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'Indians exhibit an open-minded attitude & eagerly seek new experiences'

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

In 2022, Topgolf, the renowned golf-themed entertainment brand from the US, unveiled its inaugural venue in Southeast Asia, situated near Bangkok Suvarnabhumi Airport. This marks the latest addition to its global network of 80-plus locations. Topgolf offers an all-encompassing experience, combining play, food, and entertainment in one dynamic destination. It features 102 golf hitting bays.

Tim Boda, MD, TopGolf Thailand, recently visited India with the intent of engaging with their representation company and primarily connecting with key players in the MICE sector, as expressed during his conversation with **TravelBiz Monitor**.

While talking about their USP, Boda remarked, "Topgolf stands out for its uniqueness. Golf is often seen as an elite sport, intimidating to many. Herein lays the significance of Topgolf. We have transformed this intimidating game into an inclusive activity for all. Leveraging technology and creative concepts, we cater to individuals who have never experienced golf before."



Tim Boda
MD, TopGolf Thailand

Players have the opportunity to accumulate points by striking micro-chipped golf balls at 11 massive targets spread across the 205-yard outfield. The utilisation of Toptracer ball-tracing technology and the presence of 300 HDTV screens at the hitting bays introduce a diverse realm of gameplay options.

Boda noted that the game is gaining significant popularity, stating, "Typically, individuals intend to play for an hour but, on

average, end up enjoying it for two hours in an average." He also emphasised that Indian cuisine is permanently featured on the menu, not just available upon request.

Talking about the focus on India market, he said that they have started with Delhi and Mumbai. "We are fortunate that inbound business from India to Thailand is not only substantial, but also highly diverse," Boda highlighted. "Travellers from various segments such as FIT, Wedding, MICE, and Family visit Thailand, which greatly benefits us." He indicated that their upcoming focus will extend to the Bengaluru, Chennai, and Coimbatore markets.

He also said that the Indians are very open minded and try to experience new things. "We observed this so far and now our aim is to develop the market here further," Boda said.

Talking about their achievement, he said, "It took us 1.5 years to establish a presence in the Bangkok market. Initially, 80% of our clientele comprised golfers, but now, 75% of our clientele consists of non-golfers. This represents a significant achievement," stated Boda. ♦

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ATM's sold out Travel Tech space sees 56% y-o-y growth

TBM Staff | Mumbai

More than 100 of the world's leading travel technology companies will be exhibiting at Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2024, taking place at the Dubai World Trade Centre (DWTC).

ATM 2024's sold-out Travel Tech space will be 56% bigger than last year with 33% more exhibitors participating this year, thanks to unprecedented demand from companies looking to showcase their innovations in front of a global audience.

Sponsored by Sabre, the ATM Future Stage – formerly known as the Travel Tech Stage – will host over a 100 expert speakers from across the global travel and tourism industry, plus a diverse selection of cutting-edge innovations designed

to improve efficiency and profitability within the sector. Delegates will explore how advanced tech can be leveraged to drive improvements across a range of segments, including payment, professional development, accessibility, sustainability and more.

Danielle Curtis, Exhibition Director ME, Arabian Travel Market, said, "My colleagues and I are delighted to introduce the ATM Future Stage, which will harness the ever-increasing levels of innovation our industry is witnessing while building on the long-standing success of our Travel Tech offering."

The global travel technology market was valued at USD 9.4 billion in 2022 and is projected to reach USD 21 billion by 2032, according



to Allied Market Research. The ATM Future Stage will host a selection of presentations and sessions designed to highlight opportunities within this space.

These include; Navigating the Future: A Futurist's Prediction, Strategic Capabilities and Implications of AI within Business, Putting the Traveller First with AI and Unlocking the Value of Travel: Harnessing Technology for Enhanced Traveler Journeys, which will be held in association with Amadeus. ♦

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Palladium Hotel Group will strengthen its efforts and dedication to the Indian market in the upcoming months.

The company is dedicated to fostering this market in tandem with its Global Destinations team. Each endeavour it pursues within this market will be closely coordinated with them (Global Destinations), says **Sandra Polo Canudas, Commercial Director, Asia & MEA** in an exclusive interview with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

‘Indian customers spend more now for experiences’

Q What sets Palladium Hotel Group properties apart from other hotels, and what unique selling points (USPs) do they offer guests?

As you aware, Palladium Hotel Group is a renowned Spanish hotel chain boasting over 40 establishments worldwide with continuous expansion efforts. Among our latest additions is the 45 Times Square Hotel located in New York, USA, enriching our diverse portfolio that currently features 94 distinct brands.

Our stand-out feature lies in entertainment, offering guests an immersive and experiential stay unlike any other.

For those seeking summer getaways, our Hotels in Balearic Islands stand as prime destinations, particularly ideal for visits from March to October. Additionally, our year-round properties cater to diverse interests, be it urban exploration, cultural immersion, or engaging activities. For all these, guests can visit to our properties viz- Hard Rock Hotel Tenerife & Hard Rock Hotel Marbella

Q What was the performance of Palladium Hotel Group in 2023?

In comparison to 2022, we experienced a



significant improvement in 2023. Although we faced challenges with visas, but thankfully everything was managed. Despite competition in the market, our properties worldwide continue to attract a substantial number of guests. Indian guests particularly appreciate our offerings, and we've observed a positive upward trend in their satisfaction. I am confident that 2024 will surpass our expectations.

Many Indian weddings are taking place at our properties in Mexico, for instance, Grand Palladium Costa Mujeres Resort & Spa hosting such events on a monthly basis. Our properties in Sicily are also increasingly becoming popular among the Indian guests.

Q Could you elaborate on the sales strategy employed by the hotel group and discuss any challenges faced in driving sales, particularly in the current market landscape?

From the perspective of hotel operations, we do not encounter any significant challenges. However, the real hurdle arises with last-minute requests. Fortunately, due to our extensive experience in the market, we are adept at handling such situations.

Internally, we are undergoing various changes, and soon I will be overseeing additional markets, making it impractical to visit India three times a year. Nevertheless, I want to emphasize our heightened focus on the Indian market in the coming months. We are committed to nurturing this market along with our Global Destinations team. Every initiative we undertake in this market will be in close collaboration with them (Global Destinations).

Our dedication to this market stems from the promising outcomes we have observed.

Q Which Indian cities are currently under your focus?

Presently, our attention is directed towards Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, and Kolkata. The response from these markets has been notably positive. Therefore, we will maintain our focus on these markets for the time being.

Q What upcoming plans does the Palladium Hotel Group have in store for its properties, including new amenities, expansions, or other developments?

We're expanding our global footprint as Ushuaia Unexpected Hotels & Residences makes its debut in the Middle East. We intend to open a hotel and luxury residences on Al Marjan Island in Ras Al Khaimah within the next 2 years. one of the region's premier tourist and investment destinations, and will comprise a sophisticated beach club, exquisite restaurant and captivating infinity pool, all situated adjacent to the Wynn Resort Island and overlooking the picturesque Arabian Gulf. With a budget of over 100 million dollars, this major project will be carried out alongside Marjan, one of the leading developers of freehold properties in Ras Al Khaimah, and Almal Real Estate Development, a luxury property developer based in the region. A total of 442 hotel rooms and residences, complemented by "a stylish beach club and restaurant", will open in the country from 2026, marking the group's debut in the Middle East.

Our forthcoming strategy involves expansion into markets such as the US, Mexico, and the Mediterranean region. When I refer to expansion, it entails the establishment of new hotels. We aim to broaden our presence in fifty countries as part of our plans.

Q What changes have you observed in terms of Indian customers' behaviour, especially after Covid?

I've noticed that Indian customers are increasingly willing to spend more in experiences while prioritizing safety and security. Furthermore, the tendency to explore new destinations has increased significantly.

Q Can you outline the sustainability initiatives undertaken by the Palladium Hotel Group and how they align with the company's commitment to environmental responsibility?

In 2023, we launched the "Palladium Cares" program, which organizes the group's CSR initiatives under three pillars- Our People, Our Community, and Our Planet. Our first centre was opened in the US. To date, the program has facilitated 56 activities in collaboration with 30 NGOs, engaging over 300 volunteers. ♦

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AIUla sets sight on leisure travellers from India's metro cities

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

The Royal Commission of AIUla (RCU) is keen to tap leisure travellers from the Indian market, especially from the cities of Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad.

