

# FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL TravelBizMonitor

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1

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## Thailand targets pre-pandemic Indian nos by end 2023

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Bangkok

The Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) 2023 will help the tourism industry recover faster from the losses it made due to the Covid-19 pandemic, hopes Sukanya Sirikanjanakul, Executive Director, ASEAN South Asia and South Pacific Region, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) while speaking to journalists from India and Sri Lanka.

She said that the 2023 edition of TTM+ hosted 370 buyers. "The figure was 250 in the last edition," Sukanya said. She also stated that the addition of Amazing Thailand Culinary City will help enhance the Kingdom's image from the gastronomy point of view.

Talking about inbound tourism she said that last year the country received 11 million international tourists. "This year from January - May 30, we already touched the figure of 10 million international tourists," said Sukanya.

Replying to a question from **TravelBiz Monitor**, she said India has always been an important for Thailand. Talking about the target for 2023, she said,



**Sukanya Sirikanjanakul**  
Executive Director, ASEAN South  
Asia and South Pacific Region,  
Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)

"In 2019, we received 40 million international tourists, and out of this 2 million were from India. Since we are recovering from the losses due to the pandemic, we have kept the target to 2 million from the Indian market. We will do everything possible to reach this figure," said a confident Sukanya. She also added that during January - May, 600,000 Indian tourists visited Thailand. "This is very encouraging," she said.

TAT is also targeting wedding and MICE segments from India in a big way. "MICE movement is very good from India, especially from the cities of Delhi and Mumbai," Sukanya said. On the sustainability front, she said that they are mainly focusing on the supply side.

Sports tourism is another area of focus for TAT. They are currently working on this to attract more tourists other than for golf. "In the future, we have plans to bring the Indian cricket team to play here. In this direction, we are focusing on improving the infrastructure," Sukanya pointed out. ♦

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## All India Association of Authorized Money Changers & Money Transfer Agents advocates level-playing field for overseas transactions

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The All-India Association of Authorized Money Changers and Money Transfer Agents has demanded inclusion of foreign currency cash, wire transfers through banks, pre-paid forex cards and other international payments into the TCS exemption ambit offered to the overseas transactions using debit and credit cards under the Liberalized Remittance Scheme (LRS).

The Union Ministry of Finance recently stated that, from July 1, transactions carried out overseas using debit and credit cards will be exempted from the 20% Tax Collected at Source (TCS) up to INR 7 lakh per financial year. However, no specific guidance has been issued regarding other widely-used international payment options, including foreign currency cash, wire transfers through banks, prepaid forex cards, and various modes of international transactions frequently used by individuals during overseas trips for both leisure and

employment purposes.

The money exchange industry expects the Central government to ensure a level-playing field for all overseas transactions, regardless of the mode of payment or instruments used. Travellers use various options like foreign currency cash (within the permitted limits of USD 3,000 or its equivalent), prepaid Forex Travel Cards, wire transfers, as well as debit and credit cards. It is important to note that the common man, particularly first-time travellers, often lack awareness about the forex requirements while traveling abroad. Normally, they carry INR cash and seek destination currency upon arrival at an airport terminal. According to immigration data published by the Directorate General of



**TC Guruprasad**  
Vice Chairman, All India  
Money Exchange and Money  
Transfer Association

Civil Aviation (DGCA), over 60% overseas travellers are first-time flyers, primarily from blue-collar backgrounds and falling outside the income tax bracket. This economically weaker section of society, with limited education and having no debit or credit card facility, deserves equal treatment with the debit and credit card holders.

Commenting on the development, TC Guruprasad, Vice Chairman, All India Money Exchange and Money Transfer Association, said, "The notification will have a

direct impact on individuals travelling abroad for employment, especially the labour/ working class, who belong to the low-income group and have no access to card payment facilities.

Contd PG. 4 ►

# Korea Tourism Organization launches K-incentive Scheme for travel agents in India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

As part of the ongoing marketing plans for 2023, the Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) India office has launched a special K-incentive Scheme to boost sales of Korea travel packages in the market.

The new initiative, which is aimed towards travel agencies across India, was introduced at an event in Mumbai that was held especially for the occasion and in collaboration with OTOAI.

With the launch of the K-incentive Scheme, KTO India hopes to get travel agents in India in the spirit for this being a special year as 2023 commemorates the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between India and Korea.

The incentive scheme's main benefits include providing travel agents with prizes of USD 30 per passenger and support for quick, simple, and hassle-free tour visas for visitors to Korea between June and December 2023.

In addition to Seoul, KTO is keen to promote regional destinations in Korea including Busan,

Gangwon province and Jeollanam-do province. Including any of these regional destinations in the itinerary would be a necessary condition to be eligible for the benefits of the K-incentive Scheme.



Speaking at the launch event at Four Seasons Hotel in Mumbai, Myongkil Yun, Director, KTO India said, "This is the first time any NTO is launching an incentive scheme for leisure travel packages in India and this initiative comes at a very opportune time when we are in the year of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between our two nations."

Riaz Munshi, President, OTOAI, shared his thoughts on the launch as well, "Korea has enormous potential to grow from the Indian market and I am confident that together we can generate good numbers for the destination.

On behalf of OTOAI, I would like to thank Korea Tourism for specially curating this incentive program for our members and entrusting OTOAI. I would like to request all the members to whole-heartedly support the destination by recommending it to your clients. I assure you that your travellers will return with a unique and memorable experience in Korea".

To be eligible to be a part of the K-incentive Scheme, interested travel agencies should share their marketing plan on or before 14th June 2023. Yun added, "This year, South Korea is seeing a surge in visitors from India, and we are keen to further boost that many-fold with the launch of the K-incentive scheme. There is a lot to see and do in Korea, for visitors of all ages and we are ready to welcome Indian travellers to in huge numbers to Korea, where K-culture begins!" ♦

## New Tourism Secy V Vidyavathi takes charge

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Senior IAS officer V Vidyavathi of the Karnataka cadre has taken charge as the new Union Tourism Secretary.

The 1991-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer succeeds Arvind Singh.

Soon after taking charge, Vidyavathi reviewed preparations for upcoming G20 events in Goa.

"With utmost warmth and gratitude, the Ministry of Tourism bids farewell to Arvind Singh, extending a cordial welcome to V. Vidyavathi as the new Secretary! Ministry of Tourism extends heartfelt gratitude to Arvind Singh for his unwavering dedication



and eagerly," the Ministry tweeted.

Vidyavathi was serving as the director general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) until recently when she was appointed the Officer on Special Duty in the tourism Ministry.

On April 20, an order issued by the Ministry of Personnel,

Public Grievances and Pensions had said the officer will take over as secretary, Ministry of Tourism, after the superannuation of Arvind Singh, a 1988-batch IAS officer, on May 31 this year. Vidyavathi takes charge ahead of the crucial fourth Tourism Working Group (TWG) Meeting and the Ministerial Meeting of the G20 in Goa later this month. The 'GOA Roadmap' and a ministerial communique endorsing it will be released after the last meeting of the G20 TWG.

"Anticipate the leadership of V. Vidyavathi to pave the way for an extraordinary journey ahead in shaping the future of tourism in India," the Tourism Ministry said in another tweet. ♦

## All India Association of Authorized ....

CONTD from PG 03 ►

This group of travellers generally procures foreign currencies in the form of cash from the money exchange outlets operating at international airports or city outlets and a levy of 20% TCS on such transactions will be a severe blow to them as they do not fall under the income tax bracket."

