

## Schilthorn Cableway eyes growth in India with world's steepest cableway

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

Switzerland-based **Schilthorn Cableway** Ltd, which operates Schilthorn Piz Gloria, is very optimistic about the Indian market, as India is experiencing a rising middle class and an increase in disposable income. "India has become a very important market for us," said Alan Ramsay, Head of Markets at Schilthorn Cableway Ltd, during a recent visit to Mumbai while speaking with **TravelBiz Monitor**.

Schilthorn Piz Gloria is a stunning mountain peak in the Bernese Alps of Switzerland, renowned for its breathtaking panoramic views and its **iconic revolving restaurant**. Located in the **Bernese Oberland**, it stands approximately 2,970 meters (9,740 feet) above sea level. Notably, Piz Gloria is famously associated with James Bond due to its role as a filming location for the 1969 movie "On Her Majesty's Secret Service."

Visitors can reach the summit via a series of cable cars from the valley station in Stechelberg. "It takes 32 minutes to reach Schilthorn Piz Gloria. On the way, tourists must change cable cars at Gimmelwald, Mürren, Birg, and finally at Schilthorn. The 32 minutes includes the changes from one cable car to another," said Ramsay.

Ramsay also mentioned that at the top of the mountain, there is an interactive multimedia exhibition called Spy World. "We have a cinema

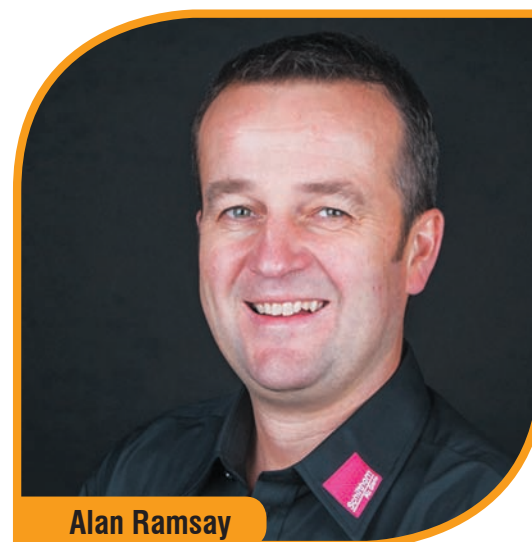
that shows clips from different seasons, as we experience various seasons here. Additionally, we have a Walk of Fame where the stars from the film have left their handprints. Not only that, but we also have a viewing lounge at the summit," he explained.

He pointed out that Schilthorn Cableway is the only company that takes tourists to the very top of the mountain. "The summit building is located at the peak itself, which is unusual. Most other cableways take tourists close to the top, but not actually to the summit," Ramsay noted.

Reflecting on his own experiences, he shared, "I visited the village of Mürren one winter season, and I ended up staying for 35 years. Every time I take a cable car to the top, the view is always different and never looks the same. Standing on the peak with a 360-degree view is fantastic. I still love it."

He mentioned that they are constructing a brand-new cable car that will connect the valley floor directly to Mürren, and from Mürren to Birg, and finally to Schilthorn. "With this, there will be only two changes instead of three. There will also be only three sections instead of four, which will further reduce the time needed to reach Schilthorn," pointed out Ramsay.

According to him, the cable car from Stechelberg (the valley floor) to Mürren will be the steepest in the world. "It will open on December 14 of this year, and the **steepest cable**



Alan Ramsay

**car ride will be free of charge** with a **Swiss Travel Pass**," Ramsay revealed. Their Winter Sports event had already started on September 28 and will continue until April 2025. The entire project is expected to be completed by 2026. "Hopefully, we will open it on Swiss National Day, which falls on August 1," he added.

Discussing their target audience in India, he stated that they are focusing on people who have already visited Switzerland, which means they are aiming for repeat customers. "Our priority cities are Mumbai and Delhi to start with. However, travellers from Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, and Ahmedabad are also showing interest in our product," said Ramsay. ♦

prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in

## Iran Tourism debuts in India amid 39% hike in arrivals

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Iran Tourism Board recently made its first foray in India with its roadshows in Mumbai, Delhi and Hyderabad which attracted a healthy crowd. The main objective was to enhance tourism relations between India and Iran.

By interacting with Indian travel agents and tourism professionals, the board sought to forge strong business ties and promote Iran as a premier travel destination. The delegation was headed by Aliasghar Shalbafian Hosseinabadi, the Deputy of Tourism at the Iran



Aliasghar Shalbafian Hosseinabadi

Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Ministry.

Speaking exclusively to **TravelBiz Monitor** on the sidelines of the Mumbai roadshow, Hosseinabadi highlighted that this was their inaugural roadshow in Mumbai. He noted the deep historical connection and mutual understanding between Iran and India, emphasising that tourism serves as a means to further enhance this relationship.

"Iran recently waived visa requirements for Indian travellers, leading to a 39 per

cent increase in Indian tourist arrivals," he revealed.

Hosseinabadi mentioned that currently, pilgrimage and cultural tourism are the primary attractions for Indian visitors. However, he stressed that Iran offers a wide range of tourism experiences, including nature, adventure, historical, and medical tourism etc. "Our goal is to attract all types of travellers from India," he said.

He also encouraged Indian tourists who have not yet visited Iran to seek feedback from those who have.

Contd PG. 7 ►



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**Otila International Pvt. Ltd.**

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

Ahmedabad: +91 93 7612 0982

Coimbatore: + 91 99 5271 7750

Kochi: +91 75 9386 3903

Nashik: +91 25 3231 0044

Bengaluru: +91 96 0648 4185

Hyderabad: +91 88 8501 5970

Kolkata: +91 98 3011 9561

Pune: + 91 20 4002 6960

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# Louisiana Office of Tourism hosts first-ever Sales Mission in India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Louisiana Office of Tourism, the official tourism promotional agency for the state of Louisiana, USA, organised its first mission to India from in Mumbai and New Delhi.

The objective of this mission was to increase destination awareness amongst the travel and media on the diverse range of tourism offerings available for potential Indian visitors. The mission was led by Billy Nungesser, Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana state, and Doug Bourgeois, Assistant Secretary of Tourism, Louisiana Office of Tourism, along with Louisiana's partners Visit Lake Charles, New Orleans & Company, and Mississippi River Country.

Visitor numbers from India to the USA continue to set new records. After the rapid recovery in visitor arrivals in 2023, exceeding pre-pandemic numbers, there has been an impressive growth of 35% in arrivals to the USA between January-July 2024, making India the second-largest overseas market for the USA. Louisiana, with

its cultural experiences, unique local cuisines, music & entertainment, outdoors, and vibrant festivals, is a perfect extension for Indians planning a holiday in the US.

Supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce under the Market Development Cooperator Program, the expansion to the India market includes collaboration with U.S. Commercial

cities of New York, Newark, Chicago, Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta, making it a great addition to any USA itinerary. The primary gateway to Louisiana by air is New Orleans, with its newly renovated Louis Armstrong International Airport, facilitating easy access from all important Indian outbound cities like Mumbai, New Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai.

In 2024, Louisiana is celebrating the "Year of Music," highlighting its rich musical heritage as the birthplace of Jazz, Cajun, and Zydeco forms of music. This campaign aims to attract visitors from around the world by showcasing the state's vibrant and unique musical legacy.

"We're very excited to have continued our work in India," said Doug Bourgeois, Assistant Secretary of Tourism, Louisiana Office of

Tourism. "The Indian traveller is looking for the kind of authentic experiences, amazing music and delicious food that Louisiana is known for. We can't wait to welcome even more visitors from India to our great state." ♦



Services and the U.S. Embassy as part of the International Travel Office's efforts.

Louisiana is conveniently located in the Southeastern region of the United States and is easily accessible from major gateway



Maraya Concert Hall, AlUla

## Saudi: Unlocking its MICE Potential

Celebrated for its rich history, heritage, and stunning landscapes, Saudi is developing its MICE infrastructure to accommodate the needs of business travellers from India. This is in line with its Vision 2030 which is driving growth across sectors. Just a short flight from India, Saudi is gaining its appeal as a prime destination for the MICE segment.



State-of-the-art exhibitions and convention centres lead the charge for MICE offerings. Venues like The Riyadh International Convention & Exhibition Center and the Jeddah International Exhibition Center, strategically positioned near the airport, stand as examples tailored to host large conferences and exhibitions. Delivering world-class amenities and services, The King Abdulaziz Center for World Culture in Dammam and the King Fahd Cultural Center in Riyadh complement the country's MICE landscape.

