it's recognised as one of the highest and toughest races in the world, covering distances of 60 km – 42 km (full marathon), and 21 km (half marathon) across rugged Sherpa trails. Witnessing participants gear up for this challenge was truly inspiring.

The helicopter descent

After completing our summit, we opted for a helicopter ride instead of the four-day return trek. In just 10 minutes, we soared between mountain peaks, witnessing the Himalayas from an eagle's perspective—a surreal experience, encapsulating the grandeur and serenity of the mountains in ways no trek could.

Connecting with inner self

This trek was far more than just an adventure—it was a profound journey of self-discovery. As we ascended through remote trails, completely cut off from the world, I found myself immersed in deep introspection. The stillness of the mountains, the simplicity of life around me, and the solitude away from digital distractions allowed me to reflect on my strengths, weaknesses, endurance, and resilience.

Each step taught me something new about myself—my mental fortitude, adaptability, and willpower at the age of 52! Standing at Everest Base Camp, gazing at the



towering peak above, I realised the importance of perseverance, patience, and embracing challenges. It was not just about reaching a physical destination, but about rediscovering myself along the way.

Bidding adieu

The Everest Base Camp Trek was more than just an expedition—it was a life-changing experience, testing my limits and rewarding me with memories that will stay with me forever. For those who seek adventure, challenge, and self-reflection, this trek is worth every step.

Would I do it again? Absolutely.



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OFFSHORE BINOCULARS



A PIECE OF KANDY

A charming hill resort cum cultural centre rolled into one, Kandy offers myriad charms.

- Inder Raj Ahluwalia



OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

It lives in a different time-wrap and manages to do what few places around the world can manage today. It slows one down. Pleasantly!

465 metres above sea level means it is hilly enough. But it is also forested enough, isolated enough, and original enough, which all translates into one big charming destination. Nestling on low hills, it is looped by Sri Lanka's largest river, the Mahaweli, and nature's bounties are reflected through its cascading waterfalls, rivers, lakes hills and valleys.

For a small town, Kandy boasts a long history. Created in the 14th Century, the city became the capital of the Kandayan Kingdom in the 16th Century, and Sri Lankan culture's citadel. The Royal City fell into the hands of the British when the last Kandayan King, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha was captured by them in 1815. The British called it Kandy for Kanda in Sinhala,

whose literal meaning is a hill.

Several hallowed and living shrines of Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, and Muslims dot Kandy and its environs.

The city is particularly important for Buddhists, thanks to the famed 16th Century Temple of the Sacred Tooth (Dalada Maligawa), the lodestar of the Buddhists. One of the most spectacular sections of the temple; the Patthirippuwa or the Octagon, was added by the King of Kandy in the early 19th Century, and a golden canopy was recently constructed over the relic chamber. To the accompaniment of flute and drum music, rituals are enacted daily in the temple to venerate the relic. July/August each year sees public honour to the temple paid through the Procession of the Month of Esala (Esala Perahera).

The local lake is a landmark, and straddling it on two sides are Sri

Lanka's two most important Buddhist Monasteries, their chief incumbents being the senior ecclesiastics of the Buddhist Order in Sri Lanka. The Asigiriya Temple which is situated on the city's western side at Asgiriya, contains a giant statue of the Recumbant Buddha, and also the cremation ground of the Kandyan royalty. The Malwatta monastery on the lake's southern side is embellished with 18th Century architectural design and planning. The higher ordination of the sangha, the monks, takes place annually in both these temples.

Known as the 'western shrines', the 14th Century Embekke, Gadaladeniya, and Lankatilaka Temples, are located close together on the Kadugannawa-Peradeniya road, 16 km west of Kandy. Set on a rock, Gadaladeniya is built of stone and has a seated Buddha image, lacquered doors, wall murals and carved stone friezes. Lankatilaka is a magnificent

though peculiarly designed, white three-storey brick building that shines against the blue background. Amidst the painted wooden doors and wall and ceiling frescoes in the shrine room is a superb seated image of the Buddha. The Embekke Temple is a Deistic shrine dedicated to God Kataragama, well known for its carved wooden intricately designed pillars which leap to life with dancers, musicians, wrestlers, legendary beasts, and birds.

Of great historic interest is Dodanwela Devale, the site where King Rajasinha of Kandy offered his crown to the Presiding God after his great victory over the Portuguese in the 17th Century. The 15th Century Suriyagoda Vihara, the rock-perched Hindagala Temple, and Gangarama and Degaldoruwa Temples - both famous for Kandayan murals and Buddha images - and Galmadauwa, and Medawela Viharas, are also the region's notable shrines.



OFFSHORE BINOCULARS

A host of interesting exhibits is stored in the National Museum, housed in what were once the quarters of the royal concubines, and also in the Archaeological Museum, comprised of the remains of the splendid royal palace of the Kandayan Kings. The Audience Hall is a unique example of wooden architecture of the Kandayan period, and the site of the memorable 1815 Kandayan Convention.

The former pleasure gardens of a Kandayan Queen, the Royal Botanical Gardens are a 150-acres oasis, with landmarks like the Octagon House, the Great Palm Avenue, the Orchid House and the Pergola. The must-visit gardens are lush with cannas, hibiscus, and crotons.

The arts and crafts, music, dance and song which flourished during the reign of the patron king, are still amply present in the town. At the Kandayan Art Association, one can buy the work of skilled craftsmen, and also see weavers, copper, brass and silversmiths at work. Laksala, the Government Handicrafts Shop, is another good sales outlet. At Kalapuraya Nattarampota, 7 km from Kandy, is a settlement of craftsmen who produce their work in their own rhythms, in their own homes, just like in olden times.

The lake accounts for much of Kandy's beauty, and there's scenic splendour all around. The tea-plantation heights of Hantane; Hunnasgiriya Falls; the mountain plateau of Hanguranketa, Katugastota, and Halloluwa, where the road winds past precipitous heights; and the Dumbara Valley, all feature immense natural beauty. Coconut, rubber and tea plantations merge into the forested hillsides of Udawattakele, and at Bahirawakanda, the untamed mountain abode of the Guardian deity of the land.

Fact File

- Kandy lies 129 km from Colombo, Sri Lanka's main gateway, and is a three-hour drive along a picturesque route. Colombo is connected by air with several international cities.
- The best way to see the town is on foot.
- Local accommodation comprises everything from deluxe down to budget hotels and guest-houses.
- Several restaurants around town serve authentic local cuisine, and also Indian and other Asian dishes.
- While Kandy is a year-round tourist destination, the best time to visit is from October through April.



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.





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EVENT AFFAIR

GITB 2025 lights up Jaipur

The Pink City turned Technicolor this May as Jaipur hosted the 14th edition of the Great Indian Travel Bazaar (GITB) from May 4 to 6. Over 280 international buyers from 50+ countries mingled with 300 Indian sellers in an arena that buzzed with excitement and opportunity.

- Tripti Jain



EVENT AFFAIR

Far more than just a travel trade event, GITB 2025 became a theatrical showcase of India's inbound tourism potential, where cultures collided, ideas flourished, and global partnerships took root. Held at the sprawling Jaipur Exhibition and Convention Centre (JECC), this year's edition was a hub of business and networking.

Where business found its groove

Inside the high-ceilinged convention halls, the real action unfolded, 11,000-plus B2B meetings that stitched the world closer to India. Travel companies pitched not with cold data but with warm stories, with booths designed like palaces, temples, and forests that evoked emotion at every turn. The conversations were sincere, driven by an eagerness to collaborate, not just transact.

The MICE effect: A new India rising

The showstopper this year was the 'Meet in India' MICE conclave, a high-powered forum that unfolded on May 4 at Hotel Novotel. In the presence of Rajasthan's Deputy Chief Minister and Tourism Minister



HH Diya Kumari and Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, the narrative shifted from leisure to leadership.

The conclave saw tourism stakeholders, policy heads, and global experts deep-dive into how India could become the next MICE giant. With world-class venues, improving infrastructure, and unmatched hospitality, India's potential to host conferences, incentives, and global summits is no longer a dream, it's a strategy.

A love letter to Rajasthan

No one leaves Rajasthan untouched. And GITB ensured that its visiting buyers took home more than contracts, they carried stories. Curated FAM tours by the Rajasthan Association of Tour Operators (RATO) took delegates deep into the state's soul: dawn camel rides, candlelit dinners in forts, quiet moments by Udaipur's lakes, and joyous dances under Jodhpur's starry skies.

State pavilions across the JECC mirrored this warmth. Odisha's vibrant stall turned heads, Madhya Pradesh unveiled wildlife trails, and Gujarat showcased spiritual circuits. The diversity on display was staggering, not just in geography but in emotion, because in India, every destination comes with a heartbeat.



Flying in fast, tuning in deep

This year's GITB also highlighted Jaipur's growing stature as an international gateway. With added flights and improved connectivity to global hubs like Dubai, Bangkok, and Singapore, the city was buzzing with arrivals. Airlines, tour operators, and hoteliers worked in tight sync, proving that the Indian tourism ecosystem is becoming not just bigger, but better coordinated.

Ripples of revival

As GITB drew to a close, its impact was already beginning to show. Industry insiders forecast a robust 8-10 per cent spike in foreign tourist arrivals over the next season, with destination tie-ups and long-term contracts already inked. But more than numbers, it was the sentiment that stood out. Sellers were optimistic, buyers were inspired, and government bodies were aligned in purpose. The event showed that when India showcases itself on its own terms, the world listens.

Curtain call or new chapter!

GITB 2025 wasn't just an event. It was an invitation. An open door to a country that is ancient, agile, and astonishing in equal measure. Jaipur, in all its regal glory, proved to be more than a venue; it was the heartbeat of the event, a reminder of why India is unmatched in hospitality and charm.

As delegates boarded their return flights, Jaipur remained aglow, not just with fairy lights and fireworks, but with the echoes of conversations, the warmth of new friendships, and the promise of future journeys. GITB didn't just put India on the map again. It reminded the world why India never really left the spotlight.



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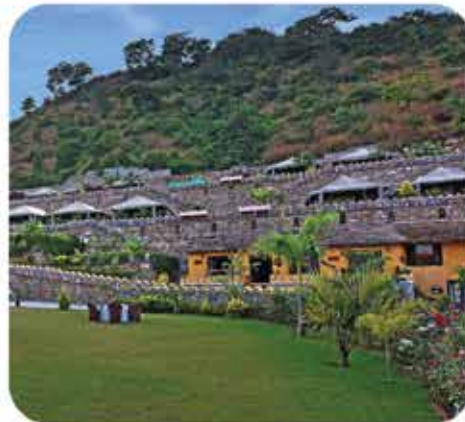
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Rendez-vous en FRANCE 2025

unfolds in Lyon with panache



Sheetal Munshaw

Returning to Lyon, the undisputed culinary capital of France for Rendez-vous en France 2025 was more than a symbolic homecoming. Sheetal Munshaw, Director India, Atout France shares her experience from the show.

