

UP Tourism embarks on INR 4,415cr development of spiritual, religious sites

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Uttar Pradesh Tourism Department has embarked on a significant INR 4,415.55 crore initiative to develop spiritual, mythological, and religious sites across the state.

Starting from the fiscal year 2017-18 to 2023-24, foundational amenities have been established at key tourist destinations, anticipating the growing influx of domestic and international visitors.

The development includes the enhancement of facilities at 1,620 religious tourism spots, incorporating 140 projects that involve ghats and pilgrimage routes. Proposals for these initiatives have been received from legislators, Members of Parliament, and other public representatives.

The projects are underway in various locations, including Ayodhya, Vindhyachal Mirzapur, Naimisharanya Sitapur, Prayagraj, Maa Shakumbhari Devi Saharanpur and Shukratal



Muzaffarnagar.

UP Tourism Minister Jaiveer Singh, mentioned the major tourism development projects undertaken over the last 7 years.

He said in Ayodhya district, tourism development projects underway include establishing tourist facilities along the Chaudah Kosi Marg at a cost of INR 12.10 crore. ♦

Sudha Murthy calls for tagging 57 domestic sites under World Heritage status

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In her maiden speech in the Rajya Sabha, philanthropist and author Sudha Murthy highlighted promoting domestic tourism.

Murthy proposed that 57 domestic tourist sites to be considered for World Heritage status. These include the Bahubali statue in Karnataka, Lingaraja Temple, Unakoti rock carvings in Tripura, Shivaji forts in Maharashtra, Chausath Yogini temple in Mitawali, Lothal in Gujarat, and Gol Gumbad, among others.

"In India, we have 42 World Heritage sites but 57 are pending ... we should bother about those 57 sites," Murthy stressed.

She underscored the importance of preserving India's cultural heritage, mentioning landmarks like the Srirangam temples and



Mughal gardens in Kashmir.

Murthy further emphasised the need for

improved facilities such as toilets and roads to enhance tourist experiences and boost revenue.

"There are beautiful Mughal gardens in Kashmir. We always go and see the film shootings, but we never realise that they are not in the World Heritage Sites. The package should be done very well so that people can come and see them. The package should be conveniently done so that we should have good toilets and roads so that the tourists can come. It will increase our revenue in our own country," she explained.

Drawing parallels, Murthy linked the design of the old Parliament Building to ancient Indian architecture, specifically citing inspiration from the Chausath Yogini temple in Mitawali, Madhya Pradesh. ♦

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Australia's Jet Ski Safaris appoint Auxilia Networks as India Representative

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Tourism consultancy firm Auxilia Networks has added another client to its portfolio – Jet Ski Safaris, Gold Coast, Queensland (Australia). Jet Ski Safaris is Australia's premier provider of water-based soft adventure activities and own the largest fleet of jet skis in Australia. They also offer a wide range of water sports activities along with jet skiing, like jet-boating and parasailing.

A statement released by Jet Ski Safaris said, "We are excited to announce a significant partnership with Auxilia Networks, India. This collaboration marks a pivotal moment for us as we aim to expand our reach and enhance our offerings for visitors from India."

The Indian market is of immense importance to us. With a growing number of Indian travellers seeking unique and adventurous experiences, our thrilling jet ski tours on the Gold Coast offer an unparalleled way to explore the stunning coastline and pristine waterways of this beautiful region, providing an unforgettable experience for our

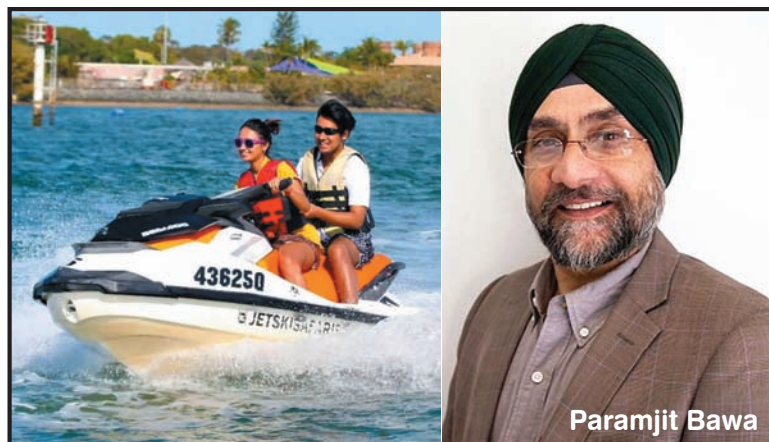
guests.

Our decision to partner with Auxilia Networks was driven by their deep understanding of the Indian market and their exceptional ability to connect international

experiences for Indian tourists and strengthen our presence in this dynamic market. We look forward to welcoming more visitors from India and providing them with the thrilling and memorable adventures that Jet Ski Safaris is known for."

Commenting on this, Paramjit Bawa, Founder & Principal Consultant, Auxilia Networks, said, "In our pursuit of working with best-in-class suppliers of experiences and products from around the world, we are absolutely delighted to announce the latest addition to our select portfolio of international clients – Jet Ski Safaris, from the beautiful Gold Coast in Queensland, Australia. Not only are they the premier Australian watersports providers, but they do so with a deep commitment to the environment and the preservation of marine ecosystems and wildlife in their area."

We are thrilled to represent Jet Ski Safaris in India, marketing their fabulous offerings to the Indian travel trade (and by extension to their customers) via a hybrid model of trade engagement, training, collateral support and PR activity. They are a fantastic addition to our family of top-quality international partners and we take great pride in being chosen as their representatives in the India market." ♦



Paramjit Bawa

brands with Indian consumers. Their expertise in this field will enable us to develop targeted marketing strategies that resonate with Indian travellers, ensuring that they are aware of and excited about the unique adventures we offer.

This partnership underscores our commitment to diversifying our customer base and tailoring our services to meet the specific needs and preferences of Indian visitors. We are confident that, with Auxilia's support, we will be able to create memorable

Pure Morocco appoints Ace Connect as India Representative

TBM Staff | Mumbai

ACE CONNECT, a B2B niche specialist in the travel and hospitality sector in India, has been appointed as India Representative for PURE MOROCCO.

ACE Connect, known for its strong industry connect and respected reputation, will give Pure Morocco the desirable edge by offering the right connections amidst trade partners.

PURE MOROCCO is a full-Service DMC based in Marrakech and Rabat, offering a wide range of comprehensive and hand-picked tours and experiences throughout Morocco.

The India market and its travel temperament has witnessed a marked evolution. The percentage of discerning travellers is on the rise. Hence products that are exotic and experimental like PURE MOROCCO have a definite market in the India context.

For Zakaria Anouar, CEO/ Managing Director – PURE MOROCCO, offering Morocco to the world is a passion and serious work. India is an exciting market for them and the company is thrilled to find their foothold in India through Ace Connect.

Expressing his views about the tie-up and its future presence in the

Indian market via Ace Connect, Anouar said, "Leveraging our deep-rooted connections within the Moroccan travel industry, we are

confident in our ability to create unforgettable journeys that will exceed your clients' expectations. Our team is dedicated to providing personalized attention and ensuring a seamless experience from start to finish."