Maraya in AlUla is a stand-out venue for events. It is a marvel of architectural ingenuity that uses its glass panels to seamlessly blend in with AlUla's natural beauty and marks Saudi's commitment to artistic and environmental harmony. From inside this futuristic venue, guests are offered panoramic views of the magnificent Ashar Valley through its glass façade. The Jeddah Superdome is another glamorous addition to Saudi's cutting-edge infrastructure. The Superdome is the largest freestanding building and geodesic dome in the world and can accommodate up to 35,000 people. It has played host to many events from professional wrestling to international motor shows and music festivals, featuring renowned artists from across the globe.

Beyond these remarkable venues, Saudi is heavily investing in infrastructure projects such as new airports, hotels, convention centres, and highways in different cities to further enhance its MICE capabilities.

Saudi also offers travellers a host of accommodation options to choose ranging from luxurious five-star hotels to budget-friendly options. Major cities like Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam are home to internationally renowned hotel chains like Hilton, Marriott, Intercontinental, and Mövenpick, which provide a comfortable stay with modern amenities.

MICE travellers can savour traditional Saudi dishes like Kabsa (spiced rice with meat), Mandi (slow-cooked meat and rice), and Samboosa (stuffed pastries), as well as the international fare at a variety of restaurants and eateries. From upscale dining establishments serving gourmet cuisine to street vendors offering affordable delicacies, Saudi has a diverse culinary landscape that caters to all tastes and preferences. The country is also home to some amazing Indian restaurants, like the Maharaja Palace in Riyadh, ensuring travellers feel right at home.

To further enhance the ease and convenience of hosting MICE events, the country offers e-visa services and visa-on-arrival options for those holding UK, US, or Schengen visas with stamped proof of entry from the issuing country. There are 10 Tasheer Centres across India to facilitate the visa process. Proximity to major Indian hubs, increased flight connectivity, and simplified visa process make Saudi an enticing MICE destination.

Find out more about activities and easy visa process on [www.VisitSaudi.com](http://www.VisitSaudi.com)



# Promoting Peace Through Tourism: A Collaborative Event by the Thai Consulate and IIPT in Mumbai

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

The Thai Consulate in Mumbai and the International Institute for Peace Through Tourism (IIPT) organised an event "Promoting Peace Through Tourism" on September 21 in Mumbai.

The event witnessed the presence of consuls general and eminent personalities from the travel trade. It highlighted how tourism can be a harbinger of peace in the world. Additionally, it showcased Thai cuisine and offered many fun activities, including a lucky draw for a round-trip ticket to Thailand. The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) also played an important role to make the occasion a grand success.

Speaking on the occasion, Donnawit Poolsawat, Consul General of Thailand in Mumbai, stated, "We are in the 21st century, and advancements in technology and progress in social media should have made the world a better place to live in. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Conflict, mistrust, and misunderstanding still exist in our world, which is undesirable. Tourism can play a significant role in addressing the issues

we currently face."

The Consul General also expressed profound gratitude for the participation, stating that the event effectively highlighted the positive impact of tourism in promoting global peace.

While speaking to media, Ajay Prakash, Global President of the IIPT, highlighted that the organisation, founded in 1986 by Dr. Louis D'Amore, operates as a non-profit. Prakash succeeded Dr. D'Amore as Global President last year. He noted that the International Day of Peace (IDP) is celebrated worldwide on September 21, as designated by the UN General Assembly to promote peace.

"Most people are familiar with International Tourism Day on September 27, and interestingly, this year's theme also focuses on tourism and peace," Prakash remarked.

According to him, "It is implied that you need peace for tourism to be successful. Conversely, tourism can also serve as a tool for peace, which is not easily understood. That is the mission of IIPT." Prakash further noted that travel and tourism contribute 10% of global GDP, and the industry has the



potential to become the first global peace industry. "What is even more profound is that every traveller is potentially an ambassador of peace," he pointed out. He emphasized that tourism is a harbinger of peace and, citing the example of Kashmir, highlighted the remarkable difference in the region's socio-economic conditions. "It is tourism that defeats terrorism," he stated.

Justifying the choice of Thailand as a partner for the event, Prakash remarked that the country welcomes everyone, regardless of caste, creed, religion, or colour. "This makes it an ideal partner for collaboration," he stated. ♦

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

# Sharjah gains popularity among Indians; showcases development & growth targets

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

Sharjah, one of the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is quickly becoming a top tourism hotspot. To attract more visitors from India, the Sharjah Commerce and Tourism Development Authority (SCTDA) recently hosted a roadshow in Mumbai, which saw strong participation from the city's travel trade sector.

At the event, Khalid Jasim Al Midfa, Chairman of SCTDA, highlighted Sharjah's progress and its expanding range of attractions. "We are making significant advances, particularly in adventure tourism and eco-tourism, which is increasingly popular globally," Midfa remarked.

One of Sharjah's latest highlights is the Hanging Garden, featuring expansive green areas, flower-adorned terraces, and waterfalls. "This garden has quickly become a favourite among tourists and tends to be busy except during the summer months. However, visitors can still enjoy indoor amenities like restaurants and cafes during this time.

The garden's outdoor areas are open from September through May, and the Hanging Garden is also popular with Indian tourists," Midfa added. He also noted a striking artificial lagoon near the garden, which offers a variety of activities for visitors.



Midfa noted that these attractions are situated in a rural area on the East Coast, and their development is being executed in three phases. "First, we connected the area to the city of Sharjah and the rest of the UAE with a world-class road. In the second phase, we established the attractions. Currently, we are focused on building additional hotels," Midfa explained. He mentioned that Sharjah currently offers 11,000 hotel rooms.

When asked about possible joint marketing

and promotional campaigns with other GCC countries, Midfa responded, "Such initiatives might occur in the future, but there are no plans at the moment. I believe individual efforts are currently more effective."

Regarding the upcoming winter season, Midfa indicated that while there will be a winter campaign, it will not be as extensive as the summer campaign due to the existing strong demand.

On the Indian market, Midfa highlighted that the country has become Sharjah's third-largest source market. "Last year, 165,000 Indian visitors stayed in Sharjah hotels. This year, our goal is to increase that number by 10%, aiming for around 185,000," he said. He also noted that 94,000 Indians have visited Sharjah in the first half of this year, which is very encouraging.

Additionally, Sharjah International Airport is expanding its capacity from 8 million to 25 million passengers per year, with the project slated for completion by the end of 2026, according to Midfa. ♦

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

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At a time when outbound travel is seeing a surge, a fact well supplemented by the growth in visas, **Yummi Talwar, COO – South Asia, VFS Global** spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about this trend, and the segments that are driving traffic abroad.

#### Q Do you see Indians opting for visa free or visa on arrival destinations amid delay in obtaining visas?

The choice of a travel destination is influenced by several factors beyond the visa process, such as the destination's appeal and whether the traveller has visited before. With the Indian outbound travel market growing at a promising CAGR of 11.4%, destinations are actively working to attract these travellers, offering a wide range of expanding travel opportunities.

For a smooth visa application process, we recommend applicants review the checklist available on our website before applying. As a trusted partner to governments, VFS Global handles the front-end administrative tasks, ensuring a reliable and efficient process. However, it's important to note that we play no role in visa decisions, which are solely made by the respective embassies or consulates.

#### Q How are you engaging with the travel trade in India?

In India, travel agents are critical partners in the travel ecosystem, playing a vital role in guiding clients through the visa application process. We regularly communicate with them about any updates or new requirements

## 'Visa demand rises in tandem with outbound travel growth'

#### Q What is your overview of the outbound travel market considering your half yearly performance of 2024?

In recent years, the Indian outbound market has experienced remarkable growth, and its upward trajectory shows no signs of slowing down. According to a joint study by FICCI and Nangia NXT, this market is poised to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 11.4%, reaching a staggering USD 55.39 billion by 2034. This reflects not only the growing affluence of Indian travellers, but also their increasing aspiration for global experiences.

A significant driver of this growth is the rising number of Indian students seeking educational opportunities abroad. The Indian Student Mobility Report 2023 reveals that 1,090,000 students travelled overseas in 2019. By 2022, this number had surged to approximately 1,320,000, and projections indicate that by 2025, around 2 million Indian students will be pursuing higher education in foreign institutions.

Mirroring this trend, VFS Global saw its application volumes in the first half of this year exceed pre-pandemic levels by 2%, with an 11% growth in the same period in 2023. It highlights VFS Global's role in supporting India's growing global mobility.

#### Q What are the factors driving the growth in visa applications from India?

The demand for overseas travel from India has surged, driven by leisure, business, Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR), employment, and student travel. Rising disposable income and

"In India, travel agents are critical partners in the travel ecosystem, playing a vital role in guiding clients through the visa application process. We regularly communicate with them about any updates or new requirements mandated by the 52 client governments we serve in India."

increased spending power are key factors, with Indians ranking among the top spenders in many destinations.