The industry requests the government to extend the exemption of TCS to the purchase of cash, wire transfers, and prepaid forex cards. The association remains committed to advocating for a fair and equitable environment for all individuals engaged in overseas transactions. It is imperative to address the concerns of economically weaker sections, first-time travellers, and the labour and working classes to ensure inclusive policies and practices. ♦

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## ‘One of our primary areas of interest this year is the Premium and Luxury travel segment’

Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) considers India as a growing source market, and has launched the Korea Premium Travel Consultant Program 2023 to educate the travel agents about the destination in detail. **Myong-kil Yun, Director, India Office, KTO** spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their focus in India, and the value of this education initiative.

### Q Where does India rank in pecking order of global source markets for KTO?

India is not yet a very big source market for travel to South Korea and compared to certain other countries, it can be considered to be a growing market for the destination. That being said, the recovery of outbound travel from India post pandemic has been absolutely great and the interest and feedback we have received for travel to South Korea has also been very positive.

We are accordingly working on our marketing campaigns to boost these numbers and the KPTC 2023 programme is one such initiative.

### Q In terms of trade outreach, what are you trying to achieve through the Korea Premium Travel Consultant Program 2023?

As KTO, one of our primary areas of interest this year is the Premium and Luxury travel segment. We wanted travel agents in India and neighbouring countries, to have specific information about this category of travel to accordingly

be able to design unique and interesting Korea itineraries for the discerning traveller.

For the same we decided to change up our Korea Premium Travel Consultant programme this year, to specifically cater to this area of travel.

### Q How are you encouraging the travel trade to participate in the Korea Premium Travel Consultant Program 2023?

We conducted a survey to shortlist potential travel agents with whom we could work together to promote Premium Korea and who in turn expressed interest in this specialized program.

Additionally, all shortlisted members were given destination training pertaining to Premium

K-beauty kits from Amorepacific and welcome kits from KTO are some of the benefits on offer for KPTC members, subject to meeting the criteria laid out for the program.

### Q Besides online training, what are the on-ground activations being conducted to create awareness about the Korea Premium Travel Consultant Program 2023?

As part of the Korea Premium Travel Consultant Program 2023, all selected participants were asked to share their marketing plans to promote Premium Korea travel to their clients.

KTO is reviewing all such plans and will be working together with the KPTC 2023 members on these marketing plans on a case-to-case basis. This includes on-ground activities like networking sessions with HNI clients and other physical and digital campaigns.

### Q Which destinations are being highlighted through the Korea Premium Travel Consultant Program 2023?

KTO has been focusing on Seoul, Busan and Jeju Island as the destinations for Indian travellers for the past couple of years. For the KPTC 2023 program, additionally the regions of Jeollanam-do Province and Gangwon-do Province, are some destinations that we are looking to actively promote.

Jeollanam-do Province is where the cities of Suncheon and Yeosu lie. Suncheon is known for its lush greenery and the Suncheonman Bay National Garden and Wetlands, which is also hosting the Suncheonman International Garden Expo this year. Yeosu is a great place to build seaside memories with mouth-watering seafood and busker performances.

Gangwon-do Province gained international fame when it hosted the Winter Olympic Games in 2018. It is “the” place to go to winter activities and sports, but is also quite famous for its many beaches and coffee streets. It also provides a host of adventure activity options for thrill lovers. ♦

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# Australia & Worldwide Travel appoints Global Destinations as Sales and Marketing Representative in India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Australia and Worldwide Travel, an inbound tour operator and ADMC in Australia, with an intent to set foot and leverage growth potential in India, has assigned Global Destinations the mandate to build sales and develop brand awareness in-market.

The Australia and Worldwide Travel management team have years of experience and knowledge in inbound tourism. The company specialises in Australia & the South Pacific regions and was formed in April 2022 under the experienced Managing Partners, Leon Ellas and Ian D’Nazareth.

Sumaira Kabir, Country Manager India, based in Mumbai, heads up the operational team. She has an in-depth knowledge of Australia, having worked with Tourism Australia, India office.

Australia and Worldwide Travel specialise in tailor-made FIT itineraries, leisure groups, large groups series, incentive travel and have a dedicated team in Sydney.

Talking about the Indian market, Leon Ellas, Managing Partner Australia and Worldwide Travel, said, “India is a very important market for us. Australia has witnessed a strong growth of Indian arrivals in the last few years. To leverage this growth, we needed to have a strong representation in India. We

felt that Global Destinations is the ideal partner to have in India because of their highly professional team, excellent track record and their undisputed knowledge of travel trade in India. We are delighted to appoint Global Destination as our representation company.”

Pranav Kapadia, Founder & Director, Global Destinations, shared, “Being a leading holiday destination that attracts more than a million guests annually, Australia is undeniably one of the top long

haul outbound destinations from India. Under this alliance we aim to build a strong brand recognition for Australia and Worldwide Travel in India, along with implementing a robust sales strategy and optimizing their full potential from the India market.” ♦



**Leon Ellas**  
Managing Partner Australia and  
Worldwide Travel



**Pranav Kapadia**  
Founder & Director,  
Global Destinations



  
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## SECURITY CONCERNS VERSUS TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

*What exactly can handle the impressions of strict security contrasted with great-experience needs?*

After sailing seamlessly through immigration counters at Airports in 60 plus countries in the the last decade and a half, to be asked to step aside for further questioning at the Ben Guiron airport in Tel Aviv came as an irritant, howsoever minor. Especially since they allowed me to go without asking a single question.

The world today is cautious, suspicious and should definitely be on guard. However, from the tourism standpoint, how smooth, unobtrusive and efficient this process can be may define tourism friendliness to starry eyed visitors.

Adverse news relating to security or safety hits tourism like a ton of bricks. And if the 'prevention is better than cure' is the dictum to follow, the thankless job of relevant bodies to nip crime or unrest before it happens turns vital.

Any lack of deterrence and detection abilities of security apparatus is inexcusable in today's world. Towards this, even among front line travel industry workers, consistent development of security measures, personnel and training rises to the forefront. They have to equipped professionally and emotionally tackle such situations whenever they arise but try to prevent them in the first place.

Recently there were reports of panic created by an irresponsible passenger at Atlanta in USA that led to the authorities almost vacating the airport. Closer home in India's Rishikesh an ugly midstream brawl on the rapids between rafters was another irritant. Similarly, regular news of unsavoury arguments amongst passengers themselves and with crew as well, during flights requires definitely keener attention.

Thankfully enhanced and greater travel experiences can always help ride over such hiccups.

As my last fortnight's experience showed, the sheer sunny disposition of Nadia, our guide in Jerusalem who narrated three thousand years history right till 2023 with humour and wit and Majid, our eager young Uber driver who stopped the car to actually treat us to baklava he bought for us from his favourite shop at Tel Aviv were very warm experiences indeed.

Anurag Yadav  
Industry Expert

Anurag Yadav is a travel author and columnist, writing on hospitality and design. An avid traveller, he has published five books and divides his time equally between Delhi and London.

The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.

