India's Leading, Multi-Award-Winning Travel Magazine

VOLUME 6 | ISSUE 11
NOVEMBER 2026
₹200/-
PAGES 72

TRAVEL turtle

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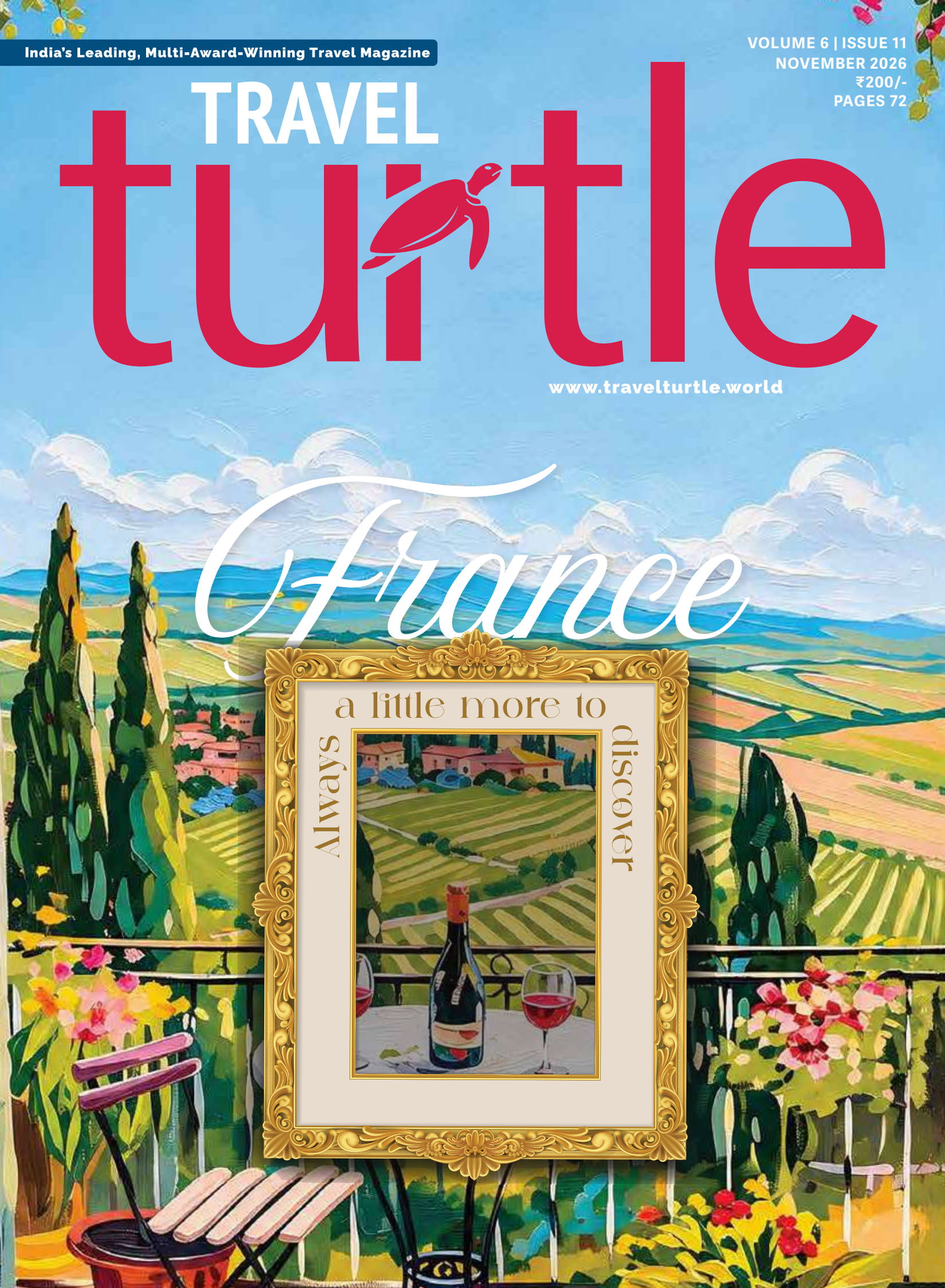

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Paris, mon amour ♡

Have you ever wondered what makes you fall in love with something, even after years of being a part of it? Is it the places you discover, the people you meet, the stories you collect, or those fleeting moments when you realise that what you do goes far beyond a profession?

For me, it is a little bit of everything.

Recently, I found myself taking India across three cities in the UK, from Dublin to Manchester and London, with the Namaste India roadshows, followed by WTM London. It was a fortnight of familiar faces, new friendships, conversations that lingered long after they ended and countless reminders of why I love this industry. There is something truly special about seeing your country through the eyes of people eager to discover it. Their curiosity, enthusiasm and warmth make you see your own home in an entirely new light. And perhaps that is travel's greatest gift: it gives us new places to explore while constantly finding new ways to make us appreciate the ones we call home.

As though the journey needed a little more magic, I landed back in India on Diwali, with celebrations waiting at home. Some journeys leave you with photographs; others leave you with memories you carry a little closer to your heart.

This edition brings together its own collection of journeys. We take a closer look at France, explore the charm and growing appeal of villa hotels, discover the distinctive world of Capella Hotels, and delve into the experiences offered by Atlantis The Royal. Each story offers a different perspective on hospitality, destinations and the ever-evolving expectations of today's traveller.

And perhaps that is what keeps this industry so fascinating. Just when you think you have seen enough, another destination surprises you, another experience moves you, and another story reminds you why there is always somewhere new to go.

Here's to the journeys that take us places, and the ones that bring us closer to ourselves.

Happy reading!

Stay curious. Stay connected. And as always,
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Bharti Sharma
Editor

: travelturtlemag





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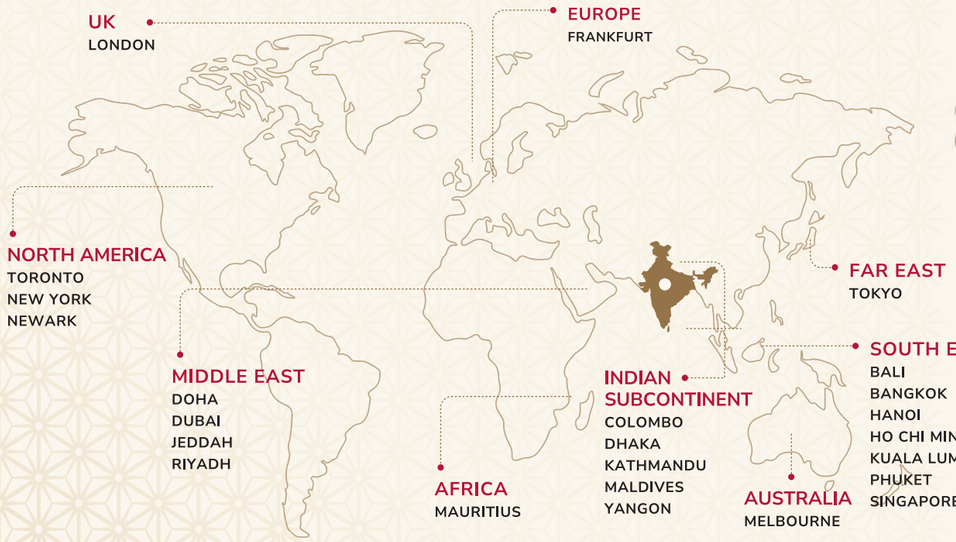





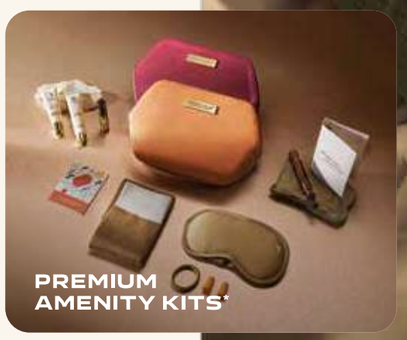





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Printed and Published by: Harish Chandra on behalf of Trouvaille Media & Communications Private Limited; Printed at Shree Ram Print O Pac, D 10/5 (Basement) Okhla Industrial Area Phase II, New Delhi 110020 ; Published at Plot No.1, 311, Vardhman Sunrise Plaza, Vasundhara Enclave, Delhi 110096.
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Maldivian launches Journey+

Maldivian, the national airline of the Maldives, has launched Maldivian Journey+, a new range of optional travel services offering passengers greater choice, convenience and comfort. The first phase brings together services under the Journey+ subbrand, allowing travellers to personalise their journeys according to their individual needs and preferences.



Accor brings Novotel to Himachal Pradesh with signing of Novotel Solan Kumarhatti

Accor has signed Novotel Solan Kumarhatti, marking its entry into Himachal Pradesh. Scheduled to open in 2031, the 120-room hotel along the Kalka–Shimla Highway will feature three dining outlets, a bar, wellness facilities and an 800-sq-metre ballroom, catering to leisure travellers, weddings, corporate gatherings and MICE demand.

MPTM 2026 showcases hospitality, handicrafts and rural tourism

The Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM) 2026 featured 177 exhibition stalls showcasing tourism, hospitality, technology, handicrafts and rural tourism from Madhya Pradesh, across India and overseas. A key highlight was the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Pavilion, which used digital displays, interactive kiosks and an AI-powered avatar, ‘Mowgli’, to help visitors explore destinations and create personalised travel itineraries.





Israel Tourism signs MoU with OTOAI

The Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) has signed an MoU with the Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) in Mumbai to strengthen tourism cooperation and promote Israel among Indian travellers. Signed by OTOAI President Himanshu Kesari Patil and Galit Hoffman, Consul, Tourism Affairs, India, the agreement marks IMOT’s first MoU with an Indian travel trade association.



Vietnam Airlines adds Ahmedabad as its fifth Indian station

Vietnam Airlines will launch four weekly flights between Ahmedabad and Hanoi from 3 November 2026, marking its fifth Indian station. Operating every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, the service will improve connectivity between Gujarat and Vietnam, supporting leisure, business and MICE travel. Aeroprime Group serves as the airline’s Passenger GSA in India.

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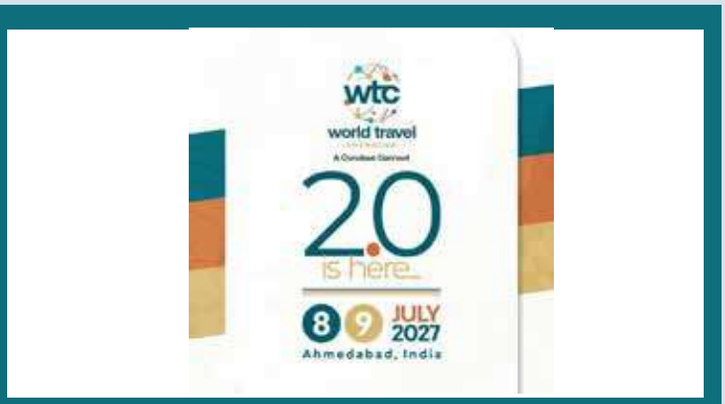

World Travel Collective announces dates for 2nd edition in Ahmedabad

The World Travel Collective (WTC) will hold its second edition on 8–9 July 2027 in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The B2B travel platform will bring together travel trade professionals, tourism boards, hospitality brands and tour operators for structured networking, buyer-seller meetings and business development opportunities.



TAFI Convention 2027 to be held in Sri Lanka

The Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) has announced Sri Lanka as the host destination for its 2027 Convention. Following its 2026 convention in Rhodes, Greece, the upcoming event will bring together travel trade professionals for networking, industry discussions and business development, while strengthening tourism ties between India and Sri Lanka.

Singapore Tourism Board unveils 'The great Indian family holiday: Singapore edition"

The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) has created The Great Indian Family Holiday: Singapore Edition – a four-episode travel series streaming exclusively on JioHotstar from 31 October 2026. The series follows four of India's most beloved families as they trade their routines for something altogether more memorable: actor Pratik Gandhi exploring Singapore across three generations, television host Maniesh Paul going full throttle with his kids, actress Sameera Reddy finding her own rhythm in the city, and comedian Atul Khatri doing what he does best – eating his way through Singapore with his family in tow.





Air India and Singapore Airlines expand partnership

Air India and Singapore Airlines will expand their commercial cooperation from 15 October 2026, offering customers greater booking flexibility across 126 weekly flights connecting Singapore with eight Indian cities. Passengers will be able to book eligible flights operated by either airline separately through the other carrier's website, app and appointed travel agencies.



18th ATOAI Annual Convention 2026 to be held in Jim Corbett, Uttarakhand

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board proudly announces its 18th Annual Adventure Convention, scheduled to take place in Jim Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand from 13 December to 16 December 2026. Bringing together industry leaders, policymakers, global experts, and grassroots operators, the country's premier adventure travel gathering will deliberate on this year's core theme, "India 365: Boundless Adventures."

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THE MICE Multiplier

How business events are building destinations, driving economies and redefining global tourism.

-Bharti Sharma



Picture a city on a quiet Tuesday in the middle of October. The beaches are calm, the monuments are uncrowded and the hotel lobbies hum softly. Then the delegates arrive. Suitcases roll across marble floors, lanyards swing, and the convention centre fills with the happy noise of a thousand introductions.

This is the magic of MICE, the world of Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions. It rarely makes the glossy postcards, yet it quietly shapes where the world travels, how cities grow and why a destination becomes a name people remember.

The weekday wonder

Leisure travel loves a weekend. Conferences love a Monday. That simple difference gives MICE its charm. Meetings and conventions typically run from Monday to Thursday, filling hotel rooms that would otherwise wait for the Friday rush.

Organisers also plan with a smile for the calendar. Large conventions are often booked in shoulder and off - peak months, when venues are available and group rates are friendly. The result is a destination that stays lively all twelve months.

Spending that travels far

A business delegate travels with a company behind them. Flights, hotels and meals are often covered by corporate budgets, so delegates comfortably choose premium services. The evenings tell their own story. Client dinners, gala banquets and lounge conversations over drinks lift food and beverage revenue across the city. Many attendees extend their stay for a little sightseeing, and some bring along a partner or family. Every one of those choices adds up to a higher spend per visitor than most holiday itineraries can offer.

Three ripples, one city

Economists describe the impact of a single conference as ripples on a pond, and the pond has three rings. The first ripple is direct spending. Speakers and delegates book flights and train tickets, then rely on airport taxis, ride-hailing apps, metros and chartered shuttles. Organisers rent halls, and guests fill hotel rooms and venue restaurants.

The second ripple is indirect spending. Behind every great event stands a crew of local specialists. Sound engineers, lighting technicians, stage builders and live-streaming teams bring the programme to life. Banquet kitchens source fresh produce, beverages and linen from regional wholesalers and freight handlers.

The third ripple is induced spending. Wages earned by temporary staff, drivers, hospitality teams and technicians flow into neighbourhood groceries, housing and daily services. Delegates wander into cafes, malls and cultural attractions during free evenings.

Handshakes that last

A trade show floor is where trust is built at human speed. A face - to - face meeting often does what a hundred emails cannot, and that is why MoUs and major contracts so often get signed beside an exhibition booth. Foreign direct investment in the host region frequently begins with a conversation at a conference. The benefits keep travelling after the badges are returned.



Cities built to host

Some destinations have turned hosting into an art. Dubai, Singapore and Barcelona have used international events to raise their global profile, welcoming business visitors who return later as leisure guests.

India is writing its own chapter with confidence. Delhi NCR, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai and Jaipur are expanding convention capacity, and e-visas have made arrivals smoother for international delegates. Smarter taxation and stronger infrastructure are the next milestones on the road, and each upgrade brings the country closer to the world's biggest event calendars.

Mega-events also leave gifts behind. Metro lines, airport expansions, waterfronts and smart-city digital networks arrive for delegates and stay for residents. Modern convention districts such as Expo City Dubai and Pragati Maidan in Delhi are designed as mixed-use cultural, retail and innovation zones, with life flowing through them between shows.

Work hours, wander hours

Welcome to the age of bleisure, where a business trip and a holiday share one boarding pass. Remote and hybrid work policies let professionals stretch a three-day conference into a longer stay, with a weekend added on a flight already paid for by the employer.

The spending map changes beautifully once the sessions end. Money moves from business districts into museums, heritage sites, spa and wellness centres, local cafes and handicraft markets. Incentive travel adds another layer of delight. Trips awarded to top-performing employees, dealers and partners have grown from standard luxury perks into carefully curated experiences, built around local stories, cuisine and culture. Destinations with heritage, flavour and natural beauty shine here. Rajasthan, Kerala and Goa in India, and Lisbon and Kyoto across the globe, offer experiences that a convention hall alone can never match.

Greener gatherings

Sustainability now sits on the main stage. Global corporations ask host venues to meet ESG standards, including renewable energy, zero single-use plastics and carbon-offset tracking. Many conferences add CSR moments to the agenda, such as upgrading a local school, planting trees or donating to food banks.

The last word

MICE is far more than a calendar of conferences. It fills hotels on quiet weekdays, feeds local businesses, builds airports and metro lines, and introduces thousands of visitors to places they will love enough to revisit. The next time a city hosts a grand convention, look beyond the stage. The real show is the way a single event lights up an entire place, one handshake and one holiday memory at a time.

Quick notes for smart travellers

- Midweek and shoulder-season dates bring better venue availability and friendlier group rates.
- Hotels near convention centres suit delegates who want to save time between sessions.
- Adding two or three leisure days to a business trip turns a work schedule into a mini-vacation.
- Heritage, cuisine and nature give a destination a strong edge in winning events and incentive groups.
- E-visas and good transit links make a city far more inviting for international delegates.
- Green credentials such as renewable energy and plastic-free policies are becoming a key part of venue selection.
- Local vendors, artisans and guides benefit most when planners source close to the venue.



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France

Always a little more to discover



Sheetal Munshaw

From the familiar charm of Paris to the vineyards of Burgundy and the French Alps, France is inviting Indian travellers to look beyond the usual itinerary. Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France India, shares how the country is approaching the Indian market and why there is always another reason to discover France.

-Tripti Jain



There is something about France that makes travellers want to return. For some, it is the romance of Paris; for others, it is the Mediterranean coastline, charming villages, vineyards or the allure of the Alps. The destination has long enjoyed a special place in the Indian traveller's imagination, but the way people experience it is changing. Longer stays, regional exploration and personalised holidays are opening up fresh possibilities for France in the Indian market.

A market with momentum

India continues to be an encouraging source market for France. The destination welcomed approximately 700,000 Indian visitors in 2019 and around 625,000 in 2024. Despite some disruption during the peak season this year due to the geopolitical situation, the long - term outlook remains positive.

Sheetal shares, “Our numbers have honestly been very, very encouraging. We were at about 700,000 in 2019 and, in 2024, we were at about 625,000. We are still awaiting the final figures for 2025, but they should be in a similar vein. We have seen steady growth of about 10% year on year, and I am guessing the trend will continue.”

The next phase, she explains, will focus on attracting greater value from tourism rather than simply increasing visitor numbers. Longer holidays, regional exploration and meaningful local experiences are becoming important considerations, aligning with France's vision of more sustainable tourism.

Celebrations and business, the French way

France's appeal extends beyond leisure, with MICE and destination weddings emerging as significant opportunities. Paris remains an aspirational choice for incentive travel, while Nice, Cannes, Deauville, Chamonix and Courchevel offer distinctive settings for corporate gatherings.

The country's experience in hosting international events, including the Cannes Film Festival and Paris Olympics, further strengthens its proposition. Sheetal highlights, “MICE has been a mainstay for France. Paris is definitely one of those very aspirational destinations for incentives, but there is tremendous potential beyond the capital. We are geared in terms of both hardware and software when it comes to hosting such events.”

Indian destination weddings have also found an increasingly welcoming setting in France over the past seven years. Paris and its surrounding regions, Cannes and Monte Carlo have emerged as preferred locations, offering grand venues, luxury properties and picturesque backdrops for celebrations.

Beyond the postcard

A holiday in France often begins with Paris, but there is plenty waiting once travellers venture further. With Indians increasingly spending more time in the country, Atout France sees an opportunity to introduce them to destinations that bring different experiences to an itinerary.

