

# FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL TravelBizMonitor

VOL 17 | ISSUE 9 | PAGES 28

FEBRUARY, 2024 PRICE: ₹40

www.travelbizmonitor.com

1



## BECOME AN **AFFILIATE.TRAVEL SPECIALIST** & Increase **your Revenue** by Earning **Commission**



**500,000+**

Hotel & Apartment Rooms Worldwide



**20,000+**

Directly Contracted Preferred Hotels



**45,000+**

Sightseeing items & over 5000 Tours in 500 cities



**5,000+**

Transfer Option in Over 900 Airport and City Locations



**JOIN**



**PROMOTE**



**EARN**

### Key Benefits

Affiliate.Travel

- ⦿ B2B2C Commission Model
- ⦿ 6500+ Active Affiliate Agents
- ⦿ Facility to create Sub-Affiliate
- ⦿ Own Branded Website with Zero Investment
- ⦿ Best Corporate Booking Tool
- ⦿ Global Inventory
- ⦿ Option to share Payment Link with Client
- ⦿ Best Net Rates
- ⦿ 24\*7 Support Services

T&C Apply

Visit <https://travelbizmonitor.com/affiliate.travel> to become an Affiliate.Travel specialist

Looking for comfort and convenience for your clients' visa submission process?

Choose VFS Global's

# PREMIUM LOUNGE SERVICE



Our state-of-the-art, plush **Premium Lounge** offers a seamless experience during visa application submission.

- ✓ Personalised attention at every step
- ✓ Refreshments and beverages
- ✓ Photocopy & Photobooth services
- ✓ SMS Alerts

For exclusive deals and incentives, write to us on:

[b2bsales@vfsglobal.com](mailto:b2bsales@vfsglobal.com)



# FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

# TravelBizMonitor

VOL 17 | ISSUE 9 | PAGES 28

FEBRUARY, 2024

PRICE: ₹40

www.travelbizmonitor.com

3

## FM drastically cuts down overseas promotion budget while increasing outlay for tourism

TBM STAFF | MUMBAI

For FY25, the Finance Minister has increased allocation for the tourism sector to INR 2,449.62 crore in the Interim Budget, recording a rise of 44.7 per cent, over the revised figure of INR 1,692.10 crore for the current fiscal. However, a meagre sum of INR 3 crore has been set aside for overseas promotion of India for its 'Incredible India' campaign, shrinking the allocation by 97% from last year's INR 100 crore.



**Ministry of Tourism**  
Government of India

Last year, the Budget slashed overseas tourism promotion expenditure by a staggering amount, having spent just INR 15.89 crore,

only to rise somewhat in FY24 to INR 100 crore. It spent INR 89 crore during 2021-22 from its allocated INR 524 crore.

More than two thirds of the FY25 allocation, has been kept aside for its Swadesh Darshan scheme. This scheme, set up in 2014-15, provides financial assistance to state governments to develop tourism infrastructure. Alongside, the Prashad Darshan scheme has been allocated a similar amount as last year, at INR 240 crore. ♦

## India recovers to pre-Covid level of visitations for New York City

DISHA SHAH GHOSH | MUMBAI

With 336,000 Indians visiting New York City in 2023, the country has reached pre-Covid levels of arrivals for the key gateway city in the USA. During the Mumbai leg of their three-city India Sales Mission, Makiko Matsuda Healy, Senior Vice President, Tourism Market Development, NYC Tourism + Conventions spoke to **TravelBiz Monitor** about the "extremely important source market of India, and the long-staying Indian visitors".

Healy said, "India is the fifth largest economy, and Indian visitors are long staying guests with an average length of stay of 11 days in NYC, which is an increase. Pre-Covid Indians spent less than 10 days in NYC. Currently, India is the second largest source market for NYC Tourism + Conventions, and 12th, globally. It has recovered to pre-Covid level of recovery with 336,000 Indian visiting NYC in 2023." During 2022, NYC recorded 258,000 Indian visitors, and

the forecast is to close 2024 with 383,000 visitors.

Elaborating further she said, Indian visitors spent USD 569 million in NYC during 2022, and the per-person per trip spend to NYC is USD 2,200. "During 2023, 68% Indians visited for leisure (including 35% VFR), and 32% for business. While NYC is the number one port of entry for Indians via Air India and United, Indians have options for one-stop flights via Middle East and Europe."

She said with Mumbai and Delhi being primary markets, the travel trade in Ahmedabad is also well versed with knowledge about NYC because of a lot of VFR traffic moves to the US from Gujarat. "This time, I visited Ahmedabad for the second time after 2019, and with the international airport of Ahmedabad and now



Makiko Matsuda



Surat, direct traffic coming into the US, make it more relevant for us."

The NYC Travel Trade Academy, an online training programme, has been re-launched, and Healy is expecting good traction from the Indian market as well. With improvement in visa processing time and better air access, she is hopeful of consistent growth from the Indian market going forward. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in



**CUNARD**  
**Cherry Blossom Cruise**  
**JAPAN**

**Mar - Apr - May 2024**

For Itinerary, Sailing Details etc.

GRIFFON 1 Cusrow baug, Colaba, Mumbai 400001  
Tel.(91-22) 22045019, 9820060241 Email: sales@griffoncruises.in

**QUEEN ELIZABETH**



# TravelBizMonitor

Stay Home, Stay Safe, Stay Relevant

**TravelBiz  
Webinars**



**e-learning  
Programmes**

**Virtual Exhibitions**

Utilise the Stay at Home time for Knowledge Seeking & be Future Ready.

Break the Isolation through a Virtual Exhibition, e-learning Programme or a live Webinar, and educate.

Gear up your teams for Product Development & Itinerary Management for Future Travel Bookings.

Use these tools to spark New Ideas, Forge Connections & Innovation.

## Webinar Partners



## e-learning Programme Partners



For further information, write to:

**Ajay Wadode**

ajay.wadode@saffronsynergies.in  
+91 8087127814/+91 8767031410

**Disha Shah Ghosh**

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in



# Dubai Adventure

# دبي



05 Days From  
**US\$ 656\*** pp

#### Highlights:

- ✓ Half-Day Dubai City tour
- ✓ Desert Safari with BBQ Dinner (Premium Camp)
- ✓ Sky Views with Glass Slide (1 time Slide)
- ✓ Flying Cup with Popcorn
- ✓ Hot Air Balloon Ride

**Remarks:** Rates are based on DBL/TWN sharing basis. Rates and Offers are subject to change without prior notice & are subject to availability. Tourism Dirham Fee is not included.

Valid till 31st March'2024. \*T&C Apply.

## Ottila International Pvt. Ltd.

Mumbai (Registered Office & Corporate Headquarters) : 022 6720 5000

Ahmedabad: +91 93761 20982

Hyderabad: +91 40 4020 0301

New Delhi: +91 11 4141 4242

Bengaluru: +91 80 4165 6324

Indore: +91 731 4911 374

Pune: +91 20 4002 6960

Chennai: +91 44 4555 8582

Kochi: +91 75938 63903

Nasik: +91 253 231 0044

Coimbatore: +91 99527 17750

Kolkata: +91 98301 19561



For Enquiries & Bookings, please contact any of our offices | Website: [www.ottila.com](http://www.ottila.com) | B2B Portal: [www.ottila.net](http://www.ottila.net)



# VFS Global cements Preferred Employer status with high Glassdoor scores

TBM Staff | Mumbai

VFS Global has secured a rating of 4.01 on a scale of 5 for 2023 on Glassdoor, a leading platform for employee feedback and company reviews.

This significant achievement reflects VFS Global's unwavering commitment to excellence in every aspect of its people management and human capital development. With an employee value proposition of developing a 'fellowship of winners', VFS Global is deeply committed to best-in-class HR practices and to developing every team member to her/his full potential. The company has continuously invested in training and development and in building an organisation where people come first, and in creating meaningful work opportunities and building successful careers, in a diverse and inclusive workplace.

The six parameters on which Glassdoor assesses companies are based on Excelling in Culture & Values, Work/Life Balance, Senior Management, Compensation &

Benefits, Career Opportunities, and Diversity & Inclusion. VFS Global has elevated its standing on all of them.

VFS Global has set a benchmark in creating an exemplary work culture that resonates with employee satisfaction and empowerment. This recognition not only celebrates the company's achievements but also solidifies its reputation as an employer of choice in the global marketplace.

This rating is even more satisfying as this reaffirms the company's employee-centric policies and its sharp focus on nurturing the potential of its employees as it has always focussed on Learning and Development programmes which is highly appreciated by its workforce. Over the years, the company has also won recognition by winning the Golden Peacock National Training Award four times since 2017 in recognition for its exemplary learning and development practices. The last it won was in 2023.

According to Nirbhik Goel, Chief Human Resources Officer, VFS Global, "I am thrilled to acknowledge the high Glassdoor rating

VFS Global has received, a reflection of our commitment to an inclusive and empowering workplace culture. Central to our success is our vibrant workforce, comprising over 131 nationalities, which not only enriches our work environment but is also a cornerstone of our global success. This rating is particularly meaningful as it stems directly from our employees, offering a genuine and voluntary endorsement of our practices."

With a headcount of 10,976 employees at the end of 2023, VFS Global's Glassdoor rating reflects its commitment to its people. This achievement highlights the company's journey towards excellence, combining diverse talents with unified goals. As VFS Global continues to innovate, its focus on nurturing a dynamic and inclusive work environment remains key to its success. It reinforces VFS Global's position as a leader in the industry and a preferred employer globally. ♦



Nirbhik Goel

# 'SriLankan Airlines' total revenue sees a 20% contribution from the Indian market'

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Indian market contributes 20% of the total revenue for the SriLankan Airlines said its Head of Worldwide Sales & Distribution Dimuthu Tennakoon, while exclusively speaking to **TravelBiz Monitor**. The airline has recently introduced double daily flights between Colombo and Mumbai.

"Mumbai has emerged as the second destination after Chennai in terms of number of passengers and frequencies. Last year, despite a few challenges, our Indian operation was successful," he said. Tennakoon added, "The Indian market has been incredibly important to SriLankan Airlines since the get-go, and with India fast becoming one of the world's largest outbound travel markets, we are only happy to expand our operations in one of India's most celebrated cities and make travel between Mumbai and Colombo extra seamless."

Talking about passengers, he said they recorded 80% load factor throughout the year. Currently, the airline operates from 9 cities in India. When asked about their focus, Tennakoon said that their priority is to increase capacity on the existing connections.



Dimuthu Tennakoon

To enhance passenger comfort for travellers from India, SriLankan Airlines is considering adjusting the arrival times of select flights to Sri Lanka. "In certain Indian locations, the current arrival times are either midnight or early morning. Our goal is to provide more convenient timings for passengers, and the schedules should be

tailored to meet the requirements and preferences of our passengers," emphasized Tennakoon.

SriLankan Airlines has introduced its SriLankan Direct Connect, a New Distribution Capability (NDC) agents booking portal. Speaking about this, he said that they had first launched it in Sri Lanka in June last year. "After Sri Lanka, we launched it in India as it is a very important market for us. Around 200 plus agents are using it across 9 stations we operate. The next launch will be in the Middle-East market," said Tennakoon.

According to him, Sri Lanka received 302,000 tourists from India in 2023. "The figure is quite impressive when compared with 2022, and I believe this year we will surpass the 2018 figure (from India) which was 450,000," said an optimistic Tennakoon. ♦

[prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in](mailto:prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in)

# Israel Tourism upbeat about OTM participation

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Israel Ministry of Tourism is upbeat about its participation in OTM. During the event, Israel Tourism will be accompanied by 5 DMCs to engage with industry leaders, stakeholders, and delegates from around the globe.

