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# travel mail

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# Editors note

Dear Reader,

Travel has always been about discovery. Yet increasingly, the most rewarding experiences are found beyond the obvious landmarks and well-trodden itineraries.

Our cover story, Cairo: Beyond the Wonder... The City Beyond the Pyramids, explores this idea through one of the world's most iconic destinations. While the pyramids continue to inspire travellers from across the globe, Cairo offers a far richer story—one of culture, history, neighbourhood life, cuisine, and experiences that reveal the true character of the city.

This spirit of deeper exploration is reflected throughout this issue. From Meghalaya's efforts to empower local tourism champions and Rajasthan's promotion of lesser-known destinations, to the growing appeal of places such as Uzbekistan, Seychelles, Georgia, Finnish Lapland, and Bintan, travellers today are seeking journeys that are more authentic, meaningful, and experience-led.

At the same time, the travel industry continues to evolve at remarkable speed. Artificial intelligence is reshaping how trips are planned and booked, while innovations from travel platforms, airlines, hospitality brands, and transport providers are making travel more personalised, seamless, and accessible than ever before.

The confidence in tourism's future is equally evident across the industry. New hotel developments, expanding airline networks, stronger destination marketing initiatives, and investments in rail and airport infrastructure all point to a sector that continues to innovate and grow in response to changing traveller expectations.

Across these stories, one message stands out: today's traveller is looking for more than a destination. They are seeking experiences, connections, and stories that leave a lasting impression.


At Travel Mail, we remain committed to bringing you those stories while highlighting the people, destinations, and innovations shaping the future of travel.

Welcome to the June 2026 issue.

Happy Reading!

Warm Regards,

Ajay Gupta  
Managing Editor – Travel Mail



# travel mail

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# Content

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## 01 Tourism

---

Meghalaya Empowers Local Tourism Champions; Announces Major Support for Homestays, Infrastructure, and the Youth



## 08 Travel

---

AbhiBus Brings 'Full Transparency' to Life with New Campaign Featuring Prabhu Deva



## 23 Association

---

IEIA Open Seminar & Exhibition Services Expo 2026 Concludes with a Resounding Success – Celebrates 20Years of IEIA, Industry Growth & Collaboration



## 27 Interviews

---

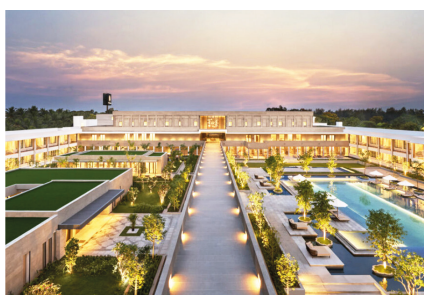
Five Years of Redefining Luxury and Wellness in North Goa: Insights from Harish Gopalakrishnan of The Westin Goa



## 33 Hotels & Resorts

---

Espire Hospitality Limited expands its uber-luxury portfolio by agreeing with Marriott International to manage its upcoming 'JW Marriott Resort & Spa' near Vrindavan



## 43 Restaurant

---

District by Zomato Launches India's First Inclusive Dining Toolkit for Restaurants

## 44 Feature

---

93rd BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY

## 45 Cruise

---

Smart cruise tips from Norwegian Cruise Line® (NCL) that will help strengthen family bonds

## 47 Airlines

---

Egyptair celebrates 94 years in India with a grand industry evening in New Delhi; announces upcoming UNESCO collaboration

## 52 Aviation

---

Riyadh Cargo Appoints GSSA Partners Across Egypt, India, and the UAE, and to Accelerate Its Global Expansion

## 54 Ministry of Railways

---

Equipped with World Class Facilities, 15 Redeveloped Stations in Rajasthan like Jaisalmer, Bundi, Barmer, Mandalgarh & Somesar etc. are Serving Passengers with Latest Amenities

## 57 Appointments

---



# Meghalaya Empowers Local Tourism Champions

Announces Major Support for Homestays, Infrastructure and the Youth



**Shri Conrad K. Sangma**

In his keynote address, **Shri Conrad K. Sangma, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Meghalaya**, said, "Meghalaya is now firmly on the tourism map of the country and the global scenario. He noted that every stakeholder has played a positive part in the transformation seen today. He added that the State is clear that tourism is not just about a single event or one cultural program; it can only thrive when a complete ecosystem is in place.

Further, he noted, the runway expansion work at the Umroi Airport will be complete in the next 15 months, strengthening connectivity. He emphasized that it is important for the State to be present and visible to bring an experience of a lifetime to visitors. While massive change has taken place over the last eight years, the sector's expansion will prioritize job creation, livelihoods, and individual growth through local entrepreneurs and homestays. He reaffirmed that over the next two to three years, the tourism sector will witness a massive transformation with the implementation of several iconic projects, including the Shillong Ropeway, the Rain Museum in Mawsynram, and new tourism centres across locations like Sohra. Reaffirming the government's core philosophy. We are here to work for you, and this government always ensures that we keep the people first."



In one of the most poignant moments of the day, the Hon'ble Chief Minister also presented the 'Bravery Award' to **Mr. Teiborlang Pakma (Tourist Buddy)** for his exceptional courage and selflessness in society.

## Travel Mail Desk

In a continued push towards strengthening the State's tourism sector and recognising grassroots contributors, the Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya, hosted a grand event to celebrate the empowerment of 'Tourism Champions' at the Orchid Lake Resort, Umiam.

A key highlight of the event was the expansive rollout of Government support for the local tourism ecosystem. Under the Chief Minister's Meghalaya Homestay Mission, which targets the creation of 3,000 new homestays and over 15,000 jobs by 2028, sanction letters were distributed to the initial cohort out of approved applications.

Furthermore, the Community-Led Tourism Infrastructure Scheme has announced up to ₹3.40 crore in funding for 58 new beneficiaries, providing tiered grants ranging from ₹5 lakh to ₹20 lakh based on site footfall, building upon the ₹10 lakh grants already awarded to 20 existing projects.

The event also felicitated the success of the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) Homestay Scheme, which has sanctioned ₹115.68 crore and disbursed ₹102 crore for over 900 beneficiaries to date, by awarding a ₹20,000 cash prize to each of the State's top ten performing hosts.

**Shri Timothy D. Shira, Hon'ble Minister of Tourism**, said that tourism in Meghalaya has transformed into a powerful driver of economic growth and a strong pillar of the State's economy, indicating a tourist footfall of 18 lakhs and rising. He emphasized that this progress is

the result of a structured approach focusing on infrastructure, connectivity, and investment, highlighting the current implementation of over 150 tourism projects backed by thousands of crores and strong private sector participation. Furthermore, he noted the ongoing development of Umiam as a global tourist destination in line with the 'Viksit Bharat' roadmap, alongside the establishment of a dedicated Destination Management Organization (DMO).

Further focusing on capacity building and youth empowerment within the hospitality sector. Certifications for full-course scholarships were handed out to Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) students under the Chief Minister Hospitality Scheme, complemented by the announcement of yearly stipend scholarships for IHM students.

The event also saw emphasis on improving the visitor experiences with the sanction for the construction, modification, and upgradation of toilets at tourist sites across the State.

Sharing his experience, **Mr. Damint Kharshandi, a beneficiary of the Chief Minister Homestay Scheme**, said the Homestay Scheme provided the crucial financial confidence to launch his business, which he has successfully expanded. He added that the State's robust "Meghalaya Tourism" branding policy has been instrumental in driving the steady footfall and revenue.

By harnessing the potential of tourism and empowering the citizens, Meghalaya is promoting inclusivity and creating a long-term foundation for a brighter and more prosperous future.

# Tourism Department Holds High-Level Stakeholder Meeting to Strategise on Challenges and Opportunities for Goa's Tourism Industry

## Travel Mail Desk

In a proactive move to reinforce Goa's position as a premier tourism destination, the Department of Tourism, Government of Goa, convened a high-level stakeholder meeting at Paryatan Bhavan, Panjim. The meeting was chaired by Hon'ble Minister for Tourism, Shri Rohan A. Khaunte, and attended by key officials, including Shri Kedar Naik, Director of Tourism; Shri Kuldeep Arolkar, Managing Director of GTDC; Shri Shawn Mendes, OSD to the Hon'ble Minister; and leading members of the tourism industry and the Goa Tourism Board.



In his opening remarks, **Hon'ble Minister Shri Rohan A. Khaunte** emphasized the importance of timely and structured stakeholder engagements, particularly in light of national and regional developments. Referring to the recent Pahalgam incident in Kashmir, he noted, "As the Hon'ble Prime Minister ensured a swift and resolute response through

*Operation Sindoor, it was equally important for us, as a tourism-driven state, to evaluate the ripple effects on travel sentiment. Today's meeting was not only about addressing current concerns but also about building long-term resilience. We are moving from mere policy reviews to dynamic recalibrations that are responsive to ground realities. Goa's strength lies in its people—every Goan is a stakeholder, an influencer, and a tourism ambassador."*

### Shri Kedar Naik, Director of Tourism,



underlined the Department's commitment to listening, learning, and enabling. "We are here to ensure that the voice of every stakeholder is heard. From formal hotels to homestays, from digital platforms to community operators—Goa Tourism belongs to all of them. The goal is to ensure that our policies remain inclusive, adaptive, and implementation-ready."

The Department also shared encouraging data, with Goa witnessing a 10.5% year-on-year growth in tourist arrivals for the first quarter of 2025, rising from 25,80,155 in Q1 2024 to 28,51,554 in Q1 2025. While the month of April saw a marginal dip, the overall sentiment remains strong, and targeted strategies are being deployed to address seasonal and market-specific variations.

The full-day series of sectoral and plenary sessions reflected the Government's emphasis on collaborative governance. From understanding how the previous season unfolded, to jointly preparing for emerging challenges—whether geopolitical, geoeconomic, or geostrategic—the consultations reaffirmed Goa Tourism's commitment to collective foresight and resilience-building.

The concerns raised during the discussions have been consolidated. The Hon'ble Chief Minister will soon be chairing an interdepartmental meeting to drive a more coordinated response and lasting resolutions to the challenges at hand.





## Rajasthan Tourism Department Rolls Out Summer Campaign for Lesser-Known Destinations

### Travel Mail Desk

The Rajasthan Tourism Department is set to roll out a large-scale “Rajasthan in Summer” campaign aimed at boosting off-season travel and positioning the state as a year-round tourism destination.

The initiative will promote Rajasthan beyond its traditional winter tourism image by highlighting immersive travel experiences rooted in heritage culture, wildlife and local lifestyles.

The campaign will be integrated with the “Visit My State” and “Holiday in Rajasthan” tourism drives to attract domestic as well as international travellers during the summer season. Officials said the initiative seeks to showcase a quieter

and more authentic side of Rajasthan away from peak season crowds.

**Joint Director of Tourism Daleep Singh Rathore** said the campaign is being implemented under the guidance of the **Honourable Deputy Chief Minister and Tourism Minister Ms. Diya Kumari** to strengthen Rajasthan’s identity as a destination for all seasons.

According to the department, a detailed outreach strategy is being developed around digital storytelling, social media engagement, experiential tourism and the promotion of lesser-explored destinations across the state.

As part of the campaign, different tourism regions will be promoted through curated themes.

Udaipur will focus on lake tourism, sunrise and sunset experiences along with cultural evenings. Bundi will be positioned as a hidden heritage destination known for its stepwells, historic streets and architectural legacy. Jaipur and Jodhpur will highlight palace stays, heritage hospitality, traditional cuisine, and evening cultural experiences.

The Thar Desert region, including Barmer, will be promoted for desert tourism, solo travel and rural immersion experiences.

Wildlife tourism has also been included as a major component of the campaign. The department plans to highlight increased wildlife sightings during summer at Ranthambore National Park to sustain tourist footfall during the lean season.

Officials said the campaign will rely heavily on digital content including short film reels and video-based storytelling, instead of conventional tourism advertising. The focus will remain on experience-driven travel narratives that appeal to younger travellers seeking meaningful journeys.

The department said **Deputy Chief Minister Diya Kumari** has consistently emphasised tourism infrastructure development, heritage conservation and promotion of lesser-known destinations across Rajasthan. Recent review meetings have also focused on regional tourism circuits, cultural events and long-term tourism infrastructure planning.

Rathore said the campaign will involve hospitality stakeholders, heritage hotel operators, travel companies, local artisans and folk performers to strengthen tourism-linked economic activity across the state.

Officials added that the initiative is expected to support local employment, encourage long-stay tourism and bring wider visibility to Rajasthan’s lesser-explored destinations and cultural landscapes.





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02, 03, 04  
OCTOBER, 2026

## GOA

31 OCT., 01, 02  
NOVEMBER, 2026

## JAMMU

21, 22, 23  
NOVEMBER, 2026

## LUCKNOW

18, 19, 20  
DECEMBER, 2026

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# Sacramento Kings and Visit California Deepen Engagement in India Through Community Events, BUDX NBA House Participation and Strategic Partnerships

## Travel Mail Desk

The Sacramento Kings and Visit California showcased their global presence in India through a series of youth-focused community events and participation in the BUDX NBA House. The two organisations, representing the Golden State and its capital city, collaborated to support the growing game as it comes to New Delhi. Throughout the week, the Kings and Visit California engaged directly with local communities in New Delhi through events designed to inspire and connect with the next generation of players and fans.

The Kings and Visit California teamed up to support a community-driven basketball experience at BSES Basketball Academy. Led by basketball organisers and content creators Lionel Ngotchi Kab (@liobhaisaab), Dhruv Barman (@druvsushilbarman) & Jai Sachdeva (@Nolooknationind), the Park Takeover welcomed approximately 200 attendees, including youth athletes and key voices from India's growing basketball community. The event featured influencer-led games, skills challenges, and interactive fan experiences, while the Sacramento Kings Dancers and Slamson energised the crowd with live entertainment. Giveaways and on-court activations further enhanced the atmosphere, reinforcing the event's focus on accessibility, engagement, and community impact. The activation also highlighted the Academy's mission

to provide sustainable basketball development opportunities for underserved youth.

Earlier that day, the Kings participated in a youth-focused activation in the U.S. Embassy's American Centre, bringing together more than 150 students for a day of basketball programming, cultural exchange, and entertainment. The event featured a special appearance by Kings legend Vlade Divac alongside the Kings' entertainment team, highlighting the power of sports to foster global connection.

In addition to community outreach, the Kings and Visit California participated in BUDX NBA House India for the second consecutive year. The team's entertainment group energised fans through live performances and interactive moments, while Divac served as an honorary co-captain in the celebrity game and interacted with fans. Together, these appearances reinforced the Kings' role as active contributors to the NBA's global growth efforts.

In India, Visit California continues to strengthen its presence, inspiring Indian travellers to explore the state's diverse experiences and deepening cultural ties through sports, entertainment, and tourism. As a year-round destination, California offers an unmatched variety of landscapes, from coastal drives and wine country to theme parks, outdoor adventures, and a vibrant farm-to-table culinary scene, making it a unique holiday destination with endless opportunities for exploration.



**Caroline Beteta, President & CEO of Visit California,** also shared, "As the Ultimate Playground, California offers an unmatched blend of sports, entertainment and lifestyle. Visit California's partnership with the Sacramento Kings and NBA India is an exciting way to showcase that spirit while strengthening our connection with India's vibrant and growing community of basketball and travel enthusiasts."

With a unique cultural connection to India through team owner Vivek Ranadivé, the first Indian-born owner in NBA history, the Kings continue to demonstrate their commitment to long-term investment in the country's basketball ecosystem by supporting youth development initiatives, fostering community connections, and building strategic partnerships that drive lasting impact.

# Uzbekistan Tourism Strengthens India Outreach with Successful Roadshows in Hyderabad and Chennai

## Travel Mail Desk

Reinforcing its strategic focus on India's rapidly expanding outbound travel market, the Tourism Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan in India, recently successfully concluded two high-impact, back-to-back roadshows in Hyderabad and Chennai. The initiatives form part of Uzbekistan's sustained efforts to deepen engagement with the Indian travel trade and position itself as a preferred destination for Indian travellers.

The roadshows witnessed strong participation, with over 70 leading travel agents and tour operators attending the events across both cities. Designed as focused B2B platforms, the engagements aimed to strengthen trade partnerships, enhance destination awareness, and unlock new opportunities in one of the world's fastest-growing outbound travel markets, which currently records around 33 million annual departures.

*"India represents a key strategic market for Uzbekistan's tourism growth. Through these roadshows, we aim not only to strengthen partnerships*



*with the Indian travel trade but also to showcase Uzbekistan as a destination that offers a unique blend of history, culture, and modern experiences. We warmly invite Indian travellers to explore Uzbekistan and be part of this shared cultural journey,"* said **His Excellency Sardor Mirzayusupovich Rustambaev, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan to India.**

The sessions highlighted Uzbekistan's key tourism offerings, including its UNESCO-listed heritage cities, vibrant cultural experiences, architectural landmarks, and growing appeal

for leisure, group travel, and MICE segments.

Uzbekistan Airways, the national carrier, showcased its expanding connectivity with India, reinforcing ease of access for Indian travellers. Uzbekistan has also recently launched direct flights between New Delhi and Namangan, offering direct access to the culturally rich and economically important Fargana Valley. The national carrier also sponsored two 'lucky draw' winners each during the roadshows in Hyderabad and Chennai with flight tickets to Uzbekistan.

# Tourism Seychelles Strengthens India Focus as Arrivals Grow Nearly 75% in 2025

## Travel Mail Desk

Tourism Seychelles successfully concluded its 2026 India Roadshow across Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Delhi, building on strong growth momentum from the Indian market and reinforcing its commitment to one of the destination's most promising source markets. India continued to show strong recovery and growth for Seychelles in 2025, recording approximately 13,400 arrivals and a year-on-year increase of nearly 75% over 2024.

The three-city initiative brought together leading tourism stakeholders from Seychelles for destination presentations, focused networking sessions and one-on-one meetings with key travel agents, tour operators and industry professionals. Participating partners included Club Med Seychelles, Eden Bleu Hotel, Hilton Seychelles, Kempinski Seychelles Resort, Raffles Seychelles, Savoy & Coral Strand, Minor Hotels, Luxury Travel Seychelles, Mason's Travel, 7<sup>o</sup> South, Creole Travel Services, MC Travels, IndiGo Airlines and Air Seychelles.

Speaking about the roadshow, **Sherin Francis, Principal Secretary for the Tourism Department**, said,



*"India has moved from being a market of opportunity to a strong growth market for Seychelles. The nearly 75% year-on-year increase in arrivals in 2025 reflects the growing confidence and interest we are seeing from Indian travellers, supported by improved connectivity and a stronger appetite for premium, experience-led holidays. What is equally encouraging is the way demand is evolving. Indian travellers are now looking at Seychelles not only for honeymoons and luxury escapes, but also for family holidays, milestone celebrations, intimate weddings, incentive movements and curated group experiences. This gives us a clear*

*opportunity to build more sustained, high-value demand from India. Through the India Roadshow, our focus was to equip the travel trade with a deeper understanding of Seychelles, from our diverse accommodation options and island-hopping possibilities to our cultural, wellness, marine and nature-led experiences. As demand grows, our partners must be able to sell Seychelles with greater confidence, beyond its traditional beach and luxury image. We remain focused not only on increasing arrivals, but on building the right kind of demand across segments that are meaningful for the destination and valuable for our partners."*

## BRAND USA LAUNCHES NEW INITIATIVES TO BUILD TRAVELER CONFIDENCE AND INSPIRE INTERNATIONAL VISITATION DURING MILESTONE YEAR FOR U.S. TOURISM

### Travel Mail Desk

Brand USA President and CEO Fred Dixon announced a major expansion of the organisation's America the Beautiful brand platform. Two new supporting initiatives expand the organisation's messaging: Get Facts. Get Going, an always-on effort designed to provide

real-time information on visa and entry policies, fees, and more to combat misperceptions; and American Originals, a new content and storytelling series spotlighting the people, places, and experiences that are uniquely American.

The new initiatives being announced in the U.S. Travel Association's IPW in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, targeting leisure tourism, and at IMEX in Frankfurt, Germany, targeting international business events, reflect the organisation's focus on growing international travel demand and boosting travel exports that impact the U.S. economy and communities. The announcement comes as the USA is readying to host significant major events beginning next month, including the FIFA World Cup, America's 250th anniversary, and the Route 66 Centennial.

*"In line with our mission to impact the U.S. economy through travel exports, we have an opportunity to further build traveller confidence and inspire visitation,"* said **Fred Dixon, Brand USA's President and CEO.** *"With our expanded platform, we are introducing American Originals, which spotlights the people and places who originated the styles,*

*sounds, and tastes the world loves, while Get Facts. Get Going, serves as a single source of information to address misperceptions head-on. We want international visitors to know that we are open for business and warmly welcome them."*

The expansion comes at a necessary moment. With the byline "Travel with Confidence to the USA", the initiative addresses a range of misperceptions circulating on social media and in international markets, including outdated or incomplete information. In each case, the facts tell a far more welcoming story than what travellers are hearing. To meet the moment, Brand USA is publishing a full set of facts, available at [visittheusa.com/entry](http://visittheusa.com/entry)

Get Facts. Get Going. It is built to be always on and continually updated as an integrated marketing, communications, and trade effort reaching international audiences through paid media in key global markets; real-time content delivered through global distribution systems; direct travel trade engagement through Brand USA's agent training USA Discovery Program; and testimon



## Germany Positions Itself as the Next Big European Experience for India's New-Age Traveller

### Travel Mail Desk

The German National Tourist Office (GNTO India) unveiled a fresh narrative for Indian travellers, positioning Germany not merely as a European destination, but as a land where culture, creativity, sustainability, and cinematic imagination converge.

While Germany continues to see steady growth in overnight stays from India, GNTO India is shifting the spotlight beyond statistics toward experiences that resonate deeply with India's new-age traveller: meaningful journeys, heritage with a twist, green mobility, and immersive storytelling.

From the fairytale turrets of Neuschwanstein Castle to the avant-garde art scene in Berlin, from scenic drives through the Black Forest to cutting-edge automotive heritage at the Mercedes-Benz Museum. Germany



offers Indian travellers a mosaic of experiences that blend nostalgia with innovation.

Today's Indian outbound traveller is younger, culturally curious, and sustainability-conscious. Germany's seamless public transport, eco-certified

hotels, slow travel routes, and strong vegetarian and vegan culinary culture make it especially relevant for Indian families, Gen Z explorers, honeymooners, and luxury FIT segments alike.

*"India is one of Germany's fastest-growing Outbound markets, and the evolving Indian traveller is looking for far more than a checklist of landmarks. Today, travellers from India seek journeys with depth and meaning. Germany offers layered stories from fairytale castles and cities that shaped world history to sustainable travel experiences and contemporary creativity. We are seeing Indian guests engage deeply, whether through slow travel in the countryside, luxury automotive experiences, or cultural immersion in our music and art capitals. Our goal is to position Germany not just as a stop on a Europe itinerary, but as a destination worthy of its own journey,"* said **Romit Theophilus, Director of Marketing & Sales Office, GNTO India.**

## AbhiBus Brings 'Full Transparency' to Life with New Campaign Featuring Prabhu Deva

### Travel Mail Desk

AbhiBus (ixigo's bus business), one of India's leading online bus ticketing platforms, has unveiled its latest brand campaign featuring iconic dancer and actor Prabhu Deva. The campaign introduces a striking visual metaphor to spotlight a simple consumer truth: when it comes to bus travel, what you don't see often matters the most.

The campaign brings this promise to life by seamlessly integrating AbhiBus's key features into the storytelling, including the ability to explore buses through 360° photos, choose between new and older buses, access safety checks for more informed decisions, and benefit from Abhi Assured for added reliability. Extending this further, the platform also offers roadside assistance, ensuring that in the event of a breakdown, users are provided with an alternate cab to complete their journey. Together, these features reinforce the idea of transparency not just as access to information, but as a commitment to accountability, ensuring users are not left stranded even when things go wrong.



Speaking about the campaign, **Rohit Sharma, COO, AbhiBus**, said, "Transparency is not just about providing information, it's about building trust. With AbhiBus, users can not only understand their bus before they travel (with the use of AI), but also choose from thousands of buses listed across 650,000 routes. This campaign brings that promise to life."