At the recent showcase, destinations such as Occitanie, Toulouse, Lourdes, Provence, Marseille, Nice, Nîmes and Aix-en-Provence presented their offerings, spanning wine trails, gastronomy, coastal escapes and cultural experiences.

“We would love for Indians to travel all over France. Fortunately, Indians are now taking more time to spend in the country, which allows us to showcase more destinations. It really depends on whether travellers are motivated to stay by the beach, have an alpine sojourn, experience wines or explore cities,” says Sheetal.

Taking France across India

Atout France's engagement with the Indian travel trade has increasingly adopted a pan-India approach. Its last six showcase editions have taken place in destinations such as Goa, Udaipur, Coimbatore and Kochi, extending its reach beyond traditional metropolitan markets.

The organisation also invites travel professionals from across India for familiarisation programmes in France. Specialised showcases introduce Indian partners to specific experiences and products, with a programme centred on wine tourism scheduled in Cognac.

Sheetal emphasises, “We have come to a time where you really have to approach India as a whole. Every market is a source market, and we are seeing interest and travel from everywhere. Having a pan-India approach is now a norm; it is not an option.”

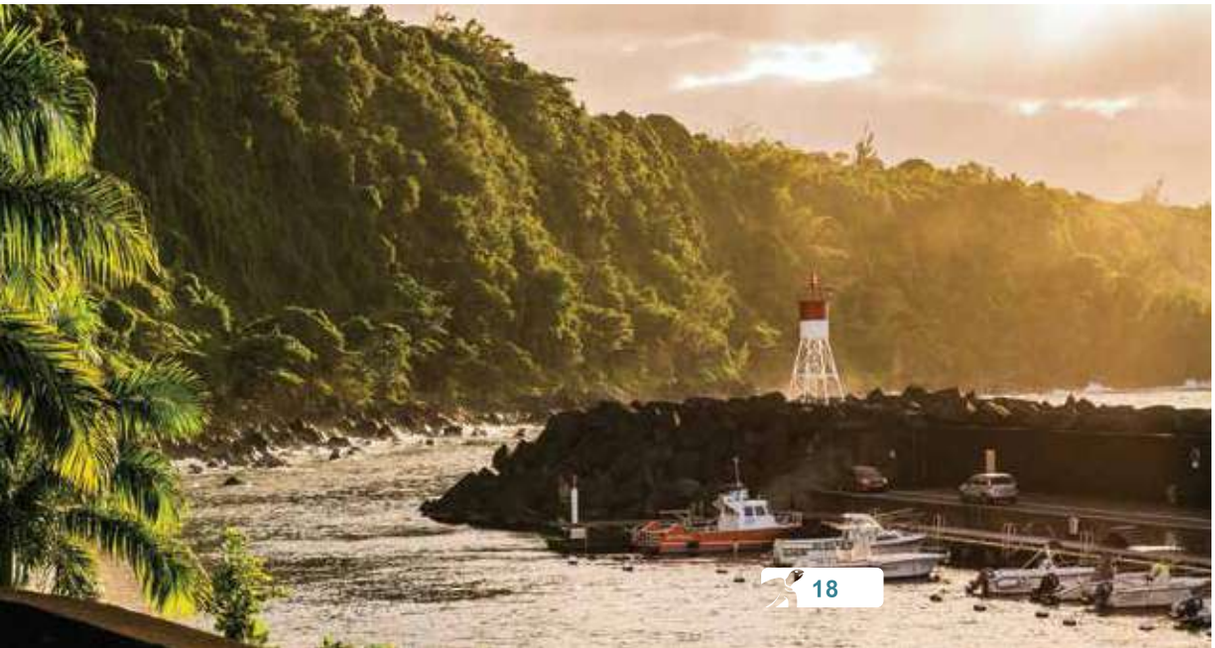
This approach recognises the outbound potential of India's tier II and tier III markets, giving travel professionals across the country opportunities to strengthen destination knowledge and develop France - focused products.











A traveller for every season

MICE groups, destination weddings and conventional group tours continue to contribute to the Indian market, alongside a diverse leisure FIT segment. Families, couples, retirees, women travellers and younger explorers bring different expectations to the destination. Affinity travel is another interesting segment, with communities sharing cultural and personal connections with France looking to rediscover the country.

"We have a bit of everything. We have MICE, weddings, group travel and leisure FIT, which itself encompasses several subsegments. We have families, couples, retirees, affinity travellers, women travellers and youth travellers. The list is endless," says Sheetal.

The French art of living

With competition among international destinations becoming stronger, France is focusing on continuous reinvention. Sustainability, seasonal diversification and the promotion of lesser-explored regions form important parts of this strategy. The country is also working with its hospitality ecosystem to enhance service standards and adapt to international visitors.

Local artisans, regional produce and cultural traditions are receiving greater attention, allowing visitors to experience the destination through the people and communities that give each region its character.



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"Our focus is on sustainability, diversifying seasonality and showcasing more undiscovered areas of France," Sheetal explains,

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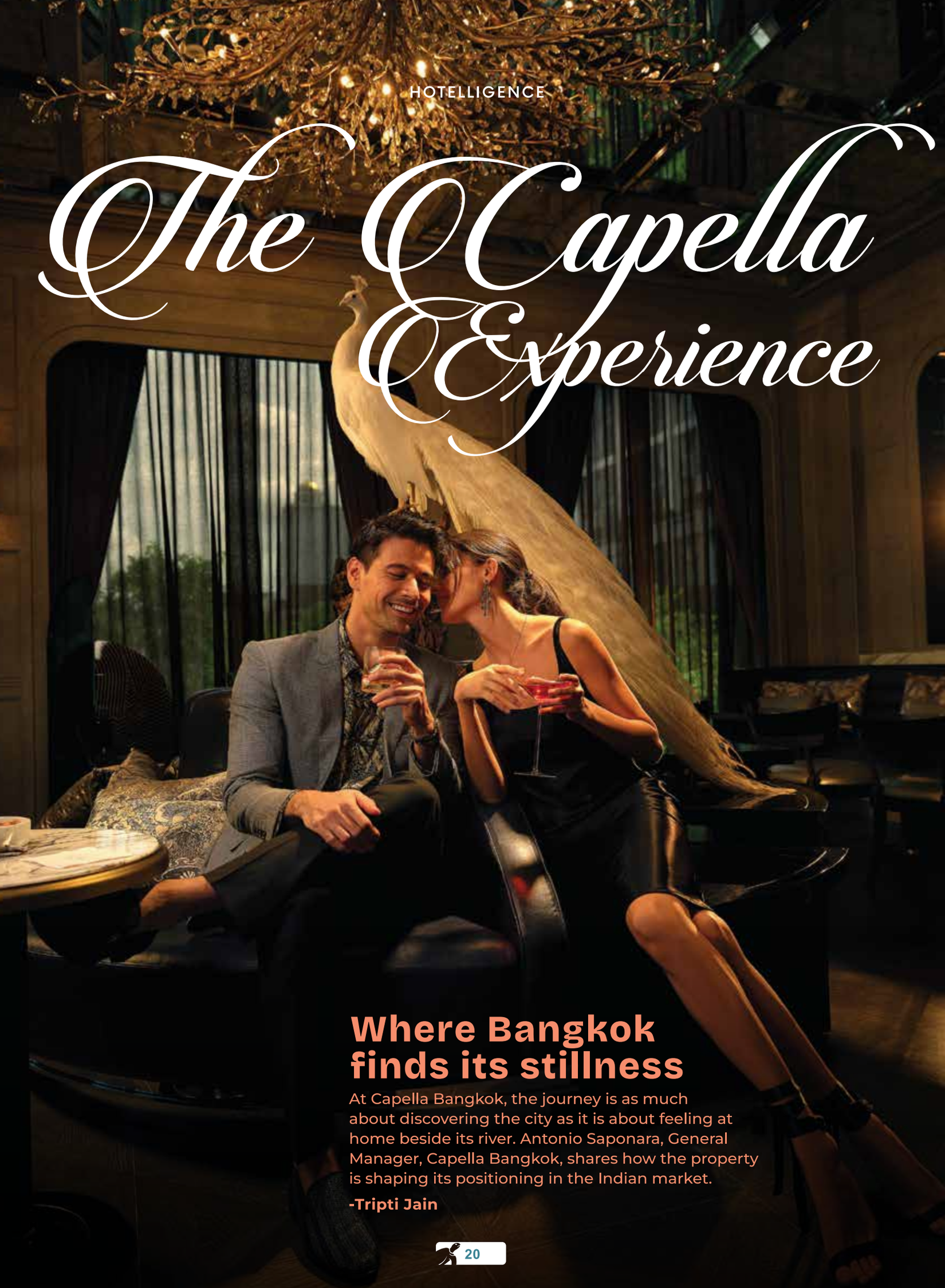
The Capella Experience



Where Bangkok finds its stillness

At Capella Bangkok, the journey is as much about discovering the city as it is about feeling at home beside its river. Antonio Saponara, General Manager, Capella Bangkok, shares how the property is shaping its positioning in the Indian market.

-Tripti Jain



Bangkok is a city that thrives on contrasts. Its bustling streets, vibrant markets, historic temples and contemporary lifestyle destinations create an energy that draws travellers from across the world. Along the banks of the Chao Phraya River, however, the city reveals a different rhythm, one where heritage, tranquillity and personalised luxury come together. At Capella Bangkok, this riverside setting becomes the starting point for an experience that allows guests to discover the Thai capital at their own pace.

With a philosophy rooted in place, people and personalisation, Capella Bangkok is carving its own space in the city's luxury hospitality landscape. From river - facing suites and villas to distinctive culinary experiences, wellness journeys and curated cultural encounters, the hotel brings together the many dimensions of Bangkok under one address. For Indian travellers seeking privacy, meaningful experiences and exceptional hospitality, this approach holds particular appeal.

A riverside address

At Capella Bangkok, the Chao Phraya River is central to its identity. Situated in the historic Charoenkrung neighbourhood, the hotel offers guests a setting that combines the city's cultural character with the calm of a private riverside retreat. Each of its 101 rooms, suites and villas overlooks the river, creating a constant connection with the destination.

Antonio believes that the property's strongest proposition lies in the combination of its setting and people. “I believe it's a golden combination of place, people and highly personalised hospitality. We're privileged with our perch directly on the Chao Phraya River in the heart of Bangkok's historic Charoenkrung neighbourhood, which offers a sense of tranquillity while also remaining deeply connected to the cultural heart of the city,” he says.



Antonio Saponara

For Indian travellers, the spacious accommodation, privacy and personalised services make the property particularly suitable for family holidays, multigenerational travel and milestone celebrations. Its culinary offerings add another dimension, with the Two - MICHELIN - starred Côte by Mauro Colagreco and Phra Nakhon, which celebrates regional Thai cuisine. Thoughtfully curated vegetarian options and personalised menus further accommodate diverse dining preferences. Auriga Wellness completes the experience with holistic offerings focused on relaxation and restoration.

Discovering Bangkok differently

The hotel's Capella Curates programme and its dedicated Culturists help guests explore Bangkok beyond its familiar landmarks. Its Charoenkrung address offers an opportunity to discover a neighbourhood where historic character meets an increasingly creative spirit. From local communities to cultural traditions, these experiences provide a closer understanding of the destination.

“The two are inseparable. Capella Bangkok offers an international standard of luxury, but the experience should always feel unmistakably rooted in Bangkok,” Antonio explains, highlighting how the hotel's global hospitality standards work alongside its local identity.

This philosophy also finds expression through its dining and wellness experiences. Phra Nakhon celebrates regional Thai recipes prepared with locally sourced ingredients, while the Chiva Jit vegetarian set menu caters to guests seeking thoughtfully presented vegetarian cuisine. Guided meditation sessions with Monk Phra Ajan Prasert offer another opportunity to engage with Thai traditions.

The new luxury traveller

Luxury travel is increasingly shaped by individual interests, with travellers seeking experiences that reflect their personalities rather than following a prescribed itinerary. Privacy, cultural discovery, wellbeing and destination - led dining are becoming important considerations, particularly among discerning travellers.

Antonio observes this shift among Indian guests as well. “We increasingly notice a desire for more personalised and meaningful experiences. Travellers want privacy and comfort, of course, but they are also looking for authentic cultural connections, wellbeing, deeply rooted dining and experiences that feel tailored rather than prescribed,” he says.

The hotel's complimentary shuttle boat service to ICONSIAM, one of Bangkok's leading retail and lifestyle destinations, also adds convenience for guests keen to explore the city's shopping scene. At Auriga Wellness, guests can choose restorative treatments, movement, mindfulness and cultural experiences according to their individual preferences.

Antonio believes that the human element will remain central to luxury hospitality. “Technology can make travel more seamless, but being remembered, understood and genuinely cared for will remain irreplaceable.”







India's growing connection

India represents an important market for Capella Bangkok, with opportunities emerging across leisure travel, family holidays, gastronomy, wellness and destination celebrations. The diversity of Indian luxury travellers also presents possibilities for the hotel to engage with different travel segments. Antonio points out that there is no single definition of the Indian luxury traveller. Couples, families, multigenerational groups and travellers drawn to cultural and culinary experiences all form part of the market's potential.

Antonio shares, “We’re seeing growing interest from Indian families looking to bring their loved ones together in Bangkok for highly personalised celebrations, including enquiries for exclusive, full - hotel buyouts.”

These opportunities are supported by relationships with Indian travel partners and wedding planners, alongside the efforts of the Tourism Authority of Thailand offices in key Indian cities. For Capella Bangkok, the objective is to build lasting connections with guests, whether their first visit is for a leisure holiday, a family occasion or a destination wedding.

Building trade partnerships

In the luxury travel segment, recommendations and relationships play an important role in influencing travel decisions. India's travel advisors, with their understanding of individual client preferences, therefore remain important partners for Capella Bangkok.

The hotel's engagement strategy focuses on education, familiarisation opportunities and closer communication. Giving advisors a first - hand understanding of the accommodation, dining, wellness and cultural offerings helps them present the property's experience with greater confidence. Antonio says, “The travel trade plays an important role because luxury travel is built on trust and personal recommendation. We therefore see our relationships with travel advisors and partners in India as something to develop over the long term.”

He also sees Indian travel advisors as an important link to a new generation of luxury travellers. Their ability to understand whether a client values a riverfront villa, gastronomy or a deeper connection with Thai culture allows them to recommend experiences that are more closely aligned with individual expectations.

A stay to remember

As Bangkok continues to attract travellers with its vibrant mix of culture, cuisine, shopping and contemporary experiences, Capella Bangkok brings a quieter, more personal perspective to the destination. Its riverside setting, locally inspired experiences and focus on individual hospitality create an address where guests can enjoy the city's energy while finding their own moments of calm.

For the Indian travel trade, the property's diverse appeal across leisure, families, wellness and destination celebrations opens up several opportunities to introduce it to discerning clients. As Antonio Saponara envisions, the real measure of success lies in building relationships that encourage guests to return.





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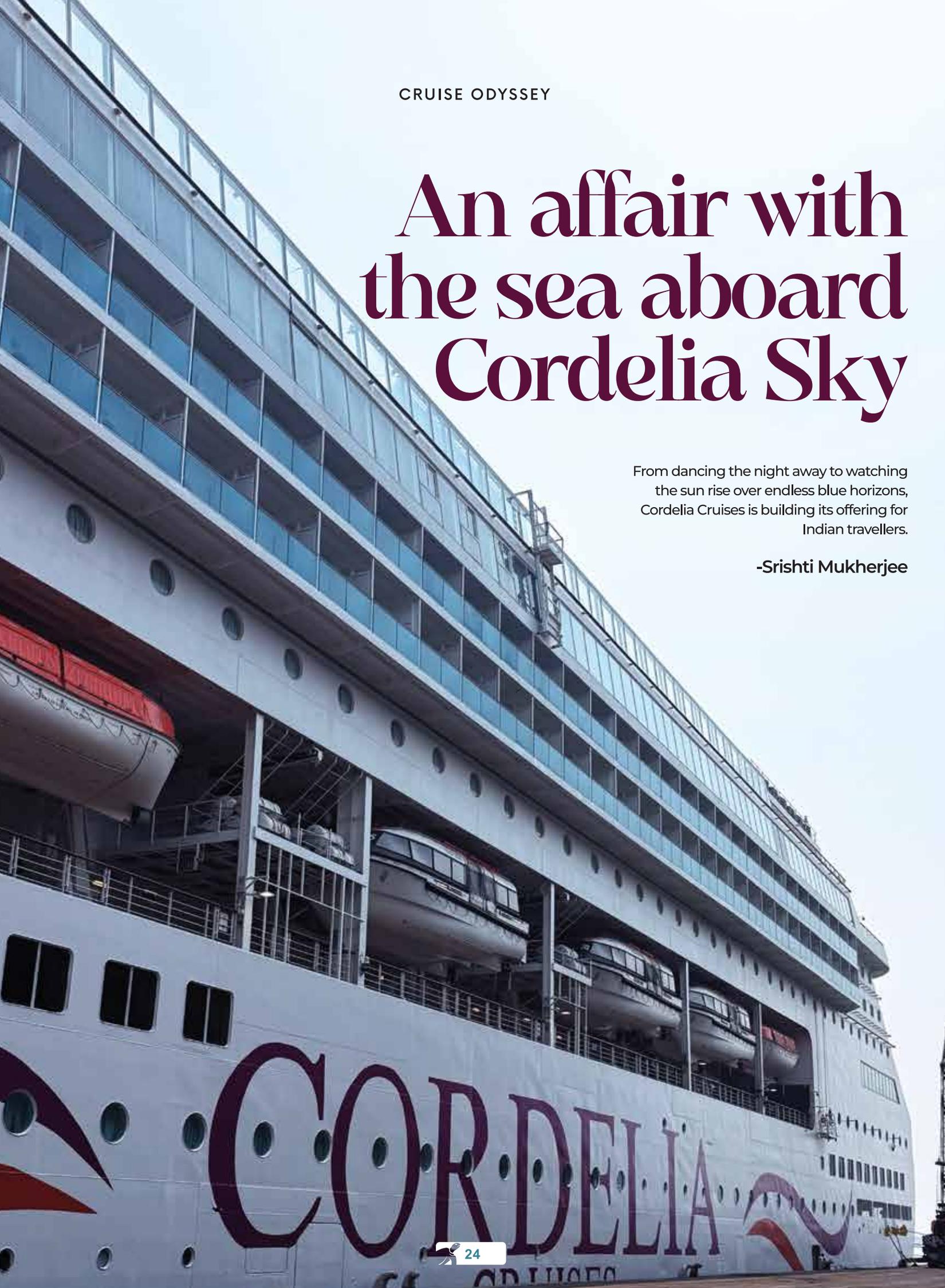
An affair with the sea aboard Cordelia Sky

From dancing the night away to watching the sun rise over endless blue horizons, Cordelia Cruises is building its offering for Indian travellers.

-Srishti Mukherjee



You know that feeling when a kid is given a new toy, something that is a constant source of amusement and excitement, that is how I felt during the three days that I spent on Cordelia Sky. A core memory that will probably live with me forever, my first ever cruise with India's most sought-after cruise line, Cordelia, was nothing short of magical. With a luxury experience par excellence, Cordelia cruises felt like a floating dream. Think soothing mornings that are spent catching sunrises with the sound of the sea perfectly blending in the background. And for someone who has literally spent a huge part of her childhood romanticising mountain peaks, it's safe to say, I had a little fling with the Arabian sea aboard Cordelia Sky at its inaugural season 2026 that made for some of the most beautiful memories I made.

Founded by Jürgen Bailom, Cordelia Cruises has something that fits everyone's plans, the gaming arcade for the kids, bar crawl and theatrical or dance shows for the youngsters and the adults, you will find yourself surrounded by different experiences in every part of the ship.

All aboard!

