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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Travel has always been about discovering places, but the way we experience and understand destinations is constantly evolving. Today, travellers are looking beyond conventional itineraries. They want meaningful encounters, deeper cultural connections, distinctive experiences and journeys that stay with them long after they return home.

This changing outlook is shaping the global tourism landscape, and it is particularly evident in the growing appeal of destinations that offer more than a single defining attraction.

For our November issue, we turn the spotlight on **Kenya** — a destination whose story extends far beyond the traditional image of an African safari. The Maasai Mara remains one of the world's most remarkable wildlife destinations, but Kenya's appeal lies equally in its landscapes, communities, culture and the experiences that bring them together. Our cover feature, Maasai Mara: More Than a Safari, explores this wider perspective, inviting readers to look beyond wildlife sightings and discover the deeper character of the destination.

Our coverage of the **Magical Kenya Tourism Expo 2026 in Nairobi** adds another dimension to this story. Bringing together tourism stakeholders from across the world, the expo highlighted Kenya's efforts to strengthen international partnerships and expand its presence in the global travel marketplace. It was also a reminder of the importance of platforms that connect destinations with the people who shape travel decisions — tour operators, travel agents, buyers, media and other industry professionals.

Closer to home, India continues to strengthen its position on the global tourism map. From the Prime Minister's reflections on India's growing tourism potential to new initiatives across states, the country's tourism story is gaining momentum. Madhya Pradesh, in particular, features prominently in this issue. Its evolving proposition across MICE, adventure, wildlife and heritage tourism, alongside the Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart 2026, reflects the growing importance of connecting destinations with investment, business opportunities and international markets.

The wider industry is moving in the same direction. Tourism boards are developing new experiences and strengthening trade engagement, while destinations such as Sharjah, Oman, Malaysia, Switzerland, Israel and South Africa continue to build their presence among Indian travellers. From simplified visa processes and new partnerships to curated familiarisation programmes, these developments demonstrate how destinations are adapting to an increasingly competitive market.

The traveller, meanwhile, is changing. Experiences are becoming as important as destinations themselves. Whether it is exploring Malaysia through its food, culture and the excitement of MotoGP, discovering the heritage-rich coastal towns of Thailand, or seeking seamless journeys where time becomes the ultimate luxury, travel is increasingly being shaped by individual interests and expectations.

This shift is also influencing the hospitality sector. Across India and international markets, new hotel openings, resort developments and distinctive hospitality concepts are expanding the choices available to travellers. The conversations with industry leaders featured in this issue offer perspectives on building hospitality destinations, creating new expressions of coastal luxury, strengthening guest experience and preparing for the future of the sector. Technology, leadership, operational excellence and sustainability remain central to these discussions.

Across our coverage of trade events, associations, tourism boards, airlines, hospitality brands and industry leaders, one idea connects this month's stories: **The future of travel will be shaped not only by where people go, but by what they discover, experience and take away from the journey.**

As we bring you this November edition, we hope the stories within these pages offer fresh perspectives, useful industry insights and inspiration for the journeys ahead.

Happy reading, and happy travels!

Warm Regards,

Ajay Gupta
Managing Editor – Travel Mail

travel mail

India's Leading Travel Magazine

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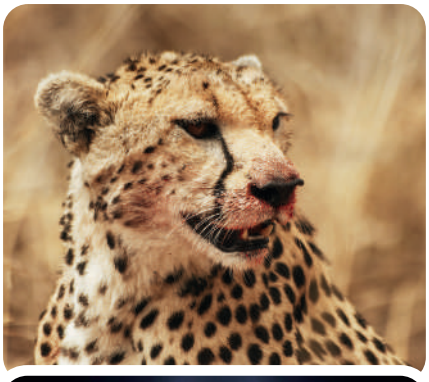



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Prime Minister shares an article on India's growth as a global tourism destination

Travel Mail Desk

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has shared an article written by Union Minister Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.

The article highlights India's rise on the global tourism map, supported by better connectivity, improved tourist facilities and easier digital access. It notes that this growth is opening new opportunities for local businesses, guides, artisans and communities.

The article further highlights sustainability as a key focus for the next phase of tourism, connecting India's rich heritage with economic opportunity while creating better experiences for travellers.

The Prime Minister's Office said in a post on X:

"India's rise on the global tourism map reflects better connectivity, improved tourist facilities and easier digital access, writes Union Minister



@gssjodhpur. This growth is opening new opportunities for local businesses, guides, artisans and communities.

With sustainability at the heart of tourism's next phase, India is connecting its rich heritage with economic opportunity as well as creating better experiences for travellers."



India's new leap on the world tourism map

India's 31st Rank in TTDI 2026 Shows that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Vision of 'Development as well as Heritage' Is Now Visible on the Ground

GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT

IF TOURISM IS TO REMAIN SUCCESSFUL OVER THE LONG TERM, NATURE AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES MUST BE TAKEN CARE OF. THIS IS WHY INDIA'S SEVENTH RANK IN TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY HOLDS SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE. OUR OBJECTIVE IS NOT MERELY TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF TOURISTS. WE WANT TOURISTS TO STAY LONGER, PURCHASE LOCAL PRODUCTS, EXPLORE NEW PLACES NEARBY AND RETURN WITH A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE

Union Minister Shri Prataprao Jadhav Seeks Surya Kiran Air Show at Lonar to Promote Maharashtra's Tourism Potential

Ayush Minister Requests Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to consider air shows at Lonar, Ajanta and Ellora during November 23–25

Travel Mail Desk

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Ayush and Minister of State, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Shri Prataprao Jadhav, has requested Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh to consider organising performances by the Indian Air Force's Surya Kiran Aerobatic Display Team at Maharashtra's iconic tourism destinations, including Lonar Crater Lake in Buldhana district, during November 23–25, 2026.

In a letter to the Defence Minister, Shri Jadhav highlighted the Surya Kiran team's reputation for precision, skill and coordinated aerial manoeuvres, noting that its performances showcase India's aviation capabilities while inspiring public interest and encouraging young people to explore opportunities in the Indian Air Force.

Shri Jadhav particularly highlighted Lonar Crater Lake, a unique natural formation in Maharashtra's Buldhana district that attracts visitors for its distinctive geological and environmental features. The lake is known for its saline and alkaline water and its striking crater landscape.

The Minister also drew attention to the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, globally recognised for their outstanding cultural and historical significance. Both sites are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.



Shri Jadhav has requested the Defence Ministry to provide the necessary approval and issue appropriate directions to concerned authorities for organising Surya Kiran Aerobatic Display performances and associated inspirational activities at Lonar, Ajanta and Ellora on any of November 23, 24 or 25, 2026.

The proposed air show is aimed at adding a distinctive public attraction to these destinations while showcasing India's aviation excellence and highlighting Maharashtra's rich natural, cultural and heritage tourism potential.

Railway Minister and Chief Minister of West Bengal Flag Off Jaipur (Khatipura) – Tatanagar – Santragachi Express Train

New Rail Service to Strengthen Connectivity Between Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal

Improved Rail Services to Boost Employment, Education and Trade

Travel Mail Desk

Union Minister for Railways, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw, and the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Shri Suvendu Adhikari flagged off the Jaipur (Khatipura)–Tatanagar–Santragachi Express train today. Shri Vaishnaw participated in the programme through video conferencing.

Shri Dilip Ghosh, Minister, Government of West Bengal; Shri Sunil Kothari, Mayor; Shri Bidyut Baran Mahato, Member of Parliament; and Smt. Manju Sharma, Member of Parliament, along with other public representatives and dignitaries, were present at the programme.

The Minister of Railways, Shri Vaishnaw said that the new train service connecting Jaipur with Jamshedpur and Kolkata would improve rail connectivity between Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. The Railway Minister added that the new service would benefit migrant workers residing in Rajasthan, business communities, students and other passengers travelling between different regions.

Highlighting the development of Railways in Jharkhand, Shri Vaishnaw said that the railway budget allocation for the state has increased from ₹450 crore to ₹7,500 crore, which is approximately 16 times the earlier allocation. He added that projects worth approximately ₹75,000 crore are underway in the state. He also stated that 57 stations in Jharkhand are being redeveloped under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Work has been completed at several stations, including Godda, Govindpur Road, Lohardaga, Madhupur and Muri.

The Railway Minister said that redevelopment work under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme is underway across the country, with more than 1,300 stations taken up for development. Several stations in West Bengal, including Santragachi, Jalpaiguri Road, Joychandi Pahar, Haldia and Kamakhyaguri, are also being redeveloped.

Shri Vaishnaw said that railway development is being undertaken keeping in mind the needs of middle-class and economically weaker families, for whom Railways is a major means of affordable transport. He emphasised that station redevelopment and improved connectivity would benefit passengers across all income groups.





Shri Vaishnaw said that the work of expanding the railway line connecting Howrah, Kharagpur, Chakulia and Tatanagar to four lines is underway. The Railway Minister also stated that the 4.5-kilometre-long section connected to the Beleghata-IT Centre of Kolkata Metro has been completed and trial runs have commenced on it. He said that this section would provide connectivity with the Green Line.

Chief Minister of West Bengal, Shri Suvendu Adhikari expressed his gratitude to Railway Minister Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw during the programme for the railway infrastructure projects being undertaken in the state.

Referring to the increase in railway budget allocation for West Bengal, Shri Adhikari said that the annual average allocation during 2009-2014 was ₹4,380 crore, which has increased to ₹14,205 crore for 2026-27. He said that the increased investment would help in the development of railway infrastructure and improvement of connectivity in the state.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Railway Minister to Flag Off New Vande Bharat Sleeper Trains Connecting Varanasi to New Delhi

New Train Service to Offer Faster & Luxurious Overnight Travel Alternative for Pilgrims, Students and Professionals Across Uttar Pradesh and Delhi

Travel Mail Desk

Indian Railways expanded its network of modern overnight rail services with the introduction of new Vande Bharat Sleeper Express trains connecting Varanasi with New Delhi. These services strengthened inter-city connectivity while offering passengers a modern, comfortable and efficient option for long-distance overnight travel.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Shri Yogi Adityanath and Union Minister for Railways Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw flagged off new Vande Bharat Sleeper Express services between Varanasi and New Delhi from Varanasi.

Following the introduction of Vande Bharat Sleeper services on the Howrah-Guwahati corridor and the corresponding return journey in January 2026, the new services will extend the benefits of this next-generation train to additional regions. With enhanced onboard amenities, advanced safety features and thoughtfully designed sleeper accommodation, Indian Railways is working towards making long-distance overnight journeys more comfortable, reliable and passenger-centric.

Varanasi–New Delhi: Enhanced Connectivity Between a Major Pilgrimage Centre and the National Capital

The Vande Bharat Sleeper service between Varanasi and New Delhi strengthened connectivity between one of India's most prominent spiritual and cultural destinations and the national capital.

Varanasi attracted pilgrims, domestic and international tourists, students and other visitors throughout the year. Improved overnight connectivity with New Delhi provided greater convenience to passengers travelling for religious, educational, professional, administrative and tourism-related purposes. The service connected Varanasi, Prayagraj, Kanpur Central, Aligarh and Ghaziabad before reaching New Delhi. These stations served important urban centres and provided connectivity to surrounding districts, helping extend the benefits of modern rail travel to a wider passenger base.

The service departed Varanasi at 20:50 and arrived in New Delhi at 06:10 the following morning. In the return direction, it departed New Delhi at 21:40 and reached Varanasi at 07:10 the next day.

Compared with the existing Shiv Ganga Express, the Vande Bharat Sleeper Express reduced journey time from Varanasi to New Delhi by 55 minutes and from New Delhi to Varanasi by 35 minutes, offering passengers a faster overnight travel option in both directions.



The service operated six days a week, except on Fridays for the Varanasi-originating service and Saturdays for the New Delhi-originating service. The overnight schedule allowed passengers to travel during the evening and reach their destination the following morning, helping them make more effective use of their time. The service proved particularly beneficial for pilgrims, tourists, students, working professionals and families who frequently travelled between eastern Uttar Pradesh and the National Capital Region.

Vande Bharat Sleeper: A New Standard in Overnight Passenger Travel

Designed specifically for long-distance journeys, the Vande Bharat Sleeper combined modern technology, improved safety systems and passenger-friendly amenities to enhance the overnight travel experience. Its design focused on providing a comfortable environment for passengers travelling over extended distances, with particular attention to sleeping arrangements, cleanliness, safety, accessibility and convenience.

Key features:

Power & performance

- Regenerative braking for energy efficiency
- Under-slung propulsion system
- Advanced aerodynamic design, smoother acceleration and jerk-free ride



Design & features

- Austenitic SS car body, meeting EN15227 crash standards
- Fully sealed flexible gangway with quick release mechanism
- Centrally controlled Single Leaf Automatic Sliding Plug Doors
- Noise insulation and mitigation measures for silent saloon space
- LED direct & indirect lighting
- Sensor based intercommunication door



Safety & Security

- Compliant with EN45545 HL3 grade Fire Safety standards
- Fire barrier doors at end wall
- Train Collision Avoidance System (TCAS)
- Disaster management light
- Smoke/Fire Detection System (FDS)
- CCTVs for safety and passenger surveillance
- Passenger Alarm Emergency push button

Comfort & Convenience

- Ergonomically designed odour free toilets with vacuum evacuation
- Special berths and toilets for differently-abled
- Modern passenger amenities with spacious luggage room
- Integrated BRL with 3-PIN charging socket & switch
- Type A and C USB charging ports
- PAPIS based driver / guard / passenger communication system
- Shower with hot water in First AC
- Wi-Fi Router with Access Point Network
- Air-conditioned Driver Cab & toilet for crew



These features reflect Indian Railways' commitment to combining modern engineering with passenger comfort, safety and operational efficiency.

Madhya Pradesh Set to Emerge as a Major MICE and Adventure Tourism Hub; MPTM 2026 Explored Future Tourism Strategy



Travel Mail Desk

The second day of Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart (MPTM) 2026 in Bhopal featured two significant sessions focused on strengthening the State's tourism ecosystem and positioning Madhya Pradesh as a leading tourism hub of the future. Roundtable discussions on 'Adventure Tourism' and 'MICE and Creative Economy' brought together eminent experts, policymakers and industry representatives to deliberate on strategies for unlocking the State's immense tourism potential.

Indore and Bhopal hold immense potential for major events.

During the roundtable on "MICE and Creative Economy: Drivers of Economic Growth, Building Madhya Pradesh's Event Economy", Mr. Harikishore S., Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, and Chairman, India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB), said the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) and live events sectors are expanding rapidly across the country.

He said India's MICE market has grown to approximately ₹37,576 crore, while the live events sector is projected to reach ₹19,600 crore by 2028. With demand for large-scale events rising in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, he highlighted the strong potential of Indore and Bhopal to emerge as prominent national and international event destinations.

He suggested establishing a City MICE Promotion Bureau, developing a dedicated State MICE Strategy, and creating large-scale convention venues to strengthen Madhya Pradesh's position in the national and international MICE landscape.

The session was moderated by Prateek Hira, Founder and CEO, Tornos.



Promoting destination weddings and the experience economy

During the session, Sabbas Joseph, Chairman, FICCI MICE Tourism Committee and Co-founder, Wizcraft Group, delivered a presentation on "Madhya Pradesh: The Experience Economy Opportunity."

He highlighted the potential of historic and culturally rich destinations such as Orchha, Khajuraho, Maheshwar, Mandu and Gwalior to emerge as distinctive destinations for weddings, festivals and large-scale celebrations.

He emphasised the need to organise familiarisation (FAM) tours for wedding planners, develop a portfolio of certified wedding destinations and service providers, and create comprehensive celebration packages that bring together Madhya Pradesh's traditional cuisine, art and culture, handloom and handicrafts.

Such integrated experiences, he said, can help position the State as a distinctive destination in India's growing experience economy.

Safe and integrated adventure hubs to be developed

The 'Adventure Tourism 2030' roundtable focused on developing Madhya Pradesh as a leading adventure tourism destination. Dr. Ilayaraja T., Secretary, Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, said that the State will undertake focused efforts to expand adventure tourism and has proposed observing 2027 as the "Adventure Year" to give greater impetus to adventure activities across Madhya Pradesh.

Focus on safety, infrastructure and professional standards

Padma Shri Ajit Bajaj, former Chairman, Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) and keynote speaker at the session, said adventure parks and supporting infrastructure in Madhya Pradesh should be developed through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model.

He advocated the creation of integrated adventure hubs rather than developing isolated activities at different locations. He further emphasised that safety standards must remain the highest priority in adventure tourism, with a strong focus on certified guides, activity-specific Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), emergency rescue mechanisms and medical insurance arrangements.

The roundtable was also attended by Dr. Abhay Arvind Bedekar, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, and Santosh Kumar Srivastava, Joint Director (Adventure).

The discussions at MPTM 2026 highlighted Madhya Pradesh's growing focus on MICE tourism, destination weddings, experience-led travel and adventure tourism, with an emphasis on developing world-class infrastructure, strengthening industry partnerships and creating safe, sustainable and distinctive experiences for visitors.

MADHYA PRADESH HAS IMMENSE TOURISM POTENTIAL: CHIEF MINISTER DR. YADAV

State Government Committed to Promoting Tourism Investment; Major MoUs Signed and Letters of Award Presented in Presence of CM Dr. Yadav

Travel Mail Desk

Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav said that *Madhya Pradesh offers immense tourism potential, with its natural beauty, rich wildlife, historical heritage and spiritual destinations. He said that the state government is fully committed to supporting investors through transparent policies, expedited approvals and a single-window system. Chief Minister Dr. Yadav held one-to-one meetings with leading tourism investors, hospitality groups and stakeholders from India and abroad to promote private investment and accelerate tourism infrastructure development in the state during MP Travel Mart 2026. Several important MoUs were signed in areas including tourism infrastructure, heritage conservation, skill development and film tourism, while Letters of Award (LoAs) were also presented to investors.*





₹848.40 Crore Investment MoU for Ramgarh in Sehore

In a major investment promotion initiative, an MoU was signed with A.R.M. Foods Pvt. Ltd. for an investment of ₹848.40 crore in Ramgarh, Sehore district, for developing a golf course, hotel villas, a wellness resort and luxury hotel projects. The ambitious project is expected to create 920 direct employment opportunities. A.R.M. Foods was represented by its Chairman and Director Atul Agrawal.

Assurance of Expedited Approvals to Boost Investment and Employment

Chief Minister Dr. Yadav welcomed investors, institutions and entrepreneurs and assured them that the state government would facilitate land allotment, infrastructure development and necessary approvals in a time-bound manner. He expressed confidence that the MoUs, investment proposals and Letters of Award would take Madhya Pradesh's tourism sector to new heights and create extensive employment and self-employment opportunities for local youth.

MoUs for Skill Development, Heritage Conservation and Film Tourism

Several other important MoUs were signed in tourism development, planning and capacity building. An MoU was signed with ACAD, Indore, for film production education, tourism and content creation. For heritage conservation, an MoU was signed with the School of Planning and Architecture (SPA), New Delhi, to prepare an integrated management plan for the historic Orchha complex.

Under skill development, an MoU was signed with the Indian Institute of Travel and Tourism Management (IITTM), Gwalior, for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) training and certification of tourist vehicle drivers. In the first phase, 100 tourist vehicle drivers from Bhopal will be trained. The institute was represented by Prof. Prashant K. Gauta.

An MoU was also signed with Dronah for preparing an environmental, landscape and conservation plan for the Orchha complex, represented by Shikha Jain.

In addition, a tripartite MoU was signed among the BSF Academy, MPSTDC and the district administration for developing tourism facilities and digital infrastructure and upgrading the BSF Museum at the BSF Academy in Tekanpur, Gwalior. The initiative was represented by DIG Harinder Singh Tomar and Ritesh Thakur.



Major Investment Proposals in Hospitality and Luxury Resorts

During the one-to-one meetings, major investment proposals emerged in the hospitality and luxury resort sectors. Atmosphere Group Managing Director Saubhagya Mahapatra shared plans to invest ₹500 crore in expanding luxury hospitality facilities in Ujjain, Indore and major wildlife circuits.

Renny Group Director Pankaj Fulwani discussed investments exceeding ₹290 crore, including the development of the 350-year-old Lunera Sarai in Mandu as a 'Welcome Hotel by ITC' at an investment of ₹130 crore, a waterfront resort opposite Kutni Dam in Khajuraho at ₹125 crore, a 'Storii by ITC' property in Sidhi at ₹35 crore and a resort near Bansagar Dam in Maihar.

Sarv Group Managing Director Kunal Gyani discussed an investment of ₹100 crore in a 40-acre ultra-luxury wildlife resort in Satpura Tiger Reserve in partnership with Taj Safaris, along with total investments of ₹300 crore across the state.

MRVH Resorts Director Jitendra Singh proposed completing the ₹200-crore 'Ramada Resort by Wyndham' under construction in Omkareshwar by the end of 2026, ahead of Simhastha 2028, along with an additional investment of ₹150 crore in Ratapani, Bandhavgarh, Pachmarhi and Madhai.

Leading Groups Show Interest in Wildlife Tourism and Hotel Expansion

To accelerate wildlife tourism, Ramco Group (JKR Hospitality) Managing Director Sharda Deepa presented plans to develop sustainable wildlife resorts with investments of ₹120–140 crore in Kanha, Kuno, Pench, Rani Durgavati, Sanjay Dubri, Ratapani, Bandhavgarh and Panna.

Varay Hotels CMD Shailesh Kalwaria discussed an ₹80-crore hotel project at Brajrajkhedi in Ujjain. Abraham George Ramapuram of Evolve Back Group discussed a resort project worth more than ₹50 crore in Mandu, while Vinod Singh Rajpurohit of Anashvish Tiger Camp discussed luxury projects in Kanha and Satpura in partnership with The Leela.



Visquess Hospitality's S. Venkat Reddy, JuSTa Hotels' Ashish Vohra, Ambuja Neotia's Avaneesh Kohli and Ahilya Experiences' Yashwant Rao Holkar also expressed strong interest in investing in hotel and destination hospitality projects across the state.

Discussions on Film Production, Cultural Promotion and Food Tourism

Under film tourism, TVF founder Arunabh Kumar discussed developing Madhya Pradesh as a film hub, referring to the shooting of popular web series such as Panchayat and Gullak in the state. Renowned actor Annu Kapoor shared his views on promoting cultural heritage through cinema, while celebrity chef Ranveer Brar offered suggestions for developing destination-based food tourism.

Letters of Award Issued for Resort and Tourism Projects

In the presence of Chief Minister Dr. Yadav, the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board presented Letters of Award to investors and entrepreneurs for developing new tourism projects across different regions of the state.

These included a resort and multipurpose tourism project in Orchha, Niwari district, to M/s Anya Polytech and Fertilizers Ltd. (Yashpal Yadav); a resort project in Gurgunda village, Betul, to M/s Haven Techno System Pvt. Ltd. (Rajendra Thakur); and a resort project in Bothiya village to Sandeep Soni. Letters of Award were also issued to Swati Goyal for a resort project in Bassi village, Neemuch; Jainam Jain for a wellness resort in Kanghatthi village, Mandsaur; and Raghuraj Singh Choudhary for an eco-tourism project in Gandhi Sagar. In Raisen, M/s Techno Planners LLP (Ashish Bhadauria) received a Letter of Award for a resort and other tourism projects in Murli Khedi village, while M/s Gyanodaya Group (Murat Singh) received one for a hotel/resort project in Salaiya Ganj village, Sagar district.

Heritage Hotel and Wayside Amenities Projects Approved

Letters of Award were presented to Sanjesh Raghuvanshi, Alok Kataria and M/s Sai Harda Construction and Developers (Akash Sachdeva) for resort projects in Lavakhedi village, Sehore district. Shailesh Kalwaria received a Letter of Award for a resort project in Brajraj Khedi, Ujjain, while Ratna Jadon received one for a heritage hotel project at Lakshmipur Palace in Panna.

Letters of Award were also issued for developing wayside amenities along highways to provide quality facilities to tourists and travellers. These included a facility centre on the Khajuraho–Panna route to M/s Neelam Construction (Neelam Singh); a facility centre at Tendukheda village on the Jabalpur–Bhopal route to Durga Das Patel; and a wayside facility centre at Harsodan village on the Ujjain–Makshi route to Patidar Foods Pvt. Ltd. (Purushottam Patidar and Akash Patidar).

Focus on MICE, Adventure Tourism and Technological Innovation

To position Madhya Pradesh as a major destination for national and international MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) events and adventure tourism, EEMA President Deepak Chaudhary and Wizcraft International Co-founder Sabbas Joseph discussed opportunities for hosting major events.

Former Adventure Tour Operators Association of India President Ajit Bajaj emphasised the development of environmentally sustainable adventure tourism.

TBO Group Managing Director Ankush Nijhawan proposed skill development for tourism stakeholders through the 'TBO Academy'. TAAI President Sunil Kumar and ADTOI President Ved Khanna outlined strategies for promoting unexplored tourism destinations.

In technology and innovation, Explorger founder Jitin Bhatia proposed deploying AI-based assistants or 'AI Agents' at tourism destinations to enhance visitor experiences.



Tourism Malaysia Brought Together International Media Representatives for Mega Fam Programme in Conjunction with PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia (MotoGP 2026)

Travel Mail Desk

Tourism Malaysia hosted a Meet & Greet session at IRAMA Dining Kuala Lumpur for 19 international media representatives and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) participating in its Mega Familiarisation (Mega Fam) Programme in conjunction with the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia (MotoGP 2026). Held from 29 October to 2 November 2026, the five-day programme brought together delegates from China, India, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Thailand to experience Malaysia's motorsports, cultural, heritage, gastronomy and lifestyle offerings. The initiative formed part of Tourism Malaysia's efforts to strengthen international media engagement, expand destination visibility and support the Visit Malaysia 2026–2027 (VM2026–2027) campaign.







