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Atout France confident of major rebound in Indian arrivals by 2024-25

TBM Staff | Mumbai



Caroline Leboucher

Caroline Leboucher, the CEO of Atout France, expressed optimism about the resurgence of outbound travel from India, anticipating a return to pre-COVID levels by the end of the year or early 2025.

Speaking exclusively to **TravelBiz Monitor** in Toulouse, Leboucher highlighted the excitement surrounding France's hosting of the Olympics Games and Summer Paralympics, viewing these events as catalysts for tourism.

"France received 549,770 arrivals from India in 2023 vs. 700,000 in 2019, which is a deficit of around 22% of pre-Covid arrival numbers. Alongside India, Japan and China are other two key Asian markets that have still have a larger arrival deficit of around 40% and 60%, respectively, when compared to their pre-Covid arrivals. With France hosting world-class sporting events and the entire excitement around these huge tournaments, we are

confident of a large number of tourists coming to witness historic moments. We are already seeing recovery from India, and our assessment is to reach the pre-Covid number of arrivals by year end or early 2025," she said.

To support the recovery efforts and enhance engagement with trade partners in India, Atout France has implemented various initiatives. These include conducting training sessions and workshops aimed at equipping frontline staff with comprehensive destination knowledge and tools for creating tailored itineraries. Additionally, the organisation is actively promoting the 'France Connaisseur' online training programme in the Indian market.

By leveraging such outreach programmes and the heightened interest generated by major sporting events, Atout France aims to facilitate the resurgence of tourism from India, with the goal of returning to pre-pandemic arrival numbers by the end of 2024 or early 2025. ♦

Destination DC records 50% growth in visitations from India

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Destination DC, the destination marketing organisation of Washington DC, has seen a growth of 50% in visitations from India, year-on-year during 2023.

Elliot Ferguson Jr., President and CEO, Destination DC, during his recent visit to Mumbai, said, "India ranks no 4 in terms of visitations, and we have seen 147,000 Indians during 2023 that is a 50% growth over 2022, and 11% hike over 2019."

He said these visitors landed directly into the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. "The key for us is how we continue direct flights from key cities in to Dallas. Leisure is a predominant proportion of inflow into the US, and MICE vertical is a growing opportunity, and business travel continues to be going strong."

Citing example of changing traveller

preferences, he said that in the past the East Coast and West Coast of the USA were the preferred choices by Indians for exploration. "But now with direct air access, travellers want to explore newer destinations, indulge in enriching local experiences and explore local farm to fork options."

With regards to their strategy for the B2B market, he said, "We are keen to increase frequency of visits, the number of destinations that one visits, increase average length of stay and boost visitor spending. In that direction, we are working with operators to equip them with better tools and content to share with their client. Additionally, air connections will only further aid travel to the USA. Our airport authorities are always seeking newer destinations, and we are supportive of their endeavours." ♦

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Elliot Ferguson Jr.

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19th edition of HICSA to spotlight Innovations in Food Tech & Design

The 19th edition of HICSA, hosted by Hotelivate, is set to spotlight “Savouring South Asia: Innovations in Food Tech and Design” showcasing the evolving hospitality ecosystem in South Asia. With a focus on food technological advancements, the conference which is scheduled on 3-4 April, aims to foster dialogue, investment exploration, and networking opportunities, shaping the future of the industry. Featuring global CEOs and exclusive interviews, HICSA 2024 promises to be a dynamic platform for exploring trends and best practices in the hospitality sector. From reducing food waste to promoting sustainable practices, the conference seeks to unlock the region’s culinary potential while addressing challenges such as food security and environmental impacts. The event will also feature panel discussions, keynote sessions, and awards ceremonies, offering a comprehensive experience for industry professionals and enthusiasts alike. **TravelBizMonitor** reports...

TBM Staff | Bengaluru

Commenting on the 19th anniversary of HICSA, Manav Thadani, Founder Chairman – Hotelivate said “We are excited to bring HICSA 2024 again this year to the “Silicon Valley of India”. This year we are focusing on the aspect of technology in our business and no other city would be more appropriate than this one. India is the heart of South Asia’s thriving hospitality industry and this year’s conference promises to be a dynamic platform for exploring investment prospects, trends, and best practices, and to network with the industry’s brightest minds. We believe HICSA will set the stage for numerous investment ventures in this rapidly evolving region. We are extremely grateful for the support we have received from our delegates, patrons, speakers, and sponsors as we come together in celebration of all things remarkable in food, beverage, and hospitality.”

Vikram Lalvani, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Sterling Holiday Resorts Limited, expressed his thoughts on India’s contributions to food-tech innovations and their impact on the hospitality industry. He emphasised the importance of the HICSA theme on innovative food technology for a sustainable culinary future, highlighting its role in addressing challenges such as food security, environmental impact, and resource efficiency.

Lalvani stressed the need for solutions to reduce food waste, “I think food waste reduction and the use of smart solutions around this is not only the need of the hour but is imperative for a sustainable solution ahead. Real-time inventory management systems, smart packaging, and storage are some of the ways to tackle food wastage at every point of the value chain – from production to consumption. These are relatively easy implementable solutions in hotels and resorts,” he said.

He also mentioned that the promotion of organic farming in their resorts as a way to minimise wastage and offer a sustainable dining experience. Emphasising the progress being made by startups, he said, “From a national perspective, our country has a rich culinary heritage with a diverse agricultural landscape. For us to make significant progress in this space, the dynamic ecosystem of startups, entrepreneurs, farmers, and policymakers has started making headway for a more sustainable and inclusive food system,”



Manav Thadani



Vikram Lalvani



Federico J. González



Mark S. Hoplamazian



Sébastien Bazin

This year's HICSA will feature the presence of three global CEOs at their prestigious conference, which brings together participants from the hospitality, real estate, and investment industries. The 19th Edition of the conference will have Sébastien Bazin, Chairman & CEO of Accor, Mark S. Hoplamazian, President & CEO of Hyatt Hotels Corporation, and Federico J. González, Executive Vice-President of Radisson Hotel Group, as speakers.