As I left Delhi, ahead of the cruise adventure, all I could feel were butterflies in my stomach. However, the anticipation that clouded my mind for most of my journey to the Ballard Pier port in Mumbai vanished as soon as I laid my eyes on Cordelia Sky. With an all-white exterior, painted with colourful flowers, Sky left me speechless not just because of its beauty but also because it was gigantic, leaving me feeling almost dwarfed by its size. As I boarded the beautiful cruise the sound of 'dhol' engulfed the air around us, welcoming us into the whole new world of Cordelia cruises. What followed was a warm greeting by the crew. We were welcomed onboard with a ceremonial tika solidifying Cordelia's deep-rooted ties to India and its culture.

Sky was a 12-deck ship that could accommodate close to 2400 people with almost everything that a guest would require on their getaway. Think dining venues, bars and lounges, swimming pools and hot tubs, game rooms, stores for when you want to get your loved ones back home a souvenir and even sports court and gaming lounges, the ship had it all. A masterful work of art, Sky was no less than a five-star hotel with its cabins that could fit all the luxuries. I stayed in their mini suite and it was a suite, alright! The view of the turquoise sea right outside the balcony of my suite felt absolutely surreal and it got even more beautiful with a little sunset in the distance as the hours passed.

While a little part of me felt a little too comfortable as soon as I entered my cabin, another part of me was more than excited to go explore the 848-foot-long ship and witness everything that the cruise had to offer first hand (and I am glad I did!). We were just in time for the most Indian lunch that one could ask for and what's lunch without a delicious dessert to bring the meal to its climax, Sky had it all.

A whole new world

You remember when Lorelai Gilmore said, "women go on adventures too and they go in heels,"? That was what followed the delicious lunch—a detailed exploration of the cruise and I did that in heels! 12 decks, end to end, from every bar to theatre to library and gaming arcade, we explored it all till our legs felt numb and our hearts felt satisfied.

We started with the top deck, the 12th one that featured some of the best bar and dining spots for the guests, the sports court and a complete view of the vast sea blending into the sky in the distance. We then moved down towards the 11th deck, the pool deck that featured two pools and five hot tubs alongside bar and dining spots, a fitness centre, spa and salon and dome—an observation lounge with panoramic ocean views by day and high-energy nightclub by night. Moving forward, we explored all the other decks that featured different activities ranging from photo gallery, gift shops, library and meeting rooms, the different bars, the chairman's club, casino, the Marquee theatre and connexions for entertainment, the kids academy, the teen entourage club, the arcade, and the gaming lounge.

And just like that it was time for the naming ceremony aboard Cordelia Sky as we started sailing into the night. A welcome address by







Jürgen Bailom and Captain Whitley got the party officially started as they popped the champagne open. The naming ceremony then witnessed a small burlesque dance party on the pool deck that was followed by the introduction of Cordelia's first official mascot, Corde and a soulful singing performance accompanying the dinner and drinks.

As the night proceeded, so did the quota for the entertainment with the Bollywood night at the Marquee theatre because what celebrates Indian culture better than a little Bollywood dance party. It featured all the Bollywood bangers from the early 2000s to the most recent hits, getting the groove on, not just for the dancers but also for the guests watching the energetic performances. I'd be lying if I said I didn't shake a leg (or two!). However, just when you think the night is over, they'll tell you there's more. As soon as I returned to my cabin to call it a night, the director announced the after party and we realised the night was still young and the party was just getting started. And while the rest of the night is still blurry in my mind, I know for sure that it was a blast.

The world is your oyster

My next morning started way earlier than I thought, after all the sun still rises at six in the morning even if we sleep at three in the night and how could I miss a sunrise on the sea. Half asleep, I marched to the top deck to capture the sunrise in the middle of nowhere and dare I say it was totally worth it! With the soft sea breeze touching my face as we patiently waited for the sun to show in the misty blue sky ahead of us with the sound of the waves in the background, it almost felt like a movie scene and while I strongly believe I am a main character in my mind, this time Cordelia Sky took the spotlight.

A serene sunrise and a hearty breakfast later we got ready for the next round of entertainment onboard Sky—a musical drama, 'Tu Aashiqui hai.' A musical journey of love, dreams and a whole lot of family drama, the theatrical production gripped the audience in an unmissable emotional roller coaster.

This was followed by an insightful press conference with the core team addressing some crucial questions by the media regarding Cordelia Cruises, the newest addition and their future plans. Jürgen Bailom took the opportunity to announce that Cordelia Sky has joined its fleet, with Cordelia Sun expected to arrive earlier than planned. The company aims to expand cruise tourism in India, targeting a place among the world's top five cruise markets by 2032. Sky features around 1,000 cabins, including over 260 premium-category cabins. Corporate and MICE travel account for 30–35% of business. Cordelia also plans a 34-day Mumbai–Sydney cruise in 2028, covering seven countries and 16 ports.







"Cordelia Sky is 260 metres long, has 14 floors and is powered by 69,000 horsepower. We have around 800 crew members on board, and the ship uses very low Sulphur fuel, which is regulated globally. Cruise ships are not like cargo ships; they are constantly maintained, upgraded and brought in line with the latest technology. Everything you see on board is the latest, and the ship is constantly maintained and updated to meet global standards. We have to come out of the water every two years for what we call dry dock, and the ship goes through regular maintenance. We are also highly regulated and have to go through around 800 audits a year. I hope you enjoy the ship. I think she is a very beautiful lady." - Jurgen Bailom, President & CEO, Cordelia Cruises

As the Media conference concluded, another live singing performance commenced in connexions and I thought I wasn't big on rock music but well, if Elvis Presley's 'Can't help falling in love' is rock you will find me sitting front row. And so I was—swaying to all the songs including 'Summer of 69,' and 'Countryroad.'

Now, when you're given a chance to dance, you grab a partner and you swing your hips to the beat in sync. And that's what we did next at the salsa workshop aboard Cordelia Sky but it was everything but in sync. Think chaotic, a lot of mismatched dance moves and stepping onto each other's toes. One thing that the salsa workshop taught us was that team work really did make the dream work, only we couldn't do either within eight counts.

Life is the bubbles

Nonetheless, dance did seem like one of the core elements of Cordelia Cruises as we then gathered in front of the Atrium Bar, looking down at the lobby as the crew members gave a surprise performance marking our last night on the three-day cruise adventure.

While the crew gave us a goodbye performance in the evening, it certainly wasn't the end of the night. What followed next was a class act of Burlesque in the Marquee theatre and a pre-Diwali party simultaneously for all the premiere creators, influencers and media guests to bring the cruise adventure to a close.

With a shimmering Diwali bash, the night turned into early morning with drinks, conversations and a whole lot of dancing. And just like that, the time to disembark finally arrived as we docked back at Mumbai's Ballard Pier.

Looking back, my first cruise adventure with Cordelia Sky was a little bit of everything, with experiences I never quite knew I needed. And for anyone wondering whether a cruise holiday is worth taking, I'd say if the sea calls, you go for it!

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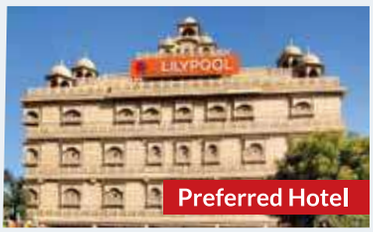

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Atlantis

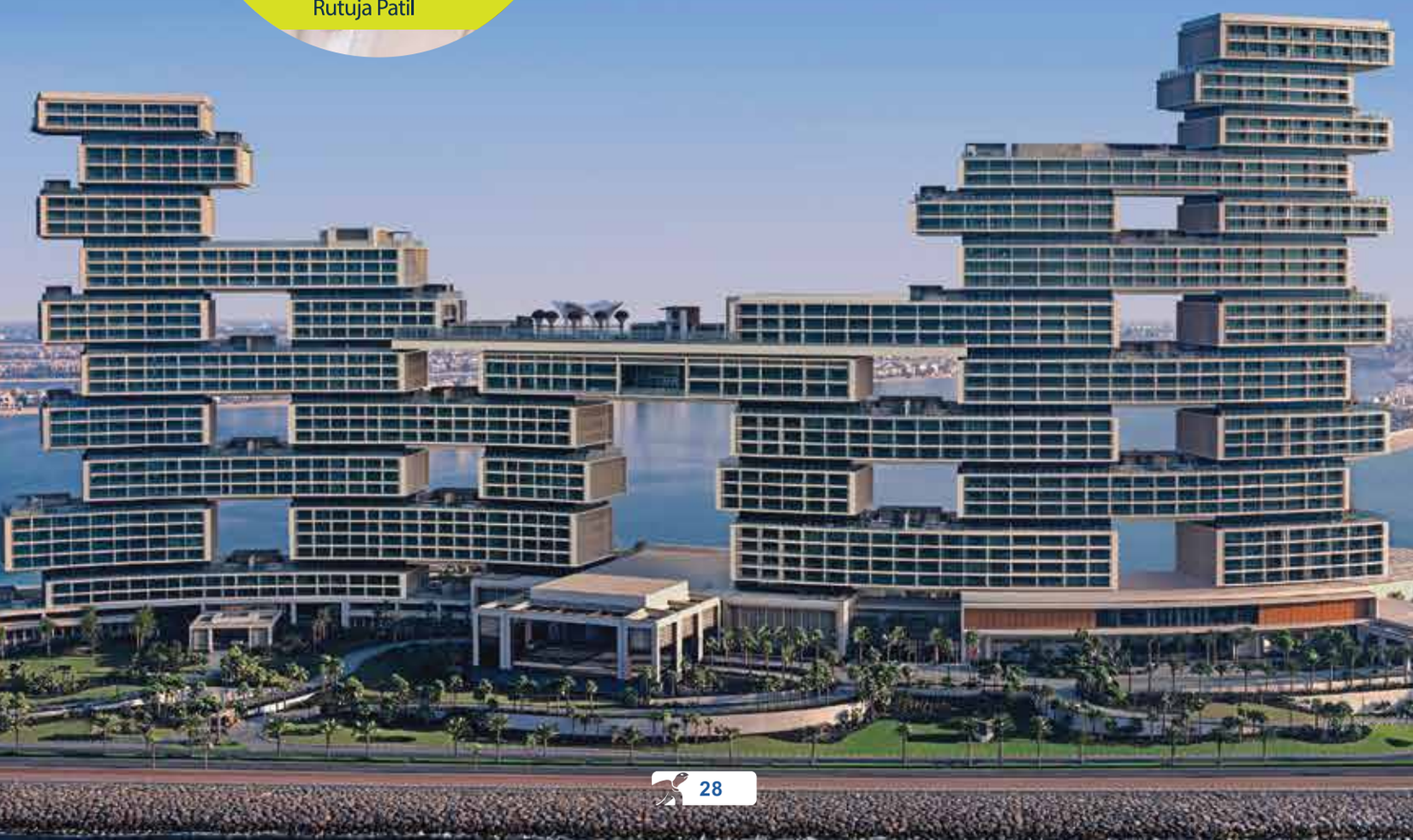
Dubai's approach to luxury travel



Rutuja Patil

With dining, entertainment, marine experiences and family activities, Atlantis Dubai offers plenty of reasons for guests to return.

-**Naina Nath**







Atlantis needs no introduction to the luxury travel trade. With two distinctive resort experiences, Atlantis, The Palm and Atlantis, The Royal, the destination offers far more than a place to stay. As Indian travellers increasingly seek memorable experiences alongside luxury accommodation, Atlantis brings together dining, entertainment, wellness and family time under one roof. Speaking to Travel Turtle, Rutuja Patil, Account Director, Leisure Sales (India), Atlantis Dubai, discusses the evolving Indian traveller, the destination's varied offerings and the role of travel advisors in matching clients with the right experiences.

Beyond the hotel stay

Indian luxury travel is becoming more experience - led, according to Patil. Travellers are looking beyond room categories and amenities to consider what a destination offers throughout their stay. "Today Indian travelers are more experienced," she says, noting their focus on "the overall experience rather than simply the hotel they stay in." Dining, personalised service, distinctive activities and quality family time all contribute to the experience. For Atlantis Dubai, this presents an opportunity to position the resort as a destination in its own right, rather than simply a stop on a Dubai itinerary.

A market that travels all year

India remains an important source market for Atlantis Dubai, with demand extending beyond traditional holiday periods. Dubai's proximity makes it practical for Indian travellers to plan both short breaks and longer family holidays. "India is an all-year-round market," Patil explains. "Dubai's proximity makes it easy for Indian travelers to visit throughout the year, whether for a short getaway or to spend time with family and friends." She describes the Indian market as resilient, with travellers familiar with the product and its appeal. For travel advisors, this creates opportunities to promote Atlantis for a range of occasions, from weekend escapes and family holidays to celebrations and group travel.

Two resorts, different experiences

Atlantis, The Palm and Atlantis, The Royal offer distinct accommodation options within the wider Atlantis Dubai destination. Atlantis, The Palm has 1,544 rooms and suites across its East and West Towers, ranging from Ocean and Palm View rooms to Imperial Club accommodation, family suites and signature options such as the Underwater Suite, Grand Atlantis Suite and Presidential Suite. Atlantis, The Royal offers 760 rooms, suites and signature penthouses across its Sunset, Sunlight and Sunrise towers. Categories include Seascape, Palmscape and Royal Club rooms, alongside Sky View suites, Sky Pool Villas and signature penthouses.

"The breadth of inventory gives advisors scope to match accommodation to different

budgets, group sizes and occasions, while tailoring the wider resort experience to each client," Patil adds.

Dining as a destination

Food is another major draw, particularly for travellers seeking memorable culinary experiences. Patil highlights the destination's extensive dining portfolio, comprising 51 restaurants and bars across the two resorts. Atlantis Dubai's culinary credentials received further recognition in the 2026 MICHELIN Guide Dubai, with six stars retained across four restaurants, alongside five additional restaurants recognised by the guide and two individual awards.

"Dining is also a part of our major experience that we have," she says. For travel advisors, the restaurants provide another reason to recommend a stay, particularly to clients who consider good food essential to a luxury holiday.

Adventure, wellness and things to do

Beyond accommodation and dining, Aquaventure World, marine experiences, beaches and wellness facilities offer guests multiple ways to spend their time without leaving the destination. Families can enjoy waterpark adventures and shared activities, while couples and other leisure travellers can focus on dining, relaxation and entertainment. Patil says Atlantis caters to varied traveller profiles, including FIT guests, leisure groups, weddings and MICE travel. "Atlantis is one





destination for all travelers," she says, pointing to its range of facilities and experiences.

Keeping the experience fresh

Continued investment helps maintain the destination's appeal. In September 2026, Atlantis Dubai announced enhancements across Atlantis, The Palm, Atlantis, The Royal and Aquaventure World. These include a refurbishment of Ossiano and an expansion of Plato's Lounge at Atlantis, The Palm, waterpark improvements and updates to leisure and guest facilities at Atlantis, The Royal. The programme reflects an ongoing effort to evolve the guest experience. Patil says "Atlantis reinvests in its resorts to keep the offering fresh and give visitors reasons to return".

Building stronger trade partnerships

Atlantis Dubai engages Indian travel partners through training, webinars, social media collaborations, sales visits and client-facing events. Its Global Booking Rewards programme also incentivises travel advisors to book through the platform. Patil emphasises the brand's focus on creating experiences that encourage both first-time visits and repeat stays. "Our biggest opportunity is creating extraordinary experiences that give a guest a reason to choose Atlantis and, importantly, to keep coming back," she says.

And so, as Indian luxury travellers place greater value on holiday experiences, Atlantis Dubai's opportunity lies in making every stay feel different.

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Rediscover ISRAEL like never before!



Galit Hoffman

With renewed trade engagement and direct flights planned for December 2026, Israel is working to build fresh opportunities for Indian travel partners. Galit Hoffman, Consul-Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism in India, discusses the country's engagement with Indian travel partners, upcoming initiatives and the opportunities she sees for tourism growth.

-Naina Nath

Israel is looking to expand its appeal among Indian travellers beyond its established pilgrimage market, with a renewed focus on luxury holidays, MICE and experiential travel.

Rebuilding trade connections

The Israel Tourism Roadshow in New Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai, held on October 12, 14 and 16, marked an important step in reconnecting with India's travel trade. Accompanied by Israeli tourism partners Amaris Tours and Events, Magi Holidays and Satguru Travel, the delegation met nearly 300 Indian travel professionals. "We strongly believe in the value of meeting our travel trade partners face to face. Nothing replaces personal conversations, exchanging ideas, understanding the industry's needs and building relationships based on trust," says Hoffman.

A closer look at luxury

In November, Israel will host its first dedicated luxury travel agents' familiarisation trip from India in many years. The programme will showcase leading luxury hotels, culinary experiences, cultural encounters and personalised travel options. Dedicated B2B meetings with Israeli destination management companies are also planned in cooperation with the Israel Incoming Tour Operators Association. "Ultimately, we want our Indian partners to experience Israel first-hand and return with the knowledge, connections and confidence to create exceptional, tailor-made holidays for their clients," Hoffman says.

More than a pilgrimage

Israel's compact geography allows



travellers to experience diverse landscapes and contrasting destinations within a single itinerary. Tel Aviv brings together beaches, restaurants, markets, art and nightlife, while Jerusalem combines ancient history with vibrant everyday culture. The Dead Sea, Negev Desert and Red Sea resort of Eilat add opportunities for nature, adventure and relaxation. "Israel is also a fantastic destination for active travel, agritourism, culinary and wine experiences, and trips built around music, film and cultural festivals," says Hoffman, highlighting the scope for travel advisors to develop itineraries around varied interests.

Opportunities beyond leisure

Luxury travel, multigenerational holidays, corporate meetings and incentive programmes are among the segments Hoffman believes offer significant potential. Israel's hotels, boutique properties, wineries and private experiences can support tailored luxury itineraries, while its international conferences in cybersecurity, agriculture, water technology and medical innovation create opportunities to combine business with leisure. "Our message is simple: Come for the conference, stay for Israel!" she says. Conferences and exhibitions, including Cybertech and WATEC, can provide a starting point for itineraries incorporating Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and the Dead Sea.

Easy access for Indian travellers

Visa facilitation and air connectivity remain important considerations for the Indian market. In 2025, India became the first country to benefit from Israel's eVisa-B2 pilot programme, allowing eligible Indian passport holders residing in India to apply for tourist visas online. Group visa arrangements are also available through authorised travel agents. Air India's announced return to Israel on December 1, 2026, with five weekly nonstop flights between Delhi and Tel Aviv, is another significant development. Connecting services via international hubs, including Abu Dhabi with Etihad Airways, provide additional options. "This is a major development for tourism between our countries, making Israel more accessible and opening new opportunities for Indian travellers and travel companies," Hoffman says.

Rebuilding confidence

Israel is also working to reassure trade partners about the availability of tourism services. Hoffman says hotels, restaurants, museums, attractions and historical sites are welcoming visitors. Nearly 800,000 tourists visited the country during the first nine months of 2026, including approximately 140,000 in September, up around 19% year on year. "We want our partners to see Israel as it is today, a destination offering extraordinary experiences, warm hospitality and so much to discover," she says.

Long-term engagement

The Ministry's plans for the coming year include participation in major travel trade shows, focused B2B meetings in additional Indian cities, segment-specific webinars and familiarisation trips for travel agents and media. A dedicated e-learning platform for Indian travel professionals is also planned. An MoU signed with OTOAI during the Mumbai roadshow supported training, joint promotions and business opportunities. "India holds a very special place for us. It is Israel's leading tourism source market in Asia and one of our top ten source markets worldwide, with tremendous potential for further growth," Hoffman says. "My message to our Indian travel trade partners is simple: come and rediscover Israel. Experience it, explore its possibilities and help us share its many stories with Indian travellers."







A thousand ways to escape with

Marriott International



Silvio Rosenberger

India continues to be an important market for Marriott's Maldives portfolio, driven by its diverse traveller base and growing appetite for premium holidays. Silvio Rosenberger, Market VP – Maldives & VP of Operations, Asia Pacific excluding China, Marriott International discusses the region's travel dynamics.

