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January arrives softly.  
Not with declarations, but with reflection.  
A pause between the chapters we've lived and the stories waiting to unfold.

There is poetry in beginnings, in fresh pages, unfamiliar paths, and journeys that start with curiosity rather than calendars. Travel, at its heart, has never been about distance. It's about presence. About slowing down enough to truly see, feel, and connect.

As we step into the new year, travel feels more intentional than ever. Less hurried. More meaningful. It's no longer about collecting destinations, but about immersing ourselves in places that leave a quiet imprint on us long after the journey ends.

At Travel Turtle, travel is not just what we write about, it's how we live. Our team is constantly on the move, exploring, experiencing, and uncovering stories that deserve to be told. Every journey shapes our perspective and fuels the narratives we bring to these pages.

This January issue celebrates contrast and calm. We take you from the pristine serenity of Switzerland, where landscapes feel almost poetic, to the vast, soul-stirring beauty of Kutch and the Rann of Kutch, where silence speaks louder than words. Different worlds, yet united by the sense of wonder they evoke.

As we begin this new chapter, you'll also notice a fresh visual language in this issue. We've introduced new design elements, subtle, thoughtful, and inspired by movement and discovery, to reflect the spirit of the year ahead.

We hope you enjoy this renewed look as much as we enjoyed creating it for you. As always, your thoughts matter to us, do share your feedback and let us know what resonates.

Here's to a year of mindful journeys, meaningful stories, and travel that truly stays with you.



**Bharti Sharma**  
Editor

 : travelturtlemag



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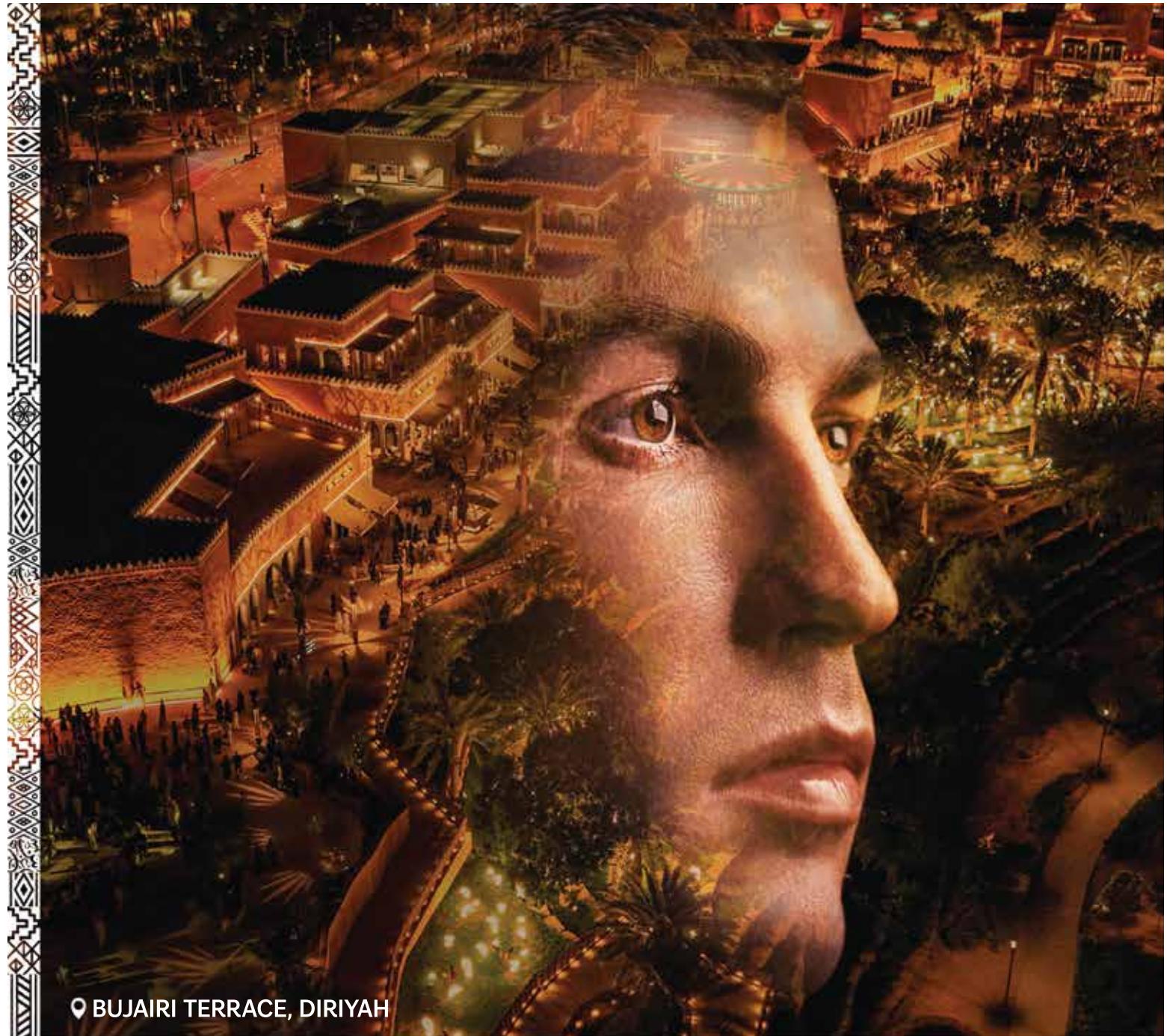
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**ACHIEVERS' WORLD CSR TIMES**

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### Norwegian Cruise Line unveils sun-soaked 2027/28 deployment with Caribbean and Mexican escapes

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) announces its highly anticipated 2027/28 Northern Hemisphere winter deployment. The new season promises sun-soaked escapes, culturally enriching itineraries, and unmatched flexibility, allowing guests to design personalised holiday experiences both onboard and ashore.



### Saudi Arabia and Qatar to launch high speed rail link by 2026

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are set to enhance regional connectivity with a new high-speed electric railway linking Riyadh and Doha, scheduled to begin operations in June 2026. Approved by Saudi Arabia's Cabinet, the 785-kilometre cross-border project will reduce travel time between the two capitals to around two hours, marking a significant leap for Gulf transport infrastructure.



### Centara Hotels & Resorts unveils Centara Karon Villas Phuket

Centara Hotels & Resorts announces the launch of Centara Karon Villas Phuket, a villa-only extension located beside Centara Karon Resort Phuket and just moments from Karon Beach. Designed for travellers seeking extra space, comfort, and privacy, the new retreat features 50 contemporary villas ranging from one to three bedrooms. Select villas come with private plunge pools, balconies, and separate living areas, catering to couples, families, and groups.

### Millie Bobby Brown brings Stranger Things adventure to Yas Island

Millie Bobby Brown, fresh from the dramatic finale of the last season of *Stranger Things*, has chosen Yas Island Abu Dhabi for a well-deserved holiday, one that soon transforms into an adrenaline-charged adventure. The newly released video opens with Millie drifting atop a pool inflatable, quipping that she's "upside down once again," but this time under the warm sun of Yas Island. Her escape from Hawkins takes a nostalgic turn when she spots an 80s-style bicycle, a subtle nod fans of the series will instantly recognise.





### Air India and Maldivian interline partnership to enhance connectivity to Maldives

Through this collaboration, Air India passengers can now conveniently access 16 islands across the Maldives via Maldivian's domestic network, including Hanimaadhoo, Kooddoo, Gan, Kaadedhdhoo, Kulhudhuffushi, Dharavandhoo, Maafaru, and Kadhdoo. Conversely, Maldivian passengers can connect seamlessly to Air India flights from Delhi, Mumbai, Kochi, and Thiruvananthapuram to Malé and Hanimaadhoo.



### UP strengthens global outreach to attract foreign investment in tourism and hospitality

Uttar Pradesh has ramped up its international investment outreach to support the rapid expansion of its tourism and hospitality sector. This week, the Singapore Desk of Invest UP, led by Additional CEO Shashank Chaudhary, held a series of high-level meetings with major global investors, presenting the state as a prime destination for luxury hotels, premium real estate, themed tourism projects and sustainable urban infrastructure. Special emphasis was placed on Ayodhya, Varanasi and Mathura, which are witnessing significant growth in visitor inflow following recent development initiatives.



### Sun Siyam announces major Solar Energy initiative in the Maldives

Sun Siyam has taken a landmark step in its sustainability journey with the launch of one of the largest solar energy initiatives in the Maldives hospitality sector. The project, revealed during a dedicated event at Sun Siyam Olhuveli, marks a significant milestone in the group's long-term commitment to renewable energy and environmental stewardship. The event welcomed government officials, local media, trade partners, and members of the group's sustainability and management teams, who received an exclusive preview of how the new solar installations will transform energy consumption across the resorts.

### Rajasthan unveils Film Tourism Promotion Policy with lucrative sops of subsidies and incentives

The Rajasthan Government unveils its new Film Tourism Promotion Policy at a function held in the Shekhawati town of Mandawa, aiming to position the state as a major national and international filming hub. Releasing the policy, Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma said Rajasthan's rich cultural heritage, vast desert landscapes, historic forts and palaces, and diverse natural locations meet international filming standards. He said the new policy would significantly promote the state's history, culture, and legacy on global platforms while generating employment and skill development opportunities for the youth.





**AVIAREPS honoured as 'World's leading Airline GSA' at the World Travel Awards 2025**

AVIAREPS has been named the "World's Leading Airline GSA" at the World Travel Awards 2025. The ceremony, held on December 6th in Bahrain, honoured excellence across global travel and tourism sectors. Voted for by industry professionals worldwide, the award signifies strong confidence in AVIAREPS' expertise, leadership, and service excellence.



**MATATO announces launch of Maldives Finder 2026**

The Maldives Association of Travel Agents and Tour Operators (MATATO) announces the release of Maldives Finder 2026. The annual publication continues to serve as a strategic platform connecting Maldivian tourism stakeholders with international tour operators, travel agents, airlines, investors and key decision-makers worldwide.

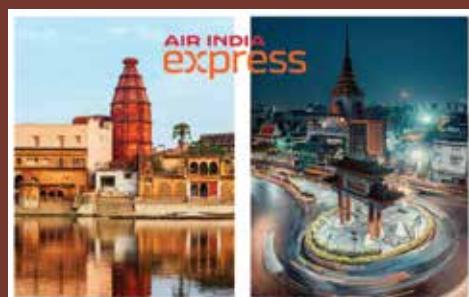
**Brand USA launches 'America the Beautiful Game' hub for 2026 World Cup travellers**

Brand USA has introduced America the Beautiful Game, an all-new trip-planning platform created to help football fans make the most of their time in the United States before, during, and after the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Available at [AmericaTheBeautiful.com/Football](http://AmericaTheBeautiful.com/Football), the hub features in-depth city guides, local food recommendations, and AI-curated sample road trip itineraries that link all 11 U.S. host cities with nearby attractions and experiences.



**Diwali inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list**

Deepavali, India's celebrated festival of light has been officially inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The announcement was made on Wednesday during the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), currently underway at the Red Fort in New Delhi.



**Air India Express to connect Varanasi with Bangkok from Feb 1, 2026**

The new service will offer travellers from Varanasi convenient non-stop connectivity to one of Asia's most popular leisure destinations. Similarly, it will provide convenient options for tourists from Thailand to visit Varanasi, Sarnath, and other major attractions on the Buddhist circuit. Bookings are now open on the airline's award-winning website, [airindiaexpress.com](http://airindiaexpress.com), mobile app, and other major booking channels.



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# TRANSIT TRAVEL TURNS LOST HOURS INTO TOURISM'S SMARTEST CURRENCY



Once upon a time, a long layover meant airport coffee, restless pacing and counting boarding calls. Today, it can mean breakfast in a souq, an evening by the harbour, or a night in a city you never planned to visit. Transit travel has quietly rewritten the rules of tourism, transforming in-between time into intentional experience. What was once a pause in the journey is now, very often, the highlight.

- Bharti Sharma

### The journey may pause, but curiosity does not

Transit travel refers to short stays taken during international stopovers, typically ranging from a few hours to several days. What has changed is not the layover itself, but how destinations now design around it.

More than sixty per cent of long-haul international journeys involve at least one stop. For years, this was treated as a logistical necessity. Today, it is recognised as opportunity. Destinations have understood that travellers are no longer unwilling to step out during a stopover. They simply need ease, access and reassurance that their time will be well spent.

A traveller landing for eighteen hours does not want a checklist. They want a feeling. A glimpse of the city, a sense of place, and the comfort of knowing that everything works smoothly within a tight window.

### When visas invite exploration, travellers say yes

One of the most powerful drivers behind transit tourism is immigration policy. Not marketing budgets or glossy campaigns, but the quiet simplification of entry. Across regions, countries have introduced short-stay transit visas, visa-free stopovers and temporary entry permits designed specifically for travellers passing through. These typically allow stays of twenty-four to ninety-six hours, often with minimal paperwork and quick approvals.

The impact is measurable. The UN World Tourism Organization has consistently noted that easier visa regimes can lift tourist arrivals

by up to twenty-five per cent. Transit travellers, in particular, respond immediately. With the barrier removed, curiosity turns into action.

What was once border control has evolved into an invitation. A short one, perhaps, but enough to open the door.



### Airlines have become the first storytellers of a destination

Airlines now play a defining role in transit tourism. Sitting at the intersection of booking behaviour and route planning, they are uniquely placed to shape how and where travellers choose to step out.

Stopover programmes have moved far beyond hotel discounts. They now include curated city experiences, cultural introductions, dining offers and seamless airport-to-city access. The flight becomes part of the tourism narrative, not just the transport.

Data from multiple aviation markets shows that destinations linked to structured stopover programmes see significantly higher conversion from transit passenger to inbound visitor. Many of these travellers return later for longer holidays, having already established trust and familiarity during their brief first visit.

In this model, airlines are no longer just carriers. They are collaborators in destination growth.





### Short stays often leave the strongest economic footprint

Transit travellers may stay briefly, but they tend to spend decisively. With limited time, there is little room for hesitation.

Research across global hub cities shows that stopover visitors often record higher per-day spending than longer-stay tourists. Dining, guided experiences, shopping and cultural attractions benefit the most. There is a sense of purpose to the expenditure. Everything counts.

Equally important is recall. Transit visitors experience destinations without fatigue. Their impression is fresh, positive and incomplete in a way that invites return. For tourism boards, this is not lost

business. It is an investment in future travel.

### In a fast-moving world, transit travel offers permission to pause

The future of transit tourism lies in precision and feeling. Travellers no longer want to see everything. They want to connect, briefly but meaningfully.

Destinations are responding with modular experiences designed to fit exact time windows. Four-hour city loops. Overnight cultural trails. Wellness resets between flights. Culinary introductions that tell a story in a single meal. Global travel trend reports consistently show growth in short, experience-led travel,

particularly among premium and long-haul audiences. Transit tourism sits neatly within this shift. It respects time, removes pressure and delivers memory without obligation.

In a world obsessed with speed, transit travel succeeds because it allows travellers to pause, without falling behind.

Transit travel is no longer about filling time. It is about using it well. As journeys become smarter and borders more welcoming, the destinations that will win are those that understand one simple truth. Sometimes, a few well-designed hours are all it takes to turn a passer-by into a traveller.

### Top Transit Travel Offers by Country

#### • Qatar

Stopover programmes offering complimentary or subsidised hotel stays and curated city experiences

#### • Singapore

Structured stopover holidays combining accommodation, attractions and transport access

#### • Iceland

Up to seven nights without additional airfare, transforming transatlantic routes into mini-breaks

#### • Turkey

Simplified transit visas and short cultural experiences centred around Istanbul

#### • United Arab Emirates

Short-stay visas, city tours and hotel partnerships in Dubai and Abu Dhabi

#### • South Korea

Free in-transit cultural tours for passengers passing through Seoul

#### • Japan

Highly efficient connectivity enabling compact exploratory stays during international transits



### Facts to remember

- Over 60 per cent of long-haul journeys involve a stopover
- Visa facilitation can increase tourist arrivals by up to 25 per cent
- Transit travellers spend more per day than long-stay tourists
- One in three stopover visitors return for longer holidays
- Airlines are now among the most influential tourism promoters globally



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# TWELVE WINDOWS INTO TRAVEL'S FUTURE

Travel has always moved to the rhythm of the calendar. Seasons dictate demand, months shape moods, and timing transforms intent into experience. As the global travel industry steps into 2026, it reveals itself gently, thoughtfully, month by month, much like an advent calendar that rewards patience and curiosity.

- *Tripti Jain*



This is Travel Turtle's month-wise unwrapping of the year ahead. Each month opens a new window into how travellers will think, feel, choose, and explore. Together, these moments sketch a year defined by intention, elegance, emotional connection, and industry-wide evolution.

### JANUARY PURPOSE SETS THE COMPASS

The year opens with reflection and resolve. January travellers approach journeys with clarity, choosing experiences that align with personal values and meaningful milestones. Travel becomes a conscious decision rather than an impulsive escape. For the industry, this month signals a shift towards narrative-led itineraries, where purpose shapes planning and destinations speak to identity, aspiration, and emotional relevance.

### FEBRUARY SLOW TRAVEL FINDS ITS RHYTHM

February softens the pace of movement. Travellers choose longer stays and deeper immersion, allowing destinations to unfold naturally. Fewer hotel changes and relaxed itineraries create space for genuine cultural engagement. Slow travel emerges as a sophisticated choice, offering the industry an opportunity to design journeys rooted in depth, sustainability, and storytelling rather than speed.

### MARCH EXPERIENCES TAKE CENTRE STAGE

Spring introduces experiential richness. March travellers seek moments rather than monuments. Private workshops, guided neighbourhood walks, heritage interactions, and local narratives become central to itinerary design. Travel professionals curate journeys that feel personal and fluid, transforming traditional sightseeing into immersive storytelling that lingers well beyond the return flight.

### APRIL CONSCIOUS LUXURY COMES INTO BLOOM

Luxury in April expresses itself quietly. Thoughtful service, mindful design, and emotional intelligence redefine premium travel. Guests value elegance that feels personal and respectful, with sustainability and authenticity forming the backbone of indulgence. For hotels and destinations, April highlights the power of refined restraint and meaningful detail.

