

Disney Cruise Line bullish on India; to tap first-time family cruisers with themed-Disney Adventure

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Set to make its debut in Asia next year with Disney Adventure, Disney Cruise Line is confident of growing the family luxury cruise market, and bringing in first-time cruisers on board from India.

Talking to **TravelBiz Monitor** during her recent visit to Mumbai, Sarah Fox, VP & Regional GM, Asia, Disney Cruise Line, said, "India is incredibly important and we are super excited. Having Disney Adventure in Singapore, the gateway to Asia, the proximity to enjoy Disney products is closer to home than ever before. The outbound numbers from India are growing exponentially, and Singapore has been a strong destination to benefit from that."

She went on to add, "We are excited about welcoming Indian guests on board. We did focus group visits from India, and it turned out that 97% of them know Disney, and their touchpoints can be Disney Plus, Disney Movies, Disney Parks and the experiences. Indians have a trust factor in Disney, and expect a certain quality

from the brand. It is extremely validating for us, since today's generation has grown up on Disney entertainment, and we will bring family luxury cruisers from India in the marketplace.



Sarah Fox
Vice President and
Regional GM, Asia
Disney Cruise Line



Lloyd Machado
Director of Hotel
New Build & Dry Dock Operations
Disney Cruise Line

Years ago, when we launched Disney Cruise Line in the US, we brought first-time family cruisers on board."

Talking about the difference in the product offering, Lloyd Machado, Director of Hotel, New Build & Dry Dock Operations, Disney Cruise Line, stated, "Multi-day cruising is growing and that is good for the entire cruise industry. Through Disney Adventure, we

are experimenting by investing so much of our intellectual property with adventure and entertainment experiences. Guests will love their days at sea because it will allow them to explore the depth of offerings."

Disney Adventure will offer three to four-night sailings on the high seas of Singapore, allowing guests to explore and indulge in the 7 themes onboard Disney Adventure. The experiences will range from entertainment, stage shows, adventure, attractions, dining to themed spaces of the favourite Disney characters, a big pull for the young segment of travellers.

With regards to the competition in the cruise space, Fox is of the view that the Disney offering will complement its peers, bringing in new cruisers. "It is fantastic for the industry at large to have the Disney brand sailing in Asia. Many of kids will witness their first large scale theatrical experience onboard which can be very impactful. Therefore, Disney Adventure is purposefully designed for 3-4 days at seas with 7 themes that are rich in content and story-telling." ♦

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'Indo-US Tourism needs swifter visa approval, more direct flights'

TBM Staff | Delhi

India and the US have a lot of unexploited potential in the tourism and hospitality space and more direct flights between the two countries and swifter visa application process is the need of the hour to boost the segment said sector experts and officials at the 1st Indo-US Tourism & Hospitality Summit, organised by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) at New Delhi.

Industry participants and officials noted that although India and the US have robust bilateral relations, and a large number of people from both the countries visit the other country, there is enough scope, primarily in terms of aviation experience.

Addressing the event, the Attorney General

of India, R. Venkataramani stressed on the need for responsible tourism. He emphasised that India would continue to play a role in building cohesive and peaceful world, wherein tourism would be a key factor.

"India is beginning to build a world of togetherness. So, how do we therefore build a world of togetherness in which all of us have equal regard. Each country, each community, each faith have equal regard for each and everyone of us. And from that equal regard what do we get is equal reward for our relationships. It can be equal reward in terms of market, in terms of commerce, industry. So I think India stands for equal regard and equal reward principle and I think tourism is probably one umbrella where we can talk more and more



about it. And to project India's position in it."

"I think it's important for us to spread this message of goodwill and togetherness. What else can be better package than a tourism package. I think all of us can build into it weave into it and be part of India's global journey towards the higher level of togetherness at the global level."

Contd PG. 7 ▶

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Zimbabwe promotes tourism in India, aims for 34,000 visitors in 2024

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Government of Zimbabwe and private sector players are keen to promote the country's tourism destinations in India.

In this effort, the Zimbabwe Tourism Industry, in association with BRANDit, organised a roadshow in Mumbai. The initiative was driven by Zimbabwe's private sector players, highlighting India's growing importance as a key source market. Seventeen exhibitors from hotels, destination management companies (DMCs), luxury tour operators, helicopter operators, and other sectors participated in the event.

Later, speaking to the media on the sidelines of the event, Tongai M. Mngangwa, Deputy Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry, Government of Zimbabwe, expressed encouragement with the results from the Indian market. "When we began focusing on the Indian market, the number of visitors

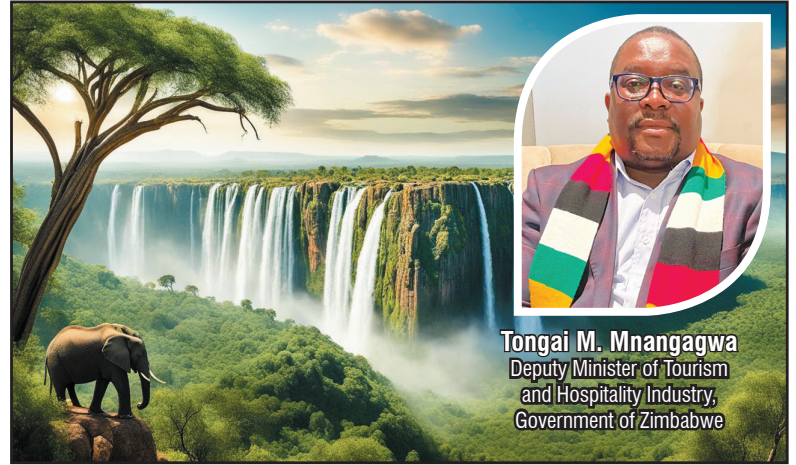
from India was just 3,000.

The following year, the figure increased to 17,000. This makes us very optimistic about this market and convinced that Indian tourists will continue to grow."

Regarding the choice of Mumbai as the venue for the roadshow, Mngangwa noted that this was his first visit to India and that he recognises the vast potential for growth in this market. "We deliberately chose Mumbai because it is the financial capital of India. From here, we plan to focus on other Indian cities. We aim to explore new territories in the tourism business," he said.

When asked about the target number of Indian tourists for the current year, Mngangwa stated that they have set a goal of 34,000. "Given the current trend, I am confident we will achieve this target," he said.

On the topic of visas, Mngangwa mentioned that earlier this year, the Government of Zimbabwe announced visa-



Tongai M. Mngangwa
Deputy Minister of Tourism
and Hospitality Industry,
Government of Zimbabwe

on-arrival for Indian nationals. "Indians can obtain a visa on arrival. They only need to carry their passports and present them at the designated counters upon arrival in Zimbabwe. No online forms are required," he explained.

Regarding connectivity, Mngangwa noted that travellers can choose from airlines such as Emirates, Qatar Airways, Ethiopian Airlines, and Kenya Airways. "Emirates flies via Dubai, offering a semi-direct flight," he said. He also added that efforts

are underway to establish direct flights from India.

As for travel trends, Mngangwa observed that most Indian travellers are young and prefer adventure activities. "Our goal is to popularise Zimbabwe among all segments of Indian travellers," he said.

Currently, India is the 8th largest source market for Zimbabwe, with the US, UK, and China being the top three source markets. ♦

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Martinhal Family Hotels & Resorts appoints Intrepid Marketing as India Representative

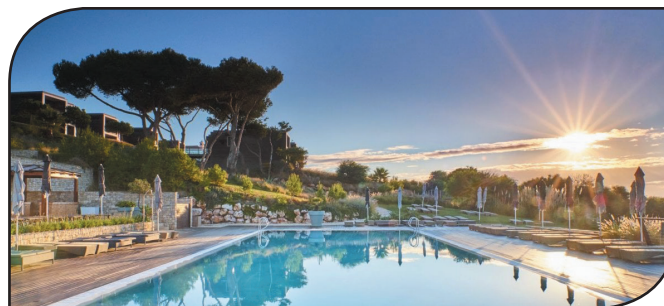
TBM Staff | Mumbai

A collection of Europe's leading premier luxury family resorts, Martinhal Family Hotels & Resorts has appointed Intrepid Marketing and Communications as its official representative in the Indian market.

Chitra Stern, Owner & Founder, Martinhal Family Hotels & Resorts, commented on the collaboration: "Martinhal Family Hotels & Resorts are expertly designed to cater to the Indian market's deep-rooted family values and increasing preference for family-oriented vacations. Our properties offer a holistic experience that surpasses mere accommodations; they provide personalised attention and tailored amenities to each family member, specific to their age and interests.