Talking to the press during her recent visit to Mumbai at ITC Parel, Melanie de Souza, Executive Director, Destination Marketing, RCU, said, "The ancient city of AIUla is well positioned to tap leisure travellers for its heritage, arts, and adventure, nature and wellness offerings. Our while campaign is about the leisure market, and visiting AIUla is an experience of a lifetime."

Sharing her views, she said, "AIUla is well-positioned to cater to the Umrah+ travellers. Saudi Arabia is sitting on the

natural assets, Red Sea, its pristine corals, and the luxury hotels are worth indulging in. It is a matter of time that the world will realise that Saudi also beyond a religious destination."

With regards to their campaign, she said that they have strong anecdote from India that the country will emerge as its Number 1 source market, and their entire campaign is centred about tapping the leisure travellers in India. "With a firm commitment to sustainability, RCU aims to limit tourist influx to 2 million by 2035 while striving for net carbon neutrality."

AIUla welcomed 26,300 visitors, with projections estimating 29,100 tourists for 2024 and an anticipated surge to 38,100 guests by 2025. ♦

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Melanie de Souza

With target of 200,000 arrivals from India, KTO hosts leisure & MICE roadshows in Bengaluru & Mumbai

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) concluded a series of roadshows in Bengaluru and Mumbai last week. These events brought together Indian travel professionals with a delegation including the Busan Tourism Organization (BTO) and 10 Korean Destination Management Companies (DMCs).

The evenings boasted a unique flair, featuring CHEF, a dynamic culinary performance team, flown in from Korea. They captivated audiences with a blend of beatboxing, B-boying, and a live cooking battle.

Adding to the events' prestige, dignitaries from the India Tourism (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India), MTDC, IRCTC senior officers, along with the heads of leading travel associations graced the event. A high-level delegation from the KTO headquarters also actively participated in the roadshows. Their presence demonstrated the organization's strong commitment to the Indian market.

Leading the KTO HQ delegation, was Chang Wook Jung, Executive Director, MICE, Korea Tourism Organization (KTO). "We are thrilled by the enthusiastic response at our recent roadshows in Bengaluru and Mumbai," he said. "The productive interactions between



Indian travel professionals and our Korean delegation were a highlight. This direct engagement strengthens partnerships within the MICE sector and the broader Indian travel industry, laying the groundwork to achieve our ambitious target of attracting 20,000 MICE delegates from India in 2024. The engrossing cultural exchange, including the phenomenal performance by the CHEF team, resonated deeply with the audience. Building on this success, we eagerly anticipate welcoming even more Indian travellers to explore the

wonders of Korea."

Myong Kil Yun, Regional Director, India & SAARC Countries, Korea Tourism Organization (KTO), said, "We are energised by the momentum in India! With a record-breaking target of welcoming 200,000 Indian travellers this year, the recent roadshows were a resounding success. We are confident that by showcasing the diverse experiences Korea offers, from fascinating cultural performances to exciting leisure and MICE opportunities, we can achieve this ambitious goal." ♦



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TAFI hosts session with Spanish Consulate, spotlights Visa Surge & Tourism Interest

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Western India Chapter of TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India), in collaboration with the Consulate General of Spain Mumbai and Tourespana, hosted a meeting for its members. A large number of members attended the meeting.

Fernando Heredia Noguera, Consul General of Spain in Mumbai, gave a presentation followed by an engaging exchange with attendees. In fact, he answered a barrage of questions from the members.

Later speaking to **TravelBiz Monitor**, the Consul General, said, "In 2023, we had processed almost 52,000 visas which is 30% higher when compared with 2022."

Talking about the trend, he said that more and more travellers are now showing interest in visiting Spain. "Spain is a diverse country just like India, and people should visit other parts of the country, not just Barcelona and Madrid," he exhorted.

It is important to mention here that Consulate General Spain (Mumbai) covers Gujarat to Kerala and from Tamil Nadu to Chattisgarh. Noguera emphasised, "Despite facing manpower constraints, we have successfully reduced the turnaround time for Spanish visas to just 48 hours."

He added, "Residents of Mumbai and Pune can expect their visas within 48 hours, while



those residing in areas like Coimbatore etc. will receive them within 72 to 96 hours due to the longer courier transit times."

According to Ajay Prakash, President, TAFI, the meeting was path-breaking. "It's rare for a Consul General to willingly engage with our members and answer questions, which makes this event particularly noteworthy. I hope this sets a precedent for similar dialogues with other consulates," remarked Prakash. He also lauded Pranav Kapadia of Global Destinations for playing a pivotal role in ensuring the success of the event.

The event also witnessed a presentation by Elisa Robles Fraga, Director, Spain Tourism Board.

Jay Kantawala, Chairman, Western India Chapter, TAFI, said that the purpose of

the event was to provide education to their members regarding the Spain visa process and to promote the country as a tourism destination. He commended the Consul General while stating, "He has been extremely supportive to the industry, and has made concerted efforts to facilitate our needs."

"We are thrilled to have hosted such a successful networking event in collaboration with TAFI's Western India Chapter, the Consulate General of Spain, and TourEspana," said Pranav Kapadia, Founder, Global Destinations. "The event provided a platform for meaningful dialogue and collaboration within the travel industry. A fantastic example of how collaboration can truly elevate the travel industry," he added. ♦

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Bali's tented luxury camp Capella Ubud is keen to tap the Indian market.

Brooke Hall, Director of Sales and Marketing, Capella Ubud, Bali talks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their plans for travel trade outreach.

'We are committed developing the Indian market through partnerships'

What does Capella Ubud bring to Indonesia's hospitality landscape?

Capella Ubud, Bali elevates the adventure travel experience in Indonesia by combining ultra-luxurious tented accommodations with total jungle immersion.

What is your property's brand positioning?

Capella Ubud is an award-winning luxury tented camp. We embody excellence in the craft of hospitality by delivering personalised, unique, and memorable service superior to

our competition.

What is your outreach strategy in India on the b2b front?

We work with Heaven's Portfolio as representation on behalf of Capella Hotel Group – interacting with the travel trade.

What response have you received from the Indian market?

We are pleased that the Indian market has responded positively to our offerings and is witnessing steady growth in demand. We are committed to continuing to develop the Indian

market through partnership programmes with key business accounts.

Are you considering an online specialist programme to educate the travel trade in India about your products?

The education and familiarisation programme are essential. We provide access to our online media library, where the travel trade can easily navigate the hotel and destination information, videos, and social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook). ♦

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Travel Designer Group is upbeat about prospects of the Indian market with travel tech platforms bringing about an organised structure to the largely fragmented industry. **Jaal Shah, Group Managing Director, Travel Designer Group** spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their flagship brand RezLive, growing the Affiliate.Travel platform, and the forecast for the market in India.

the opportunity for the affiliate to have a sub-affiliate dedicated portal which they can offer to their B2C clients or corporates. Affiliate.Travel is a B2B2C payment gateway model, wherein an affiliate earns commission on each reservation done by them or their sub-affiliates. For travel agents engaging with corporate clients, Affiliate.travel by RezLive.com stands as a potent resource for broadening their outreach and fostering revenue expansion. This innovative tool empowers corporate entities to utilize their company credit cards, facilitating the earning of commissions for the travel agency involved.

While both platforms share a commitment to excellence and innovation, RezLive.com focuses on serving the needs of travel professionals directly, while Affiliate.Travel enables businesses to leverage our technology to enhance their own offerings and brand presence in the travel industry.

‘We are dedicated to fostering deeper penetration & engagement in India’

Q Are you looking at adding new products to the RezLive portfolio since it's your flagship brand?

We are committed to the ongoing evolution and expansion of the RezLive portfolio, our esteemed flagship brand. As part of our strategic vision, we are actively engaged in the development of multiple products that will further enrich the offerings available through RezLive.com. While specifics regarding these new products are currently confidential, we assure you that our focus remains steadfast on delivering innovative solutions to meet the diverse needs of our valued travel partners.

Q What is your strategy to further penetrate into the Indian market since the offline agent base is still very fragmented?