Commenting on the collaboration, **Prabhu Deva** said, "The idea is simple and relatable. We often don't know what

kind of bus we're booking. This campaign shows how you can now see everything upfront – from bus age and amenities to a 360° virtual tour before booking."

Each film blends Prabhu Deva's signature style with relatable scenarios, turning everyday travel concerns into engaging storytelling moments. The recurring message, "AbhiBus Full Transparency, journey ellam jolly," reinforces the brand's promise of making bus journeys more predictable, comfortable, and worry-free.

### Travel Mail Desk

Digital travel platform Agoda has unveiled its ranking of what Asian travellers prioritise most when searching for accommodation in 2026. Looking at the most-used search filters on its website this year, Agoda reports that Indian travellers consistently prioritise accommodation type, including breakfasts and strong review scores, when seeking holiday stays.

At 26% of all filter activity, the choice of accommodation type ranked first for Indian traveller searches in 2026, emphasising the importance of selecting the right stay over all other factors. This places India among the top markets, compared with the Asia-wide average of 19%. Review scores of 7 and above rank among the top search criteria for Indian travellers in 2026, constituting 13% of all filter activity, reflecting a strong preference for highly rated stays.

Flexibility across booking, payment, and stay options is a clear priority for Indian travellers in 2026. Free cancellation and pay-at-hotel options are featured among the top 10 search filters, highlighting the interest in refundable and on-site payment choices that reduce booking friction.

Other search options that offer flexibility, choice and convenience also feature



among the top 10 searches for Indian travellers, including location score (of 9 and above) and car parking facilities. These indicate that travellers are increasingly keen on accommodation that can cater to their diverse preferences, whether this is travelling as a group, driving to their destination, or wanting to be close to public transport and other attractions.

**Gaurav Malik, Country Director, Indian Subcontinent & Indian Ocean Islands at Agoda**, said, "In 2026, Indian travellers

are becoming more intentional in how they choose their stays. Searches show a clear focus on accommodation type, breakfast-included options and highly rated properties, alongside flexible booking features such as pay-at-hotel and free cancellation. It is not just about availability, but about finding the right fit. Agoda's easy-to-use search filters and wide range of accommodation choices, amenities, locations and more enable travellers to find the perfect stay based on individual needs and wants."

# The City Beyond the Pyramids

Why Egypt's capital is far more compelling than its most famous landmark.



That rhythm revealed itself in unexpected ways. At one point, we found ourselves navigating the city in a tuk-tuk driven by two young boys, relying on Google Translate and a healthy dose of optimism to reach our destination. What could have been stressful quickly became one of those travel moments that transforms into laughter before the day is over.

## LIKE MANY GREAT CITIES, CAIRO IS BEST UNDERSTOOD THROUGH ITS FOOD.

At Abu Tarek, one of the city's most iconic eateries, we experienced koshari—Egypt's beloved national dish. A seemingly unlikely combination of rice, lentils, pasta, chickpeas, fried onions, tomato sauce, and spices comes together in perfect harmony. It is affordable, filling, and deeply woven into the city's identity.

Among the market's most confident residents are its cats. Unlike the cautious strays commonly found in many cities, Cairo's cats move with an air of ownership, calmly observing the world around them. They are not merely part of the scenery—they are part of the city's character.

No visit to Cairo would be complete without exploring the Grand Egyptian Museum. Housing one of the most significant collections of ancient Egyptian artefacts ever assembled, the museum provides invaluable context to the wonders that have drawn travellers to Egypt for generations. Together with the pyramids, it reinforces Cairo's unique position as a gateway to one of humanity's greatest civilizations.

## By Siddharth Gupta

**THE MIND DOES FUNNY THINGS WITH SCALE WHEN CONFRONTED WITH 4,500 YEARS OF HISTORY.**

No photograph prepares you for the Pyramids of Giza. It isn't just their size; it is their presence. Rising from the edge of the desert, they stand with a confidence that has survived empires, invasions, revolutions, and the passing of millennia. Standing before them, my friend Shashwat and I found ourselves momentarily speechless, struck by the sudden realization of our own insignificance.

## CAIRO HAS A WAY OF DOING THAT.

Egypt's capital is a city of contradictions—ancient yet energetic, chaotic yet strangely composed. It is a place where modern apartment blocks stretch endlessly across the horizon, packed tightly together like pieces of a giant puzzle. Buildings appear unfinished, yet lived-in. Streets seem to operate by their own unwritten rules. Dust-covered Mercedes and ageing Fiats move through traffic with remarkable persistence, as if time itself has agreed to slow down for them.

For first-time visitors, Cairo can feel overwhelming. But beyond the apparent disorder lies a city with a rhythm entirely its own.



At Karam El Sham, shawarma arrived packed with flavour, reminding us that some of the world's best meals are often found not in fine dining establishments, but in places where recipes have been perfected over generations.

To walk off the indulgence, we wandered through Khan el Khallili, Cairo's historic bazaar and one of the oldest markets in the Middle East. Here, narrow alleys twist between shops overflowing with lanterns, perfumes, spices, jewellery, and handcrafted souvenirs. The glow of brass lamps reflects off centuries-old stonework while the call to prayer echoes through the district from nearby Al-Hussein Mosque. It is a place where commerce, culture, and history continue to coexist much as they have for centuries.

## YET CAIRO IS NOT A CITY THAT EXISTS SOLELY IN THE PAST.

Our final evening was spent at the Marriott Mena House, where the pyramids remained visible on the horizon, illuminated by the fading light. After days spent navigating busy streets, bargaining in markets, and immersing ourselves in the city's energy, the moment offered a rare opportunity to simply pause and reflect.

What surprised us most was not Cairo's chaos, but its generosity. Popular perceptions often paint the city as intimidating, yet we found it welcoming, engaging, and far easier to navigate than expected. The warmth of its people, the richness of its culture, and the depth

of its history create an experience that extends far beyond its famous landmarks.

The pyramids may be Cairo's most recognisable symbols, but they are only the beginning of the story. Beyond the ancient stones lies a city full of life—where markets buzz with energy, food tells stories of tradition, and history remains part of everyday life.

Standing at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean, Cairo continues to be one of the world's most compelling urban destinations. It is a city that rewards curiosity, embraces contrast, and leaves visitors with a deeper appreciation for both the endurance of history and the vitality of the present.



**Population:**  
23.5 million to 27 million people  
(Greater Cairo)

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**Currency:**  
Egyptian Pound (EGP)

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**Flight Time from India:**  
Approx. 5-7 hours (depending on routing)

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**Known For:**  
Pyramids, ancient history, Islamic architecture, Nile River cruises, and Egyptian cuisine.



## CAIRO ESSENTIALS

### MUST SEE

- **Pyramids of Giza** – The last surviving Wonder of the Ancient World and Egypt's most iconic landmark.
- **Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM)** – A modern showcase of ancient Egyptian civilization and one of the largest archaeological museums in the world.
- **Khan el Khalili** – Cairo's historic bazaar, where centuries of commerce, craftsmanship, and culture come together.

### MUST TASTE

- **Koshari at Abu Tarek** – Egypt's beloved national dish served at one of Cairo's most famous institutions.
- **Shawarma at Karam El Sham** – A local favourite known for bold flavours and generous portions.
- **Traditional Mint Tea** – Best enjoyed overlooking the Nile or while taking a break from the city's bustle.

### BEST TIME TO VISIT

October to April, when cooler temperatures make sightseeing and outdoor exploration more comfortable.

### DON'T MISS

- \* Watching the sunset over the Giza Plateau.
- \* Listening to the call to prayer echo through the streets of Islamic Cairo.
- \* Getting lost in the alleys of Khan el Khalili.
- \* Experiencing Cairo after dark, when the city reveals a different rhythm and energy.

### BUCKET LIST SID'S TIP

Cairo can feel overwhelming at first, but the city rewards those who slow down. Leave room in your itinerary for unplanned discoveries—the conversations, cafés, markets, and unexpected moments often become the most memorable parts of the journey.

# ConfirmTkt Launches AI Seat Finder, Rolls Out Unconventional Campaign with RCB Players



marks its third consecutive year as the Official Train Ticketing Partner of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB). The campaign comes alive through a high-energy, humour-led ad film featuring RCB players Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar and Venkatesh Iyer highlighting AI Seat Finder and how it is making it easier for train travellers to find confirmed tickets or same train alternate options.

Commenting on the launch, **Dinesh Kumar Kotha, CEO, ConfirmTkt & ixigo Trains**, said, "Getting a confirmed train ticket in India has always involved a degree of uncertainty and effort. With AI Seat Finder (powered by TARA), we are reimagining this experience by making it conversational and outcome-driven. Instead of navigating multiple options and screens, users can now simply express their intent and let the app guide them to the best possible journey. This is a significant step in our vision of building an AI-first travel experience that is simpler, more accessible and truly built around the needs of Indian travellers. We're also excited to continue our partnership with RCB for the third year, bringing this innovation to millions of fans during the cricket season."

## Travel Mail Desk

ConfirmTkt, India's leading train-ticketing platform and the Official Train Ticketing Partner of Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) for 2026, announced the launch of AI Seat Finder (powered by TARA, which is an AI native agent developed by ixigo), an intelligent, in-app feature designed to help users find confirmed train tickets with ease.

Integrated seamlessly into the ConfirmTkt app, AI Seat Finder (powered

by TARA) is a conversational AI-powered feature that activates as soon as a user begins searching for trains, analysing real-time availability to guide them towards the best possible travel options. It highlights trains with confirmed seats, suggests train alternatives across routes, boarding points and departure times, and allows users to interact conversationally with queries.

The launch is amplified by ConfirmTkt's new campaign, 'Talk Travel Repeat - AI Seat Finder Dilayega Seat', as it

# Thomas Cook India & SOTC Travel sign strategic MoU with Vinpearl of Vietnam to enhance experiences for Indian travellers.



## Travel Mail Desk

Thomas Cook (India) Limited, India's leading omnichannel travel services company and its group company SOTC Travel, have signed a long-term MoU with Vinpearl, Vietnam's leading hospitality, tourism, and entertainment brand. The collaboration brings together Thomas Cook India and SOTC's market leadership and travel expertise with Vinpearl's expansive destination portfolio, further strengthening Vietnam's appeal among Indian travellers.

The MoU was signed by Mr Abraham Alapatt, President & Group Head - Marketing, Service Quality, Value Added Services & Innovation at Thomas Cook (India) Limited and SOTC Travel and MMsNgo Thi Huong, CEO, Vinpearl.

As part of the agreement, the Companies will position Vinpearl as a preferred Vietnam partner, backed by exclusive inventory and priority availability.

Beyond enhancing travel experiences, the collaboration marks Vinpearl's first investment initiative in India's travel and tourism sector and lays the foundation for a comprehensive tourism ecosystem for the Indian market. Thomas Cook India and SOTC Travel will play a key role in driving market development, customer access and curated travel experiences for Indian travellers. Vinpearl's portfolio spans resorts, entertainment, golf and large-scale event infrastructure across destinations such as Phu Quoc, Nha Trang and Hoi An, catering to both leisure and MICE segments.

**Mr. Abraham Alapatt - President & Group Head - Marketing, Service Quality, Value Added Services & Innovation at Thomas Cook (India) Limited and SOTC Travel** said, "Vietnam has emerged as one of the most exciting growth markets for Indian travellers, and our partnership with Vinpearl reflects our strategic intent to strengthen our leadership in the destination. As leaders in India's

travel and tourism sector, we see a significant opportunity in combining our omnichannel reach, strong consumer base and market expertise with Vinpearl's world-class hospitality and entertainment ecosystem. Together, we look forward to creating unique and seamless experiences for Indian leisure and MICE travellers, while building a long-term collaboration focused on unlocking the immense potential of the Indian market for Vietnam."

**Ms. Ngo Thi Huong, CEO of Vinpearl**, said, "India is a key market in Vinpearl's international expansion strategy. Through partnerships with leading players - Thomas Cook India and SOTC Travel, we are not only expanding market access but also proactively developing tailored offerings for different customer segments. Vinpearl aims to strengthen its presence in the Indian market while contributing to positioning Vietnam as a compelling and differentiated destination on the global tourism map."

## Tour Blue Completes 14 Years, Strengthening Commitment to Safe, Responsible and Personalised Travel Experiences

At a time when safety, accountability, and reliability are redefining travel decisions, Tour Blue is strengthening its position as a trusted destination management company by setting new benchmarks in crisis responsiveness, personalised service, and responsible tourism.

In today's rapidly evolving travel environment, responsiveness is critical. Tour Blue adopts a proactive, solutions-driven approach to managing challenges, ensuring that every situation is handled swiftly and effectively. A defining strength of the company is its collaborative team culture, where senior leadership and operational teams work seamlessly to resolve issues and maintain uninterrupted service delivery for partners and travellers.

As Tour Blue completes 14 years in the industry, the company's journey reflects resilience, adaptability, and a forward-looking vision that continues to guide its growth.

*"In an environment where safety and trust are paramount, our responsibility goes beyond delivering travel services. We are committed to being dependable partners. Our focus remains on proactive problem-solving, personalised experiences, and building long-term relationships that stand the test of changing times."*  
**– Darshana Cabraal, Joint Managing Director, Tour Blue.**

At the core of Tour Blue's philosophy is a deeply personalised approach to travel. Each itinerary is thoughtfully curated to reflect individual preferences, combining flexibility, attention to detail, and high service standards. This is complemented by a strong focus on offering competitive value, ensuring travellers experience both comfort and confidence throughout their journey.



## ixigo Reimagines Travel With a Fully AI-Native App; Reinvents TARA as a Multimodal AI Assistant and Introduces Agentic Travel Flows

ixigo, India's leading AI-powered travel platform, unveiled the new AI-native version of its app, reimagining travel through conversational and agentic AI experiences. The launch was announced at ixigo NEXT, the company's flagship tech launch event.

Unlike traditional travel apps that layer AI features onto existing systems, ixigo's redesigned AI-native app has been rebuilt from the ground up with AI seamlessly integrated across the entire user experience, making travel more conversational, intuitive and deeply personalised.

The platform moves beyond transactional booking journeys to become an intelligent travel companion that helps users discover, decide and act in one place, offering a truly transformative trip planning and booking experience for hotels and flights. Instead of navigating multiple filters and screens, users can simply express their intent naturally through voice and let the app guide them towards the best travel outcomes. At the heart of the experience is TARA, ixigo's multimodal AI assistant, designed to fundamentally reimagine how users interact with the new ixigo app and plan their journeys.

Meet the Reinvented TARA: ixigo's Multimodal AI Travel Assistant. Reinvented as the conversational core of the ixigo app, TARA has evolved



into a deeply integrated AI-native travel companion designed to make travel planning more intuitive and personalised. Users can interact with TARA naturally in English, Hindi and Hinglish through voice, text or tap, with support for more languages coming soon. Unlike traditional chatbots that function as standalone API-based interfaces, TARA is deeply embedded into the app's core user experience.

TARA is capable of handling complex, intent-driven travel queries that go far beyond conventional search flows. Instead of navigating through multiple filters and screens, users can simply express their intent naturally through voice.

Speaking on the launch, **Rajnish Kumar, Group Co-CEO and Alok Bajpai, Group CEO, ixigo** said, "Over the last two decades, ixigo has focused on building

products that reduce anxiety and bring peace of mind to travellers. With the new AI-native version of our app, we are reimagining travel as a conversational, intuitive and deeply personalised experience powered by AI. The new ixigo app has been rebuilt from the ground up as an AI-native travel platform – not by adding AI in patches, but by integrating it seamlessly across the entire experience. We believe the future of travel will be agent-led, with AI that can understand intent, take proactive actions and assist travellers seamlessly before, during, and after their trips. By combining frontier AI capabilities with two decades of travel intelligence, real-time data and deep customer understanding, we are reimagining what a travel app can truly become in the AI era. Our vision with this reinvention was to create an actionable playbook for how AI-native reinvention can be done in a complex, real-world category like travel."

## India BusTrack by redBus reports 147 Million Passengers Travel in 6 months, showing a 24% increase



### Travel Mail Desk

RedBus, the world's largest online bus ticketing platform, has released the latest edition of its India BusTrack Report, a comprehensive tracker of intercity bus travel trends across passengers, regions and private operators in India. The report spotlights the evolving scale and momentum of India's intercity bus sector for the period from October 2025 to March 2026 and the corresponding period in the previous years.

Intercity buses carried 147.19 million passengers from October 2025 to March 2026 in India, reflecting a 24% increase in passenger volumes compared to the same period in the previous years. Gross ticketing value increased by 20% to ₹142.16 billion. The number of active private operators also rose to more than 6,800, reflecting the widening operator base and strengthening network depth across India's intercity routes. These numbers pertain to all Indian private operators, not just redBus.

The edition further highlights evolving traveller preferences across India's intercity bus sector. Sleeper and hybrid buses accounted for 86% of all journeys, while AC buses accounted for 72%, reflecting sustained demand for comfort-led and longer-distance travel.

*"This edition of India BusTrack covers the second half of the last financial year from October 1, 2025, to March 31,*

*2026. During this period, the intercity bus market grew by 24% in terms of passengers travelled, compared to the same period last year. Digitisation has been rapid, and the active bus operator count has increased to 6858. Due to the digitisation of many short route bus services, the average seat price (ASP) has dropped 3% this year to Rs. 966. The industry recorded a healthy 77% occupancy during this period. In this edition of BusTrack, the spotlight is on Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, two robust markets that have strongly driven the growth of India's intercity bus industry. Interestingly, both states have consistently shown higher-than-national bus occupancy at around 83% since the latter half of 2025. The region also recorded a higher average seat price of Rs. 1,016, compared to the national average of Rs. 966. This indicates high customer demand and potential for bus operators looking to expand,"* said **Prakash Sangam, CEO, redBus.**

## zingbus launches Chyll as bookings to offbeat destinations surge 90% year-on-year

### Travel Mail Desk

India's leading intercity mobility platform, zingbus, has launched Chyll, a packaged travel offering that combines intercity bus travel, last-mile connectivity, curated stays, and local guides into a single booking experience.

The launch comes amid rising demand for experiential and offbeat travel across India, with bookings to such destinations on the zingbus platform growing by over 90 per cent year-on-year. The momentum is further supported by the government's continued focus on tourism infrastructure, regional connectivity, and intercity transport expansion under the Union Budget 2026-27.

Designed to simplify leisure travel beyond just ticket booking, Chyll offers integrated intercity travel with end-to-end services including intercity bus travel & last-mile connectivity, handpicked stays, guided experiences, and on-ground assistance. Travellers heading to

destinations such as Jibhi or Shangarh often need to separately arrange local transport, accommodation, and discovery experiences after reaching a transit point. The platform brings all these elements together into one seamless checkout flow.

Commenting on the launch, **Mr. Prashant Kumar, Co-founder of zingbus,** said, *"The bus ticket was never the full journey. For travellers heading to offbeat destinations, the real challenge begins after the booking. Chyll has been designed to simplify that entire*

*journey through one integrated booking experience, from seamless last-mile connectivity to reliable stays and meaningful local experiences."*

zingbus has facilitated over 10 million journeys across 300+ cities in 20+ states through partnerships with more than 60 operators and continues to expand its electric bus network across high-demand corridors. With Chyll, zingbus aims to move beyond ticketing and build a more connected, end-to-end intercity travel experience for India's growing base of leisure travellers.



# The Age of Experience: Cleartrip's Data Reveals 108% Surge in Luxury Stays as Indian Travellers Pivot to High-Value Summer 'Coolcations'

## Travel Mail Desk

For the Indian traveller, summer is no longer just a break; it is a carefully curated plan for relaxation and indulging in new experiences. Cleartrip, a Flipkart company and one of India's fastest-growing online travel platforms, has captured this shift through its flagship Nation on Vacation (NoVac) event, which signals the official onset of the summer vacation planning cycle.



### Strong Growth Across Categories

- Air bookings grew by over 20%, while Bus bookings went up by over 35%
- Hotels, however, stood out with an increase of over 80%
- 5-star bookings rose by 108.2%, outpacing both premium and budget categories, suggesting that travellers are increasingly willing to spend more for higher-quality stays.
- Family hotel bookings jumped 124.9%, pointing to a strong return of shared travel experiences.

### Rise of Domestic Travel

Domestic travel remains strong, driven by Tier 2 & 3 cities and cultural tourism

- Jaipur
- Lucknow
- Udaipur
- Rishikesh
- Varanasi

### Event-led travel shapes booking patterns

- IPL matches in Guwahati drove a surge in flight bookings
- Highlights the growing influence of live experiences on travel decisions



### Top Destinations & Emerging Travel Corridors

**Most booked destinations: (Overall)**  
 Domestic: Delhi  
 International: Bangkok

#### Gen Z's Summer Picks – Top domestic destinations

- Bengaluru
- Mumbai
- Kolkata
- Hyderabad

#### Gen Z's Summer Picks – Top international destinations

- Bali
- Phuket
- Kuala Lumpur
- Dubai
- Singapore

**Emerging travel corridors see strong growth** – driven by better connectivity, rising regional demand, and more confident travellers



#### Domestic airports:

- Navi Mumbai
- Darbhanga
- Leh
- Gorakhpur
- Kannur

#### International airports:

- Nairobi
- Frankfurt
- Guangzhou
- Riyadh
- Lisbon
- Milan
- Haneda

#### Payments and Flexibility Trends

#### Payment trends show a strong preference for credit cards

- 63.1% of domestic bookings
- 48.9% of international bookings

#### Loyalty and flexibility are gaining importance

- Strong usage of Flipkart SuperCoins, especially for domestic travel
- Increased adoption of Cleartrip's flexibility products: ClearChoice Plus and ClearChoice Max

# Places In India Perfect For A Workcation Right Now

## Travel Mail Desk

The way people work has changed dramatically over the last few years. With remote and hybrid work models becoming increasingly common, professionals are no longer tied to traditional office spaces. This shift has also given rise to a growing travel trend — the workcation. Combining work and leisure, workcations allow individuals to stay productive while exploring new destinations and taking a break from routine city life.

India, with its diverse landscapes and improving digital infrastructure, has become one of the most attractive destinations for workcations. From mountains and beaches to peaceful towns and cultural hubs, travellers today are looking for places that offer reliable internet connectivity, comfortable stays, vibrant local culture, and a slower pace of life.

Here are some destinations across India that are currently ideal for a workcation experience.

### Bir, Himachal Pradesh:

**The Mountain Pause That Works:** Nestled in the Kangra Valley, Bir has steadily emerged as a favourite destination among remote workers, digital nomads, and solo travellers. Known for its scenic mountain views, peaceful cafés, and paragliding culture, Bir offers the perfect balance between productivity and relaxation. Unlike crowded hill stations, Bir has a calm atmosphere that helps people disconnect from urban stress. Many cafés and accommodations here are equipped with reliable Wi-Fi and comfortable, work-friendly spaces, making it easier for travellers to manage meetings and deadlines while enjoying the mountain lifestyle.

**Rishikesh, Uttarakhand:** **Where Productivity Meets Stillness:** For professionals looking to combine work with wellness, Rishikesh has become an increasingly popular choice. Located along the banks of the Ganga and surrounded by hills, the city offers a unique mix of spirituality, adventure, and calmness. Workcation travellers are drawn to Rishikesh for its relaxed atmosphere and scenic surroundings. Yoga centres, riverside cafés, and peaceful accommodations create an environment that supports both productivity and mental well-being.

by **Pranav Dangi,**  
Founder and CEO,  
The Hosteller



**Coorg, Karnataka:** **The Quiet Productivity Zone:** Coorg offers a refreshing escape for people who want to work amidst nature without sacrificing comfort. Famous for its coffee plantations, greenery, and cool climate, the destination provides a peaceful setting for remote work. Unlike busier tourist hotspots, Coorg maintains a laid-back atmosphere that encourages slower living. Many travellers choose plantation stays and homestays for longer workcations for their calm surroundings and access to nature.

**Kasol, Himachal Pradesh:** **The Parvati Valley Work Escape:** Kasol has steadily emerged as one of the most distinctive workcation destinations in the mountains. Set along the Parvati Valley, it blends natural beauty with a lively traveller culture. Unlike quieter Himalayan towns, Kasol carries a social, backpacker-driven energy. Cafés line the river, conversations

flow easily, and long-stay travellers often find themselves settling into an unhurried but engaging routine.