While the adults are relaxing or savouring

their favourite drinks at one of our bars, our dedicated play zones keep the kids engaged in creative activities. Our baby concierge services allow parents to unwind in peace knowing that their young ones are under safe hands."



Neeti Sharma, Director of Intrepid Marketing and Communications, expressed her enthusiasm for the partnership: "We are deeply honoured to represent Martinhal Family Hotels & Resorts

in India. Martinhal represents the pinnacle of luxury family hospitality, where every guest can enjoy access to bespoke activities. This unique brand of familial hospitality is perfectly tailored for Indians seeking a holistic family retreat

where they can unwind in unison as well as in their own separate space. Our objective is to shine a spotlight on these exceptional offerings and assist Martinhal in effectively tapping into the growing demand for luxury family travel in India."

Intrepid Marketing and Communications will utilise its expertise in strategic PR, marketing, and sales, coupled with its in-depth industry insights, to enhance the brand's presence and appeal among Indian families, showcasing the resorts as the ideal choice for luxurious, family-centric vacations. ♦

Visa applications in India surpass pre-pandemic volumes in H1, 2024

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Robust pent-up demand for outbound travel from India for the first time went past the pre-pandemic levels in H1 2024 (January to June 2024). According to VFS Global that manages visa applications for 52 countries from India, the volumes recorded in H1 2024, surpassed the same period in 2019 by 2%. It also witnessed a steady 11% YoY growth in application counts over H1 2023.

“Outbound travel demand from India has remained robust and it was a matter of time that pre-pandemic levels were restored. India has been witnessing an extended travel season over the past two years and we are confident the momentum would last till the year-end. We remain committed to providing exceptional customer service through technology-led, seamless, highly secure and reliable solutions,” said Yummi Talwar, COO – (South Asia), VFS Global.

Talwar emphasised the importance of applicants being cautious of counterfeit websites and fraudulent social media pages that pose as VFS Global and offer appointments in exchange of money.

“Appointments are free and are exclusively

available through www.vfsglobal.com on a first-come, first-served basis. As a responsible service provider, we persist in raising awareness about this concern and encourage applicants to arrange their travel plans well in advance.”

Some of the popular destinations comprise Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Switzerland, USA and UK. (in alphabetical order).

The preference for tailored services persisted as a predominant trend in visa application behaviours. VFS Global noted a significant increase in the demand for personalised services such as Visa At Your Doorstep (VAYD). This premium optional service allows applicants to manage the full visa application submission from their homes or any preferred location, including biometric enrolment. VAYD bookings in H1 2024 in India registered around five-fold increase when compared to 2019 as a well YoY increase of 16% over H1 2023. VFS Global provides its VAYD services for 16 nations within India, including Austria, Czech Republic,



Yummi Talwar

Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Switzerland, and the UK.

“The preference for personalized services like VAYD has increased among travelers post-pandemic due to health reasons. These offerings improve the visa application process by providing additional

comfort and convenience. We anticipate a growing demand for these premium services that emphasize secure travel within this year as well,” added Talwar.

VFS Global is the trusted partner to 52 sovereign governments in India and provides visa services on their behalf through a network of over 560 visa application centres spread across 19 cities. VFS Global's role in the visa application process is limited to front-end administrative tasks only, which include collecting visa application forms, required documentation as per the checklist, and enrol biometrics, if applicable. VFS Global has no role in the decision-making process of granting or refusing a visa. ♦

VIVA Cruises partner with Global India Reps for tapping Indian market

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Expanding its reach, VIVA Cruises, established in 2018 as a subsidiary of Scylla AG, specialises in river cruise tours that showcase Europe's most scenic destinations.

Operating year-round, VIVA Cruises offers modern, state-of-the-art vessels navigating some of Europe's most iconic waterways, including the Rhine, Danube, Main, Moselle, Seine, Rhône, and the Baltic Sea coast.

Scylla Shipping and VIVA Cruises have partnered with Global India Reps, a seasoned representative and marketing platform with nearly two decades of experience in consulting, launching, and promoting international products in India.

Rony H. Broun, Regional Vice President, expressed his enthusiasm about the

collaboration: “We are thrilled to partner with Global India Reps to introduce VIVA Cruises and its exceptional offerings to the Indian market. This partnership allows us to showcase our unique services and standards



to potential partners and customers in India. With the growing demand for outbound travel from India, we are excited to serve this market for 2024 and beyond.”

Adding to this sentiment, Broun noted,

“With their extensive experience, robust trade relationships, and successful track record in launching new international products from India, we are confident that Global India Reps, led by Mr. Ashish Saran, will significantly accelerate our entry into the Indian outbound market.”

Ashish Saran, Co-Founder and Business Head of Global India Reps, highlighted the potential of this collaboration, “There is a substantial demand for innovative and experiential travel products among Indian agents. Our goal is to connect these agents with unique brands like VIVA Cruises, creating distinctive travel experiences for their clients.”

This partnership marks a significant step in broadening Scylla Shipping and VIVA Cruises' global footprint, offering Indian travellers and partners access to premium European river cruising experiences. ♦

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ETAA's first ever roadshow brings together 25 exhibitors

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Enterprising Travel Agents Association (ETAA) recently held its inaugural roadshow in Mumbai. The event featured 25 exhibitors from various sectors of the travel and tourism industry.



Jagat Mehta, National Director, ETAA, shared with **TravelBiz Monitor** that while the event was modest in scale, it provided a more personalised experience for exhibitors and buyers. "We will assess the success of this event, and consider organising similar shows in other cities. If all goes well,

we plan to continue this initiative after Diwali," Mehta said.

Dipti Pradhan Thakur, National Director & Event Head, ETAA, noted that ETAA has a history of connecting industry partners with travel agents and tour operators. "This is our first roadshow, and we have received an excellent response from the industry. Exhibitors range from insurance and loan advisors to DMCs and airlines. We are excited about expanding this initiative to other cities," Thakur stated.

When asked if the event was exclusive to ETAA members, she clarified, "The event is open to all travel agents in Mumbai, though we have charged a nominal fee for non-ETAA members."

Dharmesh Advani, National Director, ETAA, commented, "Although this is our first roadshow, we are thrilled with the response. Over 150 agents have committed to attending. Both ETAA and non-ETAA members recognise the value of this platform for interacting with exhibitors. Our goal is to ensure that everyone benefits from the event and increases their revenues," Advani emphasised. ♦

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New Zealand's Tara Travels eyes India market

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

Tara Travel New Zealand, a DMC, has set its eyes firmly on the Indian market.

Talking to **TravelBiz Monitor** during his recent visit to India, Sachin Sarin, Director, Tara Travel New Zealand, said, "The DMC business is an extension of Sarin Hotels, and we realised the B2B market is a huge space in the Indian market. There are HNI clients in India that are shifting towards more unique experiences, and that's the market we are catering to."

Tara
Travel | New Zealand



Sachin Sarin

A noticeable trend among Indian VFR travellers visiting New Zealand is their interest in exploring different parts of the country. "Post their stay in Auckland, VFR travellers from India are keen to visit different parts of New Zealand. The demand for New Zealand is rapidly growing, and we are hopeful of ease in visa issuance, and improved air access in the near future. While we cater to the GIT and FIT segments, we are keen to develop the FIT vertical with our luxury portfolio."

Besides nature, New Zealand offers variety in adventure, history and culture.

In India, Tara Travel New Zealand is working with tour operators for wholesale contracts, as well as direct sales besides participating in select roadshows. ♦

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Morocco sees 41% growth in Indian visitors till June

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Moroccan National Tourism Office (MNT) has reported a 41% year-on-year growth in the Indian market until June 2024.

This milestone marks the first year of MNT's operations in India, demonstrating an impressive start and setting a promising trajectory, with expectations of a 45% growth by the end of 2024.

In the first semester of 2024, Morocco welcomed 7.5 million tourists globally, representing a 15% increase. The target for the year is set at 15.5 million tourists. As part of its strategic objectives, MNT aims to attract 100,000 Indian visitors by 2026.

Over the past year, MNT has been actively engaging with the Indian travel industry and media.

Recent roadshows in Delhi and Mumbai have been pivotal, fostering strong relationships with numerous tour operators and inviting esteemed media partners. These events

have played a crucial role in raising awareness about Morocco as a premier travel destination.

Jamal Kilito, Country Manager of MNT

India, expressed optimism about the increase in Indian arrivals to Morocco. He added, "Morocco is a promising destination for Indian tourists. It's encouraging to see Indian travelers, whether with family or solo, exploring the destination. With multiple trade engagements planned, Morocco has significant potential to attract honeymooners, MICE, and celebrations. In the coming months, we will accelerate our efforts in the Indian market, with plans to tap into the film industry for future collaborations." ♦



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MTF's SPARK draws interest from 240-strong audience



TBM Staff | Mumbai

In a first of its kind and a unique informative format, MTF hosted its first-ever completely sponsorship free event SPARK on Saturday, August 10th.