We recognise the immense potential of the Indian market and are dedicated to fostering deeper penetration and engagement within it. Our strategy entails a multi-faceted approach that prioritises collaboration with local partners, leveraging advanced technological solutions, and providing tailored support to address the unique needs of the diverse offline agent base. By fostering strong relationships, harnessing the power of data-driven insights, and continually refining our services, we aim to cultivate sustainable growth and meaningful impact within the Indian market landscape.

Q In terms of pecking order, which are your key source markets? How has the growth from India?

At RezLive.com, we value all our source

markets and recognise their significance in our global operations. While each market plays a crucial role in our overall strategy, India stands out as one of our key source markets due to its vibrant tourism landscape and growing demand for travel services. The growth trajectory from India has been particularly encouraging, reflecting our commitment to delivering tailored solutions and fostering strong partnerships within the region. As we continue to expand our presence globally, we remain dedicated to nurturing and maximizing opportunities in all our key source markets, including India.

Q How do you differentiate RezLive & Affiliate.Travel?

RezLive.com and Affiliate.Travel are both esteemed platforms within our portfolio, each offering distinct value propositions to our travel partners.

RezLive.com serves as our flagship brand, providing a comprehensive B2B online booking platform tailored to the needs of travel agents and tour operators worldwide. With RezLive.com, travel partners gain access to a vast inventory of hotel, sightseeing, and transfer services, supported by advanced technology and dedicated customer service.

On the other hand, Affiliate.Travel, an innovative product of RezLive.com, is transforming the travel industry landscape by redefining how travel partners and businesses collaborate. Powered by the vision of RezLive.com, a leading global B2B travel wholesaler, Affiliate.Travel has emerged as a game-changer in the domain of affiliate marketing for the travel sector wherein it even provides

Q What is your forecast for growing the India business?

At RezLive.com, we maintain a positive outlook for growing our business in India, a market with immense potential and dynamic opportunities. Our forecast is grounded in our steadfast commitment to understanding and addressing the evolving needs of Indian travel professionals. By leveraging our extensive network, innovative technology solutions, and personalized support, we aim to further strengthen our presence and deepen our relationships within the Indian travel industry. We remain dedicated to driving sustainable growth, fostering mutually beneficial partnerships, and delivering unparalleled value to our travel partners in India and beyond.


Q Travel Tech has emerged as a key force for the industry in India. In that regard, what kind of impact do you foresee in the coming decade?

Jaal: As travel technology continues to evolve, we anticipate a transformative impact on the travel industry in India over the coming decade. The emergence of Travel Tech as a key force underscores the importance of innovation and digitalization in enhancing the travel experience for both businesses and consumers. At RezLive.com, we foresee this trend driving significant changes, including greater accessibility to travel services, enhanced personalization, and improved efficiency across the entire travel ecosystem. By embracing emerging technologies, such as AI, blockchain, and IoT, we believe that the industry will unlock new opportunities for growth, collaboration, and sustainability. As a leading player in the travel wholesaling space, we are committed to driving this positive change and empowering our partners with cutting-edge solutions to navigate and thrive in this dynamic landscape. ♦


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GOD, THE SAVIOUR

The consecration of the Ram Temple in UP's Ayodhya garnered global spotlight, and the surge in its visitors is only mounting. History has witnessed time and again that religious tourism has always been a non-negotiable pursuit across people of all faiths, and the opening of this temple has only reinforced the fact that temple tourism is a big pull factor.

India is known for its elaborate celebrations of festivals and various auspicious moments as per planetary movements. Whether it is the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine in Jammu & Kashmir or the Ajmer Sharif Dargah in Rajasthan or Golden Temple in Amritsar, pilgrims have flocked to these sites in hordes since ages. Therefore, it is only timely and topical to encash on this opportunity in this day and age by a little tweaking of brand-management strategy. And Goa is the latest state to take a leaf out this experience by focusing on regenerative tourism, throwing the spotlight on the various *Teerths* that it is home to. This entire change in narrative is also an exercise to move away from this 'beach destination' image that in recent years has dented the tourism prospects of the state. The Goa administration has taken serious cognisance of changing the 'brand image' to a more family-friendly and religious destination. With the decline in tourists from Eastern Europe, the state is now banking on domestic tourism to bridge the inbound gap, and also offer a diverse range of experiences.

Whether it is about bringing in stringent guidelines for hosting large-scale music festivals to a war footing beach management policy, the state is on a make-over mode.

This is essential since competition is cut-throat, and tourists are spoilt for choice with a plethora of destination options.

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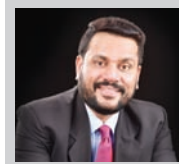
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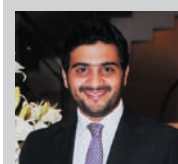
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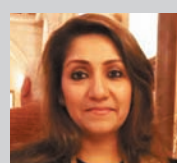
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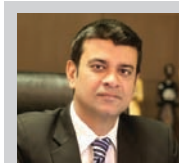
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Exploring Israel: A Journey Through IMTM, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv

I recently embarked on an extraordinary media familiarization trip to Israel, curated by Israel Ministry of Tourism, and accompanied by participants from India, the United States, Canada, the Philippines, France, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Spain, and Austria. Together, we explored the bustling cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv while attending the International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM) TLV 2024.

This trip, which took place from April 2-7, 2024, allowed me to experience Israel's rich cultural heritage and contemporary attractions, including its exceptional gastronomy scene. It was an immersive journey through the country's varied history and vibrant modernity, creating an unforgettable experience for travelers seeking both tradition and innovation.

April 2: Arrivals in Jerusalem



The Orient Hotel, Isrotel Exclusive Collection

Our journey began with a six-hour flight from Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi to Ben Gurion International Airport, named after Israel's first prime minister. Situated near Lod, just outside of Tel Aviv, the airport served as our gateway to the adventure. Upon arrival, we were warmly welcomed by our tour guide and driver before heading to Jerusalem. We checked into the luxurious Orient Hotel by Isrotel Exclusive Collection, our peaceful base for the next few days.

April 3: IMTM and Jerusalem



IMTM 2024 at The Expo TLV Center

After enjoying a delicious Mediterranean breakfast at the Orient Hotel, we made our way to Tel Aviv for IMTM 2024 at The Expo TLV Center. This event provided an invaluable platform for travel industry professionals to connect with global leaders and explore emerging trends in Mediterranean tourism. The half-day event offered fruitful networking opportunities and insights to help travel agents thrive in an ever-changing market.

Later, we visited Castel Winery for a delightful wine-tasting experience surrounded by picturesque vineyards. The relaxed afternoon included learning about the winery's history and wine-making process while soaking in the beautiful surroundings.



Castel Winery

Returning to Jerusalem, we explored Thinkers Distillery and took part in a tasting tour of the bustling Mahane Yehuda market. This culinary journey allowed us to savor local flavors and immerse ourselves in the lively market atmosphere.

April 4: Unveiling Jerusalem's Treasures



Zedekiah's Caves

We kicked off the day by exploring Zedekiah's Cave, also known as King Solomon's Quarries. This site is renowned for its intriguing history and aura of mystery. While there, we enjoyed a mesmerizing audio-visual laser show that added a whole new dimension to the experience.

One of the most memorable moments of the day was our journey through the Old City of Jerusalem, where we wandered through ancient streets and uncovered hidden treasures and sacred sites.

For Jews, the Western Wall holds immense spiritual significance as it is close to the Holy of Holies in the Temple Mount. Our exploration of the ruins of Robinson's Arch, which once supported a staircase leading to the Temple, also deepened our understanding of Jewish heritage.

As we moved through the Jewish Quarter, we admired the Western Cardo Mosaic, which is a testament to the area's historical importance.

For Christians, our visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are believed to have occurred, was a profound spiritual experience.



The Western Wall

For Muslims, the Old City is home to sites like the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque, both significant to the Islamic faith due to their connection to the Prophet Muhammad's night journey.

The Tower of David Museum, located near the Jaffa Gate, offers an engaging look at Jerusalem's history through exhibits and multimedia displays. As you wander the museum, enjoy the ancient stone architecture and stunning views of the city from the towers.

After exploring the city's quarters, we had time to leisurely browse the markets for jewelry, Mediterranean food, souvenirs, and other treasures. This time allowed us to fully absorb the unique atmosphere of the Old City and appreciate its rich tapestry of history and culture.