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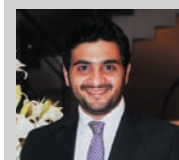
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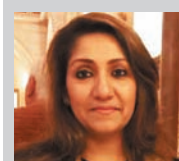
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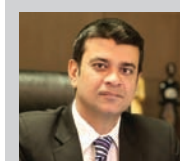
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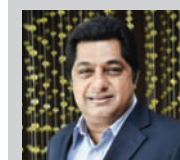
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# TAAI to host 67<sup>th</sup> Convention in Sri Lanka from July 6-9

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) is set to host its 67th Convention in the capital city of Sri Lanka, Colombo from July 6-9, 2023, on the invitation from the Sri Lankan Tourism Promotion Board (SLTPB). This Convention and Exhibition in Colombo is being held in association with Sri Lanka Association of Inbound Tour Operators (SLAITO). The theme of the Convention is 'Transcending Borders, Transforming Lives' to position the island nation as a key destination of choice among Indian travellers.

TAAI President Jyoti Mayal said they are looking at a participation of 500 delegates for the Convention, and have partnered with Sri Lankan Airlines, Air India, IndiGo and Vistara for special rates for members.

Mayal shared they have received support from the Sri Lankan Tourism Promotion Board, and the Government of Sri Lanka is keen to bring back tourism on track after a period of political turmoil last year. "Every destination that has played host to the TAAI Convention in the past has seen tourist numbers surge at least quadruple, since our members serve as ambassadors of tourism. This Convention is the right opportunity for improving bilateral tourism," Mayal said.

Jay Bhatia, Vice President, TAAI, stated, "As per the tentative schedule, delegates will arrive in Colombo on July 6. The opening ceremony will take place at BMICH. On July 7

and 8, there will be Business Sessions and Knowledge Discussions. From 2 – 5pm, there will be B2B Meetings for around 200 delegates while the balance of delegates will go on city tour and sightseeing on both days."

Lokesh Bettaiah, Hon. Secretary General, TAAI, said, "We have made the process extremely user-friendly with all details regarding hotels and airlines clearly listed on the website along with all payment gateways." ♦



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## 'Infrastructure growth and avid use of technology changed the MICE scenario in India'

In the last decade, there has been a significant improvement in infrastructure development in India and the number of 5-star hotels in the country has grown by 3 fold. In addition, India is hosting the G-20 summits in a grand way, will also encourage many global players to consider India as a great destination for MICE, says **Shylender Jindal, Founding Chairman & CEO, Skil Travel**, while speaking with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

### Q Brief us about your journey.

It's started with a passion to give people the best in travel services. 20 years ago I was fearless and committed to give the corporate world the best travel solutions. To this day relentlessly the passion and commitment has been the same. The journey has been a fairytale for me. The more I gave the more I got! I thank the universe to be so generous.

### Q How is the MICE business evolved over the years?

With increased infrastructure and avid use of technology, MICE in India has transformed to a very large extent. Now the entire focus is on creating unique & memorable experiences. Also, Virtual & Hybrid events have taken over in a big way.

### Q What are your USPs that give you an edge over your competitors?

First and foremost, our 21 years of standing in the Indian Hospitality Industry. Because of our Travel background, venue sourcing & in-house logistics is our biggest strength. We have a great design team in-house which has a rich experience of ideating & executing more than 5000 events. We have one of the largest partner networks because of which we are

able to handle events of any size and scale. From Leh/Ladakh to Pondicherry, from a 25 pax Global Leadership Meet or a German Delegation to an 18000 pax event for an Indian tech giant, our teams have successfully executed all types of events. Our unique gifting options, our artist management capabilities & team building offerings also act as our biggest differentiators. While executing a MICE, SKIL Events can deliver everything from a pin to a plane, that's why our clients love us.

### Q What is the role of technology for the success of your kind of business? Have

### you tied up with any technology company?

Absolutely. Not only for logistics and accommodation management, we are actively using technology for enhancing the guest experiences at our events in multiple ways. Our guests can get all event details, their flight PNR's, room details, chauffeur details on the app which we customize for our events. Apart

Hyderabad and Ahmedabad. In terms of our employee strength, we were reduced to 35 employee count during covid and now we are 120 plus.

### Q India's outbound MICE market is considered one of the fastest growing globally, but when it comes to incoming MICE travels India stands way behind. What is your approach to change the scenario?

It is mostly a perception issue. Earlier the reasons were poor infrastructure, limited connectivity (airports) & unavailability of skilled workforce. However in the last decade, the scenario has changed completely. Some of the new airports in India are the best in-class. Number of 5 star hotels in India has grown 3 folds, and the talent in the MICE industry knows no bounds. Also, India hosting the G-20 summits in a grand way will encourage a lot of global players to look at India as a great MICE destination.

### Q Organising MICE events require a very high degree of professionalism and service quality. How do you ensure this?

Oh, it does. Basis our 20 plus years of experience in this Industry, we have zeroed it down to 3 things –

“ Now the entire focus is on creating unique & memorable experiences. Also, Virtual & Hybrid events have taken over in a big way ”

from admin activities, we also use a lot of AR/VR based technology elements at our events as we are the pioneers in that space for corporate events. Some of the commonly used elements are virtual paparazzi walls, interactive brand legacy walls, VR based engagements and many more.

### Q What are your plans to expand footprints in India?

With god's grace we have already gone past our pre-covid numbers and we are looking at phenomenal growth in the next two years. We just opened up our second office in Bangalore. Next in line are Dubai,

People, Process, Technology. And we take immense pride in sharing that SKIL Events by far has the best of the best in all three domains.

### Q What are the trends in corporate MICE events?

Sustainable Gifting, tech-driven engagements, Unique Team-Building Activities, Well thought-of Itineraries, Undiscovered destinations, Focus on wellness & wellbeing, Personalized experiences & Experiential events, are the trends in corporate MICE events. ♦

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## ‘We strive to be the unrivalled leader in our industry’

With over two decades of experience in the hospitality industry, **Hemant Mediratta, CEO, One Rep Global – An HMC Enterprise**, is keen to bridge the gap in the representation space. He spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about his various brand, and the need for niche, curated sales & marketing strategies depending on client segmentation.

### **Q** Tell us about your vision behind setting up One Rep Global.

I am passionate about sales and marketing and that's what I have done in the luxury hospitality space for the last 20+ years. My previous assignments gave me the opportunity to travel extensively around the world and meet great professionals from this industry. Whenever I would talk to international hoteliers about the booming India outbound market, they would mostly be ignorant and had preconceived notions about the nature of our travellers. I saw a clear gap in the market where majority of the representation companies were being run by travel agents and young hoteliers who lacked experience and exposure of global markets. I felt we needed a hotelier-run company that understands the nuances, and are culturally more adept to understanding the needs of luxury hotels. Our vision is to bring the best of global luxury hospitality to Indian consumers. We aspire to be the number one or the only one in what we do. We strive to be the unrivalled leader in our industry, setting new standards and exceeding expectations.

### **Q** Which are some of the latest clients signed on by One Rep Global?

At One Rep Global, we are thrilled to have recently partnered with

a diverse range of exceptional clients. Each one is unique and brings something extraordinary to the table, which personally excites me. For example, we have welcomed The Farm at San Benito, an eco-luxury holistic medical wellness resort in the Philippines, offering a serene oasis of well-being. Additionally, The Grand Ho Tram Strip in Vietnam has joined our roster, an entertainment capital that captivates guests just a short drive from Ho Chi Minh City. And we are proud to add Galeries Lafayette Paris Haussmann, the iconic Parisian department store renowned for upscale fashion, gourmet food, and stunning Art Nouveau architecture. These partnerships exemplify our commitment to curating unforgettable experiences for discerning travelers.