The two-hour format had some of the most accomplished and seasoned achievers from the travel industry namely Nishant Kashikar,

Kiran Bhandari, Sunil Kumar, Syed Sanjar, Neil Patil and Rahim Aslam.

The event was aimed at educating the next gen of travel along with industry prominent owners many of whom actually took the initiative to being their successors to be part of this educational format.

Sanjeet from Buzz Marketing, moderated the interaction to make it more interesting and

thought provoking.

In the 240-strong audience at Jai Hind College, the travel and tourism faculty & students who took an interest in the show, are looking forward to benefiting the industry experts in the coming years.

Next in line for MTF is MELANGE scheduled for September 2024. ♦

Indo-US Tourism needs swifter visa approval...

CONTD from PG 01 ►

Speaking at the programme, Dr. Lalit Bhasin, Immediate Past National President of IACC outlined his association with the tourism and hospitality space. "My association with tourism, hospitality is nearly of 6 decades, when I started practicing law," he said.

In panel discussion on "Outbound Tourism, India to USA", Suman Billa, Additional Secretary, Union Ministry of Tourism highlighted the strong bilateral partnership and the growth in travel between the two countries, there is significant headroom for progress in this space.

"So there's a lot that is happening based in India and I think it is a little bit surprising even though the numbers are good. If you look at from a tourism perspective, we really have not capitalized on the potential that we have. I think judging by the potential of what we have, there is probably much more headroom for us to capture," Billa said, adding that the growth in the Indian economy is unlikely to slowdown adding all the more potential for growth in outbound tourism.

"India has been the fastest growing of

the lot. And nothing in the market, seems to suggest that it is going to slow down. So I think our natural affinity to the US will draw us closer and will open more pathways for us to explore and I think tourism should be one of those pathways which will open the doors for the possibility, but to build more understanding between the people of India and the United States," he added.

He noted that although a US visa is valid for 10 years, not requiring any frequent updates by a visa holder, the process of getting the visa for the world's largest economy is a cumbersome and tiresome process. He also stressed on the need for more direct flights between India and the US.

Jonathan M. Heimer, Minister Counsellor for Commercial Affairs, India U.S. Commercial Service, however, noted that over the past one year, the pace of visa application processing has gained momentum leading to record visa issuances. "On the backend for the application processing, we've been able to process something like 60% more visas with more or less the same resources. And also we have issued more than 1.1 million visas in the last year, which for us, is a record and that's just going to continue to go up that

number," Heimer added.

In his response to the issue of the visa application process, Rajesh Magow, Co-Founder & Group CEO, MakeMyTrip Limited suggested that introduction of short-term visas for tourists.

"There are many other countries which have done it, maybe short-term tourist visa can be quick, maybe that could be one potential innovation that can happen as well," he said. speaking in favour of boosting of international tourism he said that international travel is not growing at the cost of domestic travel.

Talking on the revival of air travel from the Covid-induced slowdown, Harvinder Singh, Director India & Middle East, United Airlines noted that all the three key segments of air travel — business, students and leisure — have picked up and gained momentum.

"What we see in terms of the segmentation there is business, there is the student along with the leisure part and what are what we have really observed is all these segments are actually going," he said. Singh also stressed on the need for better customer experience with the help of newer technologies and other resources. ♦

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WITH RENEWED VIGOUR

Taking a cue from the growing popularity of helicopters and smaller aircraft by NSOP for last mile connectivity, it seems the government has finally woken up to revive seaplane operations in India.

After some failed attempts, MoCA has shown keen interest to boost seaplane operations by unveiling dedicated guidelines.

For routes under the government's flagship regional connectivity scheme UDAN, which is now in its fifth leg, MoCA is set to provide a viability gap funding. This will become a catalyst for making seaplane operations a lucrative option.

While the changes will take time to manifest, the very intent of bringing seaplane into mainstream aviation will positively spur India's tourism agenda.

Maldives is a good example of efficient and extensive deployment of seaplanes for tourist transportation. India with its long coastline, has fertile opportunities of alternate choice for passenger transport. MoCA can also learn from its Shipping counterpart that has successfully harnessed India's waterbodies under operation Sagarmala project. The recent success of RoRo ferries is yet another example worth emulating.

An aggressive and sustained approach will ensure this initiative does not flounder. Lack of keen focus on results is a recipe for failure. MoT's ambitious '777 Days of Indian Himalayas campaign' that died a quick death is a glaring example.

India is an expensive aviation market, and fare wars are a reality. That is quite evident. Indeed economical alternatives to air transport that connect the hinterland and offer last mile connectivity is the perfect spread for the tourism repast, and the fact that it brings newer destinations to the travel fold is the perfect icing on the cake.

The multiplier effect of job creation and economic growth is ultimately the cherry on the top.

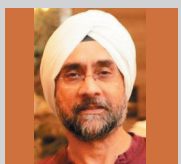


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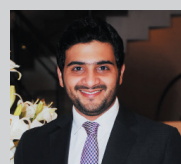
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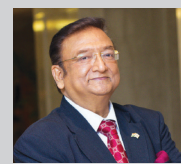
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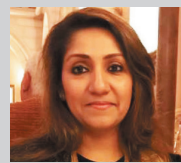
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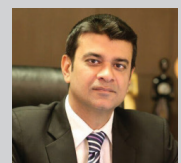
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DigiYatra, the visionary platform transforming air travel in India

Vitasta Gurtoo | Bengaluru

In a world where convenience and security are paramount, the need for a seamless travel experience has never been more pressing.

DigiYatra, a cutting-edge platform utilising biometric technology, is revolutionising the way passengers navigate airports.

At the helm of this transformative journey is Suresh Khadakhbavi, whose vision and determination have turned DigiYatra from a mere idea into a reality that is redefining air travel across India.

Reflecting on the origins of DigiYatra, Khadakhbavi recalls the frustration familiar to many frequent travellers—the endless checkpoints and the repetitive demand to present the same documents multiple times.

“The inspiration came from a simple question,” he shares. “Why can’t this be done just once?” This straightforward yet powerful statement sparked the vision for DigiYatra: a travel experience where a passenger’s face is their boarding pass, allowing them to breeze through the airport with minimal interruptions.

However, the journey from concept to reality was not without its challenges. Although the technology behind DigiYatra was relatively straightforward, the early days of biometric adoption were fraught with concerns. People questioned the accuracy of the technology and raised valid concerns about data privacy. Khadakhbavi and his team faced the monumental task of convincing the public that their biometric data would be safe and not stored centrally. “Our biggest hurdle was building trust,” he explains. “We had to assure users that their data was only stored on their phones and would be purged within 24 hours.”

Beyond gaining public trust, the physical implementation of DigiYatra’s infrastructure, such as eGates at operational airports, required meticulous planning and testing. Despite these challenges, the platform’s development continued, driven by the belief that the future of air travel lies in seamless, tech-driven solutions.

Data security and privacy are at the core of DigiYatra’s design. Khadakhbavi emphasises that DigiYatra was built with “privacy by design” as a foundational principle. Unlike many other platforms, DigiYatra does not store any personal data centrally. Instead, all data remains securely on the user’s phone and is automatically purged within 24 hours after the journey. “We even launched a campaign called ‘Don’t Know Your Customer’ to highlight that while we don’t store personal information, we understand and cater to the need for a hassle-free travel experience,” he adds.

As DigiYatra expanded to airports across India, it became clear that the platform was meeting a critical need in the rapidly growing aviation sector. With more passengers and airports, there was a

pressing need for technology-driven solutions to enhance customer experience. Khadakhbavi explains that DigiYatra’s goal is to eliminate friction points in the travel process, contributing to the broader vision of making Indian airports more efficient and potentially positioning

them as global aviation hubs. The success of this expansion is a testament to the collective efforts of the Ministry of Civil Aviation, various airports, and industry stakeholders, all united in their commitment to putting the passengers first.

One of the most remarkable aspects of DigiYatra is how it balances cutting-edge technology with user-friendliness. The platform is built on Self-Sovereign Identity (SSI) technology, which inherently provides a secure and user-friendly experience. SSI allows users to manage their credentials in a decentralised manner, eliminating the need for central data storage and

reducing the risks associated with data breaches. “This technology not only ensures security, but also enhances user confidence, knowing their data is handled with the utmost care,” Khadakhbavi explains.