Amruta Bangera - Director of Marketing, India, said, "Participation in OTM is significant for Israel for several reasons.

It provides us with a platform to showcase the diverse and rich cultural experiences, historical sites, and natural beauty that our destination has to offer. In light of the ongoing challenges, our primary goals at OTM are to strengthen existing partnerships, forge new collaborations, and increase awareness about Israel as a tourist destination. We aim to highlight any new attractions, developments, and unique experiences that would appeal to Indian travelers. Additionally, we seek to understand the evolving trends and preferences in the Indian travel market to tailor our strategies accordingly". ♦



Amruta Bangera



# TAIWAN



**Taiwan  
Dil Se**

For more information, please contact:

**TAIWAN TOURISM INFORMATION CENTER IN MUMBAI**

Add: Suite No. GRA 102 / 7 Raheja Platinum, WeWork, Marol,  
Andheri East, Mumbai, Maharashtra - 400059

E: [info@blinkbrandsolutions.com](mailto:info@blinkbrandsolutions.com) | P: +91 98350 69443 | W: [taiwan.net.tw](http://taiwan.net.tw)



## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF &amp; CEO

Sheldon Santwan

## EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Prasenjit Chakraborty

prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in

+91 9819263364

## EDITORIAL TEAM

MUMBAI

NEWS EDITOR: Disha Shah Ghosh

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in

+91 9619453170

SR.REPORTER: Asmita Mukherjee

asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in

+91 98342 55360

## CONTRIBUTORS

Hugh &amp; Colleen Gantzer, Anurag Yadav,

Hector D'souza, Nimit Chaudhary &amp;

Amala Dantas

## MARKETING TEAM

MUMBAI

HEAD - SALES &amp; MARKETING

Ajay Wadode

+91 8087127814

ajay.wadode@saffronsynergies.in

## GOA

HEAD - GOA

Harshad R. Bhonsle

+91 8999047490

harshadrhonsle@gmail.com

## COORDINATION, SUBSCRIPTION &amp; DATABASE

Gauri Sawant: +91 8369080796

gauri.sawant@saffronsynergies.in

\*Responsible for selection of news under the PRB Act



Saffron Synergies

Sterling House, 5/7 Sorabji Santuk Lane,  
Opp. Dr. Cawasji Hormasji Street, Dhobi Talao, Marine Lines (E),  
Mumbai 400 002  
Tel: 91-22-6101 1700 / 701 Fax: 91-22-6712 1854

# LET'S BUILD A 'VIBRANT' INDIA

Recently, I read a report on how repeat international visitors to Goa are upset about overcrowding in the state, and the deplorable hygiene situation on its beaches have become an eyesore for visitors. This isn't the story of Goa alone; most popular tourist destinations in India are saturated, and therefore are facing hygiene and crowd management crises.

While destinations are making strides in digital promotions, what is required is large scale investment to develop tourist amenities and attractions in the state, and this requires public private partnerships at varied levels. One can take a leaf out of Gujarat. At its recently-concluded Vibrant Gujarat Summit, it signed 10 MoUs to the tune of INR 770 crore for tourism development. These funds will be utilised towards developing a submarine tourism facility in Dwarka, a four-star resort, and an entertainment zone and culture theme park.

At times like these when there is ample world-class infrastructure available across established destinations, what states in India require is to offer attractions and facilities to make our destinations more tourist-worthy. And this isn't restricted just to create extraordinary experiences, but also bring in international sanitation and crowd management techniques to the fore.

It's time we diversity tourist traffic and bring in some stringent hygiene practises to create standardisation of facilities. It is important to admit here that the responsibility doesn't lie with the municipal corporation alone. It is an entirely state responsibility and there needs to be a proactive approach from the authorities to seek active participation of private players to maintain and manage our tourist sites, and create a conducive environment for welcoming a steady flow of domestic and international tourists alike. A case in point here is the Interim Budget where Nirmala Sitharaman has laid emphasis on comprehensive development of tourist infrastructure at the state-level through interest-free loans, and creating a framework to assess destinations on their facilities and services being offered. This is a step towards creating and showing to the world the best that India has to offer.



Disha Shah Ghosh  
News Editor  
disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in

## FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL TravelBizMonitor EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



**Paramjit Bawa**  
Founder & CEO  
Auxilia Networks



**Carl Dantas**  
Chairman Emeritus  
ETAA



**Rakshit Desai**  
CEO  
TPConnects



**Rajiv Duggal**  
Director  
Travel Specialists LLP



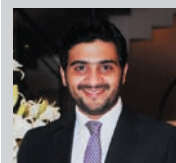
**Manoj Gursahani**  
President  
Visit USA Committee



**T C Guruprasad**  
Managing Director &  
Board Member, EbixCash



**Zubin Karkaria**  
CEO  
VFS Global Group



**Dev Karvat**  
CEO  
Karvat Group



**Jehangir Katgara**  
CMD  
Trail Blazer Tours India Pvt Ltd



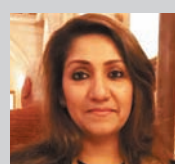
**Kapil Kaul**  
CEO - India & Middle East,  
CAPA



**Mark Mendes**  
Industry Consultant



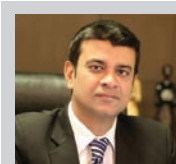
**Iqbal Mulla**  
Chairman, Treasure Tourism  
Corporation Ltd



**Sheetal Munshaw**  
Director  
Atout France, India



**E M Najeeb**  
Chairman  
ATE Group of Companies



**Ankush Nijhawan**  
MD, Nijhawan Group &  
Co-Founder, TBO Group



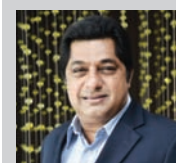
**Ajay Prakash**  
Chief Executive, Nomad  
Travels & President - IIPT India



**Sriram Rajmohan**  
CEO & MD  
Club7 Holidays Ltd.



**Naresh Rawal**  
Vice President - Sales & Marketing,  
Resorts World Cruises



**Dhananjay Saliankar**  
Head - Sales & Marketing,  
Fortune Hotels



**Arjun Sharma**  
Chairman, Le Passage to India  
& MD Select Group



**Vasudha Sondhi**  
Managing Director  
OMPL Group



**Sheema Vohra**  
Managing Director  
Sartha Global Marketing



**Kiran Yadav**  
VP  
IIPT India





# HANDOVER AYODHYA TO INDORE

*If tourism is one of the visible spin-offs, let proven experts handle the town's civic maintenance.*

Some local municipalities do work hard on sanitation but the usual narrative is that the littering habit is inherent in the common people. However, there is no reason to be smug and not step up to hold our own bull by its horns. It is time to pick and select one example and work on it.

It's easy to blame the teeming public for littering. Despite almost a decade of *Swachh Bharat* initiatives, what meets the eye leaves much to be desired. Special occasions and VIP visits do make a difference to the worst kept tourist destinations but post that brief interval, it is business as usual.

The recent consecration of the Ayodhya temple has catapulted the town as a potential city that will define the expertise of modern India to salvage infrastructure, civic systems and tourism management. It will serve as a beacon for similar civic development in Tier 2 and even tier 3 destinations. There has been a colossal change in Ayodhya's infrastructure and facilities recently but the development is wide open.

The nation and a significant part of the world is now quite aware of it and a stream of international media and visitors will soon be making a beeline. This can be a good test case how spiritual tourism can be brought centre stage.

It can also become a showpiece of how Indian authorities and tourism departments can up their act, especially if it's beyond the pale of the glitzy crowds that sashayed past on their 100 private jets on the 22nd last month in that dusty old town of Uttar Pradesh. Herein is the significance of the heading of this column. The same common people and the same official set up of the same kind if people can make a difference.

The municipal corporation of Indore in Madhya Pradesh has surprised the country by being adjudged India's cleanest city for almost seven years in a row.

The heading might sound provocative but it's a call to put an end to passing the blame of poor sanitation, maintenance and even street discipline to the people, especially those from the poorer

sections of society. Indore did it. Why can't every other city?

For years tourism conclaves and associations mouthed the importance of spiritual or religious tourism as a big revenue generator. Last month Ayodhya emphasised it with a bang.

The evidence of its potential is now spilling all over the place. Estimates deduce an Rs 20,000 crore revenue from visitors in the first financial year itself. Last time I visited the temple town I had to contend with mosquitoes in the best accommodations I could find in a small street that was supposedly the main market centre. Today, the scene is quite the opposite.

There are many more destinations that could offer a similar tourism prospect. State governments are waking up to it. Witness the effort at Puri in Odisha to build better environs at Jagannath temple complex. However not much is heard about any consolidated attempt to upgrade the entire city's civic infrastructure beyond that.

Coming to Ayodhya, the state government plans to make it the cleanest city in the state. The first step in line with this objective was an additional 1,500 Safai Mitras (sanitation workers) on the streets to achieve cleanliness. Next in line is a 100% implementation of zero waste levels by June. That does sound laudable but needs to be monitored.

On the 23rd January I watched nervously when dedicated crowds thronged from 3 am on that cold wintry pre-dawn to enter the temple. Six hours later when it opened, the fancy equipment and systems didn't quite seem to be working. Thankfully quick reaction from authorities streamlined the scene in a few hours. The question is, why wasn't this anticipated?

The sage discussions on benefits of religious tourism often raised in seminars and interactions with tourism departments need to be implemented with an urgency that is immediate and nationwide.

The economics of that temple town and the entire district has undergone a tectonic shift with a financial windfall for almost every small business, hotelier, innkeeper, guide, taxi driver and dhaba owner. Many mega hotel chains are scurrying to look for properties to create a presence.

There is a need, more than ever, to keenly observe the Municipal Corporation of Ayodhya and compare it with Indore rather strictly. Any takers for spiritual tourism?

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.*



# Explore alternative revenue models beyond hotels & ticketing: TAFI President

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Western Region Chapter of the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) organised a meeting in Mumbai recently. The purpose of the meeting was to help its members embrace technology and also to explore alternate revenue models. The meeting also witnessed a presentation from Nuvama Wealth.

Ajay Prakash, President of TAFI, said that the travel business has changed enormously, and technology is a reality now. "We need to embrace technology and, at the same time, look for alternate revenue models beyond hotels and ticketing," exhorted Prakash. Describing Nuvama's presentation as an excellent proposition, he said, "I think there is

synergy here, and we need to work on this."

According to Prakash, the airlines have become very rigid in their approach now. "The relationship that existed earlier is a thing of the past," he pointed out. Prakash said it is imperative now to create products beyond just travel. "We need to create experiences and amplify lifestyles. We need to go beyond what we have been doing all these years," pointed out Prakash.

Speaking to TravelBiz Monitor on the sidelines of the event, Jay Kantawala, Chairman, Western India Chapter, TAFI, said that they want to add value to the business of their members. "We want to make a difference to our members; at the end of the day, we are all in business and have to flourish," pointed out Kantawala. He also said that their next



Ajay Prakash

meeting will focus on technology. Kantawala appealed to members to participate in every meeting and raise questions on important issues. "This will help both the association and the industry," he said. Around 80 members participated in the meeting. ♦

# Kenya's Safari Trails launches Super-Luxurious Uganda package in the Indian market

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

Buoyed by the launch of direct flights by Uganda Airlines from India, Kenya-based Safari Trails, a boutique DMC for East Africa has initiated promoting Uganda in the Indian market.