### Dharamshala and McLeod Ganj:

**Work at Altitude, Think with Clarity:** For those looking for a mountain workcation blending spirituality and culture, Dharamshala and McLeod Ganj continue to attract remote workers from across the country. The region offers breathtaking views, peaceful cafés, and a strong backpacker community. Internet connectivity and remote-work infrastructure have improved considerably in recent years, making longer stays more convenient. The Tibetan influence, monasteries, and quiet mountain surroundings create an atmosphere that encourages reflection and focus. Travellers often find that working from the hills improves creativity, productivity, and overall clarity of thought.

### Goa: The Reinvented Remote Work Capital:

Goa is no longer just a vacation destination associated with nightlife and beaches. Over the years, it has evolved into one of India's most established workcation hubs. Areas such as Assagao, Siolim, and South Goa have become popular among professionals seeking peaceful environments with modern amenities. The appeal of Goa lies in its flexibility. Travellers can spend mornings working from cafés near the beach and evenings exploring local markets, restaurants, or coastal trails. The state also has a thriving community of freelancers, entrepreneurs, and remote workers, creating opportunities for networking and collaboration. [14:27, 09/06/2026] +91 88268 75594: Jaipur, Rajasthan: The Heritage City with a Modern Work Rhythm: Jaipur brings a structured yet culturally rich alternative to traditional workcation destinations. With strong connectivity, well-developed infrastructure, and a growing café culture, the city has become increasingly relevant for remote professionals. What sets Jaipur apart is its balance. Workdays feel organised, while evenings offer access to heritage spaces, rooftop cafés, and cultural experiences that keep the routine from feeling repetitive.

# Dua Lipa's Safari Diaries

## Capture the Magic of South Africa

### Travel Mail Desk

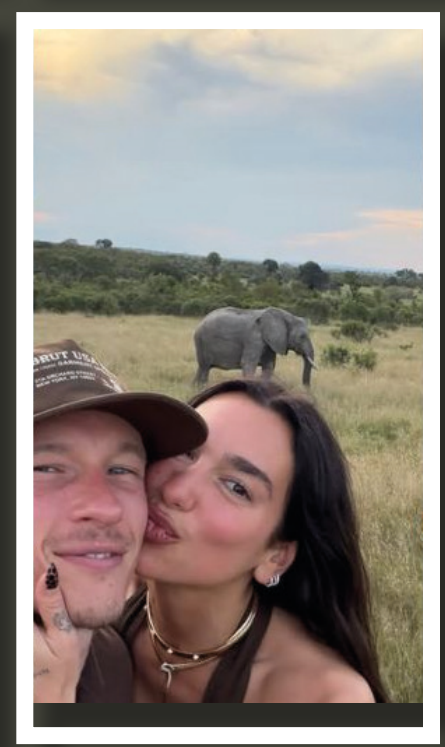
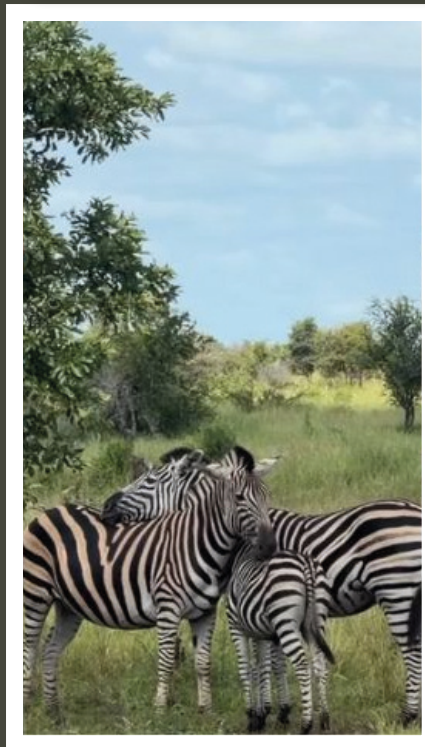
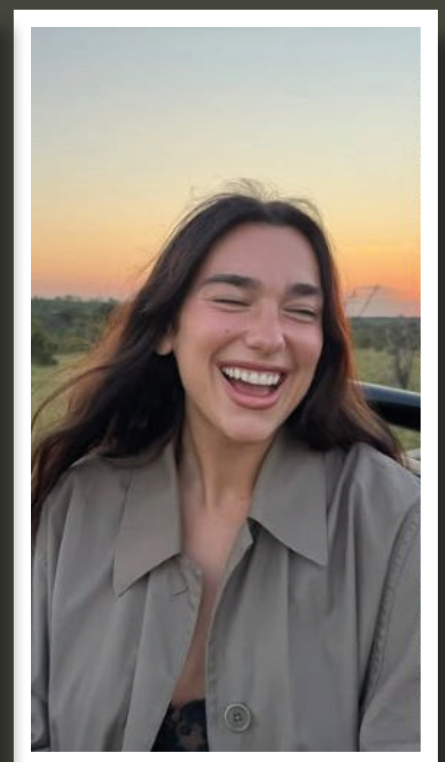
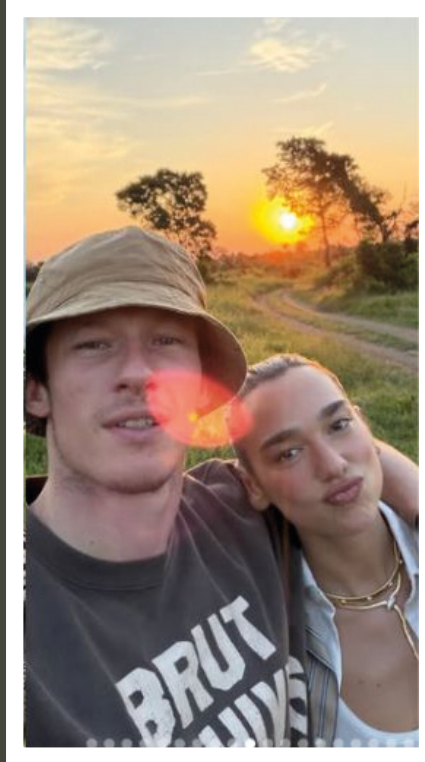
Global pop icon Dua Lipa has set social media abuzz with her recent reflections on an unforgettable journey through South Africa, capturing the magic of the country's world-renowned wildlife, landscapes, and immersive luxury safari experiences.

In a heartfelt Instagram post, the artist described her visit as "the most incredible trip of my life," highlighting her time across Kruger National Park and the ultra-exclusive Sabi Sands Game Reserve. Known for their dense wildlife populations and intimate game-viewing experiences, these reserves offered her rare, up-close encounters with the Big Five, including lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, and buffalo, set against the dramatic backdrop of the African bushveld.

Dua Lipa's endorsement adds to South Africa's growing appeal as a bucket-list destination for global travellers seeking meaningful, once-in-a-lifetime experiences. As international travel rebounds, such authentic and emotionally resonant journeys are increasingly shaping travel decisions, with South Africa firmly at the forefront of this shift.

Inspired by her South African escape, here are a few sought-after stays that offer a similar experience:

- Royal Malewane (Thornybush): Located in Kruger National Park
- Safari Moon Luxury Bush Lodge: Situated in Hoedspruit
- Tswalu Kalahari Reserve: Found in the Northern Cape
- Shamwari Private Game Reserve: Located in the Eastern Cape
- Phinda Forest Lodge: Situated in KwaZulu-Natal
- Aquila Private Game Reserve: Near Cape Town
- The Palace of the Lost City: In Sun City



# Beyond Winter

## Discover The Magic of Summer in Finnish Lapland

### Travel Mail Desk

In Finnish Lapland, summer brings a rare kind of magic where the sun barely sets, and daylight lingers late into the night. The light is golden, the air is cool, and the forests are wrapped in complete stillness. For travellers used to chasing the Northern Lights, summer in Lapland is a different kind of surprise, and an equally compelling one. While the region is often associated with snowy landscapes and winter adventures, summer reveals a completely different side of Lapland, filled with endless daylight, serene lakes, scenic trails, wellness experiences and unique activities. With direct flights from Delhi to Helsinki and seamless onward connections to Kittilä and Ivalo via Helsinki, Finnair makes it easier for Indian travellers to explore Finnish Lapland this summer.

### Hiking and biking

Summer is one of the best times to experience Lapland's untouched natural beauty. Hiking trails such as the iconic Hetta-Pallas route offer breathtaking views across rolling fells, forests and open landscapes, while adventurous travellers can explore the dramatic Kevo Canyon with its rugged terrain and scenic river crossings.

For cycling enthusiasts, Lapland's wilderness trails provide a unique opportunity to explore remote Arctic terrain under the Midnight Sun, combining adventure with spectacular scenery.

### Fishing and gold panning

Lapland's lakes and rivers offer travellers a wide range of authentic summer experiences, from fishing in pristine waters such as the River Teno and Lake Inari to exploring the region's rich outdoor culture and heritage.

Among the region's most distinctive cultural activities is gold panning, the traditional practice of searching for small flakes or nuggets of gold in riverbeds using a shallow pan. Several resorts and activity centres across Lapland offer guided gold panning sessions where visitors can learn the technique and try their luck at uncovering real gold, making it a memorable experience for families and adventure seekers alike.

### Restaurants and relaxation

Beyond adventure, Lapland is also ideal for slow travel and relaxation. Visitors can unwind at cosy lakeside retreats such as Neljän Tuulen Tupa, known for its traditional log cabins, smoke sauna and

peaceful beachside setting. Travellers can also experience Nordic dining at Lapland Hotels Pallas, where local Arctic ingredients and regional flavours take centre stage.

Summer in Lapland also surprises travellers with its beach culture. Spots such as Säikäsalmi, often referred to as "Lapland's Riviera", offer opportunities for swimming, kayaking and paddleboarding during the warmer months. Visitors can also stop by the popular lakeside café, Summer Café Säikkä, known for its traditional open-fire pancakes and relaxed summer atmosphere.

For wellness seekers, experiences such as Arctic Sauna World provide an authentic introduction to Finnish sauna culture, allowing travellers to unwind while taking in panoramic Arctic Lake views under the glow of the Midnight Sun.

Rather than a traditional sightseeing destination, summer in Finnish Lapland offers a slower, more immersive way to experience the Arctic. Whether through outdoor adventures, local culinary traditions, lakeside wellness, or the phenomenon of the Midnight Sun, the region presents Indian travellers with a distinctive alternative to conventional summer holidays.



# How to Spend a Family-Friendly 4th of July in Lake Tahoe

## Travel Mail Desk

As the USA prepares for the upcoming 4th of July festivities, this year being especially significant with the nation's 250th Anniversary, Lake Tahoe is also ahead with its lineup of special family-friendly events commemorating the milestone. From magnetic aviation shows to a vibrant parade, viewing the dazzling fireworks from unique spots, including a cruise, to the top of a mountain, this 4th of July, Lake Tahoe transforms into a merry ground of celebration.

## Red, White and Blue Aerial Showcase, July 3

Kick off the Independence Day celebrations early with the Red, White & Blue Aerial Showcase, a ground-based family-friendly aviation experience and static airshow inviting all to get up close and personal with an impressive lineup of military, firefighting, and speciality aircraft parked on the airport ramp at the Lake Tahoe Airport on July 3. The event also includes educational displays, hands-on activities, and opportunities to meet aviation experts.

## 4th of July Parade

Celebrate the nation's historic milestone at the 4th of July Parade in Lake Tahoe, marking the 250th anniversary of the United States. This year's parade honours the nation's path from its founding to today, highlighting the people, moments, and values that continue to shape the country. Join the vibrant parade, featuring floats, music, and creative displays that reflect the USA's story and the pride of the community in this once-in-a-generation Independence Day celebration in true Lake Tahoe style. This year's 11th Annual 4th of July Parade starts at 9:00 a.m. with the theme, Celebrating 250 Years! family-friendly events, themed outfits in red, white, and blue, and more. Viewing areas include the Grand Stand Area at Lakeview Commons, County Library, South Tahoe Middle School, Ross Parking Lot, and the LTUSD Bus Garage, which also offer seating areas.

## Lights on the Lake Fireworks

Lake Tahoe's dazzling 4th of July fireworks show, Lights on the Lake Fireworks, is



attributed as one of the top five 4th of July fireworks displays in the nation by the American Pyrotechnics Association and witnessing that from a cruise is a truly unique experience. The show is scheduled at 9:45 pm, and the fireworks are visible from numerous spots all over town, as well as from the water.



## M.S. Dixie II 4th July Fireworks Dinner Cruise

Step aboard the award-winning paddle-wheeler for a front-row seat to this one-of-a-kind holiday experience featuring festive music, gourmet dining,

and drinks. Zephyr Cove Resort will be offering the dinner cruise aboard the M.S. Dixie II in the backdrop of the stunning light show.

## Tahoe Cruises' Fireworks Cruise

Join Tahoe Cruises aboard their luxury 80-foot motor yacht, the Safari Rose, and the Spirit of Tahoe, for the Fireworks Cruise! Enjoy a delicious catered dinner and unlimited beer, wine, and champagne, along with music and unbeatable views of the spectacular fireworks display.

## Nevada Beach

Located about two miles east of the Nevada casinos on Elk Point Road, Nevada Beach is the ideal setting for a family barbecue at the beach while enjoying the fireworks show. A wide, sandy shoreline leads down to the sapphire waters of Lake Tahoe. The view across the lake to the West Shore and Desolation Wilderness is unsurpassed, and the view of the fireworks display is one of the best in town.

## The Tallac Historic Site

Located off Emerald Bay Road and near Baldwin Beach, the Tallac Historic Site offers an east-view perspective of the light show. For the more adventurous, trek to the top of Mount Tallac for a bird's eye view of the fireworks extravaganza.

# Why Bintan Is Becoming Southeast Asia's Go-To Destination for Wellness-Led Travel and Endurance Experiences



## Travel Mail Desk

Travel today is no longer only about ticking destinations off a bucket list. Increasingly, travellers are seeking experiences that leave them feeling more connected, energised and balanced, both physically and mentally. From marathon tourism and cycling holidays to wellness retreats and endurance events, active travel has evolved into one of the most significant shifts shaping the global travel landscape.

Rather than simply sightseeing or relaxing by the beach, modern travellers are choosing holidays that allow them to stay active, recharge mentally and return feeling refreshed. Experiences that combine movement, wellness, nature and opportunities to unwind are increasingly influencing how travel itineraries are being planned.

Reflecting this evolving mindset, Bintan Resorts is set to welcome the return of one of Southeast Asia's most anticipated endurance events, the Bintan Triathlon 2026, taking place from 2nd to 4th October 2026 at the scenic Lagoi Bay.

Set against Bintan's tropical coastal landscapes and located just a 60-minute ferry ride away from Singapore, the internationally recognised triathlon has evolved into far more than just a sporting

competition. Today, it brings together professional athletes, fitness enthusiasts, families, wellness travellers and first-time participants from across the globe for a vibrant weekend centred around endurance, adventure and community spirit.

Known for its picturesque race routes and high-energy atmosphere, the event offers participants the opportunity to swim through crystal-clear coastal waters, cycle along scenic coastal roads and run through lush tropical surroundings, creating a race experience that is both challenging and immersive.

This year's edition will feature multiple race categories across all age groups and experience levels, including Olympic Distance, Sprint Distance, Standard Duathlon, Youth Triathlon, Kids Triathlon, Sprint Duathlon, Family Duo (50m swimming & 400m running) and the entry-level Splash & Dash categories.

Last year's edition saw participation from over 600 athletes and wellness enthusiasts representing more than 30 nationalities, highlighting the growing global interest in active, experience-led travel. With travellers increasingly seeking holidays that combine movement, recovery and meaningful experiences, this year's edition is expected to attract even stronger participation.

What makes the Bintan Triathlon especially compelling is how naturally the race experience extends into a relaxing island getaway. Beyond the excitement of competition, participants and visitors can transition into a slower pace through beachfront stays, wellness experiences and Bintan's laid-back tropical atmosphere.

After the intensity of race day, travellers can unwind by the beach, indulge in restorative spa therapies, explore mangrove tours, enjoy water sports or simply recharge in a peaceful tropical setting. This balance between high-energy activity and meaningful relaxation is increasingly becoming a defining part of modern travel experiences.

Beyond the race itself, Plaza Lagoi will come alive throughout the weekend with entertainment, hospitality experiences and a vibrant community atmosphere that has become synonymous with the event over the years.

As Bintan Triathlon 2026 prepares to welcome participants from around the world once again, the event continues to reflect a larger shift in how people travel today, where wellness, endurance, relaxation and meaningful escapes seamlessly come together in one tropical destination.

# San Francisco Travel Reports Visitor Spending Milestone and Projects Continued Growth in 2026

## Travel Mail Desk

The San Francisco Travel Association (SF Travel), the official destination marketing organization for the City and County of San Francisco, released its 2026 tourism forecast and 2025 visitor impact results. The data shows San Francisco's visitor economy posting its second consecutive year of gains – and, for the first time since the pandemic, projecting visitor spending that surpasses the city's pre-pandemic record.

San Francisco is projected to welcome 24.2 million visitors in 2026, with visitor spending reaching \$9.9 billion, exceeding the city's 2019 record of \$9.6 billion. In 2025, San Francisco welcomed 23.7 million visitors who spent \$9.4 billion, generating \$655 million in tax revenue for the city and supporting 63,900 jobs across hotels, restaurants, retail, and cultural institutions.

*"The convention pipeline is doing what we built it to do,"* said **Anna Marie Presutti, President & CEO of SF Travel.** *"Thirty-eight events at Moscone Centre this year, RevPAR growing nearly 8% on top of last year's 14% gain – this is what recovery looks like. And it translates directly into tax revenue that funds city services for every San Franciscan."*

### 2026 Forecast Highlights

- Visitor volume: 24.2 million
- Visitor spending: \$9.9 billion
- Hotel occupancy: 69%
- Average Daily Rate (ADR): \$257.81
- Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR): \$177.85, up 7.9% year-over-year
- Moscone Centre events: 38, generating 674,000 room nights

### Conventions and Major Events Drive the Growth

From 25 events and 399,000 room nights in 2024, Moscone Centre grew to 34 events and 635,000 room nights in 2025 – a 59% increase in room nights year-over-year. In 2026, 38 scheduled events are expected to generate more than 674,000 room nights, a further 6% gain.

Major events amplify that impact. "Super Bowl LX and the FIFA World Cup bring visitors who spend well beyond the events and put San Francisco on the world stage. They allow us to showcase our city to a global audience and create a sense of connection with attendees and viewers across the world," Presutti said.



## International Visitation

Geopolitical and economic factors continue to create headwinds for international travel to the U.S. Nevertheless, data from Tourism Economics forecasts a modest recovery, with overnight international visitation to San Francisco expected to reach 2.3 million in 2026, up from 2.2 million in 2025, and international visitor spending projected to rise 5.8% to \$5.2 billion. San Francisco's top five international source markets are Mexico, the United Kingdom, China, Canada, and India.

### Tourism Works for Every San Franciscan

In 2025, tourism generated \$655 million in tax revenue for the City's General Fund – equivalent to \$778 in tax relief per San Francisco resident. That represents a \$50 million increase from 2024.

Tourism-supported employment reached 63,900 jobs in 2025, up from 62,000 in 2024. Sixty percent of visitor dollars are spent outside of hotels – in restaurants, retail, arts institutions, and neighbourhood businesses across the city.

### 2025 Results Highlights

- Visitor volume: 23.7 million
- Visitor spending: \$9.4 billion
- Hotel occupancy: 67.2%
- Average Daily Rate (ADR): \$245.38
- Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR): \$164.85, up 14.4% from 2024



- Moscone Centre: 34 events, generating 635,227 room nights (up 59% from 2024)
- Tax revenue generated: \$655 million
- obs supported: 63,900

### San Francisco International Airport

San Francisco International Airport served over 54.5 million passengers in 2025, a 4.3% increase over 2024. New routes added in 2025 include San José, Costa Rica; Adelaide, Australia; and Terceira in the Azores, expanding international access. SFO offers nonstop service to over 140 destinations, including more than 80 domestic and over 60 international locations.

### SAN FRANCISCO TRAVEL

San Francisco Travel is the official destination marketing organization for the City and County of San Francisco. The city is one of the top destinations for tourism and meetings in the U.S., attracting over 24 million visitors annually. In 2025, total visitor-related spending contributed \$9.4 billion to the San Francisco economy and supported nearly 64,000 jobs.

# Castles, Countryside and Slow Luxury: A Different Side of Czechia Is Winning Over Indian Travellers

## Travel Mail Desk

As travel preferences continue to evolve, Czechia's castles, countryside estates and historic châteaux across regions such as Central Bohemia, Vysočina Region, South Moravia, Brno, Karlovy Vary and Hluboká nad Vltavou are emerging as a distinctive way for Indian travellers to experience Europe beyond the expected. Travellers today are increasingly seeking experiences rooted in heritage, local culture, gastronomy, wellness and slower styles of travel. While Prague continues to remain the gateway for Indian visitors travelling to Czechia, a growing number of travellers are now extending their journeys beyond the capital to discover the country's historic castle stays and countryside retreats spread across some of Czechia's most scenic and culturally rich regions.

Located around an hour from Prague, Chateau Mceley is among the countryside chateaux attracting travellers looking for peaceful and wellness-led escapes surrounded by forests and nature. Combining heritage architecture with wellness experiences, gardens and intimate hospitality, the property offers a slower and more tranquil alternative to traditional city-focused stays.

Similarly, Chateau Světlá nad Sázavou, situated in the Vysočina region between Prague and Brno, allows travellers to experience restored aristocratic heritage through elegant chateau interiors, wellness offerings and countryside experiences set within a historic castle environment.



Near Karlovy Vary, Chateau Kynžvart offers travellers an opportunity to experience the charm of historic castle architecture while exploring one of Czechia's most renowned wellness regions. Surrounded by forested landscapes and spa traditions rooted in centuries of history, the region continues to resonate strongly with travellers seeking restorative and experience-led holidays.

Further south, South Moravia is increasingly drawing travellers to heritage stays such as Chateau de Frontire in Hlohovec (10mins from Lednice-Valtice Area) and Chateau Valtice, both located

within the UNESCO-listed Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape. The UNESCO-listed Lednice-Valtice Cultural Landscape, often referred to as the "Garden of Europe," is home to grand chateaux surrounded by vineyards, gardens and historic estates; these castle-style stays allow visitors to combine wine tourism, regional gastronomy and cultural exploration while experiencing a slower and more immersive side of Czechia.

The growing popularity of such stays reflects how Indian travellers are increasingly exploring Europe through more regional, experience-led journeys centred around heritage, wellness, gastronomy and nature.

Across Czechia, castle hotels and countryside retreats are allowing travellers to move beyond traditional sightseeing and discover the destination through its history, landscapes and local culture. The rising interest in Czechia's heritage stays also mirrors the growing global travel trend of "slow travel," where travellers are prioritising meaningful experiences, longer stays and deeper cultural connection over fast-paced sightseeing. Across Czechia, castle hotels, vineyard estates and countryside retreats are allowing Indian travellers to experience Europe through history, nature and local culture at a more relaxed pace.



# Georgia Unveils Its Most Iconic Hiking Trails for Global Adventurers



## Adishi to Iprari – A Hiking Trail in Svaneti

The Adishi to Iprari hike, also located in Svaneti, is among the most scenic yet demanding routes in Georgia. Covering approximately 17 km over 1–2 days, this moderately challenging trail includes steep ascents, river crossings, and high-altitude terrain. Beginning at around 2,040 metres, the route climbs towards Chkhutnieri Pass, offering breathtaking views of glaciers and peaks such as Tetnuli and Shkhara. The best time to experience this trek is from late June to September.

## Hiking on The Sairme Pillars

For a shorter and more accessible experience, the hike to the Sairme Pillars is ideal for beginners. This easy-to-moderate trail spans approximately 2.5–3 km and takes around 3 hours round trip. The well-marked forest path leads to viewpoints overlooking striking volcanic rock formations, with spring to early autumn being the best time to visit for clear views and pleasant weather.

## Travel Mail Desk

Nestled between Europe and Asia, Georgia is fast emerging as a hiker's paradise, offering an unparalleled blend of natural beauty and cultural richness with its 252 hikes. From lush forests to the snow-capped peaks of the Caucasus Mountains, the country's diverse landscapes offer trails suited to adventurers of all levels.