Student travel, a rapidly growing segment, is outpacing other categories. The expanding Indian diaspora is also contributing to the growth, particularly in the VFR segment. Looking ahead, this trend is expected to continue well into 2025, indicating sustained growth in India's outbound travel market. These are key reasons that are driving the growth of visa applications from India.

As a market leader and trusted partner to 68 governments, VFS Global's unique value proposition has enabled governments to focus solely on the critical visa decision-making process and helped significantly in driving cross border mobility benefiting visa applicants worldwide.

mandated by the 52 client governments we serve in India.

We deeply value our collaboration with major travel associations like TAAI, TAFI, and ETAA. We advise them to avoid fraudulent entities that charge for scheduling appointments, which are freely available on our website. We also encourage agents to advise their clients to apply for visas well in advance, considering the processing times of different governments.

At the local level, we engage with agents to address region-specific issues and offer solutions within our services. We consistently emphasise that our role is limited to handling the front end of the visa process, a message well understood by our partners. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in

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

# Pure! Travel Group appoints Global India Reps as Representative for India

TBM Staff | Mumbai

Pure! Travel Group, a DMC for Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina offers tailor-made services, specializing in leisure & incentive travel. Additionally, selected cruise expeditions to Antarctica and top-notch services for the MICE segment. It works exclusively with B2B partners and has inked an “exclusive marketing partnership by appointing Global India Reps to implement their mandate in India”.

Pure! Travel Group was founded by Bram Evers in South America, with shared management, mission, vision, & values focused on social and environmental responsibility, while creating unforgettable experiences with respect for nature, heritage, and local cultures. It has offices at its six

destinations.

Global India Reps is an expert marketing platform in India having the collective experience of almost 20 years in representing, launching, promoting, and creating a network

Indian market. Outbound travel from India presents a significant opportunity given the huge demand for this region, and we wish to offer and serve the outbound travel market for 2024.”



“With their unique experience, strong trade relationships, and proven track record of success launching new international products from India, we are confident that Global India Reps, headed by Ashish Saran will springboard and accelerate our entry into the Indian outbound market from Asia”, Bram added.

Ashish Saran, Business Head, Global India Reps, feels that “Lesser known but exciting no less, exotic experiential journeys will be a fast-growing segment from this market. Agents looking at new destinations & product options are keen to promote such journeys, and this will create a unique distinction for their markets.” ♦

for business from the B2B segment in India — with successes in promoting Europe, Asia, Central Asia & Canada in India.

Upon signing the agreement, Bram Evers, Managing Director, at Pure! Travel Group said, “I am delighted that through our newly appointed, exclusive representative, Global India Reps, we can introduce our programmes, and custom services to the

**Explore Spectacular Saudi with Your Family**

Saudi packs a punch with diverse experiences and fun activities. Natural wonders and ancient relics contrast with modern entertainment options and interactive museums, just perfect family vacation for Indians.

**Riyadh**

In Riyadh, families can enjoy a variety of entertainment options together. Explore the city's history at iconic landmarks like Al Masmak Fortress and Al Murabba Palace. Enjoy stunning views of the city from the Sky Bridge on the 99th floor of Kingdom Center followed by a leisure time at Riyadh Boulevard. The city has plenty of Indian restaurants that serve favourites like butter chicken, biryani, all kinds of snacks and beverages. Take a tour of mud-brick architecture of Diriyah's At-Turaif, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

**Jeddah**

Experience the lively Jeddah Waterfront with its iconic King Fahd Fountain and discover marine life at the Fakieh Aquarium. Jump Up, a family entertainment centre, makes for an amazing day out for the kids with activities ranging from sports to virtual reality games. Take a high-speed Haramain train to soak in the spiritual and cultural facets of Medina. A day trip to the historic district of Al-Balad is surreal with coral-built houses and vibrant street art.

**Red Sea**

Snorkelling and diving in the Red Sea unveil the world of colourful coral reefs and marine life. Need some adrenaline rush? Go for jet skiing, parasailing, or a banana boat ride along the coast. Whether exploring underwater wonders or enjoying beachside activities, the Red Sea ensures an unforgettable, rejuvenating getaway for families.

**AlUla**

Start by exploring the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hegra, an ancient Nabatean city known for its stunning rock-cut tombs. For adventure seekers, a hike through the dramatic landscapes of the AlUla canyons, camping near the natural sandstone Elephant Rock or a hot air balloon ride over the striking desert vistas are unforgettable experiences. Don't miss visiting Maraya Concert Hall, the world's largest mirrored building, which hosts lively concerts and art exhibitions.

Find out more on [www.VisitSaudi.com/en/campaigns/india](http://www.VisitSaudi.com/en/campaigns/india)





**Editor-in-Chief & CEO :** Sheldon Santwan  
sheldon@saffronsynergies.in

**Executive Editor :** Prasenjit Chakraborty  
prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in, +91 9819263364

**EDITORIAL TEAM**  
MUMBAI

**News Editor :** Disha Shah Ghosh  
disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in, +91 9619453170

**Sr. Correspondent :** Tejaswini Paranjape  
tejaswini.paranjape@saffronsynergies.in, +91 99200 80545

**NEW DELHI**  
**Sr. Correspondent-North India :** Shayan Mallick  
shayan.mallick02@gmail.com, +91 9818710659

**HYDERABAD**  
**Chief Correspondent-South India :** Asmita Mukherjee  
asmita.mukherjee@saffronsynergies.in, +91 98342 55360

**BENGALURU**  
**Social Media Consultant :** Vitasta Gurtoo  
vitasta.gurtoo@saffronsynergies.in, +91 90555 05184

**Social Media Team (Mumbai) :** Nishtha Ganesh  
nishthagand@gmail.com, +91 93240 36308

**DESIGN & LAYOUT (Mumbai)**  
Madhukar Ingawale  
madhukar.ingawale@gmail.com, +91 9967433821

**CONTRIBUTORS**  
Hugh & Colleen Gantzer, Anurag Yadav,  
Hector D'souza, Nimit Chaudhary & Amala Dantas

**DATABASE & SUBSCRIPTION**  
**Senior Coordinator (Mumbai) :** Gauri Sawant  
gauri.sawant@saffronsynergies.in, +91 83690 80796

**Coordinator (Mangaluru) :** Priya Karkera  
priya.saffron@gmail.com, +91 9702944562

**TECH SUPPORT**  
**Design & Development (Mumbai) :** Gilson Prabhudas

**MARKETING TEAM**  
NAGPUR  
**Head - Sales & Marketing :** Ajay Wadode  
ajay.wadode@saffronsynergies.in, +91 8087127814

**MUMBAI**  
**Sr. Manager – Sales & Marketing :** Pooja Nalawade  
pooja.nalawade@saffronsynergies.in, +91 97690 52241  
**Manager – Sales & Marketing :** Jagdish Patil  
jagdish.patil@saffronsynergies.in, +91 74000 63663

\*Responsible for selection of news under the PRB Act



**Saffron Synergies**  
902, 9th Floor, Cozy Apartments, Yari Road, Versova, Andheri (W),  
Mumbai-400061, Maharashtra, India.

## SILENCE OF THE LAMBS

Two things are happening in stark contrast of each other, and unsavory to both, India's inbound trade and the Government. The gulf between inbound and outbound has continued to widen. In 2019, India's best tourism year in terms of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs), the country received 10.9 million visitors against 26.9 million outbound Indian tourists. India was producing 2.5 tourists for every single tourist it received.

In 2023, which was the first Covid-free travel year, India's outbound tourism bounced back strongly, registering a record 27.1 million outbound visitors. However, inbound was different story. In the absence of any credible plan or promotions in the overseas market, India could barely reach 85 per cent (9.2 million) of its peak 2019 number. So, in 2023, India was producing nearly 3 outbound tourists for every single tourist it received.

Come 2024, there was near unanimity across stakeholders, Government or private, of not just a full inbound recovery but potentially, a growth. However, H1 2024 numbers were still 10 per cent behind the peak 2019 corresponding period. And if that was not enough, the political turmoil in India's biggest tourism source market, Bangladesh that began in July not only decimated any hope of a rebound in H2 2024, but has potentially already dragged the year-till-date 2024 number below the corresponding 2023 period. As for the available data for H1 2024, India was producing 3.15 outbound tourists for every single tourist it received. And for June alone, the gulf has further widened to 3.4 outbound travellers for a single tourist received!