Accor promises nonstop potential and opportunities with its tagline – “Live Limitless”. In a thought-provoking keynote session at HICSA2024 titled “Live Limitless: Going ALL The Way”, Sébastien Bazin – Group Chairman & CEO – Accor, will talk about his vision in the ever-evolving hospitality scape. “We are proud to be partnering with Hotel Investment Conference South Asia for their 2024 event. HICSA is an incredible platform for the global hospitality industry, bringing us together in India – a country which is alive with endless potential for the travel sector and unique experiences. It is clear that India's moment is now, actively shaping tomorrow's journeys and paving the way for the future of hospitality. Our collaboration with HICSA reflects our commitment to India and our vision to become a true trailblazer in this vital market”, said Sébastien. He has a finance background and has held various leadership roles in the hospitality sector. He joined Accor's Board in 2005, became its Chairman and CEO in August 2013, and chairs the Gustave Roussy Foundation's Board. Additionally, Sébastien has been on GE's Board since 2016 and took on the role of CEO for Accor's Luxury & Lifestyle division in January 2023.

Accor, a leading player in the hospitality industry, is gearing up to showcase its endless potential and opportunities at HICSA2024.

Under the theme “Live Limitless: Going ALL The Way,” Sébastien Bazin, Group Chairman & CEO of Accor, will delve into his vision for the future of hospitality. The keynote session promises to offer insights into the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of the industry, highlighting Accor's commitment to innovation and excellence. With its tagline “Live Limitless,” Accor aims to inspire and



redefine the boundaries of hospitality, setting the stage for a transformative experience at HICSA2024.

“We are proud to be partnering with Hotel Investment Conference South Asia for their 2024 event. HICSA is an incredible platform for the global hospitality industry, bringing us together in India – a country which is alive with endless potential for the travel sector and unique experiences. It is clear that India's moment is now, actively shaping tomorrow's journeys and paving the way for the future of hospitality. Our collaboration with HICSA reflects our commitment to India and our vision to become a true trailblazer in this vital market”, said Sébastien.

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In an exclusive interview, Manav Thadani – Founder Chairman of Hotelivate, will engage with Federico J. González – Executive Vice Chairman – Radisson Hotel Group and CEO – Louvre Hotels Group in a conversation centered around “Happiness and Change”. Commenting on this edition of HICSA, Federico said “HICSA is a platform to explore and capitalize upon untapped growth opportunities within the multitude of destinations in India. As one of the largest international hotel groups in the country, Radisson Hotel Group remains committed to deepening its presence in this vibrant market. The engaging discussions at HICSA will provide an opportunity to not only address the challenges confronting the industry but also to collaboratively map out the areas of upliftment within the sector. At Radisson Hotel Group, we are actively driving change through industry-leading initiatives such as the Hotel Sustainability Basics and a commitment to Net Zero. Our diverse portfolio of country-specific brands as well as our growth strategy and recent accolade as ‘Best Hotel Chain – South Asia by Pacific Area Travel Writers Association (PATWA) International Travel Awards’ at ITB Berlin 2024 stand as a testament to our focus in India as well as our commitment to excellence.” Federico has extensive global executive leadership experience in hospitality, leisure, and FMCG. He was CEO of NH Hotel Group and Deputy GM of Disneyland Paris. He also held senior roles at Procter & Gamble.

Federico is known for his marketing expertise and has authored three books. He advocates for ambitious profitability, purpose, and diversity in organisations.

On Day 1, the conference will feature some exclusive interviews and keynote addresses in an endeavour to make the event more content rich. The day will close with the 'HICSA Hotels of the Year Awards' presented by MakeMyTrip, that recognizes the most remarkable new hotel developments in the South Asian region. The nominations include hotels across six categories: Luxury/Upper Upscale Hotel; Upscale Segment; Upper Mid-Market Segment; Mid-Market Segment; Budget/Economy Segment; Boutique Hotel Segment. The winners will be shortlisted by a designated jury and then finally determined by the HICSA 2024 delegates through a voting process and announced as part of the conference program.

The first full day of the conference will culminate into a 'Culinary Carnival' – a celebration of gastronomy, bringing together talented chefs, artisanal food vendors, and passionate hoteliers at the JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort and Spa. In line with the theme this year, the focus will be on a gastronomic extravaganza. A diverse and mouth-watering array of dishes from celebrated restaurants, both standalone as well as in hotels, across India will showcase their cuisines, from street food classics to gourmet delicacies. Marriott International, ITC Hotels, InterContinental Hotel Group, Massive Restaurants, The Leela Hotels, Resorts & Palaces, Hyatt International and Atelier House Hospitality and would be some of brands showcasing their top restaurants.

Day 2 of HICSA will feature curated panel discussions and mini keynote sessions with industry leaders. Post the famous "Hot Seat:

Leaders on Fire", which will bring to light leadership dilemmas, the conference will ultimately conclude with the prestigious MakeMyTrip General Manager of the Year Awards 2024. While the Hotel Operations Summit India (HOSI) took a hiatus in 2023, our commitment to celebrating excellence in the hospitality industry remains steadfast. These awards have been seamlessly integrated into HICSA as a part of the main conference. These awards are a wonderful opportunity to recognize and highlight the hard work and outstanding performance displayed by the General Managers untiringly running the show. The closing dinner will be at Falak, The Leela Bhartiya City as the perfect end to this event. The 19th edition of HICSA promises to be a remarkable convergence of insights, innovation, and inspiration, offering an unforgettable experience that will leave a lasting impact. ♦

Red Carpet Travels unveils 'Red Planner' platform for seamless travel planning

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Mumbai-based Red Carpet Travels has unveiled its latest innovation, the 'Red Planner' platform. This ground-breaking technology offers live inventory of five long-haul destinations, including Canada, Scandinavia, Europe, USA, and Australia.

The 'Red Planner' platform provides travel agents with unprecedented access to ready-made packages at their fingertips, allowing them to customise itineraries with just a few clicks. According to Rajesh Kakade, Founder & Global Director, Red Carpet Travels, the brain behind this cutting-edge system, it is the fastest operating platform of its kind, designed to serve premium destinations effortlessly.

Kakade emphasised the platform's role in educating agents and newcomers about these sought-after destinations, making it easier for them to sell packages efficiently. The integration of 'Red Planner' with Römu, their new mascot, promises to empower agents to handle inquiries swiftly, resulting in increased conversions and revenue.