## Hiking on Lake Memuli

The hike to Lake Memuli from Zeda Memuli is a moderately difficult trek spanning around 15 km and typically completed over 2–3 days. Set at an altitude of approximately 2,750 metres, the trail transitions from forest paths to steep alpine terrain, offering stunning high-mountain views. Best undertaken between July and September, it is ideal for moderately experienced trekkers, with a guide recommended for navigation and safety.

## Hiking at Juta–Shatili–Omalo trail

The most demanding and rewarding route is the Omalo to Shatili trail, a 70 km multi-day trek completed over 4–6 days that runs through the Greater Caucasus Mountains, remote settlements, and connects three regions of Georgia. This challenging journey leads into the Khevsureti region and is best suited for experienced hikers, with a guide strongly recommended.



# IEIA Open Seminar & Exhibition Services Expo 2026

## Concludes with a Resounding Success – Celebrates 20 Years of IEIA, Industry Growth & Collaboration

### Travel Mail Desk

Marking a defining moment for India's exhibition and MICE industry, the 15th IEIA Open Seminar & Exhibition Services Expo 2026 concluded on a resounding high, bringing together the most influential voices, policymakers, innovators, and global stakeholders under one roof to chart the future of India's exhibition ecosystem. The landmark edition also celebrated a historic milestone – 20 years of the Indian Exhibition Industry Association (IEIA) – commemorating two decades of industry leadership, advocacy, collaboration, and transformation that have played a pivotal role in positioning India among the world's fastest-growing and most promising exhibition markets.

Organised by IEIA, the flagship international conclave welcomed more than 1,200 industry leaders, global delegates, CEOs, venue owners, exhibition organisers, service providers, trade associations, and senior government representatives, making it the largest and most influential gathering of the Indian exhibition industry. Held under the compelling theme "When the Right Dots Meet, Industry Moves," the 15th edition served as a powerful platform for collaboration, innovation, knowledge exchange, strategic networking, and business acceleration – reaffirming India's emergence as a global exhibitions and MICE powerhouse.

The inaugural session was graced by distinguished leaders, including Amb. Jawed Ashraf, IFS (Retd.), Chairman, India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO); Shri Suman Billa, IAS, Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India; Shri Sooraj Dhawan, President, IEIA; Shri Rakesh Kumar, Chairman, India Exposition Mart Limited (IEM); Shri Jagdish Patankar, Hon. Secretary, IEIA, Shri Ubaid Ahmad, Vice President, IEIA, Ms. Nidhi Sharma, Executive Director, IEIA along with all Executive Members of the Association.

**Amb. Jawed Ashraf, IFS (Retd.), Chairman, ITPO,** delivered the Chief Guest Address, highlighting "The evolution of the exhibition industry in India has been remarkable, with larger events and increasing global participation contributing significantly to economic growth and employment generation. In the age of AI, the continued growth of exhibitions highlights the



*enduring importance of face-to-face communication and human engagement. Our role as government is to act as a force multiplier for the industry. We must work together in an integrated manner to create a seamless participant experience from arrival to departure and continue strengthening the ecosystem through collaborative PPP-led approaches with the industry."*

Delivering the Special Address, **Shri Suman Billa, IAS, Additional Secretary & Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India,** said "There is a strong national vision for the tourism sector's contribution to India's GDP to grow from 5% to 10% over the next decade, with the MICE segment expected to be one of the biggest engines driving this growth. As India continues to be one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, exhibitions will play a critical role in showcasing technologies, products, manufacturing, and services to global markets. With significant expansion in airports, expressways, and MICE infrastructure over the last decade, the next focus must be on optimising and better utilising our exhibition and convention centres through collective effort and proactive collaboration."

Addressing the gathering, **Shri Sooraj Dhawan, President, IEIA,** shared "Exhibitions are the platforms that showcase technology, innovation, and the manufacturing capabilities of a nation to the world. As an industry, we are not just creating events – we are architects of infrastructure and catalysts of growth. IEIA has been working very

*closely with the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Commerce & Industry to strengthen the exhibition ecosystem as India moves towards becoming the Expo Hub of the World and contributing meaningfully to the vision of Viksit Bharat."*

**Shri Rakesh Kumar, Chairman, IEM,** highlighted "It is a matter of pride to witness both IEIA and India Exposition Mart Ltd. completing 20 remarkable years together. IEIA has played a significant role in uniting organisers, venue partners, and industry stakeholders from across India, and we are proud to be part of this journey. Today, with the upcoming Noida International Airport adding greater connectivity, the opportunities ahead for the exhibition industry are even bigger. At IEM, we have always believed in being a venue by the exhibitors and for the exhibitors."

Concluding the inaugural proceedings with a vote of thanks, **Shri Ubaid Ahmad, Vice President, IEIA,** remarked "India has immense potential, and the next 10 years will be about India and only India. Across sectors, the country is witnessing remarkable growth, stronger global positioning, and expanding opportunities, with the exhibitions and MICE industry playing a significant role in this journey. I sincerely thank all the dignitaries, speakers, partners, delegates, exhibitors, and industry stakeholders for coming together and contributing to the success of Day 1 through meaningful conversations, collaboration, and shared industry vision."

# FICCI FLO WELCOMES The Women's Parliamentary delegation from Sri Lanka



## Travel Mail Desk

FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO), the apex body of businesswomen in the country, welcomed the women parliamentary delegation from Sri Lanka, led by **Ms. Saroja Savithri Paulraj, Minister of Women and Child Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka**, engaged with the distinguished members on strengthening bilateral trade and cultural ties and cooperation between India and Sri Lanka.

During the interactive session, discussions also focused on women's leadership, inclusive development, and greater participation of women in decision-making processes, as well as deeper bilateral collaboration, especially in the spheres of women's leadership, entrepreneurship, and economic participation. Both sides reaffirmed the shared commitment towards deepening ties between the two nations and enhancing the exchange of women's business delegations between the two countries.

*"India and Sri Lanka share a truly timeless relationship. Our ties go back more than 2,500 years, rooted deeply in shared civilizational values, cultural heritage, spiritual traditions, and enduring people-to-people connections. Sri Lanka holds a central place in India's "Neighbourhood First" policy, and our bilateral relations today are mature, multifaceted, and future-oriented. Over the last 42 years, FLO has evolved into one of India's most influential women-led business organisations committed to promoting entrepreneurship, professional excellence, leadership development, and socio-economic empowerment of women across sectors. Over the years, FLO has spearheaded several impactful initiatives that have created meaningful change on the ground. FLO has also launched several dedicated national*



*initiatives, including the FLO Startup Cell, FLO MSME Assist Cell, Women in STEM, Handloom & Handicraft Initiatives, Rural Enterprises Programs, Financial Literacy Campaigns, and Digital Skilling Platforms, among many others. Today, Indian as well as Sri Lankan women are leading businesses, driving innovation, heading institutions, serving in governance, excelling in science and technology, and transforming communities at the grassroots level. From boardrooms to space missions, from startups to local governance, women are contributing meaningfully to the country's progress. And this is one powerful thread that India and Sri Lanka deeply share ... the strength, resilience, and leadership of women." Said **Ms. Puja Garg, President, FICCI FLO**, welcoming the delegation.*

*"We are particularly inspired by the remarkable work being done by the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus of Sri Lanka, a unique and exemplary platform that brings together women leaders across political parties, communities, and regions with the shared goal of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. In many ways, the vision and objectives of the Women Parliamentarians' Caucus and FICCI FLO align strongly. Both*

*institutions believe in empowering women through leadership, opportunity, education, entrepreneurship, advocacy, and community engagement. Both institutions believe that when women rise, societies prosper. And therefore, today's interaction is not merely an exchange of ideas ... it is the beginning of what can become a meaningful and enduring partnership," said **Ms. Saroja Savithri Paulraj, Minister of Women and Child Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka.***

*"Both India and Sri Lanka are just not neighbours but partners in progress bound by history, culture, heritage and the unbreakable spirit of our people. Both countries enjoy a multifaceted relationship that has grown remarkably stronger in recent years. Both nations strongly believe in women's empowerment, and when women lead in governance and the economy, the entire society prospers," said **Mr. Anant Swarup, Secretary General, FICCI.***

Both sides agreed on the exchange of best practices in women entrepreneurship and policy advocacy. Capacity building and leadership development initiatives

Collaboration in MSMEs, startups, handicrafts, textiles, and rural enterprises. Knowledge-sharing in digital inclusion, financial literacy, and STEM education. Joint forums, business delegations, and trade facilitation initiatives, cultural and people-to-people engagements that strengthen our regional cooperation

Those present on the occasion included Past President FICCI Ms. Poonam Sharma, Ms Pooja Chaudhary, Vice President, FICCI FLO, and members of the FLO Praesidium, Past Presidents, Governing Body Members, and senior members of FLO.

# ADTOI CONVENTION

## — RAIPUR, CHHATTISGARH —

12<sup>TH</sup> & 13<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2026



### Travel Mail Desk

ADTOI Announces its 'Annual Convention 2026' in Raipur, Chhattisgarh on 12th & 13th December 2026. The prestigious annual convention will bring together leading stakeholders from the tourism and hospitality fraternity from across the country. The Convention aims to promote the immense tourism potential of Chhattisgarh and position the state as one of the emerging destinations in India's domestic tourism landscape.

**Mr. Ved Khanna, President ADTOI**, made this important announcement addressing the present esteemed members attending the hybrid General House Meeting and assured that the Convention will not only showcase



the tourism offerings of the State of Chhattisgarh but will also create strong business networking opportunities for

tourism stakeholders and contribute towards boosting domestic tourism of Chhattisgarh. He further stated that the Convention will serve as an important platform to connect industry leaders, travel professionals, policymakers, and tourism partners for meaningful deliberations on the future growth of domestic tourism in Chhattisgarh.

**Mr. Vivek Acharya, Managing Director, Chhattisgarh Tourism**, expressed his



provide an excellent platform to showcase Chhattisgarh's rich culture, heritage, eco-tourism, tribal traditions, waterfalls, forests, and unexplored destinations to the national tourism fraternity. He assured ADTOI of all the desired support for the successful Convention.



**Mr. Neelu Sharma, Chairman, Chhattisgarh Tourism Board**, stated that Chhattisgarh is waiting to provide all delegates with the real experience of

the richness of Chhattisgarh's tourism and its culture. He extended his warm welcome to all ADTOI delegates and expressed his optimistic views for the ADTOI Convention, which is all set to take place on 12th & 13th December 2026 in the city of Raipur, Chhattisgarh.

The ADTOI Convention 2026 is expected to witness participation from tour operators, hoteliers, tourism boards, transporters, travel media, and allied tourism stakeholders from across India, making it one of the most significant domestic tourism events of the year. Circuits for the domestic tourism in the state of Chhattisgarh will also be showcased through Pre-Convention FAM Tours in the state of Chhattisgarh.

# GAEHP and Tourism Malaysia Host Exclusive Skill Enhancement Webinar for 100+ Travel Professionals

## Travel Mail Desk

The Global Association of Events and Hospitality Professionals (GAEHP) successfully concluded a virtual product presentation in collaboration with the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board on Thursday, 21 May 2026. Attended by over 100 leading travel agents, the event was a marquee initiative under **The GAEHP Exclusive: Skill Enhancement Series 2026**.

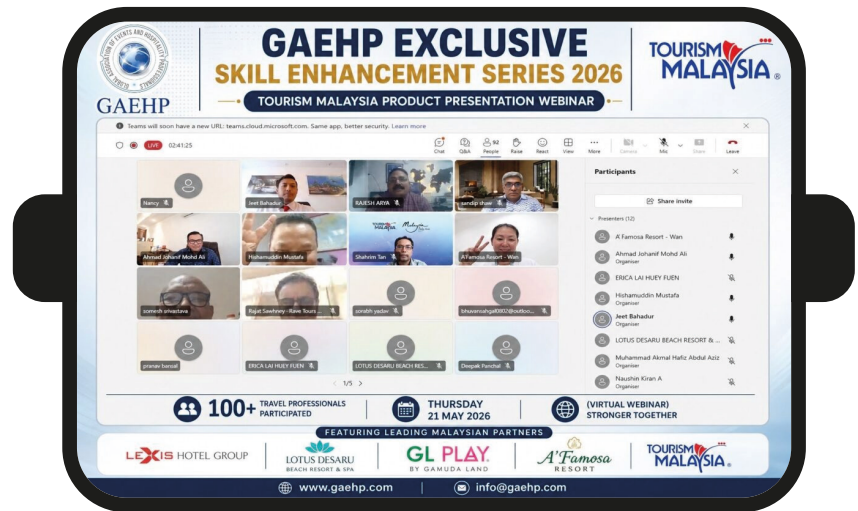
Designed to equip the Indian travel trade with advanced product knowledge, the webinar provided the latest destination updates to effectively promote Malaysia to both leisure and corporate travelers. It featured comprehensive presentations by top-tier Malaysian partners:

- Lexis Hotel Group
- Lotus Desaru Beach Resort & Spa
- GL Play by Gamuda Land
- A'Famosa Resort
- Tourism Malaysia

GAEHP President Mr. Rajesh Arya and Director-Programme & Coordination Mr. Sanjay Sahgal emphasized the

strategic importance of the initiative. *"Equipping our members with firsthand knowledge of prime international destinations is crucial as the global travel landscape evolves. This webinar reinforces our commitment to fostering professional growth and building strong, cross-border business opportunities for our members,"* they noted.

The association extends its deepest gratitude to **Mr. Ahmad Johanif Mohd. Ali, Director of Tourism Malaysia, New Delhi**, for his continuous support of the Indian travel trade. GAEHP also places on record a special note of appreciation for **Mr. Jeet Bahadur** for his meticulous coordination in bringing this highly successful virtual event to fruition.



# PATA and TOP25 Restaurants Enter Partnership to Improve Travellers' Experience

## Travel Mail Desk

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with TOP25 Restaurants, an artificial intelligence-powered travel ranking system that provides travel guidance on a variety of attractions.

Signed by Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO of PATA, and Bernard Metzger, Founder and Chairman of TOP25 Restaurants, the agreement was witnessed by over 300 travel and tourism professionals at the PATA Annual Summit 2026.

Following the signing, **PATA CEO Noor Ahmad Hamid** said, *"We believe that when travellers have access to clear, reliable, and comprehensive information, they are better equipped to make informed decisions and enjoy experiences of a higher calibre. This is why we are keen to support the work of TOP25 World, which plays an important role in enhancing visitor satisfaction."*

**He added**, "Additionally, I would like to sincerely thank TOP25 Restaurants for the opportunity to collaborate, and hope that this will open up new avenues for future joint projects."



Following the signing, **Bernard Metzger, Founder and Chairman of TOP25 Restaurants**, said *"We are honoured to collaborate with PATA in advancing the role of gastronomy tourism as a strategic driver of destination attractiveness, cultural identity, and visitor engagement across the Asia Pacific region. As we look into the possibility of integrating TOP25 Restaurants Awards into PATA events, we aim to create meaningful international visibility for destinations, chefs,*

*restaurants, and culinary ecosystems while contributing added value to the overall event experience."*

**He added** *"Today, destinations increasingly compete not only through heritage and attractions, but also through their culinary identity and food experiences. By recognising and promoting restaurant excellence through our internationally visible awards platforms, we help destinations strengthen their positioning as gastronomy tourism destinations and generate enhanced media, digital, and social media exposure."*

This partnership is also expected to benefit Destination Management Organisations and tourism boards across the Asia Pacific region by improving destination visibility and providing exposure for the local gastronomy and food industry.

Under the MoU, PATA and TOP25 Restaurants will collaborate on mutual event promotion and participation. In addition, each organisation will prioritise representatives from the other organisation for speaking engagements at its events, where appropriate.

# Skyscanner's Neel Ghose on Smarter Summer Travel, AI-Led Planning and India's Growing Appetite for Meaningful Journeys



## Travel Mail Desk

As Indian travellers become more flexible, value-conscious, and experience-driven, travel planning is evolving rapidly with the help of technology and data-led insights. In an exclusive email interview, **Neel Ghose, Travel Trends and Destinations Expert, Skyscanner**, shares how Skyscanner is adapting to changing traveller behaviour through AI-powered discovery tools, flexible search features, and smarter planning solutions. He also highlights emerging summer travel trends, hidden gem destinations gaining popularity among Indian travellers, and the growing influence of purpose-driven travel on destination choices and booking patterns.

### Could you briefly share your role at Skyscanner and the kind of travel insights you work on?

As a Travel Expert at Skyscanner, I am one of a handful of trained experts globally who analyse travel trends based on Skyscanner's data and share relevant travel insights and tips for the Indian market. Travel in India is at an inflexion point today. It's no longer seen as occasional or aspirational, but increasingly as an essential part of lifestyle and self-expression. Being at Skyscanner allows me to work at the intersection of this cultural shift and technology, helping shape how travellers discover, plan, and experience journeys in a smarter, more seamless way.

### How is Skyscanner evolving its platform to cater to the changing needs of Indian travellers today?

Indian travellers today are far more informed, flexible, and value-conscious than ever before, and our platform is evolving in line with these expectations. We are seeing a clear shift from static

planning to more dynamic decision-making. Travellers are no longer locking in one destination or set of dates early on. Instead, they are exploring multiple options, comparing routes, and adapting plans based on value and convenience.

To support this evolving traveller behaviour, Skyscanner is focused on making trip planning simpler and more flexible. For instance, features like our Whole Month view help travellers quickly identify the most cost-effective travel windows, making it easier to plan around price fluctuations without needing to search day by day.

At the same time, we're also evolving how travellers search altogether. With the launch of the Skyscanner app in ChatGPT, travellers can now search for flights in a far more natural and conversational way, whether that's asking for the cheapest flights to Japan in August or exploring destinations within a certain budget. It reflects a broader shift we're seeing, where travellers increasingly want answers and recommendations, not just search results.

We're continuing to invest in discovery-led experiences powered by AI, helping travellers move beyond obvious choices and uncover destinations that better match their preferences, budgets, and travel intent.

**Neel Ghose**  
Travel Trends and Destinations Expert,  
Skyscanner

### What key trends are you currently observing in travel search and booking behaviour among Indian users on Skyscanner?

Summer in 2026 is shaping up to be a highly intent-driven travel season. Our latest insights from the "Smarter Summer Report" show that nearly 9 in 10 Indians are either planning or have already booked their summer holidays, which reflects a strong and sustained appetite for travel.

What's changing, however, is how travellers are approaching planning. There is a clear shift towards smarter, more adaptive behaviour. For instance, 48% of travellers are closely tracking airfare fluctuations, while 45% are evaluating overall trip value more carefully.

We are also seeing growing flexibility in decision-making. Instead of cancelling trips, many travellers are adjusting, whether that means switching destinations, rethinking travel dates, or exploring alternative routes. In fact, 30% are willing to change destinations altogether if it helps optimise costs or improve the experience.

Another standout trend is the move towards offbeat travel. Around 81% of travellers are open to lesser-known

destinations, and 60% are actively seeking quieter, less crowded places. This reflects a broader shift from “where everyone is going” to “where else can I go,” signalling a more confident and curious traveller mindset.

### **Skyscanner has been focusing on smarter travel planning—how does the platform empower users to make more informed and cost-effective travel decisions?**

Smarter travel planning today is about giving travellers the right information at the right time, so they can make decisions that balance cost, convenience, and experience.

At Skyscanner, we enable this through a combination of data-driven insights and intuitive tools. Tools like Price Alerts help travellers monitor fare movements in real time and book when prices are more favourable, while DROPS helps travellers discover flights that have seen price drops of over 20% compared to their lowest point in the last seven days.

We’re also seeing that travellers are becoming more aware of pricing patterns. As seen in our Smarter Summer Report, 58% already believe that months like July can offer better value compared to peak periods like August. Our platform builds on this awareness by helping users validate and act on these insights instantly.

Ultimately, the goal is to shift travellers from reactive booking to proactive planning, where they feel informed, in control, and confident about getting the best possible value for their trip.

### **With Summer Travel 2026 approaching, what are some strategies travellers can adopt to “outsmart” peak season travel in terms of pricing and planning?**

Outsmarting peak season travel isn’t about cutting back on plans; it’s about being smarter with how you plan them. Airfares can move quickly during high-demand periods, so being open to different dates, nearby airports, or alternative destinations can make a meaningful difference. Mixing and matching airlines or airports instead of booking a standard return route can also help travellers unlock better value.



A useful first step is to search broadly before narrowing down. Tools like Skyscanner’s Explore Everywhere search really come into play. It allows travellers to instantly scan multiple destinations based on their budget and dates, making it easier to spot unexpected deals and make smarter, value-led decisions.

Travellers can also benefit from flying during less popular hours, such as late evening or overnight flights, which are often more affordable while also maximising time at the destination. For longer journeys, considering indirect routes instead of only direct flights can sometimes unlock significant savings while also offering the opportunity to explore an additional destination along the way.

Additionally, travellers can refer to Skyscanner’s “Smarter Summer Report” for some of the cheapest days, weeks, and alternative destinations to travel to during the summer period.

### **Could you highlight a few emerging or hidden gem destinations that Indian travellers should consider this summer?**

We’re seeing strong interest in destinations that offer a mix of value, uniqueness, and relatively lower crowds. Through Skyscanner’s Smarter Summer Report, we analysed traveller behaviour, search trends, and summer travel planning patterns to identify the destinations gaining the most traction among Indian travellers this season.

In our list of the top cheapest destinations for the season, we’re seeing domestic destinations such as Kozhikode, Diu, Puducherry, Shillong, and Jammu emerge strongly, offering travellers a mix of cultural depth, scenic beauty, and relatively more accessible price points compared to traditional hotspots.

Internationally, destinations such as Penang in Malaysia, Krabi in Thailand, and Phnom Penh in Cambodia also featured among destinations seeing growing interest from Indian travellers looking for affordable yet enriching experiences.

What’s particularly interesting is that this shift towards hidden gems is not just about cost. Travellers are actively seeking quieter, more meaningful experiences, with many prioritising destinations that allow them to engage more deeply with local culture and communities.

### **How do you see the rise of purpose-driven travel influencing destination choices and travel patterns in the coming years?**

Purpose-driven travel is becoming a defining force in how trips are planned and experienced. Today’s travellers are not just asking “where can I go,” but “what will I take away from this experience.” This shift is already visible in our data, with nearly 9 in 10 travellers saying it’s important that their holiday spend benefits local communities and small businesses.

As a result, we expect to see continued movement towards destinations that offer authenticity, cultural immersion, and a sense of connection. This aligns closely with the growing interest in offbeat and community-led travel, as well as the willingness to move away from crowded, mainstream locations.

In the long term, this will reshape travel patterns significantly. Destinations that may have previously been overlooked will gain prominence, while travellers increasingly prioritise impact, meaning, and personal relevance alongside value.

For Skyscanner, this means continuing to enable discovery and helping travellers uncover options that align not just with their budgets, but with their values and travel intent.

# From Backpacker Hostels to a Travel Lifestyle Ecosystem:

## Aviral Gupta on Zostel's Journey & the Future of Experiential Travel

### Travel Mail Desk

What began as India's first backpacker hostel in Jodhpur has today evolved into one of the country's most influential travel-led lifestyle ecosystems. In this exclusive interaction, **Mr. Aviral Gupta, CEO of Zostel and Zo World**, reflects on his entrepreneurial journey with Zostel, the vision behind building community-driven travel experiences, and how the brand has transformed the way young Indians explore the world. From unlocking remote destinations and championing safe solo travel for women to expanding across Southeast Asia with Zo World, Aviral shares insights into the evolving preferences of modern travellers, the rise of alternative accommodation, and why India is poised to become a global backpacking powerhouse.



**Could you share your entrepreneurial journey and what inspired you to join Zostel early on? What have been some defining moments along the way?**

I joined Zostel in 2014 as the company's very first employee, and honestly, it was never a calculated decision. Seven young graduates had launched India's first backpacker hostel on August 15, 2013, in Jodhpur, betting that Indian travellers were ready for something entirely new. No blueprints, no comparable models, plenty of scepticism. But what drew me in was the mission itself: to help people discover themselves while meeting others, exploring new cultures and perspectives, and to genuinely change the way India travels.