-Tripti Jain



Travel is becoming a story of diverse aspirations, from families seeking meaningful time together and couples chasing secluded escapes to business travellers and celebration seekers, the region's hospitality landscape is constantly evolving. Few destinations capture this diversity quite such as the Maldives, where every island offers a different interpretation of a holiday. For Marriott International, understanding these changing motivations is central to shaping experiences across its portfolio.

The APAC advantage

Asia Pacific is a collection of diverse markets, each with its own travel patterns and opportunities. Silvio believes the region is increasingly self-sustaining, with considerable movement taking place between its countries. He shares, “APAC is very different depending on which country you look at. There is corporate travel and leisure travel, but intra - regional travel is a big part of the picture. Countries such as India, China, Japan, Thailand and Vietnam have strong travel ecosystems of their own. We do not always need to look outside the region; there is substantial movement within it.”

MICE and weddings continue to contribute significantly to regional demand, particularly as economies grow. India, he notes, is an important market for both, with opportunities spanning corporate gatherings and destination celebrations.

India’s growing footprint

For Marriott's Maldives portfolio, India remains one of its most important source markets. The company's second Maldives roadshow across Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Delhi brought together more than 250 travel trade partners and 35 media professionals, strengthening its engagement with the Indian travel fraternity. A dedicated four-person in-market sales team established this year further reflects this commitment. Silvio explains, “India is super important for us. We see individual travellers and family travel as particularly important. The market is evolving, and it is essential for us to understand what guests are looking for and make sure our offerings respond to those expectations.”

With almost 50 direct flight connections from key Indian cities, a journey of around two-and-a-half to four-and-a-half hours and no pre-arrival visa requirement, the Maldives offers an accessible island escape for couples, families, multi - generational groups and wellness seekers.

When generations travel together

The Maldives has traditionally been associated with honeymooners, with its overwater villas and intimate island settings defining romantic holidays. Today, its appeal is expanding as families increasingly choose the destination to spend quality time together.

“The Maldives has always been seen as a honeymoon destination, and it continues to be one. At the same time, it is moving towards more family travel. People want to spend quality time together, so our offerings have changed as well,” Silvio explains.

This shift is influencing everything from accommodation to recreational experiences. Spacious multi-bedroom villas offer greater comfort for families, while kids' clubs are being complemented by dedicated programmes for teenagers. Snorkelling, paddleboarding, fitness activities and yoga bring different generations together, making the island a shared playground. Dining is another important consideration, with Marriott's Maldives resorts catering to Indian preferences, including vegetarian, vegan and Jain cuisine.

An island for every imagination

The strength of Marriott's Maldives portfolio lies in its individuality. Each resort has a distinct personality, setting and experience, allowing travel advisors to recommend an island that reflects the traveller's expectations.

Silvio points out that convenience can influence the choice. Resorts closer to Malé work well for shorter stays, while those located further away offer a more secluded escape. The collection includes The Ritz - Carlton Maldives, Fari Islands, with access to dining at Patina Maldives; The St. Regis Maldives Vommuli Resort; and the vibrant W Maldives. JW Marriott Maldives Resort & Spa is appreciated for its culinary experiences, while The Westin Maldives Miriandhoo Resort offers a more intimate setting. Le Méridien and The Halcyon Private Isles bring sustainability, wellness and marine discovery into the experience.

Families have equally distinctive choices. JW Marriott Maldives Kaafu Atoll Island Resort, located a short speedboat ride from the airport, offers multi-bedroom residences and family facilities, while Sheraton Maldives Full Moon Resort & Spa combines convenient access with recreational activities and varied dining. Across the collection, experiences above, on and beneath the water give guests different ways to connect with the destination.

The heart of hospitality

Having spent more than 30 years with Marriott, Silvio’s understanding of hospitality goes beyond properties and experiences. He credits the people who guided his professional journey and the company's philosophy of putting associates first. He says, “When you take care of your associates, they take care of the guests. That is something we keep close to our hearts in everything we do.”

For Marriott, the opportunity across Asia Pacific lies in recognising the individuality of each market and translating those insights into memorable stays. In the Maldives, that philosophy takes shape across nine distinctive resorts, where romance, family time, adventure and relaxation find their own island address. After all, the beauty of an island holiday lies in finding the one that tells your kind of story.



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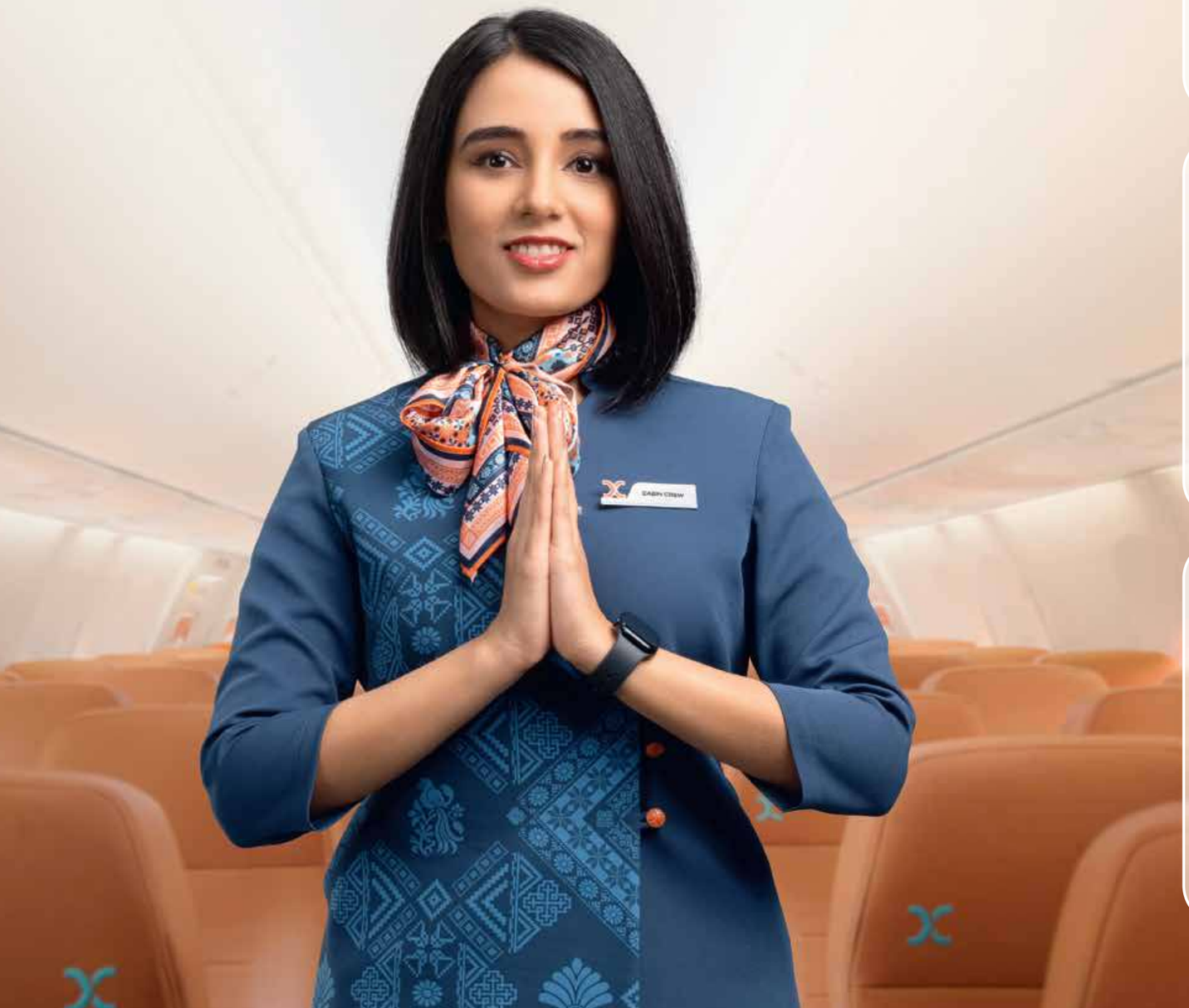

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VILLA RESORTS

Maldives meets the family table



Mohamed Azmeel



Pankaj Kumar Pandey

Villa Resorts, a Maldivian-owned group that has welcomed guests since 1986, is watching multiple stories unfold from the day they open doors. Now the brand opens a fresh chapter with India, guided by Mohamed Azmeel, Cluster Director of Sales, and Pankaj Kumar Pandey, Cluster Senior Sales Manager – India.

-Tripti Jain

Picture a sunrise over a turquoise lagoon, a seaplane gliding low, and three generations of one family pressed against the window. The Maldives of today is written in scenes like this, and Indian travellers are holding the pen.

A story since 1986

Mohamed Azmeel has lived more than two decades of the Villa Resorts story, moving from resort operations to reservations, guest services and sales. That journey shows him every moment a guest experiences, from the first enquiry to the farewell on the jetty. He shares, “We have grown with the destination, and many of our colleagues have spent decades understanding what guests need and how an island experience should be delivered.” India's role has grown alongside that experience, and Pankaj sees the change in his daily conversations with agents. “Indian travellers are no longer looking for one standard version of the Maldives,” he explains, and that variety now shapes how the brand shares its story with the trade.

Three islands, three moods

Since the 2023 relaunch, every Villa Resorts island carries its own personality. Villa Nautica brings a lively maritime mood close to Malé, Villa Park spreads across one of the country's largest natural resort islands with adventure and marine experiences for families, and Royal Island in Baa Atoll offers an intimate escape with a 360-degree house reef. Azmeel sums up the benefit for agents in a single line and says, “Each resort therefore gives the trade a distinct story to sell.” Furthermore, Pankaj shares, “Different generations can spend the day differently, from the Park Players Kids' Club and watersports to wellness, dining and year-round whale shark experiences, before returning to the same residence.”





Room for every generation

The Two-Bedroom Beach Pool Residence at Villa Park offers extended families, two couples travelling together and groups celebrating a special occasion a beautiful shared home by the sea. Pankaj describes the appeal clearly and says, “It gives them two bedrooms, generous shared spaces, a private pool and direct access to the beach, allowing everyone to stay together without compromising on privacy.” Azmeel sees the residence as a strong addition to the resort and a sign of more to come. He shares, “The Two-Bedroom Beach Pool Residence has strengthened Villa Park's position for larger families and groups, while the upcoming One-Bedroom Residences will extend the collection to couples and smaller families seeking an elevated island experience.”

Wings over the atolls

The holiday begins well before check-in, and Pankaj encourages agents to present the seaplane ride as a highlight of the trip. He shares, “The journey can be presented as the beginning of the holiday, with aerial views of the atolls creating a memorable first impression of the Maldives.” Guests who spend the flight gazing at ring-shaped reefs arrive already smiling, and a warm welcome waits on the other side. Azmeel credits the people behind that welcome, noting that the experience across the portfolio “remains connected by Maldivian warmth, long-serving teams and a genuine sense of place.”



The curious traveller

Today's guest often arrives at the travel desk with a shortlist and plenty of ideas, and Pankaj welcomes that enthusiasm. He says, “Indian travellers are more informed than ever. Many research the resort, villa category, dining options and experiences before approaching an agent.”The advisor becomes a trusted curator who recommends the right island for each client, whether the trip celebrates a birthday, an anniversary or a reunion with close friends. Azmeel looks forward to giving agents even more to work with and shares, “This will give our partners more choice and allow them to match clients according to occasion, personality and preferred style of travel.”

Next stop, together

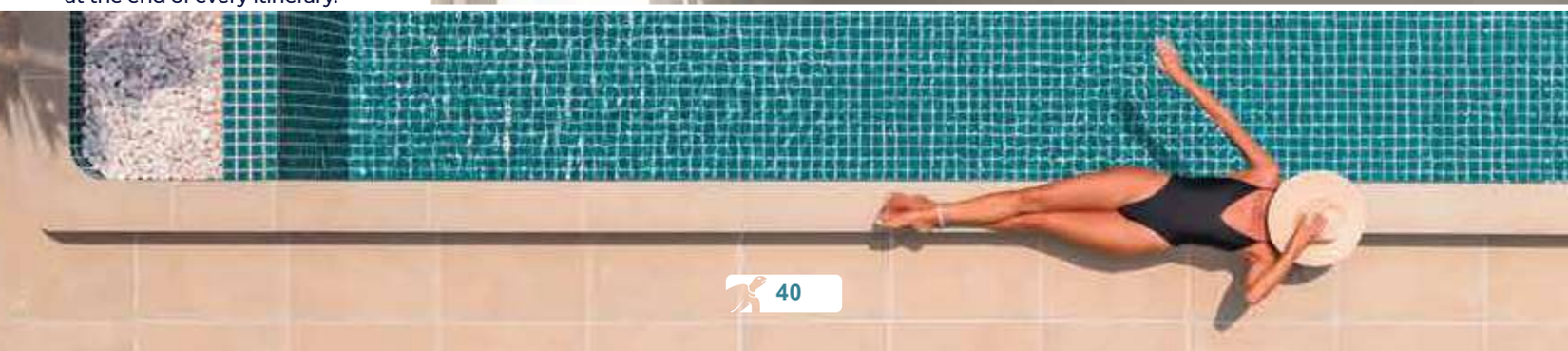
More properties and concepts are in development, each with its own character, along with fresh investment in dining, wellness and family programming. The trade can look forward to closer support too. “We want to build long-term business together through regular engagement, stronger product education, familiarisation opportunities and responsive sales support,” says Azmeel. Pankaj shares the same goal for every partner who puts their name behind a recommendation. He says, “We want to give them the knowledge, access and confidence to recommend Villa Resorts to the right client, and to know that the experience discussed in India will be delivered in the Maldives.”

The last page, for now

Villa Resorts brings nearly four decades of island wisdom, a growing collection of residences and a team in India ready to listen. For agents and tour operators, that adds up to a story worth telling, with a Maldivian welcome waiting at the end of every itinerary.







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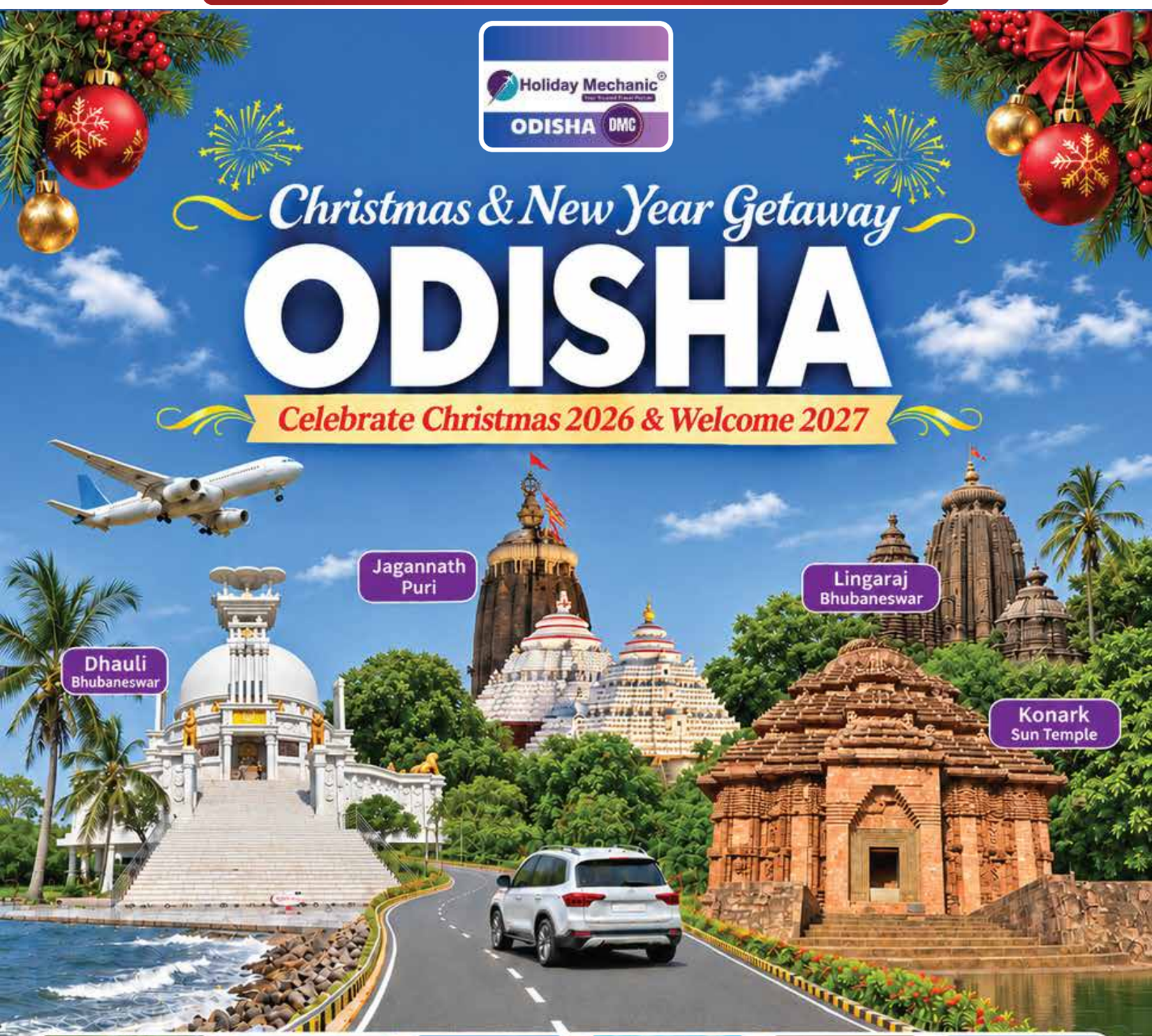