After an early dinner at Chakra restaurant, hosted by Yael Golan, we toured the National Library. The library holds 4.5 million books and items, showcasing Israel's literary and cultural heritage.



National Library in Jerusalem

Exploring the vast halls gave us insight into the country's history and culture through its archives. The meticulous preservation ensures these materials remain accessible for generations. Our visit was made even more special by the opening event of the "Open House Festival."

April 5: Dead Sea & Drive to Tel Aviv



En Gedi Nature Reserve

We began our day early to admire the breathtaking beauty of the Dead Sea. The adventure started with a brief hike in En Gedi Nature Reserve with stunning views of desert landscapes and lush oases.

It was followed by a short visit to the AHAVA Visitors Center where we learned about the production of skincare products using Dead Sea salt and mud. It was fascinating to see how AHAVA uses natural resources and modern techniques to create high-quality mineral-rich products.

Floating in the Dead Sea's mineral-rich waters was a truly calming and refreshing experience. We enjoyed the peace and quiet at the Milos Dead Sea Hotel's private beach, soaking in the soothing surroundings. The gentle, buoyant waters made us feel renewed, and lunch at the hotel was a treat with stunning views of the Dead Sea and delicious local cuisine.

After delectable lunch, we continued our journey to Tel Aviv. We enjoyed a delightful dinner at Onza restaurant before checking into the Alberto Hotel, marking the start of the next phase of our trip. Part of the Isrotel Design group, Alberto Hotel is located in the heart of Tel Aviv, near the lively Rothschild area. The hotel's prime location offered easy access to Tel Aviv's vibrant nightlife, which truly comes alive in the evenings with people eager to relax and enjoy music in an electrifying atmosphere.

April 6: Experiencing Tel Aviv



Street Art tour (Florentin)
Neve Tzedek and the American Colony

Tel Aviv's artistic and cultural scene was on display during our street art tour of Florentin, Neve Tzedek, and the American Colony. The city turned into an open-air gallery, showcasing the talent of local artists through vivid graffiti and murals.

A sunset yoga session at Charles Clore Park offered a peaceful moment by the sea.

Delicious Dinner at Yulia restaurant showcased Tel Aviv's culinary excellence.

The Tel Aviv nightlife tour was enchanting, immersing us in the city's dynamic energy after dark. As the night progressed, the lively music and vibrant atmosphere drew us into the city's energetic nightlife scene. We explored popular bars and clubs, mingling with locals and reveling in the excitement. This experience emphasized Tel Aviv's reputation as a city that never sleeps.



Tel Aviv Nightlife Tour

April 7: Tel Aviv and Departure

On our final day, we visited the beautiful R48 hotel and garden, followed by a leisurely stroll through Meir Park and the newly opened Pride Center.

In the afternoon, we wandered through Jaffa Flea Market and Old Jaffa, savoring a tasting tour against the backdrop of the sunset. The blend of history and modernity added to the experience. Later, we had free time at Jaffa port, where we soaked in the area's charm and character.

Following this tour, my time in Israel drew to a close as I made my way to Ben Gurion Airport. As I prepared to leave Israel, I reflected on the vibrant and captivating journey I had experienced. Israel's seamless



Seafront Buildings at the old Jaffa Port

blend of ancient heritage and contemporary energy creates a unique and exciting destination for travelers. Although I only visited two cities, I left wanting more.

Special thanks to the Israel Ministry of Tourism, Mumbai office, for facilitating an unforgettable journey through the country's rich culture and landscapes.

"Until next time." This phrase perfectly captured my feelings as I departed Israel. It's not a farewell, but a promise to return and continue exploring the many facets of this exceptional country. Until then, I will cherish the memories and look forward to uncovering even more on my next journey. ♦

MakeMyTrip Report Reveals Where, How, When and With Whom India Travels



An increase in holiday frequency, family-centric journeys, spiritual serenity, affordable luxury, and spontaneity are the major trends shaping travel

From Backpackers to Bon-Vivants – and everything in between – Indian travellers are not just reshaping the realm of domestic tourism but also commanding an increasingly important role in the ambit of international travel, leaving no corner of the globe too out of reach. Taking insights from travel searches by its 100M+ annual active users, MakeMyTrip has put together some of the top behaviours of Indian travellers in the first edition of its India Travel Trends Report. Insights include where, when and how India travels, top trends from millions of journeys – both from a national and a region-wise perspective.

Rajesh Magow, Co-founder and Group CEO, MakeMyTrip said, “Understanding the evolving travel behaviours of Indian travellers is essential to help shape the future of tourism, both domestically and globally. MakeMyTrip’s India Travel Trends Report highlights some of the latest essential trends. As India emerges as a formidable force in the tourism sector, these insights can help bridge the demand and supply gaps in the travel and hospitality space. This means crafting policies, identifying destinations, and creating experiences that resonate with the traveller’s unique travel preferences and aspirations. Recognizing and catering to each traveller’s diverse behaviour will not only enhance travel experiences but also contribute significantly to the growth and development of the tourism industry.”

Some Key Insights from the report are as below –

WHERE INDIA TRAVELS

- Number of people taking more than 3 trips per year has grown by 25% in 2023 as compared to 2019.
- Tier-2 and tier-3 cities are embracing spiritual journeys, with searches for destinations with or around religious spots growing 97% in the last two years.
- Searches for Ayodhya grew by 585%, Ujjain by 359% and Badrinath by 343% in 2023 as compared to 2022.
- Weekend getaways continue to curry favour with Indian travellers – Searches for Jim Corbett grew by 131% in 2023 as compared to 2022; Ooty and Munnar are other favourites in this context.
- 30% all international travel searches from India are for Dubai, Bangkok and Singapore while London, Toronto and New York are the most searched long-haul destinations.
- Searches for emerging international destinations grew by multi-fold in 2023 – hot favourites include Hong Kong, Almaty, Paro, Baku, Da Nang and Tbilisi.

WHEN, WITH WHOM AND HOW INDIA TRAVELS

- **Family vs Solo** - Family travel bookings surged by 64% in 2023 as compared to 2022, followed by solo traveller booking growth at 23% for the same comparative period.
- **Flight booking preferences –**
 - 50% of all domestic flyers pick flights between 9am and 6pm irrespective of destination or origin.
 - A significant portion of travel bookings in India are made spontaneously, with 46% of domestic flights booked less than a week before the travel date. In contrast, about half of all international bookings are made at least two weeks in advance.
 - Only one-third of international bookings are made more than a month before the travel date, suggesting a flexible approach to international travel planning among Indian travellers.
 - Women prefer to pre-book window seats, while men pick aisle seats.
 - Tomato Cucumber Cheese Lettuce Sandwich is the most ordered in-flight meal on domestic flights.
- **Accommodation booking preferences –**
 - 56% of domestic leisure hotel bookings on the platform are made less than a week before the day of travel.
 - 33% of international hotel bookings are made at least 30 days before the date of travel.
 - Alternative accommodations on the platform recorded 24% growth in bookings in 2023
 - For Hostels and Apartments, the preference is for those less than INR 2,500 per night but for Villas, it is higher.
 - Close to 20% of family travellers searched for properties with tariffs over INR 10,000 per night.
- **Payment Preference –** UPI is the most preferred payment method for booking travel, making close to 40% of all transaction types, followed by use of credit cards. Credit card is the most used payment mode for high value transactions such as for booking international hotels and flights. This can be attributed to the benefits associated with credit card payments.
- **The gift of travel –** Wedding gift cards in the denominations of INR 5000 and 10000 are the most gifted. 1 out of 2 travel gift cards being purchased are being gifted as wedding shagun. ♦

ANNEXURE – City-specific insights

DELHI-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS AT A GLANCE

- Rishikesh, Amritsar are some of the most searched destinations
- Travellers prefer flights between 12 PM and 6PM
- Travellers over-indexed on booking domestic flights less than a week ahead of travel date
- Travellers showcase higher intent for pre-booking meals while traveling International
- Northern states have a higher preference for Hostels
- Almost half of all domestic travellers book a room with breakfast and a major meal