Mr. Mohd Akbal Setia, Deputy Director General (Promotions), Tourism Malaysia, said, *"The Mega Fam Programme was a strategic platform to strengthen Malaysia's international visibility and support the objectives of Visit Malaysia 2026–2027. By bringing international media representatives and content creators to experience the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia and Malaysia's diverse tourism offerings, we aimed to generate meaningful media coverage and inspire greater interest in Malaysia as a preferred travel destination. Hosting world-class motorsports events at the Sepang International Circuit (SIC) demonstrated Malaysia's capability to stage major international sporting events while creating opportunities for tourism growth. By combining the excitement of the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia with experiences across our cultural, heritage, gastronomy and lifestyle attractions, we could further strengthen Malaysia's appeal as a sports tourism destination and encourage visitors to discover more of the country."*













A key highlight of the programme was the Night Track Tour at Sepang International Circuit (SIC), held as part of the strategic collaboration between Tourism Malaysia and SIC for the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia (MotoGP 2026). It offered participants a unique after-dark experience at the iconic motorsports venue. The itinerary also featured visits to Kuala Lumpur City Gallery and Batu Caves, a shopping experience at The Exchange TRX, and a city tour aboard the KL Hop-On Hop-Off (HOHO) service.

Participants also visited Thean Hou Temple, enjoyed a Malaysian cultural dance performance at the Malaysia Tourism Centre (MATIC), and attended a product briefing and guided tour at KLDEX, featuring its durian museum. The programme further included an interactive experience at Space & Time Cube Malaysia and a taste of traditional Nusantara cuisine at Tuai + Till Restaurant, Kimpton Naluria Hotel Kuala Lumpur.

The highlight of the programme was the delegates' attendance at the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia race on 1 November 2026. Their participation was expected to generate international media exposure for Malaysia's motorsports scene while showcasing the country's capability to host major sporting events and deliver diverse visitor experiences.

Malaysia's tourism sector continued to demonstrate positive momentum, recording 32.3 million international visitor arrivals from January to September 2026, a 2.4 per cent increase from 31.5 million arrivals during the same period in 2025. Against this backdrop, Tourism Malaysia continued to strengthen its international promotional efforts through initiatives such as the Mega Fam Programme, aiming to broaden media coverage, raise awareness of Malaysia's diverse tourism offerings and encourage more travellers to visit the country in conjunction with Visit Malaysia 2026–2027.

Madhya Pradesh Tourism Bags Prestigious Excellence Award, Showcased Rich Heritage and Connectivity at the 75th Anniversary TAAI Convention in Kolkata



Travel Mail Desk

The Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board marked its robust participation at the landmark 69th Convention & Exhibition of the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), held at the ITC Royal Bengal, Kolkata. Coinciding with TAAI's historic 75th anniversary celebrations, the three-day Indian Travel Congress served as a strategic platform for Madhya Pradesh to engage with over 900 domestic and international travel trade delegates.

Adding a monumental milestone to the occasion, Madhya Pradesh Tourism was conferred with a prestigious Excellence Award during the grand anniversary ceremony. The accolade recognises the state's outstanding contributions to tourism innovation, forward-thinking policies, operational brilliance, and successful execution of major domestic travel trade initiatives.

"Madhya Pradesh is transforming into a global tourism hub by seamlessly blending our rich historical heritage with contemporary experiences," stated **Dr. Abhay Arvind Bedekar (IAS), Additional Managing Director (AMD) of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, shared the state's forward-looking roadmap for the travel trade.** Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board focused heavily on driving regional tourism, highlighting the state's burgeoning film tourism potential, and expanding aviation connectivity with major Indian and global carriers. A major highlight of the state's showcase included the comprehensive planning and infrastructure preparations underway for Simhasth 2028 in Ujjain, one of the world's largest spiritual congregations.

Dr. Bedekar added, *"Madhya Pradesh is transforming into a global tourism hub by seamlessly blending our rich historical heritage with contemporary experiences. Receiving this excellence award at TAAI's historic 75th anniversary is a testament to our tireless efforts toward destination innovation and sustainable trade practices. Through trailblazing initiatives like the Tourism Policy–2025, robust rural homestay expansions, and significantly boosted air connectivity via the PM Shri Heli Paryatan Seva, we are equipping travel agents with a highly diverse and lucrative portfolio to offer modern travellers."*

Qatar Simplifies Travel for Indian Visitors with the A1 Tourist Visa

Travel Mail Desk

As Qatar solidifies its position as a must-visit destination for global travellers, planning a trip to the country has never been more seamless. For Indian travellers, visiting Qatar is now easier than ever with the A1 Tourist Visa simplifying the entry process.

The growing demand for Qatar is driven by its striking blend of heritage and innovation, the thriving modern art scene, its strategic location on the map, and its position as a global transit hub thanks to Qatar Airways' vast network. The country offers desert and glamping adventures, wellness retreats, family attractions, immersive art and culture, Michelin-starred dining and a growing calendar of world-class sporting events, live entertainment and music festivals throughout the year.

Getting Started: The Hayya Platform

All visa applications are processed through the official Hayya platform at www.hayya.qa. The first step is to create a Hayya account. A quick tip: each adult application requires one Hayya account, linked to a single email address and the applicant's passport, except for dependents, who may be linked to the primary applicant's account.

Whether you are planning a leisure holiday, a business stopover, or a cultural deep-dive, here is a handy guide to the current visa options:

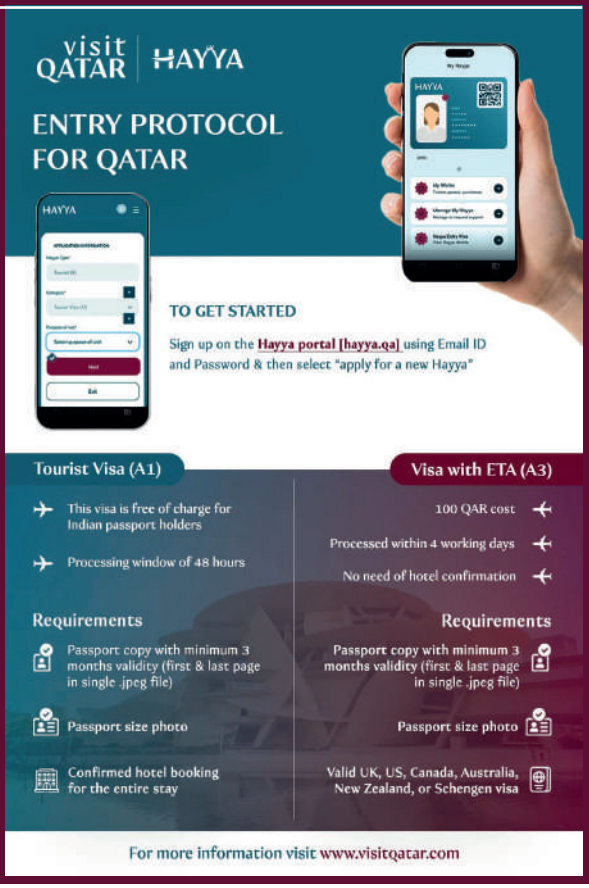
Tourist Visa (A1): A Simple Entry Option for Indian Travellers

For Indian travellers planning a visit to Qatar, the A1 Tourist Visa provides a simple and convenient entry option.

Applicants can apply through the Hayya platform, which offers a simple and streamlined visa application process. To complete the application, travellers are required to upload:

- A clear passport scan showing both the first and last pages in a single .jpeg file
- A passport-sized photograph against a white background
- A confirmed hotel booking
- Travellers who are hosted by family or friends in Qatar are not required to submit a hotel booking confirmation.

Once verified, the visa is granted free of charge, making the process quick and accessible for Indian visitors planning leisure trips, cultural experiences, or short getaways in Qatar.



Beyond Sustainability

How Sharjah Is Building a Stronger Eco-Tourism Story

Travel Mail Desk

As sustainability moves from being a travel trend to an important consideration for travellers and the tourism industry, Sharjah is committed not only to expanding its offerings for visitors seeking new and unique experiences but also to protecting the natural environments and heritage that make the destination special.

From protected mangrove ecosystems and wildlife conservation centres to nature-based stays and environmental education, the emirate is creating experiences where tourism and conservation can work alongside each other.





Kalba: Where Conservation Becomes an Experience

On Sharjah's East Coast, Kalba is one of the emirate's strongest examples of nature-led tourism. The area is known for its rich biodiversity and mangrove ecosystems, with the Khor Kalba Mangrove Centre giving visitors an opportunity to understand one of the UAE's most important natural environments.



Set amid an ancient mangrove landscape, the centre offers visitors an educational, interactive introduction to the ecosystem. The surrounding area is home to diverse marine and birdlife, including the rare Arabian Collared Kingfisher, turtles, crabs, fish and other marine species.

Kalba offers an opportunity for tour operators to create itineraries that combine nature, wildlife, kayaking and environmental discovery, appealing to travellers who increasingly want their holidays to include meaningful outdoor experiences.

Kingfisher Retreat: When Luxury Meets Conservation

Kingfisher Retreat in Kalba is a perfect example of how a high-end stay can be built around its natural surroundings. Located on a protected island and surrounded by mangroves, wildlife and the coast, the retreat incorporates conservation into the guest experience. Visitors can explore the mangroves, observe wildlife and experience the natural landscape while staying in tented accommodation designed around the destination's outdoor setting.

This aspect of tourism is aimed at attracting individuals and groups that seek experiential luxury, where privacy and comfort are combined with a stronger connection to nature.

Protecting Wildlife, Creating Experiences

Sharjah's conservation story also extends to its wildlife centres and protected environments. Wasit Nature Reserve, located within Sharjah city, is a one-of-a-kind project that shows how an environmental project can create both a thriving ecosystem and a visitor experience.

The reserve is home to more than 200 bird species and features diverse habitats including coastal dunes, salt flats, ponds and a lake. The project transformed a previously degraded area into a habitat for indigenous flora and fauna and received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2019.

Nature as a Tourism Asset

Sharjah's approach highlights an important shift for the tourism industry: nature is no longer simply a backdrop to travel; it is becoming the experience itself.

The emirate's mangroves, mountains, deserts, and wildlife reserves let travel planners build itineraries around hiking, kayaking, wildlife encounters, and environmental learning. Visit Sharjah itself positions the destination's nature and wildlife experiences alongside adventure, heritage and culture, reflecting the growing importance of outdoor tourism within the emirate's wider visitor offering.

As the travel industry continues to look for ways to balance growth with responsible tourism, Sharjah is showing how protecting natural assets can also strengthen a destination's tourism appeal.

Indian Influencers Explore Oman's Tourism Experiences Across Three Destinations





Travel Mail Desk

Oman showcased its diverse tourism offerings through a curated seven-day Social Media Influencer Familiarization (FAM) trip, highlighting the country's unique blend of cultural attractions, adventure, luxury, wellness, heritage, and natural landscapes.

In Muscat, the influencers explored the country's rich cultural and historical heritage through visits to Muttrah Souq and the Muttrah cable car station, where they browsed traditional products and enjoyed panoramic views of the Hajar Mountains, the Arabian Sea and Muttrah Corniche.

Visits to the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque and the Royal Opera House provided insights into Oman's architectural excellence, craftsmanship, and cultural significance, while a sunset excursion to the Dimaniyat Islands, featuring encounters with turtles, added an element of adventure. The group also experienced luxury hospitality at the Mandarin Oriental, along with a memorable Indian lunch at Bukhara, Kempinski Hotel.

A visit to the Amouage factory offered an insight into Oman's renowned fragrance-making heritage and its tradition of luxury craftsmanship. Birkat Al Mouz offered a glimpse into Oman's historic settlements and traditional falaj irrigation systems, recognised for their cultural importance, The group later hiked to Suwgra Village, where they had lunch and experienced the centuries-old living heritage of the local community.

At Jabal Akhdar, Indigo Hotel gave the group a taste of mountain-resort life, including enjoying a sunset and dinner at The Vue Rooftop Lounge, the highest in the Middle East.

The adventure continued in Jabal Akhdar with a Via Ferrata experience across the mountainous terrain, offering an adrenaline-filled activity complemented by spectacular views. The group also explored Diana's Viewpoint, taking in the region's dramatic mountain scenery.

The journey continued in Salalah with a stay at Anantara Al Baleed Resort Salalah. The resort offered guests an experience of Dhofari warmth and understated luxury, with elegant villa-style accommodation providing privacy and comfort by the coast. The beach and evening skies created a peaceful setting to unwind.

In Salalah, the itinerary showcased Dhofar's striking natural diversity through visits to Hidden Beach Viewpoint, Shaat Viewpoint, Al Fazayah Beach, and Al Mughsail Beach. The group enjoyed lunch at Hilton, where welcome drinks set the tone for a warm reception. The chef and team paid special attention to the guests' vegetarian preferences, ensuring a thoughtful dining experience.





At Al Haffa Souq in Salalah, the group discovered frankincense, locally known as luban, along with fragrances and other traditional products that reflect the region's trading heritage. The visit concluded with a ride on the Salalah Eye, offering panoramic views of the city at sunset.

The experience extended to the historic town of Taqah, the Anti-Gravity Point, and Wadi Darbat, where a boating excursion through lush green surroundings offered a different perspective on the region's landscapes. The group also explored the distinctive baobab trees along the Ain Hasher Trail — further highlighting experiences rooted in the destination's natural and cultural character.

Upon returning to Muscat, the group stayed at W Muscat, further showcasing the country's contemporary luxury accommodation options. The programme included special indoor activities in Muscat such as guided shooting practice at Action Point – Active Oman, where the group tried shotgun, pistol, and rifle shooting.

It also included a trip to Snow Oman, where the influencers enjoyed snow-themed attractions and observed the King Penguins, appealing to travellers looking for both outdoor adventures and urban attractions. The trip concluded with a farewell dinner at Mumtaz Mahal.

These experiences highlighted Oman's appeal to Indian travellers seeking premium stays, scenic retreats, restorative escapes and opportunities to slow down amid nature. The combination of mountain air, coastal settings, immersive local experiences and high-quality hospitality also makes the destination suitable for wellness-inspired holidays and meaningful time away from everyday routines.

With its close geographical proximity to India and strong air connectivity, Oman offers Indian travellers an alternative to conventional holidays — combining the thrill of discovery, the warmth of hospitality, and authentic cultural experiences, all just a short flight away.

Baden-Württemberg Showcases the Best of Southwest Germany Through Trade and Corporate FAM Trips with Air India

Travel Mail Desk

Tourismus Marketing GmbH Baden-Württemberg, in partnership with Air India, organised two familiarisation (FAM) trips for Indian travel trade and corporate representatives, showcasing the diverse experiences of Baden-Württemberg in Southwest Germany. The visits highlighted the region's potential for Indian travellers seeking nature, culture, distinctive local experiences and premium leisure opportunities, particularly during the autumn season.

The Trade FAM was dedicated to exploring Baden-Württemberg, while the Corporate/MICE FAM was organised in collaboration with the Frankfurt Tourism Board, introducing corporate representatives to the region's experiences and its potential for business travel and incentive itineraries.

With its colourful forests, charming towns, cultural heritage and opportunities for wellness, gastronomy and shopping, Baden-Württemberg offers a compelling proposition for travellers looking to experience a different side of Germany. Autumn adds another dimension to the destination, with golden landscapes, seasonal culinary experiences and inviting outdoor activities.

During the familiarisation visits, participants explored Baden-Baden, known for its historic spa heritage, elegant architecture and wellness experiences, before discovering the scenic surroundings and distinctive traditions of the Black Forest. The itinerary also included Triberg, where visitors could experience the region's characteristic landscapes and local attractions. Cultural stops included the House of 1000 Clocks and Modestadl, offering an introduction to traditional clothing and regional craftsmanship.



Commenting on the initiative, **Cosima Jung, International Marketing Manager, Tourismus Marketing GmbH Baden-Württemberg,** said *"Baden-Württemberg offers Indian travellers a wonderful mix of experiences, from the natural beauty of the Black Forest and the wellness traditions of Baden-Baden to authentic cultural encounters and exceptional shopping. Autumn is a particularly inspiring time to discover the region, as its landscapes and seasonal experiences create a distinctive atmosphere. Through our collaboration with Air India and our engagement with the Indian travel trade and corporate segment, we aim to strengthen awareness of Baden-Württemberg and encourage more Indian visitors to explore the many experiences our region has to offer."*

South African Tourism Works Closely with Indian Travel Trade to Simplify South Africa's New ETA Process

Travel Mail Desk

South African Tourism is strengthening its engagement with the Indian travel trade to build awareness and understanding of South Africa's new Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) process, supporting trade partners in guiding eligible Indian travellers through the digital system. Through stakeholder interactions and knowledge-sharing initiatives, the organisation is working to familiarise the trade with the process, address queries and facilitate a smoother pre-travel experience for visitors to South Africa.

Neliswa Nkani, Acting Hub Head, South African Tourism, said, *"Our travel trade partners play an important role in helping Indian travellers discover South Africa, and it is important that they have the clarity and confidence to guide their clients through new processes such as the ETA. Engaging directly with our partners allows us to address their questions, understand their needs and help them navigate these developments. We remain committed to working closely with the trade to build awareness of the ETA and support a smoother travel experience for eligible Indian travellers to South Africa."*

The Pune travel trade welcomed the opportunity to engage directly with South African Tourism and representatives from the Department of Home Affairs. **Nilesh Bhansali, President, Travel Agencies Association of Pune (TAAP),** said, *"A special thanks to Neliswa and her team from South African Tourism for continuously engaging with the travel trade in such a proactive, positive and solution-oriented manner. Your team truly understands the challenges faced by the industry and works closely with us to find practical solutions."*



Neliswa Nkani
Acting Hub Head, South African Tourism

Amol Damle, Partner, Damle Safaris, added, *"We sincerely thank Ms. Neliswa Nkani, Acting Hub Head, South African Tourism, and Mr. Yusuf Simons from the Department of Home Affairs for their clear, insightful presentations on the new ETA process. The session has helped us prepare for the anticipated rush in travel to South Africa ahead of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2027."*

South African Tourism's engagement with the Indian travel trade forms part of its broader efforts to strengthen destination knowledge, build confidence among industry stakeholders and support prospective visitors as they navigate the new authorisation process. By working closely with trade partners and relevant stakeholders, the organisation aims to improve awareness of the ETA and reinforce South Africa's accessibility as a destination for Indian travellers.

Switzerland Tourism welcomes its new Friendship Ambassador for India

Travel Mail Desk

Switzerland Tourism has announced Indian cricketer Jemimah Rodrigues as its new Friendship Ambassador for India. The association marks a fresh chapter in Switzerland Tourism's long-standing relationship with Indian travellers. The announcement was made in Bangalore in the presence of Martin Nydegger, CEO, Switzerland Tourism, along with members of the media and the travel industry.



For this next chapter, Switzerland Tourism has chosen a voice that already resonates strongly with young India. Jemimah Rodrigues represents a generation that is global in outlook yet deeply rooted in its Indian identity. As a Friendship Ambassador, she will bring that perspective to Switzerland, experiencing the destination in her own way and introducing Indian audiences to a side of the country that goes beyond the familiar.

Speaking about the association, **Martin Nydegger, CEO, Switzerland Tourism,** said, *"India and Switzerland have shared a special relationship for many years, and that relationship continues to evolve with every generation of travellers. Long-haul markets such as India have an important role to play in strengthening year-round tourism in Switzerland, especially in our mountain regions. Today's Indian traveller is curious, confident and increasingly looking for experiences that feel personal and authentic. Jemimah brings that spirit naturally. Her energy, warmth and ability to connect with people make her a wonderful fit for this association, and we are delighted to welcome her as our Friendship Ambassador for India."*

For Jemimah, the association is also an opportunity to experience Switzerland from a fresh perspective. She said, *"Representing India has always been something very special to me, and wherever I travel, I carry a little bit of home with me. What excites me about this association is the chance to discover Switzerland beyond everything we already know and love about it. I'm looking forward to meeting people, trying new things, exploring different places, and sharing those moments with everyone back home. I'm really excited to begin this journey with Switzerland Tourism"*

Adding to this, **Christian Schoch, Director India, Switzerland Tourism,** said, *"India is one of our top 10 source markets, and we are seeing Indian travellers increasingly look for new ways to experience Switzerland. With Jemimah, we have an opportunity to showcase the diversity of the destination across the year, from different seasons and regions to experiences that go beyond the traditional highlights. This also ties closely into our Travel Better philosophy: encouraging travellers to stay longer, explore further and discover both the iconic and the lesser-known sides of Switzerland. Jemimah's natural curiosity and sense of adventure make her a great fit to tell that story to India."*

Israel Ministry of Tourism Signs Strategic MoU with TAAI to Strengthen Tourism Ties with India

Travel Mail Desk

The Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) at the association's 69th Convention & Exhibition, held in Kolkata from 25–27 October 2026.

The agreement marks another step towards strengthening Israel's engagement with the Indian travel trade and exploring new opportunities for tourism promotion and collaboration between the two organisations.

The MoU was signed by Galit Hoffman, Consul for Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India, and Sunil Kumar, President, TAAI. It establishes a framework for long-term cooperation, with a focus on enhancing awareness of Israel as a tourism destination, strengthening destination knowledge among Indian travel professionals and developing mutually agreed initiatives to encourage tourism between the two markets. Under the agreement, IMOT and TAAI will explore opportunities to collaborate on joint roadshows across India, destination training and educational programmes, familiarisation (FAM) tours, and marketing and promotional initiatives.

Galit Hoffman, Consul for Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India, said *"For us, building strong relationships with our travel trade partners is key to growing our presence in India. TAAI has deep roots in the Indian travel industry and a strong network across the country, making this partnership a great opportunity to connect with more travel professionals and explore new ways to promote Israel. We see tremendous potential in the Indian market and believe that working closely with our partners will help us turn growing interest into meaningful opportunities. We truly value the trust and support of our Indian travel partners and look forward to building a strong, lasting relationship with TAAI."*



Sunil Kumar, President, Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), said *"We are pleased to partner with the Israel Ministry of Tourism to strengthen destination promotion and create new opportunities for our members. Through TAAI's nationwide network, we look forward to facilitating greater engagement between Israel and the Indian travel trade through joint initiatives. This collaboration will help our members gain a deeper understanding of Israel's tourism offerings and better serve the evolving interests of Indian travellers."*

For IMOT, the partnership forms part of its continued efforts to deepen engagement with the Indian travel trade and broaden awareness of Israel beyond its traditional positioning as a pilgrimage destination. Israel offers a range of experiences spanning culture and heritage, leisure and family holidays, luxury travel, adventure, culinary experiences and MICE, providing opportunities to engage with travellers across different interests and segments.

The MoU with TAAI follows IMOT's three-city roadshow in New Delhi, Bengaluru and Mumbai earlier this month, its first such series in India in almost seven years, as well as the signing of a separate MoU with Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI). Adding to this momentum, Air India is scheduled to resume direct Delhi–Tel Aviv flights from 1 December 2026, with five weekly services.

Through these initiatives and its partnerships with Indian travel trade associations, IMOT aims to strengthen destination knowledge, develop new tourism opportunities and build lasting relationships with the Indian travel industry.

The Great North targets share of £1.5bn Indian tourism market to drive growth across the North

Travel Mail Desk

The North of England has joined forces under The Great North banner to target a greater share of India's rapidly growing visitor market, with the ambition of attracting more tourists to discover the North.

By coming together around a shared proposition, the North's cities, destinations and visitor attractions can offer international visitors an experience greater than the sum of its parts, combining globally recognised sport, music and culture with heritage, countryside, screen tourism and premium experiences.



Looking at this year, VisitBritain forecasts 597,000 visits from India to the UK, with visitors estimated to spend £865 million during their trips. By making it easier for the international travel trade to build multi-destination Northern itineraries, partners aim to encourage more of those visitors to explore the North, stay longer and spend across more destinations.

Kim McGuinness, North East Mayor and Chair of The Great North, said, *"We want Indian visitors to enjoy everything Britain has to offer, but to travel further, stay longer and experience more. From our great cities and spectacular landscapes to Premier League football, international cricket, castles, culture and coastline, the North has an incredible amount to offer. The North East is a place I'm incredibly proud to call home, and our greatest strength is the warmth and hospitality of our people. We've experienced that same wonderful welcome in India, and I want us to return it to many more Indian visitors. By bringing our regions together through The Great North, we're putting the North of England on the international stage. Now we want to work with the Indian travel trade to turn that opportunity into unforgettable journeys, more visitors and bookings, and lasting economic benefits for our communities."*

Patricia Yates, CEO, VisitBritain, said, *"We are proud to be working alongside Mayors, destinations and industry leaders from across the North of England to support the tourism programme for the inaugural North of England Mayoral Delegation to India, one of our fastest-growing markets. Drawing on our in-market expertise and relationships in India, we are telling the story of the North of England's outstanding tourism offer, from its vibrant cities, rich heritage and spectacular scenery to world-class sporting grounds and visitor experiences. Working directly with the travel trade in India gets our products sold and broadens itineraries, so visitors explore further, stay longer and spend more. Strong and growing air connectivity between India and the regional gateway of Manchester is making it easier than ever for visitors to discover more. With India forecast to become a £1.5 billion visitor market for the UK by 2030, our destination showcase event is a timely and valuable opportunity to drive growth and visitor spending across the region and beyond."*

HIGHLANDER RAS AL KHAIMAH LAUNCHES A SHORTER, STEEPER SUMMIT CHALLENGE THIS NOVEMBER

Travel Mail Desk

HIGHLANDER – the Middle East's premier long-distance hiking event returns to Ras Al Khaimah on 21–22 November 2026, introducing its all-new experience: the HIGHLANDER Summit Series. Coming to the UAE for the first time, the Summit Series is a shorter, steeper hiking experience through the wadis, mountain villages and trails below Jebel Yabana, designed for adventurers ready to push higher and closer to the summits.

Bringing together a diverse global community of adventurers, HIGHLANDER Ras Al Khaimah starts and finishes at Bear Grylls Adventure Camp. The route traverses the rugged Hajar Mountains around Jebel Jais, with a stronger focus on elevation, challenging terrain and local mountain communities.