"There are hardly 14-15 gorilla families which are spread over in Rwanda, Uganda. These two countries are the only places in the world where one can see gorillas," said Rajay Thethy, CEO, Safari Trails, during his recent visit to India.

His main purpose of the visit was to introduce and market Uganda in the Indian market as he said, "Uganda as a destination is not known in this market." Safari Trails has segmented its business in three categories and each team handles MICE, Africa and Super Luxury. The company, in the Super Luxury category, handles destinations like Rwanda, Uganda, etc.

The company offers various packages, and among them is the Great Apes package, which allows participants to observe both gorillas and chimpanzees. "Chimpanzees are found in Queen Elizabeth National Park (Uganda). Besides chimpanzees, the park also has flamingos, tree climbing lines, salt pans, hence, making it a diverse product," pointed out Thethy. Murchison Falls is another stunning experience which is also included in this package.

In Kenya, the company offers safaris using



Rajay Thethy

Land Cruisers, while in Uganda, they offer safaris through treks and by boat on the Nile river.

For Safari Trails, India has emerged as the largest source market. "From our total business, the Indian market contributes 55%," revealed Thethy. The company is also witnessing a lot of demand for Kenya and Tanzania which also fall in the Super Luxury category. "Earlier, Indian travellers used to spend USD 5,000-10,000 for trips to Kenya and Tanzania. Now, the average spending by them has increased to USD 20,000-30,000," says Thethy.

A significant portion of their business is attributed to wildlife photographers. "Wildlife

photographers itself is a segment for us," he said.

Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Ahmedabad have traditionally served as the company's primary markets. However, they are currently focusing on Tier-II cities also, such as Nagpur, Raipur, Chandigarh, and Sambhaji Nagar (formerly Aurangabad). "I see substantial potential in these markets. With this in mind, we are organising roadshows later this year, specifically targeting Tier-II and III cities," revealed Thethy.

Clarifying the misconception about Kenya's weather, he explained that the climate there is pleasant, with the highest temperature ranging between 25-26 degrees Celsius. "Many people in India believe that Kenya is a tropical country with temperatures soaring to 42-43 degrees Celsius, but that's not the case. Kenya is a year-round destination, and its people are warm and always smiling," stated Thethy.

In terms of the demand from Indian travellers, he said that unlike the previous affinity towards luxurious rooms with chandeliers, they now seek more authentic African experiences. Thethy said, "They are looking for experiences and culture now."

He firmly believes that the combination of enhanced air connectivity, visa issuance within 24-48 hours, the availability of Indian food, and the warm hospitality extended by the people of Kenya will contribute to making 2024 a favourable year for the company. ♦

[prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in](mailto:prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in)



For news updates and more information log on to [www.travelbizmonitor.com](http://www.travelbizmonitor.com) daily

# Utah records 5% growth in Indian visitations during 2022

## Keen to work with trade on special itineraries

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

During a press briefing in Mumbai, the Utah Office of Tourism informed that 8,700 Indians visited the destination in 2022, recording a surge of

5% over pre-Covid year of 2019 as per data from Tourism Economics. During 2022, Indians spend USD 8.7 million during their trips.

Talking to the media, the Utah Office of Tourism representatives Rachel Bremer, Global Markets Director, and Zach Fyne, Global Markets Specialist said that this year they will be working with the Top 5 tour operators from India for designing special itineraries for Utah.

According to forecast, a 42.6% growth is anticipated in visits and a massive surge of 203.9% in spending by Indian visitors by 2027.

Terming India as a primary emerging market, Bremer said, "India is one of the most stable tourism markets despite global uncertainties." She said that the Utah Specialist Academy, has seen 250 completions of the programme, out of the 700 registrations, and the aim to narrow the gap this year.

Besides the Mighty 5 National Parks, Utah boasts of 28 scenic driving routes, glamping facilities, and Dark Sky Parks. Mansi Oza, Account Manager – India,

Utah Office of Tourism, said that they are keen to diversify their outreach in India, to create a perception among varied kind of travellers across India. ♦

[disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in](mailto:disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in)



### MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER: MEISEA Local recruitment in India (Fixed Term for 6 months)



**Purpose of the role:** To develop the marketing and promotions strategies for the hub, aligned to the global brand and trade strategy, and ensure management and implementation thereof.

#### KEY OUTPUTS

- Develop and implement local brand communications, marketing and trade strategies across all platforms
- Direct and oversee the creation of creative assets to support the marketing campaigns
- Develop and manage budgets for the marketing and promotions budget
- Ensure that the communications strategy is implemented and continuously reviewed for improvements
- Develop communication and support matrix to grow reach/sales and maximize market penetration
- Monitor editorial plan for all relevant touchpoints
- Hands on knowledge of PR/media is a must
- Professional writing skills are a must
- Developing and submitting clear briefs to all agencies with clear deliverables
- Agency management along with managing performance matrix per agency
- Establish and grow relationships with online travel aggregators, media, trade, and relevant stakeholders
- Deliver routine reports as per requests for the hub
- Develop and manage a budget to deliver the annual business plan for marketing and communications

#### QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

- Bachelor's Degree in Marketing/ PR/Communications or equivalent - Honors and Masters are added advantage
- Minimum 5 years working experience in Public Relations, marketing, or sales with a minimum of 2 years at a managerial level
- Travel and Tourism experience would be beneficial
- Budget & financial management experience
- Indian Citizens Only

#### KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS REQUIRED

- In-depth knowledge of the Indian travel and tourism landscape
- Strong written and oral skills for communications
- Ability to build and maintain relationships

Visit us <https://www.southafrica.net/gl/en/corporate/page/vacancies> for a more detailed job description

Detailed CV to be sent to: [tourismexecution@southafrica.net](mailto:tourismexecution@southafrica.net)

Closing date: 19 February 2024

Visit: [www.southafrica.net](http://www.southafrica.net)

Should you have not heard from us Four weeks after the closing date, kindly consider your application unsuccessful.

**No late applications will be accepted.** Only India based citizens may apply  
South African Tourism does not offer Work Permit sponsorship

# Frankfurt Tourism targets leisure, family & group travel in India

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

During a recent visit to Mumbai, Leona Flach, Manager of Tourism and Marketing at Frankfurt Tourism Board, highlighted India's growing significance as a key market for their initiatives. Flach acknowledged the increasing number of Indian tourists visiting Germany, specifically Frankfurt, attributing it to the city's central location in Germany and Europe "Because Frankfurt is located in the middle of Germany and Europe and there exists a very good flight connections. Hence, reaching Frankfurt from all across the globe (including India) is easy. There is a big traffic from India to Frankfurt and vice versa," she said.

While Frankfurt is traditionally known for conferences, Flach expressed a shift in focus towards attracting tourists in the leisure, family, and group travel segments. The goal

is to dispel the perception that Frankfurt is solely a business destination and showcase its diverse attractions.

"Frankfurt boasts an impressive array of distinguished museums dedicated to art, science, and history. The city is charming to explore on foot, as many of these museums and attractions are conveniently located within a short walking distance from the downtown core," Flach added. The New Old Town is another attraction of Frankfurt, which was reconstructed from 2012 – 2018 as part of a major urban development project. "This Old Town is nicely reconstructed which was bombed during the second world war. It's a historical city," said Flach.

The city is set to host five Euro-Cup 2024 matches in June-July, promising a significant event for the soccer fans around the world. In order to engage with the travel trade, Frankfurt

Tourism plans to organise a Sales Mission in Mumbai in April, along with a seminar in August or September. Key cities such as Mumbai, Pune, Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai remain their target markets. The first two quarters of 2023 had witnessed a 120% increase in the number of visitors that flocked the city of Frankfurt from India.

Acknowledging visa-related challenges, Flach expressed optimism, mentioning ongoing communication with the German National Tourist Board (GNTB) to address these issues. She hopes for positive developments in resolving visa concerns to enhance the overall travel experience for Indian visitors to Frankfurt. ♦

[prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in](mailto:prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in)



# Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau terms India as a "high-priority" market

## Keen to tap MICE segment & Tier-II & III cities in the coming years

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

The Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau is keen to foray into the Tier-II and III cities of India next year, after undertaking a series of sales activities via direct engagement and B2B roadshows and exhibitions in the key gateways in 2024.

Talking to **TravelBiz Monitor** in Mumbai, during his second visit to India, Joe Docal, Director of Travel Industry Sales – Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, said, "After seeing the potential that India has for the US and Greater Miami Convention & Visitors Bureau, I want to enhance our focus in the Indian market than what was in the past." Docal is in India to participate in the Brand USA Sales Mission in Goa.

"I am meeting the travel trade in India for sales call presentations. In the absence of direct air connectivity to Miami Airport, I am currently getting my feet wet in the market, before foraying into Tier-II and III cities in India in 2025," he said.

He spoke about the challenge in quantifying visitor numbers from India, but termed the country as ranking "high-priority" market.

Docal informed that exploratory talks are underway with carriers in India to seek direct

air access to Miami International Airport. "We are keen to bring in more MICE groups from India, especially incentives movement since we have the facilities to service and have the necessary hotel infrastructure in place. Of course, the larger chunk of visitors from India is leisure travellers to the USA."

Shedding light on the popularity of Miami



and the Miami Beach, he said soap operas and sitcoms have done a great job in creating awareness about the destination. In the past, the city and its beach were used as attractive locations for film shoots. Going forward, the plan is to tap that segment even in the Indian market with financial incentives. ♦

[disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in](mailto:disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in)

# Swosti Group launches Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, Sipasurubuli, Puri

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Swosti Group has introduced Swosti Premium Beach Resorts, Sipasurubuli, positioning it as a top-tier venue for MICE events and weddings in Puri. The establishment is well-equipped to accommodate large conferences and extravagant wedding ceremonies, boasting expansive landscaped lawns.

Swosti Premium Beach Resorts extends its guests Luxury Rooms (Sea View Rooms & Premium Rooms) and presidential suites (Oasis Suite, Intimate Escape Suite, Imperial Suite

& The Royal Ambassador Suite) with a no obstruction view of the sea.

One of the standout features of Swosti Premium Beach Resort is its versatility as a wedding and event destination. The resort boasts four wedding venues (namely Boita Voyage at Ground Floor, Mahari Courtyard at 3rd floor and Panaroma, Portrait at 1st floor) with open-air landscaped lawns at different heights, ensuring that your special day is set against a backdrop of unparalleled natural beauty. The mega banquet halls, complete with pre-function areas, can host up to 750 people. ♦





# Five Travel Trends to Watch Out for in 2024

By Naveen Bothra

Head - Airlines Touchpoint Products & User Experience, Amadeus India

The travel industry is always changing, adapting to the latest technological advancements, societal shifts, and emerging trends that promise to reshape the way we traverse the globe. As 2023 comes to an end, 2024 is all set to bring some big changes. These trends are like puzzle pieces forming a picture of a travel world full of new ideas and fun experiences. As we look forward to a new year, we can expect some exciting developments that will redefine the way we explore the world.