We realised early on that we were never really building a hostel chain. The hostel was the entry point, not the destination. The bigger ambition was always a community-led ecosystem where accommodation, experiences, and discovery live together on one platform. I learned entrepreneurship by doing, moving through nearly every vertical along the way, operations, marketing, product, tech, HR, and more, building it all alongside college friends who were young, passionate, and just stubborn enough to do things differently.

Staying true to that original vision through a decade of growth, pivots, and a global pandemic has been the thread that holds everything together, but if you ask what really keeps us going, it is not the numbers. It is the stories. People who found their closest friends at a Zostel, Couples who met in a dorm and got married years later. Solo travellers who arrived unsure of themselves and left with a renewed sense of who they are.

What I am most proud of is when we started, people told us Zostel would never work in India because solo female travellers would never feel safe sharing a space with strangers. That criticism pushed us. Today, Zostel has hosted more solo female travellers and made them feel genuinely safe than any other brand in the youth travel space. That shift in how India travels, that is what this has always been about and honestly, it still feels like we are just getting started.

**How would you describe Zostel's core philosophy, and how has the brand evolved since its inception?**

Zostel was never just about a bed for the night, but rather the philosophy from day one has been to make travel a way of life, to create spaces where strangers become friends, and the journey is

as meaningful as the destination. We were building communities long before community-led became a buzzword. We started with one hostel in Jodhpur. Today, Zo World spans Zostel, Zostel Plus, Zostel Homes, Zo Trips, Zo Villas, Zo Houses, and beyond, growing from India's backpacking pioneer into what I genuinely believe is the country's first travel-rooted lifestyle ecosystem. And the results speak for themselves. The community is no longer just consuming the experience; it is actively building it, driving demand, uncovering new destinations, and creating new Zostels themselves. That network effect was always the vision. The last decade was just the foundation. We are more driven than ever to shape how India travels over the next ten years and to build something that truly stands the test of time.

**What factors guide your choice of locations, and which regions are seeing the strongest growth?**

Two things guide every location decision above all else: traveller intent and destination potential. We have always had a strong instinct for going where the soul of travel truly is: remote mountains, cultural heritage towns, coastal escapes. We opened in Spiti, Ladakh, and the

Northeast long before these became mainstream, but beneath that instinct is a deeper belief: every destination has a story to tell and a culture to share. For us, the question was never whether a location is suitable. It has always been a question of when and how to unlock it.

India, with over 5000 years of history, philosophy, and lived culture, holds some of the most immense and untapped travel potential in the world. As more travellers seek depth over convenience and meaning over comfort, we genuinely believe India is on its way to becoming one of the leading backpacking markets globally. For us, that is not just an ambition. It is an inevitability.

Right now, the Himalayan corridor, Himachal, Uttarakhand, and Ladakh, continues to see strong demand, and the Northeast is growing fast. Internationally, Southeast Asia is our next big frontier. We have already launched Zostel Phuket in Thailand, and are on track to open across Bangkok, Bali, Colombo, Mirissa, Vietnam, Japan, and beyond. With Zo Trips already building communities and driving demand across Vietnam, Japan, Georgia, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka, the infrastructure is in place, and the momentum is real.

### How do you ensure consistency in guest experience across such varied properties while still retaining local character?

Consistency in hospitality is one of the hardest things to get right, and it has been central to our thinking for over a decade. The answer for us has never been uniformity. It lives in the intangibles, the warmth, the sense of community, the quality of human interaction. Over the last ten years, we have invested heavily in building our own proprietary tech and operational systems, SOPs and frameworks that ensure baseline standards across every property. But local character remains non-negotiable. Every Zostel is encouraged to reflect its geography in its design, its menus, and its programming. Our Zo Trips are built with local hosts and itineraries crafted by people from the region. The goal is simple: when you walk into a Zostel in Jaisalmer versus one in Meghalaya, you feel the same Zo warmth but experience an entirely different world.

### How do you see the hostel and homestay segment evolving in India?

India is at an inflexion point, and now the traveller is fundamentally different, more intentional, more experiential, and far less fixated on luxury as the default measure of a good trip. Young India wants meaning and connection



from travel, not just comfort. The hostel and homestay segment is a direct beneficiary of this shift. We are seeing travellers in their 30s and even families now exploring the format, something that would have been unthinkable five years ago.

We introduced Zostel Plus in 2022 to serve this premium experiential demand, and the uptake has been strong, with 20% of our FY25 travellers choosing Plus properties. The segment will continue to premiumize, but the soul of community travel will stay intact.

### What key trends are you observing in how people travel today, and how is Zostel adapting?

What stands out most is how travel preferences are evolving. More travellers today are embracing slow travel, choosing to spend longer in fewer destinations and seeking deeper, more meaningful experiences instead of ticking places off a checklist. Community-led travel is gaining momentum, with people increasingly drawn to journeys shared with like-minded individuals, even if they begin as strangers. There is also a growing preference for private, nature-immersed experiences, particularly among families and groups seeking seclusion without compromising on quality.

What excites us equally is the next generation of travellers, more experimental, more spontaneous, and far more willing to show up without a plan and simply trust the experience. They want to live like a local, to have their own Zo friend at every destination who takes care of everything, so they can be fully present in the moment.

Zo World is adapting across all of this. Zo Trips delivers curated, immersive group experiences with local hosts embedded in every itinerary. Zo Houses is being designed for founders, artists, and digital nomads seeking long-stay co-living, and Zo Villas addresses the demand for premium private escapes, eco-friendly, prefabricated vacation homes in remote, scenic locations that traditional hospitality simply hasn't reached.

### What is your outlook for the backpacking and alternative accommodation segment over the next few years?

India's domestic travel market is growing at a pace the industry has never seen before. India's domestic travel market is growing at a pace the industry has never seen before. Young Indians are travelling more, earlier, and more boldly and yet, backpacking as a segment is still less than five percent of its true potential. Hundreds of destinations, each with its own history and culture, are waiting to be discovered.

What has been fascinating to watch is how Zostel has become a recommendation engine. Since 2019, people have come to us not just to book a bed, but to find out where to go next. When a Zostel opens somewhere new, the pattern is consistent: visitors follow, the local economy shifts, and a destination is born. Bir is a case study in exactly that, and Poomburai is the next one. The appetite for authentic, affordable, experience-rich travel is massive and still largely underpenetrated. We are expanding into Southeast Asia, building out our digital ecosystem, and the next three to five years are about hyperscale, while keeping the soul entirely the same.



**Mr. Harish Gopalakrishnan**  
General Manager of The Westin Goa

# Five Years of Redefining Luxury and Wellness in North Goa

Insights from **Harish Gopalakrishnan** of The Westin Goa

inclination towards social, shareable moments alongside mindful, wellness-led experiences. We've adapted by curating a diverse mix of programming—from high-energy evenings and interactive dining to wellness rituals and family-friendly offerings—ensuring there is something meaningful for every guest profile.

**The property positions itself as an experience-led destination. Could you elaborate on the key experiences that set The Westin Goa apart?**

Our focus has been on creating a destination within the hotel itself. Guests

can move seamlessly

between experiences—starting the day with wellness activities, exploring curated outdoor or cultural moments, and transitioning into vibrant, high-energy evenings. We place equal emphasis on innovation and inclusivity, ensuring that whether it's families, couples, or groups of friends, everyone finds experiences tailored to them. It's this layered, ever-evolving mix that truly sets us apart.

**Wellness is a core pillar of the Westin brand. How has this been integrated into the guest experience at the property?**

Wellness is thoughtfully woven into every touchpoint of the stay. It goes beyond just dedicated facilities and extends into how guests sleep, dine, move, and unwind. At the same time, we recognise that wellness today also means balance—creating space for indulgence, celebration, and connection. Our approach ensures guests can engage with wellness in a way that feels intuitive to them, whether that's through structured programming or simply the overall pace and design of their stay.

**What role does location particularly being in Anjuna play in shaping the hotel's identity and offerings?**

Being in Anjuna is integral to who we are. The neighbourhood brings together a unique mix of culture, creativity, and energy, which naturally influences our programming and overall vibe. It allows us to offer guests a sense of place that feels authentic, while also serving as a gateway to some of North Goa's most iconic experiences. This balance between local character and contemporary luxury plays a significant role in shaping our identity.

**Could you share insights into your dining concepts and how they cater to both in-house guests and local patrons?**

Our dining approach is rooted in variety, innovation, and accessibility. Each concept is designed to offer a distinct experience, ensuring guests can explore different moods and flavours without leaving the property. At the same time, we've consciously created spaces and programming that appeal to the local community—through special events, evolving menus, and high-energy evenings. This blend allows us to remain relevant not just to our resident guests but also as a social and culinary destination in our own right.

**Looking ahead, what are your key priorities and vision for The Westin Goa over the next few years?**

Our focus is on continuing to evolve as a leading experience-driven destination in Goa. This means pushing boundaries with innovative programming, strengthening our connection to the local culture, and enhancing the diversity of experiences we offer. We aim further to refine the balance between wellness and high-energy social experiences, ensuring every guest—across age groups and travel styles—finds something that resonates. Ultimately, our vision is to remain dynamic, relevant, and consistently engaging for every guest who walks through our doors.

## Travel Mail Desk

**As The Westin Goa completes five years, how would you describe its journey and evolution in North Goa's competitive hospitality market?**

Over the past five years, our journey has been defined by a strong sense of identity and the ability to evolve with our guests. What began as a contemporary luxury offering has grown into a dynamic, experience-led destination that reflects the spirit of North Goa. We've embraced both sides of the market—those seeking wellness, balance, and restoration, as well as guests looking for energy, social connection, and celebration. This duality has allowed us to carve a distinct space for ourselves in a highly competitive landscape.

**How have guest behaviour and expectations shifted over the past few years, and how has the hotel adapted to these changes?**

Guests today are far more experience-driven. They're looking for stays that feel personalised, immersive, and varied—where they can do as much or as little as they like. There's also a stronger



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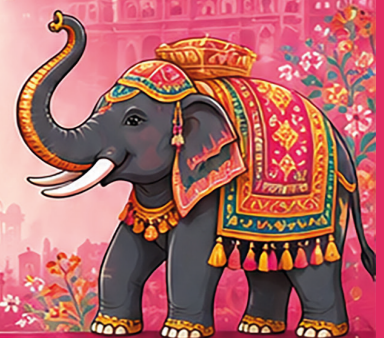
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## Espire Hospitality Limited expands its uber-luxury portfolio by agreeing with Marriott International to manage its upcoming 'JW Marriott Resort & Spa' near Vrindavan

### Travel Mail Desk

After the historic success of Six Senses Fort Barwara, Ranthambore, Espire Hospitality Limited announced another significant signing for its uber-luxury portfolio with Marriott International. The addition of JW Marriott Resort & Spa is a move set to redefine the luxury hospitality segment of the region.

The resort, slated to welcome guests from January 2029, will feature 151 luxurious keys, comprising elegantly appointed rooms, expansive villas with cascading waterfalls, and an opulent Presidential Suite. Designed for staycations, corporate FITs, conferences, MICE, and weddings, JW Marriott Resort & Spa aims to provide a blend of serenity and world-class luxury, elevating the standards of mindful hospitality.

Commenting on the signing, **Mr. Akhil Arora, CEO & Managing Director, Espire Hospitality Limited**, said, "We are delighted to join hands with Marriott International for this marquee project that reflects our deep commitment to creating exceptional hospitality



destinations. JW Marriott Resort & Spa has been envisioned as a sanctuary of soulful luxury, where contemporary elegance meets nature, culture, and timeless experiences. This partnership marks a significant step in strengthening our luxury portfolio, and we look forward

to bringing another world-class resort experience to our guests."

"This partnership with Marriott International is a testament to our strategic focus on expanding the uber-luxury portfolio with iconic, high-impact developments. We are proud to bring yet another landmark project to life, reinforcing the momentum of our rapid growth trajectory," added **Mr. Gagan Oberoi, CEO, Espire Group**.

At JW Marriott Resort & Spa, the guests can indulge in exclusive culinary experiences at three stunning dining venues, including an all-day multi-cuisine restaurant and a speciality restaurant with alfresco seating, along with a sophisticated poolside bar. The wellness sanctuary will be a standout highlight, featuring the Eden-inspired spa with four therapy rooms, a full-service health club, a stylish salon, and dedicated recreational spaces, including a kids' club and a unique mini water park. The outdoor heated pool and separate children's pool will further enrich the guest experience.

## Airbnb's 'Stay Your Way' Campaign Celebrates a Generation Travelling On Its Own Terms

### Travel Mail Desk

Airbnb India launched Stay Your Way – a bold new campaign celebrating a generation of Indian travellers who have decisively rewritten the rules of travel: away from inherited itineraries, and towards trips that are entirely, unapologetically their own.

Airbnb's Stay Your Way campaign taps into a broader truth about how Gen Z moves through the world – a generation that has made personal expression a hallmark of how they dress, eat, and engage with culture. According to a recent survey, 87% of young Indian travellers say that how they travel is an expression of who they are. The campaign positions Airbnb as the platform that brings that same individuality to the trip, with millions of unique homes across neighbourhoods, styles, and settings that suit exactly how they want to travel and experience a place.

The campaign comprises three 20-second hero films capturing trips as they unfold: a late-night swim, a morning



yoga session on a private balcony, a courtyard turned cricket pitch. Unscripted and lived-in, they reflect how this generation actually travels. At the centre of each film are culturally

resonant Gen Z voices: TrickSingh, hip-hop artist; Akshara Shivakumar, model and content creator; and Ahilya Bamroo, actor – each chosen for the cultural authority they carry with young Indian audiences, and a shared instinct to travel in a way that feels unmistakably like them.

"Across India, we are seeing a clear shift in how people approach travel today. Gen Z is leading this change – moving away from set plans and choosing the freedom to shape their trips around what feels right to them. In this shift, the stay is becoming just as important as the destination, sometimes even more. With Airbnb's Stay Your Way campaign, we wanted to reflect this evolving mindset, where travel feels original, flexible, and more individual. Airbnb offers millions of homes, each as unique as the people who stay in them – private pools, kitchens, character-filled rooms, and neighbourhoods that match your vibe. This campaign is a celebration of that freedom," said **Amanpreet Singh Bajaj, Country Head, Airbnb India and Southeast Asia**.

# Sarovar Hotels Brings Back 'Book Now, Pay Jab Aap Aao' for Flexible Summer Travel Planning

## Travel Mail Desk

Sarovar Hotels has reintroduced its consumer-first campaign, 'Book Now, Pay Jab Aap Aao', aimed at offering travellers greater flexibility and convenience while planning their summer getaways across India.

Designed to encourage stress-free travel planning, the limited-period offer allows guests to book stays across participating Sarovar Hotels properties with no advance payment requirement, while enabling payment at the time of check-in. The campaign also offers zero cancellation charges, giving travellers added confidence and flexibility during the peak holiday season.

With room rates starting from INR 3999, the offer is valid for bookings made until 30th June 2026, with stay dates applicable until 31st July 2026.

The campaign spans Sarovar Hotels' diverse portfolio across leisure destinations, hill stations, beach locations, pilgrimage hubs and key



urban centres, catering to a wide range of travellers, including families, couples, corporate guests and weekend holiday seekers.

As domestic travel demand continues to witness strong momentum, the initiative reflects evolving traveller preferences towards flexibility, convenience and value-driven experiences while making booking decisions.

Commenting on the campaign, **Nitika Khanna, Director – Marketing & Communication, Sarovar Hotels**, said "Today's travellers value flexibility and convenience as much as the destination itself. With the return of 'Book Now, Pay Jab Aap Aao', we wanted to simplify the travel planning process and offer guests greater confidence while booking their holidays. The campaign reflects our continued focus on guest-centric hospitality and creating accessible travel experiences across our hotel portfolio."

Through this initiative, Sarovar Hotels aims to make holiday planning more seamless and accessible, allowing guests to enjoy meaningful travel experiences without the pressure of upfront commitments.

## Summit Hotels & Resorts expands into Arunachal Pradesh with Rungkhung Village Resort in Dirang

### Travel Mail Desk

Marking its continued expansion across the Eastern Himalayan region, Summit Hotels & Resorts has announced Rungkhung Village Resort, a boutique retreat in Dirang under The Signature Collection, further strengthening its presence in emerging high-potential destinations.

Located in the scenic Dirang Valley and overlooking the Kameng River, the property is positioned as a refined mountain retreat offering immersive views of layered valleys, mist-covered hills, and untouched natural surroundings. Designed to blend local Arunachali character with contemporary comfort, the resort caters to leisure travellers seeking slower, experience-led stays.

The boutique property features well-appointed rooms and suites, including Premium View Rooms and Junior Suites, each equipped with private balconies that open to panoramic river and valley views. Interiors are designed with warm



tones, soft textures, and modern amenities, creating a comfortable yet contextually rooted stay experience.

Commenting on the addition, **Sumit Mitruka, CEO, Summit Hotels & Resorts**, said, "Dirang is an emerging destination with immense natural appeal, and we see growing interest from travellers looking for less crowded, experience-driven locations. Our approach has been to create a property

that stays true to the destination while offering the comfort and consistency that guests expect from the Summit brand."

The addition of Rungkhung Village Resort reflects Summit Hotels & Resorts' continued focus on building a strong portfolio of boutique properties across the Eastern Himalayan belt, with an emphasis on location-led hospitality and experiential travel.

# Sustainable Summer Travel: How OPO is Reducing Our Footprint

by Mr. Sandeep Basu is the CEO of OPO Hotels and Resorts

## Travel Mail Desk

As summer travel gathers momentum each year, the hospitality industry faces a dual responsibility: delivering memorable guest experiences while minimising environmental impact. At OPO Hotels and Resorts, we believe that sustainability is no longer an option—it is a necessity that must be embedded into every layer of our operations. Today's conscious traveller is not only seeking comfort and value but also looking to engage with brands that demonstrate genuine environmental responsibility.

One of our key focus areas is energy efficiency. Across our properties, we are steadily transitioning to energy-saving systems, including LED lighting, smart room controls, and efficient HVAC systems. Wherever feasible, we are integrating renewable energy sources such as solar power, particularly in destinations that experience high sunlight exposure during the summer months. This not only reduces our dependence on conventional energy but also lowers operational costs in the long run.



Water conservation is another critical priority, especially in regions where summer intensifies scarcity. We have implemented low-flow fixtures, rainwater harvesting systems, and water recycling practices across multiple properties.

In addition, our teams are trained to monitor and manage water usage carefully, ensuring minimal wastage without compromising guest comfort.

Waste management remains a cornerstone of our sustainability efforts. OPO Hotels and Resorts has been actively reducing single-use plastics, introducing alternatives such as glass bottles, biodegradable packaging, and refillable amenities. Segregation of waste at source, composting organic waste, and partnering with local recyclers are practices we continue to strengthen across our portfolio.

Equally important is our focus on local sourcing and community engagement. Summer travel often brings guests closer to cultural and regional experiences, and we see this as an opportunity to support local economies. By sourcing fresh produce locally, promoting regional cuisines, and collaborating with local artisans, we not only reduce our carbon footprint but also enrich the guest experience with authenticity.

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## Radisson Bengaluru City Center Hosts 5th Edition of GReaT Conversations in Collaboration with Karnataka Event Management Association (KEMA)

### Travel Mail Desk

Radisson Bengaluru City Center hosted the 5th edition of GReaT Conversations in collaboration with the Karnataka Event Management Association (KEMA), bringing together leading voices from the events, weddings, aviation, and media sectors for a curated roundtable discussion on the evolving future of corporate events, weddings, and sustainable hospitality practices.



Hosted at Radisson Bengaluru City Centre, the event also reinforced Bengaluru's growing importance as a leading source market for MICE, weddings, and lifestyle-led hospitality experiences in South India. Industry leaders discussed the importance of closer alignment between hotels and planners to ensure events are executed

responsibly while delivering elevated guest experiences.

The session was moderated by Jit Bose, Vice President – Commercial, and attended by Puneet Dutta, COO and Anu Shinoj from GRT Hotels & Resorts. Karnataka Event Management Association was represented by

Tony Stephen, President, Srikant Kanoi, Executive Vice President, along with other key members of the Executive Committee, reinforcing the strong collaboration between the hospitality and events industries.

Speaking on the initiative, **Vikram Cotah, CEO, GRT Hotels & Resorts**, said "We thank the Executive Committee of the Karnataka Event Management Association for collaborating with us on another edition of GReaT Conversations and bringing together industry thought leaders to discuss the trends and future of sustainable events. As the MICE and wedding segments continue to grow, hotels and event partners need to create experiences that are not only memorable but also mindful of the environment and the communities we serve."

## Cygnnet Hotels & Resorts Expands Bihar Footprint with New Cygnnet Inn in Motihari

### Travel Mail Desk

Cygnnet Hotels & Resorts has announced the signing of Cygnnet Inn Motihari, a new brownfield hospitality project in Motihari, Bihar, further strengthening the company's growing presence in the state and reinforcing its strategic expansion across emerging Tier II and Tier III destinations in India.

The upcoming hotel will operate under Cygnnet Inn, the company's contemporary midscale brand, and is being developed to cater to the growing requirements of business travellers, social gatherings, and leisure guests in the region.

Located in the East Champaran district, Motihari has steadily emerged as an important regional centre with increasing commercial activity and improving connectivity. The city also holds historical significance as the place associated with Mahatma Gandhi's



Champaran Satyagraha movement, while rising trade, educational activities, and regional business movement continue to drive demand for organised hospitality infrastructure.

Commenting on the development, **Sarbendra Sarkar, Founder and Managing Director, Cygnnet Hotels & Resorts**, said *"Hospitality demand in India is increasingly expanding beyond traditional metro markets. We are witnessing growing demand for quality branded accommodation and event infrastructure across emerging cities, driven by regional economic activity, improving connectivity, and evolving travel patterns. Motihari represents an important market with strong long-term potential, and this signing aligns with our strategy of strengthening our presence across high-growth destinations."*

Cygnnet Inn is the smart and contemporary midscale brand from Cygnnet Hotels & Resorts, focused on delivering efficient hospitality experiences through comfortable stays, contemporary design, modern amenities, and value-driven service standards tailored for today's travellers.

## BWH Hotels further strengthens its portfolio in Punjab with the signing of Best Western Moga, a landmark hotel in the heart of the city

### Travel Mail Desk

BWH Hotels has announced the signing of Best Western Moga, further expanding its presence in India and reinforcing its commitment to delivering quality hospitality in emerging markets. Moga is one of Punjab's key agricultural and industrial cities. Well connected by road and rail, the city plays an important role in trade and transportation and is also known for its cultural and historical importance.

The property is strategically located on the Barnala-Amritsar Bypass Road in Moga, Punjab. The upcoming hotel is being developed as a full-service destination for both business and leisure travellers.

Slated to open in 2030, the hotel will offer 50 well-designed rooms, a vibrant all-day dining restaurant, Banquet Facilities and landscaped lawns for weddings and events, a stylish bar, a swimming pool, and a range of recreational facilities. The property is conveniently located approximately 7 km from Moga Railway Station.

**Yash Chadha, Owner, Best Western Moga**, said, *"We are delighted to partner*



*with Best Western for our property in Moga. This partnership will create a new standard of hospitality in the region and offer a preferred venue for weddings, events, and extended stays."*

Sharing his views on the signing, **Atul Jain, Chief Operating Officer, BWH**

**Hotels for India, Bangladesh & Sri Lanka**, said, *"This signing marks another key milestone in our growth across Northern India. Expanding into emerging cultural and business destinations like Moga reflects our focus on strengthening presence beyond metros and tapping into high-potential regional markets."*

# Hermitage Hotel & Resort: Starhotels brings the Italian villeggiatura to Forte dei Marmi

## Travel Mail Desk

Some places do not reveal themselves at first glance. Hermitage Hotel & Resort is one of them. It is not from the street that it makes its impression, but upon arrival, when the space suddenly opens up, and the noise gives way to the quiet of the greenery. In Forte dei Marmi, where everything may seem already known, there is still a place capable of surprise: more than one and a half hectares of private gardens unfold as an unexpected oasis, a hidden retreat that has long defined the identity of this historic Versilia address.