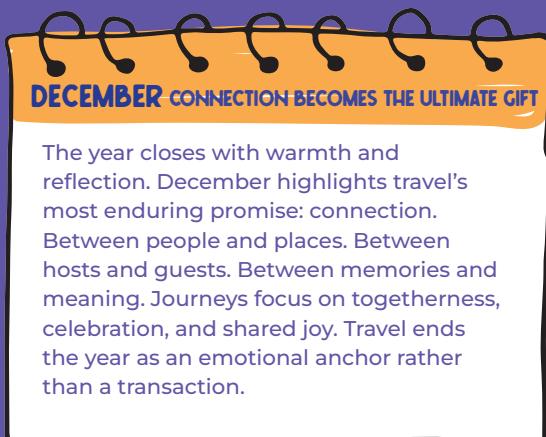
### MAY NATURE BECOMES THE NARRATIVE

As landscapes awaken, nature-led travel takes centre stage. Mountains, forests, coastlines, and open skies draw travellers seeking grounding and perspective. Outdoor experiences integrate seamlessly with comfort, offering curated adventures that celebrate the environment. May encourages destinations to present nature not as a backdrop, but as the main character.

### JUNE WELLNESS WEAVES INTO JOURNEYS

June introduces wellness as an intuitive companion to travel. Morning rituals, mindful movement, restorative stays, and nature-inspired therapies blend effortlessly into itineraries. Travel becomes a space for renewal and balance rather than escape. The industry responds with programmes that nurture both body and mind without disrupting the flow of exploration.





#### The Travel Turtle perspective

2026 unfolds as a year shaped by intention, intelligence, and empathy. For the travel industry, success lies in understanding rhythm as much as revenue, emotion as much as efficiency, and people as much as products.

At Travel Turtle, this advent calendar represents a reminder that travel evolves gradually, shaped by trust, collaboration, and storytelling. Each month brings an opportunity to engage travellers more deeply, design more thoughtfully, and communicate more honestly. As every window opens, the industry moves forward together, crafting journeys that matter long after the calendar turns.

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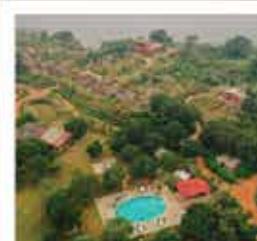
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Sariska, Rajasthan



Chitvan Jungle Lodge  
Kanha, MP



Bandhav Vilas  
Bandhavgarh, MP



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Bari, Ramsagar, Rajasthan



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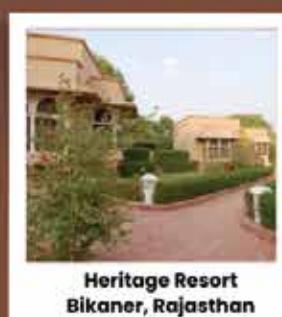
Dev Shree  
Deogarh, Rajasthan



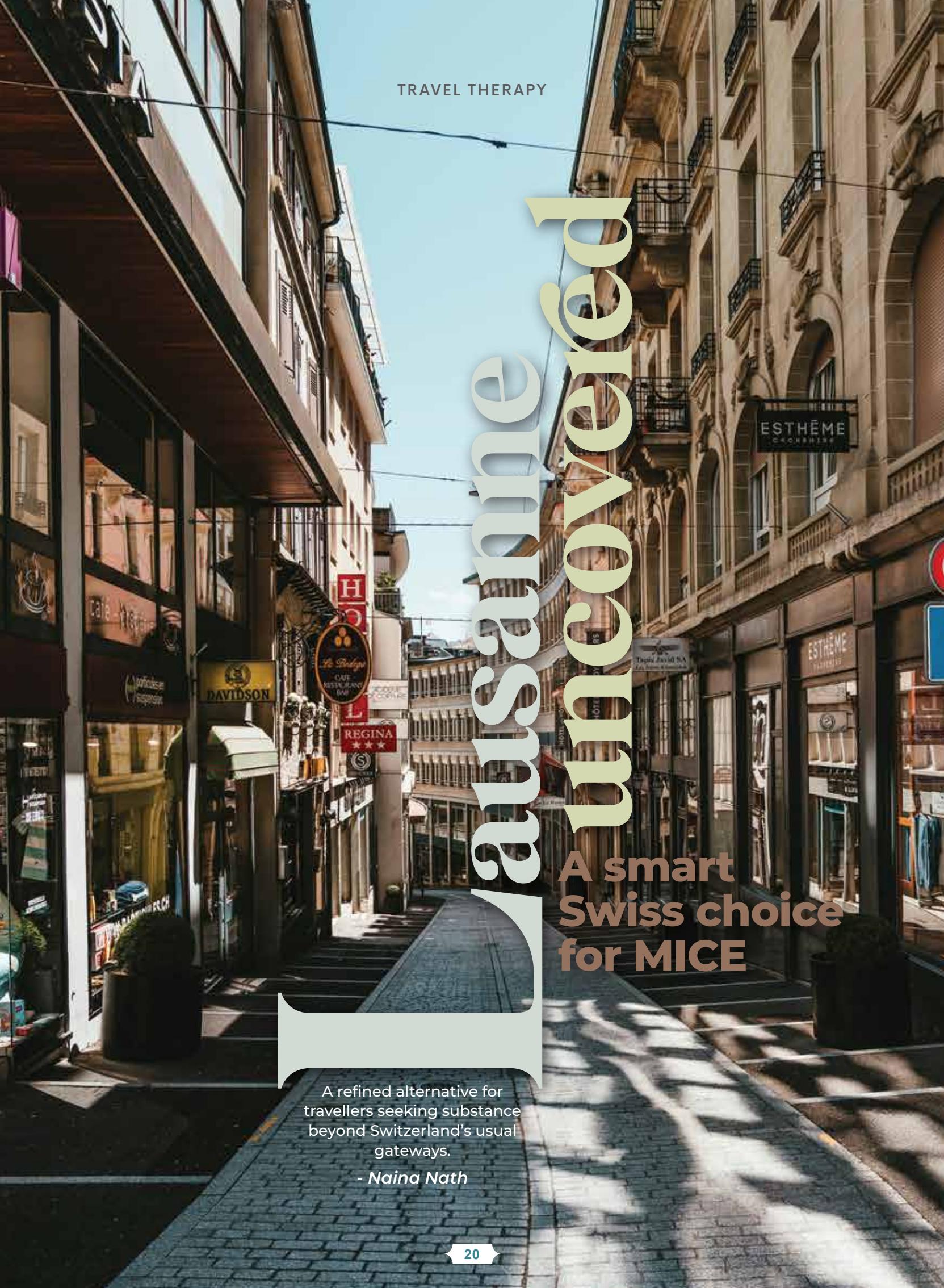
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TRAVEL THERAPY

# Lausanne discovered

**A smart  
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travellers seeking substance  
beyond Switzerland's usual  
gateways.

- Naina Nath



Often overshadowed by Zurich and Geneva, Lausanne, located in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, quietly asserts itself as one of Switzerland's most compelling destinations for meetings and corporate travel. We experienced the city during a pre-tour curated by the Switzerland Convention and Incentive Bureau (SCIB) for an Indian delegation of travel professionals specialising in corporate and MICE events. This trip took place ahead of the Asia Trophy 2025 in Zurich.

Designed to showcase Lausanne's potential as a host city, the itinerary combined premium hospitality, easy connectivity, and cultural experiences, all set against a relaxed lakeside backdrop. Over a short but well-paced visit, the city revealed itself as compact, efficient, and quietly impressive,

offering planners the infrastructure they need without the crowds or pace of Switzerland's larger hubs.

### Beau-Rivage Palace

Our stay in Lausanne was at the iconic Beau-Rivage Palace, a property that immediately inspires confidence among corporate groups. Located directly on the shores of Lake Geneva, the five-star hotel offers 168 rooms and suites, including categories well-suited to extended stays and executive travel. For meetings and events, it features 12 conference and event spaces, including the historic Sandoz Ballroom, which can host up to 600 guests, along with several smaller salons ideal for board meetings, private dinners and breakout sessions. Beyond its event credentials, the hotel delivers strongly on lifestyle,

with multiple restaurants including fine dining options, a spa, indoor and outdoor pools, tennis courts and beautifully landscaped gardens. Its heritage is equally notable, with moments such as Phil Collins' wedding in 1999 adding to its storied past. For corporate and MICE planners, Beau-Rivage Palace serves as both a venue and a prestigious address, something we clearly appreciated during site inspections and discussions.

### The Olympic Museum

One of Lausanne's biggest advantages for MICE groups is how effortlessly experiences fit into a busy schedule. Just a 100-metre walk from the Beau-Rivage Palace, the Olympic Museum is an easy addition to any conference agenda. Home to the largest Olympic collection in the world,

it houses over 10,000 artefacts, interactive galleries and multimedia exhibits that trace the evolution of the Games and their values. Landscaped outdoor spaces overlooking Lake Geneva offer room to pause, network and reflect, while the on-site restaurant allows a cultural visit to be combined with a relaxed lunch. For incentive groups and conference delegates, the venue adds context and inspiration without requiring extensive travel time.

Aline Méan, Senior Promotion and Events Manager, Olympic Museum, said, "2024 was a record year, with over 400,000 guests. Visitors come from around the world, with India among our top ten source markets. With content for all ages, we look forward to welcoming many more guests from India soon."



## Wine tasting

A short train ride from the city takes visitors into the heart of the Lavaux wine region, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its dramatic terraced vineyards. A wine tasting at Grandvaux La Croix Duplex offers an introduction to the region's celebrated wines, paired with sweeping views of Lake Geneva. For MICE groups, this experience works well as an incentive activity or a post-conference unwind, allowing delegates to step away from formal settings and connect with the destination through its produce and landscape.

## Cathedral and Old Town

A guided walking tour is one of the best ways to understand Lausanne's character. Our route

through the old town highlighted just how compact the city is, with key landmarks easily accessible on foot. The Lausanne Cathedral, regarded as one of Switzerland's finest examples of Gothic architecture, is truly unmissable. Standing at the city's highest point, it offers striking architectural detail along with panoramic views that make the climb worthwhile. The surrounding streets, lined with cafés, boutiques and historic buildings, add texture to the experience and work well for short sightseeing breaks between meetings.

## Chaplin's World

Less than an hour from Lausanne lies Chaplin's World in Vevey, where Charlie Chaplin spent the final 25 years of his life. The museum explores his personal journey and cinematic career through immersive exhibitions and intimate spaces that offer insight into his work, creativity and legacy. Our visit added a creative and emotional dimension to the itinerary, balancing business discussions with storytelling and visual engagement. For corporate and MICE groups, Chaplin's World works particularly well as a

half-day off-site excursion, with a mix of indoor exhibitions and outdoor spaces that encourage conversation, shared experiences and a meaningful break from formal meeting environments.

## Indian dining

Culinary familiarity is important for Indian groups, and Lausanne delivers. We dined at Golden India Restaurant & Take Away, which served authentic Indian cuisine with flavours that felt reassuringly familiar. Beyond this, the city offers several Indian dining options, making it easier to accommodate dietary preferences during longer conferences or incentive trips, while still giving delegates the flexibility to explore local Swiss cuisine.

## Getting there

Connectivity is another strong point for Lausanne. The city is easily reached from Zurich via the Swiss Federal Railways (SBB), with a journey time of approximately two hours. The scenic train route passes lakes, vineyards and rolling countryside, offering an enjoyable transfer for international delegates arriving in Zurich. For corporate travellers, the comfort and reliability of Switzerland's rail network make Lausanne an easy

destination to access and navigate, without domestic flights or long road transfers.

Beyond Zurich, Lausanne presents itself as a city that understands modern MICE travel. From luxury hotels and professional venues to culture, cuisine and connectivity, it delivers a well-rounded experience that appeals to all kinds of travellers. For our Indian delegation, the tour highlighted Lausanne's potential as a strong contender for future conferences, incentives and corporate events, leaving a lasting impression without trying too hard. It is a Swiss city that rewards those willing to look beyond the obvious, all year round.

"Lausanne is a destination full of opportunities for corporate travel. I look forward to welcoming our Indian partners, whether it's for site inspections, incentive trips or connecting with local collaborators. My team and I are here to support you, and our services are completely free of charge," said Sébastien Marcelis, Market Manager, Lausanne Tourism.



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of white

# Rann Utsav



Some journeys arrive quietly and then stay forever. Rann Utsav unfolded in exactly that manner, gently drawing me away from the rush of everyday life and into a world where space felt infinite and moments felt unhurried.

-Tripti Jain



From the first step into Bhuj, there was a distinct sense of arrival, a feeling that this land was ready to reveal its stories at its own pace. Kutch did not rush to impress. It allowed experiences to bloom naturally, and that is what made this journey an experience of a lifetime.

### Welcome wrapped in warmth

Dhordo's Tent City became home almost instantly. The tents were gorgeous, expansive and thoughtfully curated, offering comfort without losing the essence of the land they stood upon. Soft lighting, tasteful interiors and generous spaces made each return after a long day feel deeply reassuring. Mornings arrived gently through filtered desert light, and nights carried a calm silence rarely found elsewhere. Hospitality stood out as something extraordinary. Every member of

the team observed, understood and responded with care. Needs were anticipated with sincerity, creating a sense of being truly looked after. The warmth here surpassed many luxury hotels I have visited, simply because it felt heartfelt and human.

### Flavours that tell a story

Food at Rann Utsav formed a beautiful rhythm to the days. Each meal celebrated Gujarat's culinary pride with generosity and flair. Traditional flavours carried depth, comfort and familiarity, even when experienced for the first time. The variety ensured that every dining experience felt distinct, from leisurely breakfasts to vibrant dinners that brought people together. There was a quiet joy in watching local delicacies being enjoyed by travellers from different corners, united by shared appreciation. Meals here nourished far beyond the plate.

### Where craft becomes conversation

Kutch revealed its soul most vividly through its artisans. The handicrafts here demanded attention, admiration and respect. Watching Rogan art take shape felt mesmerising, knowing that this rare craft survives through dedication and patience. Copper bell making resonated with rhythm and tradition, each bell crafted with care and purpose. Pottery told stories through texture and form, and block printing showcased precision perfected over generations.

The artisans themselves were the true highlight. Their eyes carried pride, their hands carried heritage, and their voices carried stories worth preserving. Every interaction felt like a lesson in resilience and creativity. These crafts were expressions of identity, deeply rooted in land and community. Gujarat's cultural wealth stood proudly on

display, inviting admiration without pretence.

### White horizons and gentle stillness

The white salt desert introduced me to silence in its purest form. Standing there during sunrise felt meditative. Soft pastels painted the horizon, and the vastness seemed to slow thoughts and steady emotions. Sunset brought a different magic, as warm hues danced across the salt, reflecting light in a quiet spectacle. Each visit to the Rann felt unique, each moment carried its own emotion. The desert did not overwhelm. It embraced gently, offering calm and clarity in equal measure.

### Flamingoes and the Road to Heaven

The journey towards Dholavira unfolded like a dream sequence. The Road to Heaven lived up to its poetic name, with flamingoes appearing gracefully along the



way. Their presence felt symbolic, adding movement and colour to the stark beauty of the landscape. Watching them through the window felt surreal, as if nature itself had chosen to perform. This drive became one of the most visually rewarding experiences of the trip, reminding me of how unexpectedly beautiful the in-between moments can be.

### When history breathes again

Dholavira awakened memories of school lessons, transforming them into tangible experiences. Walking through the ancient remains of the Indus Valley Civilisation stirred deep fascination. The town planning, water management systems and architectural vision reflected intelligence far ahead of its time. A guided tour enriched the experience, connecting facts with stories that made history feel alive and relevant. Standing there felt grounding, offering perspective on time, progress and human ingenuity.

### Evenings alive with rhythm

As daylight softened, cultural evenings brought colour and sound into focus. Folk performances celebrated Gujarat's artistic traditions with energy and pride. Music flowed effortlessly, dances carried stories, and the atmosphere felt joyful and inclusive. These evenings created space for connection, laughter and shared

appreciation. Watching performers perform under the open sky added authenticity, making each moment feel rooted in place and purpose.

### A sky that redefined wonder

Stargazing became the most profound and unforgettable part of this journey. Under the vast Kutch sky, the universe revealed itself in breathtaking clarity. Stars appeared countless, brighter and closer than ever before. Witnessing Saturn and Jupiter through the telescope felt surreal, as if space itself had leaned closer. Sharing a quiet moment with the moon brought an overwhelming sense of peace. Time dissolved during these hours. The sky demanded attention, and my gaze grew stronger with each passing moment. Thoughts softened, silence deepened and wonder took over completely.

Hours passed unnoticed as I stood there, captivated and humbled. This experience felt deeply personal, rare and transformative. It reminded me of how small we are and how expansive the world truly is.

### Bhuj and the colours that travelled home

Bhuj added its own layer of charm to the journey. The city revealed itself through vibrant textiles, cultural landmarks and quiet resilience. Colours appeared everywhere, in markets, murals and everyday



life. The visit felt grounding, offering glimpses into the spirit of the region. Bhuj carried stories of strength, creativity and continuity. These impressions stayed with me long after departure, becoming memories I carried back home.

### A pause that healed

This journey offered something deeply precious. It offered pause. Days flowed gently, guided by experiences rather than schedules. Each interaction felt meaningful, each moment felt present. The care shown by the people, the richness of the land and the balance between comfort and authenticity created an environment where relaxation came naturally. Rann

Utsav did not feel like an event. It felt like a celebration of life, culture and connection.

### Carrying the Rann within

Leaving Kutch felt emotional. The white desert, the warmth of the people, the artistry, the history and the sky stitched themselves quietly into my being. Gujarat revealed countless reasons to feel proud, and I felt grateful to witness them firsthand. Rann Utsav became more than a destination. It became a memory that continues to glow softly, reminding me that some journeys change you gently and forever. This was a journey where time slowed, senses awakened and wonder returned. A journey I will always carry with me.





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# ASIA TROPHY 2025

**Racing Through Switzerland,  
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Three days. Ten countries. One  
unforgettable journey across Switzerland's  
most inspiring landscapes and venues.

*-Naina Nath*



December 2025 will always stay with me for many reasons, but most of all for being part of the Jubilee Edition of the Switzerland Asia Trophy. Marking its 10th edition, the Asia Trophy 2025 brought together 70 participants from 10 countries for an immersive four-day experience across Zurich and its surrounding regions.