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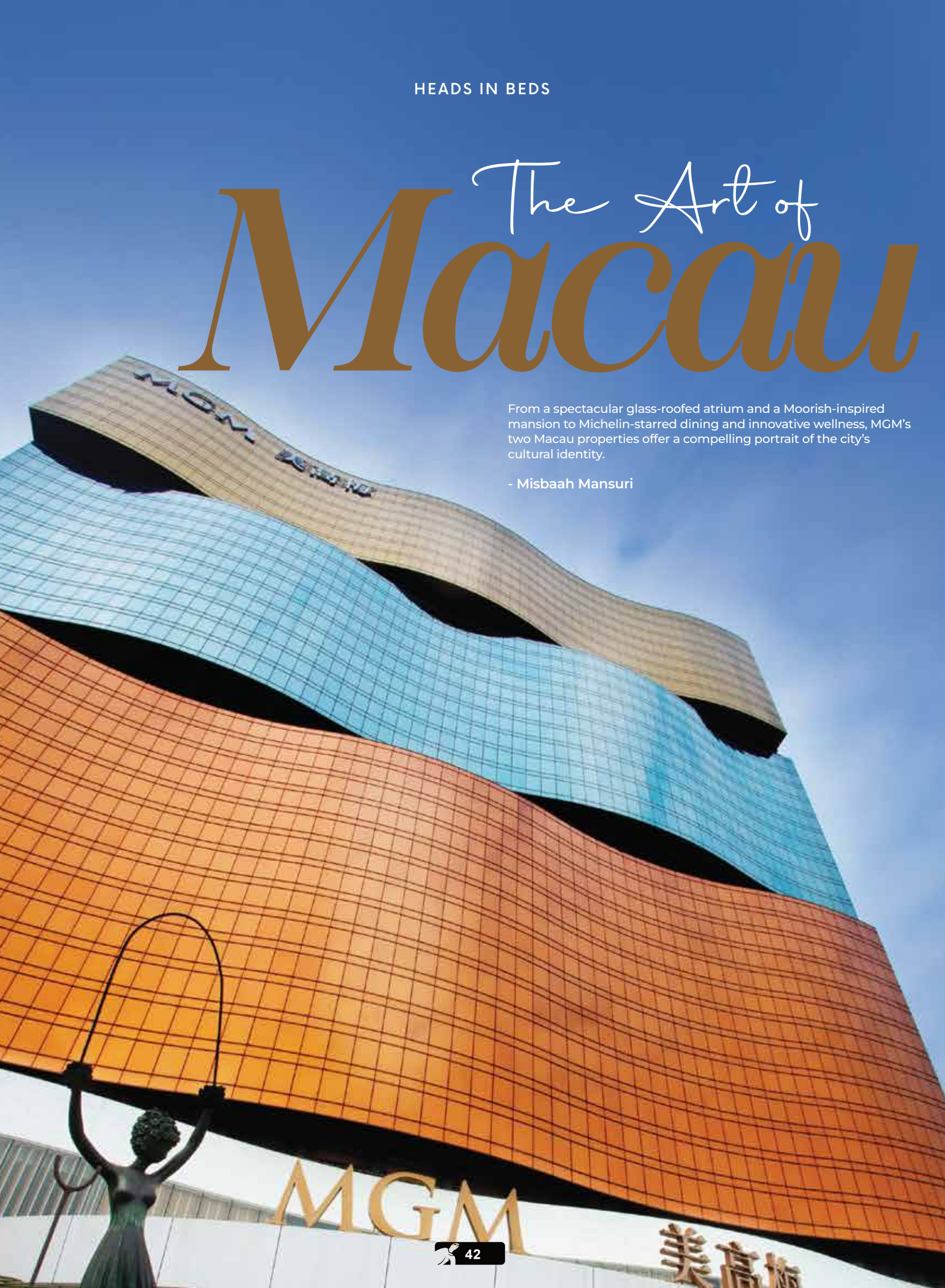
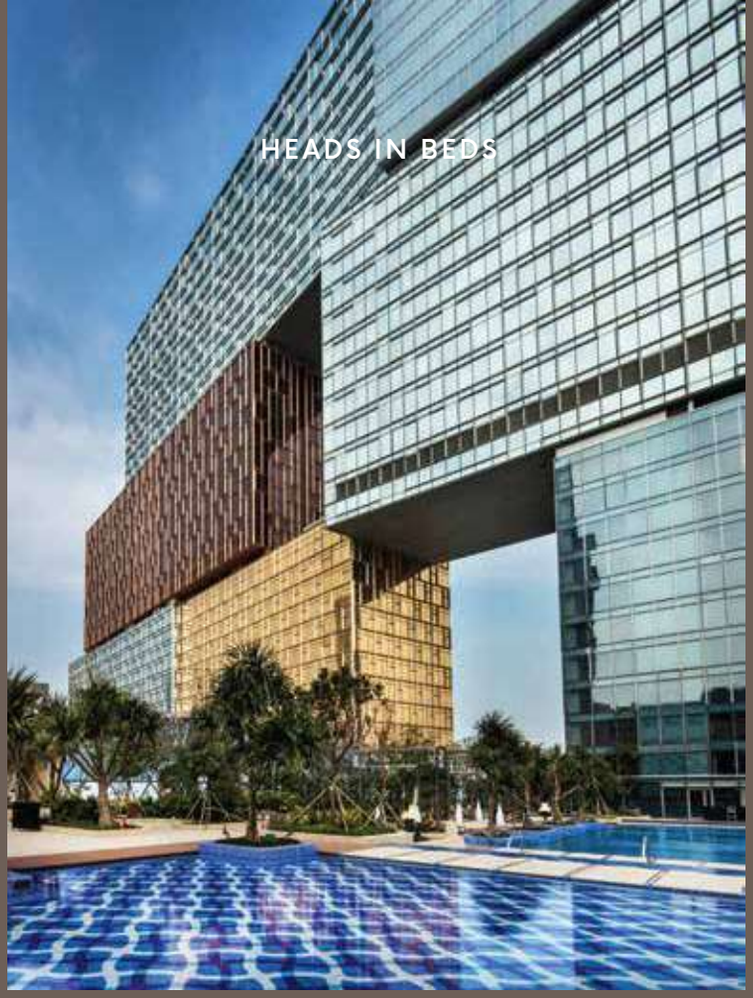
The Art of Macau

From a spectacular glass-roofed atrium and a Moorish-inspired mansion to Michelin-starred dining and innovative wellness, MGM's two Macau properties offer a compelling portrait of the city's cultural identity.

- Misbaah Mansuri





Some cities make you choose between history and spectacle. Macau seems quite happy to give you both. Portuguese façades stand beside Chinese temples, centuries-old culinary traditions coexist with contemporary restaurants and some of the world's most extraordinary hotels occupy a remarkably small stretch of land.

At MGM, these contrasts have become something of an architectural philosophy. Across MGM MACAU on the peninsula and MGM COTAI on the Cotai Strip, the hospitality group presents two interpretations of the city. One looks towards Macau's European architectural inheritance, while the other embraces futuristic design, immersive installations, ambitious gastronomy and a hidden mansion inspired by Moroccan palaces. Our two-night visit in August offered an opportunity to experience both.

A tale of two properties

We began at MGM MACAU, where the Grande Praça immediately establishes the hotel's character. Beneath a soaring glass ceiling, an enormous European-inspired square brings together elaborate façades, sweeping staircases and architecture inspired by Lisbon's historic Rossio railway station.

Art becomes part of the experience. Dale Chihuly's Fiori di Paradiso Ceiling introduces an explosion of colourful glass forms, while Salvador Dalí's Dalinian Dancer and sculptures by Chinese and French artists continue the conversation between cultures. MGM COTAI takes an entirely different approach. Designed as stacked jewellery boxes, its gold, silver and bronze exterior creates a striking silhouette. Inside, Spectacle, a four-storey atrium beneath a Guinness World Record-holding glass roof, is an extraordinary living installation.

Twenty-five LED screens display commissioned digital artworks, while more than 100,000 plants soften the monumental architecture below. Perhaps the most surprising architectural discovery is The Mansion, an ultra-exclusive, invitation-only retreat within MGM COTAI.

Inspired by Moorish architecture, its decorative arches, intricate ornamentation and richly layered interiors recall the palatial residences of Marrakesh. It is a fascinating contrast to Spectacle's futuristic ambition.

Checking in

Our Prime Wellness Suite at MGM COTAI was perhaps the clearest indication that this is a hotel interested in doing things differently. Part of the M Tower collection, the suites range from 98 to 209 square metres, bringing wellness directly into the guestroom rather than restricting it to scheduled spa appointments.

And refreshingly, this goes beyond placing a yoga mat in the wardrobe and calling it a wellness experience. Bamboo-inspired detailing, bespoke furnishings and warm, nature-led interiors create a residential atmosphere, complemented by expansive views and marble bathrooms.

The technology is particularly interesting. A Smart Comfort Bed introduces a personalised approach to sleep, while an in-room body composition scale adds another wellness element. Yet the suite never feels clinical. It remains, first and foremost, a beautiful place to stay.

Privileges include a complimentary Sky Wellness Prime Journey, access to TRIA Spa's wet facilities and the exclusive Sky Lounge on the 33rd floor. Breakfast here became a welcome ritual, offering a quieter start to the morning away from the bustle downstairs. The thoughtful afternoon tea arranged during our stay was another highlight, beautifully presented and made all the more enjoyable by the warmth of the team.

A city told through food

Dining is another area where MGM's ambitions become apparent. At MGM MACAU, Aux Beaux Arts draws inspiration from a glamorous 1930s Parisian brasserie, with mahogany panelling, Art Deco detailing and a terrace overlooking the Grande Praça. Under Michelin-starred chef Olivier Elzer's culinary direction, French classics receive a contemporary interpretation.

At MGM COTAI, Michelin-starred Aji takes a different approach, exploring Asian culinary traditions through modern techniques and carefully considered ingredients. Its open kitchen allows diners to appreciate the craftsmanship behind each course. But our lunch at Imperial Court particularly captured MGM's understanding of Chinese culinary heritage.

Celebrating Lingnan cuisine under executive chef Homan Tsui, the restaurant combines ornate dragon-carved columns, intricate interiors and beautiful Liuli tableware with contemporary interpretations of traditional southern Chinese flavours.

Our final dinner at Grill 58 returned us to MGM COTAI for fire-led cooking, premium ingredients and an impressive wine collection. Its Himalayan pink salt ageing room and use of lychee wood and Japanese binchotan charcoal add another layer of culinary theatre.

The language of Patuá

One of our most interesting discoveries came at Bar Patuá. Its name celebrates Macau's endangered Creole language, born from the mingling of Portuguese, Chinese, Malay and Sinhalese influences.

It is a rather beautiful premise for a cocktail bar. The Traveller's Whisper concept encompasses seven distinctive spaces, combining Eastern and Western design influences with intimate lighting, rich textures and contemporary mixology.

Cocktails incorporate regional botanicals, Chinese teas and ingredients that reflect Macau's multicultural inheritance. In a city shaped by centuries of movement and cultural exchange, Bar Patuá manages to turn history into something genuinely enjoyable.



Art beyond the gallery

The following morning brought us back to MGM MACAU for a visit to POLY MGM MUSEUM. During our stay, Silk Roads Beyond Borders brought together more than 200 historical artefacts and artworks exploring centuries of cultural exchange along ancient trade routes.

Highlights included original 18th-century paintings by Venetian masters Canaletto and Michele Marieschi, presented in Asia for the first time. After experiencing Macau's Portuguese-inspired architecture, Chinese gastronomy and multicultural cocktail culture, the exhibition offered a fascinating historical context for the city itself.

At MGM, art extends beyond decoration. The museum is equipped to exhibit important Chinese cultural relics, while MGM COTAI's collection of more than 300 artworks and Spectacle's immersive installations make creativity part of the everyday hotel experience.

The art of slowing down

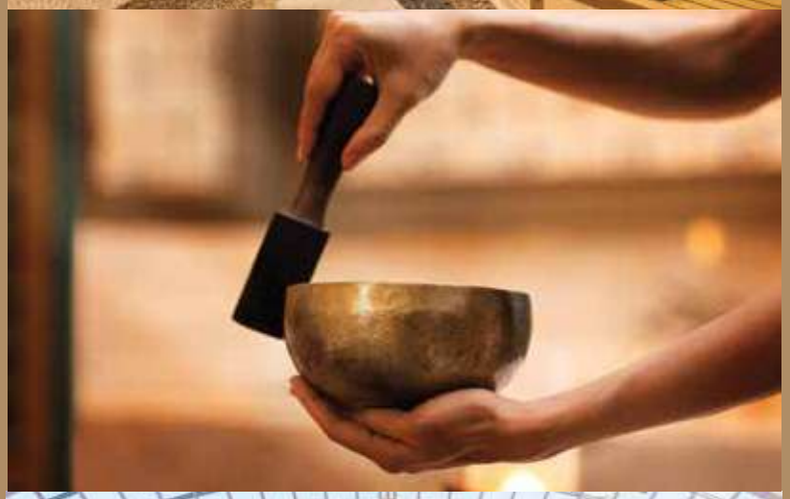
Our afternoon at TRIA Spa offered a welcome change of pace. Inspired by a Portuguese garden, the spa combines traditional therapies with advanced wellness technology and personalised treatments.

Individual assessments help identify guests' physical requirements, while its fitness facilities offer body composition analysis and tailored wellness guidance. Among the technological innovations is ICOONE, which uses robotic-assisted microstimulation for targeted body and facial treatments, including skin firming and therapies focused on circulation and texture.

Yet TRIA has not forgotten the pleasure of a genuinely good massage. After several days of travelling, the treatment was precisely what I needed. Rhythmic movements and intuitive pressure gradually eased the tension in my shoulders, while the unhurried atmosphere made it easy to forget everything waiting outside.

Guests can also enjoy the Himalayan salt sauna, infrared sauna, herbal steam room, experience showers and vitality pool. But one of the loveliest moments came afterwards. The team had arranged a beautiful post-treatment setting with tea and refreshments, allowing us to linger rather than return immediately to the activity of the resort.









It was a thoughtful gesture, and one that reflected the hospitality we experienced throughout our stay. From the beautifully arranged afternoon tea to the careful coordination of our dining experiences and spa appointments, the staff were warm, attentive and genuinely invested in making every detail feel special. For hotels operating on such an extraordinary scale, that personal attention makes all the difference.

In a nutshell

MGM knows how to deliver spectacle. There is the remarkable scale of Spectacle, the architectural drama of the Grande Praça, a Moroccan-inspired mansion hidden within a contemporary resort and enough ambitious dining to occupy considerably more than a weekend.

Yet reducing these properties to their impressive architecture would miss what makes them interesting. At Bar Patuá, a nearly forgotten language becomes the inspiration for a cocktail concept. At Imperial Court, culinary heritage finds expression through contemporary gastronomy. At POLY MGM MUSEUM, Macau's history becomes part of a much larger cultural conversation.

And at TRIA, advanced wellness technology sits comfortably alongside the simple pleasure of an excellent massage. Then there are the quieter moments: an afternoon tea thoughtfully arranged, a beautiful post-spa setting and staff who make an already impressive experience feel personal. You arrive expecting the architecture to impress you.

You leave remembering the people, the food, the art and, unexpectedly, the pleasure of doing absolutely nothing after a massage. For a city that has built so much of its identity around spectacle, that feels like rather a lovely achievement.

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Ras Al Khaimah

next phase of growth in India


Iyad Rasbey

Rising arrivals and fresh investment are creating new opportunities for Indian travel partners. Iyad Rasbey, Vice President of Destination Tourism Development at Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority (RAKTDA), discusses the opportunities across leisure, destination weddings and MICE, and how the emirate plans to deepen its engagement with the Indian travel trade.

-Naina Nath



Ras Al Khaimah is building on growing demand from India, with rising arrivals, new hospitality developments and a stronger focus on trade partnerships shaping its tourism strategy.

India remains a key market

Indian arrivals to Ras Al Khaimah grew by 14 per cent in 2025 compared to the previous year. From May 2026 to date, arrivals were up by a further 30 per cent year on year. Convenient flight connections, proximity to India and familiarity with the UAE have helped support this growth. "Ras Al Khaimah offers luxury beach resorts, mountain adventures, desert experiences and cultural attractions," says Rasbey. The authority sees opportunities across family holidays, luxury travel, adventure, destination weddings and MICE, with a focus on encouraging Indian visitors to spend more time in the emirate rather than treating it as a short addition to a UAE itinerary.

MICE beyond the meeting room

MICE revenue grew by 25 per cent in 2025, making it an important part of Ras Al Khaimah's tourism business. The emirate has resort and conference facilities for meetings and events, as well as outdoor settings for incentive trips and executive retreats. Its annual calendar includes the Ras Al Khaimah Half Marathon, New Year's Eve Festival and Ras Al Khaimah Art, alongside international conferences such as the Exotic Wedding Planning Conference. "Organisers will have even more opportunities to combine business with memorable experiences across Ras Al Khaimah's beaches, desert and mountains," says Rasbey. Events also bring business to hotels, restaurants, attractions and transport providers, while giving delegates reasons to extend their visits.

A setting for Indian weddings

For Indian couples planning multi-day weddings, Ras Al Khaimah offers beachfront resorts, desert venues and mountain settings. Guests can also take part in activities such as mangrove kayaking and heritage visits, making it possible to plan experiences beyond the wedding celebrations. RAKTDA works with Indian wedding planners and travel partners on site inspections, planning and execution. Its wedding incentive programme offers benefits to planners and couples. Participation in Vogue Wedding Atelier and DWP Congress this year has also given the authority opportunities to meet planners and discuss what they need from a wedding destination. "We work with Indian wedding planners and travel partners to build awareness and support them from site inspections through to planning and execution," Rasbey says.

Working with Emirates

A memorandum of understanding with Emirates will give RAKTDA another route to reach Indian travellers. The planned collaboration includes joint marketing campaigns, familiarisation programmes and tailored travel packages. The two sides will also explore trade incentives and opportunities to feature Ras Al Khaimah on Emirates' customer-facing platforms. "By combining our destination offering with Emirates' reach and closer collaboration with travel partners, we aim to introduce Ras Al Khaimah to more Indian travellers," says Rasbey.





New stays, new possibilities

Upcoming hotel projects will give travel partners more options for different client needs. Wynn Al Marjan Island, opening in September 2027, will feature 1,540 rooms and suites, dining, retail, entertainment and event facilities. SAIJ Mountain Lodge by Mantis, expected to open on Jebel Jais by early 2027, will focus on nature and wellness, while Rotana Ras Al Khaimah – The Mangroves will add 258 rooms, ten meeting rooms, a large pillar-free ballroom and outdoor event space. "For Indian travellers, these developments will offer more ways to experience Ras Al Khaimah," says Rasbey, creating more options for agents planning family holidays, weddings, incentive trips and corporate events.

India on the radar

RAKTDA recently met more than 750 travel trade partners across a four-city programme covering Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Mumbai, where it participated in Mélange 2026. Discussions covered leisure travel, family holidays, weddings and MICE. The next step is to help partners turn that interest into sales. "We will continue to work with travel agents, tour operators, MICE specialists and wedding planners through training, familiarisation trips and joint marketing campaigns," says Rasbey. RAKTDA also plans to strengthen ties with airlines, hotels and destination management companies, including those working in emerging Indian markets.

Working towards 2030

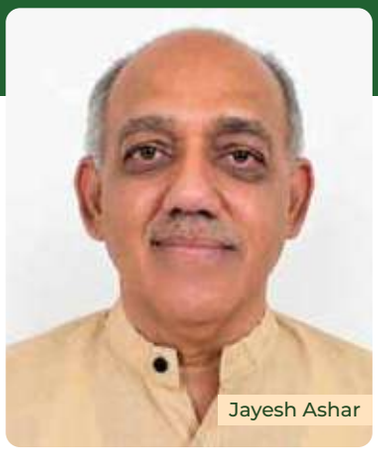
Ras Al Khaimah welcomed more than 670,000 visitors in the first half of 2026, its strongest first-half performance on record. The emirate aims to welcome more than 3.5 million visitors annually by 2030 and double its hotel inventory over the same period. Investment in accommodation, experiences, air connectivity and international partnerships will support that target. For Indian travel businesses, the additional hotel capacity and range of experiences could mean more options for clients, from family breaks and premium holidays to weddings and corporate groups. "Our travel trade partners will be key to making that happen," says Rasbey. "We encourage our partners in India to explore the destination with us, exchange ideas and develop new opportunities together."

Koncept Africa

A bespoke approach

For Koncept Africa, the future of luxury travel lies in individual itineraries, thoughtful planning and a deeper appreciation of Africa beyond the traditional safari.

-Naina Nath



Jayesh Ashar

Africa's appeal has always extended beyond its wildlife, and luxury travellers are increasingly keen to experience the continent on their own terms. For Jayesh Ashar, Founder of Koncept Africa, this is where thoughtful planning and a personalised approach make all the difference. Established in 1992, the boutique B2B destination management company creates tailor-made journeys across Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Uganda, with Malawi and Mozambique soon to join its portfolio. Operating through offices in London, New York, Cape Town and Pune, Koncept Africa is now looking to build on its strong Indian market presence, creating more opportunities for travellers to discover the many facets of Africa.

Luxury reimagined

At Koncept Africa, luxury is about more than the accommodation. The real appeal lies in the experiences that make a journey memorable, whether that means a private safari in an exclusive conservancy, a helicopter flight over Victoria Falls or a night spent beneath Africa's star-filled skies. Guests can also explore the Okavango Delta on a traditional mokoro, join walking safaris led by expert guides, or engage with local communities and conservation initiatives. Culinary experiences and carefully chosen modes of transport complete the picture, ensuring each itinerary strikes the right balance. As Jayesh explains, "Luxury goes far beyond five - star accommodation. It is about access, privacy, personalisation and experiences that stay with you long after the journey ends."

India calling

India is an important market for Koncept Africa, contributing approximately 50-55% of its business, alongside Russia and the Middle East. North America, the UK and Europe account for a smaller share. Jayesh sees considerable room for growth as Indian travellers look for more immersive experiences and holidays that reflect their individual interests. While the traditional safari continues to draw interest, there is growing potential in multi-generational family holidays, milestone celebrations and honeymoons. Combining wildlife experiences with stays in Cape Town, the Winelands or along the Indian Ocean coast is also opening up new possibilities for Indian travellers.