Set amid lush greenery, Hermitage Hotel & Resort offers a more private, relaxed experience, where spaces breathe and time naturally slows down. Here, nature is not simply a backdrop, but a living presence that accompanies every moment of the stay, creating a sense of intimacy and well-being that is increasingly rare. The sea is only minutes away, yet reaching it becomes part of a slow, quintessentially Forte dei Marmi ritual: by bicycle, or aboard the hotel's private electric shuttle.



Hermitage also redefines the idea of the contemporary family resort. For younger guests, there is not simply a play area, but an entire world of their own, set in a dedicated green space away from the adults' relaxation areas. Those who wish to truly unwind can do so, knowing that their children are happy and in good hands. Between sand, sports, and

creative activities, the weekly program offers a rich and engaging mix of experiences – from Lego Lab to Circus Lab, and the ever-popular treasure hunt – while each day ends with small shared sunset rituals, from gelato and music to moments designed especially for the little ones.

*"Hermitage escapes traditional definitions: it is not simply a seaside hotel, but a nature-filled retreat. It is our first resort, and we wanted it to be exactly this: a place where guests can enjoy the privilege of slowing down, defined by an elegance that does not need to announce itself,"* says **Elisabetta Fabri, Starhotels' President and CEO.** *"Its garden, its intimate atmosphere, and its authentic relationship with guests express a way of experiencing hospitality that feels deeply our own: the memory of Italian summer holidays as they once were. An experience where relationships and tranquillity have room to flourish again. Hermitage does not set out to impress. And yet it does. Because it is rare. Because it is hidden. Because, once discovered, it is difficult to forget."*

# OUTRIGGER Phi Phi Island Resort Opens Where Barefoot Luxury Meets the Andaman Sea

## Travel Mail Desk

OUTRIGGER Hospitality Group announces the opening of OUTRIGGER Phi Phi Island Resort in Thailand, welcoming its first guests and joining OUTRIGGER's Thailand portfolio alongside properties in Koh Samui, Khao Lak, and Phuket. Set within the protected boundaries of Hat Noppharat Thara-Mu Ko Phi Phi National Park, the resort offers 63 suites and villas on a stretch of coastline where limestone cliffs rise from jade-green water, coconut palms line a white-sand beach, and the Andaman Sea sets the rhythm of each day.

*"What we've created at Phi Phi Island is truly special – a resort that matches one of Thailand's most breathtaking settings and honours the culture and environment that make it extraordinary. This opening is a reflection of OUTRIGGER's long-term commitment to Thailand, and for those who make the journey here, I believe it will be unlike anything they've experienced before,"* said **Jeff Wagoner, President & CEO of OUTRIGGER Hospitality Group.**

Accessible only by boat, the resort sits inside a national park where development is tightly controlled,



and the natural environment remains largely untouched. Guests arrive by sea, stepping onto the sand as the Andaman horizon opens before them.

The resort's suites and villas are guided by "Nit Thra," a Thai concept centred on the soul of rest. Handcrafted furnishings, organic textiles, and woven motifs drawn from the island's craft traditions give each space its character, alongside

contemporary amenities. Three accommodation types lead the offering: the Hilltop Ocean View Pool Villa, with a private infinity pool and sea views; the Beachfront Pool Villa, positioned directly on the sand; and the Family Garden Villa, wrapped in tropical gardens.

The national park that surrounds the resort is one of the most biodiverse marine environments in Southeast Asia. PADI-certified diving excursions reach coral formations where sea turtles, manta rays, and reef sharks are regular sightings. Eco-sensitive boat rides access islands and coves that see limited visitor traffic. Long-tail boat picnics travel the mangrove channels at a pace that suits the landscape. Back on land, private Thai cooking classes, non-motorised water sports, and bead-making sessions, drawn from the island's ancient craft traditions, round out the offering. Relaxation journeys at Zeavola Spa are grounded in Southern Thai wellness practices and local botanicals. The Coral Kids Club and a teen zone ensure the resort works equally well for families. For guests who wish to explore further, Tonsai Village – Phi Phi's lively hub of restaurants, bars, and local shops – is a short boat ride away.

# A New Chapter by the Sea Unfolds at InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort

## Travel Mail Desk

InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort – part of IHG Hotels & Resorts’ luxury & lifestyle portfolio – continues to redefine Chennai’s beachfront experience, unveiling the final chapter of its transformation. Continuing the brand’s legacy as a pioneer of luxury hospitality for over 80 years, the reimagined InterContinental resort is now open, with an ocean-facing ballroom along with expansive beach lawns, new restaurants and bars, new luxury suites with plunge pools, with newly introduced sports pavilion along with scenic walking trails and a meditation garden for mindful experiences.

InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort emerges as a defining expression of the brand’s global evolution, now rolling out across the world – built on the belief that travel has the ability to expand the mind and connect cultures. From intentional, restorative design to Concierge-led moments and spaces to celebrate, the experience has been crafted to satisfy guests’ lifelong pursuit for knowledge and deliver rich cultural insight.



*“The reopening of InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort marks an important milestone for our luxury portfolio in India. This multi-million-dollar transformation reflects our commitment to delivering destination-led, experience-rich stays that combine world-class hospitality with a strong sense of place. We are excited to welcome guests back to a reimagined resort that sets a new benchmark for mindful luxury on the Coromandel Coast,”* said **Sudeep Jain, Managing Director, South West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts.**

Reflecting on this new chapter, **Anand Nair, General Manager, InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort**, commented *“This relaunch marks a proud milestone for us, unveiling a truly transformed resort. Envisioned as a coastal icon reimagined, it brings together the richness of South Indian culture with modern luxury. Every space tells a story and each experience is thoughtfully curated to offer guests a more personal and elevated stay. Our ambition is to position the resort not merely as a place to stay, but as a destination in its own right.”*

InterContinental Chennai Mahabalipuram Resort joins a growing collection of over 240 InterContinental hotels and resorts in far-flung destinations across the world. The portfolio continues to expand in the region with the announcement of InterContinental Pokhara Resort in Nepal and InterContinental Colombo in Sri Lanka set to open in the coming year.

# Accor Introduces Mantis Brand in India, South Asia

## Travel Mail Desk

Accor, a global leader in hospitality, has announced the signing of Mantis Nagarhole, a premium eco-resort set in the heart of Karnataka’s wildlife landscape. This milestone marks the debut of Mantis in India, further strengthening the Group’s diverse and fast-evolving regional portfolio. Known for its conservation-led ethos and immersive experiences, Mantis brings a distinctive blend of luxury and sustainability to one of India’s most pristine natural landscapes. Scheduled to open in 2028, Mantis Nagarhole will feature a thoughtfully designed 31-key premium wilderness retreat set across approximately 13 acres.

**Ranju Alex, CEO – South Asia, Accor**, said, *“India’s travel landscape is evolving rapidly, with a growing appetite for meaningful, experience-led journeys rooted in nature and authenticity. The signing of Mantis Nagarhole reflects our*



*strategic focus on expanding in high-value leisure destinations while staying deeply committed to sustainability and conservation. This retreat will not only offer an extraordinary wildlife experience but also embody the Mantis philosophy of responsible tourism, community engagement, and environmental responsibility. We are delighted to partner with a visionary ownership group to bring this unique offering to*

*life in one of India’s most pristine ecosystems.”*

**Balram Hirehal Jairaj, Director of Macs Max Private Limited**, said *“The signing of Mantis Nagarhole marks an important milestone in our vision to create meaningful hospitality experiences rooted in nature, sustainability, and regional authenticity. Nagarhole is one of India’s most extraordinary wildlife destinations, and we saw a strong opportunity to develop a retreat that celebrates the beauty of the region while offering guests a deeply immersive and responsible luxury experience. Our partnership with Accor and the globally acclaimed Mantis brand brings together international expertise in eco-luxury hospitality and our commitment to developing distinctive destinations in South India. We look forward to bringing this landmark project to life and contributing to the growth of experiential tourism in Karnataka.”*

## The Lind Hotels Helps Reshape Lifestyle Travel in the Philippines

### Travel Mail Desk

Independent Filipino hospitality brands are beginning to reshape lifestyle travel in the Philippines—and The Lind Hotels is helping lead the shift. Among the companies helping drive that momentum is The Lind Hotels. This independently developed Filipino hospitality group has steadily built a reputation through lifestyle-led destinations, strong culinary programming, wellness, and a distinctly Filipino approach to hospitality.

*“Our philosophy is that Philippine hospitality can resonate globally while remaining proudly Filipino,”* said **Pierre Henrichs, COO of The Lind Hotels.** *“Authenticity, warmth, creativity, and emotional connection are what travellers increasingly remember most.”*

*“As part of our ten-year milestone, we went back to the drawing board and asked ourselves where we were ten years ago and where we are today,”*



**Henrichs** said *“The entire brand has been refreshed. More than anything, we wanted to return to the human side of hospitality and focus on genuine connection at every touchpoint of the guest experience. Hospitality is about continual improvement and adapting to what modern travellers are looking for.”*

Looking ahead, the company’s future developments in Coron and Siargao reflect both confidence in Philippine tourism and growing international demand for more meaningful, nature-driven, and experience-led travel.

*“We believe the Philippines has the potential to become one of the world’s great hospitality destinations,”* **Henrichs** said *“There is incredible warmth here, extraordinary natural beauty, and a growing confidence among Filipino brands to create experiences that feel globally relevant while remaining distinctly local.”*

## Marriott International and The Fern Hotels & Resorts Celebrate 75 Signings and 50 Openings for Series by Marriott in India

### Travel Mail Desk

Marriott International, Inc. announced landmark dual milestones for The Fern Hotels & Resorts, Series by Marriott in India – 75 hotels have now been signed under the brand’s founding collaboration with Concept Hospitality Private Limited (CHPL), while 50 of those properties are already open and welcoming guests – bringing over 3,556 rooms into Marriott’s portfolio in India. Accomplished in under six months since the brand’s debut in November 2025, this pace of growth stands as one of the most compelling chapters in Marriott’s regional expansion story and firmly establishes India as the defining foundation for Series by Marriott’s global growth.

*“When we launched Series by Marriott in India last November, we spoke of a brand designed to scale with both speed and purpose,”* said **Kiran Andicot, Senior Vice President, South Asia, Marriott International.** *“Reaching 75 signings, with 50 open and operating hotels across*



*the country, in under six months is a validation of that vision. India is not simply a launchpad for this brand; it is proof of concept. As we expand our footprint, we remain focused on delivering consistent, quality experiences for guests, while*

*offering owners an efficient, conversion-friendly model, backed by the strength of Marriott Bonvoy and our distribution ecosystem”.*

*“Reaching 75 signed hotels is a milestone we are genuinely proud of, but the more meaningful story is the hotels that are already open – already welcoming guests, earning loyalty, and delivering on the promise we made when this association began,”* said **Suhail Kannampilly, Managing Director, Concept Hospitality.** *“The alignment between The Fern’s heritage of thoughtful, regionally rooted hospitality and Marriott International’s global standards and distribution has resonated powerfully with owners and travellers alike. Between our commitment to sustainable hospitality, the industry’s growing appetite for quality development, and Marriott’s unmatched systems and loyalty reach, we are tracking well ahead of our plans – and we are only just beginning.”*

## Preferred Hotels & Resorts Introduces Preferred Wellbeing, Recognising Hotels that Inspire Renewal and Reconnection through Transformative Wellness Experiences



### Travel Mail Desk

Preferred Hotels & Resorts, the world's largest independent hotel brand, announces the launch of Preferred Wellbeing, a new global designation programme celebrating a curated collection of more than 50 member hotels and resorts that deliver exceptional, holistic wellness experiences.

Designed to meet the evolving expectations of today's luxury traveller, Preferred Wellbeing highlights properties that go beyond traditional spa offerings to create immersive journeys of renewal, vitality, and reconnection. From expansive spa sanctuaries and hydrothermal circuits to nature-based retreats and nutritionally driven culinary programmes, the designation recognises hotels that are shaping the future of wellness travel.

The launch is informed by insights from the company's recently released

Luxury Travel Report, which underscores wellness as a defining force in travel decisions. More than a third of luxury travellers are actively seeking transformational wellness journeys, and 77% agree that true luxury today means escaping the pressure to post and impress online. Today's luxury traveller is increasingly motivated by experiences that support genuine disconnection and reset.

*"We are thrilled to introduce Preferred Wellbeing, which reflects an elevated focus on holistic wellness across our global portfolio,"* said **Lindsey Ueberroth, CEO of Preferred Hotels & Resorts.** *"Our latest research shows that travellers are increasingly prioritising experiences that support physical, mental, and transformative wellbeing. Preferred Wellbeing was created to help guests easily discover and book hotels that are defining what's next in the wellness space."*

Preferred Wellbeing marks a significant milestone in Preferred Hotels & Resorts' ongoing commitment to innovation and elevating the guest experience. By identifying and celebrating hotels at the forefront of wellness, the programme provides travellers with a trusted guide to discover meaningful, restorative stays around the world. Guided by a structured evaluation framework, Preferred Wellbeing ensures both credibility and consistency across its portfolio, with participating hotels assessed against five core pillars of wellbeing and twelve defined criteria. These span essential areas such as rest and recovery, movement, nourishment, connection to place, and environmental responsibility. To earn recognition, each property must meet a minimum of ten of the twelve criteria, ensuring the designation reflects a truly holistic and integrated approach to wellbeing.

## GRT Hotels & Resorts Unveils "Soulful Summer Stories" A Journey into the Heart of South Indian Hospitality

### Travel Mail Desk

GRT Hotels & Resorts, a pioneer in curated Indian hospitality, has launched its much-anticipated summer campaign, "Soulful Summer Stories." Spanning six iconic destinations across the southern peninsula, the campaign invites travellers to move beyond traditional vacations and "Choose Their Travel Katha" – a collection of curated local experiences designed to foster family bonding and cultural immersion.

In an era of digital saturation, "Soulful Summer Stories" is a tribute to the nostalgia of the classic Indian summer vacation. The campaign focuses on "unplugged" sanctuaries, where long, unstructured afternoons and shared family experiences take centre stage. The GReaT Kathas are central to the campaign framework. Each of the six participating properties offers a curated narrative that weaves together regional heritage, adventure, and wellness.

**• The Highlands:** From the "Untamed Calm" of GReaT Trails Wayanad and the "Art of Slow Living" in GReaT Trails Kodaikanal to the high-altitude



adrenaline of GReaT Trails Yercaud, the hill retreats offer a refuge in the mist-clad Ghats.

- The Heritage Heart:** At GReaT Trails Riverview Resort, Thanjavur, history flows with the Vennar River, offering guests guided "Kathas" through the architectural marvels of the Chola legacy.
- Coastal Sanctuaries:** In partnership with Radisson, the campaign extends to the shores of the Bay of Bengal. Radisson Blu Resort Temple Bay

Mamallapuram and Radisson Resort Pondicherry Bay offer a blend of shoreline celebrations and intimate backwater explorations, including kayaking past the ancient Roman ruins of Arikamedu.

The Promise of More: Every "Soulful Summer" stay is anchored by the signature GRT touch: a traditional arrival, foot ritual, chef-curated regional meals, and a thoughtful farewell gift. Furthermore, as part of the group's commitment to inclusive hospitality, all properties remain 100% smoke-free and pet-friendly, ensuring no family member is left behind.

*"We call these vacations 'Soulful' because it is a tribute to the summers we all remember,"* said **Mr. Vikram Cotah, CEO of GRT Hotels & Resorts.** *"It's about the nostalgia of long afternoons and the simple joy of a family gathered together without the glow of a screen in sight. Through our GReaT Kathas, we ensure you don't just visit a place, but truly feel its rhythm – leaving you with a story shaped by the people you love and the landscapes that move you."*

## THE LALIT SURI HOSPITALITY GROUP LAUNCHES “DEKHO BHARAT CAMPAIGN”

### Travel Mail Desk

There is a renewed romance with travelling within India—where journeys are no longer just about destinations, but about stories, contrasts and experiences that stay with you. Tapping into this evolving traveller mindset, The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group introduces “Dekho Bharat – Experience Luxury Within Reach,” an initiative that brings together culture, wellness, nature and heritage through thoughtfully curated stays.

Designed for the modern traveller seeking more than just a getaway, Dekho Bharat reimagines how India can be explored—pairing destinations, moods and moments into seamless journeys. From the pulse of metropolitan cities to the quiet charm of heritage towns and the calm of nature-led escapes, the initiative reflects the many Indians that coexist.

For cultural explorers, we offer the vibrant energy of New Delhi—where history and modernity blend effortlessly—and



then move into the timeless grandeur of Jaipur, with its palaces, colours and stories of royalty. Or trading cityscapes for a slower rhythm—starting with the serene backwaters of Bekal in Kerala, where wellness rituals and Ayurveda

take centre stage, and then transitioning into the sunlit shores of Goa for a more spirited coastal experience.

Beyond these paired journeys, Dekho Bharat also shines a light on destinations that invite deeper, more personal exploration. In Khajuraho, days unfold against the backdrop of intricately carved temples, with nature close at hand through nearby wildlife and dramatic landscapes. In Mangar, nestled within the Aravalli hills, the experience shifts inward—where sustainability, architecture and rural life come together to offer a mindful pause from the everyday.

Sharing his perspective, **Vivek Shukla, CEO, The LaLiT Suri Hospitality Group**, said, “Today’s traveller is seeking journeys that feel personal and enriching. With ‘Dekho Bharat,’ we wanted to create experiences that allow guests to move across different landscapes and cultures, while discovering the depth and diversity that India has to offer.”

## IHG Hotels & Resorts signs Garner Jagdalpur with United Hospitality Management, marking entry into Chhattisgarh’s growing Bastar region

### Travel Mail Desk

IHG® Hotels & Resorts, one of the world’s leading hotel companies, has announced the signing of a franchise agreement for Garner Jagdalpur, marking the brand’s entry into the state of Chhattisgarh. The 117-key hotel will be developed by Freedom Hospitality and managed by United Hospitality Management (UHM), one of IHG’s trusted third-party management companies in India.

IHG’s newest midscale conversion brand, Garner™, builds on the company’s strength in the essentials segment, offering quality stays at an accessible price point. Designed to deliver a relaxed and flexible guest experience, the brand caters to value-conscious travellers seeking dependable comfort supported by IHG’s global enterprise systems.

Commenting on the signing, **Sudeep Jain, Managing Director, South West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts** said “Garner’s growth trajectory in India continues to be strong as we expand into emerging markets with high potential and our partnership with United Hospitality Management further strengthens our ability to scale the brand in these markets. Jagdalpur

# Garner™

— BY IHG —

represents an important entry point into Chhattisgarh’s developing Bastar region, where infrastructure investment and economic diversification are creating new opportunities for quality accommodation. Garner’s efficient and flexible model combined with UHM’s strong local operational expertise enables us to partner with owners to unlock this potential while delivering long-term value.”

**Deepika Arora, Managing Director, United Hospitality Management (UHM), India** commented, “We are pleased to deepen our partnership with IHG Hotels & Resorts with the signing of Garner

Jagdalpur, a project that reflects the growing maturity of demand in India’s emerging destinations. At United Hospitality Management, our focus is on unlocking the full potential of such markets through a combination of operational discipline, local market insight, and brand-aligned execution. Garner’s conversion-friendly, scalable model is particularly well suited to these environments, enabling us to deliver consistent guest experiences while optimising asset performance. As we expand our Garner portfolio, we remain committed to building high-performing hotels that create long-term value for owners and resonate with the evolving needs of today’s value-conscious traveller.”

**Bakhtyaar Khan, Managing Partner, Freedom Hospitality**, said “We are delighted to partner with IHG Hotels & Resorts to introduce Garner to Jagdalpur. The region’s evolving economic landscape and growing demand for quality accommodation present a compelling opportunity. With IHG’s global expertise and the strong proposition of the Garner brand, we are confident the hotel will become a preferred choice for travellers while delivering strong returns for us.”



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# District by Zomato Launches India's First Inclusive Dining Toolkit for Restaurants



## Travel Mail Desk

District by Zomato, the going-out platform, announced the launch of the Inclusive Dining Toolkit for restaurants. A first-of-its-kind initiative designed to enable restaurants to make dining experiences more accessible for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs), the elderly, pregnant women and others.

Developed in collaboration with the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Samarthyaam, and The Association of People with Disability and in consultation with persons with disabilities, restaurant partners and accessibility experts, the toolkit aims to help restaurants identify accessibility gaps, make practical improvements and provide diners with better visibility into accessibility-related information. Beyond enabling an inclusive dining experience, the toolkit also highlights how accessibility can help unlock higher footfall, encourage repeat visits and become preferred spaces for gatherings and celebrations.

**Shri B. L. Verma, Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**, noted in his message, "Accessibility and inclusion encompass all aspects of everyday life. Dining establishments are important public spaces, and they must be designed and operated in a manner that enables persons with disabilities to participate independently, safely, and with dignity. The Inclusive Dining Toolkit developed by District by Zomato is a valuable initiative that provides practical guidance to the hospitality and restaurant sector towards building environments that are truly welcoming and accessible to all. Creating an inclusive society requires

*collective efforts from government, industry, and the community, and I encourage all restaurants and hospitality establishments to utilise this Toolkit as a practical resource."*

The launch event was graced and addressed by the **Additional Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ms. Manmeet Kaur Nanda, as the Chief Guest.**

**Ms. Manmeet Kaur Nanda, Additional Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, as Chief Guest**, said, "2026 is no ordinary year for the PwD movement. It marks over a decade since India enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and launched the Accessible India Campaign, Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan. Today, many initiatives give us hope for the future. Across industries, we are seeing encouraging progress in accessibility, and we are moving in the right direction. At the same time, there is still much more to be done. District by Zomato's Inclusive Dining Toolkit reflects a larger movement towards creating spaces where participation is truly accessible and inclusive for everyone. Inclusion must become the norm, not the exception. The true measure of a Viksit society lies in how inclusive its infrastructure, experiences, and opportunities are for every citizen."

India is home to over 2.68 crore persons with disabilities, many of whom continue to face uncertainty while dining out due to inaccessible infrastructure and lack of information. They often return to familiar places because trying new restaurants comes with too many unknowns around accessibility and ease

of movement. Restaurant partners, when consulted, expressed willingness to build more welcoming spaces. But limited operational guidance, awareness and infrastructure constraints, particularly in leased properties, continue to pose challenges. The toolkit aims to bridge this gap by taking forward District's larger vision of enabling access to inclusive world-class going-out experiences.

District has also introduced a range of accessibility-focused features on its platform, including:

- Improved support for screen-reader users
- Accessibility filter on the Dining page
- Discover accessible dining with curated AI recommendations
- Wheelchair and elevator accessibility listed under the Facilities section on the restaurant page
- Select 'Special Assistance Needs' under 'Add a special request' while reviewing table booking

Commenting on the launch, **Rahul Ganjoo, CEO, District by Zomato**, said, "We often celebrate restaurants for bringing people together. But we rarely ask whether everyone can comfortably enter a space, move through the space, read the menu, and feel independent while doing so. The Inclusive Dining Toolkit aims to close this gap. We've designed this to be a quality resource for restaurants to build experiences that are more thoughtful, inclusive and better for everyone, regardless of their needs."

Sharing her lived experience as a person with visual impairment at the event, **Ms. Meenakshi Chaturvedi** said, "Making our spaces accessible is not a technical hurdle. It is about understanding that sharing a meal is a universal joy, and no one should be left out of that experience. It is the thoughtfulness and empathy we bring that can truly change a person's experience. Don't just serve us food; make us feel welcomed, seen, valued, and cared for."

In 2024, the Union Ministry of Social Justice awarded Zomato the National Award for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities for a program that has engaged over 6,000 persons with disabilities in food delivery. The launch of the Inclusive Dining toolkit and the Purple Star initiative for restaurants marks another key milestone in District's journey to promote inclusion in India.

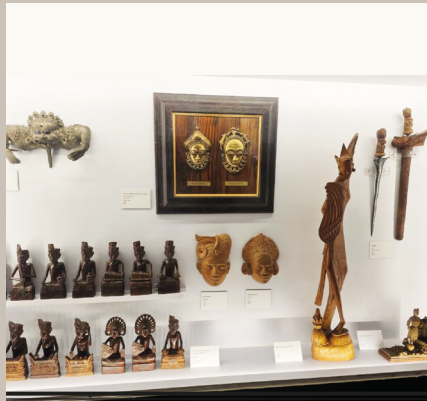
# 93rd BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF SHRI H.D. DEVE GOWDA CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL MUSEUM DAY



## Travel Mail Desk

Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya commemorated the 93rd birth anniversary of former Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda on 19 May 2026 with a special programme coinciding with the celebration of International Museum Day 2026. The initiative aimed to honour India's democratic leadership while promoting awareness around museums, heritage preservation, and cultural education.