Hosted by the Switzerland Convention and Incentive Bureau in collaboration with Kuoni Tumlare, the event was designed to showcase Switzerland as a year-round meetings and incentives destination. Having now returned home, suitcase unpacked but mind still full, it feels like the right moment to reflect on a journey that was equal parts competition, discovery, learning, and connection.

#### WHAT IS THE ASIA TROPHY?

The Asia Trophy is a travel agent-oriented event that places participants right in the heart of Switzerland's MICE ecosystem. Instead of presentations and conference rooms, the learning happens through challenges,

rallies, site visits, and shared experiences. Teams travel by train, boat, bus, cable car, and on foot, discovering destinations, venues, and service providers while competing in a friendly race across the country. Across the four days, the rally unfolded through six carefully planned stops, each designed to reveal a different side of Switzerland. The objective goes far beyond winning. It is about understanding Switzerland's accessibility, its efficient public transport, sustainability focus, safety, and the sheer diversity of experiences it offers for meetings and incentives. It was refreshing to see how professional takeaways emerged so naturally through teamwork, challenges, and genuine interactions.

#### DAY 1: ZURICH SETS THE PACE

Our journey began in Zurich, with a pre-tour visit to the Lindt Home of Chocolate, which was an instant mood-lifter and a reminder that Switzerland knows how to make a strong first impression. That evening, we checked in at Mama Shelter, a lively and modern base that set

the tone for the days ahead.

Day 1 officially kicked off with a welcome brunch at the Bellevue Christmas Market (Zürcher Wienachtsdorf), with views of the Opera House and Lake Zurich adding a festive charm. The air was crisp, the city buzzing, and there was a shared sense of excitement as the rally began. Challenges took us through Zurich's city centre and Old Town, with stops that brought together the city's past and present-day hospitality. One of the highlights was visiting ETH Zurich, where we stood in front of Albert Einstein's preserved locker. It was a small moment, but standing there made history feel unexpectedly personal. Another rally stop took us to the Mandarin Oriental Savoy Zurich, where expansive suites, rooftop terraces, and its prime location on Paradeplatz showcased Zurich's luxury offering for high-end incentives. Shopping turned into part of the challenge itself, followed by flag throwing competitions and plenty of laughter before heading up to Uetliberg for our evening challenges at Hotel UTO KULM. Perched around 870

metres above the city, the views were nothing short of breathtaking. With snow underfoot, warm lights around us, and activities like curling and cow stacking, the atmosphere felt magical. Glühwein by the campfire and aperitifs marked the end of a packed first day, with a sense that this was already turning into something more than a competition.

#### DAY 2: SNOW, SPEED, AND SWITZERLAND AT ITS BEST

If Day 1 was about urban charm, Day 2 was pure alpine magic. We travelled from Zurich to Engelberg via Lucerne aboard the iconic Churchill Red Arrow train. Dating back to the 1930s and once used by Winston Churchill himself, the train journey felt like stepping into a different era. Red seat cushions, tables for four, a spacious bar, and festive ambience made the journey as memorable as the destination. Engelberg welcomed us with snow-covered peaks and postcard-perfect scenery. Mount Titlis, rising to 3,020 metres, became the setting for our next rally stop.





From snow golfing and treasure hunts to ball-throwing challenges, the SnowXpark turned competition into play. Standing on the Titlis Cliff Walk, surrounded by endless white and panoramic views, was one of those moments where the competition briefly faded, and all that mattered was simply being there. A traditional fondue lunch warmed us up before we boarded the Titlis Rotair, the world's first revolving cable car, which provided uninterrupted views of the snowy landscape. The evening brought us back to Zurich for dinner at Zunfthaus zur Meisen, an 18th century Rococo guild house that felt elegant and regal. A live performance by Swiss composer Sophie de Quay added a cultural note to the evening. We ended the night at the Münsterhof Christmas Market, sipping glühwein and picking up small festive trinkets, tired but happy in that way only a full day outdoors can make you feel.

### DAY 3: LAKESIDE CALM AND A STRONG FINISH

Day 3 took us from Zurich to the Greater Zurich Area, beginning with a cruise on Lake Zurich aboard the MS Rosenstadt. The retro-style motor ship gave us 360 - degree views, fresh lake air, and a slower pace that allowed everyone to take a breath and reflect on the journey so far. As we arrived in Rapperswil, often called the town of roses, the medieval vibes and serene lake views immediately caught our attention.

The next rally stop was the Castle of Rapperswil, the town's landmark. Challenges ranged from aiming games to puzzles and exploring the castle's exhibitions, keeping energy levels high. We then paused for an Asian cuisine lunch before heading to our final stop at Bächlihof Farm. Surrounded by orchards, the farm was the ultimate finale. A rustic setting, perfect for team-building challenges, with an indoor

farmers market that turned shopping into one last fun challenge—talk about saving the best for last! Ending the rally in a place that celebrated nature, sustainability, and community felt like the perfect way to wrap up the adventure and a true glimpse of what Switzerland offers beyond its cities. The farewell dinner and award ceremony took place at Gasthaus Albisgüetli, a grand rustic ballroom in the heart of

Zurich. Teams gathered one last time amid applause and laughter as the winners of the 10th Asia Trophy were announced — Team Cow taking home the trophy. While not everyone walked away with a prize, the room was full of pride, camaraderie, and the satisfaction of a journey well shared.

### AND SO... REFLECTIONS, RESULTS, AND WHAT'S NEXT

As part of Team St. Bernard, inspired by one of Switzerland's most iconic symbols, the Asia Trophy 2025 was about more than rankings. It was about experiencing destinations firsthand, building relationships through teamwork, and seeing how Switzerland delivers on quality, reliability, sustainability, and seamless connectivity. From the city streets of Zurich to the snowy peaks of Engelberg and the calm lakes of Rapperswil, the event delivered on every promise it set out to make. We may not have brought back the trophy this year, but we returned with something far more valuable: new ideas, stronger connections, fresh inspiration, and memories that will stay long after the snow has melted. Somewhere between the challenges, the travel, and the conversations, the real understanding of Switzerland quietly fell into place. And with that, the hope is already alive that next year, the trophy might just come home with us.





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# SOPA LODGES

*The best so far*



A childhood spent glued to National Geographic finally paid off the day Kenya stamped my passport and said, "Welcome to the real thing."

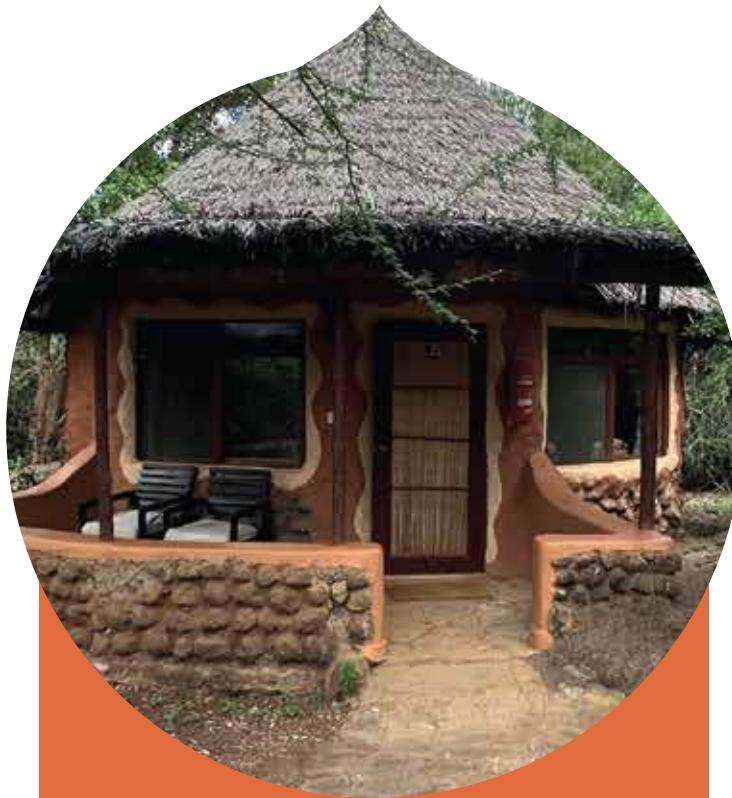
**-Harish Chandra**

Over ten indulgent days, Sopa Lodges turned a wildlife-obsessed daydreamer into a very pampered safari junky, who now believes that bush dinners, verandah with a panoramic view, and surprise flamingo sightings should be a part of everyday life. Wildlife around you is a constant presence.

### **'Karibu Kenya'**, checking into warmth

The journey began with a smooth IndiGo flight from Mumbai to Nairobi, where the screen said 'Karibu Kenya' (Welcome to Kenya) and my heart replied, 'It's About time.' At the airport, Ms Shelie, Marketing and Communications Manager, Sopa Lodges, greeted us with a warmth that felt like being adopted by a very efficient, very hospitable African family.

Sopa Lodges, founded in 1986, operates five properties across Kenya's prime wildlife destinations, but what impressed me most was; how quickly 'lodge staff' turned into people who remembered my tea preferences and asked about my day like old friends. From the very beginning, it was clear that at Sopa, hospitality is an instinct.



### **Amboseli Sopa Lodge: Kilimanjaro views with cozy luxury**

#### **Highlights of Amboseli**

**Location:** Edge of Amboseli National park, 250 Km by road from Nairobi Access: 4 hour drive from Nairobi, 30 min flight from Wilson Airport to Amboseli airstrip. 1 Hour transfer from the airstrip to the Lodge.

**Accommodation:** 84 cottages, includes 1 honeymoon suite, 1 Presidential suit.

**Conferencing:** 2 conference rooms, largest accommodation 110 people.

**Activities:** Game drives, Bush and Outdoor Dining, Nature Walk

**Attraction of Game drive:** among all big wild animals, watching pink flamingos was truly an amazing experience, Kilimanjaro Balloon Safaris ride over national park is beyond imagination.

My first hideout was Amboseli Sopa Lodge, dramatically set against the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro, the kind of view that makes you suspicious your life has been upgraded to a screensaver. A ceremonial tribal welcome with music and dance made our entry so grand that for a moment, I expected someone to roll out a red carpet for my suitcase.

The cottages here feel like a sweet compromise between 'I'm in the wild' and 'I refuse to give up hot water and plush beds.' Thoughtfully spread out across the grounds, they offer privacy, soft lighting, and an unspoken promise that even if you spot a lion on the game drive, your room will still be the star of your day.

Beautifully done verandas perfect for early morning coffee and late-night stargazing. Spacious interiors that allow you to unpack as if you're moving in. Well-appointed bathrooms that prove **safari** and **comfort** can peacefully coexist. The lodge staff operated with that magical blend of efficiency and warmth: bags disappeared from the jeep and reappeared in the right room, welcome drinks appeared





started feeling too enthusiastic, and every 'How was your game drive?' sounded genuinely curious. Between curated game drives, bush dining, and nature walks, the rhythm of the stay felt intentional, never rushed, never idle, just gently guided.

The game drive hero moment was the sight of elegant pink flamingos casually decorating the landscape while Kilimanjaro watched from a distance. **A hot-air balloon safari over the park with Kilimanjaro Balloon Safaris added an almost surreal layer; floating above the savannah, I decided this is the only kind of traffic jam I ever want to be stuck in again, one made of clouds, sunlight, and elephants.**

**Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort: Where Zebras Share Your Lawn**  
**Highlights of Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort:**

**Location:** 90 Km from Nairobi with a 1.5 hour beautiful drive  
**Accommodation:** 82 rooms, Includes 6 interconnecting rooms on the ground floor, 2 suites

**Conferencing:** 6 conference rooms, largest accommodates 70 people

**Facilities:** Bars, lounge, restaurants, outdoor boma dining area, swimming pools, gym, gift shop. Large ground to host weddings, events etc.

**Activities:** boat rides, biking, bird watching, nature walks.

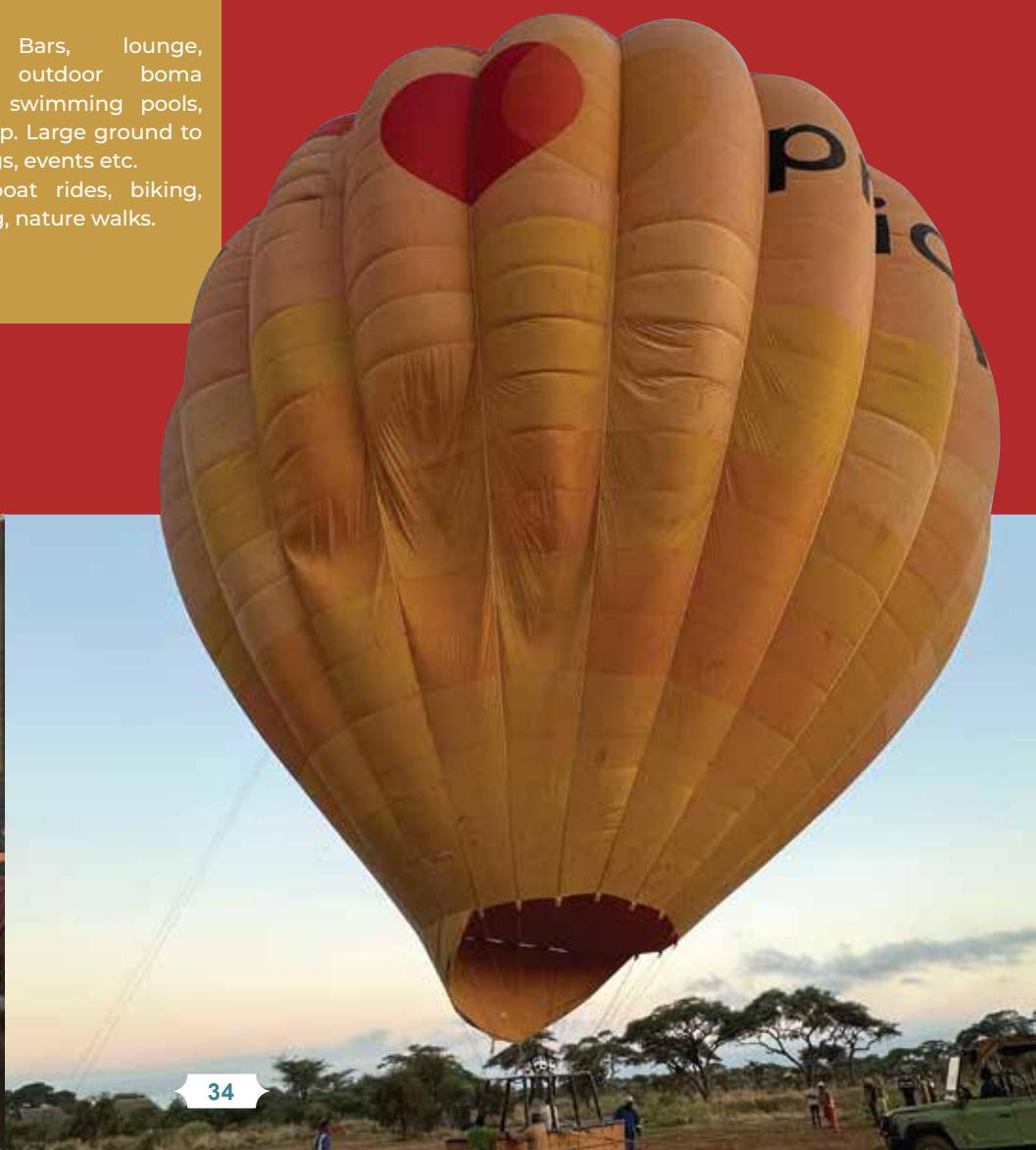
If Amboseli was about wide skies and mountains, Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort was about curves, architectural curves, to be precise. The resort seems to have grown organically between indigenous trees, with flowing lines and soft forms that make even the buildings look relaxed. This lake Naivasha is one of the largest habitat for over 1800 Hippos.

The welcome by General Manager, Mr Jerry Were and his team set the tone: warm smiles, efficient check-in, and the subtle but unmistakable feeling that these people have been running a masterclass in hospitality for years. The lobby is grand without being intimidating, and the kind of place where you could happily get 'lost' for an hour just people-watching and sofa-testing.

The rooms are destinations in themselves, each beautifully

appointed with tranquil lake views and just enough luxury to remind you you're on a premium safari, not a camping trip with delusions of grandeur. Step out onto the balcony and the first thing you notice is that the 'lawn' is shared real estate between humans, zebras, giraffes, warthogs, deer, monkeys, and occasionally hippos who believe in dramatic entrances at dusk.

Dining at Naivasha deserves its own visa stamp. We were joined by Mr Kennedy Ayoti, Chief Operating Officer, East Africa and Ms Rosemary M. Kuria, Director of Sales, Sopa Lodges. The cuisine is exceptional, and discovering authentic Indian food in the middle of Kenya, courtesy of Chef Toby, trained at the Taj in Mumbai, felt like a culinary plot twist written just for homesick travellers. Between lake-fresh dishes and perfectly spiced Indian fare, the only real





challenge was deciding what not to eat.

Resort life came with temptations: Swimming pools that looked like they'd been auditioning for a luxury magazine spread. Bars and lounges ideal for post-safari storytelling and pre-dinner 'just one drink' rituals. An outdoor Boma dining area that turned evenings into theatrical, fire lit experiences

As zebras grazed a respectful distance from my window and birds orchestrated the soundtrack, Lake Naivasha Sopa Resort quietly made a case for the wilderness being the most luxurious neighbour one could have.

**Lake Nakuru Sopa Lodge:**  
Flamingos, city lights & culinary theatre

**Highlights of Lake Nakuru Sopa Lodge:**

**Location:** 165 km from Nairobi, 21 km on all weather road from the Park gate to the Lodge with a 2.5 hour drive from Nairobi

**Accommodation:** 60 rooms

**Facilities:** bar, lounge, restaurant, swimming pool, gift shop

**Activities:** game drives, bird watching, nature walks

By the time we reached Lake Nakuru Sopa Lodge, I had upgraded my expectations from nice lodge to surprise me. The lodge, perched on elevated terrain overlooking Lake Nakuru and its surrounding forests, did not disappoint.

From the room balcony, the view stretched across shimmering water, acacia-dotted landscapes. The cottages here respect your need for both immersion and retreat, walls sturdy enough to keep out the wild, windows large enough to let all of it in visually. Lake Nakuru is famous for its dense flamingo populations, rhinos, buffaloes, and big cats, but at the lodge, hospitality stole a large share of the attention. The team greeted us with the now-familiar Sopa signature: genuine smiles, thoughtful touches, and that uncanny ability to anticipate needs before we voiced them.