Despite DigiYatra’s emphasis on not directly knowing its customers, the platform still manages to provide a personalised and efficient service. “Our goal was to provide a business-class experience to every DigiYatra user, without needing to know personal details,” Khadakhbavi notes. The system is designed to offer a premium experience by default, regardless of the passenger’s background or frequency of travel.

User feedback has played a crucial role in the continuous improvement of DigiYatra. Initially, MKhadakhbavi and his team personally responded to user queries on social media and app stores. As the platform grew, a dedicated team was established to monitor and address user feedback, ensuring that the DigiYatra experience evolves in line with user needs. “This constant engagement allows us to refine and improve DigiYatra continuously,” he says.

Looking to the future, Khadakhbavi is excited about the ongoing expansion of DigiYatra. With more airports set to adopt the platform, the focus remains on enhancing the technology and refining the user experience. New features, such as notifications when a user’s data has been purged after travel, are being explored to provide even greater transparency and confidence to users. “The journey of DigiYatra is just beginning,” Khadakhbavi concludes, “and we’re excited about what the future holds.”

As DigiYatra continues to revolutionise air travel in India, Khadakhbavi’s dedication to innovation and user experience remains at the heart of this transformative platform. With a strong focus on privacy, security, and seamless service, DigiYatra is setting a new standard for the future of travel. ♦



Suresh Khadakhbavi
CEO, DigiYatra

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MORE THAN MEDICAL

With some symbiosis, the travel industry could break into bigger smiles with the cosmetic dentistry field.



Most tourism growth discussions, when they want to be different, veer towards religious tourism, wellness tourism and even medical tourism. That is supposed to be the 'novel' or out-of-the-box thinking which needs to be heralded as the great big hope for a quantum growth in the industry.

Medical tourism is a huge market and definitely a significant opportunity. Recently I discovered that to a very large extent so called medical tourism is more about effective and affordable medical attention from patients flying in from across the world. The space between tourism, hospitality, and vacation is slowly and gradually blurring.

Yet, considering the rather ominous aspect of managing diseases, willy-nilly the field gets a distant acknowledgement from mainstream tourism players. They'd rather let hospitals handle their own affairs (and promotions).

Speaking to those in this field I discovered that few patients (or those accompanying them) seldom care for any sightseeing or vacationing options. Thereby medical tourism, all said and done, seldom catches the fancy of the tourism and travel trade as it rightly should.

The closest the industry gets to that zone is through the word 'wellness'. That expands the scope immensely with a yoga, spa and lifestyle direction. Hotels, spas and Yoga establishments crowd that segment and seem to comfortably share a filial relationship within the industry.

Experts state that the Indian beauty and wellness industry currently employs close to about 12.3 million people, with two among every three being women.

The dentistry branch of medicine which specialises in total mouth regeneration, smile enhancement and teeth corrections, teeters tantalisingly between cosmetic, wellness and medical tourism. Even here, the numbers of women dentists tower over men.

Dr Shruti Goel of Veda Dentistry and Cosmetology at Delhi who I met recently expands on the immense potential of dental cosmetology in India that's being discovered all over the world today. According to her the attraction is due to the levels of expertise and not just since the costs are immensely economical compared to the West.

I personally have met varied professionals in UK and Europe, and a few from USA as well, who combined vacations with cosmetic dental corrections in India and saved hugely in both vacay costs and medical expenses.

Initially the savings were a great initial draw for such travellers till they discovered the add-ons. I know a few amongst almost the entire crew of a foreign airline flying to Delhi who exchange rosters on their flights to majorly seek quick (and regular) cosmetic corrections in the capital.

In barely a few years, the benefits of excellent service, results, care and amazing costs for many procedures has spread amongst this fraternity. Actually the news has travelled through them to a wider audience and clientele which the tourism business in India is yet to reach out to!

Medical tourism has a humongous market but the newer market for hair, skin, slimming and nutraceuticals is showing a steady growth beyond the spa and wellness set-up. This also opens up the field to those trained in hospitality institutes

The dearth of skills and training and employability of personnel in this sector is being felt direly. Hospitality institutes could indeed as well add some sort of paramedical training for their students.

With the cosmetic dentistry industry getting more defined, it is seeking professionally skilled and certified personnel, not just doctors.

The need is of technically proficient support staff who are also trained in soft skills and behavioural outlook to work across multiple job-roles beyond the usual hospitality world.

The wellness and cosmetic sector is anticipated to grow more than INR 5 lakh crore in size by 2030. The cosmetic dentistry sector alone can account for a sizeable chunk if the travel industry would streamline and collaborate with it.

Clearly with some strategic cooperation the smiles are bound to get wider on both sides.

Anurag Yadav

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

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India's Rise in Student Remittance-Home Grown Fintech with Global Reach

By Prajay Bangur - Business Strategy and Alliances, EbixCash

The rapid rise of Indian students pursuing higher education abroad has transformed the student remittance market into a critical component of the global financial ecosystem. With over 1.3 million Indian students studying internationally, there's an unprecedented demand for efficient, cost-effective remittance services. This surge presents a significant opportunity for industry leaders in fintech and traditional banking to innovate and dominate the cross-border payments landscape.

India's student remittance market has evolved swiftly, with an estimated size of USD 13 billion, growing at a 15-20% CAGR, driven by technological advancements and the increasing adoption of digital payment solutions. Gone are the days when traditional bank wire transfers were the go-to option for sending money abroad. Today's market is dominated by fintech innovators offering mobile-based platforms that facilitate seamless, quick, and low-cost transfers with superior exchange rates.

The availability of credit facilities through dedicated sectoral NBFCs and banks focusing on this sector has led to more students pursuing overseas education from India. Today, apart from traditional STEM courses, medical and skill-based courses are hot picks, with students moving abroad for these programs.

With the increase in per capita income, especially in Tier-II and Tier-III towns such as Rajahmundry, Bhimavaram, Guntur, Rudrapur, Navsari, and Aurangabad, the number of aspirants for overseas education

has surpassed those from traditional metro cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Chennai.

Among the leaders in this space is EbixCash World Money, a trailblazer in outward remittance services, particularly for students. EbixCash has distinguished itself by combining technological innovation with a deep understanding of student needs. Their platform offers an integrated experience that simplifies cross-border payments, making it easier for students and their families to manage tuition fees, living expenses, GICs, blocked accounts, and multi-currency travel cards curated for students.

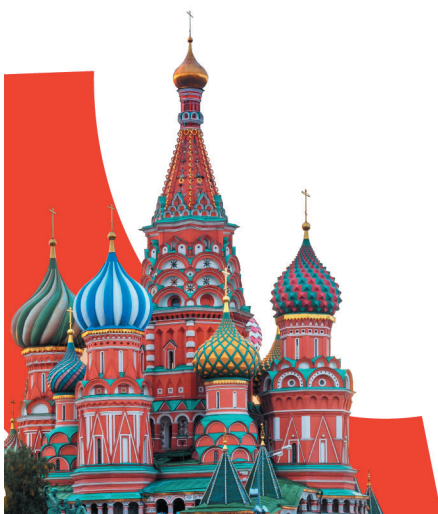
EbixCash World Money's focus on enhancing the student experience is evident in its user-centric approach with a transparent transaction process and customer support tailored to the unique requirements of students. By leveraging their extensive network spread across 62 cities with 90 branches and 23 international airports, and their technological prowess, EbixCash ensures that funds are transferred quickly, safely, and at competitive rates, positioning them as a leader in the student remittance market.

The burgeoning student remittance market is a bellwether for the broader cross-border payments industry. With India at the forefront of this growth, there's a significant opportunity for industry leaders to capitalize on the current momentum. By investing in innovative technologies and expanding service portfolios, companies like EbixCash World Money are setting the standard for excellence in this dynamic market.



The time is ripe for strategic action. Leaders in fintech, banking, and payments must seize this opportunity to shape the future of cross-border transactions, setting the stage for sustained growth and leadership in the global financial ecosystem. With their innovative approach to student remittances and a track record of success, EbixCash is well-positioned to lead the charge, offering a blueprint for success in the evolving world of cross-border payments. ♦

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IATO Convention 2024

Seeking solutions to India's poor show in Inbound Tourism

Shayan Mallick | New Delhi

The 39th Annual IATO Convention is coming at a time when the India's inbound tourism sector requires so much more than the mere lip services. While the country's outbound tourism registered a record year in 2023, besting its peak performance of 2019 by 1.3 per cent, inbound tourism doesn't paint a similar picture.

India produced a little over 27 million outbound travellers as against 26.9 million outbound travellers in 2019.