Alpa Jani, Founder & CEO, Ace Connect, is confident that PURE MOROCCO is at the right place and at the right time. Throwing further light on the partnership, Jani says, "We at Ace Connect are driven by excellence and with a strong commitment to give our partners a desired business reach in our focused market. Morocco has a unique charm to it and is blessed with rich tapestry of culture, heritage, landscape and cuisine and we are so excited to open the box of experiences for our trade partners in India through our partner PURE MOROCCO. When it comes to Morocco, PURE MOROCCO should certainly be your primary choice to experience Morocco in its pure essence." ♦



Zakaria Anouar

Alpa Jani

'T&T could boost Latin America's economy by USD260bn over the next decade'

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), in collaboration with VFS Global, revealed that the Latin American (LATAM) Travel & Tourism sector could add nearly USD 260BN to the region's economy and create nearly eight million new jobs over the next 10 years.

According to the report, 'Unlocking Opportunities for Travel & Tourism Growth in LATAM', this potential growth is dependent on three key policies to unlock annualised growth of 3.4%, reaching a contribution of nearly USD 909.2 billion.

The report includes a policy package focused on improving LATAM's growth based on transport infrastructure, visa facilitation, and tourism marketing.

Travel & Tourism is a powerhouse sector in the region, with a contribution of more than USD 629 billion to the region's economy in 2023, welcoming 86 million international travellers.

The sector was essential for employment last year, providing livelihoods to more than 24.6 million people, equating to 9% of all the jobs in the region.

Julia Simpson, President & CEO, WTTC, said, "LATAM's Travel & Tourism sector has witnessed an extraordinary transformation. In the past years, it has grown significantly, contributing immensely to the region's economy.

"Growth potential for Travel & Tourism in LATAM is significant. It has already seen substantial growth since 2000, and with the right policies it could unlock an additional US\$260 billion in the next decade.

"Countries in the region need better

transport infrastructure, simplified visa processes, improved protection for biodiversity and nature, and effective marketing campaigns to highlight the wealth of destinations in this vibrant region."

Zubin Karkaria, Founder and CEO of VFS



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Global, said, "We are delighted to partner with WTTC to unlock the immense potential that Travel & Tourism offer in LATAM.

"Since establishing our presence in LATAM in 2009, we are now the trusted partner of 18 governments, serving 29 cities across 17 countries in the region. VFS Global, with its expertise in visa services and tourism promotion, is committed to playing a pivotal role in harnessing LATAM's potential. Our involvement can also assist destinations in upskilling the workforce, a crucial component in the tourism sector.

"This comprehensive report serves as a roadmap for stakeholders, including governments and National Tourism Boards, to formulate strategies that unlock the continent's economic potential, attract crucial investments, and boost inbound arrivals. The region stands to gain significantly from our experience in simplifying cross border mobility through highly secure, reliable, efficient, and innovative technology solutions."

This report delves into the historical journey of the Travel & Tourism sector in

LATAM. It's a story of facing challenges head-on, from the Global Financial Crisis in 2008 to the setbacks caused by disease outbreaks and political instability.

Despite all these challenges, the Travel & Tourism sector is on a path to recovery.

According to the global body, 2024 is projected to be a record-breaking year, achieving a GDP contribution of more than US\$650 billion, as well as the creation of an additional one million jobs, raising the total to 25.7 million.

Opportunities for LATAM

The report underscores a strategic approach to enhance tourism by integrating investments in infrastructure, improving air connectivity, and simplifying visa procedures.

The report highlights the importance of protecting biodiversity and nature through better water management and the use of low-carbon energy.

These efforts aim to attract more tourists while ensuring environmental sustainability.

Leveraging digital technologies enhances the travel experience and can optimise marketing strategies, supported by data-driven insights. Investing in local people and natural preservation enriches the visitor experience and ensures Travel & Tourism is both sustainable and inclusive.

Finally, ensuring safety measures builds trust and sustains growth in the Travel & Tourism sector. This cohesive strategy aims to strengthen the region's position as a competitive and appealing destination globally.

These efforts could unlock the potential for environmental preservation, job creation, and economic development in the LATAM Travel & Tourism sector. ♦

Kerala explores tourism partnership with Cuba

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Kerala Tourism is set to explore possible collaboration with Cuba in the tourism sector. This initiative was highlighted during an interaction between Kerala's Tourism Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas and Abel Despaigne, Charge d' Affaires of the Embassy of the Republic of Cuba in India, held in Thiruvananthapuram.

During his nine-day visit to Kerala, Despaigne emphasised the historical significance of political and cultural exchanges between Kerala and Cuba.



He noted the importance of extending this cooperation to the tourism sector, acknowledging the mutual benefits that such collaboration could bring. He presented an

overview of Cuban tourism, highlighting similarities with Kerala, particularly in focusing on landscapes adjacent to the sea.

K. Biju, Tourism Secretary, Kerala, who presided over the function, stated that the state is eager to associate with the island nation in North America. He emphasised that possibilities of collaboration with Cuba in the tourism sector will be thoroughly examined.

Riyas, remarked on Kerala's reputation as a futuristic tourism destination, attracting visitors from across the globe through innovative tourism initiatives and products aligned with emerging trends. ♦

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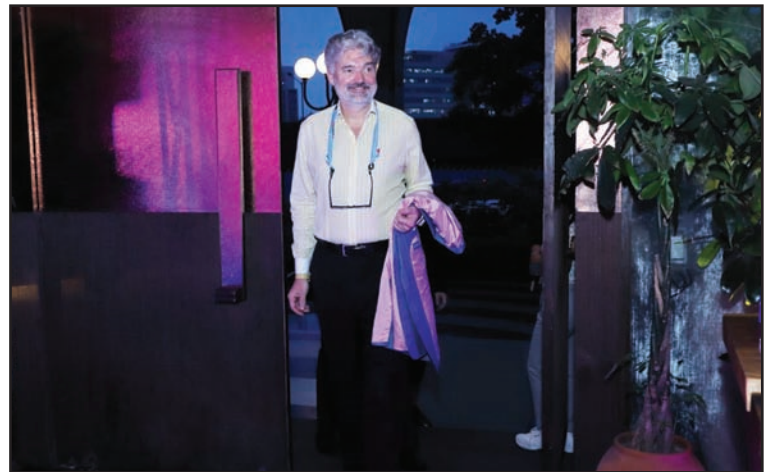
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Cinnamon Hotels introduces Cinnamon Life

Cinnamon Hotels & Resorts hosted India Link at BKC in Mumbai for select travel agents and tour operators. The idea behind this initiative was to introduce their upcoming mixed used development property, Cinnamon Life. This new integrated venue is set to open its doors by the fourth quarter of 2024, and has a line-up of confirmed weddings from clients in India. The top leadership team of Cinnamon Hotels and Cinnamon Life spoke to the travel trade about the facilities and opportunities for clients with this offering.



Türkiye marks a 34% surge in Indian visitors from January to May 2024

TBM Staff | Mumbai

In the first 5 months of 2024, the number of Indian visitors to Türkiye reached 1,26,000, representing a 34% increase compared to the same period in 2023. This surge is notable against the backdrop of 2023, wherein Türkiye welcomed a total of 2,74,000 Indian tourists for the entire year.