The culinary highlight was an interactive cooking session led by the in-house chef, which was equal parts cooking lesson and comedy show. Chopping, stirring, and tasting together turned dinner into a collaborative performance, and for a brief moment, everyone in that place felt like a contestant on a very well-organised, very delicious reality show.

Evenings were reserved for cocktails and dinner with an unexpected bonus scene: the

twinkling lights of Nakuru city in the distance, like a reminder that civilisation still exists, just in case you'd forgotten while staring at zebras and rhinos all day. The lodge manages to blend serenity, spectacle, and comfort with understated confidence.

**Maasai Mara Sopa Lodge:**  
Legacy wrapped in red & gold  
Highlights of Masai Mara Sopa Lodge:

**Location:** 250 Km with 6 hour drive from Nairobi.

**Accommodation :** 101 rooms, including 4 inter connecting rooms, 1 honeymoon suite & 12 Suits.

**Conferencing:** 1 conference room accommodates 70 people

**Facilities:** Bar, lounge, restaurant, outdoor boma dining area, swimming pool, gift shop

**Activities:** one of the best game drives, bush dining, bird watching, nature walk, hot air balloon safaris, Prime location to witness the Great Migration (best between July and October)

Stepping into Maasai Mara National Reserve is like walking into a global wildlife documentary and realising, with mild shock, that you are on the right side of the camera for once.



Maasai Mara Sopa Lodge, Sopa's oldest and most iconic property, this feeling is multiplied by a strong sense of place and history.

The welcome was nothing short of theatrical. Men in striking reds, yellows, and blacks and women adorned in deep red with silver and crystal jewellery greeted us with a powerful traditional performance that felt like an opening ceremony just for our arrival. If first impressions are everything, Maasai Mara Sopa Lodge made sure we had none left to spare.

Despite its remote location, the cottages are remarkably well-appointed, blending rustic charm with modern comforts so seamlessly that you quickly forget how far you are from the nearest city. Under the leadership of General Manager Ms Ludi Ogot, the lodge not only offers luxury stays but also a meaningful introduction to Maasai culture.

Evenings unfolded as carefully choreographed events: Sunset cocktails in the bush. Cultural performances under a slowly darkening sky. Open-air dinners that made the Milky Way feel like part of the décor. The visit to a nearby Maasai village turned the experience from a safari holiday into a cultural exchange.

**The lodge's focus on community engagement, local employment, and support for artisans through handicraft sourcing makes it an example of how hospitality can be both luxurious and responsible without turning preachy.**

### Samburu Sopa Lodge: Stars, Silence And Samburu Style Highlights of Samburu Sopa Lodge:

**Location:** 350 Km from Nairobi with 6 hour drive

**Accommodation :** 60 Rooms, **Conferencing:** 1 conference room that can accommodate upto 45 people

**Facilities:** bar, lounge, restaurant, out-door dinning area, swimming pool, gift shop.

**Activities:** Game drives, bush dinning, bird watching, nature walks, board games.

Just when it seemed the safari story could not possibly add a new chapter, Samburu Sopa Lodge appeared and changed the genre entirely. Located in Northern Kenya's Samburu National Reserve and set on elevated ground, this lodge offers sweeping views of rugged shrubland and distant hills that look like they've been painted in layers of brown, gold, and silence.

Architecturally, Samburu Sopa Lodge is a love letter to traditional Samburu homesteads; cottages are authentically styled yet equipped with all the modern comforts needed to prevent urban visitors from fainting at the sight of a missing plug point. With no physical barriers around the lodge, wildlife moves freely through the property, turning every stroll to the restaurant into a low-key game drive with a side of adrenaline.

Two things here deserve special

mention: the sky and the stars. Samburu's night sky is so clear that it feels almost intrusive, as if the universe has decided to lean in a bit too close for conversation. Sopa has cleverly turned this into an experience through guided stargazing sessions and a planetarium, making astro-tourism feel like a perfectly reasonable reason to cross continents.

Dinner under the stars followed by bonfire storytelling created some of the most unforgettable moments of the trip—part campfire, part masterclass in local stories and traditions. A game drive with Lodge Manager Mr. Walter Muriithi sealed Samburu's place in my memory, especially when it ended with a champagne bush breakfast that made it extremely difficult to respect the concept of "normal breakfast" ever again.

Service, soul & why Sopa stands out

Across all five properties, one thread remained constant: a culture of genuine hospitality that never felt scripted. Staff remembered names, dietary preferences, and half-formed wishes; questions were answered with patience, and special requests were handled with the kind of grace that makes "no problem" sound like a promise, not a phrase.

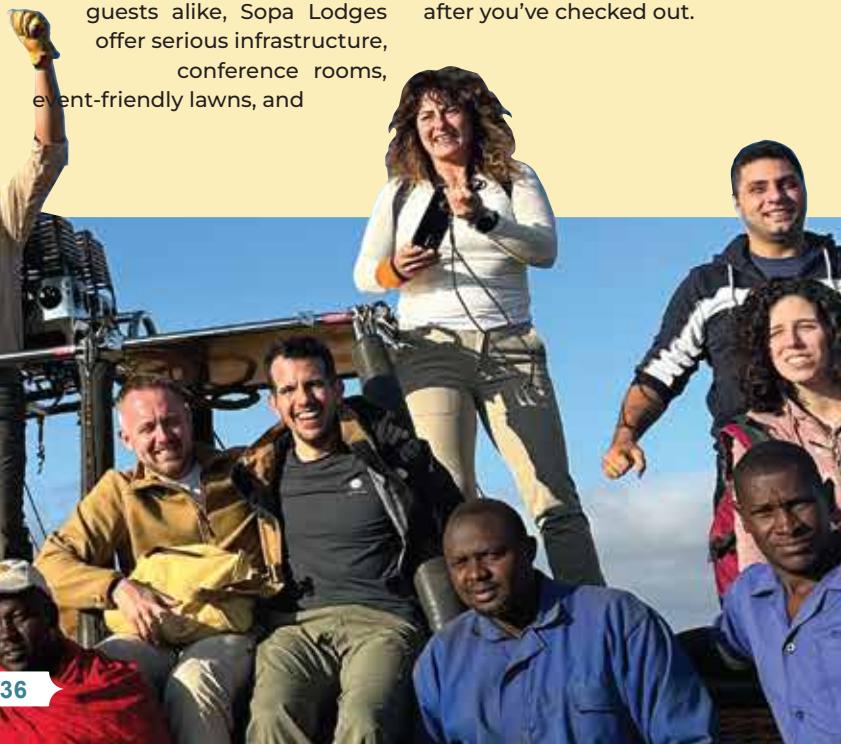
For MICE travellers and leisure guests alike, Sopa Lodges offer serious infrastructure, conference rooms, event-friendly lawns, and

seamless logistics, but it's the soft power that wins hearts: warm greetings, attentive service, and the ease with which they turn a group of travel professionals into wide-eyed kids spotting their first giraffe. Sustainability, community engagement, and cultural respect are not decorative tags here; they are quiet, consistent undercurrents in how the lodges operate.

Last night at Novotel, Nairobi - Could not have asked for a better conclusion of my trip to Kenya with my one of the best stays so far at Novotel hotel in Nairobi. Right from the location, property, restaurant and bar, accommodation and hospitality, everything about Novotel was near-perfect. Highly recommended.

**"Kwaheri kwa sasa, tutaonana tena Kenya"** Ya, just wanted to say in Kenya's Swahili language "Bye for now, see you again, Kenya"

As the IndiGo flight finally lifted off from Nairobi for Mumbai, my camera was full, my suitcase heavier, and my heart quietly protesting the return to reality. Somewhere between Kilimanjaro's silhouette, Naivasha's hippos, Nakuru's flamingos, Mara's legacy, and Samburu's sky, Sopa Lodges had rewritten my definition of a 'luxury safari' - warmth, soul, and hospitality that follow you long after you've checked out.

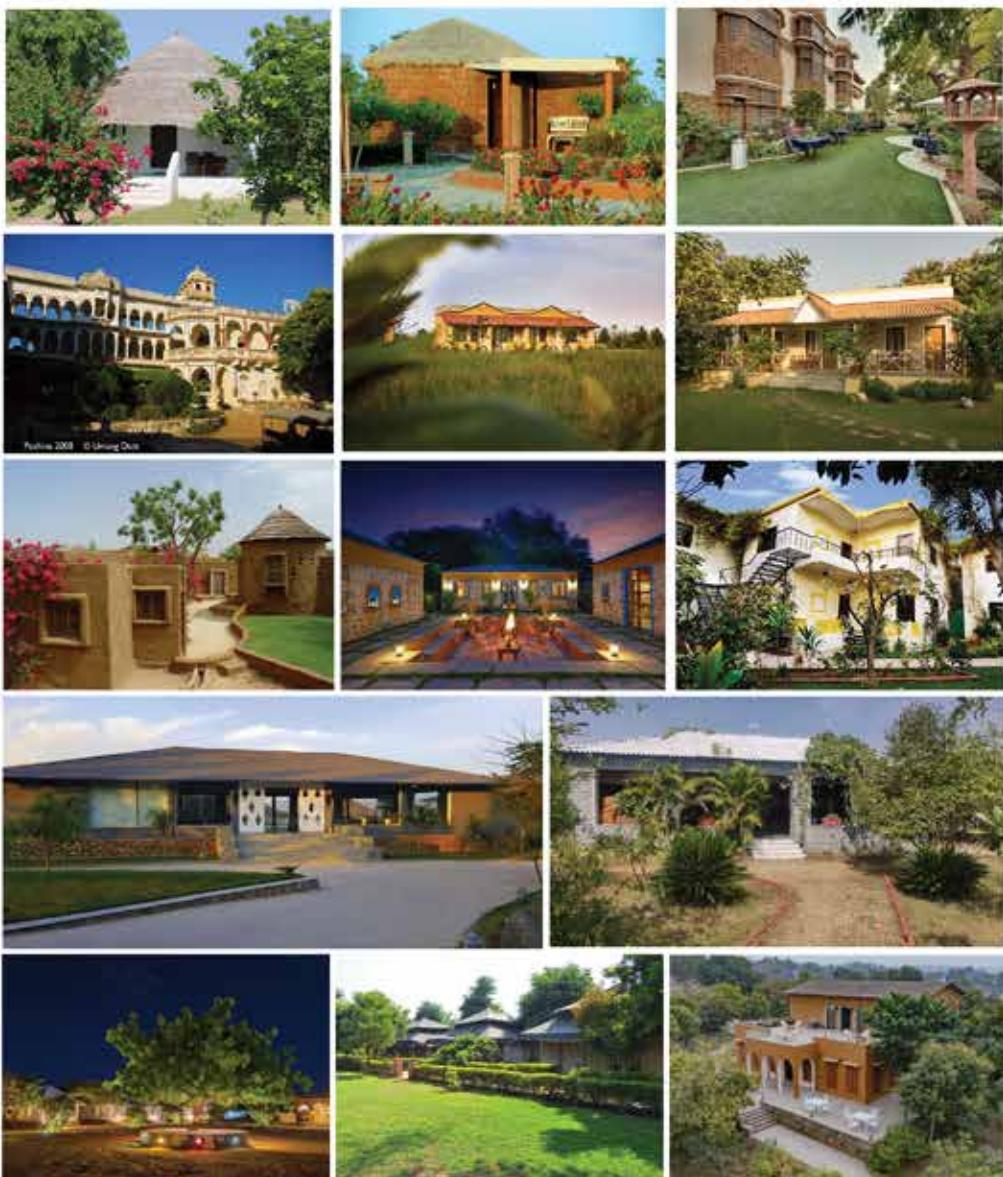


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Winds Desert Camp, Jaisalmer



## Gujarat

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HEADS IN BEDS

# Park Hyatt Bangkok

*Elevated Calm*

High above Bangkok's restless streets, Park Hyatt Bangkok becomes a place to slow down, tune in, and rediscover the luxury of space, stillness, and ritual.

- Misbaah Mansuri

Bangkok does not ease you in. It arrives loudly, all at once — traffic pressing in from every direction, heat clinging to the skin, the city in constant motion. I felt it immediately as we arrived downtown, the streets humming with urgency. And then, just as quickly, I felt it fall away.

The ascent into Park Hyatt Bangkok feels almost symbolic. One moment you are deep inside the city's pulse; the next, you are floating above it. The hotel occupies the upper levels of Central Embassy, its silver, pagoda-inspired form rising confidently against the skyline. As the lift doors opened into the lobby, the noise dissolved. The air softened. The city exhaled — and so did I. This is a hotel that understands restraint. Nothing here announces itself. Calm is the dominant language.

### A warm welcome

Check-in unfolded quietly, almost ceremonially. A warm welcome, gentle efficiency, no unnecessary gestures. The lobby itself is expansive but never cold — high ceilings, plush carpeting that

absorbs sound, and carefully placed contemporary artworks that draw the eye without demanding attention.

There is an unmistakable sense of order here. Of intention. Even the pace of walking seems to slow instinctively. I noticed how voices softened, how footsteps disappeared into the carpet, how the space seemed designed not just to impress, but to soothe. It felt less like entering a hotel and more like stepping into a pause.

### The Room - Citylights

Our 1 King Corner Room was vast, filled with light and air. Floor-to-ceiling windows wrapped around the space, offering uninterrupted views across Bangkok's dense urban sprawl. From this height, the city felt almost abstract — a living mosaic of movement and light stretching endlessly in every direction.

The design was modern and minimalist, but warm. Muted tones, smooth stone, soft woods. Nothing cluttered. Nothing excessive. The bed faced the windows, perfectly positioned for city-gazing. I found myself



standing there longer than expected, watching Bangkok pulse below, safely distant.

The bathroom felt like a private sanctuary. Stone surfaces, a deep soaking tub, glass walls that allowed the light to spill in. Even here, the sense of space was generous. This was not a room designed only for sleep. It was designed for inhabiting. At night, the city lights glittered like constellations beneath us. In the morning, the haze lifted slowly, revealing the scale of the city anew. Being this high above Bangkok does something subtle to your nervous system. It calms it.

### Breakfast - Start the day in style

Mornings at Park Hyatt Bangkok unfold gently. There is no rush, no sense of being ushered along. Breakfast became one of my favourite rituals of the stay. I ordered the Thai omelette, and it arrived perfectly cooked — light, fluffy, delicately crisp at the edges, deeply comforting. It tasted familiar and precise at once, the kind of dish that doesn't try to reinvent itself

because it doesn't need to. Coffee was excellent. Pastries warm. Fruit fresh and vibrant. Service moved quietly, attentive without interruption. It felt like being given permission to take your time, something Bangkok rarely offers.

### Executive retreat for the soul

Access to the Executive Retreat at the Park became a welcome constant throughout our stay. Open daily from noon into the early evening, it functioned less like a traditional club lounge and more like a refined living room suspended above the city.

Afternoons here were hushed and civilised. Light snacks appeared seamlessly. Drinks were poured without ceremony. Guests sat reading, talking softly, or simply watching the city shift through the glass.

It was a place to reset between experiences. To return to after the spa. To pause before dinner. In a city defined by stimulation, this sense of refuge felt genuinely luxurious.



### Dining in style

Dinner at Penthouse Bar + Grill on our first evening was one of the most memorable meals of the trip. As we arrived just before sunset, the city slowly transformed below us. Skyscrapers began to glow. Traffic traced lines of light across the streets. The view alone was enough to still conversation. And then there was the steak.

Perfectly cooked, deeply flavoured, confidently executed. The kind of steak that doesn't rely on sauces or theatrics. Each bite was rich and satisfying, the quality unmistakable. It was one of those dishes that reminds you why classics endure.

The atmosphere was relaxed but polished. Service attentive yet unobtrusive. We lingered longer than planned, letting the evening stretch, watching Bangkok shimmer into night.

### Embassy room

Lunch the following day at Embassy Room shifted the tone entirely. Where Penthouse feels dramatic and elevated, Embassy Room is calmer, more introspective.

The truffle pasta was exceptional. Rich but not heavy, fragrant without being overpowering. The truffle aroma lingered gently, woven into the dish rather than

dominating it. It was indulgent in the most refined way, the kind of plate that rewards attention. Dining here felt like a quiet counterpoint to the city outside. Elegant, composed, and deeply satisfying.

### Take some time off!

Thailand's spa culture is revered for a reason, and the Park Hyatt's wellness offering lives up to that reputation with understated confidence. The Luminous Renewal Ritual unfolded over two hours and felt less like a treatment and more like a carefully choreographed journey. It began with the Inner Glow Facial Ritual, deeply soothing, focused on hydration and circulation. The pace was unhurried. The touch intuitive. I felt my face soften, my thoughts slow.

This flowed seamlessly into the As You Like It Personalised Massage, tailored precisely to what my body needed. Pressure adjusted instinctively. Every movement felt considered. Somewhere midway through, I realised how much tension I had been carrying without noticing. The ritual concluded with the Contrast Temperature Grounding Ritual, moving between warm and cool. The effect was subtle but grounding. I emerged feeling lighter, clearer, almost recalibrate. Time in the spa afterwards, including the experience shower, extended the sense of calm. Nothing here rushes you out. Stillness is encouraged.

### The Pool

The outdoor saltwater infinity pool sits high above Bangkok's central business district. From here, the city feels distant, almost unreal. Water merges with sky. The noise fades to a low hum. Floating there, suspended between city and sky, felt like one of those rare travel moments that imprint themselves quietly. No spectacle. Just perspective.