The HIGHLANDER Summit Series offers a new experience, but it is not a race. Although the routes are shorter than HIGHLANDER's traditional multi-day, cross-mountain journeys, their steep ascents and descents make them equally demanding. Designed to take hikers higher and closer to the summits, each route challenges participants physically and mentally, leaving them with a renewed appreciation for nature and Ras Al Khaimah's mountains.



Two formats are available, open to hikers aged 18 and above, and can be chosen based on experience and fitness level:

- **HIGHLANDER 1 DAY:** 7km on Sunday 22 November 2026, with 400m of elevation gain and loss and a maximum altitude of 600m.

- **HIGHLANDER 2 DAY:** approximately 15km over Saturday and Sunday, 21–22 November 2026, with approximately 845m of elevation gain, 812 m of elevation loss and a maximum altitude of approximately 1,190m, including an overnight camp at approximately 1,050m.

Five years after HIGHLANDER first arrived in Ras Al Khaimah, and with thousands of participants since, HIGHLANDER in the UAE has grown beyond a hiking event into a movement with a purpose: to grow adventure tourism, backed by the community that makes it all possible. HIGHLANDER has helped put Ras Al Khaimah on the global map as an emerging destination for adventure tourism and long-distance hiking. The introduction of the HIGHLANDER Summit Series now shifts the focus to the summits of Ras Al Khaimah and the UAE, while the mission remains the same: to showcase the region's natural landscapes, connect with its people and open new trails for adventurers to explore on the journey of a lifetime.

Maasai Mara: More Than A Safari

Where the Wild Sets Its Own Rules

Some journeys give you photographs. Others leave you with memories that stay long after you have returned home. In Kenya's Maasai Mara, two days among vast grasslands, extraordinary wildlife, and encounters with the Maasai community reminded me that the best journeys are rarely the ones you can plan.





Hyena sneaking out a piece of wildebeest and running away from lions.

By Siddharth Gupta, Travel Mail

There is a moment, somewhere between leaving Nairobi and landing in the Maasai Mara, when the world below begins to look different.

Our aircraft made two stops before reaching the airstrip closest to Mara Intrepids Camp. From the window, the landscape unfolded in enormous patches of green and gold. I could make out giraffes moving across the open land, zebras scattered across the grasslands, hippos in the water and rivers cutting through the wilderness. It was difficult not to keep looking down. The flight itself felt like an adventure, almost as though we were leaving the familiar world behind and entering somewhere that belonged to another time.

When we finally landed, I said goodbye to the pilots with a joke that we probably would not see them for another three days. For a little while, it genuinely felt as though we had landed on another planet.

Our guide, Simone, a Maasai man from the local community, was waiting in a 4×4. There was no long pause to settle in. We were heading straight out for a game drive.

The first sighting was a family of giraffes, their long necks rising above the grass, with younger ones close by. Then came the familiar excitement of a radio call. Another vehicle had spotted a lion kill, and we changed direction.

By the time we arrived, the hunt was over. A wildebeest had been killed, and a hyena had managed to grab its head and run off with it. Nearby, dozens of wildebeest gathered beneath the shade of a solitary tree. It was a reminder that the Mara is not a wildlife park arranged for visitors. There are no guarantees, no performances and certainly no schedule. You arrive when you arrive; nature has already moved on.

A little later, we found a cheetah resting beneath the bushes. We stayed for around fifteen minutes. It looked toward our vehicle, held our gaze for a moment, then returned to watching its surroundings. There was no dramatic chase or sudden movement. Just an animal at rest, completely at home in a landscape that we were only beginning to understand.

That is one of the things nobody quite prepares you for: how much of a safari is about waiting.

And moving. The game drives can be wonderfully bumpy. A radio call might send vehicles changing direction, and a guide may have to navigate rough tracks and make quick turns to reach a better viewing position. You find yourself holding on as the vehicle moves across uneven ground, sometimes bouncing around more than you expected. Every guide wants guests to have a memorable sighting, but the best moments still depend on patience, good judgement and giving wildlife its space. You cannot make the animals appear just because you have travelled thousands of kilometres to see them.

After checking in at Mara Intrepids Camp, we headed out again. In the evening, we watched a group of olive baboons approach a resting lion. They moved cautiously around it, stopping and looking in its direction. We watched for nearly half an hour, fascinated by the quiet tension of the scene. Later, we came across a pride of lions with cubs, resting together and grooming one another.



Landed at the Olseki Naboisho Airstrip – Maasai Mara



Olive Baboons checking out the sleeping lion

The day ended with a private sundowner arranged for our group. Drinks, a barbecue and the last light of the day made for a beautiful evening in the open wilderness. Back at camp, dinner was followed by a little stargazing. Away from the city lights, the sky seemed to have room for an endless number of stars.

A morning that stayed with me

The next morning began at 6 am. It was chilly, and a black coffee was very welcome. I was still sleepy, but the excitement of the previous day had made it impossible to stay in bed.

The air was raw, fresh and wonderfully clean. There was something about it, the smell of the grass, the earth and the open wilderness that made every breath feel different.

We were out for the sunrise when the sky began to change colour. I remember looking across the grasslands and wishing, quite sincerely, that time would slow down. Then, only a few minutes later, a magnificent male lion with a full, heavy mane began walking towards our vehicle.

We stopped. The lion came closer and passed by us. For a moment, the sounds around us seemed to disappear. I could hear its breathing and the grass moving as it walked. I watched it disappear into the bushes, trying to take in what had just happened. It was one of those rare encounters that a photograph can record but never quite explain. I was so moved that I nearly cried.

And the Mara was not finished surprising us. In the distance, more than twenty hot-air balloons floated above the grasslands, their envelopes glowing in the early morning light. It was a spectacular sight, and one that made the landscape feel even more immense.

Soon afterwards, we watched a group of wildebeest cross a river. Their hooves struck the ground, and water splashed as they made their way across. Simone reminded us that crocodiles lived in the water, and that every crossing carried its own risks. We did not need to see a crocodile to understand the danger. The animals were moving through a landscape where survival is part of everyday life.

Our morning continued with a bush breakfast. There was no dining table or elaborate setup. The team had brought breakfast boxes, which were placed on the bonnet of our safari vehicle. We opened them ourselves, poured black coffee and enjoyed breakfast in the middle of the Mara, with hippos nearby in the water. It was simple, wonderfully unexpected and perhaps all the more memorable for it.

Meeting the people of the Mara

One of the most meaningful parts of the visit was a cultural experience at a Maasai village, arranged as part of our programme. We were welcomed by Naurori, who introduced himself as our guide for the visit and promised an educational hour exploring the community and its way of life.



Herd of Wildbeest crossing river



Hot Air Balloons Flying Over Maasai Mara. Photo by Wladia Lancrey Javal



Showing off spotting skills post bush breakfast



Maasai Man showing showing off his jump



Enjoying the hospitality and culture of the Maasai

He began not with a performance, but with identity. Explaining Kenya's three broad linguistic groupings: Bantu, Nilotic and Cushitic. He placed the Maasai among the Plain Nilotes. He also spoke about the different Maasai clans and how these shape family relationships.

"Because a member of the clan is just like a family," he explained. Marriage, he told us, traditionally takes place outside one's own clan, with people marrying into another clan rather than within their own. It was a simple explanation, but it offered an interesting insight into how community and kinship are understood.

Then came a detail I found particularly memorable. Naurori broke down the name Maasai itself. As he explained it to us, "Maa" represents the language spoken by the community, while "sai" refers to the people who speak it. In his words, the Maasai are the people who speak Maa.

He also told us that approximately 350 people lived in the village, across around 50 houses. We were invited to visit one of the homes and see how people lived. The welcome continued with traditional songs and dances performed by men and women from the community. The men demonstrated their famous jumping dance, while the group gathered for photographs and conversation.

We saw cattle, chickens, dogs and children going about their day. Our hosts demonstrated how fire could be made using sticks and explained the importance of cattle, including as a source of milk. Inside the homes, lighting was limited, with small solar lights providing illumination. We also saw colourful beadwork and clothing that form an important part of Maasai identity.

During the visit, we were told about the significance of jumping among Maasai men. The explanation we received linked a young man's jumping ability with traditional ideas of strength and courtship. We were told that, in the custom described to us, a particularly high jumper could be rewarded with four cows and the prospect of marriage. Traditions and their meanings can differ between Maasai communities, but it was a fascinating part of the explanation shared with us.



Cheetah spotting in the bushes. Photo by Siddharth Gupta

What stayed with me was not just the welcome or the performance, but the opportunity to hear people speak about their lives in their own setting. A cultural visit can only offer a glimpse of a community, of course, but it can still make a journey more meaningful when approached with curiosity and respect.

The Mara's final moments

Our final afternoon game drive brought another extraordinary sighting. A radio call led us towards several safari vehicles gathered around a cheetah that had already caught an antelope. It was feeding, seemingly undisturbed by the vehicles watching from a respectful distance. We could hear the sounds of it eating and see the remarkable concentration with which it went about its meal.

Then came an elephant family. We were close enough to notice a young calf keeping itself tucked behind its mother. Their bodies were still wet, as though they had recently been bathing, and they moved through the grass, feeding on leaves and vegetation. We also spotted another pride of lions resting along a ridge.

By evening, we headed out for one last sundowner. The weather had other plans. There was no golden sunset this time; the sky turned shades of purple, the wind picked up



Baby Elephant being shy and hiding behind his mother



Tent at the Mara Intrepid Camps

and keeping hold of food and drinks became an adventure of its own. It was not the picture-perfect farewell we might have imagined, but it was memorable in its own way.

Back at Mara Intrepids, we had our final dinner by the pool. The camp had become familiar in just two days, and the thought of leaving felt unexpectedly difficult.



With Mr. Gregory Wabuge, General Manager Lodges – Heritage Hotels

Mara Intrepids is part of Heritage Hotels, and its **General Manager, Gregory Wabuge,** told us that the property has 30 tents and can accommodate up to 60 guests. He spoke particularly about the importance of hospitality and repeat visitors. "We ask all the tour operators and everybody to give us a chance because we are not going to disappoint," he said, describing it as a service promise. The camp's location, he added, places guests within reach of different parts of the reserve.

The following day, as we waited near the airstrip for our flight back to Nairobi, I kept looking across the landscape, hoping to spot one more animal. Laikipia and the next part of our Kenyan journey were waiting, but a part of me was still back in the Mara.

Two days had given us lions, cheetahs, elephants, giraffes, wildebeest, a Maasai welcome, extraordinary mornings and evenings under an open sky. Yet the experience was about more than the number of animals we had seen.

The Mara does not arrange itself around a visitor's expectations. It asks you to wake early, wait patiently, hold on through the bumpy tracks and accept that the most memorable moments often arrive without warning. It reminds you that you are a guest in a world that existed long before you arrived and will continue long after you leave.

I came for a safari, but I left with something harder to put into words and a feeling that I would have to return.

The Mara had my heart.



Second windy sundowner that will stay with me

Five Days in Malaysia

A Journey Through Food, Culture, Adventure and MotoGP

By Rishika Gupta, Travel Mail

Planning a five-day trip to Malaysia? You might be surprised by just how much you can experience in a few days. From exploring Kuala Lumpur's iconic landmarks and colourful cultural neighbourhoods to discovering its food scene, shopping destinations and outdoor experiences, there is plenty to keep you occupied. And if you happen to visit during the MotoGP weekend, you can add the thrill of watching world-class racing at Sepang to your itinerary.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Malaysia as part of a Mega Familiarisation Programme organised by Tourism Malaysia in conjunction with the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia 2026. It was my first visit to the country, and I was looking forward to discovering what Kuala Lumpur had to offer beyond its familiar skyline and postcard-perfect attractions. From trying local dishes and exploring cultural landmarks to getting up close with the world of motorsport, the five days turned out to be a wonderful introduction to Malaysia.

If you are planning your first visit and wondering how to make the most of five days, here is a look at my itinerary, the places I explored, restaurants I visited and experiences worth adding to your travel list.







Day 1:
Arriving in Kuala Lumpur – TRX, shopping and a taste of the city

My first morning in Malaysia began with an early arrival at Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). After completing the arrival formalities, we headed towards the city and checked into Kimpton Naluria Kuala Lumpur by IHG, located in the Tun Razak Exchange (TRX) district.

After checking in, I had some time to explore the property and take in the views. It was a beautiful hotel, and I particularly enjoyed the food. I also loved how conveniently it was located, with The Exchange TRX just a short walk away.

My first stop was The Exchange TRX, one of Kuala Lumpur's popular shopping and lifestyle destinations. The mall brings together international fashion brands, dining options, entertainment and lifestyle experiences under one roof.

No shopping outing feels complete without a refreshing drink, so I stopped at CHAGEE at Exchange 106 for its watermelon milk tea.



Dinner was at Tuai + Till, the restaurant at Kimpton Naluria Kuala Lumpur. Offering Malaysian-inspired cuisine in a stylish setting, it was a lovely introduction to the local dining scene.













Day 2: Kuala Lumpur sightseeing, heritage landmarks and a night at the race circuit

Day two was all about discovering Kuala Lumpur's landmarks and getting a closer look at its history, architecture and city life.

We started with the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, one of the city's most recognisable heritage landmarks. Built in 1888, the building is known for its distinctive architectural style, featuring beautiful arches, copper domes and a prominent clock tower. Its beautiful architecture also made it a lovely spot to pause and capture some photographs.

We also visited Kuala Lumpur City Gallery, where interactive exhibits, historical photographs and miniature models showcase how the city has developed over the years. If you are visiting Kuala Lumpur for the first time, this is a nice place to stop and learn more about the city's history.

After sightseeing, we headed to De. Wan 1958 by Chef Wan at The LINC for lunch. Associated with renowned Malaysian chef Datuk Chef Wan, the restaurant serves traditional Malay cuisine with rich local flavours. It was definitely one of the dining experiences I enjoyed during the trip and a great opportunity to discover more of Malaysia's culinary traditions.

In the afternoon, we explored Kuala Lumpur on the Hop-On Hop-Off Bus. I enjoyed seeing the city from a different perspective, passing its landmarks and busy streets along the way. If you are visiting Kuala Lumpur for the first time, this is a convenient way to get an overview of the city.







The evening brought a completely different experience as we headed to PETRONAS Sepang International Circuit for the Night Track Tour. Sepang is famous for hosting the Malaysian MotoGP Grand Prix, but seeing the circuit after dark was an experience in itself. We explored some of its iconic corners in a double-decker bus, getting a closer look at the track and its surroundings. The tour also included a visit to the podium area, where the excitement of race-day celebrations comes alive.

One of the highlights of the tour was getting the opportunity to walk on a MotoGP circuit. I usually get to see these races on television, so standing on the very track where professional riders compete at incredible speeds felt surreal. It was definitely a bucket-list experience!

After the tour, we headed to Nasi Lemak Sambal Semerah Padi in Kota Warisan for dinner. Nasi lemak is one of Malaysia's most recognisable dishes, traditionally prepared with fragrant coconut rice and served with sambal, peanuts, anchovies, cucumber and other accompaniments. It was a lovely opportunity to try one of the country's best-known culinary traditions and experience another side of Malaysian food culture.

Day 3: Batu Caves, Malaysian culture, food and immersive experiences

Day three began with an early visit to Batu Caves, one of Malaysia's most famous attractions and a place that should definitely be on any first-time visitor's itinerary. Located in Gombak, just outside Kuala Lumpur, Batu Caves is a limestone hill featuring a series of caves and Hindu temples. The moment you arrive, the enormous golden statue of Lord Murugan and the colourful rainbow staircase immediately catch your attention.

The 272 steps leading up to the main cave are an experience in themselves. The colourful staircase, set against the natural limestone surroundings, is one of the most photographed sights in Malaysia. And then there were the monkeys! I wasn't expecting them to be such a big part of the visit. They were everywhere, casually moving around the staircase while visitors stopped to photograph them. I even had a little encounter with one myself! It was funny and completely unexpected, adding another memorable moment to the visit. Just remember to keep your belongings secure because these curious little visitors aren't shy about getting close!

From Batu Caves, we headed to the Malaysia Tourism Centre (MaTiC) to enjoy a cultural performance. Featuring traditional dances, music and colourful costumes, the show offered a glimpse into Malaysia's diverse cultural traditions and multicultural identity.

Our next stop was the Kuala Lumpur Durian Experience Centre (KLDEX). Often called the king of fruits in Southeast Asia, durian is known for its distinctive appearance, strong aroma and creamy texture. The Durian Gallery Experience introduced us to its history, different varieties and cultural significance. It was an interesting way to learn about a fruit that holds such an important place in Southeast Asian food culture.

Lunch was at Nasi Kandar Pelita, where we got to experience another popular Malaysian dining tradition. Nasi kandar is a well-known Malaysian meal featuring rice served with a selection of curries, gravies and accompaniments. With its roots in the Indian culinary traditions brought to Malaysia, nasi kandar reflects the country's diverse food influences. It is definitely worth trying if you enjoy discovering a destination through its local cuisine.













The afternoon continued with a visit to Thean Hou Temple. Dedicated to the Chinese sea goddess Mazu, this six-tiered temple is known for its colourful architecture, traditional Chinese design and elaborate decorations. Located on Robson Heights, the temple also offers lovely views of the city. I enjoyed walking around, admiring its intricate details and taking in the peaceful surroundings. It was a beautiful place to explore and experience another side of Malaysia.

Our next stop was Space & Time Cube Malaysia in Bukit Bintang, and this turned out to be one of the most entertaining experiences of the trip. If you enjoy photography, interactive attractions and places that look straight out of another world, this is worth adding to your itinerary. Featuring immersive digital art installations, optical illusions, naked-eye 3D displays and virtual reality experiences, the attraction offers something different in every space. I particularly enjoyed experimenting with photographs and discovering the different creative settings.

What made the experience even better was the staff. They were incredibly helpful and guided us on where to stand, which poses to try and how to get the best angles for our photographs. They even helped us take pictures, so we didn't have to figure everything out ourselves. We ended up getting some really nice shots!

We ended the day at IRAMA Dining Kuala Lumpur, located in the Old Malaya heritage area. The restaurant offered a lovely setting to enjoy Malaysian cuisine with traditional and contemporary influences. It was also the venue for a meet-and-greet session with the Tourism Malaysia team, making dinner an opportunity to interact, exchange experiences and connect with the people behind the programme.

Day 4:
Horse riding, MotoGP and the excitement of Sepang

Day four was one of the most exciting days of my trip. We started early and headed to Equestrian Park Putrajaya, where I got the opportunity to try horse riding. It turned out to be such a lovely experience! What I enjoyed most was how friendly and gentle the horses were. They made me feel comfortable, and once I got on the horse, the excitement kicked in. It was such a fun experience and a refreshing change from the usual sightseeing activities.









From Putrajaya, we headed to PETRONAS Sepang International Circuit for the main event: the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia. For motorsport enthusiasts, Sepang is a destination worth experiencing. The circuit is famous for its distinctive double-hairpin layout and challenging tropical weather conditions, making it an exciting venue for racing. The atmosphere was already buzzing when we arrived.

Watching Moto3, Moto2 and MotoGP live was an entirely different experience from following the races on television. The roar of the engines, the speed of the bikes and the energy of the crowd made the atmosphere electric. Seeing the riders take on the circuit at such incredible speeds, right in front of us, was something else. Even if you aren't a regular motorsport follower, watching a MotoGP race live is an experience worth having at least once.

After an action-packed day at the circuit, we headed to Mohd Chan Chinese Muslim Restaurant in Kota Warisan for dinner. The restaurant serves Chinese Muslim cuisine, bringing together traditional Chinese flavours and halal ingredients. It was another interesting addition to our Malaysian food trail and a reminder of the variety of dining experiences available across the country.

Later that evening, back in Kuala Lumpur, we made a stop to see the PETRONAS Twin Towers illuminated against the night sky. Seeing the iconic towers in person was a moment I had been looking forward to. Naturally, I couldn't resist stopping for a few photographs!

Day 5:
Cycling around TRX and saying goodbye to Malaysia

After four days of sightseeing, restaurant visits and packed activities, it was nice to slow down a little. We spent the morning cycling around TRX and the surrounding neighbourhood, which gave me a chance to see Kuala Lumpur at a more relaxed pace. I really enjoyed seeing the city wake up. Sometimes, travelling isn't just about ticking off famous attractions; even a leisurely cycle through a neighbourhood can turn into one of your favourite travel memories.

And just like that, five days of exploring Malaysia came to an end. Looking back, what made this trip special was the variety of experiences packed into it. One day was spent exploring heritage landmarks and cultural attractions, another discovering local food, and another experiencing the adrenaline of MotoGP at Sepang.

From the colourful steps of Batu Caves and the beauty of Thean Hou Temple to the friendly horses at Putrajaya and the spectacular Kuala Lumpur skyline, every day brought something different. What stayed with me just as much was the warmth of the people and the hospitality we experienced throughout the journey.

Malaysia turned out to be much more than I had expected from my first visit. Five days gave me a wonderful introduction, but also plenty of reasons to return and explore more of the country.







Agoda Appoints Riisa Naka as New Brand Ambassador for Japan

Travel Mail Desk

Agoda Company Pte. Ltd., which operates the digital travel platform Agoda, has appointed actor and creator Riisa Naka as its new brand ambassador for Japan and has launched a new brand campaign, "GO GO with Agoda!", nationwide in Japan from October 2026.

Widely recognized and loved across generations for her work as an actor, while also building a close and authentic connection with fans through social media as a creator, Naka is both highly recognisable and relatable. Her energetic and down-to-earth personality makes travel feel within reach, closely aligning with the campaign's aim of giving travellers the confidence to turn their travel ideas into real trips.

The campaign emphasises making the entire process of travelling easier and more enjoyable, from discovering a destination to finding the right place to stay and booking with confidence. Whether it's a traditional ryokan or a hotel stay, Agoda helps Japanese travellers see and experience more local destinations with options to match every travel style and preference. Alongside Agoda's extensive



range of accommodations, great-value deals and coupons, the platform provides an environment where travellers can book with confidence, helping turn questions such as "Where should I go?" and "Where should I stay?" into actual travel experiences.

Kris Suebjaklap, Senior Vice President of Marketing, Agoda, shared *"We know Japanese travellers want to explore more of their own country, but sometimes the planning just gets in the way. This campaign is all about removing that friction and getting people excited to actually book. We are delighted to have Riisa Naka on board because her energy and genuine love for discovery are contagious. Whether it's a hot spring escape or a ryokan experience, we understand that every Japanese traveller has their own idea of a perfect trip, and Agoda is here to make finding and booking those stays effortless. Our goal with this campaign is simple: help more people go from 'I've been thinking about a trip' to 'I'm booking it right now,' and enjoy the whole journey with Agoda."*

Agoda's "GO GO with Agoda!" campaign is now live on YouTube and can be viewed here and here. The campaign is also now live on national TV in Japan and additional digital channels from October. It showcases the platform's vast offerings, including over 6 million holiday properties, more than 130,000 flight routes, and over 300,000 activities, all of which can be combined in a single booking. For more information, visit Agoda.com or download the Agoda mobile app.

ixigo launches 'ixigo for work' to simplify business travel bookings

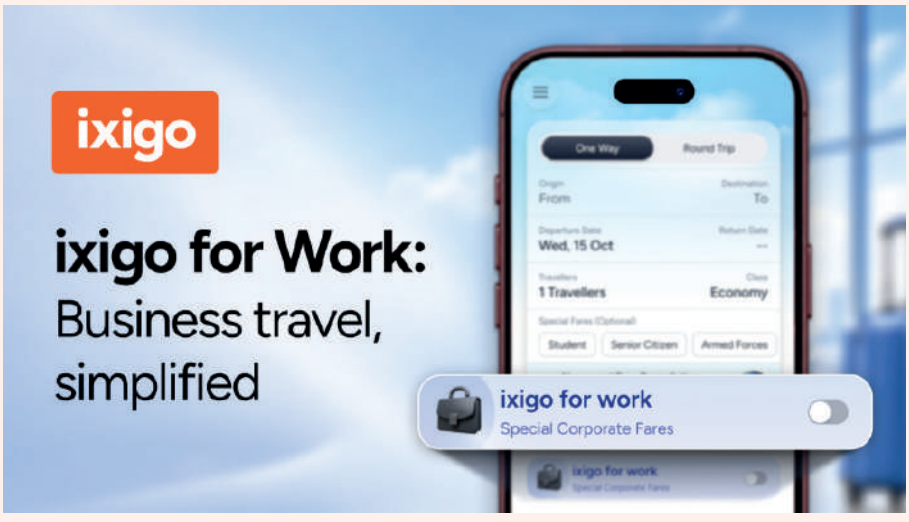
Travel Mail Desk

ixigo, India's leading AI-native travel platform, has introduced 'ixigo for work', a new business-travel experience that simplifies flight bookings by bringing corporate fares and added flexibility into its existing booking journey, without the need for a separate business account or setup. Currently available on the ixigo app, the experience offers corporate fares on domestic flights.

Travellers can simply switch on 'ixigo for work' before searching for domestic flights to discover and compare eligible corporate fares alongside regular fares. Corporate fares offer benefits such as reduced cancellation and rescheduling charges, complimentary seat selection and meals, giving business travellers greater flexibility and convenience. The experience also allows users to save their company's GSTIN, helping them claim applicable GST input credit. Business travellers can also opt for ixigo's flagship Assured product with their booking, which offers a full, instant refund on cancellations with no questions asked, along with travel value-added services such as Travel Insurance, Airport Cabs and Flight Delay Protection.

Sumit Vijay, SVP, Flights, ixigo, said, *"Business travel comes with enough moving parts, from booking the right fare and managing changes to getting the paperwork right. With ixigo for work, we wanted to make the entire process as simple as booking any other flight on ixigo, while giving travellers access to the flexibility and benefits they need for work travel."*

With ixigo for work, business travel stays as simple as the rest of the ixigo experience. Travellers can switch on Work mode when starting a flight search, compare eligible fares, add their GSTIN and complete their booking, all within the ixigo app. By bringing business-travel benefits into a familiar booking journey, ixigo continues to build towards its vision of peace-of-mind travel, now extending to work trips too.