This growth is attributed to active promotion and PR activities in India, as well as successful collaborations with

Indian stakeholders, including travel agents, corporates, and wedding planners. Earlier this year, Türkiye Tourism concluded a successful six-city India Roadshow in collaboration with the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI). This initiative aimed to strengthen ties between the Indian travel trade and Turkish tourism, fostering collaboration and opening new horizons.

Türkiye recently concluded OTOAI



(Outbound Tour Operators Association of India) mega fam tour with 40 agents from India participating. ♦

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DISRUPTION-IN-WAITING

For the fastest growing aviation market in the world, it is surprising that the GDS space even today has only three players. India has huge order books of aircraft, and it needs a sophisticated mechanism to service this impending supply.

And for a nation that has emerged as the home of tech start-ups, a disruption in the GDS space is long overdue. While this will not only bring innovation in the travel tech space, but also harbour competitive pricing. Aviation is an expensive business, and India has seen the birth and death of airlines due to high operating costs.

Therefore, a home-grown GDS from the India stable will be a change-maker. While it will support the Make in India initiative, it will also be an apt opportunity to showcase the tech prowess of India to the world.

A host of new airlines with smaller aircraft are looking at connecting hinterlands. What is better than a new, localised GDS platform that understands the cost dynamics of the market?

If this turns out to be a reality, it will be interesting to see how the industry reacts. Moreover, for people of my generation and the Gen Z, we will witness history in the aviation 3.0 landscape.



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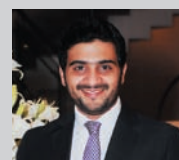
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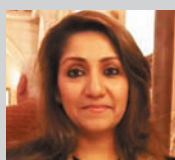
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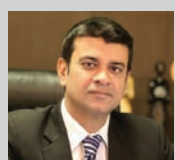
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In the past four decades, Brightsun Travel has adapted to the changing needs of the travellers, and business to remain relevant. **Deepak Nangla, Managing Director, Brightsun Travel**, spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their journey so far, expansion and business expansion.

‘Understanding the customer builds trust, leading to repeat business & better margins’

Q Give us a brief about Brightsun Travel's journey over the past almost four decades.

Brightsun started in the United Kingdom in 1986 as a family-owned company drawing upon several generations of expertise spanning almost four decades in the travel industry. Despite our growth, we maintain a fundamental principle of managing the company akin to a small shop, guaranteeing personalised care for our clients, who are regarded as extensions of our own family. This principle is deeply ingrained in our team, enabling us to comprehend our customers' travel needs as though they were a family member.

Our experienced team of travel consultants have travelled to many global destinations, hold training certificates, and have vetted suppliers that have a proven track record. We also have crisis management procedures in place with our suppliers so that we can assist in emergencies. Our 24/7 customer service, available via WhatsApp chat or phone, operates 365 days a year for all our customers to benefit from. Customer satisfaction is a priority, which is reflected in our independent reviews on Trustpilot rated excellent. Till date the company puts its team at the heart of success.

Q What kind of footprint do you have? Are you looking at retail expansion?

Brightsun has a huge presence in the metasearch space through Traveasy, where we market our products through partners such as Google flights and Skyscanner in the UK, Ireland, and India. Brightsun Travel utilises digital media to showcase our knowledge and expertise in selling holidays and cruises. We

have a separate brand, Premier by Brightsun catering to corporate clients and high-net worth individuals. Currently, we have offices in Gurugram, Mumbai, London and Manchester. Additionally, we have established sales team in Kolkata, Chennai and Punjab, with plans to expand to Hyderabad and Gujarat. Our Ireland office, opened in 2021, enables us to access European markets. We aim to further expand our global network of partnerships to ensure that our travellers have access to even more diverse and exclusive offerings.

Q At a time when margins are wafer thin, and there is intense competition among players, how are you managing to sustain and stay relevant?

We must understand the customer. Some of our customers seek the cheapest deals, and travel providers such as airlines and hotels offer these products, which we then market to them. However, we also have customers who want to book the perfect trip, whether combining a business trip with a short break, planning a friends' get-together, or arranging a last-minute business trip where arrival times need to match their meeting schedules. Understanding the customer builds trust, leading to repeat business and better margins.

As more people turn to online booking, there is a process that can be developed to provide an option for customers to venture offline for a more personalised experience. No Doubt AI tools of the future will make this easier for customers to navigate. Additionally, our relationships with suppliers, built over four decades, foster trust from both suppliers and customers, enabling us to create bespoke deals that are not available in the public

online domain, allowing Brightsun to maintain margins.

Q What kind of investment do you make for customer acquisition?

Brightsun has implemented CRM, is active on all social media platforms, and creates contact groups through chat and other direct messaging tools. By offering our services 24/7, customers have access to support for any issues they may face during their travel journeys. Additionally, customers receive push notifications from us throughout their holidays providing important updates and travel information to enhance their travel experience. We are further improving the customer experience by enhancing our mobile apps, giving customers control to make informed choices for their trips. This is in addition to our regular marketing efforts, such as newsletters, outdoor advertising, digital advertising, radio, and TV, which help enhance our brand presence. Simultaneously, sales managers are reaching out in the corporate space targeting companies for their corporate travellers through the new booking tool on the Premier by Brightsun website.

Q The T&T industry is facing huge manpower crises. In such a scenario, are you looking at offering training to the youth?

Brightsun has been reaching out to colleges, and travel and tourism schools since 2004 to meet its recruitment needs as the organisation expands. Every year, about 10% of Brightsun's recruits are freshers. These newcomers bring curiosity and enthusiasm to the existing workforce, and some have risen through the ranks to become senior managers within the organisation. Also, we celebrate "Inspire a teen to work in travel day" organising workshops for young people every year, where they could learn about the different opportunities that exist within a travel company.

Q How are you leveraging technology for meeting your business goals?

Brightsun has its own technology development team since 2004. All the websites, booking engines, payment gateways, and back offices are all created inhouse, and operate on the cloud, ensuring security and up time for our customers. The tech development team has built websites for our travel partners and is continuing to add skills with business analysts, mobile app developers, and additional testers for new products that we are launching.

Brightsun also works with vetted, industry-leading third-party development companies to deliver the clearest content to our customers. These third-party suppliers often bring exclusive content, such as flights and hotels to our agents, and our customers. ♦

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68% APAC's HNI travellers planning to spend more on travel in next 12 months: Marriott Report

- 68% spending more on leisure travel with 74% respondents planning an intra-regional holiday within Asia-Pacific (APAC)
- Australia is the top destination in next 12 months ahead of Japan, with 46% planning to visit
- Indian HNW are driving luxury travel with 89% Indians planning to spend more in next 12 months
- High end gastronomy is the primary driver for luxury travel with 88% planning holidays around food
- Three new personas of luxury traveler defined

As the Asia Pacific region continues to be the growth engine for luxury travel, a new comprehensive report from the Luxury Group by Marriott International has identified new expectations and travel preferences among high-net-worth (HNW) travelers in Asia Pacific.