However, India's inbound recovery isn't as promising with the total arrival number reaching just over 84 per cent in 2023 of the pre-Covid level. The country had received 10.9 million foreign tourists in 2019, its best year. Affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, the number has now climbed to 9.2 million foreign tourist arrivals, still short by over 15 per cent.

In 2023, for every inbound tourist, India produced nearly three outbound travellers. More recently, for June 2024, there were 7.06 Lakh Foreign Tourist Arrivals against 24.04 Lakh Indian National

Departures. Foreign Tourist Arrival (FTA) has yet to catch up with peak arrival figures of 2019. FTA in the first half (January-June) of 2024 was recorded at 47,78,374, still short by nearly 10 per cent to peak numbers recorded for the same period in 2019 at 52,96,025.

As the 1700-members strong inbound tour operators' body meet for the three-day for the 39th annual Convention in Bhopal, revival of country's inbound tourism fortune is high on the agenda as also highlighted, says IATO President, Rajiv Mehra. The Convention theme is 'Resurgent India Inbound'. The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh Dr. Mohan Yadav is expected to attend the IATO Convention.

The convention, he said, would delve deep on the evolving scenario, and what measures are required to chalk out a successful road map.

The industry is seeking several measures for the revival of inbound

tourism in the country.

Mehra and his comrades in the association, Sr. Vice President Rajnish Kaistha, Vice President Ravi Gosain and Secretary Sanjay Razdan and other key industry stakeholders have highlighted several

FTAs in 2023 could barely reach 85% of its peak 2019 numbers. For H1, 2024 numbers are also lagging by 10% behind the data for first half of 2019, clearly dashing any hope of full recovery this year.



Dr. Mohan Yadav
CM - Government of Madhya Pradesh



Rajiv Mehra
President, IATO



Rajnish Kaistha
Sr. Vice President, IATO

reasons including withdrawal of incentives to the inbound tour operators on their foreign exchange earnings which were being used for overseas marketing and promotions; lack of trained tourism manpower in Indian Embassies who are also not able to engage in interaction and follow up with the foreign tour operators.

Besides, lack of marketing and promotion of tourism in overseas markets as budgetary support for overseas promotion like Fam Trips to India, overseas road shows were also withdrawn. Furthermore, non-availability of funds with the Ministry of Tourism for participation in overseas travel marts and approval required from the Ministry of Finance for participation in each mart has also been a big hurdle in promoting inbound tourism.

According to Mehra, "FTVs (Foreign Tourist Visitors) numbers falling during Covid was understandable but now things are absolutely normal but our numbers are nowhere near the 2019 level. These in no way do justice to our country which has so much to offer in terms of natural beauty and rich cultural history."

Kaistha said that there are multiple steps that need to be taken to revive the numbers, and IATO has requested the government to offer financial support to the inbound tour operators by providing a 5 per cent incentive on their net foreign exchange earnings on the condition that this be utilised for overseas promotions and marketing at least for 5 years or till the time inbound tourism to India reaches 2019-20 level.

Secondly, IATO has requested for trained MOT officers to be posted at consulates or embassies overseas for regular interaction and follow up with the foreign tour operators.

The apex inbound body has also suggested advance planning of at least one year and dedicated Budgetary Funds to be provided to

MoT (Ministry of Tourism) for aggressive overseas promotion through electronic and print media, travel marts participation, Fam trips and other such measures required for revival of tourism, and last but not the least, immediate formation of National Tourism Board.

Resurgent India Inbound

IATO has over 1700 inbound tour operators as its members spread across the country. Their key interest is inextricably linked to India's inbound tourism fortunes. The messages that come out from the Convention on the current state of inbound tourism could potentially go a long way in determining India's tourism fortune in the foreseeable future. It will also be a big statement in underscoring the relevance of the annual event.

The 2024 IATO Convention is themed 'Resurgent India Inbound' that seems more of aspirational for now. "India's resurgence as a destination for inbound is a multi-faceted phenomenon-driven by economic stability, strategic reforms, infrastructure development, technological advancements, favourable demographics, and global integration. The country's proactive approach to fostering a business-friendly environment, coupled with its inherent strengths, has created a compelling narrative for global investors.

As India continues to evolve and adapt to the changing global landscape, it stands poised to capitalise on its potential and solidify its position as a key player in the global economy. Here IATO would play the role of catalyst to synergise the efforts of the policy-makers and our nodal Ministry in particular to take tourism to the pre-Covid level," said Mehra showing optimism. ♦

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With over 1.2 million visitors recorded in the first seven months, for the anticipated peak season Oct-Nov-Dec windfall, Sri Lanka Tourism is confident of achieving its target of 2.3 million tourists for 2024. **Chalaka Gajabahu, Chairman, SLTPB (Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau),** spoke to **Shayan Mallick** in an exclusive chat.

Sri Lanka gearing for record tourism in 2024, eyeing to best it's 2018 visitor numbers

After a tumultuous few years that started with Easter Sunday bombings in 2019, followed by Covid-19 pandemic and lastly, the economic crisis of 2022, Sri Lanka is finally set to dominate the travel charts once again.

The island nation looks comfortable to achieve its target of 2.3 million international tourist arrivals, and USD 4.6 billion in tourism revenue during 2024. Sri Lanka had registered its record tourism year in 2018 when international tourist arrival surpassed 2.3 million visitors for the first time.

At over 99.9%, Sri Lanka had nearly achieved its 2023 arrival target of 1.5 million that came slightly undone because of geopolitical exigencies like the Russia-Ukraine war and more recently, the crisis in Israel.

"Sri Lanka missed the target by a mere 10,000 visitors because of the two ongoing wars, or we would have jumped the target of 1.5 million because we were getting lot of tourists from these countries as well", believes Chalaka Gajabahu, Chairman, Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB). He spoke recently to TravelBiz Monitor, in an exclusive chat, on the sidelines of an award function in New Delhi.

"This year, our target is to reach 2.3 million tourists which are also our best numbers from 2018. We have already received over 1.2 million visitors in the first seven months. But don't forget that, especially for the European market, the winter season is coming. October,



November and December months are going to be very big. We are expecting about 700,000 to 750,000 visitors within these three months alone, that's excluding the visitors for the August and September months. So I am pretty confident that we will achieve our target of 2.3 million figures," he added.

Gajabahu also pointed that Sri Lanka's tourism source markets are diverse and they are keen to maintain it that way. "India has always been our number one market. It was our number one market in 2023, and this year as well. We want it to grow to all categories of visitors. India will be our top market for a long time to come and we want it to be. However,

Sri Lanka is a very neutral country. Whether it is India, China, Russia, the UK, France, Germany or the US, we are very welcoming to tourists from across the world."

Commenting on the turnaround, the SLTPB head pointed, "We went through a very troublesome period before 2022 for five years! When you go through an economic crisis with long queues for essential commodities like food, medicines and petrol, no one wants to visit that country. But, in the past two years, with all that we have done, not only in India but globally, with road shows, promotions and influencer campaigns like 'Seeing is Believing', we are now in the top five travel indexes, wherever in the world, from the Fortune to the Forbes, and lot of other such platforms."

In June 2022, Sri Lanka, said Gajabahu, became the first country to come to India to do the roadshow and also "India was the first country we went to because we knew that India was our next door big brother. It was the market we knew very well that we can handle, and I must admit that all the associations, especially TAAI (Travel Agents Association of India) and Jyoti Mayal came forward to help and committed to bring tourists to Sri Lanka." TAAI organised its 67th Annual Convention in Sri Lanka last year themed around regional tourism promotion.

Furthermore, under its influencer campaigns like 'Seeing is Believing', Sri Lanka hosted no less than 200 global journalists and social media influencers in the last one and half years, earning the island nation receive a lot of positive coverage across the globe that gave a huge fillip to its destination image. Recently, Times of India rated Sri Lanka as the second 'Most Popular Travel Destination in Asia.' It was also voted as one of the safest countries for the single women travellers.

"There are many good things happening in Sri Lanka, and we hope to continue the momentum," said Gajabahu. ♦

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Destinations like Khao Lak, Koh Samui, and Koh Nangyuan remain relatively unknown to Indian travellers. Khao Lak offers tranquil, unspoiled beaches and lush landscapes. Koh Samui impresses with its pristine sands, clear waters, and luxurious resorts. Koh Nangyuan captivates with its turquoise waters, vibrant coral reefs, and picturesque sandbar. Each location combines natural beauty with unique and memorable experiences.