As part of the commemorative programme, a special exhibition dedicated to **Shri H. D. Deve Gowda** was inaugurated, showcasing rare photographs, archival documents, and personal belongings associated with the former Prime Minister. The exhibition offers visitors an insight into his political journey, leadership, and contribution to the nation.



The ribbon-cutting ceremony for the exhibition was conducted by **Dr. Sowmiya Ramesh, daughter-in-law of former Prime Minister Shri H. D. Deve Gowda.**

In line with **International Museum Day**, celebrated globally on **18 May**, the museum also organised an exhibition featuring ethnographic objects from the Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya collection. Additionally, two short films — one on the museum and another on Shri H.D. Deve Gowda — were screened at the Parichay Gallery, providing visitors with a deeper cultural and historical context while highlighting the role of museums in conservation and education.



Speaking on the occasion, **the Director of Prime Ministers Museum and Library** said, *“Through these exhibitions and special screenings, Pradhanmantri Sangrahalaya seeks to strengthen public engagement with India's political history, cultural diversity, and museum heritage. Visitors, scholars, students, and the general public are invited to experience these commemorative programmes and explore India's historical, cultural, and democratic legacy.”*



# Smart cruise tips from Norwegian Cruise Line® (NCL) that will help strengthen family bonds

## Travel Mail Desk

Family holidays today are no longer about ticking off one sightseeing spot after another. Instead, families are choosing to slow down, reconnect and spend meaningful time together through immersive experiences that broaden their horizons. If you're considering your very first family cruise this year, here are a few smart NCL tips that will make this holiday a pleasure from start to finish:

**Start Planning Early:** One of the biggest advantages of a cruise holiday is the time it gives you to plan. Cruise lines typically announce sailings months in advance, so if you have a destination on your wish list or a particular itinerary in mind, it's worth exploring the sailing dates across NCL's fleet early.

**Choose an Itinerary That Matches Your Family's Travel Style:** FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) is real, but when it comes to choosing your cruise itinerary, it's important not to follow the crowd. Focus on selecting a cruise experience that



aligns with your family's interests, pace, and travel style. Those travelling with younger children may prefer shorter sailings with more relaxation time onboard, while those with teenagers may enjoy port-intensive itineraries packed with adventure and excursions.

**Prioritise Comfort:** For first-time cruisers, cabin selection plays a key role. After a day of exploring ashore, returning to a spacious, well-appointed stateroom can make all the difference in helping you rest, recharge and make the most of each day. For families, especially those travelling across generations, options such as connecting rooms, family mini-suites, or balcony cabins are ideal.

**Pack Smart and Pre-Book Key Activities:** Cruise vacations offer a diverse mix of activities from excursions and pool days to dinners and entertainment, often across multiple climates and time zones, so packing versatile essentials is a must. Comfortable footwear, lightweight layers, warmers, sunscreen, chargers, swimwear, and a compact excursion bag are must-haves for a seamless trip. It's also important to reserve popular dining experiences, activities and shore excursions in advance, especially during peak travel periods. Pre-booking allows you to spend less time on logistics onboard and more time enjoying the experiences.

## TravClan Appointed as Preferred Sales Agent for StarDream Cruises in India

### Travel Mail Desk

TravClan, one of India's leading B2B travel technology platforms, has been appointed as the Preferred Sales Agent (PSA) for StarDream Cruises in India. The partnership aims to strengthen and modernise cruise distribution across the Indian travel trade ecosystem by making cruise products more accessible, scalable, and easier to sell for travel agents across the country.

Through this partnership, TravClan aims to leverage its technology-led distribution network to simplify cruise discovery, booking, and support for travel agents across India – including emerging travel businesses in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. The collaboration is expected to help broaden cruise accessibility beyond traditional distribution channels while enabling more travel agents to confidently participate in the category.

Speaking about the partnership, **Chirag Agrawal, Co-founder of TravClan**, said "One of the biggest gaps in the cruise industry today is distribution accessibility. Cruise inventory and selling expertise have traditionally remained concentrated within a



relatively small ecosystem, which limits wider adoption across the travel trade. At TravClan, we believe technology can play a meaningful role in simplifying cruise discovery, booking, and support for travel agents across the country – not just in metros, but also for emerging travel businesses in Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets. Our partnership with StarDream Cruises is an important step towards making cruise selling more scalable and accessible for the broader travel agent community. We believe the category holds strong long-term potential as

*Indian travellers increasingly explore experience-led and convenience-driven holiday formats."*

Commenting on the collaboration, **Naresh Rawal, Senior Vice President – Sales & Marketing, StarDream Cruises**, said "At StarDream Cruises, we see significant long-term potential for cruise holidays in India, and strengthening our distribution network is critical to unlocking that opportunity. TravClan brings scale, technology, and strong engagement with the travel trade, which makes them a valuable partner in helping us expand our reach across the country. This partnership is about making cruise holidays more accessible for travel agents beyond the traditional cruise-selling ecosystem and creating new opportunities for business growth together. We look forward to working closely with the TravClan team and the wider travel trade fraternity to further build the StarDream Cruises market in India."

As part of the partnership, TravClan will work closely with travel agents across India on cruise awareness, sales enablement, training, and distribution support initiatives aimed at helping agents better understand and sell cruise vacations to Indian travellers.

# Antara Cruises Launches 'The Silent River Escape' Aboard Antara Catamarans

## Travel Mail Desk

Antara Cruises has launched a new 2 Nights / 3 Days private all-inclusive itinerary, "The Silent River Escape," aboard its elegant Antara Catamarans, offering an intimate journey through Bhitarkanika, Odisha — one of India's most beautiful and still largely unexplored regions.

Operating from Gupti – Dhamra – Kanika Island – Gupti, the experience is designed as a personal luxury floating sanctuary, with just 2 suites on board and a dedicated 5-member crew ensuring highly personalised service throughout. The catamaran accommodates up to 6 guests, making it ideal for private escapes and special occasions. With 4 such Catamarans, 24 guests can be accommodated to travel together – perfect for a larger group holiday.

While Bhitarkanika Sanctuary is closed for the season, this itinerary offers a rare opportunity to explore the history, ecology and quiet beauty of the mangrove system beyond the crocodiles — revealing a landscape shaped by waterways, wildlife, local culture and spiritual heritage.



The voyage begins at Gupti, with lunch served onboard before sailing toward Dhamra, and an enjoyable evening on the sublime sundeck. Guests enjoy high tea, dinner and serene river views as the journey unfolds. The second day includes a visit to the Dhamra Temple for Puja and Darshan, followed by time near the harbour before continuing to Kanika Island, where the catamaran anchors

amid untouched wilderness. The journey concludes with a relaxed return to Gupti and breakfast onboard.

Antara Catamarans offer refined comfort – fully air-conditioned indoors with two suites, lounge-cum-dining space, spacious decks and thoughtful amenities. Dining is a highlight, with welcome drinks, fresh fruit, customised cuisine, and a menu featuring local Odia specialities, Indian favourites and international dishes. The kitchen accommodates food preferences including a vegan menu. Guests also enjoy table d'hôte meals, tea and coffee, wildlife talks, cooking sessions, books and board games, along with curated shore excursions and all admissions included.

Priced at ₹1,00,000 for a private yacht accommodating up to 4 guests, with special arrangements available for up to 6 guests at an additional charge, this exclusive journey offers a more contemplative and elevated way to encounter a remarkable destination — through its sacred river landscape, in complete privacy, and in the restorative company of those who matter most.

# Cordelia Cruises Returns to Chennai for Its 5th Season with Sailings Across India, Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia

## Travel Mail Desk

Cordelia Cruises, India's premium cruise line, is set to return to Chennai for its 5th cruising season in 2026, further strengthening the city's position as one of India's key cruise gateways.

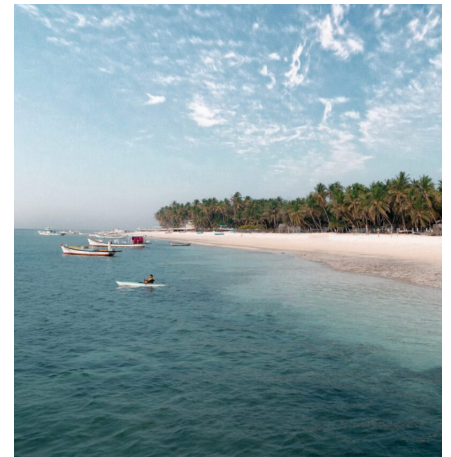
The Cordelia Empress will make its first call in Chennai on 20th June 2026, with sailings scheduled through the end of August. The upcoming season will feature a diverse mix of domestic and international itineraries ranging from 2 to 10 nights, including sailings to Visakhapatnam, Puducherry, Sri Lanka, and Southeast Asia.

Over the last few years, Chennai has steadily emerged as an important homeport for cruise tourism in India, offering travellers easier access to cruise holidays across both coastal and international destinations.

### The itinerary includes:

- 3-Night One-Way: Visakhapatnam – Puducherry – Chennai (July 15–18, 2026)
- 10-Night Southeast Asia Cruise: Chennai – Phuket – Langkawi – Kuala Lumpur – Singapore (July 18–28, 2026)

*"Chennai has become an important part of India's cruise story, and we are excited to return for our 5th season with a wider mix of itineraries and experiences for Indian travellers. What makes this deployment particularly exciting is the variety it offers, from short coastal getaways to longer international sailings across Southeast Asia. We are also seeing growing interest from families and groups looking for holidays that are easy to plan and bring multiple experiences together within a single journey. As cruise travel continues*



*to grow in India, Chennai is steadily strengthening its position as a gateway for both domestic and international cruising,"* said **Jurgen Bailom, President & CEO of Cordelia Cruises.**

# Egyptair celebrates 94 years in India with a grand industry evening in New Delhi; announces upcoming UNESCO collaboration



During the evening, Egyptair also announced an upcoming collaboration with UNESCO focused on promoting cultural exchange and supporting initiatives around the preservation of cultural heritage, biodiversity, and traditional practices. More details regarding the initiative are expected to be unveiled in the coming months.

The airline also felicitated and honoured its leading travel trade partners and industry associates for their continued contribution and support towards Egyptair's growth and success in the Indian market.

The celebration comes at a significant time for Egyptair globally, as the airline continues its ambitious fleet modernisation and international expansion strategy. Earlier this year, Egyptair inducted its new Airbus A350-900 and Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, while also announcing plans to further expand its global network, including new long-haul routes to Chicago and Los Angeles, in addition to new European connectivity such as Venice, alongside enhanced passenger experience initiatives as part of the airline's broader growth vision towards 2030.

With direct connectivity between Delhi and Mumbai to Cairo, Egyptair continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing tourism, business travel, and people-to-people connections between India, Egypt, Africa, Europe, and beyond.

## Travel Mail Desk

Egypt's national flag carrier, Egyptair, hosted a celebration evening in New Delhi to commemorate the airline's 94th anniversary, bringing together 200+ distinguished guests, including members of the travel trade fraternity, aviation leaders, corporate partners, diplomats, and other distinguished guests.

The evening was hosted by **Mr. Amr Aly, Country Manager, Egyptair**, marking a significant milestone in the airline's growing engagement with the Indian market, while also celebrating the deepening cultural, tourism, cinema, and aviation relationship between India and Egypt.

**H.E. Kamel Galal, Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to India**, graced the occasion and addressed the gathering, highlighting the strengthening bilateral ties between the two nations across tourism, trade, connectivity, and culture. The presence of the diplomatic community further underscored the growing strategic importance of India-Egypt relations and Egypt's focus on India as a priority market.

Speaking at the event, **Mr. Amr Aly, Country Manager, Egyptair**, said "As Egyptair celebrates 94 years of global operations, India continues to remain one of our most valued and strategically

*important markets. This evening is not only a celebration of our legacy, but also of the growing friendship between India and Egypt and the continuous support we have received from our travel trade partners, industry stakeholders, and passengers over the years. As we move towards our 95th anniversary next year, we remain committed to strengthening connectivity, tourism, and cultural exchange between our two nations."*



## VietJet expands to Europe with new Hanoi–Prague route

### Travel Mail Desk

VietJet has announced the launch of its new Hanoi–Prague service, marking another milestone in the airline's continued global expansion and reinforcing Asia–Europe connectivity. As the airline continues to strengthen air links between India and Vietnam and across Asia–Pacific, the new route reflects VietJet's growing international footprint and commitment to expanding affordable global travel options.

The Hanoi–Prague route is scheduled to commence on October 10, 2026, operated by the airline's Airbus A330 aircraft via Almaty in Kazakhstan, with an initial frequency of two return flights per week on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Flights depart from Noi Bai International Airport in Hanoi at 08:25 and arrive at Vaclav Havel Airport in Prague at 18:55. The return service departs Prague at 20:55 and arrives in Hanoi at 16:20 the following day (all are in local times).

To celebrate the latest expansion, VietJet is offering promotional fares for the route from US\$405 one-way (approx.



INR34,000), inclusive of all taxes and fees. Passengers can also choose to fly in Business and SkyBoss classes – Wings for Leaders, offering premium services and enhanced comfort. Tickets are available via [www.vietjetair.com](http://www.vietjetair.com), the VietJet Air mobile app, and the airline's official ticket offices and agents worldwide.

**Mr. Nguyen Thanh Son, CEO of VietJet**, shared *"This is an important milestone in VietJet's strategy to become a global aviation group. With a new-generation fleet, modern technology, and a continuously expanding network, VietJet will soon operate many more routes*

*to Europe, enabling passengers to conveniently connect between Europe and the Asia–Pacific. With VietJet, Europe is now closer than ever."*

VietJet plays a pioneering role in enhancing connectivity between India and Vietnam, one of the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia and the world. The airline has built a strong network connecting India's major economic, cultural and tourism hubs, including New Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Bengaluru, with Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam's top destinations.

## AIR INDIA MAKES FLYING MORE FUN FOR KIDS WITH THE LAUNCH OF 'CLOUD CHASERS'

### Travel Mail Desk

Air India, India's leading global airline, announced the launch of Cloud Chasers, a comprehensive new programme designed to enhance the travel experience for families and young explorers. Cloud Chasers serves as a holistic offering for all of Air India's child-centric products and services. At its core, Cloud Chasers celebrates the joy of discovery and the spirit of childhood curiosity. It's an invitation to our young flyers to explore the world with imagination. The launch comes at a time when family travel as a trend is on a steady rise, with the segment growing by 13% between 2024 and 2025, strengthening the need for thoughtfully designed experiences for children and their parents alike.

The Cloud Chasers universe also introduces a playful new avatar of the Maharaja who moves beyond his traditional role, and appears as a young, adventurous and imaginative companion for children, guiding them through their journey of discovery. This reimagined Maharaja will be woven beautifully into the Cloud Chasers brand universe, appearing in various personas



across touchpoints such as the onboard engagement kits and the First Flight Certificates.

**Rajesh Dogra, Chief Customer Experience Officer, Air India**, said, *"With Cloud Chasers, we are reimagining what it means for families with kids to fly Air India. We have curated this programme with careful attention to what our young travellers truly need and designed*

*thoughtful experiences that will make their journeys with us more joyful and fun. With this launch, we have also introduced our iconic Maharaja in a new, playful avatar. As the summer vacations set in, we are happy to give kids another reason to travel with us. This launch marks the first phase of a long-term vision, and travellers can expect more enhancements as we continue to elevate Air India's family travel experience."*

# ANA Signs Travel Partnership with Indian Film Production Company “Aamir Khan Productions Pvt. Ltd.”

## Travel Mail Desk

All Nippon Airways (ANA), Japan’s largest airline and a recognised leader in customer service, is proud to announce its partnership with Aamir Khan Productions Pvt. Ltd. (“AKPPL”) as the official airline partner for the upcoming film, “Ek Din”. This marks ANA’s first collaboration with the Indian film industry. Since filming began, ANA has supported the production with international and domestic air travel, offering a true Omotenashi (Japanese hospitality) experience.



Junaid Khan, son of Aamir Khan and Sai Pallavi, stars as the lead in “Ek Din”, set against the winter landscape of Hokkaido. The film was shot across picturesque locations including Sapporo, Otaru, Asahikawa and Noboribetsu. A key highlight of the film is the Sapporo Snow Festival, one of the most celebrated and widely attended annual events.

**Mr. Kazuto Shiba – General Manager, ANA Mumbai** “We are honoured and excited to partner with Aamir Khan Productions Pvt. Ltd. on the upcoming

release of ‘Ek Din.’ This collaboration reflects our commitment to strengthening ties between Japan and India through cultural exchange and meaningful partnerships. At All Nippon Airways, we take pride in delivering world-class service, backed by our renowned Japanese hospitality and extensive domestic network. Since 2023, it has been a privilege to support the talented team led by Aamir Khan in bringing this exciting project to life in Hokkaido. We are delighted with the resumption

of our daily flights effective 29 March 2026 from Mumbai to Tokyo (Narita) and truly hope that it will inspire more travellers from India to explore Japan and experience its rich culture and natural beauty. ANA remains committed to providing safe, comfortable, and seamless travel experiences while continuing to foster future collaborations with the Indian film industry.”

**Aamir Khan** “We are delighted to collaborate with All Nippon Airways on this special project. Japan, particularly Hokkaido, offers a unique and visually stunning backdrop for storytelling, and this partnership has made our filming experience seamless and truly memorable. ANA’s exceptional hospitality, reliability, and commitment to excellence have greatly supported our cast and crew throughout the production of “Ek Din”. We hope this film not only entertains audiences but also strengthens cultural ties between India and Japan, inspiring more collaborations in the future.”

# Malaysia Airlines Marks 200th Boeing Aircraft Delivery Milestone with Latest 737-8 Arrival

## Travel Mail Desk

Malaysia Airlines today marked the arrival of its Boeing 737-8 aircraft, the fourth of the type delivered to the airline this year, and a milestone that also represents the 200th Boeing aircraft delivered to Malaysia Airlines in its history.

**Captain Nasaruddin A. Bakar, President and Group Chief Executive Officer of MAG,** said, “This delivery holds special significance as it marks the 200th Boeing aircraft to join the Malaysia Airlines fleet since 1972. More than just an addition to our fleet, this milestone reflects a long-standing operational history that has supported our capacity growth and fleet evolution over the decades as we continue our deep-seated mission to connect Malaysia to the world. The introduction of these next-generation aircraft will further strengthen our ability to support future growth opportunities and evolving market needs, while continuing to deliver a more modern and comfortable travel experience for our customers.”



The airline’s fleet history reflects periods of significant scale and ambition, including widebody operations such as the Boeing 747 and Boeing 777, which underscored the airline’s long-haul capabilities and global connectivity during key phases of growth. Together with the evolution of the Boeing 737 family, these aircraft reflect how the airline has continuously adapted, modernised, and expanded its reach over the decades.

Today’s aircraft, bearing registration number 9M-MVR, departed from Boeing’s Seattle Delivery Centre on 21 May 2026 at

2:00 pm local time and made refuelling stops in Honolulu and Guam before continuing its journey home to Malaysia. Operated as flight MH5045, the aircraft was flown by Captain Arian Syazwara B. Adenan, Captain Mohd Aidilputra bin Abd Razak and First Officer Ahmad Asnawi bin Ahmad Rahman, and landed at KL International Airport (KLIA) on 24 May 2026 at 1:30 pm after a total flight time of 19 hours 44 minutes.

The latest addition reflects Malaysia Aviation Group’s (MAG) continued focus on fleet modernisation as it strengthens network connectivity, improves efficiency and enhances the travel experience across its network. The Boeing 737-8 plays an important role in supporting the Group’s narrowbody operations with greater fuel efficiency, improved reliability and enhanced passenger comfort.

To date, MAG has taken delivery of 18 Boeing 737-8 aircraft from its total order of 55 Boeing narrowbody aircraft, comprising 43 Boeing 737-8s and 12 Boeing 737-10s, with deliveries scheduled through to 2030.

## Cathay Cargo further expands its Airbus A350F freighter orders to eight

### Travel Mail Desk

The Cathay Group is among the top five largest cargo airline groups globally in terms of cross-boundary air cargo capacity (measured in available freight tonne kilometres), according to Accenture Cargo data. This capacity has contributed to the success of Hong Kong International Airport, its home hub, in achieving the status of world's busiest cargo airport 15 times since 2010, according to Airports Council International.

To support the Group's future growth, Cathay Cargo today announces that it is further expanding its fleet by exercising purchase rights for an additional two Airbus A350F freighter aircraft. In addition to its order for six of these aircraft announced in 2023, this brings Cathay Cargo's total commitment to eight A350F freighters.

These highly efficient, new-generation freighters will help further strengthen Hong Kong's status as the world's leading international air cargo hub, enhancing cargo connectivity between Hong



Kong, the Chinese Mainland, and other markets across the Group's extensive global cargo network. They will also contribute to the Group's sustainability leadership goals.

**Cathay Group Chief Executive Officer Ronald Lam** said *"We are pleased to further strengthen our fleet with these additional A350F freighters that will provide greater connectivity at our home hub and more choices for our customers. This strategic, future-*

*ready investment reflects our resolute confidence in our long-term growth prospects and supports Cathay Cargo's goal of being the world's best air cargo carrier. As we continue to grow alongside our home hub, the Cathay Group has already committed well over HK\$100 billion in investment to our fleet, cabin and lounge products, and digital innovation. Together, these investments will elevate the customer experience and strengthen the Hong Kong international aviation hub propelled by the Three-Runway System."*

The eight new A350Fs will complement Cathay Cargo's fleet of 20 Boeing 747 freighters, including 14 B747-8Fs and six B747-400ERFs. In addition to freighter capacity, Cathay Cargo provides belly capacity through the Cathay Group's passenger network serving more than 100 destinations worldwide.

The Cathay Group has orders for more than 100 state-of-the-art narrowbody, regional widebody, long-haul widebody and large freighter aircraft as part of its all-encompassing fleet renewal and expansion plan.

## Saudia Takes Delivery of the First Airbus A321XLR in the Middle East and Africa

### Travel Mail Desk

Saudia, the national flag carrier of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, has welcomed its first Airbus A321XLR, becoming the first airline in the Middle East and Africa to take delivery of the extra-long-range narrow-body aircraft. The milestone supports Saudia's fleet growth program and reflects its continued investment in advanced aircraft models that enhance operational efficiency, guest experience, and sustainability performance.

The aircraft also marks the first delivery to feature core elements of "The New Saudia Experience", Saudia's new onboard offering focused on comfort, connectivity, entertainment, dining, and service consistency across the guest journey. The cabin is configured with 24 Business Class suites designed for privacy and comfort, alongside 120 Guest Class seats featuring enhanced seat design, 13-inch personal entertainment screens, and convenient charging ports to support a more comfortable guest journey.

Further enhancing the onboard experience, the aircraft will be equipped with high-speed in-flight connectivity

designed to support browsing, live streaming, virtual meetings, and access to major entertainment platforms. Business Class guests will also benefit from Saudia's in-flight chef service, offering a personalised dining experience with a selection of Saudi and international cuisine.



His Excellency Engr. **Ibrahim Al-Omar, Director General of Saudia Group**, said *"The delivery of the A321XLR reflects the momentum of Saudia's ongoing transformation. As we continue to grow our fleet, our focus is not only on adding capacity but on investing in aircraft, products, and capabilities that strengthen Saudia's competitiveness and support the Kingdom's aviation ambitions. The New Saudia Experience reflects this direction, bringing together enhanced onboard products, service quality, and operational efficiency to deliver a more distinctive journey for our guests."*

Saudia is scheduled to add 15 Airbus A321XLR aircraft to its fleet by 2027, as part of its wider fleet growth program. The aircraft will support network growth across key travel segments, including tourism, business, major events, and pilgrimage travel, contributing to Vision 2030 and the Saudi Aviation Strategy as the Kingdom prepares to host major global events in the years ahead, including the AFC Asian Cup 2027, Expo 2030, and the 2034 FIFA World Cup.