- Bharti Sharma





It was a vibrant celebration of culture, collaboration, and connection. For India's travel fraternity, it marked a renewed romance with France, as a robust 32-member Pan-India delegation arrived to experience the country beyond the surface. Sheetal Munshaw shares, "It's such a joy to return to this city, known for its rich gastronomic legacy, and witness how the Indian travel community is engaging with France more deeply than ever. The event offered not just meetings and trade opportunities, but a multisensory journey through France, reaffirming why experiential travel is the new gold standard."

Where travel becomes tactile

Unlike standard trade shows, Rendez-vous en France is built around the concept of immersive discovery. For the Indian delegation, it meant tasting, touching, and traversing through the real France. From snow-dusted ski resorts to cobbled city streets, vineyards to valley views, each moment felt crafted for connection.

Sheetal explains, "Our delegation explored regions far beyond the fairground. They ventured into the ski slopes, explored the beauty of Provence, Occitanie, Auvergne Rhône-Alpes and ended with post-event tours in the French Riviera. That's the power of a platform like this; it brings France

alive in all its diversity. And while business meetings remained central, it was the lived experiences that stirred excitement and imagination."

The rise of immersive India

India's outbound travel preferences are transforming, and France is taking note. From FITs to MICE groups, today's Indian traveller seeks depth—not just destinations. Experiences like grape stomping, vineyard stays, gastronomy trails, and authentic team-building adventures are shaping the future of travel.

She shares, "Experiential travel is not a buzzword anymore, and it's the way India travels. Our travellers are passionate, curious, and want holidays that combine leisure with learning, hobbies, and personal growth. With oenology, gastronomy, fashion, art, and adventure taking center stage, France finds itself uniquely positioned to satisfy these evolving appetites."

The France Connaisseur E-learning Programme

Even as travel becomes more tactile, digital tools are helping professionals become better ambassadors. Atout France's France Connaisseur e-learning programme is one such initiative—offering certification and community to

travel professionals globally. "We encourage Indian agents to sign up for the France Connaisseur programme, obtain a certification, and join a global network of like-minded professionals," said Sheetal. "It's not just about education, it's about creating recognition and opportunities for interaction worldwide," she adds.

From Vine to Vogue

The definition of luxury and indulgence is shifting. For Indian travellers, it's not just about Parisian runways or Michelin-starred dining anymore. There's a growing hunger to discover local labels, explore boutique fashion houses, and dig into regional cuisines that tell stories.

Sheetal shares, "Indian travellers are curious, they want to know what lies beyond the big brands. They're seeking hidden gems, artisanal products, and culinary experiences that reflect local heritage. Whether it's shopping for vintage fashion in Marseille or learning to cook Provençal recipes in Avignon, France offers the perfect canvas for these evolving desires".

Wellness in the wilderness

France's wellness offerings have also captured Indian imaginations. From apple therapy in Normandy to vinotherapy in Bordeaux and alpine

retreats in Auvergne Rhône Alpes. These aren't just spa holidays, they're soulful escapes that rejuvenate and reconnect.

Sheetal shares, "Wellness is becoming more than a trend—it's a lifestyle," remarked Sheetal. "People want to contemplate the mountains, breathe pure air, and spend quiet moments reconnecting with themselves. Whether in the lap of the Alps or nestled within vineyard estates, wellness travel is helping Indians unplug, unwind, and embrace slower, more mindful journeys."

A Rendezvous that resonates

Rendez-vous en France 2025 was a powerful reminder of what travel truly means: exploration, education, and emotional connection. For India and France, it marked a promising chapter in a relationship built on mutual discovery. With deepening engagement, evolving products, and growing enthusiasm on both sides, the future of Indo-French tourism looks nothing short of magnifique.

"As France opens its arms to Indian travellers, it does so with authenticity and warmth and our goal is simple - to ensure that every Indian returns with not just memories, but meaningful moments that last a lifetime," shares Sheetal.



Karan Agarwal

COX & KINGS

IS BACK ON THE MAP!

Once a titan of Indian outbound travel, Cox & Kings is making a bold, heartfelt return to the industry. Karan Agarwal, Director, Cox & Kings share how the brand is reimagining itself with fresh energy, emotional depth, and a laser focus on experience.

- *Tripti Jain*



Cox & Kings is making a comeback but this isn't just a comeback, it's a passionate revival of memories, community, and meaningful travel. Karan shares his unique story of building the brand in a different way. He says, "I come from a background of cement and soaps, but this brand spoke to something deeper, nostalgia, and a connection. I saw an opportunity to revive not just a name, but a sentiment. We've built empires brick by brick, quite literally. Now, we're building experiences."

A NEW PULSE FOR AN OLD SOUL

Cox & Kings once ruled Indian outbound travel. Now, it's recalibrating to fit into the 2025 landscape in a more agile, more digital, but still just as heartfelt. Karan shares, "Travel has become deeply personal post pandemic. People don't want just an itinerary. They want stories, connections, and moments worth retelling. Think slow travel for Gen Z, solo traveller group connections, and curated group tours that feel like a family reunion on foreign soil."

EXPERIENCE OVER EVERYTHING

Comfort is the new luxury. The interest in premium economy, business upgrades, even within group tours is evident. Their goal is to elevate leisure without taking away the warmth of togetherness. "Earlier, families saved for years to take one big vacation. Now, they're taking three a year. The shift from materialism to experience is at the

core which is our refreshed brand philosophy and we are designing every product to reflect that," explains Karan.

BIG BRAND, BOUTIQUE SOUL!

Cox & Kings may carry a legacy brand's weight, but internally, it's still a tight-knit gang of dreamers. Karan highlights about the personalised intent and shares, "We work long hours from a single desk sometimes. It's chaos. It's fun. It's ours. The company's rebirth is similar to raising a baby, but thankfully, my team changes the diapers."

With a small, fiercely committed team, Karan is focused on marrying technology with tradition. He adds, "Our website is getting a facelift. We're enabling real-time bookings, self-serve tools, and combining that with personalised call-based sales. It's tech with a human face."

ALL HANDS ON DECK

From roadshows and mall activations to trade exhibitions and digital blitzes, Cox & Kings isn't playing it safe. The idea is to be everywhere; Karan elaborates on the same idea and says, "We're trying everything. Being a new-old brand gives us the unique edge to experiment. Established companies won't take those risks — we will."

While the immediate focus is outbound and domestic leisure travel, the brand is eyeing MICE and NRI markets next. Furthermore he adds, "We already have 11

franchisees on board. Many of them used to work with Cox & Kings earlier. It's like getting the band back together. We are also resurrecting the classic General Sales Agent (GSA) model, building distribution muscle across Tier-II and Tier-III cities."

THE CULTURE CODE

Cox & Kings wants to be more than just another name in your travel bookmarks. It wants to be your holiday heartbeat. Whether you're planning a solo retreat in Tuscany or a family jaunt through Japan, they want you to feel at home. What sets this reincarnation apart is its heart. Karan's vision is clear: "We're not building a transactional business. We're building an emotional brand. Our service staff doesn't need to ask a manager to change your tea if it's cold. They're empowered. That's how much we care about experience."

He reminisces, "I remember the Cox & Kings of 15 years ago, the warm tour leader, and the excitement of group camaraderie. That's the magic we're bringing back but reimagined for a world that's faster, younger, and yearning for meaning."

BETTER THAN EVER

With a powerful blend of legacy, innovation, and deeply personal leadership, the brand is poised to be not just a player, but a favourite. Karan concludes, "We're not just reviving a company. We're bringing back a feeling. And trust me; we're having a good time doing it."

HEADS IN BEDS

Timeless in BERN

At Hotel Schweizerhof Bern & Spa, heritage isn't just preserved—it's deeply felt.

- Misbaah Mansuri



HEADS IN BEDS

Some hotels promise escape. Others offer elevation. But then there are those rare places that manage to hold both—the charm of a world gone by, seamlessly laced with the energy of now. Hotel Schweizerhof Bern & Spa is that kind of place.

Tucked in the beating heart of Switzerland's capital, it's not merely a luxury hotel. It's a mood. A feeling. A long exhale in the middle of the city's quiet rhythm.

Arrival, reimagined

There's something about arriving in Bern. Maybe it's the cobbled streets underfoot, or the way the Old Town seems to glow under the winter light—stoic yet soft, never trying too hard. The drive from the train station was barely three minutes, and yet, by the time I stepped into the Schweizerhof's entrance, it felt as though I'd been gently nudged into another frequency altogether.

The doors opened not with a dramatic flourish, but with quiet grace. Inside, the lobby hummed with warmth—a soft rustle of coats, the low clink of afternoon coffee cups, the smell of polished wood mixed with faint floral notes. You don't arrive at the Schweizerhof. You arrive into it.

A heritage that breathes

The building has stood in this spot since 1859, but it doesn't feel like it's frozen in time. Instead, the past has been curated—layered into the present with care. High



ceilings, original mouldings, and elegant chandeliers mix with modern furniture, curated art, and that unmistakable Swiss sense of restraint. Luxury here isn't loud. It doesn't need to be.

You sense it in the way you're greeted—never overly formal, but never casual either. My check-in was warm, efficient, and done within minutes. But more importantly, it felt personal. Like I was a returning guest, not a first-time visitor.

A room of one's own

My suite, tucked at the end of a long, quiet hallway, opened with a soft click into a world I didn't know I'd been craving.

Taupe walls. Cashmere throws. A headboard that looked like it belonged in a modern art museum, but felt like the comfiest thing on earth. The windows opened out to a postcard view of Bern's old rooftops and, beyond them, a hint of the snow-dusted Alps.

The bathroom could've passed for a spa—heated floors, a freestanding soaking tub, and lighting that actually made you look like you'd slept eight hours. There were Hermès toiletries, yes, but what struck me most was the scent. Clean, woody, a little spicy. Like someone had bottled the feeling of a fireside in winter.

I unpacked slowly, relishing the room's silence. No humming fridges, no blinking lights. Just the occasional church bell in the distance and the faint sound of the city, muted by snow.



HEADS IN BEDS

Jack's Brasserie: A modern ode to tradition

Dinner that evening was at Jack's Brasserie, the hotel's crown jewel—and rightfully so.