MUMBAI-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS AT A GLANCE

- Goa, Pune, are some of the most searched destinations
- Travellers prefer flights between 12 PM and 6PM
- Travellers showcase higher intent for pre-booking meals while traveling International
- Maharashtra has the highest share of domestic hotel searches overall – highest preference for Villas
- More than half of domestic hotel bookers book room with breakfast; internationally they prefer room only

KOLKATA -SPECIFIC INSIGHTS AT A GLANCE

- Digha, Mandarmani are some of the most searched destinations
- Travellers have a higher proclivity to book flights over 3 months in advance for both international and domestic
- Travellers have a higher preference for booking in-flight meals for domestic
- Eastern states have a higher preference for Hotels
- Approximately half of travellers prefer room only for domestic hotel bookings
- 60% of international hotel bookers prefer room with breakfast

CHENNAI-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS AT A GLANCE

- Madurai, Pondicherry are some of the most searched destinations
- Travellers prefer flights between 6PM to 12AM
- Travellers over indexed when it comes to booking international flights 30 days in advance
- Travellers most actively pre-select seats for domestic and international flights
- Travellers have a higher preference for booking in-flight meals for domestic
- Southern states have a higher preference for alternative accommodations
- Maximum preference for room only bookings for international hotels

BANGALORE-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS AT A GLANCE

- Mysore, Coorg, Mangalore are some of the most searched destinations
- Travellers prefer flights between 12AM - 6AM
- Travellers most actively pre-select seats for international flights
- Travellers have a higher preference for booking in-flight meals for domestic
- Bangalore has a higher preference for villas while traveling domestically

HYDERABAD-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS AT A GLANCE

- Vishakhapatnam, Tirupati are some of the most searched destinations
- Travellers prefer flights between 6AM and 3PM
- Travellers over-indexed on booking domestic flights in less than a week and international flights 30 days ahead of travel date
- Travellers most actively pre-select seats for domestic flights
- Southern states have a higher preference for alternative accommodations
- Approximately half of domestic travellers prefer room only



Rendez-vous en France 2024, Gearing Up for Global Spotlight

TBM Staff | Toulouse

For its 17th edition, Rendez-vous en France was hosted in Toulouse, in the Occitanie Region, on March 26 and 27, 2024, in a particularly rich and special event-management context for France.

In 2024, France, as a destination, will organise and celebrate a host of events with a global reach: The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 80th anniversary of the D-day Landings and the Battle of Normandy, the celebrations to mark 150 years of Impressionism, the 19th Francophonie Summit and the reopening of the Notre-Dame Cathedral at the end of the year.

Atout France and its partners plan to take advantage of these spotlights on France to give tour operators from all over the world a foretaste of the quality and variety of France's tourism offering, which is innovating and being updated to meet travellers' expectations, particularly with regard to sustainability.

In a bid to effectively help diversify tourism programming in France and actively support tourism professionals with showcasing their offering, Atout France invited 1,900 tourism professionals to Toulouse for this major gathering of the global tourism industry.

With the contribution of the trade show's long-standing partners, primarily the 13 regional tourism bodies, Paris Je t'aime, Air France and SNCF, and that of all of the professional exhibitors, this year's show presented to international distributors a high-quality and sustainable tourism offering that is constantly being updated. This goal is all the more crucial on the eve of the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, which will feature prominently at the show this year.

This year's show also addressed strong demand on the part of the 635 French exhibitors to bolster business contacts with tour operators all over the world to boost their business's international development. Atout France has accordingly reached out to 813 international tour operators with whom



Sheetal Munshaw, Director, Atout France India

A delegation of 27 travel agents pan India and 2 B2B media attended the 2024 edition of Rendez-vous en France. The delegation comprised of travel professionals across segments including tour operators, mega B2B players, OTAs and specialised boutique travel agencies with a focus on FIT. Hosted buyers participated in familiarisation trips in various regions in France including host region Occitanie, Grand Est, Provence with destination Luberon and Aix en Provence,

Auvergne Rhône Alpes and Loire Valley.

The buyer seller meet proved to be successful in connecting Indian travel professionals with the French travel fraternity gaining knowledge about the destination and its versatile offering as well as establishing connections with relevant industry professionals, identifying new products and services and inspiring Indian professionals to showcase different facets of France.

This edition also conferred travel agents from various source markets with the France Connaisseur certification during the gala event by our CEO Ms Caroline Leboucher. One of our Indian delegates, Ms Sunita Amarnani Executive Vice President at VEXPLORE Management was among the 5 hosted buyers to receive the certification at The Aéroscopia Museum on the opening night of the convention.

India has witnessed a robust recovery post pandemic. With 549770 visitors in 2023 vs 700000 visitors in 2019. (source Oxford Economics), we witnessed a 78.5 % recovery.

With revenge travel being a reality in India and the market poised to grow at an unprecedented pace we are very hopeful to attain our pre pandemic figures by end 2024 or 2025.

We are also looking forward to receiving more Indians in France with France being in the spotlight, as it will play host to the Olympic and Paralympic Games this July-August. 2024 also marks 80 years of the D-Day landings and 150 years of the Impressionist movement. It is an eventful year for the destination and we are encouraged to believe that these events will motivate the Indian visitor more than ever to Explore France in 2024.

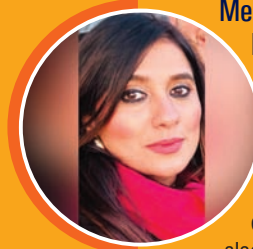
they had business at meetings arranged prior to the event, and ensure that their attendance at the show is optimised to the full.

European tour operators once again attended the show and numerous tour operators from India, Japan, South Korea and the Middle East were back in force, so this show turned out to be essential means of showcasing the major changes in the tourism industry and its adjustment to the current issues, as evidenced by the more than 26,000 business meetings hosted.

Rendez-vous en France also provided an opportunity for 56% of the international buyers (453) to discover the destinations' tourist offering through 53 FAM trips organised throughout France. ♦



Indian Delegation Reacts



Meha Vashi, Co-founder and Director, Nivalink Holidays Pvt Ltd

It was my first time at the Rendez-vous en France, and it proved to be a unique platform where I could not only strengthen my existing contacts with internal tourism boards, hotels, and destination management companies, but also explore and promote new territories and sectors, aligning with the evolving expectations of our clients.



Anoop Kanuga, Director, Bathija Travels

It's was a great experience since I Got to interact with a lot of new suppliers covering regions which we can promote to repeat travellers. I look forward to promoting these regions to our well-heeled travellers. The energy at the event was unparalleled with preparations in full swing to welcome a global audience for world-class sport tournaments.



Sapneal Rao, Director, SSR Travel Solutions

It was interesting to meet the varied profile of exhibitors showing the lesser-known regions of France that will allow us to sell the destination with a wider choice of options.

The entire set-up of the show, displayed the destination's preparedness to host the upcoming sporting events.



Sunita Amarnani, Executive VP, V-explore Travel Management Pvt. Ltd.

The experience was nothing short of amazing. The exploration of Southern France was an eye-opener, revealing a wealth of culture, unique experiences, sumptuous cuisines, and enhanced product offerings that are incredibly appealing to Indian tourists. I have returned with a wealth of knowledge, product learnings, and strengthened relationships, both new and old. I am looking forward to the season ahead, planning great products for our clients to France with longer stays and enhanced experiences.



Sanjeev Mendes, Proprietor, Aury Mendes Representations

Meeting with a wide variety of suppliers of tourism services, and having one on one conversations with them helped us to get a better insight into their products. Having been to the various places that we were taken to on the pre-Fam has strengthened us with our product knowledge and now gives us the confidence to sell France on a better platform. As my company promotes Lourdes, a spiritual and religious destination, I am grateful to the Lourdes Tourism Office who arranged a beautiful insight to their destination, not only showcasing the religious part of the region, but also the rich culture and heritage that it has to offer. The evening dinners were well organised, and gave us new ideas to take back and offer to the MICE segment.



THRIVING BUSINESS OF JET LAG REMEDIES

There are umpteen flyers that battle jet lag as a routine. However, businesses aren't lagging in providing solutions.

Generally speaking, for each time zone you cross it takes about a day of adjusting to a new light/dark schedule to get in sync with local time at your new destination.