## 1. Music Tourism: A Blend of Harmony, Travel, and Entertainment

After a prolonged period of pandemic-induced isolation, when bands and music artists were unable to perform for months, there is now a growing desire for connection and shared experiences which is fueling the rise of music tourism. Travelers are increasingly journeying to destinations to partake in music events, be it concerts or festivals. Music tourism boosts the local economy, culture, and tourism industry, as well as creates unforgettable memories for travelers. The Amadeus Travel Trends 2024 Report revealed that music tourism significantly influences travel searches and bookings, especially when popular artists announce their tour dates. For instance, tour dates by renowned artists like Taylor Swift has already had a substantial impact on travel patterns. In the summer of 2023, Coachella festival in California brought about 500K attendees and contributed approximately \$1.5 billion to local economy.

## 2. Influencers: The New Travel Ambassadors

Social media influencers have evolved into influential travel ambassadors who wield considerable sway over travelers' decisions. With large and devoted followings, these influencers not only inspire and inform travelers, but also facilitate direct bookings by offering their followers exclusive deals, discounts, or access to their travel platforms. Travel influencers are organizing and hosting their own group trips, leveraging technology-enabled e-commerce platforms



to streamline booking links directly on their social media profiles and process payments. These influencers are not just showcasing picturesque destinations; they are also guiding travelers through the complex realm of travel technology. From recommending the best navigation apps to highlighting the benefits of contactless payment solutions, influencers play a crucial role in demystifying and simplifying the use of technology for their audience.

## 3. Electric Skyways: A Leap Towards Sustainable Air Travel

As urban areas grapple with congestion and environmental concerns, electric vertical take-off and landing (eVTOL) aircrafts are emerging as a promising sustainable solution for eco-conscious travelers. Companies like Volocopter are pioneering electric air taxi networks, aiming to introduce these innovations for major global events and expand services across Asia, while providing low-emission travel options within cities, to satellite airports, and across countries and islands. The transition to electric aviation has the potential to emerge as a powerful solution for mitigating the environmental footprint of air travel in the future, complementing advancements like sustainable aviation fuel (SAF).

## 4. Intelligent Concierge: Personalized Travel Planning at Your Fingertips

The integration of Generative AI (Gen AI) into travel planning is revolutionizing personalized assistance for travelers. GenAI is already

adding tremendous value to the online travel planning and booking experience for consumers, as search and advice become hyper-personalized and more intuitive. Chatbots and AI-powered virtual assistants now cater to customer needs, offering tailored recommendations and facilitating instant bookings. This intelligent technology not only enhances travel planning but also alleviates the burden on human resources, allowing for more personalized and specialized customer support. Expedia has already launched ChatGPT plug-in to serve as a virtual travel assistant. It attentively listens to customer requirements and promptly provides hotel and itinerary suggestions along with booking links.

## 5. Business Luxe-Lite: Accessible Premium Travel Experiences

An emerging trend in air travel focuses on offering more affordable yet luxurious 'unbundled' business class fares. Business class passengers today don't necessarily adhere to the traditional suit-and-tie attire. Whether they are a Gen Z entrepreneur, a Gen Y digital nomad, or a Boomer vice-president, the demographic makeup of business class has diversified. Social media has played a significant role in fostering a common desire for lifestyle optimization across age groups, particularly among those under 50. The aspiration for more luxurious experiences is on the rise, and individuals are keen on achieving them, be it through points, credit, or savings.

## Conclusion

As we navigate the ever-changing landscape of travel, these anticipated trends for 2024 are set to transform and enhance the travel experience for all. With travelers eagerly anticipate the unfolding of these trends in the year ahead, the evolving world of travel is poised to deliver innovative, immersive, and tailored experiences, ensuring that the allure of exploration continues to thrive in this ever-evolving journey of discovery. ♦

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

# IATA's Air Passenger Market Analysis

## 2023 was marked by strong industry-wide recovery

The global air passenger market recorded 25.3% YoY growth in December with global passenger load factor at 82.3%, a little less than 2019 levels, as per the International Air Transport Association (IATA). **TravelBiz Monitor** presents highlights of the analysis.

### Air passenger market in detail - 2023

	World share <sup>1</sup>	Year-on-year %			Year-on-year % vs 2019			PLF (level)
		RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt)	RPK	ASK	PLF (%-pt)	
<b>TOTAL MARKET</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>36.9%</b>	<b>31.0%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>-5.9%</b>	<b>-5.6%</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>	<b>82.3%</b>
Africa	2.1%	36.4%	35.5%	0.5%	-6.6%	-7.9%	1.0%	72.8%
Asia Pacific	31.7%	96.3%	75.1%	8.7%	-14.0%	-12.3%	-1.6%	80.3%
Europe	27.1%	20.2%	15.8%	3.1%	-4.8%	-3.9%	-0.8%	84.4%
Latin America	5.5%	17.0%	14.5%	1.8%	0.4%	-0.4%	0.7%	83.2%
Middle East	9.4%	32.3%	24.6%	4.7%	-1.9%	-6.6%	3.8%	80.0%
North America	24.2%	15.3%	14.0%	0.9%	2.4%	2.8%	-0.4%	84.4%

<sup>1</sup>% of industry RPKs in 2023

### 2023 was marked by strong industry-wide recovery

Strong demand for air travel continued to propel the recovery of passenger markets in 2023. The total industry achieved a remarkable 36.9% year-on-year (YoY) growth, as traffic, measured in revenue passenger-kilometer (RPKs), reached 94.1% of 2019 levels, a significant increase from 2022 when it stood at 68.7%. The supply of seats slightly exceeded the demand for travel compared to 2019 (pre-pandemic), resulting in an industry-wide load factor of 82.3%, which was only 0.3 ppt lower than the load factor in 2019.

Domestic traffic set new highs in 2023, most of the monitored markets surpassed the pre-pandemic levels by mid-2023. The definitive reopening of China in January 2023 shaped the industry's recovery profile as total domestic RPKs remained largely above pre-pandemic levels for most of the year reflecting the buoyant activity this major market has observed (Error! Reference source not found.). In 2023, total domestic RPKs grew 30.4% YoY and stood 3.9% over 2019 levels.

On the other hand, international traffic remained lower than its levels of 2019 while maintaining a stable yet robust growth pace. Industry-wide

international RPKs increased 41.6% YoY and totaled 88.6% of pre-Covid levels. Although airlines across the globe saw various outcomes, all regions contributed to those developments by achieving resilient growth in international passenger traffic. Asia Pacific airlines more than doubled their RPKs, growing 126.1% compared to 2022, overcoming a large part of the setback caused by past strict travel restrictions, however, they remained 27.3% under pre-pandemic levels. On the other hand, North American carriers have surpassed their 2019 record by 1.4%, leading the regions in terms of international recovery.

While the airline industry had recovered the majority of its traffic 2019 levels as of December 2023, network restoration remained relatively uneven as connectivity and passenger demand to and from Asia Pacific has not yet reached its pre-pandemic status.

#### Industry-wide growth was resilient in December...

Air passenger traffic, measured in RPKs, increased 25.3% YoY in December. Compared to the same month in 2019, traffic levels in 2023 were 2.5% lower. In seasonally adjusted terms, RPKs grew 1.3% month-on-month (MoM) aligning with the pace the industry saw over the past year, thus demonstrating the ongoing positive trend (**Chart 2**).

Industry seat capacity, measured in ASKs, grew by 24.1% compared to December 2022 and reached 97.5% of pre-pandemic levels. Passenger load factors (PLF) remained in the vicinity of 2019 levels (**Chart 3**). Industry-wide seat occupation was 0.8 ppt superior to the previous year and in line with the December 2019 number.

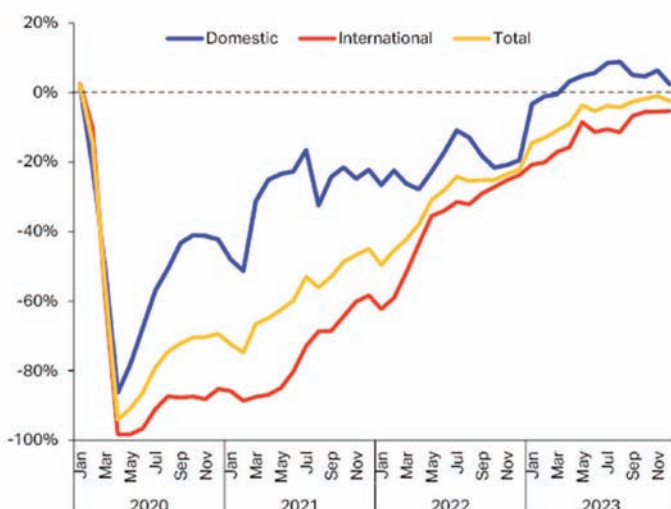
The same observation applied to most regions, showing the alignment between demand for air travel and airline seat capacity globally. Asia Pacific and North American carriers saw slightly lower load factors compared to the same month in 2019, a result driven by seat supply outpacing passenger numbers in China and US domestic markets respectively. Europe led among the regions, exceeding December 2019 PLF by 2.1ppt as RPKs surpassed the pre-pandemic threshold by 2.0%, for the first time since 2020 (**Chart 3**)

#### ...while total domestic traffic expansion continued globally and most markets

Total domestic RPKs grew 27.0% YoY while maintaining a strong positive course in seasonally adjusted terms. RPKs were 2.3% above pre-pandemic levels, a lower result compared to the level observed in November 2023 that reflects the latest traffic numbers in US (**Chart 4**).

US domestic traffic increased 9.6% YoY and 0.4% over December 2019 RPKs. This is a large variation in perspective to the last months,

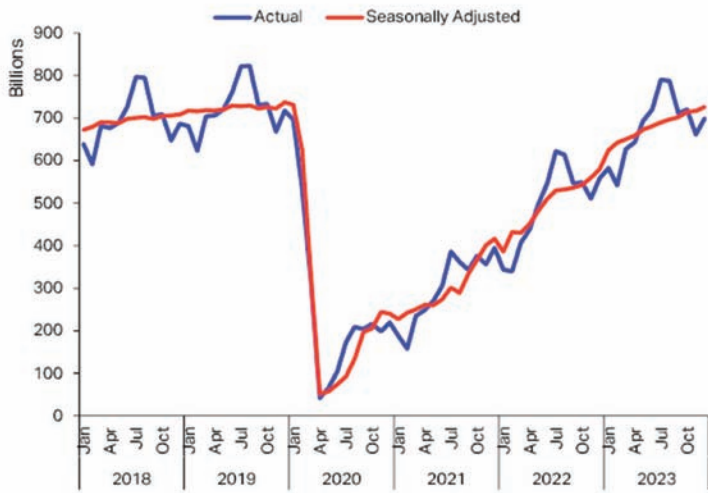
**Chart 1 – Global domestic and international RPKs, YoY% change vs.2019**



Sources: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

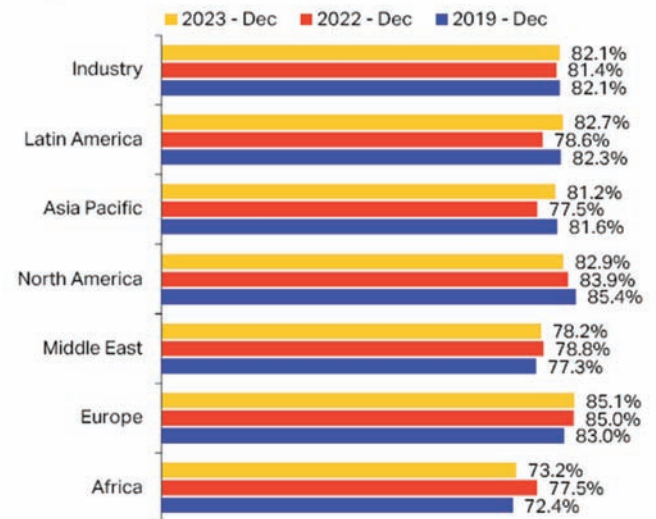


**Chart 2 – Global air passengers, RPKs, billions per month**



Sources: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

**Chart 3 – Passenger load factors, by airline region of registration % share of ASKs**



Sources: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

especially in comparison to November 2023 when growth over the latest pre-pandemic year had reached 9.2%. In December 2019, domestic RPKs had increased by 9.9% YoY thus standing out from the previous observations of the pre-Covid years. Consequently, this market has not seen any sign of slowdown (Chart 4).