## Finland in the Skies: Finnair Launches Its Summer 2026 Onboard Menu

### Travel Mail Desk

From **20 May to 20 October 2026**, Finnair introduces a refreshed onboard dining experience inspired by the flavours of the Finnish summer. Rooted in Nordic simplicity and seasonal ingredients, the menus draw inspiration from two distinctly Finnish summer notes: the brightness of fresh strawberries and the depth of delicately smoked notes, reimagined across all travel classes. With direct connectivity between Helsinki and Delhi, Indian travellers can seamlessly access Finnair's new onboard dining experience as part of their journey to Northern Europe and beyond.

### Long-haul Business Class: Finnish flavours with destination-inspired touches

For long-haul Business Class passengers departing from Helsinki, the onboard dining experience has been thoughtfully elevated to reflect the clean, balanced flavours of Finnish cuisine.

Starters spotlight ingredients from the Nordic pantry, including salmon



summer flavours. Main courses continue the seasonal narrative alongside destination-inspired dishes that nod to local culinary traditions. Desserts include strawberry cake with rhubarb compote or chocolate cake with pistachio crème, complemented by a curated cheese selection served with fig compote.

### Premium Economy and Economy: lighter, brighter seasonal dining

Premium Economy passengers can enjoy dishes such as chicken with shiitake mushrooms in Chikuzen sauce or linguine with prawns in Choron sauce, alongside a complimentary selection of hot, cold and alcoholic beverages throughout the flight.

pastrami with sour milk sauce and cauliflower, or marinated whitefish paired with sour cream potato salad and dill mayonnaise, depending on the route. A vibrant tomato broth with cream cheese, crushed peas, strawberries and jalapeño oil is served across all flights, offering a fresh and contemporary interpretation of Finnish

In Economy Class on long-haul routes, passengers are served a hot meal with non-alcoholic beverages and one complimentary alcoholic drink, with a second light meal offered on longer journeys. Additional snacks and refreshments can also be conveniently ordered through Finnair's inflight entertainment system.

## Etihad Guest Launches Frequent Flyer Partnership with Bangkok Airways

### Travel Mail Desk

Etihad Guest, the award-winning loyalty programme of Etihad Airways, the national carrier of the UAE, has launched a new frequent flyer partnership with Bangkok Airways' FlyerBonus programme, enabling members of both loyalty programmes to redeem rewards when travelling across either airline's network.

Etihad Guest members can now redeem their miles for award travel across Bangkok Airways' network, including popular leisure destinations across Thailand and Southeast Asia such as Samui, Luang Prabang and Siem Reap. Likewise, Bangkok Airways' FlyerBonus members can redeem their points to explore Etihad's expanding global network, including new destinations like Palma de Mallorca, Krakow and Salalah via its award-winning hub in Abu Dhabi.

Etihad Guest Miles earned can be redeemed across a wide range of rewards, including flights, cabin



markets; this partnership gives our members seamless access to some of the region's most desirable destinations while redeeming Etihad Guest Miles along the way. We are equally excited to welcome FlyerBonus members onboard Etihad and introduce them to our signature Emirati hospitality, taking them beyond borders across the global Etihad network."

### Ms. Amornrat Kongsawat, Vice President – Sales and Marketing of Bangkok Airways PCL,

commented, "We are delighted to partner with Etihad Airways to further enhance the

upgrades, hotels, holidays and shopping through the Etihad Guest Reward Shop, offering members flexibility and choice at every stage of their journey.

**Mark Potter, Managing Director Etihad Guest,** said, "Partnering with Bangkok Airways further enhances the value of the Etihad Guest programme, creating more opportunities for members to redeem their miles on every journey, wherever they choose to fly. Thailand is one of our most valued and in-demand

value and benefits of our FlyerBonus programme. This collaboration reflects our commitment to offering members more meaningful travel experiences and broader redemption opportunities across a truly global network. Through Etihad Airways' extensive international connectivity, FlyerBonus members can now enjoy seamless access to destinations across Europe, the Middle East and beyond, while continuing to experience the distinctive boutique service of Bangkok Airways."

## Riyadh Cargo Appoints GSSA Partners Across Egypt, India, and the UAE, and to Accelerate Its Global Expansion

### Travel Mail Desk

Riyadh Cargo, the dedicated cargo division of Riyadh Air, has added three additional General Sales and Service Agents (GSSA) partners across the priority markets of Egypt, India, and the United Arab Emirates, taking a key step forward in its international expansion. Riyadh Cargo's presence will be strengthened in some of the world's most dynamic air freight markets, while supporting Saudi's Vision 2030 ambition to position the Kingdom as a leading global hub for trade and logistics.

These partnerships provide Riyadh Cargo with strong on-the-ground commercial representation and operational expertise across high-growth markets that sit at the crossroads of global trade, with activation progressing in phases in line with market readiness and network deployment.

These latest appointments build on Riyadh Cargo's growing global partner network, which already includes key operational and commercial relationships across major international stations. This includes SATS Saudi Arabia Company as ground handling partner



in KSA hubbed at Riyadh, Worldwide Flight Services in London Heathrow, Crest Cargo Services across Pakistan, Millennium Transportation in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Envotech Aviation in Bangladesh and FlyUs in the United Kingdom, supporting both online and offline sales coverage across the market, including Riyadh Cargo's recent addition of Manchester to its growing network.

**Pravin Singh, Vice President of Cargo at Riyadh Cargo,** said "Each of these markets brings distinct strengths to our

network. India offers scale and sustained demand; the UAE and Egypt provide strong connectivity and opportunity to scale through direct flights that will deliver strong point-to-point capability on key trade lanes. By working with experienced partners in each market, we're building a cargo network across both online and offline markets that is globally connected and locally grounded. This allows us to deliver consistent reliability, greater transparency, and a more efficient experience for our customers, while continuing to scale in line with Saudi Arabia's broader logistics ambitions."

These appointments reflect Riyadh Cargo's continued focus on building a strong commercial and operational platform as it expands its global reach. With an emphasis on digital integration, strategic partnerships, and network connectivity, the company is well-positioned to support evolving trade flows and play a meaningful role in strengthening links between key markets and the world, further advancing Riyadh's position as a leading international logistics hub under Vision 2030.

## InterGlobe Air Transport Appointed as the Exclusive General Sales Agent for Aeromexico in India

### Travel Mail Desk

InterGlobe Air Transport, a leading airline and travel management company, has been appointed as the exclusive General Sales Agent (GSA) by Aeromexico for the entire territory of India. This collaboration aims to provide travellers and trade partners with streamlined access to the airline's network and strengthen its presence across the country.

As Mexico's global airline, Aeromexico is renowned for its exceptional connectivity and service across North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. The airline currently operates an expansive global network covering 48 domestic and 55 international destinations across 24 countries, including major global hubs such as Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. To support its growth plans in India, InterGlobe Air Transport will provide comprehensive sales and service support, including passenger management, reservations, ticketing, and dedicated contact centre operations.



A primary focus will be on building brand awareness and generating demand within the Indian outbound sector. Leveraging decades of aviation experience and a strong nationwide presence, InterGlobe Air Transport will make Aeromexico's global connectivity more accessible to Indian travellers, businesses, and tour operators alike. Passengers can expect a superior experience through seamless booking processes and comprehensive customer support.

**JB Singh, Director, InterGlobe Air Transport,** said, "Aeromexico's appointment marks an exciting new chapter for us. Their growing global footprint, especially across the Americas, opens valuable opportunities for Indian travellers and businesses. This collaboration reflects our commitment to expanding high-quality global travel options for our customers. Our focus will be on building strong awareness, simplifying access to their network, and creating meaningful demand for travel across the region."

# Encalm Launches 'Encalm Skyplates,' Marking a Landmark Entry into Large-Scale In-Flight Catering

## Travel Mail Desk

Encalm, a pioneer in premium airport experiences, announced its strategic expansion into the aviation catering sector with the launch of Encalm Skyplates. This dedicated platform will mark a pivotal milestone in Encalm's pursuit to provide an integrated, end-to-end hospitality ecosystem for the modern traveller.

Envisioned as a next-generation culinary and logistics powerhouse, Encalm Skyplates combines massive production scale with precision-led technology and globally benchmarked food safety systems. The platform will be introduced across key aviation hubs, offering scalable catering solutions that adapt to the rapidly evolving expectations of domestic and international passengers.

*"With Encalm Skyplates, we are redefining the boundaries of airport hospitality by taking our signature excellence from the lounge to the aircraft cabin,"* said **Vikas Sharma, Group Chief Executive Officer, Encalm Hospitality.** *"In-flight catering*



*is a high-stakes environment where precision must meet passion. Our goal is to bridge the gap between ground and air, ensuring that the premium experience a traveller starts with at the terminal continues seamlessly at 30,000 feet. Skyplates isn't just about dining; it's about elevating the entire passenger journey through consistent, world-class service."*

Beyond logistics, Encalm Skyplates positions itself as a culinary-first brand.

Led by a team of veteran chefs, the platform offers curated menus that balance global gastronomy with regional authenticity, supported by a dedicated fleet designed for seamless, aircraft-side delivery. This operational excellence is matched by a deep commitment to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards.

*"Skyplates is being built as a high-performance, systems-led catering platform where sustainability and accountability are at the core,"* said **Abraham Pothan, Chief Operating Officer, Encalm Skyplates.** *"Every element of this platform – from energy-conscious infrastructure and optimized production systems to responsible sourcing and waste-reduction – is designed with long-term environmental responsibility in mind. We are embedding globally benchmarked safety protocols and precision logistics to guarantee reliability, ensuring that as we scale, we do so responsibly and in line with the future of sustainable aviation catering."*

# Adani Airports and Bastian Hospitality Launch Maison Twenty-Seven at Ahmedabad Airport

## Travel Mail Desk

Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL) has launched Maison Twenty-Seven in partnership with Bastian Hospitality, adjoining the arrivals area of Terminal 2 (T2) at Ahmedabad's Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport (SVPIA).

The launch marks another strategic step in AAHL's vision of transforming airports into integrated lifestyle, hospitality and urban ecosystems that extend beyond conventional transit infrastructure. The launch also follows AAHL's recent partnership with IHG Hotels & Resorts to develop and operate five airport-linked hotels across key Indian cities, further strengthening its vision of building integrated airport ecosystems.

For Bastian Hospitality, it marks the group's boldest expansion yet as it completes a decade of shaping some of India's most celebrated dining and lifestyle experiences.

Speaking on the launch, **Mr Ranjit Bindra, Founder, Bastian Hospitality,** said *"Maison Twenty-Seven represents an important evolution for Bastian Hospitality as we complete ten years of creating experiential dining and lifestyle*



*destinations in India. We wanted to build a space that responds to how modern consumers increasingly travel, work, recover and connect. Ahmedabad, with the rapid growth around SVPIA and GIFT City, offered the perfect environment for a concept that brings together hospitality, wellness and community in a globally relevant format."*

**Arun Bansal, CEO, AAHL,** said *"At Adani airports, we are reimagining airports as*

*dynamic lifestyle and social ecosystems that extend far beyond travel. Maison Twenty-Seven reflects our commitment to creating experiences that are immersive, future-ready and rooted in evolving consumer aspirations. From hospitality and wellness to dining and community spaces, every aspect of the destination has been shaped through a deeply hands-on approach to how modern travellers and urban consumers want to engage, pause and connect. As Ahmedabad and GIFT City continue to emerge as globally significant growth hubs, we believe destinations like Maison Twenty-Seven will redefine the role airports play in shaping urban experiences."*

**Actor, entrepreneur, wellness advocate and co-founder of Bastian Hospitality Shilpa Shetty** said *"Wellness today is no longer limited to fitness. It shapes how people travel, recharge, spend time with family and build meaningful everyday experiences. What makes Maison Twenty-Seven special is the way it brings together recovery, hospitality, dining and community within one thoughtfully designed space that feels both elevated and inclusive."*

## Equipped with World Class Facilities, 15 Redeveloped Stations in Rajasthan like Jaisalmer, Bundi, Barmer, Mandalgarh & Somesar etc. are Serving Passengers with Latest Amenities

### Travel Mail Desk

The Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting, and Electronics & Information Technology, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Shri Bhupender Yadav, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Shri Bhajanlal Sharma laid the foundation stone and dedicated to the nation various projects worth over ₹400 crore in Rajasthan virtually. State Minister Shri Sanjay Sharma, along with other dignitaries and senior railway officials also attended the event virtually.

The Railway Minister said that redevelopment work at Alwar railway station worth ₹112 crore is being undertaken under the Amrit Bharat Station scheme. Strategically located on the important Delhi-Jaipur route, Alwar station serves as a major hub catering to thousands of passengers every day. Keeping in view the continuously rising passenger footfall, the station is being upgraded with improved traffic management systems, ample parking facilities, organised arrival and departure areas, and modern passenger amenities. Shri Vaishnaw said that redevelopment work at Alwar Railway Station is progressing rapidly and the station will emerge as a modern and aesthetically designed facility after completion and has been planned in line with the vision of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi that railway stations should act as connectors for cities.

He added entry facilities are being developed on both sides of the station to improve urban connectivity. The station buildings are being constructed in accordance with the cultural and architectural heritage of Rajasthan. Modern platforms, foot overbridges, parking arrangements and passenger movement facilities are also being developed.

Under the redevelopment project, passengers will benefit from improved and seamless entry and exit arrangements at both the main and secondary entrances of the station. The new station complex, being developed over an area of nearly 16,000 square metres, will showcase modern infrastructure and passenger-centric facilities. An additional high-level platform, two foot overbridges of 6-metre width, and nine modern lifts are also being developed for enhanced passenger convenience.



The redevelopment project also includes the development of nearly 1,900 square metres of space for commercial activities. Besides providing world-class passenger facilities, the project is expected to strengthen Alwar's position as an emerging centre for tourism, trade and employment in the region.

The Railway Minister said that under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, three stations in Alwar area, Govind Garh, Rajgarh and Khairthal have already been completed. Across Rajasthan, redevelopment work is underway at 85 stations, out of which 15 stations have been completed so far.

**Shri Bhupender Yadav thanked Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw** for strengthening railway connectivity in the Alwar region and said that several train services have either been introduced or extended for the benefit of passengers. Shri Yadav said that the redevelopment of Alwar Railway Station reflects the grandeur and architectural identity of Rajasthan. He expressed confidence that the modernised Alwar station would emerge

as one of the finest railway stations in the state. Shri Yadav also thanked the Railway Ministry for sanctioning and completing several railway overbridge and underpass projects in the region. He said that the project would greatly benefit the people of Khairthal, Kishangarh Bas, Behror and surrounding areas by improving connectivity and easing transportation.

**Shri Bhajan Lal Sharma** said that Rajasthan is benefiting from its proximity to Delhi, which is strengthening industrial and transport connectivity in the state. Industrial centres such as Bhiwadi, Neemrana and Khushkhera are being connected through improved railway and transport infrastructure. Two major rail connectivity corridors are being planned for the region, including one railway line towards Alwar and an RRTS corridor towards Behror. These projects would improve integration with both conventional railway infrastructure and regional rapid transit systems, and the state government is committed to expediting their implementation.

# Union Railway Minister Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw Flags Off Bengaluru–Mumbai Express Train Strengthening Rail Connectivity Between Karnataka and Maharashtra

**Bengaluru–Mumbai  
Vande Bharat Sleeper  
Service to Start Soon  
–Ashwini Vaishnaw**

## Travel Mail Desk

**Sh. Vaishnaw** stated that long-pending demands of South & North Karnataka are now being fulfilled. Further, he announced that the Vande Bharat Sleeper service between Bengaluru and Mumbai is expected to start soon.

Highlighting infrastructure growth, he noted a significant increase in railway funding in recent years, accelerating project execution across Karnataka.

Under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, 61 stations are being redeveloped at a cost of ₹2,160 crore, with 9 already completed. Bengaluru Cantonment station is being redeveloped at ₹485 crore and Yeshwantpur at ₹367 crore.

Since 2014, about 1,750 km of new railway lines have been constructed in Karnataka, and complex electrification works in the Hassan–Mangaluru section have been completed and testing is going on.

On the Bengaluru Suburban Railway Project, he stated that work is progressing across all four corridors. For the Baiyappanahalli–Chikkabanavara and Heelalige–Rajanukunte corridors, land acquisition has been completed and station works are currently under progress. The KSR Bengaluru–Devanahalli alignment has been jointly approved by the State Government and the Railways, and the geotechnical survey has been completed. The Kengeri–Whitefield alignment was recently approved, and survey work will commence shortly. And he said that the suburban rail network will integrate key hubs, including the airport, Electronic City, Marathahalli, and Hebbal.

The Railway Minister further stated that Karnataka currently operates 12 pairs of Vande Bharat trains covering 14 districts. He noted that a Vande Bharat Sleeper maintenance depot will be established at Thanisandra at a cost of ₹270 crore, along with a chair car maintenance facility at SMVT Bengaluru costing ₹52.73 crore. Doubling of Baiyappanahalli–Hosur (₹1,116 crore), Bettahalasuru–Rajanukunte (₹248 crore), and quadrupling works around Bengaluru



Bullet train corridors connecting Bengaluru with Hyderabad and Chennai have also been approved, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted. He further noted that, with a long-term vision to connect Mumbai, Bengaluru, and other major cities, the network is expected to expand to 7,000 km.

**The Union Minister of State for Railways, Shri V. Somanna** while addressing the gathering during the flagging off of Train No.16553/54 SMVT Bengaluru – Lokmanya Tilak Terminus Express, expressed his gratitude to Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw for sanctioning the new Bengaluru–Mumbai train, stating that it will greatly benefit passengers on one of the busiest routes and further boost Karnataka's development.

He highlighted that Karnataka currently operates 12 pairs of Vande Bharat trains covering 14 districts. He noted that a Vande Bharat Sleeper maintenance depot will be established at Thanisandra at a cost of ₹270 crore, along with a chair car maintenance facility at SMVT Bengaluru costing ₹52.73 crore. Doubling of Baiyappanahalli–Hosur (₹1,116 crore), Bettahalasuru–Rajanukunte (₹248 crore), and quadrupling works around Bengaluru

(₹1,347 crore) are being undertaken to enhance capacity.

**Shri Somanna** informed that automatic signalling works are being implemented across key sections, including Yesvantpur, KSR Bengaluru, Lottgollahalli, Baiyappanahalli, Penukonda, Mysuru, and Jolarpettai, at a total cost of ₹6,396 crore. Highlighting overall growth, he stated that Karnataka has received a record railway budget allocation of ₹7748 crore. Since 2014, about 3,840 km of railway lines have been developed and 3,742 km electrified, taking the state close to 100% electrification. He added that the number of ROBs/RUBs has increased from about 150 before 2014 to 707 now, with 146 more to be completed within the next one year, and all level crossings targeted for elimination in the next three years.

Dignitaries present on the occasion included **Shri P. C. Mohan, Hon'ble Member of Parliament from Bengaluru Central; Shri Lehar Singh Siroya, Hon'ble Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha; and Shri Tejasvi Surya, Hon'ble Member of Parliament from Bengaluru South**, who joined the event through video conference, along with senior Railway officials.

# Railways Urges Passengers to Stay Alert & Vigilant While Travelling

**Report any Suspicious Activity or Person Indulging in It to Helpline Number 139 to Check Anti-Social Elements Targeting Railways.**

## Travel Mail Desk

Railways are using the latest technology tools like AI, drones, CCTV etc. intensively to enhance the safety of trains, passengers, station premises and the vast rail network. This is being undertaken in a mission mode by strengthening the intelligence gathering mechanism at the beat level of the Railway Protection Force (RPF). In a crucial high-level security review meeting held in New Delhi today, the Railway Ministry carried out extensive consultations with field officers from across the country in the presence of senior officials in the national capital. The meeting was chaired by **Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw at Rail Bhawan**. **Ministers of State for Railways V. Somanna and Ravneet Singh Bittu** were also present, besides the Chairman, Railway Board.



It was noted during the meeting that in the last few days, the involvement of anti-social elements has emerged during the initial probe into multiple incidents, including some recent fire incidents. Indian Railways has taken these

incidents seriously and the RPF is actively probing them. In several cases, prompt and proactive action by Railways helped avert major eventualities. It was also felt that, besides strengthening intelligence systems and the use of technology to

process inputs faster, Railways will further encourage passengers to actively support efforts in containing anti-social activities during their journey and while waiting at station premises. Railways has thus urged passengers to remain alert and vigilant while travelling. Any suspicious activity or suspicious person noticed on railway premises should be immediately reported on the Railway helpline number 139.

Discussions during the security review meeting focused on strengthening intelligence gathering mechanisms from the field through an improved reporting system. Emphasis was also laid on enhancing technology-driven security systems, expanding CCTV coverage across the railway network, and improving operational security coordination between Railway Board headquarters and field zones. The meeting also highlighted strengthening cyber security, upgrading camera specifications, and deploying AI-based surveillance and monitoring systems. The meeting further focused on strengthening coordination by improving information-sharing mechanisms between RPF and Government Railway Police for more effective security management across the railway network.

# Appointments



## **SEYCHELLES TOURISM BOARD REINSTATED; VESNA RAKIĆ APPOINTED CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

The reinstatement of the Seychelles Tourism Board marks a major milestone in the Government's efforts to strengthen the governance, international promotion, and long-term strategic development of Seychelles' tourism sector. The Seychelles Tourism Board Bill 2026, which was passed by the National Assembly, provides the organisation with a renewed legal mandate to market and position Seychelles as a premier, sustainable tourism destination, while supporting the continued growth, resilience, and competitiveness of the industry.

## **MIRAMO APPOINTS MR. RAAG VERMA AS HEAD – BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGY**

Miramo has announced the appointment of Mr. Raag Verma as its Head – Business Development and Strategy. With over 17 years of experience across luxury hospitality, travel management, experiential hospitality, and consumer brand development, Raag brings extensive industry expertise to the organisation.



## **VINEET GOPAL JOINS INDEVA HOTELS & RESORTS AS HEAD – CORPORATE RELATIONS & ASSET MANAGEMENT**

A respected name in India's tourism and hospitality industry, Vineet Gopal brings with him over 26 years of extensive experience spanning global tourism strategy, destination marketing, luxury travel, MICE, hospitality consulting, government liaison, and international business development.

## **JYOTI MISHRA TAKES CHARGE AS GENERAL MANAGER OF HYATT PLACE BHOPAL, USHERING IN A DYNAMIC NEW CHAPTER FOR HOSPITALITY EXCELLENCE**

With over 20 years of hospitality experience, Jyoti specialises in pre-opening operations and positioning properties for long-term success. Her focused approach to quality standards, guest satisfaction, and building high-performance teams has enabled her to drive operational efficiencies across the hotels she has been associated with. Her strong understanding of hospitality trends and evolving guest expectations makes her a valuable asset to the Hyatt family.



## **BLACK ROCK HOTELS & RESORTS APPOINTS PRANAV BHARADWAJ AS GENERAL MANAGER OF AAMAGHATI WILDLIFE RESORT RANTHAMBORE**

JW Marriott Mussoorie Walnut Grove Resort & Spa is pleased to announce the appointment of Gaurav Issar as its new General Manager, effective 9 March. A seasoned hospitality professional with over twenty-five years of experience, Gaurav steps into this role at a time when travel is increasingly defined by meaningful experiences, mindful luxury, and a deeper connection to the destination.

## **MANALI GUPTA APPOINTED AS CLUSTER GENERAL MANAGER FOR GRAND MERCURE MYSORE AND IBIS STYLES MYSURU**

Manali Gupta has been appointed as the Cluster General Manager for Grand Mercure Mysore and ibis Styles Mysuru. With over 18 years of experience in luxury hospitality and hotel operations, Manali brings a strong record of accomplishment in operational excellence, guest experience, team leadership, and brand positioning across renowned hospitality brands.



## **ATMOSPHERE CORE APPOINTS VANITA GOMEZ AS GENERAL MANAGER AT STILLWOOD RETREAT, A SIGNATURE ATMOSPHERE COORG**

Vanita Gomez brings over 18 years of cross-functional experience across premium global hospitality brands and destination hotels in India, spanning operations, sales leadership, revenue management, MICE, and weddings. She has demonstrated strong expertise in driving revenue growth, enhancing guest satisfaction, leading high-performing teams, and delivering memorable guest experiences.



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