The New Indian Traveller Is Choosing Experiences Over Itineraries

By Pranav Dangi, Founder and CEO of Hosteller



Travel Mail Desk

For decades, the Indian holiday followed a familiar pattern: save for months, plan carefully, take one big annual vacation and return with a packed camera roll. That model is changing. Travel is increasingly becoming less about one large getaway and more about frequent, flexible and experience-led journeys.

The shift is particularly visible among younger travellers. A 2026 Airbnb and YouGov study found that seven in ten Gen Z travellers in India would prefer three short trips over one long annual holiday, while 95% want their trips to feel personal and unique. This signals a broader change in how travel is being valued. The question is no longer simply, "Where should I go?" but "What do I want from this trip?"

This is creating an important opportunity for the travel and hospitality industry.

From destinations to experiences

The modern traveller is increasingly choosing destinations based on what they can experience rather than what they can see. Food, music, local culture, outdoor activities, wellness and community are becoming important parts of destination discovery.

Music is one example. Airbnb's 2026 travel insights found that 62% of India's Gen Z travellers planned to travel for concerts or music festivals, while 76% had visited a city for the first time because of a concert or festival. More than half also extended their stay beyond the event.

This suggests that travel is becoming more closely connected with culture and lifestyle. A concert, food trail or local festival can now be as powerful a reason to travel as a landmark.

The rise of shorter, smarter travel

The other major shift is the changing definition of affordability. Young travellers are not necessarily travelling less. They are finding ways to travel more intelligently.

Research from Skyscanner shows that 56% of Gen Z Indians made financial sacrifices for their last holiday, while 37% said they would trade premium accommodation for budget stays and 36% would take a shorter trip to stretch their travel budget.

This is creating demand for accommodation that delivers value beyond a bed. Travellers increasingly want a place that can also provide social interaction, local recommendations, community and access to experiences.

For the hospitality sector, this means affordability cannot simply mean lower prices. It has to mean greater value for every rupee spent.

Hospitality has to become more flexible

As travel becomes more spontaneous and personalised, the traditional hospitality model will also need to evolve.

Travellers may want to stay for two nights instead of five, work remotely during the day and explore at night, meet fellow travellers or simply leave parts of their itinerary open. The industry therefore needs to design experiences around flexibility rather than rigid packages.

This also creates an opportunity for smaller destinations. Nearly one-third of Gen Z Indians say they would choose lesser-touristed destinations to save money. As travellers look beyond conventional tourist circuits, accommodation providers can play a larger role in helping them discover emerging destinations and local experiences.

Building the next phase of Indian travel

The future of Indian travel will not necessarily be defined by longer holidays or higher spending. It could be defined by frequency, flexibility and relevance.

Travellers want more journeys, but they want those journeys to fit into their lives, budgets and identities. For the travel industry, this means moving beyond selling rooms, tickets or itineraries and thinking about the larger experience around the journey.

The winners in the next phase of hospitality will be those that understand this change. The opportunity is not simply to accommodate a traveller, but to become part of the reason they travel in the first place.



Wander Through Thailand's Heritage-Rich Coastal Towns

Travel Mail Desk

Thailand is often imagined in neon nights and island escapes. Yet, step a little away from the usual routes, and you'll find towns where heritage lingers in facades painted in pastel shades, in flavours shaped by Thai kitchens, and in waterfronts that once welcomed travellers from across the seas. These coastal towns carry stories in their architecture, in the morning markets where languages mingle, and in the evening light that falls over lakes and shorelines.

Phuket, Trang and Songkhla show this side of Thailand in their own ways. In one place, the morning might begin with the scent of fresh noodles drifting through the old town and in another, with a boat ride into the Emerald Cave, while elsewhere the day winds down beside the lake. Each place is best savoured at an unhurried pace. Each place is best enjoyed without trying to pack too much into a day.

Phuket: Where Heritage Meets Island Energy

Phuket makes a lovely first stop. In Old Phuket Town, Sino-Portuguese shophouses sit alongside street art, cafes and small shops, making it an easy place to spend an afternoon. Visit the Thai Hua Museum, stop by one of the old buildings now turned into restaurants or cafes, or come on a Sunday when Lat Yai Market brings food, stalls and a lively crowd to Thalang Road.

Food is very much part of the Phuket experience, with Hokkien noodles and dim sum to Phuket-style kanom jeen, all reflecting the island's mix of cultural influences. Then, head towards Kata, Karon or Nai Harn, settle into a beachside stay, find a spot for sunset, and let the evening unfold over fresh seafood and the sound of the sea. Phuket's real appeal lies in that easy switch between a colourful morning in town and a barefoot evening by the water.

Trang Where Slow Travel Feels Just Right

Trang has a gentler pace. Begin with breakfast, because food is one of the pleasures that makes the province memorable, then make your way towards Kantang, where the mustard-yellow railway station offers one of those wonderfully photogenic stops that feels made for a travel album.

Then take a boat out to Ko Muk, better known as the Emerald Cave. Snorkel around Ko Chueak and Ko Waen, or spend the day on Ko Kradan, known for its clear waters and sandy shores. Back on land, stop by Na Muen Sri, known for its handwoven cloth and the local weaving traditions that continue to be passed on. You can also see more of the city from one of Trang's distinctive frog-head tuk-tuks before calling it a day.

Songkhla Where Every Turn Has Character

Songkhla Old Town has its own character. Walk along its historic streets, and you will find old facades, street art, cafes and places serving Southern Thai food along the way.

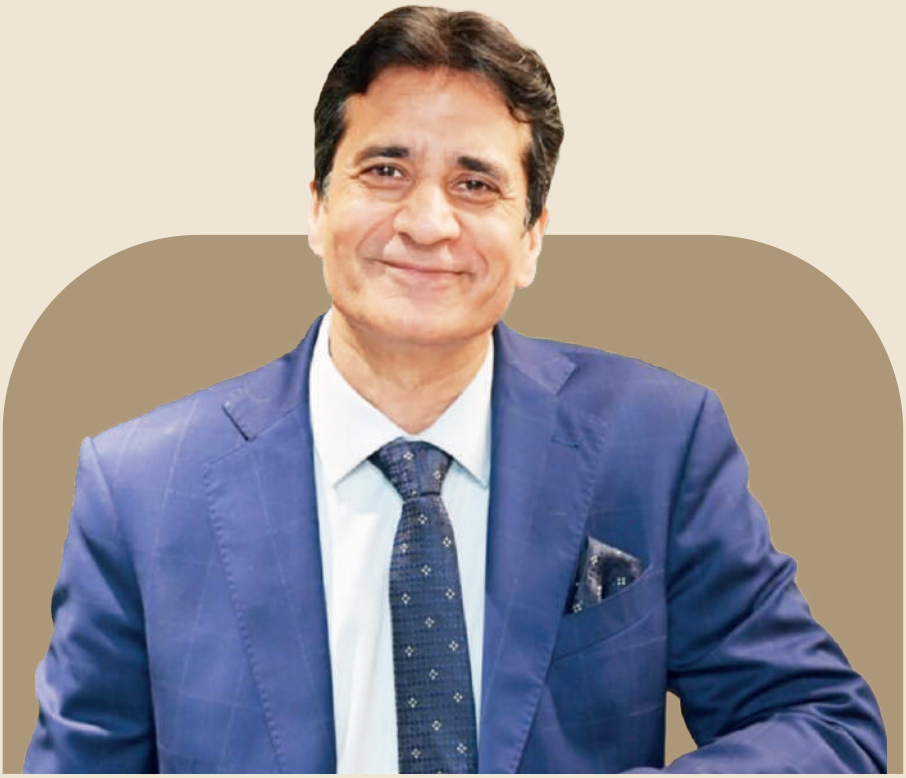
Follow the streets towards Samila Beach; an evening here can be as simple as taking in the breeze, watching the changing light or finding dinner by the waterfront before returning to a characterful stay. The nearby Songkhla Lake adds another beautiful setting, while the province's history as a place of trade and cultural exchange can still be seen in its architecture, cuisine and traditions.

What makes Phuket, Trang and Songkhla so captivating is the way each leaves you with a different feeling. Phuket brings the colour and energy of island life, Trang opens the door to slower days, while Songkhla draws you into a world of food, art and waterfront evenings. Together, they offer a side of Thailand that feels wonderfully personal, unexpected and full of little moments worth travelling for.

So, when you start planning your next Thailand escape, let curiosity shape the itinerary. Walk through an old quarter, stop when something smells too good to pass on, take a boat out to the islands and make time for one more sunset. Thailand has plenty more waiting beyond the familiar. All you must do is take the trip and find your own favourite corner.

When Time Becomes the Ultimate Luxury – Why Affluent Travellers Are Paying for Seamless Journeys

By Deepak Nangla, Managing Director, Premier by Brightsun





Travel Mail Desk

A five-night holiday can lose much of its first day to an awkward connection, a long transfer and a room that is not ready. The hotel may be exceptional. The guest still arrives tired, with less time to enjoy it. For an affluent traveller with limited days away, that loss can matter more than the difference between two room categories.

This is where the willingness to pay for a well-managed journey becomes understandable. Money can widen the choices available, while leave schedules and family commitments often remain fixed. A higher fare for a direct flight may therefore offer better value than a cheaper route that consumes another day. The relevant calculation includes the usable hours at the destination.

Virtuoso's 2026 Luxe Report offers context for this demand. Drawing on more than 2,400 travel advisers across over 50 countries, it identifies family travel and time with loved ones among important priorities, alongside demand for privacy and personalized experiences. It also notes that luxury clients remain conscious of costs. This global adviser survey is not a measure of Indian travellers alone, but it reinforces the need to explain what a premium actually delivers.

Much of that value lies in coordination. An early arrival requires a confirmed plan for room access. A private transfer needs the correct terminal and enough space for the family's luggage. A dinner reservation should account for the time needed to reach it. Individually, these are modest details. Together, they determine how much of the holiday the guest spends managing arrangements.

Good planning also involves judgement about pace. A family travelling with an older parent may benefit from fewer hotel changes and a room near the lift. Someone arriving after a demanding working week may prefer an unscheduled first morning. Such decisions require a conversation about how people want to spend their time. A list of favourite hotels cannot provide the whole answer.

Responsibility becomes especially valuable when something changes. If a flight is delayed, the transfer, hotel arrival and evening plans may all need attention. Having one person coordinate those changes reduces the number of calls the traveller must make. No adviser can prevent every disruption. The service should be judged by the quality of the response and the clarity of the options offered.

Technology can support this work by keeping preferences accessible and communicating updates promptly. Human judgement is still needed when the alternatives involve a trade-off, such as accepting a later arrival to avoid a difficult connection. The traveller should understand that choice without having to reconstruct the entire itinerary.

There are limits to what should be arranged in advance. Filling every hour can make an expensive holiday feel restrictive. Leaving an afternoon open gives guests room to linger over lunch or change their minds. That flexibility needs to be considered alongside cancellation terms and the availability of local support.

For luxury travel providers, the price must be explained through the service delivered. Guests should know who is responsible, what is confirmed and where flexibility exists. When those arrangements work, a family can stay at the table a little longer without someone reaching for a phone to organize the next part of the day.

Building a Hospitality Destination in Eastern India

Mr. Samrat Chakraborty on Laa Montre's Vision for Kharagpur and Beyond

Travel Mail Desk

With nearly 25 years of hospitality experience, Mr. Samrat Chakraborty, General Manager of Laa Montre Collection of Hotels & Resorts, brings deep expertise in hotel operations, guest experience, and hospitality management. As Laa Montre establishes its presence in Kharagpur, West Bengal, the property aims to cater to the evolving needs of corporate travellers, families, leisure guests and the local community through an integrated offering of accommodation, dining, wellness, leisure and event facilities.

In this exclusive email interview, Mr. Samrat Chakraborty discusses the factors driving Laa Montre's entry into Kharagpur, changing guest expectations, the growing potential of emerging hospitality destinations in Eastern India, and the brand's vision for sustainable growth and expansion over the coming years.



Mr. Samrat Chakraborty
General Manager of Laa Montre Collection of Hotels & Resorts

Laa Montre has chosen Kharagpur as an important market for its regional presence. What factors influenced the decision to launch the property in Kharagpur, and what potential do you see in the city's evolving business and leisure travel market?

We chose Kharagpur because of its strong connectivity, growing industrial and business ecosystem, and the presence of institutions like IIT Kharagpur. We see good potential in both corporate and leisure travel, with opportunities from business visitors, institutional guests, social events and weekend travellers. Laa Montre aims to be a trusted hospitality partner as Kharagpur continues to grow.

With around 25 years of experience in the hospitality industry, you have witnessed significant changes in guest expectations. How are these changing preferences reflected in Laa Montre's approach to service and guest experiences?

Over the years, guest expectations have evolved from simply seeking comfort to looking for personalised, seamless and memorable experiences. At Laa Montre, we focus on warm hospitality, personalised service, quality food and modern comforts, while ensuring that every guest feels valued and at home.

Laa Montre brings together accommodation, dining, wellness, leisure and event facilities. How do you envision the property positioning itself as a hospitality destination for corporate travellers, families, leisure guests and the local community?

Laa Montre is designed as a complete hospitality destination where guests can stay, dine, relax and celebrate under one roof. We aim to cater to corporate travellers, families, leisure guests and the local community through comfortable accommodation, quality dining, wellness and leisure facilities, and well-equipped event spaces—all supported by warm and personalised hospitality.

Personalised service is an important part of Laa Montre's hospitality philosophy. What are some of the experiences or service elements that you believe will set the Kharagpur property apart for guests?

For us, personalised service means understanding our guests and going the extra mile to make them feel comfortable and valued. At Laa Montre, we focus on personalised dining, attentive service, prompt guest assistance, and customised experiences tailored to individual preferences. Our warm hospitality, special occasion arrangements, and proactive service aim to make every guest feel valued and create memorable stays.

Eastern India is witnessing growing opportunities in emerging hospitality destinations. What role do you see Laa Montre playing in this evolving hospitality landscape, and what opportunities do you see for the brand in the region?

Eastern India has significant potential as new business and leisure destinations continue to grow. We see Laa Montre contributing by bringing quality hospitality, personalised service and a complete guest experience to emerging markets. Kharagpur's growing industrial, corporate, and railway connectivity creates strong opportunities for hospitality. Laa Montre aims to cater to corporate travellers, business meetings, weddings, and leisure guests. With our focus on quality service and diverse dining experiences, we see opportunities to expand into emerging destinations across Eastern India and build a trusted regional hospitality brand.

Looking ahead, what is your vision for Laa Montre over the next two to three years? Can we expect the brand to expand into other destinations across Eastern India and beyond?
Over the next two to three years, our vision is to strengthen Laa Montre as a trusted hospitality brand, with a strong focus on service quality and guest experience. We are certainly exploring opportunities in other destinations across Eastern India and beyond, with expansion driven by the right locations and sustainable growth.

DESIGNING A NEW LANGUAGE OF COASTAL LUXURY

Mr. Gagan Mathawan on the Vision Behind NiiRA, Mirissa

Travel Mail Desk

As Sri Lanka's southern coast evolves beyond its vibrant beach culture, a more considered approach to hospitality is taking shape—one that celebrates thoughtful design, natural tranquillity and a strong sense of place. In Mirissa, NiiRA reflects this emerging philosophy, bringing together contemporary minimalism, Sri Lankan artistic traditions and a deep connection with the surrounding tropical landscape.

In this exclusive email interview, Mr. Gagan Mathawan, Space & Hospitality Designer and Creative Director at NiiRA, Mirissa, shares the design philosophy behind the property and discusses how architecture, local craftsmanship and nature can come together to create meaningful hospitality experiences. He also reflects on the growing appeal of design-led boutique stays and how such properties can contribute to a more conscious, experience-driven future for tourism in Sri Lanka.

For years, Mirissa has been internationally celebrated for its surf breaks, whale watching, and lively backpacker beach culture. From your vantage point as a designer, how is the South Coast evolving toward a quieter, more considered, and design-led hospitality language—and what makes Mirissa the right canvas for this transformation right now?

Mirissa is experiencing a natural evolution. While its vibrant beach culture has long defined its international appeal, there is a growing appreciation for a more considered kind of hospitality—one that prioritises a sense of calm, connection with nature, and thoughtful design.

What makes Mirissa particularly compelling is its contrast: the energy of the ocean alongside pockets of tropical tranquillity. At NiiRA, the intention was never to replace the character of the coast, but to create a quieter experience within it. Through natural textures, restrained forms, and carefully considered proportions, we have created a sanctuary that offers a sense of retreat while remaining deeply connected to the spirit of Mirissa.

Hospitality on Sri Lanka's southern coast carries a rich architectural lineage, from Geoffrey Bawa's tropical modernism to raw coastal minimalism. How did you interpret the local landscape, materials, and coastal light when shaping the spatial identity and aesthetic philosophy of NiiRA?

Geoffrey Bawa's work demonstrated how architecture can respond to its tropical surroundings rather than compete with them. At NiiRA, we drew inspiration from this sensitivity to nature, interpreting it through a contemporary language of understated luxury, clean lines, and natural warmth.

Light, airflow, and the existing landscape were central to our approach. Trees are integrated into the built environment, allowing nature to remain an active part of the architecture, while the presence of local wildlife, including peacocks and monkeys, reinforces the connection to the surrounding ecosystem. The material palette balances simplicity with refinement, from hand-polished cement floors and walls to exposed ceilings and carefully selected minimalist furnishings. The result is a space where considered detailing and local context come together to create a distinctive sense of place.



Mr. Gagan Mathawan
Space & Hospitality Designer and Creative Director at NiiRA, Mirissa

The contemporary traveller is increasingly seeking sanctuary and cultural nuance over standardized luxury. In your spatial design and creative direction at NiiRA, how do you balance private, contemplative retreats with communal spaces that encourage guests to encourage the slower rhythm of the coast?

For me, contemporary luxury is about a sense of ease, privacy, and genuine connection rather than formality. At NiiRA, this begins with the arrival experience. We chose not to have a conventional reception desk or formal concierge, instead creating a warm, intuitive welcome that feels closer to arriving at a private residence than a traditional hotel.

The private suites are designed as quiet retreats, with minimal detailing and soothing materials that allow guests to slow down and disconnect. The communal areas, by contrast, are open and relaxed, with lounge spaces and outdoor settings that invite conversation and a closer connection with nature. The balance lies in giving guests the freedom to move between solitude and shared experiences, allowing them to discover the slower rhythm of the coast at their own pace.

Authentic destination design often depends on the integration of indigenous craft and site-specific materials. Could you share some of the tactile design choices, local artisan collaborations, or sustainable vernacular techniques embedded into NiiRA that give it an unmistakable sense of place?

At NiiRA, a sense of place comes from interpreting Sri Lankan heritage through a contemporary design lens, allowing local craftsmanship and cultural references to become an integral part of the architecture.

- **Temple mural artistry:** The headboards feature intricate artwork inspired by traditional Sri Lankan temple murals, bringing a distinctive cultural reference into the private spaces without relying on conventional decorative art.
- **Collaborations with local artisans:** Our work with local artists and artisans is ongoing, with site-specific murals and artworks developing across the property. This allows the creative identity of NiiRA to evolve while maintaining a meaningful connection to local talent.
- **Materiality and craftsmanship:** Hand-polished cement walls and floors bring a tactile quality to the spaces, while exposed architectural ceilings and restrained furnishings allow the materials and craftsmanship to take centre stage.

These elements create a balance between heritage and modernity, ensuring that NiiRA feels rooted in its Sri Lankan context while remaining contemporary in its expression.

As Sri Lanka continues its tourism resurgence, we are seeing a shift from mass resort circuits to boutique, micro-destination journeys. Looking ahead, how do you see design-driven properties like NiiRA shaping the future of high-yield, conscious travel across the island?

I believe the future of luxury travel lies in offering experiences that are distinctive, personal, and deeply connected to their surroundings. As travellers move beyond standardised resort experiences, design-led boutique properties have an opportunity to offer a more intimate way of discovering a destination.

At NiiRA, this philosophy is reflected in the relationship between architecture, nature, local artistry, and hospitality. By creating spaces that respond to their environment and celebrating the cultural character of the destination, properties like ours can contribute to a more thoughtful model of tourism—one that values quality of experience over scale. Done well, this approach can strengthen Sri Lanka's appeal to discerning international travellers while supporting local creative communities and encouraging a more considered relationship with the island's natural and cultural heritage.

The Future of Indian Tourism: Experience-Led Travel, AI and Sustainable Growth



Mrs. Jyoti Mayal
Chairperson, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC)

Travel Mail Desk

The Indian travel landscape is evolving rapidly in 2026, with travellers increasingly seeking meaningful experiences, authentic local encounters and journeys that go beyond conventional sightseeing. From the growing popularity of solo travel and emerging destinations to the transformative role of artificial intelligence, sustainability and skill development, the tourism industry is entering a new phase of growth and innovation.

In this exclusive interaction, **Mrs Jyoti Mayal, Chairperson, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC),** shares her perspective on the changing preferences of Indian travellers, the potential of experience-led tourism, the role of technology in shaping travel planning, and the priorities for making Indian destinations more globally competitive. She also highlights the need for stronger infrastructure, consistent service standards, workforce skilling and collaboration across the tourism ecosystem to build a more connected, inclusive and future-ready industry.

What are the biggest changes you are seeing in the Indian traveller in 2026?

Indian travellers today are far more experience-driven than destination-driven; they're asking, "What will I feel and learn?" rather than just, "Where will I go?" We're also seeing a sharp rise in solo travel, multigenerational family trips planned around shared interests, and a much stronger pull towards Tier 2 and Tier 3 destinations. Value-consciousness hasn't gone away, but it's now paired with a willingness to spend more on authenticity and comfort.

With AI increasingly influencing travel planning, how do you see technology reshaping the travel experience?

I think AI is going to make travel planning far more personal and seamless. Things that once took hours of research can now happen in minutes—from building an itinerary to finding the right experiences and getting real-time recommendations. But what excites me most is that technology can take care of the logistics while we focus more on the human side of travel. For me, great travel is ultimately about the experience—the warmth of hospitality, discovering something local and unexpected, and having someone there to solve a problem when it matters. AI can make that journey smarter and more efficient, but human connection is what will make it memorable.

Domestic travel remains a strong growth driver. What more can be done to encourage travellers to explore emerging destinations in India?

We need three things moving together: infrastructure that reaches beyond the usual circuits, last-mile connectivity by air and rail, and strong, consistent storytelling around lesser-known destinations rather than one-off campaigns. State tourism boards and private players also need to co-invest in training local guides and developing homestays, because the quality of the experience at an emerging destination is what turns a one-time visitor into an advocate.

Experience-led travel is gaining momentum. Which segments do you see having the biggest potential in India, and how can the industry support this new way of travelling?

I believe India has a huge opportunity in experience-led travel because our diversity goes far beyond destinations; it spans wellness, food, culture, heritage, adventure, and nature. Travellers today want to experience a place, not just see it, and wellness tourism, culinary trails, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, and heritage-led travel have tremendous potential. For me, the shift is from simply promoting destinations to creating experiences that give travellers a reason to stay longer, explore deeper, and come back. That will require all of us—tourism businesses, technology platforms, destinations, and policymakers—to think beyond individual offerings and build an ecosystem that can take these experiences to the next level.

What should be the next priority to make Indian destinations more globally competitive?

Consistency. A traveller should get the same standards of signage, safety, digital payments, and service, whether they're in a metro or a smaller town. Alongside that, we need sharper destination branding in global markets. India is still under-marketed relative to the experiences it actually offers.

What are the key conversations the tourism industry needs to have right now to build a more connected and future-ready ecosystem?

Sustainability needs to be built into infrastructure planning, not bolted on later. We need skilling at scale so that service quality keeps pace with demand, and far better data-sharing between government, private players, and technology platforms. A connected ecosystem isn't just about physical connectivity; it's about everyone working with the same information.

MR. YOUNIS KHAN ON GUEST EXPERIENCE, OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND BUILDING TRUST IN HOSPITALITY

Travel Mail Desk

With over three decades of experience across the hospitality industry, how has your approach to hotel management evolved over the years, and which key leadership principles continue to guide your approach to operational excellence and guest satisfaction?

I started in Front Office, and that still shapes how I see a hotel. It's where you learn very quickly that a guest remembers how they were treated, not how well your systems ran. Over thirty years, what has changed is that I now spend far less time solving problems myself and far more time making sure my team can solve them without waiting for me. Guests are also better informed today and expect more personalisation, so the job has become more about anticipating than reacting.

What hasn't changed is a short list of things I keep coming back to. Listen to your people. Give them ownership. Recognise good work, and not only commercial results. Keep teaching. When associates feel trusted, they take care of the guest almost without being told, and that's where both operational excellence and guest satisfaction come from.

Food safety and quality assurance are integral to maintaining guest confidence in the hospitality sector. What protocols and monitoring mechanisms does The LaLiT Ashok Bangalore implement across procurement, storage, food preparation and service to ensure compliance with applicable standards?

At The LaLiT Ashok Bangalore, food safety and quality assurance are integral to delivering a safe, consistent, and high-quality dining experience. We follow a systematic approach that covers the entire food journey, from procurement and receipt of ingredients to storage, preparation, and service, in line with applicable food safety regulations and standards. Procurement and Receiving: We source ingredients from approved suppliers and conduct checks upon receipt to assess freshness, quality, packaging integrity, expiry dates, and temperature, wherever applicable.

Storage and Inventory Management: Ingredients are stored under appropriate temperature and hygiene conditions, with raw and cooked foods segregated to prevent cross-contamination. Clear labelling, date marking, stock rotation, and regular temperature monitoring help maintain product quality and safety.