### **Q** How do you differentiate your brand MICEVERSE from One Rep Global?

While One Rep Global focuses on luxury and ultra-luxury hotels and tourism boards, MICEVERSE is our specialised brand catering to the MICE industry, as well as the wedding business. MICEVERSE operates with a distinct strategy, recognising the unique needs and clientele within these specific sectors.

### **Q** What is your B2B outreach strategy?

Our B2B strategy is designed to captivate the industry and position us as the go-to partner for exceptional results. Here's how we plan to make a compelling impact: **1. Unparalleled Personalization:** We understand that every ultra-luxury establishment is unique, with its own distinct brand and requirements. Our B2B strategy revolves around crafting personalised experiences for each potential client. From tailored email campaigns to bespoke proposals, we showcase our deep understanding of their needs and aspirations, demonstrating how our representation services will elevate their brand to unprecedented heights.

**2. Indomitable Networking Prowess:** Building meaningful connections is at the core of our B2B strategy. We recognise the

power of face-to-face interactions and strive to forge relationships with decision-makers, influencers, and industry stakeholders. By attending high-profile luxury travel and hospitality events, conferences, and trade shows, we create opportunities to connect with industry titans, share our vision, and establish valuable partnerships that amplify our reach and influence within the ultra-luxury sphere.

**3. Exquisite Brand Alliances:** We firmly believe that collaboration is the key to success. Our B2B strategy includes strategic alliances with complementary service providers in the luxury travel industry. By partnering with luxury travel agencies, high-end tour operators, and prestigious lifestyle brands, we create an ecosystem of exclusive experiences, tailored packages, and unparalleled customer service. Together, we offer a seamless journey for discerning travellers seeking extraordinary luxury experiences, positioning us as the one-stop solution for their desires.

**4. Compelling Client Advocacy:** Our clients are our greatest assets, and their success stories become our strongest testimonials. Our B2B strategy includes showcasing case studies and testimonials that highlight the tangible results we've achieved for ultra-luxury hotels and tourism boards. By showcasing their revenue growth, enhanced brand recognition, and unparalleled guest experiences, we demonstrate the profound impact of our representation services. Through a well-structured client referral program, we incentivize our satisfied clients to become brand advocates, amplifying our reach and influence within the industry.

Our B2B strategy is not just a plan but a commitment to excellence, unwavering dedication, and an unyielding passion for the ultra-luxury space. We aim to exceed expectations, inspire trust, and forge long-lasting partnerships that redefine success in the world of luxury sales and marketing representation. Together, we will redefine the boundaries of luxury and create a new standard of excellence that sets us apart from the rest. ♦

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# Paris, Gearing Up for Olympics 2024

TBM Staff | Paris

The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games are set to be a remarkable event, aiming to be the largest ever organised in France. With the Olympic Games scheduled to take place from July 26 to August 11, 2024, Paris is preparing to host a grand spectacle that will be etched in history. The city will become the centre of the world, not just for sports enthusiasts, but also for people from diverse cultural backgrounds and tourists alike.

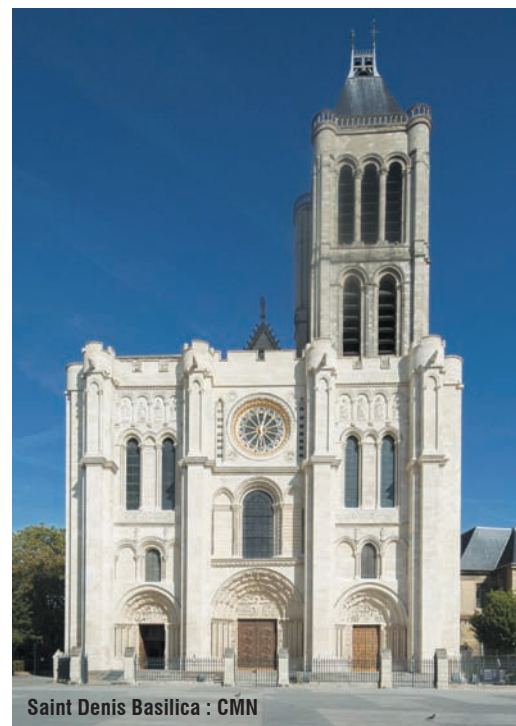
The Games in Paris will be a multicultural festival and a platform to showcase the vibrant spirit of France to the global audience. The country is embracing this opportunity to create an extraordinary experience for athletes, spectators, and television viewers alike.

One of the distinctive features of the Paris 2024 Games is the transformation of iconic landmarks into sporting venues. These renowned sites will serve as unique arenas, offering spectators an unparalleled experience. The integration of these historical and cultural landmarks into the sporting events will undoubtedly add an extraordinary charm to the overall spectacle.

The aim of the Paris Games is to provide a well-thought-out experience for everyone involved.

## Basilica of Saint-Denis

The Basilica of Saint-Denis stands as a testament to the rich artistic heritage and historical significance of France.



Saint Denis Basilica : CMN



It continues to attract visitors from around the world who come to admire its architectural beauty, explore its royal tombs, and experience the profound cultural legacy it represents.



Stade de France : Seine-Saint-Denis Tourisme + crédit architectes  
©Stade de France - Macary, Zublena et Regemba, Costantini - Architectes, ADAGP - Paris 2022

The Basilica of Saint-Denis is renowned as the birthplace of Gothic art. It was constructed in the 12th century and played a crucial role in the development of Gothic architecture. The architectural style of the basilica, characterized by pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and large stained glass windows, became a defining feature of the Gothic style that spread throughout Europe.

## Olympic Aquatic Center

The Aquatics Centre, built for the Paris 2024 Games, is a significant sports facility that will host artistic swimming, water polo, and diving events. It is one of the two permanent sports venues constructed specifically for the Games, the other being the Le Bourget Climbing Wall.

Overall, the Aquatics Centre not only

fulfils its role during the Paris 2024 Games, but also leaves a lasting legacy by providing a world-class venue for future swimming competitions.

## Stade de France

The Stade de France is the largest stadium in France and has been a significant venue for major sporting events since its construction in 1998. It was initially built to host matches for the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France.

The stadium is located in the commune of Saint-Denis, just a few kilometers north of Paris. Its strategic location allows for easy access via public transportation, making it convenient for spectators to attend events. The Stade de France has excellent transport links, including nearby train stations and metro lines,

which contribute to its accessibility.

In addition to hosting football matches, the Stade de France has become renowned for its ability to accommodate a wide range of events. It has been the venue for various sporting events, such as rugby matches, athletics competitions, and important national team fixtures. The stadium's versatile design and size make it suitable for hosting concerts featuring some of the biggest stars in the world, as well as large-scale shows and performances.

Looking ahead, the Stade de France will play a crucial role in the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games. It is set to be transformed into the Olympic Stadium, where the opening and closing ceremonies, as well as track and field events, will take place. ♦



## ‘Since travel rebound, India is in the top 30 leading sales markets for us’

Printemps is a well-known high-end department store in Paris, France. Founded in 1865, Printemps has become one of the premier shopping destinations in the city. The store is located on Boulevard Haussmann in the ninth district and covers over 45,000 square meters of retail space.