Stepping into Jack's feels like slipping into a different era. There's a cinematic quality to it: the art nouveau lamps, the waiters in white aprons, the buzz of conversation in German, French, and English. But despite its grandeur, the room doesn't intimidate. It draws you in.

I started with a glass of crisp Swiss Riesling and followed with the famed Wiener Schnitzel—a dish so perfectly golden and airy, it practically floated off the plate. Paired with a buttery potato salad and a dollop of lingonberry, it was indulgent without being fussy.

Dessert was a simple crème brûlée—crackly, cold, and perfect. I lingered longer than I meant to, sipping an espresso and watching the room move. There's something about the pace in Bern. Nobody rushes. Not in the streets. Not at Jack's. And certainly not at Schweizerhof.

Slow mornings, soft light

The next morning began with breakfast back at Jack's. A buffet stretched out across a vintage counter—crusty breads, local cheeses, smoked salmon, fresh fruits, and fluffy eggs that actually tasted like eggs. I opted for a cappuccino and found a seat near the window, letting the light pour in and the hours drift.

Later, I wandered through the hotel. Each corner revealed something—a quiet reading nook, a velvet chair by the fire, a black-and-white photo of Bern from a century ago. The Schweizerhof doesn't demand to be seen. It reveals itself to you, one elegant detail at a time.

A rooftop for all seasons

One of the hotel's best-kept secrets is the rooftop terrace. Even in December, it was worth stepping out for. From up there, the entire Old Town unfurled in shades of



slate and snow. Church spires, red-tiled roofs, and the slow swirl of smoke from winter chimneys. It's a view that doesn't ask for your attention—it simply holds it.

A mulled wine in hand, wrapped in a thick blanket, I stood still for a while. There was no music. No background noise. Just the sound of Bern being Bern.

Spa rituals beneath the city

By midday, I was ready for the Schweizerhof's spa—500 square metres of hush and healing. Nestled in the hotel's lower levels, it feels more like a private wellness retreat than an urban spa.

I had booked their signature Hydrathermal Journey followed by a massage. The facilities included a heated pool with underwater jets, an aromatic steam bath, and a Finnish sauna, all designed to lull you into deep, sustained stillness.

The massage was as good as I've ever had. The therapist worked in sync with the natural rhythm of the room, using warm oil and firm, purposeful strokes. I don't remember falling asleep—but I remember waking up lighter.

A different flavour: Kyoyu

For my second dinner, I traded schnitzel for sushi at the Lobby Lounge Bar's new concept — Kyoyu. A Japanese-Latin fusion, it sounded like a bold move for a heritage hotel, but it worked.

I started with yellowtail ceviche kissed with lime and jalapeño, followed by maki rolls that paired wagyu with a whisper of yuzu. There was a sharp elegance to each dish—flavours that danced but never clashed.

The cocktails mirrored the menu's ambition. My pick—a sake-based mix with shiso and passionfruit — was equal parts floral and fiery. The kind of drink that makes you sit up a little straighter.

It struck me then how easily the Schweizerhof manages to bridge the past and the present. Here I was, eating Nikkei cuisine in a bar that's seen over a century of guests pass through—and somehow, it all made sense.





HEADS IN BEDS

A walk through winter

The hotel had organised a city tour earlier that afternoon. Normally, I'd skip such things, but I'm glad I didn't. Our guide, a soft-spoken Bern local, wove stories into streets—pointing out medieval clocks, Einstein's old apartment, and the sandstone arcades that define the Old Town.

We ended at the Christmas market—an affair of twinkling lights, handmade ornaments, and cinnamon-spiced everything. With a paper cup of hot apple cider in hand, I browsed slow, warmed from the inside out.

That night, back in my suite, I took one last bath with the window cracked open. The cold crept in gently, just enough to remind me I was in the Alps. I lit a candle, turned on soft music, and let the bathwater rise.

The departure that lingered

On my final morning, breakfast came to the room. I ate in my robe



— scrambled eggs, buttery toast, and a second coffee I didn't need but couldn't resist.

Checkout was at ten, but I left closer to eleven. Not because I was running late, but because I couldn't quite bring myself to leave. I lingered in the lobby, then the rooftop, then the entrance, dragging out the moment before I stepped back into the world.

There's a German word — *fernweh* — that means longing for a place you haven't yet been. But I think there should be a word for its opposite too. For the ache of leaving a place that feels like it's known you all along.

Hotel Schweizerhof Bern & Spa is that kind of place. Not flashy. Not overproduced. Just quietly, utterly timeless.

And when you leave, you don't just take photos. You carry it with you—in how you move, how you breathe, and how you remember what it feels like to be still in the middle of something beautiful.



Angsana Velavaru

Winning hearts of travellers



Mrinal Shanker

In the dreamy waters of the Maldives, where turquoise lagoons kiss endless skies, Angsana Velavaru stands not just as a luxurious escape. Mrinal Shanker, General Sales Agent, India, Director of Sales, Angsana Velavaru, Maldives.

- Tripti Jain

In the turquoise embrace of the Maldives, Angsana Velavaru feels less like a resort and more like a warm invitation, especially for Indian travellers. From thoughtfully tailored touches to heartfelt hospitality, it's a place where comfort meets culture.

Where romance meets relevance

Indian travellers aren't just looking for beauty, they're looking for belonging. Whether it's a honeymoon in an overwater villa, a destination wedding, or a milestone family trip, Angsana Velavaru has curated every detail

to match Indian aspirations. Mrinal shares, "We've tailored our offerings to resonate with Indian tastes—vegetarian menus, family-friendly experiences, and private celebrations with flair. It's about making every moment feel personal. From lavish lagoon villas to intimate candlelight dinners on the sand, the resort doesn't just offer stays; it offers stories waiting to be told."

Bridging islands and ideas

Behind every Indian booking is a trusted travel advisor. And Mrinal knows this better than anyone. His strategy focuses on empowering India's vibrant B2B network through meaningful engagement. He explains, "We're not selling rooms, we're creating relationships. Through familiarisation trips, agent incentives, and hands-on training, we're helping Indian travel

professionals live the product so they can sell it with passion. From immersive webinars to exclusive FAM invites, the resort is building a community of brand ambassadors across the subcontinent."

The Velavaru vibe

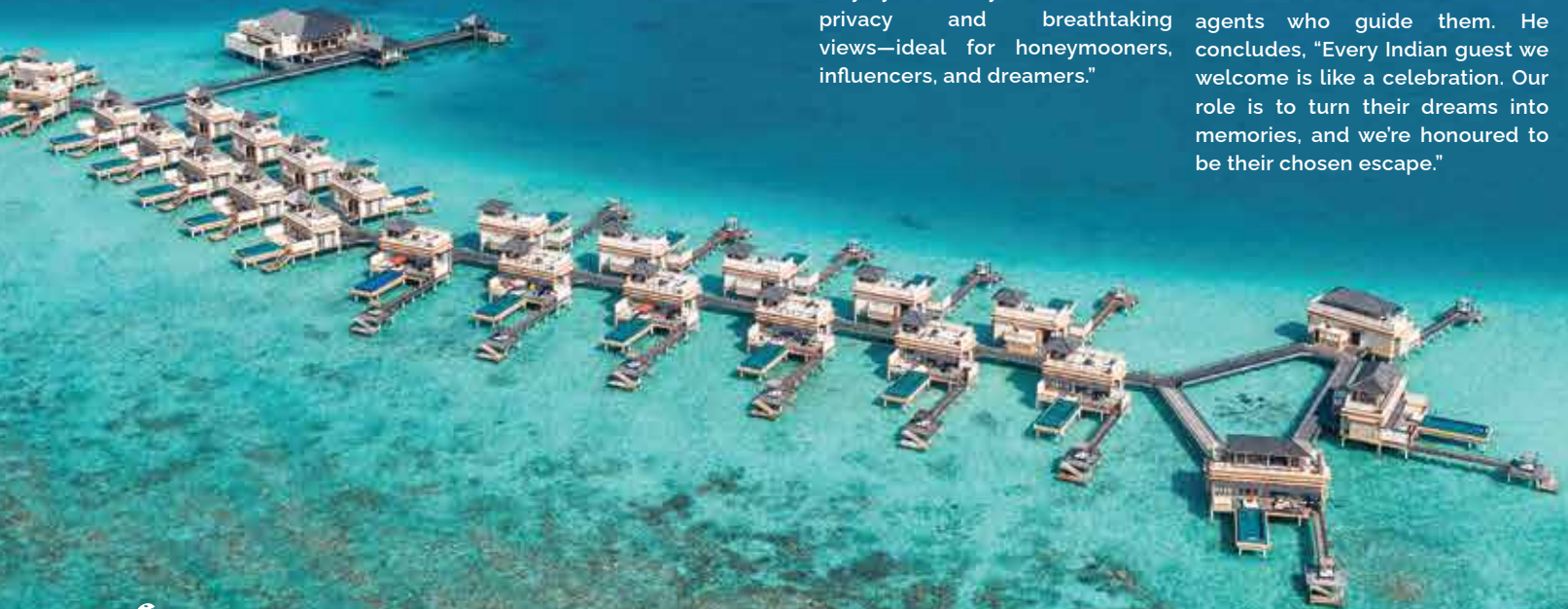
Angsana Velavaru is a destination with purpose. As part of the Banyan Group, the property merges barefoot luxury with responsible tourism. From coral conservation programs to a zero-plastic initiative, the resort invites guests to experience indulgence with intention. Mrinal shares, "Today's Indian traveller is globally aware. They want their luxury with a conscience. At Velavaru, we give them both, the thrill of discovery and the joy of giving back. And let's not forget the crown jewel: InOcean Villas suspended in the middle of the lagoon. Accessible only by boat, they offer unmatched privacy and breathtaking views—ideal for honeymooners, influencers, and dreamers."

India as a growth engine

India is not just a key market, it's a movement. With rising disposable incomes, young explorers, and a growing wedding segment, Mrinal sees the potential for exponential growth. He shares, "We're seeing India take centre stage in the Maldives story. Direct flights, evolving preferences, and an appetite for luxury travel are fuelling this momentum, and we're here for it. Roadshows, trade collaborations, and cultural alignment are ensuring that Angsana Velavaru becomes a name that rolls off every Indian travel planner's tongue."

It's about belonging

In the end, Angsana Velavaru is offering a feeling of being understood. With Mrinal leading the charge in India, the resort is crafting journeys that go beyond the ordinary, resonating deeply with Indian travellers and the agents who guide them. He concludes, "Every Indian guest we welcome is like a celebration. Our role is to turn their dreams into memories, and we're honoured to be their chosen escape."