Unveiling Thailand's Lesser-Known Treasures: A Journey Through Khao Lak to Koh Nangyuan

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Thailand

I recently attended TTM+ 2024 (Thailand Travel Mart) at the invitation of the TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand) Mumbai office. The choice of venue for this year's event reflects TAT's intention to spotlight Thailand's lesser-known destinations to international buyers. The grand event was held in Khao Lak, Phang-Nga. The town is anything but noisy; its serene beauty draws everyone in. After the event, a media colleague, a TAT official from the Mumbai office, our guide and I embarked on a tour to several destinations that are largely unfamiliar to Indian travellers.

We stayed in Khao Lak for three days as the town hosted the event. After arriving

at Phuket Airport, we drove to Khao Lak, a journey that took 1 hour and 40 minutes. Khao Lak, a renowned for being one of the Andaman coast's most breathtaking sunset spots as well as being home to popular tourist attractions like Memories Beach, Had Nang Thong (Black Sand Beach), The Khao Lak Lighthouse, Kuek Kak Beach, Pak Weep Beach, Bang Sak Beach and many more. Most of the Beaches here features impressive accommodation options as well as shops and restaurants for convenience.

Old City of Phuket

The first destination we visited after the event was the Old City of Phuket, about a 2-hour drive from our hotel in Khao Lak. Known also as Phuket Town or Thalang Road, this historic area lies at the heart of Phuket.

The Old City features vibrant Sino-Portuguese style buildings that have been meticulously restored and exude charm. The area is rich with attractions, including restaurants, souvenir shops, cafes, dispensaries, and Tottori's parlours, all catering to tourists. For those seeking a Phuket experience beyond its exotic beaches, this is a fantastic alternative.

The streets are lined with beautifully preserved colonial-style buildings, reflecting the heritage of Chinese and European settlers from the 19th century. The colourful shop-houses, with

their ornate facades and decorative shutters, provide a picturesque backdrop, making the area reminiscent of a European town.

Little Amazon Takuapa: How many of us are aware of the Little Amazon in Thailand? One morning, after breakfast, we set out from our hotel in Khao Lak and reached this unique destination in just 35 minutes. Resembling



the Amazon rainforest, the Little Amazon offers an immersive canoeing experience. We embarked on a 2 hour canoe journey along the tranquil Klong Sung Nae stream. During the journey we spotted snakes, monkeys and birds. The stunning banyan trees, palms, and mangroves are also noteworthy. The Little Amazon provides a clear glimpse into the characteristics of the Amazon Rainforest.



The site offers three types of floating boats—canoes, kayaks, and paddle boats. The time to visit is between 9 AM and 5 PM.

Takua Pa old town: After savouring our time at Little Amazon, we reached Takua Pa Old Town in just 15 minutes and took a leisurely stroll around it. The town has become a significant cultural attraction. Every Sunday



evening, the town's main road, Thanon Sri Takua Pa, comes alive as a walking street lined by local vendors and food stalls between 04:00 PM and 08:00 PM.

After saying goodbye to Khao Lak, we flew from Phuket to Koh Samui, with the flight taking about 50 minutes. Koh Samui is a picturesque island in the Gulf of Thailand known for its pristine beaches. The island offers a range of activities, from water sports and spa treatments to exploring local markets and natural attractions. Koh Samui is a popular destination for both relaxation and adventure.

From the airport we straight drove to the Grandfather and Grandmother Rocks.

The Grandfather and Grandmother Rocks: These rocks are also known as Hin Ta and Hin Yai in Thai, are iconic rock formations



located on the southern coast of Koh Samui in Thailand. These rocks are famous for their unusual shapes, which resemble male and female genitalia. They have become a popular tourist attraction due to their unique appearance and the folklore associated with them. People visit to admire the natural formations and take photographs, making it a notable spot on the island of Koh Samui.

From here, we headed for lunch and then experienced massage at Eranda Herbal Spa. The location of the spa is truly exceptional and epitomizes the natural luxury spa experience.

Our last activity of the day was Sunset Cruise by Banana Fan Sea. The Sunset Cruise by Banana Fan Sea offers a serene and picturesque experience on the water. As the sun began to set, we all enjoyed breathtaking views of the island's coastline. The cruise typically includes a relaxing atmosphere with light refreshments and the chance to soak in the stunning colours of the sunset. The ship's friendly crew made our journey even more enjoyable. It's a perfect way to unwind and experience the island's natural beauty in a tranquil setting.

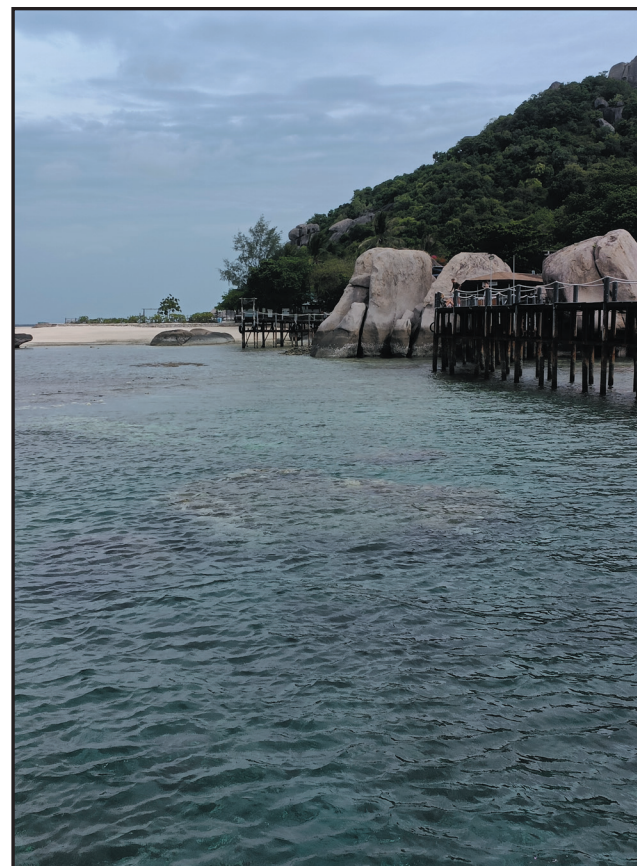
Koh Nangyuan: The next morning, we set off for Koh Nangyuan. Our journey began at Lomprayah Pier, a major transport hub in Koh Samui. From there, we boarded a catamaran and reached Koh Nangyuan in approximately one and a half hours. The journey from Lomprayah Pier to Koh Nangyuan by catamaran is a scenic one. The high-speed catamarans offer a comfortable ride with panoramic views of the Gulf of Thailand. As we sailed, we passed by breathtaking coastal landscapes and nearby islands. The catamaran is well-equipped with amenities to ensure a pleasant journey, making it a great way to travel to Koh Nangyuan.

Besides its scenic beauty, the island is also a popular destination for snorkeling and diving enthusiasts due to its vibrant coral reefs and diverse marine life.

Upon arriving at Koh Nangyuan, we boarded a small boat and headed to Ao Mung for diving and exploring coral reefs. The entire activity was conducted under the careful supervision of trained professionals. The water and surrounding areas are impeccably clean. Ao Mung Beach features soft, white sandy shores and tends to be less crowded than other locations, providing a peaceful and tranquil atmosphere.

Due to its relatively remote location, Koh Nangyuan maintains a peaceful and unspoiled atmosphere, making it a favourite destination for those seeking a serene tropical escape in Thailand.

Afterward, we had lunch at the restaurant of Koh Nangyuan Dai Resort and then climbed numerous stairs to reach the viewpoint. At the top, we were greeted by breathtaking views of the crystal-clear waters and lush greenery, making it an ideal spot for photography and



taking in the natural beauty of the area.

The final leg of our journey began the next morning with our first stop at Baan Bo Ran, followed by a visit to The Nature Samui (Mini Cooking Class).

Baan Bo Ran: Located in Koh Samui, this cultural and historical attraction is an open-air museum that features traditional Thai and Chinese architecture and artifacts. Visitors can explore replicas of traditional Thai houses, temples, and structures, gaining insight into Thailand's rich heritage and historical lifestyle. We also enjoyed a hands-on experience making hot-pressed coconut oil, which involved peeling, cutting, grating, squeezing, and simmering the coconuts.

The Nature Samui (Mini Cooking Class): It offers a mini cooking class as part of the experience, giving visitors a hands-on opportunity to learn about Thai cuisine. We participated in cooking using fresh on-site ingredients under the guidance of experienced instructors. This engaging activity not only taught us cooking techniques but also provided insight into the flavors and culinary traditions of Thailand, all within the lush, eco-friendly environment of The Nature Samui.