**Emmanuel Suissa, Chief Partnership Officer, Printemps** talks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their client profile and outreach strategy for India.

### Q How important is India as a source market for Printemps Paris?

India is a significant source market for luxury brands globally. The Indian market has a growing middle class with increasing disposable incomes and a growing appetite for luxury goods, including fashion, beauty, and accessories.

Therefore, it is likely that India is an important source market for Printemps Paris, as the company is targeting Indian consumers who are interested in luxury shopping experiences in Paris. Since the travel rebound, India is in the top 30 leading sales markets for Printemps Paris.

### Q What is your strategy to tap high spending tourists from India?

Printemps has engaged in a range of activations on premium luxury & lifestyle channels to reach a premium & well-travelled Indian audience.

**Promote unique and luxury experiences:** Indian tourists who spend a lot on travel are often looking for unique and luxurious

experiences. So, our focus is on promoting such experiences like transform a shopping session into a Parisian Shopping day.

**Offer customised experiences:** Offering tailor-made experiences that cater to the needs and preferences of Indian tourists can be a great way to tap high spending tourists from India. Indian travellers often prefer to have personalised itineraries that allow them to experience the local culture, cuisine, and attractions.

**Partner with travel bloggers and influencers:** Collaborating with travel bloggers and influencers can be an effective way to reach out to high-spending Indian tourists. They have a large following in India and can help promote Printemps Paris and services we provide to their audience.

**Leverage social media platforms:** Indians are active on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Leveraging these platforms can be an effective way to reach out to high-spending tourists from India.

**Offer exclusive benefits:** Offering exclusive benefits to

high-spending Indian tourists can be an effective way to attract them. Indian tourists are often price-sensitive, and offering them value for money can be a great way to build brand loyalty and attract repeat customers.

### Q Besides women travellers, how are you reaching out to male travellers who are interested in shopping?

Men's fashion is a part of Printemps Paris' DNA. In 1925, Printemps Paris was the first to dedicate an important part of the store to the men's Fashion. In 1930 Printemps

Invents 1st Men's Ready-to-wear Fashion collection with its new label BRUMMEL.

Today, one of the 3 stores dedicated for Men's Fashion, 6 floors are literal temples for men and each floor represents a specific universe. As men are also big kids, they will find spaces where they could find latest smart tech products to play with.

### Q How are you positioning your brand in India?

**Embrace the culture:** India is a diverse country with a rich cultural heritage. Brands that embrace Indian culture and values are likely to resonate well with Indian consumers. Incorporating traditional elements and local language in marketing campaigns can help build trust and credibility among the audience.

**Build partnerships:** Building strong partnerships with luxury travel designers and concierge services, OTAs and hospitality partners, airlines companies, financial partners, influencers, and organisations can help us establish a strong visibility in

India. This can help build our awareness, credibility, and reach a wider audience.

**Leverage technology:** India is one of the fastest-growing tech markets in the world. Brands that leverage technology to enhance the customer experience and offer innovative solutions are likely to be successful. For example, offering digital payment options, using social media for marketing and providing personalised online experiences can help attract and retain customers.

**Be socially responsible:** Indian consumers are increasingly conscious of social and environmental issues. At our 7th Heaven floor, we dedicate an entire floor to Luxury Vintage and pre-loved goods. We prioritise sustainability, ethical practices, and giving back to society is likely to be well received. Being socially responsible can help build a positive brand image and attract socially conscious consumers.

It's important to note that India is a diverse country, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to positioning Printemps Paris in India. Understanding local nuances and tailoring marketing efforts to suit the local audience is key to building a success in India.

### Q Enumerate on the kind of experiences once can enjoy at Printemps store in Paris?

We customize shopping experiences to match with our partners' audience to address the level of expectations of their customers tiers with a range of services and benefits including :

- Personalised welcome in Hindi.
- Personal assistant at disposal
- Access to the VIP Lounge
- Personal styling session with personal shopper
- Welcome offer with a 5% off on the Shopping day
- Hand Free Shopping
- A gourmet break in one of our restaurant's rooftop to enjoy 360° view over Paris
- 12% Tax Refund on-site and top up tax refund for heavy spenders
- Shopping delivery at their Parisian address. ♦

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# Of Land Mines and Gold ones

By Paramjit Bawa, Founder & CEO – Auxilia Networks

A few recent research reports on the Indian travel landscape came up with some pretty encouraging findings. There are facts, opinions and figures aplenty on the potential of the India market, its growth, its aspiring “tourism superpower” status, the rising and increasingly spend-happy Great Indian Middle Class, etc. ad infinitum. All undoubtedly good stuff, I’m sure.

are seen beating a disappointed retreat).

Hey there, Messrs. “Not the right market” – here’s some news. There’s a thousand overseas entities just like yours doing successful business in India, some for many years, while you licked your wounds and left. So what are they doing that you aren’t? Well, they figured out a few things that you didn’t. Here’s a few (just a few) of them:

The first error that’s made by businesses (not just tourism ones) that struggle in India is to assume its one country. Buzzer sound! Politically maybe. But there’s actually four or five countries in one. As one moves from north to south, east to west, everything changes – climate, language, food, social behaviour, culture, music, dance, demographic and family structures, people’s priorities, and importantly, the way money is both saved and spent. One may even find variation from a big metro to a smaller town in the same region. **One size most certainly DOES NOT fit all.** A sales pitch that works in Kolkata may not necessarily work in Kochi. And because the consumer is different, the way the travel trade works will, by necessity, be different too. There’s too many aspects to this to be accommodated in this blog, suffice to say the understanding of this diversity is fundamental to success in this market.

Second place goes to the number of passport holders in India. What’s the number that keeps popping up in water-cooler chats? Almost 101 million issued just in the past 20 years - from 2014 till April 2023. Don’t take my word for it, just ask Google. OK, our population is gargantuan and we have a LOT of passport holders. But they’re not all going to be your customers. So two words I might suggest to anyone looking to do business in India – “target” & “segment”. One man’s cruise liner is another man’s Titanic – or something like that.

Ironically, there’s one aspect

to Indians that is common across the whole country, and again, it’s a critical one that many fail to understand the significance of. Unlike many societies around the world, especially in the “developed” world (I confess I do not really understand what that means), where the predominant societal norm is the concept of “I”, India’s has always been predominantly that of “We”. Its there in the way our families are structured, in our communities, cultures and faiths, and even our businesses. And “We” implies relationships. And outside of families, building lasting **relationships** takes time and effort. So here’s the thing – India isn’t, and never was, a quick-fix market. A year isn’t going to hack it. Don’t be fooled by the big numbers, because they don’t guarantee big business. The secret to success here is forming relationships. If you know the people you deal with well, beyond just business, they will not turn away from you. Meet up, have a meal together, remember their anniversaries and their kids’ birthdays, call them, work with them – but regularly. They won’t stop doing business with you.

I think I’m very close to the point where you’re going to click on that cross in the top corner, so let me close by saying this to Messrs. “Not the right market” – India is very much the right market for you, just approach it in the right way, work with the right people. But don’t expect big returns straight off the bat. It’s a market that demands time, investment and patience. And once it builds momentum for you, it could be THE market.