Now, what's utterly surprising is that given the plethora industry associations and federations, inbound has miserably failed to argue its case so far. A big shout out and a joint representation, cobbled together bringing every sector of tourism industry, and led by some of the most powerful voices like those of Taj, the Oberoi, the Lalit, the Park, Marriott, Air India, IndiGo, and the IATOs and the HAIs of the industry, is the need of the hour!

Shayan Mallick  
shayan.mallick02@gmail.com

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 <p><b>Jaal Shah</b> Group Managing Director RezLive.com, Travel Designer Group</p>	 <p><b>Naresh Rawal</b> Vice President - Sales &amp; Marketing, Resorts World Cruises</p>	 <p><b>Dhananjay Saliankar</b> Head - Sales &amp; Marketing Fortune Hotels</p>	 <p><b>Arjun Sharma</b> Chairman, Le Passage to India &amp; MD Select Group</p>	 <p><b>Vasudha Sondhi</b> Managing Director OMPL Group</p>	 <p><b>Sheema Vohra</b> Managing Director Sartha Global Marketing</p>	 <p><b>Kiran Yadav</b> VP IIPT India</p>	



# EXPLORE TAIWAN

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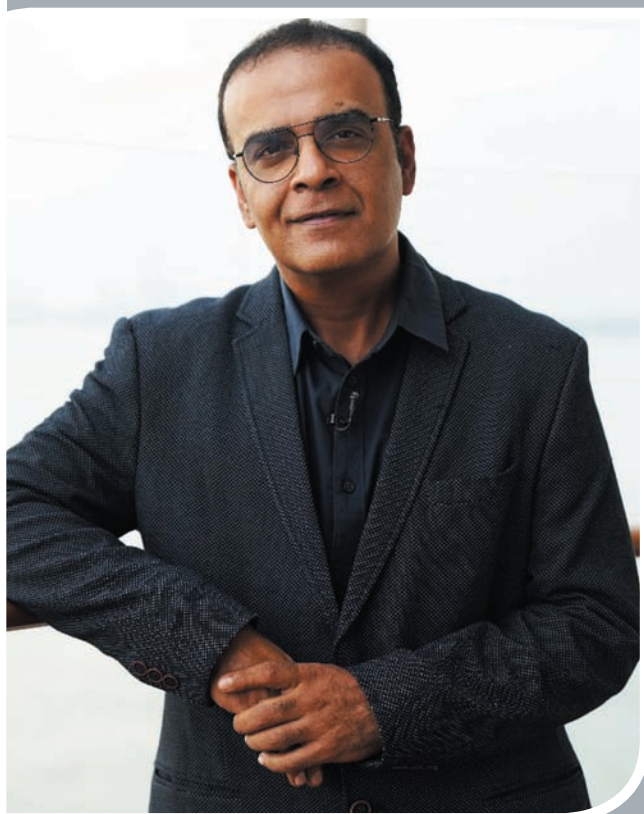
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**E:** [info@blinkbrandsolutions.com](mailto:info@blinkbrandsolutions.com) | **P:** +91 98350 69443 | **W:** [taiwan.net.tw](http://taiwan.net.tw)



**交通部觀光署**  
Tourism Administration, MOTC





With Resorts World Cruises making its debut in the Gulf region, Indian travellers will have an added layer to their overall experience in the region. Brimming with excitement, **Naresh Rawal, Senior Vice President – Sales & Marketing, Resorts World Cruises (South Asia and Middle East), Resorts World Cruises**, spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about this new opportunity to bring the expansive Asian hospitality to one of the global melting point of Dubai.

## ‘We are familiar with pioneering new waters’

**Q At the cusp of launching the Gulf sailings, what are your sentiments for foraying into new waters?**

The feedback and demand on the ground from both the local and fly-cruise market, be it from the trade, customers and overall in general are very positive, as we are set to introduce a unique brand of cruising with round trip cruises from Dubai to Sir Bani Yas, Doha, Khasab and Muscat. We are excited and highly optimistic of the strong prospect and new opportunities that await us in the Gulf region.

**Q How challenging is this opportunity, considering your experience has always been Asia centric, and even Resorts World has been a known brand in this region?**

We are up for the challenge as pioneering new waters is something we are very familiar with. As a group, we have decades of valuable experience and skillsets in the hospitality, entertainment and cruising sector, which enabled us to cater to different markets effectively. Our progression to the Gulf is timely and we are looking forward to delivering various customised offerings that we have outlined for the upcoming homeport deployment in Dubai.

**Q With Dubai as home-port, you will be competing with larger ships deployed by your contemporaries. What is your strategy to establish a foothold in this market, and the kind of passenger count you are looking at in the first year of operations?**

For us here at Resorts World Cruises, we know Asia best. We are offering a unique brand of Asian cruising experience, coupled with our renowned Asian hospitality and best in class services, which we feel will set us apart from other brands. Our goal is to ensure we deliver offerings that matter to the target market such as providing certified Halal cuisines, Muslim-friendly offerings and exciting customised entertainment for the region.

**Q The ship will introduce lesser-known Sir Bani Yas Island. At a time when the Indian traveller is spoilt for choice, how do you plan to position such unique sailing ports in India?**

Resorts World Cruises is about introducing new destinations and creating new demand. Sir Bani Yas island is truly a beautiful island with a wide variety of attractions and we are constantly working very closely with the local authorities to highlight and promote

the island. We are also enhancing the overall experience with fun-filled onboard activities that will be brought from ship to shore. It will be a colourful and memorable experience.

**Q What are some of the ship enhancements implemented to tap HNIs from India?**

Dubai is already a popular tourist destination for many HNIs from India. The commencement of Resorts World One on November 1, also coincides with Diwali, which will also attract a wider expat demographic in the region and the inbound fly- cruise segment to Dubai.

Aboard the Resorts World One, we have specially curated performances and unexpected entertainment, inspired by the Gulf and across Asia. With the first departure coinciding with the Diwali festive celebrations, guests from the Gulf and across Asia will get to personally experience the Festival of Light on the Resorts World One, as the ship will be colourfully decorated and brightly lit with exciting Diwali inspired activities, entertainment, “Gujarat food festival”, sweets and desserts during the entire week of celebration.

Catch the onboard day to night parties for the best time of your life, starting with the high energy ‘Dazzling Departure Party’ packed with music and entertainers. Enjoy the captivating ‘Twilight Soirée’ – featuring a mesmerizing dinner show party that will elevate your senses; or experience the magical Arabian culture, tradition, music and colours with the ‘Enchanting Arabian Nights Party’ or the ‘Sand & Oasis Party’ under the starry nights. Continue to dance the night away to your favourite tunes at the ‘Bollywood Party’ and for more amazing experiences, don’t miss the bubble-licious ‘Foam Party’; water-splashing ‘Rain Party’; ‘Family Pyjama Party under the Stars’ and more.

The ship will also offer vegetarian and Jain cuisine for the convenience of guests from India.

**Q What activities have been chalked out for travel trade engagement jointly with the tourism promotion agencies of Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Khasab and Muscat since these destinations along with Dubai are actively working in India?**

We are working hand-in-hand with the different tourism boards to promote the respective cruising destinations through various A&P platforms, media and key influencers. The support from the various Tourism bodies has been very positive in India, and we will continue to collaborate on joint promotions to develop the cruise sector in the Gulf region. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in



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

# With members-first approach, Sunil Kumar to lead TAAI for two-year term

Prasenjit Chakraborty | Mumbai

At the Travel Agents Association of India (TAAI) national elections held in Mumbai at ITC Maratha, Sunil Kumar has been elected as President for the 2024-26 term, with Lokesh Bettiah joining him as Vice President.

Kumar secured 306 votes to win the elections.

Shreeram Patel is now the Honorary Secretary, and Paras Lakhia has been named as Honorary Treasurer.

The other two contenders for the President's post were former President, Jyoti Mayal (177 votes) and Harmandeep Singh Anand (286 votes).

The newly-elected Managing Committee members are P Lalith Kumar Jain, Hema RV Chander,

Sameer Karnani, Rajan Sehgal, Manav Soni, Gopal Unadkat and Amish Desai.

The elections for the national office-bearers and Managing Committee was held after concluding the 73rd AGM of the oldest and largest association of the travel agent fraternity in India.

Speaking exclusively to **TravelBiz Monitor**, Sunil Kumar, the newly elected President, stated that his priority will be a "member-first" approach. "All our programmes will focus on members, and we will begin identifying challenges that we can overcome together," he said. "I have a very good team, and we will work collaboratively."

Kumar expressed his gratitude to members from across the country for their confidence in him. "Though I am returning after



five years, I will strive to continue the goodwill that was established earlier. The members believe that I can bring the changes they anticipate."