"Indian travellers are increasingly looking beyond conventional holidays towards immersive, experiential travel," says Jayesh, pointing to Africa's appeal across wildlife, adventure, luxury, culture and family experiences.

Destinations in demand

South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe are among the destinations catching the attention of Indian travellers. South Africa appeals to those keen to combine Cape Town, scenic drives, fine dining and wine experiences with a safari. Kenya and Tanzania continue to draw visitors for their wildlife and the Great Migration, while Botswana is a favourite for its remote wilderness and exclusive safari camps. Zambia and Zimbabwe offer walking safaris and the chance to experience Victoria Falls.

Jayesh also points to growing interest in Africa's Eden, which brings together Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Travellers returning to Africa are increasingly choosing to combine one or two of these destinations. "Indian families increasingly appreciate itineraries that balance wildlife with relaxation, scenic experiences and a comfortable pace," he says.

Beyond packages

More travellers are choosing to combine destinations within a single holiday, allowing them to experience different sides of Africa without rushing through the journey. Private air transfers, well-chosen accommodation and knowledgeable guides help bring these itineraries together, particularly for families.

For Jayesh, the difference often lies in the details, from getting the food right to understanding what each traveller expects from their holiday. "What truly differentiates us is the thought that goes into every detail," he says. "We want each itinerary to feel personal rather than prescribed."

The road ahead

Koncept Africa plans to strengthen its ties with Indian travel advisors and develop itineraries that cater to different types of travellers. Understanding Indian families' food preferences, pace of travel and expectations of service will be an important part of this effort.

Jayesh also wants to broaden perceptions of Africa beyond safaris, bringing greater attention to its cities, beaches, cultural experiences and conservation-led travel. The aim is to help Indian travellers discover more of the continent, with journeys shaped around their interests rather than standard packages.

Ultimately, the proposition is straightforward: Africa offers far more than a single type of holiday. With thoughtful planning and the right local partnerships, it can surprise even the most seasoned traveller. For Koncept Africa, the opportunity lies in turning that extraordinary variety into journeys that are as individual as the people taking them.



THE HORIZON TOURS

Beyond the itinerary

International travel is becoming an increasingly experience-led affair for Indian travellers. Rajdeep Mandal, Director, The Horizon Tours, shares how destination expertise, personalised experiences and a quality-led approach are shaping the company's growing business across Japan and Europe.

-Srishti Mukherjee



Rajdeep Mandal

From exploring Japan's cultural treasures to discovering Europe's scenic landscapes, travellers are looking beyond familiar sightseeing circuits to create holidays that reflect their interests and aspirations. For destination management companies (DMCs), this shift brings fresh opportunities to offer destination knowledge, personalised itineraries and seamless on-ground experiences. For The Horizon Tours, Japan and Europe form the backbone of its business, with a growing focus on creating journeys that bring destinations closer to travellers.

New horizons

The growing appetite for international holidays is being driven by rising disposable incomes, social media inspiration and a desire to explore newer destinations. The Horizon Tours sees Japan contributing approximately 50 per cent of its travellers, with Europe accounting for the remaining share.

"Instagram and travel creators are inspiring people to explore destinations they may not have previously considered. We cater to honeymooners, families, backpackers and multi generational travellers across cities such as Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Jaipur and Lucknow," says Rajdeep.

Destination watch

Japan and Europe continue to offer diverse experiences for Indian travellers, with interest extending from established tourist circuits to lesser-explored regions. In Japan, Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, Mount Fuji, Hakone and Hiroshima remain popular, alongside growing interest in Kanazawa, Takayama, Nagano, Hokkaido and Okinawa.

"Europe continues to attract travellers to Italy, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, France, Germany and Croatia. Scandinavia and Finland are drawing interest for Northern Lights and winter experiences, while Prague, Budapest and Vienna remain popular. We are also seeing demand for Croatia and the French Riviera among premium travellers," Rajdeep shares.

Changing preferences

The company's business reflects the growing diversity of international travel. During the first nine months of 2026, The Horizon Tours served approximately 1,500 travellers, including 1,000 Indians and 500 travellers from markets such as the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, the USA and Mexico.

Rajdeep says, "We are seeing growing interest from high-net-worth individuals, VIPs, celebrities and their families, senior corporate leaders and journalists. These segments are creating opportunities for personalised planning, exclusive experiences and specialised services."

Families, honeymooners, shopping enthusiasts, school groups and golf travellers also contribute to demand, with comfort, flexibility and individual preferences increasingly influencing holiday choices.

Experiences first

A sushi-making session in Japan, a night food tour through local neighbourhoods or a winter holiday to witness the Northern Lights can add an entirely different dimension to a journey. Such experiences are becoming important considerations when planning international holidays.

"Travellers are looking for itineraries that combine comfort, flexibility, shopping and cultural experiences. In Japan, sushi - making, night food tours and theme parks are popular, while Europe is seeing interest in scenic holidays, golf tourism, premium destinations and winter experiences," Rajdeep explains.

He also observes a preference for well-planned six- or seven-day holidays that cover key attractions while allowing travellers to make the most of their time.

Value matters

Rising airfares, hotel rates, transportation costs and inflation have made travellers more conscious of their holiday budgets. Seasonal demand, particularly during Japan's cherry blossom and autumn foliage seasons, also influences pricing and availability.

"Our approach is to offer transparent pricing, explain the differences between services and help clients select experiences that fit their budgets without compromising unnecessarily on quality," Rajdeep says.

MICE momentum

Corporate and incentive travel presents another promising opportunity for The Horizon Tours, with enquiries coming through partner agents across pharmaceuticals, real estate, banking and manufacturing.

"This year, we have handled approximately 17 MICE groups, comprising around 300 – 400 travellers. We specialise in groups of 40 – 80 people, creating programmes that combine industry visits, learning opportunities, networking and distinctive destination experiences," says Rajdeep.

Beyond bookings

For The Horizon Tours, destination management extends beyond quotations and reservations. The company places emphasis on understanding traveller expectations, recommending practical itineraries and ensuring reliable on - ground coordination.

Rajdeep adds, "Our role goes beyond quotations and bookings. We guide our travel partners through destination planning, practical routing, experience selection and on - ground arrangements. We believe in quality over volume, ensuring every programme receives the attention it deserves."

As Indian outbound travel evolves, The Horizon Tours is looking to create more meaningful connections between travellers and destinations. With Japan and Europe offering an ever - growing canvas of experiences, its focus remains on turning well - planned itineraries into journeys worth remembering.

TAAI CONVENTION 2026
CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF LEGACY!

The 69th TAAI Convention 2026 brought together over 750 delegates in Kolkata, with AI taking centre stage alongside discussions on emerging tourism trends, business opportunities and technology.



















The 69th edition of TAAI Convention and Exhibition- India Travel Congress 2026 brought together over 750 delegates, stakeholders of the tourism industry, guests and exhibitors in Kolkata from October 25th to 27th. The convention marked a significant milestone in the Association's 75 - year long journey. Combining business networking, knowledge sessions, industry recognitions and celebrations, the three-day convention placed particular emphasis on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its growing influence on the travel and tourism industry.

Organised alongside the 75 Years Celebrations of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), the convention witnessed participation from travel professionals representing different regions of the country, including North, South, East and West India, along with international tourism authorities, industry leaders and partners. VFS Global and ASEGO were among the key partners supporting the event.

Across the two-day knowledge programme, experts discussed several aspects of tourism. However, AI emerged as one of the central themes with experts and thought leaders from India as well as overseas discussing how technology is changing the way travel businesses operate, engage with customers and develop products. The discussions spanned the impact of AI on tourism, its applications and how it can be used as a tool for tourism. Presentations, panel discussions and virtual sessions featuring speakers from Israel, South Africa and the United States explored the growing relevance of AI, and the opportunities and challenges it presents for travel professionals.

Speaking about the focus on technology, Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI, said, "TAAI has AI in its name, so we are trying to promote AI as much as possible." The emphasis reflected the Association's intent to encourage its members to understand and adopt emerging technologies as the industry navigates an increasingly digital and competitive environment.

The discussions also examined changing business dynamics, emerging tourism opportunities and the need for travel professionals to embrace new approaches to remain relevant. Thought Leader Awards were presented to speakers in recognition of their contributions to the knowledge sessions.

A larger platform for business networking

A major highlight of the convention was the TAAI B2B – India Travel and Tourism Expo, which was positioned as the largest-ever B2B platform at a TAAI convention. The expo brought together travel agents, tour operators, tourism boards, hospitality companies and other industry stakeholders, providing opportunities to establish new business relationships, strengthen existing partnerships and explore collaborations across domestic and international markets.

TAAI offered a platform that enabled exhibitors and delegates to engage directly, exchange business insights and explore destination-led opportunities. Exhibitors also reported encouraging footfall and business interactions, underlining the importance of such platforms in connecting different segments of the travel trade.

International participation included representatives from Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau, Singapore Tourism Board, Tourism Malaysia and Israel Tourism, along with destination management companies from other countries. Government representatives, state tourism boards and tourism authorities also participated, reinforcing the importance of collaboration between the public and private sectors in promoting India's tourism potential.

Celebrating 75 years of TAAI

The convention further celebrated TAAI's 75th anniversary, as it brought together generations of travel professionals to recognise the people, partnerships and institutions that have contributed to the organisation's journey.

The opening ceremony on October 25 set the tone for the celebrations with performances by Sajda Boys and Bengal Beauty. On October 26, delegates gathered at the Sundarban Lawns at ITC Sonar for the 75 Years Celebration, where 75 cakes were cut in a symbolic tribute to the Association's seven - and - a - half - decade legacy. The evening featured performances by The Calcutta Choir, followed by a midnight after - party.

The celebrations concluded on October 27 with a farewell gala featuring rock band Anarkyst, performances by Bengal Beauty and BAD Salsa, and a DJ evening. The anniversary celebrations also provided an opportunity to recognise individuals and organisations for their contributions to the travel and







AMRIT BHAWAN

Haridwar, at its own pace!


Varun Bajaj

A riverside retreat is opening up new ways to experience the city, placing leisure and local discovery alongside its spiritual heritage. At Amrit Bhawan owned by Ekat Travel & Lodging, Founder and Managing Partner Varun Bajaj is bringing these many facets of Haridwar together.

-Sudipta Saha

There is a certain rhythm to Haridwar, one that follows the gentle flow of the Ganga, the morning chants drifting across its ghats and the timeless rituals that have drawn pilgrims here for generations. Yet, beyond its familiar spiritual landscape, the city reveals another side to those willing to linger a little longer. Forest trails, mountain vistas, bustling old bazaars and quiet moments by the river offer a different way of discovering this ancient destination.

A city with many stories

Haridwar's river, forests and mountain setting offer scope for hikes, safaris, nature trails and neighbourhood walks, encouraging longer stays alongside pilgrimage. Varun highlights this aspect and shares, "Pilgrimage will always remain central to Haridwar. It is part of the city's identity and the reason generations of people have travelled here. What has changed, particularly since 2020, is the range of people considering Haridwar and what they want to do once they arrive."

A family home finds a new calling

Amrit Bhawan began as an underutilised family property beside the Ganga. Ekat wanted to revive it as a leisure retreat for guests seeking time by the river. The pandemic accelerated interest in intimate properties and short driving-distance breaks. Varun explains, "Our original thought was to create a leisure-focused retreat. People began looking for smaller properties, intimate getaways and places within driving distance where they could spend a few quiet days."

Room for a slower journey

Wellness and spiritual travel sit naturally within the Amrit Bhawan experience. Groups, particularly international travellers, enquire about yoga and spiritual retreats. Ekat is exploring programmes combining stays, meals, wellness sessions and local experiences. "Wellness and a slower pace have always sat quite naturally within the Amrit Bhawan experience. Someone should be equally comfortable coming here for a quiet weekend by the Ganga without participating in a single organised activity," shares Varun.

Leisure and FIT travellers remain the core audience. Winters bring more international guests; summers attract families and pilgrimage visitors. All seek to engage with the destination on their own terms.

Discover Haridwar beyond the itinerary

The experience extends beyond the property gates, with old bazaars, local food, architecture, historic neighbourhoods and natural landscapes to explore. Curated walks, hikes and excursions reflect individual interests. A walk to Chandi Devi, for instance, makes the journey part of the encounter with the landscape. Varun paints a picture and shares, "We try to move away from the idea that experiencing Haridwar means following a temple-to-temple itinerary. There are many Haridwars, and spirituality is one of several lenses through which the city can be understood."

Partnerships with wellness practitioners, artists, craftspeople, community members and priests bring local knowledge into the guest experience and support the destination's experiential tourism ecosystem.

Hospitality with a sense of place

Contemporary comfort is rooted in the setting through architecture, interiors, food, curated experiences and the river. Guests can explore local traditions or read beside the Ganga. Varun shares, "A property can offer a very high level of comfort without feeling disconnected from where it is. Cultural immersion should always be an invitation, never an obligation."

The intimate scale has also proved suited to small weddings, proposals and celebrations. Guest feedback often highlights the team's warmth and the feeling of staying somewhere personal. For younger travellers, the story, setting, food and experiences can matter as much as the stay itself.

A thoughtful path

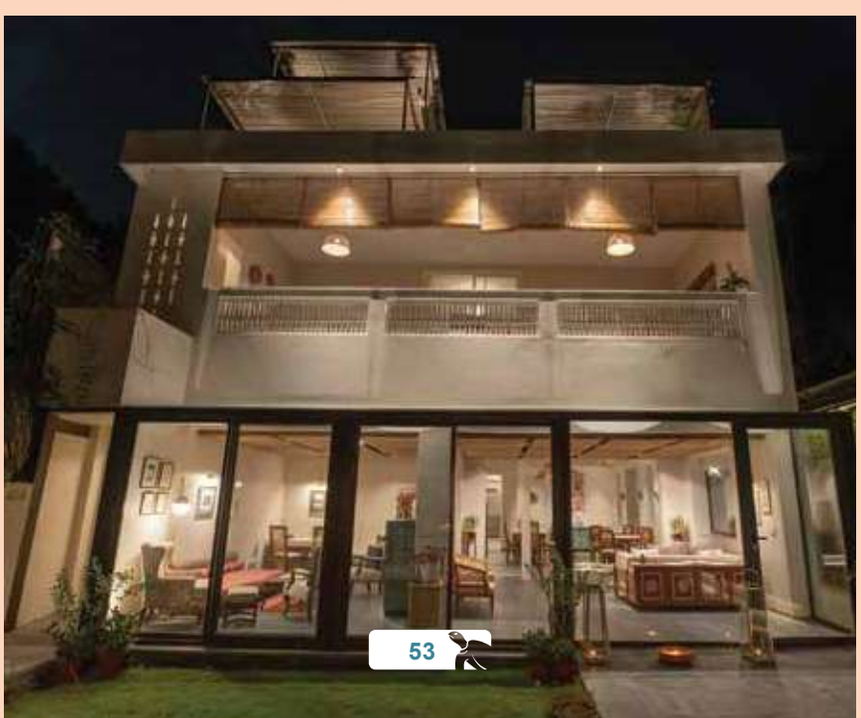
Amrit Bhawan begins a wider vision for Ekat Experiences: intimate properties shaped by storytelling and a strong sense of place. Ekat will focus on 10-to-20-room properties, particularly adaptive reuse of older buildings and heritage sites. Its next project, Amrit Sadan, is scheduled to open in January 2027. The three-room courtyard house dates to the 1960s and is being restored with its Delhi-based owner family, preserving its original character. A small coffee shop is planned at the front. Ekat is also exploring a mountain retreat in Tehri-Garhwal.

"We see Ekat Experiences growing into a collection of intimate, experience - led properties, but we are equally clear that we do not want to replicate Amrit Bhawan elsewhere. The common thread across Ekat will not be spirituality, or even a particular design language. It will be storytelling and a strong sense of place," says Varun.

The river keeps calling

Amrit Bhawan brings Haridwar's many layers into view. The Ganga remains its centre, with nature, culture, wellness and local encounters adding dimensions. For the travel trade, it creates room for itineraries that encourage guests to linger and build journeys around more than its familiar spiritual landmarks alone. Amrit Bhawan's invitation is simple: experience Haridwar in your own way, and let the destination reveal its stories at its own pace.







BRIGHTLY BRIGHTON



A city by the sea that since Regency times has been on a roller-coaster of fun, charm, style and eccentricity, Brighton has managed to retain some charm and its holiday-turf status.

-Inder Raj Ahluwalia

There was this strong, biting, almost intrusive wind, but it had sort of been foretold. Savoring a large coffee at 'Boardwalk Wholesome Restaurant and Bar', the Brighton Pier alongside, the sea face boulevard behind, I got a sense of what the fuss was all about.

To start with, the view was as good as had been touted, which wasn't just visually delightful, but also a sort of mood-enhancer. Jutting boldly out into the sea for a kilometer, with the customary fun areas, children's games, and lots of eateries, the Pier is somewhat grim but impressive, a remnant of what piers used to be. We did the tourist number, and bit into Fish & Chips (Haddock fried in oil) and enjoyed our lunch seated on a bench. A 'pierless' experience...!

If you didn't know what to expect, don't fret. It's all easy to uncover and there's something for everyone. Diehard shoppers find a diverse yet compact mix of unique retailers; foodies encounter the highest number of restaurants outside London; sports fans have a combination of things to see and do; and culture vultures find an active arts scene that includes the annual festival.
Centre to things here is the long sea-facing boulevard which has an impressive façade of mostly white-a la French style-buildings. This is where one finds most of the local action. Our walk took us past offices, casinos, hotels, restaurants, bars, pubs, and shops, all proclaiming their presence with bright signage.

Dominated by the famous pebble beach, the architectural beauty of Regency
Seafront's squares and crescents, and the twin piers – Brighton Pier and the West Pier, the Beachfront is diverse and relaxed. They encourage you to stretch your legs. You can participate in several water sports; go east on the Volks, England's oldest electric railway; head west for the King Alfred Leisure Centre and the green expanse of Hove Lawns; or stop off at the Sea Life Centre.

Sporting a certain type of charm, a quirky mix of traditional seaside shops and artists' studios makes the neighborhood interesting. You encounter everything from buckets, spades and jelly shoes next to handmade marionettes and driftwood mirrors. Fresh mackerel smoked and sandwiched in a bag makes a tasty lunch and a good introduction to the Fish quarter with its museum, art trail and seafront Artists' Quarter. The nights are lively, with clubs, free performances at the Ellipse area, open-air cinema, music on the beach and shows and concerts at the Brighton Centre.

So, as one can see, it's quite a bit about the sea. But Brighton does spill over inland too! The city's cultural quarter with 300 shops, cafes, pubs and theatres, North Laine is a bohemian bustle of inter-crossing streets tucked away between the station and the Royal Pavilion, North Street and Trafalgar Street. In this mix of the ethnic, exotic and funky, you can find anything from 50s kitsch to millennial fashions, and from furniture from the Mexican peninsula to muslin from Mesopotamia. Quite a handful, really.

Pride of place here goes to the magnificent Royal Pavilion, whose extravagant oriental style makes it an exotically beautiful and breathtaking Regency palace. Thanks to periodic restoration, the palace sports its full Regency splendor.

A distinct and nostalgic feel permeates from The Lanes! Once the heart of the old fishing town of Brighthelmstone, Brighton's historic



quarter is an intricate maze of twisting alleyways featuring jewellery, antiques, and famous labels. This is quite the place for lounging around if one has time to spare.

We rambled around past hidden squares, elegant arcades and winding passages. This is a world of bespoke perfumes and fragrant herbs mixing with freshly roasted coffee and the aroma of Italian cooking, all of which combined to make our outing a rather pleasant experience.

Literally a pebble's throw from the beach and the Royal Pavilion, you get to soak up local history. Four hundred year - old fishermen's cottages, quaint old pubs, brick-paved twittens and flint stone exteriors give the neighbourhood a distinct charm. Walking tours start from The Lanes and cater to several interests including film locations, ghost hunting and murder mysteries.