Experts at a Boston medical world like to warn us that food — or, more specifically, the lack of it — may resynchronize body rhythms faster than light and dark. They want us to believe that they have studied and discovered a second “master clock” in mice, that can take over when food is scarce. Hence most probably human physiology will also respond positively to a bout of food deprivation during flights to avoid jet lag. Bet those gyanis haven't travelled much.

Sitting in an aircraft for the better part of a day who would really choose hunger as a tool to influence circadian rhythms?

Another tribe of wise men, some medical experts suggest we try fasting both before and during long flights. They postulate that not eating or eating in-flight meals in accordance to time zone of the destination puts the body in a pattern that falls in sync with local destination time zone. For instance, if taking a 14-hour flight from Delhi to Sydney we are prompted to avoid all food even before check-in. This translates to no sandwich-munching or canapés in the lounge or elsewhere about two hours before departure. And then we are also expected to refuse the food tray that's handed over with a polite smile with a bigger, if reluctant one. The advice includes drinking plenty of water and not even look at the choices in the drinks trolley.

Nutritionists chip in and vouch for eating smaller meals. They frown on caffeine and alcohol during flights, blaming the duo for exacerbating jet-lag symptoms. Woe to the airlines which offer champagne first thing when flyers settle in the seat, even before take-off!

Drinking lots of water, juice or herbal tea can help the body recover faster. Now how many such fastidious flyers has anyone ever encountered? Including their own selves?

Other yoga and physio experts advocate stretching legs and moving around during long haul flights. While at that, one might also pray there are no sudden air pockets on the way.

All these remedies seem to plug for some sort of in-flight asceticism.

There's another solution which I've tried. That is about wearing futuristic looking glasses that beam a soft green light into the eyes.

The light stimulates that part of the brain which handles the body's circadian rhythm.

This Re-timer technology was developed at a university in South Australia. Ideally travellers are supposed to wear the glasses for a few hours a couple of days before travel for better effect. Thankfully one doesn't need to close their eyes and watching inflight entertainment might be allowed with the glasses on.

These re-timing glass-less eye wear aren't the only products from the stable of innovative scientists. Scientists, entrepreneurs and marketing companies are working hand in hand to throw up jet-lag solutions.

Some airport lounges across the world have light therapy rooms. Some even offer lessons (and sales) of some on-the-go light therapy devices. Neat marketing by high tech indeed! I haven't found one lounge selling melatonin pills though. Meanwhile, the legions of flyers popping those pills before take-off are growing. And so is dazed drug induced haziness. To check that, phone apps like Timeshifter use algorithms to update users when to get sunlight or when to take melatonin.

I haven't checked it out yet but have heard of a Lumos smart sleep mask that works by delivering non disturbing short flashes of green light to sleeping flyers. Using the same principle of light therapy, it claims to be an effective way to assist the body's clock.

All said and done basically just being reasonably fit does matter more. Even good rest may create disturbances in the body clock as well depending on how desperate the time zone is where one is headed. All these contraptions are supposed to work and manipulate the body clock, without waking up most users.

Unless, of course you have an aisle seat on an overnight flight and the person seated next has a hyper active bladder or an over-active baby! In this latter case, jet lag does seem less of a travel hazard after all.

Follow him

YouTube: @everywherewithanurag

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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.



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DCS Plus India Pvt. Ltd.

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: DCS Plus India Pvt. Ltd. (Parent company DCS plus Romania)

Core Team: Prashant Kumar

Founding year: 2020

Company Website: www.dcsplus.net

Description: DCS Plus India Pvt. Ltd. is a technology company that provides business-critical enterprise software for the travel and tourism industry. DCS Plus India is part of DCS Plus Romania who is Market leader in travel technology with 22Yr of experience. DCS India mainly works to grow the Indian market. DCS Plus provides a full software stack of solutions, addressing the complex needs of all types of travel companies. The travel technology ecosystem provided by DCS Plus is designed in-house and consists of a mid-back office (TINA), a booking engine/ agent desktop (IRIX), an OBT (NOVA), a B2C online solution (TRIP) and an inventory management application (AIDA). This software suite allows the agencies to maximize their revenue through the sales channels (IRIX/NOVA/TRIP/AIDA), while the mid-back office (TINA) optimises operational processes making the travel agency more efficient and thereby reducing costs and increasing profit.

<http://Youtu.be/FJBpzeiJ2ek?feature=shared>



Our aim is to dispel the myth that Thailand is solely a budget-friendly destination and to promote it as a luxury market with plenty in store for Indian tourists says **Isada Saovaros, Director, Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) Mumbai** in an interview with **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

‘We have recently observed surge in luxury-oriented travellers’

Q How has the Tourism Authority of Thailand adapted its strategies to cater to the changing preferences and interests of Indian travellers?

Our approach towards meeting the evolving preferences of Indian travellers has been multifaceted. We have observed a growing affinity towards offbeat and cultural experiences, luxury staycations, and eco-tourism activities. To tap the demand, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has strategically promoted unexplored locations, including the Northern provinces of Thailand and luxury destinations like Phuket and Pattaya. We have highlighted these destinations through a combination of trade, marketing and PR activations such as B2B roadshows, workshops, and media collaborations. We also leverage social media platforms to capture the attention of travel enthusiasts with influencer FAM trips where they were introduced to the vibrant culinary scene in Phuket.

Q What is your plan to promote lesser-known destinations of Thailand in the Indian market? Have you come out with any new unique experiences and attractions in the recent past?

We plan to promote Thailand's lesser-known gems by hosting a series of seminars, and workshops and augmenting sales outreach in Tier-II & Tier-III along with major cities. Through these initiatives, we can impart crucial destination knowledge to Indian audiences and the travel trade fraternity. Besides the popular Chiang Mai province, the region is dotted with hidden gems such as Mae Hong Son, Chiang Rai, Sukhothai,

Phetchabun, Lampang and Udon Thani which are known for their pristine landscape, wildlife, endemic tribes, unique culture and distinguished cuisines. From solo escapades and road trips to romantic getaways, the untouched beauty and diversity of these regions make them perfect for all types of travellers. Furthermore, we aim to dispel the myth that Thailand is solely a budget-friendly destination and promote it as a luxury market with lots in store for Indian tourists.

Q What factors do you attribute to the growth of the luxury tourism segment in Thailand, and how does the TAT plan to capitalise on this trend?

Thailand has always been regarded as one of Asia's finest luxury tourism destinations and is a base for some of the biggest hospitality brands in the world. While many Indians enjoy budget-friendly options, we have recently observed a meteoric rise in luxury-oriented travellers. This shift, ascribed to a rise in disposable income and the shift towards "quality over quantity" thinking, has contributed to the success of Thailand's luxury segment in the Indian market. TAT aims to capitalise on this trend through smart B2B and B2C collaborations. By participating as well as hosting events, workshops and roadshows, we aim to spur collaboration among Indian travel agents, Thai DMCs and luxury hospitality brands. To realise our targets we also intend to implement subsidy schemes for wedding and celebration groups.

Q How have the recent additions and resumptions of flights from India

to Thailand influenced tourist arrivals in Thailand?

The decision to improve flight connectivity and frequency between India and Thailand was made to compensate for the growing demand from Indian tourists. The augmented flight connections coupled with the temporary visa-exemption protocols, have significantly propelled tourist arrivals from India. Currently, Indian travellers (from West & South India) can fly to Bangkok from 11 cities including Mumbai, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad and Tier-II cities like Vizag and Kochi. Likewise, flights to Phuket can be boarded from International airports in Mumbai and Delhi. With India and Thailand recently signing the memorandum of understanding in Bangkok, we may see further improvement in airline capacities between the two countries, giving way to more non-stop flight connections from Tier 2 cities.

Q With sustainability becoming increasingly important in the tourism industry, what efforts is TAT undertaking to promote eco-friendly and responsible tourism practices in Thailand?

Today's travellers are not only experience-conscious but also environment-conscious. This is particularly relevant for Indian travellers who are increasingly seeking sustainable travel options. To meet their needs, TAT aims to transform the tourism sector through sustainable tourism goals (STGs) aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. As part of this initiative, we have taken many steps.