When discussing the biggest challenge in the industry, Kumar emphasised the need to ensure

that the growth of the tourism industry is directly proportional to the growth of individual travel companies. "I assure you that we, as a team, will be visible in the industry through our actions," he added. ♦

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

CONTD from PG 01 ►

## Iran Tourism debuts in India...

"Prospective travellers should inquire about Iran's safety, hospitality, and overall appeal from those who have already been there. Our country is safe, and Iranians are known for their warm welcome to visitors," he added.

Hosseinabadi urged people not to be misled by those trying to present a distorted image of Iran. "Certain media outlets are deliberately broadcasting misleading information," he remarked."

Meanwhile the event also witnessed signing an MoU between the Iranian Tour Operator Association (ITOA) and Maharashtra Tour Organisers Association (MTOA). The MoU was signed by Mostafa Shafiee Shakib, Chairman, ITOA and Vishvajeet Raja Patil, President, MTOA.

Later, Patil mentioned that ITOA aims to start a dialogue with local travel agents in India. "They want MTOA to play a key role in connecting with travel agents from Mumbai, Maharashtra. ITOA is looking to establish a regular exchange of ideas to explore ways to boost outbound tourism from India to Iran and vice versa," Patil explained.

He mentioned that Iran has introduced a paperless visa entry system for Indian tourists, eliminating passport stamping. "This is a significant move by the Iranian government," Patil noted.

Acknowledging that there are concerns among Indians regarding safety in Iran due to the current political situation. However, it's a matter of time; when tourists start visiting, it will be as usual.

Shakib stated that this is just the beginning of understanding and recognising each other's needs. "I am very happy and sincerely believe that tourists from both India and Iran will travel to each other's countries, opening up new vistas on the tourism front," he said." ♦

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

## Illinois Office of Tourism appoints Sartha Global Marketing as India Representative

TBM Staff | Mumbai

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), Office of Tourism announced it is opening a new office in New Delhi, India to attract more overseas visitors to Illinois.

The official travel authority for the state of Illinois in the USA announced the appointment of Sartha Global Marketing LLP as its partner in India for marketing and promotional activities.

Sartha will develop and implement comprehensive travel trade and public relations programs to inspire Indian travellers to explore the state and its unique experiences including luxury, culinary, architecture, outdoor experiences and cultural attractions.

Daniel Thomas, Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Tourism, said, "India is now the largest overseas source market for Illinois, with a tremendous 55% increase in visitors from 2019 to 2023. We are excited to partner with Sartha Global Marketing to welcome Indian travellers to experience Illinois' world-class cities, natural landscapes, and cultural diversity. From vibrant Chicago to charming small towns along the Mississippi River and stunning state parks, we offer something for every traveller. Whether it's culinary, arts, history, or nature, we invite you to discover the heart of the U.S."

Sheema Vohra, Managing Director, Sartha Global Marketing LLP, added, "We are excited to commence work on promoting Illinois in India, a state that has something for every Indian traveler. With Chicago as an excellent gateway, Illinois offers dynamic cities, breathtaking outdoor adventures, diverse attractions, and a rich historical legacy. We are honored to be working with the Illinois Office of Tourism to promote this wonderful state, a must-visit destination." ♦





**Sheetal Munshaw**  
Director – India, Atout France

It was an absolute pleasure and honour to receive Mr Branco Ruivo-Managing Director of the Eiffel Tower on his very first official visit to Mumbai in late August. Undoubtedly, the most iconic monument in France, the Eiffel Tower is a must-visit on every travellers bucket list. The “Grande Dame” is very bullish on enhancing its Indian arrivals and is poised to double the number of Indians by 2026.

The recent introduction of the UPI facility has made the booking process using the website seamless and is a convenient option for India travellers wanting to reserve their tickets. In addition to the payment facility, a slew of very experiential propositions of visiting the Eiffel Tower and indulging in France’s world renowned art de vivre and savoir faire are also in the offing making repeat travellers visits memorable and setting them apart. The Eiffel Tower under the guidance of its very dynamic leadership continues to tower upon France’s ever evolving tourism offering and we will be working in close collaboration with the them to achieve their objective of doubling the number of Indian visitors by 2026.

The Eiffel Tower will also be participating in our annual B2B showcase that will take place in Goa early this month which will be an appropriate platform to showcase the new offerings.

# Eiffel Tower bets big on India with plans to double visitors by 2026

**Becomes first monument in Europe to offer UPI payments service**

**TBM Staff | Mumbai**

**T**he Eiffel Tower is the most visited paid monument across the world witnessing 6,300,000 visitors annually.

During the first visit of the Managing Director of the Eiffel Tower Patrick Branco Ruivo to India in Mumbai this year in August, he shared his plans to double the percentage of Indian visitors by 2026.

In terms of spread of foreign visitors in

2023, 50% are European, 19% are Northern American, 4% Southern American, and 4% Indian, while French visitors contribute 20% to the total share.

This year, the Eiffel Tower was at the forefront and centre of the Olympic Games.

In terms of its popularity in India, the percentage of Indian visitors to the Eiffel Tower increased in 2024, reaching a peak in May 2024 (6,8%).

Indians are in the Top 10 visitors of the



Eiffel Tower month since the beginning of the year. The average age of visitor being over 30 years old, and more and more individual or family visitors (30% of visitors with children, mostly first-time visitors);

mainly present between April/June, and November.

Therefore, India has emerged as a key source market for the Eiffel Tower.

In order to reach its goal in India, the

Eiffel Tower was the first European site to implement the UPI payment system. In terms of ticketing, 50% of tickets are available online and 50% are sold onsite at the towers cash desks. ♦



**Mannoj Varma**  
Director, Lyra India

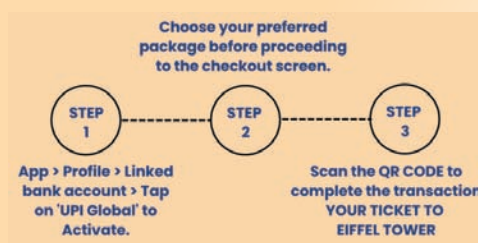
**Q Tell us about Lyra Network and its association with NPCI.**

Lyra Network, a company founded in 2001 in Toulouse, France, has established itself as a leading provider of secure payment solutions for eCommerce and point-of-sale transactions. With a strong expertise in fintech and paytech, Lyra has expanded its operations globally, offering its services in over 50 countries through its 11 subsidiaries. Recognising Lyra's expertise in European e-commerce and proximity payments, NPCI International Payments Limited (NIPL) has partnered with Lyra to introduce UPI in France. The collaboration between NIPL and Lyra

involves the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to facilitate the acceptance of UPI and RuPay cards in France. This partnership marks a significant achievement in India's international payment landscape, as it paves the way for the expansion of UPI and RuPay beyond Indian borders.

**Q What is the process to use an Indian UPI service at the Eiffel Tower?**

Indian tourists can now book their visit to the Eiffel Tower through their E-Commerce website by purchasing online ticket using UPI — making the transaction process quick, easy, and hassle-free.



**Q Any pre-requisite of making a successful transaction.**

System work similar as used in India. To use UPI for international payments at the Eiffel Tower in France, you'll need to activate iUPI. This feature is available for Indian tourists traveling in Europe. The Eiffel Tower was the first merchant to accept UPI payments, facilitated by Lyra.

Other popular retailers like Galeries Lafayette have also adopted UPI. You can use various UPI apps like BHIM, PhonePe, and GPay to make payments by scanning QR codes.


**Q What is the roadmap for UPI in France?**

The initial focus is on expanding UPI acceptance among French merchants, particularly in the tourism and retail sectors. This began with the landmark launch at the Eiffel Tower. The goal is to make UPI a convenient payment option for Indian tourists visiting France and to encourage more French businesses to adopt it. ♦

**To Book refer the link below:**  
<https://ticket.toureffel.paris/en>







VFS Global has partnered with Bintan Resorts to boost its presence in the Indian market. Located less than an hour by ferry from Singapore, the Indonesian island of Bintan has the potential to become a sought-after destination for Indian travellers seeking for a peaceful escape from overtourism.

## Bintan Resorts: A Serene Getaway for Indian Tourists Amid Overtourism Challenges

**Prasenjit Chakraborty | Indonesia**

Incredible, Impressive, and Inconceivable are three words that aptly describe Bintan Resorts. Although situated in the Riau Archipelago of Indonesia, it is just a 55-minute ferry ride from Singapore. This proximity makes Singapore a favoured getaway for Indian travellers wishing to visit Bintan Resorts. To attract more tourists from the Indian market, VFS Global recently entered into a partnership with Bintan Resorts, Indonesia. To enter Bintan, travellers need a multiple-entry visa for Singapore. Once they arrive in Bintan, they will receive a visa on arrival.