All the places we visited are largely unknown to Indian travellers. During our trip to destinations like Little Amazon Takuapa and Koh Nangyuan, we did not encounter any other Indian visitors, though we observed many foreign tourists enjoying their vacations. This presents a significant opportunity for the TAT to promote these destinations within the Indian travel market. I would also like to congratulate TAT (Mumbai) for meticulously planning the trip—it was flawless. ♦

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Boosting Indian Tourism: The Role of Amusement Parks in Creating Memorable

By Arun K Chittilappilly, MD, Wonderla Holidays

India is a land of vibrant cultures, breathtaking landscapes, and ancient traditions that have always offered great tourist attractions. Experiences for tourists range from pulsating cities to peaceful retreats. But now, there is a new star rising on the horizon of Indian tourism: the amusement parks! These lively, fun-filled havens are not just for kids; they are crafting unforgettable moments for people of all ages and, in a way, giving an entirely new dimension to the Indian travel experience.

The Indian amusement park scenario is currently booming and is worth billions of dollars. It is still emerging and full of opportunities for new innovations and exciting developments.

An Exciting Getaway

Imagine the wind rushing through your hair as you hurtle down a roller coaster track, experiencing the refreshing splash as you plunge into a water ride, or revelling in joyous laughter reverberating around a carousel. Amusement parks offer an exciting blend of family-friendly attractions, heart-pounding rides, and interactive entertainment, making them a popular travel destination that draws visitors from all over the world.

Multigenerational Fun

Amusement parks are growing as the face of family vacations in India, engaging and entertaining every age group, from toddlers to grandparents. There are gentle rides for the young ones, with their favourite cartoon

characters waiting to meet and greet. Teenagers and adults get heart-pounding, adrenaline-rushing roller coasters and intricate water slides. Many parks also have themed dining features, live entertainment, and shopping areas; hence, they offer a full package for fun and relaxation.

Economic Impact and Employment

The surge of amusement parks in India is not just about fun; it is also about economic growth. These parks attract millions of tourists annually, significantly boosting local economies. They create numerous jobs, from ride operators and entertainers to food vendors and security personnel. Furthermore, they spur the growth of additional businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation services, further contributing to the economy.

Promoting Local Culture and Heritage

Many Indian theme parks offer a distinctive fusion of entertainment and education by skilfully incorporating the local culture. They celebrate the rich history and diversity of India through themed attractions, local cuisine, and traditional dance performances for visitors to enjoy.

Technological Wonders

Indian amusement parks are at the forefront of technological advancements, using innovative technology to enhance visitor experiences. From virtual reality rides and interactive attractions to advanced safety measures and eco-friendly initiatives, these parks are constantly evolving to



provide the best possible experience for visitors.

The future looks bright for India's amusement park industry. New expansions with technological advancements promise even more thrilling and immersive experiences, ensuring that amusement parks remain a key attraction for tourists.

The thrill that amusement parks provide is instilled in the spirit of Indian tourism, as they create travel experiences that are unforgettable for their fun, culture, and adventure. Be it the adrenaline rush for thrill seekers, a perfect family vacation, or revisiting childhood memories, India's amusement parks have their magic to unfurl. Life is a roller coaster, so why not enjoy every twist and turn? ♦

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



With Switzerland maintaining its aspiration profile among Indian travellers, **Devika Abraham**, Country Manager, Zermatt Bergbahnen AG talks to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about their position in India.

'We experience an average annual growth of approx. 30%'

Q How are you looking at positioning Matterhorn in the Indian market?

Zermatt is a year-round luxury destination and a premier ski resort. The Matterhorn, an iconic mountain and the symbol of Switzerland, is a must-see for all travellers. It holds the title of the world's most photographed mountain. Matterhorn Glacier Paradise is the highest excursion in Europe.

Q What is your B2B outreach strategy?

We have strong partnerships with our General Sales Agents (GSAs). These GSAs generate business from cities across India, including those in Tier-II and Tier-III markets.

Q How many Indian tourists visited Matterhorn in 2023?

We experience an average annual growth of approximately 30%. In 2023, we achieved a 35% increase. We saw a growing number of individual travellers using the Swiss Travel Pass. Additionally, many luxury group series and ad-hoc groups including

the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise experience in their itineraries. We also had MICE incentive groups visiting Zermatt and experiencing our world-class cable cars.

Q What is the profile of Indian tourists visiting Matterhorn?

We welcome many families, young travellers, and nature enthusiasts to the Matterhorn Glacier Paradise. In the summer, Indian students often come to our slopes to learn skiing. ♦

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Travel, peace, and oneness: The transformative power of tourism!

By Dr Nimit Chowdhary, Professor and Head (Tourism), Faculty of Management Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia.

Every year on September 27, we celebrate World Tourism Day, highlighting travel's crucial role in our lives. This year's theme, "Tourism and Peace," marks the third time we focus on tourism's potential to foster harmony. Previously, in 1986 and 2003, we explored how tourism can bridge cultures and promote global unity. Today, we continue to recognize tourism's transformative power in fostering peace. Peace is a cornerstone of human well-being, deeply valued in its absence. Conflict heightens our appreciation for tranquillity and highlights the essential role peace plays in a harmonious society.

Advaita shows the way

Humans have populated the entire world for centuries, evolving in different geographies and adapting to local conditions. These adaptations led to unique solutions to local challenges, which over time solidified into traditions handed down as legacies. While humans are one species, our diverse environments have shaped varied perspectives on the same world, creating a rich tapestry of wisdom and cultural wealth. This diversity is a source of beauty and creativity but also a potential source of conflict when differing viewpoints clash, leading to religious, communal, racial, gender, and economic disputes. Such conflicts are detrimental to peace.

The philosophy of Advaita offers a solution, positing that all existence is interconnected. Our world, with its mosaic of cultures, reflects our shared humanity rather than division. Tourism fosters this understanding by breaking down stereotypes and building empathy, showing that our differences are expressions of the same underlying unity, thus promoting a sense of cosmic oneness.

But, what is peace?

Peace is a multifaceted concept that includes harmony, inner calm, balance, justice, and understanding. It means the absence of conflict and violence, emotional well-being, stability in relationships, fairness, and mutual respect. Achieving peace requires continuous effort and commitment to these principles. Peace manifests in several dimensions: inner peace (personal tranquillity), interpersonal peace (harmony in relationships), social peace (community cohesion), international peace (relations between nations), and environmental peace (respect for nature). Each dimension plays a vital role in creating a peaceful and balanced existence.

Tourism and oneness

Tourism continues to provide a unique opportunity to realize the interconnectedness of all human experiences, echoing the principles of *Advaita*. By immersing ourselves in different cultures, we break down barriers and stereotypes, developing empathy and understanding. This appreciation of diversity leads to a deeper recognition of our shared humanity. Through travel, we become global citizens, fostering a sense of unity and peace.

Travelling for understanding and peace is a concept celebrated across cultures. The Chinese proverb, "Traveling 100 miles is like reading a good book," suggests that exploring the world offers valuable insights. Similarly, the Indian principle "*Atithi Devo Bhava*" (the guest is God), the Greek tradition of "*xenia*" (hospitality), and Islamic teachings all emphasize kindness and respect toward guests. These values promote hospitality as a path to warmth and peace. Embracing these principles in tourism can enhance global understanding and foster a more peaceful world.

Tourism plays a crucial role in fostering peace across various dimensions. It begins with personal peace, as travel provides opportunities for relaxation, personal growth, and spiritual exploration. Visiting a serene destination or a spiritual retreat can rejuvenate individuals, helping them find inner peace and clarity. It addresses interpersonal peace by facilitating respectful interactions and mutual understanding between travellers and hosts. For instance, tourists who visit a new place and engage positively with the local community create bonds that transcend cultural barriers.

Social peace is promoted through community development and cultural heritage preservation. Tourism strengthens social bonds by encouraging the preservation of cultural traditions and supporting local economies. For example, tourists participating in cultural festivals or visiting historical sites help keep these traditions alive and economically support the local community. They educate themselves by interpreting and appreciating different traditional rituals and mores. Similarly, cross-border peace is fostered by tourism through global understanding and cultural exchange. When people travel and experience different cultures first-hand, they build bridges between nations, fostering a sense of global oneness.

Tourism also supports environmental peace by promoting conservation and a harmonious relationship with nature. This has seen an upsurge post-COVID. Tourists increasingly



prefer travel options that preserve natural habitats and support environmental initiatives, contributing to a healthier planet.