Discover the charm of Rajasthan



Alleppey

Spice Routes - Luxury Houseboats
Marvel Cruise

Athirapally

Rain Forest Resort

Hassan

Hoysala Village Resort

Idukki

Silver Oak, Nedumkandam

Jaipur

Indana Palace
Rajrasa - A fine dine restaurant

Udaipur

Yaan Wellness Retreat

Munnar

Eastend, Munnar

Mumbai

Fariyas Hotel

Poovar

Poovar Island Resort

Ranthambore

The Kipling Lodge - By Nature Kalp

Thekkady

Carmelia Haven Resort

Kumarakom

Lakesong, Kumarakom

Lonavala

Fariyas Resort

Dausa, Rajasthan

The Clement Dera Village Retreats

Jamba, Rajasthan

The Clement Dera Dunes Retreat

Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

Om Vilas Benares

Marvel Tours

DMC for South India

Mussoorie

Soul Storries - Luxury Wellness Estate



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Director | Hospitality and Marketing Services

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Threads of Time

TAMIL NADU'S HANDLOOM LEGACY

Imagine the rhythmic clatter of looms echoing through sun-drenched courtyards as artisans deftly intertwine threads of history, culture, and artistry.

In Tamil Nadu, experiencing and feeling every thread with the heart is a living tradition. The State's handloom textiles, many bearing the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag, are not mere fabrics but chronicles of a rich woven culture over centuries.

The global journey of Madras Checks

While the British popularised the then Madras for its vibrant plaid-patterned cotton fabrics known as 'Madras Checks,' local weavers had been crafting these lightweight, colourful textiles for generations. Originally used for lungis and turbans, by the 13th century, these fabrics had travelled to the Middle East and Africa, becoming integral to various cultural attire.

The colonial era saw these fabrics gain prominence in Western fashion. In the 1960s, 'Bleeding Madras,' known for its colour-fading property, became a summer staple in

American Ivy League circles, symbolising a blend of casual elegance and global heritage.

The timeless glory of Kancheepuram Silks

Nestled in the temple town of Kancheepuram, artisans have, for centuries, been weaving silk sarees that epitomise opulence and tradition. These sarees, made from pure mulberry silk and real silver zari, are renowned for their durability and intricate designs. The unique korvai (joining or to bind together) technique, where the body and border are woven separately and then interlocked, showcases unparalleled craftsmanship.

Historically patronised by South Indian dynasties, Kancheepuram sarees have been favourites for brides and deities. Today, they continue to be a symbol of cultural pride, passed down through generations as treasured heirlooms.



Madras Check



Madras Check



Kancheepuram Saree

From loom to living room

Rooted in centuries-old traditions, Tamil Nadu's diverse handloom crafts continue to evolve while celebrating the essence of their origins. Bhavani Jamakkalam, known for its durability and bold stripe patterns, was once a staple in every South Indian household. Handwoven using coarse cotton yarns, these mats and blankets are now reinvented as stylish furnishings.

Complementing this heritage is the Toda embroidery of the Nilgiris, distinct for its red-and-black motifs symbolising tribal beliefs, and the Madurai Sungudi sarees, famed for their intricate tie-dye patterns and zari borders. The Chettinad Kandangi sarees dazzle with their broad checks

and earthy hues, while Thirubuvanam silk sarees showcase traditional motifs with a glossy finish. Kovai Kora cotton sarees combine sheer texture with vibrant borders, ideal for daily wear with elegance. Meanwhile, Salem Silks blend modernity with heritage, renowned for their sheen, softness, and elaborate pallu designs—each weave preserving a slice of Tamil culture.

A journey worth taking

Co-optex, the custodian of Tamil Nadu's rich handloom heritage since 1935, is a celebration of craftsmanship, culture, and conscious living. Co-optex offers a curated collection of handwoven marvels, from resplendent silks and breezy cotton sarees to intricately designed

home furnishings. Every piece is a labour of love, crafted by artisans whose skills have been honed over generations. Purchasing from Co-optex is a tribute to tradition, a pledge to sustainability, and a step towards empowering weaver communities. Here, heritage isn't just preserved—it is proudly worn, lived, and passed on.

Several legacy brands continue to showcase exquisite pieces that blend timeless craftsmanship with modern designs, keeping the rich textile tradition alive and relevant today. IndyVogue adds a fresh perspective by highlighting the stories and artisans behind each weave. Together, these platforms play a vital role in sustaining Tamil



Karaikudi Kandangi Saree

Nadu's handloom legacy and promoting its cultural richness.

Weaving stories into fabric

Embracing Tamil Nadu's handloom textiles is more than a fashion statement; it's an acknowledgement of a rich cultural heritage. Each thread tells a story of resilience, artistry, and tradition. By choosing these fabrics, one supports the artisans who keep these age-old practices alive.

So, whether you're draping a Kancheepuram saree for a festive occasion or donning a Madras Check shirt for a casual outing, remember, you're wearing a piece of history, lovingly woven by skilled hands, bridging the past and the present in every strand.



Bhavani Jamkalam



Toda



Thirubhavanam Silk

SOUTH Africa

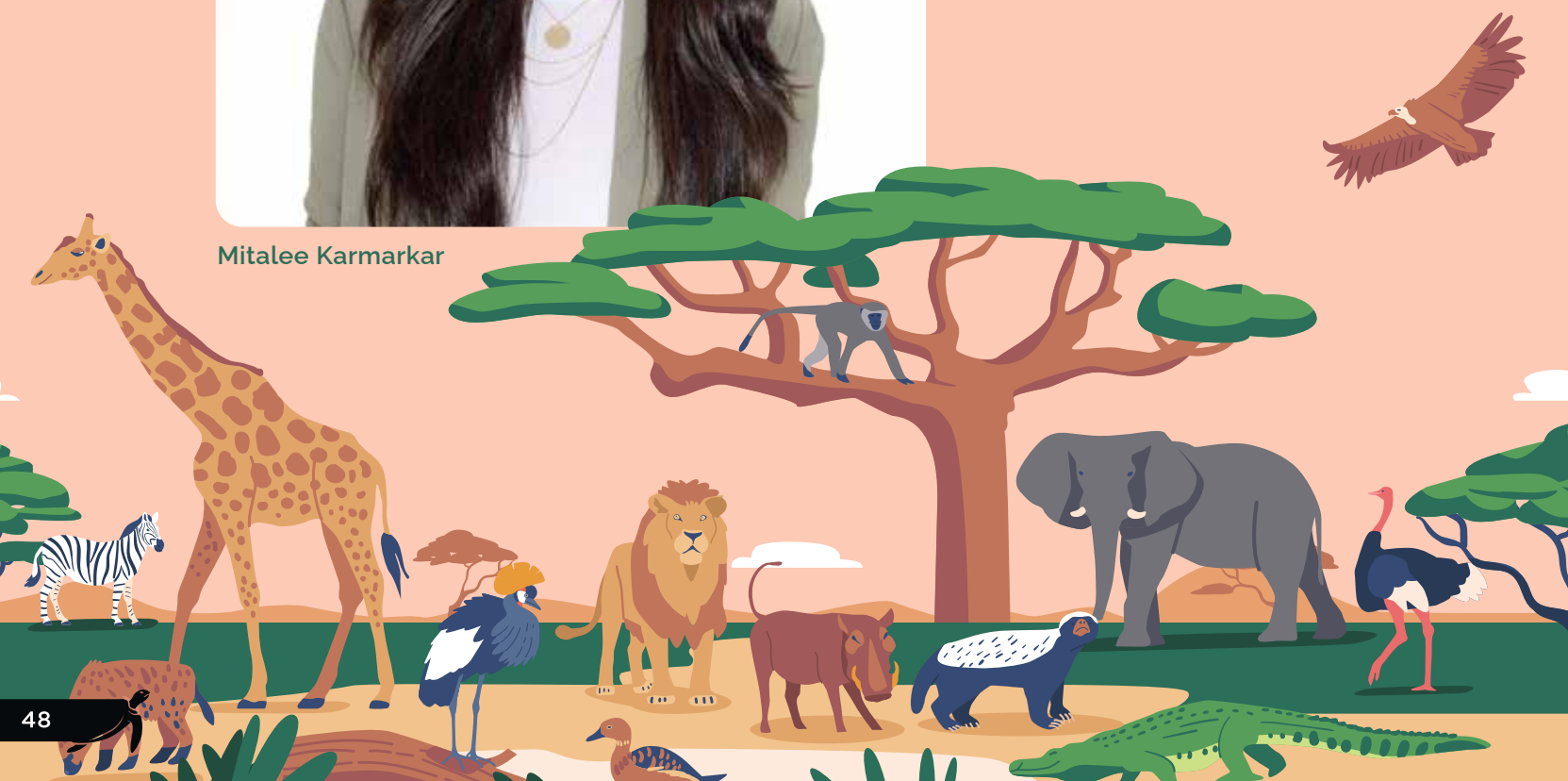
welcomes a new wave of Indian travellers



Mitalee Karmarkar

From offbeat adventures to business-led travel, South African Tourism is reshaping how Indians travel in 2025. Mitalee Karmarkar, Marketing and Communications Manager: MEISEA, South African Tourism shares the unique experiences about the rainbow nation.

- *Naina Nath*





Indian outbound travel is on a new high! And South African Tourism is adapting quickly to meet its evolving dynamics. We explore how the Rainbow Nation is curating unique, value-driven experiences and changing the visa game with TTOS, while maintaining its position as one of the top leisure and MICE destinations in the world.

Spontaneity, luxury and value

Indian travellers today seek much more than just sightseeing — they're looking for curated, authentic experiences. "We're seeing a shift towards shorter, high-quality trips with greater emphasis on value and cultural depth," says Mitalee. Whether its boutique vineyard stays, wildlife safaris, or local heritage tours, South Africa is adapting to this shift with diverse offerings that deliver a mix of luxury and substance.

More than just safaris

While South Africa's iconic wildlife continues to draw visitors, the destination is moving beyond its

safari reputation. "Adventure lovers can enjoy shark cage diving, scenic hikes, or bungee jumping, while those looking for indulgence can unwind in vineyard retreats or luxury game lodges," she shares.

MICE is driving growth

Business travel from India is surging, and MICE are a big part of that story. "MICE and business travellers now account for nearly half of total Indian arrivals—49.6 per cent, with MICE contributing 20.2 per cent," reveals Mitalee. Key initiatives such as the Annual Roadshow and Indaba FAM Tours have strengthened connections with Indian partners. "Our upcoming five-city roadshow in 2026 will take this engagement even deeper into tier-II and tier-III cities," she adds.