PR China domestic traffic increased more than twofold, surging 147.1% YoY and exceeding 2019 numbers by 8.4%. Passenger load factor was 13.4ppt higher than the past year, however, 3.3ppt lower than in 2019, still reflecting the large improvements this market has seen from the last Covid year and traffic expansion in comparison to 2019 (Chart 4).

In India domestic traffic also continued to expand, increasing 8.2% over the year and surpassing pre-pandemic levels by 6.0%. Somewhat mirroring the economic situation and slowing domestic consumption, domestic RPKs contraction is confirmed in Japan. In seasonally adjusted terms, passenger numbers decreased on average 1.3% per month. Nevertheless, RPKs were 0.9% superior to December 2022 and 7.9% lower than pre-pandemic.

Australia domestic RPKs increased 6.6% over the year and sat 7.6% under pre-Covid levels. Brazil saw 5.9% YoY growth in domestic RPKs. Traffic continued to trend around pre-pandemic levels (Chart 4).

**International passenger traffic recovery remained stable in December**

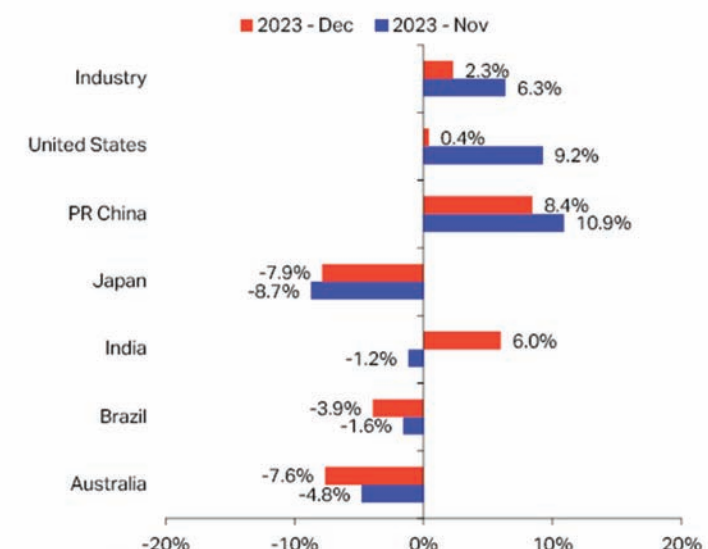
International traffic growth saw only modest changes from the

previous month, RPKs saw 24.2% yearly growth while sitting 5.3% under pre-Covid numbers. Regions also experienced minor developments in terms of growth while maintaining an upward trajectory in seasonally adjusted terms, however, sustaining their growth momentum in terms of growth over 2019 levels. North American carriers continued to lead, increasing their performance by 5.5% over 2019 levels. Europe saw monthly recovery in international traffic for the first time, surpassing December 2019 RPKs by 0.8%. International RPKs performed by Latin American carriers still trend above pre-Covid levels as December levels were 1.6% higher than the same month in 2019 (Chart 5). These three regions continued to see solid growth compared to the same month in 2022. Europe international RPKs grew 13.6% YoY while North American and Latin American carriers saw 13.5% and 26.5% YoY growth.

Airlines in Africa experienced the lowest increase in international RPKs among the regions, nevertheless close to double-digit growth. RPKs grew 9.5% YoY and reached 93.4% of pre-Covid levels. Middle Eastern carriers' international traffic fared near its pre-pandemic levels, totaling 96.9% of December 2019 RPKs.

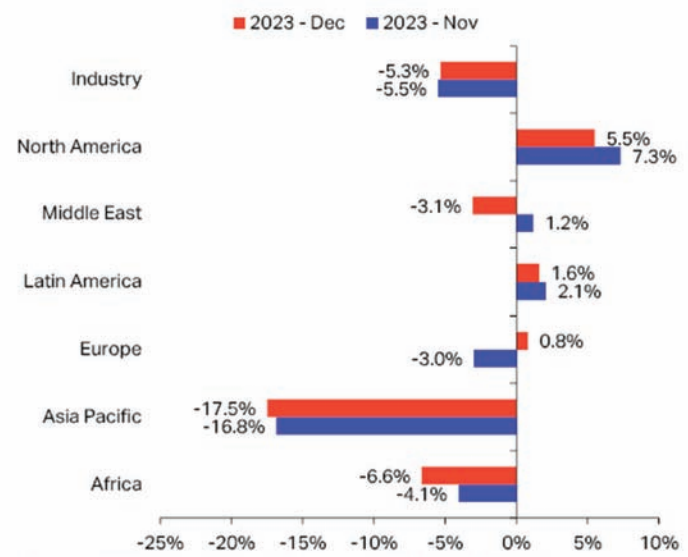
Following a swift recovery in early 2023 and the end of 2022, Asia Pacific's international passenger numbers have been trending roughly sideways since July 2023 in terms of recovery to 2019 levels. Nonetheless, the region saw the highest yearly growth again in December, with RPKs increasing 56.9% YoY. ♦

**Chart 4 – Domestic RPK growth by market, YoY% change vs. 2019**



Sources: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

**Chart 5 – International RPK growth by airline region of registration, YoY% change versus 2019**



Sources: IATA Sustainability and Economics, IATA Monthly Statistics

# How Amusement Parks Are Turbocharging Local Tourism and Economy

By Arun. K. Chittilappilly, Managing Director, Wonderla Holidays

The phrase “amusement parks” conjures up images of our own childhood memories in our mind. For more than a century, amusement parks have been a mainstay of entertainment, thousands of people visit these parks every year, which provide a variety of attractions like water slides and roller coasters. Only in the last 20 years, with the advent of globalization and an increase in consumer disposable income, has the idea of theme parks and amusement parks experienced a significant upsurge in popularity in India.

The ever-changing social and economic landscape, along with demographics, are significant factors influencing demand for amusement parks. They have an impact on consumer behavior, therefore to guarantee

living is also made possible by the type of work, as well as the many training programs linked to services. When a well-known amusement park is open, demand for local stores, restaurants, lodging, and transportation all increases. Suppliers who supply the park with goods and services are also included in the economic stimulation, resulting in a network of interconnected business connections that may promote sustainable growth.

India’s magical theme parks not only entertain visitors, but also are essential to the vibrant role of our changing economy and culture. Imagine an environment where happiness is the primary focus, where there is a bustle of activity, laughter from families, and delight from children. This magical atmosphere isn’t only the result of thrilling rides and attractions—rather, it’s engrained in the various consumer behaviours and demographics that define our global nation.

Amidst this fanciful realm, businesses find themselves at a crossroads where it becomes imperative to properly identify their target audience. The objective is to create an experience that transforms a satisfied client into a loyal follower and, eventually, an enthusiastic ambassador for the business, rather than just providing a brief distraction.

## Here are some of the key impacts:

### Job Creation:

Amusement parks create employment opportunities,

ranging from entry-level positions to skilled jobs in areas such as maintenance, operations, and management. Furthermore, Amusement parks also have a knock-on effect on the local economy. An increase in parks contributes to the neighbourhood’s infrastructure development.

**Learning Experiences:** Often incorporate educational elements into their attractions, providing visitors with opportunities to learn about science, history, and other subjects in an interactive and engaging manner.

**Tourist Spending:** Visitors to



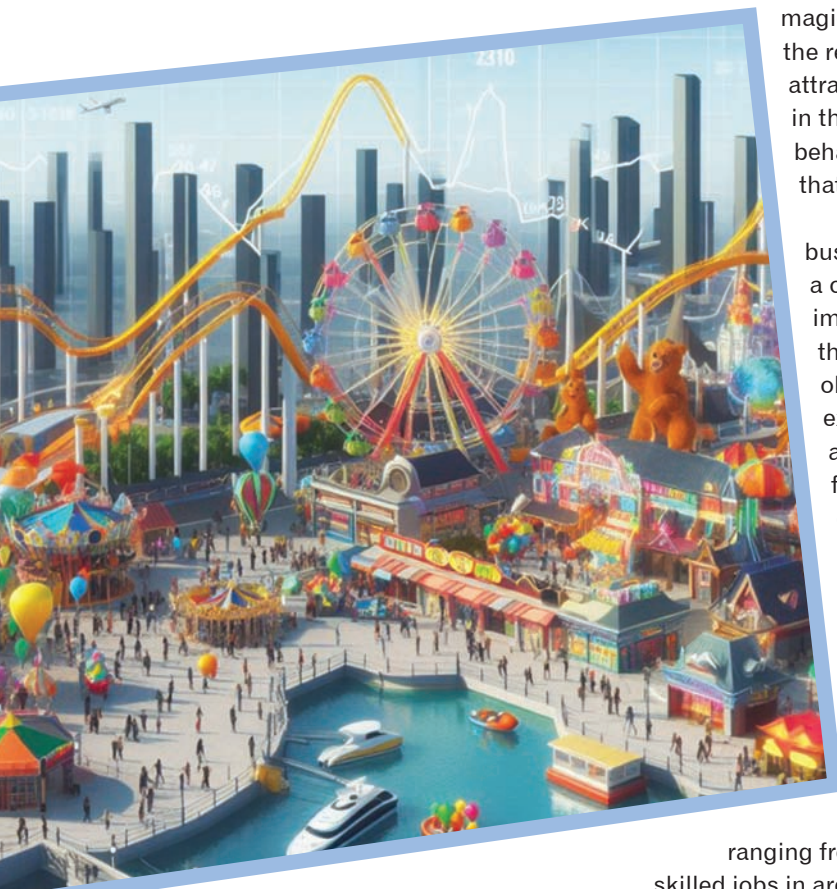
amusement parks contribute to the local economy by spending money on tickets, food, merchandise, and other services. This injection of tourism dollars can have a positive multiplier effect on the community.

**Improved Infrastructure:** The presence of a popular amusement park may stimulate improvements in local infrastructure, including roads, transportation systems, and utilities, to accommodate the increased influx of visitors.

**Diverse Visitor Base:** Amusement parks attract a diverse audience, bringing people from different regions and even countries. This cultural exchange can enrich the local community and promote understanding between different cultures.