Across the region, 68% are planning to spend more on travel over the next 12 months – 89% among Indians - with 74% planning to travel within Asia Pacific and 88% prioritizing gastronomy as the reason to travel. One in four of all holidays planned (25%) are celebrations. Three distinct new groups of luxury traveler have emerged – the 'Venture Travelist' who seeks business opportunities when traveling, 'Experience Connoisseur' Millennials who are traveling for enrichment and 'Timeless Adventurer', over 65s who are building their own itineraries and exploring places before they become popular.

"Our New Luxe Landscapes Report provides deeper behavioral insights and motivations into elite travelers from Asia and the Pacific," says Oriol Montal, Managing Director, Luxury, Asia Pacific (excluding China), Marriott International. "Whether it's discovering new culinary experiences, traveling with their family or friends, or looking to forge connections with the local community, our research has identified new traveler archetypes, and provides Marriott International with new understandings in catering to this discerning traveler segment."

Deeper Extended Experiences With Their People

The research among HNW travelers in Australia, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia and India reveals they are traveling frequently with longer holidays especially across the Asia Pacific region. An average of six leisure trips is planned within the next 12 months while 33% of respondents are planning at least seven holidays this year. On average, a short stay comprises three nights while a long stay is two-and-a-half weeks. For many, the kinship and connection within a group enhances the richness of the travel experience, with over 70% choosing to travel with family or friends.

Australia is the destination of choice (46%), above Japan (42%) and Hong Kong, China (27%). 69% of India's HNW tourists are planning a trip to Australia and it is the top destination of choice for Indonesian, Japanese and Singaporean travelers.

Increasing Demand in India

The most active and engaged travel market, 89% of Indian HNW say they are planning to spend more on travel. Families and friends are touring together to mark key milestones, attend a private function or event, with 38% planning a trip with friends and 33% making theirs a celebratory trip.

A Fascination for Food

88% are picking their holiday destination based on discovering a new food or culinary experience. Acutely aware of dining trends, almost half of the respondents (49%) describe a fine dining experience as an ideal night out. Reinforcing this point, 83% will choose a destination to visit an award-winning restaurant and 35% agreed they would spend more on unique culinary experiences. When choosing a hotel, 81% of HNW travelers make their selection based on fine dining options and 83% choose a destination so they can visit a celebrated restaurant.

New Traveler Personas

With more disposable income for holidays and a growing population of ageing travelers, the research has identified three new categories of affluent travelers. These include:

i. The 'Venture Travelist'

The next-generation Bleisure tourist, the Venture Travelist prioritizes holiday destinations that will generate business opportunities. While they enjoy their vacation with their family and loved ones, they are always on the lookout to secure a deal. Entrepreneurs at heart, they explore a location, shopping for local products and antiques, and looking to forge business connections with members from the local community.

ii. The 'Experience Connoisseur'

Predominantly millennials, Experience Connoisseurs plan their leisure travel as an opportunity for personal enrichment. They travel extensively and see the experience as an investment in their mental and physical wellbeing. They want to deeply explore a destination, they value personalization and actively seek exclusive one-of-a-kind experiences.

iii. The 'Timeless Adventurer'

Debunking every stereotype of the over-65 'silver set travelers', Timeless Adventurers are keen explorers who want to immerse themselves in a destination. They're less interested in tourist attractions and more drawn to what gives the destination a sense of place, what makes it unique and memorable.

Findings are from a research report commissioned by Marriott International Luxury Group conducted over a period from April 18, 2024, to May 13, 2024, with frequent international travelers who primarily travel for leisure. The study targeted the wealthiest 10% of residents in Australia, Singapore, India, Indonesia, South Korea, and Japan with 200 respondents from each market.

Refer to Annex A for additional data on the preferences of luxury travelers across the APEC region.

ANNEX A: 10 INTRIGUING FACTS ABOUT THE CHANGING FACE OF LUXURY TRAVELERS ACROSS THE APAC REGION

Most engaged travel market is India. 89% of high-net-worth (HNW)

Indians are planning to spend more on their leisure travel, looking at six trips over the course of the year, with an average three-four nights for a short trip and two-three weeks for a long holiday.

Most self-sufficient travelers are Singaporeans. 61% prefer to travel independently and curate their own itinerary, versus 43% across the region.

Most pressing social issue is sustainable travel. Mindful of the impact their travel has on the environment, 80% of HNW travelers say a hotel's sustainability and environmental practices is a consideration when deciding where to stay. 43% want to see hotel restaurants offering locally-sourced food products and a further 35% expect to see effective management of food waste.

Most likely to holiday longer are Australians. With Australians entitled to a minimum of four weeks annual leave, it's not surprising they take the longest holidays with 73% planning a minimum two-week getaway and 33% taking over three weeks. Similarly, a third of Indonesians expect their trips will extend beyond three weeks.

Most important factor in a luxury experience is a sense of security. Most respondents (91%) say a safe environment is more important than exceptional service (41%), engaging in an exclusive experience (36%) or having a truly personalized experience (33%).

Best reason to shop overseas is to purchase locally made products. For HNW individuals, shopping is a key driver to travel and 85% of respondents say access to locally-made products is a key consideration when deciding where to travel.

Most likely to stay within their hotel are South Korean travelers. 54% of travelers surveyed would rather spend time at their hotel or resort rather than exploring local attractions or engaging with the locals.

Most favored cuisine is authentic local dishes, with over 62% preferring to explore unfamiliar local flavors over food from home.

Top mark of a luxury holiday is discovering a new destination, with 78% regarding it as important or very important.

Most valued luxury experience is an immersive and refined sense of space, with 80% defining luxury travel as being surrounded by refined craftsmanship and exquisite design. ♦





THE VISA EMEPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES

The underbelly governing the economics of 'visa fees and processing charges' needs to be exposed.

It started as a casual conversation on the state of students, especially those from the supposed hinterlands of India, who get visas for pursuing education in UK. Now this chat over dinner took place at a reasonably well known university in England. The professor of Economics I conversed with bemoaned the fact that there was so many students with educational visas at her university who were quite low in their educational standards. On persistent query, during the course of the conversation, she admitted that the university itself was bending backwards to accommodate those 'students' lack of intellectual accomplishments simply because it needed the humungous fees charged from the institution to survive!

In other words, all that talk of not attracting the right talent was actually smothered by the univ's own need of economy from those who were willing to pay. This was indeed sad since a whole lot of really bright students aren't able to realise those dreams simply because they can't pay those huge fees upfront. Evidently, Mammon wins. That can also be read as 'mammon rules', at least in the realm of visa fees.

An American politician, in a different context however, famously remarked 'It's the economics, stupid!' and he was ever so right.

Travel, either for business or for leisure, is a different kettle of fish. And lately for a long time now, rumblings regarding visa fees has been going on in many circles about the perceived 'unfairness' of it all.

Let's be clear- this is not in the context of education visas for any particular country nor is it the brief of this piece to tattle about any specific case in particular. The fact, in any case remains that the richer a country, the less its citizens pay for visas to go abroad. How does one fix a particular amount for visa fees after all?