Travel that changed Maria Conceicao

To conclude, let me share the story of Maria Conceicao, originally from Portugal, who worked as a flight attendant for Emirates. As a dedicated air hostess and former abandoned child, she found a new purpose through her travels. During a layover in Dhaka, she was deeply moved by the plight of slum children. Driven by her own past, Maria dedicated herself to their welfare, providing education, supplies, and vocational training. To fund her efforts, she undertook extraordinary challenges, setting Guinness World Records for the most skydives in 24 hours, the highest altitude marathon, and the longest non-stop bungee jump. Maria's remarkable achievements demonstrate how travel can inspire acts of kindness and contribute to peace. ♦

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

Dr. Nimit Chowdhary, a distinguished Professor and Head of the Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, brings over 30 years of teaching expertise to the table. With 18 years as a professor across India, China, and Mexico, Dr. Chowdhary has also enriched minds as a visiting faculty at renowned institutions including the University of Gotland (Sweden), Girona University (Spain), IIM Sirmaur, IIQM, and EDII. Celebrated for his academic excellence, he has penned 30 books and over 300 scholarly papers, articles, and chapters, and has guided 23 PhD candidates. A globetrotter who has explored more than 40 countries, Dr. Chowdhary is a recognized authority in the field of tourism.



Goa is the most affordable tourist destination in India

Agoda returns with Cheapest Destinations rank for the next six weeks

Digital travel platform Agoda reveals its latest list of the most affordable destinations for travelers. Travelers looking for some of the best deals in Asia for August and September are best off in Hat Yai, Thailand. While in India, Goa offers the most competitive room rates during this period.

With several long weekends and holidays in August and September across Asia, including Raksha Bandhan and Independence Day in India, Agoda highlights some of the most popular Asian tourist destinations to enjoy Agoda's great value deals. In India, Goa is the most affordable tourist destination, with an average room rate of Rs. 5,538 based on booking data between 15th June to 7th July 2024. Goa takes over from Bengaluru, which came out on top of the cheapest destinations ranking released in April.

The destinations with the cheapest average accommodation rates for 15th August to 30th September across nine Asian markets are Hat Yai in Thailand, Yogyakarta in Indonesia, Kuching in Malaysia, Siargao Island in the Philippines, Dalat in Vietnam, Narita in Japan, Goa in India, Taichung in Taiwan, and Busan in South Korea respectively.

Krishna Rathi, Senior Country Director India Subcontinent and Maldives at Agoda at Agoda shared, "As travelers seek to recharge before the final months of the year, our latest ranking of the most affordable destinations across Asia is designed to help them make informed decisions and enjoy memorable experiences without

breaking the bank. Whether it's for a quick getaway or an extended vacation, these affordable destinations offer a variety of unique experiences that cater to all types of travelers. At Agoda, we hope this list encourages more people to discover new places and see more of the world for less."

Despite offering the lowest average room rates, these destinations offer an abundance of experiences – truly allowing travelers to see the world for less. From the lively cities of Busan and Taichung to the relaxing beaches of Siargao Island, here are some of the highlights from the nine cheapest destinations in the researched markets:

1. Hat Yai, Thailand (Average room rate: 3,020 INR)

Southern Thailand's Hat Yai is a lively city worth exploring. The Hat Yai Municipal Park offers panoramic views and serene walking paths. Travelers looking to excite the tastebuds will enjoy a trip to the Kim Yong Market and experience local flavors as well as unique finds. Hat Yai is easily accessible thanks to its well-connected airport. International travelers will also appreciate the proximity to the Malaysian border, making it a convenient gateway for cross-border adventures.

2. Yogyakarta, Indonesia (Average room rate: 3,188 INR)

Yogyakarta is a cultural hub in Indonesia which offers a rich blend of history and modernity. The Borobudur and Prambanan temples,



the Sultan's Palace, and the vibrant Malioboro Street are some of the must-visit spots in the city. Visitors can immerse themselves in local crafts and street food while exploring this dynamic city. It is also a convenient base for further exploration of Javanese cultural sites.

3. Kuching, Malaysia (Average room rate: 4,531 INR)

Kuching, the state capital of Sarawak, is known for its unique vibrancy and stunning natural beauty. Explore the historic Fort Margherita, which provides insights into the region's colonial past and offers stunning views of the Sarawak River. The city is also home to the Cat Museum, a quirky attraction dedicated to all things feline, reflecting Kuching's name, which means "cat" in Malay. Adventure seekers will appreciate the nearby Semenggoh Wildlife Centre, where they can observe orangutans in their natural habitat, making it a perfect destination for both cultural and wildlife experiences.

4. Siargao Island, Philippines (Average room rate: 4,783 INR)

Deemed the 10th best island in Asia by Condé Nast Traveler in their 2023 Readers' Choice Awards, Siargao Island offers pristine beaches, crystal-clear waters and a laid-back atmosphere. It is also well-known destination for surfing, with Cloud 9 being a must-visit spot for surfers alike. Non-surfers can enjoy the relaxing waters and island breeze at Magpupungko Rock Pools and the Sugba Lagoon. Beach lovers will find Siargao a perfect getaway for both relaxation and adventure.

5. Dalat, Vietnam (Average room rate: 4,783 INR)

The cool climate and beautiful landscapes make Dalat a popular destination in Vietnam. Visitors can explore the Valley of Love, the Dalat Flower Gardens, and the historic Dalat Railway Station. Adventure seekers will also appreciate the proximity to the Lang Biang Mountain, perfect for those who enjoy hiking and outdoor activities.

6. Narita, Japan (Average room rate: 4,867 INR)

Narita, often associated with its international airport, has much more to offer beyond its role as a travel hub. It's a destination rich in both cultural and culinary experiences. Narita is also known for its beautiful Naritasan Park, a tranquil oasis featuring ponds, pagodas, and walking trails that offer a peaceful retreat from the bustling city.

Food enthusiasts will appreciate the local delicacy, unagi (eel), which can be savored at numerous traditional restaurants along Naritasan Omotesando Road.

7. Goa, India (Average room rate: 5,538 INR)

A vibrant destination known for its beaches and lively nightlife, Goa offers a unique fusion of Indian and Portuguese cultures. This pocket-sized paradise is enriched with sun, sea, sand, seafood, and a laid-back lifestyle known as susegad. Key attractions include Baga Beach, the Basilica of Bom Jesus, and the Dudhsagar Falls. Travelers can immerse themselves in the region's spiritual and cultural heritage while enjoying its natural beauty, making it a perfect destination for both relaxation and celebration.

8. Taichung, Taiwan (Average room rate: 8,055 INR)

Taichung, a city in central Taiwan, offers a mix of cultural and natural attractions. Travelers can enjoy a mix of educational exhibits at the National Museum of Natural Science and vibrant street art at the Rainbow Village. For shopping and a taste of Taiwan, travelers will appreciate the Fengjia Night Market. And stunning nature is around the corner, because Taichung is also the perfect base for day trips to Taiwan's breathtaking Sun Moon Lake.

9. Busan, South Korea (Average room rate: 9,482 INR)

The bustling port city of Busan is known for its beaches, mountains, and temples. Aside from the popular must-visit spots like Haeundae Beach, the Gamcheon Culture Village, and the Beomeosa Temple, the city has a lot more to offer. For a unique shopping experience, head to the Gukje Market, one of Korea's largest traditional markets, offering everything from local delicacies to vintage goods. Busan also boasts the scenic Oryukdo Skywalk, a glass-bottomed walkway that extends over the ocean, providing breathtaking views of the coastline. The Igidae Coastal Walk, a trail that offers stunning sea views and rugged cliffs, is a nature lovers' dream.

In addition to over 4.5 million holiday properties, the Agoda platform also offers more than 130,000 flight routes and over 300,000 activities, which can all be combined in the same booking. Ideal for booking a hassle-free vacation. ♦



Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

Timble Glance

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



Startup Name: Timble Glance

Core Team: Dhananjay Goel - Founder, Dr. Siddharth Srivastava - CTO,
Prashant Tandon - Strategic Advisor, Pratyush Chandramadhur - Board Advisor
Sagar Mohanty - Strategy and Ops, Adityavardhan Kumar - Founders Office (Strategy & Ops)

Founding year: 2016

Company Website: <https://timbleglance.com/>

Description: Timble is a secure AI analytics company that provides workflow automation and API technology infrastructure for financial institutions, travel companies, staffing, and logistics partners. It helps enrich customer data, provide verification checks, and empower partners to make smarter decisions.

The company works with leading banks such as HDFC Bank (customer since 2020), Kotak, IDFC, IndiaFirst Life Insurance, and others. It offers different APIs for onboarding, underwriting, account management, chatbots, and collections. Timble helps process 700,000 applications per month for its customers. It has been a profitable company for the last few years and is now scaling.

For travel, the company is exploring and piloting different use cases of its technology for OTAs, global business travel and corporate self-booking tools, hotel chains, global tour operators, travel insurance, and cab companies.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFh1CStJfdw&feature=youtu.be>

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