A major attraction is the award-winning Churchill Square Shopping Centre, with several shops under one glass-domed roof, including big-name stores, specialty shops, lively cafes and restaurants. Also worth trying out are Western Road that also features high street names and specialist shops, and Preston Street, an entire street given to restaurants.

Cafes, pubs, delis,high street stores and trendy restaurants, animate the St James area of Kemp Town. Further on, the village atmosphere of St. Georges Road encourages you to linger at the antiques gallery, undercover flea market and various shops.

I wound up my local discovery tour at Brighton Marina, located a mile east of Brighton Pier. This vibrant village within the city has its own village-square with specialist seafaring shops, supermarket, restaurants, pubs, a multiplex cinema, indoor bowling alley, and casino all occupying an inner harbour. The Waterfront Development includes the Walk of Fame, a Hollywood style celebration of famous locals, designer outlets, restaurants, bars, and cafes.

Brighton awaits and has it all up there for you. From fashion goods shopping and bargains in the weekend flea markets and bric-a-brac shops, to admiring innovative and interactive exhibits at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery, its laid out.

If not materially inclined, just chill out at a tiny bar or café and indulge in some people-watching. It's quite the done thing around the world.



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.





Travel Facts

- Brighton & Hove is less than an hour by train from London, and two hours by road on the M23/A23.
- The Visitor Information Centre is at Bartholomew Square, The Lanes.
- There's a vast accommodation network with hotels and guest-houses.
- When the sun goes down, the lights come up at Brighton's Theatreland. Pre and post West End productions at the Theatre Royal, performing arts at the Brighton Dome, and comedy and cabaret at the Komedia.
- Your ideal visit could involve a 2-night stay.







The majestic Khajuraho Dance Festival

In Madhya Pradesh, culture is not confined to museums or monuments. It is performed, celebrated and lived. And the most rewarding way to experience the State's great festivals - occasions that give you the opportunity to hear the strains of a raga on a winter evening, ghungroos ringing against the silhouette of ancient temples, or smelling the aroma of a local kitchen preparing recipes that have travelled through generations.

Music, Melodies and Magic!

Music afficionados are awed by the Tansen Samaroh in Gwalior in December, held in honour of the legendary musician Tansen. It brings leading exponents of Indian classical music to a historic city whose relationship with music runs deep. To hear melodious ragas in the precincts of Tansen's resting place. Here, at the foot of the majestic Gwalior Fort, you get a rare feel of classical music in a setting intimately connected with its history.


A Tansen Samaroh peformance



Recitation at Lokrang


A poised Cheetah at Kuno


Jet-skiing at Hanuwantiya

The Joy of Folk Colours!

Around Republic Day, Bhopal witnesses Lokrang, a celebration that brings folk and tribal traditions into the spotlight. This is culture in its most exuberant form: dancers in traditional attire, musicians playing instruments rooted in regional communities, craftspeople demonstrating inherited skills and food introducing visitors to flavours rarely encountered on conventional restaurant menus. For the traveller, Lokrang offers a window into the extraordinary cultural diversity that exists within Madhya Pradesh.

Dance brings Temples alive!

At the annual Khajuraho Dance Festival, some of India's finest classical dancers perform Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi and other classical traditions in an especially evocative setting of UNESCO World Heritage temples. Look closely at its sculptures during a day time temple walk and you encounter mmusicians and dancers immortalised in stone; return in the evening for the festival and those artistic traditions seem to spring back to life.

A Celebration of Water!

With the arrival of autumn, Madhya Pradesh comes alive with festivals, music, folklore, traditions and immersive cultural experiences. Thoughtfully designed Tent Cities presents travellers a unique blend of premium comfort, nature and local culture. While Gandhi Sagar offers lakeside walks, bird watching and folk performances, Hanuwantiya's Jal Mahotsav combines water-based adventure, music and relaxation along the serene Indira Sagar reservoir. Chanderi celebrates its rich handloom heritage and artisan traditions, while the Kuno Forest Festival brings together wildlife, conservation and community through safaris, craft demonstrations and storytelling.

What's more, the festivals suggest a fascinating new way of travelling through Madhya Pradesh: not simply by destination, but by calendar. Come for Tansen and discover Gwalior. Let Lokrang introduce you to Bhopal. Follow classical dance to Khajuraho and add Panna to the journey. Travel west for Bhagoriya and encounter a Madhya Pradesh far removed from conventional tourist circuits. Because sometimes the finest souvenir from a journey is not something you bring home. It is a sound, a colour, a performance or a fleeting moment that could only have been experienced in the heart of India.


A colourful Bhagoriya celebration

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BLACK ROCK
Hotels & Resorts

Building beyond boundaries

From grand wedding celebrations in Jaipur to wildlife escapes in Ranthambore, Rajasthan offers a diverse hospitality landscape. Gaurav Mudgal, Managing Director, Black Rock Hotels & Resorts, shares the group's approach to destination selection, hotel management and evolving travel demand.

-Sudipta Saha



Gaurav Mudgal



India's hospitality landscape is opening up fresh opportunities as domestic travel, destination weddings and MICE demand bring newer destinations into focus. With an established presence in Rajasthan, Black Rock Hotels & Resorts is building its management portfolio around locations that offer strong tourism potential and varied guest experiences. Its appeal across leisure, weddings and MICE makes it an important market for hotel operators looking to cater to multiple travel segments.

The group currently manages more than 900 rooms across its Rajasthan portfolio, with properties ranging from Ananta Spa & Resort Jaipur to AamaGhati Ranthambore. Its management model combines centralised commercial expertise and operational systems with the individual character of each property.

Gaurav shares, "Our larger vision is to build a professionally managed portfolio where each hotel retains its destination character while benefiting from centralised commercial expertise, operational systems and management oversight. We believe there is considerable room in India's hospitality sector for management companies that combine professional standards with the flexibility to respond to individual owners and markets."

Rajasthan roots, wider reach

Rajasthan remains central to the group's business, supported by its established wedding economy, leisure demand and improving connectivity. The state also offers a variety of hospitality opportunities, from large-format resorts to distinctive leisure properties. Beyond Rajasthan, Black Rock is evaluating markets across North India where accessibility and growing domestic tourism are creating demand for organised accommodation.

Gaurav explains, "Our expansion strategy looks at opportunities across North India, particularly destinations benefiting from stronger road connectivity, growing domestic tourism and demand for professionally managed accommodation. We are interested in markets where a hotel's commercial proposition can be clearly established, whether through destination weddings, corporate travel, leisure or a combination of segments. Our approach will be selective rather than expansion for its own sake. We would rather enter a market with the right property, ownership partner and demand fundamentals than pursue a large number of signings without sufficient operating potential."

Udaipur is among the group's immediate priorities, with three additional hotels planned in the city. The proposed properties will add to its presence in a destination that enjoys strong appeal among wedding planners, leisure travellers and MICE organisers. Gaurav adds, "Larger resorts with meaningful room inventory are particularly interesting because they offer greater scope for weddings, conferences and group business, although we also see opportunities in smaller, distinctive leisure properties."

Finding new destinations

India's tourism map extends well beyond its established gateways. For hotel operators, the potential lies in identifying locations where visitor interest can translate into longer stays and consistent demand.

Gaurav identifies Pushkar and Ajmer as destinations with scope to attract a wider mix of spiritual, leisure, wedding and short-break travellers. He shares, "We see potential in destinations that can develop a stronger overnight tourism economy rather than depending primarily on sightseeing traffic. Another opportunity lies along established tourism circuits, where improved highways can make secondary destinations more accessible from major cities. These locations can attract travellers looking for shorter holidays and more immersive experiences."

Understanding the difference between tourist footfall and overnight demand is central to hotel planning. Accessibility, seasonality, the availability of local experiences and the profile of visitors all influence the kind of accommodation a destination can support.

The owner's advantage

Black Rock's independent management model also shapes how it works with hotel owners. The group prefers to be involved during the planning stage, bringing operational and commercial insights into decisions around room inventory, event facilities, food and beverage offerings and infrastructure.

Gaurav highlights, "We prefer to become involved while a project is still being planned, so decisions around room mix, event spaces, F&B facilities and operating infrastructure reflect the property's intended market. This can prevent expensive changes after construction and improve the hotel's commercial viability. As an independent management company, we can also adapt our operating and sales strategies to individual assets rather than applying an identical brand format everywhere."

Driven by data

As hotels cater to increasingly varied customer segments, technology and revenue management are becoming essential to commercial planning. For MICE and wedding-focused hotels, revenue management involves balancing room bookings with group requirements, event schedules, catering and transient demand.

"Technology will be increasingly important, particularly as hotel portfolios expand across destinations with very different demand patterns. Revenue management today requires more than adjusting room rates during peak periods. Hotels need to analyse booking pace, lead times, channel costs, cancellations, market demand and the contribution of different customer segments. At Black Rock, our focus is on strengthening data-led commercial decisions while maintaining property-level market intelligence. Technology can improve forecasting, distribution efficiency and cost control," Gaurav explains.

Visionary approach

With Rajasthan providing a strong foundation and Udaipur forming an important part of its development pipeline, Black Rock Hotels & Resorts is approaching the next phase of its journey with a clear understanding of the markets it wishes to serve. Its focus on destination weddings, MICE and leisure reflects the changing preferences of domestic travellers and the growing opportunities across North India's tourism circuits.

By combining destination-led planning, early owner engagement and data-backed hotel operations, the group is looking to create properties that respond to the character and commercial potential of their locations. For Black Rock, the opportunity lies in bringing professional hospitality management closer to destinations where India's evolving travel story is unfolding.



Neelam Singh

TRAVEL INDIA TOUR

Taking India to the world

India's tourism story is finding new expressions as international travellers look beyond familiar itineraries. Neelam Singh, Director, Travel India Tour, discusses India's growing inbound tourism potential, changing traveller preferences, emerging destinations and the company's vision for expanding its international footprint.

-Srishti Mukherjee

From the wilderness of Central India and the grandeur of its heritage properties to spiritual retreats, regional cuisines and immersive local encounters, the possibilities for inbound tourism continue to grow. The opportunity lies in bringing these experiences together through journeys that offer a deeper understanding of the destination.

For Travel India Tour, this evolving landscape presents an opportunity to connect India's tourism offerings with a wider international audience. With an established presence in Dubai and plans to explore markets such as London and Sweden, the company is looking to strengthen its global network while developing its inbound tourism portfolio.

A world of experiences

India's appeal lies in the sheer variety of experiences it offers. Travellers can move from historic cities and wildlife reserves to spiritual destinations, vibrant cultural centres and quieter regional retreats, each offering a different perspective of the country.

Neelam believes that presenting this diversity through well-curated travel experiences is central to India's inbound growth. She shares, “India has so much to offer, from its wildlife and heritage to its spiritual destinations, regional cultures and lesser-known experiences. Our aim is to make these experiences more accessible to international travellers and build long-term relationships with overseas travel partners. We see considerable potential in taking India's tourism story to markets that are looking for something distinctive and enriching.”

For the company, this also means looking at travel requirements across different segments, including corporate travel, MICE, group tours, educational travel and customised holidays. Bringing these segments together allows the business to cater to varied traveller profiles while developing a wider understanding of the market.

Beyond the familiar

The changing expectations of international travellers are creating fresh opportunities for India's destination portfolio. Rather than following packed itineraries covering multiple cities, visitors are increasingly drawn towards experiences that allow them to spend more time understanding a place, its people and its traditions.

Neelam points to personalised journeys, regional food, local crafts and community experiences as areas with considerable potential. “Travellers today have a wide choice of international destinations, and their expectations around comfort, safety and service have grown. India's strength lies in its diversity. We have the opportunity to move beyond conventional circuits and introduce visitors to experiences that allow them to connect more closely with the country. The focus should be on creating journeys that encourage travellers to explore more, stay longer and return.”

She also emphasises the importance of the experience on the ground. Dependable transport, knowledgeable guides, suitable accommodation and seamless coordination between destinations play an important role in shaping a visitor's perception of India. Strong partnerships across the tourism ecosystem are therefore essential to delivering a consistent travel experience.

Discovering Central India

Among the regions offering exciting possibilities for inbound tourism is Central India. With its combination of wildlife, heritage, spirituality and regional culture, Madhya Pradesh presents opportunities to create itineraries that appeal to travellers seeking varied experiences within one journey.

Neelam believes that such destinations deserve greater attention in international travel programmes. “Madhya Pradesh and Central India have a strong combination of wildlife, heritage, spiritual destinations and regional culture. These experiences can be developed into well-planned itineraries for international travellers. We see opportunities to explore destinations beyond the established tourist circuits and introduce visitors to different sides of India.”

Building global connections

International expansion forms an important part of Travel India Tour's growth vision. Its existing presence in Dubai provides a foundation for developing relationships across overseas markets, with London and Sweden identified as important next steps.

Sharing the company's roadmap, Neelam says, “Over the next three to five years, our focus is on strengthening our international presence while continuing to develop our travel business in India. We want to build closer relationships with overseas travel partners, understand the requirements of different markets and create more opportunities for inbound tourism to India. London and Sweden are among the markets we see potential in as we expand our network.”

The journey ahead

As India's tourism offering continues to evolve, the role of travel companies will increasingly involve connecting destinations, experiences and people through well-planned journeys. For Travel India Tour, the vision is to combine its understanding of the Indian travel landscape with an expanding international network.

Reflecting on the company's approach, Neelam concludes, “We want to grow into a recognised international travel company with Indian roots and a global outlook. Our strength lies in understanding different travel requirements, bringing together the right services and ensuring that every arrangement works smoothly. Ultimately, we want our clients and partners to associate us with dependable service, practical solutions and relationships that grow over time.”

With India's diverse tourism portfolio offering new possibilities for international exploration, Travel India Tour is looking to build its next chapter around stronger global connections and a wider showcase of the country's experiences.

Clubside

Decoding the new-age traveller

From emerging travel segments and evolving booking behaviour to AI and destination expansion, Amit Periwal, Director, Clubside Tours & Travels shares his perspective on the shifts shaping India's tour operator landscape.

-Srishti Mukherjee



Amit Periwal

The landscape of Indian travel is continuously evolving and the travellers now no longer just want a conventional holiday. They are now looking for newer and more unique experiences with personalised itineraries, and greater flexibility in how they plan and book for their trips. This is simultaneously followed by the changing Travel business environment as the tour operators navigate the changing traveller preferences, emerging destinations, technology and the growing influence of artificial intelligence on how they make a seamless experience for the travellers.

Beyond luxury travel

Amit shares that beyond the traditional leisure and luxury travel, Indian travellers are increasingly looking for experiences that reflect their interests. He explains, "Wildlife and birding, tea tourism, culinary journeys, festival travel and soft adventure are now attracting attention. Wellness and spiritual travel are also evolving, with travellers seeking time to reconnect with themselves and their surroundings. Travellers today want to explore a destination beyond its usual sightseeing stops, they want to discover it through local food, village life, crafts and conversations with communities. Additionally, educational travel is another promising segment, where families and student groups combine exploration with learning. But there is a common thread across these segments and that is a desire to return with a deeper understanding of the place."

He believes that today travellers are more informed, more involved in planning and have more clarity about their preferences. "They want itineraries adapted to their interests and pace, rather than accepting a standard package. There is also greater scrutiny of value over the quality of the experience and the support available during the trip. One thing that I feel, major family trips tied to particular events can encourage advance planning. Operators need to respond quickly as well as guide customers towards realistic choices because a thoughtfully paced holiday often delivers a better experience than an itinerary packed with too many stops," he adds.

AI and tourism

Discussing how artificial intelligence is influencing the travel and tourism landscape, Amit believes that while AI as a tool will make travel advisors more efficient, it will also, at some level, disrupt the traditional role of the travel agent. He shares, "AI will make good travel advisors more productive, while challenging businesses whose value is limited to providing information and processing bookings. As customers gain easier access to travel suggestions, advisors will need to demonstrate why their expertise matters. This becomes especially important on complex journeys or in destinations requiring specialist knowledge. I believe the strongest travel businesses will combine the speed of technology with human judgement, relationships and accountability."

Furthermore, he adds, "The most practical applications of AI for Tour Operators today are in improving response times and reducing repetitive work. AI can help teams prepare initial itinerary drafts, structure proposals, organise customer preferences and respond to routine enquiries. I also see potential in making internal destination knowledge more accessible to employees. However, AI-generated recommendations need operational verification. Hence, while AI can accelerate the preparation; experienced teams must still validate the journey."

Biggest challenges for Tour Operators

Talking about the biggest challenges currently facing tour operators in India, he shares that maintaining consistent service while managing changing costs and operating conditions is a major challenge. He explains, "Airfares, accommodation rates and availability can shift quickly, while customers expect competitive prices and prompt confirmation. For operators working in East and Northeast India, weather, road conditions, connectivity and uneven infrastructure add another layer of complexity. Seasonality can also put pressure on vehicles, hotels and trained manpower. I think these challenges make reliable local partnerships and contingency planning essential. As an industry, we also need to invest in people: technology can improve processes, but service quality ultimately depends on capable teams making sound decisions."

The next chapter

Apart from the destinations already part of their itineraries Amit shares that he views the next phase of growth as a combination of deeper exploration within their existing regions and selective expansion into complementary destinations. "East and Northeast India still offer considerable scope for lesser-known circuits, community experiences and special-interest journeys. For any new destination, our priorities would be connectivity, customer demand, dependable local partnerships and our ability to deliver consistent service. I would prefer to build a strong offering in a carefully chosen destination before widening the portfolio further. The objective is to give our travel partners and customers more compelling choices, backed by the same operational confidence they expect from us," he says.

As the travel industry continues to change, the road ahead for tour operators will largely be shaped by their ability to adapt to the changing travellers expectations and their ability to bring a balance between technology and the human touch. For Clubside Tours & Travels Pvt Ltd., the focus remains on identifying emerging opportunities and adapting to technology to bring the best experiences for the travellers.



Geeta M Maheshwari

H&M SERVICES
Where stays meet stories

As hospitality continues to evolve, the ability to understand travellers and identify the right business opportunities will remain central to the industry's success. Geeta M Maheshwari, Director, H&M Hospitality & Marketing Services, discusses the evolving travel trade expectations and how a focused approach to sales and marketing is helping independent properties.

-Srishti Mukherjee

A memorable hospitality experience begins long before a guest checks into a hotel. It starts with discovering the right property, understanding what makes it special and finding a reason to choose it. In an increasingly competitive hospitality market, connecting these elements requires a strong understanding of destinations, traveller preferences and the business opportunities across the travel trade.

For H&M Services, this understanding forms the foundation of its work with independent hotels and hospitality brands. With a portfolio of properties across India, the company has developed an approach that combines market understanding, strategic positioning and industry relationships.

Beyond representation

Hotel representation has traditionally centred on introducing properties to travel agents, tour operators and potential business partners. Today, the role calls for a more comprehensive understanding of the property's identity, target audience and market potential.

Geeta explains, “When I started working in hotel sales and marketing, representation was largely about taking a property to the trade, meeting travel agents, building relationships and generating business. Hospitality remains a relationship business. However, today, an independent hotel needs to understand who its customer is, where that customer is coming from, how the property should be positioned and which markets it should enter. That is where H&M Services has evolved. We increasingly see ourselves as an extended sales, marketing and business development arm of the hotel, rather than simply a representative.”

A strong south connect

With over 20 hotel partners across India, H&M Services has a particularly strong presence in South India, especially Kerala and Karnataka. The region's diverse hospitality landscape, ranging from leisure retreats and nature-led escapes to boutique properties, offers opportunities to engage travellers with varied interests.

Highlighting the region's potential, Geeta says, “We have 20+ hotel partners across India, with a strong concentration in South India, particularly Kerala and Karnataka. What I find particularly encouraging is the quality of the recovery in the South Indian inbound market.”

She also points to the importance of market intelligence in identifying emerging source markets, understanding competing destinations and recognising the experiences travellers are increasingly seeking.

Reading the traveller

From short leisure breaks and wellness retreats to destination weddings, MICE and multigenerational holidays, travellers are exploring different ways of experiencing a destination. These preferences are also influencing the kind of accommodation and experiences travel agents recommend.