There are myriad factors that influence the costs of visas between countries. It could be about processing costs, political and cultural ties between nations and could even include regional, religious and political factors. It could even be reciprocal treatments or crudely put, tit for tat arrangements as well. Clearly it is a given that 'visa costs besides processing fees often serve as a tool for states to control population movements and simultaneously position themselves in international relations'.

Now this has to be seen in the light of the rising visa costs across the world. The shoe bites most in those countries which

are lower in the pecking order. Many experts I spoke to arguably state that visa fees are governed by practical factors and are not a decision based on sinister or even petty considerations. While one can be in total agreement with this hypothesis, the fact that the entire visa fees, including of course the processing fees, is totally lost by the astronomical amounts of rejected visas does need some rational explanation.

In India, recently, especially in the post Covid era, the delays in granting visas and the absolutely interminable delay in visa appointments for a number of countries brought this issue to the fore.

It is not just about visitor visas. Business visas, family travel and migrant visas have their own hurdles to cross. And we are only talking of the heavy fees a family might be expected to pay if only to join their loved ones for a ceremony or a vacation if they are and especially if they aren't full-fledged citizens there. The delay, the suspense and the loss of fees does hurt the genuine visa seeker. Should India take the initiative of returning visa fees to applicants if they are refused visas for any reason, if only to set an example? Otherwise what is this rant all about?

On the other hand, many travel agents in a nudge-nudge-wink-wink manner even forwarded theories that visa appointments could be obtained in time by stepping sideways or creating certain pecuniary short cuts. I personally wouldn't believe this till I was shown a demonstration recently. This sorry incident one can possibly attribute to an exception to the generally fair and impeccable processes.

The total non-return of fees of refused visas is however something that my mind can't really digest. And this despite the fact that it is a worldwide phenomenon. Or is it? I'm open to correction.

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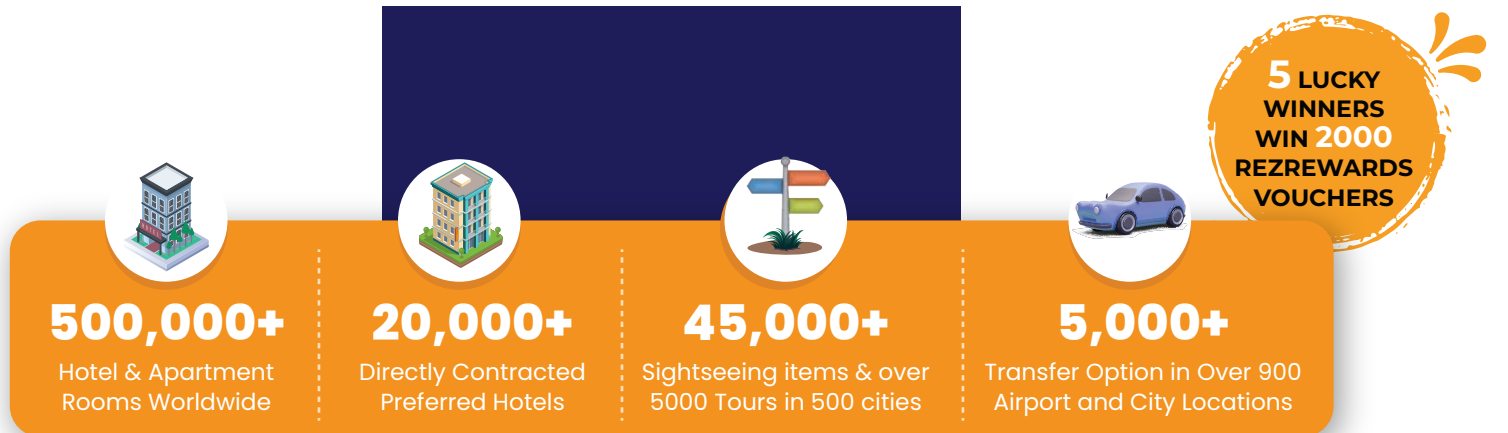
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Anurag Yadav is a travel author and columnist, writing on hospitality and design. An avid traveller, he has published 5 books and divides his time equally between Delhi and London.

The views are personal.



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‘With multi-source, AI backed content, we are seeing huge uptake on customer conversions’

Within six months of assuming the role of Managing Director for India & South Asia at Sabre, **Samual Machado** has focused on building a foundation for success. This includes hiring top talent, enhancing Sabre’s robust support architecture, and introducing state-of-the-art automation and data analytics products. Additionally, Sabre has implemented world-class training programs for commercial teams, ensuring they are equipped to help customers achieve remarkable growth and success. In an insightful conversation with **Disha Shah Ghosh**, Machado discusses these strategic initiatives and Sabre’s commitment to driving innovation in the travel technology sector.

Q What is your investment strategy in India?

We are using a multi-pronged approach in India. One is team building; we had to be frugal during Covid, but because of language and culture barriers, we have now realised the need for local support. Therefore, we have revamped our support infrastructure. We have a dedicated phone line where our staff can address queries in English, Hindi and other regional languages, with options of more languages to be available progressively. As far as the product team is concerned, we are revamping that as well.

Alongside, we are expanding the commercial team with hiring of several roles across the broader commercial functions in the past three months. This team exclusively supports our valued agency customers. Additionally, we have a separate team that supports the hotel and airline sectors on the IT front.

The second area of focus is content availability. Until last year, we did not have the Air India content on our platform. We now have the entire gamut of Air India content back on our platform, that is a huge advantage, and we have already started seeing encouraging results. As far as the airline space is concerned, we are keen on adding LCC content using a combination of direct airline partnerships and via our multi-source channel. The other approach is how we can provide access to global LCCs for domestic agents since they may want to book flights for point-to-point connections, in destinations outside of India.

The third investment is on product development. Even an outstanding product

offers no value if it isn't tailored to local customer requirements.

Therefore, we are providing comprehensive back-office services, including GST, payment solutions, and product support, to facilitate seamless business operations for our agency customers.

Our Global Capability Centre (GCC) in Bengaluru, staffed by our 1,700 engineers, is a cornerstone of our innovation. Our strategic partnership with Google empowers us to develop cutting-edge Agency, Airline and Hospitality Technology products. These advancements are tailored to meet unique demands of the Indian market, ensuring we deliver unparalleled value to our customers.

Q What kind of acceptability does NDC (New Distribution Capability) have in India?

Globally, NDC is ramping up. Sabre is committed to NDC, and we foresee that by end of 2030, a significant percentage of Sabre bookings will be on the NDC platform.

Sabre is currently the only Global Distribution System (GDS) to power NDC content for several leading corporate travel management tools, including: GetThere, Atrii, SAP Concur, Spotnana, Serko and Wooba.

Currently we have more than 20 airlines available on Sabre’s NDC platform, and by the end of 2024, a dozen more are set to come onboard.

Our agency customers can now shop, book & service NDC offers from our growing list of NDC airline partners around the world. As travellers seek better shopping and booking experiences, staying competitive

and relevant is more important than ever. Our integrated workflow allows agencies to access NDC travel content through Sabre Red 360, GetThere, or their own API.

Q How will AI shape the online booking engagement in coming days?