Doing business in India can be like walking through landmines but if you get it right it can also be like walking through a gold mine.

**Auxilia helps to unravel this complex market and make you India-ready. ♦**

*‘The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.’*



But let’s take a small peek behind the research and have a look at a couple of things it doesn’t talk about.

Despite all the positive India vibes doing the rounds of travel & tourism media, I’m still regularly bumping into tourism execs and business owners at international shows and events shrugging their shoulders, rolling their eyes and telling me “We tried India for a year, it didn’t work for us. We don’t think it’s the right market for us at this time”. Or words to that effect (The poor rep company people from India trying to bag that account





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## ‘Since Q4 of 2022, we have observed upward trends in the hotel business’

With its strategic location in the heart of the bustling business area in the city, Sofitel Mumbai BKC offers a blend of business and leisure amenities.

**Manish Daya, General Manager, Sofitel Mumbai BKC,** talks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about his vision for the property, and their major revenue generating areas.

### **Q** What is the USP of your hotel?

Sofitel Mumbai BKC, as part of the luxury brand Sofitel Hotels & Resorts under Accor and a flagship hotel in India, introduced Mumbai to a luxurious blend of French elegance and rich Indian tradition 11 years ago, offering all our guests a premium experience that sets us apart. Our prime advantage lies in our exceptional location at the heart of Bandra Kurla Complex, surrounded by consulates, the Bharat Diamond Bourse, major banks and financial institutions, and corporate offices. Additionally, we are conveniently close to the Jio World Garden, Jio Convention Centre, and the most recently launched jewel of BKC, the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre.

At Sofitel, we pride ourselves on providing the renowned French Art of Living, combined with unparalleled Magnifique experiences. Our award-winning dining options, such as Jyran, Artisan, Pondichery Café, and Tuskers, showcase the finest culinary delights. To enhance your well-being, we offer the Sofitel Spa with six treatment rooms and state-of-the-art Sofitel Fitness facilities.

What truly sets us apart is our ability to seamlessly blend business and luxury leisure amenities. As a result, our 302 rooms' contemporary elegance combined with fantastic designs

creates a symphony of style that helps us cater to the needs of both business travellers and leisure guests—a unique combination that few properties can offer. Our business facilities are top-notch, ensuring a productive environment for meetings and events. All this is available in close proximity to the International and Domestic airports, with easy access to major highways, the Bandra Worli Sea link, and all tourist attractions in North and South Mumbai.

Sofitel Mumbai BKC has

always been known for delivering an exquisite experience that epitomizes the perfect harmony between French sophistication and Indian hospitality since its launch in 2012.

### **Q** What are your major revenue streams and how have they grown?

Since Q4 of 2022, we have observed upward trends in the hotel business. Whether it be rooms, our award-winning food and beverage outlets, or our MICE offerings, all have experienced significant growth. At Sofitel Mumbai BKC, our Magnifique Meeting experts are always available to ensure that even the smallest details are tailor-made to perfection, resulting in Magnifique experiences. It is rewarding to see these aspects emerge as major revenue streams that have surpassed past performances.

### **Q** What are your promotional strategies for the F&B segment?

Sofitel Mumbai BKC implements a range of strategic initiatives to promote its Food & Beverage segment. These initiatives include captivating culinary events that showcase the hotel's culinary team's creativity and expertise. The hotel also offers seasonal menus and special offerings to provide guests with fresh and exciting dining experiences. With

a strong focus on social media engagement, Sofitel Mumbai BKC shares visually appealing content and hosts interactive contests to foster an engaging online presence. Collaborations with influencers and food critics contribute to expanding the hotel's reach and establishing credibility. Additionally, exclusive dining privileges are extended to loyalty program members, promoting guest loyalty and appreciation. The hotel also forms strategic partnerships with local suppliers and artisans to highlight regional culinary specialties, further enriching the overall dining experience.

Recently, Jyran - serving Northwest Frontier province cuisine, is now open for lunch as well. Tuskers, a vegetarian dining bar, offers a mix of traditional Rajasthani and Gujarati delicacies during lunch hours, promoting sumptuous thalis. Both outlets have new chefs on board, enhancing the dining experiences. Artisan Café now offers a new patisserie, featuring French-style bakeries, cakes, and hampers, along with the finest coffees. In the evening, it transforms into a vibrant spot with music, providing a wonderful place to relax with a drink of your choice.

Regarding our MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) strategy, Hriday reflects the grandeur of Sofitel Mumbai BKC and is a part of our Inspired Meetings offerings. Sofitel Mumbai BKC with 30,000 sq. ft. of meetings and event space in the heart of Mumbai serves as a great venue for exchanging vows and celebrating special occasions in style. The Marquee, a new pillar-less venue spanning 8000 sq. ft., provides a seamless setting for banquets, corporate events, and product launches during the monsoon season.

I would also like to mention our dynamic loyalty programme, Accor Live Limitless, which is a core part of our strategy to drive Food & Beverage diners. This programme not only allows our loyal customers to earn reward and status points but also fosters loyalty towards the brand. Members can earn and redeem points for Food & Beverage usage

at the hotel, which has gained significant traction in the Mumbai market. And the dining loyalty program, Accor Plus, which has a substantial membership base in this beautiful city of Mumbai, complements it.

**Q What are the major ancillary revenue streams that you witnessed is significantly contributing to your balance sheet?**

Sofitel Spa, managed by the ambassadors of Sofitel Mumbai BKC, combines exceptional decor and an array of luxurious spa treatments. The interiors of the spa are bright and pleasant, featuring controlled lighting and a captivating color scheme predominantly showcasing gold. The choice of gold resonates with the shared passion for this color among the French and Indians. Notably, the spa's centrepiece showcases golden drops of luxury, creating a mesmerizing depiction of exotic golden rainfall. The spa boasts six treatment rooms, each offering signature treatments that are highly sought after. This combination of exquisite

decor and top-notch treatments positions the spa as a significant ancillary revenue stream for us.

**Q What is your vision for the future of the hotel?**

AI am thrilled about the opportunities that lie ahead in the hospitality industry this year, as we have the chance to set ourselves apart from the competition by introducing innovative features that cater to our guests' evolving needs. At Sofitel Mumbai BKC, we believe in the timeless allure of French luxury, seamlessly blending style, sophistication, and chic elegance. Mumbai, as a destination, perfectly complements our vision, offering experiential stays even for business travellers. Our primary goal is to enhance the guest experience by leveraging technology to deliver personalized services rooted in our Cousu main service culture. We go the extra mile to make our guests feel not just at home but truly special, genuinely caring about their happiness.

Embracing life passionately, we find joy in every moment and offer

authentic culinary experiences, wellness programs, and a bespoke lifestyle that embodies the essence of Sofitel.

In 2023, sustainability is a key focus for us. We understand the importance of minimizing our carbon footprint and preserving the environment for future generations. By continuously evolving and implementing sustainable practices, such as reducing food waste, utilizing eco-friendly products, and incorporating energy-efficient systems, we strive to make a positive impact.

Furthermore, we have plans to expand our brand presence and attract new clientele who seek the blend of modern luxury, the French art de vivre, and the essence of Mumbai. Through strategic partnerships, industry participation, and exploring new marketing channels, we aim to increase brand awareness and drive bookings.