Key features of the platform include a user-friendly interface available in multiple languages, enabling agents worldwide to utilise it seamlessly. Additionally, 'Red Planner' boasts a vast repository of pre-designed itineraries, along with tools to customize them in real-time based on client preferences. Detailed excursion information and multimedia resources further enrich the itinerary planning process. To spread awareness among this service, Red Carpet Travels has planned an extensive marketing strategy. This includes participation in trade shows, digital engagement through social media and webinars, and leveraging the power of word-of-mouth marketing. ♦

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SSR Travel Solutions brings 12 exhibitors for maiden three-city 'Bali Luxury Show' in India

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Cashing on the growing interest for Bali among Indian travellers with direct flight services, Mumbai-based SSR Travel Solutions recently hosted its first edition of the 'Bali Luxury Show' across New Delhi and Ahmedabad finally concluding the showcase in Mumbai. A delegation of 12 exhibitors including hotels and airlines interacted with the travel trade counterparts in each city on their offerings suited to the Indian clientele.

All the 12 exhibitors were unanimous in their opinion of the pleasant working experience with SSR Travel Solutions with quality business leads and conversion of deals, positioning the company among preferred choice of DMCs for Bali in India. Many of the exhibitors were first-time participants or entrants in India to gain their share of the burgeoning outbound pie from India.

Talking to TravelBiz Monitor, Sapneal Rao, Founder & CEO, SSR Travel Solutions, said, "This is must first roadshow with multiple hotels from Bali. The focus of SSRTS is luxury, and there are many quality

hotels in Bali that don't have visibility in India. These properties were keen to come to India and meet their trade partners. We have hotels from different locations in Bali participating at the roadshow, and having a limited number of exhibitors was a conscious choice to focus on the quality of discussions targeting the upcoming summer season. We have senior representatives of the hotels



showcasing their top-notch facilities to cater to the Indian market."

Rao said that they have plans to host the second edition of the roadshow in Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Kolkata by end 2024 or early 2025. "With direct flight access by Vistara and IndiGo, these hotels were keen to have their presence in India. We had 120 premium agents interacting with these partners." ♦

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GROUND REALITY

There has been a steady surge among hospitality brands for announcements of ambitious hotel openings and expansion in newer and niche destinations hitherto not frequented by the Indian traveller. Take the example of Ayodhya, a host of hotel companies have jumped on the bandwagon to get their fair share of tourists visiting the pilgrim destination to seek blessings at the Ram Temple.

But it is between these announcements lies the ground reality. Such gigantic development of real estate projects would require a huge workforce to manage the property, and deliver on the brand virtue of exceptional service and sustainability ethos. This requires localisation of the brand and tweaking of the umbrella guidelines to meet the needs and suit the profile of the traveller visiting a relatively newer destination in search of an overwhelming experience.

No longer are we living in times when a cookie-cutter model would work across different geographies. The more sensitive the brand is to the evolving traveller, the easier it is to meet their expectations. There is every possibility that the experience at a certain brand in a city location is unsatisfactory, while the similar property would outperform on guest expectations in a largely underdeveloped location. The reverse of this could also be a circumstance. While the addition of new and upcoming hotels is a positive sign, and demonstrates the scope of growth of tourism and interest in newer locations, the crucial requirement of manpower with necessary skill sets and technical know-how in an extremely competitive world is non-negotiable.

And that's where established brands and skill development agencies like THSC have a key role to play by not only creating a dialogue for level-playing field on pay parity, but also making enough room for up-skilling of workforce at regular intervals. The final onus is on the hotel management companies and chains to drive the industry in a direction that is not only prepared for today, but also ready for the future.



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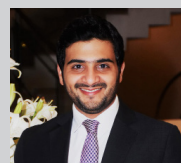
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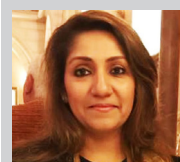
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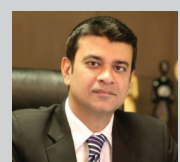
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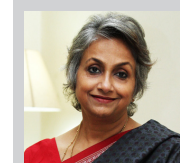
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‘The highlight of this year’s HICSA is going to be the culinary carnival’

With a legacy spanning over two decades, The Hospitality Investment Conference South Asia (HICSA) has continually evolved to reflect the shifting landscapes of the hospitality sector. From exploring the burgeoning market potential of South India to shining a spotlight on the often-overlooked domain of Food & Beverage (F&B), this year’s conference promises to be a melting pot of inspiration, ideas, and actionable insights for hospitality professionals across the globe. In a candid interview with **Manav Thadani, Founder Chairman, Hotelivate, Asmita Mukherjee** delves into the strategic decision behind shifting this esteemed event to Bengaluru, the significance of this year’s theme, “Savouring South Asia: Innovations in Food Tech and Design”, and the key discussions that attendees can anticipate at the 19th edition of HICSA 2024.

The theme of this year’s HICSA is “Savouring South Asia: Innovations in Food Tech and Design,” Speaking on this Thadani remarked, “Until our Bengaluru event last year, we had never implemented a specific theme for HICSA. However, in 2023, we introduced AI as the theme, and it resonated strongly with our audience, proving to be a successful and engaging choice. Building on this positive experience, we have decided to focus on F&B as this year’s theme.”

He mentioned that F&B doesn’t get as much attention in hotel conferences and is often just seen as a space for weddings and parties. “Despite this perception, F&B can be a crucial revenue stream, accounting for 30-50% of total revenues for many hotels. With this in mind, we aim to bring F&B into the spotlight, highlighting its significance and potential within the hospitality industry. Therefore we may talk about subjects that are tech and design-related but specific to food and beverage. Or why not talk about using revenue management of restaurants so that we can increase the revenue per person or have a higher turnover of seats. Plus why is it that independent restaurants generally outperform the hotel restaurants. We hope HICSA 2024 will address some of these issues and provide our operational teams with fresh ideas. Our goal is to delve deeper into this often-neglected aspect of hotel operations, showcasing innovative strategies, trends, and best practices that can help hotels optimise their F&B offerings,” he elaborates.

Highlighting the culinary presentations set to unfold at HICSA 2024, Thadani exclaims, “The highlight of this year is going to be the culinary carnival on the first night of the conference which brings to life 7 different restaurants across India, all with different cuisines. Additionally, we are excited to announce a new approach to encourage more operational participation. This change was facilitated by the absence of our annual Hotel Operational Summit India (HOSI). Instead, the prestigious MakeMyTrip GM’s Award, which is typically presented at the summit,

will now be awarded during the second day of HICSA. This adjustment allows us to integrate operational excellence more closely into the main conference program, providing greater recognition and visibility for hoteliers’ achievements in the industry.”