Travelers today seek exceptional experiences with personalized interactions and frictionless service. However, challenges like content fragmentation and technical complexity make it difficult for the industry to make such experiences a reality. That's why we've embarked on a partnership with Google to deliver the modern travel retailing experiences of tomorrow. With larger volumes and varieties of content spread across platforms, travel agencies are challenged with finding the best options – and fast – for their customers. Sabre uses Google models and Sabre Travel AI™ to give travel agencies the insights they need to delight travellers.

Airlines are thinking strategically and creatively to capture new revenue opportunities while delivering a positive passenger experience. Developed with Google’s best-in-class AI/ML capabilities, Sabre products are helping airlines use data intelligently to do just that with the help of Sabre Travel AI™.

Also, when it comes to hotel reservations, travellers are increasingly looking for unique amenities, personalized experiences, and smart tech-enabled properties. Sabre helps hoteliers maximize retailing and distribution effectiveness and productivity with solutions that leverage Sabre Travel AI™ and Google Cloud Platform capabilities.

Q Enumerate some of the new products that Sabre will roll out.

Our Lodging AI product is already available and helps agencies improve hotel attachment rates using machine learning models that analyse property attributes, trip segmentation, and agency preferences to generate more personalised lodging options.

On the NDC front, we expect to offer over 30 airlines by the end of the year.

Thirdly, with Sabre Air Connect, we will be adding more LCC content on our platform. These low-cost airlines will be available on our platform directly or through an aggregator, that gives agencies access to regional LCCs in those markets via Sabre Air Connect.

We have recently launched SabreMosaic, a revolutionary airline retail platform that is modern, open and is powered by AI. Airlines can create, sell and deliver an array of personalised content to travellers paving the way to a world of offers and orders. We'll be announcing more on that in the coming months, so watch this space.

Q Which are some of the B2B partnerships in the pipeline?

The biggest partnership currently flourishing for us is with Google, and the second is Sabre Air Connect through which we will make aggregator content available from a number of partners. These aggregators are authentic players that enjoy volume in their respective markets, and stability with their platform. These aggregators will have a significant role in enhancing our Air Connect platform.

We also have our own developer community in respective markets. These developers know our platform, our APIs, and the speed at which they can write to us, and this will enhance speed of integration with our platform.

On the airline partnership front, multiple discussions are at various stages of development.

Q What is the scope for GDS players with massive aircraft orders from Indian carriers? How do you view the competition in this market?

We are already consulting with airlines in India on revenue management, distribution, technology and retailing.

We aim to bring even more agency partners onto our platform since they play a crucial role in selling the ever-growing airline inventory, essential to maintain demand-supply balance. In order to support these large aircraft orders from Indian carriers, we need to be technologically ready. We take pride in the stability of our platform because the sheer volume of inventory can disrupt it if it is not agile. We are working on making our platform extremely robust, and the priority is to get OTAs and agencies on our platform.

The competition is intense and fierce. Now that we have Air India content back, and have hired best-in-class commercial and product teams, we are seeing huge uptake on the ongoing customer conversations.

We are also prioritizing employee well-being and benefits by refurbishing all our offices in India. Additionally, we are preparing our sales teams for the future with the Miller Heiman corporate training program.

Q What kind of market share does Sabre have in India, how are you looking at gaining a larger pie in five years?

Let's start with the hotel reservation space. Sabre currently holds a commanding market share of the branded hotel market for Hotel IT in India. All reservations across hotel chains, whether through GDS, brand websites, or call

centres, are processed on the Sabre platform. The hotel segment is a \$32 billion market, and our dominance here underscores our commitment to providing top-tier technology solutions.

Regarding the agency market, now that Air India content is available again, we are confident in our ability to regain and expand our market share. We are actively signing new contracts, with implementations expected to complete within 3 to 6 months. By the end of this year, we anticipate substantial growth.

Our goal is to significantly grow our market share in the near future, aligning with the projected growth of India's travel market to \$250 billion. With strategic initiatives and strong partnerships, we are well-positioned to capture a larger share of both the airline and hotel markets.

Q How do you view the potential of the markets of India and China?

The Chinese GDS market, dominated by the state-owned TravelSky, presents challenges for international providers due to stringent regulations and local preferences.

While TravelSky controls the domestic market, international providers find success in outbound travel segments. Key challenges include regulatory barriers and competition with local players.

Both markets present significant opportunity. In particular, as we increase our market share in India we will see our overall market share in APAC grow exponentially.

India and China will have to play a huge role in the aviation space due to population, growth of aircraft, and this will lead to growth for Sabre and across the global travel ecosystem. ♦

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NEWS ROUND UP

THSC leadership meets with Skill Development Minister

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Jyoti Mayal, Chairperson, Tourism and Hospitality Skill Council (THSC), along with CEO Rajan Bahadur and Vivek Shandilya met the Minister of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (I/C), Government of India, Jayant Chaudhary at Kaushal Bhavan, New Delhi.

During the meeting, the Minister talked about various scope in the field of Tourism and Hospitality, and how skilling can help youth to find meaningful employment opportunities.

Mayal and Bahadur briefly explained the various initiatives like PMKVY, PMVK and RTD being taken by THSC under the purview of MSDE and in guidance of NCVET & NSDC. More skilling with states, especially North East and Tourism Ministry were discussed and to meet again soon to plan a way forward. ♦





TTM+ 2024 Showcases Record Attendance and Dynamic Themes

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Thailand

The Thailand Travel Mart Plus (TTM+) 2024 took place between June 5-7, at the JW Marriott Khao Lak, Phang-Nga.

This edition of TTM+ 2024 has seen a robust attendance, attracting a record number of buyers- 425 in total, comprising 55.5% returning buyers and 44.5% new participants. They hail from various regions- East Asia (30.4%), Europe (25.2%), ASEAN, South Asia, and the South Pacific (20.9%), the Americas, Africa, and the Middle East (11.3%), along with Thailand (12.2%).

Sernsak Pongpanit, Minister of Tourism and Sports, presided over the opening ceremony. Joining him at the event were Niracha Banditchat, Vice Governor of Phang-Nga Province; Thapanee Kiatphaibool, Governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT); Lertsak Ponklin, President of the Phang-Nga Tourism Association; as well as officials and eminent figures from the Thai public and private sectors.

Speaking on the occasion, Sernsak said, "The Thailand Travel Mart Plus, organised in line with the government's 'IGNITE Thailand' vision, has played a crucial role as a premier showcase of Thai tourism. I am confident that this year's event will further affirm its well-earned recognition as a must-attend B2B trade show that provides a valuable business platform for sellers and buyers."

In its 21st edition this year, TTM+ presents the theme 'Amazing Thailand: Your Stories Never End', the latest marketing communication campaign recently launched by the TAT. This dynamic theme highlights

Thailand's commitment to providing meaningful travel experiences.

Thapanee said, "The TTM+ 2024 has been conceptualised to showcase diverse tourism offerings that leverage Thai cultural values for a remarkable and excellent experience in Thailand. Another prominent feature is our 'smart tourism' strategy, which is aimed at elevating Thai tourism's competitiveness. We are highlighting the unprecedented digital transformation to accelerate Thailand's tourism ecosystem to quality and sustainability."