Bintan Resorts is a stunning destination with pristine beaches, turquoise waters, and lush landscapes. It features luxurious accommodations and a variety of activities, including water sports and cultural experiences. This blend of natural beauty, exclusivity, and convenience all set to make it a popular destination for Indian travellers in the months to come.

The Bintan Resorts occupies an exclusive space within the island, offering a modern escape set within nature, combining serenity and calmness with a unique advantage- zero traffic. In contrast to the traffic congestion common in Indian cities, Bintan Resorts provides a hassle-free experience, allowing

travel from one point to another in just 15-20 minutes. Low or no traffic within the resorts facilities is due to its separation from Tanjung Pinang, the capital of the Riau Islands, where most locals live. Only those working in the Bintan Resorts reside in designated areas, ensuring travellers feel freedom of movement and vast spaces. This aspect is especially appealing when choosing a destination in the post-COVID era. To be candid, the destination is perfect for those looking to escape the hustle and bustle of city life and reconnect with themselves. Its tranquil atmosphere is also ideal for bonding with family, friends, and colleagues.

In a competitive market where, other destinations are aggressively promoting their offerings, VFS Global and Bintan Resorts need a strategic and tailored approach to effectively promote Bintan. To achieve this, it's crucial to build substantial market awareness among travel partners. Going forward, they have to ensure that travel agents and trade partners are well-informed about what Bintan offers to Indian travellers.

In recent years, worldwide many known destinations have suffered from their own success. With the surge in tourism, overcrowding has become a significant problem, diminishing the charm of once-pristine locations. However, adventurous

travellers need not worry. There are many lesser-known destinations are waiting to be explored, offering unique experiences far from the tourist crowds. And Bintan Resorts is certainly one of them!

Visitors to Bintan Resorts will discover a unique experience that few destinations can match. The key distinguishing feature? The unparalleled peace and tranquillity that make this destination truly special.

### Target Audiences and Cities in India

VFS Global and Bintan Resorts will focus on the family, young travellers, MICE and wedding segments within the Indian market. From a MICE destination perspective, corporates could pair Bintan with Singapore in their offerings, allocating perhaps two nights to each destination.

It is important to note that Bintan Resorts is being reintroduced to the Indian market. The Tourism Service Unit within the VFS Global will promote the destination across India, not just in metro cities. Singapore has direct connections from above 15 cities in India, and the audiences from these gateways will naturally be of priority to engage with.

"Bintan Resorts offer the Indian audiences a diverse range of experiences in a tranquil, bountiful nature and beautiful setting. From beaches to forests, idyllic resorts to





**GB Srithar**  
Head of Tourism Services  
VFS Global

a delightful range of food and relaxation activities, the Indian audiences will enjoy their visit and re-visits," stated GB Srithar, Head of Tourism Services at VFS Global. "We will work closely with our travel trade partners in India to bring the island's offerings to their clients. Our strategy will include targeting travellers from secondary cities." He also mentioned that, based on his 13+ years of experience with the Indian travel and tourism market, he has observed a growing demand for outbound travel from secondary cities with a good propensity to spend on experiences.

In 2023, 1.08 million Indians visited Singapore. Moving forward, VFS Global and Bintan Resorts aim to significantly increase the number of tourists travelling to the island. To realise this vision, it is crucial to share relevant information with the travel trade, embark on meaningful consumer outreach efforts and marketing collaborations. "In the coming years, we are optimistic about achieving a double-digit percentage of visitors to Singapore spending a few nights in Bintan Resorts," Srithar stated emphatically.



**Abdul Wahab**  
COO  
Bintan Resorts

### Bintan Island Infrastructure Development

Abdul Wahab, Chief Operating Officer, Bintan Resorts, outlined their immediate plans for the Indian market, which include working closely with VFS Global to organise roadshows in key cities across the country and launch trade engagement efforts. "We will soon invite Indian travel agents for a familiarization trip," he announced.

Wahab noted that Bintan alone might not be an attractive destination for Indian tourists, so they have paired it with Singapore. "Bintan and Singapore are already recognised as a twin destination holiday," he explained. He also mentioned that their focus will be on both family vacations and the MICE segment. "We've already hosted several meetings for pharmaceutical companies from Ahmedabad and aim to continue this," Wahab added.

Regarding infrastructure, Wahab stated that it is not an issue since Bintan Resorts is managed by a single company. Currently, the destination has 2,800 hotel rooms, with an additional 1,200 rooms expected by the end of the year. "This will bring the total to

4,000 rooms by next year, which is sufficient for Bintan Resorts to establish itself as an international destination," Wahab pointed out.

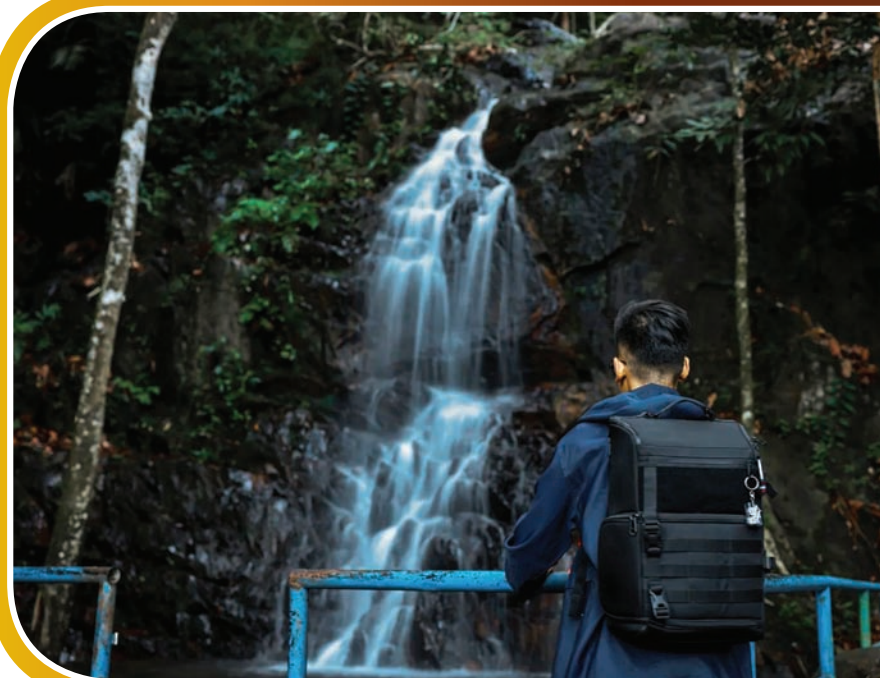
Additionally, construction has begun on an international airport, "The airport is set to become operational by 2027," Wahab revealed.

It is believed that the collaboration between VFS Global and Bintan Resorts will yield positive results. In the past, the Bintan Resorts team participated in Singapore Tourism Board's tourism roadshows and will continue working closely with the Board. Wahab mentioned that VFS Global not only has extensive reach and expertise in India, but its tourism division is now led by Srithar, a seasoned professional who has spent over a decade promoting Singapore in India. "GB Srithar's knowledge and expertise regarding the Indian market will be invaluable in achieving positive visitor-ship growth results," said an expert, speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Another significant development that could attract more tourists to Bintan Resorts is the issue of overtourism in some popular destinations frequented by the Indian travellers. Some destinations aim to manage the growing number of tourists and safeguard their natural beauty, cultural heritage and residents' need for their own space, which are currently under threat from increased tourism.

If everything goes as planned, Bintan Resorts is poised to become one of the most popular destinations for Indian tourists in Southeast Asia in the coming years. The strategic marketing initiatives and partnerships aimed at raising awareness will further enhance its appeal. As more Indians seek new and exciting travel experiences, Bintan Resorts is ready to welcome them with their distinctive Indonesian hospitality and unique island charms. ♦

*prasenjit.chakraborty@saffronsynergies.in*





# Melange set to move to the upcoming Nesco exhibition space for 2025 run

Disha Shah Ghosh | Mumbai

**A**fter making its debut at the Jio Convention Centre in Mumbai's business hub of BKC, Melange is set to move to the upcoming state-of-the-art exhibition space at Nesco for its 2025 edition.

The inaugural show, termed as a table-top exhibition with a standardised layout for all exhibitors without any grandeur, Melange has pleasantly surprised the trade fraternity in Mumbai. Organised within a couple of months since ideation, the trade show stuck to its ethos of offering a platform to engage in business discussions rather than an over-the-top branding exercise with unfiltered visitors.