In addition to the main theme of F&B, the organisers of HICSA are placing a special emphasis on technology and design. This decision comes from the growing interest and representation of delegates from these particular segments. “We also have given special focus again to technology and design as increasingly we realise that our delegate list is evolving to represent more people from this segment,” explained Thadani.

The lineup of discussions and topics at HICSA this year mirrors the current trends and challenges faced by the hospitality sector. “The conference sees industry stalwarts under one roof and a specially curated agenda which addresses current challenges and opportunities. Apart from F&B, there will be sessions on technology where experts will delve into the latest trends shaping the hospitality industry, such as AI, IoT, and data analytics, and how hotels can leverage these innovations to enhance guest experiences and operational efficiency. Sustainability remains at the forefront and we hope to address that too along with burning issues like the current talent crunch. Real Estate from an investment perspective, franchising and leasing, owning and managing, growth for hotels, and what leaders really think are some topics that will also be covered. To name a few sessions, we will have – “Travel Trends in Asia Pacific”, “Blending Technology with Aviation & Hospitality”, “Beyond the Plate: Restaurant Concepts Creating Magic”, “Creating and Marketing Experiences”, “Design Aesthetics” and of course, “The Hot Seat”! And this is just an indicative list, there is so much more!”

In the past two years, HICSA has found a new home in Bengaluru, a shift that has proven beneficial in attracting many of the tech companies and brands from South India, as noted by Thadani. While this relocation has been fruitful, organisers are now considering the

possibility of branching out to fresh locations. “Mumbai has historically served as the primary location for HICSA, with 15 out of the 18 editions being held in this city. The decision to shift to Delhi in 2015 was made to break the pattern of hosting the event in the same city repeatedly. Consequently, for two years, in 2015 and 2016, HICSA was held in Delhi before returning to Mumbai. The 2021 edition was an aberration, as it was held in Delhi again, owing to Hotelivate being based there. Last year, we moved to Bengaluru for similar reasons and experienced tremendous success, making us anticipate this year to be our largest event yet. Hosting in the south allowed us to attract tech companies and brands from South India.”

Despite recent successful ventures in Bengaluru, Thadani hints at a return to HICSA’s traditional home in Mumbai for its 20th edition in 2025, “Looking ahead, while exploring new locations has its advantages, the essence of HICSA remains deeply connected to Mumbai. Hence, the plan is to return to Mumbai in 2025, reaffirming its position as the traditional home for HICSA,” he said.

While discussing the key takeaways for attendees, Thadani expresses his aspirations for HICSA 2024 to leave a lasting impression on both professional and personal fronts. “I hope attendees at HICSA 2024 will leave with fresh insights and practical ideas they can use in their professional and personal lives. Professionally, they can learn about the latest trends and best practices in hospitality, helping them make better decisions and innovate in their work. They’ll also have the chance to meet new people and build relationships that can benefit their careers.

Personally, I hope attendees will feel inspired by the stories and experiences shared at the conference. I hope they’ll leave with a renewed sense of purpose and motivation to pursue their goals. Overall, I want attendees to feel empowered to make a positive impact in their work and lives, and to be part of a community that is driving positive change in the hospitality industry.” ♦

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Indian travellers planning to spend more, use travel hacks and seek new adventures: Report



With 62% of Indians planning to spend more on travel this year vs. global average of 40%, Indians are willing to go the extra mile to have a fulfilling travel experience in 2024.

While spending more, Indians are also looking for value for money by mastering the art of using travel hacks to make their journeys more affordable and rewarding. These findings were revealed in the American Express Travel® 2024 Global Travel Trends Report based on survey data from across India, the United States, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Japan, and the United Kingdom.

There is an evident travel boom amongst Indians with 65% planning more domestic trips and 48% planning more international trips this year. In terms of using travel hacks, the survey indicates that as many as 43% of Indians planning on taking a trip in 2024 (vs global average of 30%) are using credit card points to offset flight and hotel expenses, while 42% (vs global average of 26%) are opting to book from companies offering complimentary hotel benefits such as room upgrades and credits. Furthermore, 35% of Indians planning on taking a trip in 2024 are planning to stay in a mix of luxury and more affordable hotels and 31% are planning to travel during off-peak seasons or stay with friends or family during their travel.

“Indian travellers are embracing the spirit of adventure and exploration in 2024, driven by a desire for new experiences and cultural immersion. From using travel hacks to embarking on solo journeys, Indians are redefining the travel landscape with their changing preferences and behaviours. At American Express, we understand the evolving needs of consumers and strive to empower our Card Members with rewarding offers and benefits, enhancing their travel experiences wherever they venture,” said Sanjay Khanna, CEO and Country Manager, American Express Banking Corp., India.

With food and accommodation as the top aspects of travel, beach vacations, adventure trips and metropolitan travel top the charts for Indians.

- For 71% of Indians, food is the top travel aspect they aren't willing to compromise on (vs global average of 52%) while a close 67% Indians aren't willing to compromise on accommodation.
- 67% of Indians planning on taking a trip in 2024 would like to plan a beach vacation in 2024.
- 58% of Indians planning on taking a trip in 2024 would like to indulge in outdoor adventure trips including camping, surfing,

skiing and mountain climbing.

- 55% of Indians planning on taking a trip in 2024 would like to take a metropolitan trip and explore a new city.

Embracing solo adventures: The allure of exploring new cities, unwinding on relaxing beach getaways, and discovering domestic destinations, solo resonates strongly with Indian adults.

- 34% of Indians are planning on traveling solo more often this year vs global average of 18%.
- 84% of Indians planning on traveling solo in 2024, plan on taking a solo trip centered around self-love and treating themselves.
- Reconnecting with themselves (46%), getting a break from chaotic daily life (39%) and being independent (34%) are the top reasons Indians would consider going on solo trips.

Spontaneity beckons: With the rise of structured nature of modern life, Indians are increasingly craving flexibility in their travel arrangements, carving out space for impromptu travel.