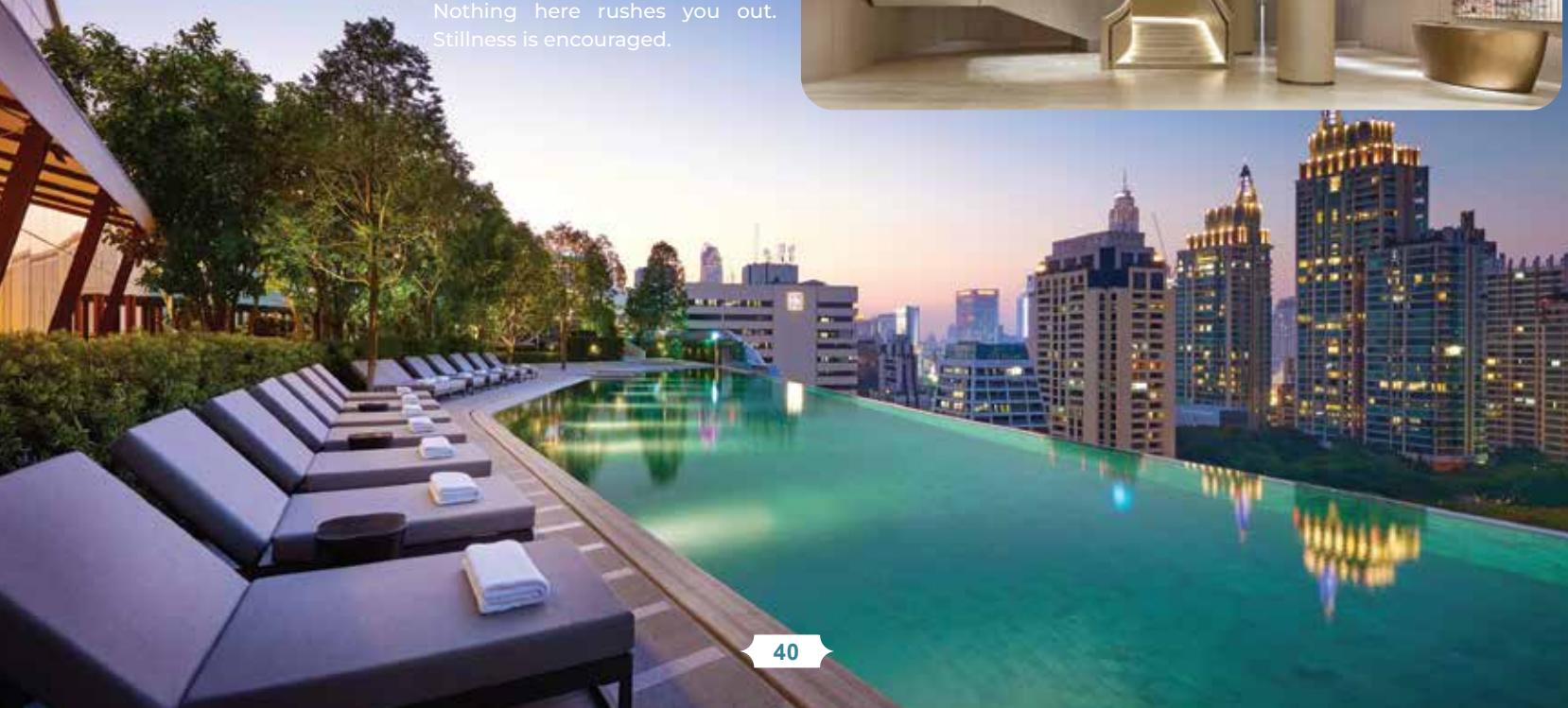
### Style & Character

Architecturally, Park Hyatt Bangkok is striking. The building rises like a metallic form shaped by both futurism and tradition, drawing inspiration from Thai pagodas while remaining decisively modern. Inside, the aesthetic is international yet softened by local nuance. Contemporary sculptures punctuate the space. Leica photography connects the hotel to Bangkok's creative scene.

Nothing feels decorative for decoration's sake. There is a sense of discipline here. Of knowing exactly what the hotel wants to be.

### In a nutshell

Park Hyatt Bangkok offers something increasingly rare in modern travel: space to breathe. From its expansive rooms and quietly confident dining to its deeply restorative spa rituals and elevated calm, the hotel creates distance from the city without disconnecting you from it. This is not a hotel that competes for attention. It already has it. Instead, it focuses on comfort, clarity, and care. For me, it became a place to slow down, to observe Bangkok rather than be consumed by it, and to remember that luxury is often found not in excess, but in restraint. A home above the city. A pause in the noise. A stay that lingers long after checkout.





The heart of  
Incredible India

**Here's a snapshot of how this integrated aerial network will bring the state's great destinations closer to each other than ever before:**

## MADHYA PRADESH TAKES TOURISM TO NEW HEIGHTS WITH HELICOPTER SERVICE

*A vast landscape punctuated by spiritual hubs, ancient monuments and sites where wildlife and natural beauty abound. Exploring all of Madhya Pradesh would take a lifetime! In today's age of pressed timelines, Madhya Pradesh presents a service to assure the elderly pilgrim of safe and comfortable trips and delight the contemporary traveller. The PM Shri Heli Tourism Service offers fast and affordable aerial connectivity between major attractions, replacing long road journeys with short flights.*

### Navigating Nature: Bhopal - Madai-Pachmarhi

A weekend getaway from Bhopal to the picturesque locales of Madai and Pachmarhi involves more than five hours of driving on winding roads. Turn this into an effortless and affordable journey via just an hour of helicopter hopping. Cruise along dreamy islands of the Tawa Dam & reservoir or laze in the infinity pool of the MP Tawa Resort. Enjoy a never-before 45-minute joyride over the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve, touching incredible nature-based experiences.

### Heritage Hopping: Bhopal - Khajuraho - Rewa - Satna - Singrauli

Beyond helicopters, leverage the PM Shri Vayu Paryatan Seva and hop from Bhopal to explore historic temples, palaces and caves in Khajuraho, Rewa, Satna and Singrauli.

If you have a destination, and are short on time, Madhya Pradesh's newly launched aerial services offer curated experiences for the contemporary traveller. Reduce the strain of long road journeys and take in more of the magical heart of India by maximizing your holiday time.

### Wildlife & Worship: Jabalpur - Maihar - Chitrakoot - Kanha - Bandhavgarh - Amarkantak

Base yourself in Jabalpur to explore the Mahakoshal region. Helicopter rides make tiger spotting in the stunning flora and fauna of Bandhavgarh and Kanha's sanctuaries even easier. Taking the aerial route empowers visitors with fast and smooth trips to pray at the Sharda Devi Shaktipeeth at Maihar, or at the mouth of the Narmada at Amarkantak. Relive the Ramayana with a flying visit to the pilgrim town of Chitrakoot.

### Seamless Spirituality: Indore-Ujjain-Omkarshwar

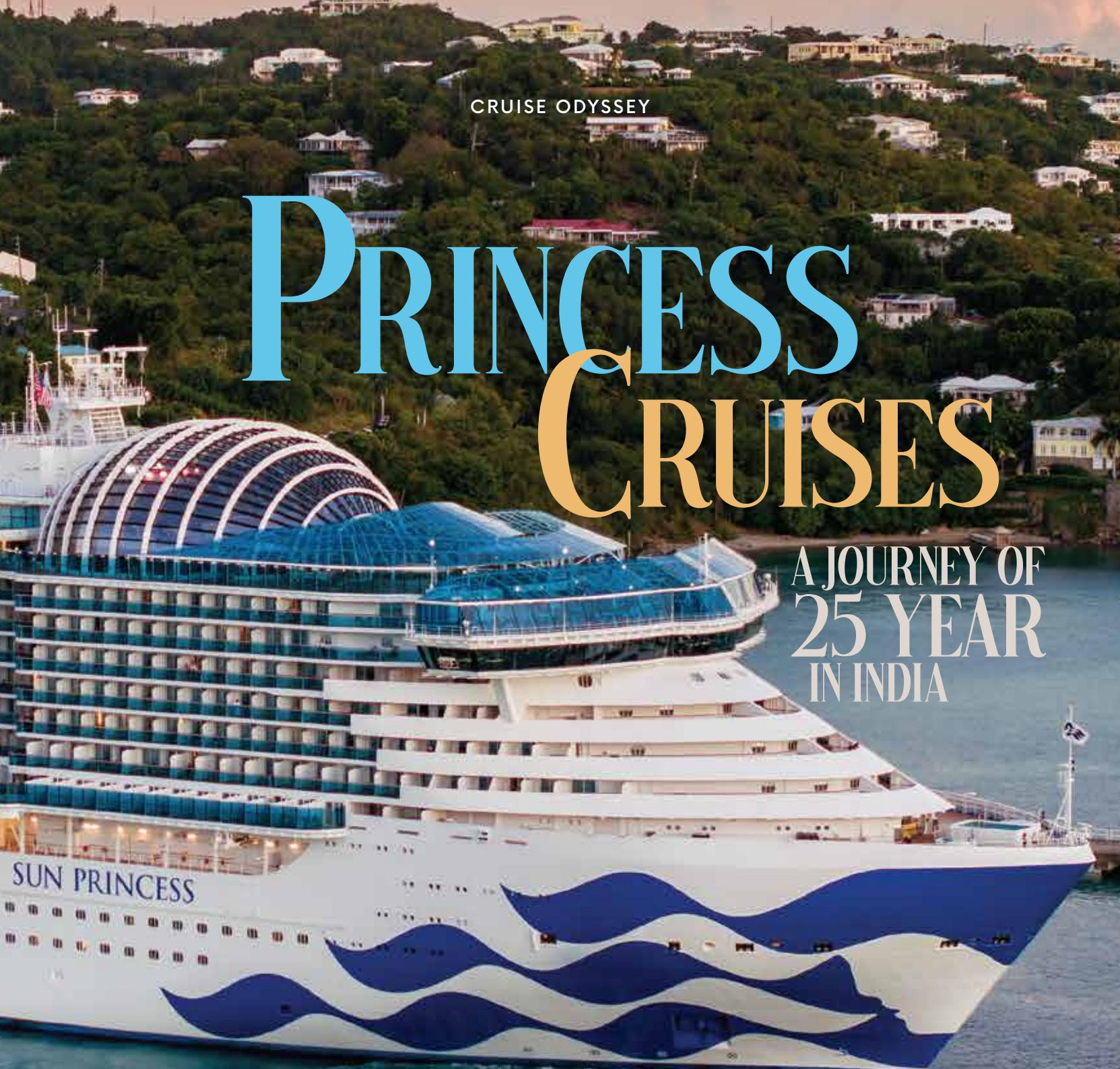
Hop on to a helicopter at Indore and cut travel time to Ujjain by an hour. Do a darshan at the iconic Mahakaleshwar Temple, pray at the Kaal Bhairav and Harsiddhi shrines and walk through the Bhartihari Caves. You can even sample a traditional Ujjain thali and then do what was unimaginable earlier – taking the aerial route once more, save over three hours and land at Omkareshwar for a same-day darshan of the state's other Jyotirlinga too. Truly a blessing, especially for senior citizens who can travel in comfort!

### The Narmada Parikrama: Circle of Faith

Do a symbolic circumambulation of the mighty Narmada River, using a mix of aerial and road routes while walking the last mile. In a spiritually transformative journey that covers more than three thousand kilometres, a traveller touches a range of experiences – from stunning shrines to tribal life, from forests and wildlife to ancient rituals, from historical anecdotes to riverine adventures. It is a journey for the ages!

# PRINCESS CRUISES

A JOURNEY OF  
25 YEAR  
IN INDIA



Nishith Saxena

When the story of cruising in India is written in full, it will not be a tale of overnight success. It will be a story of patience, belief and a small group of professionals who chose to sell a dream long before the market was ready to buy it. At the heart of this story stands Princess Cruises and alongside it the journey of committed professional - Nishith Saxena who has been associated with Princess Cruises for the last 25 years.

This is the story of how a global cruise brand found its Indian voice and how an emerging market learned to understand, trust and eventually embrace premium cruising as a serious form of holidaying.

## The global legacy meets an uncharted market

Princess Cruises was already a legend by the time India entered its horizon. Globally recognised for refined experiences, destination-led itineraries and a strong emotional connection to travel — popularised further by its association with The Love Boat — Princess represented elegance, reliability and discovery. Yet India, at the turn of the

millennium, was not an obvious cruise market.

International leisure travel itself was still evolving. Indian travellers were price-conscious, land-focused and itinerary-driven in a very traditional sense. The idea of unpacking once and waking up in a new destination every day sounded appealing—but also unfamiliar, even risky.

Cruising was often misunderstood as either too luxurious, too expensive or

too complex. There were hardly any presence of premium cruise brands in India, limited multi-visa requirement awareness, limited forex allowance available to Indian traveller be spent on cruises and almost no trained cruise specialists. Selling a cruise in India required not brochures but belief.

It was into this environment that Nishith Saxena stepped in not merely as the Country Manager for Princess Cruises in 2000 but also someone who wanted India to be on the cruising map of the world.

### **The early years: Selling the unseen (2000-2004)**

In early 2000s, the word “cruise” in India often meant river cruises in Europe — or worse, confusion with ferries. Ocean cruising was an alien concept known only to a few.

There were no roadshows filled with eager buyers, no social media reels showcasing ships, no cruise-specific training programs. Sales conversations began with basics:

- What is a cruise?
- Will I feel seasick?
- Is it suitable for families?
- Is it Indian-friendly?
- Is the food vegetarian?

Nishith and his team in India were educators before they were sellers. They invested time in explaining the concept of cruising, breaking myths and aligning global cruise experiences with Indian sensibilities. Princess Cruises stood out even then. Its destination-intensive itineraries, longer port stays, and understated elegance appealed to discerning Indian travellers — particularly honeymooners, multi - generational families and senior travellers seeking comfort and enrichment.

But growth was slow, deliberate, and earned.

### **Building trust, one travel partner at a time**

Cruising in India did not grow through mass advertising. It grew through trust-based partnerships. Nishith worked closely with travel agents across metros and emerging cities, many of whom had never sold a cruise before. Training sessions were personal, often one-on-one. Cruise selling was introduced as a consultative art and not a transactional product.

Princess Cruises' value proposition was positioned carefully - Not as luxury for luxury's sake, but as value-rich, experience-led travel, where accommodation, dining, entertainment and transportation were seamlessly integrated. Over time, a small but committed community of trade partners emerged in India—people who understood ships, itineraries, seasons, cabin categories and onboard culture. They became storytellers, not brochure pushers. This was the foundation era for premium cruising in India.

### **The middle phase: Awareness turns into aspiration (2005-2015)**

As India's outbound travel expanded, cruising began to find its place in aspirational travel planning. Indian travellers started travelling farther—to Alaska, Europe, Australia and Japan. With these destinations, Princess Cruises became increasingly relevant. Alaska, in particular, emerged as a defining product with Princess being recognised globally for its deep expertise and land-sea programs popularly known as cruise-tours.

During this phase repeat cruisers began to emerge and families started planning milestone celebrations onboard. Simultaneously, Princess Cruises gained a reputation for consistency and elegance and Cruise Professionals established itself as the pioneer in premium cruising segment with Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA) certified specialists.

As the company grew in stature, Nishith's role evolved from market builder to market strategist. The focus shifted from “Why cruise?” to “Which cruise is right for you?”

Cruise selling matured. Training became structured. Trade confidence increased. Princess Cruises' brand values — service, destination depth and refined onboard experience — aligned naturally with the evolving Indian premium traveller.

### **The human side of the journey**

What truly differentiated the Princess Cruises journey in India was its people - first approach.

Cruise Professionals were not treated

as intermediaries but as partners. Feedback from India was heard and respected. Dietary preferences, family travel patterns and cultural nuances were communicated back to global teams. This two-way dialogue helped Princess Cruises become more accessible without losing its core identity.

For Nishith, this phase was as much about mentoring as it was about selling. A generation of cruise specialists in India today trace their learning back to early training sessions, market visits and strategic guidance provided during these years.

### **Resilience through change**

It is impossible to assume that this 25-year journey was without any disruption.

Economic slowdowns, geopolitical uncertainties, currency fluctuations and changing visa regulations tested the resilience of the cruise business in India. Each challenge required recalibration. Then came the defining global disruption—the pandemic. Cruising, more than any other travel segment, faced unprecedented scrutiny. Ships stopped sailing. Confidence was shaken. But within the crisis lay an opportunity to rebuild stronger, safer and more transparent echo-system. Princess Cruises responded globally with enhanced health protocols, technology-driven safety measures and a renewed commitment to guest wellbeing. In India, Cruise Professionals—guided by experience and credibility—played a vital role in restoring confidence. Trust, once earned, proved resilient.

### **The new era: India comes of age as a Cruise Market (2022 onwards)**

As cruising restarted, the Indian market returned more informed, more confident and more experience-driven. Cruising is no longer explained as a novelty. It is positioned as a smart, immersive way to explore the world.

Princess Cruises today resonates strongly with Multi-generational Indian families, Mature travellers seeking comfort and enrichment, Couples celebrating life milestones and High-value travellers prioritising experience over extravagance.

Technology, personalisation and destination storytelling have

enhanced the selling experience wherein Cruise Professionals have embraced technology and have Browse & Book capabilities on their website [www.cruiseprofessionals.in](http://www.cruiseprofessionals.in) and are now respected specialists, not niche sellers. Nishith's leadership in this phase reflects continuity and evolution—anchored in the values of the past, while shaping the momentum of the future.

### **The legacy of 25 years**

The true achievement of the last 25 years is not measured in numbers alone. There are more intangible parameters which define the success of this association between Princess Cruises & Cruise Professionals. Today we have

- A trained and confident cruise trade in India
- Thousands of Indian travellers whose first cruise became a lifelong passion
- A global cruise brand that earned trust in a complex, diverse market
- A professional journey that blended persistence, integrity and vision

Princess Cruises' story in India is inseparable from the story of the professionals who believed in it early—and from the leadership that guided its course steadily, year after year.

### **The next chapter**

As India stands on the cusp of becoming one of the world's most important outbound travel markets, cruising is no longer on the periphery. It is central to every travel conversation.

The next chapter will be about scale, innovation, deeper engagement and online booking capabilities —but it will still be rooted in the fundamentals established over the last 25 years: education, trust and partnerships.

For Princess Cruises and for Nishith Saxena, the journey continues—not as pioneers of a new idea, but as custodians of a legacy that helped shape cruising in India. Cruise Professionals is currently the representative of 8 premium, luxury & expedition brands but retains its first love for Princess Cruises.

And like every great voyage, it is not the destination alone that matters—but the people who made the journey possible.

# ETOSHA ESCAPE

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The first rays found us through the gate, driving north. Things were rather quiet this morning. Our dusty car with a cracked windscreen, gliding along the non-metal road, hadn't disturbed the equilibrium of the jungle. (Not yet, anyway)

*- Inder Raj Ahluwalia*

5 a.m. isn't quite the time to notice any finer details, so we didn't bother. The sun was still only hinting at its presence on the eastern horizon as we left the cosy confines of Makuti Lodge.