Bollywood and beyond

Indian cinema continues to influence travel trends, and South Africa is embracing it. "Bollywood holds a deep emotional connection with South Africa," she

notes. The country's diverse landscapes have long served as a backdrop for films and reality shows, inspiring Indian audiences to visit those very locations. By tapping into the power of cinema and cricket, South Africa is reaching both the hearts and itineraries of Indian tourists.

2027 World Cup

With the ICC Cricket World Cup scheduled to take place in South Africa in 2027, the country is gearing up to welcome thousands of Indian fans. "For Indian cricket lovers, this is more than a sporting event — it's a full-fledged adventure," says Mitalee. The tourism department is working to ensure that fans experience not just the matches but also the culture, cuisine, and natural beauty surrounding them.

Visa process with TTOS

The Trusted Tour Operator Scheme (TTOS), led by the Department of Home Affairs, is a major step towards simplifying travel to South Africa for Indian visitors. "We currently have 65 operators under TTOS, including 14 from India, all vetted for reliability," confirms Mitalee. The scheme fast-tracks visa processes—often within a day—and ensures a smooth and secure booking experience. Beyond leisure, TTOS is also expected to encourage more international business events and exhibitions in the country.

Annual Roadshow Highlights

South African Tourism's 21st Annual India Roadshow was a vital touch point in 2024. Held across Mumbai, Delhi, and Chennai, the event brought together 41 exhibitors and over 1,300 Indian tour operators. "It gave us valuable insights into

changing preferences and allowed us to reinforce our commitment to the Indian market," she explains.

Tourism numbers and 2025 goals

South Africa welcomed over 75,000 Indian visitors in 2024, and the growing momentum remains strong. "Our aim for 2025 is to restore the traffic levels and continue building towards our 2030 goal of attracting 14.9 million international tourists annually," says Mitalee.

Campaigns and regional expansion

To resonate with younger audiences, South African Tourism launched the 'More & More' campaign, spotlighting lesser-known provinces and personalised itineraries. "We're working with influencers to uncover hidden gems and connect with millennials and Gen Z through authentic storytelling," she shares. The campaign also features emerging regions such as Eastern Cape, Free State, and Limpopo — rich in landscapes, culture, and adventure.

Going beyond Cape Town

Indian travellers are increasingly exploring provinces beyond the usual hotspots. "Whether it's the dramatic Blyde River Canyon in Mpumalanga, the cultural richness of KwaZulu-Natal, or the spring flowers of the Northern Cape, each region has its own charm," Mitalee adds. Places like Eastern Cape's Wild Coast, Free State's Golden Gate Highlands, and the Cradle of Humankind in Gauteng are also drawing interest. Provinces like North West, with its luxury resorts and national parks, are gaining traction among premium travellers.



Wings of Pride

Where every journey celebrates you

Travel has always held a special place in the LGBTQ+ community. It's a form of self-expression, exploration, and sometimes, a quiet rebellion.

- Tripti Jain

For queer travellers, Pride Month is about owning space, rewriting stories, and discovering destinations where one can simply be. Today, LGBTQ+ tourism is flourishing, not just in the predictable hotspots such as Amsterdam, New York, or Mykonos, but in emerging destinations such as Taiwan, Colombia, and Portugal, where acceptance is not a trend, but a lived reality.

The modern queer traveller seeks more than glossy marketing. They want safety, warmth, culture, and above all, genuine inclusion. That means experiences where they don't have to second-guess holding hands, checking into a hotel, or expressing their identity. It's not about avoiding places; it's about being welcomed into them.

Hearts that roam

More than a trend, LGBTQ+ travel is a deeply personal expression of identity. From couples seeking

romantic getaways to solo travellers craving self-discovery, every journey becomes a reflection of who they are. It's about being able to express love without fear, walk into a hotel lobby without judgment, and enjoy local culture without concealing any part of oneself.

For many, travel is a way to reclaim joy. It's the chance to explore destinations that not only accept them, but also celebrate them. Whether it's a beachside escape, a cultural tour, or an adventure trek, the essence lies in the freedom to just be, without explanation or hesitation. This desire for dignity and joy is shaping how the travel industry approaches LGBTQ+ tourism.

Pride in every step

Across continents, Pride celebrations are drawing travellers not just for the

spectacle but for the sense of unity and empowerment they offer. Cities that host inclusive parades and festivals become annual havens for community, celebration, and cultural exchange. These events, often intertwined with local history and activism, allow travellers to feel part of something larger, even far from home.

Beyond the glitter and celebration, Pride-inspired travel experiences now go deeper, combining entertainment with education, activism, and cultural immersion. From guided tours through LGBTQ+ heritage districts to wellness retreats focused on queer healing, Pride travel is taking on meaningful dimensions. It's not just about where you go, it's about how the journey makes you feel.

Voices that move the world

There's a growing wave of inclusive and queer-owned travel experiences that are rewriting the rules of the road. From welcoming stays to LGBTQ+-friendly activities and guides, the industry is steadily creating spaces where every traveller feels valued. These community-led offerings go beyond tokenism, they provide opportunities for cultural exchange, economic empowerment, and meaningful engagement.

The road ahead is rainbow-coloured

As Pride Month fills the skies with colour and celebration, it also reminds the world that LGBTQ+ travellers are here, proud, and ready to explore. Their presence shapes the future of travel, one that's vibrant, inclusive, and conscious.



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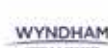
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A Cheesy Day, Indeed!

Discovering French cheese culture at
Paroles de Fromagers, Paris — one bite at a time.

- *Naina Nath*



Paris, my favourite city in the world, never runs out of ways to surprise me. On my latest trip, the highlight wasn't a hidden rooftop bar or a scenic walk along the Seine—but a wonderfully cheesy detour that fed both my curiosity and appetite. As someone who'll happily devour cheese on anything from pizzas to parathas, learning about how cheese is made (and tasting the strong, moldy varieties France is famous for) felt like the ultimate indulgence — An experience I'm convinced Indian travellers would absolutely enjoy. Because let's be honest, we do love our cheese.

Musée du Fromage: Cheese, culture & craft

Tucked in the heart of Paris, Musée du Fromage is a new interactive museum dedicated entirely to French cheese — its history, its smells, its making, and most of all, its deep connection to the French identity. As you step in, you're immediately hit with that unmistakable cheese smell. It's sharp, earthy, and oddly comforting — a clear sign you're in the right place.

We started by walking through their cheese shop and were handed an audio guide along with a bilingual booklet. The museum is self-paced, so you can explore leisurely—read about the evolution of cheese, watch videos about age-old cheese-making techniques, and even take part in a digital interactive called "Which French Cheese are you?"—a lighthearted personality quiz that matches you to your cheese counterpart. Mine revealed that I'm a Camembert—cultured, complex, and quietly intense. Not mad about it!

After soaking in the history, we were met by our friendly and knowledgeable museum guide, Gabriele Zamboni, who introduced us to the process of cheesemaking and guided us through a generous tasting of some of France's finest cheeses. From creamy Bries to strong blues, the selection covered a wide range of textures, smells, and flavours representing different regions of the country. You know what they say: "French cheese is the soul of France—the older and smellier, the better."



A standout for me? Époisses—a soft cow's milk cheese from the Burgundy region that also happened to be Napoleon's favourite (and now, mine too). For the brave-hearted, Roquefort is a must-try. Known as the King of the Blues, this sheep's milk cheese from the south of France packs a punch with its salty, creamy, blue-mold bite. The museum itself is quite modern in its design but rooted deeply in tradition. It combines education with entertainment, offering not just a gallery of information but a genuine sensory journey. There's also a dairy production unit where fresh cheese is made, an actual creamery and shop, and even a souvenir store to pick up edible and non-edible memories. Their mission? To encourage careers in cheese-making, create awareness and spark curiosity, especially among younger generations, to highlight the regional richness of France's 1,200+ cheese varieties, and, most importantly, to make cheese fun and accessible. And they do it incredibly well.

Cheeseology 101 (with wine, of course)

If you think learning about cheese was the best part, think again. The real magic happened across town, at the Paroles de Fromagers, a renowned cheese school located in the heart of the Marais district. In their authentic 17th century cheese cellar, we joined a 90-minute. We were welcomed by Nick, a true-blue Parisian gentleman who was as entertaining as he was knowledgeable. His quick wit, dramatic storytelling, and undeniable charm made the session equal parts fun and educational. Our group was a diverse mix—cheese-lovers from India, the US, and the UK, all curious and wide-eyed. We sat at a long table, surrounded by aged stone walls and dim, warm lighting. It felt like a secret supper club for cheese nerds. Over the course of the session, we tasted seven different aged cheeses paired with three varieties of wines, each explained in delicious detail by Nick.

We discussed terroir, a French concept referring to how soil, climate, and tradition influence the taste of cheese (and wine). I also learned about biodynamic wines—made using holistic, organic practices that follow lunar and cosmic cycles. Nature's own wine pairing system!

I now know that a biodynamic white from Château de Lardiley pairs beautifully with Saint-Nectaire, a semi-soft cheese from Auvergne. And a light Saint-Pourçain red? Perfect with that too. These aren't just tastings—they're curated experiences, designed to let you appreciate how cheese and wine truly complement one another.

By the end of the session, we were all giggling over our new favourite cheeses and trading travel tips. It was educational, yes—but also heartwarming, hilarious, and just plain fun.

More ways to get 'Cheesed' in Paris

If you're hooked and hungry for more, Paroles de Fromagers offers a variety of other workshops to deepen your appreciation. You can try your hand at cheesemaking in a fun, hands-on session followed by a wine and cheese tasting, or opt for a masterclass on pairing cheeses with different wines—perfect for those who want to go beyond the basics. True enthusiasts can book the all-in-one Pass that includes access to the Musée du Fromage, a guided tasting, and a cheesemaking workshop. There's even a gourmet food tour of Île Saint-Louis for those who want to explore Paris through its most delicious lens.

More than just a cheese fix

I walked into Paroles de Fromagers thinking I'd learn a little and eat a lot. I walked out not just with a bag full of cheesy goodies, but as someone who could confidently talk about French cheese culture over dinner. From the sensory overload at the museum to the cozy laughs in the cellar, it was a day I'd recommend to anyone, even the skeptics. And honestly? The next time someone calls me 'cheesy,' I'll take it as a compliment. Call it dairy enlightenment—or just a very, very good day in Paris.



Nature's abode *Mayfair Springvalley Resort, Guwahati*

Tucked amidst the lush hills of Guwahati, Mayfair Springvalley Resort is a destination where serenity meets scale.