Food Preparation and Service: Our teams follow established food hygiene practices, including personal hygiene, appropriate food handling, cleaning and sanitisation schedules, and temperature controls during preparation and service. Supervisory checks help ensure that these procedures are consistently followed across our kitchens and food and beverage outlets. Monitoring and Accountability: Regular operational checks, documentation, and supervision by the concerned department heads help maintain compliance and identify areas requiring corrective action. We also emphasise employee awareness and training to reinforce a culture of food safety and accountability.



Mr. Younis Khan

Hotel Manager, The LaLiT Ashok Bengaluru

At The LaLiT Ashok Bangalore, we believe food safety is not merely a procedural requirement but a daily responsibility. Through consistent monitoring, team awareness, and a focus on continuous improvement, we strive to uphold guest confidence and deliver a safe and enjoyable culinary experience.

In light of the recent FSDA-related reports concerning The LaLiT Ashok Bangalore, could you share the hotel's perspective on the observations and outline the measures undertaken to address them and strengthen existing food-safety and inventory-management practices?

At The LaLiT Ashok, Bengaluru, we take all observations made by the relevant authorities seriously and view them as an opportunity to review and strengthen our existing processes. Regarding the recent FSDA-related observations, the concerns pertained to the storage and segregation of meat and frozen products. As communicated at the time, the products in question were reported to be fit for consumption. Nevertheless, we recognise that proper storage, segregation, labelling, and inventory management are essential components of effective food-safety practices.

In response, we have reviewed our existing procedures and are reinforcing controls relating to stock rotation, date verification, product labelling, storage conditions, and inventory monitoring. We are also strengthening team awareness and reinforcing adherence to established food-handling and hygiene protocols to ensure consistency across our operations. We remain committed to cooperating with the relevant authorities and addressing observations appropriately. Food safety is a priority at The LaLiT Ashok, and we continue to focus on maintaining high standards of hygiene, quality assurance, and operational accountability to safeguard guest confidence.

Our commitment is to ensure that food-safety practices remain robust, consistently monitored, and aligned with applicable regulatory requirements.

Maintaining stringent operational standards while delivering a seamless guest experience requires coordination across departments. How do you ensure that hygiene, quality control and accountability remain embedded in the hotel's day-to-day operations without compromising service excellence?

I think the answer is to keep it simple and visible. Every department head owns the standards for their area, and everyone knows what good looks like. I walk the hotel, kitchens and stores included, and speak to people on the floor, because that tells you more than a report does. We talk openly about what went wrong and why, without it turning into blame. If someone raises a problem early, they should be thanked for it.

Guests shouldn't feel any of this. The back-end is strict so the front-end can be relaxed and warm. At Baluchi, for instance, the interactive kitchen lets guests watch their food being prepared, which makes the care visible.

With increasing emphasis on transparency and accountability in hospitality, how can hotels communicate effectively about food-safety practices, respond to guest concerns and reinforce confidence in their operational standards?

Be honest, be quick, and be specific. When a guest raises a concern, they should hear back from a real person, soon, with a clear answer on what we found and what we're doing about it. Vague reassurance doesn't build trust, but plain facts do. The same goes for public communication. Say what you know, don't overpromise, and update people when things change.

It also helps to show the work in ordinary times, whether that's open kitchens, trained and well-informed service staff, or being willing to answer questions about sourcing. Confidence comes from guests seeing that we are consistent, not from us telling them we are.

MS. DEEPIKA ARORA ON LEADERSHIP, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE FUTURE OF INDIA'S HOSPITALITY SECTOR

Travel Mail Desk

Your career spans international hospitality brands and entrepreneurship. What have been the defining moments in your professional journey, and how have they shaped your approach to leadership, decision-making, and building successful hospitality businesses?

Looking back at my career, I believe the most defining moments have not necessarily been the milestones or achievements, but the transitions that challenged me, pushed me out of my comfort zone and helped me grow, both professionally and personally.

My journey from architecture and hospitality real estate at JLL to working with global hospitality brands such as Hilton, Wyndham and Dusit, and eventually becoming an entrepreneur, has been one of continuous learning and reinvention. Each chapter has taught me something different: the importance of understanding a business, the value of relationships, the courage to make difficult decisions and, perhaps most importantly, the resilience to keep moving forward when things don't go as planned.

Building Rosastays from the ground up was undoubtedly one of the most transformative experiences of my life. Entrepreneurship changes you. When you are building something of your own, every decision carries a different weight. You learn to take risks, deal with uncertainty, make mistakes, trust your instincts and take responsibility for outcomes. There are moments of immense satisfaction but equally moments of self-doubt. It taught me that perseverance is just as important as ambition, and that success is rarely a straight line.

Acquisition of Rosastays and transitioning into my current role as Partner and Managing Director of UHM India marked another defining chapter. It required me to evolve from being a founder, deeply involved in every aspect of my business, to leading a much larger organisation with different stakeholders, expectations and responsibilities. It has also taught me that growth often requires letting go of familiar ways of working and being open to new perspectives.

Over the years, I have also come to appreciate that leadership is as much about people as it is about business. You can have the strongest strategy, but without the right people, mutual trust and a shared sense of purpose, very little can be achieved. I have learned to listen more, empower people, accept that I may not always have the answers and recognise that vulnerability is not necessarily a weakness in leadership.

If there is one thing my journey has taught me, it is that personal growth and professional success are deeply interconnected. Every challenge, setback and new beginning has shaped the person and leader I am today. I am still learning, still evolving, and still challenging myself, and I believe that is what makes the journey meaningful!



Ms. Deepika Arora

Managing Director, United Hospitality Management (UHM) India, and Head – India, Dusit International

As Head – India for Dusit International, how do you see India's evolving hospitality landscape, and what does it take for an international hospitality brand to adapt its global philosophy to local traveller expectations while maintaining its distinctive identity?

India offers international hospitality brands an opportunity to participate in a market with diverse demand drivers, varied destinations and travellers whose expectations continue to evolve. What makes the market particularly interesting is that the opportunity is not confined to one segment or geography. Different destinations call for different hospitality propositions, creating room for brands with clearly defined identities.

For an international brand such as Dusit, the question is how to make its philosophy relevant to India without losing the qualities that distinguish it globally. I believe this begins with being selective about where and how the brand enters the market. The destination, the property's positioning, the ownership partnership and the expectations of the intended guest must all be considered together.

Localisation should be thoughtful rather than cosmetic. It is not simply about adapting a menu or introducing local design elements. It involves understanding how guests use a property, what they value in the service experience and how the brand can meet those expectations while remaining consistent with its own standards.

My responsibility is to help connect Dusit's international capabilities with an informed understanding of the Indian market. This involves working across development opportunities, owner relationships and market positioning, while ensuring that each project is evaluated on its own merits.

I believe a brand establishes credibility through the quality of its execution. A well-chosen property, a clearly understood market proposition and a consistent guest experience will ultimately do more to build a brand's presence than expansion alone.

Looking ahead over the next five years, which trends or opportunities will have the greatest impact on India's hospitality sector? What advice would you give aspiring entrepreneurs and hospitality professionals who want to build businesses that are commercially successful, distinctive, and sustainable?

The next five years will be particularly exciting for Indian hospitality. We are seeing a shift not just in the growth of hotel supply but in traveller aspirations, emerging destinations and evolving business models. Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities, experiential travel and the professionalisation of India's fragmented hospitality sector will present tremendous opportunities.

Having built Rosastays, I have seen firsthand the potential of independent hotels that have great character but lack professional management, distribution and brand visibility. I also believe third-party management will become increasingly relevant as owners seek greater flexibility, accountability and returns on their investments. This is where companies like UHM have a significant opportunity.

Technology and AI will undoubtedly transform revenue management, distribution and operational efficiencies. However, I firmly believe hospitality will always remain a people business. Technology should enhance, not replace, the personal connections that make hospitality special.

For aspiring entrepreneurs, my advice is simple: believe in your idea, but understand the economics behind it. Passion alone doesn't build a sustainable business. You need resilience, financial discipline, the right people and the courage to adapt. Having been an entrepreneur myself, I know that the journey is rarely a straight line, and some of the greatest lessons come from setbacks.

For young hospitality professionals, I would encourage learning beyond one's immediate function. Hospitality brings together real estate, finance, operations, design and people, and understanding these dimensions makes for stronger leadership.

Ultimately, success is not just about how big a business you build, but how well you build it, the people you take along and the value you create. India's opportunities are immense, but sustainable growth, integrity and the ability to evolve will define the businesses that truly succeed.

A Night at Sepang International Circuit

Exploring the MotoGP Circuit Before Race Day

By Rishika Gupta, Travel Mail

Most people visit a racing circuit to watch the action from the grandstands. But getting an opportunity to explore the track itself is a completely different experience. During my recent visit to Malaysia, I got to do just that at the iconic Sepang International Circuit, a day before the actual MotoGP races.

As part of the Mega Familiarisation Programme organised by Tourism Malaysia in conjunction with the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia 2026, we headed to Sepang after a day of exploring Kuala Lumpur for a special Night Track Tour.

We arrived just in time to witness a beautiful sunset, which added a lovely touch to the beginning of the evening. As daylight slowly faded, the circuit began to light up, creating a completely different atmosphere. The grandstands, pit lane and garages offered a glimpse of the preparations that go into hosting an international racing event. Knowing that the same venue would soon welcome professional riders and thousands of fans made the experience even more exciting.

A Different Kind of Track Ride

The experience began with a double-decker bus ride around the circuit. And honestly, a sightseeing tour on a racing track is not something you come across every day!

As the bus took us around, we got a closer look at the circuit's layout, its long stretches, famous corners and grandstands. We also got to see the pit lane and garages, which are an important part of the action behind every race. With the race just a day away, it was exciting to imagine the world's best motorcycle riders speeding through the same corners.

Walking Where the Champions Race

The highlight of the evening was getting off the bus and actually walking on the racing track.



Standing on the same surface where professional riders compete felt quite surreal. We got to walk along the track, see the finish line and even stand on the starting grid. Having watched countless races on television, standing at the very spot where riders prepare for the start was quite a moment.

I couldn't help imagining the motorcycles waiting for the lights to go out, the roar of their engines and thousands of spectators cheering from the grandstands.

Sepang Beyond Race Day

What I enjoyed most about the Night Track Tour was getting to experience Sepang beyond the usual spectator areas. Being able to explore the circuit, walk on the track and stand on the starting grid gave us a glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes of an international MotoGP event.

The experience also made me appreciate the circuit beyond just the races. There is so much that goes into hosting a Grand Prix, and getting to see the venue up close gave me a better sense of the excitement and scale of the event.



And we weren't done with Sepang just yet. The following day, we would return to experience the circuit in an entirely different atmosphere, with international riders, roaring engines, racing teams and thousands of fans gathering for the MotoGP action.



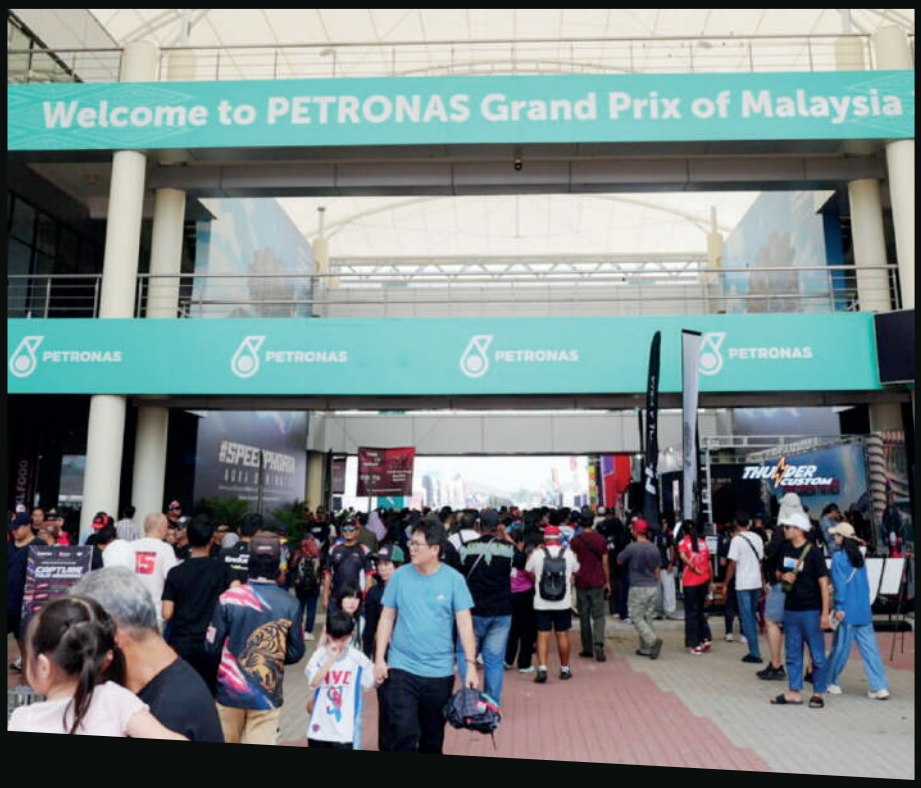


The Roar of the Engines

Experiencing the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia 2026

By Rishika Gupta, Travel Mail

The roar of motorcycle engines, the excitement of the crowd and the sight of racing bikes speeding past the grandstands made my visit to the PETRONAS Sepang International Circuit one of the most exciting experiences of my Malaysia trip. I was there to witness the PETRONAS Grand Prix of Malaysia and, for the first time, experience the thrill of MotoGP racing right in front of my eyes.



As part of the Mega Familiarisation Programme organised by Tourism Malaysia in conjunction with the Grand Prix, we got the opportunity to be part of one of the biggest sporting events on Malaysia's calendar. Having watched motorcycle racing on television, I was curious to see what it would actually feel like to be at the circuit, surrounded by thousands of fans and watching some of the world's finest riders compete.

The Excitement of Race Day

Located in Selangor, the PETRONAS Sepang International Circuit is one of Malaysia's most recognised sporting venues. We took our seats in the grandstand near the starting and finishing line, giving us a good view of the track. The atmosphere was already lively,



with fans arriving in their favourite team colours, cheering for different riders and discussing the races.

One thing that immediately caught my attention was the diversity of the crowd. Fans from different countries had come together, each supporting their favourite riders and teams. There was a wonderful sense of excitement in the air, and even though everyone had their own favourites, the enthusiasm was something we all shared.

Sitting among so many passionate fans made the experience even more enjoyable. You could hear the cheers getting louder as the motorcycles approached, while everyone around you followed the action closely. It was interesting to see how involved the spectators were, reacting to every moment on the track. Having watched races on television, I had seen the excitement before, but being part of that atmosphere was a completely different feeling.

Every Turn Was Worth Watching

We joined the race-day action with Moto3, which began our afternoon at the circuit. The 15-lap race was followed by the 17-lap Moto2 race, before the much-awaited 20-lap MotoGP Grand Prix took place.

For someone watching these races live for the first time, there was plenty to take in. The motorcycles would approach the grandstand at incredible speeds, pass right in front of us and disappear around the next turn. The sound of the engines was something else altogether. It was much louder and more powerful than I had imagined while watching races on television.



What I particularly enjoyed watching was how the riders handled the corners. Seeing them lean their motorcycles while navigating the turns and then accelerate out of them was fascinating. There was so much precision involved in every movement, and it made me realise just how much skill and control the sport demands.



As the afternoon progressed, the excitement built towards the main MotoGP race. The atmosphere in the grandstands, the cheering fans and the sight of the riders competing on the track made the final race even more special. Sitting so close to the action gave me a better appreciation of the speed, concentration and technique that go into professional motorcycle racing.

An Experience Beyond the Ordinary

My first live MotoGP experience at Sepang was certainly a highlight of my Malaysia visit. I went to the circuit looking forward to watching the races, but the experience turned out to be about much more than that. From the energy of the crowd to watching the riders tackle the circuit, it gave me a glimpse into the passion that motorsport brings out in people.

For travellers visiting Malaysia, especially those who enjoy sporting events, the PETRONAS Grand Prix is an experience worth adding to the itinerary. It is also a wonderful opportunity to see a different side of the country beyond its popular attractions, shopping destinations and food experiences.

I had always watched motorcycle racing from a screen, but getting to sit in the grandstands and witness it all unfold in front of me was something I will remember. My first MotoGP race at Sepang gave me a new experience to take back from Malaysia, and perhaps a new appreciation for a sport I had only followed from a distance.

DF UNCAGED JORDAN

International MMA Championship to Take Over Historic Roman Theatre in Amman

DF UNCAGED Jordan will bring professional fighters from across 16 countries to Amman's nearly 2,000-year old Roman Theatre on 30 October 2026, combining international MMA competition with Jordan's cultural heritage.



Travel Mail Desk

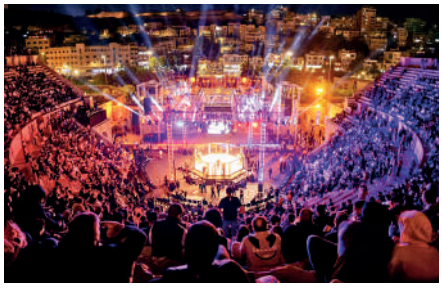
DF UNCAGED Jordan will bring international mixed martial arts (MMA) action to Amman's historic Roman Theatre on 30 October 2026. Featuring professional fighters from 16 countries across 14 bouts, the championship will transform the nearly 2,000-year-old landmark into an international sporting arena, combining Jordan's cultural heritage with sports tourism.

Featuring professional fighters from 16 countries across 14 international bouts, the event will transform the ancient Roman venue into a spectacular arena for world-class combat sports, showcasing Jordan's rich cultural heritage to regional and international audiences.

The championship will headline **Jordan MMA Week**, a six-day sporting initiative that combines international athletic competition with activities at some of the kingdom's most celebrated cultural and tourism destinations, including the Amman Citadel, the Dead Sea and the historic Odeon Theatre.

Drawing on more than 15 years of regional experience, the organizers are introducing a new international sporting platform to showcase elite talent while positioning Jordan as a destination for major international events.

The championship will feature prominent international athletes, led by former ACA welterweight champion Mukhammad



Berkhamov (17-3), who will face American fighter Dante Schiro (13-6) in a 176-pound catchweight contest.

The co-main event will see former UFC middleweight and The Ultimate Fighter 23 winner Andrew Sanchez (14-9) take on Russian veteran Mikhail Ragozin (25-7) in a middleweight bout.

The event will also mark the return of Lebanese MMA star Mohammad Fakhreddine (18-5), a BRAVE CF Hall of Famer and former two-division world champion. He will face Welsh fighter John Martin Fraser (11-6), a veteran of Cage Warriors and UAE Warriors, in a 202-pound catchweight contest.

Four Jordanian athletes will compete on home soil, giving local talent an opportunity to participate in a major international sporting event.

The international lineup reflects the organisers' ambition to deliver a high-calibre championship featuring established professional fighters alongside emerging regional talent.

Official DF UNCAGED Fight Card

Main Card

- Mukhammad Berkhamov (17-3) vs. Dante Schiro (13-6) — 176-pound catchweight
- Andrew Sanchez (14-9) vs. Mikhail Ragozin (25-7) — Middleweight
- Faris Al-Raimi vs. Salman Hentous — Bantamweight
- Romero Cotton vs. Ezequias Glim — Middleweight
- Abdullah Jaweesh vs. Islam Chelouti — Featherweight

Preliminary Card

- Tamerlan Dulatov vs. Levy Carriel — 176-pound catchweight
- Mohammad Fakhreddine (18-5) vs. John Martin Fraser (11-6) — 202-pound catchweight
- Kurban Zaynukov vs. Gilson Nogueira — Featherweight
- Zafar Rashidov vs. Dawei Zhou — Bantamweight
- Kurbanali Zaynukov vs. Catalin Safta — 161-pound catchweight
- Ratibor Yaschenko vs. Rui Chen — Bantamweight
- Freih Harahsheh vs. Abdel Hafid Bendary — Bantamweight
- Zaki Kayyali vs. Abbes Hadded — Featherweight
- Yazan Balaawi vs. Issam Azelhad — Middleweight

Chief Secretary Shri Barnwal and Union Tourism Secretary Shri Kumar inaugurate the exhibition at Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart 2026

Travel Mail Desk

Chief Secretary Shri Ashok Barnwal and Union Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Shri Bhuvnesh Kumar inaugurated the exhibition on the second day of the Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart 2026 (7th Edition) at the Kushabhau Thakre International Convention Centre.

Chief Secretary Shri Ashok Barnwal said that tourism in Madhya Pradesh is witnessing sustained growth, with a steady increase in tourist footfall. He emphasised that special focus is being placed on promoting business opportunities at both the domestic and international levels, to give the state's hospitality and tourism economy a distinctive global identity.

The exhibition at Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart provides a significant global platform for key tourism stakeholders, including tour operators, hoteliers and homestay operators, to expand business opportunities, forge strategic partnerships and explore new avenues for tourism growth.

During his visit to the exhibition, Chief Secretary Shri Barnwal reviewed the various showcases and interacted with exhibitors. He also took keen interest in the interactive digital displays and AI-based digital initiatives being showcased at the event.

Chief Secretary Shri Barnwal Engages with Travel-Tour Operators and Hospitality Stakeholders

Chief Secretary Shri Barnwal visited various stalls at the exhibition and held direct interactions with travel-tour operators, hoteliers and homestay operators from across India and abroad. He discussed their tourism packages, upcoming business plans and the emerging potential for expanding tourism in Madhya Pradesh.

He encouraged the participating stakeholders and emphasised that representatives of the travel and hospitality sectors are playing the role of brand ambassadors for Madhya Pradesh tourism. He urged them to effectively showcase the state's rich cultural heritage, extraordinary wildlife diversity and distinctive rural tourism experiences on the global stage.

The Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart 2026 (MPTM 2026) features 177 travel and hospitality stalls, making it a significant platform for the state's tourism ecosystem. The event aims to further accelerate the sustained growth in tourist arrivals to Madhya Pradesh while creating greater opportunities for business networking, partnerships and investment in the tourism sector.

Madhya Pradesh Pavilion Showcases the State's Distinctive Tourism Experiences

The Madhya Pradesh Pavilion presents the state's major tourism destinations through an immersive and visually engaging experience.





Large digital display screens offer visitors a vibrant glimpse of the state's magnificent historical forts, wildlife sanctuaries and breathtaking natural landscapes.

Adding a modern technological dimension to the showcase, interactive kiosks enable visitors to independently explore comprehensive information about tourism destinations across Madhya Pradesh based on their interests and preferences. The integration of digital technology has made the visitor experience more engaging, informative and seamless.

Tourism Village Panchvati Brings Rural Madhya Pradesh to Life

Under the rural tourism programme implemented by the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, visitors are being offered opportunities to experience the authenticity, culture and charm of rural life in the state.

To bring this unique rural experience alive, a special replica of Tourism Village Panchvati has been created within the Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart premises.

The vibrant showcase offers visitors an immersive experience of rural Madhya Pradesh through a range of activities, including homestay experiences, stargazing, bullock-cart rides, cycling, tribal folk dances, traditional musical performances, archery and displays of traditional handicrafts.

The showcase also features glimpses of national parks, natural waterfalls and Gond paintings. Tribal communities are presenting their traditional lifestyle, cultural practices and stories, providing visitors with an authentic and engaging insight into the rich cultural fabric of rural Madhya Pradesh.

Rich Heritage of Madhya Pradesh Showcased through Art and Craft

Special Art & Craft stalls have been set up to showcase the rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions of Madhya Pradesh. Visitors can experience the state's distinctive traditional arts, handicrafts and handloom products, including Bagh Print, Chanderi Sarees, Bhil Art, Bhairava Craft and Batik Print.

These stalls not only provide the state's traditional art forms with a global platform but also contribute towards preserving, promoting and creating new opportunities for local artisans and craftspeople.

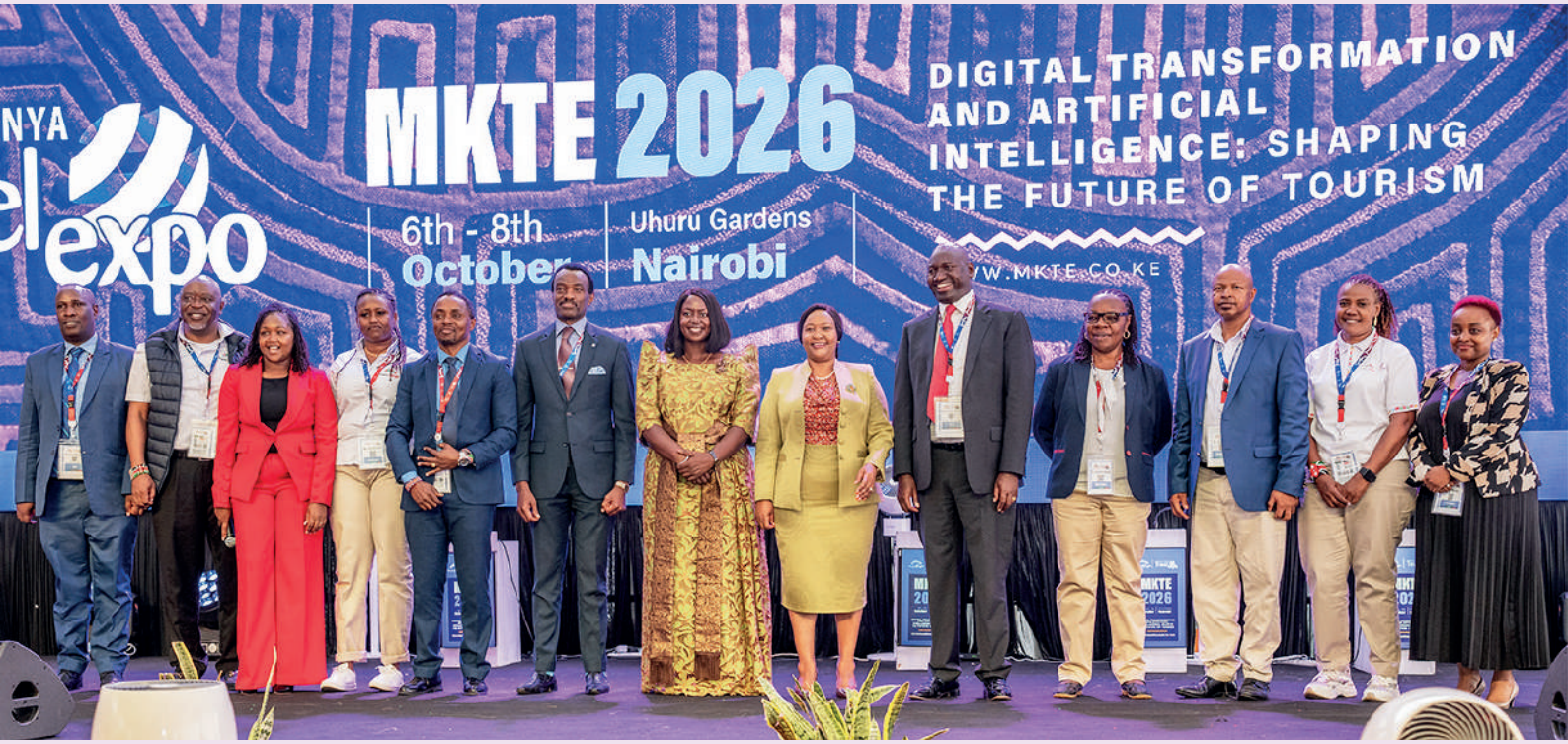
The exhibition reflects Madhya Pradesh's commitment to positioning its rich cultural heritage, diverse tourism offerings and local craftsmanship on the global tourism map while creating stronger avenues for economic opportunities within the state's tourism ecosystem.