We were in the famed Etosha Park in northern Namibia, an outstanding wilderness area and conservation case - study, and the natural habitat of hundreds of animal and bird species including the famous 'Big Five'. Etosha literally means 'the great white place of dry water', an apt description considering its barrenness! Most game parks don't have the space, but here we had been driving for two hours and were still far from its centre, one reason being that there is no centre or core area. The entire park is core area and home to game, encircled by electrified wire to fence in the animals. (And keep out the humans...!)

Spanning some 22,700 sq km, Etosha is almost a country by itself in terms of vastness and physical diversity. If comparisons

interest you, it is ten times the size of Luxembourg.

Ignoring the park's official speed limit, of 60 kmph, we were doing a steady 80, our over-speeding justified by the straightness of the roads, the complete lack of traffic, and a late breakfast and start. The landscape changed literally by the minute, wooded areas giving way to vast flatlands, open meadows, bush - land, and forests. The only break in the basic dryness came by way of the acacia, among the world's hardest and most durable trees and the mainstay of the African bush.

In keeping with the trend in Southern Africa, in Etosha the light falls on shrubs and mopane grass, making animals visible even from a distance. The density and rich diversity of game thriving in a near - desert environment makes Etosha rank amongst the highest- rated parks in game - rich Southern Africa. Elephant, leopard, lion, black rhino, white rhino, and cheetah,

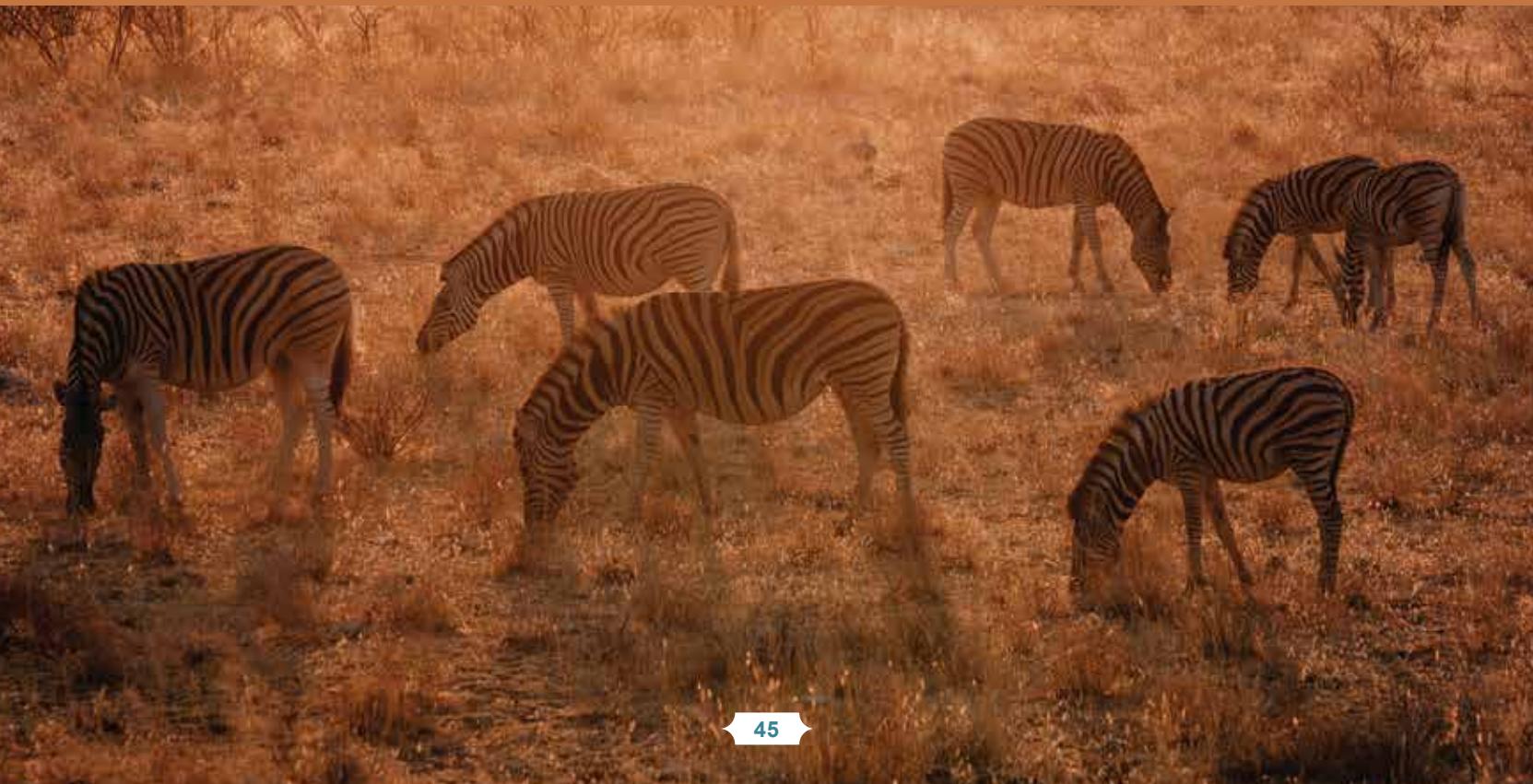
roam through the acacia groves and savanna. Antelope are present in thousands, and include zebra, kudu, impala, and wildebeest, grazing on vegetation where they can find it. Scavengers like spotted hyenas and jackals follow predators' hunting tracks, crying late into the night. Perhaps, watching all this from a safe haven is Africa's smallest antelope, the Damara Dik Dik.

The day had gone by in a flash. The park authorities like to see all visitors safely out of the gates by dusk, so nightfall found us back at the Makuti Lodge, located just outside one of the park's gates, featuring wide - open spaces, sprawling low structures, a boma - style dining area, and the proverbial swimming pool. This was customary barbecue time. And tomorrow was another day.

We awoke to the smell of freshly brewed coffee, excited at the day that lay ahead. A half hour with a huge breakfast crammed in, found us back in the park, on

another dusty road. Sunrise in Etosha is an experience to be long cherished. The sky was ablaze with birds. There were crimson - breasted shrike that perch on several types of trees, and thread the park with song. There were weaver birds that build communal nests that make even big branches sag, and there were the great raptors that drop out of the blue like arrows. High up in the skies, making concentric circles, was a Tawny Eagle watching over proceedings.

You might say there are two Etoshas. The dry winter sees game converging around natural springs and on the wide Andoni Plains. There are as many water holes here as there are patches on a giraffe's neck, but for the best game-viewing, head for select ones like Gaus, Arroe, and Klein Namatoni. The concentration of game around water holes is one of Etosha's main assets. The wet summer shows the park's other face, with game migrating westwards as newborn animals celebrate the cycle of creation.



Covering about a fifth of the total area is the Etosha Pan-the heart of the park-a unique and beautiful eco-system and a famous landmark in its own right. Miles and miles of completely flat salt plain form a unique geographical phenomena. Comprised of huge stretches of savanna, with flat lands of limestone and endlessly stretching golden grass, the Pan is a unique stretch of wilderness. Once there was a lake here, one of the world's largest. Then, eons ago the earth shifted and the lake drifted into the ocean, and the sun shrank the pan, leaving behind deposits of mineral salt. The result is beauty personified, as we saw to our immense satisfaction.

When nature is kind, rain evokes the ancient lake and surrounds it with green. But this is rare, and mostly the Pan remains true to its name. A bone-dry water place, caked, parched, barren, and haunting beautiful as animal tracks criss-cross its length and breadth before fading into the distance and merging with the horizon, and mirages dance across its shimmering expanse. Blue wildebeest, zebra, and springbok cross the flatlands, stirring fine dust as they graze the salty grass and leave their spoor on its surface like tracks across a white moon.

Having covered about half the Pan, we headed for Sprokieswoud (the enchanted wood), which shows a different face of Etosha, with a

small forest of Moringa trees on a level plain, contrasting with the surrounding barren environs. The presence of these trees that normally grow only on hill sides, is one of the park's many mysteries. "The great builder completed his creation and then flung these Moringas eastwards with their roots pointing to the sky". So says a San legend.

At a water hole near the Von Lindequist Gate, we saw something one is lucky to see once in a lifetime. As many as thirteen giraffes together, their slender long necks criss-crossing, as they stretched down awkwardly to drink, oblivious of a pride of black-striped hyenas nearby! For some five minutes they 'posed' for us, then suddenly backed off from the water and loped away, stirring whirls of dust. "Probably a lion upwind," our guide said matter-of-factly.

Etosha is all about vivid images. The one that sticks to mind is of a solitary elephant by the pool, his image reflected in the water. Soon, others would join him, and the intricate life cycle of the jungle would be acted and reenacted the way it has been for millions of years. We had rare animal sightings. And swirled dust in true desert fashion as we drove through one of the last frontiers of wildlife.

### File Facts

- Etosha is a few hours drive from Windhoek, Namibia's capital and main gateway, served by international flights.
- The park is open to visitors throughout the year. Accommodation is available at the park's three rest camps, Namutoni, Halali, and Okaukuejo, and in private lodges outside the park. The rest camps have private landing strips, restaurants, bars, shops, and fuel stations, and also provide literature and road maps.
- Visitors may not get out of their vehicles in the park area, and open vehicles, motorcycles, catapults, air-guns, and firearms are forbidden.
- Recommended are carrying along road maps of the park, binoculars, light-coloured clothing, sun-hats, and drinking water.



### 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.

## NATURE MEETS MODERN LUXURY

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TRAVEL THERAPY

# *Tourism growth in the Northeast*

A focused discussion on connectivity, sustainability, and community-led tourism shaped the narrative leading up to ITM 2025.

- *Naina Nath*



**V. VIDYAVATHI**  
SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF TOURISM  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

**PEMA KHANDU**  
HON'BLE CHIEF MINISTER OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

A renewed sense of purpose framed the International Tourism Mart as India's Northeast moved into sharper focus within the country's tourism vision. Senior leadership from the Ministry of Tourism and the region's state governments came together to underline a shared commitment towards strengthening the Northeast's role as a high-potential, experience-driven destination. Representing the Government of India were Honourable Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, V. Vidyavathi, and Shri Suman Billa, Additional Secretary and Director General, Ministry of Tourism, who highlighted the region's strategic importance in shaping India's future tourism growth through sustainability, connectivity, and community engagement.

State leadership reflected a unified regional voice and strong alignment with the national agenda. Honourable Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Shri Pema Khandu, joined Shri Pasang Dorjee Sona, Minister of Tourism, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, and Shri Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Minister of Tourism, Government of Assam, in presenting a forward-looking outlook for the region. Sikkim's vision was represented by Shri Tshering Thendup Bhutia, Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, Government of Sikkim, along with Shri Indra Hang Subba, Member of Parliament, Sikkim, Shri Ravindra Telang, Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, and Shri C. S. Rao, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Sikkim, collectively reinforcing the Northeast's growing prominence in India's tourism landscape.

### Building stronger connectivity

One of the strongest themes of the discussion was infrastructure. Leaders acknowledged that while the Northeast has made significant strides, improving air, rail, and road networks remains essential for unlocking the region's tourism potential. Honourable Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, V. Vidyavathi shared that the Ministry of Tourism is working closely with state governments to fast-track connectivity-led projects and strengthen access to both popular and lesser-known destinations. She noted that infrastructure cannot be treated in isolation and must support tourism models that protect natural landscapes and cultural identities. "We want to make travel easier and more seamless, but not at the cost of the environment or the communities that define this region," she said during the conversation.

### Sustainability and Responsible Tourism

Sustainability remained a recurring point throughout the briefing. With fragile ecosystems and a rich cultural fabric, the Northeast represents a region where tourism and conservation must go hand in hand. Shri Suman Billa highlighted ongoing initiatives under the National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism, capacity-building programs, and partnerships supporting zero plastic zones, renewable energy adoption, and responsible waste management.

"Our effort is not just to grow tourism, but to grow it responsibly, so the benefits stay within the region and the character of the



Northeast remains intact," he said. He added that the role of communities is central, and long-term planning must ensure they are active partners, not bystanders.

### Community-led tourism models gain importance

States also shared updates on homestay programs, rural tourism clusters, and community-operated cultural and heritage experiences. Shri Pema Khandu spoke openly about the shift toward tourism models that create livelihoods at the source. The focus, he said, is on helping local families become proud custodians of experiences, not just service providers. "The Northeast does not need to copy what other destinations are doing. Our strength is authenticity, culture, and nature. If tourism grows with respect, our people will support it because they will benefit from it," he said. His comments received strong agreement from fellow ministers, who echoed the need for scalable but grounded development.

### Cinematic tourism and new opportunity areas

Emerging opportunity areas also came into focus, with cinematic tourism drawing notable attention. States shared success stories linked to film shoots that helped bring new destinations into the spotlight. Honourable Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Vidyavathi noted that cinematic tourism is more than a visibility tool. It is also an economic driver when paired with regulation, training, and local involvement. "When a film chooses a destination, it creates

employment, supply chain opportunities, and long-term tourism interest. The Northeast is uniquely cinematic. The world should see more of it," she remarked.

### Strengthening skills and industry capacity

Skill development and training were mentioned as essential pillars for the future. The Ministry highlighted ongoing programs through CIHMs, SIHMs, and FCIs to prepare youth for roles across hospitality, tourism operations, guiding, and digital marketing. Several attendees stressed that tourism growth must translate into opportunities for employability and entrepreneurship for the region's younger population. "As the industry grows, our goal is to ensure that the youth of the Northeast are not only part of it, but leading it," said Suman Billa. He added that digital outreach and content creation will also help shape the global perception of the region.

### Vision moving forward

The press briefing closed with a collective message. The Northeast is ready to expand its tourism landscape with clarity, collaboration, and long-term vision. The leaders agreed that the region is entering a crucial phase where storytelling, access, sustainability, and community benefit must move together. "We are not just building tourism. We are shaping how the world experiences the Northeast," Honourable Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, V. Vidyavathi said in closing, summarising the mood in the room: confident, collaborative, and future-focused.



# OA GLOBE DMC'S ROADMAP FOR 2026

As travel moves into a phase driven by feelings, celebrations, and experiences people actually want to remember, DMCs are no longer just booking hotels and transfers. Rahim Aslam, Founder, OA GLOBE DMC shares his thoughts on personalisation, partnerships, and what comes next for the travel industry.

-Naina Nath

Dear travel industry colleague, we all know Rahim, don't we? For many of us, he is both a friend and a sharp businessman. And for those who do not know him yet, you might just be missing out. So here is your shortcut. We are bringing you the inside information straight from him! DMCs are expected to understand what the journey means to the traveller, shape it thoughtfully, and deliver it well across multiple destinations. OA GLOBE DMC sits right in the middle of this shift, guided by its Founder, Rahim Aslam.

## STRENGTH BEFORE SIZE

Growth remains important for OA GLOBE DMC, but not as a pursuit in isolation. Rahim is clear that expansion for its own sake has never been his approach. The priority is strengthening what already exists, keeping service consistent across destinations, and adding new markets once the right teams and partnerships are in place. He explains that the company is prioritising consolidation of existing markets and the selective onboarding of new destinations under the OA GLOBE DMC banner. A key focus area is ALLDMC.com, the company's online portal, which will support partners with quicker access to information and services. As he puts it, "Expansion only makes sense when strong teams, local understanding, and long-term partnerships support it."

## NOT JUST ITINERARIES

According to Rahim, the year 2026 will be defined by experience-led and



Rahim Aslam

emotion-driven travel. Travellers no longer want packed schedules or rushed checklists. They want journeys that feel personal and meaningful. Celebration-led travel is on the rise whether for weddings, anniversaries, or milestone birthdays. This shift places greater responsibility on DMCs to understand intent and build travel around it, rather than simply arranging logistics. "People don't remember how many places they visited; they remember how a destination made them feel. Anyone who has seen a wedding or incentive group come back thrilled from their trip will instantly relate to this outlook," he says.

## SPECIALISED VERTICALS FOR THE TRADE

What Rahim believes truly differentiates OA GLOBE DMC is its destination-first approach, combined with a strong understanding of the Indian traveller. The company is developing dedicated verticals

for weddings, MICE, and experiential travel, supported by strong local supplier networks across destinations. This structure means faster responses, customised solutions, and reliable execution for the trade. "Our role is not just to manage travel, it is to simplify complexity for our partners," Rahim explains. If you have ever handled a demanding group departure, you will agree that this statement hits home.

## PERSONALISATION WITH PURPOSE

For OA GLOBE DMC, personalisation goes beyond premium upgrades. It is about relevance. Every traveller has a reason to travel, and that purpose deserves attention. Rahim explains it simply, "Whether it is bonding, romance, celebration, or discovery, our teams across destinations focus on understanding the right intent." He adds, "True personalisation begins when you

emotion-driven travel. Travellers no longer want packed schedules or rushed checklists. They want journeys that feel personal and meaningful. Celebration-led travel is on the rise whether for weddings, anniversaries, or milestone birthdays. This shift places greater responsibility on DMCs to understand intent and build travel around it, rather than simply arranging logistics. "People don't remember how many places they visited; they remember how a destination made them feel. Anyone who has seen a wedding or incentive group come back thrilled from their trip will instantly relate to this outlook," he says.

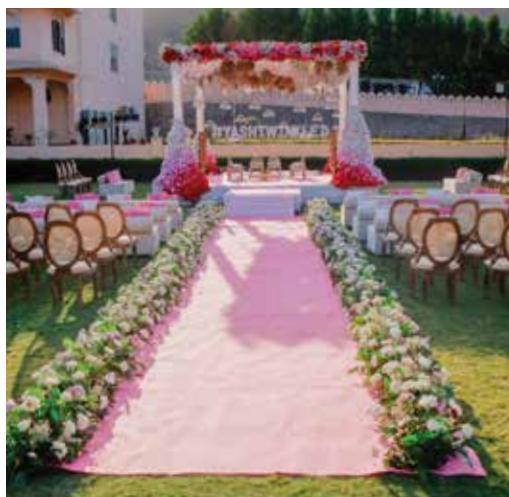
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## PERSONALISATION WITH PURPOSE

For OA GLOBE DMC, personalisation goes beyond

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Sharad Tiwari

# Destination Launcher

*Travel with Intent*

Measured, warm and quietly confident, Sharad Tiwari carries the temperament of a traveller who observes before he speaks. As Managing Director of Destination Launcher, his personality reflects years spent exploring countries beyond itineraries and factsheets.