Mayfair Springvalley Resort is where grandeur wraps around green vistas, and where Assam's natural beauty is matched only by its luxurious hospitality. With the recent expansion, this iconic property has become one of Northeast India's largest and most versatile resorts, setting a new benchmark in experiential travel and event hosting.

Room for more

What was already an impressive property with 140 rooms has now evolved into a 260-room haven for travellers seeking elegance, comfort, and a deep connection with the land. The newly added 120 rooms blend seamlessly with the existing architecture, retaining the earthy tones and cultural motifs that define the property. Whether you're a business traveller, family

vacationer, or destination wedding guest, the expanded inventory ensures accommodation that caters to every taste and need spacious, stylish, and soaked in tranquillity.

The flavourful twist

With great room comes great appetite—and Mayfair Springvalley rises to the occasion. The resort now boasts a new multi-cuisine vegetarian restaurant, offering a thoughtful variety of regional and global delicacies, curated for both health-conscious and indulgent palettes. The addition of a sophisticated bar elevates the evening atmosphere, serving as the perfect setting for winding down with curated cocktails, fine spirits, and sunset conversations. Whether you're a fan of Assamese classics or international favourites, dining here is not just a meal—it's a memory.

Big dreams need big spaces

If space defines luxury, then Mayfair Springvalley wears the crown. With 30,000 sq. feet of indoor banqueting space, the resort is perfectly equipped for corporate conclaves, grand weddings, and cultural celebrations. But it's the 100,000 sq. feet of manicured outdoor venues that truly steal the show—imagine a wedding beneath the stars, a musical soiree set against a mountain silhouette, or a yoga retreat embraced by fresh hill breezes. The versatility of the venues makes it a dream canvas for event planners and a magnet for those looking to make memories in majestic settings.

Beyond the rooms

The expansion hasn't diluted the soul of the resort—in fact, it has amplified it. Paths wind through tranquil gardens, and every corner

invites guests to pause, reflect, and immerse themselves in nature. The attention to detail, from service to sustainability, echoes the Mayfair philosophy: luxury that's warm, rooted, and always evolving.

Crown jewel of Guwahati hospitality

With its newly enhanced capacity, thoughtful culinary additions, and expansive event spaces, Mayfair Springvalley Resort isn't just growing — it's glowing. This resort has become more than a getaway; it's a landmark of leisure, a venue of vision, and a space where every sunrise promises new possibilities. Whether you're planning a celebration, a corporate gathering, or just a soul-refreshing escape, it offers the perfect setting — wrapped in the timeless charm of the Eastern Himalayas.



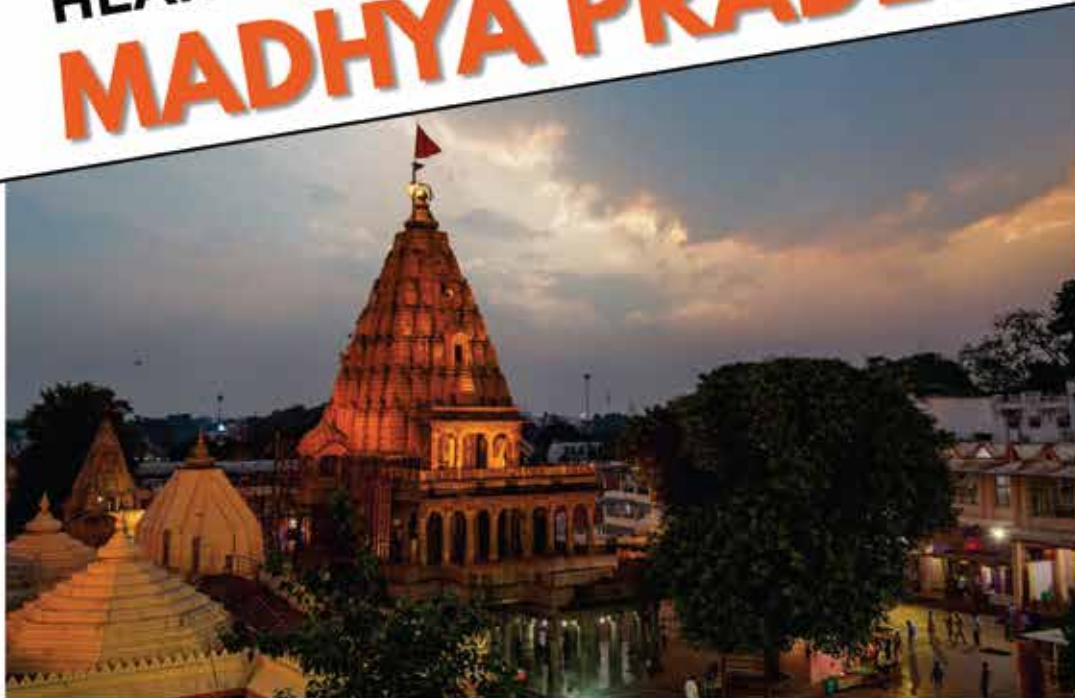


The heart of
Incredible India



Make the transition from the stress of urban chaos to a mindset of serenity. Close your eyes and let your senses take in clean air, while listening to the sound of the wind blowing through a forest. Set your own pace exploring a hidden heritage site far from the maddening crowd. Soak in the atmosphere of a spiritual destination. Pamper yourself at a rural homestay. Or simply lie back and do nothing! For those seeking a wellness break on the eve of World Yoga Day, Madhya Pradesh presents a rich variety of destinations to rejuvenate:

AN OASIS OF TRANQUILITY IN THE HEART OF INDIA: **MADHYA PRADESH**



Divine journeys to the Jyotirlingas

Connect with the divine in the Bhasma Aarti, early on a crisp Ujjain morning at the iconic Mahakaal Temple. Allow yourself to be touched by the spiritual light of the Shiva Linga and come out with an energy only the truly faithful have experienced. Close your eyes and become one with the cosmic consciousness at the island-shrine of Omkareshwar. Or join a Yoga session on the banks of the Narmada.

Immortal peace at Amarkantak

Follow the footsteps of Sant Kabir and meditate close to the mouth of the Narmada. Enjoy a picnic at one of the gigantic waterfalls or be startled by one of the many strikingly attractive temples here, such as the Shri Yantra shrine. Spend time at a natural tree grove dedicated to the Goddess Narmada.

Village Visuals: Taste the rural way

Immerse yourself in a rural community. Select from a range of rural homestay options across Madhya Pradesh and experience the joy of an eco-friendly lifestyle - partake of the earthy flavours of home-cooked food or join an impromptu pottery session and village sports or volunteer for a project that could transform lives. Enjoy retail therapy at places like Art Ichol in Maihar and interact with skilled artisans.

Sanctuaries for the Soul

Perhaps nothing detaches the mind from stress as much as watching a mighty Tiger prowling around its habitat or zooming in to admire the antics of a rarely sighted bird. Or merely having a slow day watching creatures frolic in the stunning landscape of a sanctuary's buffer zone. With nearly three dozen sanctuaries and national parks - such

as Bandhavgarh, Kanha, Pench, Kuno, Pachmarhi and others - visitors can take their pick for a holiday that is a balm for the soul.



Nestled in India's heart, these extraordinary experiences will live with you forever. Simply choose to embark on the journey—and you may find yourself never wanting to leave.



Balm by the Betwa

Wander through the timeless portals of Bundela palaces at Orchha. Watch the Betwa gently go past the memorials of long-forgotten kings. Admire striking murals inside a temple that acts as a medieval art gallery. A place so relaxed that even Lord Rama is worshipped here not as a God, but as a King.



Tranquil Temptations at Tamia

Mountaintop Tamia combines with the horseshoe-shaped Patalkot Valley below, creating the state's best-kept secret in the Satpura Hills. Untouched forests and little-visited mountains form a perfect setting for treks and long walks. Be amazed at how the Gond and Bharia tribes live in harmony with nature, making it central in everything from their art to medicines.



Monsoon Magic in Mandu

Put away those cameras and listen to the drumming of incessant rain atop the Mandu plateau. Meander through monuments in India's original City of Joy and allow yourself to be soaked. You might just be tempted to shed your inhibitions and start dancing in the rain!

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The art of healing at *Chiva-Som*



Vaipanya Kongkwanyuen

The Indian market has become increasingly vital to Chiva-Som's success, with visitor numbers doubling. Vaipanya Kongkwanyuen, General Manager, Chiva-Som shares about the brand's positioning in the India market.

- Rishi Arora



Thailand's overall Indian tourism has boomed from 900,000 visitors in 2022 to 2.1 million in 2024—a trend reflected in Chiva-Som's own guest demographics. What makes Indian guests particularly valuable is their focused approach to wellness. Despite being the land of Yoga and Ayurvedic traditions, Indian visitors come to Chiva-Som seeking a complete holistic experience that combines modern wellness techniques with Eastern practices. Vaipanya shares that Indian guests are remarkably enthusiastic, often requesting immediate program starts upon arrival rather than resting, displaying genuine dedication to their wellness journey.

Secret behind 30 years of success

The bedrock of Chiva-Som's three-decade achievement lies in its staff—many who have been with the resort since its inception. This extraordinary retention rate (over 30 per cent have remained since the beginning) creates an environment where therapists know guests by name and communicate seamlessly about their preferences and restrictions. "We greet people in the morning with 'did you sleep well,'" explains Vaipanya, highlighting the personalised attention that has become Chiva-Som's signature approach. What truly sets the staff apart is their communication not just with guests but among themselves—ensuring that if a guest sees different therapists on consecutive days, the second therapist knows exactly what the first one did, including anybody's restrictions or preferences without guests having to repeat information. He adds, "This dedication extends beyond job descriptions, with staff members going the extra mile to ensure guest satisfaction. The consistent staff experience translates directly to guest loyalty, with many visitors returning year after year for the familiarity and personalised care they've come to expect."

The future of Chiva-Somaaavv

Chiva-Som's vision extends beyond its original Thailand location with new concepts like Zulal by Chiva-Som in



Qatar, which introduces family wellness programs. Further explaining about the concept Vaipanya shares, "This expansion recognises that wellness education should begin at a young age — a philosophy championed by the chairman who believes in building wellness habits from childhood. The resort continues to invest in cutting-edge treatments while maintaining its holistic approach. Recent innovations include hyperbaric oxygen chambers, genetic testing, sleep apnea assessments, and personalised nutrition programs. These advancements allow for more targeted, personalised wellness journeys."