- 58% of Indians are interested in taking last-minute trips in 2024 with 40% generally booking only a week or less in advance in the past.
- Exploring cities other than where traveling (46%), dining (45%) and nightlife and excursions (43% each) are parts of the trip Indians prefer to be spontaneous.
- The freedom to explore without pressure (50%), flexibility to visit multiple destinations (49%), and the opportunity to immerse themselves in new cultures (48%) are cited as top motivations for spontaneous travel.

Thriving on sporting excitement: For sports enthusiasts, travel is not just about sightseeing but also about experiencing adrenaline-pumping events firsthand.

- 29% of Indians, surpassing the global average of 14%, plan to travel more often for sporting events in 2024.
- Football/soccer (47%) Formula 1 (30%), and the 2024 Paris Olympics (24%) top the list of sports events for Indians planning to travel for sporting events in 2024.
- Paris (43%), London (42%) and New York City (37%) are top destinations among Indians planning on travelling for a sporting event this summer. ♦

Hotels to see 9-11% Revenue Growth in FY25; third straight year in current upcycle: CareEdge Ratings Report

Room rates expected to rise to Rs 7,700 – Rs 7,900 in FY25

CareEdge Ratings estimates that in FY24, hotel industry will end at RevPAR growth of 12-14 per cent on the high base of FY23. The robust resurgence in demand, coupled with the gradual alignment of supply and demand of branded hotels room inventory, has been a noteworthy facet of the hospitality sector's post-pandemic trajectory.

The growth momentum in the hotel industry is expected to be sustained in FY25, resulting in likely y-o-y revenue growth by 9-11% backed by healthy domestic leisure and business travel and complemented by increasing foreign tourist arrivals, contributing to an improved credit profile for industry players. This will make it the third straight year of an upcycle. Pan-India, average room rates (ARRs) are expected to be around Rs 7,200 to Rs 7,400 in the current fiscal, which is likely to rise further to Rs 7,700 to Rs 7,900 in FY25. The hospitality sector's commendable recovery in occupancy rates and average rates has in turn cushioned its RevPAR, estimated to have climbed to an average range of Rs 4,800 to Rs 5,000 by the end of FY24 up from the 4,300-range registered in FY23 and is expected to grow by 9-11% in FY25 on the high base of FY24.

While supply of room inventory is expected to experience a delayed catch-up due to the protracted setup period for greenfield hotels, organized players are strategically expanding their footprint in an asset-light manner. Anticipated supply growth is estimated to range from 4% to 5% compounded annual growth rate over the next 4-5 years, adding over 50,000 rooms to the country's current inventory of approximately 160,000 branded rooms.

Capacity additions on the rise; Midscale- economy segment gaining share

Presently, supply is more balanced across different segments, as compared to an earlier mix that was heavily weighted towards luxury and upper upscale hotels. Over the years the supply concentration in the luxury-upper upscale segment has reduced from 39% in FY15 to 32% in FY23 and is expected to reduce further to 26% by FY27 as the majority of new supply is coming in Upscale, Upper midscale and Midscale/Economy sections. This reduction in supply share is despite new rooms being added in all the segments; better balance has arisen due to material supply growth by rooms in upscale, upper midscale and midscale-economy segments. Several global/Indian hotel operators have also launched sub-brands with a clear focus on quality within key destinations which not only helps them in swiftly building a pool of quality inventory with presence across segments but also aids in better allocation of their capital.

"On the back of the surge in domestic demand and underlying GDP growth, the players in the industry are witnessing strong capacity utilization. With the sharp increase in capacity utilization combined with stable supply growth, hotels are seeing significant ability to yield the demand for branded hotels on an ongoing basis which shall support the strong ARR at current levels or drive some growth as well. While the material contribution from international travelers is yet to materialize, currently the domestic demand is the key driver. With the current travel momentum expected to continue and anticipated demand likely to outpace current supply, FY25 is likely to witness steady high occupancies in the range of 68-70% and continued RevPAR growth at 9-11% which shall aid in overall improvement of the credit profile of the players in the industry", said Ravleen Sethi, Associate Director, CareEdge Ratings. ♦



VFS Global travel trade outreach attracts 1,200 agents across 12 cities

VFS Global, advancing its pre-season engagement with the travel trade in India, organised a series of roadshows across 12 cities in February and March. The roadshows enabled the company to share insights on their plans for the upcoming peak travel season and provided the agents a platform to address the challenges that they encounter.

The programme commenced in Bhubaneswar on 19 February and concluded on 26 March in Kochi. The other cities where these roadshows were conducted include Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Jalandhar, Chandigarh, New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, Bangalore, and Chennai. Over 1,200 agents from across these cities participated in the event.

The events focussed on the need to book appointments in advance as most countries accept visa applications up to 90 days (3 months) before the date of travel. According to the revised Schengen Visa Code, effective 09th February 2020, one can apply for a Schengen visa up to 6 months before the date of travel.

Another issue that was reiterated at the meet was that visa appointments are free and it's only available on www.vfsglobal.com.

The agents were also updated on the operational changes taking place within the regions and VFS Global took the opportunity to promote Visa At Your Doorstep (VAYD), services and Premium Lounge.

The VFS Global team was led by Vishal Jairath, Head—South Asia, Visa Operations; Sharad Gowani, Regional Head—West, and Jaya Amit Mitra, Regional Head—South India, Sri Lanka and Maldives addressed the travel agents at their respective locations.

The event received overwhelming response from travel association such as the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI), and the Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI). Jyoti Mayal, President TAAI and Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, addressed the agent community in Delhi and Mumbai respectively.







Luxury Redefined: The Leela Bhartiya City sets new standards in Bengaluru hospitality market

TBM Staff | Bengaluru

Nestled within Bengaluru's thriving Special Economic Zone, The Leela Bhartiya City stands as a beacon of luxury and sophistication, offering guests an unparalleled experience in hospitality. As a gateway to this vibrant city's future-shaping rhythm, the hotel promises not just accommodation but an immersion into the bustling energy of India's leading startup hub.

From its prime location, accessing Bengaluru's key destinations is a breeze,

whether it's the IT corridor, Financial District, airport, or the myriad parks, lakes, and museums that dot the landscape. The weather, famed for its pleasantness, invites leisurely strolls around the township, allowing guests to soak in the city's ambiance without breaking a sweat.