Secretary, Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Dr. Ilayaraja T., Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC), Shri Dileep Kumar Yadav, Additional Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Dr. Abhay Arvind Bedekar, FICCI Madhya Pradesh Chairman Shri Mahendra Pratap Singh, along with senior officials, travel and tour operators, exhibitors and hoteliers, were present on the occasion.

MAGICAL KENYA TOURISM EXPO 2026

Records 10,000+ B2B Meetings, Draws 10,000+ Delegates

The 16th edition of MKTE brought together tourism stakeholders from over 40 countries in Nairobi, with 450 exhibitors, more than 250 international hosted buyers and new opportunities for global travel trade partnerships.



Travel Mail Desk

NAIROBI, KENYA: Kenya brought together the global tourism industry for the 16th edition of the Magical Kenya Tourism Expo (MKTE) 2026, held from 6–8 October at Uhuru Gardens, Nairobi. The three-day event welcomed tourism boards, travel trade professionals, hospitality businesses, destination management companies, international buyers and media representatives from across the world, providing a platform to explore partnerships and strengthen international tourism connections.

With participation from more than 40 countries, the expo recorded over 10,000 delegates, 450 exhibitors and more than 250 vetted international hosted buyers. A total of 10,008 B2B meetings were booked during the event, reflecting the scale of business engagement and the growing importance of the platform in connecting Kenya's tourism industry with global markets.

Tourism Leadership and Global Ambitions

The official inauguration brought together Kenya's senior tourism leadership and regional representatives, including the Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, Rebecca Miano, Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) CEO June Chepkemei, KTB Chairman Francis Gichaba and Principal Secretary, State Department for Tourism, Amb. Prof. Julius Bitok. The presence of Uganda's State Minister for Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, Hon. Susan Nakawuki Nsambu, also reflected the regional dimension of the event.

The proceedings underscored Kenya's ambition to strengthen its tourism sector, deepen international partnerships and position the country as a diverse and competitive destination in the global marketplace.





Ms. Rebecca Miano
– Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife

Addressing the gathering, Rebecca Miano emphasised the importance of expanding Kenya's tourism appeal beyond its traditional wildlife and coastal offerings. The country's strategy increasingly encompasses MICE tourism, sports, adventure, culture, wellness and other emerging experiences, alongside its established safari and beach products.

Kenya is targeting 5.5 million international visitors by 2028, with the government looking to strengthen destination marketing, improve tourism infrastructure and encourage investment across the sector. Its diverse landscapes, wildlife heritage, cultural experiences and hospitality remain central to this ambition.

A Showcase of Africa's Tourism Industry

The exhibition floor reflected the diversity of Africa's tourism industry, bringing together national and regional tourism boards, airlines, hotel groups, safari lodges, resorts, tour operators and destination management companies.

Tourism representatives from across the continent, including Uganda, Rwanda, Zambia and Malawi, showcased their destinations and experiences. Aviation companies such as Kenya Airways, Jambojet and Air Kenya, alongside international airline participants, engaged with the travel trade, while hospitality brands, safari operators and accommodation providers presented their offerings to international buyers.

The participation of businesses spanning accommodation, transport, travel technology and destination services highlighted the interconnected nature of the tourism value chain and the opportunities for collaboration across the continent.

India's Presence at MKTE 2026

India's participation was particularly visible at this year's expo, with more than 25 Indian travel trade delegates and buyers representing the country. Their presence provided an opportunity to engage with Kenyan tourism stakeholders, explore destination offerings and develop stronger connections between the two markets.



India Travel Trade Delegation at MKTE 2026



Speaking to Travel Mail during the expo, **Ms. Fiona Ngesa, Market Development Lead – Asia, Middle East and Oceania at the Kenya Tourism Board,** highlighted the participation of Indian tour operators and the wide range of experiences available across Kenya.

"*There's so much more that Kenya has to offer to you,*" she said, encouraging Indian travel professionals to discover destinations such as Tsavo, Amboseli, Mombasa, Diani, the Maasai Mara, Lamu and Samburu, alongside the country's adventure, cultural and ecotourism experiences.

She also expressed hope that the connections made during the expo would translate into future itineraries, encouraging Indian tour operators to approach their Kenyan counterparts and curate more travel experiences to the destination.

Ms. Fiona Ngesa
Market Development Lead
– Asia, Middle East and Oceania at the Kenya Tourism Board

Taking International Buyers Further MKTE

Extending the experience beyond the exhibition grounds, MKTE 2026 also facilitated an extensive familiarisation programme for international buyers from 9–13 October, immediately following the expo.

More than 20 groups were organised, with each group comprising at least five buyers, taking participants across different regions of Kenya to experience the country's diverse tourism offerings firsthand. The programme provided an opportunity to explore destinations and experiences beyond the widely recognised Maasai Mara, introducing buyers to Kenya's varied landscapes, wildlife, coastal attractions, cultural heritage and adventure offerings.

Such familiarisation initiatives play an important role in helping international travel professionals gain first-hand destination knowledge, build relationships with local suppliers and develop more diverse itineraries for their respective markets.

See Through The Wildlife with Diverse Experiences

While Kenya's wildlife and safari experiences remain major attractions, the wider conversations and presentations at MKTE 2026 reflected a growing effort to diversify the country's tourism portfolio.



Siddharth Gupta
Editor, Travel Mail, with Ms. Fiona Ngesa, Market Development Lead
– Asia, Middle East and Oceania at the Kenya Tourism Board



From the Indian Ocean coastline and cultural heritage to adventure tourism, sports, wellness and community-based experiences, Kenya is seeking to encourage visitors to explore more of the destination. This approach also creates opportunities for smaller tourism businesses, local communities and emerging destinations to participate in the country's tourism growth.

The expo's programme further explored the role of technology, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, tourism resilience and the creative economy in shaping the future of travel. These discussions highlighted the need for the tourism industry to adapt to changing traveller expectations while strengthening collaboration between public and private stakeholders.

Regional cooperation was another important theme, with discussions highlighting the potential of closer collaboration between African destinations. Shared marketing, improved connectivity and cross-border tourism experiences can help strengthen the continent's position in the global travel market.



FAM Trip No. 4 – Group Photo at The Equator 0 degree located at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Nanyuki, Kenya

A Platform for the Future of African Tourism

Over the years, the Magical Kenya Tourism Expo has developed into an important meeting point for the international travel trade, providing a platform for businesses to build relationships, exchange knowledge and explore opportunities across the African tourism landscape.

The 2026 edition reinforced the importance of collaboration, destination diversification and stronger international market engagement. As Kenya works towards its visitor growth ambitions, platforms such as MKTE will continue to play a role in connecting its tourism businesses with global demand and showcasing the country's many experiences to the world.

With thousands of business meetings booked, international buyers introduced to destinations across the country and new connections established, MKTE 2026 concluded with a clear message: Kenya's tourism story extends far beyond its iconic safaris, and the country is looking to bring more of that story to travellers across the globe.

Panel Discussion on Wildlife, Communities and Sustainable Tourism Marks Day Two of Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart



Travel Mail Desk

A panel discussion titled "The Living Landscape of India's Wilds: Wildlife, Communities and Sustainable Tourism in Madhya Pradesh" was held on the second day of Madhya Pradesh Travel Mart 2026 at the Kushabhau Thakre International Convention Centre in Bhopal. The session explored how wildlife conservation, community participation and responsible tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of the state's tourism sector.

Bhuvnesh Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, delivered the keynote address. The session was moderated by Akanksha Garg, Founder and Director, Waxpol Hotels & Resorts, and Chairperson, ATOAI Women's Collective.

The panel featured L. Krishnamurthy, CEO, Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board; Dr. Ilayaraja T., Secretary, Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board; David Raju, General Manager, CGH Earth Experience Hotels; Toby Sinclair, Director, andBeyond Asia; Parikshit Singh, Founder and CEO, Gram Stay; and Shivang Mehta, Wildlife Photographer.

Community engagement essential for sustainable wildlife tourism: Bhuvnesh Kumar

In his keynote address, **Bhuvnesh Kumar** emphasised that meaningful engagement with local communities is essential for wildlife tourism. He said sustainable tourism can achieve its true purpose only when it follows the spirit of "walking with and engaging with local communities."

He noted that Madhya Pradesh has undertaken significant work in forest management and wildlife conservation, with cheetah conservation at Kuno emerging as an important example. He stressed the need to take wildlife tourism beyond tiger sightings and connect visitors with a wider range of nature-based experiences.

He highlighted experiences such as dolphin sightings in Chambal, the biodiversity of the Gandhi Sagar region, vulture conservation, and full-moon boating around vulture breeding habitats as initiatives that could add new dimensions to wildlife tourism in Madhya Pradesh.

Bhuvnesh Kumar said the success of tourism should not be measured merely by the number of visitors, but by the benefits it generates for local communities and nature. Tourists should be encouraged to become more sensitive and responsible through greater awareness about tourism and the environment. At the same time, local communities should be trained in visitor interaction and hospitality so that the economic benefits of tourism reach people at the grassroots level.

Technology and effective communication to shape the future of wildlife tourism: L. Krishnamurthy

L. Krishnamurthy, CEO, Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board, said the future of tourism will increasingly be shaped by technology and effective communication. Wildlife tourism, he observed, is no longer limited to sightseeing; travellers today seek distinctive and memorable experiences.

Along with Kanha, areas such as Ratapani, Satpura, Sanjay and Veerangana Durgavati Tiger Reserve are also being developed as wildlife tourism destinations in Madhya Pradesh. He underlined the importance of visitor safety, professional training of guides and drivers, and active participation of local communities in strengthening the tourism ecosystem.

New possibilities for wildlife tourism in Ratapani and other destinations: Dr. Ilayaraja T.

Dr. Ilayaraja T., Secretary, Tourism and Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, said Madhya Pradesh has undertaken effective initiatives in forest and wildlife management. He noted that a cheetah born in India has given birth to five cubs, marking an important milestone in the country's cheetah conservation efforts.

He said the cheetahs took time to adapt to Madhya Pradesh's environment, but the conservation efforts are now showing encouraging results. The State is focusing on connecting these conservation initiatives with new and responsible tourism experiences.

He said the development of Ratapani as a new tiger reserve is an important step towards expanding wildlife tourism in Madhya Pradesh. Distinctive experiences such as boating under the full moon around vulture breeding habitats in the Chambal region can bring visitors closer to nature and wildlife while also strengthening awareness about conservation.

Dr. Ilayaraja T. said Madhya Pradesh aims to develop a sustainable and conservation-driven tourism model in which the protection of natural resources remains the highest priority, while creating employment and livelihood opportunities for local communities.

Diverse wildlife experiences and trained guides are key to enriching tourism

Toby Sinclair, Director, andBeyond Asia, said wildlife tourism is no longer confined to tiger sightings. Forests, landscapes, birds, other wildlife and local ways of life must also become an integral part of the visitor experience. He emphasised the need for trained storytellers who can help tourists not merely see a destination, but also understand and experience its character.

David Raju, General Manager, CGH Earth Experience Hotels, said it is often the smaller experiences that make a destination truly distinctive. Along with improving safari and vehicle experiences, greater attention should be given to the knowledge and professional training of guides. Well-trained guides can enrich a visitor's understanding of forests, wildlife and local ecosystems, making the overall experience more informative and memorable.

Community participation to strengthen wildlife tourism

The panel discussion strongly emphasised conservation-led and community-centric wildlife tourism. It was highlighted that forest landscapes across Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Satpura, Panna and Madhav offer immense potential for further development of wildlife tourism in Madhya Pradesh.

The discussion underlined that tourism development should not focus merely on increasing visitor numbers, but should prioritise nature conservation and meaningful participation of local communities.

Promoting local employment, trained nature guides, homestays, regional cuisine, handicrafts and cultural experiences can strengthen rural economies while ensuring that tourism creates tangible benefits for communities living around wildlife and forest landscapes.

The discussion reflected Madhya Pradesh's evolving approach towards wildlife tourism—one that seeks to bring together conservation, immersive visitor experiences and community prosperity, while preserving the State's rich natural heritage for future generations.

Israel Ministry of Tourism Returns to India with Three-City Roadshow and Signs Strategic MOU with OTOAI

Travel Mail Desk

The Israel Ministry of Tourism (IMOT) has successfully concluded a series of roadshows across three major Indian cities- New Delhi on 12 October, Bengaluru on 14 October and Mumbai on 16 October 2026 marking its return to large-scale, in-person engagement with the Indian travel trade after several years.

The events brought together approximately 300 travel trade professionals, including travel agents, tour operators and industry representatives. The roadshows also saw participation from destination management companies (DMCs) Amaris Tours and Events, Magi Holidays and Satguru Travel.

The events showcased Israel's diverse tourism offerings, including leisure and family travel, luxury tourism, MICE, culture, adventure and unique experiences, extending beyond its traditional image as a pilgrimage destination. The programme featured destination presentations, video screenings and face-to-face interactions with travel trade professionals, aimed at strengthening industry relationships and broadening awareness of Israel as a tourism destination.

Strategic Partnership with OTOAI

A key highlight of the Mumbai roadshow was the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Israel Ministry of Tourism and the Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI), marking an important milestone in the Ministry's relationship with the Indian travel industry.

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Galit Hoffman, Consul for Tourism Affairs, Israel Ministry of Tourism, India, said: *"There is no substitute for meeting our travel trade partners face to face. These interactions allow us to strengthen relationships, better understand the market's needs and explore new opportunities together. They have reinforced our belief in the tremendous potential of the Indian market.*

Our partnership with OTOAI goes far beyond the signing of an agreement. It represents a meaningful vote of confidence in Israel as a tourism destination; in the diversity of experiences, it offers and in the future of tourism between our two countries. We deeply value the trust of our Indian partners and see this collaboration as a shared, long-term commitment to strengthening ties and unlocking our tourism potential.

India is an important strategic market for us, and we remain committed to working closely with our industry partners to introduce more Indian travellers to the many diverse experiences Israel has to offer."

Tourism Recovery and Renewed Air Connectivity

The roadshows and the partnership with OTOAI come amid encouraging signs of a gradual recovery in international tourism to Israel.

According to the Israel Ministry of Tourism, approximately 140,000 tourists visited Israel in September 2026, an increase of 19% compared to September 2025. Based on current trends, tourist arrivals are projected to exceed 1.1 million by the end of 2026.

India is Israel's largest Asian source market and one of its top ten international source markets, highlighting its strategic importance and significant growth potential.

Another important development for the Indian market is the upcoming resumption of Air India's direct Delhi-Tel Aviv flights from 1 December 2026, with five weekly services. The return of the route is expected to make travel to Israel more convenient for Indian visitors and create new opportunities for the travel industries of both countries.

Alongside Air India, major international carriers, including United Airlines, Delta Air Lines and KLM, have also resumed direct flights to Israel in recent months. Their return reflects renewed confidence among international airlines in the destination and further strengthens Israel's global air connectivity.

Strengthening Long-Term Engagement with the Indian Market

The three-city roadshow forms part of the Israel Ministry of Tourism's broader strategy to expand its presence in India and deepen cooperation with the local travel industry.

Building on this momentum, the Ministry will continue to promote professional training, familiarisation trips, webinars, B2B meetings and joint initiatives with travel trade and media partners, with the aim of strengthening destination knowledge and encouraging the development of new tourism products tailored to Indian travellers.

Rahul Akerkar, Simi Garewal and Vishal Bhardwaj Grace the Line-up for Vedanta Presents Jaipur Literature Festival's Landmark 20th Edition

Travel Mail Desk

Renowned restaurateur Rahul Akerkar, iconic actor and television personality Simi Garewal, and acclaimed filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj are among the prominent names set to grace the line-up of the landmark 20th edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival, presented by Vedanta. Joining them are several distinguished voices from Mumbai, including poet and cultural theorist Ranjit Hoskote, celebrated singer Rekha Bhardwaj, author Jeet Thayil, actor Joy Sengupta, author and podcaster Shunali Khullar Shroff, Isheeta Ganguly, Namita Dubey, Mazda Turel, Kiran Manral, and Hindi author and storyteller Divya Prakash Dubey.

Celebrating two decades of bringing the world together through literature, ideas and dialogue, the Jaipur Literature Festival, presented by Vedanta, hosted a special preview of its landmark 20th edition at The Quorum, Mumbai. The evening brought together members of the literary, cultural and media fraternity for a glimpse into the forthcoming edition, scheduled to take place from 14-18 January 2027 at Hotel Clarks Amer, Jaipur.

Over the past 20 years, the Jaipur Literature Festival has evolved from a literary gathering into one of the world's most celebrated international literary festivals, creating a vibrant meeting ground for writers, thinkers, artists, policymakers and readers from across the globe. Rooted in the belief that literature and ideas should be accessible to all, the festival has consistently championed an open and democratic space for dialogue, discovery and the exchange of perspectives. Its journey has been defined by its ability to bring diverse voices, languages, disciplines and cultures together, fostering meaningful conversations that transcend geographical and intellectual boundaries.

From Nobel laureates, Booker and Pulitzer Prize winners to emerging writers, poets, historians, scientists and public intellectuals, the Jaipur Literature Festival has welcomed an extraordinary spectrum of voices over the years. Beyond celebrating literary excellence, it has expanded the scope of cultural discourse, engaging audiences with conversations spanning history, politics, science, philosophy, art, cinema, technology, climate and contemporary society. Its growing international presence and enduring engagement with readers have helped establish the festival as an important platform for global literary and cultural exchange.

The evening opened with a series of audio-visual presentations showcasing the journey and diverse cultural initiatives of Teamwork Arts, including the Jaipur Literature Festival, Jaipur BookMark, Jaipur Music Stage and TWA Voyage. A special presentation by The Quorum, the venue partner for the evening, was followed by remarks from Saloni Puri, Director of Programming at The Quorum, who welcomed the gathering.



Speaking at the preview, **Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director of Teamwork Arts and Producer of the Jaipur Literature Festival,** reflected on the festival's remarkable journey over two decades and its evolution into a global platform for literature, ideas and cultural exchange. He said, *"Since its inception, the Jaipur Literature Festival has welcomed over 5 million visitors and brought together more than 8,000 writers, speakers and artists, reaching an estimated global audience of over 1 billion. What began as a gathering in Jaipur has grown into a global platform for literature, ideas and cultural exchange. As we mark our 20th edition, we remain committed to making literature and knowledge accessible to all and bringing diverse voices together."*

The preview also highlighted the festival's Friend of the Festival initiative, offering audiences an opportunity to engage more closely with the Jaipur Literature Festival through exclusive packages and special experiences.

A special highlight of the evening was the launch of bestselling author Ashwin Sanghi's latest book, The Blind Fury. The book was unveiled in the presence of Ashwin Sanghi, author and podcaster Shunali Khullar Shroff, Sanjoy K. Roy and Saloni Puri.

The launch was followed by a literary conversation titled The Art of the Whodunnit, featuring Ashwin Sanghi in conversation with Shunali Khullar Shroff. The session explored the craft of crime writing, the art of building suspense and the enduring appeal of mystery narratives. Drawing on The Blind Fury, which follows a retired Mumbai police officer investigating a series of ritualistic murders, the discussion offered audiences an insight into the storytelling, research and inspiration behind the book, followed by an engaging interaction with the audience.

The Mumbai preview offered a glimpse into the celebrations planned for the landmark 20th edition, inviting readers, writers, students and cultural enthusiasts to join the Jaipur Literature Festival in commemorating two decades of literary excellence, cultural exchange and conversations that continue to shape the way we understand the world.

The forthcoming edition will feature an extraordinary mix of international and Indian voices, bringing together Nobel, Booker and Pulitzer laureates, celebrated writers, historians, economists, journalists, artists and thought leaders from across disciplines. The line-up includes acclaimed names such as Olga Tokarczuk, Sudha Murty, James Wood, Esther Duflo, Neil MacGregor, Claire Messud, Sir Paul Nurse, Akshata Murty and Mishal Husain, alongside an exciting range of distinguished voices. These include Pulitzer Prize-winning author Liaquat Ahamed; Edmund Richardson, winner of the 2026 Baillie Gifford Prize for his book Alexander: God, King, Man; Antonia Senior, finalist for the 2026 Orwell Prize for Political Writing; acclaimed Guardian culture writer Charlotte Higgins; Amitabh Kant, former G20 Sherpa and CEO of NITI Aayog; economist Michael Greenstone of the University of Chicago; and award-winning Bloomberg Businessweek journalist and author Matthew Campbell. The line-up also features internationally recognised chef Asma Khan, Chef Patron of Dubai's three-Michelin-starred Trèsind Studio Himanshu Saini, acclaimed Australian author Anita Heiss, poet and essayist Tishani Doshi, and award-winning writer and screenwriter Raam Mori, among others.

The 20th edition of the Jaipur Literature Festival, presented by Vedanta, will take place from 14–18 January 2027 at Hotel Clarks Amer, Jaipur. For programme updates and festival information, visit www.jaipurliteraturefestival.org.



TOFT's 9th Annual Wildlife & Nature Tourism Awards 2026 to Take Place on 11 December, in New Delhi

Travel Mail Desk

The Travel Operators for Tigers (TOFT) is set to host the 9th Annual TOFT Wildlife & Nature Tourism Awards 2026 on Friday, 11 December 2026, at Bikaner House, New Delhi. The event will bring together leaders and stakeholders from conservation, tourism, hospitality, government, academia, civil society and local communities to recognise outstanding contributions to responsible wildlife and nature tourism across the Indian subcontinent.

The Awards have become one of the region's leading platforms for celebrating excellence in wildlife conservation, community engagement, sustainable tourism and nature-positive development. The annual gathering provides an opportunity for industry stakeholders to exchange ideas, strengthen partnerships and recognise initiatives making a meaningful difference to conservation and responsible tourism.

Theme for 2026

"Nature Positive Travel: Driving Conservation, Empowering People"

As destinations across the world seek to balance tourism growth with ecological protection and community wellbeing, the 2026 Awards will recognise individuals, organisations, destinations, protected areas, tourism enterprises and community initiatives setting benchmarks in responsible and sustainable tourism.

For over two decades, TOFT has worked alongside governments, protected areas, tourism businesses, conservation organisations and local communities to promote tourism as a force for conservation and sustainable development. The Awards programme reflects this mission by recognising leadership, innovation and measurable impact in wildlife and nature tourism.





Commenting on the occasion, **Mr. Vishal Singh (Co-Founder & Director, TOFT),** said, *"We are honoured to host the 9th TOFT Wildlife & Nature Tourism Awards at Bikaner House, New Delhi and look forward to welcoming stakeholders from across the sector. The venue provides an exceptional setting to bring together leaders from conservation, tourism, government, and local communities."*



Ms. Deepika Chowdhry (Director, TOFT) said, *"Hosting the 9th TOFT Wildlife & Nature Tourism Awards at Bikaner House, New Delhi reflects the growing recognition of nature-based tourism as a meaningful contributor to conservation, livelihoods, and sustainable development. We look forward to welcoming stakeholders from across the region for this special occasion."*

The ceremony is expected to attract senior representatives from government agencies, tourism boards, conservation organisations, wildlife destinations, hospitality businesses, tour operators, researchers, media organisations and community enterprises from India and overseas.

The 9th Annual TOFT Wildlife & Nature Tourism Awards 2026 will reaffirm the importance of responsible tourism in protecting natural heritage, strengthening local livelihoods and encouraging a more sustainable future for the travel and tourism industry.

ATOAI Announces its 18th Annual Convention to Focus on Building Year-Round Adventure Tourism Destinations in India

Travel Mail Desk

The Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI), in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India and Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, proudly announces its 18th Annual Adventure Convention, scheduled to take place in Jim Corbett National Park, Uttarakhand, from 13 December to 16 December 2026.

Bringing together industry leaders, policymakers, global experts, and grassroots operators, the country's premier adventure travel gathering will deliberate on this year's core theme:

"India 365: Boundless Adventures" Stronger Destinations | Infinite Seasons | Endless Growth

As India accelerates its ambition to rank among the top ten global destinations for adventure tourism, the 18th convention will address a critical industry evolution: shifting from seasonal activity spikes to sustainable, year-round operational ecosystems. The convention will focus on unlocking the perennial potential of India's diverse geographical landscapes—spanning mountains, rivers, deserts, coastlines, and forests—to ensure continuous economic viability for local communities and tour operators alike.