Geeta observes, “The Indian traveller has become considerably more adventurous. We are seeing strong interest in short experiential breaks, wellness, nature, family travel, celebrations, destination weddings, MICE and boutique leisure stays. The multigenerational family segment is particularly interesting because families are looking for properties where different age groups can actually enjoy the same holiday. Value no longer means simply finding the lowest possible rate. Increasingly, people ask what they are getting for the money.”

She adds that customised itineraries are gaining preference over fixed programmes, with travellers approaching agents with clearer ideas about the experiences they wish to include in their holidays.

Finding the right identity

For independent and boutique hotels, standing out in a crowded marketplace begins with identifying what makes each property distinctive. Its setting, local experiences, architecture, hospitality style or access to a destination can become important differentiators when communicated to the right audience.

Geeta explains, “At H&M Services, we begin by understanding what genuinely makes a property different and then build the sales and marketing approach around that strength rather than trying to fit the hotel into a generic category. The biggest challenge independent hotels face is being visible to the right customer at the right time and converting that visibility into business.”

This involves identifying suitable customer segments, strengthening trade connections and exploring opportunities across leisure, corporate, events and other travel segments. For independent properties, such focused market access can help create a more balanced business mix.

The human connect

As online platforms continue to influence booking decisions, the travel agent retains an important role in bringing expertise and personalisation to holiday planning. Complex itineraries, luxury holidays, weddings and MICE movements often require detailed coordination, destination knowledge and an understanding of individual requirements.

“Technology has changed the way people book, but it has not eliminated the need for expertise. In fact, for complicated travel, the value of a knowledgeable travel professional has increased. A traveller can find a hotel online. What becomes difficult is putting together a journey involving multiple destinations, accommodation, family requirements, special occasions, transport and experiences. That is where an experienced agent earns their place,” Geeta shares.

Building what lasts

For H&M Services, the focus is on bringing together market intelligence, distinctive property positioning and meaningful industry partnerships. By helping independent hotels communicate their strengths and connect with relevant audiences, the company is working towards a hospitality ecosystem where every property has a clearer identity and a stronger place in the travel market.

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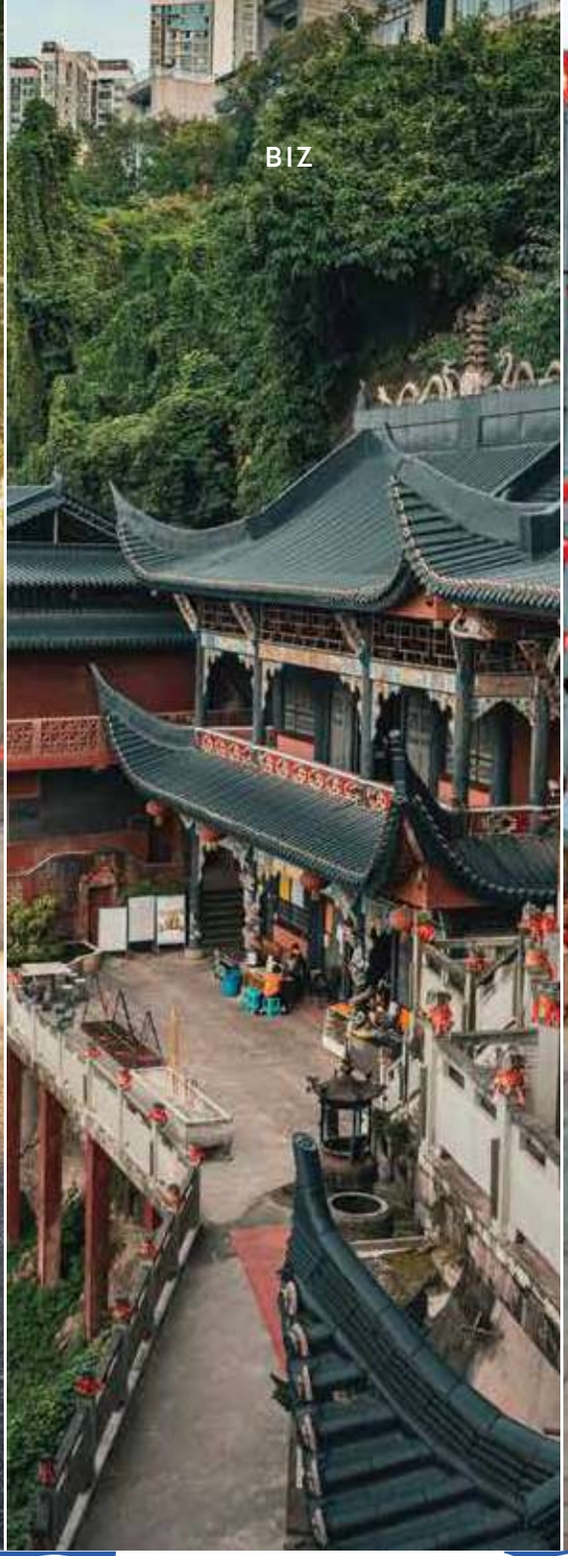




Via East DMC



Neha Nath & Pranay Nath

Where East Asia beckons

As Indian outbound travellers look towards more diverse Asian experiences, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are emerging as destinations of growing interest. Pranay Nath, Founder and CEO, Via East DMC, and Neha Pranay Nath, President, Via East DMC, discuss destination demand, changing traveller preferences, emerging segments and opportunities in MICE tourism.

-Team Travel Turtle

East Asia, with its contrasting landscapes and distinctive identities, is finding a place on the Indian travel map. From Japan's cherry blossom trails and heritage towns to South Korea's pop culture and Taiwan's scenic escapes, the region offers varied experiences for travellers across age groups and interests.

For Via East DMC, this shift presents an opportunity to introduce Indian travellers to the many dimensions of these destinations. Pranay observes, "The Indian outbound market continues to show encouraging demand, with travellers becoming more confident about exploring destinations beyond their familiar favourites. International holidays are increasingly being planned around specific interests, whether that is cherry blossom, food, culture, skiing or family experiences."

Neha adds, "The opportunity lies in creating well-designed itineraries backed by dependable destination support. Travellers are looking closely at value, but they are also willing to invest in experiences that make a journey memorable. Understanding what each traveller wants from a destination is central to the way we plan holidays."

A different Asian experience

Japan, South Korea and Taiwan each bring a distinct proposition to the Indian market. Japan remains the most established of the three, attracting families, couples, premium travellers and groups through its combination of heritage, technology, seasonal attractions and efficient travel infrastructure. Interest is also extending beyond Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, with regional destinations offering opportunities for deeper exploration.

Neha shares, "Japan remains the flagship destination within our portfolio. We are seeing interest extend to different regions and seasons, as travellers look to discover more of the country. South Korea is attracting attention through its contemporary culture, shopping, food and scenic experiences. Taiwan is an interesting choice for those seeking something fresh, with its combination of city experiences, nature and cultural discovery."

South Korea's appeal among younger travellers is closely linked to Korean entertainment, cuisine and popular culture, creating opportunities for themed holidays. Taiwan, meanwhile, offers a combination of vibrant cities, mountain landscapes, night markets and cultural attractions. Together, these destinations provide alternatives for travellers who have already explored popular Asian markets such as Thailand, Singapore and Bali.

The numbers behind the interest

The growing visibility of these destinations is reflected in visitor arrivals. Japan recorded approximately 315,100 Indian visitor arrivals in 2025, an increase of 35.2 per cent over 2024. South Korea welcomed close to 200,000 Indian visitors, up approximately 13 per cent, while Taiwan recorded 46,134 arrivals from India, registering growth of 20.9 per cent.

Pranay points out, "The latest full-year figures indicate encouraging growth across all three destinations. Japan continues to demonstrate considerable strength in the Indian market, while South Korea and Taiwan are building their presence. These numbers reflect the growing curiosity among Indian travellers and the opportunity to introduce them to more diverse Asian holidays."

Japan's momentum has continued into 2026, with approximately 250,100 Indian visitor arrivals between January and August, representing a 20.2 per cent year-on-year increase. For destination specialists, these figures underline the importance of understanding the market and identifying the right experiences for different traveller segments.

Beyond the usual itinerary

Families, independent travellers, private groups and younger holidaymakers are important segments, alongside premium travellers seeking distinctive accommodation and more personalised experiences. Repeat visitors are also creating opportunities to introduce regional destinations and lesser - explored attractions.

Neha explains, "Families, independent travellers and small private groups are important segments for us. Premium travellers are looking for distinctive accommodation and deeper cultural experiences. Repeat visitors are particularly valuable because they are often willing to explore beyond the main cities. We also see opportunities in corporate incentives, educational travel and special-interest programmes."

Seasonal travel remains a strong attraction, particularly Japan's cherry blossom and autumn foliage periods. Across the region, local food experiences, cultural activities, wellness and outdoor pursuits are adding new dimensions to itineraries. Pranay shares, "Travellers increasingly want holidays built around their interests rather than a standard sightseeing checklist. Social media often provides the initial inspiration, but practical details influence the final decision. A balanced itinerary, suitable accommodation and smooth local arrangements help create confidence among travellers and their travel advisors."

Planning around value

The overall cost of international travel continues to influence destination and itinerary choices. Currency movements, airfares and seasonal accommodation rates are encouraging travellers to evaluate their holiday expenditure more carefully. This has placed greater emphasis on transparent pricing and flexible programme design.

Neha observes, "Travellers are comparing the complete cost of a holiday more carefully, including flights, accommodation, transport and experiences. Currency movements and seasonal pricing can influence their choice of dates, hotels and itinerary. Some may adjust their trip duration or reduce the number of cities to remain within budget, while others retain their spending but expect greater personalisation and quality. Our approach is to help clients prioritise the experiences that matter most to them."

MICE opportunities

Beyond leisure travel, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan offer interesting possibilities for the MICE segment. Japan brings cultural experiences and strong aspirational appeal to incentive programmes, while South Korea combines contemporary event infrastructure with entertainment and leisure options. Taiwan offers an appealing mix of city experiences, hospitality and nature - based activities.

Pranay shares, "MICE represents an important opportunity across our destinations, particularly for incentive programmes that combine business objectives with memorable experiences. Each market has its own strengths, allowing us to create programmes that offer corporate groups a different perspective of East Asia."

Neha adds, "Indian corporate requirements are programme - specific, with close attention to budgets, hotel capacity, meeting facilities, meals and execution. Our focus is on bringing these elements together while creating experiences suited to the organisation and its delegates. A well-planned programme should offer a seamless combination of business and destination discovery."

New chapter in Outbound Travel

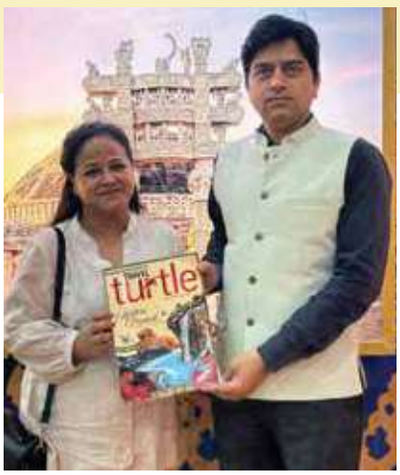
Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are bringing fresh possibilities to India's outbound tourism landscape. Their varied cultural identities, seasonal attractions and distinct travel experiences offer opportunities across leisure, premium, family and corporate segments. For Via East DMC, the focus is on connecting these destinations with the Indian travel trade through destination expertise, carefully designed itineraries and dependable on-ground services. As Indian travellers continue to explore new geographies and experiences, East Asia is poised to remain an interesting part of the region's outbound travel conversation.

MPTM 2026

Madhya Pradesh in all its glory!

The four-day event in Bhopal brought together over 1,000 domestic tour operators and delegates from 34 countries, generating investment proposals worth more than ₹1,100 crore and facilitating business partnerships across the tourism sector.









The 7th edition of the Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM) 2026 that was held from October 7 to 10 at the Kushabhau Thakre International Convention Centre in Bhopal, brought together domestic and international tourism stakeholders to explore business opportunities, investment prospects and partnerships in the state of Madhya Pradesh. Featuring 177 exhibition stalls, the four-day event served as a platform to showcase the state's heritage, wildlife, adventure, rural and cultural tourism offerings while strengthening its position in the global tourism market.

The exhibition at the Travel Mart was inaugurated on October 8, 2026 by Chief Secretary Ashok Barnwal and Union Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Bhuvnesh Kumar. The event witnessed participation from more than 100 international delegates representing over 34 countries, alongside more than 1,000 domestic tour operators from over 15 states and Union Territories.

Secretary, Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Dr. Ilaiyaraaja T., said that the state's progressive tourism policies had contributed to a historic 57% increase in tourist footfall in 2025, taking the number of visitors to 21.05 crore. MPTM 2026 aimed to translate this growth into global investment, improved infrastructure and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Business networking

One of the major highlights of the mart was its business networking programme, which facilitated more than 10,000 pre - scheduled B2B meetings through an online scheduling system. The meetings connected domestic and international buyers, tour operators, hotel groups, airlines and travel agencies with 355 local tourism stakeholders, including hoteliers, resort operators, heritage property owners, homestay operators and adventure tourism providers.

The event also focused on attracting private investment into the state's tourism infrastructure. Investment proposals and agreements worth over ₹1,100 crore were being finalised, including Letters of Award worth ₹252 crore for 14 projects involving hotels, wellness resorts, luxury tented camps and eco - tourism units.

The mart also witnessed plans for 12 strategic MoUs, MoAs and agreements across tourism, education, digital innovation and infrastructure. These included collaborations with the Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management for training tourist vehicle drivers, Gram Stay for digitalising rural homestays, Royal Enfield for identifying motorcycle tourism routes and the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India for developing adventure tourism safety standards.

Rural tourism and heritage take centre stage

Technology and experiential tourism were prominent features of the exhibition. The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Pavilion used large digital screens, interactive kiosks and AI-powered initiatives to introduce visitors to the state's destinations. One of the attractions was Mowgli, an AI avatar designed to provide destination information and assist visitors in developing personalised travel itineraries.

A replica of Tourism Village Panchvati offered visitors a glimpse into rural Madhya Pradesh through homestay experiences, bullock - cart rides, cycling, stargazing, pottery-making, tribal folk performances and traditional handicrafts. The initiative highlighted the potential of community - led tourism in generating livelihood opportunities for rural residents.

Art and craft stalls showcased indigenous traditions, including Bagh Print, Chanderi sarees, Bhil art and Batik printing, connecting local artisans with wider markets.

The event also featured initiatives for film tourism, including collaborations with The Viral Fever and Krarck Family Office, alongside plans for a Museum of Storytelling.

A multilingual version of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board's website, offering information in German, Spanish, French and Japanese in addition to Hindi and English, was also introduced. An interactive digital MP Travel Handbook featuring panoramic views, maps, AI - powered storytelling and virtual reality links further strengthened the mart's technology - led approach.

Focus on sustainable and experiential tourism

Sustainability was another important aspect of MPTM 2026. The event adopted paperless operations and a single-use plastic-free approach, encouraged locally sourced jute and fabric products, and used electric vehicles for guest transportation.

The mart also highlighted Madhya Pradesh's ambition to become India's leading adventure tourism destination by 2030 while strengthening its positioning as the 'Wildlife Capital of India'.

With international participation, investment proposals, extensive B2B engagement and a strong focus on technology and sustainability, MPTM 2026 underscored Madhya Pradesh's efforts to develop a more connected tourism ecosystem while creating opportunities for businesses and local communities.







VisitBritain showcases Northern England to Indian Travel Trade

VisitBritain hosted the North England Destination Showcase 2026 at Shangri-La Eros New Delhi, bringing together CEO Patricia Yates and over 10 destination partners. The event highlighted attractions across the Lake District, Manchester, Liverpool and Yorkshire, fostering travel trade partnerships and promoting Northern England's diverse tourism experiences to Indian travellers.











Minor Hotels showcases global portfolio at Delhi Roadshow 2026

Minor Hotels hosted its India Roadshow 2026 at The Imperial, New Delhi, on October 26, bringing together hospitality and travel trade professionals. The event showcased the group's international portfolio and encouraged networking, business collaboration and stronger industry relationships. Its broader outreach supports engagement with India's growing outbound travel market.

IATO Cricket League 2026 celebrates teamwork and travel trade camaraderie

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) Cricket League 2026 brought together travel industry professionals at New Delhi's Siri Fort Sports Complex on October 24. Four teams competed, with IATO Himalayan Kings winning the championship and Spice Route Strikers finishing runners-up, celebrating teamwork, sportsmanship and industry camaraderie.





Kerala Tourism hosts network Kerala Delhi to strengthen trade partnerships

Kerala Tourism hosted Network Kerala Delhi at The Lalit, bringing together tourism stakeholders for B2B meetings and industry discussions. Led by Tourism Secretary Biju K. and Director Anjana M. IAS, the event showcased Kerala's diverse tourism offerings and explored opportunities to strengthen partnerships and promote new travel experiences. Additionally, Kerala Tourism Additional Director (General) Sumit Kumar Thakur, IAS, delivered a presentation highlighting the state's tourism potential, from its beaches, hill stations and backwater cruises to its cultural heritage and emerging experiential offerings.

Resorts World Sentosa hosts Delhi networking evening

Resorts World Sentosa hosted an exclusive networking evening in Delhi, engaging Indian travel trade partners to showcase upcoming attractions, new developments and hospitality experiences in Singapore. The initiative aims to strengthen industry partnerships and promote the destination's integrated offerings, including immersive entertainment, luxury accommodation, dining and leisure experiences for Indian travellers.





Israel Tourism Roadshow targets growth in Indian Travel Market

Israel Tourism conducted a roadshow across Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad to strengthen tourism ties with India and engage travel trade professionals. The presentation reported 116,000 tourist arrivals in August 2026 and 655,000 during January–August, projecting over one million arrivals for the year amid signs of tourism recovery.

Taiwan Tourism Roadshow strengthens India tourism ties

The Taiwan Tourism Administration hosted a roadshow in New Delhi, bringing together travel trade professionals to promote Taiwan's tourism offerings and strengthen bilateral tourism ties. With StarDream Cruises India and EVA Airways as key partners, the event explored new travel opportunities and fostered collaboration among destination management companies and Indian industry stakeholders.





Marriott showcases Maldives Resorts across three Indian cities

Marriott International concluded a three-city roadshow across Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Delhi to promote its Maldives resort portfolio. The initiative engaged over 250 travel trade partners and 35 media professionals, highlighting evolving Indian traveller preferences, family holidays, wellness experiences and diverse dining options. The company also emphasised strengthening partnerships and expanding its presence in India's travel market.



The Leela Coorg Forest Sanctuary

The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts has appointed Rajesh Namby as General Manager of The Leela Coorg Forest Sanctuary, its first forest sanctuary. With over three decades of experience in luxury hospitality, destination resorts, food and beverage, and hotel operations, Namby brings extensive industry expertise and a longstanding association with The Leela to the role.



SIX & SIX PRIVATE ISLANDS

SIX & SIX Private Islands has appointed Gaurav Makhijani as Director of Sales – India, effective October 2026. With nearly 15 years of experience in luxury hospitality and travel, Makhijani brings expertise in commercial strategy, business development and strategic partnerships, along with a strong understanding of the Indian luxury travel market and Maldives hospitality sector.



Brightsun Travel

Brightsun Travel has appointed Chetan Sharma as Manager – Air Products (APAC & Middle East) to strengthen airline partnerships and expand its air travel portfolio. With over 16 years of experience, Sharma previously worked as Key Account Manager at ITA Airways in Delhi. His career also includes roles at Qatar Airways, Vistara, Jet Airways and DoubleTree by Hilton in Toronto.performance and long-term sustainability.



Brand USA

Brand USA, announces that its Board of Directors has appointed Caroline Beteta Interim President & CEO, effective Nov. 9. Beteta, who retired in September after nearly three decades as President & CEO of Visit California, brings extensive tourism leadership experience and a longstanding connection to Brand USA, including previous service as Chair of its Board of Directors and Acting CEO.

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