TAT has initiated on-ground responsible tourism activities in renowned destinations, such as Pattaya, Chon Buri, Walking Streets in Chiang Mai and Phuket. Workshops like Spotlight Koh Tao are held to inspire tourists to learn eco-friendly practices, including re-purposing waste plastic into useful items such as jewellery, key rings, soap dishes, coasters, and plant pots. We believe that the collaborative efforts between government and private sector organisations, local communities, and international travellers are essential to bolster the image of Thailand as the preferred destination for sustainable tourism.

To promote organic farming, healthy gourmet, and low-carbon footprint initiatives, TAT implemented a series of 'Amazing Organic Trip' ideas, last year. Similarly, "The One for Nature" campaign proved pivotal in inviting eco-conscious travellers to raise awareness and foster responsible tourism practices in Thailand through international influencers. Last but not least, TAT's efforts also extend to partnerships, digital technology adoption, and niche markets, all aimed at enhancing Thailand's tourism industry while prioritising sustainability. ♦

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The UAE's travel and tourism sector, particularly in Ras Al Khaimah, has witnessed significant growth in the last few years, becoming one of the world's fastest-evolving regions for hospitality development. Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island, nestled in Ras Al Khaimah, has been at the forefront of this growth. In a conversation with **Asmita Mukherjee, Fabien Chesnais, GM, Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island**, shared insights into their vision and the changing dynamics of the luxury resort experience, as well as how the resort is attracting Indian couples to choose the emirate for their destination weddings.

Every segment of travellers is seeking unique, bespoke experiences that go beyond conventional sightseeing. FITs, MICE, and weddings are no different. The FIT category is drawn to a floating water park in the middle of the Arabian Gulf and likes to indulge themselves in dining options, and wellness therapies at the Citrine Spa. MICE groups from India have evolved into needing a space that fosters collaboration as well as productivity in a luxurious set-up. Hence, we strive to offer flexible options, multi-functional venues, efficient technology, and team-building activities along with a tailored menu.

While MICE groups are focused on productivity and relaxation on their tours, the wedding planners need a whole other ecosystem. Along with an eye for detail and on-ground support, Indian weddings enjoy exotic spaces, such as beachfront, grand ballrooms and lush gardens. Our property is steadily becoming

'Our diverse cuisine, vibrant entertainment, and abundant activities are transforming us into the ultimate luxury wedding destination'

Q UAE's travel and tourism sector has witnessed significant growth. Can you elaborate on the current market landscape, particularly in Ras Al Khaimah, and its key differentiators attracting tourists?

The Middle East is one of the world's fastest-evolving regions for hospitality development. Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) has a distinct vibe, well-deserving of becoming a favourite. Even the numbers speak for itself. According to a report by Ras Al Khaimah Tourism Development Authority In 2023, RAK witnessed a 24% increase in inbound tourism compared to 2022. The report also highlighted a notable 12% year-on-year rise in hotel occupancy in the region, indicating a lucrative market landscape.

Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island, for example, is an ideal holiday spot for conscientious travellers seeking eco-luxe options. With its proximity to all the other emirates and India, it is a fantastic vacation location.

Q Can you share your vision for Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island, including any upcoming developments, initiatives, or strategies to further elevate the guest experience?

Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island has always been focused on serving the good life to its guests while nourishing its environment, people, and local communities. Our commitment to protecting and preserving the planet's resources while delivering unparalleled luxury to our guests was recognised by the Coral Travel Starway World Best Hotels 2023 Award in the

Environment-Friendly Hotel category. Our resort also won the prestigious BBC Good Food Awards Middle East in the 'Best Staycation in Northern Emirates' category last year. These are



important achievements for our team, and they motivate us to continue working towards creating unique guest experiences, and setting new standards in the luxury hospitality sector.

To bring more awareness about our varied experiences, expertise in Indian wedding planning, and unique water sporting activities like the floating water park, we intend to collaborate with influential personalities and industry experts. Recently, we have witnessed a surge in our online traction after we hosted a couple of popular celebrities and influencers from India.

Q Indian outbound travellers are increasingly seeking unique experiences. How are the preferences of Indian FITs, MICE groups, and wedding planners changing when it comes to luxury resort experiences?

a top choice for them as we are in the process of hosting a couple of Indian weddings and milestone celebrations. Our team of wedding stylists works with the planners to style the perfect event, that is both pleasing to the guests and magical for the bride and groom.

Q How do you see Ras Al Khaimah & Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island attracting Indian couples to choose the emirate for their destination weddings?

Our dedicated efforts and the growing popularity of Ras Al Khaimah as a preferred celebration spot, have aided Mövenpick Resort Al Marjan Island's status as a sought-after wedding destination. One of the key attractions for couples while choosing their wedding venue is the abundance of picturesque backdrops, both indoor and outdoor events and pre-wedding shoots. From pristine beaches and lush gardens to a 530 sqm pillarless ballroom, multi-functional venues, and rooftop terraces, our resort has it all. The resort's modern architecture is complimented by impeccable service by a dedicated team of experts that brings the happy couple's vision to life. The staff also ensures that the family receive the highest standards of hospitality and personalised care throughout their stay. Diverse culinary offerings, vibrant entertainment options, and an abundance of leisure activities add to the appeal, ensuring that wedding guests have an overall enriching experience.

From a logistical point of view, the streamlined visa process and easy access to the location add to the convenience for Indians. ♦

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GITM 2024

Crafts a New Narrative for Goa Tourism

The two-day event highlighted regenerative tourism, emphasising sustainable practices that prioritise and revitalising local ecosystems and communities, writes **Prasenjit Chakraborty**.

The fourth edition of the Goa International Travel Mart (GITM) 2024, unfolded on April 3-4 within the confines of the Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium. This event served as a significant platform for the state to spotlight its tourism allure on the global stage. Notably, GITM 24 also embraced a virtual dimension, allowing industry leaders, stakeholders, and aficionados worldwide to participate, bridging the gap for those unable to attend in person.

EXHIBITORS' VIEW

"The exhibition has been excellent, drawing visitors from both India and abroad who have displayed keen interest in our products. I'm confident that a notable portion of our interactions with visitors at our stall will translate into business opportunities. This event has served as an effective platform for showcasing our products to a diverse audience,"

Caesar Fernandes
CEO & MD, Wooden Homes India

"We are in the wildlife segment and not many people in the tourism know about us, hence the exhibition gave us a much needed platform to exhibit our products to the world. We received a very good response from the buyers of India and abroad. International buyers from France, Thailand, Turkey, etc., had shown their interests to our products,"

Parag Rangnekar
Director, Mrugaya Xpeditions

The inaugural event took place at Bay 15, Dona Paula on April 2 in the distinguished presence of Dr. Puneet Kumar Goel, IAS, Chief Secretary, Government of Goa, Suneel Anchipaka, IAS, Director Tourism & Managing Director GTDC, Nilesh Shah, TTAG President, Vivek Kerkar, Skal President Goa Chapter and Carlos Desouza, Convenor CII.

A notable focus of this year's GITM was on regenerative tourism, a paradigm shift towards sustainable practices that prioritise the restoration and revitalisation of local ecosystems and communities. Besides this, it also focused on what Goa's appeal can offer on MICE and Wedding.

GITM 24 had witnessed 65 international and 80 domestic buyers. In addition to domestic buyers from various parts of India, delegates from Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Italy, Norway, Thailand, the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, etc., had also attended the event.

The first day kicked off with the grand inauguration of the Goa Tourism stall, a symbol of the state's commitment to showcasing its rich cultural heritage and diverse tourism offerings. The stall was inaugurated at the hands of Anchipaka, Parag Rangnekar, Member of the Goa Tourism Board, Jack Sukheeja, President-elect of TTAG, Ralph Desouza, Chairman of Desouza Group of Hotels, Mark Mendes, Member of the Goa Tourism Board, Carlos Desouza, Convenor of CII, Deepak Narvekar, and Deputy General Manager of GTDC, alongside other esteemed dignitaries.

Following the inauguration, there was knowledge-sharing session by Travel Trends with a focus on Regenerative Tourism, exploring the evolving landscape of tourism in Goa. This session provided valuable insights into emerging trends and strategies for driving Goa's tourism industry forward.