Voices from Leadership:



Shri Dhiraj Singh Garbyal, Secretary, Tourism, Government of Uttarakhand, said *"Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board is proud to be among the sponsors of the ATOAI Annual Convention in Ramnagar. Uttarakhand has always been a natural home for adventure, and gatherings like this bring together the people who shape adventure travel in India. We warmly welcome all delegates to experience the hospitality and spirit of the Himalaya."*

ADVENTURE TOUR OPERATORS ASSOCIATION OF INDIA



Shri Tejbir Singh Anand, President, ATOAI, remarked *"India possesses an unmatched geographic diversity that uniquely positions us to become a premier global adventure hub, yet seasonality has traditionally limited our operational potential. With our theme for the 18th Annual Convention, 'India 365: Boundless Adventures,' we are driving a paradigm shift—moving from periodic tourist surges to building resilient, high-standard, year-round adventure ecosystems. Hosting this milestone convention in Kausani, in partnership with the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board, underscores our collective dedication to decentralizing tourism, empowering grassroots mountain communities, and expanding off-season travel corridors. ATOAI remains steadfast in upholding uncompromising safety standards, environmental stewardship through our Net-Zero and Leave No Trace commitments, and fostering sustainable economic viability for operators across all terrains and all seasons. Together, we are paving the path to establish India among the top ten adventure destinations in the world."*

Convention Highlights & Core Pillars

The multi-day flagship event will feature a comprehensive program designed to drive industry transformation:

- High-Impact Plenary Sessions & Panels: Strategy discussions on overcoming seasonality, developing monsoon and winter travel corridors, and building resilient destination infrastructure.
- Safety & Standards Workshops: Interactive masterclasses reinforcing safety protocols, risk management frameworks, and eco-sensitive operations in line with national adventure guidelines.
- B2B Networking & Hinterland Integration: Bridging the gap between grassroots adventure operators from regional communities and national/international travel conglomerates.
- Low-Carbon Footprint Conference: Continuing ATOAI's commitment to sustainability, the convention will focus on minimising its carbon footprint, with plastic-free protocols and adherence to 'Leave No Trace' ethics across all sessions and activities.
- Exhibition: A dedicated exhibition featuring adventure tourism products, experiences, and offerings from exhibitors across India, providing a platform for industry visibility, networking, and business engagement.

Building an All-Season Future

The 18th ATOAI Annual Adventure Convention stands poised to set a new benchmark for India's travel industry. By transforming seasonal destinations into perennial adventure hubs, the association reaffirms its mission to foster safe, responsible, and economically inclusive adventure travel across the subcontinent.

Convention Leadership Team

The 18th ATOAI Adventure Convention will be led by a dynamic team:

- Mr. Yog Chinmoy Dutt, Treasurer, ATOAI & Chapter Chair – West-Central Region (Convention Chairman)
- Mr. Mohit Gupta, Senior Member, ATOAI (Convention Co-Chair)
- Mr. Arvind Bharadwaj, Executive Committee Member, ATOAI (Convention Co-Chair)



The 75 Years of TAAI Celebrations and the 69th TAAI Exhibition

Travel Mail Desk

The 75-Year Celebrations of TAAI, alongside the 69th TAAI Convention & Exhibition – Indian Travel Congress 2026, will be remembered as a defining milestone in the history of the Association.

It elevated TAAI's image and standing, generated tremendous excitement across the travel and tourism fraternity, delivered the largest-ever B2B platform at a TAAI Convention, and brought together three extraordinary days of knowledge, business, networking, celebration and hospitality. With two days of focused knowledge sessions, a vibrant India Travel and Tourism Expo, prestigious commemorative awards, and three spectacular evenings, the Convention surpassed expectations on every front.

There were over 750 attendees, including delegates, guests and exhibitors. This convention was delivered at a LEVEL ABOVE and in a record time of less than 5 weeks. It made the entire TAAI fraternity proud and earned the admiration of our esteemed industry leaders, media and delegates alike. In its scale, presentation, engagement and execution, it established itself as an event of the decade and set a formidable new benchmark for future industry conventions.

DAY 1 – THE OPENING CEREMONY

The Opening Ceremony delivered the first major surprise, astonishing delegates with the quality, uncompromising top-class setup and grandeur of the entire decor. The spectacular presentation, meticulous production and pulsating entertainment immediately established the extraordinary character of the Convention. The Band at the opening – Sajda Boys were simply incredible, captivating the audience with their energetic musical performance, while the charming dance performers of Bengal Beauty added colour, grace and cultural splendour to the evening. The opening night was a powerful statement of intent: TAAI's 75-year milestone would be celebrated on a scale worthy of its remarkable legacy.

DAY 2 – THE 75 YEARS CELEBRATION

The 75 Years Celebration exceeded every expectation. It was far more than a



conventional anniversary event; it was an emotional, exhilarating and unforgettable celebration of the people and partnerships that have shaped TAAI over seven and a half decades. In a unique expression of togetherness, 75 cakes were cut by the delegates, transforming the occasion into a memorable spectacle of music, dance, camaraderie and collective pride. The magnificent Sundarban Lawns at ITC Sonar provided a breathtaking setting, while the grand arrangements and electrifying atmosphere reflected the importance of this historic milestone.

The large band – The Calcutta Choir- rocked the evening with pulsating music, adding another dimension to an already spectacular celebration. The festivities continued well into the night, followed by a midnight after-party that drew hundreds of delegates together. It was a celebration that brought generations of travel professionals closer, strengthened friendships and created memories that will endure for years. The evening belonged to TAAI, its members, its partners and everyone who has contributed to its extraordinary journey.

DAY 3 – THE FAREWELL GALA

The Farewell Gala built magnificently on the excitement of the preceding two evenings, bringing the Convention to a spectacular close. It offered delegates one more opportunity to reconnect, strengthen business relationships, reinforce partnerships and celebrate three days of meaningful engagement and memorable experiences. The eclectic rock band Anarkyst kept the excitement alive throughout the evening, splendidly supported by the energetic dance performances of Bengal Beauty and BAD Salsa. An incredible DJ added to the celebratory atmosphere, ensuring that the final evening was every bit as vibrant as the opening and anniversary celebrations. It was a fitting finale to a Convention that seamlessly combined business, knowledge, relationships and entertainment and sent delegates home with renewed enthusiasm and lasting memories.

TAAI KNOWLEDGE SESSIONS

The two days of Knowledge Sessions were among the most substantive highlights of the Convention. Carefully focused on emerging trends, growing opportunities, changing business dynamics, and a lot on Artificial Intelligence and the evolving demands of the travel and tourism industry, the sessions brought delegates face-to-face with ideas and perspectives relevant to the future of their businesses.

The programme featured distinguished speakers and thought leaders through individual presentations, engaging panel discussions and virtual presentations from Israel, South Africa and the USA. This innovative approach enabled TAAI to bring international perspectives and expertise into the Convention, expanding the horizons of delegates beyond geographical boundaries.

The diversity of subjects, the quality of the speakers and the relevance of the discussions ensured that the sessions were not merely informative but genuinely thought-provoking. They encouraged travel professionals to embrace change, explore new approaches, leverage technology and prepare for emerging opportunities.

In recognition of their valuable contributions, the most impressive Thought Leader Awards were presented to the speakers. The Knowledge Sessions reinforced TAAI's commitment to continuous learning, professional development and preparing its members for the future of travel and tourism.



A NEW CHAPTER
BEGINS IN UTTAR PRADESH

Travel Mail Desk

GAEHP – Global Association of Events & Hospitality Professionals proudly marks another significant milestone with the official launch of the GAEHP Uttar Pradesh Chapter in the historic city of Varanasi. The launch marks an important step towards strengthening GAEHP's presence across Uttar Pradesh and bringing together professionals from the Travel, Tourism, Events & Hospitality industry on a stronger platform for networking, collaboration and growth. The occasion was graced by the presence of esteemed industry leaders, including **Mr. Amit Gupta from India Tourism and Mr. Dinesh Kumar, Joint Director, Uttar Pradesh Tourism,** whose presence added great value and significance to this important milestone.

The occasion was also attended by the GAEHP leadership and team members, with the presence of **Mr. Rajesh Arya, President, GAEHP; Mr. P.P. Khanna, National Advisor and Mr. Pranav Bansal, General Secretary, GAEHP**, along with other members of the GAEHP team, who came together to mark this special milestone and extend their support to the newly launched Uttar Pradesh Chapter.

We are pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. D.N. Singh – Travel Club as Chairman, GAEHP Uttar Pradesh Chapter, and Mr. Avaneesh Kant Pathak – Travel Prism as Secretary, GAEHP Uttar Pradesh Chapter. Their leadership, experience and commitment to the industry will play a vital role in building a vibrant and connected professional community across Uttar Pradesh.

One Association. One Vision. Stronger Together.



Brij Hotels Announces the Launch of Brij Tara, Ranthambore

Travel Mail Desk

Brij Hotels, part of the IHCL brandscape, announces the opening of Brij Tara, Ranthambore, on October 11, 2026. A private 17-key retreat spread across nine acres at the edge of Ranthambore National Park, Brij Tara offers an intimate way to experience one of Rajasthan's most evocative landscapes, bringing together the thrill of the wilderness with the quiet rhythms of a Rajasthani home.



Speaking at the opening, **Udit Kumar, Co-Founder, Brij Hotels,** said, *"Ranthambore has a rare ability to bring together the thrill of the wild with a deep sense of stillness. With Brij Tara, we wanted to create a retreat that allows guests to experience both the excitement of the forest and the warmth & slower rhythms of Rajasthan. Every aspect of the property has been designed to make the destination itself an integral part of the stay."*

Here, the experience begins long before a tiger is sighted. Warm interiors, handcrafted details and generous living spaces create a serene base between days spent exploring Ranthambore. The property comprises luxury villas, cottages and suites, each equipped with either a private garden or heated plunge pool. At the heart of the property is a private lake, offering a quiet setting to slow down, whether over an unhurried breakfast, an evening by the water or simply a few peaceful hours.

Brij Tara brings together the character of a Rajasthani home with the intimacy of a luxury retreat. Rather than treating the destination as simply a backdrop to a safari, the property invites guests to experience Ranthambore through its many rhythms.

IHG Hotels & Resorts signs voco Vrindavan, bringing premium hospitality to a leading pilgrimage destination

Travel Mail Desk

IHG® Hotels & Resorts, one of the world's leading hospitality companies, has signed a management agreement with Vrindam Developers Private Limited for the development of voco Vrindavan. Set to open in Q1 2031, the 130-key hotel will bring voco's distinctive hospitality experience to Vrindavan, one of Uttar Pradesh's most prominent pilgrimage destinations, strengthening IHG's growing premium portfolio in North India. The signing also marks Vrindam Developers Private Limited's entry into the hospitality sector.



The signing reinforces IHG's focus on expanding its portfolio across high-potential destinations, with Vrindavan's strong pilgrimage appeal and growing visitor base creating an opportunity for quality branded hospitality. Located in the Braj region, Vrindavan and neighbouring Mathura welcomed more than 90 million visitors in 2024, up from 79 million in 2023, with arrivals expected to reach 110 to 140 million annually over the next decade. Strong connectivity to Delhi NCR, Agra and Mathura, alongside ongoing infrastructure development including the Banke Bihari Corridor and improved expressway links, is expected to further support the destination's growth.

voco offers a premium experience that combines the informality and charm of an individual hotel with the quality and reassurance of a global brand. Known for its thoughtful, unstuffy approach, the brand brings distinctive character, thoughtful touches and consistently premium guest experiences, centred around its hallmarks of 'Come on in', 'Me time' and 'voco life'.

Commenting on the signing, **Sudeep Jain, Managing Director, South West Asia, IHG Hotels & Resorts,** said *"Vrindavan holds a unique place within India's tourism landscape, with its deep cultural and spiritual significance attracting visitors from across the country and around the world. As the destination continues to evolve, there is an opportunity to bring more quality branded hospitality to meet the needs of its growing visitor base. The signing of voco Vrindavan reflects our focus on bringing the right brand to the right destination, with voco's distinctive character and thoughtfully relaxed hospitality well suited to the evolving expectations of today's traveller. We are delighted to partner with Vrindam Developers Private Limited on their first hospitality venture and look forward to bringing the voco experience to Vrindavan."*

Ankush Kadyan, Director, Vrindam Developers Private Limited, added *"We are pleased to partner with IHG Hotels & Resorts for our first venture into the hospitality sector with voco Vrindavan. Vrindavan's significance as a pilgrimage destination, coupled with its growing visitor base and improving connectivity, presents an exciting opportunity for a quality international hospitality offering. We look forward to working with IHG to bring voco's distinctive hospitality experience to the destination and create a hotel that responds to the evolving needs of travellers visiting Vrindavan and the wider Braj region."*

Hotel La Palma Capri Reaffirms Its Commitment to Sustainability, Community, and Social Impact

Travel Mail Desk

From marine conservation and waste collection initiatives to cancer awareness campaigns and responsible hospitality practices, Hotel La Palma continues to champion a more sustainable future for Capri and beyond.

Capri, Italy – Hotel La Palma, Capri's oldest and most iconic hotel and a distinguished member of Oetker Hotels, continues to place sustainability and social responsibility at the heart of its operations. Blending timeless Italian elegance with a forward-thinking approach to luxury hospitality, the hotel remains deeply committed to supporting environmental preservation, community wellbeing, and meaningful social causes through a series of impactful initiatives and partnerships.

For the 2026 season, Hotel La Palma has further strengthened its sustainability strategy by combining internationally recognised environmental programmes with locally driven projects that directly benefit the island of Capri and its residents. These initiatives reflect the hotel's belief that true luxury extends beyond exceptional guest experiences and should generate lasting positive impact for both people and planet.





Through this collaboration, the hotel reaffirms its commitment to safeguarding and promoting the cultural heritage of Capri, supporting initiatives that preserve the island's history and strength in the connection between local heritage and contemporary tourism.

The project also resonates with Hotel La Palma's own history: according to historical sources, the 1826 expedition that led to the rediscovery of the Blue Grotto departed from the former Locanda Pagano, the site where Hotel La Palma stands today, with the involvement of then-owner Giuseppe Pagano.

Israel's Largest Spa Resort to Open on the Mediterranean Coast in Ashkelon

Travel Mail Desk

Israel's Mediterranean coastline is getting a major luxury upgrade as construction officially begins on a brand-new seafront resort in the vibrant coastal city of Ashkelon. Developed by the Shevet Ahim Group, the upcoming complex breathes vibrant new life into a famous local landmark – the long-abandoned shell of the Cliff Hotel – turning a forgotten coastal bluff into an iconic getaway for international travellers seeking sun, wellness, and modern comfort. Designed by the renowned Itzik Levy Architecture and Engineering firm, this ambitious seaside haven is scheduled to welcome its first guests in March 2027.



Spanning over 20,000 square meters on Ashkelon's picturesque seafront promenade, the destination seamlessly blends boutique hospitality with grand scale. The resort will feature 98 smart, sea-facing guest rooms designed for seamless relaxation, allowing visitors to control room settings effortlessly via a dedicated app while enjoying uninterrupted views of the turquoise Mediterranean waters. With more than 14,000 square meters dedicated entirely to public spaces and leisure facilities, guests will find an expansive playground of wellness and culinary experiences just steps from the sand.

At the centerpiece of the resort lies what is set to become Israel's largest and most comprehensive spa. Designed as a sanctuary for total mind and body rejuvenation, the massive 30-room facility will offer guests an unprecedented array of wellness treatments, including a traditional hammam, relaxing saunas, an indoor pool, therapeutic salt rooms, hyperbaric oxygen chambers, ice baths, and an exclusive VIP wing. Beyond the spa, active travellers can enjoy a state-of-the-art gym, a dedicated Pilates studio, and top-tier padel courts overlooking the sea.

Food lovers will find plenty to celebrate, as the resort aims to be a premier culinary hotspot on the southern coast. The property will house several concept restaurants serving diverse global cuisines, including gourmet Asian and Italian offerings. To top it off, the resort's stunning rooftop complex will feature an infinity pool, a chic lounge bar, and an open-air restaurant, making it the ultimate place to watch Israel's famous sunsets over the Mediterranean.

This exciting development marks the latest expansion for the Shevet Ahim Group, a leader in Israeli lifestyle hospitality known for iconic properties such as the acclaimed Dream Island resort near Sde Yoav and a luxury resort at Migdal Beach on the Sea of Galilee. As Ashkelon continues to grow as an attractive tourist destination, this spectacular new resort promises to give international visitors yet another compelling reason to experience the beauty, warmth, and hospitality of southern Israel.

Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island Combines Beachfront Weddings with MICE Facilities

Travel Mail Desk

Located on Al Marjan Island in Ras Al Khaimah, UAE, Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island offers a beachfront setting for destination weddings, corporate meetings, conferences and social celebrations. With flexible event spaces, 418 rooms and suites, and a range of dining and leisure facilities, the resort allows groups to combine events with a leisure stay along the Arabian Gulf.

At the heart of its meetings and events offering is the 530 sq. m. Jais Ballroom. The pillarless venue features natural daylight and can accommodate up to 300 guests for wedding banquets, conferences, gala dinners and product launches. It can also be divided into two sections to suit different event requirements. An adjoining pre-function area and outdoor terrace provide additional space for guest gatherings.

For smaller groups, the resort offers two meeting rooms, Yanas and Sall, each measuring 79 sq. m. Both rooms can be divided into smaller spaces and accommodate up to 60 people. Suitable for corporate meetings, training sessions, workshops and smaller social gatherings, the rooms feature complimentary Wi-Fi and audiovisual equipment. A dedicated breakout area with table tennis and a



pool table provides an informal space for participants between sessions.

The resort's beachfront location also lends itself to destination weddings, with the Jais Ballroom providing an indoor setting for larger celebrations and the adjoining terrace offering additional space for guests to gather. With accommodation and leisure facilities on site, wedding groups can extend the celebration beyond the main event and spend more time together at the resort.

Accommodation comprises 418 rooms and suites, each featuring a private balcony with views of the Arabian Gulf. Beyond the event spaces, guests have access to a 300-metre beach, three outdoor swimming pools, a floating water park, a fitness centre and the Citrine Spa. Families travelling for weddings or leisure can also make use of the year-round Starfish Adventure Kids Club, which offers programmes for different age groups, alongside an indoor Kids Zone, outdoor playground and dedicated children's pool.

Dining adds further choice to the guest experience, with six restaurants and bars offering a variety of settings and cuisines. The Market serves all-day dining with live cooking stations, while Beach House features California-inspired cuisine. Ula offers Mediterranean dining by the beach, and Boons is a European-style brasserie and bar with live entertainment. MÖCA Lobby Lounge serves pastries, refreshments and Mövenpick ice cream, while Neo Sky Bar, located on the 10th floor, offers drinks and panoramic views.

By bringing together event facilities, beachfront accommodation, dining and leisure activities in one location, Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island presents an option for travel partners planning destination weddings, corporate events and group leisure stays in Ras Al Khaimah.

City Express by Marriott Debuts in India with the Opening of City Express by Marriott Udaipur-Nathdwara Highway

Travel Mail Desk

City Express by Marriott, part of Marriott Bonvoy's global portfolio of over 30 extraordinary hotel brands, announced the opening of City Express by Marriott Udaipur Nathdwara Highway, marking the debut of the City Express by Marriott brand in South Asia. City Express by Marriott is designed for both business and leisure guests who focus on quality, efficiency, and simplicity. Every element of the brand experience is thoughtfully curated to provide convenience, modern comfort, and value.





"*India represents an important growth market for Marriott International, and the debut of City Express by Marriott further broadens the range of travel experiences we offer across the country,*" said **Cristiano Rinaldi, Chief Lodging Product & Services Officer, Asia Pacific excluding China, Marriott International.** "*Built around quality, simplicity and value, the brand responds to the needs of today's travellers with modern comforts and an efficient stay experience. We look forward to bringing this distinctive proposition to more guests as we expand the brand across the region.*"

Strategically located along the Udaipur–Nathdwara Highway (NH-58), the hotel offers convenient access to Nathdwara, one of Rajasthan's most revered pilgrimage destinations, while serving as a comfortable and efficient base for travellers visiting Udaipur and the surrounding region. The hotel is approximately 35 kms from Udaipur's Maharana Pratap Airport and 30 kms from Udaipur Railway Station. The city centre is within easy reach, and historic attractions such as the City Palace, picturesque lakes, Eklingji, Delwara and Haldighati are accessible to guests.

"*As the first City Express by Marriott in India, we are proud to introduce a hotel experience built around what modern travellers value most: quality they can rely on, comfort without complexity and genuine hospitality,*" said **Abhishek Jha, General Manager, City Express by Marriott Udaipur Nathdwara Highway.** "*Launching the brand in a destination as distinctive as Udaipur makes this milestone even more meaningful. We look forward to welcoming guests and providing them with a stay that is effortless, welcoming and thoughtfully designed around their needs, so they leave feeling refreshed and well cared for.*"

City Express by Marriott Udaipur Nathdwara Highway participates in Marriott Bonvoy – the award-winning travel program from Marriott International – allowing members to earn and redeem points for their stay at these hotels, and at other hotels and resorts across Marriott Bonvoy's portfolio of extraordinary hotel brands. With the Marriott Bonvoy app, members enjoy a level of personalisation and a contactless experience that allows them to travel with peace of mind.

NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINE® OPENS FOR SALE NORWEGIAN BELLA™ – THE NEWEST SHIP TO SAIL FROM EUROPE BEGINNING MAY 2028

Travel Mail Desk

Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL), the industry leader in delivering freedom and choice in experiences with uncompromising hospitality, today opened for sale its next cutting-edge vessel, Norwegian Bella™, which will offer seven-day round-trip Mediterranean itineraries from Barcelona, Spain beginning in May 2028.

On board, Norwegian Bella will offer similar experiences to Norwegian Aura, the Company's latest vessel due for delivery in May 2027. With Norwegian Bella sailing in Europe and Norwegian Aura in the Caribbean, NCL will bring its newest guest experiences to two of the world's top cruise destinations. Both vessels are currently being built by renowned Italian shipbuilder Fincantieri, with interior designs created by world-class architects AD Associates, Piero Lissoni, Rockwell Group, SMC Design, and Studio Dado.

"*Norwegian Bella marks a milestone moment in our fleet as the culmination of our award-winning Prima Class,*" said **Marc Kazlauskas, president of Norwegian Cruise Line.** "*Drawing on the innovations and guest feedback that have shaped the class from the very beginning, Norwegian Bella brings together our most sought-after experiences in one extraordinary ship. From enhanced outdoor spaces and family-friendly attractions to elevated venues for relaxation and connection, every detail has been thoughtfully designed to give guests the freedom and flexibility to vacation exactly how they want to, without anyone having to compromise. We look forward to welcoming guests to discover the Mediterranean with us aboard Norwegian Bella.*"

Norwegian Bella showcases a collection of elevated experiences, including:

OCEAN HEIGHTS: OPEN-AIR ACTIVITIES FROM DAY TO NIGHT

Spanning decks 18 through 21, Ocean Heights™ is the multi-level, open-air complex that transforms throughout the day, serving as a sun-soaked playground by afternoon that evolves into a vibrant social hub under the stars with immersive lighting and LED projections at night.

From friendly competition to heart-pounding thrills, Norwegian Bella delivers unforgettable experiences for guests of all ages. Adventure seekers can race side-by-side on Eclipse Racers, take the plunge on the Bella Free Fall waterslide or experience The Wave, a pendulum-style raft slide accommodating up to four riders. For the ultimate adrenaline rush, travellers can brave The Drop, the signature Prima Class dry slide that sends guests speeding down 10 decks in a matter of seconds. The excitement continues with the Bella Ropes Course; the Bella Midway, which brings classic carnival-inspired fun to sea and on deck 20, guests can perfect their putt on the nine-hole mini golf course or discover Moon Climber, a vibrant, multi-level harness-free adventure course.



OCEAN BOULEVARD: OCEAN VIEWS, FAMILY SPACES AND INFINITY BEACH

Wrapping the entire ship on deck eight, Norwegian Bella's Ocean Boulevard is the signature Prima Class promenade, now enhanced with additional seating compared to Norwegian Aqua and Norwegian Luna, featuring hot tubs and an outdoor bar. At the heart of the experience is Infinity Beach, where guests can enjoy stunning infinity pools, upscale daybeds, hot tubs and a full-service outdoor bar.

Dedicated spaces for younger guests include Little Explorers' Cay complete with a playhouse and slides for ages two to six; Adventure Alley offering ages six to 10 an immersive playground filled with crawl spaces, winding tunnels and imaginative ocean-inspired adventures; and teens can claim their own hangout at Surf's Bay, a contemporary retreat with a striking surf wall photo installation for the best selfies at sea.

WELL-APPOINTED ACCOMMODATIONS AND UNPARALLELED LUXURY IN THE HAVEN BY NORWEGIAN®

Norwegian Bella offers nearly 2,000 staterooms with a variety of thoughtfully designed accommodations, ranging from inside staterooms and studios to spacious balcony staterooms. With the diverse range of staterooms, every type of traveller, including families and multigenerational groups, can feel comfortable at sea while experiencing NCL's uncompromising hospitality and genuine service.

The ship will include 159 suites within The Haven by Norwegian, NCL's exclusive, keycard-access ship-within-a-ship experience. Designed by Piero Lissoni, The Haven will be located aft and offer private elevators, a sundeck with an infinity pool, two hot tubs, an outdoor sauna and cold room, and separate family-friendly and adults-only areas. Haven guests will also have access to a private restaurant and bar with exclusive menu offerings, as well as a lounge. Additional benefits include 24-hour butler and concierge service, as well as priority embarkation, disembarkation and reservations.