I am actively collaborating with our team of ambassadors to share our brand passions and deliver exceptional experiences to our valued guests. Overall, I am

excited about the potential that 2023 holds for our hotel and the industry as a whole.

**Q What are your biggest challenges? How do you plan to overcome them?**

Joining Sofitel Mumbai BKC is truly the realisation of a dream in the vibrant City of Dreams. As I embark on this new chapter, marking a decade with Accor, it feels incredibly rewarding, as I have mentioned in many of my past interactions. However, it also comes with great responsibility, as Sofitel Mumbai BKC represents the prestigious luxury brand Sofitel Hotels & Resorts of Accor and presently stands as its sole representative in India. While I embrace this role, I see it as an exciting journey rather than a challenge, especially considering the hotel's resilient rebound and the positive trends it exhibits. My primary focus will be to harness the growing demand, elevate our Reputation Performance Scores, and ensure that our dedicated team at Sofitel Mumbai remains deeply engaged. ♦

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# IATO writes to PM for restoring SEIS scheme in Foreign Trade Policy

## NEWS ROUND UP

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) President Rajiv Mehra has written to the PM requesting him to restore SEIS (Service Export Incentive Scheme) or introduce an alternative scheme in the new Foreign Trade Policy, as the inbound tourism sector is still suffering and needs hand holding by the government.

Besides, IATO seeks roll back of TCS of 20 per cent to 5 per cent on Overseas Tour Packages announced in the Union Budget. These steps would place the tourism industry at par with foreign tour operators and help them compete with the neighbouring countries. Also during the current G-20 Presidency, where promoting tourism is one key objective, it would be pertinent that the Government extends a helping hand to the Tourism sector.

In the letter Mehra has mentioned that the inbound tourism industry was the worst affected due to Covid-19 pandemic. Post revival of international flight operations and tourist visa, only 30-40 % of inbound tourism to India has been revived, which the government accepts. So either SEIS should be restored or an alternative scheme benefiting the tourism sector should be announced in the Foreign Trade Policy 2023.

In the letter it has been stated that it took 9 years to increase foreign exchange earnings to USD 30.05 billion in 2019 from USD 14.49 billion in 2010. However, at present we have gone back to 2004 level, which was 6.17 billion in terms of foreign exchange earnings. This

is indicative of the stress this sector is undergoing.

According to Mehra, "We need to compete. But it becomes very difficult as the Govt. has withdrawn marketing and promotion support in foreign countries. Ended SEIS, not given any alternative benefit, GST is as high as 20-23 percent without any input tax credit, whereas neighbouring countries are charging 6-8 percent . To attract tourists we need to holistically look at all these issues. As regards the argument of revenue loss- it would be made up more than 100 times as it has a positive multiplier impact on the overall economy".

Mehra also mentioned about the Increase in TCS rate from 5 % to 20 % w.e.f 1st July, 2023 is causing loss to outbound tour operators based in India. The traveller would simply bypass the Indian operator and book outside, it will be a lose-lose situation both for the government and tour operators. This needs to be brought back to 5 per cent as was before or even lower.

The letter states nothing matches the tourism sector in terms of employment generation and contribution it makes in the economic growth of a country. Today the sector needs support, and therefore IATO is hopeful that the government would favourably consider its request. ♦



Rajiv Mehra

# The subtle art of doing nothing!

## *It's a tourism product too!*

By **Dr. Nimit Chowdhary**, Professor of Tourism  
Faculty of Management Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi.

There is evidence that, in the aftermath of COVID-19, people are pursuing more tranquilly, relaxation, and a connection to nature. To establish a relationship with nature, people seek natural, quiet, and relaxing places to relieve stress. This is a chance to promote nature-based tourism, such as rurality and outdoor adventure. Rightly, in India, we are aggressively promoting rural and adventure tourism. However, I fear we might end up killing the product with added ramifications. Attractions and activities are so intricately married in tourism that even with famous anchor tenants, the destinations turn to multi-form tourism. The argument is that visitors seek out activity-packed getaways for enriching experiences. So, tourist destinations must offer activities to keep visitors engaged. We are introducing a range of activities at our rural locales to attract more visitors. Around ten to fifteen years back, there was also a thrust on developing rural destinations- each with a USP like handicrafts, adventure, etc.

During a recent study trip of our students to a remote village in Uttarakhand, they kept sharing pics and videos. One of their assignments was to assess and recommend measures to promote the place as a tourist destination. As they enjoyed the serenity of the locale, they kept pitching, ".....and there are many activities to do here....".

Our research on visitor response to Mawlynnong, the cleanest village in Asia, during the post-COVID phase, revealed interesting insights. A good number of people are visiting the place to return two seemingly contradictory sentiments. While some visitors opined that there are no activities to do in Mawlynnong, the other segment of visitors are disappointed by the commercialisation of the place. A possible explanation is that while the natural self of the place that included the tradition of cleanliness attracted visitors, with the growth of footfall, the necessity to host guests took precedence. Commercialisation also mandated that Mawlynnong evolves as a multi-form tourist destination. As a multi-form destination, it won't be easy to compete with other destinations, as increasing commercialisation erodes the original serenity of the place. Another insight sourced from guests' feedback was that they are now

seeking nearby villages to retire after visiting Mawlynnong. As a result, Mawlynnong is reduced to an anchor tenant attraction while neighbouring villages cradle rurality for the visitors.

The question is, is tourism always about doing something at the place? My argument is that doing nothing can also be a tourism product. Our lives are too engrossed with doing something or other in our daily routines. Our engagements have grown manifold due to the technologies we use daily. As a result, we sometimes need a break to do nothing. Danes refer to this subtle art of doing nothing as *hygge*. *Hygge* (pronounced "hoo-gah") is a Danish word that roughly translates to "cosiness" or "comfort." It's a cultural concept deeply ingrained in Danish culture and way of life. It refers to a feeling of cosiness, contentment, and well-being that comes from enjoying the simple things in life and being in the moment. It's all about creating a warm, cosy atmosphere and enjoying the simple things in life with friends and family. While it doesn't necessarily mean doing nothing, it often involves slowing down, savouring the moment, and creating a sense of comfort and ease.

*Hygge* can take many forms, but some examples include sipping tea while gazing at the vast expanse of mountains for hours from the verandah of your homestay. A stroll through the woods, picking cherries, or indulging in comfort food like *khichdi* or a *parantha* is *hygge*. It's also about creating a sense of togetherness and community, whether through spending time with loved ones or simply enjoying a quiet moment alone. *Hygge* is not just a physical but also a mental and emotional state. It's about being present at the moment and enjoying the little things in life rather than constantly striving for more. It's a way of life that prioritises comfort, connection, and contentment over material possessions and external achievements. Rurality is a reflection of this. In recent years, *Hygge* has become increasingly popular outside of Denmark as people worldwide seek to incorporate more cosiness and contentment into their lives. Many people find that *hygge* helps them to feel more relaxed, grounded, and grateful for the simple pleasures in life.

We may not have been using the term in



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its literal sense. However, back home, there has always been a craving for "*Shanti*", or tranquil calmness as we call it locally. It is a state characterised by inner peace, harmony, and balance. It can be achieved through meditation, yoga, and other mindfulness practices. Rurality offers the necessary context and act-lessness to help one gradually and easily slip into this relaxing peace.