The highlight of the day was the keynote address by Anchipaka,



shedding light on the topic of Regenerative Tourism. With a focus on sustainability and responsible travel practices, he outlined Goa's vision for a tourism sector that not only thrives but also preserves the state's natural and cultural heritage for future generations. "With a steadfast focus on sustainability and responsible travel practices, we envision a tourism sector that is not just economically prosperous but also environmentally and socially conscious. Our commitment to Regenerative Tourism goes beyond mere preservation; it encompasses a holistic approach that seeks to regenerate and rejuvenate our ecosystems, communities, and cultural traditions. Our vision for Goa's tourism sector is one that harmonizes with nature, respects local cultures, and fosters meaningful connections between visitors and our communities. By embracing Regenerative Tourism, we not only enhance the visitor experience but also ensure the long-term sustainability of our tourism industry."

Rohan Khaunte, Minister for Tourism, Government of Goa, visited the exhibition on the first day and toured the stalls.

The day also witnessed the Department of Tourism, Government of Goa, forging strategic collaborations with Mastercard, Just Udo Aviation (FLY91), All India Institute of Ayurveda, and Yoska Event Solutions LLP.

Day two of the event witnessed an array of insightful discussions and engaging sessions, further solidifying Goa's position as a premier tourism destination.

The first Panel Discussion Titled 'New Vision: Strategy, Branding & Promotion' by panelist Andrés O. Hayes, President and CEO of Airtfae Hospitality Consulting, Carl Vaz, CEO of Mumbai-based Charson Advisory Services, GB Srithar, Head of VFS Global's Tourism Services, Ajay Prakash, Chief Executive of Nomad Travels, Mumbai and the Founder President of IIPT-India (International Institute for Peace through Tourism - India): delved into innovative strategies for promoting tourism in Goa and enhancing its brand identity on a global scale.

The Plenary Session shed light on developing a new vision for branding strategy and promotion that aligns with the core values and objectives of the organization. It involves a strategic blend of creative vision, market analysis, and effective communication strategies to effectively position Goa as a premier destination for regenerative tourism. The session emphasised implementing a comprehensive branding strategy and promotion plan, which can effectively communicate its new vision for regenerative tourism, attract conscientious travellers, and foster sustainable growth for the destination.

Following this, two additional plenary sessions, titled 'Goa: A High Yield Destination' and 'Development of Skills for the Tourism Sector in Goa,' were conducted, featuring the participation of distinguished personalities.

While talking to TravelBiz Monitor, Mendes, said, "This edition marks a shift in the narrative for Goa. While previously we focused on beaches, churches, and temples, we're now encouraging travellers to explore Goa in a fresh light. We're not discouraging visits to these spots, but rather urging people to experience Goa in a new context. As you may have noticed, the stalls at the exhibition are eco-friendly, with a commitment to using sustainable materials. The event showcases products that are regenerated, including the display materials. Moving forward, our future events will continue to embrace the theme of 'Regenerative', albeit with more refined approaches. The next GITM will undoubtedly be even more advanced compared to this edition."

It is estimated that over 500 buyers and 300 sellers converged into fruitful discussions and negotiations. With a report from the sellers,

VISITORS' VIEW

"80% of my expectations from the exhibition have been met. However, I noticed that most of the properties featured here are high-end. I would like to appeal to the organisers to ensure the participation of mid-segment hotels in the next editions. There is significant demand from segments such as families, individual travellers, and students for mid-segment accommodations. Additionally, companies which provide self-drive car, bike should also participate,"

Rajkumar PV
Director, Grass Hills Holidays, Tamil Nadu

"The exhibition is truly captivating. While I've been selling India (tourism destinations) for many years, Goa wasn't among them. However, this event has been enlightening, offering me valuable insights into Goa. I've gained a wealth of knowledge about hotel infrastructure and am particularly pleased to discover that Goa places a strong emphasis on sustainability and responsible tourism. As a result, I'm motivated to begin promoting tourism destinations of Goa. My visit here has certainly been worthwhile,"

Michaela Schiffer
MD, Vivamundo-Reisen, Germany

over 3000 meetings took place, facilitating invaluable connections and partnerships within the industry. The sellers recorded business prospects, estimated at over 10 million Dollars, underscoring the event's significance as a platform for strategic partnerships and driving economic growth within the tourism sector. ♦

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Enchanted journeys: AIventures in marketing India's destinations

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

Imagine a traveller, Priya, scrolling through her social media feed, dreaming of her next adventure. Suddenly, an AI-powered algorithm detects her interests in ancient architecture and adventure sports. Instantly, Priya is presented with personalised recommendations for exploring the historical wonders of Hampi, followed by an adrenaline-pumping trek through the Western Ghats in Karnataka.

As Priya delves deeper into her research, she stumbles upon a captivating blog post about the serene backwaters of Kerala generated by an AI content creation tool. The post is accompanied by stunning visuals and insider tips on off-the-beaten-path experiences, enticing Priya to add Kerala to her itinerary.

India, a land of rich culture, diverse landscapes, and historical treasures, has long been a magnet for travellers seeking unforgettable experiences. As technology continues to revolutionise every aspect of our lives in the digital age, the potential for leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) in marketing India's tourist destinations is boundless. Let us embark on a journey through the lens of AI, exploring how AI can transform how we showcase and promote India's incredible beauty and cultural heritage.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, Rohan, a photography enthusiast from New York, receives targeted advertisements showcasing the vibrant colours of Rajasthan's desert landscapes and the bustling markets of Jaipur. Thanks to AI's predictive analytics, these ads are strategically timed to coincide with Rohan's upcoming vacation window, maximising the likelihood of converting his interest into a booking.

As Priya and Rohan continue their journey of discovery, they encounter AI-powered chatbots eager to assist them every step of the way. Whether they have questions about local customs, transportation options, or must-visit attractions, the chatbots provide timely and accurate information, enhancing the overall travel experience.

AI's influence extends beyond convenience; it can shape the perception of India's tourist destinations, establishing a solid and lasting global reputation. With its pivotal role in revolutionising marketing strategies, AI offers multifaceted assistance in promoting tourist destinations.

Personalised recommendations

AI algorithms can analyse user data to offer personalised recommendations. Imagine a traveller, Pinaz, researching her next vacation. AI algorithms analyse her past travel history, preferences, and demographics to suggest destinations aligned with her interests, such as a cultural tour through Rajasthan's forts and palaces, tailored precisely to her tastes.

Content creation

AI-powered tools generate captivating content about tourist destinations. Suppose Pinaz comes across a blog post detailing the serene backwaters of Kerala or a visually stunning video showcasing the vibrant festivals of Goa. These engaging pieces of content, created by AI, capture her attention and inspire her to explore these destinations further.

Targeting the right audience

AI also optimises advertising efforts through targeted campaigns. A nature enthusiast, Pinaz might receive ads promoting eco-friendly adventures in Uttarakhand's Himalayan valleys, perfectly aligned with her interests and preferences.

AI-powered Chatbots

AI-driven chatbots provide instant assistance. Pinaz may have questions about accommodations or transportation options. AI-powered chatbots offer prompt and helpful responses, effortlessly guiding her through the planning process.

Predictive analysis

Predictive analytics anticipate future demand. By analysing historical data and market trends, AI predicts peak travel times, allowing marketers to adjust strategies accordingly. For example, AI might forecast an increase in demand for beach destinations like Goa during winter, prompting marketers to ramp up promotional efforts.

Immersive experiences

AI opens the door to immersive experiences through virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies. Imagine stepping into a virtual tour of the Taj Mahal, where every intricate detail comes to life before your eyes or using AR to overlay historical information as you explore the ancient ruins of Hampi. These immersive experiences inspire



wanderlust and foster a deeper appreciation for India's rich cultural heritage.

Sentiment analysis

Last but not least, sentiment analysis monitors online platforms for public perception. If the likes of Pinaz, our intrepid traveller, stumbles upon negative feedback about a destination's cleanliness during her research, AI swiftly alerts marketers. This enables them to take immediate action, addressing concerns promptly to ensure a positive reputation for the destination.

Thus, the fusion of AI and marketing ignites boundless potential for India's tourist hotspots, ushering in a new era of engagement, personalisation, and captivating narratives. With AI in our arsenal, we craft a realm where each traveller's adventure is a tapestry of unparalleled moments, mirroring the distinct charm of the destinations they explore. As we intend to move forward on a collective quest to unveil the splendour and mystique of India to the globe, we would want to paint a vivid portrait of wonder with every AI-driven encounter. ♦

'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.

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