Speaking to TravelBiz Monitor, Hemant T Pandya, Proprietor of RK Tours & Travels from Hyderabad, who attended TTM+2024, said that the event had provided ample opportunities to meet their existing and new suppliers.

"By attending the event, we have established direct contact with reputed hoteliers and agents, which would make our job much simpler. I must say TTM+2024 is a very good platform for us," pointed out Pandya.

Similarly, Bhushan Rathod, Director of VConnect Travels & Holidays based in Pune, praised the organizers for meticulously arranging the event.

"The TTM+ event has really grown well over the years. This year, a greater number of buyers and sellers participated compared to the previous year. By attending the event, I have established many new contacts that will help flourish our business and also assist us in curating better holiday packages for our clients," said Rathod.

There are 430 booths featuring quality sellers from various regions of the country, including 46 exhibitors who received the Thailand Tourism Awards 2023. Among them are 360 hotels and resorts, 34 tour

operators, 18 entertainment venues and attractions, 8 transportation providers and carriers, and 10 companies offering services such as online travel platforms, shopping malls, golf clubs, and vineyards. Additionally, the event is attended by over 100 media representatives from both overseas and within Thailand.

According to Thapanee, "The event will provide a platform for 15,000 business appointments between buyers and sellers. As a result, this is estimated to bring about 3 billion Baht to Thailand's tourism industry and distribute no less than 30 million back to the communities."

The three-day TTM+ 2024 programme includes pre-tours, opening ceremony, Thailand product update, TTM Talk and welcome reception on the first day and B2B appointment sessions and networking events on the last two days.

At the Thailand Product Update, buyers and media were briefed on Thailand's tourism direction and marketing strategy, as well as the focus on sustainability.

The TTM Talk comprised two topics, delivered by Ms. Victoria Loomes, Head of Trends at TrendWatching, on the "Navigating Tomorrow: Global Consumer Trends Reshaping the Tourism Industry" and Ms. Chudaree Debhakam, Head Chef at Baan Tapa, a 2 Michelin-star restaurant, on "Thailand's Gastronomic Journey: Towards a Sustainable Food Future".

The TTM+ annually showcases unique tourism-related products. This year, the event presents four diverse tourism experiences in Phang-Nga. These include 'Try & Taste' – a selection of delicious coffees and teas from various regions such as Thai-Style coffee from Kopi Kuapa and organic tea from Sawanbondin; 'Showcase' – unveiling the secrets behind local crafts like those from Morgan Village and Batik from Takuapa; 'Local Product' – presenting authentic local dishes and fresh fruits; and 'Unleash' – DIY activities on batik painting or beadwork workshops.

Reflecting on the event's theme, the half-day pre-tours presented hidden gems of Phang-Nga, while the post-tours were crafted to allow participants to create never-ending stories in other parts of Thailand such as Phuket, Krabi and Ko Samui in the south and Chiang Mai and Lamphun in the north.

TAT continues to prioritise the effort to minimise the environmental impact of waste generated from the event. Actions include properly sorting waste into organic, recyclable, and general waste categories and sending them to appropriate destinations for further management. This is aimed to help reduce waste sent to landfills, following the Zero Landfills concept in the "Reduce World Mess: Zero Landfills" activity.



India Market

Talking to Indian media, Patsee Permvongsene, Executive Director of the ASEAN, South Asia, and South Pacific Region Department, mentioned that TTM Plus is being organized in Phang-Nga for the first time.

"Our aim is to promote Thailand's lesser-known destinations to international buyers," she stated.

Regarding the Indian market, Patsee highlighted its significance, noting that India currently ranks as the third-largest source market for Thailand after China and Malaysia.

"Our government had exempted visas for Indian citizens for six months, and this policy has been extended. In the future, we may see no requirement of visas for Indian citizens," she added.

Patsee also mentioned that since the visa exemption for Indian citizens, Thailand has been welcoming approximately 7,000 Indian tourists daily.

Last year, Thailand recorded over 28 million international arrivals and a revenue of 1.2 trillion Baht. The top five markets were Malaysia, China, South Korea, India, and Russia.

This year, from 1 January to 31 May, Thailand has welcomed over 14.76 million international arrivals, generating more than 682 billion Baht in revenue. The top five markets are China, Malaysia, Russia, India, and South Korea.

TAT has set a tourism revenue target of 3 trillion Baht for this year. This constitutes 1.92 trillion Baht from 35 million international arrivals and 1.08 trillion Baht from 200 million domestic trips. ♦

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Subtle hostilities in global tourism

Addressing microaggressions for a better travel experience

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

Tourism has become a cornerstone of socio-economic development for many economies in the modern era. As travel evolves into a prevalent lifestyle trend, there is a notable surge in leisure tourism. This heightened enthusiasm for travel has led to the resurgence of over-tourism in many well-established destinations. Having matured through years of heavy tourist influx, these locales are witnessing a growing disenchantment among their host communities. The initial charm of welcoming visitors has been replaced by a palpable strain, giving rise to a phenomenon where subtle yet pervasive hostilities—known as microaggressions—emerge between tourists and residents.

Microaggressions, typically understood as indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group, can also manifest in the tourism context. Here, tourists and hosts may exhibit behaviours that, while not overtly hostile, contribute to an undercurrent of tension and mutual dissatisfaction. Microaggressions in tourism manifest in various ways, impacting both visitors and hosts. These subtle yet significant behaviours create a growing sense of tension and dissatisfaction on both sides.

Visitor microaggression

Tourists often unknowingly commit microaggressions that offend locals and harm the environment. In Thailand, disregarding temple dress codes by wearing revealing clothing is disrespectful. Similarly, in Japan, loud talking and public displays of affection disrupt expected etiquette, especially in public transport and shrines. Environmental irresponsibility is evident in Iceland, where increased tourism leads to littering and damage in natural areas like the Golden Circle. In Venice, Italy, tourists' excessive water and energy use strain local resources. Cultural insensitivity is prevalent, with tourists stereotyping locals in some African countries and neglecting to learn basic phrases in places like Morocco. Cultural appropriation, as seen in New Zealand with Maori tattoos or attire, is viewed as disrespectful.

Host microaggression

Hosts can also exhibit microaggressions toward tourists, often due to frustration from the constant influx of visitors. In Barcelona, locals may offer minimal assistance, leaving tourists feeling unwelcome. Similarly, in Paris, subtle hostility is conveyed through tone and

body language, indicating displeasure without direct confrontation. Unwelcoming attitudes persist in Venice, where tourists often encounter cold service in restaurants and shops due to overcrowding. In Amsterdam, locals may exclude tourists from activities, fostering a sense of isolation. Negative comments about tourists, often overheard in the local language, exacerbate these feelings. Direct confrontations are explicit, as seen in Dubrovnik, where verbal altercations between locals and tourists occur due to over-tourism. Public shaming for inappropriate behaviour or swimming in public fountains can lead to embarrassment. Physical aggression is rare but may arise from severe provocations.

Why be bothered?