Continuing with its two-day format, Melange 2025 will be held on September 20 and 21, with the organisers wanting to make it an annual feature.

While the inaugural edition saw 126 exhibitors comprising airlines, hotels, DMCs, cruise liners, tourism boards, representation companies, what set it apart was the stringent measures in place to restrict the entry of buyers and visitors. Clearly, the idea was to make it a quality show over unregulated quantity of visitors.

Besides Mumbai, buyers from nearby Pune and Gujarat saw major participation. For 2025, the show will be bigger and better, as echoed by the MTF management.

For the next edition, some key takeaways from the inaugural would be to restrict the entertainment quotient during the business hours, and better turnaround time of the catering facility to avoid serpentine queues. This will allow the upcoming edition to better regulate the crowd since the vision is to make it a larger event with a pan India trade participation.

What worked in the advantage of Melange this time was the spacious floor plan, standardised stall set-up and the networking programme just being an extension in the same pavilion post business hours.

Since the focus is on business engagement and exploring partnerships, the absence of a conference programme didn't feel like much of a miss. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in



Pic Courtesy: The Digital Travellers



Pic Courtesy: The Digital Travellers



Pic Courtesy: The Digital Travellers



Pic Courtesy: The Digital Travellers





Having recently taken over as Business Head-Sales for India at Sharaf Travel Group, **Leena Brahme's** focus lies in promoting the MSC brand in India, and growing the of Pegasus Airlines and DrukAir Holidays Bhutan line of businesses. She spoke to **Disha Shah Ghosh** about her new role and the possibilities of hosting large groups on the MSC ships.

## 'Sharaf Travel India has seen over 35% on year growth in passengers'

### **Q Enumerate on your new role at Sharaf Travel.**

My role as Business Head Sales-India entails and encourages me to increase business on MSC Cruises as the core of Sharaf Travel India. MSC offers weekend getaways to full-fledged family vacations – a world of discovery is all to experience. From 23 ships across and in the fleet of MSC sailing into 250 most sought-after ports, MSC ticks boxes for multi-generational travel. My new role also extends to Pegasus Airlines as Sharaf Travel is their exclusive GSA in India. Pegasus has been flying for 20 years and is Turkey's most established private airline. This exclusivity adds a nice feather in the cap to have offerings for our B2B partners.

The newest product in the kitty is DrukAir Holidays Bhutan! This is exciting as well as challenging for us to foray into land-based holiday offerings featuring the most premium destination. DrukAir Holidays will offer Premium and Luxury packages which also will be customisable.

### **Q Where does India rank as a source market for Sharaf Travel? What is your vision to grow this opportunity further?**

Sharaf Travel India has seen over 35% year on year growth in passenger numbers. For MSC cruises, India is fly cruise market, and we are amazed to see that guests are booking long-haul sailings for 07 nights just as we see increase in demand for 03/04 and 05 nights too.

The uptick we see is corporates looking to

“ MSC's fleet having 23 ships across is a synonym to being spoilt for a choice! Fly cruise market with partnerships of right stake holders like NTOs/airlines etc., will surely boost a better know how for fly cruise advantage. ”

book at least 6 months in advance. Taking longer sailings for e.g.: Ex Copenhagen, Barcelona, Rome, Piraeus, Naples, Dubai and so many more options to board from we see this ride as our opportunity to grow. Our venues onboard are not just classy but so large for all size corporates looking to do their events. We believe in offering a venue equipped with all AV's without charges. This has helped us in creating that space of indulgence which is not worrying on the pocket for the end guests. Only the right offers/discounts will keep us engaged with the trade to make the noise on the B2B front. On the B2C front, we will step up on creating good content for end guests to latch on enough to make the mark to ask for MSC Cruises.

### **Q Which are your three areas of focus with this role?**

A. Sales force strengthening, strategic clarity regarding all the three brands, and a focus to

on move ahead with learning which will help Sharaf Travel to strengthen its foothold better, is my key responsibility.

### **Q India is an expanding market for outbound travel, and the traveller is spoilt for choice with newer destinations, products and experiences. In that context, how are you looking at growing the fly-cruise market?**

MSC's fleet having 23 ships across is a synonym to being spoilt for a choice! Fly cruise market with partnerships of right stake holders like NTOs/airlines etc., will surely boost a better know how for fly cruise advantage.

### **Q What is your strategy to engage with the travel trade in India, offline and online?**

The travel trade is moving leaps and bounds with their digital footprints. We will do our best to channelise that medium, engage through posts and visuals so that they are well equipped to convince their guests that the buying they are looking to happen is a safest choice of vacation. Offline, we will continue to meet and greet our TA partners as need to showcase our ships for them to gain strength in the brand.

### **Q Any plans of MSC making India as a port of call for your ships?**

Never say Never! And we believe MSC will venture into Indian waters.

### **Q Which are some of the popular sailings of MSC for Indians? How are you engaging with international tourism boards?**

The popular choice of sailings always has remained from Mediterranean and continues to be. New sailings that are garnering the attention are from Bahamas as our newest and large ships are plying in those regions. Another popular sailing port is Copenhagen covering Norwegian Fjords. Best of what MSC is offers are Mediterranean sailings in winter. From October all the way up to January, the possibilities of sailing from Valencia, Greece, Izmir (Turkey) and newest Tunisia are popular choices. We are proud to be one-of-its-kind offering newer explorations with MSC. ♦

disha.shah@saffronsynergies.in



## IATO Convention 2024

# Desperate stakeholders, arguing Tourism!

**Shayan Mallick | Bhopal**

India's inbound tourism paints a very gloomy picture ahead. In the absence of adequate promotion, initiatives and funding, the inbound recovery was far from satisfactory the last year. However, and to the industry's absolute chagrin, 2024 has been no different so far, probably even worse than the last year, amidst some clear indication that we would likely miss the bus in 2025 as well.

Furthermore, as if a host of unfriendly measures like shutting down overseas Indian tourism offices, discontinuation of scheme that earned the inbound operators incentives on the foreign exchange they earned, among others, were not enough, the 2024-25 Union Budget further plunged the industry, already tottering on the brink, in abject misery.

The recently concluded, 39th edition of IATO Convention, was organised at a time when eyes and expectations are on the post-Covid recovery and the growth thereafter. And in that context, probably the biggest highlight of the event was the lingering scrutiny throughout the three-day event of the government's commitment to inbound tourism, voiced amply and repeatedly by stakeholders representing IATO and other industry associations and stakeholders.

There were some very strong suggestions, opinions, and demands, made during the events by the likes of IATO President Rajiv Mehra; Puneet Chhatwal, MD & CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Ltd. (IHCL); Ajay Bakaya, MD, Sarovar Hotels & Resorts; Vikram Madhok, MD, Abercrombie & Kent, Amaresh Tiwari, Vice Chairman, ICPB and Board Member – FAITH; among others, with regard to the current state of

inbound tourism and the initiatives that are required.

While welcoming Union Minister Tourism and Culture at the inauguration, Mehra expressed hope that under the new Tourism Minister's leadership, the industry will get full support from the Ministry and overseas promotions will restart. He also requested the Minister to re-instate MDA scheme for the tour operators which has been discontinued for last 3-4 years. "This has resulted in tour operators not being able to do overseas promotion and participate in overseas travel marts," Mehra lamented.

Reinstatement of schemes such as SEIS that not only motivates and rewards inbound operators on the foreign exchange that they earn, but also aids their individual overseas marketing efforts, an efficient and better-funded Market Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme, putting up trained manpower at embassies overseas to undertake effective promotional work, undertaking different overseas promotion initiatives and regular interaction with foreign tour operators through roadshows, better budgetary support to Ministry of Tourism, advance planning and information for overseas promotion, development of new source markets, organising destination showcase thorough familiarisation trips for FTOs, journalists and influencers, prominently figured in various discourse and suggestions that took place at the IATO Convention.

The three-day event, themed 'Resurgent India Inbound' was organised along with a number of business sessions sought to not only, among others, highlight the immense socio-economic and job dividend that the country can benefit from by leveraging inbound tourism, but





also highlighted the poor recovery in the aftermath of pandemic and the little support or attention that the inbound tourism sector has been given, amply demonstrated by India's despondently poor show in attracting foreign tourist so far. Notably, the country earned foreign exchange in excess of USD 30 billion (INR 2,11,661 crore) in 2019, its best year till date.