Reflecting on the collaboration, **Rose said**, "*Designing the hull art for Norwegian Bella was an opportunity to capture the sense of wonder that travel inspires. Through vibrant colour, organic forms and a feeling of movement, I wanted to create a piece that reflects the excitement of exploration and discovery. I'm looking forward to seeing my artwork come to life on a ship that will visit some of Europe's most remarkable destinations, and I hope it becomes part of the memories guests create throughout their journey.*"

TransNusa Celebrates Historic Milestone With Launch Of Maiden Melbourne-Bali Flight

Travel Mail Desk

TransNusa, the Asia-Pacific region's pioneering Premium Service Carrier, today marked a major international expansion milestone with the official launch of its maiden flight from Bali to Melbourne. The inaugural daily scheduled flight establishes a highly competitive alternative on the heavily travelled Australia-Indonesia corridor.

The strategic expansion from Melbourne follows TransNusa's exceptional growth in the Australian market, where it rapidly captured a 20 percent market share in Perth by increasing its scheduled flight frequency to 21 by July 2026 from just 3 weekly flights in April 2025. This showcases the confidence and loyalty the TransNusa brand has garnered in the Australian market within 15 short months.

Datuk Bernard Francis, Group Chief Executive Officer of TransNusa, speaking on the historic launch, stated that this new daily Melbourne-Bali route marks a significant milestone in the airline's growth trajectory, shifting the paradigm from conventional point-to-point operations to positioning Bali as a primary international transit hub for Australian travellers.



"The launch of the Melbourne-Bali route represents a monumental step forward in TransNusa's international expansion strategy. It strengthens Bali's position as a premier gateway between Australia and Asia, while giving travellers a compelling new choice that combines connectivity, value, and a distinctly premium travel experience. Bali remains a prime global holiday destination, and by connecting it directly to Melbourne, we are providing travellers from Australia with a highly competitive, premium flying alternative," **he added.**

To celebrate this milestone, TransNusa continues to offer exclusive introductory fares, with standard basic seats starting from just AUD299. Distinct from traditional low-cost competitors, even TransNusa's standard tickets include generous baggage provisions alongside baseline comfort amenities such as complimentary water and snacks.

IndiGo selects Skywise Core X3 to power next-generation analytics at enterprise scale

Travel Mail Desk

Indian carrier IndiGo, the largest airline in India and one of the fastest-growing carriers in the world, has just signed for Skywise Core X3, the premium tier of the Skywise Core X suite, designed to explore complex, uncharted data through advanced analytics.

While Skywise Core has already established a core data foundation and streamlined early fleet insights at IndiGo – the airline has been using it since 2020 – the carrier is now upgrading to Skywise Core X3 to gain a highly advanced, unified operational data foundation.



Skywise Core X3 will support the industrialisation of IndiGo's artificial intelligence ambitions, allowing the airline to build machine learning models, deploy operationally intelligent applications, and establish automated data pipelines.

While generic data analytics solutions often require extensive customisation, Skywise Core X3 comes pre-verified for aviation-grade needs and compliance, enabling IndiGo to accelerate time-to-value while reducing the overhead traditionally associated with building and scaling enterprise analytics ecosystems.

At the same time, the solution offers a ready-made data foundation specifically purpose-built for Flight Operations and Technical Operations contexts, ensuring data integrity across departments.

IndiGo is one of the largest Airbus A320neo operators in the world, and one of the largest Skywise Flight Planning customers. The integration of Skywise Core X3 will further drive the operational efficiency of IndiGo's existing fleet, while seamlessly scaling to support its future A350-900 operations.

Marc Lemeilleur, CEO of Skywise, said *"Skywise Core X3 addresses both IndiGo's immediate infrastructure needs and its longer-term AI ambitions within a single, governed platform. It is a platform the airline can grow into, not just start with. For IndiGo, Core X3 is the right infrastructure for all the data-driven and AI-powered capabilities they will need tomorrow."*

Isidre Porqueras, Chief Operating Officer of IndiGo, added *"At IndiGo's scale, data must help us look ahead and not just explain the past. Skywise Core X3 will create a trusted aviation data foundation that enables faster decisions, anticipates operational challenges and improves reliability. As our fleet and network grow, it will help us turn complex data into measurable operational outcomes."*

Vietjet and Satair sign MoU to strengthen aviation supply chain, supporting fleet growth and global expansion.

Travel Mail Desk

Vietjet and Satair, an Airbus Services company, have exchanged a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to deepen their long-term cooperation across the aviation supply chain, material management, and lifecycle solutions. The ceremony took place in the presence of H.E. To Lam, General Secretary and President of Vietnam, alongside His Majesty King Frederik X of Denmark, and senior dignitaries from both countries, during the Vietnam–Denmark Business Forum in Copenhagen.



The agreement marks a new milestone in the partnership between the two companies, connecting Satair's global aviation supply and services capabilities with Vietjet's growing demand for fleet, international network expansion, and technical infrastructure development, while contributing to strengthening Vietnam's aviation supply chain capabilities.

Vietjet Chief Executive Officer Nguyen Thanh Son said *"A proactive and efficient supply chain is fundamental to Vietjet's fleet development, international network expansion, and continued enhancement of passenger services. Our partnership with Satair enables us to leverage Airbus' global expertise and supply chain capabilities to improve operational and maintenance efficiency, while preparing for strategic infrastructure development, including Long Thanh International Airport. We also look forward to strengthening local technical expertise and developing aviation talent in Vietnam, contributing to a more sustainable future for the industry."*

Richard Stoddart, Chief Executive Officer of Satair, said *"This Memorandum of Understanding marks a significant milestone in our evolving partnership with Vietjet. By building upon our established Integrated Material Services foundation, we look forward to supporting Vietjet's fleet growth and working collaboratively to develop scalable, sustainable, and data-driven supply chain solutions that strengthen Vietjet's long-term growth ambitions."*

Vietnam Airlines Adds Ahmedabad as Its Fifth Indian Station



Travel Mail Desk

Vietnam Airlines, the national flag carrier of Vietnam, is further strengthening its presence in the Indian market with the launch of operations from Ahmedabad, marking its fifth station in India. Vietnam Airlines will operate four weekly flights between Ahmedabad and Hanoi, every Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday, providing travellers from Gujarat and neighbouring markets with direct connectivity to Vietnam.

The launch marks another significant milestone in Vietnam Airlines' India expansion strategy and reflects the airline's growing confidence in the Indian market. Aeroprime Group, the Passenger GSA for Vietnam Airlines in India, has been closely supporting the airline's commercial growth and market development across the country.

India remains a strategic growth market for Vietnam Airlines. Vietnam Airlines Spokesperson, **Mr. Nguyen Trung Hieu, Country Manager, India,** said *"India is an increasingly important and strategic market for Vietnam Airlines, with strong growth in travel demand, business exchanges and tourism between the two countries. The launch of our Ahmedabad–Hanoi service marks another important step in expanding our presence in India and bringing Vietnam closer to more Indian travellers. Ahmedabad and Gujarat represent a dynamic market with strong economic, business and tourism potential. We are confident that this new service will create greater opportunities for travel and strengthen the connectivity between the two countries. We look forward to working closely with our partners, including Aeroprime, to further develop the India market and deliver greater value to our customers."*

Aeroprime supports Vietnam Airlines' continued India expansion. **Mr. Abhishek Goyal, Executive Director & CEO, Aeroprime Group,** said *"Ahmedabad is a significant addition to Vietnam Airlines' growing India network and a strong reflection of the airline's confidence in the market. As Passenger GSA for Vietnam Airlines in India, Aeroprime has been closely aligned with the airline's growth strategy and has been working to build stronger market presence and demand across key Indian cities. With Ahmedabad becoming the fifth Indian station, Vietnam Airlines is expanding its footprint at an exciting pace. Gujarat has a strong business community, growing outbound travel demand and significant potential for Vietnam as a leisure and MICE destination. We are confident that this new connectivity will further strengthen the India–Vietnam travel corridor."*

Malaysia Airlines Charts Next Phase of India Growth Through Travel Trade and Consumer Partnerships

Travel Mail Desk

Malaysia Airlines is building on strong demand in India by deepening its engagement with the travel trade and formalising strategic collaborations with PayU, Times Black and Jio Network to further broaden its reach among Indian consumers.



The airline hosted its annual India Trade Gala Dinner in Mumbai on 8 October 2026, recognising the important role of its travel trade partners in supporting Malaysia Airlines' growth in India. The Top Agents Awards honoured leading partners for their performance and contribution, while the evening also provided an opportunity to share priorities for the year ahead and build on the collaboration already established across the market.

Malaysia Airlines currently operates 80 weekly flights across 10 ci:es in India, connec:ng travellers through its main hub in Kuala Lumpur to des:na:ons across Malaysia and the wider Asia-Pacific region. In the first half of 2026, the airline carried close to a million passengers between India and Malaysia, representing a 10% increase year-on-year, with demand spanning both leisure and premium travel segments. The breadth of the network, together with continued passenger growth, underscores the strength of travellers between India, Malaysia and the wider region.

Captain Nasaruddin A. Bakar, President and Group Chief Executive Officer of Malaysia Aviation Group (MAG), said, *"India is an important market for us, not only for point-to-point demand, but also for the opportunities it presents through our Kuala Lumpur hub. Our travel trade partners are central to how we reach and serve this market, and we value the role they play in growing travel between India and Malaysia and beyond. At the same 8me, we are broadening our engagement with Indian consumers through new collaborations that bring together complementary strengths across payments, lifestyle and digital platforms. Together, these efforts support our ambition to make Malaysia Airlines a preferred partner for travellers from India and enhance the connectivity that links India with Malaysia and the wider region."*

The airline also formalised three Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Pay U, a leading digital payments and financial services provider; Times Black, a premium lifestyle and experiences platform; and Jio Network, a leading digital and media network in India. The collaborations will explore opportunities across digital payments, premium lifestyle engagement and digital media outreach, supporting the airline's ambition to deliver more relevant, seamless and connected experiences throughout the customer journey.

These initiatives reflect Malaysia Airlines' continued commitment to India, leveraging its Kuala Lumpur hub, extensive network and growing consumer reach to facilitate more travel between India, Malaysia and beyond. As the national carrier, the airline will continue to support Visit Malaysia 2026 by encouraging more Indian travellers to discover Malaysia and its diverse destinations, while showcasing the warmth of Malaysian Hospitality throughout the journey.

Finnair strengthens its Japan network and will operate up to three daily flights to Tokyo next summer

Travel Mail Desk

Finnair is responding to growing demand for travel to Asia, and Japan in particular, by increasing flights to Tokyo for the 2027 summer season. The airline will add frequencies on its Tokyo Narita route during the peak summer travel period, operating up to two daily flights to the destination. In addition, Finnair will continue to serve Tokyo Haneda Airport daily.



With the additional Narita frequencies, Finnair will offer a record number of connections between Helsinki and Tokyo next summer, with up to three daily flights at peak times. The flights have been timed to provide smooth onward connections from Japan across Finnair's European network.

"Japan is our biggest market after Finland and demand for flights to Japan has remained strong. We have been steadily increasing our capacity to Japan for the past years, and the additional Narita frequencies will allow us to offer our customers greater choice and even more convenient connections to Tokyo, which is by far the most popular of our destinations in Japan," says **Christine Rovelli, Finnair's Chief Revenue Officer.**

With the additional frequencies, Finnair's services to Japan will increase from 28 weekly flights operated this summer to up to 32 weekly flights during the summer of 2027, further strengthening Finnair's position as one of the largest airlines between Europe and Japan.

Finnair operates year-round services to Tokyo Haneda, Tokyo Narita and Osaka. In summer, Finnair also flies to Nagoya as the only European airline to operate flights to the city.

Additional Narita frequencies from 12 May to 14 August 2027 (excluding HEL-NRT on 13 May and NRT-HEL on 14 May):

AY71 HEL-NRT 12:20-07:15 (+1)

AY72 NRT-HEL 08:55-15:35

SriLankan Airlines Boosts Regional Aviation Training Credentials with A330 Programme for Etihad Airways

Travel Mail Desk

The SriLankan Airlines Flight Training team has successfully conducted a specialised Airbus A330 Line Flying Under Supervision (LFUS) programme for six senior training and examination pilots from Etihad Airways, underscoring the confidence placed by Etihad Airways in SriLankan Airlines' training and operational capabilities, while further strengthening the professional relationship between the two national carriers.



Five Type Rating Examiners (TREs) and one Senior Type Rating Examiner (STRE) from Etihad Airways participated in the programme, which drew on the expertise of SriLankan Airlines' flight instructors, experienced flight crew and supporting operational teams to provide the visiting examiner pilots with a safe, effective and professionally rewarding training experience.

Captain Chaminda De Zoysa, Head of Flight Operations at SriLankan Airlines, commented on the programme's success, stating, *"For SriLankan Airlines, this opportunity represented more than a single training assignment. It demonstrates the airline's ability to leverage its Airbus A330 fleet, experienced instructors, operational expertise and established training infrastructure to support the training and development of aviation professionals from other major global carriers. The initiative also highlights the potential of SriLankan Airlines Flight Training to serve as a regional aviation training partner, offering specialised and high-quality training solutions to international operators."*

Behind the programme was extensive planning and coordination by SriLankan Airlines. The Civil Aviation Authority of Sri Lanka (CAASL), the Ministry of Defence and other relevant stakeholders supported the process of establishing the necessary framework and securing the required clearances, paving the way for the seamless delivery of the programme. Through initiatives such as this, SriLankan Airlines continues to demonstrate that its expertise is not just limited to operating flights, but extends to supporting the development of aviation professionals worldwide and positioning Sri Lanka as a regional centre for professional aviation training.

Etihad Airways and Ibom Air sign interline agreement connecting Nigeria and Etihad's network

Travel Mail Desk

Etihad Airways, the national airline of the United Arab Emirates, and Nigerian carrier Ibom Air have signed an interline agreement that will carry guests travelling with Etihad beyond Lagos and Accra to five Nigerian cities on a single ticket, from the day Etihad's own services to the two cities begin in March 2027.

Under the agreement, Etihad guests arriving in Lagos or Accra will be able to continue their journey on Ibom Air to Abuja, Uyo, Port Harcourt, Calabar and Enugu, with connections also available between Accra and Abuja and between Accra and Uyo. One booking will cover the entire journey, with bags checked through to the final destination.

Uyo and Calabar in the south join Abuja, Port Harcourt and Enugu on the list of Nigerian cities available on a single ticket with Etihad, whether guests are travelling for business, to see family or to see the country.

Etihad's nonstop service from Abu Dhabi to the region begins next year, with a daily service to Lagos from 23 March 2027 and four flights a week to Accra from 24 March 2027.



Arik De, Etihad Airways Chief Revenue and Commercial Officer, said *"Our ambitions in Africa are long-term, and Nigeria sits at the centre of them. Ibom Air has built a strong domestic network from its base in Uyo, and partnerships with airlines that know their own markets are how we grow on the continent. Having this in place before our Accra and Lagos flights begin next March means we arrive in the region already connected to the cities beyond them."*

George Uriesi, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Ibom Air, said *"This agreement marks a significant milestone in our journey to becoming a truly world-class African regional airline. It enables international travellers to access the cities we serve through a single booking, enhancing connectivity and convenience. Additionally, it positions Ibom Air as the key domestic and regional connection for Etihad Airways' operations into Nigeria and Ghana from next year. We look forward to welcoming Etihad's guests onboard and showcasing the excellent service that defines the Ibom Air experience."*



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Sun PhuQuoc Airways Launches Its First Direct Route to India, Fares Starting from ₹9,596

Travel Mail Desk

Starting December 3, 2026, Sun PhuQuoc Airways (SPA) plans to operate direct flights connecting Ahmedabad and Phu Quoc with a frequency of 5 flights per week and a flight duration of approximately 4 hours and 45 minutes. This marks the airline's first route to India, adding a convenient travel option between Pearl Island and one of the major economic hubs in Western India. Tickets go on sale from October 16, with one-way fares starting from 9,596 INR (taxes and fees included).

Flight 9G315 departs Phu Quoc International Airport at 19:35 and arrives at Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport in Ahmedabad at 23:30 (local time). In the reverse direction, Flight 9G314 departs at 01:00 and arrives in Phu Quoc at 07:15. Flights are scheduled every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Sunday. Beginning in early February 2027, the airline will increase frequency to 7 flights per week (daily). Thanks to the early morning arrival time, travellers from Ahmedabad can start their very first day in Phu Quoc right after landing.



On this route, SPA operates Airbus A321neo aircraft offering full-service experiences, featuring food and beverage options specially prepared for Indian passengers. Menus respectfully cater to cultural and religious preferences: strictly no beef or pork, non-vegetarian dishes prepared exclusively with chicken or fish, alongside vegetarian choices and Halal meals upon request.

The spirit of a "Resort in the Sky" is present in every detail of the cabin—from the signature La Festa fragrance, created for La Fest Curio Collection by Hilton, to wireless in-flight entertainment systems. In-flight baggage includes 23 kg of checked baggage and 7 kg of carry-on baggage, ensuring passengers can kick off their vacation without worrying about extra costs.

Fares for the Phu Quoc – Ahmedabad segment start from VND 2,619,000 one-way, while the Ahmedabad – Phu Quoc segment starts from INR 9,596 one-way, all inclusive of taxes and fees. These promotional fares apply to the first four flights on each leg. From October 16 to November 13, 2026, Passengers booking through the airline's official website or mobile app between October 16 and November 13, 2026, will receive an additional 20% discount on the base fare for eligible travel through June 3, 2027, subject to the applicable terms and conditions. Passengers will also receive a complimentary "Phu Quoc – Your Ultimate Escape" package, which includes Sun World Hon Thom cable car tickets, WOW Pass priority lane access, and discounts of up to 30% on resort and entertainment services across the Sun Group ecosystem in Phu Quoc.

Air Cambodia Expands Delhi–Cambodia Connectivity with Third Weekly Frequency

Travel Mail Desk

Air Cambodia is strengthening its connectivity between India and Cambodia with the introduction of a third weekly direct flight from Delhi to Phnom Penh, effective 17 December 2026. The additional Thursday frequency will complement the existing Tuesday and Saturday services, offering travellers greater flexibility and more opportunities to explore Cambodia.

With the new frequency, Air Cambodia will now operate three direct flights per week between Delhi and Phnom Penh: every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

As Air Cambodia continues to strengthen its presence in the Indian market, the addition of a third weekly frequency is expected to support the growing demand for direct connectivity between India and Cambodia. Aeroprime Group, the India GSA for Air Cambodia, will continue to drive market development, trade engagement and destination awareness across India.



Abhishek Goyal, Executive Director & CEO, Aeroprime Group, said *"The introduction of a third weekly frequency between Delhi and Phnom Penh marks an important step in strengthening Air Cambodia's presence in the Indian market. India continues to be an important growth market for Cambodia, with increasing interest from travellers across leisure, business and experiential tourism segments. The additional Thursday service will provide greater flexibility to travellers and the trade, while making Cambodia more accessible from Delhi. We look forward to further strengthening the India–Cambodia travel corridor and creating greater opportunities for tourism and business between the two countries."*

Spokesperson from Air Cambodia *"India is an important market for Air Cambodia, and the introduction of our third weekly service from Delhi reflects our commitment to strengthening connectivity between the two countries. With flights now operating every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, travellers will have greater flexibility to plan their journeys to Cambodia. We see strong potential in the India market, particularly across leisure, tourism and business travel, and this additional frequency will help us serve this growing demand while bringing Cambodia closer to Indian travellers."*

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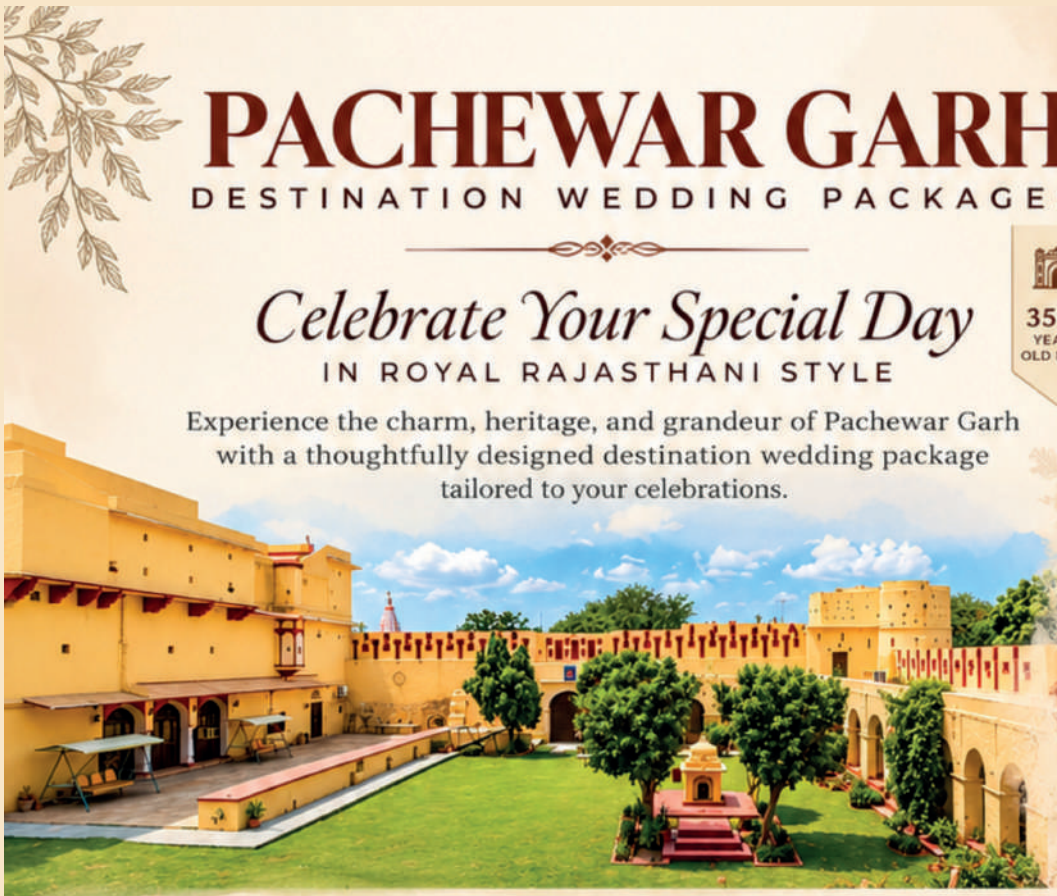



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Appointments



BRAND USA APPOINTS CAROLINE BETETA INTERIM PRESIDENT & CEO

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

ACCOR APPOINTS VIPIN KHATTAR AS CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER, SOUTH ASIA



With more than two decades of international hospitality experience spanning India, the Middle East, Africa, and the United Kingdom, Vipin brings a distinguished track record of driving business growth, building strategic partnerships, and leading high-performing teams. Throughout his career, he has consistently demonstrated strong commercial acumen, operational excellence, and a commitment to delivering sustainable business results.



BLACK ROCK HOTELS & RESORTS PROMOTES VIVEK BHARDWAJ TO VICE PRESIDENT – BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & PRE-OPENING

Black Rock Hotels & Resorts has announced the promotion of Vivek Bhardwaj to Vice President – Business Development & Pre-Opening, recognising his contributions and leadership as General Manager of Pushkara Resort & Spa in Ajmer.In his new corporate role, Vivek Bhardwaj will support the company's business development initiatives and pre-opening activities as Black Rock Hotels & Resorts expands its hospitality portfolio across Rajasthan and other markets.

CHAITANYA SINGAMSETTI APPOINTED AS THE DIRECTOR OF SALES & MARKETING FOR HYDERABAD MARRIOTT HOTEL AND CONVENTION CENTRE AND COURTYARD BY MARRIOTT HYDERABAD



Hyderabad Marriott Hotel and Convention Centre, Courtyard by Marriott Hyderabad, has appointed Mr. Chaitanya Singamsetti as its Director of Sales & Marketing. With over 10 years of experience in hospitality sales, MICE, group business and corporate accounts, he brings extensive expertise across premium Marriott and Accor properties



ROSETTA HOSPITALITY APPOINTS ABHISHEK DHAR AS GENERAL MANAGER OF ROSETTA SAKLESHPUR

Rosetta Hospitality has appointed Mr. Abhishek Dhar as the General Manager of its flagship resort, Rosetta Sakleshpur, set within a 100-acre coffee plantation in Hassan, Karnataka, approximately a three-hour drive from Bengaluru. Mr. Dhar returns to Rosetta Sakleshpur, where he earlier served as the Resident Manager, having most recently led Elements by Rosetta in Varca, Goa, as the General Manager.

COURTYARD AND FAIRFIELD BY MARRIOTT BENGALURU OUTER RING ROAD WELCOME DEEP VAHI AS MULTI-PROPERTY GENERAL MANAGER



Courtyard and Fairfield by Marriott Bengaluru Outer Ring Road are delighted to welcome Deep Vahi as Multi-Property General Manager. Bringing nearly two decades of experience across Sales, Marketing and Operations, Deep joins the properties following a career that has taken him through diverse commercial and operational leadership roles. Deep began his career with The Oberoi Hotels & Resorts before joining JW Marriott Mumbai Juhu in 2008, where he built his foundation in Sales.



RUBY GARCIA RETURNS "HOME" TO BECOME NEW GENERAL MANAGER OF PHULAY BAY, A RITZ-CARLTON RESERVE, KRABI

Phulay Bay, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve, the ultra-luxurious seafront sanctuary in Southern Thailand's Krabi province, is embarking on an exciting new era of leadership following the arrival of its new General Manager, Ruby Garcia, who returns "home" to the place where she previously spent almost three happy and successful years.

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Swiss French Magic
Visits: Switzerland & France
8 Days @ ₹ 3 38 000.00 PP

UK Delights
Visits: Manchester, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Lake District, Birmingham, Stratford Upon Avon, Windsor, Oxford & London
10 Days @ ₹ 3 65 500.00 PP

European Express
Visits: France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Italy & Vatican City
13 Days @ ₹ 3 85 906.00 PP

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Visits: Norway, Sweden & Finland
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