Upon stepping into the elegant suites, guests are enveloped in comfort and luxury. The amenities rival the best in the world, ensuring a stay that's as indulgent as it is relaxing. Culinary delights await at the hotel's celebrated restaurants, where global cuisines come alive in a symphony of flavors. As the sun sets, guests can unwind by the pool with a refreshing drink or partake in The Leela's traditional lamp lighting ritual, a testament to the hotel's rich heritage.

The culinary journey at The Leela Bhartiya City is nothing short of extraordinary. Five exceptional restaurants cater to every palate, promising a fusion of impeccable taste and discerning indulgence. Falak, perched on the 17th floor, offers panoramic views alongside slow-cooked delicacies from Awadh and the Northwest Frontier. The Lotus Oriental transports diners to the Far East with its flavorful Oriental delicacies, while The Library Bar beckons with its Indo-Victorian charm, offering a curated selection of wines, single malts, and artisanal cocktails.

For corporate and social gatherings, The Leela Bhartiya City's convention center is a seamless blend of contemporary chic and timeless elegance. With over 80,000 square feet of space, including the opulent Grand Ballroom and Royal Ballroom, the hotel offers extensive choices for bespoke events. The meeting rooms, including Bidar, Hampi,

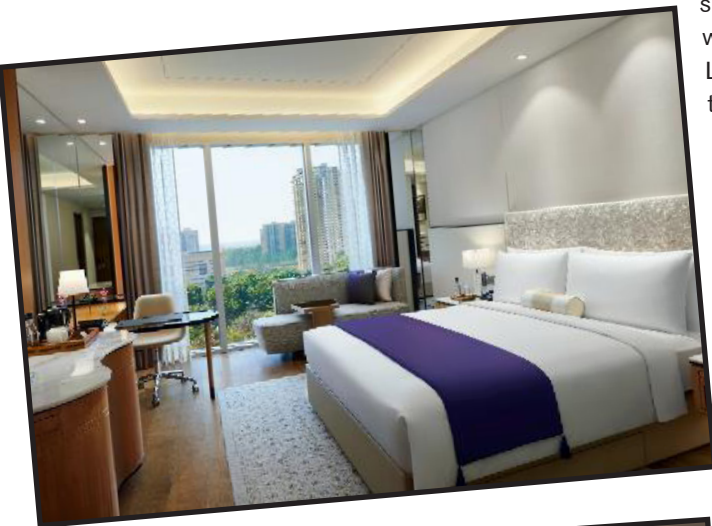
and The Boardroom, cater to gatherings of various sizes, ensuring that every event is executed with perfection.

While the hotel boasts several exclusive venues for Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE), Rajat Sharma, EAM Conventions, The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru, sheds light on their offerings: "Our hotel's dedicated convention center, spanning over 80,000 square feet, boasts a personal arrival porch and lobby, seamlessly connected to the hotel through a sky bridge. Featuring an inventory of 280 spacious rooms, with a minimum size of 470 square feet, exceeding the city's average 5-star room size by over 20%, The Leela Bhartiya City ensures utmost comfort for attendees."

With over 70% of its inventory standardised to accommodate the need for uniformity during events, the hotel offers versatility in event planning. Sharma highlighted that the majority of their clientele hails from metropolitan hubs such as Mumbai, Delhi NCR, and others. "Outdoor activities and team-building exercises find ample space in our expansive lawns and terrace, each spanning over 12,000 square feet. Moreover, the hotel's proximity to a shopping mall adds a touch of leisure to conference proceedings, with amenities like a multiplex available for private screenings and entertainment. Furthermore, The Leela Bhartiya City caters to the logistical needs of event organisers with multiple breakaway meeting venues and boardrooms, facilitating parallel programs and sessions," he added.

In addition to its world-class amenities, The Leela Bhartiya City offers the Amaris Salon and Spa, where guests can rejuvenate their mind, body, and soul with a range of therapeutic treatments and wellness experiences.

The Leela Bhartiya City stands as a beacon of luxury in Bengaluru, offering an unforgettable blend of opulence, comfort, and hospitality. ♦





Virender Razdan, General Manager, The Leela Bhartiya City Bengaluru is a hospitality professional and an astute business matter expert with over three decades of experience, having held positions at renowned hotels such as Hyatt Regency Delhi, Hilton New Delhi, Oberoi Hotels Mumbai, The Leela Mumbai, and ITC Hotels across various cities in India. With a track record of effective team management and stakeholder engagement, he excels in translating strategic goals into actionable plans to drive sales growth and profitability. **Asmita Mukherjee** spoke with Razdan, to know more about his plans for the growth and profitability of the property.

‘We consistently deliver on our brand promise, which sets us apart and keeps us ahead in this market’

Razdan reflects on a three-decade journey marked by evolution, innovation, and unwavering commitment to excellence. “Every sunset is an opportunity to reset. Every sunrise begins with new eyes,” he remarks.

For the last three decades, the hospitality industry has undergone a massive change in terms of technological advancement, guest preferences, etc., speaking about the changes Razdan said, “The hospitality industry has undergone significant transformations, which are fuelled by technological advancements, changing consumer/guest preferences and the emergence of new market players. These changes have pushed traditional hospitality businesses to innovate and adapt to stay competitive in an evolving landscape.”

Amidst these changes, Razdan emphasises that the fundamental formula for business growth remains anchored in



simplicity. “Our approach in driving sales growth and profitability is anchored in simplicity, as we focus on sales and it’s supported by unreasonable hospitality to our guests and colleagues,” he said.

“We do adopt dynamic pricing, yield management, distribution channel optimisation, upselling and cross-selling techniques and enhanced and differentiated guest loyalty programs,” these features have been instrumental in staying ahead in the

game, Razdan highlights.

Acknowledging the challenges posed by a competitive market, Razdan stresses the importance of equipping frontline staff with the necessary training of tools and knowledge of the product that they are selling. “We give a lot of emphasis to training all frontline staff in knowing the product and selling it effectively. Likewise, our team is trained in a few logic. You Know More – You Tell More – You Sell More.”

As a General Manager, Razdan’s priorities lie in commitment to understanding and exceeding guest expectations. “Our key priorities and strategic initiatives for the property are centered around fundamental principles. We aim to thoroughly understand our guests’ expectations to ensure personalised experiences and exceptional guest services. Leveraging social media platforms, we engage with our audience effectively to enhance brand visibility and connect with potential guests. Constantly monitoring online reviews allows us to gather valuable feedback and address any concerns promptly, thereby maintaining our reputation for excellence. Additionally, we foster a culture of innovation, continually seeking new ways to elevate the guest experience and stay ahead in a competitive market landscape,” he added.