However, Foreign Tourist Arrival figure in 2023 was still short by a lamentable over 15 per cent in comparison to the peak 2019 numbers, and the situation has not improved much in 2024, because of India's heavy reliance on fewer source markets. The H1, 2024 inbound numbers were still lagging by 10 per cent, but that was before the Bangladesh, India's number one tourism source market contributing nearly a quarter of the total FTAs, crisis. Given the continuing political upheaval there, India's overall FTA number till date is probably worse off than the corresponding 2023 period.

Mehra also highlighted that over the years IATO Conventions have played critical role in showcasing and establishing destinations inbound profile and Madhya Pradesh as the host of the 39th Annual IATO Convention will reap big rewards with increased inbound visitations in the coming years. The delegates were treated with 10 richly crafted post-convention tours covering prominent sites such as Khajuraho Temples, Sanchi Stupa, the prehistoric cave paintings

of Bhimbetka, all UNESCO World Heritage Sites, along with other prominent sites, such as Mandu, Jabalpur, Ujjain, Panchmarhi, Shivpuri, its rich wildlife, culture, among others, in order to unlock state's inbound potential.

The event was attended by Dr. Mohan Yadav, Chief Minister, of Madhya Pradesh; Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Tourism and Culture; Rajendra Shukla, Deputy Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh; Dharmendra Bhav Singh Lodhi, Tourism & Culture Minister of Madhya Pradesh; M.R. Synrem, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; Sheo Shekhar Shukla, Principal Secretary – Tourism, Government of Madhya Pradesh & MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Bidisha Mukherjee, Additional MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board, Dr. Ilayaraja T, MD Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. and senior Government officials from Union Ministry of Tourism and Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Department, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board and Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation Ltd.

More than 1,200 delegates attended the event. IATO's famous Hall of Fame award was bestowed upon IHCL's Puneet Chhatwal and Late M.L Razdan of Razdan Holidays. ♦

*shayan.mallick02@gmail.com*





# Goodbye FOMO, Hello JOMO!

## Embracing the joy of missing out in travel!!

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

**M**aya, a young professional from Mumbai, finally saved up enough for her dream trip to Paris. Armed with a detailed itinerary and a smartphone full of Instagram spots, she was determined to experience each and everything the City of Lights had to offer. Maya packed her days with back-to-back activities, from sunrise at the Eiffel Tower to late-night strolls along the Seine. She barely slept, constantly checked her phone for the next "must-see" location, and spent most of her time snapping photos instead of soaking in the atmosphere. By the end of the trip, Maya had checked off every item on her list but returned home feeling more exhausted than fulfilled.

Meet Aditi, a friend of Maya who visited Paris a few months later. Unlike Maya, Aditi had a different idea. She had a few places she really wanted to see but left the rest of her time open for exploration. One day, she spent hours in a small, cozy café sipping coffee and chatting with the owner about life in Paris. Another day, she wandered through the city's quiet neighborhoods, stumbling upon hidden parks and local markets, making sense of how Parisians live. Aditi didn't feel the need to see everything or post constant updates on social media. Instead, she embraced the joy of missing out (JOMO) on the non-essentials, focusing on what truly mattered to her. When she returned home, Aditi felt relaxed, content, and deeply connected to her experiences in Paris.

### The checklist chaos: Doing it all, enjoying it none!

FOMO, or Fear of Missing Out, is a mindset many travellers experience today. It's that nagging feeling that you'll miss out on something amazing if you don't do it all. That you are here for the first and perhaps the last time and must see it all. FOMO travellers, like Maya, often cram their schedules with as many activities as possible. They're driven by the desire to see and do everything, often influenced by social media, where everyone seems to be living their best lives in exotic locations.

### Where less is more: Unplanned, unscripted, unforgettable!!

Look at the opposite mindset: JOMO, or the Joy of Missing Out. JOMO travellers like Aditi understand that skipping some things



is okay to truly enjoy others. They focus on quality over quantity, choosing to immerse themselves in a few meaningful experiences rather than trying to do it all.

### In no hurry! Travelling on your own terms!!

So, what sets JOMO travellers apart from FOMO seekers?

**Less stress, more enjoyment:** When you're not trying to do everything, you can actually enjoy what you're doing. JOMO travellers are less likely to feel stressed or burned out because they're not constantly rushing from one activity to the next. They take their time and savour each experience.

**Deeper connections:** JOMO travellers have the time to form deeper connections with the places they visit and the people they meet. Whether it's making friends with a local shop owner or spending an afternoon talking to a fellow traveller, these moments often become the most cherished memories.

**Authentic experiences:** FOMO travellers often rush to popular tourist spots commoditised in tourist bubbles. In contrast, JOMO travellers are more likely to explore off-the-beaten-path locations. This leads to more authentic experiences, like discovering a hidden beach, witnessing a nonchalant event, or stumbling upon a local festival that isn't mentioned in any guidebook.

**Mindfulness:** JOMO travellers practice mindfulness, being fully present in the moment to meet the unforeseen, the unscripted, unencumbered. This might mean enjoying a sunset without worrying about getting the perfect photo or sitting quietly in

a park and observing the world around them. These moments of mindfulness can make a trip feel more meaningful and fulfilling.

### Joy in the journey: How JOMO keeps one young!

Interestingly, the concept of JOMO aligns with a recent study linking travel to slowing the ageing process. By embracing mindfulness and avoiding stress-inducing, packed itineraries, JOMO travellers focus on meaningful experiences, which can enhance mental and physical well-being. Positive travel experiences, such as Aditi's relaxed approach, contribute to improved health by reducing stress and promoting emotional connection, potentially slowing the entropy increase associated with ageing. Thus, JOMO may support the benefits outlined in the study.

### Ditch the itinerary and discover joy!

In today's whirlwind world, FOMO can hijack your wanderlust. But what if you broke free from the chaos? Embracing JOMO reveals a liberating truth: less is more. Surrender to the unknown, and authentic experiences unfold. Your travels transform into heartfelt tales, etched in your soul, not just your social media feed.

So, ditch the checklist and collect moments that breathe. Return home with a heart full of stories, not just souvenirs. Travel deeper, not farther.

*"Travel isn't about collecting places; it's about discovering moments that stay with you long after the journey ends." ♦*

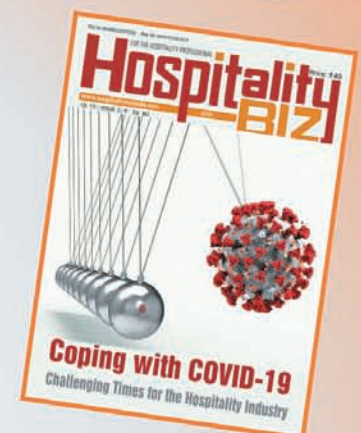
*'The views expressed in the column are of the author, and may or may not be endorsed by the publication.'*

**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.



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Jagdish Patil: +91 8007992422  
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Pooja Nalawade: +91 9769052241  
pooja.nalawade@saffronsynergies.in

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Gauri Sawant: +91 8369080796 | gauri.sawant@saffronsynergies.in





# Bringing Innovations to the Forefront

NURON.AI

By TBM Staff | Mumbai

**A**nticipating 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](mailto:ashishkumar@agnitioworld.com). Co Chairman FICCI Travel, Technology & Digital Committee*



**Startup Name:** NURON.AI

**Core Team:** Srijan Magon, Co-Founder and Co-CEO  
Sudeepa Singh, Co-Founder and Co-CEO

**Founding year:** 2023

**Company Website:** <https://nuronai.org>

**Description about the company:** IntelliVisa, the only end-to-end visa automation SaaS platform for enterprises created by Nuron.AI, is poised to revolutionize visa application processes globally. Truly powered by AI, its APIs enable the visa filing process—whether manual or digital—to become exponentially more efficient and accurate, reducing the overall visa package creation and submission time to just 10 minutes while boasting an accuracy level greater than 99% in just three easy steps, for all nationalities traveling to any of the 190 countries.

Its AI co-pilot offers seamless integration into travel websites and the digital front-ends of web and mobile applications through APIs, white-label technology, and login-based SaaS.

They are the world's first AI backend processing engine that powers leading visa service providers, digital visa applications, visa facilitation firms, online travel companies, and immigration firms through an agile and customizable microservices architecture designed to process up to 100,000 visa applications per day.

It features a full suite of APIs available as a single workflow as well as individual modules to automate every step of global visa filing, including e-visas and sticker visas for tourism, work, and study.

<https://youtu.be/fWDkos6cH-Y>



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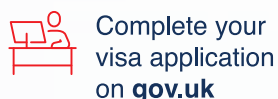
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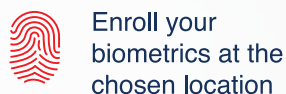
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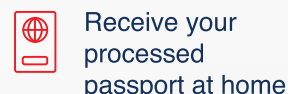
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