In conclusion, amusement parks are major drivers of the local economy and greatly enhance the well-being of the communities they serve. It is impossible to overstate their contribution to local economic stimulation, employment creation, and tourism promotion. Despite certain operational difficulties, amusement parks continue to have a very beneficial overall economic influence on local and regional communities. These attractions’ contribution to economic growth will probably continue to be an engaging story in the years to come as they develop and grow. They bring in money, support neighbourhood companies, create jobs, pay taxes, draw tourists, and enhance the standard of living. Any nation or area that wishes to increase tourism might benefit greatly from having amusement parks. ♦

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



customer pleasure, any business must choose the appropriate group of target customers in order to convert a happy customer into a devoted one and eventually into a product or service. According to a report by **FICCI – KPMG**, the amusement park industry in India is growing rapidly. In 2019, the industry generated over Rs. 5,000 crore (US\$625 million) in revenue and employed over 250,000 people. A higher standard of



# CAN'T WAIT TO WINTER



visitabudhabi.ae



experience  
abu dhabi

## 4 DAYS ABU DHABI PACKAGES

STARTING US \$355

### Inclusions:

- 03 Nights stay in Abu Dhabi City Hotel
- Daily Breakfast
- Return Abu Dhabi International Airport Transfers on Private
- Abu Dhabi City Tour with Grand Mosque - Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque
- Visit on SIC
- Yas Island Any 2 Parks Tickets only

(Select from SeaWorld Abu Dhabi or Ferrari World Yas Island, Abu Dhabi or

Warner Bros. World™ Abu Dhabi or Yas Water World Yas Island, Abu Dhabi)

\*T&C Apply



**Travstarz Global Group**

A CTRIP® Invested Company

DMC II CONSOLIDATORS II VISAS II REPRESENTATIONS

+91-11-44790402 | [bookings@travstarz.com](mailto:bookings@travstarz.com)

[www.travstarz.com](http://www.travstarz.com)

416/2, 2nd Floor, Ghitorni, MG Road,  
Opp. Metro Pillar No. 127,  
New Delhi - 110030

Official Promotion Partner DCT Abu Dhabi

Your Trusted Exclusively B2B Company Since 2009

Members Of:





# Interim Budget 2024, Hits & Misses



Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

The sixth Budget speech by Nirmala Sitharaman, an Interim one this time due to the ensuing General Election, and therefore the shortest one of 58 minutes in her tenure, saw the Finance Minister being upbeat about the brighter prospects of India's growth story.

For travel & tourism, she laid emphasis on developing iconic tourist centres, and branding and marketing them on a global scale. In order to reach this target, she announced long-term interest-free loans to states to finance such development, including in the islands of Lakshadweep.

Moreover, Sitharaman said that a framework will be created for rating of the tourist centres based on quality of facilities and services to be established.

All this when the government massively slashed its outlay for overseas promotion via the Incredible India campaign, and renewed focus on the Swadesh Darshan scheme and allotment to Alliance Air for UDAN flights. This clearly indicates that the government is keen on pushing its resources for development tourism in India.

## Budget Highlights

### Indian Railways

- Port connectivity corridors
- High traffic density corridors
- 40,000 normal rail bogies to be converted to Vande Bharat standards

### Tourism Sector

- States to be encouraged to take up comprehensive development of iconic tourist centres including their branding and marketing at global scale.
- Framework for rating of the tourist centres based on quality of facilities and services to be established.
- Long-term interest free loans to be provided to States for financing such development on matching basis.

### Aviation Sector

- Number of airports in the country doubled to 149.
- 517 new routes are carrying 1.3 crore passengers.
- Indian carriers have placed orders for over 1000 new aircraft.





## Industry Reactions

### Aashish Gupta, Consulting CEO, FAITH



It is hoped that the actual budget in July will take forward the statement of intent announced in the interim budget—such as international promotion, developing iconic destinations in partnership with states through an incentive-based system, further focus on domestic tourism and recognition of MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) tourism capabilities of India further to the G20 Summit in India, and also continuing focus on new airports and Vande Bharat trains and high traffic highways.

### Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI



We are happy that the FM spoke about Viksit Bharat and has encouraged other industries, but totally ignored the travel agent and tour operators who are the catalyst in developments, enhancement and promotion of tourism, be it domestic, inbound, inland as well as outbound tourism. We also acknowledge that the Government has placed MiCE, especially Business and Conference Tourism as a prime focus area, but the same is not possible without appropriate infrastructure, which shall take a few years to develop. Overall we feel that once again the Travel Trade has been ignored.

### PP Khanna, President, ADTOI



The Interim Budget is pro-domestic tourism. If a country takes care of domestic tourism in all respects it will automatically bring international tourism to its door-step as well. Spiritual tourism is going to surge. Plans to expand the existing airports and develop new ones will facilitate people to travel across the country seamless. Long term interest-rate loans will be provided to states for financing these development projects on matching basis. This is to address the emerging fervour for domestic tourism

### Ajay Singh, CMD SpiceJet and President, ASSOCHAM



It is an India first budget. A confident budget of a confident government that focuses on the objective of ensuring that India becomes a 5 trillion-dollar economy by 2025, and a developed nation by 2047. I commend the FM for her unwavering commitment to Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas. I commend especially the increase in infrastructure spending that will have a multiplier effect on our economy. I commend the evident railway corridors, and the 1 lakh crore fund for research and development and the start-up sector. The

emphasis on clean energy, technology and digital infrastructure will make India a world leader. This is India's moment and this budget is part of a continuous process of making policy that will provide massive opportunities for India and Indians.

### Nishant Pitti, CEO & Co-Founder, EaseMyTrip



The Budget prominently highlights a substantial emphasis on the tourism, aviation, and railways sectors. It's truly exciting to observe the government's keen attention to nurturing and expanding both domestic and spiritual tourism and highlighting Bharat's strength through global events like G20. The dedicated efforts towards developing aviation and rail infrastructure, especially through the commendable initiatives of UDAN and the PM Gati Shakti scheme, encouraging States to promote iconic tourists' centers by providing interest-free loans are noteworthy with a special focus on developing island tourism and fortifying port connectivity, including Lakshadweep. These measures are anticipated to spur economic growth, create employment, and create new opportunities, marking a progressive move towards positioning India as a global destination.

### Chirag Agrawal, Co-Founder, TravClan



Tourism cannot grow without investment. We welcome the government's initiatives on developing iconic tourist centers and investing in tourism and connectivity infrastructure. Measures such as long-term loans to states will foster long-term development and unlock India's tourism potential. We hope for more measures from the government that continue to build our air infrastructure and hospitality sector. This development will not just invite the world to explore our heritage but also ignite local economies and our pride!

### Sandeep Arora, Director, Brightsun Travel



The Budget puts a strong emphasis on domestic tourism, and we truly applaud this move. The commitment to providing interest-free loans to states for enhancing tourism within their borders is a positive step to boost domestic tourism in the country. There are many offbeat destinations within India that are unique and one of a kind, so government's pledge for the comprehensive development of tourist centers, with a focus on branding and global-scale marketing, is another welcome move. This will undoubtedly pave the way for transformative growth in the travel and tourism sector, enabling us to showcase the incredible diversity and richness of our nation to the world.

*disha.shah@safronsynergies.in*





# Ayodhya's Ram Mandir A New Vista for Religious Tourism

**W**hether referred to as Spiritual Tourism, Religious Tourism, or a Sacred Journey, this sector of tourism in India has gained significant momentum following the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya last month. While it may seem that this development will primarily boost domestic tourism, its impact is not limited to that; it is expected to influence the inbound tourism sector as well, albeit with varying magnitudes.

Jefferies (an investment bank) predicts that the South Asian country, home to the world's largest Hindu population, could witness a substantial increase in tourist numbers, ranging from 50 million to 100 million annually, following the inauguration of the new Ram Mandir in the northern city of Ayodhya. This projected influx to the temple is anticipated to surpass the yearly visitors to iconic landmarks such as the Taj Mahal in India (6.5 million), Vatican City in Rome (9 million), and Mecca in Saudi Arabia (20 million), as indicated in the report.

The investment bank also highlighted the strong spiritual, historical, and cultural significance of other religious sites in India, such as the Tirupati Temple in Andhra

**Religious tourism has surged in the country, particularly post-Covid. Experts anticipate that the inauguration of the Ram Temple will accelerate this growth, as an increasing number of travellers seek to include religious destinations in their holiday plans, writes Prasenjit Chakraborty.**

Pradesh, drawing 25 million visitors annually, and the Vaishno Devi Temple in Jammu and Kashmir, attracting 8 million visitors per year.

Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI, said that religious tourism, or the sacred journey of the soul, is one of the oldest and most profound forms of tourism in India. "The country, a kaleidoscope of cultures and faiths, beckons millions of pilgrims and seekers every year, who flock to its various holy

places, monuments, and festivals. They come to witness the divine splendour, to feel the spiritual energy, and to partake in the rituals and traditions that have been passed down for centuries," Mayal opined.

According to the latest statistics, religious tourism in India is set to reach new heights in 2024, especially after the grand opening of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, which is expected to attract millions of devotees every year. "The temple, a symbol of faith and resilience, stands on the banks of the Sarayu River, where Lord Ram is believed to have been born. Other sacred sites, such as the Kashi Vishwanath Corridor, the Mahakal Corridor, the Tirupati Temple, and the Vaishno Devi Temple, are also witnessing a surge in popularity and accessibility among tourists," she said. These places offer a glimpse of the diverse and vibrant expressions of Hinduism, from the ancient to the modern, from the serene to the ecstatic.

Religious tourism is not only a lucrative and employment-generating sector for the country, but also a catalyst for social harmony, cultural exchange, and national integration. As India emerges as a global pilgrimage hotspot, it also faces some challenges, such as ensuring the safety and security



of the tourists, preserving the cultural and environmental heritage of the religious sites, and enhancing the quality and diversity of tourism services and products. The infrastructure needs to gear up to handle the influx of tourists.

There is a huge untapped potential in the religious tourism segment. People are flocking in huge numbers to pilgrimage sites as more than 60% of tourism in India is associated with religious and spiritual tourism. "I believe that collaborative efforts between travel agencies, religious organizations, cultural bodies, and the stakeholders, including the government, the private sector, the civil society, and the tourists themselves, need to work together to make it a sustainable, inclusive, and rewarding experience for all," pointed out Mayal.

Unfortunately, the majority of religious and spiritual tourism activities revolve around the unorganised sector. This means, there are currently only a limited number of organised entities providing services for religious tourism in India. Traditionally, the industry has primarily focused on inbound and outbound sectors, neglecting domestic tourism for a long period. The realisation of domestic tourism's true potential emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the segment played a crucial role in sustaining the industry. Perhaps, the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya has opened a new vista for the religious tourism



**Jyoti Mayal, President, TAAI**



**Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO**

devotees visited the Ram Mandir. "The surge in spiritual tourism presents significant opportunities for local entrepreneurship. With its robust infrastructure, proactive leadership, and favourable environment, the future appears promising for the residents, the state, and the country," said Khanna.

Prior to the inauguration of the Ram Temple, various digital travel platforms experienced a significant surge in searches for Ayodhya, leading to the introduction of new offers. Cleartrip and Flipkart Travel, for instance, recorded an impressive 1,500% increase in Ayodhya-related searches across their platforms. This surge inspired them to introduce 'Darshan Destinations.'

"As a customer-centric company, Cleartrip

2023 to Calendar Year 2021). The focus is particularly on Ayodhya, in anticipation of the consecration ceremony of the Ram Mandir. Ayodhya is notably prominent, witnessing an extraordinary 585 per cent increase in searches among the top 10 pilgrimage and spiritual locations that are currently garnering heightened attention.

This data, extracted from on-platform engagements, underscores a discernible shift in travel preferences, signaling an increasing inclination towards spiritual journeys. In the comparative analysis of popular spiritual destinations from Calendar Year 2023 to Calendar Year 2021, the top 10 locations demonstrating substantial growth include Ujjain (359 percent), Badrinath (343 percent), Amarnath (329 percent), Kedarnath (322 percent), Mathura (223 percent), Dwarkadhish (193 percent), Shirdi (181 percent), Haridwar (117 percent), and Bodh Gaya (114 percent). "On-platform searches for Ayodhya from within India have witnessed a remarkable surge of 1806 percent since the official announcement of the temple's inauguration," said MakeMyTrip in press release.