- Sudipta Saha

Travel, for Sharad, has always been an education shaped by people, culture and lived moments. This deep-rooted curiosity has given him an instinctive understanding of the destinations he represents. Each country in his portfolio feels familiar because he knows it from the ground up, from its streets and stories to its rhythm and relevance for the Indian market.

### **Stories sell better than maps**

At the heart of destination marketing lies emotion, and this belief drives every narrative crafted at Destination Launcher. Destinations gain meaning when their stories connect with human curiosity and aspiration.

Sharing more on the same Sharad says, "A destination truly comes alive when its story is told with honesty and emotion. Travellers may remember the landmarks, but they fall in love with the feeling a place gives them. When we share stories that reflect culture, lifestyle and lived experiences, destinations stop being locations on a map and start becoming aspirations. This philosophy ensures that marketing efforts feel immersive rather than instructional, allowing the trade to speak with passion rather than prepared lines."

### **Listening is the strategy**

Strong market understanding begins with attentiveness. Time spent engaging with agents, operators and partners helps shape strategies that feel grounded and practical. India's diversity demands sensitivity to regional preferences, travel maturity and evolving aspirations. From Sharad's perspective, "India cannot be addressed with a single lens. Listening to the trade across regions offers clarity on how destinations should be positioned. When strategies grow from real conversations, destinations find the right audience naturally. This approach enables our company to build campaigns that resonate deeply, ensuring relevance across varied segments of the market."

### **Confidence is the product**

Education forms a cornerstone of destination growth. Knowledge shared through experience transforms how destinations are perceived and sold. Training sessions, immersive workshops and familiarisation trips remain integral to empowering the trade. Speaking on the same lines Sharad shares, "When agents experience a destination themselves, their storytelling changes. Confidence enters their voice, and authenticity enters their pitch. That confidence is what ultimately influences the traveller's decision. Personal travel insights often enrich these sessions, adding depth and relatability that strengthen learning outcomes."

### **Trust that travels**

Long-standing partnerships reflect a commitment to transparency and consistency. Relationships built over time form the backbone of successful destination representation. Trust creates longevity, highlighting more about this Sharad explains, "Sustainable growth happens when trust exists on all sides. Trust allows destinations to invest patiently and allows partners to plan with confidence. It shifts the focus from short-term visibility to long-term value. This principle has positioned us as a reliable partner, bridging international tourism boards and the Indian travel fraternity with clarity and mutual respect."

### **Aspirations in motion**

Indian travellers continue to evolve, driven by exposure, awareness and curiosity. Experiences now carry greater value than conventional sightseeing. Destinations that offer authenticity, culture and connection resonate strongly. Observations from the market reveal a clear shift. "Travellers today want to feel part of a destination rather than just observe it. Experiences that allow them to engage with local life, cuisine and traditions leave a lasting impression. This insight shapes destination narratives that

highlight depth, emotion and meaningful engagement, aligning perfectly with changing traveller aspirations," shares Sharad.

### **Calm minds, curious paths**

Leadership within Destination Launcher reflects a culture of calm decision-making and constant learning. Collaboration, open dialogue and curiosity guide internal processes. Learning keeps teams relevant, Sharad shares more about his team and says, "Curiosity encourages growth. When teams remain open to learning and new perspectives, innovation becomes natural. It allows us to adapt while staying true to our core values. This mindset nurtures creativity while maintaining focus, enabling the organisation to navigate an evolving industry with confidence."

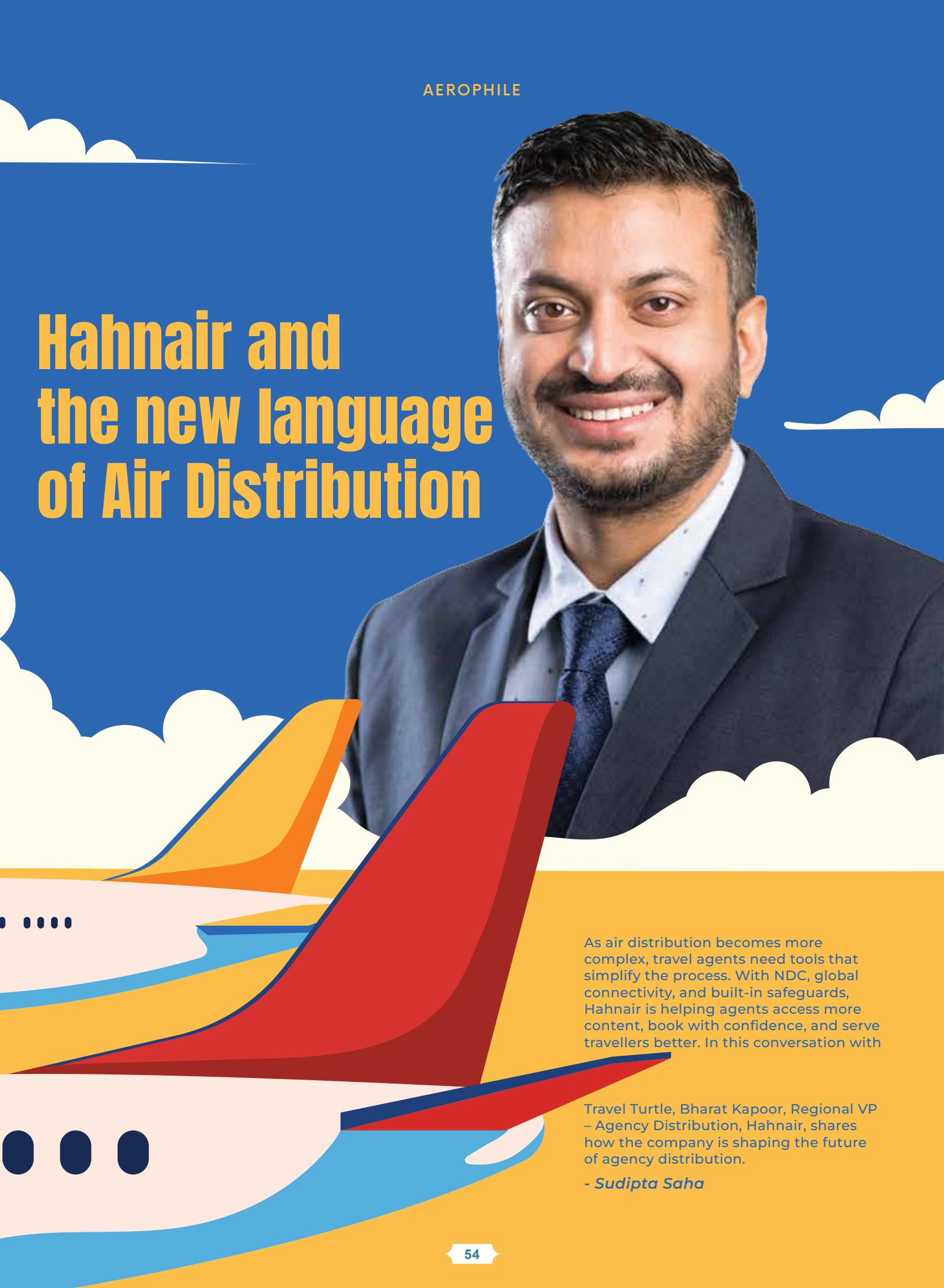
### **Purpose before promotion**

The future of destination marketing lies in responsibility and mindful growth. Sustainability, community engagement and thoughtful tourism form essential pillars of long-term success. "Destinations thrive when tourism supports local communities and preserves cultural integrity. Responsible tourism creates meaningful experiences for travellers and lasting benefits for destinations. This outlook continues to guide our vision, ensuring growth aligns with positive impact," shares Sharad.

### **Launching destinations, leaving footprints**

Sharad Tiwari's journey reflects a life shaped by exploration, learning and human connection. At Destination Launcher, destinations are understood before they are promoted, and stories are shared before they are sold. With deep market insight, authentic storytelling and a people-first approach, his work continues to make destinations matter. In an industry defined by movement, his grounded vision offers clarity, confidence and purpose that travels far beyond borders.

# Hahnair and the new language of Air Distribution



As air distribution becomes more complex, travel agents need tools that simplify the process. With NDC, global connectivity, and built-in safeguards, Hahnair is helping agents access more content, book with confidence, and serve travellers better. In this conversation with

Travel Turtle, Bharat Kapoor, Regional VP – Agency Distribution, Hahnair, shares how the company is shaping the future of agency distribution.

- Sudipta Saha

### How do you foresee the travel distribution ecosystem evolving in the next 2-3 years?

In the coming years, we expect the travel distribution ecosystem to become even more dynamic. Travellers are more demanding, new players are entering the market, and rich travel content is becoming more widely available via NDC. This creates huge opportunities for travel agents to stand out by guiding customers through an increasingly complex landscape. At Hahnair, we understand that adopting new technologies like NDC requires time and resources, which is why we launched Distriply by Hahnair, our new brand for innovative NDC solutions. The first product, Distriply One, is already live in the US and Italy, providing agents with easy access to NDC content without upfront investment or complex integration, while offering strong servicing features for refunds, rebookings, and changes. Indian agents can already sign up to our priority list at [Distriply.com/registration](http://Distriply.com/registration) to be the first to access Distriply One when it launches locally.

### What role will technology and data-driven insights play in transforming agency distribution?

Technology and data will be at the heart of how agency distribution evolves. With NDC, agents can access richer, more personalised content, complete with ancillaries and branded fares, to meet individual traveller needs. Data-driven insights allow agencies to understand customer trends, forecast demand, and curate offers that are both relevant and competitive. At Hahnair, our Distriply brand embodies this shift by combining advanced NDC capabilities with simplified access, so even smaller agencies can compete effectively.

### What impact does Hahnair's global GDS connectivity have on expanding route options and inventory availability for Indian travel agents and travellers?

Finding regional connections or ticketing certain airlines can be challenging for agents, especially when carriers aren't in their BSP or even don't have a GDS presence. Hahnair solves this problem through its global network of over 350 partner airlines, all available for ticketing on an HR-169 document in all major GDSs. This unlocks access to tens of thousands of routes and millions of flights, including over 100 carriers under the X1 and H1 codes that may not be available in a standard GDS. For Indian agents, this means greater choice, faster booking, and the ability to serve clients needing

off-the-beaten-track destinations without resorting to manual workarounds. With no extra training required, agents can simply choose Hahnair (HR) as the validating carrier within their usual process. Essentially, we turn what could be a time-consuming search into a smooth, reliable experience for both agents and travellers.

### With Hahnair offering free and comprehensive reimbursement in case of an operating carrier's insolvency, how significant is this security feature for both agencies and travellers, particularly in volatile market conditions?

Our free insolvency protection Securtix®, included automatically with every HR-169 ticket, offers peace of mind in today's volatile travel market. In the rare event of an operating airline's insolvency, Securtix® guarantees a refund of the unused portion of the ticket. In addition, we support stranded passengers by covering meals and accommodation. For agencies, this is a powerful selling point, especially when booking unfamiliar regional carriers. For travellers, it's reassurance that their trip and investment is protected. Introduced in 2010, more than 57 million insolvency-safe HR-169 tickets have been issued to date.

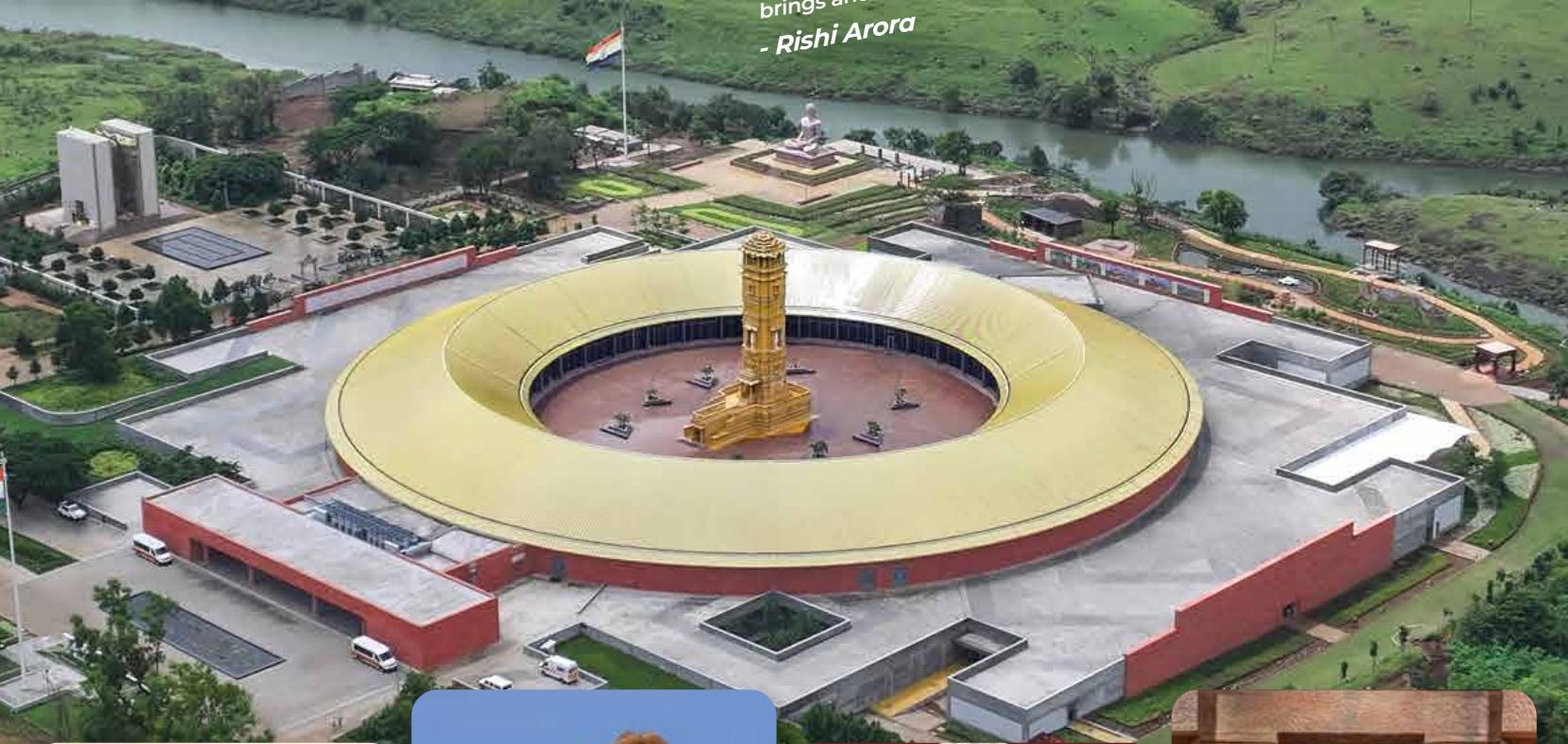
### The HR-169 ticket provides benefits such as a 14-day refund policy, one ADM-waiver per rolling year, and 24/7 service desk support. How do these value-added services enhance trust and operational efficiency for travel consultants?

We aim to make life easier for agents, and our HR-169 ticket is designed with that in mind. With our fast, free 14-day refund policy, agents can respond fast to their clients' refund claims. One ADM-waiver per rolling year for registered agents adds flexibility and security, while our 24/7 Service Desk, including the dedicated Indian desk, ensures help is always at hand for ticketing queries. Our partnership with Travesla in India further offers personalised training, presentations, and guidance. Complementing this support, agents have access to the Hahnair Knowledge Centre, webinars, tutorials, and newsletters to make the most of our services. By combining strong operational support with financial safeguards, we build trust and efficiency into every interaction, ensuring agencies can deliver exceptional customer service while staying productive and profitable.

# Abhay Prabhavana

This 50-acre experiential museum near Pune abandons the traditional idea of preservation through objects and replaces it with preservation through meaning. Using contemporary art, architecture, technology, and landscape, it brings ancient Jain values into a modern, immersive narrative.

- Rishi Arora



You hand over your phone at the entrance. That phantom reach for your pocket fades as you move through corridors where sunlight falls across wooden archways, where a small waterfall murmurs over stone, where your breathing slows to match the stillness around you.

### The museum without artifacts

Abhay Prabhavana challenges fundamental assumptions about what museums should be. Opened in November 2024 near Pune, this 50-acre institution houses zero historical artefacts. Every sculpture, installation, and artwork across 30 galleries was specifically commissioned — 350 pieces created to communicate ancient Jainism values as the philosophical foundation of Indian civilisation.

Rather than preserving objects behind glass, Abhay Prabhavana preserves ideas through contemporary expression. The investment went toward reminding us of values that make our cultural heritage unique — values that remain profoundly relevant today.

Even without ancient relics, walking through these galleries transports you backward through time. You find yourself wondering: how did civilisations centuries ago achieve such architectural grandeur, such engineering precision? The museum succeeds not by showing you age, but by making you feel it.

### Monuments that speak to eternity

A 43 - foot Rishabhdev statue rises at the Festival Walk's end, its Art Deco lines — cascading locks, sculpted strength, chiseled features — commanding immediate attention. Murals surround it, depicting the teachings of the first Tirthankar, the founder who introduced tools, communication, agriculture, trade, craftsmanship, and knowledge to

civilisation. Standing before it, a different question emerges: a hundred years from now, will this monument be revered as we revere the ancient ones? Will future generations feel what we feel now — this pull toward something larger than ourselves? The question it poses isn't philosophical — it's personal. Is this structure a mould to make temples, or a mould to make yourself? The answer matters less than the asking. The Plaza of Equanimity centers on a 17-foot Sarvabhadra statue in pristine Vietnamese white marble, its four sides facing all directions, surrounded by reflection pools where the sky meets stone. Lotus ponds border flowering trees; temple pillars frame the space. At the campus heart, a 100-foot Manastambh rises through seven carved tiers — each representing a stage of the soul's journey from worldly life toward enlightenment. The circular complex creates natural acoustics, turning the space into an echo chamber where your footsteps sound different, where silence has weight. Children instinctively test this — a whisper, a clap, watching sound behave strangely in the round space. At the viewing gallery above, you stand between earth and endless sky — grounded and limitless at once. The 320 - meter Heritage Walk follows the Indrayani River's curves, miniature replicas of ancient Jain monuments—Jal Mandir, Gwalior Caves — compressed into a single trail where centuries become steps. Walking among these scaled - down wonders, you feel like a giant traversing history, yet despite their diminutive size, you find yourself pausing to admire the beauty and craftsmanship of each piece.