In the competitive market of Bengaluru, Razdan’s strategic vision revolves around reinforcing The Leela’s position as a market leader. With a strong brand presence built over

two decades, the property distinguishes itself by delivering on its brand promise. “We have a strong brand presence in Bengaluru as a market leader for the past two decades. 100% deliver on our brand promise keeps us ahead in this market,” said Razdan.

Addressing the pressing water crisis in Bengaluru, Razdan shed light on The Leela Bhartiya City’s proactive measures on sustainability. “Our asset is built on the “The LEED”

deliverables. We focus on carbon positive, water positive and zero waste principles.” Not only that but the property also is undergoing rainwater harvesting, wastewater treatment, etc to save water, explains Razdan, “In addition to having rainwater harvesting at the premises, all wastewater is reused in the form of common area cleaning, cooling tower, flushes and gardening. This makes The Leela Bhartiya City as the water-positive hotel in Bengaluru.” ♦

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A TRIP DOWN UNDER

Australia is friendlier, more panoramic, urban and majestically aboriginal at the same time than many parts of the world.

If one wants to connect with its people, nearly two thirds of Australians live in just five metro cities of Sydney, Perth, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide - that's where you go. Melbourne and Sydney, both rapidly growing cities, consistently high on liveability indexes appeals to a plethora of immigrants and tourists alike.

Both cities (like much of the country) derive heavily from English colonial heritage in street names as well as the style of architecture. But this is probably where the similarities end, especially for Sydney. Sydney boasts of a unique topography where the ocean interweaves intricately into that particular landscape, creating waterway inlets, bays, and a plethora of beaches.

Sydney's transport infrastructure criss-crosses between buses, trams, a much smaller metro, but a wide network of ferries. During our short stay, we took ferries to Mosman and Manly from Circular Quay, which is right next to the Sydney opera house. The sunset trip on the ferry was a memorable and inexpensive way of admiring the Sydney iconic landmarks of the Harbour Bridge and opera house.

Now there is a beach for every need in Sydney - from the world famous Bondi beach to the much smaller hidden coves and beaches that attract surfers, instagrammers, families, quiet swimmers and naturist sunbathers. One is never far from the water in Sydney, and the locals make the best use of it.

Melbourne has historically always been busy playing catch-up to the more popular and exciting Sydney, but as I experienced myself, it has now arrived on the scene in its own stead. It's more of the culture and gastronomic scene where Melbourne has attempted to create a unique imprint on the world stage.

While Melbourne's street art scene appeared to be a poorer cousin of London's Shoreditch, it is still quite vast and interspersed with innumerable cafes and restaurants. In fact, Melbourne has a higher density of cafes and restaurants than any other major world city. So much for city life.

Let's face it. Food isn't really Australia's original forte. It knows this and has taken the bull by its horns recently to turn matters around. What it lacks in authenticity, it has made up for in quality and improvisation. With the increasing Indian diaspora in the large cities, emergence and acceptance of Indian cuisine in the mainstream is well and truly underway.

The world famous Great Barrier Reef is the hotbed of all sorts

of marine life in Australia. Lady Elliot Island, at the southernmost tip of the reef, houses the highest density of bird species and a mesmerising coral spectacle.

Back on the coast at Brandenburg, we had a chance to see visit the Mon Repos turtle centre during hatching season. There was a rewarding midnight experience to see a turtle hatchling scramble towards on the sand and be swept away by the waves into the moonlit ocean.

Another unique experience in Australia was being able to watch a kangaroo family hop into the huge backyard of our Airbnb and remain there fairly unperturbed by our presence at a little distance. The Great Ocean Road is one of the world's great road trips and we enjoyed every moment of it. Car hire in Australia is very straight forward. Unfortunately the GPS signal was patchy and even non-existent at times in remote sections of the drive where one might need it most. Despite that in a broader sense, driving Down Under was a pleasure.

One place that has reinvented itself in the last four years is Uluru (or Ayer's Rock as previously known). The vast Red Centre of Australia is still home to the many Aboriginal tribes who are the original landowners. Thankfully Australia has respectfully recognised them lately. Many recent changes, including a ban on climbing the sacred Uluru rock in 2020 and removal of all motels from the national park itself, have meant that the place can be seen in its natural glory. That is also in line with the wishes of the Anangu tribe who have rightfully received back its ownership.

What can Australia do better to get more tourists, especially from Indian shores? Well, curated trips for desi honeymooners - adventure activities, beach resorts, wildlife themed Itineraries for one. More resorts for families near wildlife parks, preservation centres and just outside urban centres and a sustained plug for self-drive Itineraries among others can help as well.

My trip was majorly self-drive and we are glad we did it!

Anurag Yadav

Anurag Yadav is a travel author and columnist, writing on hospitality and design. An avid traveller, he has published 5 books and divides his time equally between Delhi and London.

The views are personal.



FCM Travel India is bullish about prospects of business travel from Southeast Asia, Greater China and its youngest source market of Japan. Sunny Sodhi, Managing Director, FCM Travel India spoke to Disha Shah Ghosh about the MICE segments driving growth, and their focus areas.

Meetings in 2023 had an exponential growth of more than 300 per cent. We have also seen a 30 per cent increase in requests for incentive trips which are making a comeback. Also known as employee reward programmes, incentive trips are used to boost employee engagement and productivity.

Q For FCM Travel, besides India which are the top 5 key priority markets in Asia?

Southeast Asia, Greater China and Japan are priority markets for FCM Travel. Asia has continued to outperform with strong performances across Southeast Asia and the re-opening of China. Japan is our youngest market, and it is an exciting and dynamic market for business travel as it is the 4th leading business tourism market based on total travel spending.

Q What is your strategy to drive the business travel market in India?

There are several strategies in place. We have heavily invested in technology and recently announced our corporate AI Centre

'FCM Travel India's revenue has grown by more than 20% as compared to 2019'

Q In terms of global pecking order as well as its position in the APAC region, where does India rank as a source market for business travel?

India is the 9th largest market in the world based on business travel spending. It is the 4th largest market in the Asia Pacific region, representing 5.7 per cent of business travel spend in the region.