What is interesting is, Ayodhya's charm reaches far beyond the confines of the nation, drawing significant international attention. MakeMyTrip reported (Search data till 12Jan, 2024) that Global searches for Ayodhya are on the rise, with the United States leading at 22.5%, closely trailed by the Gulf region at 22.2%. Canada (9.3%), Nepal (6.6%), and Australia (6.1%) are notable contributors as well, showcasing widespread global interest in gathering information about Ayodhya.

People in the industry said that the religious fervour is expected to lead to enduring business prospects, driven by the ongoing infrastructure development of pilgrimage centres. The surge in spiritual tourism is remarkable, with numerous pilgrimage centres witnessing substantial foot falls from pilgrim tourists. Industry insiders are optimistic that Ayodhya will also emerge as a major attraction for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) residing abroad, eventually finding its place in the travel itineraries of international visitors. ♦

*prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in*



**PP Khanna, President, ADTOI**



**Ayyappan Rajagopal, CEO, Cleartrip**

sector. Of course, there are challenges on different fronts in terms of manning crowd, infrastructure etc.

Rajiv Mehra, President, IATO, pointed out, "Most of the religious and spiritual tourism activities are centred around the unorganised sector, barring a few exceptions of organised travel forces. There are new regulations being announced and hotel developments are in the pipeline. But it will take some time to stabilise because a traveller wouldn't want to stand in long queues for hours for seeking the diety's darshan. Immediate enforcement of measures is crucial to regulate steady movement of pilgrims, and in due course, it will be smoothly regulated."

According to PP Khanna, President, ADTOI, in just six days, nearly 1.3 million

caters to the evolving needs of our user base. We understand that spiritual journeys are central to our culture, embodying centuries-old traditions. With more people seeking out these meaningful travels, we wished to make these experiences more accessible and affordable. We are excited to kick off the offering with the upcoming opening of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. Our offering, specially tailored for senior citizens who desire to soak in the country's rich heritage, reflects our commitment to meeting the diverse needs of our customers," said Ayyappan Rajagopal, CEO, Cleartrip.

Similarly, MakeMyTrip, has revealed an impressive 97 per cent surge in searches for spiritual destinations over the last two years (Comparing Calendar Year



# Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

## AUGTRAVELER

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.vgmtechsolutions.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.vgmtechsolutions.com/form.html>**



**Startup Name: AUGTRAVELER**

**Core Team: Pankaj Manchanda, Sumit Gupta, Manish Upa**

**Founding year: 2018**

**Company Website: [www.augtraveler.com](http://www.augtraveler.com)**

**Description:** Augtraveler is an award-winning DPIIT on-boarded Start-up in the Heritage and Culture Travel and Experiences space. The platform uses new age technologies of Augmented Reality (AR), Geo Fencing, Multimedia and Analytics to enhance the visitor experiences at the UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and other Cultural, Natural and Spiritual trails of Bharat, and promote Swadesh Darshan. The project mandate is to further sensitize the masses of the rich tangible and intangible heritage of Bharat which ironically lacks authentic and accurate interpretation, despite its richness and value. For this, the team is being supported by globally renowned knowledge partners.

The platform further builds on evolving curated self-guided AR and Geo location-based trails, which connects the travellers directly with the 'host communities' in the vicinity of the sites – ensuring tourism dollars reach them and therefore facilitating in evolution of a sustainable livelihood model for the 'host communities'. The communities are also provided a 'curated online marketplace' where they can push the authentic crafts, cuisines and related services as well as GI tagged products of Bharat. The essence is to evolve a sustainable livelihood model for them whilst promoting and therefore preserving the intangible cultural heritage of a region. This spoke is aligned with Government initiatives such as ODOP and Vocal for Local.

Augtraveler also has a school outreach program where we have evolved multidisciplinary activity books along with the App evolve our World Heritage Sites as knowledge dissemination zones.

The Augtraveler project vision is committed to evolve a responsible and sustainable tourism model and is aligned with UN Sustainable Development Goals of 4, 8, 11, and 13.

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgCCBFLg5ml&t=1s>**



# Travel through **karṇa, jñāna,** and **bhakti mārg**

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

**A**s I have always maintained, any travel is, to some extent, transformative. Travel is an opportunity to reflect. As discussed in a previous article, whether it is the Dvaita or Advaita perspective, the pursuit of truth and the search for a deeper understanding of human existence are central themes in Indian philosophy. These pursuits are often approached through different paths, known as “margas” (means). The three primary paths—Jnana Marg (path of knowledge/wisdom), Karma Marg (path of action), and Bhakti Marg (path of devotion) – are integral to the Indian philosophical and spiritual framework. These paths provide different approaches to self-realisation and a deeper connection with the divine or the ultimate truth.

The Karma Marg is a philosophy rooted in the Bhagavad Gita, emphasising selfless action and the idea of performing one’s duties without attachment to the outcomes. This philosophy backs travelling with the intention of experiencing and contributing positively to the places and communities visited. Individuals cultivate a sense of selflessness and empathy. This approach to travel encourages a deeper connection with the destinations and the people encountered, leading to personal growth and a broader perspective.

Jnana Marg is the path of knowledge and wisdom. It encourages seekers to explore the nature of reality through contemplation and self-inquiry. Jnana Marg’s approach suggests that the act of journeying and encountering new environments can serve as a catalyst for self-reflection and the exploration of more profound truths. Travellers engage in introspection while experiencing unfamiliar cultures, landscapes, and ways of life, leading to insights about the nature of existence and one’s own place in the world.

We mentioned Bhakti Marg in the previous issue, also. It is the path of devotion and love for the divine. Bhakti Marg encourages travellers to approach their journeys with a heart full of love and reverence, fostering a profound spiritual



experience manifested in a responsible travel. On a more superficial level, it can be a spiritual pilgrimage, where individuals embark on journeys to sacred places, temples, and shrines. In a deep sense, through these travels, individuals deepen their sense of devotion and connection to the creation of the divine while also experiencing a sense of unity with fellow travellers in this journey called life.

Let us also be clear that these three paths are not mutually exclusive. In fact, individuals often employ a combination of these paths based on their personal inclinations, life circumstances, and the specific context of their journeys. A traveller’s journey to a beach destination can involve a combination of the three paths. She might be curious about the local ecosystem, marine life, and environmental sustainability. She could join guided tours or workshops focusing on marine biology, ocean conservation, and the impact of tourism on coastal ecosystems. By seeking knowledge about the local environment and the importance of preserving it, the traveller moves through the Jnana Marg.

Subsequently, she could participate in beach clean-up activities organised by local organisations or resorts to contribute positively to the local community and environment. By participating in these efforts, she embodies Karma Marg, performing selfless actions to maintain the

cleanliness and beauty of the beach for themselves and others. The traveller might develop a deep appreciation for the beauty and tranquillity of the beach setting. This could lead to more mindful conduct, creating a sense of connection and reverence for the natural surroundings. This practice cultivates a state of devotion and gratitude on the way to Bhakti Marg.

Individuals often have a natural inclination towards one path over others. Still, their experiences and journey context can lead to the integration of multiple paths. Travel provides a unique opportunity to engage with these paths dynamically, depending on the destinations visited, the interactions with local communities, and personal reflections along the way. Combining these paths enriches the travel experience, offering a holistic approach to the pursuit of truth and deeper understanding.

These are just a few examples of how different schools of Indian philosophy offer unique perspectives on travel and its potential for personal transformation. Each philosophy provides a distinct lens through which individuals can approach their journeys, fostering a deeper connection with the world and a greater understanding of their own inner selves. ♦

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

*Dr Nimit Chowdhary is a Professor at the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia. He has more than 29 years of academic experience, of which he has been a full professor for 16 years in India, China, and Mexico. In addition, he was a visiting faculty at Gotland University (Sweden), the University of Girona (Spain), IIM Sirmaur, IIQM, and EDII. He is a recipient of many academic awards and recognitions. He has authored 20 books and more than 200 academic papers and chapters. He has travelled extensively to around 40 countries and almost all states within the country.*



In 2024, SOTC Travel envisions transformative trends in spiritual tourism, hidden gems exploration, sports and event tourism, luxury, and sustainable travel, embodying resilience, growth, and a customer-centric vision as we celebrate our 75-year milestone, shaping the future of travel, says **Vishal Suri, Managing Director, SOTC Travel**, in an interaction with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

## ‘We achieve success by foreseeing industry trends, addressing customer needs, and leveraging technology’

**Q How has SOTC Travel evolved over its 75-year journey, adapting to the changing landscape of the travel and tourism industry? What key milestones and achievements does SOTC Travel attribute to its successful 75-year legacy in the omnichannel travel sector?**

SOTC's 75-year journey is a testament to our unwavering commitment to the Indian traveller and showcases our innovation and evolution in the ever-changing landscape of the travel and tourism industry. Established in 1949, SOTC has been a pioneer in Escorted Outbound Group Tours (designed around the unique preferences of the Indian consumer); also Customised Holidays, Domestic Tours, Incentive Travel and Business Travel – driven by a legacy of innovation. As we navigate the dynamic shift in the global travel landscape in 2024, we anticipate transformative trends in spiritual tourism, exploration of hidden gems, sports & event tourism, luxury and sustainable travel. While celebrating our 75-year milestone, SOTC Travel stands as a symbol of resilience, growth, and a customer-centric approach, shaping the future of travel.

We have a deep understanding of the Indian traveller, and this is evident in our regional approach: the launch of our language microsites, tailor-made product offerings, and regional marccomm.

To appeal to India's powerful regional source markets, we have designed unique tours like SOTC Brahman Mandal and SOTC

Gurjar Vishwadarshan - that offer the comfort of co-travellers from the same region along with regional language speaking, experienced SOTC Tour Managers. We have recently introduced exclusive charter products to Bhutan from South India.

Our omnichannel model, integrating cutting-edge digital tools, contact centres and a pan-India retail network, reflects our dedication to providing choice and convenience.

Via unique concepts like our Holiday Bazaars, held across metros and key catchments across Tier 2-3 markets, we emphasize ease in access and the personal touch of our Holiday Experts. Embracing digitisation, our AI-enabled chatbot, apps, portal and QR-enabled Live Video Connect, are intended to redefine customer experience.

MICE is a key business segment for us, and we excel in managing corporate movements – from exclusive CXO meetings/ events to mega incentive groups. Our 'SOTC Connect,' our new-age MICE app, reflects our commitment to seamless and tech-driven solutions.

Our Business Travel is one of our key segments and offers end-to-end, customisable solutions to a range of MNCs, India Corporates and SMEs, Banks, etc. We deploy global top-of-the line self-service booking tools, embedded with respective corporate travel policies, approval matrices and MIS/ reports integrated to our centralized mid

office system to ensure smooth workflows.

We also provide dedicated managing and consulting tools for customers to minimize expenses and maximize output during their travel.

Our outlook is Glocal - we maintain a global approach and act local. We have partnered with leading travel management companies and consortiums around the globe that implement the best practices worldwide to ensure superior/exceptional customer experience on-ground.

Having successfully surpassed our pre-pandemic levels, our acquisition pipeline is equally robust.

From the rise of spiritual tourism post the Ram Mandir inauguration, to the exploration of hidden gems and offbeat destinations, we are poised to cater to evolving customer preferences. SOTC Travel's success is rooted in anticipating industry trends, understanding the customer's needs & wants and leveraging technology – towards an exceptional customer experience.