### Where technology meets the soul

Inside, the galleries use impressive technology — projectors, LED

screens, dome projections, VR displays — to serve a purpose. The Cosmic Dome envelops you in immersive projections of the universe, while the digital koi pond responds to your movements, fish darting beneath your footsteps. The Philosophical Journey section explains Jain concepts in ways that simply make sense, rendering ancient ideas in language that connects. The Cultural Journey traces Jainism's history, festivals, and landmarks across India. The 'self-realisation' section addresses the practical question: how to live well, how to die well, and everything between. Interactive installations like "Letting it Go" let you select feelings or vices on a touchscreen and watch them float away as coloured boats — philosophy you can touch. There's something oddly satisfying about pressing "anger" and watching a red boat drift into the digital distance, carrying your confession with it.

### A place between hills

The location itself tells part of the story. Abhay Prabhavana sits nestled between rolling hills along the Indrayani River, 22 kilometres from the ancient Pale Jain Caves. The choice of place wasn't arbitrary. Those hills, that river, the way light moves across the landscape — it all creates the calm, natural energy the museum wants to channel inward. The 50 - acre campus ensures space breathes, and you'll want to allocate 5-6 hours minimum to experience it fully. The food court sits beneath the 100-foot Manastambh, and at first you think you're dining underground until you discover windows opening to meadows and hills beyond — another architectural surprise. The vegetarian cuisine matches the quality of everything else. Climate - controlled galleries, wheelchair accessibility, professional operations — the infrastructure

reflects serious commitment. It operates Friday through Sunday with extended weekend hours.

### The Firodia Legacy

Abhay Firodia, who chairs Force Motors and founded this museum through the Amar Prerana Trust, brings family legacy to this project. His father, Navalmal Kundanmal Firodia, established the trust with similar philanthropic vision — a commitment to building institutions that serve beyond profit.

The museum's curation team includes PhD - level scholars whose expertise shows in presentations that balance depth with accessibility.

### Walking without your phone

You walk in and hand over your phone, and initially there's unease — that phantom reach for your pocket, that itch to document or check. But then you move through these corridors and something shifts. Sunlight floods through the center, falling across wooden archways and tall ceilings. Massive paintings cover the walls, each one pulling you into different narratives. A small cascading waterfall provides constant background sound — water over stone, steady and unhurried. Multiple statues of Tirthankars line the corridor, each in meditation pose, and you realise your breathing has slowed to match theirs.

The phone policy wasn't punishment. It was permission — permission to be present, to walk for hours and emerge calmer than when you entered.

Visit **अभय प्रभावना** with an open mind. And it will do you the service of opening it further.

"Heritage is not something we can preserve in mere stone. It must be kept alive in spirit."

— Abhay Firodia, Founder, Abhay Prabhavana



Alefiya Singh

IRIS Reps has quietly built its reputation around this belief, choosing intention over volume and relationships over reach. As the industry steps into a more thoughtful phase of growth, let's know how IRIS Reps has shaped its portfolio and what has the past year revealed about the market.

**Representation with purpose**  
 Ask Alefiya what defines IRIS Reps, and the answer goes beyond sales or scale. "At IRIS Reps, we've always believed that representation is not about noise, it's about meaning," she says. The company positions itself as a partner that builds markets rather than chases quick wins, grounding its work in insight-led storytelling and long-term demand creation.

This philosophy is reflected in its hospitality portfolio, which includes island and experiential brands such as Barceló Coconut Island Phuket, Barceló Nasandhura Maldives, Makunudu Island

Maldives, NOOE Maldives Kunaavashi, Beachcomber Hotels & Resorts Mauritius, Ninety Six Collection Hotels Mauritius, and The Sea Cliff Resort and Spa Zanzibar. On the DMC and attractions side, IRIS Reps works with partners who understand the Indian mindset, from The Rickshaw Travels in East Africa to Pacific Pearl Holidays, Tour Managers DMC Fiji, The Authentic Asia, and Paradise Cruise. As Alefiya puts it, "For us, representation has always been about building trust, and not just transactions."

#### A year of clarity

Reflecting on market response, Alefiya describes 2025 as steady but significant. "2025 was a very grounding year. There was momentum, but more importantly, there was clarity," she notes. Indian travellers became more conscious about their choices, while the trade shifted focus from

# IRIS Reps

## How Meaningful Representation Is Shaping India's Travel Market

If you have spent any time in the Indian outbound travel space, you will know that representation today is about relevance. It's about strategy, storytelling, and smarter growth. Alefiya Singh, Director, IRIS Reps shares how the Indian market thinks, plans, and evolves.

-Naina Nath

volume-driven enquiries to performance-led results. Island destinations saw a strong recovery, with renewed confidence across the board. What stood out most, however, was the change in how international partners viewed India. "Our partners no longer view India as an experimental market. They treated it as a priority," she shares — a change that validated years of consistent groundwork.

#### Defined direction

Alefiya is clear about where IRIS Reps is headed. Growth, for her, is no longer about expanding portfolios endlessly. "My vision is simple; depth over width," she says. The priority is to create a stronger impact for existing partners through better engagement, sharper storytelling, and reliable market intelligence. Rather than chasing short-term buzz, IRIS Reps is focusing on long-term brand equity. "India doesn't need selling, it needs better understanding," Alefiya explains, underlining her belief that meaningful growth comes from insight, not assumptions.

#### Evolving travel trends

Current travel trends, according to Alefiya, reveal a more thoughtful traveller. Island holidays remain popular, but the focus has shifted. "Today it's about experiences, privacy, and connection rather than indulgence," she observes. Africa is gaining ground for wildlife and culture, while Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji are seeing renewed interest from families and multi-generational travellers. Asia continues to perform strongly, with Vietnam emerging for cruises

and cultural journeys, and destinations like Thailand and Hong Kong seeing repeat demand. "Today's traveller wants meaning, comfort, and stories they can carry back home," she says, summing up the shift succinctly.

#### Focused markets

IRIS Reps' destination focus remains clear and deliberate. Island destinations like the Maldives and Mauritius continue to anchor the portfolio, supported by experiential long-haul markets such as Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji. Asia, particularly Vietnam and Hong Kong, remains a strong growth driver.

Segment-wise, the alignment is equally sharp. "We see strong traction from honeymooners and couples, families and multi-generational travellers, experience-led FITs, and cruise and soft-adventure travellers," Alefiya notes. These segments, she adds, fit naturally with the brands IRIS Reps represents.

#### What's next?

As the company steps into 2026, there is fresh momentum on the horizon. "Hong Kong is definitely getting stronger for us," Alefiya reveals, confirming that a new Hong Kong DMC will soon join the portfolio. It is an addition that opens new possibilities for the Indian trade.

Summing up the road ahead, she says, "It's really about smarter growth, stronger partnerships, and travel that genuinely connects people to places, which is the philosophy, much like IRIS Reps itself, feels built to create lasting impact."

# MAYFAIR Springvalley Resort

Weddings today are about storytelling, emotion, and experiences that linger long after the vows are exchanged.

Set against the rolling hills of Guwahati, MAYFAIR Springvalley Resort has emerged as a destination where love finds a breathtaking stage. With its recent expansion and thoughtfully designed spaces, the resort transforms wedding celebrations into immersive, multi - day experiences woven with elegance, nature, and grandeur.

#### A grand welcome for grand love stories

With 260 beautifully appointed rooms, MAYFAIR Springvalley offers the rare luxury of hosting entire wedding families under one roof. The resort's recent addition of 120 rooms enhances its ability to accommodate large wedding entourages with ease. From the bride's bustling preparation suite to the quiet corners where families reconnect, every stay becomes part of the celebration.

The property's scale allows guests to settle in, unwind, and truly live the wedding, rather than simply attend it.

#### Spaces that turn rituals into revelations

Weddings at MAYFAIR Springvalley unfold across a canvas of extraordinary venues. The resort features 30,000 sq. feet of indoor banqueting space, ideal for elegant receptions, sangeet nights, and intimate ceremonies that call for refined settings. Stepping outdoors, the magic magnifies with 100,000 sq. feet of open - air venues. These expansive lawns and terraces create unforgettable backdrops for pheras under the sky, sunset cocktail evenings, and lavish mehendi celebrations framed by lush greenery and distant hills.

#### Flavours that celebrate togetherness

Food sits at the heart of every

Indian wedding, and MAYFAIR Springvalley honours this sentiment with finesse. The newly introduced multi-cuisine vegetarian restaurant adds depth to wedding menus, offering a diverse spread that caters to traditional preferences and contemporary tastes alike. Complementing this is the resort's stylish bar, which sets the tone for vibrant cocktail nights and relaxed post-function gatherings. Each culinary experience is curated to match the mood of the celebration, ensuring every meal becomes a moment to savor.

#### A wedding that feels like a holiday

What sets weddings at MAYFAIR Springvalley apart is the feeling of a shared escape. Surrounded by nature, guests enjoy moments of calm between functions — morning walks, quiet conversations,

and scenic views that soften the pace of festivities. The resort's layout encourages connection, allowing families to bond, laugh, and create memories beyond the rituals. It's a setting where celebrations breathe, unfold naturally, and feel refreshingly personal.

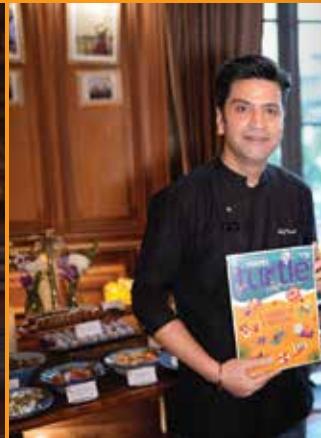
#### Where forever begins beautifully

At MAYFAIR Springvalley Resort, Guwahati, weddings become more than events—they become experiences etched into memory. With expansive venues, seamless accommodation, curated dining, and the serene embrace of nature, the resort offers couples a destination where every detail aligns with their dream day. Here, love is celebrated not just with grandeur, but with grace, warmth, and a sense of timeless beauty.



**Saudi Table residency showcases cultural storytelling through cuisine**

The Saudi Tourism Authority's brand, 'Saudi, Welcome to Arabia', hosted a preview of The Saudi Table at One8 Commune, curated by Chef Kunal Kapur. The event showcased Saudi Arabia's contemporary cuisine and agricultural heritage through a shared grazing table of signature dishes, bringing together food and culture experts to celebrate the kingdom's rich culinary traditions.



**Vietnam Airlines hosts annual soirée celebrating global connectivity**

An elegant evening celebrating global connectivity and the spirit of Vietnam. Annual Soirée 2025 in New Delhi, hosted by Mr. Nguyen Trung Hieu, Country Manager India, Vietnam Airlines, along with Mr. Abhishek Goyal, CEO & Executive Director, Aeroprime Group was a memorable night of conversations, collaborations and shared visions for the future of travel.



## EVENT AFFAIR



### France showcases its iconic wine regions in New Delhi

Celebrating the richness of French terroir and the growing global interest in wine tourism, Atout France – France Tourism Development Agency, in collaboration with WineVox and Bordeaux Vins Editions, hosted an exclusive Wine Tourism Masterclass at the Embassy of France in India

### Korean Air celebrates partnership strengthening India – Korea connectivity

To commemorate 15 years of a successful partnership in India, Group Concorde, in collaboration with Korean Air, hosted a formal gala evening in Gurugram. The event was attended by leading travel trade partners, cargo stakeholders and industry representatives, reaffirming Group Concorde's role as the General Sales Agent (GSA) for Korean Air in India and underscoring its continued commitment to strengthening passenger and cargo connectivity from the Indian market.



### Finland embassy hosts festive gathering to celebrate travel growth

The holiday spirit was in full swing at the Embassy of Finland in New Delhi! Alongside Sara Consulting Services, the Embassy hosted its annual festive gathering to toast to a phenomenal year of travel growth. Ambassador Kimmo Lähdvirta took the stage to express deep gratitude to the Indian travel trade and media. It's clear that the synergy between our two nations is stronger than ever, paving the way for even more exciting milestones in the year ahead.

## EVENT AFFAIR



### Thai embassy hosts national day reception in New Delhi

A gracious evening at the National Day reception of the Kingdom of Thailand, where the Ambassador warmly addressed the gathering, honouring the legacy of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great and welcoming guests to an exquisite Thai feast curated for the celebration.

### Malaysia engages Indian travel trade at appreciation luncheon

Dato' Muzafer Shah Mustafa, High Commissioner of Malaysia to India, warmly welcomed the Indian travel trade community at the 'Surreal Experience with Malaysia Truly Asia' appreciation luncheon, celebrating Malaysia's vibrant culture, rich traditions, and the exciting road to Visit Malaysia Year 2026.



### Turkish Embassy hosts media for immersive Turkish coffee experience at ambassador's residence

The Turkish Embassy hosts media representatives for a warm Turkish morning experience at the Ambassador's residence, celebrating the timeless ritual of Turkish coffee. Guests enjoyed the art of authentic coffee brewing alongside traditional delicacies such as baklava, coconut specialties and Turkish delights, complemented by stories, fortune readings and lively conversations. The intimate gathering highlighted Turkey's rich coffee culture, where coffee serves as a symbol of tradition, connection and hospitality.



### TOFT hosts 8th Annual Wildlife & Nature Tourism Awards

TOFT (Travel Operators for Tigers) hosts the 8th Annual TOFT Wildlife & Nature Tourism Awards, bringing together leaders, conservationists, policymakers, and changemakers shaping the future of sustainable tourism across the Indian subcontinent. The 2025 edition was themed 'Rewilding Tourism: Sustaining Nature, Empowering Communities,' spotlighting exemplary efforts that are redefining nature-positive and regenerative tourism practices.



### Bingo celebrates year-end with partners in New Delhi

An evening dedicated to the stars and showstoppers, wonderful event of Bingo's Year-End Celebration at Odella, New Delhi. Great connection and communication with valued partners and celebration of a year shared success.



## EVENT AFFAIR



### Creative Travel hosts community - focused Christmas soirée

Creative Travel - India and beyond recently hosted 'Twilight & Tinsel,' a unique Christmas Soirée hosted by Rajeev Kohli, CIS, CITP, DMCP and Rohit Kohli. Shifting away from traditional office celebrations, the event focused on community and shared storytelling. The event centered on a collaborative Christmas tree, where partners added personal ornaments to symbolize their shared professional journey.



### Yorker Holidays hosts year-end dinner for industry leaders

Yorker Holidays hosted a standout year-end dinner at My Bar Headquarters, Pusa Road, bringing together a distinguished group of senior executives from the airline, cruise, and hospitality sectors. The evening was a tribute to the power of collaboration. Managing Director Vineet Srivastava extended his gratitude to the business partners who have been vital to the Yorker success story.





**TAFCA cricket championship 2025 held in memory of late Mohd. Shoeb**

The TAFCA Cricket Championship 2025 was successfully held on 6 and 7 December at the Parth Republic Cricket Ground, Lucknow, in loving memory of Late Mohd. Shoeb, Founder President of the Travel Agents Fun Club Association (TAFCA). The two-day tournament saw enthusiastic participation from eight teams representing leading travel and allied companies, including Akbar Travels, FSR Travels, Trip Jack, Olive Travels, Star Dream Cruises (with Yorker Holidays), Seeingo, Aseglo, and RDL Forex.



## APPOINTMENTS



### **FICCI**

The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) announces the appointment of Ravi Gosain, President of the Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO), as the new Chair of the FICCI Inbound Tourism Committee, a key sub-committee operating under the National FICCI Tourism Committee. This appointment reflects FICCI's recognition of Mr. Gosain's extensive contributions to India's tourism landscape, particularly his leadership and expertise in the inbound travel segment.



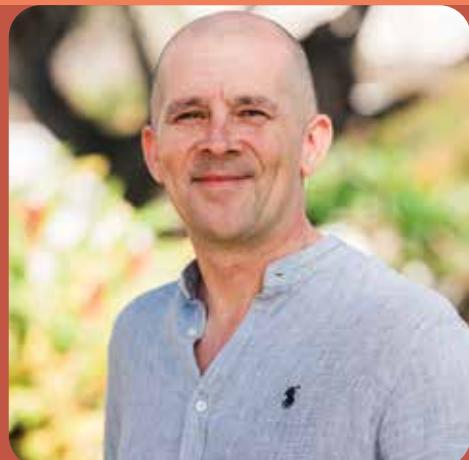
### **Department of Tourism, Government of Bihar**

Dr. Nilesh Ramchandra Deore, a 2011 batch IAS officer of the Bihar cadre, takes charge as Secretary, Department of Tourism, Government of Bihar. He has also served as Special Secretary in the Civil Aviation Department and was previously Private Secretary to the Union Minister of Civil Aviation.



### **Rosetta Hospitality**

Rosetta Hospitality announces the appointment of Mr. Rajesh Kattakam as Vice President – Sales and Business Development, further strengthening the group's commercial leadership across its growing luxury portfolio. With close to two decades of experience in hospitality sales, Rajesh brings a strong understanding of market behaviour, revenue strategy, and relationship-led growth to the role.



### **Outrigger Hospitality Group**

Outrigger Hospitality Group announces the appointment of Chris Long as General Manager of the forthcoming Outrigger Phi Phi Island Resort, scheduled to open in February 2026. Long assumed the role in April 2025, bringing nearly a decade of leadership experience with Outrigger and an extensive background in culinary and operational roles across the Maldives and Southeast Asia.



# OA ISLANDS

SEYCHELLES



MALDIVES



BALI



MAURITIUS



SRI LANKA



**HEAD MALDIVES:**

**HEAD MAURITIUS:**

**HEAD SEYCHELLES:**

**HEAD SRI LANKA:**

**HEAD BALI:**

**HEAD INDIA:**

**Kashif**

**Jaleel**

**Yusuf**

**Nabeel**

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# EXPLORE HOT MEALS

Make every journey more delicious with our delectable range of '**Gourmair**' hot meals, served oven hot at 36,000 ft. Xplore the menu and pre-book your favourites before you fly.



▲  
Awadhi  
Chicken  
Biryani with  
Mirch Salan



●  
Paneer Makhani  
with Jeera Aloo  
& Vegetable  
Pulao



●  
Hakka Noodles  
with Veg Manchurian



●  
Mini Idlis,  
Medu Vada  
and Upma