Q What has been the growth of the business travel segment in India during 2023, and your forecast for 2024?

FCM Travel India has seen an overall business growth of more than 20 per cent in 2023 compared to 2019. FCM India's Meetings & Events revenue has also doubled. With India's GDP estimated to grow at 6.8 per cent in 2024, we expect a robust year ahead.

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Q Which vertical of the MICE segment is driving this growth of business travel from India?

of Excellence which has seen new features added to our suite of products already available to improve the customer experience and increase our operational productivity.

Aside from technology, we've also been working tirelessly towards clear and consistent strategies that have been successfully executed globally, with these strategies initially focusing on 'Grow to Win', but now also include productive operations.

We are also investing in FCM Meetings & Events which has just announced the launch of FCM Venue Finder, a platform that revolutionises the booking process for meetings and group hotel accommodations within the MICE industry.

Q What has been your revenue growth in 2023?

FCM Travel India's revenue has grown by more than 20 per cent as compared to 2019. ♦

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Immersive experiences: Unveiling *Rasas* through *Indriyas*

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

The Indian philosophy refers to 'rasas' as emotional or aesthetic experiences that arise from interactions between the external world and the "indriyas". The term "indriya", in turn, refers to the senses. The human perception and interaction with the external world occur through the operation of these indriyas. There are traditionally five main *Indriyas* or *Jnana Indriyas* (Cognitive Senses). *Chakshu*- the sense of sight; *Shrotra*- hearing; *Ghrana*-the sense of smell; *Rasana*- the sense of taste; and *Sparsha*- the touch.

Traditionally, there are nine main rasas, which represent different emotional states- *Shringara* (Love or Erotic), *Hasya* (Laughter or Humor), *Karuna* (Compassion), *Raudra* (Anger), *Veera* (Courage), *Bhayanaka* (Fear), *Bibhatsa* (Disgust), *Adbhuta* (Wonder or Amazement), and *Shanta* (Peace or Tranquility). Rasa theory is particularly emphasised in Indian aesthetics, drama, and literature. These rasas are not just emotions but are also regarded as aesthetic experiences that can be evoked through various forms of art and storytelling.

The centrality of this discussion revolves around how *rasas* (emotions) are and can be triggered and experienced through *indriyas* (sensory perception). The *indriyas* play a crucial role in receiving stimuli from the external world, and these stimuli then lead to the generation of emotional responses (*rasas*) within an individual. Let us see how *indriyas* and *rasas* can be used to create tourism products.

Consider the Taj Mahal, a tourist attraction. In the mornings, the Taj Mahal may attract explorers and history buffs. Through sight (*Chakshu*), guided tours can reveal architectural details, historical significance, and war echoes, deepening comprehension of the monument's history. Guides may tell stories (*Shrotra*) of the Taj Mahal's construction and architecture with the clang of swords and the resonance of ancient battle commands, interweaving auditory senses into the historical fabric. In the backdrop, the site managers can use scents (*Ghrana*) of Mughal-era herbs and spices. Every inhale can transport visitors to the past. In addition to sight and scent, this journey may involve taste (*Rasana*). Traditional breakfast may offer a tantalising

glimpse into Mughal cuisine. Finally, hands can explore (*Sparsha*). Technology-enabled touchable displays can let history be felt- the stone's texture and craft's tradition beneath your touch. With mediaeval battles and architectural genius, each *Indri* will stir Rasa (emotions) that will kindle the spirit of exploration, etching memories of courage and awe in the heart of the Taj Mahal's historical adventure, allowing courage (*Veera*) and wonder (*Adbhuta*) rasas to converge.

With ASI's on board, the Taj Mahal may become a romantic historical site for high-paying couples and honeymooners at night. This customised encounter can ignite love and unite hearts in its eternal embrace. Through the eyes' lens (*Chakshu*), the Taj Mahal may appear gently lit by sunset, enhancing its romance. The architectural marvel is the setting for a twilight love story. Melodies awaken (*Shrotra*). Elegant and romantic live classical music serenades couples with harmonies that mimic their emotions with every note. Scents (*Ghrana*) from flowers and candles can be released into the air. The smell swirls on the breeze, enchanting every breath with love. But more than sight and scent are involved. The palate may also convey emotion (*Rasana*). A romantic dinner with various gourmet foods awaits in the stunning setting, creating a tasteful tapestry. As couples sit (*Sparsha*), the atmosphere comforts them. Cradled by intimacy and connection seating, shared moments are heightened by the calm of the surroundings. *Shringara* (Love) and *Shanta* (Peace) Rasa create an intimate and peaceful atmosphere in this symphony of sensations. The Taj Mahal's ethereal splendour inspires love transcending time and space, leaving couples with precious memories.

Cultural immersion enthusiasts and families may be targeted in the afternoons. Guided tours reveal the Taj Mahal's beautiful details, craftsmanship, and stories as eyes (*Chakshu*) explore. Families may congregate for storytelling (*Shrotra*) sessions to pass on monument folklore and history. During cultural events on the outskirts, incense and indigenous spices (*Ghrana*) may fill the air, engulfing visitors in the sense of Agra's culture. The Rasa of authentic native foods and beverages connects guests to the mediaeval culinary tradition from their



earlier Delhi visit. Craft lessons or visiting a curious shop outside the Taj Mahal can connect visitors with local traditions through the touch (*Sparsha*). *Adbhuta* (Wonder) and *Karuna* (Compassion) rasas combine in this story, immersing visitors in the Taj Mahal's rich cultural fabric. The past and present intersect to promote empathy for historical traditions and a deep understanding of the human tales within its walls.

We need to realise that *indriyas* are the channels through which sensory experiences occur, while the *rasas* are the emotional and aesthetic responses that arise from these sensory interactions with the material world which the visitors seek. Tourism service providers need to be creative in invoking *indriyas* to generate *rasas* for different audiences (read different experiential tourism products)- interestingly using the same resources. ♦

'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 17 years in India, China, and Mexico. In addition, he was a visiting faculty at Gotland University (Sweden), the University of Girona (Spain), IIM Sirmour, IIQM, and EDII. He is a recipient of many academic awards and recognitions. He has authored 24 books and more than 240 academic papers and chapters. He has travelled extensively to around 40 countries and almost all states within the country.