Destination leadership is pivotal in managing the intricate dynamics between tourists and host communities. Addressing microaggressions is vital for several reasons. Firstly, it is essential for sustaining tourism. If microaggressions are left unchecked, they can lead to a deteriorated visitor experience, resulting in negative reviews, reduced repeat visits, and a decline in tourism revenue. Ensuring positive interactions helps maintain a steady flow of tourists, which is crucial for the local economy.

Secondly, addressing microaggressions is fundamental for community well-being. Persistent microaggressions can foster frustration and resentment among residents, undermining the overall quality of life. Proactively tackling these issues promotes harmony and enhances community well-being. Furthermore, it is crucial for cultural preservation. Mitigating microaggressions helps preserve local culture and traditions, fostering mutual respect and understanding between tourists and hosts.

Dealing with microaggressions is within reach

To mitigate microaggressions effectively, destination leadership can employ various strategies. Educating tourists about local customs, cultural norms, and environmental practices through websites, travel guides, and on-site materials is crucial. Japan exemplifies this with comprehensive campaigns using videos, brochures, and signage to educate visitors about proper behaviour.

Equally important is training local service providers in communication and conflict resolution to handle tourist interactions professionally. Supporting locals in managing



the stress of high tourist numbers is essential for maintaining positive interactions.

Community engagement is vital, involving locals in tourism planning to address their needs and ensure fair distribution of economic benefits. Bhutan's approach, balancing tourism development with cultural and environmental preservation, serves as a model.

Regulatory measures, like limiting tourist numbers and enforcing environmental protections, safeguard destinations' integrity. Promoting off-season travel and cultural exchange programs further alleviates pressure and fosters mutual understanding.

For example, Iceland's "Inspired by Iceland" campaign educates tourists on responsible behaviour. By implementing these strategies, destination leadership can create a more harmonious and sustainable tourism environment, benefiting visitors and residents. Japan, Iceland, and Bhutan have successfully utilized these approaches, ensuring positive and enriching experiences for all involved.

In the heart of every journey lies the power to reshape the world—one respectful interaction at a time! ♦

'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.



Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

Travel Buddy (Terrainspotter 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.

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.

For Mentoring & Guidance please email ashishkumar@agnitioworld.com. Co Chairman FICCI Travel, Technology & Digital Committee



Core Team: Saurav Chakraborty, Founder & CEO

Paramita Bir, Co - Founder

Founding year: 2020

Company Website: <https://beatravelbuddy.com/community>

Description: Travel Buddy is a travel sector disruptor as they are a community-driven marketplace for solo and GenZ travellers. They have more than 4 million travellers on the platform as of today and as of June, they are generating a GMV of 40 Lacs @ a blended net margin of 25% via their marketplace and subscription model. Travel Buddy is a technology-first company. The company (Android/iOS/Web) runs on intelligent algorithms to match potential travellers and travel providers based on their interests, location, behavioural, and demographic data. These personalized results are then shown on your social feed to enable you to make better travel decisions.

Travel Buddy has grown 400% in GMV in the last three months and 243% in net revenue. They expect to grow from a 40 lacs INR GMV(Completely Organic) to a 80 Lacs- 1 Cr INR GMV within the next 6 months

The company is in the process of building Bharat's fastest-growing network of Genz travellers & aspire to be their Partner in Every Stage of their Travel Journey. Because with Travel Buddy no one should feel alone.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/193ktyrvS2IbMjv9YPyfpCOFYsoymDnkj/view?usp=sharing>

What you must know about travel insurance amidst the new Schengen visa rules

By **Meet Kapadia**, Business Head, Travel Insurance, Policybazaar.com

The European destinations are one of the most popular travel destinations for Indians. Picturesque landscapes, historic architecture, vibrant cultural heritage make Europe one of the attractive destinations of the world.

Moreover, the new Schengen visa rules will prove to be beneficial for frequent travelers. Under the newly adopted visa cascade regime for India, Indian nationals can now receive long-term multi-entry Schengen visas valid for two years after obtaining and lawfully using two visas within the past three years. During the validity of these visas, Indians can enter and exit Schengen countries multiple times without needing separate visas. With the implementation of new visa regulations, there is an increasing trend among European travelers to purchase long-term travel insurance. As per Policybazaar's internal data, since April 2024, there has been a 3-4% rise (with expectations of further increase) in users booking policies lasting more than 45 days compared to March 2024.

If you're planning to visit any European destination this summer, then obtaining travel insurance is pivotal for your peace of mind and financial protection. It provides coverage against any unexpected medical and trip related emergencies during international and domestic trips. Travel insurance policies provide several benefits including cashless hospitalization, coverage for baggage, flight delay, passport loss, trip cancellation, etc.

Here are a few things to be mindful of -
Opting for refund of visa fee

With the rise in travel to European countries

and a surge in demand for travel insurance, the industry is also evolving to tailor the requirements of the customers. This includes introduction of the refund of visa fee rider. This rider enables refund of visa application fee if the application is rejected on the condition that embassy guidelines were followed during the submission process.

Policybazaar's data indicates that applicants spend around Rs 11,000-18,000 per visa application and this fee has increased by 12% June 11 onwards. The number of Schengen visa applications from India lodged in 2023 were 9,66,687, making it amongst the top five countries to lodge visa application. Currently, the rejection rate for Schengen visa is 18-20% highlighting the stringent requirements. With refund of visa fee add-on, travelers need not worry about the refund in case of visa rejection and can claim a refund for application fee. It provides a safety shield for travelers who can face unanticipated visa rejections.

Coverage for adventure sports rider

There are also other useful riders available for travelers such as Adventure Sports rider. It provides coverage against injuries, impairment arising out of high-risk adventure sports. This involves activities such as mountaineering, skiing, river rafting, and paragliding. This rider is crucial for travelers who enjoy adventure sports during their trips.

PED coverage for senior citizens

Schengen destinations have also witnessed a 100% surge in senior citizen travelers and a notable rise in travelers declaring pre-existing



conditions. Policybazaar's data indicates that a significant 82% of Indian travelers are attracted to destinations such as France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain for the upcoming season.

The number of travelers aged 70 and above visiting Schengen countries has doubled since FY'23. Additionally, there has been an increase in travelers aged 31-45 visiting these countries compared to last year.

This year, there has been a notable 15% increase in travelers declaring pre-existing conditions like diabetes and hypertension when traveling to Europe, compared to the previous year. Furthermore, travelers this year have shown a keen interest in selecting appropriate add-ons for their travel insurance. Popular add-ons include coverage for baggage or belongings loss, trip cancellation, adventure sports, and pre-existing disease (PED).

An interesting trend observed is a 40% decrease in users purchasing travel insurance in Euros, possibly due to embassies accepting coverage in dollars. This suggests a growing consumer awareness and understanding.

In conclusion, travel insurance is a crucial investment for anyone planning a trip, as it offers comprehensive protection against unforeseen events and expenses. Additionally, these riders provide enhanced protection for travelers in specific situations. By adding riders to their travel insurance, travelers can embark on their journeys with confidence, knowing they are safeguarded against potential risks and disruptions. ♦

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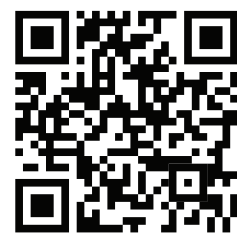
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