For Indian travellers specifically, Chiva-Som sees tremendous growth potential, noting that convenient flight times (late night departures from India with early morning arrivals in Thailand) allow guests to maximise their time, even during shorter stays.

Evolution and consistency: 1994 to 2018

When Vaipanya returned to Chiva-Som in 2018 after initially working there in 1994, he discovered a property that had evolved significantly while maintaining its essence. The physical structure remained remarkably modern despite being 30 years old—a testament to the architect's vision—but the services had

expanded dramatically to encompass six complete wellness modalities.

He shares, "The resort's commitment to sustainability has flourished over the decades. During our 30th anniversary celebration, we organised eco-friendly activities such as releasing 3,000 baby blue crabs back to the sea and expanding their mangrove conservation project. What began with 700 mangrove trees entrusted to them by a local temple has grown to an impressive 15,000 trees, complete with a 1km boardwalk serving as an educational center for the community."

Like minded expansion

When asked about potential expansion into India, Vaipanya, expresses a keen interest but emphasised the importance of finding the right partners who truly understand their wellness philosophy. He shares, "Unlike conventional luxury hotels, wellness resorts require partners aligned with our long-term vision of improving people's lives rather than focusing solely on immediate returns."

The unique staffing model — Chiva-Som employs over 300 staff for just 54 rooms—illustrates why wellness is a different business model requiring specialised knowledge and commitment. While leadership

acknowledges India's enormous potential as both a market and location, they remain cautious about expansion without the right partnership foundation.

A personal approach to wellness

Chiva-Som's leadership embodies the wellness principles they promote. Vaipanya shares his personal transformation journey, transitioning from a luxury hotel executive who never used gym facilities to someone who now walks over 100km monthly and has reduced his weight from 77kg to 71kg.

He highlights, "Discipline is the key word for Wellness. We practice this principle through staff wellness initiatives such as walking program where departments target 60km monthly. The GM and chairman engage in friendly competition, sometimes accumulating nearly 200km in a month, demonstrating wellness leadership by example."

The Ideal Chiva-Som Experience

The Chiva-Som journey begins before arrival with a comprehensive health questionnaire sent to guests. This pre-consultation allows wellness advisors to prepare and understand each guest's goals before they arrive at the resort.

Vaipanya explains, "Upon arrival, guests meet with advisors who conduct in-depth consultations to design personalised programs from among 15 retreat options and over 200 treatments. The minimum recommended stay is five days—enough time to meaningfully engage with the program and experience lasting benefits. What truly distinguishes the Chiva-Som experience is the follow-up care. Advisors contact guests weeks or months later (based on guest preference) to check progress and offer additional guidance."

As Chiva-Som blossoms into its next chapter, it's clear that its success is rooted not just in treatments or stunning location, but in the philosophy of holistic wellness that transcends time, trends, and borders. It is a philosophy that resonates deeply with guests—whether they come from Thailand, India, or beyond—and continues to inspire them to embrace wellness as a way of life.



Ravi Gosain elected as the President of IATO for 2025-2027 term

In a vibrant and enthusiastic atmosphere at Hotel The Ashok, New Delhi, the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) concludes its much-anticipated 2025-2027 elections. With excitement running high and the travel industry keenly watching, the new executive committee was announced amidst loud cheers and camaraderie.



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WHISPERS OF THE CLOUDS

Discovering the spirit of Tawang

Tucked away in the farthest folds of Arunachal Pradesh, where the clouds descend to whisper secrets into the ears of mountains, lies a land that feels more imagined than real—Tawang.



Often overshadowed by the more commercial Himalayan destinations, Tawang is India's best-kept secret, a place where spirituality, serenity, and raw Himalayan beauty converge. Here, monks walk beside mountain goats and ancient monasteries echo chants that have defied time. At 10,000 feet above sea level, Tawang isn't just a destination—it's an emotion, a sense of calm that stays with you long after you've descended from its heights. From historic tales of the 6th Dalai Lama to the soul-stirring chants of the largest monastery in India, this is a story every traveller must live once in their lifetime.

Monasteries, myths, and mist

The beating heart of Tawang is undoubtedly the Tawang Monastery, Asia's second-largest and India's most majestic Buddhist monastery. Perched like a crown jewel, it overlooks the valley with 65 residential buildings, vibrant prayer

wheels, and a grand library housing ancient scriptures. Founded in the 17th century by Merak Lama Lodre Gyatso, the monastery isn't just an architectural marvel—it's a living, breathing institution of faith.

But what adds to its mystique is the spiritual lineage—Tawang is the birthplace of the 6th Dalai Lama, Tsangyang Gyatso, a poet-monk whose verses about love, longing, and spirituality are still sung across these hills. As the morning sun paints the monastery in golden hues and the sound of long horns fills the air, one can't help but feel the stillness of something ancient, something divine.

Lakes that remember

No journey to Tawang is complete without getting lost in the silences of its lakes. Madhuri Lake (officially Tsangetsar Lake), named after Bollywood actress Madhuri Dixit following a shoot for Koyla, is surreal. Created by an earthquake in 1950, its dead



tree trunks protruding from the water like haunting sculptures make it eerily beautiful.

Then there's Pankang Teng Tso, a hidden gem enveloped in alpine forests and meadows, perfect for picnics and quiet contemplation. During winters, these lakes freeze into mirrors for the clouds, creating a magical illusion of walking on the sky. You're not just visiting lakes here—you're visiting stories trapped in snow and reflections.

Borderlines and battlefields

Tawang, sharing a sensitive border with China, is not just about peace and prayer. It has stood witness to the fury of history during the 1962 Indo-China war. A visit to the Tawang War Memorial, built in honour of the martyrs, is a sobering experience. Standing amidst the fluttering tricolours, overlooking the valley they once defended, you realise that these mountains have known both serenity and sacrifice. Today, Indian soldiers greet visitors with warmth, their presence reassuring and proud. There's a blend of patriotism and hospitality here that makes you feel both grateful and humbled.

The soul of Tawang

Beyond the landmarks, Tawang's magic lies in its people—the Monpas. With infectious smiles,

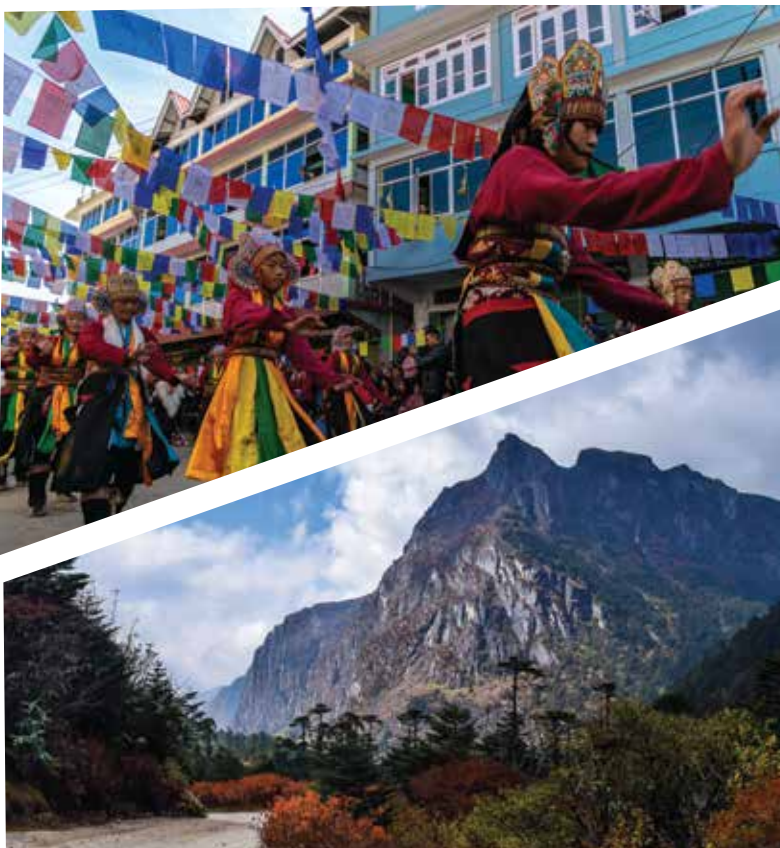
warm butter tea, and colourful festivals like Losar and Torgya, they welcome you into their culture with open arms. Their homes, built to withstand the harshest winters, are a blend of tradition and practicality. Their folklore is rich, passed down through song, dance, and fire-lit gatherings.

Every traveller becomes a storyteller here—whether you're sharing space in a local kitchen, or joining in the laughter at a village celebration. The locals don't just guide you—they make you part of the story.

Leaving footprints on the sky

As you prepare to leave Tawang, descending through winding roads lined with prayer flags and wildflowers, a quiet longing sets in. This isn't the kind of place you visit once—it's the kind of place you remember in moments of noise, a sanctuary you carry in your soul.

Tawang is not built for mass tourism. It resists rush, refuses chaos, and demands that you slow down and feel. In return, it gifts you a piece of stillness—a souvenir rarer than anything money can buy. In a world rushing to Instagram the next best view, Tawang asks you to pause, breathe, and listen—because here, even the wind has stories to tell.



ADVERT

Dharoi

Adventure finds a new address

This summer, Gujarat took a thrilling leap forward in redefining its tourism story, with the inaugural Dharoi Adventure Fest.



Held at the scenic Dharoi Dam in Satlasana Taluka, Mehsana, this one-of-a-kind festival has opened up a world of possibilities for nature lovers, adventure enthusiasts, and curious travellers seeking more than the usual. This is a gateway to excitement, exploration, and the untouched beauty of Gujarat's outdoors.

Where water meets wild

Dharoi Dam, surrounded by soft hills and shimmering waters, has transformed into a vibrant adventure zone. The setting itself is a postcard-perfect invitation to play, and the activities on offer make sure you do.

Whether it's soaring above the reservoir with paramotoring, gliding across the water on a boating tour, or getting your adrenaline fix with parasailing, Dharoi invites you to experience nature from every angle.

Prefer to keep your feet on the ground? Try your hand at rock climbing, or simply pause and watch the sun melt into the horizon during a peaceful sun-gazing session. The experience is carefully curated to suit the brave-hearted and the calm-seekers; it is a rare blend of pulse and peace.

Tents, trails, and tales by firelight

What makes Dharoi Adventure Fest truly memorable isn't just the action, it's the atmosphere. After a day of adventure, visitors are welcomed into comfortable air-conditioned tents, set under star-filled skies. Equipped with modern amenities, these glamping experiences strike the perfect balance between comfort and the thrill of the outdoors.