My sixpence for rurality-based tourism is that rurality can be promoted for tourism for doing almost nothing- sit back and relax. I'm reminded of my trip to Spain a few years ago. Popular tourist destinations were hustling and bustling with visitor activity. But on the other hand, the rural neighbourhoods were where visitors would disappear to unwind in rural obscurity. Complete lack of involvement in anything. Do **NOTHING!** ♦

*'The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.'*

### Q How big is the overall transportation economy and the share of bus transport in it?

The Indian transportation sector is crucial to the Indian economy, with a contribution of around 4.9% to the country's GDP in 2019-20. This industry has immense potential to continue developing and contributing to the country's economic growth. In terms of inter-city travel, buses are a popular mode of transportation in India. The vast majority of long-distance travellers in India use buses as their primary mode of transportation.

The inter-city mobility market in India is dominated by bus travel, accounting for around 66% of domestic tourist visits, according to a 2019 report by the Ministry of Tourism. Buses provide an affordable and accessible mode of transportation, particularly in remote areas where other modes of transportation may not be available.

### Q What kind of growth opportunity this segment of travel presents?

The bus segment for travel presents significant growth potential as intercity buses have gained the trust of their customers by offering efficient transportation services. IntrCity recently released a report on the Outstation Bus Market in India, which revealed that the online bus market in the country is projected to reach 10%. With a transformation in customer behavior and bus operator business practices, this potential could increase significantly to 25%. The bus industry has made significant strides in enhancing the customer experience by providing comfortable, air-conditioned buses with ample legroom, on-board entertainment, and other amenities.

With the Indian government focusing on making world-class road and highway infrastructure in India, there is immense potential for growth of inter/intra city travel. The Indian government's recent budget allocation towards road travel has led to a surge in demand for co-branded buses. This demand is bolstered by the rapid growth

rate of 8% CAGR over FY20-25 for Indian national highways infrastructure, which outpaces railway track lengths and airports, making it the fastest-growing supporting infrastructure for outstation travel.

Private pre-bookable co-branded buses are proving to be the most cost-effective option, with prices ranging from INR 1-3 per km. With increased connectivity to more cities, road transportation emerges as a highly economical option, backed by the fastest-growing infrastructure.

### Q What are InterCity SmartBus key USPs?

## 'IntrCity's SmartBus is on an impressive growth trajectory, with expectations of a yoy increase of over 300%'

Convergence of technology and growing network of quality highways is redefining inter-city bus travel in the country. The online bus market is projected to reach 10 per cent but given the right eco-system could potentially breach the 25-per cent-mark too. Leading the transformation is IntrCity SmartBus, a tech-driven mobility brand and aggregator revolutionising the bus travel experience. **Manish Rathi, CEO and CoFounder, IntrCity SmartBus**, in an interaction with **Shayan Mullick** shares insights into the market and opportunity.

IntrCity SmartBus has embraced an asset-light aggregator model that is changing the way people view bus travel, elevating it to a premium alternative to trains. With its innovative suite of applications, IntrCity SmartBus has emerged as a technology-driven mobility brand that is leading the way in revolutionising the bus travel experience. The company's cutting-edge applications, including the Operator Dashboard, Crew App, Consumer Platform, and IOT-based Fleet Analytics, ensure that every aspect of the journey is seamlessly managed, providing real-time tracking, accurate ETA of destinations.

Passengers can enjoy the privacy and luxury of private cabins with flat beds, while Wi-Fi-enabled AC lounges at boarding points offer a place to relax and



recharge, in-built washrooms with food being given on their tables.

IntrCity SmartBus is pioneering a revolutionary concept with the introduction of IntrCity SmartBus Lounges to provide passengers with a secure and comfortable boarding experience. These lounges offer a plethora of amenities, including air-conditioned waiting areas with fast Wi-Fi, charging ports, spacious and hygienic seating arrangements, recliners, hot tea/coffee, and immaculate washrooms.

### Q How is the growth forecast for the current year?

IntrCity's SmartBus is on an impressive growth trajectory, with expectations of a year-over-year increase of over 300% by 2023. In the next five years, the

company aims to revolutionise conventional bus travel by converting over 5,000 buses into a "Connected SmartBus Network" utilizing cutting-edge technological advancements from Mobility Platform.

IntrCity SmartBus has set its sights on providing reliable and accessible mobility solutions to the previously unexplored regions, thereby bringing forth a new era of convenience and connectivity. IntrCity SmartBus will expand its current routes across North, South, and West India by adding new lines to its network.

By establishing IntrCity SmartBuses as a dependable, secure, and practical mode of transit, connecting Tier-II and III cities with neighbouring metro areas or industrial hubs will become a seamless task. ♦



# Start-Up Forum

## Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

### TripBuilder

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

Anticipating the impact of technology, 16 years ago, **TravelBiz Monitor** introduced an industry-first live news portal, with hourly online reporting on travel, tourism, aviation and hospitality industries. Since then, we have created a niche for ourselves by providing analytical stories and statistical information to the travel trade on a regular basis. To keep this momentum going, the Editorial team has decided to showcase new-age technology products and services every month that have the potential to disrupt the market further. Moreover, the time now is also appropriate as the on-going pandemic has further widened the scope of using technology.

For this unique initiative, **TravelBiz Monitor** has partnered with 'Start-up Mentor Board', a visionary platform with credentials in business, technology, e-commerce, digital market place, payment solutions and IT infrastructure, to highlight the stories of new-age technology ideas. Start-up Mentor Board has been set-up as an initiative to mentor and guide the travel technology driven start-ups and facilitate collaboration in the larger travel ecosystem.

**Website – <https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com>**

The Board is spearheaded by well-known thought leader Ashish Kumar, who is also the Co-Chairman of FICCI Travel Technology Committee. It comprises Bharti Maan, who has led start-ups to scale rapidly; Patrick Richards, an experienced travel industry leader in the UK; Chetan Kapoor, an analyst with deep understanding of the travel and tourism business and trends; Kartik Sharma, an artificial intelligence practitioner; Karthik Venkataraman, a digital transformation & an e-commerce visionary; Jure Bratkic, who led innovative solutions in the USA and Kyasha Bhoola, with expertise and advanced insight into the travel industry across Africa.

**\*One can register for the SMB Program at**

**<https://startupmentorboard.vgmrtechsolutions.com/form.html>**

**Startup Name:** TripBuilder

**Core Team:** Tejas Patil

**Founding year:** 2023

**Company Website:** <https://www.tripbuilder.in/>

**Description:** TripBuilder is a new app that is changing the way people plan their trips. The app allows users to watch short videos created by influencers about their experiences in different cities and countries. This gives users a first-hand look at what it's like to visit a place, and helps them to plan their own trip accordingly.

TripBuilder is easy to use. Users simply search for the city or country they want to visit, and then browse through the videos that have been uploaded by influencers. Each video is typically around 30 seconds long, and gives users a quick overview of the location. Users can also read comments and reviews from other users, which can help them to make a decision about where to stay, what to eat, and what to do. In addition, to helping users plan their trips, TripBuilder also rewards influencers for their content. When a user makes a purchase through the app, TripBuilder shares a portion of the revenue with the influencer who created the video that inspired the purchase. This helps to ensure that influencers are motivated to create high-quality content, and it also helps to keep the app fresh with new videos.

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgIWXdp5cBY>**



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