**Q In light of technological advancements, how has SOTC Travel leveraged its nichannel approach to enhance the overall customer experience over the years?**

While we established India's Outbound Escorted Group Tours and have excelled in Customised Holidays, we have created an optimal blend by infusing technology.

We have adeptly leveraged our omnichannel approach to enhance the overall customer experience:

Our omnichannel model gives customers the flexibility to choose holidays from our website with over 1500 options, contacting call-centres for that important human touch/ assistance, or visit nearby SOTC stores for in-person consultations with our holiday experts. Our innovative QR-enabled Live Video Connect platform seamlessly connects customers directly with holiday experts via a video call and chat, without having to download any added apps or software.

Recognising the diversity of our customer base, we have expanded our website accessibility by launching versions in four regional languages—Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and Tamil. This initiative enhances our regional connectivity, providing customers the convenience of accessing content in their language of choice. The past year's stellar performance, marked by a 76% consolidated growth in the leisure business and an 88% top-line growth in MICE, underscores our commitment to excellence.

**Q Can you share insights into the strategies and innovations that have allowed SOTC Travel to remain a prominent player in the travel industry for seven decades?**





SOTC Travel has been a leader with a strong customer loyalty for over seven decades, due to a multi-pronged approach that is rooted in strategic innovation. We have customised our product-service portfolio basis our customer's requirements, focusing on regional preferences and unique elements like regional cuisine and language-speaking tour managers, while we ensure a personalised and culturally resonant experience for our customers.

Our leisure segment caters to various traveller segments, including multi-generational families, Gen Z, millennials, young professionals, couples, honeymooners, DINKS, solo travellers, and seniors.

Strong travel intent and high disposable income, combined with the aspirational value of holidays emerging from Regional India has contributed to a noteworthy 35% of SOTC's holiday business, thus making these markets key growth drivers for us. The launch of SOTC's website in regional languages is intended to reach out to this rapidly growing market.

Pioneering escorted group tours and introducing unique offerings like SOTC Brahman Mandal for Maharashtra and SOTC Gurjar Vishwadarshan for Gujarat exemplify our dedication to catering to distinct regional preferences. Initiatives like a one-day road shows - Holiday Bazaars, allow us to engage with diverse communities directly. This regional focus aligns with our goal of accessibility and has proven instrumental in tapping into potential markets with high disposable income.

Our strong digital focus has resulted in a drop in the average age of our consumers by 10 years. To cater to the unique preferences of this younger and more enthusiastic segment who loves to explore and experience, we offer a diverse range- from our Gen Z products to co-curated holidays across destinations that can be customized as per their specific interests.

Given the high interest for Cruises, across

segments, we have launched an extensive range of value, premium to uber luxury Cruise Holidays: from short cruise getaways/weekenders, river cruises, Polar cruises (Arctic/Antarctica), round-the-world cruises and more to target segments - across Leisure, Corporate, B-Leisure and MICE.

While we were the first to launch a dedicated Darshans/Spiritual Journeys portfolio that covered all the religious circuits of India, we saw an interesting shift in customer behaviour – Young India displayed high interest in exploring traditional pilgrimages but they also wanted to combine this with unique local experiences and outdoor adventure like white-water rafting and night trekking in Vaishno Devi, diving with PADI professionals in Rameswaram, bungee jumping in Rishikesh, etc. – this inspired us to create a range of holidays that catered to this demand.

Moreover, our continuous investment in technological advancements has kept us at the forefront. The omnichannel model, coupled with the AI-enabled chat bot combined with our regional focus have collectively fortified SOTC Travel as a prominent and trusted player in the travel industry for an illustrious seven decades.

To ensure we build a deeper connect with our consumers, we have deployed AI to analyse our customer conversations and enhance our products-services and processes. Another key initiative is our tech enabled end-to-end CXI program at each stage of the consumer journey – giving us deep insights into our customer experience.

**Considering the diverse travel preferences and trends, how does SOTC Travel plan to continue meeting the evolving needs of its customers in the years to come?**

With the inauguration of the Ram Mandir creating heightened interest in spiritual tourism, coupled with a zeal for exploring hidden gems and the opening up of India via

the UDAN scheme, we see strong potential in 2024! Our strategy will pivot around the twin pillars of product development/innovation and technology, while keeping the customer at the heart of what we do.

Cruise holidays, the convergence of sports and travel, and an ongoing penchant for luxury experiences will reinforce our commitment to providing diverse and personalised travel options. Emerging trends, including Astro Tourism and sustainable tourism ensure our teams are kept forward looking!

For instance, the introduction of our 'Easy Book Easy Go' portfolio caters to the spontaneous and fast-paced travel preferences of the modern explorer. As we navigate these dynamic trends, SOTC Travel is poised to redefine and elevate the travel experience for our customers in 2024 and beyond.

**Q What is your business expansion strategy, and what are the major areas of focus for the next two years?**

As SOTC Travel enters a new phase of growth, we are embarking on an extensive expansion strategy aimed at strengthening our retail footprint. Currently, operating across 44 cities with 76 outlets, including both owned and franchise outlets; also an expansive partnership of over 800 preferred agent partners.

In 2023, we successfully launched 12 franchise outlets in tier 2 and 3 cities such as Ludhiana, Dehradun, Anand, and Meerut, setting the stage for our ambitious expansion plans. Over the next two years, our strategic focus will emphasise diversifying our product offerings, with a particular emphasis on meeting the preferences of the younger demographic and strengthening our position in spiritual tourism. At SOTC Travel, we are not only expanding geographically but also evolving with agility to meet the dynamic needs of India's diversity of travellers, reiterating our reputation as pioneers in the travel industry. ♦

prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in





# Agoda Reveals New Horizons List for India's Travel Landscape

As the new year kicks off, digital travel platform Agoda, has revealed the top five emerging destinations in India in its "New Horizons List". The year-on-year search data has highlighted the destinations that have marked growth in traveller interest. Ahmedabad led the way, followed by Kodaikanal, Mahabaleshwar, Ooty, and Kochi. These cities reflect a growing interest among Indians to experience local culture and heritage and

grew owing to the city being the host of a major sports event, the 2023 Cricket World Cup.

Picturesque nature destinations dominate the New Horizons list, with Kodaikanal experiencing a 35% increase and hill stations Mahabaleshwar and Ooty, rising by 22% and 21% respectively. Kodaikanal's unspoiled natural beauty and serene ambience has experienced a notable uptick in interest and Mahabaleshwar and Ooty are also capturing attention for their distinct attractions, ranging from Mahabaleshwar's sweeping hill vistas to Ooty's captivating colonial-era ambience and tea plantations.

At number five on the New Horizons List is Kochi, a vibrant port city in Kerala, which witnessed a 19% increase in searches. The state has been a hotspot for Indians, and Kochi is where history and modernity seamlessly converge. It remains a favourite among travellers for its remarkable Dutch and Portuguese architecture, food and spice markets, and traditional cultural experiences.

Krishna Rathi, Country Director India, Sri Lanka, and Maldives at Agoda shared, "2023 has proven to be a great year for travel in India. Agoda's Year-on-Year search data highlighted growth across domestic, inbound, and outbound travel. The New Horizons list features quite a few hill stations and some bustling cities with a mix of food, culture, and interesting activities. As the new year begins, we are excited to see the trends that will shape the preferences of Indian travellers."

Agoda's platform, which offers over 3.9 million holiday properties, along with flights and activities, provides travellers with the convenience of planning and booking a comprehensive adventure. These emerging destinations present an exciting opportunity for travellers to discover new facets of India. ♦

INDIA	
Destination	% increase in searches
Ahmedabad	44%
Kodaikanal	35%
Mahabaleshwar	22%
Ooty	21%
Kochi	19%

are increasingly inclined towards picturesque locales.

Ahmedabad, the financial capital of Gujarat, has claimed the top spot with a notable 44% increase in searches year-on-year. It is home to the Statue of Unity, the world's tallest statue and also boasts of a rich cultural and culinary heritage. Ahmedabad has grown in popularity among Indian travellers, and this year it further



# Welcome to

# Malaysia Master

SPECIALIST E-LEARNING PROGRAM

brought to you by



in association with



## E-learning Program for Travel Agents in India

**“Upskill knowledge and Sell Malaysia More Effectively”**

Tourism Malaysia in association with TravelBiz Monitor invites Indian travel trade to register and successfully complete the Malaysia Master Specialist Program.

With a storied past embodied in centuries-old temples and shrines, as well as a visionary outlook, Malaysia can be experienced in so many different ways. This course will help you to design vacations to suit your clients' changing needs and let them explore the destination on their own terms.

You will learn not only about some of Malaysia's newest attractions but also how to make the best recommendations for clients seeking off-the-beaten-path experiences.

### Why Become A Malaysia Master Specialist?

- Malaysia as a renowned desired destination
- Improve knowledge about tourism products and destinations
- To increase travel package bookings
- Higher percentage of Repeat traveler.

### How to participate?

- Log on to <https://www.travelbizmonitor.com/malaysiamaster2023/>
- Complete 5 Compulsory Modules with min. 80% per module in chronological order in order to become a 'Malaysia Master'.

Program valid for 180 days from the date of launch on [www.travelbizmonitor.com](http://www.travelbizmonitor.com)



**Register Now**



# INTERNATIONAL CRUISE? THINK NCL.

OVER 450 DESTINATIONS WORLDWIDE | SAILINGS AVAILABLE THROUGH TO 2026 | 20 AWARD-WINNING SHIPS

**50% OFF**  
 CRUISES<sup>+</sup>

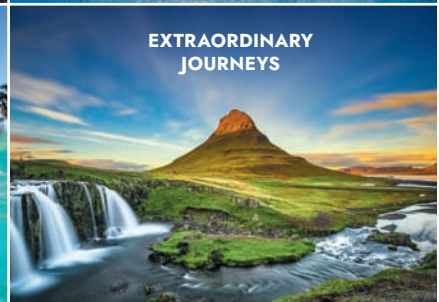
- FREE** OPEN BAR
- FREE** SPECIALTY DINING
- FREE** EXCURSIONS
- FREE** WIFI
- FREE** EXTRA GUESTS



SCAN FOR MORE INFO

**NCL**  
**NORWEGIAN**  
**CRUISE LINE®**

WORLD'S LEADING  
 CRUISE LINE  
 WORLD TRAVEL AWARDS  
 8 YEARS IN A ROW



**CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL AGENT | CALL +91 22 7127 9333**  
**BOOK TODAY AT NCL.COM**

+50% Off Cruises: Discount valid on all open for sale sailings including Sailaway categories. +Free At Sea: Free Open Bar is based on Premium Beverage Package. Free Specialty Dining and Free Wifi Packages are dependent on cruise length booked. Free Shore Excursions are US\$50 credit per excursion, per port and applicable to 1st guest in the stateroom. Free Extra Guests is applicable to the 3rd and 4th guest in a stateroom and is valid on select dates. Any taxes & gratuities are additional. Sailaway categories are not applicable for the Free at Sea offer. Sailaway categories receive US\$50 shore excursion credit offer only. Offers are valid until 31 March 2024 unless extended. Offers are non-transferrable, have no monetary value and are valid for new bookings only. Offers are subject to change or withdrawal at any time and combinability with other promotional offers is subject to change. Other restrictions may apply. For full terms and conditions visit ncl.com. All rights reserved. ©2024 NCL Corporation Ltd. Ships' Registry: Bahamas and USA. 1463559 01/2024