Evenings are no less exciting. As the night deepens, the festival comes alive with folk performances, live music, dance, and storytelling that showcase Gujarat's

ADVERT

cultural richness. It's where thrill meets tradition, and memories are made around flickering firelights and shared laughter.

Wander beyond dharoi

Dharoi is not only an adventure destination—it's also the perfect starting point for deeper discovery. Located within driving distance from several of Gujarat's most iconic spots, it serves as a hub for heritage and exploration.

Take a detour to Vadnagar, the ancient town that whispers stories through its temples and lanes. Discover the spiritual quietude of Taranga Hills, the rugged charm of Polo Forest, and the revered shrines of Ambaji and Shamlaji. For lovers of architecture and history, Modhera's Sun Temple, Rani ki Vav, and Siddhpur's grand havelis are just around the corner.



era—one that combines natural beauty, cultural depth, and curated excitement. It's not just a place for weekend adventure—it's a celebration of everything the state has to offer in a fresh, energising format. This isn't about copying global trends. It's about creating something homegrown, rooted in Gujarat's landscapes and legends, and offering a distinct identity in India's adventure tourism map.

Your moment is now!

If there was ever a perfect moment to do something out of the ordinary, this is it. Whether you're craving that first adrenaline rush, a change of scene with your family, or just a deep breath in an unfamiliar place, Dharoi is waiting—with open skies and open arms.



With Dharoi as your basecamp, your adventure doesn't end when the festival does—it only expands.

Thrill without the risk

A great adventure fest is only as good as the care it takes, and Dharoi excels here too. The festival's layout and experiences have been thoughtfully planned with trained instructors, proper safety gear, and on-site medical services. Every activity is closely monitored and certified, offering safe thrills for individuals, couples, and families alike. Whether you're strapping on a harness for the first time or letting your child try parasailing, there's a comforting sense of security that allows you to simply let go and enjoy.

Reimagining Gujarat's outdoors

With the Dharoi Adventure Fest, Gujarat has boldly stepped into a new tourism



Hayleys Travels

Crafting meaningful journeys!

Travel today isn't just about destinations; it's about how those destinations make you feel. Suchitra Aluwihare, Chief Operating Officer, Hayleys Travels shares his love for travel and crafting journeys.
- *Tripti Jain*



Suchitra Aluwihare



Hayleys Travels, one of Sri Lanka's leading travel companies, the focus has shifted from selling holidays to curating emotional experiences. And in doing so, they've captured the imagination of one of their most important markets, India.

Indian travellers are incredibly intuitive. They value authenticity, comfort, and something personal. That's the gap the brand has been filling, with both heart and strategy.

India rising

The numbers speak volumes. Indian tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka have surged by 120 per cent in FY 2024-25. Hayleys Travels anticipated this shift and quickly evolved its offerings to match the moment and adapting not just itineraries, but the way it thinks. Speaking on the same lines Suchitra shares, "We knew we had to think like the Indian traveller, not just market to them. That meant more tailored experiences from vegetarian culinary trails to spiritual getaways and destination weddings. With each package, the team infuses cultural insight, personal touches, and operational precision, ensuring travellers from Delhi to Kochi feel both welcomed and understood."

Trade first, always

Hayleys Travels doesn't view Indian travel agents as intermediaries; they are treated as core partners. By participating in key events, hosting frequent roadshows, and investing in familiarisation tours, the company ensures its B2B presence in India is active and responsive.

Highlighting more about the core values of the company Suchitra explains, "Our partners are our voice in the Indian market. So we've built tools that help them thrive in real-time, such as WhatsApp

quoting, vernacular content and region-specific itineraries. We're here to make their job easier. This relationship-first approach has boosted both trust and bookings and a win-win for both ends of the travel chain.

Strength in the group

Being part of the Hayleys Group, one of Sri Lanka's largest and most diversified conglomerates — gives Hayleys Travels a strong backbone. This translates into seamless coordination across transport, cruise handling, and aviation services, often giving travellers privileges others can't easily match. Speaking more about it he shares, "When you're backed by an ecosystem like ours, you don't just promise efficiency, you deliver it. From airport meet-and-greets to private coastal transfers, it's all under one roof and that's a big comfort, especially for MICE and luxury travellers."

New tastes, new trails

Indian travellers today want more than sightseeing, they crave meaning. Boutique resorts, Ayurveda therapies, scenic train journeys, and multigenerational family circuits are all growing in popularity. Hayleys Travels has realigned its offerings to mirror this new mindset.

"We've seen a beautiful shift. There's growing interest in wellness, slow travel, and connecting with local communities. So we've created itineraries that help travellers pause and reflect, not just run from place to place. With high-net-worth groups leaning toward exclusivity and comfort, the company has also introduced luxury experiences that blend privacy with nature and from jungle spas to tea estate retreats," shares Suchitra.

Purpose in every journey

Sustainability and community are no longer side notes, they're central to how Hayleys Travels operates. The company has integrated responsible tourism deeply into its product, offering guests opportunities to engage with real Sri Lankan life while giving back.

Explaining about the same Suchitra shares, "Our coral reef restoration, eco-tours, and village visits aren't just experiences, they're acts of solidarity. Guests learn, participate, and contribute. That's what makes a trip truly memorable. Whether it's cooking with women from rural cooperatives or learning about elephant-human conflict in the highlands, each initiative is designed to be immersive and impactful."

Future-focused

Hayleys Travels is sharpening its focus across three pillars: product expansion, digital innovation, and regional outreach. That includes scaling in Tier II Indian cities and building more robust booking platforms for global partners. Suchitra adds, "We're bringing in smart tech, but keeping empathy at the core. AI chat support, CRM automation, region-specific booking interfaces — these are tools to strengthen relationships, not replace them. It's a model that's both future-ready and deeply grounded in hospitality, making the company a standout in a competitive market."

A Journey with heart

Travel is about trust and creating moments that linger, stories that stay, and bonds that go beyond itineraries. Suchitra shares "We want every guest to feel seen and heard. That's the magic of Sri Lanka and that's what Hayleys Travels is here to deliver."

ATM 2025 concludes on a high note

The 2025 edition of Arabian Travel Market (ATM), takes place at the Dubai World Trade Centre from 28th April to 1st May, witnessed 41 per cent year-on-year growth in participation from India. This surge is driven by key exhibitors including the Ministry of Tourism of India, Air India, Air India Express, and expanded representation from regional tourism boards.



Take off to tranquillity Take off to Tawang

In Tawang, silence speaks volumes.
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calm embraces you.



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Island Life hosts Universal Resorts Roadshow in New Delhi

The 'Universal Resorts Roadshow,' a joint effort between Universal Resorts and Island Life Travel, aimed to provide a comprehensive Maldives travel experience to travel trade professionals. This roadshow served as a platform for networking, discovering new offerings, and exploring collaboration opportunities, specifically focusing on weddings, leisure, and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions)



Sartha Global Marketing organises a fun jazz night showcasing the attractions of New Orleans



A Trip to New Orleans was an evening of soulful jazz, featuring silky vocals, soaring sax, and captivating piano melodies. Orleans — a night of soul, swing, and pure magic.





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Dusit Hotels celebrates the upcoming launch of DusitD2 Feydhoo Maldives

Dusit Hotels & Resorts is all set to make waves in the Maldives with the launch of DusitD2 Feydhoo Maldives, opening from 1st August 2025, the brand introduces this exciting new property to the travel trade at exclusive events — Island Hopper in Delhi and Island Life in Mumbai, respectively.



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AIR Cambodia appoints Aeroprime Group as its exclusive India GSA

On the side line of the most prestigious event in global aviation, the IATA AGM 2025, Air Cambodia, announces the appointment of Aeroprime Group as its exclusive Passenger General Sales Agent (GSA) in India, effective 1st July 2025.



IndiGo interacted with the Delhi media ahead of IATA



IndiGo engaged with Delhi media ahead of the IATA AGM, sharing updates on new international routes, strategic partnerships, and fleet expansion plans. As the host airline for the event, IndiGo highlighted its growing global footprint and commitment to advancing Indian aviation.

Costa Navarino showcases the journey of Greece

On the side line of the most prestigious event in global aviation, the IATA AGM 2025, Air Cambodia, announces the appointment of Aeroprime Group as its exclusive Passenger General Sales Agent (GSA) in India, effective 1st July 2025.



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Coming soon to The Atollia by Centara, Centara Grand Lagoon Maldives will offer a pristine haven of Thai-inspired hospitality and Maldivian allure alongside the underwater-themed Centara Mirage Lagoon Maldives. A scenic ferry ride from Phuket, Centara Villas Phi Phi Island is also set to open as a tranquil oasis, while family fun and adventure await at the newly renovated Centara Karon Resort Phuket and Centara Grand Mirage Beach Resort Pattaya—both featuring completely reimagined looks, refreshed dining experiences, and thrilling new water attractions for all ages.



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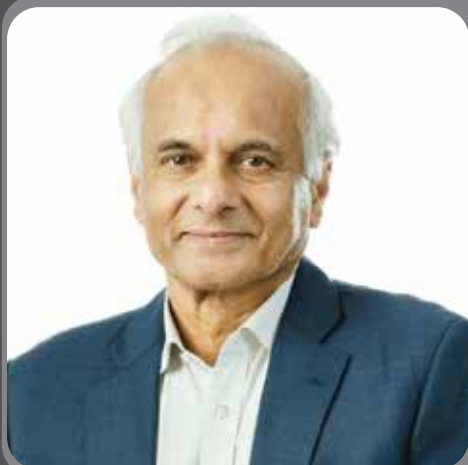
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APPOINTMENTS



IndiGo Airlines

IndiGo, announces the appointment of Mr Vikram Singh Mehta as the Chairman of the Board. Mr Mehta has been a Member of the Board of InterGlobe Aviation Limited (IndiGo) since May 2022. He succeeds Dr. Venkataramani Sumantran, who stepped down from the post after completion of his five-year term as a Board Member.

Dusit International

Dusit International, announces the appointment of Ms Prachoom Tantiprasertsuk, Vice President – Operations (Central & Southern Thailand) and Government & Business Relations, as President of the Thailand Incentive and Convention Association (TICA) for the 2025-2026 term.




Island Life

Island Life has announces the appointment of Ishana Global Representations as its official sales representative for the Maharashtra region. The collaboration aims to tap into the growing demand for luxury Maldivian holidays from Western India and provide seamless support to travel trade partners across the state.

One Rep Global

One Rep Global, announces the appointment of Aparna Anand as Head of Sales. With a career spanning over a decade across luxury, lifestyle, and hospitality sectors, Aparna brings a unique blend of creativity, cultural fluency, and commercial acumen to her new role.



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